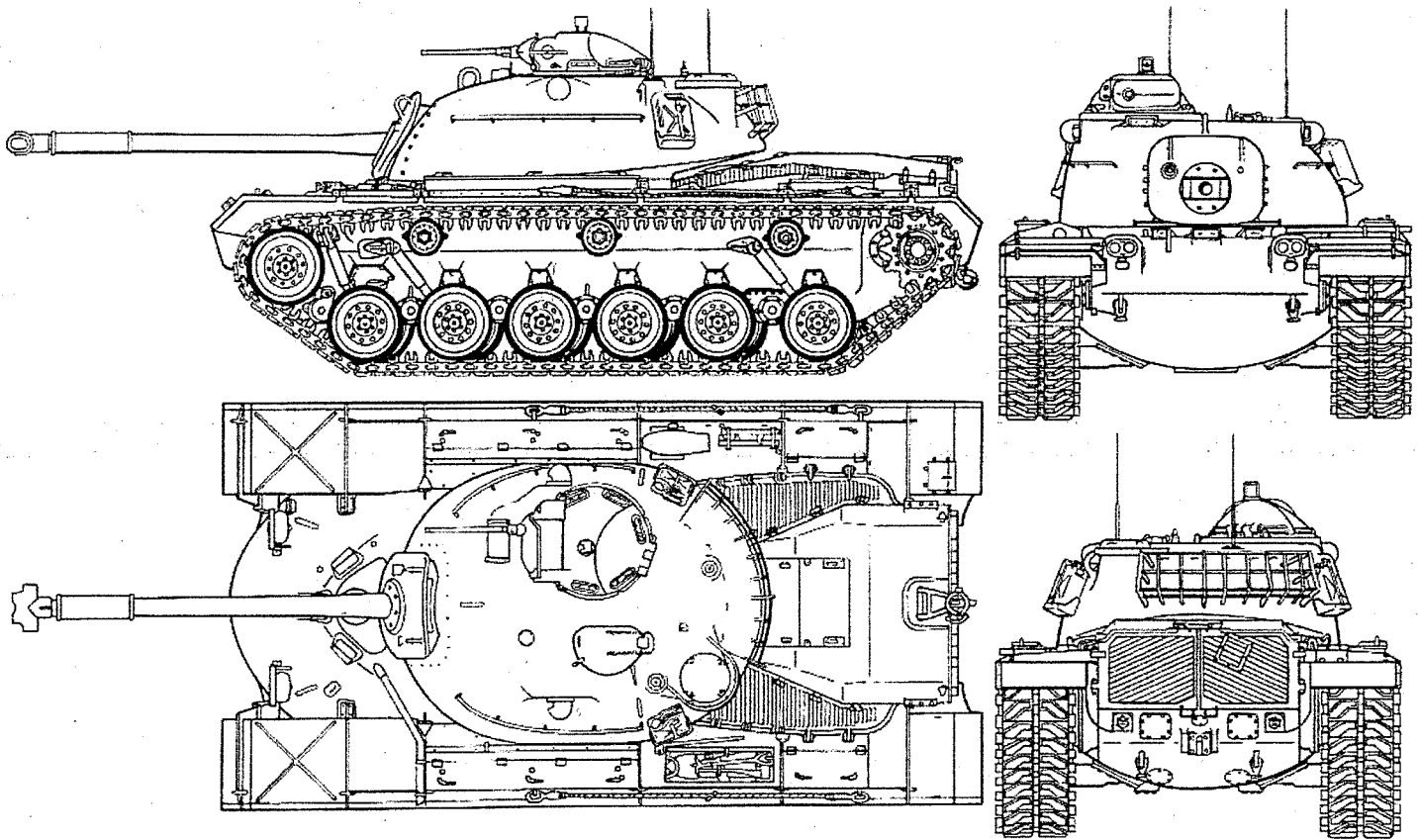




Sponson BOX

*Voice of the USMC
Vietnam Tankers Association*

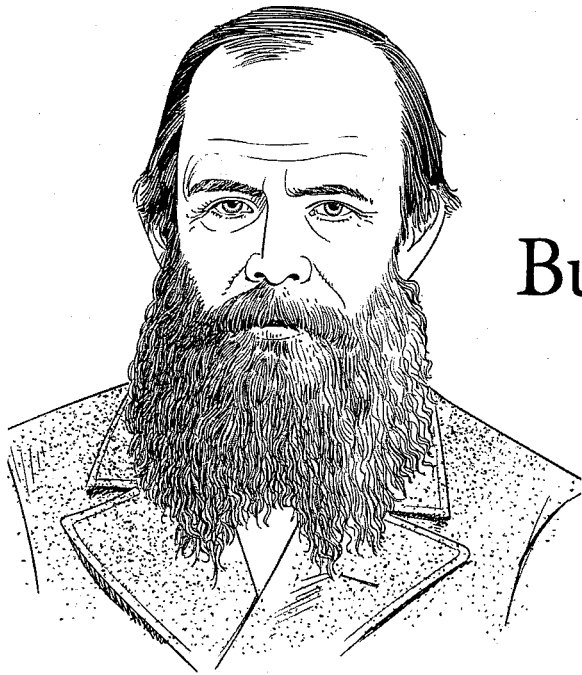
Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



THE HISTORY OF THE M-48 TANK

	Cover Story: Designation M48	Page 21-24
Featured Stories:	More Stories from John Hughes	Page 29-30
	2026 Mini Reunion Announcement	Page 45-47

It's just six months until we meet & greet in Kansas City!!!



But how could you live and
have no story to tell?

– DOSTOEVSKY

Your military memories: your personal stories, captured in your own words and photographs, are one of the most valuable legacies that you can leave your family. By being able to read what you did while serving your country, enables family members and future generations to understand and appreciate what you went through in order to provide them the freedoms they enjoy today. We are currently running out of member stories. Please keep the sponson box healthy and happy by submitting your own accounts of your service to our nation.

If you feel like you have a story to tell, it's important to recognize that everyone has a story to share.

Here are some insights:

1. Share your experiences: whether it's a personal achievement, a significant challenge, or a heartfelt message, sharing your story can be a powerful way to connect with others.
2. Evaluate your story: consider who your story is about, what they want, and how it relates to your identity. This can help you refine your narrative.
3. Consider your medium: decide whether your story is best shared through writing, art, or other forms of expression. If you have the talent, consider pursuing writing as a way to share your story.
4. Embrace your story: remember that your story is valuable, and it may not need to be published in a book. You can share it through various channels, including personal blogs or social media.

Ultimately, your story is unique, and sharing it can be a meaningful way to express yourself and connect with others. Do not check into the "great tank park in the sky" without at least writing and sharing something about your time in the usmc. Too many of your brothers have not done their duty ... and we keep getting requests from their families asking for details about their recently passed away marine's time in nam. We keep telling you that it does not have to be all blood and guts... it can be funny, it can be sad, it can be uplifting or it could be a downer. It should be something to share.

Letter from the President

"Don't let anyone tell your story. Pick up a pen and write your own." – Majid Kazmi

2026 MINI-REUNION: It's just six months until we meet and greet in Kansas City. Please join us! There's really nothing like a bunch of US Marine brothers getting together and shooting the \$hit; reliving old times together.

OUR USMC VTA HISTORY PROJECT VIDEOS: For the updated channel numbers, it looks like our videos have a grand total of 524,932 views so far. And the watch time hours are now over 106,700 hours. Additionally, there are over 1,500 individuals who "subscribe" to the Tankers channel and get notifications every time we post a new video. Tankers videos have been watched in 44 countries and every single US state. The state with the most views is Colorado!

Here are the top 10 all-time viewed videos:

1. Vietnam Tankers–**Ambush on the way to Con Thien 1967–Jon Morrison** (51,540 views)
2. Vietnam Tankers–**Rick Lewis–The M48A3 Patton Tank** (41,195 views)
3. Vietnam Tankers–**Wally Young 2023–Cam Lo River Ambush** (27,699 views)
4. Vietnam Tankers–**Operation Meade River–Randy Roberts** (13,958 views)
5. Vietnam Tankers–**Richard Langley–2015** (12,521 views)
6. Vietnam Tankers–**Operation Buffalo- 2 July 1967-- Greg Martin, Terry Hunter, and Hank Brightwell** (12,217 views)
7. Vietnam Tankers–**Bounty on Marine Tanks–Dan M. Wokaty** (11,939 views)
8. Vietnam Tankers–**Operating with Korean Marines–Wally Young, Lynn Young** (11,838 views)
9. Vietnam Tankers–**Gerry Hearne–2015** (9,418 views)
10. Vietnam Tankers–**ONTOS–Walters and Luli–2015** (9,172 views)

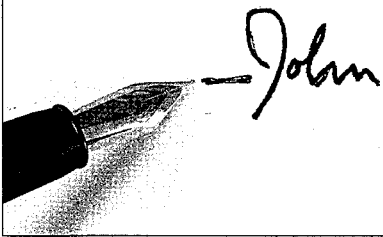
Here are the top 10 videos of the last 2 years:

1. Vietnam Tankers–**Wally Young 2023–Cam Lo River Ambush** (27,699 views)
2. Vietnam Tankers–**Rick Lewis–The M48A3 Patton Tank** (15,034 views)
3. Vietnam Tankers–**Ambush on the way to Con Thien 1967–Jon Morrison** (6,864 views)
4. Vietnam Tankers–**Richard Langley–2015** (6,297 views)
5. Vietnam Tankers–**Wally Young–2021** (4,778 views)
6. Vietnam Tankers–**Jan and James Wendling** (4,433 views)
7. Vietnam Tankers–**Greg Martin 2023** (3,755 views)
8. Vietnam Tankers–**Robert Bob Haller 2023** (3,708 views)
9. Vietnam Tankers–**Ken Gancy 2023** (3,283 views)
10. Vietnam Tankers–**Gerry Hearne–2019** (3,256 views)

TIME: I was driving down the road the other day, and I thought how quickly time passes. And how unfortunately it seems to pass even quicker as we got older. The years seem almost like months. The months almost seem like weeks... etc. I guess that the old saying is true: "Life is like a toilet paper roll: The closer to the end, the faster it goes."

THANK YOU! – I want to take a minute (or more) and cite a VTA member who does one heck of a great job proofreading every issue of our magazine. **Craig Newberry** is one heck of an eagle eyed Marine. I am not aware of many, if any, problems that we've had since he took over the job.

"It is sad when someone you know becomes someone you knew." – Henry Rollins



—John

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

4904 Mt. Hay Dr, San Diego, CA 92117-4820
858.735.1772 Email: ricklent@aol.com

MSgt Bruce Van Apeldoorn, USMC (Ret.) Treasurer

99 Shoreline Drive, New Bern, NC 28562-9550
585.613.6564 Email: bvanapeldoornsr@gmail.com

Ronald C. Knight, Secretary

6665 Burnt Hickory Drive, Hoschton, GA 30548
678.828.7197 Email: rckusmcvta@att.net

Directors

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

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

Fred Kellogg

15013 NE 16th St.; Vancouver, WA 98684-3605
360.609.3404 Email: kelloggfr@comcast.net

Greg Martin

21420 N Verde Ridge Drive, Sun City West, AZ 85375
Phone: (360) 480-1206 Email: 1811tanker@gmail.com

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

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

Jim Raasch

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

Louis Najfus

3255 Town Manor Circle, Deluca, GA 30019
Phone: 678-779-3255 Email: najfus@hotmail.com

Membership Information Change

Don Bell

11266 Evergreen Loop
Temescal Valley, CA 92883
Email: donbell2@yahoo.com

Ray Byrnes

5050 Long Pier Lane-Apt103
Raleigh, NC 27610

Robert Haller

8 Harmony Way
Newtown, PA18940

Greg Martin

Email: 1811tanker@gmail.com

Terry Summerlot

123 W Woodland Drive
Pendleton IN, 46064

Paulette O West

(Widow of Charles West)
Email: paulettewest@icloud.com

William "JJ" Carroll

Phone: 651.440.9924

Committees & Chairmen

SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll

Nominating Chair & CRCS/CR
Representative
Phone: 651.440.9924

Bruce Van Apeldoorn

Audit & Finance
Phone 585.613.6564 EST

Joe Liu

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund
Phone 801.643.4027
Email: pjliu@hotmail.com

1st Sgt. Rick Lewis

VA Information VTA History Project
Phone 858.735.1772 PST

Louis Najfus

Ontos Marines
Phone: 678-779-3255

Greg Martin

Webmaster National Recruiter
Phone (360) 480-1206 PST
Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Open

Fallen Heroes

Garry Hall

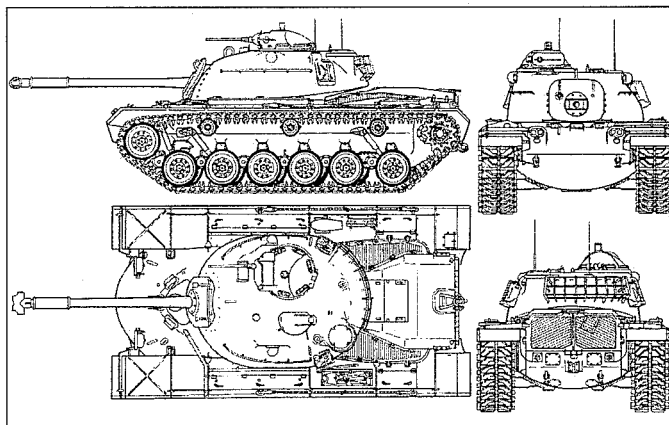
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Ron Knight

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ON THE COVER: The M-48 "Patton" Medium Gun Tank

Web Site: www.usmcvta.org

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

Proof reading – Craig Newberry

Tuyen Pham – Layout and Design

Printed in the USA

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

Sorry, we missed a few "Over & Above" donations for 2025

We send the next issue of the magazine to the Art Department and then to the printer starting about two months before it arrives in your mailbox. Donations received in November and December:

Ed Bennett	Rick Lewis
Carolyn Colucci	David Owen
Richard Coulter	Frank Remkewicz
Kenneth Dahl	George Schlieben
David Danner	Jerry Wahl
Buster Diggs	Stan Williams
Greg Kelley	

Remembering Roger Kropke

Stan Williams writes: Once in a while you will meet someone who immediately becomes a great friend. When that friend happens to be a fellow Marine the friendship means even more. This is the friendship and camaraderie that I had with Roger Kropke. I was stationed with Roger in 1967 at Quantico, VA with Track Vehicle of Schools Battalion. One of our main missions or duties was putting on live demonstrations for VIP'S from foreign countries such as diplomats, officers and also the Boy Scouts, Eagle Scouts etc. These were live demonstrations with tanks firing blanks and driving full speed toward the full bleachers in order to show the audience what shocking power is. We did a neutral steer at a safe distance and drove away from the bleachers. Believe me our spectators in the bleachers came out of their seats. We also had Infantry and propeller driven planes simulating dropping napalm that was actually gasoline that was set off in a trench. It was quite real. Roger and I enjoyed putting on the Combat Demonstrations almost as much as we enjoyed our weekends in D.C. on liberty together.

Roger and his wife Elle visited my wife and me this past year on their way through La Grande, OR as they were on their way to the Washington coast. Roger, you will never be forgotten. Rest in peace brother. Semper FI Buddy. Sgt Stanley J Williams.

Sgt Roger Kropke went to the Big Tank Park in the Sky on April 13, 2025.

USMC VTA History Project Video Interview Update

Clayton Price, our videographer, writes:

- Your YouTube channel got 4,884 views in the last 28 days (1,300+ watch hours)
- Your channel has gotten 537,175 views so far (109,600+ watch hours)

- 1,495 people subscribe to the channel to get notified of new videos.

- 90% of your audience is age 45+

- Your videos have been watched in over 40 countries and in every single state.

Good-bye from Gary McDaniel

I've been meaning to let you know that I will not be renewing my VTA membership this year, so you can save postage on the "Sponson Box". Nearly all, if not all of my platoon at PI have gone. And I tend to be a no-goer...stay-at-home, stick-in-the-mud type, going only to a few candle shoots at the camp or to pick up chicken feed or cattle feed. I think I am one of the last \$78.00 a month critters left. When the do-gooder/feel-gooder type tell me "Thanks for your service", I reply "Don't thank me for my service, I learned to kill people for \$78.00 a month; You can't get that type of training nowadays!"

If you get over toward Montgomery, Alabama, give me a call, or stop by. Best Wishes for a nice Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

Steve Minetto's Brother

Thanks again for sending your article about our visit this summer—so kind of you. I have sent a copy of it to my family and they all enjoyed it very much. All of the kids have commented how much they enjoyed our visit and it really helped them feel a connection to an uncle they have never met. It also helped me feel some "closure" (if that is the right word and makes some sense).

Thank you also for the photo of my brother's name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I finally did have the opportunity last February to visit the Memorial in person when I visited Katelin and her family in Virginia. My parents had both been to Washington to see it. Dad actually went on an Honor Flight with his cousin back to DC; they both served in the Navy during WWII.

My visit to the Memorial in person was, to say the least, very moving on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level. Even after all these years I felt very close to my brother there, much the same way when I have visited his burial place, which I don't get to do very often now. I suppose once my mom passes, I will rarely get back to Reno (she will be 98 at the end of this month.)

Last Sunday, January 11 was actually Bobby's 79th birthday. Hasn't been many days that go by that I have not thought of him.

Meeting you was such a great blessing and comfort for me. Thank you for taking the time. I am so glad Katelin >>

followed her feelings and reached out to you and glad you responded—it has meant a lot to me and my family.

I hope to be able to visit with you again sometime (although I don't know when that will be given my current circumstances). In the meantime, best wishes for continued good health, happiness and success in all you do.

Your magazine leaves all the others in the dust

Tom Howe writes: I have an article to write for the Sponson Box but thought I would send some photos first with an article to follow in the next week or two, triggered by articles seen in the most recent Publication, January 2026.

The VTA magazine leaves all the others in the dust. Thank You and your staff for all you do to keep the memories alive.

Donation

Marsha Falk writes: I am Steve Falk's widow and have been receiving the Sponson Box as a gift since my husband passed away several years ago. Therefore, I am happy to send

you this donation in order to have the magazine continue. Especially since you all put in so much hard work to make it happen. The magazine brings me close to my husband, Steve and to all of you who served in Vietnam.

A Good Deed

Carl Hokanson writes: A few weeks ago, when I got my copy of the Sponson Box. I noticed that another magazine was stuck inside of mine. Upon seeing that it was a lady in Connecticut, I put it in an envelope and mailed it to her with a note of what had taken place. On Jan 21, I received the below thank you note:

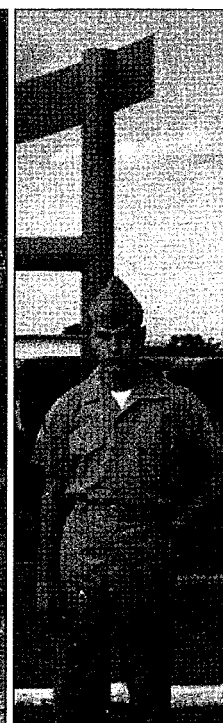
Thank you so much for sending my copy of the Sponson Box to me. I do love reading the stories of all of you Marine heroes! Reminders of the "Old Days" can be difficult at best. But more rewarding than anything knowing what all of you did for our country. My husband would be proud that I am an Associate Member of the VTA. I know that the VTA and the USMC are an amazing brotherhood. Pat Simpson.

The Old Guard

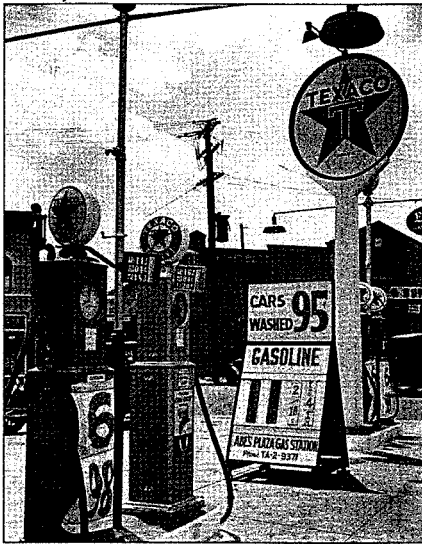
Bill "JJ" Carroll writes: I have attached a picture of me when I was a PFC and a Brig Guard in Okinawa. I am in the third row back second one from the right. Everyone in the picture was a grunt except me and another tanker.



CAMP BUTLER BRIG GUARDS
OCTOBER 1966



Here is another picture of me at the Camp Butler Brig. This was 59 years ago. Notice the cotton khaki uniform.



A FAMILY LOADING \$10 WORTH OF
GROCERIES INTO THEIR
\$1,000 CAR BEFORE HEADING TO
THEIR \$12,000
HOME IN 1950S

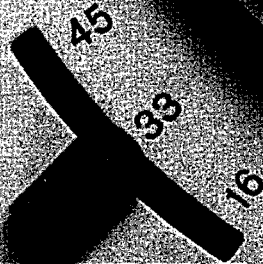
MILITARY FRIENDSHIPS ARE
ORDINARILY BASED ON
CERTAIN FOUNDATIONS



ALCOHOL.
- A SARCASTIC AND DEPRAVED
ABILITY TO LAUGH AT ANYTHING
AND EVERYTHING.
- COMMON EXPERIENCES OF HIGH
ADRENALINE SITUATIONS.
- A DISLIKE OF SUPERFICIAL PEOPLE.
- THE ABILITY TO MEET AGAIN
AFTER YEARS APART, HAVING HAD
NO CONTACT, AND CARRY ON
EXACTLY WHERE YOU LEFT OFF.

.....LOYALTY.

IF YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS



YOU ARE AS OLD AS DIRT!

THE MINETTO FAMILY TRUST
MRS. JUNE V MINETTO TTEE.
STEVEN L MINETTO TTEE.

88-0971212

206

15 Jan 1986

USMC Vietnam Tankers Assoc \$250⁰⁰
Two hundred Fifty and 00/100



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Westlake, TX

Scherish Bank Investor Checking

Steve L Minetto

For

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ON 1965 CHEVROLET TRUCKS

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reflectors,
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CHAIN RACKS-4 Speed Trans-
mission-Deluxe Fresh Air
Heater and Dual Defroster Unit
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mercial 700 S Ply Tires-Plus
many other desirable Chevrolet
Truck Options-Specially pro-
ced, this weekend only at.....



Robert Neil "Bobby" Minetto
CPL CO A 3 Tank BN 3 Mar Div
who was KIA in Vietnam on May 9, 1968
In our hearts always!

To all those who made the ultimate
sacrifice and to those who continue
today to serve.

The Minetto Family

To the Great Beyond

"Our dead are
until we have forgot"

Francis Arlin "Fran" Kopf 1947-2022



Francis A. "Fran" Kopf, age 75, of Stoughton, passed away on Friday, Oct. 28, 2022, at St. Mary's Hospital, from Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS/AML). He was born on June 18, 1947, in Baraboo, the son of Raymond and Josephine (Schara) Kopf. After graduating

from Baraboo High School in 1965, Fran enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1966 and served in Vietnam until 1968. He was a tank commander for Bravo Co, 1st Tank Battalion. Fran married the love of his life, Billi Patten, in April of 1969. Together they had two children, Bobbi and Rick. After completion of a carpenter apprenticeship, Fran worked for Anthony Grignano Company, CCI, and finally, Tri North Builders of Madison, retiring in 2005. He was an active member of the USMC VTA.

Rene Cerda writes: I found the below obituary for "Buzz" Conklin who is mentioned in the article "Birthday Brawl: Tankers Hold the Line at Khe Sanh" that was featured in the latest issue of the Sponson Box. Buzz is listed as Adrian "Buzz" Conklin, but as you can see his name was Arden. I do not know who provided that name for Buzz, but it's probably what they recalled his first name was. I didn't even remember his first name I just remembered him as "Buzz." He was not a member of USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, but I thought you can include it in a future Sponson Box magazine.



Arden M. "Buzz" Conklin, Jr. 1947- 2025

Arden M. "Buzz" Conklin, Jr., age 78, of Dayton, Ohio, passed away August 29, 2025. He was born January 7, 1947 in Ventura, CA to the late Arden and Nikki Conklin. In addition to his parents, Buzz

was preceded in death by his son, Joshua Ruple; and brothers: Fred Conklin and Leonard Conklin. Buzz was a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps., where he honorably served his country as a tank crewman and received the Purple Heart for his heroic actions in the Vietnam War. He was an avid outdoors man who loved nature, fishing and animals.

Thomas F. Snyder 1945 - 2025



Thomas F. Snyder, 80, of Bushkill Twp., passed away peacefully on Monday, December 22, 2025 at Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. He was the beloved husband of Becky S. Snyder (Baltz) to whom he was married to for 59 years. Born in Easton, Thomas was a son of the late Henry and Helen Snyder (Werkheiser).

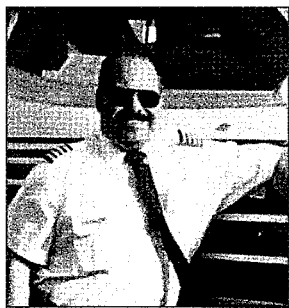
Park in the Sky
"ever dead to us,
them." – George Elliot

Tom was an avid hunter and fisherman who found joy in the outdoors and music alike, especially while playing the keyboard. A proud graduate of Wilson Area High School, Class of 1963, he went on to serve his country with honor in the United States Marine Corps and remained a dedicated member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. He was a member of the Free and Accepted Masons and the Teamsters Union, and was active in the Belfast Rod & Gun Club. His love for conservation and wildlife led him to serve part-time as a Pennsylvania Deputy Game Warden. He was also a faithful member of St. John's UCC, Nazareth.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be offered to USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, c/o John Wear-16605 Forest Green Terrace Elbert, Colorado 80106.



William Keith Kimball



William Keith Kimball passed away at Fairfax INOVA Hospital in Falls Church, Virginia on Thursday, April 28, 2016. Born at Nazareth Hospital in Philadelphia, William was the son of the late William M. and Gloria Salerno Kimball.

William and his wife have been residents of Herndon, Virginia since 1985. He was a Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, having enlisted and served tours of duty as a tank commander in Vietnam. After returning to the United States, William graduated from Clarion College in Clarion, Pennsylvania with a double Master's degree. He went on to work in the aviation industry as a

medivac pilot, corporate jet pilot, and flight instructor. William retired from the aviation industry to become the proprietor of Piper Hobby in Chantilly, Virginia. Unfortunately, Bill never found the VTA or became a member.

NOTE: My name is Shon Stephens. I served in the Marines from 1994–1998 as a 4034 (data dink) but after my active-duty service, I made friends with a fellow Marine who had served as a tank commander during Vietnam. His name was William (Bill) Keith Kimball from PA. Bill passed away back in 2016, too soon for many of us who knew him. If any member of the VTA knew Bill, I'd love to know what they know. Please contact John Wear (Phone: 719.495.5998). ■

Your Attention Please!

We would greatly appreciate it that if you recognize a name in the obits that you, please send us an email note or give us a phone call telling us about the recently departed Marine. Anything that you recall might be posted so that others will know that he is remembered by others... plus we will have another record of his memory.

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

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



Last Issue Winner was

Last issue's winner was Sgt Maj Bill "JJ" Carroll who called at 5:20 PM on Wednesday, January 14, 2026 to identify Gene Whitehead.

JJ added that he and Gene had served together in Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks.



If you feel that you have a photo that may stump the readership, please take a photo of it with your smartphone in ambient light and send it on email to johnwear2@verizon.net

Looking For...

Neil Conner, Platoon Leader, 2nd Platoon, C Co, 1/26 who was with BLT 26 and whose platoon was accompanied by tanks from 1st Platoon, A Co, 5th Tanks on September 15 – 23, 1966 on Operation Deckhouse IV is now looking for any tank crewmen who were on any of the accompanying tanks. Neil found that one of the crewmen that was KIA during an ambush on Sept 24 was a driver named **LCpl Estill Lee Childers**. If you knew Childers, please either contact Neil or John Wear.

Neil Conner
406 Henry Drive
Woodstock, VA 22664
Phone: 540-333-8077
Email: marine@shentel.net

Neil writes: The operation took place NW of Dong Ha, in the Gia Linh District, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam. The tank / infantry operation included 1st Platoon, Co. A, 1st Tank Battalion (4 or 5 tanks) and Co's B, C, and D, 1/26, part of Battalion Landing Team 1/26. The Team had 3 ships, a Landing ship Helicopter, the USS Iwo Jima, two Landing ship docks, the USS Vancouver, and USS Thomaston.

The infantry men loved the tanks for their firepower and willingness to carry extra water, food and ammo. A case of bandoleers was a luxury to my 2nd Platoon. The tankers appreciated our ability to see and destroy enemy RPG teams.

There were days of moving NW to assault the village of An Dinh held by the NVA (North Vietnamese Army). The assault reminded me of tank/infantry assaults in WWII Normandy against hedgerows. We had stands of bamboo fence lines with a trench behind them. The tanks with their 50 calibers were a huge help. They would advance and fire their 50 caliber machineguns in an arch. One tank was hit by an RPG rocket. One of my marines shot and killed an enemy soldier preparing to fire at a Marine tank. After this assault, a flame tank hit a mine and the crew worked all night to restore mobility. I have a picture of this tank repair.

During this same operation on 9/24/66, my 2nd platoon and the 3rd Platoon of Company C, 1/26, were riding/escorting a tank column back to Dong Ha. The armored column consisted of 1st Platoon, A Co, 1st Tank BN (5 tanks) and 1st Platoon A Co, 5th Tank BN (4 tanks) and 2 amphibious tractors (amtracs). I was half dozing when the column came under attack. The column of 9 tanks and 2 amtracks were on an incline with several trails cutting through head-high brush. Luckily, we took an unexpected trail which diminished the effect of the ambush. I immediately got off the tank and started organizing a perimeter defense on the left



Deckhouse IV Tank / Infantry Operation
Sept 15 1966 - Sept 24 1966

side of the rear half of the column. The tanks were firing into a ravine on their right side. A spotter plane (Bird Dog) arrived and at first didn't see any enemy soldiers. Moving to the rear of the column I encountered a sergeant from an attached machine gun squad and he was incoherent, very frightened, so I left him with a member of my platoon and went back down the trail. One of my squads was missing with Sgt. Jones, the platoon sergeant. A Lt. from the tank company, my radio man, and I continued down the trail. We saw 2 NVA in a foxhole and shot them. One was wearing a Marine cap, and I thought we had killed a Marine, but they were NVA and they had an AK-47 and a Chicom automatic rifle. Continuing down the trail approximately 100 yards, we came upon my squad; they were in a bad way. Out of 12 men, everyone was a casualty. Pfc. Martin and Davis were KIA, Sgt. Jones, Cpl. Johnson, Pfc. Jazinski, and 7 others were WIA. Cpl. Johnson had moved from man to man collecting grenades and ammo. Many squad members felt they owed their survival to his efforts. Later, I recommended Cpl. Johnson for the Silver Star.

The tank lieutenant went back to the column to get a tank to haul the dead and wounded to the center of the column where corpsmen could stabilize the wounded for evacuation. I remained at the end of the column to organize a tight perimeter defense and found a casualty from the attached weapons squad and sent him forward for evacuation.

I asked the 3rd Platoon leader to take command of the Marine detachment and call a Medivac. The Bird

(Continued on page 15)

Special Stories

I am Jeni Clock, the widow of longtime VTA member, Darrell Clock. Darrell and Tom Dorton were good friends and classmates for over 12 years. They were drafted at the same time but Tom went into the Army and they both served in Vietnam. Darrell passed away in 2018 and Tom in 2020. I miss my husband every day. Tom's widow and my good friend, Barbara Dorton, wrote this poem and read it during a church service for Veterans Day. I asked her if I might send it for the Sponson Box and she and I both thought that the VTA membership and their wives might enjoy reading it.

I AM THE WIDOW OF A VETERAN

by

Barbara Dorton

I am the widow of a man who served his country with pride.
One who vowed to protect his country and obey his
Commander in Chief no matter the cost.
A man passionate about his belief in God and country.
A true patriot looking out for fellow man.
A man that sacrificed his life so that others could remain free and
to protect Americans' rights.
Those same inalienable rights that some take for granted and abuse.

I am the widow of a veteran overcome with health issues due to his
service in a country 7000 miles away.
A country where terrain, culture, way of life and language was different.
This man fought an enemy that could be your friend one minute and kill you the next.
Over 58,000 young men lost their lives in that conflict.

I am the widow of a veteran who received the
folded flag that draped his coffin.
I stood by as a volley of fire followed by the playing of Taps
paid tribute to his service and sacrifice to this country.

I am the widow of a veteran who loved God, family
friends, community and country.
This is a title I never dreamed would be given me at this stage of my life.

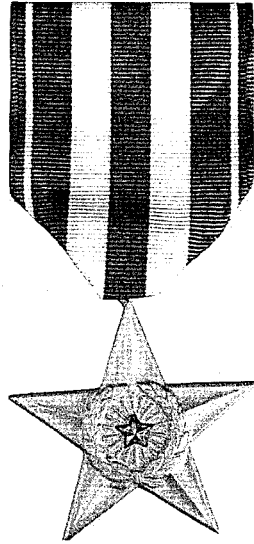
I am the widow of a veteran whose heart is broken by the acts of
Individuals that betray everything my husband fought to preserve.
May we never forget the service and sacrifice of every veteran
and those still serving.

At one time I was the wife of a veteran.
An honor bestowed upon me when wedding vows were exchanged;
Promising a life-long commitment, to one who served.

Today. . .
I am very proud to say
I AM THE WIDOW OF A VETERAN!

Joseph Clinton Brown

DATE OF BIRTH: March 14, 1946
HOME OF RECORD: Pasadena, Maryland



Silver Star

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War

Service: US Marine Corps

Rank: Corporal

Unit: B Co. 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION: The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Corporal Joseph C. Brown, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with Company B, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 30 July 1966. Corporal Brown was serving as the driver of one of two tanks assigned to support elements of Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, on outpost duty at Bao Tran on the song Thu Bon River near Da Nang. At 0445 on 30 July 1966, while he was standing turret watch on his tank, one Viet Cong opened a vicious assault on the defensive positions, preceded by intense anti-tank, grenade and heavy automatic weapons fire and Corporal Brown immediately engaged the enemy. When another crewman, while boarding the tank, was critically wounded by an enemy anti-tank rocket which partially severed his left arm and inflicted severe abdominal wounds, Corporal Brown unhesitatingly dismounted during the unabating barrage, aided his comrade to a secure position, and applied a tourniquet to the remains of his arm. Displaying a continued disregard for his own personal safety, he re-mounted his vehicle, procured a morphine syrette and again dismounted to aid his fellow Marine by easing the pain of the wound. When a Corpsman reached the site of the wounded Marine, Corporal Brown again braved lethal fire, resumed his battle position, and assisted in repelling the attack which annihilated the majority of the enemy force of twenty communist insurgents. Subsequent investigation disclosed that his comrade's left arm required amputation, and that Corporal Brown's timely and efficient actions undoubtedly prevented the death of that Marine. His marked courage, daring initiative and selfless efforts in behalf of another were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country. ■

What Members Are Doing



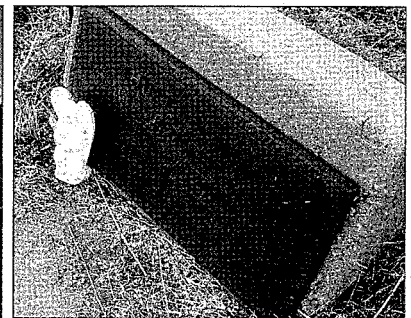
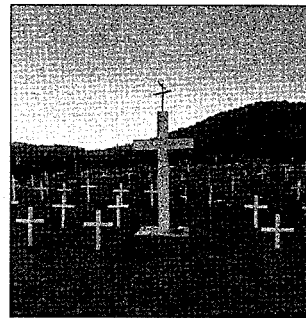
Joe Liu writes: My granddaughter, Amanda, took a bunch of my VTA reunion t-shirts and created this stunning quilt and presented it to me on Veterans Day.



Ron Knight writes: Chris and I became first time grandparents at 3:10am Thanksgiving Day! Baby Emerson Christine Oakey, Daughter MaryBeth and son-in-law John are doing great. Chris and I are over the moon.



Carl Hokensen writes: Today I drove down to Philadelphia and presented a model of the M103A2 tank (aka the "Ramp Queen") to Marine Kevin Flynn who served with her in the 60's as a tank maintenance officer.



John Hunter writes: I went out to the cemetery where TJ Siva is buried this past October. Everything was pretty much the same as it was on my last visit. It looked like they did some maintenance on the crosses and cut the grass. For anyone concerned about where TJ is buried, they should rest easy. As I wrote in my last article he is buried at the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation. It is the largest reservation in San Diego County, 25,000 acres, mostly rolling hills and oak trees. It is surrounded by mountains the whole area is very beautiful. I saw a mule deer standing in the middle of the road as I approached the entrance gate. The gate is always unmanned as I get there at o-dark-thirty. According to the information I have found there are less than 300 full time residents in the area, so there is plenty of elbow room. The reservation is located next to Warner Springs, CA, which is 41 miles from Valley Center where I live. Warner Springs is real country, and Valley Center is semi country, not a lot of shopping in either place, so Escondido is the closest good shopping area. If anyone is looking for a place to stay, there are 2 Indian casinos in Valley Center, Valley View Casino, and Rincon Casino, one on Valley Center Rd. and the other about 1/4 of a mile off VC Rd.



Ron Dudek and his lovely wife, Minh Thu at the 2025 MC Ball



Jim Cowman
Joe Bolton
Doug Chamberlain

Rita J Lowell
Photography

Jim Cowman (left) helps celebrate the US Marine Corps' 250 years at the Wyoming state capitol. For those who attended the 2023 VTA reunion in Colorado Springs, the gentleman on the right is Doug Chamberlain, who was our Guest Speaker. ■

Looking For

(Continued from page 11)

Dog reported that he felt there were a lot of NVA in the area and asked if I wanted fixed-wing aircraft. I made the request and for the next few minutes, the firing got quieter. I thought I had made a mistake in requesting the aircraft.

Medivac helicopters came in and one KIA was left with the column. He was transported in an amphibian tank, which worked, but my company commander blamed me for his not being medevaced by the helicopter.

The Bird Dog reported a company-sized NVA unit running up the road toward us when his plane was hit by ground fire. I could see smoke coming from his plane and he left abruptly, promising a replacement. We needed to leave immediately, but a tank had thrown a tread off its track and an engineer used C4 to blow it apart so it could be towed by another tank. It took three tries to break the tread. Later, we started to move the column and the Bird Dog reported a direct hit on the enemy company with napalm. We got into Dong Ha later that night with no more incidents.

I later learned that the second tank and the last tank

in the column had been hit by RPG rockets and both drivers had been injured. The tanks ran forward out of control until they hit another tank. This explained how my squad got left so far behind, since they jumped off when the rocket hit. It had been a hard day, and someone stole the AK47 that I picked up from the NVA foxhole.

I wrote up reports for two of my Marines, recommending Silver Star awards. My company commander disputed the award for Cpl. Johnson and indicated there were too many requests for awards for the operation, and I should not expect any consideration for a citation if I insisted on Cpl. Johnson's recommendation.

The outcome of this operation has haunted me over the years since my tour in Viet Nam. I am hoping to locate any tanker that survived this operation during the Viet Nam war to confirm my memories and gain a greater degree of closure.

Editor's Note: If you have a reply for Lt. Conner, please go ahead and give him a call. Please also let John Wear know so we can include your reply in our magazine. OK? ■

This story ran in our #2 – 2016 issue and we felt that it rated repeating.

Remembering Max

BY LT COL JUSTIN "JERRY" MARTIN, USMC (RET)

Over the past 42 years, I have been asked many times, "How can you be so close to guys you served with for only a year of your life?" For all combat veterans, I imagine the response is similar: "Unless you were there, you wouldn't understand."

For United States Marines, the term "brotherhood" means more than just the men you served with – it has a meaning that is defined by a legacy of our 230 years of service to our nation.

"Brotherhood" evolved into a code of conduct and commitment to each other, mostly unwritten and unspoken, but ingrained in every recruit and officer candidate from their first day of training. It is sealed in the hardships endured by every generation of Marines that has come before and is expected of every generation that comes after. It is the basis for the silent bond that exists between all Marines.

I was inducted into that Brotherhood in the fall of 1967 and would meet the "brothers" with whom I would share the most memorable year of my life in May 1968. I was introduced as the new lieutenant and second platoon commander, and this was sufficient for acceptance into my new family. Two of us were joining the platoon as replacements that day: me and PFC Muriel Stanley Groomes – "Max," as he preferred to be called.

Our platoon and their rifle company had only days before been battered by a numerically superior North Vietnamese infantry regiment for 48 hours of vicious assaults reminiscent of WW2 and Korean War battles. A total of 57 Marines were killed or wounded in what became known as the battle for Foxtrot Ridge in the Khe Sahn area of I Corps Republic of South

Vietnam. It was into this Brotherhood of survivors that Max Groomes and I were thrust for our tour in-country.

Besides being new guys in the platoon, Max and I both came from the same area of the country: Max from Hampstead, MD and Me from Manassas, VA.

There was only three years difference in our ages – he was 19 and I was 22 – yet he referred to me respectfully as "Lieutenant" or "The Old Man" (with a smile) when I later became the company commander. I referred to him and "Little Brother" because our interpreter had told me that the Vietnamese word for enlisted man was "ahn em," which means "little brother." It was appropriate; I was the big brother responsible for taking care of and watching out for him and my other men.

However, Max was not a typical Marine. He was small in frame and, others later said, too kind and gentle in nature to be in combat.

My recollections of Max are of a Marine who was always willing to do more than what was expected of him. On patrol, even when suffering from both malaria and active dysentery, he willingly shouldered another Marine's heavy machine gun when that Marine complained of not being able to make it. Max willingly shared the contents of his packages from home and gave away his rations of beer and cigarettes. He often volunteered to carry the platoon radio when others balked at the task, even though he realized this made him more of an enemy target than his job as rifleman did. He was selfless in nature, always willing to do his job without complaining and usually with a shy smile. Seldom did he speak of home

except an occasional mention of older brothers, a fondness for Maryland seafood and a desire to get back to "the world," our slang term for the United States.

He was the quietest member of our small portion of the Brotherhood. There was no pretense of false bravado about him. Max listened more than he talked. His actions were more memorable than his conversations. He was just a damn good Marine.

As a combat leader, I learned to steel my emotions to the news of casualties in our unit. However, shortly after I left the rifle company and was awaiting reassignment, I was notified that one of my men had been killed in action. I ran to the landing zone to check on the casualties evacuated to the battalion aid station, and there was Max, his shattered remains wrapped in a poncho and guarded by the sergeant who had been wounded with him.

Both men had absorbed the blast of a command detonated claymore mine. One Marine had lived; the other had died. Max had volunteered to carry the radio that day. Typical of Max, he had helped someone else and then made the ultimate sacrifice.

Muriel Stanley Groomes is an unsung American patriot. His name is but one of many listed on what Vietnam veterans call our "hallowed ground" – the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. His service and sacrifice are anonymous, except for the posthumous Purple Heart awarded in his memory to his next of kin. His courage and life are remembered only by those who knew him. His death was not heroic, but was selfless, like Max himself.

Max Groomes represents just one of the thousands who stand in

silent witness to the devotion to duty displayed by a generation of Americans. When those who knew him are gone, who will speak for him? I hope that, in my lifetime, a Vietnam

Veterans Memorial Education Center will be built to honor those like Lance Cpl. Muriel Stanley Groomes. Semper Fidelis, Max.

Reprinted with permission of:

Scruggs, Jan C, *Dreams Unfulfilled: Stories of the Men and Women on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Washington, DC: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. 2010

A Dead Horse

SUBMITTED BY RICK BEIRNE

The tribal wisdom of the Dakota Indians, passed down from generation to generation, says that when riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount. In modern government, however, a whole range of supposedly far more advanced strategies are often employed, such as:

1. Buying a stronger whip.
2. Changing riders.
3. Threatening the horse with termination.
4. Appointing a committee to study the problem.
5. Arranging to visit other countries

to see how others ride dead horses.

6. Lowering the standards for dead horses so that it can be included.

7. Reclassifying the horse as "living impaired".

8. Hiring outside contractors to ride the dead horse.

9. Harnessing several dead horses together to increase their overall speed.

10. Providing additional funding and/or training to increase the dead horse's performance.

11. Doing a productivity study to see if lighter riders would improve the dead horse's performance.

12. Declaring that a dead horse does not have to be fed; it is less costly, carries the lowest overhead, therefore contributing substantial savings to the bottom line of the economy than do some other horses.

13. Re-writing the expected performance standards for horses.

14. Promoting the dead horse to a supervisory position

In looking back some 30 to 40 years, it is easy to see evidence of attempts of all or most of these strategies by the Federal government.

The Wounds We Carry

BY ROGER HALLE

In 1986, I had assumed the Lord wanted to do something in Vietnam. But he had other plans, Luke wanting me to experience His healing before I ever set foot back in that country.

It was Veterans Day weekend, 1986. I was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to speak at a church to honor those who served and to share the story of God's grace and healing in my life due to the trauma of war. I was also scheduled to appear on a major TV network in town.

The network put me up in a very nice hotel in downtown Milwaukee. Breakfast was included, so I picked up a copy of the Chicago Tribune outside my door and went to the restaurant. Back then, you dressed up for things like that. I wore a suit, so I felt comfortable in the business crowd in the restaurant. I sat down, ordered breakfast, and sipped my coffee as I looked through the Veterans Day supplement to the paper.

On the front page was a letter left

at "The Wall," the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC. It was written by a 26-year-old young woman to her father. He died in Vietnam when she was six years old. As I began to read, a surge of emotions suddenly rose up, and I felt like I was going to start weeping. I put the paper down and picked up my coffee, casually looking around to see if anyone noticed. I picked the paper back up but felt the tears gathering, so I put it down again.

I managed to keep control during the TV interview, but when I returned to my room, I got down on my knees and prayed, "Lord, what is going on?" I heard the "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit say, "Son, I want to take away the guilt you've carried all these years because you came home and your friends did not." But the pain was too much, so I did what I had apparently always done: stuffed everything back down inside.

A year went by, and after nearly 14 years of trying to go back to Vietnam,

an opportunity opened up with a new ministry of Christian Vietnam veterans called Vets With a Mission. This group was taking a fact-finding trip to see how Christian veterans could minister to the people of Vietnam. When I received the itinerary, I realized we were going through the village where my whole squad died in an ambush, but I survived. I still carried the guilt 23 years later.

In December at a Teen Challenge retreat, my staff said they wanted to pray for me before the trip. I began to tell them about how I felt the Lord wanted to do something on this trip, and about my going back to the place where I survived but my friends did not. As I tried to say the words, however, a flood of emotions swept over me and I began to weep ... and weep ... and weep. Afterwards, I knew a huge weight had lifted off of me.

I had assumed the Lord wanted to do something in Vietnam. He had other plans. God wanted me to >>

experience His healing before I ever set foot back in the country where my life had been radically changed. My Heavenly Father knew I needed His healing before I left.

When I became a Christian 14 years earlier, the nightmares I carried were gone. The bondage of alcohol addiction was also gone. I thought Vietnam was behind me. Scripture

says, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14)

I don't know why there were so many years in between the healing of my emotional wounds. Obviously, God knew I was going to need it before I went back to Vietnam. Even then, I was afraid to let go and trust His love for me and the freedom He had for me.

If you're going through life with

wounds from your past, you don't have to keep the pain inside. You can find healing in the arms of your Heavenly Father. Jesus said it best: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

It's time to let go and let God!

Semper Fidelis

What Comes Around – Goes Around

BY JOHN WEAR

3rd Tanks, RVN 1968-1969

In the early part of 1967, I was enrolled in the basic Tank Crewmen School at Del Mar. After each "section" every student filled out a personal evaluation of the course and the instructors. When we came to tank gunnery, the instructor was a buck sergeant named Woodard. He did not have the best command of the English language and unfortunately his classroom skills were quite lacking. You may or may not know that for me between attending military prep school for three years and one year of college prior to enlisting in the USMC, I had been exposed to a lot of different classroom situations... mostly good ones.

With that said, out on the tank gunnery range, Sgt Woodard was amazing. I'd say that at the time and for my limited experience in the USMC, this man was a classic "Field Marine." His gunnery range instruction was wonderful and everyone agreed that we learned far more at the tank gunnery range than we had inside of the classroom.

When the school's Gunnery Section concluded, we filled out our course evaluation forms and went back to the barracks. The next morning after morning chow at the Camp Del Mar mess hall, we formed up at the barracks and marched to the school house building near the tank ramp. As soon as we came to "Platoon halt!" A loud cry came out of the school building for, "Where's Wear?"

I'd say that at least ten students then all shouted in unison, "Sir, Where's

Wear!" ... and when I raised my hand, someone inside of the building shouted, "Get your ass into the CO's office!"

Bewildered, I double timed into the building.

As I passed by a gauntlet of about a dozen Marines...most of who were either instructors or on staff at the Tank School, they all shouted, "Get your ass moving!" or "Your ass is grass, Wear!" and threatening shit like that.

Bewildered, I entered the Tank School office and the 1st Sgt, said, "Wear? Get your ass into the skipper's office!"

I knocked on the hatch and said, "PFC Wear reporting, Sir!"

"Get in here Wear." He held up a bunch of papers and asked, "Is this your course evaluation?"

I had no idea what he was getting at and I had a quizzical look on my face.



He then bellowed, "Get over here Wear and look at this shit!"

I took a step forward and saw my hand writing on the papers. It was my gunnery course evaluation so I said, "Yes, Sir. That's mine."

"Who the fuck elected you God and let you write this shit about one of my Marine instructors?"

"Sir?"

He continued his berating, "What sort of punk assed son of a bitch writes this shit about one of my instructors?"

"Sir?"

"I am only going to ask this one more time: Did you write all of this untrue shit about Sgt Woodard?"

"Sir. I only told the truth that he is a great field Marine."

He held the evaluation over the trashcan next to his desk and said, "Wear, I am telling you to give me permission to shitcan this."

"Yes, Sir. If that will make matters better."

His last words were, "Get out of here maggot."

"Yes Sir."

I graduate without incident and report to 5th Tanks at Las Flores. I am there over about a year and I went from PFC to Lance Corporal to Corporal.

I thought that I has skated the untenable situation at Tank School until about eighteen months later, when it is 1968 and I was sitting on my rack at the 3rd Tank Bn maintenance facility at Dong Ha in Vietnam. My brand-new flame tank was assigned to

Alfa Co and since Dong Ha was Alfa Co's rear area, my crew was waiting for an assignment or an operation to head out to participate. One day, after morning chow, all of a sudden there is a shout from the tank ramp, "Whose f*ckin' tank is this?"

The entire tent goes on alert as one of the Bn maintenance penguins sticks his head in the tent and says, "Wear, there's a lifer snooping around your tank."

I walk out of the tent followed by about ten other Marines. I see this heavy looking Marine wearing brand new jungle utilities walking around

my tank like he was on an inspection tour. I take about three more steps closer and all of a sudden, I see that it is Sgt Woodard, the Tank School gunnery teacher. Ooops!

He takes one look at me and shouts, "You're Wear, aren't you? Is this your fuckin' tank? Look at those fuckin' leaking final drives? Why are they not repaired? I should write you up for destroying government property?"

I take one look at my tank and say, "That oil is leaking from the Jerry cans on the rear."

He does a double take and then walks off in a huff.

End of story.

Well, not exactly the end. It's now almost two months later and my tank is assigned to 1st Platoon, Alfa Co that is up at Con Thien. The platoon leader is Lt Coan. We are up there for about three months when we get our second or third platoon sergeants assigned to our platoon. It is Sgt Woodard. Thankfully the good lieutenant is not overly "gung-ho" so we don't have a ton of interaction with him and/or with his platoon sergeant. One day, Sgt Woodard is not there anymore. I don't ask and no one seems to know where he disappeared to.

2026

BY CLYDE HOCH

It amazes me that I am here to see 2026. As a young tank commander in Vietnam in 1968 I thought for sure I would never see 1969. I am here I believe because of God's will and only for that reason. I believe it was never about my strength, my intelligence, or my cunning. I believe it was totally God's will. Remember the old saying there are no atheists in a foxhole.

I prayed to God many times a day in Vietnam. I said to God every day in prayer, I know I will never make it home alive from here. Please let me die with dignity and not screaming and crying in pain. I asked God to not

let me do something stupid and get Americans killed.

I have no words to describe how very close I came to death, so many times. It is incomprehensible to me that I am still here.

I am old enough to realize that instead of wishing for more I need to sit back and enjoy God's gifts. Appreciate what you have while you have it. You could lose it all in just seconds. Our needs are met, food, clothing, and shelter. Our desires will never be met because we want everything and usually once we have it, it is not that important in time.

At times I wonder why us old Vietnam veterans are so cautious about our security. How we hate being in crowds of people. Then I think back to remember the destruction we brought to other human beings. I remember the destruction those human beings brought on us. Pure horror fills my mind.

It seems the United States is turning back to God. I feel through God we will all prosper

God Bless our Veterans who could not be home with their families for the holidays and their families.

LEAVING VIETNAM

BY ANTHONY F. MILAVIC, MAJOR, USMC (RET)

10 September 2019

In May 1969, I was standing on the tarmac in Danang, Vietnam with some hundred other Marines waiting to board an airplane to Okinawa. The group was made-up of those who had served in the First and Third Marine Divisions and the First Marine Aircraft Wing. This was to be the first leg of our journey back to the place young Marines called, "The World." Standing there, thoughts ran to: 13 months had passed since we first landed here; 13 months had passed in combat at places

known as Khe Sanh, Dai Do, DMZ, Ashau Valley, Dodge City, Anh Hoa, Arizona Territory, etc.; 13 months had passed anticipating this day, and now we stood silently, cautiously aware that it had arrived. Finally, on order, we shuffled aboard a chartered civilian airliner and took our seats.

Rolling down the runway, the anticipation in the cabin rose with the plane's increasing speed to become airborne. When its wheels freed themselves and us from "Nam," a

spontaneous round of applause broke out followed by a shouted chorus from a popular song of the day:

We gotta get out of this place
If it's the last thing we ever do
We gotta get out of this place
'Cause girl, there's a better life for me and you

Seemingly, everyone started talking to each other and the American stewardesses — especially the American stewardesses. As Okinawa drew ever closer, the excitement >>

grew over what they were going to do when we got there: a hot bath, a girl, get drunk, a girl, a meal on dishes in an air-conditioned restaurant, a girl, use a flush toilet, a girl, sleep in a bed with sheets, a girl, and GIRLS. With months of back pay coming, all wrestled with the decision: What to do first on this island stopover back to "The World"?

It was early evening when we landed at Kadena Air Force Base. Some in our

group immediately mounted waiting ground transportation and sped off to an out-processing location. The rest of us went into the air terminal to wait for a ride to Camp Hansen, Marine Corps Base. After picking up a coke and a sandwich at the snack bar, I wandered about the terminal and then went outside. The cool night air was tranquilizing causing me to pay little attention to the passing time. Suddenly, I sensed that I was alone. Fearing the

buses had come and left without me, I hurried back inside to search for the others on my flight. After several frantic moments, I found them all jammed into the TV lounge. The scene bordered on the poetic: The first thing these Marines did after spending 13 months in the combat environment of Vietnam was to watch an episode of the World War II television series, "Combat" starring Vic Morrow. ■

Lee Aitken's Nam Photos



Lee Aitken with a captured NVA machinegun



Lee Aitken, Bob Bonderud, Leonard Coco fixing mine



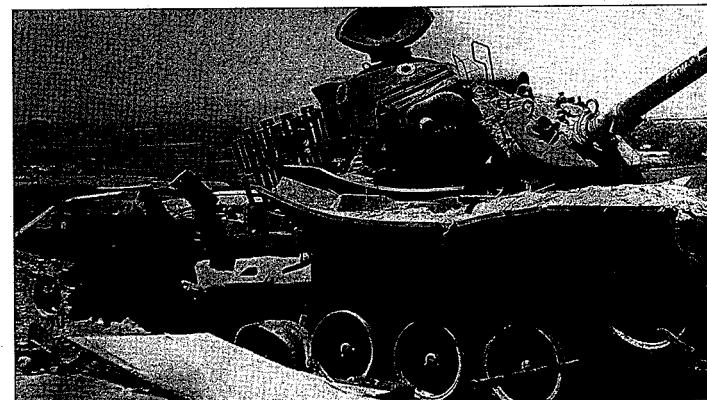
The crew of C-32 and C-33



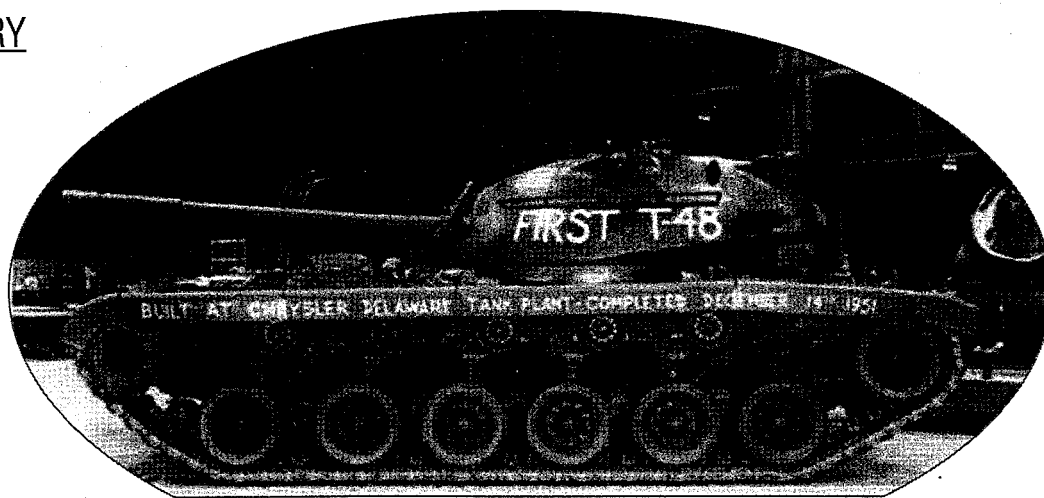
Most of 3rd Platoon, 1st Tanks,



C33



Ran over a bomb?



The very first M-48 off the production line

Designation: M48

Manufacturer: General Dynamics Land Systems—GDLS

Product type: Armored Vehicles

Name: Main battle tank

Development

In October 1950, Detroit Arsenal Tank Plant began design work on a new tank armed with a 90 mm gun and, in December the same year, the Chrysler Corporation was awarded a letter of intent to design the new tank under the designation T48. Design work began in late December and six prototypes were built, the first being completed in December 1951. In March 1951, before the prototypes had been completed, the Fisher Body Division of the General Motors Corporation and the Ford Motor Company at Livonia were both given a production contract for the tank. Chrysler's first production M48 rolled out of the Delaware Tank Plant and was christened by Mrs. George S Patton Junior on 1 July 1952.

The first production M48s were completed in 1952 and production of the M48 series amounted to 11,703 units, about 6,000 of which were built by the Chrysler Corporation at the Delaware Tank Plant which continued production until 1959. Alco Products of Schenectady also built a number of M48A2 tanks.

Many components of the M48

are also used in the M88 ARV as well as the M53 SPG, and further development of the tank resulted in the M60 series, production of which was finally completed at the Detroit Tank Plant in September 1987. Initial production of the M60 MBT was in fact undertaken at the Delaware Tank Plant but in 1959 a decision was taken that all future production would be undertaken at the Detroit Arsenal Tank Plant. The latter facility was run by General Dynamics Land Systems but this has now been closed down.

Description (M48A3)

The cast hull of the M48 is boat-shaped with additional sections welded into position. A hull escape hatch is provided in the floor of the tank. The turret is a one-piece casting.

The driver is seated at the front of the hull in the center and is provided with a single-piece hatch cover that opens to the right, forward of which are three M27 periscopes. For driving at night, an M24 infrared periscope is placed in the turntable located in the driver's hatch.

The other three crew members are in the turret with the commander and gunner on the right and the

loader on the left. The commander is provided with an M1 cupola which he can traverse by hand through 360°. This cupola is equipped with five vision blocks and an M28C sight for controlling the 12.7 mm (0.50) machine gun. The M28C has a magnification of x 1.5 and a 48° field of view. The coincidence range-finder is operated by the tank commander and has a maximum range of 4,400 m and a magnification of x 10.

The gunner is seated forward and below the commander and has a roof-mounted periscope sight with a x 8 magnification and a telescope with a similar magnification linked to the main armament. The ballistic computer is an electromechanical device which has been designed to compute superelevation angles for the main armament. It receives range information in the form of shaft rotation from the range-finder. The data are then applied to the ammunition data and ballistic corrections which have been entered into the computer by the gunner. The end product is the superelevation angle which is transmitted through the ballistic drive to the periscope. >>

The ballistic drive also transmits the same superelevation angle to the range-finder which is operated by the tank commander. The loader is provided with a single-piece hatch cover that opens to the rear. Mounted to the top rear of the turret is a dome-shaped ventilator cover and a stowage basket is provided at the rear of the turret.

The engine is mounted to the immediate rear of the bulkhead separating the engine and fighting compartments and the transmission is at the rear of the vehicle. The engine compartment is equipped with fire extinguishers but there is not a fire warning system. Power is transmitted to the final drives through the cross-drive transmission, which is a combined transmission, differential, steering and braking unit.

The torsion bar suspension consists of six dual rubber-tired roadwheels with the idler at the front, drive sprocket at the rear and five return rollers on each side. Some earlier versions of the M48 tank were fitted with a tensioning idler between the drive sprocket and the sixth roadwheel station. Hydraulic shock-absorbers are provided for the first, second and sixth roadwheel stations.

Infra-red driving lights are fitted as standard and most models have an infrared/white light searchlight mounted over the main armament, which has a maximum range of 2,000 m. Standard equipment includes an NBC system, heaters, an external infantry telephone and provision for installing a dozer blade on the front of the hull. The M48, M48C and M48A1 can be fitted with the M8 blade weighing 3,980 kg and the M48A2, M48A3 and M48A5 with the M8A1 blade which weighs 3,810 kg.

The tank can ford to a depth of 1.219 m without preparation and to 4.438 m with a deep fording kit. Before deep fording, all the openings are sealed and an exhaust extension is fitted vertically to the right rear engine grill, the bilge pump is switched on.

Main armament of the M48A3

is an M41 (T139) 90 mm M41 gun, which consists of the barrel, evacuator chamber, blast deflector and breech mechanism assembly. The breech block is of the vertical sliding type with an inertia percussion firing mechanism. The barrel has a life of 700 equivalent full charge rounds. The following types of fixed rounds can be fired, but it should be noted that not all are currently in use: APERS-T (M580), APC-T (M82), AP-T (M77), AP-T (M318), Canister (M336), Canister (M377), HE-T (M71), HEAT-T (M431), HEAT (M348/M348A1), HVAP-T (M332A1), TP-T (M353) and Smoke WP (M313).

A total of 19 rounds of 90 mm ammunition is stowed to the left of the driver with a further 11 rounds to his right, eight horizontally on the turret floor, 16 stowed vertically around the turret ring and the remaining eight for ready use in the turret.

Mounted coaxially to the left of the main armament is a 7.62 mm M73 machine gun (earlier models have the 7.62 mm (0.30) M1919A4E1 weapon), and mounted in the commander's cupola is a 12.7 mm (0.50) Browning M2 HB machine gun which can be elevated from -10 to +60°, and can be aimed and fired from within the cupola.

Variants

• M48

This was the first production model of the series and has the following distinguishing features: small driver's hatch, five track-return rollers, no tensioning idler, no dust shields on the fenders, 'T' or cylindrical-type blast deflector on the barrel, and the commander's cupola has the 12.7 mm machine gun on an open mount rather than in a fully enclosed cupola as later production tanks.

• M48C

This is identical to the M48 but has a hull of mild steel and is therefore unsuitable for combat. This model is used for training only and has the letter C embossed on the right front of the hull meaning that the tank is non-ballistic.

• M48A1

This model has a larger driver's hatch, a fully enclosed commander's cupola, fender dust shields, a rear track idler wheel, five track-return rollers and a 'T'-type blast deflector.

• M48A2

Development of this model began in 1954 under the designation T48E2. The first production order was awarded to Alco Products Incorporated of Schenectady, New York, in 1955, followed two years later by an order to the Chrysler Delaware Tank Plant (Lenape Ordnance Modification Center) at Newark, Delaware. Major differences between this and earlier models can be summarized as a fuel injection system for the engine, larger fuel tanks, an improved engine, a constant-pressure turret control system, an improved fire-control system, a modified commander's cupola, a stowage basket mounted at turret rear and the main armament fitted with a 'T'-type blast deflector. The suspension was also modified and jettisonable long-range fuel tanks could be fitted at the rear.

• M48A2C

This is almost identical to the M48A2 apart from slight differences in the optical and fire-control equipment. Most models do not have the track tensioner wheel.

• M48A3

This had the development designation of M48A1E2 and is basically a rebuild of the earlier M48A1 and M48A2 tanks. Major differences are the replacement of the petrol engine by the same diesel engine as installed in the M60A1 MBT, an improved fire-control system and the modification of the commander's cupola by mounting a circular ring with vision blocks between the roof of the turret and the base of the commander's cupola. Most M48A3s have only three track-return rollers and no rear idler. In addition, they have 'T'-type blast deflectors and fender dust shields.

Cover Story

In 1967, Bowen-McLaughlin-York was awarded a contract to remanufacture and modify 578 M48A1 tanks to M48A3 configuration. Under this program, the company rebuilt the vehicles and performed extensive modifications in accordance with 74 US government-funded, Chrysler-designed kits. The principal change to this vehicle was the replacement of the petrol engine with the Continental (now General Dynamics Land Systems) AVDS-1790-2A diesel engine. Both remanufacture and modification were carried out in York, Pennsylvania.

The Red River Army Depot converted 400 M48A1s to M48A3 standard while the Anniston Army Depot converted 800 M48A1s to M48A3 standard.

• M48A4

It was intended that turrets removed from M60s after they had been fitted with the new turret mounting the Shillelagh missile system would be fitted to older M48 chassis to be designated the M48A4. This project was cancelled after six prototypes had been completed.

• M48A5

The Anniston Army Depot converted 2,064 M48A1/ M48A3s to M48A5 configuration, with final deliveries taking place in December 1979. Major modifications required to convert an M48A1 to the M48A5 standard were top-loading air cleaner, top deck grill, engine and transmission shroud, gun travel lock, exhaust grills, power pack (new engine fitted), final drives, tow pintle, engine and transmission mounts, hull turret seal, torsion bar knockout, bulkhead, drain valves, fuel tank and lines, track support rollers and shield, turret basket, modified turret ammunition stowage, T142 track, double bump spring and forward arm, driver's controls, driver's escape hatch, modified hull ammunition stowage, fire extinguisher, hull armor, heater, stowage boxes, driver's periscope,

gun shield and cover, turret and gun control, 105 mm M68 gun (as in M60 series), composite headlamp, 2.2 kW searchlight, nylon ballistics shield, M114 mount and M105 telescope and graticule kit, M13B1 quadrant elevation, M10A6 ballistics drive, M32 and M118 periscope mount, M13B1C computer cam kit, M17B1C range-finder and M28C periscope, M104A1 periscope mount, turret electrical kit, cupola adaptor ring and retaining ring, turret manual drive and traverse gearbox, turret stowage, searchlight stowage and cargo rack screen. Major modifications to convert the M48A3 to the M48A5 are the turret electrical kit, turret stowage, top-loading air cleaner, gun travel lock, solid-state regulator, turret basket, T142 track, ammunition stowage, 105 mm M68 gun, gun shield and cover, M87 gun mount, graticule kit and computer cam kit. The fully enclosed commander's cupola was replaced by an Israeli-designed cupola which was manufactured by Associated Steel Foundries in Israel. First US-produced cupolas were delivered in mid-1976. A 7.62 mm M60D machine gun is mounted externally at the commander's station and there are two mounting positions provided at the loader's hatch for a 7.62 mm M60D machine gun to provide suppressive fire against enemy troop and ATGW positions. These M48A5 have now been phased out of service with the national guard and some passed on to other countries.

• German M48s

The German company Wegmann (Kassel) rebuilt 650 M48 series tanks to a new configuration known as the M48A2GA2, first deliveries of which were made in mid-1978. The modifications include the replacement of the 90 mm gun with a 105 mm L7A3 rifled gun as installed in the Leopard 1, a thermal sleeve for the main armament, a new gun travelling lock, a new commander's cupola, modified ammunition stowage, passive night vision equipment for the driver, commander and gunner

and modifications to the fire-control system. Basic data are as follows: loaded weight 47,800 kg, length gun forwards 9.35 m, length gun rear 8.1 m, height 2.9 m, ammunition stowage 46 rounds of 105 mm and 4,750 rounds of 7.62 mm (2,250 rounds in turret and 2,500 rounds in the hull). German M48s also have four German smoke grenade dischargers either side of the turret. The driver has the Elektro image intensifier periscope, while mounted over the 105 mm gun is the PZB 200 passive TV aiming and observation unit from AEG-Telefunken with a screen that can be seen by both the commander and gunner. The first M48A2GA2 was handed over in June 1978, with final deliveries being made in November 1980. GLS, a subsidiary company of Krauss-Maffei, has supplied 170 of these kits to Turkey (see Turkey in this section). In addition to the modifications carried out for the German and Turkish M48s, Wegmann has suggested a number of further improvements including add-on armor for the turret, a stabilized periscopic sight for the gunner, a laser range-finder, a thermal imager, a fire-control computer, the fitting of hydraulic shock-absorbers to improve ride, new torsion bars and an NBC system.

The M48A2GA2 MBT is no longer in service with the German Army. A total of 24 M48 series tanks of the German Army have now been converted into the Keiler mine clearing system by MaK System Gesellschaft mbH. Details are given later in this entry.

• GLS suspension improvements

The German company GLS, a subsidiary of Krauss-Maffei, has produced a suspension system retrofit package to improve the cross-country mobility of M48 series MBTs. All the components envisaged for retrofitting are already used on German armored vehicles such as the Leopard 1, Leopard 2 or Marder 1, or have been derived from such components.

The retrofit package consists of >>

hydraulic bump stops at all roadwheel positions, hydraulic telescopic shock-absorbers at first, second and sixth roadwheel stations and torsion bars of high-strength material.

• Greek M48s

The Greek Army has upgraded 400 of its M48 MBTs with the German STN Atlas Elektronik MOLF computerized fire control system. These were M48A5s with the 105 mm M68 rifled tank gun and diesel engine.

• South Korean M48 rebuild

Many of the South Korean M48 series MBTs have been brought up to the 105 mm M48A5 standard under the leadership of Hyundai Precision & Industry Co Ltd who is also prime contractor for the South Korean K1 MBT. It is understood that a total of 597 were upgraded.

• Spanish M48s

Details of these vehicles are given in the Peugeot Talbot MBT conversions entry under Spain.

• Taiwanese M48H

This is fully covered under Taiwan and is an M60A1 chassis with an M48 series turret and a new range-finder.

• Turkish M48s

Details of these vehicles and the modernization programs, are given under Turkey.

• Iranian M48s

M48s of the Iranian Army were brought up to M48A5 standard between November 1970 and February 1972 at a vehicle manufacturing plant built in Iran by Bowen-McLaughlin-York.

• Israeli M48s

Many Israeli M48s have been brought up to M60 standard by the installation of a now General Dynamics Land Systems 12-cylinder diesel engine, a 105 mm gun and the Israeli-designed and manufactured tank commander's cupola. Israel has fitted mine clearing ploughs to both the M48 and M60 tanks and provision has also been made for fitting applique armor to the hull and turret. Details of this Israeli-developed Blazer explosive reactive armor and other modifications carried out to the M60s of the Israel Defense Force are given in the M60 entry under Israel. The system consisted of a converted M48A5 tank chassis with the CD-850-6A1 transmission and the AVDS-1790-2D

diesel engine, a launching mechanism and the span, Class 60 aluminum scissors bridge.

Marvin Land Systems conducted engineering and chassis overhaul and conversion, bridge construction and the assembly and testing of the complete system at its Los Angeles facility.

• M48 ARV

The German companies GLS and Jung Jungenthal offer an armored recovery vehicle based on the M47 or M48 chassis.

• M48 Mine Clearing vehicle

To meet the requirements of the German Army for a mine clearing tank based on an M48 chassis, MaK designed and built a system called the Keiler armored Mine clearing vehicle and, following extensive trials, this was adopted by the German Army. MaK of Kiel was awarded a contract to convert an initial batch of 24 M48 chassis into the Keiler Mine clearing vehicle with first vehicles being delivered in 1996. Mine clearing is carried out at a speed of 0.6 to 4.2 km/h with the clearing path being 4.7 m wide and the clearing depth 25 cm. ■

The M48 Patton Tank Can Be Summed Up in Two Words: "WARRIOR TANK"

By Brent M. Eastwood

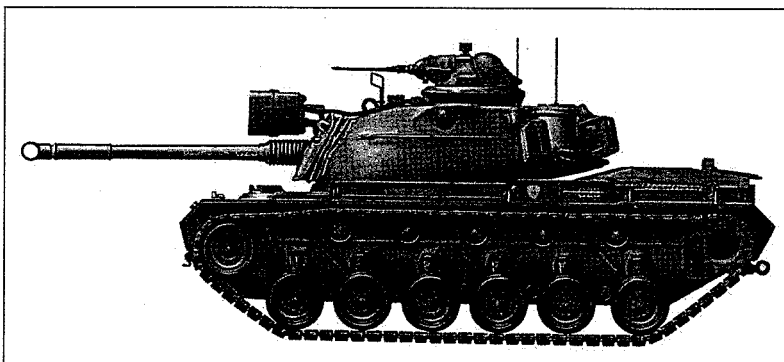
The M48 Patton tank was a versatile Cold War workhorse with a storied history in Vietnam and the Middle East.

Initially built to counter Soviet forces, over 3,200 were produced. Early models struggled with short-range and gasoline engine risks but were later upgraded with safer diesel engines and

improved features like the 105mm gun on the M48A5.

In Vietnam, M48s protected convoys, cleared jungles, and provided firepower in engagements like the 1969 Battle of Ben Het. Israeli forces leveraged M48s to decisive effect in the Six-Day War and Yom Kippur War. The M48 served until 1987, leaving a durable legacy.

M48 Patton Tank Has a Long History of Serving



Everywhere: At the U.S. Army First Division Museum in Wheaton, Illinois, you can see a real-life version of the M48 Patton Tank. The nickname on the turret reads "Snoopy," but this was anything but a sleepy cartoon character on the battlefield.

The M48 served with distinction during the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Israel-Arab Wars, and into the 1980s. The United States produced a whopping 3,200 M48s – that shows how much the military depended on the versatile tank.

Designed for the Soviets and Warsaw Pact Armies In Mind: The M48 replaced the M47 and M46. It sported a different hull, turret, and suspension. The M48 was designed to win the fight against the Soviet hordes during the Cold War and many were deployed to Germany and other NATO countries.

The Gasoline Engine Didn't Cut It: One downside to the M48 was its gasoline engine. Unsurprisingly, a hit from a high-explosive anti-tank round would have resulted in a devastating fire that no crew member could escape. Plus, the tank could only hold 200 gallons of gas, which yielded a short range of just 70 miles. This was going to be a problem with any tank-on-tank battle in Europe. Seventy miles before a re-fuel was just not going to cut it.

Fortunately, the follow-on M48A3 had diesel engines, which were safer with a greater range. The earlier M48s had an AV-1790, 12-cylinder engine that could hit a speed of 28 miles per hour at 810 horsepower.

Versatile If Not Powerful Main Gun: The M48 weighed around 50

tons. It had a lighter 90mm main gun, which might have been a liability against Soviet tanks. On the upside, the gun could fire several different types of projectiles: high-explosive anti-tank, high-explosive, and anti-personnel with canister pellets and flechettes. It was also equipped with a .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine gun for the four-man crew. The armor thickness was around five inches.

Interesting History in Vietnam: The M48 was deployed during the Vietnam War but it was of limited use due to the lack of tank-on-tank battles. Six hundred M48s served in Vietnam. They mainly protected convoys and roads. They were also used at fire bases for better security. The deep jungle foliage was no match for the tanks, so the infantry often used them to clear out sections of the jungle.

Dismounted Marines and soldiers were happy to have the M48 around because it forced the enemy to fire at the tanks while the friendly fighters maneuvered to take out bunkers. The tanks also used their canister anti-personnel rounds at the enemy. These were effective at scattering Viet Cong insurgents or NVA troops.

One Memorable Tank-On-Tank Battle During Vietnam: There was one notable armor operation that the M48 was involved in. This happened in 1969 during the night Battle of Ben Het near the Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia border.

Enemy troops hit a Special Forces compound. M48s from the 1st Battalion 69th Armor hurried over to help. They were met by several NVA PT-76 tanks and BTR armored personnel

carriers. The M48s eliminated two tanks and one BTR. The friendly forces sustained a loss, though. One M48 was hit in the turret, two crew members died, and one was wounded.

Israelis Rode High on the M48 Tank: The M48 was heavily deployed to Israel and used repeatedly during the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973. These were some of the biggest armor battles since World War Two. The M48s, by now upgraded to the A2 and A3 standard, had superior armor and great maneuverability, which helped the Israelis take out scores of Egyptian and Syrian tanks.

Relegated to the National Guard: The last upgrade was the M48A5 variant that emerged in 1975. This had a new and more powerful 105mm gun, a coaxial 7.62mm machine gun, a twin turbo-diesel engine, and now a 300-gallon fuel capacity for greater range. This version was mainly deployed to National Guard units because most M48s had rotated out of American active-duty units by 1973. The M48 was finally retired completely by the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 1987.

The M48 Patton was a fine tank that showed it could handle both Southeast Asia's jungles and the Middle East's deserts. While it had limited usage in Vietnam, it was a difference maker for the Israelis, and the Army National Guard units used it for decades.

So, if you are ever in Wheaton, Illinois, cruise to the First Infantry Division Museum to check out "Snoopy," the M48 tank that never shied away from a battle. You won't be disappointed.

M-48's Missing in Action?

FROM: DUCKWORTH, ERIC J MAJ MIL USA TRADOC [MAILTO:ERIC.J.DUCKWORTH@US.ARMY.MIL]

Sent: Friday, June 10, 2011 6:56 PM

Subject: RE: REPLY = Rebuttal to Armor Magazine Letter (UNCLASSIFIED)

Dear Mr. Wear,

It is a pleasure to write to you. I was able to find your contact through

the great work you are doing on your USMC Vietnam Tankers Website. Thank you for your service the

Armor Community and Nation and continued stewardship to a precious portion of our military history. >>

I read your critique to my letter in the latest edition of ARMOR. In the spirit of clarification, one tanker to another, I must say I feel compelled to reply.

You take issue with my claim that "it is difficult to find an effective medium tank after 1960, as they evolved into heavier main battle tanks." Because I did not address the M48 and M60, I am somewhat ignorant of its achievements and must disqualify my statement. On the contrary, I am very aware of the flexibility of the M48 in all the various spectrums of conflict and environments it served in. The M48 was indeed a champion in Vietnam, the Middle East, Indo-Pakistani Wars, and even Mogadishu (something the Major James did not address either in his initial article).

My statement was not to dismiss the stellar performance of these tanks and their crews, but I considered them both part of the evolutionary transition to main battle tanks. The M48 was not so much a medium tank as it was the interim design for America's first Main Battle Tank. Classified as a "medium" tank, the

M48 diverged significantly enough to share more in common with emerging main battle tanks than WWII and Korean era medium tanks. When production ceased in 1959, it required a gun upgrade in order to compete with the T-54/55 (hence, your baby, the M48A3), which it did in spades. By the time of the M48A5 modification, the Patton's more competitive 105mm gun made it virtually indistinguishable from America's first official MBT, the M60 Patton. So, the argument is semantic. I concede the M48 was a medium tank in name. But once the A3 and other variants occurred, it had much more in common with MBTs.

Letters to the editor do not normally include credentials. Your letter assumed my statement was the result of being among "younger folk" with inexperience, and not appreciative of the recent past. I would like to offer my credentials to counter your perception. Like you, my father was an Air Force Officer. He was a C-130 and Jolly Green Giant SAR pilot, and earned the DFC in Vietnam where he was

combat veteran of the Tet Offensive and Khe Sanh. So, I certainly possess a knowledge and appreciation for Vietnam. I possess 17 years as an armor officer in Armor, Infantry, and Stryker formations. I served overseas in Korea as well as two-line combat tours in Iraq (one as an Iraqi Infantry Advisor). My assessment emerges from this experience and from a B.S. in military history from West Point, as well as a Masters of Military Art and Science from the School of Advanced Military Studies at Ft. Leavenworth. My credentials speak for themselves. I stand by my assessment.

Again, hopefully this helps you understand the basis for my statement. I am very pleased with your interest in this debate, and humbled that you took the time to respond to ARMOR. I certainly believe the M48 is much underappreciated, and I admire the efforts you have gone through to keep its legacy and those of its crews alive. Best of luck!

GO ARMY!

Sincerely,
MAJ Eric Duckworth

SUBJECT: WRE: #2 REPLY = REBUTTAL TO ARMOR MAGAZINE LETTER (UNCLASSIFIED)

Hello Major,

What a nice surprise! Thank you for responding so positively and respectfully. And thank you for your service to our wonderful country. It is young men like you who make this nation strong & safe.

To be honest, I had forgotten that I had written (again) to Armor magazine and since I have not received my most recent issue, I did not know that they had published my comments.

I must admit that as I grow older, (and unfortunately not all that wiser) ...I find myself being exposed over and over again to "youngsters" who profess their expertise on a subject when there is absolutely no basis for their "learned" statements. With that said, after reading your resume, I have to admit that I was terribly

wrong to assume that you were one of those ne'er do well young-uns.

You do seem to have a far deeper and much more technical knowledge of US armor development than I can profess. And your detailed explanation above is testament to your understanding of a far bigger picture than I was ever been privy to. As you may or may not know, I was a lowly Marine corporal and a tank section leader (of three M-67A2 flame-thrower tanks) while I was deployed to Vietnam. Prior to that time, I was a crewman on an M-48A3 on garrison duty at Camp Pendleton, CA. My narrow focus was solely on the Patton tank so reading your original article made me bristle...unnecessarily I might add.

Just so you know, my son is a 25-year career US Army 1st Sgt who spent his

first fourteen years with the Rangers. Fortunately (or unfortunately) he's deployed and "gotten into the fray" seven times thus far. Thankfully he is now non-deployable for the next three years...and that is a good thing!!!

I wish you the best of good luck to you in your Army career and with your life as it unfolds.

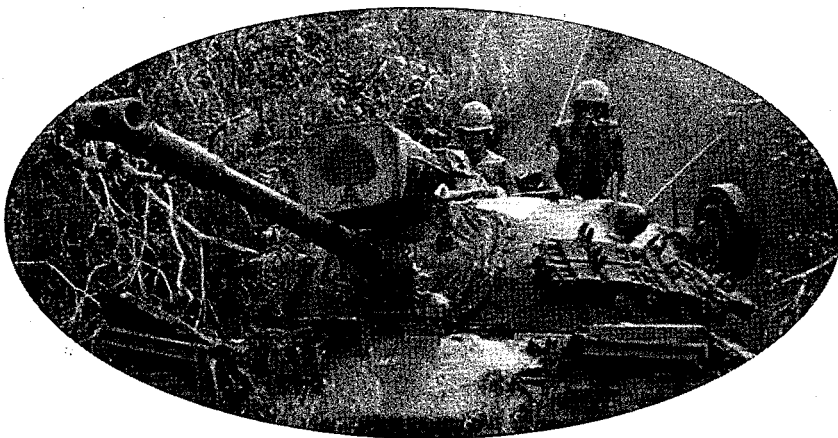
Semper Fidelis,
-John

P.S. I'd like to thank you for your permission to publish your rebuttal letter in the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association quarterly magazine, the Sponson Box. Our group of veterans are all Patton "tread heads," so they might enjoy your words.

How Dangerous was it for Tankers during the Vietnam War?

THIS STORY IS ABOUT JARHEAD
AND DOGGY TREAD HEADS...

BY RJ HOLLAND (FROM QUORA)



Patrolling through the Vietnam jungle in a tank wasn't as safe as one might think. For instance, the enemy can hear you across a great distance and has time to prepare a welcoming committee upon your arrival. Other things that we might not have considered are discussed in this new post. Check it out...

Jungle combat was extremely dangerous. Many times, you couldn't see past the front of your tank. Anything could be out there waiting and many times it was. Our tanks, the M48A3 Patton tank could take a lot of crap from RPG rounds, stick grenades, and small arms fire. What gave our tanks a hard time sometimes were tank traps. Large, square holes dug in the ground and covered. Very hard to see, very hard to get out of. The L or U-shaped ambushes were not a welcome thing either. But with the help of other tanks 'scratching your back' with small arms fire to kill the VC soldiers that had climbed onto the tank and after some desperate fighting, we usually got out of those ambushes. The grunts out in the open had it much worse. The VC usually chooses when and where to fight you. The slimy, sticky Vietnam muck, especially during the monsoon season was hell to get around in.

Anything can happen in the jungle. When you are driving your tank and crunching trees, branches, and anything else that gets in your way, it's pretty stressful because you cannot see six feet in front of you. You are ordered to 'button up.' That's really two orders for it means to close your hatch and

lock the latch and that has been drummed unto you since Advanced at Fort Meade, for Blackhorse troopers anyway.

If we were lucky, we would have the engineers with us with their big dozers and their Rome plows. But they were busy most of the time so our A3s had blades that could be attached to the front of our tanks to plow a path through the jungle for the infantry.

There were lots of dangers in the jungle, from hidden punji sticks to hidden snakes. Yes, this is exactly what it sounds like. Viet Cong guerrillas would often carry Bamboo Pit Vipers in their packs to (hopefully) kill anyone who searched through them.

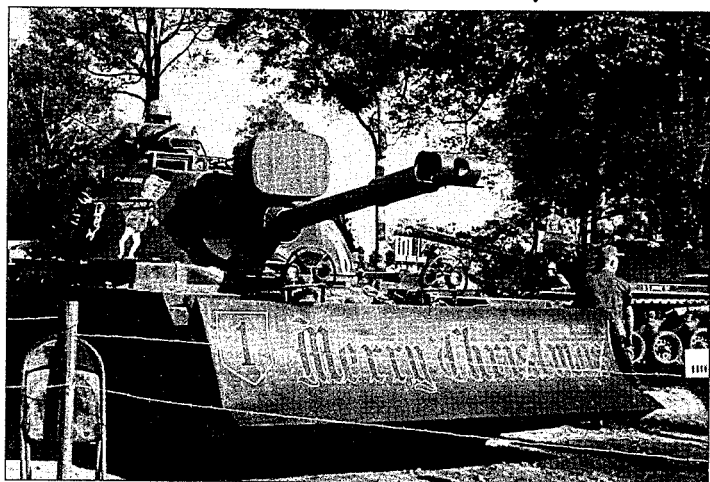
The cartridge trap. This trap was an awful one because it was very difficult to detect. A cartridge – a round of ammunition – would be set into a piece of bamboo and lowered into a shallow hole in the ground. At the bottom of the bamboo was a board and a nail. The regular weight of someone walking on the cartridge would drive the nail into the primer, turning the nail into a firing pin and firing the bullet upward through the unsuspecting victim's foot.

Another tripwire trap was the Mace. Once the wire was triggered, a 24-inch metal or wooden ball with spikes welded onto it, weighing 40 pounds or more, would swing down from a tree, sending anyone in its path straight to Valhalla.

A tiger trap was similar to the mace, in that a tripwire would undo the catch on a rope. Only instead of a swinging ball, the death from above took the form of a man-sized plank weighted with bricks and ball of barbed metal spikes quickly falling to earth on someone's forehead.

At any time, the enemy could jump out at you from spider holes, do some damage and disappear in seconds.

The driver, had the most dangerous position in the tank. The driver was surrounded with extra ammo rounds for the tank's cannon. The hatch was a little more difficult to open than the other hatches on the turret and had to be raised and swung to the right. If something in combat jammed the hatch or was lying near it so it couldn't be opened all the way, the driver was pinned inside and burned to death then blown to hell from the exploding tank rounds inside. One ace up his sleeve was an escape hatch on the floor >>





which was usually covered with flak vests to dampen mine explosions. If he was quick enough to fling them out of the way, grab his Car 15, and open that hatch, with a little luck he could live to fight another day.

We were issued the old M3 grease gun but later scrounged Car 15s, a much better weapon that was shorter than the M16. Took a 29-round mag, standard for US weapons. I also wore my shoulder holster for my 1911 .45 over my flak vest. A little cumbersome but if I had to get out in a hurry, I'd have my vest and my beautiful Colt. Besides, Mama made me promise to be careful and take care of myself.

Our tanks had the armor to withstand RPG hits, especially when we added Pierced Steel planks and spare track blocks on the outside of the tank. The outside bustle rack behind the turret was loaded with spare Mg ammo, c ration boxes and our duffel bags to further protect us from RPG rounds. When the round hit any of these things they would take the blast of the round and not the actual tank. For the 90mm cannon, we mostly used canister and HE in Vietnam. Also, Beehive, a shell packed with steel flechettes when available.

However, the M113 ACAVS could not survive RPGs as well as our tanks. RPGs usually tore through their thin armor, and the result was not pretty. The crew was usually



burned alive. I lost one of my best friends that way. He was driving an ACAV close to us and I saw it hit and explode with a tremendous flash. Didn't have a chance. I could do nothing but keep driving my A3. The despair and loss overwhelmed me, but I had to keep working. I can still see it today. Mine clearing, convoy duty, thunder runs and troop support ops were not without their own dangerous hazards.

There are other segments of being a tanker that are dangerous and have little to do with combat such as smashing your teeth, nose or breaking a jaw against the edge of the hatch, crushed hands and fingers and a simple thing like traversing a turret can end up with a mangled arm or leg. And oh yeah, back spasms. Tankers should be built like The Hulk, smaller versions though. A tanker's life is mostly maintenance, maintenance, maintenance.

Side note: This was Bob Peavey's tank with Bravo Co, 5th Tanks 1968.



One hour of tank operation is equal to about three hours of maintenance. At least it used to be in 1968 and I'm sure it hasn't changed all that much. I'm not even counting loading ammo and supplies. You are always working with very heavy solid steel items, lifting, handling, fixing, pushing, and pulling. A tanker's life is backbreaking work and living in a greasy, loud, smokey, scorching hot kidney crunching world is not easy, but someone has to do it.

The jungle? It wasn't only the human enemy you had to worry about. The incessant mosquitoes, hordes of ants, scorpions, 15-inch centipedes, huge snakes that could easily swallow a man, and the two-step snake. Let him bite you then after taking two steps, you were dead, or so they said. And let's not forget the 'wait a minute vine', that lovely thick vine with the big, sticky barbs that have pulled tankmen out of their hatches. That's what you have to live through in the jungles of Vietnam during the war.

However, your fellow crewmen are living it with you, and your brothers, and the humor and closeness get you through it. Now, next time you pass an armor crewman, maybe you'll look at him a little differently and more respectfully knowing the dangers he also goes through when he's not in combat.

Even More Stories

from

John "Hughie" Hughes

3rd PLATOON ROUTE 9 – KHE SANH

In late March of '68, Ron Ingram and I, having been promoted to corporal, had been called back to Dong Ha. Ron was sent to the heavy section of 2nd Platoon and I never saw him again. I was told that I was getting C-33. On April 1, instead of finding the tank at the tank park, I was loaded into a Jeep and we drove up Route 9 where C-33 was lining up with a large number of tanks and other vehicles. We were going on Operation Pegasus to relieve the Khe Sanh combat base.

Now the Army's 1st Cav. claims that Pegasus was "their" operation and that the 26th Marines didn't think that they needed anybody's help. However here was the 1st Marines, 11th Engineers, 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks and we picked up Bravo Co at the Rockpile. All heading up Route 9 which had been closed since the beginning of Tet at the end of January of that year.

The old TC of C-33 I met for just a second as he was on his way home. I stowed my gear and met the tank's crew. The only name that I remember is Kurt Foster who was the driver and thought that he should have been given the tank to command. It was a bit of a problem but we worked it out.

Foster was only a L/Cpl but was senior to the other two crewmen on the tank. He came from the southside of Chicago, the place where the singer, Jim Croce would call "baldest part of town" which was part of his song "Bad

– Bad LeRoy Brown." The unusual thing was that Foster was a blonde, blue-eyed white guy about 5'3" and just 150 pounds. But a true wannabe told me that Scotch and milk was his cocktail of choice. You can see why he was unforgettable.

In about 20 or 30 minutes the operation got underway. The 1st Cav is making helicopter assaults along the mountains beside Rt 9 but not finding much resistance. We move up past Cam Lo and into the mountains up past the Rockpile. We start slowing down as the engineers halt to repair the bridges and sweep for mines.

We get up to the area that will be known as LZ Vandergrift. We need to move a little farther west to the outpost called Ca Lu. For some reason the engineers are making a new cut through a section of the mountains. We wait while an engineer driving a Caterpillar tractor slowly bulldozing a passage through this area. He finishes up and signals us to come on through. I tell Kurt to move and as we start moving, the end connectors are scrapping the sides but it looks like we can make it. We get midway into the cut and all of a sudden the dirt that the track was knocking now begins to bunch up in the track. A few more feet and the tracks start to pop...and another foot forward, both tracks are thrown ... both to the inside. What a great way for my first day as a tank commander. Luckily, things would get a little better in the following days.

MORE ON PEGASUS

One day instead of bringing us a case of C-rations, we got two #10 cans of sausage links and hotdogs. This went on for two days, no one ever explained why. But one thing that they did bring us was a complete change of tank track. And right in the middle of the road, we put the track blocks together with end connectors and center guides. Then we ran the old track off and the new track on. First the left and then the right... and it took all day. Everybody gets to go back to Dong Ha for new track but not us. And we also don't get to enjoy hot chow at the mess hall.

I used to tell this story as happening to me but it really happened to Ned Trudeau, I think.

He was on his tank going up the entrance road to Khe Sanh combat base early in the morning. As his head comes level with the plateau, he is looking into the ARVN Rangers area, and specifically the roofless shitter. And on the shitter, he saw the sweet white broad ass of a Caucasian woman. The story was that she was a French reporter. Why was she there was never explained but we often talked and thought about it, for sure.

ROUTE 9 TANK LOSS

Most everybody knows the story of the night tank patrol on Route 9 and what a FUBAR it was. A tank destroyed, Jimmy Jaynes killed and the rest of the crew spent the night in Indian country surrounded by NVA.

>>

I talked to Garry Hall for a few minutes the next morning and that would be the last time that I saw him until the USMC VTA reunion in Minneapolis in 2001. John Rodriguez would be my driver later on but that is one thing that we never talked about. The other survivor I don't remember.

About midmorning a lieutenant in a Jeep comes by where C-33 is set up along Rt. 9 and he tells us to mount up and follow him. We move back down Rt. 9 a click or two and see a dead gook by the side of the road. Garry and his guys had at least killed the NVA that had killed Jimmie Jaynes.

The a-hole grunt colonel was pissed because the gook had not been properly disposed of so the LT. had come and got us since we were the closest. We had to bury Mr. Charles. So, we scraped out a hole in the edge of the hard-ass road until it was deep enough to roll him in and cover him up. When he was alive, he may have weighed 100 pounds but after laying in the hot sun, he swelled up and looked like a little Oriental Charles Atlas. We get him planted and took a breather.

We cracked open some C's and had lunch. After a few minutes some guy came by and asked us if we buried the gook. We point out the mound and he pulled up his M-16 and fired a burst into the grave. Green shit came bubbling out of the bullet holes. We load up on the tank and moved back up to our position. What a great after dinner show

ANOTHER ROUTE 9 STORY

One morning C-33 is sitting in line at Ca Lum waiting to move out on some road march or another, when coming up the road from LZ Vandergrift, I see a guy, Steve Wilder, that I had last seen in boot camp on graduation day. I started to dismount my tank to talk to him. But we started to move out. I reminded myself to try to find him when I got a chance.

The chance never came. Steve was killed by mortar fire a couple of days later. He is the only boot that I had

been able to identify from our platoon that was KIA. We lost two DI's but Steve was the only boot KIA. We were incredibly lucky in that regard but Steve wasn't. He was one month before his rotation date. Cpl. Steven Clifton Wilder, 3/9, KIA 5/2/68. Survived by a wife and child. Rest in Peace.

RECON BY FIRE

After getting the track back on and spending the night at Ca Lu, we pulled up on a hill that looked over Rt. 9 as it ran along the river. I got orders to do a little recon by fire. So, we put a couple of 90 HE rounds and some .30 cal. down range.

All of a sudden there are two civilians climbing over the sprocket, it was a news reporter and his cameraman. He wanted to know what we were shooting at. He interviewed me and I tried to explain "recon by fire" to him. So, I guess that I had my "15 minutes of fame." I've never seen anything about it. Oh well, fame would have spoiled me.

BACK TO CUA VIET

One morning not long after returning to Cua Viet, we were told to mount up to accompany an amtrac down to the south on a mission. We did not go far, probably just to the west of the combat base where we halted while some ARVN and their advisor went into a hooch.

In a minute they came out dragging this 10-year-old kid, (I guess that he was about 10, some of the oriental 19 years olds look ten) but I think that he really was a kid. He was bad scared, crying and for some reason, they threw him up on the slope plate of our tank while they went about playing badass with the locals. While they were preoccupied with this, the kid's mother, grandmother, whoever, came out of the hooch with a bowl of soup. She was crying too. She pantomimed giving me the bowl of soup for the kid. I did.

Later they said that the kid was the little brother of some VC official and

that they wanted to "interrogate" him. The ARVN were actually "white mice." South Vietnamese military police ... some real S.O.B.'s. They took the kid off with them. But at least the kid got to finish his soup. I gave the bowl back to his mama-san. That whole business bothered the hell out of me. I didn't sign up to help beat up kids, even if they were VC.

GRAND THEFT TANK

As I have written before, that although the old C-23 had been surveyed, the new beast still had some problems, mainly she could blow a fuel injector while just sitting there idling.

There was a young staff sergeant with us, as a young guy whose chief joy in his off hours was pulling the projectiles out of his .45 bullets and filling them with melted candle wax and shooting at the abundant rodent population.

In spite of this, he was probably one of the best shit-fisteres I have ever known and he wasn't going to let a little problem like constantly blowing fuel injectors frustrate him and cut into his rat killing time.

One of the things we noticed there at Cua Viet was the Army of the United States had a different way of doing things. For instance, mine damage to the suspension was not handled at battalion level like ours but required the damaged vehicle to be dragged down to Cua Viet and shipped south to be repaired at some higher-level maintenance facility.

So, the staff sergeant, our acting platoon sergeant, me and a whole host of others who shall remain nameless in case the of statute of limitations has not run out. It was all great fun and really improved the tank. Years later I heard there might have been an investigation but I was long gone stateside and CID never caught up with me. Maybe someday we'll be on a reality show "We Did Not Get Away With It !!!"

Chapter 8

Looking Back

BY ROGER LULI

God's Plan: I have often wondered "Why did I survive the horror that was combat in Vietnam"? It was a time when I was not religious, I was not courageous, and I was completely out of my element. It was true that I had been well trained, almost an entire year of schooling. I was working with group of excellent Marines. But why, when men were being killed and wounded all around me, was I spared?

Over the years, I have considered events in my life and have come to believe I now know why. God has a plan for me, and it has been in play since I was first conceived. My father and his parents were Catholic and my mother and her parents were Presbyterian. I knew they had some different beliefs, but they had the same God. I was raised with the church. I regularly attended church, Sunday school, and the youth group. (I even had a crush on the youth leader - Nancy L.). I was confirmed and baptized. I even prayed before going to bed.

Everything changed when I went off to college. I stopped attending church and became involved in many discussions of the arguments for and against Christianity. I even watched as one of my friends was brought to tears trying to defend the Holy Trinity.

Then came the Marine Corps. There I was grouped with men of various beliefs, some devoutly religious, some with no religious beliefs at all. The Marine Corps' job was not to teach any specific religion. Their job was to teach us discipline, leadership, and to destroy the enemy or his will to fight. Again, I did not attend church even after being commissioned and earned the privilege to do so that option was available if I desired. There was prayer at formal functions but no evidence at daily meals in the mess halls. I never saw anyone praying over a can of "C" rations.

I had abandoned God, but I was to learn he had not forgotten me. That was revealed near the end of a four-day battle in which I saw a lot of death and felt fear and finally fear on the verge of terror. I basically had shut down. I cried out for God to get me out of that place and he heard me. I immediately felt a calm and warmth come over me. I was able to function once again and move the tank and its crew to a place of relative safety.

I came home with a serious case of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Instead of asking for professional help or going to God in prayer, I self-medicated. Obviously, that did not work and I knew I had to change.

God understood and got involved. I was asked to speak to a school full of students about Veterans' Day. The principal (a Marine himself) took me from class to class where I talked about the meaning of Veterans' Day and how it differed from Memorial Day. I also answered some of their questions about Vietnam. Later, in the office, the principal introduced me to a young woman. It was a brief hello-goodbye. After she returned to her class, the principal said, "Save this date, you are going to take her to our Christmas party and eventually you are going to marry her". The principal's name was Michael, and he must have been a Prophet because that is exactly what happened.

We were married eight months later. We had a son, then lost a baby, then had a daughter. My wife had a terrible time dealing with the loss of the baby, but I reminded her that if the baby had lived, we would not have our daughter. It was part of God's plan.

We were involved in the church (actually three different churches). My wife had a strong faith, and her education background was put to use as a Christian education director. Like me, our children were raised with church and Sunday school. They are both adults now with children of their own. I >>

am so proud of how they matured. God must have been involved because I certainly had no clue what I was doing.

February 2021 started a very dark period in my life. First my wife of more than fifty-one years passed away after a long battle with dementia. I was devastated and the walls were closing in around me. I needed to get away. My sister had rented a house in Florida and agreed to let me stay with her for a while until I got my senses back. I packed my car and headed south on what I thought was a path to healing my emotions. Instead, that trip began a most catastrophic health event for me. The first stop was lunch at the home of my friends Scott and Marcia Duennes. She had prepared a spread of soup and sandwiches. As the first sign that something was wrong, I had no appetite. I could not eat even enough to be polite. I apologized and continued south.

I had been invited to spend the night at the home of Sterling Young who was a member of my tank platoon in Vietnam. The stay seemed to rejuvenate me. I ate and slept well. The next morning, he said, "There is no way I will let you drive out of here in that car covered with road salt". He washed my car and again I headed south.

The next stop was in southern Georgia. I checked into a motel then went shopping. The Adcock Pecan Company was where my family had earlier found a delicious brand of peanut butter, so I went there and bought a case. To my dismay, I didn't have the strength to carry it to the car - another bad sign. I skipped dinner and went back to the motel. After a good night's sleep, I felt refreshed and started on my way again.

Arriving at my sisters place pretty well exhausted but able to unpack the car then take a swim. The feeling of weightlessness was transforming. It did not occur to me that each day

after I rested and took the weight off my back the symptoms went away-temporarily.

To sum up the experience, eventually I was rushed to an emergency room then put on a plane to Cleveland for surgery. The surgeon removed bone spurs and stenosis from my back and fused all my lumbar vertebrae together. He also installed a PIC line for antibiotics to fight five different types of infections, one of which was sepsis. That one almost killed me. Apparently, God was not done with me. He also had my sister rent a house from a man who transported cars as a business, so my car was transported home. I do not think this came about due to coincidence.

The latest evidence of his plan happened over sixty-two years. I had given Jean, my high school sweetheart, a gold football necklace and when we broke up, I let her keep it. The football meant a lot to me so it must have been the Holy Spirit that put these words in my mouth. "It is yours; I could never give it to anyone else". In February 2024, I received a package from Jean Patterson. I did not know any Jean Patterson until I opened the package. It contained that football. We got together, we were both widowed, and three months later we were married. God made me the happiest I had been in a long time.

Now in my eighties, I look forward to whatever God plans for me next.

Reflections:

"And yet for all the adrenaline rushes, and the out of body experiences, and the incandescent flashes of truth and light, war like a drug, took its toll on the body, the mind, and the soul. There was a point of diminishing returns, and a price to pay for spitting in the eye of death and getting away with it."

Nelson DeMille from his book *Up Country*.

"I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears."—Psalm 34:4

"No one wanted to admit the awful high of combat, the adrenaline boost that some compared to narcotics. It was unseemly to "enjoy" combat, to feel that tingle, to realize nothing else in your life would ever really approach it. That was the terrible secret you could never voice."—Harlan Corben from his book *Fool Me Once*.

"You just have to go even if there is no clarity about coming back."—Unknown

"Vietnam, I was there. Sometimes I still am."—Unknown

"It is only when a mosquito lands on your balls that you realize there is a way to solve problems without using violence."—Confucius

"The truth is that all veterans pay with their lives. Some pay all at once while others pay over a lifetime."—Jim Storm

"With each passing year, memories of the war grow more faded. The pain of losing friends remains, but the sharp edges have dulled. It doesn't take much though, to bring it all back again."—James P. Coan from his book *Con Thien the Hill of Angels*.

"There is nothing like sitting in the TC hatch of a tank roaring down the road on a mission. It's hard to describe the euphoria of that moment of invincibility, being in control of 53 tons of steel and firepower, able to overcome anything in its path."—Ben Cole from his book *38 Months My Time in the Marines*.

"We cannot take each other for granted. Too often, anger, blame, or division shape our view of others. Instead, we need to work harder to see the best in one another."—Bryan K. Jensen, Mayor of Avon, OH in his fall newsletter to the community.

Ed Hiltz Remembers

I had a fairly long conversation with Ron Colucci (may he rest in peace) about an RPG hitting my tank. I was the tank commander that night and I was only a Lance Corporal but because I had the most seniority and there weren't enough sergeants around. The RPG hit right at the top of the tank commanders hatch where Pat Heagy was standing on guard. I was asleep right behind in the gypsy rack. I got away unscratched. I do remember that I had to call our platoon sergeant SSgt Hoover and (I think) Lieutenant Cohen in order to get permission to return fire. Weren't those the days of asking for permission to return fire? So, I got up on the 50 Cal and started blasting away blindly hoping I would hit something. I also called in a medevac for Heagy who was seriously wounded. We did find out later that he survived his wounds but he never returned to Nam. The next morning, I don't know if the grunts sent out a patrol or not. I am pretty sure that I didn't hit anything the night before. As an afterthought, I wish that I could have found Heagy and got him to join our brotherhood. It would have been great to see him again.

Now the land mine incident, which I was the driver, and LT Hurt was the TC ... our tank was seriously and heavily damaged. Many grunts were riding on our tank's

front fenders, and they were also seriously injured. Our tank had to be towed back to battalion for at least a month of repairs. Once our badly damaged tank was towed on to the pontoon barge to be floated across the river, which was located around the Liberty Bridge area. When we disconnected our tank from the towing tank all hell broke loose. The unbalance pontoon barge raised up and tipped over and it took our tank and all the civilians/children and several Marines who were riding with us to cross the river, spilled into the river. I know several civilians were killed and if I remember correctly, it was either Sena or Jelartson who jumped into water and grabbed a baby that was floating down the river. I remember SSgt Hoover had a lot of paperwork and reports to make explaining what happened to all the commanding officers.

Just like the RPG incident and the mine incident, I was lucky and was unscathed. If I remember correctly, I think Lieutenant Hurt our tank commander when we hit the landline may have received a Purple Heart,

I'll try to dig up pictures. I know I have a picture of our tank and what it looked like after the mine and the after-action report also a picture of Lieutenant Hurt, Heagy and Staff Sergeant Hoover.



Ed Hiltz, Tim Caderell and Russell Sena



Lt Hurt and SSgt Hoover

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DECLASSIFIED

INTERCOMBAT SPOT REPORT

UNC P 281418H

Case/Position: _____ Frequency: _____ Band: _____ Band Clear: _____ Band Clear: _____

REPORT: 2806 DT: 2803

INITIAL REPORT: PT PLACE OF: () VIAL: (A)

ALPHA: _____
 Date/Location: _____ BY: _____
 INFO: _____
 MUG Activity/Incident: _____ 281350H
 CHAPLAIN (Optional if necessary): _____
 Location By: _____ (V) 180553 (O) SAME
 VEHICLE: _____
 Unit, Dist, Mtr, Vtr, Vtr, Vtr: _____ WHILE MOVING WITH 3rd PLT
 "C" Co ALL HIT ARMY ISOLATED MINE DAMAGE
 To 1st and 3rd ROAD WHEELS 1st SUPPORT
 TOWER DAMAGE ON RIGHT SIDE

REMARKS: _____
 Remarks or Action Taken: VEHICLE IS BEING RECOVERED AT
 THIS TIME

POINTER: _____ GOLF (Main/Sec/3rd Arm) _____
 Primary: _____ Secondary: _____ Tertiary: _____
 INFO: _____
 VEHICLE: _____
 INFO: _____
 INFO: _____
 Weapons: _____ or lost (State type if known) N/A

NAME: _____
 Equipment/Designation (Capture/Destruction): N/A

TIME: _____ DATE: _____ OPERATOR: _____

28 1st 68 1418H RS H10PP

* PT, 5 & PLT, Combat, Zoom P, Security Force, 1st, 2nd, Clearing
 Operation, 3rd Operation, 4th Operation, 5th Operation, etc.
 ** IF applicable - Time of arrival of action force(s) is added below
 Time of arrival of action force(s) is added below
 ** Double Primarily, Quality Figure

LT HMD 3268 SPIT 1/1, POSSIBLE TAKEN AOSC
 (1)

After Action Report

Saturday, Sep 27 at 3:27 PM

From: Ed Hiltz <hiltz5@verizon.net>
To: johnwear2@verizon.net
Subject: memories

John,

Here are a few more additional things I can recall;

On June 28, 1968 while moving with the 3rd PLT "C" CO our tank A11 Hit a land mine Approximately 150 pounds. I was the Driver Lt: Hurt was TC I believe he may have received a purple heart for injuries to his face/nose. Several other marines who were riding on the fenders were also injured. One even possibly severely wounded or KIA. Prior to hitting the land mine I was told years later by PFC David Reed now deceased that he remembers me saying to the crew something doesn't look right the shits going to hit the fan. This was because it was unusually quiet and no civilians around. Cpl Sena was gunner that day I don't know were we were heading at the time. I actually have a copy of the after action report regarding this incident. I never wrote home about this to family/parents didn't want to upset or worry them. Like Paris Island Boot camp always wrote home and said everything is fine.

The damage to A11 was really bad to the right side (have photos of it while at either hill 55 or Battalion area being repaired) Don't remember exactly when a tank retriever came either to An Hoa or at our location and hooked us up to be taken to Hill 55 or Battalion. My self, Cpl: Sena and I don't remember if others were with us. Once we got past Liberty Bridge down to the pontoon raft used to get back and forth to each side of the river the tank retriever backed our tank onto the pontoon raft. Along with our tank numerous Vietnamese people and children also got on the raft. Well both tanks were on the pontoon when the tank retriever disconnected from our tank in order to return back the raft became unbalanced. At this time the pontoon capsized forward or backward cant remember. Our tank rolled off down into the water taking with it many Vietnamese women, men and children. Several marines went jumping into the water in an attempt to rescue as many people as they could.. Cpl Sena and others were in the water grabbing children/babies. I do remember S/SSgt Hoover having to right some sort of report about this and questioning us about the incident. Don't know how many civilian casualties I'm sure there were some. Then we had to spend some time recovering the tank out of the river.

More on operation Nameluke Thurst always remember rationing out our water to the grunts because we carried around three or more five gallon water cans with us on tank. I watched as many grunt marines dipped their helmet into rice paddy water to get a drink. They used to form a line behind our tank while we poured them water from our supply. Sometimes they didn't get water supplied from choppers until much later. Remember while on unknown hill maybe hill ten or 148 or other a Vietnamese mother carrying her child up to the marines. The infant had several cannister / arrows/ flechet rounds protruding from his chest could here the air from his lungs. I assume the corpsman attended to him?

On Perimeter one night in An Hoa close to rotating back to the states I was TC and only an E-3 because I had the most time in country and no Sgt available. While Heagy was on watch I was sleeping on the tank rack behind the TC Cupola.

Our tank took a RPG sinking the TC Cupola. PFC Heagy was seriously wounded hollering out Nazi (my nick name) I'm not. PFC Perez jumped into drivers compartment and backed the tank up away from the concertina wire. I started firing the 50 caliber blindly at the area I thought the RPG came from. Notified SSgt Hoover and Lt: Cohen or Hurt via radio don't remember which one. Right after that I called in for a medevac and they flew PFC Heagy out. I believe Lt: Col: Ron Colucci has information about Heagy. Even though I was right behind Heagy the impact of the RPG never touched me. My guardian angel must have been watching over me the home time I was in country from July.

Next I was down my B.C. down with a lot of things. Marine Corps and what I'm doing now.

Along with pictures then and now.

ED

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Subject Re: Goi Noi Island
From Carol Ferrari <cj72@bellsouth.net>
To: Charles E Hiltz <hiltz5@verizon.net>
Date Feb 5 at 5:16 PM

I remember the day quite well...lots of Marines killed or wounded that day...if you recall, we discovered the trunk of a body the next day which was hit in the bombing run and blown down range where we found it at least 500 meters from the bombing site.

We were engaged with an NVA unit who was flying their flag and we took it under fire with 90mm and machine gun fire...we withdrew from the island the next day following this incident.

Allen Cohen
678-778-6963 Mobile

On Feb 5, 2023, at 12:06 PM, Charles E Hiltz <hiltz5@verizon.net> wrote:

Reading book.

Any one remember us Observing NVA Flag somewhere in the vicinity of Goi Noi Island and us attempting to shoot it down using our tank. ? Also being inadvertently bombed by our own planes when we were on the island. Trying to record / document some of my experiences and incidents. For my children. Would like the information to be correct.

Best regards Ed Hiltz

Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS



Only picture I could find of Patrick Hagey ... He's standing on the ground in back of tank. I'm standing on top with the other Marine. I forgot his name, but his nickname was "Ghost."

Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS

Begin forwarded message:

On Monday, February 6, 2023, 4:06 PM, Carolyn & Bob <cv1rb2@aol.com> wrote:

Yes Ed seem to remember the incident seeing the NVA flag. I think we made several trips out on the Goi Noi and you may gone out after I left so you may be right about the plane getting close.

Take care, Bob

----- Original Message -----

From: Charles E Hiltz <hiltz5@verizon.net>

To: Carolyn & Bob <cv1rb2@aol.com>; Carol Ferrari <cj72@bellsouth.net>

Sent: Sun, Feb 5, 2023 12:06 pm

Subject: Goi Noi island

Reading book

Any one remember us Observing NVA Flag somewhere in the vicinity of Goi Noi Island and us attempting to shoot it down using our tank ? Also being inadvertently bombed by our own planes when we were on the island. Trying to record / document some of my experiences and incidents. For my children. Would like the information to be correct.

Best regards Ed Hiltz

Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS

My Marine Career

BY TOM HOWE

First, I would like to thank you and the VTA staff for all you-all do to keep us relevant in these changing times. Your publication is extremely well done, leaving so many of the others in the dust.

I am a graduate, of The Citadel, Class of 1964. At that time the college offered just two programs, Army and Air Force. We were not made aware that we could have opted out for all the other branches of the Armed Forces. I chose Army and attended two summer camps, as I recall at Fort Bragg and Fort Benning. I came to the realization that the Army was too big, too impersonal, and not what I wanted, and would never meet my expectations of the "First to Fight."

After a rather ugly departure from the Army program, who retaliated with a Draft notice, I met with A Marine Corps recruiter in Washington, DC, a major who happened to be a Citadel graduate, and I immediately was enrolled in 38th OCC / BC 3-66, Marine Corps, Quantico, VA. This was the fall of 1965.

The Basic School is six months long and a requirement of all lieutenants, no exceptions. Upon graduation were given a choice, pick one of 3 MOS. If any one of the three was O3 you got it. My choice was 1800, can't remember the others, probably all three were 1800, trying to beat the odds. About

30 of us received orders to the Army's Armor School at Ft Knox, KY, this was June 1966. But at the last minute our orders were changed to Camp Del Mar, on the beach at Camp Pendleton, CA, being told the Marine Corps was starting its own Tank School. What a blessing, especially knowing how I felt about the Army. Several of us rented a high-rise apartment on the beach, just south of the Oceanside pier. It is still there last I looked, but now it's a luxury building on the beach, totally renovated selling for millions, time waits for no man.

After Tank School, that I think took 4 months, we received our orders. Almost everyone took leave but instead I drove cross country and immediately checked in to Camp Lejeune, NC, and to the 2nd Tank Battalion. I was instantly assigned platoon leader, Alpha Company, 3rd Platoon. Within a couple of weeks, we were loading our tanks on rail, moving up to Camp Picket, VA for live fire exercises.

Upon return we loaded our tanks aboard ship in Moorhead City, NC, for a Caribbean Deployment. We went down on the USS Fort Snelling, LSD -30, and after our deployment we returned on the USS Hermitage, LSD -34. The return was memorable in that on the way home we were following a hurricane back up the coast, and one of our tanks broke loose on the well

deck. The skipper of the ship was out of control, reasonable response I thought.

As I recall, we had a great platoon sergeant, Musgrave. He was a E-5 Sergeant and about 40 years old. I never asked, he never volunteered. But he was Old Corps. Nothing bothered him, cool, calm, and collected, I mean nothing. His response was, "No big deal, do you want to come down with me Lieutenant? It can get pretty exciting down on the well deck with a loose Tank that broke its tie down chains and could possibly sink the ship considering the heavy weather we are in."

An M48-A3 Tank weighs 53 Tons, and it was sliding port to starboard and back on a deck that acted like it was covered with grease. It would stop just a foot or two from going thru the ship's hull into the ocean. Then in seconds it started the other way. The challenge was to get the tie down chains on during that couple of seconds. Many tankers may have experienced this over the years, it was the perfect storm, the tail end of a hurricane. Sergeant Musgrave said to the platoon already assembled waiting for us to arrive, "The Lieutenant has volunteered to join you but we need to keep him alive to face the ship's captain. If the Tank breaks thru the ship's hull, and sinks the ship, as that captain's career will be over.

Then the arguing started, the whole Platoon volunteered. This is when I realized I had found a home. I must have been about 24 to 25 years old; these young men were between the ages of 18 to 24. It was at that very moment that I realized what makes the Marine Corps different. We are kindred spirits, we are related, cut from the same cloth, and yes, we are like nobody else, we saw a potential disaster as a challenge, not a catastrophe, and saw it as no big deal. Few in Life get to be surrounded by men like this. One of the Marines asked, "How many of these catastrophes do we have to do to set a record?" Thankfully, we didn't have Google back then.

Sergeant Musgrave was right; I was going to jump down onto the well deck of the ship and help get that monster chained down. Why would I not? We are a family. But Sergeant Musgrave had no intention of facing the ship's captain if all hell broke loose and the tank left a gaping hole in the side of his ship. And then having to explain to the Marine Corps how he lost a tank overboard. I can't say enough about these young Marines. They do what so many avoid doing, serving our country, and no one does better, and they would do it again, and again, fear was replaced with laughter.

President Ronald Reagan said it best "Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference in this world, Marines don't have that problem"

One of the Marines on this deployment was reading an earlier publication of Sponson Box some years back wrote in to say that he was on this cruise with me. He reminded me of so many great stories that I had forgotten. It doesn't get any better. He also said I promoted him to corporal and easy to work with. Upon returning from this Caribbean deployment, I made captain and was assigned to the USS Columbus, CG-12 as the CO of the Marine Detachment, of 40 Marines.

I will comment here, rarely do officers stay in their assigned MOS

their entire career, unlike enlisted where you can be a tanker for most of your career. Once a captain, we are assigned to numerous schools like Amphibious Warfare School, or even back to college to get advanced degrees in various subjects related to war fighting. A handful of my classmates from tank school, Camp Del Mar received orders to Vietnamese Language School at Monterey, CA, and never saw a tank again.

While on Sea Duty with the USS Columbus, we made two deployments to the Mediterranean. Then my three-year active-duty requirement was over. So, I applied for an extension to remain on Sea Duty for one more year. Then I asked for another one-year extension, why when I could leave the Corps and avoid serving in Vietnam. Simple, the deployment to the Caribbean as a tanker, and the Marines I was with, were fantastic. Think about this for a minute, what is better in life than being surrounded by Marines. It's like playing in the NFL, but we stand for our National Anthem, have guns, and we play a game of life or death. We know many in the NFL don't have the intestinal fortitude to survive in war. Nor could they pass our PFT (Physical Fitness Test). This isn't for everyone, it's why they call us "The Few, The Proud."

When my one-year extension was over, I extended for a second year for Vietnam since I didn't want to miss the biggest event in possibly our life time. An event we were trained for.

I arrive in Da Nang, the Republic of Vietnam by chartered aircraft from Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, CA. Long since closed, now a residential community, Irvine, CA.

I am assigned as the S-3, 1st Tank Battalion. Strange as that usually a major's position, and I am a Captain. Stranger yet, the 1st Tank Battalion Commander was a Major, usually it's a Lt Colonel. His name was J.J. Louder, another fantastic Marine. My responsibility as a S-3 was Training, Planning, and Operations. However, all our tanks were under operational

control of our infantry. This leaves me with no real responsibility. So, I sat down with Major JJ Louder and suggested that I work with Hoa Cam, a ARVN Training Camp who was our neighbor to the west on the southern perimeter of Da Nang, as they were being targeted routinely, rockets into our compound as well, and overrun on occasion. Hoa Com was under command of an Army major and captain, who were having too much fun, and I will end it there. Both officers were very likable. So, like all Marines of any rank, I set up fields of fire, added and rearranged the concertina wire, set up listening posts 50 to 60 yards outside of our perimeter, and set up a ready reaction team, that was up all night, prepared to move in any direction as needed, or where we were being overwhelmed. Basically, it was 03 type of stuff. Thanks to the Army captain and his Vietnamese Counterpart they awarded me with a handful of Medals to include their Purple Heart, my first of two. This led to a much larger responsibility; I was named the coordinator of the Southern Sector of Da Nang. More 03 activities to include patrols, and constant movement throughout the Division Tactical Area of Responsibility. This is 1970.

Then one day I was summoned back to 1st Tanks, and my Tank CO, Major JJ Louder said we have a new Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division, Major General Edwin B Wheeler, fought in WW2, Korea, and earlier in Vietnam as a Colonel and Regimental Commander of the 3rd Marines, who landed in Vietnam 1965. He is looking for an Aide de Camp and has asked various commands to send a captain up to 1st Division HQ for an interview, and I was the only captain the tank battalion had that was available at the moment, as I slept most nights at 1st Tanks HQ Long story, of all the captains interviewed I was selected. It's a whole new word working at the highest level in the Corps. I was surrounded >>

daily by colonels, other generals, Marine, Air Wing, Army, Vietnamese, CIA, etc. General Wheeler was a first-class individual, saw his Marines as family, like sons, and I could write a book on how he interacted with his Marines.

Two quick stories, our day was briefings all morning, then on to the Huey to fly out to the field. I had his sidearm, a 45 in my desk. On the way to the Huey, I held it out to him and he waved me off, so I pushed out a little farther, and he stopped and said very nicely, "Tom. I am surrounded by 27,000 Marines, I feel pretty safe." I saw photos of him earlier as a colonel and Regimented Commander in Vietnam, even then, no pistol.

He also did something I didn't see from other generals. Every week he had me put together a list of Marines that had been seriously wounded and their location, to include the USS Sanctuary and the USS Repose, the two Navy hospital ships that were always off the coast and close to shore. He would pin a Bronze Star and Purple Heart on their hospital gown and chat with them like they were his son. Neither of us would speak the rest of the day, he was their dad at that moment. And it was devastating for us to see these young Marines whose life was forever changed in the most horrific ways, missing arms, legs, blind, the list is long. It still makes me cry when I think about it all.

Sadly, our Huey on a search and destroy mission west of Da Nang, almost to Laos. when down on an approach to a hot LZ. Whenever there was contact with the enemy the general wanted to be there on the ground. He didn't intervene or interfere with the commanders on the ground managing the battle, but the word moved quickly the general is here with us getting his ass shot at too. I forwarded some photos of crash. The general and I were medevac'd out of country, via Japan, Alaska, to Bethesda Naval Hospital, Washington DC. I extended again three times in

total, giving me six years of active to remain on Sea Duty, for Vietnam, and lastly for MCRD Parris Island, where I commanded B Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion. Being an Aide de Camp to a Commanding General can help in your next assignment.

Now finally we get to those Marines that served in tanks in Vietnam. As you can see, I was an MOS 1802 but was side tracked to other responsibilities. Which was extremely common. Between my OCS Class, and my Basic School Class, we had the highest casualties during the Vietnam Conflict.

I will mention two, and start with Lt. Louis Dobbin. He was with the 3rd Platoon, C Company, 3rd Tank Bn. Louis died on May 13, 1967. Of interest, his dad was a Marine general who flew 125 Combat Missions in WW2, and was an Air Ace. Louie got married upon graduation from Tank School at Del Mar. His wife had a baby girl while he was in Vietnam and he never lived to see his daughter.

The second story is extremely tragic but every death was tragic. Lieutenant Wayne Hayes, by coincidence was with 3rd Platoon, C Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, the same unit as his friend and classmate Louis Dobbin died on July 6th, 1967. He had met a girl while in Tank School at Del Mar, and they agreed to get married during his R&R in Hawaii. His parents flew in from Wisconsin and his bride to be and her parents flew in from I don't recall. They all met in Hawaii and Lt Wayne Hayes never got off the plane. No one knew where he was. After waiting a week, they all left still not knowing, and went home. You see Wayne was killed just several days before his R&R Flight to Hawaii. It was only when his parents arrived home in Wisconsin that, they found out he had been killed. When the Marine Corps went to his home, to notify his parents, no one was home, they were in Hawaii waiting for him to arrive for the wedding. As a result, the Marine Corps changed their

policies to take you out of combat a week or more before leaving for R&R

We lost 58,200 killed in Vietnam. I read somewhere that the majority of deaths were in the North, or from the DMZ South and were Marines. Everyone has a similar story, but these two I trained with starting at OCS, 12 Weeks, the Basic School, 6 months and Tank School, 4 months. And on top of it all, it said Wayne Hayes went to the Army's Tank School at Ft Benning, and was married. Wrong and Wrong.

Technology back then consisted of a typewriter and a company clerk, many of which were drafted, hated the Corps, and on departing Vietnam took all the paper on their desk and threw it in the trash. So many earned medals they never got, this is partly why.

I was on active duty for six years, loved every minute, in the worst of times, sitting in the mud, during the monsoon season, constantly raining, no shower, no hot food, sometimes no food, and walking around half naked because you have worn the same utilities for several months with rotted out boots that made every step torture. Once you learned to embrace "The Suck," and all that you could do is laugh, if you had the strength. I mean what can they do, send you to Vietnam, too, late we are here.

I left the Corps because I started running into senior officers, who couldn't laugh, and were as serious as a heart attack. Worse, I didn't see that special relationship between the officers and those they commanded.

Today I see that relationship once again, we have a better Corps today than ever before because of our relationships. The Marine Corps is the closest thing you can find to unparalleled fun, highs and lows are part of life, it's how you react that separates the men from the boys. As for the Marines, we are a National Treasure. As General Edwin B. Wheeler, whose entire career was spent at war, said, "I am surrounded by Marines, I feel pretty safe."



A Million Candlepower: Operation Snatch and the Early Days of Marine Corps Infrared Warfare in Vietnam

BY SGT. JOE TYSON, SR.

At 1500, B-31 left B Company command post with B-34 behind. We passed through the two Marble Mountains and out to the beach, heading south. I received a radio call from Bravo 6.

"B-31 and B-34, turn around immediately and proceed to Battalion at Hill 34 for an equipment change."

I copied that and radioed Gil to see if he got the transmission. He had. We turned the tanks and headed north back up the beach. We arrived at Hill 34 at 1700 and parked by Battalion Maintenance. I told the crews to stay with the vehicles. Gil and I went inside and spoke with Sergeant Harold Riensche, who ran the whole show here at Battalion Maintenance.

"Your two tanks are scheduled to have the old incandescent searchlights replaced with a new Xeon-type searchlight with infrared capability," he said.

"Infrared? What about the tank optics? They don't have infrared capability," I asked.

"Each unit comes with a special set of binoculars that do."

"What's the candlepower?" Gil asked.

"About a million."

A million candlepower. That would reach out a thousand yards at least.

"Leave the tanks here overnight," he continued. "The technicians will install them in the morning."

Back at the vehicles, we briefed the crews. They chose to stay with the tanks instead of sleeping in the battalion area. Smart move, I thought, remembering the mortar attack I had experienced there months earlier.

The next morning, the technicians finished installation

by noon and zeroed the new light with the main gun. We signed for the equipment and were ordered back to the forward infantry outpost south of Marble Mountain. We arrived at 1330 after dropping seven cases of C-rations at the leper colony for the nun and her patients. Back in our old position, I coordinated with the Marines from A Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines in the bunker to our left. Canister was loaded in the 90mm. The heat and humidity were brutal. I poured a full canteen over my head and set the watch. It was October 1, 1965.

At 1500, both tank commanders were called to the command bunker. We were told we would accompany the infantry the next morning on Operation Snatch, departing at 0630. Our mission was to serve as a blocking force overlooking a valley while the infantry conducted a sweep.

"This ought to be a fun two days," I told Gil.

"Very pleasurable," he replied dryly.

That night, at 2000, I tried out the new Xeon infrared light. Through the binoculars, the world turned green. I traversed across the rice paddy and spotted movement — a dog. When it turned toward the beam, its eyes glowed white.

Later, around midnight, the loader woke me.

"There's a Marine sniper on the tank. He wants to talk to you."

He carried a Springfield 30:06 with a starlight scope.

"Nice piece," I said. "Want to try our infrared?"

When we scanned the paddy, he stopped me.

"Back left... stop. I see someone."

Through the binoculars, I saw an enemy soldier sitting in a dry drainage ditch with an AK-47 on his lap. >>

Then another. I radioed Alpha Two. "B-31. Two enemy combatants with weapons in the paddy to my right front."

"Bravo 31, no friendlies in that area. Take them out."

"Smitty, fire canister."

"On the way."

The round detonated. One enemy dropped. Infantry patrols moved out, and using brief white-light illumination and infrared guidance, we led them in. Two enemy KIA. The new equipment had already proven its worth.

At first light, we moved north along the beach. Automatic fire erupted from the wood line.

"Gunner, canister, my target. Fire."

"On the way."

"Loader, WP."

"Up."

"Fire."

White phosphorus impacted. Amtracs and infantry returned fire. A medevac Huey came in under escort, lifting two wounded Marines while we suppressed the tree line with main gun and machine-gun fire. We eventually pushed inland to our blocking position overlooking a broad valley. It was 0800 when the operation kicked off. The heat was suffocating. Mosquitoes swarmed. The valley below appeared quiet.

Around midday, after the infantry had swept through, Smitty called out, "Movement in the valley!"

Through the scope, I saw enemy soldiers emerging from spider holes — positions the infantry had unknowingly walked past.

I radioed Gil. "Do you see them?"

"Affirmative."

"Wait. Let's see if more join."

A lieutenant climbed up. "What are you waiting for?"

"They can't see or hear us at 400 meters," I said. "They'll get 90mm on top of them before they hear the report."

More gathered. I counted at least nine.

"Gunner, HE. From right to left."

"Up!"

"Fire!"

"On the way — boom!"

Gil's tank fired almost simultaneously from the opposite direction. Round after round impacted. Dust engulfed the valley.

"Cease fire."

As the dust cleared, the lieutenant looked through the scope.

"Holy hell... nothing but pieces."

He climbed down, shaking his head. "Some job you have. I wouldn't want it. Too hot in there. What's your name?"

"Sergeant Tyson, B-31."

That night, I thought about the infrared light — a million-candlepower cutting through the darkness. It was primitive by later standards. The tank optics weren't integrated. We had to improvise, coordinate, adapt. But it changed the battlefield. In the rice paddies and valleys near Marble Mountain, in the heat and the mosquitoes and the constant tension, we were witnessing the beginning of something new — the early days of Marine Corps infrared warfare in Vietnam. And for those of us inside the steel hulls, counting the months left in our tours, it was one more edge in a place where survival often came down to who could see first.

About the author: Joe Tyson is also the author of his book, *Unfortunate Sons*. A war memoir of a US Marine tanker who fought in Vietnam. The book is dense and analyzes various aspects of the author's conflict and military career. Preparation, military operations, American interaction with civilians in Vietnam, political analysis of events, and many other aspects are present in this work.

BOB FORNWALT

JANUARY 15, 1947 TO SEPTEMBER 22, 2025

BY HARRIS HIMESW

On September 21, 2025, a justifiably monumental memorial service was held for Christian hero, Charlie Kirk. The day after, another American hero — a Marine — died inauspiciously in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His name is Robert George Fornwalt. Both died before their time — one by assassination and the other by cancer. Our flag at Big Sky Christian Center in Hamilton, Montana flew at half-staff earlier for Kirk and then for Fornwalt.

Bob was a man who looked at the world with a smirk on his lips and a matching spark in his steady eyes. He knew what he

knew — and he knew it — as many have discovered. He exhibited a sly sense of humor to temper his occasional sternness.

All of us Marine tankers knew him as "Fornwalt." One of his closest and oldest Marine friends — Ronald Shuppy ("Shuppy") — always refers to him as, "Bobby." They went through tank school together at Del Mar and have remained in frequent touch up until a few days before Bobby's death.

In later years, I called him, "Bob," along with other choice epithets, "Pig-Headed" and "Turkey." I was probably the last Marine to have talked with him.

I first met Bob in July of 1967 when I took command of 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, Third Tank Battalion at the Rock Pile, just west of Camp Carroll on the DMZ. Shuppy chortles as he often reminds me of my advent. I stuck my head in their bunker to meet them, and – to him – I looked like a young kid. And so it began.

That first night, the Rock Pile came under a rocket attack. I ordered my tanks to disperse to the perimeter. They did – all but one. The tank commanded by my platoon sergeant was buttoned up. Never moved. I ran over to see what was wrong. My platoon sergeant had ordered his crew to button up, and I found him cowering on the floor of the turret. I sent him packing to Camp Carroll the following morning. Don't even remember his name – and don't want to.

From then on, I was wise enough to learn from Sgt. Fred Mace, LCpl Bob Fornwalt, and LCpl Charlie Carson how to run a combat tank platoon. Bob had already done one thirteen-month tour and had come back for another. After I was medevaced the next month, Fred rotated home, and shortly thereafter, after I had returned, Charlie was severely wounded while TC-ing the tank I was on and was sent back to the states. Then, it was mainly Bob who continued to give me wise counsel all the way to Khe Sanh in May, 1968. And he knew what he was doing – and the whole platoon respected his quiet competence.

The NVA were fortunate that Bob saw little combat, but in one fracas before my arrival in country, he was wounded in his right hand. With customary stoicism, he didn't go to the corpsman and didn't receive the purple heart he warranted. If I had the opportunity to go back in time, I would put him in for the Legion of Merit, given the role he played in our platoon and company – and for his Purple Heart.

Shuppy tells this vignette which exemplifies Bob's personality and the way he responded to the world around him:

Bobby had just returned from leave to the States after having extended for six more months. The scene was at what was called "Payable" because it was near Payable Hill at the Rock Pile. We also called it "Conviction Kilo," a call sign used by Kilo Company, 2/3 when they were there with us – and the name stuck even after they were replaced by another battalion. Lt. Himes was still on the hospital ship after being wounded in August of '67. Luckily, the company had assigned two new lieutenants for Mr. Himes to train.

One was Lt Georgaklis. He took over for a while, and we got along with him well. He was a savvy officer who took care of us, and we had mutual respect for one another. He learned how to deal with troops in combat from Lt. Himes. But he got wounded and left us.

The other lieutenant took over. He was fat and aloof. He didn't heed Lt. Himes's principles of leadership. He chose to separate himself from our platoon with a barrier like two-strand barbed wire, which was fine with us if that's how he wanted it. Accordingly, we treated him with the prescribed

Navy discipline – and nothing more.

One evening, we were in our sand-bag bunker/hooch unwinding. Lt. Himes was a reader and encouraged all of us to read – and that's what Bobby and I were doing. Bobby's reel-to-reel tape deck, which he had brought back with him, was playing '60's music in the background. He played it just loud enough so the grunts on watch nearby could hear it and remind them of home. He and I were both enjoying the music.

Bob was across from me, and the lieutenant was at the far end of the hooch, also reading. No conversation, just relaxing after a hard, hot day of PMing the tank.

Out of nowhere, the lieutenant barked, "Would you shut that f*ckin' thing off!" Not a question but a strident assault.

Silence. Shocked suspense. I kinda looked over at Bobby, and we locked eyes. "Here-we-go," the wordless look communicated. Then I looked down at my book – but with no comprehension. Just waiting and aghast at what had happened.

What happened next reminds me of a red-bone Iowa hound dog and a pack of his buddies I once saw sprawled across a dusty road. Our car approaches and honks at them to move out of our way. The hound raises his head and considers. Like it's his idea, he slowly and – at his own volition and pace – moves just barely out of the way. The rest follow him. He's in control – of the whole situation. Without acknowledging our existence, he allows us to continue on our rude intrusion. I look in the rearview mirror. He lies back down in the middle of the road – their road. The rest settle down around him. Order is restored. His order.

That hound dog was like Bobby. Like it's his idea – like there was no rude intrusion – Bobby leisurely, nonchalantly and – if I might say – insouciantly turned the tape deck off. He calmly placed it on a shelf of the crate he had behind his rack and went back to his book. Didn't say a word. Or acknowledge the lieutenant. He had now confirmed control of our hooch. Order was restored. His order.

And I, like a dutiful member of Bob's pack, returned to my book – comprehending not only it but awed by what had taken place – with a smile on my face and a moment to remember the rest of my life.

But the lieutenant's barbed wire barrier now met our concrete wall – with the prescribed Navy discipline.

When Lt. Himes returned, the lieutenant was transferred up to Con Thien. I heard later that he unfortunately caught a bullet between the eyes.

As I look back, Bob was in my platoon – but I also was part of his pack, and grateful to be included. Bob took care of his pack, including me. When Jeff Griffith ("Griff") became incapacitated due to a stroke, he was wheelchair bound, and his wonderful wife, Mary Beth, couldn't adequately care for him even though she's a nurse. He entered a VA hospital facility in Allentown, PA. Bob drove the four or so >>

hours from Lancaster to visit him. Once I was able to make it out there to see him, also. He was on the phone with Griff multiple times during the week. The same went for Shuppy. They were always yakking, and then I'd hear about it. He also kept in touch with Harry Christensen ("Super Jew") in Marble Head, MA. We all exchanged phone calls frequently, and I'd make it out maybe once or twice a year to see them and others – usually with Mike Parker (a Marine-at-heart) who helps me run the shelter, and sometimes our Anatolian Shepherd-mix dog, Theo. Mike did most of the driving. We are all family.

Contrary to Marine protocol, I addressed my men by their first names, even though they always referred to me as, "Lieutenant," or simply, "Sir." Since we fought together and lived together, my men were family. And I didn't call my older brother, Larry, the premier Marine of my state-side family, "Himes." That would be absurd.

Our relationship in a combat environment was a symbiosis which won firefights and battles and kept us all alive and sane. However, I was routinely called on the carpet by a string of company commanders over my ten-and-a-half months in the field for my lapse because I wouldn't play the hypocrite and resort to last names in the company area when we came in from the field. And my men appreciated that.

I understand that the military requires some system to select its officers. Generally – and certainly during Vietnam – the usual indicia was a college degree. Otherwise, you were enlisted. Of course, a college degree doesn't automatically make a good officer. Shuppy had a degree but preferred to just do his time as a snuffy and get back to Iowa, but he was absolutely an integral part of our platoon. A college degree was my entry ticket, at least for consideration to become an officer. However, I learned early – and confirmed it over the years – many 17, 18, or 19 year-old enlisted men would have made fine officers – but for the lack of a degree. Many of my men would have made fine officers, and, incidentally, got degrees after they got out. Bob was such a man. He got a degree in mechanical engineering after active duty. But his leadership skills back then were obvious, and I put them to good use.

We all love and miss Bob mightily.

I miss his low, gravelly voice intoning: "Hello, Sir...", or "Good afternoon, Mr. Himes...", or, "One of these days I might make it to Montana. Susan wants to go." Or he'd rumble, "Let's get some ice cream," or, "I'll ask Susan," or, "Shuppy says, 'hello,'" or, "Say, 'hi,' to Parker." Words I'll never hear

again – but remember.

Mike Parker misses the confabs with Bob about hotrods and Corvettes – and motorcycles, particularly Bob's Indians.

Shuppy and Bobby were always talking cars and motors.

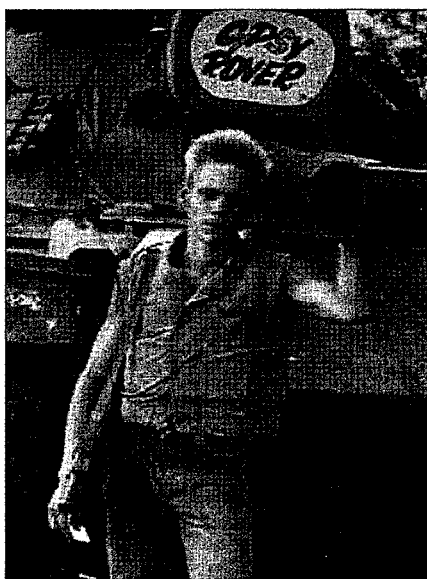
Just as Charlie Kirk knew his Lord, so did Bob Fornwalt. And they're both with Him.

I can also envision Bob's reunion with Griff and Super Jew – three now-glorified tankers once-again together on an eternal mission – unstoppable. I hope to join them with Shuppy and others of my platoon when we get there.

Bob is survived by his faithful daughter, Tracy Fornwalt, and her sister's kids, Gabe, Leah, and Opal – his adored and spoiled "grandkids." He is survived also by his beloved companion of many years, Susan Holmberg, who has become my friend, also. Tracy and Susan rarely left his side at the end. Susan was holding his hand when he died.

I can hear Bob saying: "Lieutenant, you don't need to write some kinda eulogy – but you'll do what you want to do, no matter what I say."

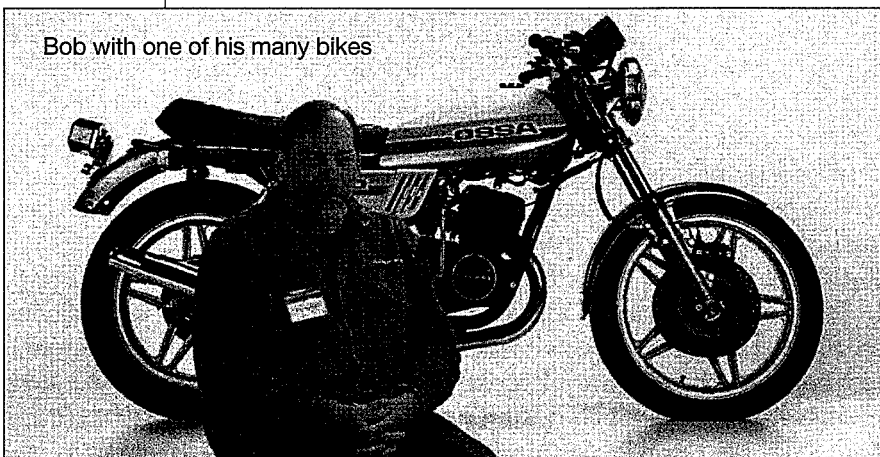
And Bob's right. He's always right. ■



Bob in Nam



Bob and Lt Himes in Nam



Bob with one of his many bikes

VTa 2026 MINI-REUNION
Kansas City, MO
Sept 10 – 13, 2026

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Thursday, Sept. 10th Arrival Day – Dinner on your own.

Friday, Sept. 11th 0700 – Complimentary Breakfast
0900 – **Load buses for tour of the WW1 Museum**
1200 – Lunch on your own
1400 – Return to hotel
Dinner on your own

Saturday, Sept 12th 0700 – Complimentary Breakfast
0900 – **Open Day**
1200 – Lunch on your own
1800 – BBQ dinner at hotel paid by the VTA

Sunday Sept 13th Departure Day

TRAVEL SUGGESTION:

Fly to Kansas City International-(KCI)

Then take the complimentary hotel – airport shuttle to the hotel

LODGING:

Homewood Suites KC International Airport

7312 NW Polo Drive | Kansas City, MO 64153

Direct to Hotel: 816.880.9880

Special Room rate: \$139 per night + taxes, special fees, etc..

Rate includes:

Two queen beds

Free breakfast- Free Wi Fi – Free Parking

Room reservation cutoff date: 08/20/26

- 1) You can call the hotel direct at **816.880.9880** to make your room reservation by giving the agent our dates and the code: **"USM"**
- 2) Or you can book a room through this website link: <https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/csgfbhx-usm-f32c51f1-44f3-47f1-bad9-332b724244cc/>
- 3) If, for any reason, you have to cancel your room reservation, it is a 48-hour minimum to notify the hotel.

Please note: This mini-reunion requires all attendees to fill out and mail in a reunion registration form and to pay a \$75 registration fee per attendee to help defray the cost of the tour bus transportation; the beverages in the Slopchute and the dinner paid by the VTA for one evening.

USMC VTA 2026 MINI-REUNION

September 10 – 13, 2026

Homewood Suites KC International Airport
7312 NW Polo Drive | Kansas City, MO 64153
Phone: 816.880.9880

Please Print All

Name: _____

Guest's Name (s): _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Cell Phone _____ Home Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

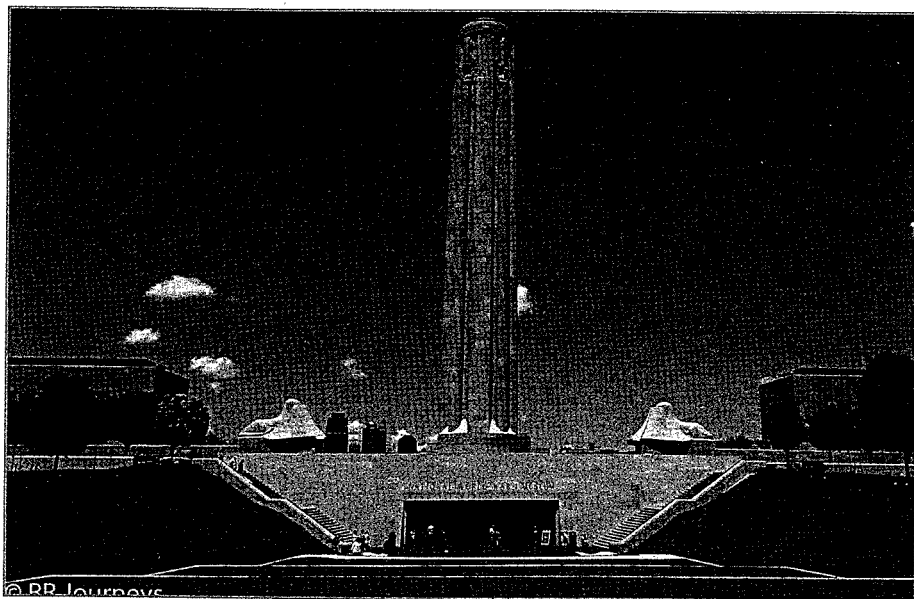
Would you like to participate in our video interview program? Yes _____ No _____

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

Please note that this is a mini-reunion for three days. We will not be conducting any special events other than visiting the National World War One museum and catering a BBQ dinner at the hotel. All other meals will be on your own.

To cover the bus transportation, the one dinner and the Slopchute beverages, please pay: \$75 per person. Mail completed form and your reunion registration check to:

USMC VTA
c/o Ron Knight
6665 Burnt Hickory Drive
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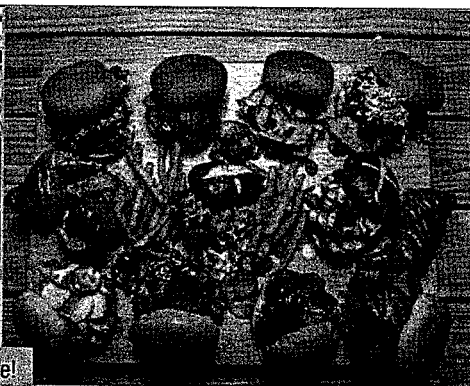
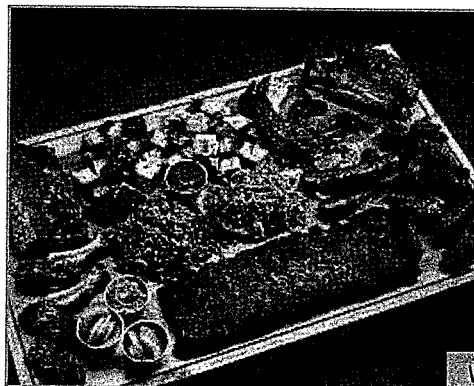
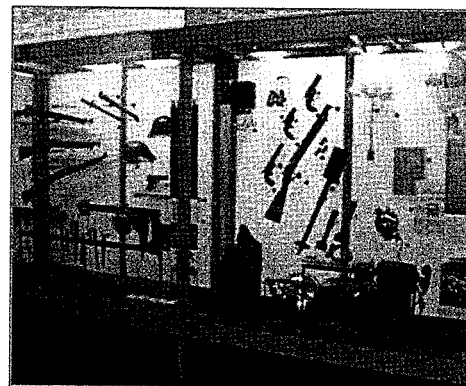
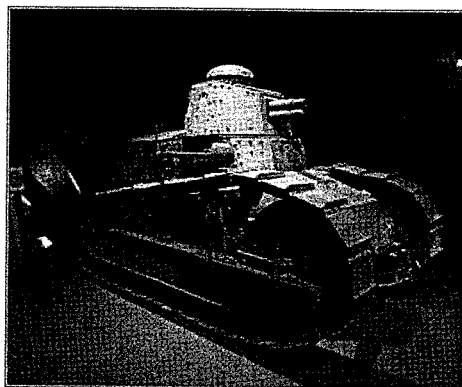
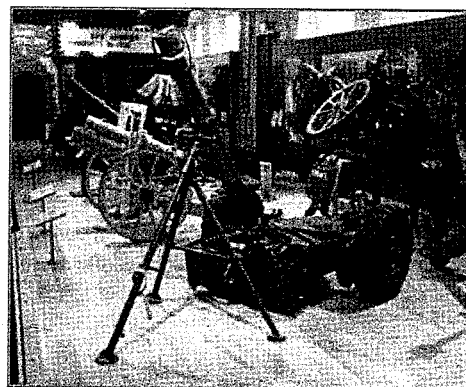
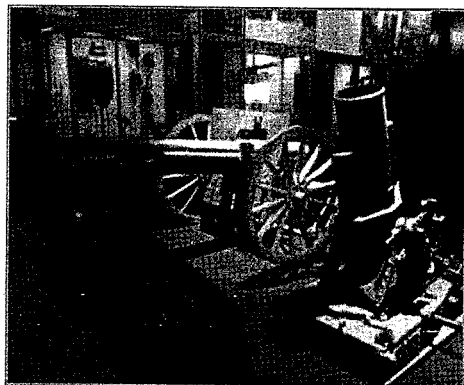


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– Gen. William Thomson,
U.S. Army