



Sponson BOX

*Voice of the USMC Vietnam
Tankers Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



ONCE A MARINE – ALWAYS A MARINE

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- A Grunt's Story: Marines Sharing a BurdenPage 35-38
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YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!!!

The Sponson Box seems to be the main form of communicating with the vast majority of the USMC VTA membership. Unfortunately, our magazine only comes out four times per year, thus only allowing us to "talk to each other" every-three-months.

We do send out periodic emails but less than 50% of the VTA membership seems to have an email address...and even worse, only about half

of those members seem able to open the email to read the communication.

We'd like for ALL members who do not have a valid email address to please provide us with an alternative email: your wife's, your children's or even your grandchildren's... so that we can send timely communications to you. If you can have them, send the email address to John Wear whose email is johnwear2@verizon.net . Please be sure to include the name of the member who corresponds to the email address.

DO NOT LEAVE YOUR LOVED ONES HANGING!
GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW!

BY 1ST SGT RICK LEWIS

I have once again found myself helping a Marine's widow navigate how and what to do as her Marine has passed on to the Big Tank Park in the Sky. Below are some very simple steps to get your Ducks in a Row!

1. Start a folder and mark it "Military Papers."

2. Put your DD from-214 in it with a few extra copies.

3. Any letters from the VA that state your level of disability.

4. VA form 40-10007 titled: Application for pre-need determination of eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery. Note: you can down load this form by going to VA.gov and type in the form number, fill it out and send it in with your DD-214.

5. If you are a retired Marine and receive: Semper Fidelis Newsletter, on one of the last pages is a step-by-step direction, what to do when you pass. Make a copy and put it your folder.

6. If not a retired Marine, make a list of important phone numbers and websites. Example: Social Security and where your retirement comes from.
7. Let them know where you little "Black Book" is with all your passwords to different sites, so they can close them or access your accounts. If you do not have one, start one!

8. You might want to put a note about what you want done with your body. If you have not told your family, it keeps the family from infighting. I have seen it. It is not fun.

9. Now that you have placed all the above in your "Military Papers" folder then let you loved ones know about it and where you keep it. Also keep it up dated.

10. Note: you can also have your spouse's burial at a VA National Cemetery, just fill out the VA 40-10007 and submit it with a copy of your DD form 214.

We Marines, pride ourselves on having our act together, so please follow these simple steps for your loved ones.

Letter from the President

2023 REUION: As I compose this letter, due to our magazine's publication timing and deadlines, it is not quite time for our 2023 reunion to commence. As it has been since 1999, when we held our very first gathering in Washington, DC, we are pretty confident that all of the attendees of this year's gathering had a wonderful time, mostly because we are able to meet and greet one another, "**Brothers of a different mother.**" OOO-RAH!!!

And it continues to pain us to know that so many of our members (and/or their family members) are suffering from health issues which precludes them from traveling to our reunion cities.



GUEST OPINION: When we first started the "Guest Opinion" feature several years ago, we published a disclaimer that the opinion of the author of the article was not necessarily the opinion of the VTA. The original intent of the article was to offer different opinions on various subjects and ideas and to perhaps offer some fodder for an open debate. The last Issue of our magazine had a not-so-center-of-the-road article that the author (and we) felt was important to discuss. Now that the article has run, we are hearing some (not a lot) ... but some, pushback that the Sponson Box was perhaps not the ideal publication for the article. With that said, if anyone (including the one specific member) was offended by the article, we are sorry that it may have struck a nerve. Let's see if we all can move forward and keep our eye on our mission of writing our personal stories of our time in service to our nation.

VA INFORMATION: For many years, a retired US Army officer who lived for a very long time in the Philippine Islands produced a twice monthly emailed newsletter that recapped "All-things-Veterans Administration" which also included many other concerns for veterans. Unfortunately, the good man passed away about a year ago and his publication has ceased being published. As a result, our source for our own magazine's VA NEWS has dried up. We will try to search for another source but unfortunately, we may be seeing an end of that informative and useful section of our quarterly magazine.

2024 MINI-REUNION: Just so you have the dates, the 2024 Mini-Reunion are planned to be 9/12/24 – 9/15/24 and the location is Fort Benning, Georgia (a.k.a. "Fort Moore"). We have a special invitation to visit a brand new and outstanding US Army Tank Museum that is not yet opened to the public. The full details will be in the next issue of our magazine which should be in your hands right after the first of the New Year.

POST PEARL HARBOR AMERICA: I am currently reading a book about the heroic US Marines on Wake Island at the very early part of the war in the Pacific. The book title is "Pacific Alamo." The author sites a phrase that first appeared in a book written by Robert Sherwood at that infamous time: "In going about in Washington in those first days (immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor), it sometimes seemed that maybe the Nazi and Fascist propagandists were right, that maybe our democracy had become decadent and soft, that we could talk big but that there were too many of us who simply did not know how to stand up under punishment." After I read this line, my first thought was that it certainly could apply to today's world. I guess what comes around, often goes around. And those of us who are ignorant of our history are cursed to repeat it.

"Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by neglect, ignorance or incompetence.." –
Author Unknown



Everyone has a story. If your story is good enough to reminisce about with your buddies then it's good enough to write down and send it for the Sponson Box and for the VTA website. Your story can be about the war or about the home front. Just write it the same way that you tell it and send it to John Wear. We'd love to share your story with he membership... and for you to share it with your family.

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Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

THANK YOU!

I just received the beautiful lap robe along with my reunion refund in the mail yesterday. What a wonderful surprise. Thank you very much. It has been an honor to be a member of the Association since y'all "found me awhile back". You and your team of volunteers run a good and tight ship in the tradition of the USMC of which we are all members of the Brotherhood.

I wish you and all attendees at the 2023 Reunion have a successful and joyful reunion. Please extend my regrets for not being among you physically, but rest assured I will be there in spirit. God Bless to all!

Semper Fi,

Don Scott

Remembering Bruce "Boston" Manns

Mike Giovinazzo writes: In the recent Sponson Box, I noted the death of Bruce Manns, with great sadness. I first met Bruce at the DC reunion and then would see him at future reunions. I did not know him well, nor talk to him at length. We did discover that we both came from Manhattan, in different neighborhoods, but shared many similarities in growing up at a young age there. What immediately impressed me about Bruce was his calm gentle manner and pleasing personality. This fine gentleman left a lasting impression with me that I will never forget and will miss very much.

Where were you?

I got this from a US Marine Vietnam grunt who was passing it on: Probably about 30 years ago, I was doing some electrical work in a woman's kitchen in a retirement community. Her very old dad lived with her. I was working and I'm kind of quietly whistling some song stuck in my head. She came out to the kitchen and very nicely asked me not to whistle because it really bothered her dad. I figured it was just because of my shitty musical abilities ... and she added that he had been a Marine. I told her that I had also been in the Marine Corps and she hollered and said "Dad, Mike was in the Marines too!"

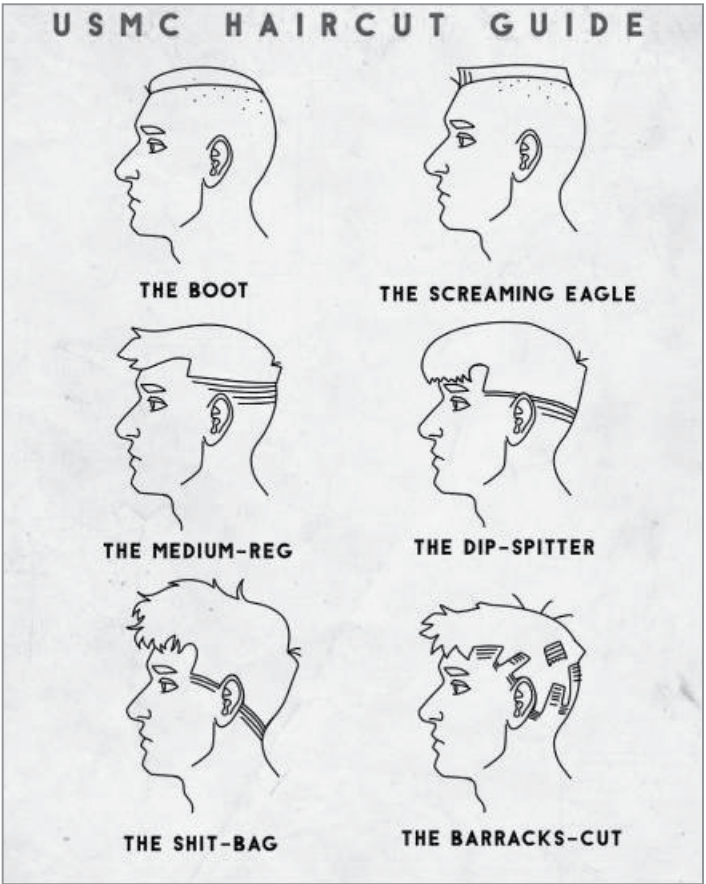
So, I stopped what I was doing and went into the living room where the old guy was so I could introduce myself. "Mike Reed 7th Marines Vietnam."

He puts out his hand and said, "Sam Gossett 5th Marines Belleau Wood."

I get cold chills just typing this, I was f*cking tongue tied and couldn't think of a damn thing to say but I finally stammered out something, no idea what.

Every now and then when I was working close to his

daughter's house, I'd stop in and say hello. I was still in such awe of meeting someone from that era and that particular battle. I couldn't really talk with him other than, "Good to see you Sam. How are you doing?" Just small talk and I didn't think I should try to get too personal. He did tell me that he was listed as the oldest living Marine but said that he knew that wasn't true since he was just the oldest in the 1st Marine Division Assn. and that he knew someone older. I think I was truly blessed to have met him.



Rick Beirne writes

This was in our church bulletin this morning: Writing about over-protective parents, Dr Willis Tate, former president of Southern Methodist University, recounts the story of a significantly zealous mom. Mother sent a lengthy letter to Dr. Tate asking him to assure her, her son would be assigned a "good" roommate who would encourage her son to go to church, not use bad language, smoke, drink, or otherwise negatively influence her son. The concerned mother concluded her letter, "The reason all this is so important is that this is the first time my son has been away from home, except for the 3 years he spent in the Marines" >>

JOKE



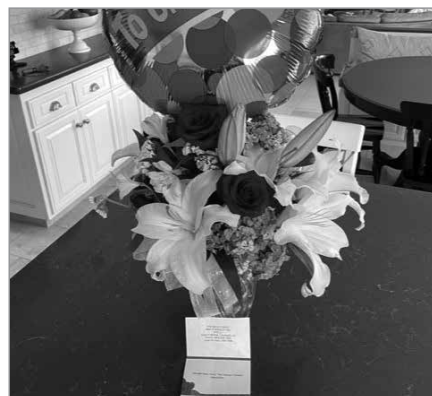
F-4 Phantom

John Wear writes: The first time that I saw that "ugly" warbird was on the Da Nang Air Base as we deplaned after first arriving. Two of them were taking off and their afterburner blasts scared the shit out of me, a totally brand new FNG. Not much later, after arriving at my first combat assignment and after two weeks of no air support ... (the brass hats in Saigon did not allow us to "destroy Hue City in order to save it") ... the leaders at MAC-V relented and F-4's started bombing the NVA holed up in the Citadel. What a lovely sight!!!

The next situation that is burned into my memory is seeing "gooks in the open!" just east of Con Thien. After the Air "Farce" and the Navy made ineffective high level bombing runs on the enemy soldiers attempting to cross the DMZ, two US Marine F-4's flew at tree top level and dropped their ordinance while barely making it out of the blast area. They then turned and flew strafing runs while the spent 20 mm brass dropped on our heads. GET SOME!!!

Thank you!!!

Armando Moreno writes: It was very thoughtful of you to think about my wife, Esther, as she continues to recover from her surgery. The Buddy Fund flowers are beautiful. She is on the mend and



we are making plans to see everyone in Colorado Springs. Thank you all!

The Most Recent S-Box

Mike Giovinazzo writes: Great edition as always. I hope all VTA members realize how much work you put into this magazine and all you do for the organization. Also, to be included are all the people behind you who perform functions for the magazine and the reunions. I pass the magazine to other Marines and all say it is the best magazine they have seen.

I will write my good friend Joe Harrigan for his excellent article. I met him and his sister at the DC reunion, for the first time and we have stayed in contact since.

I enjoyed the article, "Saving Doggie Tankers". I am curious to the reference to APC's (armored personnel carriers), with H 2/3. Were these the Army APC's, M-113? or are they referring to Amtrak's?

The article about Lucy Caldwell was great. You would have to have ice in your veins to not be moved by it. Too bad so much time has passed since her presence became known. I would think some members of the VTA came in contact with her.

John Wear replies: It is my understanding that sometime in mid- to late-1969, the 3rd Tank BN CO was offered to test five or seven US Army M-113 APCs to test. They proved to be a major failure for Marines.

Joe Woolever writes: The last issue of our magazine brought memories. The back inside cover page with the images of Red Beach!!! I believe it was 2/3 that landed there. I was with 1/3 that was flown in from Okinawa. I was a 2143 Ontos mechanic. A Co, 3rd Anti-Tank BN. I spent the 1st six months of the 13 on Oki and the last seven months (from Mar – Sept) near Da Nang. They flew the Ontos but our Tanks came via ship. I would like to come to a reunion but there is no way I can

I stand corrected, it probably was 9th Marines who landed, but when we were on Okinawa before deployment, we were the 3rd Marine Division, I was a PFC. I choose Okinawa as a duty station when I got out of 2143 School as I wasn't old enough to drink elsewhere. I arrived on Okinawa August of 64. Vietnam hadn't started yet other than advisers. I didn't even know it existed

Guy Everest writes: Looking at the photos of Cam Lo Bridge, if you look at the bridge at the bottom of the page in



the lower lefthand corner. That is definitely not Cam Lo bridge. I would think it's the Washout which was just north of Cam Lo on the road leading to Con Tien.

Ed Hiltz writes: After reading the article about Tun Tavern in the last issue of our magazine, I have to admit while being in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for work related visits, I think back in the mid-90s and I did have the occasion to go to the fake Tun Tavern to have a few beers. Now that I know the history, I would have never done that after reading the Sponson Box story.

Remembering Jeff Griffith

Would I be allowed to add some additional personal information to Jeff's obituary in the next Sponson Box?

I placed Jeff in a V.A. nursing facility 3 1/2 yrs. ago after he had a stroke & I could no longer care for him. He passed on 4/14/23 from end-stage prostate cancer. He also had Alzheimer's & Parkinson's disease. My sister Patty moved in & I became her caregiver before she passed on 5/4/23 from a brain tumor..I'm still reeling. I wasn't even thinking about sending in his obituary. However, after you read this you might want to categorize it as an editorial as well.

Jeff was so much more than what was originally published. He was 17 when he quit high school to join the Marine Corps. He was in Bravo Co. 3rd Tank Battalion. He served two tours, unable to leave his brothers behind after serving one. We were married for 46 years and we have a 45-year-old son, Stefan, his wife Bushrah, & a five-year-old granddaughter, Brooke. Jeff was one of a kind... a great husband, Dad, Pop Pop, & my best friend. We had a wonderful life together. Jeff had an exciting career as an emergency generator technician. He was responsible for the installation & maintenance of huge generators that serviced many NYC banks & hospitals, the World Trade Center (before and after 9/11), the preservation of Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, and Jacques Cousteau's boat. He was the only one chosen to travel overseas to Russia & Saudi Arabia because he was the most competent in his field. His nickname was, "Lead Man".

I'm a bit unsettled, John. Within the past year, several guys have told me, "You know, he wasn't a tanker." I realize that I'm a bit sensitive & feeling overprotective, but it irks me, as if he was "less than". I know his MOS was "tank repairman". Of course, I may have missed a mention re: the guys who kept the tanks rolling, even though I have faithfully read the Sponson Box from cover to cover for years. Out of 500+ members are there any other tank repairmen out there? Like many Vets, Jeff rarely spoke about the War, so we're left with lots of uncaptioned photos that he took while riding in a tank out in the field (bush?). There's a picture of him standing on top of a huge tank retriever ("Bodacious Bastard"), and I may be way off the mark, but I

think that massive machine weighed 60 tons, yet no one has ever mentioned it. I gently prodded him over the years, assuring him that I'd help write his stories ... even just one story. But as you continue to warn the vets during reunions & in this magazine, he took his stories to his grave. The poorly timed, "He wasn't a tanker" is unnecessary. It would destroy him if he felt that his service was not as important as "a tanker." Like all of the Marines of the VTA, he was extremely proud to have served our country as a U.S. Marine. Whatever he did, we KNOW he went above & beyond. I've read & heard you guys say that everybody stepped up to the task, wherever & whenever needed. The Corps set the tone for the rest of his life, which he led with honor, integrity, dignity & respect.

Thank you for your time, John. I'd certainly welcome your (gentle) feedback, since I'm totally overwhelmed with a fractured ankle, impending surgery for a herniated disc very close to the spinal cord, broken A/C, and a big hive of angry yellow jackets inside my wall. However, I am all too aware that you Marines have a reputation for "telling it like it is" and that's one of the many reasons why I loved Jeff... although he bore a lifetime of scars from me subtly kicking him underneath many a table. He made me laugh so hard that I'd gasp, "You make me laugh!" One night I said that to him & as he turned over he muttered, "Put that on my tombstone." I asked, "What??" He repeated, "Put that on my tombstone." He Made Me Laugh! Well, the next best thing is including it here. It would make him laugh!

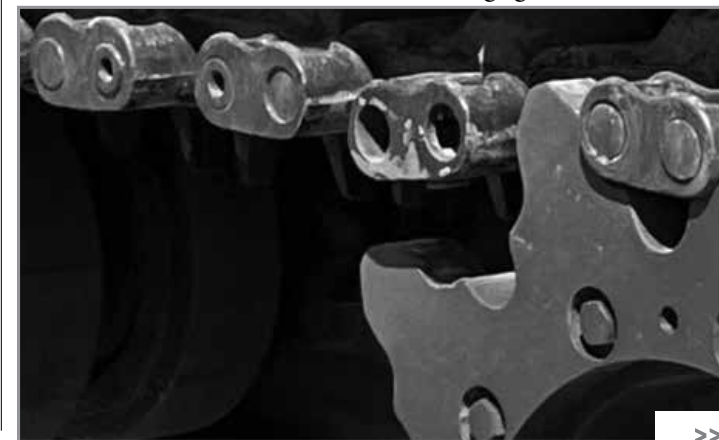
I wish I could make it to this year's reunion. It looks like it's going to be fantastic! I look forward to reading about it. Praying that everyone has a safe journey

Blessings,

Mary Beth

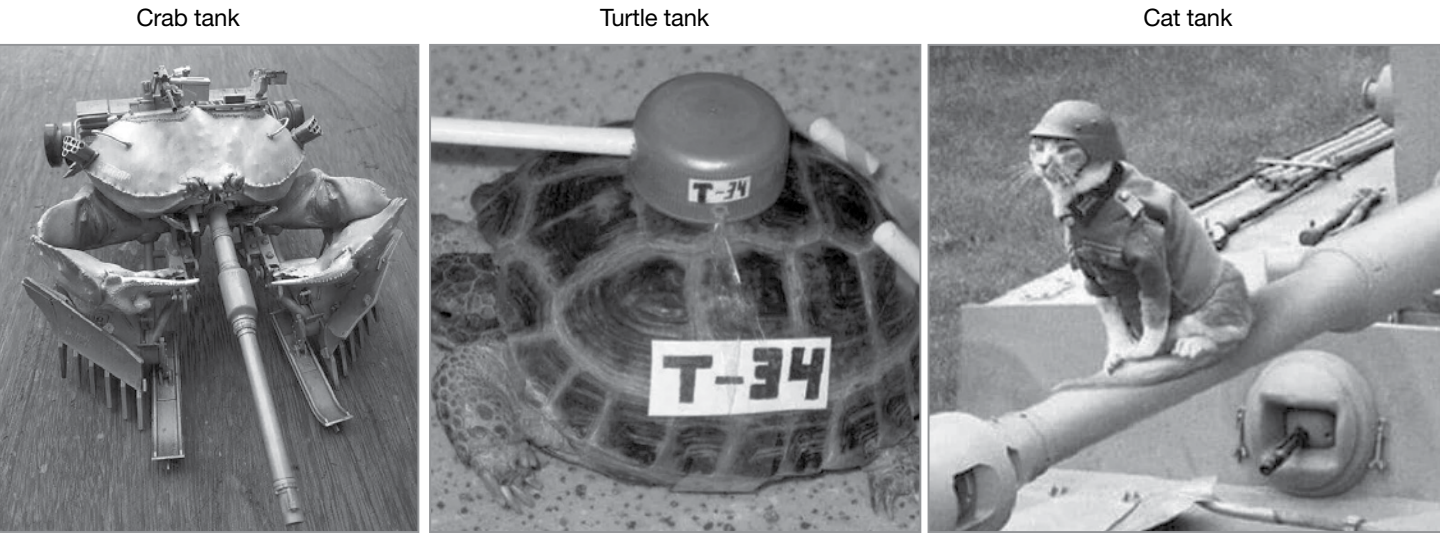
Track Maintenance Needed?

Clyde Knox sent us this photo that he took last September when we visited the National Museum of Military Vehicles in Wyoming. Obviously, from the look of the end connector, the tank's driver was a bit negligent in his duties.



>>

ANIMAL TANKS



Craig Newberry submitted this:

When I was younger I dreamed of Lamborghinis and Maseratis. Now my dreams have changed.

Missed the Colorado Reunion

Chris Vargo writes: Thanks John, Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend because I am in France, studying at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. If we came it would be at a very last minute. Thanks for caring.
Chris

NAPALM

Doug Scrivner writes: I was just reading the most recent issue of the Sponson Box. I've had a few acquaintances from other branches ask me if we had mixing machines or was it

premixed. All I remember is you could tell the flame tankers by the well-developed forearms & biceps.
Scriv F-33, 2nd Platoon, C Co, 1st Tanks.

John Wear adds: We used a 55-gallon barrels with a large funnel welded to the bottom and screwed into the main bottle of the flame tank. Mogas truck parked next to the tank dispensing its gasoline and the crew opening barrels of powdered napalm to be mixed in with the mogas. Everyone was covered in white powder. I really don't know if the mixing process was any better or worse than humping 90 mm ammo while loading the gun tanks for battle.

Ed Hiltz Writes

I was sitting on my deck, enjoying a beer and reading the Sponson Box. I had an event similar to you and maybe others. I occasionally wear my Vietnam Veteran hat especially when I go out with some of my buddies to a bar or lounge because many times that hat gets me some free beer from some of the patrons.
One day, when dropping off my wife's Jeep at the local dealership for some repairs, an Asian woman looked at me and asked, "Where in Vietnam were you?"
So, in replying, I said, "Around Da Nang." And then using that as a reference point, I said, "At a combat base called An Hoa."
She said that she was Vietnamese but never lived there. She told me that she was one of the first Baby Lifts / Flights flown out of Vietnam to the United States and that she never knew her parents. I said, "That's a sad story."
But she added that she is now happily married, has two children and is thankful for the United States. Then she thanked me. ■

Photos from Vietnam

2nd Bn – 1st Marines 1967 “Camp Big John” at Mai Xa Thai – Dai Do



2/1 - Bunker at The Washout, 1967



Editorial comments in the following article represent the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Marine Corp or the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. We'd like to ask that anyone who may be offended by what might be written in this article, please skip over it and do not read it. The article is intended to be thought provoking and is not intended to be dogma.

Marine Corps No More?

BY BING WEST – TUESDAY, MAY 23, 2023

Since 1775, the iconic image of the American Marine has been that of a disciplined, tough rifleman moving forward in battle, often with fixed bayonet. The Marine Corps is small, agile, and flexible, priding itself on being the first to fight, anywhere. Over the past four years, however, the current Commandant, General David H. Berger, has radically transformed the image and the mission of the Marine Corps. The primary focus now is upon developing missile units intended to sink Chinese warships. To fund those units, General Berger did away with 21% of the personnel in infantry battalions, 100% of the tanks, 67% of the cannon artillery batteries, 33% of the assault amphibious companies, nearly 30% of Marine aviation, and almost all assault breaching equipment. The desired number of large amphibious ships was reduced from 38 to 31. Due to these cuts, Marines are less capable to fight as a combined arms force. The Marine Corps cannot seize a city from an entrenched enemy, as it did Fallujah in 2004. It cannot fight on a battlefield such as Ukraine unless it queues up behind the National Guard to receive any left-over tanks and crews the U.S. Army is not employing.

What has been gained by shredding the Marine's historic image and reducing its capability to fight in any place or clime? In theory, China is further deterred. On paper, the Marines will be prepared by 2030 to land small units on a dozen islands or atolls in the South China Sea. Each unit will include eight or ten anti-ship missiles mounted on heavy trucks, plus sophisticated naval intelligence devices

to detect ship movements. When and if Chinese warships try to exit the South China Sea to attack Guam or wherever, the Marines will track and sink them.

However, the Philippines has refused to permit U.S. forces to use its bases as a staging area, let alone land on its islands in the South China Sea. Plus, the Marines don't have the shallow-draft ships to get to those islands. The Navy is reluctant to build them and has secured the Marines' pledge that such ships would pull out before a shooting war began. This means the Marines may never get to the islands; and if they do, they are on their own, without reinforcement or resupply. In addition, those islands are one thousand miles south of Taiwan. If Taiwan is the focus of Beijing's future aggression, the Marines have placed themselves out of position. In short, the anti-ship mission lacks strategic coherence as well as resources.

General Berger concocted his concept in secret, not consulting the retired four-star community that, appalled by his extensive cuts, has united in opposition. Multiple articles have been written, laying out the irremediable defects in the anti-ship strategy. To sink some Chinese warships in a dubious war scenario, Marine resources and organizational cohesion have been severely damaged. General Berger's injudicious change of direction will adversely affect Marine warfighting capabilities, internal morale, and recruiting for years to come. ■



GUESS WHO Photo Contest

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



Last Issue Winner

No one was last issue's winner. We got no calls to identify Charlie Kern (left) and John Wear (right) at the Dong Ha tank ramp in 1968. Thanks to Garry Hall for providing this classic photo.



If you feel that you have a photo that may stump the readership, please take a photo of it with your smartphone in ambient light and send it on email to johnwear2@verizon.net

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

"The only guarantee in life is death, but the only thing worse than death itself, is being forgotten." – Trent Thomas

Conrad A. Gordon 1942 – 2022



Conrad Arthur Gordon, 80, of Montpelier, VT, passed away on Friday, August 19, 2022, at Woodridge Nursing and Rehab in Berlin. His nickname was "T-Bone." The last son of Leslie and Agnes (Dumas) Gordon, Conrad was born on March 13, 1942, in Northfield, VT. Conrad's Dad passed on his 11th birthday. He attended Saint Mike's, Saint Monica and Marian High School.

He then joined the U.S. Army so he did not graduate, but he did earn his GED and Driver's license while in the service. He was in the U.S. Army stationed in Erlangen, Germany and served three years. He was then joined the US Marine Corps and served for 4 years; he was stationed in Cuba and Vietnam and the 1968 Riots in Washington, D.C. He was Tank Commander and was wounded in Da Nang Vietnam in which he received a Purple Heart that was later presented to him by character actor, Raymond Burr (Perry Mason).

Following his active duty, he served in the Vermont Army National Guard as a tanker at Bradford Armory serving for twenty-eight years. He was an active member of the USMC VTA.

Brian T Jeffries 1947–2022



Tom Kelly sent us this note from Jane Jeffries, Brian's widow: Brian died on October 16, 2022. He had been getting weaker and weaker for the last year and following many tests, which showed very little, they decided to do open heart surgery to replace a valve he had had replaced ten years before. Once in, they found 3 of his 4 valves were compromised and one was beyond repair. They got him off the table but he never

woke. Our son Rob was with us when he died. I am beginning to get a handle on life without him, but it is difficult after 51 years of marriage. I know how much he valued his time in the Corps and serving with great Marines. Brian was an active member of the USMC VTA.

THE OBITUARY: Brian Teel Jefferies died Sunday, October 16, 2022. He was born in Houston, Texas, November 14, 1947, to John Fred Jefferies, Jr., and Louise Jefferies and graduated from Austin High School. After attending Houston Baptist College for two years, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. While on leave between two tours of duty in Vietnam, he met his wife, Jane Criner. They married after his return from Vietnam and lived in California while completing his enlistment. Brian spent the remainder of his life in Houston serving as a police officer with the city of Houston and with Hedwig Village until his retirement. He was proud to be a Texan.

Michael Muir Kephart 1947–2022



On Friday, December 23 of 2022, our beloved friend, brother, husband, father, and grandfather, Colonel Michael Muir Kephart (USMC) of Lorton, Virginia, departed on his final journey home to his Lord & Savior, leaving behind a legacy of loyalty and love to those still waiting to join him for eternity. He died peacefully in his home with his loving wife and oldest grandson, Trevor, by his side as he

passed over to the next glorious chapter in a life already written with stories of valor, honor, and exceeded expectations that we all share having known this kind and wonderful soul.

Mike served nobly in the Marine Corps for more than 30 years with multiple deployments and duty stations. One of his many career highlights included being the Commanding Officer of 1st Tank Battalion during the Gulf War. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his leadership, and heroic & meritorious deeds the battalion performed in the liberation of Kuwait.

Mike was not a member of the USMC VTA.

Ronnie Lee Lyons 1947 – 2018

Ronnie Lee Lyons, 70, of Centralia, passed away April 3, 2018 in Centralia. He was born the son of Charles F. and Edna Ruth (Deadmond) Lyons on September 19, 1947 in Centralia.

Ronnie was a proud United States Marine veteran, having served three tours of duty in Vietnam earning three Purple Hearts and a Bronze star with "V" for valor. While serving in the USMC, he was a drill instructor for 14 years. After his service, he became a post master in Du Quoin and a commercial fisherman. He also was a certified scuba diver, bee farmer, and loved to hunt and trap. He was proud of his many accomplishments.

Unfortunately he never joined the USMC VTA.

Walter F Brock 1949–2023

Walter Fredrick Brock, born in Detroit, MI on February 2, 1949 passed away at 74 years old in Corpus Christi, TX, June 10, 2023 after a brief but hard-fought illness.

Walter was a Marine veteran who served during the Vietnam war as an Ontos crewman and was part of the group of Marines, many of whom lost their lives, during the battle of Hue City in February 1968. When he returned to the states, he spent some time in California before returning to Michigan where he completed an apprenticeship to become an Optical Mechanic. He made eyeglasses for a number of years before he began working for VARO in Dallas, TX making military grade optics. From there he traveled back to California where he worked for Exotic Materials, another government contracted company that made military optics for TADS (target acquisition defense system) for the Apache helicopters, M1's (eye piece for tanks and binoculars) and PNVIS (pilot night vision system) along with other high-grade optics.

He was a past member of the USMC VTA.

THE LAST BATTLE

If it should be that I grow weak,
and pain should keep me from my sleep,
then you must do what must be done,
for this last battle we face, cannot be won.

You will be sad, I understand;
don't let your grief stop your hand.
For this day more than all the rest,
your love for me must stand the test.

We've had so many happy years –
What is to come must hold no fears.
You would not want me to suffer so;
the time has come, so let me go.

Please call the doctor and soon they'll come
To ease the pain and let me run.

One more thing I ask, dear friend,
Please stay with me until the end.
Hold me firm and speak to me
Until my eyes no longer see.

I know in time no doubt you'll see
the true kindness that you did for me.
Although my tail its last has waved,
from pain and suffering I've been saved.

Please don't grieve – it must be you
who has this painful thing to do.
We've been so close, we two, these years –
So don't let your heart hold back the tears.

Your Attention Please!

We would greatly appreciate it that if you recognize a name in the Great Tank Park section, please send us an email note or give us a phone call telling us about your remembrance of the recently departed Marine. Anything that you recall might be posted so that others will know that he is remembered by others... plus we will have another record of his memory.

Nutrition for Aging: Vitamin D

Are you getting enough of this important vitamin?

We need many essential nutrients for long, healthy lives. But most adults in the U.S. get less vitamin D than recommended. When you get older, it's really important to have the right amount of vitamin D. It protects your bone, joint, and muscle health. Learn the risks of not having enough vitamin D, and where to get it.

What can a vitamin D deficiency cause?

If you don't have enough vitamin D, you could have vitamin D deficiency. That means your body won't absorb calcium well. It can also lead to illnesses such as osteoporosis or rickets.

What can cause Vitamin D deficiency?

- Lack of vitamin D in your diet or problems absorbing vitamin D from food
- Not enough sunlight
- Problems in liver or kidneys converting vitamin D
- Medicines that interfere with absorbing vitamin D

How much is enough?

The amount of vitamin D needed varies for each person. Most adults need 600 IU (international units) each day. But adults aged 71 and over need 800 IU. You might be at risk of vitamin D deficiency if you're in one of these categories:

- People with osteoporosis, liver disease, chronic kidney disease, obesity, Crohn's disease, hyperparathyroidism, and some types of lymphoma
- Older adults
- People with dark skin
- People who take certain medicines that impact vitamin D metabolism

Where do you get vitamin D?

Bodies naturally create vitamin D after sunlight exposure. Another way to get more is through your diet. Try these foods to boost your vitamin D:

- Fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, and mackerel
- Beef liver
- Cheese
- Mushrooms
- Egg yolks
- Milk (fortified: nonfat, 1% or 2%, or fat-free)

Remember: Don't forget to read your food label to ensure your foods have plenty of vitamin D. Vitamin D is considered a "voluntary" nutrient. It is not included on every food label. It is only included when it is added to a food.

Ask your doctor for a vitamin D test to learn if you

need supplements. Make sure you record any vitamins or supplements you take in My HealtheVet. You can download and share this information with your provider at future appointments. [Source: My Health Vet newsletter]

Expanded presumptive disability benefits for Vietnam Veterans

By Bryan Lett—March 29, 2023

Vietnam Veterans may be eligible for expanded VA disability compensation under the PACT Act, a law passed in 2022 which increases access to VA benefits and health care for Veterans exposed to toxic substances during their military service. If you are a Vietnam Veteran who served in any of the locations below, you may qualify for disability compensation due to certain medical conditions. VA considers these "presumptive locations"—meaning that if you served in any of these places during the specified time periods, you do not have to prove that you were exposed to toxins, such as Agent Orange. VA automatically assumes you were.

Qualifying presumptive locations and dates include:

* = Represents new locations added under the PACT Act

- Republic of Vietnam or on a vessel operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975
- Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) between Sept. 1, 1967, and Aug. 31, 1971
- Air Force or Air Force Reserve Veterans who regularly and repeatedly operated, maintained or served aboard a C-123 aircraft known to have been used for spraying herbicides.
- *Any U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand from Jan. 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976
- *Laos from Dec. 1, 1965, through Sept. 30, 1969
- *Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969
- *Guam or American Samoa, or in the territorial waters off Guam or American Samoa from Jan. 9, 1962, through July 31, 1980
- *Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll from Jan. 1, 1972, through Sept. 30, 1977

If you were exposed to Agent Orange—or have a presumption of exposure—and experience any of the below medical conditions, you may be eligible for VA disability compensation. VA considers these to be "presumptive conditions"—meaning that you do not have to prove that the condition was caused by your military

service if you served in one of the locations and time periods listed above.

Qualifying presumptive conditions include:

* = Represents new conditions added under the PACT Act

- AL amyloidosis
- B-cell leukemia
- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia
- Chloracne (or other acne-form disease consistent with chloracne)
- Early-onset peripheral neuropathy
- Multiple myeloma
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus
- Hodgkin's disease
- Ischemic heart disease (including but not limited to, coronary artery disease and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease)
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease
- Parkinsonism
- Porphyria cutanea tarda
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers
- Soft-tissue sarcoma (not including osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma)
- Bladder cancer
- Hypothyroidism
- *High blood pressure (hypertension)
- *Monoclonal gammopathy of underdetermined significance (MGUS)

Your VA ID Card is the proof you need for discounts

April 5, 2023

"How do I prove that I'm a Veteran?" It's a question often asked by those who once served in the military. Many businesses offer discounts to Veterans for restaurants, hotels, stores, recreational activities and even home improvement, among other perks. Former service members will want to take advantage of those opportunities.

First, you'll want to apply for VA's Veteran ID Card (VIC), which is a digital photo ID you can use to get those discounts. Since September 2022, all new Veteran ID cards have been digital. A Veteran with a physical ID card can continue using it to get discounts. The VIC is separate from the VA health care ID, which a Veteran receives when enrolling in VA health care.

If you have any questions or need help, email VA's VIC program at vetidcard@va.gov.

Click here to apply online and login using your existing Login.gov, ID.me, DS Logon or MyHealtheVet account. A Veteran without any of these accounts can create a free Login.gov or ID.me account. If you are unable to submit your VIC application through VA.gov, please use Access VA. When applying, make sure to have your social security

number; a digital copy of your DD214, DD256, DD257 or NGB22 that you can upload; and a copy of a current and valid government-issued ID, such as a driver's license, passport or state-issued identification card.

You'll also need a digital color photo of yourself from the shoulders up. The photo should follow all of these standards:

- Show a full, front view of your face and neck with no hat, head covering or headphones covering or casting shadows on your hairline or face.
- Be cropped from your shoulders up much like a passport photo.
- Show you with your eyes open and in a neutral expression.
- Be taken in clothing you'd wear for a driver's license photo.
- Be a square size and have a white or plain-color background with no scenery or other people in the photo.
- Show what you look like now, meaning a photo that is no older than 10 years old; it should be uploaded as a .jpeg, .png, .bmp or .tiff file.
- A Veteran must meet certain criteria to be eligible for a VIC, including both of these requirements:
- Service on active duty, in the Reserve or in the National Guard, including the Coast Guard.
- Receipt of an honorable or general discharge under honorable conditions.

If the Veteran received an other-than honorable, bad conduct or dishonorable character of discharge, that person is not eligible for a Veteran ID card. If a Veteran has an uncharacterized or unknown discharge status, VA must verify that person's eligibility before approving an application. The Veteran must provide a copy of his/her discharge papers when applying for a VIC to prove their character of discharge.

After a Veteran applies for a VIC, VA will check that person's eligibility and verify that the character of discharge meets eligibility requirements, the ID submitted is valid and the image chosen to appear on the card meets photo requirements.

VA will then send an email letting the Veteran know the status of the application. If the Veteran has an unknown or uncharacterized discharge status, the application will take more time to process. VA may need to request your records from the National Personnel Records Center, part of the National Archives and Records Administration.

If a Veteran receives an email from VA asking for additional information or evidence to process the application, that person must sign in to AccessVA and update the application.

VA will send an email with the digital card attached if a Veteran is eligible for a Veteran ID Card.

For more information, email VA at vetidcard@va.gov. You can also click here.

>>

VA Wants Vets to Use Their Benefits When
Choosing a Final Resting Place

By Patricia Kime – 25 Jan 2023

The Department of Veterans Affairs is raising awareness of little-used benefits for veterans: burial at a VA, state or tribal veteran’s cemetery, and headstones or markers for veterans buried in private cemeteries. According to VA officials, just 20% of eligible veterans who died last year were buried in a VA-managed or -supported cemetery, a benefit that comes at no cost to the veteran’s family. And fewer than half who qualified for a burial allowance or headstone used the opportunity, according to Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Matt Quinn.

As the VA nears the 50th anniversary of assuming management of national cemeteries, the department is spreading the word to veterans and families that vets can apply for eligibility before they die, taking care of the needed paperwork beforehand to ease the financial and emotional burden on their families and make their wishes known.

"I want families to know that they can honor the services of their veteran with a VA-provided headstone, marker or medallion, but I also want every veteran or veteran’s family to know they have the option of being interred in a national, state, territorial or tribal veteran’s cemetery," Quinn said during a roundtable with reporters Tuesday. The VA manages 155 cemeteries nationwide and funds an additional 121 state, territorial and tribal veteran’s cemeteries. Veterans who are eligible for VA burial benefits include all who were discharged under something other than dishonorable conditions; spouses or surviving spouses of eligible veterans; dependent children; and some others. The VA has a goal to ensure that 95% of the nation’s 19 million veterans live within 75 miles of a VA or VA-supported cemetery; currently, the department is "just shy" of 94%, according to Quinn. "It’s that final benefit that the veteran has earned and that the nation can show to that veteran’s family appreciation for their sacrifice and service," Quinn said.

During a meeting of the Veterans’ Family, Caregiver and Survivor Advisory Committee on Wednesday, VA Secretary Denis McDonough noted that the burial benefits are underutilized and said the department is planning additional outreach to veterans to publicize them, rolling information on their availability into the

information provided to those who use the VA's new life insurance program, VALife. About 85% of eligible veterans use education benefits offered through the VA, while roughly 66% of eligible vets utilize VA health care. But just 15% of veterans are buried in VA-managed cemeteries.

"The uptake on the NCA [National Cemetery Administration] benefit is nowhere near where it should be," McDonough said. "We are meant to be there for you every step of the way."

The department is expanding opportunities for veterans to be buried in VA or supported cemeteries as it closes in on its goal to make them more accessible. The VA plans to open a columbarium-only cemetery in Queens, New York, this year, part of an urban initiative for the NCA that will provide burial sites for cremated remains in cities with few in-ground burial options. A columbarium is a building that holds cremated remains. Along with another urban columbarium in Indianapolis, Indiana, and two new rural cemeteries in Elko, Nevada, and Cedar City, Utah, the VA plans to add 310,000 sites for interment of cremains in the next several years, for a total of 4.2 million gravesites.

The VA provided roughly 350,000 headstones for veterans’ graves and 35,000 medallions to adorn the private gravestones of veterans in 2021. But given that nearly 642,000 veterans die each year, the number is a fraction of those eligible for those benefits and more. In addition to burial at no cost in VA and VA-supported cemeteries, veterans are eligible for headstones or medallions to place on private headstones as well as burial allowances for veterans who die of service-connected conditions and prefer to be buried in a non-VA cemetery.

Veterans who die in a VA medical facility of a non-service-connected condition also are eligible for limited burial and plot allowances for interment at a private cemetery. Quinn urged veterans to consider applying for eligibility for burial benefits as part of their estate planning. They can learn about applying for benefits on the VA's website without any obligation to be buried in a national cemetery or charge, Quinn said. "This is one of the best ways to ensure a veteran's family knows their loved ones' wishes and that NCA is able to provide the benefits for service to our country. I have done this myself," he said. ■

Special Stories



Tom Howe writes: This was our Tank School Class, Camp Pendleton, CA, 1966. The majority of our class served in Vietnam, either deploying directly from Tank School, or in my case, later as a Captain, and S-3, 1st Tanks, Danang, 1968. At least two of these young officers that I know: Wayne Hayes, and Louie Dobbin were KIA in Vietnam.



Tom Howe



Jim Ray

Jim Ray writes: Several of us went to Vietnam immediately and among them were Lou Dobbin, Phil Sauer, and Wayne Hayes who were KIA's near the DMZ with the 3dMarDiv. We were all on the same flight from San Francisco, and I was the only one who made it back home. The probable difference was some Remington Raider made a mistake and cut me orders to the 1st Marine Air Wing. Upon checking into the Wing and given I had not become a Naval Aviator at the Tank School; I was given the choice of which division I wanted

to join. I had no idea what the tactical situation was at the time and chose the 1stMarDiv, because I had been a 106mm antitank team leader with the 7th Marines in my enlisted hitch. While we had our constant exposure to the VC, occasional NVA action, and of course land mines down south, it wasn't the meat grinder actions on or around the Hill Fights near the DMZ where the majority of the 33 of my classmates ended up on the Vietnam Wall. I have always wondered about those orders. >>

REMEMBERING RICHARD HORNER

BY ARMANDO MORENO
MOS 0353



Armando writes: This is Rich and me in 2017, Marine Corps Celebration, Captain Horner was our Honored Speaker.

provide direction for the tanks and to provide cover for his dead,

Richard L. Horner

HOME OF RECORD:

Los Angeles, California

Silver Star

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War

Service: US Marine Corps

Rank: Second Lieutenant

Battalion: Co F, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Second Lieutenant Richard L. Homer (MCSN: 0-101999), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company F, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 1 February 1968, Second Lieutenant Homer's platoon was attacking toward the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, compound in the city of Hue. Suddenly, the platoon came



dying, and wounded Marines. He was subsequently, blown off the tank by an RPG, and had to be medevac'd. His story is told in the book, "Hue 68", and he was also known as "Wrong Way Horner", as the story goes.

He is survived by his wife Rebecca, and two sons. His older son, Randy, just retired as a Lt Col, from the Corps. Rich suffered all his life from his injuries and never complained. He loved to play golf, have a few beers, and talk about his grandkids. Talking about his service, it was all about his wounded troops and those that didn't come back from that painful major battle years ago. He was a man's man, and will be truly missed. He is now in the Tun Tavern in the sky, knocking down a cold one and telling jokes with all his fellow Marines. God bless them all.

under a heavy volume of enemy automatic weapons fire. With complete disregard for his own safety, Second Lieutenant Homer unhesitatingly exposed himself to the hostile fire while directing the deployment of his men. Wounded by an exploding rocket round, he continued to direct an aggressive attack against the enemy position. When the platoon radio operator was killed, Second Lieutenant Homer ignored the hostile fire and crossed the fire-swept terrain to retrieve the radio, which enabled him to maintain control over his men and the two tanks supporting his platoon. Throughout the two-hour engagement, he continued to refuse medical

assistance until certain that the enemy was defeated and all the wounded Marines were treated. Only after collapsing from loss of blood and exhaustion did he submit to medical aid. His calm professionalism and determined efforts were an inspiration to all who served with him and contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger, Second Lieutenant Homer upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■

Another Pulitzer Prize discredited as propaganda...

BY MONICA SHOWALTER

Remember all that political hay the far left and its media allies made during the Vietnam War about the wickedness of America's South Vietnamese ally and the importance of abandoning that country to the communists? Here's the Pulitzer Prize-winning AP photo that was supposed to prick our consciences and make us turn against that "immoral" war against a communist takeover:



There's no doubt about it, the photo is hard to look at. It's crude, rough, wartime justice, a picture of South Vietnamese Police Captain Nguyễn Ngọc Loan coldly executing Viet Cong Captain Nguyễn Văn Lém. The film is even harder to look at. The photo ran on the front page of the New York Times, cropped from the original to fill the space and make its impact even more immediate.

And it got the results the anti-wara left wanted: public sentiment abruptly turned against the war as a result of this photo. The Vietnamese people were abandoned by the Americans, whose cut-and-run evacuation from the Saigon embassy rooftop was only recently bested by Joe Biden's Afghanistan pull-out. After that, the re-education camps rolled in, the boat people launched into the high seas, and the killing fields of Cambodia began.

Jane Fonda must have been so proud of herself. Just one problem, though: The context was missing, and that context mattered. The guy who got shot, who went by the nom de guerre Bay Lop, was a death squad psychopath in the Viet Cong who had just gotten done massacring 34 innocent people.

According to Groovy History: From January to September 1968, North Vietnamese forces launched a coordinated series of attacks on more than 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam, proof that American forces had failed to quash the guerilla combatants. Death squads made their way through the cities, killing anyone who wasn't joining their revolution. Captured in a building in the Cho Lon quarter of Saigon, Nguyễn Văn Lém was a member of the Viet Cong whose downfall began in the Tet Offensive. Allegedly

Lém was arrested for cutting the throats of South Vietnamese Lt Col Nguyen Tuan, his wife, their six children and the officer's 80-year-old mother. On top of that, he was leading a Viet Cong team whose whole deal was taking out members of the National Police and their families. At the time of his death, Lém should have been considered a prisoner of war under the Geneva Convention, but because he

was dressed in civilian clothing and he wasn't carrying a firearm, he was technically seen as an "illegal combatant."

During the Tet Offensive, Lém was on a blood-thirsty tear through Saigon. He may look boyish, but he had the heart of a killer. The photo shows Lém handcuffed and in civilian clothing, but he was operating a death squad that had killed 34 that same day. He allegedly took out seven police officers, multiple members of their families, and even a few Americans. Each victim was bound by their wrists and shot in the back of the head, execution style. Because he wasn't wearing the outfit of a soldier this put him in a bad

Wikipedia notes that maybe this didn't happen the way these facts say it happened. A leftist adding that American historian Ed Moise "is convinced that the entire story of Lém murdering the Tuan family is a post-war invention" and that "The truth will never be known."

Now that revisionist history is falling apart. The Daily Mail found an admiral in the U.S. Navy, who was a tiny sole survivor of that massacre. He was a little Vietnamese boy at the time who watched as this psychopath shot civilian after civilian including his entire family. He survived by playing dead and eventually made his way to America to become an American citizen, joining the U.S. Navy, and rising to the rank of admiral.

According to the Mail: Bay Lop, the subject in the photo, had been executed in Saigon after carrying out the mass murder of Huan Nguyen's father — South Vietnamese Lt. Col. Nguyen Tuan, along >>

with the officer's wife, mother, and six of his children, five boys and one girl.

Huan Nguyen, managed to survive despite being shot three times through the arm, thigh, and skull. The youngster stayed with his mother's dead body for two hours following the cold-blooded murder according to Military.com. When night fell, Nguyen then escaped managing to avoid the communist guerrillas, and went to live with his uncle, a colonel in the South Vietnamese Air Force.

There's no disputing the facts of what happened to him, which pretty well puts paid to the nutty leftist professor's claims, and there's no excusing the behavior of the anti-war left, which used this child's family's murder to sell the first great bug-out of America on its allies for the purpose of spreading communism. The press, which acted pretty much in the same dishonest manner as it does today, was amazingly dishonest in its presentation of its "narrative," particularly at the editorial level. Now we learn that a brave survivor ex-

ists from that terrible incident, and the badness of America suddenly wasn't so bad. The bad guy, in fact, was the communist Viet Cong "captain" who was a mass murderer not at all different from the Las Vegas spray shooter.

It's amazing what the press got away with on that one. And it serves as a reminder that pictures can be distorted and manipulated without context, without even Photoshop. While the photographer, Eddie Adams, was blameless, as he was just doing his job, the way the photo was presented, by broadcasters and newspaper editors, was not. This is one sorry incident that the left got away with. They showered their Pulitzers and watched the protests begin. One only wonders what the little kid who survived the massacre to become an admiral must have thought. Now that it's out that he survived this psychopath, his life is living testimony to that reality.

https://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2023/03/another_pulitzer_prize_discredited_as_propaganda.html ■

What Members Are Doing

Joe Harrigan & the MOPH



Tom Fenerty writes: This is VTA member Joe Harrigan (center) representing the Military Order of the Purple Heart on April 1st, at the Veterans Expo, sponsored by the Lower Southampton (PA) Veterans Advisory Council.

Annual Elks Rodeo Parade 2023



Armando Moreno writes: Annual Elks Rodeo Parade 2023, Sheriff Bill Brown and his mounted Santa Barbara Co unit. I rode on a float with our Marine Corps Detachment.

Wannabe Vietnam Veteran



John Wear's dog "Willow."

Joe Tyson is Honored

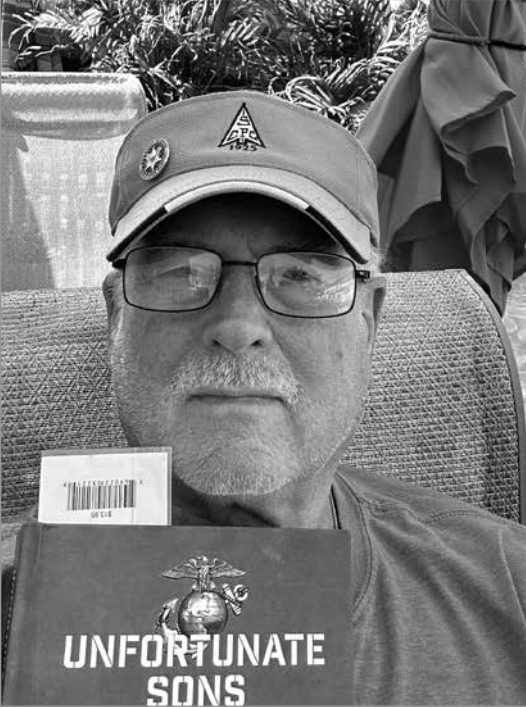


Guy's '87 El Camino



Guy Everest writes: I had my 1987 Chevy El Camino in for some mechanical work with a neighbor who does backyard mechanics. He said that he wanted to do something for a veteran, so he did some bodywork and repainted it all for free. He told me that it was his honor to do the work.

Unfortunate Sons



Ed Hiltz writes: I am enjoying retirement while sitting on my deck and reading "Unfortunate Sons" by Joe Tyson Sr. I am loving this book. ■

This is the first of several "Ontos related stories" I would like to submit to you for your consideration for publication in a future issue of the Sponson Box. I have no idea who the author is or even how the poem came to be in my possession. I have the original TYPED on yellowed paper and I have replicated it in an electronic format. The reason that I think it should be included as an Ontos story is because the authorship points to someone familiar enough with us to even mention an Ontos in the poem. However, that being said, whoever wrote this magnificent poem has an extensive knowledge of military terminology. I actually had to look up several terms to learn the meaning of them, and never did determine the meaning behind the line: "Our TIPSYS blew a fuse". The entire original was typed in all capital letters, which added to my confusion, but I have no clue what a "tipsy" is. Anyway, if you don't think it is Ontos enough, perhaps a spot in an issue later this year nearer to Christmas. Thanks for your consideration. Semper Fidelis, Ralph Beck

A Christmas Poem

There's strange things done, 'neath the Vietnamese sun
But the time that locked my jaws,
Was the night 'neath the moon, when the 3rd Platoon
Gunned down Santa Claus.
It started off right, just another night
You had to spend in the dirt,
Security was out, 360 about
With 50% alert.
We had 81's, and naval guns
Our Tanks were track to track,
An Ontos or so, an Arty FO
With barrages back to back.
I froze where I stood, 'cause out of the wood
Eight horses came charging along.
This may sound corny, but those mustangs were horney
My God I thought "mounted Viet Cong".
He was coming our way in what looked like a sleigh,
You never know what they will use,
Our flairs were tripped, our SIDS had flipped,
Our TIPSYS blew a fuse.
We let him close, then we yelled "Who goes",
Like they do in the movie show,
The answer we got, believe it or not,
Was a hearty "HO HO HO".
Now these troops of mine have seen some time,
They've done some things back-assword,
They may be thick, but I'll tell you a trick,
They know that wasn't the password.
The nineties roared, the 81's soared,
The naval guns raised hell,
A bright red flair flew through the air,
We fired our FPL.
I'll give him guts, but that man was nuts,
Or I'm a no-good liar,
He dropped like a stone, in our killing zone,

3rd Marine Division–December 1966
Author Unknown

I passed the word "cease fire".
I went out and took a real good look,
My memory started to race,
My mind plays games when it comes to names,
But I never forget a face.
He was dressed in red, and he looked well fed,
Older than most I'd seen,
He looked right weird with that long white beard,
And stumps where his legs had been.
He hadn't quite died when I reached his side,
But the end was clearly in sight,
I knelt down low and he said real slow,
"Merry Christmas" and "to all a good night".
Now we should have known our cools were blown,
When that light in the East we'd seen,
I thought it was flares, and it had to be theirs,
Or the damned things would have been green.
I picked up the hook, with a voice that shook,
"Gimme the Six, and quick",
"Colonel", I said, "Hang on to your head,
We just greased old Saint Nick"
Now the old man's cool, but he's nobody's fool,
Right off he knew the word,
If this got out, there'd be no doubt,
He wouldn't be making his Bird.
"Just get him up here, and we'll play it by ear,
Make sure he's, . . . he's got a tag,
Dismantle the sleigh, drive those horses away
And burry that god dammed bag".
Now by and by, the kids may cry,
Cause nothings under the tree,
But the word came back, from FMF PAC,
That Santa had gone VC.
There's strange things done, 'neath the Vietnamese sun,
But the time that locked my jaws...

Short Stories

Editor's Note: Since this is the 4th issue of 2023 and, in a few months, it will be the Thanksgiving and then Christmas holidays, we decided to include a holiday story for your enjoyment.

The Miracle of Christmas

At this time of year, my son taught me eternal lessons about God's Son.

BY ROGER HALLE – DEC 23, 2020

My mind was reeling. How long had it been? Everything was happening in slow motion. The explosion, bullets hitting me, the smell of charred skin, everything around me spinning. Now I'm on a hospital gurney in a triage room in a field hospital in Da Nang, Vietnam. There was confusion as casualties from various firefights were brought into the room. Sights and smells that would haunt me for years assaulted my senses.

Then I saw the kind eyes of an Army doctor telling me they were taking me to surgery. The next few days were mostly a drug-induced blur mixed with moments of intense pain.

One day, I was aware of a doctor talking to my brother, who was also serving in Vietnam. I heard him telling my brother I was going to die; there was nothing else they could do. As my brother wept by my bed, not knowing I was conscious, I felt a fear I had never known during my times in combat. I was afraid! I didn't want to die. I cried out silently to a God I nei-

ther knew nor believed in: "God, if you let me live, I'll do anything you want!" He did, I didn't!

Several months later, when I was able to communicate, they explained the extent of my injuries and how long it would take to recover. Among the different realities, they told me I would be unable to have children. Not married at that time, the news did not really impact me.

Later, after I did get married and spent years having nightmares, drinking, and being unfaithful to my wife, the God I cried out to in Vietnam became real and personal to me. Shirley and I asked Jesus to come into our lives and save us. Over a period of time, our marriage was healed and our lives were being restored with new purpose. Two years later, my wife informed me I was going to be a father. I was filled with joy! When our baby arrived, the doctor announced we had a son. Three days later we took Joshua home from the hospital on Christmas Eve.

That evening, after Shirley nursed

Josh, I put him to bed in his crib. I remember standing there looking down at my son who was helpless and vulnerable. Suddenly, I flashed back and was hearing the doctor telling me, "You won't be able to have children."

It was only a moment and then I was back looking down at my son in the crib. Then I heard the still small voice of God my Father saying, "That's how much I love you!" Christmas took on a whole new meaning for me. While I would die to protect my son, God sent His Son to die a horrible death to pay for my sins, to remove the guilt and shame of my past.

This Christmas, so many around us are confused, fearing the future, feeling hopeless and without peace or joy. Let's remember Christmas is about giving. It's also receiving the gift of God's only Son. Jesus said, "I come that you might have joy and that your joy would be full." His joy will give you hope in the midst of life's storms. Rest in His love and receive His hope!

Merry Christmas!

The Stockings were Hung by the Chimney with Care

Editor's Note: This story was submitted by Guy Everest. It is a bit risqué but pretty funny none-the-less...

As a joke, my brother used to hang a pair of panty hose over his fireplace at Christmas.

He said all he wanted was for Santa to fill them. What they say about Santa checking the list twice must be true because every Christmas morning, although Jay's kids' stockings were overflowed, his poor pantyhose hung sadly empty.

One year I decided to make his dream come true. I put on sunglasses and went in search of an inflatable love doll. They don't sell those things at Wal-Mart. I had to go to an adult bookstore downtown.

If you've never been in an X-rated store, don't go, you'll only confuse yourself. I was there for an hour saying things like, "What does this do?"

"You're kidding me!" "Who would buy that?"

Finally, I made it to the inflatable doll section. I wanted to buy a standard, uncomplicated doll. One that could also substitute as a passenger in my truck so I could use the carpool lane during rush hour.

Finding what I wanted was difficult. Love dolls come in many >>

different models. The top of the line, according to the side of the box; could do things I'd only seen in a book on animal husbandry.

I settled for 'Lovable Louise." She was at the bottom of the price scale. To call Louise a "doll" took a huge leap of imagination.

On Christmas Eve, with the help of an old bicycle pump, Louise came to life. My sister-in-law was in on the plan and let me in during the wee morning hours, long after Santa had come and gone, I filled the dangling pantyhose with Louise's pliant legs and bottom. I also ate some cookies and drank what remained of a glass of milk on a nearby tray. I went home, and giggled for a couple of hours.

The next morning my brother called to say that Santa had been to his house and left a present that had made him VERY happy but had left the dog confused. She would bark, start to walk away, then come back and bark some more.

We all agreed that Louise should remain in her panty hose so the rest of the family could admire her when they came over for the traditional Christmas dinner.

My grandmother noticed Louise the moment she walked in the door.

"What the hell is that?" she asked.

My brother quickly explained, "It's a doll."

"Who would play with something like that?" Granny snapped. I had several candidates in mind, but kept my mouth shut.

"Where are her clothes?" Granny continued.

"Boy, that turkey sure smells nice, Gran," Jay said, trying to steer her into the dining room. But Granny was relentless.

"Why doesn't she have any teeth?"

Again, I could have answered, but why would I? It was Christmas and no one wanted to ride in the back of the ambulance saying, "Hang on Granny! Hang on!"

My grandfather, a delightful old man with poor eyesight, sidled up to me and said, " Hey, who's the naked gal by the fireplace?" I told him she was Jay's friend.

A few minutes later I noticed Grandpa by the mantel, talking to Louise. Not just talking, but actually flirting. It was then that we realized this might be Grandpa's last Christmas at home.

The dinner went well. We made the usual small talk about who had died, who was dying, and who should be

killed, when suddenly Louise made a noise that sounded a lot like my father in the bathroom in the morning. Then she lurched from the panty hose, flew around the room twice, and fell in a heap in front of the sofa.

The dog screamed. I passed cranberry sauce through my nose, and Grandpa ran across the room, fell to his knees, and began administering mouth to mouth resuscitation. My brother fell back over his chair and wet his pants. Granny threw down her napkin, stomped out of the room, and sat in the car.

It was indeed a Christmas to treasure and remember

Later in my brother's garage, we conducted a thorough examination and found the cause of Louise's collapse. We discovered that Louise had suffered from a hot ember to the back of her right thigh. Fortunately, thanks to a wonder drug called gorilla tape, we restored her to perfect health.

Louise went on to star in several bachelor party movies. I think Grandpa still calls her whenever he can get out of the house. I hope that every time you see "Stockings hung by the chimney with care" you think of me.—

to the funeral home for people so that there weren't so many people in each car. The cars wrapped all around the graveyard and down in the road with

police officers stopping traffic so that people could walk to the gravesite. My heart still hurts and my memories won't go away, I sit and cry by myself

I've Been Lucky

BY KEN ZEBAL

My career in the Marine Corps was blessed with luck, consistently good luck.

Having graduated from Parris Island and being assigned the initial MOS of 1800 was the beginning of my good fortune. Being ordered to 2nd Tank Bn as an 1811 rather than as an 1833 in sardine fleet at Court-house Bay began a clear trend of good luck for me. Finding myself under the uncompromising leadership of such outstanding NCOs as Jimmy Dodgen, Don Clark, Sam Kaleleiki, Dan McQueary and Joe Wilder taught me how to be a better Marine and tanker. I'm very grateful for their willingness and their unending patience to show me how to do things both in peacetime and in combat. This brings to mind General Lejeune's thoughts on leadership found in the Marine Corps Manual – establishing the teacher-student relationship rather than a senior-subordinate one and how critically important the difference is. A lot of my lessons were hard-learned and I had to learn more than a few twice or more.

I also feel lucky to have been in the company of some pretty sketchy Marines and to have not followed their examples. The bad example opportunities kept showing up and, in many instances, seemed to multiply like rabbits. "There but for the grace of God go I." Without being aware of it at the time "The Hand of God" was present in my life then and remains present in my life to this day. Something I foolishly misinterpreted as good luck.

In mid-August 1965 I was on R&R in Hong Kong when the platoon participated in OPERATION STAR-LITE. Cpl. Bill Laidlaw was filling in for me as TC of A-32 when he was KIA– that could have been me. After

returning from R&R several days later, the C-130 which departed immediately after the one I was on crashed into Hong Kong Bay killing everyone on board – that could have been me too. In July, we learned of a C-130 that crashed into the hills just north of El Toro killing several members of Co "C" 2nd Tanks including Rich Lehman. If I had not received orders to 3rd Tanks in January, then I undoubtedly would have also been on that ill-fated flight – again, that could have been me. Undeniable good luck for me again, again and again.

My good luck continued on 23 June '66 while on a patrol from Hill 54 along with S/Sgt. Fred "Boat" Staton accompanying a squad from Co "B" 1/5. We were reconnoitering a fording site in the large open area between Hill 54 and Duc Bo when our patrol was taken under enemy fire. Actually, we were pinned down stuck in a cross fire. The enemy soldier who shot me kept on trying to kill me too. I was lucky that he only hit me once although another Marine on that same patrol was killed and the Corpsmen suffered shrapnel wounds. Many of you can quickly and easily recall the sound of enemy rifle fire crackling over your head and seeing enemy rounds kick up dirt close to you. Most of us can quickly recall the number of times when we were almost certain to be killed or wounded but weren't. Near misses that were too numerous to count and much too frequent; never mind the countless ones you didn't see or hear.

The night before I left Charlie Med in Da Nang, the enemy attacked the CP in Chu Lai with mortars, machine guns and, to make it even more thrill-

cause no one around me understands. So, the article that you sent to me came at a very opportune time."

ing, they were in the wire. The day after I left Charlie Med and returned to the Platoon, the ward I was in at Charlie Med was mortared. This, once again, gave me reason to pause, reflect and be thankful for my good luck.

During my second tour in RVN it was more of the same although a lot more intense. Countless opportunities for the North Vietnamese soldiers to kill or wound me – yet here I am. And yes, I am very well aware that each and every day is a gift.

Sometime during 1969 the Marine Corps began reducing its end strength from a peak of over 440,000 down to 167,000. Because I had two profiles the Marine Corps put me on notice. Whether or not I wanted to remain on active duty was irrelevant to HQMC – I was damaged goods and had to go. I applied for the Marine Corps Physical Fitness Academy in an attempt to demonstrate my ability to physically perform all assigned duties. While at PFA I applied for the Marine Associate Degree Completion Program. From the thousands of Staff NCOs and NCOs applicants 17 were selected and I was lucky enough to be in that number. While on MAD-COP I took the College-Level Examination Program 3 times before passing and then applied for the Warrant Officer Program and the Enlisted Commissioning Program. Ultimately HQMC accepted me for OCS as an ECP and, as the saying goes, the rest is history.

If Clint Eastwood, acting as Inspector "Dirty Harry Callahan ever asked me "Do you feel lucky?" Well, do ya, punk?" I'd have to say–yep, I sure do, I feel very lucky.

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For Families the Pain Never Ends

BY MICHAEL GIOVINAZZO

A while back I got an emailed story about a Marine officer who returned from Vietnam and was assigned duty as a notification officer, to the families of KIA's. I sent it to friends, including the sister of Victor Tarasuk, who was an Ontos crewman and who was KIA 12/22/66. He was a member of my crew, of which I was the Ontos commander. He was KIA shortly after I left the country.

I wrote in a previous article about my relationship with the family, which started 31 years after his death. I still remain in frequent contact with his sister, the only family member since

the parents passed away, in 2009 and 2012. We can never forget.

Below is an excerpt from an email from Tina, Victor Tarasuk's sister in response to the forwards I sent her concerning the Marines who have the duty to notify next of kin of a death. I knew most of the story she relates from her and her parents. It was her mother who first saw the USMC car pull up and told Tina to wake her father, since she knew what was coming.

"The story that you sent to me about the Marine that had to talk to the family about losing a loved one came at a very unique time. On Jan.

4th, 1967 we buried Victor. On this Jan 4th, I remembered that day, as I always do, with tears and heartache. I remembered the day the Marines came to notify us. It was December 27th. I can tell you where I had been that day, what I was doing when they came and the sheer pain I felt down in my soul. The way my grandfather looked when Dad told him. The way the Marine sergeant shook and cried as he told Dad. The notifying officer said that he actually knew Victor. My Dad sat him down and let him talk and cry. The funeral was numbing. There were 104 cars in the procession-al, the local Ford dealership sent cars

Spare Track Block?

BY JOHN WEAR

Dong Ha Combat Base, Vietnam: After evening chow, the same day, I gather my driver, Steffo; my buddy Tom "Sparrow" Moad and Tom's driver, "Creech" for some old-fashioned scrounging. Old Creech looks and acts like some weird creature...besides his last name is Frankenbarger. Or how about calling him "Frankenstein?" We take our brand-new tank out of the 3rd Tank's tank park and we head over to the doggie's Duster / Tank Park. We simply drive into the place. Sparrow and I had reconnoitered the doggie area the day before and noted that every single doggie goes to evening chow and no one stays in their area to keep watch, so we pull our tank around to the back of one of their Butler buildings, there you have it! A huge pile of brand-new track blocks stacked on pallets! We are as quiet as we can be while breaking our asses loading up twenty sets of blocks. We take more than we really need...Who knows? Someone may need a few of our "extra" and they can always be traded for something, no? Amazingly no one is there to stop us. I guess that this is due to two main facts: The Army looks on their bountiful & seemingly endless supplies with the casual attitude that no one needs to guard them. Why? Because everyone has plenty... (But not the Marines). The second reason is that the doggies have a "9 to 5" attitude about their jobs in Vietnam. No wonder we

can't seem to win this lousy war! Anyway, every doggie from this area has either gone to the chow hall or is at the club swilling beer. That is ok with me. We get our illicit supplies and leave quickly. My guess is that our "take" is worth close to \$20,000... (that is on a scale for some of those Pentagon paper-pushers buying a \$5,000 toilet seat or a \$1,000 screwdriver).

As we pull into our own tank park with a pile of spare track block on the back armor plate, one of the battalion maintenance guys sees our bounty and ducks back into his hooch. Sparrow jumps off of the tank and runs into the maintenance hooch to speak to the shit fister.

Sparrow: "Hey dude, what's going on?"

Maintenance man: "I saw you assholes stealing that track block. Where'd ya get it?"

Sparrow: "Doggies."

Maintenance man: "Cool!"

Sparrow: "Yep. Don't tell anyone, ok?"

Maintenance man: "What's it worth?"

Sparrow: 'Couple beers?"

Maintenance man: "Tonight?"

Sparrow: "Affirmative."

Maintenance man: "See ya there."

Sparrow: "Roger that."

That evening, we buy a few beers for the shit fister and that's that.

The next morning while we are mounting the brand-new track block on to the turret, the Alfa Co maintenance gunnery sergeant comes over to our tank, shakes his head and says, "Cpl. Wear, I am not going to ask you where you got that brand new track block...but I need ten of them for that there tank who hit a mine this past week." Shit! What can I say?

I reply, "What am I supposed to use for protection and for spares in an emergency for my tank gunny?"

"Hell, I don't care. Go back where you got that pile and get some more tonight."

I always follow my superior's orders. So, we go back and get more of it that evening! The cool thing about using brand new track block is that we can strap Jerry cans (metal 5-gallon cans of water) using the center guides and we have not only a lot of extra water but we have double protection from gook RPG's and B-40's.



Thank you, Lord

SUBMITTED BY BRUCE VAN APELDOORN

Considering where we are in politics/government/world relationships, this is refreshing to be reminded that God is mixing things up on our behalf because we need his help. This

is good advice for life, and especially today.

A pastor asked an older farmer, decked out in bib overalls, to say grace for the morning breakfast.

"Lord, I hate buttermilk", the farmer began. The visiting pastor opened one eye to glance at the farmer and wonder where this was going.

The farmer loudly proclaimed,

"Lord, I hate lard." Now the pastor was growing concerned.

Without missing a beat, the farmer continued, "And Lord, you know I don't much care for raw white flour" The pastor once again opened an eye to glance around the room and saw that he wasn't the only one to feel uncomfortable.

Then the farmer added, "But Lord, when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm fresh biscuits. So, Lord, when things come up that we don't like, when life gets hard, when we don't understand what you're saying to us, help us to just relax and wait until you are done mixing. It will probably be even better than biscuits. Amen."

Within that prayer there is great wisdom for all when it comes to complicated situations like we are experiencing in the world today.

Stay strong, my friends, because our LORD is mixing several things that we don't really care for, but something even better is going to come when HE is done with it.

General Magnifico

SUBMITTED BY RETIRED CA DMV ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER JOY LEWIS

Wife of 1st Sgt Rick Lewis, USMC (ret)

Respectfully, I submit this for the humorous Marine Corps reference and not to make fun of the mentally ill. Right or wrong, they are allowed to proceed with their lives unless they're a danger to themselves or others.

California law used to state that an individual could change their name by just making an application at the DMV. This new identification would then be cross-referenced to their original birth certificate in the official records. However, due to increased problems with identity theft, the California Legislature passed laws to prevent individuals from changing their names at will. But back in the 1970's, before the law changed, there was an unusual individual (did I say one?) who would appear at the local DMV offices in the Los Angeles area.

General Magnifico was a small, grey-haired woman who was unremarkable in appearance except for her attire: she wore an ornate military dress uniform, replete with epaulets, braids, ribbons, dozens of medals, and a tall, gold-trimmed hat with a huge Marine Corps insignia patch stitched to the front.

The General had first become familiar to the office staff as she tried to obtain a California Identification card.

The office declined to accept the document she presented as proof of identity and date of birth, which was a large sheepskin scroll bearing wax seals, ribbons, and numerous signatures. The document attested to her birth on July 4, 1916 to Tsar Nicholas and Tsaritsa Alexandra of Russia, (supposedly a lesser-known sister of Anastasia), and said she was the sole survivor of the execution of the royal family, and had been spirited out of Russia by American agents and personally escorted by Woodrow Wilson across the Atlantic aboard the U.S.S. United States.

During her many visits to the DMV (each time in a different uniform), General Magnifico willingly filled us in on the rest of her story. She said she was raised at the Marine Corps Office Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia, had eventually attained the rank of six-star general, was the first U.S. military officer since George Washington to bear the title of "Field Marshall", and was secretly married to J. Edgar Hoover.

Through sheer persistence, General Magnifico finally got someone in DMV headquarters to okay her proof of birth date, and she was issued an ID card, bearing the name as it appeared on the scroll: "General Meta Magnifico".

Then...she applied for a driver's license. She appeared for her driver's test in a compact car plastered with Marine Corps stickers and decals. When informed she had failed because she hadn't looked over her shoulder or checked her mirrors before changing lanes, she acknowledged her error and said that as one who was more accustomed to piloting F-4 Phantoms, she simply wasn't used to thinking about anything coming up from behind.

She passed her subsequent test but asked to delay the taking of the photograph – we hoped it was to allow her to dress normally. However, when she returned for the picture, she wore camouflage, including tree branches protruding from the netting over her helmet. She protested when we asked her to remove the helmet for the picture, saying she'd be out of uniform, but eventually complied.

Finally, after we'd seen the last of the General, (although we'd already spoken to Social Services) an employee took it upon himself to report her to the FBI as a possible threat to national security. The FBI agent with whom he spoke told him they had a file on her, mostly because of the repeated attempts to enter Camp Pendleton to "review the troops".

Life and How to Live It, Part XIII

BY MIKE ADAMS | JUN 26, 2023

Editor's Note: The following is a republication of a column by the late Mike Adams, a longtime Townhall columnist. More of Mike's writings and wisdom are featured in the new book, Life and How to Live It, compiled and narrated by Mike's brother, Dave Adams, released on June 20. As Dave explains, this column contains Mike's poignant recounting of a conflict not >>

long before his father's passing, which could have been a calamity, but instead yielded some great life lessons, such as: "We are all dying, folks. It is time to meet the people we love where they are and start talking. There is no need to wait until the holidays."

My father died just before the holiday season began three years ago. On the anniversary of his death, I wanted to share a story with my readers that occurred about three years before he died. It concerns an argument we had during one of my holiday visits to Houston. I thought it would be good for people to hear it before they spend time with their families over Christmas.

For that holiday visit, I was planning on staying with my parents for a few days in the Woodlands, then visiting friends across town in Katy and then in Clear Lake before circling back to see them again prior to going back to North Carolina. But just as I was preparing for the day trip across town to Katy, my dad began lecturing me on my need for a GPS. I told him I did not need one as I had been to the Katy destination several times before.

For some bizarre reason, my dad just kept on arguing with me. When my mother tried to change the subject, he just raised his voice and shouted over her. He kept interrupting both of us until my mother begged him to just shut up. She only told him to shut up when he was way out of line – so that usually worked. But it did not work this time. He just kept going.

Finally, in anger, I looked at him and said "Dad, there is no problem here for you to solve. So stop interrupting me!" Before I realized it, everyone was either yelling or angry. I then told him I did not drive 1250 miles to put up with his nonsense—although I may have used an expletive. Next, I grabbed

my bags and stormed out of his house vowing never to visit my father again.

I spent the night in Katy that night – just as I had already planned to do. The next day I drove down to Clear Lake as I had also planned to do. After spending the day and the early evening with a friend I had decided to just start the drive back home to North Carolina instead of going back to dad's house in the Woodlands.

I guess I just did not want to face my father again. I was furious at him for lecturing me and for raising his voice to me after I drove all the way across the country to see him. He was furious at me for telling him I did not need his advice. We both felt hurt and we both felt disrespected. Nonetheless, for some bizarre reason, as I headed up I-45, at just the last second, I decided to miss the I-10 exit to North Carolina and instead drive back up to the Woodlands.

When I walked into the house, my dad was sitting by the fireplace. I sat down next to him and pulled out an iPad and starting showing him pictures of our old house in Clear Lake, which I had just taken earlier that day. He never apologized for raising his voice. And I never apologized for storming out of the house. I just met him where he was and started talking in order to break the silence. Three years later, I knew just why dad had been acting strangely during that visit. A massive tumor had started growing in the middle of his brain. The next two holiday visits were peaceful. By the third he was dead.

Had I taken that exit and gone back

to North Carolina, things never would have been the same again. Instead, I made peace with him. In fact, I was the last person ever to speak to him. I even delivered a sermon to him on his last Sunday on earth, as he lay there blind, mute, and dying. He died peacefully and I have been at peace with it ever since. It was all because I met him where he was and started talking.

If there is someone you love that you are not at peace with just swallow your pride and reach out. Chances are, the source of your conflict really is not as important as you once thought it was. Perhaps it is just as meaningless as the one between my dad and me. If fact, I'll bet it is.

We are all dying, folks. It is time to meet the people we love where they are and start talking. There is no need to wait until the holidays to start applying this principle. We can start today. We might not have tomorrow.

It is true that our lives are measured in years. But they are given meaning in precious moments. Those moments include more than just the ones where we refrain from taking a wrong turn. They also include the ones where we have to knock down a wall when it seems safer to hide behind one.

When we do, we realize that it is far easier to let go of our pride than it is to live inside a prison of our own construction.

This story was submitted by Laura Riensche, wife of VTA member Harold Riensche.

Veterans Day Profile: Point Man, Roger Helle

BY MARK ALEXANDER—NOVEMBER 9, 2007

"Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives." –John Adams

"Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

"I'm Sgt Helle's brother. How is he?" asked Roger's identical twin brother, Ron, also an E-5, USMC. "I'm sorry son, but your brother is going to die," the physician responded tersely. That

was July 1970, China Beach, Vietnam.

My friend Roger Helle was 17 years old when he joined the Marine Corps. The product of a broken home, he was very insecure and hoped becoming a

Marine would provide him the confidence he lacked.

In February 1966, five months into his first 13-month tour in Vietnam, Roger's unit was searching for Viet

Cong around Gia Le, near the Phu Bia Combat Base. Roger had walked point for patrols during the previous four months and had been shot once, so his intuition about the enemy's presence was acutely tuned.

On a night mission to a small fishing village reportedly occupied by VC, Roger and 12 other Marines were moving down a trail lined with dense bamboo. His squad leader had taken Roger's position as point man, and Roger's instinct told him the squad was moving too fast along the trail. So urgent was his sense that something was wrong that he wanted to call out, but did not want to betray their position.

In an instant, gunfire erupted and a series of "daisy-chain" explosions propelled Roger and two other Marines over the vegetation into an adjacent rice paddy. As he slowly recovered from the shock of the concussion generated by the explosions, he could see green tracers from VC weapons cutting up and down the trail.

The ambush was over as quickly as it began, and more than 60 VC emerged like ghosts from the bamboo, killed the wounded Marines on the trail, collected their weapons and disappeared.

As Roger regained his senses, he pulled the other two Marines in the water to the edge of the rice paddy. He then pawed around in the muddy water for his M-14, and crawled back onto the trail to check for survivors among the ten remaining Marines – among his friends. The squad leader had taken 29 rounds. There were no survivors.

Roger recovered a radio under one of the dead, crawled back to the water's edge with the wounded Marines, and called base camp with their coordinates. Within a half hour, Chinooks arrived with quick reaction squads to recover the injured and dead. The two Marines Roger pulled from the water were evacuated to Da Nang, but died in route.

Roger was the sole survivor of that horrific ambush. There was no consolation for the "survivor's guilt" he experienced – not the anger, not the nightmares – not for years.

In July 1970, two tours, two Purple Hearts and numerous other decorations later, Roger Helle, now a sergeant and platoon leader for a "killer team," was walking point on a mission back to a village to destroy earthen tunnels used by the VC for escape and evasion.

Normally, a platoon leader would not take the point position in front of his men; if he was wounded or killed, it could threaten the continuity and survivability of the whole platoon. However, suffering four years of guilt after relinquishing his position on point and losing his entire squad, Roger was not about to ask one of his guys to walk point for what he considered a "mop-up" mission.

Their packs overloaded with C-4 explosives to destroy the VC tunnels; Roger's platoon took frequent breaks. After one stop, he crossed a field about 50 yards ahead of his platoon to check for booby traps. While scanning the area, he sensed a glint of something in his peripheral vision, coming through the air. A grenade bounced off his leg – and a second later, exploded under his feet, violently impelling him backward and then to the ground.

Roger recounts that the detonation "felt like thousands of volts of electricity surging through my body." After hitting the ground, he says, "My body would not respond to what my mind wanted it to do."

Amazingly, he managed to stagger to his feet and wipe enough blood from his eyes to see an enemy soldier, about ten yards in front of him, point his weapon and fire. As the rifle recoiled, two rounds hit Roger, spinning him around and knocking him face down to the ground. As he rolled back toward the light of the sky, he could make out the silhouette of that NVA soldier standing above him. Their eyes met as the enemy thrust his bayonet into Roger's abdomen.

Just a few seconds, but an eternity had elapsed.

Roger's platoon had instinctively hit

the ground after the grenade detonated, but six of his men rose up in time to see the NVA soldier over their platoon leader. They fired on the enemy as he withdrew his bayonet, and he dropped a few feet from Roger.

Roger was riddled with shrapnel from the grenade, hit with two rifle rounds and bayoneted. Worse yet, the shrapnel had detonated one of the phosphorus grenades in his demolition bag. His clothing and body were on fire. He managed to get out of his burning flak jacket, but the pain racked his body.

At that moment, Roger says, "I was tired of the killing, tired of losing friends, tired of trying to make sense of the war and my life. I just wanted to die and have all this suffering be over."

Roger was evacuated to the 95th EVAC Hospital, China Beach, where he underwent numerous surgeries. After six days at death's door, he regained consciousness long enough to recognize a familiar voice on the ward – that of his brother Ron, asking a physician if Roger was there.

After telling Ron that his brother was going to die, a nurse led him to Roger's bedside. Ron stood over Roger for a minute, trying to recognize what was left of his brother, and then started to sob, falling to the end of Roger's bed in grief.

"Your brother is going to die." The finality of those words were sinking in, as Ron wept, compelling Roger to pray, "God, if there really is a God ... if you let me live, I'll do anything you want." With that, he fell unconscious again.

In the days that followed, his brother Ron (who also has three Purple Hearts and later received the Navy Cross for jumping on a grenade to protect other Marines) never left the side of his twin brother. Roger saw many injured men brought into that ward and could only watch as life drained from their bodies. Miraculously, Roger's condition improved. The road to recovery was long and hard, but 31 operations later, including four to reconstruct his face, recover he did. >>

Along the way, Roger met his Savior and fulfilled his promise to God – and he has served in full-time ministry since 1978. Indeed, in a war with no victors and replete with death, Roger found victory over death through Christ. He also met and married his wife and ministry partner, Shirley, and they now have two children and five grandchildren.

At this writing, some 37 years later, Roger appears as robust as a linebacker. He leads a challenging but successful ministry of discipleship to young people in the grip of life-controlling addictions. "Life is a gift from God," says Roger. "What we do with it can be our gift to God."

Roger's ministry to others also includes 19 trips back to Vietnam since 1989, where he and "Vets with a Mission" have helped to build orphanages, clinics and hospitals for rural peasants ignored by their Communist government and they have supplied them with millions of dollars of donated medical supplies.

This Christian Soldier understands well the counsel of Ecclesiastes 3:1–3, which says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal." His third book, "A time to kill and a time to heal," takes

its inspiration from that passage, as does Roger.

Regarding Vietnam and the current war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Roger is characteristically candid: "I have never regretted a minute of my service in Vietnam. That's because I did not see the war the way the media portrayed it. I saw it through the eyes of the people that I lived with; the people of Vietnam who wanted to live free in peace."

He continues, "As the Patriot Post noted years ago in its analysis of the media's Vietnam war coverage, Hanoi and the Soviets were very pleased with the disunity created by John Kerry, Jane Fonda and their ilk."

Roger adds, "Vietnam will not be a failure if we learn the lessons of that conflict. Politicians cannot run the war – the generals must lead and lead well. The majority of people in Iraq and Afghanistan want peace and freedom, but the media's portrayal of that critical conflict is just as prejudiced as it was during Vietnam – maybe more so. The Left, with the media's help, may force the same scenario in Iraq that they forced in Vietnam, with the same consequences for the entire region. The vast majority of our Armed Forces in the region both understand and support our mission."

To Roger, and to all fellow

Patriots who have served our nation with courage and great sacrifice, we offer our heartfelt gratitude. You have honored your oath "to Support and Defend...So Help Me God" as do those on the front lines in the war with Jihadistan today – Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. You have kept the flame of Liberty, lit by our Founders at the dawn of our nation, burning bright for future generations.

(Update: In 2018, Roger Helle was appointed Executive Director of the National Medal of Honor Heritage Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the first Medals of Honor were awarded for heroic actions in 1862.) In 1918, the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month marked the cessation of World War I hostilities. This date is now designated in honor of our veterans, and a focal point for national observance is the placing of a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Today, nearly 24 million (eight percent) of our countrymen are veterans. Of those, 33 percent served in Vietnam, 18 percent in the Gulf War, 14 percent in WWII and 13 percent in Korea. About three percent served in Iraq and Afghanistan and other counter-terrorism theaters. More than 25 percent of those veterans suffer some disability.

Bob Minetto's Memorial

To Whom it May Concern: This afternoon I was on "The Wall" website looking up a few of my KIA US Marine tank crewman brothers to see if there were any updates on their memorial posts. I noted that you had posted stories that you had found on the internet about some of the Marines. I am a little curious how you came about to find and post the stories? The story of my good buddy, Robert Minetto that you posted on his page happens to be a story that I had written and posted on

the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association website. I am not at all upset that you posted it. In fact, I am honored.

Semper Fidelis

John Wear

THE REPLY: Thanks for your email. Looks like I posted two tributes to Minetto's profile on vvmf.org, one in 2015 that is attributed to work you produced, and another in 2019 that appears to be drawn from the 3rd Tank BN. Command Chronology.

For my part, I am a volunteer researcher for vvmf.org. We're attempting to provide details on the loss of each veteran, so their sacrifice is known and never forgotten. Regards,

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Thank You! You Saved my Life!

BY JOHN WEAR

Many years ago, I met a Vietnam veteran Army nurse. Her name is Grace Moore. She and I shared board of directors' duties at the Veterans Multi-service Center in Philadelphia. One day after a board meeting, Grace needed a ride home to Doylestown in Bucks County. Since I lived in the general area, I offered her a ride. As we drove home, I asked her how she got involved with the VMC and if she was involved with any other veteran groups.

She replied that when she got back home from Vietnam, like so many of us, she shut down and left her most recent past alone. She did keep serving as a civilian nurse for another 30 years and all along her veteran past was kept buried. One day, about 15 years ago, some of her former Army

Vietnam nurse buddies contacted her and asked if she'd like to join them in Chicago for a "Welcome Home from Vietnam" parade and celebration. They added that their old Army hospital in Vietnam, a M.A.S.H. facility that was in the Central Highlands was being honored at the celebration.

As a side note: That hospital was where they medevac'd WIAs. The hospital staff got the WIA's stabilized and then they were sent to major hospitals in-country for more advanced care. So, the bottom line was that the nurses and doctors at her hospital only saw the WIAs for a brief time (usually three days) and then they were taken away. No one knew what ever happened to the WIA.s

Fast forward to Chicago: The

group of nurse buddies (including Grace) are in a large field in the park after the Welcome Home parade. A guy walks up to Grace and says, "I know your voice from anywhere! You saved my life!"

Grace does have a very distinctive voice...kind of like Gracie Allen, the lady comedian of "Burns & Allen." Anyway, the guy says to her, "I was wounded in my face and the bandages prevented me from being able to see but you sat beside me and comforted me for the three days that I was there and before they shipped me off to Cam Ranh Bay. Thank you!!! Thank you!!! Thank you!!!"

Grace told me that from that day forward, she got more involved with veteran's groups.

Being a Marine is enough of a bonus,
No. 2 Marine Corps General says

BY GEOFF ZIEZULEWICZ-FEB 14, 2023

SAN DIEGO - As America's military struggles with recruiting and the services offer various financial incentives to get people to join, the Marine Corps' second-in-command warned Tuesday that new devil dogs should not to expect a hefty cash payment if they enlist.

Assistant Commandant of the Ma-

rine Corps Gen. Eric Smith told attendees of the annual West naval conference here that recruiting remains a "strategic challenge," but that the Marines are going to address the problem their own way, via a route that doesn't involve stacks for those who join.

"Your bonus is that you get to call yourself a Marine," Smith said. "That's

your bonus ... there's no dollar amount that goes with that."

The service's position stands in stark contrast to the Navy, which is offering maximum enlistment bonuses of up to \$50,000 and has lowered entrance exam scores in the past year to attract more recruits. ■

Photo from
Vietnam



The front bumper or fender, C23 in 1967, probably An Hoa road sweep



Memoir of a Tank Crewman in Vietnam 1968

BY LEE AITKEN

Before I relate my experiences being detailed to support the Korean Marines (Blue Dragon Brigade) I would like to share my first in-country experience in late January 1968. After getting orders to Vietnam while serving with Bravo Co, 5th. Tanks at Camp Las Flores, on Camp Pendleton, California, I took 30 days leave and then flew out of Travis Air Force Base, headed to Okinawa. I flew on Flying Tiger Airlines, that, unknown to me at the time was owned and operated by the CIA. Probably all Marines shared the same experience of going over to Vietnam alone, not knowing anyone else on the aircraft, buses or trucks that took the passengers to Kadena Air Force Base, on Okinawa, then over to Marine Camp Hanson by truck.

After two weeks in Okinawa, I was flown into Da Nang Air Force Base by Continental Airlines, where I received orders in a manila envelope that I was going to be assigned to 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Tanks. What the orders didn't say was where the 3rd Platoon was operating. A helpful Gunnery Sergeant in the operations tent checked his files and told me the 3rd Platoon was part of a Battalion Landing Team (BLT) operating as an SLF (Special Landing Force), in the upper reaches of

Quang Tri Province of South Vietnam, just a few miles south of the DMZ. He said the BLT routinely sends C-46 helicopters into Da Nang Air Force Base, three times a day for supplies and to transfer incoming and outgoing Marines assigned to the BLT, and that I needed to get down to the flight line to catch the next ride north to the BLT's rear area. Little did I know the rear area was a WWII converted aircraft carrier called the USS Valley Forge.

Just as the Gunny had told me, as I sat waiting on the flight line with several other Marines, none of which were tank crewmen, two C-46 Sea Knight helicopters came in and landed about 50 yards from us. A crewman jumped off one of the C-46 and asked if we were going up to 3/1. Yep! So, we went up the rear ramp, found a canvas seat and after several minutes we were in the air. From a little window I could see we were out over the ocean, following the coastline north. Two hours later we were landing on the deck of the Valley Forge, where sailors directed us through a hatch and down a ladder to the hanger deck below the flight deck. The hanger deck was jam packed with wood crates and all sorts of supplies. The other Marines and I sat on the deck and waited to see what

was going to happen since no NCO or officer had talked with us. After about an hour we were alarmed to hear a really loud klaxon sounding the following:

MUSTER ALL FLIGHT CASUALTY ASSISTANCE TEAMS ON THE HANGER DECK! INBOUND IN FIVE MINUTES! MUSTER ALL FLIGHT CASUALTY TEAMS ON THE HANGER DECK! INBOUND IN FIVE MINUTES!

We soon heard the sound of C-46's engines and rotor noise coming in and setting down above us on the flight deck. About 25 yards away, we saw medical personnel hurriedly setting up operating tables and a lot of medical equipment. The klaxon sounded again and a huge aircraft elevator descended to the hanger deck. Several doctors and nurses helped some Marines carry stretchers over to the tables where the surgeons started working on wounded Marines. We could hear the wounded crying in pain or hissing under their breath. The surgeons were working furiously on the wounded Marines. After about 45 minutes or so, several of the wounded were wheeled away on gurneys, and a few dead Marines were put in body bags and wheeled into what appeared to be a refrigerated compartment.

We were all jolted by what we had just seen and heard and just about 20 minutes later, the klaxon went off again and the unreal scene repeated itself. This happened three more times over the next four or five hours. What we didn't know was Kilo Company, was in for the fight of their lives in a little hamlet named Lam Xuan (East). The rifle company was commanded by Captain John Regal and it was facing a very large force of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops intent on retaking the hamlet and destroying Kilo Company. Captain Regal's Marines successfully drove off the NVA with the help of Lt. Robert Parrish's tanks. Many years later, I learned that Kilo Company in that battle, suffered six Marines KIA, one Navy Corpsman KIA, and 23 WIA. Kilo Company killed more than 200 NVA, and took seven prisoners.

As we waited, we talked about what we had experienced on the hanger deck of the Valley Forge. We all agreed that if we just got a taste of what was happening on shore, we were probably not going to make it home in one piece. A Navy officer came by, saw us and where we were sitting, and directed us to another part of the hanger deck. He told us he didn't want us watching the medical teams operating on wounded or dead Marines. Several hours later, four Marines in hospital blues walked over to us and asked if any of us were tank crewmen. I raised my hand and said I was. As the other Marines and I listened, we were introduced to Lt. Robert Parrish, 3rd Platoon Commander and his three crewmen. They had been wounded that morning by an RPG that had penetrated the turret of their tank.

Lt. Parrish was med evacuated from the Valley Forge, to Subic Bay Naval Base for recuperation. He rejoined the platoon a week later. The other Marines and I were still in stateside utilities. A supply Marine working on the hanger deck told us we could open some of the wooden boxes near us and get some jungle utilities and jungle boots. As we scavenged through two of the boxes, we dis-

covered that all the jungle utilities had been worn before and washed. Several had holes in them and faint bloodstains. We tossed them aside and rummaged around until we all found clothes with no holes or bloodstains. We never found any serviceable jungle boots to wear.

At dusk, several 0311 Marines and I were hustled up to the flight deck and boarded a C-46 and flown to the shore. We landed just outside the village of Lam Xuan East, where an NCO led us to the Kilo Company Commander's hootch. We were introduced to Captain John Regal who directed his platoon sergeant to get us some 782 gear, an M16, and a few loaded magazines. The Platoon Sergeant took me outside the hut and put me in a shallow fighting hole between two destroyed huts. He told me to shoot anything that moves to my front because they would be NVA soldiers. I did not know at the time that Kilo Company and just retaken this hamlet from the NVA and the company was expecting a counterattack. Needless to say, I didn't fall asleep that night. Thankfully there was no counterattack.

WELCOME TO VIETNAM!

Sometime in late March, 3/1 was sent over to Camp Carroll to support ongoing combat operations there. 3rd Platoon's heavy section went with 3/1 leaving the light section on the north bank of the Cua Viet River in support of 2/4, which assumed control of the area. 2/4 also had a heavy section from 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co, 5th Tanks, along with my light section of 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co, under the command of Sgt. Coco. The tanks supported 2/4's rifle companies in several engagements with the NVA north of the Cua Viet River. Several tankers were wounded or killed in combat with the NVA over the next two months. One of the KIA was my best friend, Sgt. David Simmons, a tank commander with Bravo, 5th Tanks. He had been assigned to recon on foot to find a route for the tanks to maneuver in an upcoming sweep operation. He, along with several riflemen from 2/4, were ambushed by the NVA and killed.

By the end of May 1968, the light section of 3rd Platoon was reassigned to support the 1st Marine Regiment, operating south of Da Nang near the Marble Mountains. For the first time in my four months in country, all five tanks in the platoon were reunited.

In June 1968, 3rd Platoon, Charlie 1st Tanks supported several combat operations with the First Marine Regimental rear area south of Da Nang, for several months. I was a driver on Sgt. Leonard Coco's tank from May through August. Sometime in late August, our Company Commander called me to his command hut and promoted me to E-5, Sgt. and made me a tank commander on C-32.

Most of the time the tank platoon went out either as a heavy section or a light section with an infantry platoon or an entire company on sweeps and operations. Sgt. Charles Wright, a tank commander was killed in late August when his tank was guarding heavy equipment used for working on a bridge repair. A Viet Cong sapper unit charged into the perimeter and hit Sgt. Wright's tank with an RPG while he was cranking the turret around to engage the VC sappers. The 3rd Platoon tanks supported infantry companies in several combat engagements against the NVA, or the Viet Cong.

Almost daily, a tank from the platoon would accompany combat engineers and a squad of infantry, riding on the tank, checking roads and bridges in the area for mines. At night, the tanks were placed on the perimeter of the 1st Marines base, with the crews alternating guard duty behind the sandbagged perimeter. The days were mostly mundane unless we hit a mine and had to repair track, replace broken torsion bars and road wheels.

I can't remember the exact date, but sometime in late October 1968, a heavy section under Sgt. Leonard Coco, was assigned to support an element of the Blue Dragon Brigade, (KMC) a South Korean Marine unit, in Quang Nam Province, several miles south of our regimental rear area. I was a fairly new tank commander, and Sgt. Coco, was >>

to lead the section south, into Quang Nam Province, to the Korean Marines fire base. I think someone in a jeep led the tanks over miles of dirt roads until we finally drove into the perimeter of the KMC base. The perimeter was sand-bagged with barbed wire outside sand-bagged walls. Within the firebase, there was an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) artillery unit. The ARVN had their entire families with them. Apparently, their government had families provide the necessary logistics to support their combat units.

In this KMC base, the entrepreneurial spirit of the ARVN families was alive and well. They had built and supplied a small restaurant with tables and chairs to sell food, soda and beer to the KMC, as well as any other military units in the firebase. It didn't take long before relations between we tankers and the KMC went south. The tanks supported the KMC on several sweeps through their assigned areas. Most of the time the KMC, only wanted one tank to go out with an infantry company. On my first trip out, the KMC walked through a small hamlet at a snail's pace. I saw a young boy with a pet monkey on his shoulder. Without giving any warning, a Korean Marine grabbed the monkey and smashed its head on the ground. The boy started screaming and crying. Another Korean Marine butted the child in the face with his rifle causing what looked like horrible facial damage. His mother came out and started crying and holding the unconscious boy.

I stopped the tank, got off and ran forward to the Korean company commander. He spoke pretty good English. I told him what his men just did to a boy. His answer; "They are all VC". I told him that if they weren't VC before, now they probably would become VC. He told me to go back to my tank and stay with his company. To this day, I still think about that boy.

On another overnight sweep, the KMC company dug in about 200–300 yards outside an occupied hamlet. I didn't know what the Koreans' plan

was, so, that afternoon I set the watch for the crew. Late that night I was in a trench just in front of my tank when I got surprised by what I thought was a Korean officer who jumped down into the trench with me. He told me in pretty good English that he wanted me to go with him to rape some of the women in the hamlet. I told him he was crazy and U.S. Marines didn't rape women and that we had the UCMJ, to dictate what happens when a Marine commits a crime. He disappeared only to return several minutes later. This time he demanded that I, and my crew, go with him and some other Korean Marines to rape women in the hamlet. I told him to eat shit, we weren't going. He threw some dirt on me and yelled that U.S. Marines were all faggot queers and then disappeared once again. Since it was zero dark thirty hours when that happened, I didn't recognize who the Korean Marine was the next morning. When we returned to the KMC firebase, I let Sgt. Coco know what had happened on the overnight patrol. Little did I know at the time that the worst was still to come.

We tankers must have pissed off some of the KMC Marines when one morning we saw human feces on the ground behind the tanks. A lot of it! Sgt. Coco talked with a KMC officer who told him that we were being shown the ultimate disrespect. Sgt. Coco was really pissed off over that incident. He used his E-tool, scraped up a bunch of the crap and heaved it in the general direction of the KMC hootches.

In one of the ARVN families working the makeshift restaurant, was an attractive young Vietnamese girl. In our tank section, was a crewman from Texas. I wish I could remember his name but, he was a VERY BIG Texan. He fell head over heels for that Vietnamese girl and spent a lot of time over at the restaurant. His infatuation over this young woman almost started a war with the KMC. He was at the restaurant late one day when a few Korean Marines came in and slapped the girl around. This according to the Texan; he walloped the Korean Marines and booked it back to

the tanks. When he told the rest of us about his act of chivalry, we congratulated him. Our whole world changed in the next few hours.

Sometime after dark, we heard the sound of Koreans talking and moving in our direction. Also, we heard a jeep engine getting louder too. Sgt. Coco told everyone in the two bunkers we occupied to get onboard their tanks and fire up the engines. Sgt. Coco swung his main gun around and turned on the xenon searchlight. It seemed like there were many, many armed Korean Marines, along with a jeep having a recoilless rifle on it headed our way. Sgt. Coco commanded me, and the other tank commanders to get our main guns turned around to point at the Korean Marines.

We heard a loud whistle blowing followed by some Korean on a bull horn shouting in Korean. A Korean officer got on Coco's tank and was yelling something at him. Sgt. Coco told his other tank commanders to turn the main guns back around. I heard Sgt. Coco tell the Korean Marine that we were leaving the compound immediately. Sgt. Coco got on the radio and told us we were leaving and to follow him. As we drove out of the compound, the Korean officer ran next to the tanks yelling at us to stop in English. Sgt. Coco's tank drove right over the barbed wire entry gate to the compound with two tanks right behind him. So, there we were, in the middle of the night, driving what seemed like hours in unfamiliar territory till we reached our own rear area. The perimeter guards let us in and we parked the tanks and we went into our huts for some sleep.

The next morning, I found Sgt. Coco and asked him if we were in big trouble for leaving the KMC compound without permission. He said the company commander never said another word about the incident nor, were any of the crews in Sgt. Coco's section ever interviewed about what transpired that night. Shortly thereafter, Sgt. Coco rotated back to the states and I rotated back in late February 1969. To this day, I have no respect for the KMC.

Mike Giovinazzo writes: This story is about understanding the loss of a friend's friend and the effect it has had on him over the years. I think that any Marine can understand this. Tom Mundy and I are two good friends, we were both members of the NYC Fire Dept. for over 30 years and we both served as US Marines in VN so we share each other's loss.

My buddy, Tom went to Boot Camp with and then served with his buddy, Ceil Lamm for a year in Iceland and then they were both sent to VN. Both were assigned to the 7th. Marines. Tom, an 0331 went to A Co 1/7 and Lamm to L Co 3/7 as a 0311. Both were casualties within a very short time of each other - Tom by a booby trap, which caused him to spend more than six months in various hospitals and a lifetime of suffering from wounds... and his buddy Lamm was KIA.

Tom, through tenacity and a Marine fighting spirit was able to overcome his injuries enough to pass the rigorous standards to become a NYC firefighter and survive in one of the most active areas of the city. He never forgot Lamm and had met with his family. Tom has lived up to our motto—Semper Fidelis.

Marines Sharing a Burden

THIS WAS WRITTEN BY A MARINE IN 2ND PLATOON, LIMA 3/7

November 25, 1967 started out with an air of excitement. It was a moonless night and 2nd platoon Lima Company (reinforced), about 40 Marines and one Navy corpsman, were moving silently through the night to an ambush site on Football Island on the southern border of Arizona Territory on the bank of the Song Thu Bon River, 2 clicks West of Liberty Bridge. In monsoon season Football Island was in fact an island shaped like a football, but now on the Arizona side it was a dry wash. A clear field of fire with no obstructions for 200 yards to the tree line where a main trail ran just inside the river bank. We had scouted the area several days before and saw evidence of heavy enemy activity recently. We were anticipating 'bustin some caps' in the morning, just like on the rifle range, only with live targets. A Marines delight.

We came up on the backside of the island and spread out in fire teams on line on the crest giving us about a 10 foot elevation advantage, shooting down on the tree line across the dry wash. A formidable force of 35 M-16 rifles, 3 M-79 grenade launchers and 3 M-60 machine guns. Everyone had helmets, flak jackets and carried a green towel around their neck; a pack with two days chow, mess gear, spare trousers,



pressure bandages and personal items; a block of C-4 explosive strapped to the top; 200 rounds of M-60 ammo in boxes strapped to the sides as well as an entrenching tool (shovel) hooked on the back. A cartridge belt around the waist with 5 M-16 magazine pouches, 2 mags to the pouch with 18 rounds per mag; 2 canteens for water; a K-Bar knife and a rifle cleaning gear pouch. Riflemen also had two bandoleers of M-16 ammo over their shoulders. Machine gunners and their A-gunners had belts of 7.62 MM ammo across their chest giving them the appearance of Mexican bandits. We were ready for a fight.

At first light we saw them, helmets, packs, green uniforms and armed to the teeth, double timing on the path in the tree line from our right to left. A seemingly endless procession in a hurry to get somewhere fast. The Lieutenant passed the word "fire on my command." And

all hell broke loose. A minute or so later the word came "Cease fire! Cease fire!" And I remember thinking to myself "I hope we don't have to go down there and look for bodies" as when we scouted the area, I had spotted fighting holes and trenches from previous battles. They may well be waiting for us to cross the dry wash and open up on us as we get out in the open. We didn't have to wait long for orders as the Lt.

shouted cease fire so he could hear the radio. It seems Fox Company 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines had just been ambushed out in the open and was taking heavy casualties. They were only a mile away and could we help them out. Well now we knew where all the dinks were running to.

In a loud voice the Lt. says "Fox Company is in trouble. We're going to go help them out. Corporal Brown take point. Cross the wash double time". Brown says to my fire team leader "Lamm take point" and Lamm shouts to me "Proper take point". I think to myself "Oh man, I'm dead". However, as a Marine I was trained to act, not to think, so I rolled over the crest of the hill and slid down the embankment, went to high port and started to double time across the dry wash toward the tree line, all the time waiting for that first round to hit my chest. I looked back every few >>

seconds to see where the Lt. was pointing for me to go and could see the entire platoon spread out behind me double timing in a platoon wedge formation. The Lt. was in the center of the wedge directing me and the squad leaders with hand signals like a maestro conducting a symphony.

I made it to the tree line without a shot being fired. The gooks di-di-ed the area, probably thinking we would call in arty after springing the ambush or maybe they were just in a hurry to get in on the fight going on with Fox Company. As I passed through the ambush site I looked for bodies or blood trails. Didn't see anything and kept on moving as the Lt. was pushing us hard. I couldn't believe after all the shooting we did; all we did was made a lot of noise.

I broke out of the tree line on the other side and into a wide expanse of rice paddies. The Lt. was constantly looking at his map and directing me with hand signals. The platoon still maintained a wedge formation and changed direction as I did. We were not being fired upon but I could hear a battle going on in the distance. Small arms, machine guns and artillery explosions. There was a battery (6 guns) of 105 mm and a battery of 155mm on Hill 65 about five miles away that fired in support of our activity in the Arizona. The 11th Marines, were one of the best in the Corps. They sometimes fired 24 hours a day to support us.

I came up on a rise and stopped. In front of me to my right flank was a gook graveyard about 200 yards away with a Buddhist monument and to the left was a tree line about 300 yards away. Separating them were dry paddies. Behind the monument was a Marine, bare to the waist and waving his arms in the air. I looked back at the Lt. and he gives me the go ahead, I thought, to go in the direction of the Marine who seeing me coming gets frantic pointing his rifle at the opposing tree line and telling me to run. I go to high port and start to run on a narrow paddy dike when all hell brakes loose. Rounds are hitting all around me coming from the tree line. I make it to where the Marine

is and he tells me there are gooks everywhere. I look back and no one has followed me. The rest of the platoon took cover when the gooks started shooting at me and now the Lt. is motioning for me to come back. I thought "Oh shit, I'm a dead man". The bare chested Marine says "Stay here, don't go. You won't make it". At that moment a Marine helicopter gunship flies over at tree-top level with guns blazing. I seize the moment and at high port, running the fastest I've ever run with shell casings from the helicopter hitting all around me, I rejoin my unit.

The platoon is on line preparing for a frontal assault. The shooting stopped for a moment as warriors on both sides prepared for battle. The Lt. says "Move out" and the entire line comes to their feet and starts to move rapidly forward in the direction of the far tree line. The ville on the other side of the tree line was named Phu Long (2). About 50 yards out the gooks open up and we hit the deck behind a minor paddy dike and everyone started to return fire. On the edge of the tree line there were a series of inter-connected trenches with fighting holes every 10 feet. The enemy were NVA regulars with AKs and light machine guns and they were battle hardened and spoiling for a fight.

I was on the far right flank of the line with PFC Charlie Schwab next to me. An 18 year old Jewish kid from San Francisco so scared he was shaking. He says to me "I don't know what to do" and I tell him "Charlie, do everything I do, follow me, stay close". I knew we were going to assault the trenches soon and I was afraid he would stay behind the dike and then I would have to go back and get him and that would be suicide.

As I peered over the edge of the dike I see NVA soldiers with pith helmets on, popping up like targets in a carnival shooting gallery, firing short bursts in our direction, and then ducking back down. I decide rather than firing indiscriminately, I would try to hit one of these popup targets. After firing several times with no success, I gave up on that idea. Then the word comes down the line,

"Try to lob a grenade into the trenches." I pull the pin and try to lob it in the direction of the trench line. Unfortunately as I tried to throw the grenade the weight of my helmet, flak jacket and loaded pack threw me off balance and instead of going out, it went up and landed barely 10 feet away. Another good idea that back fired with the confusion of battle: I don't think anyone else noticed.

Over the din of battle I hear clearly, distinctly and loud, "Charge!" I roll to my side and look in the direction of the Lieutenant and see him standing bolt upright, holding his rifle over his head, encouraging the troops to get to their feet and assault the trenches. Without hesitating every man comes to his feet while continuing to fire. I say to Charlie, "C'mon we gotta go, stay with me" as I rise to run forward, lagging a few steps behind the others. I slam into the parapet of the enemy trench line still on the extreme right flank; Charlie stayed right with me and on my left is my fire team leader Corporal Lamm, then Corporal Salas, the Lt., Corporal Brown my squad leader and so on down the line. With the exception of me, Charlie and the Platoon Sergeant Staff Sergeant Keeton, every man was on his knees on the parapet firing down into the trenches at the NVA troops trying to get away. It was a bloodbath. At that moment an enemy machine gun opened up, starting with Lamm next to me and worked his way down the line. All headshots. I was looking up at Lamm when the rounds hit him. The first hit his rifle; the second went through his helmet into his head. His body froze and I had to reach up and pull him down next to me. The Lieutenant was the only one not hit.

I become oblivious to what is happening around me. My best friend has just been shot in the head with a high powered weapon. My mission at that point was to help him. I took out a battle dressing and tried to stop the bleeding as with every heartbeat blood would pump out of the hole in his head. I hollered for Doc Allred, our Corpsman, with no response. Sgt Keeton crawled over to me and said, "Doc is dead." He

had taken two rounds to the side of his head as he was helping Ryan who was shot in the knee. I was starting to lose my sanity. I would apply pressure to the wound to stop the bleeding and Lamm would cry out "Mama, you are hurting me. Please stop. It hurts so badly!" I had never felt so futile. At that moment I lost touch with reality. I threw off my helmet, stripped off my pack and flak jacket and I was going to do something. I had no idea what, only that I had to do something. I couldn't just lay there and wait for death. The Lieutenant wisely saw what was happening, rolled over on top of me and started screaming in my ear, telling me to, "Get a grip!" When I returned to sanity Lamm had been drug away by others to a more secure spot behind trees to wait for a medivac chopper along with the others who had been wounded. All the while, an enemy machine gun was firing constantly, hosing the area; the only thing protecting us was the parapet of the trench line. Eventually several guys from 3rd squad worked there way around the flank of the machine gun and silenced him, giving the Lt. some breathing room to plan the next move.

Corporal Rex Riegel came crawling around behind us and said without pausing, "I'm going around the flank" and disappeared around some bushes, low crawling. A few moments later a rifle round hits a mound of dirt between my legs a foot in front of Sgt Keeton's face. He rolls over shouting "Son-of-a-bitch there's a sniper behind us!" as he waits for the next round so he can spot him. We had no place to go or take cover as over the parapet was sure death. We wait but the suspected sniper doesn't shoot again.

A minute later the Lieutenant gets a radio call from a helicopter gunship that a Marine is laying motionless in the open on our right flank. The Lt. asks for a volunteer to crawl out and check on Rex. Since I was the closest I said that I'd go and immediately started a low crawl in the same direction Rex had taken. I didn't have to go far until I saw his boots and crawled up next to him.

He was lying motionless with his head resting on his rifle, helmet in place, as though asleep. I was whispering to him as I gently raised his helmet to discover a small hole directly between his eyes. As I slid backwards using his body as cover in the event the sniper was aiming at me, I saw that the round had exited the back of his head, penetrated his pack and apparently was the round that had impacted between my legs and in front of Sgt. Keeton. I pulled his rifle from under his body and sliding backwards I grabbed his boot and started to drag him back when I felt a hand on my boot. It was Sgt. Keeton; he had crawled out to help me start Rex on his way home.

USMC CH-34 medivac choppers were coming and going constantly taking the wounded out. Using a paddy behind a growth of trees on our left flank they would set down for just a few seconds so as not to give enemy gunners an easy target. They refused to take weapons, packs, 782 gear, or bodies of our dead. Weight was an issue and gaining altitude rapidly meant priority one wounded only. Minor WIA and KIA were lined up near the LZ like a phalanx of sleeping warriors. When I carried Rex's body over and gently laid it next to Doc, I saw Ryan laying propped up by a tree, his left lower leg almost detached from his body at the knee, high on morphine and whistling the Marines' Hymn.

The enemy fire had almost stopped when the Lt. passed the word that in one minute we would continue the assault. As I rolled over the parapet into the enemy trench, there were bodies everywhere. They had apparently drug their wounded with them as they pulled back as all remaining were dead. We advanced through the tree line and stopped to set up a defensive perimeter. I found a B-52 bomb crater hole to roll into and crawled up the other side and took up a firing position. It was quiet, no sound until a loud explosion in the crater next to mine. I rolled over into it to find Corporal Hendrickson with his machine gun and his assistant gunner. The A-gunner was on his feet in the bottom of the crater dancing in circles, screaming in pain with the back of his flak jacket blown apart and smoke coming out of his body along with a lot of blood. Several other guys tended to him as I went to Hendrickson who was motionless lying on his gun. A trickle of blood was running down the back of his neck. He was dead. A sliver of hot steel had penetrated his brain. An NVA 61mm mortar had dropped into the crater directly behind them.

It was late afternoon by now and the Lt. was giving thought to where we could set up a defensive position >>



for the night. He was certain with all the enemy in the area they would counter attack after dark. The wounded had all been evacuated. However, we had a lot of packs, cartridge belts, weapons, ammunition and dead bodies to consider. There weren't enough of us remaining to defend where we were at so the Lt. decides we will pull back across the paddies to the graveyard and set in with the remnants of Fox Company. He ordered us to stack all the packs and 782 gear in a pile and produced a white phosphorus grenade to burn them. Then we are to pick up all the weapons and ammo and each man was to carry a body back across the paddies to the night pos. I had 6 M-16's slung on my left shoulder and

I chose to carry Doc. When I squatted down to pick him up I found that rigor mortis had set in and had to carry him as one would carry lumber on the shoulder. I made it halfway across the open area when I collapsed under the weight. Several men ran out from the security of the graveyard and carried Doc's body the rest of the way and laid him next to the others at the base of the Buddhist monument.

Sgt. Keeton assigns me to an area on the perimeter for the night and tells me to dig a fighting hole as there was a good chance the gooks were going to counter attack and we may have to call in arty onto our own position if they overrun us. I was so exhausted as I started to dig

I had to lay down, so I dug a 12" depression the length of my body, laid down and passed out. When I awoke there was a machine gun dual going on, directly over my hole. A burst of red tracers several feet over my head from my right. A burst of green tracers from my left in response. I went back to sleep.

At first light I opened my eyes and there are Marines every where. It seems the word was that 2nd platoon Lima Co had been annihilated and every Marine unit in the Arizona wanted a piece of the action but Charley wasn't anywhere to be found. Once again he had disappeared into thin air leaving only one lone machine gunner to cover their withdrawal.

Weird Guard Duty... aka LP

BY CORPORAL THEODORE HILDABRAND

RVN 4/1/67 - 4/29/68

H&S and Bravo Company, 1st Tank BN, Hill 55



There was nothing special or unique about my service in Viet Nam. Well, if you disregard my landing in country on April 1, 1967; April Fool's Day. About half of my tour was with H&S Company, 1st Tank Battalion just west of Da Nang. I like Dick Peksens description of that base location (Forgotten Track Volume 1 - "Piss Tube Encounter" page 114) ... "You pass through Dog Patch then turn right or South after the French Bunker then on top the hill to the right; HQ 1st Tank Battalion. I spent about 6 months there and then 6 months on Hill 55 about 15 miles west ... except for several weeks at NCO School in Okinawa in the middle.

My MOS 3516 was Motor T. I spent half of my nights in-country on guard duty. One night on and then one night off except for duty assignments with the Reactionary Pla-

toon. I volunteered for that assignment and there are several interesting stories there but nothing comparable to the 1811s service with 1st and 3rd Tanks. Your VN service is commendable. I'm humbled by just being in service with and in support with 1st Tank Battalion. Tanks were the point of the spear, my opinion. I was just happy and glad to serve with a rifle and not have to be inside that steel enclosure with that 90 mm tube and other weaponry. Most of us were never really given an MOS option but for those of you that had that option and elected to get an 1811 MOS is a remarkable service commitment.

The French bunker on the North side of the 1st Tank base was an interesting structure. I had to stand guard duty there



one. You can clearly see the Da Nang air base and Marble Mountain from that position. Either way it was a common reference point in the Da Nang area. 1st Tanks had a 50 cal. with a pivot mount set on it.

Anyway, back to guard duty at Battalion, I don't recall volunteering for this unusual guard duty but sometime shortly after I arrived in-country I ended up with this weird assignment. I suppose it is not uncommon for F*ckin' New Guys (FNGs) to get these type of duty assignments. It has taken me sometime to finally figure out that I was actually on a LP. There was never any explanation about what was required, just get in the truck. However, all I recall is being hauled by truck with five other Marines to a point southwest of the base for an unknown distance of at least 2-3 miles.

However, I have a vivid recollection of detail of our position and its characteristics. We were dropped off and were set



into position in a B-52 bomb crater, or at least that is what I was told. It was a 12'-15' diameter dished crater that was about 4' deep. Perfectly symmetrical! There were six of us, four marines and two ARVNs. An E-6 was the senior NCO in charge. I subsequently worked with him for 4-5 months in Motor T, but he arrived in-country after me. All four of us Marines were Motor T. The E-6 and I were FNG 3516's but the other two were just MT drivers. It didn't take me long to figure out that I was in a very awkward situation. I didn't say too much nor did anybody else for at least 20-30 minutes as we got our gear together and set into position in that crater. There was at least 2 hours before dark.

We were on an elevated area except on the North for about 120 degrees the area along the road and another intersecting road. Those Northern points and maybe 50 yards beyond it were all at a higher elevation, say 30' than the area around our crater perimeter. The area Southwest of our position was a low, large valley. We had an extended view for a good distance say 2-3 miles into this valley.

The E-6 gave us no instructions or tactical guidelines. I guess it was supposed to be obvious that we were here to guard this position. To what strategic end I never figured out until later. We had no radio or communication link of any type with Battalion. Obviously, I felt vulnerable

and it got worse as the time went on, but I kept my mouth shut. Even to me I felt exposed by the higher ground to the North. Any attack could flank us from the North position where we would be exposed even though we were in the crater. Once we became pinned down from the higher ground to the North just one grenade into that crater could hit or disable all six of us. At least from my thinking. I felt awkward and vulnerable.

We had been in position about 30-40 minutes, then there was some dramatic activity in the valley to the SW. There was an air strike by two of our jets that made bomb runs on a position in the valley. That strike was approximately 1.5 miles away. We could see the jets making their bomb runs and could see and hear the explosions. Aside from that, we couldn't see anything on the ground in that area as the strike position was slightly below the horizon. The E6 did not have any binoculars or similar equipment. He didn't even seem dramatically concerned or focused on the air strike. I suppose this was all supposed to be normal but the E6 and I were just FNGs.

I knew the other two Marines but they were not two that I would select to work with but those are not duty options in the Marine Corps. Best recollection they were PFC's. They were both what I would call classical "Shit Birds" (SBs) or assholes same / same. There is always a 5-10%. Such is life anywhere and even in the USMC!

I wanted to introduce myself to the ARVNs and or at least get their names. I was waiting for the E6 to give some type of commentary and organization details, but he never said anything. I was at the point of thinking about approaching and making an introduction and generating some dialog with the ARVNs. They appeared even more apprehensive than me. Understandable, especially with four of us being Marines and only two of them. However, one aspect about the ARVNs bothered me. It was their rifles. They both had M1 carbines. Their rifles and gear looked out of place. More about that later! We had M14s but no other special gear except the normal 782 and magazines. I don't think we were even given grenades. At least I did not recall seeing any.

The ARVNs, typical of the Vietnamese people are small in stature. I was 5'-6" and weighed 110 pounds. I looked significantly bigger in body structure than them. So maybe the carbine and the ammo in their opinion was a better fit considering their small size. Personally, I never minded carrying the M14 and extra magazines but again that was how we were trained. You would at least think they would want to carry M1 Garands if they couldn't get M14s. My opinion, that rifle choice just bugged me.

Then two different scenarios developed, sort of simultaneously. The E6 started taking practice shots at a piece of wire that he saw. He shot about 5-8 times. I could not believe he was doing this shooting. That was extremely inappropriate Marine behavior on guard duty. He kept on giving us verbal feedback on his shooting. He was trying to impress us >>

with his marksmanship. I thought he was nuts and still do. While this was going on, a problem developed between the two SBs and ARVNs. Apparently, the SBs stole a 782-pistol belt from one of them. The two shit birds were laughing it up when the ARVNs raised the issue. Apparently, it must have been stolen when we first settled into the crater. Anyway, the ARVNs were asking them to please return it. They were being very polite but persistent. This just encouraged the SBs more. One was laughing it up and the other was the bully and would just make it worse with derogatory insulting commentary. The two SBs were playing a tag team match; one would bully and the other would laugh it up. The ARNs started begging them. They indicated when they would get back to their base their commanding officer would physically beat him for losing gear. I believed him! However, this was like fuel to the fire for the two SBs as they continued with their laughing and tag team play. The SBs were oblivious to the controversy they were creating.

I could not believe the E6 was letting all this develop. He was oblivious to all of this and seemed just focused on himself. I finally decided I was going to have to get in the middle because the situation was turning to shit. God forbid if we got hit. We needed each other in a combat situation. It was a f*cking mess. How could we possibly fight together under combat stress when we couldn't even work together under what should have been a friendly cooperative non stressful duty atmosphere.

It was approaching dark. Then God intervened! The bully SB shouted out in pain. He was bitten by a large centipede. He kept scratching and cursing at the bite near his waist. He had significant pain. The two SBs went quiet except for the occasional moan of the bully from the bite pain. I sensed an almost humor like attitude now from the ARNs. I just kept my mouth shut.

There was no plan for sleep and shifts that I recall. Either way I was mentally prepared to be alert and wired the whole night. It was one hell of an awkward situation to be in. The bully tossed and turned all night writhing in pain. God works in mysterious ways!

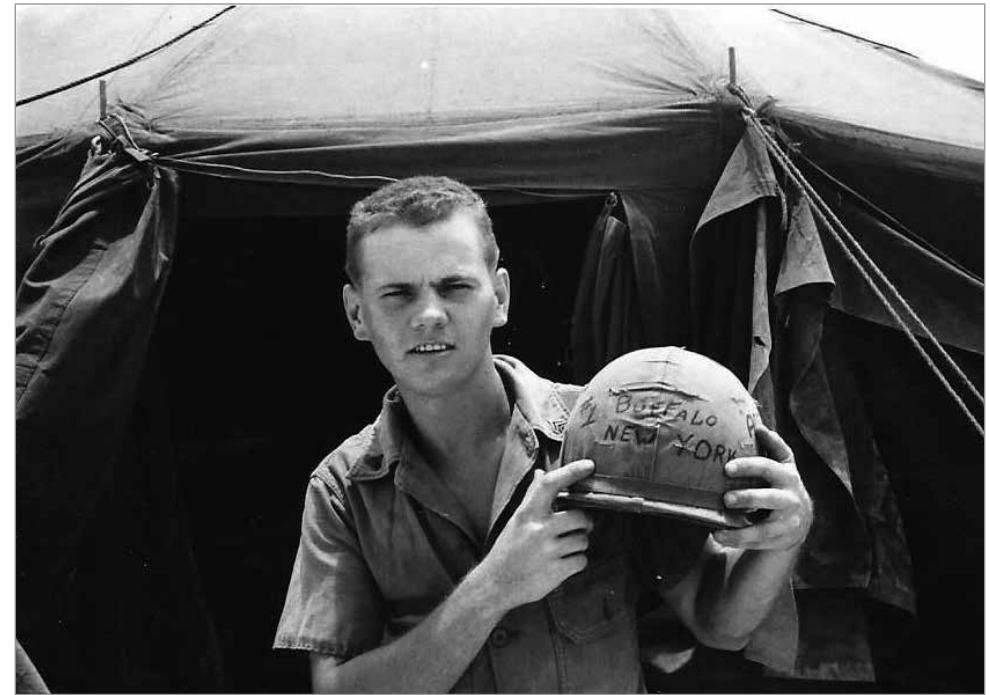
I've thought about this incident several times of the last 56 years. I reflect frequently on what I could have done differently and better during my VN service. You know, there are numerous situations in which I wished I had been better or did things differently. However, to be honest, I typically

and finally conclude I wouldn't have changed anything. If I had acted differently, my VN service could have taken a different course. I'm happy I came home unscathed physically. In this case I feel bad that I didn't pressure the E6 or intervene earlier with the situation and help those poor miserable ARVNs.

On deeper reflection I have finally resolved that the six of us, the two ARVNs and four Marines were placed in that crater as an expendable LP commodity. My thinking is that intelligence or Force Recon found that enemy unit in the valley SW of Battalion. That enemy unit was hit by an air strike based upon a known enemy position via some type of intelligence. I think orders were given to protect the Battalion from a potential enemy threat that night by setting up that LP. The instruction to the OD was probably this, strictly conjecture on my part, "Set up an LP with several FNGs, SBs and some ARVNs between that enemy unit and battalion on that hill". So, the LP was an expendable commodity aka cannon fodder. I'm just thankful to God that the cannon was never fired. Life is not perfect, especially in the Marine Corps! We can't change history, but we can sure learn from it.

I have never told this story before except verbally about a year ago. Even then it was a short explanation. A member of my Sportsman's club asked me about several aspects of my VN service. The history from this story just spilled out. I felt it appropriate to document it for the VTA. This is not good Marine history, but it is what it is. I served with some fabulous Marines, officers, NCOs, and enlisted Marines. There are SBs and assholes in life but thankfully they are a small minority. It's part of life and we must learn to live with it because there is always a group within our world that will never change. Adjust and move on!

The other interesting aspect is the adjustment we all had to make when we arrived in country for our service. Being an FNG is always an awkward adjustment. You always get the awkward duty assignments. Run to the dump, mess duty etc. there are a myriad of lousy duty assignments available for the FNG. Eventually turnover and new arrivals come up and you are no longer the FNG. Such is life in the Corps! I also think I know how SBs got their name. Maybe that's a story for another day. They are SBs because they are not squared away good Marines, just assholes. SBs a\$\$Holes = Same / Same.



My Time with 3rd Tanks H&S Co and Charlie Co

BY ADAM ZLOTEK

I arrived in Da Nang in August 1966 and was assigned to H&S Co 3rd Tanks. The Company was located south of Da Nang on Highway 1. I remember going through "Dog Patch" I think it was called "Freedom Hill" but not sure. Amtracks were on the other side of the road from us. There were rice paddies and a small river below our perimeter on one side and a small village on the other. You could see Marble Mountain, Monkey Mountain, and the airstrip from our area. I stood a lot of guard duty on the perimeter, some mess duty and foot patrols at night. First week of October 66, I was assigned to Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks located in Dong Ha. I was a 2111 Armorer—small arms repair.

At the time, the battalion CO was Lt Col Fred D Chapman and Battalion Sgt Major was DE Culpepper. Capt. Paul Lessard was the H&S Company CO, Lt. Ray Kinhead was the XO, the Gunnery Sgt was RB English. Some of the names I remember were: Sgt Siva, Sgt Tews, Terry O'Brien and Bob Mahoney.

The Company was located near the Dong Ha airstrip. At times, I thought one of the landing C-130's would take our tent down. There was a regimental mess hall for all units on the base. Talk about a cluster f*ck. It was hard to get chow and make it back to formation on time.

November '66, the Company moved down the road near the southeast corner of the base. The Army had a 175 mm gun battery on the other side. One night a F-4 Phantom made an emergency landing, he definitely ran out of runway and end-

ed up in a rice paddy. As you well know those runways were for C-130's and smaller aircraft and not fast movers. I'll be damned, there was no explosion or fire, just an aircraft sitting intact in that rice paddy.

After we relocated down the road, GySgt Hollingshead became our 1st Sgt. Few other names I recall, S/Sgt Roberts, S/Sgt McConville, S/Sgt Jones, Corporals Hamby and Sellers. Sgt Roberts and Sgt Fletcher were TC's of the Flame Tanks. Our Corpsman were Doc Shaw and Doc Stewart. Although I was the Company armorer, I rode shotgun on many "Rough Rider" convoys between Dong Ha and Da Nang and Dong Ha and Phu Bai that were getting supplies, diesel fuel, or whatever for the Company.

After H&S Co moved up to Phu Bai around Feb '67, I made runs to Cam Lo, Con Thien (by chopper), getting supplies and mail to the platoons in the field. I repaired a 50 Cal. machine gun for the Seabees on their river boat on the Cua Viet River. We made a run up to Camp JJ Carroll and I met up with a Marine named Gibbons who was Alpha Company's armorer, we had gone through Ordnance School at Quantico.

Then Charlie Company was on the move again. This time from Dong Ha to Camp Evans around Feb '67. Capt. Ruhlmann became our CO, he replaced Capt. Lessard around Jun '67 and Lt. Dobbins, our XO. I don't remember the 1st Sgt but he was a M/Sgt. Then GySgt Pope replaced him. Some of the names I recall were Sgt Ray Scheurich, SSgt Duncan, SSgt Rivera, SSgt Hicks, GySgt Rolfes, Sgt Flanagan, Cpl. >>



Schulte, Cpl. Varese. Our Corpsmen were Doc Stewart (not the same one from Dong Ha) and Doc Abernathy.

Sometime in June or July '67 a call came in that one of our tanks was in mud or quicksand almost up to the turret ring. It was C-24 in the field with two other tanks. I was part of the retriever crew with SSgt Hicks and others. We went out about 1700 Hrs., with two other tanks northeast of Camp Evans going over train tracks that ran parallel to Highway 1. Working most of the night, we got the tank out with the retriever and the two tanks. We came back to Camp Evans about 0800 Hrs. the next morning. I don't recall any grunts being out there with us that night.

August '67, Capt. WJ O'Butch, became our CO and I am not sure about the XO or the 1st Sgt. Mid-August is when we lost a tank and its crew on the "Street Without Joy." That was the unfortunate tank that hit the mine that was two or three unexploded 500-pound bombs. That incident was in an earlier issue of the Sponson Box.

(Ed. Note: The "Upside Down Tank" was also the subject of a presentation in a "Fallen Heroes" program.) Sgt Joseph Hallas, LCpl Anthony Benet, LCpl Richard Smith, LCpl Kenneth Spoth were the KIA crew members. On second thought, as for the tank and crew we lost on Aug 17, 1967, Ray Scheurich (Phone: 306.423.4078) is the guy to talk to. He was an eye witness. He was on the retriever and it was the tank behind, him or the 2nd tank behind him, that hit that mine that destroyed the tank. Pete Ritch was supposed to talk to him and apparently didn't. I talked to Ray the other day and he says nobody contacted him for further information.

The club building at Camp Evans was built by the local Vietnamese people. We built the bar. Whether it was Dong Ha or Camp Evans, we managed to scrounge up beer, soda



Bar built with 90mm ammo boxes
Dong Ha

and ice whenever we could. Two cans per man when available. Mid-September '67 I went back to Battalion (Phu Bai). I had five days before I rotated home when we were put on "Red Alert" because of the big build-up of NVA." I didn't know it



at the time but my guess is it was the beginning of the Tet Offensive in Feb 68.

By March '68, I was on a float in the Mediterranean with 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines. Schulte and Varese were on the same float with 2nd Tanks. I was with 2nd Service Battalion. SSgt Paul Petrovsky (1811) was my recruiter in Buffalo NY when I enlisted and went to Parris Island. He got promoted to GySgt and served with 1st Tanks '68 - '69 in Nam. I served with a lot of good Marines. I was proud and privileged to be among tankers. God Bless those who we lost and those who served.

Semper Fi,
Adam Zlotek Sgt USMC
agold19@gmail.com

Post Script: I went to Camp LeJeune when I got back. Dec '67 or Jan '68. I was in Panama with a unit made up of armorers and other personnel. We had recruits fresh out of boot camp to fire M-16's to determine malfunctions. We test fired the weapons for the US government. Over a million rounds were fired. No specific targets, just putting rounds through the rifle. Mar '68-Aug on, I was on a Med. Cruise with 3rd BN-8th Marines. We stopped in Rome, Paris, Turkey, Malta, Crete, Sardinia. We got back to LeJeune Dec '68 and I went to Gitmo as part of an IG inspection on 2nd BN-8th Marines. We flew from Cherry Point, NC to Gitmo. I don't remember how many officers, but there were only 6-8 enlisted personnel.

I then got discharged 17 Jan '69. I got out as an E-4 Corporal. Then 14 years after I got out, I joined the Marine reserves. I lasted a year because I got divorced. That's when I found out I had earned more medals. Then 16 years after that I put in for them and I got an amended DD-214 with the medals and a permanent E-5 promotion showing. Surprise! I made E-5 on 1 Mar '68 which never caught up with me when I was on the Med Cruise. That's all I have!! ■

Tanks & Medals of Valor

Jose Juan Alvarado

HOME OF RECORD: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Silver Star

Awarded for Actions during: Vietnam War

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Staff Sergeant

Battalion: 3d Tank Battalion, 3d Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

GENERAL ORDERS: Board Serial 1857 (March 16, 1967)

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Staff Sergeant Jose Juan Alvarado (MCSN: 1259372), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Section Commander with Company B, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division, in connection with military operations against insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces in the Republic of Vietnam on 20 August 1966. During Operation SUWANEE, Staff Sergeant Alvarado was participating in a coordinated tank and infantry operation as the leader of a section of two tanks in support of Company M, Third Battalion, Ninth Marines. As the infantry unit moved along an open area, it came under an intense volume of automatic weapons, rifle grenade, and anti-tank rocket fire from concealed ambush sites. The ferocity of the attack pinned down the Marines so effectively that they were unable to maneuver into assaulting positions without suffering heavy casualties. Reacting instantly and with great professionalism, Staff Sergeant Alvarado immediately positioned his tanks between the Viet Cong force and the Marine unit while he directed effective 90-mm. and machine gun fire on the enemy positions. The enemy responded



with a heavy concentration of anti-tank fire which hit Staff Sergeant Alvarado's accompanying tank, wounding the Tank Commander seriously and severely damaging the communications system. With complete disregard for his own safety, he left his armored vehicle, maneuvered under intense small arms and anti-tank fire, to assist his wounded comrade to a position where he could receive medical aid. He then returned to the disabled tank, reorganized the crew, and utilized arm and hand signals to direct the movement of the tank. Again, braving the enemy fire, he returned to his own

tank and maneuvered his section to positions where they were able to gain fire superiority over the enemy. Exhibiting outstanding courage and presence of mind, he successfully maintained his section of tanks as a cohesive fighting force and contributed significantly toward the death of at least 27 Viet Cong and the ultimate defeat of the enemy. By his inspiring leadership, resourceful professionalism, bravery, and loyal devotion to duty, Staff Sergeant Alvarado upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

Another Marine that left no trace of his passing! We know it was in 2019, but we could not find an obituary.

Jerry White writes: I just found out that my T.C. (Silver Star) passed away in Puerto Rico in October 2019. I learned he was the Commandant of a >>



Military School there. He was a Great Marine.
The photo on the right is S/Sgt. Alvarado on the right and a young Lt. Richard Nagle on the left alongside of our tank "Ho Chi Minh's Nightmare" B-14. I have a curious story about S/Sgt. Alvarado, and you might think I stayed out in the sun too long but here goes anyway:
After Aug. 20th he was called away to the Hill #55 briefly, when he returned, he was wearing Gunny chevrons. A week or so later, he was called back to

the Hill and when he returned, he was wearing 2nd. Lt. Bars on his collar! Now I know that sound nuts but when I left Nam on Sept 9th. He was an Officer Tank Commander. If there is anyone out there that remembers these weird promotions, please "Sound Off." I also recall the Capt. Ev Tungent was our skipper. He was a really good officer.
Bob Haller Adds: I do remember Capt. Tangent. He was a good officer. He never spoke down to anyone. He just said, "I need this done" and it was done. He invoked trust, respect and expected the same in return. But I do not remember any crazy promotions of others as I was PFC, then a Lance Corporal and then a PFC for a 'long time' ... and it's crazy but somehow brig time stifles promotions. I was promoted again on HILL 55 and then sent out with B Co, 1/9 until I was hit for my second Purple Heart and I spent the next year in several hospitals. Finally, I was sent to Quantico and then got out. For the most part Lance Corporals were not on a need-to-know basis. And besides so much was going on so I paid little attention except for what I had to do. ■

Looking For...

CAN ANYONE ID THESE TANKERS?



Please call or email John Wear with answers...

MURDER IN MARBLEHEAD

Long time VTA member, Harry Christiansen co-authored a book entitled, "Murder in Marblehead." He sent me the below letter asking any VTA member who is ... or was a police detective to take the challenge. Harry's phone number is on the letterhead. Please call him to receive a complimentary copy of his book and start your own investigation.

LAW OFFICES OF HARRY C. CHRISTENSEN
40 South Street, Suite 105
Marblehead, MA 01945

781-631-2416
FAX: 781-639-1782

FED-EX

March 21, 2023

Mr. John Wear
16605 Forest Green Terrace
Elbert, CO 80106

RE: My new Book
Murder in Marblehead

Dear John:

My co-author and I have recently published a book which I have researched over nearly sixty years involving an unsolved murder in my town of a young school teacher in 1950.

I am sending you a copy of the book with the hope that you may reach out in the Sponsor Box for my help. We are seeking the expertise of some of our membership, with law enforcement and/or crime investigation knowledge of homicide details which may help to resolve this decades old mystery.

We are willing to send a copy of the book, with all details recorded, to any member who could help us with this endeavor.

As always John, all marines are troubled by justice unresolved.

Semper Fi,

Harry C. Christensen, Bravo 42

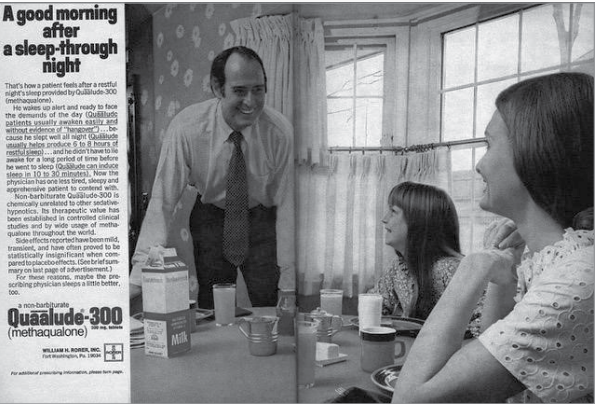
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Photos from Vietnam

The mouth of the Cua Viet River Delta and South China Sea – 1967



Flame tank, South of Da Nang - 1967



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106-8937

Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" on your address label is "22" or lower your 2023 membership dues are a year past due. It appears as if we have "carried" you for a year now, please pay last year's dues... and since 2024 is almost upon us, you may as well go ahead and pay it now.

**Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30* per year 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.**

