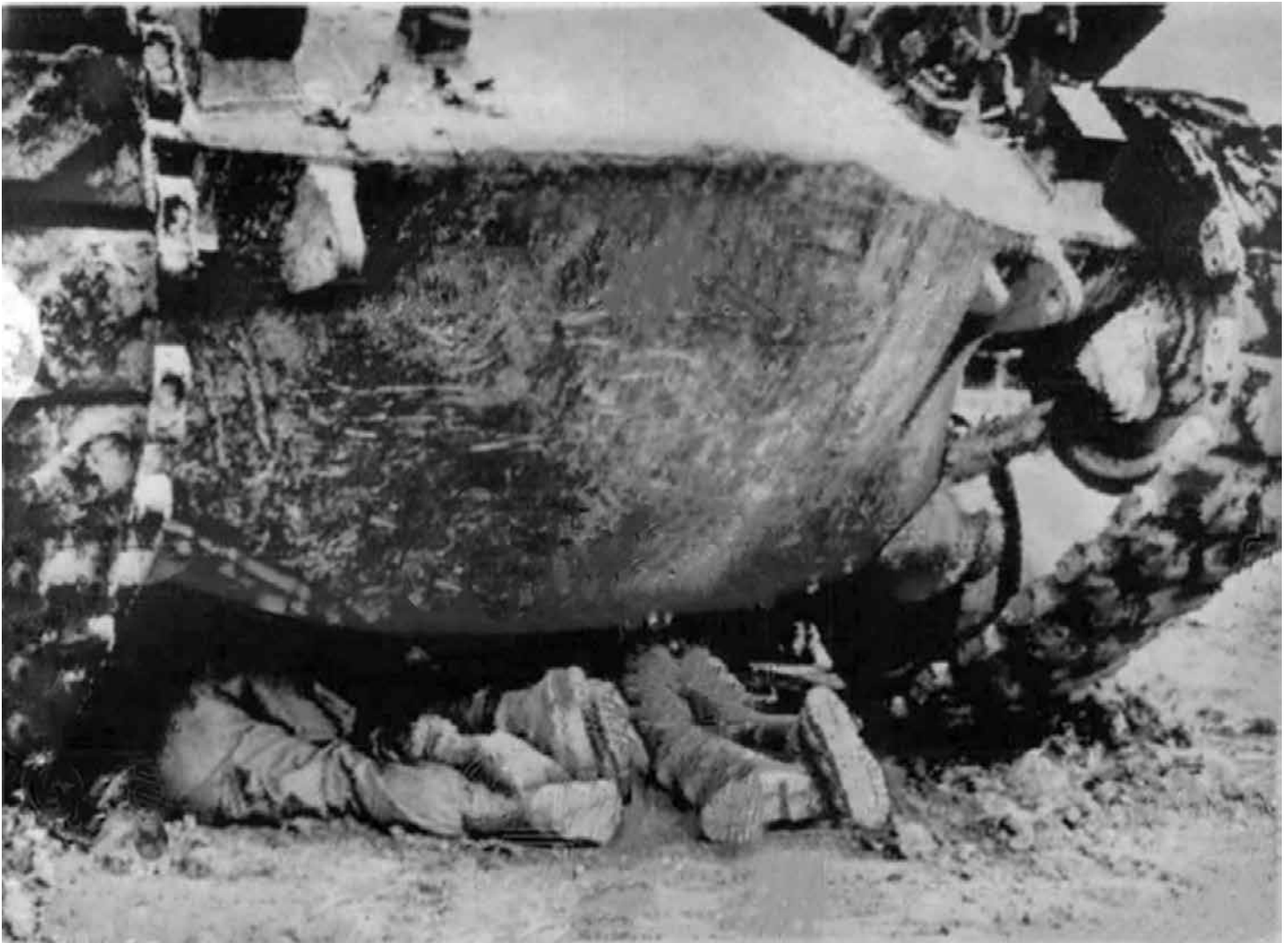




# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

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



## **INCOMMING!!!**

**Featured Stories:**

- Cover Story: A Little Piece of Hell ..... Pages 33 - 35
- Crazy Asian War ..... Pages 37 - 38
- Ev Tungent Remembers ..... Pages 42 - 44

## Forty Years Ago...

### The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C.



Ground Breaking March 26, 1982



Dedicated November 13, 1982.

This year on November 13, 2022, it is the 40th Anniversary of the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in Washington, DC. Also known as "The Wall."

PLEASE NOTE: We would like to run the next Sponson Box magazine that is dedicated to your experience when visiting The Wall. Would you please submit any article that you may have already written ... and/or if you will sit down now and pen a story that we can share with the membership?

If you want to give John Wear a call at 719.495.5998

FOUND ON THE INTERNET



## Letter from the President

**2022 Mini-Reunion in Lander, Wyoming:** We are locked and loaded. See you in September!

**REMINDER: Please pay your 2022 annual membership dues and / or your 2022 Annual Life Member assessment now.**

In an effort to solicit a small amount of pity for the USMC VTA Board of Directors... who as you know, we are made up of 100% volunteers, so let me try to explain a recent occurrence:

Back in mid-2016, during an annual VTA board meeting, we decided that in order to be able to continue publishing and mailing out hard copies of the Sponson Box magazine, we would need some additional help from the Life Members. That "help" would translate into a \$20 per year "Life Assessment."

In order to enact this program, we first sent out emails to the Life Members who had email addresses on record. For those who were not on email, we mailed personal letters. The total number of Life Members in 2016 was around 140. Later, for the "non-response" Life Members, we then attempted to call the phone numbers that we had on the membership roster. Most calls resulted in us leaving a message and asking for a reply. After these two or three different attempts to contact the Life Members failed, we more or less, gave up and placed the non-reply Life Members on "Inactive" status ... thinking that a non-response was most likely the same as a refusal to pay the annual assessment.

Very recently, (five years in passing) we decided to make one last attempt to contact the 41 "Inactive Life Members" by mailing another letter to them. I am heartened that the most recent letter has solicited some very positive results. Again, thank you.

**Armor in Combat:** As we watch the poorly designed and cheaply produced Russian tanks take a beating in the Ukraine, many of us have thought that the less-than-mental-giant who is occupying the Commandant of the Marine Corps quarters in Washington, DC, might be right about getting rid of tanks in the USMC. If so, we should hearken the words of Australian Maj. Gen. Kathryn Toohey in 2019: **"Tanks are like dinner jackets. You don't need them very often, but when you do, nothing else will do."** The general's caution explains why the tank has endured and why it is perhaps not time for its funeral, unless she can be proven wrong.

### Treasurer's Report 2022

At the San Antonio Reunion I was asked to take on the responsibilities of the VTA Treasurer. So, what do I do? Process a lot of checks, draft a few checks for payments such as the Sponson Box, reconcile the bank statements, generate financial reports for Director Meetings, and annually file an income tax with the IRS. (It sure beats burning shitters)

Why do I do it? Because I am willing to do anything that will result in our staying together and meeting at reunions. The Marines of this organization are my number one priority. I suspect we all agree with the motivation to serve.

Two things really make doing this job a rewarding experience. First would be opening each envelope as I never know if there will be a note from you...many times there are and it always makes my day. Next is the occasional phone call...always a pleasure to talk to a fellow Marine no matter the topic.

I would also like to thank you for your donations as they make the difference. Between the normal dues and the Life Members helping out by paying for the printing & shipping of the Sponson Box we do get by but the donations allow us to prepay a lot of Reunion expenses which add value to the Reunion experience.

We are current and in compliance with the IRS. We also have documentation that is an audit trail to every dollar collected and every dollar spent. Feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Semper Fi, Bruce

### 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  
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#### SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll

Nominating Chair &  
CRCS/CR Representative  
Phone 651.342.0913 CST

#### Bruce Van Apeldoorn

Audit & Finance  
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#### CW04 Bob Embesi

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#### Rick Lewis

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#### Bob Peavey

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#### Greg Martin

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Tuyen Pham - Layout and Design

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## New Members

#### Bates, Donald E

8880 W 49th Ave  
Arvada, CO 80002  
Home: 303.422.2370  
Cell: 720.635.4947

Email: SBates324@msn.com

A Co, 1st Tanks, 1967

MOS: 1811

DOB: 02/01/490

Wife: Susan

Recruited by: John Wear

#### Bundock, Michael D

2313 Jones Bar Court  
Plumas Lake, CA 95961  
Home: 530.434.6891  
Cell: 707.778.8479

Email: diamondguitar@gmail.com

H&S Co, 1st Tanks, 1968

MOS: 1811

DOB: 02/11/49

Wife: Carol Jean

Recruited by: Louis Najfus

#### Cartwright, Robert W

PO Box 205  
Lexington, IN 47138-0205  
Cell Phone: 502.409.0376  
Email: None

A Co, 3rd Tanks, 1965

MOS: 1811

DOB: 05/13/46

Wife: Glena Jean

Recruited by: VFW Magazine

#### Everest, Guy Chad

98 Crabapple Lane  
Franklin Park, NJ 08823  
Cell Phone: 732.540.3102  
Email: yoda67@gmail.com

Son of Guy Everest -

Associate Member

#### Griffin, Brandon Tyler

6623 Montezuma Road (#47)  
San Diego, CA 92115  
Phone: 619.333.9513  
No Email

DOB: 01/18/01

Grandson of Guy Everest -  
Associate Member

#### Juare, Wil

1231 Apple Ridge Court  
South Bend, IN 45514-6154  
Cell Phone: 952.426.8553  
Email: Wiljuare35@gmail.com

C Co, 1st Tanks, '65 - '66

MOS: 2841

DOB: 01/24/45

Wife: Shirley

Recruited by: John Wear

#### Portillo, Frank

10901 Connemara Court  
Bakersfield, CA 93312  
Home: 661.587.9612  
Cell: 661.706.7838

Email: fportello@aol.com

A Co, 3rd ATs, 1968

MOS: 0353

DOB: 03/31/48

Wife: Rosa

Recruited by: WELCOME BACK

## Member Info Changes

#### Rick Lewis

4904 Mt. Hay Dr  
San Diego, CA 92117

#### Jim Manson

Cell phone: 541.554.7609

#### Hal Miller

Phone: 208.308.3466

#### Grady Nappier

4241 Oakhurst Cir. East  
Sarasota, FL 43233

#### Gary Peterson

Email: marinetankerpete@gmail.com

#### Joyce Ritch-(Pete's widow)

Cell: 850.247.8815

#### Robert Singer

Email: singerrobert75@gmail.com

#### Terry Wallace

Email: terry.wallace704@gmail.com

#### Dave Zaslow

Cell Phone: 760.420.2685  
Email is zaslowd@gmail.com



ON THE COVER: Con Thien 1967 - taking refuge from the NVA massive artillery incoming

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### Looking For...Trying to Reconnect

I was with Lima 4-11 on Hill 55 '69 - '70 and with India 3-13 '68 - '69 at Camp Las Pulgas. I am trying to locate two buddies from 1st Tanks: Ken McCarroll (comm.) and "Phillips" (comm.). Phillips may have been WIA in '69 when the tank that he was riding hit a mine and he lost both legs.

My health is not good and the doctors tell me that I'm dying. I don't know how to say it any other way. Sorry. I would enjoy reconnecting if I could.

STEWART "REZ" RESMER

Email: stewartresmer@aol.com

Phone: 291.396.9715

### Recruiting Efforts Pays Off

John Wear writes to VTA member Terry Wallace: This morning I got a phone call from a Henry Belton, who said that a fellow with a "USMC Vietnam Tankers Association" shirt met him at breakfast this morning. Henry said that even though he was not an in-country Vietnam US Marine tanker, he was in the USMC and a tanker. He told me that he was interested in joining the brotherhood. He also thought that this t-shirt wearing US Marine Vietnam veteran tanker was "Terry Wilson." I looked at the VTA membership roster for any Wilsons ... and the only one that we have lives in Indiana and his name is not Terry. Well, since Henry was from SC, I looked up all of the members from SC...and YOUR name showed up. OOO - freakin' - RAH!!!

As of this publication, we are still waiting for Henry's membership application.

### Rick's New Sword



(L to R) Blues, Rick, Guy and Frank

Guy Everest writes: Our good buddy, Rick Lewis had his

USMC NCO sword stolen when he was on Active Duty ... so Blues and I picked one up for him for his birthday.

### Wally Young Remembers

In Sept of '67, Herb Gardner of C Co 2nd Tanks at Camp Le Jeune was out with me in J-Ville enjoying the festivities one night. I told him, "The next time they ask for volunteers for WESPAC, my hand is going up!"

He says, "Well I'll tell you what Bub, when your hand goes up, mine going up right after yours!"

We both landed in Da Nang on 12 Oct 67. He was medevac'd off Hwy 9 between the Rockpile & Ca Lu on the same day we lost Capt Kent. Then 32 years later he left a message on my phone asking if I was going to the first VTA reunion in DC in 1999! I was glad to find out he had survived!

Posted on Facebook

Fred Kellogg responds: Me too Wally. When was the last time you heard from Herb? We were buddies while stationed at Lejeune and Cuba. Years ago I tried to get him into the VTA but he wasn't interested. It would be great to see him again.

Wally Young replies: Herb calls me quite often to check on us after tornadoes or hurricanes! He won't fly any more. Wish he would come to the VTA reunions. I'll tell him you asked about him. He's really a good friend.

### Comments on the Most Recent Past Issue

Tree writes: I do believe you hit a home run with this issue. Diversity of articles, well edited mixing everything you did, great memorials (did you miss Dave Turner?) and continuing kudos for Pete Rich--the guys that wrote to you about Pete are very tight ... and I will miss Mario Fuentes. I also thought you might like to know that "Blues" is moving to Florida. He has some very compelling reasons, but dang, I am going to miss him being nearby.

Armando Moreno writes: Desculpeme! I have shared my Marine Barracks, Adak, Alaska, story with my wife and family and I have received several complements on my putting together my thoughts to paper. I, however, choose to give you the credit for your encouragement, knowing that if published, it has to be factual, respectful, and concise. Thank you for that opportunity and for your kindness in giving me the confidence to share my experiences with the tanker and Ontos community.

Armando continues: Reference: the video histories from the Seattle reunion. Several Ontos guys, including, a retired judge, happened to see my video on the VTA website and have commented favorably on its content. I, person- >>

ally, have been in fear of watching it, thinking I might look like a buffoon, and might let the team down. This weekend, I sat my wife down and we watched it together. It was an emotional moment for both of us and I came out of it feeling better for its content. In due time I will send my daughter and son a link and they can see for themselves, what my service was all about. I can't promise any book deals and no fanfare, life goes on. Thank you for this opportunity,

Bob Haller writes: Just wondering if it is possible to acquire 4 more copies of the current Sponson Box. I must say every publication is fantastic but I do not want to give up my copy as I have every publication. I want to present one copy to the small museum, one each for the two people who dedicated the memorial and one to the person who invited me. Whatever the cost it does not matter.

John replies: If you go onto the VTA website and click on STORE, the first item is "Purchase copies of the current Sponson Box." And take it from there.

Jim New writes: I saw Dave Zaslows article in the Sponson Box and wanted to try to get in touch with him. His earlier contact info didn't work, (it was from a couple of years ago). If you could help me with that I would much appreciate it. Hope you are well, Semper Fi

Jim comments later: I got hold of Dave and we had a great dialog.

### Tanker Intelligence

Jim Sausoman writes: After reading part of the most recent "Sponson Box," I seem to recall what I told some guys in Recon one day many years ago: "Do you remember the aptitude test that you took in Boot Camp? It was to determine your MOS. Well I was a tanker and what did you guys get? A pair of boots and a rifle. This was based on your intelligence."

### "Tree" Updates Us on the VTA History Project Podcast Program

We have 913 "listens" to date. We are still rising in "listeners." Interestingly only 85% of our audience lives in the US while 15 % of the audience is international. A full 5% of our audience is listening from England. And 20 other international countries have listened to at least one podcast. The majority of our audience is below the age of 45.

We need to keep our podcast running if we are to achieve our goals of capturing more and more of our personal stories of our time as US Marine tankers. It seems as if everyone is sort of busy right now. So, I am ready to take whoever wants to jump ahead and do a podcast.

Also, if you have already done one podcast and would like to do a second one, I am willing to get you on as well. And, if you know someone who is not on the list but would be willing to jump into a podcast please let me know.

Remember, the only "bad" stories, the only "boring" stories are the stories that are never told. It is my great plea-

sure to say that no two stories on our podcast program are alike and I have learned a great deal from all of you about our time in Vietnam. So, please, step up and let's get rolling once again.

Francis "Tree" Remkiewicz  
Email: fremkiewicz@gmail.com  
Phone: 209.848.4433

P.S. If you log onto the USMC VTA website and click on PODCAST PROGRAM, you will hear some really wonderful and meaningful stories. It is easy and fun.

### Ron Knight, VTA Secretary Reports



The above photo are the 112 personal letters that I just mailed to the VTA members who have not paid their 2020, 2021 and 2022 membership dues. We are trying to get them caught up and get them back on the Sponson Box mailing list.

#### UPDATE:

As reported earlier, on March 11 we mailed out 112 letters (at a cost of around \$75) ... to VTA members who last paid dues in 2019 and 2020.

19s-22 letters

20s-29

Inactive Life-40

Life-21

To date, 16 members paid dues

19s-0

20s-6

Inactive Life-6

Life-4

Of the 112 letters, 5 were returned as "Undeliverable," and 7 were returned with a New Address and we resent those 7 letters. I would say it was well worth the effort to get 16 members back to Active Duty! It would even be better if the rest of the 96 got caught up.

### A Canadian Book Author Comments

As soon as I get my Armor in Vietnam book off to the publisher I will send you all the NARA / USMC tank pics that I have in high resolution. They will be useful to your website. They include Tank, Amphibian Tractor and

Antitank Battalion pics. I will include my captions where relevant. You can modify as required. I am getting the itch to do a general history of the USMC in Vietnam but it has to come after my American Artillery in Vietnam and The Huey in Vietnam books.

I have to say, given the huge amount of research I have done since 2014, I have never read of braver men than the US Marines in Vietnam. And that is a tall bar. I have researched the British Army over many campaigns (WW1, WW2 and Cold War) and Canada's Army 1943-1945 in Italy, the French in 1940 and later in Indochina and all the Allied armies in Korea. The US Marines in Vietnam were a special breed of men. It is of a similar caliber of men with similar hardships to the men who stormed Tarawa and Iwo Jima in WW2.

The US Army in Vietnam had a larger budget and many times the resources than the Marines could count on. The USMC spirit lives on even 55+ years later. It amazes me how hard Marine units fought and what they achieved with what was at hand. I would like to commemorate that adequately as a historian while I am still young enough to do it justice.

I want to thank you John (if I may) for your service 55+ years ago and for your help with my Armor in Vietnam book. If it weren't for guys like you, it would have been impossible to write this book but then again... if it weren't for guys like you then guys like me would be speaking Russian. No joke. And thanks for that.

Merlin

### An Ontos Officer Says "No Thanks."

I attended the 3rd AT BN reunion in Texas in 2003 and another Ontos reunion in Quantico (I don't remember the date). I fully enjoyed both and was excited when I read the initial email about the reunion in Wyoming. I decided right away that I would attend.

Then, I began reading the follow-up emails about requirements in order to attend the reunion. To say that I was surprised would be an understatement. I have no desire to join the VTA and find the requirement like something I would expect from Publishers Clearing House. I suppose requiring membership would help keep the VTA alive however.

You have helped me decide that I will have to go visit the military vehicle museum on my own. Have a good reunion.

DANIEL L. TAYLOR, 1stLt, USMC (Ret), 3rdATBn Motor Transport Officer, 1965-66

Editor's Note: We did send "Danny" a reply note thanking him for his acrimonious and one-sided point of view. We also assured him that despite his absence, we would definitely have a "good reunion."

### "Hokey" Writes a Note

Carl Hokanson writes: While sitting at home during the

"pandemic" I have just about finished reading all four volumes of the USMC VTA "Forgotten Tracks" books. As I read, I can across a photo of some tankers sitting on tank. Looking at the Xenon searchlight cover, I saw two sets of footprints with the word, "IT." I said to myself, "What a small world!" When the Marine tankers left Vietnam and came back to the World, I went off shore and unloaded that very tank from the LCS (landing craft ship) and brought the tank back to the 41 Area (Las Flores). I took a picture of the recently returned tank and have it to this day in my scrapbook.

Also, while reading the Vol. 3 on Page 155 there is the story, "The Parking Lot Encounter." I read that you liked to send you son trail mix from Altamonte's Italian Market in Doylestown, PA. I went online and found the store. I called the number listed and spoke to the store manager/owner. She was so excited when I told her about you sending your son their trail mix overseas while deployed as a US Army Ranger. Since Doylestown is only 66 miles from my home in New York, I drove out to the store to pick up some trail mix. Enclosed with this letter are two types of trail mix that the store had in stock.

During the "pandemic," I also had time to clean up some areas in my "man cave." Buried in a box was some manuals on the M-103A2 "ramp queen" heavy gun tank. Since you had indicated that there will be some articles about the "ramp queen" in the Sponson Box, I made a copy of the manual so you might be able to use it in some way.

### Paying Tolls



### A Random Butt Dial

We received a random call about 1:00 AM today. I called the number back just for the hell of it since it came from Hawaii. It turned out that my old company commander, Lt. Colonel Ken Zitz "butt dialed" me. He is doing well these days. He reported that unfortunately Mario Fuentes had passed away about a month or so ago. Ken also said that Mario's widow Ana is doing OK so far, he keeps in touch.

We are happily living in Florida having left New Jersey about six months ago. Ron is having some health issues >>

but we are trudging through them. We should be good for the mini-reunion in Wyoming. We are booked already and planning our route to and from. We can't wait!

Ron and Carol Colucci

**Anti-War?**

John Wear writes: A few weeks ago, I was at the kitchen sink doing the dinner dishes when an announcer came on the radio. It was the local classical station and they were getting ready to broadcast a special symphony "For the Ukrainian People." The announcer was going on and on

about the many flags and other pieces of clothing that displayed the Ukrainian flag colors and how sorry they were for the plight of the innocent Ukrainians.

All of a sudden I got really pissed off. I quickly dried my hands and went over and shut off the radio. Why was I pissed off? These same overly enthusiastic supportive turds are either the same ass wipes or the children of the f\*ckin' anti-war ass wipes who called us "baby killers" and despised us for doing our country's bidding in Vietnam.

Upon reflection of my being upset, it may be just me but ... F\*ck them all...!!!

**JOKES**

Prison overcrowding is cruel and unusual punish...  
Oh wait, that's just Marines bunking on a Navy ship



Me: I'll never spend my money on dumb stuff ever again!

[30 MINUTES LATER]



*The Vietnam Veteran*

*By James Bollack*

*Golf 2/7*

*There'll come the day when the papers say  
The last Viet Nam Vet has passed away*

*10 years later no one will remember his name  
But he'll live on just the same*

*And in a graveyard there'll be a spot  
Two rows over from the parking lot*

*A granite slab carved with the dates  
Of a man who cheated fate*

*And every Memorial Day  
The flag will wave and taps will play  
Then all will walk away*

*Forgotten for another year  
Except for the ones who sheds the tears*

# To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“The only guarantee in life is death, but the only thing worse than death itself, is being forgotten.”

Trent Thomas

## Doyle, George W

1943–2021



George W. Doyle, 78, passed into eternal life on December 3, 2021. Born to Fred and Rose Ann Doyle in Loogootee, Indiana, he spent his youth working on the family farm. He later went on to proudly serve

our country as a radio operator with H&S Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division during the Vietnam War. After earning a degree in Electrical Engineering from Purdue University, he spent most of his career working in the communications industry. A charismatic man, George's presence rarely went unnoticed, nor was a meeting with him soon forgotten. He is preceded in death by his devoted first wife, Catherine; his parents Fred and Rose Ann; and his siblings Maryanne and Fred. He is survived by his loving wife Gloria, his 4 children and his 11 grandchildren.

## Fournier, Harold John

1949–2019



Mr Fournier was born on September 10, 1949 and passed away on Sunday, August 11, 2019. He served with Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks 1968 – 1969.

## Reese, John E

1946–2021



John E. Reese, Jr, 75, of the Parsons section of Wilkes-Barre, PA, passed away peacefully at his home on July 29, 2021. He was born June 18, 1946 in Greensburg, Pennsylvania a son of the late

John E. and Wanda Sias Reese.

John was a US Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War where he served as a tank crewman. He founded and was the president of School Installers of Pennsylvania, Inc. John was a member of the Wyoming Valley Country Club, Fox Hill Country Club, Corvette Club, American Legion, the Marine Corps Tankers Association, and enjoyed attending the Wilkes-Barre Penguins games.

Surviving are his wife of 37 years, Sharon (Burrier) Reese; son Robert Reese, daughters Tammy Greely, Christina Reese; four grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.



## Tanks & Medals of Valor

### Harold D. Tatum

DATE OF BIRTH: August 6, 1932

PLACE OF BIRTH: Dawsonville, Georgia

HOME OF RECORD: Sandy Springs, Georgia

### Silver Star

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War

Service: US Marine Corps

Rank: Gunnery Sergeant

3d Tank Battalion, Division: 3d Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

#### GENERAL ORDERS:

#### CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Gunnery Sergeant Harold D. Tatum (MCSN: 1102779), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with Company B, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 10 September 1967. While participating in Operation KINGFISHER in direct support of the Third Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines, during a sweeping operation, Gunnery Sergeant Tatum's section of tanks came into contact with the lead elements of attacking enemy forces. He unhesitatingly reacted to the situation and positioned his tanks to repel the brunt of the enemy attack, effectively preventing Companies



I and L of the Third Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines from being overrun. In the ensuing battle, Gunnery Sergeant Tatum's tank was penetrated by an enemy rocket-propelled grenade which set off several rounds of white phosphorous ammunition, resulting in an intense fire inside the tank. Disregarding his own personal safety, Gunnery Sergeant Tatum remained inside the burning tank and assisted in the removal of a mortally wounded comrade. As a direct result of his heroic and unselfish actions, Gunnery Sergeant Tatum received severe burns over 40% of his

body. Gunnery Sergeant Tatum's initiative, outstanding courage and selfless efforts in behalf of another reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. ■

## GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who the Marine 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 in a contest for a chance to win a yet un-named mediocre prize.



And as a bonus: If you can identify the Marine on the left, you will receive double credit.

## **Last Issue Winner**

Last issue's winner was Brian Fieldhouse who called at 4:22 PM (Mountain Standard Time) on April 8th to identify the T-28 Heavy Gun Tank. It was reported that the tank never went into production and the one and only remaining model is on display at the Patton Armor Museum at Ft Knox, KY.



## Guest Opinion

Another voice of sanity regarding the dismantling of our Marine Corps combined arms capability: Very incisive and spot on assessment and one that the US Congress, the Sec Def, Sec Navy and our Corps needs to wake up and halt the ongoing suicide of our beloved Marine Corps, our "911" reaction force for any event in the world until our heavy ground forces can arrive. It's not too late to halt this Commandant's dismantling of the Marine Corps and if not by him then the White House and Congress needs to relieve him and appoint another Marine who will restore the Corps ability as a combined arms force in readiness.

## **Ukraine's Tragedy Should Refocus the U.S. Marine Corps**

BY BING WEST-MARCH 13, 2022

The public esteems the Marines for their discipline and toughness. Like their bulldog mascot, Marines latch onto an enemy and don't let go. They stand ready to fight in any clime or place — until recently.

A few years ago, policy-makers advocated a "pivot" to the Pacific, concerned that China was building forts on atolls in the South China Sea. The commandant of the Marine Corps immediately proclaimed a counter. Small groups of Marines would move into unoccupied islands in the South China Sea, after receiving permission from the host nations of those islands, they could then fire missiles to sink Chinese warships. Congress joined the press and policy-makers in praising this dramatic initiative, launched in haste and with scant consultation.

Three mortal flaws in this anti-ship strategy have since emerged. First, the Chinese forts are now yesterday's newspaper. China has "pivoted" toward Taiwan, far out of range of Marine missiles in the South China Sea. The Marines are out of position.

Second, the invasion of Ukraine has again demonstrated that aggressors strike when and where they choose. Because our nation does not pick the time and place, our forces must be prepared to fight anywhere. However,



U.S. Marines take part in a military exercises near Kherson, Ukraine, as part of multinational Sea Breeze drills, July 2, 2021.

Marines today are much less capable as our global "force in readiness," because the resources devoted to the South China Sea scenario are not transferable elsewhere. There are few battlefields where anti-ship missiles, unlike Javelins, will be used.

Third, to pay for those missiles, the Marine Corps gave up its tanks and much of its artillery

and air, with more reductions planned. With fewer combined arms, the Corps is less capable of fighting in urban spaces like Ukraine. Marines with combined arms fought the largest urban battles in Vietnam (Hue City) and Iraq (Fallujah) 20 years ago. Marines today are less capable than two decades ago. With urban growth soaring worldwide, the Marines, focused on isolated atolls, have diminished their capabilities to fight on the likely battlefields.

Congressional legislation directs the Marines to be a combined-arms corps. That capability is being eviscerated. Therefore Congressional language directing a pause in the anti-ship strategy for an objective study is fitting and would benefit our national security. Forsaking proper consultation and ignoring history, the commandant of the Marine Corps is giving up too much to gain too little. ■

## Does The War In Ukraine Prove Tanks Are Totally Obsolete?

BY BRENT M. EASTWOOD—MARCH 20, 2022

### Are drones and anti-tank missiles making tanks obsolete?

You've seen the photos and videos that have documented the numerous mangled and destroyed Russian tanks that have littered the battlefield. The Bayraktar TB2 combat drone and the Javelin anti-tank missile have been devastating to Russian armor. The tank's vulnerable turret is no match for missiles. Antitank systems are truly raining death from above. 1945 has chronicled attempts by the Russians to protect their tanks from these types of missiles. Vladimir Putin's forces have built iron cages above tank turrets to block the downward trajectory of anti-tank munitions. These countermeasures have not been effective.

### Astounding Russia Losses

As of March 13, the Ukrainians have lost 389 tanks and 1,249 armored personnel carriers, according to the Ukrainian ministry of defense quoted in the Kyiv Independent. While these numbers are not independently confirmed, it is safe to say that the Russians have seen hundreds of tanks destroyed.

### Worth the Cost?

In 2020, Army Technology web magazine conducted a survey and asked whether tanks are a worthwhile investment. They asked over 6,000 respondents. 74 percent of those surveyed said that tanks indeed were a worthwhile investment while 26 percent said they were not.

The poll concluded that during counter-insurgency and counter-terror fights in Iraq and Afghanistan the main battle tank played less of a role, and it risked becoming obsolete. But due to the great power resurgence of Russia and China – both countries that have large-scale armored forces – the tank was seen as more important.



Russia's T-90 tanks

### But Here Come the Ukrainian Forces

The Russian invasion of Ukraine may have changed that sentiment again. Russian tanks are being obliterated throughout the country. The use of stand-off missiles and drones by the Ukrainians have introduced a new wrinkle in armored maneuver warfare – one that has changed viewpoints on what it means to have a tank in combat.

### Marines Ditch Their Armor

The U.S. Marine Corps was so sure that this change in warfare would make tanks expendable that they have retired many of their Abrams tanks and the force plans to go tankless to concentrate on their maritime amphibious mission. Marine tankers have been asked to leave the service, re-class into another military occupational specialty, or join the army.

Perhaps the marines are looking smart because the war in Ukraine is showing the tank and infantry fighting vehicle is becoming redundant. One reason for armored vehicles' difficulty in Ukraine has been the Bayraktar TB2 combat drone.

### Bayraktar Drone Making Piecemeal of the Russians

This unmanned system is proving

deadly to the tank. The Bayraktar TB2 is Turkish-made, and the Ukrainians have about 50 of the drones with more on the way. Each aircraft has four laser-guided missiles. The drone can fly for around 24 hours with a ceiling of 25,000 feet. Drone operators can be up to 185-miles away. The payload is 121 pounds with a 105 horse-power engine. Its top speed is around 80 miles per hour.

The Bayraktar is proving that it can avoid Russian radar and jamming equipment. But their success also is due to the questionable tactics from the Russian as the invaders do not always protect their armored columns with surface-to-air missiles and other types of air defense systems.

Despite the success of the Bayraktar, I don't believe the tank should be given its last rights. Countries will learn lessons from the war in Ukraine and strengthen the armor along the top of the turret. Tactics will also improve. U.S. brigade combat teams will use their own drones to counter the enemy and better sniff out attacks from remotely-piloted vehicles. Thus, the tank will still remain a mainstay in modern combat.

## Opinion: Russian tanks are taking a beating. Do they still have a place on the modern battlefield?

BY MAX BOOT—MARCH 22, 2022

The Russo-Ukraine war is still raging in all its fury, with the outcome far from clear. It is much too early to draw any definitive judgments about lessons learned. But what we have seen to date is already offering fresh evidence for the continuing debate in military circles over the future of warfare – and in particular over whether the tank can continue its eight-decade reign as the king of land warfare.

On one level, what we are seeing vindicates the

judgment reached by national security adviser H.R. McMaster's 2017 National Security Strategy and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis's 2018 National Defense Strategy. Both proclaimed, in the words of the Defense Department, that "inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security." And both documents correctly focused on the looming threat from Russia. As the National Security Strategy stated, "Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders."

That change in national strategy encouraged the Army to double down on conventional, large-unit armored operations. The Marine Corps went the other way by ditching its tanks to focus on a strategy of employing portable missiles to challenge Chinese ships and aircraft in the western Pacific. Both decisions can claim some degree of vindication from events in Ukraine.

The Russians have attacked using large numbers of tanks and armored vehicles, which again emphasizes their importance on the battlefield. But the Russians have also suffered devastating vehicle losses at the hands of Ukrainian troops armed with potent,



Pro-Russian troops and tanks on the outskirts of the besieged southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine, on March 20.

hand-held antitank missiles such as the American Javelin and the British NLAW (Next Generation Light Antitank Weapon). The Ukrainians have also made good use of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones firing antitank missiles. Open-source reporting indicates that the Russians have lost more than 1,600 vehicles and equipment, including nearly 300 tanks and more than 500 armored vehicles of other kinds.

The Russians are likely to suffer even heavier losses now that the United States is not only providing Ukrainians with many more Javelins but also 100 Switchblade kamikaze drones – technically known as loitering munitions – that can stay aloft searching for a target and then dive into it. The combination of TB2 drones and Israeli-made loitering munitions proved highly potent for Azerbaijan in its victorious war against Armenia in 2020. As I previously reported, 47 percent of Armenia's combat vehicles were damaged or destroyed.

The Army Times wrote that the Armenia-Azerbaijan war "has given armor supporters and detractors a lot of talking points. ... Depending on the take, the destruction of tanks by precision drone strikes either spelled

the end of armor as we know it or served as an example of what unprotected, poorly deployed armor would face."

The Russo-Ukraine war is certain to intensify the debate.

Already some are rushing to claim that "tanks & armored personnel carriers have become obsolete. They are too expensive & are easily destroyed with manifold light anti-tank weapons or drones." But armor experts reply: Not so fast. As former British army officer

Nicholas Drummond wrote: "Russia's disastrous tactics have been a terrible advertisement for tanks. But we should be careful to avoid drawing the wrong conclusions. No artillery support. No infantry support. No air support. This is not how combined arms tactics work in an era of multi-domain operations." If the Russian tanks were better supported by infantry, artillery and airpower, the argument goes, they would not be so vulnerable to the hit-and-run tactics of Ukrainian infantry armed with antitank weapons.

The consensus of military experts is that armor still has a vital place on the battlefield in enabling offensive operations. Mick Ryan, a recently retired major general in the Australian army, told me that "the historical data on ground forces that have tanks, versus those that don't, is pretty exhaustive. If you have tanks, you lose less soldiers and have a better chance of success. The caveat is that they need to be used in a well-led combined arms team."

The question, then, is not whether armies should have tanks in the future but what they should look like. The U.S. Army is spending \$4.62 billion upgrading its M1A2 Abrams tanks with the Israeli-developed Trophy >>



active-protection system to defend against drones, electronic warfare devices to counter roadside bombs, and ballistic armor upgrades. But is there a point at which these 40-year-old, 80-ton behemoths become too costly and unwieldy? The Army is spreading its bets around by developing a light tank, along with unmanned ground vehicles.

Some visionaries suggest that the eventual M1 replacement shouldn't be a new tank at all, Breaking Defense writes, but a wolf pack of manned and unmanned vehicles working together: "Instead of having gun, sensors, and crew all on one vehicle, you could put, say, your long-range sensors on a drone, your decoys on another (expendable)

drone, your main gun on a ground robot, and your human controller in a small, well-armored command vehicle hidden some distance away."

The only thing all sides in the armor debate can agree on is that Russia is badly misusing its tanks — and Ukraine is taking full advantage of Russian ineptitude.

## How the 'Jack-in-the-Box' Flaw Dooms Some Russian Tanks

BY SAMMY WESTFALL AND WILLIAM NEFF

THE WASHINGTON POST

APRIL 30, 2022

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/30/russian-tank-turret-blast-jack-in-the-box/>

ANALYSIS — The sight of Russian tank turrets, blown off and lying in ruin along Ukrainian roads, points to a tank design issue known as the "jack-in-the-box" flaw.

The fault is related to the way many Russian tanks hold and load ammunition. In these tanks, including the T-72, the Soviet-designed vehicle that has seen wide use in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, shells are all placed in a ring within the turret. When an enemy shot hits the right spot, the ring of ammunition can quickly "cook off" and ignite a chain reaction, blasting the turret off the tank's hull in a lethal blow.

"For a Russian crew, if the ammo storage compartment is hit, everyone is dead," said Robert E. Hamilton, a professor at the U.S. Army War College, adding that the force of the explosion can "instantaneously vaporize" the crew. "All those rounds — around 40 depending on if they're carrying a full load or not — are all going to cook off, and everyone is going to be dead."

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace this week estimated that Russia has lost at least 530 tanks — destroyed or captured — since it invaded Ukraine



Main battle tank T-14 object 148 Armata in the streets of Moscow on the way to or from the Red Square

in February.

What to know about the role Javelin antitank missiles could play in Ukraine's fight against Russia. "What we are witnessing now is Ukrainians taking advantage of the tank flaw," said Samuel Bendett, an adviser at the Center for Naval Analyses, a federally funded nonprofit research institute. Ukraine's Western allies have provided antitank weapons at high volume.

Ukraine, too, has been using Russian-made T-72 variants, which face the same issue. But Russia's invasion has relied on the large-scale deployment of tanks, and Ukraine has been able to fight back better than

expected.

The flaw speaks to a broader difference in approaches between Western militaries and Russia's, analysts say. "American tanks for a long time have prioritized crew survivability in a way that Russian tanks just haven't," said Hamilton. "It's really just a difference in the design of the ammo storage compartment and a difference in prioritization."

Ammunition in most Western tanks can be kept under the turret floor, protected by the heavy hull — or in the back of the turret, said Hamilton. While a turret-placed ammunition storage compartment is potentially vulnerable to a hit, built-in features can prevent the same level of decapitating devastation seen in the case of the T-72.

Even the early versions of the American M1 Abrams tanks in the 1980s were fitted with tough blast doors separating the crew inside from the stored ammunition. These tanks have a crew of four, including a loader who opens the ballistic door manually. These were designed to be stronger than the top armor, so that if ammunition is cooked off, the explosion

would be channeled upward through blowout panels, rather than into the crew compartment, Hamilton said.

On the other hand, Russian tanks rely on mechanical automatic loaders, allowing them to be manned by a team of three. The design of Russian tanks prioritizes rate of fire, firepower, a low profile, speed and maneuverability vs. overall survivability, said Hamilton. Russian tanks tend to be lighter and simpler, and have thinner, less-advanced armor than Western tanks. The design vulnerability was probably

"just cheaper and lighter," Hamilton said.

Newer Russian models have come out since the T-72, which was produced in the 1970s by the Soviet Union. One of them, the T-14 Armata, has been described as a sophisticated battlefield game-changer since it debuted at a 2015 military parade. But the Armatas have not yet seen much use outside parades. Newer variants of the T-72 have come with greater tank protections, Bendett said, but the prevailing principle has been the

same: a three-person crew with a lower profile, and shells in a circle within the turret. Understanding the weapons that have drawn the world's attention since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For the U.S. military, Hamilton said, "if the tank is destroyed and the crew survives, you can make another tank more quickly than you can train another crew."

For Russia, "the people are as expendable as the machine," he said. "The Russians have known about this for 31 years — you have to say they've just chosen not to deal with it." ■

### V. A. News & Updates

For more VA information please go to our website  
[www.USMCVTA.org](http://www.USMCVTA.org)

VA Community Care Program Update 01: To Be Phased Out by MAR 2022

Veterans Affairs leaders are phasing out the department's office in charge of community care programs, a move that some advocates are decrying as unfairly limiting veterans' medical options but officials insist is only about efficiency and not sweeping policy changes. Last week, VA officials said they would begin a multi-month process of "designing a new integrated access and care coordination model to better deliver seamless care." Connected to that, lawmakers on Capitol Hill received letters from VA Secretary Denis McDonough announcing that the Office of Community Care would be decommissioned in the coming months, with its responsibilities shifted to a yet-to-be-established Office for Integrated Veterans Care.

"Implementation of these changes allows the Veterans Health Administration to continue its modernization journey and transformation to operate as a high reliability, veteran-centric organization," the letter stated. The issue of community care — where veterans can see private sector doctors paid for by department funds — has been a contentious one within VA for years. Former President Donald Trump made expanding outside medical access a key point of his 2016 campaign and presidency, pushing for more "choice" for veterans in where they received their health care.

But Democratic lawmakers — including President Joe Biden — have cautioned that too much use of private-sector doctors for core VA medical responsibilities could drain finances from the VA health care system and lead to "privatization" of the department. In a statement to Military Times, Donald Koenig, special advisor to VA's acting Under

Secretary for Health for Integrated Veteran Care, said the goal of the new changes is not to hamper or dismantle the community care program. "Nothing we are doing will change any appointments scheduled now or in the future," he said. "We're working to simplify, coordinate better, and make scheduling faster for veterans, whether for a VA provider or a community care provider. Our goal is to deliver the right care at the right time that best meets our veteran's health needs."

Officials at Concerned Veterans of America — longtime advocates of increased community care programs and critics of the VA health care system — see it differently. They noted that VA also recently took down a web page devoted to explaining veterans' options under the community care program, effectively limiting public information about how to enroll or schedule outside appointments. "The administration does not like community care," said Darin Selnick, senior advisor to the group and former Veterans Affairs advisor for the Trump White House. "If they are renaming and neutering offices and moving around access to the revenue, it feels like it is part of a campaign to get rid of it completely." Koenig said the Office of Community Care won't be fully shut down until next spring, with a target now of March 2022. About 3,600 employees will be transferred to the new integrated care office, while another 4,300 will be reassigned to the Veterans Health Administration's finance office. No jobs will be terminated or physically relocated. But Selnick said CVA has heard from numerous veterans and congressional offices about increased problems accessing the program and getting outside medical appointments. He said the decision to separate the financial and operational functions of the program could cause even more delays and confusion. >>

VA officials say that's not true, noting that community care referrals were up about 12 percent last month compared to 2019 levels (September 2020 levels were down about 6 percent, but VA leaders say that's because of reduced demand related to the coronavirus pandemic.) Lawmakers received a briefing on the looming changes this week. House Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member Mike Bost, R-Ill., said he supports efforts to improve the community care program, but said he is leery of the moves so far. "I am hearing more and more often from veterans who are not being given the choices they are entitled to under the law," he told Military Times.

"I am very concerned that this will divert much-needed focus from community care and make it that much easier for wait times to creep back up and veterans to suffer for it, just like they did in 2014. "It's on Secretary McDonough to make sure that doesn't happen, and I will be a keeping very close watch."

[Source: Military Times | Leo Shane III | October 13, 2021 ++]

EDITORS NOTE: As of May 2022, the program is still running at full steam ahead.

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Covid-19 Misinformation Update 07: VA will not withhold Benefits for Those Refusing Shots

A Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Georgia sent an emergency email alert 22 OCT about a false news story on a satirical site that veterans are misconstruing as true. The false article—20—states President Joe Biden ordered the VA to withhold health care benefits from veterans who refuse to receive coronavirus vaccines. The story was published by DelawareOhioNews.com, which describes itself as a satire and parody entertainment website.

The Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin, Ga., issued the email alert to inform veterans that the article is not true. "It's sick," the email reads. "There is nothing funny about spreading false stories of stripping our heroes of their hard-earned benefits." The false article was posted online in September. It was shared widely after a Republican lawmaker from Iowa, Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, tweeted about it. Along with a link to the story, she tweeted: "If true, this is insane!" As of 22 OCT, Miller-Meeks' tweet had not been deleted, despite the story being marked as satire.

In a legal statement on its website, DelawareOhioNews.com states "all stories herein are parodies (satire, fiction, fake, not real) of people and/or actual events." The VA urged people to stop sharing the false article. "The president has not and will not withhold benefits to veterans who choose not to be vaccinated," said Terrence Hayes, the VA press secretary. "The spread of this misinformation is extremely detrimental to our veterans and their families and should cease immediately."

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | October 22, 2021 ++]

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VA Elderly Benefits Special Benefits for Elderly Wartime Veteran Population

As a follow up to the 14 AUG National Financial Awareness Day, the Department of Veterans Affairs is launching an awareness campaign to inform elderly wartime Veterans and their families of their lesser known pension, funeral, burial and survivor benefits. "VA's pension benefit helps Veterans and their families cope with financial challenges by providing supplemental income," said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. "Currently, only 189,800 wartime Veterans and 139,800 surviving spouses are using their needs-based pension

benefits that are meant to ease the burden on them, their families and caregivers. We need to ensure all of our wartime Veterans and their survivors are aware of their benefits." The following benefits are available through VA's Pension and Fiduciary Service as noted in the guide at

[https://benefits.va.gov/FIDUCIARY/docs/VA\\_Fiduciary\\_Guide\\_Apr2020.pdf](https://benefits.va.gov/FIDUCIARY/docs/VA_Fiduciary_Guide_Apr2020.pdf) for use in planning and preparing for the future.

- VA pension is payable to wartime Veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to nonservice connected disability, or who are age 65 years old or older, and who meet certain income and net worth limits. Refer to <https://www.va.gov/pension>.

- Special monthly pension is an additional benefit for Veterans in receipt of pension who are housebound, require the aid and attendance of another person to help them with daily activities (such as eating, bathing and dressing), have very limited eyesight or require nursing home care. See <https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/limitedincome/EnhancedorSpecialPension.pdf>.

- For surviving spouses, there are two types of benefits P&F Service offers. Survivors Pension (<https://www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension>) provides monthly payments to qualified surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of wartime Veterans who meet certain income and net worth limits. Special monthly pension is also available to surviving spouses who are housebound or require the aid and attendance of another person.

- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation is available to dependents and parents and generally is not based on income and assets (except the income limits apply to parents). DIC is a monthly monetary benefit paid to a surviving spouse, child or parent of a Veteran who died from a service related injury or illness, or when an active duty service member dies in the line of duty. Special monthly DIC is also available to surviving spouses who are housebound or require the aid and attendance of another person. See [www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation](http://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation).

- A surviving spouse of a Veteran who served on a Blue Water Navy vessel offshore of the Republic of Vietnam, or on another U.S. Navy or Coast Guard ship operating in the coastal waterways of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975, may be eligible for DIC benefits — even if they were previously denied. See <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materialsexposure/agent-orange>.

- VA's funeral and burial benefits are available for both service-related and non-service-related deaths. New regulations allow a flat-rate burial and plot or interment allowance with decreased paperwork and maximum payment permitted by law. See <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials>.

- For those interested in burial benefits such as a Presidential Memorial Certificate, burial flag, headstone or marker, the National Cemetery Administration has information about pre-need eligibility. See [https://www.cem.va.gov/burial\\_benefits/index.asp](https://www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/index.asp).

Many vulnerable senior wartime Veterans are targeted with misinformation. In many cases, this is because they are not fully aware of their benefits, which increases the chances of them being taken advantage of and/or defrauded. VA encourages elderly wartime Veterans and their family members to consult a VA accredited representative (<https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/index.asp>) if they want or need help filing a claim. They are reminded to beware of individuals or companies that promise benefits or ask for money upfront, as only VA can make final determinations on eligibility. Factsheets at <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/factsheets.asp#BM3>

are available to assist Veterans with limited resources. Pension eligibility information with details on how Veterans and their families can get help filing their claim for free can be found at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/limitedincome/pensionprogram-and-representation.pdf>.

[Source: VA News Release | August 17, 2021 ++]

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Vet Death Preps Update:

Keeping Records for Our Significant Others Veterans need to be well organized when it comes to keeping records for our significant others. They will be stressed out enough dealing with our passing. They do not need the added chore of trying to find critical items necessary for planning funerals and other issues. What follows is a list of documents that are necessary to ensure that things get taken care of in a timely manner when we die.

The first item is a copy of your DD-214. This is the most important document relating to your military service. It shows a funeral director that you are a veteran and, in some cases, determines the level of services you are eligible for. If you are drawing benefits from the VA and you do not have a copy of your DD-214, log on to [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov) where you will be able to find and print a copy, as well as review your disability rating.

The second item is a copy of your award letter from the VA. This document shows what your disabilities are and their percentages. If you are a 100 percent permanent and totally disabled veteran, the letter will save your significant other a lot of headaches when it comes to filing for Dependent Indemnity Compensation. It also gives the physician who fills out the death certificate a list of conditions that should be named as contributing factors to the veteran's death.

During the pandemic the primary cause of death listed for many veterans has been COVID-19. But the veteran's service-connected conditions in most cases were contributing factors. COPD and diabetes, for example, often are contributing factors. By having the doctor list a service-connected condition as a contributing factor on the death certificate, the widow will not have any difficulty getting the DIC claim approved. As a 100 percent permanent and totally disabled veteran, you are authorized a free death insurance policy providing you filed for that benefit within two years after you received your rating award letter. Locate the phone number for the insurance agency and keep it with the policy.

Then you need to compile all the documents listed below. The items and all pertinent information should be kept in a folder.

- Will
- Do Not Resuscitate statement
- Obituary
- Funeral wishes
- Passwords for computers and other items
- List of people to contact other than family (old military buddies, etc.)

It's also important to contact your nearest Casualty Assistance Office, which can help you file whatever documents are necessary for retirement pay and other issues. If your significant other is not a member of a Veterans Service Organization, locate the nearest VSO that helps with filing DIC claims and performs graveside honors.

This list is by no means complete. However, it will give you a starting point and provide critical information necessary to take care of the most time-sensitive items. AVVA offers a Paper Safe. Most funeral homes have guides, and will provide additional guidance. Please

take the time and make this one of your priorities. As Vietnam veterans, we are all living on borrowed time. For more information, see "Navigating the VA Widow's Benefits Maze: Get the Facts and Don't Give Up," by Claudia Gary, in the July/August 2019 issue of The VVA Veteran (<http://vvaveteran.org>). [Source: VVA | John A Miterko | May 2021 ++]

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VA Survivors Update:

Survivors and Burial Benefits Kit Access After the passing of a loved one who has served this country, many survivors do not know what to do or where to begin to obtain VA assistance. VA has prepared a Survivors and Burial Benefits kit to help guide Veterans, service members and their families after the loss of a loved one. The Kit gives a description of each burial benefit, instructions on how to apply, and where to go to get assistance. It covers:

- Pre-need eligibility for National Cemetery burial or memorialization
- Memorial or burial flags
- Government headstones or markers
- Medallions
- Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMC)
- Burial benefits and burial automatic payments
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
- Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA)
- Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship
- Survivor's pension
- Special monthly pension benefits
- The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMP-VA)
- Home loan guaranty
- Veterans Month of Death benefits
- VA life insurance

Other features include tips on how to fill out applications with examples of completed forms. These tips examples give applicants a better understanding of how to properly fill out applications. VA encourages Veterans and service members to discuss their military service with their dependents, as well as planning their legacy. Families and survivors should know where to locate service medical records, discharge documents, VA disability ratings, and other information. These details will be beneficial to survivors as they prepare to apply for VA benefits. Families and survivors should keep this kit in storage so that it will be available when needed. The Planning Your Legacy VA Survivors and Burial Benefits Kit is available for download at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/docs/VASurvivorsKit.pdf>

[Source: Vantage Point Blog Update | March 2, 2021 ++]

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VA Handbook:

All new enrollees will receive a personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbook, generally two weeks after enrollment has been confirmed. The handbooks are tailored specifically for each Veteran and provide detailed, updated information about the VA health care benefits the Veteran may be eligible to receive, such as medications, prosthetics and dental care. Click Handbook to view a sample. For information about the Handbook or to request an undated replacement, contact call 1-877.222.8387. ■

# Pete Ritch's Vietnam Photo's and Captions

From Pete Ritch, Bravo Co., 3rd Tank Battalion, from approximately October 1968 through November 1969. My entire tour was spent in I Corps at places like the Rock Pile, Washout, Con Tien, Vandergrift, Dong Ha, Quang Tri and the DMZ were places we laid our tracks.



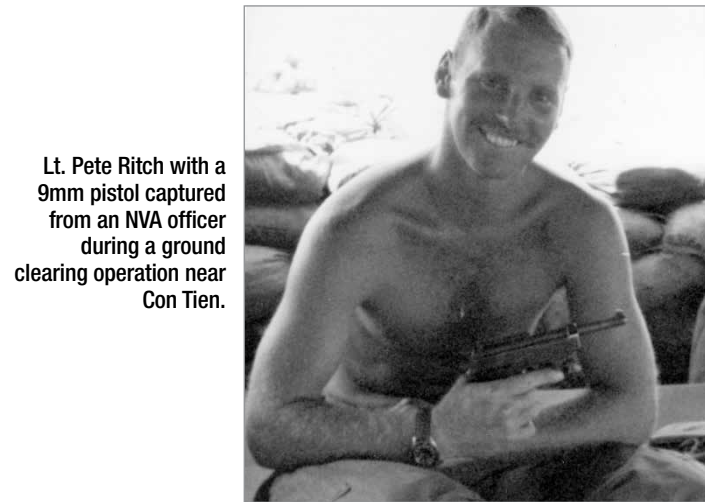
Pete (on the left) delivering beer to his platoon in 1969



(L to R) Sgt. Dale Sandifer and Lt. Pete Ritch 1969



Lt. Kerrigan, Pete Ritch, and (Unknown) at Navy Commendation Award Ceremony at Bravo Co. Headquarters on Route 9 between Dong Ha and Vandergrift.



Lt. Pete Ritch with a 9mm pistol captured from an NVA officer during a ground clearing operation near Con Tien.



BRAVO 32, "Girl Watcher," running the beach from Cua Viet to Oceanview. We ran in the surf to avoid land mines. September 1969.



Lt Pete Ritch (Left) and Staff Sgt Jim Jewel (Right) enjoying a warm Miller beer in a hooch at Camp Vandergrift. August 1969.



Bravo Co. volleyball court in July 1969 where we were training for the 1972 Olympics.



Sgt. Soto firing a 50 caliber machine gun at enemy position near Camp Vandergrift, July 1969.



A tanker's nightmare! An NVA land mine found on a road sweep near the DMZ, April 1969.



Chopper extracting a five-man Marine Recon team from the south boarder of the DMZ, July 1969. If you look really close, you can see the five team members clinging to the extraction ropes.



Third Platoon Bravo Co. with a Flame Tank on an operation with the ARVN (notice how they ride on the tank rather than hump). Flame Tank taking out a bunker complex that we came across. Notice the Marine Tankers working on the track while the Flame Tank is doing its' thing, September 1969.



Pete Ritch after the Bronze Star Award Ceremony at Bravo Co., April 1969.



Steve Devaney and crew members on "Ghost Rider," May 1969. Let us know if you can identify any of the crew members.

## What Members Are Doing

### Joe Harrigan

Veterans Expo, 4/9/22,

Neshaminy Senior Center, Lower Southampton Township, Bucks County PA.

Picture taken at the Military Order of the Purple Heart display.

Tanker, Joe Harrigan (center).



### BEST OF SHOW

Bruce Van Apeldoorn writes: My ride won the "Best of Show Award" at the Annual New Bern NC Corvette Show on May 1, 2022!!!

Note the tank on the hood of the car!!!



### Guy Everest celebrating St Patty's Day



## Short Stories

### TANKS IN THE US MARINE CORPS

BY ERIN COATES—AUGUST 1, 2021

The Marine Corps acquired its first tanks in 1923 and first employed them in the Guadalcanal amphibious landing in 1942. From that initial combat experience until the 1970s, Marines most often used tanks as part of tank-infantry teams. Beginning with exercises at the Marine Corps Training Center, Twenty Nine Palms in the early 1970s and during NATO exercises in the mid-1970s, tanks became integral to ground units as tanks and infantry units were cross-reinforced. As a result, rather than being simply repositories for tanks that were parceled out to Infantry units, tank battalions became maneuver battalions, which, with Infantry mounted in armored amphibious vehicles could be employed as armor-mechanized units. The value of this approach to ground operations was proven in Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom.

The Commandant stands virtually alone among the military leaders of the world in his conviction that tanks have no future. An informal survey of members of the US intelligence community found none who could identify a military other than the US Marine Corps divesting itself of tanks. Nations with the most experience in armored warfare are developing new tanks. As examples, the Israeli Defense Forces is developing the Barak tank as part of its Carmel armor program and the Russian Army expects to begin delivery of its new T-14 Armata this year after years of troublesome development. Meanwhile the Chinese continue

fielding its modern Type 99A2 tank. Tanks have certainly been a centerpiece in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Commandant has suggested that the Army would provide tanks if the Marine Corps found itself in a situation requiring them. The Army has certainly not programmed to have tanks for this purpose and even if it had and did provide tank units to Marine infantry units, they would have had no training or experience in employing them. With logic of this sort almost any currently inherent Marine Corps warfighting capability could be "outsourced"—artillery, helicopters and fighter/attack aircraft. The Corps has long and rightfully argued that it was a self-contained organization that came to fight in a wide-range of contingencies. What's changed?

Even if a case could be made, and we don't believe it can, that the world will never again see a major armor-mechanized battle, the Marine Corps will still need a mobile, protected, direct-fire weapon to neutralize hardened targets such as prepared defensive positions, bunkers, buildings, and armored vehicles at extended ranges.

If the Corps believes it needs to lighten its weapons systems and that tanks will have less utility in the future, and again we are skeptical that such a case is viable, a more prudent move than eliminating all tanks in the Marine Corps would have been to maintain both Tank Battalions while committing to the US Army to buy into its Mobile Protected Firepower

(MPF) program enabling a conversion from the M1A1 Tank to MPF in 2026 or 2027. The Corps could have maintained its M1A1s at the current capability for another four to five years, forgoing any upgrades, only doing necessary maintenance actions to preserve readiness standards, and then transitioned to MPF. This would have avoided the risk of not having the necessary direct-fire capability in the intervening years. Joining the Army in the MPF acquisition would have benefitted the Army by increasing the production quantities and reducing unit cost for both Services.

The Army is developing the MPF for the Infantry Brigade Combat Teams to enable them to fight as a combined arms team. The MPF is in effect a "light" tank with a 105mm gun as the main armament. Although not as lethal as the M1A1's 120mm gun the improvements in tank ammunition since the early 1990s has made the 105mm cannon a formidable weapon. The Army is also working on a 120mm guided Extended Range using technology that could be incorporated into a 105mm round. Ongoing development of Active Protection Systems is likely to be applicable to MPF in the future to increase survivability. In summary, the MPF is not a main battle tank, but it does maintain considerable maneuverability, firepower, lethality, survivability, and shock effect and its acquisition would enable the Marine Corps to regain part of its combined arms capability.

## Buddies

BY TOM FENERTY

Fox, 2/9 and proud member of the USMC VTA

Author's note: This story has taken way too long to put on paper... (First draft)

I'd been with Fox 2/9 since somewhere around Oct 67. Rough start acclimating, accepting my role as a front line grunt, dysentery, heat, and keeping up with the hump. Craig Kaiser and his best friend Mike Thomas arrived in December two months later. Craig was assigned to 3rd platoon same as me, and Mike to second (or



maybe it was the first). These two young California men enlisted on the 'buddy system' right after high school graduation (USMC program where the 'buddy' (s) stay together all through training). It was unusual that both were assigned to Fox Company once given orders to WESPAC (Vietnam). But here they were together. Being in different platoons separated Mike & Craig on occasion, but not for long. Sooner or later the whole company would be at the same place and the two men would always get together. Best friends.

In July of 68 Mike was KIA on an operation in and around the DMZ. I was there, so was Craig. I remember helping put Mike's body on a tank. A sad day.

Using the Internet, phone books, and word of mouth, I had tried to find Craig Kaiser for 30+ years until finally, Phil Franklin, also Fox, called me with a phone number. In all the passing years I was the first person to speak to Craig. He remembered me and we made plans to meet at a future Fox Co Reunion.

Little Rock AK was our first meeting. 49 years later. A guy with a Dodgers cap walked up to the bar and said, 'You must be Tom'. We spoke about that day in July 68 in

detail (things I hadn't known) and I could tell this event still haunted him. We've met since then and have conversed on the phone

A few years have passed. Yesterday I opened an email from the 'Battalion Runner' (2/9) providing info for our annual Reunion in DC. At the bottom of the page I read the following:

Hi,

My name is Debbie Wing and my fiancé Michael Edward Thomas was killed on July 9, 1968, in Quang Tri province. He was with Fox Company, 2/9 and joined on the buddy system with his friend Craig Keiser. Both Mike and Craig were from Canoga Park, CA. I am longing to post a request to any Marines that served with Mike that I would be grateful to correspond with them if they would be willing. Is there a newsletter that you send to 2/9 vets in which I might post my request and contact email? Here is his service picture and also his high school graduation picture.

Thank you

Debbie Wing

I got severe chills reading Debbie's words.

Danny Shuster (Gulf 2/9) supplied an email address for Debbie. I sent an email and got her phone number. She and I spoke

for over an hour. I told her that I was there the day that Mike was KIA and that he was a brave Marine and didn't suffer. The following morning I gave Debbie Craig's contact info and gave Craig Debbie's contact info. Mission accomplished.

The part that very few know is that prior to Mike's passing Craig (two Purple Hearts) was wounded so

severely that he went from field hospital, to Naval hospital ship and then to the Naval Hospital in Youska, Japan. After weeks

of recovery Craig was given the option of going home (USA) or returning to VN and Fox 2/9. Craig chose to return because his best friend (Buddy) was still there. Within a week Mike Thomas would be KIA from an enemy mortar. The first Marine to get to his body was Craig Kaiser. We would lose a few more men in the days that followed.

Craig, took his best friend's death personally. From that point on Craig Kaiser took it upon himself to kill every North Vietnamese soldier in Quang Tri Province. He didn't care, volunteering for dangerous missions, walking point, hoping for revenge. Mercifully, the CO transferred Craig to an Ontos battery where he continued his mission to destroy the enemy, only not so up close and personal.

The term 'Semper Fidelis' comes to mind when I think about these two brothers. Always Faithful ...

Pray for and support our Veterans

February 15, 1968, transit barracks El Toro Marine Corps base. 0330 on came the lights. I woke up to a loud voice yelling at "Everybody get up. The bus leaves at 0400 for the airstrip. Get all your gear together and form up outside."

Half-asleep I stuffed my gear into my Sea bag and stumbled out into the parking lot of the transit barracks. 0400 came and went and still no bus. At around 0530 buses showed up and we all piled into them. It was a 5 min. ride to the airstrip. We unloaded and everybody sat on their Sea bags. Not an airplane in sight.

At around 0645 a Continental airlines 707 taxied up to where we were all waiting. By 0800 everyone was on the plane and seated. Off we went into the wild blue yonder heading for Okinawa and eventually Vietnam.

A little over 18 hours later we landed at the US Air Force base in Okinawa. We took our gear and loaded onto buses that took us to the Marine Corps base. We were directed to a transit barracks, told to find a rack and get some sleep.

We spent February 17th and 18th processing and storing what gear we were not taking to Vietnam. We were issued jungle boots and utilities. At around 10 AM on the morning of the 18th about 200 of us were loaded

Over the past 55 years I have often wondered if I may have been the only fully licensed pharmacist to serve in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. I ask because of the enlisting procedure I encountered. In late 1965 I awoke one morning having decided to do something I had dreamed of for many years – join the United States Marine Corps. I was draft exempt due

## The Flipping New Guy

BY BOB VAXTER

onto buses taken back to the Air Force Base where sometime around noon we loaded onto the TWA 707 airplane. Approximately a four hour flight from Okinawa to Vietnam. When we arrived in the Da Nang area the pilot advised that we could not land as the air strip was being shelled. About 45 minutes later we landed. We were taken to a processing area just off of the runway. The clerks there told us to go to the huts about 100 feet away and to come back with our orders the next morning as it was 1600 Hrs. and the duty day was finished.

Sometime in the middle of the night a siren went off, waking us to the sound of incoming. We all ran out of the building and into a bunker next to it. I thought to myself this is going to be a long year. The enemy tried to blow up the plane I was arriving in and then they tried to blow up the building I was sleeping in.

The next morning the dozen or so tankers that were going to 3rd Tanks were processed and placed on an airplane and flown to a place called Phu Bai. We checked in at the 3rd Div. office. The clerk advised us that it was lunch time and to come back at one o'clock. He said there was a mess hall at the top of the hill, we could eat there. Upon arriving at the mess hall, we found a 8-to-10-foot hole in the

floor and about a foot sized hole in the roof. One of the mess men advised us that they had been mortared last night and one of the rounds came through the roof and put the hole in the mess hall floor.

At around 1 PM we returned to Div. Office. The clerk lined us up and went down the line: as he pointed each man he called out "A company," "B Company," "C Company." That's how I ended up in C company 3rd Tanks.

The five of us assigned to C Company were told to take our gear go down the airstrip and catch a plane to Dong Ha.

I arrived at the Dong Ha airstrip with the steel pot, a flak jacket, a 45 caliber pistol and 21 rounds. The five of us got on a truck and were taken to Quang Tri. We got there as they were closing the gate to the base. We were directed towards Charlie Company's area. Told to put our gear in a tent. The side of the tent looked like a giant green piece of Swiss cheese. I asked a Marine that was laying on a cot what had happened? He said the NVA had set up a machine gun on the railroad tracks and shot up the area last night. So here I was a young kid from small town in the Midwest. I had been in Vietnam two days and in my mind the enemy had tried to kill me three times. It was going to be a long year.

## Pharmacists in the Corps

BY CAPT. DAVID J THOMPSON

to a shortage of pharmacists in Illinois. I had graduated from Drake University in June 1963 with a bachelor's degree in pharmacy. I became fully licensed in August 1963 after passing the state boards.

The Marine Corps recruiting office, at the time, was in the Peoria, Ill, post office. I entered the recruiter's office with the intent to join the Corps on a

two-year enlistment.

The recruiter began by informing me that two-year enlistment quotas were full. I then agreed to discuss a three-year enlistment. The recruiting staff noncommissioned officer, a gunnery sergeant, then began questioning me on my education by asking if I was a high school graduate, if I had attended college, did I graduate, to which >>

I answered yes to all. He then asked my degree.

When I answered pharmacy, he immediately informed me that he could not accept me as the recruiting of doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses and veterinarians was prohibited by Marine Corps regulations and I needed to see the Army, Navy or Air Force recruiters. I informed him that was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to enlist in the Corps. He stated that there was nothing that he could do and that I needed to think things over.

I departed his office and stood in the hallway pondering the situation. After about 10 minutes, I re-entered

the recruiting office. The gunny looked at me as if he had never seen me before and asked me if I was interested in enlisting. I, of course, answered positively. He then began asking me the same questions about my educational background. However, when he asked my degree, I answered that I had been a chemistry/biology major. He then continued the recruiting process and convinced me to attempt to complete the Officers Candidate School (OCS) program.

I entered OCS in March 1966 and successfully completed the course in late May. After OCS, I attended The Basic School, class 5-66, and

the Army's Armored Officer Course at Ft Knox, KY, which I finished in February 1967. I had two tours in Vietnam as an 1802, tank officer, with 1st Tank Bn.

I returned to civilian life in June 1969. My DD-214 indicates my related civilian occupation as a truck dispatcher. The officers and men with whom I served, to me, are the finest men I have known. I have never once regretted my decision to be a Marine.

Editor's note: The skipper's letter first appeared in Leatherneck magazine in the April 2022 issue.

## As Time Has Gone By

SUBMITTED BY RICHARD CARMER

We left home as teenagers or in our early twenties for an unknown adventure.

We worked hard and played harder.

We loved our country enough to defend it and protect it with our own lives.

We didn't earn a great wage.

We said goodbye to friends and family and everything we knew.

We experienced the happiness of mail call and the sadness of missing important events.

We learned the basics and then we scattered in the wind to the far corners of the Earth.

We didn't know when, or even if, we were ever going to see home again.

We found new friends and new family

We grew up fast, and yet somehow, we never grew up at all.

We became brothers and sisters regardless of color, race or creed.

We fought for our freedom, as well as the freedom of others.

We had plenty of good times, and plenty of bad times.

Some of us saw actual combat, and some of us didn't.

We didn't get enough sleep.

Some of us saw the world, and some of us didn't.

We smoked and drank too much.

Some of us dealt with physical warfare, most of us dealt with psychological warfare.

We picked up both good and bad habits.

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 our country.

Try to remember the good times and make peace with 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'M PROUD TO BE A VETERAN!

## LORE of the CORPS

### 8th Marine Regiment

Camp Lejeune, N.C

SUBMITTED BY RICK LEWIS



The 8th Marine Regiment was formed on 9 October, 1917, at Quantico, Virginia during the build-up for World War I. While training for war, the command was transferred to Fort Crockett, Texas to guard the nearby Mexican oil fields. The Regiment was joined there by the 9th Marines to form the 3d Marine Brigade; the first Advance Base Force of World War I. As such, the Marines were held in reserve to establish and defend naval bases in the Atlantic or the West Indies, if required. The 8th Marines were deactivated at Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1919.

A year later, the Regiment was reactivated for service in Haiti where Marines had been fighting the Cacos bandits since 1914. Through systematic patrolling which culminated in a number of brief, sharp clashes, the 8th Marines eliminated Haitian banditry that had lasted more than a hundred years. With its mission accomplished, the 8th Marines was deactivated again in 1925.

In 1940 the Regiment was formed once more, in San Diego, California. It was a well-trained

unit by the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor and became the first Marine Regiment to deploy into the Pacific waters to Samoa. After ten months of jungle training, while defending the Samoan Islands, the Regiment sailed to reinforce the engaged 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal. While there, the 8th Marines won its first Presidential Unit Citation.

A second test was not long in coming. Joining the 2d Marine

Division in New Zealand, the 8th Marines spent several months refitting for operation GALVANIC, the amphibious assault on Tarawa. In 76 hours of some of the bloodiest fighting in American history, the Marines seized that island and opened the door to the Japanese Empire. The lessons of Tarawa were to influence the conduct of amphibious operations for the rest of the war. For its gallant performance, the 8th Marine Regiment received its second Presidential Unit Citation.

After refitting in Hawaii, the 8th Marines sailed for the Marianas, to storm the beaches of Saipan and Tinian, capturing key bases for the air war against Japan. Reinforced with artillery, the Regiment later joined the 1st and 6th Divisions in the battle for Okinawa.

After a year of occupation duty in Japan, the 8th Marine Regiment left the Far East for Camp Lejeune. For the past four decades it has provided landing forces for the 2d and 6th fleets in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Caribbean. A demanding tempo of training and deployments has been >>

interrupted by service in Lebanon, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. In 1980, the 8th Marines provided security forces for the Haitian/Cuban Refugee operation.

Marines from the Regiment attracted worldwide attention in August 1982 when the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines landed in Beirut, Lebanon, to ensure the safe evacuation of the Palestine Liberation Organization. In May of 1983, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines arrived in Beirut as the BLT of the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit. In October of that year, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines suffered a devastating loss from a terrorist attack on the BLT headquarters.

Almost simultaneously 2d Battalion, 8th Marines participated in Operation URGENT FURY, the successful liberation of the Island of Grenada and the rescue of American students. Immediately after departing Grenada, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines races to join the Multi-National Peacekeeping Force in Beirut, Lebanon ending

their duties as part of the Multi-National Peacekeeping Force and resuming their commitment as the Landing Force Sixth Fleet (LF6F) Battalion Landing Team.

In August 1990, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines participated in Operation SHARP EDGE in Liberia to protect American lives during that country's civil war. 3d Battalion, 8th Marines then relieved 2d Battalion, 4th Marines and successfully concluded SHARP EDGE in January 1991.

From December 1990 to April 1991 the 8th Marines participated in Operation DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. 2d Battalion, 8th Marines participated in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in northern Iraq from April to July 1991 and 3d Battalion, 8th Marines participated during July 1991. During December 1991, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba during Operation TAKE CHARGE to assist in controlling masses of

Haitian refugees. From September 1991 to March 1992, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines participated in the continuation of Operation Desert Storm in the Arabian Gulf.

During 1994 and 1996 elements of the Regiment participated in refugee control operations in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and embassy protection operations in Monrovia, Liberia and in Bangui, Central African Republic.

From June to July of 1999 3d Battalion, 8th Marines participated in operation JOINT GUARDIAN in Kosovo. A year later elements of 8th Marines were called on again for Operation EASTERN ACCESS, April 2000 to May 2000, on the island of Vieques located near Puerto Rico.

The Marines and Sailors of this proud Regiment are acutely aware of their heritage and mindful of their current mission. Our motto, "MORE THAN DUTY," underscores our commitment to Corps and country.

their weapons and equipment and disappearing into the night. The three Marines blown off the trail slowly regained their senses, two of whom had taken the brunt of the explosions. Shock gave way to pain and they began moaning. One 18-year-old Marine had somehow been spared and was only dazed by the force of the explosion. He called for the reaction force that was always on standby at the nearby base of Phu Bai.

After what seemed like hours but was less than 30 minutes, a helicopter landed a platoon of Marines who set up a perimeter on the trail. The two wounded men were flown to Da Nang and the third man, just a kid really, was taken back to the base at Phu Bai. The next day, the surviving Marine was told the other two Marines did not make it. It was a guilt he would carry for nearly 23 years.

It was 1989. The young Marine, now 41, stood on the rice paddy dike where his friends had died. With his family and a dozen other Vietnam veterans in over 100-degree heat, they held a memorial service for the fallen whose memory he had carried with him every day for the past 23 years. While the impromptu ceremony was being held, a crowd of villagers quietly gathered around this group of Americans, the first they had seen since the end of the war in 1975.

An elderly woman carrying a little girl came and stood next to the Marine. Through an interpreter, he told the local villagers that his friends had died here and he had come to honor their memory. The older woman walked up to the Marine and laid her head against his chest and wept. She too had suffered loss during the war, so they cried together.

Today, I am 71, but the memory of Vietnam is with me forever. I still remember Vietnam, but by God's grace, He has taken away the pain I once had from those memories. What I do remember is the brave men I fought alongside and the love they had for their country.

A favorite saying I saw all over during my tours in Vietnam was, "To those who fought for it, freedom has a flavor that the protected will never know."

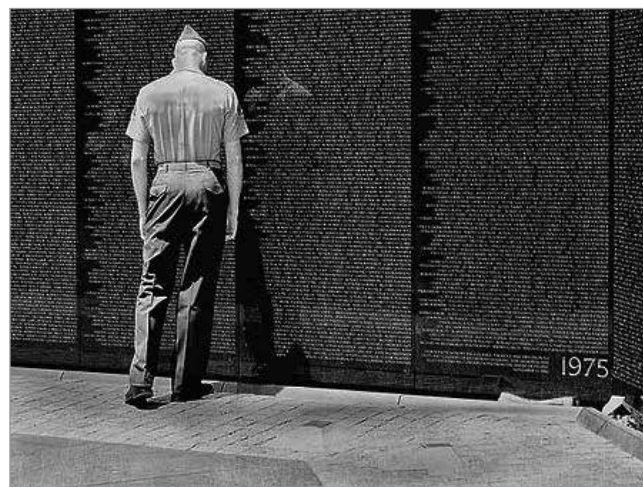
Memorial Day is not about mattress sales, cookouts, discounted linens, or an extra day off work. It is a day to pause and remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to defend the freedoms that America has unlike any other nation on the face of the earth. They earned your remembrance, because freedom has a price tag!

Something to think about?

## Memorial Day is not about mattress sales, cookouts, discounted linens, or an extra day off work.

BY ROGER HELLE - PATRIOT POST, MAY 24, 2019

It was just one of many routine patrols in Vietnam that night. The 13-man Marine squad made their way through the village silently. The point man paused now and then to listen for any unusual sounds before continuing down the trail. They arrived at the edge of the village and began the nearly two-mile hike across open rice paddies toward their destination — a small fishing village on a tributary of the Perfume River just south of Hue, the Imperial City of South Vietnam.



It was a moonless night as they approached the village where the

Viet Cong were believed to be gathering. As the squad entered the village, the stillness of the night was broken when the jungle tree line erupted in automatic-weapons fire. At the same time, a "daisy chain" of mines exploded, throwing three Marines at the end of the squad like rag dolls into the rice paddy.

When the firing stopped, stillness fell upon the trail and, like ghosts, the Viet Cong emerged from the jungle, moving quickly among the bodies of the dead or dying Marines, taking

Marines of BLT 3/9 landed in March 1965 with the mission of reinforcing the local security of the airbase at Da Nang. By the time the war was over in 1975 (although the last Marine ground force departed in June 1971) some 480,000 Marines had served in Vietnam, most with the mission of searching for and destroying a very elusive ground-based enemy.

Of those 480,000 Marines, both men and women (approximately 220 women Marines served from 1967 to 1973) who served in Vietnam, an astounding 13,000+ were killed and 89,000 were wounded.

Compared to the WW2 figures of 485,000 Marines (at peak strength in 1945) on active duty with a total of 19,000+ killed and 67,000 wounded, one can readily see the Vietnam experience was not only traumatizing to the Corps, but equally, if not more so, traumatizing to the country as a

whole.

Additionally, it was the first war of the twentieth century that was played out in real time in the living rooms of the American people, as they sat down for their evening meal. And it wasn't pretty, but the war never is.

No matter one's personal feeling about the Vietnam War, here in 2022, bathed in the perfect light of history, there is absolutely no way to properly repay the tens of thousands of young Americans who served honorably during one of the Corps' and the country's (at the time) longest and more unpopular wars.

One cannot forget the courage, honor and commitment of the men and women who fought day in and day out for the thirteen months at a time in that "dirty little war." No matter one's personal feeling about the war, no one can forget the price paid in blood and the unbelievable moral and

physical courage of the men (for the most part) who daily fought not only the absolute terror and mind-numbing fear deep in their guts but also against a formidable and equally courageous and ideological motivated enemy.

No matter one's personal feelings about the war, one cannot, simply must not, forget the Marines on the ground and in the air who sacrificed everything — their legs, their hands, their eyes, their very lives — for their fellow Marines or for their fellow comrades in arms.

No matter one's personal feelings about the war, one must not in any way denigrate the spirit of selflessness the each of the Vietnam veterans had at the time or carries with him/her today. Those of us who didn't fight in Vietnam owe each and every one who did a deep debt of gratitude and genuine does of sincere brotherly love.

# The Etymology of 'F\*CK' and the War that Popularized it

BY CLAIRE BARRETT

You're dashing around, running a bit late perhaps, and your pinky toe just happens to connect with the corner of an inanimate object that seemingly just popped up on you despite its relatively permanent and solitary position in your home. Through watering eyes and an emanating pain that doesn't seem natural for such a small appendage, you let out an anguished "F\*CK!" It's practically muscle memory. And yet, most remain unaware of their favorite word's origins, or the notion that, for many, the F-word became part of the daily lexicon due in large part to service members in World War II.

The etymology of the word itself is murky, but the epithet appears to have hit its stride in the 16th century after famed English lexicographer John Florio published "A Worlde of Wordes," an Italian-English dictionary intended to teach

people these languages as they were really "f\*cking" spoken.

F\*ck, however, remained in the shadows of polite society largely until the onset of World War II, according to historian Tom Harper Kelly. "One new recruit James Nichol recalled that in basic training he 'was still very nervous of the F-word (frig being the current substitute, but I avoided that, too)," Kelly wrote. But a sergeant in Nichol's training company impressed the young recruit with the word's "repetition, if not invention. I lay in my bunk one evening and counted

the number of times 'f\*ck' occurred in his conversation. It occurred every four and a half words, though I was counting mentally and might have missed some." In combat, the predilection for using the expletive naturally only grew.

In "Helmet for My Pillow," Marine Robert Leckie described the word as a "handle, a hyphen, a hyperbole; verb, noun, modifier; yes, even conjunction. It described food, fatigue, and

part of the GI vocabulary that British soldiers on the Western Front identified American soldiers of the 84th Infantry Division as friendlies due to their incessant swearing. In this instance, "f\*ck" happened to save their lives.

Johnny Freeman, a sergeant in the 84th, recalled being fired upon near their lines when he yelled "You f\*ckers turn that thing off."

"Is that a Yank out there?" a British soldier replied.



U.S. Army Gen. George Patton, left, employed the F-word with great enthusiasm.

"Who the f\*ck you think it is?" came Freeman's retort. The American later commented, "Well, I guess the way we were swearing he knew we had to be okay, so he let us on through."

Some, like legendary war correspondent Ernie Pyle, lamented the linguistic crutch. "If I hear another f\*cking G.I. say 'f\*cking' once more," Pyle reportedly

remarked, "I'll cut my f\*cking throat."

The F-train, however, had already left the station. From privates all the way up to the top brass, the word's usage was firmly inculcated into the minds and mouths of millions of American service members, so much so that it turned out to be a hard habit to kick upon returning home — eventually spreading through the civilian masses and remaining entrenched within military culture.

"I want to see them raise up on their piss-soaked hind legs and howl, 'Jesus Christ, it's the Goddamned Third

Army again and that son-of-a-f\*cking-bitch Patton," General George Patton once quipped.

From WWII on down to the Millennial with a stubbed toe, the

rampant use of f\*ck is here to stay.

Observation Post articles reflect author observations. Any resemblance to news may be purely coincidental.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/>

## Vista Cruiser Memories

BY KELLY NEUNER

USMC 1990-1995

When my Dad got back from Vietnam in 1968, he bought a late model Vista Cruiser station wagon. It was the SUV of its day, a great big mammoth American car with the power to match. It had three rows of seats (one that folded up from the rear cargo area like the SUV's have now) and two windows on the roof that let in plenty of light and also allowed you to see out (like a sun roof but they didn't open). It was great for our family of six.

That same year ('68) Dad got orders to Hahn AFB Germany. We were at Stewart AFB NY and packed everything up for the move. The Vista Cruiser got shipped as well. Driving that huge chunk of metal must have been a challenge at times. The streets in Europe are quite narrow in the older towns and villages. But that didn't stop Dad! We traveled all over Europe even taking the Vista Cruiser across the English Channel on a ferry many times to visit Mom's family in England. Many a time I can remember Dad having to pull over on the shoulder of a narrow road as a farm tractor made its way past. How he navigated some of those narrow medieval streets with the hair pin curves is beyond me. The German Autobahn was a different story... Dad would open her up and let her roar... Man, could that car move! Dad was quite handy with cars so he always kept her running perfectly.

Six years later and we were



returning to the States. The Vista Cruiser was once again shipped across the Atlantic Ocean, this time to Wright Patterson AFB in Ohio. It was 1974 and Dad decided to retire from the military after 24 years (three of which were with the USMC). We moved to Newburgh NY where we owned a home just outside the front gate of the old Stewart AFB (the base had already been closed). By this time all of us kids were older and didn't need so much supervision from Mom. After all of those years not driving, she decided it was time to learn. Yep, Dad taught her in the Vista Cruiser. After she got her license, she even got a job for the first time since before I was born. Yep, she drove the Vista Cruiser every day to work. By this time, Dad was working in an auto body shop and fixing/selling cars on the side.

He always had a different car in the driveway! When he had something nice, Mom would get to drive it until it sold, then it was back to the Vista Cruiser.

We were only in upstate NY for a few years. It was the mid 70's and the

[off-duty/military-culture/2021/03/12/the-etymology-of-fck-and-the-war-that-popularized-it/](https://www.militarytimes.com/off-duty/military-culture/2021/03/12/the-etymology-of-fck-and-the-war-that-popularized-it/)

economy wasn't doing too well. Dad had taken a stab at opening his own business (a small restaurant) but after a year, he was forced to close the doors. It was heart breaking for him and he decided we needed a change of scenery. He bought a used school bus from the local school district and ripped all the seats out. He sold the house and packed all of

our belongings (what didn't get sold in the yard sale) in the back. In the front of the bus, Dad had converted it into living area. He was quite handy and had taken the bench seats out of an old VW camper bus and installed them. It folded down into a bed and it's where he and Mom slept. In the day, it's where we kids would play, write, etc. while on the road. It's also where we ate when we stopped. We kids slept in narrow bunk beds (I think they were made for camping) that folded down when not in use. He also installed a port-a-potty which we were highly discouraged from using unless it was an emergency.

Dad had a good friend from the Air Force that was a Texan from San Antonio. He was also retired from the Air Force and we were going to go live close to them. The plan was to head south from NY and go to Florida for a family vacation at Disney World, then head west to Texas. Oh, I forgot to mention that the Vista Cruiser was also loaded down and my Mom was to drive it behind the bus. We kids would take turns keeping her company as >>



she drove.

So in the summer of '76, off we went in a big yellow school bus and the old faithful Vista Cruiser. To me, it was a great adventure! We stopped along the way at camp grounds where we would go swimming at the pool, meet other kids, etc. We were in no hurry so sometimes we would stay in one place for a couple of days. I was surprised to see other school busses at the campgrounds as I thought we would be the only ones fool enough to be traveling in this manner. Some of them had been converted quite nicely!

I'll always remember getting lost in Washington DC. Before we headed out on this trip, Dad had given Mom instructions that if at any time the bus and Vista Cruiser were to be separated, stop right away as close to where you last saw each other. Well, if you've ever drove through DC, you know how hectic the traffic can be. After all day sightseeing, here we were (bus and station wagon) going through downtown DC. Sure enough, a few people cut Mom off and had gotten between her and the bus. Then sure enough, we (I was in the Vista Cruiser with her) got stuck behind a car that stopped quickly as a light turned yellow. She watched in horror as the big yellow school bus got smaller and smaller in the distance. Keep in mind that she was a fairly new driver and was driving a big oversized car that was packed full of stuff (she could only use the side mirrors). She was nervous enough but now she was almost panicked. She stopped right away and we waited for the bus to come back around. An hour later we were still waiting... 30 more minutes and still no sign of the bus. So we decided to drive and look for the bus. After all, how hard would it be to spot a big yellow school bus in downtown DC? Well, evidentially, pretty damn hard! We drove around for another hour and a half before we finally spotted the bus pulled over on the

side of a road in downtown DC. What a relief it was to my Mom! As it turns out, Dad had also pulled over when he realized that the wagon wasn't behind him anymore (waiting for us to catch up). Well of course we were pulled over as well... Then Dad also drove around for another hour before pulling over! What a mess... In hind sight, as thorough as Dad was, I figured he would have had walkie-talkies! Oh well, years later we would laugh many times over the DC story.

While passing through South Carolina, Parris Island was a must see for Dad. He had not been there since Boot Camp. Who knows what the MP's at the gate thought as they saw a big yellow school bus pulling up... ha-ha-ha!!! We spent a half day touring PI listening to Dad's stories. He showed us where the Quonset huts had been (3rd Recruit Battalion), etc. I remember watching in awe as the recruits came marching past... I had been around the military all my life but had never seen this sort of display on any Army or Air Force base. I was impressed with what I saw as stone cold disciplined Marines that moved as one. Their loud screams in unison reached right into your gut. It was something I wouldn't forget... Three years later, I would return. But that's a whole other story...Ha-Ha-Ha

Long story short (yeah right!!!), we eventually wound up in San Antonio. We pulled the bus up close to Uncle Jim and Aunt Dixie's house (no relations but we called them "Aunt" and "Uncle") where we were to stay for almost a month. Dad was out job hunting and looking for a house. We had the run of Uncle Jim's house but slept on the bus. I didn't mind but I think my Mom was getting a bit tired of it. After all that time in San Antonio, Dad and Mom called us for a family meeting. They said that they were thinking of heading to Florida and not staying in Texas and wanted our

opinions... After having nothing but fun in Florida (the beach, Disney World, Sea World, etc.) we were all for heading back to Florida. I think Texas was just too much of a culture shock for my parents. They were both born in Europe and we had spent all my life in Europe, the mid-west and up north. Texas was like being in a whole different world to them.

So the adventure continued... Off to Florida with the big yellow school bus, Vista Cruiser close behind. We arrived in Orlando and stayed at the Yogi Bear camp grounds, not far from Disney World. Man, that place was a blast! As a young teenage boy, it was a dream come true. People from all over the country came and stayed for vacation. Girls galore, like I said, a teenage boy's dream come true. That's all I have to say about that (In my best Forest Gump imitation). For almost a month we stayed while Dad found us a house and got a job. Dad bought a pick-up truck and once again, the Vista Cruiser was delegated to my Mom. She drove it every day!

A year later I got my learners permit. Dad gave me a few lessons but soon gave up on me (we always butted heads when I was a teenager). Poor Mom was handed the job and I think I put ten years on her. Parallel parking that beast was no easy task and was something I had to practice over and over. On my 16th birthday, I passed my driver's test in, yes, the good ol' faithful Vista Cruiser. My two younger Brothers would also learn to drive in her. When I see a Vista Cruiser (which is very rare these days) it brings back lots of memories.

Editor's Note: I met Kelly online at the Sgt Grit's Bulletin Board back in the early 2000's. I am eternally grateful that he shared this very nice personal story with us. Unfortunately Kelly passed away in 2015 from a genetic cardiac problem. Rest in peace Marine. ■

## COVER STORY

# A LITTLE PIECE OF HELL

BY DON NORTH  
THE NY TIMES- JULY 4, 2017

It was known to local missionaries as "The Hill of Angels," but to the occupying Marines, Con Thien was a little piece of hell. Just two miles south of the Demilitarized Zone, it was a barren, bulldozed plateau of red dirt 525 feet high and ringed with barbed wire, studded with artillery revetments and crisscrossed with trenches and sand bag covered bunkers. To the east stretched the "McNamara Line," the 2,000-foot wide "barrier" ordered by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, which the Marines had cleared and sowed with seismic and acoustic sensors and minefields.

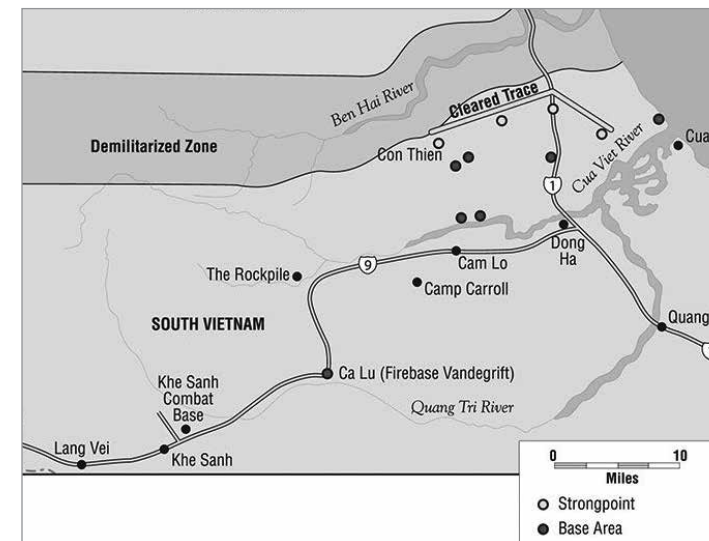
The Marines at Con Thien were the human equivalent of a tripwire, there to block North Vietnamese ground incursions. In reality, the men became a sitting target for scores of North Vietnamese artillery pieces, which rained down shells on their positions 24 hours a day. Between February



Con Thien 1967—taking refuge from the NVA massive artillery incoming

I covered some of the fiercest fighting, in the summer of 1967, as an ABC news correspondent. Ironically, perhaps, some of the bloodiest engagements came on and around July 4th. My team—our cameraman Nguyen Van Quy; our soundman Nguyen Xuan De and myself—didn't want to go but it's the assignment we drew. My weeks at Con Thien revealed, to me at least, some fundamental truths about the Viet Nam

War: that our soldiers and Marines fought bravely; that the North Vietnamese were relentless and that our military and political leaders had committed us to a war we couldn't win and prosecuted in the most inept way possible. Nearly half later as Memorial Day 2016 approached, I thought back on that assignment.



1967 when they arrived and their departure two years later, 1,419 men were killed and another 9,265 wounded; more than 7,500 North Vietnamese were killed and an unknown number wounded.

At Con Thien in 1967, American commanders failed to recognize that loyalty flow downward as well as upward. The commander's loyalty should have been to their Marines facing the North Vietnamese Army as much as to their superiors in Washington. American Marines died in droves at Con Thien; they deserved better of their commanders.



The author reporting from Con Thien in 1967. Photo credit...ABC News

Take for example the McNamara Line. Secretary McNamara ever on the lookout for clever, logical and arms-length solutions, floated the idea of a barrier in March 1966, at a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. High ranking officers pretended to take this myopic vision seriously, and construction began in April 1967.

So why was there at Con Thien in the first place? Simply because the 525-foot hill, if taken by the North Vietnamese could have facilitated hits on the key American staging area at Dong Ha. Aside from denying the hill to the enemy, there was little reason to protect Con Thien. But its vulnerabilities also made it an inviting target. >>

Con Thien had fatal flaws. For one, designed to block North Vietnamese incursions it merely diverted the enemy around it. And because it wasn't a physical barrier, it needed large numbers of ground troops to back it up. The result was that thousands of Marines sat within range of the North's 135mm artillery, which struck firebases and roving Marine patrols with deadly accuracy. The North Vietnamese's side of the DMZ was off limits from American ground attack. NVA divisions, operating within range of their 135mm artillery were free to target firebases and roving patrols at will.

The North Vietnamese had no shortage of targets but Con Thien was the biggest. Atop a prominent hill and stripped of forest cover, it was an easy mark. It also held strategic value: if the North Vietnamese captured it, the hill could have served as a launching pad for strike on key American staging areas at Dong Ha. It held a symbolic value too. The commander of the North Vietnamese forces, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, had defeated the French in a similar situation at Diem Bien Phu in 1954 and he was trying to replicate that victory along the DMZ.

My team and I reached the area in late June 1967, to find the Marines of the First Battalion, Ninth Regiment suffering from blazing heat and choking dust, from snipers and constant threat of ground attacks. But what made duty at the outpost a special hell was the artillery from North Vietnamese batteries tucked away in the hills north of the DMZ. The 135mm guns were well camouflaged and sheltered in caves; the North Vietnamese quickly rolled them out to fire, then just as quickly rolled them to shelter. Although Americans retaliated with artillery and airstrikes, they were unable to stop the hundreds of shells that each day took a toll of Con Thien's defenders.

On July 2nd Marines from Alpha and Bravo companies began Operation Buffalo, a sweep in the area north of the base. Unfortunately, faulty reconnaissance and inadequate observation allowed an undetected North Vietnamese force to ambush the Marines. Eighty-six Bravo Company were killed and 176 were wounded; only 27 walked out of the battle unaided. Though an estimated 1,290 North Vietnamese were killed, by anyone's definition, including that of the Marines, it was the enemy's victory. The Marines acknowledged that it "was the single worst disaster to befall a Marine Corps rifle company during the Viet Nam war."

The fighting wasn't over. The North Vietnamese were well aware of the Marines' tradition of not leaving their dead behind and they prepared for the Americans to return. On July 3rd, airstrikes and Marine artillery were directed to the battle area in preparation to retrieve the bodies. Marine reinforcements lifted off from the amphibious assault ship Okinawa early on the morning of July 4th, Independence Day, they attacked on a six-company front to reach the dead. Marine Skyhawk attack aircraft laid down suppressing fire as our news crew joined the recovery operation.

As we slowly advanced with two battalions, it became

obvious that the North Vietnamese had pulled out during the night. The bodies were spread out over a wide area of low bushes. Two days lying in the blistering sun had bloated them and burned them black. Many bodies had been riddled with grenades and almost all had been mutilated or desecrated. One dead Marine had his genitals cut off and sewn to his face, with a photo of his girlfriend stabbed to his chest.

Several members of the recovery team wore gas masks as protection from the stench; other Marines retched and vomited. They placed the corpses in green rubber body bags and carried them to a clearing where the remains were loaded on tanks. Personal effects were collected and placed in upturned helmets.

Many in the work party made it forcefully known that they were not pleased that a TV news crew was accompanying them on a mission to reclaim their dead. We shot sparingly and from a distance so as not to upset them. In any event, those scenes could never be used in a news program.

The next morning, our ABC news crew entered the base at Con Thien itself. It felt like being at the heart of the war. We could look across the Ben Hai River, which marked the 17th parallel and see the North Vietnamese flag waving from a tall pole. We could look beyond the flag to see puffs of white smoke and hear the rumble of shells being shot in our direction, giving us about 20 seconds to find the nearest bunker.

Late in the afternoon, one of the Marine artillery pieces took a direct hit; its crew had not been able to retreat to a bunker in time. As rockets and shells continued to drop, an Army Special Forces medic jumped out of a bunker and joined a half dozen Marines trying to save the life of a badly wounded comrade. They took turns pumping his chest to strengthen a weak pulse and giving him direct mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while shouting encouragement.

"C'mon, Sidell, you can make it, buddy! Don't give up!" Lance Corporal Jimmy Sidell didn't respond with either a gasp or a pulse as his Marine buddies worked on him for almost an hour. Another shell hit with a deafening impact just a few yards away. Our film camera was blown off Nguyen Van Quy's shoulder; Sidell's buddies recoiled from the concussion but never missed a beat pumping his heart. Finally, it was clear Sidell wasn't coming back. Through sobs and curses, the Marines tied an identification label to his boot laces and carried him to a tank waiting outside the wire that would serve as his hearse.

I cried too, even as I tried a "standupper" to conclude my report. In New York, ABC News located Sidell's parents in Atlanta and warned them that the report of their son's death would be on national TV the following evening.

It was clear that what motivated these Marines to endure the daily hell of Con Thien was not victory or satisfying the chain of command but their strong devotion to one another. They would risk all to be worthy of their comrades.

The MACV Commander General William Westmo-

reland was not satisfied with the effort the Marines were putting into making the barrier work. In October 1967, he complained, "the barrier has not been accorded a priority consistent with operational importance." Engineer companies showed enormous courage working in daylight hours, in the open with heavy equipment and suffered a higher percentage of casualties than the rifle companies at Con Thien. It also became clear that the entire plan was a bad idea, especially for the Marines. Broadly speaking, Marines are an offense-oriented organization. Building in-depth defenses is not their forte, especially questionable ones like the McNamara Line. Marine Corps generals complained that the barrier plan was a constant irritant. Holding static defensive positions prevented the Marines from conducting pacification programs and from attacking the enemy's infiltration routes. Maj. Gen. Rathvon Tompkins, commander of the Third Marine Division, referred to the McNamara Line as "absurd." Lt. Gen. Robert Cushman, the Marine commander in Vietnam later admitted, "We just weren't going out getting everyone killed building that stupid fence." But they followed orders and they built and maintained the line at high cost.

Nevertheless, Gen. Westmoreland, back in Saigon, was unsatisfied with the effort the Marines were putting into making the barrier work. In October 1967 he complained, "The barrier has not been accorded a priority consistent with operational importance." Eventually, Westmoreland's successor, Gen. Creighton Abrams, adopted a more flexible po-

sition along the border, relying on airstrikes and long-range artillery to check incursions and closing many of the firebases around Con Thien.

Fifty years later, I am reviewing my scripts from my days at Con Thien. I see now that the anger I felt at the misguided strategy and the compassion we felt for the Marines' suffering were not fully expressed. My script should have been much clearer in saying that American strategy was not only flawed but resulted in an unnecessary waste of lives. I am reminded of an observation by Chris Hedges, a former war correspondent for the New York Times: "Reporters who witness the worst of human suffering and return to newsrooms angry see their compassion washed out by layers of editors who stand between the reporter and the reader. The creed of objectivity and balance, he wrote, "disarms and cripples the press and transforms writers into neutral observers or voyeurs."

Con Thien showed American Marines at their best and American political and military leaders at their worst. As the Marine historian Eric Hammel concluded, "Americans were bound by the moral poverty of their political leaders and the North Vietnamese were bound by the intellectual inflexibility of their Communist doctrines. The soldiers of each side suffered mightily in the stalemate that ensued. "Anyone seeking glory in battle did not find it in the mud and heat of Con Thien, but those who seek tales of extraordinary valor need look no further. ■



# No Marine is an Island

BY FRANK "TREE" REMKIEWICZ

*"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."*

**John Donne, No Man is an Island – A selection from the prose**

"No Marine is an island, entire of itself; every Marine is a piece of the Corps, a part of the main. If a Marine be washed away by the sea, the Marine Corps is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any Marine's death diminishes me, because I am also the Marine Corps, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."

**John Donne, No Man is an Island – Revised by Tree**

From the yellow footprints to the final parade, boot camp turns us into Marines. I may never accomplish anything more nor do I need to. I was trained to be a Marine. The United States Marine Corps took me in, trained me, changed me, and transformed me in a Marine. The day that the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor was pinned on my chest I became a small part of the most famous family in all of America, the United States Marine Corps family. In fact I gained hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters. My family consists of those who have gone before me, those who served with me, and those who will come after me. Warriors one and all.

The Marine Corps taught me a lesson in family life. Namely, the sum is greater than the total of its parts. Marines perform ordinary daily duties that looking from outside the Corps are characterized as extraordinary. Those daily duties are not performed for themselves but for each other. Marines talk about and learn



about Tripoli, Belleau Wood, Tarawa, Saipan, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Santo Domingo, Chosin Reservoir, Da Nang, Hue, Khe Sanh, Fallujah, and Kandahar and hundreds of other battles. Our heroes are John Basilone, Chesty Puller, James Mattis and others. We learn these not because Marines are history buffs. These stories and people are not just history. It is Marine Corps legacy. It is our legacy. It is our past, our present, and, our future. We know that what has gone before will last long after we are gone.

It gives Marines great pride to know that we each play a minor role in a continuing drama. We run to the battle not away from the battle. In our days we protect each other because we know that another Marine is protecting us. And even after our initial battles are behind us we still run to the fire not away from the fire. Listen to the local news and read the local newspapers. A person is saved from a car wreck; a child is saved from a burning home; a lost in the wilderness camper is found and brought to safety, a bank robbery is thwarted, a person under attack on the streets is saved, a heart attack victim is brought back to life. Dig deep to find out who was involved and much of the time it will be a Marine. The saying "A Marine is a Marine for life." Is true. Once in the Corps, you cannot leave the Corps. A Marine cannot unlearn what has become the foundation of your character. A Marine may not talk about it for years, may even try to forget, but when the rubber hits the road that Marine will be right

there, in the thick of it. See, it is no longer a question of will I or won't I the question is when. The answer is when it is needed. Marines have no bat mobile, red cape, no fancy web or rope, no special powers at all. What we have is a belief that "a Marine of one is never outnumbered". What Marines have is an innate belief that honor, duty, commitment are not words or a slogan, it is who Marines are.

So the question arises, where are all these Marines that no longer wear the uniform daily? It is true that sometimes, especially when there is no trouble and no one in need, Marines can be hard to find – if you are not looking. The uniform of the day for those who no longer serve on a daily basis is as varied as there are lines of work. Marines are successful plumbers, electricians, doctors, teachers, and attorneys.

The Marine Corps hymn gives all of us a clue to the John Donne quote from the beginning of this article.

"If the Army and the Navy  
Ever look on Heaven's scenes;  
They will find the streets are guarded  
By United States Marines."

Those of us who have put our time in in tanks, have somewhat of a corollary. We say that when a Marine tanker dies, he goes to the Great Tank Park in the Sky. However one looks at death, even in death Marines are still a band of brothers. And when one of us dies, all Marines feel the death. That is, the synergy, the tight knit closeness of every Marine is such just like a body losing an arm or a leg. The body feels it. With Marines, it is different, it is the legacy. We all know that there is a new Marine coming up. The legacy of the past gives way to the legacy of the present gives way for the legacy of the future.

And that is why whatever I accomplished after I moved on from Active Duty pales in comparison to becoming a Marine.

Semper Fidelis

# CRAZY ASIAN WAR

John Wear writes: *I have a longtime friend who is US Marine Vietnam grunt veteran, Dave Martin, who grew up (and still lives) in Trenton, New Jersey. During the time when I lived in PA, directly across the Delaware River from Trenton, I became acquainted with several Vietnam veterans who met every Saturday morning for breakfast. Dave was one of them. In the late 1960's, after being discharged from the USMC, Dave then worked for the Veterans Administration for 20 years, so he has a large amount intimate knowledge of the how's and why's of the VA. He offered me (and many others) a lot of very useful guidance for the process of making disability claims. God Bless US Marine Vietnam veteran Dave Martin.*



**Description of the author of Crazy Asian War:** Dave Martin served seventeen months in Vietnam as a Marine infantryman (grunt). He was involved in sixteen major operations along with the dozens of smaller firefights and skirmishes. He participated in "Operation Buffalo" and the Siege of Con Thien. He served in Bravo Co. 1/9, India Co. 3/3, and India, Kilo, Lima, Mike Co. 3/9 as a forward observer from July 1966 to November 1967. He's never forgotten the courage, sacrifice and brotherhood he witnessed by the Marine grunts he served with. Most of his tour in Vietnam was with the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment. He feels fortunate and proud to have served with them.

John adds: Dave said that it took him 40 years, but he ended writing a 261 page book about his time in-country. The title of this incredible personal and harrow account is called, "Crazy Asian War." Dave was in-country in 1967–1968 and spent most of his 17 months there as a mortar and arty Forward Observer with 3/9. He was part of a reactionary force during "Operation Buffalo." As most of us



Operation Buffalo – July 1967

know that this battle led to literally hundreds of Marines from 1st Battalion, 9th Marines to be killed or horribly wounded just outside of the wire at Con Thien in early July of 1967. In describing that battle, Dave had occasion to observed several US Marine tanks.

**Dave's words are below:**

In the distance the rumble of tanks was heard. The Third Tank Battalion was being brought up from the Con Thien combat base. Although there were only a few tanks per (infantry) battalion, their incredible size, and added fire power, boosted our morale. They brought in some much needed C-rats, too. It was learned the tanks would be used to cart

away the bodies when we got to them. These huge beasts stayed abreast of us in a sort of ad-libbed bargain of mutual protection. We'd keep the RPG-7 anti-tank rockets away from them, and they'd provide the additional fire for us, during the anticipated frontal attack the NVA would launch. It seemed to be a good deal. Soon, however, we'd learn to avoid being anywhere near them because of the incredible amount of incoming missiles they'd attract.

**Thirty pages later, Dave writes:**

A large volume of RPG fire zipped in on us. The tanks, which were right in front of my position, were drawing RPGs like a huge steel magnet. I'd never been the target of so many all at once like this. Those Russian anti-tank rockets were very fast; we couldn't hear them coming until they were almost on top of us. We were slightly up hill from the tanks, and so the rockets impacted all around us. We were in the beaten zone, as the Marine Corps called being in the impact area. The NVA were seriously intent on killing a tank, and fired several dozen RPGs at them. The supersonic speed combined with the large volume of rockets, combined with the devastatingly loud explosions only a stone's throw behind me equaled complete terror, to this Jersey boy.

It wasn't just the rockets, either! The gooks had fifty caliber machine guns blasting away at the tank, and they also tried to shoot it with rifles. But the pukers kept missing, and all that missing shit found me! I suppose I'd be missed too, if I had to fire at a huge tank, which was firing giant, shotgun type, canister rounds back at my ass. It could tend to make one a little nervous and make it difficult to keep that RPG from shaking. They were desperate to knock out the tank, however, and did everything they could to kill it. If the NVA knew how miserable they were making my life, perhaps it would have made them feel a little bit better. >>

## Twenty pages later, Dave writes about the ending of Operation Buffalo:

I called in the coordinates for a fire mission. In a few seconds that it took for the rounds to come, I searched the battle field for more targets. It was about then that I saw one of the most incredible feats of raw bravery in my whole tour in Vietnam! Some crazy, jar headed, leather balled grunt broke from the perimeter India company had set on our left flank, ran towards the tank, and with one hand, high bounding leap, jumped up on the back of it. Ignoring the vast amount of incoming AK and machinegun fire, he climbed to the turret. The tank commander was slumped across the gun, probably KIA. I could see red blood all over his chest area. The ballsy grunt pushed the commander back into the turret opening, in order to clear the machine gun. He then took a one man stand against the advancing hordes of NVA, blasting them with the fifty.

Lying flat in the red dirt with bullets zinging overhead, trying to call in fire support for the company, I kept glanc-

ing over to this scene of valor. It amazed me that someone could fire a gun at those gooks, under all that volume of fire. It was beyond anything that I wished to do at that moment. I was doing all my guts would allow just lying under the bullets, and not freaking out. But this guy, this super grunt, was pulling off a Medal of Honor act if I ever saw one. I feared for his life, but silently cheered him on.

As the gooks were halted in their attack by this one Marine, the tank he was on suddenly sprung to life. The turret swung towards the gooks, and the ninety millimeter cannon dropped down level to the ground, blasting away with the giant, shotgun like canister rounds. The shells opened up large holes in the ranks of advancing NVA. With the combined counter attach of the tank, the crazy Marine, and our fire power, the assault ended quickly. I looked over to the tank but couldn't see the Marine anymore. Later that morning we found out that he'd been blown off the tank by a direct hit from a sixty-one millimeter mortar. Yet he was only wounded, and would live to tell of his exploits to his grandchildren, who wouldn't believe him anyway?

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# Coming Home from Vietnam

BY ED HILTZ

This story was initiated with John Wear and me emailing back and forth about today's veterans returning home from either Iraq or Afghanistan. We were discussing the return of war veterans of today compared to war veterans of Vietnam. How different the atmosphere was for both sets of veterans. The veterans of Iraq, "Desert Storm," and Afghanistan were welcome back home with an abundance of fanfare and rightly so. Some news channels of today covered their return as they showed returning soldiers on television where they were greeted by their loved ones, families, friends, dignitaries, and supporting citizens and others. Sometimes their return was a complete surprise, surprising their wives, children and parents, at unsuspected locations and occasions, schools, work places. It was truly an occasion of celebration. The gratitude displayed towards them was much different than the 1960's and 1970's Vietnam veterans returning back home.

In my last month in Vietnam, I was stationed at An Hoa Combat Base. 4th Platoon, Bravo Company, First Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division with Lieutenant Allan Cohen and Staff Sergeant Hoover. I had just thirty days or less left in-country before returning to the World in April of 69. Our platoon was short of sergeants or corporals so I was selected to be the TC for that night's perimeter guard duty. I was only a Lance

Corporal. The reason for me being a TC was that I had the most time in country and the most experience at the time. The crew was Private Vince Perez, Private Pat Haggey, one other man that I can't remember his name and me.

While in our assigned area of the perimeter late at night or the early morning hours without any warning our tank took an RPG hit on top of the tank. Private Haggey (spelling?) who was on watch at the time was hit and started yelling "Nazi\* I'm hit, I'm hit!" I was asleep right behind him in the Gypsy rack while the others were asleep on the back of the tank's engine deck. Vince Perez quickly jumped into the drivers' compartment and repositioned our tank. I took the 50 Caliber which wasn't damaged and on top of the TC cupola and starting firing 50 caliber rounds randomly and blindly into the area I thought where the RPG came from. (Remember having to call in to headquarters or where ever and asking for permission to fire?) I can't remember if I did or not that night. I radioed in to LT Cohen or Ssgt Hoover and gave them information they needed regarding Haggey's wounds. I think we used to give part of their serial number for that to have Private Haggey medevac out. The rest of the crew members fortunately were not injured at all. (Ron Colucci and Lee Dill may have more on information about Private Haggey.) Our

tank was taken back to Hill 55 then to battalion to have the cupola repaired. It didn't matter if you were a short timer or FNG ... you never knew when the shit would hit the fan.

\*The nick name Nazi was given to me because my last name Hiltz sounded like Schultz from the TV show "Hogan's Heroes." If you remember him saying, "I see nothing and hear nothing." Which wouldn't be politically correct in today's world.

## Back to returning home:

As my days in country started winding down, I was sent back to Bravo Company on Hill 55 where maybe I spent a day and night there. From there went to Da Nang Receiving and Departing Barracks area. I spent a day or to two there going through military customs (which I might add that they confiscated all my "contraband" that I was trying to sneak home) and getting all my paper work in order. I finally boarded a TWA commercial airliner. I was so ecstatic; the feeling was wonderful; I never had intentions of extending my tour. From Da Nang we flew to Okinawa and spent about three days there getting uniforms squared away and paid.

While there, I didn't want to miss out going to one of the friendly villages where I met my "one night" girlfriend Kim. Her picture is included below.



I vividly recall the steam baths, bathing pool, and massage tables. Do any other tankers remember the local Vietnamese young local girls riding their Honda scooters and hustling us young Marines? And they would mount on our tanks and after striking a deal, we'd go inside the tank for a friendly "meet and greet"?

Back to Oki, after all my paper work was completed, I was on my way back to the World. We may have stopped in Hawaii but I can't remember. Then on to Travis Air Force Base in California. From there I was on my way home to Friendship Airport located in Maryland.

Keep in mind I didn't call my parents to let them know my exact dates of coming home since I had been unsure exactly when. After I arrived at the Maryland airport, I then called home and told them I was at the airport. I convinced them not to drive to pick me up at night and told them that I would get myself home. While inside the passenger waiting area, they had several bars and I was looking forward to buying a cold beer. I was in full uniform with my ribbons, and medals proudly attached but I was denied a drink because I wasn't 21 years old. Luckily, a (divine intervention occurred) a complete stranger saw my dilemma, he came over to me and asked what I wanted. He then ordered and bought me a beer. I have never forgotten that act of kindness. And whenever I'm out in a restaurant or bar and see a Marine, I always gladly send him over a drink.

From the airport I took a cab which was about 26 miles from my home in Baltimore City, Maryland. I remember that the ride cost me a whopping \$7.00 dollars. Remember this was 1969 and the dollar was a lot of money. When I finally arrived home, my parents had gathered the family ... my two sisters and brother-in-law to welcome me home. There wasn't much fanfare but some heartfelt handshakes, hugs and kisses. Before I had enlisted in the Marines, we had a German shepherd named "Gypsy." In the past, she could be very aggressive and protective unless she knew you. She was a great watch dog. Well after being away for approximately sixteen months or more, my dog wanted nothing to do with me. She was barking and very aggressive towards me while barring her teeth and all. So, I knelt down on my knee, extended my hand and starting saying her name ... and Bam! Just like that she remembered who I was and became super excited. At the end of the night, I went to my old bed room and guess what? My old faithful dog jumped up onto the bed took her usual place right beside me in the bed like I had never left.

The following weeks while on leave I went about my daily life. I met up with some friends. A few of them even told me they heard I was killed in Vietnam. There were neighbors that didn't even know that I had been away ... or even cared about Vietnam. A funny one was that a neighborhood girl, Donna, asked me where I got so tan. While I was home, I did buy a brand-new motorcycle with the money I saved. I spent a lot of time riding it all around town. I also had some money left over to buy a used 1962 Ford Galaxy convertible so I blew all my savings on them.

All the information is remembered from 50th years ago so if anyone has any corrections, please add them.

After my 30 days of leave was up reported back to Camp Le June. I was garrisoned there several months and then headed out on a Mediterranean Cruise. That was a lot more FUN! ■

# Harry C. Christensen

Via email: [johnwear2@verizon.net](mailto:johnwear2@verizon.net)

John Wear - for Sponson Box

John, find herewith an article for the Sponson Box as requested, along with a copy of my Silver Star Citation.

With hope that both can be included in one of the next issues.

Very truly yours,

Harry C. Christensen (please spell my name correctly)

## ON BEING WOUNDED

On Wednesday, January 24, 1968, it was like every Wednesday except that the monsoon rain was over, the dirt roads were dry, but the incoming were increasing at Camp Carroll. For me, no Wednesday would ever be the same. Every Wednesday thereafter I will remember for the rest of my life.

The tank was on fire, our Captain dead, next to me, grunts on the tank falling left and right.

I had wounds to both hands, face and arms and could hardly see.

Our fifty cal was inoperable, the 30 cal out of ammunition as was most of our 90 M ammunition.

The tank was stalled in the middle of the ambush site and on fire.

We bailed out under heavy automatic machine gun fire and RPG fire, impacting the tank.

Crawling into a small ditch to the right of the burning tank, I lay as the battle raged around me. I called for a corpsman but was told the corpsman was dead. I began to pray.

Above I could see the automatic weapons of the enemy cutting through the elephant grass as explosions erupted around me. I continued to pray the 23rd psalm, over and over.

At first I was glad to be out of the burning tank, then I began to take stock in the many times I had been hurt. A comrad in the ditch along with me began to hit me on my back. I shouted stop - I'm wounded! He said your flack jacket is on fire, I'm trying to put it out. Apparently, I was hit in the back as well. I thought the day would never end. I began to feel the effects of many wounds many parts of my body and tried to remember when the wounds occurred as I continued to pray. Many nights today, instead of counting sheep, I try to remember when each wound occurred during the battle - most often I fall asleep before I get to ten.

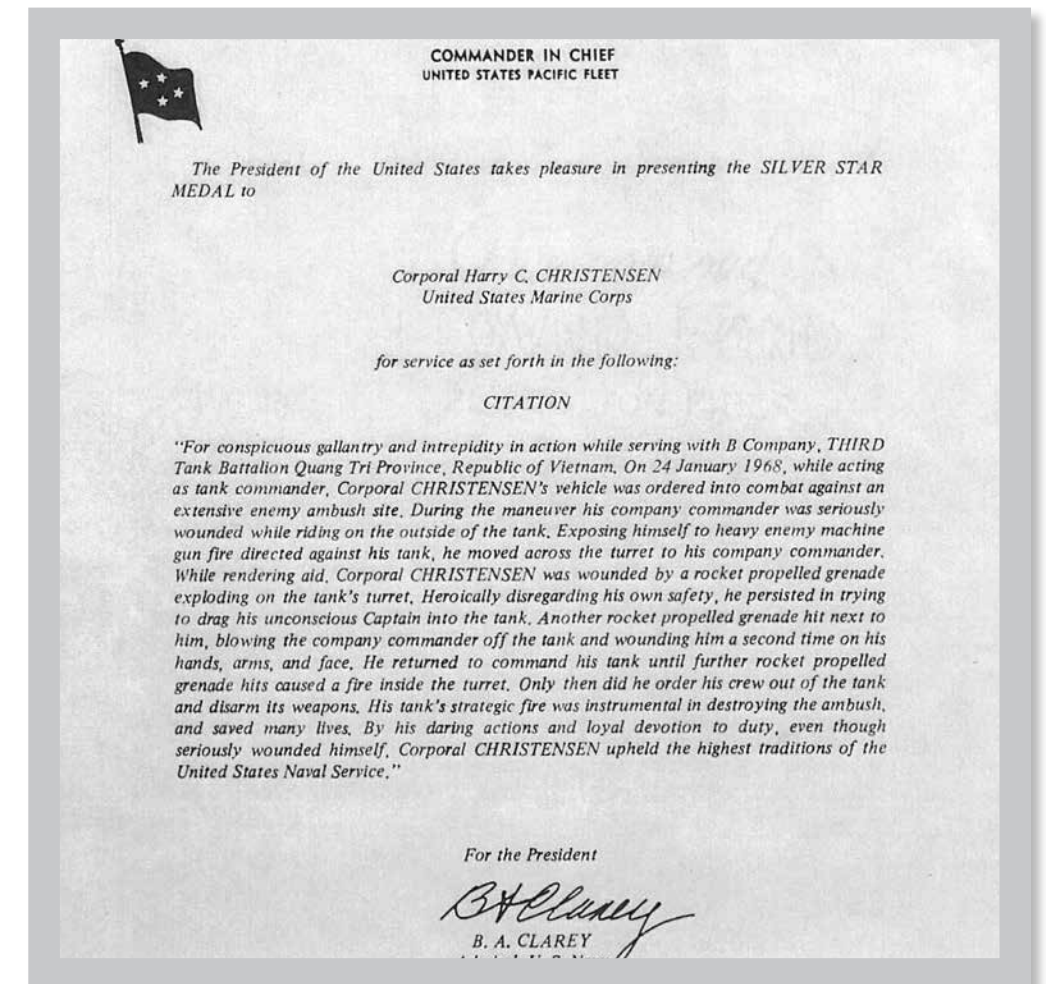
I had no weapons and couldn't use one anyway due to the injuries to both of my hands.

Soon a Marine Corp. jet, I guess a phantom flew over, on its return it dropped two large bombs on the NVA positions which were so close to me that I was nearly blown from my small cover. On the planes next run it dropped napalm so close to me that I could smell the gasoline. I continued to pray. I was so scared! I was certain that the NVA would overwhelm the small ditch where I lay and bayonet me - as I tried to crawl deeper into the ditch and explosions occurred around me, I wondered which part of my body would go first. I was so scared.

Hours went by as the battle went on and I continued to pray "the Lord is my Shepard". Finally, after six hours of battle, artillery from Camp Carroll, support from the air and from the ground, the North Vietnamese withdrew with heavy losses.

A relief column from Dong Ha arrived with a med evac truck. I was loaded with the dead and wounded and convoyed to a med station at Dong Ha, still repeating the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. What I witnessed on that truck and later in the med station is a horror story that I will never forget.

On being wounded was not what I expected it to be - for me WEDNESDAY WILL NEVER, EVER BE THE SAME DAY AGAIN - FOREVER!



*Editor's Note: I was looking around in my computer files for stories written by members when I discovered this dandy that Ev Tungent sent to me in 2017.*

## AN HOA BASIN REMEMBRANCES

LT COL EV TUNGENT

(Ev writes: This is an email letter I sent to Bill Lochridge and Tom Shirey several years ago. Bill was my 2nd Platoon Leader and Tom, who has since passed away, was one of Bill's "cracker jack" TC's.)

I know both of you have much more in-depth "remembrances" than me, but I have numbered some specific incidents I can recall where we were all involved, and a couple others which didn't involve you. I'll number them and give a recap of what happened "on that day in history" in my memory.

#1—Somewhere south of Hill 55 you, Bill, and I were conducting a patrol/recon of our operating area to get the lay of the land shortly after moving to 55 from Marble Mountain, or possibly it was during Operation Liberty. We came to the north bank of the Song Thu Bon and noticed a "suspicious" object on the south bank which you thought was probably a boat the VC were using to cross the river. We both emptied a magazine or two from our grease guns across the river and "saved the day" from any more VC incursions across the river. (NOT!)

#2—This is as close as I can tell to

the spot where we walked the Thu Bon checking out a possible fording site to get our tanks into the An Hoa Basin. Remember when 9th Mar Regimental Hdqs moved out to Hill 55 late in the summer of '66? Our company area was right next to the helipad and I started receiving "constructive criticism" from the 9th Mar HQ that my area was "trashy" and didn't look good to visiting honchos arriving at the helipad. Never mind that the "trash" was damaged tank parts from tanks supporting the regiment! Soon after that, however, 9th Marines received a new CO. Col Don Barrett (one of Bill Corson's old CIA cohorts), arrived and things started looking up. Col Barrett asked me one day if there was any way to get some of my tanks across the Thu Bon into the An Hoa Basin area to support 3/9. I told him I had noticed a large gravel build-up on the north bank of the Thu Bon and from our aerial photo maps we were using there seemed to be a similar area on the south bank. Since the river was really low, I told him I wanted to organize a recon operation to check out whether the gravel build-up extended all the way across the river to give us a fording site. As I recall, the river here was

about 150–200 meters wide.

We had a platoon from a 1/9 company deployed at our north bank starting point to provide supporting fire as necessary and the 105mm battery on Hill 55 to provide smoke on the south bank area to give us a bit of "invisibility" as we waded across into "Marlboro Country". I'm sure we had a couple of your tanks there as well. Decked out with flak jackets, steel pots, grease guns and tank bars, you and I spread about 10–12 feet apart and started walking and poking toward the south bank to make sure the gravel was sufficiently heavy to support a tank and hoping we didn't all of a sudden find a hole in the river and drown! When we reached the other side and never got deeper in water than the top of our shoulders, I was convinced we had a good ford. You spotted a small dug-out type boat on the beach several yards up and wanted to go up and "decommission" it with the grease gun. (Given your fascination with boats then and since with the NY State Maritime Militia, I think you might have been well suited to be in the Navy's Mobile Riverine Force, like my son-in-law, Ray. Ray was a '64 USNA graduate and served two tours in Nam with the MRF, run-

ning up and down the Mekong in the Rung Sat Area. He destroyed a few VC boats as well as inserting and recovering Seal Teams.)

When I gathered you up, we started back across the river and about half way across the arty smoke stopped! We were apparently not as invisible as we thought before, as we began receiving small arms fire from some folks who were wondering what we were doing on their side of the river. We made like turtles with only our helmets above water for the most part the rest of the way back and let our supporting fire people discourage the "southerners".

#3—About two weeks later, we crossed the Thu Bon with your platoon (minus Tom's tank), our Headquarters Company gun and flame tanks, the Retriever, a tank platoon from A Co, a few LVTP-5's and some 1/9 grunts to link up with 3rd Bn, 3rd Marines near the Old Railroad Line to commence Operation Macon. 3/3 had been heli-lifted in from their area near Da Nang.



In their home area, they devoted a great deal of their time toward pacification efforts. I remember receiving more "constructive criticism" about damaging rice paddy dikes and tanker personnel not wearing full uniforms in the tanks. I recall telling the CO of 3/3 that I considered this to be "VC rice" and that the temperature inside the tanks was pretty damned hot! One of our tanks sheared a final drive toward the end of the operation and we had one flown in on a CH-53. Thank God we had the retriever with us. "Buddha" Clark and his maintenance crew did their usual outstanding job and got the tank back in service.

The last night of the operation down toward Hoi An, 3/3 established a battalion perimeter and we were assigned to provide perimeter security. Their 81mm mortars started registering fires with WP rounds and one of them "happened" to hit one of our tanks and severely wounded a crewman who was on turret watch. It even started a fire with the

camo netting in the bustle. I went screaming to the Bn CP to cease fire and our corpsman and I ran to the tank to check on damage and to treat our wounded crewman. 3/3 was lifted out the next morning and we started our march back to the fording site. We were taking quite a bit of small arms fire from the tree lines all the way back but weren't going to stop and try to flush them out. I do remember one of our "lessons learned" about not tracking old routes. However, there was one area where we had to traverse an old track through a bamboo cluster. I was in the lead tank and the break in the bamboo was a slight uphill grade. I stopped

and fired a canister round and got a very nice secondary explosion. From there we reached the fording site and went home leaving your 4 tanks there in the An Hoa Basin to support 3/9 with the promise that we would get Tom's tank, which was at the company CP for repairs, to you ASAP.

Several days later, we did coordinate with you to meet us at the fording site to get Tom's tank back to you. I was there in my tank and had the radio up on your platoon frequency to be able to direct the crossing. The driver was getting a little freaked out because, even though he was buttoned up, the hatch wasn't very well sealed and the tank was taking on water like a sieve! That was on top of the fact that I felt the tank was veering too far off the ford track. Just as I was about to call and talk them through it, you, Bill, got on the radio and started "cheer leading" them on. I could have throttled you if I could have reached you!! Long story short, the tank managed to reach the south bank where Gunny "Cowboy" Smith had them drop the escape hatch and drain the water from the inside of the turret. For the SECOND time, I could have throttled you as you ALL got off the radio to tend to the "wet one" and I had no idea what was going on "over there"! You finally came back and told me that everything looked OK. I was concerned about damage to the slip-ring but as I recall it wasn't bad. So, you were off and running there in the Basin with your full platoon and went on to bigger and better things for 3/9.

#4—After Bill Corson informed me that I was being brought back to Battalion HQ as the S-3, I wanted to get down to An Hoa for a final visit with you guys. I hopped on a Huey courier flight and spent a couple of days with you there. I remember you had a river patrol planned along the Thu Bon and asked if I wanted >>

to go along. The river was still low and we stopped for lunch on a sandy bit of river bank. After lunch, we proceeded north and all of a sudden started receiving a lot of fire from the western bank of the river. You stopped and had the platoon return fire, traversing the turret back and forth. My problem was that I was riding on top of stuff piled in the bustle and, every time you traversed, my ass was hanging out to dry! I rapped you on the helmet and told you to either let me inside or let me off. I did get off and found the protection behind the tank to be a bit better!

#5—A light section of Dix Garner's 1st Platoon was supporting a 1/9 platoon on a river outpost by the Song Vu Gia to interdict any VC infiltration from the western portion of the Arizona Territory. One night they received concentrated RPG and small arms fire from across the river. L/Cpl Johnson was killed and another crewman, whose name I can't remember, lost his arm in the attack. Johnson was the first man killed under my command and was followed the next day by Cpl Brown. I went in to the hospital in Da Nang the next day to visit the crewman who had lost his arm. He really blew me away with his positive attitude. After putting up with "constructive criticism" for some time, I was at probably the lowest point in my whole time in Nam knowing my troops were making various other commanders "look good" and sacrificing so much in the process. I stopped by Tank Battalion HQ on the way back to Hill 55 to talk to our CO, LtCol Milt Raphael, about my frustrations. Col Raphael was out of the CP but Major Jim Doss

took me over to our Bamboo Hut "O" Club and we talked. I broke down with tears of anguish and anger as I vented to Maj Doss. He told me to hang in there as both he and Col Raphael were fully aware of the fine job the company was doing in support of 9th Marines.

#6—After you had set up shop in An Hoa, 9th Marines came up with a plan to get into the western portion of the An Hoa Basin Arizona Territory. I had found another fording site across the Song Vu Gia similar to the one over the Thu Bon, i.e., a gravel deposit extending from bank to bank. With 1st Platoon tanks, some LVT's and a company from 1/9, we crossed over the Vu Gia and conducted a probe south. Ran into some heavy contact and withdrew since it was only planned as a day operation. At least it let Charles know that he could run but not hide!

#7—Our 3rd Platoon was supporting 2/9 in the eastern portion of the TAOR north of the Thu Bon. There was a river I believe called the Song Bau Xau which sliced through their area making supply and maneuver difficult. The engineers set up a 60 ton air-filled pontoon ferry operated by cable from bull dozer winches on each side of the river to alleviate the problems. The river wasn't all that wide but was very deep in the middle with sharply sloped banks. 3rd Platoon had a tank returning to their area from a maintenance/repair job at the company CP one day. I got a radio call that the tank was in trouble at the ferry site and was about to sink! When I drove over there, I saw that the tank had skidded down the wet bank and had

slammed hard into the pontoons, bursting a couple of them. The tank was nose down and the water was almost up to the driver's hatch. The engineers had hooked up a dozer cable to the rear of the tank and were trying to pull it back up the slope, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. I called back to the CP and had the retriever come over. While waiting for the retriever I started back to the tank and stepped over the cable the engineers still had hooked up. Just as I was about over the cable, it snapped and started to whip lash. It took some skin off of my right leg shin but fortunately I was far enough over it that I didn't become a "high tenor" singer! The happy ending was that the retriever took about 10 minutes to get hooked up and haul the tank back to dry land. As I recall, we had to take the long way around for a while until the engineers fixed their ferry!

Epilogue—This has been a fun labor of love to try to reconstruct events of some 44 years ago. I find myself thinking more and more of the service we gave our country back then. When I consider where our great country is headed these days under our current administration and congressional leadership, I want to scream at them, "Don't you understand the sacrifices men and women have fought and died for to maintain the freedoms we enjoy and to keep us at the pinnacle of being the leader of the free world? Why do you want to turn us into another third world land?" God willing, and through putting our faith in Him, we can turn this obscene scenario around and get back to the basics of what this country is all about.

Semper Fidelis, my Friends ■



*Editor's Note: In the last issue of our magazine we featured Roger's story about OCS. Now let's see what he has to say about TBS...*



## THE BASIC SCHOOL

BY ROGER LULI

The newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenants were given leave for Christmas and told to report to The Basic School on 3 January in the New Year. The school at Camp Barrett is located in the southwest corner of the Quantico Marine base on Belleau Avenue. The Marine reported on crutches and had to endure the first few weeks of training in a cast. While the training officers

had little sympathy, there were a large number of classmates that stepped up to help. ?? Lovejoy, his roommate, was particularly helpful. The Marine's company commander was Major Broad and his Platoon commander was Captain Chapin. The captain once told the platoon to pay attention in his classes. They were like sex, if you miss one, it was one you can never get back.

The mission of the school was to provide basic education for the marine infantry officer. No matter what their military occupational specialty (MOS) a marine officer must be prepared to lead an infantry unit at any time. Course subjects include: Amphibious Operations, Aviation, Combat Intelligence, Communications, Drill, Command and Ceremonies, Field Artillery,

Field Engineering, First Aid, Infantry Weapons, Leadership, Logistics, Map and Aerial Photo reading, Marine Corps History and Traditions, Marksmanship, Military Law, NBC Defense, Personnel Administration, Physical Training, Tactics, Technique of Military Instruction, U.S. Military Forces, and Current Marine Corps Operations.

Some memories from the basic school:

The Marines trained with some foreign officers 5 from China, 2 from Thailand, 2 from Venezuela, 1 from Portugal, 5 from Korea, 5 from Viet Nam. One afternoon, the Marine was eating with a Thai officer named Suppanitt Chudhabudhi. They had each taken a glass of iced tea and the Marine asked Supannitt if he would like sugar or lemon for his tea. The officer replied that he did not like sweet tea.. When the Marine asked what his favorite flavor was, he replied “hot”.

One of the exercises was the grenade toss. The platoon was lined up at a safe distance from the target. They were then called one at a time to a bunker that was open on the top and at the rear. Opposite that bunker was another at a distance of about 20 yards. The Marine was called forward, introduced to the target, and handed a grenade. He sized up the target and distance, pulled the pin, did a hook shot, and ducked down in the bunker. He heard the explosion and then a cheer from the men behind him. Apparently, he had hit nothing but net. The grenade had landed and exploded in the enemy bunker. Fortunately, that was the last grenade the Marine ever had to toss.

On a weekend trip to Washington D.C., the Marine, Wayne Manson, and Mike Neal decided to run to the top of and back down the Washington Monument. Other tourists nearby could not believe their eyes. Another adventure with Mike and Wayne occurred in Ocean City, Maryland. Wayne had lived near and spent summers in Ocean city. He could also sing like Bobby Hatfield of the Righteous

Brothers. The trio would walk into a bar and someone would shout, “Hey Wayne, sing for us”. Wayne would jump up on the bar and sing. The three never had to pay for a drink in Ocean City. It is sad to report that Wayne was seriously wounded and disabled in Vietnam.

There was a social organization called JOPA (Junior Officers and Professional Association) in Washington D.C... It provided a mixer and entertainment to young adults in the D.C. area. One of the entertainers was Jerry Lee Lewis. He put on an exciting show. The Marine doesn't know how the piano survived. The joke at Quantico was the National Defense Medal was really called the Shirley Highway Ribbon which recognizing the surviving of the trip from Quantico to JOPA and back.

Near the end of the program, there was an exercise called the three day war with the entire battalion participating. Since they need someone to attack, some of the officers, including the Marine, were selected to play the role of aggressors. This turned out to be a great assignment. The aggressors wore regular utility shirts, trousers and field jackets – no heavy packs or helmets. They covered their hands and faces with camouflage paint and their shiny skin heads with dark blue watch caps. The aggressors holed up in a replica Vietnamese village until the battalion flushed them out. For the rest of the next two days, the aggressors would set up an ambush, spring it, and fall back. Repeat, repeat, repeat. The holly bushes at Quantico grew about 15 feet high and their leaves were seriously sharp. Maybe the intent was to get the officers prepared for cuts from the sharp elephant grass in Vietnam. On the last night, the aggressors found a ridge in front of a tree line and that's where they set up the last ambush. The Marine was sent about 100 yards down the road to keep watch during the night. It was a cold, dark, and sleepless night. At first light, the Marine spotted the battalion approaching. Once he was able to see how they were deployed, he

found an escape route and waited for them to close to 50 yards and squeezed off a few bursts of automatic fire. He then ran up the open slope in front of, on past, and into the woods behind the ambush with the lead elements of the battalion in hot pursuit. He crawled back and joined the aggressors in time to spring the ambush. The trainers then called the exercise over and the rest of the day was spent debriefing the war.

Mess night is a celebration where marines dress in their best dress uniforms-whites in this case. The evening started out well. There were prayers, toasts, and the singing of the Marine Corps Hymn. There were several general officers in attendance. This was truly rare and special; the Lieutenants were told to be on their best behavior. Then the generals departed, the bar stayed open, and things went downhill rapidly. Two officers broke their ankles jumping off the flying bridge. The Marine observed a group who were putting their cigars out on the others' dress whites. Attendance was low at breakfast the next morning.

The officers were introduced to the M48A3 tank and shown how tanks and infantry could work together in close quarters. At that demonstration he met Lt. Col. Jinx McCain. They spoke extensively about the tank and the successor M60. When they were done, the Marine was sure he wanted to be a tanker and the Colonel McCain promised that he would do everything in his power to make that happen.

Of approximately 411 officers that graduated with the class, 48 were killed in Vietnam. Two from the marine's platoon did not make it home alive. Frank O'Brien from Wheeling, West Virginia was killed on 28 March, 1968. His name is on panel 46E, line 10 on the Vietnam Memorial. John Norris from Las Bonas, California was killed 4 October, 1967. His name is on panel 27E, line 50 on the memorial. ■

## 2022 Wyoming Mini-Reunion

### **YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!!!**

Below is the list of names of the members who have indicated that they plan to attend the 2022 mini-reunion in Wyoming in September.

If your name is not on the list below and you are planning to attend then please call John Wear TODAY at 719.495.5998 or email johnwear2@verizon.net!

We really would like to not have any “walk-ins” to this gathering. Please pre-register by contacting John Wear and being added on the attendee roster. Also if you are bringing a quest please make sure we know how many.

If your name is on this list and you cannot make it, please also call today and let us know so that we do not order and pre-pay for your bus transportation and any reunion associated expenses (beer, meals, etc.).

ALSO: If you are driving, please bring an insulated ice chest that we can borrow for the beverages in the hospitality room.

Aitken Lee	Hokanson Carl	Pipkin Mike
Auclair Greg	Hunter Terry	Plank Milo
Beck Ralph	Jewell Jim	Price Stan
Bell Don	Kalanick Ron	Portello Frank
Brightwell Hank	Kellogg Fred Jr	Raasch Jim
Busk Randy	Kellogg Fred	Rasner William
Cecil Richard	Knox Adrian	Remkiewicz Frank
Christy Al	Knox Clyde	Riensch Harold
Cole Ben	Lewis Rick	Roth Jack
Colucci Ron	Liu Joe	Schroeder Patrick
Cowman Jim	Luli Roger	Sparks Earl
Cramer Monty	Manns Bruce	Thompson Dave
Dahl Ken	Martin Greg	Trower John
Damschen Mark	McCleary Geary	Unland Roger
Everest Guy	McKnight James	Van Apeldoorn Bruce
Fay John	Mefford Gary	Wear John
Fieldhouse Brian	Miller Hal	Werner Larry
Goodin Brad	Moreno Armando	Whalsten Bruce
Hall Garry	Murray Paul	Williams John
Hambright Rea	Najfus Lou	Wolfenbarger Guy
Hearne Gerry	Newberry Craig	Young Wally
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Himes Harris	Parshall Larry	■
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**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 “21” then your 2022 Membership Dues are payable now.

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

\*Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.



# **MARINES**

If you want it easy

don't join this branch. Some of us may have gained a little weight. Some of us don't walk as well. Some of us can't stand as long as we use to. Kneeling is almost impossible. Our feet, knees and back are wore out at an early age. Let's face it, your body is put through pure hell. We even may be "Legends In Our Own Minds". Looking back and knowing what we know now, ask any Marine and they will say they'd do it all over again.

**Semper Fi**