



Sponson BOX

*Voice of the USMC Vietnam
Tankers Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Training for War at 5th Tanks in 1967

Featured Stories:	Cover Story: California Dreamin'	Page 32-38
	Remembering Charlie Denton	Pages 39-42
	How to Stop a Marine Tank	Pages 43-44



We are back in stock and ready to ship the USMC VTA "Forever Coin."

Based on numerous requests, we have recently ordered a quantity of the official USMC Vietnam Tankers Association "Forever" coins in order to make them available for purchase to all of our members. This is not your average dull finish challenge coin. It is not only larger by a 1/4" (1.75" diameter) but it has a bright gold and silver metallic finish in 3-D relief on both sides. The tank is bright gold and holds the detail of our logo. The front and back are completely custom and you will not see the design on any other challenge coin. Each comes in an individual protective plastic folder. The coins are \$20 plus \$5 (each) for postage and handling fee.

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

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

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

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

Letter from the President

2021 REUNION: Just so you have the dates, the 2021 Reunion will be 9/15/21 – 9/20/21 and the location is on the East Coast in Providence, Rhode Island. The full details will be in the next issue of our magazine which should be in your hands right after the first of the New Year.

DISAPPOINTED? Yes, we are. Not one person (out of nearly 500 VTA members) contacted us with an interest in recruiting potential members. I guess that no one feels committed enough to get involved with helping make our organization bigger and better... Pretty sad.

A QUESTION: I was recently corresponding with a US Air Force veteran friend who makes scale models of military vehicles. He was speaking about a model of a USMC Flame-thrower tank. As he spoke he called the model "SHE." When I harken back to my days as a tank crewman, I do not recall if we Marine tankers ever referred to our tanks in masculine or feminine terms. It was always, "IT." Am I right?

THE PAST-The one thing that happened to a lot of us who were "young and stupid" back in the day and when we served our nation in a not-so-wonderful foreign environment ... that pretty much left scars on our tender little brains and hearts. For most of us those scars are still there and they are likely to never go away. Even if they are not "pretty" and even if they do not make us feel "nice" ... they are still there. I liken it to having a scab over a wound. Sometimes that only way that the wound will heal is for us to scratch off the scab and let the air in to help to maybe heal the wound. With that said, I believe that some of our old memories of Vietnam are "scabbed-over" wounds and for the most part, most of us want to leave them alone ... (not realizing that they could end up festering). The vast majority of the stories that we feature in the Sponson Box are from members who realize that getting their stories out in the air is the best way to put those memories "to bed" and to help heal their personal wounds.

Even though it may be painful to expose them, once they are out in the open...they turn out to not be nearly as ominous, as hurt-filled or as "scary" ... and that the story teller finds himself not nearly as vulnerable to criticism of what they did so long ago. I also believe that many members tend to think that their story is "not worthy" or that they just don't know how to convey the story ("I don't know how to write") ... so they clam up. Whether they know or understand that they are actually suffering in their silence. I am quite certain that the only person who is "judgmental" about their own personal account is you. Over 99% of the membership loves to read anything that happened in Vietnam...good, bad or ugly.

You say that you go between extreme interest and avoidance? If you can harness the interest, it will feed on itself and become more or less an obsession. And that is a good thing.

We have a long-time member who spent his entire working career as an educator, Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz. Fortunately for us, Tree has volunteered to help anyone who wants it, to coach them in writing their story. Tree's cell phone number is: 209.996.8887.



"In war, nothing ever goes according to plan except occasionally, and then, only by accident."

-Winston Churchill

Author Unknown

When the last living link to the Vietnam War throws his ruck over his shoulders, picks up his steel pot, his M-16 and climbs aboard the last "slick" off of the LZ, an era and a way of life will pass forever into history. Vietnam has held on to its people like no other war that we have ever fought. We were never allowed to come home. We were the warriors that nobody wanted. When there was no one else to turn to, we turned to each other and in our Brotherhood where we found comfort, acceptance and understanding. In our shared experience we found validation of our service and sacrifice. Hopefully, some day, someone will tell our real story. But probably not. Our experience, our wartime way of life, all the things that transpired to produce the unique Vietnam Veteran will be known only to us. And that will have to be enough.

Editor's Note: And I completely disagree with the "untold story" BS. It is incumbent on each one of us to tell our own story now...and not wait until we are dead so that our own unique and personal story is not lost forever...

Executive Directors

John Wear, President

16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106
719.495.5998 · E-mail: johnwear2@verizon.net

1st Sgt. Richard "Rick" Lewis, Vice President

5663 Balboa Ave (#366), San Diego, CA 92111-2793
858.735.1772 Email: ricklent@aol.com

Bruce Van Apeldoorn, Treasurer

73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611-2837
585.613.6564 Email: bvanapeldoornsr@gmail.com

Ronald C. Knight, Secretary

6665 Burnt Hickory Drive-Hoschtcon, GA 30548
678.828.7197 Email: rckmsmcvta@att.net

Directors

Lt. General Martin R. Steele, USMC (Ret.)

16331 Ashington Park Drive; Tampa, FL 33647
E-mail: mrsteele46@aol.com

Fred Kellogg

15013 NE 16th St.; Vancouver, WA 98684-3605
360.609.3404 E-mail: kelloggf@comcast.net

Pete Ritch

833 E Gulf Beach Drive, St George Island, FL 32328-2915
850.734.0014 Email: goldendog@mchsi.com

Greg Martin

6514 - 81st Drive NE, Marysville, WA 98270-8010
Phone: 360.480.1206 Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Col. William (Bill) J. Davis, USMC (ret)

518 Mowbray Arch, Norfolk, VA 23507
Phone: 757.622.6973 Email: billandjandavis@gmail.com

Jim Raasch

3116 1st Avenue NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405
Phone: 319.551.1675 Email: jraasch47@gmail.com

Committees & Chairmen

SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll

Nominating Chair & Reunion Chair
CRCS/CR Representative
Phone 651.342.0913 CST

Bruce Van Apeldoorn

Audit & Finance
Phone 585.613.6564 EST

CW04 Bob Embesi

CRCS/CR Representative
Phone 406.821.3075 MS

Joe Liu

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund
Phone 801.731.7591
Email: gjliu@hotmail.com

Ron Knight

Member Data Integrity
Phone 678.828.7197 EST

1st Sgt. Rick Lewis

VA Information/VTA History Project
Phone 858.735.1772 PST

Bob Peavey

Fallen Heroes
Phone 770.365.3711 EST

Pete Ritch

VTA History Project
Phone 850.734.0014 EST

Greg Martin

Webmaster/National Recruiter
Phone 360.480.1206 PST
Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Web Site: www.usmcvta.org

Copyright 2012. USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be republished, reproduced, copied, faxed, electronically transmitted or in any other manner duplicated without express written permission from both the USMCVTA and the author or authors.

John Wear - Editor & Publisher - johnwear2@verizon.net

Proof reading - Craig Newberry

Tuyen Pham - Layout and Design

Printed in the USA

New Members

Cross, Ken A, MGySgt, USMC (Ret)

3122 Morningside Drive
Oceanside, CA 92056-4401
Home: 760.724.9861
Cell: 760.547.6711

Email: kencross294@gmail.com

C & H&S Co, 3rd AT Bn, 1965

MOS: 2143 / 2191

DOB: 02/10/38

Wife: Lillian

Recruited by: Lou Najfus

McKnight, James E, Sgt Major, USMC (Ret)

150 Nevada Loop Road
Davenport, FL 33897-5606
Home: 863.438.2402
Work: 863.438.2400

Email: inirishman@aol.com

C Co, 1st Tanks, 1967

MOS: 1811

DOB: 07/23/46

Wife: Charla

Recruited by: Website

Member Info Changes

Frank Turner

Cell: 812-290-1643

Joe Woolever

2105 Amanda Dr
Reedsburg WI 53959
Phone: 608-768-0457

Gene Whitehead

211 Newport Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28540

Rick Walters

24 Cottage Lane
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458



ON THE COVER:

LCpl Garry Hall (right) explains the nomenclature and function of the tank mounted .50 cal. machine gun to his crew (from left) LCpl Roger Unland (gunner), LCpl James Carbone (driver) and Pvt. Wayne Kingsbury (loader) at 5th Tanks at Las Flores on Camp Pendleton.

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

Remembering Dan Wokaty

When I picked up four weeks of old mail, once I saw the Sponson Box all the rest of the mail hit the deck. As happy as I was to see it arrive, flipping through it, I got to page eight. My heart dropped, Dan Wokaty had passed. That really hurt. He was one on my instructors in Tank School in '65. I remember making it a point to pick his brain housing group as he had so much knowledge about tanks and how to keep them alive. Dan and I would cross tracks at 1st Tanks at Camp Pendleton in '75 after I came off the drill field. Dan then was then off to "The Rock." I saw him at 3rd Tanks in '76. He had just got hitched in PI to an old flame of his. He was now a Master Sgt. and the tank leader of Bravo Co. 1st Tanks. The next time I saw Dan with his bride was at one of our earlier reunions. I always looked forward to seeing him. Someday up in "The Big Tank Park in the Sky" we'll hook up again. God Bless!

Semper Fi!

Rick Lewis

"Letters" by Marcia Falk

Recently, while sorting through a box of old photos, my daughter came across a letter from her grandfather Carl. It was written to her grandmother while he was serving in Germany in 1945 during WWII, just five months before the war's end. The letter includes a description of shelling while Carl and a driver were traveling in a Jeep, dodging each shell along the way. Jokingly, Carl had bragged beforehand that nothing would happen as long as he was in the Jeep. Once on the road, his bragging fell silent!

In addition to colorful stories, much of what was written in the letter described the daily routine of living through difficult days far away from family, friends, and familiar places, especially from his wife and young daughter.

As I read the letter, it echoed words from letters I once received from my fiancé, Steve Falk, serving with Marine Corps, 1st Tank Battalion in Vietnam (1967-68). I fondly recollect memories of blue air mail envelopes bordered with red and white stripes that showed up in my mailbox almost every day. Those letters meant everything to me. They were a life line and I would hurry home from work to receive them.

Miles apart, we shared our lives in letters, sadly separated but perpetually hopeful for better days ahead for us and for the world. Our letters brought words of comfort, encouragement, and sentiments of love promised to one another.

Today, technology has changed the written letter with the speed of an email, text, or tweet. We often replace the ritual of letter writing with face to face conversation over Skype or FaceTime.

There's an old adage that states history does repeat itself after time. But in a more important sense, love letters are forever.

Tank Jump



The Marines Make Do

Gary McDaniel writes: Sorry to hear that the 2020 Ft Benning tanker reunion was cancelled. Perhaps we can still have a reunion, somewhere else. I have always wanted to take in the Army Infantry Museum over there but I keep putting it off because of work, etc.

An amusing story (and perhaps I have told you this before): When I arrived at Da Nang in the spring of '66, I got off the plane into what had to be 100+ degree heat. After checking in at the arrival terminal, the Marine corporal says "The mess hall is down the line and through the wire." I worked my way through the military traffic, dust, and heat until I came to the mess hall. I had no mess gear with me but I got in the chow line hoping to find a tray, a plate, a knife, a fork and a spoon. No way! Finally, a young Marine corporal comes walking out carrying two cans and a spoon. He gives them to me and says "Here, this is what is passing for mess gear these days."

An hour or so later, I arrive at H&S Company, 3rd Tanks and after checking in and dropping my gear, I was sent to the armory to draw a weapon. They had no M-14's on hand and they issued me an M-3 "Grease Gun" and one magazine! I knew nothing about the M-3 and no one offered to check me out on it! Additionally, there were no .45 M-1911's on hand! I carried the grease gun for several weeks until someone rotated back to the States and a .45 became available.

I tell these stories as my way of impressing on people how short the Corps usually is on anything. If the >>

Joint Chiefs and Congress decided they could do away with the Marines, I can see the CMC coming to the Senate and saying "No, don't do away with us. Take our rifles. We will throw rocks!"

Now tanks are going away. Makes me ask this question: Does the Marine Corps still issue Liberty Cards to the pens? Remembering always the Old Corps!

Tree's Comment

Great edition of the Sponson Box. It came in yesterday's mail and by nighttime had read it cover to cover! Hey buddy, you rock!

Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz

8th Tank Battalion CO

With regard to the USMC getting rid of all tanks, ironically, the Marine Corps has allowed the last great Tank Battles (Desert Shield/Desert Storm) to be fought by Reservists from the East and West Coasts. As fate would have it, it was our Battalion that would establish many firsts 30 years ago this November. First to unload, retrofit and fight with M-60A1's that were already on ships in the Persian Gulf when the conflict began. First to fight with armor that were Vietnam-era (save the sights upgraded in 1980). The only unit that road marched to our LOD, while others were low Boyed. The first Reserve unit to lead an active duty Division clearing two minefields and establishing blocking positions for follow on forces. The first combat force to be located via PLARS the precursor SATCOM. There was more as you know but who cares but us old dogs who were so proud of our troops our chests were busting and still are...Semper Fi my friend, Cav

Submitted by Pete Ritch

Models for the Auction in 2021



Cliff Wiley is producing two hand-built scale models for the auction in Providence

They Are Hard to Recover

Several months ago Roger Luli sent a personal story in

for publication which is included in our stories of this issue. When he and I discussed the difficulty of recalling our stories, he wrote: "It took copious amounts of bourbon to erase those memories. Now they are hard to recover."

John Wear replied: I do understand the emotional desire to rid oneself of the pain and memories. I tried for a long time with self-medication with liberal amounts of booze. I do not recall exactly when it was that I was able to get my butt in gear and actually pen my "Vietnam Story" but it certainly was after 1999 (... thirty years after I rotated out) and coincidentally the year that the VTA was founded and the year that we had our first reunion. I have since found that for most USMC Vietnam veterans, recalling and writing their stories is a soothing balm. That is, once they get moving forward and discover that many of the (to me) irrational fears do not rear their ugly head. Out of all the VTA members who have joined and then left the brotherhood, only one member had the temerity to tell me that his shrink had told him that his association with the Marines who he served with in-country was a detriment to his mental health. Of course I would like to seek out, find and poke that shrink in the nose...or at least give him the true scoop.

Roger replied: Being with Marines and other Vietnam veterans and sharing experiences is therapeutic. I cherish our reunions and the camaraderie. I really believe we help each other. At the Seattle gathering, two Marines who had suffered strokes and were experiencing speech and memory problems spent several hours encouraging my wife to continue to fight her issues which is absolutely priceless!!! Keep up the good work with our magazine. I have three more stories almost ready. Once more I will get input from others who were there.

Jimmy Dorsett's Family

Hey Pete Ritch: Patsy and I received the Sponson Box magazine this week. Patsy was especially touched by the way the story of her father (Jimmy) was presented. We both agree that it is a very touching tribute to him. Thank you for putting it together. It means a lot to her and all of Jimmy's family. My best regards—Patrick Schroeder, Jimmy Dorsett's son-in-law

Pete Ritch replied: I am so glad you and Patsy enjoyed the article!!! You two were the key to getting Jimmy's story and photos to us. You are good son-in-law. Stay well and our best wishes to you and your family.

Robert Shofner's Family

Lou Najfus writes: I mailed three of the fall publications to Robert Shofner kids. Below is a copy of the letter that accompanied the magazine.

To: Donna Shofner Martinez, Jane Shofner and Dan Shofner,

Date: June 29, 2020

Please accept my deepest sympathy for the loss of your father.

I had the pleasure to meet your father in May, 2008. I was one of twenty crewmen at one of the earliest Ontos reunions. I learned Robert was primarily responsible for the restoration. At the conclusion of this impressive accomplishment in Kentucky, the "Road Runner" was moved to the museum at Fort Knox.

Our paths did not cross again until faith brought us together in September, 2018. It all began when I attended a small USMC Vietnam Tankers Association (VTA) reunion at Fort Benning. A couple of crewmen brought to my attention an Ontos that was located in the adjoining building. We were pleasantly surprised to see a restored Ontos on this base.

The restoration of this Ontos was exceptional after personally seeing a number of these vehicles in the past. The name printed on this vehicle was ROAD RUNNER along with another marking USMC 226684. As we explored the interior, one of the crewmen came across a white piece of paper protruding from behind sheet metal. We removed the paper which was inside a clear plastic bag. On the paper was the name Robert Shofner along with a phone number. I took a photo of the information and returned the paper and bag behind the sheet metal. On the way home from Fort Benning, I dialed the phone number and was delighted to reach Robert. I learned that in 2017 when the tankers were relocated to Fort Benning, this Ontos was relocated to Fort Benning, as well.

Robert began to reminisce. I was amazed and asked Robert to share his memories with all the crewmen and tankers. Initially, he was reluctant, for the typical reason, he diminished his experiences. I was delighted when Robert finally agreed to put pen to paper and sent me a record of his time on the Road Runner. A few months ago, I called Robert to share my excitement when I learned his photo would be on the cover of the fall publication along with his article. I was devastated to learn he died in December, 2019. With the help of the funeral director, I was able to speak to Janie. We shared our stories and reflected on the fact he was not alive to share in the celebration....at least not on earth.

Enclosed is your personal copy of our publication. Your family, friends, crewmen and Marines will have this publication for austerity. I want to add my appreciation for the investment and effort Robert took to document his memories for God and Country.

As a side note, I had the opportunity to produce the second edition of the Ontos challenge coin. I have two coins left. Janie informed me that she has one of the coins from the first edition. Therefore, allow me to present Donna and Dan with an Ontos challenge coin, which is also enclosed.

Who's in the Photo?

Laura Riensche wrote: We read Jimmy Dorsett's story in the last issue of the magazine... And, Harold wanted to ask you if you have a better copy of the photo that is supposed



Harold and Ricky Sermons



B Co, 3rd Tanks Maint. Ramp w/ Larry Parshall and William "Wingnut" Wegmuller

to be him walking past the tank? We don't think that Harold is the Marine in the photo ... but the photo is too hard to see. Harold told me that he doesn't think he ever had a cover that was that squared away.

(Continued on page 14)

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

""The legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name
And the inheritance of a great example."
—Benjamin Disraeli, English politician and author"

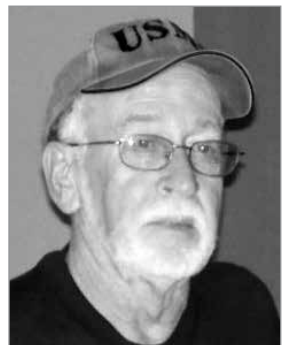
HODUM, Gerard William, MGySgt USMC (ret)
September 30, 1933 – April 9, 2020



Gerard William Hodum, MGySgt USMC (ret) a resident of Deatsville, Alabama passed away Thursday, April 9, 2020 at the age of 86. Mr. Hodum is survived by his wife Florence Anne Hodum; children Gerri Anne Bishop, Theresa Marie Lominac, Michael Stephen Hodum, David Wayne Hodum, Gerard William Hodum, Jr., Paula Frances Hodum, Kurt Edward Hodum; siblings Howard Hodum, Joan Rizzo; 12 grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

Ken Zebal writes: I'm very sad to learn of his passing. He was the Charlie Co 2nd Tk BN Maintenance Chief and we were on "STEEL PIKE" together. He later made the Santa Domingo crisis ('65). Very smart, cultured and talented.

Curts, James E. "Jim"
1947 – 2018



Jim's widow, Susan Curts called us on Tuesday, June 30, 2020, to tell us that her husband passed away two years ago. She explained that she had just received the most current issue of the Sponson Box magazine and she (rightly) figured it was time to let us know that we should stop sending it to her husband.

James E. "Jim" Curts, 71, of Corydon, Indiana, died Wednesday, October 17, 2018, at Harrison County Hospital in Corydon. He was born February 16, 1947, in New

Albany, Indiana, to the late Jesse C. Curts, Sr. and Ruth L. Straub Curts. He was retired from maintenance at the U. S. Census Bureau in Jeffersonville, Indiana, was a charter member of the Marine Corps League in Scottsburg, Indiana, was a member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association and the American Legion Post #133 in Alton, Indiana, and was a Tet Offensive survivor and U.S. Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War.

Charles W. Tucker

Garry Hall sent us a note telling us that his gunner, Charles W. Tucker, 71, of Lawrence, Kansas, died Aug. 4, 2019, at his home. The obituary was pretty sparse of details.

As an aside, this is one of those stories that we all need to pay attention to since Garry freely admitted that he had always planned to stop by Charlie's home for a visit. And over the past 40+ years, Garry said that there were several times when they could have gotten together but time and life got in the way. Now it is too late to fulfill that promise of a special reunion of old warriors.

Gilman Michael L, Maj USMC (ret)
June 1, 1944 – Aug 12, 2020



Major Michael L. Gilman, 76, of Chesapeake, Virginia, went to be with the Lord on Wednesday, August 12, 2020. Maj. Gilman was born June 1, 1944 in Riverside, California to the late Mary King and Leon Lande. Upon graduation from the University of Notre Dame in 1966, Mike Gilman was commissioned through the NROTC program as a Marine 2nd Lt., retiring as a Major in 1986. He was a tank platoon leader for Bravo Co, 5th Tank Battalion and served in Vietnam in 1968 – 1969.



THE MARINES' PRAYER

Almighty Father, whose command is over all and whose love never fails, make me aware of Thy presence and obedient to Thy will. Keep me true to my best self, guarding me against dishonesty in purpose in deed and helping me to live so that I can face my fellow Marines, my loved ones and Thee without shame or fear. Protect my family. Give the will to do the work of a Marine and to accept my share of responsibilities with vigor and enthusiasm. Grant me the courage to be proficient in my daily performance. Keep me loyal and faithful to my superiors and to the duties my country and the Marine Corps have entrusted to me. Make me considerate of those committed to my leadership. Help me to wear my uniform with dignity, and let it remind me daily of the traditions which I must uphold.

If I am inclined to doubt; steady my faith; if I am tempted, make me strong to resist; if I should miss the mark, give me the courage to try again. Guide me with the light of truth and grant me wisdom by which I may understand the answer to my prayer. Amen

Will Ye Go Lassie, Will Ye Go?

Forty plus years ago the winds whispered of war
It whispered for help Real hard at our door

Will Ye Go lassie, Will Ye Go?

The country would ask of the women in white to Put on a Green
Uniform and enter the fight

Will Ye Go lassie, Will Ye Go?

A few young men Have answered the gun and now they are falling
One by one

Will Ye Go lassie, Will Ye Go?

When the battles are over and the war is no more We will bring you
back home to your country's door

Will Ye Go lassie, Will Ye Go?

It is here, that we hope you will find peace of mind walking among
the Heather, And the green mountain Thyme

Will Ye Go lassie, Will Ye Go?

Written By

S/Sgt Joseph P. Keely July 20, 2008
USMC 3rd Tank Battalion Vietnam '65,'66,'67
And dedicated to the nurses of Vietnam



*The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY
COMMENDATION MEDAL to*

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS MARK STEVEN ANDERSON

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

*"For heroic achievement while serving as a Crewman with
Company B, Third Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division in connection with
operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of 19
May 1968, Private First Class ANDERSON was Driver aboard one of two tanks
supporting a friendly unit conducting a road clearing operation south of the Khe
Sanh Combat Base when the Marines suddenly came under a heavy volume of
automatic weapons and antitank rocket fire from a numerically superior North
Vietnamese Army force and sustained numerous casualties. Realizing the seriousness
of the situation, he fearlessly maneuvered his tank forward across the fire-swept
terrain when his armored vehicle sustained a direct hit from a hostile antitank
rocket, wounding his tank commander. Reacting instantly, he calmly executed
evasive actions, while his injured comrade was treated, and maintained radio
communications with his platoon commander, advising him of the tactical situation.
His heroic actions and resolute determination inspired all who observed him and
were instrumental in the Marines accounting for over three hundred North
Vietnamese soldiers killed. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and unfaltering
devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Private First Class
ANDERSON upheld the finest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United
States Naval Service."*

Private First Class ANDERSON is authorized to wear the Combat "V".

FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

**H. W. BUSE, JR.
LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDING GENERAL, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC**

VIETNAM WAS LOST BY OUR CONGRESS

BY SAM'S WARRIORS

- The misinformation just continues on and on. That we, the Americans LOST the war in Vietnam. It just isn't so. The war was essentially won by 1973 and we and our allies pulled out, leaving the South Vietnamese to finish up. But, here is the truth of what happened, make that what DIDN'T happen, and you can know the truth. First of all, know this....Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had met secretly in Paris in 1973 and agreed to pay the North Vietnamese \$3.9 Billion dollars in reparations to rebuild the country, for which they would release all of the Prisoners of War that they were holding. But by now, our Congress was filled up with the tie-dyed anti-war protestors and

draft dodgers that they said: "No Way In Hell Will We Give That Much Money to the North Vietnamese."

- So on Operation Homecoming, we got back only 591 and we know that on that date they were holding hundreds more in eleven camps, plus an unknown number in Laos and Cambodia that they controlled. No one who was released were amputees, psych cases, or anyone showing signs of very severe torture. LtGen Tran van Quang, the head of enemy proselytizing had previously said that someday our POWs would be released, except those 'who had chosen the bad path', whatever that meant.

- So, our Congress refused to provide any assistance, like beans or bullets, to the South Vietnamese forces. But Russia and China were merrily backing the North Vietnamese Army with everything they needed so in two more years, they won. And the scenes everyone saw of the Fall of Saigon in 1975 were heartbreaking. But we had been gone for two years!

- So, share this around. It's time that everyone who treated our warriors so shabbily when they came home should know. We didn't lose the war. Our Congress lost the war.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY—1975

U.S. Army Chief of Staff reports that South Vietnamese forces are on verge of collapse

After a weeklong mission to South Vietnam, Gen. Frederick Weyand, U.S. Army Chief of Staff and former Vietnam commander, reports to Congress that South Vietnam cannot survive without additional military aid. Questioned again later by reporters who asked if South Vietnam could survive with additional aid, Weyand replied there was "a chance."

Weyand had been sent to Saigon by President Gerald Ford to assess the South Vietnamese forces and their chances for survival against the attacking North Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese were on the verge of collapse. The most recent assaults had begun in December 1974 when the North Vietnamese launched a major attack against the lightly defended

province of Phuoc Long—located north of Saigon along the Cambodian border—and overran the provincial capital at Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975. Despite previous presidential promises to aid South Vietnam in such a situation, the United States did nothing. By this time, Nixon had resigned from office and his successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's earlier promises to Saigon.

The situation emboldened the North Vietnamese, who launched a new campaign in March 1975, in which the South Vietnamese forces fell back in total disarray. Once again, the United States did nothing. The South Vietnamese abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with

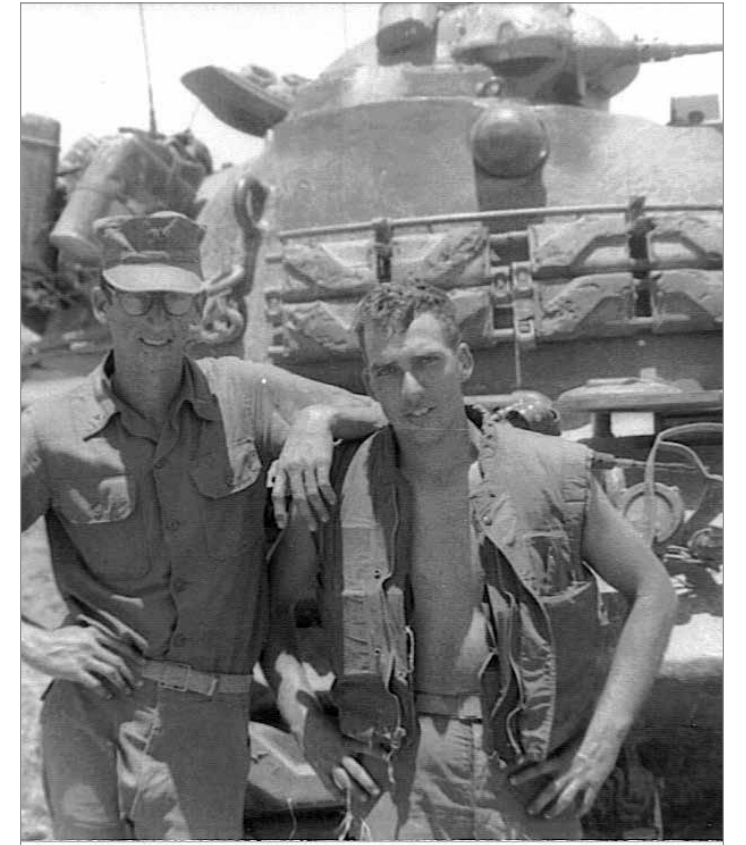
very little fighting. Then Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang fell to the communist onslaught. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast toward Saigon, defeating the South Vietnamese forces at each encounter.

As Weyand reported to Congress, the South Vietnamese were battling three North Vietnamese divisions at Xuan Loc, the last defense line before Saigon. Indeed, it became the last battle in the defense of the Republic of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese forces managed to hold out against the attackers until they ran out of tactical air support and weapons, finally abandoning Xuan Loc to the communists on April 21. Saigon fell to the communists on April 30. ■

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

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

Bonus: Name the Marine tanker on the left.



Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner was Dave Turner who called on July 4th at 8:50 PM and correctly identified Jan "Turtle" Wendling. ■



What Members Are Doing

Ed Hiltz enjoying retirement



Ed writes: I saw pictures of Tom "Sparrow" Moad's motorcycle in last issue of the Sponson Box. Below is my 1960 custom



Harley pan head got this in 1972 when I was already out of the Marine Corps.

Thank you for your Service



Ron Knight wrote: We live in The Village at Deaton Creek, a Del Webb Community. There are 1144 homes. We are in the Vista III section, called Bordeaux, which has 113 homes. One of the more active resident collected info and had this tribute

installed at our entrance!

As you can see, 33 neighbors are veterans and 3 are proud Marines!

Joe Tyson's new Toy



It's a Black Rain Ordinance, sub-atomic, recon series. 223 caliber / 5.16 mm pistol. Yes, it is a pistol with a 10.5" barrel. Very high tech weapon. 40 round mag. Has a red dot scope ordered for it with night vision. It took me an hour just to field strip it using the handbook. Very well made weapon, highly dependable. This piece is a long way from the M-1 and M-14 and even the M16.

A Very-Mini Reunion



Here is a little story about the latest 3rd platoon's mini reunion, or more apply a very-mini reunion, as there was only two of us there, myself, and Stan Williams. We invited Bob Willoughby, he was with us in Chu Lai, and Da Nang, but he was a no show. Our reunion started in La Grande, Oregon,

from there we visited several bars, and one winery in Wala Wala, Washington. The best place we went to was The Helix Market and Pub, in Helix, Oregon, population 184. We met with Stan's brother, Bob Williams, and his friend Terry Lee, both Army guys, Terry was career Army. Bob Williams is the unofficial mayor of Umapine, Oregon, population 315, and Terry Lee is from Athena, Oregon, former home of the Hodaka Motorcycle Company USA. Good time was had by all! Northeastern Oregon is a special place, lots of wheat,



grapes, and cattle. Not to mention the great little towns.

I have also attached a couple of photos of my new motorcycle, a Yamaha YZ 250F, I bought it on May 27th during COVID-19 times!

The first photo is Stan, and me in La Grande, at Stan's. Next the new YZ, and the third one is of me taking a jump at the Fox Race Track, at the Pala Indian Reservation, in Pala, California, I am on the right side, naturally!!

John Hunter



V. A. News & Updates

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

VMandatory Things Needed For Your Disability Claim

As reported to us by a consulting Veterans Service Officers (VSO), there are many items needed by a veteran to support his/her claim. While each disability case is unique, and each requires a different set of documentation, the following represent "must have" items that will strongly support a veteran with their disability claim:

1. DD Form 214
2. Marriage certificate(s)
3. Birth certificate
4. Social security card (including spouse and children)
5. VCAA Notice
6. Stressor Letter
7. Buddy Statement
8. Medical documentation from military and civilian records
9. Psychological records from military and civilian sources
10. Military C-file

Also, VSOs strongly encourage a veteran to "open up" during exams with medical and mental health professionals. Reports from our consulting VSOs all over the Nation have indicated that veterans have a tendency to "clam up" during medical and psychological examinations. Expressing your pain and suffering to Comp & Pen examiners is paramount to your claim. VSOs are adamant; "A veteran must never miss an examination appointment."

Agent Orange Pay

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is distributing disability benefits to Vietnam Veterans who qualify for compensation under new liberalized rules for Agent Orange exposure? Up to 200,000 or more Vietnam Veterans are potentially eligible to receive VA disability compensation for medical conditions recently associated with Agent Orange. The expansion of coverage involves B-cell (or hairy-cell) leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease (IHD).

Providing initial payments – or increases to existing payments – to the 200,000 or more veterans who now qualify for disability compensation for these three conditions is expected to take a long time, but VA officials encourage all Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and suffer from one of the three diseases to make sure their applications have been submitted.

VA has offered veterans exposed to Agent Orange special access to health care since 1978, and priority medical care since 1981. VA has been providing disability compensation to Veterans with medical problems related to Agent Orange since 1985. If you believe you qualify for Agent Orange compensation see a certified Veterans Service Officer (VSO).

Pre-Need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA national cemetery

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) has implemented a pre-need

>>

eligibility program so that veterans, spouses and unmarried dependent adult children may better prepare for burial in a VA National Cemetery prior to the time of need. Interested individuals may submit VA Form 40-10007, Application for Pre-Need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA national cemetery. The program details and the VA Form 40-10007 can be obtained here. VA will review pre-need burial applications and provide written notice of a determination of eligibility. VA will store the pre-need application, supporting documentation, and the decision letter to expedite burial arrangements at the time of need.

<https://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/va40-10007.pdf>

Understanding What It Means to Be Rated 100% Disabled

Unfortunately, many veterans are too often confused about Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 100 percent disability ratings and whether or not they are allowed to secure gainful employment if rated at 100 percent. While complex, and sometimes confusing to the most experienced VSO, let's take a look at the four types of 100 percent disability ratings in plain, understandable English.

1. Combined. When a veteran's service-connected disabilities are combined to reach 100 percent, he/she is allowed to work full time or part time. For example, if a veteran is rated 70% for PTSD, and 30% for IBS, the two disabilities equal 100% (sometimes – see rating table), and the veteran is allowed to hold a full time or part time job.

2. TDIU or IU. Total Disability/Individual Unemployability. This is a specific type of claim made by a veteran, requesting that he/she be paid at the 100 percent rate even though his/her disabilities do not combine to reach 100%. The request is often made because the veteran is unable to maintain "gainful employment" because his/her service-connected disabilities prevent him/her from doing so. The basic eligibility to file for Individual Unemployability (IU) is that the veteran has one disability rated at 60 percent or one at 40 percent and enough other disabilities that result in a combined rating of 70 percent or more. The one disability at 40 percent criteria can be a combined rating of related disabilities. Meeting the basic criteria is not a guarantee that the veteran will be awarded 100 percent under IU criteria. The medical evidence must show that the veteran is unable to work in both a physical and sedentary job setting. A veteran not meeting the percentage criteria may still be awarded IU if the disabilities present a unique barrier to gainful employment. If a veteran is granted 100 percent under IU he is prohibited from working full-time, because in filing the claim for IU the veteran is stating he/she is unable to work

because of his/her service-connected disabilities. However, receiving IU does not necessarily prevent a veteran from all employment circumstances. The veteran can work in a part-time "marginal" employment position and earn up to a certain amount annually, but not allowed to surpass a certain amount.

3. Temporary 100 percent rating. If a veteran is hospitalized 21 days or longer or had surgery for a service-connected disability that requires at least a 30-day convalescence period, the VA will pay at the 100 percent rate for the duration of the hospital stay or the convalescence period. For example, if a veteran has a total hip replacement for a service-connected hip disability, the VA will pay 100 percent compensation for up to 13 months, the standard recovery period for a replacement of a major joint. The duration of 100 percent temporary disability for any other type of surgery will depend on what the doctor reports as the recovery period.

4. Permanent and total. A 100 percent "permanent and total" rating is when the VA acknowledges that the service-connected conditions have no likelihood of improvement and the veteran will remain at 100 percent permanently with no future examinations. The P&T rating provides additional benefits, such as Chapter 35 education benefits for dependents, among others. Veterans sometimes make the mistake of requesting a P&T rating simply because they want education benefits for their dependents. The one caveat that veterans need to keep in mind is that when P&T is requested, all of their service-connected disabilities will be re-evaluated. If improvement is noted during the subsequent examinations, a reduction from 100 percent can possibly be proposed. Because many veterans are service-connected for conditions that VA says have a "likelihood of improvement," most ratings are not considered permanent and are subject to future review. The only time veterans can't work a full-time position, that is considered a gainfully-employed job is if they were awarded 100 percent disability through a claim for IU. Additionally, a 100 percent rating under either IU or combined ratings may or may not be rated as permanent and total. A temporary 100 percent rating is just that: temporary due to being hospitalized or recovering from surgery on a service-connected condition, not considered permanent and are subject to future review. The only time veterans can't work a full-time position, that is considered a gainfully-employed job is if they were awarded 100 percent disability through a claim for IU. Additionally, a 100 percent rating under either IU or combined ratings may or may not be rated as permanent and total. A temporary 100 percent rating is just that: temporary due to being hospitalized or recovering from surgery on a service-connected condition. ■

Looking For...

The Washout

The photo is just for fun...

On a very serious note, long-time VTA member Ben Cole is gathering information about the history of the area around Con Thien and "Bastards Bridge" ... also known as "The Washout" ... during the summer and fall of 1967.

If you have any recollection or story that you'd like to share, please give Ben a call at 770-861-7640 or email him at: b_cole@bellsouth.net ■



Special Announcements



The last tanks assigned to 1st Tank Battalion depart Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twenty Nine Palms, California, July 6, 2020. As part of Force Design 2030, tanks are being divested from the Marine Corps in an effort to accelerate modernization and realign capabilities, units and personnel to higher priority areas.

Tanks era ends at 29 Palms Marine base

By Jene Estrada, Hi-Desert Star
Jul 15, 2020s

TWENTYNINE PALMS — In the last few weeks the Marine Corps has begun disbanding units as part of a plan to streamline the force, pushing away from heavy ground armor and increasing long-range, precision capabilities for the Marines. This redesign of the Marines will include disbanding the Corps' four tank units and supporting companies.

"This report describes the progress of the Marine Corps on my watch in preparing for the sweeping changes needed to meet the principal challenges facing the institution: effectively playing our role as the nation's naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, while simultaneously modernizing the force in accordance with the National Defense Strategy," said Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger in his updated force design plan that was released in March.

The plan includes reducing the Marines by 12,000 members by 2030, reducing infantry battalions, reducing law enforcement battalions, disbanding nearly all cannon artillery battalions and disbanding all tank battalions.

There are currently three tank battalions in the USMC; 1st, 2nd and 4th. The 1st Tank Battalion is based out of Twenty Nine Palms and has been active since 1941.

While the force design plan gave no timeline on when these changes will be made, only that they would occur before 2030, steps are already being taken to move the Marines away from tanks and toward new forms of combat.

Two combat logistics regiments, CLR-25 in Camp Lejeune and CLR-15 in Camp Pendleton, were deactivated on

Marine Corps Begins Shutdown of All Tank Battalions

21 Jul 2020

Military.com | By Gina Harkins

The end of the Marine Corps' tank missions has officially begun.

July 1. The 7th Engineer Support Battalion in Camp Pendleton and CLR-35 in Okinawa, Japan, were also disbanded earlier this summer.

"The commandant's plan is all about being a more mobile, lethal force. For us, that means small teams to get the job done," said CLR-25's commanding officer, Col. Denise Mull, at her unit's deactivation ceremony.

"We're excited to see who can step up to fill the role that this regiment filled."

Marines who work in these battalions have been advised by their command to transfer to a different military occupation specialty, or in some cases, move into a different branch of the military like the Army, which will be receiving many of the USMC tanks and towed artillery.

In place of tanks and the cannon artillery they carried in the USMC, the Marines will triple the size of land-based rocket artillery and stand-off missile units, Berger said.

This would essentially replace long-used towed artillery like the howitzer with high mobility artillery rocket systems, HIMARS.

The Corps is also planning to add land-based launchers able to fire the Tomahawk cruise missile to their arsenal in the coming years.

Berger said this will make the USMC ready to fight nations like China and Russia.

This aligns with a larger push dictated in President Donald Trump's National Defense Strategy released in 2019 to refocus America's military efforts away from terrorist response and toward larger rivals.

"I will continue to advocate for the continued forward deployment of our forces globally to compete against the malign activities of China, Russia, Iran, and their proxies," he said.

Marines with 1st Tank Battalion recently watched the last of their unit's tanks depart Twentynine Palms, California. Photos taken of the event show Marines sur- >>

rounding an oversized flatbed as the tanks were loaded up onto the vehicle and driven away.

Less than two weeks later, Alpha Company, 4th Tank Battalion, held a deactivation ceremony at Camp Pendleton, California. The unit is the first of several companies with 4th Tanks facing deactivations this summer, Maj. Roger Hollenbeck, a spokesman for Marine Forces Reserve, said.

The changes are part of an aggressive plan the Marine Corps' top general set in place earlier this year called Force Design 2030. The plan, leaders say, will set Marines up for future fights, defending ships while at sea and operating in hotly contested spots near the shore.

To be ready for those missions, Commandant Gen. David Berger said the Marine Corps must get smaller to get better. That includes cutting all tank battalions and getting rid of the vehicles.



The last tanks assigned to 1st Tank Battalion depart Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, July 6, 2020. (U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Courtney White)



U.S. Marine Capt. Chandler Brown, the executive officer for Alpha Company, 4th Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Marine Forces Reserve, with the color guard during the company's deactivation ceremony on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, July 18, 2020 (U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Andrew Cortez)

"Remember that our tanks were just weapon systems," Capt. Mark Rothrock, commander of Alpha Company, 4th Tank Battalion said when the unit deactivated on Friday. "[Tanks are] a damn fine weapon system, but nonetheless, just equipment. You individual Marines were always the key to the company's success."

Retired Master Sgt. Jay Corroccia had a similar message for members of 1st Tanks as that unit's vehicles rolled away earlier this month.

"Take the standards and the pride you had here and apply it to whatever you do," he said. "Whether you stay in the Marine Corps or you get out, nobody can ever take Tank Battalion away from you."

More than 1,300 Marines will have their careers affected

by Force Design 2030. Service officials announced in May that four military occupational specialties would be cut because of the changes, and several more would see their billets reduced.

The Marine Corps Reserve, Hollenbeck said, has created a team to help provide any Marines affected by unit deactivations or other changes information on career options. Those options include lateral moves into other fields or transfers to other military branches.

All of 4th Tanks' six companies, along with its battalion headquarters, are expected to deactivate by the end of 2021, Hollenbeck said.

Tank battalions aren't the only units deactivating because of Force Design 2030. Several combat logistics regiments, an engineer support battalion, and a Marine wing support group have also cased their colors in deactivation ceremonies this summer.

Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, the head of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, is overseeing many of the Force Design 2030 changes. Tanks leaving the Marine Corps, Smith told Military.com in May, could be sold to foreign militaries or to the Army. The Marine Corps could also sell their parts or store the vehicles, he said.

Smith added that the Marine Corps' decision to move forward without tanks doesn't diminish their importance in past missions.

"They were of massive value, I mean huge value, in the past," he said. "I used them in and around Ramadi and in and around Fallujah [in Iraq]. They've paid their dues in blood. These are Marine warriors from the Korean War until now."

"It's just that for the future fight, [tanks] are of less value than the things that we need most, such as long-range precision fire," Smith said.

— Gina Harkins can be reached at gina.harkins@military.com. Follow her on Twitter @ginaaharkins. ■

What I Learn From The Vietnam War

Editor's Note: It would truly be outstanding if our membership felt compelled to write their own opinion of what they learned from their experience while serving in the United States Marine Corps in Vietnam instead of us having to use a "commercial" opinion

"STOLEN VALOR: SETTING THE VIETNAM RECORD STRAIGHT

DEFENDING AMERICA

BY DAVID H. HACKWORTH

29 SEPTEMBER 1998

The Vietnam War just won't go away. Daily it kills vets who fought there. Daily it kills Vietnamese who live there. Daily it haunts those warriors who survived the battlefield but still live with the nightmare of America's most divisive war. Of all the wars our country has fought Vietnam was perhaps the toughest for the grunt; the most reported, but the least understood. It was the only war where our heroes who did the bleeding were never honored. There were no parades. No "Welcome Home". No "Job Well Done." When it ended, it was quickly buried. The Pentagon swept it under the rug. Colleges refused to teach it. Many vets even denied they were ever there. Collectively, society wanted to forget it.

But still it wouldn't go away. Hollywood produced its Rambo version, the media followed with theirs, and the rumor mills churned out still more sleaze. The vets never countered these massive Misrepresentations. Their voice was silenced by their shame at being accused of losing the war — a first for America — and the stigma that bad war engendered.

Myth eventually replaced truth. The fiction became that the "baby killers" of Vietnam were unstable losers, drug fiends, suicidal creeps, murderers, pathological time bombs, animals unfit for society. They were branded like cattle. Too often at the top of a negative story — a crime, a murder, a violent act — would be "Vietnam Veteran" For thirty years, reporters produced thousands of distortions. Big hitters like CBS's Dan Rather, for example, who received a prestigious media award for a story about a nutso SEAL in Vietnam who later turned out to be a rear echelon weenie rather than a member of that elite outfit.

Time Magazine reported a vet shot a pregnant women while in Vietnam, except that the impostor had never served in Vietnam. The Boston Globe told the story of a vet who was in the slammer for murder because of a heroin addiction he picked up in Vietnam. The story won him an early release until it was revealed he'd never served in Vietnam. These lies from and about wannabes and total frauds are just three of countless stories designed to degrade those that fought there. Many in the press accepted these cons and exaggerations without doing their homework

because too many reporters bought into the propaganda that Vietnam vets were bums. And when caught along with CBS, Time and The Boston Globe, their false stories were seldom retracted and the record was seldom set straight.

Why apologize? For decades it's been open season on the men who served our country so faithfully and so bravely in Vietnam — the ones who didn't follow the example of over 14 million of their contemporaries who shirked in Canada, shirked in college or shirked in the National Guard.

Few have stood tall to the press and said "Wait a minute. You got it wrong." Vietnam vets didn't have many public defenders.

Now Vietnam vet B.G. Burkett, a Texas businessman, has taken on that role. For ten years, at a huge personal cost, he dug through the National Archives and filed hundreds of requests for military documents under the Freedom of Information Act. Finally, he gathered enough for his self-published book, *STOLEN VALOR*, and launched a vigorous counterattack that has "uncovered a massive distortion of history."

In his own words, his research revealed "killers who have fooled the most astute prosecutors and gotten away with murder, phony heroes who have become the object of award-winning documentaries on national television and liars and fabricators who have flooded major publishing houses with false tales of heroism which have become best-selling biographies."

Former Navy Secretary James Webb called Burkett's work "one of the most courageous books of the decade." In *STOLEN VALOR*, Burkett tells the story of more than 1700 people who tried to steal the valor of others or to disgrace the service of those who did their duty in Vietnam by distortion and lies.

Few regular bookstores stock it. Most are as afraid of a lawsuit as the publishers were. But Joe Galloway, a distinguished combat correspondent, says "*STOLEN VALOR* exposes more fraud than the Justice Department." You can get it by calling 1-800-253-6789.

Editor's Note: This article was written 22 years ago but it still rings true today. ■

A Letter Home

This letter, written fifty four years ago from my (then) soon-to-be fiancé, Steve Falk, recently surfaced while my son was cleaning out a file cabinet at my home. I found it to be a welcomed surprise and timely gift for Mother's Day 2020. It also reminded me of all the uncertainties of the time and anxieties experienced.

The Marine Corps held all the cards for time and place for each of their Marines to actively serve or to have a time for leave and/or R&R. Perhaps this was the fine print in your "signing on" and very much the reality.

Many of you might have experienced similar anxieties not knowing if you were "coming or going" or having doubts about just what you did choose at the time. Without a doubt, many personal sacrifices were made and plans dashed by schedules of deployment.

Steve did come home on leave that November, 1966, before shipping out for California in December and then on to Vietnam in January 1967 with 1st Tanks, 1st Marine Division. We weren't together to celebrate Christmas but we were engaged to be married on his pre deployment leave and planned to be married when he returned home. In spite of the stress and anxieties, we were fortunate to have our plans work out. That was not the case for many.

Marcia Flak – the widow of VTA member, Steve Falk

Sweetheart,

Boy, am I in a fix. Everything is screwed up. I don't know if I am coming or going. Nobody will tell me for sure when I'll get leave and come home. It looks like I'll be here on Thanksgiving Day. The only thing they tell me is that I have to be in Pendleton on or before the 20th of December. Therefore, I might not leave here until the 30th or the 1st. I'd rather miss Christmas by a month than by a week. It will be so hard. I've never even thought of not being home for Christmas. But, I've got no choice, so there's no sense in running my garbage pit.

How's my best Pook tonight? I guess you're working right now. By the way, I got the money today. I don't know what to do with it. I guess I'll just carry it around until I get to cash them. I'm going to buy a trunk and maybe sent it home, maybe bring it. It all depends on when I get to leave here. The thing that's really bothering me is that I planned to be home this week. If I don't get out of here, I'll miss thanksgiving and Tuesday there is a junk on the bunk inspection. As you know, all of my junk is home. I might screw myself up yet. I hope not. I'm going to have to ask for some definite answers tomorrow. I'll let you know.

Honey, I'm lost, really. All of a sudden I don't know what I'm doing or where I'm going. If I could just go to Nam and get it over with I'd be a lot happier. Of course, I'd rather not leave you at all. Nothing seems worthwhile. I've been working so hard and getting so little done. I don't have any time to myself. I'm on the road by 0500 and I'm lucky to get off by 1700 in the afternoon. And I just wish I could talk to you all day. I know I'll miss you bad when I go overseas, but at least it will all count toward the last second I'll have to miss you. When I come back, we'll be together for good, always and forever. I ask you only to try not to get to emotional about me going. However, don't keep it all on the inside, that's no good either. It will be hard, but so worthwhile. If I didn't join now, I would have been drafted later. If I don't go now, I'll go later. I think that it's best to get all this junk over with for good.

Well, babe, the kid is very tired and I have another long day tomorrow. Sorry, but I've got to go now. Be good and take care.

Love always and forever.

Steve

Photo from Vietnam



Duke Hughes – Task Force Robbie

We Are Veterans

BY MARSHALL KORNBLATT

We left home as teenagers for an unknown adventure.
We loved our country enough to defend it and protect it with our own lives.
We said goodbye to friends and family and everything we knew.
We learned the basics and then we scattered in the wind to the far corners of the Earth.
We found new friends and new family.
We became brothers and sisters regardless of color, race or creed.
We had plenty of good times, and plenty of bad times.
We didn't get enough sleep.
We smoked and drank too much.
We picked up both good and bad habits.
We worked hard and played harder.
We didn't earn a great wage.
We experienced the happiness of mail call and the sadness of missing important events.
We didn't know when, or even if, we were ever going to see home again.
We grew up fast, and yet somehow, we never grew up at all.
We fought for our freedom, as well as the freedom of others.
Some of us saw actual combat, and some of us didn't.
Some of us saw the world, and some of us didn't.
Some of us dealt with physical warfare, most of us dealt with psychological warfare.
We have seen and experienced and dealt with things that we can't fully describe or explain,
as not all of our sacrifices were physical.
We participated in time honored ceremonies and rituals with each other,
strengthening our bonds and camaraderie.
We counted on each other to get our job done and sometimes to survive it at all.
We have dealt with victory and tragedy.
We have celebrated and mourned.
We lost a few along the way.
When our adventure was over, some of us went back home,
some of us started somewhere new and some of us never came home at all.
We have told amazing and hilarious stories of our exploits and adventures.
We share an unspoken bond with each other, that most people don't experience,
and few will understand.
We speak highly of our own branch of service, and poke fun at the other branches.
We know however, that, if needed, we will be there for our brothers and sisters
and stand together as one, in a heartbeat.
Being a veteran is something that had to be earned, and it can never be taken away.
It has no monetary value, but at the same time it is a priceless gift.
People see a veteran and they thank them for their service.
When we see each other, we give that little upwards head nod, or a slight smile,
knowing that we have shared and experienced things that most people have not.
So, from myself to the rest of the veterans out there, I commend and thank you
for all that you have done and sacrificed for your country.
Try to remember the good times and forget the bad times.

Share your stories.

But most importantly, stand tall and proud, for you have earned the right to be called a Veteran.

I just got the most recent Sponson Box – Another good job. I noticed one of my articles was published – Thanks mucho. I read the article "Qualifying" and noticed that something seemed missing, not sure what happened but the entire article is below for your reading pleasure and comparison with what was published

Ken Zebal

Qualifying

As a newly assigned 1811 tank crewman I was presented with several opportunities to excel. Fire watch is one example and Assistant Duty NCO another. I thought these, along with guard duty and mess duty, were nuisance assignments that did little or nothing to enhance my skills as the Assistant Loader on C-23 an M-103 heavy tank.

However, at the tank park everything was focused on Tanker business. We checked oil (hot & cold), checked track, cleaned guns, cleaned OVM and heavens only knows we cleaned the tank and the turret. Boy did we ever clean that turret, batteries, linkages, radios, ammo boxes and dropping the breach. All this was accomplished in accordance with the training schedule (conduct OJT) and under the direct and unforgiving supervision of our salty TCs; Sgt. Jimmy Dodgen, Sgt. Ralph Greenwood, Cpl. Harmon, Cpl. Red Brezinski, and Cpl. Morehead.

In those days we didn't actually march as a detail to and from the Company area to the Tank Park but rather negotiated the distance more like as an orderly herd with one NCOIC to make sure we didn't get lost. By way of comparison, we were marched to both morning and noon chow by the A-Duty. Mess hall 407 was almost 50 yards catty-corner across the Battalion Street from Charlie Co. In retrospect, maybe that's how we informally learned drill. As many of you may recall your snuffy (Pvt, PFC and L/Cpl) peers don't suffer fools lightly and provide quick feedback to drill commands not done in accordance with the Landing Party Manual.

One fine day the NCOs thought we, as a group of boots, needed some special OJT. By then we had gained a little experience with the 12 lb. sledge and tank bar but the TCs felt we actu-

ally needed to qualify with the sledge as part of our OJT and to protect their tanks from our unskilled hands. If memory serves, we were actually supposed to strike the end connector with a brass drift or 2x4 or something of the sort. As you might imagine we hit the end connectors with tank bar directly and the end connectors never seemed worse for it.

So, Pat Rogers, Jim Thompson, Charlie Tubbs, Steve Lyon, Rich Lehman, Clay Marks, Vince Bartashus, Paul Fedor and I were lined up and were told what was going to happen. One at a time we were to individually qualify. However, while one was qualifying the rest were to be sequestered in the company shed to ensure we couldn't see how the actual qualification process and thereby gain an unfair advantage. All that seemed to make sense and we were escorted into the company shed while someone was selected to qualify on the ramp. When my turn came, I got three practice swings at an end connector laying on a section of track in the dirt. So I wound up and blasted that end connector three times in

a row. The NCOs intently scrutinized each swing and offered lots of helpful advice and tips. Then came my big chance to qualify and I meant to do well. But first I needed to be blindfolded and they needed to spin me around both ways a few times so someone held my utility jacket and cover. They permitted me a practice swing to get some azimuth, elevation and range. Now I'm finally set to begin qualification, so I swing and hit the ground. Someone says a little to the left, so I swing and hit the track. Someone else says a little up and then they tell me to go ahead. So I swing again and again and again. Then someone said we're done so let's get that blindfold off. The NCOs are all happy, smiling and having a pretty good time when I see my utility cover all smashed up and full of holes and finally put it all together. Sgt Jimmy Dodgen shakes my hand, says I qualified but have to wear that cover for the rest of the day so everybody will know that I've qualified. By then I'm very skeptical but put my cover back on and hang out with the rest of my newly qualified Tanker buddies. One can



only hope that Marine Tankers today have as much fun as we did back then.

Editor's Note: We deeply regret omitting any part of Ken's original story and

we hope that he can find it in his heart to forgive the error.

Route 9

We were on Route 9 nearing Vandergrift. I asked our destination. The salty short timer announced, Khe Sanh.

"The hell you are!" was the reply. Apparently only the young and stupid would have gone as far west

as we did on Route 9, the rest of the journey was not secure.

Paul Urschalitz

I Remember Charlie Brown

BY MIKE COLLIER

Here's a short story about Charlie Brown. I should have sent this when his photo appeared in "The Sponson Box" some time ago. To the story. Cpl Brown was one of my tank commanders in 2nd Platoon Bravo Company, 2nd Tank Bn in 1965. Of the five TCs, I rated him as #2, he knew his tank inside and out, and took good care of his crew. Back to the story. One summer Sunday morning I received a call at home from the battalion OD. Cpl Brown was in the Jacksonville jail on a charge of assault. I made my way to the jail in uniform and announced I was there to see one of my Marines. Making my way back to the cells I could hear hymn singing. When I got to the cells I received a surprise. There was Cpl Brown in a crisp white shirt with blood stains down the front and a puffy lip, he was behind bars, but all of his cell mates were black. Next to this "black" cell was the white cell. I was face to face with racial segregation in Jacksonville, North Carolina, version 1965. The hymn singing

was coming from the white cell, and a street preacher was leading them in "The Old Rugged Cross", then moved on to scripture readings. Cpl Brown was as far away in the corner of his cell, and as far away as he could get from the street preacher. The look on his face was clear that he wished to be as far away, anywhere, but not there. He didn't have much to say for himself, except that he didn't start the fight.

I was not able to get him freed from his cell that Sunday, however I vouched for his presence when his trial came about. My recollection is he came back to duty on Monday, after his bail hearing. His trial on the charge of assault was set for a few weeks in the future, and I told him I would testify on his behalf regarding his value to the Marine Corps, to his country and to 2nd platoon Bravo Company. I was sworn in and swore to tell the truth etc. Following my testimony regarding his excellent service as a U.S. Marine, and my general opinion that he was a good citizen, I

was cross examined by the prosecutor. He, in his slow southern drawl, asked if I thought that Cpl Brown was such a good Marine, did that mean I thought he was a "good fighter". I reiterated he was a good Marine, and as such he had to know how to fight, in a combat environment. Further, I testified I was proud of him as a Marine and as a member of my platoon, he had been trained, and was ready for combat if his country sent him. I probably went on for quite a bit longer continuing to emphasize Cpl Brown's value to the United States and his willingness to serve. Finally the prosecutor had enough of my "God Bless the United States and Success to the Marines" speechifying and said he had no more questions. Cpl Brown received a modest fine, and a welcome back to 2nd Platoon. He was quite a Marine.

Editor's Note: Several years ago, Joe Woolever sent me a copy of the following articles that came out of in one of the summer 1965 issues of Stars and Stripes newspaper.

March 6, 1965 – US Sends Marines to South Vietnam

The White House confirmed reports that, at the request of South Vietnam, the United States was sending two battalions of US Marines for security work at the Da Nang air base, which would hopefully free the South Vietnamese troops for combat. On March 1, Ambassador Maxwell Taylor informed the South Vietnamese Premier Phan Hue Quat

that the United States was preparing to send thirty-five hundred US Marines to Vietnam. Three days later, a formal request was submitted by the US Embassy, asking the South Vietnamese government to "invite" the United States to send the Marines. Premier Quat, a mere figurehead, had to obtain approval from the real power, General Nguyen Van Thieu,

chief of the Armed Forces Council. Thieu approved, but asked that the Marines be "brought ashore in the most inconspicuous way feasible." The Marines began landing near Da Nang on March 8.

Joe writes: "I was driving an Ontos directly behind the tank when it went into the hole in the river during fording."

US Names Seven Dead, One Missing

The five US Marines who drown Saturday when the tank in which they were riding sank in 12 feet of water 10 miles southwest of Da Nang have been identified by US military spokesmen as: 1st Lt Robert A Butz,

Easton, PA; Sgt Arthur B Eustace, Jr. of Chicago and Fox Lake, IL; Cpl Frederick J Schwantger, Elizabethtown, PA. Also Cpl George P Zupancic, Detroit, MI; and Cpl Joseph P Grugan, Philadelphia.

In addition, US military spokesmen identified two Army officers killed on recent operations and a US Navy pilot missing on a mission over North Vietnam.

Da Nang – Tense Vietnam Boom Town

BY RICHARD F NEWCOMB

Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam – The seaport city of 160,000 people has 10 hotels, a USO, 35 bars and is full of misquotes, jukeboxes and bar girls. It closes tight at the 10 PM curfew.

It is also full of Viet Cong or communist sympathizers. One was caught there recently just after he had left a plastic bomb in the lobby of a hotel housing Americans. The bomb didn't go off, but 7,000 people turned out to watch as Le Dau, 24, was publicly executed on the Da Nang soccer field. They cheered.

About the same time, a Catholic stabbed a Buddhist in a card game. In the ensuing riot, Buddhists burned 14 Catholic homes. And on the outskirts of Town, ageless peasants till the fields, as they have for centuries. Off to the west, the Annamite Mountains begin to rise from the coastal plain.

None of this would be of much

concern to Americans, except that Da Nang is a bustling military base, the same distance from Hanoi as it is from Saigon.

A few months ago Da Nang was just another airstrip. Today it is an aerodrome handling 600 flights a day or more. Once there was a handful of American advisors there. Today 16,000 American servicemen have pitched tents there.

Da Nang air base is a 10,000 foot runway complete with control tower, hangers, supply dumps, cantonments, PX's, theater, beer halls and base bus service.

The Marines there are not sitting on their barracks bags. First they took the local hills – Hill 327, Hill 228, and Hill 312 – overlooking the airfield.

Then the patrols began to fan out – 15 miles to the southwest, 35 miles to the north – probing, probing.

50 years ago, a Marine victory in Vietnam was considered a defeat by the media

BY ARTHUR HERMAN FOR FOX NEWS

A mainstream media that reshapes reality to fit a preordained political agenda isn't something that started only recently. A half century ago America's major news organization deliberately buried the true story of one of the crucial battles of the Vietnam War, and one of the Marine Corps' greatest achievements: the 31-day battle for the South Vietnamese city of Hue that ended on March 2, 1968.

The fight for Hue set a standard for Marine courage and endurance that stands beside the World War II Battle of Iwo Jima and the Korean War Battle of Inchon. But 50 years later, few Americans even know what our Marines accomplished at Hue because

the battle didn't fit a biased media's narrative then and now – the claim that in 1968 we were losing the War in Vietnam. The time has come to set the record straight.

The communist attack on Hue, South Vietnam's third largest city, was part of North Vietnam's Tet Offensive. Viet Cong units infiltrated the city dressed as ordinary civilians and after midnight on Jan. 30, 1968 they seized key strongpoints. Five thousand North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops also swarmed down on the ancient provincial capital. The first moment the Americans realized they were under attack was when an NVA rocket blew up a jeep outside Marine Maj.

In the first week in May, 3,000 more Marines went in, to be followed by 3,000 Seabees. This force went ashore in the best amphibious warfare style – but unopposed – over beaches at Chu Lai, 50 miles sought of Da Nang. There the Seabees, the Navy's famed construction battalions, will build a new airfield on the coastal plain.

Every day the planes go out from Da Nang – South Vietnamese, US Air Force, even Navy planes hopping from US Navy carriers off-shore. They range over South Vietnam to the outskirts of Hanoi. They are bridge-busting, shooting up trains and trucks, barracks and ammunition dumps, radar and anti-aircraft posts. And they are hurting the enemy.

The communists would like to take Da Nang. It would be a tremendous prestige-builder for the Viet Cong. But it isn't likely to happen.

Frank Breth's window in the American command compound, which would be the center of savage fighting for the next six days. Breth and others in the compound managed to fight off the first round of attacks. Reinforcements arrived piecemeal, company by company, starting with Company A of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines under Capt. Gordon Batcheller.

Besides being outnumbered, the Marines were hampered by bone-chilling cold weather and rain that limited visibility and air support. They also fought under strict rules of engagement that excluded the use of heavy artillery and air strikes within the bounds of the historic city. Apart >>

from a handful of tanks, Marines had to retake Hue only with the weapons they could carry on their backs against a fanatical Viet Cong and NVA armed with mortars, rockets and heavy machine guns – and ready to fight to the death house by house, sometimes room by room. The Marines learned how to charge a house with hand grenades, then cover it room by room with M-16 fire. They learned how a 106 mm. recoilless rifle could blow a hole through a reinforced wall, so they could storm in under cover of the dust and smoke.

Sgt. Alfredo Gonzalez was typical of the Marines at Hue. Just 21 years old, he took command of A Company when its commanding officer was wounded. For five days, he led his men with the skill and dedication that earned him the battle's only Medal of Honor – posthumously. Others displayed similar tenacity and courage. They included the men of Capt. Michael Downs' F Company, Capt. Charles Meadows' G Company and Capt. George Christmas' H Company of 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. Casualties were so high in 1st Battalion's D Company that all but the most seri-

ously wounded men stayed in the fight.

Though completely outnumbered, the Marines managed to clear the enemy from the southern and eastern sectors of Hue less than two weeks after the battle started. Then they relieved exhausted South Vietnamese troops to retake the city's historic citadel.

By Feb. 24, the Marines had regained almost all of Hue. On the 25th, Marine Capt. James Coolican led soldiers from South Vietnam's elite Black Panthers in storming the last NVA stronghold, the Imperial Palace.

On Feb. 28, Marines moved to cut off the remaining NVA forces fleeing the city. On March 2 Operation Hue City officially ended, after 216 Americans had been killed in action and 1,584 were wounded. Communist losses were more than 5,000 killed and wounded. For many Marines, the American flag flying over the provincial administration building on Hue's Le Loi Street was a sight as inspiring as the flag that flew over Mount Suribachi during the 1945 Battle of Iwo Jima.

But Americans at home learned almost nothing about this. The media was so set on painting the Tet Of-

fensive as a U.S. defeat, and convincing Americans that the U.S. was (in Walter Cronkite's words) "mired in a stalemate" in Vietnam, that they largely ignored how the Marines at Hue had achieved a stupendous victory. The media also ignored the discovery of bodies of 2,800 civilians and captured South Vietnamese soldiers who had been ruthlessly murdered by Viet Cong death squads, including teachers, doctors, nurses and students.

Fifty years later, we need to honor what the U.S. Marine Corps accomplished during the siege of Hue. We also need to remember that our liberal media has a long history of twisting the truth beyond recognition in pursuit of a political agenda – and in the case of Vietnam, of cheating American servicemen and women of the recognition they deserve for their valor and sacrifice.

Historian Arthur Herman is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C. He is author of several books. His latest is "1917: Lenin, Wilson, and the Birth of the New World Disorder."

July 10th, 1969

BY FRANK RODRIQUEZ

3RD SQUAD, 3RD PLATOON, GOLF COMPANY, 2/7

We were at a place called Cobb Bridge, and "Tug Boat" and Bobbins and the rest of the squad were skating there. Not a lot of shit happening. Squads would take turns going across the river to clear the Island of booby traps and any gooks.

It was really skate. The other squads would guard the bridge and HQ area. I recall correctly a squad would stay on the Island four or five days. We had to find our own way across the river, usually giving papa-san C-Rats to use his sampan to cross.

The next day my squad was going back over to the main land. Second squad which was "Pineapple's, was going to relieve us. It had been raining all day for a fat man's ass. The river was

really swollen. At about 1800 hours, Pineapple let us know they were getting ready to set in for the night at the edge of the river and would cross to relieve us at first light.

Then all hell broke loose! Explosion after explosion! We heard voices on the radio crying for help and things like "GOD don't let me die!" I guess what happened was that they set in and one guy laid his pack down and it set off a million booby traps. There was absolutely nothing that we could do. No choppers because of the weather. We could not risk sending Marines into the rain-swollen river with the fast moving current.

All we could do was listen to them die. Marines are supposed to help oth-

er Marines. Jim Whalen was the survivor and lived with the thought that he had set things off. But in reality he did not. The reaction force proved he did not. But he lived with that guilt for over thirty years until we told him differently. He lost an eye and had metal all over his body. He is alive and my hero! All of the squad either died at the scene or in medevac.

We will never forget this date, July 10th 1969. I love you Jimmy. You will always be my hero. And I love that squad. If you have heard this from me before, I apologize.

Rest in Peace,
Semper Fidelis Third Herd

Frank (Rod)

This past week I was on a four and a half hour, nonstop flight from Seattle, Washington, to Atlanta, Georgia. In all my years of traveling, I have learned that each time a plane has the opportunity to stop, there is potential for unexpected challenges. Flight delays, weather and airline crews can create unanticipated challenges on any trip. Therefore, I always try to fly nonstop between my destinations.

About an hour into this particular flight, the Captain's voice rang over the intercom. He asked if there was a physician or nurse on the plane. If so, he asked them to identify themselves by ringing the flight attendant call button beside their seat. I listened carefully but heard no one ring their bell. I immediately began to wonder what was happening. In a few minutes the Captain informed us that there was a medical emergency on board and asked again if there was a physician or a nurse who could help. When there was no response, we were told that we were going to make an emergency stop in Denver, Colorado. He apologized but told us that there would be a medical emergency team waiting to meet us at the gate and that we would probably only be delayed by about thirty minutes. Though it was necessary, we knew we would all be inconvenienced by the extra stop.

Perfect message for today

About half an hour later, we landed at Denver International Airport and the medical crew immediately came on board. However, everything took longer than had previously been expected. An elderly gentleman, about 95 years old, had suddenly taken ill. It was not clear whether he had experienced a stroke or heart attack. Even after the gentleman was carried off of the plane, we still sat there for quite a while. The original "short" stop turned into about an hour and a half.

When we finally pushed back from the gate and were in the air, the pilot apologized profusely for the unavoidable delay. He said that since the stop had taken longer than expected, those passengers who needed to make connections in Atlanta would miss their flights but would automatically be booked on the next flight out. You could almost hear the moans and groans throughout the airplane of everyone who was being inconvenienced by the unexpected stop.

Then the pilot did one of the classiest things I have personally ever seen or heard anyone do. He spoke into the intercom and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I thought you might be interested in one bit of information. The elderly gentleman who was taken off the plane was a Marine in WWII. I am holding in my hand a copy of the Congressio-

SLANGUAGE: Is "Viet Cong" a racist term?

BY GORDON L. ROTTMAN

Some years ago I was somewhat surprised with accusations made by college students about the term "Viet Cong." The phrase was racist they passionately claimed. I discounted it at first as these same students were in high school when I returned from Vietnam (1969–70). They thought we were fighting the Japanese at the time.

Those same claims that Viet Cong is racist have frequently emerged in the Left, but are no longer "passionately" claimed, more like zealously or vehemently avowed. More recently—5 December 2017—in Toronto, Canada a

small group of Anglo and Vietnamese demonstrators assembled in front of Lee's Palace restaurant to protest the touring Calgary quartet band, Viet Cong—described as "labyrinthine post-punk" and comprised of Anglos. They bore signs declaring "Change Your Racist Name," "Still Named Viet Cong Still Racist," and "Not Your History Not Your Name." The police attempted to arrange a meeting between the band and the protestors, which the band had no desire to attend. It was not clear if ancestors of the twenty-something protestors has actually been Viet

nal Medal of Honor that was awarded to him and signed by President Harry Truman in 1945."

The pilot went on to say, "I realize that we have all been inconvenienced today. However, in light of the fact that this gentleman was a war hero, and was inconvenienced for four years of his life in order that we might experience the freedoms that we enjoy today, I thought you all should know that."

Immediately the airplane was filled with applause. Everyone was cheering and so pleased to know that the gentleman had been cared for in a way that was fitting and appropriate. As we continued to fly, I thought to myself, "Isn't that interesting? We were concerned that we were inconvenienced for a couple of hours and yet, this gentleman's entire life was interrupted and inconvenienced for over four years while he went and fought in a war to protect the freedoms and values that we love and hold dear in this country today."

I breathed a prayer for the gentleman and asked God to bless him for all he had done to help us understand what freedom is all about.

"History does not entrust the care of freedom to the weak or timid."
– Dwight D. Eisenhower

Cong or why this issue was a concern to them other than someone earlier declaring it "racist." In 2015 one venue owner "said "No" to hosting a performance because Viet Cong is racist toward Vietnamese people. Their name, which started as a racist joke, profits off of traumatic Vietnamese history."

American troops were to call the Vietnamese and other ethnic groups in Vietnam by many names, good, bad, and indifferent. Some were outright racist and derogatory. The attitude of soldiers toward the Vietnamese is often discussed and >>

was a major dynamic. Regardless of the line pitched by the US Government and armed forces, the average grunt thought very little of the people they were fighting to protect from communism and instill democracy in. To many Americans they were unmotivated, indifferent, lazy, unclean, selfish, uneducated, and would do anything for a piaster. There was widespread corruption within the Vietnamese Government and ARVN. They thought even less of the ARVN who often appeared unmotivated and unreliable (though there were many well-led, effective units). There was a degree of racial prejudice among Americans too and the soldiers' common names for Vietnamese were "gooks," "slopes," "slopeheads," "dinks," "zips," and "zipperheads." Are these words racist? Yes, they are. Much of this was caused by simply having little or no understanding and familiarity with a complex and much different culture.

Another factor was the type of Vietnamese most often encountered by soldiers. One does not develop a kindly outlook toward a people when exposed mainly to prostitutes, pimps, bargirls, and drug and pornography dealers. The population suffered from almost 30 years of war-weariness and changes in corrupt governments. The attitude had evolved to make the best of it for oneself. Rural villagers did not

care who ran the country; they just wanted to be left alone to continue their simple lives.

The focus of this article though is the phrase: "Viet Cong." Up front, I never considered Viet Cong to be racist and I know of no Vietnam veteran who viewed it as racist or deprecating term nor were any of the related terms.

First, what was the official name of the organization known informally as the Viet Cong? Pundits like to point out that the term "Viet Cong" is incorrect. On one level this is true. The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Mặt Trận Dân Tộc Giải Phóng Miền Nam Việt Nam), or the SVNLF, (often mis-abbreviated to NLF) was both a political organization with its own local government superimposed on South Vietnam and an armed insurgent force. Its military arm was the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) (Quân Đội Giải Phóng Nhân Dân) or more commonly, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Quân Đội Giải Phóng). They were commonly called the Việt Cộng or VC, a contraction of Đảng Việt Nam Cộng Sản (Vietnamese Communist Party).

To the South Vietnamese, civilian and military, Free World forces, the public at large, and by the PLA itself, they were commonly called the "Viet Cong," whether a political operative or a fighter. The American soldier called

them the "VC"— "Victor Charlie"— from the NATO Phonetic Alphabet. In more abbreviated form they were the "Charlie" or the "Cong." Some writers have claimed this a derogatory term in the grunt's vocabulary. It is a neutral term and nothing more than the phonetic alphabet word for the "C" in VC. Likewise the terms "Charles" and "Chuck" were occasionally used simply as neutral nicknames. If Charlie was meant to be demeaning, grunts would not have called their enemy "Mr. Charles" or "Sir Charles," begrudging a sign of respect for their battlefield prowess. There is no sense for contemporary historians to make something out of "Viet Cong" or "Charlie" that it is not. As individual fighters, the VC referred to themselves as chiến sĩ (combatant or soldier) or thu chiến (liberation fighter).

One further point: More research should be conducted on this aspect. What is the meaning and context of the phrase "Viet Cong" used today by Vietnamese-Americans? I read one account that if directed at a Vietnamese, possibly being accused of having been a VC, then it equates to the "N-word," but only in the aspect of having been a VC or being sympathetic to the Vietnamese Communists. It has nothing to do with racial issues.

See also <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-true-origin-of-the-term-viet-cong/>

ordinates to use it more than you. Fear not. It will work.

- Inform and communicate up and down-always. Human interaction is the elixir of life on the battlefield.
- Think from the enemy viewpoint—that is the only perspective that really counts.
- Remember—there is a huge machine behind you. Task it ruthlessly.
- Do what you think right and want to do, not what you think you must do. If you succeed, no one will notice how you got there, but you will get the credit. Fail and you won't care.
- Don't try to be loved. Just try hard and lead always. All else follows.
- Remember your basic human values. If you forget them or allow others to forget them, you forfeit your purpose and why we exist as a nation.

Things That Count

- Casevac. Troop impressions of its management are as powerful as any bullet.
- Water, food and ammo. It's not rocket science. Maslow is hard at work here.
- Sleep. Tired troops give the bad

guys the edge Especially the leaders.

- Combined arms. Anything is cheaper and better than a soldier. Use it. It's free.
- Reporting precision. Initial combat reporting is always bad and always wrong. Help your boss make correct informed decisions.
- Mail. Close to sexual gratification in isolation. Be the organizational pimp.
- Accomplishing the mission. Do everything above and this will automatically follow.

Stuff To Work On Before Engagement

- NCO roles and responsibilities. NCO's make things happen. Officers watch. NEVER mess with this.
- Concept and employment of clear measurable standards in all unit tasks. This is a CORE necessity. If you do not inculcate this, you WILL fail.
- All weapons and all roles cross trained all the time. There is no guarantee of unit integrity when the battle is joined. Every soldier must be capable of doing every job.
- Marksmanship and bullet control. Every round a hit. Spray and pray is for

people who do not routinely get shot at. Assume if you don't have it, you won't get it. That is usually true.

- When something is FU, stop it. Discuss it—bottom up. Restart. Reinforce success. Minimize failure.
- Uniformity—packing, wearing, doing. It's a mental thing and symbolic of the unit quality.
- Delegation as a constant mantra in all things. Be lazy and observe. Practice this routinely. In combat you can manage yourself and maybe the radio operator.
- Physical fitness. Lead and make others follow. The core of every quality unit.
- Communication skills. Up and down. Talk to your troops frequently—informally. Do not lecture—listen, watch and discuss. They want to know the Why from you. They will figure out the How.
- Read history. A lot of good stuff there that can save your lives. Plagiarize frequently.
- Get and stay involved. Get dirty. Be seen. Bullshit. Enjoy your people. It is a short tour.

Submitted by Bob Skeels ■

What I Have Learned With Bullets

BY KEITH NIGHTINGALE

I was cleaning out my accumulated files and I came across a series of notes regarding officers and leadership accumulated through the years. Having commanded four rifle companies, three Airborne/Ranger battalions and two Airborne/Ranger brigades, several in combat between 1965 and 1993, I saw a lot, did a lot and tried to remember. This article is for those who wish the knowledge, hopefully without the pain.

Officers in Combat

- Do what you are trained to

do. Sounds simple but it's hard when bullets fly. Just do it. Do not think. Thinking at this stage is deadly for your troops. You will fight as you train. You will not get magically better when you deploy. Bad units are always bad—the enemy tells you that.

- There is no luxury of self-indulgence. Be with the troops. Lead. Do not order.
- In a small moment in time, you are God. Take the care associated with the responsibility.

- Be calm. Fear is contagious and calm inoculates.
- Use all the toys and tools you have or can demand. Nothing is more expensive than a soldier.
- Expect the unexpected. Reverse the process and surprise the bad guys.
- Be flexible. Combat demands it. Everything changes all the time. Open minds dominate the battlefield.
- Initiative is the Sword of Excalibur. Do not fear. Trust your training and your instincts. Use it and use it always. Teach and inculcate the sub-

Photo from Vietnam



Duke Hughes – Sgt Eugino (Hawaii) sitting on gun
Cpl. Thomas (Chicago) sitting on tank.
L/Cpl. Thurstrum (LA),
L/Cpl. Hughes (Portland, OR)

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

BY GARRY HALL

After completing Basic Specialist Training for Tank Crewmen at Camp Delmar, Camp Pendleton on 6 February 1967, the new rookie tankers received orders for their permanent duty stations wherever the Corps needed them. I was assigned to the 5th Tank Battalion located at the new facilities at Camp Las Flores on Pendleton, just a short hop by cattle car from Delmar/Oceanside. The Fifth Tank Battalion had been reformed in August 1966 at Las Flores and the barracks, offices and chapel were new and a far cry from our Quonset hut days at boot camp at MCRD. Life was looking up in the Corps!

This was the first time since the yellow foot prints at San Diego, that I would have all the formal training in the rear view mirror and be able to experience what the day to day routine would be for a new Marine Corps Tanker. When



the group of us from Tank School arrived, we mustered around the flag pole near the barracks and H&S Company office with everything we owned stuffed into our sea bags. The group assigned to Flores was not a large group by my recollection and included myself, John Wear and Bob Peavey and a few others that I don't specifically recall from our Tank Crewman class. As they called out the roll, each Marine was instructed to join in a designated area for their respective company assignments.

I was assigned to a very small group for H&S Company. As it turned out, it was a lucky draw to be in the H&S Company for it consisted of just two tanks, Y-55 & Y-56. These two tanks were for the Battalion Commander, Lt Col Warren Sherman and Battalion Sgt Maj Lindolph Ward. I was assigned tank commander of Y-56 and Lewis Miller was TC on Y-55. My first crew, and this is where memory starts to fade, consisted of PFC Bill Storm as driver and PFC James Carbone as loader and PFC Sevilla (not sure of first name) as gunner. All the jobs were interchangeable and they often were. Storm received orders elsewhere in a short time as did Sevilla ... and by April or May of '67 I had two more crewman joining me and Carbone on Y-56. One of which was our beloved VTA member PFC Roger "Blues" Unland and the other was Private Wayne Kingsbury.

Our section leader was Staff Sgt Richard Cecil. I remember Sgt Cecil as being a role model to me because of his deep knowledge of all things M-48. He had recently returned from Vietnam and his expertise and hands-on training were invaluable to all the crewmen of H&S Company tanks. I often thought of Sgt Cecil but never again had the opportunity to thank him personally... That is until our Seattle reunion this past October 2019. "Blues" greeted me and my wife, Donna at the Welcome Table of reunion and said "You're not going to believe who's here! Sgt Cecil!!!!" He gushed. I was eager to see him again and took no time in telling him how much I appreciated his training skills



(L - R): Lewie Miller and SSgt Cecil

and knowledge about the M-48A3. Sgt Cecil went above and beyond the call of duty because, you see, Blues Unland being from San Francisco Area required, let's say, "Special handling" that caused some heartburn for both he and Blues and for the Corps.

Now, Battalion Sgt Maj Ward was actually a First Sgt in the Sgt Major billet awaiting promotion. He was, in my eyes, the epitome of a tough Marine's Marine. He was a World War II and Korean War veteran. He stood tall, always in-charge and he was sure to let you know it. He was fair but he had very little patience for screw-ups. He did however, take me under his wing and on at least one occasion he called for me and LCpl Lewie Miller, TC Y-55, from our barracks on Sunday to go to his home for delicious home cooked meal prepared by Mrs. Ward. Mrs. Ward also had a hobby in ceramics and made both Miller and me a ceramic tankard with the Marine Corps Insignia on one side and on the other our respective tank company number.

Editor's note: I also have one of Mrs. Ward's beer mugs and I still have it on a display shelf in my family room.

Duty at Las Flores was, in most all respects, very good. I often lamented the less fortunate saps that were assigned to the lowly line companies especially when I had just finished a wonderful dinner by the Sgt Major's Wife and washed it

down with a cold beer in my custom made ceramic tankard. Ahhh to be so gifted!

Additionally, being on the Battalion Commander and Sgt Major's H&S Company tanks afforded us the opportunity to be showcased in the "Pendleton Scout," the official Camp Pendleton newspaper. In May '67 Marine journalists Sgt Mike LaBonne & L/Cpl JJ Crites wrote and photographed the article that follows in this issue of the Sponson Box.

As I mentioned earlier, duty at Las Flores was in most respects very good. A couple exceptions come to mind. When falling out for morning formation one day the company gunny instructed me and Lewie Miller to report to the company office after the formation was dismissed. Before heading up to the office, I asked to Miller "I wonder what that's about?" Miller then proceeded to tell me he had volunteered him and me for assignment to a guard detachment in Adak, Alaska.

"ADAK ALASKA!!! Are you NUTS? I don't want to go to ADAK ALASKA!!!"

When we arrived at the gunny's desk, he said, "Here are the orders for you to sign."

And I replied, "This was not my idea and I don't want to go ALASKA."

My memory blurs at that moment but I believe both the gunny and the Company CO, Captain Beirne, read us the Riot Act for having taken all the time for preparing and processing these orders and wasting valuable Marine Corps time ... as well as a few choice adjectives to complete the dress down. Both Miller and I were able to walk out under the office door.

By July of 1967, everything was back to the normal routine of life at Las Flores. Since my enlistment was for just two years, I was now within about 13 months of discharge from the Corps. I had heard that if your enlistment was to end in less than 13 months, you would not get orders to Vietnam. Could it be that I would finish my enlistment stateside? I began to feel gifted again.

Well, the Sgt Major, came to me one day, put his arm around my shoulder and said "Hall, I had to pull some strings but I got it done!" he exclaimed.

I asked, "What's that Sgt Major?"

He said, "I got your orders cut for Vietnam!"

Now I think he thought I was the John Wayne-type, I guess, but all the blood in my body just drained to my feet. My palms were sweating and all that I could manage to say was, "Thank you Sgt Major." With that revelation so ended my days of California Dreamin'. Vietnam here I come.

Garry's Post Script: I've never heard from Lewis Miller since Camp Las Flores. Could you spread the word and see if anyone in the group has heard of him or knows where he is? He was from Texas. >>



FLAME TANK - Flame tanks of the 5th Tank Bn. practice at a range in the Las Flores area.

5th Tanks Progress Since A Paper Unit

"The 5th Tank Battalion took a beating on Iwo Jima."

LCol. Warren C. Sherman, 5th Marine Division's 5th Tank Battalion commander, will never forget that distant Pacific island.

"I was an infantry sergeant on Iwo and had nothing to do with tanks," said Col. Sherman, "but I know they, like many other units, took quite a beating."

Today the battalion occupies Camp Pendleton's Las Flores area with access to hundreds of acres of rugged hills and terrain for training.

Although the battalion reactivated with the 5th Division on June 1, 1966, three months prior to this, "A" Company was formed and deployed to Vietnam with the Division's first element, Regimental Landing Team 26.

"We've come a long way since last June, when we were a battalion on paper only," recalls LCol. Sherman, who assumed command of the battalion last August. "We now have 59 tanks, three retrievers, and we're a little above strength in the manpower department."

"With our Vietnam veterans," stated Maj. Thomas M. Bryant, battalion operations and training officer, "the training of new troops is somewhat easier. They get firsthand information on the tank's role in combat."

Much of the practice firing and tank-infantry tactics are performed at Range 407 where the tankers can shoot everything except an armor-piercing round, which, due to its tendency to ricochet, is considered unsafe for range firing.

Organization of the battalion's gun companies has Headquarters and Service Company using flame and retriever tanks, "B" and "C" companies working with the medium 90mm tanks and "D" Company with the new 120mm heavy tank.

In addition to the big gun, each tank is equipped with two 30 and one .50 caliber machine guns, hand grenades and normal small arms carried by its crew

of four.

The tank's arsenal includes 62 varied rounds for the big guns and 3500 for machine guns. All are carried and loaded from the tank's interior.

Sporting a 1,000 horsepower diesel engine, the "medium" achieves an average speed of 30 miles per hour.

It can climb an eight foot ditch, ford from four to eight feet of water, sight and fire in a matter of seconds, and has a turret traversing capability of 360 degrees.

According to LCol. Sherman, the tank has been modified to where it is one of the finest pieces of weaponry in the Marine Corps. He lists the most important modification as being the switch from gasoline to diesel fuel engines.

"Since switching to diesel fuel after Korea," he explains, "our cross country mobility increased from 70 miles to 250 miles per tank of fuel."

"With gas we were averaging approximately 1 mile for every four gallons of gas. Diesel fuel gives us about 1.6 miles to the gallon, a real economy factor," stated LCol. Sherman.

The tank is also equipped with one of today's most sophisticated range finders.

While sighting on an object, the gunner sees two images, one on either side of a cross-hair, and centered. He turns dials and the images merge towards the center of the sight. When only one image is visible, the gunner is ready to fire with a 99 per cent chance of a direct hit with the first round.

The battalion's most recent addition, the heavy 120mm, is the largest and most powerful tank known today.

The 120mm gun has a range of about 21 miles, and is almost twice as large as its medium counterpart.

"Now that I'm in tanks, I like them," summarized Col. Sherman, "I tear myself away from my desk two or three times a week to go churning around the countryside."



INSPECTION - Marines lay out maintenance gear for inspection. The equipment is carried in or on each tank.



WEAPON INSTRUCTION - LCpl. Garry L. Hall (right) explains the nomenclature and function of the tank-mounted .50 caliber machine gun to his crew, (from left): LCpl. Roger A. Unland, gunner, LCpl. James A. Carbone, driver, and Pvt. Wayne A. Kingsbury, loader.



BIG GUNS - Two heavy tank crews pull into the tank park to perform preventive maintenance on their vehicles. The 120's are largest in the world.



TANK MASCOT - "Sergeant Smedley," a purebred English bulldog given to 5th Division tankers by a retired Marine, waits for his crew to "mount up."

Christmas Dinner in Vietnam

BY DARCY VERNIER

Christmas 1969, south of Da Nang, South Vietnam

They hadn't taken much fire that day, not much when you consider that the previous weeks had been filled with "wading in the deep stuff." Still, there had been a few hits through the rotor blades when they had gone in to Firebase Ross, but the gunships had jumped in and hosed things down pretty well

and it was no big deal. Maybe the Vietnam Christmas Truce was going to work.

They were flying turkey dinners to the grunts in the field, part of a mission with two other CH-46s and two Cobra gunships and they had been at it for nearly 10 hours, two hours more than the limit insisted upon by the 1st Marine Air Wing. The dinners were prepared in a field kitchen that had been flown in by a big CH-53 to LZ Baldy, and the finished products turned over to the CH-46s for delivery. Christmas dinner and a show were scheduled back at Marble Mountain, but it looked like they were going to miss it.

The weather was hot and crummy and the crew could see the humidity trail as it came off the rotor blades where they meshed together like a Mixmaster. Their flight suits had soaked through hours ago and, for the two pilots, the cockpit was an oven in spite of the thousands of horsepower of fan directly above them.

This is how Christmas was delivered for many grunts in Vietnam



In the back, the gunners would watch over the long barrels of their big .50 caliber machine guns during the approaches. The rest of the time they were relaxed and chatted together with lip-reading abilities developed over long hours of flying in an environment where the sounds of radios and engines and rotor blades killed normal conversation. The crew chief, LCpl Boyd, usually rode leaning in to the cockpit and then standing exposed in the door as he guided the pilots in to the zones.

The grunts on the ground never understood how the "fly boys" could comfortably fly around, exposed, barely above the ground, just asking to get shot at. For their part, the aviators never understood how the grunts could comfortably live on the ground in the mush and the goo, just asking to get shot at.

Earlier that day Boyd and the co-pilot had picked up a dozen cases of Bud and smuggled them onto their bird. Boyd had a raw-boned cowboy look about him, although he was from New

Orleans. His flight suit was usually dirty and his hair a bit long for a Marine, but you could eat off the engine on his aircraft.

Many nights he worked straight through the night, repairing battle damage to be ready to fly the next day. The pilots would say it was better to have a grimy crew chief with a clean air-

craft, than the other way around.



"The cockpit was an oven."

Boyd had gotten a bunch of cotton from the hospital tent and rigged a beard under the chin strap of his helmet. As they delivered the dinners to the really remote observation posts or small units stuck out in the bush, he would toss down a couple of 6 packs to the Marines on the ground. The dirty, tired Marines would run up to >>

the cans, waving and smiling and chug the warm stale beer like it had been perfectly chilled and served at their favorite bar "back in the world."

Around sunset, LZ Baldy called and released them. Christmas or not, no one wanted to risk aircraft and crews to deliver turkey dinners. The tower asked Boyd's pilot to wait a few minutes to take a couple of "walking wounded" to the hospital ship in Danang harbor, so, as their wingmen and the gunships left for home, they taxied to the side of the runway and shut down to wait. Dinner and the Christmas show at Marble seemed less and less likely.

LCpl Boyd disappeared and then reappeared 15 minutes later with five cans of Korean War-vintage C-rations and five cans of Coke, just enough for the two pilots, two gunners, and him.

Boyd said not a word but went straight to his work and, giving a nod, asked the pilot to start the #2 engine. He then flattened a cardboard box, punched holes in the tops of the C-ration cans with his K-Bar, and opened the engine access door. The door swung down from the overhead, exposing the pumps, wires, and plumbing of the General Electric T-58 engine and, on this occasion, food warmer. Boyd slid the cans on the cardboard into the engine compartment like a pizza chef. Four minutes later he removed the feast and opened the cans the rest of the way, holding each with a pair of pliers. The aroma of boiling turkey filled the back of the helicopter, mixing with and almost covering the smell of hydraulic fluid, fuel, and sweat that defined the interior.

He distributed plastic forks, sprayed

the cans of Coke with the fire extinguisher to chill them, and served Christmas dinner. For the pièce de résistance Boyd opened a can of peaches he had secretly hoarded and passed it around to the crew. Each speared one peach half and gratefully took a swallow of the thick, sweet juice.

Back "in the world" people were sitting down to turkey at grandmother's house and snow was drifting mistily beyond frosted windows that reflected the flame-shaped bulbs of hanging wreaths. In Vietnam it was hot and humid and sticky as the four Marines sat in the troop seats and looked gratefully at Boyd. He raised his Coke to each in turn, "From my house to your house," he said. "Merry Christmas."

It was Christmas dinner, 1969, and it was good.

us pause for a moment in honor of all of those brave warriors who participated in Linebacker II, in memory of those who have made their Final Flight, and to especially remember the incredible courage of our POWs who were fortunate to have returned with honor and those who were not fortunate and did not return.

A toast to all our comrades—POWs, missing in action, living or dead, whatever their duty, whatever their war, whatever their uniform. God Bless Them All!

"We toast our hearty comrades, who have fallen from the sky, and were gently caught by God's own hands to be with him on high. To dwell among the soaring clouds they have known so well before,

from victory roll to tail chase at heavens' very door. And as we fly among them there, we're sure to hear their plea: Take care, my friend, watch your six, and do one more roll for me." (Author unknown)

Benge, a Foreign Service Officer, was captured on January 30, 1968 during the TET Offensive and was held in camps in South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam for over five years. He was released during Operation Homecoming in March 1973,

Mike

Published: Christmas Lights over Hanoi. Maggie's Farm. 12/23/13



Christmas Lights over Hanoi

BY MIKE BENGE

The lighting of the Christmas trees in Washington, DC and New York are beautiful sights. And the Christmas lights in Denver and other cities are outstanding. However, the most beautiful Christmas lights of all were those of the Christmas bombing of Hanoi in '72. The flash of the Sam missiles, the flares dropped from the plane, the arc lights hitting the city, and yes, even when a Sam hit a plane, it was all spectacular, for this gave us all hope and we knew we were soon going home.

Bless that noon time reccie who flew up the train tracks blowing past our camp for the past year with a sonic boom while gaining altitude and turning across the Red River heading for home. It gave us hope, and we knew that when the bombs started falling, we wouldn't get hit, for Uncle Sam knew where we were.

When the bombs started falling, we all cheered, and for a minute the guards threatened to shoot us if we didn't shut up, but they soon were crouching in

their hidey-holes and shitting in their mess kits as the bombs started falling and they were too scared to say anything more.

We had been forced to dig trenches down the middle of our rooms before the bombing, so I guess Johnny Walker had been instrumental in the NVA knowing the B52s were coming. The bombs were close enough that the trenches contorted like a Z and the double doors to our cells would move over their own width from the shock. The next day we found a dead bird outside our door presumably killed from the shock. As the NVA was moving us to the Hanoi Hilton we peeked out of the sides of the trucks and saw that the B52s had been right on target for everything had been flattened except our old camp—the Plantation Gardens.

Yes Christmas lights are pretty, but none will ever be as beautiful as those over Hanoi on Christmas '72. And God Bless the pilots and crews of the planes who gave their all to set us free.

December 18, 2019, marks the 47th anniversary of the beginning of the air offensive over North Vietnam, Linebacker II. This was a multiservice campaign that lasted for 11(12) days, and which culminated in the resumption of the Paris peace talks, the ultimate signing of the Vietnam peace accords, and the release of our POWs. It is the consensus of a great many of us that without Linebacker II, we would still be rotting in the hell of Vietnam's prison system.

- Overall Air Force losses included fifteen B-52s, two F-4s, two F-111s, and one HH-53 search and rescue helicopter.

- Navy losses included two A-7s, two A-6s, one RA-5, and one F-4.

- Seventeen of these losses were attributed to SA-2 missiles; three to daytime MIG attacks; three to anti-aircraft artillery; and three to unknown causes.

- The bombardment lasted 12 days resulting in 43 POWs captured and a loss of 27 others KIA.

At this Holiday time of the year, let

Christmas Eve at Khe Sanh

BY DENNIS M MANNION

Like weary travelers who finally get to rest in the comfort of their own homes after a week of constant motion and movement, the members of "Kilo" Company, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines spread out into the foxholes and bunkers that made up the company's perimeter.

It was Christmas Eve 1967, and we had just returned from a four-day operation that took us into the rugged hills of Vietnam's Khe Sanh Plateau. Despite minimal creature comforts, it was a relief to know that we didn't have to hike those hills for a while. That by itself was a legitimate Christmas present.

In terms of the physical setting and the expected sounds and colors, this was sure to be my bleakest holiday ever, but it remains the Christmas that stands apart from all the others and the one which memory doesn't confuse, even two decades later.

My radioman Dave Kron and I headed straight for the position that we had constructed the previous week. Even though it was just two connect-

ing foxholes covered with a tent-like affair of scrounged parachute silk, we felt elated to be home for the holidays. At midday, a rumor which had been circulating since the previous day turned into reality. An arriving helicopter touched down just outside the company area, and mailbag after mailbag began to spill out onto the ground!

The distribution of our Christmas mail, which had been held in storage for nearly two weeks, required the work of a score of Marines as there were thousands of letters and hundreds of "care packages." More than anything else, it was the sheer volume of these packages that brought a festive, holiday atmosphere to our war zone. Denied a chance to be in the real world, it was as if its realities had been sent to us, and each package opened helped to reduce the tensions and fears accumulated in the previous week. By late afternoon, "Kilo" Company was almost giddy with child-like happiness and Christmas spirit.

Since Dave and I had not drawn perimeter guard that night (another

present), we settled in under our parachute hooch to feast from our collective packages and to recall Christmas memories from earlier years. With our military gear relegated to the sides of the tent, the war seemed almost to have been replaced with plentiful food, laughter and friendship. Considering how the previous four months had been spent, we had another gift to be thankful for. . . we were still around for the holiday while a number of our companions were not. Sometime after midnight, wrapped in a poncho-liner and surrounded with comforting memories of home, I drifted off to sleep thinking of my family and most of all my mother.

I was jolted out of my sleep on Christmas Day by the sound of "Jingle Bells!" Two helicopters with Santa painted on their sides were making repeated passes over the base, and loudspeakers mounted in the doors were playing one Christmas song after the other. It was incredible! Within seconds, people from all over were up, out, and on their feet to cheer >>

and to wave. The show didn't last more than 10 minutes, but it was enough to get our day off to a magical start.

At noon, a Catholic chaplain celebrated Mass out in the open, and as I sauntered over, I was suddenly struck with the thought that noon on Christmas Day in Vietnam corresponded exactly with midnight on Christmas Eve in Connecticut. While I knelt with rifle in hand in the red dust of Khe Sanh, my family was kneeling in the pews of St. Mary's Church in New Haven for Midnight Mass. It was the only time

in my 13month tour when I knew exactly what members of my family were doing at a given moment.

I used to wonder and guess at their actions from time to time, but in this short period of Mass and remembrance, I was linked to them with a bond that stretched over 15,000 miles. In spite of the distance, I never felt closer to any of them than I did at that moment, and the simple act of closing my eyes seemed to move me out of the war and into the comfortable surroundings of family and home.

Christmas Past—1967

BY TON FENERTY

A long time ago, in a place far, far away...Sometimes I get the urge to revisit...it's all good.

We were out around the DMZ and the "Strip" for the better part of a month. Patrols, sweeps, pounding engineer stakes, stringing barbed wire (that's right, I was part of the team installing Mr. McNamara's "Wall") and bathing in bomb craters finally came to a stop on December 24th. We humped quite a ways out to a road, boarded trucks, and were transported to Camp Carroll.

In addition to showers and hot chow there were packages from home; more than a month's worth. The luckiest guys had some Christmas cheer in their packages and shared it with others. It was certainly different, but way better than sitting in a fighting position (a hole in the dirt) out near the DMZ. There was plenty of alcohol and food.

It was still early when all of a sudden two men from my platoon (3rd Platoon, Foxtrot, 3/9) squared off at opposite ends of the hardback tent. Our M-79 man, Smires (sp?) was pointing his weapon and yelling at another Marine accusing him of being the reason that Nelson McKenna ("Mouse") was killed. The nameless man was Mouse's A-gunner and he was not with Mouse

when he was shot and killed on Nov 30th. There were those who thought he should have been at his gunner's side, but he had trouble negotiating the paddy mud and getting up the hill. I do remember passing him. Mouse was a white kid from New York and these two Marines squaring off were black; affirming that there was no 'color' in the bush.

The nameless man had a weapon too, an M-60 machine gun. So there we were, sitting on cots with a taste of alcohol trying to be merry and these two guys are facing off like it was the "OK Corral." In a heartbeat everyone was looking for a way to scurry out of that freekin' hardback tent. I have no idea who put the lid on this event, but in the end no one was injured and we were all soon banished out to the perimeter bunkers to stand the lines for the remainder of Christmas Eve. Ho, Ho, Ho!!!

All these years later I think about pounding those engineer stakes and stringing wire while listening to mortars leaving the tube and wondering. After that night I never saw the nameless Marine again. Probably best.

Walt Thomas adds: I remember that event on Christmas Eve of '67. As you stated, we had been out in the field for quite a while. I believe that

By nightfall-Christmas morning back in Connecticut-I was strapping on the weapons and gear of an infantryman and preparing to move to an ambush position outside our protective barbed wire. Our route took us directly across the very ground where Mass had been said earlier and where, through the miracle of Christ's birth, I was permitted to stand for a brief moment at a window to the world.

Originally Published by the Marine Corps Assn. December 1988

we were dug in on a hill adjacent to another hill where some type of base was being constructed. We had one coil of the barbed wire around our positions. One night a gook tried to sneak inside the perimeter and he tripped a flare. He was about 150 yards from my hole and lots of fire erupted. I'm not sure if he was killed or not but everyone was fully awake. We ran patrols, ambushes, and LPs (listening posts) while out there.

On the morning of Dec 24th we humped out to a road where we were trucked back to Carroll. It was great to get out of the bush. I remember an argument starting that evening but I don't remember what the argument was about or I never really knew but one Marine came running past me carrying a M-60 with about 60 rounds loaded in it and swinging from the gun. He was yelling something about not being a coward and ran into one on the tents nearby. I wasn't sure what was going on but I jumped into a nearby bunker and waited. After 15 or 20 minutes, I came out of the bunker and everything seemed calm. I never forgot the event and never knew the details of the disagreement. That was one Christmas Eve that I never forgot. ■

REMEMBERING CHARLIE DENTON

Members of the 3rd Platoon, Company "A", 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific received a request for personal stories about Charlie from the family of Corporal Charles Denton. Cpl. Denton served as a tank crew member on A-31 at Chu Lai in The Republic of South Viet Nam during 1965-1966.

Charlie Denton is in the front row kneeling and third in from the right.

Family, friends, and Marines that Charlie had been close to had lost track of him. The family knew, based on newspaper reports, that Charlie had been awarded the Silver Star Medal for "Conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action" on 18 August 1965 during OPERATION STARLITE, and also a Purple Heart Medal for wounds received. The family believed that Charlie had left the Marine Corps and that he had passed away in 1983.

In the late 90's the Internet was part of my life, and one of the first things I did was to search for those who were important but no longer present. It took years to finally connect with some of those with whom I served, but strangely enough my search for Charlie stumbled upon another name I knew—Ken Zebal. Thus, a weird twist of fate turned a search for a friend into an open door to many friends and comrades in my past.

A few incidents Charlie and I shared still come to memory.

"Breaking track" was a job we hated but did as a matter of course. The tank's treads are joined to one another by two iron unions (end connectors) which have to be pounded off with a long and heavy steel bar being struck with a sledge



Photo of Charlie's gravesite headstone
Contributed by Jim Thompson:



Charlie Denton, Tony Pennetti, Chris V. Dave Erickson
3rd Plt. Party on Okinawa.
Charlie is second from the left with a cigarette and a can of beer.

hammer. This steel bar must be held nearly horizontally by one man as another man hits it with great force using a sledge. If the man wielding the sledge misses the bar or loses control of the hammer, serious injury is possible so this involves trust and steady nerves. Crew members would spell another to prevent fatigue and crews from other tanks would often join in the labor. Because we camped within a few yards of the ocean, these end connectors became thoroughly rusted to the treads. At one point I was holding the bar and Charlie was pounding it with the sledge when a shard of hot metal separated from the end of the bar and became slightly embedded in my bicep. I lowered the bar and Charlie looked at me like I'd lost my bearings before he saw what had happened. Then he grinned that famous wide grin of his and we continued.

We remember things differently and conflicting stories from our experiences in OPERATION STARLITE should be expected. Charlie's and my tank were hit within seconds of each other, and after my tank commander was evacuated, I heard that

another tank had been hit. Since our radios had been damaged, I could not communicate with the driver (LCpl Cunningham) nor did I have any idea of what the tactical situation was. I remember someone ground-guiding our tank back to a new position—it may have been Charlie. At that time, I didn't see any tank burning. Sometime later my tank took another hit and began burning; it was later blown apart by the engineers (I've been told). After STARLITE things were different—we were hardened. Shared experiences in combat and within the confused and >>

illogical matrix of the Marine Corps and upsetting social and political environment had an effect on all of us.

Charlie and I both returned to Camp Lejeune from 30 days' leave driving cars. I believe his was a 62(?) Ford hardtop. At one point it was running poorly and Charlie did some engine work. Shortly thereafter we piled into the Ford for a quick trip to the slop chute but when we arrived the engine was on fire. Charlie popped the hood, removed the air filter and doused the engine with the only thing available at the moment—dirt from the parking lot. Again, he had to clean the carburetor, but he made it work.

Nicknames – it seems everyone was generating them, and some of them stuck. As Charlie and I spent more time together they began to refer to us as the "Two Bantam Roosters", which invokes two images: small and fierce (this occurred when we were back at Camp Lejeune). By that time, we were both described as having 'bad attitudes', which was true. Bantam roosters are fighters, but our fights now were not physical, but verbal and mental—often within our own minds. Neither Charlie nor I were great drinkers, but we'd enjoy a beer or two on occasion. One night found us in a local bar just talking and enjoying being off-base when a gentleman joined us and asked if one or both of us were interested in making some extra cash. Of course, we were! He explained that the task was simple. We would pick up a car and drive it to New York or New Jersey, park it, take the bus back to base and collect \$500. Charlie was more world-wise than I and he warned me with his eyes that this was not a good idea and politely declined the offer. I'd had no idea that this was a moonshine run.

Throughout those and subsequent days, my friend Charlie was a rock of refuge that I missed when the time for final partings arrived, and still miss today. Charlie must have experienced the confusion of returning to "the real world". My own return was contentious. Charlie is still alive in my memory, feisty, smiling and ready for the next task.

Ky Thompson's note:—Jim was the gunner on A-34 and heroically saved Sgt Ed Sipel's life by applying a tourniquet to Ed's leg which had been traumatically amputated by enemy fire.

Contributed by Ken Zebal:

My relationship with Charlie aka Cpl. Charlie Denton was good and we were close. We first met at Camp Hansen on Okinawa and although we served on different tank

crews, he on A-31 and I on A-32, we got along very well. As a platoon, we trained on Okinawa with 3/3 for many months before conducting the amphibious assault at Chu Lai and, as a platoon, we equally shared the same work and field experiences. Charlie was a good fit and got along with everyone. He was also very competent tanker and a hard worker. His nickname was head because the size of his head appeared disproportionately large when compared to the rest of his body. I can describe Charlie as being medium height and having a stocky build with an agreeable disposition. I would also say that Charlie's closest buddy in



Charlie is on the far left in this photo taken on Okinawa in early 1965.

the platoon was Jim Thompson.

At Chu Lai our platoon's command post was co-located with the 3/3 command post in the sand right on the beach. On a day-to-day basis we performed maintenance on our vehicles, conducted combat patrols and provided direct support to each of the infantry companies. The weather at that time of year ranged from 85 degrees with 85 percent humidity to around 100 degrees with 100 percent humidity. We seemed to be constantly perspiring even though we were right on the beach. Heaven only knows what the heat and humidity was a few miles inland. We performed manual labor on our tanks, day-in and day-out first and foremost because tanks required it to stay combat ready. Secondly, because we were operating in sand, and the friction took a heavy toll on the suspension system including; track, end connectors, center guides and the sprockets all of which were heavy and required hands-on work to maintain readiness. On the beach with 3/3 we were lucky and had at least one hot meal each day. However, when on an outpost with a rifle company or on patrol we ate C-Rations. We washed our bodies and washed our clothes in the ocean which required us to rub the dried salt off of our bodies and clothes to avoid rashes. Initially combat was light. We had occasional snipers and every now and again we received

mortar attacks and small arms fire but in general it was fairly quiet. However, when on outposts we encountered mines, booby traps, small arms fire and some automatic weapons fire. Early in the war we couldn't fire at the enemy due to the rules of engagement. We would receive enemy fire, report it to the 3/3 CP and request permission to return fire. That permission rarely came and that's how it was until the real shooting war started.

Charlie was the first member of our platoon to go on R&R and I'm assuming that was in early August 1965. The process our platoon sergeant, S/Sgt DJ Clark, developed was something like this; Sgt Dan MacQueary wrote everyone's name on torn slips of paper and placed them in a utility cover, stirred them up and then a Sgt picked the winning slip of paper – Charlie Denton was #1. Because none of us had knowledge of a preferred location for R&R or much experience in Asia, except for Okinawa, Charlie chose Hong Kong although I don't recall the other choices which likely would have included Tokyo and Bangkok.

After his return from Hong Kong and right before STARLITE my name was #2 to be picked for R&R. Based on Charlie's glowing review, I also chose Hong Kong. That was the easy part. The harder part was getting from our Platoon. CP with 3/3 on the beach to Hong Kong. We somehow or other wrangled up a set of khakis for the trip and because I was a new Corporal the task was complicated by finding a shirt with Cpl. chevrons. This was no mean feat given that all of our uniforms and what little civilian clothing we owned were locked away in seabags stored in a warehouse at Camp Hansen, Okinawa. My luggage for R&R was either a sandbag, laundry bag or a water proof (willie peter) bag – I forget. From the Platoon CP there was a jeep ride to the Company CP and then after checking out with the company there was another short trip to the airstrip for the 30-minute C-130 flight north to Da Nang and, of course, there were the inevitable delays and hurry-up and waits. Once we arrived at Da Nang things changed. Air freight at that time was about as big as a golf course starters shack. We signed in, weighed in and then waited outside under the shade of a tree during mid-August in RVN at approximately 95 degrees and 95 percent humidity – in khakis. At Da Nang's air freight, we were then required to get additional shots and blouse our boots (we had no dress shoes) which seemed very strange. I found myself doubly blessed by running into a former Drill Instructor who was then serving as a platoon sergeant with Bravo 1/9. He remembered me and then without hesitation gave me a rifle and put me on the lines defending Da Nang airfield that night – in khakis no less. It got better when I ran into S/Sgt Jimmy Dodgen the next day. S/Sgt Dodgen had been my very first Tank Commander (TC) at Charlie Company 2nd Tanks. Now, Jimmy was platoon sergeant of a tank platoon at Da Nang and the epitome of a hell raising tanker so we went for a beer or two, or more.

The C-130 ride to Hong Kong's Kai Tek airport seemed to last forever but we all arrived safe and sound. The aircraft wasn't very full and I knew many of the men from 2/4 and 3/3 but no one from Da Nang and I had been a Cpl. for just over 2 weeks at the time. In Hong Kong I enjoyed being clean and eating real food as well as being able to get a full night's sleep. As a nineteen-year-old, it was exciting to ride the Star Ferry, visit Kowloon, visit tailor shops, dine in one of the floating restaurants and eat bona fide Chinese food.

The return flight from Kai Tek airport to Da Nang was on another C-130. Da Nang Air freight was alive with scuttlebutt about the battle at Chu Lai. Once in Da Nang I hopped a ride on an R4D full of blood plasma which took me to Chu Lai. At the Chu Lai airstrip, I hitched a ride to the beach and saw litters all over the place while also observing 3/3's battalion aid station (BAS) going as fast as they could go – and this was several days after the main battle. The 3/3 CP, BAS and our Platoon area were right on the beach and the entire area was covered with litters. Some litters were on the sand or on ponchos on the sand while others were up on saw horses. The scene was very much like one would see at the movies about the aftermath of WWII beach landings. Our platoon commander, 2ndLt Thompson had been medevac'd and was rumored to have had his heel shot off. Sgt. Ed Sipel who was also medevac'd, was rumored to have had his leg traumatically amputated by enemy fire during one of A-34s many turret penetrations. We'd lost 2 tanks A-31 and A-34, which had been blown in place, due to enemy fire. I cleaned up the blood from A-32's TC cupola and the turret from the fight and spent some time thinking about what our Platoon had just been through. Similar to how the Vietnamese women picked lice from each other's hair, some guys from the Platoon picked small shrapnel flakes from just beneath the surface of each other's skin during slack time. A lot of the men had some metal in them including Charlie. There was a lot of discussion about the fight and someone mentioned that Charlie had been recommended for an award along with some others. Charlie was non-plussed with being nominated for a heroic award and felt that he was merely ground guiding the tank off the road and out of the way.

2ndLt Ky Thompson's note: Ken was the assigned Tank Commander (TC) for A-32. However, when OPERATION STARLITE was being fought kismet placed Ken on R&R in Hong Kong. He moved heaven and earth to get back to Chu Lai but returned only in time to accompany the body of Cpl. Bill Laidlaw, who was killed in action on STARLITE. Laidlaw had only been in country two days and was substituting for Ken as TC A-32.

Contributed by LtCol Ky Thompson, USMC (Ret.).

As the Platoon Commander of third platoon, Company "A", 3rd Tank Battalion, A-31 was my command tank. It was an M-48A3 which was long in service but still >>

considered mission effective. A-31's crew consisted of: driver, Andy Senecal, the gunner, Charlie Denton and the loader Dan Yoder – Yoder the loader. I was pleased to learn that the crew was generally well trained. Every now and then though one of those "Oops!" moments might arise and, in this case, it involved Charlie. We'd been on standby all day, prepared to assist a multi-company operation on the far side of the Song Tra Bong river in whatever way possible. Because we had no means of crossing the river our support was from afar. We received a call on the radio alerting us to the fact that a withdrawal would soon commence and that we should be prepared to provide direct fire support as necessary. The infantry would designate targets with white phosphorus (WP) which would show up clear and bright in the night. For some unknown reason Charlie had switched crew positions with Dan Yoder. I told Charlie, "Load one round high explosive (HE) and prepare for firing." Charlie sung out, "up" meaning the round was loaded and the breach block was up and he was clear of the 90 mm recoil path. Yoder as the gunner had also acquired the WP signature burn and confirmed my spot. I told him, "fire when ready."

Corporal Charles L. Denton, Jr. US MARINE CORPS



For service as set forth in the following citation:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Corporal Charles L. Denton, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with Company C, 3d Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, during Operation STARLITE in the Republic of Vietnam, on 18 August 1965. While engaged in an attack against determined, well entrenched insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces, Corporal Denton's tank was hit by an enemy anti-tank rocket. As a result of the hit, Corporal Denton, his platoon commander and the tank's gunner were wounded and the tank was set afire. With complete disregard for his own wound and the intense enemy fire, he climbed out of the turret and assisted his seriously injured Platoon Commander to a position of relative safety. Realizing that the burning tank was a hazard to the wounded Marines in close proximity to it, Corporal Denton returned through the heavy enemy mortar and small arms fire to the tank. Boldly utilizing hand and arm signals while in a completely exposed area, he successfully guided the tank to a protected position where the fire could be extinguished. Once again returning to the open area, Corporal Denton assisted in evacuating the numerous wounded. Having completed this task, he selflessly refused to be evacuated and returned to his tank. By his heroic actions and inspiring devotion to duty throughout, Corporal Denton was instrumental in saving the lives and reducing the suffering of several wounded Marines, and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. ■

The gun went off with an ear cracking bang and I told Charlie, "With one round HE, load." There was no response, nothing was moving inside the turret. I looked to my left and I could see his distinctive silhouette. He was intently watching the fighting across the river. I reached over and slapped his crewman's helmet. Surprised, he turned towards me. "Load one round HE!" I bellowed. He disappeared like a shot and in what seemed like seconds later, I heard, "up!" We then watched as the amphibian tractor platoon formed up on the beach across the river. We provided illumination using the incandescent searchlights from A-33 and A-34.

Ky Thompson's note: As a 2nd. Lt. OPERATION STARLITE was my first major battle. The Marines won because they were better trained, had far superior supporting arms, and had confidence in their fellow Marines, Men such as Charlie Denton rose to occasion in battle just like Marines have done ever since their beginning.

For his heroic conduct under enemy fire on 18 August 1965 Cpl. Charles Denton was awarded the Silver Star medal and he was also awarded the Purple Heart medal for wounds received in action.

How to Stop a Marine Tank

BY BEN COLE

After a little spade work a couple of Marines made it their home for the night.

The bad news was that anyone tracking us now knew about where we were. The good news is that if they found us, they would be facing tanks. These were the days after Ambush Valley and It was a sunny day in Vietnam in the fall of 1967, just another morning on some forgotten operation as we searched for an elusive enemy. Attached to the Ninth Marines in Leatherneck Square our tanks had been rolling since dawn. But now we were stopped. Sitting in the cupola of my tank I watched an interesting event unfold fifty yards away.

A few hours earlier we pulled out of our night position about a klick south of the DMZ. The day before we had been pushed down bushes and trees looking for a mystery mobile artillery piece or even a fanciful elephant carrying a small cannon. It had become a lethal version of Whack-a-Mole. Run them out of this neck of the woods and they pop up somewhere else and shoot again.

Just before dusk we found a section of woods to dig in the for the night. While our tanks crushed the foliage opening fields of fire, the grunts dug fighting holes or cleaned out some old ones. Here and there rusty shell casings and old brass littered the ground. Someone had fought here before.

After placing the tanks facing outward in circle-the-wagons style, we shut down the engines. For a few quiet minutes there was just the sound of muffled talk and the thuds of entrenching tools. My crew had opened their C-rats and boiled water for coffee on the back of the tank.

Suddenly, a shattering roar broke the calm and had us scrambling for cover. There had been movement in a bunker hidden in the underbrush. A round from Gunny's English's main gun took care of it. When the dust cleared noth-

ing was found. Bastard's Bridge, from where we had just departed. We were not taking any chances.

It put everyone on edge, but we kept preparing for the night. I spotted a large hole in the ground behind my right track. It looked like an entrance to a tunnel, but a closer inspection show it had caved in a few feet below the ground. The last folks here must have blown it in. I hoped they did a good job and the former residents were gone.

We thought about backing the tank track over it but decided to leave it alone. It was getting dark and cranking the tank would make more noise than it was worth. We would just keep an eye on it. We did, very intently, all night.

After things settled down, I put a small nugget of C4 in my C-rat can stove. Pound cake cans worked best. They didn't have to be cleaned of stew, meat leftovers like ham and MFs. A few air holes with a P38 opener gave the burning explosive a vent for the smooth intense heat. A can of water would be boiling in a minute.

Like most tanks we kept a stash of C4 around. It was part of the stuff we "inherited" when people got medevacked by chopper. If there wasn't room on the chopper for their weapons and ammo, they were thrown on the tanks. It's better than being left for Charlie. Combat engineers carried a lot of the putty-like C4 explosive sticks. Sometimes it can get in the way. We learned a few weeks earlier when it almost ruined our day.

As we were pushing through a thicket a limb knocked a pack full of C4 out of the gypsy rack of Lt. Brock's tank. As he traversed the turret it was crushed against the armor deck. I saw it smoking and first thought he had taken a dud RPG. I got his attention and he dislodged it and put out the flame. I still wonder how much more pressure could have set it off.

It was quiet after the bunker event.

We had not made contact that day, but it felt like we were being watched and tracked. That night about midnight we had proof. I had first watch that lasted till around 11 when woke up Turner, my loader, to relieve me. I laid down behind the turret, a second away from the TC hatch. I was drifting off when I heard the thumps of rounds leaving tubes in the distance. It wasn't a dream.

A dozen seconds later the final approach of a few large shells hissed through the quiet night air around us. With no time to climb into the tank, I cursed myself and tried to be small as possible. I wedged myself between the turret and the deck armor as the first salvo impacted. The first round hit about twenty yards to the right of the tank, others were further away on the other side. They continued for the eternity of a minute impacting all around us. Then it was quiet with just the ringing of my ears. There were no calls for corpsmen. Apparently, no one had been hit but everyone was now awake and waiting. A few shadows in the trees provoked a rifle shot or two, but there was no return fire.

Shelling was common as both sides used H and I fire. These muzzle blasts probably came from the long range guns of North Vietnamese batteries north of Ben Hai river. If it came from any other direction it was probably our side or the mystery gook gun. I would like to think that our cannon cockers knew our position. There was no more incoming the rest of the night, just the rumble of artillery in the background making for a fitful catnap until dawn.

After a can of C's for breakfast at sunrise, we moved out at a walking pace eastward toward the coast. All morning we meandered and pushed through any thicket of trees and hedges in our path. We finally emerged and stopped in a wide field covered with low shrubs.

The grunts popped smoke and a >>

CH-46 chopper landed. After unloading supplies and a few men, a few others got on board and it took off.

We started moving again. It was easy going with the low brush and great visibility. My tank led the right column and Charles Thatcher led the left one. The plan was to find a place to cross the creek that blocked our eastward track and crush any thicket that we came across in the process.

Later something caught my eye as I glanced toward the other tank. There was a Marine standing on the front fender. It was the driver. There was no one driving the tank and it came to a gradual stop.

About then a radio transmission from the gunny stopped us. My crew and I watched as a drama played out on the other tank. It was like a silent movie, but instead of black and white, the participants wore dirty green uniforms and camo helmets. Rather than being on a broad stage they stood in waste deep grass around the driver's hatch of the tank. I couldn't hear the words but pointing fingers and gesturing arms gave a hint of the unfolding story.

A big Marine officer with his radioman behind stomped through the low foliage to the front of tank. The driver was standing on the fender pointing to the now vacant driver's compartment. The officer listened as the driver held his hands wide apart as if telling how big the fish was that got away. A few moments later the tank commander on the other fender leaned down to look into the driver's hatch. He suddenly jumped back and he too made a big fish-length gesture.

For a few minutes the tall officer and the two tank Marines seemed to be discussing the situation. The driver then looked down and slowly shook his head as if saying no. He had the body language of a doomed man. As the officer spoke, he looked around and pointed back at the column of troops. The radioman spoke and handed the officer the radio handset. The officer took the handset and became animated as he spoke. After handing the receiver back, he unholstered his pistol and started talking to the driver again.

The driver then slowly kneeled over and peered into the driver's hatch. He reached down and gently retrieved his

com helmet which was still connected to the intercom cord. Gingerly, he placed one foot into the compartment stepping onto the driver's seat. It was if he was testing the water temperature before a swim. Excruciatingly slow, he put the other foot in as if searching for a hidden trip wire. His body slowly settled onto the seat and only the top of his helmet was visible. Moments later the tank engine started. There is a crackle in my radio headset and then the words "Were ready, Let's move, it was just a snake."

When we stopped for the night, I spoke to the driver whose name escapes me. I asked "What kind of snake was it?" He looked sheepishly and said "it was long and brown." I asked "Is it still in the tank?" He replied "It must not have liked the ride. It crawled right back out and down the slope plate and down in the bushes like it came." I didn't ask if he needed a change of underwear, we didn't wear them anyway.

It is hard to stop a tank but we all know it can be done. RPGs and mines are on the top of the list. Now add reptiles. ■

Ambush at the Khe Ran Bridge – "My Moment"

BY ROGER LULI

Day one was 19 April 1968. I was at the Calu firebase checking on the tanks at that position. While there, I received a call from the infantry battalion commander at that location. He wanted the tanks to assist a company of infantry as a reaction force. A bridge about 700 meters west on route 9, where the Khe Ran creek runs into the Quang Tri River, was under attack. On the way we were told that the tanks should use the bypasses around the bridges since they would not hold their weight.

As the marines neared the ambush site, they too came under attack. Either a mine or a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) exploded by the right front of the lead tank followed by automatic weapons fire from both sides of the river. The explosion threw up a dust cloud which reduced visibility to zero. I directed the driver to back up a few meters until we could regain vision. As the lead tank backed up, the second tank also backed up and went over a steep bank on the south side of the road. About this time, a mighty mite (miniature jeep) raced out of the ambush site with the body of a marine laying across the back. He had been hit on the right side by an RPG or claymore mine. His arm and most of the right side of his torso were gone. I learned later, he was a platoon sergeant and he must have been well liked because the company commander radioed an apology for evacuating his body in such an exposed manner.

We had to get the tanks back into the firefight so we attached cables between the tanks and began pulling the disabled tank up the embankment. As it came up, it threw the right track off the idler wheel, but at least it was up on the road. Normally, in situation like this, we would break the end connectors off the track, lever

it back into position and use two track jacks to pull the track together and reconnect the ends. While we were pulling the track together, one of the jacks broke. Now we had only one track jack to pull the track back together so this was going to take a long time. We had to be careful not to disable the remaining jack as we pulled one side of the track together and attached the end connector then switch to the other side.

Staff sergeant Jim Jewell took the lead tank forward to support the infantry. I told the gunner to man the 30 caliber machine gun and cover the north side of the road. I took a position on the road to the right front of the tank which enabled me to see both the embankment down to the river and the mountainside to the north and behind the tank. So, with the machine gun and a 45 pistol, we hoped we could prevent any assault on Cpls. Lynn Young and PJ Pijura who were repairing the track.

We had one side connected, but before we were able to switch the jack to the other side, a forward observer ran across the road about 30 meters in front of the tank. He was attempting to get a better vantage on the enemy. He was KIA by automatic weapons fire. (For a long time I believed the observer was Lt. H.K. Persons who I knew at basic school. I found out recently the he had been killed by a mine in Thua Thien on 01 02 1968 a couple of months before the ambush. He is honored on panel 36E line 58 of the memorial. I never learned the identity of the brave marine observer.) An infantryman attempted to get the body but he too was wounded in the leg. Corporal Young went to assist the wounded Marine back to the rear. While he was gone, two RPG's flew past us. At the time the enemy was not able to get a clear shot at us.

My concern now was that the enemy would move into a better position and disable the tank before we could finish the repairs.

When Corporal Young returned, we attached the other side of the track, mounted up, and moved to a position behind SSgt. Jewell's tank. He was firing at enemy positions in three gulleys above the bridge. We began canister and "bee hive" rounds at the enemy across the river. The tanks were told to stand down while air strikes were hitting those positions. The loader took the opportunity to photograph the planes. In one picture, he caught an F-14 climbing while the napalm was exploding right behind it. I have attached pictures of the "snakes and napes" to the story.

Near dark, the tanks and infantry pulled into a defensive position to the east of the bridge. That night SSgt. Jewell said that he had been wounded by shrapnel while closing the tank commander's hatch. He had cleaned his wound and seemed ok. When I called Bravo Company to report, I requested a flame tank. I was informed that both "Zippos" were unavailable. I was so frustrated by the news that I forgot to mention SSgt. Jewell's wound. For that, I later received a reprimand from Captain Claude Reinke, the bravo company commander.

On day two, the battle continued with the NVA still in bunkers up the three gully's and hidden in the tall grass and bushes on the far side of the river. While the tanks provided fire support, the infantry attempted to flank the enemy positions from above on the east and north slopes. We expended a lot of ammunition and that night, I informed Bravo Company that we needed a resupply of 90 millimeter rounds.

Early on day three, a CH 36 helicopter brought the tank ammunition. There was no room >>

Photo from Vietnam



Duke Hughes – Left is a tank that was hit in the air filter by an RPG. Our tank (THOR) was moving up to cover them as the crew checked for damage.

for the pilot to land so he hovered close to the road and the air crew slid the crates out the back door of the helicopter and flew it away. After instructions on how to uncrate the rounds, and being careful to protect the percussion caps, the infantry formed two chains and relayed the rounds to the two tanks. I learned later that the pilot was Lt. Richard Spohn, my fraternity brother from Penn State.

Later that day there was a lull in the fire from the NVA positions. We received orders from the infantry battalion commander to send a tank through the ambush site to see if it would "draw fire" from the enemy. I protested saying, "We would only draw RPG fire," but the commander insisted. Still not sure whether the bridge would support the weight of a tank, we were forced to use the bypass. That placed the tank in a position that rendered the main gun useless and exposed the top of the turret, the least protected by armor, from RPG fire. SSgt. Jewell, with Cpl. Young driving, took his tank through the bypass while the second tank provided fire support. He was able to cross the ambush and move to a wide spot in the road by a culvert. As they were attempting to turn around, they took some small arms and RPG fire. They returned fire, completed the turn,

and came back to the bridge position. Both bridge crossings occurred without drawing fire. I never learned how the battalion commander benefitted from that fiasco unless it was to inform him that there were NVA all along the road. Since the tank received no enemy fire on the bridge, the infantry began taking positions further down the gulleys.

As the infantry was moving, two trucks approached from the west and as they crossed the bridge, the enemy opened fire destroying the trucks and killing the Marines inside. The enemy had been playing possum. Why were those marines not warned of the situation at the bridge? As the battle continued, two tanks commanded by 2nd Lt. Ralston came from the west and provided supporting fire against the eastern side of the gulleys. He also provided information that the bridges would support the weight of tanks. The bypass (death trap) would no longer be used.

With darkness approaching, Lt. Ralston's tanks returned to their base and we again took up a defensive position for the night. Bravo Company radioed and told me to return to Camp Carroll to go on R & R (rest and relaxation). I replied that I would not leave my tankers while they were in contact with the

enemy they could give my slot to someone else.

cheers and raised fists in the air. The maintenance chief on the retriever thought he saw some enemy across the river but through the gun sight, it was clear they were only some brown bushes bobbing up and down.

We stopped at the Rockpile long enough to give the officers of 3rd Battalion 9th Marines a report of the ambush, specifically how the enemy was positioned in the gulleys. I went on to Camp Carroll to drop off the disabled tank and pick up my gear for R & R. Then it was off to Australia.

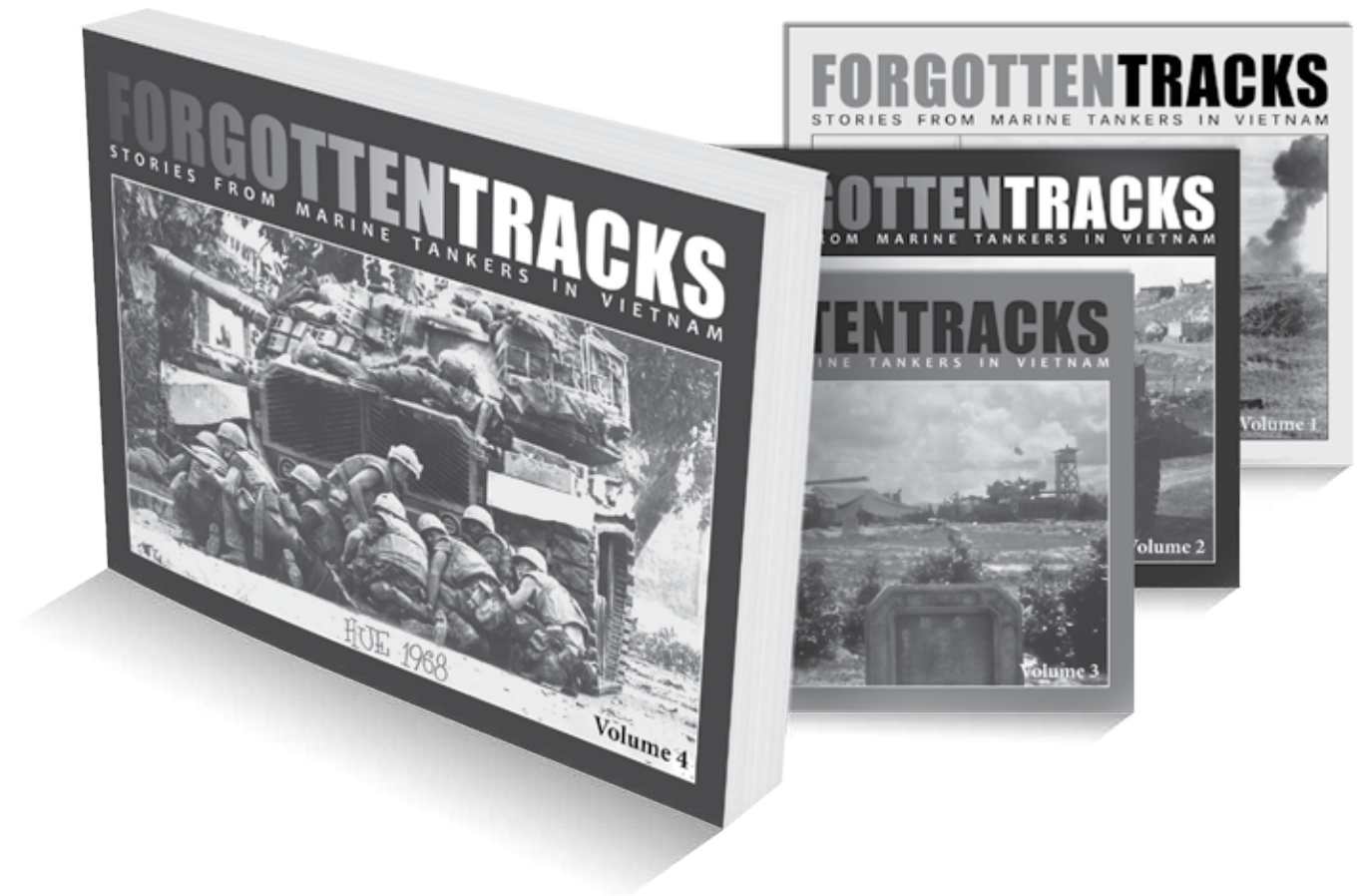
Regrets from this episode:

I did not write citations for Staff Sergeant Jewell, Corporal Young and the other crewman the helped repair the track.

I did not have enough trust in God to go through the explosion and across the bridge on that first day.

Please be sure to give Jim Jewell and Lynn Young credit for helping me remember names and events in this story. It was a tough tale to tell. I have been working on it since the Philadelphia reunion.

I was not able to explain to others what had happened there in the dark and how the power of prayer helped me. ■



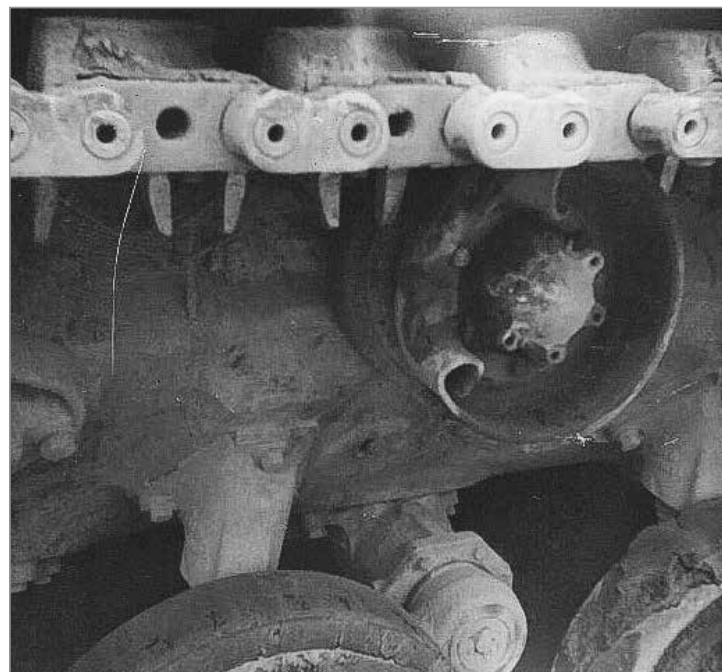
FORGOTTEN TRACKS Volume Four **IS NOW AVAILABLE!**

A perfect gift for the USMC Birthday and / or any holiday

This is the fourth edition with a large collection of USMC VTA members' stories ... and this time we feature many full color photos of some of the VTA's reunions. As we have done in the previous three volumes of *Forgotten Tracks*, many of the stories and all of the reunion images were previously published in our award winning magazine the Sponson Box. The format and layout of Volume 4 is similar to the design of our previous three *Forgotten Tracks* books. Just so you note copies of this edition will be sent to the Archives of the USMC Museum and Library at Quantico, to the Library of Congress and to the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archives. We want to preserve our heritage.

LOOK FOR THE ORDER CARD IN THIS MAGAZINE ... OR YOU CAN ORDER ON LINE ON THE VTA WEBSITE, <http://www.usmcvta.org> STORE BY USING A MAJOR CREDIT CARD OR PAYPAL. WE ONLY PRINTED 150 COPIES OF VOLUME 4 SO ORDER YOURS NOW! THEY ARE \$30.00 PER BOOK WITH SHIPPING INCLUDED

ALSO NOTE: There are still a few copies of *Forgotten Tracks* Volume 1, 2 and 3 available at \$30.00 including shipping.



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

Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" on your address label is "19" then your 2020 membership dues are payable now.

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.

