



Sponson BOX

*Voice of the USMC
Vietnam Tankers Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



January 24, 1968 - Ambush on Route 9

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THEY ARE BACK IN STOCK AND READY TO SHIP THE USMC VTA "FOREVER COIN."



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

We need you to first email Fred Kellogg at email: Kellogg@comcast.net

Or call him at **306.609.3404** (Pacific Time) to discuss what you want to do with the order.

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

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

Letter from the President

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! The years sure seem to be blowing past far too fast!!!

2025 USMC VTA REUNION: We will be reuniting in San Diego, California, on Sept 10 – 15, 2025. Full details on the back pages of this issue. Please note that the schedule of events is subject to change. We'd really like for any member who is attending to make sure that you bring your old Vietnam photos (put up in an album) for the rest of the attendees to enjoy and also bring any guests who may want to attend. We have seen some amazing bonding going on between VTA members and their children and/or grand children who attend together. The old man may not talk a lot about his time in Vietnam but his buddies will fill the kid's ear!!!

It wasn't that long ago that I read a very startling fact: Due to the current and recent past runaway inflation, hotel room rates have gone up over 40% in the past few years. Very unfortunately the \$99 per night room is a thing of the distant past. Also gone are free hotel airport shuttle services.

THIS ISSUE OF OUR MAGAZINE: We had several completely different stories lined up for this issue of our magazine when not that long ago one of our longtime VTA members, Harry Christensen sent me an email note that also included a photo of the painting that appears on the cover of this issue. Besides Harry being quite persuasive (like the good lawyer that he is), the story certainly qualifies as one in a million. We hope that you enjoy it.

WE ARE EXCITED to start a new venture in our magazine. For the past several years, Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz has conducted an exciting and highly successful telephone interview podcast program. And fairly recently we have found an AI program that will effectively translate the spoken word into writing. This issue features the first (of many) personal stories that were recorded on the podcast program. Please stand by for many more as Tree has them transcribed and submits them for publication.

VIETNAM IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR: I was listening to a radio talk show the other day and a woman was discussing a book that she had recently written about her traumatic distant past. The moderator asked, "Why did you want to dredge up the not-so-pleasant past?" Her response was, "I looked back and decided that it had been so long that it was not nearly as traumatic as I remembered it as a young person." And that is what many VTA members say after they either attend their first reunion and/or when they finally write about their own past. For years, many of us had buried our past because it seems to cause us emotional pain. If we can overcome some of our fears, our own story is very similar to all combat Marines. And as I have said many times before, our families would really love to know and maybe understand our legacy.

PLEASE PAY YOUR ANNUAL DUES OR LIFE ASSESSMENT: Enclosed with this issue is a self-addressed envelope for you to pay your 2025 dues. Just place a postage stamp on it and enclose your check.

As a side note: During the Annual Board of Directors meeting this past September, the directors discussed the ever-increasing cost of producing the Sponson Box. The US Post Office has raised the cost of mailing two times in the past year. The cost of the beautiful layout and design, while fairly affordable, has gone up. And of course, the cost of paper and printing is quite a bit higher. The one solution (that is not acceptable to the board) is increasing the annual membership fee from \$30 or the annual life assessment from \$20. We decided that to help solve the increased costs is to discontinue the multi-year discount. Hence, you will note on the enclosed self-addressed envelope, there is just one fee schedule. We highly recommend that, if you want to, continue to pay forward several years but the cost per year will be \$30.

—John

If it is not written, you will soon be forgotten...—Unknown

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A painting of the Jan 24 ambush on Rt. 9

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

2024 Mini-Reunion

Clyde Hoch writes: I want to thank the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association for a fine mini-reunion. It was well organized and well planned. I do have to say that it was too dammed loud in the room we were in for dinner. I couldn't hear shit. But it was a very enjoyable trip. It was great to see my old Med cruise friend Ben Cole. It is always good to see Joe Tyson and John W. Thank you, Tankers Association and Ben, Joe, and John. I wish you all the best!

Lou Najfus writes: Dear fellow Ontos crewmen—First, I want to report on the VTA mini-reunion that took place at Fort Moore (Fort Benning), Georgia. It was a blast. The first full day we went into a huge building that housed 160 tanks and tracked vehicles. More than a half dozen international countries were represented. As you walk down each aisle, the sequence of tanks took you from WW-I to tanks that operated in a host of some of our more recent conflicts. The second day we entered another warehouse occupied by another massive number of tanks, all different and unique. These tanks were undergoing restorations or were being equipped with the latest improvements. The presentation regarding the Abrams tank was jaw dropping. We now have the fourth version of the Abrams tank. The design flaws on the previous versions were at times appalling and potentially detrimental to the personnel. You could only wonder how we won all those battles. Only through the grace of God. It was extremely interesting.

On display, was Robert Shofner's restored Ontos "ROAD RUNNER." We had about 54 participants, including a few spouses stopping by the "Thing" to get a better appreciation of the unique characteristics of this intimidator. Frank Portello and Roger Luli shared their experiences and honest assessment as crewman. As for myself, I tried to bring a little humor and reflection into the moment through a number of stories

Regarding the good news, get a pencil and write down "September 10–15, 2025 at San Diego". That's the next VTA reunion. I was voted in as a member of the USMC VTA Board of Directors. I am honored to represent the Ontos community. I witnessed, first hand, the Board's sincere efforts to make this upcoming VTA reunion the best reunion yet. Each segment of the 2025 reunion was reviewed, discussed and actions were taken accordingly to enhance the trip to San Diego. I was very impressed. Please make a concerted effort to come. You won't be disappointed.

Roger Luli writes: I completely agree with Louis, it was a great time. I am looking forward to San Diego. Hope to see you there.

TREE'S PODCAST LETTER

To My Brothers-in-Arms: This is a direct call to each of you who has not yet completed a podcast. Your time has come. I struggle each day with my PTSD. I still have nightmares and even an occasional daymare. The VA tells me that in my case "good enough is good enough". I am not unique; I have talked with enough of my brothers to know that PTSD is rampant among us tankers. These very facts have made our lives more complicated and most challenging. However, we have always improvised, adapted and overcome all that. It is also apparent that our public in general has forgotten most of us and what we did in Vietnam.

Now, let me ask you a question. Over the course of your lives have you ever had anything just handed to you? If you are like me the answer to that question is a resounding no. The Vietnam veteran has had to fight for our memorial in DC. We had to fight for the recognition that we are disabled due to Agent Orange. We fought for the VA to recognize PTSD and traumatic brain injuries. We had to fight for recognition that we are warriors, that warriors go and fight when our country calls us to duty and that we as warriors did not start the war but when we got there, we kicked ass every time! In today's public, we are being once again swept under the rug. The public seems to think we are old, we fought a useless war, and the public can salve their conscience by sweeping us under the proverbial rug.

Each and every one of us has a unique story to tell. Your story is incredibly important to you, me, and the VTA. It is also important to our society, the folks we call the "public". The public just does not recognize how important our blood, sweat, and tears are to them. So, the public begins to bury our vast amount of knowledge and experience with other "more important" histories. The public is now counting on the idea that old people should be seen but not heard. That eventually we will just go away.

Once again, we will have to fight to set the record straight. To indelibly write our history, the history of the United States, on their hearts. Our podcasts, your podcast does that. Without your unique story our history will be lost forever. Your personal story is necessary to fully develop the history of the Vietnam War. Every story or experience not told moves all our experiences closer to irrelevance. There is no such a thing as an insignificant story or experience. There are no two stories that are alike. There is no story too awful, too silly, too numbing, or too small to not tell. There is no story that cannot be told because no one would understand. Together we can unfold even the most complicated, jumbled, hard to tell or explain we together cannot make clear.

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Please dig deep into your heart and soul and make a commitment to share your experiences with your family, your brothers and your public. Please contact me at my email address at fremkiewicz@gmail.com or call me at 209.848.4433. Thank you.

Remembering Bob Peavey

Greg Kelley writes: John, you probably knew Bob better than any of us, and his death must have hit you hard. For that, I'm truly sorry. I didn't really know him that well until I spent some time with him at our Colorado Springs reunion last year. Bob, Ben Cole and I spent the day together one day when we visited the Air Force Academy and had a nice lunch, etc. It was over our lunch that Bob shared how much guilt he carried ... like a heavy cross ... for all the years since Vietnam. He spilled a lot of tears recounting why he could barely live with himself. Even later the next day in the Slop-chute, his tears welled up when we spoke. There was no consoling him. His pain was too deep. I am so sorry for all who loved him.

John Wear writes: As I understand it, Bob was involved in a very unfortunate "friendly fire" incident in 1968 during Operation Allen Brooke with the 7th Marines in and around Go Ni Island. One night during the op, several Marine grunts were hit with deadly 90 mm main gun fire in a horrible miscommunication incident. As it turns out one of the grunt platoon leaders was 100% to blame for sending out a patrol when the battalion commander ordered no patrols that night. As a result, the tank crew was deeply affected. Bob carried the guilt for the rest of his life. Then amazingly during our 2023 reunion in Colo. Springs, one of the 7th Marines company commanders responding to my request, actually traveled down from Wyoming and met with some of that tank's crew that was attending the reunion (including Bob and Gerry Hearn), The skipper exonerated any blame by the tank crew. It seemed to be a huge relief for Bob. Hopefully Bob did not carry the unnecessary guilt to his grave.

Rick Walters writes: I was stunned, when I read the Sponson Box. Both Guy Wolfenbarger and Bob Peavey were GREAT Marines and anyone who met them, like me, were fortunate. "Fallen Hero's" was always a riveting presentation. Bob never discussed much about his classic Ford "Torino," a big man's car.

Armando Moreno writes: The fact that Bob Peavey passed away brings fear into my heart, how can a man of his stature be taken from us? I was saddened to hear about his passing. What a gentle soul, what a beautiful man. His loss will create a ripple effect across the Tanker Community, as we have known it. As an Ontos crewman and a member in good standing in the USMC VTA, it's because of Marines like him that I have found a "Comfort Zone," in which my wife and I have been able to participate in so many of the tanker's reunions. I have been losing friends at a rapid rate

and hope to stay active until the day comes when I take that dreaded "dirt nap." Until then, I will be celebrating my 78th Birthday on Dec 31st, but, also our Marine Corps' 249th Birthday.

To John, the board, and all members, I send my deepest condolences for all our departed brothers, who have fought the good fight. Total respect and admiration

Remembering Virgil Melton

We sent an email to Virgil's son informing him that we sent Leatherneck magazine his father's obituary and the October issue of the magazine is featuring it.

Chase Melton writes: Thank you for letting me know, we will be looking for it. We are doing better, taking time to adjust to our new life. Thank you for checking in and thank you for the flowers that were sent. God Bless Sir.

Remembering Tony Pinnetti

Charlie Tubbs writes: Afternoon John, I read Tony's obit in the September 2024 issue of Leatherneck magazine and sent it along to Ken Zebal. Ken mentioned that he thought that you had submitted it to them. A great tribute for a fine Marine! I served with Tony stateside and with the aid of the USMC VTA, I caught up with him some time ago. Once we moved to Florida we met up with Tony and his daughter Angela. I was able to visit with Tony while he was experiencing the cancer that was eating away at him. He kept a pretty positive outlook. I attended a memorial service for Tony and met his family. I think of him a lot may he rest in peace. Thank you for submitting the obit.

John Wear writes: For the past few years, we have been forwarding our "To the Great Tank Park in the Sky" to Leatherneck magazine and they almost always publish at least some of the names of our recently deceased members. This past issue, when I sent them with a note and the Senior Editor offered this reply:



Charlie Denton, Tony Pennetti, Chris V. Dave Erickson
3rd Pit. Party on Okinawa.

"There's no question about it. They will have a place in Leatherneck. It's our honor to ensure they are remembered by their fellow Marines."—Nancy Lichtman, Executive Editor Leatherneck Magazine.

Jack Kenna writes: I may have known Tony. He was in the same time I was 1963–67. I was in Platoon 396 in Bootcamp. I went on all these things he did and was in Nam '65 – '66 3rd Tank Bn. May he rest in peace.

Remembering Steve Falk



Did you know that the photo of Steve, which Terry Wallace identified in the last issue, is my favorite of Steve? How did I miss it in the July Sponson Box? I was away at the Jersey shore for the month of July. Did I receive that issue? Had my mail held and it should have been there. Not sure. What a wonderful surprise. I was so proud of that good looking, young Marine.

Couldn't wait to marry him! I still miss him every day after six years. Guess I always will.

I also love receiving the Sponson Box. Interesting articles and contributions. Your talent is appreciated. Hope all is well. I'm doing fine and keeping busy with family and friends. Did some traveling in February and September. Stay well and keep up the good work for your brother Marines. Never to be forgotten.

Hugs, Marcia (Steve's widow)

Marcia's UPDATE: Found it! It was mixed in with a stack of magazines, flyers and a BJ Wholesale sales brochure. I'm embarrassed to admit that I put these to the side and never got back to them since August. On the happier side of it, I found the July edition. Yay! My very favorite picture. Thanks, John. You're the best!

Remembering the Fallen

Tom Kelley writes: I just returned Thursday from my last "Bucket List" mission. That was to visit the gravesite of the two tankers that I lost on November 26, 1969 when I had C Company, 1st Tank Battalion. They were PFC Terry Rexroat and PFC William "Rick" Van Cleave. They were driver & loader on C-11 when a 500-bomb exploded under their tank. I visited PFC Rexroat's gravesite in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and met PFC Van Cleave's Marine brother, Doug Van Cleave, at the airport in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, Doug took me to his brother's gravesite in Toledo, Ohio. About

four years before, I had visited the Phoenix, AZ gravesite of the other man that I had lost, Hospital Corpsman David Schoenewald, when I had the company.

While having breakfast with Doug Van Cleave on the morning of 8/28, we were informed by the waitress that there was a Veterans National Memorial Shrine & Museum nearby in Ft. Wayne that had an 80% replica of the original Vietnam Wall and other memorials and a museum. Doug and I visited this site and were very impressed with what they had done. We also were able to locate Schoenewald's, Van Cleave's and Rexroat's names on the wall. I would highly recommend visiting this site if you are in the area. Below is the contact information and a website on this Memorial. Semper Fi

Tom Kelly

Colonel USMC (Ret)

Veteran's National Memorial Shrine & Museum

2122 O'Day Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46818

Phone: 260.267.5022

Website: Rememberingforever.org

The Last Issue of our Magazine

Marcia Falk writes: I just read your article in the Sponson Box, "Cua Viet River Monsoon Adventure." You write so well. I can't believe all the back and forth on the radio identifying yourselves "Over and Out". I can remember playing with walkie talkies as a child with my sister, and "Over and Out" was our mantra. With modern technology in communications today, do you suppose that "age old" military lingo is still used? I wonder. I wouldn't know.

I enjoyed your story and then read Terry Wallace's, "Mess Duty." Steve never spoke of mess duty that I remember. I love these stories and accounts that give me so much insight into your life there. I thank God for all of you who served so selflessly and I'm grateful to learn more about that service. I also believe that there's so much truth to how writing heals wounds...if we dare. It's an honor to know you and read these words that bring me even closer to Steve and all of you.

Mike Giovinazzo Submits:



Armando Reminds Us



Veterans Brotherhood

Clyde Hoch writes: USMCVTA member Clyde Hoch started an organization ten years ago. Since that time the Veterans Brotherhood has helped well over 700 veterans. There is a far bigger impact when you consider most had families with them. The Veterans Brotherhood takes homeless veterans off the streets as soon as they hear about them, when they are at their lowest and nowhere to turn. Thereby they are hoping to prevent veteran homelessness and prevent veteran suicides. The Veterans Brotherhood puts a veteran in a hotel and evaluates them for their needs long term.

The Veteran's Brotherhood has recently opened a new center in Pottstown, PA. Representatives from the VA will be on hand to assist veterans. Representatives from the Veterans Multi-service Center are on hand weekly to assist veterans to purchase homes. In the future, mentoring programs will be set up for one-on-one sessions and group sessions. When a veteran gets frustrated with the world, he can have a coffee and talk to other veterans. It will be one stop shop for veterans; except we will not house them at the building.

No one is paid in the Veterans Brotherhood; it is an all-volunteer force. The Veterans Brotherhood is at the point where the Veterans Administration asks us to help with a veteran that they cannot place immediately and the Veterans Brotherhood steps up and assists. The Veterans Brotherhood helps veterans in a variety of ways such as back taxes, rent, car repairs and a host of other issues. The Veterans Brotherhood operates by donations only.

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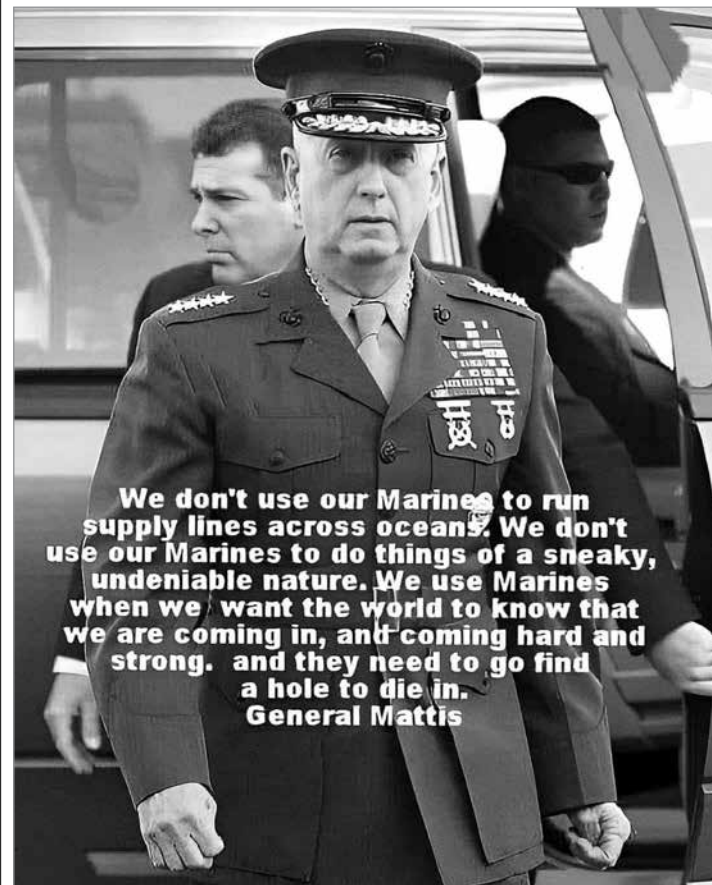
Real or Fake?

Richard Beirne writes: On a recent visit to the Spy Museum in DC, they have one of the famous Ghost Army tanks. Overlook the 155mm gun tube, but I'm sure at 10,000 feet it looks very real.



We looked it up: Inflatable rubber tanks were part of sophisticated deception operations aimed at confusing the German army about Allied intentions. The Ghost Army included about 1,100 soldiers in the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops unit, which operated in Western Europe, and another 200 soldiers from the 3133rd Signal Company Special in Italy.

Mad Dog!!!



Russian – Ukraine War

John Wear writes: I spent part of Labor Day at the brand-new local VFW post's "Buddy Poppy" fund raising event. One of the participants introduced us to a young man who very recently returned from combat duties with the Ukrainian army. He is a US Army veteran who signed a two-year contract with a civilian contractor to fight with the Ukrainians. He had a ton of stories to tell us but one that really made me understand the desperation of the Russian leadership. He said that virtually every single enemy soldier fighting there were people from former Soviet providences and other communist countries. That is, Chinese, Cuban, North Korean, all sorts of African nations ... and of course, many recently released Russian prisoners. He said that his unit would fight and take a position where there would be fields with hundreds of civilian dead just lying out in the open. Most of the dead appeared to be executed by the Russian troops. Men, women and lot and lots of children. He said that it was pretty horrible. He added that the enemy troops could not fight well but they were brutal animals with the Ukrainian civilians.

The other thing that made me nod my head was that he said from 7 AM to 7 PM, they were pounded by Russian artillery. At almost exactly 7 PM, the arty stopped and the Russian troops opened up their vodka and drank all night. He said that his troops would yell across the lines at the drunk Russian soldiers and vice versa.

When I asked him about the failure of Russian tanks, he agreed with me that not only were the Russian tankers poorly trained, if at all, but they drank so much that they were either drunk or badly hungover and could not operate their equipment effectively.

He also said that his unit lost 46 of his American buddies in the fighting. It was obvious that this young veteran's PTSD was in full force.

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

John Wear writes: Rick Lewis sent me an email reporting that of the new leadership of the National Museum of the Marine Corps, the Director is a retired US Marine career artillery officer and the Deputy Director is a retired career US Marine tank officer. Even though the most recent past Commandant and the current Commandant have no use for what most of us would consider prime support for our infantry (arty and tanks), perhaps the management of the NMMC might have some influence as we move down the road.

As an afterthought: I recently spoke to two retired 30-year career Marine officers, they feel that the two new directors of the NMMC will have little or no influence ... but it is a nice thought. ■

The Commandant's Own

In late September we emailed the membership to inform them of the impending USMC Band's cross-country (national) tour with the idea that if a VTA member lived near one of the venues that they were going to visit, they could avail themselves of the music. We got the below (humorous) reply from VTA member Gary McDaniel:

Thanks for sending! Looks like my area has been scheduled for much, much, much later. The band was here in the "Big Plantation" several years ago and the performance was well attended. After sitting through most of the performance without hearing a single martial piece, this "Old Geezer" (me) stood up and yelled "More Martial Music, More Marching Music" at the top of his lungs. As I remember it, the only martial music that night was "Stars and Stripes Forever". The crowd, like me, was disappointed. Don't think anyone wanted to hear "Ode to Springtime" in place of "Semper Fidelis" or the Hymn! Needless to say, my wife has sworn off concert attendance with me because of my outburst!!!

It's always good to hear from you. Oh, yes, from time to time I do YouTube and catch The Military Tattoo in Scotland. Same with the Aggie Band at Texas A&M (the real university of Texas). Good marching drills there! Try em, you'll like em!!

Crazy Things!

Doug Scrivner writes: I was sitting in a Bob Evans restaurant this morning, another Vietnam vet was talking to me & asks me, "Since we're eating, what's the craziest thing you remember eating in vietnam?" I told him that in '69 we came in from the bush & got to go to Freedom Hill (that big PX that also had round eyed Donut Dollies there) to spend the day. They had ice cream. Shit, I hadn't seen ice cream in over a year! I got a bowl & while I was eating it, a big fly landed right in the middle of it. I flicked that shithead right out with my spoon & commined my attack on that bowl. The crazy the things that stick in your mind...



housing ad from 1955.

2 BEDROOMS — ONE BATH — SCREENED PORCH — CARPORT
TOTAL PRICE \$7,450 Monthly Payments \$47.92
INCLUDES PRINCIPAL, INTEREST, TAXES AND INSURANCE * CLOSING COST AND PREPAYMENT \$165

3 BEDROOMS — ONE BATH — SCREENED PORCH
TOTAL PRICE \$7,900 Monthly Payments \$49.74
INCLUDES PRINCIPAL, INTEREST, TAXES AND INSURANCE * CLOSING COST AND PREPAYMENT \$165

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

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

Robert Allen Kendrick 1947 – 2019



Born on August 26, 1947 in Stockton, California. Passed away on November 29, 2019 in La Jolla, California. Served in A Co, 3rd Tanks, 1968 – 1969. As far as we can tell, Bob owned and operated a fishing boat based out of Oceanside, CA. He was a former member of the USMC VTA.

John Wear writes: Back in 2018, Bob and I carried on an email correspondence for a while. I was making an attempt to have Bob "ship over" and rejoin the USMC VTA after his initial membership had lapsed. In our conversations, I found out that Bob had been the crewman of a tank commanded by one of my best buddies, John Perry. And then just this past summer, after trying to reach Bob on email, I sent a hand-written letter to him. A few weeks later, the letter was returned "undeliverable" and so we made a search for his obituary and this is all that we found.

Richard D Carey 1946 – 2024

Richard D. Carey, age 78, of Sandwich, Massachusetts was born March 14, 1946 and passed away on Thursday, September 19, 2024. No further details are available at this time.



John Wear writes: It is with a heavy heart that I write this memorial. It was 1998 and my wife presented me with my first laptop computer. I had owned company computers in the past but this was my first chance to experience the Internet. I immediately typed in "US Marine tanks in Vietnam" in order to see what

the world wide web had for me. Almost at once a few items showed up, including a note that someone wanted to have some sort of a reunion of US Marines who served in tanks in-country Vietnam. I made a phone call and connected with a Dick Carey. He said that he had made plans to have his specific tank company (Bravo, 3rd Tanks) reunite but since there was so few responses, he decided to include ALL Marines who served in tanks. Fast forward to the July 4th weekend of 1999 and 70 US Marine veterans assembled in Washington, DC. For me it had been 30 years and one month since I had even remotely thought about making an effort to reconnect. During that weekend we voted to become the US Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers Association. It has now been 25 years and we are going strong. And we can truly thank Dick Carey for making our brotherhood a reality.

David T Benner 1945 - 2024

Dallas, GA - David Thomas Benner, a devoted father, beloved grandfather, and esteemed Marine Corps veteran, passed away peacefully on August 28, 2024. He was 79 years old. David was born on July 4, 1945, in Allentown, PA and throughout his life, he cherished his roles as a father, as a grandfather and great grandfather. He also is survived by his partner Rita Leduc. David proudly served his country in



the Marine Corps, where his bravery and dedication earned him the prestigious Purple Heart award. David was an alumnus of the University of Florida and his working career included Bethlehem Steel for 30 years as a Forman and later with US Department of Agriculture as a Technician. "Semper Fidelis." May David rest in eternal peace. David was an active member of the USMC VTA.

MSgt Richard Cecil, USMC (ret) 1934 – 2024



If you are reading this, I have made the transition to the Great Tank Park in the Sky, as my friend Dan would say. In reality I have departed Earth life and now I am in the Spirit World to be reunited with family, friends and above all my Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

I first saw the light of day May 1, 1934 in San Francisco as my father was a Naval Radioman stationed on the Farallon Islands where we were living at the time. My parents were James F. and Carol E. (Fink) Cecil. From there we moved to Panama and then to Seattle. At this time World War II started and Dad left for duty in Naval Aviation in a PBY Squadron stationed in Key West, FL. This required my mother to travel from Seattle via San Diego to Key West with me and my little sister in a 1937 Chevy.

As a kid living in Key West was a "Tom Sawyer" existence including building rafts, fishing, beach combing, gigging mullets, crabbing, camping, and all things a boy would love. During the war we didn't see much of my dad but my mother was the outdoor type and she supported the activities.

In 1953 I joined the Marine Corps and had 5 tours overseas that included Japan, Okinawa, Korea, Vietnam and visited other places in the Far East. I received numerous commendations and decorations as a Marine retiring in 1977 a Master Sergeant.

In 1968 I joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints serving in various callings including Elder's Quorum President, Scoutmaster, High Council, Bishop and Seminary Teacher.

In 1977 I went to work for Yakima Cement Products as a concrete dispatcher. Many thanks to Bob and Frank Jump for their help in making the transition to civilian life. I married the love of my life, Dorinda, in 1980 in the Salt Lake Temple for time and all eternity.

Richard is survived by his wife Dorinda Cecil, his children Juantia Roederer, Sylvia Cecil, Richard B. Cecil, Robert Cecil, Connie Fann, Andrew Platter, and Jason Platter, seventeen grandchildren, many great grandchildren and one great, great grandchild, plus several nieces and nephews. He was an active member of the USMC VTA. ■

Your Attention Please!

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

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

The Marine Corps Has Gone Off the Rails

The U.S. Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 has been a dismal failure.

BY GARY ANDERSON
OCTOBER 18, 2024

A new Congressional Research Service report brings harsh scrutiny to the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030, with many in Congress and the Department of Defense reportedly having buyer's remorse. What they thought was a modernization effort has rapidly become an embarrassment — with the Marine Corps' preparedness hanging in the balance.

When former Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David Berger unveiled his radical new vision for the Corps in 2019, many in the administration and Congress hailed it as a bold step toward confronting China. Berger's Force Design vision was to place small groups of Marines armed with anti-ship missiles on islets and shoals in the South China Sea where Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines have territory. The same territory is now claimed by China.

The commandant believed that the U.S. Marine Corps had wandered from its traditional mission and legal directive to conduct amphibious operations in support of naval campaigns. Berger was concerned that 20 years of land warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan had reintroduced the "second land army" stigma that followed the Corps after World War II and Vietnam. He wanted to get the Marines back to their naval roots and prepared for conflict on small islands in the Indo-Pacific region.

In order to pay for the anti-ship missiles and associated sensors needed to implement Force Design, Berger divested the Marine Corps of all its tanks, heavy engineering equipment, much of its cannon artillery, and numerous combat aviation capabilities. In addition, Berger dropped the number of amphibious ships the Navy was required to maintain from 38 to 31, reducing the fleet by nearly 20 percent.

In a perfect world, this might still be enough to keep a nimble, sea-based presence in the three most dangerous global hotspots — the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the Western Pacific — but this is not a perfect world. The Navy's current atrocious repair and maintenance capabilities have reduced amphibious readiness rates to just 40 percent.

We now have only about 12 amphibious ships operational worldwide at any given time. Berger shifted resources away from these capabilities in order for the Navy to build a new class of shallow draft vessels called Landing Ship Medium. These new vessels would, theoretically, resupply the Marines across small, widely scattered island garrisons.

Interestingly, independent war-games conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies have determined that Force Design would be of marginal use in a war with China over Taiwan. Despite these lackluster findings, Berger's successor, Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Eric Smith has doubled down on Force Design. Smith's steadfast devotion to Force Design ignores the advice from all eight of his and Berger's living predecessors, as well as the former four-star Marine Corps theater commanders.

Worse yet, not one of the nation's potentially in danger from China, which was the catalyst for this redesign of the Corps, has signed on to the concept. Even the Philippines, the U.S.'s closest ally in the region, has told us that it will not allow U.S. forces to use its territory as a staging base in a conflict with China over Taiwan

— much less staging offensive missiles.

Apparently, Berger created a product that has no market.

Military leadership is not solely responsible for this mess. Ultimately, Congress and the president have oversight. Civilian control of the military assumes that the civilians should know something about the military, or at least hire people that do. As with Afghanistan and naval readiness, the Biden administration and Congress have failed in that basic function. If you are a member of Congress from East Cupcake, Indiana, with no knowledge of military affairs, and are told by a service chief that he will reduce his force structure, save money, and still confront the Chinese, what's not to like?

But the recent Congressional Research Service report should jolt both into action because the nation has lost key capabilities that Americans, rightfully, assume the Navy and Marine Corps possess.

They can no longer perform large peacetime sea-based contingencies like the 1975 evacuation of Saigon. They cannot execute large humanitarian operations such as the 1991 Sea Angel effort in Bangladesh or the 2005 response to the devastating earthquake and subsequent tsunamis in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. They cannot conduct brigade-sized amphibious operations, much less division-sized assaults similar to Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Inchon. Even worse, the Corps can no longer be a meaningful participant in major regional conflicts such as Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom — it lacks the tanks, armored personnel carriers, and heavy engineering assets that broke through Iraqi lines in both conflicts.

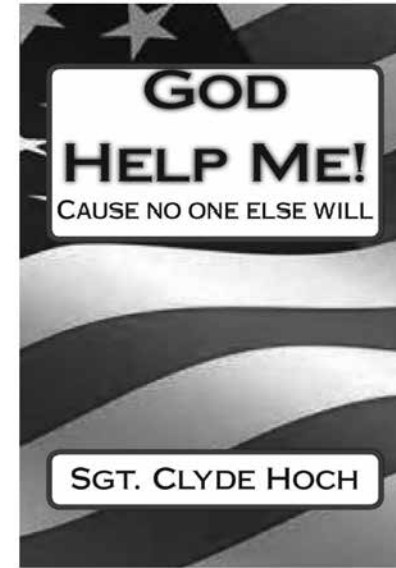
In the half decade since the launch of Force Design, not one Marine Corps missile unit is operational and not a single Landing Ship Medium has been launched. Essentially, the nation has lost its emergency response force and traded it for no additional gains in capability elsewhere.

By the end of his tenure in 2023, for the first time in history, Berger had to tell the president and secretary of defense that the Marine Corps could not respond to missions in the NATO and African command regions.

The bottom line: the Navy can no longer perform the same functions that they have for the last 85 years. There are two types of incompetents, active and passive. Active incompetents don't know they are incompetent. They are dangerous because they don't know they are incompetent. They are dangerous because they act on the zany ideas. Passive incompetents know that they don't know what they are doing. They are dangerous because they tend to defer to the active incompetents.

Berger and Smith are active incompetents. Biden and Congress have been passive incompetents. Shame on them. If Congress acted today to repair the Navy and Marine Corps and return it back to 2018 capabilities, it would take at least a decade to recover. Our civilian leaders were sold snake oil, and the rubes bought it.

Gary Anderson is a retired Marine Corps Colonel. He retired as Chief of Staff of the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab and served as a Special Advisor to the Deputy Secretary of Defense. ■



Clyde Hoch, a U.S. Marine veteran; a member of Vietnam Veterans of America and a longtime member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, has written six books. His latest is God Help Me! Cause No One Else Will (CreateSpace, 34 pp., \$5.38).

This self-help tract is dedicated to veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. In a perfect world, this informative work would be in the hands of every Vietnam veteran, military family member, and every professional working with returned veterans and active-duty personnel.

Hoch, who volunteered for duty in a tank battalion, arrived in Vietnam during the 1968 Tet offensive. "I was an old guy," he writes. "I was around 21 years old. Most of the guys were 18 or 19. They would come to me for advice about everything. I didn't know much more than they did. At times I felt like a father and priest to these guys."

Hoch's value as leader and counselor easily could have qualified him to be a drill sergeant or an officer candidate were it not for a land mine explosion. Because of the resultant Traumatic Brain Injury and difficulties with memory Hoch opted to end his career as a Marine.

His return to life as a civilian came before there was widespread recognition of PTSD as a war-related affliction. "There was no such thing as PTSD or TBI," he writes. "I became very aggressive with people, especially my wife. I took much out on her and my children. I regret all, but can't do anything about it now. My attitude was very hard for all of us. I set up an appointment with the VA to see if anyone could help me."

Hoch filed PTSD and Agent Orange VA claims. "The service officer filed all of these forms," he writes. "All came back rejected." Further appeals were dismissed by doctors and lawyers.

Finally, after more than twenty years, Hoch began to offer advice and assistance to other veterans, something reminiscent of his relationship with his fellow tankers back in 1968.

In this book he provides important contact information for those in need.

"Do Not Give Up," Hoch advises. "When I feel myself getting angry at a situation or person, I have learned to walk away. I will go outside. If I am where there are lots of people, I observe them. I will wonder about their lives. Everyone you see is fighting something. If all else fails and you feel all alone and feel no one cares, contact me. I will do what I can for you." ■

—Curt Nelson

Photo from Vietnam



V. A. News & Updates

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

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

Eight Important Benefits Widows of Veterans Should Know

Please show this to your wife...

Widowed spouses and other survivors of military veterans typically become acquainted with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) during one of the most challenging periods in their lives, following the loss of a veteran.

Jim Marszalek, national service director for Disabled American Veterans, is familiar with the problem. He says that even though the VA conducts classes for service members before they leave the military to become acquainted with benefits, many service members are focused on immediate concerns, not on benefits that might help them and their families in the future.

For example, a widow was attempting to claim a state property tax break that was designed to help veterans and their survivors, but there was a problem. To qualify, she needed proof that her husband had been totally disabled, but her husband had never applied to VA for a total disability rating before he died.

Plus, Marszalek says, many benefits hinge on having a condition that the VA labels a disability, and "there's a stigma associated with disability." Such feelings, combined with the complicated rules involved in qualifying for benefit programs, often mean that survivors of veterans end up missing out on benefits they deserve.

For key insights on survivor benefits, we spoke with Kevin Friel, deputy director of pension and fiduciary service at the VA and Garrett Schmidt, a management and program analyst at the department.

Health and education benefits for military families

- Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs and other health assistance programs can provide care to military families.
- Scholarships, grants and GI Bill transfer make higher education and vocational training more accessible.

Compensation for survivors, spouses and dependents

- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.
- Accrued benefits.
- Survivors pension.
- Burial benefits.
- Home loan benefits.

1. Health care

A valuable benefit available to eligible survivors is comprehensive health coverage from the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA). Under this program, the VA shares the cost of most health care services and medical supplies that it considers necessary for eligible surviving spouses and children. In most cases, eligibility for the coverage applies to survivors of veterans who were totally disabled or who died from a VA rated service connected disability.

Comprehensive health coverage is also available under the VA's Spina Bifida Health Care Benefits Program to children of Vietnam veterans and certain Korean War veterans who have been diagnosed with the condition.

Other limited health coverage is available to survivors from specific stations or service eras. For example, service members, spouses and children who lived at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina between August 1953 and 1987 can be reimbursed for certain out-of-pocket health care costs because of contaminated drinking water there. The benefit applies to treatment of 15 specific illnesses and medical conditions, including several forms of cancer, infertility and miscarriage.

Another targeted health benefit applies to children with certain birth defects who were born to female Vietnam veterans. The Children of Women Vietnam Veterans Health Care Benefits Program (CWVV) covers services necessary

for treatment of the covered birth defect and associated medical conditions.

2. Education and training

Substantial financial help is available for survivors of service members interested in pursuing education or vocational training. The government, in some cases, will pay all or a large part of tuition costs for college and other educational programs.

Two key programs that eligible surviving spouses and children should explore are the Fry Scholarship and Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA).

Under the Fry program, the government pays the full cost of in-state tuition at public institutions, up to about \$27,120 a year for a private school, plus a monthly housing allowance and a stipend for books and supplies. This scholarship is for eligible children of veterans up to 33 years and widowed spouses.

Eligible survivors who choose the DEA program can get a monthly check sent directly to them to pay educational costs for 36 months.

The DEA and Fry programs can be used for college, vocational and business technical programs, apprenticeship programs, certification tests and tutoring. The federal Forever GI Bill, enacted in 2017, has made it easier for survivors to transfer benefits under the GI Bill after the death of service members.

Eligibility for educational benefits can depend on a number of factors, including the date and circumstances of a veteran's death, the ages of dependent children and the widow or widower's marital status.

3. VA home loans

Surviving spouses who meet certain criteria can get a VA-guaranteed home loan to buy, build or improve a home or to refinance a mortgage.

VA loans have important advantages over other home loans. In most cases, the buyer does not have to make a down payment on the home. Home buyers using these loans also do not have to pay monthly mortgage insurance premiums.

For those who are refinancing, one option is a cash-out refinance loan, which enables homeowners to get cash from the equity in the home and use it, for example, to pay off debt, pay for education or make home improvements.

4. VA survivor's pension

Surviving spouses of veterans who served during a time of war with a modest income who have not remarried may apply to receive a monthly tax-free VA Survivors Pension payment. The benefit is also available to unmarried dependent children of wartime veterans until age 18, or age 23 while attending a VA-approved school.

The maximum annual survivors pension rate (MAPR) is set annually by Congress, and eligibility is based on income and net worth (including assets such as bank accounts, investments and real estate other than your primary residence). In 2023, the top rate for surviving spouses will range from around \$10,750 a year to about

\$20,500, depending on whether they have children and qualify for other VA benefits. The actual payment amount is the difference between your income and your maximum pension rate.

5. DIC benefits for surviving spouses and dependents

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is one of the most valuable benefits available to veterans' survivors. People who meet the criteria for DIC can get tens of thousands of dollars a year in tax-free payments.

DIC payment rates are adjusted annually. In 2023, surviving spouses of veterans who have died since Jan. 1, 1993 will receive about \$1,560 a month, with supplementary payments possible if the veteran was disabled or if the spouse is disabled or caring for minor children. The VA uses a different scale for veterans who died before 1993, with DIC rates ranging from about \$1,560 to \$3,580, plus supplements, depending on the deceased's pay grade.

Dependent children may also qualify for DIC payments, and some parents of deceased veterans can receive benefits if their income is low.

The sooner survivors apply for the benefit, the better. If they apply more than 12 months after the service member's death, payments are retroactive only to the date they applied, not the date the veteran died. In most cases, surviving spouses lose eligibility if they remarry unless they are over age 55.

The program is designed to compensate survivors when service members die while in the service or because of a service-connected disability. It also compensates survivors of veterans who died from a cause unrelated to their service but were rated by the VA as being totally disabled from a service-connected disability for a certain amount of time immediately before their death.

Experts cite the program as one of the reasons veterans should apply for total disability ratings as soon as they are eligible.

After a surviving spouse or child submits the application form 21P-534EZ, the VA will also determine eligibility for survivor's pension and accrued benefits.

If the VA notices that a veteran, for instance, had developed hypertension, which is now considered a service-connected condition due to the PACT Act, they will assess whether the veteran qualifies for DIC compensation.

"The surviving spouse in their moment of grieving might only say, 'Well, I'm only entitled to the survivor pension because I'm in this nursing home. I don't think my husband's or my wife's death was service connected,'" said Schmidt. "If we see something like hypertension on a death certificate, which is one of the new PACT Act, herbicide presumptive [a condition presumed to have stemmed from military service] and we see on the DD 214 this veteran had foreign service, maybe the veteran even served in Laos, we now have a slam-dunk connection, where we can pay the surviving spouse DIC." >>

6. Burial benefits

Eligible veterans and their spouses and dependents can be buried in one of the 155 national cemeteries maintained by the VA.

Burial benefits for veterans in these cemeteries include opening and closing the grave, perpetual care, a government headstone or marker, a burial flag and a Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC), at no cost to the family.

Burial benefits available for spouses and dependents buried in a national cemetery include burial with the veteran, perpetual care of the grave site and the spouse's or dependents' names and dates of birth and death inscribed on the veteran's headstone, at no cost to the family. Eligible spouses and dependents may be buried in a VA national cemetery even if the veteran is not buried there.

When veterans are buried at private cemeteries, the government provides a headstone or marker, a burial flag and a PMC. The VA also may pay for some of the burial and funeral expenses up to \$2,000.

The department recently announced that it will also cover burial transportation fees; typically, this would be the fee incurred from moving the veteran from a funeral home to their final resting place. A receipt is required so the VA can determine how much to reimburse.

For non-service-connected deaths, burial benefits must be filed within two years after the veteran's burial. Meanwhile, service-connected burials, when the cause of death is related to military service, have no time limits to file a service-connected burial, transportation, or plot and interment allowance.

7. Accrued benefits

Accrued benefit payments can be made when a veteran had a claim that wasn't finalized at the time of their death. When an application is submitted to the VA for DIC benefits, the VA will check if there were benefits that the veteran should have received, which would then be paid to their spouse.

"Sometimes survivors aren't aware that the veteran had a claim, so we're going to look at that and make a determination if there's any eligibility or potential for accrued," says Friel. "If there is, we'll process it and make that payment without the survivor having to do more." The payment for a claim submitted by a deceased spouse, child or parent dependent may also be eligible for an accrued benefit payment.

8. Life insurance

The Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance (S-DVI)

policy stopped taking new applications after 2022. But those who already have S-DVI may keep it.

In 2023, the agency introduced VALife, which provides up to \$40,000 in life insurance coverage for any veteran 80 or younger. No medical underwriting is required, and veterans with any disability rating will be accepted. For veterans 81 or older, there are some additional requirements.

S-DVI coverage typically caps at \$10,000. However, VALife offers up to \$40,000 for those with service-connected disabilities, with lower coverage amounts in \$10,000 increments.

Monthly premiums range from \$10.90 to \$1,768 depending on age and coverage amounts.

How to apply to VA survivor benefits

From health care to education and monthly compensation, there are a number of benefits that spouses and dependents may be eligible for after a veteran dies, even if they never enrolled in the VA system before.

If the veteran already received benefits, from the VA the agency can automatically initiate payments for burial benefits and DIC; the spouse just needs to inform the VA of the veteran's passing.

If the veteran was already receiving VA compensation or pension at the time of their death, survivors may also receive a one-time payment in the amount that would have been paid to the veteran if they had lived for the entirety of that month.

If the veteran was never in the VA system, spouses and dependents may still apply for survivors' pension and DIC by submitting their military service record, medical records and death certificate. If the veteran was receiving Social Security disability benefits, the VA can retrieve them on a spouse's behalf.

Remember, the more information provided, the faster a decision can be made. Fill out as much as you can. If you can't answer everything, that's OK: The VA will accept a substantially complete form.

"We have a duty to assist as far as it relates to federal records," said Friel.

All survivors may receive filing assistance through an accredited veteran service organization (VSO), a VA regional office or by calling the VA benefits hotline at 800-827-1000.

Review the family member benefits page on the VA's website to see all the benefits available to spouses and dependents, with links to all forms and contact information. ■

Special Stories

FALLEN HEROES

Another USMC VTA History Project Program

If you've attended one of our many biennial reunions and participated in a Farewell Banquet, you've witnessed one of the deeply moving 'Fallen Heroes' presentations created by our recently departed charter member Bob Peavey to honor our fallen comrades. Since 2003, Bob has crafted multiple heartfelt programs for each reunion, detailing the lives of U.S. Marine tankers and support personnel who

lost their lives in Vietnam. A few years ago, with Bob's permission, we began reassembling and preserving these presentations to ensure the legacy of the VTA. You can view some of the recently completed programs on the USMCSVTA.org website, including the most recent tribute for Ben John Greene. We are sure that you will truly appreciate the presentation.

Photo from Vietnam



Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks, Quang Tri, the fall of 1968.

FRONT ROW (L to R) – Bob Peavey, Andy Anderson, Larry Fuentes and Ray _? _

BACK ROW: John Wear



GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who the person is in this photo?

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



Last Issue Winner was

At 6:30 PM on Monday, Oct 7th Jim McKnight called to identify himself.



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

Above & Beyond

We are extremely grateful to the following members who reached deep into their pockets and made a financial contribution to the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association this past year that was above and beyond their normal membership dues in order to help our organization grow and prosper. You are the lifeblood of the brotherhood and we thank you very much.

<u>Last</u>	<u>First</u>		
Arena John	Dixon Ernest	Kreiger Raymond	Schultz Ned
Barnhouse Robert	Dodd Robert	Landaker Joseph	Schwartz Ralph
Barry Thomas	Everest Guy	Langlitz Harlan	Scrivner Jr. Douglas
Bisbee William	Falk Marcia	Larsen James	Shapiro Myron
Blum Howard	Fay John	Lewis Richard	Sims Charles
Bolick Reed	Fieldhouse Brian	Mabe John	Singer Robert
Bonderud Robert	Fierros Robert	MacKenzie James	Soncrant Gary
Boyette Roy	Fischer Michael	Marinez Freddy	Sparks Earl
Brazeau Max	George Carroll	Martin Greg	Stayton James
Brightwell Leroy	Goodine Paul	Mashburn Thomas	Tierney Edward
Brummitt Dennis	Gulbranson Robert	Mastrangelo Giuseppe	Van Apeldoorn Bruce
Buttstadt Karl	Haller Robert	McKnight James	Van De Bogart Allen
Byrnes Raymond	Hancock Jr. John	Mefford Gary	Van Dusen yrck
Cardiel Frank	Hayes Thomas	Moreno Armando	Vaughn Michael
Carmer Richard	Hays Max	Nagle Richard	Venturi Sandino
Cerda Rene	Henderson Rodney	Newberry Craig	Voss Martin
Cerone Edward	Hildabrand Theodore	Niciols Tim	Vrakelos Chris
Chassereau Jr. Joseph	Himes Harris	Norman Jr. Olin	Wallace Terry
Christenberry Arthur	Hokanson Carl	Paragas Andrew	Walters Rick
Clavan Robert	Howe Thomas	Pronnette Anthony	Warham Richard
Coan James	Hughes Merritt	Rasner William	Wear John
Coulter Richard	Hughes John	Riensch Harold	White Jerry
Coulter Richard	Hunter John	Rollins Steve	Williams Steanley
Cowman James	Hunter Terrence	Russell Dickie	Young Vernon
Curti Stephen	Jewell James	Sanders Donald	Zebal Kenneth
Curtis Michael	Jugenheimer Richard	Santos Ladis	Zuley Richard
Dale Irvin	Kelly Thomas	Schlieben George	
Diggs Alphonso	Knight Ronald		

****If we have inadvertently left off a name of a donor, please forgive our oversight****

What Members Are Doing

Ron with a Feast fit for a King



Ron and Chirs Knight hosts Bruce and Nancy VanApeldoorn

A Celebration of Life for Tree's Daughter



(L to R) Tom "Sparrow" Moad, Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz, Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri and Larry Parshall

John Hunter's Update

These photos are a result of my annual trip to the Great Northwest. First to Montana to visit my dad. I had plenty of company, my sons, and grand kids. I left Montana on July 4th heading to Hayden Lake, Idaho to visit Lt Col Ray Stewart. Ray was the 3rd Platoon Leader in Chu Lai during 1965.



When I left Hayden Lake I headed to La Grande, Oregon to see Stan Williams. When 1st Tank Battalion mounted out from San Diego in 1965, Stan, and I were on the same tank, B-35. Somehow Stan was able to escape to another tank. The photo is of me and Stan in front of his Trophy Class RestoMod 1968 Chevrolet Camaro.

Short Stories

USMC Wounded Warrior Regiment

BY BRUCE VAN APELDOORN

I just finished reading "Needs of the Corps" which is based upon the life and career of Lt Gen. Ron Christmas. Known for his participation in the Battle for Hue City, the then Captain was almost discharged. The Navy Cross recipient lost a part of one leg from a B-40 Rocket in Hue, was medevacked, repaired and readied for discharge. He ended up avoiding discharge and rose to be the number three Marine in the Corps.

During that period in the Corps "damaged Warriors" were repaired and discharged. For some Marines this turned out okay but for many they were not ready to end their days as a Marine. At the same time, we had "Casual Company" where we could dump nonfunctional Marines. Those Marines were sent to the base stables, linen survey, mess duty, and built targets. Until their discharge date they were given the less than desirable jobs. I think during that time we mistakenly put



Lap Robes for Veterans – Nancy Van Apeldoorn



the two categories together.

During this century the Corps did the right thing and organized a "Wounded Warrior Regiment." The three Battalions are located at Quantico, Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton. These Battalions are Marine-focused rather than combat-focused. The goal is to ensure that Marines who will take longer than 90 days to get back to full duty are supported.

Why longer than 90 days? Studies have shown that Marines recover faster if they stay with their unit. The decision was made to have those with recovery periods of less than 90 days stay with their parent unit while those over 90 days

will transfer to one of the Wounded Warrior Battalions.

The Battalions do not provide medical care but are in a position to support those Marines while they are scheduled for surgery and complete rehabilitation. The family-centered support includes coaching, physical conditioning, mental health and for those due discharge, transition to civilian life assistance. A link to the Veterans Administration and job training or education are also provided.

The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association is proud to have partnered with Lap Robes for Veterans II to provide Lap Robes to the Marines of the Wounded Warrior Battalion at Camp Lejeune, NC at their annual Wounded Warrior Symposium. We were just one of twenty-seven organizations that provides services and support to the Marines of the Wounded Warrior Battalion.

Corporal Kerby

BY CLYDE HOCH

I arrived at Camp Lejeune just after infantry training. I was assigned to 2nd Tank Battalion in 1965. Our barracks were very large and most of the tank company slept there. I was a private, as low as it gets in the military. Soon a Private 1st Class introduced himself to me. His name was Private 1st Class Kerby. He did out rank me but there wasn't too much difference between us except he was one rank ahead of me and much bigger in stature.

His hobby was to harass me. "Private Hoch front and center." I never listened to him. "You are a coal cracker from the hills." He was a black guy from Philadelphia. One day I heard him talking to his friends a few racks away. "I'm going to cave Private Hoch's chest in." I was lying in my rack with my boots on the floor as was regulation.

Our set up was two wall lockers per person, side by side so four wall lockers

became almost a wall. Then there were two racks. So, it made a nice little cubicle for two people separated from the rest of the company. When people walked down the center, they could see everything very well. You couldn't get away with much there. There were sergeants of the guard and guards patrolling the barracks.

When Kerby came around the end wall locker I took both feet and kicked him in the chest. He fell against >>

the wall lockers. He got up and walked away. I heard his black friends say "I guess private Hoch caved your chest in."

I went on a Mediterranean cruise and never thought of Kerby again. When I arrived back at Camp Lejeune after a Med Cruise for six months, I was sent on another Med Cruise. Sometime after the second Med Cruise I was promoted

to sergeant. I now slept in the sergeant's quarters. One day I had to see one of my crew in the barracks. As I was walking through the barracks, I spotted Kerby. He was now a corporal; I was a sergeant. There is a very large difference between a corporal and sergeant.

I will never ever forget the look on Kerby's face when he realized I was a

sergeant. That night I laid in my rack in the sergeant's quarters and had to smile upon seeing Kerby as a corporal. I could have gotten revenge 10 times over, but I just let it go. The look on his face was satisfaction enough for me. I didn't see him much after that. Karma is great.

Jim Thompson is a Hero in my Eyes

BY KEN ZEBAL

As a young man, Jim, left sunny California to pursue his profession as a credentialed schoolteacher in Canada. Like most young men at the time, he signed up for the draft and thought nothing more about it. However, while working as an educator, his draft notice arrived in the mail. Jim quickly assessed the situation and enlisted in the Marines. After a period of delayed entry which enabled him to complete his school year teaching commitment, Jim found himself enjoying life as a Private at Parris Island in August of 1963. If you fast forward in time, Jim went to Camp Lejeune and Company "C", 2nd Tanks where he participated in two cruises before getting orders to 3rd Tanks in Okinawa. Life at Camp Hansen was good and Jim learned everything he could under the watchful eye of Sgt. Ed Sipel, A-34's Tank Commander. After several practice mount outs to the P.I. and Mt. Fuji with 3/3, the battalion actually did mount out from White Beach destined for South Viet Nam.



Jim went ashore at Chu Lai in mid-May and quickly adapted to the grueling regimen of conducting preventative maintenance in high heat and humidity during the day and being on an outpost

with one of 3/3's rifle companies at night. On or about 16 August, the platoon boarded LCU's and LCM-8's as they embarked on the USS Cabildo in preparation for an amphibious landing just south of Chu Lai's Song Tra Bong river. A-34 was part of a heavy section in direct support of 3/3's India Company.

During the bloody fight on 18 August, A-34 sustained multiple penetrations from enemy 75mm recoilless rifles. One of the initial penetrations traumatically amputated Sgt. Sipel's leg and spread back spalling all throughout the turret which wounded both Jim, the gunner and Dan Yoder, the loader. Without hesitation, Jim removed his web belt and placed it as a tourniquet on Sgt. Sipel's severely wounded leg thereby saving his life.

During a pause in the fight and with A-34 now on fire the crew was evacuated and staged, along with numerous other wounded Marines, near a landing zone awaiting evacuation to the USS Boxer. During that time 2/Lt Ky Thompson, who was also wounded and pending evacuation, placed Cpl. Jim Thompson in charge of the heavy section and gave him his maps. Jim then commenced leading the heavy section which now consisted of A-31 and A-32. Although wounded and covered in Sgt. Sipel's blood as well as some of his own, Cpl. Jim Thompson, as the senior NCO present, continued to fight from A-31 until forcibly evacuated to the hospital ship.

After recovering from his wounds, Cpl. Jim Thompson returned to the 3rd Platoon and successfully completed his tour of duty. Tank A-34 was so severely damaged that Marine Combat Engineers were ordered to destroy it in place. Although he was decorated for meritorious achievements after his tour of duty, Cpl. Jim Thompson's heroics during OPERATION STARLITE were never acknowledged until now.

THE BROTHERHOOD

BY FRANK "TREE" REMKIEWICZ

I know we all talk about the "brotherhood". Our brotherhood was formed from red clay, sandbags, malaria pills, C-rations, rats, rain, and RPGs. Now we are home. Most of us for over 50 years. We are long in the tooth, hair on our

face and bald on top. We have families. If you are anything like me your family has come to revere the VTA brotherhood. My family has. One example is found in a simple telephone call. Most of my phone calls these days are spam, unsolicited sales

call, and an occasional crazy relative. All of my family, including my grandchildren that live with me, know that "Papa" does not take phone calls. There is a singular exception to this rule. (Continued on page 27)

2024 Mini-Reunion Recap Fort Benning (Ft Moore) Sept 12 - 15, 2024



In the Slopchute



Dinner is served



Gary Mefford, Clyde Hoch & guest



On the bus headed to the Armor Collection



The first "tank"



WW-1



T-28 Super Heavy



Director Len Dyer gives us hours of extensive and highly informative "school house"



The 160+ vehicle Armor Collection



Tank crews have really changed!!!



Ontos



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Ron and Chris



Lap Robes for Vets



Roger, Lou and Frank



Fire Power



Lee Atkin and an M-48



Ron on an M-1



John enters Driver's Compartment



60 Years later Larry Fuentes and John Wear



Loader Greg Kelley



Clyde Hoch and Ben Cole were on a med cruise together in 1966 before going to Vietnam. They both later wrote books about their experiences there.



The Crew of C-23
TC: Gary Soncrant, Gunner: Rick Lewis, Loader: Ed Boyette and Driver: Greg Auclair



KIA James Epps little brother Ron



John "Hughie" Hughes



Arty Hines writes: Here is a photo of 1st Sgt Greg Auclair with a M103 heavy tank, that he served with. My brother, Kev and I thoroughly enjoyed being with you guys. All of the attendees made us feel welcome. Len Dyer was a fantastic tour guide! World class tank collection! Well done on an outstanding reunion!!



M-48



Museum interior

The Brotherhood

(Continued from page 22)

If the phone rings and the caller asks to speak with "Tree" that family member will hunt me down and let me know one of the brotherhood is calling.

My daughter was the brotherhood's biggest fan! Rebekah knew not only who you were but how important you are to me. When my medical records and my personal file finally arrived over 40 years after my active time in the Corps, she asked if she could read it. She was taken aback by all that we had done. Bekah

knew a few of you from the time she was a baby. She knew many of you by telephone or Facebook, or text messages and just about anything else attached to the Internet. Bekah also listened to all our podcasts. She debated with some of you, but she loved you all. Rebekah knew how much the members of the VTA meant to me. In July of 2024, Rebekah died from breast, bone, and spinal fluid cancer. This was the one time I could not improvise, adapt, and overcome. Over the course of her illness, she felt the brotherhood surround her. From September of 2023

until she died, she received cards, flowers, text messages and phone calls. She especially felt the love and care of Blues, Sparrow, and First Sargent Rick Lewis.

Greg writes: At the 2024 mini-reunion at Ft Benning, we spoke briefly about Bob Peavey and how he could finally continue to bear his cross. When I told you that he shared his deep guilt with me, and that I tried to console him by sharing mine with him, you suggested I write a piece for the Sponson Box. I've made the effort, and attached it. I'm not a psychologist, but maybe someone reading it might benefit.

Guilty!

BY GREG KELLEY

Webster's dictionary defines guilt as: "feelings of deserving blame especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy."

In a court of law, if one is found guilty, there is typically a sentence commensurate to the crime. In that court, a judge or jury deliberates and then imposes sentence. Self-guilt is an entirely different animal. In the case of self-guilt, the person feeling guilty is the judge, jury, and sentencer. In the case of guilt derived from high-pressure situations (such as combat), it is my contention that self-guilt is bound to be the most severe. Sometimes it is so severe that it can and does kill. Self-guilt is one of the major reasons for suicide amongst combat vets. If you've gone through the 12-step PTSD program via the VA, you have had to confront and tackle your feelings of guilt. And for those of us who have NOT yet been diagnosed and "treated", the problem may lie dormant for years.

Recently, one of our own succumbed to the guilt he had borne for most of his adult life. Bob Peavey, whom I only briefly knew, carried his guilt for over half a century. When I heard of his passing, and learned by scuttlebutt of perhaps how and why, I felt a sort of understanding. Bob had shared the deepest bilges of his guilt with me at the Colorado Springs reunion, and I in turn shared some of my guilt with him. I shared my own guilt in a conscious effort to try to persuade Bob that he was not alone; that we all deal with our own festering wounds. Some

of these wounds are deeper than others, and some are buried with years of heaps of booze and heaps of drugs in an effort to not have to acknowledge the fact that they are affecting, and infecting us. Through these many years, I have carried my own guilt. Confronting my guilt and expelling it together with Bob was therapeutic for me, and I hoped for Bob. I felt like I do after a good cry. It takes a lot to get tears out of me, and it takes a lot to regurgitate deep guilt.

I've chosen the following two personal episodes as they have come to the top as the primary causes of "dreams" and conscious angst for most of my life:

1. I think it was as we were heading back out from Buffalo... We were a column of tanks and grunts and were suddenly hit with a heavy barrage of artillery and mortars and some small arms fire to the point that there were many casualties. Our tank, and other tanks, were charged with transporting the dead and wounded to the LZ. Bodies, both dead and still living, were handed up to me and Calderone. We did our best to stack them and had those that were alive hold on to the tank and to each other for the short and fast trek out. One guy, who looked to be in his late teens like me, was handed up. As I pulled him up to a sitting position he reached out and clutched my arm and looked into my eyes from only

several inches away. "I'm going to die, aren't I?" It was as if I was looking into a mirror. He was asking me this question, and it shook me. He had lost so much blood that his skin was translucent. I told him "No, you'll be fine. Just hang on." I knew I was lying to him, and that he was so badly wounded that he would not live. That I lied to him at that moment, his last moment alive, has haunted me. I feel an extreme amount of guilt because I lied. Yeah...I know. What else could I have done? But still, I feel the way I do.

2. Another time concerned the last day in the life of Lance Corporal Dewey. Dewey was the gunner on the tank next to mine up at Con Thien. The night before, Johnny Seiler and I were talking with Dewey. He was acting odd, not himself. We asked him what was up; was something wrong? He answered "I'm going to die tomorrow." Now, Dewey was native American and was always talking about spirits and dead ancestors visiting him, etc. But, when he made that statement, it was spine-tingling. Well, the next morning my tank was called out as well as one other for a sweep off the hill. When we tried to start her up, we couldn't. Batteries were so low it wouldn't turn over. Instead, Dewey's tank took our place. Dewey was the gunner of his tank like I was the gunner in mine. They made it for no more than an hour when they took an RPG right >>

through that killed Dewey. Yeah... I have "dreams" and a lot of guilt. Should have been me. I should have been the gunner, not Dewey. Again, what else could I have done? But still, the guilt.

I've not written of these "guilts" for my sake. Rather, I've written in hopes that anyone who has not allowed his guilt to come to the surface might make an effort to finally allow it. It's "good" to share

it...to get it off your chest, so to speak. Keeping it suppressed either consciously or subconsciously is not good. And, it's never too late.

High School Sweethearts

TRUE LOVE BETWEEN PEOPLE LASTS A LIFETIME EVEN WHEN THEY ARE APART.

BY ROGER LULI



In the fall of my senior year in high school, my friend Gary Samuels told me he knew a girl that "liked" me. I agreed to meet her with her and when we met, we hit it off immediately. Her name was Jean Hoffman and she was a majorette. So, I followed Coach Bestwick's advice about dating girls that liked sports.

From that time on, we were inseparable. At the end of the season, I took her to the football banquet. Since the team was the first to go undefeated since 1942, the players received a small gold football charm with our names and "Undefeated" stamped on it. I gave that football to Jean on a chain that she wore around her neck. (remember this part of the story for it comes up later).

Our schedules matched with her practices and mine so I walked her home every chance I got. We ice skated, saw movies, attended basketball games and the dances afterward. We also attended the prom in spring and I have attached a photo of us leaving her house.

The fall of 1962 I went off to Penn State University to Study engineering. When I met my roommate, he was the most outgoing and energetic man I had

ever met. He was from Orangeville NC, an Army brat, and he was black. My father asked if I was ok with him as a roommate and I was. Sadly, he was KIA on 06 Sep 1968 and is remembered on panel 45W, line 53.

Near the end of my first semester, I decided it was selfish of me to keep Jean waiting for me during her junior and senior years of high school. She should be dating and having fun like I had. At home for Christmas break, I went to Jean's home and knocked on the door. When she answered, I could tell she was expecting bad news. I told her we should separate and she reacted calmly and asked if I wanted the football back. I told her it was hers and I could never give it to anyone else. I walked away and never talked to her again. Almost a year later, I saw her at Penn State. She was with the marching band so I walked down by the field with a friend of mine. Our presence was not well received by the majorettes.

Fast forward 62 years. My wife Sherry had died and I was alone in an empty nest. Sometime in early January, 2024 I received a small package from a Jean Patterson. My uncle was a Patterson but I

searched my memory and found no Jean Patterson. When I opened the package, I knew right away who sent it.

I wrote and thanked her for returning the football. I thought one of my grandsons who all play football might want it someday. I also asked her if she would entertain the idea of getting together and talking about our life's events over the past 62 years. She thought about it for about two weeks then wrote back she would like to get together.

On the 22nd of January this year, I drove to her daughter's house in Grove City, PA where she was living. Not knowing what to expect, I cautiously approached the door and she came out to meet me. "Holy Guacamole!!!" She was a vision from the past. The dark hair was gone but her smile and sparking eyes were still the same. She introduced me to her daughter Lisa, son-in-law Daryl, her other son-in-law Daryl, and her daughter Amy. I also met her dog, Buddy.

We went to Fat Eddies—a local eatery—and began our journey down memory lane. She had married right after high school graduation and gave birth to three girls and two boys. She ended that marriage and later married an Air Force Vietnam Veteran named Jim Patterson, hence my confusion about her name on the package. He had passed away about the same time as my wife Sherry.

In the following weeks, we celebrated our birthdays and burned up the phone lines with talks and texts. Finally, one night we were having some of our neighbor's home-made wine and he turned to me and said, "If you don't ask her to marry you, I will ask her". So, I asked her and she said yes. We were married on 16 April this year. And that my friends, is why I smile all the time now.

Editor's Note: We saw this letter in the most recent issue of Leatherneck magazine and even though it's not about Vietnam, we thought that it was worth republishing here.

The Corpsman's Sacred Duty

BY TOM YAMASHITA

Somewhere in a distant land there are a group of young Marines, humping the hills, road, swamp and jungle. Carrying rounds for the 60mm mortar attached to the unit. Plus, the flak vest, helmet, grenades, water and rations.

It's hot; sweat pours from the Marines moving forward going to an area known to be a hot spot, but they need the Marines there for support. The only complaint you hear being spoken about is the heat. They hump their packs, each lost in thought and watching out for snipers and the ever-deadly IED.

The backs of the Marines strain under the weight of what they carry. NO use bitching, it won't get them anything. Plus, they know that in a fire fight, they'll need all the ammo they can carry.

It seems like they've been walking forever—up one hill and down, then up another hill, or winding through a jungle with bugs large enough to carry off a Marine pack and all. Wading through the water in the swamp, the mud trying its best to suck a boot off with their feet.

Talking is at a minimum as they don't want the enemy to know their position.

One hears the occasional Marine calling out, "F*ck this place! When are we stopping for a beer break?"

Suddenly shots ring out. The Marines scatter. They look and listen before retuning fire, just as they've been trained to do. Someone calls out the position, and the Marines unleash a hail of bullets in the direction called out.

They receive more incoming fire. The Marine with the machinegun is set up and throws hell at the unseen enemy. Above the sound of the gun fire, you can hear the cry of "Corpsman, I've been hit!"

Somewhere from the group of Marines a slightly built corpsman runs forward to the wounded Marine and administers lifesaving aid to the fallen Marine. The corpsman tells the young Marine it will be OK.

Then another call is heard asking for the corpsman. Again, the corpsman scans the battlefield trying to locate that wounded Marine. Once spotted, the corpsman gets to a crouching position and takes off toward the wounded Marine.

The corpsman slides in next to the

Marine and in a soothing voice, tells the Marine that it's not as bad as it may feel. While working on the Marine, the corpsman's helmet falls off, revealing the features of a young woman. A pretty one at that, she is doc to these Marines. She cares for them physically and sometimes emotionally.

She patches up their bullet wounds and torn limbs. She tries her best to save the lives of those in her care. The Marines in turn, watch over her. After all, she is their corpsman, doc to some, they know in the shit that she'll be the one moving to get to them. She will move in fire fights that some Marines would rather keep their heads down.

When she hears the call "corpsman," she's up and moving to get to the Marine. Come hell or high water, she will give it her all to render aid to the fallen Marine. Sometimes she will be the last person the Marine will see.

No matter where the Marines go, so goes the corpsman. Into combat or on base, there is a corpsman to tend to the Marines.

We Make Marines and Win Battles

BY BRUCE VAN APELDOORN



Sgt Macey Estrella



WWE Lacey Evans



Me and Zac

Most of us have been involved in winning battles so why not be involved in

the other activity of the Corps? I know a few did earn the right to wear "The Hat"

and make Marines but there is an opportunity for the rest of us to >>

help make Marines. It is the Corps' "Legacy Program."

About a decade ago I read an article in *Semper Fi* (the magazine of the Marine Corps League) about a program that had Marines returning to MCRD to share their experiences with newly minted Marines. Any MOS, any rank, with or without combat experience, to spend an hour sharing experiences and answering a few questions. Some speak solo while some go in as teams.

My first experience I was teamed up with Macey Estrella-Kadlec and Zachary Green. Neither had combat experience but their presentations were outstanding. Macey, a former Sgt., spoke about the pressures of work and home and the importance of mental health. You might know her as World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) star Lacey Evans.

Zachary, a former Major, shared his personal experience after the Corps that took him into a volunteer Fire Department in Ohio in search of the camaraderie he so missed. It was in a

burning home training exercise where he had an idea for a new product that would allow Firemen to see in the smoke. A self-made millionaire, Zachary now lives in Hilton Head and is an integral part of every graduating series.

My presentation is about my tour in Vietnam and how the phrase "Every Marine is a Rifleman" is reality. The message is: Don't think your MOS will



Bruce with recruits

Fuji Japan. Toss in a lesson about liberty "If your buddy is drunk don't let him sleep on his back." My parting suggestions are that getting married, buying a new car and getting tattoos should be put off until the rank of Corporal. The target is real experiences and solid advice not just sea stories.

Normally there is a lot of interaction once the first Marine asks a question. Some are about current events such as Ukraine and Isreal, but most are about life as a Marine. Since training is now integrated, be ready for questions from both sides of the platoon.

If you are interested in becoming a Legacy Speaker let me know for Parris Island. My phone number is 585.613.6564. Or Rick Lewis for San Diego. Rick's

shelter you from combat. I attempt to connect with them with my 18-year-old self, 1811 Marine in Vietnam story.

Other topics I like to share are being aboard ship and making amphibious landings plus cold-weather training at Mt.

phone number is 858.735.1772. You have valuable information to share plus it will be the highlight of your Marine career... you don't have to stay! Compared to your last trip to MCRD it will be a breeze.

Fifty Shades of Age

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Editor's Note: I have no idea who put this together, but it is wonderful, especially if you're North of 70!

Long ago and far away, in a land that time forgot,
Before the days of Dylan, or the dawn of Camelot.
There lived a race of innocents, and they were you and me.
For Ike was in the White House in that land where we were born,
Where navels were for oranges, and Peyton Place was porn.
We longed for love and romance, and waited for our Prince,
Eddie Fisher married Liz, and no one's seen him since.
We danced to 'Little Darlin,' and sang to 'Stagger Lee'
And cried for Buddy Holly in the Land That Made Me, Me.
Only girls wore earrings then, and 3 was one too many,
And only boys wore flat-top cuts, except for Jean McKinney.
And only in our wildest dreams did we expect to see
A boy named George with Lipstick, in the Land That Made Me, Me.
We fell for Frankie Avalon, Annette was oh, so nice,
And when they made a movie, they never made it twice.
We didn't have a Star Trek Five, or Psycho Two and Three,
Or Rocky-Rambo Twenty in the Land That Made Me, Me.
Miss Kitty had a heart of gold, and Chester had a limp,
And Reagan was a Democrat whose co-star was a chimp.
We had a Mr. Wizard, but not a Mr. T,
And Oprah couldn't talk yet, in the Land That Made Me, Me.
We had our share of heroes, we never thought they'd go,



At least not Bobby Darin, or Marilyn Monroe.
For youth was still eternal, and life was yet to be,
And Elvis was forever in the Land That Made Me, Me.
We'd never seen the rock band that was Grateful to be Dead,
And Airplanes weren't named Jefferson, and Zeppelins were not Led.
And Beatles lived in gardens then, and Monkees lived in trees,
Madonna was Mary in the Land That Made Me, Me.
We'd never heard of microwaves, or telephones in cars,
And babies might be bottle-fed, but they were not grown in jars.
And pumping iron got wrinkles out, and 'gay' meant fancy-free,
And dorms were never co-ed in the Land That Made Me, Me.
We hadn't seen enough of jets to talk about the lag,
And microchips were what was left at the bottom of the bag.
And hardware was a box of nails, and bytes came from a flea,
And rocket ships were fiction in the Land That Made Me, Me.
T-Birds came with portholes, and side shows came with freaks,
And bathing suits came big enough to cover both your cheeks.
And Coke came just in bottles, and skirts below the knee,
And Castro came to power near the Land That Made Me, Me.
We had no Crest with Fluoride, we had no Hill Street Blues,
We had no patterned pantyhose or Lipton herbal tea
Or prime-time ads for those dysfunctions in the Land That Made Me, Me.
There were no golden arches, no Perrier to chill,
And fish were not called Wanda, and cats were not called Bill
And middle-aged was 35 and old was forty-three,
And ancient were our parents in the Land That Made Me, Me.
But all things have a season, or so we've heard them say,
And now instead of Maybelline we swear by Retin-A.
They send us invitations to join AARP,
We've come a long way, baby, from the Land That Made Me, Me.
So now we face a brave new world in slightly larger jeans,
And wonder why they're using smaller print in magazines.
And we tell our children's children of the way it used to be,
Long ago and far away in the Land That Made Me, Me.
If you didn't grow up in the fifties,
You missed the greatest time in history,
Hope you enjoyed this read as much as I did.

OLD FART PRIDE

SUBMITTED BY BOB SKEELS

1. Old Farts are easy to spot at sporting events; during the playing of the National Anthem. Old Farts remove their caps and stand at attention and sing without embarrassment. They know the words and believe in them.

2. Old Farts remember World War II, Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, Normandy and Hitler. They remember the Atomic Age, the Korean War, The Cold War, the Jet Age and the Moon Landing. They remember the 50 plus Peacekeeping Missions from 1945 to 2005, not to mention Vietnam.

3. If you bump into an Old Fart on the sidewalk he will apologize. If you pass an Old Fart on the street, he will nod or tip his cap to a lady. Old Farts trust strangers and are courtly to women.

4. Old Farts hold the door for the next person and always, when walking, make certain the lady is on the inside for protection.

5. Old Farts get embarrassed if someone curses in front of women and children and they don't like any filth or dirty language on TV or in movies.

6. Old Farts have moral courage and personal integrity. They seldom brag unless it's about their children or grandchildren.

7. It's the Old Farts who know our great country is protected, not by politicians, but by the young men and women in the military serving their country.

This country needs Old Farts with their work ethic, sense of responsibility, pride in their country and decent values.

We need them now more than ever.

Thank God for Old Farts! ■

On January 24

Introduction

Harry Christensen writes: On January 24, 1968 a convoy coming from Dong Ha was ambushed on Highway 9 by elements of the NVA 64th Regt., 320th Division. Two tanks from Bravo Co. 3rd Tk. Bn. (B-42 & F-22) along with two M-42 "Dusters" from "C" Bat., 1st Bn., 44th AAA, with some infantry (a platoon from H/2/4.) rushed to the scene not knowing how large of an NVA force was involved. This small force was in turn caught in an ambush. Captain Daniel W. Kent was KIA and Corporal Harry C. Christensen was WIA (Evac). Harry was later awarded a Silver Star for his actions that day. B-42 (a dozer tank) was knocked out by RPG fire. It was recovered and returned to service on January 26, when Lynn Young took it back to the ambush site with other units, bull dozed a trench and buried approximately 400 to 600 NVA bodies.

An amazing thing occurred to me recently. I received a call from Joe Belardo (Army), who was T.C. of the 2nd Duster that entered the ambush site along with my tank in the lead, on that day. As you know this was not an "ambush" but a battle with two regiments



of NVA with nearly 11,000 of their troops. Joe was kind enough to contact Lt. Col. Vincent Tedesco (Army), who led the 2nd "reaction force" from Dong Ha to aid with multiple Dusters and "Quad 50's. Thank God for them.

One of the Duster men took a photo as they engaged the NVA. From that photo a painting was commissioned and now is on display at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. I include a copy of the painting that was gifted to me by Col. Tedesco, now a good friend.

As you can see the battle raged on my tank can be clearly seen with Capt. Kent on the front of my tank. I can be

seen in the T.C. cupula, unconscious at this point, just before the tank was struck with the last RPG which began the fire and caused the captain and myself to be blown off the tank.

I was told by Col. Tedesco that my tank sustained several RPG hits. The Duster behind me was struck with multiple MPG's. The driver was killed, one crew member lost both legs another lost both arms. A very bad day which was the beginning of "Tet".

Semper Fi,
Harry Christensen

Captain Daniel Wilder Kent, KIA

SUBMITTED BY HARRY C. CHRISTENSEN, © 2003
Bravo Co., 3rd Tanks, 1967-68

Daniel Kent, known by his friends and family as Danny, was all Marine. He was killed in action on January 24, 1968. Many of us recall his level of discipline. Without doubt he ran a tight ship. Along with many others, I felt the sting of that discipline. I recall a wound on my left arm, the result of a playful encounter with an abandoned mortar pit.



Capt. Kent on left with Top White

Unfortunately for me the wound required treatment at the aid station at the Rock Pile. Upon my return to Camp Carroll an investigation was held to determine culpability. Fortunately for me, my crew and I "reconstructed facts" about how the injury occurred while destroying bunkers at the Fish Bowl position, which was

east of the Rock Pile. I just barely dodged the bullet. In addition, some of you may recall that in December, while I slept one night at Camp Carroll some "scumbag" took my pistol and a wonderful shoulder holster (provided to me by Lt. Himes after S/Sgt. Warton traded mine for a case of beer.) Again, I was under the gun (no pun intended). Due to the able defense provided by Lt. Harris Himes, I was acquitted of negligence. Such were the events of discipline that we all recall at Camp Carroll in 1967, relating to Captain Kent.

A year or two ago I made the acquaintance of a gentleman who turned out to be the best friend of Danny Kent. I learned that Danny Kent was much like the rest of us. He loved scouting and often spent weekends camping in the woods with his father and friends. I was told that he did like things his way! His father was devastated as a result of his death . . . and died never fully able to reconcile this loss.

I recall the captain watching with envy our touch football games with the clear yearning that he would like to have been involved. He was a great advocate of the process that much of us were troubled with—specifically, the division between enlisted men and commissioned officers. I recall a number of situations where Lt. Himes (to his credit) was sanctioned for his association with enlisted men. Nevertheless, Captain Kent adhered to the code of ethics he learned at Quantico, Virginia, and commanded his company in that respect and manner. Some may recall that (after a few beers) a number of us convinced Terry Bocchino (who had the keys to the ammo dump) to provide us with a number of flares (Matty Mattel's), which we promptly sent airwards. The entire hill was in chaos, the sirens blasting away. I will never forget Kent charging around Camp Carroll in a steel helmet with pistol in his hand and covered by a flak jacket in his green skivvies. Many recall the formation the next day and the

"dressing down" we received from the captain.

The day Captain Kent died he approached my hooch and informed me that an ambush was underway on Highway 9 just south of Camp Carroll. We were ordered to meet at "the Gate" to provide support. We coordinated at the Gate leading to Highway 9—my tank in the lead, two army dusters and the Camp Carroll flame tank bringing up the rear. Along with us were a significant number of Marine infantry (Grunts) who took up positions on the tanks and Dusters. I listened intently on the radio to those in the ambush site who begged for help as they encountered heavy automatic weapon fire along with a significant number of RPG's. I will tell you now as then that I was frightened beyond my years (21). We turned right on Highway 9 and headed toward the site, Captain Kent, riding on the outside of my tank, his pistol in his hand.

We reached the ambush site rather quickly and witnessed the carnage therein, coming to a stop some 100 meters from the site. I could clearly hear the incoming rounds, screams of the dying and their pleas for help. Captain Kent ordered us to stop and attempted to coordinate an effort to engage the NVA. We thought at the time that we were engaged with the standard small ambush scenario and were not aware that we had stumbled upon a concerted effort by the NVA to attack Camp Carroll. Battle reports I have read included elements of the 52nd and 48th NVA regiments along with 320th NVA divisions. Accordingly, we held our position and began to recon by fire at the flanks of the ambush site.

To his credit, the captain did not interfere with my command of the tank but dismounted to coordinate efforts with the dusters and the infantry. I remained in the T.C. cupula to command the tanks ordinance. I must have made a great target as the tank immediately sustained small arms fire. In the course of the initial action, my

tank infantry phone (T.I. phone) was disabled. As a result, Captain Kent and I began to coordinate the tanks fire by hand signals, as I could not hear his voice over the resulting action. This solved the problem but apparently caught the attention of the NVA who were not pleased with the effort of the tank guns. Accordingly, more and more NVA small arms fire impacted upon the tank. A ricochet round struck my face above my right eye and I was blinded for a moment. I was bleeding profusely and attempted to get a rag tied in place when Captain Kent and a corpsman mounted the tank. I stated to both that I was fine. At that time, one of those life-changing events occurred. The captain asked me if I "felt up" to continuing as tank commander. I said I did.

On the ground, Captain Kent continued to organize the infantry to fire on both sides of the ambush site, all of which was accomplished with great result. In addition, my tank in the lead began the same manner of fire. Over the course of some time, my tank raked the ambush site with 90mm, 50 cal. and 30 cal. In the course of this action, my tank fired much of its canister and HE rounds; the 50-caliber machine gun had malfunctioned due to a broken cable; and the 30 cal. was nearly out of ammunition. Many, many, many NVA were killed. At some point, my tank and the duster behind decided to rush the ambush site to aid those in distress. The infantry again loaded onto the vehicles, which began to enter the ambush site at a good clip.

Just prior to entering the site, Captain Kent shouted that we were receiving automatic weapon fire from both sides of the road. He didn't have to inform me as I could hear and see the effect. With much of the tank's firepower compromised, I requested from the loader and received the grease gun along with a small duffle bag of magazines. I began to fire at every target including spider holes along with the very brazen NVA soldiers who suddenly appeared with RPGs from >>

both sides of the road. Captain Kent called my attention to “that little bastard in the soft cover” with an RPG to our right on a small knoll. I fired the grease gun and he doubled over and fell. Another appeared and I again fired. It seemed as though they were everywhere along with the swishing sounds of the fired rockets. As I turned to acknowledged my efforts to Captain Kent, who was riding on the outside of the tank next to the loader’s hatch firing away with his pistol seconds before, I watched as a round or two entered his back and exited his chest. Some of his chest splattered upon my face and chest. Clearly, he was badly wounded. I will never ever forget his expression as he looked to me for help. Witnessing the occurrence, I knew he was dead or badly wounded. I announced to the crew of my tank that he had been hit and that I was going to bring him in. Just as I reached him and attempted aid, a RPG exploded nearby wounding me again. I attempted to bring him into the turret

again when another RPG impacted upon the turret. I was wounded again. I patted his helmet assuring him that I would take care of him as I pulled him toward the hatch, a recoilless rifle round impacted upon the turret blowing him off the tank and wounding me again. The last NVA round caused a fire inside and outside the turret. Accordingly, after an attempt to put out the fire without success I ordered the crew to disarm the weapons and abandon the tank. As I mounted the turret, another RPG exploded on the turret killing and wounding many including me again and blowing me from the tank’s turret to the right side of the ambush site. As I scrambled to cover, I saw the body of Captain Kent by the roadside smoldering from his many wounds. He had been struck in the back at least twice. In addition, he sustained several RPG wounds.

Survivors were pinned down for several hours before help arrived. I had received multiple wounds . . . how many I’m not sure. Captain Daniel W.

Kent died that day leading his company into combat. I will never forget the countenance of Captain Kent – blond hair and fair complexion, a pistol in hand; riding into immortality as all Marines would wish to die. Most of all I recall the expression of hope on his face . . . in my dreams I often relive that event and each time hope that this will be the occasion that I am successful in pulling him inside the tank turret. As for the North Vietnamese, both Sterling Young and Terry Bocchino visited the ambush site shortly after the action and will testify to several hundred NVA bodies present. Some battle reports I have read cite the number as high as 600. (I would be happy to verify these events with “After Action” reports and other material that I have gathered over these many years.) Captain Daniel Kent’s efforts that day were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. Captain Kent was 24 years old at the time of his death.

PODCAST PROGRAM

Roger “Blues” Unland

We March In, We March Out: Brotherhood of the Vietnam Tankers

Summary:

In this edited transcript of episode two of “Tracking our History”, Tree and Blues—two brothers in arms reflect on the deep bonds they forged over 50 years of friendship. Through vivid recollections and heartfelt conversations, they share the raw realities of life inside a tank during the Vietnam War. Blues brings listeners into the driver’s compartment, recounting the relentless hours, the intense pressure of combat, and the unforgettable moments of brotherhood that helped them survive. From ambushes and firefights to the camaraderie that followed them home, Tree and Blues reveal the enduring strength of their connection. This is a story of resilience, friendship, and the unbreakable ties between men who fought together and continue to support one another—on the battlefield and beyond.

What’s Past is Prologue

[Tree]

Shakespeare, in *The Tempest*, Act 2, Scene 1, wrote, “What’s past is prologue.” My mom was married to a Marine from the Second World War. She knew Marines very well. So, when I started bringing home some of my buddies from the Corps, my mom quickly adopted every single one of them.

Blues was one of those guys, and like most of them, he called my mom “Mom.” The bonds grew very tight. These guys stayed over the weekend. My mom fed them, talked with them, and we played games. We were all family. A permanent relationship was established.

Over the years, before my mom died in 1994, she would periodically ask about these guys. Her focus always seemed to be on Blues and Sparrow. We’ll meet Sparrow in a couple of episodes.

Now, I always hoped Blues was doing fine, even though I had lost touch with him. Still, I always told my mom he was doing just fine.

After we all separated from the Corps, we drifted apart. I lost track of Blues for years. But fate intervened. Several years ago, out of nowhere, I got a phone call, and the first word I heard was, “Tree!” And in that instant, I knew it was Blues.

It was like we had never been apart. Blues, Sparrow, and I now meet frequently, and we never fly anywhere

without all of us going together. With Blues, we talk like brothers — but even closer.

We talk about religion, love, head trips, whatever. We are brothers to the core. I’m not ashamed to say, I love you, man. Because, you know what? I love you, man. There’s nothing that will separate us — not TBI, PTSD, Agent Orange, and certainly not geography. That’s just how it is.

Blues, Tree, Sparrow... What’s in a Name?

“Blues” is a nickname. In Vietnam, many of us picked up nicknames when we arrived.

Blues, can you start us off with a little description of how you got the name Blues? Then maybe you can share with the audience how I got my nickname ,Tree, since you pinned me with it.

[Blues]

It was 1967, and I had joined Lieutenant Coan’s platoon up at Con Thien. They put me on 1-4, “Bleeding Eyes,” with a corporal named Bert Trevail. I started off as a loader and did my job. After two days, Bert moved me around and made me the driver.

We were out on a road sweep in the morning, doing a mine sweep down the road at Con Thien. I jumped up out of the hatch and turned around. Back then, my eyes were vibrantly blue. It was still a little dark, not quite dawn yet, and my eyes were like headlamps. Bert looked at me and goes, “Man,

your eyes are as blue as the sky! From now on, your name is Blues.” He said, “No more Roger, your name is Blues. We’re going to have to get you dark glasses so you can stay on guard duty at night. I’ve never seen eyes so blue!” So from that point on, man, I was Blues. Everyone in the platoon started calling me that. John Ware, Stubby, and all the guys. When I got down to Dong Ha, it stuck. I’ve been Blues since 1967, and to this day, I’m still called Blues by my Marine Corps brothers.

We gave a lot of people different names, like John Ware, we called him “Sherman” after Peabody and Sherman. He looked like Sherman. And there was Jan Wendling, we called him “Turtle.” And Bert... well, I always called him Bert, but I can’t remember his nickname. Anyway, after Bert, I moved off his tank and onto another one. My second tank commander came along. I was up at Dong Ha, and we were mixing up a batch of napalm. This guy comes up to me, and he says, “It’s my first day in-country. Hi my name is Frank Remkiewicz. What can I do to help, man? I’m here to help.” I told him, “Well, jump up here and roll up your sleeves.” He still had his long sleeves from being an FMG guy. So he climbs up on the tank, and I say, “We’re mixing up napalm.”

I was stirring it with my hands, and when I stood up, I looked at him. This guy was like 6’7”! I said, “Damn, dude, you’re as tall as a tree!” I told him, “You can’t be in tanks,” and he replied, “I’m in tanks.” I said, “There’s noth- >>

Special Story

THE DEATH OF THE PODCAST IS GREATLY EXAGGERATED.

BY FRANK “TREE” REMKIEWICZ

This Sponson Box is a perfect example of what a legacy means. We said farewell to Bob Peavy and Virgil Melton. Neither will be forgotten because both have created lasting memories for friends, family, and the world to listen to and hear their voices once again. If you travel to www.usmcvta.org and pull down the podcast tab, you can listen to both their experiences while in Vietnam. I highly recommend the Bob Peavy podcast as it has a great nugget in the middle that you absolutely do not want to miss. Pete Ritch, John Wear and “Belmo” all have podcasts. Right now, there are about 40 podcasts. The total number is the start of a legacy that will continue forever. Unlike the Sponson Box, where you have to dig through old copies to find brothers-in-arms, the podcast is right out in the open and readily accessible.

However, the history of and in the podcast program is not complete. We need more tankers like John Hughes, Ken Zebal, Fred Kellogg, Ron Knight, and everyone else in this over 400-member association. All you need is an easy chair, a telephone, a beverage of your choice, about an hour of your time, and we will preserve your legacy as well as continue to inform our listening audience. Would you prefer or feel more comfortable with your tank crew? The podcast can accommodate up to four tankers. That means you and your crew can share your experience and share the camaraderie with your brothers all at once! My rough math tells me that if we have about 40 podcasts done and you subtract that from our current membership, that means we have a “shitpot full” of brother tankers that need to be heard. Pick a few experiences from

your time in Vietnam, and rather than put pen to paper, let’s put voice to a telephone. It really is easy

Did you operate with Bob Skeels, Pete Ritch, Hank Fuller, or John (Jay) Heffernan? Want to share some of the experiences you had with these grunts-turned-tankers? If you want to see what they said first, you can listen to the podcast “Grunts to Tankers” on the VTA website.

Let me share a few of the more interesting statistics. We have an international audience that spans 34 countries. Two of the more fascinating areas are Ho Chi Minh City and, get this, Hanoi! About 12% of our listeners are women. 12.5% of our listeners are between the ages of 17 and 34. And we have 31 followers. (If you can get on the Spotify website and click on the “follower link”, Surely, we can all listen and follow these important experiences.) The most listened-to podcasts include Episode 44 with Alonzo Jacobs: A Different Perspective, Episode 43 with Dennis Fresch: Welcome to Tracking Our History, Episode 34 with Ron Colucci . . . (Carol, remember how we had to convince Ron that people would like to hear of his experiences), and, Episode 2: Driving with “Blues”.

If you would like to do a podcast, send me via email (remkiewicz@gmail.com) your name, email address, your contact telephone number and what you would like to talk about and I will get back to you so we can work out an agreeable day, date, and time.

I will end with this: **“If not you, then who? If not now, when?”**

ing you can do except be a tank commander. Every other position requires someone smaller.” So from 1968, Tree caught the name. Even today, he’s still called Tree because of his size and being in tanks.

It was interesting how we called each other different names. Nobody really minded. Everyone kind of liked it because, you know, they did that in all the wars. Vietnam was no different. Anyway, that’s it for names.

Navigating 52 Tons of Steel

[Tree]

Okay. So, now, my experience with you, and from what I’ve heard, was that perhaps you were the very best driver ever to sit in the driver’s compartment of a tank. So, Blues, share with us what the compartment of a tank is like and what it’s like to drive 52 tons of machinery around the countryside.

[Blues]

To have a loaded military tank that you’re driving, I mean, you’re hauling around 54 tons loaded down, even more because, you know, you’re in wars. But just the thought of having all that power and moving this tank around, and I had to stop and think, I go, man, look at my responsibility. I’m not just driving.

Because once you get off the road, you’re apt for mines and the terrain. The terrain was real sandy during the monsoon season, and then when the monsoon season came, it was mud. So you had to think all the time being a driver. Now, I didn’t try to be good. It just came to me, and people appreciated it every time I got into a tank.

Now, I also have to tell you about another driver, and this guy was Wally Young. And Wally’s still around, and Wally’s from Alabama. And Wally and I never competed, but Wally was, I’d have to say, as good as me. Our names actually got well known for being drivers, and Wally and I talked a couple of times now in our reunions about operating and what we wanted to do.

And so as far as the tank and driv-

ing, I got to the point because you have limited vision unless you have your head out. Then you only have left, right, and frontal viewing. When you have to jump down inside your hatch and close it, you have what they call periscopes. And I forget the number, but they have three periscopes, one on the left, one on the right, and one in the middle, and that’s what you get to look at. It’s only about four, about four and a half inches, and it consists of an inch and three-sixteenths thick bullet-proof glass. These things are real small, so you have to depend on your tank commander and yourself to maneuver this tank when you’re under fire.

My best skill as a driver was positioning and backing up. I would let my mind tell me where I had just been, so when I had to back up, I could make turns and go back exactly where I had started from. This was really appreciated by my tank commanders. Positioning was the key for tanks, and it was very important because, in tanks, you’re a support unit. Whatever happened inside the turret, your tank commander, your gunner, and your loader, it was your responsibility to take the tank safely and put it in the position that the tank commander told you. Now, if you didn’t like it, you could move it a little bit to the left or the right. So, you know, it’s at your discretion because you are the driver. Mines were, man, mines were a dime a dozen. They were giving them away like candy. And tanks, you know, we hit mines. Sometimes they were full-on, and sometimes they weren’t.

So the responsibility, man, it was pretty big. And that’s all I can say about the driver. The responsibility was...It was tremendous, I should say.

The Art of Neutral Steering

[Tree]

How about neutral steers? Remember those?

[Blues]

Oh, yeah. I got to the point where I could make my 54-ton tank dance.

I used to be able to come out of the chute, in other words, out of a parking place. I’d come out of the chute, and I’d hit the road. I’d throw it in neutral, and I wouldn’t even let off the gas. I’d just get my foot down on the gas. When I popped it back into drive, it would take off.

Now, this neutral steering, this is a good story. Up at Con Thien, a lot of times, we would go out on patrol, and the VC. liked digging tunnels and underground complexes, like hospitals, places to cook their rice, and stuff like that.

We’d go out, we’d find one of these tunnels, and Bert would guide me up, and I’d throw it in neutral, and I would dig a hole and collapse a tunnel and knock that off. Coming out, I’d have to go back, forward, back, forward, back, forward, and walk my way out of these things. But, yeah, the neutral steer would just dig a hole.

From Gun Tank to Flame Tank

[Tree]

I happen to know that you drove both a gun tank and a flame tank. First of all, how did that happen, and was there much of a difference between the two?

[Blues]

I got changed from a gun tank to a flame tank, and that wasn’t pretty because Bert Trevail was not only the tank commander, but he also trained people. People would come in, and Bert would get them for maybe two, three weeks, maybe a month, and then they would be shoved off into another tank. They would learn how to load, they would learn how to fire, they would learn how to drive, and then they’d be passed on. But I lucked out with Bert as a friend, and I stayed with Bert for about 10 months.

Normally, I would have been gone, but Bert just wanted to keep me around because I’d gotten that reputation. Going from the gun tank and the responsibility, I got an opportunity, and

I didn’t even ask for it. It’s because my friend, and here we go, another name, Tom Mode, we called him Sparrow. Sparrow was my next tank commander, and they put him in a flame tank.

Now, a flame tank and a gun tank are two very different things. When you get inside the flame tank, there are only two of you: the gunner and the TC. Then you have the driver down in the driver’s compartment. But next to you, you’ve got 350 gallons of napalm just gurgling under pressure, wanting to get out. And so you’re sitting there thinking, if we get hit with an RPG, man, crispy critter, everybody’s going to be gone. So I’d have to say, you know, they put us in support an awful lot, more than burning. Sparrow, and I did a lot of the left echelons, and we covered the left.

And we always had a .30 cal, and we had an extra .30 cal, we had extra barrels, we had a lot of extra ammunition, because a .30 was one of your main firepowers. A .50 cal was alright, but Sparrow would have to go out of the turret to use it, so that .30 cal was pretty handy for a flame tank. There was a big difference, but being a driver, your responsibility is the track and the outside of the tank. That didn’t change for me. It was just the positioning, and I’d have to get closer because when you shoot your load, you have to be a little bit closer than with a gun tank. There was a big difference in how they used us both.

[Tree]

Just as a side note, can you help us understand how many hours you and the guys spent in a tank at any given time?

[Blues]

All day. All night. You would stand guard, but the other guys would be in the hooch or along the side of the tank. You’d do two-hour shifts on guard duty. Then you’d wake up around 5:30 in the morning and try to make a little cup of coffee, since you’d have to be down at the gate for the mine sweep.

We had to go down the road to Cam Lo, down to the bridge, and drop off

supplies. There were outposts on the way back, and we would keep the road to Con Thien open because we weren’t allowed to receive supplies otherwise.

You’d have your two hours of guard duty at night. You’d wake up at 5:30, try to get a cup of coffee, and then you’d do the road sweep, which took a couple of hours because the engineers would walk in front of you. So you’re in the tank for a couple of hours, and then you’re on post. This was when you’d take care of your gear, straighten up, and clean up because Vietnam was filthy. Everything was dirty.

We’d go through the gear and we’d go through our ammo, make sure everything was clean and ready to go. You’d do your guard duty, and after the day was done, you’d have chow and get ready to go on guard duty again. So I don’t know, 8, 9, 10 hours a day you’re in there.

[Tree]

And of course, on operations, we lived in there.

[Blues]

With Sparrow we didn’t even leave the tank. We just stayed with the tank all the time. Even when we went to Đông Hà, we stayed in the tank because Sparrow wanted to stay ready to go out in case they called. So, pretty much, as a crew member in a tank, that was your home.

Napalm: The Power of Flame

[Tree]

What did you think, as a driver, when you fired off that flame tank and a big old ball of napalm rolled over your head?

[Blues]

Oh, man, it sounded like sludge coming out of a tube! You could hear it gurgling like your stomach sometimes does. Napalm starts as a powder, and then you’d mix it with fuel, and it would turn into gel. It would sit there in that compressed vat, and you’d just hear it baloop baloop baloop. When it went through that tube, it sounded

like old sludge. I couldn’t believe the pressure and how far that stuff would shoot out.

The heat was tremendous. Most of the time, when Sparrow fired a load, I would be down inside. I wouldn’t stay out because of the heat—it was so tremendous. I didn’t like it too much, flames. But Sparrow was a friend, and we grew up in the same neighborhood in East L.A. I never really complained. He was always excited about it. He had a tank, and we were both Lance Corporals.

They didn’t give him rank often because we were always in trouble. But comparing the flame tank to the gun tank, I’d have to say I had fun in both. But for serious fighting, I’d rather be in the gun tank.

[Tree]

Why don’t you share with our readers what it’s like to button up in the driver’s compartment? You’re kind of isolated anyway because you’re in a compartment all by yourself, right?

[Blues]

Right, you’re shut off from the rest of the crew because, once the gun is to the front, you can’t get out or up into the turret. Your only way out is through the driver’s hatch or the escape hatch down below. You could drop through and go underneath the tank. I used that a couple of times.

But I fixed my compartment up. I had pictures, I had my frags, and I had my small arms. If I had to come out of the tank, I wanted to make sure I had a lot of firepower.

Sparrow and I, out in the flame, we lived in that tank. There’s a picture of me with my poncho hat over the tube, covering me up during the monsoon because we lived in that tank.

[Tree]

What was it like in terms of actually driving? Now you’re buttoned up. You’ve got the three periscopes or vision scopes. How was it to navigate? Did you need help from the tank commander?

[Blues]

Well, if the firing was bad, I’d stay buttoned up, but I’d piss Bert and >>

Sparrow off because I liked coming up and out of the hatch to drive and maneuver. I never really thought about catching a round while being outside, driving like that. Many years later, I thought about it. But when you're young and dumb and numb, you just don't think about that. I liked operating where I could see. I didn't like using the scope. I didn't like being buttoned up. It was too claustrophobic for me. It was like being in jail, and I couldn't get out. It's cramped, and with four of you in the gun tank, that was the best part. Especially when you're getting fired at, and you'd hear these little "bing, bing, bing" noises as they shot at you, just to mess with you.

[Tree]

Can you share what it was like to be part of a flame tank crew? How close did you all get?

[Blues]

Well, I can only tell you, being the driver on Aftermath's Sparrow's tank, I can tell you we were definitely close. You have to be in tune with your tank commander, so afterwards you talk, and before you talk, and afterwards you talk. You'd always talk about what you're going to be doing when you go out to operate. As far as being close, Sparrow and I always went in and we tried to get a bunch of extra stuff in our rack and stuff because we liked going back up, and Sparrow and I liked sharing, so we always shared with the grunts and other tankers, and we just liked sharing. So, Sparrow and I became really good friends.

Bert, when I was on the gun tank, Bert and I became really good friends. I lost Bert three years ago, but I got to go up to San Francisco and visit with him with Tree, and Belmo, and Sparrow, and we'd go up and visit, and then he moved down to Texas, and I, you know, being an old Marine, you know, I don't have that kind of money. A couple of times I went down to Texas and visited Bert and hung out with him for a week.

As far as Sparrow and I, we had become close enough to where we still call one another once a week, or

I'll go out and visit him. He's an old desert rat, and he's a gold miner, so I got to go out there, because he just doesn't like people, so I still go out and I'll visit Sparrow and stuff, and we'll reminisce and talk. I guess we got pretty tight.

Operation 3/4

[Tree]

Can you share a personal story or two about an operation or a firefight you were on?

[Blues]

Yeah, let's talk about 3/4. That one was kind of forgotten. 3/4 was up at Con Thien, and they were down in the company, operating in what we called Leatherneck Square. The 47th regular NVA Army, had set up an ambush, and they walked right into it. The word came from Con Thien for the tanks to go down and run support, so we went down and ran support.

We were told to go back to Con Thien and pick up the water buffalo because it was extremely hot. The grunts were falling down from heat exhaustion. The firefight sucked, man. We were getting our asses kicked. On the way back with the water buffalo, I was driving outside the hatch, and Bert yelled, "Down, Blues!" So I got down, and he started spinning the turret. We got hit on the side with an RPG, and Bert said, "Hard left, Blues!"

He charged them as they were running up this little hill. I positioned the tank going up the hill, and Bert let two rounds go, and that was it for that RPG team. We backed down, got back out on the road, and went down to run support.

I had this medevac cot that I got where I could put it across my headlamp and sleep, and then when we get in these firefights, I would bring it out because we would run up, and I would jump out of the driver's compartment, and I would help the other grunts, and I'd help the corpsmen throw bodies up on the tank, and I put the wounded in the front, and I could put them on that

medevac rack, and I could put like four or five more people. Then the people that were deceased, I'd throw on the back because the engines were so hot.

I'd run back, and here's where, you know, my mind, I wouldn't turn around. I would back out of the firefight, and so my mind had to tell me where to go all the time about backing up, so we would drop off everybody. I'd jump back in. We'd go back up and get more, and we did that for, three or four hours, and at the time, they said we couldn't fire up into the DMZ because that wasn't allowed, and this is where they were coming down and firing their HE and their big guns at us. Nighttime came, and it was just really bad. I mean, they couldn't medevac anybody out.

It was just they had surrounded us. All night was screaming, and the corpsman he couldn't get enough morphine for everyone's pain. The next two days when we left, there was almost a platoon left, and I think the highest-ranking guy was a sergeant. Being in the Marine Corps, you march in and you march out. So after the firefight, we marched back out. That was a scrimmage for two days, and there was lot more, but that was pretty bad. We lost a lot of guys, a lot of guys on the wall.

I'm going to stop there because I get kind of emotional about people that we had lost, other Marines.

[Tree]

I understand.

Outro

[Tree]

Well, let's wrap it up here then. I want to say, welcome home, Blues. You and I have been brothers for over 50 years, and I am ready to once again mix some napalm anytime you're ready.

[Blues]

I enjoyed this. I enjoyed talking with Tree because we talk at least once a month anyway. But I like this format because it's calmer. I'm a lot calmer talking this way, and I want to thank

Tree for this opportunity. It's going out to everyone in our VTA unit, and I hope others will participate. It's a good thing, and it's helped me. Even though we talk like this on treatment calls, it's nice that people can hear what we talk about after 55 years.

I appreciate this opportunity. I appreciate Tree being a friend of mine. I appreciate everyone in the VTA and what we did. I'm proud of what we stand for.

[Tree]

Should we let them in on a little secret? Sparrow, Blues, and I—we never fly independently. We pretty much always fly together.

[Blues]

Yeah, it takes three of us to get on

the plane and get to our reunions.

[Tree]

Yeah, so we don't get waylaid by air marshals or something.

[Blues]

Exactly. You know, we're all Vietnam vets on disability. We get on the plane, but going through TSA can be a hassle. One time, Tree had something in his pocket, and he couldn't find it. He kept setting off the scanner, so they said they'd have to do a strip search.

Before they got to Tree, I stepped in front of the guy and said, "Look, sir, I know you have to do your job, but just be respectful. He's a Vietnam vet, and he'll do what you ask, but be respectful." That's why it takes three of us. Sparrow runs in front of us to hail

down a bus or a taxi. It takes all three of us to get somewhere. I like it that way anyway. I don't like flying that much, but if I have to, it's better to be with friends than...

[Tree]

Me too.

[Blues]

Yeah, exactly. I don't like all those civilians talking about business and crap, not knowing anything. I'm grateful for our time together.

I wish all my brothers the best because they deserve it. They earned it. I love every one of them. That's it for me, Tree.

[Tree]

Thank you, brother. Talk to you later.

AN AWARD-WINNING STORY!!!

Leatherneck Magazine Executive Editor's note: The following article received second place in the 2024 Leatherneck Magazine Writing Contest. The award is provided through an endowment by the Colonel Charles E. Michaels Foundation and is being given in memory of Colonel William E. Barber, USMC, who fought on Iwo Jima during World War II, and was the recipient of the Medal of Honor for his actions at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. Upcoming issues of Leatherneck will feature the third-place winner and honorable mention entries.

Tribute to a Vietnam War Marine

BY CAPTAIN JAMES P COAN - POSTED ON AUGUST 15, 2024

From the spring of 1967 through mid-1969, a firebase named Con Thien, located 1.5 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing North and South Vietnam, was the scene of fierce combat between the U.S. Marines and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The Marines would hold Con Thien "at all costs," but the cost was high. By the time the firebase was turned over to the South Vietnamese Army in 1969, 1,400 U.S. Marines and Navy corpsmen had sacrificed all their tomorrows and more than 9,000 were wounded.

I arrived in Vietnam in August 1967, a recent graduate of the Marine officers tracked vehicle training course at Camp



Pendleton, Calif. After a brief stint at the 3rd Tank Battalion Headquarters outside of Phu Bai, I was called into the colonel's bunker one day where I was informed that I was being transferred up to Con Thien to take over command of "Alpha" Company's 1st Tank Platoon. I was going to replace the tank platoon commander there who had been wounded twice by NVA artillery in 10 days.

Sept. 10, my first morning on Con Thien, I ducked into the tanker bunker to introduce myself when I was greeted by a tall Marine who said, "Welcome to the fighting first platoon, sir!" He then stabbed his bayonet into a warm can of beer and offered me a swig. >>

I remember thinking as I managed to down the warm beer without gagging on it, “All right! I’ve found a home here.”

The Marine who first greeted me was Albert “Bert” Trevail, a 24-year-old lance corporal who had served one tour in the Canadian Army. He then tried college but didn’t enjoy academia, so he came to America, joined the U.S. Marines, and got his wish to be sent to Vietnam. He was the driver on my tank and had been at Con Thien for a month before I arrived. When I mentioned needing to meet with the platoon sergeant, Trevail sat me down and explained what dangers I had to be aware of and how and when it was safe to make any trips on foot around the perimeter. No doubt, I owe my survival during my 40 days under siege at Con Thien to Trevail’s tutoring of his “new-boot second lieutenant.”



During enemy attacks, wounded Marines were sometimes loaded onto tanks and carried back to safety. (Photo courtesy of USMC Vietnam Tankers Association)

Every afternoon, all unit leaders were required to attend the 3/9 CO’s daily briefing at 4 p.m. During one briefing, we twice dove out of our chairs due to several close incoming rounds of artillery fired from the DMZ. When the briefing ended, I waited until it was quiet, then sprinted over to my bunker.

Bursting in through the entrance, I noted my crewmen were all sitting hunched over in silence, dejectedly staring at the floor. That’s when I learned that one of the incoming artillery shells had scored a direct hit on the bunker next to ours, critically wounding two Marines. Trevail had ignored the threat of more incoming, rushed over to the two wounded Marines, loaded them on our tank by himself, then drove the tank over to the Battalion Aid Station, likely saving their lives. I made a report on Trevail’s act of bravery under fire to my company commander back in Dong Ha, but never heard any more about it.

My third evening on Con Thien was my tank’s turn to spend the night on the northern perimeter. Around 3 a.m., I was asleep on my tank’s rear deck when I was jarred awake by snapping and popping noises zipping over the tank. We were under attack! Flares floating down from overhead revealed nu-

merous enemy figures charging towards our perimeter wire. I jumped inside the tank turret and ordered the crewmen to open fire with our weapons—the 90mm main gun and the .30-caliber coaxial machine gun. But my own cupola-mounted .50-cal. machine gun jammed. Sitting up forward in the driver’s seat, Trevail heard me cursing out my gun. He chose to open the driver’s hatch, expose his head and shoulders to enemy fire, and open fire with his .45 pistol and the M14 rifle he kept (against regulations).

The word was soon passed to cease fire. In the dwindling flare light, numerous NVA bodies lay unmoving on the ground before us. None of them had been able to breach the inner perimeter wire. At daylight, the 3/9 CO and XO were making the rounds of the northern perimeter when they stopped beside our tank. “You tankers did a great job last night, lieutenant,” said the colonel. I thanked him on behalf of my tank crewmen. I would also inform my company commander about Trevail’s bravery under fire. Unfortunately, the captain was soon relieved of duty due to some questionable decisions he had made, so my report on Trevail never saw the light of day.



1st Tank Bn in Con Thien, June 1968. Then-1stLt Coan can be seen in the front row on the far left. Then-LCpl Trevail is pictured in the back, second from the right. (Photo courtesy of USMC Vietnam Tankers Association)

Several months later, after Trevail had made corporal and was promoted to tank commander, we were back up at Con Thien for another 60-day stay. It was a sunny, warm spring day when I was told to mount up my platoon and head out the south gate. A Marine patrol had walked into an ambush southwest of Yankee Station. As my three tanks got in line and charged at the enemy position, an NVA soldier leapt out from behind a shrub and opened fire at Trevail’s tank with his AK-47 rifle. Nearby Marines immediately shot down the NVA soldier, so I believed he had missed Trevail. As my tanks reached the abandoned NVA bunker position, I pulled my tank up next to Trevail’s tank expecting to tell him, “Nice work, Corporal.” That’s when I noticed a bloody bandage

wrapped around the side of his face as he was helping hoist an injured Marine up on his tank.

I said in no uncertain terms, “Trevail, you get on over to the medevac area ... now!!” He replied, “Sir, I can’t leave these Marines out here.” I replied again, “Bert, that is an order! Now, move out!” He did as ordered but didn’t climb aboard a medevac helicopter until after all the wounded Marines carried on his tank were safely medevacked.

Later that same morning, I rode my tank to our company headquarters in Dong Ha to make a full report on my reaction force attack on the NVA ambush site. I decided to stop in at Delta Med and see how Trevail was doing. He was sitting at a table by himself, his head all bandaged. When he saw me, he jumped up and begged me to take him out of there and back up to Con Thien. I told him I could not do that without the head corpsman’s permission. I told him to enjoy the hot chow, hot showers, and clean sheets to sleep on. But he wanted no part of it. Excusing myself, I left and went over to the Alpha Company CP to report in. Later, after a delicious hot lunch at 9th Motor Transport, my crewmen and I mounted our tank and headed back up the road to Con Thien. As I stepped down into our bunker, who should greet me with a sheepish smile but Cpl Trevail.

“T-Trevail! H-how ... how?” I stuttered, totally dumbfounded. I did not know whether to chew him out or what. I decided to stay calm and ask him why he was not still back at the hospital. He stated that when he noted a truck convoy forming up outside of Delta Med, he walked out and approached a truck driver, asking him where they were headed. When the driver said “Con Thien,” Trevail asked permission to climb aboard and the driver said, “Sure!”



Shortly after deploying to Vietnam with 3rd Tank Bn, then-1stLt Coan was sent to Con Thien (left) to take over command of Alpha Co’s 1st Tank Bn. (Photo courtesy of Capt. James P Coan)

I did not know what to do. Here was a Marine who would rather be with his buddies in a dangerous place where he would risk getting hurt or worse at any moment than live comfort-

ably for a week in a relatively safe, secure location in the rear. I radioed my company commander back in Dong Ha, told him what Trevail had done, and asked for advice. The captain told me he would cover for Trevail, saying he misunderstood the doctor’s instructions. I thought I heard a few muffled chuckles in the background.

In mid-July, 1968, the entire 9th Marine Regiment embarked upon an incursion into the southern half of the DMZ. My five-tank platoon was attached to G/2/9. As we moved out in attack formation toward a North Vietnamese bunker complex, the enemy opened up on us with a mortar attack. One of my tanks drove down into a 2,000-lb. bomb crater caused by a recent B-52 strike and was stuck in the loose dirt at the bottom. All my tanks halted in place while I tried to think how to undo this dilemma. The infantry company commander was on the radio, yelling at me to get my tanks moving. I told him I couldn’t leave one of my tanks behind. Just then, Trevail pulled his tank up to the edge of the crater, jumped to the ground and unhooked his tow cable. Ignoring the enemy mortar shells impacting nearby, he dragged that heavy, steel tow cable down to the stuck tank and hooked it up. Then he climbed out of the crater and ground-guided the stuck tank out of the crater. We were able then to resume the attack. I subsequently wrote Trevail up for a Bronze Star medal and he received it, as well as a meritorious promotion to sergeant.

I rotated stateside two months later. Trevail extended for two more tours in Vietnam. He remained on active duty for 20 more years, retiring as a master sergeant. Years later, I encountered him through our membership in the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. I learned that he had gone back to college, achieved his teaching certificate, and was working at a Sacramento, Calif., high school as a computer science instructor. Sadly, Albert Trevail is no longer with us, having passed away a few years ago. He will always remain in my heart and mind as the most outstanding Marine Corps warrior that I was fortunate to have served with in Vietnam. I personally witnessed his courage under fire numerous times, often when coming to the aid of other wounded Marines.

Author’s bio: Capt. James P. Coan served three years active duty in the Marine Corps and three years in the Reserves before being honorably discharged in 1972. Coan had a 30-year career with the California Youth Authority before retiring to Arizona near his hometown of Tucson. Coan is the author of two books: “Con Thien: The Hill of Angels” and “Time in the Barrel: A Marine’s Account of the Battle for Con Thien.” Coan is a life member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, VFW, Military Order of the Purple Heart and Marine Corps League.

Editor’s Note: *This article was published with the permission of Leatherneck magazine where it appeared in their September 2024 issue.* ■

Why We Reunite

By Bob Peavey

Many first timers to a USMC Vietnam Tankers Association reunion say the same thing as you have, that they never wanted to or thought about joining a veteran organization, myself included. Our thought process is that we did our time and we didn't want to be reminded of it all over again. In fact, our war has the least number of participants by percentage within all the standard organizations like VFW, Am Legion and the like. I think a lot of it has to do with the way we were treated when we returned.

But let me share with you something we see at every reunion. The new

members attending their first reunion always come up to us afterwards with big smiles on their faces and comment about how good they feel and how rewarding it was to have gotten together after 50+ years. Most of them say it was something missing in their lives that they were totally unaware of. I know it sounds like a church revival sermon but having attended the thirteen reunions we have conducted; I hear with great satisfaction the same comment over and over again. You will be with your own and see people you served with and experienced things with. It is a great healing process even

if you don't realize something has been missing all these years. I have found it to be a great catharsis. And many of our members bring their wives.

We only get together once every two years and our ages are beginning to show. It will, in the not-too-distant future, become where it is just too difficult to travel. You are fortunate to have the chance to attend at least one reunion and catch up with your past friends. I can assure you that you will want to attend the following reunions thereafter. Every month we lose more and more members who have moved on to "The Great Tank Park in the Sky."

USMC VTA 2025 REUNION September 10 – 15, 2025

Handlery Hotel

950 Hotel Circle North, San Diego, CA

Phone: 619.298.0511

The special reunion room rate will be \$159 per night. Free parking. Complimentary Wi-Fi in all rooms. Heated outdoor swimming pool. Business center with complimentary board pass printing. Fitness Center. Dry cleaning and laundry service

The hotel is two blocks from Fashion Valley Mall one of the largest shopping malls in the metropolitan San Diego area. It features over 190 assorted retail stores and there are over 12 restaurants nearby. See the accompany detailed list.

Room reservations: The last day to make your room reservations is August 4, 2025. Toll-Free reservations assistance: 1-800.676.6567. Please provide our group name as "USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Reunion." Reservations will be made with a credit card but no charges will be made until after the first night stay... or if a cancellation is made 72 hours before the first night stay so, please make your room reservations early ... even if your attendance is in

question, you can always cancel later with no cost to you. Reservation hours are Mon – Fri, 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM (West Coast) and Sat – Sun from 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM.

The hotel is located 6 miles from the San Diego airport. Calling Uber will cost you about \$10. A taxi cab will run around \$20. It is also 3 miles from downtown San Diego; 2.5 miles from Little Italy; 2.5 miles from Balboa Park and 3 miles from Sea World.

Fashion Valley Shopping Mall San Diego

12 DINING OPTIONS

Blanco Tacos + Tequila - Mexican | \$\$

One bite of our modern, ultra-fresh food and you'll want to step away from the daily grind. Dining Terrace near AMC Theatres. Serves Dinner, Desserts & Drinks

California Pizza Kitchen - Pizzeria | \$\$

California Pizza Kitchen hosts hearth-baked pizzas to creative salads. Lower Level below AMC. Serves Lunch, Dinner, Desserts, Drinks & Snacks

The Cheesecake Factory - American | \$\$\$

The Cheesecake Factory menu features more than 200 selections made fresh from scratch each day using the highest quality ingredients. Lower Level, stand-alone building near Valet. Serves Lunch & Dinner

Craft House Fashion Valley - Mexican | \$\$\$

New American Mexican fusion | Handcrafted burgers, seafood, shareable bites, & signature cocktails. Serves Lunch & Dinner

Marketplace Cafe at Nordstrom - American | \$\$\$

Our signature menu selections, including sandwiches, soups, pizza, panini, fresh salads, and desserts. Smaller portions are offered for youngsters! 3rd level of Nordstrom. Serves Lunch, Dinner, Desserts & Drinks

Neiman Marcus Cafe - American | \$\$\$

From creative sandwiches to regionally inspired entrées and house-made desserts. Located on Level 3 of Neiman Marcus. Serves Lunch

NORTH Italia - Italian | \$\$\$

This is more than just an Italian restaurant. We're a group of folks who have become family, bonded by our mutual affinity for all things Italian. In front of Bloomingdale's near Friar's Road. Serves Lunch, Dinner, Desserts & Drinks

P.F. Chang's China Bistro - Chinese | \$\$\$

Family-friendly atmosphere offering creative takes on Chinese fare in a sticking space. East end of the mall adjacent to Friars Road and SR-163 southbound on-ramp, near The Container Store. Serves Lunch & Dinner

Silverlake Ramen - Chinese | \$\$\$

They specialize in authentic ramen that is wholesome & fresh with vegan options. Lower level below Dining Terrace and AMC Theatres. Serves Lunch & Dinner

Tommy Bahama Marlin Bar - American | \$\$\$

The Marlin Bar at Tommy Bahama introduces a new restaurant and full-service bar adjacent to the retail store. Lower Level near Macy's, next to Saje Wellness Lower Level. Serves Lunch & Dinner

True Food Kitchen - American | \$\$\$

Honest food that tastes really good. Entrance from Friars Road at Avenida De Las Tiendas, use surface lot near Bloomingdale's. Serves Lunch, Dinner, Desserts & Drinks

59th & Lex Cafe - American | \$\$\$

59th & Lex Cafe is a cafe that serves salads, sandwiches and burgers, offers excellent service and has a great atmosphere. Located inside Bloomingdale's. Serves Lunch, Dinner & Desserts.

190 Retail Stores

Bottom of Form	CHANEL	J. Jill	Neiman Marcus	Tecovas
7 for All Mankind	Chrono Toys	Janie and Jack	Nike by Fashion Valley	The Container Store
A X Armani Exchange	City Kicks	JCPenney	Nordstrom	The North Face
Abercrombie & Fitch	Claire's	JCPenney Optical	Oakley	The White Barn Candle
Aerie	Coach	JCPenney Portraits	Oliver Peoples	Tiffany & Co.
Aesop	Cotton On	JD Sports	Omega	T-Mobile
Aldo	Craft House	John Varvatos	Optica	Tom Ford
All Saints	David Yurman	Johnny Was	Pacsun	Tory Burch
Alo Yoga	Devil & Angel	Journeys	Panda Express	TOUS
AMC Theatres	Ding Tea	Kate Spade New York	Pandora	Toys R Us at Macy's
American Eagle	DIOR	Kay Jewelers	PINK	Travis Mathew
Ann Taylor	Dolce & Gabbana	Kendra Scott	Pinkberry	TUDOR
Anthropologie	Dr. Martens	Kieh'l's Since 1851	Play Area	Tumi
Apple	eBar at Nordstrom	Kurt Geiger	Poke One N Half	Typo
Aritzia	ECCO	Laderach Chocolatier	Porsche Studio	TYR
Aroma360	Everything But Water	Le Parfait Paris	Pottery Barn	Urban Outfitters
ATHLETA	Express	LEGO Store	Prada	Valentino
Audi San Diego	Fabletics	Lens Crafters	Princess Polly	Vans
Aveda Store	Fashion Valley Eye Care	Levi's®	Psycho Bunny	Veronica Beard
Banana Republic	Ferragamo	Lids	Purificación García	Versace
Bath & Body Works	Firestone	L'Occitane	Ray-Ban	Victoria's Secret
Ben Bridge Jewelers	Food Court	Loro Piana	Red Door Escape Room	Vince
Better Buzz	Foot Locker	Louis Vuitton	Rolex Boutique	Vuori
Blanco Tacos + Tequila	Forever 21	Love Sac	Saint Laurent Paris	Warby Parker
Bloomingdale's	Francesca's Collections	lululemon	Saje Natural Wellness	Wetzel's Pretzels
BOSS	Free People	Lush Fresh Cosmetics	Sandro	White House Black Market
Bottega Veneta	Free People Movement	MAC Cosmetics	Sbarro	Williams-Sonoma
Breitling	Geppetto's	Macy's	See's Candies	Zara
Brunello Cucinelli	Gorjana	Madewell	Sephora	ZEGNA
Build-A-Bear Workshop®	Green Biotics	Madewell Men	Sprinkles	Zimmermann
Burberry	Green Go Wash	Mango	Starbucks Coffee	Zumiez
Cafe Nordstrom	Gucci	Marc Jacobs	Steve Madden	Zzang Chicken & Hot Dogs
California Pizza Kitchen	H & M	Michael Kors	Suki Hana	
Cartier	Happy Nails & Spa	Mong Q	Sun Diego	
Celine	Hollister Co.	Montblanc	Sunglass Hut	
CH Carolina Herrera	In Style Salon -JCPenney's	Na Hoku	Swarovski	

2025 San Diego Reunion Schedule
Wednesday, September 10 – Monday, September 15
 (This schedule is subject to change)

Wednesday (Sept. 10)	0900 – 2330	Arrival Day – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside the Slopchute hospitality room (Presidio Room). Sign up for VTA History Interviews
	0900 – 2330	The Slopchute is Open - Lunch & Dinner on your own
Thursday (Sept. 11)	0600 – 0815	Breakfast on your own
	0830 – 1200	Ladies Coffee (Terrace Room) Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (In the Slopchute)
	0900 – 1200	Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion! Must submit ticket before <u>0900</u> in the meeting room and be present for the drawing to win
	1200 – 1630	Free Time and lunch on your own
	1100 – 1630	The Slopchute Open
	1700 – 1800	Picnic dinner in the Garden Area – Paid by VTA Cocktails Cash bar
	1800 – 2000	Short Live Auction! (In the Slopchute)
Friday (Sept. 12)	2000 – 2300	Slopchute Open
	Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!!	
	0600 – 0815	Breakfast on your own
	0900 – 0915	Load buses MCRD graduation
	1000 – 1045	View Graduation
	1100 – 1200	Lunch at the Mess Hall (That's a maybe)
	1230 – 1430	Tours MCRD Museum and gift store.
Saturday (Sept. 13)	1430 – 1500	Load buses / back to the hotel
	1530 – 2300	Slopchute open - Dinner on your own
	0600 – 0745	Breakfast on your own
	0800 – 0830	Load buses to Camp Pendelton
	0945 – 1100	Edson Range Tour
	1130 – 1230	Lunch at either Mess Hall or All Ranks club
	1300 – 1430	Tour Mechanized Museum
Sunday (Sept. 14)	1445 – 1500	Load buses to return to hotel Return to Hotel
	1600 – 2300	The Slopchute Open Dinner on your own
	0600 – 0815	Breakfast on your own Open Day-All Day Interview Schedule Posted in Slopchute Lunch on your own
	1000 – 1530	The Slopchute Open
	1600 – 2030	FAREWELL BANQUET (In the Crystal Ballroom) <i>NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat & tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket are highly encouraged.</i>
	1600 – 1645	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	1700 – 1715	Presentation of Colors and remarks
Monday (Sept. 15)	1715 – 1800	Dinner Served
	1800 – 1805	Head Call on your own
	1805 – 2030	30–minutes – Guest Speaker 35–minutes – Fallen Heroes 05–minutes – 2026/7 Reunions
	2030 – 2400	The Slopchute Open – Last Call.
	Departure Day	



OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM
2025 Reunion San Diego
Handlery Hotel

September 10 – 15, 2025

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

Please Print All Information

Member's Name: _____

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

Address: _____

Town: _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Cell Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

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

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

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

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

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to July 30, 2025. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer. Be sure to cancel your hotel room reservation.

Pre-July 30 Form

NAME(S) as you want them to appear on your reunion name tag

Men's T-Shirt Sizes S – XL = \$20 each
(\$5.00 extra for XXL & XXXL)

○ _____ ○ SHIRT SIZE _____

○ _____ ○ SHIRT SIZE _____

○ _____ ○ SHIRT SIZE _____

○ _____ ○ SHIRT SIZE _____

TOTAL REUNION FEES

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

My T-Shirt \$20/\$25 = \$ _____

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

Guest T-shirt _____ X \$20/\$25 = \$ _____

Guest T-shirt _____ \$ X \$20/\$25 = \$ _____

SUB TOTAL: = \$ _____

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

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____

You must make your own hotel room reservations by Aug 4th to get the reunion room rate!

Call: **1-800-676-6567** and be sure to mention the “**USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion**” for the special room rate of \$159.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$217 per night.

CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel room booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has a July 30 deadline. HOTEL REGISTRATION MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY BY YOU BY AUG 4, 2025

HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$30.00

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

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

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



Downtown



Old Town



Coronado Island



Naval Base



Miles and miles of beautiful beaches



Our hotel pool



Fashion Valley Shopping Mall



MCRD



Miramar MCAS



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106-8937

Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRATION:" above your address label is "24" or lower your 2025 membership dues are now due.

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

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

***Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.**



**VIETNAM TANKERS
REUNION 2025
San Diego**