



Sponson BOX

*Voice of the USMC
Vietnam Tankers Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

**IN LESS THAN 60 DAYS
WE WILL REUNITE IN
SAN DIEGO!!!**

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September 2019

www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck

LEATHERNECK

MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES



HAPPY AMERICAN 250th INDEPENDENCE DAY!!!

"Somewhere in our growing up we began to be aware of the meaning of days and with that awareness came the birth of patriotism. July Fourth is the birthday of our nation. I believed as a boy and believe even more today, that it is the birthday of the greatest nation on earth... In recent years, however, I've come to think of that day as more than just the birthday of a nation. It also commemorates the only true philosophical revolution in all of history. Oh, there have been revolutions before and since ours. But those revolutions simply exchanged one set of rules for another. Ours was a revolution that changed the very concept of government. Let the Fourth of July always be a reminder that here in this land, for the first time, it was decided that man is born with certain God-given rights; that government is only a convenience created and managed by the people, with no powers of its own except those voluntarily granted to it by the people. We sometimes forget that great truth, and we never should. Happy Fourth of July." — Ronald Reagan

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

BY 1ST SGT RICK LEWIS

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

1. Start a folder and mark it "Military Papers."
2. Put your DD form-214 in it with a few extra copies.
3. Any letters from the VA that state your level of disability.
4. VA form 40-10007 titled: Application for pre-need determination of eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery. Note: you can download this form by going to VA.gov and type in the form number, fill it out and send it in with your DD-214.
5. If you are a retired Marine and receive: Semper Fidelis Newsletter, on one of the last pages is a step-by-step direction, what to do when you pass. Make a copy and put it your folder.
6. If not a retired Marine, make a list of important phone numbers and websites. Example: Social Security and where your retirement comes from.
7. Let them know where your little "Black Book" is with all your passwords to different sites, so they can close them or access your accounts. If you do not have one, start one!
8. You might want to put a note about what you want done with your body. If you have not told your family, it keeps the family from infighting. I have seen it. It is not fun.
9. Now that you have placed all the above in your "Military Papers" folder then let your loved ones know about it and where you keep it. Also keep it updated.
10. Note: you can also have your spouse's burial at a VA National Cemetery, just fill out the VA 40-10007 and submit it with a copy of your DD form 214.

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

Letter from the President

Everyone dies eventually, whether they have power or not. That's why you need to think about (and write about) what you've accomplished while you're alive.—Mary Macbeth

SAN DIEGO REUNION: If you plan to attend and have not sent in your registration for our 2025 gathering, please do not delay any longer. We need to have an accurate head count for the very expensive tour buses, for the three VTA paid meals and to confirm the total sleeping room number for the hotel. We have less than 60 days before the event! Even if your attendance is in question, make your hotel room reservations now. You can always cancel 72 hours before you have to check in...and you will not be charged.

NEW MEMBERS: Rick Lewis and I were discussing the dwindling population of US Marine Vietnam tank veterans. As of today, the VTA has just over 400 active members. At one point we had over 500 names on our mailing list but some have simply quit the brotherhood and unfortunately some have had a PCS to the "Great Tank Park in the Sky."

Rick said, "So, I did some numbers based on each Tanks Bn's T/O and OEM. Counting crews, maintenance, supply, admin, comm, cooks, motor-T and corpsmen of each tank battalion. Each company T/O would be 275 counting all the above. Now I know the T/O of each Bn's: 375 Marines so you have 100 in support at the Bn level, which is about right. So, if take 375 x 5 years is 1,875 bodies that served so your number (2,000) is not that far off figuring turn over and replacements"

"Now of the 2.8 million of the boots-on-the-ground who served in Vietnam, today the VA says 3 out of 10 are alive. You take tanks, as small as we were in overall numbers to have about 500 of us left is pure luck. Could there could be a few potential members still out there? Probably, I just know that every time I met a VN Marine vet (and a lot live here in SD), they are for the most part noncombatant arms ... so in the rear with the gear guys. I do believe those of us who were actual combat arms, they are the ones going the fastest. Combat arms are grunts, arty, tanks, tracks, Engr's, Force Recon and a few others."

"I know just from the taps list of the MCTA a lot of passed on from the VN time. In the two groups that I have had lunch with for several years now, the numbers were as many as 20 VN vets Army, Navy, Marines are now down to 9 in one group and 6 of us in the other. The most lost in those groups are Marines. Guy, George, myself are the only Marines in the 6 group and we are the only combat arms Marines in both groups. Even in my hunting and shooting clubs, I am one of the few combat arms Marines. So, again the VTA can keep doing our best to reach out to those who never joined ... but Father Time is chasing all of us."

And all of that aside, if you have an old Marine buddy who is not a VTA member, you should take the time and make the effort to recruit them into the brotherhood. Do it now before you regret it later!

YOUR MILITARY MEMORIES: The other day, I was listening to a radio talk show where the guest was a music director for a chorale. She said that there are times when she introduces a new music piece to the chorus and several members complain that they just cannot participate because it looks too difficult to overcome. That spurred me to think about many VTA members who either refuse to write a personal story about their time in the USMC or complain that they don't know how to write it. The music director said that she feels as if the members who are having a problem are either feeling that they lack the skills to perform or they do not have the courage. I may be mistaken but our own members may be feeling the same thing. That is, they think that they lack the skills to write or just don't "want" to because it's either too difficult or that they don't want to be embarrassed. I also think that if those members can just write one sentence to start the process, they may find that the one sentence is easier than they imagined and maybe a second sentence will be forthcoming.

Your personal stories, captured in your own words and photographs, are one of the most valuable legacies you can leave your family. By being able to read what you did while serving your country, enables family members and future generations to understand and appreciate what you went through in order to provide them the freedoms they enjoy today. We are currently running out of member stories. Please keep the Sponson Box healthy and happy by submitting your own accounts of your service to our nation. As I have indicated in the past, your stories don't have to be about bloody combat. They can be funny or they can be silly. They can be a confession or a regret. No matter what, they will be from a US Marine.

**Putting your story to paper will assure its permanence.
They will know and remember.**

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



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Open

Fallen Heroes

Garry Hall

Last Man Standing Award
Phone: 812.882.1190

Fred Kellogg

VTA Challenge Coin Project
Phone: 360.509.3404

Ron Knight

Member Data Integrity
Phone 678.828.7197 EST

New Members

Claire Broussard – Associate Member

1135C Howard Broussard Rd.

St. Martinville, La. 70582

Phone: 337.303.4967

Email: clairebrsd1968@yahoo.com

Widow of a Marine tanker

Recruited by: Greg Martin

William P Herstowski

8183 W Pine Lake Road

Hiles, WI 54511

Phone: 715.649.3835

Email: benita123@frontier.com

Charlie Co, 1st AT BN – 1967

DOB: 11/24/47

Wife: Benita

Recruited by: Greg Martin



ON THE COVER:
MGYSgt Harold Riensche USMC (ret)

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

**"Write it before you run out of time. Write it before it's too late.
Write what you're feeling. Waiting is a mistake."**

–Unknown

Podcast Errors?

John War writes: Some of you may have noticed that Pete Ritche's podcast in the most recent past issue of our magazine had a "+" where an apostrophe should have appeared. I was quite frustrated to see this error since it had not been apparent when we proof read the last issue.

I asked our most excellent Graphic Designer how this happened. His reply: This type of occurrences is very, very rare. I did notice them while laying out the magazine and I did correct them but somehow Peter Ritch's story was skipped. The reason being when you import a story from Word, some character in Word is interpreted in the layout program as unavailable or missing, therefore it is replaced by another character. This only happens when the original story uses a strange font but, in this case, Word uses Arial, which is a very common font. Although it does happen from time to time when Word uses bullets, and on my side, it replaces by some weird character, especially in VA stories but they were so obvious. I did a "search and replace" but I limited myself to story in question (I don't remember which one). It looks like a rare glitch to me for it has never happened before. You cannot do anything on your side for it happens on my side only. I'll keep an eye on similar glitches next time. Very sorry to see this kind of thing happen (The good thing is it is still readable without much guessing).

38 Months

Clyde Hoch writes: Having a few books in print myself and having spent six months on ship with Ben, I was anxious to read his work. Ben is a good person and a good Marine. He did not disappoint me. It was a very good read.

Howard Blum writes: Ben Cole's story in the last Sponson Box brought back many memories of Con Thien. Spent much time (6/67-3/68) and wounded/medevaced twice from there. The rain, mud, incoming rounds and other fun stuff at Con Thien not easily/willingly forgotten. Ludwig and Garcia (A Co. 3rd Tanks) who died there, are never far from my mind. Con Thien is a place and time that's a part of me.



Eggs in a Helmet

Bruce Van Apeldoorn writes: When I read your egg story, I had a flash-back to cold weather training on Mt. Fuji in 1974. I too used a helmet as a cooking vessel to make spaghetti. All was going well until the spaghetti was getting hot. Then I noticed that the paint on the inside of the helmet started to blister off. A very sad end to what could have been a wonderful meal on the Gun Range.

Kent Hughes' Story

Rick Lewis writes: Reading our latest Sponson Box the story by Kent Hughes. I find it amazing that he was able to recall in such detail the daily events of his time in VN. I know almost all Platoon Commanders kept log books, but his is crazy. I know once I became a Staff Sgt, at Tank School, Capt. Edwards handed me my first log book and told me what kind of notes I needed to keep in it. I kept a log book from then on as my rank changed or command changed. I sat down several years ago and read over about dozen log books I had packed away and I >>

had some good laughs reading them, but when I was done they all got put in a camp fire.

Remembering Clarence Leroy Funkhouser

Bob Haller writes: I knew Master Gunny Funkhouser on Hill 55 as he worked maintenance and always was on the tank retriever and helped the rest of us doing general maintenance. For some reason his memory would pass through my memory bank now and then, always good thoughts. Below is picture of one of his crew towing me back with the retriever after getting hit. I am going to donate to help his family.



Ken Zebal writes: I remember him being a Corporal (or Sgt?) at 2nd Tanks in '63, '64—a truly outstanding Marine.

Carl Hokanson writes: At our meeting of the Central Jersey Leather Detachment #868 tonight of which I am the past commander, we voted to send \$200.00 to help with MGYSGT Funkhouser's funeral

A Tank!



Jake Kenna writes: My wife wanted to take some photos of us by a tank. Well not too many tanks are just lying around, but I knew of one at the VFW post where I am a Life member, so we drove over there and took this photo of an M-60 tank. She wanted to know if this was the kind of tank that I was on in Vietnam. I told her, "No. I was in an M-48A3 and this one is an M-60. It replaced the M-48A3." And just as a heads up for all: The M-60 has a 105 mm gun compared to the 90 mm that we had on the M-48. Plus, the M-60 had a larger turret. Just thought I would share this with everyone. Not able to make the next reunion this year since my wife has to work, Hope to make the next one, I'd love to see it in DC (again). And maybe we could go to Marine Barracks 8th and I for evening Parade?

MSgt Robert Fierros Thrown Track:



In the photo: Tank driver Westbrook threw the track on C-32. Back in operation in 30 minutes. Okinawa Japan 1960.



P.S. My daughter Rebecca is typing for me and helps with all things especially emails and correspondence I have memory issues and currently in a skilled nursing facility with a broken pelvis. I am 94 years old. ■

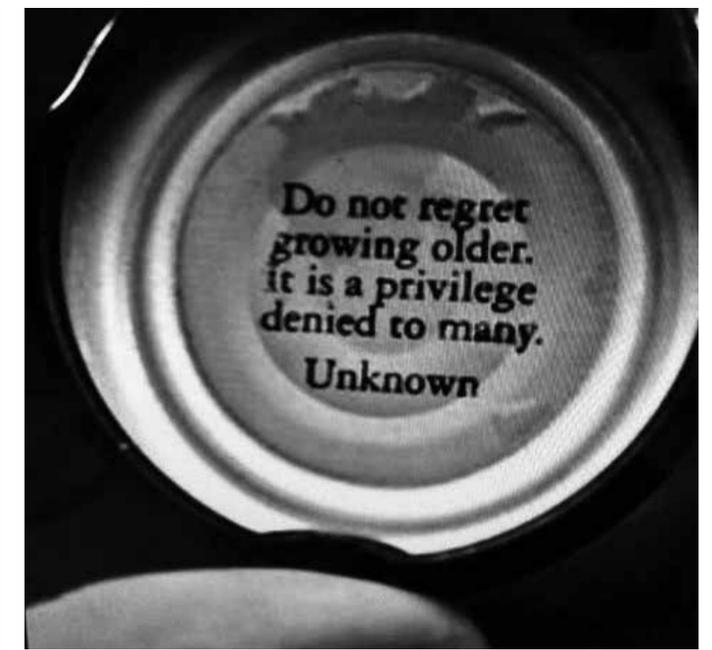
Thank you for your interest



Farmers Market Tank



Remembering our Fallen Heroes



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269796 * JOHNNY MATHIS FEELINGS	252486 * THE BEST OF BUCK OWENS	249524 * BARRY MANILOW II MANDY
267383 * HANK WILLIAMS, JR. 14 GREATEST HITS	264424 * TRAFFIC HEAVY TRAFFIC	264424 * The Greatest Hits Of JOHNNY RODRIGUEZ
264044 * THIN LIZZY JAILBREAK	263806 * DAVID ALLAN COE Longhaired Redneck	176891 * RAY CONNIFF'S GREATEST HITS
265744 * RAY CONNIFF Send In The Clowns	269785 * OZEL ALLATURCA	262907 * PHOEBE SNOW SECOND CHILDHOOD
258087 * BAY CITY ROLLERS Saturday Night	269630 * ARTHUR FIEDLER & THE BOSTON POPP PLAY NEIL DIAMOND SONGBOOK	
262915 * TELLY SAVALAS WHO LOVES YA BABY		
263889 * EARL SCRUGGS REVUE VOL. II		

*Available on records and 8-track tapes only * Selections marked with a star are not available in real tape

What Members Are Doing



L to R) Richard Walcott F2/1, Radioman; Dr. Cliff Henio DMV F2/1 81 mm Mortars; Rick Coulter Bravo 3rd Tanks; Michael "Doc" Pipkin F2/1; Rick Osborne Bravo 3rd Tanks; Fred Kellogg Bravo 3rd Tanks.

Michael "Doc" Pipkin writes: May 1968, all of Vietnam was under fire as then NVA was launching their Spring Offensive, called the May Mini Tet. A complete surprise to Americans. It was on May 19th that the NVA, and on Ho Chi Minh's Birthday, that they tangled with Fox Company 2nd Battalion, First Marines and Bravo Company, First Platoon, Third Tanks outside the gates at Khe Sanh.

It was very intensive fighting with many Fox, 2/1 Marines killed and wounded, all the tanks battle damaged, all crewmen wounded and one tank destroyed. Fox company retired to the Hills to regroup and refit. Just another day to the grunts in the field.

Thirty years later in the 2000's, I sat down to write the story of Fox Company and decided to find out who these tankers were. Contacting 1st Tanks, I was directed to 3rd Tanks and Fred Kellogg. Fred had been seriously wounded in the battle and had many questions about the fight.

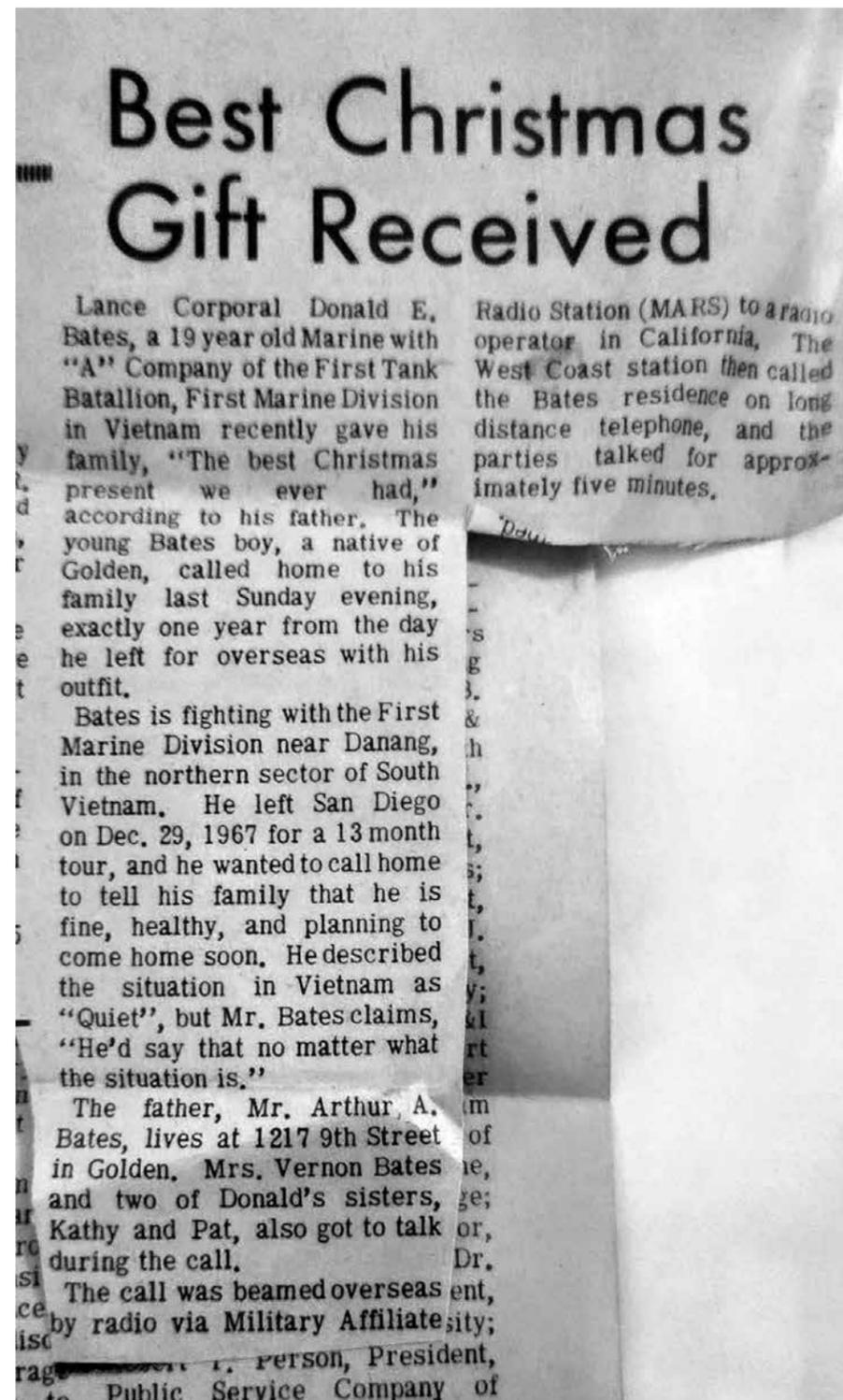
So we all live in Washington State and get together once a year for lunch, Fred Kellogg, Rick Oswood, and Rick Coulter. (Rick Coulter has been living 3 miles away from me the last 50 years on the same road). ■

Doc Hackemack and the First Couple



Special Story

Don Bates writes: I was going through stuff my parents had saved and found this article from the Golden (Colorado) Transcript newspaper. Back in Vietnam, I got the chance to call home via MARS radio on Christmas Day and talk to Mom and Dad. I didn't realize what a big deal this was to them. Dad had gone to the Transcript the next day and told them he spoke to me. This is the article they saved. ■



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

"One lives in the hope of becoming a memory." —Antonio Porchia

LeRoy G. "Hank" Brightwell 1932–2021



LeRoy G. "Hank" Brightwell, age 78, died Saturday, April 5th at University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Medical Center in Bel Air after a brief illness. Hank is survived by his wife of 55 years, Helene, two daughters and a son-in-law: Kirsten Brightwell and

Courtney Murray and her husband, Paul. He also leaves behind five grandchildren: Brooks Buck, Talbot Buck, Chloe Murray, Remy Buck and Sophie Murray.

Hank served over two years, with distinction, as a Marine. He was a veteran of the Vietnam War, where he was awarded several medals, including the Purple Heart. The discipline and patriotism he learned in the Marines never left him, as friends and family will attest. At the time of his death, he was a proud member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

He was born and raised in Baltimore, the only son of George and D. Elaine Brightwell. As a young man, he learned to work on cars and developed his lifelong interest in woodworking. He was the District Manager of SCAN International and his success in business can be directly attributed to his work ethic and his extraordinary attention to detail. Hank retired in 2007 and spent his retirement volunteering on various Boards of Directors in Ocean City, MD and doting on his five grandchildren, who adored their Papa.

Westley L. Kilgore 1940–2025



Westley L. Kilgore, 84, passed on April 1, 2025 after a brief illness. Originally from Ohio, born May 16, 1940. The son of Willis L. Kilgore and Helen Mae (West) Kilgore. The love of his life was the late Florence Kilgore, theirs was a love story you dream about.

Westley, also known as "Gunny" or "Tiny", served his country and retired after 20 years in the Marine Corps,

where he drove around in Tanks (proudly serving in the 1st & 3rd Tanks and retiring from the 2nd Tank Battalion). He served several tours in Vietnam among other campaigns during his career and is a Purple Heart recipient. The big bad Marine found his creative side in retirement doing woodworking out of his garage and loved visiting with all the friends, neighbors and fur babies that would stop by the garage. "Tiny" was a long-time and active member of the USCM VTA.

Harry C. Christensen, Jr. 1946 – 2025



Harry, or "Buddy," to those that knew him by his Marblehead name, made the trip to heaven on April 20, 2025. Harry passed away peacefully in his home at the age of 78.

Harry served in the United States Marine Corps from 1967 to 1968 and was proud to have served in Vietnam as a tank commander.

On January 24, 1968, he was wounded in combat against an enemy ambush site. Due to his actions, the ambush was destroyed and saved many lives. Harry was a highly decorated veteran with many awards including the Silver Star for gallantry in action and two purple hearts. After he medically retired from the Marine Corps, he returned to his home and to his education.

Harry graduated from Salem State University and later received his Master's Degree from Boston College. After teaching in the Danvers School Department for 13 years, Harry received his Juris Doctorate of Law Degree from Suffolk University in 1983 and practiced law in Marblehead for over 40 years.

Over his career, Harry was active on many Boards and Committees in Marblehead including over 20 years on the Board of Selectmen and member and Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2005. Harry also served on the Marblehead Historical Commission and as Shellfish Constable. He was generous with his time and expertise. He was also an active member of the USMC VTA.

Roger Kropke 1945–2025



Roger's widow Elle writes: Roger went to heaven April 13th. His body went into septic shock secondary to pancreatitis. Onset of pain to heaven less than 48 hours. We are all devastated. I am at peace and grateful for the 55 years God gave Roger to me.

I want to thank the USMC VTA for reuniting David Thompson and Roger after 40 years. I have passed on the Tanker Reunion "FNG Roger Kropke, David Thompson" interview/video on YouTube to so many people. There is no official obituary. Roger was a proud member of the USMC VTA. As an aside: Capt. David Thompson passed away in 2024,

MGYSGT Clarence Leroy Funkhouser, USMC (Ret) 1942–2025

It is with deep sadness and heavy hearts that we announce the passing of Master Gunnery Sergeant Clarence Leroy Funkhouser, 82, who passed away in comfort on February 14, 2025, surrounded by loved ones. Clarence was born March 19, 1942 in Delaware, Indiana to Robert Funkhouser Sr and Louise Mckee Sears. The second oldest of 5, Clarence was closest with his sister Glenda, and his grandpa, William. He loved his brothers- Robert, Paul, and Dennis deeply.

Clarence joined the Marine Corps at the age of 18. He was dedicated to his country until the day he died, taking extreme pride in the title of United States Marine. He was promoted meritoriously not once, but two times, the second being for his title of Master Gunnery Sergeant. Those who served with him referred to him affectionately as "Top Funk." Clarence went around the world seven times including serving tours in Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Desert Storm, Japan, Guadalcanal, Quemoy- Matsu Islands, and the Dominican Republic. He was an innovator for the Marine Corps, creating fabrications and ideas in the field that saved millions of dollars, and landed him in articles and books throughout the years. You can still see some of his tanks today on Camp Lejeune. After retiring from the Marine Corps, Top joined the Merchant Marines and continued his service. Unfortunately, "Top" Funk never had the opportunity to join the USMC VTA.

Submitted by Tom Kelly and Reed Bullock.



Terry J. Broussard 1948–2024

Terry J. Broussard, 75, passed away on Tuesday, July 2, 2024, at his residence surrounded by his loved ones. Terry, a proud member of the United States Marine Corps and the American Legion in Parks, dedicated his life to providing for his family as a

truck driver, creating a foundation of love and support. His passions included camping, horseback riding in his younger days, watching old western movies, and playing practical jokes, bringing laughter and joy to those around him. Unfortunately, Terry was never able to join the brotherhood of the USMC VTA but his widow, Claire, has joined as an associate member.

Anthony Holmes Johnson 1948–2025



Anthony Holmes Johnson, affectionately known as "Captain Tony" to his wide circle of friends, departed this life at 76 in Istanbul, Turkey, far from his roots but ever true to his adventurous spirit. Born on November 11, 1948, in the quiet panhandle town of DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

After high school, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps at 17, serving as a tank maintenance man at Camp Pendleton and then as a 106 recoilless rifleman during a grueling 13-month combat tour in Vietnam—a chapter that would shape him profoundly.

After his discharge he attended college and ultimately graduating with a Juris Doctor degree. While in law school, he joined the Naval Reserve and later earning a direct commission as an Ensign and rising to the rank of Captain—a title he wore with pride. Unfortunately, Tony never got a chance to become a member of the USMC VTA.

John Biddle Brock 1943–2020

John Brock died Tuesday, April 28, 2020 in Beverly, MA, from the Coronavirus. John was born February 20, 1943, the first son of Hope Distler Brock and Horace Brock. He graduated from Salisbury School and the University of Pennsylvania in 1965. He entered the Marine Corps and served as a tank commander in Vietnam. On his return, he went to Harvard Business School. After a career in the CIA, he pursued financial ventures. He was also active in supporting Veterans' groups. He was a member of the USMC VTA but fell out of the brotherhood in 2005.

Submitted by Sgt Maj JJ Carroll

This is Just a Reminder

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. ■

As my memories of the past grow fainter with each passing year, one question still lingers in the back of my mind. With lots of safer, less challenging options open to me after college, why did I choose to go the hard way, pursuing a commission as an Officer of Marines when a war was being fought in Vietnam?

No one laid out a road map and said this is what you must do. I chose this path. Perhaps it was decided at age four, when my older step-brother came home from World War II, a decorated Marine veteran of the Pacific Island fighting. He had gone from private to first sergeant in four years. He was then, and always would be, someone I admired and looked up to.

I knew that I could not travel the paved, level road when our country was at war. I had to see for myself what Vietnam was all about, and I would choose

the bad road full of ruts and blind curves. To this day I am thankful for that choice. I'm a better man for it.

I don't know what sustained me through all of the sweating, cursing, and pain of OCS, except that I wanted it badly, too badly to quit. Others fell by the wayside, their resolve weakened under the stress. I survived the cut and went on to Basic School as a boot lieutenant, an Officer of Marines. Then came the fork in the road when we put in our choices for M.O.S. I put in for infantry, artillery, and tanks, and was one of the lucky ones selected for tank school.

Then it was off to Nam where danger lay ahead at every turn. We Marines never faltered in carrying out our missions, despite the loss of comrades who gave up all of their tomorrows. Many times, it could have been me lying on that stretcher, a poncho covering my

head, boot toes pointing skyward.

We kept "short timer" calendars, counting the days until our tour ended, praying we would still be in one piece. A few extended their tour, having a score to settle. Most of us went home, glad to be done with that place, but our memories remained behind, forever haunted by what we went through, and seething with anger at the homecoming reception we received: name calling, insults, and even worse . . . indifference.

Some continued on down that rocky road, making the Marine Corps a career. I take my cover off to all career Marines; but, no matter how we all arrived here today, we are secure in the knowledge that we chose the hard way, persevered, and ultimately succeeded. No one can ever take that from us. We truly are the few, the proud, the United States Marines.

Semper Fidelis!

COMMENT

BY MIKE "BELMO" BELMESSIERI

After reading the article "The Marine Corps Has Gone Off the Rails" as published in our Jan thru March edition of SB I was reminded of something that happen in 2011 related to where we are today. I wanted to share it with you earlier but, I forgot to.

Back in 2011 I was serving as the Commandant of the Marine Corps League's General J. C. Breckinridge San Francisco Detachment # 10. At the time there were two Life Members in the detachment who are fairly well-known Marines. Those Marines were Maj. Gen. James "Mike" Myatt USMC (ret.) a Viet. Vet; former 1st Mar. Div CG. during Operation Desert Storm and at the time of the incident I will tell you about was the serving President and CEO of the San Francisco Marines Memorial Club and Hotel. The other Marine detachment Life Member was the late Former Sec. of State George Shultz.

One day back in 2011 I received a telephone call at home from General Myatt. The general informed me that Sec. Shultz had asked that I get as many members of my detachment to attend an informal town hall style meeting at the Marines' Memorial Theater that night. The meeting was to be with former Sec. of State George Shultz and then serving Sec. of Defense Ron Gates who just happen to be in town.

Many of our detachment members joined several other Marines who were from local Marine Reserve Commands for the "meeting" at the theater. One of the things Sec. Gates informed us of was very disturbing to us all. He advised us that then serving President Barrack Hussein Obama felt there was no need for 2 land armies and therefore the US Marine Corps was no longer needed. It was then, some may think, that Force Design 2030 began. However, it may

have already begun years earlier. The start may go all the way back to 2008 when Pres George Bush ignored the warrior generals and appointed a Commandant who was not even a Marine. From that point forward I believe it has been a fight to maintain a USMC as needed.

I've had the privilege to have spent time with some great Marine Corps leaders who've fought the fight to maintain our Corps as it should be. However, as Sec. Shultz once told our former Commandant Gen. James Conway and Sgt. Maj. Carton Kent when asked what the problem is in Washington DC the former Sec. of State replied "to many politicians not enough statesman". Marine George Shultz was right that is in my opinion our greatest problem brother. The other side of that is this Marine's opinion and a dollar will not even buy a cup of coffee.

This story originally ran in the #3 – 2013 issue of our magazine. We thought that since we recently lost Lt. Col. Tungent that reprinting this story would be a fitting tribute.

THE TANK PLATOON SPEEDING TICKET

BY EV TUNGENT

I would bet money on the fact that I am the only tank platoon leader in the history of the Marine Corps who received a speeding ticket for the five tanks in his platoon. This occurred at Camp Pendleton in the summer of 1956 shortly after I joined the 1st Tank Battalion following graduation from The Basic School at Quantico.

The 1st Marine Division was conducting a sweeping Base-wide field exercise that summer, complete with Aggressor Forces. As large as Camp Pendleton is, operating area terrain is fairly well chopped up by the buildup of Base buildings/Camps and cultivated fields along the coast which were leased back to local farming concerns. A number of times it was necessary to go "administrative" to reposition units from one operating area to another prior to resuming the exercise.

It was during one such "administrative" move that I fell afoul of "The Law". While moving from the southern portion of Pendleton north toward the San Onofre area, we had to traverse one of the cultivated lettuce fields on a small dirt road. Interstate 5 had recently been opened and old Highway 101 became part of Base property. It was toward Hwy 101 that I was headed with my tanks in order to make a speed run north to another staging area.

Unbeknownst to me, some local farmers had complained to Base that any vehicles moving through their fields were raising too much dust which settled in the heads of lettuce and made the crop hard to sell! To placate the farmers, Base issued a bulletin requiring any vehicle speed through the fields be slow enough not to raise large clouds of dust. The only problem here is that the bulletin was issued while the Division operation was ongoing and the word didn't get passed down. As I recall, speeds were to be no more than 2-3 MPH through the fields.

I was leading the column and clipping along at a pretty good speed. I had the following tanks hang back from each other so as not to eat too much dust from the tank ahead. When I reached Hwy 101, I pulled up far enough for the platoon to close up on the road before continuing on. When I looked back to make sure all the tanks had left the field and were on the highway, I saw a vehicle with flashing blue lights bearing down on me. It was a Base MP patrol with a Sgt. and a shotgun rider. My Platoon Sgt, Gysgt Bill Robinson, came up to see what was going on. The MP patrol told us about the speed restrictions and when we pled ignorance, they said normally they would simply issue a warning but

our dust cloud was unlikely to dissipate for days!

So, the MPs very politely issued me a traffic ticket for the 3rd Plt, Delta Co, 1st Tank Battalion for excessive speed through cultivated fields with an appearance date before the Base Provost Marshal TBD after the field exercise. I KNEW my career was over at that point as I had just been accepted for a Regular Commission a few days before. My Company CO was 1st Lt Bob Larson, with whom I served in Nam years later. Bob said not to worry about it as the Base PMO was a former tanker himself and would probably go lightly with me. I can tell you that was small consolation for a fresh caught 2nd Lt.

On the day of my appearance, after explaining the circumstances of not being aware of the speed limits, the major gave me a "tongue-in-cheek" ass chewing about "ignorance of the law" being no excuse. He then said that this was one for the record books for citations which came across his desk. He told me he had probably pulled some real boners himself but that this one was a story he was going to get a lot of mileage out of. He told me to go back to my company and "sin no more"!

More Stories from Jim Cowman

SHILOH, JULY 9, 1967

On a Sunday morning, two platoons (rein) from Hotel Co, 2/5 left the An Hoa combat base and patrolled the Phu Nhuan village area that was northwest of the base. This was an all-day operation and we were to return that evening.

Hotel Co at this time was made up of Marines who had been in the area for some time and knew what

they were doing. All three lieutenants (Pendell, Leonetti and Hoffman) were former enlisted Marines with a wealth of experience. I had seven months' time in Vietnam, but this grunt war was relatively new to me. On this day the term "fire fight" would become a reality.

We reached our objective, searched it and prepared to change directions

and go home. Just as we "moved out" we received a whole bunch of small arms fire from a tree line we had just left. The fire was so intense that bamboo twigs and leaves were falling on us much like a peach tree blossoms fall at Shiloh. It was quite an experience.

We returned fire with everything that we had, got credit for 3 VC KIA and got the hell out of there. >>

1ST TIME IN ARIZONA

Hotel Co9, 2/5 left the An Hoa base on a Tuesday during the week of July 12, 1967. It was my first time to hump into the "Arizona Territory," but most of the Marines in the company were old hands at it.

Our objective was the Song Thu Bon River and a ville called Phu Nhuan (8), where we would set up a blocking force of some sort. There were a series of Phu Nhuan villes to hump through and the area was not a nice place to be. This particular hump out was made in the dark and, of course, in the rain. It was so dark and it rained so hard that visibility was zero and everything was mud and soaked.

Two platoons preceded the headquarters group, one platoon brought up the rear, standard procedure. This was classic booby trap country, everyone knew that and lived with it.

Someone in the headquarters group tripped a booby trap late that evening. This was my first experience with such a traumatic happening. The blast was deafening, the screaming was worse. Lt Hamm, the arty FO normally walked near me. We had just slopped through a muddy creek when Lt Hamm slipped. I bent back down below the creek edge to help him, an act that may have saved my life. Seven Marines were KIA. Lt Hamm and I could not speak, the concussion saw to that.

Several Marines and the interpreters of the intelligence section were dead, others horribly wounded and screaming. The corpsmen did their usual good work and a sense of order returned. It did not take very long and several med-evac US-34s were in the area to take out the dead and wounded. How they ever found us, were able to land under such poor conditions and complete their mission was a real credit to the pilots.

We regrouped and humped on. My notes say that this was "Operation Arizona" and this was the first evening. I commented to the gunnery sergeant that I might give up ten years of my life

if I could get on a chopper and get out of this mess. His response was that we all felt that way, at least for a while.

Hotel Co reached the river area about One AM. Before morning one of our ambushes opened up on something and scared the hell out of us. The next morning, we crossed the river on amtracs and humped to the Son Vu Gai River. We lost a good Marine when sniper rounds caused Marines to jump from the amtracs. Jumping with flak jackets, packs and weapons was quite a load. He pitched forward and smashed his face into his weapon. We burned the village area where we thought that the sniper rounds came from. Some TV crew filmed it but I never saw the TV crew after that.

THE WATER WHEEL

The engineer group attached to Hotel Co had a field day when we located a water wheel and the engineers were told to blow it up. The water wheel was in the Go Noi Island area of the Arizona. It was a huge device. The force of the river current made it turn. Hollow bamboo "buckets" filled with water would empty into a bamboo trough. The trough was elevated on bamboo tripods and carried the irrigation water someplace. It was a marvelous contraption and I've always wondered how long this had been there.

It wasn't there anymore. The engineers blew the entire rig sky high and into the river. It was quite a blast to observe and as I recall we all cheered. Hotel Co had a lite section of two M-48A3 tanks attached at the time (Captain Fable, 1st Tank Bn) and the tanks drove through and destroyed the irrigation trough for as far as we could see. The water wheel was so big that it seems that I recall the engineers were standing on it and it kept turning like a Ferris wheel.

THE NIGHT THE COAL MINES WERE HIT

On Monday, July 3, 1967, Hotel Co, 2/5 departee the An Hoa combat base and humped out to Hill 42 in Anten-

na Valley. By the time we got to Hill 42, Hotel Co had suffered one Marine KIA, had medevacked one Marine who had lost a leg plus had eleven Marines qualify for Purple Hearts.

Hotel Co, set up its position on Hill 42 and as was the usual practice, monitored Battalion and other company radio traffic. Golf Co of 2/5 was in position at the Nong Son coal mines complex south of An Hoa. As it turned out the coal mines were not the place to be that night.

Radio traffic increased and it was evident that the An Hoa base and the coal mines were under attack! Hotel Co was on Hill 42 and we were very concerned. It was just a matter of time before they hit us. We got ready as we could but no attack came. Golf Co had 13 Marines KIA that evening and some 43 Marines wounded. This attack on the coal mines has been documented in several official USMC reference books.

On the afternoon of the 4th of July, 1967, Hotel Co was ordered to hump back to An Hoa. We had steak that evening but the VC had done their work well and we did not have much to cheer about.

DOC DOC BURNS DOWN

Duc Duc was a resettlement village created near the An Hoa industrial complex. On July 5, 1967, Hotel Co 2/5 had just returned from Antenna Valley and was still assigned as maneuver company.

Late on this Wednesday evening, a TPQ-10 bomb dropping arrangement screwed up and released a bomb short. This bomb landed in Duc Duc and the village commenced to burn.

Lt Butch Pindel and his platoon were dispatched to the village to assist. The rest of Hotel Co remained on the hooch's "back porch" and monitored radio traffic.

What happened the rest of the evening resembled a Marx Brothers comedy. Villagers were more upset than their family, immediate requests for solatium payments, Marines trying to

put out fires with no equipment and some villagers happy that the place was burning because they didn't want to be there in the first place. Some 47

refugee homes burned.

After a few hours of this comedy, we secured the fiasco, the platoon returned, we all had a few more laughs

"Friendly fire isn't..." (Friendly)

BY JOHN WEAR

It's October 1968 and Charlie Company; 3rd Tanks is deployed to the sprawling combat base at Quang Tri. One evening just after dark, several AK-47 rifle shots ring out at the perimeter that is a hundred yards from our tank park.

The voice of SSgt Baker calls out from the company office for all of us to "Mount up!" This means that we are to get on our tanks and be ready for combat. Of course, since we just came out of the field, Steffe, Pappy and I are mounted up with our tank idling and are ready before most of the company tankers are out the door of their hooch's.

As soon as Steffe had cranked up the engine, I set the radio frequency to the Charlie Co frequency and call out, "Charlie Six, this is Foxtrot 3-1. We are ready and standing by."

The head office Pogue, Handler is manning the radios and he tells me to stand by. All of a sudden, two of our gun tanks take off hauling ass out of the tank park and head out on the perimeter where we usually stand guard duty. We monitor the radios, there is small arms fire and all of a sudden one of the gun tanks lets off a round from their main gun and the chatter of the .30 coax lets go.

I come over the radio again, saying in a little sarcastic way that my tank is still standing by. The "ditty dot" laughs

in the mike and tells me to stand by. What an asshole he is being. If there are gooks in the wire, what better weapon than a friggin' flame-thrower with 360 gallons of flaming napalm to stop them? They say that the gooks hate death by fire worse than anything. It has something to do with their religion. Both of the gun tanks fire their main gun a few times as we stand by. As the small arms fire slows down the rumors are flying. There are a zillion versions of the same story..." gooks in the wire," RPG's and B-40's flying around, grunts caught in crossfire, snipers shooting at the tank, etc.

The action stops almost as fast as it started. When the "All Clear" is given, I tell Steffe & Pappy to stand down and we dismount our tank and head back to our hooch. I see SSgt Baker but he doesn't seem to have any scoop yet. Then I bump in to our company office pogue, Handler. He almost always has the straight scoop. As it turns out... (and I hate to say this) ...about an hour ago our company's tanker/grunts were leaving the perimeter to go out on a night patrol and/or to set up an ambush. Just as the lead man clears the perimeter wire, an enemy sniper takes a few pot shots into the far side of the doggie (US Army) perimeter. At the sound of the sniper fire, the Marine tanker/grunts who are leaving the perimeter wire hit the deck. The rear ech-

elon doggie Pogue in the bunker that is just above the location of the Marines leaving the perimeter, hears the sniper fire and then sees the Marines in the wire. He thinks that the Marines are gooks and that he's under attack. He opens up with his M-60 machine gun and accidentally shoots one of the prone Marines. The bullet enters the Marine's crotch, tumbles through his body and it exits his shoulder. The doggy's machinegun firing is so heavy that no one in the squad is able to attend to the wounded Marine and he dies almost immediately on the spot. By this time the gook sniper has didi-ed out of there and the Americans are there killing each other.

The next day, we go down to the perimeter to see what we can see. The three bunkers and two towers that we normally would man for nighttime guard duty are riddled with bullet holes (or pockmarks) in the steel plate. This is not the work of one single sniper. There has got to be fifty or more bullet holes showing. Perhaps it was more of an enemy force than everyone thought. We will never know. But the bottom line is that this was another "friendly fire" incident that makes me want to throw up when I think about it.

As a side note...and for some gal-lows humor: "Friendly fire isn't..." (Friendly)

Lore of the Corps Two Marine Memorials

SUBMITTED BY BOB SKEELS

The great Marine War Memorial in Arlington, Virginia depicting the flag raising on Iwo Jima was sculpted by Felix de Weldon. The Marine Memo-

rial was completed and dedicated on 10 November 1954. Every Marine and friend of the Corps knows about the flag raising on Iwo Jima, Joe Rosen-

thal's famous photograph, and Weldon's iconic Marine Memorial. What is less well known is that only one year after the Marine Memorial >>

in Arlington was dedicated, Felix de Weldon on 18 November 1955 dedicated a different Marine sculpture named, The Marine Memorial.

Most people, even most Marines, have never heard of Felix de Weldon's second Marine Memorial. The reason is the second Marine Memorial is not in the United States. Felix de Weldon created a black marble monolith with a bronze relief of a fighting Marine. The sculpture has a commemorative plaque with a Marine EGA. Weldon's second Marine Memorial still stands today in France at the site of the battle of Belleau Wood. It is the only sculpture in Europe that only honors U.S. Marines.

The World War I battle of Belleau Wood took place June 1918. The Marines fought and won against a numerically superior German invasion force. U.S. forces bore more than 10,000 casualties. The ferocious valor of the Marines at Belleau has become a part of the lore of the Corps. While some scholars have their doubts, it has been said the Germans called the Marines "Devil Dogs." And Marines wear the name proudly today.

Another part of the lore of Belleau is an incident said to have taken place during a particularly desperate part of the fighting. Three Marines were under fire, a Sgt and two PFC's. One

PFC had been patrolling a few yards ahead of the other two, he was suddenly ambushed and badly wounded by small arms fire. Alone and bleeding, the wounded Marine called out to his friend.

The other PFC and the Sgt were lying face down. As soon as his friend called out, the other PFC started to get up, to go to his aid. But the Sgt pulled him back down, "No. Wait. We have to see what's out there"

The forest was silent. No more firing. No more calls from the wounded PFC.

Finally, the Sgt said, "I think he



During this Christmas season, may God bless Devil Dogs everywhere, and also Felix de Weldon for his two Marine Memorials.

bought it."

The PFC jumped up and ran to his friend, picked him up, put him over his shoulder and carried him back under a hail of bullets. The PFC took a round in his leg and they both tumbled to the ground by the Sgt. The Sgt checked both Marines, "Are you crazy? Now you're wounded and he's dead. All for nothing."

The PFC said, "It was worth it."

"Worth it?" How?"

The PFC looked at the Sgt and said, "When I got out there, he was still alive. He saw me and said, 'I knew you would come.'"



Marines Eat Crayons

BY CLYDE HOCH

I'm at an event with a friend who is a Vietnam Veteran who served in the Army. He hands me a small pack of crayons. I guess by the dumb look on my face he felt I needed an explanation. He said, "Marines eat crayons."

I said, "What are you talking about?"

Again, he said "Marines eat crayons." Not knowing what he was talking about, I looked it up on the computer. It reminds me of grade school. Apparently somewhere someone started this whole thing. It is now at the point where they are making

edible crayons. Is this whole thing a marketing scheme?

I thought back to when I was in high school. Three of us got together and decided to enlist in the Marines. We went to take the mental tests. One backed out and one failed the mental test. I heard later the one who failed the mental test went into the Army. I once heard an Army Commander make fun of the intelligence of Marines. I lost all respect for him right there.

One of the most recognizable monuments in the world has to be

the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima by Marines. I do not get caught up in the inter service rivalry because every person who wears the uniform deserves the respect of our nation. Each branch has specific roles in our military. Each branch depends on the others.

Let us remember that after your time in uniform is complete you are still a Marine. "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Some people feel the Marines are not the smartest of people but keep in mind that the current second highest leader in the world is a Marine. ■

One-Man Stand



By
Kyle Watts

The tank retriever ground to a halt on the beach. A gaggle of amtracs and tanks collected on the scene, awaiting its arrival. Harold Riensche climbed down from the cab and dropped into the soft sand. Waves off the Gulf of Tonkin lapped against the shore in the distance. Anywhere else, he might have relaxed and enjoyed the view.

Instead, he absorbed the mess that was now his responsibility. A tank turret protruded above a pit full of mud. The main gun seemed impotent without the tank visible beneath it. Quicksand nearly swallowed the vehicle whole. A tow pintle lay 3 feet below the surface. They would have to dig it out. Even then, how would they break the suction? The winch would have to work. Riensche thought through the grueling task ahead. A lieutenant with the amtracs interrupted his planning.

"Well, Staff Sergeant, what do you think? Better hold your retriever right there, or someone will have to come get YOU out!"

"Thanks, Sir. We'll take it from here."

Riensche understood why his company commander "suggested" he should come along on this recovery. As the maintenance chief for "Bravo" Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, Riensche typically oversaw maintenance back at the company headquarters (HQ). Sergeant Craig Ammon, the retriever's commander, was competent and capable. The extravagant nature of this tank's predicament, however, brought many "take charge types" to provide opinions on the operation. The commanding officer (CO) wanted Riensche's extra stripe to manage any interference. The five-man recovery crew went to work.

Lance Corporal Robert Walkley and Private First Class Jimmy Dorsett stripped off their blouses and grabbed shovels. They struggled to move in the mud digging out the tow pintle. The rest of the Marines found their duties equally difficult. Everything was heavy in their



MGySgt Harold Riensche

line of work. Corporal Mike Foster maneuvered the retriever behind the tank. Riensche and Ammon removed equipment to lower the front spade, covering the width of the vehicle. Foster drove the spade forward into the ground to lock the retriever in position. They trekked back and forth through the mud, arranging snatch blocks and the winch cable. By the time they were ready to make their first attempt, all five Marines were spent.

Foster started the winch. The cable tightened. The 60-ton retriever slid forward, plowing up sand. The tank did not move an inch.

Riensche flagged down two of the tanks that were providing security and moved them behind the retriever. He ran tow cables from the retriever out to each

tank. He hoped the additional 96 tons would provide an anchor. Foster spun up the winch once more. The retriever screamed at maximum horsepower. The winch sparked and spewed smoke. Riensche gave the signal to cut it off. The tank still would not budge.

Riensche devised a less conventional plan. He sent the crew to cut long reeds out of a nearby marsh. Meanwhile, he crafted balls of C4 and fused them with blasting caps. He taped the explosives to each reed, jabbed them into the muck around the tank and wired everything together.

Foster started the winch a final time. When the retriever reached maximum horsepower, Riensche touched off the C4. Mud churned and flew up the sides of the tank. The suction broke, and the

tank emerged slowly onto solid sand. All five crewmembers dropped beside the retriever, too exhausted to celebrate their victory. By the time they stowed their gear and hooked up the tank on a tow bar, the sun was setting. They backed the tank into the waves to wash off the mud. They joined their vehicles in the water, fully clothed, praying it might cleanse their stench. With tank in tow, the retriever followed the amtracs 6 miles back to their base at Cua Viet. Riensche told the crew to rest and prepare for the trip home in the morning.

Dawn of March 24, 1969, arrived too soon. The recovery crew had filled a gap in the perimeter, rotating turns on watch all night so no one felt rested. They refueled, connected a tow bar back to the tank, and departed. Afternoon arrived before they reached the Route One bridge into Dong Ha.

Riensche radioed their progress back to HQ while they waited for their turn to cross. Another transmission came over the net as he tuned in.

“Bravo 6, this is Bravo 3. Be advised, I’ve got two tanks hit by mines. We are buttoning up now.”

Lieutenant Pete Ritch and his three tanks had swept west from Gio Linh with a company of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldiers. They moved 5 miles out and were on their way back when the first tank hit a mine. Ritch radioed for the ARVN to stop and set up security.

When Riensche heard the lieutenant’s call to company HQ, he checked his watch. It was already 4 p.m. Riensche jumped into the conversation. “Bravo 3, this is Bravo 9.

What’s your location? We can come help get you out.”

As his Marines repaired the track, Ritch watched the ARVN continue marching as if nothing happened. One of his operable tanks stopped to provide security, while the third continued onward. Two hundred meters ahead, that tank also hit a mine. Ritch contacted the officer in charge of the ARVN soldiers to make them stop, but again, they continued marching with no regard for the Americans’ predicament.

When Riensche heard the lieutenant’s call to company HQ, he checked his watch. It was already 4 p.m. Riensche jumped into the conversation.

“Bravo 3, this is Bravo 9. What’s your location? We can come help get you out.”

“Bravo 9, we are five clicks west of A2, heading east. We are buttoning up now and should be moving shortly. I think we can limp it back to Gio Linh.”

It did not feel right. The damage sounded light but would take time to short-track the tanks. Once the repairs were complete, they would move no more than 5 miles per hour. Ritch had to get his tanks back to base before dark. They were in the heart of Leatherneck Square, an ironic name for the enemy-infested area just south of

the Demilitarized Zone. It was no place to spend the night in disabled tanks. The retriever currently sat less than 15 miles away. Riensche decided the previous day’s recovery, now extended over 24 hours, could wait.

“Roger that Bravo 3. Heading your way. Get buttoned up, and we’ll meet you back at Gio Linh. We’ll put both tanks behind the retriever and get you to Dong Ha before dark.”

Riensche informed the recovery crew of the change in plans. They unhooked the tank and headed north. By the time they reached Gio Linh, Lt Ritch was nowhere in sight.

“Bravo 3, this is Bravo 9. What’s your status?”

“Same location. First tank buttoned up, the second is giving us a hard time, over.”

Ritch could never make it back to Gio Linh before dark now on his own.

“Roger that Bravo 3. Sit tight. We’re coming out to get you.”

The retriever rolled through the wire down the same road Ritch had taken. As they moved, Ritch informed Riensche of the ARVN company heading the

retriever’s way. For a third time, Ritch requested that the ARVN company stop and provide security for the retriever. Less than a mile down the road, the column of soldiers came into view. Riensche told Foster to halt. He stood on top of the cab, waiting for someone to stop. Some of the soldiers bowed as they walked, while some waved. Most passed without a word. The entire company, over 200 strong, marched past the retriever toward their home at Gio Linh.

“So much for our security.”

With or without the ARVN, Riensche

They were surrounded. Riensche grabbed the headset.

“Bravo 6, this is Bravo 9, we are under attack!

Heavy small arms fire all around. We need help now!”

knew they could not abandon Ritch. The retriever set off once more alone.

After a few more miles, Riensche decided they had to be getting close. They crossed a large, dried up rice paddy and came over the far berm in a set of old tank tracks. Riensche ordered Foster to halt again. Waist-high elephant grass surrounded the retriever. A small, grassy mound stuck out of the earth 300 meters off, but the terrain was otherwise flat. From Ritch’s directions, Riensche figured the tanks were less than 1,000 meters away.

“Alright, Mike, let’s go get them. Follow those tank tracks.”

Foster accelerated. The retriever lurched backward with the sudden forward motion. It shifted weight just enough to trigger a pressure plate beneath them.

The mine heaved the retriever’s rear end off the ground. The Marines rocked from their seats into the steel surrounding them. When things settled, Ammon, Walkley, and Dorsett exited their hatches to inspect the damage. Riensche dropped to the ground behind them. The right side track lay broken in multiple places. Two sets of

blankly down between his legs into the vehicle. Riensche studied Foster while he finished with the radio. He looked tired. Riensche had seen him worse. This was their second time together in Vietnam. On their first deployment, Riensche and Foster carried an M-60 together on ambush patrols. They never expected to see each other in country a second time. When Riensche arrived, Foster extended his tour to stay with him. Foster was not even supposed to be there.

“Hey Mike, you want to stand watch first, and I’ll go down and help? One of us has to stay up here.”

Foster straightened and eased up from his hatch.

“Naw, Chief. We’ll take care of it. You stay here.”

He disappeared over the side of the retriever to join the others. Riensche returned to the headset to contact Lt Ritch.

“Bravo 3, this is ...”

An AK-47 bullet smacked into the .50-cal. ammo can inches from Riensche’s face. Another ricocheted off the receiver and zipped past his head. Round after round followed, striking steel all around the hatch. Riensche’s legs went limp, and he fell inside the retriever. As he checked himself for holes, the volume of automatic fire swelled outside. He peered into the periscope, looking over the right side of the retriever. It was shot out. He turned to the left side periscope. It was shot out



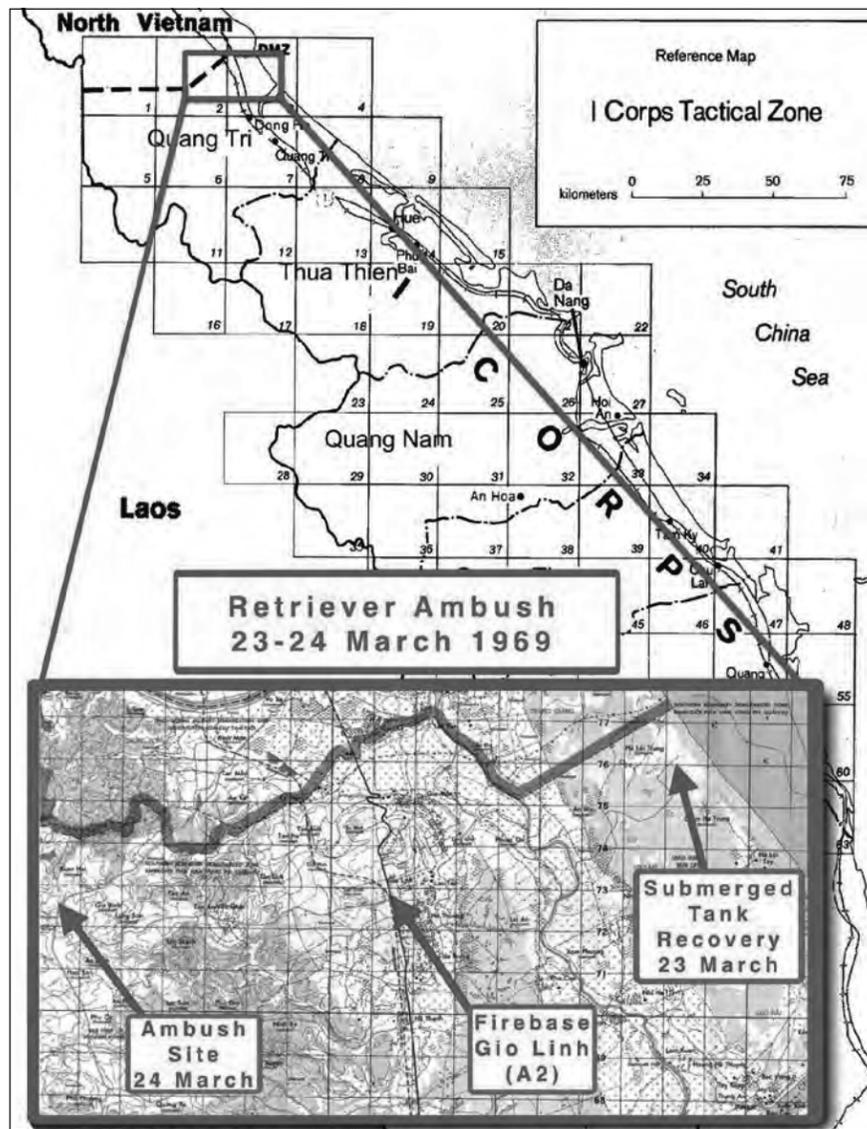
Lt Pete Ritch and his crew with their tanks at Khe Sanh, Vietnam, in 1969.

COURTESY OF PETE RITCH



This tank is being towed by a retriever. The helmet of the driver, left, is visible in the driver’s hatch. The tank commander, center, stands behind the 50-cal. with his back to the camera. The crane operator, right, stands half exposed in the crane operator’s hatch. The last crewman, the rigger, sits in full view. No hatch existed above the rigger’s seat.

COURTESY OF USMC VIETNAM TANKER’S ASSOCIATION



COURTESY OF KYLE WATTS

as well. They were surrounded. Riensche grabbed the headset.

“Bravo 6, this is Bravo 9, we are under attack! Heavy small arms fire all around. We need help now!”

He dropped the radio and grabbed an M16 inside the cab. He popped up, half exposed in the TC hatch. A North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier flashed through the grass. Riensche fired three rounds before shifting his aim at more movement to his left. He adjusted aim again and again. They were everywhere. The first magazine drained quickly. He fumbled with a second. Bullets fragmented off the side of the retriever and cracked through the air. The concentration of fire adjusted onto him. Halfway through the next magazine, the rifle stopped. He dropped into the cab and tried to eject the round. His sweaty hands struggled to grasp the charging handle. He jammed his fingers inside the ejection port, trying to get at the stuck round. He gave up and threw the rifle aside.

Riensche’s eyes darted around the inside of the cab. What should he do next? His hands shook uncontrollably. His blouse bounced on his chest with each heartbeat. A vision of his wife, Laura, and their three boys overtook his mind. She huddled the older two close while the baby, only six weeks old when Harold left, screamed in her arms. Riensche recognized the scene around his forlorn family. He witnessed it far too many times while on Inspector-Instructor duty in San Francisco. They were in a cemetery. It was a military funeral. The meaning was clear. He was going to die.

“Oh, God, help me!”

He closed his eyes and tried to focus. His hands began to settle. His breathing slowed. The verbal recognition of his terror diminished its power. The resignation to his fate gave him clarity. He opened his eyes. The .50-cal. above him looked ready. He stood again to unleash hell.

A bullet destroyed the ammo belt leading into the big gun. Riensche broke it off and fed it back through. He reached down and scooped up the radio onto his head. If Co B was listening, he wanted to hear their reply. An NVA soldier appeared out of the grass 30 meters away. Riensche pivoted the gun and fired. The huge bullets shredded the soldier’s body before he fell. Riensche swung the gun toward the rear of the retriever, chasing another sprinting enemy. A three-round burst sent him tumbling out of sight, blocked from view by the boom of the crane. Bullets struck the front of the cab behind Riensche. He turned the gun back toward the front and fired at the unseen enemy. Suddenly, three enemy soldiers appeared above the

A retriever had three methods of recovery: a tow bar, a winch and a crane. In this photo, the crane is extended for use.

grass 50 meters away, heading toward the mound in the distance. Riensche fired a long burst in front of them. The soldiers ran into his fire and dropped. The grass where they fell shook violently as they writhed beneath it.

Despite the damage Riensche inflicted, the NVA maintained the intensity of the ambush. Enemy bullets passed over his head and under his arms, impacting the retriever all around. He waited for the round that would get him. A voice came through the headset.

“Bravo 9, Bravo 6, what’s your status?”
 “We are under attack! Near ambush, all around! I’m returning fire, I don’t know where my crew is! We need a reaction force out here now!”

“Roger that Bravo 9. Hold tight.”

Riensche swept fires toward the rear of the retriever again. The crane blocked his ability to cover this avenue of approach. Over the crane operator’s hatch, an M60 sat in a mount welded to the top of the cab. The maintenance chief two tours ahead of Riensche added the extra firepower for his retriever crew. It only further blocked Riensche’s view, but he knew the second machine gun would soon come into play.

“Bravo 9, Bravo 6. Be advised, I’ve been instructed it’s getting dark, and we can’t



COURTESY OF HAROLD RIENSCHÉ

send out a reaction force at night. Someone will be out to assist in the morning.”

Riensche’s heart sank. How could this be happening? They were leaving him out there to die.

“You be advised, there won’t be anyone left in the morning!!”

He dumped the headset. No one was coming so there was no point in talking to them. Riensche returned a rage of fire. Enemy rounds struck the ammo can again. The .50-cal. immediately stopped. Riensche tried to unjam the belt of ammo,

but it would not budge. Without more ammo cans, his heaviest weapon was knocked out of action.

Riensche jumped out of the hatch in full view of the enemy. He ran across the cab and removed the M60 from the mount. He peeked over the side of the retriever. A bloody hand reached out from under the fender. Riensche leaned further. The bloody hand became an arm, connected to a bloody body. Foster lay draped over a road wheel. He struggled desperately for a breath. His body had absorbed so



COURTESY OF HAROLD RIENSCHÉ

Harold Riensche’s M51 Heavy Recovery Vehicle, or as the Marines called it, “the retriever,” in Vietnam.



COURTESY OF HAROLD RIENSCHÉ

Riensche’s retriever back at headquarters for repairs after the ambush.

many rounds that Riensche dared not try to count.

“Mike!”

Foster strained his head upward. He connected his gaze with Riensche’s. The breath he fought for exhaled.

“Get some for me!”

Foster’s head slumped down, and his arm dropped limp. Riensche screamed and stood on top of the cab to resume his war.

With the M60 blazing in his hands, Riensche’s mind transported through time to his boyhood home in Nebraska. Standing on the front porch, Riensche watched the wheat fields flow in unison with the wind. Any sort of unnatural disturbance to the harmony stood out like a sore thumb. At 18, he left the farm and enlisted in the Marines. He spent two and a half years in the infantry before training as a mechanic. Now, standing atop the retriever, it seemed his entire life prepared him for this moment. The elephant grass swayed in the breeze, just like wheat. The NVA hiding beneath it gave themselves away with each movement. The M60 fit perfectly in Riensche’s hands, just as it had so many times before. His training took over and kept him in the fight.

He blew through a belt of ammo and started on a second. More NVA appeared from the grass heading toward the mound in the distance. Riensche cut them down and swiveled back to the opposite side of the retriever. The movement in the grass appeared closer each time he turned. AK-47 fire smacked the retriever and whizzed by him. He marveled that no rocket-propelled grenades came his way yet. Could that be why soldiers were sprinting for the mound?

Riensche finished a second belt and fed in a third. He resumed firing until the gun abruptly stopped. He looked down in time to see the barrel release and fall forward out of the receiver. Without thinking, Riensche snatched the smoking barrel out of the air. Adrenaline negated any pain, as the scorching metal seared his hand. He dropped the rest of the gun to reinsert the barrel.

A flash of movement caught his eye. An NVA soldier sprinted from the grass behind the retriever and disappeared under the rear spade. Riensche heard an entire magazine of AK-47 fire erupt beneath the vehicle.

The third ammo belt ended and Riensche put in a fourth. He grabbed the radio once more. He called out to Lt Ritch, less than a click away, for any help he could send.

“I’m the only one left and I’m running out of ammo!”

Riensche fired all around but eyed the

rear of the retriever. After a series of five-round bursts, the M60 stopped again. He opened the cover and found two rounds hopelessly jammed in the barrel. The M60 was done. Riensche reached down into the crane operator hatch and grabbed two grenades. He tossed one over both rear corners of the retriever, hoping to take out the enemy soldier who disappeared under the spade. He threw a few more into the grass for good measure.

Riensche located an M79 grenade launcher stashed in the cab with a bag of 30 high explosive rounds. One by one, he fired the grenades at anything that moved. The growing darkness played tricks on his eyes. Everything seemed to move. The bag depleted quickly. He dropped the M79 back into the cab and grabbed a case of unopened grenades. As he struggled to unwind the tape from the packaging, another NVA soldier appeared. He stopped 20 yards away and leveled his AK. Riensche drew his pistol from its shoulder holster and fired. The .45-cal. bullet smashed through the soldier’s face,

tumbling him backward. Riensche followed him into the grass with several more rounds.

With the immediate threat neutralized, Riensche returned to the box of grenades. They were his only hope. The .50-cal. was useless. The M60 and M16 were done. The M79 was out. He had less than 20 rounds left for his pistol. All that remained were the grenades and his Ka-Bar. He found unexpected difficulty unwrapping the grenades. His nerves rose to the extreme once more. The past 20 minutes were the most brutal and eternal of his life. He felt it about to end.

He slipped a grenade out of its sleeve and tossed it into the grass. As he worked on a second, he realized the incoming fire had ceased. He paused and studied the area around him. A cacophony of ring tones and racing heartbeats filled his ears, but nothing more. Silence diffused through the grass. Harmony reasserted itself over the sway. Could it really be over?

He ran around the top of the retriever,

**He called out to Lt Ritch, less than a click away,
for any help he could send.**

“I’m the only one left and I’m running out of ammo!”



In less than 30 minutes of nonstop firing, Harold Riensche used virtually all available ammunition for each of the pictured weapons as he fought for his life and the lives of his crew.

COURTESY OF KYLE WATTS



COURTESY OF BOB SKELLS

Sgt Al Soto in the commander's cupola of his M48A3 tank.

checking each side for the enemy. What happened to his crew? Riensche dismounted and looked under the retriever. Walkley lay across the undercarriage. His bullet-riddled body was motionless.

“Is anyone alive under there?”
Craig Ammon responded immediately. “We’re under here, Chief! Walkley’s dead! I’m hit bad, and Dorsett is too!”
“Can you crawl out the front?”
“No, can’t move!”

“Alright, I’ll back it off you. Hold on!”
Riensche rolled Foster’s body off the road wheel and dragged him away from the retriever. He tried to grab Foster’s belt,

from, but it was friendly. He immediately recognized Sgt Al Soto standing in the commander’s cupola.

“Bravo 9, I have you in sight! Where do you want me?”

“That mound to your right! Light it up!”
The turret rotated. A long, beautiful rod of flame spewed out and set the mound a blaze. The inferno brought Riensche a sense of peace. Something about napalm always shut Charlie up.

He backed the retriever off the crew. A second tank appeared. Both must have come from Lt Ritch’s position. In the quickly fading dusk, Riensche and the

Riensche could not believe what he was hearing. First, no one would send a reaction force to help when he needed it most. Now, this pilot was going to leave without taking Ammon and Dorsett.

but could not close his hand. He stopped and turned his palms upward. Huge blisters had formed on all five fingers and palm of his left hand. Now that he noticed the burns, pain set in. No time for that now. Riensche unsheathed his Ka-Bar. He sliced gashes down each finger, and across his palm. He squeezed out the fluid and pus, allowing him to close the hand again. He dragged Foster away, then climbed back inside the retriever.

He called for an emergency medevac of his wounded, then slid into the driver’s seat. Movement around the mound 300 meters off captured his attention. A tank appeared—a flame tank. Riensche did not know who it belonged to, or where it came

tank crewmen tended the wounds of Ammon and Dorsett. They were both in critical condition.

A medevac chopper finally arrived, circling low over the scene. Riensche climbed back in the TC hatch and put on the headset. The pilot’s voice came through.

“Bravo 9, we’ve got you in sight. Is it a secure LZ? Over.”

“Well, it’s as secure as it’s going to get right now!”

“Roger Bravo 9. I can’t land unless it’s a secure LZ.”

Riensche could not believe what he was hearing. First, no one would send a reaction force to help when he needed it

most. Now, this pilot was going to leave without taking Ammon and Dorsett.

“I’ve got two WIA in critical condition! You have to land! They have to go NOW!”

“Bravo 9, I can’t land unless it’s a secure LZ.”

Riensche grabbed the .50-cal., and made a show of racking the bolt. He swiveled in the chopper’s direction and angled the barrel skyward.

“You land it, or I will!”

A long pause followed the ultimatum. “Roger, Bravo 9. Pop smoke in the LZ, over.”

Riensche heaved a smoke grenade into the grass. The Marines quickly loaded Ammon and Dorsett into the chopper. Riensche and the dead would have to wait for evacuation in the morning.

Darkness overwhelmed the area before the chopper lifted off. Lt Ritch’s two mined tanks limped into the position shortly after. They arranged security and settled in for the night. An AC-47 Spooky gunship circled overhead, lighting the darkness with flares. Riensche waited on high alert, scanning the grass. It flowed as softly as the wheat.

At first light, the tank crews set to work short-tracking the retriever. Another medevac chopper arrived for Walkley and Foster. Despite his burns, Riensche refused evacuation. A platoon of Marine infantry provided security as the tankers finished buttoning everything up. They connected tow bars from Al Soto’s flame tank and the retriever to Lt Ritch’s two limping tanks. Despite its own wounds, the retriever would still get one back to Dong Ha. Riensche climbed in the driver seat a final time to lead the procession. As they passed through Gio Linh and headed south on Route One, he could not help but notice the retriever had never run so well.

Following the ambush, life in the company quickly returned to normal. The pace of operations never slowed. No formal after action was ever conducted. Lt Ritch and any other Marine involved that day proceeded directly to the next operation, without time to dwell on what happened. Riensche wished he could move on so easily. Two of his Marines were dead. All of them should have been. His unit had decided he was not worth the effort of saving. He went through Walkley and Foster’s personal belongings, separating out the things to send home to their families. Each item set aside reminded him of their absence. Each item reminded him how expendable they had been—how expendable he had been.

He finished the remaining five months of his tour. Before leaving, Riensche received orders to the drill field at Parris



COURTESY OF HAROLD RIENSCHÉ

Gen Leonard Chapman, 24th Commandant of the Marine Corps, awards Harold Riensche the Navy Cross at the Marines Memorial Club in San Francisco in 1970.

Island. He had heard the rumors about this duty. Married Marines going to the drill field came back divorced Marines. The thought of moving Laura and the boys from one coast to the other felt like a nightmare. After two tours in Vietnam, they had endured enough. They needed a father and husband more than the Corps needed another staff sergeant. Riensche took his discharge and left active duty. He moved his family to Petaluma, Calif., north of San Francisco, and joined the reserve unit at Treasure Island. The city of Oakland brought him on as a heavy equipment mechanic. He tried to fit in and keep his mouth shut. He provided for his family, and that was all that mattered now. The past was the past. It haunted him still.

A year later, Riensche learned he was awarded the Navy Cross for defending the retriever. He stood at attention while General Leonard Chapman, the 24th Commandant of the Marine Corps, pinned the medal on his chest at the Marines Memorial Club in San Francisco. A large

crowd of Marines, civilians and press looked on. Riensche looked through them.

“Get some for me.”

Foster. Walkley.

“Under here, Chief!”

Ammon. Dorsett. What was the point of their sacrifice?

Oh God, please, help me.

Riensche ended the night with a bottle of Jack Daniels. It eased the pain. It clouded the memory. Many bottles followed, helping blot out the past.

How powerful is time against wounds from within? A veteran’s fight to come home from war can only begin once they return. Time becomes an ally, promising relief. Vietnam had stolen a piece of Harold Riensche. Part of him died with his Marines in March of 1969. Could time revitalize the missing pieces and make him whole once more?

Five years passed. Riensche persevered down the road supporting his family. The U.S. government scrapped the war and pulled out of Vietnam. He watched

on TV as Saigon fell to the NVA and helicopters evacuated refugees from the American embassy. What was the point of his service? The news drove him further inside himself and away from what he lost.

Sixteen years passed. Riensche retired as a master gunnery sergeant from the reserve unit on Treasure Island. Young Marines noticed the Navy Cross on his chest and immediately stood taller in his presence. For Riensche, the medal dragged him back to the worst chapter of his life, killing more of him inside.

Thirty years passed. Vietnam began to fade. The future looked bright. Riensche finally neared retirement from the city of Oakland. He and Laura purchased land in Montana near their middle son, Ken. The new location promised new beginnings. While they built their future home, Ken was diagnosed with liver cancer. He passed away just one month later. In the midst of their grief, Riensche received a phone call from an old Marine. The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association (VTA) planned a reunion in Minneapolis. They wanted him to attend. Riensche turned them down. He could not think about discussing Vietnam after losing his son.

Forty-two years passed. The VTA invited Riensche again to their 7th reunion in San Diego. Laura convinced him to combine the trip with a visit to their youngest son, who was living in southern California. They spent most of the time with their son but occasionally dropped by the reunion. Riensche did not make it past the check-in table before fellow tankers recognized him and approached. He felt surprised by his interest at reconnecting with familiar faces.

In 2013, 44 years after the ambush, Riensche attended the next VTA reunion in San Antonio. Knowledge of his Navy Cross had much the same effect on the other attendees as it had years earlier on the young Marines at Treasure Island. On the first day, former Lt Bob Skeels approached the Rienschés at their table.

“Hell of a thing you did that day, Harold. I’m just sorry we didn’t make it all the way out to you that night.”

Riensche furrowed his brow.

“What do you mean, make it out to me?”

“With the reaction force. We tried to get to you, but hit two mines on the way.”

Skeels explained how three of his tanks sat in the maintenance shop at Co B HQ that afternoon. The company commander, Captain Jay Miller, received Riensche’s distress call and immediately ordered Skeels to get his tanks rolling. Al Soto, one of Skeels’ tank commanders, burst through the door of his hooch, red-eyed and ready to take the lead. They scrounged



COURTESY OF HAROLD RIENSCHÉ

Riensche, left, sits next to Bravo Co CO, Capt Jay Miller, in country.

up whatever tanks they could get—two gun tanks and the company flame tank. Soto shot out of the gate in the flame tank, with Skeels trailing close behind at top speed. They were less than 10 miles away from Riensche’s position.

The reaction force got within 500 meters of the ambush. Skeels could hear the explosions and gunfire in the distance. He could not make radio contact with Riensche to let him know they were on the way. Suddenly, two of his tanks hit mines, blowing apart the track. Skeels yelled out to Soto in the lead to continue and make it to Riensche on his own. Darkness enveloped the damaged tanks before the Marines could get them buttoned up. Skeels arranged his two tanks and six Marines in the best security posture he could to wait out the night. In the distance, flares lit up the sky over the ambush site. The gunfire had ceased. He prayed the retriever crew was OK.

At first light, they repaired the damage and drove the rest of the distance to the ambush site. Everyone was already gone. Skeels exited his tank and surveyed the scene. He saw the hole in the ground where the mine stopped the retriever. An NVA soldier lay dead in the grass not far off. Riensche’s huge .50-cal. bullets left the body in a grotesque state. Skeels walked a large circle around the hole. Mangled dead lay around the entire 360 degrees. He counted 13 bodies, with blood trails and drag marks revealing a higher number.

Riensche silently listened to Skeels’ story. Larry Parshall, the driver of Skeels’ tank, corroborated the narrative. How could this have happened, yet Riensche never knew? What about the message over

the radio that no one was coming? They tried to work out the details. Everything about that day seemed so chaotic, and the distance in time left memories hazy. Riensche knew now, though, without question, they had not abandoned him.

Following the San Antonio reunion, Laura pressured Riensche to write down his story of the ambush. She saw in his eyes a spark of something that had been missing. Could Harold be whole again? He tried to put pen to paper. Words came slowly. He spent nearly half a century erasing the day. Recovering it now seemed more impossible than a tank submerged in quicksand. Memories came and went. Flashbacks woke him at night as his brain divulged details of the day. He rose from bed each time and recorded the memories. He wanted to face them.

Two more years passed. Riensche once again attended a VTA reunion, this time in Washington, D.C. He brought with him 2,500 words on paper representing 2,500 battles won. Each brought him closer to what he had lost. He shared his story with the other tankers. They received it better than he could have imagined. They validated his facts and memories of the day. He sat for a video interview, recounting the details of the ambush. Several years earlier, this would have been unthinkable. Now, he was at peace. He understood the role of time in his breakthrough, affording him the distance



Lt Bob Skeels with members of his platoon. Sgt Al Soto stands on the far right. (Photo courtesy of Bob Skeels)

needed to heal. The true power came not from time itself, however, but through facing each memory unearthed from the past. March 24, 1969, meant so many different things to the Marines involved. Riensche saw the power of prayer and the hand of God over him. Knowing about the reaction force restored his faith in the Marine Corps and the meaning of “Semper Fidelis.” Pete Ritch understood that Riensche saved more Marines than just Craig Ammon and Jim Dorsett. The ambush was waiting for him and his tanks. If Riensche had not done what he did, Ritch and his Marines might not have survived. Bob Skeels caught a glimpse of the epic one-man stand Riensche made defending the retriever. My God, what must he have endured? To all those who arrived that day and witnessed the scene, the Navy Cross could never adequately recognize his heroism.

Riensche left the reunion and returned to the house in Montana. He dropped his bags and walked onto the back deck. The sun dipped low over pine-covered hills in the distance. A gentle harmony held sway over the boughs. He closed his eyes and drew a deep breath of fresh mountain air. The quiet mirrored that in his soul. Finally, he was home.

Riensche saw the power of prayer and the hand of God over him. Knowing about the reaction force restored his faith in the Marine Corps and the meaning of “Semper Fidelis.”

EPILOGUE

On March 14, 2019, just 10 days prior to the 50th anniversary of the retriever ambush, the first Master Gunnery Sergeant Harold A. Riensche Award was presented to the honor graduate of M1A1 Tank System Mechanic class 2-19. The commander of Marine Detachment, Fort Benning, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Campbell, named the award in honor of Riensche following an initiative to develop his entry-level Marines' understanding of Marine armor history.

"Riensche's story could not be a better example of what a true tank mechanic does, is expected to do, and without any glory that goes with it," Cambell explained. "Going out behind enemy lines and being a Marine first, fighting the enemy while doing his actual job of recovering a vehicle. He is the true expectation of what every Marine tanker has of a mechanic, and there is no better example of what they do."

Lance Corporal Matt Eidson became the first recipient of this prestigious recognition. Eidson learned about Harold Riensche at the same time he discovered he would graduate at the top of his class.

"To me, it sounded like a Medal of Honor Citation," Eidson reflected on Riensche's story. "It's just heroic. You read stories or citations of Marines and other

servicemembers like that in the past and realize those are some big shoes to fill."

New mechanics coming to the school-house now receive a class on the namesake of their honor graduate award. The detachment is currently creating a memorial to Riensche, displaying his photo, citation and the names of all future recipients of the award. Fifty years later, the story of Riensche's one-man stand continues to inspire and impact Marines. LtCol Campbell and his staff ensure every new mechanic knows his name and his place in the history of Marine tankers. For those joining the armor community, these are big shoes to fill, indeed.

Author's note: Thank you to Harold and Laura Riensche for your commitment to each other and our Corps. Your service and example have inspired generations of Marines, including this author.

Author's bio: Kyle Watts is a former Marine communications officer, and an award-winning contributing author for Leatherneck. He lives in Richmond, Va., with his wife and three children. He is the founder of Battlesight Zero, an online publication with the mission of honoring military veterans by telling their stories. For more information, visit www.bzo.history.com.



COURTESY OF FORT BENNING MARDET

LCpl Matt Eidson received the first MGySgt Harold A. Riensche award as the honor graduate of his class at the M1A1 Tank System Mechanic class at Fort Benning in March 2019.



COURTESY OF USMC VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION

Harold and Laura Riensche at the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Reunion in Washington, D.C., in 2015.



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Tanks & Medals of Valor

HAROLD RIENSCHKE Navy Cross

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War
SERVCE: US Marine Corps
RANK: Staff Sergeant
UNIT: 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division (Rein.), FMF
ACTION DATE: March 24, 1969
CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Staff Sergeant Harold A. Riensche (MCSN: 1880764), United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Maintenance Chief with Company B, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in the Republic of Vietnam on 24 March 1969. Staff Sergeant Riensche and his four-man crew were embarked aboard an M51 Tank Retriever assigned the recovery of a disabled tank located near Dong Ha, when their vehicle detonated a mine and sustained extensive damage. While repairing the retriever, the Marines came under a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire from a North Vietnamese Army platoon occupying well-concealed emplacements in the tall elephant grass nearby. In the initial burst of fire which came from all sides, two of Staff Sergeant Riensche's crew were killed and two wounded, leaving him the sole defender of the retriever. Although in a dangerously exposed position, he commenced returning fire with a mounted .50 caliber machine gun. When a hostile round rendered the weapon inoperable, he moved across the top of the tracked vehicle to an M-60 machine gun, removed it from its mount and, standing in full view of the enemy, continued firing at the advancing North Vietnamese.



When the barrel vibrated loose and fell from his weapon, Staff Sergeant Riensche caught the red-hot cylinder in midair and, while reinserting it, sustained serious burns to his hands. Ignoring his painful injury, he resolutely resumed firing all around his vehicle until the machine gun malfunctioned. While attempting to correct the difficulty, he observed a hostile soldier who had maneuvered to a point next to the recovery vehicle and quickly killed the man with his .45 caliber pistol. Unable to pinpoint the location of each North Vietnamese soldier in the gathering darkness, he then commenced throwing hand

grenades in all directions, forcing the enemy to withdraw. Following their retreat with grenade launcher fire, Staff Sergeant Riensche, although still a very vulnerable target and vastly outnumbered, tenaciously manned his hazardous position and continued firing on possible hostile emplacements until a friendly tank arrived to render assistance. His heroic and decisive action inspired all who observed him and saved the lives of two fellow Marines. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty in the face of grave personal danger, Staff Sergeant Riensche upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

ROBERT M WALKLEY Silver Star

HOME OF RECORD: Ionia, Michigan
AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War
SERVCE: US Marine Corps
RANK: Lance Corporal
UNIT: 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division (Rein.), FMF
ACTION DATE: March 24, 1969
CITATION:

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the Silver Star Medal (Posthumously) to Robert M. Walkley (2365067), Lance Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with Company B, 3d Tank Battalion, 3d Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on March 24, 1969. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Lance Corporal Walkley upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.



An Additional Story

Editor's Note: We recently had a new member join the VTA. When I saw his membership application and noted that he was an FMF Corpsman, I pick up the telephone and called him. "Doc" Finch explained that when he reported for duty there was already another Corpsman assigned to Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks and because the original Corpsman was able to take care of the medical needs of the company personnel, Doc Finch decided to volunteer to be a tank crewman (loader).

Below is a recent email exchange between the Doc and Bob Skeels who was a platoon leader with Bravo Co.

Doc Finch writes: Hello Lieutenant—I was a Corpsman with Bravo from Dec '68 through July '69 and was riding as a loader on the tank that was towing another mine damaged tank behind us when all this went down. As I recall, two tanks went to help the retriever and we stayed behind until we could get there later. Once we finally got there SSgt Riensche's hands were in bad shape from burns so I wrapped them but he refused any type of pain killer. I seem to remember our tank driver's name as Jennrich, Jennrische ... something like that ... it has been a long time.

Anyhow, this is just a note to say "Hey!" I once had a polaroid of my last night at Bravo with Lt. Ritch, SSgt Jewel and SSgt Riensche having a beer in the staff hooch but I misplaced it somewhere over the years. It was an honor to serve with such a great bunch of men. Semper Fi—Doc Finch

Bob Skeels replies: Great to hear from you, Doc ... and THANKS for your service in Vietnam. So, you must have been attached to Pete Ritch's Bravo Company tank platoon and at that time you guys hit some mines with two tanks down just south of DMZ near the Gio Linh Combat Base in Leatherneck Square. The ARVNs that were in the area would not help you with security. Fortunately, you had a radio contact with Harold Riensche and he said that he and his tank retriever crew would be on their way to assist you on this March 24, 1969.

I left our Bravo Company's rear at Vinh Dai upon getting Harold's transmission of his mine hit and enemy ambush that was close to your 3rd platoon position. So, I left immediately with two gun tanks and a flame tank (my platoon sergeant Al Soto as TC) on a quick reaction. It was just before dark

going through Cam Lo an up Rt#1 and then east to Harold's position where we hit two mines maybe 1/4 of a click from Harold. So, I then sent the flame tank over to Harold and Sgt Soto with crew assisted just as Harold was running out of ammo!!!

God bless, Harold, for his heroic action and outstanding Marine performance protecting his crew in that horrific ambush. The next morning, we limped in with my two mined tanks and counted 13 enemy KIA that had paid the price for their ambush on this Marine's tank retriever.

Great to make contact with you, Doc. I hope to see you at the next VTA reunion in San Diego. Please stay healthy & have a great Christmas holiday.

SF brother, Bob Skeels,
1st platoon, Bravo Co,
3rd tank Bn, 3rd Mar Div

Tanker Word Search Puzzles

Jim Coan writes: Dan Shaw is the Commandant of my Marine Corps League Det. He likes coming up with Word Search puzzles. I gave him a list of 20 words that tankers use and he came up with the below puzzle. If you are interested in Dan creating your very own puzzle you can contact me or Dan at our email addresses—Jim Coan: zzjimco@aol.com

Dan Shaw writes: My intent is to sell custom Word Search puzzles for a fee. They can be for businesses, clubs, churches, family members, special occasions, etc. I can personalize logos, images, etc. Whatever anyone desires. I have already done a St. Patrick's Day puzzle for the Landmark Cafe.

Dan Shaw: chemo38@gmail.com

To our readers: Can you find each of the tanker words that are hidden inside of the puzzle that also appear in the list below?

The answers are on the back cover.

BREECH	GYPSYRACK	PERISCOPE	TORSION BAR
CUPOLA	INFANTRYPHONE	ROADWHEEL	TRACK
DOZER	NEUTRALSTEER	SEARCHLIGHT	VISION BLOCK
DRIVESPROCKET	ONTOS	SPONSONBOX	ZIPPO

G	O	X	K	C	O	L	B	N	O	I	S	I	V	D
C	Y	P	K	C	A	R	T	F	T	U	G	D	P	H
O	E	P	K	J	F	L	D	Q	S	C	D	R	E	T
T	S	N	S	J	B	O	U	S	E	E	T	I	N	I
D	P	E	Q	Y	Z	P	O	O	A	A	R	V	O	P
U	O	U	Z	E	R	A	Z	T	R	Z	Z	E	H	E
K	N	T	R	H	Q	A	G	N	C	I	F	S	P	R
Z	S	R	O	V	V	B	C	O	H	A	X	P	Y	I
Q	O	A	A	I	J	W	E	K	L	B	N	R	R	S
B	N	L	D	R	A	B	N	O	I	S	R	O	T	C
R	B	S	W	L	V	Z	P	P	G	D	O	C	N	O
E	O	T	H	L	T	U	I	J	H	V	N	K	A	P
E	X	E	E	Z	C	S	J	P	T	L	U	E	F	E
C	A	E	E	A	S	K	W	N	P	B	Z	T	N	Y
H	E	R	L	L	Y	B	J	Q	U	O	H	Z	I	O

Chronology of My U.S. Marine Corps Service

BY KENT S. HUGHES

April 1969

In April I received promotion to First Lieutenant. We moved by road to Hill 55 (Camp Muir), in Quang Nam Province (See Dai Loc map sheet 6640 IV, coordinates AT967617), where we were under operational control of Bravo Company, 1st Tanks, operating in support of the 7th Marine Regiment, which was headquartered there.

While my platoon was not at that time under the operational control of BLT 3/26, the BLT was also based on Hill 55 on "Finger 3," so that shortly after arriving on the hill, I attended a memorial service on March 30 held by the BLT for the 83 men killed in action during the period January 13-March 23, 1969 (specifically, Operation Defiant Measure/Russell Beach 13 January-9 February 1969, and Operation Bold Mariner/Taylor Common 10 February-23 March 1969). Three of the KIA, including a staff sergeant, had been members of the tank platoon killed by "bouncing Betty" antipersonnel mines on Operation Bold Mariner exactly one month before I arrived in Vietnam. I kept the printed program for this service.

On its last page, following the list of KIA, the program for the memorial service provided a list of the following officers (and, in two cases, staff non-commissioned officers), most of them unit leaders, of the battalion:

Commanding Officer	LtCol. E.W. Snelling
Executive Officer	Maj. W.T. Macy
Sergeant Major	SgtMaj. J.T. Thompson
H&S Company	2ndLt. L.R. Linnartz
Company I	Capt. G.B. Meegan
Company K	Capt. R.D. Barba
Company L	1stLt. D.R. McBirney
Company M	1stLt. D.E. Crawford
C Battery	Capt. M.E. Popelka
W Battery	1stLt. M.C. Bunton
Amtrack (sic) Platoon	1stLt. T.W. Hribar

Engineer Platoon	1stLt. H.P. Adams
Motor Transport Platoon	2ndLt. P.W. Esplin
Reconnaissance Platoon	2ndLt. W.G. Deatherage
Shore Party Platoon	GySgt. F.H. Lackey
Tank Platoon	2ndLt. K.S. Hughes

C Battery was a battery of 105 mm towed howitzers, while W ("Whiskey") Battery was a battery of 4.2in. mortars.

While on Hill 55, in addition to the flame tank and search and clear operations described below, we provided perimeter security and sometimes provided security for mine sweeps conducted every morning on the road north from the hill.

One day, Staff Sergeant McCabe and I rode with my driver to Hoi An, where we visited Charlie Company, 1st Tanks. One day, I drove one of my tanks from the B Company, 1st Tanks tank park to Finger 3 where 3/26 was headquartered. I climbed out of the driver's hatch and walked to the S-4 tent, where I found the S-4, Captain Turrietta, sitting with his feet propped up on a table. He was eating one of those cheese snacks that include not only a small plastic package holding the cheese, but a little wooden stick to use to scoop it out. As I entered, cheerfully and somewhat proudly telling him that I had just driven over in one of my own tanks, he looked up from his cheese snack and said, "I don't give a shit!" Then he grinned and laughed.

Immediately south of Hill 55 was a wooden bridge called the "Golden Gate Bridge" over the Song Ai Nghia. About 300 meters south of the bridge was a small village. One night, troops providing security for the bridge had heard talk coming from brush on the south side of the bridge. In response, on a subsequent evening approaching dusk, three M-67A2 flame tanks arrived from 1st Tank Battalion, crossed

the hill, and moved across the bridge in column. When the third tank had crossed the bridge, the three tanks executed a simultaneous right turn, placing them on line. They then burned on a 300-meter front between the bridge and the village. In the meantime, as part of the plan, I moved my own tank to a position on the hill overlooking the bridge, so that we could provide covering fire if needed, as well as take under fire any NVA who fled the flames. Unfortunately, there was no evidence of enemy troops caught in the fire, and we secured the operation.

One day, after obtaining cases of beer and soda and a small refrigerator up in the Da Nang area, my jeep driver and I headed back to the hill with our payload in my jeep's small trailer. At some point we took a wrong turn and ended up in the "Dodge City" area, where the road had ended, becoming more of a trail, and South Vietnamese soldiers, obviously in the middle of an operation, were encamped. There were CH-47 helicopters landing and taking off with South Vietnamese troops, and we watched as a wounded (or worse) ARVN soldier was being carried toward us in a poncho from the direction in which we had been going, by two other soldiers, who, presumably, had not carried him very far. My jeep driver and I, laughing nervously at our mistake and with the refrigerator bouncing noisily up and down in the trailer, turned around and retraced our route to the point where we could take the correct route back to our hill.

While based on Hill 55, I used to get my hair cut by a Vietnamese woman barber.

In late April, we operated in support of 3rd Battalion 1st Marines on a search and clear operation that proceeded in two phases: 1) moving across the Golden Gate Bridge and then

southwest of Hill 55 into the Dodge City area south of Route 4, and then 2) north to Route 4, then west into the Thuong Duc Valley ("Happy Valley") along Route 4 via Hill 37 (See Dai Loc map sheet 6640 IV, coordinates AT916582), where we stopped for an hour or two, past Hill 65, and south across the Song Vu Gia into the northern Arizona Territory near Minh Tan. (I am uncertain of the river crossing point, but it was within grid squares AT8154, AT8255, or AT8355.)

About noon on April 26, the day the operation was to begin, we were standing on our tanks on Hill 55 waiting for 3/1 to arrive by truck when I saw arriving on the hill a PX truck from Freedom Hill PX near Da Nang. I purchased 20 hamburgers and Cokes from the truck and distributed them to the members of my five tank crews for a small touch of America before going into combat. A short time later, 3/1 arrived on the hill by truck, and we moved out with them.

In the first phase of this operation moving south of Route 4 into the Dodge City area, I led my Heavy Section in support of Kilo Company, 3/1, while my Light Section was with India Company. When one of my tanks developed starter problems as we were setting up for the night one afternoon at about 1630, requiring that it be jump-started, I spoke to Kilo Company's C.O., a Capt. Robert Weeks, who was a heavy-set "mustang" (previously an enlisted man). I told him that I needed to keep the tank's engine running all night so that it could move and shoot if we were attacked that night. He initially denied my request out of concern that the noise generated would attract enemy fire. When I later walked back over to him and forcefully repeated my recommendation, he reluctantly relented. Early the following morning, when I walked over from my tank to see him, he noted that we had not been attacked during the night, despite the tank engine noise. In a generous gesture, he then had his radio operator, who had been making

him a cup of C-ration coffee, give me the captain's cup of coffee with creamer. (The "cup" was, in fact, a C-ration can with the partly opened top formed into a makeshift handle.) The captain was taking care of me before taking care of himself in a small gesture that I will always remember.

Near the end of the second phase of this six-day operation, after crossing into the northern Arizona from Route 4, the S-3 (Operations Officer) of 3/1, a major, tactically mis-used us against my advice while moving into the Arizona. The S-3 told me to pull three of my tanks quickly up to the Song Vu Gia's northern bank, and have them elevate their main guns and blindly fire HE rounds to the south over the bluff overlooking the southern side of the river. Because of the height of the bluff and the resulting high angle of fire that was required, this would have meant firing probably a couple of thousand meters into the Arizona without knowing where the rounds would impact. (Certainly, the S-3 had no idea where they would land, either.) When I began to tell the S-3 that the flat trajectory weapons' rounds would be impacting deep into the Arizona, and that I would have no idea where, the major snapped at me, "Don't argue with me, Lieutenant, just do as I say," or words to that effect, and I ordered my section to crank off the rounds as directed. Subsequently, we forded the river at a shallow crossing point and climbed the southern banks to enter a beautiful, freshly tilled field, beyond which lay a thick tree line. One of my tanks then broke down. I radioed Capt. Kenneth Zitz, C.O. of Bravo Company, 1st Tanks, requesting that my platoon be pulled off the operation. I described the significant towing and security requirements to evacuate the down tank (one to tow and at a minimum of two to provide security, as tanks were always employed in sections of at least two tanks) and told him that the S-3 was mis-using us. Capt. Zitz granted my request, and we moved by road back to Hill 55, one of my tanks towing the broken-down tank. I subse-

quently received a call on my tank radio from the S-3 indicating his battalion was taking fire from the tree line and requesting our return, but I indicated we had been pulled off the operation.

While in the field, we ate C-rations, known as "C-rats" or "C's." Out of the 12 individual meals in a case of "C's," ham and eggs was my favorite, as it also was for each of my crewmembers. As a consequence, each of us took turns, thereby getting to eat his favorite meal every fourth time that it was available. I normally ate mine cold from the can, although I occasionally heated it with a heat tablet ("heat tab"). At night, I slept in the "gypsy rack" on the back of the turret on top of "Willy Peter" (waterproof) bags filled with utilities and other personal gear. My loader slept on the armor plate over the engine, the gunner slept under the gun inside the turret, and the driver slept on a stretcher placed over the driver's hatch. At night we took turns on watch in the cupola. When I rode in my tank, I stood on top of my seat, which I had adjusted to one of its lowest positions. I adjusted the "TC's hatch" so that it was partly raised behind me to serve as a shield for my back. Going to the head was managed by getting off the tank, walking a short distance to the rear of the tank along the marks on the ground made by its tracks (making the assumption that the weight of the tank would have set off any landmines), and digging a "cat hole" with an entrenching tool (shovel). Toilet paper was supplied with our C-rations.

May 1969

On May 4, my platoon returned to operational control of BLT 3/26 for the remainder of my tour. At this time BLT 3/26 completed Operation Oklahoma Hills and became the Amphibious Reserve for III MAF. The average monthly strength of BLT 3/26 in May was 64 Marine officers, 1,669 Marine enlisted men, 6 Navy officers, and 83 Navy enlisted men. My platoon moved by road to Deep Water Pier in Da Nang and embarked the following day >>

on the dock landing ship U.S.S. Alamo, LSD 33. The Alamo was part of Amphibious Ready Group Bravo transporting SLF Bravo and consisting also of the amphibious assault ship U.S.S. Valley Forge, LPH 8, the flagship for SLF Bravo; the attack transport U.S.S. Paul Revere, LPA 248; and (possibly) the attack cargo ship U.S.S. Tulare, LKA 112. My roommate on the Alamo was Lt. Cliff Henes, Antitank (Ontos) Platoon Commander of BLT 3/26. The skipper of the Alamo was a Capt. William L. Harris, Jr., whom I took into the ship's well deck one day and gave a tour of my tank. A Naval Aviator who reportedly had previously served as Operations Officer on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Forrestal, he was acquiring deep draft experience as skipper of the Alamo—a prerequisite for consideration for promotion to the rank of admiral. With a gleam in my eye, I told Captain Harris that, as a platoon commander with five tanks under my command, I felt a bit the way I imagined a Navy commodore with ships under his command must feel! Captain Harris, chuckling at my comparison, was kind enough not to mention to me the live, captured North Vietnamese Army RPG-7 hanging on the wall inside the turret of my tank I also gave tours to the Alamo's Executive Officer and three of its junior officers.

In the Alamo's well deck, two of my tanks were "pre-loaded" in two LCM-8 "Mike boat" landing craft floating in the well deck forward of the ship's Landing Craft Utility ("LCU") and two LARCs (amphibious wheeled vehicles resembling the DUKW amphibious trucks used in World War II). Forward of the "Mike boats" were 10 amtracs, then my three other tanks, then five Ontos. The ship's Engineering Officer playfully nicknamed me "Tanks" and would announce my entering the ship's wardroom for meals by hitting a spoon on a pitcher and calling out "Tanks, arriving!"

We sailed around in the South China Sea off the coast of South Vietnam. I made daily trips by helicopter to and from the Valley Forge for BLT meet-

ings. One of the first days that I went aboard the "Valley," one of the other lieutenants gave me a paperback book that he and a couple of other officers had been saving for me from among a bunch of books distributed by Special Services. Filled with photographs of tanks, it was Panzer Division, the Mailed Fist by Maj. KJ. Macksey, and, while I no longer have that very copy, I do have a duplicate. On another day aboard the Valley Forge, I sat at lunch with Lt. Chris Tibbs, the S-2A, one of only two other officers in the battalion from my Basic School class. He had been the Platoon Leader of 2d Platoon, India Company, and liked to carry a Thompson submachinegun, undoubtedly because it looked "cool." He and I commiserated about the problem of well-meaning field grade officers who had had no combat experience as company grade officers and, now in charge of directing the tactical movement of subordinate units, did not appreciate what it was like to move a small unit on the ground in combat.

One night aboard the Alamo, reveille was sounded at midnight for a "VERTREP" (vertical replenishment by helicopter). The replenishment ship and its two Navy UH-46's finally arrived at 0330, and my troops helped other personnel unload the cargo nets released by the helicopters until 0500. I had to arouse the Navy ensign leading a SEAL team, which was sleeping or pretending to be asleep on deck, so that he would get them, too, to help out with this unwelcome but necessary task. On another occasion, we watched as the Valley Forge underwent vertical replenishment by the U.S.S. Mars (AFS 1).

One day, the Alamo had a "smoker" (boxing between Marines and sailors who volunteered) followed by a cook-out on the flight deck. I noticed that the naval officers, as was their custom, were first in line and ate before their men, whereas we Marine Officers, as was our custom, went last in line and ate after our men. Some naval officers, not being familiar with our customs, were getting in line for "seconds" before we ate, were

astonished to see us still waiting for the last of our troops to eat, and encouraged us to get in line, but I told them that Marine officers always eat after their troops. I took considerable glee in their puzzled expressions.

Amphibious raids on May 11 on Hour Glass Island (south of Hoi An in Quang Nai Province) and on May 25 on a place south of the Cua Viet River and west of Wunder Beach in Quang Tri Province), which were planned with 24 hours or less notice, were cancelled at the last minute.

While we had been at An Hoa in March, PFC Guyton, a troublemaker in my platoon, had run into the bunker during a rocket attack, rather than having run to his assigned tank, as standing orders required. The next day I had ordered him to dig a trench as unofficial punishment, and he had refused to comply with this order. Aboard the Valley Forge, I took PFC Guyton to Company, then Battalion, Office Hours, types of non-judicial punishment, where he was awarded three days on bread and water in the ship's brig by Lt. Col. Snelling. Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, such a punishment could only be awarded while aboard ship.

In mid-May I received homemade tollhouse cookies from Susan Heckscher, wife of my roommate at St. Andrew's. I also received a bottle of Worcestershire sauce from Mrs. Norton, my sister Abby's godmother, in response to my request when she promised to send me whatever I wanted. Mrs. Norton, widow of a Navy captain, was an extremely nice lady who, among other things, was a member of the exclusive Acorn Club in Philadelphia. The Worcestershire sauce came beautifully gift wrapped from a store on Rittenhouse Square. I later used it regularly on my "C-rats"

When informed by Major McHenry, our Battalion S-3, that, upon our moving to new positions ashore, I would be required to assign both of the tanks in my platoon which were equipped with Zenon searchlights to

guard the "hootch" of the Regimental Commander of the 26th Marines, I felt compelled to ask respectfully to see Lt. Col. Snelling concerning this waste of my vehicles and men. I did so in a private meeting with him in the Officers' Mess, and Lt. Col. Snelling then persuaded his superiors to keep my platoon intact with the Battalion.

June-September 1969

On June 12, BLT 3/26 was re-designated 3rd Battalion 26th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), essentially a BLT without ships in support, and was placed under the command of the 26th Marine Regiment.

Also, not long after this, my platoon was re-designated 3rd Platoon, Co. A, 5th Tank Battalion.

We painted new tactical numbers A31-A35 on the tanks to reflect the change.

Replacing BLT 2/26, we came ashore at Da Nang and moved by road to new positions on Hill 190 (me and my Heavy Section of three tanks) (See Da Nang map sheet 6641 III, coordinates AT892822) and Nam O Bridge (my platoon sergeant and my Light Section of two tanks). (See Da Nang map sheet 6641 III, coordinates AT928842) in Quang Nam Province along the Song Cu De, a river about 10 miles north of Da Nang. Hill 190 was situated on a finger of the Annamite Mountains (the Annamite Cordillera) to the south of the Song Cu De and thereby overlooked and covered what I later learned was called "Elephant Valley" to its northwest and the Song Cu De floodplain (including "The Claw") to its immediate northeast. The Claw was the site of a river crossing point used by NVA units in the mountains to our north to enter our area. As part of protecting the northern flank of Da Nang, our battalion was to conduct cordon and search operations, patrols, and ambushes in an effort to deny the enemy use of Elephant Valley, a known infiltration route, as an avenue of approach into the Da Nang area.

On Hill 190 we supported Mike

Company, initially commanded by 1st Lt. Duane E. Crawford, until July 19. On July 19, India Company, commanded by Capt. R. Furleigh, took over Hill 190, and we supported it until it turned over the position to Kilo Company, commanded by Capt. RD. Barba, on August 28, which we supported until the end of my tour. At Nam O Bridge we initially supported Lima Company, commanded by Capt. J. Turrietta, until July 19. On July 19, Mike Company, initially commanded by 1st Lt. D.E. Crawford, took over Nam O Bridge, and we supported it until it turned over the position to India Company, commanded by Capt. R. Furleigh, on August 28, which we supported until the end of my tour. The two other rifle companies of 3/26 were based to the north of Nam O Bridge at the "Esso Plant" (formally known as the Lien Chieu Esso gasoline depot) and Hai Van Pass.

On Hill 190, which was located on the west side of Provincial Route 545 just north of An Dinh (2) and northwest of Quan Nam, we "fired range cards" with the main gun at NVA who moved across the paddies in and out of local villages at night, we provided perimeter security for the hill, and we provided personnel for a night reaction force. ("Firing range cards" refers to the activity of a tank shooting in the dark or during periods of reduced visibility at targets for which probable targets have been previously plotted on a diagram in relation to their actual location on the ground using direct fire sights during daylight hours, noting the deflection from a reference point, and the range.) In our case, such fires were controlled by the rifle company that we supported on our hill, when it observed (normally using a Night Observation Device or "NOD") enemy troops moving through one of the previously plotted targets. The forward observer ("F.O.") of Mike Company was 1st Lt. Dick Buckley, a chain-smoking Harvard alumnus and a nice guy. Officers who were forward observers were artillery officers who

served with individual rifle companies, calling for and adjusting the fires of supporting artillery batteries.

In one instance we provided security for a convoy of amtracs and infantry relieving a unit which was providing security for engineers constructing part of the Da Nang Barrier, a system of ground sensors, tactical wire fences, concertina wire entanglements, observation towers, and minefields arrayed in a 12,000-meter semicircle centered on Da Nang Air Base the radius of which was the range of the NVA's 122 mm and 140 mm rockets. I led my Heavy Section of three tanks. To reach the unit, we took Provincial Route 545 south from Hill 190, then moved west on Provincial Route 544, then south on Provincial Road 540. I took a home movie and slides of our turnaround point at the construction site and our return to Hill 190 and have retained them.

About this time, my callsign was changed to "Fudge cake 6." This was not an improvement, in my view!

I would ride daily in my jeep from Hill 190 to the Light Section at Nam O Bridge by going south on Provincial Route 545, east on Provincial Route 545, and north on National Route 1, paralleling the railroad. The two tanks there provided security for the bridge. Daily jeep rides also took me to our Battalion Headquarters and often to First FSR (Force Service Regiment) at White Beach for parts for my tanks. (See Da Nang map sheet 6641 III, coordinates AT931846-AT928851). Frequently, one of the five tanks was "down" for parts or maintenance. In an extreme instance, one of them had to wait several weeks for a new engine at 1st FSR.

One night, A34 at Nam O Bridge shined its xenon searchlight the 3 1/2 to 4 "clicks" (3,500-4,000 meters) toward Hill 190. So bright was the searchlight that one of my tankers on Hill 190 was able to read a newspaper by its light.

One day, I gave a ride in my jeep to an M60 machine gunner, who had been attached, it turned out, to >>

the rifle platoon of Lt. Chris Tibbs, the previously mentioned member of my Basic School class who was also at that time in 3/26. Learning that I knew his platoon leader, this very big but boyish looking machine gunner said, "Lt. Tibbs is the finest man I've ever known." I wondered how many men he had known in his 19 or 20 years, but it nevertheless was a wonderful compliment.

On another occasion, as my driver and I left the hill in my jeep, a young South Vietnamese woman, a teacher, dressed in an ao dai, the traditional long dress, and standing in front of a school made a motion for us to stop. Although she spoke no English, it became apparent that she wanted me to give her a ride. She motioned for us to park at the side of the road for a few minutes while she went into the schoolhouse and did something. I stood next to my jeep in front of the schoolyard and looked at the corpses of two North Vietnamese Army soldiers, which were lying at the entrance to the schoolyard, apparently put there after having been ambushed somewhere else nearby during the night. One had a large head wound that exposed his brain. As I stood there, a young boy who had been playing in the schoolyard ran up to the bodies, looked at them with casual curiosity, and then returned to his game.

In late June, I requested to extend my tour in Vietnam by six months, only to withdraw the request about a week later when I got a letter from home and began to feel that I was being selfish in delaying my return. Also in late June, I wrote to my father to say that Lt. Henes, the Ontos Platoon Commander, and I were going into Da Nang every Sunday to join Robin Johnson in steaks and drinks at his (1st Military Police Battalion) officers and staff NCO club. As we had come ashore so recently, I am not certain on how many Sundays we ended up doing that.

In early July, I visited 1st Marine Air Wing to see John Reynolds and Mike Hoblock, the two Marine lawyers pre-

viously mentioned in this chronology who had been Basic School classmates of mine.

Also in early July, LCpl. Cody, one of my tank crewmen at Nam O Bridge, began acting strangely and was sent to Sickbay at the Battalion rear for evaluation. While there, he drew a pistol on the Corpsman who was with him. When Lt. Col. Snelling visited the tent to see him, Cody pointed the pistol at him, too. Finally, a Corpsman jumped Cody, put his finger in front of the hammer on the ".45," and wrestled Cody to the ground. After the pistol was taken from him and he was restrained, Cody was diagnosed as having "acute psychosis" and was medevacked to a Naval Hospital in the States. Prior to this development, Cody had performed entirely satisfactorily.

Also in early July, my 5-ton truck was stolen from the parking area in front of the China Beach PX. After getting a Navy jeep taxi to Headquarters, III MAF, taking a launch across the Han River, taking another Navy jeep taxi to Armed Forces Police Headquarters, taking another taxi to an Army base near Nam O Bridge, and hitching a ride with an ARVN second lieutenant to the bridge, I got a ride to Hill 190 in our Ontos Platoon's jeep. Near the hill I saw my truck (recognizable because of the black electrical tape "peace symbols" on the headlights placed there by Daughtry, my driver) barreling down the road toward the Battalion area. I had the jeep driver turn us around and give chase. We passed the truck and forced it to stop. I jumped onto the step under the driver's door, drew my ".45," and told the driver to drive back to Hill 190, which he did as we followed him. Unfortunately, the thief's company commander, 1st Lt. Duane Crawford, C. O. of Mike Company, let the Marine rotate on schedule to the States the following day without punishment. The joyride cost my truck a blown head gasket.

One day during the summer, as I was returning to Hill 190 in my jeep, I saw a Marine Corps combat water

tank truck speeding toward me along the road past two elderly Vietnamese women, who were walking north along the road just ahead of me. As the truck approached my jeep, I had my driver stop, and I leaped out and motioned the truck to stop. I then chewed out the driver, referring to a recent incident nearby in which a speeding Marine Corps truck had overturned on top of a Vietnamese woman, killing her. After I told the driver to be on his way, I turned toward the elderly Vietnamese women, who gratefully smiled and bowed repeatedly with hands folded in front of them.

About this time, a Naval Intelligence Service agent found marijuana and amphetamines in the tool kit located under the passenger seat of my jeep where, it turned out, they had been stowed by my jeep driver, LCpl. Dale. Of course, I occupied that seat every day. I was told he had mailed home to his mother 30 bags (1 3/4 pounds) of marijuana which had resulted in FBI agents converging on his mother's home to confiscate it. NIS had followed up with searching his (my) jeep. He ultimately received an Undesirable Discharge. Prior to disposition of his case, he asked me to recommend a good Marine lawyer but, feeling betrayed, I refused to help him, even to that extent. My new jeep driver was PFC P. E. Binion.

During the summer, SSgt. L. L. Morrisson joined my platoon—first as Heavy Section Leader based on Hill 190, and then, with the departure of SSgt. McCabe for the States, as Platoon Sergeant, also on Hill 190.

In early July, while visiting our Battalion rear, I went into Da Nang with two other lieutenants from my battalion to the Stone Elephant (the Naval Support Activity, Da Nang ((U.S. Navy)) Officers' Club) where I had dinner and we all had drinks with our Battalion Medical Officer, a nice guy who smoked a pipe and, at home, drove a Porsche 912. We subsequently all tried to get into the MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) Club, but it was closed

to Marine company grade officers! According to the story, one night a Marine captain had walked down the top of the bar on his hands and had been observed by a senior officer from another service.

In late July, I received from Dad a package including cans of lobster and pate de Fois gras, just for fun.

One night, approximately 50 NVA were spotted crossing the paddies to the south of Hill 190. As one of my tanks and one of the Ontos fired at them, a large volume of 4.2-inch mortar and 155 mm howitzer and 8-inch howitzer rounds (a combination of HE ((high explosive)) and "firecracker") fired by batteries in the Northern Artillery Cantonment west of Red Beach arrived on target, making a dramatic display and devastating the NVA column.

One day when I was off Hill 190 for part of the day, an explosion went off in the market area near the base of the hill when an elderly Vietnamese woman, apparently wearing explosives, triggered them, wounding the local village chief, the apparent target. Immediately, Hill 190 came under heavy automatic weapons fire. An RPG was fired at A33, Sgt. Mundy's tank. As the hill's reaction force formed, Sgt. Mundy's tank started laying down fire with its .30 caliber coax machinegun across the paddies to the immediate south. Unfortunately, in doing so it killed a U.S. Navy Corpsman from the local CAC (Combined Action Company) unit, who, running alone across a dry rice paddy, carrying a rifle, and clad only in his green underwear, appeared in this fast-moving situation to be an enemy infantryman. I learned of this "friendly fire" incident only after my return to the hill later that afternoon.

From its position on Hill 190 one night in early August, one of my tanks hit seven "friendlylies" out in the rice paddies with a "beehive" round (a type of main gun anti-personnel ammunition), because South Vietnamese Popular Forces, members of a Combined Action unit, had sent a deliberately inaccurate position report to the rifle company command post on Hill 190

which was controlling the fire of the tank. The "PF's" had done so reportedly because they had been ordered to move to a suspected enemy position and, wanting to avoid contact, falsified their position report so as to appear to have followed orders. When NVA were detected by our hill with a Night Observation Device, the NVA appeared to be in an area free of friendlylies. Fortunately, only the outer rim of the conical dispersion pattern of the thousands of flechettes dispersed by the round hit them, and, miraculously, none were seriously wounded.

On another night, one of my tanks, under control of the hill, fired beehive rounds at NVA troops in the paddies to our east. Early the following morning, I was invited by a lieutenant (as I recall, he was the rifle company executive officer) to join a patrol that he was leading into the target area to see if bodies had been left. The NVA were known for trying to carry away their dead. I photographed the body of one NVA, who, in addition to being hit elsewhere, had been hit—by chance of course—dead center between the eyes by a single flechette.

I received in the mail one day a transistor radio as a gift from an American Legion post near my home in Rosemont. Accompanying it was a nice letter from a member of the post.

In early September, I received a new tank, USMC number 202005, to replace my own tank, 202044.

One night, probably in September, the company gunnery sergeant of India Company, the rifle company on Hill 190, came into the "hootch" that I shared with most of my men. In the darkness and not realizing I was there; he yelled to everyone to fall out as soon as possible to join a hastily forming reaction force to come to the aid of a patrol which had been "in contact" resulting in a wounded Marine. Just as my men did, I got off my cot, dressed, mounted one of two or three waiting amtracs, and went to the site of the night activity, I had been feeling sick to my stomach that evening, anyway, and

the amtrac's exhaust made me feel close to vomiting. Unfortunately, too, in my haste to suit up I had failed to put on a belt. As a potentially risky consequence, when we arrived at the edge of the appropriate paddy and dismounted, I had an M-16 in one hand and the waist of my utility trousers grasped in the other. As the gunny yelled instructions, we spread out around the paddy to provide a secure area for a helicopter medevac. The NVA had broken contact, and we did not come under fire. Unfortunately, the wounded Marine had died, the medevac was cancelled, and we returned to Hill 190 on the tractors. I helped several other people carry the dead Marine's body off one of the amtracs and into an empty "hootch" where the body remained for the night.

On September 15, Lt. Col. William A. Simpson succeeded Lt. Col. Snelling as my battalion commander. Lt. Col. Snelling had only recently begun calling me by my first name.

During September, Dad sent me another package of food, including lobster and crabmeat.

One day (I think it was in September), I was at Naval Support Activity Hospital in Da Nang. While there I saw a Basic School classmate of mine, who was executive officer of a rifle company. A short while before, he had watched nine of his people die on gurneys outside the hospital, as the Marines lying on them awaited admission to the limited number of operating rooms, triage governing who went first. The men had been wounded when the company had triggered a "daisy chain" of mines.

I was originally scheduled to take "R&R" (Rest & Recreation) in Hong Kong in late September. Hong Kong had been my choice from a list that included Hawaii, Bangkok, Singapore, Taipei, Okinawa, Sydney, and Penang. Lt. Van Dusen, my eventual successor as Tank Platoon Commander, checked in to the Battalion, and I cancelled my R&R so as not to have to let him have my platoon any earlier than necessary. Nothing personal! Just possessive!

On Hill 190, I looked in >>

the direction of Da Nang Airbase at the approximate takeoff time for the flight on which I had been scheduled, only to watch in horror as a civilian, propeller-driven airliner headed away from me rolled 90 degrees and plunged to the ground, producing an enormous column of smoke. It turned out that what I had observed was the result of a U.S. Airforce F-4 Phantom II fighter colliding with the right wing of a commercial Air Vietnam C-54. The C-54 had fallen near Dog Patch, a squalid, densely populated concentration of shacks housing South Vietnamese civilians, killing all aboard but a little baby and a couple of Vietnamese civilians on the ground.

I signed over my platoon to Lt. Van Dusen on September 28 and had a week or so of time at our Battalion rear before leaving Vietnam. During that time, I lived in the "hootch" of 1st

Lt. Paul Bourdon, the Battalion Motor Transport Officer. I was assigned as Investigating Officer to investigate an accident in which one of the Battalion's trucks left the road and fell down an embankment, injuring the driver. When I first interviewed the driver in his Quonset hut ward at NSA (Naval Support Activity) Hospital, he was enthusiastic about recovering and returning to his unit for duty. A couple of days later, when I interviewed him again, his attitude had turned negative. In the intervening period, the enemy had attacked the hospital with mortars, and a mortar round had come through the roof of the ward, wounding another Marine whose bed was located under the point of penetration.

October 1969

On October 7, I left South Vietnam at the end of my tour, flying by

government chartered commercial airliner from Da Nang Air Base to Kadena AFB on Okinawa, where I spent six days at Camp Hansen. Then I flew by government chartered commercial airliner from Kadena to Travis Air Force Base, near San Francisco. After a cab ride to San Francisco Airport, I flew to Philadelphia for leave at home.

I consider myself to have been extremely fortunate to have been allowed to lead my platoon, a group of competent, motivated, hard-working Marines, with only a few exceptions. I also consider myself to have been very fortunate to have served with an infantry battalion, where I was given the responsibility of being the battalion commander's principal advisor on the employment of my tanks at an early stage in what turned out to be almost eight years of active duty—much of it spent as a tanker. ■

Adam Zlotek's Photo Gallery

Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks, 1966 - 1967



Charlie Company 3rd Tanks retriever. Sgt Ray Scheurich was the driver of the "Magnificent Bastard". In July/August of 1967



Bar built out of 90mm ammo boxes in Dong Ha. This was out EM club and movies. Dec of 1966



C-24 was stuck in mud or quick sand up to the turret ring. Three tanks and a retriever went out to pull out the tank with cables east of Highway 1 northeast of Camp Evans.



The Lonely Bull" C-42 Blade Tank in Charlie Co. 3rd Tanks Jun-Sep 67.



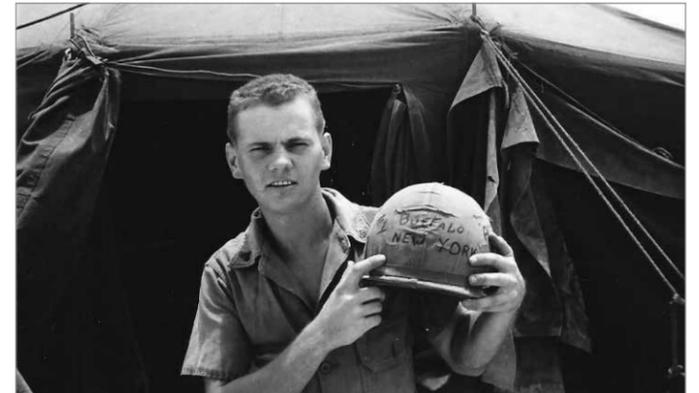
Co. sign at Camp Evans made by Cpl. A. Zlotek May 6



Roman Catholic Cathedral in the City of Hue. Jun 67



Cpl. Doug Hightshoe in Dong Ha Nov-Dec 66. The CO's (Capt. Lessard) driver.



Cpl. Zlotek Camp Evans Jul 67. At the age of 20. Company armorer MOS 2111



Flame Tank (F-33) "Snoopy vs Viet Cong" on a gun barrel.



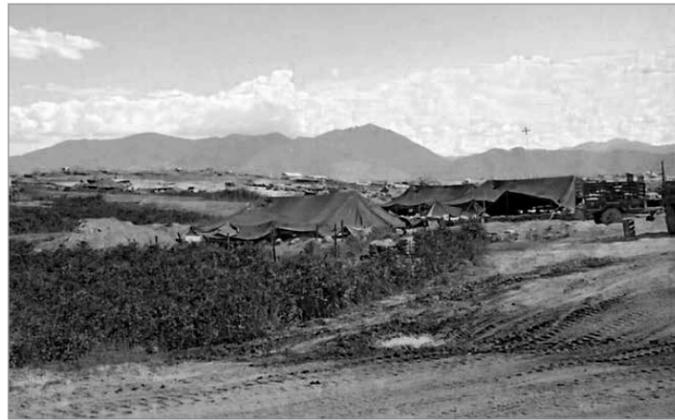
Cpt Ruhlmann New CO about May-June '67



Two Gun Tanks.



"Happy Hour at the EM Club Camp Evans" Sgt Ray Scheurich with the cover on. Jul 67.



Camp Evans Jul-Aug 67



L/Cpl. Zlotek on a convoy moving from Dong Ha to Camp Evans Feb-Mar 67 with Charlie Co. 3rd Tanks



Our homemade shower Dong Ha Nov-Dec 66. The "Bath Fitters" were not available at this time.



Flame Tank (F-31) with Snoopy riding shotgun on a flame tank barrel.



Water entering our tent during monsoon season at Camp Evans.



Cpl. Zlotek with M-16 on a bunker behind maintenance tent on perimeter where many nights of guard duty were stood.



S/SGT Gladney having a beer at the EM Club Jul 67 at Camp Evans.



S/SGT Roberts at Dong Ha Nov-Dec 66.



Cpl. Dale Otto with captured 57 mm recoilless rifle by one of the tank platoons. Jul 67.



River crossing of the Perfume River between Phu Bai and Hue City



Staging area for the move to Camp Evans.



GY/Sgt Rolfes and SGT Ray Scheurich with cover on in the EM Club in Camp Evans.



SGT Baxley Dong Ha Nov-Dec 66. He was the supply SGT for Charlie Co 3rd Tanks.



Sign over the EM Club hooch was built by local villagers Camp Evans Jul 67.



The guys are getting ready for the steaks that are on the grill for dinner chow. At Camp Evans



Seabees building new hootches at Camp Evans for us guys Jul-Aug 67

"Tích Tây" Village, South Vietnam

BY DOC GENE HACKEMACK

When I read the articles that Jim Cowman wrote in the latest Sponson Box, it shook a whole lot of memories in me. If you remember, he and I had not seen each other since 1967, when we met for the very first time at our 2023 Colorado Springs Reunion. It still blows my mind today. Also below are some photos of our village, Tích Tây.



Doc Hackemack



Doc Herzog

The very moment that my eyes latched on to "Tích Tây" village, South Vietnam – my thoughts were, "WHAT MEMORIES!!!" I am referring to Page 13, Sponson Box April, May, June 2025 in the article written by "Jim Cowan" which I am assuming is my "Captain Jim Cowman". Any time that I see the name "Tích Tây", I know that it is a village that I am intimately familiar with. I was one of their Med CAP Corpsmen in much of 1966. The village lies between Chu Lai and Danang, 20 miles south of Danang; 48 miles north of Chu Lai.

Jim Cowman's stories brought back FLASHBACKS like you would not believe. Here is one of my observations that

I have never seen printed before in the Sponson Box, and I'll bet it will be verified by others. Just before entering Tích Tây village (with no electricity) there was a "Mama-san" in a hooch that she turned into a Beer Joint with ICE COLD BEER!

"How the Hell?!!" This is what we all thought. Once inside, Sgt Tannehill, Corporal Cheney and I watched her remove a piece of plywood which covered a deep HOLE in the dirt floor. She got down on her knees and pulled out ICE COLD 'Bah-Muy-Bah' ("33") Vietnamese beer! Mind you, this was early 1966 before imported beer reached us. At the time it was the best Vietnamese beer available. But, back to why it was COLD. A very large hole was dug in the middle of the hooch. It was lined with SAWDUST to provide insulation. Once a week an Ice truck from Danang would deliver 20 kilo blocks of ice which she bought, put into the hole and filled it with "33" beer. We thought this was the coolest thing ever!

Another memory – when the village school leader found out that I knew German, he asked me to teach a German class, which I did for a few weeks. One day he came up to me with a wallet loaded with \$100 bills and asked me to buy him a certain Akai recorder from our PX. Not just any old recorder, it was a very expensive recorder, which he no doubt had a market for. I got cold feet and did not return to my German teaching job.

So back to my intended Sick Call duties for the villagers. One day my 10-year-old interpreter "Phu" tugged at my shirt and asked me to visit his grandfather, in his very primitive hooch. This very old "Papa-san" looked like he was over a hundred years old. But his left foot was completely wrapped up with a bandage, and Phu asked if we could save it. I began to unravel it but stopped when the totally gangrenous foot began to separate from the still-alive part of his ankle. The next day I asked our brand "new-guy" FNG company doctor to come with me. He did and explained to Phu and my nurse "Co-Hien" that the foot would have to be amputated. The old Papa-Sahn said "No." He wanted to have his complete body intact in the afterlife. I think we pumped him full of penicillin and I feel sure he did not last long.

Rewind back to the FNG doctor – the day he checked into our unit, we were thinking WTF?!!!! He was spastic, with a nerve condition that he was almost unable to shake hands. His speech was detached. At that moment my heart just sunk. My only saving grace was knowing that it was only two months that I would return to 'the World'. I am glad I can't recall his name or I might be open to libel...! Later, at our very first USMCVTA reunion in 1999 did I understand when Colonel Al Snell, our tank battalion commander told us all, "We were scraping the bottom of the barrel."

One day I stupidly went into a different village by myself. When Corporal Cheney and others did not show up to escort me. I did not want to appear as "dereliction of duty". I held sick call in a schoolhouse that I was not familiar with.

Upon wanting to leave, a young school teacher grabbed me by my arm and said, "No, no Bac Sey – too dangerous", as he pointed to a small group approaching that he thought were enemy. He hid me a few hours, until my unit picked me up.

As I was reading Jim Cowman's mention of the "55-gallon drum" showers, it brought back memories of the same type of shower system that our Marines rigged up near our 1st Tank Bn, 1st Mar Div HQ showers. Same thing – 55-gallon drums suspended on platforms, for our Marines only, and these were FIRST CLASS – they had burners underneath! And we all know the winters got damned chilly at Da Nang! The village showers Jim Cowman spoke of must have been erected after I left in March 1967.

Lastly, and sadly I found out that Jim Sefrhans was killed

after I left. I only knew him a short time, but we became very good friends when he joined our team. He was the type of Marine one could not help but like. I think he was Lance Corporal at that time. Also worth mentioning is Sgt Tannehill who helped HM2 Herrington and me build the First Aid Station in Tích Tây. Sadly, Sgt Tannehill died several years ago as related to me by Captain Stith, who has also passed on.

Last-but-not-least, Jim Cowman and I met for the VERY FIRST TIME, at our 2023 USMCVTA reunion in Colorado Springs. It was the first time since 1967! And that's when I got the news about Jim Sefrhans.

Semper Fi!—Doc Hackemack



Jim Cowman



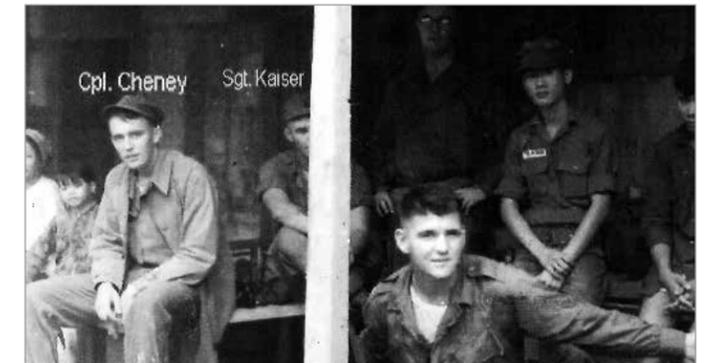
Doc Hackemack



Doc with village kids



Doc with village mayor



Cheney, Kasar and Sefrhans



The First Aid Station



Jim and Doc at the 2023 Reunion

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who is this Marine in this photo that was taken at the Tank School machinegun range on Camp Pendleton in March 1967?

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

Last issue winner was Stan Williams who called at 2:27 PM on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, to identify his good buddy, John Hunter.



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

SAN DIEGO REUNION 2025

We have less than 60 days before our gathering in San Diego. Don't miss out!!!

We have over 150 VTA members living in California, Nevada, Arizona, Oregon and Washington State so we are scratching our heads wondering why so few of you have signed up and planning to attend?

"Our biggest regrets are not for the things we have done ... but for the things we haven't done." — Chad Michael Murray

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 boarding 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 accompanying 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 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. The hotel 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.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!!!

Please provide the following if you are attending one (or both) the two tours of the military bases:

Driver's license# _____ State of issue _____

Date of Birth _____ SSN# _____

Country of Citizenship _____

We need this same information for each of your quests as well...

The simplest solution would be for you to include the information in your reunion registration. You can also email your information to Ron Knight, our esteemed secretary at rckusmcvta@att.net

If not then you can call it in at 678.828.7197

PERSONAL INTERVIEW SIGN UPS

The **USMC VTA History Project** needs to record your stories. More importantly, once we obtain and chronicle our experiences, not only will they be shared within the USMC Tanker Community... but they will be added to the archives in the US Library of Congress, the Marine Corps University and the world-renowned Texas Tech University

"Vietnam Archives."

The goal of **USMC VTA History Project** is to assure that we (and our stories) will never be forgotten. If you would like to be interviewed during our 2025 reunion in San Diego, please do not wait until the reunion to sign up. Go ahead and contact Bruce Van Apeldoorn now either by phone **585.613.6564** or by email at bvanapeldoornsr@gmail.com.

Bruce will add you to the new 2025 reunion interview schedule and then let you know the day and time of the interview.

We will have one full day in San Diego available for interviews and we have already received several requests for a time slots. We would love for you to gather your buddies and assemble a group of tankers for a group interview session.

PODCAST INTERVIEW SIGN UPS

We are also trying something totally new at this reunion. Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz will have a quiet room set up to conduct his

podcast interview program. If you have an aversion of going on camera for our video interview program then the podcast may be exactly what you are looking for.

You can sign up at the **WELCOME table** on the first day of the reunion or you can give Tree a call before the reunion. Call today!!! Tree's cell phone number is **209.996.8887**.

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 The Slopchute is Open - Lunch & Dinner on your own
	0600 – 0815	Breakfast on your own
Thursday (Sept. 11)	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 0900 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)
	2000 – 2300	Slopchute Open
Friday (Sept. 12)		Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!!
	0600 – 0815	Breakfast on your own
	1000 – 1015	Load buses for Camp Pendleton
	1030 – 1545	Tour Edson Range and Mechanized Museum Lunch at Edson Range – Paid by the VTA
	1445 – 1600	Load buses / back to the hotel
	1630 – 1700	Return to hotel
Saturday (Sept. 13)	1700 – 2300	The Slopchute Open Dinner on your own
	0600 – 0745	Breakfast on your own
	0800 – 0090	Load buses to MCRD
	0920 – 1130	Recruit Graduation
	1130 – 1230	Tour the MCRD Museum
	1230 – 1430	Lunch at the MCRD Mess Hall – Paid by VTA
Sunday (Sept. 14)	1445 – 1530	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 is highly encouraged..</i>
Monday (Sept. 15)	1600 – 1645	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	1700 – 1715	Presentation of Colors and remarks
	1715 – 1800	Dinner Served
	1800 – 1805	15–minutes Head Call
	1805 – 2030	30–minutes – Guest Speaker 45–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
(Circle "Tank" or "AT" above)

Bn: _____ Co: _____ Years in-country: _____ to _____

Are you a first time attendee? YES NO MOS

Would you like to participate in our video 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 (two meals), bus transportation, meeting facilities, hospitality room, beer & sodas, entrance fees (if any) and other expenses associated with the cost of hosting the reunion. Registration fee does not include your sleeping room, taxes, meals 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.

SAN DIEGO REUNION 2025

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

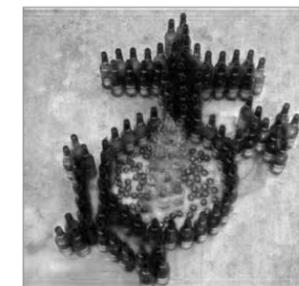
Submit this form along with your payment by July 30th to purchase a reunion t-shirt and save \$30 off of the Late Reunion Registration Fee of \$200.

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

Pre-July 30 Form

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106-8937

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

Answer to the Tanker's Word Search Puzzle

