



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

THE 2022 MINI-REUNION

LANDER, WYOMING • SEPT 17 - 20, 2022



M3 Stuart



Japanese Type 95 HA-GO



M3 Grant



Japanese Type 94 Tankette



M4A3E8 Sherman



M4A1 Sherman



M4 Sherman



M3 Lee



M32 Tank Recovery Vehicle



M32 Tank



Russian T-34/85



M24 Chaffee



M6 37mm Tank Destroyer



M5A1 Stuart



M10C Tank Destroyer



M18 Tank Destroyer



M36 Tank Destroyer



German Jagdpanzer Hetzer



M4A3E9 Sherman



M3A1 Satan



M4A3E2 Sherman Assault



M4A4 75mm Sherman

THIS IS JUST A SMALL SAMPLING OF THE OVER 500 TANKS AND OTHER VEHICLES AVAILABLE TO SEE AT THE NATIONAL MILITARY VEHICLE MUSEUM

Featured Stories:

- Cover Story: 2022 Mini Reunion Pages 30 - 33
- Remembering Dick Peksens Page 28 - 34
- Remembering JC Brown - The Day After Pages 36 - 37

**We are back in stock and ready to ship
The USMC VTA "Forever Coin."**



FRONT & BACK

Based on numerous requests, we have recently reordered an additional quantity of the official USMC Vietnam Tankers Association "Forever" coins in order to make them available for purchase to all of our members. As always this is not your average dull finish challenge coin. It is not only larger by a ¼" (1.75" diameter) but it has a bright gold and silver metallic finish in 3-D relief on both sides. The tank is bright gold and holds the detail of our logo. The front and back are completely custom and you will not see the design on any other challenge coin. Each comes in an individual protective plastic folder. The coins are \$20 plus \$5 (each) for postage and handling fee.

BEFORE YOU PLACE AN ORDER

We need you to first email Fred Kellogg at email: Kelloggfred@comcast.net
Or to call him at (306) 609-3404 (Pacific Time) to discuss what you want to do with the order.

Then when you send your payment, please indicate how many coins that you want to order, add postage and handling fee for each and enclose your personal check made out to: USMC VTA and mail it to:

**USMC VTA
c/o Fred Kellogg
15013 NE 16th Street
Vancouver, WA 98684-3605**

Letter from the President

2022 MINI-REUNION: Finally!!! We have the dates, the city and the hotel nailed down. Please refer to the Cover Story of this issue of the magazine for all of the details. If you have not contacted me with your intention to attend, please do it right away. Please note that the reunion hotel rooms are very limited. We'll see you there!!!

A HAPPY NOTE: This issue of our magazine features three new stories that were inspired by stories or events that occurred since the last issue. It is one very real goal of the Sponson Box to have our membership read about events that they may recall when they were in-country and that it may inspire them to tell their side of the story. I know that I sound like a "broken record" but in my humble opinion you really should be interested in telling your story...so that it's not completely lost when you check into "The Great Tank Park in the Sky." If you object to writing, we do video recording during our biennial reunions and we also have the podcast program conducted over the telephone at virtually any time. All it takes is for you to consent to make the effort.

PLEASE PAY YOUR 2022 DUES: If you have already paid your 2022 VTA Membership dues of \$30 ... or your \$20 Annual Life Assessment, thank you very much. If you have not paid them, please use the enclosed self-addressed envelope to send your check today. Also be sure to affix a postage stamp. And thank you in advance.

Also please note: Any of the old return envelopes with Bruce Van Apeldoorn's Rochester, NY mailing address are no longer valid. Bruce moved to North Carolina a year ago ... so be sure to use his new address. If for any reason you saved an old remittance envelope for later use, please simply throw it away.

MORE BACKGROUND ABOUT THE CMC \$HIT CANNING TANKS: You know? I am quite lucky that I receive a yearly publication which is sent to me from the Marine Corps History Division. Most of the books that I have received are filled with essays written by "experts" on the history of the USMC from all climes and places. This year US Marine career tank officer and well-published expert on USMC tanks, Lt Col Ken Estes, wrote a scholarly essay on the history of Marine Corps tanks from WW1 to the present. In his story he includes some quotes from past Commandants of the Marine Corps that made me fall out of my seat:

"...demonstrated by statements of CMC Gen Robert Barrows refusing to consider a tank purchase during his term of duty (as CMC)..."

"Gen Alfred Grey and Gen Carl Mundy equivocated between preferences for armored cars to testifying before Congress that "borrowing" tank units from the Army rather than purchasing more tanks had greater merit..."

"When Gen Charles Krulak retired in 1999, he stated that he would "...eliminate the tank fleet found in the Marine Corps today if (I) could."

Colonel Estes concludes his essay, "In the end, only the leaders of the Corps can take advantage of this reality, while it still exists. That said, the Corps leadership now appears to have lost its sense of need for armored combat vehicles. ...The current Commandant has determined that based on war gaming (Editorial comment: Not real combat), it has been proven to be a legacy burden."



If I don't tell my story ... I won't know who I am
Author Unknown



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ON THE COVER: Just a small sampling of the 500 tanks and other military vehicles that we will be seeing in Wyoming during our 2022 mini-reunion

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

USMC VTA PODCAST UPDATE

Francis L "Tree" Remkiewicz writes: I hope that everyone is enjoying listening to our VTA website podcast program. It is a thrilling adventure for me. You folks all have stories to tell and believe it or not no two podcasts are the same. To see the perspective of so many other warriors only enhances my admiration for all the things you all accomplished!

We were very lucky recently to be able to connect with Jan Scruggs, the founder of the Viet Nam Veterans Memorial (aka "The Wall") as a podcast interviewee. I hope that everyone get a chance to listens to his truly amazing interview.

Our listening audience has expanded by one country. We are now listened to in 18 countries with the inclusion of Spain. The two countries with the most listeners are the United Kingdom and Germany. Also, the two age groups that most frequently listen to our podcasts are the 35-44 and the 45-59 age categories. A little surprising if you ask me. The men to women breakdown in our listening audience is 79% male and 16% female.

We need to keep up advertising by word-of-mouth to make sure our audience is ever increasing. There was a slight fall off during November and December which could be attributed to the holidays. Please let everyone you know to listen to these podcasts. Our stories have got to be heard by everyone! Keep in mind that Marine tankers are becoming "obsolete". After us, there are no more tankers.

Please encourage everyone to tap the "Follow" button. That will assure the listener that each time a new episode is published they will get an update. Thank you again. I am working through our list and I will get to everyone that is a promise.

For those who have not yet signed up to do a podcast or who have wives/spouse please talk with them about their own interview or a joint interview with both of you. If you have listened to the podcast by Bruce and Nancy Van Apeldoorn you will find these to be fun, easy, and entertaining. Please let me know via email when you are ready.

I would like to add a personal note to everyone. I am incredibly proud to be a part of our United States Marine Corps legacy and especially of this Association of Tankers. We all should be very proud of our history and experiences in the Corps. It is my own personal belief, based in part on these podcasts, that the Marine Corps will sorely miss the strength, bravery, and courage of Marine Corps Tankers.

P.S. Log onto the USMC VTA website and click on PODCASTS.

We End Up Living This

John Wear writes: I have a friend living in Billings, Montana. He grew up on a horse ranch nearby. One day a neighbor rode up on his horse. At the time my friend was about 10 - 12 years old and he said that while the two ranchers shot the bull, my friend eaves dropped on his father and the neighbor's conversation.

The neighbor's horse was tied to the fence next to a pasture where a few mares were grazing. The male horse got "excited" and the neighbor had to smack the horse to calm him down. He then said to the boy's father:

"Yep, when you're young you have a hard time keeping from peeing in your face. When you're old you have a hard time from peeing on your feet."

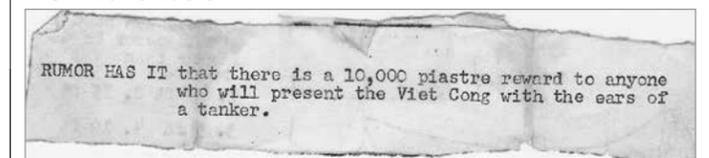
CHANGE OF ADDRESS???

A VTA Member writes: Hello and Happy New Year gentlemen. I hope it is off to a great start. My wife and I are doing well and living with one of our daughters on a farm in Darlington MD. I cannot remember enjoying such peace and quiet in a long time.

The reason for my email is to let you know my dues payment check was returned to me. It was sent to 73 Stanton St, Rochester, NY 14611. Is there a new address for me to use?

ATTENTION: The back cover of the past several issues of our magazine has Bruce's living at as his new North Carolina address ... please use it to send in payments.

From Dave Zaslou:



Dave says: I've had this since I was in country 66/67

Roger Luli writes:

Congratulations on another great issue of our magazine. It is a wonderful tribute to Pete Ritch. I did not realize how much he and I had in common. I wish I had known that while he was alive. Looking forward to the 2022 mini reunion in Wyoming. My son-in-law and daughter gave me plane tickets for Christmas. Stay healthy & "Senior" Fi

Ted Hildabrand writes:

Super job on the current Sponson Box! I'm only half way through but it is fantastic. I read your intro on Page 3 and it makes me feel guilty. Obviously I have a lot of good >>

intentions but I will get it done. Numbers are mounting!

I don't know your past profession but your article on Pendleton VN Prep Training was well done. Damned if I know how you remember all that shit.

I just recently read the book *Walk With Me* by Lt. Col. Gerald Kurth. I bought the book at the reunion. It's a great read but especially the chapters on ROE and the M14. It was signed by the author "for Richard." I am not sure who Richard is but the book is now a favorite possession.

I like the front commentaries written on Letters to the Editor. You and your people did a fabulous job with the Providence reunion. The ability for me to meet Larry Zuley and Marsha Faulk has been a significant benefit to my health. Larry called and checked in with me at Christmas. Great support! Meeting Marsha was just the crowning jewel on top of Larry's help. I was also able to and dine with Larry's family and Marsha / daughter at the banquet.

I don't know what else to say but "Thank you" and I will do as you have asked.

Jerry White writes:

Thanks to you and the all the efforts put forth by the all-volunteer staff. Without your dedication to our common history, there would be fewer and less accurate testimony of Marine Tankers in Vietnam. Those records take on additional importance since the end of Marine Tankers appears to be near!

A Notes about Pete Ritch

Bob Skeels writes: Happy New Year to you and yours. I had known Pete for such a long time. Of course, I was fully aware of his prior professional work history, including his detailed organizational skills, his great work for the USMC VTA including the published books, oral history interviews, etc. and so I just was in awe again of witnessing him totally assuming the lead on getting this information gathering and submission process done quickly for the project for upgrading the valor award. All of us were aware of how completely competent this great Marine was in everything he did ... God Bless Peter Ritch. I commended him many times along the way for his professionalism, his commitment and his due diligence to the effort ... and I certainly offered to help in any way that was needed. Pete made sure all the bases were covered and made the submission package to the USMC Awards Department. He then engaged in the follow up with the Montana senators and his list of their contacts.

Hank Fuller writes: Gentleman I know how much you guys loved and respected Pete...I as well. At the time of his death I sent a (not too long winded, I hope) condolence card to his wife Joyce trying to express what I thought of Pete and how I would honor and miss him. I think the memorial cover portrait, articles, and remembrances in the latest Sponson Box were more than appropriate; he was a unique guy; we all were better folks for having known him-espe-

cially in the situations we shared with him. Every morning on my walk I mention the names of the men I knew over there who didn't make it or have passed since then; sometimes I can't remember them all-sadly, there are quite a few-but I work on remembering those I missed the next time. Since Pete died, I haven't forgotten his name once. I hope you two brothers are doing well! I am headed outside in the teeth of a nor'easter to refill my generator which I started early this AM. It seems since the first of the year that it has either snowed or been below zero; no rest from the weather next week as well...but daylight has increased by 38 minutes. Stay well. Semper Fi! Hank

Paul Heffernan notes: When I got my Sponson Box last week it was face down in the stack. As I sorted the mail I turned it over and was shocked. I knew Pete was gone of course but here he was back. I spent more than a few minutes with my head in my hands thinking about things I wished I had been able to say to Pete before he left and how much I truly missed him. And by extension how much I miss and at the same time am comforted by my association with the other boys now men of Hotel 8-68. What a gift. Until Valhalla Pete!

Bob Skeels adds: I really liked this Sponsor Box and really miss Pete. This mild winter for me is going by quickly and that's great even for a hardy Maine resident. I always find myself always looking forward to seeing you Marines again as it always a good time when we get together and share some grins and genuine brotherhood.

P.S. I will share the sentiment with two additional good buddies...Here's a toast to the New Year and to the next time we good buddies get together.

More Hand Written "stuff" from Tom Hayes

Writer's note: To all editors and staff of the Sponson Box - Too bad you had to type my last letter. I do not like computers. I like to write letters like I did in 1968. My good friend Dale Dye said, "Fuck 'em! You continue to write letters by hand and fuck John Wear." My reply to DD was, "But John Wear won't like it. He has trouble reading letters written by hand."

With that said, you'd think that a 0141 Chief Clerk, office pogue would use a computer (or at least a typewriter). And by the way, all of us 0141's don't like the term Office Pogue. And by the way, what is a pogue? We all came into the Corps with no MOS and took tests in boot camp to determine what we would do. Too bad only intelligent people could run the administration part of the Corps and the rest became grunts or tankers.

I dare you to print that!!!

I read in the most recent issue of the Sponson Box that there is currently a real concern by recruits about taking a dump during boot camp. I have to tell you that I never met one guy on the plane our of Newark, NJ, in 1966 as we flew to Charleston, SC, who ever said that he was concerned

about taking a dump at PI.

I see that my old 3rd Tank BN CO, Lt Col Fontenot died in 2016. While he was my battalion commander, he signed my promotion warrant in January 1968 to Corporal. Speaking of dying, I wonder if anyone else had their company commander and company gunny both KIA at the same day while crossing a river up by Con Thien?

I grew up in a small town, Bergenfield, New Jersey. While I was on my 30 pre-Vietnam leave, I went to a high school football game and met up with an old friend who was also on leave (from the Army) before shipping off to Vietnam. His name was Ross Applegate. He was going to be assigned to the 101st airborne in-country. We shook hands after the game and promised to write to each other. Then while I was in-country, we left Camp Evans and headed north to Quang Tri. During my stay at Camp Evans, it was really quiet. We had no incoming or any action at all. After we went north, the 101st took over Camp Evans. I kept wondering my Ross never wrote to me. Weeks later, my parents wrote to me telling me that Ross had been KIA at Camp Evans by incoming rockets. They had read the sad news in the local newspaper. Holy Shit!

PLEASE NOTE: I keep waiting for some of you non-tankers to write a story or three. Where the heck are you? I know that we have all sorts of non-tank MOS guys out there.

Well, this old Office Commando who has a job in retirement where I serve as a school crossing guard and since the kids will be getting out of school soon, I have to stop writing.

Semper Fi, Tom

P.S. I don't usually praise people for doing their job but John Wear is an exception. This is one dedicated Jarhead to the Corps and to the Sponson Box! Where will we be when he eventually steps down from the presidency? Will he come back like we hope Donald Trump will? I kid him with his great friendship with "Chesty" Dye. After a round of golf the other day, I asked DD if John could join us the next time we play a round. DD said that Wear could caddy for him and nothing else. "After all," DD said, "I am a captain of the infantry and not a combat correspondent like I am portrayed to be in my classic novel, "The Citadel." By the way, who won the copy of the book that I sent for the Silent Auction in Providence? Or did John use it for shit paper instead? LOL!!!

A Note addressed to a Corpsman

A Vietnam Grunt writes: Doc-I apologize for not remembering your name. I thank you for saving my life and my leg. The Navy MDs were going to take it off at NSA Da Nang. If you have mama-san's address, I will forward her the 50 P's plus a little interest. The wound I got that you applied the tourniquet on (my left leg) ... along with the other injuries caused progressive nerve damage over the years. I

am now rated by the VA as 100% totally disabled. Oh well it only took 40+ years for it to get that way to 100%. I fought Navy MDs at every reenlistment physical for over 20 yrs. They finally forced me out in '87 just as I was up for E-8. I am glad I finally got to have contact with you to thank you. Oh yeah-when you knew me I wasn't from TX ... I was from NM-about 200 miles from where I presently live. THANKS AGAIN and SEMPER FI my brother.

REPLY from Robert Allsup (aka "Doc"): This one lifts me up. This is what it's all about ... 45 years later. That's how we roll. Damn, we're getting old

ANOTHER MARIENE'S REPLY: As it should Doc! The unique relationship between a Doc and his unit was always amazing and deeply appreciated, except when it came to pill day. And as you may recall, the hamlet moms loved Med Cap days as well as you being on-call 24 hours a day. The medical assistance provided to the Vietnamese by us was instrumental in the success of CAP.

Water Tanks



Comment on the USMC VTA History Project

John Wear writes: I got an email inquiry from a Canadian author who is currently writing several books on the Vietnam War. One of the impending books has to do with American armor deployed in-country. Besides US Army tanks, he seems extremely interested in the US Marine Corps deployment of the "tank-infantry team" concept.

During several of our email exchanges, I told him >>

about the USMC VTA History Project and the several different venues that we have for recording and preserving our history. Below is a comment that he made about what he found on our website. And by the by, his reference to COVID is that he contracted the Wuhan virus and had some extra recovery time to spend doing research.

“I have spent my Covid days watching as many videos as possible of the USMC VTA members’ recollections as I could. Very moving and some of it is very hard to watch. I have studied many military units in my time writing, and been involved with many regimental associations (as we call them in the British Commonwealth) but I have never seen a more impressive effort to record and preserve the experience shared in war than the efforts of your association.”

Car Tank



1st Tanks Christmas



I thought that I’d share the above image with you. It is a stocking that I made for my oldest grandson for Christmas this year. It was made from a shirt given to Steve and some of his other Vietnam Marine buddies by Monte. It’s beautifully embroidered and a memory to be treasured. My grandson, Gio is delighted with it. I’m just showing off! Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year. Stay well.

Marcia Falk, widow of VTA member Steve Falk



Rick Ellis writes:

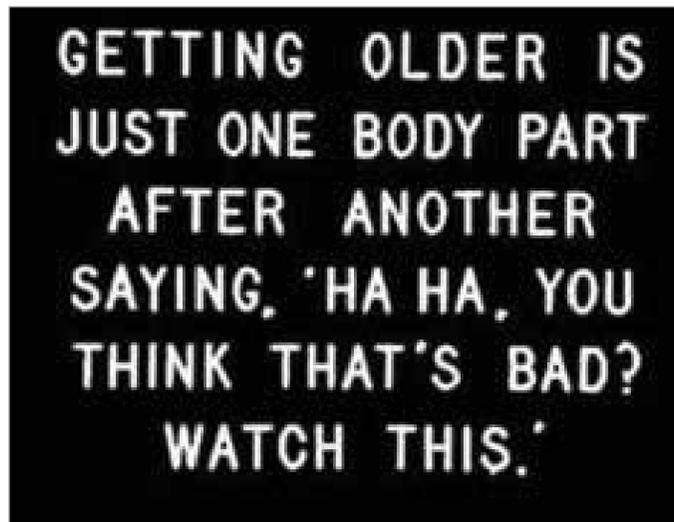
I hope that you and yours have a healthy and prosperous New Year.

By the way, I spoke to Bob Embesi a couple of weeks ago (my old Platoon Sergeant in Vietnam). He had some health issues a few years ago, but he is doing fine right now. I used to say that his job was to run the platoon and my job was to keep him out of jail. I think I had the harder job!

Tom Cartier writes:

Since the Marine Corps has dropped tanks both VTA and MCTA are doomed to age out of being. It was a good career for me, I do not regret any of it.

When the USMC adopted the M1 Main Battle tank, I seriously wondered how long it would be because of the extremely heavy and expensive logistics support burden that it brought with it. I can remember high ranking Officers bitching about the number of flights it took by helicopter to fuel and keep ammunition up for our then M48A3’s when we were in Nam.



(Continued on page 46)

POEM & JOKES

Old Men's Faces

By Pat Ewing Vietnam 1969-1970

*Now we stand behind old men's faces,
Speak of forgotten times and places,*

*So bent are those who wouldn't break,
Who did fearsome things with lives at stake.*

*Their shadows sharp and darker then,
Now fading away are these old men.*

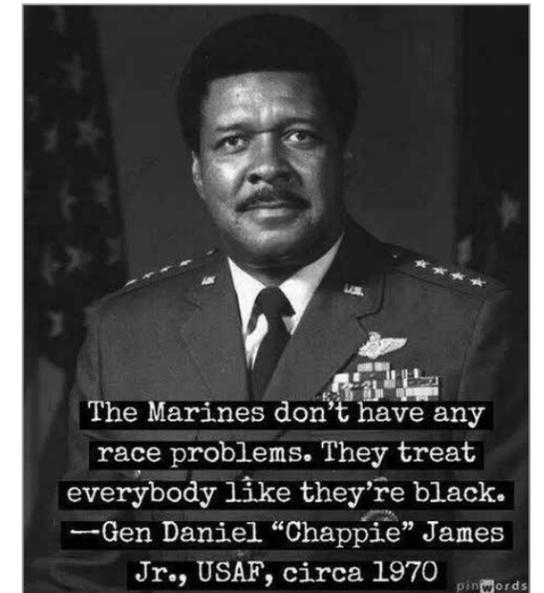
*But no one can steal the legends bold,
Not thieves, nor liars, nor growing old.*

*To never weave excuses that some men must,
But to stand with men who earned our trust,*

*And speak of what we did back then,
Before we became, these old men.*

Civilians: “That’s so cool that you get free healthcare. It’s the military, so it must be really good!”

Me:



HIM: what r u doin
HER: just here in a tank top
HIM: send me a pic
HER:



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.”

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

Peksens, Richard
1945–2021



Richard “Dick” Peksens, 76, of St. Petersburg, Florida, slipped away on November 15, 2021. He was surrounded by his loving family. Survivors include his wife, Victoria; daughter, Alexandra; son, Erik; brother, Rudolf of Arlington, VA and his family. Dick served as a tank platoon leader with 1st Tanks in

1967. He was also a long time member of the USMC VTA and an active contributor to the Sponson Box magazine. This was the quiet passing of a true American hero. At his own request there was no formal announcement or funeral service. He went out quietly like a gentleman.

McCabe, Avery
1944–2021

Avery was born on 03/14/1944 and was from Live Oak, Florida. He served with 1st and 3rd Tanks from 1964 – 1969. He retired from the USMC as a Gunnery Sergeant. He was a longtime member of the USMC VTA. Unfortunately there seems to be no obituary written for him.

Montemarano, Carmine
1948–2021

“Monty” was born on 09/10/1948 and was from Waretown, New Jersey. He served with H&S Company, 1st Tanks from 1967 – 1968. He was a longtime member of the USMC VTA. Unfortunately there seems to be no obituary written for him.

Maffioli, Len, MGySgt, USMC (ret)
1925 – 2021

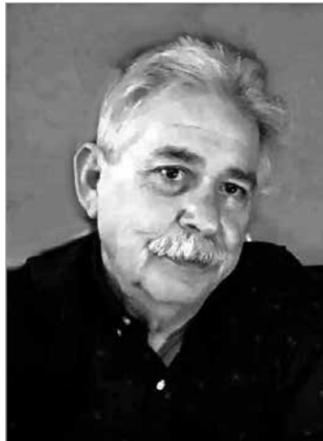


Rick Lewis writes: MGySgt Len Maffioli, survivor of combat tours in three wars (WWII – Iwo Jima, Korea and Vietnam) and long-time friend of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot passed away on December 27, 2021. We’re holding a brief memorial service here at the Depot Chapel this coming Monday, 24 Jan, at

1030. This will be followed by internment at the Miramar National Cemetery. He was a tanker during his entire USMC career and the owner of the MCTA “Silver Sprocket” award for the Oldest Tanker Alive.

As a side note, Len co-authored a book on his life as a 3 war Marine and a POW... Grown Gray in War: The Len Maffioli Story

Fuentes, Mario
1949 – 2022



Mario Fuentes born May 3, 1949 in San Antonio, Texas went to be with our Lord on January 14, 2022, at the age of 72. He was preceded in death by his parents, Federico and Maria de Jesus Fuentes; and brothers Hector Fuentes and Federico (Ranchero) Fuentes Jr. He is survived by beloved wife, Anna G. Fuentes; sons, Mario Fuentes Jr and Steven

Fuentes; sisters, Lupe Fernandez (Gustavo) and Rosa Lopez (Jesse); two grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Mario was a proud veteran of the United States Marine

Corps who served as a tank crewman in Vietnam and earned a Purple Heart medal. He was a longtime member of the USMC VTA. He will be missed by many friends and family.

Sharon “Sherry” Ann Luli



Longtime VTA member, Roger Luli asked that we inform the membership of his dear wife’s recent passing. Since Sherry accompanied Roger to many of our biennial reunions and many members knew and loved Sherry.

Sharon Ann “Sherry” Luli (nee Haeflinger) was called home to be with the Lord

on February 5, 2022. She would like to be remembered as a child of God; a loving member of the Melvin and Margaret Haeflinger family along with Sister Carol Ehrbar; devoted wife of 51 years to Roger; nurturing mother to Michael (Alisha) and Amanda Ringenbach (Kurt); loving Grandmother to Keregan, Ryanna, Henry, David and Charlie.

She was born and raised in Cleveland and educated in the Cleveland School System, later at Bowling Green University and Baldwin-Wallace College. Her career was in education, first in the Berea school system, then in the

Bay Village School System, and later at Baldwin-Wallace College. She was instrumental in developing a Christian Education Curriculum first at Church of the Advent, then Bay Presbyterian Church. She will be interred at the Ohio Western Reserve Cemetery.

George Fred Ogle
1936–2021



George passed away on August 8, 2021, in Oceanside, California. Born on May 9, 1936 in Crystal City, Missouri, he grew up near the Mississippi River, and always carried that history with him. His favorite song “Proud Mary”, was his anthem to his childhood, and he loved to dance to it. He was a fantastic dancer,

and he and Rosemary, his wife of 64 years, were usually the first on the dance floor.

George proudly served in the Marine Corps for 20 years, making many lifelong friends that he cherished as his ‘brothers.’ He worked for Southern California Edison before he retired. George joined the USMC VTA early on but dropped out in 2006.



GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess what the US armored vehicle 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

Last issue there was NO ONE who called to identify Bruce Van Apeldoorn.



Tanks & Medals of Valor

Peter J Ritch

Home of record: Syracuse, New York

Bronze Star Medal

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War

Service: US Marine Corps

RANK: 1st Lieutenant

UNIT: 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division (Rein)

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" to 1st Lieutenant Peter J Ritch, United States Marine Corps, for heroic achievement while serving as a tank platoon leader with Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam. On February 22, 1969, Lt Ritch



skillfully manning his .50 caliber machine gun to suppress enemy fire threatening infantry personnel riding on the back of his vehicle. After clearing the hazardous area he again exposed himself to hostile fire and deployed his tanks and used supporting fire from his units 90mm weapons to allow the infantry to deploy. At the risk of his own life, he ensured the safety of others.

distinguished himself against a platoon size force of North Vietnamese Regulars who were attacking his armored column with automatic weapons fire. Disregarding his own safety, he exposed himself to intense enemy fire while

For his actions Lt Ritch is awarded the Bronze Star Medal with combat V device. His courage and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service. ■

Keep It Separate: Why America Wants a Marine Corps

BY MAJOR BRIAN KERK, U.S. MARINE CORPS
DECEMBER 2021

The Marine Corps of today is not the one of the 1950s. Revisiting an argument from that era to abolish the service is more of an intellectual exercise than a relevant one.

The recent article by retired Commander Norman Denny, “How to Absorb the Marine Corps into the Army and Navy,” offered new life to an old discussion within U.S. national security circles: Does America need a Marine Corps? Denny answers in the negative, arguing that the Army, Navy, and Air Force are capable of performing the Marine Corps’ missions, and proposes ways to execute this absorption.

First, the naval community must tip its hat to Commander Denny for his willingness to recommend a proposal he certainly knew would result in significant push back. This conversation is often rife with emotion and parochialism, and it is rare to see clear-eyed arguments made about this subject. Offering such a heterodox yet structured argument, his article embodies the U.S. Naval Institute’s mission of daring to read, think, speak, and write.

That said, Denny’s arguments don’t make the case. He overestimates the capabilities of the other services to take on the Marine Corps’ missions, underestimates the massive structural challenges inherent in his proposal, does not account for the ever-adapting nature of the Marine Corps as a service, and does not appreciate the unique synergy of the service as a fighting force.

Commander Denny frames much of his argument around the dialogue occurring after World War II and the Korean War. While important, this ignores the changes that have

occurred over the ensuing seven decades. Denny claims that the Army can assume amphibious assault responsibilities because it performed this role at Normandy. The Army did indeed conduct a number of impressive amphibious operations across the European Theater of Operations in World War II, Normandy being just one of them. But the Army was capable of doing this because the units involved in those operations were manned, trained, and equipped for the task, and they worked closely with the Navy toward this aim. The Army is not capable of doing those tasks today and putting this role on the Army would require significant additional structural changes to both the Army and the Navy. For example, Marine Corps acquisitions integrate the considerations of the L-Class ships from which that equipment might have to be projected. How much Army equipment currently meets this bar?

Regarding Marine aviation, Commander Denny claims the Navy and Air Force are fully capable of providing close-air support, but uses as his citation an article showcasing a Navy F/A-18 shooting down a Syrian Su-22 fighter-bomber. This air-to-air combat role is functionally and completely different from the role of close air support (CAS). While other services possess aircraft that can perform close-air support, doing this also requires integration of those pilots and their aircraft into aviation command-and-control systems for their employment in the CAS role. What makes Marine Corps aviation so effective in providing CAS is that the aircraft fall under the command-and-control of a Marine commander common to the ground

forces—that is, the aviation is organic to the Marine Corps unit. For this level of effectiveness of CAS to hold under Denny’s proposal, the aviation belonging to the ground forces (in this case, now an Army unit) would also have to be organic to the Army commander common to both the ground forces and the air forces. Such an arrangement would require significant additional structural changes to the Army and/or the Navy to pull off. It would also require Army fixed-wing pilots, or the assignment of Navy fixed-wing pilots to the Army. Both options are rife with additional challenges requiring myriad structural changes.

Regarding what the nation wants, Commander Denny suggests the Marine Corps will demand the status quo. This contention seems to completely bypass every discussion on Marine Corps force design that has dominated Marine Corps professional discourse since General David H. Berger became the commandant. The 38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance, Force Design 2030, Talent Management 2030, and a Concept for Stand-In Forces are fundamentally about radically changing the status quo to better pursue naval integration. The Commandant himself has published numerous articles in Proceedings and elsewhere advocating for these changes, while many other naval professionals have further discussed and fiercely debated these changes. The bottom line is that the Marine Corps is probably the last service that will demand the status quo from Congress. As it has historically demonstrated, the Marine Corps will instead continue to be a chameleon and change to fit the needs of the nation.

Later, Denny suggests that incorporating the Marine Corps into the Army would “eliminate the need for the Commandant to go to the Army and beg for future armor and artillery support.” In the context of a joint operation, if Marine Corps forces needed additional armor or artillery support, this would be requested from the commander of those Marine Corps forces through the joint task force commander, and not the Commandant, who has no role in the command-and-control of combat forces. Further, this comment

does not seem to appreciate the “why” behind the divestment of armor and the replacement of tube artillery for rocket artillery—to support force-design efforts for naval integration and allow Marines to serve as an extension of the fleet, a task for which armor is poorly suited.

Finally, the theme underwriting all these critiques is that an organization is more than its line-and-block chart would suggest, and units are not truly interchangeable. Service culture matters, as this bleeds into doctrine,

tactics, standards, and ultimately into the capabilities of one unit versus another. To absorb the Marine Corps into another service would ultimately rob the organization of the culture that makes it so much more valuable and effective than the sum of its parts—and, consequently, something uniquely effective and capable. Marines are different, in the best way possible. Americans know this—and that is why they want a Marine Corps.

ARVN Take Over An Hoa

AN HOA!
To the thousands of Leathernecks who have served their tours in Vietnam there, those two words evoke many memories.

Laughter and pain, rain and heat, dust and mud, rockets and land assaults, and the sense of pride in accomplishment, the name An Hoa Combat Base brings to the men who knew this orange scar of clay near the Arizona Territory, 20 miles southwest of here.

An Hoa, as far as Marines are concerned, is now another illustrious name to be added to the long list where Marines have fought. One of the first Marine units to help defend a vital industrial complex under construction there, the 2d Battalion, Fifth Marines, arrived on Dec. 30, 1966.

The battalion was the last Marine unit to leave the combat base as it was turned over to the 1st Battalion, 51st Regiment, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), on Sept. 20, 1970.

For years the scene of bustling activity, many datelines filled the newspapers of the world, starting, “AN HOA, Vietnam.” Names like Go Noi Island, Liberty Bridge, the Phu Nhuan Region, Arizona Territory, Football Island, Vu Gia and Thu Bon Rivers, Alligator Lake and many, many more come to mind when An Hoa is mentioned.

The vast An Hoa Basin was the stage for many major operations and large scale battles initiated not only by Free World Forces but also the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong.

Aside from the construction of the industrial complex there, the only source of soft coal in Vietnam is a mine nearby. An Hoa lies in the path of enemy infiltration from the mountains west and southwest of Danang to the country’s second largest city. It

is one of the many keystones in the security of the Danang Vital Area.

From a helicopter high over the Arizona Territory, An Hoa is set off by the brilliant orange clay compound surrounded by verdant fields, lakes, rivers and scenic mountain terrain. On the ground it’s quite different.

They even have a name for it: An Hoa Mud. In the monsoon season the An Hoa Basin seems to be the draining point for every drop of water that falls in the region. Vast quagmires stall machines and men alike. Still, the elements were overcome in the past and movement was always somehow possible.

When seasonal rains seemed to be at their peak everyone prayed the approaching summer would hasten the sun’s return. When it did the mud turned to a fine dust that settled and worked its way into everything, making life miserably orange tinted. A huge dust cloud visible for miles marked the area and everyone prayed for rain again.

Just outside the multiple rows of concertina wire that rings the combat base lies one of the most dangerous regions in Vietnam —

the Arizona Territory. Named after an operation conducted by the Seventh Marine Regiment in June 1967, the area is pitted with deadly booby traps and land mines. An Hoa is the gateway to the territory and its deathtraps.

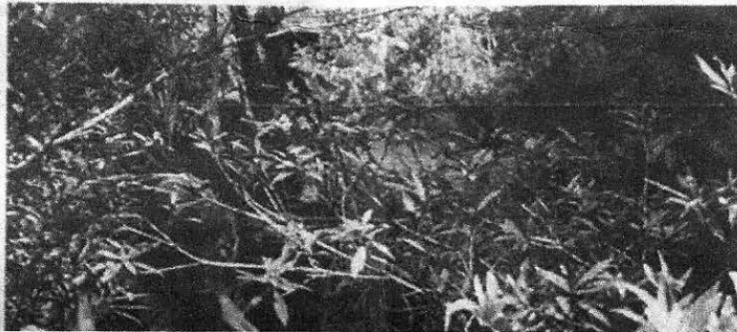
Yet the Marines there have tamed these one-time enemy strongholds and have moved about the area freely in search of contact with the enemy during recent months.

Major battles have raged across the area. In May 1969, an estimated battalion of NVA was caught on the banks of the Vu Gua River by units of the 2d Bn., 5th Marines. After the din of battle had ceased, 200 of the enemy lay dead on the battlefield.

Operation TAYLOR COM-MON, one of the largest operations conducted in the area, ended with 1,266 of the enemy killed.

Units working out of An Hoa participated in many of the “grand scale” operations such as Union I and II, Pipestone Canyon, Allen Brook, Mamaluke Thrust, Oklahoma Hills and others.

Story by Cpl. “J” Richards, photos by USMC photographers



An Hoa Leathernecks in battalion and multi-battalion strength engaged similar sized Viet Cong and NVA units in the area. Enemy kills in the hundreds each month were common.

In the midst of this blooded ground, An Hoa bore the brunt of savage ground assaults that sometimes breached the defensive wires and had to be stopped inside the perimeter.

Rocket and mortar attacks made living in sandbagged bunkers a necessity. Daily rocket attacks, an enemy harassment tactic, brought life down to the bare essentials. Showered and shaved Leathernecks in fresh jungle utilities were not to be found on the combat base.

With the continued Marine success in the An Hoa Basin, life became relatively easier. The direction changed from pitched battles to small unit action. Pacification of the entire area advanced rapidly as combined Marine, Regional Force and Popular Force units secured former enemy sanctuaries. Whole villages were relocated, leaving entire areas devoid of civilian inhabitants and denying much needed food and shelter from prowling enemy units.

As the Vietnamization of the war progressed, soldiers from ARVN units began taking over more and more responsibilities in the field. Many of An Hoa’s sister components changed hands.

An Hoa, once a respite and refuge for tired “bush” Marines, where a man could take a shower, eat a hot meal, see a movie, have a beer and relax in relative safety, was a home to many Leathernecks.

The 5th Marines have since departed; their colors fly elsewhere in the Republic of Vietnam, and the ARVN now hold this important bastion. But the memory of An Hoa remains and possibly, An Hoa also remembers its Marines.

V. A. News & Updates

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

Death | Loss of a Spouse Ways to Prepare for It

The death of a spouse is a traumatic event. Whether it's due to illness or injury and whether it's anticipated or unexpected — it doesn't matter. Preparing for death is something we often put off. The reality is that even though death may be awkward to discuss, it's better to be prepared and have a financial plan. The conversation may be difficult to have, but you'll be glad you sat down with your partner to deal with the issues today, because later, during the grieving process, they will be the last thing you will want to worry about.

Put a Team in Place

Assemble a great team to help you prepare for the worst. You will need an estate attorney, an accountant, and a financial adviser. There are also support organizations that can help. In Charge Debt Solutions provides information on organizations that can help widows with financial relief, and the American Widow Project specifically aims to help military widows. If you or your spouse is a veteran or in the military, check out some of these many survivor support organizations. Make a list of them for when the time comes.

Call Upon Friends to Help

Have a couple of friends you can call on in an emergency. When a spouse passes, you will be overwhelmed with many things. You will be dealing with funeral arrangements, friends and relatives calling, breaking the news to children, or collecting a vehicle if your spouse died while at work. If you have someone who can help you with these tasks, it will be a lot easier. If you have a pet, make sure you have someone who can take care of it if you have to travel or be away from your house for extended periods of time.

Set Up a Will

It can take less than an hour to draft a will at LegalZoom — a nationally recognized discount legal firm. A will enables you to designate your assets and property and takes the burden off your spouse in the event of your demise. If you have children, you can designate who will be responsible for their care.

Make Sure You Are an Ira Beneficiary

Remember, it's the designated beneficiary who receives the assets from an individual retirement account (IRA). (The exception to this rule is if the IRA contributor resides in a community-property state and the spouse did not approve the designation of beneficiary. In that case, the spouse may be entitled to only a portion of the IRA.) Naming your spouse as the primary beneficiary is advantageous as it enables your 105 spouse to roll the IRA over into their own IRA — and then name children as beneficiaries as needed. The best way to deal with the complexities of retirement accounts is to work with an estate-planning attorney who can help navigate the nuances of these deals.

Make Funeral Arrangements In Advance

It may sound morbid, but it is so much easier if arrangements and burial wishes are set up before anything bad happens. Does your spouse want a cemetery plot or a burial niche? Have you selected a funeral home? You will need to meet with a funeral director. Talk it over and find out how to make things easier for all involved.

Apply For Life Insurance

If you haven't thought about it, now is the time. Some plans are as inexpensive as \$15 a month. Life insurance can help you cover funeral costs, medical bills, car payments, rent or mortgage and even offset childcare costs. It's a worthwhile investment.

Examine Long-Term Expenses

Perhaps you've bought a house, and you have mortgage payments. If you have children, maybe they attend private school, or perhaps you and your spouse have been saving for college tuition. The loss of your spouse could mean drastic lifestyle changes for you and your family. Examine these expenses with your mate in advance, and, as a team, explore your options for going forward in the event of a death. Options to consider may include refinancing your mortgage or selling the family home and downsizing to a smaller place.

Plan To File For Work-Related Benefits

If your spouse is employed at the time of their death, you may be eligible for group life or accident insurance benefits, depending on the cause of death. In addition, there may be retiree life insurance in force. You may also be entitled to a lump-sum or monthly payment from the company pension plan or other savings plans. Surviving spouses should contact previous employers if there could be accrued pensions that were never paid out. Beforehand, maintain a list of company names, phone numbers, and dates of service.

Contact Insurance Companies

Ahead of time, gather information on any life insurance policies, and find out what documentation the insurers will need in the event your spouse dies. This will make it easier when the time comes to make a claim. Proceeds are usually disbursed within 30 days after all requested materials have been received.

Social Security — Investigate Spousal Benefits

If your spouse passes before you do, know that you are entitled to receive half of their Social Security benefits upon your retirement. For example: A widow or widower of full retirement age is entitled to 100 percent of the deceased's benefit amount. If the survivor is between 60 and full retirement age, that amount could be 71.5 percent to 99 percent depending on age and other circumstances. The age ranges change for those who are disabled or rearing children. The more that's been paid into Social Security, the higher the payout will be. It's wise

to contact your Social Security office and go over such details ahead of time.

Social Security — Know the Remarriage Rules

If you remarry after you reach age 60 (or 50 if disabled), you will continue to qualify for benefits on your deceased spouse's Social Security record. If you remarry before you turn 60, you forfeit this benefit.

Plan To Seek the Special Lump-Sum Payment

When a spouse dies, Social Security gives a special lump-sum death payment of \$255. This is a one-time payment, and there are specific qualifications for receiving this money. Generally, this lump-sum is paid to 106 the surviving spouse who was living in the same household as the deceased when they died. If they were living apart, the surviving spouse can still receive the lump-sum provided that, during the month the person died, they were either already receiving benefits on the deceased's record or became eligible for benefits upon the person's death.

Explore Tax Implications

Did you know that the date of a spouse's passing determines the amount of income and deductions that will be reported on a person's tax return? Marital status is determined on the last day of the tax year (Dec. 31), but when a married taxpayer dies, different rules apply. The married-filing-jointly status is often permitted even if the death occurred on Jan. 1. Bottom line, when it comes to taxes and the death of a spouse, there are many rules that come into play, and they are as complex as they are varied. Best suggestion: Consult with a tax attorney or accountant for optimal advice.

Investigate Access to Accounts

You don't want to be locked out of your savings simply because your spouse passes away. You will continue to have access to joint bank accounts. Any account in your spouse's name alone typically will not be accessible to the executor (who may be you) until the will is probated. But if there's money in your spouse's account, the bank will likely advance funds to pay for the funeral if you present a bill. And again, plan to have a death certificate for the bank. They may require an original. It's also a good idea to make a plan for your social media and other online accounts, so that your spouse can access, deactivate or delete those accounts when needed.

Plan for Your Estate

Depending on the circumstances surrounding a spouse's passing, survivors may have issues that require estate planning. Remember, estate planning isn't strictly for the wealthy. For example, if your spouse died in an accident, you might receive insurance money and suddenly you find yourself with \$50,000. You might want to set those funds aside through asset-protection planning — which an estate planner can do. Perhaps it's been a few years since your spouse's passing and you're ready to remarry, but you have children and money from your first marriage. Your goals may include: providing for your children from that prior marriage after your death, setting up a tax shelter for your existing property, or providing for family members that may have special needs. Estate planning can be complex and it requires special knowledge, so it's best to consult with a professional.

Know How to Handle Credit Card Debt

If a card is solely in your spouse's name (and your spouse had no

estate and no will), you can probably skate by without paying off this debt. Credit card companies will try to scare consumers into paying off any remaining debt, but the reality is: If it's not in your name, you don't need to worry about it. Plan to send a copy of the death certificate and a letter informing the company that your spouse died intestate. If it's a joint account or there's an estate, plan to consult with your attorney on whether you are responsible for the outstanding debt.

Investigate Flexible Spending Accounts

It's important to understand your spouse's health care plan and its benefits, such as flexible spending accounts that allow employees to set aside tax-deferred money for health expenses. Some FSAs allow for participants' beneficiaries or the representative of the estate to submit claims for expenses or benefits for the remainder of a plan year or until the plan's funds allocated to each specific benefit are exhausted. Participants may designate a specific beneficiary for this purpose. If no such beneficiary is specified, the 107 plan's administrator may be the one deciding if the spouse, a dependent, or a representative from the estate is eligible to continue coverage throughout the year. Some plans specify that coverage ceases when a participant dies. The best solution is to contact your spouse's health plan administrator and discuss the options. A good question to ask: Are you and your family eligible for COBRA should benefits cease?

Plan To Obtain Death Certificates

After the death of a spouse, the surviving partner will need copies of the deceased's death certificate. Plan to get at least three or four certified copies of your spouse's death certificate. You will need certified, government-issued originals for claiming life insurance, pension benefits, Medicaid benefits, and other services. Some companies, such as credit card companies will require only a photocopy. You can obtain copies and original documents for the many types of transactions associated with your spouse's death from your county recorder's office. Your funeral director can assist in this process.

Check On the Paycheck

Chances are your spouse has a few weeks of back pay, vacation pay or sick pay that may have accrued. By law, if you are the beneficiary, or even if you're not, and simply live in a state with community-property laws, you should be eligible to receive your spouse's last paycheck. Plan to get in touch with the human resources department at your spouse's employer. They will be able to direct you to someone who can discuss payment in detail.

Don't Be Afraid To Seek Support

If your spouse dies, go easy on yourself. This is a time of great change. You will feel as if you're on an emotional roller coaster. The non-profit group Mental Health America acknowledges that "the loss of a loved one is life's most stressful event." They advise seeking out friends and relatives who can understand your feelings of loss.

[Source: Cheapism | Taylor Van Arsdale | October 12, 2018 ++]

After Vet Death Guide What to Do Afterwards

Whether you're a spouse, a dependent who has recently lost your military veteran or you're a retired military veteran looking to make sure all your "ducks are in a row" for your next of kin in case you pass away — knowing what to do when a military veteran or retiree dies is important. If you type into your computer search engine "After >>

Vet Death Guide” you will find:

- How to prepare for the event of a military veteran passing.
- Who you need to contact.
- Required documentation.
- What forms need to be completed and where to obtain them.
- Resources Available to Assist after a Military Veteran or Retiree Dies.

While it’s hard to consider your death or that of a loved one, being prepared can ease some of the burden while you or your loved ones grieve. It may feel like a morbid task, but taking the time to discuss your wishes and organize documents can help make the process easier to handle when the time comes.

[Source: Military Wallet | Jessica Gettle | November 17, 202 ++]

VA Long Term Care Update 02: Can Escalating Demand be met?

More of our loved ones who are getting older or have special medical needs requiring basic health care assistance are getting the help they require at home instead of in a facility or institutional setting. The VA has been expanding long-term care (LTC) services to veterans in the home or in a community setting, as have other public health care systems, as more veterans and their families’ desire to age in place. This comes at a time when the country has contended with widespread COVID-19 outbreaks in LTC facilities such as nursing homes while also dealing with the rapidly growing elderly population — one study estimated the growth in LTC employment between 2010 and 2030 at 79%.

Veterans rely on VA LTC for everything from occasional help around the house to around-the-clock care. Eligibility is primarily based on the extent of a service-connected disability. To gain a better perspective of veterans’ access to home and community-based services, the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health conducted a hearing on 27 JUL to address what the chair, Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA) refers to as a “silver tsunami” — a massive wave of Americans and veterans requiring LTC, the scale of which is too big to ignore.”

While VA delivers 14 different types of LTC programs in both institutional settings (like community living centers or nursing homes), and non-institutional settings (like a veteran’s home or through community adult day care services), purchasing or providing the care is placing increased demand on the department’s health care system. “VA’s various LTC programs provide a continuum of services to help 19 meet veterans’ needs over time,” Dr. Scottie Hartronft, VA’s executive director for geriatrics and extended care (GEC) told lawmakers. “VA recognizes more needs to be done to accelerate home care. It is also critical to continue providing the funds needed for moving forward on these programs.” From FY 2014 to FY 2018, demand for LTC increased 14% and VA’s expected spending went up 33%. The VA projects demand will continue to grow, with spending set to double by 2037.

Know Your Care Options

Today, VA’s LTC programs serve 439,970 veterans — 73% are 65 years and older and 20% are 85 years or older. About 85% of veterans in the program are receiving care at home. Two newer extended care programs are the Veteran-Directed Care Program (VDCP) and Medical Foster Homes

- VDCP (https://www.va.gov/GERIATRICAL/pages/Veteran-Directed_Care.asp) is one of the more popular programs and garnered a lot

of attention during the hearing as a potential model for delivery of other VA health care services. The program is for veterans of all ages enrolled in VA health care who meet the clinical need criteria for services. Veterans in VDCP are given a flexible budget from the VA to purchase services that they or a family caregiver can manage as they see fit — a unique approach among VA programs.

- Medical Foster Homes (https://www.va.gov/Geriatrics/pages/Medical_Foster_Homes.asp), on the other hand, are an alternative to a nursing home. Care is delivered to a small number of veterans and non-veterans in a private-home setting where trained caregivers provide care and supervision 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Most expenses for care fall on the veteran, their family, or a legal representative.

Barriers for Veterans Accessing LTC

Lawmakers focused extensively on a February 2020 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-284.pdf>) identifying three key challenges the VA faces in meeting the growing demand for LTC services. These issues aren’t unique to the VA and are common in other health care systems nationwide:

- Workforce shortages. The VA continues to grapple with hiring and retaining geriatricians and palliative care providers, and with caregiving staff in other areas such as nursing assistant and health technician positions. Shortages contribute to growing wait lists for certain programs.
- Geographic alignment of care. The VA struggles to align its services to where veterans live because of demographic shifts in the veteran population. Providing care to veterans in rural areas is especially challenging because of the lack of adequate workforce and infrastructure to support the delivery of care.
- Difficulty meeting veterans’ needs for specialty care. Finding appropriate LTC for veterans with dementia, behavioral health conditions, ventilator care, or other specialized needs is challenging and costly.

GAO noted the VA had yet to develop measurable goals to address these challenges. Brownley voiced concern during the hearing that the VA had not yet acted on GAO’s recommendations, holding up a two page document representing GEC’s Elder Care Strategic Plan from last year. “A plan without a plan is a plan to fail,” she said; “The committee needs sufficient detail to be able to oversee and ensure goals are being accomplished.”

Like MOAA, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation (EDF) and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) support expanding LTC programs, including VDCP. Witnesses from these groups called attention to other barriers facing veterans and their caregivers and families at the hearing:

- Difficulty in finding and managing caregivers or home care workers. PVA gave one example of a quadriplegic veteran who had to interview more than 400 potential caregivers over a 10-year period. These workers are paid low wages. Agencies typically charge 20–25% above what a worker is paid, so if the VA authorizes \$20, the worker makes only \$12 or \$13 per hour.
- Caregivers are not integrated into VA’s LTC programs. EDF talked about burnout of caregivers during the pandemic. VA’s respite care is disjointed and needs to be easier to access. Caregivers help veterans stay in their homes, saving the VA from covering more expensive care in an institutional setting.
- VA LTC programs are not aligned to veterans’ needs. Programs

should put veterans and their caregivers at the center of health care like VDCP. That means building caregiving support around them, not a one-size-fits-all approach typical of the VA.

Subcommittee members were particularly baffled at why more VA medical centers have not adopted VDCP, especially as PVA testified that each medical center needs only a master level social worker to coordinate the program. VDCP is very popular and allows veterans and their families control over how benefit dollars will be spent. Hartronft told members LTC is available in all medical centers except for the two newer programs, VDCP and Medical Foster Care. “We really are trying to expand VDCP as quickly as possible and communicating awareness of the program,” he said, adding that the VA “can never over communicate with veterans on how they can access these programs.” Currently only 69 of the 171 medical centers administer the program.

What Can Veterans and Their Caregivers Expect?

The challenges and desire to improve VA LTC programs did not fall on deaf ears with subcommittee members. Brownley warned the subcommittee would be watching and making sure the department accelerates its efforts to expand VDCP and other LTC programs. She also suggested reforms for all VA LTC programs were needed to integrate caregiver support, respite care, mental health, and telehealth services more fully within the continuum of care. “I want to put together a package of LTC programs that works for veterans,” she said. “It’s about veterans having a one-stop-shop place to go to get the care they deserve.”

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | René Campos | August 3, 2021 ++]

Changes to VA’s Community Care Program raise concerns about vets’ health care access

By Leo Shane III

Wednesday, Oct 13, 2021

Veterans Affairs leaders are phasing out the department’s office in charge of community care programs, a move that some advocates are decrying as unfairly limiting veterans’ medical options but officials insist is only about efficiency and not sweeping policy changes.

Last week, VA officials said they would begin a multi-month process of “designing a new integrated access and care coordination model to better deliver seamless care.”

Connected to that, lawmakers on Capitol Hill received letters from VA Secretary Denis McDonough announcing that the Office of Community Care would be decommissioned in coming months, with its responsibilities shifted to a yet-to-be-established Office for Integrated Veterans Care.

“Implementation of these changes allows the Veterans Health Administration to continue its modernization journey and transformation to operate as a high reliability, veteran-centric organization,” the letter stated.

A GAO report this week said VA has refused to set guidelines on appointment delays for vets seeking care outside the department’s medical system.

The issue of community care — where veterans can see private-sector doctors paid for by department funds — has been a contentious one within VA for years.

Former President Donald Trump made expanding outside medical access a key point of his 2016 campaign and presidency, pushing for

more “choice” for veterans in where they received their health care.

But Democratic lawmakers — including President Joe Biden — have cautioned that too much use of private-sector doctors for core VA medical responsibilities could drain finances from the VA health care system and lead to “privatization” of the department.

In a statement to Military Times, Donald Koenig, special advisor to VA’s acting Under Secretary for Health for Integrated Veteran Care, said the goal of the new changes is not to hamper or dismantle the community care program.

“Nothing we are doing will change any appointments scheduled now or in the future,” he said. “We’re working to simplify, coordinate better, and make scheduling faster for veterans, whether for a VA provider or a community care provider. Our goal is to deliver the right care at the right time, which best meets our veteran’s health needs.”

Officials at Concerned Veterans of America — longtime advocates of increased community care programs and critics of the VA health care system — see it differently.

They noted that VA also recently took down a web page devoted to explaining veterans’ options under the community care program, effectively limiting public information about how to enroll or schedule outside appointments.

“The administration does not like community care,” said Darin Selnick, senior advisor to the group and former Veterans Affairs advisor for the Trump White House. “If they are renaming and neutering offices and moving around access to the revenue, it feels like it is part of a campaign to get rid of it completely.”

Koenig said the Office of Community Care won’t be fully shut down until next spring, with a target now of March 2022.

About 3,600 employees will be transferred to the new integrated care office, while another 4,300 will be reassigned to the Veterans Health Administration’s finance office. No jobs will be terminated or physically relocated.

But Selnick said CVA has heard from numerous veterans and congressional offices about increased problems accessing the program and getting outside medical appointments. He said the decision to separate the financial and operational functions of the program could cause even more delays and confusion.

Debate over how to expand veterans’ health care choices connects to larger national fights over the role of government and private-sector partnerships.

VA officials say that’s not true, noting that community care referrals were up about 12 percent last month compared to 2019 levels (September 2020 levels were down about 6 percent, but VA leaders say that’s because of reduced demand related to the coronavirus pandemic.)

Lawmakers received a briefing on the looming changes this week. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Mike Bost, R-Ill., said he supports efforts to improve the community care program, but said he is leery of the moves so far.

“I am hearing more and more often from veterans who are not being given the choices they are entitled to under the law,” he told Military Times. “I am very concerned that this will divert much-needed focus from community care and make it that much easier for wait times to creep back up and veterans to suffer for it, just like they did in 2014.

“It’s on Secretary McDonough to make sure that doesn’t happen, and I will be keeping very close watch.” ■

THOUGHTS ON COMBAT AND DEMOCRACY

BY DONALD C. SCOTT

Bravo Two, 5th Tank Battalion, 1st Mar Div. (Rien)

In 2001 I enrolled in a one year alternative certification program to become a certified teacher in the Texas Public School System. After graduation I was certified to teach composite science grades 6–12. In 2002 I started as a second career educator teaching physics and chemistry in a 2A school (typical graduating class ~100 each year) to high school students. I was 60 years old, and soon everyone knew I was a Marine and had served in Vietnam. It didn't take long for my students to begin asking me about my experiences during that time. Invariably one of the first things they would ask was "Did you kill anyone"? And "How many"? My answers were never direct. My responses to them were that combat among human beings was complicated, war very complex and never glorious. On the other hand, at times war was necessary to protect the nation from aggression and to protect our way of life.

So in September 2006 I sat down one early morning and penned "Thoughts on Combat and Democracy". Even though my primary task was to teach science, I always tried to mix discussions on ethics, philosophy, and deeper thinking to help those kids prepare for a life after high school. Got in trouble for that at times, but what the hell, their future was at stake. So we spent some time talking about our country and what is necessary to keep our sovereignty. Just thought this might be of interest to our members. Thanks, Don Scott, VTA member

COMBAT is neither glorious not fun -

*It is hours, days, and even months of absolute boredom and drudgery -
Separated by a few seconds of sheer and utter terror and chaos-
Followed by human waste and destruction*

*HOWEVER, a democratic society must be prepared to sacrifice and undertake
Combat to ensure self preservation.*

*ALL citizens of a democratic society are called upon to uphold the rights and
freedom of each and every member of that society while all the time
realizing that the sacrifices of those gone before are what allowed them
to have freedom of choice in the present time.*

*YES, BROTHER, there really is no free lunch -
We reap what we sow.*

*That is the law of nature in the past, now, and in the future -
and it always will be.*

*You may cheat Mother Nature for a time, but in the end, you'll only cheat
yourself and your fellow members of society.*

*FOR IN THE END, the only real pleasure we will get out of this life on earth,
Is to know that we have helped our fellow mankind whenever we could.*

*THAT, MY FRIENDS, is called TEAMWORK!!!
"No man is an island onto himself" -
WE progress through mutual effort.*

*MY CHALLENGE TO YOU—Have the intestinal fortitude (i.e. guts) to help your teammate be successful
and to ask him to help you be successful in your endeavors.*

*FOR IN THE END, if we are to survive as an American Society, we must remember those famous words: "We have met the enemy, and
they are us."
And ultimately to pull together as a team to preserve our unique way of life, albeit so fragile. ■*

What Members Are Doing

Bob Haller – New Vietnam Veterans Memorial



This is a picture of the Vietnam Memorial that was dedicated on September 26, 2021. My wife and I attended the dedication. The park is in Middletown Township, Bucks County, PA. It is heavily supported by the local community and fully funded by contributions since they have a beautiful veterans' park dedicated to all service members from all eras which is located on Veterans Highway (Route 413). The above Vietnam Memorial was dedicated to the 94 killed and one MIA in Vietnam who lived in Bucks County, PA. Captain Michael Wunch, a tanker that was killed by an RPG is on the list of names.

Bob Haller participating in the Wreaths Across America



Jim Cowman

GySgt Rube Render and VTA member Maj Jim Cowman present the City of Clovis, NM with a flag of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War ■

A Note from George Doyle



Thank you John, so much for your sending me the information of the upcoming 2022 mni-reunion of which I would love to attend. I will not be able to come this year because of insufficient funds. I would like to become a member however of your group and hopefully, will still be alive for net event in 2023 wherever it may be. I don't know if you are having a Zoom

session of parts of the meeting or not, I can join that if there is.

I have a picture that I would like to present to you and the group from the Enlisted Men's Club at the Subic Bay base from 1964. I believe it was in September of 1964. There are several of us Marines and a few Sailors at the table. The person on the far right side of the picture is me and I don't remember the names of most of the Marines except I know the guy on the left is named Eichelberger and the one to his left is Bifano. I remember him as he slugged me in a rage in a fight with someone else aboard the ship we were on. I just happened to be walking thru the hatch when I was slugged in my left jaw. I had to spend a few weeks in the Subic Bay Hospital recovering from that accident. The gentleman on my right is a Navy Corpsman (May God Bless those people), I am not sure of his name but Edwards rings a bell.

This trek was a warm up excursion

of our Beloved Corps preceding the 3rd Tank Battalion landing at Hue and then proceeded to Hue Phu Bai Airport area on Holy Thursday of 1965. It seems April 12th was the date, I am not 100% sure on the date but Holy Thursday I am sure of.

I remained in Hue Phu Bai until sometime in June when I was transferred to Da Nang area by helicopter as my enlistment was about to expire, still a member of the 3rd Tank Battalion.

While in the Hue area the company commander was a lieutenant who wanted me to go on patrol with him in the daytime to reconnoiter the area for enemy activity. Since I was a Radio Technician (2841) I was the only one besides the armorer who had a rifle, which is why he always wanted me to accompany him. I was made a Corporal while still at 29 Palms in the FAG (Field Artillery Group 155 self-propelled guns). This only happened

a few times but he always wanted my rifle for himself leaving me defenseless. It all worked out for the good.

Back in those days they used to publish the names of those who gave their all for our country. Among those names I read about after returning home to Indiana was a Lieutenant Woolly (I am not sure on the spelling). I believe he was from 2 years

at Yale University. A great loss as he was as he was a fine officer. Another person was a Sergeant Clark. He was a tank commander. I never met a more Gung Ho Marine. There was another dear Marine who lost his life while I was at Da Nang, he was a small arms weapons expert, an Armorer. I do not remember his name however.

There is more I would like to write; however, at this time I must get to work, yes I am 77 years old and still working. I sell Health, Accident and Life insurance and would like to be an agent for those Marines who live in the states where I am licensed. I specialize in MEDICARE. The States are Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Florida and Texas and I represent most of the major carriers including Aetna, United Health Care and Humana and others.

Respectfully,
George Doyle, Corporal, USMC,
1968597

My Tour in Vietnam

BY DAVE ZASLOW

In 1964 I was on a Philippines float with 3/9. While on Mindoro Island doing jungle survival training, we were taken back to our tanks by 12th Marines with no explanation. We boarded our tanks on the Mike and U boats and to our LSD 18 Colonial with no word what was going on. When we got to sea, the platoon leader and sergeant got us all together in our sleeping quarters for the mystery info.

The platoon leader broke out a map of South East Asia, and start talking about a place called North and South Viet Nam. We went from a BLT to an RLT over night. Actually, there were two RLT's, one in the Gulf of Tonkin and the one we were in off the coast of DaNang.

For seventy-five days, 6 Aug to 20 Oct 1964 I was floating only five miles off the coast. On October 20th I was taken off the LSD and returned to Co nus for my next duty station. My three years on Okinawa was over.

After being with BLT 2/6 in

Veigas Puerto Rico for aprox four months and aprox three and a half at Cuba I got to return to Viet Nam 29 September 1966 thru 16 Sep 1967.

After staging at Camp Pendleton, California, we headed to San Diego to be boarded on a couple of APA's distend for the Nam.

My first outfit I was attached to was "C" co. 3rd Tk's. 29 Sept 1966. in 14 Oct 1966- 12 Nov. I was with 4th Marines. I was flown from Da Nang to Dong Ha via C-130 and trucked out to the Rock Pile.

On 13 Nov 1966 I was with "A" Co. 5th Tk. Bn. Attached to 2/4 till 11 Dec 1966.

8 Jan 1967 "B" Co 3rd Tk. Bn. Kobie Ton Ton

11 Marl 967 - 16 Sep I 967 "C" Co. 3rd Tk. Bn. Camp Evans

While with these many different outfits we were on many types of mission's armored columns, night parameter security, bridge security et cetera.

When I was at Camp Evans we

would go out to a forward combat base hill?? This position over looked the Ho Chi Minh trail. Every day B-S2's and Phantom's would constantly bomb and bomb and bomb. I took movies of the B-S2's dropping there loads. It was amazing to see how these bombs would just walk across the mountain sides from planes that could not even be seen or heard.

I can remember going from Camp Evan's to the forward outpost with the relieving tank section. We had to pass though a stream was some grunt outfit was trying to wash up.

One of the persons washing down to his skivvies was the Chaplin. We all needed to try and get clean.

We participated in many search and destroy missions, Prairie, Hastings and many more I just can't remember them all, so long ago.

David Zaslow
Sargent United States Marine
Corps

I haven't sent in anything for a while and I hope you are well and happy. I am doing well and my wife says I'm at least 50% better looking when I wear my Covid mask!

Leaving Vietnam in a Hurry

BY MIKE LEDFORD

On October 13, 1968, my 22nd birthday, I was waiting to board a Continental 707 for my flight home from Da Nang, South Vietnam. I had just finished my 13 months on the DMZ with A Co. 3rd Tank Bn., 3rd Marine Division. As we waited on the tarmac, enemy 122 mm rockets started impacting around us. The pilot had the engines running and was reading out the names on the manifest to board. All of a sudden, he threw his papers up into the air and yelled, "Get on board if you are

coming!"

We piled on board, they shut the boarding door and the pilot took off. It was the monsoons and heavily over-clouded. As I tried to fasten my seatbelt, I was upside down! Then a stewardess went flying by me. After we settled down out over the South China Sea, the pilot got on the intercom and told us that we had just been in a barrel roll to avoid an incoming Vietnamese transport plane that was trying to land as we took off. Of course, we took off without

any proper clearance from the tower. The flying stewardess broke her arm but everyone else was okay. The pilot commented that the 707 could do almost anything a fighter plane could do. I believed him!

As you see from the above note, leaving Vietnam was a little bit of an adventure for me. As the pilot of our Continental Boeing 707 said that day, "You have been in a barrel roll on a 707 and probably nobody will believe you!" So here is the proof to corroborate my story: >>

See the following link: Boeing's Insane Gamble—The First 707—YouTube

In 1955, Boeing invited all of the airlines to witness, what they described, as history in the making. A

new type of passenger plane, it's like anything ever seen before. But instead of a simple tour and fly by, the test pilot did a series of impromptu maneuvers that left everyone watching on the ground gob smacked. Twin barrel

The Early Truck Gets The Mine

BY BEN COLE

When I have my blood drawn for a donation or physical, I always remember an incident in the spring of 1967. It was at the triage of Charlie Med, the field hospital near the airstrip at Phu Bai, Viet Nam.

When I arrived in country in three months earlier even though I was 1811 tanker, I was assigned to a newly formed battery of 155 howitzers with 4th Bn 12th Marines. We had our guns dug in on a hillside north of Hue overlooking Highway 1 that would become Camp Evans. Our water trailer was filled from a river north of their base where it was supposedly treated.

I got a case of diarrhea that would go not go away. I tried slough it off as bad C-rats but in a couple of days it got worse. I couldn't stand up without getting sick.

The pills the battery Corpsman gave me didn't help. Finally, when I couldn't pull my load on the crew, he told me to be on our truck the next morning to the Charlie Med in Phu Bai just a few miles down Highway One, aka Thunder Road. It left early the next morning and I missed it due to an emergency head call. I was lucky and caught a Huey that was headed there.

The chopper landed down the runway from the busy medivac pad for Charlie Med where wounded were being unloaded. A unit had been hit and they were bringing in the casualties. The noise and dust of choppers and the stretcher cases being rushed inside was right out a Mash episode. While walking down the runway, I was dizzy and stopped a couple of times to lay down, but

finally made it to a shady spot near the entrance and laid down under a tree and waited.

I felt like a slacker lying there watching shot up guys being carried in. I was intact and unbloodied but felt like hell. I considered going back to Camp Evans and finding a corner to curl up in and die but just standing up would make me dizzy and sick again. I knew I had to stay to get better.

Just as I nodded off, a corpsman woke me and up led me into a large hootch. I sat down at a small desk cluttered with paperwork and open cabinets with bottles and equipment lying about. Across the room wounded Marines on stretchers waited their turn in the operating room next door.

The head Doc called younger corpsman over and take my blood sample. He wore new clean utilities and looked like middle schooler with a blank look on his face. He stuck me once, then again but still couldn't find a vein. He kept trying. Finally, after a half dozen needle jabs, he found a gusher on the inside my left elbow. It wasn't that my vein was small or hard to find, he was new and just needed practice. He was in the right place to learn, unfortunately I must have been his first patient.

A few minutes after the blood sample, they took my temperature and told me I had amoebic dysentery and had to be cooled down. I was taken down a breezeway that connected several hootches on each side.

The one just across the breezeway had chain length fencing inside the walls and a substantial pad-locked metal door. Inside were bandaged Viet Cong and NVA sitting on benches

rolls at 490 miles per hour—proving not only the military performance of this new aircraft, but that the age of the jetliner had truly arrived.

while others in cots with IVs attached. Some looked back at me with forlorn looks or hateful stares while others just looked away.

A Marine MP stood nearby with a rifle guarding them. I wondered if he was there to keep them from escaping and protect our people from them, or the other way around.

After finding a head for a quick dry heave vomit, I was led into another hootch with an oversize bathtub filled with ice. In I went and it was cold. I immediately knew of what the people on the Titanic must have felt like. What seemed like an hour, but was probably only ten minutes, I got a thermometer check where the sun doesn't shine. After a few more minutes in the frigid tub a second try gave them the number they wanted, and I was allowed to exit the icy water.

I was led to another hootch, assigned a bunk and an IV was hooked up. Around me were other Marines, wounded and bandaged. A couple lay motionless and unconscious with blood-stained bandages where limbs had been.

Years later I recall the scene in the movie Patton when he accosted the shell-shocked GI in the hospital for being in a same room as the wounded and dying soldiers. I could picture George C. Scott busting through the door of that ward and asking what I was doing there.

I was just before getting warm and comfortable when a familiar face walked through the door. I recognized him even though his arm was in sling and his face was bandaged. He was a buddy from my battery at Evans. I had last seen him earlier in that morning

before he boarded the truck I missed.

I asked, "What happened to you?" "We hit a mine" he explained. "The first sergeant didn't want to wait for the roads to be swept for mines and we went out on our own. He was riding shotgun and just north of Hue it went off under the front of wheels. He is probably going to lose both legs." I asked about the driver. "He got hit with glass in the face and will probably

be blinded." "Me and another Marine were in the open back of the Dodge and were tossed out like ragdolls but survived.

Looking back decades later at my close calls I consider myself lucky. Timing is almost everything, being punctual is good, but being late is not always bad.

I spent two more days there taking more pills resulting in fewer throw

ups and head calls before I persuaded them that I was good to go. I caught a chopper back to Evans rather a truck after becoming a little mine shy. Six months later I would have another mine event and again I would be lucky. A truck would not be involved, it would be a tank.

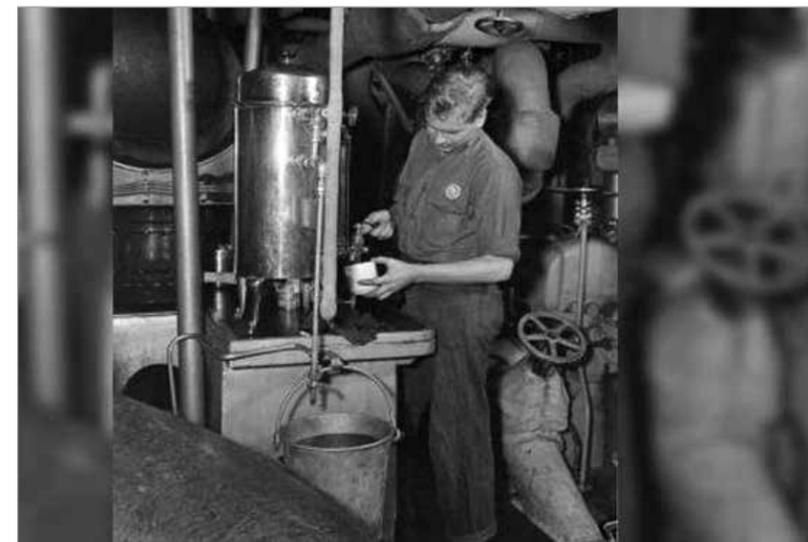
Bc 2022

Why WWII Navy Veterans Added Salt to Their Coffee

BY BLAKE STILWELL

In 1914, Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels banned alcohol from all U.S. Navy property, and ever since the cup of coffee has replaced the sailor's grog aboard American ships. Those black beans became just as important for fueling the Navy as diesel fuel or uranium. Descendants of sailors who fought in World War II might have noticed their dad or grandpa adding a dash of salt to their morning coffee and wondered why on Earth they would do that.

There are actually two reasons "old salts" have been known to do this (and it's not why they're called old salts). Aboard Navy ships mornings don't happen at the same time for every sailor. As a result, the ship keeps coffee brewing all the time, so no matter when your morning is, a cup of Joe is ready somewhere. But anyone who has ever had a big steaming cup of



An enlisted coffee mess aboard a submarine.

government coffee knows, it's not the best. That's true today, and it was true during World War II.

When your coffee tastes terrible you have a few options. You can add cream and sugar—if it's available. Or you can cut the bitter taste some other way. For World War II era sailors, the most readily available way was through the use of table salt. You might have seen some people salting fruit like cantaloupe and grapefruit or adding salt to their beer. That's because when

presented with both flavors at the same time, human taste buds can be fooled into ignoring bitter tastes and reacting more strongly to salty tastes instead. Salting coffee did the trick to reduce the bitter flavor and made the brew more palatable.

But that's not the only reason sailors of that era grew accustomed to salty coffee, bringing the preference home

with them when the war ended. The desalination units on World War II-era ships that converted sea water to drinking water weren't 100% efficient at removing the salt from the water. As a result, the coffee retained a slightly salty flavor, so sailors just got used to the taste. Now that we know that trick, we can all feel free to buy the world's worst bulk coffee and, with a little salt, make it seem like Juan Valdez himself brought it to you from the mountains of Colombia.

After the 2021 VTA Providence reunion, John Wear and Rick Beirne exchanged the following string of emails:

John Wear wrote: Hey Rick, thanks for the email. Here are some additional comments:

1. I just stuck the M-48A3 tank

model in the mail to you that you ordered at the reunion. I hope that you enjoy it.

2. I spoke to Richard Zuley at

the Providence reunion. He had just finished having a long chat with you. Dick reminded me that YOU were the Charlie Co, 5th Tanks skipper >>

when Dick and I were bunkmates in the Charlie Co barracks at Las Flores in 1967. Go figure! I don't know if you recall, late that year, I was the Training NCO for Charlie Co. I wanted to go to Vietnam and 1st Sgt Moss told me that if I could find a replacement that he'd sign my deployment orders. Zuley took over for me and I went.

Richard Beirne replied: WOW!! Regrettably I do not remember, but the story kind of rings a bell. Yeah, Richard told me about how he used to get my field jacket from my office and go out and test the Marines providing security at the tank park asking them their general orders.

I often think of "Boogaw," (1st Sgt Moss) specifically the time we had a beach party and the troops picked him up and dropped him in the tarp lined trailer after we had drunk most (all?) the beer. I was done likewise, perhaps before, and I was concerned the ice cold water would stop his heart

Thanks for sending the tank model. Between the USMCVTA and the Corgi factory I have four (now five) tanks. That's a tank platoon.

John Wear: I remember one specific Charlie Company, 5th Tanks party on the beach in 1967. I think that it was at the Camp Pendleton San Onofre beach club. The jeep trailer was filled with ice and beer. Somewhere I have a photo of my buddy, Bob Minetto (KIA 1968) and me leaning on the trailer both of us "toasted" on way too many beers.

Rick Beirne: The party I remember was at Camp Delmar beach. Don't

recall that I've ever been to San Onofre. But then, aging mind could be wrong, so I wouldn't bet more than one month's labor wages (currently retired). Thanks for the memories.

John Wear: Camp Del Mar was way south near the Pendleton Main Gate and Oceanside. While San Onofre was just up the road north of Camp Las Flores. I remember walking to the beach from Las Flores and just up the beach was San Onofre.

Rick Beirne: Correct. Never walked to a beach. However, lived on the beach in Oceanside when I was going through Tank School (the photo Tom Kelly shared, which was printed in the newsletter). Will never again live on a beach. Salt air was too corrosive on my '64 'Vette. Richard reminded me of the '67 'Vette I parked at Las Flores. Those definitely were the days.

John Wear: As a young enlisted man living in the Las Flores barracks, with no automobile so walking and bumming rides was a rite of passage. I recall several Charlie Co. Marines checking out shelter halves and spending weekends on the beach... especially when a PFC was paid \$97 per month...the paycheck normally lasted one beer soaked weekend at the EM club.

It was just before my deployment to SE Asia. I seem to recall putting on civilian clothes and standing out on Basilone Road thumbing a ride into Oceanside. A very young Marine officer saw me, pulled over and offered me a lift. It turned out that the young LT was just one or two years my senior

and he seemed pretty impressed that I had been on Active Duty for almost two years, was a Corporal and was on my way to Vietnam.

A year later, after I got back to garrison at Las Flores, I was a Sergeant and I had a car. That made all of the difference in the world...at least to me.

Rick Beirne: What an endearing recollection. Thanks for sharing. I recall thumbing rides on weekends from summer school to home. Interesting way to travel as long as one is not on a schedule. A shame that life has changed to what we have.

Hitchhiking reminds me of the joke: A fellow is thumbing a ride and after some time a guy stops to pick him up. They chat while on their way. After a while the hitchhiker says, "You picked me up not knowing anything about me. How do you know I'm not a serial killer?"

The guy replies, "The chances of two being in the same car are pretty remote."

Rick added: You know? Regrettably most of those old times are tucked away in the depths of my memory bank, inaccessible for the most part. But I do remember that when I was with 5th Tanks, I had a '67 Vette and a '56 T-bird. The Commonwealth of Virginia has license tags on the front and back of cars. They didn't send me a renewal notice for license plates for one car, so I put the same numbered plates on the back of each car, just remembering never to park them side by side with the back ends showing.

talking, a Marine PFC walked out of the warehouse, looked at the Army General and walked right past him without saluting. The PFC hadn't walked more than 5 feet away when the Army General addressed him sternly and loudly, stating, "Private, don't you salute officers?"

The PFC stopped, turned around,

looked directly the Army General, and said, "I don't got to salute no Army puke."

Upon hearing this remark, General Joslyn and Col. Marsh walked up the PFC with Col. Marsh saying softly, "Private, you salute all officers."

To which the PFC responded, "Even Army pukers?"

As I came out of the supermarket that sunny day, pushing my cart of groceries towards my car, I saw an old man with the hood of his car up and a lady sitting inside the car, with the door open.

The old man was looking at the engine. I put my groceries away in my car, and continued to watch the old gentleman from about twenty five feet away.

I saw a young man in his early twenties with a grocery bag in his arm walking towards the old man. The old gentleman saw him coming too, and took a few steps towards him.

I saw the old gentleman point to his open hood and say something. The young man put his grocery bag into what looked like a brand new Cadillac Escalade. He then turned back to the old man. I heard him yell at the old gentleman saying:

"You shouldn't even be allowed to drive a car at your age." And then with a wave of his hand, he got in his car and peeled rubber out of the parking lot.

I saw the old gentleman pull out his handkerchief, and mop his brow as he went back to his car and again looked at the engine.

He then went to his wife and spoke with her; he appeared to tell her it would be okay.

I had seen enough, and I approached the old man.

He saw me coming and stood straight, and as I got near him I said, 'Looks like you're having a problem.'

Col. Marsh, an outstanding and legendary officer who was nonetheless somewhat mischievous, grinned and replied, "Yes, even Army pukers."

When the PFC replied, "It just doesn't seem right,"

General Joslyn told him, "Marine, it doesn't matter if he's in the Russian Navy, you salute all officers."

The Old Man in the Parking Lot

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

He smiled sheepishly, and quietly nodded his head.

I looked under the hood myself, and knew that whatever the problem was, it was beyond me.

Looking around, I saw a gas station up the road, and I told the old man that I would be right back. I drove to the station and I went inside. I saw three attendants working on cars. I approached one of them, and related the problem the old man had with his car. I offered to pay them if they could follow me back down and help him.

The old man had pushed the heavy car under the shade of a tree and appeared to be comforting his wife. When he saw us he straightened up and thanked me for my help. As the mechanics diagnosed the problem (overheated engine), spoke with the old gentleman.

When I shook hands with him earlier, he had noticed my Marine Corps ring and had commented about it, telling me that he had been a Marine too I nodded and asked the usual question, 'What outfit did you serve with?'

He had mentioned that he served with the first Marine Division at Tarawa, Saipan, Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal ...

He had hit all the big ones and retired from the Corps after the war was over. As we talked we heard the car engine come on and saw the mechanics lower the hood. They came over to us as the old man reached for his wallet, but was stopped by me. I

The PFC gave the Army General a halfhearted salute and proceeded on his way. General Joslyn turned to the Army General and said, "Sorry about that."

To which the Army General responded, 'Don't be. "I wish we had more of his type in the Army."

told him I would just put the bill on my AAA card.

He still reached for the wallet and handed me a card that I assumed had his name and address on it and I stuck it in my pocket. We shook hands all around again, and I said my goodbye's to his wife.

I then told the two mechanics that I would follow them back up to the station. Once at the station, I told them that they had interrupted their own jobs to come along with me and help the old man. I said I wanted to pay for the help, but they refused to charge me.

One of them pulled out a card from his pocket, looking exactly like the card the old man had given to me. Both of the men told me then that they were Marine Corps Reserves. Once again we shook hands all around and as I was leaving, one of them told me I should look at the card the old man had given to me. I said I would and drove off.

For some reason I had gone about two blocks, when I pulled over and took the card out of my pocket and looked at it for a long, long time. The name of the old gentleman was on the card in golden leaf and under his name was written: 'Medal of Honor Society.'

I sat there motionless, looking at the card and reading it over and over. I looked up from the card and smiled to no one but myself and marveled that on this day, four Marines had all come together because one of us needed help. He was an old man >>

A Story For Marines Only... and maybe A few Sailors

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Maybe those of you who were at Camp Lejeune in 1975 heard this story.....

"An Army Lieutenant General had come down to Camp Lejeune to visit. He and the CO of the 2nd Mar Div. Major General Bill Joslyn, along with his Chief of Staff, Colonel Jim Marsh, had all gone out to lunch at the Officer

Club. After lunch they walked down one of the side roads near the Division HQ. As they passed Division Supply a Major came out and asked General Joslyn if he could have a word with him. Gen. Joslyn and Col. Marsh walked over to him to converse, while the Army General stayed to the side.

As the three Marine officers were

all right, but it felt good to have stood next to greatness and courage, and an honor to have been in his presence.

Remember, OLD men like him gave our FREEDOM for America. Thanks to those who served and still serve, and to all of those who supported them, and who continue to support them.

America is not at war. The U.S. military is at war. America is at the Mall. If you don't stand behind our troops, PLEASE feel free to stand in front of them! Remember, Freedom IS NOT free. Thousands have paid the price, so you can enjoy what you have today.

GOD OUR FATHER, WALK

THROUGH MY HOUSE AND TAKE AWAY ALL MY WORRIES; AND PLEASE WATCH OVER AND HEAL MY FAMILY; AND PLEASE PROTECT OUR FREEDOMS, AND WATCH OVER OUR TROOPS, 'WHO ARE DEFENDING THOSE FREEDOMS. AMEN.

OLD AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

SUBMITTED BY BEN COLE

Don't be worried about your smartphone or TV spying on you. Your vacuum cleaner has been collecting dirt on you for years.

If you can't think of a word, simply say, "I forgot the English word for it." That way people will think you're bilingual instead of an idiot.

I'm at a place in my life where errands are starting to count as going out.

I don't always go the extra mile, but when I do, it's because I missed my exit.

My goal for 2021 was to lose 10 pounds. Only have 14 to go.

Ate salad for dinner. Mostly croutons and tomatoes. Really just one big round crouton covered with tomato sauce and cheese. FINE, it was a pizza.... OK, I ate a pizza! Are you happy now?

I just did a week's worth of cardio after walking into a spider web.

I don't mean to brag, but I finished my 14-day diet food supply in 3 hours and 20 minutes.

A recent study has found women who carry a little extra weight live longer than men who mention it.

Senility has been a smooth transition for me.

Remember back when we were kids and every time it was below freezing

outside they closed school? Yeah, me neither.

I may not be that funny, or athletic, or good looking, or smart, or talented. Uh-- where was going with that thought?

I love being 84, I learn something new every day and forget 5 other things.

I think I'll just put an "Out of Order" sticker on my forehead and call it a day.

Just remember, once you're over the hill, you begin to pick up speed.

Having plans sounds like a good idea until you have to put on clothes and leave the house.

It's weird being the same age as old people.

When I was a kid I wanted to be older ... This is not what I expected.

Life is like a helicopter. I don't know how to operate a helicopter either.

It's probably my age that tricks people into thinking I'm an adult.

Marriage Counselor: "Your wife says you never buy her flowers. Is that true?"

Me: "To be honest, I never knew she sold flowers."

Never sing in the shower! Singing leads to dancing, dancing leads to slipping, and slipping leads to

paramedics seeing you naked. So remember. . . . Don't sing!

If 2021 was a math word-problem: If you're going down a river at 2 MPH and your canoe loses a wheel, how much pancake mix would you need to re-shingle your roof?

I see people about my age mountain climbing; I feel good getting my leg through my underwear without losing my balance.

So if a cow doesn't produce milk, is it a milk dud or an udder failure?

Corona coaster: noun; the ups and downs of a pandemic. One day you're loving your bubble, doing work outs, baking banana bread and going for long walks and the next you're crying, drinking gin for breakfast and missing people you don't even like.

I'm at that age where my mind still thinks I'm 29, my humor suggests I'm 12, while my body mostly keeps asking if I'm sure I'm not dead yet.

You don't realize how old you are until you sit on the floor and then try to get back up.

We all get heavier as we get older, because there's a lot more information in our heads. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. ■

What I Learned from the War in Vietnam

Michael, Evanston, IL, July 11, 2019

Painfully vivid. And the lesson is: we learn nothing; we die for nothing. How pathetically sad – and revealing– for a country that claims to be the greatest nation in the world. 25 years after I fought to stay out of that war that betrayed the very people it asked to fight, I visited the Viet Nam Memorial for the first time. I was looking for the name of a good friend who had gotten engaged to be married, then was drafted and was killed in Viet Nam a week after he got there. I searched but couldn't find his name on the designated panel. I looked again– suddenly, his name jumped out at me. It was like a blow to the gut, and it sent me to my knees where I wept uncontrollably. I finally composed myself enough to approach a nearby park ranger to ask for a grease pencil so I could trace my friend's name on a piece of paper. After I finished, I returned the pencil and shook the ranger's hand. "I'm sorry about your friend," he said. "Thanks" I said, "Were you in Viet Nam?" He nodded in the affirmative and asked me if I had been there. "No" I said, "I fought for a long time to stay out." He nodded, and, still grasping my hand, looked into my eyes and said, "Those were crazy times, weren't they? We each did what we thought we had to do." "Yes," I said, "we did." I thanked him for his service, and for his help. He smiled and released my hand, and I walked away feeling a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders and common ground found – a great lesson indeed.

Bill, Arizona, July 11, 2019

I enlisted in the Marines in 1969. Half of the platoon I trained with got orders for Vietnam and half didn't. I didn't get mine. The old combat vets from WWII who knew me as a kid were elated I didn't go. I was a disappointed 17 year old. My war came later in another misguided government adventure and my wife, kids and mom learned about the fear of the car and doorbell. My son did six years in the Corps after enlisting the day after 9/11. I know what you mean about the car pulling up and the door bell ringing pride, fury and sweats. My daughter just got back from a combat tour in Afghanistan and we relived the fear of the car and doorbell. Now we live with the reality of our future son-in-law who is deployed in a faraway land. We really haven't learned from your war, our kids' war or my war. Same circus, different clowns calling the shots that costs so much in so many ways.

Marge Keller, Midwest, July 11, 2019

It has been 50 years for me since my brother returned from Nam. I was in middle school at the time he enlisted, but I worried every single day until that Saturday afternoon when he walked into our living room and said, "I'm home . . . this time for good." He and I talk a lot, especially since he stayed with us last summer through this spring battling his own fight with cancer. He always thought he was protected by a higher power while in Nam because he was a combat medic yet never got so much as a scratch. He has been talking more and more about that time, especially about his friends and fellow soldiers who were not lucky enough to return alive and walk in their own living rooms. He can only talk for short periods of time because of the emotional weight of the stories he carries. He said the nightmares are not as extreme nor frequent as they once were. "I alternated between great pride and helpless fury. I had cold sweats from thinking the car coming up the driveway was the casualty detail telling me that he had been killed." The time from when my brother was in Nam until he arrived home was as terrifying as it was eventually thrilling. I think a lot of people forget what a service man or woman's family goes through, emotionally, while they are serving this incredible country. I think the words "great pride" and "helpless fury" says it all. Bless all of those brave souls who did not come home alive and continued condolences to their loved ones.

"Smoke and Mirrors", Oregon, July 12, 2019

War is always the result of excuses to go to war by a political elite who become aggressors, or by the failure or unwillingness of governments to reach diplomatic solutions to critical economic conditions. War in defense of one's nation—protecting both a form of government and its people or the national security of its allies—is perhaps the most tragic and yet heroic. War's smell, its taste, its memories are tragic, totally wasteful, yet we have not come to a place of human development where this will abate. ■

USMC VTA Mini-Reunion in Wyoming!!!

The dates are September 17th to 20th, 2022

The Holiday Inn Express & Suites

1002 – 11th Street, Lander, WY 82520

Phone: 307.332.4005

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE:

Saturday, Sept. 17 – Arrive. Lunch on your own.

For dinner we are thinking about arranging for an “Old West” dinner in the little town of Hudson which is about ten miles outside of Lander. You will be responsible for your own beverages ... but dinner will be paid for by the VTA. I have been told that you will probably remember the meal for a long time after. And by the by, we will select several of the restaurant’s best-selling items for you to choose from...to be chosen by you about a month before we gather. Please don’t arrive too late or you’ll miss dinner.

Sunday, Sept. 18 – Free Breakfast at the hotel.

We will then travel by charter bus to Dubois and spend the day at the National Military Vehicle Museum. We plan to have VTA-provided box lunch at the museum.

We will travel back to Lander in the late afternoon / early evening. Dinner will be on your own in Lander or where ever you choose to dine.

Monday, Sept. 19 – Free Breakfast at the hotel.

This will be a “Open Day.” You can hang out in the hotel hospitality room or you can travel around (on your own) as a tourist. Lunch and Dinner on your own.

Local Sites: Shoshone Rose Casino (in Lander)

Sinks Canyon State Park

Museum of the American West

Popo Agie Falls Trail

Freemont County Pioneer Museum

Wild Horse Sanctuary

Chance Phillips, USMC burial site (of “Taking Chance” movie fame) (in Dubois)

Wind River Reservation Casino (in Riverton)

Order a FREE site seeing guide book: <https://www.go-wyoming.com/Lander/Attractions/#>

Tuesday, Sept. 20 – Free Breakfast at the hotel.

Travel home ... or embark on a tour of Wyoming (Jackson Hole, Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons, Etc.) on your own.

AIRLINE FLIGHT: If you need to make airline reservations we will be flying into the Riverton, Wyoming airport. Right now, there are three flights per day into Riverton. There may be some unfortunate changes where there is only one flight per day. I highly recommend that you take care of this sooner

than later.

PLEASE NOTE: Just so you are aware, several attendees are flying to either Salt Lake City, UT; Denver, CO; Jackson Hole or Cheyenne, WY and renting a car to drive to Lander ... many of them are planning to take time after the gathering to be tourists in the area.

CAR RENTAL: At this point, the car rental situation in Riverton is considered “slim” ... but if we get our heads together and commit ahead of time, we may be able to arrange to make the situation “better.” That is, let me know if you intend to rent a car and we will try to get the rental people to remedy any shortfalls.

Again, you may want to fly to a larger city (Salt Lake, Denver, Jackson Hole or Cheyenne) and rent a car to drive to the Lander, WY hotel.

As you may or may not know, due to the COVID hysteria forced a lot of car rental companies to sell off excess cars and now they are facing a very short supply of rental cars because car manufacturers cannot make new cars fast enough to fulfill demand.

TRANSPORTATION: There are four or five “fixed route” buses from Riverton to Lander each day. This is a no-cost bus service. It is not an “on demand: service. They have a set schedule where departure times may be hours apart. This bus service is the Wind River Transit Authority at 307.856.7118.

If you need to travel on your own schedule, there is a taxi service (it is \$70 each way) and you need to contact Gator Creek Taxi by Aug. 1st at 307.851.3619 to reserve your ride. There may be another shuttle bus starting up later in the year. That new shuttle bus will also have a fee to ride from the Riverton Airport to Lander.

LANDER HOTEL: The room rate is \$159.00 per night. We will be staying for three nights. We will be getting a FREE breakfast so that it worth (what?) \$20.

You HAVE TO make your room reservations NOW!!! The contact information is below. Most of us know and understand that the hotel will not charge you until you check out of your room on the last day. Please secure your room reservation right away.

The Holiday Inn Express & Suites
1002 – 11th Street, Lander, WY 82520

Please note, guests will need to make their individual reservations by the cut-off date, August 20th. After this date any unclaimed rooms will be released and reservations will be taken on a space and rate availability basis. Reservations can be made by calling the hotel directly at 307.332.4005 or on line using the link below: (The group code and rate will populate when they put in their travel dates)

<https://www.hiexpress.com/redirect?path=hd&brand=EX&localeCode=en®ionCode=1&hotelCode=LRW-WY&PMID=99801505&GPC=VTA&cn=no&viewfullsite=true>

If the Holiday Inn Express in Lander runs out of the 50 rooms that we reserved for our mini-reunion then you can call: The Inn at Lander Travelodge 307.332.2847 or the Pronghorn Lodge Rodeway Inn 307.332.3940 and get rooms

at their prevailing room rate.

For those of you who want to drive an RV to the mini-reunion:

The best RV parking option in Lander is Sleeping Bear RV Park. Their phone number is 307.332.5159. They of course have full hook ups.

If anyone is interested in “dry camping” (no hook ups), RV’s and campers can be parked in our City Park (off Fremont St in Lander) for up to 3 nights for free. It’s a very nice park with beautiful mature trees and the Popo River running through.

REMINDER: This is a mini-reunion...there is no registration form and no upfront fee. We will be asking for “donations” after we arrive and get moving...

VTA 2022 Mini-Reunion

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MILITARY VEHICLES

The \$100+ million National Museum of Military Vehicles Opened August 7, 2020.

Dan Starks didn’t start collecting historic tanks and military vehicles with a museum in mind. As word got out, however, requests to see the growing collection multiplied. The public’s initial introduction was due in part to the appearance of some of the vehicles in the annual Fourth of July parade in Dubois, Wyo., the small mountain town near the Starks ranch. Inevitably, interest in the collection grew. Word of mouth spread, and the requests increased.

Starks always enjoyed showing the collection, but “it finally got so that in the summer I was doing a morning tour and an afternoon tour, day after day,” he says.

Interest was significant — and diverse. It crossed boundaries of age, gender, income, education and experience. From kids to senior citizens, from veterans to tourists, from buffs to novices — all sorts of people wanted to see the tanks. And this was when the vehicles were still squeezed, side by side and end to end, into two storage barns, with no description, interpretation or display planning. Still the requests kept coming. “I could see that it was a significant experience for these visitors. Parents wanted their kids to have that experience,” Starks says. “It was the same with veterans, seeing the level of enthusiasm.”



It didn’t take long before he realized the combination of his passion for the collection, and the public’s interest in it, presented an opportunity. “This process has been very interesting,” says Starks. “The vision has expanded, starting with a small kernel, as a result of feedback from so many different people.

“I came to think there actually is a lot of interest in this kind of an experience, and to the extent that I can

better organize the stories, the education element, and historic preservation—man, this could be something good.”

The primary motive in moving forward with the museum, says Starks, was “just to build something good that could prove to have appeal to more people than we had expected.” No more sardine-can display. It was time for a plan to show the vehicles in an organized way, with historical notes, technical specifications, and in realistic settings that portrayed not just the vehicles, but the people who used them.

Dan Starks is enjoying the ride: “It’s been exciting, absorbing and fun — and a great reason to get out of bed in the morning.” The \$100 million, 140,000 square-foot National Museum of Military Vehicles, about eight miles southeast of Dubois, Wyo., along U.S. Highway 26, opened to the public in the fall of 2020. >>

John Wear notes: I have had several telephone and email conversations with Mr Starks. He is thrilled that the VTA is planning to conduct our 2022 mini-reunion at his museum in Wyoming. He is so excited that he has offered the attendees something that is almost beyond belief.

During one of our conversations, Mr Starks said to me, "If any of your members want to drive a tank, I am offering

Did somebody say "Tanks"?



anyone who wants to, a chance to do so for FREE!!!"

Just so everyone understands, many places that offer tank driving, charge anywhere from \$200 to \$500 (or more) per person for five minutes of driving. Mr Starks also added that he'd offer us the ability to drive the vehicles in a private setting or with an invited crowd. I vote for showing off in public!!!



This is the John Simpson musket, which was the weapon that shot the first bullet at Bunker Hill at the start of the American Revolutionary War.

It was purchased for \$500,000.



Here is an Ontos, which was used during the Vietnam War. Ontos were produced from 1955-1957 and were well-known for their 6 mounted 106 mm recoilless rifles. The rapid firing capability ensured a higher probability of hitting the target

Korean and Vietnam War Gallery Opening at National Museum of Military Vehicles

DUBOIS, Wyo., April 28, 2021 / PRNewswire/—The National Museum of Military Vehicles (NMMV) announced today that its new Korean and Vietnam War Gallery will open Wednesday, May 26, 2021. The 40,000 square-foot, multi-million dollar gallery uses immersive dioramas, interactive exhibits, oral histories, vehicles, and other artifacts to honor the millions of Americans who served in these two wars.

"Our museum was voted one of the ten best new attractions in the U.S. in 2020 on the strength of our World War II Gallery," said Dan Starks, Founder and Chairman of NMMV. "We raise the bar in our Korean and Vietnam War Gallery

by making the exhibits even more immersive and captivating."

The Korean War sometimes is called "The Forgotten War." Not at NMMV! More than 5 million Americans served in the Korean War between June 1950 and July 1953. Approximately 140,000 were killed or wounded. Visit the museum to find out why along with how the American experience in the Korean War impacted American conduct during the Vietnam War.

Over 3 million Americans served in the Vietnam War. More than 200,000 were killed or wounded during their service. Many more died afterwards from their exposure to Agent Orange. More than

200,000 veterans still suffer from PTSD. Come to the museum to learn more about the Vietnam War and about why our veterans and their families deserve so much appreciation from all of us.

About the National Museum of Military Vehicles

NMMV is a privately funded, 140,000 square-foot facility located near Dubois, WY. The museum is home to over 475 military vehicles (the largest private collection in the world) ... plus 275 firearms and 1,000 other artifacts on display.

Related Links: <https://nmmv.org/>

YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!!!

BELOW ARE THE NAMES OF THE MEMBERS WHO PLAN TO ATTEND

If your name is not on this list, please call John Wear at 719.495.5998 or email johnwear2@verizon.net today!!!

If your name is on this list and you cannot make it, please also call today.

We really do not want any "walk-in's" to this gathering. You have to pre-register by contacting John Wear and being placed on the attendee roster.

Aitken Lee
Auclair Greg
Beck Ralph
Brightwell Hank
Cecil Richard
Cole Ben
Colucci Ron
Cowman Jim
Cramer Monty
Dahl Ken
Damschen Mark
Doyle George
Everest Guy
Fay John
Fieldhouse Brian
Goodin Brad
Hall Garry
Hambright Rea
Hearne Gerry
Hearne Ed
Himes Harris

Hoch Clyde
Hokanson Carl
Hunter Terry
Jewell Jim
Kellogg Fred Jr
Kellogg Fred
Kenna Jack
Knox Adrian
Knox Clyde
Lewis Rick
Liu Joe
Luli Roger
Martin Greg
Mc Cleary Geary
McKnight James
Mefford Gary
Miller Hal
Moreno Armando
Najfus Lou
Newberry Craig
Oswood Rick

Parshall Larry
Peterson Gary
Plank Milo
Price Stan
Raasch Jim
Rasner William
Remkiewicz Frank
Riensch Harold
Roth Jack
Schroeder Patrick
Sparks Earl
Thompson Dave
Trower John
Unland Roger
Van Apeldoorn Bruce
Wear John
Whalsten Bruce
Williams John
Wolfenbarger Guy
Young Wally
Zebal Ken

THE LIEUTENANT

BY CLYDE HOCH

I was a sergeant when I arrived in Vietnam. I was sent to C Company headquarters south of Marble Mountain, which was the area of the 1st Marine Division, 1st Tank Battalion. Soon after a new platoon commander arrived. He was very different than most officers. He even came out and helped us fill sandbags at times. He seemed to enjoy going out into the field and I suspect he volunteered us for operations often.

He had a great sense of humor and often kidded around with us. He was not one of those strict and by the book officers. I remember going out with him often on operations. I remember once near the company area we spent the night in a field with a company of grunts. As night fall came some of the grunts were sitting on top of the tanks talking to us. We had three tanks out. The lieutenant commanded one, and I was in another. I am not sure who was in the third. All of a sudden artillery rounds started exploding in the air above us. This was USMC artillery. We all scrambled into the tanks and so did many grunts. It was like a clown car stacked with people. I remember the lieutenant calling on the radios telling them to stop. It was the only time I remember closing all the hatches.

Another time we went out with three tanks the lieutenant taking the lead. We passed through a leper colony. That was a horrible experience to see people with opened flesh just rotting off of them, missing arms and legs and facial features. It was scary like a horror movie and there were so many of them. Some were in the sea, some in hootches about 300 feet from the sea. We went right through the middle of them.

We got to a very small grunt compound. They were almost over run the night before. We parked the tanks. After I had time to think about it, I did not like the situation at all. There was concertina wire about 20 feet from the jungle. About 20 feet from the wire was the tanks About 40 feet is perfect for RPGs. I went to talk to the lieutenant about moving the tanks back further from the wire. I felt we had enough room. He did not want to do it. Sure, enough as it got dark, we started to get hit with RPGs. If I remember right only my tank was targeted. Luckily none hit the tanks but close enough to get debris splatted in my driver's face.

Later a trip flare went off right in front of my tank and I opened fire with the 50. Soon it all died down. The lieutenant decided at a specific time we would fire all the guns on every tank at the same time. When the time came it made a hell of a commotion. Enough to get the big brass in Da Nang excited. When they were told why we did it the grunt battalion commander was really pissed. My battalion commander got involved and there was a pissing match. My battalion commander said if we cannot protect ourselves, we were pulling out. I thought I hope like hell not tonight.

In the morning the grunts sent out patrols and they found a dead water buffalo laying on an RPG in front of my tank. They found several other RPGs and lots of blood trails leading off into the jungles.

On the way back to company headquarters we passed by the leper colony again. It was like in the movies we just slowly drove through them. No one said a word. They looked at us and we looked at them.

We were sent to a place on the beach. We had hootches. It was great there. I do not remember a shot being fired while we were there. We made a football field. There was a large tree stump, but C-4 took care of it. So, we had a sand football field. There was an amtrac sunk about 40 feet offshore. It had a large hole in the side of it and a shark claimed it as home. Often while we were swimming in the sea it would swim by us. It never bothered us, and we never bothered him. This was by far the best duty I had in Vietnam.

The lieutenant was sent to Bravo Company as Executive Officer and that is when I lost contact with him.

These are just a few of the incidents I remember serving with that lieutenant. Most time we went out on our own without an officer. Not while we had this lieutenant. He had no problem going out into the field. I was closer to him than any other officer I ever served with. I had the greatest respect for him. The world would be a far better place if we had more people like him. I was proud and honored to have served with him.

I ran into him several times over the years. One of those times was in DC. He was one of the reasons I felt the Marine Corps has the finest of officers. I recently got an email from his brother stating he is in hospice for cancer. He will not be around long, but his memory will be with me as long as I am around. I will remember him as a fine man and a fine officer. He was the kind of Marine leader who led from the front and not from the rear. The best I ever met; his name was Lieutenant Richard Peksens.

Richard was born on 1945 in Boston and was a lifetime fan of all Boston sports teams. In 1963 he graduated from Westwood High School where he ran track and threw the javelin and discus. In 1967 he graduated from Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA, where he majored in geology. He enlisted in the Marine Corps late in 1967 and went to OCS in 1968 at Quantico. Soon after that he went to a Tank / Amphibious Vehicle Officers Course at Camp Pendleton. In 1974 he got his master's in physics at UCLA. 1974 to 1985 he was a radiation specialist. He started a medical service company in St. Pete called Tampa Radio Physics, which he ran until 2021. During all this, he married a lady named Victoria and had two children, Alexandra and Erik.

So many people use the term "hero" way too loosely in my opinion. In my lifetime I only met four people I would consider heroes. Lieutenant Peksens is certainly one of them. He was right there in front to find a solution to any problem even when receiving enemy fire. Because of his bravery he was given the Navy Commendation Medal with a combat V.

OBITUARY: Lieutenant Richard Peksens slipped away quietly on November 15, 2021, at 18:30. He was surrounded by his loving family. This was the quiet passing of a true American hero. At his own request there was no formal announcement or a funeral service. He went out quietly like a gentleman,



"Dickey Pee" in Vietnam



Having Fun



One of his last portraits

Ron Knight: Interestingly, Rick's father, Rudolph, was born in Mazsalaca, Latvia, graduate of the Latvian Maritime Academy. After he immigrated to the US, he became a US Navy Combat Veteran of WWII, and Retired Sea Captain. While his brother is Brigadier General Rudolf Peksens, US Air Force. He flew B-52's and Phantom jets over Vietnam!

Editor's Note: Since we recently lost Dick Peksens, we thought that we could honor him by republishing one of his stories that appeared in a previous issue of our magazine.

"FRIENDLY COBRA, FRIENDLY COBRA, THIS IS BRAVO-ONE, OVER"

BY 1ST LT RICHARD PEKSENS (1ST TANK BATTALION)

In Vietnam, "friendly fire" was a significant occupational hazard. In 1968, while with my Charlie-Three tanks on a patrol with 2/1 in "The Riviera," we came under direct assault from 11th Marines H&I fire when about 10 anti-personnel rounds exploding just above our heads resulting in a number of grunts who were too slow to find the cover of our tanks, got wounded. Earlier, while setting up outside the 11th Marines perimeter, my gunner had fired a volley of 30 caliber machinegun bul-



"Dickey Pee" trying to sell a broken refrigerator to an unsuspecting grunt

lets between my knees as I mounted the slope plate to converse with the TC. Moments before, my face had been in front of the barrel! The misfire occurred while loading the weapon from our defensive position the night before. On another ill-fated day, while on patrol with the Koreans, we were fired upon by a US Marine patrol who mistook us for NVA...with tanks?

Friendly fire also took a toll on the non-combatants including children, grandparents and water buf- >>

falo. I was responsible for more than one SIR's (Serious Incident Report) while serving as both a platoon leader and XO.



In early 1969, I travelled south from Hill 55 along Liberty Road to join the two platoons of Bravo Company, 1st Tanks who were then ensconced within the SE perimeter of the 5th Marines combat base at An Hoa. The site, on flat terrain, had been established as a French outpost 25 bumpy miles SW of Da Nang with the intention of extracting coal, iron ore and clay from the rock-solid red earth. In 1962, President Diem decided that An Hoa would be an ideal location for an industrial complex devoted to fertilizer manufacturing, water purification and hydro-electric power. In 1964, the VC blew up the railway bridge at Phu Lac (6) which would later be rebuilt by US Marine engineers and called "Liberty Bridge."

The infamous bridge provided access to Liberty Road, An Hoa, Go Noi Island and Dodge City. In 1966, the 12th Marines installed artillery at An Hoa to support the 3rd MARDIV operations when the Marines moved north from Chu Lai. Later, the 5th Marines would move south after TET '68 to occupy the territory under the watchful eyes of NVA guns high in the triple canopy of Charlie Ridge. It was not Con Thien or Khe Sahn, but we received a "daily dose" of incoming 122 mm rockets and enemy artillery in retaliation for the daily B-52 Arlight strikes along the Que Son ridges to our west. One of the best spots on base was



an abandoned conveyor belt mining tower which could be mounted by means of a rusting latter to the 1-man observation booth 40 feet above the sweltering clay. Our tents were located near An Hoa's artillery which included guns as large as 175 mm. +

In our exposed location, enemy rounds designated to impact amongst the artillery would often drop "short" into our platoon area. These surprise "visitors" killed and maimed many of our tankers. Later in my tour, the 5th Marines would move us to a safer location on the SW berm where artillery strikes were much rarer ... other than the direct hit we took on our comm. bunker nicknamed "Fort Apache." The ground was extremely hard and couldn't be excavated with simple shovels and sweat. On the SE corner of An Hoa, we had bunkers that had previously been dug into the hard red clay which required quick egress from our raised tents at the first sound of enemy incoming. The tents had lateral sandbags but there was no overhead protection. When we later moved across the base, our "cover" consisted of cement "ratholes" constructed from 6 foot culverts s topped by sandbags.



You didn't want to be "last in line"! Again, we lived in tents and ran and crawled into the culverts during incoming. Similar to Khe Sanh, C-130 transports were often hit on the tarmac and our regimental ammo dump was once reduced to rubble following a day of spectacular fireworks. While on the SE corner, we could look east across a wide expanse of rocky soil to see the tail end of Liberty Road and the German Hospital and HQ of one of the 5th Marines battalions that guarded the base from attack from Go Noi Island and the many enemy lurking about ancient graveyards east of An Hoa. We had a single bunker to man nightly and would often disburse tanks to points around the perimeter to guard against the frequent sapper attacks. Sappers were a common occurrence with limited success in breaching the many strands of concertina wire. After an unsuccessful breach, we would find bodies in the wire blackened by camouflage paint and still attached to ropes and Bangalore torpedoes. The ropes were used by fellow sappers

to pull the wounded back for extraction when discovered too early in the wire.

One balmy evening, we came under attack from a probable platoon of sappers trying to blow the adjacent 155 mm Howitzers using satchel charges. The attack was thwarted with only a few souls penetrating the wire, but the NVA continued firing into our positions from defilade positions beyond the berm. The firing continued through the early morning hours and a Cobra gunship was called to provide support. As a result of the line of fire and poor night visibility, we were unable to use our 90 mm guns. We watched as the gunship lights approached from the east firing rockets followed by their twin mini-guns. With a poorly marked enemy, the Cobra overshot the primary target and sprayed our area with "hot lead" before they could be called off. Fortunately, most of us were either in bunkers or manning the berm waiting for the 5th Marine's COC bunker to give our tanks permission to fire on the enemy sappers. As light illuminated the ground in front of our three tanks, we could see the NVA about 300 meters away returning fire against our 50 mm MG's. We were finally given permission to fire the big guns and loosed some rounds of HE into the enemy position. We then followed the HE with a few flechette rounds. I stood atop one of the tanks with a camera hoping to get a prize photo of the carnage as dawn arose (my film would later be returned from the Liberty Hill PX labelled

"overexposed"!). A few of the rounds appeared to be "duds" and ricocheted off the ground in low trajectories. The gunfight was over quickly and I had managed to take a few photos to commemorate our victory. Nobody on our side had been wounded and a patrol was being dispatched for a body count. As we inspected our hooches, we found numerous holes exclusively from the wandering Cobra gunship. My most precious possession, a fan that I had bought from the previous resident, had been destroyed by a direct hit. The evening before the attack, we had a truck arrive from Da Nang carrying a full contingent of 90 mm rounds. The truck had been hit by 8-10 mini-gun rounds including two holes through the truck windshield. The driver, arriving late from Da Nang, had decided to sleep in the front seat and had only been awakened when the rounds had penetrated his windshield. Amazingly, he was unscathed and none of the many rounds had hit ignitable ammo! At the evening briefing, it was reported that a number of Marines at the eastward battalion encampment had been killed or wounded during the overnight attack. The deaths were blamed on incoming NVA recoilless rifle fire. On that day, and to this day, I wonder if some of the "NVA incoming" was, in reality, our ricocheting 90 mm rounds. Perhaps we added a few "good guys" to our body count that night! If so, forgive us our sins! ■

THE DAY AFTER

BY JERRY WHITE

I read with great interest the Silver Star citation for Joseph Clinton Brown in the last issue of Sponson Box. Sadly, the award was presented posthumously. "JC," as he was called by our crew, was actually KIA the following day, July 31, 1966, in the same location as described in the citation. I was with JC that day and, to the best of my memory, this is the rest of the story:

In the morning of that fateful day, I received news that I was being assigned to Tank B-14 (I think). I had previously been with another tank in Bravo Company, B-42, but our crew had been broken up when our TC Sgt. Reed went back to the world. My new TC was Sgt. Alvarado and also aboard was a familiar face: JC Brown. We had been in the same platoon back at Camp Lejeune and had come over to 'Nam in March '66. We readied our tank's departure by replenishing our ammo and topping off our fuel. With JC driving, we left basecamp Hill #55 in the early afternoon.

We arrived at our outpost position located on the Song

River less than two miles from Liberty Bridge in mid-afternoon. Our two tanks were in support of Marines of 1/9, possibly a platoon (no more) and they were strung out along the riverbank with our companion tank a hundred or so yards on the other end. We parked our tank parallel to the river and went about setting up a makeshift camp. We tied a large tarp to the side of the tank that wasn't exposed to the river. During this time JC caught me up with the events of the day before. The attack by the VC had been intense and the loader was severely wounded. I was, in fact, his replacement. The way JC told me, I never knew he was anything more than a Marine doing his job, if anything he downplayed his actions during the attack. I didn't find out about the Silver Star until I joined the VTA several years later.

I have to admit, I was scared of the prospect of another attack that might come that night. After a while, we broke out some good old C-Rats (from WW2) and began to chow down when all of a sudden a crackling whizzing >>

sound penetrated the air above us. JC said it was snipers and it was almost a daily occurrence, then cautioned me to stay low when moving around the area. It was now early evening and Sgt. Alvarado had me relieve the fourth member of our crew who was on watch up on the turret (I wish I could remember his name). I mounted the tank and climbed into the loaders hatch and gazed out across the river to a wooded area along the bank, maybe a hundred or so yards away. It was quite scenic, like on a postcard. I was soon joined by JC who said Sgt. Alvarado wanted to call in to base that our position was all secure. I moved over to the TC hatch and JC called it in.

Afterward, JC remained in the loader hatch and we began talking about our time at Camp Lejeune. We had a good laugh when we remembered the time we were on a long weekend and drove to Maryland where I dropped him off and went on to Michigan, then picked him up on the way back when I had a tire blowout going down a hill. I lost control and my old '59 Ford spun out several times before coming to a halt near a deep ditch. It scared the crap out of both of us, but we were safe. However I was so shaken up that JC drove the rest of the way back to Le Jeune. Soon the conversation turned to baseball as we were both big fans. His team was the Baltimore Orioles and mine was the Detroit Tigers. My favorite player was Norm Cash and his was Boog Powell. So we were talking baseball when more shots rang out.

Instinctively I jumped off the tank to my right and JC to the left, then we took cover behind the unexposed side of the tank, away from the river. JC had a strange look on his face and he took a couple steps toward Sgt. Alvarado then collapsed. Everything after that is hazy as I must have been in shock. JC had a chest wound and I know he did not regain consciousness. It was the worst thing I ever saw in my

life. A corpsman had immediately been called, but after a few minutes he informed us JC was gone. I vaguely remember everybody shooting up the coastline of the other side of the river where the shots had come from. I sure hope we got the sniper, but we will never know for sure. Soon darkness filled the air and it got really still and quiet...I'm sure no one slept that night with thoughts of an impending attack, but it never came.

The next morning a helicopter came and took Corporal Joseph Clinton Brown on what would become his long journey home to Maryland. We stayed on for another week or ten days, but I don't remember anything eventful happening. I only saw action once after that, on August 20th. It was a pretty big deal at the time, but I only learned years later that Sgt. Alvarado was awarded the Silver Star and Bob Haller a Navy Commendation for their valor. I'm proud to have been a member of that team even though I can't remember the names of all involved. On September 8th I was summoned to the Company Commander's tent where Captain EV Tunget told me I would be going home the next day. He said some other things too, but all I heard was I was going home. The next month my four years was up and I was to begin a new chapter in my life.

Now, fifty-plus years later, I still think about what happened that day and wonder why it was JC instead of me. It's really hard to understand! I think of JC often...Memorial Day, Veterans Day, or when opening the pages of a new issue of Sponson Box. My family and I have visited The Wall in Washington, DC, several times over the years. It's quite an emotional experience for me to see JC's name there with the other fifty-eight thousand who gave all. What a fine young man he was, only twenty years old. I will never forget him. ■

Bob Haller (left) JC Brown (right)



Jerry White Tank



BSgt Alvarado and Ho Chi Minh's Nightmare

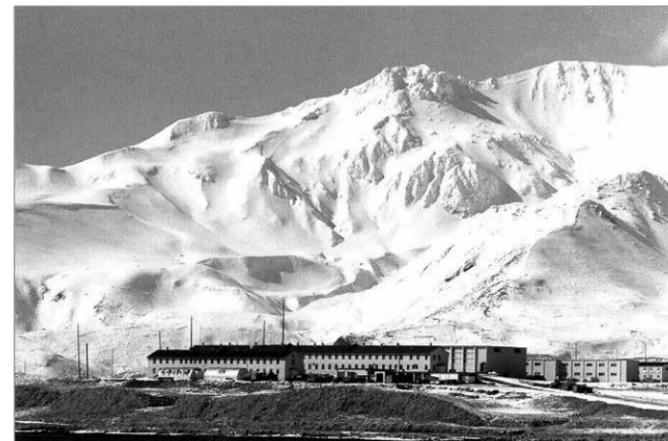


How I got to serve 12 months on "The Rock"

Marine Barracks, Adak, Alaska

BY ARMANDO MORENO

Reference Garry Hall's article, "California Dreaming" in the #4-2020 October/ November/ December Sponson Box page 32-33.



Author's note: I am truly sorry for sitting on this story and had many times thought, who wants to hear it? But, here goes. The point of the story is when Garry Hall was "volunteered" for assignment to a guard duty in Adak, Alaska in May or June 1967 and he did not want to go. And I did. I shipped out to Alaska on July 1968.

Here's the back story: I came back from Viet Nam in December 1967, 28 days before the big 1968 Tet Offensive, and was stationed at 5th ATs at Camp Las Flores on Camp Pendleton from January 1968 to July 1969. My home of record was Santa Maria, California, so liberty consisted of jumping on a Greyhound bus at Oceanside on Friday night at 6:00 PM, arriving in Santa Maria at 11:00 PM, which was just in time to start drinking and partying until Sunday night. I then would jump back on the Greyhound bus, otherwise known as the "Vomit Comet," at 7:30 PM Sunday night and arrive back at Oceanside at 5:00 AM on Monday, just in time for morning formation. Of course, those travel adventures, could only happen on paydays otherwise the odd weekends were a drag.

We were having to do a lot training which required us to spend a bunch of time firing our 106's, with a platoon of 13 Ontos crewmen, while our TO was supposed to be 15 or 20. After a day on the range, we'd run back to Las Flores and clean guns. On paydays or not you didn't get liberty until everything was inspected. So, if you thought that liberty was "automatic" and that you'd expect to get laid plus you thought that other great weekend of partying with buddies in Santa Maria was a

given, guess again. If you missed that Friday bus then you were stuck on base or in Oceanside, at the Normandy bar...where I was 86'd a couple of times.

So the new routine got old fast, TET kicked in and my yearning for adventure in a foreign land had lost its luster and so I decided that I needed a different change. Also, when I got back from Vietnam and I still had about 30 months left on my enlistment. I needed a change after 6 months of garrison duty in Camp Las Flores with Ontos and tankers. So I bid farewell to my Ontos buddies at Camp Las Flores after I talked to our First Sgt about any Marine Barracks assignments. The Top said USNS Adak, Alaska was available and I was ready to try anything to get away from all the bullshit that was part of stateside garrison duty. I remember looking at the evening news and seeing the carnage brought on as a result of the TET OFFENSIVE. I had mixed feelings about going back to Vietnam and I finally decided on Adak, Alaska, thinking that anything is better than this.

In July, 1968, I flew into Adak, Alaska by way of Seattle on Aleutian Air Lines. I had expectations of kick back duty, snow, frozen tundra and anything but the reality of what the 71 mile in-circumference island known as Marine Corps Barracks really was. The reality of Adak, Alaska is that Marines were stationed there to provide security for air-to-surface anti-submarine weapons. The weapons were stored in a compound that required all personnel assigned there to have a Top Secret clearance and Marines were not allowed in the storage area where the weapons were stored. Marines only worked the control board controlling the two gates in and out of the compound. For information only, a squadron of P3 Orion's, flown by Navy pilots, were the delivery system of the anti-submarine weapons, flying from Adak to Moffitt Field in California and guarding the approaches to the Northwest part of the country against foreign submarine attacks and threats, as we knew them at the time.



Marine Barracks, Adak, Alaska

I was assigned to the second platoon and that is where my adventure began. My recollection of Marine barracks USNS, Adak, Alaska is as follows: 80 enlisted Marines, plus a Gunnery Sgt, a 1st Sgt, a 1st Lt, and a commanding officer, Major Bowers.

We had our own barracks with 1st Platoon on the first floor and 2nd platoon on the 2nd floor. We had our own brig >>

and our own “Tun Tavern” that was next to the garage area.

It didn't take long to figure out that my year in Adak would not be the Shangri-La that I had envisioned and many times I wondered if maybe going back to the “Nam”, might not have been a bit easier.

Our weapons were crap. The old 45 pistols and M-1 rifles were the standard issue. The fact that we had turned over so many M-14's to the ARVNS in Vietnam and here we were in Adak, a stone's throw from the Russian Siberian border, with old, out-of-date weapons didn't make any sense. We had patrolling duties throughout the island and we were constantly having to call out the mechanics to change tires or patch them, because they were constantly going flat from the rugged terrain. The tires were called “maypops” because they were so bad.

Discipline was iron-clad and we had to do a “junk on the bunk” monthly and a general personnel inspection every other week. We had to successfully complete a PRT every three months and we were encouraged to do intramural sports, which included swimming in the basement pool. Everything was below ground, including a bowling alley that had a vending machine selling beer for 50 cents a bottle. We took every opportunity on our days off, to have our fair share of alcohol.

One of the main reasons I feel I had to share my memories with my brothers of the VTA is because if there was ever a story to tell it is the Marine Corps Birthday Celebration 1968. The Major's wife set up a beautiful layout with 12 to 14 tables to accommodate 80 Marines, staff and guests. It was complete with white linens, tons of King crab and one female school teacher at every table. The teachers were flown in to teach the Navy's dependent children, which numbered less than 80 kids, and so they were the “eye candy” for the troops. Along with all this were three open bars, yes three open bars. I did say three open bars? The celebration started out quite dignified, as one would expect, conversations with the teachers were kept light, a toast here and there, and then the cake was cut. And with tradition, the first piece of cake went to the oldest and the second piece to the youngest.



In the photos:

Me and my “token date” at the USMC Birthday Party. Somewhere, soon after the cake cutting, things started getting out of hand. Alcohol, the magic ingredient, started to do its work, and hard feelings between the first platoon and the second platoon were exposed. What started as a traditional,

noble, dignified ceremony became a raging nightmare for a lifetime of memories, never to be forgotten.

A fight broke out on the dance floor between the First platoon and the Second platoon for some unknown reason other than it spread. The animosity, so insane, so violently crazy and Marines were holding back other Marines from making a bad situation worst.

The fighting between the troops brought an abrupt end to the festivities and the staff tried to corral the troops back to their respective barracks. Navy Security got involved and then the troops' anger was directed toward them, as Marines did not want sailors touching Marines. A drunken black Marine from Philadelphia fought his way into our recreation room and promptly put his fist through a pinball machine. He smashed the glass and cut his wrist, leaving a trail of blood everywhere.

Oh by the way, did I say there were three open bars??? The bars were raided by the Marines that weren't too drunk and that knew that a free drink later would probably be a good idea.

Along with all the booze that was taken, another item of interest was stolen and never to see the light of day again. It was the Major's Mameluke sword that was used to cut the birthday cake. Whoever took the sword was smart enough not to stash it in their wall locker or foot locker. For weeks after we were instructed to leave all our lockers open when we went out on duty and when we returned our belongings would be strewn about in our cubicles. The craziness that night as Marines, especially those that fought with the 5th Marines in Operation Desoto, having flashbacks, crying, screaming and total insanity. The staff that night stood guard in the stairwells, to keep Marines from going after each other.

Weeks later, when things calmed down a bit, there was some great drinking within our own platoons, but never with the other platoons. Guys made it a point to police each other and keep the staff from finding out about the drinking in the squad bays.

When I departed Adak, Alaska in early July 1969, the sky was clear, very little wind, and the bay was very peaceful. I didn't want to reflect on the windy conditions that swept through the area and the bravery of the bush pilots that would land their planes in gale conditions. Or the resupply ship that came in every two weeks and by the 12th day, we were eating cold cuts. Or the racial tensions that existed in the ranks at that time. I will never forget those beautiful eagles as they would gorge themselves on salmon and have fish oil from top to bottom. Oh yes, those Navy cooks baking cinnamon rolls at 3:00 in the morning and since we were on night patrol, we would have first crack at them. I will forever love cinnamon rolls!!!

That's my story and I dedicate it to Garry Hall, with all my best wishes and best of intentions. My time in Adak was a time to reflect. I got to take a USAFI correspondence class in histo-

(Continued on page 46)

OPERATION SUSSEX BAY

BY FREDDY MARTINEZ

As I recall the events of August 29, 1968, we moved out of Hill 55 early in the morning to participate in Operation Sussex Bay east of the wire into Dodge City. Dodge City was a heavily wooded area that extended east and south of Hill 55. Hill 55 is where Carlos Hathcock the famous Marine sniper had killed an equally notorious NVA sniper by placing a round through the NVA's rifle scope into the eye of the enemy sniper.

Our tank, Bravo 52 (B52) was the company blade tank. The crew consisted of tank commander John Murphy, loader Mario Fuentes, driver Robert Jaron and me, Freddy Martinez, as gunner. We were temporarily assigned to the third platoon of Bravo Company 1st Tank Battalion in support of Lima and Mike Companies, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines.

Early that morning Lt. Daily, the officer commanding the tank group was gut shot by a sniper as he stood atop the tank. After he was medevacked out of the field, we were sent in a southerly direction to assist in the evacuation of a group of Marines.

The stuff had hit the fan when an advancing group of Marines was ambushed by the NVA in well entrenched lines, bunkers and spider holes. This was typical of Dodge City. The enemy was always present and we could engage them anytime we ventured there.

As we approached the area, we found approximately seven stretcher cases which we shielded beside B52. We could not return fire into the tree line due to our own WIA's remaining amongst the enemy. Later that night single pistol shots were heard where the NVA were executing the Marine WIA's.

The immediate problem arose in safely loading the wounded onto B52 so we could evacuate them to the landing zone at a Vietnamese cemetery further north of our position. Anyone who exposed himself on top of the tank was an easy target for the enemy, as we were within 30 or 40 yards from the tree line and standing 10 feet above the ground. No one was willing to do this.

At this point, I decided to exit the tank to begin loading stretcher cases. Fuentes agreed to help so out we went to the top of B52. As we exposed ourselves, we began taking heavy small arms fire. It was like being among a swarm of bees. Twice we were forced to jump off the tank and take cover. The third time we went up we managed to load one stretcher case who did not want to remain on top amongst the fire. While loading another Marine I took an AK round in the right arm and Fuentes and I jumped off again. After getting a bandage Fuentes and I went back up and loaded all the remaining WIA's.

We proceeded to the LZ and waited for what seemed like 3 or 4 hours for a chopper to medivac us out. There were 23 WIA's on that flight to Da Nang. I wound up on the USS Sanctuary hospital ship and returned to duty on Hill 55 two or three weeks later. At this point the Marines had lost nine KIA and 23 WIA.

Operation Sussex Bay — page 2

Fuentes relates that after he was medevacked the Marines went “on-line” and attacked the tree line. They were soon overwhelmed by small arms fire, including RPG's, heavy machine guns and 60 mm mortars. The NVA were on their home turf in bunkers, trenches, and spider traps. After a spell the Marines reorganized in the clearing and called in air and artillery support. After five hours of bombardment the Marines lined up again and attacked.

Dan Farrell, gunner on B34, describes the scene as one from WWII with most all of the vegetation gone. During this night attack B34 drove into a 500 pound bomb crater and had to be cabled out by another tank.

During this contact B52 came under RPG fire and was hit three times. According to Murphy, one rocket missed, one hit the fuel cell resulting in a fire, one hit a road wheel, and one came into the turret near the Gunner's seat and exploded inside the turret. Murphy adds that he doesn't recall if he and Fuentes were blown out of the tank but he wound up on the ground and had to get back in. Fuentes recalls that upon the explosion in the turret the gunner who replaced me, presently only recalled as “G”, hollered “fire!” and Fuentes found himself on the ground. He ran to the front and hollered to Johnson that he was going for cover under the tank. He eventually re-entered the turret and B52 continued to fire 50 caliber and 90 mm rounds. Fuentes had sustained shrapnel wounds to the back of his legs. He continued with his duties loading the 90 mm.

In the meantime, Farrell on B34, positioned to the right rear of B52, fired beehive and canister rounds where he had seen the smoke of the RPG being fired. They later found the RPG launcher on the ground.

After four days the area was cleared. While destroying the NVA emplacements, NVA packs full of uniforms, documents, ammo, rice, gas masks along with a Chinese Communist radio were found.

As of this writing, November 30, 2021 Mario Fuentes is in the ICU at Methodist Hospital in San Antonio, Texas with a cancer that has spread to his lungs. It started as bone cancer in the right leg where the RPG shrapnel was left in place. In addition to the Purple Heart medal for injuries received on August 30, 1968, he received the Navy and Marine achievement medal for Valor for >>

his heroic actions on November 29 and 30, 1968. He was credited with saving the lives of seven Marines.

Respectfully submitted,
2390160-USMC

Additional Article on Operation Sussex Story

John Wear writes: Long time VTA member, Freddy Martinez called me a few months ago to tell me that his long time buddy, Mario Fuentes had been suffering from cancer for quite a while and was not expected to live very long. Through the "Buddy Fund," we ordered flowers for Mario and a week later Mario sent me a hand written letter (below) thanking us for the flowers.

During the first conversation with Freddy, he indicated that he wanted to write a story about his (and Mario's) experience on an operation in Vietnam. Freddy wanted to try to get it published in a Sponson Box magazine before Mario passed away. Besides the publication effort, we also sent Mario a copy of the story so that he could see it now. In his thank you letter he also thanks us for including the

story. Mario also asked that we send extra copies to Mario's two kids and his granddaughter. Of course we will comply.

Dear John Wear,

Thank you for the flowers and prayers that the Tankers Association sent to me.

Also I enjoyed the reunions that I was able to attend. I will miss all my brothers that I met through the years. Freddy Martinez and Dan Farrell have a much better memory. Also Murphy, our TC at the time that this event happened. I don't remember much because the memories confuses me.

I love you my brother. Thank you.

Mario Fuentes.

P.S. Can I have an extra copy of this issue of our magazine for my son?

Sadly Mario reported to the Great Tank Park in the Sky on January 14, 2022. ■



2005 Philadelphia reunion (L to R) Freddy Martinez, Mario Fuentes, John Murphy, Chico Famularo



(Top Left) John Murphy, Tank Commander of B-52. (Bottom Left) Mario Fuentes, Loader. Freddy Martinez, Gunner.



2005 Philadelphia reunion, USS New Jersey...Mario and Ana Fuentes



2005 Philly reunion (L to R) Mario Fuentes, Pete Limanek Dan Farrell, Chico Famularo, Freddy Martinez

Officer Candidate School

BY ROGER LULI



The Marine spent late summer and early fall in Mount Vernon, Ohio. To get in shape, he ran to Gambier, Ohio and back home on route 229. On or about 9 October, 1966 his parents took him to the airport in Columbus. There he caught a flight to Washington D.C., then a bus to Triangle, Virginia. On that bus he discovered Lynn McAninch and Jim Denniker from Grove City. From Triangle the officer candidates were taken to Camp Smedley Butler.

At Camp Butler, the candidates were introduced to their platoon commander, platoon sergeant, sergeant instructor and the general tone their training would take over the next ten weeks. They were given haircuts, shots, clothes and another physical. The clothing issue was interesting in that in order to insure everyone had all their gear, the quartermaster called out, shoes, boots, boxers, etc. As each item was called, the candidates had to hold the items high above their heads until told to put the item down. On the way to the barracks, the Marine spotted Tom Moore, from high school and Larry Parsons, from Penn State. They had been assigned to different platoons.

Inside the barracks, the candidates found all the bedding neatly folded on bunks (racks). All the canvas and web gear (782 gear) was stowed in individual foot lockers at the end of the racks. The candidates were shown how to make their racks, where to stow their gear, where to find the head and the platoon sergeant's office. Later that night after chow, they were given the rules of conduct and sent to bed. "Tomorrow will be a big day".

The next morning reveille arrived with shouting and banging of garbage cans. The candidates were given a few minutes to shave, wash their faces, get dressed and fall into formation for the morning run. The first day, the run was one mile and as time went by, it became a two mile run. They weren't really run-

ning; it was a gait they called the "OCS shuffle". It can best be described by bringing to mind Bill Murray's platoon drilling in the movie Stripes.

At the end of the run, the candidates arrived at the mess hall. They were instructed to take all you want but eat all you take. This rule provided a curious event. Having known Larry Parsons at Penn State, the Marine knew he had not eaten anything but meat and potatoes his entire life. To Larry, tomatoes were just little red cartwheels and when given a maraschino cherry, he took the tiniest bite and after a little reflection, announced, "I could probably choke it down if I had to". So, when the Marine spotted Larry pick up a banana, put it on his tray, and walk away, he thought "finally"! But when confronted later, Larry simply said, "I took it back".

Days were a mixture of classes and physical training. The candidates received education covering: Proper dress, Care of equipment, Manual of arms, Calling cadence, and the Viet Nam experiences of our instructors.

Some of his memories from OCS:

There was a candidate named Heider who had graduated with a degree in nuclear physics, then traveled the length of the Alcan Highway both ways on a motorbike, and then reported for duty at Quantico. Heider could not keep cadence and could not react to drill commands. It was so bad that the ser-

geant instructor would shout, "Heider, I think I hate you". One night the platoon heard a familiar noise coming from the grinder. The grinder was a large paved lot covered with a thin layer of gravel. It made a crunching sound under marching boots. Several of the candidates went out to investigate and when they came back, they reported the noise was Heider practicing cadence and commands.

Another man named Koppenhaver was an enlisted man who had served in the Dominican Republic. He had attained the rank of sergeant and applied for OCS. He was a great help to the platoon. He had in depth knowledge on how to care for military gear.

There was a firebreak protecting high tension power lines running through the camp. Years of pounding boots had created a trail dubbed the "Power Line Trail". The trail covered 12.5 miles out and 12.5 miles back. There were seven hills on the trail that the candidates called the "Seven Wh*res". The candidates took marches of ever increasing distances building up to final 25 mile march.

The reason the hills were so hated was due to something the "bull whip effect". You too have experienced this if you have ever been in heavy traffic. Someone taps their brakes; the next car does the same and the following cars come to a complete stop. The lead car tapped the brakes and continued on and is miles down the road by the time the last car is finally moving. It is the same thing for the hill trail. Everyone is keeping together doing the OCS shuffle, when the head of the column hits the first hill and struggles on its way up. Eventually, the end of the column is marching in place. By the time those in the rear get to the top of that first hill, the head of the column is at the top of the next hill. At that point, the rear of the column has to run the rest of the way.

The last march, a 25 mile one, >>

was brutal. Halfway through, the Marine said to his platoon commander, "Something is wrong with my foot". The commander simply said, "Tighten your bootlaces". He followed the instructions and on they went. The Marine will never forget when they saw the end in sight, The Platoon burst out singing the Marine Corps Hymn. The instructors couldn't figure out where they got the breath to sing.

Later that afternoon, after showering, the Marine discovered that his left foot was so swollen that it would not fit back in his boot. A trip to sick bay led to a trip to the Naval Hospital. An x-ray showed a stress fracture in the left foot. Fitted with a cast and crutches, the Marine headed back to the barracks to give the bad news to the platoon sergeant. The hill trail took a toll that day. There

were three marines on crutches at the next morning's formation. They were told to form up in the rear and keep in step on the way to breakfast.

The last memory is one of those "You had to be there moments". A little background is in order. When the lights went out, the barracks was to be silent. One night, after lights out, they heard flatulence. Not just any flatulence. This one went on and on. To get an idea how long, watch the burps of Will Farrell in Elf or Booger in The Revenge of the Nerds. The following silence lasted only a few seconds. Then there were some snickers, then giggling, and then raucous laughter. The whole barracks reverberated with the sound of 42 men trying but unable to stifle their laughter. That ended when the platoon sergeant came roaring I with, "What the h**l is

going on in here?" Silence returned. No one is sure who provided the levity but the Marine suspects a candidate named Malliard.

The Marine was able to complete training in spite of his broken foot. Not all 42 candidates made it to graduation. Those men were given the rank of sergeant and assigned to administrative jobs. Tom Moore was one of those men.

A Marine tradition requires newly commissioned officers to hand a silver dollar to the first enlisted man that salutes them. As the newly commissioned officers came out the door, there stood the platoon sergeant saluting and collecting dollars.

The new officers received their commissions on or about 16 December 1966 and were sent home with orders to report to The Basic School in January. ■

was thrown from a passing car and exploded killing her. The insurgents knew that we worked at a military base because of the uniforms in which we were dressed. It was a common occurrence to have bullets flying back and forth between the military and the insurgents.

Michael and I began regularly communicating by telephone and regular mail. It wasn't but a short while before Michael asked me to come and visit him and meet his family in San Francisco and I agreed. During the two week stay in San Francisco, Michael proposed marriage to me and I accepted. We planned to have a big wedding in El Salvador but the civil unrest in El Salvador just got worse so we changed our plans and decided to marry in San Francisco. The wedding took place on September 7, 1990 at St. Paul's Catholic Church.

Shortly after we were married Michael was ordered to annual training at Camp Pendleton. The training was part of Operation Desert Storm. It was just a week after we honeymooned that Michael was required to go. That left me sad and lonely. It was also my first experience as a military wife.

It was during this period in our life Michael was in the Marine Corps Reserve stationed in Concord, California at the Landing Support Base (LSB). He was stationed with a Landing Support Unit. Michael served as the Company Gunnery Sergeant.

My next experience was when Michael was sent to Camp Lejeune for MOS training. The LSB training lasted five weeks on active duty (Michael was now in the Reserves). Once again, I was hit by loneliness and this time it was accompanied by a strong feeling of missing my family in El Salvador. When Michael returned we discovered that I was pregnant with my first child, Fernando.

In February of 1991 Michael and 10 other Marines were selected for Cold Weather Operations. Michael and his fellow Marines were about to be sent to Norway just as Operation Desert Storm began. It turned out that the 10 Marines and Michael were transferred TDY to Camp Lejeune to retrofit military equipment that was later sent to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, (Did I get this right?) The war with Iraq (Known

as "Operation Desert Storm") only lasted about 100 hours. It took months to bring all the personnel, supplies, and equipment to the United States. Michael was activated for seven months, and this was my third experience being home alone. As things would have it I was once again pregnant. This time it was different, better, because I had Michael's family for support. It was also during this time that I went to school to learn the English language.

Throughout my marriage to Michael I learned that he had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This learning experience came in many forms. The nightmares of Vietnam is one. The constant going to bars and drinking a lot was another. The "getting into trouble" and fighting was yet another. Most of Michael's friends were Vietnam veterans like him. Probably because these vets were the only people Michael could really trust and really relate to. I did not like some of these veterans because they were alcoholics, they smoked pot, they were loud and they were womanizers.

Michael and his Vietnam veteran friends liked to get together and watch war movies, talk about war, Vietnam, guns and ammunition. Every November 10th Michael and his Marine buddies would get together and I saw them cry. They also took camping trips into the wilderness of Northern California. But this is what I liked about them. They loved, they sacrifice, their big hearted patriotism, and they would give their lives for our freedom and for the "brotherhood".

I especially liked one of Michael's friends, Tony Wilson. Tony was a Master Gunnery Sergeant. In Tony's military career he was a Scout/Sniper and a member of a CAP (Combined Action Platoon) both while serving in Vietnam. Tony was like a brother to Michael in both good times and in bad times. He was the Best Man at our wedding and the godfather of our son, Fernando. We used to see Tony, his wife and kid all the time. We would go and do things together all the time. Tony and his family would come to our house for a BBQ. We would go to their house for holidays, or BBQ's. We would also take long trips with them. One other of Michael's close friends was in the Army, a

Green Beret and Airborne.

During our 31 years of marriage we have weathered good times and bad times. We have three sons, Vincente is the oldest and is from Michael's previous marriage. We also have Fernando and Michael, Jr. Our youngest son is a US Marine and is now in his eighth year with the Corps. His current duty station is in South Carolina. Currently he is a sergeant and is considering once again his opportunity to re-enlist. Our greatest joy at this moment in time is our two year old grandson, Mikey.

My husband Michael has had serious health problems since 2003. First, Michael had two strokes. In 2005 he had cancer of the larynx which seriously damaged his throat. In 2013 Michael was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Parkinson's disease is a serious but slow degeneration of the interior of the brain. Clearly the Agent Orange Michael was exposed to in Viet Nam is taking a toll on Michael's body.

Michael spent nineteen months in Viet Nam with 3rd Tanks and another 7 months in-country with 5th Tanks. The serious Agent Orange issues do not keep Michael from doing things that he loves like travel, going to events like wine tasting, concerts and socializing with family and friends. One of the best times we have had recently was Michael and I took a military hop aboard an Air Force transport plane to Germany, France, and Spain.

Michael continues to remain active regardless of the continual progression of the disease. His "can do" attitude reflects is Marine Corps training and spirit. Michael and I have attended the Marine Corps Birthday Ball several times and reunions such as the CAP reunion as well as the Vietnam Tankers reunions, which I have always found fun and interesting.

I have many things from many experiences seared in my head. One is that Vietnam veterans were mistreated and not appreciated for all the sacrifices they endured when they returned home. Clearly, this was and is unfair treatment. We won all the major battles we fought in Vietnam. We lost the war at home.

I am proud to be Michael's wife.

Rhena Castillo Barriere

Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz writes: Below is a story about VTA member Mike Castillo and his wife Rhena. I think that it is incredibly fascinating and that our members might enjoy reading it. It is not all about Vietnam but she is from El Salvador and living there when that huge fight between the government and insurgents was at its peak.

Rhena Castillo Barriere

My name is Rhena Castillo Barriere. I was born in San Salvador, El Salvador. I am the wife of Michael A. Castillo who is a Vietnam Veteran with the 3rd and 5th Tank Battalions.

I first met Michael while I was working at the Military Exchange of the Armed Forces of El Salvador. I was introduced to Michael by my uncle who was a good friend with my husband, Michael. Michael was on a business and vacation trip visiting his cousin who was the Director of the Military Hospital in San Salvador. Michael's cousin was a doctor and Colonel. Between the years of 1979 and the early 1980s El Salvador was going through a civil war. It was in these years that United States Marines were killed at Chilies Restaurant. Chilies Restaurant was in the Zona Rosa, a very popular place known for its restaurants and night clubs.

After the day my cousin introduced me to Michael I did not see him for a long



Rhena Castillo Barriere and Michael Castillo

was escorted to my office by the military police. Michael wanted to see me. Michael was permitted on the base because he had a U.S. Military ID. Michael's told the military police that he wanted to see me and to buy Johnnie Walker Black Label scotch, a very popular drink.

Michael stayed in El Salvador for a month. During that time he traveled to several vacation spots including beaches, restaurants, and "Pizza Hut" which had the best pizza in town. Michael said it was better tasting than even the pizza back in the United States.

The civil war in El Salvador was escalating and it was a very dangerous place especially for American citizens. My job in the audit department required me to go to work even though danger was never far away. It was my job and so I still went to work every day. For example, my co-worker was waiting for a bus when a hand grenade

time. One month later I was surprised to receive a letter with a Marine Corps sticker and \$100 colones which is the equivalent of \$25.00 to buy flowers for myself. I thought it was very nice of him and so I sent a thank you letter to Michael. I did not hear from him for another two years.

One morning in December of 1988 I was very surprised to see Michael at my place of employment. I was now working in the Audit Department when Michael

Looking For

RVN 1965 ABOARD USS ALAMO LSD33

After years of trying to find Marines that I served with while assigned to 2nd Platoon, Charlie Co, 1st Tank BN in RVN 1965 aboard USS Alamo LSD33. We were attached to BLT 3/5 with 2nd Plt. C Co. I wonder if you can you

help me locating anyone attached to that unit?

Wil Juare MSGT (Ret) USMC
952.426.8553
Email: wiljuare35@gmail.com

CHARLIE 1-1 ON HILL 55



John Wear writes: A Canadian author contacted me about wanting to write a book about American armor during the Vietnam War. He provided the above photo that was taken by a US Marine grunt who was with the 7th Marines on Hill 55. He did not provide the date of the photo but we are asking the VTA membership to help identify the tank and maybe the crew. As far as we can tell it has "C-11" and (maybe) "BUMBLE" painted on the gun tube. ■

How I got to serve...

(Continued from page 40)

ry and to take a correspondence course on NCO leadership, which made me promotable to Sergeant, with less than three years active. I came home and got out on an Early Out with 11 months left on my enlistment. Oh yes, did I mention that I had a circumcision while on the rock? I will save that story for another time. I needed time off and I had acquired a Top Secret clearance and so I had to be on "The Rock" for a full 12 month tour. During that time I got one week off!!! Finally, I will forever wonder who took the Major's sword, why was it taken, and where did it end up?

God Bless you all,

Armando Moreno
Ontos crewman, 1966-1969
Dec 22, 2021

As a post script: John Wear recalled a Marine named Sgt. Brister, who was a tank commander with Charlie Co, 5th Tanks at Camp Las Flores in 1969 and who claimed that his last duty station was

Adak, Alaska. John asked Armando if he recalled Sgt Brister at Adak.

"No, but, we had a supply sergeant, I forgot his name, he left Adak overnight to Anchorage in a strait jacket! Must have been the water! He was an isolator, not like us, we were normal. We were just bat shit crazy! Between my 13 months in-country and my year in Adak, I accumulated 25 months overseas duty ... and in 3 years I was never home for Christmas. I was a perfect fit for law enforcement after 6 years from the time I left the Corps and had some "downtime" to decompress. ■

Our Readers Write

(Continued from page 8)

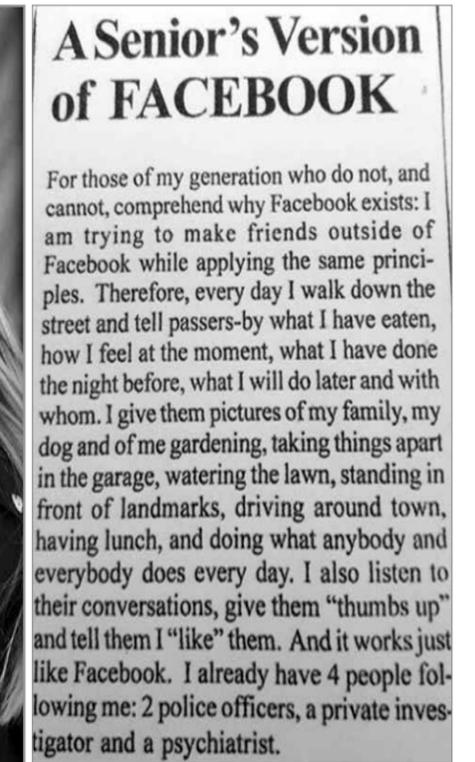
A DUI Conversation

I emailed a funny video of a DUI situation in Great Britain and one of my Korean War Marine veteran buddies replied:

In some respects, this reminds me of a situation in which I was involved as a Police Officer in Albany, GA in the '60's. I was on patrol on the midnight shift when a black woman staggered out of a bar and into the street and shouted "Taxi,

taxi!!!" Our cars were black and whites, like Los Angeles PD with a rather obvious 'Police' painted on the front doors.

Apparently she "thunk" I was a taxi, so I kindly stopped the car, got out and opened the back door for her. She got in and I asked her where she wanted to go and when she got in the car I swear she said "Jail," so I accommodated her wishes inasmuch as public drunkenness was a law at the time. Bitch didn't even tip me. ■



Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" on your address label is "21" then your 2022 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.

THE AMERICAN'S CREED

"I do not choose to be a common man. It is my right to be uncommon. I seek opportunity to develop whatever talents God gave me -- not security. I do not wish to be a kept citizen, humbled and dulled by having the state look after me. I want to take the state look to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I refuse to barter incentive for a dole. I prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence; the thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of utopia. I will not trade freedom for beneficence nor my dignity for a handout. I will never cower before any earthly master nor bend to any threat. It is my heritage to stand erect, proud and unafraid; to think and act myself, enjoy the benefit of my creations and to face the world boldly and say -- 'This, with God's help, I have done.'"

All this is what it means to be an American.