

# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

## OUR LARGEST YET!



- Featuring**
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### “COMBAT READY”

“Combat Ready” is an original oil painting of an Marine M48-A3 tank by artist Tim Hinton, himself a former Marine who served in Vietnam with the 3rd Marine Division, Hotel 2/4. The original oil canvas art was purchased by Bob Vaxter, a member of the Vietnam Tank Association, and was displayed at the reunion in Charleston. Now you can own a high quality reproduction of this magnificent painting. It is available on giclée paper or on a canvas mount; these are limited edition prints (18” x 24” signed and numbered) and are now available to decorate your office or living room wall. Each print comes with a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist. The artist is donating a percentage of each sale to your organization, the USMC Vietnam Tank Association.



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All sales are final; no refunds or exchanges. Please allow 2-3 weeks for delivery. Thank you for supporting the Vietnam Tank Association!			

### Letter from the President

Wow! I am still floating on air over the reunion! If you were unfortunate to not have been in Charleston August 19 – 23, you missed one heck of an amazing and awesome time. Every single attendee who I spoke with told me that the Las Vegas gathering was great but Charleston was unbelievable! The USS Yorktown was impressive even with the un-Godly hot & humid weather. The recruit graduation on Parris Island proved to me that today’s freshly minted Marines are as good as they ever were. And those Lady DI’s were a beautiful sight for these old sore eyes! I don’t know how he does it but Bob Peavey’s “Fallen Heroes” program just keeps getting better and better. Someone said to me, “I don’t come to reunions to cry but I do every time a Fallen Heroes program unfolds on the screen.” Interestingly a good portion of Fallen Hero David Dodson’s family came to the presentation including the daughter who was born 17 days before David was KIA. And her son, Brett, was also in attendance. David’s sister & her husband (a Vietnam Army vet) were so impressed with the program that he is going to the next 1st Cav. reunion and more or less demand that the doggies do the same sort of presentation for their own fallen heroes. The niece and the sister of KIA Ben John Green drove from their homes to view the presentation and to begin the process of having “Uncle Benny” be the honoree for our 2011 reunion.

As I announced in the Membership Meeting in Charleston, the Association is healthy & growing. We have just under-600 members. This is up from 400 members when I became president. Just this year we have 55 new members and 30 of these “New Guys” attended the reunion. Thanks to Lt “Fuzz” Henderson’s Third Herd, 19 (mostly new) members were present or accounted for. Many of these tankers had not seen each other for 40 years! What a great time!

One of the methods of making sure that the Membership Meeting is at full capacity at the very start of the meeting is to offer a chance to win a free room for the reunion. Congratulations go out to Randy Roberts who was the lucky winner of the drawing.

Early this year I was approached by Bob Vaxter asking if he could run for a director’s seat on the board. Since the board was short one director, I added his name to the slate that the membership voted for during the reunion. Welcome aboard Bob!

The VTA website has two features that I’d like more members to read and participate in. There is a “Tanker Blog” where you are able to write and post to the blog any recollection or story about your time in Vietnam that you want to. Please feel free to contribute as much as you can. The other new feature is a “Tanker’s Stories” forum. This is for your sea stories no matter how long or how bawdy. Type up your story and submit it to a board member. We’ll see that it gets uploaded on to that part of our website for all to enjoy.

We are still looking for tankers who may, for various economic reasons, be less-fortunate and cannot afford the annual membership dues. We want to grant them a gift membership. Send their names and addresses to me or any member of the board of directors. We want each and every eligible Vietnam Marine tanker as members in the association so they can share in the brotherhood. The more the merrier...and the stronger we will be.

Semper Fidelis,

John

“If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are gone,  
 either write things worth reading or do things worth writing.”

Ben Franklin

## Board of Directors 2007–2009

### Executive Directors

#### John Wear, *President*

5537 Lower Mountain Road; New Hope, PA 18938  
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#### Robert "Bob" Peavey, *Vice President*

304 Abbey Court; Canton, GA 30115  
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#### Jim Coan, *Treasurer*

5374 East Lantana Drive; Sierra Vista, AZ 85650  
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#### Ronald C. Knight, *Secretary*

720 Quail Run Court; Alpharetta, GA 30005-8920  
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16331 Ashington Park Drive; Tampa, FL 33647  
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#### Carl Fleischman

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#### Robert H. Vaxter

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### Committees & Chairmen

#### Mike Burnett

Awards & Medals  
209-383-2261 PST

#### Bruce "Boston" Manns

Association Archives  
603-448-3305 EST

#### CW04 Bob Embesi

CRCS/CR Representative  
406-821-3075 MST

#### Lt. Col. Harris Himes

Chaplain  
406-375-0097 CST

#### Terry "Bo" Bocchino

Chaplain, Asst.  
518-537-2509 EST

#### Bob Peavey

Fallen Heroes  
770-365-3711 EST

#### Jim Guffe

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund  
804-744-1179 EST

#### "Robbie" Robinson

National Recruiter  
usmctanker65@peoplepc.com

#### "Pappy" Reynolds

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Robert Peavey - Editor/Publisher  
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**ON THE COVER:** The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association celebrates its 10th year in Charleston, S.C. this past August. Here attendees gather for a picture on the flight deck of the USS Yorktown at Patriot's Point, S.C

## New Members

#### Robert F Baxley

12113 Golfside Dr  
Tampa, FL 33612  
Phone: (813) 931-4746  
Email: Baxley12@verizon.net  
C Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 66 – 67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Delia  
DOB: 5/31/44  
Recruited by: Website

#### Louis C Berger

721 New Bloomfield Rd  
Duncannon, PA 17020-9717  
Phone: (717) 834-9880  
Email: None  
A Co, 1st Tank Bn – 68 - 69  
MOS: ?  
DOB: 5/17/49  
Recruited by: Harvey "Robbie" Robinson

#### Cecil Brown, Jr

3265 Leatherwood Circle Rd  
Sidney, OH 45365  
Phone: (937) 492-0674  
Email: browncecil1@gmail.com  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn – 66 - 67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Janice  
DOB: 5/1/47  
Recruited by: "Robbie" Robinson

#### Donald W Chester

329-A Bayou Blue Rd  
Houma, LA 70364  
Phone: (985) 851-6471  
Email: dcandnat@aol.com  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn – 66 – 68  
MOS: 1316  
Wife: Natalie  
DOB: 4/9/48  
Recruited by: Tom Clary

#### Harvey C Collins

1640 Eagle Crest Dr  
Pffaltown, NC 27040-9508  
Phone: (336) 924-5164  
Email: hcollins1@triad.rr.com  
H&S Co, 1st Tank Bn – 67 - 68  
MOS: ?  
Wife: Frances  
DOB: 1/6/46  
Recruited by: Tom Clary

#### John A Cox

12651 SE 21st Pl  
Morrison, FL 32668  
Phone: (352) 486-3199  
Email: soappony@aol.com  
H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 65 - 66  
MOS: 2141  
Wife: Margaret  
DOB: 4/30/46  
Recruited by: Website

#### Wayne A Eller

207 Poclain Rd – Box 174  
Perryman, MD 21130  
Phone: (410) 459-6189  
Email: shadow04@comcast.net  
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 67 - 68  
MOS: 2531/2511  
Wife: Patricia  
DOB: 12/26/46  
Recruited by: American Legion Magazine

#### Fritz Firing, Sr

422 Navaho Circle  
Summerville, SC 29483-9285  
Phone: (843) 875-7291  
Email: mhellen53@aol.com  
C Co, 3rd Tank Bn - 66  
MOS: 1802  
Wife: Mary  
DOB: 5/23/33  
Recruited by: "Robbie" Robinson

Please note: Most of these new members were recruited through a joint effort. The recruiters called or emailed John Wear or "Robbie" Robinson and the perspective member had a membership packet sent to them. The packet that was mailed included a sample of the *Sponson Box* news magazine, a membership application and a letter asking them to join. Anyone who knows a perspective member, please alert either Robbie or John.

#### Michael L Gilman

820 Hidden Harbor Ct  
Chesapeake, VA 23322  
Phone: (757) 547-8388  
Email: mlgilman@cox.net  
B Co, 5th Tank Bn - 68  
MOS: 1802  
Wife: Denise  
DOB: 6/1/44  
Recruited by: Website

#### James "Jim" R Gulledeg

8918 Melanie Ln  
Shreveport, LA 71106  
Phone: (318) 688-9662  
Email: None  
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 66 - 67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Molly  
DOB: 4/4/45  
Recruited by: DAV Magazine

#### Chris G Hicks

4273 Zero Mark Rd  
Morganton, NC 28655  
Phone: (828) 403-3143  
Email: None  
C Co, 3rd Tank Bn - 68  
MOS: ?  
DOB: 1/25/48  
Recruited by: Jim Kneee

#### Charles E Hiltz

1 Stone Park Place  
Nottingham, MD 21236  
Phone: (410) 256-7151  
Email: hiltz@comcast.net  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn – 68 - 69  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Kathleen  
DOB: 6/6/48  
Recruited by: "Chet" Ruby

#### Kent S Hughes

1540 James Rd  
Ardmore, PA 19003  
Phone: (610) 642-9184  
Email: kenthughes@aol.com  
A Co, 5th Tank Bn - 69  
MOS: ?  
DOB: 3/2/45  
Recruited by: Ron Knight

#### Joseph C Landaker

PO Box 2481  
Big Bear City, CA 92314-2481  
Phone: (909) 585-4528  
Email: jlandaker@charter.net  
A Co, 1st Tank Bn – 65 – 66 & 68  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Laura  
DOB: 7/28/46  
Recruited by: Jim Sausoman

#### Otis E Martin

2606 Ave B  
Nederland, TX 77627  
Phone: (409) 727-3090  
Email: None  
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 68 - 69  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Carolyn Sue  
DOB: 12/8/47  
Recruited by: John Wear

#### Michael A McCabe

10593 Merriman Rd  
Cupertino, CA 95104-3921  
Phone: (775) 846-1819  
Email: tanker@mccabe.org  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn – 66 - 67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Joyce  
DOB: 10/30/48  
Recruited by: John Wear

#### Ira B McQuade

1706 N Pasadena St  
Indianapolis, IN 46219  
Phone: (317) 356-2158  
Email: buc1tkboo@yahoo.com  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn - 68 - 69  
MOS: 2141  
Wife: Glenna  
DOB: 5/13/50  
Recruited by: John Wear

#### William C "Cal" Moody

1555 River Road  
Boyce, LA 71409  
Phone: (318) 419-4931  
Email: rapidesstation@suddenlinkmail.com  
A & B Co, 1st Tank Bn - 68  
MOS: ?  
Wife: Jackie  
DOB: 2/28/44  
Recruited by: John Wear

#### Ernest "Ernie" E Perez

1085 O Farrell Ct  
Salinas, CA 93907  
Phone: (831) 757-1644  
Email: None  
C Co, 3rd Tank Bn - 68  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Yolanda  
DOB: 11/12/46  
Recruited by: Bob Vaxter

#### Larry G Ray

102 S 14th St  
Murray, KY 42071  
Phone: (270) 293-1258  
Email: None  
Bravo Co, 1st Tank Bn - ?  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Marilyn  
DOB: ?  
Recruited by: Website

#### Richard L Rodriguez

1050 W Woodward Ave  
Fresno, CA 93706-3544  
Phone: (559) 266-6481  
Email: None  
A/C Co, 1st Tank Bn – 65 – 66  
MOS: ?  
Wife: Hortensia  
DOB: 2/22/46  
Recruited by: Robbie Robinson

#### Robert "Bobby" L Ruble

1613 – 14th Ave (#F1)  
Central City, NE 68826  
Phone: (308) 946-3152  
Email: None  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn – 66 - 67  
MOS: ?  
DOB: 3/16/33  
Recruited by: Tony Wills

#### Donald L Sanders

746 Baldwin Ave  
Elyria, OH 44035  
Phone: (446) 366-6157  
Email: sandersd-44044@yahoo.com  
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 67- 68  
MOS: 1811  
DOB: 2/24/45  
Recruited by: John Wear

#### David E Smith

1562 River Bluff Dr  
Reedley, CA 93654  
Phone: (559) 638-8578  
Email: woodman1562@comcast.net  
H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 65 - 66  
MOS: 2141  
DOB: 12/25/43  
Recruited by: "Robbie" Robinson

#### Noel Stubbe

701 E North Lake St  
Handcock, WI 54943  
Phone: (715) 249-3295  
Email: None  
A/B Cos, 1st Tank Bn – 66 – 67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Kathy  
DOB: 9/24/46  
Recruited by: Doug Ewers

#### Claude "Chris" Vargo

5054 Civitania Rd SE  
Mableton, GA 30126  
Phone: (770) 739-1572  
Email: cvargo@comcast.net  
B Co, 3rd Tank Bn – 67 - 69  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Gloria  
DOB: 1/16/48  
Recruited by: Website

#### Robert A Walker

4417 Garcia Ave  
Sarasota, FL 34233  
Phone: (941) 922-7363  
Email: sswalkers53@verizon.net  
H&S Co, 1st Tank Bn – 67 - 68  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Susan Pat  
DOB: 2/22/45  
Recruited by: Tom Clary

#### David W Walters

259 Teri Lane  
Prattville, AL 36066  
Phone: (334) 399-3662  
Email: stumps53@yahoo.com  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn – 66 - 67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Dorothy  
DOB: 10/26/45  
Recruited by: Ron Davidson

#### James R Williams

261 Jones Springs Church Rd  
Ellerbe, NC 28338  
Phone: (910) 652-24387  
Email: stumpwil@efinternet.net  
H&S Co, 1st Tank Bn – 67 - 68  
MOS: 0353  
Wife: Carol  
DOB: 1/3/50  
Recruited by: Tom Clary

#### Matthew W Young

1697 Greenbrooke Rd  
Hudson, NC 28638  
Phone: (828) 728-5641  
Email: usmccen159@hotmail.com  
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn, 68 - 69  
MOS: 1811 / 8511 / 9999  
Wife: Charlotte  
DOB: 11/29/41  
Recruited by: Website

## Meet Your Board of Directors

A feature that provides some history about one of your Board members.

# Rick Lewis



Marine. Rick retired in August 1986 as a 1St Sgt. of Marines.

Once a civilian he started his own business as a manufacturer's representative for the waste water collections industry and he never looked back. Then, one day many years later, Rick got a phone call from Dick Cary. Dick talked about a Vietnam Tankers Association and did he want to join? Rick replied, "Not now, maybe down the road. Please check with me later." Dick kept calling and in 2002 he finally joined the brotherhood. Rick was already a member of the Marine Corps Tankers Association and had only been to one meeting but felt out of place in that organization. There was a serious lack of Vietnam-era tankers in the membership. Then one day his friend Craig Newberry said, "Pack your bags; we're going to the VTA Philly reunion." So they did and were glad they attended; it filled a hole that was missing. It was great to sit around and hear the history of tanks

in Vietnam being told through personal histories. Craig and Rick also attended the Las Vegas reunion and that's when Rick decided to get more involved. He spoke to John Wear about some ideas that he felt could help the VTA.

Rick says, "So I have made that commitment to the VTA as a director. I will be meeting with the VA to get all the info I can to pass along to my fellow tankers or any Marine who may be looking for help in anyway from the VA. After all, Marines take care of our own. I hope to do this either via our web site or S-box by early next year. I am already looking forward to the San Diego reunion in 2011; the board has already begun laying plans for this next reunion which should prove to be even larger yet." ♦

## Membership Information Changes for 2009

<p><b>Tom Colson</b> tcolsonsr@hughes.net Wife: Mary DOB: 12/25/44</p>	<p><b>Gene "Doc" Hackemack</b> Buttonbox01@gmail.com Tucson, AZ 85748 (520) 269-7169</p>
<p><b>Jim Crooke</b> 9270 Edgemont Lane Boca Raton, FL 33434 (561) 477-7441 Email: sarge5usmc@bellsouth.net</p>	<p><b>"Boston" Bruce Manns</b> PO Box 605 Enfield, NH 03748 (603) 632-1295 Bostonblackie_tankbn@comcast.net</p>
<p><b>Norman Crowe</b> 363 Canterbury Rd Oklahoma City, OK 73130-0246</p>	<p><b>Dale Reed</b> Yesko1978@yahoo.com</p>
<p><b>Ken Dahl</b> Dahl Plumbing &amp; Heating 2044 – 7th Street East West Fargo, ND 58078</p>	<p><b>Pete Rich</b> PO Box 1071 Apalachicola, FL 32329</p>
<p><b>Fritz Firing</b> C Co, 3rd ATs</p>	<p><b>Richard E Sevick</b> 800 Wavecrest Drive Orlando, FL 32807-1381</p>
<p><b>Charles Fischer</b> (845) 626-5494</p>	<p><b>Roger Unland</b> rogerblues@cox.net</p>
<p><b>Doug Fischer</b> DFisc12GA@aol.com MOS: 0353 B Co, 3rd ATs</p>	<p><b>Bruce Van Apeldoorn Sr</b> (585) 613-6564 bvanapeldoornsr@gmail.com</p>
<p><b>Tom Colson</b> Wife: Mary DOB: 12/25/44</p>	<p><b>Claude "Chris" Vargo</b> cvargo@gmail.com</p>

## Letter to the Editor

Why you should come to a reunion!  
Hello Rich,

It was great seeing you at the reunion in Charleston. As time flew by with my first visit with so many guys I wish that I could have talked more to you and everyone there. It was at times so emotionally overwhelming and so goddamn rewarding I really cannot put it into words. I never really knew what closure was all about until the reunion. Like all the guys I visited, I wish I had known about the group years ago so that I could have contributed even just a little sweat like we did as partners in comradeship so many years ago.

I have talked with a dozen guys since Charleston and they wish they could have been there...but did not go for various reasons. Let's make it to San Diego together. Why the hell not? How much longer are we going to live? We did something that I am very damn proud of for my family, my country and MY GOD!

My wife Gloria told me that she enjoyed being there and with chatting with you. I think she had a better time than me, if that is possible. She really got into hearing what we guys went through in Vietnam. She knew me well before, during and after I was in-country but now she can finally connect the dots between photos and real people like you. This brings closure for her as well. Besides, she bought out all the trinkets at the Slopchute!

Let's make the next one together!!!  
Tanks in Advance and Semper Fi!

Chris Vargo  
(832) 545-7600

P.S. Oh, here is the photo you asked me for of Soto on B-14 and let me know if you want any more. Lastly, I talked with Gunny Al Soto who is in San Antonio. His phone number is 210-882-8763.



To John Wear & members,  
Thank you so much for all that you did for my husband, Fred Hoekstra, in his last days and after his passing. The birthday flowers were beautiful. The many cards that came to support him in his illness were much appreciated. The flowers at the funeral home were lovely and a comfort to the family at a difficult time. I know Fred was appreciating all this. He was very dedicated to his military background, to honoring veterans and appreciating all their efforts and sacrifices. He had been looking forward to attending the reunion in Charleston. Thank you again for everything.

Beverly Hoekstra

From a non-member who reads the Sponson Box:

John,  
Agent Orange finally got me with a blood disease called MDS (Myelodysplastic Syndrome). It's a leukemia-like problem in the bone marrow and its inability to produce red blood cells properly. I go on a chemo regimen next week. I've already been to Duke U and their transplant center for consultation. Fortunately the VA is paying for the new drug... the cost on the outside is an unbelievable \$30,000 per month. No, that's not a typo... that's the cost of this stuff. I can't get compensated for Agent Orange but they'll pay for the drug.

Lt Col Jim Walker, USA (ret)  
Charlottesville, VA  
2nd Bn 69th Armor Rgt  
RVN '66 - '68  
66jw70@cox.net

*Editor's Note: Anyone have a problem with this? The VA treats it but doesn't compensate for it? Isn't it an automatic admission of guilt as soon as they begin treating it?*

John,  
I didn't know you were involved with Operation Allen Brook! I was with the Bravo Company, 5th Tanks. I remember when Ben Greene got hit. We were attached to the grunts of 3/7 and my tank was not 50 yards away when it happened. Ben's crew

was starting to panic and a Indian/Hispanic Platoon SSgt (maybe Silva) talked them into calming down and backing out of the area. That was a hell of a day right about now 41 years ago. I had forgotten that the area was called Goi Noi Island and the tank ferry right by Liberty Bridge, where one half of the bridge had burned.

I'm reading the book 'Praying for Slack' written by a guy (Bob Peavey) that could have been me. I was with Bravo Co, 5th Tanks at Los Flores at Camp Pendleton. I had volunteered to go over to Vietnam and went to Las Pulgas for two weeks of Staging Bn training. After one week, I went back and everyone at 5th Tanks was crazy. They all shouted "John, John, we're going to Nam!!!". I explained that I was going and they told me the Captain had told them on Friday that a boat was coming to take them Monday morning. That was the boat trip Robert Peavey writes about. If I hadn't volunteered, I would have been on that same boat trip. After Allen Brook, I went to Nam to guard the bridge. What a wonderful month... NOT!!!

I know I saw your name in the book's chapter on Allen Brook but I can't find it right now. The only names I remember were two of my crew Mario Fuentes and Juan Martinez. I also remember Sgt. Fran Kopf from Third Platoon, Bravo Co or at Hill 37. Kopf was the only one who was with me the entire time from Bootcamp to discharge at El Toro. In the States there was Dick Zuley, Dick Shripka, J. D. Kimble and Lee Aitkens. Last year, Aitkens and I did the 'Run for the Wall' together with 450 other bikers, mostly Vets. I'm glad I did the 'Run', I wouldn't want to do it again. Riding across the country in formation is no fun but the flag waving and salutes were worth it one time.

At Bravo, 1st Tanks, I was an office clerk until I made Sgt. and then I outranked the Chief Clerk. They gave me a tank (#?) and told me not to hurt it. Two weeks later, I ran over a 500 lb bomb and hurt it bad. We were following the mine sweeping team on the road south of Hill 55 to meet up with a similar team coming from Hill 37. It is too bad that the engineers missed

the mine with my name on it. That was in April '68. May '68 was Allen Brook. Later, they gave me B-52, the blade tank, and sent me to Nam.

I'm volunteering help with a group that would like to host the Viet Tankers reunion here in San Diego in 2011.

John T Gardner  
Sgt. USMC 1968  
B Co., 1st Tank Battalion  
1st Marine Division  
Hill 55 south of Danang  
9858 Caminito Laswane  
San Diego, CA 92131  
858 693-1615 Home  
858 342-5628 cell  
Email: jnsgardner@usa.net

John,

I keep a sharp, Motor-T eyeball open for possible candidates... lol

My compliment to the producers/editors of the latest Sponson Box... Good Job!! Mine arrived today...

It is refreshing to read/see the terms/descriptions/language used in the different articles... some words/names I have not heard in years... lol. Tell it like it is, applies here...

I laughed my ass off on the "Crows Nest Shitter Burning... it must have looked like a Roman Candle when it lit up... great story... unheard of till now...

SF,

Tom Snyder

John:

I, Rick Oswood, am in the picture (on Page 9 of the last issue of the Sponson Box) at the 2/1 reunion. LT Col Harris Himes,



Fred Kellogg, Rene Cerda, (Doc) Michael Pipkin, the doc's wife and myself went to the reunion for 2/1 in November 2008. As you probably know, we fought in a battle

supporting them on May 19 1968, just outside Khe Sanh. They lost 18 men KIA and had approximately 60 wounded. After looking at their web site, I believe this was the third worst day 2/1 had In-country as far as KIA. We tankers, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks had 11 wounded. I went to the reunion to get a perspective of how they viewed the fight and meet some of the infantry. Being that we fought and supported them, we are also part of their organization. If you look at their web site they have us as a supporting unit. See attachment below about MUC for that day.

Semper Fi,  
Rick Oswood  
Sumner, WA  
(253) 376-0842

The 12 March newsletter I saw the heading ONTOS from Capt. Robert Bailey, Ret '67 that caught my eye. When I was on I&I staff of 1st Depot Supply Bn., USMCR in Norfolk, VA. The CO LtCol. John R Fields had me and another member go the Naval Base where a flatbed trailer truck and a driver met us at the rail yard to transport a vehicle to our MT garage.

When we found the rail car, which was parked next to a warehouse, inside the car was an ONTOS we had never heard of this vehicle. The only way to unload it was through the side door of the boxcar, the car was loaded through the end that had a door also.

The naval rail yard could not move the car so we had to unload from the side and drive through the warehouse to the flatbed. The two of us looked over the manual for about an hour then after much; much maneuvering we got it out and on the flatbed. First time I ever operated anything like that.

We used it one day for recruiting display at a football game at Norfolk State University. A few days later it disappeared I think Headquarters FMF Atlantic in Norfolk used it to evaluate its use for the Marine Corps. This was in 1954 - 55 or 56 not sure when.

D.E. Wilson, SSgt.  
1950 to 1959

Thanks Tanks!

I was with "L" Co 3 Bn 27th Marines on Operation Allenbrook in May 1968. I'm not sure if you guys were the tanks with us or not, but I know when I was down at the river and the gooks opened up, I sure was glad to crawl under one of those tanks, until he fired, I scrambled out as fast as I could, felt like I had been hit by the tank. When it rained out there, we got in your exhaust to keep warm and a sniper opened up, a black Gunny or SSgt. used the main gun to silence him. I just wanted to say, "Thanks to you for the help."

Semper Fi brothers

Chuck Spencer  
usmcolesarge@aol.com  
Bartow, FL

John,

I was surprised and happy with the beautiful floral arrangement. It was very thoughtful of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association to remember me. It could not have come at a better time. I had lost my little sister on December 16th at forty eight years of age after a six year battle with cancer. I was with her the last six weeks of her life, at her bedside. I was already going into that deep dark depression that comes for a lot of Tet 1968 survivors. I was going into surgery Feb 25th. The night before, I got a call from South Florida. My younger brother had choked on a piece of roast beef that had gone into his lungs. His brain had starved for oxygen and he was in a coma and on life support. I had the surgery at 8:00 AM, Wednesday, Feb 25th and my brother dies at 5:45 AM, Friday, Feb 27th. There were only the three of us. I never thought that I'd get out of Vietnam alive or to outlive Maryanne and Steve. Again thank you for all. You were more help then you know.

Semper Fi,

Tom Clary  
Fort White, FL  
(386) 497-2453

*P.S. There are two military charities that I fully support. The **Wounded Warriors Project** which is a God send to America's wounded sons and daughters.*

The other is **Adopt a Platoon** which all of the work is done by volunteer mothers of deployed troops. Several years ago at a national meeting of the Vietnam Veterans of America we resolved that never again will one generation of veterans forsake another.

#### Hunting Trip

While serving with Bravo Company 1/9 in the vicinity of Cam Lo in 1969 we were assigned to a tank patrol. After several hours of seeing nothing, the Gunny in charge of the tank frantically requested an M16. From his perch he popped off five or six rounds. Of course we scattered and set up a perimeter expecting the worse; with a sheepish grin the gunny informed us he had shot a deer. Volunteers were requested to mount a combat patrol to retrieve it. Several of us searched for about a half-hour to no avail. On the way back riding on the tank any wild animal was fair game. With the M79 loaded with buckshot and M16s firing it must have sounded like a small rolling firefight. Fortunately we weren't hunting for supper because we came home empty-handed. Upon returning to base a special formation was called and our CO informed us that would be the first and last hunting trip we would participate in. Our unauthorized hunting trip stands out in my memory as one of the few enjoyable times I spent in Vietnam.

William Whitley  
B Co, 1/9  
'67 - '67

#### Two-Beers-A-Day,

In response to all of the letters that were written about the "Ballad of The Green Beret" in your last Sgt Grit News, I'd like to weigh in on the topic as well. Back in the summer of 1968 my tank had hit a mine and we were back in "the rear" of the sprawling Dong Ha Combat Base repairing the mine damage. The daily drill when we were in the rear was to wake at dawn, eat morning chow at the 3rd Motor-T chow hall, spend the day making butt-kicking repairs with a break at noon for

noon chow. Then after evening chow we'd head to the tin-roofed hooch that served as the enlisted club to collect our two-beers-a-day ration. When the beer was consumed, we'd then head over to the doggie's outdoor movie theater that was up the hill from the tank park. On one particular evening the movie was "The Green Berets" with John Wayne. We sat on the telephone pole seats and hooted & hollered at the horrible acting and the not-so-accurate portrayal of the Vietnam War. Just as the movie was ending the base experienced about a dozen incoming mortar rounds. We movie watchers piled into the open trenches that were alongside the outdoor theater until the "all clear" was sounded. As we crawled out of the trenches, off in the distance "Puff the Magic Dragon" opened up on the suspected NVA mortar position. We watched in awe as the stream of thousands of red tracer rounds tore up the jungle. Shouts of "Get Some!" rang through the air. What a way to watch a war movie!

John Wear  
Former Sgt of Marines  
RVN 1968 - 1969

John,

The first time I went to Cuba (I was at Gitmo twice) we were chased into the Bay by a Russian trawler. The trawler kept getting closer even though warned off by the captain of the US Navy LST via loudspeaker. By the time the trawler was so close I could have waved to the crew, a US Navy destroyer came racing out of Gitmo heeling several degrees as the ship made a high speed turn to cut off the trawler. It eventually got between the trawler and our LST and forced the trawler to back off. This was pretty cool to watch for an 18 year old Marine. Now that I'm older and wiser, I realize it would have not been wise to do what we Marine tankers were demanding of the LST crew. We had five M-102 heavy tanks on board in the well deck with ramp access to the main deck. We wanted (demanded) one be brought up so we could swing

our 120MM cannon toward the Russians. We thought it would have been great fun!!!!

Fred Kellogg  
Kellogg@comcast.net

Dear John,

Thanks very much for your letter and the January - February - March 2009 issue of Sponson Box. I really enjoyed reading it, and look forward to future issues. Thanks so much for making that possible.

Even the cover photo brought back memories, as it is of my old "Phu Bai" stomping grounds. I commanded a battery of 105s when we occupied the old ARVN firebase in Phu Bai itself, and we would often tow two or three howitzers into the surrounding area to shoot infantry support fire missions.

I noted that your upcoming 2009 reunion will be in Charleston, South Carolina, this year. I attended a Society of Military History conference there a few years back, so I know that you will all have a great time - it's a terrific city.

Thanks again for your letter and magazine. I really appreciate Col Stewart's recommendation that you send me the magazine and your generosity in sending me the Sponson Box.

Best Wishes,

Jerry D Morelock, PhD  
Col, US Army, ret.  
Editor in Chief, Armchair General Magazine.



## Looking For

### S/SGT. JAMES V. HARPER

Dear Mr. Peavey,

My name is Devon Harper. My father was a tanker in Vietnam and a VTA member. His name is James V. Harper; he served with 3rd Tanks in Alpha Co in 1964 - 65. Unfortunately my father passed away on April 15, 2009. I was surprised to see his Sponson Box in the mail because I didn't know he kept up with his membership.

I found the name of another VTA member in his wallet along with his address. I went on-line to the website and after reading the roster, wrote him to notify him of my father's death. His name was Kurt Ross and I spoke with him over the phone. I was elated he helped fill in the empty gaps and he encouraged me to acquire my Dad's DD-214 which I am currently waiting for.

My mom gave me the okay to convert his den to a memento room in his honor. It's become a project of sorts for future generations to know what role he played in history and not a social studies text book account of the war. He wouldn't have it any other way.

He never really talked about what he endured over there in explicit detail. I respected this. What I do know is that my dad was a Tank Commander and a Staff Sergeant. His nickname was "I.W." in the Corps. He was a small man but my sister and I view him as a giant. My nieces simply called him Grand Pa - a title he wore with pride along with his eagle, globe and anchor.

I have a request if it's possible to continue my dad's membership primarily to contact anyone that served with my dad and also I'm curious if I can acquire a 3rd Tanks patch if that's even possible. On behalf of my family and myself, you have our support and the utmost respect. Thank you very much.

Sincerely Yours,

Devon Harper  
1 Convent Ave. #41  
New York, NY 10027

*Editor's Note: I hope to have a phone number by the time this magazine goes to press. If you knew S/Sgt Harper, please get in touch with me if you want to talk to his son who would really like to hear from anyone.*

### MICHAEL DALE COCHRAN

Looking for anyone that served with my father's brother, Michael Dale Cochran, KIA Nov. 1967. Just trying to put together his past and his part in Vietnam.

Al Cochran  
Accochran0777@sbcglobal

### RONNIE L. LYONS

Thanks for all veterans! I would like to locate anyone who would know my father Ronnie L Lyons, He was a tank commander in March 1969, Company C, First Tanks, Quang Nam Province. He was a CPL at time he received the Bronze Star during this operation. He became DI in seventies, at MCRD, rank there SSGT R. L. Lyons. All feel free to email myself, God bless one and all.

Lea Lyons  
Leaort123Qqmail.com

### L/CPL CLINTON BOLL

My father recently passed away and in his things I found a year book titled - "Bravo Company, 1st Tank, 1965-1966, Vietnam"

I didn't know him well as a stroke robbed him of his ability to communicate well in 1981. If anyone remembers L/Cpl Clinton Boll of the Motor Transport Crew and has anything to share about his time in the Marines my brothers and I would love to hear from you. Thank you.

Sarah Boll-Gamble  
Miss sarah 76@yahoo.com

### DO YOU KNOW DACE SMITH?

VTA member & Silver Star recipient

Joe Tiscia has located a Vietnam Ontos track commander, Dace Smith, living in Ft Worth, TX. Dace was involved in the huge ambush of a convoy outside of Hue City during Tet '68. Dace's Ontos was in the rear of the column and could very easily have turned his "pig" around and headed to the safety of Phu Bai but instead he took the NVA to task and ended up WIA. Dace is currently in the VA hospital and may not pull through. Joe was wondering if anyone who knows or remembers Dace, maybe they could either call or write to him and wish him well. Also anyone in the Dallas - Ft Worth area could maybe pay him a visit.

Dace Smith

5317 Collinwood Ave

Ft. Worth Texas 76107

Home Phone is 817-886-0147.

His wife Carol's email address is: carol-smith8094@sbcglobal.net

### LOOKING FOR ASBESTOS

I am looking for information about asbestos used in and around the tanks we drove and road in, along with any asbestos we may have come in contact well in veit nam. If any one has any information or where I can find information about this please email me as soon as possible.

It may help the doctors I am seeing and may help me compensation wise. My Email address is jameslittman@yahoo.com

Bless You All

James Littman  
(763) 323-1481  
313 Belle Aire Dr  
Champlin, MN 55316  
jameslittman@yahoo.com

*Editor's Note: Wasn't the loader's glove made of asbestos? If there was any asbestos in the tank, Jerry Hodum could tell us where. ◆*

# Shotscreen

BY KRIS OSBORN, KOSBORN@MILITARYTIMES.COM

The Office of Naval Research is spending another \$1.5 million to develop an active protection system that tracks incoming rocket-propelled grenades and fires a spray of pellets that can detonate RPGs 15 to 20 feet away, Marine officials said.

The Corps is considering deploying the Non-Lethal Shotscreen RPG-Defeat System to protect light armored vehicles, Corps officials said.

"We rely on sensors to tell us how far away the RPG is. We release thousands of pellets in one cloud. There is a very sensitive fuse in the tip of the RPG. We exploit that by throwing out a cloud of pellets at low velocity," said an engineer with Mechanical Solutions, Whippany, N.J.

The pellets linger in the air for a few seconds, so a single blast can intercept multiple rounds.

An RPG that detonates 12 feet from an armored vehicle is unlikely to do much damage, and even six feet of separation reduces the chances substantially. Detonation four feet from the target cuts the penetration by half.

Compared with active-protection systems that fire interceptor rockets, one analyst said, this could reduce risks to nearby friendly forces.

"In theory, this would address one of the real concerns with active protection systems, which is the risk to nearby personnel and other vehicles. If it can work as effectively as interceptor systems, then it ought to be a real competitor for the active protection role," said Daniel Goure, vice president of the Lexington Institute, an Arlington, Va.-based think tank. Engineers at the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab are tracking Shotscreen.

"It is our understanding that the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab may have been looking at Shotscreen systems recently," said Bill Johnson-Miles, a spokesman for Marine Corps Systems Command.

The technology, which began six years ago as part of ONR's Small Business Innovative Research program, has just entered a new two-year Commercialization Pilot Program designed to help move the Shotscreen system to deployment.

The \$1.5 million is in addition to \$1 million ONR already has spent on Shotscreen. The Army's Picatinny Arsenal has helped with development, which has included a handful of static test shots using an early Shotscreen prototype.

During several tests in Socorro, N.M., Shotscreen was attached to steel plates to simulate the armor of a tank or LAV. Fifteen RPGs were fired, one at a time, from up to 80 meters away; the pellets caused 13 of the grenades to prematurely detonate, company officials said.

"In trumping the potency of the RPG, we believe this removes a psychological burden off the shoulders of our war fighters, and will provide needed protection to Marines traveling through theater in light armored vehicles," said William Marscher, president of Mechanical Solutions. "To be able to achieve this with a nonlethal system, which actually reduces the threat to nearby dismounted troops and civilians, is an achievement we are very proud of."

Mechanical Solutions is working on allowing Shotscreen to intercept RPGs fired from above the vehicles, as from rooftops.

Permission to reprint story given by Mike Randazzo

E-Commerce Support Specialist  
Army Times Publishing Company

## Wareham Vietnam vet to be honored posthumously today

BY JENNIFER LADE, JLADE@S-T.COM

April 20, 2009 6:00 AM

WAREHAM — When Dick Duffy first met Francis E. Vining Jr. in the late 1980s, he saw an intimidating man — 6 foot 2, 220 pounds and extremely tight-lipped about his experiences as a gunnery sergeant with the Marines in Vietnam.

And when Duffy, a history teacher at Tabor Academy, first approached Vining one Sunday after Mass at St. Patrick's Church in Wareham, asking if Vining would be willing to share with Tabor students stories of his three tours of duty, he quickly was rebuffed.

But over time, Vining softened, at first grudgingly agreeing to speak to students,



and later, actually looking forward to the talks he delivered each semester. Duffy believed that the talks were therapeutic for the retired Marine, who "had six tanks blown out from under him," took an AK-47 shot to the face, was exposed to Agent Orange and once had to give combat orders to a relative, which led to the man's death.

Occasionally, there were lighter stories, such as the

time his unit submitted its pet monkey for a Purple Heart. The commanding officer came down to present the award himself, looking in vain for a soldier while Vining and the rest of his unit tried not to laugh.

"The major was not pleased that he had a Purple Heart for the monkey," Duffy said.

Vining, whom Duffy affectionately called "Gunny" after his military rank, spoke to the Tabor students for 15 years, until his death in 2005.

"He was just a real inspiration to the kids," Duffy said.

But the years of talks also led Duffy to realize that Vining was a true hero. When he found out about the In Memory Program, which honors veterans who died prematurely from noncombat injuries and emotional suffering caused directly by the Vietnam War, he knew that Vining deserved to be honored.

Vining's widow, Priscilla, said her husband, who was 65 when he died, had diabetes, colon cancer and respiratory problems that had been caused or worsened because of his exposure to Agent Orange, a toxic herbicide and defoliant used by the U.S. military in Vietnam.

"They just sprayed the jungle with it," she said.

According to Priscilla, Vining received three Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star and several other awards during his tours of duty, which took place from 1960 until around 1966. A couple of friends credit him with saving their lives, she said.

After months of petitioning "the powers that be," Duffy said, he was successful in getting Vining into the In Memory Program, which has recognized more than 1,800 individuals to date.

Today, 123 Americans, including Vining, will be honored posthumously at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., for the 11th annual In Memory Day.

Department of Defense rules do not qualify these individuals to have their names on The Wall, because their deaths were not due to wounds suffered in combat zones. But in a ceremony, loved ones will read their names, and tributes to them will be placed at The Wall.

According to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, which sponsors the program, In Memory Day purposely

coincides with Patriots Day, which commemorates the battles of Lexington and Concord at the start of the Revolutionary War.

More than 1,000 family members and friends are expected to gather for the ceremony. To honor Vining, Duffy will be there, as will Vining's widow; her daughter, Holly Deckler; her son, Robert Edwards, and his wife, Karen; and three grandsons, Jackson, 8, Kai, 6 and Benjamin, 22.

Vining and Priscilla married in 1983, three years after he retired from the service, and worked as a tool and die maker until he retired. Vining, who grew up in Charlestown, was a fixture at the 8 a.m. Mass at St. Patrick's Church and was a member of the American Legion in Wareham and the Benjamin Cushing Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Marion.

"Once he retired from traveling all over the world he really was a home guy. He loved his home and his dog," Priscilla said. "Big Marine... you think rough and tough. But really, he had a soft heart." ♦

## READ Most Important Latest Findings READ

*Showing A Correlation Between Prostate Cancer Reoccurrence Among Veterans Post Radical Prostatectomy*

Dr. Martha Terris, Chief of Urology, Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta recently stated: "There is something about the biology of these cancers that are associated with prior Agent Orange exposure that is causing them to be more aggressive."

A study of 1,495 veterans who underwent radical prostatectomy to remove their cancerous prostates showed that 206 exposed to Agent Orange had nearly a 50% increased risk of their cancer recurring, despite the fact that their cancer seemed relatively nonaggressive at the time of surgery. And, their cancer came back with a vengeance. The time it took the prostate specific antigen (PSA) to double --an indicator of

aggressiveness--was eight months versus more than 18 months in non-exposed veterans.

After surgery to remove the diseased prostate, the PSA should be zero, but any prostate cancer cells left behind continue to make PSA, a red flag of recurrence, Dr. Terris said. The PSA often "percolates along" so physicians tend to watch it for a while to determine if additional therapy is needed. However in patients with Agent Orange exposure, radiation or hormone therapy to kill remaining cells may need to be done sooner rather than later.

Dioxin, the known carcinogen in Agent Orange, is also found in herbicides and pesticides used by

farmers, forestry and chemical plant workers, who also have increased cancer risk. Dr. Terris is investigating whether the veteran's degree of exposure is related to the severity of their cancer. Everyone has some dioxin exposure, even if one never set foot in Vietnam, says Dr. Terris. She is now measuring levels in the body fat, which is a repository for what the body has been exposed to, to determine any correlation with cancer severity.

Source: T. Baker, Medical College of Georgia, School of Medicine

NOTE: For the full 4-page article please go to our website.

*(More Medical Information on page 32)*

## Above & Beyond

We are extremely grateful to the following members who reached deep into their pockets and made a financial contribution to the USMC VTA. Thank you very much. If we inadvertently missed someone who also participated in the financial well being of our organization we humbly apologize for the omission and ask you to please notify us of our oversight.

Mark Anderson

Jack Arena

Tom Barry

John Beck

Mike Belmessieri

Mike Bollenbaugh

Ed Boyette

Max Brazeau

Hank Brightwell

Dennis Brumitt

John Byrne

Richard Carmer

Frank Carr

Bill Carroll

Rene Cerda

Jim Coan

Ben Cole

James Cowman

John Cox

Gary Cummings

Ron Davidson

Justin Donnelly

RB English

Cappy Everhard

Dan Farrell

Fritz Firing

Michael Fischer

Bob Fornwalt

Doc Forsyth

Dennis Fresch

Jim Guffey

Doc Hackemack

Tim Hackett

Gary Hall

John Harper

John Heffernan

Rod Henderson

Doug Hightshoe

Fred Hoekstra RIP

John Hughes

Terry Hunter

Glen Hutchins

Clyde Knox

Tom Kelly

Roger Kropke

James Langford

Harlan Langlitz

Rick Lewis

James Littman

Joe Liu

Jake Mahoney

Geary McCleery

John McGuire

Mike Matzenbacher

Larry Mobley

Rick Oswood

George Palmer

Larry Parshall

Jimmie Patrick

Richard Peksens

Barnett Person

Joe Petro

Jim Raasch

Lloyd Reynolds

Peter Rich

Randy Roberts

Tom Roberts

Maria Rodriguez

Frank Slovik

Paul Tate

Charles Thatcher

Richard Tilden

Richard Traiser

Dave Tweden

Bruce Van Apeldoorn

John Voss

Jerry Wahl

David Walters

Jan Wendling

Dan Wokaty

Guy Wolfenbarger

Wally Young

## To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

### FRED JOHN SILVESTER

April 26, 1950 - June 22, 2006

Fred John Silvester, 56 of Gustine, died Thursday in Livermore.

Fred was a native of St. Paul, Minnesota and had lived in Gustine for 7 years. He was a Crane Operator for 25 years and



Fred & Gary

was recently employed at Sheedy Company he previously was employed with Hatton Crane Company and San Jose Crane Company for many years. He also was a Bear Trainer with the Hathorn Circus. He was a Vietnam Veteran who served in the United States Marine Corps from 1968 - 1976. He was an avid animal lover.

He is survived by his mother, Betsy Ross Silvester of Gustine; brother, James Fred Silvester of Sacramento; sisters, Sandra Clarisse Saugen of San

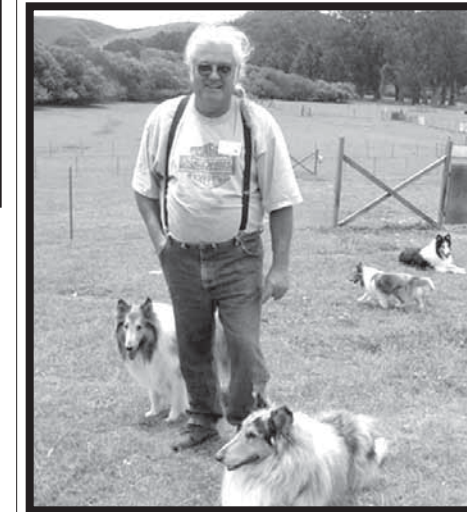
### ROBERT JOHN WRIGHT

Robert John Wright, 61, of Janesville, WI, died Monday, Sept. 8, 2008, at University Hospital, Madison. He was born on June 23, 1947, the son of Theodore and Katherine (Russel) Wright in Beloit. He was a member of the United States Marine Corps, where he served his country with the 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division in Vietnam from 1968-1969. He married Deborah Olson on Aug. 1, 1975, in Janesville, and the couple resided

in Beloit until moving to Janesville in 1978. He was a laborer for McDonald's Trenching until retiring in 1989. He loved fishing, talking, reading and spending time with family, especially his grandchildren.

### NIEZURAWSKI, DONALD J.

Niezurawski, Donald J. - Bay City, Michigan, age 57 years, died at his home Friday, March 24, 2006. Died as a result of Agent Orange Lung Cancer. Served with Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks, 1967/1968.



### COL. GILES WOOD BOND, JR.

Col. Giles Wood Bond, Jr., USMC (Ret.), 68, of Brandon, MS, went to be with Jesus on April 21, 2009, after finally winning his 11-year battle with cancer.

Born in Hattiesburg, MS, Woody was a graduate of Hattiesburg High School. He received B.S. degrees in history and political science from Mississippi Southern, now known as USM. Upon graduation, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps.

After serving in Vietnam with the 3rd Tank Bn., 3rd Marine Division (Rein) and earning several personal awards for valor, Captain Bond left active duty but continued

service in the Marine Corps Reserve. He taught history at Hattiesburg High for one year while earning a graduate degree in history at Southern. He thereafter entered law school at the University of Mississippi.

Upon earning his J.D., Woody accepted a regular commission in the Marine Corps, serving as a prosecutor, defense counsel, and staff judge advocate with tours at Camp LeJeune, NC; Okinawa, Japan; Camp Pendleton, CA; Cherry Point, NC; and Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D.C. In his last active duty assignment, Col. Bond was Deputy Counsel for the Commandant of the Marine Corps. He retired in 1990.

### CLINTON ANTON BOLL

Clinton Anton Boll, 62, of Jerome, passed away Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009.

Clinton was born Nov. 23, 1946, in Minnesota. Later, his family moved to Southern California, where he spent most of his childhood. After high school, he joined the Marines and served time in Vietnam during the war as a motor transportation specialists with 3rd Tank Bn at Chu Lai. After serving with the Marines, he moved to Alaska. During his time in Alaska, he suffered a severe stroke in his mid-30s which left him disabled.

### GOODBYE OLD FRIEND

"Is this Doc Forsyth?" The voice on the phone was not familiar to me and my mind was not prepared for a female referring to me as Doc. "I got your number from Gary Mefford. I think you patched up my husband in Vietnam. His name is Fred, Fred Hoekstra?" Ah yes, I remembered my friend Gary sharing some Christmas photos with me that had included a shot of Fred and his wife Beverly when they had visited Gary and his wife Margie in Texas.

Other than Gary Mefford, I had not kept in touch with anyone from Nam, it was

just one of those things. I wanted to shed all of that experience but even so, Mefford and I exchanged Christmas cards every year and that had been the extent of my staying in touch. Now, there were three of us. Now there was Fred.

It took some time but eventually Fred and I began to communicate, albeit sporadically, and that communication evolved into a full on renewed friendship. Fred was very involved in Community service, especially the Marine Corps League. He was the head of the "Honor Guard" for his chapter and attended ceremonies at the Soldiers cemetery near his home in Agawam, Massachusetts or wherever he was needed. Fred was the consummate outdoors man and thoroughly enjoyed camping, canoeing and hiking and had intended to hike the Appalachian trail from bottom to top. He did do pieces every now and then to get himself prepared for the ultimate long journey and he always kept me up to date on his progress. Then one afternoon he called and said "Doc, they just told me I've got Prostate cancer." He had surgery and afterwards a long and sometimes bumpy recovery but his spirits remained intact and he continued to hike and to perform his duties to his family and to his beloved Marine Corps League.

Not long after Fred's surgery, very unceremoniously, I too learned that I had cancer and was to undergo a lengthy series of Radiation treatments. During my treatments Fred stayed in close touch. He was a great support and although we were both very sick, we always managed to share laughs and plans for hikes. Then Fred learned that his cancer had returned and that he was to begin a series of Radiation treatments also. He started his Radiation therapy on August first, the day I finished mine. The next year was somewhat of a bust in terms of hiking but our friendship flourished and we never gave up on our plans. Then, after more than a year had passed we managed to hit the trail. Fred worked hard at getting in shape for the grueling ordeal and I joined him for a few days of his ten day journey as he passed through New Jersey into PA. It was an arduous but wonderful hike and when we finished we almost immediately began planning our next trek. But cancer was not through with Fred.

Early in 2009 Fred learned that his condition was most probably terminal as they had discovered cancer cells in his bones. He

was scheduled for a series of very aggressive chemotherapy sessions that would put him in the hospital for three days at a time while being infused. After the second round and for the first time in my memory, he became discouraged. The pain was such that he was becoming depressed and the medication, including Morphine, no longer helped. We cancelled the scheduled two week hike that we'd been looking forward to doing and called it a temporary delay but I think we both knew otherwise. But being the sort of man that Fred was, being the Marine that he was, this Spring he suggested that we do a canoe trip instead of a hike. And so we packed up our gear, Fred's wife Beverly, my dog Buster and my girlfriend Deb and we headed for the Adirondacks. Although very sick, the trip was just what the doctor "should have" ordered. Fred was in his element and we canoed and camped for several days and had a wonderful time. For the most part one would never have known Fred was ill. He laughed and told the terrible jokes for which he'd become famous. For all intents and purposes he was good to go.

Two or three days after returning home however, the doctors did a spinal tap and found that cancer cells had invaded his cerebral - spinal fluid. A week later he was hospitalized and a couple weeks after that his wife called to let me know he had been moved to Hospice care. I called our friend Gary Mefford in Texas, and "E" mailed Todd Phillips and Clyde Hoch and let them know what was going on. In a matter of days, Gary drove up from Texas, Hoch and I came from PA but unfortunately, due to being in the middle of moving from Michigan to Vermont and having his communications temporarily down, I was not able to reach Todd Phillips in time and he did not make it.

Gary, Clyde and I, along with Fred's wife, brother, daughter and his ninety four year old father, Russell, were all at his bedside to see him off. In his usual style, he rallied and was able to talk to us and to laugh and joke with everyone, although with great difficulty. We stayed the weekend and Gary was the last of us to leave on Monday. Fred passed away on Tuesday. He is and will be sorely missed. His humor and sense of decency were a credit to him as a man and to the Corps he loved.

When I returned from his Memorial and Funeral service the following week, I contacted the guys from Charlie company and asked if

they would like to contribute to this Sponson Box Memorial. Here are some of the responses.

#### KNOWING FRED HOEKSTRA

By: Sgt. Gary D Mefford

I first met Fred in 1968-shortly after TET. I was transferred from 1st Tank Bn to assume the role of Charlie Company Communications Chief. Fred was a tank mechanic at our cantonment at the end of the MSR just South of Marble Mountain. We were both Corporals at the time. I had just lost a good friend who was a radio communications operator with a recon unit during that TET season in 1968 and I needed a good friend to lean on for support. Fred became that person. We became good friends very quickly. We hit our first disagreement early on. When we talked about friendships, he made the statement, "You don't have friends in the Marine Corps or Viet Nam - you only have acquaintances." We disagreed and discussed that at length-many times! In later years, he told me that I became infuriated each time he said it.

Fred and I became good buddies and we spent lots of time together. We each had different responsibilities that took us in different directions in our work and travels. He mostly worked at company on tanks, but did get sent out to platoons often to resolve tank problems. I had communicators assigned to various platoons and needed to travel to take radios, train crew members, or relieve assigned communicators with replacements.

Fred was an organizer. I saw it first hand when he overhauled the entire tank maintenance record keeping system at Charlie Company-it was in total disarray until Fred organized and streamlined it. I was impressed with the personal filing system he maintained when we went to visit them in Massachusetts July 4th of 2000. He pulled out various folders which contained letters from those of us with whom he had corresponded including every Christmas card and letter I had sent since we started in the 1970's. He arranged White House and Congressional tours when we visited Washington DC. Later, he arranged a trip for several of us to visit the Marine Corps Museum at Quantico, and VIP seating for Veterans Day ceremonies at the wall. Finally, he talked us into and arranged an Alaskan cruise that he and Bev and my wife Margie and I took in May of 2008. Margie and I

had talked about an Alaskan cruise for 25 years but were somewhat reluctant to go due to economic and time restraints. But, we are so pleased Fred talked us into pulling the trigger and going - it was a fantastic experience which we cherish.

Fred was a mover and a shaker. He was into "let's get R done" long before Larry the cable guy coined the phrase. Fred's favorite phrase was "Let's not dilly the dally!" and he believed whole-heartedly in its meaning. He was always trying to move things and people along.

In Nam, having transportation to get to our platoons was always a hassle as Charlie company had few jeeps. So, I believe it was Fred who went with me to liberate one of those many "extra jeeps" the Army always seemed to have from the Army Supply Depot in DaNang. It was so easy to just drive into the depot and find one. I chose one, hopped in and drove out with Fred following me. No key needed-just the flip of a switch, lots of guts and a convincing story at the guard gate acting like I knew what I was doing! We rushed back towards Marble Mountain and headed down the MSR towards Charlie Company never looking back. Since Fred was a tank mechanic, we set it up on tank road wheel sprockets and stripped it down. We removed all the Army paint, insignias, and numbers and painted it with 1st Tk stencils and duplicated a number on another jeep in company. Fred and I then had our own jeep to come and go as needed-even though it was known as "C-28's jeep." Others also enjoyed the benefits of having "our own" jeep including Doc Forsyth, Sgt. Hoch, and more.

I decided to extend 6 months in country and talked Fred into it also. We had both gotten in country in December of '67 and since the Marine Corps had a 12 and 20 program, we would have the honor of spending two Christmases in Viet Nam. After experiencing TET of '68, I wanted to spend Christmas of 1968 at home. Extending for 6 months enabled us to go home for Christmas in 1968. We both did and both got telegrams, at home, extending our Christmas vacations. Returning to RVN in January of 1969, we continued our friendship. My time in country came to an end August '69. I received orders to MCRD San Diego as a communications instructor in C&E Bn. Fred and Doc took me to the airstrip in "my" jeep - how appropriate to have two good friends take me to the

"Freedom Bird." We exchanged addresses and vowed to remain in touch.

Fred and I maintained contact and each year exchanged Christmas cards and caught up on what the year had brought. Fred was in Massachusetts; Doc in either Florida, California, or New York; and we now lived in Texas. Fred and Bev came to visit us in 1989- what a great reunion after 20 years of not seeing each other! Then, the three of us decided to meet in Washington DC the summer of 2000 and visit "The Wall" together. Doc had been many times but Fred and I had never been. What a tremendous reunion and emotional visit. Fred was able to visit a buddy of his on the wall, and I was able to visit my good friend Russell Wilcox (Waynesfield, Oh) who's name is also engraved in granite on that somber beckoning wall of stone. How awesome to have the support of two dear friends at this emotional experience. We jointly decided it would be appropriate to meet in DC for Veterans Day and the Marine Corps birthday so we began that tradition 2001.

I joined the VTA and was able to find another person I had searched for years - Sgt. Clyde Hoch. Now, Clyde became part of the group to reunite annually in DC. Later our XO LT Peksens and Todd Phillips joined us as well. Fred and Doc were both diagnosed with cancer around the same time and both battled it courageously. We were all planning to attend the VTA reunion in Charleston in August, however Fred continued to have setbacks in his battle and it became clear he would not be able to make it. Then, we got word that Fred would only have 1 to 2 weeks to live. Margie and I decided to change our plans and go to Massachusetts to see Fred one last time - instead of going to the VTA reunion. We (wife Margie and remodeling helper/"adopted son" Michael) towed our camper up that 1,933 mile journey to see my good friend - Fred. We had 4 days to visit. The first day we saw him (Friday) and last day (Monday) were not particularly good for Fred. He was groggy from the meds and pretty non-responsive. However, Saturday and Sunday were both blessings. He was alert, responsive, joking and we had a great time. Doc and Clyde both made it in that weekend and we had a great reunion at Fred's beside at the VA hospital.

It was difficult to leave but we had to return home, so we bid Fred good bye on

Monday, July 20th. He had known who we were each time we visited him during our four days there. He seemed disappointed and saddened when I told him we needed to leave. We became emotional during our goodbyes as we knew this would be our last time to see each other. He commented on our getting all "choked up." On our return trip to Texas, I had a dream Tuesday night that he had died. Around noon on Wednesday, Doc called, we were in Roanoke, VA. And told us that Fred had died during the night. We are so pleased we were able to make it up to see my good friend and enjoy one another's company one last time.

I bid you "farewell" my good friend, Fred. But, I do have to tell you that you were wrong! You don't have "just acquaintances" in the Marine Corps and Viet Nam. These past 40 years have proven that. You are and will always remain a good life-long friend, Fred. I will miss you and I thank God our paths crossed and that I had the opportunity to know you all these years and be able to call you "friend!"

Your buddy,  
Gary

#### FROM TODD PHILLIPS:

Doc,

So sorry to hear about Fred. I didn't know or remember Fred from Nam, though I'm sure our paths crossed on more than one occasion. Fred was a company Marine and I was in the field with only the occasional stop in the Co. area. I met and was reintroduced to Fred at the USMCTVA Philly reunion and we met again in D.C. the past couple of years. From that short time I can tell you that "Esprit de Corps" and "SEMPER PARATUS" were more than just words to Fred, they were a way of life! We will all remember him fondly and be grateful for the time we shared

S/F

Todd Phillips

#### FROM LT. RICHARD PEKSENS

As a platoon leader with Charlie Company, I had the pleasure of knowing Fred from Vietnam. He was a person of engaging charm and humor who never seemed to take his situation seriously. According to Doc Forsyth, he was still laughing at his terminal

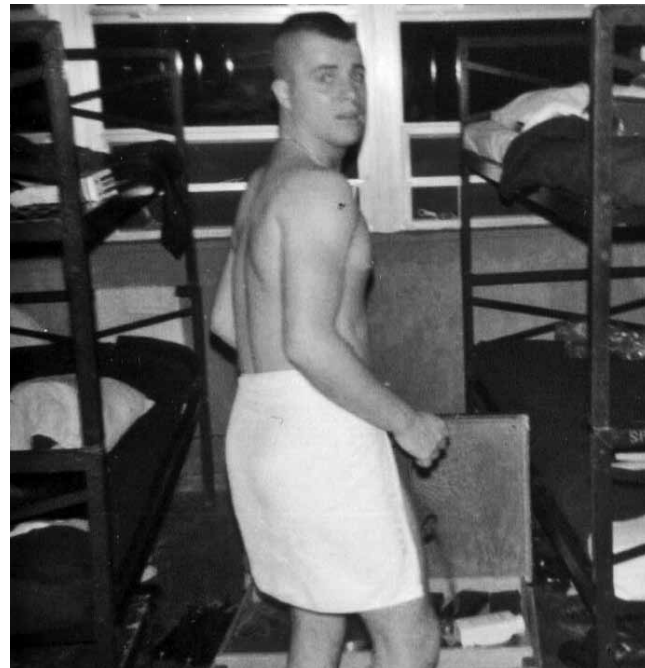
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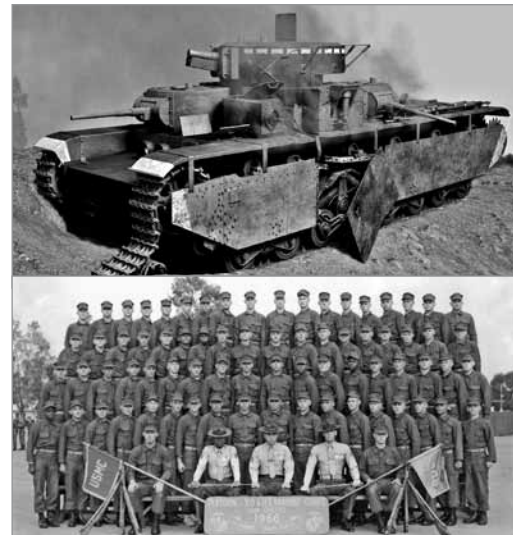
## Name That Tanker

This issue's mystery picture is of a tanker and not a tank. We think the picture was taken in 1964 in Okinawa. Can you ID this person? The first correct answer will receive a 10" USMC Vietnam Tankers Association patch worth \$30.

Call Bob Peavey with your answer: 770-365-3711.



The last issue of the Sponson Box had two trivia questions. The answer to the mystery tank was the Russian T-35 shown below. There was also a "Find the famous person" challenge on the back inside cover of a platoon graduation photo. The winning answer was Gunny R. Lee Ermey of *Full Metal Jacket* fame and the host of TV's *Mail Call* and now *Lock 'n Load*. In the picture he was an assistant DI and was a corporal.



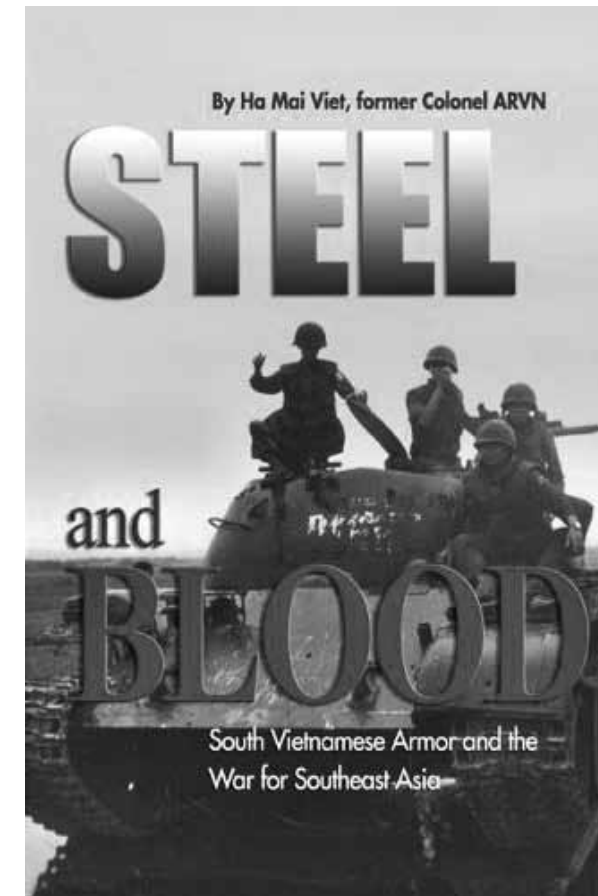
## BOOK REVIEW

LT COL RAYMOND STEWART, USMC (RET)

**Steel and Blood: South Vietnamese Armor and the War for Southeast Asia**

By Ha Mai Viet, former Colonel, ARVN.

Published by the Naval Institute Press. 460 pages



NVA enemy and ARVN alike placed on the use of armored vehicles in general and tanks specifically. Just one example – by 1975 the NVA had an estimated 600 T-54s in or on the border of South Vietnam supplied by three 6" well-concealed fuel lines with sophisticated pumping and fueling stations that ran through Laos and Cambodia hundreds of kilometers from Haiphong in the north.

In battle after battle – from the Plain of Reeds through the three front General Offensive and battles for the Central Highlands to the final assault on Saigon itself, Col. Ha Mai Viet provides the reader with the often heart wrenching candid and unwashed details of bloody victories and even more horrific defeats. He does not embellish the value of the ARVNAF in its successful

In Part II, "Military History", Col. Ha Mia Viet's attention to detail and in-depth research provides the reader the historical background of the ARVN in general terms and, more specifically, traces the establishment, growth, and deployment of the Armored forces (ARVNAF). While certainly not the "grabber" that one finds in page after page of Part I, Part II is of significant value in understanding the development, structure, employment, logistics, and administration of the ARVNAF in terms of equipment. The Colonel also provides interesting information on the background and training – not only of the armored personnel but accounts – quite candidly – of the ARVNAF leadership.

To follow the battles, I found the paucity of maps – there are just 2 small-detail maps – made the reading (and enjoyment) of the book somewhat more difficult to than need be. This, of course can be overcome by the acquisitions of a few larger scale maps early-on. Also, command structure, order of battle, and TO&E diagrams, of which there are none, would have greatly helped in better understanding of the material.

Col. Ha Mai Viet states unequivocally that South Vietnam could have defeated the VC/NVA on the battlefield had the U.S. made good on its agreement to support the South after the withdrawal of American ground forces.

This thoroughly researched book – a ten year effort – relies on both personal boots-on ground knowledge and interviews of hundreds of former ARVN as well as VC/NVA soldiers and Officers of all ranks and MOSs. To obtain a more balanced view – and with an armored slant - of the war that took more than 58,000 Americans' lives, this book is a highly recommended read. ♦

Col. Ha Mai Viet provides his meticulously researched, impressively written, and well presented 2-part book about South Vietnam tanks in "Steel and Blood". Part I details the combat history of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Armor (AF) from "Ferocious Battles, 1963-68" through "Vietnamization, 1969-74" to the final days of the Republic in 1975 – "The Capture of South Vietnam". His is a riveting account of tank battle after tank battle pitting the ARVNAF's M-41 and M48 tanks against the NVA enemy's T-54, T-59, T-34, and PT-76 tanks.

Somewhat of surprise to a Marine Corps Vietnam Tanker – and possible Army Armor as well – and for certain to those who declared that Vietnam was not "tank country" is the numbers and types of armored vehicles employed by both sides and the importance the VC/

fighters nor does he minimize the faults of senior leaderships' failed decisions contributing to catastrophic defeats. The author keeps to the rapid movement of armor and the battles in which tanks participate by extracting related details and placing them in "Notes" There are 80 pages of notes which add an impressive dimension of understanding of ARVNAF leadership – or lack of it.

For further background, two of the Central Highland Battles on which the Colonel elaborates – The Battle of Kontum and the Battle for An Loc – are written about in some detail by Army helicopter pilots <http://www.thebattleofkontum.com/graphics/index.html> and a U.S. Army Advisor to the ARVNAF <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/willbanks/willbanks.asp>, respectively. They independently confirm the Colonel's accounts.

## 2009 Reunion Poster

There have been a number of requests for copies of the official Charleston color reunion poster unframed. Here's how to order (print clearly):

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

16 x 20 - \$39.00 (includes handling and shipping) Qty. \_\_\_\_ Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

20 x 24 - \$49.00 (includes handling and shipping) Qty. \_\_\_\_ Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Send check, made out to **USMC VTA**

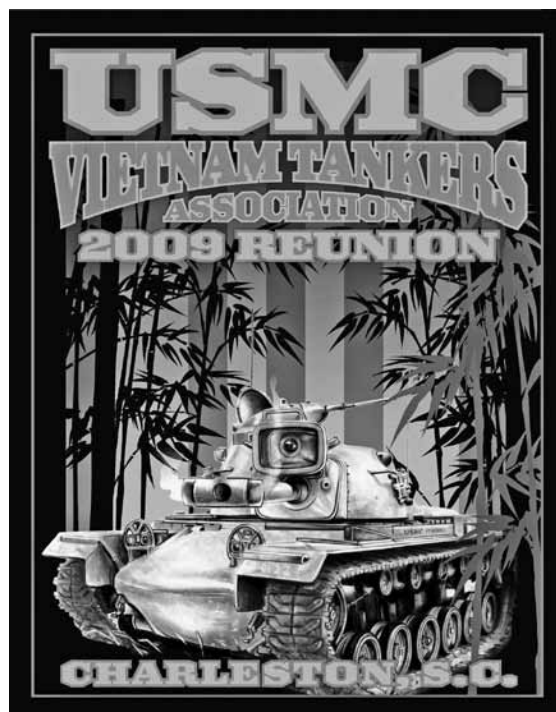
to Ron Knight,

720 Quail Run Court,

Alpharetta, GA 30005-8920

Phone #: 770-623-9237

Order must be received by November 17, 2009. Allow 3-4 weeks after cutoff for delivery. This is a limited time offer. Poster comes unframed.



# A Great Speech

BY COLONEL JAMES M. LOWE

FROM THAT ELEGANT INTRODUCTION, YOU MAY OR NOT HAVE PICKED UP ON THE FACT THAT I HAVE HAD 5 TOURS IN Marine divisions, serving in all 4 divisions and 3d MarDiv twice. I have made 8 Marine expeditionary unit deployments, served with the special operations command and have been to every level of PME possible in order to hone my war fighting skills.

Utilizing your great deductive abilities, intellect and experience as Lieutenants, you should have questioned the Corps' collective judgment when they decided to make me a Base Commander! I sure as hell did and I still do!

Look up "base" in the dictionary. According to Mr. Webster: "lowest part or bottom. Having or showing little or no honor, courage or decency; mean; ignoble; contemptible; menial or degrading; inferior in quality; of comparative low worth". So... After 28 years of focusing on locating, closing with and destroying, I've got that going for me! That's OK! Go ahead and laugh! There is at least one future base commander sitting among you right now!

Seriously, I am honored to return to the Basic School as your guest, at this, one of our most time honored traditions. I have been asked to speak on my insights and experiences as a leader of Marines. Basically, I was told to talk about what I have learned over the last 28 years of leading Marines. Well, I have only learned eight things, and it will only take me about 60 seconds to share them with you.

Now that I think of it, if I had been invited to speak to you the day Charlie Company formed up, I could have probably saved you six months of TBS training. I thought I would get this structured portion out of the way up front so I could talk about anything I want to, so here goes.

1. Seek brilliance in the basics, always do the right thing, and have a plan to kill everyone you meet.

2. If you are riding at the head of the herd, look back every now and then and make sure it is still there.

3. Never enter an hour-long firefight with 5 minutes of ammo.

4. This one is really important for all of you born North of Washington, DC. Never, never kick a cow chip on a hot day.

5. If you're not shooting, and I can see by your marksmanship badges that some of you are challenged in this area, you better be communicating or reloading for another Marine.

6. There are three types of leaders. Those who learn from reading, those who learn from observation, and those who still have to touch the electric fence to get the message.

7. Anything worth shooting is worth shooting twice. Ammo is cheap.

8. And finally, you might want to write this one down: Never slap a grown man who has a mouth full of chewing tobacco

Now that I've put that check in "proper military instruction" block, are there any questions? Of course not! What a stupid question to ask a bunch of Lieutenants so close to graduation! Now that I think of it, my TBS class stopped asking questions after the first two weeks.

I have a few minutes left; so let's talk about something I like, Marines. Up front, let me tell you how much I admire you. Why is that? Unlike the vast majority of your fellow citizens, you stepped forward and committed yourself to a greater cause without concern for your personal safety or comfort. And you did it knowing that you would gain nothing in return. Except the honor and cherished privilege of earning the title of "Marine Officer". Individually, you are as different as apples and oranges, but you are linked for eternity by the title "Marine" and the fact that you are part of the finest fighting force that has ever existed in history.

If you haven't picked up on it, I like being a Marine and I like being around Marines. Like most of you are probably thinking, I came into the Corps to do four years and four years only. But a strange happened. I was having so much fun that I simply forgot to get out. Hell, at this point, I am thinking

seriously about making the Corps a career!

So what is it that I like about Marines? This is the easy part!

I like the fact that you always know where you stand with a Marine! With Marines, there is no middle ground or gray area. There are only missions, objectives and facts.

I like the fact that if you are a self-declared enemy of America, that running into a Marine outfit in combat is your worst nightmare, and that your health record is about to get a lot thicker or be closed out entirely! I like the fact that Marines are steadfast and consistent in everything they do. Regardless of whether you agree with them or not; that Marines hold the term "politically correct" with nothing but pure disdain; that Marines stand tall and rigid in their actions, thoughts and deeds when others bend with the direction of the wind and are as confused as a dog looking at a ceiling fan!

I like the fact that each and every Marine considers the honor and legacy of the Corps as his personal and sacred trust to protect and defend.

I like the fact that most civilians don't have a clue what makes us tick! And that's not a bad thing. Because if they did, it would scare the hell out of them!

I like the fact that others say they want to be like us, but don't have what it takes in the "pain-gain-pride" department to make it happen.

I like the fact that the Marines came into being in a bar, Tun Tavern, and that Marines still gather in pubs, bars and slop chutes to share sea stories and hot scoop.

I like our motto: Semper Fidelis, and the fact that we don't shed it when the going gets tough, the battlefield gets deadly or when we hang up our uniform for the last time.

I like the fact that Marines take care of each other. In combat and in time of peace.

I like the fact that Marines consider the term "Marines take care of their own" as meaning we will give up our very life for our fellow Marines, if necessary.

I like the fact that Marines know the

difference between "chicken salad" and "chicken shit" and aren't afraid to call either for what it is!

I like the fact that Marines have never failed the people of America and that we don't use the words "can't", "retreat", or "lose".

I like the fact that the people of America hold Marines in the highest esteem and that they know that they can count on us to locate, close with and destroy those who would harm them! I like Marines. And being around Marines.

I like the fact that a couple of years ago an elected member of congress felt compelled to publicly accuse the Marine Corps of being "radical and extreme". I like the fact that our Commandant informed that member of congress that he was absolutely correct and that he passed on his thanks for the compliment.

I like the fact that Marine leaders --- of every rank--- know that issuing every man and woman a black beret --- or polka-dotted boxer shorts for that matter--- does absolutely nothing to promote morale, fighting spirit or combat effectiveness.

I like the fact that Marines are Marines first. Regardless of age, race, creed, color, sex, national origin or how long they served or what goals they achieve in life!

Let me give you one example: a young man enlists in the Navy in WWI. When the war is over, he ships over and joins the Army. He next enlisted in the Marine Corps and served from 1920-1922. There was no Air Force back then, so I guess he felt he had put all the checks in the block! When he served out his time in the Corps, he went after an education: receiving various degrees in engineering, history and political science from UCLA and Montana State University. He entered politics and served for 11 years in the House of Representatives. Next, he tackled the Senate where he served for 24 years, as both the Democratic whip and later as the Senate majority leader. He was then appointed as the ambassador to Japan where he served for 11 years.

This gentleman went from snuffy to national and international prominence. And when he passed away in 2001, he was rightly buried in Arlington. If you want to visit his grave, don't look for him near the Kennedy Eternal Flame where so many politicians are laid to rest. Look for a small, common

marker shared by the majority of our heroes. Look for the marker that says "Michael J. Mansfield, PFC, U.S. Marine Corps.

You see, Senator Mike Mansfield, like each of us gathered here tonight was prouder of being a Marine than anything else in his incredible life of national service.

There is one thing I have learned for sure over the last 28 years. The years fly by, names change, the weapons and the gear change, political leaders and agendas change, national priorities and budgets change, the threats to our nation change. But through it all, there is one abiding constant ---- the basic issue, do-or-die Marine.

He or she will do damn near anything asked, under terrible conditions, with better results and fewer complaints than any civilized human being should have reason to expect. And we, who have the privilege of serving them and leading them, make our plans and execute crucial missions based primarily on one fact of life. That the basic Marine will not fail his country, his Corps and his fellow Marines. That they will overcome any threat. If allowed to do so.

Think about that and remember that for 228 years it has worked and it has kept the wolf away from America's door. I like Marines, because being a Marine is serious business. We're not a social club or a fraternal organization and we don't pretend to be. We're a brotherhood of "warriors" -- nothing more, nothing less, pure and simple.

We are in the ass-kicking business, and unfortunately, these days business is good. But don't worry about that. What you need to remember is that the mere association of the word "Marine" with a crisis is an automatic source of confidence to America, and encouragement to all nations who stand with us. As Marines, our message to our foes has always been essentially the same. "We own this side of the street! Threaten my country or our allies and we will come over to your side of the street, burn your hut down, and whisper in your ear "can you hear me now?" And then secure your heartbeat.

Now I must tell you that I had an opportunity to review your MOS assignments. I remember that time in my life well as a real group tightener! Regardless of what MOS you now have, if you don't already know it, being a leader of Marines is about as much fun as you can legally have with

your clothes on! And that's true regardless if you are a grunt, datadink, sparkchaser, stewburner, wiredog, buttplate, remington raider, rotorhead, legal beagle, fast stick, cannon cocker, track head, skivvie stacker, dual fool or a boxkicker. And if you don't believe it - you will! Trust me!

Why is that? Because each of us fought to gain the coveted title "Marine", it wasn't given to us. We earned it. And on the day we finally became Marines, an eternal flame of devotion and fierce pride was ignited in our souls.

Charlie Company, let's not fool ourselves. You know it and I know it. You have some challenging times and emotional events ahead of you. I am not talking about tomorrow morning's headache. I am talking about the fact that the world is a dangerous place and as leaders of Marines, you will be walking point on world events.

Make sure you keep that flame that I mentioned earlier burning brightly. It will keep you warm when times are hard. It will provide light in the darkest of nights. Use it and draw strength from it, as generations of leathernecks have done since our beginning.

Before PCS'ing to Quantico, I completed a 24-month tour with the 31st MEU aboard the USS Essex. Some of the Marines here tonight were with me. The Essex is a great ship and one of six to bear that name in defense of our nation.

In 1813, the first Essex was commanded by a tough skipper named Capt. David Porter. By all accounts, Capt Porter was the type man you did not want to see at Captain's Mast. He was tough, but he was a true warrior. On one particular mission, the Essex was ordered to sail alone to the Pacific and attack Great Britain's Pacific whaling fleet.

Obviously, Captain Porter knew the fleet was well-guarded by British men-of-war and he knew his job would be a tough one and that he would be severely outgunned in his task.

Prior to sailing, Capt Porter addressed the assembled crew of sailors and Marines on the deck and explained the task at hand. He asked for volunteers only and told his men to "take seven steps forward" if they would willingly go in harm's way with him. He then turned his back and waited.

After a few moments, he turned to face

*(Continued on page 28)*

## PTSD Update 29

PTSD is a recognized anxiety disorder that can follow seeing or experiencing an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to which a person responds with intense fear, helplessness or horror, and is not uncommon in war. Feelings of fear, confusion or anger often subside, but if the feelings don't go away or get worse, a Veteran may have PTSD. The VA published a proposed regulation 24 AUG in the Federal Register to make it easier for a veteran to claim service connection for PTSD by reducing the evidence needed if the stressor claimed by a Veteran is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity. This amendment would eliminate the requirement for corroborating that the claimed in-service stressor occurred if a stressor claimed by a veteran is related to the veteran's fear of hostile military or terrorist activity and a VA psychiatrist or psychologist confirms that the claimed stressor is adequate to support a diagnosis of PTSD, provided that the claimed stressor is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the veteran's service and that the veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

This amendment takes into consideration the current scientific research studies relating PTSD to exposure to hostile military and terrorist actions. It is intended to acknowledge the inherently stressful nature of the places, types, and circumstances of service in which fear of hostile military or terrorist activities is ongoing. With this amendment, the evidentiary standard of establishing an in-service stressor would be reduced in these cases. This amendment is additionally intended to facilitate the timely VA processing of PTSD claims by simplifying the development and research procedures that apply to these claims. Comments must be received by VA on or before 23 OCT 09. Written comments may be submitted through [www.Regulations.gov](http://www.Regulations.gov); by mail or hand delivery to Director, Regulations Management (02REG), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Ave., NW., Room 1068, Washington, DC 20420; or by fax to (202) 273-9026.

Comments should indicate that they are submitted in response to "RIN 2900-AN32—Stressor Determinations for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder." Copies of comments received will be available for public

inspection in the Office of Regulation Policy and Management, Room 1063B, between 08-1630 M-F (except holidays). Call (202) 461-4902 for an appointment. In addition, during the comment period, comments may be viewed online through the Federal Docket Management System (FDMS) at [www.Regulations.gov](http://www.Regulations.gov). For further information contact Thomas J. Kniffen, Chief, Regulations Staff (211D), Compensation and Pension Service, Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20420, (202) 461-9725. VA is bolstering its mental health capacity to serve combat Veterans, adding thousands of new professionals to its rolls in the last four years. The Department also has established a suicide prevention helpline (1-800-273-TALK) and their Web site [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans) is available for online chat in the evenings. [Source: RIN 2900-AN32 & VA News Release 24 Aug 09 ++]

## Report Sees Agent Orange Link to More Illnesses

By JANIE LORBER  
Published: July 24, 2009  
New York Times

An expert panel reported on Friday that two more diseases may be linked to exposure to Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the American military during the Vietnam War.

People exposed to the chemical appear, at least tentatively, to be more likely to develop Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease, according to the report. The report was written by a 14-member committee charged by the Institute of Medicine with determining whether certain medical conditions were caused by exposure to herbicides used to clear stretches of jungle.

The results, though not conclusive, are an important first step for veterans groups working to get the government to help pay for treatment of illnesses they believe have roots on the battlefield. Some other conditions linked to Agent Orange already qualify.

Claud Tillman, a 61-year-old veteran from Knoxville, Tenn., who lost his job repairing guns after he received a diagnosis of Parkin-

son's disease, said those benefits could help dig him out of tens of thousands of dollars in debt.

Mr. Tillman has not worked since March 2007 and now lives on loans from relatives, including his son. "It sure has messed my life up," said Mr. Tillman, who said he was sure he became ill after exposure to Agent Orange while serving in Vietnam. "I don't know how to explain it. It won't be long till I'm living under a bridge. I am confident that that's where it came from, but there's no way to prove it."

Since 1994 the Institute of Medicine committee has found 17 conditions associated with exposure to the chemical, 13 of which qualify veterans for service-connected disability benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In its latest report, the committee found "limited or suggestive evidence" linking the herbicide to Parkinson's and ischemic heart disease. In the past, that has been enough

evidence of a link to prompt benefits for some conditions but not for others.

The group Vietnam Veterans of America plans to write a letter to the secretary of veterans affairs, Eric K. Shinseki, asking for extended benefits, said Bernard Edelman, the organization's deputy director for policy and government affairs.

The report notes that its conclusions about ischemic heart disease, a condition that restricts blood flow to the heart, causing irregular heartbeats and deterioration of the heart muscle, are still tentative because it is difficult to separate confounding risk factors like age, weight and the effects of smoking.

The link between Parkinson's disease and Agent Orange is also uncertain because, while new studies have strengthened the connection between the condition and certain chemicals, there is still no data on veterans and the condition.

## WHAT MEMBERS ARE DOING

On March 16, 2009 was the first gathering of Bravo Co., 1st Tanks of the Deep South Texas. Retriever man Pete "The Hulk" Limanek, Mario "Squirrelman" Fuentes, loader, B-52, and Freddy Martinez TC, B-52, met in Linn, Texas at La Madrilena Ranch for a week of relaxing and a good time. One day was spent fishing the Laguna Madre Bay in the Gulf guided by Freddy Martinez's son, Ryo.

While enjoying the food prepared by Noemi Martinez, we found time to renew our friendships and reflect on how just fortunate we are to live in this country.

Semper Fi

Freddy Martinez

### BELMO HANGS WITH WHO?

On 6 June members from the General J.C. Breckenridge Detachment along with other Bay Area Marines and their supporters gathered at the Marines Memorial Theater to attend a town hall meeting with the 16th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps General James T. Conway and,

the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Carlton W. Kent. The Commandant and the Corps Sergeant Major were introduced by fellow detachment member and, President of the Marines Memorial Association General "Mike" Myatt USMC (ret.). Also in attendance was former Secretary of State George Shultz As one would expect the Commandant and Sergeant Major of the MC. provided all present with and interesting insight and some great information regarding



our Marine Corps as America increases our combat presence in Afghanistan and begins to reduce our involvement and presence in Iraq's An Bar Province.

After the Town hall meeting the Commandant and SGT. Maj. MC along with some of our detachment members attended a dinner to honor those who fought at the battle of Midway. Because of the huge response to attend the dinner all detachment members could not do so. As a result some

detachment members who did not attend the dinner gathered at the clubs Leatherneck Steak house and Lounge to socialize with members of the Commandant's supporting staff.

### To the Great Tank Park...

(Continued from page 15)

predicament only days before pain and disease took his life. I have always judged people according to my foxhole rule. In other words, under combat conditions, whom would I choose to share my foxhole? Neither Al Gore or John Kerry (former Vietnam vets) would be allowed access but Fred would have been welcomed with open arms. He would probably be carrying, along with his M16, a few cans of appropriated beer and, perhaps, a few candy bars that he had won in a recent card game. He would, of course, bring his lexicon of stories and bad jokes to keep me entertained between incoming mortar rounds. If in my panic, I

had forgotten my flak jacket or helmet, he would gladly have offered his saying that his head was too thick to allow penetration of an AK-47 round anyway.

Thirty years after Vietnam, Fred persuaded me to meet him and a few other Charlie Company companions in Washington, DC, to celebrate the Marine Corps birthday. For the last three years, I got together with Fred and his original group in a hotel adjacent to the Marine Corps Memorial. Fred had been diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer, but it never deterred him from enjoying what remained of his life. He accosted every new Marine he met and charmed them with his gregarious nature and love of the Corps. As

many veterans know, you don't have to die in combat to be a hero. Fred will always be a hero to me and sadly, there will an empty chair when we visit Arlington this November.

Dick Peksens, 2nd LT, USMC

For those who may be interested and/or so inclined: It was his request that donations be made to either:

- The Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
799 Washington St.
- Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0807
- Or
- Westfield River Valley Detachment 141  
Marine Corps League  
71 North Elm St.  
Westfield, MA 01069

# Parris Island MCRD Visit

BY DOC HACKEMACK

0600 on this August 21, 2009 Friday is WAY TOO DAMN EARLY to catch a bus for the 90 minute drive from our lovely SHERATON Hotel in historic North Charleston, SC - to Parris Island! That means that we have to get up at least by 0555 – Ouch!

But just think of *those poor, damn miserable maggot recruits* at Parris Island, South Carolina MCRD. HOLD IT! - AFTER THIS DAY, they will no longer be “Boots” – they will have earned the title of “United States Marine”! And we were there to witness this – some of us for the first time from the *sidelines of the parade field!* I know that every single one of us were so glad to see graduation day roll around – even this FMF Corpsman. Hey, I asked Bob Peavey if he was SURE that he wanted an FMF Corpsman to do the Parris Island report, and without hesitation, he gave me his utmost 8404 Marine Corps blessing.

As we walked past Golf Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion and November Company, 4th Recruit Training Battalion and saw their faces in the endless lineup, we could almost feel the tension they were feeling. As they marched onto the parade field, we were fortunate to witness two units of Women Marines graduate, which occurs only “about once a month”, as we were told by our guide. With reviewing official Maj. Gen. John M. Croley observing, their precision march out onto the Parade Field was an inspiration to us all. Special recognition was given to the honor graduates. The USMC VTA

was recognized, but many could not understand it because of the distance from the PA system, which created an “echo effect”.

Did you notice how well the Marine Band played the United States Navy’s “Anchors Aweigh” and then the Marine Corps Hymn?

After the ceremony was complete, family members rushed out to embrace their UNITED STATES MARINE! However, this was not their very first encounter since boot camp was entered. “Family Day” now takes place on the Thursday before graduation.

In a way, we were all mentally transported back into time, as this was a poignant reminder of the day we all graduated. But I did hear scattered comments like, “...hey, where are my old barracks – they’re GONE!...” and “...this place sure doesn’t look the same...”. Time changes everything.

As we continued our tour, we were all pleasantly surprised when the bus stopped at a covered training area, and we were allowed to get up “close and personal” with the recruits in training. Apparently training has changed somewhat as we were told that a certain amount of martial arts is now part of the curriculum. We also learned that on graduation day, “none of the Marines has yet thrown a grenade”, which is now part of an advance training regimen. I was also able to speak briefly with the Navy Corpsman who was assigned to this training area. He assured me that his “Camouflaged Blue

Checked” utilities would never be worn in combat – this was his uniform for MCRD.

As we continued our tour, our next stop was the museum and then to the Chow Hall. It was an impressive Cafeteria-Style setup, however some of the comments I heard about the food was less than desirable!

After one last stop at the MPX, we boarded our busses for the ride back to the Sheraton – every last one of us glad that we had the choice to return to civilian life!

Anyone wishing to revisit the ceremonies that day in depth can go online to [www.thebootandjetstream.com](http://www.thebootandjetstream.com). After opening, click on Archives, then click on Boot, then get the online calendar to open up on Friday, August 21, 2009.

I cannot finish this report without commenting what a small world it is. First let me say that I did this report while on the road in Lancaster, PA. When I called Parris Island MCRD Public Relations on my cell phone from my travel trailer (for some additional information), Staff Sergeant Tracie Kessler immediately asked, “...is this THE Gene Hackemack from Columbus, Texas?” I was flabbergasted! Yes, I used to live near Columbus, Texas when my (deceased) wife Barbara and I used to operate the only German restaurant between Houston and Austin Texas. S/Sgt Kessler used to be one of my customers!!!

## 2009 Charleston Reunion



Check-in was a snap this year



Carriage rides in historic Charleston



The Third Heard on the flight deck



Bob Vaxter out of control...



It was really hot!



Harris and the boys



“Have you done the gift shop yet?”



Learning about the USS Yorktown



Our largest grossing Auction!



Maria & Mart bidded on everything



Oil paintings too!



The D.I.s were prettier than I remembered!

# Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island

*A revisit for many, memories for all*



We got a rare look into hand-to-hand training



We were very fortunate to have witnessed a double graduation of men and women's training series at the same time



I said put your FEET in my yellow footprints!



Hopefully it's the last meal in a mess hall!



Mr. Nice Guy – probably NOT!



The two Fallen Heroes for 2009



Mart, Garry Hall and Maria Rodriguez



Our colorguard for the evening



Friends of Cpl. John Rodriguez

# The Final Dinner



Our guest speaker was Pulitzer Prize winning author Jim Sheeler who wrote the powerful newspaper story and book, *The Final Salute*. He shared with us the behind the scenes story of what happens after *The Knock On The Door*



Roger McVay presents a tapestry to the sister of his best friend, David Dodson, who KIA on 1/25/68 with 1st Tanks

# 2009 Fallen Heroes

The 2009 reunion saw the addition of two more tankers to our Fallen Heroes table; there are now 11 pictures of men we have honored over the past 4 reunions. This year saw seven members of the same family attend the final dinner and ceremony for L/Cpl David Paul Dodson. David was with 1st Tanks which made a landing north of the Cua Viet River just below the DMZ in January of 1968 where he was killed by an RPG. Also present at the dinner was his best friend and our newest VTA member, Roger McVay. Roger was involved in the recovery of David's body after the attack.

Bob Peavey worked with David's sister, Sharon Barfield, for 6 months developing David's story. What made it so touching was the fact that the story starts with David's grandson, Brett Owens, who had a homework assignment entitled, "My National Treasures". Brett wrote that it was his grandfather's Purple Heart and the flag that accompanied his casket home that he considers his national treasure. Also attending the dinner was David's widow, Linda Dodson now Linda

Fletcher, and her husband of 30-plus years, Steve Fletcher.

The second honoree was Cpl. John Rodriguez. John attended his first reunion in 2007 and passed away just seven weeks later. Maria Rodriguez and her sister Martha attended the dinner and ceremony. Also present was John's tank commander, Garry Hall who presented the framed picture to Maria. Garry had a few funny stories about John's ability to sleep in the most nervous of moments.

Also in attendance and a first for the Fallen Hero program was Tammy Johnson. She was the niece of Sgt. Ben Green who came to visit with several of his platoon members. She wanted to witness a Fallen Hero program before committing. Ben was killed in early May during Operation Allenbrook. Needless to say, Tammy is onboard for the 2011 reunion and will be working with Bob for several months. ♦

### From the Dodson Family:

*Bob, good morning,  
Just want to let you know how much we appreciate all you did in preparing for the program Saturday night. Again, it was awesome!*

*We drove up to see my mother yesterday. I did not show her the presentation. I knew it would upset her, plus I didn't think I was ready to see it again. I did tell her about our experience and showed her pictures from the weekend. I also stopped by the cemetery to place new flowers on the graves of my dad, brother Jimmy, and David. David's looked mighty nice when I added the Marine Corp and American Flag to it (table setting from Saturday night).*

*Linda told me yesterday that she had forgotten how much she had truly loved David and that she still does. For so many years I had felt he'd just been pushed aside and forgotten. Now I know he hasn't. We have finally received closure.*

*None of this would have happened, had it not been for you, again, thanks for everything!!!*

Sharon and family

### From the Rodriguez Family:

*Bob,  
Once again thanks, it was great. My sister Martha and I had a great time, God willing we'll see you in San Diego. My boys John Jr. and Joseph look forward to meeting you and their Dad's tanker buddies. Keep up the great work you guys do. The one and only reunion that John attended meant a lot to him.*

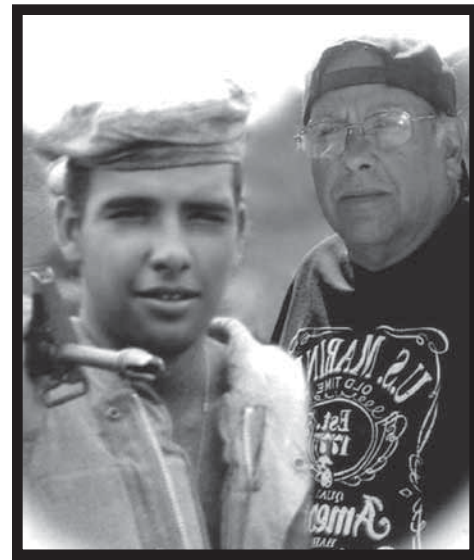
*Once a Marine wife, always a Marine wife.*

*Semper Fi,*

Maria Rodriguez



L/Cpl David Paul Dodson



Cpl. John Rodriguez

# CHARLOTTE? CHARLESTON? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

BY LLOYD "PAPPY" REYNOLDS

Well where do I begin? I guess it all started when I got my reunion notice. My wife couldn't go this time so I contacted John about sharing a room. Once that was settled, the next thing was to book a flight. So I got on the Internet and booked a round trip flight to (yep you guessed it) Charlotte. I even looked on a map and thought "That's awful far from Parris Island, why are we staying there? Well you know, men never ask for directions.

My flight left right on time. I transferred planes in Houston and arrived in Charlotte on time. Got my luggage and went to get a shuttle to the hotel. Told the driver I wanted to go to the Sheraton North. He said "You want to go where?" So I showed him my Schedule of Events. He says "We don't go there. Your a city, state and about two hundred miles north." After I checked my skivvies for unwanted residue I decided on plan "B" even though I didn't know what that was. I called my wife to give her the news and a good laugh at my expense. Then I reviewed my options. Can I get a flight to Charleston, should I try to rent a car, can I go Greyhound, (didn't thing of a one way U Haul). I went for the Greyhound. A \$25.00 cab ride got me to the Greyhound Station. Next bus didn't leave until 0800 the next

morning. Now a Greyhound Depot is not a place you want to hang around without at least a squad of armed Marines, especially at night. On the sidewalk outside the depot I called my wife again to tell her of my woes (good thing she didn't go, I'd still be in the Charlotte Emergency). The taxi drivers hung around like vultures. Then it started "I'll take you to Charleston for \$350.00, another said \$340.00. The bidding had started. No bids were submitted after it reached \$280.00, so I said let's go. I loaded up for the three hour two hundred and seven mile taxi ride. The driver and I got to know each other pretty well by the time we got to Charleston.

When we got to the hotel a cheer went up from those that knew me, "Hey Pappy's here, you finally made it." Then "why did you take a taxi, they have a shuttle from the Airport?" Then as I was peeling off fifties to pay the cabby some one said "That much, where did you come from?" The driver said "Charlotte." The cat and my stupidly was out of the bag! Might as well own up to it. As soon as Wally Young found out, I knew it was over.

At the first meeting I just had to get up and give everyone the straight scoop, as I knew being Marines it would get blown up all out of shape. But also as Marines, they take care of there own (even the stupid

one's) some one said "Let's pass the hat for Pappy." Well the hats were passed and when they were emptied at my table I thought I was at the final table of the "World Poker Tour". It came out to \$622.00. I couldn't believe it. What a great bunch of Marines. The overage of \$342.00 was turned in to Jim Coan our Treasurer. I was warned not to try this as a fund-raiser in San Diego.

For the rest of the reunion I got a lot of attention, like: "Don't let Pappy on the first bus, we'll wind up in Charlotte." "Which way is it to Charlotte?" "The next reunion is in San Diego, do you know how to get there?" "Are you the one doing the Map Program?" And on it went until "How are you going to get home?" I had a lot of input for that one. But again a Marine Tanker stepped up to the plate. Russell Tingle "Tang" from Louisville, KY volunteered to drive me to Charlotte on his way home. Then I had to break the bad news to him. My flight left Charlotte at 0600 and we would have to leave around 0130 to make it on time. To his credit he didn't bail out on me. I caught my flight on time and made it home. Much to my wife's relief. She would have killed me if I had wound up in San Francisco.

Semper Fi Marines and thank you.

Pappy

## A Great Speech

(Continued from page 19)

his crew and noticed no holes in the ranks. The ranks looked just as they had and not a single Marine or sailor stood to the front of the formation. It is reported that he went on a tirade and screamed, "What is this? Not a single volunteer among you?" With this, an aide leaned over and whispered in Porter's ear, "Sir, the whole line has stepped forward 7 paces."

I think of this story often. And when I do, I think of Marines like you. Charlie Company, on behalf of the generations of Marine lieutenants who have gone before you, thank you for taking the "7 steps forward", thank you for your love of country,

thank you for your life-long commitment as a United States Marine.

For those of you who are wondering, "Am I up to it?" forget it. You will be magnificent, just as Marine officers always have been. I realize that many of your young Marines are going to be "been there, done that" warriors and that they will wear the decorations to prove it. But you need to know, that they respect you and admire you. You need to know that they want and need your leadership. All you have to do is never fail them in this regard and everything will turn out great. Hold up your end of the bargain and they will not fail.

I am pretty sure I can speak for the entire group of distinguished guests here tonight when I say, "We admire you and would trade

places with you in a minute to do it all over again." Sooooo, if you're interested in giving up a platoon in order to be a base commander, see me at the bar!

One last thing. When you check into your first unit and start the fantastic voyage that only Marines will ever know, kick some serious ass. Because it is a full time job and there is a lot of that activity that must occur for America and her allies to survive.

"Long live the United States. And success to the Marine Corps!"

Colonel James M. Lowe, Commander  
Marine Corps Base, Quantico

Submitted by Jim Coan after attending a reunion of his Basic School class at Quantico, Virginia where Colonel Lowe delivered this speech to a graduating class. ♦

# BUTTON IT UP AND MOVE OUT

BY PETE RITCH

While looking through photographs from my tour in Vietnam in preparation for our Reunion in Charleston, I was surprised by the number of shots that included tanks with damaged track. It got me thinking about instances during my tour in Vietnam where we either hit a land mine or slipped a track and had to button it up and move out.

In mid-January 1969, B-32, B-33 and B-35 were providing road sweep security and day light patrols in support of F Co., 2nd BN, 3rd Marine Regiment, south of Rt. 9 between Dong Ha and Camp Carol. The rainy season was just ending and the dirt roads and trails were pretty slick. While on patrol with a Marine Infantry Platoon, we took small arms fire from a tree line across an open field. B-32, B-33 and B-35 rushed the tree line and opened fire. When the firing ceased, we found 5 NVA KIA's. The infantry platoon commander was ordered to bring the NVA bodies to a small village just outside our base camp. We loaded the bodies on the fenders of B33. As we worked our way back to the village on a steep and slick foot path, B-33 "slipped" the track on the right side of the tank. The crew repaired the track and we buttoned it up and moved out. Repairing the track was the easy part. Repairing the track with bodies on the fender and blood running down the hull of the tank, was the hard part.

In February 1969, while supporting a land clearing operation just east of Con Thien, B-33, B-35 and two APC's loaded with grunts from K Co., 3rd BN, 3rd Marine Regiment, were ambushed by an NVA platoon firing machine guns and small arms. In the lead tank, B-33, I accelerated through the ambush, spun around 180 degrees and opened fire. It wasn't until we quelled the ambush that we discovered that we "slipped" a track. With several Marines wounded

we decided to "limp" back to a safer locale to repair the track. As soon as we were clear, the ambush site was hit with artillery fire from a nearby fire support base. We buttoned up the slipped track and returned to our base camp. A search of the ambush site found 9 NVA, KIA's.

Hitting land mines became part of my Vietnam experience while supporting the 2nd ARVN Regiment in the April 1969. In a 75 minute span, B-33, B-35 and the Bravo Company Tank Retriever each hit a land mine. We were returning to Gio Linh, just south of the DMZ, when B-35 hit a mine. We radio'd the Army Major in charge of the joint Army, Marine and ARVN operation and requested that the ARVN set up a security perimeter around the damaged tank. In spite of his affirmative response, the ARVN infantry kept moving right by us toward the Gio Linh. With B-33 providing the only security, the crew of B-35 set a world record for repairing track. We moved out and could see the ARVN ahead of us moving in the same direction. In less than half a click, B-33 hit a mine and again we requested ARVN perimeter security while we repaired the damage. Again, an ARVN security perimeter was no-where to be found. It was nearing dusk and I radio'd for the B Company Tank Retriever to come to our assistance, in case we could not repair the damage and drive out on our own. The B-33 crew worked on the track with B-35 providing the only security. The Retriever was headed toward us. Just as we finished the repairs on B-33, the Retriever, less than 200 yards from our location, hit a mine and was ambushed. I dispatched B-35 to assist the Retriever. We buttoned up B-33 and hooked up with the other two damaged vehicles as darkness fell. The three of us, B-33, B-35 and the Bravo Retriever spent the night

buttoned up with no perimeter security, ready to shoot at anything that moved. We had flare ships up all night keeping us in "daylight" and making an enemy attack less likely. At first light, a Marine infantry platoon, who had humped all night to get to us, set up perimeter security and we repaired the Retriever. The Retriever Commander, SSgt. Harold Riensche fired every weapon at his disposal to protect the exposed crew, resulting in seven NVA KIA's, one of them, on top of the Retriever, near the Commanders hatch. SSgt. Reinsche was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions. By noon all three vehicles were operational and we moved out.

In May 1969, while supporting an infantry platoon from 3/3 at Ocean View, the northeastern most base in I-Core, B-31 was crossing the dunes and approaching the hard-pack shore line. We hit a land mine. Several grunts riding on the tank were injured and one required a tourniquet (my web belt) to stem the bleeding from his right leg. As we medivac'd the injured, the tank crew repaired the track. Once again we buttoned it up and moved out.

Tank crews were well trained in the repair of our Iron Horses but their resourcefulness in repairing damaged tanks under threat of attack was awesome. Driving the damaged vehicle out of the situation was a matter of pride. And being towed was not an option. So, we buttoned them up and moved out.

Pete Ritch was platoon leader of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment- Vietnam 1968-1969.

# HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR HIS COMRADES

## FALLEN LI MARINE AWARDED NAVY CROSS

BY NEIL GRAVES



**HAILING A HERO:**  
Jordan Haerter, who died stopping a suicide bomber in Iraq, is receiving the Navy Cross.

February 17, 2009

A young Marine from Long Island had only seconds to act when a fanatic driving a truck bomb came crashing through barricades and aimed straight for a building where 30 fellow Leathernecks and 25 Iraqi cops were just waking up.

Lance Cpl. Jordan Haerter, of Sag Harbor, and fellow Marine Cpl. Jonathan Yale, 21, of Burkeville, Va., knew they had to stop the truck at any cost - and didn't hesitate.

On Friday, the Marine Corps will mark their ultimate sacrifice by posthumously awarding each the Navy Cross.

The bomber, who struck April 22, 2008 in Ramadi, was carrying a ton of explosives as he wove through a series of serpentine barricades, bouncing off the barriers as the truck hurtled toward the building.

The two heroes strafed the truck with fire from M16s and a light machine gun called a squad automatic weapon, or SAW.

The truck detonated against two other buildings, reducing them to dust - and killing the heroes. But all the Marines and cops in the targeted building survived.

Only 22 Marines have been awarded the Navy Cross - the second-highest award for valor after the Medal of Honor

- throughout the entire seven-year War on Terror.

"I know the Marines will stand tall that day," said JoAnn Lyles, Haerter's grieving but proud mom.

The explosion was horrific.

"We heard the SAW go off and we turned our heads to see what they were shooting at," said Lance Cpl. Benjamin Tupaj. "About two seconds after that, the truck detonated. There was a shock wave. All I saw was a giant fireball two stories high." Lance Cpl. Nicholas Xiarhos said, "I saw the fireball and then the whole area was filled with dust and smoke."

Xiarhos also saw the two young men who had saved his life. "They were out there [in the rubble]. The corpsmen reached them immediately and started giving them aid."

Haerter was already gone, and Yale would hang on for only a few minutes.

"I think Jordan would think he was doing what any Marine in his position would do," said his dad, Chris Haerter.

He said his son learned to fly a plane at 16, and the dad was surprised Jordan didn't enlist in the Air Force. But the youth believed that the Marines "was the hardest service; it was the one most

respected out of all the armed services," said the father.

Shortly after the attack, Chris Haerter was watching CNN.

"The anchor said two Marines were killed in Ramadi and in my heart, I knew one was Jordan," he said. "He might as well had been talking to me."

The elder Haerter then went out for a walk, but "the minute I stepped on the sidewalk, I saw two Marines in full dress, getting out of a car. You never see Marines in Sag Harbor."

Next, he saw someone else step from the car, his ex-wife, Lyles, and he knew that what he had felt in his gut at seeing the TV news story had turned real.

The ceremony, presided over by Navy Secretary Donald Winter in Quantico, Va., will be attended by dozens of friends, relatives and fellow Marines.

"It's truly an honor," said Lyles. "Of course, I'd trade it all to have him back."

neil.graves@nypost.com

# MARINES

I like the fact that if you are a self-declared enemy of America, running into a Marine outfit in combat is your worst nightmare...And that your health record is either about to get a lot thicker, or be closed out entirely.

I like the fact that Marines are steadfast and consistent in everything they do... regardless of whether you agree with them or not.

I like the fact that Marines view the term 'politically correct' with nothing but pure disdain.

I like the fact that Marines stand tall and rigid in their actions, thoughts and deeds when others bend with the direction of the wind and are as confused as a dog looking at a ceiling fan.

I like the fact that each and every Marine considers the honor and legacy of the Corps as his personal and sacred trust to protect and defend.

I like the fact that most civilians don't have a clue what makes us tick and that's not a bad thing. Because if they did, it would probably scare the hell out of them.

I like the fact that others say they want to be like us, but don't have what it takes in the Pain-Gain-Pride department to make it happen.

I like the fact that the Marines came into being in a bar, named Tun Tavern. And the that Marines still gather in pubs, bars and slop chutes to share sea stories and hot scoop.

I like the fact that Marines do not consider it a coincidence that there are 24 hours in a day and 24 beers in a case. Because Marines know there is a reason for everything that happens.

I like our motto... SEMPER FIDELIS, And the fact that we don't shed it when the going gets tough, the

battlefield gets deadly or when we hang up our uniform for the last time.

I like the fact that Marines take care of each other... In combat and time of peace.

I like the fact that Marines know the difference between 'Chicken Salad' and 'Chicken Shit' and aren't afraid to call either for what it is.

I like the fact that the people of America hold Marines in the highest esteem and that they know that they can count on us to locate, close with, and destroy those who would harm them.

I like the fact that people think we are cocky... yet we know that we have confidence in everything we do and the fact that they don't know the taste of that makes them look at us as if we are arrogant.

I like that fact that we know the taste of freedom and would give our very lives for it. And that it is a taste the protected will ever know.

I like the fact that Ronald Reagan said... 'Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference... Marines don't have that problem!'

I like the fact that we are brothers to the end...and that no matter what happens in life, we know that we have one another's 'six'.

I like the fact that an elected member of congress felt compelled to publicly accuse the Marine Corps of being 'radical and extreme'. And I also like the fact that our Commandant informed that member of congress that she was absolutely correct and that he passed on his thanks for the compliment.

I like the fact that Marine leaders - of every rank - know that issuing every man and woman a black beret - or polka-dotted boxer shorts for that

matter - does absolutely nothing to promote morale, fighting spirit or combat effectiveness.

I like the fact that Marines are Marines first... regardless of age, race, creed, color, sex, and national origin, or how long they served, their former rank, or what goals they achieve in life.

I like Marines...and I love the fact that I am humbled to walk among the ranks of other Marines.

I like the fact that you always know where you stand with a Marine. With Marines, there is no middle ground or gray area. There are only Missions, Objectives and Facts.

In closing...if you aren't a Marine, the next best thing is to have a Marine for a husband, wife, and father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, best friend, or friend.

**SAEPE EXPERTUS,  
SEMPER FIDELIS,  
FRATRES AETERNI**

**Often Tested,  
Always Faithful,  
Brothers Forever**

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# US Can't Back Cancer Assurances to Marines

April 30, 2009

Associated Press

In an about-face, the government has disavowed a 12-year-old federal report that found little or no cancer risk for adults who lived at Camp LeJeune, N.C., where drinking water was contaminated for three decades.

Up to a million people could have been exposed to toxins that seeped from a neighboring dry cleaner and industrial activity at LeJeune, federal officials say. Now, a report that minimized the cancer threat for adults has been discredited.

"We can no longer stand behind the accuracy of the information in that document," William Cibulas, director of health assessment for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, said at a meeting in Atlanta. "We know too much now."

Sick veterans, who became known as "poisoned patriots," and their advocates never believed the report's conclusions. Their families have filed claims for \$33.8 billion in damages. A study continues on whether fetuses might have been harmed.

The agency, charged with protecting public health around toxic sites, said it was rescinding the 1997 assessment on health effects of water that residents of the base drank and bathed in, because of omissions and scientific inaccuracy. That study found the water contamination began in the 1950s and continued until wells were shut down in 1987.

The agency offered no new health conclusions but will pull the flawed document from the Internet while incorporating new science to rewrite what Cibulas called "troublesome" sections.

Jerry Ensminger, a retired Marine who has spent years digging through military and health documents at Camp LeJeune and believes his daughter Janey's leukemia death at age 9 was due to the water, wel-

comed the government's reversal on the report.

"We are in Day 99 of change, and by God we're starting to see it," he said, meaning the change promised by President Barack Obama. The report in question dates to Bill Clinton's administration.

Officials said that some sections of the document were still valid, including those dealing with past concerns about lead in water and contamination of fish, and analysis of pesticide hazards in soil. People now will have to contact the health agency in Atlanta via e-mail or phone to obtain that information now removed from the Web site, a spokeswoman said.

Among its problems, the document omitted mention of the cancer-causing chemical benzene, which military sampling found in a base well in 1984. Researchers should have mentioned its high levels and tried to verify whether it reached the drinking water, said Cibulas. He said Ensminger recently brought the omission of benzene to his attention.

Additionally, the contaminating solvents that officials focused on have been characterized by new science as even more likely to cause cancer, he noted.

Cibulas also cited findings, reported in a 2007 Associated Press investigation of the water contamination, that the study underestimated the extent of the contamination on the base due to inadequate information from the Marines.

His unusual announcement came at a meeting of the health agency, part of the Health and Human Services Department, and its community advisory panel that works on follow-up to Camp LeJeune's past water problems.

Members of the panel have long criticized the health document's failings. Lawmakers who heard the Marines' stories last year dubbed them "poisoned patriots."

A table in the document stated unequivocally that adults faced no increased cancer risk from the water. Elsewhere, the report said cancer was not likely but more study was needed.

Cibulas voiced concern that the report was misinterpreted by Veterans Affairs and others as saying: "No way, no how, would any person who drank contaminated water at Camp LeJeune be expected to suffer any adverse health effects, be they cancerous or non-cancerous."

"The science is just not that good for us to make that determination," he said.

The 1997 assessment said children's cancer risk was unknown, but it cited studies showing potential cancer dangers from solvent-tainted water for fetuses. That led to an ongoing study by the agency into whether babies whose mothers drank the water were born with elevated leukemia or birth defects.

The agency estimated as many as 1 million people at the Atlantic-sea-board base could have been exposed to the toxins; the Marines have estimated 500,000.

Levels of one solvent, known as TCE, were the highest ever measured in a U.S. public water supply, according to an agency scientist.

"We keep coming up with more and more stuff," said Allen Menard, a former Marine on the community panel who suffers a rare non-Hodgkin's lymphoma that his doctors linked to chemical exposure.

"They knew about the benzene," he said. "Why didn't they tell us?"

The reversal comes at a sensitive time for the toxic substances agency, following a blistering report last month by congressional investigators who accused it of obscuring or overlooking potential health hazards at toxic sites. The agency's director, Howard Frum-

kin, promised Congress he was working to improve on any shortcomings.

Military families "have suffered needlessly because of the agency's flawed work," Rep. Brad Miller, D-N.C., said Tuesday.

Health officials wrote to Veterans Affairs last month warning that a VA

report had read too much into the Camp LeJeune health assessment and it should not be used as the basis to deny disability benefits.

According to the Navy's legal office, which handles claims, 1,500 people have filed claims for \$33.8 billion in damages. The military is waiting for

conclusions from the current study of fetal effects before deciding the claims.

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## Camp Lejeune Historic Water Update National Academies' NRC Study Released

Dear Registrant:

On June 13, 2009, a committee of the National Research Council (NRC) released a report on its independent review of the available scientific and medical information to determine whether adverse health outcomes are associated with past contamination of the water supply at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina prior to 1987. The report assesses the strength of evidence associating exposure to trichloroethylene (TCE), tetrachloroethylene (PCE), benzene, and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in drinking water to adverse health effects in prenatal children, children, and adults.

To download the "Report in Brief," view the full report, or to download a free copy of the executive summary, please visit the National Academies website.

Additionally, on April 28, 2009, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) announced that they were removing the 1997 Public Health Assessment (PHA) for Camp Lejeune from their website. According to ATSDR, the PHA should have mentioned benzene contamination and stated the extent of exposure to benzene was unknown.

ATSDR is currently conduct-

ing water modeling as part of an ongoing study to determine if past exposure to VOCs from contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune is associated with certain birth defects and childhood cancers. After the water modeling for this study is complete, ATSDR will re-analyze and update the PHA. Persons interested in reading the 1997 PHA may request a printed copy by contacting the ATSDR Records Center at (770) 488-0707 or by email.

The Marine Corps is dedicated to taking care of our Marines, Sailors, civilians and their families. Thank you again for your service to our Nation.

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## Jokes

### The Old Sergeant Major

A weather-beaten and about to retire Sergeant Major sat down at a Starbucks in Oceanside, CA. and ordered a cup of coffee. As he sat sipping his coffee, a young woman came in and sat down next to him.

She turned to the man in uniform, "Are you a real Sergeant Major?" she asked.

He replied, "Well, I've spent my whole life in the Marine Corps, breaking in recruits and second lieutenants, been in two wars, have been shipped all over the world, I've been a tanker and have been really tanked, I have read more orders to men in formation than I care to guess, lesser ranks avoid me wherever I walk, so, I guess that makes me a Sergeant Major."

She said, "I'm a lesbian. I spend my whole day thinking about naked women. As soon as I get up in the morning, I think about naked women. When I shower, I think about naked women. When I watch TV, I think about naked women. It seems that everything I do makes me think of naked women."

The two sat sipping in silence.

A little while later an inquisitive twelve year old boy came in with his father and sat down across from the old Marine. The young child's eyes scanned the many ribbons on the old man's chest. His eyes then went to the three chevrons and rockers with a bomb burst in the center.

"Are you really a Marine Sergeant Major?" the little boy asked.

The old face slowly turned to the boy and replied, "I always thought I was, but a little while ago I found out that I'm a lesbian." ♦

# Scars Are Not Forever

BY STAFF SGT. ETHAN E. ROCKE  
Headquarters Marine Corps, 12/31/2008

Los Angeles - It was an ideal. A mantra. One of those romantic assertions that grabs hold the heart and muses in the soul the question: What if?

"Scars are not forever" was conceived for one Marine in the months of rehabilitation that followed an IED blast in Iraq, which left him badly burned and disfigured. Since then, the spirit of that ideal has evolved into an innovative partnership between military and civilian medicine that is actualizing, for some, that once rhetorical question: What if?

Aaron Mankin lay still on an operating table, bright halogen bulbs spilling light over every bit of his fire-scarred face: closed eyes placid with unconsciousness, relaxed jaw peeking out from the fissure between rich, disfigured lip tissue, an incision on the right side of his nose stretching the length of it.

The ordered bustle of the operating room lay outside, far above the anesthesia.

There, Dr. Timothy Miller, chief of reconstructive and plastic surgery at the University of California, Los Angeles Medical Center, looks down at Mankin's face and focuses.

Coolly marking Mankin's face with a pen earlier, Miller had described the goals of the procedure, Mankin acknowledging with a characteristic smile and nod - a gesture of enduring trust in the man whose scalpel has been to Mankin's face what da Vinci's brush was to his Mona Lisa.

"I take your pictures home with me, ya' know?" Miller said during the examination, referring to the dozens of photos he uses to track and plot the evolution of Mankin's face before and after operating on it a dozen times.

Mankin reached to his throat to close the airway of his tracheostomy and push the air from his lungs up through his damaged vocal chords.

"Oh yeah?" he said, his soft, raspy voice contrasting smiling, wide eyes.

"Oh yeah," Miller said, looking to

Mankin's mother, Diana Phelps, and nodding with a smile. "I do, really."

This is Mankin's twelfth surgery under Miller's hands - "magic hands," say some of his coworkers and patients. The lofty, soothing melody of Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon" wafts in the operating room as Miller makes a precise and gentle sawing motion with his tiny scalpel, a handful of doctors and nurses looking on. He trims away unnecessary flesh from beneath Mankin's nose - the nose he built with cranial bone and skin from Mankin's forehead.

That was the first step. Now Miller needs to thin it out, make it better resemble Mankin's old nose, the one he had before an explosion in Iraq left him badly burned about his arms and face - the nose from the pictures of the handsome, slender Arkansas boy with that coy twinkle of charisma. Miller takes to the task with the enthusiasm of an inspired artist.

"(These service members) have given a tremendous amount of their lives to me and my family," Miller says. "If I can give something back to them, it's very gratifying."

The thin, boyish features Mankin inherited were supplanted May 11, 2005.

Then Lance Cpl. Mankin was a Marine combat correspondent assigned to cover Operation Matador, a roughly weeklong mission to root out insurgents near the Syrian border north of the Euphrates River. Mankin was riding in an amphibious assault vehicle when a massive explosion from a roadside bomb rocked the 26-ton vehicle.

The violent blast threw Mankin down inside the vehicle. When the instant haze of chaos and concussion cleared, Mankin opened his eyes. He was on fire.

"The instinctive reaction at that point is to just gasp," recalls the 26-year-old father of two. "That's how I sustained most of my trachea injuries. I saw light at the back of the vehicle and just dove

toward this dry, crusted earth. I rolled trying to get the fire out but couldn't do it.

I was exhausted, and I just closed my eyes and was ready to die. That's when I heard the shouts of my fellow Marines saying 'Put him out! Put him out!'"

The incident left Mankin with 25 percent of his body burned. His genetic predisposition to generate unusually high amounts of scar tissue caused his facial features to gradually contort, eventually twisting and fusing his nose and mouth area so much that his mouth shrank to a tiny, taut opening about an inch below an asymmetrical half-nose that, without its natural tip, displayed irregularly large nostrils and an upturned look.

"Initially, Aaron's face looked normal," says his mother. "There were no visible wounds. And then it began to draw in and tighten up. I had to use a small funnel to feed him."

Phelps helped care for her son for the first eight months he was a patient at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where all of the U.S. military's burn victims go for treatment. "BAM-C," to which it is often affectionately referred, is one of the nation's premiere trauma centers for burn victims, both military and civilian.

The hospital has cared for more than 4,043 service members wounded in the War on Terror, and the Army Burn Center there has treated 731 of those, according to hospital officials.

Mankin underwent about 40 surgeries at BAMC, including myriad skin grafts and an operation to open his mouth back up so he could eat normally.

But, according to Phelps, the limits of the medical center's capabilities became apparent when the care required became a matter of aesthetics rather than physical rehabilitation.

"The doctors at Brooke are fantastic, but their focus is on function, not aesthetics," she says.

President Bush has expanded the Defense Department's healthcare funding by more than 200 percent since 2001, and the military has made many advances in military medicine and healthcare infrastructure since the War on Terror began. But until recently, the military could not provide extensive reconstructive surgeries to its members.

General James F. Amos, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, is among senior leadership at the Pentagon that has been at the forefront of the military's recent efforts to address the shortfall.

"We've made great gains in recent years in expanding our continuity of care for wounded warriors, but change comes slow," Amos says.

But in October 2007, the military's slow, steady trend in healthcare advancement got sent into overdrive in the field of reconstructive surgery.

The catalyst was an injection into the system from outside the government.

The prospect was revolutionary: One of the nation's top hospitals offering up the services of its world-class, plastic reconstructive surgeons - no charge. It was exactly what the military needed to quickly bridge the gap between function and aesthetics for its disfigured warriors.

The man carrying the torch to the military was philanthropist Ronald A.

Katz, a successful inventor and UCLA Medical Center board member.

"The concept was simple," Katz says. "Why couldn't we provide to these wounded service members not only the best medical care the military had to offer but the best the country could offer?"

Military leadership at BAMC and the Pentagon agreed, and a partnership was forged between the military and UCLA Medical Center, which U.S. News & World Report ranks as one of the top three hospitals in the nation and the top hospital in the western U.S. The partnership has since become known as Operation Mend.

In October 2007, Mankin became Operation Mend's first patient. He was also, in large part, the inspiration for the program, according to Katz.

Katz and his wife, Madelyn, became

involved with BAMC in 2006 when fundraiser and avid proponent of military and veterans' causes Bill White invited the Katzes to San Antonio. Katz donated the lead gift at that time to a privately-funded project that brought to Fort Sam Houston in January 2007 two new Fisher Houses, which house families of wounded service members receiving treatment at BAMC.

"My wife and I visited the burn ward at Brooke, and we were particularly distressed by the number of facially disfigured service members," Katz says.

A pivotal moment in Operation Mend's conception occurred when Katz and his wife watched Mankin, whose charismatic personality and affinity for public speaking has attracted media attention and thrust Mankin into the limelight, on CNN in an interview with Lou Dobbs in November 2006.

"Lou asked Aaron, 'What's next for you?'" says Katz. "And Aaron said, 'They've gotta' fix the beautiful part . get me back to good looking.' That really struck us."

Katz says Mankin's image and words that day were the beginning, but a final call to action came when the Katzes attended in January 2007 the opening ceremony for the Center for the Intrepid, a state-of-the-art physical rehabilitation center for amputees and burn victims adjacent to BAMC, and the new Fisher Houses, which Katz's donations helped build. There were many disfigured service members at the ceremony.

"Seeing Aaron planted the seed, but seeing how many Aarons there are was the key," Katz says. "At that point, we decided we should connect military commanders and my connections at UCLA."

Katz says it took about six months to marry up the bureaucracies of BAMC and UCLA, and as the details of the partnership were worked out, Katz's resolve and passion for the program became infectious within UCLA's medical community.

"Once the program was announced, the byproduct was a wellspring of enthusiasm from people within the hospital to do something extraordinary for these service members," he says. "The

program is really two parts: medical care and personal care."

Katz donated the first \$1 million to fund Operation Mend and helped raise more than \$10 million more. The private funds cover the costs of the surgeries as well as travel expenses for patients and their families, lodging, a living allowance and any extra medical expenses. The military's health insurance provider, Tricare, covers the cost of hospitalization for patients.

"Although it's expensive at our end, it's a blessing to be able to use these funds to make such a difference in the lives of these soldiers and Marines," Katz says.

Volunteers within UCLA's medical community also provide patients with what Katz calls "buddy families." Katz's son Todd, his wife Dana and their children are the premier buddy family, providing friendship and support to Mankin, his wife Diana and their children during Mankin's 12 trips to UCLA.

Dana also oversees and coordinates the buddy family program.

"Everyone is compelled by the cause," Dana says. "The CEO of UCLA Medical Center, called us and said, 'Can we be a buddy family?' When the CEO wants to be a buddy family, that's not your typical bureaucracy."

UCLA nurse Priscilla "Patti" Taylor, a retired Army nurse, also leads a community group of military veterans who sew "quilts of valor" for incoming patients.

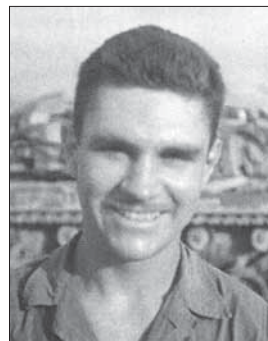
Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli and Gen. Amos, the Corps' second in command, have both visited Katz and other UCLA officials in recent months to talk about expanding Operation Mend.

"Programs like Operation Mend have shown us that sometimes the private sector can inject a capability into the system that we don't have," Amos says.

Katz says it is his hope that Operation Mend will expand beyond plastic reconstructive surgery.

"Fortunately, UCLA has extraordinary talents in many areas," he says. "Our hope

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# SUBMARINE PAY

BY KEN ZABAL

Third Platoon, Alpha Company, Third Tanks had been operating in and around the Chu Lai TAOR since arriving with BLT 3/3 in May. During that time we had been up, down and across Highway 1 many times but had yet to cross the Song Tra Bong River at An Tan village north of Chu Lai. This was before the floating bridge causeway was available.

Kilo 3/3, with a section of tanks led by S/Sgt Joe Wilder in direct support, was ordered to seize, occupy and defend Hill 69 and then conduct combat operations in and around the adjacent area. During 1966, Hill 69, would become a more significant complex and rear area. Since this was the first time tanks had been this far north, it took us a while to find a fording site. Eventually we found one a bit west of Hwy 1 down a water buffalo trail behind a small hamlet. Because this was "injun" country, the plan was for one tank with infantry to provide fire support from the river bank while we forded. Our grunt buddies could use the Hwy 1 bridge but because of our 52 ton weight we could not.

We began fording the Song Tra Bong with K 3/3 coving us from both banks. The river rose steadily above our road wheels to half way up the hull and we were going nice and slow. Milo Plank was 32's driver and he was known to be cool under fire as well as being an outstanding driver. Milo had the bow wake under control and we were looking good. In the middle of the-river we drove onto a wide sand bar and continued across it to our exit point on the far shore. However, we soon found out the sand bar had a pretty steep decline so we backed out and went up river looking for better exit. We soon

found a more navigable exit and got onto the other river bank without incident. We were then joined by some grunts and took our turn providing cover while the other tank crossed. When both tanks were formed up again we got back on Hwy 1 and drove to the by outside Hill 69.

Kilo 6 was a mustang named Capt Jay Daub who had been in Korea and was widely respected by his company and us. Our Platoon provided direct support to Kilo many times on "the rock" and many more since arriving in country. Our tanks arrived at the base of Hill 69 and the Capt says to S/Sgt Wilder "I want your tanks to run all over the hill to set off any anti-personnel mines." I tell this to the crew; Milo, Tony Pinnetti and Jim Bailey and they're not too thrilled since we all know we'll be doing some heavy labor on the suspension real soon. Note, this was well before AT mines became prevalent. Anyway, we drove back and forth across the hill for a while before the Company Gunny (GySgt Breeze) comes up and tells us to secure.

We dug revetments and stayed on Hill 69 supporting daily patrols and providing a blocking force for some small operations before the rainy season came. After the monsoon arrived navigating Hill 69 became a problem. Going down we usually slid a ways but it was controllable. On the other hand, going up, didn't work well at all and we actually got stuck once or twice. After a month or so the word come down to move back to the 3/3 CP. This was in preparation for 3/3 to join the 3rd Marines at Hue. We we're pretty happy since our bunker was a mess and we had been in mud and crud for too long. So we pack our trash and move out to Hwy 1 headed south to

An Tan and the Song Tra Bong followed by a bunch of happy grunts in 6x6s.

At the fording site we pumped up the turret seal and entered the river with the other tank and some infantry providing fire support. Going down river on the sand bar was different this time. Now the water is working it way up to the support rollers and Milo is having a hard time with the bow wake. Over the intercom he tells me the water is up to his waist in the driver's compartment. Hang in there I tell him. Further on I notice the water is almost at the fender, Milo then tells me the water is up to his chest and his MPC is floating around. I'm now on the radio letting S/Sgt Wilder know the situation when Milo says the water is up to his neck and he's standing/crouching in the driver's compartment trying to drive. About that time the air intakes ingest water and we come to a stop. The whole time I've been looking around for signs of enemy activity and haven't seen any. Now I'm now feeling like a really big green target all alone in the middle of the river.

It didn't take long for a retriever to show up on the opposite shore. The 2141 in charge walked-swam out to us with a cable that we eventually hooked up to one of the front towing pintles so we could get pulled out of the drink. Bn maintenance quickly decided 32 has to go to FLSB (pronounced foosie bravo). We get the tow bar hooked up and off we go riding our dripping wet, dead tank behind the retriever. At FLSB we pull the pack and begin to clean up. All the ammo comes out, the 90, .50 and .30 - the batteries come out and it looks like we're

*(Continued on page 40)*

# TANKS AND GRUNTS IN HUE

EDITED BY JOHN WEAR

This is the story of the men in Alfa Company, 1st Bn, 1st Marine Regiment and their love/hate relationship with four Marine tanks during the fighting to liberate the City of Hue from the invading NVA in February 1968 (Tet).

Roger "Berg" Blumberg (Greenville, MI): When we left Phu Bai that morning we didn't take enough ammo, canteens or enough of anything because we thought that we were only going to be gone for an hour or two at the most and be back for morning chow. All we knew was that a CAP unit had been hit. We had no idea in the world what we were going to run into. I was the gun team leader at the time and had just given my gun to Andy.

Alfa company continued north along Route 1 and as the convoy reached the rural fringes of Hue it met up with a column of four tanks from the 3rd Tank Battalion who had been en route, administratively, to get on Landing Craft Utilities (LCU) at the ramp outside of Hue and be transferred up to the 3rd Marine Division at Dong Ha. The tanks had come upon a South Vietnamese unit that had been ambushed.

Capt Gordon "Batch" Batcheller (Boston,

A major in charge of the tanks had just received permission to return to Phu Bai but after talking with Capt Batcheller, agreed to accompany them to the MACV compound at Hue. The company dismounted from the trucks and began sweeping both sides of the road. A short time later Lt Col Edward LaMontagne, 3rd Mar Div Embarkation Officer observed that the column was not moving fast enough so he suggested that they mount up in the trucks and on the tanks and move out with the tanks in front.

As it turns out the tank column commander was Major Bruce "Mac" MacLaren. Just before the initial contact Major MacLaren turned over the four tanks to 2nd Lt James Georgaklis to take them to the Hue boat ramp and the Major took the rest of his column of vehicles up Route 1 to Quang Tri. He missed the battle by an hour or less!!!

Edward "Andy" Anderson (San Francisco, CA): We came to a little village on the left side of the road with a rice paddy on the right. I got off of the lead tank and was flanking up through the village. I was about 50 yards parallel to the lead tank and was really scared. It was so quiet that you



Boat Ramp

MA): All I saw was a tracked vehicle of some sort in the street, with the head and upper torso of a South Vietnamese soldier lying on the deck of the vehicle.

could almost hear a pin drop...All of a sudden the tank started firing at something down the road. I remember seeing tracers going down Route 1. Then we started taking fire so I rolled into a trench. It was full of human shit but I had to stay there because of the incoming. There was this new guy behind me who was freaking out because of the maggots we were lying in. I told him to stay down but he jumped up and got shot in the neck and killed. The tanks finally got moving again and we cleared the village.

As Alpha 1/1 approached the southern

suburbs of the city, they began to come under increased sniper fire.

Capt Batcheller: At this point the street reminded me of an old western town with building fronts right up against the street so that it was like going down an alley. We were firing from the tanks ahead and to the sides and receiving incoming fire from the buildings, including RPG rounds or something similar.

John Ligato (Philadelphia, PA): A cluster of hooches appeared in what seemed to be a suburb of sorts. Then it happened! At first a mortar rounds and sniper fire then a barrage of rockets and mortars. I watched the tank in front explode with a direct mortar or rocket hit. It seemed like slow motion as I saw my friend Pat Farleigh and the radio man (Williams) being blown off of the tank.

Pat Farleigh (Poughkeepsie, NY): I never liked being around tanks much. For one thing you can't hear anything that's going around you. But we were told to get on them and they'd take us the rest of the way into Hue.

William Purcell (New York, NY): The lead tank crossed the bridge over the canal and it was like going into a downtown suburb, two and three story buildings all the way down the main street. After they crossed the bridge, the shit hit the fan. There was fire coming from everywhere. The lead tank gunned it, went flying up the road then was hit by a rocket. Then our tank gunned it and started going over the bridge. We're thinking "Damn, he saw what just happened and we're going right into it" and your stomach kind of turns into knots. So we go flying over and I couldn't fire the machine-gun because the position I was in I would have broken my arm against the turret. Everyone else was firing into the buildings and then the tank got hit twice on the right side up front. I don't know if it was a rocket, a mortar or what but

*(Continued on page 37)*

# YOU CAN'T BEAT LUCK

BY ROBERT VAXTER

It was an early morning on May 19th, 1968. I was the driver on Charlie 3-1, Third Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division. The crew consisted of myself (Bob Vaxter aka "Lurch"), Tony Simms (the loader) Tom Freeman (the gunner), and Darrell Clock (the tank commander). We had with us one of the motor transport drivers for our platoon who had two days earlier brought up our supplies from Quang Tri. As things had been quiet for several days, our platoon commander, Lt. Ralston, had authorized him to ride with us. We spent the night at Bridge 35 just off Highway 9 on the access road that led into Khe Sanh.

We were sitting on the tank having coffee waiting for the morning road sweep and convoy to come by. Tony Simms and I had already finished the morning PM on the tank and we're just kind of taking it easy.

We started hearing what sounded like bumblebees flying over our heads. First just a couple, then it seemed like an entire swarm; it went on for a couple of minutes. We soon realized that the "bees" were actually bullets from a far off firefight that was taking place somewhere between us and Khe Sanh.

Sergeant Clock radioed back to LZ Hawk and advised Lt. Ralston as to what was going on. Lt. Ralston radioed back a few minutes later and advised that he was on his way to our location with a couple of more tanks and some grunts. The morning road sweep out of Khe Sanh had triggered an ambush and was in need of help. By the time the lieutenant and his reaction force arrived at our location, we were ready to go.

We headed towards the sound of the gunfire; we were advised by Lt. Ralston that it appeared there were several hundred North Vietnamese soldiers engaged with the road sweep team. A blocking force had been set up just outside Khe Sanh and our job was to push the enemy into

that blocking force. As we came out of the woods near the entrance to the base, the tanks and the grunts got on line and began pushing towards the base.

I had been in country for four months by this time and was feeling pretty salty, for during that time I had been shot at and mortared at least a dozen times. But now I am driving towards my first actual fire fight with my tank— hatch open and my head and shoulders sticking out!

We began taking small arms fire but nothing appeared to be coming close to the tank. Tom Freeman, our gunner, was firing the .30 and Sergeant Clock was firing the .50. As I look back on it now, it played like a John Wayne movie— the enemy was shooting, the grunts were shooting, tanks are advancing firing both guns, and it is a beautiful sun-shiny day.

After what seemed like a long time but was probably not more than five or ten minutes, our advance came to a stop. To our immediate right front, about 10 or 15 yards away, was an enemy bunker; the grunts were having trouble taking it out. "Stop the tank!" came Sergeant Clock's voice over my comm-helmet. We sit and watch the grunts trying to take out the bunker. The grunts directed their fire towards an opening in the wall the bunker. One of the grunts moves forward and throws a hand grenade into the opening. As he turns and runs away, the grenade comes flying back out of the entrance and explodes. The process is repeated a couple of more times with the same results. Sergeant Clock asked permission from Lt. Ralston to fire the main gun into the bunker but Ralston advised that we were too close and that there were too many grunts around. We unleash the .30 with little results followed by the .50, again with no effect.

I suggested to Sergeant Clock that I drive across the top of the bunker and collapse it. Sergeant Clock contacts Lt.

Ralston and he gives us the okay to try my suggestion. But before I can drive onto the bunker, a North Vietnamese soldier, taking advantage of the lull, comes out of the bunker! He is tall, clean shaven, and wearing what looks like a new uniform— I can still picture him pulling the strings at the end of the wood-handled grenade. He throws it towards the tank!

I am really scared but since I am sitting unbuttoned and high-up out of the driver's hatch, I can see that grenade is going to sail over the top of the tank and miss us. The next thing I know I hear a rattling noise as the Chi Com grenade slides down the front of the turret, hits my right shoulder and lands in my lap! "Holy shit!" is all that I can think as I scramble to grab the damned thing. By the time I grabbed it and threw it out of the tank, I realized it was a dud. I finally wised up, my mama didn't raise a total idiot, and I dropped the driver's seat and closed the hatch— better late than never! I found out after the fire fight that the grenade that had my name on it had actually bounced off of Sgt. Clock's chest before rolling down the turret and into my lap!

I pull forward and drive the tank on top of the bunker. The weight of the tank starts to collapse it so I make a hard left turn and drive off the top of the bunker, collapsing it underneath the tank. The grunts then tossed in a few grenades for good measure.

A few minutes later we were advised to pull back as there were fast movers coming in to bomb and strafe the area. We had just pulled back when the jets came in. They made one pass firing rockets and guns. On the next pass they dropped several bombs followed by a third and final pass dumping several canisters of napalm.

As we move through the bombed out area I could see scores of dead NVA

*(Continued on page 40)*

# One Soldier's Viewpoint

BY TOM JONES  
JULY 4, 2008

Below are my final thoughts on Vietnam. If you are sensitive to two words that are not PC, do not read this. "Gosh" and "Golly" just do not describe the moment.

Governments, in their efforts to win wars, may fail. Diplomats, in their efforts to negotiate a settlement to save face, may or may not have success. But, the American soldier, the instrument for government policy, will get it right. When left to his or her own desire to be human in war, the American soldier will prevail and find a way to make peace one person at a time.

I came away from my one week trip to Vietnam convinced that the American soldier has won the war. Allow me to start at the ending before going to the beginning.

On June 28, 2008 after a 41 year absence, I rediscovered the effects of the American soldier on a hamlet. We were returning from a visit from Can Tho, Vietnam to Ho Chi Minh City. We were looking for Tan Tru and the base camp of the 1st Platoon, Company C, 15th Combat Engineers, 9th Infantry Division supporting the combat operations of the 2nd/60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division.

The guide stopped several times to ask directions to bridges Americans built 40 years ago ( I knew the way from memory, but I don't think our guide wanted to take a chance on my memory). We found a bridge still standing and while I was elated, proud, ecstatic that it was one built by my platoon, it is not the one I had set out to find. Way out in the boonies, we turned around to head back 50 kilometers to Ho Chi Minh City when I asked the guide to take a right, go 1.5 kilometers, turn right and take an immediate left, and then come to a halt as there would be a river, a tributary of the Mekong River. If

it were not there, I said, we would go back to the city and I would be satisfied that we tried.

As we neared the mark, the guide turned around and said, "John, we are near 1.5 Kilometers." To which I said, "Turn around and look out the window." There in front of us was a right hand turn, we took the turn, and immediately turned a sharp left...and there in front of us was the ever lovin' friggin' bridge that forever changed my life. This bridge was not mine, but one that replaced a 287 foot bridge built by 11 men and myself in seven days, defended from attack for three nights, in the middle of what use to be a thatched hut hamlet.

The "hooches" have been replaced by tin and wood buildings, but, this was MY bridge and the turning point in my life in 1966-1968, my 18 months in Vietnam.

After taking pictures, I noticed I was being watched by a number of people. I got my "Kodak moment" photos I had taken 41 years ago out of the van and began showing them to folks.

These pictures were of children who were ever present as we constructed the timber trestle bridge. Children were everywhere at that time. And, as the folks were looking at the pictures, many let out with a gasp, began laughing hard, calling their friends, passing the pictures around as fast as people came to see what the commotion was all about.

These men and women of 40-55 were looking at themselves in 1967. They pointed to a picture of me 40 years younger I had shown them, and I acknowledged that it was me. They covered their mouths, smiled, and hugged me. I was mobbed.

The governments of South Vietnam and the USA may have screwed it up, but the American soldier got it right. Forty years later, I now realize, the American

soldier finally won the hearts and minds of the people.

I was a 19 year old lieutenant platoon leader of a Combat Engineer platoon when I left Fort Riley Kansas for Vietnam in 1966. What would be a 12 month tour turned into 18 months that changed the course of my life.

From Ho Chi Minh City to Can Tho 150 miles, but a five hour drive away and two hours from Cambodia, people everywhere went out of their way to say "hello" to three visiting Americans.

Children from kindergarten to third grade stopped us. "Hello, where are you from?" they asked. When we said we were from the United States, "Oh, what state?" they would inquire. And, these kids would strike up a short conversation in near perfect English. They smiled; their parents smiled and looked prouder than any parents I have ever seen of their children. They are required to begin taking English in Pre-K and through most of their school years, which are almost identical to ours. Here in the states, our kids take Spanish for a couple terms in High School, a language that isn't even in the dialect of Hispanics entering our country.

I asked our guide why the children were going out of their way to talk with us. He replied, "They want to practice their English." He went onto say that many Vietnamese see the United States as a great country and they want to come here. He also hoped his 14 month old son would one day visit "the United States of America".

I would like to wax philosophical of the loss of humanity in war and the conflict we soldiers face in killing the enemy who "is below human" but forging relationships with children and older people we meet to restore our own individual humanity and

find hope amidst the insaneness of war. But, this trip exceeded my expectations of what we accomplished in Vietnam and I have no place in my heart right now to talk of war.

When the American soldier took a “pause for the cause” to reach out and touch an individual Vietnamese, by God and all things righteous, 40 years later we “won” the cause.

I am not one to wear flag lapel pins. I paid my dues and if my actions don't show my patriotism, no pin will add to it. I was never more proud to be a citizen of the United States as I was the morning of the last day in Vietnam. Tuesday, July 2 is a day I will never forget.

The day before, we were given a tour of the U.S. consulate. With reverence we stood on the very grounds where our Embassy had been. We were at the spot in the Wall breached by the VC in January 1968. This breach was a microcosm of what would come. We wiped out the VC infrastructure throughout the country that week. But, that “Victory” for us brought in the NVA and American public opinion. Our victory that week was the beginning of the end.

The Vietnamese government has a 10 foot monolith on the street at the breach. Inside, we have a simple plaque to the four soldiers and single Marine who died January 31, 1968 defending the embassy.

The reverence at that site was awesome.

As we prepared to leave the next day (July 2), I hiked the city from our hotel back to the Consulate. A very wide four lane boulevard divides the Consulate grounds from hundreds of people waiting across the street to queue up to apply for a VISA to visit the USA. I began taking pictures of the Stars and Stripes unfurled and waving from the original flagpole of the Embassy.

I became absolutely chilled by the goose bumps all over my body and they never disappeared. I have them now as I write this. Here I was 40 years after leaving Vietnam, once again on foreign soil, standing before OUR flag waving proudly as hundreds of people waited to get in.

Keep your flag pins. I will forever remember that engulfing moment of being damn proud to be a citizen of the United States of America.

I was finally waved off by a Vietnamese soldier guarding the Consulate. But, he was too late. I had my pictures and I had captured the moment. Remember what I said in my article before I left? From the movie, “Beyond the Sea”, “Memories are like moonbeams. Once you have one, you can do whatever you want with it.” If you see me smile when the flag is raised, you will know, that along with 2.5 million American Soldiers, sailors, Marines,

Airman, Nurses, we have been there, we have done that, and I can assure you after 40 years, we got it right.

The person who provided for the trip and whom I accompanied summed it up far better than I: “We will win Vietnam in this generation because of the way the people were treated by the American Soldier 40 years ago. Those kids (now the adults we met) have not forgotten and they will want their children to live better.”

There's so much more I would like to write, about the people and how they live and especially WORK (everyone works), the growth of the country, the changes, but my Flag in Vietnam and the looks on the faces of the Vietnamese men and women all over the country and especially at THE bridge confirm my belief that while governments quibble, the American Soldier is the human equation in the inhumanity of war. This is the Greatest Country in the World. If you can't believe that, why were there hundreds at the American consulate while in front of the French consulate, there was no one?

Finally, the beginning –the trip came from a person who has seen the movie “Pay It Forward” one too many times, perhaps. And fellas...Tiger beer and, bah,bah, bah (333) beer are still there and as good as ever at the end of a hot day. ♦

### ***You Can't Beat...***

*(Continued from page 38)*

soldiers. It first appeared that many had been killed by the explosives but as I drove further it suddenly was obvious that the majority had been toasted by the napalm.

I opened the hatch on the driver's compartment; it was beginning to stink inside. It smelled like sweat and something else but I couldn't quite place it. It didn't take long to realize that it was me! It seems that when the Chi Com grenade landed in my lap, my sphincter muscle must have had enough. I shit my pants! I was really glad I had an extra pair of trousers to change into. Forty years of time now brings out the humor of that

terrible morning but it sure wasn't funny then! Now it never fails to put a smile on my face whenever I revisit that moment.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. You cannot beat luck! ♦

### ***Submarine Pay***

*(Continued from page 36)*

going to spend forever cleaning it all. Out Platoon Leader, Lt Jeremy Glover, is not happy with us to begin with and then the Company Commander shows up. Not sure I've ever seen of met our CO

before but we're in the rear and he's nice enough to come by to check up on his troops. The Capt gets us all around, pulls out a piece of paper and begins to read the Marine Corps Order on submarine pay. Lt Glover turns red and is really mad now. The Capt is in a good mood, tells us we don't qualify for sub pay, shoots the bull for a while then shakes our hands and leaves. Nice visit, kind of took the edge off things except our Lt is really steamed and we've still got a ton of PM from the day we sunk 32. ♦

# We'll Wait on the Other Side

BY JERRY WHITE

IT WAS AUGUST OF 1966 AND I WAS WITH BRAVO CO, 3RD TANKS ON HILL 55 (DA NANG).

It sure is a funny thing about memories. Some things are as clear as yesterday and others have faded. I say that because I remember the action but not my tank crew mates. That is except for tank commander 2nd LT. Alvarado. He had just been promoted from Gunny.

We were out on a search and destroy mission with a platoon of grunts. There were 3 tanks including ours and we had just come out of the jungle to a huge rice paddy. I would say the flooded paddy was at least a 1/2 mile wide. On the other side was a wooded area. Lt. Alvarado told the ground-pounder sergeant that we would

have to take our tanks across the paddy at a high rate of speed so we wouldn't get bogged down. He said, “Once we got there, we will wait for you and your men to catch up.”

Off we went with our engines roaring. Since I was the loader, I got to sit on top of the turret with the TC. What happened next is burned in my memory: When we arrived on the other side of the rice paddy and moved into the wooded area, to my amazement I saw men in uniforms running every which way. We had driven into a North Vietnamese campsite!

Well of course all hell broke loose. Three tanks have a lot of firepower as we know. All of our guns were blazing, the .30 cal., the 50 cal. and 90 mm.

As loader, my training really kicked in as I kept loading and our gunner and TC kept firing.

After what seemed hours...but was only a few minutes...the gunfire ceased as quickly as it had began. I went up top side and saw our Marine infantry had caught up with us and they were busy securing the area. There were several dead NVA torn apart through out the campsite.

Looking back on it over 42 years later it seems like a dream. I know it really happened. I find myself wondering if there is anybody else out there that was also a part of that mission. None of our guys were hurt that day. One thing happened as a result of that battle, our tank became known as “Ho Chi Minh's Nightmare.”

The next month I was sent back to The World, as it was the end of my enlistment.

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### ***'Scars Are Not Forever'***

*(Continued from page 35)*

is that we will involve ourselves with other DoD hospitals that care for patients other than burn victims. If they need certain expertise that we can provide, we think UCLA has a lot to offer.”

In the meantime, Katz says Operation Mend currently has the funding and resources to continue providing reconstructive surgeries to any service members who need them, and he hopes to see other hospitals follow UCLA's lead.

“We're not the only place in the world that has extraordinary capabilities and talents,” he says. “I think in the next year or so, there is a possibility that this could expand to other medical centers of excellence, and if they need guidance, we can transport that to them.”

Amos says if other hospitals in the private sector are willing to further expand the care the military can provide,

“We are more than ready to embrace that willingness and build a partnership.

“The Marine Corps and the DoD are fully committed to providing world-class care to our wounded warriors, but there is always room for improvement, and there may, in certain areas, be limitations to what military medicine can provide.”

Operation Mend has provided 43 surgeries to seven soldiers and Marines since October 2007, and 10 more patients are currently scheduled to undergo surgery in 2009, according to UCLA officials.

Mankin and his mother tried to express what those numbers mean to the people whose lives they affect.

“Early on in my recovery I adopted the notion that ‘scars are not forever’ as a mindset,” Mankin says. “It was an articulation of my acceptance that this is

the way I'm going to look for the rest of my life, and, with that, I'm not going to let my physical appearance keep me from being who I am and reaching the goals I set for myself.

“That mindset evolved when individuals from the other side of the nation opened up their hearts and their homes and said to me, ‘This is a reality we can give to you.’ And for them to seek me out and ask, ‘Can we do this for you?’ is an overwhelming blessing and I think speaks to the true spirit of the American people.”

Choking up, Phelps echoed her son's sentiment, “There's not a deep enough place inside me that could explain the gratitude for what they've given and what they've done and what they're doing, not just for Aaron, but for everyone. There's not a deep enough place.” ♦

## *Tanks and Grunts...*

*(Continued from page 37)*

the guys on that side were hit pretty bad. The tank just popped smoke and he hauled ass. Someone yelled to bail off the tanks; we jumped off and grabbed the wounded with us. The tank went wobbling up the road and crashed in a building.

This time the convoy only advanced about 200 meters before enemy snipers again forced them to stop. Enemy soldiers were on both sides of the road with a machine-gun bunker on the west side of the road. A B-40 rocket (seemed to have) killed the tank commander in the lead tank. Sgt Gonzales (later to be awarded the MOH posthumously) on the east side of the road with some men of his platoon, crawled to a dike directly across from the machine-gun bunker. With his Marines laying down a base of fire, Sgt Gonzales jumped up and threw grenades into the bunker, killing all the occupants.

Vincent Kemerer (Greensburg, PA): I saw a couple of gooks shooting at us from the third floor of a house. One of the tanks turned his turret toward the house and as he did so the gooks jumped out the windows. They must have thought they had a better chance jumping out of a third story window than getting hit with a round from the tank.

Jimmie Cook (Bartonville, IL): Doc Ker, who seemed to be all over the place, said that there were two or three guys in one of the tanks that we had to get out. He was looking right at me so me and another guy jumped up and headed for the tank.

Donald Floyd (Shawnee, OK): I saw Doc Ker jump up on the tank that had been hit to try to pull the wounded driver out. He was pulling the guy out while bullets were flying all around him and I thought "Doc you're going to get yourself killed; get the hell out of there." But he got the guy out and over to the side of the road.

About that time Golf 2/5 came up from Phu Bai with several Army quad .50s mounted on trucks and two 40 mm "sky dusters" and the reinforced grunts fought their way to the MACV compound on the south side of the city. The Task Force X-ray commander, Col Gravel had one of the tanks knock holes in some of the buildings

inside of the MACV compound so that Marines could move around easily and avoid the horrendous sniper fire coming from the buildings across the road.

Jack Rushing (Nacogdoches, TX): When we finally made it to the Perfume River (that separated the two parts of the city of Hue) all hell was breaking loose. Tanks were brought up and I'll never forget this. A young boy driving one of the tanks got shot through the neck. Now you've got to get him out or he's going to die, so we set up an LZ and they called for a medevac chopper to come in. The chopper asked the boy on the radio what was our last field of fire and the boy said anywhere you want to point except behind us. The chopper pilot said "The ceiling is too low, I'm not coming in." A young Army warrant officer intercepted the message and asked the same question. "Where is the heaviest field of fire come from?" We told him and he said that he's be coming from the south side of the river and be there in three minutes. We looked up and here comes this Huey chopper with his nose about two inches off of the water. He's taking in rounds and throwing rounds. They're just chasing his ass all the way up the river. He swung around, set it down in the LZ, they throw the wounded Marine tanker on, the pilot and I made eye-to-eye contact and at the same time we gave each other a thumbs-up. He went right back down the river the same way he came in, with bullets following him every inch of the way. That pilot was one heroic son of a bitch. I often wonder if he ever made it.

The next day the grunts are hold up (like the Alamo) in the MACV compound and are receiving a large amount of sniper fire from any and all of the buildings that surround the compound.

Dennis "Walrus" Dunlap (Chicago, IL): No one could tell where the sniper fire that hit the lieutenant in the face was coming from. Every time we'd get sniper fire the guys on the wall, which was about ten or twelve feet high, would fire into the windows across the street. The sniper fire would stop, but an hour later it would start again. The sniper wasn't doing a lot of damage, but he certainly was annoying. Then someone spotted the sniper. He wasn't in any of the buildings he was tied in a tree. At about the same time one of our flame tanks was coming down the street on the way to the river. We told

him the location of the sniper. He raised the turret, fired and just fried the sniper. As sickening as it may sound, we stood on the wall and applauded.

(Note: The tank commander of the flame tank was LCpl Charles West and his driver was PFC Brad Goodin.)

On the same day the grunts went to recover the body of a sergeant that had been killed the day before.

Gregory Holmes (Rochester, MN): Along with a tank, we started out due-east toward the stadium. We caught some sniper fire on the way...As we got close to the sergeant's body the tank was about 30 yards behind us when...I saw a gook spider-hole in front of a house across the intersection... Lt Donnelly sent a fire-team out to retrieve the body of the sergeant while we laid down a base of fire. Just as they got to the body the NVA opened up with AK-47, .50 cal machine-gun and B-40 rocket fire...Finally the tank pulled up and we were ordered to pull back. The next day we were approaching the Saint Joan of Arc School with 3rd Plt on our left flank, one block over, moving toward the southeast. We had two tanks with us, a gun tank and a flame tank that had a barrel but no flame equipment. It did have a .30 cal. Machine-gun, and that gave us a lot of moral support. We used them for cover a lot. Instead of using the street we began to go through backyards with tanks blasting holes through the garden walls.

Paul Patterson (Seattle, WA): Fox 2/5 needed some help, so we went over with our 106 mm recoilless rifle. Being so big it's carried by four men. As it began to fire into the enemy position the enemy fired back with rockets hitting the 106 and wounding the gun crew...We waited as a tank was brought up and fired into the building where the sniper was. After the tank fired several rounds the enemy fire ceased. After evacuating our dead and wounded we moved to the hospital and spent the night there. We realized that without our supporting weapons we would be lost.

Gary "Woody" Giarrusso (Des Plains, IL): As I remember it, we came under some heavy fire that had us pinned down. We called for help and they sent us a tank. Boy, were we glad to see that. I think that we cheered. The tank got off a couple rounds then was hit itself and put out of commission.

Charles McCammon (Columbus, OH): When they brought up the tank, some NVA sniper was actually shooting at it with a rifle. You could hear the bullets ping off of the tank. The tank turned its turret toward the sniper and blew half the building away. We charged in the building but never found a trace of the sniper. The guy couldn't have been too bright anyway. He must have been a new recruit.

Terry "Doc" Ohlhauser (Huron, SD): Around four o'clock on the afternoon of the 8th we moved into the soccer stadium. We broke into some lockers, put on soccer uniforms and went out, horsed around on the field. We had two tanks with us and they drag raced around the track on the field. Guys were betting on the tanks. We must have horsed around there for about an hour. It was a great time. We almost forgot what was going on around us.

1st Lt Ray Smith (Shilder, OK): As we moved past the stadium and started across the intersection we ran into them! The point man got hit and the man who went to his aid also got hit. I had the gun tank and the flame tank inside the stadium. The sergeant commanding the tanks had been very reluctant to go into harm's way the first few days but by the 9th he had become a real tiger. When he heard what was happening he drove into the fire to provide a protective block for the wounded. As soon as he got to them the tank was hit by a .57 mm recoilless rifle firing from an old gas station at the corner. The tank ended up burning inside and the driver lost control, running over the corpsman before abandoning the tank. The sergeant ran back to the stadium to get the other tank and return to evacuate the wounded. (I wrote him up for a Silver Star that day, but I don't think he ever got it. I heard the tank battalion commander was very upset because he lost the tank!) We were able to pull back and regroup.

(Note: Lt Smith later became a Major General by the end of his Marine Corps career.)

Terry "Doc" Ohlhauser: We were behind a tank, using it for cover. There was me, I had my back to the tank, the wounded man and Gunny Canley. All of a sudden the tank got hit with a rocket and the driver must have pulled back on the stick. Gunny Canley was able to grab the wounded guy's arm and

drag him away but he missed my arm. As I started to turn the tank hit me and since I was in the direct center of the tank, when I fell, I fell on my face with my arms out. As the tank backed up it ran over my left elbow. Then the tank pulled forward and again backward with my arm under the tread the whole time. The tank pulled back down the road about 25 yards and I tried to get up but couldn't. Someone yelled to me to stay there and play dead. Being as I didn't have a better idea, I thought "That sounds good to me," I lay there for what seemed like a lifetime (about 45 minutes). All the while there was shooting going on all around me. I thought for sure I was going to get hit. About five minutes before they brought a tank back up a bunch of civilians come running across the street and one of them stepped on me. They thought I was dead. The tank pulled in from of me so I was able to grab on and pull myself up. Once I got up I ran like hell.

Richard "Chunky" Pettitt (Stafford, AZ): Gunny Canley picked me up (I weighed about 190 at the time), lifted me over his head and put me on top of the tank. About this time another tank got hit, backed up and hit the corpsman who had pulled me back. Then I was medevaced out of there.

Paul Patterson: When the tank got hit we got pinned down and were unable to get to the wounded.

Gregory Holmes: We had two tanks with us and as we tried to cross the intersection that triggered an ambush. The first tank was well out into the intersection and was being used for cover by Gunny Canley, the corpsman and several others when the tank got hit by probably a .57 mm recoilless rifle. When that thing hit it went ka-blam! And of course, everybody got down. It was an armor piercing round that burned through and blew up the electronics. With the driver pulled back on the operating handle and threw it in reverse. The corpsman was ducked down behind the tank and the tank ran over him. The same time they opened up with all kinds of small arms fire, both .30 and .50 cal making guns. There were green and red tracers going everywhere.

Clement Labine (Newport News, VA): After the tank got hit, I looked up and saw this big black dude (Canley) trudge up the street, like nothing was going on, pull two guys out of the tank, throw them over his

shoulders and bring them back. He was on of the heroes of the day. Here we were trying to dig foxholes in the cement and he was walking around like nothing was going on.

Donald Helton (Seattle, WA): I was short so they assigned me to supply. We not only dropped off supplies but we picked up severely wounded Marines as well. We came up on a convoy of trucks that were stopped but there was room to go around them so we did. As we started around them we looked up and there was this tank coming at us going like a bat out of hell! We stopped. There wasn't quite enough room for the tank to get by. I bailed out the right side and the driver tried to get out but about three inches of the tank track hit the left side of the Mighty Might before he could. He broke his arm when it got pinned between the steering wheel and the windshield. Sutton didn't get hurt any worse than he already was and eventually we did get him to the aid station but it got pretty hairy there for a few minutes.

As a post script, I want to end this story with some humor:

Rick Mann (Covington, KY): The first weeks in Hue there were guys who wouldn't even take off their helmet, bandoleers or flack jackets let alone even think about taking of their boots. It became a superstition. I developed this superstition that I wasn't going to take off my boots till I got back to Phu Bai and maintained that throughout Hue. The night before we were to leave Hue I was in a room with eleven other Marines, which was nice because, with twelve of us, it made each of our watches shorter. When it came my turn to stand watch I decided to finally take my boots off. I got one boot off and these other eleven guys sat up. Someone hollered out, "My God, I think there's a dead body in here!"

Then someone else said, "No, it's just Mann; he finally took his boots off."

Reprinted with permission from the book, "Marines Under Fire – Alfa 1/1 in Vietnam: From Con Thien to Hue to Khe Sanh" – by Kenneth N Jordan, Sr. For an autographed copy of his book he can be reached at [kjor908@sgcglobal.net](mailto:kjor908@sgcglobal.net) or by calling (440) 946-0020. ♦

# VA Website Reference List

Below are web-sites that provide information on Veterans benefits and how to file/ask for them. Accordingly, there are many sites that explain how to obtain books, military/medical records, information and how to appeal a denied claim with the VA. Please pass this information on to every Veteran you know. Nearly 100% of this information is free and available for all veterans, the only catch is: you have to ask for it, because they won't tell you about a specific benefit unless you ask for it. You need to know what questions to ask so the right doors open for you -- and then be ready to have an advocate who is willing to work with and for you, stay in the process, and press for your rights and your best interests.

Appeals <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21\\_1/mr/part1/ch05.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch05.doc)>

Board of Veteran's Appeals <<http://www.va.gov/vbs/bva/>>

CARES Commission <<http://www.va.gov/vbs/bva/>>

CARES Draft National Plan <<http://www1.va.gov/cares/page.cfm?pg=105>>

Center for Minority Veterans <<http://www1.va.gov/centerforminorityveterans/>>

Center for Veterans Enterprise <<http://www.vetbiz.gov/default2.htm>>

Center for Women Veterans <<http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/>>

Clarification on the changes in VA healthcare for Gulf War Veterans <<http://www.gulfwarvets.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000016.html>>

Classified Records - American Gulf War Veterans Assoc <<http://www.gulfwarvets.com/ubb/Forum18/HTML/000011.html>>

Compensation for Disabilities Associated with the Gulf War Service <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21\\_1/part6/ch07.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21_1/part6/ch07.doc)>

Compensation Rate Tables, 12-1-03 <<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp01.htm>>

Department of Veterans Affairs Home Page <<http://www.va.gov/>>

Directory of Veterans Service Organizations <<http://www1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm?template=view>>

Disability Examination Worksheets Index, Comp <<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/exams/index.htm>>

Due Process <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21\\_1/mr/part1/ch02.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch02.doc)>

Duty to Assist <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21\\_1/mr/part1/ch01.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch01.doc)>

Electronic Code of Federal Regulations <<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/ecfr/>> Emergency, Non-emergency, and Fee Basis Care <<http://www1.va.gov/opa/va-docs/fedben.pdf>>

Environmental Agents <<http://www1.va.gov/environagents/>>

Environmental Agents M10 <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1002](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1002)>

Establishing Combat Veteran Eligibility <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=315](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=315)>

Evaluation Protocol For Gulf War And Iraqi Freedom Veterans With Potential Exposure To Depleted Uranium (Du) <<http://www1.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/DUHandbook1303122304.DOC>> and <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1158](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1158)>

Depleted Uranium Fact Sheet <<http://www1.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/DepletedUraniumFAQSheet.doc>>

Evaluation Protocol For Non-Gulf War Veterans With Potential Exposure To Depleted Uranium (Du) <<http://www1.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/DUHANDBOOKNON-GW130340304.DOC>>

Fee Basis, Priority For Outpatient Medical Services And Inpatient Hospital Care <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=206](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=206)>

Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents 2005 <<http://www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/fedben.pdf>> <[http://www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current\\_benefits.htm](http://www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current_benefits.htm)>

Forms and Records Request <<http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>>

General Compensation Provisions <[http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii\\_chapter11\\_subchaptervi\\_.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii_chapter11_subchaptervi_.html)>

Geriatrics and Extended Care <<http://www1.va.gov/geriatricsshg/>>

Guideline for Chronic Pain and Fatigue MUS-CPG <[http://www.oqp.med.va.gov/cpg/cpgn/mus/mus\\_base.htm](http://www.oqp.med.va.gov/cpg/cpgn/mus/mus_base.htm)>

Guide to Gulf War Veteran's Health <<http://www1.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/VHlgulfwar.pdf>>

Gulf War Subject Index <<http://www1.va.gov/GulfWar/page.cfm?pg=7&template=main&letter=A>>

Gulf War Veteran's Illnesses Q&As <<http://www1.va.gov/gulfwar/docs/GWIllnessesQandAsIB1041.pdf>>

Hearings <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21\\_1/mr/part1/ch04.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch04.doc)>

Homeless Veterans <<http://www1.va.gov/homeless/>>

HSR&D Home <<http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/>>

Index to Disability Examination Worksheets C&P exams <<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/benefits/exams/index.htm>>

Ionizing Radiation <<http://www1.va.gov/irad/>>

Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Veterans VBA <<http://www.vba.va.gov/EFIF/>>

M10 for spouses and children <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1007](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1007)>

M10 Part III Change 1 <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1008](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1008)>

M21-1 Table of Contents <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/M21\\_1.html](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/M21_1.html)>

Mental Disorders, Schedule of Ratings <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/regs/38CFR/BOOKC/PART4/S4\\_130.DOC](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/regs/38CFR/BOOKC/PART4/S4_130.DOC)>

Mental Health Program Guidelines <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1094](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1094)>

Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers <<http://www.mirecc.med.va.gov/>>

MS (Multiple Sclerosis) Centers of Excellence <<http://www.va.gov/ms/about.asp>>

My Health e Vet <<http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>>

National Association of State Directors <<http://www.nasdva.com/>>

National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention <<http://www.nchpdp.med.va.gov/postdeploymentlinks.asp>>

Neurological Conditions and Convulsive Disorders, Schedule of Ratings <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/regs/38cfr/bookc/part4/s4\\_124a.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/regs/38cfr/bookc/part4/s4_124a.doc)>

OMI (Office of Medical Inspector) <<http://www.omi.cio.med.va.gov/>>

Online VA Form 10-10EZ <<https://www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez/>>

Parkinson's Disease and Related Neurodegenerative Disorders <<http://www1.va.gov/resdev/funding/solicitations/docs/parkinsons.pdf>> and, <<http://www1.va.gov/padrecc/>>

Peacetime Disability Compensation <[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=browse\\_usc&docid=Cite:+38USC1131](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=browse_usc&docid=Cite:+38USC1131)>

Pension for Non-Service-Connected Disability or Death <[http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii\\_chapter15\\_subchapteri\\_.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii_chapter15_subchapteri_.html)>

<[http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii\\_chapter15\\_subchapterii\\_.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii_chapter15_subchapterii_.html)>

<[http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii\\_chapter15\\_subchapteriii\\_.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partii_chapter15_subchapteriii_.html)>

Persian Gulf Registry <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1003](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1003)>

This program is now referred to as Gulf War Registry Program (to include Operation Iraqi Freedom) as of March 7, 2005: <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1232](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1232)>

Persian Gulf Registry Referral Centers <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1006](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1006)>

Persian Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Research 1999, Annual Report To Congress <[http://www1.va.gov/resdev/1999\\_Gulf\\_War\\_Veterans%27\\_Illnesses\\_Appendices.doc](http://www1.va.gov/resdev/1999_Gulf_War_Veterans%27_Illnesses_Appendices.doc)>

Persian Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Research 2002, Annual Report To Congress <[http://www1.va.gov/resdev/prt/gulf\\_war\\_2002/GulfWarRpt02.pdf](http://www1.va.gov/resdev/prt/gulf_war_2002/GulfWarRpt02.pdf)>

Phase I PGR <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1004](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1004)>

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Policy Manual Index <<http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/eds/edsmps.htm>>

Power of Attorney <[http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21\\_1/mr/part1/ch03.doc](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch03.doc)>

Project 112 (Including Project SHAD) <<http://www1.va.gov/shad/>>

Prosthetics Eligibility <[http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=337](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=337)>

Public Health and Environmental Hazards Home Page <<http://www.vethealth.cio.med.va.gov/>>

Public Health/SARS <<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/SARS/>>

Publications Manuals <<http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/publications.cfm?Pub=4>>

Publications and Reports <[http://www1.va.gov/resdev/prt/pubs\\_individual.cfm?webpage=gulf\\_war.htm](http://www1.va.gov/resdev/prt/pubs_individual.cfm?webpage=gulf_war.htm)>

Records Center and Vault Homepage <<http://www.aac.va.gov/vault/default.html>>

Records Center and Vault Site Map <<http://www.aac.va.gov/vault/sitemap.html>>

REQUEST FOR AND CONSENT TO RELEASE OF INFORMATION FROM CLAIMANT'S RECORDS <<http://www.forms.va.gov/va/Internet/VARF/getformharness.asp?formName=3288-form.xft>>

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses April 11, 2002 <[http://www1.va.gov/rac-gwvi/docs/Minutes\\_April112002.doc](http://www1.va.gov/rac-gwvi/docs/Minutes_April112002.doc)>

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses <[http://www1.va.gov/rac-gwvi/docs/ReportandRecommendations\\_2004.pdf](http://www1.va.gov/rac-gwvi/docs/ReportandRecommendations_2004.pdf)>

Research and Development <[http://www.appc1.va.gov/resdev/programs/all\\_programs.cfm](http://www.appc1.va.gov/resdev/programs/all_programs.cfm)>

Survivor's and Dependents' Educational Assistance <[http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partiii\\_chapter35\\_.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title38/partiii_chapter35_.html)>

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U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims <<http://www.vetapp.gov/>>

VA Best Practice Manual for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) <<http://www.avapl.org/pub/PTSD%20Manual%20final%206.pdf>>

VA Fact Sheet <<http://www1.va.gov/opa/fact/gwfs.html>>

VA Health Care Eligibility <<http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/home/hecmmain.asp>>

VA INSTITUTING GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF FUNCTION (GAF) <<http://www.avapl.org/gaf/gaf.html>>

VA Life Insurance Handbook a" Chapter 3 <<http://www.insurance.va.gov/inForceGIIISite/GLIhandbook/glibookletch3.htm#310>>

VA Loan Lending Limits and Jumbo Loans <[http://valoans.com/va\\_facts\\_limits.cfm](http://valoans.com/va_facts_limits.cfm)>

VA MS Research <<http://www.va.gov/ms/about.asp>>

VA National Hepatitis C Program <<http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>>

VA Office of Research and Development <<http://www1.va.gov/resdev/>>

VA Trainee Pocket Card on Gulf War <<http://www.va.gov/OAA/pocketcard/gulfwar.asp>>

VA WMD EMSHG <<http://www1.va.gov/emshg/>>

VA WRIISC-DC <<http://www.va.gov/WRIISC-DC/>>

VAOIG Hotline Telephone Number and Address <<http://www.va.gov/oig/hotline/hotline3.htm>>

Vet Center Eligibility - Readjustment Counseling Service <<http://www.va.gov/rcs/Eligibility.htm>>

Veterans Benefits Administration Main Web Page <<http://www.vba.va.gov/>>

Veterans Legal and Benefits Information <<http://valaw.org/>>

VHA Forms, Publications, Manuals <<http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/>>

VHA Programs - Clinical Programs & Initiatives <[http://www1.va.gov/health\\_benefits/page.cfm?pg=13](http://www1.va.gov/health_benefits/page.cfm?pg=13)>

VHA Public Health Strategic Health Care Group Home Page <<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/>>

VHI Guide to Gulf War Veterans(tm) Health <[http://www1.va.gov/vhi\\_ind\\_study/gulfwar/istudy/index.asp](http://www1.va.gov/vhi_ind_study/gulfwar/istudy/index.asp)>

Vocational Rehabilitation <<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/>>

Vocational Rehabilitation Subsistence <<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/InterSubsistencefy04.doc>>

VONAPP online <<http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>>

WARMS - 38 CFR Book C <<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/bookc.html>>

Wartime Disability Compensation <[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=browse\\_usc&docid=Cite:+38USC1110](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=browse_usc&docid=Cite:+38USC1110)>

War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center - New Jersey <<http://www.wri.med.va.gov/>>

Welcome to the GI Bill Web Site <<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>>

What VA Social Workers Do <<http://www1.va.gov/socialwork/page.cfm?pg=3>>

WRIISC Patient Eligibility <<http://www.illegion.org/va1.html>>



**Order of the Tank Commander**

Unveiled for the first time at the Charleston reunion was a rough prototype of a unique award that would make any Vietnam Marine tanker proud. We have been working with a design company to create a display that will generate the attention and respect of all that view it. We now have a way of recognizing those people that want to step up and contribute to the organization and at the same time give them a stunning award in return. The award has three levels which add more to the display as each level is earned.


The new program is called the **USMC VTA Order of the Tank Commander**. It is a beautiful display surrounded by the three gold flags that will have each battalion's logo etched in black along with the Marine Corps flag. The base has a large VTA logo that is hidden by the next level of donation and is replaced with a much larger VTA logo on a back wall. There is also a 3" brass USMC medallion on the back wall. The award is about 19" side to side and about 18" high. It is an eye-catching display and incorporates a finely detailed

*Corgi* tank model that is no longer available. You get to pick which model you prefer: 3rd Tanks or 1st Tanks (*w/ sky mounted .50*). The engraved front plaque calls out the Order of the Tank Commander as well as the recipient's name, years in Vietnam and what units he was with.

The complete award is given with a donation of \$1,800. It can be paid for in one of three ways: fixed monthly payments; 3 separate payments; or one grand donation. For the fixed monthly program and the 3 step program, you will be shipped the pieces as you reach each plateau. There are three steps to the display as you hit each goal.

Instead of us always asking for donations, you now have an easy way to help the organization and get something in return as well. We need members to sign up! Please use the form below to choose which payment method you would prefer. Send the below form or a copy of the form to Jim Coan to get started on this unique program. Keep in mind that any donation made to the VTA is tax deductible.

**USMC VTA Order of the Tank Commander**  
**Sign me up!**



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Circle the payment plan you would like**

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Monthly Plan</b> <b>\$50</b> <b>over 36 months</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Tri-Payment Plan</b> <b>\$600</b> <b>in 3 Installments</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Lump Sum Plan</b> <b>\$1,800</b> <b>1 Installment</b>
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Make your payment check to: "**USMC VTA**"  
Enclose your first payment with the return of this card. Send to:

**USMC VTA**  
**C/O Jim Coan**  
**5374 East Lantana Drive**  
**Sierra Vista, AZ 30005-8920**

Remember that any donation made to the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association is tax deductible

Note: This is a "work in progress" prototype that was created for the reunion. The final version will have black etching into the brass flags and engraved front plate. Current picture shows only one flag with dark etching. Flags will be finished with a ball on the end.



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

Being one of the last four people to leave the Charleston reunion site on Monday, August 24th (my flight out was at 1600 hrs) I experienced a mix of emotions that took weeks to regroup from. There was this quiet hush that enveloped the Sheraton as we left... it actually became tomb-like late Monday morning. *Chuck Garrison*

