



Sponson BOX

Voice of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



THE INVASION OF NORTH VIETNAM

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

2024 Mini-Reunion – We are going to (again) visit Columbus, Georgia in September 2024.

We have been invited to visit a brand new (and yet not open to the public) **Tank Collection** at Ft Benning (aka Fort Moore). If you remember, back in 2018, we conducted our first (ever) mini-reunion where we visited the (now closed) USMC Tank School and a very special Tank Restoration Project located at Ft Benning. While we were there, we learned that the **Tank Restoration Project** was being conducted with the idea that the US Army would eventually open a massive and all-inclusive **Armor Museum**. Many of the tanks have now been fully restored and are housed in a very large building on the Army base.

One very interesting point was the fact that the Tank Restoration Project has at least one of every tank that was ever produced at any time, by any nation in the world. The one and only exception is a tank that was produced by the Nazi during WW-2 which is the super-heavy "Panzer VIII Maus" tank. We understand that only five of those German monster tanks were ever produced and only one survived after the war. That one and only model is now housed in the **Russian Tank Museum in Kubinka**.

Next September when we visit Ft Moore, we will see a very impressive collection of international armored vehicles. Another interesting note is that the M-4 Sherman tank had 19 variants built over the years. The collection will have one of each variant. Below is a photo images of some of the restored tanks.

The mini-reunion hotel will be the Hampton Inn (2870 Lumpkin Road, Columbus, GA 31903) where we stayed in 2018. The dates for our gathering are September 12 – 15, 2024. The special hotel room rate is \$139+ tax per night with a free breakfast each morning.

More details and more photos are on the last three pages of this issue.

Please note: When you make the decision to join us in Columbus, you will need to fill out a 2024 USMC VTA Mini-reunion Registration form, write a check for \$25 for each attendee and mail it to the return address on the form. That new registration form is included in the last three pages of this issue of our magazine.

U.S. Army Armor & Cavalry Collection



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 the membership.

Letter from the President

2023 REUNION RECAP: We had a spectacular time in Colorado Springs! We also almost broke our attendance record. And to think that back in May, we were worried that we'd not make our room reservation commitment. During the Farewell Banquet, we had four Young Marines present the colors. I wish that the lady who is their organization's leader had informed me about the following **before** the dinner so I could have properly announced this: One of the Young Marines has been accepted to West Point while another has been accepted to the US Air Force Academy. The young lady in the group is on the 120-day program for enlisting in the USMC and the last young man has volunteered for the US Navy in order to become a Fleet Marine Force (FMF) Corpsman ... OOO-RAH!!!

THE USMC VTA HISTORY PROJECT: An interesting thing happened in Colorado Springs that made us feel pretty proud. As you may already know, the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association History Project has produced 85 video interviews since we started recording them during our 2013 reunion in San Antonio. Those videos are available for viewing on YouTube and they have garnered 84,000 hours of viewing time. It is my understanding that most video producers would donate an intimate part of their bodies to have that kind of viewing success. Besides the videos, we are fortunate to have many members writing about their time in Vietnam that allows us to produce the Sponson Box four times per year...which seems to keep our stories on the forefront of the "voices of combat veterans." And our more recent podcast program has been greeted by the general population with kudos. All of this activity has generated enough interest with Leatherneck magazine and the Marine Corps Association that they sent Kyle Watts, a writer (and US Marine veteran) to attend our 2023 reunion. We understand that he will be writing a feature story about the USMC VTA History Project and how successful it has been that may be in the January 2024 issue of Leatherneck. OOO-RAH!!!

2024 MINI-REUNION: Per the announcement on the inside front cover, **we are making plans to visit Ft Benning (now called "Fort Moore") in Georgia on September 12 – 15, 2024 where** we have been invited to visit a brand new (and yet not open to the public) **Tank Collection**. If you remember, in 2018, we conducted our first (ever) mini-reunion where we visited the USMC Tank School (that CMC Berger closed in 2020) and we also visited a very special Tank Restoration Project. While we were there, we learned that the Restoration Project was being conducted with the idea that the US Army would eventually open a massive and all-inclusive Armor Museum with completely refurbished tanks.

MORE MISSING STORIES? A longtime college friend of my wife recently visited us in Colorado. Her father had been a 30-year career Air Force officer who, interesting enough, had been assigned to the same Air Force base in Japan at the same time as my father. And coincidentally, she and I had attended the same DoD-run elementary school in 1959 and 1960. During her recent visit, she was reminiscing that while her father was still alive, she never implored him to tell her any stories that he may have had about his military life. Again, there is a "I wish that I knew about my dad's military experience but it's too late now."

WARNING: Please get off your duffs and tell us your story now! We have said this before, if you are unable to compose a written story yourself, how about if you sit down with your wife, one of your children or even a grandchild and recite your story to them as they type it on a Word document. They can then email the story to me and you'll be a published author!

THE US MILITARY IS IN PRETTY BAD SHAPE: I listened to a recent interview with that retired US Army colonel who happens to be an expert on military history. During the interview he said that at the end of WW2 the US had exactly 7 four-star generals and/or admirals running the entire US military that was 16 million strong. While today we have 39 four-star generals and/or admirals and the total US military is just 1.3 million. Can anyone spell "top heavy"?



"Unless you are willing to be as unreasonable and as brutal as your enemy, do not engage him in a conflict—because he will win."

Author Unknown

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ON THE COVER: An artist's rendition of urban combat – perhaps in Hanoi 1968

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

DD-215

George Shaw called and mentioned the article that 1st Sgt Rick Lewis wrote about preparing for your departure to the "Great Tank Park in the Sky." Besides filing your DD-214 in your records, if you happen to possess an amended DD-214, that is called a DD-215. Be sure to include your DD-215 with your record storage.

The Bunker at the Washout



John Wear writes: The photo of the Washout bunker in the last issue of our magazine looked familiar enough to me to recall that sometime in March of '68, our flame tank, "Crispy Critters," was ordered to relieve the flame tank, "Cremator," that was standing guard at the Washout because their quarterly PM was due to be performed at the 3rd Tank Maintenance Facility at Dong Ha. Our tank's first night at the Washout was pretty boring so after a most "excellent" evening chow of cold C-rations, I moseyed over to the gun tank that was in their tank slot which was behind our position and across the main road. My buddy from 5th Tanks, Dan "Mac" McCarney, was one of the crew members and I wanted to catch up with him. After meeting the crew, one of them mentioned that the bunker next to the tank slot was having a party and that we should partake. The bunker in the photo was most likely that same party bunker. Since the statute of limitations has long expired, I can freely admit that there was more than beer or whisky being consumed during the "party" and afterward it took me about an hour to negotiate my way back across the road to my tank which was maybe 50 yards away. At one point, as I walked in what I thought was the correct direction ... all of a sudden, I bumped into the perimeter barbed wire. Two grunts on a fighting hole nearby yelled at me, "Hey! Get the f*ck away from the wire!" I am sure that I had a look of fright on my face as I turned around and stumbled back to "Crispy Critters."

The Recent Sponson Box

Adam Zlotek writes: Thanks for publishing my story in the Sponson Box. As I went through the article, I noticed that my e-mail was missing a letter. The e-mail printed was agold19@gmail.com it should have been azgold19@gmail.com. If you want to make the change, I would appreciate it.

Reed Bolick writes: Sorry that I missed this year's reunion, but I was scheduled for my second open heart surgery and could not travel. I am now in post-op recovery and doing very well.

I received the latest edition of the Sponson Box while I was in the hospital, but I wasn't able to really read it due to all the drugs that I was on. Yesterday Tom Kelly called me to ask if I had seen the pictures on Page 44. I said no, but I had the Sponson Box beside me and took a look.



Much to my surprise, I saw a picture of my first tank crew when I had 2nd Platoon, 1st Tank Bn. In the picture are: L/Cpl Gonzales (top), Cpl McKnight (left middle), 2/Lt Bolick (right middle) and PFC Logan (head cut off bottom center).

This was the C-21 crew with Gonzales as driver, McKnight as gunner, and Logan as loader. This C-21 was named "Spanish Fly" and the platoon was named the "Death Dealers." Later on, we received "new" R&E tanks and our four tanks were re-named (roughly) after the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Death, Doom, Disaster, & Disease. C-21 became "Death" and all of the "new" vehicles' Xenon searchlight covers were white with a black ace of spades with a "2" in the middle. Thanks for another GREAT edition of the Sponson Box! Keep them coming!

Dave Zaslow writes: Nice photo in the current Sponson Box. Thanks for sharing. I will not tell anyone. I should have also mentioned how fine an issue you all put out this month. It is nothing short of magnificent. It is definitely the best of the best.

Marcia Falk writes: Just received the Sponson Box and love the cover photo. Steve would remind me of this >>

truth and moto often. How could it be differently? I honor him to this day and all of the Marines I know, young and old. I'm happy knowing that the Colorado reunion was fantastic. Gail Zuley kept me posted. Congrats to you and all who helped make it so special and memorable. Thanks for all you do for your brother Marines. God bless you.

Laura Riensche writes: When I read Mary Beth Griffith's note about her husband, Jeff Griffith... where she ref-



erences the photograph that she has of him that taken on the "Bodacious Bastard", I became curious. I am going to attach the information that Jerry Clark had from way back in 1999, which was sent to us by Wanda, his widow.

As I understand it, retrievers, as with other tanks, often had something written on them. My husband, Harold's retriever was B-43 while he was on his second tour from July 1968 – August 1969. In December 1964 he floated over to Okinawa compliments of the US Navy and began what was to be a year on Okinawa with 3rd Tanks. But as things heated up in S.E. Asia, he first went with a contact team into Vietnam and then back to Okinawa to pack out when all of 3rd Tanks entered Vietnam in March 1965. He returned to

the USA in late January 1967. So, we think he probably was not there when Jeff was. But perhaps what I have attached will help her.

One thing for sure, anyone who would try to demean another's service in war – no matter what their MOS might have been – doesn't know what they are talking about. None were spared the rats, heat, monsoon rains, incoming artillery, trips outside the wire to repair or recover broken down equipment.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged." Matthew 7:1

Ed Hiltz writes: The most recent S-Box – I totally agree with Mike Giovinazzo who writes about how much work is put into the Sponson Box. I also LEND out my copies to other Marines ... BUT I MAKE SURE they are returned. They all remark how much they like and enjoy it. John: I also remembered F-4's flying at tree top level and I could actually see their faces.

And lastly, I was talking to Harry Christensen via phone. He's sending me a copy of his book "Murder in Marblehead." It's an interesting story.

Harry C. Christensen writes: I read with interest your comments regarding your "first Phantom." The first time I saw one of these "fast movers" I was at my guard post, Camp Carroll as an FNG. The plane rolled over; I was sure it was going to crash as it flew by the valley. I ran back to my T.C. to report. He said "You stupid F.N.G., what you witnessed was a Victory Roll!"

The last time I saw two I was lying in a ditch on 24 January 1968 as they hit NVA positions around the ambush site. The napalm was dropped so close I could smell the gasoline. The bombs so close I was nearly blown from the ditch. THEY GOT SOME!!!

I was also moved by the comments written by Mary Beth, regardless of his MOS, Jeff Griffith was a Bravo Tanker, my brother.

Judy Aitkin, the wife of Lee: John, you are amazing! What the VTA does for our boys. In the 2 reunions Lee and I have attended, I saw events where our Marines who have served in the military and sacrificed for our country have a chance to come together to share their experiences while they were in their tanks. I can see how important it is to the Marines who attended. They have enjoyed getting together again, they made new friendships and healed from past experiences. It was amazing to hear them share stories and memories. I could see the importance of these connections. It is a healing experience for them.

It helped me, hearing other stories, learning more about what went on in Vietnam. The get together with the wives was also a great experience, I enjoyed meeting and talking with all of them.

Your set up of everything was perfect. The hotel food was delicious, and rooms were large and comfortable. The WW-2 Museum of Flight was incredible. We have to go back and see everything that we missed. Having lunch after

in the Airplane Restaurant was brilliant after the tour. The day Pikes Peak experience couldn't have been better, with the fresh fallen snow and getting to see the kids coming up from their 13 mile hike up and a clear, bright day.

How clever it was to think up the Purple Hearts for the tank injuries. The Farewell banquet was wonderful, perfect guest speaker, the Fallen Heroes presentation was heart-breaking but poignant.

I don't know how you did it, but you pulled it off perfectly. Nothing could have been better. We want to thank you for all you did, we know what a tremendous amount of work to put something like this together and you did an extremely good job. Looking forward to next year. Again, Thanks. Lee & Judy Aitken



Pool Tank



Sgt Grits

John Wear writes: I have been a friend of Dan Whitton, the original Sgt Grit, for several decades. For several of the early past USMC VTA reunions, Don would send two young ladies to run a Sgt Grit-sponsored PX during our reunions. For our shopping pleasure they provided us with



a very large amount of USMC merchandise for our 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 reunions. When Don decided to retire and sell his company, he ceased shipping merchandise to our reunion locations. He and I now exchange emails quite often. After the recent Colorado Springs reunion, I commented that I had worn the first reunion commemorative t-shirt that his company produced for us. He asked me to take a photo and share it with him. Here it is below.

Lore of the Corps



A US Marine attached his lucky horseshoe to his helmet and it actually did turn out to be lucky. It blocked a Japanese bullet, as can be seen in this photo, and saved his life during WW2 in Okinawa, 1945.

Tom Howe writes:

Do you know the name Ed Sutton? His name came up as a Vietnam Tanker. I believe there is an Ed Sr, and an Ed Jr, are both Marines, one WW2, one Vietnam. I will be seated at a table with an Ed Sutton, a tanker, at a Montford Point Marine Association Dinner in Atlanta on Saturday, October 21st.

Time does fly, how I became 81 years old is beyond me. When I look back at my six years active duty, the only fun I really had was on our Caribbean Cruise, where we were deployed with 2/8. We were left alone, and we actually enjoyed what we did, punctuated with a lot of laughter, after that Vietnam was ramping up and the fun was replaced by dead serious.

John Wear replies: Hey Tom! It is good to hear from you. I am sorry that you missed a truly great reunion in Colorado Springs. The next one is in San Diego in 2025. Hopefully you'll be able to make that one.

With regard to Ed Sutton: The name does not ring a bell. If, in fact, you are going to rub elbows with him next month, you really should not only inform him of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. but you should get his mailing address so we can send him a "recruiting package" that will include a copy of our Sponson Box magazine and a membership application. OK???

Speaking of "getting old." I often hearken back to when I was a "young and stupid" corporal in Vietnam, looking at the 35-year-old "lifer" SSgts and Gunnies and thinking to myself, "I will never be that old!!!" Now my grandkids are approaching that age!!!

Tom replies: Thanks for the quick response, I will certainly recruit Ed Sutton, as evidently, he was a Vietnam Tanker. I will update you after our meeting. I will bring a copy of the Sponson Box with me.

My being the Chief of Staff to a Montford Point Marine and former US Ambassador keeps me too busy. He throws projects my way on a weekly basis. The most recent, there is a Montford Point Plaque at Arlington Cemetery, and he feels that this plaque belongs at Parris Island instead, where it would be seen by many more people. So, he wants me to discuss this with the CG at Parris Island. I also arrange all his domestic travel, and join him on many of his trips.

In that it's a now paying job, between him and my now 14-year-old daughter, I am spending money faster than a drunk sailor. But have friends in San Diego so the 2025 reunion may work well for us.

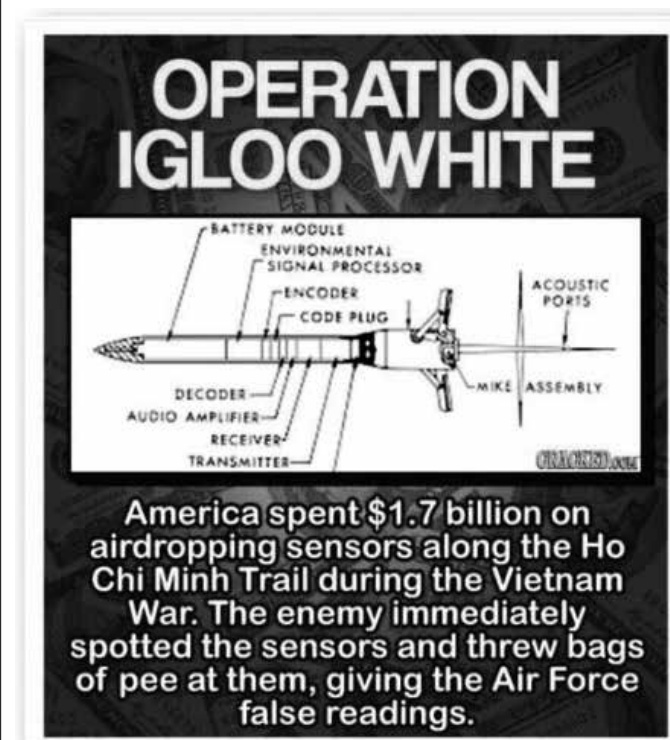
Tom Fenerty Writes:

Coins on a tombstone—What does each coin represent? Each coin left at the grave of a veteran, whether a penny, nickel, dime or quarter, has a special significance.

- Quarter – A quarter on a grave means that the person who left it there was with the fallen soldier when they died.
- Dime – A dime on a grave means that the two served together at some point in their careers.
- Nickel – A nickel on a grave means that the person who left it there trained with the deceased, usually at boot camp.
- Penny – A penny on a grave means that a fellow serviceman or woman has recently stopped by to pay their respects, whether or not they knew them personally.

People sometimes leave challenge coins in particular at military headstones. Usually displaying the emblem of a particular military unit, comrades of the late soldier will leave these special coins as a sign that they will never forget their brother or sister-in-arms.

A Legacy of the Vietnam War



Costing between \$1 and \$1.7 billion to design and build (and another billion dollars per year to operate over the five-year life of the operation) and possessing and controlling some of the most sophisticated technology in the Southeast Asia theater, the effectiveness of Igloo White remains in question.

The Reunion in Colorado

Armando Moreno writes: I wish you hadn't put together such a great event. We are now home, back to my walk and working on my yard, etc. The problem is I am depressed because deep inside I had such a great time that I didn't want it to end. I want to be with you, Gill, Bob P, Rick, and the rest of the gang. Every day was exciting, it was new and the friendships, Harris, his friend, Mike, The Hoopman's. My Hermano, to be so connected and be with you all, it's hard to describe. My wife loved the whole gang. The people that ran the Slopchute, God bless them, working so hard, so we would not be without. I want to say that I neglected to stand up and thank the association for sending flowers to my wife in May, as she was recuperating from a medical procedure. That sealed the deal for me, I decided then, that I had to be in Colorado and support you, the Board and the rest of our Marine Tankers. We are so happy and proud to have been part of this experience and it will be a memory that we will always cherish. The KIA challenge coin presented by Rick is like no other. God Bless, Semper Fidelis, Armando

Bob Haller writes: Outstanding week! Amazing! Good memories! Thank you!

Glenn Hoopman writes: As attendees, we can clearly tell that major preparations took place to make this & previous reunions a success. The side trips were great. The bus drivers were very professional. It was an all-around blast for everyone that I've spoken to. I do hate it when it's over. The time flew by so quickly & that hotel was awesome. It's going to be hard to duplicate or beat that hospitality in the future.

If you and your wife haven't yet gone on the Royal Gorge Trip—you should book it & surprise her. The meal was fabulous. I had a beef brisket sandwich (excellent) with awesome fries. Impeccable service there, also.

The "Purple Heart" presentation was great & definitely catching a lot of folks off-guard. You had to have individuals rounded up to get their presentation. Of course, it was the "element of surprise." The one lady gave me a big hug & said that she & her husband would think of me every time they viewed them. Walley Young stated, "I always wanted a Purple Heart!" So, in that sense I feel it was very successful & rewarding! You are very welcome, too.

Dan Starks really caught everyone's attention when he vividly talked about the war that we fought in S.E. Asia! Just amazing how he can speak without any notes or a teleprompter. What a great patriot, too!

In the near future I'll send you an email about my life before & after 'Nam. It's interesting.....

Glen adds: I also have a little story (I think that's worth repeating) that occurred while a group of us USCM VTA reunion Marines went on the tour to the Royal Gorge in

Canon City, CO. On Sunday Sept.17th a tour bus picked us up with our wives from the hotel and we traveled about an hour & a half to catch the Royal Gorge Train. They placed us in a very elegant rail car which was lined with oak & copper panels & had a bar inside it.

As we were being seated a gentleman came through the car with his wife & seeing we all had our Marine reunion name badges displayed, he began shaking all our hands & thanking us for our services in Vietnam. Shortly thereafter one of the servers stated that the man who had introduced himself & thanked us for our service had donated \$200 for drinks for us.

After traveling into the gorge, we met with this gracious fellow in an open car while taking pictures of the beautiful sights along the Arkansas River. His name is Paul Dolle. He is from Gravette, Arkansas. He mentioned that he has many vehicles & military weapons that he has purchased & restored. It was a great experience talking with him and his wife, knowing we still have support from other American Patriots.

P.S. Paul would be elated if he received a Sponson Box with this Thank-you note enclosed.

Dick Hecox adds: Didn't make the 2023 reunion—too many irons in the fire and couldn't be gone that long. Question—can you send me an email address or phone # for Jim Coan? I read his books—it appears he was my replacement in Alpha 3d Tanks and I want to pursue it. ■



First picture is from inside the rail car & the second is with Paul Dolle in the middle of Gil Hernandez on the left and Armando Moreno on the right.



Guest Opinion

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 thinks that they may be offended by what is 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

Compass Points–MATT-V?

MOBILE, ARMORED, PROTECTION FOR MARINES

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

Since 1775, the iconic image of the American Marine has been the Marine. Compass Points is an independent resource library focused on the Marine Corps and national security. The goal of Compass Points is to be an independent voice for a stronger Marine Corps.

It is well known, that a few years ago, the Marine Corps decided the M1 Abrams tank, the most powerful tank in the world, was too heavy for the Marine Corps. Now, it seems, the Army agrees with the Marine Corps.

As reported in Breaking Defense and elsewhere, the Army announced plans, "to design a more survivable, lighter tank that will be more effective on the battlefield at initial fielding, and easier to upgrade in the future."

Over the years, the Abrams tank has grown heavier and heavier. Still, the death of the tank on the battlefield has been greatly exaggerated. Nothing on the battlefield has the combination of speed, protection, and firepower that a tank has.

The Army is working with General Dynamics to create an upgraded tank that is lighter. General Dynamics has called one demonstration model of the new tank the Abrams X,

"[The Army has] been concerned about the weight class of the Abrams SEPv3... that is pushing 76 to 78 tons combat loaded," Scott Taylor, the company's director for US business development, told Breaking Defense during a March 21 interview. He noted that the new technologies for the SEPv4 will push that weight "slightly higher."

"What 76 and 78 [ton] tanks do to the military is challenge its logistical supplies, its ability to get across bridging in many of the countries that we might be called upon to fight in and, so, specifically [the] Abrams X was meant to stimulate the conversation about what the zone of the possible would be to lighten the tank, integrate hybrid-electric drive capability and technology to produce silent mobility and silent watch capability, substantially increasing the... lethality of that platform," Taylor said.

What the Marine Corps may need is not the Abrams M1A3 or the Abrams X, or even South Korea's spectacular and expensive

tank, the K2 Black Panther. What the Marine Corps may need is the Army's M10 Booker Combat Vehicle.

Writing for Military.com, Adrian Bonenberger reports:

"The M10 Booker is an armored vehicle that is intended to support our Infantry Brigade Combat Teams by suppressing and destroying fortifications, gun systems and trench routes, and then secondarily providing protection against enemy armored vehicles," said Maj. Gen. Glenn Dean, program executive officer of Army Ground Combat Systems.

The Army does not want to call the M10 Booker a light tank, maybe the Marine Corps should do the same. The day will come when the Marine Corps will activate the Combat Development process to find a direct fire, mobile armored vehicle that Marines can use on the battlefield. Any Marine commander today could submit a Universal Needs Statement to the Marine Corps Combat Development Command at Quantico. What the Combat Development process might reveal, after investigation and experimentation, is that Marines on the ground, in a difficult battle, like the one in Ukraine, need some kind of tracked, armored vehicle. Perhaps the Marine Corps should call the Marine version of the M10 Booker, the MATT-V, Marine Armored, Tracked, Tube, Vehicle.

For a century, the combination of infantry and armor on the battlefield has been powerful. Nothing can screen, guard, and cover for infantry like a tank. Marines used tanks in the battle at Guadalcanal, in Korea, in Vietnam, and in the desert. Today tanks are crucial for both sides in the fighting in Ukraine. The Marine Corp cannot rely on tanks from the Army. The Army does not budget for tanks for the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps does not train with Army tank units. The Army does not even supply tanks for any Marine CAX at 29 Palms.

Sometimes tanks are thought of as slow and ponderous, but speed on the battlefield is relative. Tanks provide speed on the battlefield to dismounted infantry. While it is true, that precision weapons, drones, and munitions of all sorts make tanks a target today, tanks have always been a target. Down through the

decades, one tank killing weapon after another has been developed. But just as anti-tank weapons evolve, tanks also evolve. The tank killing weapons never quite become all that was promised. What never seems to change, however, is the need infantry under fire have for an armored vehicle that can screen, guard, and cover.

The Marine Corps earned its reputation as America's 9–1–1 force because it could arrive at a crisis with the full combined arms package to immediately deter, assist, or attack. Unfortunately, America's 9–1–1 force is more reputation today, than reality. Too much has been removed from Marine Corps combined arms combat power. When Marines in battle need help, they

call for air, artillery, combat engineers, and armor – always armor. Call it a tank, call it the MATT-V, call it anything at all, but before Marines on the next battlefield call for help, it is time now to rebuild the full package of combined arms, so that, once again, the 9–1–1 reputation of Marines is reality..



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 thinks that they may be offended by what is 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.

Don't Forget the Vietnam War

FIFTY YEARS AGO, WE LEARNED HOW NOT TO FIGHT A WAR;
THOSE LESSONS STILL APPLY.

BY JACK DEVINE – FEBRUARY 9, 2022

This past January 27 was the 49th anniversary of the Peace Accord that officially ended America's engagement in the Vietnam War. It's no surprise that the anniversary was largely unnoticed — Vietnam was the hated war we've been trying to forget for all these years.

Never forget it. There are 58,276

names engraved on the long, black granite Wall that is the central feature of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC — names of the fathers, sons, brothers, and loved ones who never came home.

The underlying details reveal the depth of our loss. Over 41,000, seven of every 10 fatalities, were teenagers.

Eight were women, all nurses (in those years, women did not have the privilege — or burden — of serving in combat). The Vietnam War dead include every color, creed, and ethnicity. All were lives cut tragically short. Half a century later, the wounds are still deep.

The horror of the Vietnam >>

War is not at all unique. Every war savages both combatants and society at large. But now more than ever, as storm clouds form over Ukraine and Taiwan, the lessons of our Vietnam experience deserve serious attention.

The Slippery slope.

It's far easier to get into a shooting war than to back out of one. An uncommitted president can lead an uncommitted nation down that garden path with little appreciation for its ultimate consequences.

I've often wondered if the national nightmare of Vietnam would have been averted had President Kennedy not been assassinated. JFK initially supported our military presence in Vietnam, and he'd dispatched about 30,000 U.S. troops there. But in the months before his untimely death, there were indications that Kennedy had become increasingly wary of the chaotic and seemingly uncontrollable circumstances in that region.

By that time, Kennedy's foreign affairs mettle had been forged by the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile crises; in both cases he'd learned to push back hard on his military and civilian advisers.

Not so his successor. Lyndon Johnson repeatedly acquiesced to Defense Department pressure and over time increased U.S. military presence in Vietnam to more than 500,000 troops. By the time Johnson's presidency ended, we were hopelessly entangled.

The power — and price — of protest.

I still gag whenever I read that Vietnam War protesters stopped the war. They didn't — they protracted it, at a hideous cost.

The pivotal battle of the Vietnam War was the Tet offensive early in 1968, the NVA's last ditch, go-for-broke effort to turn the tide against superior American forces. They failed; we won that battle decisively, on all fronts.

But the American press, in tune with the growing anti-war sentiment at home, portrayed Tet as a serious and worrisome setback. The NVA was paying attention as well. They understood the political power of the American anti-war movement and recognized that what they could not win on the battlefield could ultimately be won at the negotiating table. After Tet, they elected to continue the fight in ways that would steadily sap America's will to keep going.

Their attrition strategy worked. The war slogged on for another five long years, and in that time another 38,000 Americans — nearly two-thirds of the names on the wall — were killed in action.

Our sacred American right to protest carries with it enormous responsibility. But in the years since Vietnam, instead of exercising that right with restraint, we've sharpened our protesting tactics. Time and again, well-orchestrated "mostly peaceful"

protests have sown violence, death, destruction, economic disruption, and social discord across the American landscape.

Necessity of the will to win.

The Vietnam peace process was a charade — five years of tedious, fruitless blather in Paris while combatants and civilians half a world away bled and died. Meanwhile, we hampered our own forces with arbitrary war-fighting constraints that put them in danger and prevented decisive victory.

Only in late 1972, when we accepted the reality that it would take extreme military pressure to break the logjam, did we make progress. The notorious Christmas bombing of previously off-limit targets in Hanoi — unleashing our own brand of wartime terror — finally precipitated a viable cease fire agreement. And even that was hardly a win; Americans came home, but we abandoned our South Vietnamese allies. The inevitable end came two years later with the fall of Saigon.

Today, we don't know if Russia's and China's saber-rattling will lead to war. If hostilities erupt and if we are drawn in — both to be avoided if at all possible — our leaders must hold fast to those hard-won lessons from Vietnam: get the public on board, commit to clear and achievable objectives, turn our military loose to achieve those objectives, and stay the course. ■

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

"The brave die never, though they sleep in dust, their courage nerves a thousand living men." — Minot J Savage

Chester "Chet" Ruby 1948 – 2023



Chester "Chet" Lee Ruby Jr., age 75, of Darlington, Maryland was born on June 24, 1948, and passed away on Wednesday, August 23, 2023. He was the beloved husband of Margaret Anne. He is survived by his beloved wife, four children and 12 grandchildren. Chet served in the US Marine Corps and was a tank crewman with Bravo Co, 3rd Tank Battalion in 1967 – 1968 in Vietnam. He was a proud member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

Chet's widow, Margaret adds: On July 14, 2023 little did I know that at 5:15 pm my life would be forever changed. That's when Chet had a stroke with a brain bleed.

Five and a half weeks later Chet went to hospice and passed two days later. I lost my husband, best friend, and the love my life that night. And thank you so much for the beautiful flowers that you sent me.

John Michael Studenka 1949 – 2023

With heavy hearts, we announce the death of John Michael Studenka (Carlsbad, California), who passed away on September 12, 2023 at the age of 74. Family and friends are welcome to leave their condolences on this memorial page and share them with the family. He was a career USMC tank officer and a member of the board of the Marine Corps Tankers Association. Unfortunately, he never joined the USMC VTA.

Harry Otto Roemer 1945–2023

Harry Otto Roemer was born August 4, 1945, in Carmine, Sandtown, Texas, the youngest of 5 children born. He graduated from Reagan High School class 1963. He worked at his cousin's "Veteran Trim Shop" until he went into the US Marines where he served in Viet Nam 1965–1967 where he became an ONTOS commander.

Upon returning to Houston, he started working for Southwestern Bell Telephone Co which became AT&T as a technician. There he met M Darlene Hobby and they wed Nov 7, 1970. He retired after 38 years due to a company buyout.

After many years of sicknesses Harry made one final move to be with Jesus Nov 2, 2023. Unfortunately, Harry never joined the USMC VTA.

"Doc" Hackemack alerted us to Harry's passing and has written a story that appears in the Short Stories in this issue of our magazine.

Your Attention Please!

We would greatly appreciate it that if you recognize a name in the obits that you, please send us an email note or give us a phone call telling us about 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.



V. A. News & Updates

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

Vietnam War Veterans Health Issues

- **Diseases related to Agent Orange:** The toxic chemical used to clear trees and plants can cause long-term health effects.
- **Hepatitis C:** This disease can harm your liver.
- **Hearing problems caused by noise:** Harmful sounds from guns, explosives, rockets, heavy weapons, jets and aircraft, and machinery can cause or add to hearing loss and ringing in the ears.
- **Illnesses or injuries caused by job-related hazards:** You may have come across chemicals, paints, radiation, and other hazards.
- **Mental health conditions and PTSD:** Veterans who served in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos during the Vietnam War have a higher prevalence of mental health issues, particularly PTSD, compared with both other Vietnam-era Veterans and non-Veterans.

What you can do now

Take these steps to make sure you're taking care of your health:

1. **Get your toxic exposure screening.** This makes your VA health care team aware of any potential exposures to toxins during your military service.
2. Talk to your primary health care provider or your **local VA environmental health coordinator** about other health concerns related to your military service. Remember, you can use **Secure Messaging** (sign in required) to send a private note to your doctor if you have any questions or worries.
3. Ask your local VA environmental health coordinator about getting a free **Agent Orange Registry health exam**.
4. Find out if you can get benefits from any illness or injury caused, or made worse, by your active-duty service, such as illness-related to **Agent Orange** or contact with **hazardous materials**.

Be sure your doctor knows if you have a history of Agent Orange exposure. Because of the possibility of increased cancer risk, your doctor may suggest cancer screening tests and to report any symptoms as soon as they appear.

Expanded eligibility and benefits through the PACT Act

The PACT Act expands eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras. The PACT Act also

added 2 new Agent Orange presumptive conditions, 5 new Agent Orange presumptive-exposure locations, and 3 new radiation presumptive-exposure locations for Vietnam Era Veterans. To see a complete list of the new presumptive conditions and locations, visit The PACT Act and your VA benefits.

With a My HealtheVet Premium account, you can send your health care team a Secure Message to discuss any possible toxic exposure in your service history.

New VA Identification Card

"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. Dated 04/05/23

Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife)

The VA's newest whole life insurance program that offers cash value and very competitive premium rates. Enrollment opens on Jan. 1, 2023, for all service-connected Veterans age 80 and under.

1. Who is eligible for VALife?

Veterans age 80 or under with any level of service-connected disability (0-100%) are eligible to apply at any time. Veterans age 81 or older may also apply for VALife within

two years of receiving notification of a new service-connected disability if they:

- Applied for a new VA rated disability before age 81, and
- Received a new service-connected disability after turning 81

2. How do I apply for VALife?

The VALife application goes live on Jan. 1, 2023, at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp>. The application process is completely online, and Veterans will receive an automated instant decision about their eligibility for the program. If accepted into the program, Veterans can enroll and manage most aspects of their VALife policy online.

3. What coverage does VALife offer?

VALife offers up to \$40,000 in coverage, available in \$10,000 increments. There are no medical exams or health questions for enrollment. The policy has cash value that builds over time after the first two years of enrollment.

4. How much are VALife monthly premium rates?

A full breakdown of VALife monthly premium rates by age can be found here: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife-rates.asp>

VALife premium rates are competitive—or better than—similar programs offered by the private sector. Premiums are based on age upon enrollment and coverage amount selected. Current medical condition(s) or gender are not factored into premium rates. Once enrolled, premiums will never increase on the coverage selected. If coverage is increased in the future, rates will be based on age at that time.

5. Why is there a two-year waiting period for VALife coverage to take full effect?

The two-year waiting period eliminates the need for applicants to answer health questions or provide proof of good health to be eligible. This waiting period ensures access to guaranteed acceptance whole life insurance for more Veterans than ever before.

6. Do I have to pay monthly premium rates during the two-year waiting period for my VALife coverage to take effect?

Yes, Veterans must pay premiums during the two-year waiting period. If the Veteran dies during the two-year waiting period, all premiums paid plus interest will be paid to their designated beneficiary. The full face value of the policy will be paid to the beneficiary after the two-year period. Veterans who pay premiums directly, rather than by deduction from their compensation or military retirement or checking account, have the option to pay premiums annually.

7. How does VALife coverage compare to similar private sector programs?

VALife's maximum coverage of \$40,000 is greater than what's offered by many similar guaranteed acceptance whole life insurance programs in the private sector. The cost per \$1,000 is very competitive or less than similar products, providing savings to Veterans. >>

8. Can I switch from my current VA insurance program to VALife? Can I be enrolled in VALife and another program at the same time?

Veterans currently enrolled in Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance (S-DVI) may either keep that coverage or switch to VALife when the application goes live:

- If you have S-DVI and submit your VALife application on or before Dec. 31, 2025, then by law, you may only keep your S-DVI coverage for two years. When the two-year period concludes, your S-DVI coverage ends, and the full VALife coverage amount takes effect. Any cash value from your S-DVI coverage will be paid to you or can be applied toward your VALife premiums.
- If you have S-DVI and submit your VALife application on or after Jan. 1, 2026, then by law, your S-DVI coverage ends on the day you enroll in VALife.

However, you will still need to wait two years before your full VALife coverage amount takes effect. Eligible Veterans currently enrolled in Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) may have both VGLI and VALife coverage. Veterans can also be enrolled in Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) or other VA insurance coverage and VALife at the same time. By law, only S-DVI and VALife is an either/or choice.

9. Does VALife also cover family members?

VALife does not cover spouses or dependents of eligible Veterans.

10. Is there a premium waiver option for VALife?

No, by law, there is no premium waiver option for VALife.

More information

To learn more about VALife, visit the program website here: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp>.



MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM

MVP is one of the most diverse programs of its kind in the entire world. Regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, abilities, conditions, exposures, illnesses, or service eras—we want MVP to help every single veteran. As we near the million-veteran milestone, we are doubling down on our efforts to ensure MVP is representative of all veterans. More participants from all backgrounds means more opportunities to find positive, real-world applications to improve Veteran health care in clinical settings for every veteran.

Making Research Matter

The goal for our research—made possible by you—is to help doctors find new ways to detect, prevent, and treat health conditions that matter to Veterans, including different types of cancers, heart disease, mental health, and more. The PACT Act recently expanded VA health

care and benefits for Veterans with military exposures; at MVP, we're gearing up to study how these exposures may affect health.

Your contribution also helps us positively affect health care nationwide. MVP's research will assist in the Cancer Moonshot initiative, aiming to cut the death rate from cancer by at least 50% over the next 25 years. Your involvement in this program will help improve health care for all Americans and all veterans, including better screenings for diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia, earlier detection for various cancers, and preventive strategies for conditions like PTSD and traumatic brain injuries.

Please join today!!! You can make a difference!!!

Visit mvp.va.gov to join today

Questions? Call 866.441.6075 ■



Special Stories

"Tree" Reports on the USMC VTA History Project Podcast Program

Once again, I am providing a routine update on our Tracking Our History Podcast. The latest episodes are available for your listening pleasure. The episodes are entitled Grunts to Tankers. Three tank Platoon Commanders talk about their 90+ days as grunt Platoon commanders before they came to 3rd Tank Battalion. These Tank Officers discuss their time on Mutters Ridge as well as their time as tank platoon commanders. You can listen to these at www.usmcvtta.org and/or Google podcast, Apple podcast, Spotify, Pocketcast, or any podcast application. We have over 30 podcasts from our VTA family. We have two podcasts awaiting recording, editing, and production. Our voices reach over 35 countries throughout the world. We have an audience of 15 (regular listeners) and a growing following of 30 people. Each of the podcasts have an average of eight listeners. The VTA membership roster has about 400 members. That means we still have about 300–340 tankers that should be telling their story. Let me assure you that no two stories are alike. When you listen to these podcasts you will find no two stories are the same. We have each experienced the same things but what makes you unique is what YOU saw, what YOU heard, what YOU did and how YOU felt. Our audience shows that there is a great interest in our experiences. People want to know more

and more about the Vietnam War and we are one of the very few groups that allow outsiders to see what really happened. The world wants to know how ordinary men react when faced with extraordinary circumstances.

We are all approaching the age when we begin to think about our own legacy. The single greatest event in your life, the event that shaped who you are today, is most likely your Vietnam experience. There is no greater legacy than leaving your family, your friends, your community and the world that the experiences only you can relay to them.

We have all faced far greater danger than sitting in a comfortable chair in the safety of your living room or den and talking on the telephone for 45 or 60 minutes. This is as easy as qualifying with a sledge hammer.

And so, I issue each and every Marine Tanker the following challenge:

If not YOU, then who?

If not NOW, then when?

Email me (which is preferable) or call me as soon as possible so I can set up the continuing schedule.

Email: fremkiewicz@gmail.com

Or telephone me at 209.848.4433 or 2409.996.8887



Assailant suffers injuries from fall

Orville Smith, a store manager for Best Buy in Augusta, Ga., told police he observed a male customer, later identified as Tyrone Jackson of Augusta, on surveillance cameras putting a laptop computer under his jacket. When confronted the man became irate, knocked down an employee, drew a knife and ran for the door.

Outside on the sidewalk were four Marines collecting toys for the Toys for Tots program. Smith said the Marines stopped the man, but he stabbed one of the Marines, Cpl. Phillip Duggan, in the back; the injury did not appear to be

severe.

After Police and an ambulance arrived at the scene Cpl. Duggan was transported for treatment.

"The subject was also transported to the local hospital with two broken arms, a broken ankle, a broken leg, several missing teeth, possible broken ribs, multiple contusions, assorted lacerations, a broken nose and a broken jaw...injuries he sustained when he slipped and fell off of the curb after stabbing the Marine," according to a police report.

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you identify these two Marines in this photo?

The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 with the right answer will have his name entered into a contest for a chance to win a yet un-named mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner was **Wally Young** who called at 1:52 PM on Saturday, October 7, 2023 to identify a very young **Dave Zaslow**.

Wally said, "I know that's Dave Zaslow, my first tank commander, when we were both at 2nd Tanks at Camp Lejeune in 1965."



Above & Beyond

Recognizing those members that have made financial contributions above and beyond their normal membership dues to help our organization grow and prosper.

Last	First	Last	First	Last	First	Last	First
Arena	John	Fierros	Robert	MacKensie	James	Schwartz	Ralph
Barnhouse	Robert	Fischer	Michael	Maddox	Gerald	Scott	Donald
Bartashus	Vincent	Fuentes Jr.	Ramon	Manson	James	Scrivner Jr.	Douglas
Beirne IV	Richard	Gehrman	David	Martin	Gregory	Shapiro	Myton
Belmessieri	Michael	Goodin	Bradford	Martinez	Freddy	Shaw	Michael
Bennett	David	Griffith	Jeffrey	Mastrangelo	Giuseppe	Shears Jr.	Maxim
Berryhill	Lon	Gulbranson	Robert	McDaniel	Gary	Simpson	Patricia
Bisbee	William	Hackemack	Aubrey	McKnight	James	Singer	Robert
Blanchette	Eddie	Hackett	Timothy	McMath	Phillip	Stayton	James
Blum	Howard	Haller Sr.	Robert	Mefford	Gary	Thompson	Robert
Bores	Kenneth	Hamilka	Richard	Moreno	Armando	Thompson	Ky
Brusha	Joseph	Hancock Jr.	John	Mortensen	Carlton	Thoms	Guy
Bulledge	James	Harper	John	Musser	Charles	Tierney	Edward
Byrne	John	Henderson	Rodney	Nagle	Richard	Traynor Jr.	Andrew
Cartwright	Robert	Hildabrand	Theodore	Nappier	Grady	Trower	John
Castillo	Michael	Hokanson	Carl	Newberry	Craig	Tubbs	Charles
Cerda	Rene	Holston	James	Olenjack	Stanley	Van Apeldoorn	Bruce
Cerone	Edward	Hughes	John	Paragas	Andrew	Vaughn	Michael
Christy	Charles	Hunter	Dana	Parshall	Larry	Voss	Martin
Clavan	Robert	Hunter	Terrance	Patrick	Jimmie	Wahl	Jerry
Cole	Ben	Hurt	Morton	Peavey	Robert	Wahlsten	Bruce
Cramer	Monty	Jacobs	Alonzo	Peterson	Gary	Walters	Rick
Cross	Kenneth	Juare	Guillermo	Pipkin	Michael	Warham	Richard
Danner	David	Kalanick	Ronald	Pozder	Kenneth	Waters	Michael
Davis	William	Kelley	Gregory	Quinter	Kent	Wear	John
Davis Jr.	John	Kellogg	Fred	Raasch	Jim	Williams	Stanley
Devanna	Kristen	Kenna Sr	Jack	Ray	James	Woolever	Joe
Dider	James	Kilgore	Westley	Reish	Thomas	Young	Vernon
Doty	Don	Knight	Ronald	Riensch	Harold	Zayat	Richard
English	Richard	Knox	Clyde	Rose Sr.	George	Zebal	Kenneth
Everest	Guy	Landaker	Joseph	Sanders	Joe	Zitz	Kenneth
Ewers	Douglas	Larsen	James	Sausoman	James	Zlotek Jr.	Adam
Falk	Marcia	Lewis	Rick	Scheurich	Ray	Zobie	William
Fenerty	Thomas	Luli	Roger	Schlieben	George	Zuley	Richard

If perchance we may have inadvertently missed your name, please forgive the oversight and do let us know of the mistake. Again, Thank You!

What Members Are Doing

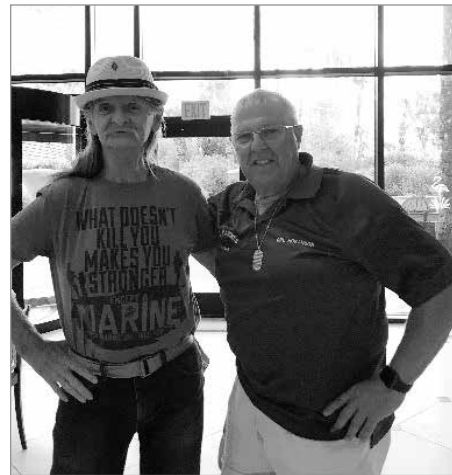
Ed Hiltz sent this to us:



Speaking of Tun Tavern that was in a recent issue of our magazine. On the left, I got a gift today from a Marine gunnery sergeant friend, that lives here in Lewes, Delaware. And on the right is the Gunny. He's 77 years old now. He is also a former drill instructor. Did two tours in Vietnam. He, his brother and I grew up in close proximity in the City of Baltimore. The brother and I used to "swoop" back-and-forth from Camp Lejeune to Baltimore on the weekends. The gunny is in front of an M-48A1 that sits in front of the American Legion Post 28 in Millsboro, Delaware



"Hokey" Reunites with another Marine buddy



Carl Hokanson writes: After 52 years met up with another Marine and USMC Vietnam Tanker member. We were together on a "Ramp Queen" tank back in 1970. That is me on the left and LCpl Lon Berryhill on the right.

The Traveling Wall



Tom Fenerty writes: I went to Kutztown, PA yesterday with my son, Tommy and his son to see the "Wall that Heals." It's a replica of the Vietnam Memorial that travels throughout the US. Tommy's son, Tom Jr. was instrumental in helping planning and

the construction of the wall. I was surprised to see so many school children. It was very impressive.

Ron's '68 Mustang



Ron Kalanick writes: I purchased this beauty in January 1969. The receipt from Ford Motors reads \$3,508.94. I'm the original owner. It is the original color (frost turquoise). I drive it mostly to car shows and cruises with local Mustang Club. Limited driving since restoration, none during the winter. Purchased partially with money saved from Vietnam. Was in pretty sad shape from neglect during and after my cardiac issues.

MOPH Representatives



VTA members Joe Harrigan and Tom Fenerty at the Vets Expo in Bucks County, PA

Bob and Jack's Mini-Reunion after the Colorado Reunion



Bob Haller writes: My wife, Jamy and I joined Jack Byrne and his wife, Janine, at the 1740 House next to the Black Bass Hotel (on the Delaware River in Bucks County, PA) last week, our mini reunion.

A Proud 0353



Armando Moreno shows off his Ontos crewman MOS cover.

WW2 Museum in New Orleans



Bruce Van Apeldoorn sent these WW2 and WW1 tank image to share. He and Nancy were visiting the WW-2 Museum in New Orleans. A few days later, they visited the WW-1 Museum in Kansas City.

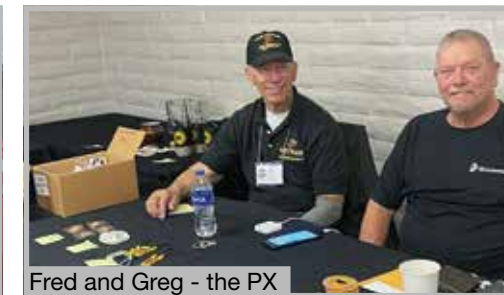
Playing Golf at the US Air Force Academy



Bruce and Greg braved the "thin air" and had a nice time.



Ron and Chris – Welcome table



Fred and Greg - the PX



Doc "Santa" Hackemack



The General Meeting



Bruce gives the financial report



Ben conducts the officer election



Breakfast every morning



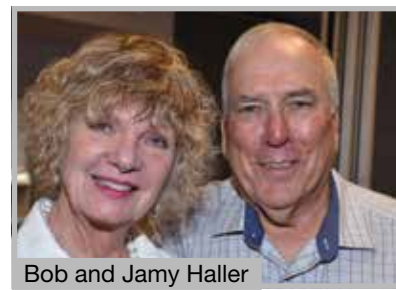
The lady's coffee



The Hildebrand's



The Young Marines visit us



Bob and Jamy Haller



1st Timer Mike Shapiro



Pikes Peak Young Marines "Interview" with USMC Vietnam Tankers Association September 16, 2023 at the Embassy Suites Hotel - Colorado Springs, Colorado.



John, Bill and Bob



1st Timer Jimmie Patrick



Gil with Maria's family

Connie Pitt, the Adjutant of the Colorado Springs Young Marines sent the above photo and this comment: "I just wanted to let you know that our Young Marines had a great time with the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association! I want to truly thank you-all for the 'Passing of the hat. We deposited \$939 in the Wells Fargo Bank!"



Purple Heart recipients



Wally's gold jump wings



The Purple Heart Creator



Jack and Mike reunite after 50+ years



Larry and Rhea



The Castellinos



Nancy's Quilt



Fred Kellog and family



All of the Youngs



Ron Knight family



The Zuleys



Joe and Tracy Tyson and cousin Tim



Ontos crewmen and wives



More Ontos



Good buddies



WW-2 Air Museum



The Kalanicks



On top of Pikes Peak



Craig and Joe



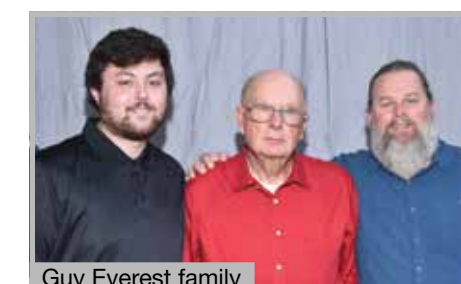
Virgil Melton's family



The John Harper's



Jim and Bonnie Raasch



Guy Everest family



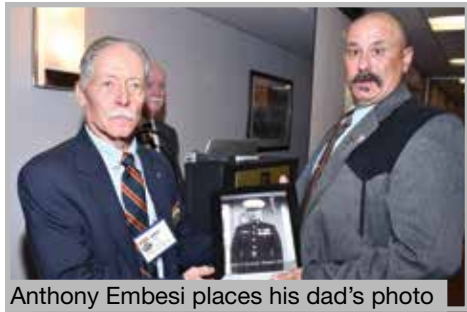
1st Timer Mike Smith

Short Stories

Navajo Code Talkers

BY RICHARD CARMER, USMC VTA

A report on one of the activities of the 2023 VTA reunion in Colorado.



Anthony Embesi places his dad's photo



Guest speaker Dan Starks' swag



Greg Kelley



Lee and Judy Aitkin



Snow in September?



On top of Pikes Peak



Bag piper



Young Marines present the colors



Fallen Heroes Photos



Farewell Dinner

Because I live in Arizona, I have been very involved with the WWII US Marine Navajo Code Talkers for the past few decades. The "Old Breed" Detachment of the Marine Corps League, of which I am a member, involves them in everything we can. As of this writing there are only three of them left. Most of them lived in the "Four Corners" area of NE AZ. Many of them are from Window Rock, AZ. A few buddies and I go up there every year for the "Code Talkers Day." There is a parade, vendor booths, family get-togethers and socializing with these Marine heroes. The following is a story about Joe Kelwood who lived here in Phoenix, he was a friend of mine.

One day, Joe mentioned that he was having trouble with transients (homeless?) intruding on his property. He and his son lived on a piece of land probably 1/2 acre in central Phoenix and at his advanced age, we wanted to give him some peace and safety. His son, a Vietnam veteran, wasn't in the best of shape so we went into action. We measured his land and determined that he needed 130 feet of fencing. We went to Home Depot to get the material and while we were talking about our project, the sales clerk overheard us. When we spoke that the material was for a Code Talker, the clerk wouldn't accept our money. He told us to do something else with our money and that Home Depot was going to supply the fencing material for free. We set up a delivery date and time and we were standing by with our shovels and tools when the Home Depot truck arrived. The delivery guys saw all of us old Marines leaning

on our shovels and said that they had a crew who would be happy to build the fence for us if we wanted. Of course, we wanted them to, so a couple of days later the work party showed up and built a beautiful fence. They said we would have to stain it ourselves but that was okay by me. I volunteered to do the job myself so I could spend a bit more time with Joe. We spent the entire day together and we had a great talking about many things; I still remember that day fondly.

Fast forward a couple of decades

Joe Kelwood. Before I could even finish, he word "Kelwood" she spun around and on the back of her shirt was a logo and photo that read "Proud daughter of Navajo Code Talker, Joe Kelwood." I couldn't believe that she and I were meeting so far from Phoenix. We spent quite a while together talking about Joe. It was an amazing evening, an experience I will never forget. We decided that somehow Joe had somehow managed for us to meet.

I have always admired the Code Talkers. After the war, they were sent home and told not to talk about what they had done. The US Govt. thought that they might be needed again someday and they wanted to keep everything a secret. To my knowledge they never talked about their exploits until a few decades later when permission was finally given for them to speak up. During WWII, after an island was secured, the Marines would go to Hawaii for further training



and to get replacement troops. The Code Talkers weren't given a break; they were simply sent to another island to do it all over again. God bless them one and all. John, if this gets published in the Sponson Box would you please forward a copy to Joe's daughter? Feel free to edit as you see fit as I'm not much of a writer but I wanted to share this story.

Connie Pitt
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The Real Thrills of Pikes Peak Trip

FROM BEN COLE

A report on one of the activities of the 2023 VTA reunion in Colorado.



The 14115-foot summit of "America's Mountain" was the destination of a three-hour round trip cog railroad excursion which started our trips most exciting day since last year's tank rodeo in Wyoming.

It started with the ride to the rail station resulting in a bent bus rear view mirror and broken pine limb before we even left the hotel parking lot. Then a ground guide was required to aid our bus driver to make the tight turns through the streets leading to the station that the other buses had no trouble getting through. Upon arriving at the terminal, a squad of bystanders helped him again after he almost impaled the rear of the bus on a metal fence post. This pleasant but hapless motorist missed his calling, he should have been driving a tank.

But the fun was just beginning as our

group, part of small mass of humanity, were shuffled and funneled into four ample and open train cars with big windows and hard seats. Seated facing stage coach style new friends were made during the next few hours as the cars' gears engaged the center rail and ascended up the scenic mountain. Those seated on the left side of the car had a best view of the of mountains and valleys below in the distance, and those of us in right saw plenty of boulders, trees, a few goats and an occasional rushing stream.

Being pushed nine miles up the mountain, sometimes at a 25% grade, put the test to the recent 100 million buck upgrade, especially on the engine, cars and passengers. After a series of lurches and stops that got everyone's attention, I discretely asked our talkative tour guide

if these were normal occurrences. She quietly told me a new engineer was still learning how drive.

It was a welcome break getting off at the summit with thin air and spectacular view that happened to coincide with the arrival of mountain marathoners finishing their climb to the peak the hard way. I was glad to get back down and back on the bus and see if our other new driver could get us back home without getting stuck or taking out a tree.

After a beer and burger in Old Colorado City, another bus and driver showed it could be done. We got back home safely with vehicle and passengers still intact, with another story for the Sponson Box.

A Reunion Sideline Tour

BY BOB PEAVEY

A report on one of the activities of the 2023 VTA reunion in Colorado.

It was a "On-your-own" afternoon during this year's reunion in Colorado Springs. I was walking across the hotel lobby when I ran into Ben Cole and Greg Kelly. They were getting ready to leave when they kindly asked if I wanted to go see the U.S. Air Force Academy with them; it was only 5 minutes from the hotel. I said I would love to and that I always wanted to see the Cadet Chapel.

On the way over I shared with them what little I knew of the chapel which was built in 1962. It was considered to be one of the ten best architectural pieces in the



US. It dominated the campus. I had seen it only briefly from U.S. I-25 while passing through the Springs 30-years earlier. You couldn't miss it from even four miles away.

We drove onto the campus and rode around looking for the spectacular chapel but with no luck. I was befuddled how we could miss a 14-story, all glass building. The only thing that stood out on the academy grounds was a huge, industrial-looking, white cube with no windows. It looked every bit like a nuclear containment building which seemed out of place on a college campus.

We finally threw up our hands and pulled into one of the many parking lots around the school and decided to hoof it. From the parking lot there were several



pathways converging to a nearby building. It was then that we came crossed paths with a woman walking in the same direction. She was wearing an official looking pass around her neck. I introduced myself and asked her where in the world the cadet chapel was located. With a half

explain that the building had used a lot of asbestos material to seal all the glass panels that made up the entire structure. Workers had to wear Hazmat suits to remove and reseal all the glass panels and fix the resulting water damage. We three Marines were crestfallen. But the woman,

smile and looking at the ground, she apologized for our bad timing. The building was closed and totally enclosed in a containment structure and would be for the next five years. . . the white cube!

She went on to

who turned out to be an Ethics instructor, took pity on us and proceeded to give us a personalized tour of the campus. Her key card got us into places we would have never seen on our own and her knowledge and insights made the tour all that more special.

What struck me most was up on the parade ground in the center of the school. There was a wall embedded with large stainless-steel letters that could not be missed: "A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate anyone who does". I found it to be an inspiration and a far cry from what you see on any other college campus today. It made me proud of the school to see it openly proclaim such a lifestyle of honor. The three of us all agreed that the tour was the highlight of our reunion experience.

Harry Otto "Butch" Roemer

BY GENE "DOC" HACKEMACK

Now that his funeral is over with, I thought that perhaps one or two of you might be interested in this. I actually wrote the article below for the Obituary, so if some of it seems a bit odd, it is directed to the general populace...

NOTE: Over the years, I attempted to get Butch to join the USMCAVTA, however he was a real homebody, tight family man.

Vietnam in mid-1966. While I was a corpsman with USMC Tanks, Butch was a USMC ONTOS driver. This is NOT a tank, but is an ANTI-Tank, with six 106 mm recoilless rockets. Butch's small stature made him a PERFECT Anti-Tank DRIVER! So, we spent a month or two together in Vietnam – accidentally! I will miss Butch very much, and my condolences go out to Darlene and Butch's entire family.

– Nov 2, 2023. For Veteran's Day it seems appropriate to dedicate it to Butch, my life-long buddy. We were in the same class many years in Burton TX. Then we lost track of each other. CAN YOU IMAGINE THE SHOCK – THAT DAY – Hill 55 near Da Nang, Vietnam when this MARINE walked past me, and I hollered "BUTCH"! A CHANCE meeting, worlds apart. His small stature made him an excellent Marine Corps

Harry Otto "Butch" Roemer

My lifelong buddy is now gone. Besides being in the same class many years in Burton, Texas schools, we also had an accidental meeting on Hill 55, South



(L and R) Doc and Harry



HARRY 'BUTCH' ROEMER 1945

ONTOS Driver, an Anti-Tank monster with six 106mm recoilless rockets. I am so glad I snapped these two pictures of him. Now he has left us, may he rest in peace. Aufwiederseh'n Butch.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

SEPTEMBER 06

On September 6, 1915, a prototype tank nicknamed "Little Willie" rolls off the assembly line in England. Little Willie was far from an overnight success. It weighed 14 tons, got stuck in trenches

and crawled over rough terrain at only two miles per hour. However, improvements were made to the original prototype and tanks eventually transformed military battlefields.

The British developed the tank in response to the trench warfare of World War I. In 1914, a British army colonel named Ernest Swinton and William Hankey, secretary of the >>

Committee for Imperial Defense, championed the idea of an armored vehicle with conveyor-belt-like tracks over its wheels that could break through enemy lines and traverse difficult territory. The men appealed to British navy minister Winston Churchill, who believed in the concept of a "land boat" and organized a Land Ships Committee to begin developing a prototype. To keep the project secret from enemies, production workers were reportedly told the vehicles they were building would be used to carry water on the battlefield (alternate theories suggest the shells of the new vehicles resembled water tanks). Either way, the new vehicles were shipped in crates labeled "tank" and the name stuck.



The first tank prototype, Little Willie, was unveiled in September 1915. Following its underwhelming performance—it was slow, became overheated and couldn't cross trenches—a second prototype, known as "Big Willie," was produced. By 1916, this armored vehicle was deemed ready for battle and made its debut at the First Battle of the Somme near

Courcelette, France, on September 15 of that year. Known as the Mark I, this first batch of tanks was hot, noisy and unwieldy and suffered mechanical malfunctions on the battlefield; nevertheless, people realized the tank's potential. Further design improvements were made and at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917, 400

Mark IVs proved much more successful than the Mark I, capturing 8,000 enemy troops and 100 guns.

Tanks rapidly became an important military weapon. During World War II, they played a prominent role across numerous battlefields.

Full Circle

BY FRED CRUZ

Have you ever had one of those moments of clarity? When the sense of changing roles in life hits you with a jolt? Well, I think I had one of those a couple of Saturdays ago. It was after my grandson, Gavin's, birthday party. My nephew Dusty had showed up with his three girls and my niece Hope with her daughter. After the party, everyone came to my house where we visited a while. The energy of 6 kids aged 3 to 7 couldn't be contained inside so naturally we hit the back yard. We sat out back and watched as Dusty and my son, Berry rolled around on the ground and rough-housed and wrestled with the kids. With all the laughing and screaming, it was a real show. Even Hope's "girlie girl" Hanna got in on the act.

As I watched, emotion began to well up inside me. Berry and Dusty had spent over 30 months in Iraq. I couldn't be prouder but I was so scared they wouldn't come back. The relief at seeing them together was overwhelming. I realized that they were doing with their children exactly as I had done with them. I was always rolling on the floor or ground with Berry, Dusty, Chris and Hope and other friends or cousins who might be over at the time. Whenever we were all together, it seemed my place was on the floor with kids crawling over me. It was good. And it was good to see them doing it with theirs.

Then it dawned on me that I was sitting on a bench that my father had built. Daddy had probably sat in the same seat and

watched me "rastle" with kids. And now I was sitting on the same bench watching my kids play with their kids. I hope he felt the same pride and love that I felt.

I experienced a generational shift in roles at that moment—a passing of the baton as it were. And it was good. Tears began to well up and I took a little walk lest I be taken for an old man in his dotage. I'm not quite ready for that yet.

These words seem so inadequate. I'm not sure what I'm trying to express, but I had to try. Getting old isn't so bad I guess but aging really sucks.

Editor's Note: This story first ran in "What Members Are Doing" in the #2 – 2009 issue of our magazine. We thought that it was worthy of a repeat.

What Is a United States Marine?

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

I am 232 years of romping, stomping, hell, death, and destruction. I am the finest fighting machine the world has ever seen. I was born in a bomb crater. My mother was an M-16 and my father is the Devil. Each moment that I live

is an additional threat upon your life.

I am a rough looking, roving soldier from the sea. I am cocky, self-centered, and overbearing. I do not know the meaning of fear for I am fear itself. I am a green amphibious monster made

of blood and guts that arose from the ashes of my enemies, festering on anti-Americans throughout the globe. Whenever it may arise and when my time comes, I will die a glorious and grotesque death on the battlefield,

giving my life for the Corps, Mom, and Apple Pie.

I stole the Eagle from the Air Force, the Anchor from the Navy, and the rope from the Army. Then on the 7th day, while God

rested, I overran His perimeter and took over the Globe and I have been protecting it ever since!

I live like a Soldier, talk like a Sailor, and slap the sh*t out of both of them.

Warrior by day, lover by night, drunkard by choice, and...

MARINE BY THE GRACE OF GOD ALONE!

Writing my Story

BY JOHN WEAR

From my own personal perspective, around 1999, when the VTA had its very first reunion and we voted unanimously to become a real organization, I was somehow able to break out of my (at the time) 30-year-old "post-combat haze" for the first time. Not realizing my own deeply depressed post-traumatic stress had affected my life up until then, one of the reunion attendees said, "Wear, you're f*cked up! You need to see a VA shrink!" And of course, my reply was, "Me? No way!"

But I did what he suggested and started with the DAV indicating that I had a "nervous condition" and receiving the VA paperwork to put in a claim. I did the massive number of forms that was required for an application for a disability review; I saw a VA shrink and I got 70% right out of the chute.

Where I am going with this is that after the VA granted me the disability claim, I realized that a lot of my fears of "reliving" my Vietnam past were probably

not going to happen ... and some of the guilty feelings of "should a – would a – could a" were also mostly simply in my mind. So, I got on my computer and on a Word document, I wrote out a calendar of the months that I was in-country. I then began the arduous task of writing down what I could remember what I did each month of my tour. I more or less did an outline and as stories and events surfaced, I entered them on the Word document. Of course, I skipped back and forth as little nuggets of the different events evolved. There were times when I wrote like crazy and other times where I went many months without writing a single word. The document is now over 200 pages. Going back and reading it while making changes and corrections once in a while is pretty therapeutic for me. The other thing that the Word document did was to help me put "stuff" into perspective. Attending VTA reunions and talking about past events, I find that my original memories are not exactly spot on. Some

of the "horrible" events were not as bad as I seemed to have remembered and there were some hilariously funny events that I had forgotten.

One instance sticks out like a sore thumb. After I got in-country in mid-January 1968, I was sitting at the 3rd Tanks rear in Gia Le / Phu Bai waiting for orders to head north to a tank company. One day the H&S Co. 1st Sgt said, "Wear, get your shit and report to the chopper pad. You're going to Hue." For decades I would have sworn that I was the only non-chopper crewman on that CH-46 Sea Knight heading into the craziness of the 1968 Tet Offensive. Then at the 2011 VTA reunion in San Diego, another attendee (Al Escovall) said to me, "Wear, that's bullshit! I was with you on that chopper!" Son of a gun! All those years, the mind-numbing stress of my first and only ride on a chopper (I hate heights!) and going into my first real combat overrode the reality of the chopper ride!!! ■

JoKe



Invading North Vietnam

An amphibious (and/or land?) invasion into North Vietnam that was planned but never exploited provides surprising insights into the war in Southeast Asia.

Excerpts from Naval History magazine October 2020.

Republished from the Fox 2/5 newsletter provided by VTA member Armando Moreno.



Editor's Note: These photos are from Saigon and Hue City during Tet '68 but you might be able to imagine if they were taken in Hanoi later that same year.

Between 1964 and 1967, North Vietnam and the United States each poured increasing numbers of troops into the war to determine South Vietnam's political future. U.S. commanders sought new ways to ratchet up military pressure on Hanoi. One invasion plan, Operation Butt Stroke, was developed by Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), in 1967. This little-known operational "path not taken" underscores a critical deficiency in allied counter fire capability seldom noted in the war's historiography, and it highlights the self-inflicted limits of the U.S. attrition strategy.

The Tactical Problem

The military situation prevailing along the inaptly named Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Vietnam drove the development of MACV's invasion plans. South Vietnam's five Northern provinces, collectively known as "I Corps" for the Republic of Vietnam Army (ARVN) corps responsible for them, were the scene of the conflict's worst fighting, including a July 1966 invasion by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

By April 1967, intelligence analysts noted three NVA divisions arrayed

along I Corps' northern border, with a fourth located within 20 miles and another pair four to ten days' march away. Facing them were one ARVN division and three infantry battalions of U.S. Marines.

The communist campaign that soon commenced dwarfed the intensity and lethality of the previous year's battles. Fighting broke out across the whole of the DMZ, from the sea to the hills around Khe Sanh.

Throughout the spring and summer, the NVA's artillery attacks intensified; by the end of the year, the communists had fired 42,000 shells along the border. Seventy-five to 100 cannons within or just north of the DMZ delivered almost half of them. Mortars and rockets, mostly fired from positions inside South Vietnam, accounted for the rest. By midsummer, the rain of fire prompted III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) to conclude that "extraordinary measures must be taken".

Butt Stroke

Planners at MACV, U.S. Pacific Command, and the Pentagon proposed an amphibious assault be one of those measures. Marine Corps leaders chafed under the policy constraints

that prevented U.S. ground forces from crossing the 17th parallel to eradicate the enemy's artillery. MACV plans created in 1964 had envisioned establishing an amphibious lodgment near the port of Vinh in North Vietnam. From this enclave, allied forces would either attack key inland political, economic, and military targets; hold or defend them indefinitely to pressure enemy leaders to withdraw their forces from the South; or withdraw upon completion of the intended destruction within the beachhead.

By 1967, MACV planners had more modest goals. They simply sought to eliminate the NVA artillery threat, capture or render unusable enemy supply depots near the DMZ, and destroy as many communist forces as they could. After considering larger and smaller invasions, MACV eventually settled on a mid-sized scheme, Butt Stroke, to neutralize enemy forces operating from the sanctuary north of the Ben Hai River.

Assessing the Plan

Butt Stroke promised a daring strike into one of the enemy's major logistic staging areas that also held a deadly concentration of his artillery. It is unknowable whether the NVA would

have retreated, as it did in the 1969–70 incursions in the A Shau Valley and Cambodia, or fought tooth and nail to protect its supply lines, as it did against ARVN's 1971 attack into Laos to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Insights

The 1967 amphibious plans for invading North Vietnam reveal several important insights about the war. While the tactical justification for the raids was to eliminate the enemy's artillery threat, the operational rationale supported the war's larger attrition strategy. These plans, designed to destroy as many units, weapons, and supplies as possible, were a bid to break northern leaders' will to continue the war.

Second, artillery—the 20th century's great battlefield killer—proved difficult to suppress, despite substantial U.S. technical advantages over NVA gunners. Service, academic, and popular histories of the war have not emphasized this fact. Even a successful Butt Stroke campaign would have provided only temporary relief from the scourge of indirect fire along the DMZ. Hanoi simply could have replaced destroyed artillery units, like its serially wrecked infantry formations, with fresh peasant recruits and new guns provided by its communist superpower sponsors.

Third, both North Vietnamese and U.S. military leaders arrived at similar solutions to breaking the prevailing tactical stalemate in 1967. Each side recom-

mended intensifying the war in the following year. Timing, as always in military affairs, proved crucial. General Westmoreland projected conducting an amphibious raid, in lieu of or in conjunction with efforts to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, in May 1968. Even if the Johnson administration had approved the invasion, its execution would have lagged behind North Vietnam's Tet Offensive, which commenced at the end of January.

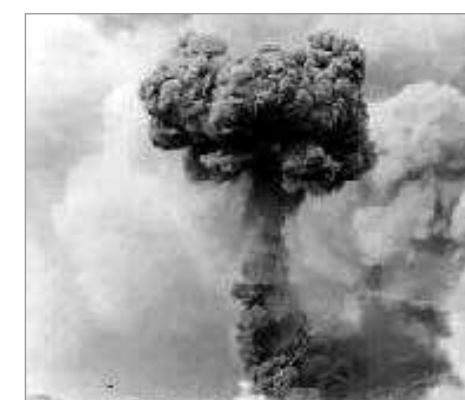
Finally, this case illustrates the wartime debate between U.S. military and political leaders over intensifying the conflict. Senior commanders wanted to increase pressure, while civilian leaders steadily refused to expand the war. Even as Hanoi's politburo approved plans to conduct a general offensive in the south in early 1968, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and President Lyndon B. Johnson rejected aggressive military options such as Butt Stroke. The fate of the shelved 1967 invasion plans foreshadowed the crumbling U.S. commitment to South Vietnam's freedom.

Editor's Note: While I served with 3rd Tanks from January 1968 to February 1969, one of the persistent rumors all during the spring and sum-

mer of 1968 was that the US was going to mass our forces along the southern edge of the DMZ and then launch a large-scale ground attack into North Vietnam. Unfortunately (or fortunately) that major American and allied offensive never happened.

Many years later, while reading the official USMC publication "The US Marines in Vietnam, 1968," I read that somehow the NVA found out about the planned US invasion into their country and so they took their long-range Russian-built 152 mm artillery pieces out of the hiding positions in the mountains just north of the DMZ and moved them several miles closer to the Ben Hai River. That move allowed the artillery fire to get closer to the southern side of the sprawling Dong Ha Combat Base...and within range of the massive ammunition and POL dumps that were housed on the southern perimeter. The enemy then launched an extremely heavy artillery barrage that set those supply dumps on fire and which then burned and exploded for several days. When the smoke cleared, the report indicated that there were not enough bombs, bullets or jet fuel left in the supply depots for the Marines to launch any sort

of an attack on the north. It then took American forces a full two months to back fill the ammo and POL that had been destroyed and any thought of an invasion of the North was forgotten. ■



The Dong Ha Ammo Dump Conflagration 13–15 June 1968



The "Short Time" Invasion of North Vietnam

BY JOHN HUGHES

In March of '68 two large boxes were delivered to the two tanks at the ocean side outpost called "C-4." Surprisingly, these boxes contained fording gear including big stacks and covers and sealant to make the engine water-tight for deep water fording. It was a "What the hell?" moment.

I was the driver of C-21 and Don McMillan was the loader. I cannot remember who our gunner was. I thought Sgt. John Hancock was the Tank Commander but when I spoke with him later, he said he did not remember the incident, so based on my memory alone the tank commander was probably Sgt. Hall. My good buddy Ronnie Ingram was driving C-22 for SSgt Hill, the tank commander. We all spent the day installing this fording equipment. This was a first for at least some of us.

The next morning, we started out

from "C-4" moving north and west from the South China Sea. We took it kinda' slowly as driving with fording gear could cause the drive train to over-heat. The infantry company that was with us was "B" 1/3 and they rode on top of a half dozen amtracs.

It took us between an hour to an hour and a half to arrive at a wide river-stream. It wasn't as wide as the Cua Viet River but it was at least 3 times as wide as the Cam Lo River.

Time to go. Ronnie and I "buttoned up" and prepared to ford. I went first and the other vehicles followed behind me. The water rushing past the vision blocks still haunts my dreams. The fact that the turret was facing backwards which meant I couldn't get out of my compartment the normal way just in case I drove into a hole or the engine just quit and I needed to escape. Luckily, none of that happened.

Once across, we set up a perimeter on the north side of the river. The grunts had a look around and found a small bunker hidden in the tree line. There was nothing in the bunker and it was blown in place. We broke open the C-rations, ate, mounted up, and crossed back over the river and landed back at "C-4."

Nothing else happened. There was no contact. In fact, there was no sign of the NVA, save the bunker. It turned out to be pretty much of a bust.

Were we looking for some sort of enemy information or intelligence or a sign of troop movement? I never knew. The fact is they don't tell Lance Corporals the real dope very often, anyway. Did we in fact cross the Ben Hai River into the North? Damned if I know! There is only one thing I am sure of and that is there no other river north and west of "C-4."

THE POST TURTLE

BY KEN ZEBAL

"WHEN YOU'RE DRIVING DOWN a country road and you see a fence post with a turtle balanced on top, that's a post turtle. You know he didn't get up there by himself. He doesn't belong there; you wonder who put him there; he can't get anything done while he's up there; and you just want to help the poor thing down."



I reported into Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Quantico in February 1972 as a two-hash mark Sergeant who was on the Staff Sergeant promotion list. The Duty NCO got me a rack and wall locker in the NCOs/SNCOs part of Casual Company barracks. It seemed like there were an awful lot of officer candidates departing the program being

billeted there too. Generally speaking, they were the sick, lame and lazy ones on their way back home. I say generally because there were a few serious injury and illness cases amongst them. To prepare for the imminent challenges of OCS I tagged up GySgt Larry Wilson, another Enlisted Commissioning

Program (ECP) candidate and Marine Associate Degree Completion Program (MADCOP) graduate (Pensacola Junior College). We did a whale of a lot of PT; running the hill trail and hill trail extension, doing pull-ups, sit-ups and working out on the circuit training course. We also refreshed our general military knowledge from the Guidebook for Marines. After almost a week, one of the Casual Company clerks said we'd be joining an OCS platoon the following day so that night we walked into Q-town for a real meal and some beer assuming there'd be no liberty for the next 3 months. The next day was full of surprises. Unlike Parris Island there were no yellow footprints or Drill Instructors getting



up in your face. We, as a group, were told to make three ranks and fall in. After a few focused introductory remarks, we were then told to fall out and get in the barracks by a bunk on the double. There was no screaming or yelling just loud and clear commands. One of the Sergeant Instructors (they were not called Drill Instructors) was S/Sgt Phil Blazer (an 1833). I knew him from Camp Lejeune by way of LSD-25 and OPERATION STEEL PIKE and also from Chu Lai. So, there I was, in utilities, at attention, lined up by a rack when Blazer comes up to me and says "Zebal, what are you doing here?" My response was "I applied for the program and got accepted." He says okay, give me your rank and BANG, just like that, I was a candidate. He gave my Sgt. chevrons back later on. There were maybe 6 or 7 of us ECP candidates in utilities with everyone else being in civilian clothes – all college graduates except for us ECPs. The OCS staff formally introduced themselves. There was a 1/Lt. Platoon Commander a GySgt. and a S/Sgt. The Sergeant Instructors, had successfully completed at least one tour on the drill field and wore duty belts and piss cutters but not cam-

paign covers.

Although we were candidates just like everyone else the Sergeant Instructors immediately put us to work helping the brand-new candidates accomplish basic tasks such as; making a rack, assembling the web belt and buckle and putting the sling on their rifle to name only a few examples. To me, it seemed highly appropriate that ECP candidates work as platoon helpers throughout the entire 90-day period without any privileges or acknowledgement. All throughout OCS candidates are graded on everything including their performance as company and platoon-level billet holders. For example; on any given day you could be the First Sergeant, a Fire Team Leader or a Rifleman. A candidate's performance in every billet held is formally graded by their OCS Platoon Commander. Mostly the grades start and stop at unsatisfactory with either major or minor discrepancies. There were no satisfactory, excellent or outstanding evaluations – just "unsat." Academically speaking, the classes were similar to boot camp in both content and delivery. However, there was a huge difference in physical training. PT varied from timed short

runs to long but not very slow runs, the obstacle course, confidence course, leadership reaction course and pugil sticks. Everything was competitive every time. There was much more PT in OCS than in boot camp and one's level of effort was duly noted. Field days, marching to and from chow and rifle inspections were pretty much like boot camp. In addition to more intense and frequent PT there were other significant differences including the ability to drop on request (DOR). This means that we could quit at any time for any reason and get sent home. Remember the candidates awaiting discharge in casual company? After the first few weeks we were granted base liberty although it was restricted to the OCS area. This freedom grew over time into weekend liberty. Although staying in the barracks was clearly a choice, some candidates got hotel rooms while others simply went home. On major holidays the barracks was closed and locked. On these occasions and, out of necessity, Wilson and I would go to supply; draw shelter halves, sleeping bags, C-rats and camp out in Prince William Park because what little money we had was sent home. The OCS CO promoted me to Staff Sergeant in May. Right after the ceremony the OCS SgtMaj pulled me aside and said that I didn't have to buy a round at the Staff club that night because, as a candidate, I wouldn't be going there, would I? Our OCS squad bay had a feeling of déjà vu because it was the same exact one, I was in while TAD for 3 months at the Physical Fitness Academy (PFA) in 1969. Except now it was full of candidates and double racks and it didn't have a fridge with beer and wine or a pull-up bar by the squad bay doors. The wooden deck which had been severely warped and buckled in several places was now nice, flat and very shiny. Another sense of déjà vu was when I saw Cpl. R. B. Johnson, my former Drill Instructor from Parris Island (Plt. 367) in 1963. He was now a GySgt. working as a polygrapher for the MPs. He had been an 1811 >>

who lost a finger to shrapnel at Hill 55 during a mortar attack. The last time I saw him he was a Sgt. in 3rd Tanks on Okinawa and we were at White Beach loading tank ammo before sailing to Viet Nam on LSD-28. Sending one of his recruits to war, as I recall, was a very emotional event for him. I was blessed to have LtCol. Robert H. Thompson as a champion while at OCS. After his return from RVN (Navy Cross as CO 1/5 at Hue) LtCol. Thompson was assigned as the Director of PFA where I was a student. While a PFA student I applied for MADCOP but prior to appearing before the base board I had been interviewed by LtCol. Thompson and the PFA Staff. From time-to-time he would stop by OCS to check up on me with the OCS staff. As the end of 90 days in OCS began to approach there were uniform purchases to be made and then tailored. Dress blues, dress whites, winter service alphas, summer service alphas, overcoat, summer service alphas, Charlies, utilities,

sword, calling cards. The list went on and on until it totaled about \$1,500 bucks. It seemed to me that just about everybody had a Navy Federal Credit Union uniform loan. Commissioning preparations appeared to be pretty standard; final inspections, and competitions followed by a parade the next day. After we passed in review, were then bussed to main side and Little Hall. The CO of OCS made a speech and then the 77th Officer Candidate Course graduates raised their right hands and were sworn by BGen Conley. The 2/Lt. to my right pinned my bars on and I returned the honor. My buddy GySgt Gary Heckman from 2nd Tanks, TV Co, SDT and Hwy 9 provided the first salute and got a silver dollar for his troubles. Throughout OCS I observed the rapid change in those candidates who came directly from universities and was absolutely impressed with how quickly they adapted to the Marine Corps OCS environment without whining or com-

plaining. They got better at everything extremely fast because they were truly motivated, worked very hard and were, in general, blessed with a high-level of native intelligence and natural athletic abilities. They really wanted to be Marine Officers and they were committed, determined and willing to work extremely hard to achieve that goal. Something else to consider was that there was no encouragement to succeed or fail from the staff – none. It was all up to you. It did surprise me that for one reason or another fully half of the ECPs dropped out of OCS. We were remotely aware that 90-days of OCS was merely the beginning with another 6-months at TBS to immediately follow. TBS would prove to be exponentially more mentally and physically demanding and at the end of TBS one's numerical class standing would end up being the benchmark for an entire career.

sure it wasn't just the shadows made by a flare descending under a parachute. It soon burned out as it floated down and everything went dark again along with my night vision. After I regained some vision, the figure moved again and then another one nearby. I told the Marine sleeping nearby that I had movement and was going to pop a flare. He got behind the M2 50 caliber MG as I prepared it.

The flare cased inside a aluminum tube is about a foot long and about an inch and a half in diameter. One end has short slide-off cap that is taken off and is slipped on the other end. To fire it, hold and drive the bottom, the end with cap affixed, hard down against a solid surface. The flare and folded parachute package will fire out of the open end like a projectile leaving a mortar tube.

It should be aimed up and away because it has the force to go several hundred feet before the parachute deploys and the flare ignites and floats to the ground.

That night when I slammed the flare down in the dark, the bottom hit the side of a sandbag instead of the flat surface of the top. This lowered the trajectory and the sent it in low arc over the graveyard, past the field beyond over the first row of houses in adjacent village. Some of the houses in the village had metal roofs, but unfortunately it landed on top of a house with a thatched roof in the middle of the village.

I shot a second flare perfectly. At the top of its ascent the parachute deployed, and the flare burned brightly as it dangled beneath descending slowly. The figures in the shadows were gone by then. When the darkness returned after the second flare burned out there was a small and growing glow behind first row of houses and the sounds of voices from that direction. Within a few minutes the glow had turned into a fire in distance and voices had turned into excited yells.

Our entire defensive line was awakened and watching the growing

fire in the village. There was the rattles of rifle bolts and ammo cans as the men behind not on watch moved into position joined us to watch the show.

"What happened?" one of my guys asked me in a low voice. "There was, movement in the graveyard over near the village" I said as I pointed. "I first thought it was a shadow but then they moved again," I added. "I popped and flare and it was low and went into the ville." I explained.

"Looks like it set the village on fire," he said with a sly chuckle as we watched the glow brighten the night sky turn to growing orange flames. "Well, at least if they hit us, we'll be ready for them this time," I replied, trying to make the best of my apparent screw up. Marines continued pull on boots and grab rifles as they emerged from the dark finding their place on along the line.

Walking from the CP, I saw small squared-away figure wearing starched Marine soft cover with silver bars of a captain. As I watched the fire and voices in the distant increase, I caught a glance had him as he conferred with the men several bunkers down. As a Marine there pointed in my direction, he glanced as he started my way. My mind did a quick inventory of what he would do.

Captain Dowd was the battery commander with a reputation as fair and decent leader. His slight southern drawl and quiet and understated demeanor was effective in getting the most out of his men. He was well liked. Hopefully he would have mercy for an honest mistake, I contemplated as he walked up beside and me surveyed the surroundings. A moment later he asked what happened.

"Skipper, about twenty minutes ago I saw some folks moving around the graves over there," I said as I pointed. "I wasn't sure at first of what I saw so I fired a flare. A few minutes later I thought I saw another one move in the same place. When I fired another one it accidentally hit the side of the sandbag and went too low and into the ville.

"Have you ever used pop flares before?" he asked sternly. "Yes sir,

many times," I answered, "I have used them and Phu Bai and Camp Evans all the time and never had a problem. In the dark I just misjudged the angle on the sandbag." He was quiet now and didn't respond. Only the shouts of the villagers could be heard. The fire was clearly visible now and had probably jumped to another hooch. Then he turned and said something to the effect that I will be held responsible.

I tried to understand what his words really meant. Would I be busted and sent to the brig. Would I be court marshaled and given dishonorable discharge. Would I be sent home in disgrace? As my mind was pondering my fate my thought process was interrupted.

There was sputtering of small arms fire from the village. Not the sound of a rifles firing but the sound of the scene in cowboy movies when the good guys throw the bullets in the fire to distract the bad guys. These sounds became louder and almost continuous. First, we thought it was incoming, but the noise was coming from the direction of hooch on fire. Then the popping was interrupted by an explosion and then several more, reminding me of the TNT charges the sappers used a few weeks earlier. It went on sporadically for ten minutes.

Then it became clear, the fire set off a small ammo dump in or under the burning hooch. The captain looked at me, grinned and left. Things grew quiet after villages put out the fire and the show was over. Next morning a patrol checked the site found a blackened hole where the bunker and hooch had been. The villagers had no idea how the ammo and explosives got there.

I wasn't busted and in fact I became the talk of the battery and one of the Skipper's favorite corporals. My buddies started calling me "Pyro". Lucky for me, the few brownies points I might have earned that night would be needed in few days later.

Bcc ■

A Pop Flare and a Straw Roof

BY BEN COLE

I arrived in Da Nang in late December of 1966 on the MSTS General Leroy Eltinge (AP- 155), along with over a thousand other Marines that sailed from San Diego after training at Camp Pendleton for Vietnam duty. When we received our assignments, although I was a tanker with an 1811 MOS, I was sent to an artillery unit. While my buddies mostly went to Third Tanks, I went 4th Battalion 12th Marines where I would remain for the next seven months before being transferred to Third Tank Battalion. This story is from those days I served as a Cannon Cocker.

It was almost midnight during my watch at our small firebase at PK17 when I first saw them.

There were two dark figures in the graveyard in front of our wire at the edge of the nearby village.

This small settlement and ARVN compound along Highway 1 was appropriately named by the French for being seventeen clicks north of Hue on Highway 1. It even had an old ornate French colonial gate at the base entrance and old French bunkers as part of our perimeter wall.

"1st Prov" as it we were called was officially 1st Provisional Battery 4th Battalion 12th Marines, had moved here March of 1967 from Phu Bai. Two

towed 155 Howitzer and self-propelled 8inch gun were placed here and the rest the other two howitzers went to Camp Evans, seven miles north of here.

I was on watch on our rebuilt bunker that had been blown-up a few days earlier during a sapper attack. It was at the at the corner where it tied in with the ARVN lines where they had breached our line.

The sapper squad had slipped in quietly from a dry moat from the ARVN side and destroyed this corner bunker with TNT charge and came through. The sappers some only wearing briefs and belts carry holding TNT blocks with short fuses held together with bamboo strips. After

slipping through the wire the spread-out tossing charges into bunkers, tents, and gun pits. The Marines drove rallied and drove out them out by daybreak.

The locals had been told that they were going takeout out our battery of howitzers before the end of April. They had almost succeeded in that first attack the week before by knocking out one gun and killing a Marine and a Corpsman. The last few days they continued the probes and mortars and kept everyone on edge.

Just after my midnight watch started, I saw movement the near concrete graves near the edge of the village. I watched carefully to make

Wish There Had Been a History Project

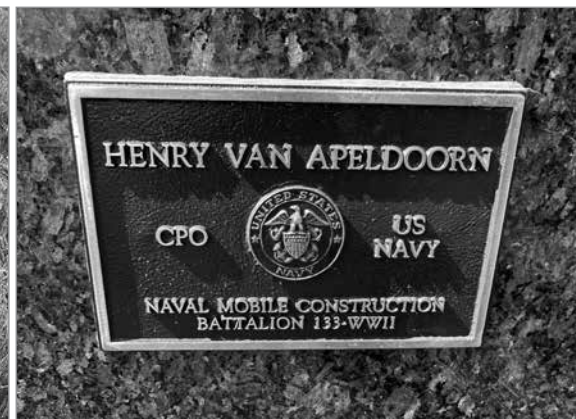
BY BRUCE VAN APELDOORN

I remember my grandfather when I was young. We would visit every Sunday afternoon after church. He would have my brother and me remove our shoes so he could polish them and if we were wearing through the bottom of the shoe, he would cut out liners from cardboard so as to give my parents another payday until they had to buy us new shoes.

I remember him and my dad talking shop as they were both plumbers but once in a while the topic would shift to WW-2. On Pearl Harbor Day both enlisted in the Navy. My Grandfather was a journeyman steamfitter so he became a Chief in one of the first Sea Bee Battalions. My Dad was off to boot camp and would become a radio operator on the USS Indiana.

I saw a picture of the two of them as they met in Hawaii. After that I only knew that my dad spent the rest of the war on the Indiana and my grandfather warned me not to join the “Mud Marines.”

Fast forward to the Pandemic. Stuck in the house with too much time and too little to do I came up with an idea to replace my grandparent's single grave marker. It was a piece of concrete with their names and dates of death. I visited it twice a year, Memorial Day and Veterans Day, to place a US and Navy flag.



I got a new very nice stone on order and turned to the VA to get the brass plaque for my grandfather. The VA said that it had been too long so would not pay for it but no big deal as I can easily afford to purchase one. That is when I discovered that my grandfather had been one of the invaders of Iwo Jima.

He was assigned to the 133 Naval Mobile Construction Battalion. The 133 trained in Hawaii for the invasion and took nearly 50% casualties as they were a part of the third wave to hit the beach. I only found this information because someone was thoughtful enough to write a book.

If you have yet to write an article for the Sponson Box, sign up for a video recording at a VTA reunion, or ask to schedule a podcast please do it for your grandsons and granddaughters. Trust me, they will want to know what you did. Shoot John Wear or me an email today. Semper Fi!

Our MOS - Vietnam

BY TED HILDABRAND

SEPTEMBER 17, 2021 - APRIL 2022

I'm humbled by the service of Marines of the VTA and other Marine veterans who were exposed to dramatic combat operations in fulfilling their duty mandated by their MOS in Vietnam. The assignment of the MOS is really a roll of the dice in most cases, at least from my perspective. Probably other Marines' experiences on their assigned MOS may be different than mine. I think it is important from a historical perspective to look at it. It did define our service history.

In addition to the MOS assignment there is also the assignment to the unit where each Marine served “in country”. In the case of unit assignment, it all has been very objective as was the MOS assignment. In my history the

MOS designation is comical and awkward. I'm saying that not to be critical of the Corps. There is also no assurance that either the MOS or unit assignment can limit or control risk. Service in Nam can expose anybody in their respective MOS via just presence “in country” which in itself is an obvious risk. This complexity of Nam service was unique especially during Tet 68, my opinion.

My MOS was assigned at Paris Island very early at the start of basic training. We were brought to a building where there were a series of clerks sitting at a table. We were directed to a 1:1 meeting with a clerk. So, in my case the clerk had my file and asked me for more information on my college curriculum. I told her it involved courses in mechanical



and civil engineering. Before I even finished my comments, she started to write immediately after I said mechanical. My first instinct was to say something additional to help clarify my comments as I felt the curriculum favored more civil engineering disciplines or at least engineering. However, that voice from your subconscious (I call it the little man) that typically reminds you when you think about morality and other, told me; keep my mouth shut. So that is what I did. My instinct is that “little man – your subconscious” is really God talking to you or through your guardian angel. I didn't know the result of my MOS until sometime near the end of basics. The DI read to the platoon each of our assigned MOS designations. Obviously, he was not wanting or asking for any response. It was what it was!!

I have often thought that encounter at the beginning of basic and my MOS designation. I would, nor would others who knew me, would ever label me as a budding mechanic. I may have had a little auto mechanical insight, above average, as compared to other young male bucks from the 60s. However, even that little auto mechanical knowledge came from my neighborhood associations with a few car “savvy” friends. My real focus on autos / mechanics was purely tied to dating girls. It is tough to date girls without a set of wheels. However, even at 14 – 15 I had no qualms about hitchhiking to adjacent towns to attend dances and other functions to meet girls. Such was life in the 50-60s!

If I had added my subconscious verbal commentary to the Corps administrative MOS assignment process about my curriculum in civil engineering, as referenced above, it could have changed my MOS designation. I could have easily been assigned an engineering MOS and service with an engineering battalion. Considering that I was a little scrawny shit at five and half feet tall and weighing 110#, there is little doubt that my Vietnam service duty could have been different. It could have incorporated me carrying C4 with detonators in a pack into gook tunnels with only a Hi Standard 22rf pistol. Crawling through tunnels and blowing up tunnels for grunts! Yikes!!

Additionally, my unit assignment upon receiving orders for Nam was a random roll of the dice. Marines know that! The Corps doesn't ask, what unit and where “in country” would you like to serve. You are assigned a unit, period! You just do your duty! That's a given in our military obligation. The only controlled decision I made in that service period was on requesting transfer to Nam. My first duty assignment after MT school was Quantico. At first it would appear to be an ideal duty station. Lots of girls close by in DC and reasonably close to home in Pennsylvania. It was not, the duty sucked; the Gunny at the motor pool never gave us any work. He didn't know how to utilize us. He had a crew of hired civilians, he didn't need us, and he felt no obligation to give us any training let alone work. It was awkward. Eventually a group of us, new MT 3516, truck mechanics, were given base BS service work. I spent a lot of the time at the library. Extremely boring! Weekend liberty was available, but the weeks dragged on. I was a L/Cpl.

So, I volunteered for Nam. Shortly after my decision 4-5 other Marines and friends I knew at Quantico followed and mirrored my decision. The E5 at the command office, my read, credited me for the others that requested Vietnam duty. I never discussed it with any of them, but they knew of my request. The result when I was “in country” after 2-3 weeks in Nam, I was bumped up to E4. My unit assignment was 1st Tanks at H&S SW Da Nang. At H&S I volunteered and served on the Reactionary Platoon.

I was at H&S for about 6 months and then sent to NCO school in Okinawa. Then shortly after return I was transferred to Hill 55 with 1st Tanks Bravo Company as the MTC (Motor Transport Chief). One of my duty requirements required that I refuel remote tank platoon units of Bravo Company.

I had an interesting exchange with a tanker during a trip into Indian Country about my MT MOS 3516. I'm not sure of the name of the position where this unit was located but I traveled South from 55 across the bridge. Best recollection the trip was 30-40 minutes around January 68. The road terminated at a river and the tank unit was on the other side. The Navy provided a boat to ferry my duce / half diesel tanker across the river.

Anyway, as the story goes while fueling the tanks, I was bull shitting with a tanker. I don't know how we got talking about MOSs. I said I'm only a 3516. He said don't ever apologize for your MOS. He said he had a story to tell about two MT Marines that got stuck with their unit overnight. He asked them to stay with his tank as they could use their help if they had to button up and move. There was a communication wired link to the tank commander (TC) where they would be their eyes / ears if they got hit. As luck would have it, they got hit that night. He said the two MT Marines laid down behind the turret. They helped direct fire during action despite numerous incoming rounds to the tank. The attack was thwarted. That tanker indicated that this >>

duty typically was done by grunts. He indicated that that the two MT Marines were the best he had ever experienced. So, he said “so don’t ever apologize for your MOS”. That exchange and comment has stuck with me. So, I don’t apologize! However, I’m still dramatically humbled by tankers 1811 and 0300 grunts and similar. I respect every Marine or service member who served. Everyone’s service is different in more ways than the service is similar. I don’t judge!

I don’t know how many different MOS disciplines are needed to make a tank company operational. All the way from Corpsmen, armorers, maintenance, communication, supply, intelligence and others, all beyond my logistical expertise! We work as one team to handle our service mission. I fully understand the bond and the comradeship of 1811s and similar within the VTA. It is a natural connection. It is a good thing!

All the above is a spin on my discussions with John Wear / VTA at the 2021 Providence Reunion. He asked me to document or write about my thinking and views on this subject. This is in response to that request. If all the Marines who served in Nam with 1st, 3rd and 5th Tanks exclusive of 1811s we would get lost within the Marine Veteran Community in trying to connect to any other Marine Vietnam Vet associations beyond VTA. Hence, our ability to connect with VTA is a good thing. In most cases some of us fought and defended with M14s / M16s, M79s etc. but not with a 90 mm gun tube. I rode on the top of tanks in several patrol situations, but I was never inside a tank.

My personal quest at the 2021 reunion was to revisit and connect with surviving Marines that were involved in the 1st Tanks Reactionary Platoons action on the evening of February 6, 1968 at the village near Tuy Long Bridge where there were 5 KIA and 8 WIA from our battalion. The intent was to document the history of this action. There is no “Post Action Report” (PAR). Why? The motivation was to allow me to connect with Wayne Greer’s family and provide them with closure. Even at this date there is not a lot of clarity. The Greer family is entitled to that history. As Marines from 1st Tanks, we are entitled to that clarity.

Wayne is only one of the five Marines that were KIA. He was a close friend along with Wayne Johns. There are several aspects of the action that are troubling beyond the lack of the PAR. One of those is the apparent “Ticket Punching” (TP) that went on by an officer. Jim Sefrhans E5, one of the KIA Five, has also not been properly recognized by HQMC. Jim was awarded a Bronze Star but that pales in retrospect with his actions on that day. This aspect and the concerns from 2/6/68 are documented to some degree in our VTA history via U tube and other. All based upon the efforts of Steve Faulk. Steve is gone but we need to continue with his work. The hope is that we have a renewed clarity and recognition for Jim and his family and the other 12 Marines.

I was very fortunate to be able to meet with Larry Zuley at the reunion. Larry was able to provide me with the history and insight from February 6, 1968. I was also able to meet Marcia Faulk, Steve Faulk’s wife, and her daughter. I am so fortunate to have met them. Steve was instrumental in researching the history from February 6, 1968. The ability to meet Marcia and talk to Larry has been instrumental in helping me. Too complicated and complex to discuss but I am forever thankful for that opportunity to meet Larry and Marcia.

The problem of “Ticket Punching” also needs to be brought to the surface so that it stops. If that means embarrassment to HQMC and all of us Marines, so be it. So, if you are a surviving Marine from 2/6/68 please contact us or me directly at tkhaquariusnetwk@gmail.com.

As a tie to the above dialog on MOS assignment the irony is that of the five KIA on 2/6/68, three were Motor Transport and Jim Sefrhans was Intelligence. Greg Lunde was a tanker who was also carrying a rifle. Another irony is that in this action, despite that we are a tank outfit, tanks were not involved as an offensive or defensive tactic on 2/6/68. Tanks were only used for recovery of our KIA and WIA. This tactic, on not allowing tanks to engage, was by direct order for rules of engagement. Why? Help us answer these questions?

SPECIAL STORY

A Letter from Craig Newberry

OCTOBER 7, 2023

I just finished proofing the first batch of stories that you sent me and returned them to you. I was elated when I read Ted Hildabrand’s article. This coincides with my beliefs spoken to you earlier in the month about our doing some sort of MOS recognition during the San Diego reunion.

I called Jeff’s widow Mary Beth and we spoke for an hour. I explained to her the discussion that we had and asked her if it would be okay for me to pen such a letter and submit to the Sponson Box for more widely read distribution. She agreed, I did and it is attached. When I was finished, I sent her a copy and requested permission to print it, which she gave me. Here it is.

Like you, the rest of our Brotherhood, their families and friends I am back from our Colorado Springs (where were the Springs, flowing or coiled? ... I missed both) now rested and recovered. I hope everyone enjoyed all of the activities

as much as I did. Joe Liu is my traveling buddy and we not only get along well now we have traveled and vacationed together with our wives until four years ago when his wife Patty passed. We’ve hit numerous reunions going back to Philadelphia with our wives and thoroughly appreciated the company of each other. **That might be an option for some of our guys as we head to San Diego in 2025, travel with another VTA guy if you’re on your own because of a wife’s inability to travel or because you’re alone!**

I received my Sponson Box the other day and sat down to read it that night. When I read the article “Remembering Jeff Griffith” on page 7 I was really shocked and disheartened. The article was written by his widow, Mary Beth. When you talk about a “full plate” we tend to think regarding numerous responsibilities we’re tasked with accomplishing. Mary Beth’s plate wasn’t full it was overflowing to the nth degree. Not only was she dealing with the death of her husband, her sister was also dying from a brain tumor and she had an appreciable number of issues with her yard and home. She, as many nurses, was dealing with structural physical issues complicated by the responsibilities of her job as a nurse. Given her state of mind at this time (grief, loneliness, depression, bereavement, anxiety etc.) she was wrought with the statement made to her on more than one occasion, “You know, he wasn’t a tanker.”

I remind you, the rest of our membership and anyone

else attending an earlier reunion where I spoke from the dais before our reunion dinner about each of the MOS that put together our mighty band of brothers. I asked all of our comm guys to stand, then our supply men, our mechanics, admin clerks, motor T guys and so on. **ALL of these men and many more are rightfully a part of our VTA.** The 1811 tanker men wouldn’t have been in the field without all of the rest of our company in support of OUR mission; we were a TEAM, the way we were trained to be in bootcamp. The tankers only did their job because we were ALLOWED to do it by the grace of ALL of our support personnel. They were no less than, no greater than all of us were as a TEAM.

Jeff undoubtedly put tanks back in the field by his work. Our radiomen allowed us clear communication when they repaired our helmet mikes and PRC 25s. As much as I came to disdain the C rats life would have been miserable without the supply organization that got them to us. Our ammo, napalm and gas were integral to our mission; without their supply chain we would have been dead in the water; not even considering the monsoons.

To ANYONE in our VTA, grunts included, none of us were EVER LESS THAN any other man, we were all Marines doing our job in support of each other, as a TEAM!!!

Respectfully,
S/F

Craig Newberry

The DaNang “Mafia” - 1967

BY COL. BILL “LURCH” LOCHRIDGE, IV (2012)

Editor’s note: If you will recall, we lost “Lurch” in 2018. This is one of his stories that we’ve had for a while. Enjoy!!!

Before I begin my “Mafia” story, a little background should be provided. In September 1966, 3rd Tank BN got a new CO by the name of LtCol William (Bill) R. Corson. I was still down in An Hoa with my tank platoon when he came aboard. We had been successfully running night ambushes with our heavy section of three tanks. LtCol Corson decided to come down to participate in one of our night ventures, and he arrived by helicopter in the late afternoon, as we were preparing to go out. As darkness came, we moved out several clicks from An Hoa, and pulled off into our ambush site. Corson was on the back of my tank. In position now at about 2300 hours, Corson asked me to come and sit with him. I did so, and he began to talk about what we were doing and had done down in the An Hoa TOAR. I guess he was impressed or whatever with what we had accomplished. Talk drifted on until the wee hours. No VC that night – oh, well.

Col Bill started to spin stories about himself. I sat there flabbergasted, as he went on and on. Bill’s career began at

the end of WWII as an OSS officer, and later, he swung back-and-forth from the CIA to the Marines. In Korea, he was first a tank company commander and then back over to the CIA for a second stint. He had a B.B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in Red Chinese money and finance. He spoke three dialects of Chinese fluently. Several months later, I was able to personally experience his language ability when he and I went to Hong Kong together. At one time, he had been the CIA Assistant In-Country Station Chief in Hong Kong. Many of his Chinese friends held dinners for us while we were there, and to my dismay, Chinese was the only language spoken. (Years later, I was proud to have Bill become Godfather to my children.)

As we pulled back into An Hoa the following morning, Bill told me he wanted me to become the BN’s S5 officer and Assistant S3 officer. I asked, “S5? What’s that?” He said, “Civic Action.” I said, “Sir, I’ve been with my platoon for months in direct combat, and now you want me to come and love’em? I can’t leave, Sir.” “Your leaving, Lurch, >>

at the end of the month.” (He had learned my nick name from Capt Ev Tunget, who had been my Company CO, and now was the BN S3). So, at the end of September, I went back to BN, and took over Bob Mattingly’s S5 position. Bob had moved on to become a district chief’s advisor. That was just wonderful for me. So, there I was as the S5. I guess we did a good job though.

Col. Bill was eventually reassigned to III MAF HQ in DaNang as the first CO of the Combined Action Program (CAP) under LtGen Walt and MajGen. Nickerson (Herman, the German, we called him). Later, Bill called me over to III MAF, and told me that the 3rd Tanks was moving north, and 1st Tanks was taking over our area. I was to join 1st Tanks as their S5, until he could bring me over to CAP HQ in the capacity of the officer in charge of CAP defensive systems, CAP Training, and for awhile, CAP logistics. The DaNang “Mafia” was about to be born.

In Bill’s book, *The Betrayal* (March 1968), his forward contains the following compliment: “to the Danang “Mafia” for their larcenous “liberation” of materials from the Government of Vietnam and the U.S. obstructionists to help keep the hamlets free.” That “Mafia” initially consisted of me, Gunny “Four Fingers” Brown, and Sgt Delorm. Later we added a few more enlisted personnel and a couple of Captains who saw it “Bill’s way.”

The 1967 plan called for 105 CAP platoons to be established, and each CAP platoon was to include 12 Marines and a platoon of local Popular Force (PF’s) troops to be positioned in hamlets throughout the I Corps area. The ramp-up was fast. All Marines had to attend a two-week training program at our beach front facility (an old Seal Ops facility) on the South China Sea – just north of MAG 16, and right next door to MajGen. Nickerson’s beach house.

To procure needed materials for the CAP Program, the DaNang “Mafia” went into full operation. No one was off limits to our scrounging, and that included the Army, Navy, Navy Seabees, Air Force, Vietnamese forces, and Marines too. At night after chow, we would go back to the office to work until Corson would call out to us it that was time for ice cream. Into the chow hall we’d go, and one or two of us would scramble over to the serving line counter and open a refrigerator for ice cream. It was there that we created our “need list and action plan.” The CAP program did not have much stuff back in those early months. We had one 6X and two jeeps until later. Simple items like tables, chairs, chalk boards, and bunks for the “school” had to be liberated from other sources...thank you, Navy.

Late one morning, several of us were in our 6X driving around the north end of the DaNang Air Base when Four Fingers spotted several Air Force men finishing up four single man heads (outhouses). It was about noon time, and they were heading off for chow. Four Fingers said, “Hey, Lt, lets go all around the base and come back to liberate

those shitters. We need them at the school.” So, around we went and then came back. No one was there, so we drove right in and loaded them up...thank you, Air Force.

We would visit the DaNang military junk yard every week or so too. The Army SGT told us to take whatever we wanted, and we took a lot of needed stuff, some of which we had to repair back at the school, where Four Fingers had set up a tented repair shop.

Sometime in June our CAP platoons exchanged their M-14s for M-16s. Within a short time, the M-16s were malfunctioning big time. So, during one “ice cream” night, Corson told us we had to find a solution fast – kids were getting killed and wounded. One of us had heard that the Seabees up near Monkey Mountain had turned in their M-1 and M-2 carbines for M-16s, so the very next morning, we took the 6X up to their compound with very official looking fake orders to pick up over 1,200 carbines. Most of them were the M-2 models with selector switches on them to allow them to be fired fully automatic. With the carbines, we got hundreds of magazines, and a ton of ammo. Also, they turned over to us 85 Thompson, submachine guns with magazines and ammo. On the way out, I spied a complete 81mm mortar, and the Seabees said we could have that too. So, off we went to III MAF, and our truck was really loaded down. We had already found a place to store these weapons. It was a small brick building that had the III MAF MARS radio tower constructed on its top. The lock was chained to the double doors. We were all set to start deliveries to our Marines in the field, and we did so. When Corson went out on CAP inspection trips, he found that his Marines were not only carrying their M-16 rifles, but they each also had an M-2 carbine for back up purposes. He was very pleased. His Mafia had come through for him again.

We needed more jeeps for transportation. We met some young, Army Special Forces officers at the III MAF O Club one night, and it was decided - after sharing many libations – that they would trade us 2 jeeps for 24 Thompsons. Two nights later, we met them on a road about a block or so from one of the DaNang Air Base gates. The deal was done. We drove the Army jeeps back to our school, where Four Fingers had them painted up and put USMC tac numbers on them.

The next significant item that CAP needed was bunker material. I recall that in the late spring of 1967, DOD had decided to build a wall along the DMZ – The McNamara Line. Most of the heavy wood was going north to build that wall. Once again, the DaNang “Mafia” stepped in to fill the need. To get 3 flatbed trucks from a Seabee unit that was located near MAG-16, we swapped more Thompsons. In order to get over 3,000 board feet of lumber and rolls of barbed wire, we gave more Thompsons to several Air Force NCOs at the Base. The Seabees stored all this material for us, and then helped to move it into the field. Some of the material also went out by helicopter or by C-130. Our boys

got their lumber and their wire.

One morning, Corson called me into his office and told me to report to MajGen. Nickerson ASAP. I arrived at the general’s office and announced myself to his aid, who immediately brought me in front of the general. Nickerson said, “Lurch I just got back yesterday from visiting one of LtCol Corson’s CAP units that is up the Song Tru Bon River several miles south of An Hoa. That unit needs a boat for re-supply purposes. You either go in by helicopter or by boat, but Lt., go find them a boat.” I said, “Yes Sir, I’ll get right on it.” Returning to Corson’s office, I reported what MajGen. Nickerson wanted, and Corson said, “Well, Lurch, go find a boat.” And I said, “Aye aye, Sir!”

I got together with Sgt Delorm and Gunny Four Fingers and I explained the situation to them. All I got from them was, “Holy shit!” Where are we going to find one of those?” I said, “We’ll talk to the Seabees, the Navy, and the Vietnamese Navy. Just maybe, we’ll get lucky.” But for the first week of our search, nothing turned up for us. Then one morning, I walked down to the III MAF dock. I couldn’t believe eyes. Sitting right there in front of me was a 16’ boat with a Johnson 30 hp outboard motor on it. I asked the guard on duty who owned the boat. He told me it was LtGen. Walt’s boat and that he used it to cross the river

to go over to the White Elephant “O” Club for meetings. This was just what we had been looking for, so I had to do something quick.

Well, later that day, the DaNang “Mafia” took action again. We typed up special orders to take the boat down to MajGen Nickerson’s beach house, and the following morning, we showed up at the dock with our 6X and one of our new jeeps. We showed the orders to the dock guard, and he helped us load General Walt’s boat into our 6X. Then we simply drove out the front gate and down to our school, where Four Fingers hired two Vietnamese women to paint it with camo colors. Our next stop was MAG-16, where we wanted to get a helicopter with a bully rig to fly it down to the river near An Hoa. The helicopter trip was arranged, but it cost us another six Thompsons.

Two days later, we were ready. Sgt Delorm, Gunny Four Fingers and I drove down to An Hoa. At the Base, we enlisted a few Marines to protect our jeep while we went up river. The chopper arrived and lowered the boat down to us. Getting aboard the boat, the three of us started up river. The Song Tru Bon River narrows down between the mountains. There were Vietnamese folks watching us from the banks all along the river, and I thought, “Oh shit! This does not look good.” Nonetheless, we made it to the CAP unit

without incident. The Sgt in charge was most surprised, especially when we told him that MajGen Nickerson had sent us to bring it to him for re-supply purposes. “That’s the good news,” we told the Sgt. “The bad news is that you people have to take us back downstream to our jeep, and the VC probably know that we’re coming back.” The CAP unit got us back to our jeep okay, and we began our return, 20-mile-plus, road trip back to DaNang. I was quite concerned about Liberty Road from An Hoa to Hill 55, for I knew ambushes regularly took place along that road, and I had actually been ambushed myself on that road in 1966.

We didn’t get ambushed, and we finally got back home. However, while we were gone, all hell had broken loose at III MAF HQ because General Walt’s boat was missing, and the general was not pleased. We just kept our mouths shut, big time. About two weeks passed before I was summoned into General Nickerson’s office. I thought, “Oh God, I’m finished now.” When I walked into his office, the general had a big smile of his face, so I knew I was going to be okay. The general congratulated me for job well done...and the DaNang “Mafia” continued to work its wonders to help keep our Marines alive and the hamlets free. It was very satisfying work but also a lot of fun too.

Photos from Vietnam



Quang Tri, Vietnam, the 3rd Marine Division’s 9th Regiment prepare to board Landing Ship Tank (LST) as they depart Quang Tri, South Vietnam, 13th July 1969. Accompanying the grunts is Charlie Co, 3rd Tank BN



Photos from The 2023 COLORADO REUNION



The Marines of the "Tanks to the Rescue" story:

Seated: (L to R): **Cpl Mike Cunha**, Scout Sniper, Mike 3/1.

Mike was up on top of Marble Mount watching unable to do anything.

Sgt John Bartusevics, Platoon Sgt, C-25. Retired rank Captain

L/Cpl Greg Auclair, Driver, C-23. Retired rank First Sgt

Cpl Ed Boyette, Loader, C-23. Retired rank Sgt. Maj

Standing: **L/Cpl Rick Lewis**, Gunner, C-23. Retired rank First Sgt.

Sgt Joe Lou, our admin chief who spent a lot of time on the tanks as a crewman.

L/Cpl Bill Ganey, Driver, C-22.

Cpl Craig Newberry, TC, Flame Tank HQ Platoon.

Missing but still a round **Cpl Gary Songrant**, TC, C-23. Retired rank Gunny.



PURPLE HEARTS

During the 2022 Mini-reunion in Wyoming, there was a tank crash accident. The folks in this photo suffered minor injuries but they were serious enough to draw blood. Glen Hoopman, who attended the Wyoming gathering, is an accomplished wood worker. Glen thought that it would be fun to have the injured parties receive a "Purple Heart" plaque at our next gathering in Colorado and here they are!!!

(L to R) Fred Kellogg, Judy Atkin, Lee Atkin, Roger "Blues" Unland and Wally Young.

Missing is Clyde Knox who was attending his granddaughter's wedding.

VTA Mini-Reunion Ft Moore, Columbus, GA Sept 12 – 15, 2024

Schedule of Events

Thursday, Sept. 12th	Arrival Day – Dinner on your own.
Friday, Sept. 13th	0700 – Complimentary Breakfast 0900 – Load buses for tour of the Tank Collection 1200 – Lunch on your own at the base PX 1400 – Return to hotel 1800 – Dinner at hotel paid by the VTA
Saturday, Sept 14th	0700 – Complimentary Breakfast 0900 – Load buses for tour of the Tank Restoration Project 1200 – Lunch on your own at the base PX 1500 – Tour Infantry Museum on your own. 1800 – Dinner at the Infantry Museum paid by the VTA. Sunday Sept 15th Departure Day

TRAVEL SUGGESTION:

Fly to Atlanta–(ATL) Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

Go on line or call to arrange for limo / bus to drive the 1–1/2 hours from ATL to Columbus (\$49 each way) from:

Groomme Transportation

2800 Harley Court

Columbus, GA 31909

Phone: 706.324.3939

Email: columbusoffice@groometrans.com

Website: <https://groometransportation.com/>

In order to get the \$49 one-way (\$98 round trip) fair, you have to book on line and not on the telephone.

OR you can possibly book a flight to Columbus, Georgia. You will have a short layover in Atlanta (ATL) and fly on **Delta Connector** from ATL to Columbus (CSG). There is no hotel shuttle. The hotel is 15 minutes from the airport. Uber or a taxi can be hired to provide transportation.

LODGING:

Hampton Inn – Columbus South – Ft Moore

2870 South Lumpkin Road

Columbus, GA 31903

706.660.5550

Special Room rate: \$139 per night + taxes, etc.

Rate includes:

Two queen beds

Free breakfast- Free Wi Fi–Free Parking

Room reservation cutoff date: 08/10/24

1) **You can call the hotel direct at 706.660.5550 to make your room reservation by giving the agent our dates and the code: "USM"**

2) Or you can book a room through this website link: <https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/csgfbhx-usm-f32c51f1-44f3-47f1-bad9-332b724244cc/>

Please note: This mini-reunion requires all attendees to fill out a reunion registration form and to pay a \$25 registration fee per attendee to help defray the cost of the tour bus transportation; the beverages in the Slopchute and the dinner on the last evening.



OFFICIAL 2024 MINI-REUNION
SEPT 13 – 15, 2024
Fort Benning (Fort Moore), GA
Hampton Inn, Columbus, GA

Please Print All

Name: _____

Guest's Name (s): _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Cell Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

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

Please note that this is a mini-reunion for three days. We will not be conducting any special events other than visiting the US Army Armor Collection and the US Army Tank Restoration Project and a catered dinner at the Infantry Museum on the last evenings. All other meals will be on your own.

To cover the bus transportation and Slopchute beverages, please pay: \$25 per person.

Mail completed form and your reunion registration check to:

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

2024 Mini Reunion – Ft Moore, Columbus, GA
Sept. 12th to 15th

This is a sampling of the massive collection of armored vehicles that we will be visiting...



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 "23" or lower your 2024 membership dues are now due.

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.

In case you wondered what our minimum pay was in 1969

E-4 Basic 214.20

Hostile Fire 55.00

Foreign Duty 13.00

Total \$282.20/Mo

On call 24/7 - 365 = hourly wage was approx. \$0.03/hour

