



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

**Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™**



## **Reminder: The St Louis Reunion is Sept 21–25** **“HONOR THE PAST BY BEING PRESENT”**

*Featured Stories:*

Coming Home from War..... Page 18

The .50 cal. Coax Machinegun..... Page 34

St Louis Reunion Section..... Page 41 – 46

## USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. Scholarship Program 2017

The Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association has implemented an annual academic scholarship program. One scholarship will be awarded to an individual student each year in the amount of \$1,000. To be eligible, the applicant must be a spouse, child, stepchild, or grandchild of a VTA member who has a DD-214 on file with the VTA and whose membership dues are current. The scholarship recipient's eligibility will remain in effect for up to four years of school, provided that the student continues to maintain an overall accumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

### Student Scholarship Criteria:

A minimum GPA of 3.0 at the last high school or academic institution attended.

Be registered to attend a minimum of half-time (as determined by the institution) at an accredited educational/technical college or university.

Agree to authorize the VTA to publicize the scholarship award announcement in the Sponson Box newsletter.

Application materials must be postmarked no later than the June 30 deadline.

The scholarship program committee will review all applications for completeness, then the VTA Board of Directors will select one scholarship winner for the year. Determining factors will be letters of recommendation, a letter in the applicant's own words expressing current educational goals and prior accomplishments, and a 500-word essay on the topic: Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans.

To obtain a scholarship application form, contact Jim Coan, 5374 E. Lantana Drive, Sierra Vista, AZ 85650, 520-378-9659, or e-mail him at [zzjimco@aol.com](mailto:zzjimco@aol.com) before the June 30 deadline for receipt of applications.

## A NOTE FROM OUR TREASURER

By Bruce Van Apeldoorn

I have completed closing out our finances for 2016 and, as promised, wanted to provide you with a brief of how the VTA is doing. This past Fall, your Board of Directors approved the establishment of the Scholarship Fund. We had been awarding scholarships but had taken the money from the General Fund. The reason for opening a separate savings account just for the Scholarship program was to provide transparency to those who wanted to donate to this fund. I did that in October and by the end of the year over \$2,000 had been donated. If you wish to donate, just send me a check, and in the note section put Scholarship Fund.

Yes, we did finish the year with a positive balance in our checking account. The main reason that we did is because of your continued generosity. The dues are just enough to keep VTA going so it is the extra few bucks almost everyone sends along with their dues that make the difference. Other than dues & donations, our other income is minimal, normally from the sale of patches and stickers.

Our largest expense is the printing and mailing of the Sponson Box. Personally I think it is the gold standard for a newsletter about the members of a Veteran's organization and provides a record of our service. The next largest expense is the planning of the next reunion. Hope to see you all in St. Louis this September.

Let me finish by providing you with some basic information accounting. (1) The annual financial report has been accepted by the President and is now a formal part of the VTA's records. (2) The accounting practices used for the VTA are that of a cash based corporation in accordance with guidelines proved by the Financial Accounting Standards Board. (3) The VTA is required to file an annual report with the Internal Revenue Service and that has been accomplished. Our record keeping practices allow us to identify where each cent came from and how it was spent. If you ever have a question about the financial operation of the VTA, feel free to contact me or the President.

## Letter from the President

SEPTUGENARIAN: I just turned 70 years old. I am going to guess that if you have not yet reached that august age, you are probably about to. For my birthday, my wife gave me a book titled "70 Things for You to Do when You Turn 70." One of the 70 essays in the book speaks about the time that we have remaining in our lives and the essay reminds us that for the once in our lifetimes many of us are just now realizing that there really is "a light at the end of the tunnel." So, taking the theme of not-much-time-left, we probably ought to: (a) Plan to attend the St Louis reunion; (b) Write a story or two about being a Marine in Vietnam, and (c) Put the USMC VTA in your Last Will and Testament before it's too late to do it later.

ST LOUIS: HONOR THE PAST BY BEING PRESENT—Please join us in St Louis, Missouri on Thursday, Sept 21 – Monday, 25, 2017 as we continue to ensure our legacy through reunion, renewal and remembrance

MAKE PLANS: We'd like for any member who is attending to make sure that you: (a) Bring your old Vietnam photos put up in an album for the rest of the attendees to share and enjoy; (b) Bring items to donate for the fund raising auction, and (c) Bring your guests who may want to attend. We have seen some amazing bonding happen between VTA members and their sons or daughters who attend together. The "old man" may not talk about his time in Vietnam ... but his buddies will fill Junior's ear in the Torsion Bar hospitality room!!! One member recently called and asked me if there was a "limit" of the amount of guests that he could bring. It turns out that his grandson was graduating from high school this fall and some of his grandson's buddies wanted to come to the reunion. Bring 'em on!!!

GUESTS in ST LOUIS: As we announced in the last issue, we have invited several young U.S. Marine tankers who participated in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as members of the MCTA to join us at our upcoming reunion. In the LETTERS section of this issue is a note from Mike Ledford about him bringing one of his friends who served as a Soviet tanker.

LEGACY GIVING PROGRAM: Please give some serious consideration to adding the VTA to your estate planning. Several members have already done so and it will help ensure the long-term viability of the association.

FORGOTTEN TRACKS—VOLUME 1 & 2 is an important part of the VTA HISTORY PROJECT, and both books are available for purchase to our members and friends. The cost of the books is \$40.00 for Volume 2 and \$35.00 for Volume 1. The cost of shipping is included. Please contact PETE RITCH at 850-734-0014 or by e-mail at [goldendog@mchsi.com](mailto:goldendog@mchsi.com) for more information regarding purchasing of the books.



"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."

Maya Angelou

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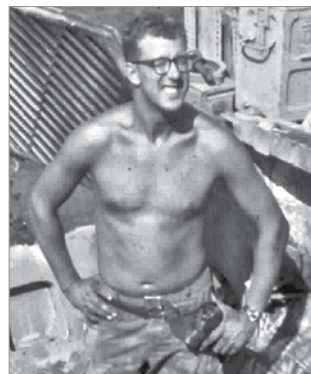
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## Meet your Board of Directors

A feature that provides some history about one of your board members

Jim in Vietnam



Jim Today



## Jim Raasch

Jim was born March 27, 1947, and raised in rural southwest Iowa. Jim's Dad served in the Army Air Corps during W.W. II. His dad was stationed in England, where he met and married Jim's English mother. Back in Iowa, his parents farmed and had a chicken hatchery. While growing up, Jim belonged to the 4-H and F.F.A. farm clubs. In his small high school, he participated in cross country, basketball, track, baseball, chorus, and class plays. He was the first freshman in his school's history to receive a varsity letter.

After high school, it was on to college, where he was on the cross-country team. He successfully dodged the draft for 2 ½ years. In the fall of 1967, he dropped a human physiology class and fell below the sixteen hours required for a military draft deferment. To avoid the Draft, he signed up for a two-year enlistment in the Marine Corps. In February, 1968, he was off to MCRD San Diego for boot camp where he served as the platoon secretary. At the completion of boot camp, he was meritoriously promoted to P.F.C. Two weeks of mess duty then preceded three weeks of infantry training (ITR). Following his boot camp leave, he was assigned to area guard at Camp Del Mar and then he attended Basic Tank Crewman School. After two weeks at Staging Battalion, it was on to Okinawa, where he was assigned to A Co, 5th Tanks and the 3/26 Rear at Camp Schwab. Since the H & S Company platoon was without a tank, they were referred to as Alpha 5-0

(zero tanks). He was one of six Marines who had a "real" job – as company armorer.

The days in Okinawa were filled with inspections, busy-work training and boredom. To break the tedium, Jim took Jeep, PC and 6X driving training. After five months he decided to take a trip "down south" to Vietnam, where his plane was greeted by a rocket attack at Da Nang. He was then sent to An Hoa to join 3rd Platoon, A Co., 5th Tanks in support of Bravo Co., 1st tanks. The time there was spent on night time guard duty at An Hoa and Phu Loc 6. Days were spent on road sweeps, convoy escorts, and infantry/tank sweeps. His tank was sent to Hill 55 and did some "work" in Arizona territory.

In May, the platoon was re-attached to BLT 3/26 and spent time on the LSD 33 "USS Alamo," preparing for landings that never came. After a few weeks, the platoon was off-loaded and the heavy section sent to Hill 190 in Elephant Valley and the light section went to Namo Bridge on Highway One, north of Da Nang. More nighttime guard duty and off-hill re-action force followed by daytime support of infantry platoons in the bush. In June, Jim was promoted to corporal and later tank commander on A-22 "Fujimo". Shortly before rotating home, he learned he was eligible for early release. Upon arriving at Camp Pendleton, he was processed out. So, after 19 months and 19 days, he was once again a free man.

Back in Iowa, he returned to college at the University of Northern Iowa, graduating

in 1971 with a B.A. in Education. In 1973, he married his wife, Bonnie. After college he worked a variety of jobs in construction, sales, and industrial management. In 1986, he completed a degree in Business Administration and took a job with the Iowa Department of Transportation as a field auditor of interstate trucking companies. He retired in 2010 and is now the "boat captain" of his 50' houseboat on the Mississippi River. He also manages his small Century farm in southwest Iowa, which is in the ten-year Conservation Reserve Program.

Jim has Life memberships in the American Legion, VFW, DAV, Marine Corps League and USMC VTA. He is Vice Commander of his Legion post, the Chaplain at the VFW, Judge Advocate of the local Marine Corps League where he is also in the Color Guard doing flag presentations at various events, parades, and two to three military rites funerals per week. He is a "new" director for the USMC VTA and secretary of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation. He is proud to say he's attended all of the USMC VTA reunions since Minneapolis in 2001.

Jim has no children, grandchildren, cats or dogs. He does have three boats and three farm tractors. Jim and his wife, Bonnie, are retired in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, spending summers house boating on the Mississippi at Dubuque, Iowa, and also enjoying traveling and attending U of Northern Iowa athletic events ■.

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### Why attending the USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunions is so significant?

There are a number of reasons why our tanker reunions are so important. Tanker and Anti-Tank Marines who were deployed together or who serve in the same unit or combat area forge a bond that is almost unbreakable. This bond helped us during the worst times. A reunion allows our members to reconnect and share their experiences while they were in the Marine Corps.

As members of the 1st, 3rd and 5th Tank and AT Battalions in Vietnam, we shared similar experiences as well as the bonds of being Marines and the oath of service to our country. Each of us has walked along the path of the warrior and our shared experiences have made each of us stronger. We were willing to give our lives to protect a fellow Marine.

The USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion allows us to reforge this bond, rekindle past friendships, and heal from past experiences together. Our reunion events can have a therapeutic benefit for us and it allows us to come together again and renew the relationships we had in the past.

If you plan to attend our September 2017 reunion in St. Louis, Missouri, great. If you have not attended a recent reunion or have never attended our reunion, please give serious consideration to attending the 2017 St. Louis reunion.

Bill "JJ" Carroll  
Sergeant Major, USMC Ret.

### Peter Tchetchirov, Former Soviet Tank Commander

A few years back, my wife introduced me to a co-worker from



T-72 Soviet Main Battle Tank

Peter Tchetchirov сержант (serzhant) of the Soviet Army



Bulgaria. After meeting her husband, I learned he had been in tanks. Naturally, we talked shop, especially since after my U.S. Marine experience in tanks, I joined the Army and was in Cobra Training where we studied Soviet tank tactics. Peter Tchetchirov, had been a Tank Commander of a T-72 main battle tank.

Peter was in service beginning in 1988, went to a six-month tank school, and then served for 2 years and 3 months guarding the capitol grounds of Sofia, Bulgaria. His tank had a three man crew consisting of a driver, a gunner and him, the tank commander. The main gun was a 125 mm that fired shells with combustible shell casings. There was no loader since the gun had an automatic feed system.

The T-72 had a V-12 diesel engine that produced 788 hp. It had a retractable blade system under the chassis that allowed the tank to dig itself into the ground by neutral steering with the blade extended. It also had an air filtration system that protected the crew from both chemical warfare and nuclear fallout environments. Peter is now 48 years old and is a craftsman who finishes out the interiors of luxury jets at Falcon Jet in Little Rock, Arkansas. He has been a U.S. citizen for years. Peter will be my guest at the VTA 2017 reunion in St. Louis. If you happen to bump into him, please give him a warm welcome.

Mike Ledford  
"A" Company, 3rd Tanks  
Ammo Tech '67-'68

### A Follow Up on Phil Weigand

In the obituaries in the last issue of our 2016 magazine, Lt. Col. Phillip S. Weigand's remembrance did not include a bit of information that we since discovered in a more recent issue of Leatherneck magazine:

"He served in Vietnam and was awarded the Silver Star for actions on May 26, 1967. According to the award citation, while serving at CO of Co C, 1st Tank Bn, 1st Mar Div., in enemy territory: Capt Weigand was informed that one of his company's tanks had sustained extensive damage...fire was raging in the fighting compartment...he rushed to the tank with as many extinguishers as he could carry and climbed on the top of the turret and began to fight the fire...disregarding his own safety. He fearlessly entered the tank and, with his bare hands, ripped out the electrical wiring and other burning material. Then despite the imminent threat of an explosion, he calmly sorted the ammunition and courageously removed the dangerous hot ordinance from the tank.

### Operation Starlite

Jack Marino writes: My father was 36 and a SSGT 1833 Amphibious Tractor crewman. He was in a support role, and was with Column 21. He was handed orders to get his track and Marines ready to shove off early around 0400 with supplies for India Company, which was a rifle company that was in bad need of supplies. He was several clicks south of Chu Lai when his column headed out using an

outdated topo map. His platoon leader was a young 2nd Lt from Poplar, MS. The relief column consisted of three or four Amtracs and was escorted by two flame tanks. The tracks also had infantry along for reinforcement. Later on my father told me that he had a feeling that they had gone too far inland and had somehow missed a turning point, so the column was halted by the Lt. whose name was Robert F. Cochran. My father exited the hatch, as did Cochran. They were overlooking the map when a mortar hit within a close range. It was so close that my father recalled red dirt exploding in his face and eyes causing his vision to be impaired. They then headed for the protection of the Amtracs. My father made it in his hatch with the Lt. following my father to his track. My father said that before the Lt could make it inside the track, he was hit multiple times from VC small arms fire. Before my dad could get to the wounded Lt., he was met with a barrage of machine gun fire that hit the young Lt again, killing him. At the same time, the enemy opened up with B-40s and RPGs and dropping mortars. One of the flame tanks was attacked by a VC who dropped a satchel charge inside of the tank. The other flame tank was stricken but they managed to spew their napalm toward the enemy.

### Who were those guys?

It was late summer, prior to the annual monsoon season. Third Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment (3/5) had established its rear area on Hill 63. The 3rd Platoon of Bravo Co, 1st AT Battalion, along with a unit from 1st Tanks were located on a finger knoll, just over a ridge on the far western end of the perimeter. First Tanks were at the high ground to the south while the Ontos were located on the lower end of the knoll to the north. [Like they say, "Take the high ground!"] Needless to say, the Ontos would receive H&I mortar fire two or three times each night. The routine was simple: Someone would shout "INCOMING!" We'd run to our "pig", or jump in a nearby hole. We'd do this repeatedly until morning and then we'd admire the new "air conditioning" in the CP tents that was courtesy of "Luke the Gook" himself.

If memory serves me (and at this age, it's not always good) I believe it was PFC Don "Tex" Fletcher who called in an enemy sighting. The sighting was to our west on a hill about 300 yards out. The hill was low. It looked like "Manny, Moe and Jack" all in black wearing their cone shaped hats, "Setting up Sticks" in the middle of the day on the ridge line. At that time, and given the fact that the Ontos had such a deadly back blast, we could not fire due to the crowd all around us. A call went over the radio to the tanks nearby. After what seemed like a long silence, I heard one of the tanks traversing his turret and then the roar of the 90 mm gun. Upon looking back out at "Manny, Moe and Jack" through my "pig's" drivers hatch scope, the gooks seemed take notice a little too late. I don't know how to say

"Oh Shit!" in Vietnamese, but I think they definitely did. There was no more H&I fire as we settled in for a soaking monsoon season. Through the years, I've often wondered who were those guys in that tank and would like to thank them for lookin' out for us Ontos guys on the lower end of the Hill.

Mike Green  
1st AT Bn, 1967  
Phone: (215) 826-0750  
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### Ev Turgent Catches Up

It has been sometime since we last corresponded, but I still enjoy the Sponson Box stories and updates from other members. As I approach my 85th birthday, I'm happy to report that I am in fairly good health notwithstanding another knee replacement and recent shoulder surgery.

When my wife passed away almost three years ago, I relocated to Woodland, CA from Washington state to be nearer my children. I'm situated in an independent living senior complex next door to an assisted living facility where I take most of my meals. As a result, I have made some dear friends of the residents there. Many of the men living there are WWII veterans representing all the services.

As a number of them have passed away, it has given me pause to appreciate that their service and sacrifices paved the way for me to grow up in a country where freedom and opportunity to succeed was guaranteed.

One of my best friends, Hy Abramson, who recently passed away, made the landing at Normandy, was seriously wounded and spent several weeks recovering in a field hospital. When he was restored to duty, he joined General Patton's new Third Army command and stayed with him through the rest of the war. In addition to the Purple Heart, he received a Bronze Star for heroic action. Hy was Jewish and shared that, as they advanced through southern Germany and northern Czechoslovakia liberating concentration camps along the way, his faith was severely tested after seeing the horrible examples of "man's inhumanity to man".

Another friend was also in General Patton's Third Army. Bob is 98 years old and is in failing mental and physical health. His son has shared with me that his dad was in Patton's logistics command responsible for refueling the tanks and other vehicles in the push through France and Germany. He also took part in Patton's memorable 90 degree shift of his Army north to relieve Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge.

We are living in very trying and uncertain times these days, both nationally and internationally. As a nation we need to come together as one people, as happened during WWII, to preserve and maintain our way of life for not only ourselves but for our descendants.

Have a great New Year and thanks for all you do, John. >>

**Ev adds:** I'm working on an article re: my tour of duty aboard ship back in 1957-'59. I'll get that to you soon with some of my recollections of being "A Soldier of the Sea." I was also amused by some of Bill "Lurch" Lochridge's "Vietnam Vignettes 1966-1967" in the Sponson Box 2016 Bonus Issue. I was Bravo Company commander during the stories he related as one of my platoon leaders in 1966. I tagged Bill as a hard charger from the moment he reported in to my CP at Marble Mountain in May of 1966. During my welcoming remarks to him, I noticed that he was wearing a 9mm Beretta pistol in a shoulder holster. Division had recently issued an order that all personal weapons be turned in to unit armories for safe keeping due to a recent outbreak of "accidental discharges" in billeting areas. I told him that I needed him to give it to me and asked if he had any other personal weapons in his possession. He lifted up his trouser leg and unhooked an ankle holster with a .22 cal. snub-nosed pistol. I was afraid to ask if that was all! "Lurch" was a nickname he had before my time but I often referred to him as "Paladin—Have gun, will travel" from the old TV show with Richard Boone. I recommended Bill for the Silver Star Medal for his heroic actions in support of 3/9 in the Arizona Territory in 1966, which was subsequently awarded to him. After reading about some of his escapades while under my command, most of which I was unaware, I might very well have had to at least "severely rap him on the wrist!" Some memories of Vietnam are best left tucked away but some involving "Lurch" are priceless and serve to lighten what oftentimes was a "vulgar brawl".

Ev Tunget  
615 Acacia Way #6  
Woodland, CA 95695



We heard that one of our members is building a retirement home in Florida with a large car port.

**Do you have an old Marine buddy who you lost contact with and who you'd like to see again?**

Blink Films, an award-winning television production company, is producing a documentary series for PBS called We'll Meet Again. The series will reunite ordinary peo-

ple who were involved in significant historic events from WWII to today. We are looking for U.S. Marine Veterans who served during the Vietnam War who would like to be reunited with someone important from that time. For more information please contact Alice on a this toll free number: 1-888-487-2771 or via email: [alice.smith@blinkfilmsuk.com](mailto:alice.smith@blinkfilmsuk.com)

**Wimp to Whack!**

I was the typical high school nerd! I minded my own business, was not very social, and dreaded confrontations from bullies. One particular bully—let's call him Harry—enjoyed exercising his rather assertive and tough nature against me on several occasions during my senior year (1966). In September of that year, I received my induction orders from Uncle Sam (the mandatory draft was in effect due to the Vietnam War) and I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. I was sent to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, on January 2, 1967 (Happy New Year!). Suffice it to say that during my training I was remolded from a wimp to a man in short order. The Drill Instructors have a way of doing that! The training was beyond tough, mean, and relentless. Somewhere along the way, I'm not quite sure when I crossed that line, I developed a "never again" hardcore attitude against being pushed around or bullied by anyone ever again. After I graduated from Boot Camp and went home on a 10-day leave, the test to that attitude came my way within a few days. The bully I feared in high school crossed my path on Main Street in the town in which I resided. Not knowing I had joined the Marines, he stopped and ridiculed my "ridiculous-looking crew cut." I attempted to walk around him, and he grabbed my arm. Instinctively, and without a moment's thought, I grabbed his arm, tripped him to the ground (as learned in my hand-to-hand combat classes), and began a rapid and relentless "machine gun" pounding with my fists about his head and shoulders. Suddenly, my arch enemy's screams of "stop! stop!" made me cease my attack. I got off him, stood up, and walked away. As I turned my head back and saw a weeping mound upon the sidewalk, I silently thanked my Drill Instructors and the United States Marine Corps for molding me into a real man and giving to me the gift of standing confident and tall wherever I go.

From the Sgt Grit Newsletter

**A U.S. Marine Vietnam grunt was discussing the current sad state of affairs with U.S. military men being court marshaled for pissing on dead Taliban soldiers. He wrote:**

A squad from second platoon was heading up the red line (road) from Liberty Bridge while our squad from 3rd platoon went to the left to set up an ambush. It was a TOTAL black night. We are 150 yards into the bush

and a squad from second platoon lights it up. It turns out they came nose-to-nose with a bunch of gooks. They killed three. One of the dead gooks turned out to be our barber. Well, we had them propped up by the front gate where all the locals had to pass even though I don't think we had many civilians working there. We then decided that the bodies needed the Ace of Spades on their foreheads so we nailed the cards on. Skipper Ripper gets wind of this and he goes berserk. Well, second platoon had to cut the bodies down and had them laying out on the road as they tried to decide what to do with them. All of a sudden, here comes an amtrac down the road and you can imagine how



Gary Hall wrote: Here I am celebrating my 21st Birthday with a stack of C-ration pound cakes, cocoa icing and a det. cord for a candle. Camp Carrol, Vietnam, Feb.20, 1968

**"New in 2017: President Trump wants a bigger Marine Corps"**

My little black heart went "pitter-patter" when I saw in the article in The Marine Corps Times newspaper that they want to add one Marine tank battalion. Well, if my information is correct, prior to the last reduction, a typical modern-day Marine tank battalion consisted of four companies of 15 tanks per each company, plus two H&S Company tanks which should total 62 tanks. After the reduction, two companies of tanks per battalion were deactivated leaving just 38 tanks in a Marine tank battalion, and only two active-duty tank battalions for the entire USMC! That means that if they needed to divide a tank battalion between the existing grunt battalions that would mean less than 12 tanks for each battalion. My rusty dusty brain housing group tells me that the current armor support situation (or lack thereof) is for all intents and purposes criminal. I did recently hear that some ignorant yahoo at HQS Marine Corps actually offered up the opinion that in future combat maybe the USMC could ask the U.S. Army for tank support. God save our once-great nation!!!

S/F  
John Wear

Last month, I was selling my hand-made pottery at a local farmers market in anticipation of a last minute Christmas rush. While I was standing near my booth, wearing one of my US Marine Vietnam covers, someone stepped to my side and said, "Semper Fi, Marine!"

I turned and saw a thirty-something young man with a smile on his face.

I asked, "Are you a Jarhead?"

He said, "Yes, Sir."

I asked, "Are you on Active Duty?"

He said, "I am a captain in charge of recruiting Marines on this part of the East Coast."

During our conversation I found out that he is the son of a career U.S. Navy submarine officer and that he is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. He said that even before he was selected to attend the USNA, he had decided that he was going to be a Marine. He admitted to me that he had recently decided that after ten years as a Marine (with a deployment in both Iraq and Afghanistan) that he was going to continue his Marine Corps career because of the change of administration. (I read that as he felt strongly that shit canning Nobama was good.)

When I asked him about the Donald's plan to add 12,000 more Marines to the ranks, he just smiled and said, "There will probably be lots of support personnel for those troops, so we are going to see a huge buildup of our Corps!" He added that the 3rd Mar Div. in WESPAC was currently a nothing more than a skeleton, and that it will probably be brought up to full division strength. As he spoke, his face got a big smile on it.

He also said that it even though the Northeast region of the US is very "fertile" for U.S. Marine recruiting, it had been pretty grim with all of the social experimentation that had been foisted on the Dept. of Defense. He did not want to go into too many specifics, but one subject he did expound on was recruiting women. He said that it was not all that difficult to find qualified female officers who were motivated, but that it was virtually impossible to find willing females for the enlisted ranks.

Semper Fi,  
John Wear

**2016 Army – Navy Game Tank**



(Continued on page 15)

JOKES

During one of the many conflicts, a ROK (Republic of Korea) commander whose unit was fighting along with the U.S. Marines, called legendary Marine general “Chesty” Puller to report a major Chinese attack in his sector.

“How many Chinese are attacking you?” asked Puller  
 “Many, many Chinese!” replied the excited South Korean officer.

General Puller asked for another count and got the same answer.

“Many, many, many Chinese!”

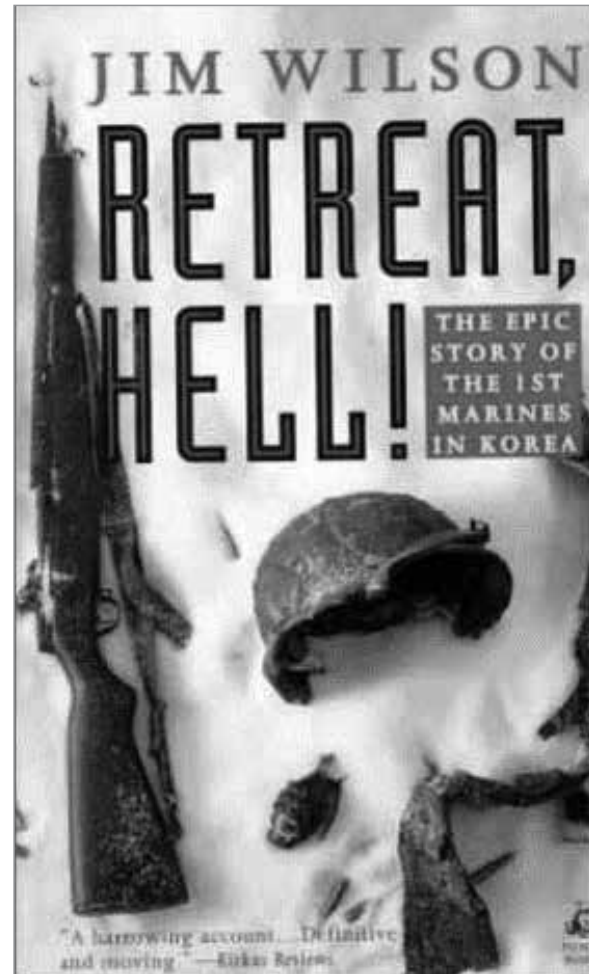
“#%\$@\*^\$@#!” swore General Puller, “Put my U.S. Marine liaison officer on the radio.

In a minute, an American voice came over the air: “Yes sir?”

“Lieutenant,” growled Chesty, exactly how many Chinese you got up there?”

“General, we got a whole ‘shitload’ of Chinese up here!”

“Thank God!” exclaimed Puller, “At least there’s someone up there who knows how to count!”



I thought that the above joke was a good transition into a review of the book, “Retreat Hell!” that is expertly written by Jim Wilson. And to me it is perhaps the most definitive and detailed history of the USMC during the Korean “conflict” that I have ever read.

**Retreat, Hell!: The Epic Story of the 1st Marines in Korea**  
*Chronicles the newly assembled 1st Marine Division’s mission to seize the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea, during which they fought treacherous mountains and seven well-armed Chinese regiments.*

To be honest, I probably would not have chosen to read it on my own ... but during the 2015 VTA reunion in Washington, DC, as one of the attendees handed me a copy, he highly recommended that I read it. I cannot recall who the good man was, but he was right. This is a spell-binding page-turner. I find that most history books that offer a myriad of personal perspectives and interviews of a subject (especially personal experiences in combat) seem to end up being the best. This tome is full of incidents and comments from the US Marines who experienced the brutal cold and massive onslaught of poorly-equipped, poorly-trained, but highly motivated Chinese army troops.

I learned why the Chinese soldiers seem to be so motivated. The author indicates that the poorly-clothed, starving and often-weaponless Chinese soldiers were promised that if they overran the American

positions, they could loot and steal all of the warm clothing, food and weapons that they could get their hands on. What a way to run a war!

If you chose to read this book, I also highly recommend that before you start reading it, you find a really good map of North Korea from the early 1950’s so that you can closely follow the action. The map helped me immensely.

John Wear

Letter Home

Dear Mom and Dad,

I’m back in battalion for a day now, after the operation we were on for the last two days. It didn’t turn out so good. We had five killed and thirteen wounded and one amtrac knocked out. We got about three miles from battalion in the bush and they hit us. We were on the amtracs and some were on tanks. You should of seen the people scatter when the rounds started flying. They mortared the one amtrac and blew it all to hell. We had choppers, jets, tanks, scout planes and artillery on our side and we still didn’t get one confirmed dead. Although we think we got a few. We’ve had around 30 casualties the month that I’ve been here. It’d better slow down soon. Lots of time I wonder why I am here. Why am I one of the guys whose risking his life every

minute and living like an animal, but I guess someone has to do it. You hear a lot of stuff on the news, Mom, but most of it’s not true. The Marines are taking a hard lick if they would let us do the job, but the VC have all the advantages and they know when to strike at us and how. Every time we get hit they scatter so fast we hardly ever see one of them, so how can we get any. The terrain is also on their side. Well enough about the war. How’s things at home going? I hear Connie’s about to have something. It’s hard to picture her with a baby of her own. I don’t know why but it does. I will write. I can’t think of anything else to say except I’ll be thinking of you all and Mom, write.

-Bern

**Second letter:** Going back into the field tomorrow and I won’t be able to write. We had an operation yesterday. Happy to say we got 7 VC and no (U.S.) casualties. We found four in a hole and got them alive. The platoon guide, my squad leader, a buddy and I went down to the river and found three more in a hole. We had to kill them to get them out. It was a confirmed NVA soldier, a VC and a woman. I managed to get some (North Vietnamese) money for a souvenir. We also got a watch and all kinds of papers. We had to turn it all in anyway. We had a company formation and we were thanked for a good job. It was the first



L/Cpl Bernard Himes

time the company never lost a man in that area. We were lucky cause as soon as we got there the rounds started flying. The Koreans that set up the blocking force were in position and they got 36 VC. I guess they didn’t lose many. The picture shows the platoon sergeant back center and a squad leader who is no longer here but on the right in the rear. Then our M-79 man is to the right of me. Hope everything is fine at home now. I wish I could come home after a while since they don’t sell Mother’s Day cards here...Happy Mother’s Day.

-Bern

**Himes’ sister Monica adds:** “Bern” joined the Marine Corps right after graduation from Punxsutawney (PA) High School in May of 1967. He was only 17 years old, too young to get into the Marines on his own. Bern wanted to be a Marine because he thought they were the toughest and the bravest. Signing papers for Bern to go to the Marine Corps was something I know my parents thought about often, but was seldom mentioned in our home. Bern’s basic Military specialty was 2141 tank repairman, but he did not go to Vietnam with a tank battalion. In

February of 1968, with the Tet Offensive, many Marines were sent to Vietnam as infantrymen even though their MOS was in other areas. There’s an old Marine saying, “Every Marine is a basic rifleman.” These men made up a unit that was very special. They were the men of the 3rd Bn, 27th Marine Regiment. President Johnson went to California to see these Marines off to Vietnam in February of 1968. Bern was killed in action May 17, 1968 in Southern Quang Nam Province, Vietnam. ■

# To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“Do you not know that a man is not dead while his name is still spoken?”

— Terry Pratchett, “Going Postal” —

## Francis W Tief

Francis W Tief, BGen USMC (ret), 87, of Seattle, WA, served as a tank platoon and company commander during the Korean War. His Silver Star citation reads: “...while directing the fire of his two leading tanks to cover the withdrawal of a company which was pinned down by a hostile barrage, 2nd Lt. Tief braved heavy enemy small-arms fire to dismount from his tank and go to the aid of some wounded Marines who could not be rescued by the infantry. Completing four separate trips, he carried the casualties one-by-one to the safety of his tank, thereby undoubtedly saving their lives.”

—From Leatherneck magazine

## Danny Ray Wilderman

(1949 – 2016)



**Jason Wilderman writes:** My father, Danny Wilderman, passed away October 27th, 2016. I believe he was a tank mechanic and a crewman. From what I gather he was a crewman for Lt. Morrison and was one of the first tanks to cross the Perfume

River during the battle of Hue, Tet '68. I believe his tank was A-51. Born Jan.3, 1949.

**Jason adds:** I would like to hear from anyone who knew him.

## Rea “Butch” L Fullmer

(1939 – 2016)



Former SSgt USMC (Age 76): Rae passed peacefully, at home, surrounded by loved ones, on the evening of August 21, 2016. He is survived by his daughter, Dawn Fullmer, three grandchildren, and great-granddaughter, all of Spokane; step-daughter Laurie Peterson, and her two daughters of Coeur d' Alene, ID; and brother Frank Fullmer Jr. of Spokane. Rae was a lover of the outdoors. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, and traveling amongst other things, but his first love was for his Marine Corps brotherhood. He enlisted with the United States Marine Corps in 1957 and served until 1977 as a Tech Sergeant, including three tours in Vietnam. He lived his life by the Marine Corps motto—Semper Fidelis- Always Faithful. Once a Marine, always a Marine. He was involved as a lifetime member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, Marine Corps League, VFW, and DAV to name a few. He was also a founder of the NW Guardian Riders, and Toys 4 Tots of Kootenai County.

## George F Kassick

January 5, 1947 – December 6, 2016

*George was born on January 5, 1947 and passed away on Tuesday, December 6, 2016. He was a resident of Mineral*

*Point, Pennsylvania at the time of his passing. He was married to Jane. He served as a tank crewman with Bravo Co, 3rd Tank BN in Vietnam.*

## George Kassick's wife sent to Terry Hunter this letter:

Terry,

I hate to have to write to let you know your brother Marine passed away on December 6th. He fell in February and little by little he lost the ability to walk and by October he could no longer walk on his own. I took care of him at home until the three weeks he was in the hospital in and out before he died.

“Kas” developed non-alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver. Doctors said that he came in contact with Hepatitis B sometime in his life, probably in Vietnam. It was a combination of Agent Orange, being a diabetic, and having neuropathy in his legs and feet. He had no feeling in his feet and half way up his legs. The last few months he was using a walker and wheelchair. We took him from doctor to doctor, even a specialist in Pittsburgh. They could only treat him with medicines because he wasn't a good candidate for a transplant mostly due to his other health problems. He never complained, always trying to cheer us up and make it easier for us, but he knew his life was short.

He had a terrific sense of humor. He never talked to anyone without joking around and leaving them with a smile.

Very few people could match his humor. He always got a laugh when your Christmas card came. He said, “Yeah, they called me Frog because I got those darn boils on my neck.” He talked about playing cards and the card tricks he learned (but he forgot how to do them). He also talked about goofing around with all of his buddies in the Marines.

We had just celebrated our 50th Wedding Anniversary on Nov. 5th. Our sons, Kenin, his wife and Scott, our granddaughter Kelsie, had a surprise party for us. We were so shocked that we both cried.

He was a better part of me and I miss him so. It's just unreal how things happened so fast. My sons are always here for me and their having a hard time too. Their dad was a worrying kind and always concerned about them. We are a very close family and his grandchildren were his pride and joy of his life.

Kas's military funeral was a really wonderful tribute to him. It made us so very proud; he always is our hero. He has many family and friends who hold great love for him so he will never ever be forgotten. I hope that you and your family are well and blessed in God's love.

As Kas would say: Semper Fi, Marine.—Jane Kassick ■

# What Members Are Doing

## Another Marine Tanker in the Family



My grandson Tristan Belmessieri graduated from MCRD San Diego in December 2016. This is a photo of a few of the brothers who attended the event. My Grandson's got the 1811 MOS that he requested. My son, Dominic actually shaved off his beard and got into his Dress Blues.

In the photo (from Left to Right): Our photographer Richard Cramer, Rick Lewis, my son, Dominic, my grandson Tristan, me and Mike Jiron. Mike and I were in the same Boot Camp Plt, and we stayed together right up until Bravo 5th Tanks was retired. I think he may soon be a new VTA member. Unfortunately Roger "Blues" Unland had to leave early so he is not in the photo.

## Gene Whitehead Remembers



It may be of interest to know that, 2nd Lt. Steele and I were in GITMO together in 1968. I was one of his Tank Commanders and I might add at the time probably not a very good one. 2nd Lt. Steele had on a few occasion a reason to chew me out intensely. But all is well that ends well. I believe this was his first Tank Plt. as a new Lt.

The photo caption reads: "31 July, 1987. MSgt. Whitehead – Congratulations and thanks again for everything that you've done for our shooting program. M.R. Steel, Lt. Col., USMC."

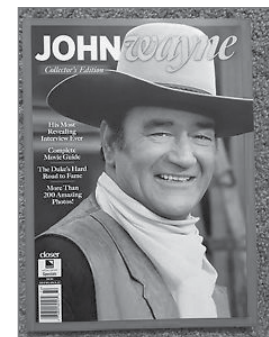
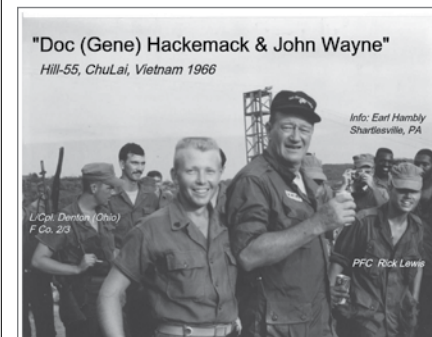
Gen. Steele replied after seeing the photo: "Amazing! Brought back great memories! Whitehead was the best and so were we. Semper Fidelis, Marty."

## Jim Coan Honored

This photo was taken at the new hospital in Sierra Vista where they have a "Wall of Honor" for twelve local veterans, which included me for 2016-17. I wore my Marine Corps League formal meeting uniform for the photo.



## USMC VTA Members are Even More Famous!



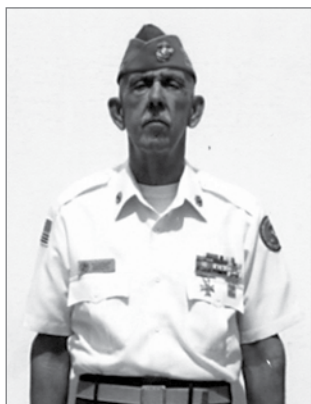
It's been reported that the now-famous photo of Doc Gene Hackemack (on the left of The Duke) and Rick Lewis (on the right) was recently featured in a Collector's Edition of the British magazine "Closer."

## Stan Olenjack Honored

Stanley Olenjack, 70, of Bradley, was elected in December 2016 to become the first veteran chairman for the Illinois veterans' advisory council with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs.

"We have a lot of veterans in this area that need help. The IDVA assists veterans in Illinois with different services they might need, whether it's education or burial assistance. We also provide seminars to educate veterans with the help they need," Olenjack said.

"For example, if someone was a medic in the service and they wanted to continue on to get their medical degree, we can assist them with that," Olenjack said.



Olenjack is a retired U.S. Marine, and also is a decorated Vietnam veteran.

Olenjack is an appointed officer with the Department of Illinois Marine Corps League as chairman of the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service, and he's a board member of the Kankakee County Veteran's Assistance Commission.

"Kankakee County has never had a veteran on the board, and we have a strong veterans presence in our area. I would like them all to know about my promotion with the IDVA. That way, they'll be able to reach out to me to help assist them," Olenjack said.

The advisory council studies issues affecting veterans, including homelessness and PTSD.

Membership on the advisory council is limited to four members of the Illinois General Assembly, veterans who are appointed by the director, and one each from the following offices: Department of Employment Security, Illinois National Guard, Secretary of State's Office and the Illinois Attorney General's Office.

Olenjack will serve on the advisory board for the next two years.

## Clyde is in the News Again

Clyde Hoch, a Vietnam Veteran, was doing research for a book he was writing based on veteran suicides. He felt alarmed and amazed at the amount of veteran suicides as he was gathering information for his book. He felt he wanted to do something about it.

He did volunteer work for the Lehigh County District Attorney's Office with a program called Veterans Mentor Program, where a veteran might have a small offense against them with the law and, through proper consideration, they are given a mentor to help them get their life back together.

Clyde thought it would be a good idea to help veterans before they got in trouble with the law, so he created Veterans Brotherhood. As the organization began to take shape, Clyde

approached Anna Rodriguez (Gold Star Mother) and asked if she would be interested in joining. She filed for a 501c3 in Jan 2016 and Veterans Brotherhood officially became a non-profit organization.

Since that time, we have helped Veterans with back taxes, car payments, rent, food, clothes and car repairs. We have taken 15+ Veterans off the streets which consisted of placing them in hotel rooms until they were evaluated and then found proper places for them to live. We have given gift cards to some veterans families that have come up short during holidays or to help with their children.

Following up with some of the people that we have helped, we were able to see how their lives have been changed and, in some cases, saved. Some have gotten jobs as well as enrolled in school.

Veterans Brotherhood also offers mentoring for veterans who need someone to talk to. Veteran to veteran is one of the best therapies for both individuals. Four individuals in Veterans Brotherhood are certified mentors through the Lehigh County District Attorney's office and one is a therapist for the VA.

Veterans Brotherhood is headquartered in Pennsburg, PA. We have monthly meetings that are held at the Lehigh Valley Active Life Center at 1633 Elm St. in Allentown, on the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 PM, and everyone is welcome, veteran or non-veteran. There are no dues. No one is paid. All donations go directly to veterans. We look forward to seeing you there.

The men and women at Veterans Brotherhood are the finest you could find. **No organization has done so much for our veterans with so little.** We are very proud of what we do and with the help from the public, as well as small businesses, you can be a part of something good. If you would like to help veterans, your kind donations may be sent to:

Veterans Brotherhood  
313-4th Street  
Pennsburg, PA 18073 ■

## Our Readers Write

(Continued from page 9)

### One of the VTA Scholarship Awardees Writes

Dear Mr. Coan,

Season's greetings! I hope you are doing well. I wanted to thank you for the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association scholarship. You have really helped me pursue my educational dreams, and I'm honored to be backed by such a prestigious organization throughout my collegiate years. I hope you have a wonderful holiday, and thank you so much again!

Sincerely,  
Emma Loving

\*\*\*Please note that in this issue of our magazine, there is an announcement telling anyone eligible and interested in applying for a scholarship where and how to apply.

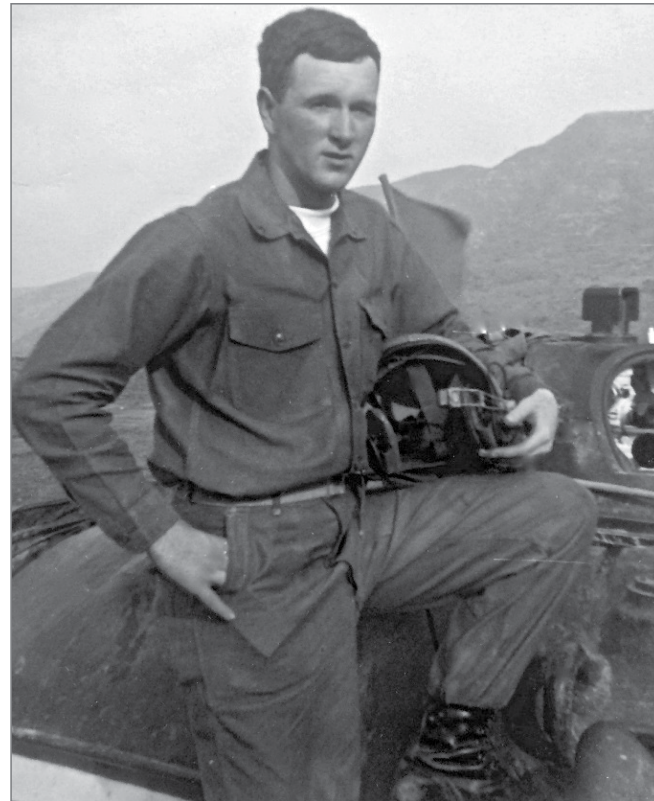
### Need Contact:

In the latest issue of the Sponson Box is an article on Page 28 by Capt. Allen Cohen. Is it possible to get contact info for him, or, if not, then give him my contact info.

CWO 5 Stan Price USMC/USMCR (ret)  
Cell: 432 386-0117 ... (leave message)  
Email: cwo5price@hotmail.com  
P.O. Box 127  
San Luis, CO 81152

**Allen Cohen writes:** I spoke with Stan today. We share some common ground and we vowed to meet up at the reunion in September. We both served in tank platoons at An Hoa in 1968 and 1969. He was with the float platoon under Lt. Kent Hughes. We knew many of the same Marines, but I could not remember ever having interacted while there. ■





Can you guess who this hard-charging Marine tanker is? When the photo taken? And where was it located?

The first person to contact John Wear at 215-794-9052 with the right three answers will have their name entered for a prize drawing to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.

## GUESS WHO Photo Contest

### Last Issue Winner

On April 14, 2016 at 7:25 PM, I got a telephone call from On October 11, 2016, at 8:21 PM, I got a telephone call from Dave Bennett of Jessup, GA, correctly identifying the photo in the last issue as Joe Tyson. Dave added, "Joe was a crewman on B-31 and Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks was at Marble Mountain, but I forget what year that was." Dave admitted that Joe used to calm him down when he would try to get in a fight with someone. He also admitted that Joe was and still is a good buddy.



### Disabilities List: Service-Connected Conditions

By Laura Martinez  
 March 7, 2016

You've probably wondered from time-to-time what kind of disability warrants compensation from Veterans Affairs (VA). Its probably crossed your mind if any of your service-related accidents, or injuries, could possibly qualify for VA compensation, especially if you have an ongoing ailment that requires medical attention. Injuries sustained during PT oftentimes get worse over time and require constant medical attention. For example, if you ever twisted an ankle during PT, and the minor injury caused you to end up on quarters for a few days, and the injury was documented in your service medical records, you could possibly qualify for VA compensation today. Especially, if the injury has resulted in an arthritic ankle.

If you have ever thought for a moment what kinds of injuries or military events could justify service-connected compensation today, we have a list of some of the disabilities that veterans have received compensation. The list is not complete, and is only a list that consists of events and disabilities as shared by the veteran (USVCP given permission by the veteran to list events and disabilities. Service-connected disabilities confirmed via VA documentation). See list below:

Veteran fell from service pole as he worked on repairing wires. The fall broke the veterans' ankles. Veteran fell 40 feet. Veteran reported to base psychologist because he thought he was going to die. Veteran has nightmares about falling; he can no longer climb poles and is afraid of heights (Acrophobia). Veteran is service-connected for osteoporosis in both ankles and PTSD.

Veteran suffers from flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and depression. Veteran reported that she was raped by her drill sergeant in basic training. Veteran is service-connected for MST.

Veteran is suffering from nightmares, anxiety, depression, and startle reflex from an incident that happened on his ship while in the Navy in Vietnam. The ship was attacked by Vietcong troops while he was asleep on board. Veteran hid under his bunk during attack. Several crew members were injured. Veteran reported that he believed he was going to die. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD and anxiety.

Veteran suffers from nightmares, fear of guns (hoplophobia), depression, and exaggerated startled reflex. Veteran's gun backfired while in M-16 training. The incident scared veteran badly. Veteran is service-connected for anxiety.

Veteran suffers from diarrhea, severe bloating, and abdominal discomfort. Veteran was struck with a bout of food poisoning while serving in Iraq. Veteran lost 25 pounds. and was hospitalized for two weeks with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) resulting from food poisoning. Veteran is service-connected for IBS.

Veteran suffers from nightmares, night sweats, startle response, anxiety, and depression. Veteran was on duty and was performing maintenance on his jeep when the jeep blew up. Veteran sustained second degree burns on his face, neck, and arms. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD, scars, and various skin conditions.

Veteran suffers from night mares, flashbacks, avoidance of ships, avoidance of engines, irritability, and trouble sleeping. Veteran was in the boiler room on his ship when the boiler room caught fire. Veteran was almost killed in the fire. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD, pleurisy, TBI, and scars.

Veteran suffers from nightmares, fear of heights (acrophobia), and emotional distress from things that remind veteran of the accident. Veteran fell from his dorm room window as he was cleaning outside the window. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD.

Veteran suffers from depression, fear of water, nightmares, anxiety, emotional distress, and avoids places that remind the veteran of his accident. Veteran almost drowned in installation swimming pool as he trained for PT. Veteran was caught in the pool drainage pipe and was unable to free himself from the drain. He was pulled out of pool unconscious. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD.

Veteran suffers from nightmares, flashbacks, exaggerated startled response, depression, anxiety, and trouble concentrating. Veteran was fueling up a base jeep and the vehicle blew up. Veteran reported that he was certain he was going to die. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD and TBI.

Veteran suffers from anxiety, depression, anger, fear of weather, and flashbacks. Veteran reported he almost died from a hurricane that hit his base. Veteran had to hide under his bed from the hurricane and was afraid to come out of his dorm room. Installation mental health team had to meet with veteran to get him out from under his bed. Veteran is service-connected for depression and anxiety.

### VA Compensation Rate for 2017

Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	\$133.57	\$133.57
20%	\$264.02	\$264.02
30%	\$408.97	\$456.97
40%	\$589.12	\$654.12
50%	\$838.64	\$919.64
60%	\$1,062.27	\$1,159.27
70%	\$1,338.71	\$1,451.71
80%	\$1,556.13	\$1,686.13
90%	\$1,748.71	\$1,894.71
100%	\$2,915.55	\$3,078.11

# SHORT TIMER!!!



*Editor's Comment: We all have a story or two about being a short timer. It could be a story about a buddy while you were together in-country or about your own return to the "World." Please consider jotting down your own short timer story and sending it to John Wear to share it with the membership!!!*

## Coming Home from War

By Lee Dill

Returning home – some Marines had a difficult time getting home going through LAX. Some may have been spit on or harassed by the scumbag anti-war hippies, but my own personal experience was thankfully unique and totally different.

### But first some background:

High school can be difficult for any teenager, especially way back in 1966. The girls seemed to mature faster than us guys and they seemed to be a lot smarter. There were cliques like The Jocks, The Cheerleaders, The "In Crowd," The Girl Jocks, and then there was a group that was hard to explain. The best I can do is say they were sophisticated. Somehow, while they were the same age, they just seemed to be older, wiser, and more mature than the rest of the class. These girls dated guys in college and the guys had nice cars. They all dressed very well, seemed to come from money and, best of all, they seemed to simply glide thru the hallways with never a hair out of place, never frazzled, and always reserved. They were friendly and popular, they

spoke to everyone, but they seemed to be above us. Such a girl was June Sturgeon. There were 3 words to describe June: "Cool, classy and sophisticated."

### Back to me:

My trip back to the World was on the USS Cleveland, a flat bottom US Navy LSD that rolled and pitched all the way across the Pacific. I was part of Nixon's 1969 troop draw down. There were 14 Marines on board, all tankers, and all had fully completed our tours; we were babysitting 10 amtracs that were being returned to Pendleton. We left Da Nang on November 24, right at the beginning of a big storm. Yep, high winds and heavy seas.

God, was I seasick! For four days nothing stayed inside me. At the

Thanksgiving dinner, I took one scoop of vanilla ice cream and not much later, I watched that one scoop go over the side. Then a sailor approached me; believe it or not he was a Navy Lifer, and he handed me an orange. The sailor told me to eat the orange and the seasickness would go away. At that point I was desperate and would do anything to end this horrible gagging and retching. I ate it. It tasted great and suddenly I had "sea legs."

We sailed from Da Nang to Okinawa then on to Yokosuka, Japan. We had liberty for the four days while the ship was docked in Japan. Then, we embarked on the long ride across the Pacific to Pendleton. One reason that the trip seemed to take so long was that we had no duties while on board

the ship. We slept, we ate, and we just hung out. At night, a few of the Marines went thru their "stash" on the fantail. Seated in a circle, we talked as one of us acted as lookout so as not to be caught smoking the weed. I was usually the guard with my back to the fantail and my eyes searching the flight deck. After all the hours on perimeter guard in Vietnam, being on "guard duty" was a normal evening event. I never was a user ... but I hung around the users enough that I became a "second hand" user.

When the ship docked in San Diego, they bused us to Camp Pendleton and hustled us through processing so we could get home for Christmas. So there I was in Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), on December 23, waiting in line for a ticket. If I recall, 1969 was still the era of federally regulated air travel. Marines in uniform flew for ½ fare. I think that students

could also get ½ fare, but only after all the uniforms were taken care of.

Like any normal Marine, I was checking out every "round eye" chick in the place. I looked at the students and I said to myself..."Oh my God! There's June Sturgeon! But wait! June Sturgeon wouldn't be in LAX getting on a plane for Baltimore. Would she?" So, lacking no self-confidence whatsoever I walked over to her and said, "Hello." To my utter amazement, it was June. She remembered me (which is even more amazing!). We talked for a few minutes. It turns out that at the time she was studying at one of the LA movie studios and she was going home for Christmas.

I got my ticket and boarded while June was still in line. It turned out that she was one of the last to board the plane.

When she arrived, she told the flight attendant that I was just returning

from Vietnam and that she knew me from high school. The flight attendant sat June right down next to me. Score one for The Corps!!!

So all the way home on the "red eye" flight we talked and had a great time – no, not that kind of "great time." June was nice and no more than nice. But we did get free gin and tonics all the way home to Baltimore. By the time we landed we were both pretty ripped. Her parents met her at the airport to take her home. As she and I walked off the plane hand-in-hand, holding each other vertical, a look of panic came into their eyes. What had their daughter done in California?!!!

June introduced me to her parents as "a friend from high school." Both of her parents gave me a big smile of relief and off we drove to my parents' house. I never saw June again. But I never forgot her, did I? ■

## 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 desired position in writing. Elections will be held during the business meeting of the reunion in St Louis. 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: SgtMaj William "JJ" Carroll, USMC (ret), 2725 Saddle Court (Unit 4), Stillwater, MN 55082-4583, post marked no later than July 31, 2017. If you have a question, you may call SgtMaj Carroll for details at (651) 342-0913 (CST). No nominations will be accepted from the floor during the annual meeting in St Louis.

## Charlie Company, 2d Tank Bn. is Being Deactivated

BY: JIM COAN

From the fall of 1968 until 1970, I was the company commander of Charlie Company, 2d Tank Bn. Lt. Col. Saul was the Bn. CO and Gunnery Sgt. Keith was my company gunny. Note that then 1st Lt. Martin Steele (later Lt. Gen. Steele) was the CO of Alpha Company. Charlie Company had the M-103A2 tanks and was the only heavy tank company on the east coast. I thought I would share some history of Charlie Company that was obtained from a recent MCTA newsletter.

In December, 1941, Company C, 2d Tank Battalion, 2d Marine Division, was first established by the U.S. Marine Corps, which was commencing mobilization in anticipation of World War II. Originally outfitted with the M3A1 "Stuart" light tanks, the company deployed to Iceland. When the Marine Corps shifted its focus to the Pacific front, the company first saw combat in 1942 during the Guadalcanal campaign. Company C was upgraded to the M4A2 "Sherman" tanks in 1943 for further Pacific campaigns such as Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, and Okinawa. After the war ended, the company went with the remainder of the 2nd Marine Division to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. During the 1960's, platoons from Charlie Company were deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to assist with the base defenses. In the early seventies, the M-103A2 heavy tanks were "riffed" out of the Marine Corps inventory and replaced with the M-60.

After the war in Vietnam ended in 1975, 2d Tank Bn. participated in

NATO security operations in Europe. In 1978, Company C deployed to West Germany in support of NATO exercise Bold Guard. In 1989, the company deployed to Camp Fuji, Japan, in support of the Unit Deployment Program. Two years later, Company C was again called upon after Saddam's forces invaded Kuwait, participating in support of Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield.

In 1998, the company deployed to Nova Scotia, Canada; then, in 2000 they deployed again to Greece for allied training exercises. After 9/11, one platoon from Company C was deployed to Pakistan in support of Operations Swift Freedom and Enduring Freedom. In 2003-04, Company C returned to Kuwait in preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom. They played a pivotal role in destroying the vaunted Iraqi tank forces they faced on the road to victory. The company also participated in the "Battle of Fallujah." They deployed to Iraq once again in 2006 in support of OIF. In 2011, Company C was attached to the 2d Engineer Bn. and deployed to Afghanistan in support of OEF.

In October, 2015, the 1st Platoon, Company C, was sent to Bulgaria, which was an historic event for the U.S. Marine Corps. That deployment was the first time a Marine armor unit deployed to an Eastern Bloc country since the end of the Cold War. This was a fitting end for one of 2d Tank Battalion's most decorated and revered companies, now facing deactivation at Camp Lejeune.

### Bobby Rydell

BY FRED GOGER

Sometime in '66, Bobby Rydell came to Hill 34 with a USO Show.

He sang some of his hit songs and told some dirty jokes for a bunch of us at 3rd Anti-Tanks next door. Along with him came twin 20 year old girls from Elizabeth, N.J. (which by the way was my birthplace). Might I add that these two girls were both 11's ... (out of a possible 10) and they were dressed "to excite." They danced and sang with Rydell, getting howls from the audience every time they kicked high enough to show us some thigh.

Afterwards my buddy wanted to get some coffee from the mess tent so he gave me his M-14 and he took my .45 with shoulder holster. The SOP at the time was that we had to have a weapon and ammo wherever we went. I also had my own M-14 with me so I slung both 14s, and when I got close to the girls, I told them I was from Elizabeth and this got their attention for a while and I was lucky enough to be able to have a short conversation with them.

All the time that I am near them I'm smelling this beauty near me; she's staring at me and suddenly asked "Why do you have two rifles?"

Me being a quick thinker said-"I'M TWICE AS SCARED."

### My Secret

BY DAVID MCKEE

I am writing this letter and sending you some pictures that I have from my time in Vietnam. I was assigned to 1st Platoon, A Company, 3rd Tanks. I arrived at Con Thien on May 6, 1969. As my last name started with Mc, I was told that my name would be "Mac." I was assigned to Alpha-12. Sgt Virgil Melton was my first tank commander and Bob Niemen was the gunner; later he was my TC. I had a secret that only Bob and my skipper (Capt Mike Wunch) knew. I was only 16 years old. My story of how I got there is not

very different from any child who was abused and beaten by a step-father who was also molesting my sister.

When I was 14, I wrapped a chair over my stepfather's back and ran for my life. I lived on the streets until I was 15-1/2, lying on my enlistment form. I got my buddy, Jerome Simmons, to sign my paperwork. Jerome was my bring-along-friend-to-the-Marines and you-both-get-fucked-over program. It is also called the "Buddy System."

I had told my mother that I was stationed in San Francisco with a Maine detachment on Ellis (Treasure?) Island, thus the APO San Francisco address. All was going well until early July 1969 when I guess that she figured out that "Free" on the envelopes that I was sending to her was not right. The next thing that I knew, I was in front of the skipper, Capt Wunch, as he advised me that he had received notification from my mother via the Red Cross.

"Yes, Sir," I replied.

His next question nearly scared me to death. "How old are you, Private?"

Knowing the cat was out of the bag, I replied, "Sixteen, Sir."

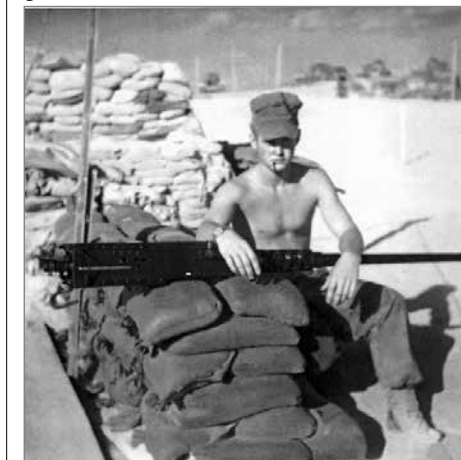
The Skipper said, "What are you doing in my Marine Corps?" And then came the worst part, "I am going to send you home where you can be courts marshalled and thrown out of my beloved Marine Corps."

Disregarding military protocol, I asked the Skipper to please hear my story. And so he sat me down and we spoke to each other man-to-man... or man-to-boy. We spoke together for almost an hour. When he had heard all that I had to say, he stood up and said something that guided me in every endeavor I have ever undertaken for the rest of my life. "Well, you have proven to me you are willing to take on a man's job, but can you be a man? I will let you stay but you better believe I will be watching you. So, step up Marine and be a man."

I don't know what he told the Red Cross but I did write to my mother and tell her not to contact them again.

I also told her that I would send her as much money as I could. I decided to keep \$35 of my monthly pay and the rest went to her. I was not aware of her ever contacting the Red Cross again.

When I returned to "Charlie-2", Bob wanted to know what was going on. We went outside of the bunker and I told him my secret. He punched me right in the mouth. After we spoke for a while, he agreed that we would keep the secret. It really did not change things but I know that for the next couple of weeks he rode me pretty hard. I am sure that he was trying to see if he could break me down so I would quit. I did not quit and I have to say that I became an exceptional tank gunner. Although I know that "Turtle" would disagree, since he thinks his gunner was the best.



On July 22, 1969, Captain Wunch was KIA. I cannot tell you how that affected me. He was the only person to ever treat me like a man and a fellow Marine. Not that the members of 1st Platoon didn't. We were a tight platoon but they did not know my secret.

After I left the Marine Corps, I branch transferred to the U.S. Army MP Corps and served 8 years with tours in Okinawa and Ft. Benning, Georgia, serving as a Traffic Accident Investigator and later as a Law Enforcement Officer in Wyoming. I concluded my working career in 1992 as the Acting Chief of Police in Hanna, Wyoming, after I had been severely wounded in a domestic situation.

Every day of my life I owe to the

Skipper, and every day I try to honor his memory by acting like a man.

In the photo: Dave at the "C-2" artillery base, in early June, 1969

## Remembering Drown Proofing

BY DOUG SCRIVNER

I got transferred while I was in-country Vietnam and ended up with 2nd Plt Bravo Co., 1st Tank Bn., attached to Fox Company BLT 2/7. We were the 1st Mar Div. "rapid reaction" Battalion Landing Team. We were on board the USS Thomaston, LSD-28. And then around November 1968, we changed over to the USS Monticello. The problem with my memory going back forty-eight years is trying to remember which one of these ships ran into the USS Tripoli LPH-10

When we came back on board after being in the bush, we always slept on the flight deck (helicopter pad) because our sleeping compartment that was below decks was too close to the boiler/engine room and it was always too hot to stay indoors. Outside, it was nice to feel the ocean breeze and look at the stars, thinking about home and more. The only time we slept inside was during bad weather.

At night the ships went out off shore 2-4 miles and did figure eights all night. I now know that figure 16's might have worked better. Thinking about the horribly cold monsoons and the time frame of them, I'm thinking it was probably the USS Thomaston that played "dodge 'ems" with the USS Tripoli.

It was sometime in the middle of the night there was a stiff shudder and, as it turns out, whoever was driving the boat drove into the side of the Tripoli. For those who have never had sea duty, on U.S. Navy ships the sailors communicated by blowing those damn whistles, which we had no idea what they meant ... except the one that signaled mess hall open. When we experienced that huge stiff shudder, whistles began to blow over loud speakers, >>

and horns (claxons) blew loudly. When we woke up, I noticed that I couldn't see the sky or stars. All I saw was pitch black, except for some red lights that we couldn't figure out where they came from.

It didn't take long for the sailors to tell us that the blackness was actually the side of another ship that we were looking at.

I thought, "Hell, these guys are crazy, there ain't no gook ships out here!"

They then told us to get our life jackets on.

Yeah right! A Marine sleeping with a life jacket!

The life jackets were stored a couple of levels down in our compartment which is a long way down and back, especially when you think you're gonna' drown! I think that my "drown proofing" class in boot camp flashed through my mind once or twice.

According to the sailors, the crash tore a hole in the bow of our ship and ripped up a couple of guns mounts on the carrier.

Early the next morning a chopper came in, picked up a ship's officer and flew away. The sailors said, "We'll never see him again, he was on duty last night."

Well, it turned out not too bad. We had to go to Subic Bay for repairs. We were there for about 8-10 days. We got liberty three days, the rest of the time we had to bore sight the tanks, PM the tanks, anything that didn't allow us more time in town. When we ran into the sailors out in town, we found out they were being called "McHale's Navy."

My Dad was an old sailor, lived through the battle of Leyte Gulf, WWII. A few years back he and I were talking about strange military occurrences. His answer was, "Maybe the sailors hadn't had liberty for a while and maybe the collision was intentional."

I laughed. He said he wasn't joking.

A couple of years back, I sent e-mails to both of these fine vessels. I mentioned this particular night, but never

got a response from anyone from the Thomaston or the Monticello websites.

I know it happened. I'm sure it happened. The Marines survived it, but it must have caused memory problems for the sailors.

## Here are a couple (3) stories for the Sponson Box.

BY RANDY CONRAD

While at Camp Matthews rifle range, we ran three miles after evening chow just like every other Marine had to do. Towards the end of our run one evening, we were nearing our platoon area and anticipating the D.I. calling "quick-time." But he didn't, and we ended up running another three miles. This time as we neared our area, the DI called "quick-time." But now WE were pissed at him. I was a squad leader and directly behind the platoon guide, so I quietly told the guys to keep running. Now about 15 of us kept going and gradually running faster and faster. The D.I. was a heavy smoker and after 6 miles he was really hurting. He kept yelling "quick-time," we continued to NOT hear him. The platoon began falling apart, the rear half of the platoon not knowing what to do. The D.I. really had to RUN to get in front of us and screamed "QUICK-TIME!" Finally, we came to a very sloppy halt, and walked back to join up with the rest of the platoon. Screwing with the D.I. like we did REALLY made my day.

For a little while after boot camp, I was driving a flame tank and took part in "Operation Silver Lance" (at Camp Pendleton). We were on night maneuvers driving through an area of trees and tall brush with only the "cat eyes" headlights lit up. I was the lead vehicle and began getting a bad feeling. I asked my TC to let me turn on my headlights. He said, "No." Again I asked him and reminded him there were troops out here somewhere, and he again said, "NO." I silently called him several names and referenced his mother and his lineage several times,

and I reached over and turned the headlights on. And I IMMEDIATELY stomped on the brakes. No more than 10 or 15 feet in front of us were two grunts trapped in their sleeping bags with stuck zippers, trying to hop away. Afterwards, my TC didn't have anything to say about me disregarding his order about "Lights Out."

My platoon, 2nd Plt, A Co., arrived at Phu Bai on 22 Dec. '65, and set up camp just to the north of the air strip. At some time, I can't remember just when, Sgt. Tews joined up with us. (I think that he replaced S/Sgt. Rowe). One night Sgts. Tews and Siva went across the air strip to the "house" to get some "black-market" booze. They loaded up with as much as they could carry, and began heading back towards camp. They started across the air strip and Tews began falling behind. Siva told Tews to hurry up, that a plane was coming in for a landing. Tews said he couldn't move because he was about to drop some of the bottles. Sgt. Siva ran to the north edge of the strip, dropped his load of bottles in the sand, ran back across the strip, picked up Tews AND his bottles, and raced back to the edge of the strip just before the plane landed. Mission accomplished!!!

## War Movies

BY JOHN WEAR

During the Vietnam War, Marine tank crewmen were often unfortunate to have our tanks run over enemy mines (and/or unexploded American ordinance) which would disable our vehicles and often cause us to have to be towed back to our tank battalion maintenance facility for several days of back-breaking repair work.

The Third Tank Battalion maintenance ramp was located in the sprawling Dong Ha Combat Base. In April of 1968, after hitting "our own" mine, and while we were busting heavies making the necessary repairs, it was three hot chow meals a day at the 9th Motor Transpiration mess hall located on the hill above the tank park. It was also many cold

beers at the FLSG-B ("floozy") EM Club at night. We also had a choice of evening movies at either the "floozy" flicks or we could go up the hill at the "Doggie" Duster compound (U.S. Army twin 40-mm cannons mounted on a tracked vehicle body). Either of the outdoor theaters had a large outdoor screen and a bunch of telephone poles lined up for us to sit on. We usually brought a few cold ones from the EM Club with us and hoped that the VC or NVA didn't send us any incoming (arty or rockets) while we are watching the show. When there was incoming, everyone simply got up and headed for the deep slit trenches on either side of the outdoor theatre. It was a "hole-to-elbow" time with men falling on top of one another in the trenches. It was pretty darn uncomfortable, but it was safe.

One particular evening, while we are watching John Wayne in the Vietnam War classic movie, "The Green Berets," there was a loud airplane engine noise above our heads. The movie stops and all of a sudden a C-47 "Puff-The Magic Dragon" gunship begins its deadly Gatling gun barrage out the side of the plane, shooting at something not too far away from us just outside the Dong Ha perimeter wire. What a sight! The red tracers pour out in an endless stream. We had never seen Puff work out before and we learned later that there were one red tracer round for every five bullets shot so to see an endless stream of red means that something like 30,000 rounds per minute fired from the four mini-guns wreaking havoc on the enemy below. I had heard that there is nothing larger than a match head left of the area after this air borne attack is completed.

What a way to watch a war movie!

## Panzer III

SUBMITTED BY JOHN HUNTER

Mount up! Five men climb through the round entry hatch atop the thick steel turret, and thread their bodies into their assigned places. Driver, radio operator, and commander cannot

see each other's faces, but all are connected to the tank's radio receiver, and the gunner manning the high-velocity 50mm gun and his loader can also talk by intercom. The outside world is visible only through slits in the armour, narrow enough to keep out bullets. There's the stench of raw fuel and gun oil and sweat. The heat is stifling when the turret hatch is bolted down, the metal already baking in the African sun, and the temperature climbs impossibly as the heat from the engine and the guns is added. The men wear black and work in shirtsleeves.

Their machine is a citadel unto itself, with 2 1/2 inches of armour plate in front, a gun by Krupp's of Essen that can throw a high-explosive or armour-piercing shot a mile or more, and two machine guns that can scythe away the enemy's naked opposing infantry. But God help the five men if their machine should founder—trapped in a treacherous slough of sand or its track blown off by a mine on shell. They are inside a mechanized bomb, with hundreds of gallons of gasoline stowed behind them, 100 shells in the racks beside them, and 3,750 machine-gun bullets in belts, all waiting to erupt and engulf them if one enemy projectile should explode inside this space. Only in the front is the armour thick; to either side and in their rear it is only half as strong, and on top and below is even thinner.

The tank jolts and bucks as it surges across the battlefield. Its tracks churn up dense and choking plumes of sand. The noise inside is deafening. The 320 horse power Mayback engine roars and races as the driver shifts up and down through the manual gears. The hot spent shell cases clatter around the metal deck. The tank stops, the gun barks, and then again, continuing until the gunner's voice cries that the enemy is destroyed or the target is lost. Here in the open desert the rules are the same for both sides. Every tank commander instinctively dreads the sight of enemy tanks appearing on his flank. He and his opponent both try to come

up behind low rises, "hull down," so that they can open fire while exposing nothing of the bulk. Both know the penalty of error—entombment in a blazing tank, with hatch jammed and flames licking toward the ammunition racks.

A tank crew thirsts for battle but is immensely relieved when delivered from the inferno. Then they can lever themselves up into the open air, emerging from their oven into the relative cool of the desert heat; they can stretch out in the tank's shadow and brew coffee. They are an elite, men of high esprit, like submarine men—their comradeship forged by shared hazards and the shared intoxication of manning intricate, almost invincible machines.

From the biography of Erwin Rommel, "The Trail of The Fox," by David Irving

## The Slingshot War in Ban Me Thuot

BY BRUCE KIRDAHY

US Army 69th Armor Regiment ... (and a good buddy of John Wear)

Back in 1968 somewhere near the end of February or in the early part of March, much of B Company 1/69 Armor was assigned the area around Ban Me Thuot. Our night defensive position was the local airfield. At various times the unit would send a few tanks down to the end of the airstrip to provide guard for the small contingency of Green Berets who had a few choppers based there. We also secured the ammo dump behind the encampment. During the day, the "brass hats" would split up the tank sections and have us do various chores. The one duty I remember most was providing road security around the large rubber plantations.

I was with the 3rd Platoon (and like the USMC, each platoon had five tanks and often operated individually as a heavy section of three tanks, or a light section of two tanks) and our day assignment was to sit guard >>

on Highway 14 leading into Ban Me Thuot. The highway traversed alongside the rubber plantations. The plantations belonged to different French nationals. We would position our tanks on opposite sides of the road some 50 to 100 yards apart facing in opposite directions. Most of the time we were operating as a light section. As you all know, sitting on the side of the road day after day can get pretty boring. Some of the guys would lay in the Bustle Rack reading or taking cat naps. Others would make slits in the rubber trees to get the sap to try to make a ball.

We had lots of local people stop and try to hawk their goods: beer, whiskey, haircuts, T-shirts, all sorts of stuff including “boom-boom.” The thing I remember most, however, was the kids selling slingshots. A few of us bought the home-made contraptions.

What then transpired was that some of us that bought the slingshots promptly engaged the other tank crew across the road in simple slingshot warfare. This simple fun soon escalated a bit and when the pebbles that we used for ammunition became scarce, the guys broke open a few 90 mm canister rounds to be used for ammo. For those who did not serve in tanks, canister rounds were huge shotgun shells that contained approximately 1,750 cylindrical metal pellets the size of .38-caliber pistol rounds.

Now, not everyone was involved or wanted to be in this form of combat. Inevitably non-participants were hit and thus became involved. Anger seemed to get the best of those “innocent” folks and they retaliated with the utmost of enthusiasm. Consider if you will, how can one best an adversary? Hit him where it hurts, right? Well that was exactly what was done. The angered “innocent non-participants” armed themselves with their .45 pistols and attacked our tank and shot the hell out of our red and white Coleman cooler that was strapped securely on the side of our turret. That offense in turn prompted an attack on their

tank’s cooler with a .45 grease gun. The end result was a few shot up coolers and no place to get replacements.

Now being the good soul that I am, later when we were in base camp for fuel and resupply, I volunteered for KP duty. I was able to sneak out a few marmite cans (insulated rectangular cans used to transport hot or cold food), which we used for new coolers. So, in the end, everyone was happy.

## Mongoose!

BY GREG KELLEY

It was early '67. I had come up as part of the “advanced party” charged with the initial move of 3rd Tanks up from Hill 34 to just west of Hue. Hank Brightwell was a part of the same “party.” We were “new guys”, a part of H&S. I had been in country for only several weeks, and had yet to be ordered up to Alpha Company. Our job was to prepare the area for the rest of the battalion, and that meant filling sand-bags, setting up tents, rolling out concertina wire, setting up claymores and other wonderful and various tasks as ordered. We also had to occasionally play grunt which meant running patrols during the day, and lying out as LP/OP positions at night.

One moonless, and therefore pitch black night (remember those?), I was hunkered down in a shallow swale as part of an LP a click or so out from the half-built compound when I heard a rustling which seemed to be coming from just a few feet from me. My heart was pounding so hard I thought I would give away my position. Whoever was out there was not part of our team. My right index finger was pressed against the trigger-guard of my M14 as I lifted my head as slowly as I possibly could. Adrenaline was pumping and I was on “full alert”. Should I look up? Now was the time, damn it! I rose up slowly and when I forced my eyes clear of the slight embankment, terror froze me for a split second as another pair of eyes pierced into my own from only a foot away!

“Damn!” I thought, as the ani-

mal slowly slunk away into the night blackness, “a mongoose!” The release of adrenaline I felt as that mongoose slipped away would be experienced again and again over the next ten months at the culmination of various firefights and incoming artillery. But, this is the only experience I can look back on and grin at the memory.

## Stories from Jim Cowman

### THE MINE PUTTER INNER

When a grunt company of 2/5 was maneuver company, one of their assigned missions might include security of the road which ran from An Hoa to the Liberty Bridge. The enemy also liked this section of the road and seemed to delight in placing mines in it to hinder the rough rider convoys. Hotel Company was assigned this mission many times. The following incident occurred in late July of 1966:

Hotel Company had been providing security for the road for several days and nights. About midnight or so, ambushes, listening posts and patrols started to report all sorts of movement and activity in the area. Lots of rounds were fired and something was going on. We went on 100% alert. Just when things seemed to be quieting down, a tremendous explosion shook the area. Initial reports indicated none of the Marines were involved or hurt. We decided to wait until just light to investigate.

A huge hole had been blown in the road. A search of the area turned up a piece of rib cage that the corpsman determined to have belonged to the enemy. Apparently the head “mine putter inner,” who had no doubt been trained up north and had ventured all the way down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, had screwed up when putting in the mine or bobby trap. Our EOD personnel later determined that the explosion had indeed been an American bomb of some sort.

It was several weeks before another trained head “mine putter inner” was assigned to our area to implant the big stuff. Normal booby traps remained

as constant as before. The Marines of Hotel Company chuckled over this event. Most of us could just picture some bespectacled buck-toothed enemy, squatting in the dark over a huge American bomb wondering which wire went where. He obviously connected the wrong wires.

### THE CATTLE KILLING CAPER

In early June of 1967, orders took me from 1st Tank Bn to the 5th Marines in An Hoa. Flying by helicopter (H-34) to Hotel Company’s position on about 3 or 4 June was quite an experience, and the flight is the subject of another sea story.

About the 10th of June, Hotel Company was to return to An Hoa, completing their part in Operation Union II when this operation secured around the same time. The 5th Marines received a PUC for Union I and Union II. The next operation was Op Arizona and it started almost at once.

Before returning to An Hoa, the forty-odd head of cattle that had been discovered by Hotel Company posed a minor problem. What was to be done with them? Several plans were formulated, attempted and discarded. All Hotel Marines with ranching experience were gathered. They felt sure that they could “round up” and “drive” the cattle into friendly areas. No so. The oriental cattle would not cooperate.

Battalion then formulated a plan to sedate the cattle and fly them in with choppers. The helicopter people not only said, “No!” but they said, “Hell No!” It seems as if this had been tried before and the sedated cows had become un-sedated too soon and commenced to kick the hell out of the choppers. The air crews wanted no more part of that. I am sure they said that they had better things to do. The next plan was to send out amtracs to pick up the cattle. It was a brilliant concept that died almost as quickly as it was conceived.

Hotel Company was leaving, so the word came down to kill the cattle.

Most of the cattle were located where they were found...in a free fire zone. And most of the cattle were tethered in place in the valley below Hotel’s position. A gun team set up its M-60 and commenced to eliminate the cattle. As I recall, M-79’s and LAWS expended a few rounds into the cattle area as well. Then came the crowning blow. A Forward Air Controller (FAC) was in the area. He circled the cattle in his military version of a Piper Cub aircraft. He fired on the cattle with what I thought was a “grease gun” out the window of his aircraft.

More was coming!

An F-4 Phantom jet appeared on the scene and had several unexpended “snake eye” bombs on board. They were dropped on the cattle! I am not sure what size the snake eye bombs were, but they put an end to most of the movement in the cattle area.

When Hotel Company walked out of there the next day, our route took us near the cattle. Some were still alive! These survivors were dispatched with M-16’s and .45’s.

## Graves Registration

BY: RICHARD (DICK) LORANCE

At the beginning of the Tet Offensive, I was the 2141(Tracked Vehicle Repairman) for Charlie Co, 1st Tanks at Hoi An, which was located about 15-20 miles south of Da Nang. All of our tanks were in the field supporting the 7th Marines and the ROK Marines as most of our position had become surrounded by NVA. I was called on the radio by our company commander, “Charlie 6,” and was ordered to be on the next incoming chopper to accompany three body bags to the morgue in Da Nang. The bodies were three of our tank commanders who had been KIA. Two were officers, and our skipper wanted to be assured that all three were properly cared for.

When the chopper landed on the tarmac in Da Nang, as I recall, it was totally dark (around 2200 hours). A triage had been set up on the runway

complete with emergency lighting. Nurses, doctors, corpsmen and others were going between the hundreds of stretchers lined up in rows. This was like the movie, “MASH,” only this was real!

I was provided transportation to the morgue along with my three dead Marines. After leaving them at the reception area and completing all necessary paperwork, I was told to find the Transit Barracks and grab a rack for the night. I was also told that there would be no ride back until daylight.

Walking in the direction of the Transit Barracks, I passed a Navy officer who immediately chewed out my butt for not saluting him, as well as for my somewhat filthy appearance. I replied to his tirade that where I had just come from, you don’t salute officers and that if he didn’t know it, there was a war going on all around us. He ordered me to check my rifle in to at the armory, because they apparently aren’t allowed there. Good luck with that, Sir.

Resuming my search for a bunk, I continued walking when I heard music coming from a building that had a sign above the door that read “Sand Bar.” I entered with the intention of having a cold one but instead I was told that after 1800, civvies were >> required! Rats! My civvies were stateside so no brews for me tonight!

Eventually I encountered a guy dressed in mess whites who was on his way to unlock the mess hall. “Are you hungry, Marine? I’ll make you some steak and eggs, if you want.”

Of course I want!

After eating the best meal that I ever had in the Nam, I finally arrived at the Transit Barracks where I crashed, fully dressed on an empty bunk

Later in the next day, I was able to beg a chopper ride back to Hoi An and to my unit. Leave me out in the field where I belong! ■

# "FRIENDLY COBRA, FRIENDLY COBRA, THIS IS BRAVO-ONE, OVER"

BY 1ST LT RICHARD PEKSENS (1ST TANK BATTALION)



Dicky P trying to sell a broken refrigerator to an unsuspecting grunt

In Vietnam, "friendly fire" was a significant occupational hazard. In 1968, while with my Charlie-Three tanks on a patrol with 2/1 in "The Riviera," we came under direct assault from 11th Marines H&I fire when about 10 anti-personnel rounds exploding just above our heads resulting in a number of grunts who were too slow to find the cover of our tanks, got wounded. Earlier, while setting up outside the 11th Marines perimeter, my gunner had fired a volley of .30-caliber machinegun bullets between my knees as I mounted the slope plate to converse with the TC. Moments before, my face had been in front of the barrel! The misfire occurred while loading the weapon from our defensive position the night before. On another ill-fated day, while on patrol with the Koreans, we were fired upon by a U.S. Marine patrol who mistook us for NVA...with tanks?

Friendly fire also took a toll on the non-combatants, including children, grandparents and water buffalo. I was responsible for more than one SIR's (Serious Incident Report) while serving as both a platoon leader and XO.



2nd Platoon & Company, 1st Tank Battalion  
An Hoa, May 1969  
Standing L to R: SSgt Kneff, Lt. Knight, SSgt Moor, Unk, Unk Unk,  
Silvester, Unk, Unk, Unk  
Kneeling L to R: Unk, Unk, Unk, Panzarellie (sp), Sgt Hauge

In early 1969, I travelled south from Hill 55 along Liberty Road to join the two platoons of Bravo Company, 1st Tanks who were then ensconced within the SE perimeter of the 5th Marines combat base at An Hoa. The site, on flat terrain, had been established as a French outpost 25 bumpy miles SW of Danang with the intention of extracting coal, iron ore and clay from the rock-solid red earth. In 1962, President Diem decided that An Hoa would be an ideal location for an industrial complex devoted to fertilizer manufacturing, water purification and hydro-electric power. In 1964, the VC blew up the railway bridge at Phu Lac (6) which would later be rebuilt by U.S. Marine engineers and called "Liberty Bridge."

The infamous bridge provided access to Liberty Road, An Hoa, Go Noi Island and Dodge City. In 1966, the 12th Marines installed artillery at An Hoa to support the 3rd MAR-DIV operations when the Marines moved north from Chu Lai. Later, the 5th Marines would move south after TET '68 to occupy the territory under the watchful eyes of NVA guns high in the triple canopy of Charlie Ridge. It was not Con Thien or Khe Sahn, but we received a "daily dose" of incoming 122 mm rockets and enemy artillery in retaliation for the daily B-52 Arclight strikes along the Que Son ridges to our west. One of the best spots on base was an abandoned conveyor belt mining tower which could be mounted by means of a rusting ladder to the 1-man observation booth 40 feet

above the sweltering clay. Our tents were located near An Hoa's artillery which included guns as large as 175 mm.

In our exposed location, enemy rounds designated to impact amongst the artillery would often drop "short" into our



platoon area. These surprise "visitors" killed and maimed many of our tankers. Later in my tour, the 5th Marines would move us to a safer location on the SW berm where artillery strikes were much rarer ... other than the direct hit we took on our comm. bunker nicknamed "Fort Apache." The ground was extremely hard and couldn't be excavated with simple shovels and sweat. On the SE corner of An Hoa, we had bunkers that had previously been dug into the hard red clay which required quick egress from our raised tents at the first sound of enemy incoming. The tents had lateral sandbags but there was no overhead protection. When we later moved across the base, our "cover" consisted of cement "ratholes" constructed from 6 foot culverts topped by sandbags.



transports were often hit on the tarmac and our regimental ammo dump was once reduced to rubble following a day of spectacular fireworks. While on the SE corner, we could look east across a wide expanse of rocky soil to see the tail end of Liberty Road and the German Hospital, and HQ of one of the 5th Marines battalions that guarded the base from attack from Go Noi Island and the many enemy lurking about ancient graveyards east of An Hoa. We had a single bunker to man nightly and would often disburse tanks to points around the perimeter to guard against the frequent sapper attacks. Sappers were a common occurrence with limited success in breaching the many strands of concertina wire. After an unsuccessful breach, we would

find bodies in the wire blackened by camouflage paint and still attached to ropes and Bangalore torpedoes. The ropes were used by fellow sappers to pull the wounded back for extraction when discovered too early in the wire.

One balmy evening, we came under attack from a probable platoon of sappers trying to blow the adjacent 155 mm Howitzers using satchel charges. The attack was thwarted with only a few souls penetrating the wire, but the NVA continued firing into our positions from defilade positions beyond the berm. The firing continued through the early morning hours and a Cobra gunship was called to provide support. As a result of the line of fire and poor night visibility, we were unable to use our 90mm guns. We watched as the gunship lights approached from the east firing rockets followed by their twin mini-guns. With a poorly marked enemy, the Cobra overshot the primary target and sprayed our area with "hot lead" before they could be called off. Fortunately, most of us were either in bunkers or manning the berm waiting for the 5th Marine's COC bunker to give our tanks permission to fire on the enemy sappers.

As light illuminated the ground in front of our three tanks, we could see the NVA about 300 meters away returning fire against our .50mm MG's. We were finally given permission to fire the big guns and loosed some rounds of HE into the enemy position. We then followed the HE with a few flechette rounds. I stood atop one of the tanks with a camera hoping to get a prize photo of the carnage as dawn arose (my film would later be returned from the Liberty Hill PX labelled "overexposed"! ). A few of the rounds appeared to be "duds" and ricocheted off the ground in low trajectories.

The gunfight was over quickly and I had managed to take a few photos to commemorate our victory. Nobody on our side had been wounded and a patrol was being dispatched for a body count. As we inspected our hooches, we found numerous holes exclusively from the wandering Cobra gunship. My most precious possession, a fan that I had bought from the previous resident, had been destroyed by a direct hit.

The evening before the attack, we had a truck arrive from Danang carrying a full contingent of 90 mm rounds. The truck had been hit by 8-10 mini-gun rounds including two holes through the truck windshield. The driver, arriving late from DaNang, had decided to sleep in the front seat and had only been awakened when the rounds had penetrated his windshield. Amazingly, he was unscathed and none of the many rounds had hit ignitable ammo!

At the evening briefing, it was reported that a number of Marines at the eastward battalion encampment had been killed or wounded during the overnight attack. The deaths were blamed on incoming NVA recoilless rifle fire. On that day, and to this day, I wonder if some of the "NVA incoming" was, in reality, our ricocheting 90mm rounds. Perhaps we added a few "good guys" to our body count that night! If so, forgive us our sins! ■

# NO TANKS / Goat Ropes

BY CWO-5 STAN PRICE USMC/USMCR (RET)

It's October 21, 1966. I've just graduated from Tank School at Camp Del Mar. My orders say that I must report to 5th Tank Bn. at Las Pulgas on Camp Pendleton by not later than 5 Nov '66. I can't tell you how excited I am. As soon as my leave is over, I'm going to a "real" tank unit and will be assigned as a driver or loader. And as a young PFC upstart Marine, I couldn't ask for more.

With leave over, I rushed to report to the 5th Tank Bn at Las Pulgas. When I checked in, to my surprise there were NO TANKS in 5th Tanks!!! I am told that we will occupy a new facility being built at Las Flores, a brand new camp being built nearby on Camp Pendleton and then we will get our tanks. In the meantime I am going to be kept busy everyday being trucked to Las Flores on "working parties" putting together wall lockers and assembling racks. The wind was defiantly knocked out of my sails. This is turning into a "goat rope." I couldn't believe there were NO TANKS!!! This craziness lasted for six weeks until we finally moved lock, stock and barrel to Las Flores on Dec. 16, '66. We got all moved in and we are off for Xmas leave.

Upon returning in the first part of January '67, I was assigned to 1st Platoon of Bravo Company and I was assigned to tank B-13. Finally I'm on a tank. Yippee!!! For seven days I enjoyed B-13 until we blew an engine rod. The power pack was pulled and the engine went away for repair. I had to go on mess duty for two weeks. It was NO TANK again. At the end of January '67, our repaired engine was

returned and reinstalled into B-13. We were finally tankers again. Believe it or not, that tank ran great even after I volunteered to go to Staging Battalion as a replacement bound for Vietnam.

I arrived at Staging Bn. around the 3rd week of August '67 and, of course, they had NO TANKS. There was lots of infantry drills and escape-and-evasion training though. We kept busy all during Staging and then we flew from El Toro MCAS to Okinawa on Sept 8, '67. Again there were NO TANKS. In Oki we just did in-processing and medical stuff for about four days, then we were off to Da Nang, RVN.

Upon my arrival in-country I was immediately given orders to 1st Tank Bn. that was located south of Hill 327. Wow! Am I excited and scared at the same time!!! A new Tank Bn. coupled with a new tank and crew and we'll be heading into combat! I reported into 1st Tanks and was immediately assigned to H&S Co, S-3 Section. I asked what tank will I be assigned to and was told there are NO TANKS available at this time. They explained that most of the tanks are down for repairs and most of them were down because they had hit box mines and needed parts such as road wheels, support rollers, etc., which were apparently being sent over from the States. In the mean time, I was told to go to the armory and check out an M-14 (the M-16s we trained on in Staging had yet to arrive in Vietnam) and I would be running patrols outside of the wire and I'd be standing guard at the 1st Tanks compound. Boy, was I disappointed!!! But being the dedicated Marine (L/Cpl. now) I leaned into it and did the best

I knew how.

In October I was sent to an observation post ... "O.P. Bear," by name. There we also ran patrols and stood guard duty. It was interesting ... but again NO TANKS. Finally, the day after Xmas of '67, I was assigned to 2nd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Tanks. I patted myself on the back. I had finally made it back into a tank. By then I had also been promoted to Corporal and was being groomed to become a Tank Commander. My new tank headed south of 1st Tank Bn and we now guarded a bridge and ran mine sweeps on the roads. It was great.

On January 31, '68, I was "voluntold" that I was being sent to CAP School.

I asked, "What the heck is that?"

I was told it is the Combined Action Platoon. These are small Marine infantry units that are combined with Vietnamese Popular Forces (PFs) and together they set up a small FOB (Forward Operating Base) on the outskirts of a village to provide protection for them and to do what we could to win the "Hearts and Minds" of the village people.

"How long does this last?" I asked.

They replied, "You will be there till your tour is over."

So that means NO MORE TANKS while I'm in Vietnam. The answer was, "Yes, NO TANKS." Now I'm really getting angry (what a "goat rope"). I headed off to CAP School fuming the whole time. I'm thinking, "The Marine Corps spent \$10,000 (in 1966 prices) to send me to Tank School to become a qualified 1811. So why am I being sent to an infantry unit?"

I decided to "request mast." I started the process and simultaneously continued CAP School until I graduated. My new CAP unit was assigned to a village (Dai Loc) just south of Hill 55. Here we set up our small compound just on the edge of the village and ran our patrols, stood guard, and befriended the villagers while doing our best to win their "Hearts and Minds." All the while my "request mast" is proceeding. The process allows a Marine to go through the chain of command airing his grievance ... and in my case, "How come a qualified 1811 is being put in a CAP unit when there are now plenty of tanks that need manning by 1811s?" The process goes until the Marine is satisfied with the result ... or runs out of people in the chain of command. It took some time, but finally I was happy with the answer given by the Commanding General of the 1st Mar Div.

He said, "Son. Yes, it doesn't make any sense that the Marine Corps spent \$10,000 on you to qualify you as an 1811 and then sent you to the infantry. Therefore, I'm sending you back to 1st Tanks immediately."

So, I packed up on March 8, '68 and headed back and reported into

1st Tanks. They assigned me back into H&S Co. running patrols. That's right, still NO TANKS. Thankfully, this only lasted 12 days and then I was assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Tanks. There I stayed guarding bridges, running mine sweeps, and participating in numerous named operations all the while serving as a tank crewman. Boy! Was I happy! So happy, in fact, that on January 15, 1969, I voluntarily extended my tour to go on a "float" with BLT 3/26.

We floated to Quang Ngai and completed a real amphibious landing. We re-embarked to the ship, disembarked in Da Nang, and went to An Hoa to spend a while there. Then it was back on the USS Alamo floating up and down the RVN coast. My final stay in Vietnam was at the NAMO Bridge just north of Da Nang. The last 17 months that I spent in-country were as the driver of a tank, then tank commander and finally a Light Section Leader as an E-5. My NO TANKS syndrome was gone ... or so I thought.

I left Vietnam in mid-August 1969 and headed to Camp Pendleton for my last 7 months of my enlistment in the Corps. When I reported in to

Pendleton, I was immediately assigned as a permanent Sgt-of-the-Guard in Main Side. There we go again, "NO TANKS." This time it made sense though. All of 1st Tanks and most of 5th Tanks were in Vietnam now, so there were virtually NO TANKS at Pendleton at all.

I was a happy camper and enjoyed my remaining few months on active duty. Even though it was fraught with "goat ropes," it was an enjoyable and rewarding experience. So much so that I went back into the Marine Corps Reserves 14 years later with TOW missiles and spent a total of almost 30 years of Marine Corps service. I retired as a CWO-5 in 2008. All of those years in the MC Reserves were with NO TANKS, but I was quite happy for my whole career. I did one tour in Iraq as an adviser to an infantry battalion. Go figure ... NO TANKS!!! But I was happy and enjoyed all of the time that I served.

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## Photo from Vietnam



Charlie Co, 1st Tanks in An Hoa 1969 (Photo by Dick Peksens)

# I Blew Up My Truck at Alpha 3

BY MIKE LEDFORD

ALPHA CO, 3RD TANKS AMMO TECH

On December 17, 1967, I died at Alpha 3. Alpha 3 was located about half way between Con Thien and Gio Linh, on the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone), in the firebreak, known locally as "Indian Country." I am not sure why the little base was established, but it was out in the middle of nowhere, solidly within NVA territory. It consisted of scrub brush and either fine powdered chocolate-like dust or bottomless mud, according to what rainy season was or wasn't at the time. I was new to Alpha Company and the current ammo tech that I was replacing, I'll call him Sgt. Tom (not his real name), wanted to do a mail and beer run to his buddies at Alpha 3.

I was the driver of a gas-powered 6x6 M54 5-ton truck and a couple of the tankers awaiting assignment rode shotgun with us. They, along with the mail and the beer, went into the bed of the truck and Sgt. Tom rode with me in the cab until we had to go off road. Then he got into the back of the truck, in the bed, standing where he could direct me.

We started driving in all-wheel drive around basement-sized bomb craters where B-52's had been attacking NVA troops in the open. We got stuck up to our axles about a third of the way in to Alpha 3. That happened late morning and by mid-afternoon I was getting quite concerned. We had no radio with us and, according to Sgt. Tom, no one knew that we were coming out here. It was just a spur of the moment type thing that he wanted to do before he rotated home. And here we were. We each had an M-14 rifle and I also had two grenades. We were in NVA territory and I really didn't want to stay here. I asked Sgt. Tom if we should walk on together to Alpha 3 but he would not allow it. I made up my mind that I would walk on in by myself. Sgt. Tom said I was crazy but he allowed it since he knew somebody had to do it.

I started walking, very stealthily, going from cover to cover. I noticed some dead vegetation in a large bush, almost a tree in size. I remember in Panama, during my jungle warfare training, we were taught that sniper nests were camouflaged and that if the camouflage wasn't kept fresh, it would give the sniper's position away. I low-crawled by it, then once I could get cover between it and me, I was able to walk again.

About an hour later, I saw the perimeter of Alpha 3, and approached it. All of a sudden some fool shot at me so I hit

the dirt and yelled back at him, convincing him I was not a gook. I then approached him, was recognized and met the grunt (infantry) gunnery sergeant who was in charge of that base. Not to get too salty, let us just say he was incredulous that I was there and that a 3rd Tanks' truck was stuck in the firebreak with night coming on. The Gunny got two of the tanks stationed there, along with a grunt patrol, to climb on the tanks with him and me and we rode out to where the truck was stuck. He had radioed in to Alpha Company what was going on with us and the truck.

On the way, I showed him what I thought was the sniper's nest, with the dead camouflage foliage, and he lit it up with his .50 caliber machinegun. We approached the truck and the Gunny chewed out all of us, especially Sgt. Tom. One tank crewman attached a tow cable to our truck to pull us out. One of the tanker sat on the outside of the tank that was doing the towing, as he watched the tow cable. I was driving the truck, turning the wheels in the direction of the tow, when all of a sudden the tank pulled my truck across an anti-tank mine.

All I knew at the time was that somehow I found myself away from the truck and the mud, and in a very interesting place. Before Reader's Digest started writing articles about near death experiences, I was right in the middle of one. I was in a luminous white fog and I could make out people standing around me. I could see their outlines and they felt very familiar to me but I could not see their faces. I found myself in front of a person that looked something like the pictures of Jesus Christ, but I couldn't be sure. He and I looked down and we could see the battlefield. I could see the truck, the smoke and the commotion going on with the people on the ground. Up there, I felt wonderful and I knew that I wanted to stay. He said I could not stay because he had work for me to do. To this day, I wonder if I got the job done for him.

Suddenly I felt myself sliding down a tube, almost like falling down through the inside of a quiet tornado. I became conscious and I was hurting, sitting in the front seat of the truck, which was riddled with large shrapnel holes. This included my seat and everything around where I was sitting. I did not have a scratch. I was not wounded. Later on, all I could think of was that I must have been physically removed from the truck by my experience and then placed

back into my seat when I was returned, or I would have had to have been penetrated by the shrapnel. I did experience the shock of the explosion but not the shrapnel. I was surrounded by thick black smoke from the explosion and I fell out of the truck cab onto the ground. Sgt Tom and the guys who were in the back of the truck were also thrown out onto the ground. My rifle and grenades were blown off of me but recovered by the other Marines.

Sgt. Tom had the tanker who had been on towing

tank, on the ground trying to stop the bleeding on a head wound the tanker had, and I started to help him attend to the wounded Marine. The Marine had one eye embedded with dirt but the other eye looked okay to me even though he was totally blind. I yelled for a T-shirt and Sgt. Tom took his off and gave it to me. I was able to use it to stop the guy's bleeding. We were all loaded onto the back of the tanks and the truck was so blown up that it was left in place.



The explosion cut off the front part of the engine block, blew the wheels out of sight and basically removed a lot of the front of the engine compartment. Up on the back of the tank, I held on to the wounded Marine with one hand and tried to hold onto the tank with the other. Sucking mud with the consistency of wet cement, was up to three feet deep or more. I was afraid that if I lost my grip on the tank, the wounded Marine and I would be thrown off and we could drown in the mud.

We made it into Alpha 3 where other Marines helped the wounded Marine and me into a bunker where a Navy doctor was attending to us. I couldn't believe a doctor was on the front lines but he was. He asked me if I was wounded before he looked at the wounded Marine because I had more blood on me than the wounded man did. I told him I thought it was the other guy's blood and to please take care of him first. I had stopped his bleeding and the doctor wrapped him up as best he could to be medevaced out by helicopter. The doctor then cut open my trousers and found that I was not wounded, however, my arms and legs were swelling due to concussion wounds. Because it was so late at night we could not be flown out until daylight. I shared a fighting hole with two grunts that night and we started to get 122 mm rocket fire. The rockets would scream into the ground with a heavy impact, explode, shaking the ground, which was mud and rocks, throwing everything up in the air and at us.

The NVA usually prepped an outpost with an artillery or rocket barrage right before they tried to overrun it. This



kept up for several hours and finally I tried to go to sleep. I was exhausted and in pain. The grunts asked me why I was trying to sleep. I told them that nobody, not even the gooks could get through the incoming so as long as there was noise and incoming, we might as well get some sleep. And I did. When it got quiet, we would know they were attacking us. The incoming rockets kept on pouring in until daylight and then it stopped. We all were awake. Later on we were told we probably got over 1,000 rounds of rocket fire that first night. One of the grunts told me I was bleeding. I pulled down my pants far enough to see that I had caught a small piece of shrapnel in the left buttock. I pulled it out and it soon had stopped bleeding. I put some antiseptic on it from my first aid kit and we shared some C-rations. The incoming started up again in a more sporadic fashion, just enough to keep a medevac flight from coming in. That went on all day and we were stuck there for another night. It was a redo of the night before.

The next day, a CH-34 chopper was going to come in to get us. He was circling in the distance, sizing up his chances to get in and pick us up. We were still getting occasional incoming. The Marine pilot swung his brass balls out of the way and came on in but only to a hover because he could not risk staying in place too long by landing on the ground. Four of us were standing near some sandbags for cover, waiting to load onto the chopper.

The first three guys, including the blind guy, were able to get into the helicopter. I was the last to get to it because I could hardly walk due to my use of the swelled >>



up joints. Incoming hit the edge of the perimeter and even though I was being shot at, I couldn't move or jump high enough to get in the chopper so the crew chief asked me if I knew the acrobat's grip. I did from a circus movie I had seen, so I interlocked my hands on the other guy's wrist and hanging like that outside of the chopper, they took off with me. Other Marines in the chopper were holding on to the crew chief's arm and belt to support him so he would not have to drop me and we could see the muzzle flash from NVA infantry firing their rifles at us.

We were at least 500 feet up and about a mile outside of Alpha 3, when the pilot yelled, "I'm going to roll it up so you can pull him in!". He swung the CH-34 so the side door was on the top and they pulled me in and the Marines piled on top of me to hold me steady until I could be secured to a seat or the floor; I can't remember which. We flew into Dong Ha and landed.

I was helped out of the chopper and I was so high on adrenaline that

I thought I could walk the short distance to the 3rd Tanks area. I got part way down the road and fell down. I used my rifle as a walking stick, alternately walking and resting and finally made it into the Alpha Company area. The CO was talking to a new lieutenant who was checking in. He asked the lieutenant how old he thought I was. Since I was covered in mud and bloody clothes, not shaving for several days, the lieutenant guessed I was 35. I was 20 years old. Then they realized I was wounded, and helped me to the sick bay bunker.

Our corpsman helped me to clean up. He medicated my shrapnel wound and stuck a large band aid on it. He asked me if I wanted a Purple Heart and since the other guy lost his eyesight so compared to him, I didn't feel I rated one. I stupidly turned it down.

It would be years later, when a VA (Veterans Administration) doctor would ask me how I got the calcified spurs on my spine that I would realize how badly I had been wounded back

at Alpha 3. According to that VA doctor, the malformed growth on my spine and the damage to my neck vertebrae were conducive to the concussion and impact on my body of the anti-tank mine. That grunt Gunny estimated the mine to be equal to at least 20 pounds of TNT. The mine had made a hole big enough to put a pickup truck inside of it. I recently was able to read declassified records from Alpha Company that recorded the truck mine incident on December 17, 1967. However, it did not list me as wounded I guess because of my recovery in the company area. I was bedridden on a cot for one week and slightly ambulatory for a second week before I was able to return to duty. I found out, years later, that the Marine Corps had notified my parents that I had been sent to a hospital in Japan, where I supposedly was recovering. During that 13 months I sustained 5 minor wounds that drew blood and made scars, but I received no Purple Hearts. ■

## WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO?

BY DAVE OWEN

This is a tale of a not-so-studious college student who failed to fill out his draft deferment papers in 1969. That student would be me. I almost immediately got my Draft Board "Greetings" letter. After sleeping on it, I knew I couldn't let them tell me what to do so the day after I got the Draft letter I went down and enlisted in the Marine Corps. The recruiter said I would get a lot better training if I went for four years. I asked "What would three years do?" He said that it would be better than two. It worked. I got into tanks.

After Tank School my orders were for WESTPAC. At the time I'm thinking that anything would be better than early 1970 in California when I am not yet 21 years old and with no hair. The "natives" knew what you were and they treated you as such. While in Staging my buddy and I got word of what they called a "blue card." It allegedly assured your ticket to Vietnam. On three different occasions I requested mast asking for a blue card. Each time I was told I didn't need a blue card and that I was going anyway. Well, I ended up on Okinawa. Several of the guys who arrived with me were told to report for further orders. I then found myself on a bus to the tank park at Camp Hansen. It seems that Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks had been pulled out of Vietnam. A week after my arrival, I was sent on an advanced party to Mt. Fuji Japan for cold weather training. Go figure. Then, 3rd platoon arrived a couple of weeks later.

After that Japanese adventure, we returned to Okinawa via LST and, wouldn't you know it? We were hit by a typhoon. It seemed the next adventure might get me closer to my goal of being sent in-country Vietnam. I had my reasons.

As it turns out, I never made it

"in-country." I spent my overseas time in 3rd Tanks on a "float" with 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines BLT (Battalion Landing Team 2/9) looking in from offshore. In my mind it is not a good feeling watching things from afar. When I think that there are people today who pay for cruises, when back in the day the USMC paid me to be on one! We would cruise up and down off of the coast and then take off to wherever. One time they let us off at Subic Bay Philippines. Well, here comes another typhoon. They didn't have time to load the whole platoon on board, so they left me and another Marine with two tanks on shore. It sure is nice to know you're wanted. They did leave a couple cases of C-rations and said they would try to check in on us via the radios.

Back on the boat one day I was told to report to the flight deck. Might I add that I was also told not to do anything but to follow orders. When I got there, I was picked up by a chopper. After a short time we landed, but I am not sure where and I am not sure why. I was just trying to figure out what I had done to be whisked away like that. After a while, we took off again and went out to the aircraft carrier USS Okinawa. Upon our arrival I was escorted to a room full of Navy and Marine Corps brass. There were captains all the way up to a general present. You can imagine what this shit bird enlisted Marine felt like. Still I did not have a clue what was going on.

As it turns out, my dear mother (God love her) had contacted an acquaintance of hers who happened to be U.S. Senator Stuart Symington. The entourage of senior officers who were now in front of me wanted to know why I hadn't been writing home. It seems as of my mother had somehow

triggered a Congressional Investigation. This meeting was like an enemy prisoner interrogation—question after question. Finally they asked what could they do for me.

All I could think of was, "What kind of question is that?" It sure sounded like some kind of set up to me so I did not say anything in reply. They were pretty perturbed by my silence. Then after some thought I said that I would like to "go up north."

They all looked startled then said that it could be arranged but I would have to go as a grunt. I then asked them that if I made it back, could I return to tanks. They wouldn't promise anything beyond granting my first wish. I asked them for some time to think about it and they gave me five minutes. You can't make this stuff up. When you get Marine Corps tanks running through you veins, it's hard to give them up, so I declined their offer. Nothing I said made them happy. They ordered me to write home. I then returned to my tank platoon. When I got back it seems as if I lost friends over the recent adventure. They were convinced I was CID (A "Narc" from Criminal Investigation Division).

I didn't know until I saw it on the USMC VTA web site that we got a PUC for that float. For years I wondered if my decision was an act of cowardice or a well-planned smart move. And, as years pass, I'm leaning in one direction. I have often wondered if it is OK to be both proud and guilty when called a "Vietnam Vet." I tried, and my hat is truly off to those that were there ... especially if they didn't make it back home.

And by the way, I did write home and ask, "WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO?" ■

### Photo from Vietnam





This is Ken Ganney – if you look, you can see the .50 sticking out of the coax hole

## The .50 Cal. Mounted as a Coaxial Machinegun? Are you nuts?

BY RICK LEWIS, 1STSGT. USMC (RETIRED)

First, a history lesson about John Browning's .50 cal. M2 machine gun, also nicknamed "Ma Deuce." Browning built the M2 in 192. To date, over 3 million have been produced, longer than any other machine gun worldwide. The only other small arms weapon that has had staying power is the .45 ACP M1911 pistol, also by John Browning. The M2 weighs 83 lbs; add the tripod at 127lbs; overall length 65.1 inches; and the barrel length 45 inches. As Browning improved the .50 cal., it soon was mounted into aircraft in WWII. It's now the AN/M2 and has a cyclic rate of fire 750-850 rounds per minute. The ground .50 cal. M2 had a cyclic rate of fire of 450-600 rounds per minute, which helped it cool better, unlike the aircraft model

which had air flowing over it for cooling and could handle the higher rate of fire which was also needed to shoot down enemy aircraft.

Now comes Korea, and the Browning AN/M2 has a cyclic rate of fire 1,200 rounds per minute. In Vietnam, the AN/M2 was tried in the new CH-43 Chopper; it caused problems with blades when the .50 cal. was fired, so the .50 cal. was taken out of the birds. This is what makes this story very interesting.

Somehow Gunny Jones shows up one day with five of the Aircraft AN/M2 .50 cal. machine guns in the back of a jeep. I have no idea how he got them—never asked—we just carried them to the maintenance tent. This became the first .50 cal. mounted in the

2nd Platoon's tanks. After a few weeks, it had to be changed out. The rate of fire caused it to heat up inside the tank and it would jam, plus it would chew up so much ammo we could not carry enough. Now, the rest of the story!

In 1966, Charlie Company 1st Tanks was located to the south of Marble Mountain in DaNang. Each tank platoon found itself being assigned to a different Marine grunt outfit; 2nd Platoon was assigned to 1st Bn., 1st Marines. They were from Marble Mountain, about an hour drive through some heavy, tree-lined rice paddies and part sand dune area. 1/1 operated in the horse shoe area which the VC/NVA owned. The 1/1 Battalion Commander liked tanks and kept us in support of his company's opera-

tions, which all ran together. It's hard to remember their names.

Gunnery Sgt. Jones was our tank platoon Sgt. and old Korean vet. He was a task master who trained us on the M48A3 till the end of time, which paid off when we got to Vietnam. We knew each other's jobs inside out, and gunny was also the kind of person that looked outside the box to see how things might be done or made better. Not too long after a few fire fights in support of the grunts, the gunny said the .50 cal. sucks in the cupola; we need to move it where it can give us better fire power.

Of course for us crewmen we were thinking where else could you put it? So we tried it, sand bagged, and tied down for the loader to use, but he needed to load the main gun, not play with the .50 cal. Gunny went back to Charlie company where he and the maintenance chief, Sgt. Funkhouser, went to work on one of the HQ tanks, moving the .50 cal. to the coaxial position on the tank. Several days later, gunny showed up with the company retriever and Sgt. Funkhouser and crew, with a tank escort. They wasted no time getting started modifying the gun mount changes to move the .50 cal. to the coax position, which all of us thought was crazy. One of the maintenance guys said it works really well there. They had tested it at the company CP, and we just needed to load up on .50 cal. ammo.

Let me back up and explain what made the gunny come up with this idea. As we all know, the grunts always seemed to get hit when they were stretched out crossing a rice paddy on line or moving up on a tree line. Once the firing started, grunts go down, hug mother earth, and try to return fire. Tanks open up, too. The problem with firing the 90 was the grunts always seemed to put themselves in the wrong places around the tanks. Yes! The .30 cal. was a good weapon, but the gooks were dug in well and it took a lot of .30 cal. to root them out; meantime, the grunts were getting blasted. With

the rice paddies, the tanks had to stop short and were not able to move up with the grunts, so a canister round was out of effective range. You had to open the breach, remove the canister round, and load an HE round, which once fired did its job. Sometimes, the main gun muzzle blast took out a few grunts who would scream at us, and you had to wait till the smoke cleared to see your target. Plus, if the grunts were trying flank the enemy, firing the 90 could take a grunt or two out. So, to make the tanks more effect in supporting the grunts, moving the .50 cal. to the coax position made it very effective.

Now, from the gunner's seat, remember, I see the battle field through the telescope and periscope and see first-hand the effect of rounds I fire. Gunny had us zero the .50 cal. with the telescope which worked well and left the periscope zeroed with the 90. Once you had the .50 cal. dialed in, it was a killer gun. As the gunner, I could pick up the muzzle flashes of the enemy faster and put the .50 cal. on target. You get to see up close just how effective a .50 cal. can be on a target. I am firing a .50 cal. armor piercing incendiary round with an effective range of over 2000 meters and made to take out airplanes and thin skinned vehicles. I would watch as the rounds would wipe out the best-built bunkers and fighting holes. The .50cal. had no problem firing from the coax position, the loader just had to keep me in ammo.

The other advantage was the .30 cal. was now sky-mounted on the cupola where the TC could lay down fire where needed, while I was free to move and track targets. It really proved to be a very effective way to use the tank's firepower in the areas that 2nd Platoon worked. Yes! Whenever possible, we would use the main gun's fire power first and foremost, but man, did I get off using that .50 cal. It was unreal to really watch what it could do. The fifty was so well set up, I could scan a tree line, find the VC/NVA, and pick them off. Yes, nothing like being a sniper

with a .50 cal. machine gun. There's no doubt we saved a lot of grunts because of that set up.

Now, there were a few down sides to the .50 cal. One, the ammo was hard to stow in the tank; however, the old Marines "adapt, improvise, and overcome" slogan came into play. The top of a 5-gallon water can was cut off and mounted on top of the 90mm ready rack; the loader had to keep his eyes on it to ensure a good feed and had to keep the oil can of 50wt. oil handy. The .50 cal. rate of fire filled the brass bag up very quickly which, again, the loader had to handle hot brass and toss it out of his hatch. But the biggest problem was the poor tank driver, as the .50 cal. now extended out the tank gun shield a good 10 inches. The firing of the .50 cal. forced the driver down in his seat, and he had to swing his hatch closed, or the blast would knock his head off. After fire fights, our driver, Greg Auclair, would crawl out of his seat and not be able to hear us for an hour or more. Greg wears hearing aids today. Sorry, buddy!

The Marine sitting on the gun was Ken Ganey, whose platoon changed to .50's also. However, not long after this picture, Ken's tank hit a mine that cracked the hull, Ken was medevac'd to Japan where he underwent seven back operations. He is alive and well living in Florida, still as mean and ornery as ever. I saw him in 2015 and tried to get him to join the VTA, but he is still thinking about it. I know some time in 1967, Charlie company got a new tank leader who got the new company commander to go along with taking the .50 cal. out of the tanks altogether and running with one .30 cal. coax and one .30 cal. sky-mounted. I now had my own tank and dug my heels in about the change out. It took them awhile to catch up with me, as I would find some way to avoid the company area. I look back now and see what a big mistake it was to lose the .50 as the coax; again, its firepower into a tree line, ground level bunkers, and concrete buildings was outstanding. ■

Excerpts about tanks from the book:

## DMZ Diary

BY JEFF "TJ" KELLY

RVN WITH 3/3 IN 1968

ARTILLERY PREP FIRE BLASTED THE NVA bunker complex while we waited for a section of tanks to arrive from Gio Linh. A gray ceiling of clouds above the woods left a thin layer of visibility, enough for an AO to slip in and report movement in the NVA's position. Near our hole a wounded rifleman sat calmly waiting, his attention fixed on the NVA stronghold. Mud and blood marbled on his flack jacket and spread to his green sling and tan bandages. His eyes never left the woods when he spoke, "We got to get those sneaky fuckers, man. We got to kill every fucking one of them."

Capt. Frank asked permission to lead the assault and the major granted it with a nod. Mike left to take up a position on the flank; the major, Blair and I stayed with Kilo (3rd BN 3rd Marines). We formed up two companies and three tanks on line. "Move out!" was called and we began to advance. There was little talk, just some commands from squad leaders adjusting the formation. Then the tanks engaged gears and clanking steel and rumbling engines broke the morning stillness. Patches of fog hung in the air and dew from the bushes wet our legs.

"Recon by fire," yelled Capt. Frank when we were twenty meters from the hedgerow. A fusillade erupted along the line that caused bushes to quiver and sawed branches off of the trees. The tanks joined in with their heavy machineguns. Kilo's men were cursing at the NVA, calling them out to die. Exhaust from the tanks rose in swirling columns that penetrated the moist, white mist.

The NVA waited until we were at the road before they began firing. A man ten meters to my left went down with a bullet in his hip. Only a corpsman stopped to

help him. Everyone else pressed on, firing and changing magazines as they advanced slowly on the bunkers. Any muzzle flash, any sign of movement drew concentrated fire, tearing that spot with unrelenting fury.

Abruptly a group of NVA bolted from a trench, racing deeper into the bunker complex. They were killed in seconds, getting no farther than a few steps before being knocked off their feet, spun around and sent reeling as pieces of their bodies went flying. Other NVA stayed on their guns, but the wave of firepower that preceded Kilo's slow advance was a grim reaper, killing anything in its path. It was a tactic so simple and direct I was amazed by its effectiveness.

THERE WERE THREE PILES ON THE LZ: the NVA gear, the American gear,

and the American dead. The tanks pulled alongside and we loaded the NVA gear on one tank and the American dead on the other two. It was absolutely quiet except for the groans of the loaders and the sounds made by the bodies of the dead being dragged to the tanks. They were stacked four high, one on his back and the next on his stomach. Heads and arms were wedged between legs of the body underneath to lock in the stack and prevent the bodies from toppling. Rigor mortis had them ridged as statues, arms and legs thrusting out aimlessly.

The tank crews watched in horror. Thick blood and body fluids oozed from under the stack and dripped off the steel fenders. Twenty-nine dead Americans rode the tanks back to Con Thien. I watched them until they disappeared in the mist.



U.S. Marine tank is used to transport dead and wounded Marines from engagement with NVA forces surrounding Con Thien, 1967. (Photo by Robert Stokes)

GRADUALLY, I HEARD THE SOFT sound of deep water moving. We'd reached the banks of the Ban Hai River. North Vietnam lay on the other side. Suddenly, there were other sounds, mechanical ones, the faint throbbing of an engine in the distance. I could see nothing but blackness and the white strip of paper on Lt. Sutter's helmet. Then I heard electrical sounds, a series of amplified clicks and pops filled the air. They were loud and coming from above. When the music started, I nearly leaped out of my skin. It was recorded bugle music and it was extremely loud, sort of an oriental version of a cavalry charge. All around me I hear the ticks of M-16 safeties going to full auto. Everyone stopped, crouched and prepared to fight these weird noises. The engine sounds grew clearer and louder; they were rapidly coming our way. This world of distinct but confusing sound was frustrating, I wanted visuals. This guessing was driving me crazy.

"What the fuck is going on?" I asked the lieutenant.

He seemed to know. "The music is to cover the sound of their tanks."

"TANKS!" I repeated in a horse whisper. That's what the engines were. We pulled quickly back from the river and the engine throbbing grew dim and stopped. By first light we were a klick back, near where the woods and the rice paddies met. Regaining visibility had a soothing effect. I felt the worst had passed, India set up a hasty perimeter beside the roadbed and word was passed to, "Take fifteen."

WE FOUND LIMA PINNED DOWN IN low sand dunes a hundred meters northeast of the woods. They were greatly outgunned. We learned later a large percentage of their weapons wouldn't fire because sand got in the mechanisms. Setting up on their left flank, we laid down a base of fire to cover their withdrawal. Shortly af-

ter we got in position, an M-48 tank came roaring across the sand flats. It paused for half a minute behind us, then raced out in front of Lima, firing both its .30 caliber and .50 cal. machine guns and lowering its 90mm main gun at the NVA bunkers, firing point blank. RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) flew out of the woods and whizzed past the tank. A hit in a vulnerable area would kill it, but the tank ignored the threat and moved protectively in front of Lima. It made a dash to the very edge of the woods and crushed a machine gun next, spinning and grinding the gun and crew into the sand.

With help from the courageous tank crew, Lima pulled back to a safe distance and the NVA remained trapped in the cordon.

### BROWNIE'S TANK

CURSING AND HOLLERING OUTSIDE our near-naked Dyemarker bunker drew me outside. So far, it had received only a few rows of sandbags. Only wooden planking stood between incoming and us. Brownie was the source of the noise and he was hopping mad.

Brownie and Rob's solution to the wire problem was to move the system underground. They worked like dogs, digging shallow trenches for the wire and stringing it from bunker to bunker. Then, they marked and protected the wire with lines of sandbags that made a big loop around the base. Heavy equipment operators and tracked vehicle units were all briefed about the wires. There were poles at two places along the base road where the wire went overhead. That was where the tracks were supposed to cross. Either from ignorance or blatant disregard, an M-48 tank cut directly over the wire Brownie had just finished burying. When Brownie went to complain, they buttoned themselves inside the tank and refused to acknowledge him.

"Hey, you asshole! Goddamn it, dick head. I'm talking to you, cock-

sucker! You cut my fucking wire, you son of a bitch. Come the fuck out of that tin can. I want to talk to you, dip shit," Brownie yelled. He stood in front of the driver's hatch, his anger apparent by the tightening grip on his entrenching tool. We could see he was losing it. I believe if the driver had been dumb enough to open the hatch and stick his head out, Brownie would have swatted it with his E-tool. The driver must have seen it too because his only response was the soft rumbling of his diesel engine.

"Well, goddamn, if you won't come out, I'm coming in," Brownie said, and climbed up and tried to force open the driver's hatch. The tank crew swung the turret around slowly. Brownie should have seen it coming but he was too intent on prying open the driver's hatch with his E-tool. The barrel of the main gun caught him behind the legs and deposited him on his butt in the dirt. We roared laughing. The tank crew put it in reverse and made a run for it. Brownie was up and giving chase, pelting the huge machine with repeated strikes from the E-tool, screaming and cursing, banging on the tank's steel body and throwing handfuls of dirt into viewing slots.

"Shouldn't you try and stop him?" Matt said to Rob.

"What, are you nuts?" said Rob. "I wouldn't go within fifty feet of that madman. Look at him swing that E-tool."

When Brownie's rage was spent, he hurled curses after the running dog of a tank. "Run, you fucking pussies! Chicken shit motherfuckers!"

Cheers and war cries from groups of Marines saluted Brownie's hand-to-hand combat with the tank. By the time he was back at our bunker, he was waving and working the crowd.

From the book "DMZ Diary, A Combat Marine's Vietnam Memoir" by Thomas Jeff "TJ" Kelly. Reprinted with permission of the author. ■

# Musings about Officers in the US Military

*Editor's Note: Over the years there has been much written about military officers. While some of it has beewn well thought out & relevant, some of it simply pokes fun at everyone. The first entry was sent to me quite awhile ago and I am sharing it with you today.*

## 2nd Lieutenants

Fortunately, I knew that I didn't know much when I was commissioned and I did listen to my Gunnery Sergeant. I was fresh out of The Basic School and I was assigned to the 1st Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton with no training in the operation, care and maintenance of the M48A1 tank. I told my Platoon Sergeant, Bill "Robbie" Robinson, that I didn't know anything about the M48A1 and I expected him to teach me. There was no better school I ever attended than the year I spent with him!

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**"The most dangerous thing in the world is a Second Lieutenant with a map and a compass."**

From Murphy's Law of War

**"Few things on earth are as useless as a newly commissioned second lieutenant. Although Congress considers him an officer and a gentleman, it would take an act of God to give him the knowledge and common sense possessed by the average gunnery sergeant. The Marine Corps, wisely unwilling to wait for God to get involved in such matters, attempts to short-circuit the process by sending young lieutenants to various schools and minor assignments, hoping they do not sink, break, or**

**blow up something in the process."**

—From the book, "BRUTE...The Life of Victor Krulak U.S. Marine" by Robert Coram.

Below is the first reasonable explanation I've ever heard:

## In US Military rank insignia; why does Silver outrank Gold?

I suppose this a question about the origins of US Military rank insignia...

**For example:**

A Gold bar is a Jr. Lt, but a Silver bar is a full Lt.  
A Gold leaf is a Major, but a Silver leaf is Lt. Col.

**But here is the real story :**

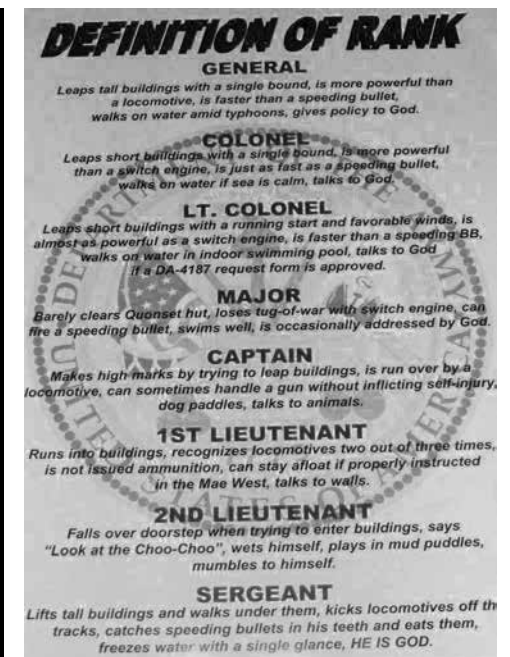
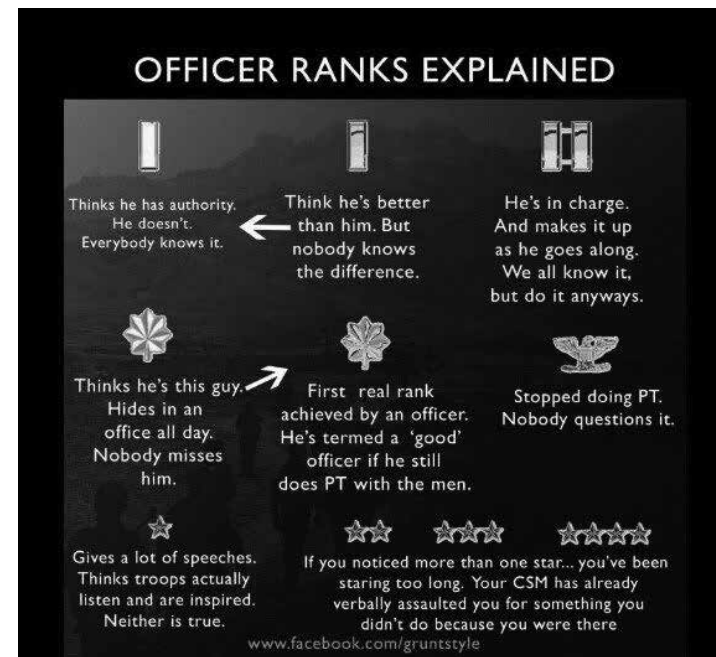
The young Marine second lieutenant approached the crusty old first sergeant and asked him about the origin of the commissioned officer insignias.

"Well, LT, it's history and tradition. First, we give you a gold bar representing that you're valuable BUT malleable. The silver bar of a first lieutenant represents value, but less malleable. When you make captain, you're twice as valuable so we give you two silver bars.

"As a colonel, you soar over military masses, hence the eagle. As a general, you're obviously a star. Does that answer your question, LT?"

"Yeah, but what about major and lieutenant colonel?"

"Now, son, that goes waaaaaay back in history. Back to the Garden of Eden even. You see, we've always covered our pricks with leaves.



Officer: "Marine, do you have change for a dollar?"

Marine: "Sure, buddy."

Officer: "That's no way to address an officer! Now let's try it again! Marine, do you have change for a dollar?"

Marine: "No, SIR!"

**Officers' Efficiency Reports**

I think I might have served with one or two of these second lieutenants (and maybe one first Lt.) whose efficiency reports somewhat questioned their ability to lead troops. Such comments could throw a wet blanket on promotions.

**Here are some comments:**

Got into the gene pool while the lifeguard wasn't watching.

This lieutenant has a room temperature IQ.

A prime candidate for natural deselection.

Bright as Alaska in December.

One-celled organisms out score him in IQ tests.

If brains were taxed, he'd get a rebate.

If you gave him a penny for his thoughts, you'd get change back.

Takes him an hour and a half to watch 60 minutes.

The wheel is turning, but the hamster is dead. ■

A REUNION STORY

*Editor's Note: This story was written just after to our second reunion in 2001. It seemed fitting to repeat it fifteen years later.*

## STILL THE HIGHEST CALLING

BY LT. COL. KEN ZITS, USMC (RET)

On December 5, 1960 I walked into the Student Union at Kent State University where I was a sophomore playing varsity baseball and major in Pre-Law and saw a table there with some interesting displays. There was a young Marine captain, with Navy Wings of Gold on his chest signifying that he was a United States Marine Corps officer and an aviator to boot. I became very interested in this display and asked the Marine captain all about the Marine Corps officer programs that he was promoting that day. He was very sure of himself, candid, and ended by telling me, "I'm not here to try to recruit you but just tell you all about the Marine Corps officer programs, you see I have been a Marine officer for the past 5 years and will soon be getting out, but if you really are looking for a challenge and want to be a part of the world's greatest fighting organization, then come back tomorrow and let's talk. If not, that's OK because the Marine Corps is not for everyone, and I'm sure that you will do well in whatever career you choose." I asked him several questions and he ended our conversation by offering that I go home, sleep on it and then come back if I thought I wanted to be a Marine officer. I ran back to my apartment and told my buddies about this encounter and they all kind of laughed and said go ahead and join if that's what you want to do. Well, as you may well guess, I spent a restless night pondering the captain's word and the next day went back and told the captain that I wanted to take the written and physical test for the Platoon Leaders Course (PLC) which would lead to a commission as a second lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps if I successfully completed the 12 weeks of officer candidate school at Quantico, Virginia prior to my graduation from Kent State University.

What led me to decide to join the Marine Corps? Well, first of all I was classified as 1-A by the Selective Service System and knew that upon graduation I would be drafted into the

U.S. Army if I did not join another service. And secondly, I knew that in order to beat the draft you had to be married and have a child (which was not an option) or teach school (which was not what I wanted to do nor was I qualified to teach) so in order to beat the draft I joined the United States Marine Corps for a three-year hitch as a reserve officer (if I successfully completed officer candidates school).

Leaving Cleveland, Ohio the following summer for 6 weeks of fun in the sun at Quantico, Virginia proved to be a life changing experience for this college athlete, and upon successful completion earned the right to return the following summer for 6 more weeks of fun in the sun which earned me a commission as a second lieutenant on June 6, 1963 (18 years after D-Day in Europe) in the world's finest fighting organization, bar none.

I put aside my aspirations to be a professional baseball player, much to the chagrin of my dad and other people who followed my career in college, to serve my country. Why? Because I firmly believed it was my duty to do so and an honor to serve my country.

Sadly today, college graduates and high school graduates alike feel by and large that serving in the military is not their duty, nor an honor. I wonder why? Could it be they saw someone like William Jefferson Clinton become President and Commander-in-Chief even though he "disdained and loathed the military" and evaded military service.

Now some 50 years later, after having served 26.5 years as a Marine officer in war and peace (in Viet-Nam as both a tank platoon and company commander), I just returned from a reunion in Minneapolis with Marine tankers who served in that war so many years ago and at 60 to quote Andy Rooney, "there's just so much sentimental baggage that you can haul around for all these years" so I decided to go to Minneapolis and be reunited with Marines from my old outfit: Corporal Chico Famularo, from Michigan; Corporals Mario

Fuentes and Corky Cummings from Texas; Freddie Silvester from Washington; Bruce "Boston" Manns from you guessed it Boston; Corporal Raasch from Iowa, and other tankers who served in that war so many years ago. There were about 160 Marine tankers at the reunion and I met some new friends and also tankers who served with buddies of mine in other tank companies like "Sparrow" Moad, who was in Captain Mike Wunsch's company up north in the 3rd Tank Battalion near the DMZ (Mike was a best friend and we were both on orders to the U.S. Naval Academy after our tours were over in Viet Nam, but Mike was killed in action five days prior to his end of tour).

"Sparrow" told me that he agonized over Mike's death over the years as he rotated out of country shortly before Mike was killed, and thought maybe if he would have been there he could have prevented Mike's death. I assured him that he did the right thing and that Mike was right when he told Sparrow not to extend his tour in Viet-Nam, but to go back to the United States.

The reunion was a happy occasion and a sad occasion. We all went to the Ft. Snelling Armor museum and took pictures, laughed, and watched an M60 tank drive around the tank park, and then went to the Ft. Snelling National Military Cemetery for a memorial ceremony where a plaque was dedicated to the 5th Marine Division. Taps were played and members of my company, Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division had a memorial ceremony for the Marines in our company who were killed in action during our tour: Sgt. Hill, Cpl. Keeling, L/Cpl. Pfeiffer, L/Cpl. Schroengost and PFC Epps. We reflected, we cried, and we remembered these Marines who made the ultimate sacrifice. They never questioned the legality of the war, never hesitated to give it 100% every day in spite of what they saw was happening at home. They served with pride, honor and

dignity the nation and the Corps that they loved and never once looked back. They were magnificent in every respect, and we remembered them as taps echoed in the background at the national cemetery.

On the last day before our farewell banquet I sat outside with one of my Marine tankers; we talked and he told me, "Skipper (term of endearment for a Marine captain), I wish I was a better Marine in Viet-Nam and did more." Can you believe this, here is a 52 year American who served honorably in that war and he is apologizing to me for not having done a better job. I assured him that he was a

good Marine and that he did a great job in my book and that I was honored and proud to have served with him in Viet-Nam so many years ago. With tears in his eyes he looked at me and thanked me and I immediately told him that it was me who was thankful for having such a great American in my company.

The reunion was fun, like when we all posed for a group picture on Saturday afternoon and sang the popular theme song in those days of every Marine in Viet-Nam: "We gotta get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do.....girl there's a better life for me and you." It was sad when we talked about

the Marines who paid the ultimate price and died for their country and beloved Corps, and it was rejuvenating as we all had a chance to charge our batteries for love of country and the United States Marine Corps.

We said good-bye and vowed we would see each other again and closed with the phrase we used so many years ago in Viet-Nam, "Well, it's been real!"

As I walked through the terminal at Minneapolis on Sunday morning heading home to Hawaii, I was reassured that the saying "Once a Marine always a Marine" was more alive and real than ever. ■



### USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Reunion

Thursday, September 21 – Monday, September 25, 2017

Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet Hotel

191 Westport Plaza, St Louis, MO 63146

Reunion room rate: \$119 per night.

If you want to come early or stay later, this room rate is good for three days before and three days after the reunion dates.

Call 1-888-627-7066 to make your room reservations.

Be sure to mention both:

"Sheraton Westport Chalet" ... and ... "USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion" when making your room reservations.

All room reservations must be made by Aug 30, 2017.

Hotel has a free shuttle bus to and from the St Louis Airport.

The bus runs every ½ hour from 6:30 AM to 11:00 PM

If you do drive, there is plenty of free indoor and outdoor parking ... including parking for RVs ... but there are no RV hookups.

Besides two hotel restaurants there are also over 20 dining and entertainment venues within a block or two of the hotel.

Kobe Japanese Grill  
Patrick's Restaurant & Sports Bar  
Paul Mineo's Trattoria  
St. Louis Bread Co.  
Starbuck's

McDonald's  
Train Wreck Saloon  
Bradford's Pub  
Edward Jones  
Dino's Deli  
Fernando's Hair Studio

Fuzzy's Taco Shop  
Imo's Pizza  
Smoothie King  
(New) Sports Bar  
O'Fallon's Brewery  
Backstreet Jazz & Blues

Drunken Fish  
Funny Bone Comedy Club  
Jive & Wail  
The Playhouse  
Family Nuts  
PNC Bank

### Your Story Is Vital to The Vietnam Tankers Association

BY FRANCIS (FRANK - TREE) REMKIEWICZ

The Sponson Box is a vital part of our communication with everyone in the Vietnam Tankers Association, especially during the time our reunion is not in session. The story you tell in the Sponson Box has the same effect on the rest of our group as if you were talking face to face with us. Truly, we need your stories, serious, funny, odd, in the rear, on R&R and/or what has happened to you since our time in-country, your story is very important. It could very well change the life of a reader.

So serious is this endeavor, the Vietnam Tankers Association will provide two Writing Seminars for your help. These seminars are not grammar, spelling, proper paragraphs, or any other English type of workshop or school class. These seminars will help you write your own story. We will provide you time and resources for you to accomplish writing your story. I think you will find that it is not as hard as you might think. You should also feel very good once your story is done that you have helped so many in the VTA.

The timing of these two seminars will also occur during the same time that the "Torsion Bar" hospitality room is open so that there will be break time for drinks and you are welcome to bring drinks and snacks into the seminar. Our seminar coordinator will be Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz. We will have sign-up sheets at the Welcome Table at the check-in so that we can get a rough idea of the numbers ... but rest assured you do not need to sign-up in order to attend. Drop-ins are welcome and encouraged. See you in September!

### PERSONAL INTERVIEW SIGN UPS

The USMC VTA History Project needs to record your stories & your photographs. More importantly, once we obtain and chronicle your experiences, not only will they be shared within the USMC Tanker Community ... but they will be added to the archives in the U.S. Library of Congress, the Marine Corps Museum, and the Marine Corps University.

The goal of the USMC VTA History Project is to assure that we (and our stories) will never be forgotten.

If you would like to be interviewed during our 2017 reunion in St Louis, please do not wait until the reunion to sign up. Go ahead and contact Pete Ritch now, either by phone (Home) 850-734-0014 or by e-mail at goldendog@mchsi.com. Pete will add you the new 2017 reunion interview schedule.

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

### Action at the Auction

For those of you who have never attended a USMC VTA reunion, we conduct an exciting and fun-filled auction immediately following our association-sponsored Italian pizza and pasta party. The auction is one of our key fundraisers. All of the items offered in our auction consist of some rare and hard-to-find items that members donate to the organization. Many of these items tend to be souvenirs of our time in-country and our time served as Marine tankers. Below are just a small sampling of the items that we will be auctioning off during the reunion. And we have it on authority that Sgt. Major Tommy Ayers, USMC (ret) will be serving as our auctioneer again this year.

**Please Note:** We intend to move all of the smaller, less expensive items to a "Silent" auction that will be conducted in the "Torsion Bar" hospitality room. This will allow the "Live" Auction to be conducted a bit quicker and allow those who want to the ability to go to bed early.

**Take Action:** What we would like for the entire VTA membership to do (and this request includes those of you who are not planning to attend our most meaningful gathering): Please scour your attics, garages and basements for your long-forgotten souvenirs of your time in-country, as well as items from any time that you served as a U.S. Marine. After you have these mementoes assembled, packed up, and ready to ship, please give John Wear a call (215-794-9052) so we can provide the "Ship To" address in St Louis. And another (maybe even better) idea would be that you bring the treasures with you when you come to attend the reunion in September. We will be happy to accept the donated items at the WELCOME TABLE at the start of the reunion.



## 2017 St Louis Reunion Schedule

Thursday, September 21 – Monday, September 25

<b>Thursday (Sept. 21)</b>	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	<b>Arrival Day</b> – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside The Torsion Bar hospitality room (in the Alpine Foyer). <b>Sign up for VTA History Interviews Sat and Sun</b>
	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	The Torsion Bar is Open <b>Lunch &amp; Dinner on your own</b>
<b>Friday (Sept. 22)</b>	<b>0800 – 1000</b>	<b>Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!!</b> <b>Breakfast on your own</b> Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (The Matterhorn Room) Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion! Rles on entry ticket
	<b>0800 – 1000</b>	Ladies Coffee (in ____ Room)
	<b>1000</b>	2 buses depart for Boeing Tour (2 more buses depart 30 min later)
	<b>1030</b>	Tour Boeing in staggered tours
	<b>1130</b>	ETD Boeing
	<b>1145</b>	ETA St Charles for lunch and browsing
	<b>Noon</b>	Bus starts shuttle runs to Casino & returns St. Chas.
	<b>Every 15 min:</b>	Buses shuttle to casino/RT or Hotel/RT
	<b>1330</b>	Start Hotel Bus Shuttle Runs (about 30 min round trip)
	<b>1430</b>	Last bus from St Charles to Casino and to hotel
	<b>1445</b>	Last bus from Casino to hotel
	<b>1500</b>	End Day at Hotel
<b>1730 – 1830</b>	<b>BID &amp; BITE Italian Buffet Dinner – Cash Bar</b> (Versailles Ballroom)	
<b>1830 – 2030</b>	<b>Live Auction!</b> (Versailles Ballroom)	
<b>2030 – 2300</b>	The Torsion Bar Open	

<b>Saturday (Sept 23)</b>	<b>0800 – 0930</b>	<b>Breakfast on your own</b>
	<b>1000</b>	Bus departs for St. Louis Gateway Arch
	<b>1030</b>	Group Photo to be taken
	<b>1045</b>	Buses start round-trip shuttle runs to the Casino, Bud & History Museum
	<b>1100</b>	First Exclusive Tram to Top of Arch (40 people per tram ride and ride takes 4 min - return tram when ready)
	<b>1140</b>	Second Exclusive Tram
	<b>1150</b>	Third Exclusive Tram
	<b>1200</b>	Fourth Exclusive Tram
	<b>1210</b>	Fifth Exclusive Tram
	<b>1430-ish</b>	Last shuttle bus returns to Riverboat Dock from wherever
	<b>1500</b>	Riverboat Sightseeing Tour (1 hour)
	<b>1630</b>	Bus departs for hotel
	<b>1700</b>	ETA at hotel <b>Interview Schedule Posted in Torsion Bar</b>
<b>1700 – 2300</b>	The Torsion Bar Open <b>Dinner on your own</b>	
<b>Sunday (Sept. 24)</b>	<b>1700 – 2130</b>	<b>FAREWELL BANQUET</b> (Versailles Ballroom) NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat & tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket is highly encouraged.
	<b>1700 – 1745</b>	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	<b>1800 – 1815</b>	Presentation of Colors and remarks
	<b>1815 – 1900</b>	Dinner Served
	<b>1900 – 1905</b>	05–minutes–Head Call
	<b>1905 – 2130</b>	30 minutes – Guest Speaker 45 minutes – Fallen Heroes 05 minutes – 2019 Reunion
<b>2130 – 2400</b>	The Torsion Bar Open – Last Call.	
<b>Monday (Sept. 25)</b>	<b>Departure Day</b>	



**OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM  
2017 St Louis Reunion**

Sheraton Westport Chalet  
September 21 – September 25

**Want to save \$25?  
Mail your registration before July 31**

Please Print all information

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Your USMC VTA membership dues must be **current** in order to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent please mail your dues with this registration (or the dues will be collected at the sign-in desk). No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions, 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 St Louis 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 31, 2017. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

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:** .....\$160 \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 (After July 31<sup>st</sup> the late registration fee is \$185 per person)

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

Number of guests \_\_\_\_\_ X \$160 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Early registration fee for each guest is \$160.00)

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

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

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

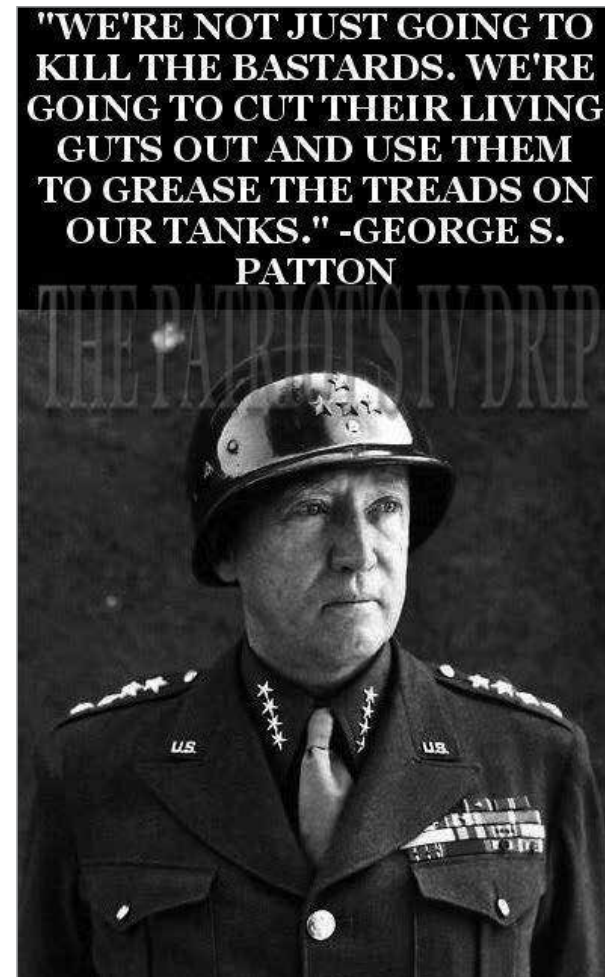
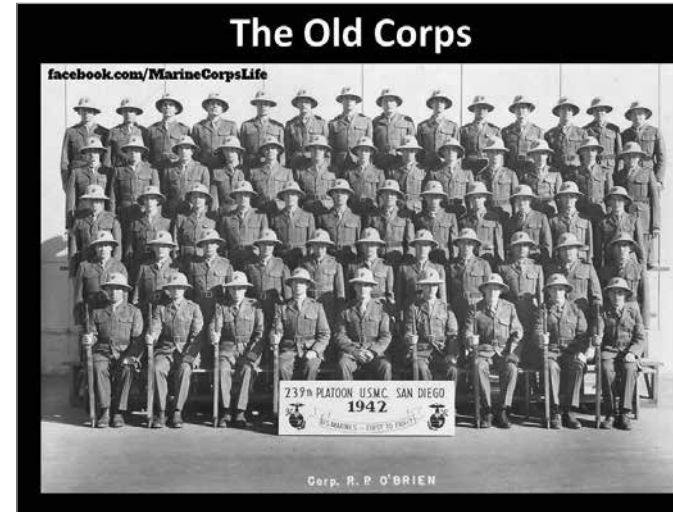
**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel room reservations by August 30<sup>th</sup> to get the low room rate! Call: **1-888-627-7066** and be sure to mention both the “**Sheraton Westport Chalet**” and “**USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion**” for the special room rate of \$119.00 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 \$180 per night.

**CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has a July 31<sup>st</sup> deadline.**  
**HOTEL REGISTRATION MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY BY YOU BY AUGUST 30, 2017**

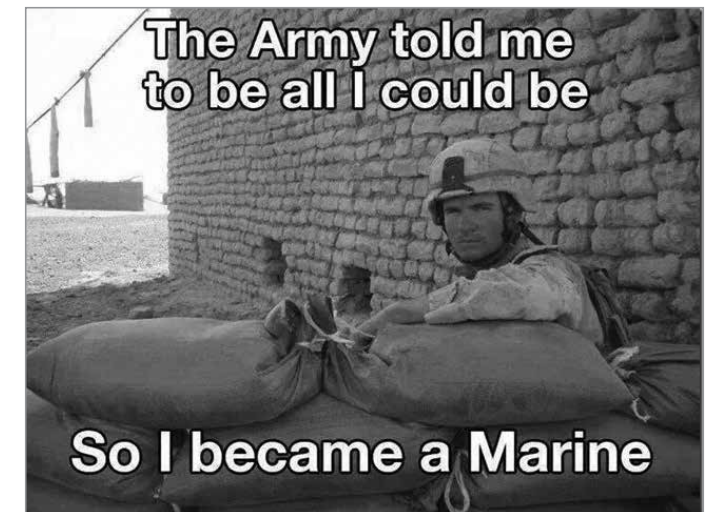
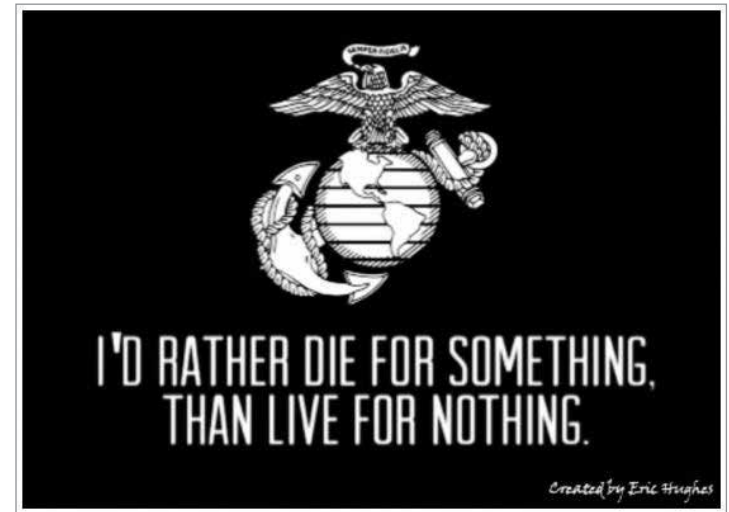
**HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$25.00**  
 Submit this form along with your payment by July 31st to purchase a reunion t-shirt and save \$25 off of the Reunion Registration Fee.  
 Send check or money order made out to: USMC VTA and the completed registration form to:  
 USMC VTA  
 c/o Ron Knight  
 6665 Burnt Hickory Drive  
 Hoschton, GA 30548-8280

**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 CST  
 Rules: The coupon will be your raffle ticket to be surrendered at the door of the meeting room before 07:59 CST for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic room rate (\$119) plus taxes. Prize value: \$476.00+.  
 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 07:59 CST. No latecomers will be permitted to enter in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President's watch set to atomic clock standards.



**Boot Camp Sayings**  
 What is your major malfunction, dipshit?  
 You're bouncin' girls, you're bouncin'.  
 If that happens again Private (xxxxx) (insert appropriate name there), I am going to unscrew your head and shit down your neck.  
 Private (xxxxx), you best unfuck yourself mo' ricky tic.  
 I gave you at ease girls, not base liberty.  
 Are you eyeballin' me Private (xxxxx)?  
 Don't take all day, girls.  
 Private (xxxxx)! Are you trying to single-handily fuck up my Corps?  
 Get in step Private (xxxxx).  
 Move it up girls. Asshole to belly button. Make the lady in front of you smile.  
 Private (xxxxx), the best part of you ran down the crack of your momma's ass and became a stain on the mattress.  
 Your other left, dumbass.  
 Get out of my pickle palms (ice plant for the boots and Pleasure Island ladies).  
 You? You? Do I look like a female sheep to you?  
 Private (xxxxx), did your mother have any children who lived?  
 From Sgt Grit Newsletter

"The situation in Vietnam is deteriorating, and without new US action defeat appears inevitable – probably not in a matter of weeks or perhaps even in months, but within the next year or so. There is still time to turn it around, but not much."  
 --McGeorge Bundy, special assistant for national security affairs, in a memo written on February 7, 1965, to President Lyndon B Johnson while flying to Washington from Saigon, where he had been when the Viet Cong attacked Camp Holloway near Pleiku





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

Please check your address label. If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" is "16" then your 2017 membership dues are now payable. Make your check out to:

**USMC VTA for \$30\* and mail to:**

**USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611**

\*Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.

