



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

## It is just 6 months until we reunite in Colorado Springs!!!

# USMC



## VIETNAM TANKERS REUNION 2023 Colorado Springs

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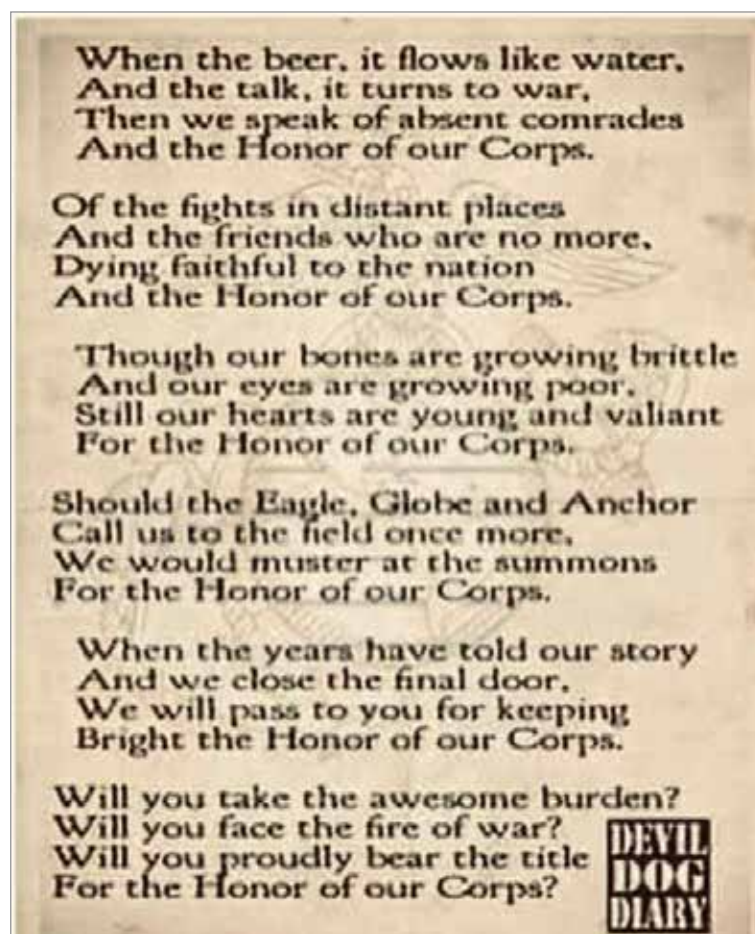
# ATTENTION 2023 REUNION ATTENDEES!!!

We are departing from a fairly standard policy for our upcoming reunion in Colorado.

**2023 REUNION ADDITIONAL EVENT:** Of the many outstanding sites that the Pikes Peak Region (a.k.a. Colorado Springs) offers and one of the most spectacular and awe-inspiring venues is the Pikes Peak Cog Railway. The Cog Railway's description is included below. As you read the description below, we are hoping that you agree with us that the trip will be worth the additional \$60 per person cost and that the special event will be remembered for decades to come. Please note that the trip is optional and not required.

**DESCRIPTION:** This is the highest and the longest cog railroad in the entire Northern Hemisphere. Nine miles to the summit of "America's Mountain," one of the most famous mountains in the United States. The first passenger train arrived on the summit in June 1891 and has seen many modern developments over the years. Most recently they have taken three years to rebuild and bring Pikes Peak Cog Railway into a new era, with new trains, new track, new depot and a beautiful new Summit House for visitors at the top. It is a train ride, yes, but this is an adventure experience that is so much more than just a journey on the train. The three and a half hour round trip up and down "America's Mountain" offers some insanely beautiful views of the sites that inspired the beloved anthem, "America the Beautiful."

## SPECIAL FEATURE



## Letter from the President

**SUNDAY, SEPT 17 TOURS:** We are also offering an outside independent tour company's selection of really outstanding sight-seeing adventures on Sunday, Sept 17th, our Open Day. You must contact the company yourself to reserve your space and send your check to assure your space on the tour bus. See the Reunion Section of this issue for all of the details.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!** For whatever reason, it seems as if we have gotten away from something that used to be very meaningful for most, if not all, of our reunion attendees. In the not-so-distant past, many of our reunion attendees would bring their Vietnam Photo Albums with them. They would place their albums on the tables in the Slopchute hospitality room so that the rest of the attendees could go through the album seeking photos of friends and find other common interests. Please bring your Vietnam photo albums with you when you come to Colorado this September.

**THE AUCTION AT THE REUNION:** The reunion auction is our primary fundraiser. Please start thinking about items to bring and donate. To be better organized and in order to not have a lot of duplicate items, we have decided in order to reduce our tremendous workload, we would like for each and every reunion attendee who is planning to donate items for our Live or Silent Auction to please call or email Jim Raasch, the Chairman of the Auction Committee and let him know what you are planning to donate prior to the actual reunion event.

Jim's email address is: jraasch47@gmail.com

And his phone number is: 319.551.1675

**LOOKING FOR:** If you note in the "Looking For" section of this issue, the son-in-law of a recently departed US Marine Vietnam tanker (Larry Conti) is looking for more information about his wife's father. Again, this is yet one more example of US Marine veterans "keeping silent" about his service to our nation for whatever totally illogical reason ... and it is even sadder that the family waited until his death to seek answers. To me it seems to be nothing short of "criminal" behavior on the Marine's part. **SHARE YOUR STORIES BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE TO BE ABLE TO DO SO!!!**

**TO THE GREAT TANK PARK:** You might have noticed a larger than usual number of obituaries in the past few issues of our magazines. That is because we fairly recently did a major clean-up of lapsed members and we found one of the reasons that they "fell out of formation" was because they passed away. If you also note in their obit when we mention their membership status, many of the "past members" unfortunately for our brotherhood, they fell out quite a bit before the date of their death.

**DO IT NOW!** The USMC VTA History Project mantra is: "If you do not write it down, it will soon be forgotten." Don't let your personal legacy fade away when you report to the guard shack in Heaven

*"People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."*

- George Orwell

### YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!

Please pay your 2023 Dues or Annual Life Assessment now.



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Recruited by: John Wear

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Recruited by: WELCOME BACK!

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### A CORRECTION

I would like to update the excellent and recent Sponson Box. On page 15 of the October – November – December 2022 magazine, is a copy of the cover of the very first issue, Volume 1, Issue 1, produced by Dick Carey. At the time, 25 years ago, Dick did an incredible job researching the number of tankers who were KIA. The article states there were 138 USMC tank battalion KIAs. Since that time, Ron Knight and I have uncovered an additional 23 names for a count of 161. Dick's initial list was a huge help in determining this current number.

Bob Peavey, "Fallen Heroes"

*Editor's Note: The "cover" of the first Sponson Box newsletter that Bob is referring to was actually a single page newsletter that Dick Carey published in 1998 with the hope to entice more US Marine Vietnam tankers to become interested in a reunion in 1999. And happily, it worked!!!*

### AN OMISSION

Bob Haller writes: As you indicated at the bottom of Page 20 of the latest issue of the Sponson Box: "Any omissions of names of those that have contributed to our organization and their names were not listed..." to contact you for the oversight. As I am doing now. I am pretty sure that this is the third year that I was not listed along with the 117 people who were credited with making a donation to the brotherhood. In 2022 I sent a note to indicate my omission the previous year 2021 ... and now again for 2023. As a Charter Member I am beginning to feel unloved and find it difficult to sleep at night because of this omission. I wanted to call John Wear and cry on his shoulder but realized that would be a waste of time and only aggravate the hell out of me. Hope to see you-all at the Colorado Springs reunion. Take care, stay safe and healthy.

*Editor's Reply: Ooops! Sorry Bob. We'll try to do better.*

### Colorado Springs 2023

Roger Luli writes: Happy new year! You made my day with 1st-2023 issue of our magazine. I will be sending my reunion registration as soon as I confirm with my brother that he is coming with me.

### Thanks for the Memories

Bob Skeels writes: Thanks for your high five (remembrance) on something I wrote for America's best military veteran magazine (the Sponson Box). I do remember writ-

ing a story re: "ESG" personnel or military specialists to honor Larry Parshall as he was not only my driver but also "buttoned up" (repaired the broken track) on all our mine hits (13) in-country. It took brass balls to hop off the M-48 and walk around a potential mine field to re-button the beast so we could accomplish our given daily mission. Larry was a highly exemplary Marine tank mechanic and I was lucky to have him in my 1st Platoon, Bravo Co... except he did drive me as TC of "Gypsy Rose" into two mines ... so no medals for him.

### Memories are Made of This

Armando Moreno writes: Thanks for sending me that joke. I am laughing so hard that I was close to peeing my pants. It was 55 years ago when I came home from the Nam by way of a Greyhound bus from San Francisco and was met by my parents at almost midnight. I think back on that and the fact that I turned 21 on that day, all I could think about was celebrating and getting fucked up. I didn't and instead went home with my parents. I didn't realize till later what a gift that was and how very hard that must have been on my parents. I didn't know about those feelings until now, I was such a child.

### Cookie DeFazio

We got a telephone call from VTA member Anthony Pronnette the other day. He was genuinely upset about Cookie's obituary in the most recent issue of our magazine. He said that he had spoken to Cookie about seven months prior and Cookie seemed to be OK. Anthony also told us that he and Cookie were on the very last "Float" that the USMC conducted in 1970 and that they went on Operation Mameluke Thrust with the Korean Marines. They were with A Company, 1st Tanks and their two gun tanks were A-51 and A-52. Anthony reminded us that the same A-52 was the blade tank that spent time in Hue City during Tet '68.

### Ronnie Ingram

We also got a call from George Flavianni informing us of the fact that Ronnie was KIA, not while doing preventative maintenance on his tank as reported in the story in the most recent issue of our magazine. George indicated that his platoon from C Co, 3rd Tanks was TAD to a US Army outfit (the 1st of the 6th Cav) because that Army unit did not have tanks and they were heading into the DMZ. >>



ON THE COVER: This is the "official" logo of our 2023 reunion.



Ronnie was KIA while deeply embroiled in an NVA ambush up along the Trace. George said that the enemy was so fast and furious that they were shooting at the tanks with RPGs from the trees. The Marine gun tanks were putting their HE rounds on delay and they still could not penetrate that NVA bunkers. George said that it was pretty tough.

New Member Larry Fuentes writes: I was with Ron Ingram when he took a bullet to the head. I was on my tank twenty yards away. We were approaching a tree line in heavy bush. I jumped off my tank and helped Bob Truitt and Patrick O’Gorman pull Ingram out of the turret. As we got him out, O’Gorman was shot in the arm and Truitt was shot in the right leg. I was in the middle and was lucky not to get wounded. 06Jul68. Operation Thor with 2/3.

### Remembering Bob Embesi

I was very amused by Robert Embesi’s article in the January 2023 Sponson Box, “Setting the record straight.” I was the section leader at the Mud Flats that this tank platoon relieved. I had heard before they were disappointed there was never any turnover. I was given orders to leave, and I sure didn’t question them. Several months in the Mud Flats with the Korean Marines was enough. We did go on several operations outside of the wire with them. We also got hit there quite a few times inside the wire. I cannot argue with his assessment of the Korean Marines.

Sgt. Clyde Hoch, Charlie Company, 1st Tanks

Don Scott—Thoughts on the passing of Bob Embesi: When I read in the latest Sponson Box that Bob had passed away, I was shocked. He and I had a telephone discussion just last July or August. He was full of life as always and we rehashed a lot of things about our time together on Operation Allen Brook back in the day. God Bless his soul and my sincere sympathy and condolences to his family.

I did not know Bob nearly as well as guys like Bob Peavey who had the honor to serve with him for long periods of time. Peavey, in his Sponson Box piece, really nailed the essence of Gunner Robert Embesi’s Marine career. And I know that Bob considered me one of “his men”, which I have been very proud of since we worked together on Go Noi Island. Me being a “Butter Bar” and Staff Sgt Embesi being a very experienced tanker, we both worked together as a team together with our crews to provide effective fire power for the Grunts who were in a big hurt.

We should all thank God for having Bob in our lives at times when the shit hit the fan, as well as providing the training and role modeling for us to be successful in the fight. Gunner Robert Embesi, may you rest in peace for eternity in the Great Tank Park in Sky.

### Sgt Ken Christopher

I just got my copy of the Jan/Feb/Mar 2023 Sponson

Box and you were true to your word, you published my suspicion that the “Saw this on Facebook” photo was one of my Marines. As soon as I saw the comment from Sgt Ken Christopher that that was him, I immediately realized he was right, that was him. I’ve had my copy of that picture since I came home in 1969 and the mystery provided by my faulty memory has been solved. Thanks a lot John

J Heffernan

### More Memories

I will start with Happy New Year. For all, I would like to pour you a glass of happiness, joy, and good fortune. I received my copy of this quarter’s Sponson Box magazine, once again, informative and very well done. It’s obvious that one hell of a lot of work goes into each publication.

I am glad to see that the personalized certificate of the M-48A3 tank is selling. What’s so great is that it can be personalize in any way you would like, and the price is right for custom work. I never thought that I would be part of “It’s a small world” but you used my copy of the tank certificate as an example, and one of our members, John Hunter recognized my name as his Tank Platoon Leader in 1966, with 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, Camp Le Jeune, NC, and as you know, we have since been in touch, Thank You.

I will start by saying John Hunter has one great memory, and in turn brought back some of my all-time best memories of my six years in the Corps. Like most Marine Lieutenants, I started with 12 weeks Officer Candidate School, followed by 24 weeks at The Basic School, both at Quantico, VA. That’s where they ask you to pick three choices of a MOS. I chose 1802 as #1. I can’t remember the other two, but Tank’s it was. I will state the obvious, anyone who chose 0302as either 1,2,or 3 got their choice. The Corps had just started its own Tracked Vehicle School, at Camp Del Mar, on the beach, part of Camp Pendleton, CA. I believe the school was 12 weeks long. There were about 20 of us Lieutenants in the class.

We graduated late September of 1966. I received orders to the 2nd Tank Battalion, Camp Le Jeune, NC, some went straight on to Vietnam, two of my classmates, Lieutenant Louis Dobbin and Lieutenant Wayne Hayes both died there. Louie Dobbin was with 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, died 05/18/1967. He was 23 years old. Wayne Hayes was also with 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, died 07/06/1967. He too was just 23 years old.

There is more on the above, another story for another day. And more regarding John Hunter, and “It’s a small world “

### Here’s a JOKE

John Hunter sent this in: During a commercial airline

flight an old experienced Marine was seated next to a young mother with a babe in her arms. When the baby began crying during the decent for landing, the mother began nursing the infant as discreetly as possible.

The Marine, pretending not to notice, and upon disembarking, he gallantly offered his assistance to help with the various baby-related items.

When the young mother expressed her gratitude, the Marine responded, “Gosh, that’s a good looking baby, and he sure was hungry.”

Somewhat embarrassed, the mother explained that her pediatrician said that the time spent on the breast would help alleviate pressure in the baby’s ears.

The Marine sadly shook his head, and in true Marine fashion exclaimed, “And all these years, I’ve been chewing gum!”

God Bless Our Marines Always!!!

### OOO-RAH!!!



*Editor’s Note: The two letters below reference a “Sound Off” letter that was featured as the “Letter of the Month” in the November 2022 issue of Leatherneck magazine. That letter is published in the Short Stories section of this issue of our magazine.*

**Rick Beirne writes:** I received my November issue of Leatherneck magazine a few days ago and since I read it from back to front, today I read your letter in the “Sound Off” section. What an outstanding and heartfelt manifestation. Wonderful, awesome, outstanding and the accolades continue to fall into place in my mind. Interesting in that as I was reading your letter because of the way you write, I wondered if this could be from you. So, I skipped down to the signature line and sure enough!! Absolutely loved it. Honored to know you. Looking forward to seeing you in September in Colorado Springs.

**Laura Riensche writes:** I have been intending to tell you congratulations on your letter to the editor of Leatherneck in the November issue. There is certainly a need for all veterans of all wars to get their stories out, for their families if no one else. Recently, we stopped at the Stillwater Billings Clinic (Columbus) for flu shots before we attended a Veterans Day dinner at the Senior Center, and the woman who gave us the shots was telling us that she wasn’t sure what service her father was in, but thinks it was the Navy (well she talked about a ship being attacked and her dad being one of the foremost defenders and receiving an award ...hmmm) ... He wouldn’t talk about WWII like so many and also our equally disappearing Korean War friends... We recommended she first talk to the VA representatives in Billings and see if they can help her obtain her father’s war records. Keep up your efforts to get those stories told. What a benefit to all the tankers you early settlers of the USMCVTA have been.

**George Bieda writes:** Thank you for the Armor in Vietnam book. I had no idea that we had that much armor in Vietnam. When we left in ’74, did we turn over all that to the ARVN or did we take it back to the USA? My second son married a Vietnamese girl who was born in ’75. All of her aunts were married to Vietnamese ARVN or Police Officers. They were all imprisoned until 8 years later when the USA ransomed them and brought them to the USA with all their family members. My daughter-in-law’s father was credited with saving all the relatives in prison. He was a furniture maker until the ARVN made him a 1st Lt. So, in prison he taught classes to all those in the same camp on furniture building. It kept them occupied enough that they did not lose heart during those 8 years. Most are here in Seattle, but a few went to Kansas and some to California. I was in the Vietnam War also ... I was an engineer on USS Truxtun, a nuclear powered cruiser. I spent two deployments stationed just 15 miles from Haiphong Harbor. We vectored incoming and outgoing raids over North Vietnam and were the air war coordinator in that area. I was on >>



station in Dec '72 for the "Line Backer 2" B-52 bombings of the north. We picked up downed pilots also ... we had two helicopters aboard. The one that went in-country was a "Big Mother" CH-53 with the six barrel Gatling gun. After that I transferred to USS Enterprise and we did operation "Eagle Pull" to evacuate Americans out of the Saigon area in '75. We took a Marine CH-53 squadron home up on our bow.

### HUE CITY?

John Wear writes: Today, Tuesday, Nov. 8, I am standing in the checkout line at our local Safeway grocery store. There is a well-dressed pleasant-looking younger man in front of me. As he starts to leave, he looks at my cover. It is my "Hue City, Vietnam" with the EGA on it that I found and purchased several years ago. The fellow squints as he's reading the cover. Then he says, "Hue City? That's where I was born."

My immediate reaction was, "When were you born?"

He said, "1971. My father was 101st Air Born and my mother is Vietnamese."

I said, "I was there in Tet of 1968 fighting the enemy who had invaded the city."

He smiled and said, "Thank you, Sir!" And then stuck out his hand to shake mine.

He then went on to say that he just retired from the US Army after 20 years. He also said that he owed America his deepest appreciation.

I shook his hand and said, "Isn't America great?"

He smiled and said, "You bet!"

Ooo-Rah!!!

### JOKES

Just need a lower to finish my build.



Turtle tank

### Musings about a Name on the Wall

Rick Dunn wrote: John, what a surprise! You found the correct email address and I'm still kicking and upright most of the time. Do you have any idea if Dennis Wear's widow, Jackie remarried? (Must have). It was mentioned she had "sons" and one was a police officer. The police officer would be easy to trace with a last name. Then too, Jackie could be located with a last name. I have a few friends in the police department that would make short work out of this with a name.

I'm really glad the Dennis Wear story got published. This writing is even more relevant today than when it was first written. Youngsters of this "me-me-me" generation don't even know where Vietnam is on a map, less understand the old farts of today now in their 70's who once saw their friends die. They are clueless. I hate to say it, but politicians will probably get thousands of the "me" generation butchered somewhere in a pathetic war because they never learned from the past.

VVMF.org, finally got a picture for everyone who has their name on The Wall. I was glad I was able to contribute to that success story. After I retired, I kept volunteering my talents restoring (Photoshop) photos for them. I just received two photos a few days ago that really are beat up. One restored photo came out good while I'm still working on the second. I might have to give up on it. This 75-year-old is having more difficulty pulling tricks out of the Photoshop hat.

I still miss Frank. I think of him often. A guy told me there was a voice interview recording of Frank while he was in Nam. I wrote to Quantico and got it. It's a little weird hearing him tell the story of one of their night patrols. Oh God! The crap you Marines went through is staggering!

I took my night pills and am way past my bedtime. I just had to write you back!

### ED HILTZ REMEMBERS

Ed also offered this comment about his wife's wonderful story that we featured in the last issue of the Sponson Box: "I really enjoyed my wife's story. It was all her doing. It's a true story that we just met by chance, complete strangers at the time. Maybe if I said I was in the Army she would've walked away."

### CRAB TANK



Ed adds: My wife is old school. She has five younger brothers and a sister. They all went to Catholic schools. She knows what good morals are and what hard work is. When we got married, I only had \$300 in the bank. We bought many things "on time." Now we are fortunate to have three successful daughters. We live a comfortable life in our later years and we are in good health. The Marines taught me a lot.

### Richard Carmer – Lost Words of our Youth

Heavens to Murgatroyd! Would you believe the email spell checker did not recognize the word murgatroyd?

Words gone as fast as the buggy whip! Sad really! The other day a not so elderly (65) lady said something to her son about driving a Jalopy and he looked at her quizzically and said what the heck is a Jalopy? OMG (new) phrase! He never heard of the word jalopy!! She knew she was old but not that old.

Well, I hope you are Hunky Dory after you read this and chuckle. About a month ago, illuminated some old expressions that have become obsolete because of the inexorable

march of technology. These phrases included "Don't touch that dial," "Carbon copy," "You sound like a broken record" and "Hung out to dry."

Back in the olden days we had a lot of moxie. We'd put on our best bib and tucker to straighten up and fly right. Heavens to Betsy! Gee whillikers! Jumping Jehoshaphat! Holy moley!

We were in like Flynn and living the life of Riley, and even a regular guy couldn't accuse us of being a knucklehead, a nincompoop or a pill. Not for all the tea in China!

Back in the olden days, life used to be swell, but when's the last time anything was swell? Swell has gone the way of beehives, pageboys and the D.A.; of spats, knickers, fedoras, poodle skirts, saddle shoes and pedal pushers. Oh, my aching back. Kilroy was here, but he isn't anymore.

We wake up from what surely has been just a short nap, and before we can say, well I'll be a monkey's uncle! Or this is a fine kettle of fish!

We discover that the words we grew up with, the words that seemed omnipresent, as oxygen, have vanished with scarcely a notice from our tongues and our pens and our keyboards.

Poof, go the words of our youth, the words we've left behind. We blink, and they're gone. Where have all those phrases gone? Long gone: Pshaw, The milkman did it. Hey! It's your nickel. Don't forget to pull the chain. Knee high to a grasshopper. Well, Fiddlesticks! Going like sixty. I'll see you in the funny papers. Don't take any wooden nickels. It turns out there are more of these lost words and expressions than Carter has liver pills.

This can be disturbing stuff!

We of a certain age have been blessed to live in changeful times. For a child each new word is like a shiny toy, a toy that has no age. We at the other end of the chronological arc have the advantage of remembering there are words that once did not exist and there were words that once strutted their hour upon the earthly stage and now are heard no more, except in our collective memory. It's one of the greatest advantages of aging.

See ya later, alligator!

### Joe Tyson's book: Unfortunate Sons

I met this guy (Chris Watson) and his family on the ferry from Fort Sumter. I signed my book for him. I was so moved by his words. This is the kind of reaction I have always wanted from my book. I started reading his words (below) to my wife, Tracey and I got so emotional that I could not finish. Of course, my wife Tracey, as always, is my rock. And Marines like you John. My Marine brother and friend.

(Continued on page 12)



# To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

## When I am dead, my dearest

By Christina Rossetti  
*When I am dead, my dearest,  
 Sing no sad songs for me;  
 Plant thou no roses at my head,  
 Nor shady cypress tree:  
 Be the green grass above me  
 With showers and dewdrops wet;  
 And if thou wilt, remember,  
 And if thou wilt, forget.  
 I shall not see the shadows,  
 I shall not feel the rain;  
 I shall not hear the nightingale  
 Sing on, as if in pain:  
 And dreaming through the twilight  
 That doth not rise nor set,  
 Haply I may remember,  
 And haply may forget.*

\*\*\*\*\*

### Your Attention Please!

**We would greatly appreciate it that if you recognize a name in the obits, please send us an email note about the Marine. Anything that you recall might be posted so that others will know that the recently departed Marine was remembered by you ... plus we will have a record of your memory.**



**Lawrence Joseph Conti**  
1947–2022

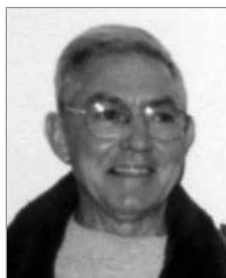
Lawrence "Larry" Joseph Conti passed away Thursday, November 10, 2022, in Norfolk, VA on his "second birthday," the USMC Birthday. Larry was born October 12, 1947 to Lawrence and Florence Conti in Bronx, NY. He was a graduate of DeWitt Clinton High School Class of 1965. He proudly served as a United States Marine from 1966 until 1970 fighting in Vietnam as a tank crewman with 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion where he earned multiple honors and medals including a Purple Heart. Following his service, he worked for the Norfolk Southern Railroad and VA Beach Auxiliary Police Department. He retired from Norfolk Southern after 38 years of service in 2008. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias from 1985 until his passing where he served in multiple capacities locally and at the Grand and Supreme Lodges. The Pythian brotherhood was his

life. Very unfortunately, he never got a chance to join the brotherhood of the USMC VTA.



**Donald Gregory Minch**  
1940–2018

Donald Gregory Minch, "Butch", passed away on Sunday, February 25, 2018, after a brief stay on the Avenue of Honor, VA Medical Center, Erie Pa. He was born on April 16, 1940 in Pittsburgh Pa., son of the late Harry J. and Catherine C. Minch. He joined the US Marine Corps at 17, served a year in Okinawa and served aboard a Navy ship on the Mediterranean where he saw action in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1958. Butch then re-entered the Marine Corps to serve in the war in Vietnam, serving in Alpha Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank battalion, where he drove an M-48 Patton tank at Con Thien in 1968. He was an active member of the USMC VTA.



**Dover Randolph**  
1942–2011

Dover Randolph, age 69, of 183 Wilkins Street, Forest City, NC, died Thursday, September 1, 2011 at the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville. Dover was born June 5, 1942 in Yancey County, NC. He served his country in the US Marine Corps for 22 years and had three tours of duty in Vietnam. He enjoyed fishing and loved taking care of his family and others. He was of the Holiness Faith. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by two brothers, Roosevelt Randolph and Ernest Parker. He was a past member of the USMC VTA.



**Larry "Doc" Cox**  
1948–2021

Larry "Doc" Cox, age 73, of Crestview, FL, passed away Thursday, March 18, 2021 at his home. Larry was born on March 5, 1948 in Pensacola and was a lifelong resident of Crestview. Larry is a 1966 graduate of Crestview High School. He honorably served as a Navy Corpsman with 1<sup>st</sup> AT (Ontos) Battalion during the Vietnam War. He was a past member of the VTA.



**Richard Joseph Babineaux**  
1945 - 2019

Richard Joseph Babineaux of Middleton, Idaho passed away peacefully at home on April 18, 2019, after a 6-year battle with Parkinson's and Dementia in Middleton, Idaho. Rich was born November 18, 1945 in Rayne, Louisiana to Ray E Babineaux and Gertie Leger Babineaux. Growing up, he had 3 older brothers and 3 younger sisters. Throughout his life, he maintained a close relationship with his siblings, and loved his family dearly. He graduated from Rayne High School in 1964 and shortly after graduation served for four years as a Marine including a year in Vietnam as a tank crewman with Bravo Co, 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks. Throughout his life, he was always very proud of his military service, and was honored to serve his country. He was a past member of the USMC VTA.



**Francis "Fran" Kopf**  
1947 - 2022

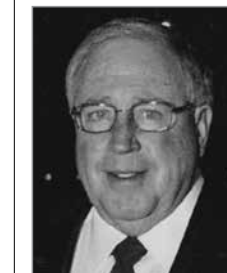
Francis A. "Fran" Kopf, age 75, of Stoughton, passed away on Friday, Oct. 28, 2022, at St. Mary's Hospital, from Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS/AML). He was born on June 18, 1947, in Baraboo, the son of Raymond and Josephine (Schara) Kopf. After graduating from Baraboo High School in 1965, Fran enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1966 and served in Vietnam until 1968. He was a Tank Commander for Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion. Fran married the love of his life, Billi Patten, in April of 1969. Together they had two children, Bobbi and Rick. After completion of a carpenter apprenticeship, Fran worked for Anthony Grignano Company, CCI, and finally, Tri North Builders of Madison, retiring in 2005. He was an active member of the USMC VTA. \*\*See Jim Sausoman's tribute to Fran in the "Short Stories" section of this issue.



**Christopher Giles "Chris" Hicks**  
1948–2013

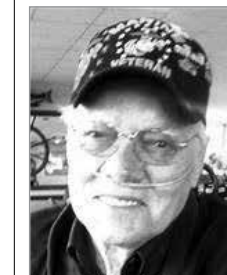
Christopher Giles "Chris" Hicks, 65, of Morganton, NC, passed away Tuesday, March 19, 2013, following an extended illness. Born Jan. 25, 1948, in Morganton, to the late Byron James Hicks and Neta Mull Hicks, Chris was a graduate of Salem High School. Chris served honorably and with distinction with the U.S. Marine Corps. Chris continued to

be active throughout his life in the Veterans Administration, local Veterans groups and was an avid member of the Table Rock Post 5362 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars located in Morganton. He was also a past member of the USMC VTA



**George Emmette Nail**  
1947–2018

George Emmette Nail, 70, went to be with his Lord and Savior on May 11, 2018 in Jacksonville, FL. He was born on September 10, 1947 to the late, Barbara Ann Nail and George Emmette Danner in Atlanta, GA. As a young man, George moved to Jacksonville, FL where he joined the United States Marine Corps. He served honorably during the Vietnam War, during which he received 2 Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star with Valor. After his honorable discharge, George started his 40 year career with Gate Petroleum. He was a past member of the USMC VTA.



**JOHNNY EVANS**  
1943–2017

Johnny Evans, 73, was born on July 11, 1943, and passed away Jan. 27, 2017. He was a native of Greenville, MS and resident of Choctaw, LA. He was a proud Vietnam Veteran and served in the United States Marine Corps as a tank crewman with Bravo, Company, 1st Tanks 1968–1969. He was a past member of the USMC VTA.



**Joseph Curtis Winther**  
1938–2019

Joseph "Big Joe" Winther of Lindon, Utah passed away Thursday August 8th, 2019, surrounded by the things that he loved most – the Lord, his family, and beautiful music. He was 81 years old. Joe was born April 3, 1938 in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was one of three children of Joseph Hyrum and Annie Virginia Curtis Winther.. Joe liked to tell his children that he had two careers in his life—one in battle and one in saving people. The first career was the United States Marine Corps, where he served for 24 years, including two overseas tours – in the Vietnam War and in Okinawa – before retiring as a major on July 31, 1981. His second career was at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Office Building in Salt Lake City, where he worked and retired as a Software Engineer in the CES department. He was a past member of the USMC VTA (Continued on page 19)



**Our Readers Write**

*(Continued from page 9)*

Chris Watson wrote: Hi Joe, we met in Charleston SC on the ferry boat back from Ft Sumter. I was with my wife and two teenage boys. Your book signing was the next day on the aircraft carrier. USS York Town LPH. Anyway, I just wanted to say WOW! I had no idea how difficult and challenging each and every day was for our soldiers and Marines. Especially you tank guys! I could not get over the amount of work and fighting you encountered. Simply amazing. I just want to thank you for your service. I have no other words to express my gratitude for your service. My father was drafted but got injured in a tank accident and ended up serving in Germany. Lastly, have you considered contacting any of the podcast members to tell your story? I follow a lot of military podcasts that focus on Vietnam sol-

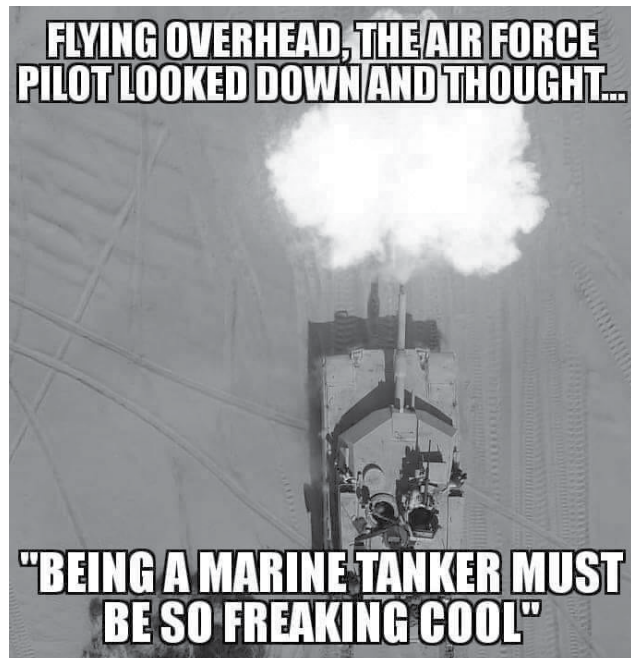
diers and you would be awesome to hear telling your story. A few of them are Jocko Podcast, Cleared Hot, SOG Cast, The Team House, and The Spear. Let me know if you need help contacting them. These podcasts are super popular and mostly ran by Veterans. I'll be happy to email them or call them on your behalf. I loved reading the book and I was really unaware of the conditions you all were under. I have a new level of respect for our Veterans because of you! Thank you again for sharing your story!

Chris Watson  
Davidson, NC  
704.400.8060

**TANKS**

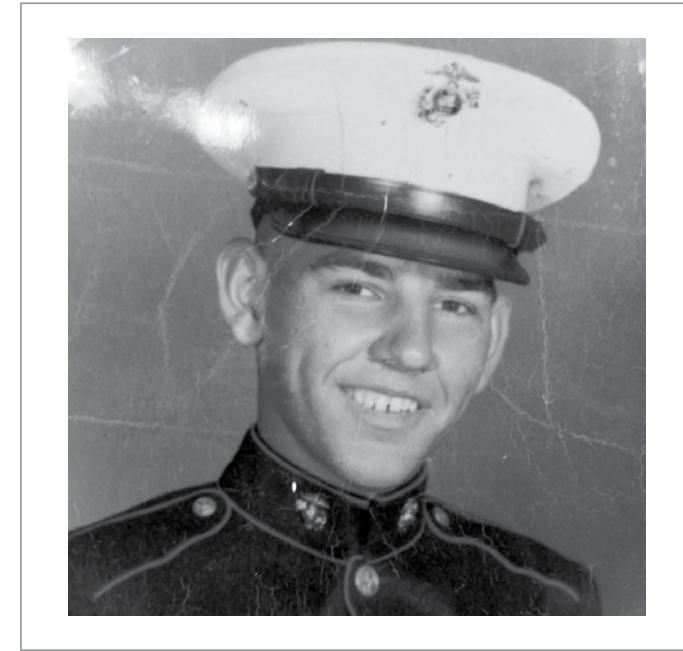


OOO-RAH!!!



**GUESS WHO Photo Contest**

Can you guess who the Marine is on this photo? The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 with the right answer will have his name entered in a contest for a chance to win a yet un-named mediocre prize.



**Last Issue Winner**

John Hunter writes: Wanted to thank you for publishing my 1965 photo of **Stan Williams** aboard the USS Point Defiance standing next to B-35, on our way to Chu Lai, Vietnam.



**Diabetes Update 30: Early Signs of Type 2**

When your body cannot use the glucose found in the blood, you develop a condition called blood sugar or type 2 diabetes. There are many ways to predict the early signs of type 2 diabetes, from unbearable thirst to frequent hunger. There are a range of symptoms that you need to look out for if you are at risk of type 2 diabetes. Even though a diagnosis can completely change your life, if you detect type 2 diabetes early on in life, you can easily learn to manage it. Here are some of the early signs:

**Urinating Frequently**—Commonly known as polyuria, urinating frequently or excessively shows that your high blood sugar levels are “spilling” into your urine. This usually happens when the kidneys cannot deal with the glucose being produced in the body. Hence, they stream some of it into the urine. This process makes one urinate many times during the day, as well as at night.

**Unbearable Thirst**—One of the early signs of type 2 diabetes is feeling thirsty all the time. Even when you quench your thirst, you may feel like you need more water. This is because of the high blood sugar levels in the body, along with the constant urination. This is why you may feel that your thirst is not being quenched regardless of how much you drink.

**Hunger Polyphagia**, or commonly known as extreme bouts of hunger, is another symptom of type 2 diabetes. This is because, usually, glucose found in your body helps feed the cells. Without this process, glucose cannot be absorbed by the cells. This causes the body to search for fuel, resulting in constant hunger.

**Nerve Pain or Numbness**—Those who have type 2 diabetes may feel some form of tingling or numbness in their feet, hands, toes, or fingers. This is known as diabetic neuropathy and happens because of nerve damage. Nerve pain or numbness takes place over time. It does not fall under the early signs of diabetes, but it can occur if an individual has had diabetes for a long period of time and has not made any lifestyle changes to deal with it.

**Wounds Healing Slowly**—When normal people get wounds, their wounds heal quickly. However, diabetic individuals may find that their wounds take much longer to heal. This is because blood vessels are narrowed because of high sugar levels found in the blood. This slows down the circulation of blood in the body, lowering the reach of nutrients and oxygen needed for a wound to heal. If you have high blood sugar levels for a long time and this condition persists, your immune system can be damaged. This will cause your body to have a difficult time-fighting infections, and you may also get sick more often.

**Blurry Vision**—When diabetes is not managed, your vision may start to get blurred. This can be due to a rise in blood sugar levels. This harms the small blood vessels found in the eyes as fluid leaks into the eye’s lens. Even though the blurriness goes away over time, we would recommend seeing a doctor stay safe. If blood sugar levels in your body are not controlled, there are higher chances of blindness in the future. One such condition is

known as diabetic retinopathy.

**Dark Patches on Skin**—If you have ever noticed discolored folds in your skin, you’re not mistaken- this is an actual condition called acanthosis nigricans. This indicates that you may be on the road to type 2 diabetes. Dark patches are usually found on the neck, armpits, and groin. Moreover, the skin also changes the texture and becomes thicker. This happens because there is too much insulin in the blood. Most individuals with type 2 diabetes go through this because of the insulin resistance caused by type 2 diabetes.

**Infections**—Infections such as bacterial, fungal, or yeast are widespread. However, individuals who have type 2 diabetes are more likely to get them often. This happens because of the high blood sugar found in the body. Kidneys are unable to filter this properly, which is why sugar is passed in the urine. This causes urinary tract infections, along with yeast infections. Moreover, people with type 2 diabetes may also suffer from gum and skin infections.

Bacterial infections are also widespread in those who have type 2 diabetes. Even though you can treat these at home yourself, you may have to go to a doctor who will give you an antibiotic. Here are some of the most common bacterial infections faced by diabetic people:

- Styes (near the eyelids).
- Boils or carbuncles on the surface of the skin or underneath the skin.
- Folliculitis- an infection that happens on the hair follicles.
- Infection that grows around or inside the nails.

Fungal infections are also common amongst people with type 2 diabetes. It shows up as a yeast like fungus that can cause the surrounding area to become extremely itchy and red. In fact, blisters and scales may also appear. The most common areas prone to fungal infections are:

- Underneath the breast
- Close to the groin
- Around the vagina
- Close to the nails
- In between the fingers and toes

If you notice any of the above early signs of type 2 diabetes, it is best to get yourself tested and visit your doctor as soon as possible. Remember, the earlier you detect this disease, the higher the chances of you managing it.

[Source: Ziggie Social | June 30, 2021 ++]  
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**Agent Orange & MGUS Study Finds Increased Risk to Exposed Vietnam Vets**

A study that used stored blood samples from U.S. Air Force personnel who conducted aerial herbicide spray missions of

Agent Orange during the Vietnam war found a more than 2-fold increased risk of the precursor to multiple myeloma known as monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS), according to an article published online by JAMA Oncology. While the cause of MGUS and multiple myeloma (plasma cell cancer) remains largely unclear, studies have reported an elevated risk of multiple myeloma among farmers and other agricultural workers and pesticides have been thought to be the basis for these associations, according to study background.

Ola Landgren, M.D., Ph.D., of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, and coauthors examined the association between MGUS and exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War in a study sample of 958 male veterans, including 479 Operation Ranch Hand veterans who were involved in aerial herbicide spray missions and 479 comparison veterans who were not.

The study found the overall prevalence of MGUS was 7.1 percent in the Operation Ranch Hand veterans and 3.1 percent in the comparison veterans, which translates to a 2.4-fold increased risk for MGUS in Operation Ranch Hand veterans. The authors noted limitations to their study, including a lack of women in the study group and the potential for unknown confounding factors such as family medical history and civilian occupation. “Our findings of increased MGUS risk among Ranch Hand veterans support an association between Agent Orange exposure and multiple myeloma,” the study concludes. In a related editorial, Niklhil C. Munshi, M.D., of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, wrote: “The study by Landgren et al has brought clarity to the risk of AO [Agent Orange] exposure and plasma cell disorder. It also highlights the importance of tissue banking that allows investigation of a number of unanswered questions using modern methods. The emphasis now is to store samples from almost every major study with correlative science in mind, and this is essential if we are to understand disease biology, mechanism of response and resistance to therapy in the era of targeted therapy and precision medicine.”

Editor’s Note: This work was supported in part by grants from the Veterans Administration and the National Institutes of Health. [Source: <https://media.jamanetwork.com/post-embargo-newsreleases> | December 17, 2021 ++]  
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**Presumptive Exposure Claim Are You Eligible to File for Benefits?**

Were you exposed to hazardous materials while serving in the military, such as from Agent Orange or burn pits? Did you serve in Vietnam, Thailand or Southwest Asia? If so, you may be eligible to file for service-connected benefits based on presumptive exposure. Over the course of the last six months VA has begun processing service-connected disability claims for six new presumptive conditions related to exposure to hazardous materials.

In May 2021, VA started implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (NDAA), adding bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism to the list of medical conditions presumptively associated with exposure to Agent Orange. A few months later,

VA added asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis (to include rhinosinusitis) on a presumptive basis based on particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia and certain other areas. Any Veteran who was previously denied service-connection for any of these six conditions but had symptoms manifest within 10 years of military service would need to file another claim.

Be sure to use VA Form 20–0995, “Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim” when filing. An online fillable one is available at

<https://search.yahoo.com/search?p=va+form+20-0995+fillable+pdf&fr=yfp-t-s&ei=UTF-8&fp=1>.

The claim form should include the name of the medical condition and also specify that the medical condition is being claimed due to in-service exposure to environmental hazards. VA is committed to assisting Veterans who may have been exposed to hazardous materials during their military service. Be sure to stay plugged in to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for the most recent developments around environmental hazards; VA is constantly–23–conducting research and surveillance, as well as reviewing scientific literature for conditions that may be related to exposure during military service.

If you feel you have a chronic condition attributed to an in-service exposure, we highly encourage you to file a claim. For more information about VA benefits and eligibility, or how to file a claim, Veterans and survivors can visit VA’s website at <https://www.va.gov> or call toll-free at 1–800.827.1000.

[Source: The Patriot Reader Newsletter | Bill Dudley | January 2022 ++]

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**New Look Benefits Eligibility MatrixTake a look at the eligibility matrix below to see what benefits you are eligible for based on your disability rating:**

**Rating of 0%–20%**

- Certification of Eligibility for home loan guaranty.
- Home loan guaranty fee exemption.
- VA Priority medical treatment card.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling under Title 38 USC Chapter 31 (must be at least 10%).

Service Disabled Veterans Insurance (Maximum of \$10,000 coverage) must file within 2 years from the date of new service connection.

10-point Civil Service preference (10 points added to Civil Service test score).

Clothing allowance for veterans who use or wear a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance (artificial limb, braces, wheelchair) or use prescribed medications for skin condition, which tend to wear, tear or soil clothing.

Temporary total evaluation (100%) based on hospitalization for a service connected disability in excess of 21 days; or surgical treatment for a service connected disability necessitating at least 1 month of convalescence or immobilization by cast, without surgery of more major joints.

**Rating of 30%**

Additional allowance for dependent (spouse, child(ren),





step child(ren), helpless child(ren), full-time students between the ages of 18 and 23 and parent(s).

Additional allowances for a spouse who is a patient in a nursing home or helpless or blind or so nearly helpless or blind as to require the regular aid and attendance of another person.

#### Rating of 40%

Automobile grant and/or special adaptive equipment for an automobile provided there is loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet, loss or permanent loss of one or both hands or permanent impaired vision in both eyes with central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in better eye.

Special adaptive equipment may also be applied for if there is ankylosis of one or both knees or one or both hips.

#### Rating of 50%

VA Medical outpatient treatment for any condition except dental. Preventative health care services.

Hospital care and medical services in non-VA facilities under an authorized fee basis agreement.

#### Rating of 60%–80%

Increased compensation (100%) based on Individual Unemployability (IU) (applies to veterans who are unable to obtain or maintain substantially gainful employment due to service connected disability).

#### Rating of 100%

Dental treatment.

Department of Defense Commissary privileges.

Veteran's employment preference for spouse.

Waiver of National Service Life Insurance premiums.

National Service Life Insurance total disability income provisions.

Specially adapted housing for veterans who have loss or permanent loss of use of both lower extremities or the loss of blindness in both eyes having light perception only plus loss of use of one lower extremity or the loss or permanent loss of use of one lower extremity with loss or permanent loss of use of one upper extremity or the loss or permanent loss of use of one extremity together with an organic disease which affects the functions of balance and propulsion as to preclude locomotion without the aid of braces, crutches, canes or wheelchair.

Special home adaptation grant (for veterans who don't qualify for Specially Adapted Housing) may be applied for if the veteran is permanently and totally disabled due to blindness in both eyes with visual acuity of 5/200 or less or loss or permanent loss of use of both hands.

#### Rating of 100% (Permanent and Total)

In Addition to the Above:

Civilian Health and Medical Program for Dependents and Survivors (CHAMPVA).

Survivors and dependents education assistance under Title 38

USC Chapter 35.

#### Non Service Connected Pension Benefits

10 point veteran preference in Federal hiring

Health care enrollment (subject to income requirements)

Travel allowance for scheduled appointments for care at a VA medical facility or VA authorized health care facility

Burial and plot allowance

#### Non Service Connected Pension with Aid & Attendance or Housebound Benefits

10 point veteran preference in Federal hiring

Health care enrollment (subject to income requirements)

Travel allowance for scheduled appointments for care at a VA medical facility or VA authorized health care facility

Free hearing aids

Free eye glasses

Burial and plot allowance

Aid & Attendance for spouse (only if spouse meets certain criteria).

#### Service Connected Disability with Anatomical Losses or Impairment—Benefits

Special Monthly Compensation

Specially Adapted Housing/Special Home Adaptation Grant

Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance

Automotive Grant/Automobile Adaptive Equipment

Home Improvement Specially Adapted grant

#### Veteran Who Is Recovering From Surgery Benefits

Temporary monetary compensation at the 100 percent rate

#### Veteran with Joint Immobilized By Cast without Surgery—Benefits

Temporary monetary compensation at the 100 percent rate

#### Veteran Hospitalized 21 Days or More For Service Connected Disability—Benefits

Temporary monetary compensation at the 100 percent rate

#### Veteran Who Served In Vietnam or Korean DMZ and Has Biological Child with A Birth Defect – Benefits

Monthly monetary compensation

VA Health Care

Vocational training for child

#### Spouse or Dependent Child of a Veteran Who Died From Disability Related to Military Service – Benefits

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (subject to income limitations for dependent child)

Dependents Educational Assistance

Special restorative training

Home Loan Guaranty benefit (surviving spouse only)

CHAMPVA—Civilian Health and Medical Program ■

## What Members Are Doing

### Marines Gather



Ed Hiltz (on the left) writes: This picture represents four US Marine Vietnam veterans who are all grew up in the same Baltimore neighborhood ... maybe a mile or two miles from each other's homes. (Left to right) Ed Hiltz (me); GySgt Bill Cumberland who was also a Drill Instructor; Capt Wayne Patrick who is a helicopter pilot, a Baltimore Police Officer and now a retired lawyer; Cpl Rodney Johnson who is a former Baltimore City Police Officer and United States Marshall. We had an enjoyable day of drinking and telling war stories.



time with the 9th in Nam and Bruce did too. A friend of his, Pappy Lavelle is also from Tupper Lake and was with Bravo 1/9. Pappy was also a Korean War Marine veteran. Pappy also passed in 1980. Both of them were great Marine warriors, and I will never forget them. May they rest in God's light.

### Remembering an Old Marine Buddy

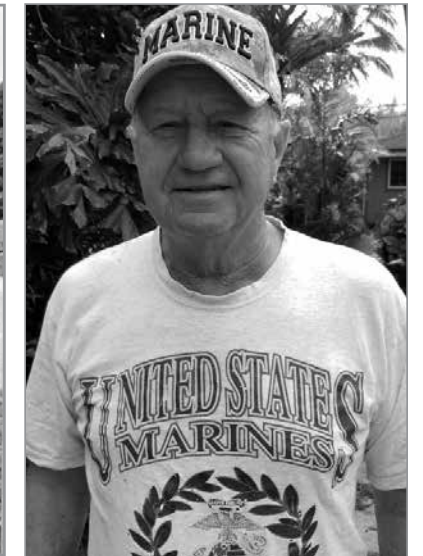
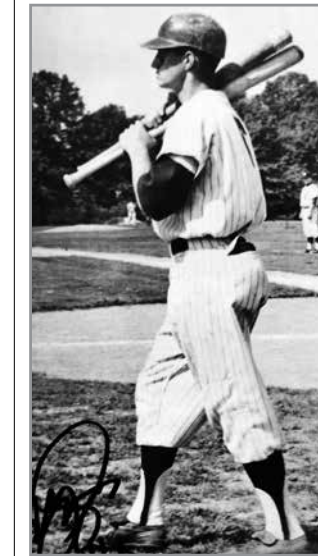
Joe Tyson writes: Bruce Hesselstine and I were good friends, first meeting each other at 2nd Tanks, Camp Lejeune. We worked a lot together in Nam as tank commanders. Tragically in 1980 he was killed in a construction accident. Bruce's daughter Rae, sent me the picture. I have been in contact with his family for years. In the early 20's I was invited to a Bravo Company, 9th Marine Regiment reunion that was happening up at Tupper Lake, NY. I spent a lot of

### 2022 Marine Corps Ball



Armando Moreno (in the middle) writes: Nov 5, 2022, Santa Maria, California, old friends, new friends, and recruiters comprised the color guard and cake cutting ceremonies. Great time had by all.

### Col. Kenny Zitz Then and Now



### Jim Cowman



### National Museum of Military Vehicles

Courtesy photo  
Jim Cowman, former Manistique resident and Vietnam War Veteran attended the United States Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers Association reunion held in September at the New National Museum of Military Vehicles in Dubois, Wyo. The highlight for some was the opportunity to drive a Vietnam era tank for free. Dan Stark owns the privately funded museum with over 500 fully restored tanks and many other vehicles. This museum honors American freedom and is a tribute to all who served. Cowman is show in front of an Ontos.



In the news

At Winter Park, Co

>>



# The First Sign of Civilization in A Culture

BY IRA BYOCK

Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones.

But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are

meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts, Mead said. "We are at our best when we serve others."

## What Members Are Doing

(Continued from page 17)

### 4 Wheeling' with Dave Edwards



Dave with his pretty granddaughter

Lon Ghaster ... all outstanding Marines and all veterans of Iwo Jima. Rest in peace my friends. I am going back to the cemetery later today and see if that spot next to Cramer can be reserved; probably not but there's no harm in asking. And yes, I'll keep you posted. I don't plan on dying anytime soon, but if I do, I'll make sure you get a photo of my final resting site of me and my new buddy. All you need to do is wait me out and keep the Vietnam Tanker Association alive and well. Semper Fi.



As a post script to my cemetery visit: Here is another story about one of those Iwo Marines. Jim Head was a baker and since they didn't have any mess facilities on Iwo yet, he found himself with a rifle assaulting Iwo on Day Two. He and another private went into a cave where two Japanese soldiers were lying in ambush. One of Japs shot Jim's companion who shot and killed the guy who was shooting him. How ironic that they killed each other. Meanwhile Jim gets his rifle going and shoots the other soldier around 8 times. Later his Lt. asked him "Why did you shoot him so many times? Jim said, "Sir, that's all the bullets I had". ■

### Kramer or Carmer?

Richard Carmer writes: On Christmas Eve, a friend and I were at the Phoenix Veterans' Cemetery to pay our respects to our Iwo Jima veterans. We were just walking around looking and commenting on all of the different designations for Navy ranks when we happened to notice this "Cramer" guy with an empty space next to him.

My whole life, 9 out of 10 times when someone sees my name for the first time, they call me Cramer. This happens to my sister, my son, and myself to this day. As a little play on words, I think it would be fitting to share my final resting site with this Army guy Richard Cramer. Richard Cramer and Richard Carmer (me) side by side for eternity, what a hoot!!! I can hear the comments now and as I lay there for eternity and hear what is being said as the similarities are noticed.

And by the way, the fellows who we were paying our respects to are James Head, Dennis Kavanaugh, Glenn Thompson and

## To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

(Continued from page 11)

### Major Raymond Carl Kinkead, USMC, Retired 1938 – 2017

Raymond C Kinkead, 79, passed away on October 12, 2017. He was a resident of Monroe, GA and formerly of Nampa, Idaho. Born in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, he was the son of the late William Carl Kinkead and Marietta Soden Kinkead. He served in the US Marines for 26 years as a tank platoon commander during the Vietnam War with Bravo Co, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks from 1966 – 1967 where he received the two Purple Hearts. He served as the Nampa, Idaho American Legion Post #18

Commander and was an avid marathon runner. He was a past member of the USMC VTA



### Robert Baxley

1944–2021  
Robert Baxley, age 77, of Tampa, Florida passed away on Sunday, December 26, 2021. Robert was born May 31, 1944. He served as a tank crewman with Charlie Co, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks from 1966 – 1967. He was a past member of the USMC VTA ■

## Photos from Vietnam



Picking Up WIAs outside of the Hue City MAC-V compound



Hue City Resupply and Medevac Chopper Pad – Feb 1968





Tuyen Pham

Editor's Comment: Most of us truly believe that our quarterly magazine is pretty darn special. What most of you may not know is that after we spend countless hours collecting and assembling the stories and photos, we then send the raw material to our "Art Director" (Tuyen Pham) and he works his incredible creative magic to form the Sponson Box as it appears in your mailbox four times a year. The work that Tuyen does for us would be extremely expensive if we used an open market company for the process. Below are his words to us:

Thank you for your consideration. But as you know, I always consider we owe a lot to US Vietnam vets and we have no way paying back the debt we owe you. USMC VTA has been especially close to me for the past 14 years. Most of our people do not fully appreciate the selfless sacrifice the US Vietnam vets did for us. I literally cry when I read articles you sent me for the magazine. Anything I can do in my ability

I will do for the organization unreservedly and I am happy to take that once in a lifetime chance.

I served in the South Vietnamese Army from 1972 to 1975. My last rank was second lieutenant. After basic training, I was assigned to Junior Military Academy in Vung Tau as teacher of English since I graduated from Saigon University with a BA degree in English.

I was incarcerated in re-education camp as POW for 3 years (1975-1978). After my release in 1978 I was put on probation with no definite time frame and was asked to relocate to a labor camp somewhere near the Mekong River (it's called An Bien labor camp) but I decided to go into hiding until 1981 when the authority offered some kind of an amnesty for those POWs who had graduated from college with a degree to a teaching position in middle and high school because of the severe shortage of teachers especially in English. This offer only applied to ex

POWs living within Saigon city and its suburbs.

In 1982 I was no longer allowed to teach in public school because I applied for entry visa to the US under the Bush (the father) administration that grants entry for ex-officers in South Vietnamese Army who had undergone persecution after the war (This program is called "HO," short for Humanitarian Objects). The communist authority considered this type of visa application as unpatriotic.

My family and I came to America in August 1991. I joined my parents and nine other siblings already in the US since 1975. It's the first family reunion in Southern California after 17 years. I moved my own family to Georgia in 1995 and made a living here ever since.

Tuyen Pham  
Graphic Designer  
Production Artist



Editor's Note: We are sorry to report that the below story was originally scheduled to appear in the issue of our magazine that featured stories about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, but somehow it got altered.

THE WALL

BY JOHN HUNTER

My first experience with The Wall was in the early 90's at a town north of where I was living in Torrance, CA. The Wall was one of the plastic replicas at a little park in Hawthorne, CA. I read in the local paper it would be there. I didn't know at the time I would visit the real Wall in Washington DC later in my life.

I went to visit without looking for anyone in particular, but when I started to look in the book of people listed on the Wall, I thought of a Marine I served with aboard the aircraft carrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt CVA 42. I had a strange feeling about the person I was going to look for. His name was David H. Phelps. When I was a month



from getting discharged; the ship was at Norfolk Navy Yard in Virginia, David had told me he had received orders to go to Vietnam.

He was one hell of a Marine, from Buffalo, New York. He was a tough guy; I guess that he got that from his dad, who was a high-rise steel worker.

I saw a photo of his dad standing on the steel beams of a high rise they were building. Scary stuff!

David was a guy that liked to fight. We were on a nine-month Med Cruise on the FDR, and went on liberty one evening in Spain. As we left the ship that evening, David tells us, "I think I'll get in a fight tonight!"

He did, with two different sailors. After he bloodied them up a little bit, he would shake their hands, and give them a hug. No hard feelings. He was a strange guy in many ways, but he never caused any trouble in the Marine Detachment and he was well liked by his fellow Marines.

Corporal David Harlow Phelps

was KIA December 7, 1968 in Quang Nam, South Vietnam, from small arms fire. He was born on July 18, 1947, in Buffalo, New York and had served three years in the Marine Corps. He was 21 years old, and is dearly missed by the people that

knew him. It is still hard to this day to realize that he gone.

It has always upset me to think about all of those young people on The Wall, and that they never got to live out their lives, and the promise of the future.

Simper Fidelis

John M, Hunter  
CPL E-4  
RVN 1965-66  
B Company, 1st and 3rd Tank  
Battalion

PAST ISSUES of OUR MAGAZINE

BY JOHN WEAR

I am a fairly avid reader. I like to read mostly hard copy books (no online publications for me) with most stories about US Marines and/or about our war in Vietnam. I had recently finished reading "Sgt Reckless," the story of the US Marine horse that served during the Korean War hauling 75 mm recoilless rifle ammo. When I was finished that book, I did not have a backup book immediately available so I went to my home office space and dug out a handful of past issues of the Sponson Box. As an aside, I have kept every single issue since Dick Carey started publishing a one-page newsletter in 1998. Anyway, I started re-reading several back issues and was impressed by two things: The large number of personal stories that you-all

have written that we have been able to feature in the past and I was also almost thunderstruck to see the massive number of NEW MEMBERS that we sought out and got to join our brotherhood. At one point in the late 2000's we had approached 600 members. The number today is just over 400, so even with a large and successful recruiting effort, we are losing more members between them passing away and some simply leaving our brotherhood for a myriad of reasons. It sure would be nice if most of you could seek out and find more potential members or entice lapsed members to come back. Once they joined, getting them back is a lot easier than finding new members.

The main reason for me writing about re-reading the past issues of our

magazines is that, I am guessing that if any of you have a pile of past issues, you may be pleasantly surprised how few stories you may actually remember reading. That is, I found that I may have either forgotten reading them or if I remember them, I had forgotten a lot of the detail. I highly recommend that you spend some time re-reading your past issues. It may open a whole new world of very fond and not-so-fond memories. The main motivator for re-reading them is to perhaps shake a few old memories out of your brain housing group and get you to write a few stories to share with the VTA in the Sponson Box and to share them with your families.

Our Connection

BY FRED KELLOGG

I attended the 2nd Battalion/1st Marines reunion in Fort Worth, Texas and the date of celebration included November 10th, 2022 - the birthday of our beloved Corps (on May 19th, 1968 the Marines of 2/1 and the tanks of Bravo Co triggered that bloody ambush just outside the gates of Khe Sanh).

The story: On the day of the Marine Corps birthday, November 10th, three of us (myself plus a friend who was in 81mm mortars and his wife) walked around town and eventually decided to catch the free trolley. In a couple minutes the trolley stopped, the door opened, and I asked the driver if he had room for three more (90% of the trolley was full of little kids ranging

from a couple babies thru 6 years old). The driver told me there would be another trolley in a couple minutes if we wanted to wait. We decided to jump aboard.

There were 3 or 4 mothers chaperoning about 15 little ones and they called the children to the back which happened to free up exactly 3 seats. When they reached their stop, they all got off, turned around and said, "Happy Birthday Marines." The trolley was now empty except for the 3 of us plus a man and a woman sitting directly across the aisle facing us and of course the driver.

We all started chatting and we learned the man and his wife were in town attending a medical convention.

I asked him if he was in the medical field and he told me he was actually a surgeon and his wife was a nurse. Of course, we were wearing clothing broadcasting we are veterans of the Vietnam War so naturally our conversation drifted in that direction.

He volunteered that he had been a Navy surgeon stationed in Da Nang during the Vietnam War. He later was stationed at the military hospital in Yokosuka, Japan. I was at that hospital when he was there!!! He then introduced his wife who had been a nurse at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in CA - the same hospital I was in at the time!!! What are the odds??? We all such a great time we missed all our stops.

The trolley driver had been lis- >>



tening and just kept driving the loop, not wanting to interrupt our excited banter. Several minutes later, when stopped at a light, I asked the driver to tell us when we should get off to see a particular attraction. He explained that we would need to switch to a bus route, explained what the buses would charge etc.

He stopped a few blocks later and got off, walking back behind the trolley where we couldn't see him. A few minutes later he returned and we left the trolley.

The driver exited with us and handed us 3 bus tickets he had cajoled from

the bus driver behind his trolley. Nice people these Texans. Still can't get over meeting that surgeon and his wife/nurse. So many threads had to come together.

Almost four years ago, at another 2/1 reunion, I actually got to meet the BN surgeon who had saved my life at Khe Sanh. Of course, he didn't remember me but he vividly remembers that day.

He had been seated at another banquet table when another Marine pointed him out to me. I walked over and introduced myself by saying, "Excuse me, I just wanted meet you and thank

you for saving my life at Khe Sanh on May 19th, 1968."

His face lit up, a huge smile began creasing his face, and he jumped to his feet and began hugging me – hard!!! He said I was the first person to ever thank him. After his patients were medevac'd, he never heard if they had made it, if they had become successful in life nor anything about them.

Amazing how all these historical threads have, over the years, come together to complete the tapestry of memories. They are sure cheaper than therapy.

## Two Bound for Parris Island

BY MSGT BRUCE VAN APELDOORN, USMC (RET)

The morning of December 7, 1966, I met Bob Zornow. We were both from Rochester, NY, were 17-year-olds and had left high school early to enlist in the Marine Corps. The Vietnam War was ongoing, and we knew we were headed there. We both agreed that stories about Marines in combat plus the awesome Dress Blues were strong selling points. We were committed to earning the Eagle, Globe & Anchor so we too could be U.S. Marines.



Fast forward to 2003 and, as a member of Chapter 20 Vietnam Veterans, made my first visit to the Vietnam Memorial in Hyland Park in Rochester, NY. I showed up early for a ceremony and decided to tour the Memorial to read the names of the 280 honored. The first KIA was in 1959 and as I rounded a turn into the 1968 section there was Bob's name. I can't even describe my reaction as I was totally in shock. He was KIA just days after I had

The trip to Parris Island took a couple days as we were sent by train. Buffalo to Washington, DC and then a train heading to South Carolina. We were given tickets for the train and meals. Once in SC we were to wait at the train station. Yes, it was the middle of the night and we were greeted by two very mean looking Marines who said nothing but pointed to the bus. You probably know much of the story from this point.

Being that our last names ended in V and Z, Bob and I were assigned to the same rack. He took the top which was fine with me. For the next 12 weeks we were together day and night. The day after graduation we were put on a bus to Camp Geiger, NC and attended

the long version of Infantry Training as Bob was to be a 0311 (Infantryman) and I an 1811 (Tank Crewman). Again, we were assigned the same rack and we spent day and night together. By this time, we had become as close as brothers.

We flew home to Rochester, NY for 30 days leave. Bob met my family and I met his. We spent a lot of time together until heading to our next assignments. I was off to Camp Pendleton and he Camp Lejeune. This would be the last time we would see each other until 2003. I went on to a tour in Vietnam with "C" Co. 1st Tank Bn. And assumed Bob was enjoying making amphibious landings in the Caribbean or Mediterranean.

rotated back and headed to Camp Lejeune. I had missed an opportunity to know of his passing and to say goodbye by just a few days.

Over the years I have visited with Bob many times and attempted to put a new American & Marine Corps Flags for Memorial and Veterans Days at his bollard. I think of him daily as his loss heads the list of those who I knew personally that gave their lives in the name of freedom.

It is difficult to write about Bob but the motivation is to keep his contribution alive. I do participate in the Legacy Project at Parris Island speaking to graduating Marines. I always include this story of Bob and I...just two 17-year old's off to war.

## Coming Home

BY TOM FENERTY

Foxtrot 2/9 and proud member of the USMC VTA

A few weeks ago, I was asked if I ever got to see any USO Shows during my time in Vietnam (67 – 68). At the time Bob Hope, Ann Margaret, Raquel Walsh and others were entertaining the troops. Unfortunately, the Big Shows were not performing where my unit was operating. However, I did see one show on the afternoon/evening of my last day in country.

By chance the aircraft taking me from "up north" to Da Nang was diverted to Phu Bai because we were told due to an enemy rocket attack. After landing in Phu Bai the Air Force sergeant in charge of air transportation said: "You Marines (10+/-) are not getting out today, we'll get you out first thing in the morning."

"But Sarge, we're rotating tomorrow...we're going home."

Sarge replied, 'Relax, go to the club, you'll be out of here in the morning'.

"You got clubs?"

"Yea, just get on the bus on he'll take you to the club."

"You got busses?" Sure enough they

had busses. And so, off to the club.

Here we were, right out of the bush with caked-on mud and filthy utilities about to rub elbows with enlisted USAF. Once at the club the Air Force guys would not let us spend our money. They couldn't do enough for us. The 'band', probably Filipino, sang all the popular tunes (Light My Fire, Love Child, Stevie Wonder) and all the while the beers flowed.

At some point I mentioned that Scotch would be a nice addition. The air crewman asked: "Are you 21?"

"Yes, I said, just last month."

"Just go through those doors over there if you're 21."

And so...

The next morning, I woke up on a bench at the air terminal. Someone, somehow, got me on a bus and back to the landing strip. It took me 30 years to figure out who. Thanks, Bill.

As an aside, many years later a former squad member won a national raffle for Vietnam Veterans to be an escort for the lovely Ann Margaret

at a "Welcome Home" ceremony in Las Vegas, Nevada. Steve Poundstone from Columbus Ohio rode in a convertible with our forever young Ann Margaret...he earned it.

I did manage to return to Da Nang the next morning and board that 'Freedom Bird' back to the 'world'. After arriving in El Toro (I think) and moving through processing in Nov 68; I got on a bus to the LA airport. Once there I boarded a flight to Philly with a couple of other Marines. We were pretty much sitting together when I spotted a very attractive woman with an empty seat next to her. I said goodbye to the jarheads and moved to the empty seat.

She was a beautiful blonde, and I couldn't believe my luck (or my boldness). Her name is long forgotten, but the impression she left me with was the opposite of everything I'd heard. We had a very pleasant conversation, and everything was going great until that second little bottle of Jack Denials. After that I fell asleep – What an idiot!

Glad to be home.

## Remembering Fran Knopf

BY JIM SAUSOMAN

Editor's Note: Jim Sausoman sent us an email informing us of his buddy, VTA member, Fran Knopf's recent passing. Accompanying the announcement were several photos (below). When asked about the details, "Sause" sent this story and the additional photos.

Fran Knopf on the beach at Del Mar



The Crew at 29 Palms (Knopf on the right)



I was with "B" Company 5th tanks. I reported back to Las Flores in January 1967. I had just finished my extension in Nam. I know that I took those photos when Knopf and I rode my motorcycle down to the beach probably early summer of that year.

We were at the 29 Palms later in the summer, you may have been there at the same time. I know the companies rotated and we used one company's tanks for the training. I believe Knopf was my loader at the time on B-41, the Skipper's tank.

Below is another photo Fran took of me when I was driving our tank in the desert after we came across an abandoned Civil Defense jeep. Needless to say, the tank did a crush job on >>





Checking out my handiwork



Jim Sausoman, one rusty – dusty Marine

the jeep and then Fran took a photo of me checking out the “work” we had done. The other photo is me after a night after a full day of training. I had come in late to our tent covered in dust from the desert. Just fun and games. Just a lot of memories now.

Semper Fi

“ Sause”

## Just How Dumb Can They Get?

BY BOB PEAVEY

Yes, we did see some really stupid people at times in late '68. There was this really dumb southern white boy who wanted to see a tank up close. We had been sitting guarding a bridge for a few weeks and we were bored silly . . . so I gave him the special tour. He was leaning over the loader's hatch looking into the turret when I reached for the switch to the air extraction fan which pulled the air and gun smoke out of the turret during a firefight. He asked what that sound was and I said, “That's our air conditioner”.

Then I asked the driver, who was in his seat, to hand up a Coke out of the refrigerator. That was his sign to hand up a warm coke and yell up to us, “Sorry! The fridge is out again”. You see, we had done this before and we got the same reaction every time.

“Ya all gots a ‘frigerator and air conditioning, holy shit!”, he said. “I shoulda beena tank man.”

I probably would have said the same had any of it been true. But the crowning achievement was yet to come and it was a first. He asked what the canvas covered, square box was on top of the gun tube. Nobody had ever asked that before.

“That's our television”, I said missing not a beat! After all, it was about the right size.

“Ya'll got a Tee Vee too?”

“Sure” I said. “We use it to entertain the troops.” I thought the crew was going to lose it with their restrained laughter and fits of coughing.

I asked him for the time and he said, “It be 'bout half past 5.”

“Come back in 30-minutes. Bo-

nanza will be on.” He may have had a doubt, I don't know, for he asked if he could see the TV. I took the cover off and he looked into the silver lined interior of the light . . . it could have passed for a TV if you had never seen one . . . I guess. At least he thought so! He came back at 1800 surprising us all. We sat him on the gun tube over the back of the tank's engine for a ringside seat. When that 75-million candle power light hit him . . . he fell back off the tank! He was blinded and couldn't see. We were all scared we had gone overboard. He was okay the next morning.

That's how dumb some of the grunts were.

Editor's Note: This story first ran in 2008. We thought that there were enough new members that had not been privileged to read it.

## Enemy Artillery by Direct Fire?

BY GREG KELLEY

Although my memories of Gio Linh in the summer of '67 are somewhat faded, I'm taking a stab at recounting a specific crazy venture. For those of you who made it up to Gio Linh during your tour, I hope this accounting puts a smile on your face as you too might recall some of what I'm about to write. For those who never made it up there, hopefully this accounting will stir a familiar memory.

I was the gunner on Alpha 2-4, and

made it up to Gio Linh several times. Although a meager hill, it was a vacation compared to Con Thien. I used to look around and think “we could take on a regimental attack”, we were so heavily fortified. Our tank faced almost due west as it sat in hull-deflate. At that time there were a few Army Dusters as we used to call them .... twin 40mms, along with a few quad fifties. The eastern-most side of the hill was occupied by a company of ARVNS.

I remember the talk was always “let's hope we don't get hit from the east.” We used to roll our eyes when the ARVNS came back through the gate after a hard day on sweep. How was it possible to return with a cleaner looking uniform than the one you were wearing when you left? And where did they find those cartons of Kool's? We had a bunker next to our tank. The Sea Bees had dug down about 8 feet and dropped in these wooden cubes and

piled the hill back on them. We never went down into them to sleep, due to the rats. Remember the rats? Big as cats!

The “mess-hall” was in the center and if you wanted to stand in the trench and wait for the call of “Five more!” you could get some hot chow once in a while. I hardly ever went in line due the 20-to-30-minute wait in line. I do remember that one day I took the silver foil from my c-ration chewing gum wrapper and folded it into a first lieutenant's bar .... stuck it onto my helmet, and presto...I was an officer and was waived to the head of the line. Just my luck though, the CO of the hill was walking through the chow-hall at the time I came down with my line-of-five. He looked me square in the eye as I leveled my tray and smirked to the mess sergeant “I've got officers up here I don't even know”. Whew! I went back to being a PFC after that.

Well, back to the story: We were getting shelled a lot, even more than usual, and it was evidently pissing off the hill CO. Mid-morning we got a call-down.

My tank and one other were to charge up north as far as we could and as fast as we could along with a squad or so of grunts, pick out targets and fire. The orders my tank commander gave me were that we were to look for anything suspicious and fire. Sounded really stupid to me, just two tanks and a dozen or so grunts chugging north about as fast as the grunts could run. I was a little nervous about running into an area that intelligence had been reporting as “full of ‘em” for days. But we took off and a half hour or so later my tank sat overlooking an expanse of open area that stretched out a mile or so. I was slowly swinging the turret checking for “targets” when I spotted something and told my tank commander. What I spotted wouldn't have been a “target” if it hadn't been deep in the “Z”. It looked like a hooch, but bigger. It shouldn't have been there. It was a target. I saw movement and asked if we should fire. He gave the go ahead ....it was at considerable distance as I recall, about at the end of the rangefinder, but we fired. I fired a HE at the base of the “hooch” watched the fireball trail into

it a bit low. I raised the tube a bit, put the sights on the middle of this thing and we fired 3 more HE into it. As I fired the third round, the target began blowing up with secondary explosions. I mean it was really exploding! We turned and hi-tailed it back to the hill, feeling lucky to get out without even getting fired at. Our sneak attack had worked. A while after we got back, we got word that what we had hit was the enemy artillery position that had been hammering us for so many days. Later on, I was told that we were supposed to have been the only tank ever to knock out an enemy artillery position “by direct fire”. I don't know if it's true, but that's what we were told. It was something for our crew to feel pretty good about for a while. Of course, a few sweeps later... another operation...and it was just another memory. I hadn't even thought about this in years. It came to mind as I was e-mailing some stuff to Pappy.

Anyway, that's my story. Hope it puts a smile on your face!

## Be Careful What You Ask For

BY KEN ZEBAL

Sometime during 1979 First Sgt McCarthy said he would begin holding NCO breakfasts in the Battalion mess hall. I thought it was a good idea and told him so. It was obvious to me he wanted to tighten up the NCOs and also stretch the S/NCOs by having them provide some military instruction. I told the Battalion CO, XO, S-3 and Sgt Major what was going on and they all thought it was a good idea – the rifle company 1st Sergeants and COs were wishing they'd thought of it. The Admin Chief thought it'd be good to have an invocation. I said he might want to call the Chaplain since he would be the best candidate I could think of. I liked the idea of using the mess hall and, having recently been the S-4, had first-hand knowledge of how hard the Mess Chief and cooks

worked and felt they'd think it was a good idea too.

After a few days the 1st Sgt stopped by to fill me in on what he had planned and said he wanted me to be the speaker. Well, this 1st Sgt wanted to make the point that a lot of responsibility was on the NCOs so, with me having been both an NCO and S/NCO in a prior life, I said okay. H&S Company 1/1 had well over 400 Marines in it. There were five platoons; Headquarters (“head shed clerks”), Service (supply, armory, motor-t, cooks), Surveillance and Target Acquisition (S-2), 81mm Mortars and Dragons (anti-tank). There was just about the right number of corporals and sergeants but when taken in aggregation there sure were a lot of them.

The morning of the NCO breakfast

arrived and I was impressed. The Top and Gunny had done a great job gathering up all the NCOs and they had an assorted group of S/NCO, mostly Platoon Sergeants, as observers. The 1st Sgt made a small and to-the-point speech, we had breakfast and then I discussed leadership traits right out to the Guidebook for Marines stressing supervision and setting a personal example. Questions and answers followed. One question from the floor was “What do you do when a Marine doesn't want to get out of the rack at reveille?” The 1st Sgt looked at me and then I looked at the Corporal who asked the question. I said “You hold a class”. Top knew what was coming so he just looked at the Gunny and smiled. I continued; “...tell the Marine in a loud and firm voice that this >>



is a class on how to assemble and disassemble the rack and the first step in disassembly is to remove the occupant. Then disassemble the rack rapidly and energetically as possible bearing in mind that you are conducting a period of military instruction. You may

combine the two steps.” These corporals and sergeants were beginning to really enjoy breakfast and getting some practical information from their CO. Finally, I said you need to direct the Marine on how to reassemble his rack—it could take several attempts.

We had several more NCO breakfasts but somehow the 1st Sgt always found a speaker so I didn’t get asked again—not sure why. We also had an NCO mess night – but that’s another story.

and showed me things away from the average tourist.

When I returned to Dong Ha, I was told to board a chopper with my gear. The chopper was to drop me at Alpha Company and my tank. I was told that while I was off on my “vacation”, my tank was on another operation deep into the DMZ. What operation it was, I didn’t know...I think it may have been Kingfisher. The chopper ride afforded me a view of the DMZ and north Vietnam that I think very few of us got. I remember looking down and thinking that all the B-52 bomb craters had it looking like the moon. After we made the quick drop-and-go down into the makeshift LZ and the blowing red smoke, I approached the first tank I saw and informed them I was looking for Alpha Company and that I was a gunner on 2/4. “Alpha company?” the TC yelled back his question. “Hell, this is Charlie company tanks. We’re all crewed up. We don’t need any crewmen”. So, there I was...in the middle of a major operation with no tank, and just my .45 hanging in my shoulder holster. Talk about feeling a little out of place! I can’t recall exactly how it happened, but I had to “fall in” with a company of grunts and spend the next three days playing 0311 with my trusty pistol. That first afternoon, we came into an operation center. I was told to pick out a helmet and a

flak-jacket from the pile “over there”. I remember going through a few banged up helmets before selecting one that suited me. I then spied an almost new looking flak-jacket, and was surprised at my good fortune. I quickly slung one arm through and pushed out a glob of congealed bloody meat with it. The new-guy who had been wearing it had left a piece of himself behind. It was unexpected, and I remember the slight urge to puke when I felt then saw the mess on my arm. Most of what went on over those three days is lost somewhere in my memory bank, but there is one memory that is still pretty vivid. So, I’ll try my best to regurgitate it up for you. Here goes: It was the last of my three days as a grunt and we were heading back. I’m pretty sure we were only a click or so north of the firebreak in the general vicinity of Con Thien. I was walking along, fourth or fifth in column, when the machine gun opened up on us from no more than a hundred feet to our left. We all hit the deck as quickly as we could as the bullets cut across our column. I remember the buzz and snapping of the bullets flying over me. I remember the yelling. I remember the return fire and the M-79s that made fairly quick work of the NVA and their gun. But what I remember most vividly is that the first two guys in my column were dead. Although the entire column had

dropped as one when we were fired on, those first two guys got hit by the left-to-right spray. They simply didn’t have time to react before they were taken out. I don’t recall ever being on any “higher alert” than I was at that moment. I also remember thinking that if I hadn’t reacted when I did, I’d probably be laying there dead, too. I also remember my intense anger. We had been almost “home”. The firebreak we were to cross was only a few minutes further south. Damn!

When we got to the firebreak, whomever it was that was “in command” decided that it was too risky to have the entire mass of us cross in column. Rather, we were to cross in small groups of four or five. As luck would have it, I was in the first group. The order was to run like hell to the other side. Keep your head down and run! Well, adrenaline probably had a lot to do with me breaking the world record for the 200-meter dash! Thankfully, we all made it across without an enemy shot coming our way.

Finally, and somehow, I made it back to Alpha Company (forgive my memory of details again).

A day or so later, I found out that Australia had opened up as an R&R port while I was in Malaysia, and that R&R there was eleven days instead of the usual five.

Just my luck!

## NOVEMBER 2022 LEATHERNECK MAGAZINE

### Letter of the Month

First and foremost, the Letter of the Month in the September 2022 issue of Leatherneck not only was deeply spellbinding to me, but it also brought goose bumps and a tear to my tired old eyes. It makes me a bit sad that so many veterans of WW2 are now being lionized for their past service when we collectively had over 75 years to do so. Now that most of our brave WW2 (and Korean War) veterans are now “Guarding the Gates of Heaven,” it would have been far more spectacular to have then recognized and their stories recorded and published much earlier.

With that said, I belong to (and am deeply involved with) the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. Our 500-member organization has a “History Project” where we record and publish our memberships’ US Marine past. We have a 48-page quarterly magazine that is full of personal stories and photographs during our Vietnam service. We video record hour-long interviews during our biennial reunions. We also conduct telephone podcasts. Several of our publications are archived in the Library of Congress and the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archives. Surpris-

ingly (at least to me) we have had some pushback from the US Marine Corps History Division Archives at Quantico.

(Editor’s Note: The magazine did not publish that last sentence.)

One of our adopted sayings is: “When an old person dies, a library burns to the ground.” We are trying mightily to prevent our past from being lost and forgotten.

I also have a WW2 US Marine story to pass down:

Many years ago, US Marine Vietnam Veteran, Don Whitton, owned and operated the mail-order company based in Oklahoma City called “Sgt Grits.” One feature that Sgt Grits’ website had was called the “Marine Bulletin Board.” It was a place where Marines could go on line and discuss just about anything.

Of the many US Marine veterans from all eras who participated in the bulletin board were two Iwo Jima Marines. One of those gentlemen was Bill Enders. After the war, I was told Bill went back to Missouri and took over the operation of his family farm. Bill also had a really good Marine buddy who served and fought side-by-side on

Iwo Jima with Bill. That buddy also went back to his family farm but his was in Nebraska. Bill and his buddy exchanged Christmas and birthday cards for decades but being “dirt” and cattle farmers, they could not get away to reunite in person.

Many years later, Bill was finally able to have his two sons take over the family farm and he retired. A few weeks after retirement, Bill decided to go visit his old Iwo Jima Marine buddy. Bill got in his car and drove north to Nebraska. As a side note, Bill decided to simply show up without calling ahead. As Bill tells it, he pulled into his buddy’s driveway and the buddy’s wife came out to greet Bill. The first words out of her mouth were, “Charley died two weeks ago. I am sorry that you missed him.”

Bill told me that story and said, “John, do not wait. Have your reunions and get together now before it is too late.”

Semper Fidelis,

Sgt John Wear  
1966 – 1969  
Elbert, Colorado

### R&R

BY GREG KELLEY

I had been waiting for a few months for Australia to open as an R&R port, but my crew convinced me to “get it while you can” and just go. It was the summer of ’67, and we had been attached to one operation

after the other for week after long hot dusty week. So, I put in for R&R and took what was available at the time. Malaysia? Okay...I didn’t know anything about it other than it was away from the constant compression

of war, so “yeah”. And off I went for five days of decompression. I don’t remember a lot of the details; I had a nice room in downtown Kuala Lumpur with a nice lady who (in addition to everything else) took me places

I was there from November 10, 1967 until March / April 68. The Marines I remember were Skipper Reamer (sp.?), Gunny Gibbons and Dempsey. The Gunny that was in charge of tank maintenance and I never knew him really well. He was a little aloof. I think his people just called him Chief. The XO was Lt Swanson. I really liked our Skipper. He left country about the same time I did as I bumped into him at Battalion in April 68. I was the MTC (motor transport chief) and reported to Gy Gibbons. I didn’t get the oppor-

tunity to interface with many tankers. They were always on the move. I did befriend a driver of one tank whose TC, best recollection, was named Jimmy and he was a hard ass. His driver liked him a lot. I also befriended Terry Monahan from communications and the two cooks. One was Pappas from NYC and the other was from Arizona, but I forget his name.

There was also Jim Raush (sp.?) a tank maintenance crew member I worked with occasionally. The Maintenance Chief sort of kept his staff

isolated in their own world over in their building. Also, there was the Marine who ran the Slopchute, “Skip” or “Flip.” I drank more than my fair share of beer there with Gibbons, Dempsey and the Skipper. However, the Skipper really liked his Crown Royal (purple bag). He did share his Crown Royal. He was a class officer.

Things I remember were the “Yellow Monster,” an Air Force diesel generator with an old jet wing tank for fuel. Gibbons wanted me to scrounge a new generator. I >>

### Hill 55

BY TED HILDABRAND

I was there from November 10, 1967 until March / April 68. The Marines I remember were Skipper Reamer (sp.?), Gunny Gibbons and Dempsey. The Gunny that was in charge of tank maintenance and I never knew him really well. He was a little aloof. I think his people just called him Chief. The XO was Lt Swanson. I really liked our Skipper. He left country about the same time I did as I bumped into him at Battalion in April 68. I was the MTC (motor transport chief) and reported to Gy Gibbons. I didn’t get the oppor-



did and that is a story I intend to write in the near future. Another

story I am writing is how I let the water buffalo get out of control.

There is a lot of humor in both stories. Later!

## Some little things learned in the military stay with you forever, like tattoos on your soul

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

You walk around enough as a veteran, and sooner or later, someone will ask you, “You military? What branch were you in?” Even though the Marine Corps continually pissed me off and was the target of my endless rants for years, I’m always proud to say, “Marine Corps.”

Once I tell someone I was in the Marines, I subconsciously try to stand up straight and act better, because heaven forbid, I disgrace the Corps and my fellow Marines, no matter how much I complained about it and it’s sometimes silly customs, courtesies, and regulations. Only Marines are allowed to think negative thoughts about the Corps, after all.

When they ask how long I was in and I get to reply “20 years,” I still enjoy their startled responses and spoken or unspoken admiration, even though I still tell anyone who asks that they should probably get out after one tour. The military, and maybe the Corps in particular, is like a tattoo on one’s soul. That tattoo isn’t applied in boot camp or even one’s job-specific school. It’s applied gradually, little by little, on every missed holiday, every “oh shit” moment, every moment of tomfoolery on deployment, and every time one finds out another comrade paid the ultimate price. The tattoo was applied both when our crew partied like rock stars on cross-country flights and when we landed in Afghan landing zones. The tattoo is subtle, but always visible to those who know where to look. The no-load punks who completed boot camp, but never finished a tour in the operational forces due to some obscure medical or administrative

reason, don’t get it, or maybe just the outline from a fading stencil.

Here are some things that people who’ve been in a while do that no one else cares about or notices. You see them and you know who you’re dealing with.

1. Posture. It’s not as if veterans are always stiffer or even stand up straighter than normal people, but they comport themselves differently. A veteran who is 5-foot 9-inches stands like someone who is 6 feet tall, and the odd part is that it’s not physical, but just in the way they carry themselves.

2. Sir and ma’am. Few children, and even fewer adults, trouble themselves with saying “sir” and “ma’am” to people in everyday life. If someone younger than 40 says “sir” to a stranger, it’s almost guaranteed he’s a vet. Of course, everyone in the military knows to call their superiors, by rank or age, by title. Almost as important, vets know that saying “sir” doesn’t mean one is necessarily subjugating oneself. They know that “sir” can mean “I respect you” or “screw you.” It’s all in how you say it.

3. Timeliness. With civilians, a couple minutes more or less never makes much of a difference. I told someone he was late to work once. When he protested, I told him that my watch, set with a time synced with the atomic clock at the damn United States Naval Observatory said differently. I’m pretty sure that guy is still “no impact, no idea” on that whole concept.

4. Belts. Before I joined the Marines, I really never noticed belts. If I dressed up, I wore them, but I never thought about them.

Now I instinctively wear a belt, and now somehow know that men traditionally thread their belts counterclockwise and women clockwise, due to bizarre old customs.

5. Shower shoes. Or “flip-flops” to you non-military types. No one who’s been in the military will ever go into a public shower without them. Put more simply, veterans know how depraved people are and expect the worst. Athlete’s foot is bad, but the dreaded white jellyfish is even worse. And don’t even get me started on appearances of the rare, but terrifying Brown Trout.

6. Undershirts. I never wore an undershirt before I joined the Corps. Now I live by them and most long-serving vets do, too. One of the positive effects of military service. No one wants to see your sweaty pits.

7. Profanity. This crosses slightly into cliché, but those in the military often swear in public, in private, and pretty much everywhere. That’s not really noteworthy in today’s day and age. Someone dropping the F-bomb is hardly unusual, but vets are more prone to create poetry of the profane.

8. Not being shocked. Vets have been around the block. That obviously comes in degrees, but when watching a movie or anything with graphic gore with vets, be prepared to hear them laugh, instead of the expected reaction of recoiling in horror. Part of this is numbness at having seen it all. Part of it is a macho facade that nothing can possibly be shocking to them. Either way, vets won’t tap out, whether at a horror movie or at what a typical

civilian would consider a horribly profane joke.

9. Not walking on the grass. This may be a Marine-specific one. Marines will avoid walking on grass like its kryptonite. The roots of this lie in history and tradition, though I’ll never forget the story I heard

from a WWII Marine who said that the penalty for walking on grass at Camp Lejeune used to be confinement with only bread and water for sustenance. If you want to keep Marines out of someplace, don’t bother with fences. Just plant a verdant field of St. Augustine around it and

Marines will avoid it like hot lava.

You can run, but you can’t hide, veterans. Your profile is out there. We will always wear an invisible red, white, and blue tattoo etched by our blood, sweat, and tears.

## COLUMN: A Soldier Returns from War without a Victory

BY JOE BARRERA—AUG 26, 2022

Colorado Springs Gazette

It was the end of August and I was on my way home. We climbed the steps to the plane on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut and took our seats. No sooner were we seated than the pretty blonde stewardess said over the PA, “Please evacuate the aircraft immediately.” Standing inside the revetment lined with PSP, perforated steel plate, we heard the VC mortars land at a distance. “It’s meant to be,” I said to the man standing near me. “It serves me right, to buy the farm when I’m almost out of here.”

The soldier just stared at me. But no. We climbed back in and the big jet took off. The moment the wheels lifted off, all the GIs whooped, cheered and threw their hats all over the cabin. I sat silent and glum. There must be something horribly wrong with me, I thought. Why do I feel that I want to stay in Vietnam? But of course, I knew the answer to that question. I had known it all along. I had not paid my debt to my dead comrades.

At the airport in Oakland, I bought a one-way ticket to San Antonio. I walked into the waiting area. Nobody looked at me, nobody talked to me or paid me any attention. I was invisible in my Army green uniform. In the lounge there were people sitting in what looked like school desks. The desks had long arms that curved around in front of the occupants. At the end of the arms were small black-and-white TVs. You put a quarter into the slot next to the screen and got 15

minutes of TV time. All the viewers were staring intently at their screens. I went up behind one man and looked over his shoulder. Just as I did that, I saw the grainy image: a cop in a white helmet liner raised a huge stick and began to beat a long-haired young man. The scene was the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago and Mayor Richard Daly had turned his cops loose on the anti-war demonstrators, all the hippy long-hairs and flower children. “What’s wrong with the country,” I asked myself out loud.

In San Antonio I saw a tall young soldier surrounded by other soldiers standing in a corner of the terminal. I walked up to them. Around his neck the tall soldier wore the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was telling the rest of us how he had earned that medal, saving the lives of his comrades in some pointless firefight in Vietnam. I understood that need to save others. The crowd of civilians swirled past, ignoring us completely. But when I got home to Mercedes, Texas, it was a different story. There I was the conquering hero. At least for three or four days. My people, the Chicanos, Los Tejanos, as we call ourselves, believed in the war. But no glory for me. “You never should have come home,” they said. “You can’t come home because you haven’t won your war.” I realized that even in Mexican American south Texas you can’t come home again if you haven’t finished your war.

And then I came to Colorado

Springs, to Fort Carson. And here I’ve been ever since. When I separated from the Army in 1970, I was fortunate to be accepted at Colorado College. It was mostly a good experience. But there was grief attached. There was rejection. It was about the now forgotten conflict that defined us then. Almost everybody at CC hated the war. And because they hated the war many of the students and some of the faculty blamed the soldiers who fought the war. They would say, “The only reason we are fighting this war of aggression is because people like you are willing to go and fight. If it wasn’t for you there would be no war.” Simple logic, but flawed.

Regardless of that faulty logic, I never could convince anybody of the evils of communism and the necessity to oppose it wherever it is encountered, which is why I volunteered for the infantry. Now, all these long years later but which have gone by like a flash, no one hardly remembers Vietnam. No one, except the soldiers who fought and bled there. But I am not bitter. I only wish that true peace was our reality, not the present gaping gulf between the left and the right which threatens to plunge us into civil war.

Joe Barrera, Ph.D., is the former director of the Ethnic Studies Program at University of Colorado Colorado Springs. He teaches Mexico/U.S. Border Studies and U.S. Military History. He is a combat veteran of the Vietnam War. >>



## Sometimes the Herd is Wrong

BY TERRY GARLOCK

Well into the autumn of my life, I am occasionally reminded the end is not too far over the horizon. Mortality puts thoughts in my head, like "What have I done to leave this world a better place?"

There actually are a few things that I think made my existence worthwhile. I will tell you just one of them, because so many of you need to hear it.

No matter how much this rubs the wrong way, I am quite proud to have served my country in the Vietnam War. Yes, I know, most of you were taught there is shame attached to any role in the war that America lost, an unfortunate mistake, an immoral war, an unwise intrusion into a civil war, a racist war, a war in which American troops committed widespread atrocities, where America had no strategic interest, and that our North Vietnamese enemy was innocently striving to re-unite Vietnam.

The problem is, none of those things are true. That didn't stop America over the last 50 years lapping up this Kool-Aid concocted by the anti-war machine, a loose confederation of protesting activists, the mainstream news media and academia. They opposed the war with loud noise, half-truths and fabrications. They are the ones who still write their version in our schoolbooks, and their account of history conveniently excuses themselves for cowardly encouraging our enemy while we were at war. You see, having the right to protest does not necessarily make it the right or honorable thing to do.

So, yes, I am defiantly proud to have been among those who raised our right hand swearing to do our duty for our country while so many others yelled and screamed and marched, burned their draft cards, declared, "Hell no! I won't go!" and some fled to Canada. In that period of uncomfortable controversy, even patriots tended to look the other way when activists heartily

insulted American troops as they returned through California airports from doing the country's hardest work in Vietnam. War correspondent Joe Galloway summed it up nicely in a column about Vietnam vets in the Chicago Tribune long ago: "They were the best you had, America, and you turned your back on them."

To be sure, there were lots of warts and wrinkles in the war. We were fighting a tough Communist enemy, defending South Vietnam's right to remain free. At the same time, we were betrayed by our own leadership in the White House with their incompetent micromanagement and idiotic war-fighting limitations that got thousands of us killed while preventing victory. And we were betrayed by fellow citizens encouraging our enemy.

I was trained to be an Army Cobra helicopter pilot. I remember many times, with no regrets, shooting up the enemy to protect our ground troops, firing to cover fellow pilots, and firing to keep the brutal enemy away from South Vietnamese civilians. A high school student asked me last year how I deal with the guilt. I answered that I don't have any guilt, that I was doing my duty and would proudly do it again.

When John Lennon turned the Beatles into a protest band, his song "Give Peace a Chance" was hailed as genius. Look up the inane lyrics and judge for yourself. At protest rallies, crowds of tens of thousands would raise their arms to wave in unison while chanting in ecstasy, "All we are asking, is give peace a chance!" over and over. Luminaries like Tom Smothers, presidential candidate George McGovern, writer and self-acclaimed intellectual Gore Vidal and a host of others lauded Lennon's song and observed "Who wouldn't prefer peace to war?"

What self-indulgent, naive stupidity!

My friend Anh Nguyen was 12 years old in 1968, living in the city of Hue,

the cultural center of Vietnam. One morning when he opened the shutters to his bedroom window, a shot was fired over his head, the first he knew the enemy's Tet Offensive had begun. The Communists had negotiated a cease fire for their New Year holiday of Tet, then in treachery attacked on that holiday in about 100 locations all over South Vietnam.

The enemy was well prepared and they took the city of Hue. They had lists of names and addresses provided by spies, and they went from street to street, dragging from their homes political leaders, business owners, teachers, doctors, nurses and other "enemies of the people." The battle raged four weeks before our Marines retook the city. In the aftermath, mass graves with nearly 5,000 bodies were found, executed by the Communists, many tied together and buried alive.

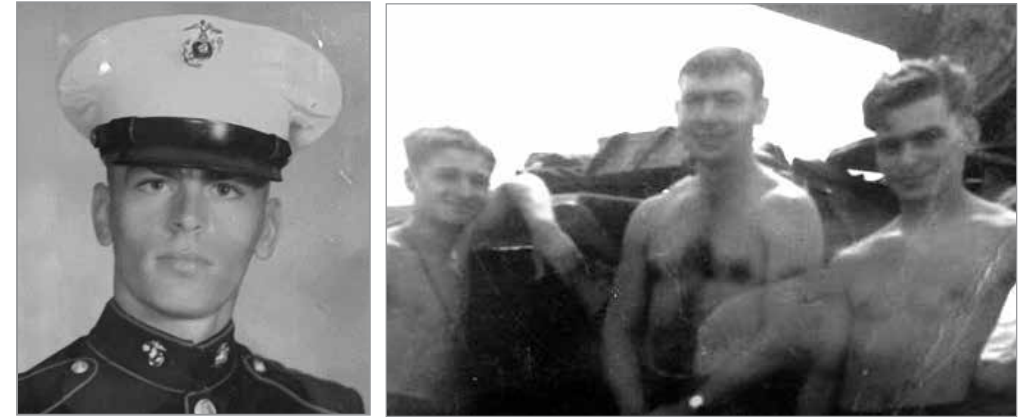
Anh and his family had evacuated to an American compound for protection. Anh says when the battle was over and they walked Highway 1 back to their home, the most beautiful sight his family had ever seen was US Marines lining the road, standing guard over South Vietnamese civilians. To follow John Lennon's plea, Anh's family and countrymen could "Give peace a chance" by surrendering to the Communist invaders, but even a mush-head like Lennon should know there are some things worthy of your fight. I doubt Lennon would have understood the best way to ensure peace is to carry the biggest stick.

Want to know what causes me shame? In 1973, when we basically had the war won, the US gave it away in a peace agreement when escape from Vietnam was the only politically acceptable option. In the peace agreement, the US pledged our ongoing financial support to South Vietnam's defense, and pledged US direct military intervention if

(Continued on page 36)

## Looking For...

### Lawrence (Larry) Joseph Conti



(L to R) Brown, McNeely, Conti

Good evening, my father-in-law Lawrence (Larry) Joseph Conti passed away on November 10, 2022. We knew that he had served in the US Marines in Vietnam, but we didn't know in what capacity. We were fortunate that he did keep a copy of his DD-214 locked in a safe that he and my mother-in-law had access to. By looking at his DD-214, it appears he served from 1966 -1970 and did two tours in Vietnam. His MOS was 1811. He was awarded a Purple Heart for an injury sustained during his time of service. He was an E-4 at the time of his Honorable Discharge. We aren't sure what unit he was assigned to. I have attached a copy of a picture of him in uniform. If any of your members might have known him and what unit he was assigned to that would be great to know and greatly appreciated. Thank you for your service.

Cyrus Shane Worth  
cshanevorth@gmail.com

Phone: 912.584.9742

*Editor's Note: We recently found a photo of Conti in Vietnam*

(He is on the right) that was stashed in a "Flame Tank" photo file. Note the name on the tank's gun tube is "The Cremator." That is an Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks flame-thrower tank. If anyone remembers Conti or "The Cremator," please contact John Wear at 719.495.5998 or you can email or call his son-in-law.

Second Note: We keep harping on the membership about the unfortunate situation that just happened to Conti's family. Larry did not talk or write about his time in the USMC and now, he has reported to the guard shack in Heaven, his family is desperately looking for clues. Please get your wits about you, collect your thoughts and write your story now. We keep telling you that there is a group of Marine brothers willing to help you write. Or if you can simply verbalize it ... then ask your wife, your children or grandchildren to listen to your story and type it onto a Word document. Share your wealth of personal knowledge now before it goes away!

### Can we ID these two Flame Tankers?



Tim Nichols is interested in identifying these two flame tankers... He thinks that the photo was taken late '67 or early '68. He remembers one of them was from Reading, PA, and since the Marine had been in-country for such a

long time, he did not think that he was qualified to go back to CONUS!!!

Phone: 760.870.3926

Email: timnichols64@gmail.com ■



## 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Tank Battalion at LZ Hawk–Khe Sanh

BY KEN ZEBAL

My second tour in Viet Nam started on or about 11 April 1968 at air freight in Da Nang. It didn't take long to get orders to 3rd Tank Battalion and board a C-130 headed to Dong Ha. The loadmaster from VMGR-152 did his best to cram as many of us as possible into the cargo bay. The pre-flight briefing went something along the lines of "get in, remain standing, link arms and then sit down." Our flight was short and sweet. There were no frequent flyer miles or in-flight movies that day. The landing at Dong Ha also seemed pretty routine. The aircraft made one left hand pass around the field and then lined up for a rather steep and very short final approach. After hitch-hiking down Highway 1 to Quang Tri and checking in with 3TkBn S-1, someone assigned me to Company "C" and said to get some chow and rack out in the transient tent. The hot chow and tent were a good sign, as were cots, it seemed downright civilized.

Tet operations had just finished up and a few tanks were still in the battalion area. Most of the ones I saw had bullet or shrapnel holes scattered amongst the sponson boxes, gypsy rack ammo boxes, Zenon lights and fenders all of which provided clear and convincing evidence of a shooting war.

Our welcome aboard briefing the next day was by Sergeant



Major Sam Fullerton (Fullington?), whom I remembered as the Company Gunny at Charlie 2nd Tanks in 1963–64–65. Back then his sea bag looked like a Marine Corps history lesson with WWII island campaigns and Korean war battles written all over it. Today the Sgt. Maj. had a severe case of dysentery so he stood before us with his web belt undone and utility trousers unbuckled, looking pale, waiting for the next wave of diarrhea to either pass or pass through him. Dysentery was one of the unintended consequences of being in the rear and eating hot chow off of a steel mess tray or mess kit that either you or someone else had cleaned. The second night being in the rear went quickly with only one short-lived mortar attack. The third day an office clerk told me to catch a rough rider and join the 3rd Platoon near Ca Lu. I had no idea what a rough rider or Cal Lu was but 2 days in the rear was enough for me.

The mini convoy of two or three 6-by's departed Quang Tri and then turned left onto Highway 9 winding through Dong Ha and past Cam Lo, Rock Pile and Camp Carroll to LZ



Stud (Vandergrift) and finally left me off at the platoon CP. The experience of being bounced around in the back of a 6-by for a few hours provided me with a much better understanding of being on a rough rider as well as a top-level orientation of what was in the area. As it turned out the platoon's location was just north of the Song Rao Quan physically separating LZ Stud (Vandergrift) from Ca Lu, right before Highway 9 bends north running parallel with the river and crossing it repeatedly. I reported in to Gunnery Sergeant Jones, the platoon sergeant, and was immediately greeted by an NVA rocket attack. After the incoming lifted, Gunny Jones assigned me as gunner on C-32 and told me to get acquainted with the crew. The word had come down that we'd be going to Khe Sanh that night along with some grunts. The platoon had already made one run in that direction engaging NVA several times along the way. Unbeknownst to me, this was OPERATION PEGASUS which lasted through 15 April and was immediately followed by OPERATION SCOTLAND II.

Well after sunset the platoon motor marched north on Highway 9 and carefully crossed a series of newly installed



bridges built by Marine Combat Engineers. Somewhere around Bridge 18, or thereabouts, either Gunny Jones or Lt Ralston told me to dismount and ground-guide our vehicle which was the lead tank of the column. So, grease gun in-hand and magazine pouch around my shoulder off I went into the night albeit much slower. The grease gun and full magazine pouch felt heavy, awkward and unbalanced. There was no moon and no ambient light, but hey, there are a bunch of grunts around and a platoon of tanks behind me—what could go wrong? I've been back in-country 3 full days now.

After a while it felt as if I was walking down a steep hill. Come to find out it was a humongous bomb crater. Sonny, the driver of 32, had dutifully and skillfully followed me into the crater so I now backed the tank out and looked for a way around. Get this—it's absolutely pitch-black out and Highway 9 is very narrow, overgrown in many places including a steep drop-off down to the river and a really steep incline going uphill. Finding a way to keep our tank on the road without crashing into the hillside or losing it over the side of the road took considerable skill on Sonny's part but, after a fashion, we got around the bomb crater and continued the approach march north towards LZ Hawk and Khe Sanh.

After many more miles and bridges we finally arrived at a fork in the road where Highway 9 goes left towards Lang Vei, Khe Sanh 'vile and continues all the way to Hanoi. We took the right-hand fork which was another dirt road to Khe Sanh Combat Base and passed the smoking ruins of what used to be some trees. I could just barely make out some scenery in the distance. There was a bombed-out coffee plantation on the left and on the right I could see the NVA knee trenches still with dead gooks crushed into the low walls by the over pressure of our bombs – thank you Mr. B-52. The overall scenery was barren moonscape enhanced by mortar, arty, and bomb craters with a whole lot of churned up dirt but not much else. All of this suggested to me that we were now on a road less travelled.

We finally reached our assigned destination which meant Highway 9 was open. Without much fuss the column turned around and travelled back towards LZ Hawk just in time for daybreak. I remember that our assigned position was immediately south of the LZ with some grunts from Company "B" 1/26 who were extremely happy to be heading for the rear having just endured a brutal 77-day siege. The LZ was just getting organized. It was just an open area west of the road and not all that flat but it was away from the CP, BAS, mortars and arty positions.

Early the next morning we began daily road sweeps to ensure Highway 9 stayed open between Khe Sanh Combat Base (KSCB) and Ca Lu. There were two sweeps each morning – one north to KSCB and one south to Ca Lu, or Bridge 18, 28 or 32 – it varied.

Shortly after we arrived 1/26 was relieved in-place by 2/3. 2/3 deployed its companies to various outposts including; one occupying a close-by ridge immediately to the west which ran roughly parallel to Highway 9, another at Bridge 34 including



a major bend in the road to the south and finally one on a small hill just southeast of Bridge 36 by the fork in the road to Lang Vei and Khe Sanh village. Our tank's (C-32) immediate future would include spending quality time patrolling around each of them.



Our platoon had had a tank go off the right side of Highway 9 although I forget how. Either the road gave way, track came apart or something – but don't believe it was due to enemy action. For all I know we only had 4 tanks in the platoon





to start with – it's been a while and many memories have faded.

Because we had absolutely no cover or concealment on the stretch of road between the old coffee plantation and KSCB we ran flat out (~40–45 mph). One way to look at it is, we were the target on a moving target range, both ways.

On one occasion we were refueling 32 at KSCB using 55-gallon drums of diesel and the fuel transfer pump. As most of you know this was a slow, cumbersome and very physical process. We manually lifted each drum from the ground up to the tank, a task which required the entire crew. One time when we were wrestling a drum of diesel up the tank we heard the distinctive dull pops from Co Roc letting us know that NVA 152 arty was incoming. It was an awkward moment so we quickly dropped the 55-gallon drum which stayed upright somehow and dove for cover. After the incoming lifted, we started the process all over again.

At LZ Hawk we only took intermittent incoming but because of the threat of an enemy ground attack we had dug hull defilade positions. Late one afternoon we received an interest-



ing fire mission. Lt Dave Ralston said S-2 had received reports of enemy tanks near the Laotian border and that they were coming our way—our mission was to fire on them. Well, as you can imagine it's a tanker's dream to fight enemy tanks and we were all looking forward to engaging them even if it was only using indirect fire. We were well aware of the PT-76s that had attacked Lang Vei and assumed there were some Russian-made T-54s, T-55s or T-62s coming our way or, perhaps, they were the PT-76s again. However, since we had dug a hull defilade position for 32 we were able to drive it forward and up the ramp in order to get the required elevation on the 90. Using the gunners table, M1A1 quadrant and then after consulting a map I set the elevation and azimuth on the gun. We fired a few rounds at the suspected enemy tanks but because there were no AOs, FOs or spotters there was no BDA, it was just a fire mission.

During my time at LZ Hawk (April-July) we were aware that we were one of two tank platoons in the area. A Bravo Company platoon was at KSCB and had endured the brutal siege. Sometime in April our section was called to mount out



as part of a quick reaction force to an ambush which occurred just south of KSCB. So, with grunts on board, we went hell-bent for leather up Highway 9. When we got to the straight stretch of road between the plantation and base entrance, we saw a tank from the Bravo Company platoon on fire with black smoke coming out of both the TC's and Loader's hatches, and some 90 rounds were cooking off. I had no idea what happened to the crew. Our tanks deployed off the road to the right and I listened to the chatter on 2/3's Tac Net. It seems there were some NVA hiding in spider holes. Many of you may recall that it was common practice for the NVA to use a small ambush to lure reaction forces into a much larger ambush. As a result, 2/3 was very wary about being baited into feeding an ambush. While we were waiting for a decision from higher headquarters an F-4 made a pass over us and then made another much lower pass at maybe 250 feet above ground level. From the TC's cupola vision blocks I watched a napalm canister being released and begin its lethal tumble towards the ground. After the nape splashed, I could clearly see the pilot's face. His oxygen mask was undone and it seemed as if he was looking right at me and then I felt the heat from the napalm.

During May it seemed like 32 spent a lot of time at Bridge 34 patrolling uphill towards LZ hawk and also patrolling south towards Ca Lu. Somewhere around that time, Cpl. Gary Hall's tank was ambushed while on a night patrol coming downhill from LZ hawk towards the bridge. That ambush



resulted in a KIA – Gary Hall's driver; Jimmy Jaynes. Gary's tank was also lost as it went off Highway 9 and into the river bed below. It caught fire and after a while the ammo began to cook off. The tank burned all night long while we waited for an NVA attack. An attack which never came.

Like the other tanks we were resupplied with ammo by truck and sometimes with fuel from a 3TkBn tanker truck. From one source or another 32 got some contaminated fuel and didn't have the power to negotiate the uphill grade from bridge 34 to LZ Hawk. The tank would run but it had no power at all. We drained and purged the fuel filters time and again but were told that we needed to completely drain and flush both fuel cells, the fuel lines and then replace both filters. Because we couldn't pull the hill, we missed a few fire-support missions. One of the missions we missed was to provide supporting fire from a location between the LZ and the big curve east on Highway 9. One of the (Bravo Co?) tanks that took that particular mission and the grunts with it got heavily mortared and received multiple casualties.

After the contaminated fuel issue finally got squared-away we were told to conduct a night patrol from bridge 34 to LZ Hawk with a platoon of grunts. Prior to the patrol we were briefed by the grunt Capt (or Lt?) to get out of the kill zone if ambushed. It was as dark as dark can be. We had a canister round in the main gun and it felt like everyone was on edge given what had happened a few weeks ago. We began the patrol and were just about at the same place where Gary Hall's tank was ambushed—when we got ambushed. I yelled at the grunt in charge and then told our driver to get up hill fast. We cleared the kill zone, got a little bit uphill and turned around, returned and re-engaged. By that time the grunts had conducted their immediate action drill and the NVA ambush was spoiled.

Fox 2/3 had been occupying the ridgeline just west of LZ Hawk for some time with little or no enemy activity reported. One night however, they got probed and then after a few hours the probe turned into an attack and then the attack became a full-on assault. First there were 81 flares then came the 105 flares and then 2/3's mortars and arty began firing. After a while an AC-130 (puff) arrived on station and used huge flares that seemed to last for a very long time. Puff began firing its 20mm cannon and each burst it sounded like someone was ripping a piece of cloth and the tracers seemed to make one solid red stream. Someone said there's one 20mm round striking every square foot and later on, at a hill outpost near Bridge 36 on the southeast side of Highway 9 we were with another tank and either a grunt platoon or company. Reveille came from Co Roc as they fired their 152mm guns and it also came from Camp Carroll as they fired their 105mm and 155mm defensive perimeter fire missions to keep the enemy at bay. Oddly enough all that arty seemed to have landed pretty much in the same place with no friendlies getting killed or wounded – not sure about the NVA though. Getting pounded by both enemy and friendly arty became our daily routine

on this small hill as was the constant threat of being overrun at night. We continued to patrol between Bridge 36 and KSCB and LZ Hawk, day after day until relieved. I believed them as the men of Fox 2/3 were fighting for their very lives against a determined NVA assault. Along with one or two other tanks 32 mounted out to a position just south of Highway 9 (the road to Lang Vei) facing Foxtrot ridge as we waited for enough light and the call to commence 90mm direct fire support. When it became light enough to shoot safely, we saw lots of green uniformed NVA soldiers running all over the ridge so we took them under fire with the main gun. Later we evacuated some of Fox's WIAs and KIAs to both Khe Sanh and LZ Hawk BASs. There were a lot of body bags that day. Capt James Jones (later CMC) distinguished himself during that fight and many years later when I was attending Amphibious Warfare School and he was attending Command and Staff College we shared a drink at combined social event and talked about the fighting at Foxtrot Ridge.

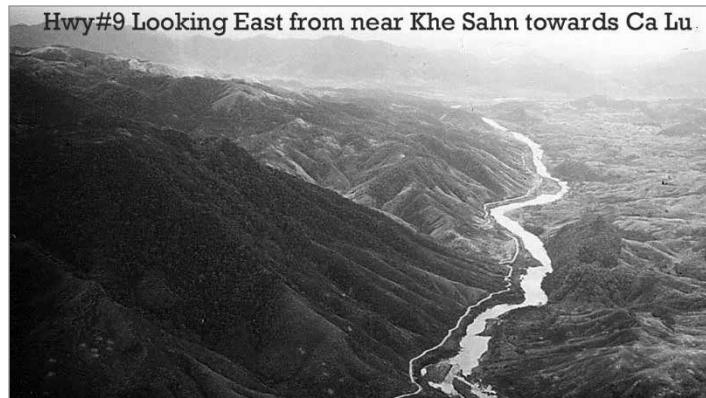
The battle for Foxtrot Ridge brought some dignitaries for the after-action briefings including Maj Gen Davis. The 3MarDiv CG spent a long time walking around talking to the men from both Echo and Fox 2/3. One officer of his entourage walked around LZ Hawk just checking things out, saw a few of us and stopped to look. At the time we were busy PM-ing the vehicles and cleaning guns and thought nothing of it. In retrospect we must have looked raggedy; greasy and dirty with lots of oil, diesel and hydraulic fluid stains, knees were rotted out of our jungle utilities. One of my boots was being held together with fording tape. I have no doubt that we smelled pretty bad too – but we were shaved. We likely made an impression on that officer because the very next day a Huey landed with boxes of new boots and utilities just for us. It sure is nice to have friends in high places.

We had other visitors at LZ Hawk from time to time. Marine self-propelled 8" howitzers and Army self-propelled 175s came to shoot fire missions every now and then. These self-propelled guns would arrive, lay their guns, fire a few missions and leave. After they left, we usually received a heavy dose of NVA counter battery so we weren't all that happy to see them arrive.

During June we conducted more patrols towards Ca Lu as the surviving grunts from KSCB and the surrounding hills (881-N, 881-S, 861, etc.) were finally going to the rear. These patrols ultimately turned into convoys with Army quad .50 (dusters) and Army Cobras for air support. For one reason or another one of the Army gunships took our convoy under fire one day although there were no friendly WIAs or KIAs. I'm assuming he was aiming for enemy troops but missed big time.

July found us participating in the full-scale evacuation of Khe Sanh which meant that the daily convoys were getting a lot larger which, in turn, made us much more lucrative targets for the NVA. Marines at KSCB celebrated the 4th of July by firing the FPF at midnight. There were red tracers and illumination rounds all over the place.





We had immediate action drills if ambushed and knew the road pretty well by then. One day we got the word that one of the Bravo Tankers from the Khe Sanh platoon was being medevac'd for malaria. He was a S/Sgt or Sgt and the word was he was a well-respected and well-liked Marine. Soon after passing Bridge 34 a command detonated mine initiated an ambush. He was in a jeep near the lead vehicle and was KIA, along with some others. When we finally left LZ Hawk, I saw a several tanks coming towards us on Highway 9 between Ca Lu and LZ Stud. Sgt.

Gary Heckman (Hex), my old buddy from 2nd Tanks and TV Co SDT, was either a TC or Section leader for this Bravo Co Platoon and I briefed him on the situation along Highway 9. Not sure if they went to Khe Sanh, LZ Hawk or some other position but he and his tanks were definitely headed directly into harm's way and I wished them well.

In early July, maybe around the 8th or so, our platoon left LZ Hawk and relocated to Gio Linh and Operation KENTUCKY. ■

Short Stories: *Sometimes the Herd is Wrong*  
(Continued from page 30)

the North Vietnamese ever broke their pledge not to attack South Vietnam. In the 1974 elections, in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and President Nixon's resignation, Democrats were swept into Congress and promptly cut off all funding to South Vietnam in violation of the US pledge.

In early 1975 when the North Vietnamese attacked South Vietnam, President Ford literally begged Congress to fund the US pledge to intervene, and Congress refused.

The same news media, protesters and academia who had screamed against the war, firmly turned their back in 1975 and refused to notice the slaughter and inhumanity as the Communists overwhelmed the ally America had thrown under the bus. Even today, few on the anti-war side know or care there were roughly 75,000 executions, that a panicked million fled in over-packed rickety boats and died at sea by the tens of thousands, that a million were sent to brutal re-education camps for decades and also died by the tens of

thousands, or that South Vietnamese who fought to remain free—and their descendants—are still persecuted to this day. Abandoning our ally to that fate is America's everlasting shame.

We could have won that war if our military had been allowed to take off the soft gloves, but it went on far too long with no end in sight, mismanaged to a fare-thee-well by the White House and became America's misery. Through it all, even the betrayals from home, we fought well and never lost one significant battle.

Leftists think they know all about the war and the Americans who fought it. They don't know didley.

At the 334th Attack Helicopter Company in Bien Hoa, we Cobra pilots were 19 to 25 years old with very rough edges. We thought of ourselves as gunslingers and might have swagged a bit. We drank too much at the end of a sweat-stained day, for fun or escape or both. We laughed off close calls with the bravado of gallows humor. We toasted our dead and hid the

pain of personal loss deep inside. We swore a lot and told foul jokes. We pushed away the worry of how long our luck would hold, and the next day we would bet our life again to protect the South Vietnamese people and each other.

To properly characterize my fellow Vietnam vets, I need to borrow words from John Steinbeck as he wrote about the inhabitants of Cannery Row, and ask you to look from my angle, past their flaws, to see them as I often do, "... saints and angels, martyrs and holy men." America's best.

I am proud to be one of them because we faced evil together in a valiant effort to keep the South Vietnamese people free, doing God's work for a little while, even though it failed by the hand of our own countrymen working against us from safety at home.

"It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for something you are not." ~~ Andre Gide ■

# T. J. SIVA

BY JOHN M. HUNTER, CORPORAL E-4  
B COMPANY 1ST, AND 3RD TANK BATTALION  
1965-1966

This story is the result of something I have been working on for a couple of years. I remember hearing about T.J. Siva for the first time at the 2009 USMC VTA reunion in Charleston, S.C. Later on, I had a conversation with Richard Tilden, and he told me that T.J. Siva had been a member of a tribe in my area. The Rincon Reservation is five miles from me so I started looking for information on him there and found nothing. I finally did a "Find a Grave" search and found that he was a member of the Los Coyotes Band of Cahuilla Indians. His grave is located on the Los Coyotes Reservation, in the San Ysidro Cemetery, also known as Hot Springs Mountain, which is near the town of Warner Springs, CA about 43 miles from me.

It took me three trips out to Los Coyotes to locate the cemetery, there are no signs, and I always arrived before the office was open at the reservation gate. The cemetery is pretty run down, but it is located in a beautiful area, with a view of the mountains.

T.J. Siva was born on August 18, 1933, at the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation. He was the youngest of three children born to Pedro, and Mary Siva. He had an older brother Charles, and a sister Ruth. The family is recorded in the 1940 Census. The Los Coyotes Reservation is one of 9 Cahuilla Reservations located in Southern California. Los Coyotes has a population of about 300 people. It is the largest in area, 25,000 acres, located in San Diego County.

I never met T.J. Siva; I have talked to people that knew him at Camp Pendleton and have read stories about him written by Marines that served with him on his tank "For Charlie" in Vietnam. Morton Hurt wrote, "If anyone ever wanted to go to war, you would want Gunnery Sgt. T.J. Siva in the lead tank." It is my understanding that T.J. Siva was loved and respected by those that knew him. I know he was a Silver Star recipient, and I believe twice-awarded Purple

Hearts. I know there were several hero's serving in tanks in Vietnam, I believe T.J. Siva was one of them!

As I mention above the San Ysidro Cemetery is in a run-down state, most of the markers are wooden crosses with peeling paint. T. J.'s marker is a brass plaque on a concrete stone. The plaque is discolored, and hard to read. I am thinking I should take another trip to San Ysidro, with some brass cleaner and attempt to clean up the plaque, it is the least I can do for a fellow tanker of such status as Gunnery Sergeant Thurlo J. Siva.

When I was getting ready to leave the San Ysidro Cemetery, I did two things, I put that marker "For Charlie" behind his stone, and I snapped off a United States Marine Corps salute, just like the way we were taught at MCRD.

I also want to thank Richard Tilden for inspiring me to do the research and write this story.

Richard Tilden commented: This is an awesome article about TJ Silva and I know he would appreciate it as well. I have one small story to demonstrate his love for the USMC:

The night before going out on any operation, TJ would put on his "grunt outfit" (steal piss-pod, rifle and 782 gear) to go out with the grunts for a reconnaissance of the next day operations. He always made his driver go as well. As the driver bitched "Why do I have to go, I going to be driving the tank"?

Siva's answer was, "Because you need to see what you're going to be driving through. I want you to be prepared because I'm going to be busy firing the guns."

John Hunter follow up: Last week I went back out to the San Ysidro Cemetery and my son Scot went with me. We tried to clean the brass plaque on Siva's grave but we weren't successful. We did clean the dirt off, but the tarnish would need a sand blaster, or maybe some acid to clean it. We also discover that Siva's sister Ruth's grave was next to his. Please note the date of her death, November 10, 2011. >>





## Tanks &amp; Medals of Valor

**Thurlo J. Siva**

HOME OF RECORD:  
Warner Springs, California

**Silver Star**

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Staff Sergeant

Battalion: 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

## GENERAL ORDERS

## CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Staff Sergeant Thurlo J. Siva (MCSN: 1139175), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Platoon Sergeant with Company B, First Tank Battalion, FIRST Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 12 May 1968, during Operation ALLEN BROOK, Staff Sergeant Siva's platoon was supporting Company E, Second Battalion, Seventh Marines, when they were ambushed near Xuan Dai Village in Quang Nam Province, by a large North Vietnamese Army force. During the ensuing fire fight one of the tanks was struck by enemy rocket fire which mortally wounded the driver and injured the crew members, forcing them to abandon the vehicle. Skillfully deploying his remaining tanks, Staff Sergeant Siva ably directed effective fire upon the hostile force, then ma-



neuvered his own tank to a position between the enemy and the disabled vehicle. Disregarding his own safety, he fearlessly left his vehicle and assisted in the evacuation of the injured crewmen. As the Marines withdrew, one of the tanks accidentally maneuvered into a bomb crater and was immobilized. Again moving his vehicle into a protective position, Staff Sergeant Siva unhesitatingly exposed himself to intense hostile fire, and connecting a cable between his tank and the one in the crater, he directed the removal of the immobile vehicle. Resolutely continuing his determined efforts, he ignored the hostile rounds impacting near him and, entering the abandoned tank, maneuvered it to friendly lines. By his courage, bold initiative and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of

great personal danger, Staff Sergeant Siva contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■

**Why Come to the VTA Reunion?**

*Editor's Note: I got the following email from a VTA member who had never been to one of our reunions but he is thinking about attending our 2023 gathering:*

"I am thinking about attending my first Tanker's reunion this fall. If my wife chooses to come with me, we'll probably fly. Her question to me is what will there be for the wives to do? Are they included in some (or all) of the events? We will probably be there for Friday, Saturday and Sunday... and then fly home on Monday morning. I really don't know what to expect and may only know two or three people there. I do know Bruce Van Apeldoorn and, if Bill Zobie attends, I know him, as well. Other than those two, I'll be re-uniting with strangers. Any thoughts?"

**My reply:**

It is great to hear that you are considering attending your first reunion. Virtually every single first time attendee says, at the end of our get together, "I am sorry I waited so long and I'll never miss another one!"

First and foremost, please come with NO expectations... other than you will meet & greet brothers who you never realized that you had. I say with a lot of humor: They may be "strange" but they are not strangers. And if nothing else, we are all Marines. And most of us are Vietnam veteran Marine tankers or tank-support personnel, we have a common thread running through all of us who attend. If there is nothing more to talk about than Boot Camp... ITR... Staging BN... 1st or 3rd Tanks... or maybe a specific operation... and on and on and on. Also please note that most of us are not "heroes" per se. We deployed, did out jobs and came home to family and friends.

Based on past reunion experiences with first time attendees, we have all "new guy" attendees

wear a red ribbon attached to their reunion name badge. The main motivator for using the red ribbons is that some first-time attendees had felt "left out" because they did not know anyone and those of us to have attended multiple reunions are like "old friends." We encourage the "old timers" to be very inclusive and welcoming when they see the red ribbon.

Personally, I have been very fortunate to have been able to attend every reunion since our founding in 1999. I always seem to find a new guy who either remembers me and helps me recall back 50+ years ago and some of events that I had forgotten ... or I find a photograph that someone brings that has an image of me when I was in-country and that I do not remember being taken. Heaven knows that today trying to remember everything that we did six months ago is a stretch ... forget about remembering everything from over 50 years ago!!! The main thing to keep in mind is that we have to be willing to open up and talk ... and to listen.

With regard to wives: Yes, quite a few of the ladies have attended many past reunions with their husbands so many of them are already acquainted with each other. Most of the wives are very welcoming and inclusive with the new wives. We do have a "Ladies Only" get together while the men have a Business Meeting on the first morning. Everyone ... (wives, kids, grandkids) ... are encouraged to participate in all of the activities as well. It is not just an "old boys" reunion. Most of the wives have a common thread running through them as well. That is, they all have Marine husbands who spent some time in hell... and that experience has made their husbands just a little bit crazy. ■



## OPTIONAL TOURS FOR SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 17th OPEN DAY

These independently operated tours must be booked by you on or before June 30, 2023.

Please do not delay with your decision and sending in your booking deposit.

All the optional tours are 4 hours (morning departure from the reunion hotel) without lunch, except for the Royal Gorge Train. For that tour, departure time would be 10:15 and the return would be 4:30 pm. The cost of lunch is included.

Each of the four optional tours listed below is based on one minibus/guide per tour with a 30 minimum-35 maximum passengers. If the minimum is not reached the tour may be cancelled and a refund will be made back to you.

**Tour 1**—Air Force Academy, Garden of the Gods Park, Historic City Tour: **\$64.00 per person**

**Tour 2**—Seven Falls Tour, Penrose Heritage Museum, Garden of the Gods, Manitou Springs mineral spring tasting and walking tour: **\$84.00 per person**

**Tour 3**—Royal Gorge Train and lunch: **\$189.00 per person**

### Tour Descriptions:

#### Historic City Tour (Tour 1)

A Civil War General and railroad man was riding on the roof of a stagecoach on a clear moonlit night when he saw and fell in love with the majestic 14,115-foot Pikes Peak within the barren Front Range of the Rocky Mountain chain. Where there was no town, he built one that flourished once gold was found in the late 1800s. Drive the streets lined with miner's mansions! Hear and see the city's history now in its 152nd year!

#### Garden of the Gods (Tour 1 and 2)

Voted the #1 city park in the nation! It is a registered National Natural Landmark. The drive through provides photo ops of towering sandstone formations with the majestic Rocky Mountains and Pikes Peak as a backdrop. Hear the history of the park and surrounding area throughout the drive. Shop for that perfect Colorado souvenir or enjoy a snack at the state's oldest and largest Trading Post.

#### US Air Force Academy (Tour 1)

Set in a scenic region at the foot of the Rocky Mountains and situated at an altitude of 7,163-feet, stands the youngest of the four service academies. Among the stops on the campus are a Scenic Overlook, a B-52 Bomber, and the Visitor Center where you can shop, view exhibits and watch a short film that highlights the first years' experience of a cadet.

Watch the skies above for gliders and parachutists.

#### Manitou Springs (Tour 2)

This quaint turn-of-the-century Victorian village has many examples of historic architecture. Steep hillside houses on narrow winding streets with magnificent views all add a visual interest. The village was incorporated in 1876 as a health resort. Tourists still flock to the area to drink and bathe in carbonated water naturally infused with minerals. Each water spring has a different taste depending on the type and percentage of minerals collected as the water travels up through limestone caverns. (A drinking cup would be provided.)

#### Penrose Heritage Museum (Tour 2)

This view at your own pace museum showcases up close over 30 fabulous carriages, original Western artifacts and race cars that competed in the famous international hill climb to the top of Pikes Peak.

#### Seven Falls (Tour 2)

Enjoy a short tram ride through the narrow canyon to the seven in one-mile-high waterfall. Stairs or an elevator can be used to get to the top where you can view the entire seven distinct waterfalls from across the canyon. A set of stairs are also available immediately alongside the seven falls allowing you to feel the mist. Each waterfall has a separate name.

#### Royal Gorge Train (Tour 3)

Ride through the narrow canyons forged by the Arkansas River while enjoying a breathtaking view of the river and the famous suspension bridge 1,000 feet overhead! Vary your view from inside seats to open air cars! In viewing the canyon, President Teddy Roosevelt described it as "The trip that bankrupts the English language!" Departure is firm at 10:15 with a 4:30 return. Lunch included.

Please either email or phone leaving a name, telephone number and email address so that the tour company can let you know your deposit check has been received. The mere receipt of the deposit check does not confirm that the tour will happen as we must reach the minimum number.

Reply email: [Glenda.Baumann@pprtours.com](mailto:Glenda.Baumann@pprtours.com)

Phone messages can be left at 719.357.7535

The address for mailing deposit checks is:

#### Pikes Peak Region Tours

1783 Pine Mesa Grove

Colorado Springs, CO 80918 ■

## REGRETS

Yes, we all have them... and sadly some last a lifetime

By far, for me, the most significant regrets I have now are about lost time. I used to have a real sense that it is getting increasingly likely that I will die without having ever seen the Amazon River, or learning to speak Spanish fluently, or having built my own vacation house in the mountains. As I grow older, the opportunity cost of truly pointless hours piles up. What could I have accomplished instead of playing computer games or spending countless hours watching television? There isn't enough time left in my life for me to become a millionaire, a rock star and much less to be elected president of the United States. So, if I don't draw the wrong card in the near future and get prostate cancer at age 80, I might make it to 10 or 15 more of the "1,000 things I want to see and do before I die."

It would be so sad (to me) to have even one single member of the USMC VTA pass away without having attended at least one of our reunions. And almost as important, to not have taken the time to be able to tell us his own story about his time in Vietnam. Either in a podcast, a video interview or a written document that we publish in our magazine.

The Board of Directors discussed the following points

during several of our past board meetings and we agreed to make a concerted effort to contact as many of our own Vietnam Marine tanker buddies as we can and to do these four things:

1) Encourage each of them to attend the 2023 Colorado reunion keeping in mind their own personal economic situation and if necessary, to find out how we may help them.

2) Suggest that they gather their Vietnam mementos & photos, assemble them in an album and to bring it to share with us in the Slopchute hospitality suite.

3) Ask them to consider participating in the personal interview process.

4) Recommend that they in turn contact all of their other tanker buddies to encourage those men to do all four of these suggestions.

If each one of us could contact two or three of our Marine tanker buddies and if those two or three buddies could contact two or three other buddies then we could very well have the largest (and best) reunion ever ... and quite possibly, we'll be able to greatly increase the VTA membership rolls.

**"Our biggest regrets are not for the things we have done... but for the things we haven't done."**

Chad Michael Murray

### USMC VTA 2023 REUNION

SEPTEMBER 13-18, 2023

Embassy Suites – Colorado Springs

7290 Commerce Center Drive

Colorado Springs, CO 80919

**HOTEL ROOMS:** Call the reunion hotel directly: 719.599.9100 and be sure to mention "USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion" (Code XVT) for the special room rate of \$149.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$217 per night.

You can also call the hotel sales office and speak to Veronica Kellerman 719.955.6826.

If you choose to make an online reservation the website link is:

<https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/coscces-xvt-e1277f05-e5ad-46a3-964d-3466ec409ea7/>

**You must make your own hotel room reservations by Aug 1st to get the reunion room rate!**

**ARRIVAL:** If you are flying to the reunion, you can fly into Denver and rent a car (it is about 60 miles to The Springs). Or you can fly to Colorado Springs and take a taxi to the hotel (which is about 20 miles from the airport). Unfortunately, there is no hotel shuttle for our reunion hotel.

### 2023 REUNION SPECIAL EVENT

Of the many incredible "touristy" offerings that the Pikes Peak Region (a.k.a. Colorado Springs) offers and one of the most spectacular and awe-inspiring venues is the Pikes Peak Cog Railway. The three and a half hours round trip up and down "America's Mountain" offers some insanely beautiful views of the sights that inspired the beloved anthem, "America the Beautiful." As you read the description below, we are hoping that you agree with us that the trip will be worth the additional \$60 cost and it may be remembered for decades to come. Please note that the trip is optional and not required.

DESCRIPTION: This is the world's highest and the world's

longest cog railroad in the United States and the entire Northern Hemisphere. Nine miles to the summit of "America's Mountain," one of the most famous mountains in the United States. The first passenger train arrived on the summit in June 1891 and has seen many modern developments over the years. Most recently we have taken three years to rebuild and bring Pikes Peak Cog Railway into a new era, with new trains, new track, new depot and a beautiful new Summit House for visitors at the top <https://www.cograilway.com/the-new-experience/pikes-peak-visitor-center/>. A train ride, yes, but this is an adventure experience that is so much more than just a journey on the train.

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**Election of Association Officers and Directors**  
 If you would like to run for a position on the Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, you will need to submit your name and your desired position in writing. Elections will be held during the business meeting of the 2023 reunion in Colorado Springs. Positions available are: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and four director chairs. You must be a member in good standing to be eligible to run for office. All who want to be considered for election must submit the request in writing to the Nomination Committee Chairman: Sgt Maj William "JJ" Carroll, USMC (ret), 4806 Heather Ridge Road North, Oakdale, MN 55128 no later than July 31, 2023. If you have a question, you may call Sgt Maj Carroll for details at 651.440.9924 (CST) or you can send him an email at sgtmajwfc@comcast.net

**Your USMC VTA History Project Team is continuing our video interviews of your personal experiences in Vietnam and in the US Marine Corps. Please help us capture your Vietnam history so that future generations can learn from and better understand our war.**

**VIDEO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE COLORADO REUNION**

Hey Marines, we are now scheduling video interviews for the USMC VTA 2023 reunion in Colorado Springs. The interviews will be between thirty (30) minutes and an hour in duration and will be held on Sunday, September 17, 2023, from 0900 to 1500 in the conference rooms at the hotel.

If you would like to be interviewed or if you have questions, please contact Bruce Van Apeldoorn by phone: 585.613.6564 or via email: bvanapeldoornsr@gmail.com. And just so you know, the interview schedule at the 2021 Providence, RI Reunion was 90% full prior to the reunion, so please schedule your interview now to insure you get a slot.

If you would like to view the wide assortment of interviews from our previous reunions, please go to the VTA website and click on "Members Stories ... Reunion Interviews."

**How To Win A Free Hotel Room!**  
 You can win a free hotel stay for this year's reunion when you fill out and submit the entry coupon that will be provided in your reunion Welcome Bag and then bring and deposit it when you arrive at the Thursday's Opening Meeting no later than 07:59 Mountain Time (MDT)

Rules: The free room drawing coupon will be your raffle ticket to be surrendered at the door of the meeting room before 08:59 MDT for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic room rate (\$149) plus taxes. Prize value: \$596.00+.

The drawing will be held at the conclusion of the same meeting. Tickets will be selected from the people who are in the meeting room prior to 08:59 MDT. No latecomers will be permitted to enter in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President's watch set to atomic clock standards.

**Vietnam Photos**  
 WE NEED YOUR HELP! For whatever reason, it seems as if we have gotten away from something that used to be very meaningful for our reunion attendees. In the not so distant past, many of our reunion attendees would bring with them their Vietnam photo albums. They would place their albums on the tables in the Slopchute hospitality room so that the rest of the attendees could go through the album seeking photos of friends and find other common interests. Please bring your Vietnam photo albums with you when you come to Colorado this September.

**The Auction Items**  
 One of the VTA's biggest and most fun-filled fund raising activities are our "live" and "silent" auctions. Please look around and find some really neat collectables to bring and donate to our fund raising events. In order to be better organized; to not have a lot of duplicate items and as important, in order to reduce our tremendous workload, we would like for each and every reunion attendee who is planning to donate items for our auctions to please call or email Jim Raasch, the Chairman of the Auction Committee and let him know what you are planning to donate prior to the actual reunion event. Jim's email address is: jraasch47@gmail.com And his phone number is: 319.551.1675



## 2023 Colorado Springs Reunion Schedule

Wednesday, September 13 – Monday, September 18

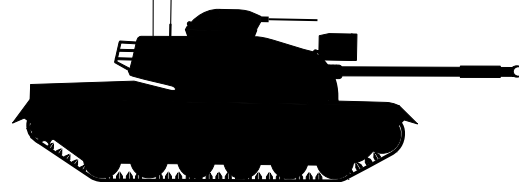
<b>Wednesday</b> (Sept. 13)	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	<b>Arrival Day</b> – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside The Slopchute hospitality room (in the Atrium). <b>Sign up for VTA History Interviews; Writing Workshops; Podcasts</b>
	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	The Slopchute is Open <b>Lunch &amp; Dinner on your own</b>
<b>Thursday</b> (Sept. 14)	<b>0600 – 0815</b>	Complimentary breakfast buffet (in the Atrium)
	<b>0830 – 1200</b>	Ladies Coffee (in the Slopchute)
	<b>0900 – 1200</b>	Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (in the Atrium) <i>Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion! Must submit ticket before 0900 in the meeting room and be present for the drawing to win.</i>
	<b>1200 – 1630</b>	<b>Free Time and lunch on your own</b>
	<b>1100 – 1630</b>	The Slopchute Open
	<b>1700 – 1800</b>	Italian Buffet Dinner Cocktails–Cash bar (in the Atrium)
	<b>1800 – 2000</b>	Live Auction! (in the Atrium)
	<b>2000 – 2300</b>	Slopchute Open
<b>Friday</b> (Sept. 15)	<b>Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!!</b>	
	<b>0600 – 0815</b>	Complimentary breakfast buffet (In the Atrium)
	<b>0915 – 0930</b>	Load buses for the WW-2 Museum of Flight (Load on the west – mountains side of the hotel)
	<b>1000 – 1200</b>	Tour – 2 hour museum tour
	<b>1215</b>	Load buses for Airplane Restaurant
	<b>1230</b>	<b>Lunch – VTA sponsored western buffet</b>
	<b>1400</b>	Load buses for return to hotel
	<b>1430</b>	Arrive at hotel
	<b>1500 – 2300</b>	The Slopchute Open <b>Dinner on your own</b>

(See reverse side)



## 2023 Colorado Springs Reunion Schedule

<b>Saturday</b> (Sept. 16)	<b>0600 – 0715</b>	Complimentary breakfast buffet (in the Atrium)
	<b>745 – 0800</b>	Load buses for the Pikes Peak Cog Railway
	<b>0800</b>	Buses Depart
	<b>0920</b>	Cog Railway Depart to top of Pikes Peak
	<b>1300</b>	Load Buses for Old Colorado City and lunch
	<b>1300–1500</b>	Lunch on your own and tour Old Colorado City
	<b>1530</b>	Load buses for return to hotel
	<b>1600</b>	Arrive at Hotel
	<b>1600 – 2300</b>	The Slopchute Open <b>Dinner on your own</b>
<b>Sunday</b> (Sept. 17)	<b>0600 – 0815</b>	Complimentary breakfast buffet (in the Atrium) <b>Open Day–All Day</b> Interview Schedule Posted in Slopchute <b>Lunch on your own</b>
	<b>1000 – 1530</b>	The Slopchute Open
	<b>1600 – 2030</b>	<b>FAREWELL BANQUET</b> (The Slopchute Room) <i>NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat &amp; tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket is highly encouraged.</i>
	<b>1600 – 1645</b>	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	<b>1700 – 1715</b>	Presentation of Colors and remarks
	<b>1715 – 1800</b>	Dinner Served
	<b>1800 – 1805</b>	05 minutes – Head Call
	<b>1805 – 2030</b>	30 minutes – Guest Speaker 45 minutes – Fallen Heroes 05 minutes – 2024/25 Reunion
	<b>2030 – 2400</b>	The Slopchute Open – Last Call.
<b>Monday</b> (Sept. 18)		<b>Departure Day</b>



### OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM 2023 Colorado Springs Reunion Wednesday, September 13 – Monday, September 18

**Want to save \$30?**  
**Mail your registration before July 30**  
**to avoid the Late Fee**



Please Print All

Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest's Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_  
and relationship \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Are you a first time attendee?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ MOS \_\_\_\_\_

**Would you like to participate in our personal interview program?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

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

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to July 30, 2023. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

Pre-July 30 Form



NAME(S) as you want them to appear on your reunion name tag \_\_\_\_\_ Men's T-Shirt Sizes S – XL = \$15 each (\$5.00 extra for XXL & XXXL)

- \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL REUNION FEES**

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

My T-Shirt . . . . . \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

Guest T-shirt \_\_\_\_\_ . . X \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Guest T-shirt \_\_\_\_\_ . . X \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Cog Railway \_\_\_\_\_ . . X \$60 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SUB TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel room reservations by August 30<sup>th</sup> to get the reunion room rate! Call the hotel directly: **719-599-9100** and be sure to mention "**USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion**" (**Code XVT**) for the special room rate of \$149.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$217 per night.

**CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has an July 30<sup>th</sup> deadline.**

**YOUR HOTEL ROOM RESERVATIONS MUST BE BOOKED BY AUGUST 1, 2023**

**HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$30.00**

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

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

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



# ATTENTION ALL USMC VTA MEMBERS

**EVEN IF YOU DO NOT READ ANYTHING ELSE IN THIS ISSUE PLEASE READ THE BELOW INFORMATION**

On the back cover of every single issue of our magazine your mailing address appears. Next to your name is the words "Expiration" and a number. That number is the YEAR that your annual membership dues and/or annual Life assessment is paid up to. At the end of that number (year) your dues are then payable. Please pay attention to that number. It is your responsibility to pay your dues on the first of each year. If the number next to your name is lower than the current year then you are delinquent with your membership dues or annual Life assessment.

Our standard policy is to "carry" a past due member between 6 to 12 months past the delinquent year and then we cut them off from receiving the magazine. If you happen to lapse an entire year and we have carried you, we would really appreciate you paying for the back year as well as any forward years. We offer a 10% discount for at once multiple year payment.

- 1 year's dues = \$30**
- 2 year's dues = \$54**
- 3 year's dues = \$81**

Our brotherhood is being managed by a very small number of volunteers. We are not a salaried professional management team. In order to benefit our brotherhood, we all work for free. We cannot be expected to babysit and coddle the membership. On January 1st of every year, when it is time to pay your \$30 annual membership dues and/or the \$20 annual Life assessment, you need to step up to the plate and simply pay what is due. We often include a self-addressed envelope in the first or second issue of our magazine each year. We cannot send out reminders after reminders to entice you to pay your membership dues/assessment. Besides the fact that you are all US Marine veterans so you can most assuredly take care of yourselves.

Our financial well-being is the lifeblood of our brotherhood. It is unfortunate that many other veteran groups suffer from lack of funds which causes them to cease publication of newsletters ... and even more unfortunately, to go entirely out of existence. The Sponson Box magazine, as most of you will agree, is pretty darn special. It is not only extremely time consuming to assemble, edit and prepare (which we gladly do for free) ... but it then costs us a great deal of money to do the art work set up, print and distribute it.

We have heard from some VTA members that "All you people think about is money, money, money!" In truth the \$30 annual membership dues and / or the \$20 Life assessment is tiny financial burden to most members but it is the lifeblood of the USMC VTA. Please help us keep an eye on the ball.

Just so you know, it is our understanding that the 1st Marine Division Association, the 2nd Marine Division Association, the 4th Marine Division Association and the 5th Marine Division Association are all OUT OF BUSINESS. Why? Due to declining memberships and the lack of a cash flow. The only US Marine Division Association that is active is the 3rd Marine Division and it is struggling. Please help us help you.



**USMC Vietnam Tankers Association**  
16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106-8937

**Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" on your address label is "22" then your 2022 membership dues were payable back last January. If you do not pay soon, this may be your last issue.**

**Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30\* and mail to:  
USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 99 Shoreline Drive, New Bern, NC 28562-9550**

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

