



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Featured Stories

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From the left: Pat Rogers, Gene Whitehead, “Turby” Tomas, and far right Cpl Brothers (in the “whitey tighty” skivvies).

Saturday morning of this past May, John Wear and Ed Horan, a VN Marine air wing buddy (the bearded one in the photo) took a trip to attend a memorial service for a VN Marine grunt that had lived in central Pennsylvania. This recently-passed-away Marine had been a “mover & a shaker” in the USMC veteran community and he had done so much volunteer work with the Wounded Warrior community that he had been highly acclaimed by a lot of the current & past USMC brass. The three star Marine general in the photo (and the Sgt Major of the Marine Corps) showed up for the memorial service. Plus there was a contingent from the MC Silent Drill Team, a Marine Corps burial detail and quite a few others. All in all about 250 mostly Marines and Marine veterans were present.

With regard to the attached funny photo....below is Ed’s comment:

“When I first saw General Hejlik, I noted that his hat brass was not straight so I went up to him and after introducing myself as “Sgt Horan,” I indicated that he might want to fix his hat brass. He looked at it and while he was making it right, he explained that he had an entire entourage of Marines with him and not one of them caught his uniform error. He then exclaimed, “We sergeants have to stick together, don’t we?” It turns out that he is a mustang officer and that he had enlisted in 1968. After becoming a sergeant in 1972, he was discharged and went to college. After graduating with a degree, he went to Marine OCS and then worked his way up to his current position.

“After looking at the photo, I was trying to remember what we were talking about that caused him to laugh so hard. Then I remembered that he had asked me what my Service Number



was (23XXXXXX) and when he told me his (24XXXXXX), he exclaimed, “You are senior to me and I am a ‘Boot’ to you!” He sure had a good sense of humor.”

Semper Fi,
Ed

Letter from the President

I was listening to the radio last month and heard an interview with retired Marine Major Owen West; he was promoting his book, *Snake Eater*. He is a third generation Marine and the son of Bing West, a retired Marine general who served in Vietnam. Major West had multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, which are the subject of his book. The proceeds from *Snake Eater* will go to a special scholarship program for the families of USMC KIAs. But during the radio interview he said something that was very profound: “You can serve your country with distinction but it is not over or complete until you write it down.”

I wish that each of you would spend a few minutes a month writing down a personal remembrance from your time in-country and send it to me for inclusion in the Sponson Box. I would also like to see everyone break out their Vietnam photos and get them into an album to bring to the next reunion. Keep in mind that this coming reunion is at a different time of year than previous; it will be held in the fall of 2013. Please write down the dates: **October 31 to November 5, 2013**. We’ll be in San Antonio, Texas and start saving your nickels and dimes. I should be as good or better than any reunion we’ve held so far!

The last issue of the Sponson Box received the most unsolicited comments ever! Dedicating an issue to our “shitfisters” was long overdue; they kept us in the battle just like our corpsman did. Thanks for the great responses and for the additional stories & photos that have recently come in. I do hope this is a trend that everyone will get more involved with getting out stores in print. Your stories are critical in keeping our history alive. Remember Major Owen, “... it is not over or complete until you write it down.”

Semper Fi,

John

“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.”

George Washington



got back in his jeep and back we went to Ca Lu. We never knew who approved the trip or why we made it. On the return one of M48A3’s blew a final drive and it seemed like it took forever to get it fixed. But we finally did and we di-di-ed out of there and got back to Ca Lu.

I didn’t see Bobby Jo Blythe on your membership list but I know he’s a member and a 2141. He was a good friend who I have been trying to find... but his email and/or address wasn’t listed in the most recent Sponson Box.

Cpl Dennis Brummitt
Sun City, AZ
Phone: (623) 974-4406

From Sgt Grit’s Newsletter:

I served in Charlie Co. 1st Tanks in Chu Lai, RVN in Flame Platoon. Cpl. Drew was my T/C and I was the gunner. Sitting buttoned up next to 360 gallons of pressurized napalm was a little “spooky” to say the least. I hated to see flame tanks go. They served a specific niche that brought holy terror to those on the other end.

Semper Fi

PFC Rick Armstrong 1965-1968

More on Flames from Sgt Grit

There was a question about Flame Tanks in a past issue. In 1971, I was with the 4th Tank Battalion at Camp Elliott, San Diego. We had the M48A3. Just after I arrived we saw one of the last flame tanks with a great demo of what they could do. They had been discontinued and it was on its way to where all old Marines go. Too bad, it was really something to see!

SSGT L. Thompson

Again, thanks for another great issue of the Sponson Box. The articles, pictures, conversations and letters from our members (and their wives) were fantastic. Thanks for adding pictures to my article on Oceanview. I got a call from Andy Anderson and in the article I had an incorrect date for his tour at Oceanview. Andy was there in 1968 not 1969. I hope any members who spent time at Oceanview will send in stories of their experiences in “The Dunes”. Keep up the good work.

Semper Fi.

Pete Ritch

Downgraded MOH

Below is a letter I submitted to the Marine Corps Times regarding the downgrading of the posthumous Medal of Honor recommendation for Sgt. Raphael Peralta to the Navy Cross. The example of another downgrading attempt I mentioned is a true story. I am personally acquainted with Col. Bob Modrzejewski, as we attended Amphibious Warfare School together just prior to assignment to Nam. I also met with him at 3rd MarDiv Hdqs after he was transferred there following the action cited in his MOH recommendation. As I mentioned in my letter, “Stolen Valor” is reprehensible, but “Deprived Valor” is unconscionable and equally unacceptable.

7 March 2012
Letters to the Editor Marine Corps Times
6883 Commercial Drive
Springfield, VA 22159-0170

Dear Sir,

While I applaud the efforts to expose and in some cases prosecute those found guilty of “Stolen Valor”, there are individuals who are deprived of the recognition of valor they so richly deserve. The most recent case in point is that of Marine Sgt. Raphael Peralta whose posthumous Medal of Honor recommendation was downgraded to the Navy Cross upon a Defense Department ordered review of the circumstances. This review panel “concluded events could not have happened the way the Corps claimed...” Well, excuse me panel members, you must have concluded that Sgt. Peralta did perform heroically, as the Medal of Honor recommendation stated, but apparently not quite enough to satisfy your “hindsight wisdom” despite the Marine Corps report based on medical evidence, eyewitness accounts and what I am sure was a thorough investigation. It is unfortunate that review boards/panels, far removed from the scene of conflict, feel empowered to render judgments on awards contrary to field command submissions. Such judgments can and have been successfully overturned. I am personally aware of an attempt by an awards board to block the submission of a recommendation for the Medal of Honor up the chain of command.

Colonel Robert J. Modrzejewski, USMC (Ret), was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Lyndon Johnson on 3 March 1968 for his heroic actions in July 1966 during Operation Hastings as a Captain commanding K Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division. However, the Awards Board of FMFPAC in Hawaii returned the original recommendation to 3rd Mar Div Hdqs with the comment that the facts of the situation only merited the award of the Navy Cross. Major General Wood B. Kyle, CG 3rd MarDiv at the time, shot the recommendation back to FMFPAC virtually demanding it go forward. One has only to read the citation for Col. Modrzejewski’s Medal of Honor to wonder what “subjective” decisions overrode the “objective” facts in the minds of the FMFPAC board to downgrade the recommended award!

I have not seen the recommended citation for Sgt. Peralta’s Medal of Honor but I’m wondering if the same “subjective” forces are at work once again. While “Stolen Valor” is reprehensible, “Deprived Valor” is unconscionable!

LtCol Everett L. Tunget, USMC (Ret)
350 North 190th St., Apt A313
Shoreline, WA 98133-3856
Tel. (206) 546-3206

Yesterday my wife, Joy, and I went to MCRD and enjoyed the USMC Battle Color Ceremony. This includes the USMC Color Guard with the official Battle Colors of the Corps with “The Commandant’s Own” Drum & Bugle Corps and USMC Silent Drill Platoon. I found out that the name for the Silent

Drill “Team” was change to “Platoon” in 2006. Also now the platoon completely changes personnel every two years. What we saw yesterday was the new platoons’ fourth outing. The entire platoon was all “Lance Coolies” who were all 0311s. We had a mother of one of the band members sitting in front of us and to say the least, she was very proud of her Marine. We got to meet her son and others after they were dismissed as they now come down to meet the public. If you ever get to DC and visit 8th and Eye, the Evening Sunset Parades are from May – August and are open to the public. I was able to see them there when I was at Staff Academy at Quantico, VA in 1972. Gee we are getting old!

A quick note these guys are going to France this year to a place called Belleau Woods to honor the famous Marine battle in WW I where we got our nick name “Devil Dogs” from the defeated Germans. How cool is that?

Rick Lewis 1st.Sgt. USMC (Retired)
San Diego, CA
Phone: (858) 735-1772

Another Shitfister Story

As a shitfister for Bravo Co, 1st Tanks, I was on Hill 55 and in April of 1969 one of my tanks was down. The tank had low batteries and it needed a jump-start. Back then I think that we called it a “slave” start. Unfortunately all of the tank crews were away on working parties and no one was there to give me a hand. I went down to the amtrac area so see if their shitfisters could help get my down tiger up. I was ground guiding the amtrac so he

could get into position for the hook up. As he was maneuvering and getting a perfect line up, everything went from bad to worse. He somehow killed his engine but the amtrac was still rolling down the hill towards our hooches. He kept trying to restart his engine to no avail while I was screaming, “Stop! Stop! Stop!” He then yelled back to me that the brakes had been disconnected and that he could not stop. Needless to say, our hooches were all flattened and my tank never got started. This shitfister spent the rest of his tour in Nam in the shithouse!

Semper Fi,
Ira B McQuade
Indianapolis, IN
Phone: (317) 356-2158

An Old Buddy Found!

I woke up at 0300 to take a piss and I see that it’s 26 degrees outside. Then I opened the door to see a winter wonderland snowstorm. There were gusts of wind up to 71 MPH. It was still snowing at 0800 but it is almost all gone now. The temp is 46 degrees now and only 8 mph winds. Did you see in the Sponson Box, they found ‘Harry the Hack’ Schossow? I lost his address in 1970 and I owed him a hundred bucks. I already sent it too him... without the interest. I hope that he comes to San Antonio to kick my ass!

Semper Fi,

“Sparrow”



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VTA Scholarship Awards for 2012

THE VIETNAM TANKERS ASSN. SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE HAS CHOSEN TWO RECIPIENTS FOR THE 2012-13 ACADEMIC YEARS. NORMALLY WE WOULD ONLY AWARD ONE SCHOLARSHIP PER YEAR BUT BOTH OF THESE APPLICANTS WERE SO OUTSTANDING THAT WE DECIDED TO MAKE AN EXCEPTION.

Page Carr, the daughter of VTA member Frank Carr from Pittston, Maine, attained a four-year high school grade average of 95.26%. Her class rank was 18 out of 153. She will be enrolling in St. Joseph's College of Maine's Nursing Program this fall. Page plans to eventually become a pediatric nurse practitioner. During her high school years, she was a member of National Honors Society and contributed over 300 hours of service to her community. Besides holding down a part-time job selling retail clothing, she worked as a children's ice skating coach 3-4 days a week.

Katherine Mulligan is the granddaughter of VTA member Frank Slovik. She is an honor graduate of Orange Senior High, Hillsborough, North Carolina. Her Cumulative GPA (unweighted) for four-years of high school was 4.0, and her class ranking was 9 of 290. Although diagnosed with a chronic health condition in her freshman year, she managed to achieve Carolina 3A All-Conference Honors in cross country her senior year. She played the clarinet and was selected to the North Carolina All-State Band. Katherine will enroll at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as a pre-med major. Her long-term goal is to eventually become either a physician's assistant or M.D. so she can travel to third-world countries and administer medical care.

Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans

By **Page Carr**

The freedom of our great country is something that people should honor and cherish. There is a great price that men and women in the military and their friends and family pay for the

freedom of the United States today that make them honorable heroes. The sacrifices they have made can be seen through physical, mental, and emotional traumas. Military veterans suffer from physical injuries, brain trauma, death and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. All of these disabilities can drastically affect relationships that the people who fight for our country have with their friends and family, all for the right of freedom.

Every day, our service men and women suffer from physical injuries, including loss of limbs,

paralysis, brain trauma and even loss of life in combat for the safety of the people of the United States. Many veterans are left with massive medical bills even with the support systems in place such as USVA Togus. Some veterans are left struggling to pay bills, feed themselves and their families, or are even left homeless, unable to function enough to have a job because of both physical and emotional ailments.

Disabilities that veterans have endured through combat not only affect themselves, but also their friends and family. I know first-hand, as my father is a Vietnam veteran. The emotional stress which these veterans have endured is often taken out on the people they are closest to, often affecting and even breaking many relationships.

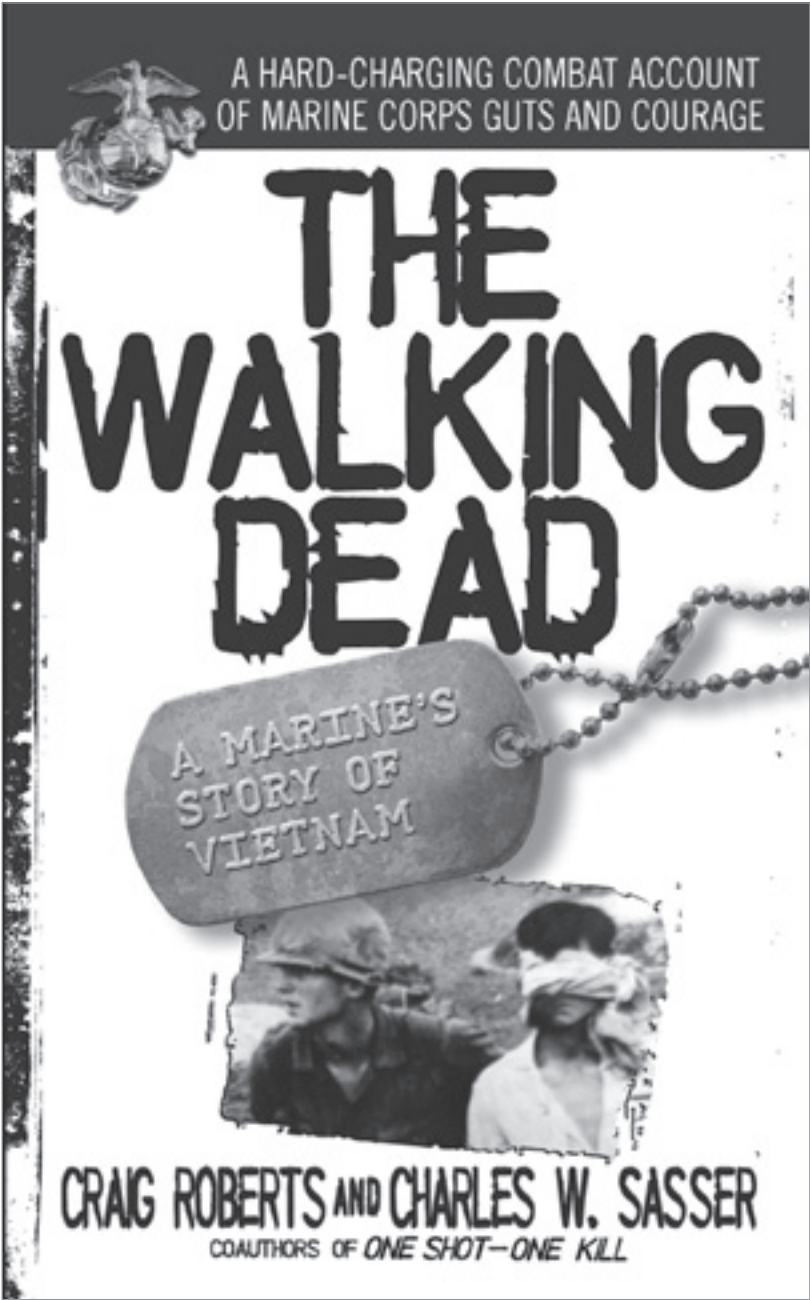
The sacrifices veterans have made in the past and are currently making for the right of freedom is drastic. These people have chosen to risk their lives for the people of the United States. They should be thanked and honored for sacrificing and risking their lives to honor and protect our country. Even now men and women are enlisting in the military knowing these risks and giving up their lives for our country.

By **Katherine Mulligan**

"It is easy to take liberty for granted, when you have never had it taken from you." The previous quotation, by an unknown author, summarizes in just a few words why we should honor those who fight for our freedom and our country. America's veterans put their lives on the line every day so that the freedoms and rights of the country's citizens will not be infringed upon. The vast majority of US citizens have never had their freedoms or liberty challenged because of the men and women that fight to protect our country. America's veterans jeopardize their lives and safety so that people across the country who they do not even know can relish in the liberties and freedoms provided by a democratic nation. For this reason, we are forever indebted to our veterans and should provide them with the highest honors.

In addition, our veterans have given up time with their families in order to do their duties. My grandfather had two tours in Vietnam, at which time he was far from his family. Our veterans have sacrificed time with their loved ones so that we may have the freedom to be with our loved ones whenever we want, and for this, our veterans deserve to be honored by all of Americans citizens.

America's veterans have given so selflessly; they protect our country and often receive nothing in return. They are truly America's unsung heroes. Their courage and bravery are second to none. Our veterans have ensured that American citizens can enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom to assemble, and so many other freedoms. We should honor America's veterans not only because they ensure our safety, sacrifice their own lives, and give up time with their loved ones, but also because they protect our rights as human beings; they guard what is coveted and treasured by humans worldwide liberty. ▲



EXCERPTS FROM “THE WALKING DEAD” BY CRAIG ROBERTS AND CHARLES W SASSER**

...We were just packing down the last E-tool of dirt on the makeshift grave when Bellot came up with a sour look. It seemed body count was not enough anymore, he said, “The brass back at Da Nang wanted to see the corpse.”

“What? You got to be shitting us,” I exclaimed.

“Dig the sonofabitch up,” Bellot said, “They’re sending out a tank to take the gook back.”

“Why?”

“How should I know, for Christ’s sake? Wahatta they tell mushrooms?”

The gook was starting to stink, lying in the hot sun, before the tank got there two hours later. A cloud of flies buzzed up from the stiff as the tank come rumbling in button-ed up and driving like hell. It halted with a grinding sound and the hatch flew open.

“Where the hell is it?” the tank commander demanded, anxious to get back to An Hoa before the Viet Cong night set in.

“On the other side of the dike,” I said.

“Bag it and strap it on the cargo rack behind the turret.”

O’Brian bristled, “Fuck off. Bag the pile of shit yourself.”

The tanker looked at us. “You call, we haul,” he said. “That’s all we do.”

The platoon was in no mood for any more shit. Sergeant Shireman intervened before things got out of hand. He looked at us, then looked at the motor grate over the tank’s engine, then looked back at us and winked.

“Take care of it for the rear-echelon shitbirds,” he said.

Fuck a bunch of tankers. Fuck the bag. We took the body and slung it onto the motor grate. The grate was hot enough to barbeque on. The body began to sizzle.

“Better hurry up, thread-head. He won’t last long,” Yates yelled at the tank commander. “You might call ahead and ask the general how he likes his meat. He should be good and done by the time you get to An Hoa.”

We were trucked to the coast and dropped off. ONTOS tank killers led the way, clattering up the beach next to the sea, carrying our pack boards for us

while the company followed walking in a long tactical march behind.

ONTOS – tracked tank killers – had accompanied the battalion sweep in case of reinforced bunkers. One of them rolled up on line, snarling and growling, like a giant green insect out of some Sunday afternoon horror flick, and opened up with the deep cough of it .50-caliber spotter rifle. The tracer streamed into the temple, making a crunching sound as it struck the stone. Then the ONTOS fired its 106mm recoilless rifle. One wall of the temple disintegrated. Smoke wreathed into the clear sky.

I knew what was wrong when I heard an ONTOS engine cranking up in the opposing tree line. A 50-caliber spotter round hurled by and crashed through the trees behind us and the next sound we heard would be that of the 106 exploding on our asses.

**REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHORS

Looking For

This photo image was posted on the Internet. Can anyone identify the tank? Can anyone identify the grunt? Can anyone



identify the loader on the top of the turret looking through the binoculars? Please reply to John Wear.

My name is John Lange. I was in Vietnam in the Marine Corps in 1966-67. I served in the 1st Tank Battalion with a wonderful young man that we affectionately nicknamed "Robbie". He was from Verona. His full name on DOD death records is Martin Robert Robinson. I am just curious as to whether or not there are any of his relatives still living in Verona? I got your name from the bio in the TribLive Verona branch of the website. It doesn't list your name so I don't really know who I am writing to but I hope you don't mind reading something from an old Marine Corps Vietnam veteran that has remembered "Robbie" all these years. Thank you for your time,

#1 REPLY: I posted parts of your email on yourtwinboros.com. I hope that you will receive some responses. That was so many years ago but folks in this area tend to stay put and someone may just remember him and know if his parents are still in the area or alive. Let me know (by email or on our website http://www.yourtwinbros.com if you receive any news or responses. My best regards, -Kathi

#2 REPLY: I just came across your article looking for "Robbie." He was a neighbor of mine and was known to everyone as "Marty." He has two sisters who I believe still live in the area. If they have not seen your article please let me know and I will try to find them for you. My husband was in the Marines in the mid-late sixties so I know how important those service relationships were. Good Luck. Kathy Kraf

FROM JOHN LANG: You are more than kind. It's taken me this long to want to do this look-up. I couldn't stand the thought

(of doing this) before now. It's still not the easiest thing (for me to do). "Robbie" was special to me as I know he was to all his loved ones. Now that I have grandchildren I constantly think of how "Robbie" would have enjoyed his (own) grandchildren. Thank you for your thoughtfulness. I hope you don't mind my copying this to some of my Marine Corps / Vietnam buddies that also knew "Robbie." (I know that) they will be interested in knowing about his kinfolks.

From the USMC VTA website Guestbook
Mon, 24 October 2011:

Excellent website and a splendid memorial to the Marines that served... heroes all!

I am looking for C.A. Johnson or V.C. Davis, both officers in A Co, 1st AT Bn, Feb. 1968 several of us would like to nominate two of your 0353s Ontos Crewmen for an award. These Marines exhibited great courage and valor in the face of a numerically superior enemy while in support of a convoy on 02-07-1968. Statute requirements specify that an officer in the chain of command make the official recommendation. Please contact me at the below e-mail

Thanks and Semper Fi

Earle "Butch" Plunkett
Email: eplunkett001@ec.rr.com

If you are able to do so, I would appreciate your assistance in identifying the company C.O. of Company C, 3d Tk Bn in May, 1967, as well as the ID of the Bn C.O. and addresses if possible. I need this info to process an award recommendation for Lt. Dobbin (Platoon Commander, 3d Platoon, Company C, 3rd Tank Bn) who was attached to my rifle company with his heavy section of tanks on May 18, 1967 during Operation Beau Charger. He was KIA on this date. I recommended an award for him, but detached from my unit (Company B, 1st Bn, 3d Marines) a few days after May 18, 1967, upon completion of my tour of duty before this award was processed. Apparently, it was never processed, as the Virtual Wall shows no award. I must now forward the recommendation through the above officers.

Thank you for any assistance you can provide.

Jerry C. Shirley
Lt Col USMC (Ret.)
Email: jshirley43@aol.com

***Ed note: This was forwarded to Historical Foundation for disposition.

This came from our webmaster, Greg Martin:

I started feeling guilty and ashamed of my involvement in Vietnam, but my wife and children told me to write back to you. So here goes: I was sent to Nam in 1969 from Camp Pendleton. I arrived in Da Nang and was sent to Alfa Co, 3rd. Tanks at Dong Ha - Quang Tri. After five months of missions, road patrols, convoys and so on, we were ordered to join the rest of the

company for a operation that was to leave Con Thien and head west to Uncle Ho's Trail to see if we could catch and report the NVA coming south for Tet. After three days we finally got out of a mined area and we set up for the night. At about 2100 the \$hit hit the fan. I was hit and Sgt. "Tree" Grady & Brown helped me get up the hill just before our position was over run. At 0430 or so I was medevaced to the hospital ship "Repose" and then down to Da Nang, to Guam and then home. When I asked about my crew and what happened to them, I was told they were all KIA. I have in some way felt that because of me they could have made it out too. If any of the FMF Marines and Alfa Co, 3rd. Tank Battalion tankers remember Alfa-23, maybe they can help me get more information. Please feel free to contact my email address: gayley9870@gmail

Semper Fi

Pvt David C. Turner

PS. I have "Wyoming" tattooed on my right bicep.

From the Sgt Grit's newsletter:

Just wondering if anyone out there had ever been in a flame tank or has even heard of one? I was in H&S Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 2nd Tank Battalion and 3rd Tank Battalion, assigned to their Flame Platoons. As part of 3rd tanks, I went to Viet Nam in 1965 and we landed on May 15, 1965, in Chu Lai, which is on the coast, about 50 some miles south of Da Nang. Since it was so hot and humid most of the mixing of gas & napalm was done by hand because the mixer motor usually did not run. Maybe some of you older tankers may remember good old Flame Tanks.

The Flame Tanks were M-67A2's as I recall the 90MM gun tanks were M48A'3. It is the same tank except for the main gun, which in our case was a napalm flame which very accurate up to about 150 yards. We also had a 30 cal and a 50 cal machine guns. With new tank of today, I doubt if the flame tank even exists anymore. I proudly served on F-13 in all 3 battalion's. The men who served with me were the best. We were a small but very tight group of guys and along with our support folks we made quite a team. I am proud that I was a part of a unique group, Flame Platoon United States Marine Corps.

Semper Fi

Cpl. Steven Andre
US Marine Corps 1962-1966

From the October – December 2011 - 3rd Mar Div Association "CalTrap" Newsletter:

Is there a way to locate DG Peters through your organization? I have his Zippo and would love to find him and return it to him.

In cast you cannot read the inscription it reads:



D.G. PETERS
2172947
USMC
SLF
1st Bn - 3rd Mar
TANK PLATOON
Short timer

Tim Campbell
Email: Roostrale@aol.com

My name is Walter Clanton. I was with Alpha Co, 1st Tanks from 1964 thru 1967. I was in Chui Lai from 1965 thru October of 1966. My tank ran over a land mine and I am now looking for anyone...such as the Lt of 2nd Plt that we were on loan to... or anyone who was on the tank or witnessed the incident. There are two names that I recall but I have no addresses: Sgt A.E. Johnson from Philly and Cpl Hall from the Mid West. I need this information for a VA claim. Anyone who was there and that can verify this information please call me @714-545-3784 or 714-425-6796.

Walter Clanton
Santa Ana, CA

***Editor's note: Walter has been invited to join the VTA but has not yet responded to our request.

I am looking for any Marine tankers who served with Amil Jackson during his tour with 5th or 1st Tanks. He was like a brother to me. We both joined the Marine Corps together after high school. Originally he was bound for Army Officers Candidate School but he chose to go in with me on a Buddy Program. I would very much like to talk to or hear from anyone who was with him during his tour in-country. I am also trying to find any photos of him or his buddies.

My Name is Paul Celedon. I served with 12th Marines, 3rd Mar Div, at Con Thien and the C-2 firebase near the DMZ. Amil Jackson was with 3rd Plt, Charlie Co, 5th Tank Bn, 1st Mar Div. He was KIA on 01-25-1969 in Quang Ngai Providence while operating with H&S Co, 3rd Bn, 26th Marines.

My contact information:

Paul Celedon
Email: celedon1@hotmail.com
Phone: Home: 830-981-9120
Cell: 210-385-3593

TC: "GUNNER - TARGET!"
Gunner: "IDENTIFIED!!!"

Devil Dogs, another great issue!!! The top picture on the inside of the front cover is C-24, Charlie Company, 1st Tank Bn located at Da Nang just out side of Marble Mount in 1966.



(Continued on page 21)



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky



Dave “Flames” Pena

I got this message from David L. Pena Jr: I just wanted to let you know my dad, Dave “Flames” Pena, passed away this past Tuesday (March 26, 2012) at home in Houston, Texas. My dad’s wife (my mom) and his sister, Melinda, were by his side and my dad went peacefully. We had a memorial service for him this Monday, (April 2, 2012) from 5 PM to 8PM at 5455 Dashwood in Bellaire, TX 77401... I just wanted to let you know and to tell you thanks for being his friend.

From Dave Zaslow:



Gary E. Cummings

Dear Mr. Wear, I am Gary E. Cummings’ son. He is on your organization’s membership roster. I am sorry to inform you that he passed away on May 6, 2011. He was a Marine to his core and a good father. I just wanted to let you know so you could update his status.

Brett G. Cummings

brett.g.cummings@gmail.com

Phone: 801-390-1824



1st Sgt. Gary F. Heckman

Brother Tankers: This quarters Marine Corps League “Semper Fidelis” magazine listing of retired Marines who have recently passed away included 1st Sgt Gary F. Heckman. I knew Gary “Hex” well. Gary was an orphan who was raised in one of Chicago’s suburbs. He played the cymbals in his high school band and then enlisted in the Marine Corps right after graduating. Gary and his former wife, Betty, had three daughters: Heather, Holly and Hope were daddy’s pride & joy. “Hex” was a Bravo company tanker serving in both 2nd and 3rd Tank Battalions. His platoon relieved our platoon on Highway 9 in July 1968 during my second tour in Viet Nam. He and I were also at 2nd Tank Bn with the Tracked Vehicle Company Schools Demonstration Troop. Gary would bring me beer when I was on restriction and I would return the favor when he was restricted. We were tight and our (now ex) wives were tight too. Gary was a Gunnery Sergeant attending the SNCO Academy when I graduated Officer Candidate School and he received my first salute. To this very day I’m absolutely confident the only reason he would ever salute me was to get a silver dollar - we

laughed about that too. Gary did a tour on the drill field and then went to the MPs where he ultimately made First Sergeant and then retired. We are all diminished with his passing.

From Ken Zebal



Wayne Cornell

my good friend of 43 years and a Vietnam Marine veteran died yesterday, probably of a heart attack but we’re not sure yet. I fondly remember the first day I met him as a fresh faced 19 - 20 year old. We were just coming back from somewhere I don’t remember exactly where, maybe an operation with the grunts. We had a year together in-country and we were “New Guys” but only for about 10 minutes. Tankers are tankers and ya just gotta’ love ‘em! He was a good & brave Marine and he will be sorely missed.

From Mike Brandi



Col Dean Esslinger

Some of us old tankers might be interested to hear that Col Dean Esslinger passed away in April 2012. As a Lt Col he commanded First Tanks just before A.W. Snell and the “big heat up.” Col Esslinger

went on to command a grunt outfit 3/5 (?). He was awarded a Silver Star and lost an eye with them. He was a great Marine.

From Justin Donnelly



Col. Joe Sleger



Col. Joe Sleger, Jr, USMC (ret) always referred himself as “Platoon Sergeant Sleger.” He was G.G. Sweet’s Platoon Sgt....3rd Platoon, “A” Company, 1st Marine Brigade, 1st Marine Division 1950-51. Joe fought a multitude of illnesses for the last several years. He and his wife, Bette, withstood more than anyone should. God took him in to his arms yesterday (July 7, 2012) and Joe departed for Heaven. God bless Joe, Bette and his loving family. No details are available to me at this time other then Joe will be put to rest at the VA Cemetery in Biloxi, MS

From Roger “The Loader” Chaput:

What Members Are Doing

John Cox's Daughter is Bachelorette

Lindzi Cox, the daughter of VTA member, John Cox, is one of twenty-five eligible bachelorettes competing for the heart of wine maker Ben Flajnik on Season 16 of the television show, The Bachelor that premiered on January 2, 2012 on ABC.



The show's PR release indicated that Lindzi knows how to make grand entrance as the 27-year-old equestrian surprises Ben Flajnik by not showing up in a limousine, but riding a horse! Some other facts about Lindzi include: she was born on October 29, 1984, served as the Associated Student Body director of school spirit at Fresno State University where she majored in public relations. She was the 2001 United States Equestrian Association Young Rider National Champion and the 2001 Area VII Young Rider of the Year in high school.

Editor's Note: Before you call John Cox for her phone number, he already told us she doesn't date old guys.

Ron Davidson, the Public Relations Director for 3rd Heard, Bravo Co, 1st Tanks reports on two of his good buddies:

Richard (Dick) Traiser is on his third year serving as the Southern Maine Marine Corps League Detachment Judge Advocate. Dick says, "It's not a legal position and my main job was to write the by laws for the Detachment. It is an elected position and you are on the board of directors. I attend the meetings when I'm in Maine but I am out of town a lot. My twin



brother, Martin, served in Vietnam with 3rd Bn, 4th Marines, 3rd Mar Div. He spent most of his time at Khe Sahn and Con Thien. He was also a 2nd Lt. He and I went through OCS and the Basic School together. I think that we really confused them being twins! He is the Adjutant / Paymaster for the Detachment

and one of the founding members. He's a lot more active then I am since I'm in Florida a lot. He handles most of the administrative work for the Detachment." Dick also said, "My wife, Nancy and I have three children and 5 grandchildren."

On November 11, 2011, Stanley Olenjack of Bradley, Illinois, took the oath of office as the new Commandant of the US Marine Corps League Kankakee Detachment #1253. Stan most recently held the position as the detachment's senior vice-commandant and public relations officer. His detachment has 125 members and he is looking to increase membership. The chapter was chartered on September 11, 2006 and has performed hundreds of various functions throughout the community including color guards for parades and holidays, posting National Colors at civic and sporting events, performing Final Salute ceremonies for all Fallen Marines during wake services, performing full military rites as grave sites including a live ceremonial rifle volley and sounding of taps to all fallen Marines and Navy corpsmen.

John Glenn and "Doc" Gene Hackmack at NASA

For half a century, the world has applauded US Marine Corps pilot and astronaut John Glenn as a heart-stirring American hero. He lifted the nation's spirits when, as one of the original Mercury 7 astronauts, he was blasted alone into orbit around the Earth; the enduring affection for him is so powerful that even now people find themselves misting up at the sight of his face or the sound of his voice.

He had planned to retire in March 1964 to run for the senate. However, a fall on 26 February 1964 caused an inner ear injury with lingering side effects. He withdrew from the race in April 1964 and postponed retiring. He later wrote the Commandant of the Marine Corps and asked that the 1964



Doc with John Glenn prior to his Shuttle Discovery mission in 1998. Glenn is the oldest person to have gone into space.

Colonels' Selection Board not consider him for promotion to full colonel due to his plan to retire when physically fit. On 29

September 1964, it was announced that he was being nominated for full colonel despite his letter because the Secretary of the Navy and the Commandant desired to recognize his many accomplishments while in the service of his country. Therefore, on 27 October 1964, President Johnson promoted him to full Colonel in a special ceremony in the White House Rose Garden. At the ceremony, the President said he had consulted with Congress on the matter and "we were unanimous in believing that we should not be deprived of doing what we think is right."



In February of this year Joe Tyson attended a fund raiser in Philadelphia put on by the Travis Manion Foundation. There were several Medal of Honor awardees in attendance and this lovely lady who is a Sarah Palin "look alike."



Bob Vaxter hits the road in his new motorhome.

Could you please pass the word that VTA member Jerry Ravino is working on his third book. The title is "THE DRIVING FORCE" USMC TANK WARFARE which

covers Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Kuwait and Operation Iraqi Freedom. This is being done at the request of our 29th. Commandant General Alfred Gray USMC (Ret.). Jerry says, “My research has taken over a year and if you could make a

posting that I would like to hear from any Marine Tankers involved in the above operations it would be most appreciated. I need as many tankers as possible to participate. The plan per Al Gray is to show large scale (non amphibious) USMC tank involvement.”



At the end of this past April, Todd Phillips, Jan “Turtle” Wendling, Dave Rakowski, Frank Snyder, Rick Bashore and Clyde Hoch traveled to the American Armor Federation, Inc. Tank and Ordnance War Museum in Danville, Virginia. Clyde wrote: “Jan & Todd traveled from Ohio while the

rest of the group came from Pennsylvania. I was surprised by the size of the museum. It houses (indoors) somewhere around 117 tanks & artillery pieces. They did not have an M-48A3... but did have an M-48A1 and an M-48A5. The museum also has large rooms filled with rifles & military uniforms from all eras and a large area for radio controlled tanks. There is just so much to take in. They have a 90 MM main gun on display that was removed from a tank. They also have a pretty young lady named April Dalton who sang great and has her own CD out.” Clyde adds: “If you ever get to the Danville, Virginia area, I highly recommend stopping in. Each year they have a “Tank Extravaganza.” This next year it will be the end of April. During the event they crushed several cars with an M-60 tank. They also put on a flame thrower and small arms demonstrations firing weapons like a BAR. Two people, William and Karen Gasser, put this whole museum together. We spent the weekend at a hotel near the museum and of course had to throw a few down adult beverages.”

Doc Gene Hackemack writes: Arriving at the Space Station last week (May 25, 2012) on the Russian “Baikonur” launch just



before the unmanned SpaceX aircraft got there was American Astronaut (and US Marine reserve officer) Joseph Acaba. In a very tiny way, Gene says that he helped Joe get into space when they both worked at NASA in Houston.

On March 8, 2012, I attended a dinner at the Marine Memorial Club in San Francisco. The purpose of the dinner was to honor Vietnam Veterans. Below is an article that was written by another attendee. It was a great event and it has been an annual event now for three years.

S/F

Belmo

Band of Brothers

Shakespeare is normally credited with coining the term, “Band of Brothers,” based upon his notable play, Henry V, and is found used in

the famous St. Crispin’s Day Speech. In more recent times, Stephen Ambrose wrote a book by the same name, followed by a WWII TV miniseries “Band of Brothers” produced by Steven Spielberg.

Last night my wife, Isaura, and I drove to San Francisco at the request of Maj Gen Mike Myatt, the President and CEO of the Marines’ Memorial Club on Sutter Street. The event was “A Salute to Vietnam Veterans,” hosted by the Marines’ Memorial Club and the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). Dinner was served in the Commandant’s Room to (I would guess) between 250 and 300 people, roughly half being Vietnam War veterans. General Myatt knew I was a former enlisted Marine and Vietnam vet, so he had asked if I would provide the invocation at the beginning of the meal.

Adding to the festive atmosphere for the evening was a small musical combo. A number of folks got up and danced in the very limited spaces available between the tables. After the main course, and prior to dessert, war correspondent and author Joe Galloway, was our first speaker. He is perhaps best known as the co-author of “We Were Soldiers Once.....and Young.” A movie was later made starring Mel Gibson as Colonel Hal Moore, commander of the Army battalion in our first major battle in November of 1965. Following a tasty dessert, LtGen Anthony Zinni, a Marine’s Marine, then treated us to a brief speech as we say in the Corps. The best line of the night was in reference to the accomplishments of the Vietnam Veterans. General Zinni, a wet-behind-the-ears 2nd Lieutenant in Vietnam, said there are a lot of people running around pretending to be Vietnam Veterans (see the book, “Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of its Heroes and its History” by B.G. Burkett), but no one is running around pretending to have been at Woodstock!

The following are some of the statistics from this often misunderstood and maligned war.

To substantiate the truth that many people falsely claim to have served in Vietnam, consider this statistic: As of the Census taken during August of 2000, the surviving U.S. Vietnam Veteran population estimate was: 1,002,511. During this same Census count, the number of Americans falsely claiming to have served in Vietnam is: 13,853,027. Thus four out of five who claim to be Vietnam Vets are not. 58,260 were killed, and 304,000 were wounded out of 2.7 million service members that served in Vietnam. 240 men were awarded the Medal of Honor. 97% of Vietnam Veterans were honorably discharged. 91% say they are glad they served. 74% say they would serve again, even knowing the outcome. 85% of Vietnam Veterans made successful transitions to civilian life. 87% of Americans hold Vietnam Veterans in high esteem. Two-thirds of the men who served in Vietnam were volunteers. 70% of those killed were volunteers. 86% of the men who died were Caucasian, 12.5% were African-American, and 1.2% were of other races.

The rest of this article is the prayer I wrote for this Band of Brothers:

Heavenly Father,

Tonight we gather to remember. We warriors from a past war remember when we fought in a distant land. Like our fathers before us who fought to rid the world of fascism, Nazism, and imperialism, we were called upon to battle against communism.

Many of us stepped forward from a sense of patriotism: a love of God and country.

Those were hard times, Lord. Truth be told, more than a few of us preferred to take our chances in the rice fields and jungles of Vietnam rather than the internal upheaval that was taking place all across our beloved country. The anti-war movement; the social unrest; the campus rebellions; the racial discord; the violence in the inner cities; the Hippies and free-love; and the multiplicity of attempts to tear apart the fabric of our society caused many of us to wonder what in the world was going on back home.

But when it is all said and done, Father, I suspect every last one of us would do it again if we could. Why? Because you made us not only to fight, to be warriors, but you created in us the means to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you, our God.

There are some among us who yet have wounds that have not healed. I pray your anointing touch on them right now. For others, who carry the scars of war, a reminder daily of the burden that was shouldered lo, these many years ago, I pray you would provide peace in the soul. For the family members who lived with the uncertainty of their loved ones return, and who dreaded answering the door for fear that their worst nightmares might be realized, I pray for their comfort.

In closing this prayer, Father, I would simply ask that in the same way each of us served to the best of our abilities in Vietnam, we ask nothing more than on that final day when our time here on earth is over, we may say with the Apostle Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,” and in so doing we might hear you say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into thy rest.”

In Jesus’ Name!

Dr. Charles R. Roots
Senior Pastor
Ripon Free Methodist Church
209-599-4815 church office
209-604-1415 cell phone
www.chuckroots.com (web site)
Captain, U. S. Navy Chaplain Corps (Ret)

Happy Tanker’s Birthday John!!!

Back in August of last year, John Wear’s wife began the planning for a surprise 65th birthday party. John’s birthday celebration had 40 of his best (local) friends and neighbors gathered at a colonial era inn located in Bucks County, PA. Check out the extra special birthday cake that his darling wife had made special just for the occasion!!!



Can you guess who these two Marines are? The first person to contact John Wear with both names will receive a yet to be named below mediocre prize.



GUESS WHO

Photo Contest

Last Issue's Photo ID Winner

The fellow in the photo is Pete Lamanik, (aka: "The Hulk" or "Retriever Man"). He could pick up the tank sprocket by hand and place it on the hub of the M48!!! I took that photo on Hill 55 sometime between '68 and '69.

Freddy Martinez
TC Bravo-52, 1st Tanks
1700 N. Valverde Rd.
Edinburg, Texas 78542
956-686-7218



Looking For (Continued from page 13)

remember that the tank park would flood something awful in the raining season. The Marine in the photo is L/Cpl. Auclair. He was the driver and I was the gunner on the tank. Sgt Maddox was our TC and our loader was Joe Liu. When Joe took the job, it got him of the company office. Later, in 1986, I got to hook up with 1st. SGT. Auclair. He was the First Sgt of Bravo Co, 1st Tanks in 29 Palms. I told myself that I was not going to retire from the Marine Corps without getting my hands on an M1A1 tank. He and I spent four great days out in the field driving and shooting. I recall that "shooting on the run" was great...What a tank!!!

Rick Lewis
1st.Sgt. USMC (Retired)
Phone: (858) 735-1772
Email: ricklent@aol.com

Semper Fi

P.S. Craig Newberry and I have tried to find Auclair...but no luck.

The top photograph on Page 47 is the Bravo Co. 1st Tank Bn. Retriever B-56, "Nadine!"



From Left to Right: On the ground is a 3rd tanker buddy of Sgt. John (?) Foster but I do not recall his name. Next is L/Cpl. John "Zack" Fraczek (2141), far right is me, Cpl. Ed Wojciechowski (1316/1811) or "Ski the Welder". Sitting on top of the crane is, Sgt John Foster, the retriever TC (2141) and standing on the rear blade left of Foster is L/Cpl. Eddie L. Mason (2141/1811).

Sgt. Foster was transferred to 3rd Tanks and six month later was KIA. Cpl. Edward F. Martinez (2141) made Sgt and was TC of B-56 after Foster left Bravo Co. at Chu Lai.

This picture was taken in July 1965 at the far south end of the Chu Lai airstrip near the bomb rack dump area but we also were there to look at the burned up DC-3 aircraft that VC sappers blew up a few days earlier.

L/Cpl. Zackowize, was a short timer but he had just extended for four months (like me)...but he was only in-country for only three of those months and due to a family emergency, he rotated back to CONUS.

One evening a week ago, I got a phone call from the Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks Comm. Chief, Doyle Harp. He told me he had the pages of our B-Co. "Memories Book," scanned and sent to the VTA for posting, a similar photo is on page 22. If the Book Cover is posted on the VTA website, as a matter of copyright, I'd like to ask for a note of credit for the cover's design drawing. I had tried to locate Doyle for over 45 years and he finds me through Cpl. Matt Felo...who I found on Facebook.

Semper Fi,

Ed "Ski" Wojciechowski
VTA Life member # 379

Can you help me find an old friend? His name is Sam Basso, who was from New York. He was in A Co, 3rd Tank Bn. We



went to Nam together in 1966 we were also to the same Company "A". He was the subject of Sgt Danner's Navy Cross citation. When they got overran, Sam Basso was a tank crewman and got shot in the chest while on his tank fighting off the NVA. Sgt Danner ran over, slung him over his shoulder and carried him back to a corpsman... all while this under intense enemy fire. Anyway, can you run this in the next issue of our magazine? I would like to find Sam. I have attached his photo.

Thanks and God bless.

Gene Whitehead
225 Bonanza Drive
Richlands, NC 28574-8399
Phone: 910-525-7306
Email: kewusmc@hotmail.com

V. A. News & Updates

Go to our website for more health related info.
www.USMCVTA.org

VA exempt from automatic cuts, White House says

By Steve Vogel

The Washington Post - 04/23/2012

The Department of Veterans Affairs' budget is exempt from the threat of automatic cuts to federal spending scheduled to be made next year, the White House said Monday afternoon.

The statement was made in a letter Monday from the Office of Management and Budget in response to a request in March from the Government Accountability Office seeking the White House view.

The letter, from OMB deputy general counsel Steven D. Aitken, says that "all programs administered by the VA, including Veterans' Medical Care, are exempt from sequestration."

Veterans groups had feared that medical care or other programs for veterans could be cut because last year's failure to reach a deal on reducing the federal deficit is supposed to trigger automatic cuts under a sequestration mechanism.

Uncertainty over the VA's status had sparked criticism on Capitol Hill, where the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.), accused the White House of leaving veterans "twisting in the wind" by refusing to

declare the department exempt from the cuts.

Aid & Attendance Update 08

Aid and Attendance (A&A) is financial assistance from the Veterans Administration that helps with daily activities like bathing, dressing and taking medications. As a general rule, a veteran or the spouse of a veteran who is receiving care at home or in a long-term care facility who owns a home, a car and limited cash assets may be eligible for A&A. So-called "advocates" are targeting veterans and their spouses with a scam. They are telling veterans to shelter assets in order to qualify for Aid and Attendance from the Veterans Administration. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. The Washington State Attorney General is investigating complaints about people who conduct seminars at senior centers and long-term care facilities telling veterans and their families that they can help with A&A eligibility by putting assets into a trust or giving them to their children, who are then advised to buy an annuity. These "advocates" make large commissions from selling the trusts and annuities. They promise help with applying for A&A, but they usually don't submit your application until a trust or annuity is bought. There are three major problems with this scheme.

• **First**, even though there is currently no penalty for veterans

to give away assets in order to meet the financial criteria to qualify for A&A, there is a five-year look-back period for gifts when applying for Medicaid (a government program that helps people pay for long-term care when they cannot otherwise afford it). This means putting assets into a trust or gifting them to children can result in denial of Medicaid benefits. In that case, a trust and/or gift may have to be undone in order to qualify.

• **Second**, the problem gets even worse because undoing a trust or annuity usually results in less than 100 percent of the initial investment being returned. An attorney may need to assist in destroying the trust and there are large surrender fees paid to get your money back out of the annuity. Also, your children may face a civil fine or need to pay for your care while you are ineligible for Medicaid.

• **Third**, you do not need the assistance of an advocate to apply for A&A. Free help is available. The V.A., the American Legion, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, and the VFW can all be directly contacted for help.

Older adults are often prime targets for dishonest firms which deliberately prey on the goodness, loneliness, greed, or gullibility of people who have reached their golden years. Many of these scams are played out over the telephone, door to door or through various advertisements. An extensive list of such scams and how they are presented is available at <http://www.atg.wa.gov/searchresults.aspx?qs=Scams>. In Washington complaints against these and the A&A scams can and should be made to the Washington State Attorney General's Office at:

Tel: M-F 1000 to 1500 (360) 753-6200; 1-800-551-4636• (in-state only); 1-206-464-6684 (out-of-state callers); 1-800-833-6384 (for the hearing impaired)

Mail: 1125 Washington Street SE, PO Box 40100, Olympia, WA• 98504-0100

On Line:• <https://fortress.wa.gov/atg/formhandler/ago/ContactForm.aspx>

[Source: The Enumclaw Courier-Herald article 17 Feb 2012 ++]

Ensuring Correct Surgery

The VA National Center for Patient Safety offers a free downloadable brochure designed to educate patients on what will happen before their surgery and how caregivers will ensure safe and correct surgery The "Ensuring Correct Surgery" pamphlet includes space for patients to write down medication information and answers to various questions, including the name of the surgery that will be performed

and what body part will be operated on. The pamphlet also explains the "time out" process surgeons and nurses take to ensure correct surgery and tips for how patients can facilitate this process, such as ensuring "X" or "yes" marks on the site of surgery is not rubbed off. Potential surgery patients can review or download the brochure to take with them to their pre-op appointment at <http://www.patientsafety.gov/SafetyTopics/CorrectSurg/CorrSurgPt.pdf>

Agent Orange Registry Health Exam For Veterans

VA's Agent Orange Registry health exam alerts Veterans to possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure during their military service. The registry data helps VA understand and respond to these health problems more effectively.

Contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator about getting an Agent Orange Registry health exam.

This comprehensive health exam includes an exposure and medical history, laboratory tests, and a physical exam. A VA health professional will discuss the results face-to-face with the Veteran and in a follow-up letter.

Important points about registry health exams:

- Free to eligible Veterans and no co-payment
- Not a disability compensation exam or required for other VA benefits
- Enrollment in VA's health care system not necessary
- Based on Veterans' recollection of service, not on their military records
- Will not confirm exposure to Agent Orange
- Veterans can receive additional registry exams, if new problems develop
- Veterans' family members are not eligible for an Agent Orange Registry health exam.

Interested in disability compensation? File a claim for disability compensation for Agent Orange-related health problems. During the claims process, VA will check military records to verify either exposure to Agent Orange or qualifying military service. If necessary, VA will set up a separate exam for compensation.

Vietnam Veterans who served in-country Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 regardless of length of service are eligible for the Agent Orange Registry health exam:

Parkinson's Awareness

Did you know that Parkinson's disease is on VA's list of Agent Orange-related illnesses? Veterans who develop Parkinson's

and were exposed to herbicides during military service do not have to prove a connection between their disease and military service to be eligible to receive VA disability compensation.

Visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange to learn more about other Agent Orange topics.

Medicare Eligible Vets

If you are a veteran with Medicare eligibility you have the following options for health care:

- If you have or can get both Medicare and Veterans benefits, you can get treatment under either program. When you get health care, you must choose which benefits you are going to use. You must make this choice each time you see a doctor or get health care, like in a hospital. Medicare cannot pay for the same service that was covered by Veterans benefits, and your Veterans benefits cannot pay for the same service that was covered by Medicare. You do not have to go to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital or to a doctor who works with the VA for Medicare to pay for the service. However, to get services paid by VA, you must go to a VA facility or have the VA authorize services in a non-VA facility.

- If the VA authorizes services in a non-VA hospital, but doesn't pay for all of the services you get during your hospital stay, then Medicare may pay for the Medicare-covered part of the services that the VA does not pay for. Example: John, a veteran, goes to a non-VA hospital for a service that is authorized by the VA. While at the non-VA hospital, John gets other non-VA authorized services that the VA refuses to pay for. Some of these services are Medicare-covered services. Medicare may pay for some of the non-VA authorized services that John received. John will have to pay for services that are not covered by Medicare or the VA.

- In some cases Can Medicare can help pay your VA co-payment. The VA charges a co-payment to some veterans. The co-payment is your share of the cost of your treatment, and is based on income. Medicare may be able to pay all or part of your co-payment if you are billed for VA-authorized care by a doctor or hospital that is not part of the VA.

- The VA gives fee basis ID cards to certain veterans. You may be given a fee basis card if you have a service connected disability; you will need medical services for an extended period of time; or there are no VA hospitals in your area. If you have a fee basis ID card, you may choose any doctor that is listed on your card to treat you for the condition. If the doctor accepts you as a patient and bills the VA for services, the doctor must accept the VA's payment as payment in full. The doctor may not bill either you or Medicare for any charges.

If your doctor doesn't accept the fee basis ID card, you will need to file a claim with the VA yourself. The VA will pay the approved amount to either you or your doctor.

You can get more information on Veterans' benefits by calling your local VA office, or the national VA information number 1-800-827-1000. Or, you can use a computer to look on the Internet at <http://www.va.gov> . If you do not have a computer, your local library or senior center may be able to help you get this information using their computer. You can get more information on Medicare coverage by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or TTY/TDD: 1-877-486-2048 for the hearing and speech impaired).

[Source: <http://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/medicare.htm#va> Apr 2012 ++]

VA Ambulance Coverage

Veterans suffering heart attacks or other perilous emergencies could be risking their lives to avoid ambulance bills. About twice a day, an ambulance is sent to Florida's Viera VA Outpatient Clinic, many times to pick up someone who went there instead of calling 9-1-1 or going straight to a hospital emergency room. More often than not, fire-rescue department records show the patients report chest pains, trouble breathing or other emergency symptoms that the VA clinic is not equipped to deal with. "You don't want to come to the VA clinic and risk your life, passing emergency rooms along the way," said Tiyy Sanchez, a VA administrator in Orlando. According to veterans' advocates and medical professionals working with patients daily, some are going to veterans' clinics first because they say they can't afford an ambulance bill as high as \$600 and they believe that cost won't be covered by their veterans' benefits or private insurance unless they go to the clinic first. "I think if it's anything serious, they should call 9-1-1, then worry about the details later," said Ron Butt, a Vietnam vet who now works with local disabled veterans. "With the economy, it's intimidating to dial that 9-1-1."

Some are worried because the decisions patients are making threaten their own safety and unnecessarily tie up county ambulances in a densely populated area. Last year, public records show ambulances in Brevard County FL took 293 patients — who county responders determined needed emergency care — from the clinic to hospitals, most to Viera Hospital about 2½ miles away. Stations in neighboring areas are affected too, because they are called in to cover when the Viera station responds to the clinic. "Our primary goal is to have the 9-1-1 system available for those who truly need it," said Orlando Dominguez, Brevard County Fire-Rescue's Emergency Medical Services Division chief. He said that agency is working with

the VA to reduce the number of calls. But, he stressed that the department shifts rescue units around to cover the Viera area as needed. "Yes, obviously you have a unit committed to the VA, but it's not any different than going to a home," Dominguez said.

According to Brevard County Fire-Rescue records, county ambulances responded to 550 calls from the clinic last year. Of those, 293 people needed emergency transport. That averages at least two calls per day — and about one transport per day — for the Monday-to-Friday work week that the clinic is open. The clinic sees an average of 1,100 patients per day. "Some veterans choose not to follow what is in their best health interest in a way to save money, just as other people in the community do when it comes to making medical decisions or following medical advice," said Tony Ingram, social work supervisor at the VA clinic. Ambulance bills can be pricey. For emergencies, the average is \$600. For non-emergency cases, such as delivering a patient to a nursing home, the average ambulance fee is about \$350. If the ambulance picks them up at the clinic, the Department of Veterans Affairs picks up 100 percent of the bill. If not, the veteran may have to file extra paperwork and negotiate to get the bill paid, depending on their personal circumstances. They know they might end up paying part or all of the bill themselves. "I think the economy plays a part in that," said Dr. Thomas Howard, chief medical officer at the VA clinic.

Butt, who volunteers with the Disabled Veterans of America chapter in Melbourne, and medical professionals noted that while the economy is a factor, in some cases, veterans are probably in denial, too, about the seriousness of their symptoms, not realizing their chest pains are a heart attack. The VA is trying to educate patients on two fronts. First, in many emergency cases, a veteran's health benefits will cover ambulance services — for instance, if the patient was seen by VA within the past two years and has no other private insurance. It doesn't matter about the location as much. Each case is different, Sanchez said. "It's not a simple yes or no," she said. Second, they're reminding patients that delaying treatment can lead to serious, permanent damage or even death. The Viera clinic has hung "Save Your Life" signs warning veterans to call 9-1-1 in emergencies rather than waiting. "I do educate them that their well-being is the most important thing, and they should not drive past a hospital in a medical emergency to come to the VA," Ingram said. Ingram said the majority of people transported via ambulance don't have urgent symptoms. "Most veterans come to the clinic because they are sick, and then after being evaluated by the medical provider are determined they need hospitalization or more care than can be provided by our outpatient clinic," Ingram said. The county fire-rescue records show 550 calls in 2011, 502 in 2010 and 451 in 2009. The VA reimburses the county for each emergency run. The bill was \$179,380 in 2011. So far, the county has collected \$73,321, with the balance still being processed by the VA. [Source: Florida Today Norman Moody article 22 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Special Monthly Compensation

It is possible to be compensated at a level above 100 percent for service-connected disabilities through VA's special monthly compensation (SMC) program. Conditions that rate SMC are identified by letters ranging from (k) to (s). Refer to rate tables at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp02.htm>. For example, a SMC(k) rating provides an additional \$99 per month above whatever your disability payment is already. Some SMC ratings provide \$8,000+ support beyond the amount awarded for a 100 percent disability rating. Medical conditions for which SMC applies include the specific loss or loss of use of organs or extremities — either an amputation or having no effective remaining function in an extremity or organ. VA lists these disabilities as eligible for SMC:

- Loss, or loss of use, of a hand or foot. •
- Immobility of a joint or paralysis. •
- Loss of sight of an eye (having only light perception). •
- Loss, or loss of use, of a reproductive organ. •
- Complete loss, or loss of use, of both buttocks. •
- Deafness of both ears (having absence of air and bone conduction). •
- Inability to communicate by speech (complete organic aphonia). •
- Loss of a percentage of tissue from a single breast, or both breasts, from • mastectomy or radiation treatment.

VA will pay more for combinations of these disabilities such as loss or loss of use of the feet, legs, hands and arms. The distinction between "loss of a limb" and "loss of use of a limb" is important — you don't have to undergo 36 an amputation to qualify for SMC. For example, if a veteran cannot balance or push off his foot, he may be considered to have lost the use of that foot, and so would qualify for SMC. Similarly, if a veteran cannot pick up objects with his hand, he may qualify for SMC for loss of use of that hand. In addition, veterans rated 100 percent disabled by VA who are housebound, bedridden or need the aid and attendance of another person also may be eligible for SMC. The amount of payment in these instances varies depending on the level of aid required. SMC payments aren't meant to compensate for potential loss of earnings from a disability but rather for noneconomic factors such as personal inconvenience, social inadaptability or the profound nature of a disability. In determining qualifications for SMC, the VA must review the medical evidence regarding the loss or loss of use and then make a decision regarding the level of SMC to be paid. Contact your nearest VA regional office for more details on SMC or you can call VA's main benefits information hotline toll free at 800-827-1000. VA also has a SMC fact sheet listed at <http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets/>. [Source: Command Master Chief Alex Keenan, USCG (Ret) article 23 Apr 2012 ++]

What I Learned in Vietnam

Two Perspectives

What I learned in Vietnam

By Jim Knee

This story starts when I was about four years old. My dad and mom had some friends they ran around with at that time. I've forgotten their names, it was a long time ago. He was a Marine in WWII during the Island Hopping campaigns and had volumes of books about the size of a high school yearbook on each campaign. I think he made everyone. I looked at them so many times that I wore them out. That's when I decided when I was big enough that I would be a Marine.

After high school I went to college in St. Louis for a year and then I went back to my hometown in Florida but it just wasn't the same so in October 1965 I joined the Marine Corps and headed for Parris Island. After ITR I got my 1811 MOS.

I was stationed at Camp LeJeune with 2nd Tanks and all of the time I was there Marines were leaving left and right to go to Tank School...but I got all my training on the ramp at the tank park with the meanest asshole corporal God ever put on this earth. I think that the Marine Corps had just made him meaner. I will say one thing, I knew the M-103 Heavy Gun Tank inside and out, right side up or upside down. And I can say that after 25 laps around the Tank Park with a fully assembled .50 caliber on my shoulders that I had no assembly problems after that.

After surviving all that stateside shit we went to Cuba for six months of perimeter guard duty where we watched the big Russian-built tanks range in on us every night. Of course we were the good little Marines and behaved ourselves. I can't understand why the commies would get pissed at us.

After that it was my turn to go to the "Garden of Eden." I left Okinawa by float and landed at the mouth of the Cua Viet River one fine morning at about 6:00 AM. There were more bombs, mortars, rockets and artillery going off than a man could fathom. Standing topside I thought what the f—k did I get myself into? I thought oh well tighten your belt and get these tanks on the beach.

I thought for being in Vietnam, things went as they could have been expected. My tank took a couple RPG hits and I was wounded with one while my driver was wounded with the other. We also hit a couple of mines but nothing that could not be repaired. We had a lot of tight spots which may have probably been more than our share. My tank was a command tank so when other tanks left the company, we went with them. Let me say now that of all the action my tank saw in Vietnam there is one thing that I am very- very proud of. Of all the Marines that served under me while I was tank commander, they all went home in one piece.

My life changed for me when we moved 1st Platoon, Charlie Co to Cam Lo Hill.

We had been living on C-rations that we brought with us and we were about to starve because the choppers couldn't get in for resupply because of all the shelling. The meat in the portable freezers went rancid and you couldn't get away from the smell. We had been there about a month when the Lt. woke up got my crew and two other crews at about 3:00 AM and told us to get ready to saddle up. I was told there was a VC village about 4000 clicks south of us and the village was used for an R&R center for all the bad guys in our area of operation. We were to go out there at daylight and wipe out every living thing present...bar none! We had to go through a cemetery just before we entered the village. All three tanks were on line as we entered the cemetery. As my tank hit the first monument in my mind I looked the Devil straight in the eyes and he told me if I went through with this he would meet me at the Gates of Hell. We went into the village and the VC had left just before we arrived. From that day forth I decided if I had to meet him at the

Gates of Hell that the line would be long. I volunteered for every mission I could get. I even volunteered to go on grunt patrols when the tanks weren't working. If I couldn't kill something or someone every day or so then I couldn't sleep at night and my hands would shake or my crew caught hell. I got real good at killing and I liked it.

I had a year left in my enlistment when

I got back to the Mainland and I found that I couldn't fit in. I got drunk every night and would end up getting into three or four fights every night when I could find them. I didn't care if the sun ever came up. I was crazy in a big way. When it came time for me to be discharged I decided I had better get out or I would lose everything that I had earned. How I kept my rank and even got promoted to E-6 I will never know, but I did.

When I arrived back home in Arkansas I really didn't fit in. I was staying with my parents at the time on their farm. I would stay out there until I was climbing the walls then I would go to town and find the worst shoot and stab I could find and have a ball. Most of the time it would be across the Arkansas state line. Most of the time I didn't care if we would f—k, fight, or run a foot race and after a couple years things seemed to settled down a little. I still had a violent temper and it didn't take much to set me off. If I got into a fight I just didn't want to hurt you, I tried to kill you. By this time I had a couple buddies that were with me most of the time and they would pull me off.

When Connie and I got married and had our sons I knew I had to get some help. I couldn't control my temper, so I went to the VA for help. That was a big mistake! The seemed as if they just didn't care. They just kept me so drugged up that I couldn't function. My family suffered so much that I would have not blamed them if they had killed me in my sleep...and a few times I wish they had. My youngest son is thirty-six and I will soon be sixty-six. And thank God we are just now becoming friends. That sure sounds like a lot of wasted life on my part. I know it's the right thing to do, to stand up and fight for your country; for a country that asks for our butt when you have to give up your heart, soul and life for some country that doesn't care either way... that's a little much. I hope with the few years I have left on this Earth I can bring my family together. I owe them more than I have time. I have started back with the VA with my PTSD and so far I'm doing well and looking for better days ahead.

I would like to also thank John and many others for what they are doing with the USMCVTA they are doing a great job, and it can only get better in the future. Just remember it takes all of us to keep the ball rolling. John, thanks for putting up with me when I call, it means a great deal to me.

Semper Fi

Jim Knee
704 Rosemary Ln.
Pocahontas, Arkansas 72455
Phone: 870-378-1148

What A Son Learned From Vietnam

By David Knee, son of VTA member Jim Knee

I recently visited my father who is a Vietnam vet. While there I read a letter published in a newsletter my father receives from the tankers association entitled "What I learned from Vietnam". While I'm not one to write into newsletters or newspapers, I found myself compelled to write this letter. I found myself compelled because of the arrogance I found in the tone of the letter. The author mentioned in the article that upon arriving back to the states, he arrived to a less than hero's welcome. He then went on to state that he entered University where life went on around him for people he no longer felt connected to. He also talked about how years later a twenty something year old, wet behind the ears counselor who had just left the safety of his parents and never experienced death except for pets he had buried was trying to help him. He even made reference to this being the kid's first job. While I'm not going to summarize the entire article I would like to tell you what I learned from Vietnam. I think people like the author of the letter too easily forget it because they are too wrapped up in self-pity. My farther recently retired and his issues with his past have been brought back to the forefront of our family once again. Forty something years have passed and my family only now has begun the healing process. I'm one of two sons of a Vietnam vet, and I can say with certainty that while I never fought in the Vietnam War it taught me much about life and relationships for that matter. I learned from watching my Dad beat the

shit out of my mother, my brother and me that it's ok to be abusive and rage out of control. I learned to be secretive because no one could see the bruises under my shirt at school. Oh and God forbid if I run down the street to get my father's aunt to keep him from killing my brother. "What happens in the family stays in the family," yep that's what I learned. By about the third grade the abuse had pretty much stopped but the damage was done. In my latter teen years I started having behavioral problems, violent outbursts, drinking and trust issues. I still to this day have a terrible temper. I have seen a counselor and guess what; I've been told I have PTSD, imagine that. You know though, I learned I do not have the Vietnam War to blame my problems or behavior on. I have been told time and time again that well you cannot change what happened to you in the past but you're an adult now and my behavior is my responsibility. I learned my mother still cries to this day when my father loses control. I learned that my mother, brother, nor I can get VA benefits to help us deal with our issues and forty something years later we don't get our hero's welcome for dealing with an asshole all this time. There is no statue or wall for all the broken families, ex-wives, or abused sons and daughters. And lastly I learned that even from the people that put us through it we don't get another thought. Because we weren't there, we don't understand. What we put up with from the hands of our loved ones don't even compare. Well let me tell you, everyone has a cross to bear, there are more ways than one to serve your country and community, and thank God that a twenty-something year old is working at the VA wanting to serve in a way that I'm sure most of us don't want to and it was a little presumptuous to say that the counselor was wet behind the ears and has never experienced death in a way that he could relate to a vet. Remember you really know nothing about him.

David Knee
333 Brownstone Dr
Englewood OH 45322
(937) 416-1438
kneedavid@hotmail.com

Poems



A MARINE DIED TODAY

He was getting old and paunchy
And his hair was falling fast,
And he sat around the Legion,
Telling stories of the past.

Of a war that he once fought in
And the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his buddies;
They were heroes, every one.

And 'tho sometimes to his neighbors
His tales became a joke,
All his buddies listened quietly
For they knew whereof he spoke.

But we'll hear his tales no longer,
For old Bob has passed away,
And the world's a little poorer
For a Marine died today.

He won't be mourned by many,
Just his children and his wife.
For he lived an ordinary,
Very quiet sort of life.

He held a job and raised a family,
Going quietly on his way;
And the world won't note his passing,
'Tho a Marine died today.

When politicians leave this earth,
Their bodies lie in state,
While thousands note their passing,
And proclaim that they were great.

Papers tell of their life stories
From the time that they were young
But the passing of a Marine
Goes unnoticed, and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution
To the welfare of our land,
Someone who breaks his promise
And cons his fellow man?

Or the ordinary fellow
Who in times of war and strife,
Goes off to serve his country
And offers up his life?

The politician's stipend
And the style in which he lives,
Are often disproportionate,
To the service that he gives.

While the ordinary Marine,
Who offered up his all,
Is paid off with a medal
And perhaps a pension, small.

It is not the politicians
With their compromise and ploys
Who won for us the freedom
That our country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger
With your enemies at hand,
Would you really want some cop-out,
With his ever waffling stand?

Or would you want a Marine--
His home, his country, his kin
Just a common Jarhead,
Who would fight until the end?

He was just a common Jarhead
And his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us
We may need his like again.

For when countries are in conflict,
We find the Marine's part
Is to clean up all the troubles
That the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor
While he's here to hear the praise
Then at least let's give him homage
At the ending of his days.

Perhaps just a simple headline
In the paper that might say:
"OUR COUNTRY IS IN MOURNING
A MARINE DIED TODAY."

JOKES

Military Pilot Takeoffs

Naval/Marine Aviator

On a carrier, the Naval Aviator looks over at the Catapult Officer ("Shooter") who gives the run up engines signal by rotating his finger above his head. The pilot pushes the throttle forward, verifies all flight controls are operational, checks all gauges, and gives the Cat officer a brisk salute, continuing the Navy/Marine tradition of asking permission to leave the ship. The Cat officer drops to one knee while swooping his arm forward and pointing down deck, granting that permission. The pilot is immediately catapulted and becomes airborne.

Air Force Aviator

We've all seen Air Force pilots at the air force base look up just before taxiing for takeoff and the ground crew waits until the pilot's thumb is sticking straight up. The crew chief then confirms that he sees the thumb, salutes, and the Air Force pilot then takes off. This time-tested tradition is the last link in the Air Force safety net to confirm that the pilot does not have his thumb up his ass.

Army Aviator

If you've ever seen an Army helicopter pilot preparing for takeoff, you will note that the pilot gives the ground guy a "thumbs up" before he is given hover and takeoff signals. There are two theories about the origin of this gesture.

One is that it is to show that the pilot has identified which of his fingers is the thumb so that he will be able to properly operate his controls. The most compelling theory says that this is to show the ground crewman that the pilot indeed knows which direction is up.

Work or Pleasure

A U.S. Marine Colonel was about to start the morning briefing to his staff, while waiting for the coffee to finish brewing, the colonel decided to pose a question to all assembled. He explained that his wife had been a bit frisky the night before and he failed to get his usual amount of sound sleep. He then posed the question of just how much of sex was "work" and how much of it was "pleasure?"

A Major chimed in with 75 - 25% in favor of work. A Captain said it was 50 - 50%. A lieutenant responded with 25 - 75% in favor of pleasure, depending upon his state of inebriation at the time. Unfortunately there was no consensus so the colonel turned to the young Marine PFC who was in charge of making the coffee.

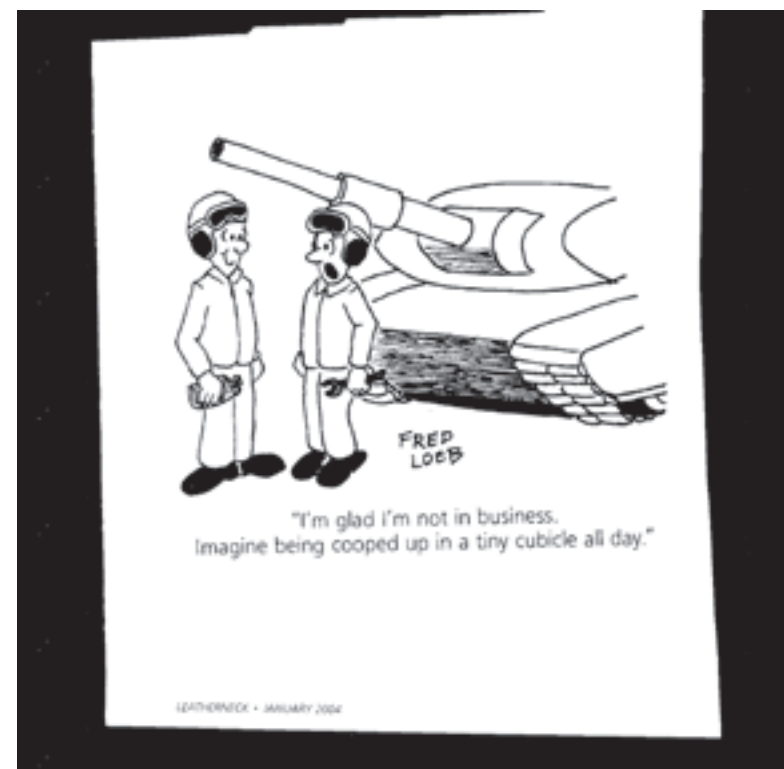
"What is your opinion", he asked the PFC?

Without any hesitation, the young PFC responded, "Sir, it has to be 100% pleasure."

The colonel was surprised and, as you might guess, asked why?

"Well, sir, if there was any work involved, the officers would have me doing it for them.

The room fell silent.



‘The Eagle Couldn’t Have Picked a Better Person’

Article by: JON TEVLIN, Minneapolis Star Tribune - June 25, 2011

Frank Glick took this photo at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. When he recorded the shot, he never could have guessed how much it was going to mean to the widow of the World War II veteran buried Photo: , Frank Glick

It was a crow that first caught Frank Glick’s attention. It was flying around erratically, so Glick got out his Nikon camera and followed it. It was around 6 a.m. on a hazy spring day and he was driving through Fort Snelling National Cemetery because he was early for a training meeting at Delta Airlines, where he works.

Glick is an amateur photographer, but he always carries his camera, just in case. So he followed the crow, in some cultures a symbol of good luck and magic, until he saw it: a huge eagle perched on a tombstone, its eyes alert, its head craned, looking for prey. In the foreground, dew glistened on the grass.

Glick got his shot.

He didn’t think too much about the photo, until he showed it to a co-worker, Tom Ryan, who e-mailed it to his brother, Paul.

Paul wondered whether a relative of the soldier might want a copy. The tail of the eagle partially covered the man’s name, but Paul did some research and looked up the soldier’s name in newspaper obituaries. The eagle had landed on the grave of Sgt. Maurice Ruch, who had been a member of the St. Anthony Kiwanis Club, the obituary said.

Paul called the club, and it put him in touch with Jack Kiefner, Ruch’s best friend. When Glick took his photo, he never could have guessed how much it was going to mean to Kiefner and Ruch’s widow, Vivian.

One day this week, I met with Kiefner and Vivian Ruch in her St. Anthony

condo. The actual print would be delivered later that day, but Vivian held a copy of the statuesque photo and her voice broke as she talked about Maurie, his nickname, who died from a form of Parkinson’s in 2008 at age 86.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “This is very emotional for me.”

Maurie graduated from college in mechanical engineering in December of 1941 and enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Known for his keen eye, he became a rifle marksman and was stationed in the Aleutian Islands. He served four years in the military and earned a bronze star.

To those who knew Maurie, he was a calm and deliberate giant. He stood 6 feet, 4 inches tall, with broad shoulders, but he was also unassuming and unpretentious.

“Used to call him Mr. Precise,” because of his love of order and knack for fixing things, said Vivian. The Ruches had a rotary telephone long after they became obsolete because Maurie scavenged parts and kept the phone working.

“He could work a slide rule like nobody else,” said Kiefner, who was a manager at Honeywell when Maurie was there as an engineer. Kiefner and Maurie were friends for more than 60 years. Not many people can say that anymore.

Maurie also loved nature and photography, so “he would have absolutely loved this picture,” Vivian said. “I told him his first love was his rifle.”

On a rainy morning, Vivian spread photos of Maurie in the service, and the two old friends sat and ate banana bread



Frank Glick took this photo at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. When he recorded the shot, he never could have guessed how much it was going to mean to the widow of the World War II veteran buried.

Photo: Frank Glick

and talked about a man they both loved.

They got that opportunity because a guy they didn’t know, Frank Glick, caught a special moment, and he and his friends took the time to seek them out and share the photo.

I told Vivian that some cultures believe the eagle is a symbol, not only of patriotism and dignity, but a messenger between heaven and earth. She nodded solemnly.

“I’d say the eagle had a very good eye when he landed on Maurie, and he was respected,” she said.

“I miss him,” said Vivian as she picked up the photo. “He was a good man and a good provider.”

“The eagle couldn’t have picked a better person,” said Kiefner. He paused. “This has been kind of fun hasn’t it?”

Tears welled in Vivian’s eyes.

“Yes, it’s been wonderful.”

jtevl@startribune.com

612-673-1702



BROKEN DOWN AT NIGHT AND NOT AN ARVN IN SIGHT

By Terry Summerlot

It was late April of 1967 and we were on the tail end of a sweep just south of the DMZ. It may have been part of Operation Prairie...at least it was during that time period. Our tank was Alpha-42 and it always seemed to be plagued with mechanical problems. Some said it was just a “bad luck tank.” Earlier in the war it had been hit and penetrated by an RPG and that probably was the beginning of its bad reputation. We had our share of superstitious guys in the battalion and at least one told me he thought the tank was just plain jinxed. But I had never been superstitious and I really liked going out in 42. Maybe because the tank had the bulldozer blade on the front and I felt that was extra protection. For whatever reason, I was comfortable on 42. Paul Ratliff was part of that crew but I can’t remember who the others were. It seemed as if our tank crews were changing weekly back then.

The sweep that we were on hadn’t gone well. We had run out of water early on, there were lots of grunt heat casualties and, of course, we kept taking small arms fire on again off again. But the real problem was a NVA machine gun that dogged us the whole time. When a helicopter came in to resupply us with water and to take out the casualties, it came under fire from

the machine gun. We would go after them but they always were able to slip away. On what should have been our last day of the sweep, we came upon some other Marine tanks. One of them had hit a mine and was being pulled back to Con Thien by one of the other tanks. We stopped to help but there was not much we could do so we got back in our tank. But our tank’s bad luck had kicked in and it would not go into gear. While the rest of the column moved on we worked on our problem. The TC made the call on the radio telling the departing column commander our situation. We were told that ARVNS were coming up the trail and would supply perimeter defense until help could arrive. When it started getting dark we thought either someone did not understand that we were the last of the column or that the ARVNS weren’t where they should have been. But later on we would hear a third scenario. We first set out claymores around us and the TC made one more call. We were told help would be there as soon as it got light. So we were on our own. The trail narrowed where we were stopped but it was wide open to both front and the rear. We could not have stopped in a worse place! There was just no hiding a 52 ton tank. If anyone came down the trail they would not miss seeing us. We locked down the loaders and the

drivers hatches and we left the TC’s cupola open. We rotated the watch, standing in the TC’s copula. We kept flares ready but did not shoot any so as not to draw attention to ourselves. No one could sleep. During my watch just about every possible worse case scenario played out in my head. For whatever reason, no one came down the trail or stumbled on to us that night. A few hours after sunup, a Marine tank retriever finally rumbled down the trail. As if breaking down and being left behind was not humbling enough, the guys in the retriever quickly fixed the problem and we returned under our own power. When we finally got back to the company area at Dong Ha, the rumor mill was churning. The story that was being told was that we had been left out there as “bait” to draw in the NVA machine gun that had relentlessly dogged us during the sweep. At that time, I really did not think that was what happened but now I sometimes think about it and wonder? ▲

We Lost Some Brave Men That Day

By Ted Hildabrand

John, I really appreciate your support and help on the VA issues but especially on the proposed historical write up on the 1st Tanks Reactionary Platoon incident. I'll try to send you some of the info I have. I have a synopsis of some info on the post incident perspective from a truck driver who drove a Warrant Officer and other WIAs to Marble Mountain for treatment. As I recall his perspective he felt that the NVA unit was significantly larger than reported by the Marine brass. I've never felt that I got an accurate perspective of the incident even though I was in-country and near by when it happened. You mentioned that you had heard that the NVA or VC had a heavy machine gun and that was the major problem for the assault on the NVA line. However, I feel that the enemy unit was a sniper unit with some machine gun support. See all of the info below. I have also read a lot of post battle reports from this period, February 1968, from 1st Tanks and there are numerous incidents of Marine KIA from snipers. With that said, I could not find any post battle report from the records for the specific incident in question. I wonder if some of the officers could have doctored up the report.

The only concrete information came from two of my friends; Lance Sullivan and Frank Stewart who were part of the Reactionary Platoon. Lance showed me Wayne's helmet liner that had a small hole in it. The hole did not look like it was made from a 30 caliber bullet but I don't know if the gooks were using 7.62 and/or 6 mm or similar smaller caliber rifles. Lance told me that Wayne took grenade shrapnel to his legs and called for the corpsman for assistance. According to Lance when the corpsman came to help that was when

Wayne was fatally shot in the head. It is my recollection that from Lance's comments that the corpsman was also killed and/or wounded. I have not been able to find any information on the corpsman's name. There was a post battle report where a 1st Tanks corpsman was KIA on the same day but that incident did not appear to be related.

My buddy Johns was also hit in the head. When they brought him out he was dragged on his back because of the severity of the head wound they could not carry him but he was already dead. Frank Stewart said that he recognized Johns immediately because his legs were exposed from his utility trousers and he could see the significantly hairy legs, which were Johns. He was one hairy Marine! Johns had been with that part of the platoon that made the ill advised crossing of the open dry rice paddy to attack the NVA / VC position.

My two friends that were KIA were Wayne Greer and Wayne Johns. We used to call Wayne Johns just "Johns." He was from a small town in Alabama and was easy going with an ever-present big smile. Wayne Greer was fairly young and from Greensburg, PA which is near Pittsburgh. While we were together in-country I always felt that I had Wayne under my wing. We had a lot in common with both of our type of families and both of us coming from Pennsylvania. Frank, Wayne, Lance and I were a tight group with bonds that only the Marine Corps can forge. "Johns" was the youngest and only male sibling of a large contingent of sisters. Based on what one of the sisters told me later, their mother never fully recovered from the loss of her son. Right after I came back home from Vietnam I tried to set up a meeting with Wayne's sisters and possibly his mother but one of the sisters told me they

did not want to meet. The loss of Wayne was still too painful and that she and her mother did not want to open up any of the painful memories.

To this day the family still feels as if Wayne and his fellow Marines were left with no support when he was KIA. The sister who was in touch with me was adamant about it from the beginning. She must have been given some additional information from some of other members of the Reactionary Platoon. She told me that if I ever found out anything of significance that she would like the information. I subsequently heard from a nephew of theirs who expressed the desire for some open communications but he emphasized the fact echoing his aunt's perspective that his grandmother wanted no further contact. I told them that I wasn't present during the ambush but I knew for a fact that their brother, uncle, son's fellow Marines would not and did not abandon him. A Corpsman was KIA while attending to Wayne based upon information from Lance. By the way, I was able to get contact information on Wayne's family from "The Wall" web page.

Frank Stewart, one of the Reactionary Platoon, told me that there were some complications and heated issues among the leadership prior to going into the attack. Apparently there was a Marine major who was directing and supposedly leading the platoon. The major asked for the firearm that a Warrant Officer was carrying and the WO reluctantly gave up his weapon. The tactics and approach to the firefight seemed to be a cluster fuck. The Reactionary Platoon was brought to the area by trucks. Supposedly half of the platoon crossed an open field leading into the village and the other half of the platoon went directly to it on the road. There

were no tanks involved in the battle and this is such a dichotomy for me...a Reactionary Platoon from a Marine tank battalion with no tanks supporting them?

Sometime earlier in 1967, prior to this incident in February of 1968, I was a member of the same Battalion Reactionary Platoon and we went into the same village. This time we were brought into the general area mounted on two tanks. Luckily there was no combat incident. It was just getting dark when we got to the village but again there was no problem. We were subsequently told that one of the villagers advised us that there were VC in the village. My personal opinion was that it was just another test to see how we would respond.

I read the short story in the "Letters to the Editor" in the Sponson Box magazine about the incident with the Reactionary Platoon and that is how I ended getting Bob Walker's name. Bob sent me a copy of the Memorial Ceremony for the KIAs of the Reactionary Platoon. I then had a telephone conversation with him. The information he provided gave me some more insight to the incident. My best recollection of what Bob said was that the grunts that were in the area would not initiate an attack on the subject village because the terrain and tactics called for clearing the village of NVA or VC. Apparently the enemy was well dug in and was looking for an attack because the terrain was in their favor. If I recall correctly when we went down the road from the village there was some high ground on the opposite side of the road. And across from the open fields there was a tree line on the other side on the approach to the village. The gooks were dug in deep with the ability to have devastating supporting crossfires.

The big question is why the Commanding Officer from 1st Tanks would send in our Reactionary Platoon to tackle this untenable and quite possibly unwinnable situation? My synopsis of the whole incident is that the enlisted Marines and Marine junior officers (including the WO) did their job as best as they could but there was a serious failure with some senior Marine officers. It would be interesting to know the outcome and what the perspective was that the Maine Corps had to lose six of our Marines in this battle. Was there any fall out of responsibility? I served under some outstanding officers and

men from the Corps but this incident was not, in my opinion, in the finest tradition of the USMC senior officers.

Wayne's sister's reaction is on target as I still wonder why the platoon was not sent into battle with any tanks. That was my immediate reaction even when I was advised of the incident when I was on Hill 55 in 1968. And if not tanks then why wasn't there artillery called in to support an attack? Why would the major in charge expose his men to an established and well dug in enemy with at least a more innovative tactical plan? If experienced grunts would not attack and clear the village why would the tank officers employ an untested Reactionary Platoon? These are the questions that haunt me.

I've tried to locate Lance Sullivan and Frank Stewart but have not been successful in finding them. Lance was from Washington State and Frank's family was from Baltimore. I left Vietnam shortly after this incident right after TET of 68. I was on Hill 55 but I had to go through Battalion when concluding my tour. That was the time that I got to talk one-on-one with "Sully" and Stewart about the incident. I wished that I had spent more time with the members of the platoon discussing the events but it was an emotionally charged issue for all of us. When I returned to CONUS I had completed my tour in the Corps so I went home for good. I have always had a problem dealing with the loss of my two good friends. More with Wayne than Johns...only because of the bond he and I had developed. It wasn't until later in my life that I have been able to deal with these emotions. I always felt guilty that I wasn't there with my friends. Could I have made a difference? Would they still be alive today? At least I would have all the answers or at least most of them.

In fact the writing of this memo has been a positive experience. I'm trying to seek closure on this issue. I still feel helpless in my inability to bring closure for Wayne's family. It is very awkward since I only live 15-20 minutes from the entire family...and I still cannot help bring them peace. I really don't have the answers that I need.

Semper FI.

Ted Hildabrand
Email: tkhaquariusnetwk@comcast.net
Monday, February 27, 2012

The following is an email conversation that Ted had with Steve Nordwell:

Steve Norwell writes: I served with H&S CO. from May '67 until June 68. I think that I remember you but not sure since my mind is not as sharp as it once was. I can remember a lot of faces but not a lot of names. I drove on a lot of convoys up to Alpha Co and I spent some time driving the three quarter ton p.c. for the Civil Affairs section. I was WIA on a convoy going up north on Jan. 10, '68. I got out of the hospital and was back to H&S Co the day before Tet '68 started. If you remember me, or some of the other guys, please get in touch with me if you like.

Ted Hildabrand replies: We were there at the same time. I was a truck mechanic. I got in-country on April 1 of 67...what a coincidence "April Fools Day." Originally we worked under a tent and small building adjacent to the motor pool. We then went to a "Butler" building (if you recall it was a large open steel framed and steel skin building) on the lower end of the base.

I went to Hill 55 sometime in late November or early December. I know I was still at H&S when the gooks blew the bridge on Election Day in November. I was with the Reactionary Platoon when we set up a blocking position in the early AM after the bridge was blown the previous night.

My best friends were Frank Stewart (he was a truck driver and then drove the tow truck), Wayne Greer and Lance Sullivan. I remember Staff Sergeant Bodie (sp?) and another Staff that ran the motor pool. The 2nd Lt in charge was a real young man and he was very pleasant. I can see his face but can't remember his name. I can also remember one truck driver that was fanatical about keeping his truck clean; especially the battery box. Otherwise it all is too fuzzy. I do have one picture which I can send you.

I spent Tet '68 on Hill 55 and left country in late April or May. Wayne Greer was KIA back at H&S along with Johns (last name) and a corpsman. The Reactionary Platoon responded to a request for help from a village nearby. I recall being at the same village before (one building was brick) but we responded with an entire platoon and several tanks. Frank indicated that they only went in on trucks and they were ambushed by what I think was a gook sniper team. I

think it was on February 14...but I would have to check. Do you know anything about this incident? Frank did give me some info back then but it is now all fuzzy. I sort of blocked it out for a long time which doesn't help with recall now.

Steve Nordwell replies: You were in the Bn Motor-T Maintenance Platoon so do you remember Cpl Charles Meyers? He was in Maintenance too. He came in with the float that brought the Ontos. Do you remember that time we hung out and we went to Bangkok on R&R? I do remember the Gunny who came in about half way through my time in-country? He was the Maintenance NCO in charge? He spit tobacco all over the place and almost all of the Maintenance guys hated him. I do remember Stewart. He and I went on a few trips together. He was from Macon, Georgia and his dad was a masonry contractor. Frank always talked about getting out of the Crotch and working for his dad. I wonder if he ever did. I remember Greer and Sullivan too. Do you remember Mike Moorhead? He and I got in-country at the same time. We were also in the same platoon in bootcamp and you know how it goes? We always lined up in alphabetical order so every time I turned around there was Moorhead next to me. He spent a short time in H&S Co and then went to Bravo Co. SGT, Bodie hated me and I will never forget him. The other sgt was Thaxton. He was a good guy and he went north with me a couple of times as my gunner since I had a gun ring on my truck. The 2nd Lt. was Hayward who was also a good guy Feb. 6th is when we went to the bridge that you are talking about getting blown up. We went out there as a reactionary force and I drove one of the trucks out with our guys loaded on the back. We went in expecting a cake walk since we had had several cake walks in the few days since TET. had started. We did a full company forced march out across a dry rice paddy towards a tree line which was not good. The NVA let us get with in range and then they opened up. Cpl Johns, Greer and PFC Fouch were KIA. Fouch had only been in-country for a couple of days. The surviving person from the first fire platoon, 1st squad, 1st Reaction Platoon was LCpl Smoot. I started out in the Reaction Platoon the night that TET had started.

We made a couple of trips here and there off the end of the run way at the Da Nang airstrip but after a couple of days some one in charge noticed that I was supposed to be on Light Duty since I had just gotten out of the hospital. Greer replaced me the day before he was killed. It was later said that we went up against a battalion of N.V.A. After we got the crap kicked out of us, the brass called in the tanks. I hope I have filled in some blanks for you. I now live in Tigard, Oregon which is a suburb of Portland. I work in construction as a superintendent for a commercial industrial general contractor.

Ted Hildabrand replies: Steve thanks for the info. I have several questions about last part of your response. I thought there was a corpsman that was also KIA while he was aiding Greer. Also do you know why the brass didn't send tanks in with the reactionary platoon when your team first responded? And did the brass call in arty at all to help out before or after the action? Stewart told me that one of the officers acted badly during the action and my recollection was that he was a major. Did you ever make contact with Sullivan on the West Coast? "Sully" was from Washington State. Have you ever met with any of the other Marines at a reunion anywhere?

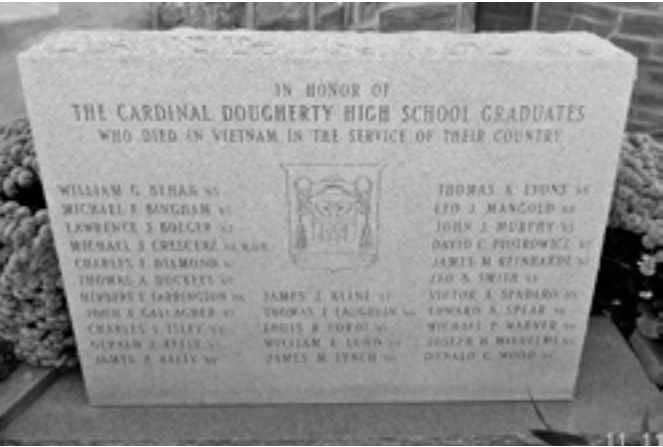
I've been retired since 2004. I worked with a private water utility for 37 years as an engineer and in operations/management. I love the retirement and have been to Montana the past 10 years to fish in late June/July. Your input and response and help have been great. Helps heal the wounds!

Steve Nordwell replies: Ted the corpsman was shot in the ass aiding Greer. When the NVA opened up, our guys were caught out in the open dry rice paddy when they were behind a small dike. Smoot was lucky where he was when he dove down since the dike was a little taller. The corpsman came to Greer's aid but he couldn't get down low enough and was WIA. I got that part of the story from Smoot afterwards. Later that night, when the tanks were finally called in, NVA broke off contact and ran. All of the WIAs were loaded into my truck and I took them to the Hospital in Da Nang. Most of the wounds were butt wounds because they couldn't get down low enough with no cover. When I went to the hospital some officer (a Warrant Officer, I believe) rode in

the cab with me. He had a wound on his right hand. I recall this because he gave me his .45 and told me that he couldn't use it. I put it in my lap as I drove. I told him I had my rifle but he insisted that I take his pistol. He was pretty shook up...Hell we all were! The KIAs were loaded onto some other truck and were taken back to H&S to spend the night there. I could never figure out that one. I would have thought that it would have been safer for both of our trucks to go at the same time. Stewart and you are right that it was a major. He was relieved of command of the Reactionary Platoon the next morning. I don't know if any other corrective action was ever taken on any of the brass for the screw up. When we went out there we were told that it was a small force of VC which we now know that it was not true. The next morning they made a sweep of the area and figured we had gone up against a battalion of hard-core NVA. As far as not sending the tanks in with the guys in the first place, I don't know if they were already at the bridge about a half mile away. I have always wondered about that. No one called in artillery or air strikes...but then it was Tet and maybe a lot of the supporting arms were busy elsewhere? I have not been in touch with any one but you. I went on line to the Bravo Co, 1st Tanks website and picked up your entry. I do recall that Sullivan was from the Seattle area at that time since I was from Goldendale that is also in Washington State. We were both fans of a local beer, Olympia. Some where I have a picture of Sullivan and me drinking some Olympia beer that my folks had sent in a care package. I now have two sons who live near me...just across the river in Washington State. We all fish together for salmon and steelhead. You are right. You can't beat the Pacific Northwest! I will probably work till I die as long as my health is good. I am 63 now and I may retire at 65...but I will still work at something. You are right on about healing the wounds. It sure is good to correspond with some one that was there. ▲

Cardinal Dougherty High School Vietnam Memorial, Philadelphia, PA

By Joe Tyson, Sr



Cardinal Dougherty High School located in Philadelphia PA, closed its doors in 2010. At one time it was the largest Catholic High School in the country. Dougherty lost 27 graduates in the Vietnam War, the highest number of any parochial high school in the nation. Cpl. John Crescenzi, a 1964 Dougherty graduate, the only Philadelphia native to receive the Medal of Honor in Vietnam, is on the memorial, which was located on the school grounds. When the school closed, the Vietnam Memorial was moved to a VFW Post 2819 that is located in my old neighborhood, close to the school. It is a fitting location since almost all of the names inscribed were born and raised in and around that area. I was proud to be involved, along with other Veteran brothers, in the grounds preparation for the memorial relocation and rededication which was held on Veterans Day 2010. In the weeks prior to the rededication, as we were preparing for the day, I did some in depth research on the Marines' names that were inscribed on the memorial. Being a Marine tanker, I found it interesting that two of the Marines, who I had known back in high school, were with Marine Ontos units in Vietnam. I had not been aware of this fact until that moment. The Marines were Cpl. Charles Isley and Sgt. James Lynch.

Marine Cpl. Charles Isley grew up not five blocks from where I lived. I remember him as being very tall but a quiet kid. We went to the same grade school, St Williams, and then to Dougherty; he was a year behind me. I was home on leave before being stationed at Quantico

when Charlie was brought home. He was killed in action on November 20, 1966 in Quang Nghi Province, South Vietnam. He was only 20 years old. He was assigned to C Co, 1st Anti-Tank Bn, 1st Marine Division, III MAF.

My Dad gave me the sad news that Charlie had been killed and he asked me, "Maybe, you should go to his funeral?" However, I could not bring myself to go and to this day I regret not attending. You see? I had just returned home from Nam and I felt that I had had enough. I was intent on trying to bury the horror of that hell hole as deep as I could get it!

Marine Sgt. James Lynch was killed in action on July 29, 1967 in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. He had been assigned to 3rd Platoon, C Co, 3rd Anti-Tank Bn.3rd Marine Div. III MAF. Jim graduated from Cardinal Dougherty three years ahead of me in 1960. He lived right across the train tracks from Philadelphia in Cheltenham, PA, which is about a half a mile from my boyhood home. Back in those days, he was one of the older guys. Jim was 24 years old when he was killed on his 2nd tour in Vietnam. Which, I didn't find out until many years later after being discharged.

So on November 11, 2010, the day of the rededication, became a day of mixed emotions. For one thing, all of the families of the KIA Vietnam Veterans were invited and many came. There ended up being over one hundred family members present. It was good to see Charles Isley's entire extended family, including his aged Mother, and Jim Lynch's entire extended family were able to attend. The

total number of people in attendance was estimated to be over 700. Secondly, during the ceremony many local Philadelphia dignitaries and family members spoke. It was very sad for the families and I could still see the pain on all their faces. It brought the feeling back of old times seeing all those old friends, neighbors and classmates as well as many Vietnam Veterans and other Veterans from the old neighborhood, remembering those who were close to us. For a very short time, I forgot about how it was and it strangely seemed like the old neighborhood and America that I had left many years before and not the completely changed country I came home to after the war. This feeling only lasted for a very, very short time. Vietnam had taken our friends and our brothers. Finally, even though this day was about remembrance, I had a sense of joy knowing the memorial found a home again in an area they all knew and where family and friends could come to visit those who they lost.

At this point I'd like to ask that any of you Marine "track heads" who may remember Charlie Isley or Jimmy Lynch, please contact me by email or phone. I would be interested to hear your stories.

SEMPER FIDELIS

Joe Tyson
B Co, 3rd Tanks RVN '65 – '66
Email: Jtysonmm90@verizon.net
Phone: (215)514-1791





Marines ride USMC tanks near Con Thien

As a follow up to the cover photo & ensuing story from “Operation Buffalo” that was featured in the Sponson Box’s first issue of 2012:

FROM TIME MAGAZINE JULY 14, 1967

“...and South Viet Nam. The action there last week provided grim illustration of the war’s bloody turn. Spotting a small force of North Vietnamese grouping for what looked like an attack on the Marine post at Con Thien, two Marine companies (from 1 Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment) moved up Route 161 to do battle. They ran right into an ambush. Two battalions of Hanoi’s 324B Division supported massively by mortars and aided by Red artillery firing over the DMZ from North Vietnam, hit the 300 Marines, killings 83 and wounding 170. It was the worst U.S. loss in a single battle this year.

Those Marines who survived had to do what Marines hate most: retreat, leaving their dead behind. Waiting until reinforcements arrived, the Marines went back for their dead three days later. Within 600 ft. of the ambush, the North Vietnamese attacked again, killing 15 Marines and wounding 22. But this time U.S. air and artillery forced the Communists to withdraw, and the dead were at last brought out, many piled atop tanks.

A Conventional Front

By late 1967 or even mid-year, Allied commanders had expected that big-unit war would have become too costly for the enemy and that the war of regiments and battalions would be substantially over. Far from fading the big-unit war has grown fiercer in recent months. Moreover, big-unit victories and massive Allied search-and-destroy sweeps have not so far advanced the vital pacification program, partly because South Vietnamese troops have been slow to take to their new village-security tasks. No matter how many North Vietnamese regulars are killed along the DMZ or in the Central highlands, it is not much aid or comfort to the peasants in a Viet Cong-ridden village down in the Delta, where a third of the country’s people live.

Most of the recent big-unit fighting is centered along the DMZ. There, alone in Viet Nam, the U.S. has built something resembling a conventional-war “front,” complete with a no man’s land, artillery duels, bunkered lines of defenses faced off against one another. Since the first of the year, the Marines have suffered some 1,000 dead and 7,000 wounded at the DMZ alone. The U.S. and the Marines chose to precipitate this kind of battle in an effort to

block the enemy infiltration lines leading due south across the DMZ. To do so, they had to establish a major line of outposts in terrain and a location where logistics favor the enemy. It is an offensive stance in a place where the Communists have short, efficient supply lines and also a sanctuary into which they can retreat to their own home – where Hanoi at times can offset the overwhelming U.S. superiority in airpower and firepower that makes the difference in any other battle farther south. It is still hideously expensive for the Communists in terms of their own dead but from Hanoi’s point of view it is also a war of attrition against the Marines. “It isn’t a great sport anymore,” says a Marine veteran. “You know – a 7-to-1 ratio of Communist casualties to the U.S.’s. It is now about 3 to 1, and in some places 2 to 1, and even occasionally 1 to 1.”

Still as numerous

Part of the new unease about the state of war stems from the fact that, for all the hard fighting over the past year, Communist forces in South Viet Nam are as strong as they were a year ago, if not stronger. Their numbers are put at a record 296,000 despite an estimated 46,500 killed this year alone. Fewer than half are North Vietnamese troops or Viet Cong main-force fighters, but these “regulars” are at least as numerous as a year ago. Their weaponry has markedly improved in variety and quality of late, from new AK 47 automatic rifles to rockets to the Soviet RPG antitank gun that last week knocked out a Marine tank for the first time in the war. Last week, also for the first time in the war, the North Vietnamese zeroed in on the Marines with a family of Russian massive 152 mm howitzers and long guns; one round hit the Con Thien command post, killing nine Marines and wounding 21. Red shelling of the chief Marine forward base along the DMZ of Dong Ha has become, in fact, so heavy and accurate that the post may soon be abandoned.

The U.S., of course, has the resources in firepower and men to defeat any Communist force anywhere in Viet Nam that is willing to stand and fight for any length of time. But, true to Mao’s manual of guerrilla warfare, the enemy is fighting for the most part only when he chooses and with a willingness to take heavy losses to undermine U.S. patience in the war. (One North Vietnamese defector

along the DMZ claimed that his job was to dig graves for a third of his unit before it went into battle against the Marines.)

Equation of Agony

Weeks sometimes go by when as many as 16 major U.S. operations are under way – no major contact is made anywhere because the enemy is ducking battle. Unless more U.S. combat troops are thrown into the hunt, or a different strategy of utilizing their present strength is found, the gains from the undeniable American and South Vietnamese progress of the past 18 months may flag. That might dim the hopes for a spreading pacification effort and the fledgling process of nation building, which could, if all goes well, get a powerful stimulus from the coming September presidential elections. The agony of the Viet Nam equation is that for the enemy, simply not to lose is, in a measure, to win; for South Vietnam and the U.S., not to lose is simply not enough.

NORTH VIET NAM

Wanted: A New Commissar

General William Westmoreland’s Communist equivalent, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, 51, commander for Hanoi of all North Vietnamese and Viet Cong political and military activity in South Viet Nam, died last week of a heart attack, said Radio Hanoi. A stocky, dour, pro-Chinese Annamese, Thanh directed the war for the most part from a redoubt in Tay Ninh province near the Cambodian border, operating under the pseudonyms of Anh Sau and Sau Di.

Educated in Hue, he started his career as a teacher, acquiring skills that he put to work when he joined the Communists in the 1930s and helped to create Ho Chi Minh’s party youth organization. He learned his soldiering in Mao Tse-tung’s military “academy” in Yenan from 1941 to 1943, the fought with the Chinese Communists until the end of World War II. From 1950 to 1961 he was chief political officer for Ho’s army in Hanoi; in 1964 he was sent to South Viet Nam, where he directed, with considerable craft and imagination, all Communist efforts against the Allies. The Communists will not announce Thanh’s successor, of course, but intelligence men will be watching carefully for signs of his appearance in the next few months. ▲

IN COUNTRY

By Ric Langley



Left to Right: Ina Langley, Ric Langley and Jake Langley. Marine graduation 1966.

In January 1966 the draft had finally caught up with me, I could not avoid it any longer. I made the bus trip to L. A. thinking I would spend the next two years somewhere in the U.S. Army. To my surprise I left L.A. on a bus headed for San Diego and Marine Corps boot camp. By July I had finished basic training, ITR, tank school and staging Battalion. About the only place you could go now in the Marine Corps was to that great vacation spot on the South China Sea, VIETNAM. On July 5, 1966 I loaded on a Northwest Orient Airlines plane, with 180 of my new best friends and headed for Nam. It was a long flight with several stops that ended in Okinawa Japan. After a couple of days of processing and a couple of nights drinking way to much with a friend, that I had gone through boot camp with, we were back on a plane for Da Nang. I was a clueless twenty years old about to embark on thirteen months that would change my life forever. After a relatively short flight we arrived at Da Nang South Vietnam. At that time Da Nang was where all Marines entered or left the country. Upon landing the airfield looked much like any other airfield. The plane taxied to a stop and as soon as they opened the door I, along with everyone else on that plane, knew we were no longer in the good old U.S. of A. The heat, humidity, dust and smell grabbed me by the throat and would not let go until the day, at that same airfield, I would get back on another plane and head back to the World. We off loaded the plane and formed up into a loose formation waiting for

transportation to the processing area. The transportation of course would be the good old cattle cars so loved by every Marine. As the cattle car pulled up I noticed that all the windows were covered with chain link fencing. I asked one of the guys who had taken charge of this group of FNGs (fucking new guys) what's up with the fencing; he said that's to keep the grenades out of the cars that the gooks throw. First clue this is very serious business. On the short ride everyone was laughing and talking until we passed an aircraft being loaded with those soon to be all too familiar silver coffins, my next clue. We arrived at the processing center and of course got into one of the never ending lines that the Marine Corps has to offer. Things moved fairly quickly and before I knew it I was being picked up by a 6X6 truck from 3rd Tank Bn. Being the only guy going to 3rd tanks I jumped up into the cab with the driver and we headed off for the drive to their headquarters. I asked the driver a few questions to try to get some idea what I had gotten myself into. He had been in country for only a few months with no problems to speak of. They had tents, cots, hot meals, showers, movies, a club, a PX where you could buy just about anything you wanted, so he thought it was pretty good duty. He then added that the companies in the field were not so blessed they had things a little rougher. Sometimes they didn't get their movies on time and they had to stand guard and things like that. This didn't sound so

bad; I can do the next thirteen months standing on my head. Think again new guy. As we pulled into the battalion area the driver pointed out the office where I was to report and wished me luck. I grabbed my sea bag and ditty bag and headed to the office where I reported in to the clerk. He told me to have a seat and the battalion XO (executive officer) would see me in a minute. After just a short time the clerk, pointing to the back of the tent, said the XO would see me now. I made my way to where the clerk had pointed and reported as ordered in my best boot camp style. I didn't want to get off on the wrong foot this early in my stay in Vietnam. The XO didn't say at ease or anything he just told me to have a seat and they would figure out where they were going to send me. I didn't have to go anywhere; I thought I could be perfectly happy right there for the next thirteen months. Like that was going to happen. The XO called the clerk in and asked him about the personnel levels in the various companies. He said that most of the companies where in good shape except for "C" company which would be losing a lot of people to rotation within the next two months. He said ok lets send him

up there, make sure he gets his weapon and all his gear. He said that will be all, wished me good luck and told me the clerk would get me squared away. What's with all this good luck stuff? I followed the clerk back to his desk where he started the process to get me on my way. Without saying a word he started shuffling a bunch of paper work and making notes. He typed up a form ripped it out of the machine and handed it to me saying it was my boarding pass for a flight to Phu Bai. I asked where the hell is Phu Bai, acting a little irritated. He must have noticed the irritation in my voice; he loosened up and told me it was up north and that "C" Co. was a good outfit, in fact if he had to go to a company in the field he would want to go there. He said it was too late in the day to get a flight so I would have to spend the night there. He said follow him and he would show me where I could bunk for the night. I followed him up the street to what he said was their transit tent. On the way he pointed out the chow hall, showers and latrine. The tent was completely empty except for a few dust covered cots. I tossed my gear on one of the empty cots and asked what's next. He pointed across the road and said to go to the armory to pick up my pistol and 782 gears. Hmmm, a pistol, maybe another clue? The clerk bid me farewell with the usual good luck. This is starting to creep me out. At the armory I was issued my pistol, holster and a ton of 782 gear. 782 gear consisted of a pack, cartridge belt, canteens, helmet and a bunch of other stuff. With another good luck from the armor I gathered up my gear and headed back to the tent. I didn't realize until I sat down on the cot that I was exhausted. The heat the tension and humping all that stuff around had kicked my ass. Being well over one hundred degrees with ninety percent humidity there was no way that I, not being use to the weather, was going to be able to take a little nap so I decided I would write some letters to let the folks back home know I had made it this far ok. I reached for my ditty bag unzipped it and upon looking inside to retrieve my writing gear I realized I had by mistake picked up my friend, Jim Fite's, ditty bag. I headed down to the office to ask the clerk where the Amtrak battalion headquarters might be. I lucked out; their headquarters was about a quarter mile down the road. I

strapped on my newly acquired pistol, what a strange feeling, and headed in the direction the clerk had pointed me. I found Jim about the same time he figured out we had switched bags. Being late in the afternoon we decided to go have a few beers at the Amtrak club. Another long night and another bad morning. The next morning as soon as I heard people stirring around I got up got my gear and headed for the motor pool to hitch a ride to the airfield. Once there I presented my papers to the guy at the desk marked departures and was informed they would have a C47 plane leaving for Phu Bai in a couple of hours. One thing I had learned already was that if you have a chance to get some Zs you had better take it. I headed for a quiet corner, dumped my gear, laid down and went right to sleep. Before I knew it the loud speaker was blurting out my flight number. I found the line to board, what I thought was the right plane and fell in behind other Marines, Vietnamese women, children, chickens and even a goat. Welcome to travel Vietnam style. Up and away on this vintage aircraft chickens goats and all. The flight was short, noisy, smelly and bumpy. Phu Bai airfield was a little smaller than Da Nang but with what seemed like a lot more military activity. I found the office and was able to get in touch with "C" Co. They told me to hang loose they would send transportation for me as soon as they could. They also told me that there was another guy there that had flown in from Da Nang that morning. I checked the area and spotted a guy that looked like he may be a tanker. I approached the guy and asked if he was on his way to "C" Co. as well and he replied yes so we sat down and started to chew the fat. He had been to battalion HQ. For office hours and had been busted from private first class to private. There just seemed to be shitbirds no matter where you went in the Corps. He asked why I was hauling around all that 782 gear around. I told him that they had issued it to me and I thought I would need it. He said lose it, I would never in a hundred years use it. I said but I'm signed out for it. Tell them it got destroyed in the field they can't verify it wasn't. So I dumped the gear in a corner and forgot it. He was right I never missed it or needed it the entire time I was in Vietnam. A jeep pulled up by the side door of the

building we were sitting in and a guy came in checking the area like he was looking for someone so we flagged him over and asked if he was from "C" Co. Bingo we had our ride and in no time I was standing in front of the company CO (commanding officer). He asked me a number of questions, like how long I had been in the Corps, what kind of experience I had in tanks, where I was from and that kind of stuff. I answered all his questions and told him I had been drafted in the Marines but that I would give him one hundred percent. He said he didn't care how I got there that I was now one of the Marines under his command and he expected no less than one hundred percent all the time. The commander assigned me to C12 a brand new tank just in from the States with Sgt. Jones as tank commander. Because of excess personnel we had five crewmembers with me as low man. The company was living in hard back tents with hot showers, a chow hall and movies, almost as nice as battalion HQ. Without all the spit and polish. I found my platoon's tent and an empty cot and started to settle in. Crewmen started to filter into the tent after completing their day's duties and introduced themselves. You could only tell I was straight from the States with my polished boots and dark green utilities. I met the other guys on our crew and they took me to meet Sgt. Jones. They all seemed to like and respect him and said he was a great tank commander. The crew left me with Jones and went off to shower and get ready for chow. We chatted a little bit about home and how long he had been in Nam and how short he was and how long it would be before I was on my way home. He told me what he expected from me as a crewman on his tank All in all I felt good, I was finally in my new home with my new family and knew what was expected of me. All too soon I was to learn that home is where you park your tank and that your family can be torn apart in a heartbeat. In the next few months Vietnam would teach me many hard learned lessons and I would collect many more of those valuable clues, but for now I was as happy as a guy could be that far from home and loved ones. ▲

SHORT STORIES

Foxholes for Tanks...?

Today I started digging around & cleaning out my home office and I found these two pictures of when I was a young L/



Rick Lewis in the trenches

Cpl tank crewman in-country. I remember that these were taken when the 1st Tanks battalion maintenance “brass hats” told us to break out our shovels and picks from our tanks and start digging fox holes. At the time we thought that this was a really dumb idea. We reasoned, “Why would we need fox holes if we have tanks to jump into?” (See the first photo)



INCOMING

In Chu-Lai the tank park was about 150 yards form the transit area tents where we slept. While digging the hole we got mortared (See the second photo).

I dug faster!!!

Early in 1966, when these pictures were taken, I was with 2nd Plt, C Co, 1st Tanks in Chu Lai but we where attached to B Co, 1st Tanks. We left for Da Nang I think in mid 66 via an old LST to C Co, 1st Tanks at Marble Mt. The only time I was with H&S Co was when I was with C Co, 1st Tanks in Dec 67 on a flame tank. That’s where they put all the short timers. With only 10 days left we got hit by motars and the company Gunny had us roll out the tanks. The only problem was the NVA had planted a mine 25 feet out the main gate and I hit it!

Semper Fi,

1st Sgt Rick Lewis, USMC (ret)
San Diego, CA

The Marines Reputation

Early in his career, when Lt. Gen. Victor H. “Brute” Krulak asked a gunnery sergeant how the Marines had come by their reputation, the Gunny replied, “Well, lieutenant, they started right out telling everybody how great they were. Pretty soon they got to believing it themselves. And they have been busy ever since proving they were right.”

Stars and Stripes Newspaper

Like cigarettes and sarcasm, the Stars and Stripes newspaper has been a daily mainstay of troops downrange for decades. Yet the paper is struggling to forge a future in the 21st century. Its original mission of providing paper-and-ink news to deployed troops is being undermined by seismic shifts in the worlds of both journalism and defense, including the rise of free news online, shrinking Pentagon budgets and a dwindling military presence overseas. Originally founded by Union soldiers in 1861, Stars and Stripes has been a fixture across military bases in Europe and Asia for generations. And copies of the daily newspaper have been a ubiquitous presence on forward operating bases in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade, bringing news stories, sports scores and bits of celebrity gossip to today’s troops. In its current incarnation, which dates to World War II, Stars and Stripes has been an unusual newspaper. The military technically

owns it and writes its operating policy, but the law requires it to be run by civilians and to be editorially independent of uniformed commanders.

The paper’s daily circulation has dropped from more than 200,000 during the Cold War to about 70,000 today, and its editors are talking of scaling back print publication from seven days a week to five. Taxpayer funds provided by the Pentagon make up more than half of the paper’s annual operating budget of \$50 million, but that subsidy has been shrinking in recent years. Stars and Stripes editors insist their online edition is robust and gaining readers. And Pentagon officials say there are no plans to shut the paper down. But with the end of the Iraq War, the winding down of the Afghanistan War, and steady reductions in the U.S. military presence in Europe, its future is hazy. “It’s been a unique thing,” said Ron Jensen, a Stars and Stripes reporter in Europe from 1988 to 2005. “But certainly it shouldn’t stick around just for nostalgia’s sake.” ‘A chilling effect’ adding to the uncertainty: Stars and Stripes editors say their independent voice is under attack from Pentagon officials who want to house the newspaper under the same roof as the military’s broader empire of command-approved media outlets, such as the Pentagon Channel and the American Forces Press Service.

Earlier this year, the paper’s editors learned that the Pentagon plans to move Stars and Stripes headquarters from its offices in the National Press Building in downtown Washington, D.C., to Fort Meade, Md. There, the paper’s civilian editors would share government office space with the Defense Media Activity, which trains public affairs officers and military journalists. “This move would have a chilling effect on our perception of independence and hurt our ability to report the news the way we want,” said Terry Leonard, the Washington-based editorial director for all Stripes editions worldwide. Defense officials say the move will save money by putting the 80-person staff in government office space rather than leasing pricey downtown real estate. Over the years, the paper has often angered the Pentagon. In 2003, the paper published a series about the Iraq War titled “Ground Truth,” which included a survey of deployed troops and identified early signs of low morale and skepticism of the war’s aims. “Are there people at the Pentagon who would like to see us go away? Sure there are,” Leonard said. He and other staffers have appealed to Congress, prompting Sen. Carl Levin, (D-Michigan), Senate Armed Services Committee chairman, to fire off a letter Feb. 29 to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, urging him to reconsider the move to Fort Meade.

Some Pentagon officials believe Stars and Stripes should become a smaller, cheaper and less ambitious operation once the Afghanistan War winds down, according to one former Stars and Stripes official familiar with the discussions. The thinking is that the paper could carry on with fewer staffers than today’s team of more than 40 reporters spread out across 16 bureaus worldwide, and could be expanded and revitalized if a new overseas conflict were to arise, the former official

said. But that won’t happen any time soon, a senior Pentagon official insisted in an interview. “Those who say that this move [to Fort Meade] is intended to clip the wings of Stars and Stripes could not be further from the truth,” said Doug Wilson, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs. “It is a budgetary decision.” [Source: ArmyTimes Andrew Tilghman article Mar 2012 ++]

Ya Gotta Love Those Grunts

While I was in Vietnam (1967-1968) I experienced the true meaning of Semper Fi and how Marines take care of Marines. I was a dump truck driver with H&S Company, 7th Engineer Battalion. I was in a large convoy leaving the An Hue Combat Base with my friend Tyrone Jones heading for Hill 55. We were then scheduled to head on to Da Nang. Tyrone had a new guy with him in his dump truck and I also one riding with me. I am sorry to say that I can’t remember my new guy’s name. The convoy had two tanks escorting it. One tank was in the front of the column while the other took up the rear.

About halfway to Phu Loc 6 the rear tank hit a command detonated land mine (IED). The convoy stopped and the front tank went back to help the tank with the blown up suspension. We all jumped into the ditches and started shooting into the tree line. We received a few sniper rounds in return. The undamaged tank blew up a hooch and the grunt next to me blew-up a small cement structure with a LAW. We got the “All Clear” from the convoy commander and we headed out for Hill 55. Little did Tyrone and I know that what just happened was only the beginning of a very scary and exciting day.

When we arrived at Hill 55, the convoy broke up, everyone headed out for their own units. One of the Marine lieutenants who had been assigned to Hill 55 told us that Route 5 hadn’t been swept for mines since morning and to be very careful. It was late in the afternoon when Tyrone and I left for Da Nang with our two new guys. We were driving really fast heading north on Route 5 and after we had traveled about 10 miles, Tyrone decided to give me a little scare. He drove his truck up and bumped the rear of my truck. Just as his truck touched the rear of mine, he hit a land mine. The blast lifted my truck about three feet into the air. Tyrone’s truck flew way up into the air and way out into a rice paddy. His truck hit the rice paddy so hard that it threw the two of them out into the water. Tyrone had a concussion and his passenger was unconscious with his right thumb torn off. My passenger and I were not hurt other than some a loud ringing in our ears.

We thought that he hit a command detonated mine and that we were all alone in the middle of nowhere without a radio but after the dust and smoke cleared, we realized that we weren’t the only ones hurt. A truck carrying nine Marines was driving by us just as the mine went off and they got hit with shrapnel which wounded most of them. Also there were two Vietnamese civilians pushing a cart alongside the road near the explosion. The woman was wounded and the man was dead.

We started treating the wounded as best as we could. I told the Marine riding with me to get his rifle and watch the tree line in case the VC tried to ambush us.

A couple of minutes later he yelled. “Someone’s coming and I think it’s VC!” Tyrone looked up and yelled, “Don’t shoot! It’s Marines!”

I can honestly say that we were scared until we saw the grunts coming. Ya gotta love those grunts!

The grunts were on patrol and saw the smoke. That squad of Marines (loaded down with all their war gear) ran over a quarter mile as fast as they could to help us. They called in a Medevac chopper, set up a defensive perimeter and helped with the wounded. After the chopper left, I thanked the squad leader. He just slapped me on the back, smiled and said: “Semper Fi Marine!”

Don’t forget we are all Marines. Even the door gunner on the medevac chopper hollered, “Semper Fi!”

Always a MARINE

Tom Madigan

.....
What’s That Tag?

The state of Mississippi authorized a car tag for those who had been awarded the Navy and Marine Corps medal. As soon as I heard about it, I applied and got number 3. (By the way, I have never run across any others.) One Sunday morning I was returning home from preaching in a nearby city and was just plain going too fast. I topped a hill and there he was... one of Mississippi’s finest just waiting for a speeder like me! Unfortunately I was too late to make myself legit. The lights came on and I pulled over.

I saw him look at my car tag as he walked up. He asked for my license and I gave it to him. Then he said, “What’s that tag?”

I said, “It’s a Navy and Marine Corps medal tag.”

He said, “So, who’d you serve with?”

I answered, “I was a Navy Corpsman attached to a Marine Corps infantry company in Vietnam.”

He handed me my license back and simply said, before he walked away, “Slow down, Doc.”

He didn’t say it, but I assume it was a case of, once again, a Marine looking after a Corpsman out of appreciation for his service.

Robert E. Hays

D 1/3, 3rd Mar Div, RVN, ‘68-’69

P.S. I don’t remember where I first read it, but this is great: “God made Corpsmen so Marines could have Heroes.”

.....
Vietnam Redux

When my tank was assigned to help guard the Cam Lo ARVN (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam) District Headquarters perimeter, we’d pull the tank up on line on the perimeter and the first thing that I would do would be to chase away the ARVN soldiers who would crowd around our tank because they were making attempts to steal anything and everything that was not tied down or under lock and key.

Several times, I’d look behind our tank as we pulled in and I’d see some skinny teenage ARVN soldier struggling to run away with a full case of American C-Rations that he had just lifted off of our tank. The next thing that I would do after pulling into the tanks slot was to break out several fragmentation grenades and lay them on the top of my tank commander’s cupola. The SOP for being on guard at this small outpost was that if we were to be hit and the specter of being over run was a factor in the fight, the man standing guard in the cupola was to throw the armed grenades into the ARVN bunkers on either side of the tank during the battle. Why would we do such a barbaric (and murderous) act? Not six months prior, when that same outpost was under a very heavy attack by a vastly superior North Vietnamese Army force, the defending ARVN soldiers abandoned their bunkers and retreated to some of the buildings that are behind the perimeter line. As a result, the defenders’ returning fire, after they repositioned themselves, killed several American Marines who were still on the perimeter defending the outpost. So the conventional wisdom was that the cowardly retreat by our so-called “allied” soldiers was not to happen again. And by the way, an American Marine grunt was awarded the Medal of Honor from that specific battle.

By John Wear

New Thought:

You would think that the young(er) brass hats in the Pentagon today who are trying to conduct the war in Afghanistan would have learned a few lessons in counter insurgency from the Vietnam War. When we US Marines would be assigned to protect and defend a South Vietnamese village, little did we know or understand that the farmers from the village had brothers, uncles and perhaps fathers on the “other side” fighting with the Viet Cong guerrillas. I hear more and more recent stories of Vietnam veterans returning to visit Vietnam and in their ensuing conversations with villagers, these simple folks “confess” to being VC sympathizers during the entire ten years that the US was involved in that war. Fast forward to today in Afghanistan: That Afghani poppy farmer (and probably the Afghani Army soldiers protecting him) who are in their villages most probably have brothers, uncles and perhaps fathers on the “other side” fighting with the Taliban guerrillas. Of course those farmers and soldiers are going to be sympathetic to their own flesh and blood versus some faceless bureaucratic (and very corrupt) government hundreds or thousands of miles away from their village.

By John Wear



Concerning Operation Kingfisher, these are the details I remember. Please keep in mind that sitting in the gunner’s seat doesn’t allow one a very good view, so my recollections are from that “disadvantage” point.

One of the details I remember most vividly is a conversation I had with PFC Dewey the night before he was fatally wounded. Dewey was a full-blooded American Indian who used to tell us stories of ancestral spirits such as the time his dead grandmother came to visit him. Dewey was a great guy and a good Marine as I’m sure Gunny Person will agree. Dewey was an exceptional baseball player who was such a good high school pitcher that the Cincinnati Reds had drafted him. Anyway, that night he was acting so differently that I asked him if he was all right. I’ll never forget his answer. He told me that no, he was not alright and he then told me & Johnny Seiler that he knew he was going to die the next day. His exact words were: “I’m going to die tomorrow”. The way he said it put the hair on my neck at attention. When it came true, I was not surprised, but I was incredibly shaken.

I remember the return to Con Thien (from the operation into the DMZ) the most vividly. Jim Coan refers to this in his book, Con Thien – The Hill of Angels, as “Running the Gauntlet” and that’s a good way of putting it. After the NVA mortars and artillery had walked through the columns...I seem to remember artillery, although I don’t think there’s any mention of it in the book. The dead and wounded Marines lay scattered on the side of the roadway like so many pieces of meat that had fallen of a truck. Mostly, I remember pulling the dead and wounded up onto the back of the tank while hoping a stray bullet didn’t hit me. We had to ask the wounded Marines to hold onto each other

Operation Kingfisher

By Greg Kelley



and then ask them to hold onto the dead so the bodies wouldn’t fall off as we rumbled out of the shit and brought them to the medevac LZ. We made a return trip to get more bodies while we were still under fire. I remember looking at each body as it was passed up to me noting how each Marine had died. Most were obvious but one dead Marine being passed to me had no visible wound and I couldn’t believe he was not alive. I remember saying to myself that maybe he was just unconscious. As I grabbed the back of his head, my hand sunk into it, I almost got sick even though I was 8 months in country at the time. I grabbed another and another, probably a total of twelve or more over the trips we made in and out.

One Marine stands out from all the others. He was severely wounded and like me, he was only eighteen or so. What he said then still haunts me to this day. He had lost so much blood that his skin was

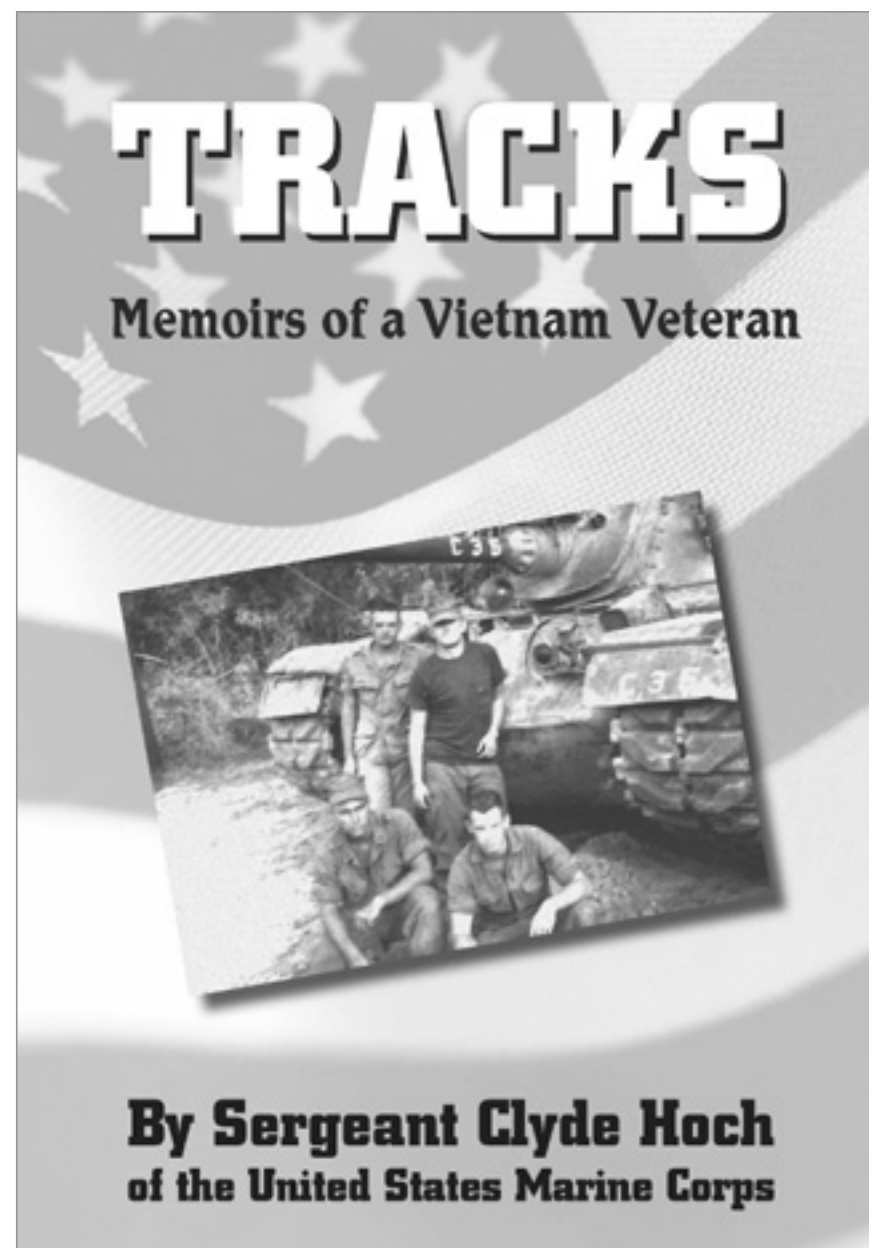
almost transparent and he looked up to me as I told him to hold on to the body he was sitting next to and he asked: “I’m going to die, aren’t I?” I couldn’t help it but I had to quickly lie to him and said, “No, you’re going to make it. Just hold on”. When we got back to unload, I jumped out to see that he had, in fact, died. His eyes looking into mine as he asked me if he was going to die are one of the recurring dreams I have to this day.

This may have been the time (forgive me as certain memories sometimes get intertwined with others) when they dropped the napalm so close to our tank that the escaping air from our turret literally sucked the loader’s hatch open.

Greg Kelley

3rd Tanks, Alpha-24





Tracks - Memoirs of a Vietnam Veteran by Clyde Hoch

“As the Republic of Korea (ROK) Marines were loading the wounded on the back of our tank, I saw a bright flash at the edge of the jungle and then I saw a small cloud of grey smoke. The cloud started to get bigger and bigger. I soon realized there was a small black speck in the middle of the smoke. The speck kept getting larger and larger. Then I realized it was a rocket propelled grenade coming right for my head! This was the second weirdest experience of my life.

It was coming in slow motion. I could see it coming at me for what seemed like five minutes and I was sure it was going to hit me right in the head. It seemed like it was taking forever but I couldn’t get out of the way. It was like being in a different time zone or dimension or something. I honestly watched as it passed just inches over my head, this black missile. I could see it so completely – it was mystifying to me. I was puzzled by the whole situation, but I didn’t have time to dwell on it, I took control of the main gun and fired in the direction of the flash.”

Editor’s note: Clyde is a member of the Vietnam Tankers Association. His book is a great read and it’s available on Amazon (in soft cover or on Kindle) and at Barnes & Noble.

SHORT ROUNDS

Short Round 1:

March 20, 1954 – Americans alarmed about impending French defeat after a force of 60,000 Viet Minh with heavy artillery had surrounded 16,000 French paratroops and Foreign Legionaries at Dien Bien Phu. The Eisenhower administration held discussions to decide on a course of action. President Eisenhower decided that the situation was too far gone and ordered no action to be taken to assist the French.

Short Round 2:

March 22, 1965 – Officials confirm “non-lethal gas” was provided...The State Dept acknowledges that the US had supplied the South Vietnamese armed forces with a “non-lethal gas which disables temporarily” for use “in tactical situations in which the Viet Cong intermingle with or take refuge among non-combatants, rather than use artillery or aerial bombardment.” This announcement triggered a storm of criticism worldwide. The North Vietnamese and Soviets loudly protested the introduction of “poison gas” into the war. Secretary of State Dean Rusk insisted at a news conference, on March 24 that the United States was “not embarking upon gas warfare, but was merely employing “a gas which has been commonly used by the police forces of the world as riot-control agents.

Short Round 3:

March 30, 1965 – Bomb explodes in a car parked in front of the US Embassy in Saigon, virtually destroying the building and killing 19 Vietnamese, 2 Americans and 1 Filipino; 183 other were injured. Congress quickly appropriated \$1 million to reconstruct the embassy. Although some US military leaders advocated special retaliatory raids on North Vietnam, President Lyndon B Johnson refused.

Short Round: 4

April 20, 1971 - The Pentagon release figures confirming that fragging incidents are on the rise. In 1970, 209 such incidents caused the deaths of 34 men, in 1969, 96 such incidents cost 34 men their lives. Fraggings was a slang term used to describe US military personnel tossing of fragmentation hand grenades (hence the term “fraggings”) usually into sleeping areas to murder fellow soldiers. It was usually directed primarily against unit leaders, officers and non-commissioned officers. Fraggings incidents in combat were usually attempts to remove leaders perceived to be incompetent and a threat to survival. Unit leaders who were perceived to be too stringent in the enforcement of discipline or regulations sometimes received warnings via a fragmentation grenade,

with the safety pin left on, but with their name painted on it and left in their bunk, or a smoke grenade discharged under their bunk. Most understood the message and intimidation though threat of fragging far exceeded actual incidents.

Short Round 5:

Feb 2, 1962 – The first US Air Force plane is lost in South Vietnam. The C-123 aircraft crashes while spraying defoliant (Agent Orange?) on a Viet Cong ambush site. The aircraft was part of Operation Ranch Hand, a technological area-denial technique designed to expose the roads and trails used by the Viet Cong. US personnel dumped an estimated 19 million gallons of herbicides over 10 – 20 percent of Vietnam and parts of Laos from 1962 to 1971. Agent Orange – so named from the color of its metal container – was the most frequently used. The operation succeeded in killing vegetation but not in stopping the Viet Cong.

Editor’s Note: It must have been one hell-of-a ambush site and the pilot must have agreed as well. ▲

Twelve Days of Nam

(sung to the tune of "The Twelve Days of Christmas")

On my first day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my second day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
two pairs of Jungle boots and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my third in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
3 pairs of socks and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my fourth in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
4 hand grenades and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my fifth in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
5 band-o-leers!

4 hand grenades, 3 pairs of socks, two pairs of Jungle boots and
an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 6th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
6 meals of C-rats and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 7th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
7 pounds of C-4 and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 8th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
8 kinds of bug spray and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 9th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
9 Claymore mines and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 10th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
10 cans of sunscreen and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 11th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
11 hand grenades and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.

On my 12th day in-country my First Sergeant gave to me,
12 maps and range cards and an M16 still packed in cosmoline.
12 maps and range cards, 11 hand grenades, 10 cans of sunscreen,
9 Claymore mines, 8 kinds of bug spray, 7 pounds of C-4,
6 meals of C-rats

5 band-o-leers!

4 hand grenades, 3 pairs of socks, two pairs of Jungle boots and
an M16 still packed in cosmoline.



I WANT A TANK



WELL THEN, WHY DON'T YOU BUY ONE?



BECAUSE THEY COST SEVERAL MILLION
DOLLARS, NOT INCLUDING FLOORMATS. I
DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF MONEY



SO WHAT? YOU'VE GOT CREDIT CARDS, RIGHT?



YES, BUT HOW AM I GOING TO PAY THE
CREDIT CARD COMPANY? THEY'LL COME
AFTER ME.



LOL, DON'T BE REDICULOUS;
YOU'LL HAVE A FREAKIN' TANK !

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

**Please get your 2012 dues paid up! Make your check out to USMC VTA plus \$30 and send to:
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