WE REMEMBER



WE REMEMBER

SERVICE RECORD

Name _____

Home of Record _____

Date of Birth _____

Branch of Service _____

Service Number _____

Date of Enlistment _____

Date of Separation _____

Dates of Vietnam Service _____

In-Country Unit(s) _____







SEMPER FI

WE REMEMBER



THE VIETNAM STORIES OF THE MEN OF 2ND BATTALION, 1ST MARINES

"For those who fight for it,
Life has a flavor
The protected never know...."

Found at Khe Sanh
Anonymous Marine

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Acknowledgments

We Remember is the result of the ideas, the efforts, and the encouragement of many people. Without our reunion organization, Vietnam Era 2nd Bn, 1st Mar, itself the result of the hard work, the caring and the concern of Robert Hughes and David "Doc" Johnson, there would have been no book.

The members of the first book committee, led by David "Doc" Johnson and convened by him at the 1989 2/1 reunion, gave the book its first impetus. Those members are: Kenneth "Sandy" Carlson, Phil Leslie, Charles Lively, Mike McNeely, David Novak, Donald Otterbein, Duane Pretzer, Paul Stenzel, Louis Voyer, and Harvey Weishuhn.

By the 1991 reunion, the committee had changed somewhat, and the second book committee formed to move the project forward: Kenneth "Sandy" Carlson, Jim Elbrecht, David "Doc" Johnson, Steve "Ski" Krasowski, Phil Leslie, David Novak, and Paul Stenzel.

Other 2/4 members who stepped in with the right help at just the right time are Paul Gloria, who provided the Command Chronology of 1968, a year for which there is not yet an official USMC history; Albert Koss, who provided additional information for 1971; Brian Murray, whose list of names of non-members made it possible for at least some of them to be correctly spelled; Paul Stenzel and Paul Stevens for their helpful background material; Phil Leslie for his research, the result of which is the background history of the Vietnam War found in End Pieces; Jim Ross, who designed the hardcover and the title page; Don Dennis and Hank Van Laarhoven, who contributed the photos which grace (respectively) the front and the back of the softcover edition; and those who contributed so generously to see to the financial needs of the project.

The deaths of fellow Marines were tragedies for everyone, but unfortunately these deaths were a part of the life of the Corpsman. Doc Johnson typifies the caring Corpsman, and the result of his continued concern and years of work is the KIA list in Part IV. We are all grateful.

The editors also wish to thank Christine Truong of Boston for her translations of the Vietnamese; Ned Brandolini for his patient, gentle, and expert care of all the old photos; and James Dedrick and his staff at the *News-Gazette* Print Shop in Lexington, Virginia, for their pleasant professionalism.

We thank our friend from 2/4, the retired lieutenant David Mix, for his sensitivity, his appreciation and his fine eye, and our daughter Dena Marie Novak Holt for her hours at the computer, time tirelessly and lovingly given "for the boys."

And to all the contributors of material, who searched their scrapbooks and attics for the photographs and memorabilia in this book and who searched their hearts and their souls to bring forth the memories on these pages, thank you.

David and Marian Novak
Editorial and Production
We Remember

Introduction

"History is written for schoolmasters and armchair strategists . . .
[W]arriors pick their way through the dark."
--R. Esher, writing at the beginning of WWI

It has been 28 years since the men of Second Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division landed on the shores of Vietnam to begin what has been for some a journey that is not yet over. It should not be difficult to understand--expecially after reading the contents of the following pages--why for many of us this war does not seem to have an end. The things that happen to us when we are young often loom larger-than-life over the horizon of all the rest of our years. And when the events are shattering and life-shaping--centered around life-and-death matters and colored with the indelible hues of brother love--it would be more surprising if they *were* forgotten than that they are not.

Words cannot, of course, describe in the abstract the pain and terror of the experience we call war; but words can describe the particular experiences that produce such feelings as pain, loss, and fear. The struggle to describe these experiences through simple, concrete details has been for many writers in this book painful in itself. It is important to understand that the crisp, clean, black lines that march across the white pages here belie this struggle. For while the stories came to the editors in different forms--from the disjointed phone interview to the typed manuscript--very often they came painstakingly handwritten on lined note paper or haltingly, almost shyly, spoken on tape.

Often there seemed to be on those lined pages filled with pencil and ink markings and on the tapes full of awkward silences an element of fear: fear of telling too much or the wrong thing or in the wrong way, fear of exposing parts of a past to specific criticism, fear of revealing oneself. For so long we "didn't talk about it." For so long no one would listen. Not to the simple truth, anyway.

But however difficult and painful, the stories came, and the result is this history of the Second Battalion, First Marines made up of the personal experiences of the 2/1 Marines and Marine-Corpsmen in Vietnam--their history, though one shared in all the basic and profound ways by any Marine who served in that war.

These personal accounts present the Vietnam story of 2/1 as it happened and is remembered by the men (and, in a very few instances, by their relatives). Readers will find fear and guilt in the stories; confusion and boredom; homesickness and sorrow; satisfaction and pride. They will hear different voices: the matter-of-fact presentation of the professional soldier; the sad telling of the death of a best friend; the proud recounting of a job well done long ago and under the worst of conditions; the reluctant retelling of something important that no one wanted to happen, but which did happen--in a place, as one of us put it, "no one especially wanted to go to." And even after all the years, the stories seem new.

Readers looking for a more "traditional" history will find some of that at the end of the book, where it will probably mean more to those who have first read the personal accounts. For the accounts, read from front to back, provide a version of traditional history as well as their own rich, personal one. Appearing as nearly as possible in chronological order, they lead the reader all the way through 2/1's six-year tour of duty--from the first landings to the final farewells. In addition to a sense of what happened and when, they reveal the personal memorable events, the significant things that stick in the memories of men because they have captured their imagination, touched their heart, wounded their soul, or otherwise changed their world.

If it's not perfect history, it is perhaps more perfectly human experience in an historical context. After all, history is not merely what happens: it is what happens to people.

Sometimes several writers provide quite different glimpses of the same event. We see things differently because we are different, and so our truths--especially truths about such incomprehensible

semi-abstractions as war--can and do vary. Our stories are as varied as we are.

And we *are* varied. Some of us joined the Marines to fight in Vietnam; some of us were professional military; a (very) few were drafted. Some of us knew exactly why we were in Vietnam; some of us still don't understand why we were there. Some of us served as many as three tours--33 months--in country; some of us served only a matter of weeks, medevaced home almost as soon as our tour had begun. Some of us have "talked" about the war before, even written about it, perhaps. Some of us can't talk about it yet. (Many have talked about it for the first time in these pages.)

We came from all over to go to our war--from every corner of the country, and from some places outside of it. We came as Corpsmen from the Navy, as career Marines from Marine bases, as boots from Parris Island and Camp Pendleton, as young officers from OCS and PLC and the Naval Academy. And we came to those places from high schools and colleges, from jobs on farms and in towns, and, yes, from the justice system. Hundreds and hundreds of men from hundreds of places, and all of us different in at least a hundred ways.

But we should never forget, nor are we likely to, what it is we have in common. Because, of course, what we have in common is more important to who and what we are as a group--and perhaps even as individuals--than our differences are. And that common bond is simply this: we served. We are Marines who served together in the Second Battalion of the First Marine Regiment in the Vietnam War. And we remember. §

WDN and MFN
Rockbridge Baths, Virginia
June 1993

Editors' Note

Dates are written in military form, and although times also most often appear in military form, they do not do so consistently.

If a Marine or Corpsman died in Vietnam, he is referred to as KIA, regardless of the circumstances of his death.

The words *Corpsman*, *Corpsmen*, *Marine*, and *Marines* are capitalized throughout.

Readers will find pages in the "Album" section in End Pieces which have been left blank and are meant for additional personal memories and photographs.

It was an honor and a privilege to edit this work. In spite of our best efforts to do it justice, and in spite of our having done our best to avoid errors, we realize we have not always been able to do so--and therefore we rely on the understanding and patience of both the readers and the writers of this book.

--WDN and MFN

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Forward!

The 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines came into being on 26 July 1899. Within a month, the new battalion was on its way to the Philippines under the command of Major George F. Elliot, who was to become the tenth Commandant of the Marine Corps. Over the next two years, Second Battalion, First Marines participated in the Boxer Rebellion and the famous March across Samar.

During the intervention period of Marine Corps history, duty followed in Cuba, Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This series of expeditions involved counter-insurgency and the training of local militia, both of which would be duplicated 40 years later in South Vietnam.

Second Battalion, First Marines was in the vanguard when the First Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942 and killed over 600 attacking Japanese two weeks later.

Second Battalion Marines joined the remainder of the First Marines in the Cape Gloucester Campaign in early 1943, and under the command of Colonel Lewis B. Puller assaulted Peleliu in September 1944. The Second Battalion's final battle of the war was the Okinawa Campaign in 1945.

The First Marines were fighting again in 1950, and the Second Battalion landed at Inchon, continuing the attack on to Seoul. Later, Second Battalion, First Marines helped carry out the successful rear-guard action that enabled the First Marine Division to make its famous march from the Chosin Reservoir.

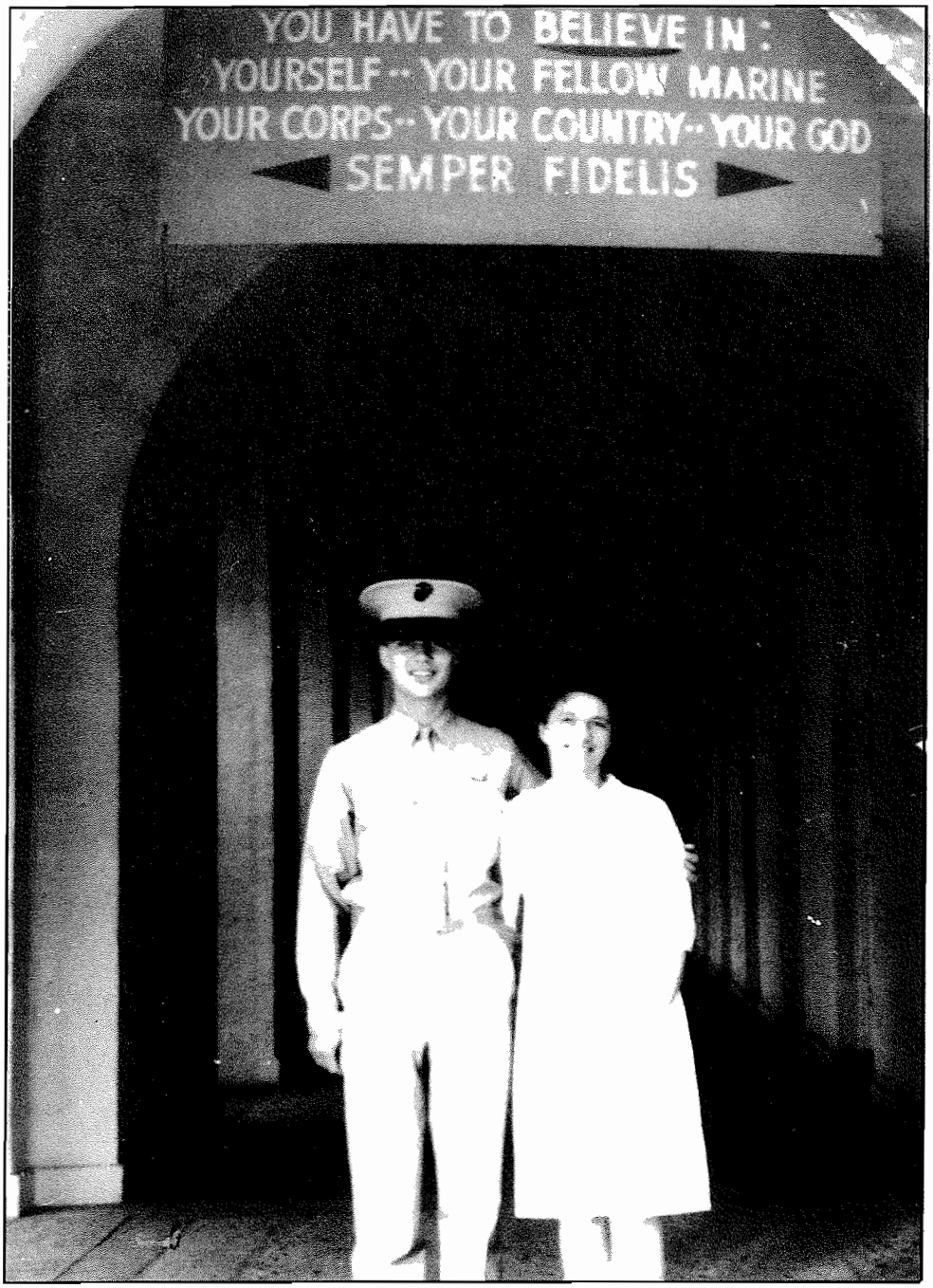
There was a busy lull of 12 years before Second Battalion Marines again came ashore on foreign soil, this time in the Republic of Vietnam. During nearly six years of continuous combat, from July 1965 to May 1971, a tough and resourceful enemy . . . employed both conventional and guerrilla tactics. Still, the Second Battalion's Vietnam generation of Marines fought and defeated this enemy from Con Thien in the north to Go Noi in the South to Khe Sanh in the west. . . .

The tedious job of ferreting out the enemy from the proverbial sea of people required both patience and sophistication. Countering the ever-present threat of enemy rocket and mortar attacks demanded ceaseless night patrolling, which turned the clock around for 2/1 Marines. The continuous hazard of booby traps added a frustrating dimension to all these endeavors. Second Battalion, First Marines met and overcame all these challenges.

In 1989, Second Battalion, First Marines retired its colors at Camp Horno, California. In its 90 years of existence, many Marines have passed through the ranks of this magnificent battalion. You will meet some of them on these pages. They represent very well the long line of good and true men who have served Corps and Country under the colors of the "Battalion Second to None."

[From the 1970 Year Book of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, *published in Da Nang, Vietnam, in 1970. Contributed by Karl Rhines and edited, adapted, and expanded by the editors of* We Remember. *Unfortunately, at this time the author of the original is unknown. --The Editors]*

For the fallen of Second Battalion, First Marines
and those faithful to their memory



(Courtesy of Mike Fire)

GRADUATION DAY, SAN DIEGO 1969

Mike Fire with proud mom Jerry.

"My mom asked the recruiter, 'Is my son going to Vietnam?' He said, 'No. They're bringing kids home from Vietnam.' This was March 1969." --Mike Fire

"Body and spirit I surrendered whole
To harsh Instructors--and received a soul."

--Kipling

THE RECRUITS



[USMC Photo]

AT PARRIS ISLAND IN THE '60's

THE CORPSMEN



Where there are Marines in combat, there you will find Corpsmen. . . .



(Courtesy of Michael Pipkin, third from left in second row from bottom)

THE GRUNTS

For them it was the six o'clock news
For us it was reality

They called for pizza
We called for Corpsmen

They watched children play
We watched children die



FIRST PLATOON, HOTEL COMPANY (1968)

They learned of life
We learned of death

They served dinner
We served their country

Their passion was success
Ours was survival

They forgot
We can't forget

--Author unknown
[Contributed by Sandy Carlson]



(Courtesy of Malcolm Creelman, third from left, second row)

I Remember

I remember.
How can I forget?
It's not made to be forgotten like the day you didn't get the bike you wanted
or the time you failed a test.
I remember my first day there
coming ashore on the wrong beach and having to go back to the ship.
I was nervous.
I remember my first Christmas
and how it seemed such an ordinary day, not the way I remembered them before.
I remember my birthday, turning 21,
being ambushed in a rice paddy,
crawling for five hours to find out there were only four left,
being told to secure the area for medevac,
moving by some bushes with Porter (see, I remember a name)
to ensure the chopper's safety,
to see a bush move and to stand five feet from an NVA
as he leveled his rifle at me and I at him.
I clicked first but the five hours of water had taken their toll and nothing fired.
I remember screaming and jumping toward him,
and seeing his face as he saw mine, scared, and he ran and I prayed.
I remember that old man
and what we did that day so the sergeant could put himself in for a Silver Star.
I remember him telling me
that it was more important for him than for me.
I didn't need it,
I'm no hero.
I remember the other Doc, the one with glasses,
giving us Vaseline gauze pads to unjam our M-16's one night
as an ambush backfired and we had no firepower.
I remember that afterwards I laughed but then there was no time to cry.
I remember throwing myself toward a grenade as it came out of a hole.
Porter lost an arm.
I remember crawling in that hole
to make sure the two men would be buried there forever.
I remember boys venturing into adulthood
through an unlikely door
and when they got there they weren't whole.
I remember finding two escaped POW's and the look on their faces.
I remember going on a hunt with Muraco,
finding our quarry, flushing them out and having wounded one,
watching him pray.
Oh I couldn't understand the words but I could understand the prayer.
I remember that it went unanswered.
I remember being good at what I did
and wondering why.
See, Doc, I remember.
I remember this and a whole lot more.
But sometimes I don't want to remember.

--Mike D'Angelo

"What you have chosen to do for your country . . . is the greatest contribution that any man could make."

--John F. Kennedy (from a speech at the US Naval Academy in June 1961)

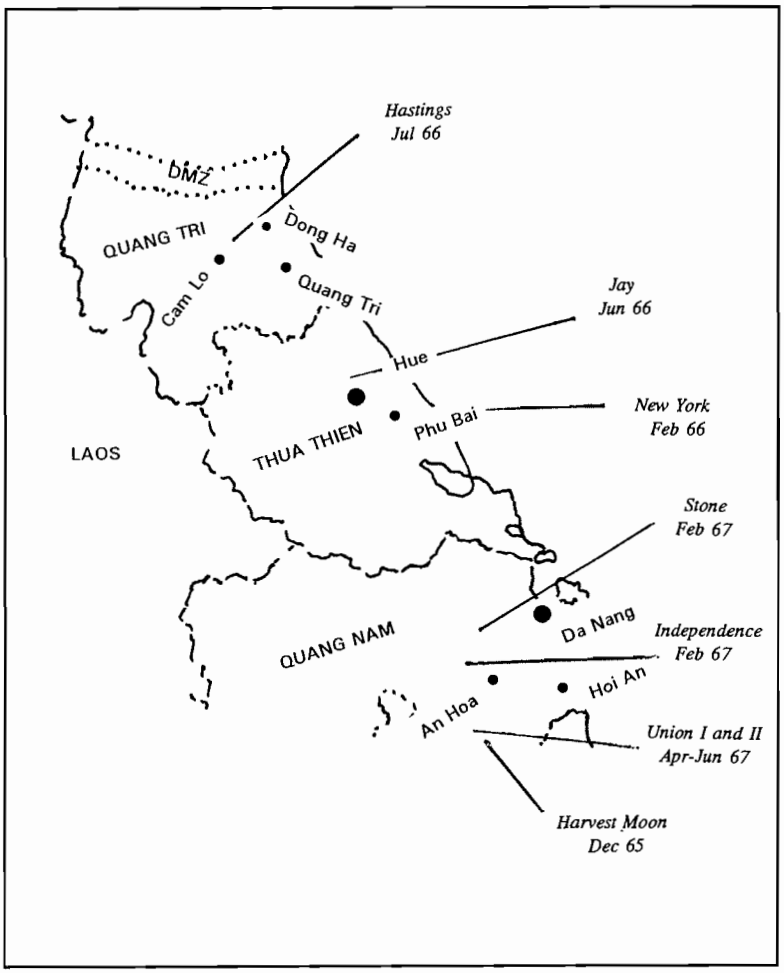


(Courtesy of US Naval Institute)

The USS *Bexar* APA-237

PART I

In the Beginning
August 1965-September 1967



"The front is everywhere."
--Maxim of guerrilla warfare

Second Battalion, First Marines: Formation and Arrival in Vietnam

By Paul Stenzel

The Vietnam Era 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment began to form in March 1965. Essentially, this was the unit which shipped out for Vietnam in August. Most of these men had just rotated back to the States after a tour on Okinawa as part of the 3rd BN, 3rd Marine Regiment. Battalion strength was augmented by the transfer of Marines who had completed tours at other duty stations. The makeup of the battalion was a good mix of professional and seasoned Marines and men who were new to the Corps. Officers, platoon sergeants and squad leaders were career Marines, dedicated and gung ho.

Home for the first Marine Regiment was Camp San Mateo within Camp Pendleton, California. Marines sought diversion from the isolated camp in the nearest town, which was San Clemente. Bus service into San Clemente provided access to a few sleepy watering holes, but most used Clemente as a point of departure for weekend assaults on Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Diego and beyond.

At the same time the battalion was taking shape, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade landed 3500 men in Vietnam (8 March). We didn't give it a great deal of thought, since the US Government implied it was a limited engagement to guard military installations. As the spring and summer months passed, we became aware of other units leaving Camp Pendleton. Their destinations were not disclosed, but we were aware of America's political and military support of Vietnam.

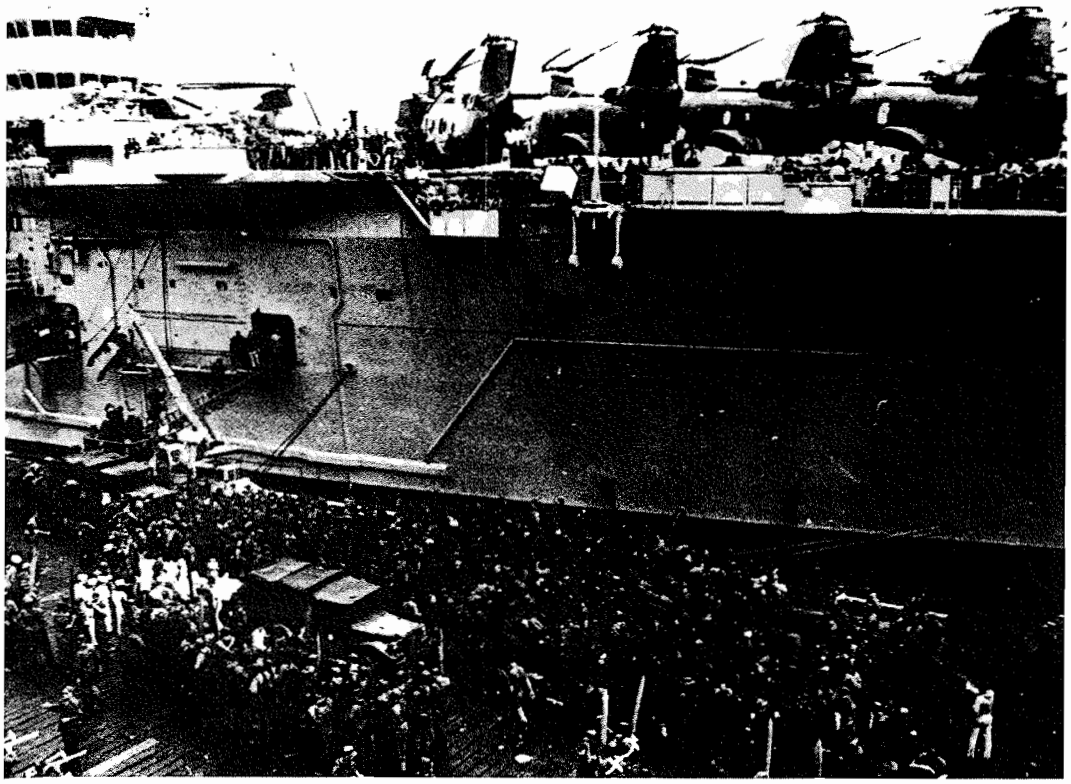
In April of 1965, the United States landed Marines in the Dominican Republic to help restore political stability. Within a month the situation was wrapped up, and Marines were pulling out with expeditionary medals in hand. The nature of that operation lingered in our minds. When 2/1 was finally ordered to ship out, most men thought it would be a limited engagement which would be resolved in months, not years.

By April, the battalion had settled into a regular training schedule. Life at Camp San Mateo included physical training, "field-daying" the barracks, classes, regimented guard duty and much more. Field training took us into the fields of Camp Pendleton and the Cleveland National Forest where we polished infantry tactics. Many will recall the 12-mile forced march we made from Casey Springs back to San Mateo. Those kind of grueling marches would pay dividends in the months ahead.

The best field training was when the company assumed the part of guerrillas against one of the other battalions. In May, Echo Company had this assignment in a weeklong operation called Crazy Quilt. The week was spent agitating and attacking the enemy, roaming in the hills, shivering through cold nights, and generally trying to stay out of the way of tarantulas and rattlesnakes. It was a great week except for the poison oak many of us got into. We spent the next two weeks smearing our bodies with calamine lotion and scratching.

More formal training continued throughout the summer with field tactical tests, land mine warfare, helicopter training and a variety of other missions.

One of those other missions for Echo Company was two weeks of raid training in rubber boats in the ocean off Del Mar. Long hours, painful sunburns and punishing surf were our everyday companions. The company took on the identity of "Raiders," and the men embraced it with a passion. Training culminated with a night raid off the coast. The mission was to destroy an objective and be off the beach before sunrise. Few men will forget the towering surf that greeted them as they returned to the beach to launch their boats. Boats were repeatedly overturned, throwing men and equipment into the black, angry ocean. Sunrise found a beach littered with 782 gear and field-stripped rifles. But most had



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

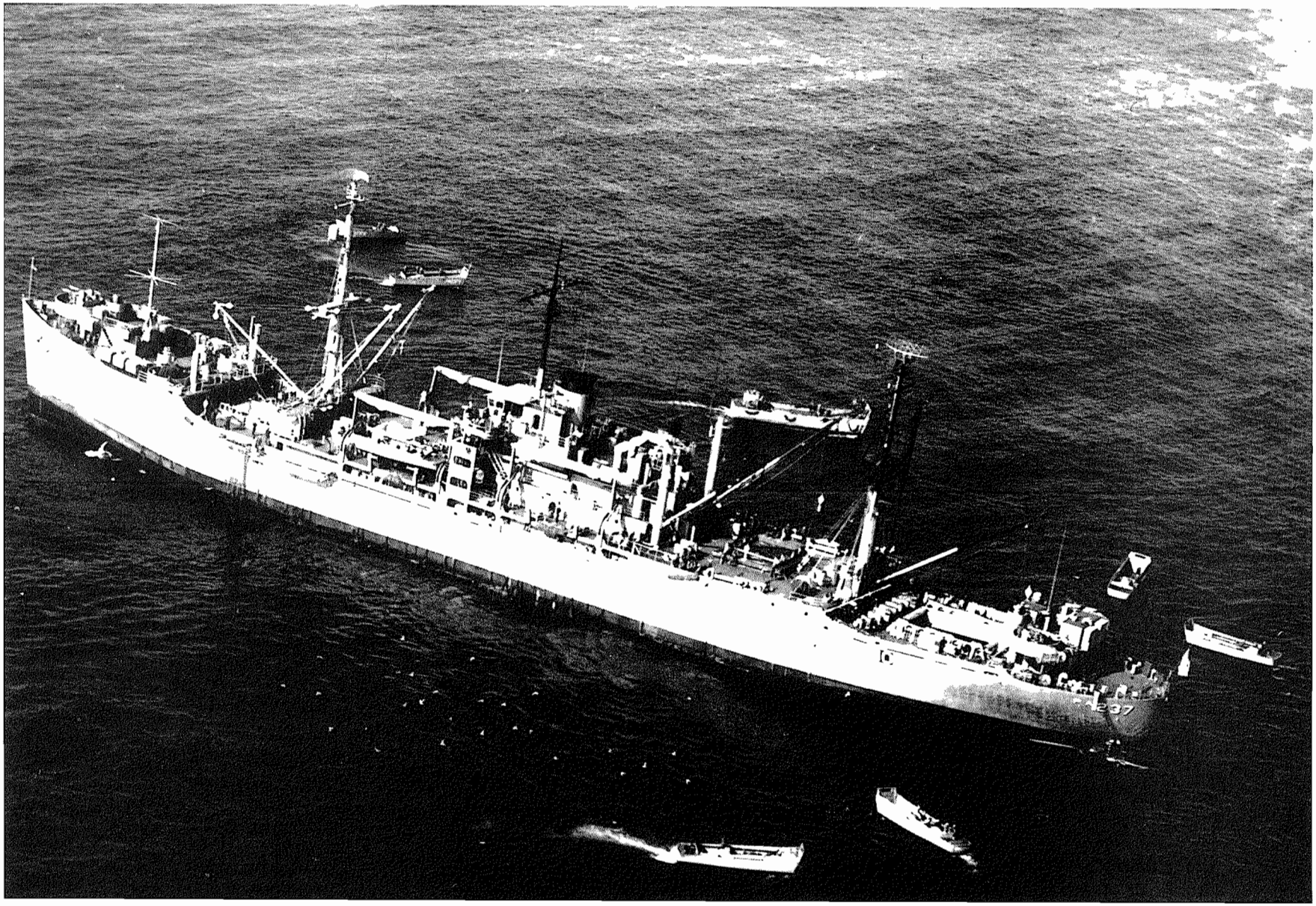
USS *IWO JIMA* (LPH-2) AT DA NANG

Troops and equipment on the dock.



(Courtesy USMC History and Museums Division)

Marines of 2/1 go ashore near Tam Quan during Operation Dagger Thrust III.



The USS *Bexar* APA-237

(Courtesy of US Naval Institute)

made it, and another lesson in determination was learned.

Near the end of June, President Johnson announced that US forces in Vietnam would increase to 75,000. The first leave restrictions went into effect and rumors began to surface that the battalion would be shipping out in September. Around the last week in July, orders were issued that all leaves would expire on 5 August, and those currently on leave were ordered back to Camp Pendleton.

The mood in the barracks took on a new tone. There were more calls home, more letter writing, and more thought about what the future would bring. You could actually find men taking a second look at their rifles and trying to put an edge on a dull bayonet.

Finally, on 2 August, orders were issued for the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment to deploy to the Far East for further assignment. We would ship out in a week. We began packing up, sending personal effects home and saying tearful good-byes to wives, family and girlfriends. We were all committed to serving our country and our Corps and we all believed we would make the difference. Six months maximum to straighten out this Vietnam situation.

We left Camp Pendleton at midnight on 10 August 1965 and boarded the USS *Bexar* APA-237 in San Diego early the same morning. At 0800 hours, the ship pulled out of San Diego and quietly steamed into the Pacific with the men of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment. Our final destination was not disclosed, and we knew only that the ship would refuel at sea near Hawaii.

Troopship accommodations were the usual fare. We slept in canvas bunks stacked five-men high, with about 200 men (or so it seemed) to a compartment. A morning field day was the first order of business and an absolute necessity. Most Marines were happy to stay above deck where they found a little more elbow room and fresh air. Those Marines who were still looking for their sea legs preferred the head or the rail. Days at sea were occupied with physical training, weapons inspection, lectures, cleaning, and standing in chow lines. During the trip, short timers were informed that their enlistments had been "involuntarily extended" by order of the President of the United States. Now we began to understand the phrase "Once a Marine, always a Marine."

Near the end of our trip, we were briefed on Operation Starlite, which had taken place near Chu Lai. Even though the operation was a big success, Marine Corps casualties still surprised us. We hadn't expected an enemy who could knock out our tanks and put 248 of us out of action (45 KIA, 203 WIA). Now we realized there would be a price to pay for any success we might have in this war.

On 28 August, after 18 long days at sea, the *Bexar* pulled into Buckner Bay, Okinawa. I believe we were at Camp Hansen for a week. During that time, they worked our butts off and pushed us hard. We had physical training every day, conditioning hikes, day and night live-firing ranges. Some of us (Echo Company) had rubber-boat raid training exercises. Sometime during that week, we managed to get to the enlisted men's club, get stinking drunk and sing the *Marine Corps Hymn*. Others found a way into town for other activities.

Around 5 September, Echo Company, and I think Fox, began boarding the USS *Talladega* APA-208. The remaining companies (Golf, Hotel, and H&S) went on the *Iwo Jima*. A day or so later, we left Okinawa and assumed the role of Special Landing Force (SLF) of the Seventh Fleet. We steamed directly to Qui Nhon to provide support for the landing of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division on 10 September. Qui Nhon was the first place any part of 2/1 hit Vietnam. They rotated a platoon in from the ships every day or so just to get our feet wet. It wasn't much to write home about, but I believe the battalion registered its first Viet Cong kills here (2 VC KIA).

From late September into early October, the battalion conducted three amphibious raids called "Dagger Thrust" (I - III). None of these operations accomplished much, but Dagger Thrust I, on 25 and 26 September, was the first combat operation that 2/1 conducted as a unit. It was a classic Marine operation with some of us hitting the beach in amtracks and others coming in by helo off the *Iwo Jima*. Echo and Fox on the *Talladega* scrambled down cargo nets into "Mike" boats and transferred to a LSD (I don't remember the name). We got operation orders on the 24 September aboard the LSD. We slept on deck that night (where we could find a spot) and rousted the men up around 0300 or 0400 hours on



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

Men of 2/1 return to the Iwo Jima *after Dagger Thrust I in September 1965.*

25 September. By 0500 or 0600 we were loading up in the amtracks. With all those amtracks firing up in the belly of the LSD, there was quite a racket. I can say that most of us feared the trip to the beach in those steel coffins more than we did hitting the beach.

We hit the beach that morning on the Vung Mu Peninsula 20 miles south of Qui Nhon. The amtracks took us inland with tanks leading the way. Then we (Echo) piled out and occupied three hills while the rest of the battalion came in. As far as I remember, we took no fire during the landing. Later in the day, we searched a village and turned up a few punji traps, but little else. The Corpsmen gave aid to some of the kids and tried to help others. It was a strange introduction to the war. On one hand we considered the people as the enemy, and on the other hand we felt compassion for them as human beings.

That night, we occupied some high ground near the village and had some probing of our position. We did some firing, but there were no casualties on either side. The next day, we marched back to the beach, and Mike boats picked us up and took us back to the *Talladega*. My main memories of that first operation were unbearable heat, having little or no water, heat casualties and wondering where the enemy was.

Dagger Thrust II was on 27 September near Ben Goi, which is north of Nha Trang. The battalion did not land (it was a bust) at all. Dagger Thrust III brought us ashore in the same manner as number I. We landed near Tam Quan on 1 October. I remember some sniper fire as we (Echo) moved inland, but not much more than that. Other companies had more enemy contact, and I think registered a few VC KIA's. The next day we pulled out and found ourselves steaming down to Indonesia. The mission was to stand by for possible evacuation of American personnel during an attempted coup by Indonesian Communists.

Around the middle of October we found ourselves in Subic Bay, Philippines. We remained there until early November and headed back to Vietnam--Echo and Fox aboard the USS *Montrose* APA-212 and the other companies aboard the USS *Valley Forge* LPH-8. The amtracks were aboard the USS *Monticello* LSD-35.

Two more Dagger Thrust operations lay ahead, Harvest Moon and the final landing at Phu Bai. All in all, the July-Oct '65 time frame was an introduction period for us. We hadn't seen enough of the war to get a good feel for what was going on. But many of us didn't like what we saw at that point. There were too many restrictions on us. We wanted to fight, but no one would turn us loose. The politics of the war didn't help, either. Getting operation approval through the Vietnamese government probably provided the Viet Cong with our plans. §

All Hell Broke Loose: The Story of 10 December 1965

By William Cowell

I joined the Marines on a Sunday night in '63 after getting a notice that I was about to be drafted into the Army. I've always loved the Marine Corps, ever since I was a child; I had a full set of dress blues when I was 11 years old. My uncle, Lieutenant Colonel Temple Mayhall, USMC (Ret.), saw that I had the old rough leather boots, hats, and anything else he could get small enough to fit me. At 11, I was the best dressed Marine in the neighborhood back in Vienna, West Virginia.

We lived in West Virginia until I was 14, then we moved to St. Charles, Missouri, where I went to high school. In high school I played football, some baseball, and also ran track. Then I graduated and went to work at McDonnell Douglas Aircraft at Lambert Field, and waited until I could join the Corps. I wanted to be an MP. I knew you had to be 21 to be a police officer, so I thought you had to be 21 to be an MP in the Corps.

Then one day I got this letter saying come and take a physical, the Army would like to have your bod.

No way.

The man across the street was an E-6 in the Marine Corps Reserves. I called him one Sunday night when he got back from his weekend drill and told him I wanted to join, right then. He knew the recruiter, and the recruiter came by the house. By that Monday--my twenty-first birthday--I was in the Corps, just as I had planned.

I went to boot camp and ITR at Diego. I went into M-2-1; our CO was Captain Lavan, who advised us he would gladly trade our dog tags for his Medal of Honor. It was at boot camp that I met Paul Allen, John Wilson, and Paul Willard. We were never in the same squad, but always close enough to talk once in a while.

When I was on guard duty one night, the order came down to close the base, no one on or off, all leave and liberty cancelled. Report to your unit. Pack and stand by. The next day we were taken to the harbor and loaded onto a troopship and away we went. We stopped in the Philippine Islands for I don't know how long. When we got to our next ship, the heli-carrier USS *Valley Forge*, our captain was Page and our platoon commander was, I think, a Lieutenant Jones.

Then onto Nam. We got to Nam water in May or June of '65, maybe sooner, and we cruised up and down the coast there for almost my whole tour.

I wrote letters home to Mom, but when I got home I destroyed them all. I saw and reported things I did not like. We would go inland in a three- to five-helicopter group, set up a raid or ambush on a village, then bug out and go back to the ship. On one of the raids we had three men killed. This would be June or July '65. As the dead lay on the deck of the ship, the sailors got their cameras and took pictures of the bodies instead of taking them down below. The captain of the ship reprimanded the ship's company for this act, but the damage was done, and the Marines and the sailors did not get along after that. Even the ones who were not involved got the red ass from the Marines.

One of our missions was to fly 20 miles north of the DMZ to be support and help recover a recon team that got caught in the open. We all returned safe. We had six safe raids after that without any WIA or KIA. I remembered the names of these operations for a long time, but now they are gone.

December 10, 1965: Operation Harvest

Moon. Our thirteen-man group was led by Corporal (E-4) Lloyd Vannatter, a tobacco-chewing West Virginia boy. I knew he was from West Virginia because we used to talk a lot about home in the hills of West Virginia. Three heli-groups were to land heading north, circle to the left, and head to the wood line and secure a landing zone for the rest of the company.

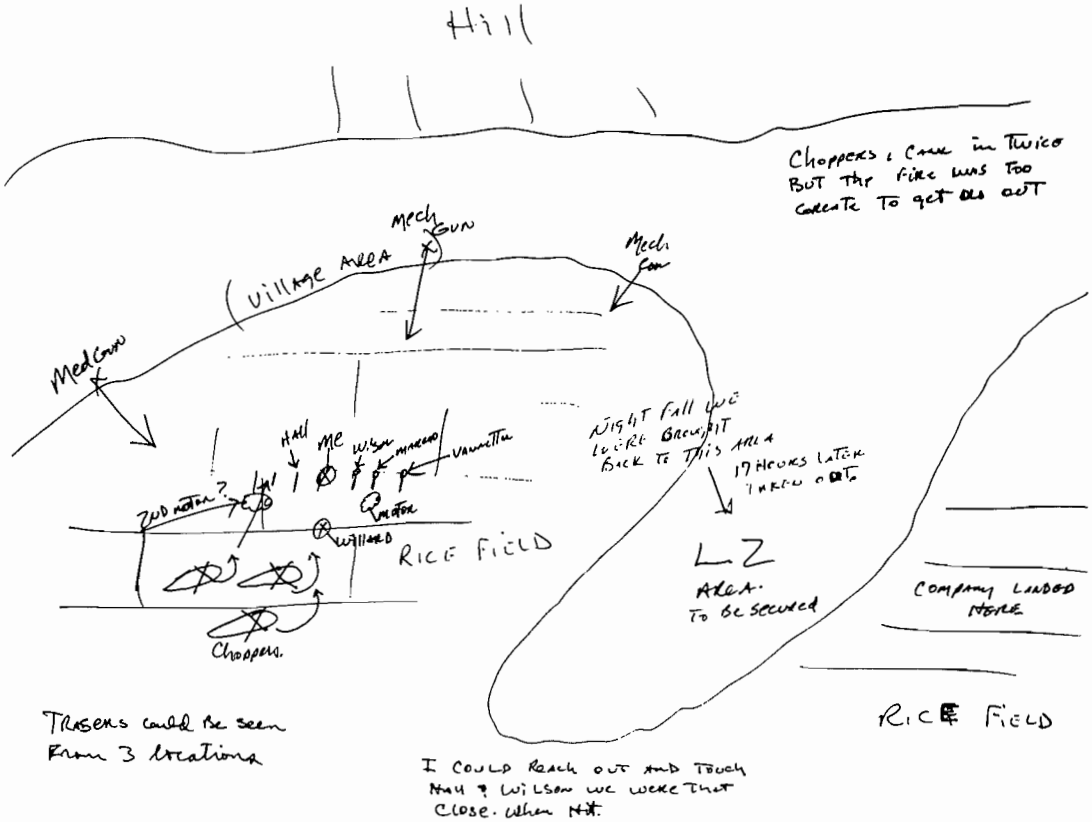
We did just like the OP order said. The copters lifted off after dropping us, and we got about 50 yards when all hell broke loose. I was later told we had come face-to-face with a battalion of North Vietnamese Regulars. We got hit by three machine guns, small arms, and mortars. I was assistant gunner to David Hall. He was on my left, John Wilson was on my right, and Joe Mareno was to Wilson's right. Vannatter was all the way to the right of the squad.

Paul Willard was about 30 yards to the rear and was the first hit. There was a loud ringing in my ears as the rounds hit the copters. When I touched the top of my helmet, I could tell the cammo cover was torn real bad. I'd taken a round in the top of the helmet. But no blood--I was OK!

We came on line and advanced forward, and then mortar rounds came in. I was hit two times in the arm and once in the back. Then two mortar rounds went off, one at the feet of Wilson and Mareno, the other on the other side of David Hall. Willard was hit again, this time in the right wrist. Vannatter was hit in the left of his chest, and whatever it was tore out his shoulder blade. I was hit again, this time in the right ankle. Shrapnel came in the back and out the side, breaking both bones.

I moved toward Vannatter and was hit again, this time through my canteen and into my hip. Then it was over.

Willard and I patched people up as best as we could, each of us with our one good (left) hand. This was about 0730. We stayed in the



(Drawn by Bill Cowell)

DIAGRAM OF BATTLE SCENE
Harvest Moon, 10 December 1965

water in that rice field till almost dark. Hall and Mareno had died in place. Wilson did not die until some hours later. Vannatter died the next day, when he was being placed on the chopper. Bang--war over!

A unit from Echo Company, 2/7 came out and picked us up and took us back to the wood line to our rear. It started to rain, and it rained all night.

Just about sunrise we were medevaced. A Marine I did not know--whose name I never found out--picked me up piggyback-style and carried me to a landing zone. Willard and I were flown to a field hospital they said was Da Nang. We were also told we were about 20 miles south of Da Nang in a place called Happy Valley. I don't know where we were for sure.

We stayed there overnight, then went to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. Stayed there overnight, then to Japan for the night, then Travis Air Force Base in California, again overnight. Then to Colorado, Texas, and Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

Finally to Great Lakes. It was snowing when I was carried off the bus. But I don't remember it being cold.

I was in the hospital from December '65 to August '66. Willard was on the same floor as I was, four beds away. Sometime that summer Paul Allen was admitted. In February he had earned the Silver Star for taking out two machine-gun nests and saving the life of a Marine. Along in September I shipped out to Brunswick, Maine. NAS. Guard detachment. I was later released from active duty.

I still see and talk to Paul Allen. He lives in Iowa and teaches school. I left Willard at Great Lakes--whatever happened to him, I don't know. At Great Lakes, Willard, Allen and myself would go out and have a beer as Marines do, and we started leaving about a half-inch of beer in the bottle for the ones that did not come home, a practice still done to this date.

I think a lot about the Marines that I have known over the years. The ones in the hospital are the ones I remember the most, and I wish I had the time and money to find them all and see how they are getting along. Hicks, Anderson, Willard, Brown, Bell, and all the rest. I was very, very lucky I lived. And I remember. §

Luck?

I must admit there have been many times
I have felt ashamed that I was never wounded
During my tour of duty in Vietnam,
But when I dig deep for an answer,
I can only come up with one word: "luck."
I have survived three ambushes,
Watched rounds dance between my legs during sweeps,
And have had the surreal experience of rounds
Flying across my chest when I chose to
Crash on the dirt floor of a hootch instead
Of using a Vietnamese bed which was too short.
I've had a Marine hit beside me flying into a hot LZ.
I've had a mortar round fall seven feet
Between myself and another Marine.
The mud was so deep the round did not denotate.
I sometimes feel, besides a Purple Heart,
They should have a Purple Brain,
For those who had to endure the day-to-day grind,
Never getting hit.
The psychological damage is unrepairable.
Lucky! I think not.

--William LaVonture

Blood on the Harvest Moon

By James E. Page

"*L*and the landing force" were the words that blared through every compartment aboard the USS *Valley Forge* (LPH-8) on that eventful morning of 10 December 1965. This announcement marked the beginning of the operation where 2/1 (Second Battalion, First Marines) received its baptism of fire in the Vietnam War. Operation Harvest Moon is briefly covered in the USMC publication, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1965: The Landing and the Buildup*. However, the official description of the battle is incomplete, misleading, and in at least one instance completely false. It is now time to set the record straight.

2/1 deployed from Camp Pendleton, California, in August 1965, and after a week's training in Okinawa, was assigned to amphibious ships of the 7th Fleet, as the SLF (Special Landing Force). In the three months as SLF, 2/1 participated in four amphibious landings along the South Vietnamese coast. In these operations, the battalion had made very little contact with the VC and received only single-digit casualties--most of which were due to friendly fire. We first heard of Operation Harvest Moon on 7 December, when 2/1 was briefed by 3rdMarDiv staff officers aboard the *Valley Forge*. We were told this was an historic operation because it was the first time Marines would fight alongside South Vietnamese troops in a combined operation.

Due to Viet Cong and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) attacks on ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) units west of Da Nang, General Walt, the I Corps commander of the five most northern provinces of South Vietnam, and his South Vietnamese counterpart, General Thi, decided on a joint operation to deal with this threat. Gen Walt created Task Force Delta on 5 December, with Brigadier General Melvin D. Henderson, USMC, as the commanding general. The Marine forces consisted of: Task Force Delta headquarters--personnel drawn from various units of the 3rdMarDiv; 2nd BN, 7th Marines from Chu Lai; 3rd BN, 3rd Marines from Da Nang; a provisional artillery battalion drawn from the 11th and 12th Marines; and the SLF (2/1) as TF reserve. Brigadier General Hoan X. Lam, Commanding General of 2nd ARVN Division, contributed the 11th Ranger and 1/5 ARVN Battalions to the combined operation named Harvest Moon/Lien Ket-18.

The concept of this operation was to use the ARVN forces to draw the Viet Cong and the NVA units into battle (*fix 'em*) and then bring the Marines in by helicopter to close the trap (*kill 'em*). In the briefing, we were told where intelligence believed the enemy units were located. I specifically remember the Task Force S-2 (intelligence officer) pointing out Hill 407 as the likely location of the 45th VC Heavy Weapons Battalion. We were also given the radio frequencies to be used in Harvest Moon. The only thing I remember from that briefing of 7 December is the logistics instructions for a limited ammunition load--only two M-14 magazines per man.

After the briefers departed the ship, a spirited discussion ensued between myself and the S-3A (assistant operations officer) about the designated ammunition load. Finally, I declared that Foxtrot was going to carry the maximum load of ammo, period. When Lieutenant Colonel Hanifin (CO, 2/1) sided with his company commander, the discussion ended in my favor.

The morning after our briefing on the *Valley Forge*, the two ARVN battalions jumped off in the attack as planned. About 1330, when

halfway to Que Son, the South Vietnamese units were ambushed by the 70th VC Battalion. A badly mauled Ranger battalion withdrew under protective Marine air support. The Rangers had lost a third of their unit in the battle and were replaced by the 1/6 ARVN BN. The following morning (9 Dec), 1/5 ARVN and its regimental headquarters were overwhelmed by the 60th and 80th VC Battalions. The regimental commander was killed and 1/5 ARVN's troops scattered away from the action. 1/6 ARVN BN was also attacked but held its ground. At this point in the operation, Gen Henderson finally decided to commit the Marines to the battle.

The ARVN forces had been battered for 48 hours by the 1st VC Regiment before any Marine Corps ground assistance was sent to help them. At 1000 on 9 December, 2/7 was heli-lifted five miles west of the beleaguered 1/5 ARVN BN and established a blocking position. That afternoon, 3/3 was heli-lifted one-and-a-half miles to the south of the 1/5 ARVN BN. As 3/3 closed in on the ARVN position, they ran into about 200 VC; a firefight raged until darkness, when the enemy broke contact. The next day 3/3 fully linked up with 1/5 ARVN. On 10 December, Gen Henderson ordered 2/7 to attack eastward and 3/3 to push northwest in order to squeeze the enemy between them. To complete the encirclement, the general planned on using 2/1 to block the enemy's southern escape route. Unfortunately, 2/1 was not given a warning order for their role to be carried out on the following day.

About 1045 on 10 December, I was sitting on my bunk writing a letter when my thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the 1 MC (the ship's main intercom circuit) blasting out the words, "Land the landing force!"--the traditional Marine Corps call to arms. I immediately stowed my writing gear and raced up to the hangar deck. Our packs, weapons, and ammunition had been staged on the hangar deck since 8 December. Foxtrot was 2/1's lead company on this operation, so our gear was positioned in the forward section of the hangar bay. When I reached the hangar deck, an announcement on the 1 MC ordered me to report to the 0-2 level (two decks above the flight deck) for a briefing. After running half the length of the hangar deck and up four levels of ladders, I was winded when I arrived at the battalion's shipboard CP. Crowded around a large map were the battalion commander and his



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

Navy crewman directs Marines running for the choppers aboard the Valley Forge *during Dagger Thrust V in December 1965.*

staff. LtCol Hanifin pointed to a large circle on a map indicating 2/1's objective area. I marked the location on my map and listened to the shortest operation order I've ever heard. The battalion commander said, "Jim! Secure this LZ. The rest of the battalion will follow. Hurry! Your company is already loading."

Even though I had only received one paragraph of the five-paragraph order, my mission was perfectly clear--seize the landing zone and protect it for the rest of the battalion who would follow in subsequent waves.

I ran down the four ladders and back up the crowded hangar deck to my staging position. Just before my heli-team was called away to the flight deck, I was able to show our LZ on the map to Lieutenant Charlie George, who commanded first platoon. The rapid deployment prevented any briefing of the other platoon commanders and executive officer. My heli-team consisted of the members of my tactical CP, who were: Joe Thurmond (company gunny); Lance Corporal Senkowski (battalion radio operator); HM2 Van Brunnisse (senior company Corpsman); and the 81mm mortar forward observer and his radioman. Our heli-team was positioned between the first and second platoons.

As we reached the flight deck, we were led to one of HMM-261 Squadron's noisy, vibrating helicopters. There were 15 UH-34 "choppers" in the first wave of the helicopter assault. The *Valley Forge* was still about 25 miles from shore, and the LZ was another 25 miles inland. This meant that the Marine helicopter squadron would have a 100-mile round-trip for the succeeding waves of 2/1 Marines.

The helicopters were quickly loaded with the 90 Foxtrot Marines and their firesupport personnel--all the first platoon and two-thirds of the second platoon. At 1100, the first wave lifted off the flight deck of the *Valley Forge*. We formed up into a formation our aviator friends called a "gaggle" and headed for the objective. After about 15 minutes of flight, the helicopters landed at a friendly position in Que Son. With the noisy rotors swirling clouds of dust, the first wave sat on the ground without any explanation to me--the assault ground force commander. Another 15 minutes passed as Foxtrot's Marines pondered the single thought which was present every time we went on an operation, *Would this be a hot zone or a cakewalk*? Finally, the pilot of my chopper told me that one of the UH-34's was having engine trouble and that we were going on without it. I didn't know who was in the heli-team, but it did mean that there were six fewer Marines in the first wave.

The 14 Marine helicopters lifted off from Que Son and resumed their gaggle formation. There are two principle ways of conducting a helicopter assault into enemy territory. One tactic is to maximize the element of surprise by flying at treetop level and then suddenly dropping down into the LZ. The other method is to "prep" (use of preparatory artillery and/or air strikes) the LZ just prior to and during the landing of the troop helicopters in order to stun the enemy. On this operation, I didn't have a clue as to what assault tactics would be used.

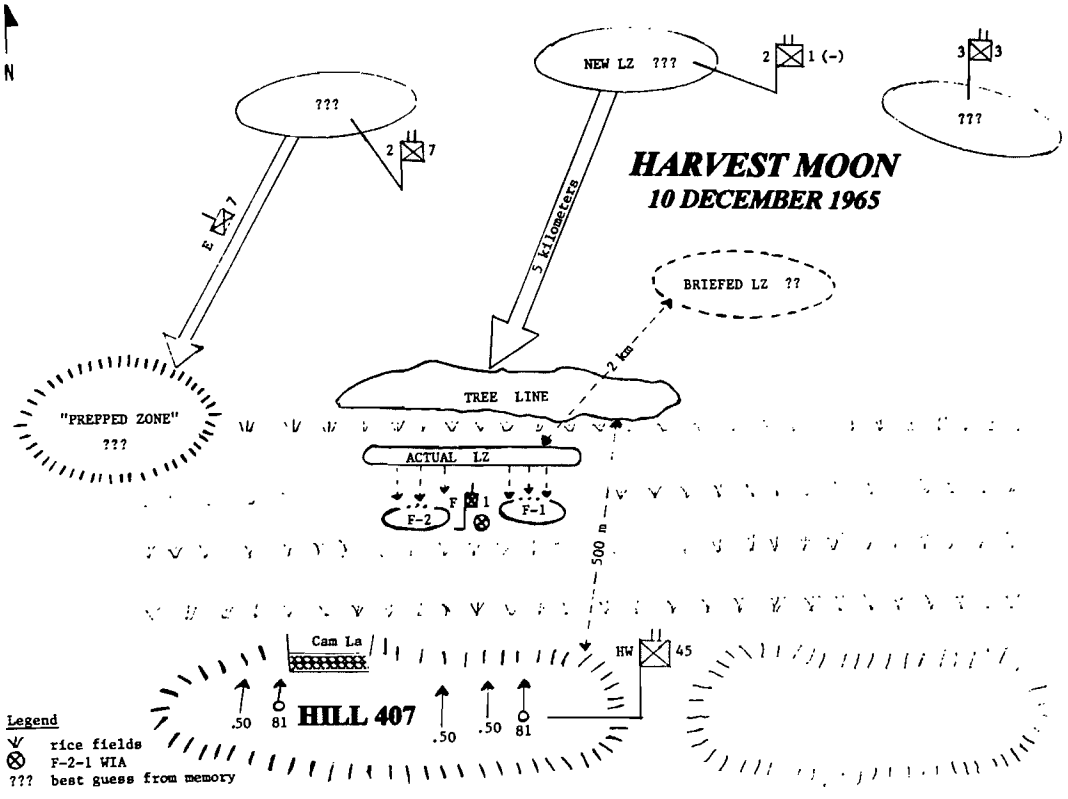
After about ten minutes in the air, the choppers began a large circling maneuver. It was then obvious that we didn't plan to use the surprise tactic. While the gaggle circled, I attempted to locate our LZ on the ground. Because our aircraft was tilted inward due to the turning movement, I was unable to recognize the LZ marked on my map. However, I did notice fixed-wing aircraft attacking with bombs and 20mm machine-gun fire someplace in the valley. I assumed that our LZ was being thoroughly prepped to protect our landing. After about three times around the track, our helicopter leveled off and began a rapid descent. About 200 feet off the ground, our worst fears were confirmed when bullets ripped through the thin-skinned helicopter. I vividly remember a flow of liquid, about the diameter of a quarter, streaming diagonally across the troop compartment of the aircraft. The chopper began making some radical gyrations. Expecting a crash, I hunched over in a protective position. Fortunately, the pilot regained control of his aircraft and we made a hard, but safe, landing.

The heli-team quickly exited, and to our amazement our helicopter lifted off and "di di maued" (*di di mau* is Vietnamese for "leave

quickly") away from the firestorm which had enveloped the entire LZ. Foxtrot deployed on line and began moving across the open rice paddy in order to seize the far side of the LZ. We were met by a hail of automatic weapons and mortar fire from a large hill which loomed above us. We were quickly pinned down in a water-covered rice field. The only available cover was behind little, one-foot paddy dikes which compartmetalized the growing area.

It was about noon, and I knew that it would take at least an hour for the choppers to fly back to the *Valley Forge* and return with the second wave. Quickly, I began the process of formulating an estimate of the situation. The first concern was, *Where were we*? Looking at my map and then the hill in front of us, I discovered that we had not landed at the place circled on the map. Crouching behind the paddy dike, I carefully oriented the map, my compass, and the surrounding terrain. The solution shocked me so much I didn't believe the findings. In order to negate any magnetic effects on the compass, I left my rifle and helmet on the ground, crawled six feet away and checked again. The second analysis confirmed the first--we had landed right under the guns of the 45th VC Heavy Weapons Battalion. The 45th was located exactly where Task Force Delta's intelligence officer had said it was: Hill 407. This unit's main armament was 81/82mm mortars and .50-caliber/12.7mm heavy machine guns. I wondered, *How could such a blunder have occurred*?

The answer to that question would not be clear until several years later when I had an opportunity to talk to other Marines, such as the first platoon commander, the second platoon sergeant, some of the HMM-61 pilots, members of 2/7 and 3/3, and those who were still on the *Valley Forge* when the first wave landed. It is still a mystery as to why Foxtrot Company did



James Page's drawing of the action of 10 December.

not land in the zone which had been designated in the *Valley Forge* briefing. But the facts are: I was briefed on one zone; a second zone was prepped; and Foxtrot was landed in a third.

I did learn why Hill 407 was not prepped. One of the HMM-261 pilots told me that Colonel Michael R. Yunck, TF Delta's tactical airborne control officer, didn't want to attack the civilians he observed in the hamlet of Cam La, located at the foot of Hill 407. Marines from 2/1 paid dearly for the good colonel's humanitarianism. Col Yunck, prior to departing the area with a serious leg wound, closed our landing zone. It was several hours before we realized that the rest of 2/1 was not coming to our LZ, ~~or~~ one close by.

When the first-wave choppers returned to the *Valley Forge* with the frightful details of the situation at Hill 407, an angry confrontation took place. LtCol Hanifin was very upset over the closing of the LZ and the fact that another near F Company's position was not opened. His anger was directed at the Marine colonel who commanded the SLF, because he had not allowed LtCol Hanifin to go immediately to the aid of his beleaguered company. The problem was not with the SLF commander; he was really only a figurehead in this operation. The blame for not quickly selecting a new LZ belongs to the same people who landed Foxtrot at the base of Hill 407 and failed to come to the aid of the South Vietnamese units--the commanding general and the Task Force Delta staff.

Having located our actual position on the ground, my next consideration was to get some fire support on the enemy. After attempting to locate our FAC (forward air controller) and his communicators, we discovered that it was their heli-team on the chopper that was forced to land at Que Son. I knew it was useless to attempt to contact LtCol Hanifin, because he was still 50 miles away on the *Valley Forge* and our PRC-10 radio's range was limited to ten miles under the best of conditions. Ditto for the radio with the forward observer from the 81mm mortars, whose guns were still aboard ship.

Our next thought was to attempt to make contact with other Marine Corps units--Task Force Delta, 3/3, 2/7, or one of the artillery batteries. Later I learned that Marine Corps artillery was in range of our position on that fateful day. L/Cpl Senkowski tried all the frequencies given us at the briefing on 7 December--but nobody answered.

As our radioman began the expediency of working on both sides of the assigned frequencies, I wondered what else could go wrong? Fact: we were given one set of frequencies, but the "friendlies" were using another set. Exasperated when it was apparent that we couldn't get any help, I told Gunny, "The name of the operation ought to be SNAFU," or barnyard words to that effect. Harvest Moon was a classic example of Murphy's Law. From the beginning, what could go wrong usually did.

After realizing that we were cut off from the "good guys," my attention focused on how to make the best of a sticky situation. The Foxtrot troopers fought back courageously against a well-concealed enemy dug in on the dominant high ground above them. There is no way to determine how many casualties we inflicted on the VC that day, but I observed many instances of well-aimed fire into enemy positions. One particular incident stands out in my memory. A Marine in the 2nd platoon area raised up, aimed his 3.5-inch rocket launcher at a 45° angle, and fired at a target on Hill 407. In a fantastic piece of marksmanship, with a weapon designed to kill tanks at close range, the young gunner silenced an enemy machine gun.

The initial firefight between the combatants lasted about five minutes, and then both sides slacked off to conserve ammunition. Thank goodness I didn't follow Task Force orders to carry only two magazines per man on this operation. We continued to receive sporadic heavy machine-gun and mortar fire from Hill 407. As long as we stayed down, the enemy machine guns were not very effective, but their mortars were still inflicting casualties upon the company. The best way to reduce the effects of mortar fire is troop dispersal. The second platoon had good dispersion, but the first platoon, on my left flank, seemed to be too close together. I couldn't raise Lt George on the radio--an enemy bullet had hit him in the arm

and damaged the radio he was holding. Using hand and arm signals, I tried to order the first platoon to spread out. That didn't work either. Thoroughly frustrated by all that had happened thus far, I told Gunny Thurmond I was going over to see Charlie George.

If I had chosen to crawl behind the paddy dike to the first-platoon position, I might have avoided my first Purple Heart medal. However, I impulsively decided to go by leaps and bounds. I jumped up and began running in a low crouch, zigzagging towards the first platoon. My first leap was too long, or maybe I zigged when I should have zagged, because suddenly my body was flipped upside down. I felt the .50-caliber bullet rip clear through my chest. My first thoughts were, *Jim, you just bought the farm*! and *It's a good thing you bought that extra life insurance for the wife and kids before you left the States*. Surprisingly, I experienced very little pain, and as my head began to clear I noticed "Doc" Van Brunnisse crawling towards me.

Doc was wearing a huge, black, rubberized pack, about three times as large as a Marine haversack. That monstrous pack must have look like a bull's-eye to the VC gunners, because a flurry of fire was aimed in his direction: two bullets hit Doc's pack, but he kept crawling until he reached me. As Van Brunnisse cut through the 782 gear to treat my wound, he asked me, "Captain! Can you move your legs?" To my relief, I could. The bullet had missed my spinal cord by only an eighth of an inch.

While Doc was applying a compress bandage to seal the sucking chest wound, we got another thrill. A mortar round plopped down about five feet from us in the flooded paddy. Poor Van Brunnisse! He was a pale-skinned Dutchman, and at the sight of that mortar round he almost became transparent. Having spent my first two years in the Marine Corps as an 81mm mortar platoon commander, I could assure Doc that the mortar shell wouldn't go off if we didn't disturb it. The projectile fins looked very much like the American WWII ammo that produced so many duds when I was at Camp Lejeune.

Being embarrassed about foolishly allowing myself to get wounded, I was anxious to crawl back to my CP. Doc told me that with a chest wound like mine any movement was very dangerous. We discussed the merits of my return to the CP until Van Brunnisse sent me into dreamland with a morphine shot. Prior to taking a nap, I placed my head, face down, into an upturned helmet liner. I was afraid that I might drown in the rice paddy if I passed out. This had actually happened to Ira Hayes, one of the flag raisers on Iwo Jima. Hayes had drowned in the Gila River in just two inches of water after a big night on the town.

For the next hour I serenely floated on cloud nine. I seemed to be more like a spectator sitting in the bleachers than a player on the field. I was conscious most of the time, but just didn't give a tinker's damn. After a while the drug wore off and the pain snapped me back to the real world again. The gunny sent Senkowski over periodically during the afternoon to keep me abreast of the situation.

When a unit loses radio communication, sometimes friendly units become too cautious in delivering supporting fire. This can be just as dangerous to the "grunts" as being attacked with over-zealous friendly fire. Aircraft constantly circled our position during the first two hours in the zone. The pilots refused to attack because we lacked radio communication with them. Their inaction was puzzling, because it was a cloudless day with both friendly and enemy positions clearly visible.

While in a happy state, I noticed a small Piper Cub--an Air Force airborne controller aircraft--drop something in front of our position. Gunny sent one of the troops out to retrieve the missle. A short time later he sent Senkowski over with a message that had been wrapped around a wrench. The contents of the message were: "Enemy troops dug in on hill to your southwest." Incredible! After muttering a few expletives, I thought, *Why didn't that "flyboy" do his job and call in some air strikes on Hill 407?* If our situation had not been so desperate, I might have died laughing. As bizarre as that incident was, I still don't find it humorous, because I believe that if we had received close-air support when we landed, there would

be fewer names today on that wall in Washington, DC.

Sometimes when nothing goes as planned Murphy's Law works in your behalf. About 1400, by a strange twist of fate a lone HU-34 appeared out of nowhere and quickly discharged its heli-team at our position. Everybody was surprised--the VC fired very few rounds as the aircraft escaped over the horizon. To our amazement, we discovered that the chopper had just deposited our FAC team. How could this have happened? This was the aircraft we lost to engine trouble at Que Son. It had been repaired, but no one told the pilot that our zone had- been closed. This was strange, because the TF Delta CP was also located at Que Son.

It took only a few minutes for the FAC to contact the circling, close-support aircraft. Now it was the good guys' turn to hand out the punishment. For the next couple of hours, Hill 407 was pounded continuously by fighter-bombers using napalm, bombs and 20mm machine-gun fire. With the enemy hunkered down, Foxtrot received a reprieve from their nightmare in hell, but the price was high--over 40% casualties for the first wave. Because they drew the attention of the VC gunners, a high proportion of those killed and wounded were officers, SNC's, NCO's, and crew-served weapons personnel.

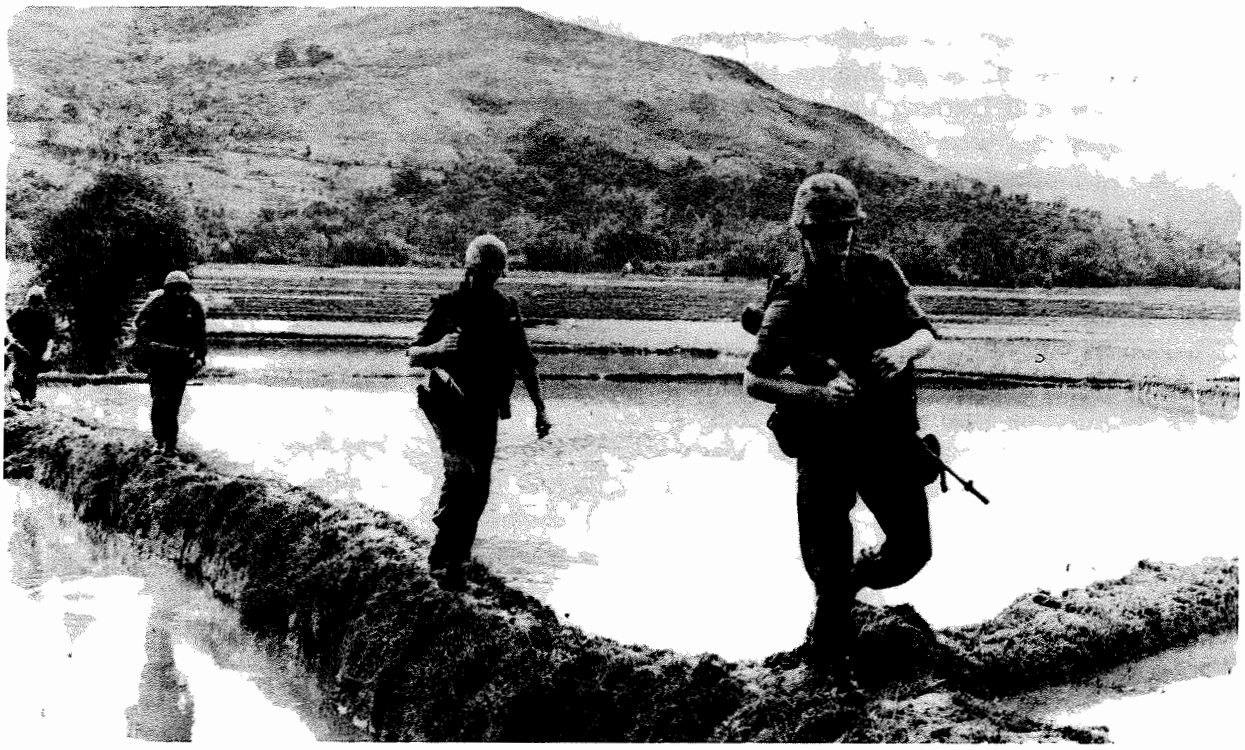
After 1430--after a great deal of procrastination--Task Force Delta finally issued orders to reinforce Foxtrot Company, by first ordering 2/7 to send their Echo Company to our aid, and then by designating an alternate LZ for the remainder of 2/1. Echo Company was attacked by a large group of VC enroute to our position. Despite heavy casualties, E/2/7 pushed through the VC and arrived about 1700 to give Foxtrot covering fire. The new 2/1 LZ was about five kilometers from our position, and it took them several hours to cover difficult terrain between us. The battalion commander arrived at our position with the rest of 2/1 (minus E and H Companies) shortly after E/2/7. That night it was a bloody harvest moon that rose over 20 dead and 80 wounded Marines at Hill 407's killing fields.

Even the official published accounts of this operation couldn't get it right. USMC history contains the fantastic story that I was pronounced dead on the battlefield and that it was only the following morning that a Corpsman discovered I had a faint heartbeat. The tale of my dramatic resurrection sounds great, but it isn't true. Prompt medical attention by HM2 Van Brunnisse kept me alive that afternoon, and Navy Lieutenant Tony Colby's diligent care brought me through that long, rainy night. As proof that I was not left for dead in Harvest Moon, here is an excerpt from Dr. Colby's description of that night: "I never thought you would pull through but you did! Every time I went to check on you I expected to find the worst. But you gutsed it through in Marine Corps tradition." The next morning, our casualties were medically evacuated to Que Son for processing and treatment.

The first three days of Harvest Moon were a complete disaster, and when such events occur in the Marine Corps . . . heads usually roll. During the evening hours of 10 December, Gen Walt relieved BGen Henderson and selected Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt to command Task Force Delta. In another critical move, Colonel Peatross loaned his experienced 7th Marines staff to Gen Platt. The new Task Force commander took positive control of the operation and the friendly situation improved immediately. The revitalized Task Force Delta headquarters stopped the strange troop manueuvering and used the new tactics against the Viet Cong. B-52's plastered the Phuoc Valley with 500-pound bombs, and the air attack was followed by Marines sweeping the area.

On 11 December, E and H Companies rejoined the battalion and for the next week 2/1's Marines slogged through the monsoon-drenched countryside. After Hill 407, the majority of 2/1's casualties were due to operating in the flooded valleys near Que Son. The Marines suffered a new affliction called "immersion foot," which caused the evacuation of 54 Task Force Marines, mostly from 2/1.

The last major action of the operation occurred on 18 December when 2/7 was ambushed at the village of Ky Phu. Both sides



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

Men from E/2/7 push through to assist the beleaguered Foxtrot.
"The only available cover was behind little, one-foot paddy dikes. . . ." --James Page

slugged it out with heavy casualties. The entire misadventure ended on 20 December.

Shortly after the completion of Harvest Moon, Gen Henderson was the subject of two boards of inquiry. The first was conducted in Vietnam by the 3rd Marine Air Wing Commander, Major General Keith B. McCutcheon. A second inquiry was ordered by Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific. While I was an outpatient at Tripler Hospital in Hawaii, Colonel Robert H. Barrow (who later became the 27th Commandant of the Marine Corps) interviewed me for over an hour on the circumstances of Harvest Moon. After the second board of inquiry, Gen Henderson was retired from active duty.

I thought I was psychologically prepared to deal with combat casualties. However, the deaths of the Foxtrot troopers in Harvest Moon overwhelmed me. I questioned my actions and those of the senior Marine commanders who controlled that operation. I was so bitter that I rejoiced when I read of Col Yunck's amputation and Gen Henderson's forced retirement. I finally had to resort to counseling to get myself straightened out.

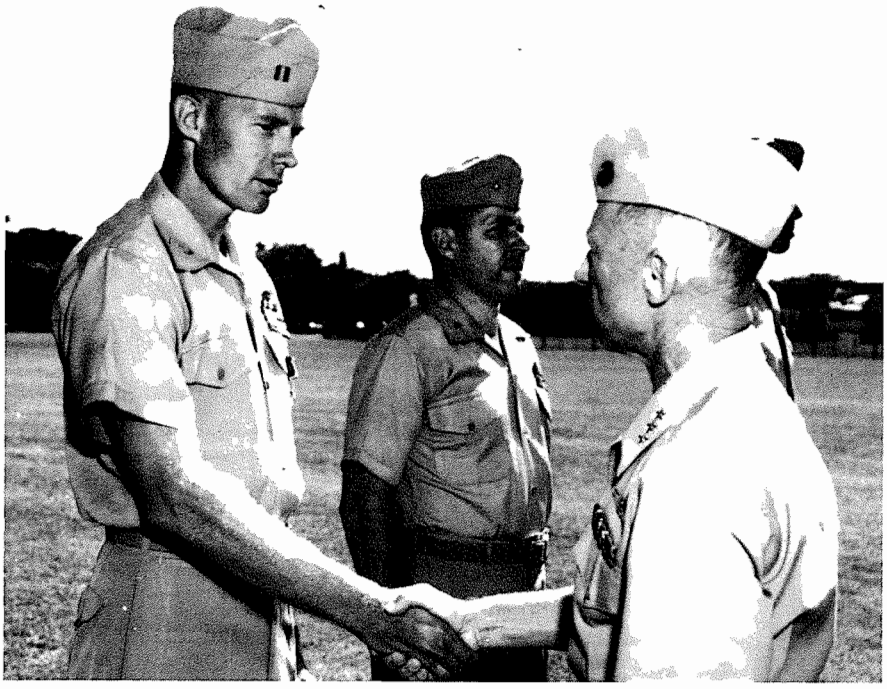
The leadership of Gen Henderson and his staff was the main culprit in the Harvest Moon tragedy, but the failure wasn't totally their fault. You couldn't find a nicer gentleman than Gen Henderson--I still have the condolence letter he sent my wife a week after I was wounded. I can remember the general when he served as regimental commander at Camp Lejeune. His command was always first in blood drives, community chest donations, athletic events, etc. Gen Henderson's command at Camp Lejeune had great morale because Marines knew he

cared for them. His problem was that he had been a Marine engineer until getting the infantry regiment. To be blunt, Gen Henderson was great at public relations, but he lacked the experience and temperament of a warrior. The Task Force Delta staff was hurriedly assembled from various units of the 3rd Marine Division. This staff was still learning the names of its members when they were thrust into a complex and combined operation. I believe that Task Force Delta could have overcome their significant obstacles if the commanding general had been a warrior, or if Gen Henderson had been dealt an experienced staff, such as the 7th Marines had. Col Peatross and the 7th Marines staff had performed brilliantly just a few months before in Operation Starlite.

One major distinction of the US Marine Corps is the development of a well-coordinated air-ground tactical doctrine. However, the hallowed Marine Corps tradition of the air-ground task force failed miserably in Harvest Moon. The helicopter assault and close-air support were both poorly planned and executed. The overall concept of the Harvest Moon operation was tactically sound. The South Vietnamese carried out their assigned task of finding and fixing the enemy. But the complete breakdown of the Marine Corps command and control functions prevented the Marine-ARVN combined force from capitalizing on a promising battlefield opportunity.

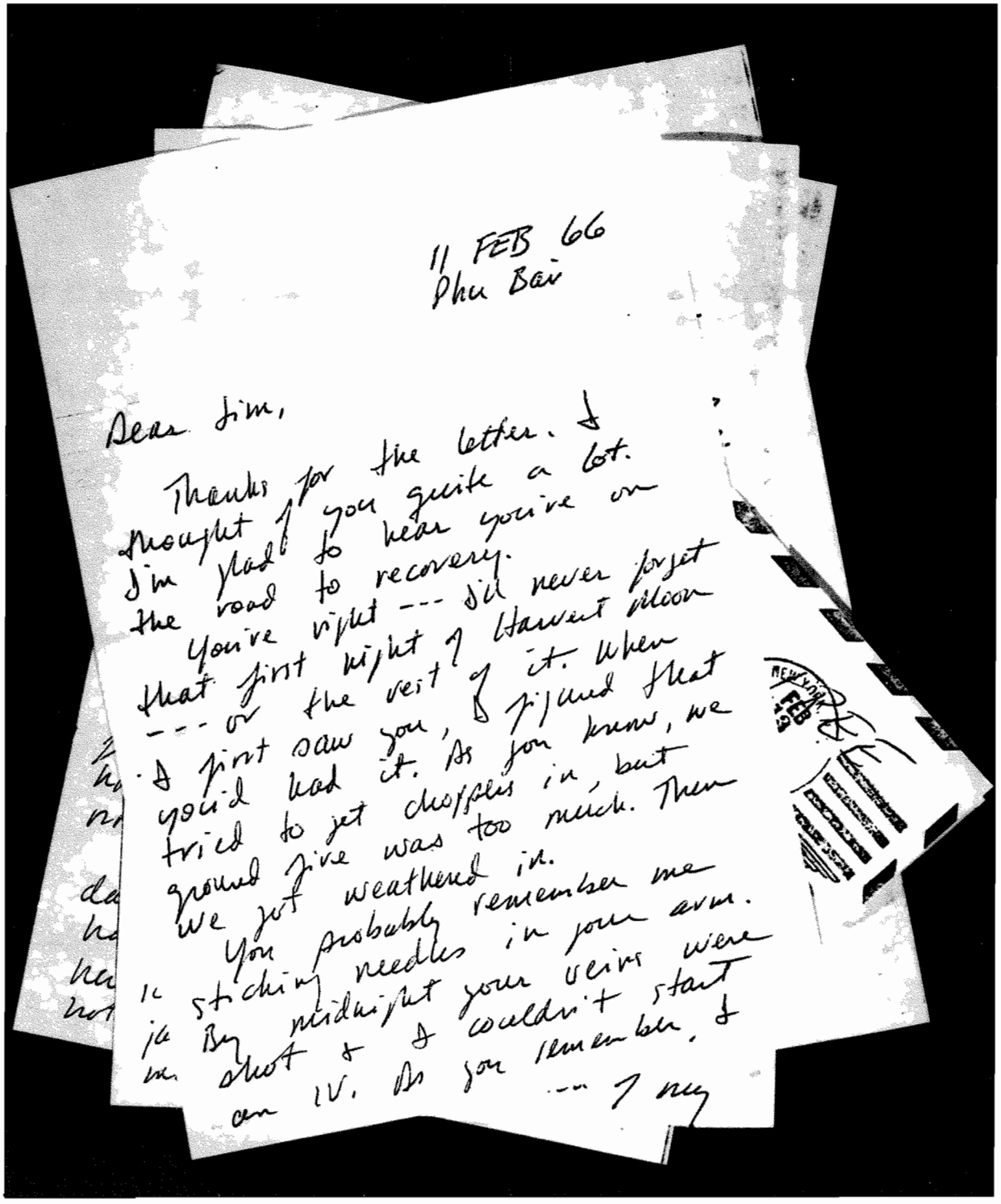
The shock of the mistakes made by Task Force Delta did have an impact upon Gen Walt and his senior air and ground commanders: *Harvest Moon became the model of how* not *to run a helicopter assault.*

Remember, this happened in December of 1965. The Second Battalion, First Marines still had almost six more years and thousands of combat actions and casualties to endure in that tropical land of nightmares. §



(Courtesy of J. E. Page)

James E. Page receiving the silver star from Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak at the Pearl Harbor Marine barracks on 15 April 1966.



A Navy doctor, Lieutenant A. O. Colby, was on the battlefield during Harvest Moon. He wrote to James E. Page about the events of 10 December: "You probably remember me sticking needles in your arm. By midnight your veins were shot & I couldn't start an IV . . . I had to lay a poncho over you, crawl under it & hold a flashlight in my mouth for security as we were still getting incoming. . . ."

I Was Scared and Thinking of You

By Wanda Clarke

*M*y son enlisted in the Marine Corps at age 17 and left our home in Kansas City on August 13, 1964. Our story is not so different from many others nor nearly as tragic, but it is our story, a story we will remember forever.

My son,
So young, so trusting,
So vulnerable, so full of pride.
Searing tears tear at my heart.
Be gentle with him, God!

08-16-1964. MCRD San Diego
Dear Mom: Have 15 minutes to write this. Got here fine but not doing so good. . . . I'll make it though so don't worry.

11-12-1964 Graduation day telephone call from MCRD San Diego
Hi, Mom . . . I made PFC and qualified expert on the rifle range . . . Will call from the airport the minute the plane lands.

My son,
So straight, so tall,
So strong.
Proud tears cloud my eyes.
Please, dear God, be gentle with him!

08-09-1965 Change of address notice:
F Co. 2nd Bn, 1st Marine Division, FMF, San Francisco

08-23-1965
Dear Mom: Just got off the USS Bexar this morning after floating around on the ocean since you last heard from me . . . Navy chow aboard ship would kill a horse . . . showers and shaving were a rat race . . . boy, what a tub. We're on Okinawa . . . made a beach landing about 0800 this morning . . . over the side of the ship and down the nets with all our gear. It's real pretty here . . . green with tall grass and scattered trees . . . houses in the villages are nothing but wooden shambles like kids at home build for clubhouses . . . the base seems to be new . . . very

clean and real good food. . . .

10-05-1965

Dear Mom: . . . thought you might find some of the wildlife here interesting . . . about four different species of cobras. The most dangerous is the king cobra that gets to be about 15 feet long and is exceptionally smart they tell us. They will stalk a man through the jungle and bushy areas to kill him. The other cobras aresn't so dangerous . . . they only get to be about 8 feet long . . . the most deadly is the crate mostly found in the rice paddies . . . they are gray . . . and the corpsmen can't even treat a bite from a crate . . . there are a lot of scorpions, huge rats and big lizards that crawl through the bush. A lot of the lizards have been shot at night. There are four different kinds of malaria here and our pills only cover two kinds . . . well, so it goes.

11-09-1965

Dearest Mom: I'm sitting here in the reefers writing this. We've made five raids in Vietnam so far. Three off the Iwo Jima and the last two off the Valley Forge . . . On this last raid we had three men killed . . . as usual we jumped from the helicopters on high ground. Another company ahead of us drew fire so we moved up to it to help . . . then our company moved across rice paddies up to a small village and swept through it. One of our men found a sawed off 12 guage shotgun in one of the the huts . . . ammunition was uncovered in another hut. Whenever a helicopter flew overhead we could hear shots from the brush around the village . . . then shots started kicking up dirt around the men. I was kneeling down with the gun (M60) when a round hit between my feet . . . it was an odd feeling being shot at . . . we moved through more rice paddies . . . mortar rounds were hitting behind us . . . we didn't know if they were theirs or ours. We dug in for the night on top of a hill and next morning came back to the carrier. Now we're waiting to go back in. Every day is a scare.

12-15-1965 Western Union Telegram:

THIS IS TO INFORM YOU THAT A REPORT RECEIVED BY THIS HEADQUARTERS REVEALS THAT YOUR SON . . . HAS BEEN INJURED IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND IS BEING TREATED AT THE US AIR FORCE HOSPITAL CLARK AIR BASE. . . .

My God!
My son so far away,
So full of courage,
So full of pain.
Anger ravages my very soul!
Christ!
I asked you, God, to be gentle with him!

12-20-1965 Western Union Telegram:

. . . YOUR SON . . . INJURED 11 DECEMBER 1965 IN THE VICINITY OF QUE SON DISTRICT QUANG NAM PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. HE SUSTAINED A MISSILE WOUND TO THE LEFT SHOULDER WHILE PARTICIPATING IN AN OPERATION AGAINST HOSTILE FORCES. . . .

01-1966
Dearest Mom: I'm not sure what the date is . . . Got here at Guam Naval Hospital yesterday by jet from Clark . . . Well, Mom, we pulled a raid (Harvest Moon) off the Valley Forge in helicopters as we had so many times before. They landed us in a huge mass of rice paddies beside a big hill surrounded by trees. That's where the VC were. When we jumped from the helicopters we ran behind a dike full of water. That's when I was hit . . . my squad leader put a pressure bandage on my shoulder and my team leader took the gun (M60) . . . everyone moved forward except for me . . . I had to lie behind that dike all day until the firing died down . . . they hit us with machine guns and dropped mortars on us. I was scared, Mom, and sure thinking of you . . . we lost a lot of men . . . killed . . . my buddy would have lived if they could have evacuated us . . . there is no more scary sight than to see all those wounded . . . arms, legs, feet, hands gone . . . heads, stomachs all wrapped up . . . and all the body bags. I was so lucky, Mom . . . I'm fine now . . . shoulder is a little stiff. . . .

02-14-1966. From Agana, Guam, to Clark in the Philippines, to Kadena, Okinawa, to Phu Bai in the Republic of South Vietnam

02-25-1966
Dear Mom: I'm back in my old F Company 2nd Battalion . . . I got my old job as gunner back . . . We're living in big squad tents and it's been raining for three days and three nights. They had it real rough since I've been gone and lost a lot of men . . . At night if we aren't on the lines we go out past the lines on patrols or ambushes . . . not much time to sleep or write . . . have been sleeping in the hole where the gun is on the line. . . .

03-15-1966
Dear Mom: I've been transferred to another company. The old F. Co. took so many casualties after Operation New York that we didn't have enough men to make a company . . . I was 'given' to H&S Company . . . yes, the Brown I told you about was my ammo humper . . . Mom, sometimes I think I will never get back home . . . I'm supposed to be in recoilless rifles now but I haven't seen one yet. . . .

My son,
Heavy laden,
Firefight weary,
Day hot--night cold,
Jungle rot,
Stench of death.
My prayers are screamed in silence.
Is this gentleness, God?

Summer 1966. Operation Utah, Operation Double Eagle, Hill 180/Phu Bai, Operation Hastings, Operation Prairie

07-01-1966
Dear Mom: Just got back off Operation Jay . . . we went out by Chinooks this time . . . they flew in war dogs to put on our lines at night and to help find buried VC bodies.

09-07-1966 From Dong Ha to Da Nang to Okinawa to Wake Island to El Torro and HOME AGAIN!

My son,
Alive,
Silent,
Soul old.
My very being aches with love.
Why, God, were you not gentler with him?

11-10-1966 Aboard APA 249 Francis Marion, Vieques, Puerto Rico
. . . I'm not so scared all the time now, Mom . . . trying to forget the past and enjoy the beach and ocean. . . .

My son,
Searching,
Hoping,
Finding himself.
My heart begins to calm.
Now let him find peace, God.

08-12-1967
Sergeant John P. Clarke, 2nd Marine Division FMF, honorably discharged from the United States Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune, NC

John entered Law Enforcement Academy and is currently a detective. He does not talk about Vietnam but has said, "Even though they spit on us and called us crazy when we came back, I'd still be a Marine if I was needed."

My son,
So sure, so knowing,
So accepting.
I see the black wall and still
Try to understand, God!



The Professionals: Harvest Moon

By Mike McNeely

*O*peration Harvest Moon took place in December of 1965 and lasted about ten days. Without a question, this was the worst time of my life.

Foxtrot and Golf Companies were dropped in a "hot" LZ and lost quite a few men. The men in Foxtrot were close to me, as I had been in Foxtrot until I was transferred to Echo Company while still in Okinawa. I was with Hotel Company when Operation Harvest Moon began.

We hadn't been on land very long when my gunner was shot in the mouth and we lost one man who died of shock after being hit. We were rained on all ten days except for two or three hours one afternoon. We slept in the mud with water running up our hind ends; our feet turned green from jungle rot. We averaged one meal a day for the ten days, and for two of those days we didn't get anything to eat at all. We were on the move before daybreak, and after dark in most cases. For supper one night, three of us split a can of white bread and some jelly that had been discarded by a Marine unit a few days before we came through the area. We thought we were in "hog heaven" with that find.To make matters worse, those damn leeches let us know who controlled the rice paddies when we waded in them.

We set up on a ridge line one night where we were told to dig in deep, as B-52's were coming in to bomb the valley we overlooked. It was decided we were too close, and so we were pulled back about a mile. Then the people in charge changed their minds, and it ended up that we went back to that ridge line that night after all. Our foxholes were just about filled with water by the time we got back up there. Well, the B-52's did come in and saturated the valley to soften it up before we went in. They dropped bombs all night long to within what I guess was a half-mile from us. Talk about the ground shaking--that was something I'll never forget. I didn't think we would make it out of there.

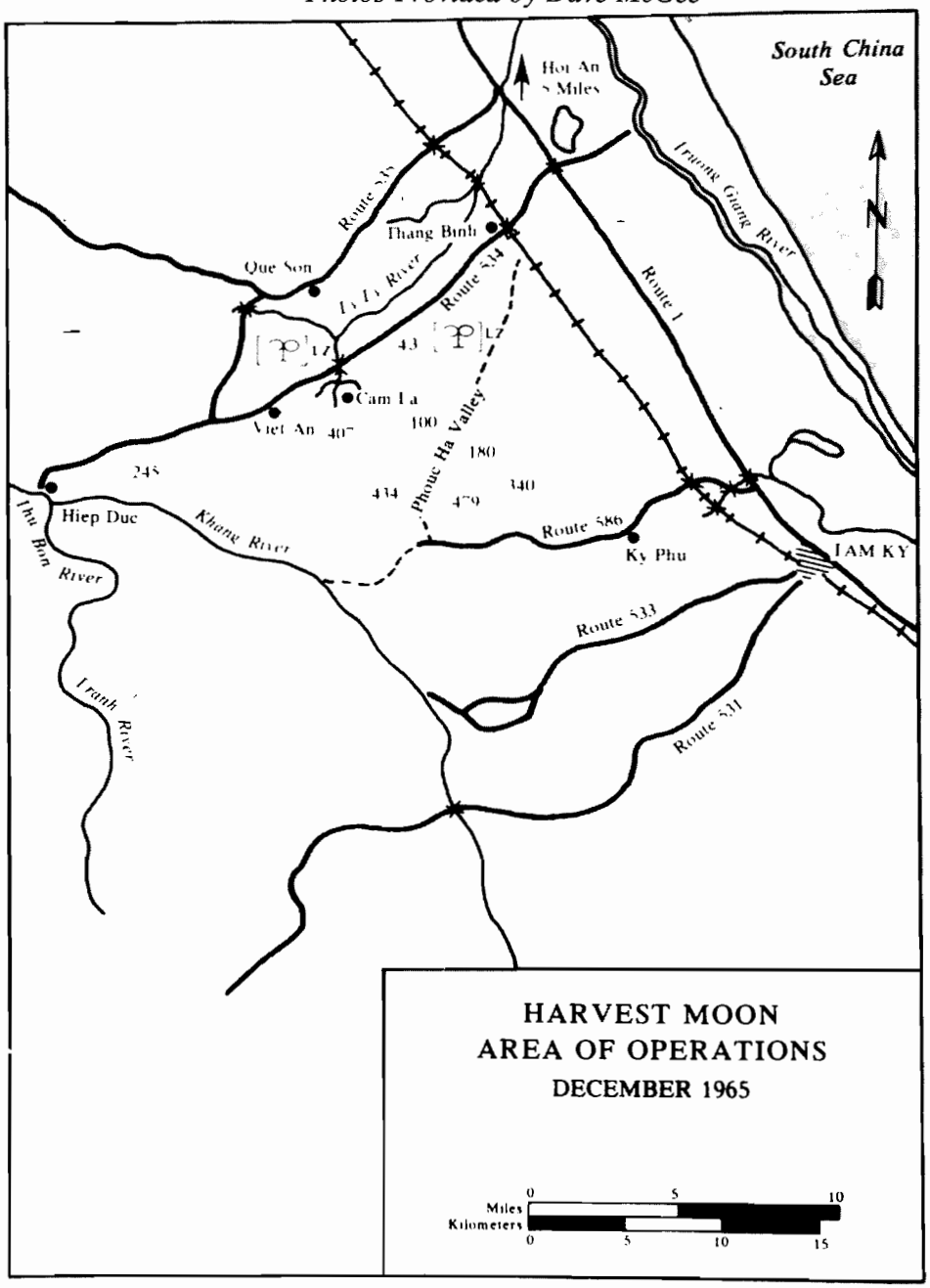
We went into the valley the next day, and we could see and smell the dead bodies--both water buffalo and humans. It plain stunk. We went on a patrol into a village and captured five prisoners, three of whom were women. A sergeant with us got his foot caught in a bear trap. Three VC were being interrogated by our interpreter, and evidently they made him mad, as he pulled out his .45 and killed one and shot the second and was fixing to shoot the third when our lieutenant stopped him.

Before we ended Harvest Moon, we were on a march when we heard some action up front, and the word came back for our company Corpsmen to go up. Shortly after, word came back for all battalion Corpsmen to go up, too. When the rest of us moved out and got up there, I learned that Golf Company had been ambushed. Two of their men had been hurt, as I remember. One of them had part of his jaw blown away and his chin strap was entangled in the wound. Showing his disgust at being wounded, that young Marine yanked the chin strap out of his mangled flesh--all the while smoking a cigarette. Seeing this made us all the more determined to "pay back" the enemy.

We were in pretty bad physical shape when a couple of days later we ended Operation Harvest Moon. §

Scenes from an Operation

Photos Provided by Dave McGee



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)







Upper left: *Robert Hanifin, 2/1 Battalion Commander, leads his troops on Operation Harvest Moon, December 1965.*

Upper right: *Charles Parziale getting water on Harvest Moon. The water was never safe.*

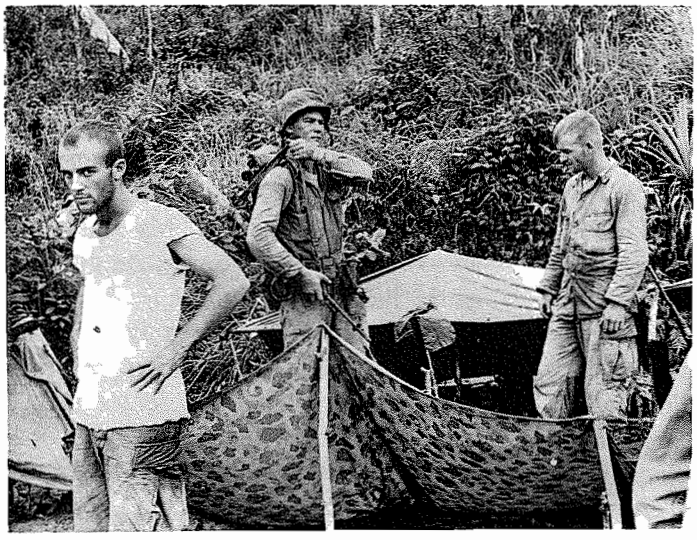
Lower left: *The enemy had a uniform factory underground--complete with Japanese-made sewing machines.*



Left: *Dave McGee crouches on the side of path while engineers blow up underground tunnels during Harvest Moon.*



Right: *Viet Cong families captured on patrols. Note the lack of young men.*



Left: *Thomas Boisvert (center) prepares to leave camp. (The other two Marines are unidentified.)*

One Marine's Remembrance: December 1965

By Peter L. Meadows

War is the most terrible of man's endeavors.

It is armed conflict against other men with the singular purpose of rendering them incapable of further resistance. It is waged with a callous disregard for the right of every man to live his life, to prosper, and to bring other men into the world to follow him. It is often executed with a brutality that I think even the "savage" animals would be loathe to exhibit. Its legacy of death and destruction has been the end of countless generations of its participants.

I'm not mentally equipped to deal with why Man has not learned the futility of war. All I can do is dismiss the problem by saying that it is the nature of the beast to destroy, in moments, what has taken years to build. All I can hope for is that one day we will see that the human rights of all men make other possessions pale in comparison.

But because we are humans, I guess our very nature casts us into a never-ending Catch-22. War is inevitable as long as men rule the earth. While we are here and must endure the phenomenon of waging war at the direction of leaders who are not always right, we need to do it as best and as quickly as we can. Once started, war must be ended swiftly and completely. This we must do for the sanity of those of us who must fight the battles.

That's when the United States Marine Corps becomes the salvation of us all. The honor and spirit brought to war and combined with the finest training and unmatched tenacity make the Marine Corps a military phenomenon that is unlikely to see its like in human history.

Yes, war is a terrible thing. There can be no tabula rasa, or clean slate, for mankind unless all memory of warfare has been erased. But we live our lives in the real world and wars will be fought forever. Thank God for the Marine Corps for bringing some sense of honor to it.

It has been 25 years now, and my personal recollections of war were growing comfortably hazy until I read some vignettes by other Marines who were on Operation Harvest Moon. It was as if the floodgates were opened and the memories rushed into my mind with renewed vividness. Suddenly, I was transported back in time and abandoned in the middle of the sights and sounds and smells of armed conflict against other men!

As my mind continued to absorb the assault from my wartime memories, I began to think that if I put these thoughts on paper and shared with others the range of raw emotions I experienced, then maybe I would feel more comfortable dealing with these ghosts that still lurked in the hallways of my mind.

So here I am, ready to speak to the world and tell it that war is terrible. Here I confront myself and admit my pride in the United States Marine Corps.

I was a member of Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines in Vietnam from August to December of 1965. My MOS was 0351, 3.5 rocket launcher assault. My squad already had a shooter, so I was the assistant gunner and chief ammo humper in country.

I joined the Corps in August of 1964. While still in boot training, we received an admonishment from our senior drill instructor that I've never forgotten. He said, "You scumbags better learn what we're teachin' you here 'cause you'll be duckin' live bullets inside

a year!"

What a crackpot he is, I thought. Didn't that lifer know that our country wasn't at war with anyone? He was just trying to scare us--this was just another of the mind games that the Corps was so fond of laying on us at Parris Island.

But how prophetic the man turned out to be. Within days of reaching my first year of service, I was in the Nam.

One of our sergeants explained to us that at this early stage of the conflict all new arriving outfits overseas had to complete what they called a float phase. This meant that for the first three months all units were to be stationed aboard Naval vessels and heli-lifted inland on missions of short duration. This we did, and G Company was assigned to the USS *Valley Forge*.

It was my belief that the float phase was meant to ease us rookies into combat conditions at a slow pace. But then, with the rapid escalation of the war, this tactic was abandoned, and young, wide-eyed, gung ho Marines were sent immediately to the bush. There they received their baptisms under the full fire and fury of actual combat.

Around 10 December 1965, scuttlebutt was running wild. Rumor had it that we were to assualt the Que Son Valley for a major sweep operation. We heard that this would definitely be a hot action. Supposedly, the VC had allowed themselves to be caught in the open at battalion-sized strength. At this point in the war everybody was itching for a chance to get at the enemy in a more conventional setting for battle.

My platoon leader was a young second lieutenant named Krulak who was the son of Marine Lieutenant General Krulak. I remember that Lt Krulak always worried me, even though he was well-trained and capable. He was so squared away and into Marine Corps life that he took his *Guidebook* with him everywhere . . . even when he had to go to the head, he told us. I was concerned that a man whose father was a general and whose whole life seemed to revolve around showing the world that he was as good as his father would play fast and loose with my butt to prove himself.



(Courtesy of Dave McGee)

LZ

"Would the LZ erupt in a terrible firestorm from which there was no escape?" --Peter Meadows

The lieutenant called a platoon meeting the evening before we went in. With an eerie, uncharacteristic calmness, he explained what was to happen the next day. Never before had he ended a meeting with a prayer, but this time he did. Silently, each man had to acknowledge to himself that he might be entering the last days of his life on this earth.

We were very frightened, but none of us could speak of our fears with another. After all, we were Marines and had 200 years of tradition to carry forth. As scared as we were, we wouldn't have it any other way than to go in and do our job. Not a man among us would dare live the shame of not performing to the magnificent standards set by millions of former Marines in countless battles.

We hit the valley early in the morning. As the choppers descended, we could see the spiraling contrails of colored smoke that marked our landing spot. My adrenaline was flowing and merged with the fear and anxiety I had about what might greet us in just a few short moments.

Would the LZ erupt in a terrible firestorm from which there was no escape?

Would the VC have the area scoped out with uncanny accuracy and blow us apart with a deadly mortar barrage?

Would they turn and run? Or would they fight like demons to the last man?

As we rapidly approached the jump-off point, all these questions raced through my mind and it was difficult to concentrate on the task at hand. Then the crew chief turned from his M-60 and screamed, "Go, Marines! Go! Go!"

We jumped two at a time. The weight of my pack and web gear along with the 3.5 rockets I was carrying drove me almost up to my knees into the muck and the water. I had to scramble quickly so the man behind me wouldn't land on my back. We dispersed and sought whatever cover was available. I was only half-aware of the activity around me. I was intent on looking for anything that wasn't wearing Marine Corps green. After a few minutes, I calmed down enough to collect my thoughts. I swear I could hear my own heart beating, and it seemed as if it would burst from over-exertion.

Not a shot was fired in that landing. There were more than a few silent prayers of thanks for that cold LZ!

After a couple of days the initial fear gave way to disappointment when it began to seem that this might be just another "exercise." The brass at battalion bounced us all over the valley like Ping-Pong balls. Whenever they got a reported "sighting," they sent us off in another direction to check it out. We were beginning to feel like yo-yo's.

Fatigue was becoming a factor, and at one point we stopped to rest in a large clearing. Maybe it was the fact that we were tired, or maybe it was the certainty we were beginning to feel that there were no enemy soldiers in that valley, but everyone momentarily relaxed to the point of forgetting their training. There we were, sitting ducks out in the open with jungle all around us. Most of us had laid our weapons down and were in various states of undress. Many were getting dry shirts out of their packs, some were putting on dry socks, and a fortunate few who had chosen to carry the extra weight were changing into a second pair of boots that were mercifully dry.

All of a sudden there was a single shot fired from a spot very close to our position. The terrifying echo electrified us, and dozens of men scrambled for the M-14's looking for someone to shoot. A dead silence followed, broken soon by a couple of NCO's barking orders. Everyone rushed to get dressed and our leaders got us out of that clearing and into the cover of the jungle.

I never did find out who fired that shot. I don't know if it was Charlie or one of our own men who accidentally pulled the trigger. But I do know we never bunched up like that again and never exposed ourselves to open field unnecessarily.

The next day we were introduced to the realities of war and learned that this was indeed not an exercise. While crossing a large water-filled rice paddy, we came under fire from snipers several hundred yards away. They were well-hidden in a tree line and had a good bead on us. It was decided that we would not attempt to advance on them, but instead would call in air support on their position. The flyboys would clean out the nest.

I remember lying behind one of the dikes of the paddy while waiting for the planes. They told us that if we could sight in on a sure target, we had the OK to take them out. I rested my rifle on the dike and raised my head so my eyes were level with the dirt walkway on top of the dike. I couldn't see any VC well enough to pop, but one of them certainly could see me. I knew this because I clearly heard the "whoosh" of a bullet flying past just to the left of my head. I ducked back behind the dike and thought to myself, *Was that what I think it was*? A few seconds later, I raised my head again, tentatively, and was shocked to hear another "whoosh" fly past, this one also to the left of my head. Again I retreated behind the dike. I must have looked like one of those bears in a shooting gallery that shows himself briefly while the marksman tries to get him on the uptick. Can you imagine being able to hear bullets in mid-air? I was astounded!

After an interminably long time (or so it seemed), the jets finally arrived. Someone on the ground was talking them in. They made a pass over the alley where the VC were entrenched and climbed high to turn. One by one they peeled off and dove on the enemy position, firing their cannons, machine guns and rockets. They made a similar pass a second time and then disappeared.

Moments later they returned and someone yelled, "Watch this! They're gonna fry 'em!"

Then two of the jets swept in especially low. Suddenly, they released several wobbly canisters which followed the planes briefly before falling away to the earth. When they hit the ground to the right of the tree line, a giant fireball erupted and danced across the countryside engulfing everything in its path in a terrible conflagration.

What an awesome sight . . . How could anyone live through something like that? I thought to myself, *Yeah, I know. All's fair in love and war. But, Christ! Does that include napalm*? Sobered by what we had just seen, we rose from our positions, wrung the water from our clothes, and continued the chase.

Several hours later we again came under fire from snipers. This time they were on a hill to our left. The hill was covered with an incredibly dense undergrowth about four feet in height. The VC were hidden somewhere in that undergrowth, and, again, none of us could see them.

Suddenly, my gunner yelled, "There he is! There he is!" He kept his eye on the spot and tried to show the rifleman where to shoot. But nobody could see the sniper except Corporal Clarence Black, the man with the 3.5. I can't remember if Cpl Black asked the lieutenant for permission to fire the 3.5, or if, out of exasperation, the Lt said, "You get him, Blackie." But the next thing I knew, I was loading a heat round into the rocket's tube. I cleared the area for a backflash and tapped Blackie on the helmet to signal that he was free to fire.

With all eyes on the hill, he sighted in and laid down a perfect shot. Simultaneous to the loud explosion and the puff of grayish-black smoke, we witnessed a small body fly into the air and tumble down to disappear back in the undergrowth. Everyone cheered and congratulated Blackie. We waited for a few minutes to see if there was to be any more activity from the hill. Then we ran up to the spot where we had seen the body fall. When we got there we were able to find the depression in the ground where the round hit, and there were bits of flesh and smatterings of blood on the surrounding bushes. But no body! Charlie had hooked him under the breastbone and dragged him off more quickly than we could get up there.

At least two things were now clear to all of us. First, this was not a mere exercise; we were really in combat. And second, we knew we were going to catch up to Charlie soon.

On two occasions now they had left snipers behind to delay us while the main body of their troops continued their escape. They had sacrificed a number of their soldiers to accomplish this. We knew that Charlie didn't want to face us, but we also knew that it was inevitable he would.

But even this obvious logic didn't fully prepare me for the most significant event of my life.

On 16 December 1965, while trudging

down a dirt road still in hot pursuit, my company came under heavy fire in a well-executed ambush. Automatic and small-arms fire opened up from across a rice paddy to our right.

Filled with terror, I dropped to the ground and began to shoot even before seeing anything move. Suddenly, I could focus on nothing but the excruciating pain I felt. Two bullets had ripped into my abdomen, one of them passing all the way through me and coming out uncomfortably close to the spine. The terror I first felt lapsed into a dull fear that I was going to die on that muddy road thousands of miles from home.

The pain was so severe that at first all I could do was to thrash about wildly on the ground. Somehow, though, I made it to my knees. I could hear my buddies yelling at me to get down, but the pain was too intense. I couldn't lie still. But while on my knees, my back was fully exposed to the hill behind us. And Charlie was up there.

Then I took a round in the back which pitched me forward onto my face. The bullet entered my shoulder blade and smashed muscle, bone and nerve on its way to its exit through my bicep. I was still conscious, and I managed somehow to crawl back to where the hill rose steeply from the road. There, at least, I was shielded from the enemy on the hill.

I was now engulfed in a cacophony of gunfire and shouting, made even worse by my fears for my own safety. I looked to my left, and there was my friend Ken Meadows lying quite still on the ground. Though we shared the same last name, Ken was from Toledo, Ohio, and was no relation to me. Sometimes we would pass ourselves off as brothers when joking with other friends. For an instant I was concerned for his safety, but then the pain brought me back to what I was facing. At about that point, the VC threw a grenade down on the road to my right. I watched as Corporal Wayne Self got up and kicked it away. Unfortunately, he kicked it in my direction. It exploded, but did not harm me except for a tiny bit of shrapnel that hit my ankle. It was enough to make a small scar which I still carry, though.

After what seemed an eternity, things calmed down enough to allow the Corpsmen to come up and minister to the wounded. The first one to get to me spoke some words of comfort and gave me a shot of morphine for the pain. I am not sure if he failed to stick the used needle in my collar [*one of the signals that Corpsmen used to show that a shot had been given. -- Eds.*] or if I had knocked it loose with my moving around, but when a second Corpsman reached me a few minutes later, the morphine had not had time to take effect. And seeing no needle in my collar, he asked me if I wanted something for the pain. Of course I said yes! Quickly, he administered another shot of morphine . . . my second within five minutes.

When I related this incident to a doctor later, he told me I was lucky I didn't die from an overdose of morphine. Today, when someone brings up the question of whether or not there is a God, I grow silent and think of that day on that muddy road. Surely there was a higher power than mortal Man watching over me. How else could I explain my life being spared twice in a few brief moments?

It may have been minutes, but it seemed like hours before I was lifted onto a heliocopter and taken to a fully equipped field hospital. From there, I went to Clark AFB Hospital in the Philippines. At Clark, I was told that Ken Meadows, though shot in the back of the head, was still alive. I never found out how well he recovered, if at all.

I went to Chelsea Naval Hospital in Boston. After a year of treatment and therapy for my arm I was medically retired from the Marines at Quantico, Virginia, in January 1967.

I feel much better having confronted my combat experiences with the words on these pages. I've put the war behind me and built an entirely different life, including a wife, children, and a career.

I've never forgotten how terrible war is and I hope I never will. But I have also never lost pride in having been a US Marine.

It's true what they say, you know. "There is no such thing as an ex-Marine. There are only former Marines." §

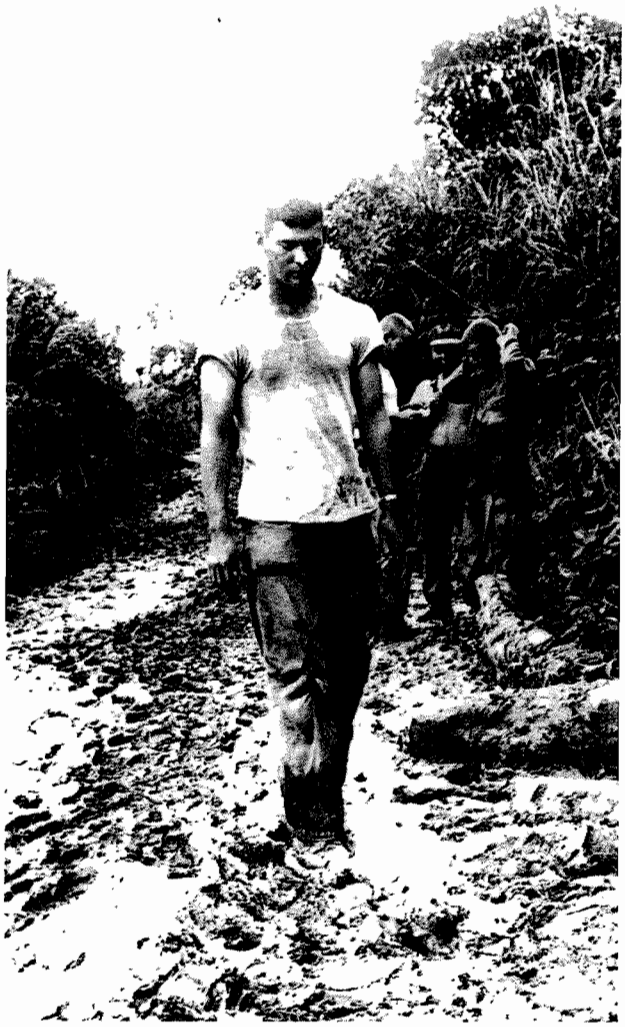
Such Is the Life of a Grunt

By Paul Allen

F/2/1 boarded the troopship *Bexar* in August 1965. We were headed for Okinawa, and the rumor was that we would then go on to Vietnam. I believe that most of us were excited about going overseas. I remember standing along the siderail with other Marines watching San Diego disappear over the horizon.

There was little to do on ship and most of us got seasick. I was assigned to officer-mess duty, which kept me busy. The ship was crowded with Marines and gear. There was barely enough room to walk. Because it was so hot and stuffy in the troop compartments, most of us slept on deck. We cleaned weapons, played cards, or wrote letters home. It took about ten days to reach Okinawa, and after being cooped up on the ship we even looked forward to training.

After a couple of weeks training, we warehoused a lot of our extra gear and boarded the USS *Iwo Jima*, LPH-2. We were a Special Landing Force (SLF duty). We were headed for the Philippines for more training and then on to Vietnam. From the *Iwo Jima* we were involved in the Blue Marlin raids (Operation Dagger Thrust). Sometimes these raids were coordinated with amphibious units. F/2/1 was involved in an amphibious assault and a nighttime amphibious assault. I remember we spent most of an uncomfortable night crammed in an amtrack, churning around in the South China Sea.



(Courtesy of Dave McGee)
". . . [A] wet, green, muddy hell. . . ." --Paul Allen
Battle-weary grunt Tom Boisvert slogs through the rain on Harvest Moon.

There was one raid when several amtracks got mired down in mud. A perimeter was set up around them for the night. The next day trees were cut down, carried to the amtracks, and chained to their tracks so they could pull them under them to get footing. A bulldozer was brought in and it got stuck, too. The amtracks finally got free of the mud, but the bulldozer had sunk so far down and so much time had been lost it was blown up.

2 / 1 was

involved in providing the covering force for the US Army's First Air Cavalary Division when it moved into the area around Qui Nhon. I remember we were high up in the hills watching the Army troops moving along the road below.

While assigned to the *Iwo Jima* we sailed into Indonesian waters, because Communist forces had attempted to overthrow the government on Java. We were to help remove American citizens there, but the matter was cleared up before we had to help.

To the best of my knowledge, very little was accomplished during these early operations. Mostly we would find old people and children in the villages or no one at all. Eventually we went back to the Philippines for more jungle training. We lived in a tent city and had some of the best liberty in Olongapo. We trained there for about two weeks.

Then at Subic Bay, F/2/1 boarded the old WWII aircraft carrier USS *Valley Forge*, LPH-8, and headed back to Vietnam. It was from the *Valley Forge* that at around 1100 on 10 December 1965 we were flown into Operation Harvest Moon.

The landing zone for F Company was near the village of Cam La. We landed in the middle of some prime rice paddies and started getting some small arms fire from a hill and from Cam La. Another Marine and I were trying to spot where the fire was coming from when a round hit the dike between us.

By the time the rest of Fox was dropped off, the incoming fire was so intense that some of the choppers would skim a few feet off the paddies and Marines would jump out. Some Marines got stuck in the mud and had a hard time trying to get to cover. Some Marines were hit while they were still in the chopper and some as soon as they got off. We were pinned down by heavy fire in the open rice paddies. It would remain this way the rest of the day. The only cover we had were the dikes. It was from behind the dikes we returned fire at whatever target we could spot.

A Marine just a few feet to my right was sitting straight up on the dike while the rest of us were lying down in the mud and water. He was smoking a cigarette and seemed to have little concern for the action going on around us. The next time I glanced over at him he was slumped over dead. We had to pull his body down because it kept drawing fire.

I remember a squad of Marines behind one dike. I saw several mortar rounds hit along the dike, wiping out the entire squad. Looking across the paddies toward the village, I saw several camouflaged figures running down a dike followed by a pig. Our machine gun opened up on this group.

There was one organized attempt to break out of the rice paddies. One group of Marines tried to launch an assault but were stopped by an aerial burst from artillery. I heard later that it was our own artillery. Those Marines had either gotten too far ahead or the rounds fell short. But I'll never forget the sight of them standing up and charging forward. They had guts. A medevac chopper came in, and I saw it taking rounds on its way in and on its way out. Air support arrived. The planes came in low, strafing and bombing. Around sundown the battle broke off.

After dark we regrouped and set up a defensive perimeter. About six of us were asked to go out and recover the bodies of the Marines who had been killed by the mortar fire. It was dark and raining and we had a hard time locating the dead Marines. Flares were fired up occasionly to help us get our bearings. We finally located the bodies and tried to carry them. This proved impossible because of the mud we had to go through. We ended up dragging them back.

I knew three of the dead Marines (Joe Morneo, John Wilson, and Bob Craft) fairly well. We also picked up what gear we could find and brought it back with us. When we got back to our position we spent the rest of the night on the line. To add to the misery, it started to rain even more. It would continue to rain for the whole operation--which would last another ten days.

The next morning, choppers arrived to pick up the dead and wounded. The wounded had spent the night in the field. There were two rows of poncho covered bodies lying in the mud. I saw a friend of mine who had a large



(Courtesy of Dave McGee)

VC BABY

Corpsman Dick Mars cares for newborn Viet Cong baby during Harvest Moon.

dent in his helmet. He had been behind a dike and a round hit his helmet and knocked him out. He had missed most of the battle. Another Marine had a bullet split the case of a grenade in his grenade pouch that he had strapped to his leg. Another Marine had a bullet clip the filters off the cigarettes he was carrying. There were other stories of near misses.

Another Marine had lost the sole and heel from one of his boots. That was how bad the mud was. The suction of it could pull your boots off or apart. Someone told him to check the boots of the dead Marines to see if he could find a pair that would fit. He couldn't bring himself to do that and walked with one bare foot for several days. He finally got a replacement pair of boots on one of the days we could get supplies.

We had lost so many men in the gun section that we were forced to have two-man gun teams instead of the usual four. Even though we didn't need all the equipment for the gun, for three days I ended up carrying the spare parts bag, the tripod, and 400 rounds of ammo. With the M-14, pack, and helmet, I figured out I was carrying well over a hundred pounds. Finally, someone in charge figured out (what most of us already knew) that we didn't need all the extra equipment.

As soon as the companies were organized, we started chasing Charlie in the rain, through the jungle and up into the hills. The next week was a wet, green, muddy hell. We went through areas that B-52's had bombed. We could hear the bombs falling but couldn't see the planes. We found several dead Vietnamese, maybe VC--who knows? We spent one night near a destroyed village and later wished we could be further away. There were dead bodies somewhere; you could smell them with a shift in the wind. The next day we found a few of them. One was a woman holding a small child.

Several Marines were pulled out because of immersion foot. One Marine was wounded by other Marines when he got on the wrong side of the perimeter one night. Due to the dampness, my hands became very wrinkled and sensitive. I could barely hold onto my rifle. It felt like thousands of tiny pins were in my finger tips. We went without food for nearly three days because they couldn't get supplies to us due to the weather. A Corpsman helped a village woman deliver her baby.

Sometimes we were on the move all day and even into the night. I remember one night was so dark that you couldn't see anything at all and had to feel your way along to other Marines, stationed earlier, who would turn you in the direction you were to go next.

We crossed rivers and nearly lost a man because of the swift currents. We climbed up terraced rice paddies and took leeches off when we had time.

Finally, mainly due to attrition, F Company was pulled back to a rear area. There we spent the next two days in bunkers. We all

were exhausted and were a miserable looking group. After a couple of days there, we finally dried out. We were told to pack up, that we were being pulled back to the *Valley Forge*. We got our gear together and stood out in the rain for a few hours until we were soaked again. Then we were told the choppers couldn't make it because of the weather conditions. Depressed, wet, and shivering we walked back to the bunkers.

We finally did return to the *Valley Forge*. When we got there we were told to drop all our 782 gear onto this huge pile so it could be cleaned. That was a mistake, because we had a hard time replacing it with good gear. When I went to the showers I hardly recognized myself in the mirror. I had a full growth of beard and was filthy dirty. We had a hot meal, cleaned our weapons and went to bed.

The next day we fell out for formation on the hangar deck. We realized then how many men F Company had lost. There were about 80 of us left. Fox Company had taken about 60% casualities on Operation Harvest Moon. We were told that Captain Marx was our new CO and that Captain Page had been killed. Capt Page always wore a red bandanna around his neck. We used to say what a target he made. I found out years later that Capt Page had survived his wounds.

We spent the last few days on the ship getting our gear squared away and listening to rumors about where we were going next. Some thought we were going back to Okinawa or the Philippines. Both rumors were wrong. F Company was to relieve some other unit on a hill around Da Nang while the rest of 2/1 was to go to Phu Bai. While still on the ship, a close friend of mine, Jose Torres, told me he felt that he wasn't going to get out of Vietnam alive.

The hill that Fox was assigned to was in the middle of rice paddies. There was a village close by. Also a road that went to Da Nang on which our drivers would get sniped at. Occasionally a sniper would shoot at the hill. There were a couple of tanks dug in on the hill and bunkers that we shared with rats and snakes. We never used the bunkers unless it rained. We ran patrols off this hill day and night.

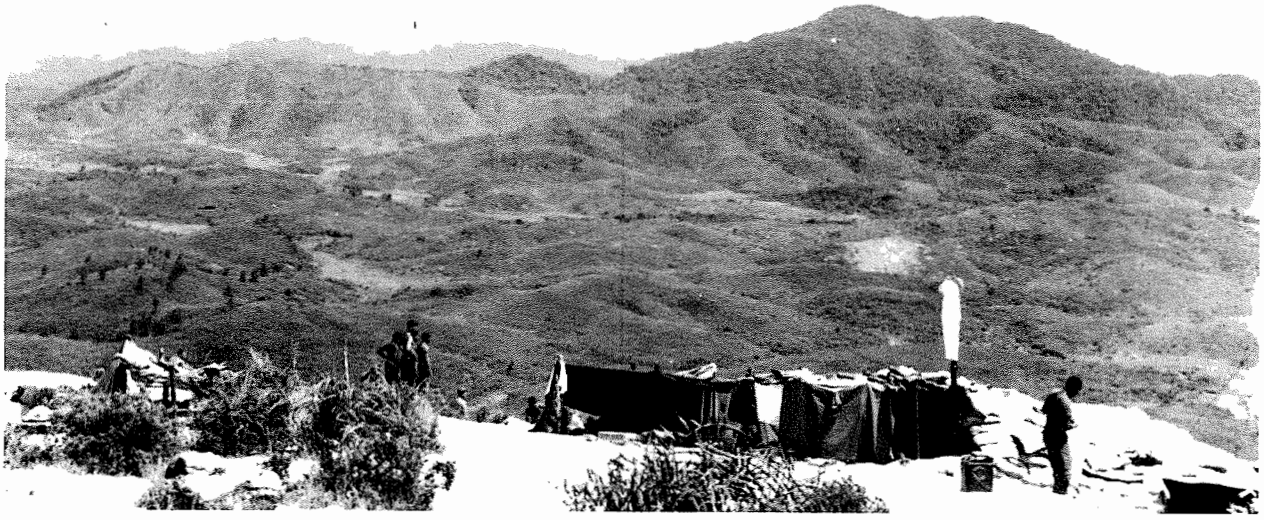
During an operation there was a bridge that the VC blew up. Five of us were sent to guard this bridge for a few days. We set up claymores and strung comm wire and cans with rocks in them around our position. A small patrol of four or five Marines would walk the road from the hill to the bridge at different times of the night. They would stop at the bridge and we would radio the CP that the patrol had made it. Then the patrol would head back to the hill.

One night the patrol was ambushed and one Marine was lost. We could see the tracers from the patrol and the VC. Flares were shot up and we opened fire at a couple of figures we saw running away. We couldn't say if we got them for sure. Two of us went down the road to help the patrol. The point man in the patrol had been hit in the head. The next day we found his helmet with the inside coated with blood.

During the day we would watch a parade of villagers heading into Da Nang to sell their goods. One day someone in one of the groups planted a mine in the road. It blew up a driver and his jeep. Every day after that the engineers would check the road for mines several times a day just to keep it clear. We wouldn't let the people stop on the road. We kept them moving.

The patrols would tell us about how the rest of F Company was doing. We heard about one of our patrols that had lost almost everyone in it because of a booby trap. A few other Marines had become ill and had to be pulled out. We were all beginning to feel like we were slowly being whittled away and if the VC didn't get us the bugs would. When the operation we were guarding the bridge for was over, we were pulled back to the hill.

The first day back, our five-man squad was sent out to guard another bridge that had been blown up. The engineers had put up a metal bridge and we were to guard this overnight while units were pulling back to Da Nang. The VC had put a large charge under the old bridge, and when the engineers drove a piece of heavy equipment over the bridge they set it off. The blast completely destroyed the piece of equipment; it had blown one of its wheels about 100 meters into a rice paddy.



(Courtesy of Paul Stenzel)

HILL 225 OUTPOST
Twelve miles west of Phu Bai.

Two Marines had been riding on the equipment and were blown to bits with it. We helped the men from graves registration look for the bodies, but all we found was a foot in a sock, bits of flesh, and pieces of an M-14. Later that day we were called back to the hill for patrol duty.

We spent the remainder of the time on the hill running patrols and setting night ambushes. I spent Christmas Eve 1965 on a night ambush and New Year's Eve at an outpost. We listened to music on the field phone. One song I remember was the Beach Boys' "Help Me Rhonda."

Then one morning choppers came in and off-loaded Marines. We were told to pack up. We were being pulled off the hill. We later heard that while on this hill Fox Company had been known as a "bastard" company, because we had not been attached to any other unit.

F Company was sent to Phu Bai to join up with the rest of 2/1. At Phu Bai there were better living quarters--showers, hot meals, and an EM club with cold beer (once in a while, anyway). F Company pulled duty on Hill 225. From this hill you could see for miles. We would run patrols and night ambushes. The worst part of Hill 225 was the climb back up. It was like climbing up a mountain. It was nearly straight up in some places.

While at Phu Bai we did get a 12-hour liberty into Hue City. The group I was with nearly caused a riot. Not too long after that all liberties were secured and we started on countless patrols and operations. Only a few were memorable events.

We were involved with tanks on some operations. The tanks were either getting stuck or blown up. I remember one occasion when we were at an abandoned village. A tank with a flame thrower was used to burn it down. We also located a VC training area out in the bush and it was destroyed.

On 27 February 1966, Fox company was

flown into Operation New York. We were to join with some ARVN units. This was the first time that such a large unit had made a night landing. There was a lot of concern that someone might run into a tail rotor blade, but luckily no one did.

On 28 February, we were crossing an open field. On the other side of this field was a village. Someone started to ring a temple bell. We figured that it must be an early warning for the VC that the Americans were coming. We had crossed about 20 meters of the field when one of the VC must have gotten jumpy and fired one round. This didn't slow the sweep too much but did make us nervous.



(Courtesy of Gerald Anton)

ROCKET TEAM

Gerald Anton was a 3.5 gunner during Operation New York. Left to right: Anton, John P. Gleason, Robert Arnold Corkill (KIA 29/5/66), Santos Sanchez (KIA 25/6/66). All were men of Fox Company.

When we were about halfway across the field, all hell broke loose from the village--automatic weapons, machine guns, and mortars. My gun team took off running toward an embankment in front of the village. We had to run through a pond about waist-deep and then up the embankment. At the top of this embankment was a fence made of entangled bushes. On the other side of the fence was a cemetery and beyond that a tree line and then the village.

My team leader, Larry "Mac" MacDonald, spotted where some of the fire was coming from, and we opened up on that position and at some people running along the tree line. We started tearing a hole through the fence to get over the embankment. What happened next probably saved my life. While going through the fence and over the embankment, I got tangled up in some of the brush. It slowed me down a little while my team leader and assistant gunner got ahead of me. They both got hit.

It was then that I realized that we were ahead of the rest of the company, and alone. I made it to Mac who was trying to get up and give first aid. I saw Richard Nugent, my assistant gunner, get up and try to run back. He had been shot through the throat. Blood was pouring from his mouth and nose. He didn't make it. I tried to get the machine gun to fire but it was jammed with sand. I took it apart, cleaned it as best I could, and got it to working again. I heard Marines screaming as they charged forward and went past me and into the tree line. Air support came in strafing and dropping napalm. The VC dropped some more mortar rounds.

After the shooting stopped I went up along the tree line and found several dead VC. One of their heads reminded me of a crushed pumpkin, the way it had caved in. They had abandoned weapons and supplies and had lost, according to official records, 178 of their men. We had taken casualties, too. I had lost a few more close friends: my team leader, assistant gunner, and Jose Torres (the Marine who had told me on the *Valley Forge* that he wasn't going to make it home) were all KIA.

In the village we found several tunnel entrances. Tear gas was used to try and get the people to come out. As far as I know, no one did. I heard later that there was some concern about the use of tear gas--that its use might be considered gas warfare and thus against the Geneva Convention. By the time our casualties had been evacuated, it was near dark. A hasty perimeter was set up. We spent a sleepless

night.

The next day we moved out chasing Charlie again. We found several blood trails and drag marks where bodies had been pulled away. We were out for several more days without making any more contact. We heard that the unit we were after had been caught crossing a river and shot up.

After Operation New York, F Company was down to only about 50 men. It was no longer considered an effective fighting force. Thus a decision had been made to use the few survivors as replacements to other companies, or we could volunteer to help set up local defenses in some hamlets. John Pabillano and I chose to be replacements and were sent to the weapons platoon of H/2/1. F Company was now called the "ghost" company. It's hard to believe that a company of over 200 men could be reduced to just a few survivors after only a few months.

The time with Hotel Company consisted of going out on countless patrols, night ambushes and operations. I remember it was around this time that I became ill. The Corpsman thought I might have malaria and sent me back to the base hospital. I spent most of the day waiting to see a doctor. When I finally got to see one, he checked me over, gave me some APC's, and sent me back to the field. I was still sick. I had the shakes, the runs, and vomiting. We were sent out on a night ambush. It rained, the pills got wet and melted, and I threw them away. Such was the life of a grunt.

I remember one operation on which some of us from old F Company thought we were seeing a ghost. We were passing some Marines from another unit. Warsaw, a Marine we thought had been killed on Harvest Moon, was walking past us. We were able to talk for only a minute. He had been wounded and sent to Japan. By the time he was able to return there was no more F Company.

2/1 was moved farther north--closer to the DMZ--somewhere around Quang Tri. We were to run patrols, do night ambushes, and participate in operations. While at Quang Tri we received some new replacements. They hadn't been with us very long when we were called in on an operation. We were to hump it (double-time) all the way out. It was hot, and even the old guys thought we were going to cook our brains before we ever got to where we were going.

All of the new replacements went down with either heat exhaustion or heatstroke. Some were delirious and had to be held down. The Corpsmen were busy trying to get to all of them. We used up our canteen water trying to keep them cooled down. We ended up drinking some pretty filthy water and the company was held up until they could be evacuated. I don't remember ever seeing any of those men again.

Millsap and I were pulled out of the field and sent back to a base camp. We were told we were to go to Phu Bai for an award ceremony. While we were at the base camp, choppers started landing with casualties. The two of us were asked to be stretcher-bearers. I was afraid these casualties might be from our own company. Luckily, they weren't.

They had been removed from the field in a hurry and piled into the chopper with the dead mixed with the wounded. We grabbed a stretcher and started running for the aid tent. There were two doctors who looked at the casualties and decided who was still alive and who was dead. He pointed for us to put our man over to the side.

When the casualties were being sorted, some of their gear had been tossed to the side. Millsap needed a canteen cover and he found one that was fairly new. It had blood on it. He took his canteen and poured water on the cover and washed it off. This was the same Marine who during Harvest Moon needed boots and walked several days with a bare foot because he couldn't stand the thought of taking boots off a KIA.

After the award ceremony at Phu Bai we returned to H Company along with two new replacements, David Hatch and Bruno Martin. Hatch I would meet again a couple of years later at the VA Hospital in Des Moines. Martin I would remember dying the day I was wounded.

We were assigned to go out on a long patrol with four tanks. I wasn't too sold on the idea of riding on the tanks because we ended up on the lead one. Sure enough, it ran over a mine and blew the left track off. There was so much dirt and smoke you couldn't see. The tank went off the road and down into a ditch with most of us hanging on. When it stopped, we all jumped off and set up to return fire in case it was an ambush. A tanker opened up on

a hill with its "fifty." But luckily there wasn't an ambush. Several Marines were hurt in the explosion and a medevac was called in. We spent the rest of the day there until they could get the tank out and repaired.

On 5 June 1966 we went on Operation Jay. Again, the VC were holed up in a village and had chewed up some ARVN troops and another Marine unit. I saw a chopper crash and burn that day. We were taking sniper fire as we got closer to the village. We held up in a ditch and saw Marines carrying back our wounded and dead.

Planes came in strafing and dropping napalm. We were ordered on line and started a push through the village. We made it through the fencerow and into part of the village. Some huts were on fire, and an old women came running and screaming out of one of them and fell. We started taking heavier fire and were pulled back to the road.

Someone came up with the idea of sending a squad down the road in order to push through on their flank. As luck would have it, my gun team--John Pabillano, Bruno Martin, and I--was sent with the squad. Altogether there were ten of us. My team leader knew I wasn't exactly excited about this. I told him I thought it was suicide. We all took off our packs and headed down the road.

We went about 30 meters, turned on line, and as we went through a cemetery we started taking fire almost immediately. A nearby rifleman's helmet went flipping in the air. He had been shot in the head. Bruno Martin, the new replacement who had been with us only a few days, was killed. We pushed on through the cemetery when suddenly four VC jumped out of a trench and tried to run. We opened up on these four and all of them were hit several times. One VC kept trying to get up and run. One of us shot him in the head with a .45.

The gunfire really increased and we were pinned down. There were seven of us left now and four of these were wounded. The three of us that were not wounded decided we would give cover so the wounded could get out. One of the wounded crawling by me was hit again but was able to keep going.

When the last of the wounded had headed back to the company, the remaining three started back. We were slowed down by grenades. The next thing I knew I was hit. My right arm and hand were paralyzed and I dropped the M-60. I got behind a grave and took out my .45. John, the gun team leader, picked up the M-60 and kept firing. A round passed through John's helmet and he dropped the gun. There was blood coming from under his helmet, but he was still able to move and talk. Zig, the last untouched Marine, picked up the M-60 and John took Zig's rifle.

We decided if we were going to make it back, we would have to provide cover for each other. One would run while the other two covered him. We did this leapfrog thing three or four times until Zig got hit and I lost so much blood that I couldn't get back on my feet. I told John that I couldn't go any further and to go on. But John wouldn't leave and Zig was still able to provide cover. With Zig providing cover and John helping, somehow the three of us were able to make it back to the road.

I ended up in Da Nang. The doctor who did my surgery was from my hometown and his father was our family doctor. I was flown to the Philippines, then to Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco, and then to the Great Lakes Naval Hospital. At Great Lakes I had nine months of various surgery. I had lost a lot of weight. When I left for Vietnam I weighed 175 pounds. After 11 months in country I was down to 119 pounds.

I was sent home in 1967. The first year I was home there were times I wished I could be back with the men of 2/1. I felt closer to those men than I did to the people at home. Many people didn't seem to realize or care that our country was in a war. Nor did the majority care about the sacrifices being made and the suffering some Americans were going through. Then came the protesting and the blaming of the war on the men who were fighting it. Our whole society had gone insane.

Luckily for me, I had a girl who had faithfully written to me in Vietnam and helped me when I came back. We were married in '68. I went to college and became a teacher. We have two sons. Sometimes I share my experiences in Vietnam with my students, but to most of them it's just ancient history. §

29 May 1966

By Paul Stenzel

On 25 May 1966, 2/1 left Phu Bai by truck convoy to replace the 4th Marines in the Co Bi Thanh Tan region northwest of Hue. We were aware that the 4th Marines had seen a fair amount of VC/NVA activity in this area, so we were expecting the same. The area was characterized by scattered hamlets in flat and gently rolling hills which spread west into the mountains. We began conducting ambush patrols, company-sized sweeps, and so on.

At 1000 hours on 29 May, a Golf Company patrol ran into an unknown number of VC. Golf initially suffered several KIA and WIA (the radio transmissions are not clear on the numbers). Echo Company was committed to assist, as well as elements of Fox and other elements of Golf. Echo marched to the area of fighting and didn't tie in with Golf until 1500 hours.

In the meantime, Golf had taken additional casualties which now included at least ten KIA with as many wounded.

When Echo arrived, they began taking sniper fire. While attempting to dislodge the sniper, Echo suffered eight KIA and two WIA (I believe they were all from 3rd platoon). They included the 3rd platoon sergeant, James MacKenna and a 3rd platoon Corpsman who was shot while checking on a dead Marine. The sniper was killed, but at a heavy cost. The radio transmission lists the total casualty count as: E Company, 8 KIA and 2 WIA; G Company, 11 KIA and 12 WIA.

There is no mention of this action in the official history, *US Marines in Vietnam 1966.* Nothing at all. And there is some dispute about the number of casualties. But whatever the number, they were too many. §

* * * * *

Official USMC Summary of 29 May 1966

(cc) 29 May--At 2901345H 1 VC walked into E-1 ambush site at YD 535290. E-1 opened fire and results were 1 VC KIA. Equipment captured: 1 pack and documents, and canned rations. At 291000H G-1 made contact with an estimated 30 VC reinforced with one machine gun and strategically located snipers, at YD 525263. The patrol returned fire and assaulted. The patrol was pinned down by intense and accurate fire and requested assistance. At 291030H "G" Company was ordered to alert one platoon to reinforce the 1st Platoon. 2nd Platoon was heli-lifted to YD 523264. C.O. 2/1 directed the 2nd & 3rd platoons of "G" Company. At 291045H 1st platoon of "G" Company was divertetd from its patrol route and directed to establish a blocking position at YD 505286. Co "F" was ordered to prepare a Command Group and 2 platoons to be heli-lifted to YD 533258. At 291205H 2nd Platoon "G" Company was heli-lifted and junctured with 1st Platoon "G" Company and began search of the area of contact,

encountering VC in tree line and fighting holes in the vicinity of YD 528265. At 291225H 1st Platoon, "H" Company established a blocking position in the vicinity of YD 505280 and was joined by "H" Company (-) and the Command Group. At 291255H "F" Company was heli-lifted to the vicinity of YD 533328. At 291340H "F" Company reported in blocking position in vicinity YD 537258. E Company commenced sweep south. At 291415H 1st and 2nd Platoons "G" Company in blocking positions in the vicinity of YD 528265. At 291505H "E" Company reported receiving sniper fire. Continuing sweep through sniper positions; results of sweep 2 VC KIA. At 291502H "F" Company was ordered to sweep west, and it was reported that sweep of contact area was completed. "F" Company junctured with "E" Company and two platoons of "G" Company in vicinity of YD 526272. "H" Company continued to block and moved slowly to the east and established contact with 2nd platoon of "G" Company. At 291542H "E" Company apprehended 4 VCS and 29 Vietnamese civilians. At 291600H all units ordered to conduct a sweep search and destroy operation orientated north with "F" Company on the right, "E" Company center, and "H" Company on the left. At 291700H C.O. "G" Company with the 3rd platoon "G" Company (Rein) with a platoon of tanks was ordered to establish a blocking position in the vicinity of YD 525287 east to YD530287 and to provide overhead fire in support of the sweep/search and destroy operation. At 291615H all units completed the operation and were order[ed] to proceed to their respective CP's. At 291955H all units returned to their respective CP's. Contact results: Enemy: 10 KIA (confirmed), 8 KIA (estimated), 10 WIA (estimated), 4 VCS captured; Friendly: 21 KIA, 16 WIA and 7 non-battle. Captured weapons: 1 US M-1 Carbine and 1 K-53 Carbine. There were 12 squad size and 3 platoon size patrols and 9 squad size ambushes and 8 listening posts employed.

[Contributed by Paul Stenzel]

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(Courtesy of Paul Stenzel)

PHU BAI, EARLY 1966
Base Camp area for 2/1.

Cobi Ton Ton

By John W. Norman

On 29 May 1966, I was in Golf Company. I was a member of first platoon (our platoon commander was Lieutenant Valentine), third squad. Our squad leader's name was Corporal Ord (this may not be the correct spelling, but that is the way I remember it). I was in the third fire team; the team leader was Lance Corporal Edwards, and the other man's name was Lance Corporal Flexer (who I remember receiving a wound to his arm). This was a long time ago.

Another member of our squad that I can remember offhand was Corporal Chickarillo. The rest of the squad, as I can recall, were WIA or KIA. I have a hard time remembering all the names. I'd only been with 2/1 since late March, and then was sent to A-Med in early June with malaria. After recovering, I was not sent back to 2/1 but transferred to K/3/3. But I will never forget the friends that I made in 2/1 even though time has taken away their names. One man who died that day, Lance Corporal David B. Brandon, had come into 2/1 with me. We came over on the same ship, the MSTS *General Gordon*. We joined 2/1 on the same day and were assigned to the same squad.

Most of what I remember about 29 May was walking toward that village in the morning--I think I was near the rear of the lead squad when the enemy opened up. The first man to get hit was a Californian named Ronald Ralich; he died shortly afterwards. Ron was a good friend of Aceivido's. After that, all hell broke loose. We moved up the trail to the left and were headed towards a paddy dike that seemed like the center point of our objective. As we got closer we took most of our casualties. Things were pretty confusing. I was scared and relatively new, so some of this could be inaccurate, but it is the truth as best as I can remember it.

I saw a lot of people who did things that day who should have been rewarded for their actions. Maybe a few did get something, because I think that a man named MacPhee--who was hit six times, but lived--was put up for something, but I never found out if he got anything. I hope he did.

That day was the longest day of my life. This happened at a place we called Cobi Ton Ton near Phu Bai. §



(Courtesy of Paul Stenzel)

Ready to go a patrol near Phu Bai in 1966 are, from left to right, Stenzel, Tootle, Unidentified, Peters, and Stone.

The Lightning Strike

By R. J. Smith

Sometime during the spring or summer of 1966, the battalion was occupying an area near Quang Tri. One night I was assigned to a listening post along with two other Marines. I hate to start a story with "It was a dark and stormy night. . . ."--but it was a very dark and stormy night. Our listening post was a *U*-shaped grave (with the mound in the middle of a semi-circular wall) about 100 meters in front of the battalion lines.

It was raining off and on throughout the night with visibility near zero. The night was proceeding with a pleasant uneventfulness when, around 0100, there was what seemed like an explosion near the entrance to the grave. Myself and a Marine I knew only as "Red from mortars" were almost asleep, one on each side of the raised mound in the center of the grave. The Marine who had been at the entrance collapsed, hard. I was sure that it was a grenade. I tried to move, but it seemed that it took forever to roll over and crawl to where the other Marine was. I don't know if it was fear or shock from the blast or what the cause of my immobility was, but it was disappointing to me. I was afraid I was going to let the other two down, and I was instantly angry with myself. It is amazing what can go through your mind in a split second. Red seemed to have the same problem moving that I did. We simultaneously asked, "Are you OK?"

There wasn't any response from the other Marine, and any night vision we may have had was gone due to the flash of the explosion. But after a while we saw the other Marine sit up, and other than being dazed he was was all right.

We thought for sure we were going to be attacked any moment. We tried reaching the rear by radio to advise them of what was going on, but we could not get through.

When the inevitable attack did not come, we relaxed a bit. We started seeing lightning strikes behind us in the rear, and we heard people yelling. We figured that it must have been a lightning strike and not a grenade that had struck in front of the grave. After two gallons of adrenaline drained from our systems, we sat back and watched the show that Mother Nature provided.

The lightning was both beautiful and eerie to watch. It would come straight down and then branch out right above the ground into fingers. We learned later that there were Marines in the rear lying on or near communication wire who were burned when lightning struck the wire.

About 0300 Red got very ill. He was vomiting and shaking. I had watched Red hump in the bush, and although he wasn't a very large man, he carried as much or more than most and never complained. And he had a fever; he was burning up. So we knew he was not faking.

We needed to get him back quick. We felt that someone would have to go back with Red and someone should stay at the listening post. It was decided I would stay at the LP and the other Marine would take Red back. We still didn't have any communications with the rear. I didn't envy those two trying to get back through the lines without any communication, and they didn't envy me staying at the LP alone.

About 0430 I heard some noise, and it was the Marine that took Red back. They had made it through OK, and he had come back out again to the LP in total darkness. He didn't have to. I was glad to see him.

We found out later that morning that Red had malaria and had been medevaced.

My job requires me to spend a lot of time out of doors, and sometimes during a thunder storm my mind drifts back. Red, I hope you are all right--I always admired your tenacity. To the other Marine--thanks, pard, for coming back. That was a lonely grave. §

15 July 1966

By Paul Stenzel

Near the end of June 1966, 2/1 had moved north to Dong Ha. Echo Company had been there since 22 June, providing security for Marine artillery. Operation Hastings kicked off on 15 July with the intent to blunt NVA penetration into the DMZ. The operation involved four infantry battalions: 2/1, 1/3, 2/4, and 3/4.

Later that evening, E Company, 2/1 was flown into LZ Crow. One helicopter, with part of the 1st platoon aboard, was shot down by the NVA. Thirteen were killed, including the platoon sergeant and seven men of the first squad.

A month before this happened, I was squad leader of the first squad. Then I was hospitalized with malaria. I often wondered, if I hadn't gotten malaria would I have been on that helicopter?

One thing that sticks in my mind is a strange incident involving Michael Gooden that took place one month before this happened. While in the Co Bi Tanh Tan area, a stray round had hit Gooden's helmet and ricocheted off. It left a good dent in the helmet, but he wasn't hurt. I remember we all told him how damn lucky he was. The round had come out of nowhere. We weren't engaged in any fighting at the time, but were moving into position to sweep through a hamlet. Michael Gooden was on that helicopter that was shot down 15 July 1966. §

* * * * *

15 July--At 1320H, TF DELTA directed 2nd Bn, 1st Marines to place one platoon on 15 minute stand by to enter the operating area to provide security for downed helicopter. At 1400H F/1 was launched and landed at 1455H. At 1635H TF DELTA directed that one company (Echo) be alerted for possible lift to 3rd Bn, 4th Marines area vicinity YD 037641. At 1750H E/1and Echo Command Group boarded CH-46's and departed DONG HA for operating area. At 1800H one CH-46 carrying 12 [M]arines from E/1 and 4 crew members was shot down in vicinity of YD050654 by a .50 Cal machine gun. Twelve Marines from E/1 and 2 crew members were KIA. At 1835H a second CH-46 with crew and remainder of E/1 returned to DONG HA. There were five squad size patrols, 8 squad ambushes, 9 outposts, and 9 listening posts were employed. Three scout sniper teams from 4th Marines remain assigned to this battalion.
[Official USMC Summary of 15 July 1966. Contributed by Paul Stenzel]

The Viet Cong felt the ferocious impact of death-dealing Marine supporting fire 23 July during Operation Hastings.

The four-hour artillery and 81mm mortar barrage came after the Viet Cong revealed their positions by firing at two 2nd Battalion, First Marine Regiment companies with automatic weapons. The companies were patrolling from a base camp near Hill 208.

The initial burst of fire caused light casualties.

An alert forward observer (FO) climbed to the top of the hill, spotted the VC position, directed the artillery fire which blasted the thick jungle flanking the two companies.

Early the next morning patrols were sent to search the area for results, and 14 dead VC were discovered.
[By Staff Sergeant Norman MacKenzie in *Sea Tiger*, 9 August 1966, p. 7. Contributed by Paul Stenzel.]

A Night I'll Never Forget

By Mike McNeely

Shortly after the beginning of 1966, I joined Hotel Company. We pulled patrols and ambushes around Chu Lai and were involved in some operations. Operation New York was one of the bigger ones, during which Hotel Company was to guard our base perimeter along with Echo Company, while Foxtrot and Golf Companies went out on the operation. Foxtrot lost quite a few men, one of whom was a real close buddy of mine, Larry MacDonald, from Detroit, Michigan. Larry was killed 28 February 1966.

From what I have been told, there was a lot of heroism among those Marines from Foxtrot. Without a doubt, Foxtrot was the hard luck company of our battalion. It seemed that if anything went wrong, it went wrong for Foxtrot.

In July came Operation Hastings, in northern I Corps against North Vietnamese Regulars. We jumped off on Hastings on 15 July. A friend of mine from Echo Company lost his whole squad in Helicopter Valley when their chopper was hit and caught fire. He told me he was supposed to be on that chopper, but because there were too many men on it they took him off and put him on another chopper. He said that while they were still in the air and the other chopper was burning, they could hear the men in it screaming above the noise of the helicopters.

The first night on Hastings, we had to go back to our landing zone, as we had gotten into some elephant grass and had no clear fields of fire. That night the North Vietnamese opened up on us with mortars and wiped out a listening post of five men. I think two were killed and the other three wounded. We had spotted the flash of the mortar and heard it coming out of the tube and waited for it to come in. We had nothing to dig in with and so just spread our perimeter out to keep more of us from being hit. We had been told to leave our E-tools behind so we could carry more ammo and C-rations. We moved over to the Rockpile, and they continued shooting at us during the night. We could hear and see the tracers come over, but as long as they didn't come close, we just went back to sleep until it was our turn on watch.

Echo Company was ambushed on the other side of the river one day, and we could hear them on the radio and watch the action from where we were, but we couldn't do anything to help them.

We ran across some anti-aircraft positions that the enemy had dug just shortly before. We found some batteries that were made in China. The enemy was pretty bold, as they would climb up in trees to check on us. But they weren't close enough for us to knock off.

We got into some triple-canopy, and while we were moving through it I had an eerie feeling, as it was real dim and quiet in there. When we stopped I felt something crawling on me and I began stripping; I knew what it was. We didn't wear skivvies while in Vietnam, so as fast as I could I just took off my cartridge belt, flak jacket, and utility jacket. I lit a cigarette and started burning leeches off my body. I had accumulated five in the short time it took us to move through the canopy. They had evidentally fallen out of the trees. I have often wondered if that was from their natural doing or from being sprayed with Agent Orange.

My last night on Operation Hastings was 21 July 1966. It was a night I'll never forget. We were tied in with Echo Company as a blocking force, situated on a small hill. I had two gun teams, and one of my gunners was on a listening post in front of our perimeter. Around 2030, the North Vietnamese opened up

on us with small-arms fire. We watched the bluish-green tracers go over our heads. Then they dropped 82mm mortars on us. That was when I was wounded.

I received shrapnel wounds to the left side of my head, to my left leg, and to my right arm. Blood ran into my left eye and I couldn't see out of it. And I had a hell of a headache. I was rather reluctant to touch the area around my left eye, fearing that I had lost my eyesight. I was pissed, to say the least, since I had only nine days left of my tour in Vietnam before rotating back to the States.

The squad leader of rockets was under my poncho with me, and he picked up shrapnel also. Even my brand new air mattress got nailed: I had promised to give it to Staff Sergeant Rameriz when I left Vietnam.

Pedro Martinez was about six or eight feet from me, and he was hit around the knees. So I hollered for a Corpsman to come take care of him. One arrived and put an Ace bandage on my head wound. I told him to take care of Martinez, but Pedro had lost too much blood and he died from shock and blood loss. A corporal by the name of [Richard] McNichols was wounded in the head by a .50-caliber round, and he lived for about 15 minutes before passing on.

SSgt Ramirez called the listening post back in, and my gunner, B. J. Fowler, told me he could have reached out and touched the North Vietnamese. He was shaking, and this was the first time I had seen Fowler shook up in all the time we were together in Vietnam.

The company commander (John Giles) called in artillery support to keep us from getting overrun. To make matters worse, of course the first rounds are spotter rounds, which are white phosphorous. These rounds landed right in the middle of first platoon and two of their men were burned.

Giles walked the artillery all around us that night. It was so close that when it landed and went off we could hear the shrapnel hitting the bushes around us. I asked the first sergeant what was happening, and he told me it was our own guns. I thought the North Vietnamese had let loose again.

Sometime around 0200, a helicopter came in and those of us with head wounds were flown back to Dong Ha to get patched up. I was taken to a dimly lit tent where I was cleaned up and designated to be sent out to the USS *Repose* to recover. On the *Repose*, I was lying on a stretcher stripped to my birthday suit when a chaplain came up to me and asked me if I would like him to say a few words for me. I agreed, wondering if my next move was to the mortuary. I thought he saw something I wasn't aware of.

Over the past few years I have learned more about Operation Hastings. A member from our outfit told me he'd had to go out on a body count the next morning, and they counted more than 200 dead North Vietnamese. I think they were probably killed by the artillery. Also, Bob Redfern--from Utah, a friend from the old 3/3 outfit--told me he was attached to Foxtrot Company, and they were on their way up to help us when they ran into the North Vietnamese who were going to try and surround and overrun both us and Echo Company. He told me he had shot and killed a North Vietnamese with his .45, and had run out of bullets and taken the .45 and knocked another one to the ground. He had picked up five rounds himself. Without a doubt, that was where the action was. What really upset me was that I thought I could leave Vietnam without being wounded or killed, but that was not to be. §



Squad

By Tim Dunn

I joined Hotel Company in August of 1966. At that time the battalion just moved south following several months of operations in support of the 3rd Marine Division in northern I Corps. The battalion base camp was established off Highway 1 (Anderson Trail) in the former hamlet of Phong Luc 1. Hotel Company was outposted south of the battalion, just west of the village of Vinh Dien (at the intersection of Highways 1 and 4) in the former hamlet of Dong Cau Nhi. First and second platoons, along with the company headquarters section, were located "mainside," straddling Highway 4. Third platoon was posted on the island at the confluence of the Dien Binh, Ky Lam and Vinh Dien rivers.

I was assigned to the 1st squad of 2nd platoon as a rifleman and the squad's rifle-grenadier. This position required an M-76 rifle-grenade adaptor attached to the flash-suppressor of my M-14 and a satchel of rifle grenades, usually white phosphorous. For the first few weeks the squad lived in an abandoned crematory which was cool and comfortable. It was later abandoned for a thatched hut during the monsoon season, as it leaked appreciably.

From early September to early December 1966, our squad consisted of: Don McKowan, squad leader; Charles (Angie) Anzalone, point man; John Herrera, fireteam leader; Walter Cox, M-79 man; Tommy Lee Patton, radioman; Ray Hannon, rifleman; Jerome S. Baker, rifleman; and myself, rifleman/M-76 man. We were augmented as needed by several Corpsmen, most notably Doc's Merriman, Long and Zalinski. To a man, the Corpsmen all performed well under fire, looked after our needs, and put up with our hazing.

I recall an incident in mid-September 1966 when elements of the 1st platoon were engaged by either NVA or Main Force Viet Cong. It was a bright and hot day. I was on perimeter watch at the time, attempting to dry my perpetually soaked feet. The engagement occurred about a click or two west of the company area in the vicinity of Nhi Kinh 3. A bird dog spotter plane continually made low passes over the area, which alerted some of us in the company compound. At mid-afternoon all available hands were alerted to *saddle up* and mount the awaiting amtracks. I distinctly remember Don McKowan yelling at me to hurry, and all I could think about was that I had no socks on!

By the time this reserve force arrived in the contested area, the firing had diminished. Nonetheless, skirmish lines and a defensive perimeter were established. We stayed about a half hour. I was assigned to help load the dead on the amtrack. A 1st platoon Marine whose name, I believe, was Ortiz died that day. An enemy trooper (An NVA--the first) was also slain and loaded onto the track.

We buried the dead enemy soldier about 100 yards in front of 1st squad's lines, just east of the trail that 3rd platoon used when they came over to "mainside." The method of burial was to blast a hole in the ground with C4. We then placed the cadaver in the shallow crater, doused it with gasoline, set it on fire and then covered it with as much dirt as possible. Unfortunately, it was not enough dirt. The local dogs feasted on one of the arms and it spooked us that night as they went about their gruesome endeavor. I had the unpleasant task of exhuming the cadaver, digging a proper grave and reburying the body.

During late September and early October many of us in 2nd platoon suffered from immersion foot as the monsoons increased in intensity. Groups of us were sent back to

battalion for a day or two of drying out. We enjoyed the relative luxury of clean, dry clothes and a night's sleep on cots with dry blankets.

I was sent to battalion in mid-October to learn the craft of sniping. Larry Lelito from 1st platoon also represented Hotel Company. Following sniper training we became the company's designated snipers, sharing between us a matched-conditioned M-1 Garand. After training, Larry went back out to the field, and I was sent to Vietnamese Language School at III Marine Amphibious Force Headquarters in Da Nang. The course was rigorous, but the accommodations were elegant: aluminum and wood barracks; stateside-type heads with sinks, commodes and showers; a sit-down mess hall with plates, flatware, and real milk! The conditions made me feel guilty and disoriented. After a month of study, I graduated on 3 December and returned to Hotel Company. When I got back to the bush, I felt like an FNG. For the first few days I wore my helmet and flack jacket everywhere and became the butt end of repeated jokes by my platoon members.

The company was located at Bravo Battery 1/11 on the site of an old railroad station at Ha Dong, south of 1st Marine Regiment Headquarters, formerly Duong Son 2 and northeast of Hill 55. There was also a platoon patrol base (PPB) located west of Yen Ne 1 which was manned by each platoon for a week on a rotating basis. The time we spent in this area was continuously contested.

The hamlets of An Trach 1 and 2 were hotbeds of enemy activity. We patrolled around these hamlets incessantly, yet never venturing inside them unless we were at company strength. Following the deaths of Eric Evans and Robert DiRoberto of 2nd platoon in mid-December, a night reconnaissance patrol was organized by Captain Banks and Lieutenant O'Connor. Volunteers were solicited. As I remember, the patrol consisted of Capt Banks, Lt O'Connor, Sgt Don McKowan, Cpl Ken Gaffney, L/Cpl Bill Guseman, a Corpsman whose name escapes me (a dark-haired Irishman from Massachusetts), and myself (a lance corporal).

The plan was to gain entry into An Trach 2, ascertain the strength of the opposition there, and make our way by foot back to the battery by dawn. The backup contingency was that the company would assault the hamlet in full-strength if we did not communicate with them by a prearranged time. We left Bravo Battery around midnight and traversed the flooded rice paddies in a rubber boat. Our landing went undetected, and we advanced along a tree line for a few hundred meters. Lt O'Connor and I were on point. We spotted a male standing in the entryway of a hut peering in our direction. Capt Banks gave a signal to Cpl Gaffney, who then threw a grenade at the individual. The explosion blew him back into the hut and killed him. It also announced our presence. We took refuge in a graveyard and received intermittent, but undirected fire throughout the night and early morning.

Capt Banks was satisfied that the response meant a significant force in the hamlet. We could hear voices periodically, possibly giving commands. The captain decided to call in mortar and artillery strikes on the hamlet. The firing and voices were surpressed, but a piece of shrapnel disabled the transmit function of the radio. We stayed in the graveyard, unable to communicate by radio. The artillery and mortar fire ceased when we did not respond to fire control inquiries. We could hear them calling us but could not respond. When the barrage on the hamlet lifted, the indiscriminate firing by the occupants of An Trach 2 resumed. Fortunately, they did not know our exact location. None of us were injured.

As dawn began to rise, we could hear the supporting ontos of Hotel Company move into place across a 1,000-meter wide, flooded rice paddy. With the increasing light, we could see the entire company on line and facing us. We could also hear their radio transmissions. Some members of the company mistook us for VC, as our wet utilities looked black, we were armed, and wore no head gear. Permission to fire was requested and given. We were taken under fire by our own comrades! L/Cpl Guseman, Doc and I began to shout obscenities and wave our arms. Luckily, our obscenities were recognized as bonified Marine Corps lexicon and the firing stopped.

A comedy of errors then commenced as we began our withdrawal from the graveyard.

Capt Banks wanted us to enter a minuscule sampan that didn't look capable of holding four Marines' 782 gear. He entered first, and immediately put his foot through the bottom of the vessel.

We then began our trek, groping our way across the flooded paddy and trying to stay on the dikes. Bill Guseman was in front of me, carrying the disabled radio. He slipped off the dike and went under the water. When he did not resurface immediately I started feeling around for him. I brought him to the surface by his hair and the radio pack-frame. He was limp. I pressed his stomach and a river of paddy water came out. He gasped for air and then began breathing normally once again. After what seemed an eternity, we reached the far bank of the paddy and the helpful arms of Hotel Company.

The result of that patrol was a multi-unit assault on An Trach 1 and 2 in late December, just before the Christmas cease-fire. This was known as Operation Shasta. Most of Hotel Company was delivered by Sea Knight helicopters. I remember riding next to the two 81 FO's on the way in to the landing zone. The taller, and senior member of the team had all the boroughs of New York City written on his helmet cover. I asked him where he was from and told him I was from New York, also. It seemed to calm us both momentarily. My next recollection is that of green tracers arching towards the copter but missing it. Suddenly, movement in the craft caught my peripheral vision. Jerome Baker was hopping excitedly in his seat. He was the unfortunate recipient of hot .50-caliber shell casings from the portside machine gun which was firing on the source of the green tracers coming at us.

We landed and deployed, as taught in ITR. Unfortunately, the air/ground team was off that day. We had been delivered to the strike zone that the jets were bombing, and not to the landing zone! No sooner were we on the ground than we were subjected to a napalm strike. Watching the two cylindrical canisters slowly fall on us was surreal, and they seemed prescient of our demise. The canisters over-shot us, but there were a few singed eyebrows. No orders were needed to move out of that area.

Cover was found next to a house near the Yen River, southwest of An Trach 1. We began to receive fire from across the river. Several men in uniform were spotted about 200 meters on the opposite side of the Yen. We took them under rifle fire. Lt O'Connor directed me to fire a rifle grenade in that direction. I fired a white phosphorous grenade. A secondary explosion occurred. Shortly after, we received a radio communication to cease fire and be advised that friendlies from the 7th Marines were on the opposite shore. We were then ordered to move into An Trach 1 without ever knowing exactly what had transpired across the river.

Hotel Company entered the hamlet in column formation. We encountered sporadic sniping along the way, but sustained no casualties. Our destination was the former church in the center of the hamlet. The closer we got to the church, the more structures and thatched huts we saw. The hamlet was obviously occupied, as evidence of occupation was apparent; cooking utensils, clothing, furniture, and miscellaneous gear were visible to us.

As the column continued, we passed one hut on our left about 20 meters off the path. Several of us spotted a male in the hut. I was in front of Walter Cox, the M-79 grenadier. We both moved to fire, but Cox fired first. No sooner had he fired, than he went down behind me, holding his stomach. All hands in the vicinity fired into the hut. Several Marines from 2nd squad, 2nd platoon rushed the hut but the occupant could not be found. Cox was hit with a fragment in the upper stomach. It was too late in the afternoon to evacuate him, and he appeared to be in good shape.

Second platoon secured the church structure, and the company established a perimeter around the building. Capt Banks ordered me up into the rafters to set up a sniping position. I stayed there until sunset without observing any activity. I spent the night in the church with Cox, who was deteriorating and becoming delirious. He made it through the night in fits of sleep and pain.

The following morning a member of 1st platoon went in front of the lines to defecate and

was shot in the buttocks with an M-79 round by a fellow platoon member who was unaware of his activity. He had been mistaken for the enemy. Both he and Walter Cox were evacuated to Charlie Med in Da Nang.

Operation Shasta lasted a few more days, interspersed with classic monsoon rains and a few significant firefights. The net result was that we returned to Bravo Battery minus a few Marines wounded in action, and the VC/NVA reoccupied the An Trach hamlets after our departure. Subsequent patrols to the area attested to renewed enemy activity.

I left Hotel Company in early January 1967 for the 1st Marines Scout/Sniper Platoon. Although I worked with Hotel Company periodically over the next eight months, it was not the same as when I was a company member. I was fortunate to have a fellow squad member (Jerome S. Baker) and a former 1st platoon member (Larry Lelito) join me in the sniper platoon. I was also fortunate to have established a lasting friendship (in excess of 27 years) with Tommy Lee Patton, and I hope to reestablish contact with the other original members of Hotel Company, 1st Squad, 2nd Platoon, circa September-December 1966. §



(Courtesy of Tim Dunn)

THE SQUAD

Left to right: *Ray Hannon, John Herrera, Walter Cox, Tommy Lee Patton, Don McKowan, Tim Dunn, and (kneeling) Charles Anzalone.*

The FOG

By Fred L. Gren

I first joined the Corps in 1956 and was on active duty through 1959. When I got out I stayed in the active reserves. In 1965, my wife and myself packed up our two kids (a boy and a girl) and all our transportable belongings into our 1963 Volkswagon, drove 125 miles to Detroit, Michigan, where, after passing my physical, I raised my right hand and once again--at the age of 29--belonged to Uncle Sam.

By the time I finished artillery and communication school, I was 30 years old.

On 1 January 1966, 2/11 loaded up for Okinawa and landed there mid-January 1966. I got into some trouble with some drunken lieutenants on Okie, and the sergeant major suggested I transfer to a different outfit as soon as one came by. So I was transferred out of E/2/11 and into C/1/11, and caught a ride with them to Chu Lai at the end of January. Got there just in time to get in on Double Eagle I and II, which ended February 1966.

From C/1/11 I was assigned to 2/1. Not long after arriving at Headquarters 2/1, I heard members referring to their new arrivals as FNG's, Fucking New Guys. Two young Marines approached me and called me an FOG, and not an FNG. They waited sometime before telling me what FOG meant. Doug French later told me I wasn't a FNG, a Fucking New Guy, but a FOG, a Fucking Old Guy. I was thirty years old when I landed at 2/1, so since that time in early '66, I have been the FOG.

I have just recently completed a three month PTSD program at American Lake Veterans Hospital, at Ward #7A in Tacoma, Washington, 98493. This program was to help me deal with my anger and trauma from Vietnam. It certainly made me feel more relaxed when they called me FOG throughout the program.

The two Marines who tagged me with the FOG handle were Douglas R. French (Frenchie) and James E. Huckabee (Huck), two of the finest young men, Marines, and best friends that any old FOG could possibly know and love. We shared our packages and letters, and they always came to me when they had a problem. I couldn't always solve their problems, but thank God they cared to ask me.

Sometime around late May or June '66, we moved to Marble Mountain in the Da Nang area. Then on 21 July '66, just a day or two after we shared a large package I had received from home, Frenchie was killed. Even as I remember this, the tears come easily, as I loved him as my own. With Huck's help I got through the loss of Frenchie, and we both thought we had stuffed our feelings. Then on 11 August '66, Huckabee was hit very hard; his head was nearly taken off. I was devastated! I saw him only twice while he was in the hospital. He couldn't speak or move at all, not even to blink his eyes. Huckabee was now a vegetable, and I would never again hear him call me FOG.

Upon returning from an operation, I learned that Huck had been moved out of Nam. For many years I didn't know if he was alive or dead. Only about five years ago, while reading a book on the Wall in D.C., did I find out that James E. Huckabee had died exactly one year to the day after Frenchie died, 21 July 1967.

When I returned to the States, it wasn't a happy time. While waiting for my plane from the L.A. Airport to Seattle, a couple of dudes threw a bucket of shit on me in my dress greens. I took the greens off, medals and badges and all, and tossed them into a trash can. I wore civies home. I spent all my stateside time in the San Francisco and Oakland area either fighting the

hippies at our gate at Treasure Island, or trying to keep the Flower Children from burning the place down at the Oakland Induction Center.

I went into the hospital around May or so of 1969 and was boarded out of the Marine Corps in October 1969 with bad legs, a bleeding ulcer, and some mental problems. I was brought back to Oak Knoll Hospital in December 1971 and given my honorable discharge with no disabilities. I was in no shape to argue, so I was history. I began therapy in early 1984 and continue today, trying to put my life back together along with my family's as well.

Now, I find that the only ones I can talk to are other Nam Vets, especially Marines. I can't find anyone else in 2/1 who remembers Frenchie or Huckabee. Is this possible? §

Warriors' Creed

A warrior once wrote in a book of much note,
about love, pain and emotion,

About the Warriors' Creed, in the country's
time of great need, that would prove his
strength and devotion.

Should these warriors forget our longest war
yet, where their bravery was scoffed at and
shamed?

While these warriors were fighting and
falling, for God, for Country, and Corps,

Others were sunning and hiding and cursing
their allegiance to our flag, and what this
country stands for.

Now many of these runners are back again,
thanks to pardons and an amnesty plan.

Lord, could you shape such a plan, to bring
these brave warriors back again, to be with
their wives, their families and their
friends?

Father, I pray it could be, you would bring
them back so I might see my fallen comrades:
Moose, Frenchie, and Huckabee.

They called it re-conciliation, to bring our
country back together again.

But all they have done is to defame all those brave ones who fought and died for this great nation.

Decades have passed, and some wounds have healed, but most are too deep to be seen.

These warriors' faces will always be clear in our minds, and their names will forever be there.

On that black marble Wall, etched with gold, warriors all, to remind us who answered America's call.

God, I pray this nation will realize someday, the need for one more stone to be made, and horizontally laid at the feet of those brave warriors who died,

To let it be known, that under their feet is the stone, with the names of those cowards who ran away to hide.

Remembering their suffering and their pain burns the scars even deeper into our souls; while cradled in our arms, we watched the last of their precious blood flow.

If you should visit that long, black Wall, and see the tears of love and grief freely fall,

Ask these veterans who were there, what is this emotion they all share, and why they feel no blame.

But if you still have some doubt what this place is all about, just reach out--and touch any name!!

--Fred L. Gren

First Combat

By Kenneth "Sandy" Carlson

When I arrived in country, I was sent to Da Nang for training on explosives and booby traps. I then spent a few days in the 2/1 battalion area, where I played taps on my trumpet for a memorial service for Marines that had been killed in Vietnam from the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines.

It was late summer of 1966 when I joined up with Hotel Company, 2/1. The company had just moved back down south after Operation Hastings. Hotel Company had set up a company base along Highway 4. First and second platoons were set up along the road in and around an old school house. Third platoon set up camp on an island south of the company's main base. The area was mostly flat with the mountains off to the southwest. Our base camp was on the edge of an area that was called Dodge City. After the monsoons hit, we started calling the area of our camp the mud flats.

I was attached to first platoon, with the M-60 machine guns. Our home was a grass shack with a fighting hole beside it, on the far northwest end of the perimeter. The defenses of the camp were enough to scare the hell out of any Marine who'd just got done with combat training in the states. The distances between most of the fighting holes were so great that on a dark night a platoon of Viet Cong could have crawled between them and not have been seen. Instead of having barbed wire and concertina wire around the perimeter, we had cut and piled up thorn branches from the bamboo that was growing around our hootch. A few C-ration cans were hung on the branches with rifle casings in them. We also set out a few claymores and trip flares.

I made a comment to the weapons platoon sergeant, Sergeant VanCourt, about these security arrangements. He explained to me that they did not have the time to set up anything else because we were always on patrol, ambushes, or operations. Besides, we were fighting the Viet Cong on their terms. The only difference was they knew where our base was and we didn't know where their base was. This didn't sound right to me, but, as I soon learned, this war was not like any war I had been trained to fight.

The first few days were uneventful. I went on a few squad patrols and ambushes with no contact. Then Lieutenant Gaughan, the first platoon commander, passed the word: the next morning the platoon would be sweeping through a suspected Viet Cong village along a bend in the Song Tam Giap river, northwest of our base camp. At the time I did not think much of it, but the next day I was to have all my questions about myself and how I would react to combat, answered all in one day.

The next morning we saddled up and moved out. We had two gun teams, each positioned between the three grunt squads. Ski, Sgt VanCourt, and another Marine made up the first gun team. The second gun team was Johnson (the gunner), Dugadeo (the A-gunner), and myself, (the ammo humper). We went in column until we got into the area, and then we got on line and started our sweep.

We swept through a graveyard and out into an open area that was 500 meters of rice paddies knee-deep in mud and water. Just before we got across the rice paddies to the other side, to another graveyard, all hell broke loose. I hit the deck, and I guess it showed that this was my first time under fire. I remember either Johnson or Dugadeo telling me to relax, as they were not shooting at us--it was just a

small firefight down at the other end of the line. After it ended we swept up into the village, which was on the edge of a river. No one was there, but whoever had been there appeared to have left in a hurry. Lt Gaughan passed the word that they must have fled across the river. He also told us we would eat lunch in the village and then move out back to our base camp.

While eating lunch I started getting used to the couple of snipers that were shooting at us from across the river, or at least as used to them as anyone can. With lunch finished, Lt Gaughan told us to get in a column and move out.

As we moved out, the sniper fire started getting heavier. We moved out of the village and through the graveyard. One squad, the other gun team, and then another squad moved out across the open area. The gun team I was with made it only about 30 or 50 yards out into the open when we came under heavy direct fire and were forced to hit the deck. We discovered that we were being pinned down by one VC shooting from the window of a house with an automatic weapon. Dugadeo told us that when he and I opened fire, Johnson should take off with the machine gun and get to safety. We opened up and Johnson took off.

After we saw the Viet Cong go down and his rifle fall outside the window, I took off across the open area with Dugadeo right behind me. The incoming rounds were getting heavier with every step we took. It was a very hot day, and, as I've said, the rice paddies were knee-deep in mud and water, but to this day I still think we set a world record for running a 400-meter dash. The zinging sound of bullets flying by one's head can be one hell of a motivator to get a person moving.

When we made it to the other side of the open area and into the graveyard, we just collapsed. After we got our breath back Dugadeo asked me if I had seen Johnson or passed him out in the rice paddies. I told him that I hadn't, so we started crawling around the graveyard looking for him. The other two squads and gun team had taken up defensive positions. We found Johnson lying by a grave suffering from heat stroke. Just then Sgt VanCourt told us to set up our gun to give cover for the last squad, which still had to come across the open area. We crawled up to a rice paddy dike and Johnson set up the machine gun.

As soon as we got set up, Sgt VanCourt told us that the other platoon was now trapped--with Viet Cong jumping up all around them in the graveyard--and that they needed the machine gun back there right then. I turned towards Johnson, and he didn't look too good. He told me he would not be able to make it all the way back to the other graveyard. Sgt VanCourt, who had seen him and heard him, then yelled out that he didn't care who took the machine gun back, but someone had to.

I gave Johnson my rifle and cartridge belt, put on his pistol belt, grabbed the machine gun and started running. I only made it about 20 feet when his pistol belt went down around my ankles and I went down. I tossed the pistol belt back to Johnson, got up, and started running again.

This time I made it about 50 feet when I realized I didn't know where I was supposed to go. I stopped and yelled this back to VanCourt. He took off running and yelled for me to follow him. I took off behind him with Dugadeo right behind me.

We made it about halfway across the open rice paddies when I found VanCourt waiting for me in a three- to four-foot drainage ditch. As we got into the ditch, he started saying something about following the ditch, the graveyard, a bamboo fence, and our guys. Then he took off running down the ditch before I had the chance to tell him that I could not hear all that he was saying because of all the shooting that was going on. I just took off following him and trying to keep up. I wish life was that easy. I was carrying an M-60 machine gun and about 800 rounds of ammunition. I tried to keep up with him, but the distance between us just kept on getting bigger. Then a .30-caliber machine gun opened up, I hit the deck, and then realized it was close--but not shooting at me. I got up and started running again, but by now VanCourt was out of sight.

I got to the edge of the graveyard and crawled up the side of a grave to see if I could see anything or figure out where the squad was. Sgt VanCourt was nowhere to be seen, and then I realized that Dugadeo was not behind me

anymore. The only thing I could see were graves and the fence a little further ahead cutting across the ditch. From what I was able to make out from what I had heard VanCourt say, I figured that the squad must be somewhere on the other side of the fence. Bullets were flying all over the place. I slid back down into the ditch and started running.

As I came up to the fence, I saw that it was a bamboo fence. Not wanting to stop to try and find a gate, I just hit the fence at a full run and forced my way through it. I then realized that I had made a big mistake. It was the VC that were on the other side of the fence, and I ran right into them.

I was still at a run when I came up to the first VC, who was kneeling, loading a rifle. I thought that his eyeballs were going to jump right out of his head as he looked at me coming at him. I didn't even have time to swing the M-60 around. I ran over him, kneeing him in the face. Then I swung my M-60 around and tried to see how fast I could get a 100-round belt through it while still at a full run. I didn't stop to count, but it appeared that there were about 10 or 12 VC where I had burst through the fence. Over all the shooting and the Viet Cong yelling came the clear sound of American voices on my right yelling, "Over here!" I never stopped running. I just hooked it to the right. I found the squad just after I finished my 100-round belt.

I was told to take up a defensive position on top of one of the graves. I set in and reloaded the machine gun. It appeared that my little mistake had broken up the main ambush, but we were still taking some incoming rounds. The word was passed that help was on its way, so we held our position until second platoon with four amtracs and two ontos, and the rest of the platoon arrived to pull us out. We had one Marine KIA who had been shot in the lower chest area when the ambush was first sprung. There were also a few minor WIA.

We did not search the graveyard because the area was still hot, but we recovered two dead Viet Cong. A Marine took a knife from one of them and gave it to me; he told me I deserved a souvenir for breaking up the ambush. The blade was 11-inches long with three sides and a double set of steel knuckles on a wooden handle. The knife was in a leather sheath that had hooks on it so I could mount it right on my cartridge belt.

After getting back to the rear area and cleaning the mud off the knife, I found that it was stamped "USA 1917" on the inside of the steel knuckles. It was an American trench fighting knife that an American fighting man, a doughboy, must have carried to France in 1917 during WWI. The 1918-issue knife had a regular blade on it with one set of brass knuckles.

A French soldier must have then brought it from France to French Indochina sometime during France's control of Vietnam. During the French defeat by the Vietminh, the knife ended up in the hands of the Viet Cong, who now carried it to use against its makers, the Americans.

Now that the knife was back in the hands of an American fighting man, I made sure that it stayed there. In 1967 I rotated back to the States, and along with me came the knife. Fifty years after the knife was made and left the United States to go to war in France, it was brought back to the United States. It is still being kept as a memento of that day when a scared, young Marine--through fate and luck--broke up an ambush, and had all his questions answered on how he would act during his first time in combat. §



Letter Home

When I first got to Vietnam, I could not write and tell my parents what was going on, so I lied a lot. I think that after we learned to live and cope with Vietnam, most of us tried to keep the harsh realities of war from out parents. At the same time . . . I wanted someone at home to have an idea of what was really going on. I decided to write to my future brother-in-law Tom.

--Kenneth (Sandy) Carlson

11/2/66

Hi Tom,

To start with you can let
Kay read this letter because she won't
go telling our parents what's in here.
Well I guess I will start from
the beginning. After I got here in
Viet Nam it took a few days to get
to my BN, and from there I went
to my company which is a Cat Company,
this means out in the field all the time.
The third day with the Co. the 1st plt.
which I'm attached to went on a
sweep in a place called Ambush Alley.
We swept through the area on line and
then got in a column to come back.
We started back and got sniper fire so
we spread it out and kept moving. The
sniper fire got heavier as we went
from one grave yard across 600 meters
of rice paddies to another grave yard.
The 1st and 2nd sqd made it across the
600 meters of rice paddies but the 3rd got
pinned down. The team I was in was
the last of any one to get out, we got
about 30 or 40 feet out in the rice paddies
and got pinned down, we covered fourth
gun until he got across and then ran
like hell to get across the rice paddies.
When we got across we were told that we
had to go back because 3rd sqd was
pinned down, the gunner said that he
couldn't make it back, so I took the
gun and went back, they were sure
glad to have that gun back with
them. All we could do is stay there
and fight it, the 2nd plt. with
M tracks, and Ontoses came and
pulled us out. It lasted for
about 2 hours, we had four dead and
six wounded. It was because of this
that I made L/Cpl. Lately we just
got done with an operation called
operation Bikini, it took place

in Ambush Alley. It lasted for
6 days and the V.C. hit us
with everything they have, it took
all of the 6 days and nights to clear
the V.C., but when it was done
we had 47 live V.C. and 36 dead.
As for us no one got hurt bad.
I would never tell my parents
any of this, the only reason I told
them we got sniper fire once in awhile
was to make it seem like I'm telling
them everything. (We get sniper fire all the
time.)
I sorry for this letter being
so sloppy, but I can't write
to good and to make matters worse
I'm out on a patrol right now.

[signed] Ken

P.S. Kay, on my emergency
sheet, I put Dad's name
down. This is when if I ever
get hurt or killed he
will be the one that they
notify, I figured he could
take it better than mom, and
then he could brake it to
her easy like.

* * * * *

Entry from the Command Chronology for September 1966:

191239H. Hotel 1 platoon crossing a graveyard at BT 023583 had 15 VC jump out of the graves in the graveyard. They were 15 meters from the rear squad and took the platoon under fire with automatic weapons, small arms and grenades. The platoon point halted and moved to assist the rear squad that was actually engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the VC. At 191240H, 10 VC jumped from graves 15 meters from the point squad and were beaten off with small arms, grenades and hand-to-hand combat. A Medevac was requested. At this time(191245H) 3 Amtracs and 2 Ontos and Hotel 2 were dispatched to assist Hotel 1. Medevac was completed; 1 USMC (KIA) was still in the zone and was later carried back to Hotel CP for evacuation. The 2 units and tracked vehicles continued to receive fire. Fire was returned and a final link-up was made at 191630H. Hotel 2 feels certain that 57 RR was fired at Amtracs in referenced action. Results were: 3 USMC (KIA),1 USMC (WIA), 3 VC KIA (Confirmed), 10 VC KIA (Probable) and 15 VC WIA (Probable). It was established that the enemy was well disciplined and had packs, black garb and camouflaged uniforms. It is estimated that there was contact with 50-60 VC throughout the day.

[Contributed by William LaVonture]

A SHOT IN THE DARK

One story that began to make the rounds in the battalion sometime during the 1967-1968 period was the "Shot in the Dark." Although many details vary in the versions still told today, some are the same. The agreed-upon "facts" are in general these: a Marine, a short timer, was lying on 2/1's outdoor stage during the showing of the movie A Shot in the Dark. *Suddenly someone realized that the short timer had been shot. The young Marine died of his wounds.*

The event can not be verified--casualty records do not match location, date, or type of wound. So did it happen, or did it not?

At the battalion base station, a movie house was set up to provide some small amount of entertainment. One evening while we were waiting for the movie to start and everyone was talking and crowding around the movie area, we heard some sniper rounds go off in the distance. Nobody thought much of this, as snipers fired into the battalion base area all the time, especially late in the evening when it was dark. But a few minutes later someone shouted that a man had been hit near the stage. We heard later that the wounded man had died on the way to the hospital. The movie scheduled to be shown did not play that night or any other night. Ironically, the name of that movie was *A Shot in the Dark.*

--By Roy Lanham

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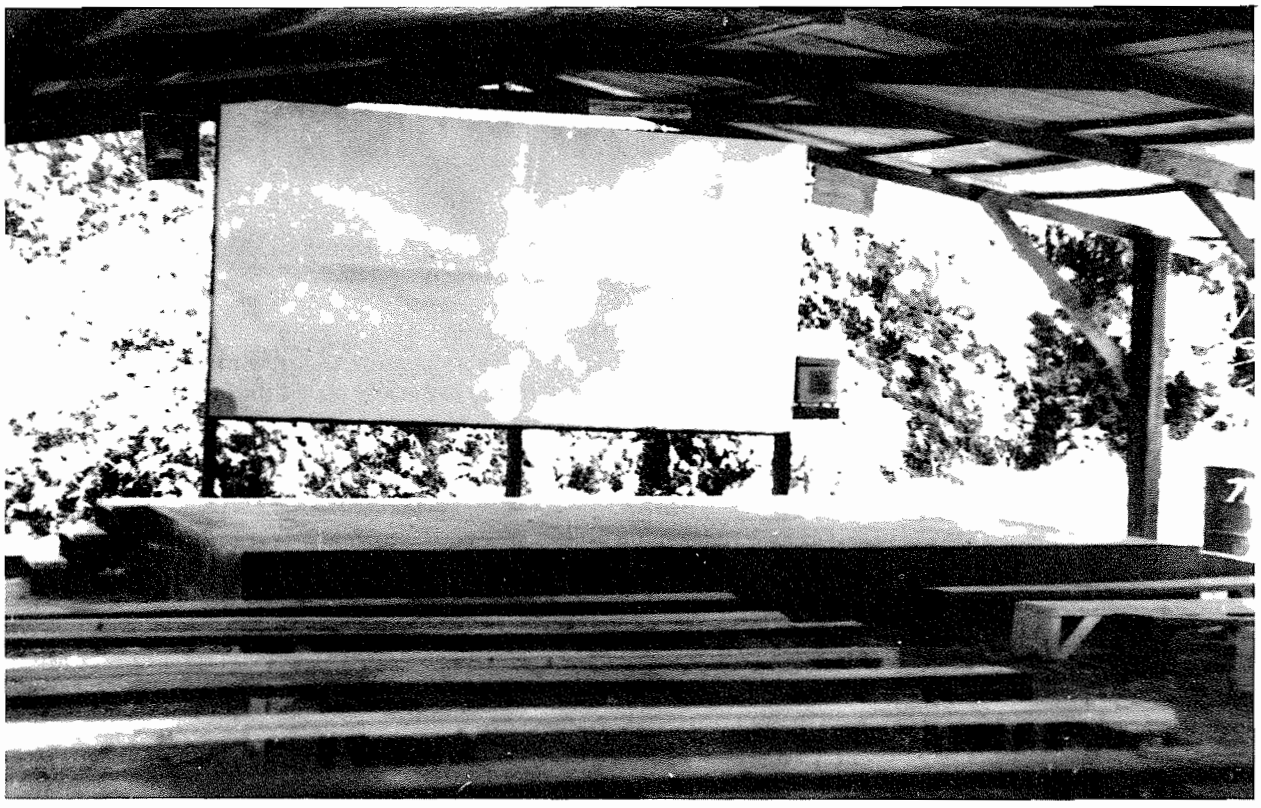


(Courtesy of Roy Lanham)

The stage and screen of 2/1's movie theater where the "Shot in the Dark" incident took place. Photo taken May or June of 1967.

I was very suprised to know that the *Shot in the Dark* movie story was still around. I didn't think it had gotten any notoriety or had been remembered or passed on. I myself have only told the story to a few people, because it sounds like one of those war stories which are as true as a fish story. But this actually happened! I hope to narrow the time frame of when it happened so any effort to review battalion or company logs can verify this occurrence.

I am clear on the time to within a couple of months. I was at staging battalion at Camp Pendleton in September 1966. I arrived at the transit area at Da Nang the last week of September. I arrived at 2/1 within a couple of days and joined 2nd platoon, Echo Company by the first week of October. My platoon leader at the time was Staff Sergeant Bathurst.

The battalion had arrived from the Dong Ha area, which was just south of the DMZ, and had gotten off Operation Hastings in late August. They were already set up and doing a regular patrolling function. The battalion CP was located about 12 or 15 miles south of Da Nang off Highway 1, about a mile down a dirt road called Anderson Trail. We were about a mile or two north of Hoi An.

The map [see next page] shows the layout of the 2/1 CP during my time with Echo Company. The theater was located within the tree line of the old abandoned ville that was our CP area. The distance from Echo Company to the theater was approximately 60 meters (straight-line distance).

One night in either late October or early November 1966 we went to the movie. This was just as it was getting dark. A lot of us carried flashlights to be able to find our way back to our own tent area after the movie. That night it became very crowded in the theater, with at least 100+ people there. Sam Huff, who was a short timer in my company, brought a webbed folding beach chair to sit in. The usual place to use the chair was in the center aisle. But you had to sit low so as not to obstruct the view of others behind you. The best place to sit was about even with the third or fourth row of bleachers.

Some of the Marines were lying on the stage at the base of the screen; by lying flat on their backs, they were able to see the screen that was attached to the back edge of the stage. A few of us from Echo sat together in the bleacher seats--adjacent to Sam, who was in the aisle.

The movie finally started after what seemed like an unusually long time. We had been sitting in the dark and the guys were getting restless and the flashlights were going on and off and being shined on the screen, and we all were getting loud. As the projector started to unwind the film, the film broke. We all groaned at the delay. The flashlights went on again. We started to get loud again. After a couple of minutes, the projector started up again. Within a very short time (30 seconds), the film broke again. We were all talking and some were hollering and the flashlights went on again, shining onto the screen and all over the theater. It might have been the second or third time that the film broke that Sam said he had had enough of this and that he "had a feeling" about this night. He got up to leave. I asked him for the use of the beach chair. He agreed and left it in the aisle, and I changed seats.

I was now sitting in the aisle in the beach chair about ten feet back from the stage. The stage was about three-feet high, and the width of the movie screen was about eight to ten feet from back edge to front edge. The screen was on the back edge of the stage. The guys lying on the stage were on their back, or on their side with their head propped up on their clenched fist with their arm bent at the elbow.

Compared to the loud noise of the Marine restlessness, the tiny "pop" I heard was barely distinguishable. It wasn't even a noise that would allow you to turn to the guy next to you and ask, "Did you hear that?" But I know I had heard it. Something out of the ordinary. The "pop" occurred when the film had broken for the fifth, sixth, or seventh time. I am not sure which, because it had happened a number of times. The projectionist had even run the film forward some few feet to start it past the breaks or splices, hoping it would continue without another problem. But this was getting hopeless, and when the film broke again and it was dark except for the guys shouting and the flashlights shining on the screen, this "pop" sound was heard.

Suddenly, there was a shout for a Corpsman. Then immediately another shout for a Corpsman. As we had gotten used to doing, when one Marine would shout for a Corpsman, other Marines would chorus-in to pass the message. The flashlights pointed toward the shouts and then fixed on the stage area. The scene was eerie, because what I saw, no more than 15 feet in front of me, was one Marine lying on his back in a pool of dark blood. Another Marine, his buddy, was trying to attend to him.

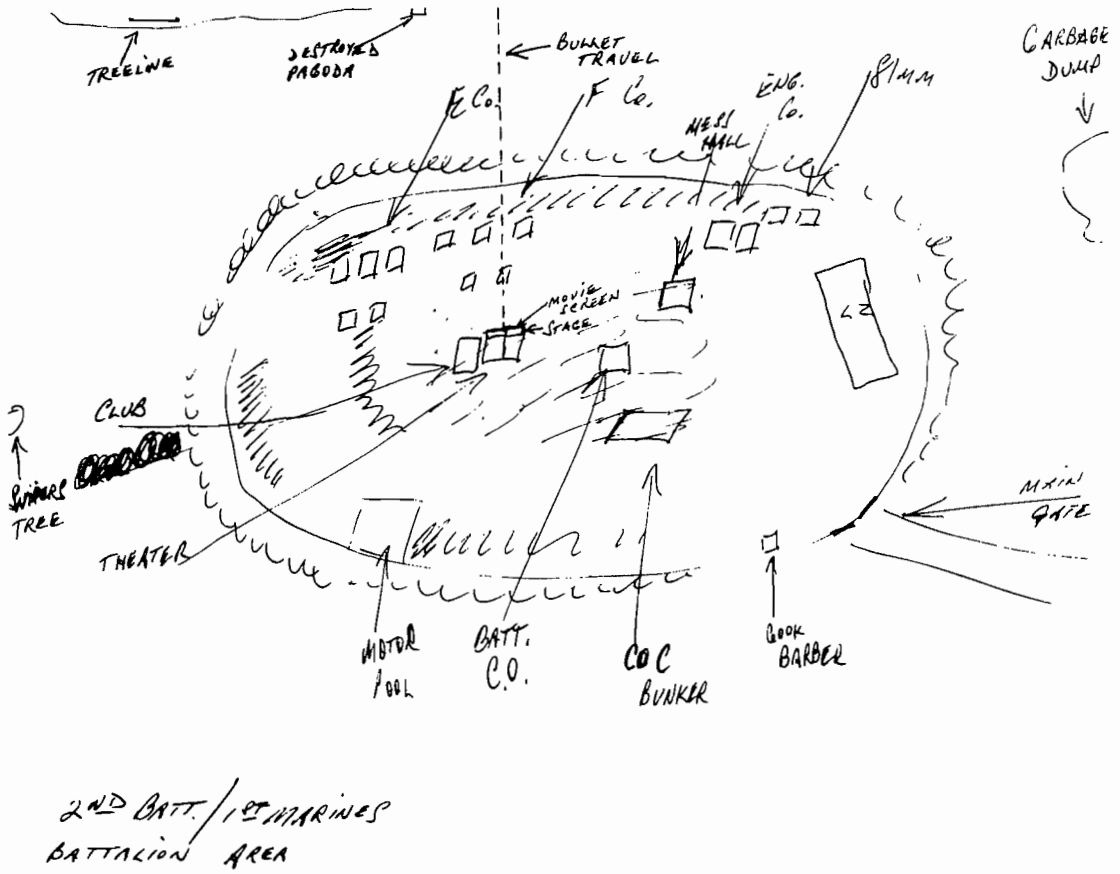
The crowd gathered at the edge of the stage and we all fell silent. Many of us felt a chill of apprehension. We suddenly realized our vulnerability and the fact that we did not have our weapons with us. Someone took charge of the situation and secured the movie, and we were told to return to our company areas. Many of us had

started to leave the theater before this had been announced anyway.

When we talked about this later, I began to realize that since I had been in the beach chair, I had been almost in the line of the bullet and the Marine who got hit. We determined that the bullet had been fired from the tree line across the open area, through our perimeter directly behind Echo Company, through the bush and across the small open area of the company area, through the bush and under the movie screen, and into the Marine. It was one lone shot fired by a sniper who had seen a gaggle of lights. It had been such an inviting target, because on that dark night there were a lot of lights shining in the direction of the sniper. This light was filtered through the bush behind both the theater and Echo Company, but it had to be obvious that a lot of people were gathered in a small, confined area. We learned later that the name of the movie was *A Shot in the Dark*, with Peter Sellers and Elke Sommer.

As far as identifying the dead Marine, I know it was not anyone from Echo or Foxtrot. I think Hotel was in the bush permanently as a mobile unit. I don't think it was anyone from a line company. He was probably from the 81 mm section or engineers or the battalion CP personnel. Since the battalion kept a log and I think all the companies kept a log, and the fact that the time was in October-November, 1966, someone should be able to identify the Marine.

--By David Ayres



(Drawing Courtesy of David Ayres)

* * * * *

The story of "Shot in the Dark" is true. As I recall, the Marine in question was in Echo. I was on duty in the battalion CP that night. Please keep in mind that it was not at a time when we were "in contact" with the enemy (VC). The Marine was listed as a KIA, but the round could have been (un)friendly fire!

One of my duties was to prepare the "Command Chronology"--an historical, blow-by-blow description of every event occurring in the BN. This document included every radio transmission into and out of the BN CP as well as logistical, personnel, psy-war, and medical reports. By the time it went to Regimental HQ it was two- to three-inches thick. This document became part of the Regimental Command Chronology and has now been declassified from TOP SECRET. If it's available to the damn bleeding hearts of Boston PBS, it should be available to anyone. It's kept at MC Historical Branch, and would cover any action, any period of time, and any operation.

The "shot in the dark" incident may or may not be hidden in the Command Chronology. I'm sure no mention was made of the movie playing at the time, but simply a statement that a Marine was killed by a round fired into the BN perimeter by persons unknown.

--By Robert Bradly Robinson

* * * * *

The man was real, and it did happen at night at the flick. I can tell you he was in Foxtrot Company. I don't have any photographs of him or remember his name. There is one ironic twist to the story. He was a short timer within a day or two of going home, but he spent a whole month on mess duty. This was a hustle that some short timers used to keep from getting killed in their last month. I remember the man was married, and I think he was from the South. I wasn't friends with him, probably because I had such a long time to go.

The time of this event escapes me, but I am sure it was earlier than April or May. I think it happened around the first of the year in 1967. I am almost certain it happened before Foxtrot was moved to Nui Loc Son as a fortified company.

The story is real, and it was quite a shock to the whole platoon. I am sorry I cannot remember names--I seem to have a mental block about that.

--By Frank Devornicki

* * * * *

In early 1967, around April of that year, 2/1 was south of Da Nang off of Anderson Trail and slightly SE of Hill 55. As was our custom, we pulled short timers from the field when they had five days left in the country.

On the night in question, we had a movie showing in our covered outdoor theater, next to the enlisted slop chute. About 2030, my double EE-8 rang in my hootch--someone calling said they believed a fight had broken out at the theater. I moved quickly in that direction. On arriving I asked, "What's the problem?" Someone said a Marine was lying injured on the stage.

There were five Marines that had been lying down next to each other, watching the movie. A number of people had heard a shot in the distance and thought nothing of it until one heard a groan from one of the five on stage. After a few minutes, one of them asked another next to him, "Did you hear that shot?" No answer, so he pushed him--and got no response. After checking, he felt blood and could see wetness in the light from the movie. Then someone called me.

A platoon sergeant from Echo Company, myself, and a couple of others gave first aid while I yelled for someone to call the Doc and a medevac. On departure from the 2/1 CP on the chopper, he was breathing, but passed away on the way to Charlie Med.

The stray round had hit the Marine in the left temple. He was one of only two Jewish boys we had at the time in 2/1. The other was from Golf Company, and stated many times he had been the drummer in the Mickey Mouse Club Band and planned to start his own band after returning home, although he was still under contract to Disney.

--By H. M. Gilmore

* * * * *

I was there watching the movie when the "Shot in the Dark" incident happened. But I didn't know the man

who was shot. A staff sergeant tried to resuscitate him but failed. The staff was later given a commendation for it; he was embarrassed at the ceremony, didn't feel he'd done anything.

--By Michael Elliot

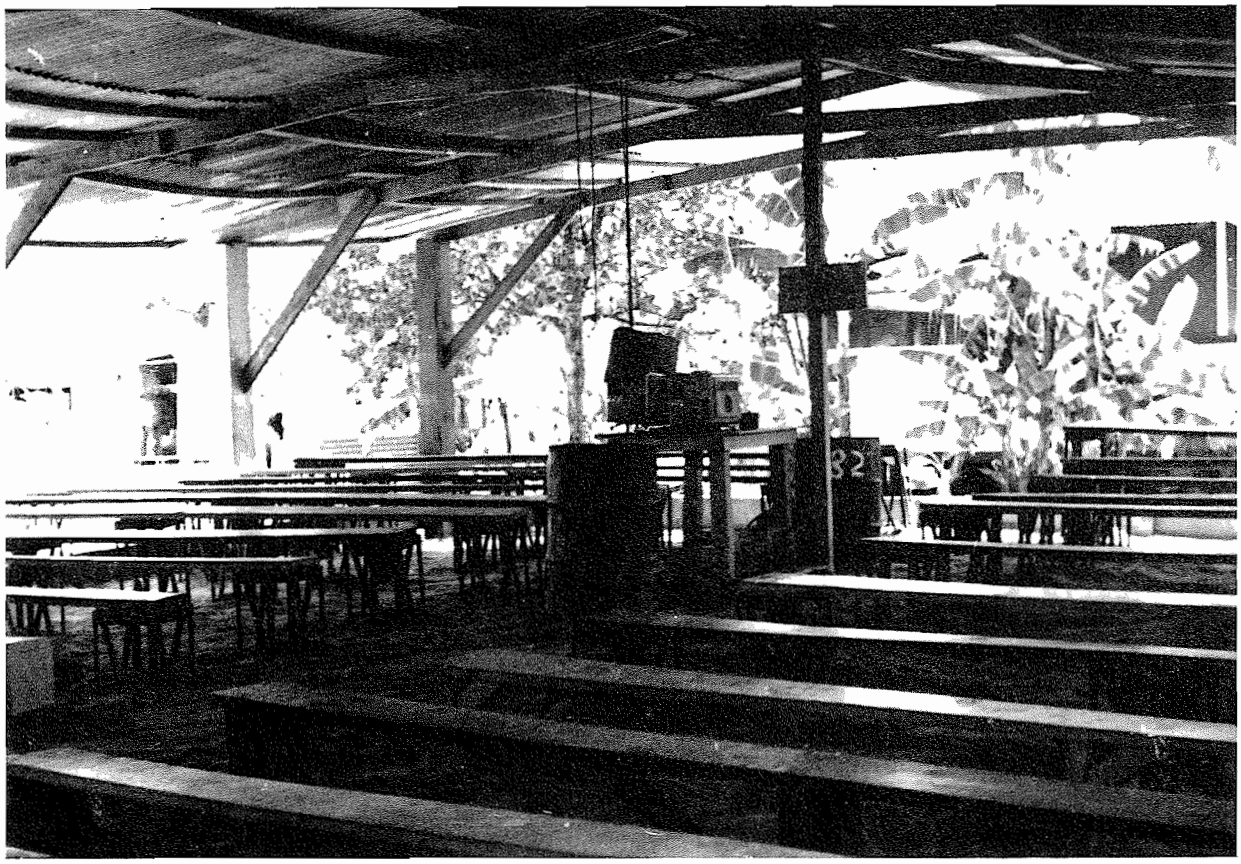
* * * * *

I can verify that there was a shot in the dark. It occurred in the time frame of September-October of 1966. The Marine was a corporal in F/2/1, and he was killed relatively early in my tour as CO of the company. His name slips my memory right now, possibly Coporal Dorsey? I'm not sure. As I recall, he was from the Philadelphia region, and I received a very nice letter from his father in response to my condolence letter. He sent me a clipping from the story in his [son's] high school paper. The corporal was assigned to the first platoon.

The platoon was on patrol, and the platoon commander had left the Marine behind because he was a short timer. The battalion surgeon and Corpsman made a heroic effort to save the Marine but were unsuccessful.

--By G. A. Deegan

* * * * *



(Courtesy of Roy Lanham)

The projector of the outdoor movie theater.

Maybe the truth will never be known, but I am one of those that swears he was there when the incident of "the shot in the dark" happened.

I was medevaced back to battalion for an abscessed tooth and was at the covered flick (remember 2/1 had one of the only movie screens with a roof over it at the time) the night Hotel came back in from the bush. I think Lou Parker and Dan "Dee" Carter were with me.

Everyone there was telling jokes and war stories, trying to make me laugh and suck air into the hole in my mouth. Agony! The projectionist, or whoever, turned out the lights and the intro to the flick had just shown on the screen when the VC opened up with small-arms harassing fire. The lights were quickly turned back off, everybody hit the deck and whatever company had the reaction platoon (the React) got their people to popping caps (that means "return fire").

We had our faces down in the dirt, were holding our beers, swearing at the world, and wishing for a weapon. Finally, somebody passed the Word that all was secure.

We laughed, hah hah, blew it off and resumed our seats. The flick started up again, the screen bright with the lamp of the movie projector. Parker said something totally out of left field (like only Parker would). I was covering my mouth, trying not to laugh or otherwise take air into the abscess.

As I said, 2/1's flick was covered, and its stage just was just beneath and in front of the screen. The stage was there for USO shows or for "indigenous entertainment" that was provided from time to time by battalion or regiment. Grunts used to like to drink their beer and lie down on the stage to watch the movies.

Anyway, the flick had just started up again when some dude, in front and lying on the stage, shouted, "This guy's dead, man!"

Someone else hollered, "What?", and the guy screamed it. "This fucker's dead, man. Jesus Christ!"

Someone else called for a Corpsman, and everyone--everyone--sat there stunned. Finally, Parker, or Carter--I forget which--muttered, "What a bummer."

We split.

I do not know who he was. He was not Hotel, I know that (although I cannot tell you how I know). He was a short timer; I recall the chatter about him going home the next day. I remember wishing--praying--it would not happen to me or mine.

To me, the story is true. It happened. If no one else believes it, so what?

If nothing else, the incident could have happened in no other war but the Nam. Apocryphal? Maybe. It was so long ago that it may be just that. A legend, a myth whose origin will be forever lost to us.

What I do find interesting, however, is that no other rifle company or batallion that served in the Nam has a similar tale to tell. And there *are* stories: the tiger and the grunt from the 4th Marines; the "Walking Dead" tag that haunted the 9th Marines from 1967 to the end of the war; the "Skull and Crossbones" flag that Charlie 1/7 carried in '67 (Operation Rio Blanco, I think it was).

But none quite like ours.

"A Shot in the Dark." It belongs in any "unit diary" of Hotel. Fact, myth, war story or Apocrypha. Hell, it's perfect.

--By Michael Rodriguez

* * * * *

"Hello, Freedom Man!" --Vietnamese boatperson to American sailor rescuing him

Mournful December

By Tim Dunn

The month of December 1966 was dismal, as I remember it. It was rainy, cold and rife with casualties. On 13 December I was on the patrol to La Tho Bac when Corporal Robert DiRoberto ("DiRo") and Corporal Eric W. Evans were mortally wounded. The patrol consisted of approxomately 15 Marines and one Corpsman (the dark-haired Irishman from Massachusetts whose name escapes me) and included Lieutenant Brian O'Connor, second platoon commander, Platoon Sergeant Don McKowan, an FO and radioman from 81's, a former NVA *chieu hoi*, myself (one of two Hotel Company snipers--the other was Larry Lelito from 1st platoon), and the second squad from second platoon.

At that time, Hotel Company was stationed at Bravo Battery 1/11 which was located off the old railroad tracks, south of the 1st Marines Regimental Headquarters (the Yen Ne hamlets) and close to Hill 55 in Quang Nam Province. Just south of Bravo 1/11's encampment were the remnants of a blown railroad bridge, which was often the site of day and night OP's and LP's.

A secondary outpost, in the vicinity if the La Tho Bac hamlets, was a PPB manned by the platoons of Hotel Company on a rotating basis. We were complemented with elements of the 51st ARVN Regiment. La Tho Bac had been either a CAC or PPB outpost which was overrun by NVA, or so we had heard. I don't recall which company or battalion had responsibility for that area prior to December 1966, but Hotel 2/1 inherited that responsibility.

The La Tho Bac area was a contested one. This patrol was the second one conducted by the same squad in two days. The mission, as explained by Lt O'Connor, was to reconnoiter the area and ascertain the level of enemy activity. Prior patrols had met no hostility.

As we left Bravo 1/11 the morning of 13 December, it was drizzling very heavily. Several of us noted the ringing of a gong--one ring for each member of the patrol.

Eric Evans was the patrol leader and the squad leader of 2nd squad. He had just been promoted back to corporal following a reduction in rank from sergeant that September. He was an affable and handsome blond man who was well liked by those who knew him. He had the assurance of a veteran combatant. I believe he came to Vietnam with 2/1 when it deployed in 1965. Indeed, he had been with the company when it was on operations in Northern I Corps.

Robert DiRoberto (DiRo) walked point that day. He was a jovial iconoclast whose trademark was to wear his helmet without the prescribed camouflage covering--much to the chagrin of Lt O'Connor.

The patrol route traversed a large rice paddy between the old railroad tracks (at that time a road) and tree line to its west. DiRo followed the same route that he had taken several days before. As he parted some shrubs to enter the tree line, a booby-trapped grenade exploded. I was next to the last in the column and the noise was deafening. We set up a perimeter and evacuated DiRo. He died of his wounds two days later.

Eric and Lt O'Connor decided to change our approach to the hamlets. The patrol moved to the access road. At the east end of the hamlets, concertina wire was strung across the road. No one could recall this from previous patrols. The column stopped to deliberate. As we did, a young peasant woman, burdened with two baskets on her yo-yo stick, deftly walked through the wire and proceeded out of sight (no doubt to give added warning of our presence).

Lt O'Connor directed Corporal Bill Guseman to remove the wire by employing the use of a grappling hook and line. Guseman attached the hook; we all took cover and he pulled the line. As anticipated, a mine exploded and showered us with debris, not withstanding the collective nerve shattering that occurred.

We proceeded down that road in two staggered columns finding a variety of booby traps: everything from punji sticks to a swinging mace in the overhead (that was dispatched by the M-79 grenadier). At a bend in the road a shot rang out. The radioman was hit in the shoulder (I believe his name was Neils or Neals--a tall, sandy-haired man from California). Fortunately, his wound was not debilitating, as I recall.

Again we proceeded. We crossed a small stream with a destroyed concrete bridge and regrouped on the west bank. Eric and Lt O'Connor were consulting the map near the tree line to determine which route to take into the main part of the hamlet. I was about 10 feet to their east resting on a stone grave marker with Sgt McKowan. We were both looking at Eric and the lieutenant when a single shot from a close distance rang out. Eric, hit in the heart, spun and fell on his back. The Corpsman was at his side immediately, but to no avail. Eric was dead.

Automatic weapons fire raked us from close range, but we could not determine the location(s) of the firing. We collectively returned fire in random patterns, at no discernable targets. The firing continued to our frustration for several minutes. Then the opposing fire ceased, and we took stock of ourselves. Eric was our only casualty.

The Corpsman asked for volunteers to carry him back across the stream to an evacuation site. I remember carrying him along with Bob Minchow and two others. He was heavy, but it seemed not to matter. I still recall the combined sense of rage and sadness I felt that day.

Sergeant Ernest Ortega was killed on a patrol on 21 January 1966, when his platoon and ours (2nd) ran a joint sweep west of the PPB.

I left Hotel Company in early January 1967 to join the 1st Marines Scout/Sniper Platoon. Hotel Company members who joined the platoon were Jerome S. Baker (from the same 1st squad of 2nd platoon) and Larry Lelito from 1st platoon.

Shortly after we left 2/1, I heard that Bill Guseman died (on 25 January 1967) while removing a propaganda sign which was booby-trapped. Lt O'Connor got hit a few days later (31 January 1967) and died of his wounds.

I am saddened to recall these events, but I am also glad to have the opportunity to remember some of our fallen brothers from 2/1. Their deeds and their lives live with those of us who have survived. It is important for us to remember and honor the deeds and the participants.

Semper Fidelis. §



(Courtesy of Hank Van Laarhoven)
CRUZ

Brief Accounts of a War

By Roy J. Lanham

These are some brief accounts of my experiences in Vietnam from July 1966 to July 1967, while serving with E Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines.

I remember my first plane ride after arriving in Vietnam. We were on our way to Dong Ha Airport in a DC-3, with only nylon straps for seats. Before taking off, the crew chief gave us a quick lesson on putting on a parachute in case we were shot down. He also said that if the plane was hit, the pilot would try to get us over the South China Sea before we had to bail out. This was my first awakening to the reality of actually being at and in a war.

* * *

Being new in the country, I was attached to the platoon leader and the radio operator instead of a permanent squad. On my first operation involving helicopter transport troops, I was told to wait near the back ramp of the chopper my group was boarding, because it was possible I would be shifted to another one in order to balance the weight in each one evenly. I was standing outside the tail of the CH-46 when the crew chief of that chopper pointed to another one. Being 19-years old and knowing--if only briefly--only those Marines on the chopper where I was waiting, I did not want to go. My heart sank, as I really wanted to board that first chopper. But I did as I was told.

All the choppers took off. When we had been in the air about 40 minutes, I was looking down toward the ground through a small round window when I saw a chopper's back end on fire. Then moments later I saw the chopper crash and burn into the side of a mountain. We tried to land nearby, but because of heavy small-arms fire in the area we could not, and so went back to Dong Ha Airport.

After landing, there was a head count to determine which chopper had gone down. It turned out it was the one I was supposed to go on with the platoon leader. All on board were killed.

* * *

One night on the edge of the runway of Dong Ha Airport, a big group of us was passing time by watching the planes land and take off. Let me mention that the runway lights were not turned on until the last moment, and then only one row at a time. As we watched a C-130 transport come in for a landing, the landing runway lights came on. We soon realized the plane was lined up on the wrong side of the lights. It was going to land where we were sitting. It was quite a sight: Marines falling over one another and falling into the rice paddies, trying to escape.

At the last moment, the plane pulled back up, circled, and came in safely. We all had a good laugh at ourselves and the way we had scrambled over one another.

* * *

The elephant grass near the DMZ line was at least ten-feet tall and had razor-sharp edges. When it cut the skin, infection always took place because of the very humid conditions.

* * *

The monsoon season had, of course, more rain than what any of us had seen before. The heavy rains made our battalion area look from the air like an island in a lake. It also washed out the dirt road from Highway 1 to our battalion area, to the point that the six-by trucks could not travel the road.

* * *

CAP compounds were set up to protect the civilians in the small villages and hamlets. These compounds were manned mostly by South Vietnamese Army troops, with a few US Marine Corps troops who mainly advised and maintained radio contact with other American forces. We always thought that half of the South Vietnamese that were in the CAP compound were Viet Cong. The reason being that whenever a compound got hit, it was on a night when several of the South Vietnamese soldiers would be missing.

* * *

One morning in the spring of 1967, our platoon commander told us that choppers would be arriving in an hour to pick up our company. We were to put on our cleanest fatigues and be shaved. We were also to bring our weapons, but no ammunition. Turning in our ammunition was like cutting off our right arm. The ammunition was our lifeline, so to speak. But we did what we were told.

The choppers came to pick us up, and we were flown to Da Nang Airport. We still were not told anything about why we could not have ammo. At Da Nang, we boarded a C-130 transport plane and took off.

After being in the air a while, we were finally told that we would be landing at Cam Ranh Bay, but we still did not know why. Upon arriving at Cam Ranh Bay, we got off the plane and went into company formation. That is when Captain Pratt told us that we were representing the United States Marine Corps in a military inspection by none other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of the United States.

Afterward, we were invited to the Air Force mess hall for chow. The Air Force personnel lined the street as we were marching in formation to the mess hall and shouted questions at us. Apparently they were not aware of much that was going on several miles from their own duties at this airport. They asked questions that seemed odd to us. For example, pointing to our bazooka they said, "What kind of weapon is that?" and, "Do you guys really see action in the field?"

* * *

Capt Pratt always showed respect for his troops. One day as I was walking through the battalion area on my way to the mess hall, I spotted from quite a distance a group of officers, including some generals, with Capt Pratt. I tried to go another way, but Capt Pratt headed me off at the pass, so to speak. After I saluted everyone and shook hands, he introduced me as one of his men. He put his arm around me, gave me a hug, and said, "All of my men are great." That made me feel good, like we really were a team, and all of us were important.

* * *

Our company was on top of a mountain southwest of Da Nang for several days. Because of the monsoon rains we could not be resupplied. It was decided that our company would walk down into the valley below, and we would be picked up by choppers and taken back to our battalion base station. After waiting half a day for choppers that never came, we had to walk back up the mountain and set in again for the night. The next day the same thing happened. The third day the same thing. As we walked up the mountain for the third time, depressed and disappointed, nobody said anything. Everyone was very quiet. When we arrived on the top of the mountain, we were cold, hungry, tired, and dejected. Then Capt Pratt stood up on a rock and shouted, "Is everybody happy?" And immediately we were yelling and screaming so loudly we could be heard all over the valley and surrounding mountains. It was a great release for us all.

By this time we had not been resupplied for days, so we dug up our previous garbage pits to get at the little packets of sugar and coffee or whatever else we could find from the discards of our C-ration kits.

The next day we went down the mountain to wait once more for choppers which still did not come. We then set in near the edge of a river, in a small village there. We bought some rice and fish heads from the villagers, and--because it was night--we dug a deep hole for our fire and used a helmet to cook the rice and fish heads. A person will eat anything when he's hungry enough.

The choppers finally did come.



(Courtesy of Hugh Niles)

RESUPPLY!

* * *

When men are at war they sometimes share their deepest thoughts with one another. One Marine told me he had accidently driven over a person in California with his car during a scuffle. This Marine was afraid that he would get a manslaughter charge when he arrived back in the States. I comforted him by telling him that if a charge had been made, he would have had papers for a court appearance served to him already, and none had been served yet.

During my tour, two men told me they felt they would be killed, possibly even the next time they were out on operation or patrol. Since they seemed to really believe this, and since I was as young as they were, I didn't quite know what to say. So I simply went over with them some of the things they could do to protect themselves out in the bush. I told them not to bunch up, to watch where they put their feet while walking, to keep an eye out for snipers in the trees, and to avoid possible mines and booby traps by not moving in an obvious direction when receiving surprise fire. A week later, a mine detonated under one of these Marines. He died on the way to the medevac helicopter. The other Marine was killed after I was rotated back to the States.

* * *

One day our squad was crossing a rice paddy near a river when we began receiving rifle fire from the river bank. We returned the fire and were soon in a very intense, full-fledged firefight. We called in artillery, and soon after were told to ceasefire: the unit that had engaged us was another Marine outfit. (The artillery people had figured this out from the locations being called in.)

We were all wet from the neck down, and since the water had turned our uniforms almost black, from a distance we had been mistaken for some Viet Cong in their traditional black clothes.

* * *

I learned from the Vietnamese people how to conquer large tasks. If you break the task down into several small tasks, it's much easier to accomplish the completion of the task. One of the ways I learned this was from watching the Vistnamese harvest their rice.

Sometimes when getting a cold drink of water now, I think back to those days in Vietnam when I would have given anything for a cool drink of water.

When I look back on the conditions we lived under--the hot, humid heat, flies during the day, mosquitoes at night, fire ants all the time--I am reminded of how blessed we are as a nation, how blessed we are for the conveniences and luxuries we have.

I am sure that some of my experiences in Vietnam have taught me lessons that have helped me become a better, stronger and more appreciative person. §



(Courtesy of Al Schaudt)

FOUL AND WARM, BUT WET

Al Schaudt drinking from his canteen, west of Da Nang.

Echo 2/1 Goes to Cam Ranh Bay

By David Ayres

According to an article in Life *magazine (4 November 1966), President Lyndon Johnson stood in a jeep at Cam Ranh Bay in the deepening twilight of a warm Vietnam evening and promised the honor guard representing the 330,000 sailors, soldiers, airmen, and Marines at war there that "We will not fail you."*

*I*n Vietnam, I was with Echo, 2/1, second platoon. After going through the usual acclimatizing from late September of 1966--when I arrived--through mid-October, I was getting into the routine and getting used to what was expected of me as a rifleman in a line company. At that time the battalion's responsibility was to patrol and search out an elusive VC. We had sporadic action, but no major contact like that experienced up by the DMZ. Platoon-sized patrols of 24-hour duration allowed us the opportunity to go out, walk the territory, set in for the night, go out on ambush and usually get wet and muddy.

When we came back to the battalion CP after these patrols, we spent the next day "degriming" ourselves and relaxing. At the time, we were constantly on eight-hour alert for Operation Prairie.

Then one day we got the word to get the boot polish out and shine up, as best we could, our best pair of boots. Also to get a clean set of utilities. "What for?" was the obvious question. "We're going to Da Nang." No further explanation was given.

The following day, there we were--all cleaned up with clean equipment and *all* weapons. As I remember, we drove to Da Nang in trucks. We arrived in time to be rushed from the trucks (which had driven into the Marine side of the air base) and directly onto a C-130 aircraft. We formed a single line and were told to unload our weapons and drop the ordnance into the appropriate ammo boxes that were in our path. That meant a helter-skelter emptying of ten M-14 magazines and our two grenade pouches filled with frag grenades and WP grenades. Weapons platoon was with us and they had to really scramble to get all their ordnance dropped.

The word was passed that we were to be an honor guard. We thought it *had* to be for Secretary McNamara. We got on the aircraft and had about an hour or so ride before landing at Cam Ranh Bay. Still puzzled.

Cam Ranh Bay: Egress from the aircraft and form up. Then we are marched to a location about a quarter-mile away and left in formation, at ease. We then see Major General Nickerson, 1st Marine Division Commander. This looks like big stuff. We're still puzzled. But it must be McNamara! Then Major General Nickerson is talking to us and we see that adjacent to us is an Army unit. And they are looking sharp. But not as good as us! We also see a bunch of Navy guys. They are "just" in their blue dungarees. A real scuzzy bunch.

Finally we get the word that we are the only Marines here as part of the honor guard for the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson. *The Commander-in-Chief!* It all happens fairly quickly. He rides by standing in the back of a jeep, and he is gone within minutes.

Within about 45 minutes we are being marched to one of the Air Force chow halls. As usual, we are the last ones to go in and eat. By now no one is sure where we are going to stay for the night. By the time it gets dark we are boarding trucks and heading out to the beach. We drive north on the beach and see GI's

hanging out there in bathing suits, with no rifles! This place is really secure.

After about 45 minutes we arrive at an Army Special Forces camp. To no one's surprise, they won't let us in to stay for the night. We drive all the way back to Cam Ranh Bay in open trucks, in the dark. We now don't know how secure the area we are driving through is, and we don't have any ammo with us.

About 9:30 at night we are put back on a C-130 and are flown back to Da Nang. Nobody thinks we are going back to the battalion CP tonight. That, in everyone's mind, is suicidal. So, as usual, we are put on trucks immediately after leaving the aircraft and ammo is thrown on the trucks so we can load up. We are frantically loading our weapons as we go through the gate and go by "Dogpatch" and down Highway 1. Now we are really nervous. It is midnight, and we are the juiciest target any VC could have dreamed for.

Not a thing happens for the 12 or 14 miles to the turnoff for Anderson Trail, the last one and one-half miles to the CP. The perimeter guard does not even shoot at us. And we finally get in at about midnight.

We now get a chance to unwind and reflect on what has happened this day. We got to see the President. We found out that Major General Nickerson had chosen Echo 2/1 due to its recent record of kills and its performance up at the DMZ. We are apparently his favorite unit.

The capper is that, thanks to our appearance as part of the Presidential honor guard at Cam Rahn Bay, we got a three-day R&R at China Beach. *Where the hell is China Beach?* This was 1966. China Beach was just being built as an in-country R&R. We soon found out that it was a place where we could go and swim, like those GI's in bathing suits that we had looked at with so much envy earlier in the day. §

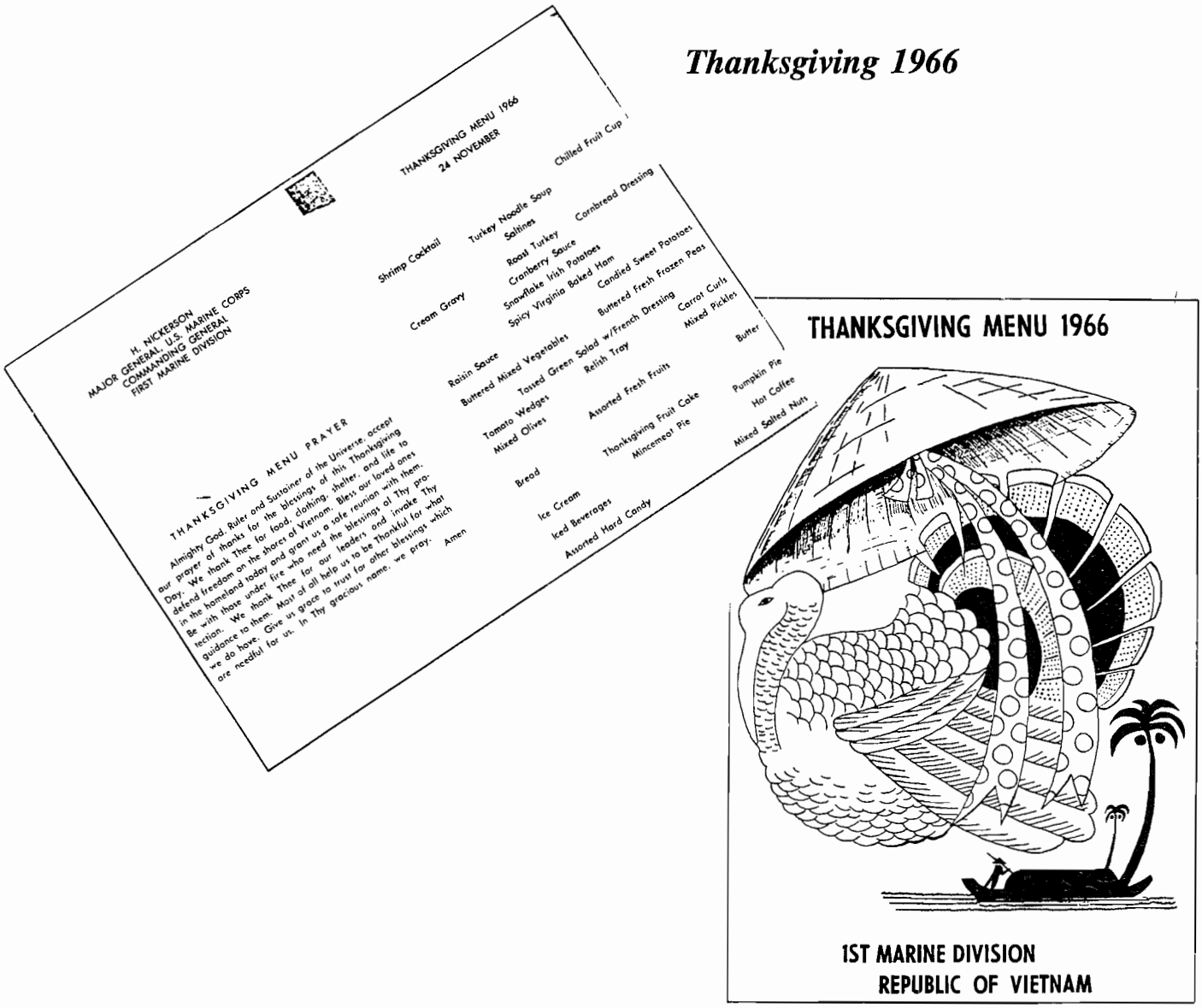


(Courtesy of David Johnson)

CHINA BEACH

An in-country R&R spot near Da Nang--hamburgers, milkshakes, and a place to swim!

Thanksgiving 1966



(Contributed by David Ayres)

THANKSGIVING MENU PRAYER

Almighty God, Ruler and Sustainer of the Universe, accept our prayer of thanks for the blessings of this Thanksgiving Day. We thank Thee for food, clothing, shelter, and life to defend freedom on the shores of Vietnam. Bless our loved ones in the homeland today and grant us a safe reunion with them. Be with those under fire who need the blessings of Thy protection. We thank Thee for our leaders and invoke Thy guidance to them. Most of all help us to be Thankful for what we do have. Give us grace to trust for other blessings which are needful for us. In Thy gracious name, we pray.

Amen

Thank You, Mr. Johnson

By Pat Morris

Thank You, Mr. Johnson

Arrived 13 October 1966. One very scared Marine. On the way to 2/1 I met a Marine from Omaha, Nebraska. My home town, Peru, Nebraska, is 60 miles south of Omaha. Anyway, to make a long story short the brother of this Marine from Omaha had been engaged to the girl that my cousin married. He ended up in Golf Company

Upon arrival, I was told that I was very lucky to be assigned to 2/1 because we were going to go to Okinawa to regroup soon. One year later, people were still being told the same thing. This was even after April and May of '67 and the Union operations.

When I got to 2/1, I was assigned to the second platoon of Echo Company. The company was out on a patrol for three days, so during the day I was on working parties and I stood line at night. While Echo was on patrol, one man was killed [Dennis E. Pike] and five men were hurt by a booby trap. When the company returned we were all put on working parties. I was in a state of awe of these Marines. The first working party I went on with the platoon, a sniper started shooting. I hit the deck and I heard people hollering. I thought someone had been hit. When I looked around to see if I could help, there were two people up on the sandbags with T-shirts in each hand doing jumping jacks and yelling at the sniper. I thought, *These are some real crazy SOB's. What the hell have I got myself into?*

A Marine combat load was five magazines and two bandoliers of 60 rounds each in the pack. Upon arriving at 2/1 I was given a mess kit with a spoon only--no knife or fork.

In late October, after several patrols the company went on Operation Kern. Most of the time Echo was a company on loan to other battalions, usually the 5th Marines.

When Kern ended (or maybe Echo was pulled out early) and we got back to 2/1, new utilities were given to everyone. Then the company was loaded on choppers and taken to Da Nang. After getting there, we were told to unload all of our magazines and we were then loaded on to a C-130 cargo plane. We did not have any idea where we were going; finally someone asked the cargo master, and he said that he was going to Cam Ranh Bay.

Even after we got to Cam Ranh Bay, no one knew why we were there. We stood around on the side of the runway for a long time until it was finally decided that it would be OK to eat, and the C-rats were broken out. About this time other units started arriving. By this I mean from other services, like the Army and the Navy, but Echo was the only Marine unit. About this time they had everyone get in formation, and then a plane came in. Next *President Johnson* drove by. (When I wrote to my mom later in the week all I said was, "I saw *a son-of-a-bitch's son-of-a-bitch* the other day." Anyway, she knew who I was talking about. Both she and my grandmother were big Johnson fans. When he was in Omaha they went to see him. The only time I can really remember Grandma getting mad at me was when I put a *Goldwater* sticker on her car.) Soon after the Prez went by, some of us got to go eat in the same tent with him. I did not get to, but I did get to eat and when I left the mess hall I had my knife and fork.

After eating, the company was loaded on trucks and taken to some barracks--where the Army people were told to get off and go in, but the Marines were told to stay on the trucks. We would be returned to our units by a C-130 to Da Nang, where trucks were waiting to take us back to 2/1. The problem was, 2/1 was ten miles south down Highway 1, and the time was 0-

dark-thirty (somewhere around 0100).

At first they could not find the ammo that had been taken from us when we left for Cam Ranh Bay. They finally found 40 rounds per man. I was putting ammo into my magazines and had gotten to my fifth magazine when the company commander, Captain Pratt, who was in the same truck sitting across from me, asked where I had gotten all the ammo. I said, "From my pack." He said, "You were to turn in your ammo before we left." I said, "Sir, we were told to empty our magazines. No one said any thing about the rounds in my pack." I think I had four bandoliers, and my five magazines had accumulated to ten or twelve by then. The captain got quiet and finally said, "Don't tell anyone about this." But it has been twenty some years. SURE HOPE IT IS OK NOW.

French Fries

At the end of 1966, Echo was taken off operations and patrols. One platoon was assigned to the island and the 106 tower, and one platoon was assigned to guard the Phong Le Bridge south of Da Nang which crossed over the Song Cau Do River. The last platoon was at the First Marine Regiment CP north of Hill 55. Second platoon was given the bridge to guard. The bridge was only one lane and one of our duties was to control traffic across it. On the south side of the bridge was a village. The road forked, one branch went to Hill 55, and the other fork was Highway 1. The kids from the village would sell us Cokes, bananas, and French bread.

One rainy day I asked one of the little girls if she could make me something hot to eat. She showed me a potato. I did not think she could do much damage to a potato, so I told her to cook it. About 15 minutes later she came back with French fries. I must have looked funny when I saw them, because she asked if there were French fries in America. When we came back through later in '67 I think every house near the road was selling French fries.

Paymaster

When I first got to Echo, our TAOR was south and east of the battalion CP and included the village on Dong Tien. In December of '66 there was a night patrol to Dong Tien. Dong Tien was one of the few villages in the area that had a good sniper, and we were always after him.

Usually all of the hootches were dark. This night there was one that had lights. The LT and two men (Greene and Davenport) killed two VC and one of them was a paymaster. The platoon stayed there until morning. After daylight, Davenport walked to the door of the hootch. The LT and Greene were sitting on a bed, and under the bed Davenport saw a live VC with a hand grenade. Davenport opened up, the LT and Greene got off the bed in a hurry, and the VC was killed while trying to get away. (This incident was in *Sea Tiger* [21 Jan 67].)

Operation Kern

My first operation was Kern. Echo was given to the 5th Marines who were in An Hoa. The operation was in the Antenna Valley south and west of An Hoa. Echo took a hill and we spent most of our time in patrols on and around the hill. In the jungle we found what we thought was a big tiger trap.

The people in the area were some of the healthiest people that I had seen in country. We found big storage bins of rice and peanuts. The rice and peanuts and a lot of people were moved out of the valley.

I remember a lot of rain and the heat in cutting through the jungle to get to the top of the hill. After three days, we were pulled off the hill--a pattern that we were to see a lot. Before we left the hill we cleared away enough trees for the choppers to land and get us. After this we walked to the south end of the valley for security so the Fifth Marines could leave. We were the first in and the last out. We took fire coming in and leaving, a pattern we would also see a lot.

Operation Shasta

Shasta took place south of the battalion

area. Later this area was called Dodge City. Choppers took us into the LZ. There were some heat casualties. There was one person who stepped on a booby trap. A lot of the time we would split the gear of the person who was medevaced among the people left in the platoon.

We came to some big rice paddies. The old railroad grade was on the left flank. There was also an old bridge on the railroad grade. The paddies were about waist-deep, between the water and the mud. Halfway through the paddies we started taking fire from the other side and from the old bridge. We got in line and continued across. (Later this was called our John Wayne charge.) I was carrying an extra rifle, and between struggling in the mud and the heat I had so much sweat running into my eyes that I could hardly see what was going on. I do remember seeing some rounds hitting the water about ten feet from me, and at first I thought that they came closer in the movies. Then I remembered that this was not the movies.

When I got across the paddies I had heat cramps in my legs so bad I could hardly walk. I sat down next to a hootch. There was a brick courtyard in front, and I was at the corner trying to get out some salt tabs to take. About that time the bricks in front of the hooch exploded. A gunship had opened up on us. I think two people were killed.

During this operation we found several villagers who had been injured by booby traps. We got to Highway 4 and then on to Highway 1 where trucks met us to take us back to our CP.

Operation Beep

We were choppered onto an island which I think was Go Noi Island. The reason I say this is that when we were done amtracks took us across the river, where we walked to Highway 4 and then to Highway 1. On Beep there was only our company, and we were looking for an enemy radio. We were there three days. One afternoon there was a patrol in the rain. The point man heard some music. So he waited and here came this VC with his radio and music. We got a radio, but I don't think it was the one we were looking for.

Operation Mississippi

This operation was to take place before Thanksgiving. We went back to An Hoa and the 5th Marines. After the chopper landed at An Hoa it was raining too hard to go into the Antenna Valley. Most of the day was spent standing in the rain waiting for the rain to quit so that we could leave. Near dark, someone decided that we could not spend the night there. We were taken to a small hill with new hootches built on the hillside overlooking a graveyard. No one was staying in the hootches. Since they were empty, we got to sleep in them.

The first night was wet and cold. The next day some pallets were found, so we slept on them. I think we stayed there four days. We went back to the same hill that we were on during Kern. More rice, peanuts, and people were moved out. There was fire going in and upon leaving. The people were not so fat this time.

Combat Load

When going on an operation most of us had the M-14 rifle, a helmet, flak jacket, 2 canteens, 300 to 400 rounds of ammo, usually at least one claymore mine, and four hand grenades. There was always 100 rounds or more of ammo for the M-60 and a mortar round for the 60mm. There was also food and other things.

Six Week Easier Duty

During the last part of '66, 2nd platoon was assigned the duty to guard the Phong le Bridge south of Da Nang. One platoon was at the regimental CP, and the other was at the island. While on the bridge, the most notable thing that I remember were the French fries. Also while we were there, the VC tried to blow the bridge. When we first got there, during the night we would throw hand grenades into the water near the bridge. After several nights of this we were told to stop. The next to the last morning before we were to leave, someone saw something tied to the columns. The LT went to look and the VC had put some explosives there.

For some reason the explosives had not detonated. The LT disarmed the explosives.

Next we went to the island. The island was a place where we could walk around in pairs. There was also a squad at the 106 tower. While at the island we swam and relaxed for a while.

Regimental CP duty was a little harder. There was a village north and east that the VC used as a training ground for making booby traps. Most were tied back and would not work, but several did. There were two reporters that went with us, but after the third medevac chopper arrived, the reporters were on it when it left.

Reporters

I could be mistaken, but it seemed like the reporters wanted to find us doing something wrong. For example, north of the 2/1 CP on Highway 1 was a market. One morning the VC set off a mine and people were hurt. The Corpsman and several of us were helping with the wounded. The news people showed up and were going to do a story until they found out that the Marines had not hurt the people. They asked the villagers, and when told that it was the VC who set the mine the reporters left.

On one operation, there had been several VC killed and one reporter asked if we were going to take their ears. When no one did, he then said that he had been with the Koreans and that they did. He said several more things, and finally someone gave him a knife and told him if he wanted ears he could have them. When I went to the CAP unit I saw some of these same things tried by reporters.

Operation Stone

After the six weeks at the bridge and other places, we went back to the 2/1 CP and started operations and patrols again. If you were under the rank of E-4, the Marines wanted a month of mess duty from you. During Stone I had mess duty. This was one of the lowest times I had in Nam. I did not mind the work, but I had the idea that I had not come here to wash pots and pans. After a week I went to see the doctor about worms, and the fact my right leg and foot were numb part of the time. I got some pills for the worms, a week of bed rest for the foot and leg, and off mess duty. Also I was told to come back in two weeks to have my leg checked. After three days in bed I was about to go nuts. The company came back and when they left I went with them. Captain Pratt got a bronze star for Stone.

Our new TAOR was the Phung Nug area down by Oscar and Papa Cap Units. We would work out of both places. While in Phung Nug one night we found a hootch set up to feed twenty people. We waited around to say hello, but they must have been busy somewhere else.

Later in my tour I went to Oscar CAP (Delta Six after 2/1 went north). This same house and area were to be the place of several firefights.

Echo Company

During the time I was with Echo Company, our platoon--2nd platoon--on several occasions had only two squads of five to six people. Early in '67 people were taken from Echo, Golf, and Hotel to make Fox a full-strength company. Fox was going to be moved south to a new area, a place called Nui Loc Son.

During our first tour at the battalion area, we had to be armed at all times. If we came in late from an operation or patrol we could sleep in and eat at a later time. Also, our wet and dirty clothes could be hung up to dry. We were usually given a day to clean our weapons, gear, and to relax some. After coming back from the guard duty on the bridges, most of this had changed. No one could be in the rack after 0800 no matter what time we came back in. We could not hang up wet clothes, and there were a lot more working parties.

Some of the time we were involved in civic action programs. One type of civic action program was called a county fair. At a county fair we would go out real early in the morning, surround an area and wait until daylight and then herd the people up like cattle. The people would be put in something like a holding pen

and then they would be checked by a doctor and checked by the government for ID cards and other things. I did not agree with the practice. I kept thinking if this were happening at home, there would be some very mad farmers. I felt that a farmer was a farmer whether he was American or Vietnamese.

About five years ago the *Wall Street Journal* ran some articles about Nam. One of these said that the Vietnamese who thought the county fairs would work were now high up in the government.

Operation Union I

During the first Union operation, I was in the hospital on Guam. A platoon from Fox Company was out on patrol and they were returning to the hill. They stopped and ate then moved out across the paddies, and when they got to the other side there was sniper and mortar fire from the village they had just left. No one in 2/1 had ever captured a mortar. It was decided to send the platoon after it. Most never made it back across the rice paddies. Another platoon from Fox Company was sent to help, and by the time they were done there were only 36 (out of about 70) or so people from the two platoons who were not WIA or KIA. More Marines from the outside were sent to help; they landed too close to the tree line, and a lot of them never got off the choppers before they were hurt. Echo came in around dark and had to walk there.

Later in the operation Echo was hit by snipers. We had several KIA and MIA. Capt Pratt was hit twice.

Operation Union II

When Union II started, Echo was on patrol in Phung Nug. In the middle of the night we walked to Highway 1 and were met by trucks and taken back to the 2/1 battalion area. The LZ was not hot when we went in. The country was not jungle but open with trees around the villages and streams. For a while there was some kind of road to follow. Then there were some streams.

At first there was the sound of battle. Then we came over a hill, and the battle could be seen going on in a tree line which looked like it might contain a village. The Marines and the NVA were so close together that we could not fire to help. I had always heard that the NVA dragged their wounded off with a meat hook. That day from our hill I saw this done.

That evening we set in close to a stream. A little before dark we moved to a different location. After setting in, one platoon was sent to help another company. The area left by the platoon was covered by spreading the rest of us out. So there were two platoons covering a three platoon area. Sometime during the night I heard that 3rd platoon (I think that was the platoon sent to help) was coming back. A little later there was noise at the stream like people filling their canteens. Someone said, "Hey, Marine, hold down the noise." Then all hell broke loose. A platoon or company of NVA was inside our lines. The CP group was shot up. The gunny was wounded and later died. The only way that we could tell who was who was that the NVA had all different colored tracers (red, blue, green, and I think even white). Ours were red, but sometimes theirs were red, too. Today, I can't think of words to describe that night. I was scared, really scared. Second platoon lost a gun team with one KIA and the others WIA. (Bob Dwyer, part of the gun team, died of wounds later.)

Friendly Fire

During the Gulf War a lot was made of friendly fire. Three examples of this in Nam:

1. The first came word of mouth from some of the older guys who were on Hastings. They said that Hotel opened up on them while they were going up a hill with an M-60. There was a definite dislike by the Hastings vets for Hotel. But thinking back, Echo worked with all of the other companies except Hotel from time to time.
2. The second was during Operation Shasta when a chopper opened up on us and killed two Marines.
3. In April 1967, a squad from 2nd platoon was in ambush near Oscar CAP when a squad from 1/1 crossed the river and walked into the

ambush. Three from Echo (Green, Joyner, and Pingree) got hit and one man from 1/1. I had moved by then, but Adam Ballard wrote to me about this incident:

11 April 1967

Dear Pat,

Well just a few lines to let you know how things are going and let you know we heard from you.

They must think something is pretty bad wrong. I hope it's not to bad but that you don't have to come back over here.

We sure haven't had any slack since you left. We have been catching hell out there across from CAP Oscar. Our squad had a ambush and a squad from 1/1 came and we opened up on them. Green got hit in the leg and Joyner got hit pretty bad three places and Pinegree got hit in the foot. We hit one man in the shoulder from 1/1.

We got grenaded one night out there and Yanaze and another guy got hit from mortars but not bad. Then we went down by Chu-Lia to stand security for artillery on a operation called Canyon and the last day or night they dropped mortars on us--around 30 rounds--but we didn't take any casualties. This shit is sure getting me jumppy.

We got to see a USO show today. They were from the Phillipines and called themselves the body guard. The girls was pretty nice.

I sure have a lot of letters to write so guess I'll close for now. I'll write every chance I get and you do the same.

(Signed) Adam Ballard

P.S. We got quite a few new men.

[*Adam Ballard was KIA on Operation Union I twelve days after writing this letter. --Eds.*]

My Thinking

When I first got to Nam the feeling was, *Let's get the job done and go home.* After taking the same hill several times, going into the same area time after time, getting fire going in and coming out, being sent on a patrol to find things or see things and then coming back and being told that was not what you saw, and being sent out just to get into a firefight so that we could be pulled out, I wasn't so sure. Most of the time it felt like our hands were tied.

Echo worked out of Oscar and Papa CAP a lot. What was happening there made more sense than what I was doing. They were teaching the people to fight for themselves. My feeling was that the way we were fighting the war would not work: the only way to win was to get the Vietnamese to fight for themselves. So I left Echo and went to Oscar CAP.

The new people that we were getting (not all, but most) had the attitude that they would spend their year and go home. §



(Courtesy of Pat Morris)
PAT MORRIS (LEFT) AND ADAM BALLARD(RIGHT)
"Adam was always worried about the new guy. He took him and showed him the ropes." --Pat Morris

Eerie, Tragic Night

By William LaVonture

*L*ate November 1966. After Operation Hastings, the 2/1 Marines moved down southwest of Da Nang--to a place we called Indian Country, where there were NVA and well-supplied Viet Cong. Hotel Company, for a reason I never understood, stayed pretty well by themselves and very rarely went back to the battalion.

In November of 1966--the latter part of the month, I think (dates are pretty fuzzy after all these years)--we were running a platoon patrol base about a click away from a 155 artillery base. One day when we were changing units, a 3.5 squad came into our hootch to relieve us. I was a squad leader, so at the time I was on the other side of a thatched hootch-divider. Suddenly, a Marine from the other squad dropped his pack from his shoulders to the ground and detonated a white phosphorous rifle-grenade.

We threw the wounded Marines into the mud to try and stop the burning, and we also put out the fire the grenade started. The bottom line is three Marines ended up dying in burn hospitals in the States. I don't remember their names. More got wounded from the other squad than from my squad, so we ended up staying the night. The thing I'll never forget is this: That night all of us and the whole inside of the hootch were literally glowing green from the phosphorous. It was a pretty eerie sight.

* * *

Ambush

Saddle up, was the word passed down the line,
fifteen meters, keep your distance, you might
hit a mine.

We would start out at daybreak, with fog on
the ground, to use nature's cover, save a
sniper's round.

But when it would lift, exposed to our plight,
our adrenaline kicked in, we were ready to
fight.

An ambush in waiting, the point man was tense,
one wrong move on his part, could mean our
expense.

Even with caution, things could go wrong; our
enemy were experts--they were called Viet Cong.

With the patience of Job, they've been fighting
for years; they were hardened guerrillas, without
any tears.

Without any warning, the guns would erupt, men
screaming and falling, the call, "Corpsman up!"

Then suddenly quiet, not even a sound, except
men groaning and dying, all over the ground.

Medevac choppers would arrive post-haste,
the enemy gone, without any trace.

With the wounded and dead sent back to the
rear, we would gather our wits and pick up
our gear.

We would slowly head back, not quite the same,
a little bit wiser, to this strange old game.

We hoped next time out, it might be our turn to
let those VC bastards burn, to put them in
our world of hurt, and annihilate them, on their
own dirt.

--William LaVonture

Operation Independence

By Kenneth "Sandy" Carlson

On 29 January 1967, we were told by Captain Banks, Hotel Company commanding officer, that we were going on a simple, half-day, two-company operation called Operation Independence. Another company along with Hotel's second platoon and the command group would be the blocking force along the Song La Tho River south of the village of La Tho Bac 3. First platoon would be guarding the river crossing where third platoon would be crossing the river on rubber boats to Go Noi Island. Go Noi Island was a 12-kilometer long island formed by three rivers.

Third platoon, the platoon I was with for this operation, would cross the river to the island and then go in column to their jump-off point. They would then get on line and sweep back to the river, forcing the Viet Cong into the blocking force. Everyone was to bring one C-ration meal and an extra bandolier of rifle ammunition. The weapons personnel were also to bring their 3.5-inch rocket launcher with them in addition to their M-60 machine guns.

Up to this point the 3.5 rocket launchers had been stored in supply, and it was only a short time before the operation that I had been ordered to get them out and train a rocket team. Lance Corporal Nolan, who had recently joined the company, was the only one I had in the weapons platoon that was trained on the rocket launchers. He helped me in training the others on how to use the launchers and how to take care of them.

Early in the morning, before the sun was up, we walked out of the 2/1 battalion area heading for the river. Even though it was still dark, already you could feel the air starting to heat up.

Just before sunup the blocking force got into position. First platoon had the river crossing site secured and assisted ferrying third platoon across the river on rubber boats that the engineers had supplied.

It was mid-morning when third platoon reached their jump-off point. Just as we got there, several Viet Cong dressed in uniforms were seen running up through a large open area that was enclosed on three sides by tree lines. The tree lines formed something like an upside down *U* around a large area of rice paddies.

We were almost at the northeast end of the northern tree line. We opened up on the Viet Cong with all our small arms and dropped a couple of them. They were Viet Cong in full regular army uniforms, which up to then had not been a common sight in this area. Lieutenant Little, third platoon commander, requested permission to go and check out the bodies, because they were 200 to 300 meters past our jump-off point. Capt Banks told Lt Little over the radio to get on line and sweep back to the river to force any other Viet Cong in the area into the blocking force.

As ordered, we got on line and swept back to the river. There were only two incidents that happened during the sweep that I know of. The first was when we were halfway back to the river. We were crossing some rice paddies that were very muddy and with almost no water in them. A mortar round came whistling in on us. We hit the deck and then it landed. It turned out to be a dud that buried itself in the mud as it landed about three meters behind us. After our hearts started beating again we continued the sweep.

The second incident occurred just as we reached the tree line along the river. One of my machine gunners, Private First Class Jackie Trim, stepped in a foot trap. He did not break his leg and said he was all right and could finish



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)

HERMAN LITTLE AT ROCKET SITE

the operation. He was lucky. A foot trap is a hole in the ground just a little bigger than a man's foot and generally about one- to two-feet deep. When you step in it, you normally fall forward and often break your leg. Sometimes you find other surprises in it like pungi stakes or something that goes bang and blows your foot off.

The sweep was done. There were no more Viet Cong encountered and only one man with a sore leg. We were ready to go back to the battalion area. Capt Banks came on the radio and told Lt Little to go to the graveyard east of Thy Bo and the railroad tracks. This was near where we had shot the Viet Cong earlier in the day. Capt Banks would cross the river with the command group and the second platoon and meet us there. We got in a column and humped it over to the graveyard.

I didn't like the sound of this. The operation had been completed. It sounded like Capt Banks had something else on his mind now. I never asked what the other guys were thinking, but in my experience when someone winged it, some people always seemed to get hurt or killed who shouldn't have.

After we got to the graveyard, Banks told us that the command group and the second platoon would stay there. Third platoon was to march out in column and then get on line and sweep the open area where we had killed the Viet Cong and try and find their bodies so we could check them out. We were to go up the large open area that was covered on three sides by a *U*-shaped tree line. I damn near had a heart attack when I heard this. When you hit something you jump on it right away. Going back to do something like this a few hours later

is asking for trouble. Big time trouble when you are dealing with Viet Cong regulars.

Just before noon Lt Little, the squad leaders, and I went back to the third platoon. Little told everyone the captain's orders. No one said anything, but you could see by their faces the men thought this was insane.

We got in a column and started moving out to our jump-off point. Just as we got to where we were to start the sweep, Lt Little passed the word that we were not going in on line but we were going in two columns. This made me feel a little better. Someone was thinking about our asses.

As far as I know, we never found the Viet Cong that we had killed earlier. We had only made it a little over halfway up the open area when all hell broke loose. We got hit hard from all three sides with automatic weapons and machine guns. We had walked right into an ambush that was big enough and powerful enough to wipe out a company. The rice paddy that I was in was so full of water that we had to lie on our backs to keep our faces above the water and our heads below the top of a rice paddy dike. There were so many incoming rounds that we couldn't even fire back from where we were in the paddy. Looking up at the sky, you could see the heat waves from all the hot lead that was flying about six inches above our faces.

Lt Little, who was with the other column, started yelling for everyone to start crawling. We turned around and started trying to crawl out of the ambush. The lieutenant then yelled at us to turn around and crawl forward. This didn't sound like the best thing to do, but really turned out to be a very good tactic. As some of us started getting closer to the center tree line, the Viet Cong must have lost some of their nerve, because they pulled back which allowed us to get into some cover.

I was still out in the paddy crawling behind my machine gunner, Jackie Trim, who had earlier stepped in the foot trap. He kept on falling behind the others and had started to let the machine gun fall off his chest into the mud and water. I yelled at him to take care of the machine gun and keep up with the others. Jackie told me that his foot was hurting real bad and that he could not keep up. I took the machine gun and passed it off to the A-gunner, Private Childs, and told everyone behind us to go around. I also told them to let the lieutenant know that we were still out in the paddy and that I would bring my gunner in to where everyone else was. After a while Jackie couldn't even use his leg, and I had to help by pulling him along.

We made it to a gate in a fence that was just before the tree line. Lt Little and two other Marines were waiting for us. He told us that we would have to run the last 25 meters and then dive over a dike that was off to our left front. I told him about my gunner, so he had another Marine help me carry him the 25 meters.

Once inside this somewhat protected area, I located the Corpsman, Doc Decker. He was working on a lot of other Marines that had been hit. I told him about my gunner's foot and the pain he was in. Doc Decker started to check him out while I talked with a friend that had been shot in the lower right stomach by a .50-caliber machine gun bullet. When Doc started to take off Jackie's boot, he found his leg swelling out of the boot as fast as he unlaced it. He told me that the leg was broken and that he was surprised that my gunner was even able to continue with the operation after he had stepped in the foot trap. I left Jackie with the other wounded and started looking for the rest of the weapons platoon.

I could not see any of my machine gun teams or my rocket team in the area. Asking around I found out that Staff Sergeant Sausau, the platoon sergeant, had moved almost everyone that had not been hit further into the tree line to help secure our position. My weapons teams had gone with him.

I moved through the tree line going up a hill. The tree line was a dense growth of bamboo. When I got to the top of the hill I found an open area with a grass hootch in the center of it. I couldn't see anyone or any sign of anyone being there. I skirted the open area until I could see that no one appeared to be in the hootch. I then approached it and checked out the inside. I found no one inside and was starting to wonder if everyone had been taken by the Viet Cong.

From the west side of the top of the hill,



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)
STAFF SERGEANT SAUSAU

I could see that there was another hootch to the west which was across a deep ravine. I moved down the ravine, wondering if I should continue--because it was so steep I was not sure that I could make it up the other side. I went on, and then had to use the bamboo to help get me up the other side.

Approaching the other hootch, I found that it also appeared to be empty. As I entered it I was charged at by a bunch of Marines, and one of them almost crushed my skull with a large rock. Thank God they stopped when they saw it was me. They turned out to be my two machine-gun teams and my rocket team. All their weapons were jammed with mud, and they had been trying to get them working when I came sneaking into the hootch. I was relieved to find that Henry Decker, Elmer Brent, Tom Nolan, Art Mason, and Childs had survived the ambush and that none of them were wounded.

They told me that SSgt Sausau, with two or three other Marines, had moved west to the last hootch at the end of the tree line. I advised my machine gunners and rocket team to get their weapons working. I gave them my .45 pistol and headed for the last hootch with my M-14.

I found SSgt Sausau with a couple of Marines inside the last hootch. Bullets from machine guns and automatic rifles were still coming in on us from all directions. From this hootch they had been trying to put a machine gun out of commission. The machine gun was firing at us from across about 200 meters of rice paddies. SSgt Sausau told me that the inside of the hootch that the machine gun was in must have been fortified. They had been shooting the hell out of that grass shack, and the machine gun just kept firing back.

Sausau yelled at me that he was going to court martial my machine gunner for holding us up and not taking care of the machine gun when we were in the rice paddies. I told him about Jackie Trim's leg and what Doc Decker had said about his leg injury. That was the end of that subject.

Sausau asked me if the 3.5-inch rocket launcher was working and if we had any rounds for it. I told him that my rocket team was cleaning the launcher, but we didn't know if it would still work and that we did have two rockets left. He told me to go back and get it so we could try to get that machine gun with it.

I went back to the hootch where my teams were. Both machine guns were now in working order and set up to cover the north and the south. I grabbed the two rocket rounds and went back, along with Nolan the gunner and his launcher.

When we got back, we set up along the north side of the hootch and had a clear shot at the enemy machine gun. Was I ever worried. This was the first time we had carried the rocket launcher out into the field since I had taken it out of supply, and to make matters worse the launcher had gotten wet in the rice paddies. I didn't know if the electrical system was going to work. I loaded the launcher for Nolan. Nolan took aim and fired. It was one of the greatest shots I ever saw. The round went right through the same window that the machine gun was shooting from, and the whole hootch just exploded.

We were stuck in this small tree line with bullets still coming in on us, and the sun was starting to set. We pulled back to the east end of the tree line to try and set up some kind of a defensive position. When we got back we found that there were only 12 of us that had not been wounded or killed. We also learned that the first platoon had crossed the river and were trying to get to us. I couldn't believe this. The river was about 2,000 meters away from us and second platoon was only 500 meters from us. I also learned we could not get any air support or artillery support because we were in a semi-pacified area.

Seven and one-half hours after we got pinned-down, first platoon joined up with us. We tried to get medevacs for our WIA and KIA, but after getting some of them out on one chopper, the chopper pilots would not land, as the area was too hot and it was almost dark.

About this time someone in the higher command decided that this area was not so pacified and approved artillery support for us. But because of the number of KIA and WIA we could not fight our way out, and thus we set up for a long and hungry night. Even though it had quieted down a little after dark, no one slept. We knew that the Viet Cong were still in the area, and we thought that they would attack during the night. They didn't, and only several firefights broke out during the night.

We had one Marine who had taken a bullet close to his heart. The Corpsman could not give him any morphine, and so the Marine lay there moaning and yelling in agony all night. At times he begged us to shoot him as he could not stand the pain. Most thought that he would not make it through the night, and several Marines commented that maybe we should put him out of his misery. But it never went past a comment. We all knew that if there was any chance at all of him making it we would do everything we could to see that he did. (He died later in the hospital in Da Nang.)

Just as it was starting to get light the medevacs came in and picked up the rest of our WIA and KIA. The rest of us along with first platoon then made our way back to the graveyard where we had left the command group and second platoon the day before. We met with only light resistance to our movement this time.

Back in the graveyard I sat down and opened a box of C-rations and talked with some friends of mine in the second platoon. Not too politely, I asked them what the hell happened to them and why didn't they come to help us. One of them told me that Capt Banks, with his command group, stayed in the graveyard and told second platoon to move up the south side of the ambush to help third platoon to try and get out of it. They had moved up through the tree line and were just getting ready to attack a hootch that had a machine gun shooting out of it when Capt Banks apparently changed his mind and ordered them back to the graveyard. My friend then added that he didn't know for sure, but he guessed that Banks must have been nervous about sitting in the graveyard with only several pistols and one rifle. I could tell by his face that he was bothered.

After we had some chow, cleaned our weapons, and got resupplied we learned that Capt Banks had requested a Quick Reaction Mission to bring in reinforcements after third platoon was ambushed. A platoon from Bravo 1/1 had been choppered into an area a little south of where we were. The Viet Cong hit them hard just after they got off the choppers, but they were able to fight their way out and were expected at our location at any time. Another platoon had been choppered to an area just southwest of the village of Thy Bo. They had worked their way through a small graveyard, crossed a small creek, and then started climbing a barbed wire fence when they were hit. The Viet Cong had been waiting for them and timed the ambush just right. All these Marines could do was to pull back to the graveyard and set up a defensive position. We were advised that what was left of third platoon and first platoon of Hotel Company were to move out to help this trapped platoon.

We saddled up and started moving west. While enroute to help this other platoon, we had on and off fire fights with the Viet Cong, but nothing that kept us from moving towards the village of Thy Bo. As we started getting closer to the old railroad tracks, we found trench lines running along the path that we were on.

Just as it was getting dark, we found a very thick and high bamboo fence running alongside the path. Both the trench lines and the high bamboo fence seemed strange to me. In all the areas that I had been in so far, I hadn't seen any like these.

The column had moved through a gate in the fence, and as I was going through the gate a machine gun opened up. I went to dive into what looked like a grassy drainage ditch on the other side of the fence, but instead I lay down on the path--because something did not seem right. As I lay on the path I saw that the ditch was about two-feet deep and about ten-feet wide. And what had looked like grass in the dim light was really punji stakes.

After we determined that the machine gun was up on top of the old railroad tracks and shooting at the choppers that were giving us air support, we started checking out what appeared to be some kind of a Viet Cong battalion-size base camp. The fence and the ditch formed a perimeter; every few yards in the ditch was a bunker. These bunkers had a frame made from railroad tracks and then were covered with banana trees and mud. There were also several buildings inside the compound, but all had been cleaned out and the camp appeared to be abandoned. Finding nothing but an empty camp, we moved out to join up with the trapped platoon.

We joined up with the platoon in the graveyard on the southwest side of Thy Bo well after dark. They still hadn't been able to get their dead and wounded choppered out, due to the repeated contacts we were having with the Viet Cong, so we set up a defensive perimeter for the night. A forward observer from Bravo Battery (105mm howitzers) advised us that he was going to drop artillery rounds just northeast of us all night long. When we heard the gun go off, we should get on the west side of the graves because the rounds were going to land so close to us that the northeast side of the graves would get hit with shrapnel. It was not the kind of thing that any of us liked--having your own artillery dropping rounds in on your position--but it worked. The Viet Cong did not bother us during the night, and the graves protected us from the shrapnel throughout the night.

At first light we moved out of the area going east along the south side of Thy Bo. Once clear of the area, we got some choppers to take out most of the dead and wounded. We then continued moving east until we joined up with the rest of Hotel Company, who were back at the graveyard where we had left them the day before. They had been running sweeps in the area and were having heavy contact. For the rest of the day we joined in with the sweeps of the area. By nightfall our contacts with the Viet Cong started to lighten up, and we pulled everyone back to the graveyard for the night. The next morning we would be leaving the field. It would be 1 February and the 1967 TET cease fire would begin. After three days of muderous fighting almost no one could sleep, but the night was almost uneventful. The next morning we humped it back to the 2/1 battalion area.

Hotel company had 5 KIA and 26 WIA from Operation Independence, almost all of which came from the third platoon when it walked into the ambush on the first day. It was estimated that there were 101 Viet Cong killed. Over the next two days after the operation, local Vietnamese peasants brought 22 dead and 18 wounded villagers into the 2/1 battalion area. An investigation determined that these civilian casualties were caused by artillery and small-arms fire and were a regrettable corollary to the fighting during Operation Independence. In my mind all of those so-called civilians were Viet Cong or members of their families and were brought into the battalion area so that they could collect retribution from us. During the operation I didn't see anyone in the area working in the rice paddies or doing anything. It was almost as though the area had been deserted.

It was later determined that the base camp which third and first platoons had almost walked up to and later entered belonged to the Viet Cong R-20 Main Force Battalion.

A follow-up operation called Operation Stone started on 10 February 1967 with three battalions from 1st Marines. By the end of this operation the 1st Marines had killed an additional 291 Viet Cong with another 112 listed as probable killed. We also captured 74 Viet Cong. §

On Monkey Mountain

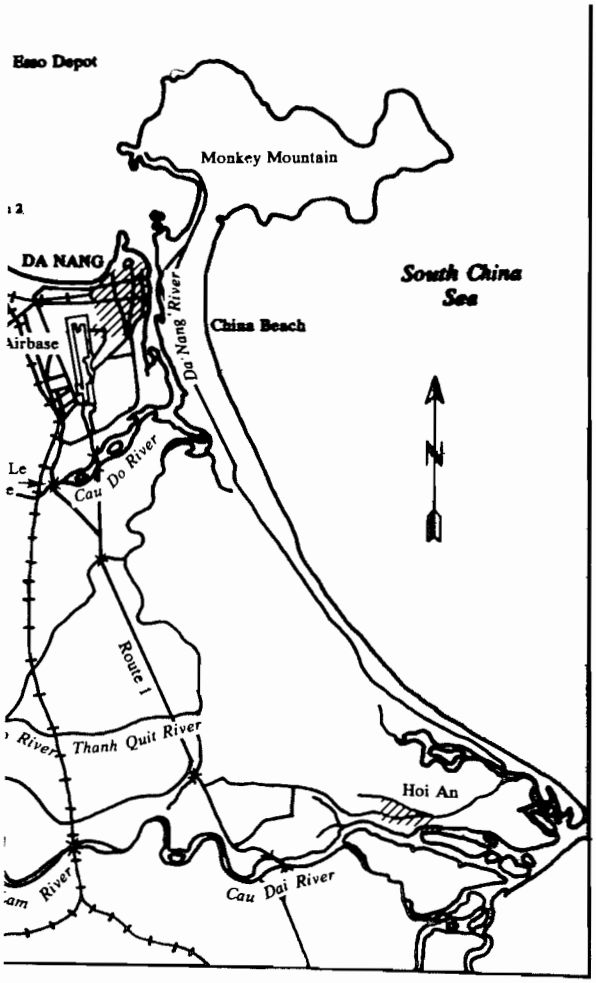
By Roy J. Lanham

*M*onkey Mountain overlooked the Da Nang harbor, and a two-week guard duty was set up there to protect a Navy communications man who maintained contact between Naval ships and the interior of Vietnam. The mountain was thick with trees and shrubs, and covered by heavy jungle vines. And monkeys were all over the place. On our patrols around the mountain we saw some monkeys as large as three feet tall.

There was a lighthouse on Monkey Mountain--about halfway down the mountainside--and one of the patrol's duties was to check on the Vietnamese lighthouse keeper and his family. It was their custom to offer tea and bananas to visitors, and on one of these patrol visits, another Marine and I decided to eat all the bananas the family could offer. But as soon as we finished off one plate of bananas, another arrived. We never could figure out where all the bananas were coming from, but we ate them and paid the price with several days of dysentery.

While on Monkey Mountain, a fairly new Marine was attached to my machine-gun team. On one particular night, I placed a poncho over the machine gun to keep the dew off. The new Marine was on watch and I went sound asleep. All of a sudden, I was awakened by a weapon going off. As I took my position behind the machine gun, I could hear squealing and thrashing about in front of us, and in the clearing I could see a monkey turning somersaults. The monkey had apparently come up to the machine gun and pulled at the poncho. That's when the new Marine shot and wounded it.

Another time on Monkey Mountain we saw a World War II plane flying close to the peak of the mountain. The pilot made a few passes and eventually we caught his eye. Then he tipped his wings and flew over as we waved to him. Later he did some aerial acrobatics, which we think were just for us. He certainly did brighten our day. §



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)
MONKEY MOUNTAIN
Map showing the Da Nang area, including Monkey Mountain, in the spring of 1965.

War Stories

By Steve Krasowski

I sent the first of these two war stories to *Readers Digest* 200 and some years ago. Thought maybe they'd print it in "Humor in Uniform," and send me a check. No print or check. But here they are again along with some others, as a contribution to our book.

Out of the eight years I served in the Marine Corps, I still recall one of my most embarrassing situations, and this happened in Vietnam, early 1966.

Sitting up, dozing in my foxhole one night, rifle across my lap, I heard movement out in the jungle in front of me. Cautiously I grabbed my weapon and attempted to peer over the rim of the hole. An alien hand brushed across my cheek. "Infiltrators, they're coming through our lines," I yell. With my rifle as a club, I blindly strike out at my enemy. A sharp pain. Had my adversary scored a mortal wound? He sure did.

A wound to my pride. My enemy was me. Apparently, by lying on my left arm, I'd caused it to fall asleep. Hence, the alien hand across my face. With a sore arm, hurt pride, and feeling like the rear end of a horse, I succumbed to the laughter and snickers of the rest of the platoon.

* * *

Once in Vietnam while on a search and destroy mission, we were hit from our flanks by a well-concealed enemy. Having no place to run for cover, I jumped into the first depression in the ground I could find.

This, to my utter amazement, was a mud-filled hole, occupied by three huge hogs who had gone to the Big Pig Pen in the sky, at least a week before. Needless to say, this aroma wasn't the best in the world.

It seems every time I tried to leave my new-found home, the enemy had other ideas. So I stayed.

As time went on, the VC broke contact, and we were told to move out. Best news I had up to date in that war. In my entire tour in the Marine Corps, if I was ever shunned, this was my shining hour. Normally on a route march, it's fifteen-pace interval between men. I swear the man in front of me was at least thirty paces, and the man to my rear at least fifty.

When the choppers finally picked us up, I overheard the crew chief stating, "We'll take everybody, but do we have to take him?"

To this day, when I use the expression "War stinks," I mean it in more ways than one.

* * *

There was an 81 FO (as I was) from Florida named, I think, Smalley, who was attached to E company, I believe. I was on the top of the hill overlooking his position--I think I was attached to G Company then. As it goes, I'm looking out over E Company's area when over the radio I'm monitoring I hear, "Whiskey [81 Fire Direction Center FDC], this is Echo Foxtrot Oscar (E Company forward observer). Fire mission/ Registration/ Coordinates 873900/ Range 600 yards/ OT azimuth 5100."

At this point I check my map to find out for myself what he planned to hit. By my check, it looked like he had called for a round directly in front of him. I immediately got on the radio: "Echo-Foxtrot-Oscar this is Golf-

Foxtrot-Oscar. Be advised your fire mission is dangerously close."

His reply: "Situation in hand, Golf-Foxtrot-Oscar." Smalley then proceeded to inform by radio, "Fire on my command, give me a splash." (This means, "Fire when I tell you and let me know when the round hits." A lot of other people's rounds land here and there, and at times it's hard to tell which one is yours. Besides, the guns have it down to the mini-second when the round you called for will hit).

Next I heard from the guns. "On the way," was their reply. At this moment I caught sight of Smalley standing knee-deep in a hole, helmet on, binoculars up to his face, back to me. Over the 81 radio net I heard "SPLASH!" At the same time, while I was looking at Smalley through my binoculars, I saw Smalley's helmet go straight up in the air, followed by Smalley and his binoculars. I then saw him crawl over to the spot where the blast had moved his radio and I heard him say weakly, "Whiskey, this is Echo-Foxtrot-Oscar. *End of mission!*"

Knowing Smalley hadn't caused any serious damage to his ragged body, I had tears in my eyes from laughing so hard.

* * *

Another time while on radio watch from 2 to 4 AM, I heard the distinct noise (wail?) of an elephant. No big deal; except we were on the top of a mountain that was 674 meters high. I said nothing, because to tell somebody would mean getting the instant tag of "Daffy Duck."

Lo and behold, the platoon sergeant cames crawling over saying, "When you give the next sit report tell them we heard elephants."

Being one to outdo myself, I called in artillery in the direction of the mating elephants and also woke everybody up. When I called in my sit report to battalion I said, "Sit report as follows: Hear approximately two elephants at this location." He replied, "You hear what?"

I said, "I spell phonetically, ECHO-LIMA-ECHO-PAPA-HOTEL-ALPHA-NOVEMBER-TANGO-SIERRA."

With that he said, "Wait one."

Next I heard, "This is Cedarbird 5 (the major). What is your sit report?"

I repeated to him exactly what I told the battalion radio operator (the one who probably woke the major up).

The next AM here came our resupply chopper, but instead of resupplies out jumped the regimental colonel, and all I hear him say is, "Where's the 81 FO"?

I was sitting behind a boulder eating a can of beans and flies when the colonel came up to me and said, "That was a good job last night sergeant. We came across a dead elephant this AM. The North Vietnamese were apparently crossing the next ridge and had the elephants carrying artillery pieces."

My reply, "No sweat, Colonel. I woke all the men, we stood a 100% watch, and we had them hide their peanut butter."

With that I got an "are you all right look" and no reply. The last I saw him he was staring at me from the chopper. Later that day we received fresh fruit sent up from the colonel on the resupply chopper. Guess he figured we were suffering from malnutrition.

* * *

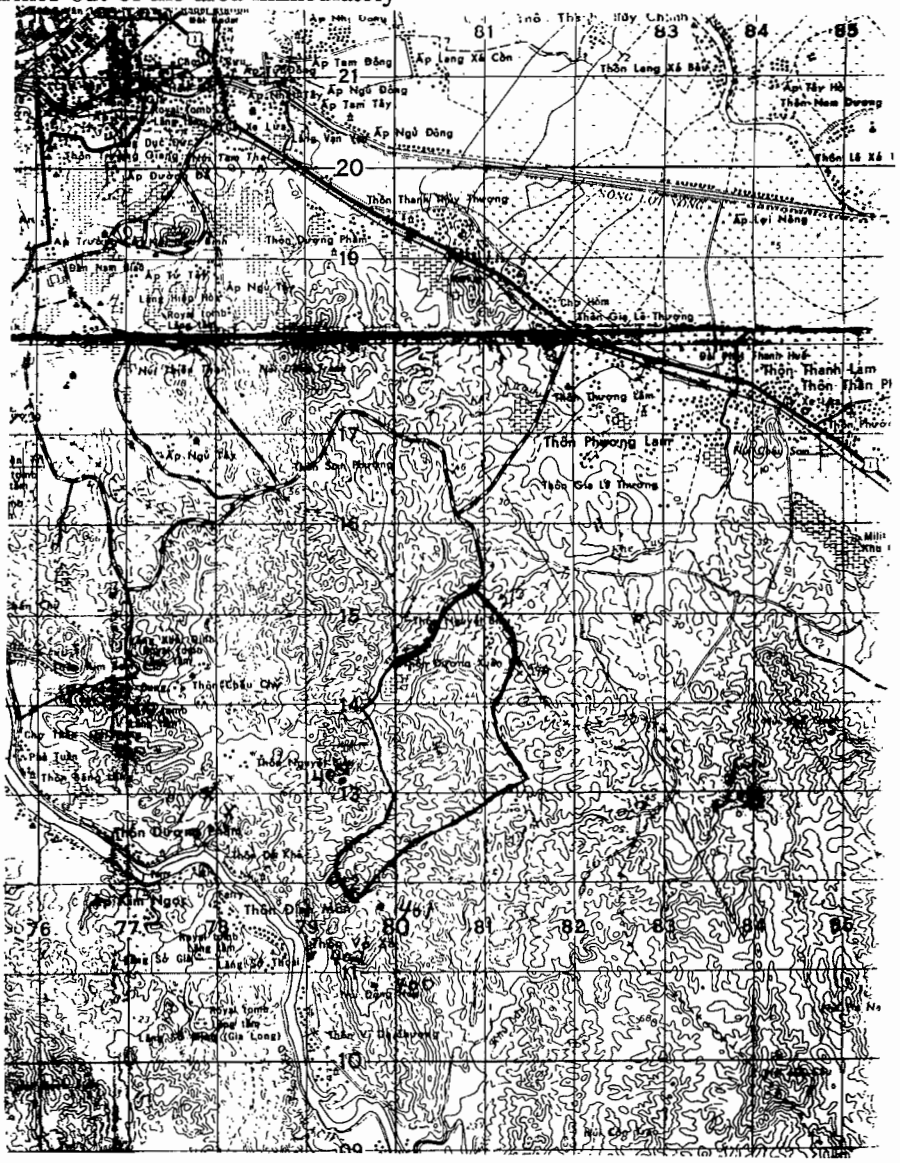
Another time on Hill 674, I was looking through a borrowed--from the Army--BC Scope (battalion commander's scope) when I observed a skirmish line advancing in our direction. They were down in the valley about a mile and a half to two miles away. As I watched one Marine in particular, a black Marine with unknown rank, walking in a semi-crouched position, I also observed, no more than 500 yards in front of this Marine skirmish line, no less than a dozen "moving trees." Funny, but at the time it reminded me of a movie I had seen as a kid, I think it was called *Bataan* with Robert Taylor.

Anyway, our radio net was not on, and I did not know what radio net the advancing Marines were on. I called the battalion and told them to get the Marines out of there. Battalion in turn called someone who called someone else. All this time the Marines kept advancing: a definite slaughter in the making. By this time I was practically screaming into the radio for

someone to get those Marines out of there. Next thing I knew, the Marines stopped, made an abrupt left face, and walked out of the picture with my observed black Marine at the tail. After the Marines left, I called in artillery with point detonating and VT (variable time) rounds on the "trees." It was discovered that a squad of NVA went to the Big Rice Paddy in the Sky.

Twenty-three years later I'm sitting in the bar at our reunion when I overhear a black, former Marine saying to his drinking partner something about someone yelling over the radio to "get the Marines out of the area immediately if not sooner." After they had left the area, the former Marine continues, a hell of a lot of artillery came down close to where they had been. Then he tells his drinking parter, "If I ever run across the individual who was yelling over the radio then, I'd definetely buy him a round and more."

With this, I introduce myself to Dwain Hill (now a 2/1 reunion member), and with wet eyes I tell him that I was that Marine on the radio. A black, wet-eyed, former Marine looks me right in the eye and says, "Thank you." No more to say, except it's a good feeling. §



(Courtesy of Steve Krasowski)

Map of area southeast of Hue in which 2/1 operated in 1966.

War, and Then Peace

By John Thoemke

I served in Vietnam from early March until late September of 1967. I was assigned to the 3rd squad of the 3rd platoon of Golf Company, better known as "Goofy Golf." Some of my experiences while there include being a radio operator for a short while and also a fire team leader.

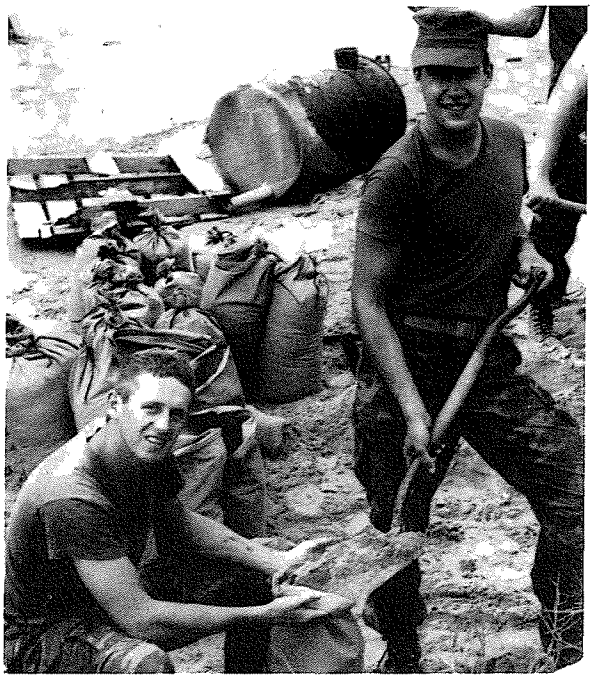
I can remember leaving Okinawa and heading for Da Nang with many, many thoughts racing through my mind--wondering what it would actually be like spending time in Vietnam, what was going to happen to me, how I would handle being there. And as I stepped off the plane in Da Nang, even though there were many other Marines with me, I felt totally alone and about a million miles from home.

However, the first evening there didn't seem all that bad. I had evening chow and took a shower and had a place to sleep for that night. I was there approximately two days before I was sent out to 2/1 headquarters by truck. I was hoping to be sent out the next day, but as things turned out I ended up filling sand bags, which at the time made me quite angry--but that's the way things go when you're in the Marine Corps. It seemed like it would take forever to get shipped out to my company.

But then the day finally arrived. As we got aboard the truck, the driver warned us that if we got ambushed on the way, he would step on it and we should hang on, because if we fell out of the truck we would be on our own; he would not stop for us, nor would he come back for us. And that's when the reality of being in Vietnam really sunk in. I can recall thinking to myself, *He's got to be kidding*. He was talking about the possibility of getting ambushed, and there we were, the four of us or so aboard the truck, and not one weapon, one magazine or ammunition of any kind among us. How were we suppposed to defend ourselves? We were United States Marines in Vietnam with the possibility of getting shot at by the enemy, and we couldn't fire back.

Well, needless to say, I arrived at 2/1 headquarters safely. Shortly after our arrival we were taken to the supply tent and issued our rifle and magazines and the rest of our combat gear. From there we were taken by mule and dropped off at our respective tents; at mine I met the rest of the guys in the 3rd squad.

I don't think I will ever forget the first time I was in combat. We were on a patrol and our



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)
FILLING SANDBAGS
Wesser holding, Dennis filling.

platoon had split up into squads. One of our squads was along the river that was not too far from 2/1. My squad--that is, the squad I was in--was patrolling along some trails that led away from the river when all of a sudden there was a deafening explosion. Not knowing exactly what had happened, we hightailed it back to the river only to discover that Charlie had seen some of our men along the bank and had touched off an unexploded 105 round. That's the day that we lost at least two, if not three, of our men. I think I was in total shock as I saw those dead Marines being put into body bags and zipped up. I really don't know what I had expected to see in Vietnam or get into, but it was a real eye-opener to see that take place.

I also recall that they had ordered a medevac, and as soon as that medevac chopper set down, everything broke loose. From across the river Charlie started to shoot at us, and I confess that I was literally frozen with fear. But once I came out of that fear I was able to empty a magazine at the enemy across the river. I also remember them calling in an air strike, and two F-4 phantom jets came in at what appeared to be a matter of just feet above the river, spitting their 20mm and dropping bombs. We were so close to that air strike that a piece of shrapnel from one of the bombs flew over my head, and as I reached to pick it up it was still hot. That was the day of my baptism of fire.

I'd also like to tell you about the day that it rained rice in Vietnam. Yeah, you got me right, it rained rice.

We were on an operation and some of us had spotted a hootch down a trail, quite a large hootch. But before you got to it, there was a stone gateway, and being warned about tripwires we carefully inspected the opening of the stone gateway, or arch, and seeing that it was clear proceeded on into the hootch.

Well, we also knew that a lot of times Charlie would hide his weapons underneath the supply of rice that was sitting in the middle of a hooch. The VC would dig out a pit and then store their rice. So, since we thought that there was a possibility of there being weapons underneath the rice, I took a grenade, pulled the pin, tossed it into the rice, ran out of the hootch, and waited.

The grenade went off, and all of a sudden it began to rain rice, and it rained and it rained and it rained rice. And that's one of my most favorite stories or, at least, one of my funniest stories, considering where we were and what we were up against on this particular operation. I really am thankful for some of those lighter moments. I really believe that they really helped us to keep our sanity and wits about us while serving in Vietnam . . . when we never knew, of course, when or if a close friend would be wounded or killed, or even if we ourselves would be wounded or killed.

I'm not exactly sure when this next incident took place--I know we were on a patrol, I don't really remember any of the dates or the places per se, but I do recall very clearly that the majority of us had walked over a sizable mine, and then one of the last men stepped on it and set it off. He had an awful lot of courage because he was very, very severely wounded, losing several limbs, but he was a real fighter. And his last name was Iael. I don't remember his first name, but we received some correspondence after he had been sent home, and we heard that he was doing quite well considering what had happened to him on this particular patrol.

I'll also never forget the day we lost a very fine Corpsman. My fire team was assigned to set up an ambush in a cemetery that was about a mile from 2/1 headquarters. The rest of the squad was going to go on a walking ambush following the trails along the river and through this small village. Well, the night went fairly good except for the time when Charlie knew that we were someplace in the cemetery, so he began to shoot at us to draw our fire. Fortunately, three of us had been there long enough to realize that that's all he was doing and that as long as we remained still and quiet he would go away.

But our man with the grenade launcher wanted to shoot back, and he did not know that at nighttime the launch you put out had quite a muzzle flash. After convincing him (probably threatening him), he didn't, and, as I said,

things were quiet.

So morning came and we were to work our way towards 2/1 headquarters and meet up with the road sweep. We had cut across a field and gone up to walk on the road. I had just turned around to remind the guys to keep their distance when there was a tremendous explosion. I turned around just in time to see this young Corpsman being blown through the air--I would say a good 20 to 30 feet. At the time we didn't know it was our Corpsman, but when we got up there, there was this huge crater in the road and he was lying in it. He never knew what hit him.

Though I'd been in Vietnam only six months, seeing a lot of death and a lot of good men killed and wounded of course made an impression on my mind, and I quess in my heart, that I won't ever forget. And even though I was over there and wounded and saw what I saw and I know what every other Marine saw, I'm still very proud that I went to fight for my country.

I also remember the times of closeness in our squad and among other men in Golf Company. I got to be good friends with one of our machine gunners and some of our rocket men. There were times we just sat around the tent, sometimes just talking. I'm glad that we had those times, and also the times of going out behind the tent in the evening after chow and just kind of cutting up. One of us had a camera, and we took some pictures of one another just cutting up. And one of our guys had a big sombrero and we took turns putting that on and just acting goofy. Doing things our company was known for--Goofy Golf.

One time we got the word that we were going to go on this big operation; we were going to burn and blow and do a real number on the enemy. However, that operation proved to be just about the opposite. As I recall, it was a long, hot, dreary operation with little or no action. When it came to an end and we were on the way back, we came to a road where we were to get aboard some trucks which were to take us back.

It got to be dark, and we had all kind of lain out in the back of the truck to catch some Z's, when all of a sudden we started to take some small arms fire. Everybody was in a pretty lousy mood after the operation, so our whole convoy opened up with everything we had, M-16's, M-60's, grenade launchers, including a .50-caliber on one of the trucks. Well, unbeknowst to us, we were quite close to 2/1, and in fact we had put so many rounds out and we were so close they actually had to shut down the flick because they were catching all of our stray rounds.

I may not know where you were over there, but I know pretty well what you went through, just because you and I were fellow Marines in 2/1 serving our country in Nam. If I remember correctly, after I got hit and was out of the country, Golf Company got sent up north, and if I remember right they took some pretty heavy casualties, and since that's the last I heard of it, I really don't know.

I do remember very vividly the day I got hit. We were supposed to go on a 24-hour patrol/ambush. We left the compound at noon and headed out, following our usual path--or trail--which headed towards the village that was along the river between the artillery battery we were staying at and 2/1 headquarters.

We came to a point in the trail that was blocked off with a lot of underbush, and knowing that that could have very well been booby trapped, we decided to back up and go around a different direction. About ten minutes later, the next thing I know is I'm flying through the air landing on my stomach, in shock, not realizing that I am the one that got hit.

After taking a quick inventory, I found out that I had all my limbs--which I was very thankful for. I believe the point man in front of me caught some shrapnel in the ankles; I'm not sure--that's kind of a blurr--but I do remember that what upset me the most was that my rifle was lying in the dirt, just covered with and full of dust and dirt, and that really made me very upset because I had spent a lot of time cleaning it for this patrol/ambush. The shock made me react like that.

They called in a medevac, and once it got

there they carried me on a poncho and put me aboard. I was taken to Da Nang where I received surgery. After a short time I was sent to Akouska, Japan, for further surgery on my leg. So I had my ticket home. After spending two months in Japan, I was flown home with a bunch of other Marines to Great Lakes, Illinois, which is about an hour away from my home town, Racine, Wisconsin. In July or August of '68, I received my official discharge.

Once I was actually back in the States, I had what I know many others had, and I'm sure still have, and that's a really fierce temper. I mean, the slightest thing would set me off. I got married in 1970, and because of all I went through and how Nam affected me, one night shortly after being married I almost killed my wife in my sleep. It must have been like a flashback, I quess you would call it. I thought she was the enemy, and I wound up choking her and saying to her, "You dirty gook, you dirty gook." If she hadn't kneed me in the chest, I'm afraid I would have killed her and have woken up the next morning to a dead wife.

I also came very close, too close to suit me, to becoming an alcoholic. From the time I got back to the World--which was the end of 1967--up until 1984, I was able to be gainfully employed. It was in 1984 that I began to have some serious problems with my right leg, which was the one that sustained the most injury when I stepped on that booby trap or land mine, whichever it was. To make a long story short, my injury has deteriorated to the point that I am just no longer able to be gainfully employed.

I know that there are many vets who are very angry at God, and, as I understand, blame God for what happened in Vietnam. But I can honestly say that if it wasn't for God's all-sufficient grace, I would not be able to endure my disability. And for that, for God's grace, I am very thankful, because I can endure and go on each day and just really enjoy the life that has been given to my family and myself.

There was a time in my life not too many years ago that I was not able to talk about Vietnam at all. I also used to have terrible, terrible nightmares. But now I can talk about it, and though it still isn't real easy, what I find is that the very bitter memories, or the hurt, or what I like to call the haunting memories, no longer exist, and I can talk about Vietnam, and I can tell people and share with others, and it doesn't make me angry anymore. It really doesn't hurt as it once did.

Now I and my family are walking in a new-found freedom and with true happiness and peace in our lives, and that is only because of what God has done in our lives, through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I know that there are a lot of vets out there who are really struggling, who are really hurting, who are really angry. There are those that are not able to have or to hold down a good job because of what is described, I believe, as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from being in Vietnam. All I know is that every Vietnam vet who still struggles can be set free, that the hurt can be healed if you're having a problem with anger as many vets do, that you don't have to carry that anymore.

I really can't describe to you the contentment I now have, the true joy in my heart, that is gladness of heart when difficult times come along. And that's not to say that I still don't struggle at times about what happened to me in Vietnam, my disability, and not being able to work. I do. I'm going to be totally honest and say that, yes, I do still struggle. But I do have God's power in my life, His active power in my life, His grace and His strength, so that when those times come--and they do come--He's there to pick me up when I fall, to strengthen me, to encourage me, and to get me going forward again and not be a slave, as it were, to the things that happened to me, not to be bitter about them, but to go on with life.

I'm thankful for this chance to share my war experiences, but I thought that it would be easier than it has been to talk about them. A great change has taken place in my life, so I'm now able to talk more easily and freely about my experiences while in Vietnam. To be totally honest, I would like to forget all the horrors and the bad times, yet not ever forget the men I came to know in Golf Company during the short time I was over there. §

The Longest Run

By Mario Sagastume

*E*ven though we had some miserable times in Vietnam--most of which I have forgotten and do not care to recollect--there were some humorous events I still remember, one of which I would like to share.

I was a member of weapons platoon attached to Fox Company, from April to October of 1967. My MOS was 0331 (M- 60 machine gunner), and, if memory serves me correctly, my gun team always went out with third platoon. The other members of the team were Pete Schillinger and Kelly. (I don't know whether Kelly was his first or last name, or if I've spelled Pete's last name correctly.)

Because of the intense heat and the humidity, we never wore skivvies, belts, or any superfluous gear. One day we were coming back from a few days' patrol with third platoon, bringing up the rear. Earlier, my jungle utility bottoms had split at the seams from the bottom of my fly to the belt strap in back, but because of the circumstances I had chosen not to attempt to sew or otherwise repair my pants.

We had just crossed the railroad tracks and were humping the sand when a sniper fired on us. My first instinct was to hit the deck. As I rose to run for the tree line where the rest of the platoon was, my pants split completely and fell around my ankles, making it extremely difficult for me to run for cover--especially with an M-60 on my shoulder. I picked up my pants with my left hand and held the gun with my right hand for what seemed to me at the time the longest run of my life.

When I finally reached the tree line, I found the rest of the platoon literally rolling on the ground, laughing their heads off and telling me what a funny sight I made. I did not immediately see the humor in the incident, but I am now able to relate the story, get a good laugh, and remember the feeling of friendship I had for Pete, Kelly, and the rest of the troops. §



(Courtesy of Gary Belden)

MACHINE GUNNERS

Gary Belden on gun and Rich "Spanky" Brown feeding, on Hill 552 outside of Khe Sanh. Cpl Brown was later KIA. "He was a great little guy." --Don Dennis

Two Incidents

By Dennis Grall

There are two events from my time in Vietnam that will live with me forever. One was up close and personal, as they say on "Wide World of Sports"; as for the other, I was a detached observer who was anything but detached.

War means death, destruction, and injury. These things cannot be avoided. However, there are also good times, and I remember some of them fondly from my eight-and-a-half-month stint with 2/1. As a sports freak who now works as a newspaper sports editor, I will always remember walking on patrol listening to an Armed Forces Radio broadcast of the Green Bay Packers beating the Cowboys in Dallas for the 1966 NFL championship. (A year later, I sat in frigid Green Bay watching the Packers repeat that conquest in the famous "Ice Bowl.")

And I will never forget people like Tony Wagner, Jack Freitag, Benny Bonner, Dennis Brooks, Bob Montgomery, Horace Sheffield, Dave Pettine, Dave Bullock, Rex White, Dave Messer, Sergeant Tobin, Sergeant McKay and Gunny Romero.

And R&R in Manila.

But two major events will also forever be a part of my life. The first took place on 21 December 1966, when I came face-to-face with death. And this event will never be forgotten, because I know the outcome could have been reversed quite easily. It happened the only time I was assigned the point while serving Foxtrot 2/1, and it only lasted about two minutes--but what an astounding period.

Our platoon had just finished taking a breather along a trail when I was told to take the point. We began moving forward, and I remember carrying the M-14 on my shoulder, like Chuck Connors in "The Rifleman."

Then all hell broke loose. Suddenly I heard a noise just ahead, and just as quickly I spotted three VC running away--not more than 25 yards from me. It happened so fast I never really understood what went down, but it must just have been gut instinct and reaction that decided my course of action.

I quickly took off the safety, slipped my rifle to the right hip and unloaded my magazine of 20 rounds on full automatic. Two VC were killed immediately and the third got away, probably because he turned off the trail when the firing began. We counted 16 bullet holes in the two bodies, and we got the rifles they were carrying, a Thompson submachine gun and a Russian K-44. One VC flag was also recovered.

After mopping up, we moved into a rice paddy and immediately drew fire, so apparently the trio we encountered were late for an ambush. We got through the clearing without any consequence and established an overnight post around a home.

That night, part of the platoon was sent out on an ambush, which proved fruitless. However, six of us remained by the hootch area and spent a terrifying night, waiting for morning with visions of being overrun by the enemy. Heightening the suspense was some yelling around 11 pm. The voices were shouting in English, but our ambush group was quiet, and battalion informed us we were the only Americans in the entire sector. The adrenaline was flowing bigtime that night, what with the incident on the trail, the brief ambush and the uncertainty.

The rest of the platoon came back at sunrise, to our immense relief.

Exactly four months later the shit hit the



(Courtesy of Brad Robinson)

GENE DEEGAN
South of Da Nang in 1967.

fan again, but this time I was physically detached from the action, although mentally and actively involved. By this time I had moved from being a basic grunt who never really was a rifleman--despite my 0311 MOS--to being a radioman. I've always loved to talk, and I figured I could be more help doing something I knew how to do than flinging misguided lead through the air. I went from squad radioman with the PRC-25 to platoon and then company radio under Captain Gene Deegan when we moved from the Hoi An are to Nui Loc Son.

On that fateful 21 April, Vince Dwyer, the regimental radio operator, asked to take my place on patrol to have a chance to get out in the field and away from our hill. With Capt Deegan's permission, we switched places and Vince went into the boondocks.

Our reinforced company ran smack into a North Vietnamese regiment and suffered huge casualties--I believe 33 were killed and about 80 wounded. Fortunately Vince was okay other than a light wound, but Capt Deegan was seriously wounded. (In fact, I heard Capt Deegan had been killed, and I believed that for many years. Later I met him again--by that time he was a general stationed at Quantico--and we talked about that action, which became known as Operation Union.)

Dwyer stayed on the air back to our base, and I had to relay the awful message back to regiment asking for immediate assistance. We could hear the shooting in the distance and could see the jets roaring past overhead on their missions against the well-protected NVA troops.

After what seemed like hours but was actually much less, 18 Chinook helicopters were spotted coming from Da Nang, some 30 miles to the north. A chill ran down my spine as the sound of the rotor blades began reaching my ears, and every time I hear a chopper today I recall that tragic encounter.

Some fine friends were killed, such as Ed Austin and Dennis Palzawicz and Lieutenant Shelton. Gary Martini, who was killed trying to rescue his fellow squad members--from my original squad--received the Medal of Honor as a result of that effort.

With such heavy casualties, we were sent back to the battalion area within a short period.

Then I was wounded 9 May, shortly after our return to battalion, and spent three weeks on the USS *Sanctuary*. Two Marines were killed by that bouncing bettie and four of us were wounded.

I only lasted with the company two days upon my return because I was hit again on 7 June, with three others getting wounded. This time I was sent back to the World, where I spent nine months recuperating from the wounds.

Even though death was close on both the occasions when I was wounded, those times were not as traumatic for me as the first two incidents I've described. But I will forever wear the scars of my wounds with the pride of doing the best job I could for my country, for the Marine Corps and those I served with--thankful to God that I survived, but always remembering those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in our behalf. §

* * * * *

Wounded Marine Directs Company

DA NANG . . . On April 21, Capt. [Gene A.] Deegan and his Marines [Fox Company, 2/1] were on a company search and clear action which initiated Operation Union in the Quang Tin Province about 25 miles south of Da Nang when a large enemy force was sighted moving thorugh the area.

Capt. Deegan deployed his platoons and directed their advance toward the enemy. The lead platoon was pinned down by heavy mortar, automatic weapons and small arms fire from a well entrenched enemy.

Thirty meters further, the platoon was again pinned down and the captain called in reinforcements and continued to deploy his company.

Then under covering fire, Capt. Deegan ran to different elements of his company and directed their return fire. Moments later he received a serious abdominal wound. Capt. Deegan walked and crawled another 50 meters to set up his command post.

There for several hours, refusing evacuation, he continued to direct his men and brief his subordinates in directing the attack.

*[*Sea Tiger, *22 September 1967, p. 2. Contributed by Paul Stenzel.]*

The LT Believed Us

By William LaVonture

*O*peration Hastings, the latter part of July 1966. A hill someplace on Razorback Ridge, west of the Rockpile. The positions (which were just foxholes) were taking turns going out on LP's. There were three grunts in my hole, Lance Corpōral Kramer, Lance Corporal Dodson, and myself, which comprised our whole 3.5 squad (bazookas). As the light fell, we were ready to head out.

We headed out in a northerly direction. There was an M-60 position on the north side which wasn't very encouraging, since they were known to have itchy trigger fingers. We went about 100 yards and set up on the edge of a B-52 crater. Kramer, even though a LCpl, had been in Nam the longest and had the keenest ears. He thought he heard sling-keepers rattling. There was definite NVA movement around us. Dodson threw a frag grenade, Kramer popped a green flare, and I started firing to my right flank. We leapfrogged, firing, till we got back to our position, praying the M-60 wouldn't open up on us.

When we got back to our holes, the Marines occupying them went back to their own positions. Kramer was squad leader at the time and went up to the CP, to tell the LT what had happened. A while later Kramer came back and said the LT believed us, but we were going back out at 2200 hours. It turned out the last two previous LP's had come back in at 2000 hours, the same time we had (an LP is supposed to stay out all night and come in in the morning).

When it came time to go out again, we were scared shitless. We knew we had heard movement and that if we got caught between our perimeter and the NVA, we could easily be chopped meat. At 2200 hours, our LT walked down to our position. I can still remember how he was standing with his hands on his hips when all of a sudden the NVA opened up with automatic weapons around the whole perimeter. Rounds were zipping all over the place. I can honestly say it was the first time I was happy we got hit. We looked up at the LT and one of us said, "You better get back to your hole, sir. You might get hit!" §

"Soldiers must obey in all things. They may and do laugh at foolish orders, but they nevertheless obey, not because they are blindly obedient, but because they know that to disobey is to break the backbone of their profession."

--Sir Charles Napier (1782-1853)

Some Godforsaken Hill DMZ Way August 1966

By Steve "Ski" Krasowski

I had just opened a can of C's when this chopper zooms in and discharges two inappropriately clothed personnel. First of all, let me say this doesn't make me too happy: for one thing, if it hadn't been for that chopper, at that moment I wouldn't be sitting by the LZ with a can of beans 'n franks full of dirt. For another, besides the dirt the chopper hasn't brought much: no water, no ammo, no chow or mail. Just two guys in civilian clothes.

The first gentleman coming towards me is tall, thin, wearing civilian cammie shorts, boots, a white- and rose-colored sport shirt, plus a British cammie bush cover. Gentleman #1 also has at least four different cameras hanging about his body, along with mucho film containers.

Gentleman #2 is medium height, medium build, and wearing light-colored civilian shorts, a light-colored civilian sports shirt, and a distinct black patch over one eye. Gentleman #2 is carrying an onion.

Because I happen to be the closest to the LZ, the tall, thin gentleman wants me to tell him who is in charge. I am still not happy with these two because I'm not crazy about beans, franks 'n dirt, but I ask Gentleman #2, "Who may you be, sir?" He tells me he is Mr. Blackman from the *London Times*, and--pointing his thumb over his shoulder--Mr. Dayan (Gentleman #2) has permission from division to visit the area. He (Mr. Blackman from the *London Times*) has tagged along to take photos, if need be.

Lieutenant Krulak (now Major General Krulak) is in charge of G Company at this time. And on a knoll near the LZ is the CP group, plus the arty, the FO, the radio operator, myself and my radio operator. At this point I yell up to the LT to put out the best china--we have company for chow.

By now most of the CP group has come over and formed a semi-circle around our two guests, and they all follow as I lead the two gentlemen up the hill to introduce them to "the man in charge." The LT disperses the troops and says, "Sergeant Ski, it's OK for you and your RO to join us." Which we do.

Gentleman #2--the one with the patch over his eye--introduces himself as Moshe Dayan. The LT then asks me if I have a spare can of C's (Mr. Dayan has his own spoon and John Wayne can opener). Then Mr. Dayan offers me half of the onion he is carrying. Naturally, I accept.

While we're chowing down and the LT and Mr. Dayan are holding a conversation, I can't help but notice my young Southern radio operator staring at Mr. Dayan. Then, out of the blue, my RO says to Moshe Dayan, "What you-all got under the patch?" With this, and without blinking his good eye, Mr. Dayan lifts his patch to reveal an empty eye socket.

My RO, not being at all set back by this unnatural display, says, "Oh, where'd you-all lose the eye?"

Replacing his patch, Mr. Dayan explains that he lost it in one of his Israeli wars.

Come to think of it, it's about this time that the LT requests I go check out the concentrations I had set up around the hill, specifying that I make sure to take my RO with me.

Several years later I had all intentions to send this statesman from Israel an onion along with a thank-you note. Unfortunately, as life has it, Mr. Dayan passed away before I could accomplish my intent. §



(Contributed by Steve Krasowski)

HOW I SPENT MY EASTER VACATION

Steve Krasowski on Hill 674 in April of 1966. Just south of DMZ and west of Dong Ha.

The Best

By Hank Van Larrhoven

*M*y first firefight--this was in June of 1966--was spent near Gunny Eggleston. I helped carry him out after the fight. I'll never forget his brains falling on my boots. I served with Wood, Van Court, Moody, Harvitson, Cannon, Moss and Eliot at first. Then this crazy LT came along who requested mast with the Commandant so he could leave his communication platoon and become assigned to a grunt platoon. He wound up with my platoon, first platoon of Hotel Company. We became the best communication/grunt platoon in the Marines. I watched him grow quickly into the finest LT anyone could serve under. His name is Neil Gaughan.

One night about ten years ago, I woke up in the middle of the night remembering an ambush we had encountered. Everybody had jumped in a trench. I was carrying a radio and was jammed in some bushes. Gaughan and Larson jumped up and ripped me free as I watched a grease gun pounding towards me. They saved my life. What bothered me most when I awakened was that I never said "thanks" to them.

I put Vietnam out of my mind over the years. Lately, I asked myself why I did this, because I served with the **best**. I wish that our friends who didn't make it could now be around to remember. We are very lucky. §



(Courtesy of Tim Dunn)

SOME OF THE BEST

Neil Gaughan directing some of his Marines in a 60mm mortar setup south of the La Tho River in April of 1967.

In Indian Country

By Ray Hannon

I got to Vietnam in September of 1966 and left 13 May, 1969. I was with 2/1 my first tour--with Hotel 2/1, with Lieutenant Matthew McKnight and afterwards Lieutenant Phillip Messer. Then I was with First Recon from December of 1967 to September 1968. Thirty-three months; I extended three times with 30-day leaves between the tours. And I was in infantry companies all that time--90% of my time was spent in the field. That's why all my years there run together, all the things that happened.

When Lt McKnight was our platoon commander, three or four of us went out in a killer team. We didn't have a Corpsman with us, just the three or four of us. We each wore Ho Chi Minh slippers, shorts, no shirt, bandoliers, and a floppy hat. We went out with the patrol wearing our uniforms, then we'd strip, get dressed like that, and when the patrol moved out we'd take off in another direction from them. We did that south of Da Nang, back over there where there was that old railroad track and the bridge that was blown. We'd go into the villes back over there. The rest of the patrol set up across from the railroad tracks--back towards Hill 55--so that if we got into trouble we could run back over there and they'd give us supporting fire. We had quite a bit of luck doing that. It was dangerous, but three or four of us were stupid enough to do it, so they let us.

The New Guy

The platoons would go to regiment every once in a while; they'd rotate--one out to the island, one to the bridge, and one to the regiment. We were in regiment one time, and we were running patrols that went up to the little bridge, and then right before we got there we'd take back off to the south--into the wood line--and then skirt up close to Highway 1. We were running a patrol back through there that was going to go back down and then come back up and into what I guess you'd call the west gate of the battalion, next to where the mortar platoon was down the road there.

We were going out there one night, and we probably got about 100 or 150 yards into that wood line when what I think was a tank battalion over that bridge and on that hill opened up on something down on the hillside where the river was. The patrol hit the ground as soon as the shooting started, and then we figured out they weren't shooting at us. So we got up, and just as we got up the new man got hit in the head. He'd only been with us about three or four days, and I don't remember his name--though I know everybody else's that was in the squad with us at the time.

We never did know where that bullet came from. The shooting had stopped, and I guess it was just a ricochet that came off the river down there and smacked him in the head. It was my squad that was out that night, and we had three ARVN's with us at the time. It took us 40 minutes to get a medevac for him, and he was out cold the whole time. I don't know if he was killed. After we called in the medevac chopper, I never did hear from him, and nothing came back to the platoon.

The Paymaster

There was a field near regiment back towards the river, and an old schoolhouse was over there. Our platoon was set up there running patrols in the area. One time I was running a patrol and I guess I'd gone about a

click and a half to the west when I motioned for everybody to get down. Then I stood up to get to my radioman and to call in "check point two" or something like that back to the platoon. Just then, out of the corner of my eye, I caught this gook standing up, and I spun around and shot him.

He had two M-26 grenades, a smoke grenade, and a bandanna on his head. He was going to throw one of those M-26 grenades at us--he might have tried to throw both of them. He was only about 25 yards away, by himself as far as we could tell. We swept through the area and couldn't find anything--except him.

That happened the first day the platoon was there. We had just moved into the area. That night was quiet and then the next day, in the afternoon, we went out on another patrol and we found another dead gook out there. He had been there a long time, because he was dried up. He'd died while he was planting a mine and it had exploded on him. I remember that because Tim Vicalvi took the guy's right arm back to the platoon CP with us. We had this new guy in machine guns, and he came up and Tim had put that dang arm up his sleeve and he stuck that dead hand out to meet that new guy. I remember that new guy hollering and running away.

The way we set up, my squad had the west side of the school house; third squad, which was Corporal Dav Shauma's squad, had the north side; east side was first squad; and machine guns and rockets had the south side. The CP was in the middle there with the school house.

That night about 2:00 or 2:30, we heard a full magazine of fire coming real fast from the north side where Shauma was. And we could tell it was an M-16 (I believe this was right after we got the M-16's). Nothing else happened that night, and the next morning we swept through the area, and we found this guy that had fallen back into some bushes. He was a paymaster--he had a bunch of money and some MPC notes. Shauma had gotten him.

Shauma was a real case in his own self. He was a first lieutenant in the Israeli Army. He couldn't speak good English, but this is the story he managed to tell us: He was sent for jungle warfare training; he went to Marine Corps boot camp; he came out of boot camp a corporal.

We got him brand new. He'd only been there in country about three or four weeks. But that man was smart, he knew his stuff. He always talked about Israel and life on the kibbutz where he lived outside of the Golan Heights. When second platoon got ambushed running a convoy down Highway 1, Shauma got wounded, twice--once in the arm and once in the leg. So he never came back to us after that.

Purple Heart

The old CAP was the battalion area where you had to walk across a little old bitty bridge at the river. They had one little old bamboo pole up there and you walked across. One time we crossed that river and we swung back to the east. The platoon CP was setting up back on the other side of the river and my squad was running down through there. Most of the bamboo stuff had been cleared out, but there was some pretty high grass, and a VC jumped up as pretty as everything, right out of that grass. He jumped up and hurled a grenade.

Well, the grenade landed between me and David Oberle, the M-79 man, who was in front of me. When it landed, I just kicked it--I just swung around and kicked it straight back towards that guy who threw it. It went probably 20 or 30 feet. There was one little bamboo pole left sticking up there, just one. And the thing hit it and bounced back. In the meantime I was diving away from it, but it cut shrapnel up and down both legs and on my right hand. The whole thing didn't go off, only the blast cap. I spent two days in the NSA hospital. I was gone two days and then was back. That was my Purple Heart.

Another Strange Thing

When I first got to Vietnam my unit was about ten miles south of the battalion area, down around an old French tower, an old, tall, brick tower that the French had built. This was just about a week before Operation Independence. We were on patrol. Our squad

leader was Sergeant McKowan, and my fire team leader was Corporal Anzalone.

Anyway, we were on this patrol and Lance Corporal Roy Stevenson was in the first fire team, and they called him back, and he and Anzalone and McKowan were going to run across this rice paddy--there were four of them laid out. Well, at the time when Stevenson got about halfway up to them, he stepped on one hell of a mine. I mean, black smoke boiled up all around this man. Even McKowan's and Anzalone's faces got covered with smoke. But all that went off, I guess, was the firing pin. It never set the mine off. Nobody was hurt. That was a strange thing. The way we were all bunched up there, and as big as that thing was, I figure it would have taken out the whole squad.

Operation Independence

On Operation Independence we provided security for Captain Banks. He kept us back to provide security while the other platoons did most of the fighting. But our squad did get two kills on that operation. Anzalone killed one, and a guy from New York whose name I can't think of got a kill, too.

Lieutenant Doughty got wounded on Operation Independence--shot through the leg. Lt McKnight eventually took over. Me and Mr. McKnight didn't see head to head. I liked him and we got along fine, but he had his way of doing things and I had mine. He knew how I felt. I thought he rushed into things. He liked to rush into things, and I didn't like to rush into things. I'm one of these guys who'd always prefer to check an area out, look it over. McKnight said I always moved too slow. But until Operation Independence, my squad had lost less people than any of the other squads had.

I never did disobey the LT, but I moved at my own speed.

Other Patrols

There was a brick well in the yard of where a brick house had been. The house had been blown down, but the well was still there, sticking up in the yard. There were two gates going to this well. One time our patrol moved through there, and then a few minutes later we moved back through again. And in the time we had been gone--probably thirty minutes--they'd booby-trapped that well, on both sides. We had filled our canteens there on the way through the first time, and when we came back through again--the second time--we found that they'd booby-trapped the well. With Coke cans--a couple of Coke cans.

We'd gone through this one village two or three times. They had a double water buffalo pen there next to a house and there was always just one water buffalo there, and it always stayed in the pen that was away from the house. I'd run a patrol through there I bet fifty times. One day we went through there and I looked down at the ground and it looked like to me that the ground in that empty pen was high, but I'd never seen that dang buffalo in it. So I went over to *mamasan* and told her to get the buffalo out of that pen. She said, "*Tao khang biet, tao khang biet.*" She was saying she didn't understand, so I grabbed this little boy and pulled him over there and told him to get the buffalo down the trail.

We got out of the way while he took the buffalo away, and then I took a block of TNT--I think we had TNT at the time, a green block with metal trim--and I put a fuse in it (an M-1 fuse lighter). Everybody got out of the way, and I pitched it over there. And when it blew up, we found a tunnel down there in that pen where that buffalo hadn't stayed, the one close to the house. We called the engineers, and they came and had a couple of guys go down in there, and they found medical supplies and all kinds of stuff in that tunnel. When we blew it, half the village sunk down in there. It was a good size tunnel. And that village was "secure." The ARVN told us that that one was secure.

I can still say exactly where this ville was. When you left the tower and turned south it was the second ville you came to. It was lax duty there. The ARVN families lived down in there, because everybody thought that was a safe area.

A Good Way to Make a Profit

When I went on R&R in Japan, I met this Navy E-9 who was with the patrol at the docks at Da Nang, down at the tower. And he told me that they'd trade for an AK or an enemy helmet or anything like that we could get plus an enemy flag--for that they'd trade exactly one pallet of San Miguel beer, delivered. A pallet was 42 cases. And *those* we could sell. Now, this is what we did with the money. We divided it up and gave some to people in my squad going on R&R; and it seemed like David Oberle's widow was having a hard time, so we sent her money; and some of the other people needed money for other reasons.

I got the red and yellow cloth and took it over to the battalion seamstress. And while she was supposed to be doing my clothes, she'd make me a flag while I waited. Two or three of my guys would stand around and guard.

We'd sell what we could in the battalion area. And then I'd send two or three guys to Da Nang, up where the new guys came in, and they would trade the MPC's for US currency.

That's how we'd get greenbacks, and then we'd send those out in letters. No problem. We sold about twelve or fifteen of those flags. For one flag and a belt buckle, we got a pallet of San Miguel beer. For another flag I got a half a beef, a case of fruit cocktail in those big gallon cans, a case of peaches in those big gallon cans, and peanut butter. Plus I had a three-quarter ton truck bring all this back to battalion area for me.

They never knew the flags weren't real. What you'd do, you'd get one made and then you'd carry it around with you for a while. You'd get it dirty, get some blood on it.

I traded those flags to this big ol' heavy-set E-9 from the Navy that I met on the plane to Japan. §



(Courtesy of Ross Liscum)

NVA FLAG

"Rebel," Ross Liscum, and Darrel Golay. "One of eight NVA flags that we found around us after an ambush. I'll never forget that night." --Ross Liscum

The Only Draft Dodger to Be Killed in Vietnam

By R.J. Smith

*I*n February of 1966 I was assigned to an outpost called Mutter Crow, northwest of Phu Bai. A two-man forward air-control team was sent out there for a month at a time. While there, I received my draft notice. I couldn't believe it--drafted?! Should I go to Canada? What *should* I do? I sought advice from a higher authority, the company gunny.

I went to Gunny's hootch with the letter in my hand and a sad look on my face, and I told him I had to go back to the States. He thought my mother had died. I told him it was more serious than that. My country needed me. I had been drafted. Gunny obviously did not share my strong patriotic ideals and told me to get out of his tent. Didn't want any damn draft evader slinking around his area.

It rained most of the time we were up there, and resupply helo's couldn't get in, so we did not receive any more mail. When we got back to Phu Bai I had a letter from my folks saying that the draft board had been calling for me. My mother did not care for what was going on in Nam and how the draft was being handled, so she did not tell them where I was. I don't ever remember hearing my mother use foul language, but she explained to the draft board that they could get screwed, they were not going to draft her son.

The draft board kept trying, but she held her ground: they were definitely not going to draft her son. Several weeks later the sheriff paid my folks a visit. He tried to explain that we all had a duty to our country. My mother gave him a list of wealthy people who had sons my age. If they went, she said, so would I.

After a heated debate, the sheriff gave up and said that I was indeed in serious trouble, and a warrant would be issued for my arrest. Mother relented somewhat then and made him promise that if she revealed my whereabouts he would bring me home. Yes, he said, he would bring me home and there would be no trouble. So she told him where I was. She wrote me that I could expect Sheriff Johnson any day to bring me home. He never did, and she never forgave him. She chuckled about that till the day she died.

In February of 1967 I extended my tour for six months and went home on leave in March. The night before I left, we received some mortars and had some wounded to evacuate. I was assisting the Corpsmen with a Marine who had taken a lot of shrapnel in the face and head. There wasn't much that could be done except reassure him that the choppers were on the way. When the birds arrived, we carried the wounded out and loaded them on the medevac.

The next morning when I got ready to leave for the States I noticed my billfold was missing. I went down to the company office to get a new ID card. The clerk told me the card would be ready soon and mentioned that he also was leaving for the States. A short time later I went back to the office, picked up my orders and ID card, and was on my way.

Two days later I was trying to get into the NCO Club in Okinawa (I was a corporal) and discovered that I had been given someone else's ID card by mistake--and a lance corporal's at that. Apparently my new card was still on the company clerk's desk in Nam.

Two more days and I was home, where it was snowing and cold. I had been home about three or four hours when we received a call from the USMC office in Minneapolis asking directions to my parents' farm. They intended to visit them. I thought this highly unusual and spoke to the caller--a captain, I believe. I identified myself as Corporal R. J. Smith and asked if I could assist.

There was a period of silence on the line, and then the captain asked if my service number was 2110186. I said it was and asked if there had been a mistake on my orders or something like that. He said that he was very glad that I was home, because that meant he wouldn't have to explain to my parents that I had been killed in Vietnam.

Apparently my billfold had fallen out of my shirt pocket onto the poncho of the wounded Marine, and several days later when he died the hospital notified my battalion of my death. My battalion didn't think the hospital had the right person, but my new ID card was still on the clerk's desk (and the clerk that filled it out had gone back to the States). The company listed me as MIA, the hospital ship had me listed as WIA and KIA. Thus, the only draft dodger to be killed in Vietnam.

I sincerely hope this incident did not cause additional anguish to the parents of the Marine who died. §

The Cock-eyed Gunny from Company "F"

By J.E. Page

I first met Gunnery Sergeant Joseph NMI (no middle initial) Thurmond shortly after joining 2/1 as S-3 (operations officer) in January 1965. Thurmond introduced himself as Foxtrot's company gunny. He wanted a preview of the battalion's coming month's training schedule as it pertained to his company. Since the turn of the century when Smedley Butler was a second lieutenant, it has been a Marine Corps tradition that the company gunnery sergeant is also the company training NCO.

For the next ten weeks of the special training schedule for those battalions that had reorganized after a WesPac deployment, Joe Thurmond would pay me a call in the S-3 shop to keep posted on how the battalion training schedule would affect his company. Of 2/1's five companies, Thurmond's was the only one whose gunny I met during my six months as the battalion S-3.

Thurmond's physical appearance was what you would have expected of a gunnery sergeant--he was a well-groomed, lean and mean Marine. But this man's most striking feature was his eyes. The right one was normal, but the other eye, instead of looking straight ahead, focused off to the left at a 45-degree angle. Joe's crooked eye must have been his best, because it was the one he used when he turned his head slightly to converse with others. Yes, the gunny had his own unique view of the world--the troopers of Foxtrot were convinced that Thurmond was always watching them no matter which way his head was turned.

I was impressed with Thurmond's professionalism and commented on it to his company commander, Captain Lavan, who told me that Gunny had received meritorious promotions to both staff and gunnery sergeant at his last duty station. Such recognition was extremely rare in the period between the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Many years later at Camp Pendleton, Sergeant Major Leland "Crow" Crawford, who later became *the* Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps in the 1980's, filled me in on the other accomplishments of Gunny Thurmond at the Recruit Depot in San Diego, where Gunny had received his below-the-zone promotions.

When I supervised Foxtrot Company's 24-hour tactical test at the end of the 12-week training cycle, I got a close look at Gunny Thurmond in the field, where he showed me the highest level of leadership. Using the same techniques that produced numerous honor platoons as a drill instructor, Gunny was a master in motivating the young Marines of Foxtrot Company.

Whatever the leadership situation demanded, Thurmond was there with the proper solution. When a trooper was down on himself, Joe was like an older brother in giving a pat on the back and words of encouragement. If a Marine had a personal problem, the gunny became the father confessor who assisted the young man in overcoming, or at least coping with, his anxiety. Should a trooper require a trip to the woodshed, Joe could lock onto the unruly youth and really intimidate him with that menacing gimlet eye.

All in all, Joe Thurmond was the

greatest practicing psychologist I've ever encountered. Sure, he manipulated people, myself included, but it was always in the best interest of the Corps--isn't that the essence of leadership?

A few days before First Marines received their deployment-to-Vietnam orders in July of 1965, I was replaced as 2/1's operations officer by a major, and in turn replaced Capt Lavan as CO of Foxtrot Company. On the night of our departure from Camp Pendleton, we had to wait, sitting on our seabags and foot lockers, until midnight so we could sneak out of camp and not disclose our departure--as if we could keep it a secret that several thousand Marines and their families were leaving town. While we were standing by for the transportation to San Diego, Gunny Thurmond asked for my assistance in a personal matter. Another company commander had asked Joe to address his black Marines, and Gunny felt that this was inappropriate. I was not sure of the motivation behind this situation, but it seemed to me the other captain was treating Gunny somewhat like an Uncle Tom, so I informed the captain to keep his hands off Foxtrot's gunny. Blacks had a difficult role to play in the Corps in 1965. Thurmond was the senior black Marine in 2/1, and as such was a role model for all blacks in the battalion, but he viewed his primary responsibility as the *Company Gunnery Sergeant of Company F*--rightly so, I thought.

The trucks arrived about midnight, and 2/1 began its six-year Vietnam odyssey. We were originally scheduled to stop in Hawaii, but since a previous Marine battalion had raised so much hell in the "Islands of Paradise," the US Navy decided to refuel the convoy at sea and proceed directly to the Far East. After 19 days of riding the troop transport *Bexar* (pronounced *"Bear"*), the First Marines landed in Okinawa, where the Second Battalion was given a week ashore to train and re-embark as the Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force. We had a week of individual training conducted by Third Marine Division personnel who had served "down south" (as they called Vietnam), which gave us a breather ashore before going back to sea again.

On our last day in Okinawa we were reviewed by the 3rdMarDiv's commanding general. The battalion formed up with companies in column and at normal intervals. When the general began trooping the line, the word was passed to open ranks. Normally, units open ranks for inspection prior to the arrival of the inspecting officer, but for some unknown reason it wasn't done this time. There was mass confusion as H&S Company shuffled around to get its ranks opened for inspection, but after about five minutes they were reformed at open but non-uniform intervals between the ranks. Meanwhile, the general continued his inspection.

Echo Company wisely lined up rank-by-rank on H&S Company. Then I tried to open ranks of Foxtrot with one command. In a loud voice I ordered, "Open Ranks--march," and the company marched forward to the proper open-ranks intervals. The problem was that we were not evenly lined up on Echo Company, so in parade-ground tones I ordered, "About face!" and marched them back to their original positions. Puzzled by the failure to gain my objective, I assumed (Ass-U-Me) that my commands had not been clearly heard, so I raised the volume of my voice so it was loud enough to be heard by a regiment of 5,000 Marines, and repeated the maneuver. The results were the same as the first time.

Meanwhile the Golf and Hotel commanders didn't wait for me to get my act together and quietly began opening up for inspection, one rank at a time. As I was stubbornly about to follow the advice of that wise old proverb on how to resolve difficult situations--"try, try, try again"--Major W. F. Saunders, the battalion executive officer, showed

up at my position and said, "Jim! Stop this damn close-order drill and quietly get lined up on Echo Company."

It was at this point that a very red-faced company commander called upon his gunny for assistance. Thurmond came to my rescue and accomplished the task quickly and efficiently. Twenty-eight years after the fact, I'm not sure if my "open ranks" order was the proper command for a company in column, but even if it was, I could have saved myself a lot of embarrassment if I had called upon Gunny in the first place.

About twenty minutes later the general began his inspection of Foxtrot Company. He moved along the ranks at a brisk rate, stopping to talk to several men in each platoon along the way. Before long the inspection party arrived at the last rank where the company staff was located. The general stopped in front of Joe Thurmond and asked him a few questions. The gunny, like all good Marines, had his head forward, facing the inspecting officer. Thurmond stood ramrod-straight at the position of attention, but he couldn't keep that crooked left eye from staring off to the port side. The general was probably only a blur, but Joe didn't move his head when answering questions--even though his wayward eyeball was pointing directly at me, who at the time was standing two paces to the right of the inspecting officer.

After our short stay in Okinawa, the battalion embarked upon the LPH *Iwo Jima* and set sail with the other ships of the Seventh Fleet Special Landing Force. Our battalion was assigned a series of amphibious landings along the coast of South Vietnam. The first two landings were unopposed and we only encountered a little sniper fire.

On the third of these amphibious raids, Golf Company, which was the lead company into the helicopter zone, made contact with the Viet Cong. Golf called for assistance, and a Marine helicopter gunship responded. But a problem developed when the pilot accidently sprayed both friendlies and enemies with machine-gun fire. Foxtrot landed behind Golf and was ordered to push through them and continue the attack. My command group, consisting of about 15 Marines, was moving in column right behind the first platoon. Along the way we came across a wounded Marine and a Corpsman from Golf Company, so I stopped to render assistance in obtaining a helicopter evacuation. In the few minutes it took to get the coordinates radioed back to the ship, I lost contact with the first platoon. Moving swiftly to catch up, I took the right fork of a tiny stream. Unfortunately, the tiny stream soon became a small river and our small command group found itself all alone in Victor Charlie country.

After studying the map and regaining radio contact with the rifle platoons--which were all the way on the other side of the river--I hurriedly moved north, seeking a ford across the river and evasively responding over the radio to battalion headquarters' demands for my location. I would report that some of us were at this coordinates and some of us were at that coordinates, etc. Finally, I resorted to that age-old method of dealing with higher headquarters--I turned the radio off.

In about twenty minutes we came to a wide open rice paddy area where we could cross. I chose to walk upon a rice paddy dike after discovering that the mud was over my knees in the field. We were spread out about five meters apart while crossing an area of about 150 meters. I noticed a few sniper rounds splashing nearby, but was so embarrassed about being cut off from the rest of the company I pushed ahead rapidly. Most of the company headquarters followed my lead, but maybe the snipers got a better bead on the gunny, because about halfway across he jumped off and crawled the rest of the way along the dike. Perhaps with a little false bravado I called out to Thurmond, "Get a hat, Gunny!"--"get a hat" was a popular expression whose meaning was that one should show one's manliness in meeting a challenge.

Shortly after we rejoined the rest of Foxtrot Company, we captured a small Viet Cong medical bunker. I called battalion for a helicopter to evacuate the three prisoners--a wounded man and two women nurses. I was standing at the side of the zone with the prisoners when the chopper arrived and began its descent into a small clearing in a tree-covered area. Since I had a whole company of Marines in the area, it was a real shock when two automatic weapons opened up on the landing zone while the chopper was still about 150 feet in the air.

Bullets were kicking up all around me as I signaled the corporal guiding the helicopter's approach to abort the mission. The dust was swirling so much, I guess the pilot apparently didn't see the wave-off, and the helicopter completed its descent into the landing zone under a hail of fire. With the noisy rotor blades whirling and the dust flying, the troops loaded the wounded man and one of the nurses into the aircraft. The other nurse was going berserk, flailing her arms and legs so wildly the Marine guards couldn't get her into the chopper. Anxious to get this operation completed as soon as possible, I grabbed the nurse by the right breast and left buttocks and pitched her into the helo which then quickly departed.

Amazingly, nobody was hit by all that VC gunfire. A question remains--where was Gunny during all that commotion? I really don't know, but he was smart enough not to be out in the middle of the landing zone with me.

After the third raid, the battalion was ordered to Subic Bay in the Philippines, to get the boat davits repaired on one of the task force transports. Rather than keep the battalion cramped in the holds while the cranes were repaired, Lieutenant Colonel Robert "Battling Bob" Hanifin, Commanding Officer of 2/1, received permission to take us ashore for some field training. Our first asignment was to clear out a section of secondary jungle for a place to pitch our shelter-half tent camp. We also encountered a few cobras that were not too happy about having their homes disturbed.

The field experience gave the S-4 (logistics) a chance to break out the field kitchen and shower unit, which had been in storage since the Korean War. The mess sergeant and his crew did a great job of setting up a field kitchen; however, the showers not only took several days to erect, they spewed water everywhere except out of the shower heads.

The next day I noticed a couple of sailors working on the showers, and by evening--shazam!--2/1 had a fully operational shower unit. It seems that crooked-eye Joe had gone to the CPO (chief petty officers) club and bought a few rounds of cheer for some of the local Seabees.

Near the end of our stay in the Philippines, the battalion made a practice amphibious landing across Subic Bay from the Naval base. It was a good exercise for troops who had been cooped up in troopships for most of the previous three months. After the exercise was over, the landing craft brought us back to the ship for a little cargo-net practice.

While climbing up the nets, one of the Foxtrot Marines lost control of his rifle and helplessly watched as it plunged into the water below. Losing any serialized piece of equipment is always a big deal in the Marine Corps--but to lose one's rifle is unforgivable and results in a formal investigation and reams of paperwork.

When I was informed of the weapon loss, I told the Marine's platoon commander to make a preliminary investigation and report back to me ASAP. After receiving a quick review of the details, I prepared to report our misfortune to the battalion headquarters. At that point, Gunny gave me a sly-eyed look and asked if I could wait until tomorrow to make the report. I was puzzled, but quickly agreed. The next morning one of the troopers said I was wanted on the flight deck. When I reached the edge of

the flight deck, the gunny pointed to a small boat and a man wearing a diver's helmet who was about to descend into the water next to the ship. A few minutes later the diver resurfaced with a stick-shaped object in his hand. Shazam! Foxtrot's crafty magician had pulled another hat trick, but instead of a rabbit he delivered a very rusty, but still serviceable, M-14 rifle.

On our last night in Subic, I went into the infamous town of Olongapo with the gunny and a few of the platoon sergeants and guides. Traveling by jitney, we made our rounds of the nightspots of that lively town. A jitney is a Filipino taxi consisting of a converted jeep containing a truck bed with benches--and vividly painted in the wildest colors and designs. On one of our trips from Club Wahoo to the Den of Iniquity, our jitney was stopped by a local cop. An argument developed in the middle of the street--while other vehicles whizzed by--between the policeman and our driver. After a while, the cop told us passengers to get off the jitney. We asked the driver what was going on. He said, "He's taking me to jail." It seems that the driver had failed to renew his monthly permit and was being apprehended.

On previous visits to the Philippines as a sea-going Marine, I had learned that one could change official decisions if enough pesos were offered. Right there in the middle of a busy street, a half-dozen slightly inebriated Marines began bartering with the police officer. After several minutes of gesturing and haggling, we struck a deal. I'm not sure how much we put in the pot to bail out the jitney driver, but it must have been plenty, because many years later Thurmond referred to that night in Olongapo as "the night we bought the jitney."

The Special Landing Force left Subic for the short trip to Manila Bay, where we transferred to another ship, the LPH *Valley Forge*. After departing the Philippines, we headed back to stand-by position off the coast of South Vietnam. Our next amphibious attack occurred in Operation Harvest Moon, during which Foxtrot stepped into a real firestorm. Harvest Moon was the first blood-letting in a series of violent combat actions experienced by 2/1 in the Vietnam War.

About an hour after landing in a really hot zone in Quang Ngai Province, I was shot through the chest with a bullet from a .50-caliber machine gun. For the next five or six hours, while I underwent many periods of unconsciousness and the company was pinned down by heavy machine-gun and mortar fire in an open rice paddy, Gunny assumed command of Foxtrot Company. Until the rest of 2/1 could come to our rescue, Thurmond diligently performed his duties in a professional manner under very stressful conditions. It is worthy to note that the gunny did not needlessly expose himself to enemy fire as his company commander had done that fateful day.

Due to the adverse monsoon conditions, I and about 70 other wounded Marines were not evacuated until the following morning. Unfortunately, several wounded Marines didn't survive the long night in the rain.

After a brief exam by doctors in Que Son, I was flown back to the *Valley Forge* where a Navy surgical team performed successful chest surgery. Two days later Joe Thurmond and scores of other Foxtrot troopers were sent back to the ship with a diagnosis of immersion foot--a condition where the skin of severely soaked feet becomes abraded and bloody.

I didn't see that cock-eyed Marine again until eight years later when I returned to Camp Pendleton as Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion, First Marines. Later, at my change-of-command and retirement ceremony on 1 June 1973, I was privileged to have Captain Joseph NMI Thurmond, USMC, as one of my invited guests. "Get a hat," Joe, and see if you can top this tale. §

TAOR '67

By Robert Bradley Robinson

*M*y name is Robert Bradley Robinson--also known as "Brad" or "Robbie" to many of the people that I have known throughout the years I served in the Marine Corps. I served in the Second Battalion, First Marines in Vietnam from September of 1966 to October of 1967. I participated in operations around the Da Nang area--Operations Lafayette, Yale, Brown, Calhoun, Elliot and Shelbyville, to name a few.

This was not my first tour of duty in Vietnam. In 1961 I was sent into Vietnam as a staff sergeant on patrol duty for one week as sort of an on-the-job training. It seems like the powers-that-might-be knew that we were going to be going in there, and they wanted to get as many qualified officers and staff NCO's familiar with the country as possible.

Even though I'd been there once before, when I arrived in Vietnam I wasn't quite prepared for the oppressive heat and the humidity, the dust and the godawful smell.

I was provided transportation to first regimental headquarters south of Da Nang. I spent the night at regimental headquarters, where they informed me that I'd be assigned to Second Battalion, First Marines--along with two other new second lieutenants, both mustangs, who had come over on the plane with me from the States. These lieutenants were Second Lieutenant Art Garcia, whom I'd served with on two previous tours and knew quite well, and Second Lieutenant James Cochran, whom I'd also served with previously.

The Second Battalion, First Marines command area was located near Phong Luc in the Da Nang area of Quang Nam. Our tactical area of responsibility consisted of a large area around the base camp bordered on the west by railroad tracks, on the east by the ocean, on the north by the Song Cau Do (River), and on the south by by Highway 4.

There were actually two roads into the battalion area. One, not often used, was at the edge of our western boundary (the railroad tracks) and led directly to regiment. We had to sweep the roads every morning, because the VC would go in and plant mines overnight. And you could always count on snipers at the time the road sweeps were being conducted.

The bridge at the crossing of the Cau Do River and Highway 1 was one of the major responsibilities of the battalion. The bridge was under constant seige by the Viet Cong, and the 2/1 company responsible for its security at any given time rotated its platoons there periodically. (The responsibility for bridge security as a whole was rotated throughout the battalion.) The bridge was eventually blown by VC action.

Upon my arrival at battalion, and after interviews and introductions, I was assigned as the assistant operations officer. The operations section was usually headed by a major and ordinarily consists of a captain as the assistant with one other officer assistant, one senior enlisted master gunnery sergeant, and two or three miscellaneous clerks. The major, myself (as his assistatnt), and the battalion OP chief were the three key personnel to the operations in the battalion during that period. Maynard, the OP chief, and myself were probably the two most reliable sources of continuity during the period of my 13-month tour of duty. I went through something like eight operation officers, and I think there were nine or ten battalion commanders. I always had the suspicion that the Marine Corps was putting people in as battalion commmanders merely so they'd have

the experience in their qualifications records. It seemed to me very few of the battalion commanders stayed there very long.

One that did stay, however, and whom I was quite proud to have served with, was Lieutenant Colonel Archie Van Winkle, who like myself was a mustang, a veteran of the Korean War--but I did not, like Archie Van Winkle, have the Medal of Honor.

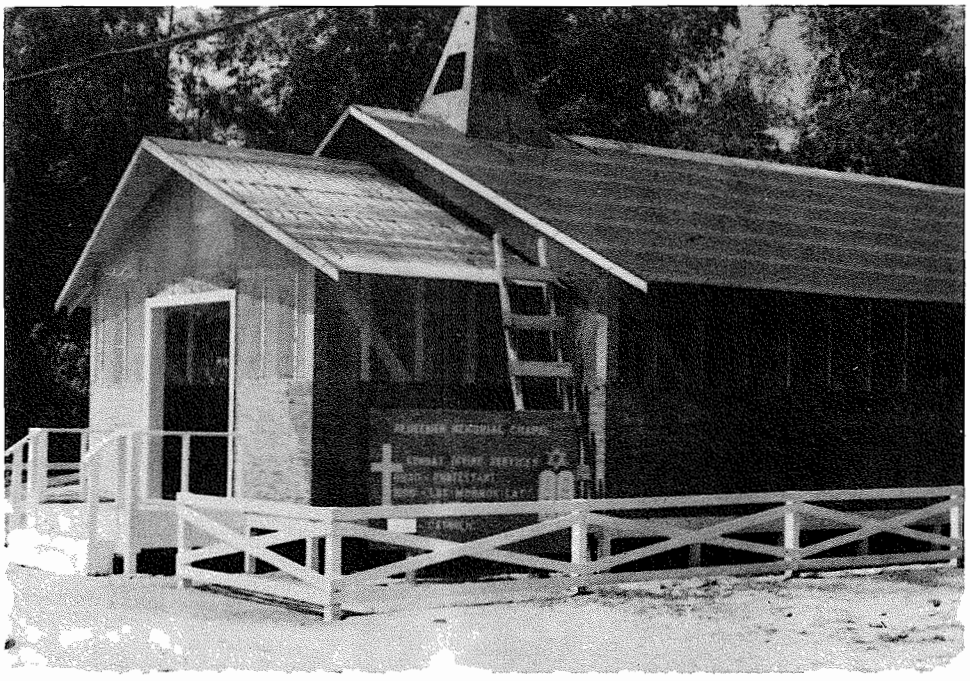
We had another mustang as an officer--a battalion commander at one point--Lieutenant Colonel Donabedien. He had won the Navy Cross as a machine gunner in the battle for Guadalcanal, I think, or one of the other early World War II battles.

Company commanders of the companies E, F, G and H within the battalion were Tom Pratt with Echo, Gene Deegan with Fox Company, John Valance with Golf Company and Ed Banks with Hotel Company. (Today, Gene Deegan and John Valance are both major generals.)

The bivouac, or compound area, for Second Battalion, First Marines was less than a half-mile across and was surrounded by triple-strand barbed wire concertina, with a gate along the main road which was manned usually by sentries in the day and by machine gun positions at night. The troops would enter and leave the compound through various passageways through the concertina.

Within the battalion area we had all the facilities for a normal village: a mess hall, an officers and staff NCO's club, an enlisted club, a movie theater, and a building that was one of my favorites--one that was built by the Marines themselves--a beautiful chapel constructed of plywood and screen that had varnished pews and was occupied generally 24 hours a day by someone. The combat operations center where I served most of the time necessary to my performance of duty was a heavily constructed log bunker completely surrounded and roofed with sandbags. I always thought that it might survive a direct hit from an artillery round. I'm glad we didn't have the opportunity to test that out.

I think it was our southern boundary, Highway 4, that was the infamous road where the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)



(Courtesy of Brad Robinson)

Redeemer Memorial Chapel south of Da Nang, built by 2/1 Marines.

troops had gone on strike at one time in early 1966 and had abandoned all their vehicles--vehicles that were loaded with M-16's, anti-personnel mines, and various other munitions and weaponry. Naturally these fell into the hands of the VC. We paid for that horrible mistake for years to come with many, many lost limbs and lives.

There were several hot spots within our area of operations that provided a lot of action, resulting in a lot of VC and NVA troops being killed as well as taking their toll of Marines. One of the hot spots that I'll never forget was in Echo Company's TAOR, La Tho Bac 1, 2, and 3, directly west of our battalion area and south towards the Song Thanh Quit River. This was primarily Tom Pratt's area of responsibility. There were some major operations conducted south of there, and the area on the south of the Song Ving Dien River was considered no man's land.

There were several unique things about our operations, and one of these was that we tried to follow congressional direction and win the hearts and minds of the people. I'm convinced that the only way to win the hearts and minds of the people is when you have them by the balls, but we did conduct several operations to aid the villagers. One of these was called a county fair, whereby a company of Marines would completely surround a village by helicopter--an early-dawn or pre-dawn landing--and round up everybody in it, and hold them in a separate compound for two days or so while we treated everybody for various medical problems and interrogated them and searched their homes and their rice bags and the tunnels underneath their homes and so forth.

One of the first operations that I went on was a county fair conducted down by Dong Bang An, and it was a successful operation. We didn't find any weapons, but we did make friends with the villagers--as surprising as it may sound when you round people up, take them away from their home and relocate them to what you'd call a miniature concentration camp.

You also have to feed these people. We'd give them the food, supply them the gear, and they'd fix their own meals their own way. They all slept together in several big tents. This



(Courtesy of Brad Robinson)

Marines of 2/1 hold a county fair south of Da Nang in 1967

was quite a sight to see. They were trying to maintain their lifestyle while being under the custody of the Marines during an operation of a county fair.

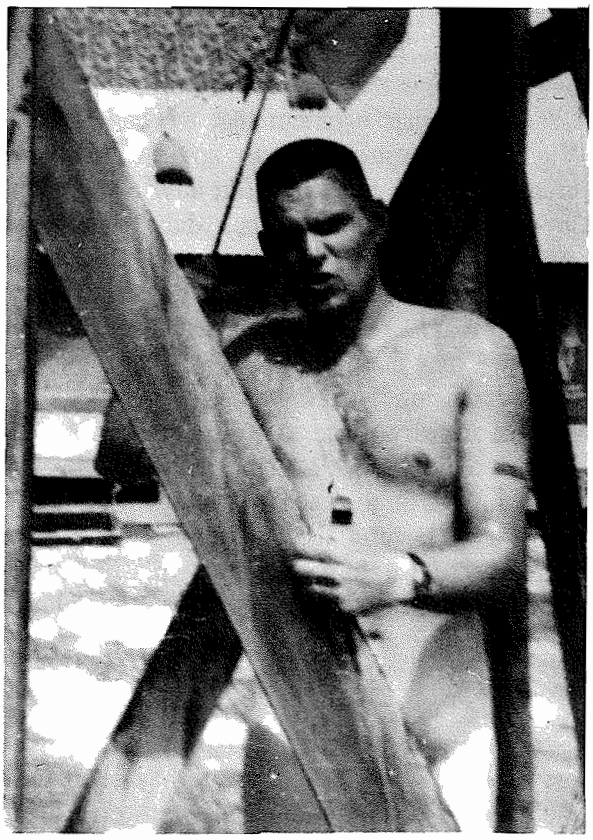
We conducted several search and destroy operations in that same vicinity, and they were always quite successful.

Another interesting aspect of the 2/1 work in the area was the CAP units (Civic Action Platoons). These were Marines that worked directly with the popular forces and actually lived in the villages with the people. We had several of these units, and it took a particular kind of individual, a particularly adept Marine, to go out and live with the popular forces in a small squad-sized unit and be away from all the usual sources of military supplies and support.

Meals provided to us in the mess hall under normal operating conditions were pretty good. Having been in the field most of my life in the infantry, I was well aware of and acquainted with both good and bad food in the Marine Corps, and I thought what we had then was quite good compared with the C-rations we had in Korea. The patrol rations weren't that great and they did take an awful lot of water. Water was prized, a very prized possession. All the water in the rice paddies was contaminated, and that which had been treated by the military tasted very highly of chlorine. Most people carried halizone tablets for purification of their water, but there were times when we didn't have that luxury and you had to drink the water straight from the rice paddies, guaranteed to give you diarrhea.

Taking showers and seeing to other necessary personal hygiene was rather hard to do. Most individual units had rigged up some kind of a water can or fuel tank with a hose of some sort so you could at least take a shower and afford that luxury every three or four or five days, depending on your own personal commitment.

A rather humorous aspect of personal hygiene was what we called the heads. Whereas in Korea the ground was hard, not usually very wet, and you could dig holes for an outdoor toilet and put a four-hole lid on top of it and



(Courtesy of Steve Krasowski)
MARINE CLEANING UP HIS ACT
Enlisted shower built by the 81mm mortar platoon. "When in use, nine out of ten times a sniper would ventilate the 55-gallon drum. Before we left this area, sniper was paid back." --Steve "Ski" Krasowski

then bury it when you were through, the wet ground in Vietnam with the monsoons and the rainy season and so forth made that kind of toilet almost impossilbe. What we used were 55-gallon drums cut in half and then each of these halves would form a basin underneath the crappers to catch the human refuse. There were several of these located around the compound, and every morning after a thousand or so Marines had used them (normal strength of the battalion being around twelve hundred), their heavy usage required that the refuse be disposed of. The only way to do this was to use diesel fluid with a very small amount of gas, take the half-drums out of the wooden frame, pour the contents out, put the fluid on it, light it afire. The use of these heads throughout the First Marine Division didn't help make the

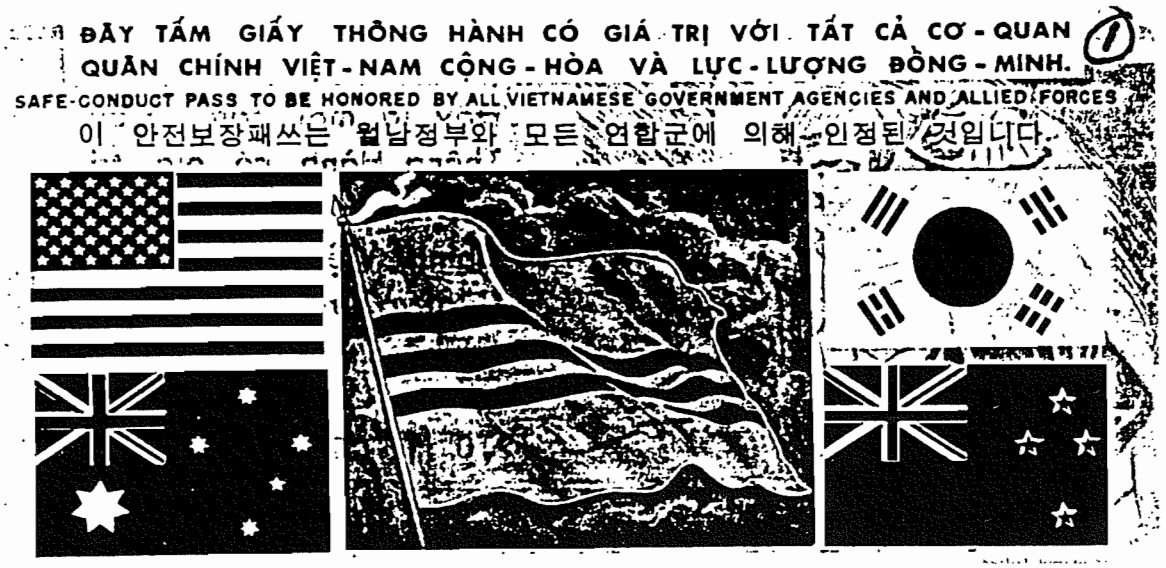
countryside smell any better, that is for sure. And pity the poor sucker that got the duty of having to burn the shitters.

Another problem that we had a lot in Vietnam was critters: snakes, spiders, all kind of creepy crawlers like that. But after a short time in the Nam, combat troops didn't worry so much about the snakes; there were other things more important that could kill you a lot better than a snake. So snakes became more of a nuisance than anything else.

During the rainy season, ants would try to find any dry place that they could. At one time, the nice Argus camera that I brought with me from the States became a nest for ant eggs. So after cleaning it out quite carefully, I managed to get it sealed up in plastic, put it away again, only to find later that it had almost rusted completely.

Aside form my primary billet assignment, one of my duties was to be psychological warfare officer. My team used the county fair operations and interpreters from the ARVN to help with the villagers and try to win their support. About once a week, it would be my job to get aboard a helicopter and distribute pamphlets throughout the area. These would be dropped throughout the countryside, over all the farming areas and the hamlets and the villages alongside our area of operations. One of these we distributed was a *chieu hoi* pamphlet which told VC or ARVN forces how they could surrender if they decided to. I don't think that anyone actually surrendered with a *chieu hoi* pamphlet, unless it was down to the wire and they were about to be killed in a conflict with Marine troops. Then they'd hold up the pamphlet and say "*chieu hoi, chieu hoi,*" hoping that we wouldn't shoot them. I probably distributed several thousand of these once a week.

My first escapade with pamphlet distribution was a real experience, because I wasn't prepared for the backlash of the chopper rotors sending a lot of the pamphlets back into the chopper. They were blowing around inside the cockpit, and the pilots could hardly see where they were going. We had to scrub the mission. I learned later to seat myself right next to the open door of the chopper, grab handfuls of the pamphlets, and throw them out and down to the rear. Just throwing them out didn't really get the job done. You had to throw them to the rear of the helicopter. I kind of enjoyed doing this; it gave me a chance to make a reconaissance-by-air and notice where possible hot spots might be.



(Courtesy of Randy Vance)

CHIEU-HOI PASS

My regular duties within the operations office actually made for a rather high-stress job. In the combat operations center we had radio communications with, I believe, the entire world--and many times I found myself talking on two or three or four radios at once, coordinating activities between two companies and calling for artillery fire or calling for the lifting of artillery fire, and coordinating this with the incoming air strikes from jets, getting the helicopters out of the way so the jets could get in and stopping all fire at the precise point where the medical evacuation helicopter could get in. There were times that this particular activity, with one or two units in the field under fire with casualties, would last for three or four or five hours at a time before it finally died down. And during that time you didn't have time for even a cup of coffee. You were constantly moving, marking the map, talking to the radios. I wonder sometimes just how well the command would have functioned without my experience. That sounds pretty egotistical, but there were very few times that I wasn't severely needed in the combat operations center.

When we had time, we pushed a lot of paperwork. We pushed paper to regiment and to division and to every other aspect of the operations. One paperwork project was a command chronology which required meticulous preparation each month, with detailed reports of all areas of the operation: administration, personnel, intelligence, logistics and supply, psychological warfare, communications, who's in command of whom, how many troops they had, what the casualties were, and what activities they were engaged in during each period. It normally took three clerks to prepare this, and they did it the old fashioned way, with typewriters and mimeograph machines. We did this each month, and each month it resulted in a book two- to three-inches thick, which I found out later was usually scrubbed at regimental or division headquarters and ground down to only a few pages. I never could understand why they asked for all this information just to throw it away.

As a secondary requirement in my duties, I was in charge of training. One might well ask how in the world you train people when they're involved in combat. This was rough. Most of the training responsibilities were left to the squad leaders, the fire team leaders, the platoon commanders, and the company commanders--in areas they knew that they might have a weakness. But there were times when something new came out that needed to be passed along to the battalion.

During one stage of our operation, someone had been reading a *Time* magazine article about the Army training in quick kill. Quick kill is instinct shooting without using the rifle sights. Although there is nothing in the world that will replace the markmanship of a well-placed, well-aimed shot, I was directed to start providing training in quick kill to members of the battalion. The assistant operations chief and I got together and discussed the possiblibites, and we did start training troops in quick kill. The training was only two or three hours, but it involved a lot of practice on the edge of the concertina wire, and the troops became quite good at it. They could hit targets with instinct quite well, using the look-point-shoot technique. I'm not quite sure how this paid off in the field. Company commanders seemed to think it was good. We did start picking up a few more for the tally of the body count, but I realized that the training was very loose and unsupervised.

One of the items that we received from higher headquarters was a grenade launcher that fired CS gas cannisters. I think there were about 22 of these cannisters in the launcher. It was my job to review this grenade launcher, learn it, and in turn make sure the word got out to the troops about how to use it. So I was provided with the launcher itself and the manuals, and I became the grenade-launcher expert. It fit quite well with me, because my secondary MOS was nuclear/biological/chemical warfare, and I was familiar with the CS and realized that it would cover such a large area, about 200 meters, with gas that in order to use it the first condition was that the wind had to be just right and that the target of opportunity had to be within a certain range.

After I became proficient at the grenade launcher, I decided that I had to make a test

with it, and demonstrate it to the key battalion personnel. When we went out to the edge of the wire to fire the grenade launcher, the wind was just right--it was blowing away from the compound--there were no troops in the area, and it looked like a good place to conduct a test. We fired the gas grenade launcher, all the rounds went off, detonated, and left a white cloud of gas moving briefly towards the west.

Then suddenly the wind changed and all of the gas returned into the battalion compound area. Everybody in the battalion was crying, could hardly see, and was cussing me like hell. The gas even got inside the combat operations center. Of course it all dissipated pretty quickly, and the air cleared out. I told everybody it would be a good time to burn the shitters because no one would ever know it.

Another item that was my resonsibility to train the troops with was something from the backwoods of Tennessee or Virginia (I'm not sure which), and it kind of gave us all the giggles. Someone had convinced Headquarters of the Marine Corps that they could use a type of divining rod to locate tunnels or anything buried where the ground had been disturbed. This was a brass rod probably twenty-six or twenty-seven inches long--I'm not sure of the measurements--roundly bent, with a six-inch portion for a handle projecting out straight. According to the person that put this over on the Marine Corps, the rods had to be of a certain thickness, they had to be of brass, and they had to be in an exact position. And its promoter was convinced that this rod could locate tunnels, much as the early pioneers claimed it could locate water.

We saw several demonstrations of it, and we conducted our own test. We buried some grenades throughout the compound and then asked certain Marines to try and locate them using the divining rod. Some Marines could find the grenades with the rod and others couldn't. They did eventually locate all the grenades, and I'll give them and the rod credit for that. But it still seemed silly to go around with a divining rod looking for something buried in the ground. And since only particular Marines could use the rod successfully, we were led to believe that you had to have the power, whatever that might be, and so overall we didn't have much confidence in the divining rod.

We also had a sniffing machine that could sniff the aroma of a person; they claimed that it would work in a helicopter and sniff people on the ground. There were quite a few wacky devices like that, and some of them actually worked.

The civil affairs officer, the person responsible for the county fairs, was also responsible for anyone non-military that might come to our front gate saying that they had a claim to file for damages against the military either for loss of property or for injury sustained. Several of these were con jobs; for example, people would cut themselves on the hand accidentally, and then come to the front gate seeking money, claiming that some Marine had injured them or hurt them during operations in their village. Most of these we could see through. But there were always those whose story seemed as if it might have some truth to it. It was very difficult to separate the real injuries or the real property destruction--such as the loss of a house--from the fake and then to attribute these injuries and losses to Marine action.

We were bound by several rules of war as laid out by the Pentagon, a lot of these which were hard to live with. For example, we were instructed not to fire artillery at a village. You can imagine what it's like when you're taking fire from a village and you've got several troops that are hit--some WIA's, even some KIA's--and you can't call in the firepower that you need to quell the fire and destroy the enemy.

This was a new form of warfare, and I couldn't really go along with it. But the troops learned, the young officers learned, and we did what we had to do. Often you'd call in an artillery strike on an empty rice paddy and then simply adjust the fire left 300 or whatever it might be to bring the artillery in on your target. But if you were to call the coordinates in initially with the fire mission, and if division had found it was a village, then they would refuse the fire power.

Lt Art Garcia, who was in charge of the 81 mortar section, trained those troops so they could drop the 81 mortars right in your left

pocket. And he was a substantial benefit for the supporting arms throughout the TAOR to all the companies.

They used to fire what they called interdicting fires. If we did not have a patrol out in a certain area that we thought might be occupied by VC, they'd randomly drop two or three artillery or mortar rounds on those trails that were used by the VC. So no one ever knew exactly where they were coming from. But all the interdicting fires had to be cleared in my shop so they would not conflict with any nighttime patrol activity. I usually had the responsibility for checking those.

One night, however, one of the gunners on the 81 mortars used the wrong aiming stake, and instead of firing on one azimuth, he fired on the opposite azimuth, 180 degrees out. This round lit directly outside of the S-1, or the administration hootch, and destroyed one of the large concrete rice bowls that were in front of the S-1 and slightly injured a clerk who was sleeping inside the building.

I guess you know that gunner got hell for that live round, and it was back to school again for Lt Garcia's mortar crew.

Sergeant Major Gilmore, the battalion sergeant major, really gave all the mustang LT's a pretty bad time. He told us the only reason we had made second lieutenant was that we couldn't make sergeant major, and he might have been right. He carried a homemade swagger stick, and being a fun-loving person, he made his way to all the troops and all the companies all the time, and if you were screwing up you got that swagger stick somewhere, and there was no one to be spared. Officers, staff NCO's, enlisted, all alike, most of them felt SgtMaj Gilmore's swagger stick at one time or another.



(Courtesy of Brad Robinson)

LtCol Archie Van Winkle congratulating 1st Lt Tim Schweizer on his promotion while SgtMaj Gilmore looks on.

I had one major run-in with LtCol Donabedien that could have cost me my career. It seems that troops up on Hill 55 with an extremely high-powered telescope had spotted a large number of VC in our western zone and asked for permission to fire artillery. Checking with the companies to make sure there was no one there, I made the mistake of giving clearance to fire without clearing with LtCol Donabedien. It was my own thinking that I didn't have to clear every artillery fire with the battalion commander. But he was highly put out, because he told me it was his technical area of responsibiliity, not mine, and he had me standing tall.

Another lieutenant had a run-in with Donabedien for his appearance. The lieutenant came in from the field one day covered in mud and dirt and sweat, and LtCol Donabedien chewed him out for not having the proper appearance of an officer.

For the most part we washed our own clothes. We hadn't received the tiger-striped camouflage at that time--we were still wearing the old olive drab--and we found some water, a helmet, a tub, whatever you could find, and rinsed them out good, and hung them out to dry. Sometimes they didn't get too dry, especially in the high humidity and during the monsoon season. But you'd put them back on and wear them for a while and they'd get dry sooner or later.

Rust was a major problem, of course, and anything leather turned to mold almost overnight.

I was able to escape from Vietnam a couple of times. After I'd been there about six months, I got R&R in Hawaii. The morning I left the battalion to go to Hawaii, the vehicle right directly in front of me on the road out of the area hit a mine and was severely damaged. There were two or three minor WIA's. No one



(Courtesy of Roy Couch)

Roy Couch's squad was in this truck when it hit a mine in March of 1967. No one was seriously injured.

was allowed to go in or out of the battalion until the road sweeps had been conducted and the engineers had sounded that the road was clear. But of course even then you couldn't be sure--they might have missed one.

I flew to Hawaii, met my wife, enjoyed the five days there and then returned. Major Pitchford, our S-3 officer at the time, sent a very nice letter (said some very nice things about me and my work in the battalion) to my wife and had me hand-deliver it. I still have that letter, and I'm quite proud of it.

The other time I escaped from Vietnam was to attend school in Japan as a registered publication custodian. Each battalion is required to have two men responsible for all classified documents, primarliy in the message operations. We had certain scrambling devices that we used for radios, and the codes had to be changed each day. These were things that we had to be very closely accountable for. That was only a two-day school, but it did give me the opportunity to get out of the Nam, an opportunity that most troops didn't have. I enjoyed the brief respite away from the duties and the action and unnerving operations in Vietnam.

I might also mention that there were times when you could not use the encoding devices on the radio, and sometimes communications were sent in the clear--which was very, very *verboten* by division headquarters and anyone else with good common sense. We devised several codes that you had to be in on to be able to understand, such as using the names of basketball teams (being five men) or names of football teams (being eleven men) to make reports about number of wounded or KIA. Such contrivances were probably used in other battalions, as well. I know during World War II the Marine Corps used Navajo code talkers, and later as a company commander in Vietnam (on another tour, that one with the Fifth Marines), I used Samoans on our radio. I didn't think that any of the Vietnamese could speak Samoan. I was quite proud to have Samoans in my company.

Christmas in Vietnam was a rather unusual experience. We had a Christmas party for some of the local villagers and the village chief. The chaplain and the civil affairs officer invited these people into our compound. It made all of us a little uneasy to have what could have been VC spies in our compound looking over the gun positions and so forth. But it was allegedly one of the ways to win the hearts and minds of the people. So we laid out a good feed--roast beef, turkey. Everyone who was in the compound that particular day had a pretty good meal. (The troops on patrol in the outside areas ate their standard patrol rations in little grey bags.) We were quite surprised to find out that the villagers brought with them some of their own native dishes for us to share.

I never got quite used to the Vietnamese food. Every time we got into a village, we were always offered tea, especially if we were talking to the village chief, and their water of course was not purified. You wouldn't want to offend the people by not drinking the tea, so you'd drink it and you could plan on having diarrhea for two or three days afterwards--one of the occupational hazards, I guess.

When I left Second Battalion, First Marines, we were preparing to make a move up north, to Quang Tri. Because I was within two or three days of leaving on rotation, it was decided that it would be better for my relief to go off without me. I think one of my replacements was Chuck Daugherty.

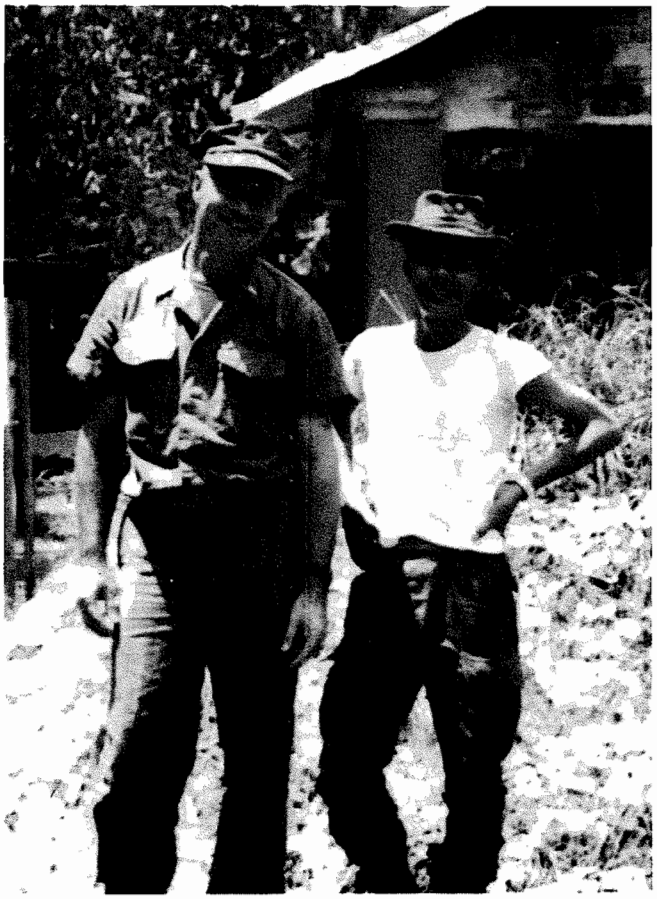
A strange thing happened at that time. One of the company commanders in the battalion decided that he wanted to take with him some of the furnishings that they'd had the luxury of using for over a year in that area. So he stripped all the galvanized sheet-metal roofs to take them along to build new barracks or quarters for his troops in the northern area. When the new battalion arrived and they found that the huts had been stripped, they were a little bit upset. The 2/1 commander, Colonel Archie Van Winkle, was called on the carpet, as well as the company commander in question. I'm not sure of the outcome of that, because I had already gone by the time the investigation was conducted.

I do know that one of the units had left

in a hurry, and had left a rather expensive, sophisticated device in an area where it shouldn't have been. A starlight scope. A starlight scope is a night-vision device that was carried by certain members of a platoon. Its value is about $50,000. And someone had apparently walked off and forgot it. When the new men arrived in the compound, they found it, brought it over and turned it in. But by then the report of its loss had gone in and the damage had been done.

There was a lot of confusion in that move, and I'm glad I got out of there when I did. It was raining at the time, it was monsoon season, and as a matter of fact it took me two days to get out of Da Nang. I sat down there waiting for a flight for quite some time.

I was real glad to get back to Okinawa, get my uniforms together and head back to the States, and I feel like I left at a very good time for me, if not for the battalion. I did consider staying longer, but with the way things were, and my attitude toward the Vietnam War in general changing rapidly, I elected to go ahead and take my rotation as planned.



(Courtesy of Brad Robinson)

Brad Robinson with the battalion interpreter, a Vietnamese warrant officer.

It's been difficult for me sometimes to think about some of the bad things that happened in Vietnam, and the fun moments or hilarious times were too few to mention.

Being a veteran of three combat tours, one in Korea at the age of 18, one in Vietnam as the operations officer, and another in Vietnam as company commander three years later, I find it hard to have special allegiance for any one particular unit. I have an affinity for each unit that I've served in during my 24 years of military service. But I was quite proud to be in the Second Battalion, First Marines both in Vietnam and Korea, too, where I had some great experiences in Dog Company, Fifth Marines, though I lost a lot of good friends. You can imagine my surprise when I returned for my second tour in Vietnam and was made company commander of Dog (then called "Delta") Company, Fifth Marines. It had taken me twenty years to go from a private first class to company commander in the same company. Quite an honor for me and a responsibility that I held very highly.

I had a good company in Vietnam, and they benefited from the experiences of my first tour there. All of these experiences are some of my fondest memories, even the bad times.

So finally I say to each of you that may be reading this book of memories, Semper Fi. §



(Courtesy of David Novak)

THE LIEUTENANT'S MAP

Map carried by platoon commander showing the major portion of 2/1's TAOR in 1966-1967 south of Da Nang.

The Phong Le Bridge

By David Novak

Normally Hotel Company kept a platoon at the Phong Le Bridge, which was just south of Da Nang and spanned the Song Cau Do (River), to control traffic during the day and provide bridge security at night. But at the end of August 1967, we had two squads of 1st platoon at the bridge and the third squad of 1st platoon at the regimental headquarters, which was about two clicks south of the bridge. At the time I was company XO and was also at regimental headquarters.



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)

THE PHONG LE BRIDGE UP, AUGUST 1967

On the night of 28 August I played poker with Platoon Sergeant Abernathy and some of the other men from the squad who had been left at the regimental headquarters. We broke up the game about 0100 and hit the sack. About 0200 a company radio operator woke me up to tell me the radio operator from the bridge was on the line saying the bridge was being hit. I told the radio operator to wake the company CO (Captain Barrett), and I ran to the hootch the radio was in. About all I could get from Rhenquist (the radio operator at the bridge) was that the bridge was under attack. Rhenquist was obviously very shaken, and I could not get any details from him. I told him we would be there with help as soon as we could.

I came out of the hootch and yelled for Abernathy to saddle up the remaining squad immediately, as the bridge was being hit and we had to go. We threw our gear on, grabbed our weapons, and were on our way to the bridge in about five minutes' time. Doc Hall, the company Corpsman, slept in the same hootch that the company radio was in and must have heard the commotion. I remember him coming down the steps of the hootch carrying a couple of bottles of IV solution. I didn't ask him to come with us, but later I was awfully glad he did.

Capt Barrett let the appropriate command centers know we were going up the road towards the bridge. I didn't know if any ambushes or H&I fires were in the vicinity through which we would travel, and we really didn't worry about that too much. Our only concern was to get to the aid of our men. From the way Rhenquist sounded on the radio, I knew they needed help. As we started out, we tried to keep in radio contact with him at the bridge, but

Rhenquist was in no shape to give us much information.

About halfway to the bridge, we took a couple of mortar rounds which landed west of the road we were on in a rice paddy. To this day I don't know if they were friendly fire or from the VC. We just kept going. A minute or two later we heard a loud explosion in the direction of the bridge and assumed that the bridge had probably been blown (it had).

In another seven or eight minutes we arrived at the southern end of the bridge. One span was down, and we heard small-arms fire coming from the northern end where the main compound was.

We left a couple of men at the southern end of the bridge to reinforce the men who were already there (who were also badly shaken), and we started across the bridge. It was rough going over the span that was down in the water, but by picking our way carefully we managed to make it across.

The compound had been hit very hard by small arms, mortars, and sappers with satchel charges. Doc Hall, with help from some of the men in the squad, started working on the wounded--who seemed to be everywhere.

The rest of the squad swept through the compound and dispatched a couple of VC who were still there. We secured the area, got illumination called in, and started a medevac. And there were some unexploded satchel charges around the hootches in the compound which we cautiously cleared.

Doc Hall was the only Corpsman there to help, as the Corpsman at the bridge, George Gallagher (who was one of my Corpsmen when I had 1st platoon), was mortally wounded. I remember Doc Hall working on George to try and save him, but he had a head wound and could not be revived. As I recall there were two KIA, George and a mortar man, and about eight WIA, including the platoon commander. After the medevacs were completed, some of the men discovered fresh, shallow graves outside the compound along the banks of the river. The men at the compound had inflicted some heavy casualties on the VC. The retreating VC only took their wounded with them and had hastily buried their dead.

I don't remember exactly how many dead VC were in the graves; it didn't really seem important to me at the time--although headquarters was certainly interested--but it must have been six or seven. A little before dawn, Matt McKnight, 2nd platoon commander, and two of his squads arrived on the scene and relieved 1st platoon. It was a difficult night for 1st platoon.

Although I hadn't had 1st platoon for a while, I knew most of the men, and George had been one of my Corpsmen. For me, the most difficult part of being a platoon commander was facing the loss of one of my men. Even now when I close my eyes, I can see myself standing between two of the hootches watching, in the illumination provided by the flares, Doc Hall frantically, hopelessly working on George Gallagher. §



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)
THE PHONG LE BRIDGE DOWN, AUGUST 1967

Where I Belonged

By Milt Cochran

When I joined the Navy and became a Corpsman, I had about as much interest in joining some elite military organization as I had in becoming Secretary of Defense. At the time I joined the service, Vietnam was beginning to claim a large percentage of newspaper space. I was content, though, to do my job as a stateside Corpsman, taking care of Navy dependents, and I would have been perfectly willing to play out my remaining time in the service right where I was, doing what I was doing.

But one chilly October morning after returning from an ambulance run, I was told to pack my gear and prepare to be assimilated into the Marine Corps. *The Marine Corps*? I didn't join the Marine Corps--I joined the damn Navy, for chrissakes!

But my howls for some sort of clarification fell on deaf ears, and so, after intensive field training at Camp Lejeune, I was off to join the Second Battalion of the First Marine Regiment, somewhere near Da Nang, South Vietnam. With trepidation bordering on terror, I was delivered to "H" Company.

Marines being sent to join other Marines is one thing. But, to use an analogy, a Navy man entering the lair of the Marines might be similar to a Marine being thrown into a unit of British infantry troops. The only similarity, really, is a common language. Would the Marines accept me? Would I be ostracized for my entire tour? Would I understand *anything* they talked about concerning everyday operations?

All those Marines had the same training. They knew each other's basic capabilities. Combat in Vietnam would be a new experience for all of them, but at least they could take some solace in the fact that the man in the next foxhole had been thoroughly equipped and exhaustively trained. And they shared that intangible element which binds Marines together as if by high-tensile steel, an *esprit de corps*.

I had been with Hotel Company, Second Battalion, First Marine Regiment for three or four months when something occurred which made clear to me that there is also a bond between Corpsman and Marine.

Up until that time, I had never missed a patrol, an all-night ambush, or a full-scale operation. I had participated in everything a Corpsman is expected to do. As a matter of fact, because of a chronic shortage of Corpsmen, I sometimes had to turn around and go back out on a patrol after just returning from one.

I was always there. If something happened, these Marines knew I was just a few feet away. I realized that this close proximity made my comrades feel better. I was cognizant of this because they told me so. Maybe because of the fact that I was always with them, it never dawned on me that this bonding process works both ways. A Corpsman doesn't operate in a vacuum.

On this particular day, we were on an operation out in the middle of nowhere. It was our second day in the field, and for those two days I had been as sick as a dog. I was throwing up, I had hot-and-cold sweats, and--to make matters worse--I couldn't go 50 feet without ducking behind a tree to relieve myself. Yet through all this I never missed even one patrol.

The dawn of the third day broke hot, without so much as a whisper of moving air. I almost had to force my lungs to inhale. Each breath filled my mouth and nose with rancid, dust-filled air. This day found me sicker than ever. My stomach was so tender I couldn't even

strap on my cartridge belt. My medical supply bag felt as though it weighed 100 pounds.

As my squad was saddling up for this latest patrol, I informed the sergeant that I just couldn't go out with them. This information didn't come as a big surprise to him. He had already noticed how sick I had been over the past few days. Although this would be the first time my squad would go out on patrol without me, I rationalized that they would survive a mere three hours on their own.

Even today, 26 years later, I can see them leaving the relative safety of the compound. As always, our point man Jones led the way. His cheerful demeanor never betrayed the fact that the point man was the most vulnerable. If his always-alert eyes ever missed that one little glint of a trip wire, if he lost his concentration for even one millisecond he would be the first to pay the price--probably with his life.

And I can still see Knowles, our radioman, fall in to his usual place in the middle of the squad. You couldn't miss Knowles. He was probably the tallest man in the company. And the fact that his radio antenna projected three feet above his head made Knowles awfully easy to spot--a fact not entirely lost on Knowles. Immediately behind Knowles is where I would be. No, that's where I *should* be.

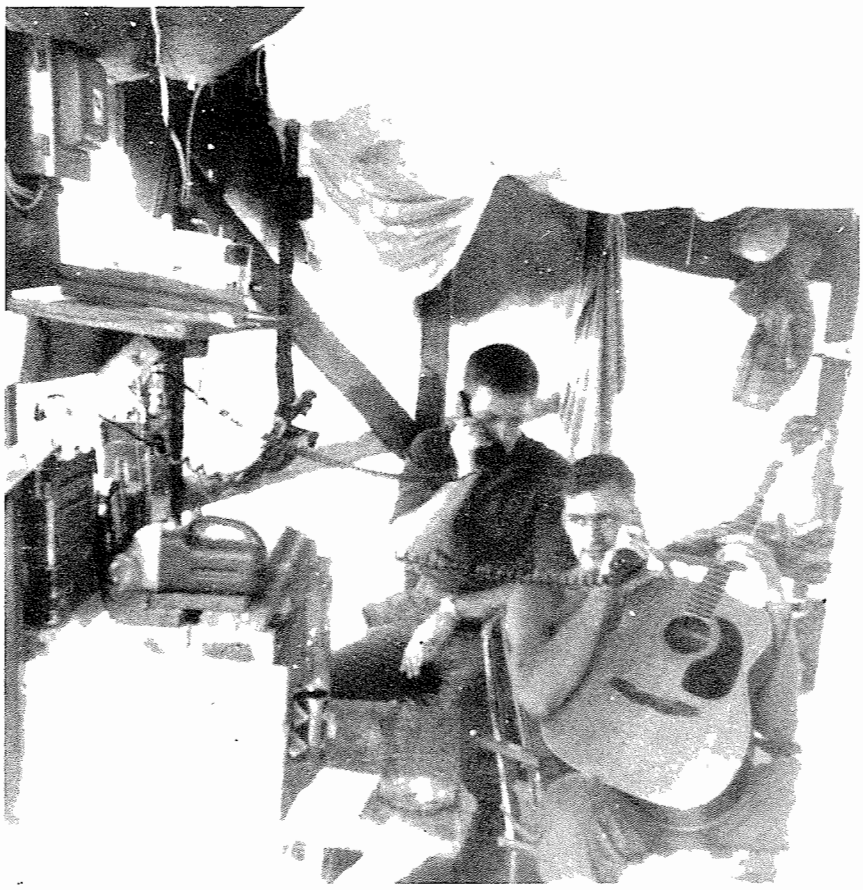
As the patrol wound its way along a narrow path, becoming smaller and smaller with every step, I felt my first twinge of guilt. The minute I lost sight of my squad, I began to pace. And I became more troubled as time passed. "How in the hell could I have let them go without me?" I kept repeating to myself.

Time seemed to stand still. The minutes ground along as though they were hours. I listened for any sound that might indicate the squad had run into trouble. I had already made up my mind that if I heard anything--a firefight,



(Courtesy of Mike Dunn)

ON PATROL
A Shau Valley, 1969



(Courtesy of Hank Van Laarhoven)

RADIO OPERATORS
South of Da Nang in early 1967.

or the sound of an exploding land mine--I would get to them, alone and running all the way if I had to.

Everyone in camp got sick and tired of me sulking around and bemoaning the fact that my squad "should be back by now." At every point I was convinced that if they didn't return within the next 15 minutes, I would have a total nervous breakdown. If something were to happen to any of those guys, I felt sure that I'd be spending the rest of my life in a padded room. I promised myself right there and then that I would never miss another patrol--no matter what. As long as I was breathing, I'd be there. As dangerous as those patrols were, I decided that I much preferred being out in the field with my squad. It was where I belonged.

Finally, after what seemed to me an eternity, I caught a faint glimpse of Jones leading the squad back home. After a quick head count to make certain everyone was there, I was the first to welcome them back.

I had come to the Marines an untried entity, and these men placed their faith in me from day one. From the very beginning I was "Doc." I was their orthopedic surgeon, their neurologist, podiatrist, and psychologist, all rolled into one. I enjoyed the faith these Marines placed in me, but I realized that their respect and my peace of mind could only be earned in one way: by my being with them on the trail or in the midst of a firefight, ready to respond to that most dreaded of all battlefield sounds, the call "Corpsman up!"

Now, all these years later, I can report that I did my job faithfully--although, I'm sorry to say, not completely. Seven months into my tour, I tripped a land mine. Because of the severity of my injuries, I spent years recuperating in several military and VA hospitals. I was discharged from the service totally and permanently disabled.

But up until the day a land mine ended my tour of duty in Vietnam, I kept the promise I made to myself the day I waited for my squad to all come back from patrol safely. I never missed another patrol.

The general consensus has always been that Marines feel better having a Corpsman at their side in the field. Take it from me, there is no place a Corpsman would rather be than out in the field with the people he cares most about--the guys he has come to love and would give his life for.

Because of the circumstances under which I left Hotel Company--a group of men whose character and stamina will never be matched--I wasn't allowed the chance to say

good-bye, nor to relate my pride in them. I am doing that now.

The men of Hotel Company will remain with me forever. I remember all of them. I remember the men whose wounds only they are aware of. I remember those who even though horribly wounded resisted leaving when told they had to be medevaced out of the field. And I'll always remember our comrades who, despite everything that was within my meager power to do, died in my arms. §



(Courtesy of Marguerite Cochran)

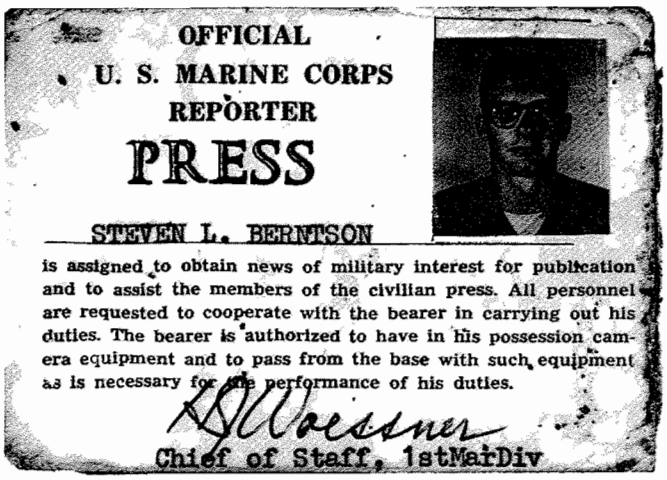
MILT COCHRAN--"DOC"
South of Da Nang, 1967

Reporter at War

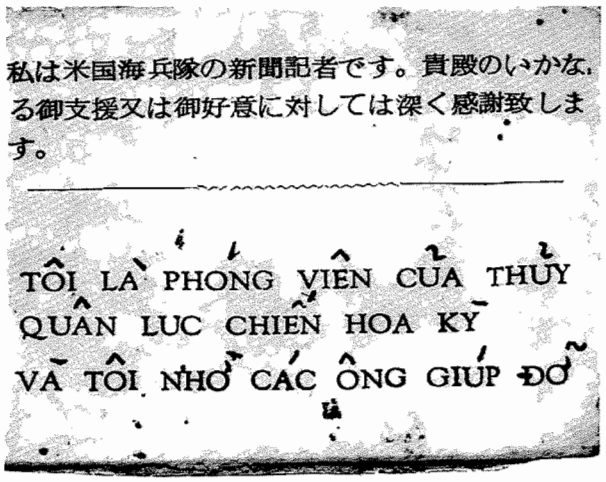
By Steve Berntson

Steve Berntson was a Marine combat correspondent in Vietnam from April 1967 until February 1968 when he was seriously wounded in Hue while covering the Tet Offensive. Although Steve wrote stories on 1/1 and 3/1, he spent most of his time with 2/1--particularily Echo Company. As Steve wrote, "I believe I can say without any apology that I belong to 2/1." We are proud to have him claim us. --Eds.

*M*y motivation for being a combat correspondent was personal pride, and the fact that it meant I could live somewhat of a dream. I had always wanted to be in the Marines. In 1965 I was working as a reporter for the *Pullman Herald* in Pullman, Washington, when I joined the Marine Corps in September. After recruit training, journalism school at the Army's Defense Information School, and a stint co-editing The El Toro Air Station newspaper, I was sent to Vietnam as a combat correspondent. I think all of us in that particular MOS pictured ourselves as an Ernie Pyle or a Hemingway; we all had that image about it.


OFFICIAL
U. S. MARINE CORPS
REPORTER
PRESS
STEVEN L. BERNTSON
is assigned to obtain news of military interest for publication and to assist the members of the civilian press. All personnel are requested to cooperate with the bearer in carrying out his duties. The bearer is authorized to have in his possession camera equipment and to pass from the base with such equipment as is necessary for the performance of his duties.
Chief of Staff, 1stMarDiv

But that image disappeared very quickly once I realized how the system worked: you were a military journalist, but you really didn't have a lot of freedom. And, of course, you weren't writing the big battle story because the work was time-sensitive. There was nothing you could do about that. And you had so many roadblocks thrown in your way by the editorial policies that it became somewhat a game and a matter of pride that you could write a story and get it through to publication in the *Sea Tiger*. If one of our pieces got put through, then we journalists tended to think of ourselves as having crafted something rather well. But the thing that became very real to me--and became another motivation--was that after I'd written a few stories that had shown up in the *Sea Tiger*, I had this great personal rush--you know, "By God I got a story in there; I got a byline in there. It's in the *Sea Tiger*--it's mine!" Byline euphoria.


私は米国海兵隊の新聞記者です。貴殿のいかなる御支援又は御好意に対しては深く感謝致します。

TÔI LÀ PHÓNG VIÊN CỦA THỦY QUÂN LỤC CHIẾN HOA KỲ
VÀ TÔI NHỜ CÁC ÔNG GIÚP ĐỠ

I can remember the first time it happened. This was when I was with the Fifth Marines, right after Operation Union. I'd gone back down there later in June on the mopping-up phase of Union II. And this kid, a PFC from Lima Company 3/5, someone I'd

just written a story about, was there. I had written a story about how he had walked point for four solid days, because he just didn't want to let some of the other guys do it. He felt safe. He knew the area. So he volunteered for point four days in a row. And I wrote this story about him. Anyway, he searched me out and came up to me with this big smile. He said, "Ah, shit, storyteller, you're back." The kind of bravado that goes on.

I said, "Yeah, how you doing?"

He said, "Boy, you got me in a lot of trouble."

I said, "What're you talking about?"

He said, "Look at this shit."

He had a newspaper clipping from his hometown paper. I think it was back in Michigan somewhere, because, from the back of my mind, I remember him telling me that his dad worked on the Ford Thunderbird line, and he was going to get a Thunderbird when he got home.

He said, "Look at this kind of shit. That story, that BS story I told you. I've got to go back home. Those people are probably going to want to buy me beer and everything."

Even right now when I think about it, the hair stands up on my neck, because that was the first time I realized what I was really doing in Vietnam. I wasn't there to save Democracy or anything. I was primarily trying to stay alive. But when I could do something like that for a kid, for a grunt, a guy walking point . . . Boy, *I'm* not going to walk point for four days. But the big thing in his world was that somebody wrote a story about him, and then his mother sent the clipping to him. Right then I was convinced what my job was. And that was what I tried to do.

Sure, I needed to, I wanted to get in the *Sea Tiger*. I wanted my name on the stories. I wanted to stay out in the field. I didn't want to go back in the rear to Da Nang, where they played with you all the time. So I kept pumping out my stories. I'd rather go out on an ambush than go back to Da Nang.

But while I was out there, of course I was hoping to write the great Ernie Pyle Pulitzer Prize-winning story. Everybody was. Amongst ourselves, we were kind of in a friendly competition to see who could write the best story, who could get the front page of the *Sea Tiger*. Since most of us were in the field all the time--we only got back to Da Nang once a month--we never really knew if we had a front page until we could get back in to see. But when we would sit around and bullshit together, it was clear our object was to get the whole front page of the *Sea Tiger*. The first to do that got an extra R&R.

Two things came down. The first was editorial policy. Today we call it "managing the news," but in those days it was just called editorial policy. One thing your stories never had: you never wrote a story where there were more Marines killed than there were enemy killed. In fact, very seldom would you report any Marines killed, but certainly nothing that was unbalanced. In other words, the line "17 dead Marines, and no NVA weapons recovered" would never see print.

And then the second problem that we always had was the one where I'm sitting with all my notebooks lined up and I've written stories about guys, and then it happens. I'd write someone's story, and then find out that three days later that person went on an operation down by VC barracks, tripped a mine, and was killed or wounded. Then I had to get word back to Da Nang to stop that story, because anybody that was KIA you couldn't mention by name, and if they were WIA and you mentioned their name in the story, you had to get a release from them. So if they got medevaced, shit, you just tore the story up. Because there was no way you were going to get a release from these guys after they'd been medevaced. And names made the story real. Things happened that, without names, no one would believe.

Another reason we used names was that once a story went to CIB (Combat Information Bureau), then CIB's job was to see that a copy of that story went to Kalamazoo, Michigan, or wherever the guy mentioned in the story lived. The worst nightmare those guys at what we called the "press club" had was

that they'd send to Kalamazoo, Michigan, a story about a Marine, and have it reach the paper about the time his obituary was going out.

You could always just say "a Marine"--like for example when I wrote about the Marine that got the tracheotomy--and not put the name in. Or, early on I learned to take the Marines' names but not to use the names if the Marines got wounded; I'd just take them out of the story. But again, a story had to have a lot of other facts to it for a reporter to be able to do that. If you came off an operation and the men you were writing about were not wounded, you beat your ass as quickly as you could to write the story before something happened.

You never wrote graphically. About the closest you could ever get was if you had a good operation--a good operation being one where you had confirmed KIA, large numbers of weapons recovered, etc.--then somewhere in the story you could say that there were two Marine KIA and seven WIA. Something like that. But that was all you could say. And generally, to be able to say that, it had better be a battalion-sized operation.

The Gunny Whethers story was somewhat of an exception. But then that was a different kind of a story altogether. In that story, I was basically trying to remember him. That's a good story. And I battled real hard for it. Actually, I didn't battle; my CO battled real hard with First Division. I found this out later, because I never got back to Da Nang from December on, since I was up north and then in Hue, and hence I never had a chance to meet the CO of First Division ISO who had taken over in January.

His name was Mark Arnold, and he's just a prince. Mark was a mustang who had been a China Marine, been in WWII, and in Korea. He volunteered to be the CO of ISO. He told me a few years later--he comes to our small reunions of combat correspondents as an honored guest--that he actually went down to division and took that story down to CIB knowing that they were probably going to can it since Gunny Whethers was dead. Mark went to Colonel Stark, who was running CIB, and explained the situation. And of course Stark agreed with him. But had it been otherwise, they would have just fallen in with the general policy of "he's dead--don't print it."

Another time I wrote a story about a wounded Marine and how he'd crawled out to save his buddy who was wounded, about how--even though he himself was shot--he'd hung on to him and kept dragging him on back while the rest of them gave cover fire. Just as he was rolling his wounded friend to safety over the rice paddy dike, this Marine was shot in the back again. I wrote that story. But I couldn't send that story in because the Marine was medevaced, and I couldn't get the release.

Another reporter wrote a story about a unit holding off some attacking VC. A grenade went off. One guy was blinded and the other one's hands were blown up. But between the two of them, they somehow continued to operate the machine gun and drove off the attack. This was the kind of story that, without specific names, everybody would just say, "Oh hell, yeah, I heard that ten thousand times." But, this was a true story, and they couldn't print it because the guys were medevaced and there was no release.

I can remember an occasion when I had a bit of trouble getting stories out of the field. This was in November of '67, right after Medina and just before they put 2/1 in the barrel at Con Thien. They ran a couple of big sweeps on the Trace, in the area of the Rockpile, Camp Carol, Con Thien, and Gio Linh. These sweeps were called Operation Lancaster and Operation Kentucky. I was with 2/1 on these operations. They took us out of Quang Tri and made Echo Company, and I think Golf Company, op-con to the Ninth Marines. I think we started around 2 November, and by around 14 November, I was still on the operation. They said, "Congratulations. You're staying out another 10 days. We just re-named this thing Operation Kentucky II."

I was a long way from Quang Tri, and it was not that easy to get out of there. Generally, the only choppers we were getting were for fast resupply and medevacs, and you didn't hitch a ride on just anything going down that road. So I was in a bind. I couldn't get out of there. But I started to write

my stories. I used all my available paper--and then I finally took a couple of C-ration boxes and ripped them up into squares and wrote on those. Then I did up a little packet of my stories, stuck it in an envelope that I had with me, and addressed it to a first lieutenant whose name I can't remember at First Marine Division, ISO, Phu Bai. I waited until the next resupply chopper came in, and I yelled up to the crew chief. I said, "Are you out of Phu Bai?" And he said, "Yeah."

"Look, I got an important package of material. Can you get it to the ISO office?"

"Where in the hell is that?"

"Look, just promise me that you'll give it to somebody that can get it to the right person. You fly out of Phu Bai, right?"

"Yeah."

"Just take it."

And he did. He transported it down, and it wound up in Da Nang at the ISO.

The established setup was for us field combat correspondants to file our stories to the First Division ISO in Da Nang. There we had this staff organization, and from time to time we had a good CO. Other times we had one that didn't know what he was doing. They used to demand that we type our stories whenever possible, so I used the chaplain's typewriter when I could. I'd type them up in manuscript form. We had all been taught the proper form for dateline and such. After I sent in a story, they would give it this magic pen-and-pencil editing. And we did have a couple of guys in First Division that were very good at it--that is, they could take your story and not destroy it in the editing.

We also had a real fine master sergeant--who to this very day is an honorary Snuffy (combat correspondent) and attends every one of our reunions as our special guest--a man we thought the world of in Vietnam and still do, and he was the NCO in charge. Also, Top Wilson used to make sure that they did not screw with our stuff unless it was really bad, and that they did not change the name on the byline, which was another thing that they were notorious for doing. If they got a real good piece and they thought they could get away with it, they might change the name on it. Most of the time they didn't, because when you came in from the field and your story had made print without your name on it, there was hell to pay. We reminded them that they shouldn't screw with us because we were armed. Not only that, we were crazy.

Then the story would be sent down to CIB at Da Nang where the geniuses, the true experts in the rear, got it. And their job was to mass-produce it on mimeograph machines that ran day and night, then hand it out as press releases to all the local news media that were there at the CIB. That's why the person's name and hometown were so important. For everyone that was mentioned in the story, they would take the story and mail a copy to the person's hometown paper. Then the *Sea Tiger* would pick and choose what they wanted.

The ISO area was as far in the rear with the beer and the gear as anybody could ever be. The First Marine Division rear. Well, we were such a rag-tag bunch they wouldn't even let us be quartered near the division band. We had such a reputation for being such a bunch of shitbirds and just sort of general malcontents that at division rear they put us as far away as they could. We got a strong-back hootch down by the wire, right next to the rice paddy. We had the very first hootch; so that if ever anybody was going to get over run, we were it.

This was also the hootch that was right by the end of the piss tube, where the drainage for all the piss tubes that came down the one little hill met.

I did carry a weapon. My authorized weapon was an M-14. However, they told us that if we were smart, the first thing we'd do on an operation was to watch for a Corpsman, a radioman, or an officer to get hit, then run over and help with the medevac. They had stopped medevacing weapons by

then, so we would end up with the pistol that would be left behind. And that, honest to God, was standard operating procedure. I got a .45 on my second operation. I helped medevac a radioman.

The whole object of being a combat correspondant was such that you sure as hell didn't need a rifle. Some of the guys preferred rifles. I was from the old school that said if you get down to the point where you need a rifle, trust me, there'll be plenty of them lying around. Plus the other fact was, as told to me by the guy that broke me into the field: "I guarantee you that the first damn time that anybody gets hit, they're going to ship him out on a chopper, and then they're going to scream for the first available attachments and make them pack his weapons." And that was the truth. Invariably.

One time I carried for four days the base plate for a 60-mm mortar, and my photographer, M. J. Coates, carried the tube. We never knew where the rounds were. But every night we'd set the damn thing up and say, "Anybody got any rounds? Anywhere? Anybody know how to operate this thing?"

Basically, the realization that all of us as correspondants had was that, even as a reporter, when you were out in the field you were a grunt. A rifleman first. That meant you stood radio watch. That meant you went on ambush if they needed somebody on ambush. I always partnered up with the Corpsman. And the reason I did that was first, I felt a little safer with the Corpsman, and second, I figured that I was probably better at dragging stuff and dragging people than I was at shooting.

I went to the field for many reasons, but probably first and foremost is something that Marines understand well, the Code of the Grunt. If you were going to write somebody's story, the only way you could really successfully write a good story was by having been there. Of course, it's naturally best to produce the firsthand story, the eyewitness account. But there was our Hemingway bravado, too. You know, "By God, I was there. I saw it."

And, then, the truth of the matter was, if you sat back at battalion and didn't go out on the operations, when the guys came back in after seven or eight days out there and you showed up the next day, clean-shaven, and said, "Hey, I understand you guys had a hell of an operation out there. Why, I was talking to lieutenant so-and-so, and he told me. . . ." they might take one look at you and say, "Yeah, it was a hell of an operation. You should have been there." You know how grunts are.

The only successful way you could write a good story was not by sitting down and asking the guys later; you had damn well better be out there. Now, maybe you weren't always out in the bush for every specific thing you wanted to write about. But if the guys had seen you out there with them at one time or another, seen you standing that radio watch for one hour, clicking the hand set for the ambush, or they'd seen you out there as an attachment packing three M-16s taken from the guys that got medevaced--then two miraculous things happened. First, people started watching out for your ass and you had a certain degree of confidence that these guys might take care of you. They'd remember you were there. It's easy to forget attachments if they're not a part of your squad or your platoon. And second, your stories got better because you saw the stories happen or, if you hadn't, the guys who had would come and talk to you.

So that's why I went out, and I went out all the time, even on those two- and three-day TOR sweeps. I'd go out with Hotel, I'd go out with Fox, I'd go with whoever was sweeping. I'd come in and get one night's sleep and go out with the next one. And that was because I had to build my credibility with those guys.

After a while it got to where, in the case of Echo 2/1, Gunny Whethers would send sonebody down to get me when they were leaving. Gunny started counting me and Mike Coates, my photographer, in. We felt like we were part of Echo. And you know, once that was established we just busted our butt.

And even when Lieutenant Colonel Van Winkle, the first couple times he took a CP group out, wanted the first sergeant to get us to go with the CP group, we used to say, "No, sir. We appreciate the offer, but our place is with Echo."

The bottom line is, when I went to the field, I went to the field to do two things. The first was to be a grunt and to do whatever I had to do to stay alive and to make sure that I did whatever people told me to do. And the second was to observe and write my stories.

One time I remember a platoon leader who kind of resented me being there. He had just taken over Tim Schweizer's platoon. He came in after Schweizer had gotten hit a second time. The first time they got ready to mount up and go on an operation, he finds out is he's got this reporter with him. And the first thing he says is, "Hell no, you're not going with me." I just said, "Well, you know lieutenant, I understand that, but I have been out before with this platoon, and I have covered this company quite a little bit."

And he said "Well, I don't need any reporters along. I need just grunts. I need my men and that's it. I don't want any attachments."

I understand his position. In hindsight I realize that the guy was just scared to death and trying to establish some kind of order. Jeez, the last thing he needed was me. Fortunately, Gunny Whethers came over and sat down and talked to him a little bit. And the gunny explained to him that by this time I'd already picked up one Heart; so I had some idea what was going on. Then the LT said, "All right, but you're gonna stay with me." And I said, "Well, okay. Fine." Why argue with the guy?

Staying with the LT also put me with the radioman and the Corpsman. But I sort of had my own personal rule, and, as much as I liked the radioman and the Corpsman, I didn't really like traveling with the CP crew.

I liked to attach myself to a squad or a gun team. I might have been five or six steps behind the LT, but I would not be with him. So he and I had a conversation about why I wasn't staying with him. He wanted me right where he could see me. And finally I just said, "Lieutenant, I don't think you need to see me. You know, I'm pretty safe where I'm working. If you have any doubts, why don't you ask the guys in the squads?" It worked out all right.

I remember the time the Corpsman performed the tracheotomy right in the field. After the Marine was medevaced, we wondered if he made it. Often we would never know what happened to someone after they were medevaced. And that led to problems which many of us suffered from for many years after. It was a particularly heavy burden borne by any officer, any grunt officer. Once you put those guys on a chopper, you often lost them.

And generally, in order to keep your sanity, once they were on the chopper you made the decision when they left whether they were going to make it or not. And that's how they were written off. If some of them looked bad, you'd figure, "Ah shit. He's dead." And that's the end of it. So you'd do a little grieving, and you never bothered to find out.

You might hear back about some of them from BAS, but most of them went back to the World and you never knew what happened to them. And even, I know for a fact that when Schweizer and some of the other guys lost men, they tried to track them through to First Med, but then they might have gone to the *Repose*, or, if they were really sucking bad, then they went to Japan or the Philippines. You weren't sure, and we just lost them. That was a heavy burden. The Marine Corps should have been better about that.

Once in a while we'd hear. Someone else would be medevaced with them, or someone else would be medevaced later. And they'd say when they wrote, "Oh, we saw so-and-so," and we'd get a report that way. Once in a while the guy himself would write us after he recovered enough. That was appreciated.

I still remember that after we loaded guys on the chopper, everybody around would say, "Doc, what'd he look like, what'd he look like Doc?"

"Oh, he had a sucking chest wound. I mean, it doesn't look good. I don't think he's going to make it."

Then you'd just say to youself, *Okay, he's dead.*

The Marine Corps' motivation for having combat correspondents was no big secret. The Marine Corps Correspondants' Association goes back to World War II, when it was first formed as a pick-up bunch by a guy by the name of Colonel Danzig who told the Commandant of the Marine Corps at that time, "You know, you need a little publicity, beause you're not getting good publicity for your Marines."

So originally it was PR. The old story is that the Marines are the best covered and the best publicized landing organization in the world, because every third one on the beach is either a reporter or a photographer. That's overstatement, of course, because we never had that many in the whole MOS.

Besides all the other things being a combat reporter meant, it was the chance to record history. They'd stand up there and tell us, "You're there to make sure that you tell the story properly for all time." It was also good PR with the national news media.

And finally it was a morale issue. The *Sea Tiger* was a morale thing. And it was important. We had to put out a paper for the grunts, you know. §



(Courtesy of Steve Berntson)
STEVE BERNTSON IN HUE

SEA TIGER

News of 1st MAR DIV

'Doc' Saves Marine With 'Big Decision'

By Cpl. Steve Berntson

DA NANG — A tracheotomy performed by a corpsman in the field in enemy terrain saved the life of a seriously wounded Ma rine.

HM Norman E. Miller Jr., (Lawrence, Mass.), "E" Co., 2nd Bn., First Marine Regiment, made the throat incision during an operation August 9.

A squad which Miller was with had moved into a hut for observation after receiving sniper fire while moving into a village. As one Marine moved to a window he tripped a mine under the floor.

"There were five Marines injured in the explosion," recalled "Doc" Miller.

"Right after the explosion, another squad moved to our position along with another corpsman. While he took care of the less seriously wounded, I moved to aid the Marine nearest the explosion," he said.

The most seriously wounded man had several pieces of fragments in his face and neck and was unable to breathe.

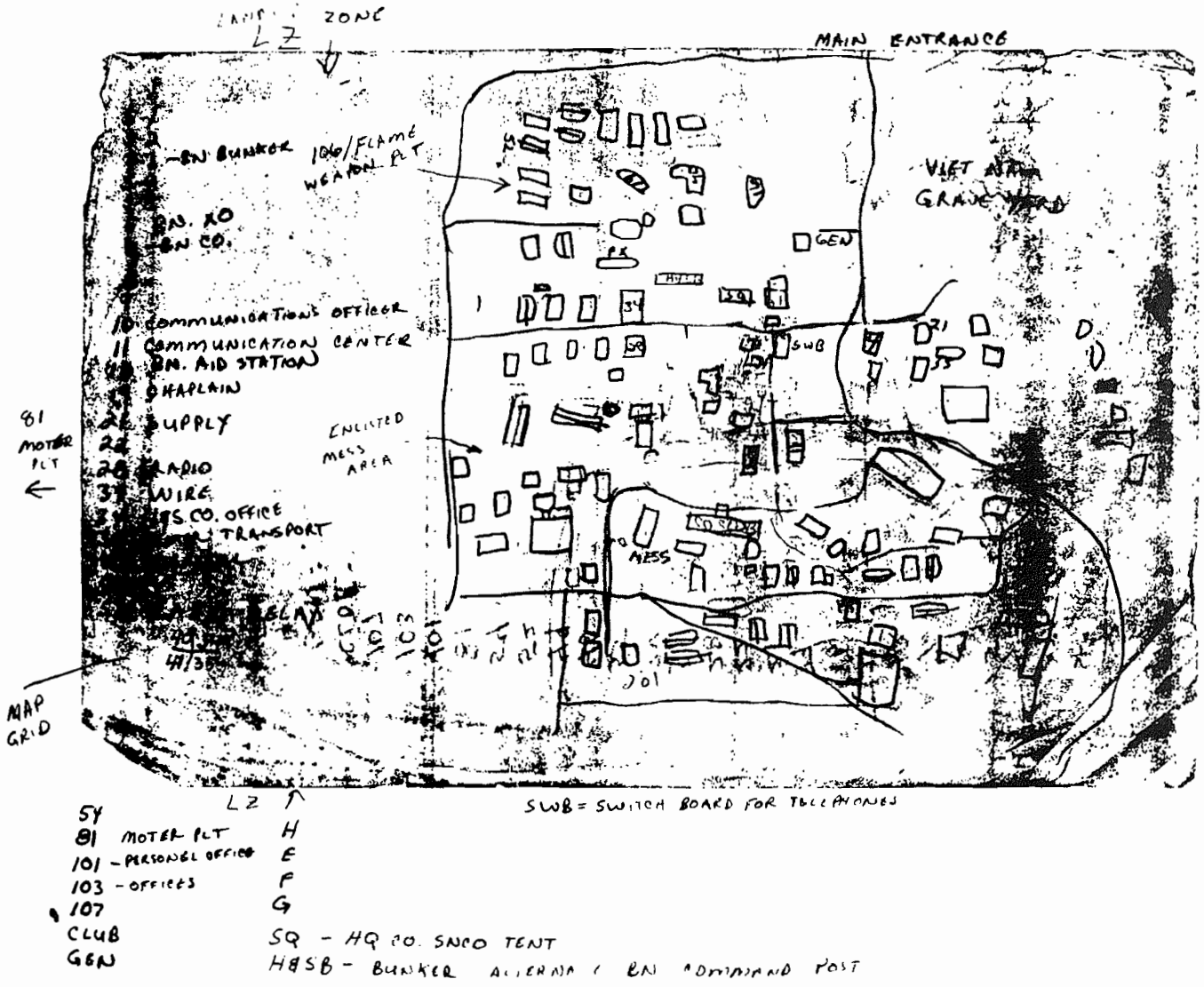
"At first I tried the mouth to mouth resuscitation but I found the air was escaping from the wounds in his neck," explained Miller.

"I immediately decided he needed a tracheotomy. It was the first one I had ever performed and was the biggest decision I've had to make since I've been a corpsman," said Miller who has been in Vietnam three months.

A medevac helicopter was called in to take out the wounded man despite heavy sniper fire. Miller went along to continue administering aid.

At the hospital Miller spent four hours assisting the doctor in the operating room.

The Marine is now recuperating and awaiting return to the States.



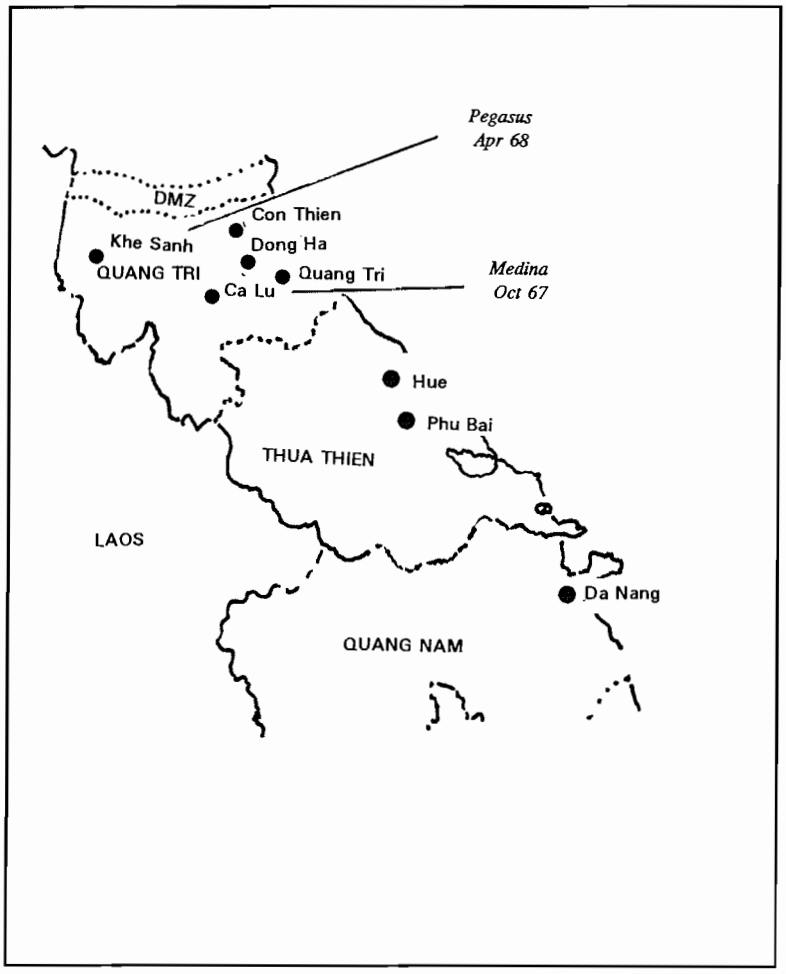
(Courtesy of Louis Voyer)

Diagram of 2/1 Bn area south of Da Nang. Drawn in 1967 by Louis Voyer and used to show laid wire.

PART II

Up North

September 1967-August 1968



"The front is everywhere."
--Maxim of guerrilla warfare



(Courtesy of David Johnson)

MOVING TO QUANG TRI

September-October 1967

"It was just like leaving home again to leave Da Nang." --David Johnson

Synopsis

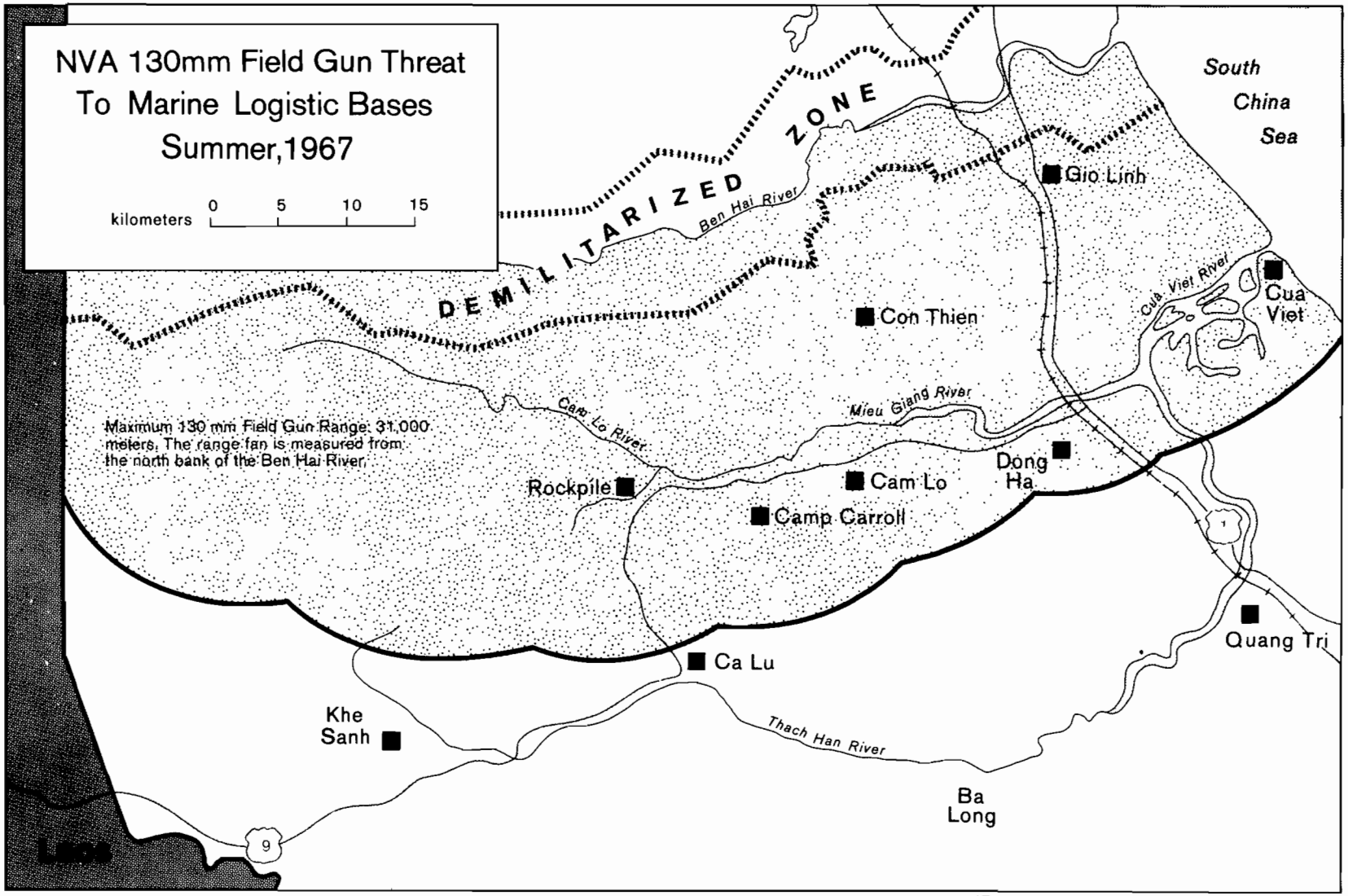
By Marvin A. Delgado

*I*n the fall of '67 we, Second Battalion, First Marines, came under the operational-control of the 3rd Marine Division and participated in all major battles in the DMZ area, with Lieutenant Colonel Van Winkle at first commanding our battalion, then Lieutenant Colonel Parker, followed by Lieutenant Colonel Duncan. We first went to Quang Tri, and then had an extended stay at Con Thien. After leaving Con Thien, we went along Route 9 to lift the siege at Khe Sanh. §



(Courtesy of Marvin Delgado)

DELGADO NEAR DMZ



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

UP NORTH

I Guess They Call This War

(From the Letters Home of David "Doc" Johnson)

July 3, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad,

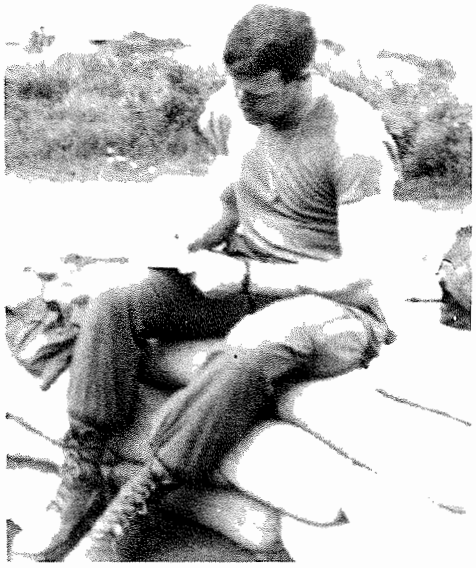
Well--I arrived in Vietnam finally and for the past two days have been trying to get out of here to my company. We made it but, Christ! for the hold up.

The weather out here is hot and humid with just no let up. The sweat just clings to me and there is nothing in the world I can do to get rid of it but wipe it off on my clothes. My underwear isn't any good for anything because out here we don't wear any [*the underwear would get soaked with sweat, then cling to your legs so when you walked your legs would be rubbed raw*], so I wrapped them all up and made a pillow out of them. I should be able to put them to all kinds of uses soon.

Our working days start tomorrow but I imagine it will be all skate. Nothing will really happen until next week--I go out in the field. That should be good. I hope I like it for I'll be there six months.

So far as the war goes, all I've seen so far is jets taking off. I've heard a few explosions here and there but nothing to amount to anything. If the whole war is like this, no sweat!

This is just a few lines to let you know I got here OK. By the way, my address has changed. It's David Johnson HN, B611898 USN, 2nd BN 1st Mar H&S Co BAS, FPO San Francisco CA 96602. In two weeks it'll change again but anyway write to me here. . . .



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

Love,
Dave

July 19, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad,

I figure I'd write a few lines here and let you know everything is OK on this side of the world. I've seen a little bit of action over here already but that could be expected.

The end of this week we pack up and go into Da Nang to the bridges. No booby traps or bullets, just a lot of fun. I've only been here for three weeks and already I want to get out of the field. It's no fun, that's for sure. . . .

Love,
Dave

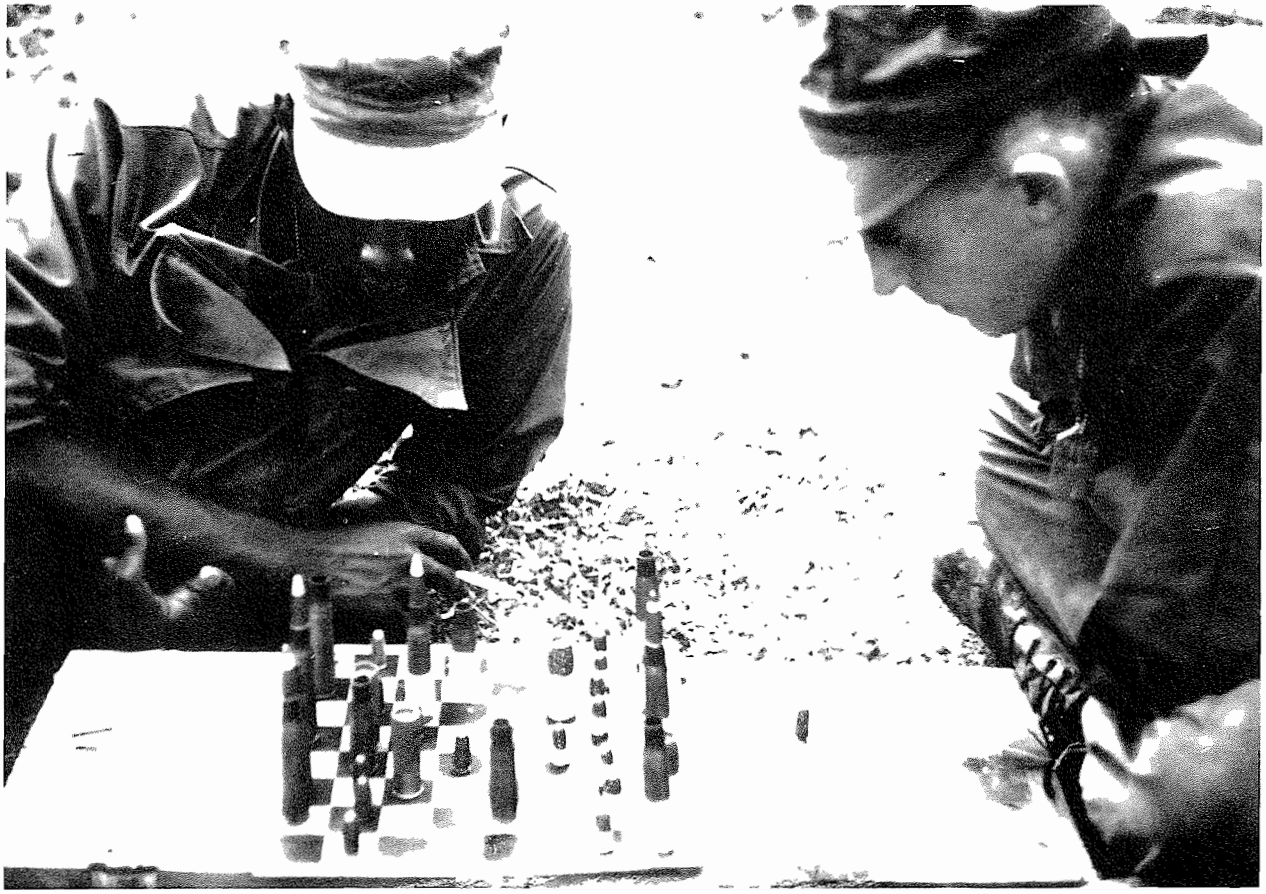
July 30, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, here I am with a month in country with only a year to go. For the last four days we have been sitting in Regiment, playing chess, cards, drinking Coke and beer. The only trouble is every night we go out and stomp through the rice paddies for about five hours. Next week we go to the bridge so all we'll do there is swim and have a good time. . . .

Love,
Dave

* * *



(Courtesy of David "Doc" Johnson)

PLAYING CHESS AT QUANG TRI

"The king and queen were .50-caliber shells, one red and one white-tipped (being a tracer, I think), the bishops were .30-caliber shells, knights were 12-gauge shotgun shells, rooks were spent .50's, and pawns were .45 slugs. The red/black men were distinguished by the adhesive tape wrapped around the red . . . We always said you had to make your own entertainment . . . ." --David Johnson

* * *

August 10, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad,

Right now my machine gunner and I are sitting here eating a gallon of peaches that I made off with from the mess hall. We have peaches coming out of our ears. If I was caught they'd probably

hang me by the ears but I always was the best watermelon stealer in North Dakota. . . .

Love,
Dave

September 17, 1967

Hi Bob,

. . . The only bad thing that has happened so far is the night we were hit at the bridge just south of Da Nang. We managed to kill 15 VC but it cost [us] two killed and eight wounded plus they blew our bridge. They hit us with about everything the VC have, so considering everything, we did good--but each gook I figure cost about $100,000 dollars to the American Taxpayer. . . .

Last night we went to the ARVN Compound, and talk about a blast. We got half looped on Tiger Beer, panther piss we call it, and ate rice mixed with fish. The fish we ate whole, heads, guts, bones and all. I'll have a gut ache for a month and probably worms till I die.

I pulled a cool one out on an ambush one night too. We were walking on a rice paddy dike, being careful not to fall in, when a guy told me to watch the hole in front of me. I did. I jumped over one, right into another one six feet deep. I must have looked like a drowned rat crawling up those four-feet mud banks. . . .

Your Big Brother,
Dave



(Courtesy of David Johnson)
CORPSMAN READY TO STROLL
"This is me ready to go on a stroll outside our perimeter. 'What did you carry in the Nam, Doc?' is a question often asked of me. Well, here I am: M-16, M-60 grenades, a helmet and flak jacket like everyone else, but my demolition bag is full of battle dressings. I heard Charlie liked killing Corpsmen, so I made up my mind to look like any other Marine." --David Johnson

* * *

October 6, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad and All,

Well here we are, 15 miles from the DMZ. We are no longer around Da Nang but up here in the sticks where all the happenings are taking place.

Below the hill [where] we are setting up our new Battalion area is an estimated 11,000 NVA--North Vietnamese foot soldiers--waiting for us. It won't be long before we have us a search and destroy mission that should take care of half of them anyway. . . .

Your Son and Brother,
Dave

October 21, 1967

[*This is three days after the ambush of October 18 during Operation Medina, and although Dave writes about the ambush elsewhere in this book, he wrote not a word home about it at the time. --Eds.*]

Dear Mom and Dad,

Here's a few lines to let you know how everything is in the Eastern Hemisphere. We have been living out of our knapsacks for the past month almost, and by the looks of things it's not going to change for a long while. We got to sleep in a tent one night here, but for the most part a poncho on the ground is our only home. Things like washing, brushing one's teeth, or shaving are a luxury around here--for the most part we don't get to. Dysentery is really a problem, for we eat out of the same can for a few days plus drink black water [*water from a rice paddy that had been fertilized with human feces --DJ*] that you wouldn't even think of washing your feet in in the States. This is the way it will be until at least December.

There are rumors [*there were always rumors --DJ*] we will be leaving here to go back to the ships around December. If that's the case I'll be in every big operation that pulls off from Saigon to the DMZ. The way it is now, we are no more than a band of Gypsies, for our packs are always packed, rifles cleaned, and we are loaded down with ammo--we are always on the stand-by for anything. Anything comes up and away we go. It was just like leaving home again to leave Da Nang. At least there was always a place to come back to. I guess they call this war. . . .

Your son,
Dave



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)
HOME SWEET (!?) HOME
Graf at home on the ground.

November 2, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well here I am still well and going strong. About all I have so far is blisters galore all over my feet from walking. I don't know how we did it but we skated out of going out tonight. Thank the Lord! We haven't had a night off now in BOO COO /beaucoup--*a very! --DJ]* long time. For a change I don't have to pick the rocks out of my place to lay down before I can go to sleep.

We have been on four operations in the last month so you know we haven't been getting much slack. Mostly walk--walk--walk. We have been lucky as far as casualties go [*not true--on 18 October Hotel took more casualties in three minutes than any unit in the history of 2/1 in Vietnam with the exception of Fox in April of 1967 --DJ*] but I don't want to start bragging about it. About the time one does, BOOM! It happens. . . . In this envelope is a check for $228 signed over to you. I'd like for you to put $200 of it in the bank for me and with the rest pick me up a few odds and ends for I have no way to pick them up.

1) 4 film, color slides for my Yashica LYNX-5000, film size EX 135
2) a pack of air mail stamps
3) one small roll of plastic wrap

THEN FOOD!

A few boxes of Bisquick, Lipton tea (all kinds) with lemon. Steak sauce, Worcestershire or whatever

it is (3-4 bottles), 3 cans pepper, 1 French dressing, a few cans of spaghetti, a few cans of Spam, about 10 packs of lemonade, a few cans of Bounty Beef Stew, chili, about 10 packages of soup, instant pudding to be mixed with water, instant frosting, chocolate chip cookies, a few cans of cream style corn, a few cans of sardines, a can of peaches, a can of pears, pineapple, and a pack of wafer cookies.

For candy, some semi-sweet chocolate, a few Snickers, 10 peanut butter cups, a few Milk Duds, Cracker Jacks, and Boo Coo sunflower seeds. I'll also need some cans of sterno heat.

You'll think I'm nuts when you read all this but I have C-rations coming out of my ears and would sure like some good American food. They're starving me over here!

Well, I have to go. Please make sure no package is over 5 lbs--if they are they will come by ship. BAD NEWS! Send them airmail. Love you all and Good Night.

Your son,
Dave

PS: I hope $28 covers it.

November 10, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad and All;

Happy Birthday SWEET Marine Corps! Ya! Happy Birthday Marine Corps! Today is the Marine Corps' 192 year old birthday and all over the battalion that's the big thing today. Free beer and sodas, singing sessions, and all kinds of lectures and good food. . . .

For a whole week here now we are going to get out of the field for a change to go to Regiment classes. You'll never guess what the classes are on? . . . How to live out in the field! My aching back! We've only been living out there for almost five months and now they pull us in to show us how. Oh, well . . . as long as we're not out there. . . .

The winter monsoons are finally on their way . . . Everyday it stays just a little bit cloudier and rains just a little longer. In a week or so it'll just cloud over and we won't see the sun or moon again until February.

Just before sundown we were standing up by the CP singing songs of the Marine Corps and home. Our captain was requesting all kinds of songs about the Marine Corps so when they asked for requests I howled "Anchors Away" and you should have heard the boo's and laughter I got out of that. Wow!

Well, I best go now for it's getting late. . . .

Love,
Dave

November 17, 1967

Dear Bob:

Well, another day down and and one more less to do. Days really aren't important, though, but when a month slips by it feels good. Come the end of December I'll feel real good for I'll be on my way home. . . .

They explained our mission to us here finally and that is to protect the city of Quang Tri from enemy infiltration from the south and to destroy him by every means possible. As far as this goes we haven't been killing very many Mr. Charlie off but as far as putting a hurt on him--WOW! We are now patrolling his one main route through Nam itself and stopping his advancements. Plus all the food of his we have been finding. So far we have destroyed over 30 tons of rice and Sunday we are going after 14 tons more. Chue Hos *[chieu hoi's]*, VC who have come over to our side, are starting to turn themselves in all over because they have nothing to eat and are on the starving point. What really

hurts them though is the fact that when one turns himself he always tells us where more rice is at. . . .

The main reason we are here is because the VC and the NVA have been fighting now for four years and haven't yet won a major battle. The morale is falling fast for the VC, so now he is trying to win a major city and control it. The biggest one they have been after is Saigon but have taken the worst setbacks from that since the war began. In one battle over 400 VC were killed in a big attempt to take it, with US casualities listed at 17 killed and 42 wounded . . . Quang Tri is the capitol of the northern province of Vietnam and is a very likely target for the VC. We are to stop them . . . at all costs.

The thing that scares us the most is . . . [our] commanding general has said that all battalions . . . will spend a month tour at Con Thien . . . [which] the NVA have tried so hard to take by mortaring, rocketing, and artillery for the one reason [that] Con Thien controls most of their way to the south.



(Courtesy of David Johnson)

LILLY IN THE TRENCH
This trench led into Lilly's "house" at Yankee Station. Con Thien, January 1968.

Sunday we fly out of here by choppers again after 14 more tons of VC rice. Hotel, our company, is assigned the mission of finding it and blowing it up, so I suppose we'll run into some grief that day, but again the VC winter supply goes down. . . . I think we are definitely defeating North Vietnam slowly but surely.

. . . [W]e have been patrolling out about our perimeter every other night or so, getting in small grenade fights here and there. Nothing big, and as far as I'm concerned it can stay that way. . . .

We test fired the other day with our M-16 rifles so I had to show the Marine Corps how a good Squid can shoot--23 bull's eyes out of 72 shots at targets 300 meters away. Not bad--not bad at all. . . .

Other than that nothing has been happening but all of us sitting around here grumbling about being here. . . .

Your Brother,
Dave

PS: Let the whole family read this if they want to.

December 6, 1967

Dear Mom and Dad and Bob and Jim,

. . . There are all kinds of rumors flying around here [about] where we are going shortly but no one knows for sure where. All we know is we are going. . . .

The guy that sleeps in the tent with me got a Christmas tree in the the mail . . . would you believe? All we need now is a manger scene and we'll be all set for Xmas. I sure wish I could be home however. . . .

Love,
Dave

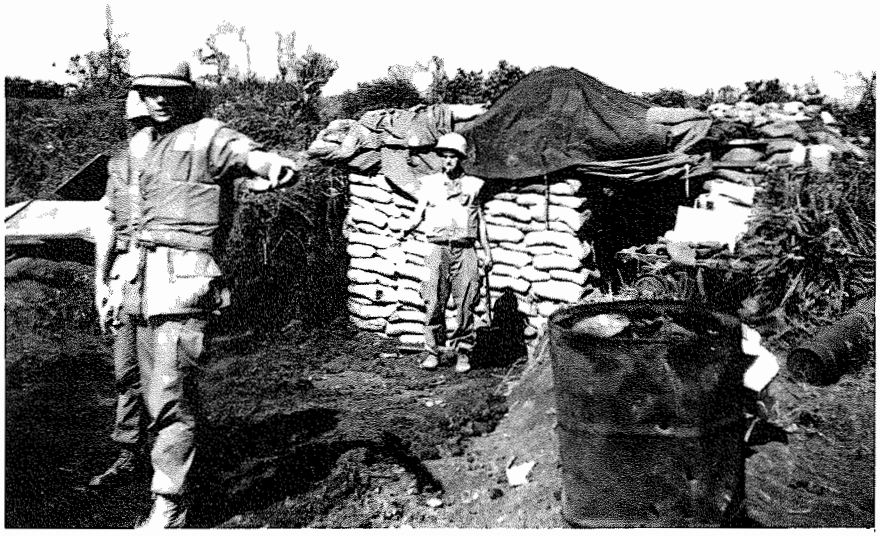
December 16, 1967

Hi Bob,

. . . I could give you all the happenings around here but I'm afraid that I'd bore you to death. The real problem lies in the near future and how I should tell Mom and Dad so that they will sleep this coming month. Maybe you can break the news to them a little easier than I can.

By the time this letter gets to you, our area at Quang Tri will be no more. In four days we'll be packing our gear again and heading north again to CON THIEN! . . . Con Thien is to the Nam like Gettysburg is to the States . . . .

Con Thien, if you don't already know, is just south of the DMZ and . . . is one of the main spots of the war . . . It is constantly shelled from the North and has received 2000 rounds of artillery in one day and at times still does. This will be our new home for 30 to 45 days.



(Courtesy of David Johnson)

COMPANY AID STATION

Mike "Doc" Hill in the background, in front of his company aid station at Con Thien, January 1968--everyone wore flak jackets and helmets outside. Trash barrels have holes from exploding incoming.

The living conditions aren't very good by what I hear, for battalions rotate in and out all the time so no one cares too much about its upkeep. It's just a mass of garbage, foxholes, trenches, bunkers, and with the constant shelling combined with monsoon rains there's a new attraction, MUD! The doctor, who just got back from there, said they had to get mules at times to pull Marines out of some of the trenches because of the mud. Just like World War I all over again--just sit and shoot arty back and forth.

My job as a corpsman, being the upkeep of the Marines, will bring my attention to first shrapnel wounds from mortars and artillery. The second is to decrease upper respiratory infections, dysentery, and a new growing problem of Con Thien, RABIES! Being the garbage dump of Vietnam, the asshole of the world, Con Thien attracts rats and with the steady growth of rats comes rabies, so I will have my hands full. I have the feeling the next month is going to be an experience I shall never forget as long as I live. . . .

Yours truly,
The Squid, Navy Davy

January 8, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad:

Here it is already 1968 and my tour is half done. I'm finally on the home stretch. . . .

We leave Con Thien around the 22nd for Phu Bai and by what I understand I have a real good chance to come out of the field then. . . .

The Vietcong also broke the New Year's cease fire--you probably heard over the news. We at Yankee Station, 600 meters south of Con Thien, were hit by unknown sized enemy force but made out well with only one man killed and one wounded. . . .

As far as work goes, the corpsmen have been pretty busy keeping up sanitation here. It's a real problem. We've built some wash racks, shitters, and showers but the rest remains a problem, meaning garbage. We must be making out OK, however, for the rat count has really dropped. So far only one man has been bitten by a rat and at present is undergoing shots at Dong Ha. . . .

Love and Miss You All,
Dave

January 9, 1968

Hi Bob,

. . . Con Thien has been hit hard a few times but so far has only taken one KIA and two WIA's, one of which was the Old Man himself (being LtCol Parker). Summoned to the scene, the corpsmen of Hotel Company made quite a name for themselves by running through a mortar barrage to aid the Battalion Commander. I was the second on the scene. The KIA was in the shitter at the time of the enemy mortar fire and seeing how the shitter took a direct hit, nothing really could have saved him. I pronounced him dead before I even reached the bottom of the staircase. On the way back from the shitter to the COC bunker, I came all too close to the same fate, as an 82 mortar completely destroyed a bunker right in front of me. . . .

Last night we had an ambush too and you'd never believe what happened. We watched a gook for three hours through a starlight scope--he never did a thing. He was just walking back and forth across the middle of the road all night. We thought for sure it had to be some dumb ass Marine because no gook just walks back and forth across the road. Well, we found out when we got back in it was some dumb ass gook who just walked back and forth across the road, and we let him. . . .

Well, in two weeks Con Thien is also in the past, just another name on my helmet. . . .

Your Brother,
Dave

January 16, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

Things around here are taking a turn for the worse, I'm afraid. By the sounds of things we're getting extended [*at Con Thien*] for a month. . . .

Well, I know this is short and everything, but really there is nothing to write about. Take care of yourself and see you in July.

Your Son,
Dave

January 22, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

Yesterday history was made at Con Thien by me. Would you believe that I took the first hot bath at Con Thien? I made me a bath tub by cutting an oil can in half and heated the water by burning wood under it. I showed it to the doctor who just said "Amazing!" I even have pictures of it that I should send to the paper. I'm in history! . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

* * *



(Courtesy of David Johnson)

CLEAN AT LAST AT CON THIEN

"We didn't have a safe water supply, and when I was in the tub it occurred to me that someone could have been killed trying to get the water. That began to eat on me, and even to this day I think this was poor judgement on my part. The bath felt great, however." --David Johnson

* * *

January 28, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well today ends the end of my seventh month in country leaving me with only five to do. It's still too long a time to start counting the days but it's getting down there anyway. . . .

Yesterday we kicked through the brush all day just to get our own artillery shot at us. It was no big deal or anything but it sure put a scare into some Marines. We figured for sure old Charlie had us pegged out, and we were out farther than any company thus far had been.

We even got overrun once--by wild hogs. About fifty of them with long ugly tusks came charging right through our position like baby freight trains. It's a miracle no one was hurt. We also found what looked to be tiger tracks and all kinds of dud arty rounds and even one 250 pound bomb that never went off. . . .

The cease fire also starts tomorrow [and will last] for five days . . . if Charlie honors it--five days of doing nothing. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

January 31, 1968

Hi Bob,

Life in the Barrel, a one-month wonder--seen all, knows all--calls life at Con Thien. Place of the Angels is the Vietnamese translation . . . we just call it "the Hill." Now candlelight is almost a gift of God and the ink I write with is quickly becoming a luxury. Water is becoming a thing to steal and clean clothes are just a dream. Food, ammo, and work are about all we have in abundance.

Life here can best be described as a blank sheet of paper, which really is about all my letters amount to any more. We haven't had any mail for so long I'm out of things to say. I could write eight letters at a time if I only had some carbon paper. The only news I have to offer is [about] the war in general. Secret meetings of generals and Johnson in Saigon--moving 70,000 Army troops north--and the large NVA buildup is leading to something. I guess it's for them to know about and us to worry about. Whatever it is, it's good. Pray for peace. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

February 5, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad:

Tomorrow I should be leaving for R&R for two or three weeks (figuring travel time and staging). . . It's going to be good to leave this place for a while. Especially now that we are at Con Thien. . .

Yours truly,
Dave

February 19, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

Here I am back at Phu Bai and here at Phu Bai is where I'll stay. I'm out of the field finally, now back at BAS [*battalion aid station*]. That's the best news I have to offer about right now.

R&R was as wonderful as everyone said it would be. All my worries and grief from the last eight months seemed to disappear. . . .

Love,
Dave

March 3, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

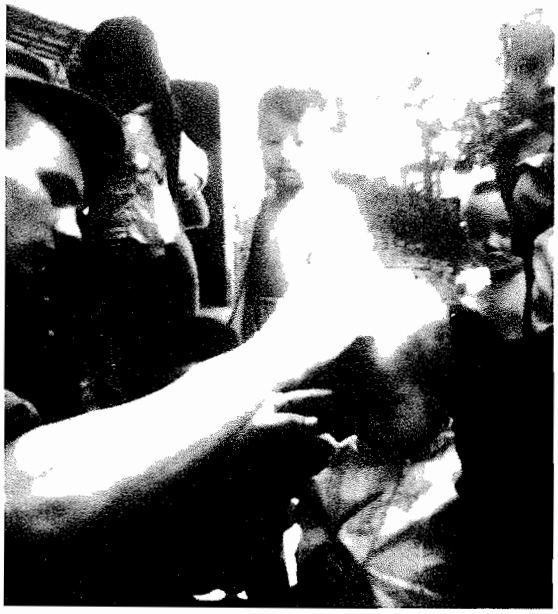
February is finally over. I never thought that month was going to end and it is the shortest month of the year. . . .

For the past week or so here we have been taking turns running convoys up to Hue and going to Med-Caps and other things. The last Med-Cap we were on we vaccinated about 100 nuns against plague and will be going to give cholera next. . . .

Aside from today the weather has been real nice and we've been out playing basketball most of the day. It takes about one game for me but somehow I make it through it all.

From nightfall on it's mostly poker and chess and as usual I'm still winning. . . .

Your Son,
Dave



(Contributor unknown)
DOC JOHNSON ON MED-CAP

March 12, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad and All:

. . . Last night we were supposed to get hit by mortars but nothing came of it. Just the same, we had to sleep in our holes--and talk about a night of misery. I swear I couldn't see my hand in front of my face for all the mosquitoes. We finally decided to hell with this and went back in our tent and went to sleep. If we would have stayed there we would have been eaten alive for sure, so we decided to take our chances with the mortars. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

March 31, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad:

Well, the end of another month and only three more to go--90 more days to be exact. I can finally see the end of all this, and believe me it is a good feeling. . . .

No news has come down from our forward so I don't really know what's going on up there. They are supposed to be moving out on an operation shortly but I don't know. I kind of hope not because if they do I may end up back in the field. With only 90 days to scratch off my short timer calendar, I can't even see that. I'm hoping I can just sit here at Phu Bai and be bored for the rest of my time here. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

April 11, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, here I am back up at Ca Lu Valley, five road miles south on Hi Way 9 from Khe Sanh. Things are pretty quiet here and surprisingly enough all the time our battalion has been up here we have never really been hit. It gets a guy to wondering where he is safer, here or at Phu Bai where they have been taking rockets almost every day.

Ya, we really have us a setup here for our BAS. Instead of tents we live in grass houses and bunkers for our working quarters. Why, you could almost say we were living like the gooks in their grass huts. The area in general is mountainous, covered with jungle and high grass. To our north the Ca Lu Valley stretches out on its way to Khe Sanh. Below our lines we have a large mountain stream we use for washing clothes, bathing, and recreation. A nice cool swim sure does feel good after all the heat and dust of the day. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

April 21, 1968

Hi Ya Bob!

On the 18th of April I made my first trip to Khe Sanh and what a trip it was. Up the road to Khe Sanh! Picture if you could a bumpy dirt road of World War II through the Alps with cliffs on each side, blown bridges, trucks laying mangled at the bottom of hundred foot drops, bomb craters, and trees burnt from napalm drops and you have Hi Way 9 to Khe Sanh. The word spelled B-A-D. . . .

Then came Khe Sanh, and everything you heard about it could only be a start of its story. Bunkers in shambles for protection, bed, and, if needed, bathrooms. Low cut trench lines, where I slept that night, full of garbage and the red dirt walls caving in at their sides. At the end of the airstrip a dead C-130 and aircraft lay like skeletons to tell the tale of resupply runs that never made it back. And again, the red powdered dirt to keep the air almost unbreatheable. . . .

My night was spent, as I said, laying in a trench scared to death. You could hear the enemy guns as they were fired from Laos and hear the scream of the shell as it howled over your head. Every once in a while it would explode so close the sides of the trench would cave in all around us and the blast would leave my ears ringing and me looking for a hole a little deeper to hide in. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

May 10, 1968

Hi Ya All:

Well I'm still at Khe Sanh but not for long I hope. I should be back at Phu Bai now but I just haven't had any luck, I guess. Tomorrow some other corpsmen are on their way up here to take our place but everything depends on how things go in the field. We lost four the other day, and if we lose any more, here is where I'll stay. Oh well, so far it hasn't been all that bad. . . .

Kroll, one of our corpsmen at Phu Bai, stopped by the Division Surgeon's office a few days ago. Our names are on the board for home the 20th and 21st of June. That means June 25th I'll be home. Home for the 4th and everything. . . . [*Dave was born on the 4th of July. --Eds.*]

We haven't really been doing anything but working on casualties. Not that we have been taking many, but they just keep coming one and two at a time. Then sick call. All kinds of sick call and they never quit coming, all day and night. They come with rat bites, crabs, dysentery, and worms.

Most of this can be best traced right down to the living conditions, which are bad. We're [*the corpsmen*] pretty lucky here for we have it pretty nice compared to the Marines. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave

May 21, 1968

Dear Mom and Dad,

. . . I'm back in Phu Bai. Back to the good life and by the looks of things here is where I'll stay. Here for the rest of the 26 days or so before I'll be on my way to Da Nang to come home. Boy, I sure can't wait. . . .

Here's to seeing you all soon. . . .

Yours truly,
Dave §



(Courtesy of David Johnson)

I Remember

By Chuck Daugherty

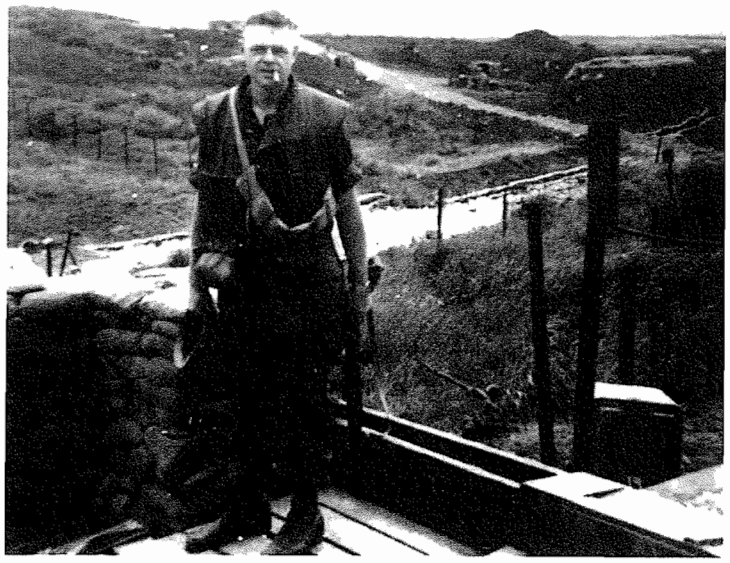
I've been retired since 1978, and now I work with the Marine Corps West Federal Credit Union. I do money management classes out in the units for the troops, try to help them with their financial problems, get loans, buy cars, that sort of thing. It's been a lot of fun. And I'd like to think I'm still helping Marines.

Recently I drove up through Camp Pendleton towards San Onfre. I drove through Camp Horno 53 Area, and paused for a minute at Building 53-512. That was the last CP for Second Battalion, 1st Marines before they retired their colors. The troops from 2/1 were taken into First Battalion, Fourth Marines, who now occupy that building. But the colors were retired from there and taken to the Ninth Marines up in the 63 area, and from there cased and sent back to Washington, D.C. I remember when the First Marines were still active at Onfre. Their regimental commander was Colonel Fred Mahady. Fred was a company commander in Vietnam in 1967-1968; when I was S3, he had Hotel Company.

I joined 2/1 about 1 November 1967. I was a captain on an SLF, came aboard, flew into Dong Ha, went to the 1st Marines CP for assignment, and was told that I had been promoted to major that day. I was promoted by (then) Major O.K. Steele. The next morning I jumped a helicopter and flew to Quang Tri where I joined First Marine Regiment. I stayed around the CP area for about a week--that was right around the Marine Corps Birthday, and we were going to have our parade, cake cutting, message reading, and all the things that go along with it. Colonel Ing was the regimental commander at the time.

We had a couple of rehearsals the day of the actual festivities. Some ARVN widows came bringing a cake and presents for Colonel Ing and some of the staff officers. They had embroidered some handkerchiefs with the date--these were the gifts they gave. It was quite touching to see these ladies helping us celebrate our Marine Corps Birthday.

I was sent down to the battalion at Quang Tri, to be the S-3. Lieutenant Colonel Archie Van Winkle had the battalion then (he was later relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Evan Parker). At Quang Tri there was a village called Tan Me that you could see from the hill where the 2/1 CP was. About three o'clock one morning--when it was dark as the ace of spades--we went down and cordoned that ville off. We made



(Courtesy of Chuck Daugherty)
CHUCK AT CON THIEN

enough noise to sound like a cavalry coming in. We kept troops there for thirty days, to keep the bad guys from occupying the ville or using it as a way station. Fox Company was in the ville when Captain Dirk Prager was the commander, and he sent a platoon up to the CP for some reason (I forget what it was--I quess to get cleaned up and change clothes). They were going back down to the ville when Col Parker came zipping up to see them off and got a little concerned that their boots weren't shined and all the rest of that stuff--you know, like a parade field practice. I kind of had to laugh at that a little bit. Wasn't too funny to Capt Prager.

Another time at Quang Tri, the regimental S-3, Major Ernie Cook (now General Ernie Cook), called me to say we were going to the Highland Forests with two companies from 2/1 and one company from 1/1, on a rice and rocket hunt--a big operation. We went down to the LZ, got on choppers, and took off. They had prepped an LZ for our landing, but it turned out we seemed to have landed in the wrong LZ--a good thing, because the bad guys would have known we were coming had we gone into the prepped LZ.

We wandered around and didn't find anything. I remember it rained, and the choppers couldn't come back in. We had some ARVN troops that weren't too pleased at having to stay out all night in the rain. But we finally got picked up the next day and brought back.

I can remember going by the regimental CP and going in their shop and jumping all over Ernie Cook about how it seemed they had just looked at a map and pointed a finger at it and that was how they ordered that operation, sent us out there for nothing. He wasn't too pleased with that attitude, but that's the way I felt about it.

We also had an early Christmas celebration at Quang Tri. Because we were going north in early December to Con Thien, they gave us a big send off and a big Christmas dinner. We took off early December and got into Con Thien and made the relief there--1/1 was up there at the time. We had to do a lot of work at Con Thien, like digging trenches and laying comm wire. We'd only been there a few days when some of the comm people were taking wire from the COC to tie into one of the companies while others of us were burning debris, and a 106 round buried in there cooked off and killed one of the comm people. That was our first casualty at Con Thien.

Although called the "Hill of Angels," Con Thien was a pretty tough place to be. It was cold and wet, and the bunkers were nothing to write home about. We were there over 82 days in a defensive perimeter. As I've said, the



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)
"PLACE OF ANGELS"--"HILL OF ANGELS"
Con Thien

first part of our tour at Con Thien was spent cleaning the place up, getting the comm wires in, digging trenches, rebuilding a couple of bunkers that were knocked down. I think it was a few days before Christmas when General Westmoreland and Premier Ky came up there to look around and, I guess, to get a little publicity. General Raymond Murray, an old friend from Parris Island days, was with them, and he asked me what we thought we needed. I told him food, clothes and beer. I remember we were in the COC and a couple of newspapermen were there, too, and they wanted to get up to OP 1 and look out across the DMZ and see all the bad guys hanging out--that was their biggest purpose for being up there.

I remember sitting in the COC on Christmas Eve, drawing up defensive fire plans for Con Thien because we knew that Tet was coming, and somewhere along the line there was probably going to be a big push. We weren't sure if it was just going to be Khe Sanh or if it was going to be Khe Sanh *and* Con Thien. So I was working up the defensive fire plans when all of a sudden I realized it was coming up midnight and I had about an 8- or 10-ounce flask of scotch that I had carried along with me for a special occasion. I remembered that flask and went over to my hootch, picked it up and brought it back to COC and passed it around to the comm radio operators, the seniority officer and the air officer and wished everyone a Merry Christmas. It was about midnight when we did this, and when I got the flask back for my own toast, the final toast, it was empty. But that was okay. That's a Christmas that really sticks out in my mind.

I remember the day before Tet. I forget what time of day Tet started, but for about three minutes before it went into effect, anyone who had any kind of a gun at all was shooting it north towards the DMZ--mortars, machine guns, rifles, pistols. We cranked off everything we had to let them know up there that Tet was starting.

As soon as the Tet cease fire began, the engineer guys got in there and started redoing the roads, building more trenches, and building dye marker bunkers--pretty much around the clock. The six-by and dump truck drivers that came for the rebuilding were bringing beer in for the troops. They had it in their gas tanks and all kinds of other places, and they were charging the troops a hellacious price for it. They were getting it, too.

Shortly after Tet was over, we started taking some heavy incoming again. I can remember we had one bunker that wasn't really occupied because it was not in a very good position. A couple of Marines dove in there when the shelling started, and a round went through the roof, down through the floor and into the ground. However, it didn't explode. The bunkers were supposed to be shell-proof, but they didn't turn out to be so.

I still have some of my maps, and not too long ago I found some of the coordinate points on them. I can remember Golf Company was facing north along the DMZ, and Randy Copeland, commander then, more or less faced the agricultural area towards the left front. On the DMZ, Fox Company was to the right front, and the market place was more or less to their right front. They swung around to the road that came up from C2, the fire base. I think the company commander then was Dirk Prager, relieved by an LT whose name I have forgotten. (If somebody knows, please let me know. A hell of a good officer, got hurt when we got to LZ Stud.) They were kind of on the west side of the perimeter, and Hotel Company was at Yankee Station, commanded by Fred Mahady, now a colonel, then captain. Tom Eagen had Echo Company, who were kind of east from the road up, tied in with Golf Company.

We spent roughly 82 days in that defensive perimeter up there. I don't think the Marine Corps was geared for that kind of defensive warfare, but we stayed there. We had a lot of incoming on several occasions, and we took some casualties. I remember OP 2 got hit pretty hard one night. That was when we sent two platoons and one reserve north of the wire, and they got hit pretty hard, in a sort of an ambush. That was Fox Company--and the LT whose name I forget was pushing that operation. We came running back through the wire in a hurry. We did make a couple of sweeps. One time Golf Company swept in the direction of the

agricultural area and back around, making no contact.

One night I remember we sent a listening post out, down to the east of Hotel Company where there was an old road. They were dropping off guys when they saw some other guys they thought were Marines coming in, so they stopped to carry on a conversation with them. But they turned out to be some NVA forward observers. Everybody was quite surprised. No shots were fired, but each group startled the other, and everybody took off for the bushes.

I remember another night when a listening post was coming back in. They got screwed up in the lane and ended up in a mine field, and some of them got really torn up. One of our Corpsmen went out to them and patched them up and got a couple of them medevaced. Then he went back for a second go, and he got his own leg blown off. The Corpsmen were good.

I also remember an Army general, General Rossen, who came up to look at Con Thien and our situation, because at one time I think they were considering reinforcing us by some Army units. He asked how our morale was and if we had any beer. I told him morale was good, but that we hadn't had beer in over 30 days. So he left, and a couple of days later a couple of choppers came in and extended a couple of cargo nets, dropped them and took off. The S-4 called me up and told me we had 80 cases of Korean beer and a note from General Rossen saying he wished he could have sent more, but that he hoped this would help. I was quite appreciative--I'm sure all the men there were. I remember we rationed that beer off starting with the enlisted, a can at a time.

We had an Army counter-mortar radar unit at Con Thien, consisting of about ten or twelve enlisted, with a staff sergeant in charge. Those guys had A-rations almost all the time. And every ten days they'd effect a relief and bring in a new group. I'm sure none of this set too well with most of us, but there wasn't too much we could do about it. Except we told them to take those A-rations and eat them inside the bunker, not outside where the Marines could see them.

I remember Sergeant Major Stepanovich--a big guy, about the size of a door frame, a good sergeant major who kept everybody hopping. We had a hot chow truck one time down there at the Echo line; we set up a field kitchen getting this hot chow, and we were feeding our people a squad at a time out of each company. And all of a sudden we started taking incoming. They had zeroed in on us. My first reaction was to dive for cover, but old Stepanovich was up there by the stove yelling for everybody to get up there and get their chow and *then* get out of the area. Stepanovich was also instrumental in bringing in crates of apples and loaves of bread, and I think eggs too, which he somehow got down at Dong Ha.

Once Stepanovich was down at the river talking to some of the local people through an interpreter. They were talking about how they fished, and Stepanovich decided to show them how we fished. He took a concussion grenade, pulled the pin and threw the grenade into the river where the explosion promptly brought about a dozen fish to the surface. That sure gained everybody's attention.

If Col Parker caught you outside with your helmet off at Con Thien, he'd throw rocks at you, yell at you to get your helmet back on. We wore our helmets and our flak jackets. Once, however, Col Parker and I were walking by the Army counter-mortar radar unit where one of those guys was lying in the sun outside his bunker, and Col Parker threw a rock at him and then turned to continue his conversation with me. Just then a rock came whizzing back. We never did find out who did it, which kind of upset Col Parker.

Another time Col Parker was standing on the veranda of the COC when we began to take some incoming, and he took some frags in his left hand and arm and his face. Some of us ran out and grabbed him and hauled him into the COC where we determined his wounds made him a medevac case. SgtMaj Stepanovich was there, and he grabbed Parker and carried him like a fireman would haul somebody away from a fire and took off down past the BAS to the LZ and loaded him onto a chopper. That's the last time we saw Col Parker in Vietnam, though I

saw him a number of years later at Camp Pendleton. His relief was Lieutenant Colonel Billy Duncan who then kept the battalion for as long as I was there.

At one point some reporters from *Stars and Stripes* came up to Con Thien to do some stories. One of them asked me if we had a gunnery sergeant who was mean looking, maybe with scars on his face, a tough-looking guy. He wanted to interview him. I looked at this guy and laughed a little bit. I thought it was ironic that he thought a mean-looking gunnery sergeant would indicate that we had some lean, mean Marines up there. I did make a comment to this reporter to the effect that our main purpose was to kill NVA. That comment got published, making us sound a little bloodthirsty, and I guess some congressman started to make an issue of it. But it must have died a natural death because I never heard any more about it.

At the end of February they decided to pull us out of Con Thien and take us back to C2, which was the artillery fire base just behind us about three or four thousand meters. I remember getting hit there pretty heavily one time. Didn't have any trenches, just bunkers. We took some casualties that we probably wouldn't have if we'd had trench lines.

We hung around there for a couple of weeks, then were given orders to move to LZ Stud. LZ Stud was also called LZ Vandegrif, and it was a brand new airfield, unfinished then, on Route 9 up by Ca Lu. We got on choppers and went whipping up there and set up a defensive perimeter around the LZ. There was a creek at LZ Stud where we all got our first opportunity in months to get a good bath with soap.

We built a perimeter around LZ Stud and we stayed there for a while (eventually even getting showers set up), but then they decided to airlift us up in the hills around the LZ, because we were going to effect a relief of Khe Sanh. The battalion was split: a company was on the hillside and two companies were down on the road, on Route 9.



(Courtesy of Chuck Daugherty)

MARINE (LEFT) AND MONTAGNARDS ON ROUTE 9

One night on that hillside a staff sergeant went out with a listening post--I think he had one or two squads--and they got hit, really whacked. We couldn't get any reinforcements out to them, though we were trying everything else--mortars and whatever. The story goes that the sergeant grabbed a machine gun and charged those bad guys, all the while singing the *Marine Corps Hymn*. He got killed. I believe he got the silver star posthumously for that.

I remember that it was beautiful up on the mountain. Those heller monkeys--sounded like a woman in labor, kind of shrieky-shrill at night--brought you up out of the sack. But eventually we had to come down. We wanted to get off that hill in a hurry, so we followed the stream bed. It was pretty rough going at times, but we made it down to Route 9.

Route 9 was about five-feet wide; it was full of crater holes and had bridges out. It didn't look like much, but that was the highway. We had to open the road and get some Rough Riders and do some bridge repair. I left the battalion there along Route 9 just about Easter, to rotate back to the States.

It was tough at times, but I have fond recollections of being with 2/1. I can remember Quang Tri when it rained, when the place where the troops set up their tents was nothing but a sea of mud. Although we had hot showers set up there, things were rough. Still, there was very little complaining about the conditions. All our people were good troops who put out a lot of effort.

People rotated in and out of the battalion quite rapidly and in most cases I didn't get to know but very few of the enlisted, a few of the staff NCO, and of course all of the officers. But I can say that during my time with the battalion I believe everybody put out the extra effort to make things click and to do a good job. I believe we were all pretty much convinced that what we were doing we were doing for a just cause. Perhaps we felt differently once we got back to the States and saw some of the political goings-on. Nevertheless, I think every Marine there did his job and can be damned proud of it. I know I felt quite confident and proud of all those that were in 2/1 during the months that I was there.

Congratulations, gents. Semper Fi. §



(Courtesy of Chuck Daugherty)

ROUTE 9, TO KHE SANH

Valley of Death: Medina

By Ray Hannon

I remember where everyone was in line when we were ambushed on 18 October 1967. Starting in the back with second platoon, before you get to third platoon, you had from second squad--my squad--Anthony Perez, then in front of Perez was Jack Hammond, and in front of Jack Hammond was David Oberle. In front of David Oberle was Tim Vicalvi, who was my radioman, and then there was me and there was Lawrence Churchill and Fisher, machine gunners, and another new guy whose name I can't remember, and then there was Hinton. That made up my squad.

In front of Hinton was Lieutenant McKnight's radio operator--I can't think of his name--then Lt McKnight, then Rocceo Cassanova, the corporal in charge of machine guns, then the two other machine guns were right in front of him. That's the way the platoon progressed up through the passage.

We'd made contact with the enemy two or three times over the previous couple of days and the battalion was chasing them, which we shouldn't have been doing--not at that pace. There's no way we should have been rushing through there chasing those people at that pace, because we already knew they were NVA and probably a battalion or more of them in size.

We had hit them twice already; we'd taken kills and we'd killed quite a few of them. And still the battalion commanders kept moving us at a hell of a pace. And there was no way to have outside security or anything like that. The terrain didn't permit it at all. There was elephant grass and we were on a sloping hillside, if I remember right. There was a sloping hill with higher places up on either side of us--we were kind of in a valley. We were going right up the valley. There was only one way for us to go, and we were following the way the enemy went. A no-no.

And then all of a sudden the NVA were just all over the place. They were on those higher places on the hillside. Some of them came up out of spider traps, and these were wounded, but they blew the guys away. They dropped everything on us: 30 calibers, machine guns, satchel charges, everything. You name it, they dropped it on us. But they had those spider holes, and so they were very close, and that's what took most of us. Lt McKnight was all blown up; the only way you could tell it was him was from the top of his head that had some of his red hair. David Oberle was wounded in the middle, Perez lost his legs, and Vicalvi was blown up. I'm sure one of the wounded took his M-16 and shot his own brains out. He was gone almost from the waist down--the crotch down was gone--and I may not be right, but the way it looked to me was that he had shot himself. There were holes in his throat and the top of his head was gone, and his M-16 was in the dirt across from him. You can't really tell about a thing like that, but that's what it sure looked like to me.

They hit us in the middle of the platoon. They hit the last of the battalion. And it took 35 or 40 minutes for the rest of the battalion to even do anything to get back there to us. Third platoon was on the tail end. They hit the middle of the second platoon, and third platoon--but first platoon took a lot of casualties, too. Second platoon was dead center in the middle of the ambush. We lost 17 people. For a platoon that's quite a bit.

Lieutenant Little had third platoon, but I can't remember who had first at that time.

There was a lot of space between Perez and the third platoon. We were moving out too fast for a situation like that, one where you

knew the enemy was with you. It wasn't Captain Barrett's fault or anything like that. It was the higher-up's. We shouldn't have been moving like that. When you're moving that fast you'll bunch up--everyone knows that. The only reason I'm here today is because Timothy Vicalvi, my radio operator, was walking right behind me. I was talking on the radio; I'd been calling to the third platoon to catch up, to get caught up--I think that's why I was on the radio. Lt McKnight had a cold that morning, and he couldn't talk on the radio. Anyway, Vicalvi was more to my right side, right around me there, when I saw this guy come up out of the ground. Then everything went red.

And that's when I start not to remember. Lots of explosions, I remember that--the NVA were popping up out of the ground all over; one guy would pop up and blow off and then another one would. It was really strange. Everything was in slow motion. Timothy Vicalvi took the blast and fell up against me. If we'd been spread out there, I would have been the one that got it. But due to the fact I was talking on the radio and he was right up against me--we were walking almost a double-walk.

The next thing I remember was Hinton--the point man in my squad--hollering. I remember hearing his voice; he was calling out to see if anybody else back there was alive. I got up--I was covered in blood--I had an AK-47 and two chest pouches. And no idea where I got them--I don't know jack about how I got them. I never found my M-16. I never found him. He could have been two yards off the trail and I would have never seen him. I don't know if he was blown out of my hands or what happened. And I don't know how I got the AK-47.

Churchill was killed, but Fisher was wounded. I never did hear from him, or anything about him, after that. Just Hinton and me from my squad were the only ones not wounded or killed from my squad, and then there was Fisher from machine guns that was wounded. The rest of my squad was gone. Everyone else was KIA.

Doc Mathia was up in front of Cassanova in the machine guns, and he and Cassanova weren't hurt either. Everybody else around them was gone.

I answered Hinton. He kept hollering, "Is everybody all right? Is everybody all right?" Just like that. Just screaming it out. I hollered out, "I'm here!" It sounded to me like I was talking inside a damn base drum when I hollered back. I guess my ears were still ringing from the explosions. Firing was still going on.

I don't remember anybody coming back through the second platoon. I don't remember anybody moving at all. After I came to I was hugging the ground, I was on the damn ground so low. I can remember the bullets cutting the grass down around me.

When the battalion finally swung back around and swept through the area all they found was what had been the rear-end security for the enemy. Some of them were still there. It looked like they had left the ones who were wounded and not going to make it. It seemed like they had set them up there shot full of drugs or something, because they were set up there and they took their lives and ours too. They hit us with everything.

Dave Oberle and me were real good friends. I knew his mother. I remember wrapping him up in his poncho and carrying him out. He was blown all to pieces. He was from Walnut Creek, California.

I re-upped even after that. I was crazy. But I lived for that stuff. I got a high going out in the woods, in fact. I'm serious. And in '69 when they wanted to know if I was going to re-up again, I said no . . . it was quiet right then, and I'd about had my share. §



Medina

By David Johnson

Shortly after Second Battalion, First Marines was moved from Da Nang to Quang Tri in September of 1967, Operation Medina began. Short of the logistics of the matter, Corpsmen were usually not briefed as to where we were going or why. About all I remember was that Hill, the company Corpsman, came around and told us, the platoon Corpsmen, to pack plenty of extra battle dressings. According to him, the area which we were about to enter had never been entered before and was believed to be a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) stronghold. Hill thought, by the information that he was able to gather, that casualties could be as high as 65%.

With those words of encouragement, we were, I remember, herded onto helicopters and flown to an open grassy area somewhere in the Hai Lang National Forest. Jumping from that chopper into the wind-swept elephant grass must have been the same feeling someone would experience leaping from a sinking ship into an angry, gale-driven sea. Noticing, as I jumped from the chopper, the surrounding canopy that could easily conceal a whole regiment of NVA added the thrill of spotting shark fins. Once on the ground, however, almost anticlimactically nothing happened. No gunfire. No explosions. No "Corpsman up!" Yet an unsettling calm settled in once the choppers flew off; it was like being left afloat in the sea wondering where the sharks' fins went.

In the days that followed, we found ourselves wandering through the jungle from hilltop to hilltop in a series of random movements designed to confuse anyone who might wish to predict what our next movement might be. Chopping and tearing our way through the entangling brush, we came upon a number of semi-permanent encampments, one complete with rice still cooking over a small fire. At one of these camps I found a number of North Vietnamese stamps showing NVA gunners shooting down US planes to the cheering of North Vietnamese civilians. Also found were a few weapons caches, a 9mm pistol, and various paraphernalia such as machetes and uniforms.

Although some minor contacts were reported from 2/1, we--Hotel Company--made no contact other than a mysterious encounter atop one hill. With an explosion (whether incoming or a booby trap is questionable) and some shooting (firefight or nervous response), a casualty nonetheless occurred that Hill, to this day, claims was the product of nerve gas. Other than that, all I recall for casualties was a sergeant who shot himself in the foot (accidentally or on purpose, both theories are believed by those there) with the 9mm pistol mentioned before. There was also an unfortunate Marine who found the back half of a leech hanging from his urethra. A few more casualties may have very well occurred, but nothing significant enough to remember as being part of Medina. If there were other casualties, it is possible that time has confused them with events before or after Medina. The point is, the casualties we had expected never materialized.

Charlie Company 1/1, however, was not so lucky. One night we lay atop a hill within ear shot of shouts and screams of the Marines in Charlie 1/1 being overrun by NVA. All night we listened to gunfire, explosions, and screams of pain and commands in both English and Vietnamese. Thinking we'd be summoned to saddle up to go help 1/1, we stared into the blackness of the jungle expecting the worst at any time. A very unsettling night ensued, for even though Hotel Company to date had had little if any contact, the events witnessed that

evening proved to me that our lack of casualties was just dumb luck. We were simply in the right place at the right time. The sharks were still out there, somewhere, unseen beneath the water.

Then came 18 October 1967, Hotel Company's darkest day in Vietnam. For reasons unknown to me, ease of mobility seemed to be gaining popularity over what to this point had been our cover--the primeval jungle itself. If the jungle could hide the Viet Cong, it could and did, until then, hide us as well.

Then, however, our invisibility and the unpredictability were to end. Then we stood upon a trail. Then the way before us was clear, clear from the entanglements that imposed a laborious burden on our movements and clear to anyone who might wish to predict what our next movement might be.

Aware that the trail took the guesswork out of predicting our positions, I began feeling extremely vulnerable. Sitting on that trail, staring into a wall of vegetation that could easily conceal someone as close as four feet away, I began feeling about as doomed as a beer bottle set upon a fence post for target practice.

Two of the first lessons so painstakingly learned in Vietnam were to never travel on obvious routes and to never congregate in numbers great enough to make a prime target for any Viet Cong willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for his cause. That trail seemed to contradict both those rules.

The Marines, I could sense, were also less attentive than they had been at any time during the operation. It had been a hard ten days. With little sleep or food, Marines were lying down and resting along the trail. Everyone's mind seemed to be more on a hot meal, a shower, a mosquito-free bed, or a cold beer back at battalion headquarters rather than on who might be watching, unseen, from a few feet away in the jungle. The question of who might be watching us, however, began to haunt me. I felt watched. I found myself peering into the jungle expecting to see someone glaring back.

Then came the word to move out. Like a train, the locomotive being the point man, we started down the track, or trail, with the rest of the remaining cars (the rest of the company) in tow. At first, each man tried to place about 20 feet between him and the man ahead of him; however, like a train, each time the locomotive slowed down or stopped, the cars in tow would slam into the car ahead until eventually little or no spacing existed at all. To make matters worse, all that the engineer (the commander) seemed to be concerned with was shoveling on the coal.

With all normal precautions cast to the wind, I found myself going over in my own head how I should react to what seemed to be a complete disregard for our safety. My first thoughts were to take some sort of action. *Maybe I should say something*, I thought. *Since as a Corpsman it is my job to protect the health and welfare of those in my platoon and since this disregard for safety puts everyone here in jeopardy, shouldn't I speak out against it?* But this conversation with myself soon gave way such rationalizing as *Hey! I'm only the platoon Corpsman. My job is to take care of the wounded, not to make command decisions. Obviously there was some reason for this. We made it this far without any casualties, why worry about a bunch of casualties that may not even happen? Marines have faith in me, shouldn't I have the same faith in the Marines? They must know the possible consequences of their actions and must have taken precautions to protect us against those consequences.*

But that type or rationalization only worked for a small while. Someone was out there, in the bushes. The same way a person could sense the displacement a large unseen body might create in the water as it passed nearby, I could feel it. I needed something beyond just faith in human beings to comfort me and soon found myself muttering prayers, bargaining with God that if He would only keep us safe until we could reach the savanna, I would show up in the chapel Sunday for sure, maybe even swear off swearing, drink more Coke, or even take up the cloth, but first just get us out of here, unharmed. And when the savanna appeared before me, for an instant it seemed that my plea to God had been answered.

But all I got was a view of the savanna.

Before I could place a foot out of the canopy, Hell opened its doors, unleashing an inferno of automatic weapons fire, mortars and incoming grenades. Everyone dropped to the trail like dominos, knocking each other down, overlapping, each thus pinning down the man in front of him. This resulted in a situation that nearly left us defenseless against an assault from our rear, since nearly everyone was facing forward. And there everyone just lay, like a train derailed, with no one having any idea what to do next.

"We can't just lie here!" I yelled at the sergeant, "Let's do something, even if it's wrong!" The sergeant, however, just motioned me to be still. So I lay there, listening to the gunfire come closer and closer, feeling the concussions of the explosions becoming more and more intense as they neared. With nothing to do but lie there, all I could think about was how scared I was. I couldn't get close enough to the ground. If only, I thought, I could pull the ground over me. Maybe then I wouldn't be noticed if the VC that I expected to see standing over me at any moment suddenly appeared.

But then the sergeant, my protector until this day, began saying, "Doc, you have to get to the rear. They're getting wasted back there."

The ambush was still in progress, however, and every bit of training that I had had up until that point stated, "Don't run through an ambush. A dead Corpsman is no good to anyone." So there I lay, torn between the sergeant's "Get going, Doc!" and the self-preservation that I had learned in field-med school.

Suddenly a Marine behind me howled, "I'm hit." That got my head out from the tree roots and got me thinking about something other than dying. I turned to him. He indicated the wound was under his right arm, so I tore into his flack jacket and saw what appeared to be a small wound on his right side. The wound didn't seem to be serious so I threw on a dressing. More importantly, however, the incident bought me a few moments for the gunfire to at least subside somewhat. It also called to mind my duty.

Now awakened to the task at hand, automatically, without even thinking about what to do next, I found myself running back along the trail looking for more wounded. But there were none, at least not in the forward platoon. I didn't notice any in the command group, either, as I passed over them. I did notice Hill lying behind the radioman, and therefore concluded that if any wounded existed here, Hill could handle them.

The first real casualty I came upon was Decker, a Corpsman just as I. He was lying on a mound up off the trail with three bullet holes in his chest, still gurgling blood. He seemed to be looking up at me, his eyes like a doll's glass ones, wide open, never dilating, and full of dirt particles, yet never blinking. I knew that he had no chance for survival; if he wasn't already dead, he'd die soon. But the idea of leaving him there with his eyes full of dirt really bothered me. For a moment I became obsessed with the idea that if for no other reason than some cosmetic effect, I should clean out his eyes so he wouldn't have to be seen with his eyes full of dirt. It took a few moments to collect myself well enough to realize there were far more important things to attend to than the dirt in a dead man's eyes.

From Decker on back, casualties were everywhere, lining both sides of the trail. Gonzales, another Corpsman, had been miraculously left unharmed but appeared to be in a mild shock, dazed like he hadn't had any sleep for a very long time. Other than that, however, he seemed to be functioning well and was busily patching up everyone around him. I knew that Gonzales was the last Corpsman in the column, and seeing many more wounded behind him I continued back to the rear.

From here on, what I had in front of me was about a platoon of dead and wounded Marines. In field-med training, the point stressed most about dealing with mass casualties was to treat those first who had the greatest chance for survival. With that in mind, I proceeded toward the rear to make a fast assessment of the task at hand. One Marine I spotted was suspended upside down by the brush in a gully beneath the trail. Both his legs had been severed at his buttocks and by what I could see from the trail above, he was probably dead, so I left him and looked for others more likely

to benefit from timely emergency first aid.

Finally I found myself standing over the end of the column, staring down the empty trail from which we had come. Suddenly I realized that no one was down that trail but the NVA. For that matter, the thought occurred to me, no one living and able to protect me was around me at all. No Marine had followed me to offer cover. I was alone with the NVA who could easily just step out on the trail and add me to the pile of dead Marines behind me. Or worse yet, I could be taken prisoner. For a moment, I found myself reflecting on what I should do if two or three just stepped out and said "Come with us." Should I die fighting rather than being taken prisoner? And if a Viet Cong or NVA suddenly jumped out on the trail and leveled a gun at me, about all I could do was to witness my life's end. Yet with that seemingly morbid reality came a strange acceptance of the situation. "OK," I thought, "if this is how my life is to end, I might as well die doing what I came for, taking care of fallen Marines." And with that I began doing what I could for whoever needed medical attention.

I do not remember the sequence of events that happened after that or how much time passed. My main concern was to get the wounded Marines, those who could move, up and moving to a safer place towards the head of the column. Then I began trying to stop the bleeding for those who couldn't be readily moved, offering a few words of comfort or a prayer, and perhaps a dose of morphine to take the edge off some of the pain.

Only after patching up the less seriously wounded did I turn my attention to the more critically wounded and dead. It was then that I returned to the legless Marine that I had noticed earlier stuck like a yard dart in the brush. I climbed down off the trail and pulled him from the entangling vegetation, only to have him amazingly come alive in my arms. As I turned him over, he immediately wanted to know what the hell had taken me so long to get to him. The guilt I felt was crushing.

But after a few moments that seemed a lifetime of staring me down, his tone changed. He wanted to know how the rest of his platoon was doing? Did his friends make out OK? I didn't want to tell him what had really happened, so I lied. I told him his friends were doing just fine. He didn't have to worry about them. He was glad for them.

With that off his mind he lay suspended in my arms for a moment, as if reflecting on the events that had just occurred. Then he rotated his eyes up to meet mine and asked, "Why? Why did God let this happen to me?" God was supposed to protect him from harm. "Why, God? Why me?" he asked. I didn't know. I had no answer, but suddenly the saying "There but for the grace of God, go I" took on a whole different meaning. I had often heard it said that God watches over us in time of need, but never had I given any thought to the negative side of the same thinking. Not only was this boy dying, he was dying believing that God, Whom he was taught loved and nurtured him, had now abandoned him. And that is how he died, held by me, abandoned by his God.

For some time I just sat there holding him, daydreaming, hashing over in mind what, if anything, all this meant. All my life I believed a purpose existed for everything. "Everything is as it should be," I believed, "or at least could be set straight." For the first time in my life, however, that belief was in serious doubt. How could anything set this straight? And what could possibly be the purpose of this? Nothing made sense at that moment. The answers that I had before weren't working, and in this absence of answers I felt the very foundation of my beliefs tremble.

Then Hill appeared above me, yelling about cover for his Corpsmen. Spotting me below the trail, he jumped down, took a look at the Marine and together we tried some last ditch attempts to revive him, to no avail. Pronouncing him dead, Hill directed me to return to the trail and head out of the canopy.

Together we began moving to the front of the column when we came upon the only dead NVA that I saw that day. He was lying face down on the trail, his head pointing to the front of our column. By the gaping hole directly in the back of his head, it could be surmised that he had been shot from the rear, perhaps by his own people, as he entered the trail. Regardless of who shot him, however, few Marines passing

by missed the opportunity to kick him, pump a few more rounds into his bullet-riddled body, or in a few cases to take a souvenir such as an ear or a finger.

"Fucking gook!" many Marines shouted as they directed their frustrations at him. I understood their anger, but looking at him lying motionless I never saw a "fucking gook," but rather I saw a man, a man as any of us, dead like the rest. And if personal sacrifice, loyalty, devotion to duty were traits to be held in high regard, wasn't his sacrifice as great as any of ours? Wasn't his loyalty, to whatever he felt his purpose might be, as honorable, his dedication to service, as great as any of ours? And if so, shouldn't we be honoring him as someone who made the ultimate sacrifice regardless of his cause? Again I didn't have an answer to another question in a string of questions that kept coming upon me like a barrage.

That evening, sitting alone in the elephant grass at the edge of the canopy, I couldn't put those questions out of my mind. Where was God? Why did He allow this to happen? What is purpose? What is honor? Why were we here? Why? Why? Why?

The questions rattled directionless through my head as if lost in the abyss of my mind.

I do not remember falling asleep, or even if I did. All I remember is suddenly it was morning, as if darkness had been chased away by the flicking on of a light. And just as remarkable, all the answers that seemed so important the day before lost their urgency. Not that those questions had been answered; in fact, a huge void now existed where answers once were. It was like someone took a huge eraser and wiped the slate clean, and for the moment I was content with an empty blackboard. Now, at least, the board wasn't all cluttered up with frivolous scratching and smudges that before I was led to believe were something important.

I left that hill with a whole new awareness of the world around me. I couldn't explain it, but everything was different, new and unexplored. Walking down that hill, I found myself going to wherever this new awareness might take me. Where didn't matter. I was just happy to be on my way--as long as it was away from where I had been. Little did I know how far the voyage was to be, but I was sure of one thing, I could never return to wherever it was I had been before.

Much has been written about the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder suffered by Vietnam Veterans that indicates we are suffering from some psychotic disorder brought on by the trauma of combat. As a 30% PTSD impaired Veteran, I prefer to compare PTSD to a plate as I did in a discussion that I held at North Dakota State University. Assume, for a moment, that the world, as it's known to you, is a plate of fine china. Imagine that since "day one" you were told that that plate was the most important thing you possessed. Everything that you ever imagined was true and everything that you valued was imprinted upon that plate. Also, everyone you knew had a plate just like yours. Thus, to you and everyone around you, reality--that is, all that is true in the world--was that plate.

Now suppose a traumatic event occurred. Someone passing by while you were examining your plate, your view of the world, bumped your arm and sent the plate crashing to the floor. Imagine watching in shock as your plate, everything you ever valued and accepted as fact, exploded into numerous little pieces.

That would be bad enough for most people. But . . . OK! Now . . . comes the task of putting the plate back together again. What you'd find is no amount of glue will ever give you back the plate you once knew. To be exact, the very best that you could possibly hope for would be a cracked version of the plate that you once had. You might even be missing a piece or two. And you'd learn that's normal. When plates smash, they don't look like they did before, nor will they ever again. Therefore, you'd come to realize that a separate reality exists that wasn't included in your plate. Only by having your plate broken, however, would you come to realize this truth.

So, then, what problem does that present to the man with the broken plate? The problem comes when he returns to all those whose plates haven't been broken. To them the world still looks just like the plate he originally had. Their plate looks nothing like the plate he now has,

and since everything they ever imagined was true looks like their plate, obviously his plate--at least to them--has to be something less than the truth. So now the question becomes, How long can this man with the broken plate endure when the truth he holds in his hand is treated by everyone else as something less?

And so it goes when one's life experiences force him to peer into his belief structure, and he discovers that what he once thought was "truth" is only a figment of his imagination, molded by the social sculptors of his time. §



(Courtesy of David "Doc" Johnson)

SORROW

Dennis "Doc" Gonzales paying his last respects to those who died in the 18 October 1967 ambush during Operation Medina. "It was Gonzales' platoon that was hardest hit, and how he came out so well is amazing. He's one of the few who did. The packs and gear in the background belonged to those lost in the ambush." --"Doc" Johnson

18 October 1967

By Tom Barrett

This is my recollection of 18 October 1967, and the action that took place. I was the Company Commander of H/2/1 at the time.

The battalion had been moved from the Da Nang TAOR to Quang Tri, preparatory to the helicopter base being constructed there. One of our first activities on arrival was participation in a search and destroy operation (Medina) in the Hai Lang Forest.

We were helicoptered into the area around 15 or 16 October, and proceeded over two days or so to sweep our assigned areas. It was an area of very heavy foliage, and movement was difficult. Hotel saw no real action during the sweeps.

On the night of 17 October, I believe, the battalion's mission was changed and we were directed to proceed posthaste to Highway 1 to the east of us, to set up security for the Vietnamese voting booths/polling places for the elections that were soon to be conducted. Our movement out of the area occurred on 18 October.

The battalion was somewhat spread out, but Hotel was co-located with Golf Company. The "Six," Lieutenant Colonel Archie Van Winkle, directed Golf to lead off, followed by Hotel in a column of companies. Hotel formed up the rear with 1st and 3rd platoons up front, the command group and 2nd platoon (Lieutenant Matthew O. McKnight) bringing up the rear. Golf led off, their commander assuring all concerned that he knew where he was going. After only a short period, however, several things were obvious to me following in trace:

* We were moving too quickly in the jungle terrain and were forced into a situation precluding proper flank security

* We were headed in the wrong direction and were, in fact, proceeding deeper into the Hai Lang, not out of it.

I contacted Battalion and informed the "Six" of this, but was curtly instructed to keep moving, that Golf knew what he was doing. My concern grew, and I can recall one of my platoon sergeants (Abernathy) expressing the same reservations. I called Battalion a second time, with the same results, and was in the process of calling them a third time when the world ended for the 2nd platoon at the end of the column.

Golf had succeeded in leading us right into an ambush that wiped out the rear of the column. Although we responded instantly with mortars and a counterattack, it was all over in a very few seconds. Initial casualty count was some 11 dead and 18 or 19 wounded. I believe the final count of KIA was 18, as some of the wounded didn't make it. Lt McKnight was among the KIA.

With Golf's assistance, all casualties were evacuated. We re-formed and continued on with the mission. Ironically, when the ambush was sprung, Golf Six had just attained some high ground and was reporting that he now knew where he was.

When we finally got back to Quang Tri, there was a bit of a flap about Marines not getting ambushed, etc., but it died very quickly. While we were enroute to Quang Tri, General Bruno Hocmuth was killed in that tragic helicopter accident and people forgot about H/2/1. I personally believe that no one at Regiment or Division wanted to own up to the movement orders that literally had 2/1 trying to double-time out of the jungle. Our experience may well have benefitted other units in the future.

In 1969, I was at Headquarters Marine Corps, working for LtCol Van Winkle again, now in the Manpower Department. (Archie is now deceased, but was one fine Marine and officer: Medal of Honor in Korea). Archie's only reference to this incident was an indicator of the man and the fact that he, rightly or wrongly, felt he carried some of the responsibility for what had occurred. He looked me in the eye and simply said, "Tom, if I had only listened to you." §

On Medina

By Charles "Chuck" G. Estes

I made Operation Medina in October 1967. I didn't personally know any of the KIA that Hotel suffered on the 18th, but I remember the day. I was in the middle of crossing a jungle stream when the ambush occurred and we started taking lots of stray rounds from the fight. I was acting as radio operator that day and remember some of what I heard. I remember being told, and still believe, that an entire platoon of Hotel Company had been wiped out.

The platoon commander, a lieutenant, had been forward in the column and ran back to his platoon, which was caught in the killing zone. He picked up a backpack full of explosives that the NVA had thrown on the trail, to throw it back--only to have it blow up in his face.

The fight was all one-sided and took place after Hotel and Golf Company had formed one column, Fox and Echo Companies another. We were all walking single-file out of the jungle back to a road where we were to meet trucks that would take us back to Quang Tri. It was supposed to be the last day of the operation. The NVA did a skillful and clever job of setting up an ambush on the trail leading out of the jungle. Golf had the lead (I talked to the kid walking point when we made it back to the battalion area), and Hotel Company brought up the rear. The ambush was sprung on the last 30 men in the column. The NVA had lain on the trail unseen while more than 200 Marines walked past them no more than ten feet away.

To my knowledge, no NVA were killed. A platoon in Golf Company picked up the dead Marines and made the medevacs.

Of Hotel's dead, I remember the name Churchill. He was a machine gunner. His father, a first sergeant in the USMC air wing, had requested duty in Vietnam so that his son would not have to stay there--according to the rule that said only one male from a family had to be in a combat zone. The father thought that someone in the air wing would have a better chance to survive than someone in the infantry, so he went to Vietnam to replace his son--and reported to Hotel Company the day his son was killed. I was told that an article about this appeared in *Time* or *Newsweek* a week or so after Medina. §

[See the following page for the reprint of the article Chuck refers to above in his piece. --Eds.]

* * * * *

"War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it."
--William Tecumseh Sherman

ARMED FORCES:

The Quick and the Dead

First Sgt. Vernon Churchill, 44, is a lean and leathery veteran of 26 years service with the Marine Corps, but he is not the blood-and-guts type from central casting. In fact, though he has seen service pretty much all over the Far East, in both World War II and Korea, Old Soldier Churchill has never actually been in combat, and the reason is simple enough: Churchill is a technician, a skilled aviation mechanic whose duties have always kept him out of the heat of battle.

Churchill's son Lawrence, 19, found a different career in the Marine Corps. He joined up fourteen months ago, planning to get his military service done and then enter college to study architecture. Seven months later, young Churchill found himself on duty as a machine-gunner with H Company of the First Marines at Quang Tri, just south of the Demilitarized Zone, a sector that has seen some of the war's bitterest fighting.

Back in California, the elder Churchill read the headlines and worried. Finally he came to a decision: he invoked a Marine Corps regulation which provides that no two members of the same family need serve in combat at the same time, and quietly set about getting himself assigned to the combat area in Vietnam as a replacement for his son.

Because first sergeants have ways and means of their own in any military service, Churchill's request was quickly granted. "I felt my chances were better than Larry's," said the father matter-of-factly, "because machine-gunners see a lot more action than first sergeants." As soon as he had his orders in hand, the elder Churchill flew directly to Da Nang and reported to the Marine division headquarters. He asked for assignment to his son's unit, got it, and forthwith set off for Quang Tri.

First Sergeant Churchill arrived at his new battalion command post on Oct. 18. He asked where he might find his son, and was told that H Company had gone out on patrol earlier but should be back soon. A couple of hours later a weary marine straggled into the tent and started talking about Hotel (H) Company.

"What about Hotel Company?" asked First Sergeant Churchill.

"Oh," said the marine. "They got creamed pretty bad."

The old sergeant jumped up. "Do you know Corporal Churchill?"

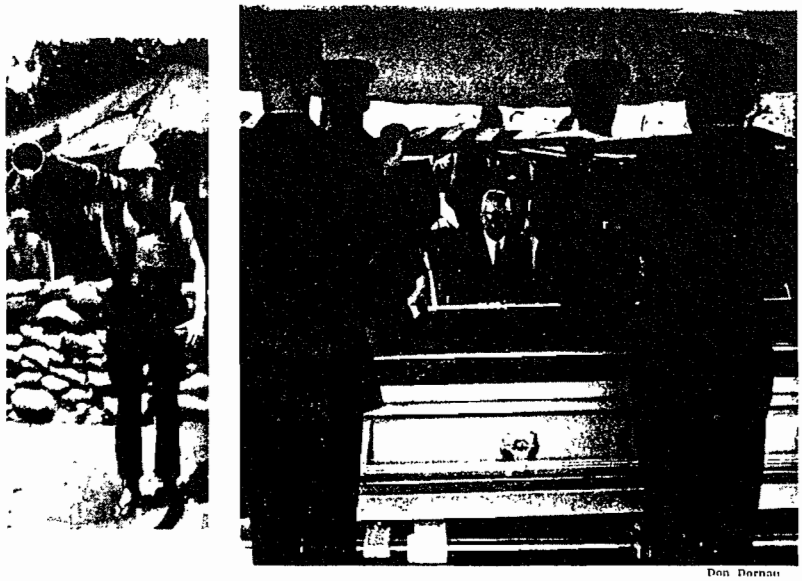
"Oh, yeah," said the marine. "He got killed."

They buried young Churchill in Fairhaven Memorial Park, near Tustin, Calif., last week after the priest had said the expected things during the funeral service at St. Cecilia's Roman Catholic Church. At the graveside the Marine chaplain read the benediction, while Larry Churchill's mother and girl friend sobbed. First Sergeant Churchill wept too, silently. The seven-man honor guard fired its three volleys, and the chaplain gave the flag that had covered the casket to the young marine's mother. Then they all left—First Sergeant Churchill still on orders to return and take his dead son's place in Vietnam.

WEAPONS:

Setback for the NRA

There are few in Washington who can stand up to the kind of firepower the National Rifle Association brings to bear whenever it gets wind of legislation designed to curb the use or sale of firearms, but last week the gun lobbyists found



Don Dornan

Arrival and departure: Churchill (right) was too late to save his son

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"Dustoff, This Is Hotel, Over": One R.O.'s Story

By Luis A. Parker

I first arrived in Nam on 10 March 1967--at Da Nang, where those of us going to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment stayed for several days, processing and waiting. The engineers needed time to clear the mined roads that would take us to our battalion area.

Upon arrival at the 2/1 area, I was assigned to a platoon which was at the Cau Do Bridge. Gunnery Sergeant Thomas assigned me to a squad and also informed me that I was their new radio operator. Not knowing what a radio operator did or anything about it, I was given on-the-job-training, and I braced myself for the challenge--not realizing that radio operators had a very short life span in the bush.

One of my first lessons was never to fall asleep on watch--something that is easier said than done. The rest of the lessons consisted of learning all I could about the radio, mostly how to keep it clean and dry during the rainy season. For some reason, I thought all this was temporary since I had no formal training and particularly since I only weighed about 120 pounds at the time.

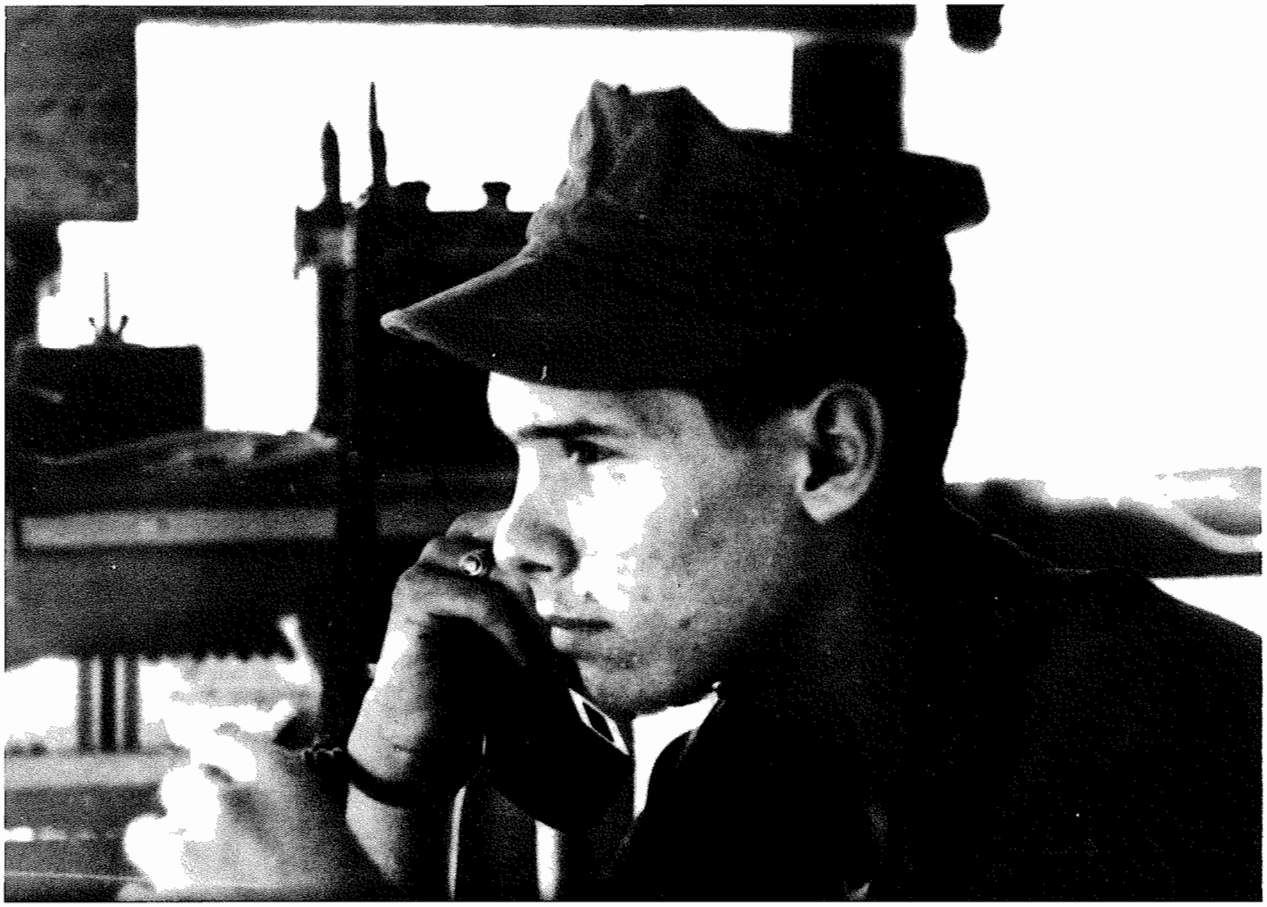
The PRC-25 is not exactly light, especially in the field when you needed to keep spare parts with you, such as a battery, handset, maybe a spare tape or whip antenna. Although it was something extra to carry in addition to my own provisions, it fit snugly into my pack and I thought it was kind of neat to be right alongside a squad or platoon leader who depended on me for their communications link to other elements. I never realized just how vital a role it would turn out to be until I had to call in medevacs. Without communications, the entire unit would be in jeopardy, and the magnitude of that responsibility did not sink in until later.

So I played my role and did my best to be a good Marine and carry my share. Over the next month or so, the company rotated the platoons among the bridge, regiment, the ARVN compound along the highway and the island. In May 1967, while on watch back at the 2/1 CP, I took a call requesting a volunteer to attend the Field Radio Operator's Course at Camp Butler in Okinawa. Naturally I figured this meant me, and within a couple of weeks I had my marching orders to attend school, much to the dismay and disbelief of everyone, including my LT and Gunny Thomas. Thomas and I were never close anyway, so naturally I delighted in his unhappiness over the situation. He'd find a way to even things up, though.

While I was at school in Okinawa, I missed our company's three-day, in-country R&R at China Beach, but I had a good time anyway. I figured I may as well make the best of the situation. While somehow maintaining an above average G.P.A. in classes, I was also upholding one of the Marine Corps' oldest traditions, that of playing hard. Nights at the "Animal House" and patronizing the many night spots downtown kept me busy after hours, when studies permitted.

With school over and my TDY completed, I returned to Hotel Company, where after a short time I was reassigned as one of the radio operators for our company, along with Corporals Campbell and Knowles. Within a week or so, while our company was at regiment, I experienced one of my most embarrassing and shameful episodes of my entire time in Nam.

On one of my nights off I was told by Frank Knowles to watch the radio--even though I had spent time at the club where I drank enough to put me out. However, I was asked to man the radio while GySgt Thomas, Knowles, and others went to the outdoor theater. I was in no condition to carry out the order, and I was



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)

LOU PARKER ON HIS RADIO

adamant that I should not be asked to cover such a highly responsible position in my condition. But I was given no alternative. Later, after falling asleep on watch, I was awakened abruptly by the slap of a broom across my face by Gunny Thomas. Apparently one of our squads had been trying to call in a *medevac*, as one of their members was getting panicky and they needed to get him out. I had asked not to be on watch and been told I would be relieved after ten minutes, but Gunny Thomas dragged me out to my tent and began to seriously beat the shit out of me, literally.

The next day I was transferred to a squad and never made another promotion until the month after Thomas left the Nam. I was naturally gun-shy about carrying the radio after that, and it took some time before I felt I could do it again. I felt so inadequate, and so responsible for what had happened. I felt it was all my fault, and I carried the burden for a long time--still do to some degree. I had let my fellow Marines down and everyone knew it.

Another vivid memory is of the night one of our units got overrun at the Cau Do River bridge, where on 29 August 1967 we took 70% casualties and lost one of our beloved Corpsmen, George Francis "Doc" Gallagher. This is dedicated to him, Jimmy Martinez, Bacerra, Rocco, Matt McKnight, and to the many others who lost their lives so that you and I may be here today. No one should ever forget their sacrifice.

Later in my tour I was upgraded to company radio operator and remained there when we moved up to Dong Ha and on to Con

Thien, and from there I rotated back to the States. My last month, the month after GySgt Thomas rotated back to the World, I was promoted to lance corporal.

Down south was not too bad, I guess, considering what we were to later face. The war there was mostly dealing with villagers and the VC, with their booby traps, punji pits, bouncing betties, and road mines. Up north was a completely different war. There we locked horns with the NVA, and they were no slouch outfit. Thankfully, we had air support and Naval gunfire to help us out when times got rough. But all the support in the world didn't help us on Operation Medina. . . .

I suppose one could say that for a radio operator I was damn lucky. While Operation Medina was in full swing, I was in Hong Kong, trying to get a lot out of my system. We had just lost some guys a month before and I was still getting over the loss of Jimmy Martinez. In Hong Kong, I contracted what was diagnosed as some form of malaria, and my R&R consisted of a week in the British Military Hospital.

By the time I got back to Hotel Company, Medina was over, and I came back to a skeleton of what our company once was. The shock, the anger, the guilt, and the pain hit me all at once, but--like most of us--I put everything on hold because we still had work to do. I was relieved that some of my closest buddies did make it, and we keep in touch even today. But I was torn up by our great losses, and rather than cope with my feelings, I put them away--for a very long time.

Everything came out one summer day in 1972 when I visited Jimmy Martinez's folks in Midvale, Utah, just outside of Salt Lake. When Jimmy died, I had been responsible for gathering up his personal effects to be sent to his folks, and I had kept in touch with them. The family welcomed me with open arms, like one of their own sons, and to say I was surprised would be an understatement. And what I saw when I entered their small, wood-framed home hit me so hard I thought I was going to have a breakdown.

In the living room, off in the right



[Contributed by Roger Goss: USMC Photo]

CALLING UNDER FIRE

corner, stood a small shrine dedicated to Jimmy. Pictures, medals, personal belongings, all placed around his dress blues. I cried, and I couldn't stop for what seemed like eternity. All of the emotions I had pent up inside flowed through my tears as I stood there crying and shaking. Even as I write, I feel those same emotions of loss for Jimmy and sadness for his family.

Later the next day, we went to his gravesite, where I got my chance to say how much I missed him and how great the loss that I felt was. I prayed for his family and asked God for the strength to carry on--which I have been able to do, although I'll never stop asking why.

Of all the memories I have about my Nam experiences, the most gratifying to me was knowing and being associated with some of the best Marines in the Corps at the time. We had a great outfit, and we accomplished whatever was asked of us no matter what the sacrifice.

I thought that after Nam anything else would be a piece of cake, but life doesn't work that way. Now I take it a day at a time. I've had other personal losses, many trials and tribulations. In 1985 I visited the DAV memorial at Angle Fire, New Mexico. Another breakdown, but it proved to have an unexpected cleansing effect. In 1988, I visited a Vet Center for the first time and felt so nervous about breaking down I never went back.

Now I'm in a group that meets weekly at the local Vet Center in Honolulu, where I now live. Here we all learn a lot about ourselves and what our experiences in the war have taught us.

My heart goes out to all my fellow Vietnam vets reading these words. I hope you have all made your own peace and have moved forward with your lives. Nam and what happened to us there will not go away, ever. The scars, both physical and emotional, will remain forever--they are part of us and we must accept that and move on. While this may be easier for some than for others, we are all brothers who need to understand and welcome each other home. Welcome home, *mahalo nui loa. Aloha.* §

Leatherneck for Real

By Roger Goss

The following is a transcription of a piece that Roger wrote for his hometown newspaper while he was serving in Vietnam in 1967-1968.

Led Solom is an adopted Marine.

Normally Marines would call him "swabby" or "milk bottle" or "squid" in reference to his being in the Navy.

But Solom is respected by the Marines of Echo Company. They call him "Doc" Solom. He's a field Corpsman or medic.

On the "outside" he would probably be considered "that short, little, dark-haired, big nosed, cynical, smart-alec punk that talks through his nose."

He talks tough, but you'd probably never believe it. He probably wouldn't be tough in a fist fight.

But if there's a wounded Marine in a firefight, the guy acts like he's immortal. He tends to the wounded *and* joins in the fight like any Marine.

A Corpsman's weapon is supposed to be the .45 caliber pistol. Solom carries an M-1 carbine he captured from a VC and he uses it just like any other ordinary infantryman would.

He's an excellent soldier and Corpsman, but not exemplary. He has no respect for rank or military protocol. He took his R&R (rest and recuperation) recently in Honolulu. He was supposed to have five days; he took 17 and went to the States. He got "busted" but doesn't seem to mind. His rebellious attitude endears him to his comrades in arms. . . .

In a recent firefight he was wounded but refused to return to a safer area until he'd done all he could for the hurt Marines.

"Doc" Solom is the kind of guy who's obnoxious sometimes, but whom you can't help liking all the time.

He's back with Echo Company now. His wounds are healed and he's back in the field being an infantryman *and* a Corpsman.

Echo Company is glad. §

Supporting Fire

By Steve Allbritton

*I*n May of 1967 the airport at Da Nang was rocketed a couple of times, and so 1/11 decided to put a couple of spotters out there. The tower across from First Marine Regiment was one spotter tower. They also put a spotter up on Hill 79, I think--right up behind the brig on the west side of Dogpatch.

At one or two o'clock one morning I was in the battalion command bunker, standing radio watch for the FSCC (Fire Support Coordination Center) for 1/11. At the time we were attached to 2/1 south of the Regimental One Headquarters. Our hootches were right alongside a tree line south of Da Nang. We were kind of segregated from the grunts. We were in the command bunker this night, though, trying to stay awke, bullshitting and nodding off, when my radioman came on with a message that was basically just "Rockets, rockets, rockets!"

I got an azimuth and a distance from First Marine Recon, and (I think) 11th Marine Regiment, and (perhaps) from a bunch on Monkey Mountain. Then we cross-sected the azimuths. We got a grid square.

I think it was 7th Marines' area that was next to us then, because there was a river that ran down the western side of the 2/1 technical area of responsibility, and that river was the border. Every evening we got sit-maps from everybody alongside us, and if they were setting anything within, I think, 1000 meters and it was a grid-square close to a border, then you had to tell the other side about it. If what you had didn't meet those conditions, then you didn't have to worry about it.

This grid-square that the rockets were coming from was right on the river, but I called in 50 or 60 rounds. I should have gone through 7th Marines' FSCC for clearance. I remember the infantry radioman yelling at me, because I had called in a fire mission. I called in the rounds, zone-shifting fire, 54 rounds, each gun firing nine rounds, six guns.

The radio operator yelled, "I just got a call from Hotel Company--they're running that way!" I guess they were setting an ambush on our side of the river when the rockets went off, so they were charging.

I knew there wasn't any way they could get over the river to do any good, so I told the operator, "Tell them to stop."

"Well, shit," he said, "I can't do that."

There was an LT on watch there, but he just sort of clammed up. I remember yelling at him something to the effect, "Tell them to get out of there. They can't do any-fucking-thing. They can't get across the goddam river!" And his answer was, "Well, that's the colonel's call. I can't do that, that's the colonel's call." So I just said fuckit and walked over and took the handset from the radioman and spoke into it, "Hotel-Six, this is Chinstrap-Six, STOP. Don't go in there. We've got all kinds of artillery going in there; don't go near the river for safety." Chinstrap-Six was the battalion radio call sign; Chinstrap was the CO. I had just made out on the radio that I was the CO. The captain on the other end couldn't tell, of course, so he answered, "Roger, Six, we're stopping."

The next morning they went in and found rockets on the ground that had never been launched. I was called into Van Winkle's office (Archie Van Winkle was the CO of 2/1). "Allbritton," he said, "don't ever fucking do that again." Basically he was after me for impersonating him, but he wasn't really too upset. It was more like, "I gotta call you in and say something because you broke the rules."

I told him that we hadn't had time to do anything else, that we had sent somebody to

wake him up but there wasn't time to wait for him to get there. Then he said, "You did exactly right."

I got to 2/1 right after Operations Union I and II--in March or April of 1967. They had just lost a lot of men when I got there. A platoon got ambushed south of where 2/1 was, below Da Nang; 21 were killed and nearly everybody else wounded. They had a service for them, a mass. I have a picture of the 21-gun salute being given. It was that salute that really lit it off. We had that 21-gun salute for the dead from Operation Union, and the next day we were gone, everybody.

It seemed the enemy hit that platoon and then stayed around, and over the next two or three days we really lit it off. We got our asses whipped, but we kicked some ass, too. I remember flying in with a battalion group and getting off the helicopter and seeing one big pile of enemy bodies. They were bringing the dead in for body counts.

The third or fourth time I went out with Golf I got wounded--by a booby trap in a little village. Five of us got hit that day. I was blown a good distance through the air and landed on my knees. I was lucky; it was a big explosion, but it was real small shrapnel: tiny slivers of cheap metal. I was out of the hospital in two weeks. I retained shrapnel in my left wrist, but the real lasting effects are in my knees, which aren't even mentioned in my medical records.

I wasn't wearing a flak jacket when the booby trap went off, because we had stopped for lunch and I had taken everything off. I was getting up, to walk away, when I tripped the booby trap--I'm the dummy who tripped it. The last thing I remember is thinking to myself, *That smells like gunpowder* . . . then BAM! I really don't remember hearing the explosion; I remember being hurtled through the air. The guy with me was a little worse off than I was. He was sitting down facing me, and he caught shrapnel right in the scrotum. It just missed his testicles. He was sitting down with his knees open, bending over and eating his C-rations.

At the hill pad, I helped carry his stretcher from the helicopter up to the saw horses. When they noticed I was wounded, too, they made me lie down. About 15 or 20 minutes later, another helicopter came in with three more guys from Golf who'd hit another booby trap in the same village.

It must have been almost ten years later that I remembered that if I had been a "good" grunt, when I smelled that gunpowder I would have instantly been facedown, screaming, "Fire in the hole!"

I was with FSCC a long time. Lieutenant Graves ran it, and after he rotated out Lieutenant Von Hays took it over. I remember another lieutenant we got in. I swear to God, I'll never forget that guy. Graves was supposed to turn him into an FO. By that time Lt Graves and I had been together about 11 months--in fact, I'd picked Graves up the day he got in country. And sometimes, when the opportunity was just right, we were kind of on a first-name basis. Graves was an Academy graduate. I asked him once why he had picked the Marine Corps and he said he hadn't: he said he was 237 in a class of 238 and he didn't really have a choice.

One time the new lieutenant was in on a pre-briefing for a patrol with Lt Graves and me, and after the briefing was over and I was walking back to my hootch, the new lieutenant came up to me. "Lance corporal," he says, "I need to talk to you."

I said, "What is it, lieutenant?"

And he said, "Well, I don't like the way you were carrying on with Lt Graves. That's way too much familiarity between an enlisted man and an officer."

I got right in his face then and said, "What goes on between Lt Graves and me is our business, and if you've got a complaint about it, I suggest you take it to Lt Graves. And something else you might want to think about, lieutenant: I'm the guy you're going to need out there tomorrow, and I don't need your fucking ass."

The next morning, we prepared to leave very early--I mean, it was 0-dark-thirty, and that green lieutenant showed up wearing Jade East. He had gotten up, shaved, and splashed on about a half gallon of Jade East before going out on patrol.

On the patrol we came to a river that was

coming through at 150 miles per hour. This river was about a click and a half south of the base camp. It had a real stiff, steep bank. The sergeant said, "Tie a rope around me. I'll swim across and put up a hand line, and then everyone can come across on the hand line." At that point, I noticed that the whole platoon was standing shoulder-to-shoulder on top of the river bank, looking at the water. I grabbed the green LT and said, "Come on, let's take a walk. He said, "Where're we going?" And I said, "Let's get away from these guys--they're not thinking too well. We're going to lie down in the grass and not silhouette ourselves against that goddam sun coming up."

While we were lying in a little ditch alongside the riverbank, we saw the sergeant dive into the river, his rope flying out behind him. Then he disappeared. He didn't come up. The platoon started calling to us--we were about 200 yards downriver from them--yelling "help, help!" Finally, when the sergeant was about 50 or 60 yards downstream, he surfaced, coughing and gasping.

When the platoon got the sergeant out of the river, this new lieutenant announced that he would do it--he would swim the river with the rope. "I'm just out of college," he said. "I'm in shape." But when he tried it, the same thing happened to him. And while he was in the water, here it came: automatic-weapons fire from the pagoda across the river. When the LT got out of the river, I asked for the coordinates so we could get some artillery on them over there. "This is where we come in," I said.

All of a sudden, there was a bright light next to me. That lieutenant had a flashlight out looking at his map. I got his light away from him and gave him a little penlight I had with me--it had a little red lense in it. When I asked for the coordinates again, he said, "I can't find that pagoda." I looked over then and saw that he had the map upside down. I started thinking, *Why me, man, why me? I don't deserve this*!

Not long after, while we were making the move up to Quanq Tri, we stopped to rest. The LT was cleaning his .45, and when he put the magazine back in the holster he said, "Wait a minute. I forgot to check and see if this thing is working." So he pulled it out of the holster again, jacked the slide back, let it go, squeezed the trigger and fired a round off into the air.

Three days later he was gone. The next thing I heard about him was that he was a regimental clerks' officer for the 11th Marines. He'd lasted about a week in the field with 2/1.

I worked mostly in the FSCC. I did more operations at the battalion level that I did small stuff. The FSCC was at 2/1's base camp, in the big bunker. Artillery had our set-up in there. Four radios. And air had a radio net, and then each company had a net, and there was a battalion net. If nobody was out a particular night from Hotel Company, for instance, then Hotel wouldn't have to have a radio operator.

We shared a countertop with the air guys. The 81's missions had to be cleared through us, but the 60's could fire on their own. We turned over certain areas at certain times; for example, if Hotel was going to work an area, we'd give them FSCC control, but they would still report back to us to let us know they had given clearance to fire in that area.

An FO would call in a mission to the artillery outfit straight to the 105's. I would be monitoring it; I would get his grid coordinates and his directions--usually we wrote down the whole mission. They would give the grid coordinates, the azimuth, a target description, a marking-shell request, a final-fire round request, and then "over."

The guy at the artillery bunker checking it would return it. By then I would have pegged it on our map. We'd give it a two-letter, three-number target number (like Romeo-X-Ray-177), and then we would have to log the target number and the grid coordinates and who was firing, etc.

I remember one time when Charlie 1/1 got the shit kicked out of them when a Marine FO dropped some rounds on his own people. Eight or nine of them were killed in a river crossing. He had read the map backwards, calling an azimuth 180° out, reading behind him instead of in front of him.

The battalion TAOR was cut up into four company-sized areas. The companies used to be rotated. I was with Golf when they occupied the northern area between the highway and the river. I remember the night the bridge was blown--the one south of Da Nang. That was

right before we moved out; we moved out right after that, and had to go up Highway 1 instead of Route 9. We went the long way to Da Nang.

I was with 2/1 on Medina. We got lost. We were so far out none of our 105's could reach us. A lot of times in a situation like that we would use a marking round. We'd guess where we were, then call in a grid coordinate and watch to see if smoke came up on it. Sometimes you'd see the smoke come up in the direction opposite where you thought you'd see it.

During Medina, the best thing we had to use were some 175's out of Dong Ha, so we tried those for marking rounds. But we never saw them; we were really lost. I remember climbing up a tree, bringing my radio up behind me, and looking for smoke and calling a mission and yelling down to the LT that I didn't see anything. He told me to look behind me, but there was nothing there, either. I can't remember how we finally got it fixed.

The FSCC group in Vietnam--the artillery boys--had a lot of freedom, because we were bastards. We weren't 2/1. Our parent was 1/11, so when 2/1's sergeant major came into our hootch one night, picked up a bottle of whiskey, and said, "Enlisted men don't have whiskey and walk with it," 15 minutes later Lt Graves was in that sergeant major's hootch getting our bottle back. Graves told the sergeant major, "If you want to push this, you may win and you may not, but we're both going to look bad doing it."

At one point an edict came out saying that grunts couldn't wear short sleeves, had to go to long-sleeved shirts and polished boots when they were in the battalion area. They were jumping guys back to the field and writing them up. Van Winkle iced that when he got there.

Our unit had good building material. We appropriated a trailer and went up to the Navy compound and ended up with a corrugated roof and enough plywood to put up "storm windows," so that when it was raining real hard we could just drop them on nails over the screens. We also built bunks inside, to use instead of cots, and we got a whole bunch of straw mattresses.

When our laundry came back in the winter, it smelled like shit. I could never figure this out until one day when we were up in Da Nang and I saw all these clothes hanging up underneath corrugated sheet-metal roofs. The Vietnamese were burning buffalo shit to create heat to dry the clothes; that's why they smelled the way they did. In the summer they used the sun to dry the clothes, and they smelled better.

It's hard to tell people about life in Vietnam. About waking up in the middle of the night because a monsoon has just sucked the tent off the top of your hardback and swept it 200 yards across the CP. Or how your clothes mildewed, and your boots rotted--in about a week's time. And about C-rations, lots of C-rations, but no heat tabs, and how we tried to bargain with the engineers for some C4 so we could cook our dinner.

I was kind of lucky, because I was never involved in any heavy combat--some sniper stuff, and we set a couple of ambushes, and we blew away a farmer one night who was out late drinking and stumbled through us. The action down around Da Nang then wasn't real hot; when we moved to Quang Tri it got pretty heavy. Con Thien was bad--a lot of incoming.

I went home on a 30-day leave (for an extension) and got back just in time for the Tet Offensive. I drove through Hue city the day it dropped. I wasn't with 2/1 anymore; I was headed back to Bravo 1/11. Then I was wounded a second time--from hand-firing a gun: just as we got the brass out of the breach, the powder lit off and flash-burned everybody. They taped my eyes shut for two or three weeks and sent me home. By that time I had about twenty-three months in country and was working on a three-month extension.

The kid across the street from me, 27 years old, wanted to join up for Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War, and I told him, "Look, sit over there in your house with your pretty little wife and forget about that shit. It ain't John Wayne movies."

The military probably wouldn't hurt him, but I don't think anybody needs to see combat. I don't think anybody needs that. §

Things I'll Never Forget

By Dennis Paul Wasson

*I*n Vietnam, I was with H&S Company's Communication Section (Platoon). Not only did we deal with company communications, but we had people working with battalion communications too. I was the only 1140 (basic electrician) in the regiment. Really didn't mean much, but made me feel good. Of course I got stuck doing things others weren't.

2/1 at Hue

February 1968, Phu Bai: I'd heard outgoing rounds from the day I arrived in Vietnam, but on 2 February 1968 (at 0200) we received incoming. The next night more rocket incoming, and a few mortars, too. Again to the bunker.

On 4 February we were awakened at about 0400-0430 and told to get our web gear, rifle, helmet and other needed equipment together. Then we fell in on one of the roads at Phu Bai Combat Base. Names were taken.

We boarded trucks--three truckloads with about three or four platoons in them--were taken to a staging area on the road to Hue where about fifteen more trucks and a few jeeps joined us. There were also several tractor-trailers with mules on the low-bed trailers. At that point, we were told where we should position ourselves and what truck we were to protect. I ended up under a mule on one of the flatbed trailers.

Then the word went down the line that we were going to be called Task Force X-Ray. Our mission was to resupply Marine units in Hue City. At the time I was not at all concerned about our designation, though I did wonder why we weren't going to be called 2/1: parts of the Fifth Marines were there, too, and they kept their name.

After we were all settled in and the trucks were lined up, someone with a bullhorn passed more word to us: We were taking supplies into Hue--some ammo, but mostly chow. A quick trip in and out. The NVA had set up a machine gun in the Catholic church on the road going into Hue. VC and NVA were in the buildings along the route.

Finally, we rolled out, headed for Hue--our objective was the MACV compound. When we entered the city we got into a terrific firefight. We received fire from the Catholic church and from the second floor of buildings along the streets. But the trucks just kept going. And, of course, all the weapons trained on us were on my side of the road. We received fire until we crossed the Perfume River. I started out with 21 magazines full of 5.56mm rounds. Shooting on semi-automatic, I had emptied all of them by the time we entered the MACV compound in Hue.

It was weird to enter that compound. You had to go around buildings before you could get into the center area. A terible smell came from one of the buildings, and later we learned that it was full of dead bodies--both US and NVA/VC. We left the flatbeds with the mules in the center courtyard there, were resupplied with ammo, got in the four-by's, and left to return to Phu Bai.

We ran into some of the same kind of gunfire coming out of Hue that we had faced going in, and again the trucks just kept moving. I made sure I was on the side the firing was coming from. On the outskirts of the city, we stopped to check for wounded. I think we had a couple.

Back at Phu Bai, I went back to my hut, dropped my helmet on my rack, and watched the liner fall out in two pieces. And there was a hole in my helmet, one inch above where it had been sitting on

my head!

Two hours after we had returned, a call went out for volunteers to go into Hue. Corporal Herman Dick and Corporal Chuck Paronto, the men I worked for in Nam, went this time. The ARVN's blew the bridge then, so those two were stuck in Hue for about a week.

I made six supply runs with Task Force X-Ray. Except for seeing what the artillery and mortars had done to such a pretty place, the later supply runs became routine. We received some sniper rounds on the ones we made right after Tet, but not much. In the end, the runs became a drag. I used to say, "Oh, not another run to Hue!"

Face of War

On 15 March 1968 I went on a courier run to C2 and Con Thien. On the way back we stopped at Dong Ha and while I was waiting on ground transportation (had arrived by CH-53 and had a long wait), a Corpsman, a chief petty officer attached (I think) to a MASH unit there, came up to where about 20 of us were waiting and told us he needed help unloading medevac helicopters expected anytime. About 16 of us volunteered to help and went over to the landing pad with him. The four we left behind watched our gear.

It wasn't long before the helicopters came in. I must have helped unload about 80 Marines. Lots of different wounds. Gunshot mostly. Some shrapnel. From the pad and on down the hall was a trail of wet, slippery blood.

This is when the thought started to really get to me that these people were playing for keeps. I thought: *There is a great chance I could be on one of these stretchers. Oh, my God! No games here. I'll never take anything here for granted again.*

I had finally met the war face-to-face. Most of my time in Vietnam was boring at best, but never again did I let my guard down. When I got back to the base, some of my buddies said I was acting different. I told them why.

One of the wounded I remember most from that day was a man who had lost both his legs to a booby trap. Two of us were carrying him off the chopper. He looked up at us and asked for a smoke. I gave him one. Then he said, "I lose my legs and get two Marines. Would rather have my legs." Then laughed! All three of us were laughing.

I felt happy that I was doing something for someone else. Sad that so many youths would be crippled for the rest of their lives. I was 21 when I got to Vietnam in November 1967. The fellow who lost his legs was just 18 and a half. Such a waste of youth.

We helped for probably the better part of an hour. Made me realize this was no war game at Camp Pendleton. No kids' play in the back yard. This was life at its worst.

Other Days in Nam: Journal Entries

> 20 March 1968. Hot and sunny all day. Didn't do much of anything all day. Sometimes it is hard to write about what I see and do here. The thought of it all bothers me. Even dream about some of it. Even those trash runs. Tonight mail call consisted of one from Dori [girl I was to marry] and one from Dad.
>
> 19 April 1968. Met friend from home at Phu Bai Seabee Base. Had a few beers at Seabee Club. Hitchhiked to Hue City with no weapon. Swam in Perfume River. Went to his friend's quarters in Hue City. Partied. Went back to Phu Bai late in day. VC still in Hue City area.
>
> 7 May 1968. My friend La Monte Horsley was killed at Khe Sanh. Was called to the first sergeant's office. He told me the details, and told me to go to the club. I was feeling like I'd lost my brother. Was in bad shape.

La Monte

Corporal Horsley and I had known each other from Camp Lejeune, prior to going to Vietnam. We were in the same outfit; I forget which one of us went to Vietnam first.

When we saw each other again, he was in one of the grunt companies. I was in H&S Company. We went to church together one to two times a week. Both of us wore our girlfriend's graduation ring on the small finger of the left hand. We went to the club together, too. Spent lots of time together.

The first part of May, La Monte was told he'd be going to Khe Sanh to supervise the building of some bunkers. I kidded him that he shouldn't go. I saw him off the day he left. He said he would write when he could.

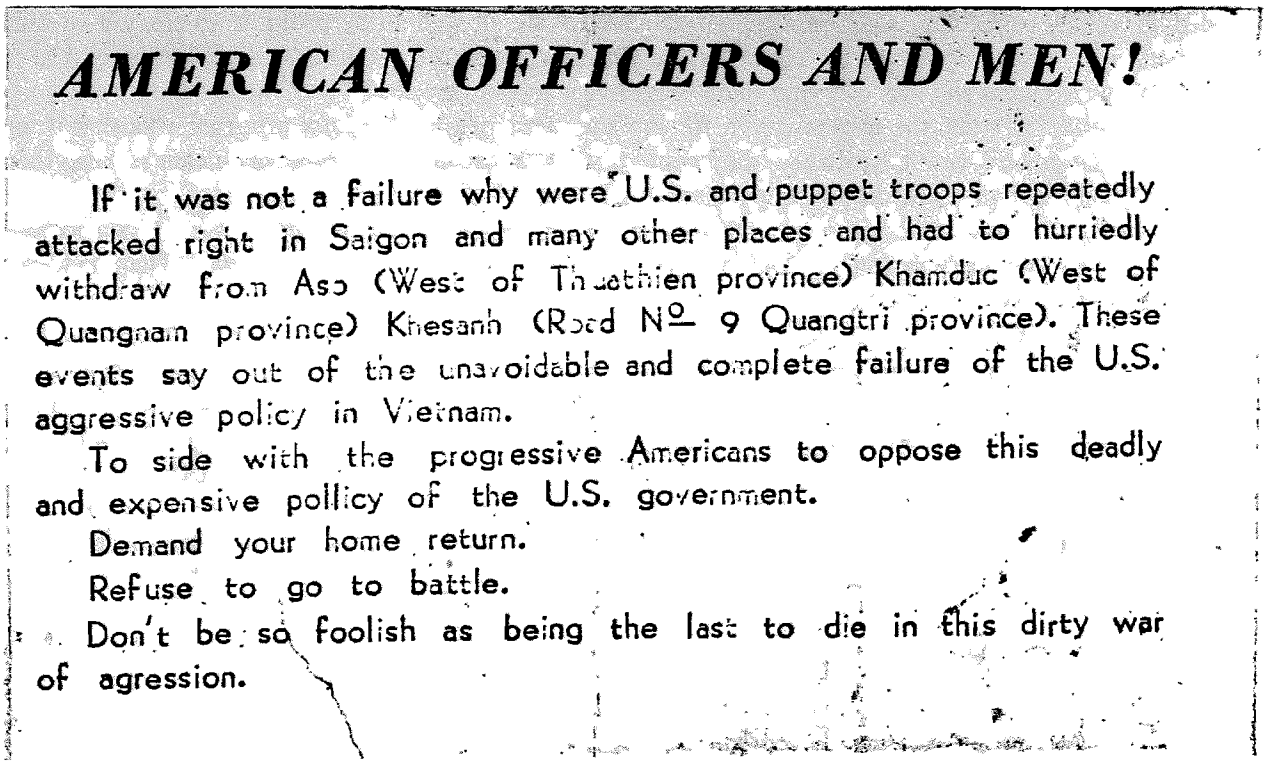
Within a week I was called to the first sergeant's office, where he told me La Monte had been killed doing his job. A 122 came in beside the bunker he was working on. La Monte took the brunt of the blast. It didn't even knock down the other men there.

Imprints

Some of the things that I'll never forget from Vietnam are the insane things that made us laugh. The real sick sights of dead VC/NVA turned us to hysterical laughter. Some of the positions they were left in, for instance. One was sitting on another's lap with a cigarette in his mouth, and shades (sunglasses) on.

That whole war warped my feelings of the world. Was not like I thought a war would be like. So much unnecessary killing, or so I thought. Saw things going on that made me wonder if this war wasn't just a nightmare. Dead Americans hanging upside down, with horrible things done to them. Never a newsman with camera nearby. We deface a VC and all the newsmen in Vietnam would be right there. Insane. But it seemed that no one cared. Except your friends--the guys with you. Even letters home, though they helped, were just a temporary fix. We really only had one another in Vietnam. §

* * * * *



AMERICAN OFFICERS AND MEN!

If it was not a failure why were U.S. and puppet troops repeatedly attacked right in Saigon and many other places and had to hurriedly withdraw from Aso (West of Thuathien province) Khamduc (West of Quangnam province) Khesanh (Road N° 9 Quangtri province). These events say out of the unavoidable and complete failure of the U.S. aggressive policy in Vietnam.

To side with the progressive Americans to oppose this deadly and expensive pollicy of the U.S. government.

Demand your home return.

Refuse to go to battle.

Don't be so foolish as being the last to die in this dirty war of agression.

(Courtesy of Jack Sturiano)

Propaganda phamplet left for Americans to find after the TET offensive of 1968.

Excerpts from a War

By David Dillberg

Two Deaths in Vietnam

I arrived in Vietnam sometime in November '67, and left the field on 11 May 1968. The big NVA push for the '68 Tet Offensive was during this time. To make things worse, our unit went to Con Thien for 76 days. Con Thien was the farthest point north in South Vietnam, 1700 meters from the DMZ. The closest town was Cam Lo directly to the south, and then there was Gio Linh to the east, toward the ocean. To the west was Camp Carroll and then Khe Sanh. Above that to the north was Hill 881 North, near where I was blown up for the third time. This third time I was wounded enough to leave the field for good. I was very lucky.

I had started out at Quang Tri. I was with First Platoon, Golf Company, Second Battalion, First Marine Regiment, First Marine Division. At Quang Tri I was put in a squad where I was point.

One time we were coming off of a patrol where we hadn't seen an enemy, but we were still being very cautious. We staggered along the trail about 15 meters apart as we approached the gate going into our compound. Just before we got to the gate, I saw a boy and his mother coming out of the jungle. The boy was across the clearing, about 30 feet away, and his mother was behind him. I motioned for the squad to stop, and then I motioned for the boy and his mother to come closer.

The boy came up to me and I saw that he was about six or so and that he was carrying a projectile, maybe a 106mm or 105mm high explosive round. It was all he could do to carry it--it must have weighed 20 pounds or more. He had it in his arms, pointed straight down. His mother had an armful of rounds, and she was carrying them lengthwise across her chest. I knew that they were going to the compound to trade the explosives in for money. Part of the *chieu hoi* program was that if any civilians found any explosive hardware, they could trade it in for money. This was meant to keep them from using the explosives for boody traps against us.

The young boy came up to me and looked right in my eyes and smiled at me. I said to him, "You're going to get money, yeah." And he said, "Money, money." So I said, "Yeah." Then he turned and walked off toward the gate.

His mother walked up to me and said the same thing, "Money, money," and nodded her head up and down. I couldn't speak any Vietnamese, so I motioned for them to go ahead. When the boy and his mother were up past us far enough for us to move on into the compound (they were about 15 meters away), I motioned for the patrol to get up and move on in. We began to walk up the trail towards the gate, each of us about our usual 15 meters apart. The mother was watching her son, and I was keeping my eyes on both of them, and just as the boy got about 15 meters from the gate, he dropped his round right between his feet. It exploded, and he disappeared. Clean as a whistle. All that was left was a smoking hole in the ground about four feet across and a foot deep with a pink ring of flesh around its rim. The pieces of flesh were no bigger than the tip of your finger.

I watched as the mother dropped all the hardware she was carrying. Nothing went off. Then she ran up to the smoking hole and fell down on her knees inside and began to claw at the dirt. No kid. Then she saw the pink ring around the hole and she started to scoop up the flesh in her hands. But it was obvious as she put her two hands full of her kid to her face, that she realized that she couldn't put him back together. She threw her handfuls down and pounded the earth and screamed. She wailed and screamed and pulled her hair out of her head.

I didn't know what to do, and I couldn't talk her language. So I just walked past her and on into the compound. That was the first death I saw in Vietnam, and it was the quickest and the cleanest ever. I've thought about that mother and the boy thousands of times since. The whole thing sticks in my mind, and I can still see it clearly. I can see the boy--his eyes looking at me and him smiling. I was the last one that made eye contact with him.

Before I had shot at anybody or had even been with anybody who had, the job was given to our fire team to go out with this sniper and provide security while he picked off his kill for the day. We were in a friendly area near Quang Tri, so as we got out to the pre-arranged spot where he was going to set up, I asked the sniper how he knew who to shoot. This guy had a lot of kills and seemed to be a smart man who didn't kill unnecessarily. He explained that the objective was to stop the supply of ammo being smuggled down from up north.

The view was clear as we looked down on a trail from the small hill where we were. All the people looked the same to me from our distance--about 600 yards away. They all wore the same clothes--black pajamas and big hats. Most were carrying packs or loads of food. The sniper said that when the gook he was supposed to hit came by, he would know--that when you carry heavy ammo you walk differently.

So he set up a small sandbag on top of a large rock. Then he unwrapped an old vintage octagon-shaped barrel, a single-shot rifle. The barrel was extremely long, and on top was a brand-new, large scope. The scope looked like the best one made. The rifle looked like it came from the Civil War, but it was well-machined and very clean--not a speck of rust or dirt on it. He settled it down on the sandbag and snuggled it in. Then he removed the covers from the scope's ends and put one round in the slot; he slid the bolt smoothly home, and the round slipped into the chamber. He sighted and focused, then said, "Do you want to look?" I took a look and saw the crosshairs aimed at some Vietnamese walking across our line of sight. The aim was stomach- to chest-high on them. When I drew back, he said, "So now we have to wait." Then he pulled out a pair of big binoculars and looked through them at the gooks walking by down below. The sniper watched for about fifteen minutes, then he said, "Here he comes." He passed the binoculars to me and as I looked through them at the people on the trail, he aimed and waited for the particular VC he had picked out to walk into the crosshairs. When he did, the sniper fired.

The bullet entered the pack on the enemy's back and exploded the ammunition he was carrying--it looked like it was about as much as a 100 pounds of TNT. The VC was gone. Just another smoking hole in the ground.

The sniper said, "That's it. Let's go." Then he wrapped his old rifle up, and we went back to the compound. We didn't talk about it--but it was kind of sobering to see a kill so simple and uneventful. Kind of shocking.

Patrolling

Sometimes on patrol we would break out into a beautiful meadow surrounded by jungle. One time we broke out into a large meadow about the size of two football fields placed side-by-side--100 square yards. It was round, and there was an opening on the far side that let us look up through the canopy. This canopy had three distinct levels; the sun was shining and sunbeams were shooting down through them. The top level was kind of sparse and birds were flying through it. The second level was a little thicker, with less sunlight. The bottom level was almost dark and full of ferns growing up from the ground. The meadow itself was grass and blooming flowers. There was no wind, and bugs were buzzing around. It was very peaceful.

When we would go out on patrols and nighttime came, we would dig foxholes and clear a field of fire. Sometimes it would rain all night, and, since we'd dug the foxholes deep enough to protect us,

we'd be sitting in a pool of water up to our chests. I used to feel really stupid sitting in water, soaking wet and my skin all wrinkled. One time Terry Wright dug a foxhole at night when he couldn't see a thing. The next morning he looked over and saw a 155mm arty round sticking in the mud. If he had hit it with his entrenching tool, he might have set it off. He didn't like that.

Sometimes in the mountains it would be 120° during the day. Then after we'd dug our foxholes and set in for the night it would rain and the temperature would go down to 60°, a 60° change. It felt like it was freezing.

But being all wet was the worst. Sometimes we would dig a two-man hole and sit on the edge with our ponchos overlapping, covering us completely. Then we would light some C4 explosive. As long as you didn't ignite it with a blasting cap, it wouldn't explode; it would just burn with an intense heat for a short while. We got dry and warm real fast. We weren't supposed to waste the C4, but we didn't care. To us it was a real luxury.

We had a lot of rashes in our crotches and on the places where the straps from our packs rubbed. Those rashes took constant attention. It was most important to put medicated powder on them, or they got bad.

The packs we were supposed to use were from World War II. They were totally inadequate. It was better to find an NVA pack and use that; the NVA packs were a lot better designed. They had big straps, a lot of big pouches, and they hung low on the back so you could get through the bush easily. I found one along with a hammock and mosquito net. Real nice. They worked great. The American way was to have a small pack with small straps (those rubbed), a rubber lady that got hole in it easily, and a lot of mosquito repellant that stunk and didn't work.

The small American pack meant you had to strap everything on the outside, and so it always snagged in the jungle. The NVA pack was big, so you put everything inside and nothing snagged. The NVA were smart. We were dumb. I loved my mosquito net and hammock.

We did a lot of patrolling, sometimes at day and sometimes at night . . . I always thought it was stupid to be on night patrols. Even if it was completely dark--no starlight--we would still go on these night patrols. It would be so dark the guy in front would hang onto the barrel of the rifle of the guy behind, and so on down the line until everyone was hooked up like that. There were casualties that occurred because the man holding the rifle would accidently pull the trigger.

The point had a compass and also a feeler stick about three or four feet long. He was supposed to feel and probe the ground in front of him before he moved--up, down, then across, then into the ground. Every time he took a step--every time we took a step. All the way out; just go in the direction of the compass with illuminated dial and needle. So many paces in one direction, then turn a certain number of degrees. Then count off so many paces. Then the same thing until you worked your way back to the safe lane through the minefield. What we were supposed to do on that kind of patrol was a very ignorant thing to do. It was like we were the bait walking through the dark looking for death to spring out and get us. Then we would know where the enemy was and everybody else could shoot back and get them.

Con Thien

After Quang Tri we moved up north to the so-called "ugly place," Con Thien. We passed Cam Lo and rode trucks to C2 where they told us to walk the rest of the way: they didn't want to take the trucks up to Con Thien because of the arty barrages. I was thinking that I didn't want to go up there; I had a bad feeling about it. Then as we approached the fence line going into Con Thien, we saw the troops we were replacing leaving. They were on one side of the road, walking single-file about 15 meters apart. A steady line of them was coming out as we were going in. They looked terrible--dirty and sweaty, and they had a dead look on their faces. As we passed they said things like, "You're going to find out what war is really like," and, "You guys don't really want to go up there."

I had a real bad feeling in my stomach. Back in the States I had seen some pictures of Con Thien in *Time* magazine. It was nothing but dirt, sandbags, ammo boxes, and empty shell casings. Brass everywhere. Trash and garbage piled up everywhere. And now it was our turn to defend this ugly place.

The first time I knew that Con Thien was really bad was when I walked past the LZ and the filled bodybags were laid out neatly, waiting for the chopper to take them out. One of the bags was folded in half. Even though I had heard what a bad place it was, it still shocked me to think that there wasn't enough of that man to fill up the bag. Lots of bags there, both full and not full.

At first we took over the same bunkers the Marines before us had built, but we soon found them inadequate. We had to build deeper and stronger bunkers and trenches. It was very hard to work and dodge artillery barrages at the same time. The enemy had recoilless rifles, 82mm mortars, 152mm artillery, 157mm rockets, B-40 RPG's, AK-47's, short-round .50-caliber and one-man assault machine guns. The weapons were Russian-made. We were told that the NVA troops were really Red Chinese in North Vietnamese uniforms.

Many days we could see thousands of enemy troops moving past us on their way down south. I was told the units that were at Con Thien before us had been overrun by the NVA. And after we left, the units who replaced us were overrun, also. I feel we would have been overrun, too, except we discovered the NVA before they got to us, thanks to the brave men of F Company. God bless their souls and the families who live with the memory of their sons and fathers and husbands and brothers who died in a bad place far away.

The end of '67, a couple of hours before New Year's '68 at Con Thien--out in no man's land, in another country across the Pacific Ocean from our girlfriends, wives, families and friends. We sat in the dark, in the cold rain and mud, with fear and anger overwhelming us, thinking how bad it was not to be having fun, not to be partying on New Year's Eve like everyone else back in the World. I, for one, felt cheated.

Nothing was happening, except the order came down the line at midnight that we were to carry on our duties with no celebration: no lights of any kind, no shooting, no yelling. We were to do nothing but be silent so the enemy wouldn't shoot arty and mortars at us. That order really pissed off the troops. We were all saying, "Yeah, right. Just wait."

As midnight approached, I made the rounds in my squad's area. I said to everybody, "No lights or noise at midnight, OK?" Everybody said OK, so I went back to my bunker to get out of the rain. I was really mad. I wanted to go out and throw grenades.

Right before midnight, I went outside again. It was drizzling and completely dark--I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. Suddenly flares popped up and lit the whole area. Our flares. And everybody took this as a signal to fire everything we had. Soon the whole battalion was lit up with the glow of tracer rounds from rifles, machine guns--big and small--from tanks, mortars, hand grenades, and pop-up flares of all colors. Con Thien looked like one big Roman candle--explosions going off everywhere on the outside of the perimeter. It was extremely uplifting. We were all screaming "Happy New Year!" It was like saying "fuck you" to the NVA. We were showing off, showing our muscle to the enemy.

But we attracted a response. And the enemy response was--what else?--incoming arty and mortars. They pounded the shit out of us for quite a while that night while we hid in our bunkers. It was like the NVA were saying to us, *Oh, yeah. You think you're going to celebrate New Year's, do you? Well take this . . . and this . . . and this!*

The attack was traumatic and woke us up from our feeling us celebration. I don't remember anything after the arty and mortars started. I guess I numbed out.

There's nothing in the official records about this. Kind of strange. I bet someone would have gotten chewed out real good if it had been reported. I don't know if anybody got killed.

At Con Thien, I found it impossible to sleep during the day--like we were supposed to do at times. Whenever I would take my boots off and lie down, we would get hit with arty. I didn't want to get hit with my boots off, or have to run over hot shrapnel in my bare feet, so I left the boots on--till my socks rotted and I had to change those. The socks were shreds by the time I changed them, so I would have to peel them off. Then I put talcum powder inside my boots and on my feet, put on a new pair of socks, talcumed the outsides of those, and finally put my boots back on. And I wouldn't take them off until the new pair of socks rotted. (This worked as long as I didn't get in stagnant, rotten water.)

One rule at Con Thien was "no more than two to a group." We thought this was a stupid rule, and one day a group of four of us were standing about five or six feet away from each other, talking and laughing. Out of the sky came a 81mm mortar round whose tail section had come unscrewed; it flip-flopped right down and landed sideways between a couple of us, impacting about a foot into the mud. We all dove away, but it didn't go off. That was a real close call, and it was like God was telling us to snap out of our shit. After that we took the rule more seriously.

During the day when there was blue sky, we could see the incoming artillery barrage groups moving past us overhead. As long as the black dots up there kept moving, it was all right. But when they looked like they had stopped, it was because they were coming straight at us. Then it was time to run as fast as possible. One of them would usually land right behind us causing an extremely loud concussion and hot, jagged metal to zoom through the air. The sound the concussion made was at first very sharp, with echoes like you get in a big tube. Then the sound would move away from the impact zone in a wave.

Terry Wright said that when you can hear it coming, it won't get you. It's the ones you don't hear that get you.

Fear

During my short time in Vietnam I found that there are different levels of fear. The first, I guess, would be the feeling that you did not want to go somewhere or do something because you might get hurt or killed. The second would be not wanting to go somewhere or do something because you know there is a good chance you will get killed. Then there is the level of fear you feel when you know there is no way you are going to make it, but yet you do.

There is another level when the sensation of being scared pushes you beyond the sane limit, and your senses are devastated beyond any comprehension. You come out of a situation with traumatic overload and you're numb. I believe they used to call this "shell shock."

And there is the final level, when you give up any chance of living: It's just you and God, and whatever happens to you will go beyond into the afterlife. I think this must be what those who died experienced, because sometimes we live to remember this feeling. It seems some of us now alive reached that point. We were cheated out of dying.

It seemed like the NVA were always trying to knock out OP #1. One time by an 82mm recoilless projectile. The day before, the commanding officer of our battalion, Evan Parker, had been standing behind the command post between the outhouse and the CP bunker. His radioman was in the shitter, and the 82mm recoilless opened up at the OP #1 and hit somewhere close. Then he shot again, and the round hit the shitter and the radioman, killing him and wounding the CO.

The next day it was our squad's job to rebuild the outside of the CP bunker and the shitter. While we were cleaning up the mess, the recoilless moved up again, just outside of the cleared area and past the fence line in the bushes. We could never find the guy.

The next day he pulled up into the same area and shot at the OP #1. We couldn't see anything, but it sounded like it landed in our area. So I told everybody to stay down, that I was going to see what

happened. I was leaving the place hit the day before, moving toward the place just hit--so I was moving in the same direction that the gun was pointing.

He shot again then, and I could see the projectile coming directly toward my face. I could see the heat waves coming off its surface. It wasn't wobbling; it was pointed straight toward me. I didn't have time to react in any way; it only took about one second for it to proceed from where I first saw it to where it went into the ground directly in front of my feet. As I was runnning forward and thinking I was going to die right at that moment, I was saying to God, *This is it, God--here I come.* And then I got the loudest dose of concussion I ever experienced. I was blown up and back and I landed on the ground on my back. I think I was knocked out by the blast, because I don't remember flying through the air or hitting the ground. I just woke up, and suddenly I could hear every tone and at full volume and intensity. And I was full of terror.

The next thing I knew I was trying to pick myself up off the ground, but I had no feeling from my rib cage down. I thought of Dobbs then--the man I replaced--who was blown away, and I thought, *Now I'm the one blown away.* I was afraid to look, so I reached out with my hands and felt for my legs and balls, and to my astonishment they were still there. I had a piece of shrapnel in my helmet and a piece in my flak jacket, but none in me.

Then I could hear God saying to me, "Get up. The next one's going to land right where you are lying." But when I tried to move my legs, my right foot got caught in a loop of communication wire sticking out of the mud. I pulled, but I couldn't get my foot out. A Marine from mortars asked me if I was all right and just as he did, the enemy shot again. So I jerked my body as hard as I could, and the wire broke.

Since I couldn't use my legs, I rolled over the edge of another mortar pit, and just made it as the next round landed and exploded right where I had been lying in the mud. My heart felt like it was going to jump right out of my chest, and I prayed and thanked God over and over.

The Marine from mortars stood up in his mortar pit then and didn't see me, just a smoking hole in the ground, and thinking I was blown away he started screaming that I was gone. When I moved to get up, saying, "Here I am--I'm OK," he freaked out like I was a ghost or something. At that moment the recoilless rifle shot again, and the round zoomed over our heads and hit the ammo dump--direct hit. The ammo dump went up like a small atomic bomb going off. I saw many secondary explosions, too, but I don't know who got killed. I was numb. I think I had traumatic shutdown, because I don't remember things after that. But I knew that this time it had been too close; I knew I had to shape up or I would die.

One of the most sobering experiences was the memorial service we used to have for the guys who were killed. Since we weren't supposed to be in large groups, one fire team would go to the service at a time. The services were held in a small clearing--just big enough for maybe 10-12 men--with trenches leading away from two sides. As we arrived, the chaplain would be standing there in his helmet and flak jacket, with his gas mask at his side and his Bible in his hands. There would be four or five or six rifles with bayonets attached sticking in the ground with the helmets of the dead on the top of the butts. The chaplain stood behind the rifles. We would file in and do a one-knee ready stance, with our rifles pointing up and the butts on the ground. We also wore our helmets and flack jackets and carried gas masks--like always.

As we knelt in front of the line of rifles, we kept our helmets on and simply bowed our heads. The chaplain said a few short words, mentioned the names of the dead, said an "amen," and we were up and out of there. Then the next four or so Marines came in and went through the same thing.

The chaplain had so many of these services to run through, we couldn't spend very much time--just a few minutes. There were so many of these memorial services--just more names to forget. I got tired of them. I told myself that when I got back to the World, I would never go to another memorial service or funeral. So far, I haven't.

Khe Sanh

The word was out that Khe Sanh was under seige and we had to go rescue the Marines there. As we moved through the jungle over the ridges that were the sides of a mountain, we ran across a small stream with a bamboo trough with water flowing down through the grass and trees. The bamboo was slit in half with the small barriers between the sections cut out so the water could flow. Down and over the land the trough went, with bamboo supports crossed under it, holding it at a slant just less than level. The water flowed on and on. The trough was quite long--we followed it to the end, where we found an NVA battalion camp high up and well-hidden.

When we first found the camp, we thought the enemy was still there. As we approached, we had seen campfires still glowing in the cooking area. But there were no NVA. They had bailed out.

Since we were falling behind the movement of our larger unit, we didn't have time to stop and examine or search properly. But what we did find while we were there was a camp complete with running water, a hospital, shitters, mess hall, and bunkers for the troops. The water system was what had led us to the camp in the first place.

Another time on our way to Khe Sanh we were sitting under the leaves of banana trees on the side of a steep hill. We were very tired and enjoying our chance to rest. Everybody had fallen real quiet, and then the rain came. As the drops hit the banana leaves, the sound grew and magnified from a rush to a loud roar. Then we couldn't even hear ourselves screaming at each other.

It rained for quite a while. After it let up, we could see the squalls float through the valley and fall randomly on the jungle-covered side of the valley opposite us. The squalls were very visible against the green contrast. It was extremely peaceful where we were then. I just wanted to stay there and forget about the war.

But we had to move out, and once again were on our way.

When we got to Khe Sanh, the first patrol we went on was north of the base. We patrolled out until we came to an area of trees right outside the fence line. Hundreds of green parachutes and support lines were hanging from branches all over. I guess these were from airborne troops and cargo dropped for the men at Khe Sanh during the seige. The scene looked eerie. Hundreds of perfectly good parachutes all over as far as we could see. The cords were good, braided ones, so we cut up a lot of those and took some of the chutes for our hootches back at Khe Sanh.

I don't remember any enemy in this area, but I do remember it being very beautiful--not like the DMZ over at Con Thien.

We went on many patrols around Khe Sanh when nothing happened. In fact, things were so much better at Khe Sanh around April that some of the men were sleeping in when we were supposed to be up at dawn. One of these late-sleepers was Dennis Razor. Razor didn't want to get up. He refused to get out of his hootch.

I had a hard time disciplining the men when they had been through so much. I didn't want to sound like an asshole, but after a few attempts to get Razor up, the men were looking at me to see what I would do. So I thought I would be a smart aleck and put a smoke grenade in his hootch. But as the smoke billowed out of the openings, Razor still didn't appear.

Now I was worried. I thought I had made a mistake. What if Razor was unconscious, overcome by the smoke? I yelled at him to come out; still he didn't. Then I gave in and opened the flaps to his hootch to go in and get him out. But just then here he came, perfectly cool Razor--walking out with his gas mask on while all the men stood and watched. And they all started laughing. They knew Razor had got the best of me.

I had to laugh too. Razor was smart; he won that time. It was a good joke on me, and we all needed a good laugh. §

The Completed Tour

John Rosenbusch

*M*y tour in the Marine Corps started 31 May 1967, when I left for boot camp at Camp Pendleton. That was the first time I had ever flown in an airplane, flying from Oakland Airport to San Diego; it was a PSA-4 engine prop job.

Boot camp wasn't bad as far as I was concerned. I came from a pretty rough family situation, and for me boot camp was a reprieve from what I had been dealing with at home. The toughest part was the ITR training and the BLT training right afterward. It was hot at Camp Pendleton, and moving up and down those hills with all the equipment on was rough. I'm short--I'm only 5'4"--and always in the rear of the company, and it seemed like we were always running--either running on the street, or running up the hills, with all our equipment. But one of the things I'm proud of is that I never stopped. Quite a few of the guys would fall out of formation and rest, but I never did. I was a good Marine. I did what I was told, and I was a good Marine.

I got to Vietnam 15 November 1967 and ended up at Da Nang for a couple of days. I was assigned to 2/1, to a weapons platoon.

As usual, from Da Nang we flew to Dong Ha. They made us walk from Dong Ha to Quang Tri. Luckily we got aboard a Navy flatbed tractor-trailer truck that had a big wide bed on it, and the driver put us up on top of it and took us almost to the edge of the base at Quang Tri. When I got there it was raining; the monsoon season was in full swing. Most days were cloudy, overcast, and rainy; at night it was cold. When I realized how long my tour was going to be there--380 days--I got real depressed, realizing exactly what I was going to have to go through for 380 days. It was very depressing. It was certainly different from anything anybody had ever prepared me for. Mentally, you were on your own in Vietnam. You had to deal with your own tour of duty. I just figured, I'll do the best I can.

They never let you forget for one day that you were a boot. Every day somebody reminded you that you were a boot or treated you like shit. The thing is, by the time that I got medevaced out of there (two months after my arrival), I was just beginning to get some kind of feeling for the place. We had been in a few firefights and I had seen a lot of things and experienced a lot of things. I even experienced a lot of funny things, like the time I got stuck in the mud at Con Thien. I tried to walk across a patch of mud between my bunker and my squad leader's bunker. And everybody said no, don't do it, don't do it, it's too muddy, you'll never make it; and I said, yeah, yeah, I'll try it, I'll try, let me try it. And I ended up sinking up to my knees. After everybody quit laughing, they pulled me out, and it was such a thick, sucking mud that my boots came right off of me and stayed in the mud. Of course, they were size 8 boots, and my feet are size 7, but that was all they had, so that's what I took.

There was no equipment for us. My rifle was rusty and had sand in it when they handed it to me. The magazines--I only got two of them--were filthy. I found more for myself; in fact I found quite a bit of my own gear, because they just didn't have it. Of course, the supply folks had plenty, but the grunts and the new guys coming in didn't get shit. So I learned how to be a good scrounger, I learned to go and get what I needed, one way or another. And I ended up with everything I needed, including a K-bar.

The killing and the maiming started the first night I was there. A patrol was coming

into the base when a new guy was on the sentry, and even though they popped the correct color of smoke, he sprayed them with his M-16. I think he wounded six of them--he might have wounded all of them, I don't know. I don't know if he killed anyone, but I knew then that this war we were in was very dangerous.

The conditions were pretty bad. We lived in mud. At first when I got there, we were living in two-man shelter-halves. My fire team leader, Lance Corporal Lowe, and myself lived together, until Lowe burned down the tent one night with a candle. Naturally, it had to be in the middle of a huge downpour. I lost all my clothes. I only got out with my cartridge belt, my rifle, and one pair of utilites that had almost the entire butt burned out. So that's what I wore for the next month in Vietnam, until I was medevaced out.

Another time we were out on a huge company patrol when I almost drowned going across a river; by the time I got down into the water, everything was over my head and I felt like I was going to drown, until I felt some hands on me and about three guys pulled me up and got me out of there. It was pretty scary, but we laughed about it afterward.

We traveled all night long that night. We set up an ambush in this beautiful, beautiful valley--I mean this was just a gorgeous place. I would have loved to live in this valley under different circumstances. And another funny thing happened. It was cold and rainy, as usual, and I was making some hot chocolate when we heard some shots and everybody got down, and come to find out one of the guys had snuck out and he was trying to kill the captain, the company commander. This CO had just gotten there about the same time I had, and he made everybody tighten up, get haircuts, shine their shoes, shine their boots, clean up. At the time we thought it was chickenshit, but now looking back on it, I can see it was the only way to maintain discipline and to keep some kind of morale up. If we walked around all like pigs, which some guys did, you would just feel like it was even worse than it was.

Generally, every day I think about Vietnam, and when I think about Vietnam the first thing I think about is the time we went into this village. We were coming across a rice paddy, and I still had my stateside boots on, because they still didn't have Vietnam jungle boots that fit me. So I was slipping and sliding across this muddy, clay rice paddy dike. It was raining, or it had been raining, and I was slipping and sliding, cussing the Marines, cussing Vietnam, cussing everything, and we came across this barbed wire fence. We had to go over it, and I slipped just as we got there, grabbed hold of the barbed wire fence just to keep my balance, and cut myself pretty good on one of the barbs. So then I was really hot.

But that was just at the beginning of the village. We went on into the village, and as we entered it all the people were watching us, as if they were thinking, *What are these guys going to do? What's going to happen now?* They stayed in the doorways of their hootches, stood there with apprehensive looks on their faces.

All of a sudden, I felt a hand on me, and this woman grabbed me off the road. She brought me to the doorway of her house. She went in and got a white rag, a clean and white rag, which was unusual for Vietnam, and she wrapped my hand in this rag, and she gave me just a real nice, loving pat. To this day it still surprises me when I think about this. She was so nice to me, and it wasn't like she was doing it for any other reason than maybe she had a son, and maybe her son was with the VC, or maybe her son was in the South Vietnamese army. I don't know, but she just treated me like she was my mother. It was a very kind gesture, and from then on I could never hate these people. I never hated them to begin with. I had nothing against them.

Another episode that always comes to my mind when I think about my tour happened after we settled into this village. Fire-team leader L/Cpl Lowe and I were just casually walking around--I think without our rifles, which, thinking about it now, seems pretty stupid. We had walked a little way from where we had set in when we saw a young girl chopping wood. She was squatting down and chopping wood, and all of a sudden Lowe went over to her and knocked her flat on her back. I thought, *Oh, no--what's wrong with this guy*? Because all of

us boots had been indoctrinated when we first got to Vietnam and told not to mess with these people, to leave these people alone and respect them. Don't touch them, don't mess with them at all. So when I saw Lowe knock this girl over, I was shocked--and confused.

Then he took out his knife and started chopping away at the woodstack. All of a sudden he pulled out this bamboo viper that he had chopped up. The girl hadn't seen the snake, but Lowe had seen it going into that woodpile, and as everybody knows, bamboo vipers will kill you in about thirty minutes.

When that happened her father or her grandfather came over to us. (I'm not sure who he was, but he looked like a typical--a stereotypical--old Vietnamese: he was old, he was bald, he had a Fu Manchu mustache.) He came up to us and he brought us into his hootch, and invited us to sit down. I didn't know what was going on, as neither Lowe nor I spoke Vietnamese, and the old man didn't speak English. He sat me and Lowe at his table and he served us tea, and I thought to myself, *Oh, no, I don't think I'm going to be able to drink this stuff. I don't know what it's going to taste like, and I don't want any of it.* But, again, we had been told that if anybody ever offered us anything to eat or drink we were to take it, because if we didn't, it would show disrespect. So we sat there in silence and I looked around to see how this man lived. It was an incredible experience for me, because I am interested in other cultures, and in history, and I was a very curious person in those days. I really thought it was a neat thing that Lowe had saved this woman's life, and I felt very mature taking tea with this old man, and I still have very fond memories of that time.

We went back to our camp, and then the worst thing that ever happened to me over there happened that night, though the beginning of it was actually very funny. We dug in along the Cua Viet River, and the weapons platoon, the anti-tank guys and the 80mm mortars were set up next to each other. It was the job of the rocket squad, the squad I was in, to guard the road going into and out of this section of the village that we were staying in. The river was at our back and there was a beautiful lawn to lie on, and we dug a foxhole.

In front of us was this old abandoned French schoolhouse. The grunts all went in there with the captain. I don't know how many grunts were in there, a whole company of grunts. Along with the machine gunners--there were four or five sets of machine gunners and A-gunners--we had a fairly healthy company. In the front of the holes were palm trees and other vegetation.

I stood the first watch, and my watch didn't end until two o'clock in the morning, when my partner, Nathan Williams, and myself let Lowe and another corporal (whose name I have forgotten) man the hole. Then Nathan and I lay out flat on the grass and went to sleep. All of a sudden, there was action: bombs and explosions, one after another, and wood splintering and people yelling. Nathan shook me and said, "Rosie, get up man, we're getting hit!" This was my first time in any kind of combat, and I said, "Oh, Nathan, I'm so tired, I can't hardly keep my head up. If it gets real bad, let me know." And I went back to sleep. It was only for a second, or two seconds, and then it hit again. I mean the shit really hit the fan. There was rifle fire going off and incoming and shit was happening all around us, and the guys in the 81's were pumping out flares, and the sky was lighting up. So I just crawled over to my M-16, which I had sitting on bi-pods right next to me, and I started pumping out rounds. I pumped out four or five rounds. I thought, *OK, this is it, this is what we've been trained for.* And I just automatically did it.

A staff sergeant came running over to me and he said, "Rosenbusch, Rosenbusch, where are you firing to?" I said, "I don't know--right out there, where the tracer rounds and the stuff is coming from." He said, "Don't fire out over there. We got a patrol out around there somewhere." So I said OK, and I quit firing, and Nathan and I just sat there wondering what to do. Then we got up and we started moving around by the mortar team, and suddenly we saw this guy come running directly toward us. He was running flat out; he had sat on a hand grenade--that's the story we heard--and all I

could see behind this guy were flames. He came right to me and fell flat on his face right in front of me, and then I could see that his body was all bloody behind--his butt, his back. So Nathan and I picked him up, and we took him over to the Corpsman's tent. Then we went back into the foxhole because there wasn't anything else to do. The captain was in the schoolhouse screaming and yelling, "What's going on, what's going on?"

What had happened was that three VC had tossed grenades into all the holes where the machine gunners were, and into the schoolhouse, also. It was just chaos; it was nothing like I had figured my first time in combat would be. I had figured my first time in combat would be like a John Wayne movie: someone saying, "You do this, you do that, you go over there." I mean I'd be excited, I knew that, but I didn't realize that our leadership would be so unorganized. The staff sergeant didn't know what he was doing. The captain sure as hell didn't know anything, and if it hadn't been for the 81 team pumping out the flares, trying to get us some kind of idea what was happening, we would have been at a total loss. That night, we suffered 13 casualties, dead and wounded together.

The next night, the enemy started playing the mind games. We stayed in that village all that day, all the rest of the night and the next day; then the next night all we could hear was someone pumping out a few rounds and screaming and yelling, "I see you out there! I see you out there! What is it? Why don't you get in here?" All night like that.

And then, all of a sudden, we heard a bunch of rounds go off, *boom, boom, boom.* I found out a little while later that a very good friend of mine had been killed by his squad leader. He was a machine gunner, Private First Class William Roy. He was accidentally shot by the other guy in the hole with him. He had been asleep and I guess he thought he heard something, and he jumped up and the guy with him put three rounds into his chest--and they were probably only two feet away from one another. A few minutes later the staff sergeant came crawling up to our hole and he said, "Look, you guys be very careful who you're firing at, because Roy just got killed."

I had just eaten chow with Roy. Roy and I had been in the Marine Corps exactly the same amount of time, the only difference was he went to boot camp in Parris Island. He was from Boston, and I was from California. But we met in Staging Battalion and got to be pretty good friends. He was a machine gunner, and he had lasted less than a month in Vietnam. That's something that comes to me almost every day. I remember that night.

Sometime in December, we moved from Quang Tri to Con Thien. Everybody was a little tense about going up to Con Thien, because we had learned that there was lots of shelling going on and lots of firefights, and it was a pretty dangerous area. And it made it even more scary when we found out that the truck drivers weren't going to take us all the way up the hill. They were only going to take us to the bottom and we were to walk on our own, carrying all our own gear and everything, the rest of the way--up the hill. We figured that it must be pretty dangerous if the drivers weren't going to take us all the way up.

Con Thien was a hellhole. It was horrible, muddy, had a lot of garbage on it from other units that had been there, and the rats were huge. It just was not a good place to be. Quang Tri looked like a paradise compared to that dump. We had this giant hole at Con Thien that four of us were to man; it was up the hill and through the gate. Echo company was not at the bottom of the hill--which was good; we had a land-mine field in front of us and that was nice: it was sort of comforting to know that the enemy wasn't going to come right up on us without some kind of warning; they would have had to hit some of those mines. Plus there was another company (I can't remember which one) in front of that land-mine field. I sat in that hole one night and watched a firefight between that company in front and what was at that point probably the NVA (Con Thien was only three miles from North Vietnam).

That hole at Con Thien was so deep I could barely see over it (as I've said, I'm only 5'4"). I had to stand on ammunition boxes to

look over it. The worst part of Con Thien for me was the bunker that I lived in with L/Cpl Lowe. My hole in the bunker was a little tiny hole with rats.

We went out on patrol quite a few times in Con Thien, checking the telephone wires and looking for any kind of action, and fortunately for me we never got hit at Con Thien. It wasn't that there wasn't anybody there; they just decided not to hit us. Very fortunate for us then.

About a week after New Year's, I had the first watch in our hole. Four of us would take turns every night in that hole, and I had the first watch. I can remember sitting in that hole all by myself as soon as it got dark, sitting on the ammo boxes, and getting up every few minutes, to check out the front of the hole for anything happening out there. I could hear the cats fighting with the rats, though all I could hear were the cats, which was kind of eerie. This particular night I got up on the box and looked up and saw nothing and sat back down. All of a sudden, the bunker started spinning around, real fast, faster and faster, and I started shaking my head. I couldn't understand what was happening. I stood up for a minute and my head kind of cleared; then I sat back down again, and the bunker started spinning around again. The next thing I knew, I had fallen forward. I fell forward from a sitting position onto an ammo box and split my lip.

I was out for about an hour, and scared to death when I woke up--because if anyone had seen me, an LT or anybody else making a watch, they would have figured I had fallen asleep, and I would have been in deep shit. I shook my head and I had blood on my lip, so I got up and I went to the squad leader who was next door, a real nice guy whose name I can't remember. "Rosie," he said, "you still got another hour out there." He thought I was tired, and he added, "Try to handle it. Try to hack it."

I said okay, and I went back in there, and everything started spinning around again. It was just unbelievable. So I went back to the squad leader and I said, "I can't take this--there's something wrong and I don't know what it is, but I can't stay in that hole." He said, "Okay, go back into your bunker, and I'll take over."

I went back to my sleeping bunker and lay down and went to sleep. The next day they were going to go out on patrol and I heard the squad leader say, "Leave Rosie here, he's sick." Thank God they left me, because I could hardly walk. I got up to take a piss, and I collapsed. I was throwing up, and luckily a Corpsman was walking by who saw me, and he said, "What's wrong with you?" He asked me if I thought I would be able to make it up to the top of the hill where the doctor was. I said, "Well, I quess I can, I'll try." So he and I walked up the hill, and there was a Navy doctor there, kind of a gruff son-of-a-bitch, who looked at me and said, "What's wrong with you?"

I said, "I don't know. I've been shaking and throwing up and being real dizzy."

He said, "Oh, is that right? Well, how long you've been in Vietnam?"

I said two months.

He said, "How long you've been in the Marine Corps?"

"Six months," I said.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of Vietnam?"

I said, "I don't know--what do you mean?"

And he said, "Well, is it your cup of tea or not?"

"My cup of tea?" I said. "If you think I'm afraid and want to go home, well, you're wrong--that's not why I'm talking to you." At that precise moment, my whole chest started to twitch and jump, and I lost control.

"What are you doing that for?" the doctor said. And all I remember replying is, "That's what I was doing last night." And he said, "Well, you better go lie down."

The next thing I remember is being medevaced out on a chopper. I went back to sleep, woke up again with two Corpsmen over me on, I assume, a plane. I had IV needles in me and they were sitting over me talking, and when I woke up again it was in a Naval hospital at Da Nang with an IV bottle on me and a tongue depressor taped to the head of my rack.

I stayed there for about a day, and, naturally, that night we had a rocket attack and

I had to get underneath the bed. I was one of the fortunate ones who could move; some of the rest of the guys couldn't get out of their racks. So the second day--I quess it was the second day; I don't know for sure how many days I was there before I was awake--a Navy doctor called me into his office and started examining me and asking me questions about my family's medical history and things like that. The only thing I knew of was diabetes--my second-youngest sister has had diabetes since she was nine years old, and at that time she was about 12 or 13. He said, "We're sending you home. Your tour in Vietnam is over, and we'll probably discharge you out of the Marine Corps."

I was stunned, I was totally stunned. I had no idea that I was going to be sent home. I was overjoyed--it was unbelievable. It would probably be like winning the million-dollar lottery today, like somebody telling you that you've won the lottery. You might not know exactly what your feelings are, but you just know that things are going to be better.

A couple of days later I was on my way home on a big medevac jet with all these wounded, fucked-up guys on it--which made me sick: it was really hard to take, sitting up in this plane with all those wounded guys. I was sitting next to this guy who had been hit while in his tank by an RPG round, and he had a big bandage on his head, and he and I sat with each other the whole way across. He was just a great guy, a real nice guy, but he had been hit pretty hard. He was real thin. You could tell he had lost a lot of weight.

We got to Hawaii, where we all had to get off. By this time I'd had a haircut and had a summer uniform issued to me, I quess in the Philippines--I'm not really sure. A Marine Corps general, I believe it was General Walt (a short guy, if I remember) was pinning Purple Hearts on everybody. And he came up to me and said, "What happened to you, Marine?" I said, "I don't know sir. They think I might have epilepsy." He patted me on the shoulder and said, "Don't worry, son, you're going to be okay."

That's when I started feeling guilty--that was the first real feeling of guilt that I had because I wasn't wounded and I was coming home way before my tour was over. I was leaving a bunch of guys behind that were counting on me and needed me. It was like being a malingerer. Here I was, didn't have any wounds, had this mysterious thing happen to me which, in my mind, made me seem like a coward, like I was running from Vietnam.

As much as I disliked the conditions and as much as I realized that it was dangerous in Vietnam, the idea of coming home early had never entered my mind. I'd had no thoughts of making it home early. I left a bunch of good guys behind. Why? Why was I allowed to come home? I had never passed out in my life, and here was almost a miracle--I mean it *was* a miracle--but at the same time it was eating away at me that I didn't finish my tour.

We flew into Travis Air Force Base late at night. There was nobody there. I was put on a bus, and I can remember looking out the window of the bus and thinking, *What the fuck? What am I doing here? What's going to happen to me*? I was practically the only one on this bus. I was the only one sitting up. There may have been other guys on the bus, but it seemed I was all by myself.

I got to the hospital and they put me in the psychiatric ward. I didn't know this until a doctor called me in and he started interviewing me about what happened. "Well, you don't belong here--you belong in a regular ward."

"Where am I?" I said.

"You're in the psychiatric ward," he said.

And I said, "Oh, my God!" I would have had a nervous breakdown right there if I thought they thought I was nuts. He sent me over to the proper ward, and that same night they put me up on a table and gave me a spinal tap. I was in the hospital at Oakland for three months and got excellent care and got every kind of neurological test possible, needles in my head, radio isotope in my arm, needles pushing dye into my neck. They gave me everything, and the final evaluation was that due to lack of sleep and proper diet and the tensions from being in a combat zone, my body just reacted in that particular manner.

Then they said that I would have to finish my tour in the Marine Corps, and I was real

disappointed by that. By then, I wanted out of the Marine Corps. It was Oakland, the Bay Area, 1968, and a lot of stuff was happening. I could not wear my uniform. There were a lot of protests. I'd gotten out of Vietnam, and now I wanted out of the Marine Corps--out of everything: I just wanted to get on with my life.

I said fuck the Marine Corps, I'm out of here. They said no, you're going to stay in the Marine Corps, but you'll be on light duty. And I thought, *What the hell is light duty in the Marine Corps? The Marine Corps doesn't give you light duty.*

But they sent me to Treasure Island, and at Treasure Island I became a runner. I was in a casual company and they sent me to the separation office of Treasure Island and the guys liked me so well that Sergeant Ruth, a great guy, changed my MOS to 0141. He got Headquarters Marine Corps to change my MOS, and I got orders in July of '68 to go down to Camp Pendleton. When I checked in at Camp Pendleton they sent me to Staging Battalion as part of the permanent personnel there.

It was depressing being back at Staging Battalion, knowing that all those guys going through there were going to Vietnam and knowing what they were going to face. I started working for Captain Lamb, a mustanger, great guy, absolute great guy, and I worked for Corporal Wall, who had just come back from Vietnam. He had real bad shakes. He was a good Mormon, real religious, and since I knew he didn't drink, I knew it wasn't from alcohol that he had the shakes; I knew it was because his last duty station had been Con Thien. He had been in Con Thien just before coming to Staging Battalion.

I was in the order-writing department. I had many duties and lots of reponsibilities, and I got there as a PFC, and I went to E-5 in less than two years on that job; I made sergeant in twenty-three months. I worked hard, and Captain Lamb promoted me. I had a very good time at Staging Battalion with the guys that I got to know and stayed there with. We had a lot of good times.

So I finished my tour in the Marine Corps. I got out on 1 March 1970, three months early--to go to college. I'm proud that I made sergeant before I got out. And I'm glad and proud that I did not leave the Marine Corps early like I did Vietnam. I'm very glad and proud I finished my tour. §

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(2/1) Inherits Embattled Con Thien

CON THIEN--The embattled outpost at Con Thien has been manned by numerous Marine battalions since February 1967, when the Leathernecks took it over, but none has stayed as long as (2/1).

Commanded by LtCol. Billy R. Duncan (Amarillo, Tex.), the battalion assumed command at Con Thien December 21.

Since their arrival they have made significant improvements in their living bunkers, fighting holes, trenches and lines of communication.

According to Duncan, some 200,000 filled sandbags have been brought in to fortify bunkers and build new ones. "We've also hand-filled about 20,000 sandbags ourselves," he added.

"We have also devised new and better ways to strengthen our communication lines," he said.

Many new trenches have been dug there by both hand and machine.

During the previous rainy seasons, the road leading into Con Thien would become a sea of mud, sometimes three feet deep, making it nearly impassable for convoys trucking needed supplies into the outpost. The road has been vastly improved with tons of rock, gravel.

"We have made many improvements," stated the colonel, "and with each one made, it makes us that much more proficient in our task here."

[By SSgt Don Willis in *Sea Tiger*. Contributed by Jerry McCarthy.]

The Lieutenant from the 81's

By Brian Barron

I had a platoon with 1/1 for nine months, a good platoon. We always walked point, and we never led anyone into an ambush. I knew what chances I could take, I knew what to do with the VC, and I knew what to do with the NVA. The NVA liked to hit you around four o'clock in the afternoon. They didn't like to make contact until they could fight at night. So you could usually screw around most of the day.

I would have liked to have kept my platoon the whole 13 months, but I lost it when I got malaria. When I came back from Cam Ranh Bay, where I'd been hospitalized, I was made XO. Then I went to the 81's, and somewhere along the line after that I went to Regiment, where I was in charge of the Kit Carson scouts--even though I never saw a Kit Carson scout the whole time I was there. They also put me in charge of S-2, intelligence. I was basically just up there goofing off.

But it was safe there. No gook in his right mind would ever hit Regiment because the enemy realized that that was the place screwing everything up, so they just let them operate.

One day the CO called me in and told me I wasn't panning out too well. I told him there was nothing to do. He said, "Well, what would you like to do?" I said, "Go back to the field." Then he reminded me that I had only two months left. I told him that I didn't care--I wanted to go back to the field. So the next day I went to 2/1.

2/1 was still at Quang Tri, not doing much. Their base camp was a little bit south of the regimental base camp. They were set up, but the 81's weren't, so I'd take them out and we'd go up to a hill and then we'd fire them like we used to fire the 60's, just fire by hand.

We moved to Con Thien soon after I got to 2/1. I had five tubes at Con Thien, and there were two tubes down below at Yankee Station. We didn't have any night-firing stakes. You had to get out there with a flashlight to shine on the night stakes. And I was sending my people everywhere trying to find parts for those tubes--all the way down to Dong Ha. Trying to go through the S-4, logistics, was hopeless; they weren't getting us anything. One time we found a whole, complete base plate just outside the perimeter.

Once one of the companies got hit out there around Con Thien, hit by NVA and Chinese, with Russian advisers (or whatever you want to call them; of course, no one's going to say the Russians and the Chinese were there). The company got pinned down, and before the second company got out through the wire, we fired 1400 rounds--in 45 minutes we fired 1400 rounds out of the five tubes. We used heavy lube oil to cool them down, and I can remember having only one cook off.

After it was all over, a lot of wounded came in. I don't know how many were killed. I never had any dealings with those people; I just dealt with 81. It might have been Fox Company. I don't know, but I always wanted to know how much the 81's helped them out. They had FO's out with them, and they called it in. I remember them walking artillery across the hill.

After it was over, the colonel and the sergeant major came down, and the colonel said to me, "You're firing your mortars too fast." I said, "Sir, I'll burn every mother-fucking mortar tube I have if I think I can save one Marine's life. A fucking tube isn't worth a Marine's life." He didn't say a word then, and neither did the sergeant major.

The A-gunner used to get covered with the heavy lube oil. One day that colonel said to

me, "Why don't you wear clean utilities?" And I said, "Sir, I give the clean ones to my men, because what the hell do I need them for?" They wanted us to spit-shine our boots and everything else at Con Thien. Holy shit, we didn't have water there. We were there 40 days before any of us got enough water to take a shower with.

It was cold and misty while I was there. We got a lot of incoming when the mist and rain cleared up, because then the enemy could see you. We were told never to have more than two or three standing around at one time because groups drew mortar fire. I can't remember if we got hit by tube rockets, but we got hit by artillery. I remember by the size of the holes we got in our area that it was artillery.

When my time was up, they indicated they wanted me to stay. They wanted me to stay because I hadn't had any wounded in my unit in the more than two months I'd been there. And a lot of those incoming had come close to our gun pits. But I left. I had arrived at 2/1 on 1 December 1967, and I left 5 February 1968.

I left country from Con Thien. I went down to the 2/1's rear outside of Phu Bai--they were right next to 1/1's rear, my old outfit, which was in Hue at the time.

After I returned to the States, I went down to Cuba. I was in Cuba when I received my latest fitness report, the one made out by the colonel at Con Thien. It was bad--guess I had a bad attitude--but when I read it I just burst out laughing. §

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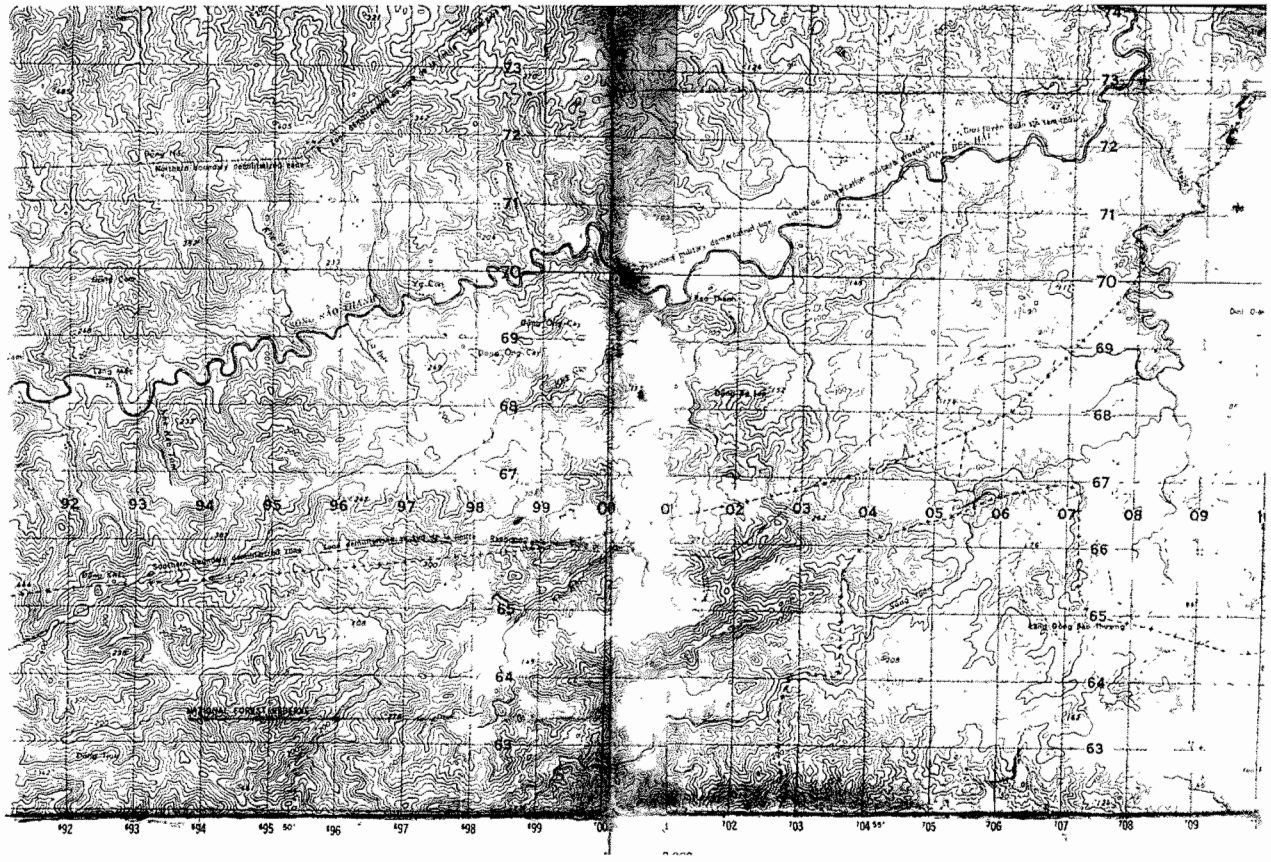
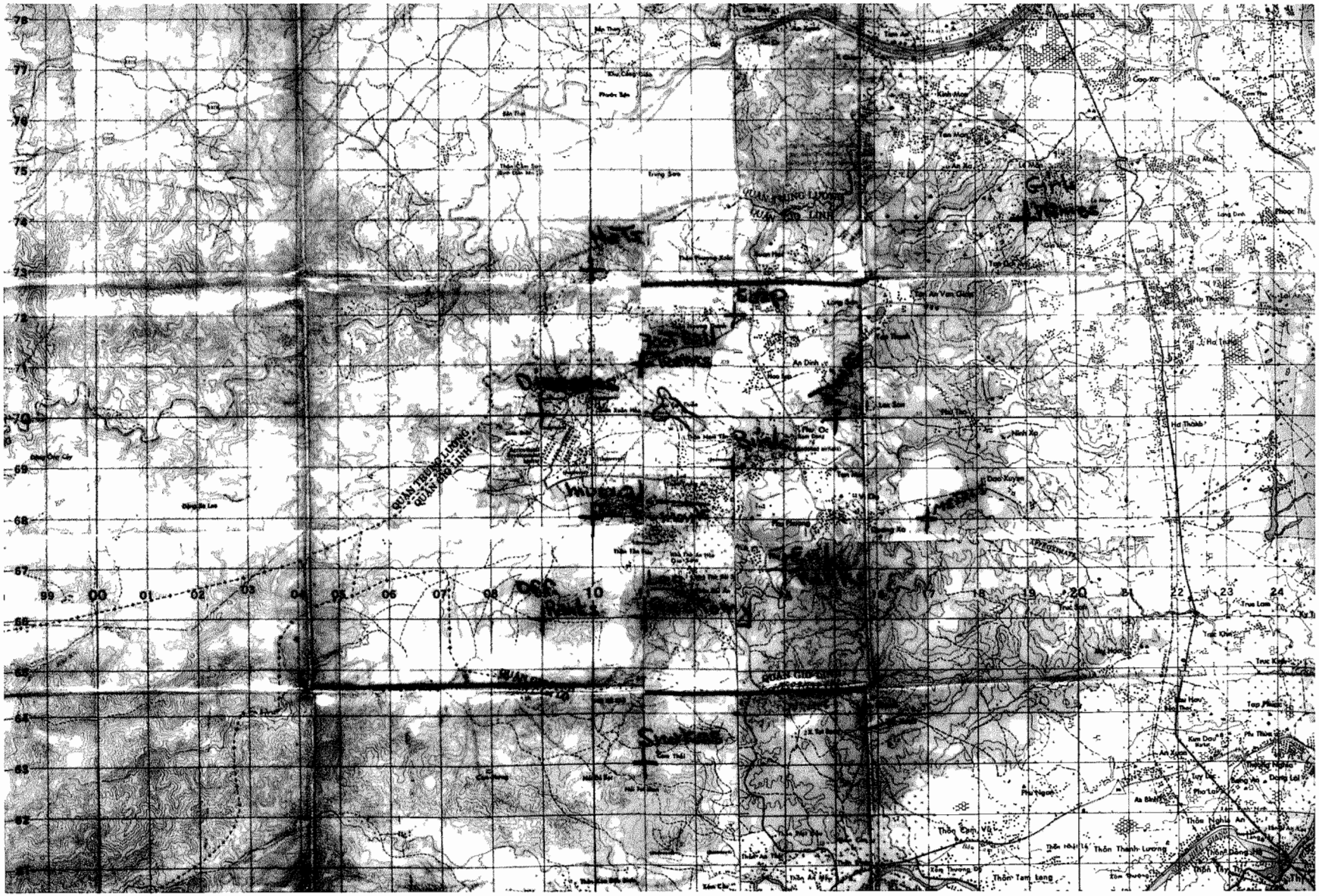


(Courtesy of Steve Krasowski)

DMZ

Map showing the Song Rao Thanh (River) going through the DMZ.



(Courtesy of Chuck Daugherty)

S-3 MAP OF CON THIEN

The Diary of Don Dennis: Thirteen Months in the Life of a Rifleman

This is a transcript of a diary kept by Don Dennis during his 13 months of duty in Vietnam. The diary itself is small, a 3" x 6" red plastic looseleaf notebook--the kind with the rings at the top (it opens up instead of out). Barely visible on the cover is a worn, gold Marine emblem and underneath, at the bottom, the words

Recruit Training Regiment
MCRTC Parris Island, NC.

Inside the front cover is written in blue (ball point) ink: Dennis, Don #2365714, 2/1, Golf, 3rd Platoon, 2nd Sq. The paper is narrow-lined and much of it water stained. The writing, mainly in blue inks, sometimes black, some pencil additions, is small printing.

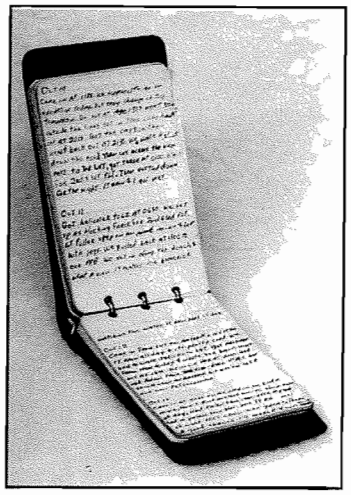
Feb 5, 1968
Left El Toro at 1630. Arrived in Hawaii at 2000. (Time change) Left Hawaii at 2035.

Feb 6, 1968
Lost in time change.

Feb 7, 1968
Arrived in OKA at 0215. It's 530 now. Turned records in & hit the rack.

Feb 8, 1968
Saw film & got GG shot. Now we're on 15 min alert. We had to wait for this to be done before we're able to go. The 7 of us from 1171 play cards & mess around together. They're good guys. It's cold & damp.

Feb 9
Waiting to leave for "NAM". The waiting is hard. Yesterday we heard that 8 guys from our old unit 1171 we're killed & 30 wounded when their plane got hit. We learn tonight that we're leaving early tomorrow for "NAM" at about 0430. I hope I live long enough to die in the fighting not in the plane. We're all up for the fighting--hope we get our share.



Feb 10
I got bumped off last night's flight. I should get a flight out today. Read in the paper the fighting picks up some. It's going to be a long 13 months but I'm going to do my job. I hope I get my share. Well when I come back this way I'll know if I did.

Feb 11
Well I'm here in "Nam". I arrived at 0630. I got my orders to the 1st MAR Reg. which is at Phu Bai. I got my first look at the people. I was on a trash run for the mess hall & we were dumping food waste. We hadn't even stopped the truck when the kids jumped on for the "chow." It was sickening, they ate the waste. The kids are cute but they live poor lives. Couldn't get a flight out so I'm staying overnight here. I felt sick on the plane but better now.

Feb 12
Got a flight out at 0800 & got to Phu Bai at 0835. I'm in Golf 2/1. It's about 65° & rainy. Got some of my gear. We stole some C-ration. Saw them bring in some POW.

Feb 13
Got my rifle. I lay around most of the day. I'll write home later. I had 2 beers tonight at the club. Met Ames who is with snipers. I met a guy from boot camp named Howard there. Some gunnys boots with me listens to radio.

Feb 14
Wrote Jean today. It's cold tonight. We had rifle inspection. We--couple other new guys & me--going to Con Thien soon but don't know when.

Feb 15
I learned that tomorrow I leave for Con Thien. Last night we had 3 incoming alert. Wrote Mother. Got pay 7.00. I fired my rifle for data. It's cold.

Feb 16
We left Phu Bai about 1115 and arrived in Dong Ha at 1145. There was one bullet hole in left wing. I got up here in Con Thien about 1600. I'm in the third platoon. The hill is mostly bunkers and mud. The guys here seem like pretty nice. Tanks fire every so often.

Feb 17
This morning we had 7 incoming rounds (60). They hit on the other side of hill. I went on my first patrol. We check wires out to about a mile. We spent the rest of the day building my bunker. About 1600 a aut. rifle opened up on us. We run into the bunker. I don't think he was firing at us. We stood 5-1/2 hour watch tonight. We're the only company on hill tonight.

Feb 18
We went on a road sweep. From 7:30-9:30. We slept from 10:30-13:30 to make up for last night. We just about finished my bunker today. We had some incoming, about 25 shells.

Feb 19
We work on the bunker this morning. At 1430 we had about 15 incoming I'm my fire team "LAW" man. We had some more incoming about 25 this afternoon about 1530.

Feb 20
We went out on a patrol. From 0630-1715 We found 80 82mm rounds. Our company heard a tank and four NVA troops. Wrote Mom. We found an OP plane that been shot down. There was a .38 and dog tag, no body.

Feb 21
I was on a working party. We built a bunker around the soup kitchen. We had about 20 arty round. They were 152. The mortar rounds don't bug me too much but arty another thing. I talked to one guy whose plane was supposed to been shot down first part of Feb.

Feb 22
Today we had wire check. From 10:30-11:10 We got sniped at. He fired about 10 rounds at us. Later we were working on my bunker. They opened up with mortar & arty. We had over 1100 round. Well over 100 round at our bunker line. No one got hit I don't think. I've $166 on books. I wrote Jean & Janet.



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

DON DENNIS, 1968

Feb 23
Today was wet. We're almost finished with the bunker. Its not mine, I've moved into "Buck's" bunker for the time being. We got a few incoming. I haven't seen a star since I got here to show you what the weather's like. I wrote Carol.

Feb 24
We sleep all day and go out tonight from 2000-2400 on an ambush. We learned yesterday our squad will go on all night operation, we got night shift in other words. We had incoming about 1330. Our bunkers didn't get much. But down LZ they took over 300 rounds. About 15 guys were hurt & 3 killed.

Feb 25
Last night on the ambush we didn't see anything and we just about froze. We started getting incoming at 11:20. I got 12 letters from Jean today. It was so dark tonight I couldn't find the shitter which was only 200 feet away.

Feb 26
We worked on the bunkers until we got incoming. Last night a man from Echo got lost from his patrol. He saw five men, one with a radio and went up to them. He asked what's going on and saw that they were NVA. He hit one and ran away, they fired but miss him. We'll work some more on the bunker tonight. 1 platoon lost 3 bunkers to arty, no one hurt. Wrote Jean & Russel.

Feb 27
Today is real clear. The first time since I've been here. I fired 2 "LAWS" today. Out of seven guys I'm the only one who hit the target (dead center too). Today is a nice day, too bad there's a war on. We got an LP tonight. (We'll be going out). We had service for one guy in our company that was killed by arty the other day. We didn't see anything on LP.

Feb 28
We filled sandbags and slept.

Feb 29
We worked on the trench. Today is warm, we went without shirts. We had some incoming mortar. The small 60's doesn't "bug" anyone, everyone acts like they're nothing. Most guys don't even get in a bunker when they come in anymore. After arty they seem harmless. (They're not.)

March 1
We got our money today. I got $166 on the books. We put rocks (big ones) on the bunker. We work our "ASS" off. Our squad was picked as the "killer team". We should get a chance to "kick ass". We got a class on the radio at 1830. Today was misty. We are spending at least 30 more days up here. Today is our 69th day.

Mar 2
We had class on the Machine Gun, "LAW" and 3.5 this morning. Today is windy, cold & raining. We slept all afternoon. We had a few arty rounds hit in the LZ. We had another class on maps.

Mar 3
We had class on supporting fire. We can now call in mortar & arty. We got a class on first aid. They think there's a good chance to be hit tonight if not in the near future.

Mar 4
Well today I saw my first real combat. We went out to hill 86. We were going to practice calling in arty and firing the MG. We set in and no more than 3 min later, we got fired on. There were 17 of us and about 30 or 40 enemy. I fired blindly into the woods you couldn't see them. The Gooks wear uniforms like ours and it was hard to tell the difference. At first we did not know where they were, made me mixed up, but I got my shit together. The rest of Golf Company came up to help us from Con Thien--it took them about (a fast) 35 min. They assaulted the enemy and we joined them. At a hedge row we were forced to hold up. When I moved up I saw a MG with its dead gunner shot through the cheek. I took it over and moved into position. We fired at them & had return fire. We stayed for about 3 hours. We had 3 KIA & about 6 WIA (one was our LT). We killed 9 Gooks and captured 1 heavy & 2 light MG, 3 or 4 AK 47, rocket launcher, general's clothes. The firefight lasted from 1100 to 2:45. We then moved out looking for them. We couldn't find any more so we returned to Con Thien. On the way we got two arty rounds--no one was hurt. I had LP last night. The new guy in my squad was wounded in the head. I don't want anything to do with the killer team. I fired 150 Rds and saw one gook.

Mar 5
Today we cleaned rifles and lay around. I got letters from Jean & Barbara today. I wrote each of them.

Mar 6
I was on working party today. We got about 20 arty rounds about 1100. We got 2 rations of beer & soda each. I took a bath down to the bridge today. It was a hot day.

Mar 7
Today was hot. We got ready to move tomorrow. I had to help 2 platoon build some bunkers. We had LP tonight. All we saw was that wild "cat" running around.

Mar 8
We moved up to the "washout" today. The bunkers aren't as strong as our old ones but they're better living quarters. We got hot chow. This place looks like we'll have it nice. Today was hot.

Mar 9
We got to take bath down to the bridge. And wash clothes. It was warm. We set up a squad ambush. It rained and we got wet and cold. We didn't see nothing. Got mail from Jean and Mother.

Mar 10
A wet day. We moved to the other side of the bridge. I got mail from Jean and Mom.

Mar 11
Today started out being hot but about noon it became cloudy and cooler. They're moving me around again. I have to sleep in an open bunker tonight. I got some gook gear today. I got letters from Jean & Mark Jones.

Mar 12
Today it rained & winded. I wrote Jean, Carol & Mark Jones. I had tank security. I got letter from Jean.

Mar 13
We tore down some bunkers. Today was cool. We had LP tonight I'm in another fire team.

Mar 14
We stood 2nd platoon line today. It was warm but windy. Tonight the gooks were fooling around the wire. 2 PLT say they might've got one.

Mar 15
Today we went out on patrol. After about 7th mile they dropped us (killer team) off 1-1/2 mile from CP. We stay here all night. Saw nothing. We got here at 1600 after leaving base at 0730.

Mar 16
We saw movements in tree line 200 yds away. We called arty on them? We got picked up at 1530 and got back at 1610. We didn't see anything else. Got drink mixes in Jean's letters.

Mar 17
We got to sleep all day. I got a bath down to washout, and wash my clothes. I'm getting homesick & tired of this place. I'll have to cheer up. I finished Ian Fleming--in some ways I'm like him. That is in his personal feeling.

Mar 18
Today was hot. We had to carry logs and metal stakes to a bunker they're building. I'm in better spirits. I'm wondering what I'm going to do when I get back to the States & also when I'm out of the services.

Mar 19
I was on a working party which moved the mess hall. It was hot. We hear today that we're going on

operation the 23rd around Khe Sanh. We had night ambush. It rained. We didn't see nothing. It was hot. We're going to be on operation for 2 months. I signed pay records--$304 on pay records. Got a new guy named Wesser in our squad.

Mar 20
Today was hot. We got our gear ready for operation. And took shower. They showed movies but it was too hot to stay in the tents & watch. 18 & 19 we got 1 can beer ration. We didn't get any tonight & no mail 3rd night straight.

Mar 21
I had tank security first part of today. We learned that we're leaving tomorrow. We were told to make marching pack, then transport, then marching--they gave us the runaround. Today was hot. I wrote Mom & Carol & Jean & sent my film home. No mail! Makes us mad that they're fooling with us in the rear. We stole 1 case C-ration a piece (7 cases).

Mar 22
We moved out today. We're now in a valley. We lay around most of the day. We moved out at 1730 (instead of 1400). I guarded the LZ tonight. We're guarding an air base being built.

Mar 23
Today was hot. I used 2 canteens of water in 30 minutes. We moved around all day. We try to keep in the shade and keep cool, but it impossible.

Mar 24
Hot. We went on a patrol to get some gear the "ARMY" left behind. I sat around the rest of the day until we moved. I read most of "7 Days in May." It pretty good.

Mar 25
We went on a patrol. Today rainy and wet. I took picture of Turner. I got mail from Jean & Mom & Janet. It's good to get mail. First time in a few days. I enjoy hearing about home & they miss me. It makes being here a little more meaningful.

Mar 26
Today cool, we dug fighting hole or at least started one. I wrote Janet. The Army helicopters are flying around everywhere. I never seen so many.

Mar 27
Today started out cool but warmed up by afternoon. At 1900 they told us to move then after we set up, they had us move back! They're fooling with us. We got another new guy. Fox got ambushed and had 6 KIA, 14 WIA including the captain and 2 LTs. This morning we had bulldozer security. Wrote Mom.

Mar 28
Today is hotter. We had "dozer" security again. Wrote Jean, got mail from Jean & Mom also 2 newspapers. We lay around most of the day. Dug a little on bunker, too hot to do much. We *hear* that we are going on operation the 1st. We know a lot of guys will be "zapped" on that operation (Scotland). It put us in a quiet mood!

Mar 29
Today was hot and windy. We didn't do anything but lay around, and write letters. I wrote Jean & read a little.

Mar 30
Today was again hot and windy. Maybe that's the way the weather will be for some time. I think about home & Carol's little girls, it's for them I'm over here. If Comm. won here their generation would pay dearly. It's costly but has to be done, there's no other way.

Mar 31
Today we were told to pack up, but then we wait all day to move out. It hot today. Took a bath down to stream. Wrote Carol and Sue K.

April 1
We moved out at 0600. The day was cloudy. The going was hell. We went up hill and down then. We went about 4 or 5 miles. Got cut all over hands. At 2020 we got 2 friendly 81 rounds, 11 WIA.

April 2
The going was slower & easy. At 1600 we got helicoptered to our next check point. Our PLT Ser. broke his leg.

April 3
We moved about a mile today. We set out at 1130. We got to C-10 about 1550. We are low on water. I got one canteen for all day. The day is hot. Tonight rain. We got mail.

April 4
Today it rained. We found an enemy bunker with 2 B-40 rocket rounds, AK-47 rounds and other gear. Last night I got mail from Mom & Jean & Carol & Barbara Jane. It was raining and cold tonight. We got 2 new men named Hunching & Poode.

April 5
Today is warm. 2nd PLT find "much" gook gear. We moved to two different positions. We stay up here tonight & move out tomorrow. It rains tonight. 2nd PLT found "many" bunkers & Gook gear. We were moving off the hill until they found them. We kept what we wanted.

April 6
We got helicoptered out at 1200. We took hill 502. No contact. We can look down on Khe Ca Lu & down the valley. Its a pretty sight.

April 7
We lay around today. It's hot. We got mail. I got mail from Jean & newspapers. We got 2 beers & 1 soda.

April 8
We went out on patrol, PLT size. Saw nothing. Fox

Company got hit today & we were on alert. We got 2 beers. Got Jean's packages & newspapers.

April 9
Today we were supposed to move off this hill, but we didn't for some reasons. Today was hot, and what little water we got was dirty. Water so cheap and for us so hard to get.

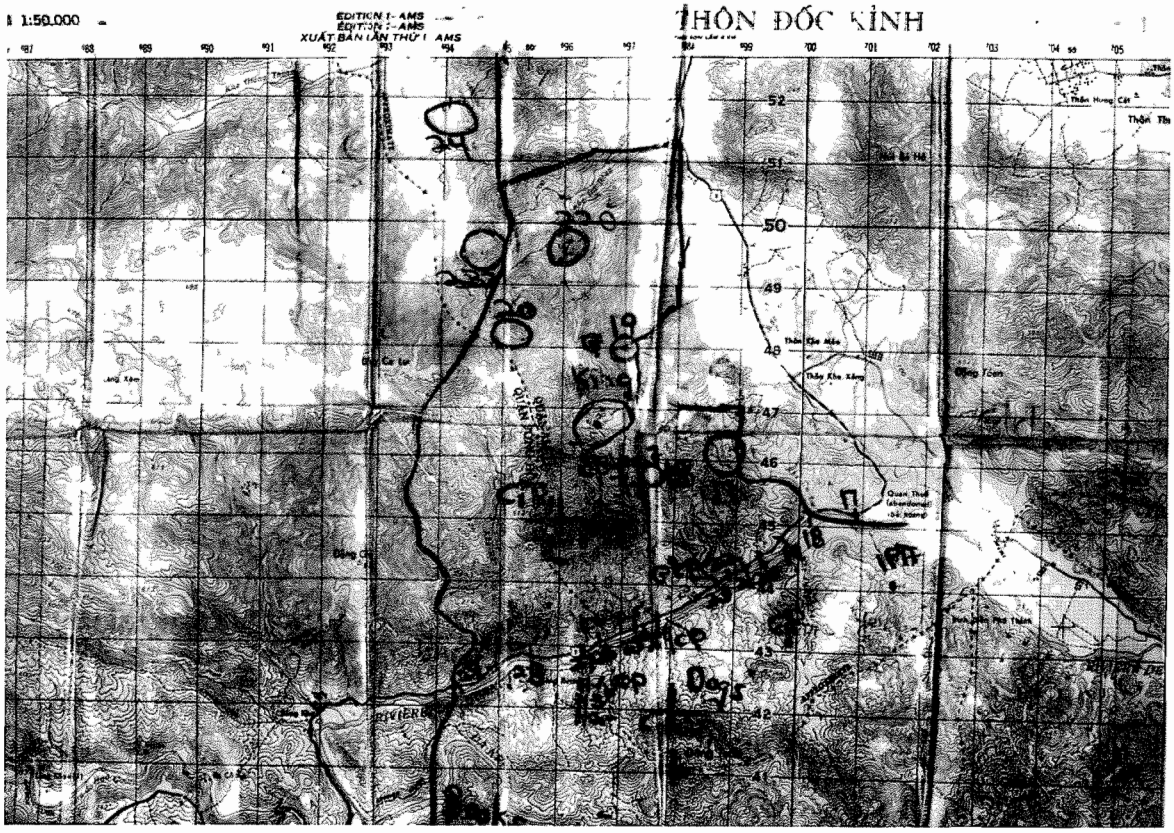
April 10
Today was hot and we were out of water. It took them all day to get water to us. We slept when we could--the sun was so hot and them damn flies made it hard. We heard that we're going to take hill 254, if so we could lose alot of men. I wrote Carol & mailed my film home. Last night I had LP. We saw nothing. I'm an acting fire team leader. I like having someone under me.

April 11
Today we got helicoptered off the hill at 1430 down to Khe Ca Lu. We took baths down to the river. Man does time like this make you feel good. I got mail from Mom & Carol. We heard today that they're having "Peace Talk". I don't think the war will end before my tour over. I wish I was wrong but I don't think so. We hear that we'll be done here about a day or two. It's like a rest camp, everyone in good spirits. We learn that the last helicopter was dropping its last load of the company that was replacing us and they got arty. One guy got a direct hit on his head and all they found was his dog tags and fingers. They had some WIA too. Man that's some feeling knowing we just got off and bang, they hit the hill.

April 12
Today it's cloudy. We're moving out at 1200. We'll be going to guard a bridge. We bought a bottle of "VO" for $15. The S-Sgt wants all the bottles we bought from the gooks. He says that they may be harmful. We not handing ours in, not $15 worth anyway. We now guarding a bridge. It's not too bad. Bridge 18.

April 13
It's cloudy. We had 50% watch last night. That's the way it will be as long as we guard the bridge, our squad and guns & rocket with LTs & S-Sgt. In all about 20 of us. We had road sweep from 0820 to 1000. Me and Cpl Puff put out some flares & we found an M-26 booby trap. We are lucky we saw it, instead of stepping it off. I got mail from Jean & Carol & newspaper.

April 14
Today cloudy. We went on a water run, 9 of us and 20 water cans on a little mule. A friendly patrol set



(Courtesy of Chuck Daugherty)

S-3 MAP SHOWING AREA OF CA LU

off one of our flares. We thought we had some gooks for a minute. Right now everyone wants a gook. I know I do. We went swimming in the water.

April 15
Today was cloudy but warmer in the afternoon. We cleared "field of fire" and then went swimming. I stood watch on another hill which needed some men. Got mail from Jean, Aunt Nancy & my film.

April 16
Sentry on hill before going back to bridge. It's hot. Learned we going to Khe Sanh tomorrow.

April 17
We had to march 2-3/4 mile to the LZ in this hot sun and 100 pds of gear. We got to Khe Sanh at 1435. The helicopter behind us landed in a mine field. They had 1 KIA and a couple of WIA. The WIA had their feet blew off. It's a waste of lives. Khe Sanh is dumb. Trash- everywhere. We moved 4 time. Tomorrow we're supposed to go on operation. We got a few incoming.

April 18
We lay around, slept & read. Every time I went out of my bunker we got arty. One hit 20 yds from me. An "82" sent dirt all over me. We were supposed to get hit last night, but didn't. We stole chow and gear from around the area. Got mail from Jean & Mom.

April 19
Today is hot. I wrote Jean. We got a new man name Winters. We got incoming.

April 20
Today is hot. We worked on our bunker to make it wider and stronger. We didn't get any incoming.

April 21
We moved down and took over another company line until tomorrow. My fire team went up to BAS on an working party. Our Battalion on operation on a hill, hit the shit. They brought in 4 KIA & 37 WIA we carried off the helicopter then from BAS to helicopter to be medivacd. They were shot up pretty bad. Makes you change your mind about combat. Got letter from Janet.

April 22
Hot. We lay around, cleaned rifle and went on working party, still standing line for "K" Company.

April 23
Slept till 1400. We were on 100% most of night. Read a little & wrote letter to Janet & Jean.

April 24
We went on a road sweep from 0615-1310. We saw some bunkers & trenches and seven dead NVA. Later we ran across one the 1,000 pds bombs killed. You could hardly tell it was a man. He was about 6" wide. I got mail from Jean.

April 25
Last night was cold, in fact every night we been here, it's been cold. We learned that we're staying at this position. I like our other better. We had better bunkers and more room.

April 26
We rode shot guns on trucks. We picked up some Vietnamese mountain people. We had to carry about 160 of them on 4 trucks including our platoon. We had to make two runs. The gooks were sickening. Most were old or young children, hardly any middle aged people. The only young men were crippled. Just think, we're fighting for them? Ha. Last night I stole a "S-P" pack & case of chow today.

April 27
Got a letter from Sue & wrote her back. We think "Cowboy" is going to be PLT radioman. I hope not. It pisses me off. If he goes, I'm going to try and get in guns. I don't want to be here with the rest of these shit birds. Tex & Wes are alright but not the rest. Joe got back today--he's now my fire team leader. Well I'm out of a job. We got beer & soda.

April 28
We went on a company size patrol. We saw nothing. We went along side of a road. We were out from 645-1520.

April 29
We learned that we're going on operation the 1st. That not so good. We had patrol today. We reconned the area in front of our position and didn't see nothing. We got a soda a piece. Pete got back from R&R. Wrote Dad, Mom, Carol, Jean and Ronnie.

April 30
Today was cold. We got our gear ready. I don't care any for Pete. He's a lifer. I was runner for Golf 3. I got 2 needles [shots].

May 1
We left at 1200 by truck to bridge 33. Then walked about 3 miles down the road. We saw a dead gook, and a burned out tank along the way. We humped 1500 meters up and down hills. The day started out warm, in the afternoon to rain about 1600. The going was hard--everyone just about dropped out. We dug in for the night. We had an ambush at 2200-0100, didn't see nothing.

May 2
We started out at 0630. We had to hump it over three big hills. This was almost straight up, at times the only thing that kept us going was guts and sometimes that almost gave out. It rained today off and on. We got chow tonight. I ate 2 boxes of C's for dinner the only meal I've had sent yesterday morning.

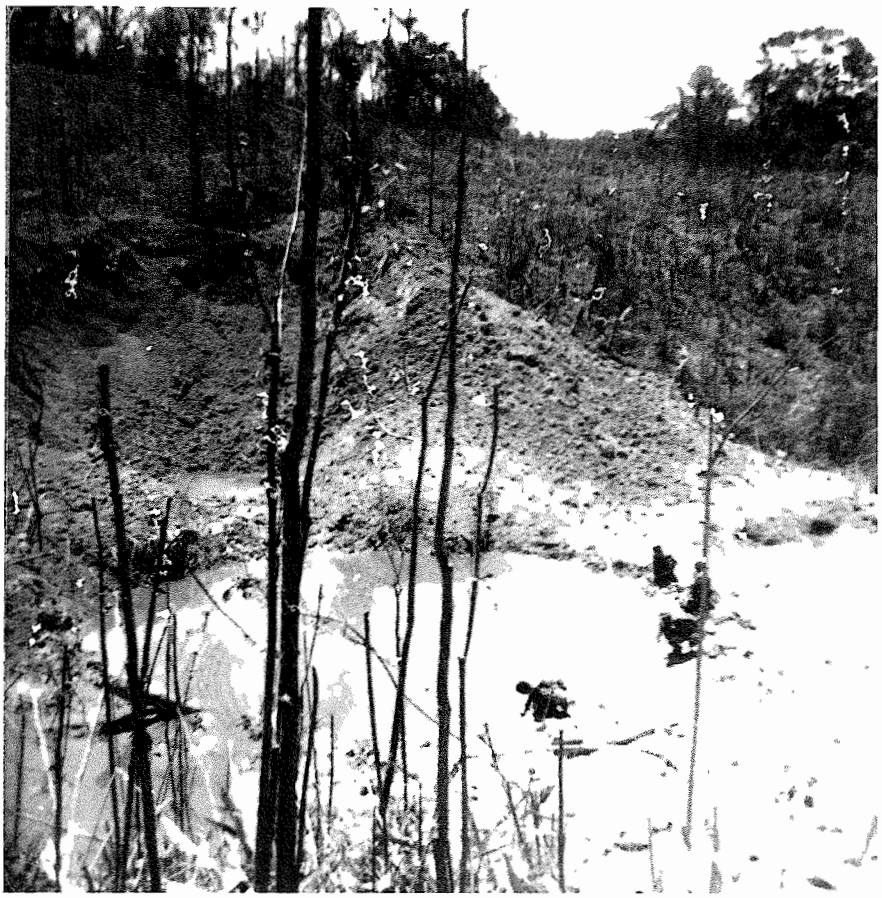
May 3
We had a patrol. Supposed to get helicoptered out, but staying tonight. We got our PLT on this hill and

the other 2 platoons on the other hill. Tonight is a good night to get it. We way under strength.

May 4
We got helicoptered out at 1030. We got our old position back. We got some incoming some was pretty close. We heard that they're going to start peace talk the 10th. We lost 2 guys killed in the company by incoming. The Gooks used 122mm rockets. Tonight during my watch we got some close ones. One hit 10 feet from our fighting hole. We heard firing all night, they had a battle going on in the hills behind us.

May 5
We got some incoming this morning. Rocket fire worse then 152, they sound like low flying jets. My PLT had road sweep--it was my time to stay behind and watch the gear. Got a letter from Jean. Stole me a Williepeterbag and rubber lady.

May 6
I was on a working party. We built a bunker for the brass. We got a few arty incoming. We threw a gas grenade at some seabees. We had services for the guys who got killed the other day. We heard that we got an operation to hill 881 in 3 or 4 days. The word changed, we go day after tomorrow and there's 99% chance of making contact. 2/1 and 1/1 is going.



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

FILLING CANTEENS

This day, the search for water ended at water-filled bomb craters.

May 7
We got about 100 incoming rounds of arty & rockets. One round hit a gas dump and set it afire, I got a flick of it. Got a letter from Jean. We spent the day getting ready for operation. Got pay 140 I sent home.

May 8
We had a road sweep from 0700-0830. We leave for hill 881 about 10:30. We saw a down helicopter on our way in that 1/1 lost. We made no contact today. On hill 881, it was very high but was on high elevation. There wasn't any gooks on it. We got a few arty rounds but it hit on the other side of hill. Hotel Company had 4 WIA from them. There's about 30 122mm rockets on this hill.

May 9
We moved to the next hill over. We made a water run. We got water from a bomb crater. We're spending the night here, get helicopters out tomorrow. We got resupplyed tonight, we sure needed it. Our fire team had an ambush.

May 10
We moved out on a patrol around our hill, supposed to get helicopter out at 12:00. They change the word, we'll be out here another 2 or 3 days. The Lifers are pissing us off. We went on patrol in circle & they keep changing the word every 10 sec.

May 11
We heard we're walking the 11 clicks to Khe Sanh. Got SP yesterday. We sat on hill until 1200, while the other 2 PLT moved out. We followed their trails. We started moving on hill line but then moved down in the valley. We'd been in it about 15 min and had just stopped, when we got mortar. Everyone ran for cover. It was one tube firing 3 rounds and the T&E's. Joe and I ran back down the draw, away from the tube, I never ran so hard in my life and with all that gear. We got up on a ledge going into a draw. We heard some guys in the draw, we just yelled to them to get out of there when the mortar hit in there, one round landed down below us. I don't know how

we didn't get hit. Shrapnel landed on my arms & neck but they were small pieces & only burned. A couple of us ran into the draw to help. The round had landed at Puff's feet in between him & Tucker. Puff's legs were cut up pretty bad & Tucker's arm & legs. Fairbrother and me helped Puff. He was hurting pretty bad & went into shock once, but soon came out of it. We had to move him and we could only get four guys to help--everyone else froze. We moved him best we could. We got him up the draw then started work on him. We got the bleeding to stop and we talked to him to keep him out of shock. He seemed alright when we loaded him to the LZ. We got Tucker to LZ and we had a pretty hard time carrying them up that hill side. They knocked the tube out by this time. We moved on down the valley and on a hill where the guys with lesser wounds got medivacd. Their gear & some of ours we didn't want to hump. We moved out at 8:00 and had to climb a high hill. It took us hour & half and we had two heat casualties on the way up. We got them a medivac at 12:10, the gunners on the Ch34 had to get off because they couldn't get up, but another copter got them off. We walked along the hill tops, we passed some friendly troops. At 0615 we took a break for an hour then moved on. We drank some of the dirty water on the way but didn't care. We got in at 1420 after 31-1/2 hours with out sleep or food & little water. We were dead on our feet. We got chow and hit the racks.

May 12
Part is above. We got mail and got a few arty rounds.

May 13
Wrote Carol, Mom, Jean. Got some arty rounds about 40. We heard we might move down South to Phu Bai in a month. Trade our rifles in for new ones. Got mail from Mom, Jean, Carol. Got about 20 arty rds close.

May 14
Fanfire my rifle. We got some arty rds pretty close. Wrote Mr. Mitchell. It rained most of the afteroon & night. We made a stove & cooked some pan cakes.

May 15
Had a road sweep from 0630-0800. Went on a convoy to Ca Lu from 1015 to 1830. The Gook body we saw long side the road wasn't anything but bone. His head sat on a stick thanks to some Marine. We took a bath while at Ca Lu. When we got back we got bread & juice. The Captain said we did a fine job on the operation. Got a letter from Jean and some newspapers. I got put up for L/CPL. Cowboy and me got put at the top of the list. I don't think I'll make it!

May 16
Cowboy went to PLT radioman. We were on a day long working party. we tore down buildings and burned up the woods. We got some incoming, nothing close. I got a letter from Carol. We got SP's & bread. I'm at low spirits, I don't care anymore. In fact everyone seems this way. I'm thinking of going to guns. I don't feel too good, I've got the shits. 5 C-130 came in today, the first ones I've seen land here at Khe Sanh.

May 17
At 1200 to 1520 we had a patrol. We swept the area in front of us. Turner now squad leader & Joe right guide, this change upset me. I know now I'll have to get out. LTS went to Phu Bai for at least a month to head some things. Nothing going my way now. We got about 25 close arty rds.

May 18
We were on alert all day in case 2nd PLT got hit. I slept most of the day. I felt sick again today. Doc Adams thinks I might have caught malaria. I hope not.

May 19
The 2nd & 3rd PLT went out to help Fox. The Doc made me stay behind. I wrote Jean & slept most of the day. Company didn't come in.

May 20
3/9 took over our lines. The company hit a little action, haven't heard how much. Stay at "SIX" tonight. The gunny might be able to get me in guns. It's pretty "cool" up here. We got a 50 cal and 81mm. Sat up in case we get hit. Slept most of the day. Got some incoming.

May 21
Just lay around. Word is, Company will be out at least 3 more days. I don't know when or if I go out in the field. I sure want to. Didn't get any incoming today.

May 22
Got mail from Jean today. The Company came in at 1500. We got B-rations. We didn't get any incoming. I'm in a better mood now after couple days rest. The PLT was in a pretty good firefight. The more I heard of it the more I wished I was out there. No incoming today.

May 23
I was on a day long working party. We got some incoming. We got B-ration. I'm now the M-79 man.

May 24
We had a Company size road sweep. From 0615-1010. LT & Pete came back, bad news. I fired a couple rds from my M-79. I got mail from Mom & Carol & Ronnie. I sure was glad to get his letter. When I get home we're going to do things together like skindiving. I can hardly wait.

May 25
At 9:30 we had a stand down to 1800. We went down to Ca Lu. We took baths while we were there. It was hot and the water felt good. The only trouble was we had to come back on that dusty road. By the time we got back we needed another bath. Had

LP tonight. Got some incoming.

May 26
We had a PLT from 0900 to 1400. That dumb LT shot himself in the hand & Cowboy in the side, the dumb S.O.B. Cowboy will be back in about 3 or 4 weeks. We got B-rations. We cooked some hot dogs--they weren't bad. Got letter from Mom.

May 27
We had Company size road sweep. From 0630 to 845. Had working partys. One was getting all the ammo left on other hill. We threw grenades, set off flares & played around with these deadly weapons. We got B-ration. The bread & orange were great. I got a hair cut, about time. We had 2 incoming rds. Wrote Ronnie.

May 28
Had stand down from 1015-1700. We took baths. It rained on the way back and everyone got soaked. We got back and no sooner started getting dry & we got word to move out. We went down Rd 9 to Fox 2/3 and reinforced them. It was raining & there weres some pissed Marines. We got 19 incoming rds.

May 29
We walked back in 0800-0935. We lay around & read mostly. Got letter from Mom. On the way in we saw some of the dead gooks killed last week. They were rotting and smell horrible. Nothing smells as bad as that. We got a can of soda & SP. We cooked some bacon & steak. We had an ambush 1030-0100. We got some incoming. At 0600 it woke us up.

May 30
We had road sweep from 0630-0800. We got back and told us to get ready to move out. We never did. We got ice cream, man it was good. We got B-ration & cooked some steaks & hamburgers, they were pretty good. I fan fired the M-79 and .45. They shoot pretty good. Got letter from Mom. We got a new E-4 in my fireteam. Named Mike.

May 31
Wrote Mom and Carol. We were told to pack up and be ready to move out on an operation. We waited all day. We cooked some hot dogs for chow. It rained part of today. We got orange & apple today. Got arty at 0015 & 0100. 7 rds.

June 1
Had convoy from 0730-0630. We waited for about 2 hours. We got arty and 2 trucks and a jeep got knocked out. No one was hurt bad. We got out as fast as possible. It rained the whole time & we got soaked again. Got mail from Sue. We had LP tonight. A NVA got inside the lines and turn himself in. We were on 100% till 0300. It was foggy and damp.

June 2
We had PLT patrol from 1300-1800. Got mail from Jean & papers. We got a can of soda. Got pay, $140 checks & $5 cash. It rained in the morning.

June 3
We had Company road sweep, then patrol. We stayed out all day from 0630-1800. It rained a little. Got letter from Mom.

June 4
Today was rainy & damp. We had to bury trash pits & police up the area. We had working party all day. Had a few incoming rds early this morning.

June 5
We had a Company patrol from 0900-1400. We went out west of Khe Sanh. It's been damp today. Got new guy named Reese.

June 6
We had a road sweep from 0630-1900. We swept the road then sat in till convoy came back from Ca Lu. Tonight me and new guy was setting out a Claymore when Echo started firing night firing & either them or 79 guy fired at us. The rds came close.

June 7
We waited 4 hours for the convoy, before they called it off. Got mail from Mom & Jean. It rained this afternoon & night. We had LP from 2100-2400. We took Poncho so not to get wet. Heard we're leaving Khe Sahn soon.

June 8
We had a patrol from 1300-1600. We went out toward the hills (north). We lay around & read the rest of the day. We fanfired the M-79 & LAWS.

June 9
We had a patrol from 1730-2030. We let 1st squad off at an ambush sight. We fan fired our weapon and a hog ran out in the open. Don't know if we got him or not.

June 10
We had a road sweep from 0700-1300. We went out, started back in, but waited for an hour & half then had to go back & get that truck that ran over a mine. We came in & cleaned weapons.

June 11
We were "sparrow hawking" today, we cleaned weapons and lay around the whole day. Wrote Mom, Jean, Judy and sent home my film. Played cards over at "81" until we had 100% [*watch*]. Someone thought he saw something. We have operation in 2 days.

June 12
We had road sweep from 0700-1000. We then had a patrol from 1230-700. We saw a deer. Got mail from Mom & Jean.

June 13
Had working party at C-med. We were there from 0600-1830. We only had about 20 medivac. Got Tex & me a poncho liners. Got Valen. card from Jean little late. We got about 20 arty rounds. We had LP tonight, but I get to stay behind because I had the

all day working party.

June 14
We had a patrol from 0930-1530. We got word they saw gooks in our area. I don't think so. We walked in circle getting back. Pissed us off. At 1830 they told us to get ready to move out. A recon team got in trouble. We waited 1-1/2 hours before getting the word we not going. We got a beer a piece.

June 15
We had a road sweep from 0630-1015. As we were leaving we got 3 arty rds. We ran on down the road, passed the ARVN. We got to bridge 35, we got around 7 rds. We had a patrol from 1800-2100. We went North toward Hill 953 then to the road coming into Khe Sahn. We left 1st squad off there for an ambush. It was dark by the time we came in. It rained most of the time. Mike got us an ice cold beer from S-H. It was good.

June 16
Patrol from 1800-1515. We went North again. We go into the same area about every day. My fire team ran a patrol to the valley, closest we been to it yet. Wrote Mom.

June 17
We stood lines at the Rock Crusher from 0800-1230. We got alot of gear & can goods. Third [day] without mail, pisses me off. We were sparrow hawking today.

June 18
We had a road sweep from 0630-1010. We got arty on the way down so we followed the valley back in. We took about 100 Rds in the afternoon. We played some football. My fire team vs Guns. We won. You never lived till you played football on a field of trenches or bunkers, wires ect.

June 19
We had convoy from 0700-1630. We took a bath there. We thought we were going to get hit bad. We got arty when we got back.

June 20
We left Khe Sahn about 1000. We now on hill 552 about 1-1/2 miles NW of Khe Sahn. We took our fighting gear, WP bags and extra amm. We made a water run, its a hard one.

June 21
We had a patrol from 1500-1900. We went SW and on the way back in we went out of our way to come the hard way. Damn Lifer. Didn't get mail third straight mail call. Read most of the day. Turner came back today with case & half of soda.

June 22
Patrol from 0600-2010. We got soda & beer a piece. I got some newspapers but no letters. Tex went to Phu Bai to make a phone call. We fan fired today.

June 23
We didn't have no patrol, so we had it pretty easy. We stood line from 0630-1200 then took baths down at the creek. Got a letter from Jean. Wrote Dana & Jean.

June 24
Been sick since last night, didn't go out on today patrol. They held air strike in the valley below us. Got some good pictures. Tex came back today.

June 25
Sick again today, no patrol for me. Played cards and read. It rained tonight on watch--feel lots better tonight. I saw a jet shot down over Khe Sanh tonight by a 50 cal. The pilot got out alright.

June 26
Got mail from Judy & Mom, first mail call I've had in a long time. We had a patrol from 1200-1815. We got to swim & bathe in the creek. This hill is hell to climb because its so steep. We put in for R&R and I got Japan.

June 27
Tear down the bunker, wrote Mom, got letter from Sue.

June 28
Had a patrol from 0700-1700. We had a hell of a march. While we were out the hill took one arty round. Hope Gooks don't shell us. Climbing these hill, make me love Delaware cause its so flat. It rained tonight, with no bunker most of us got wet.

June 29
We got today off. It rained this morning. The hills around us been getting hit. I read, but all in all, it was a long, slow day. We made a water run and got wet on the way up. Tonight about 2130, Brown the Machine Gunner who came over the same time as me shot himself in the head. They don't think he'll live. They don't know how it happened. Wrote Sue.

June 30
We got today off. Two days in a row. Boy the next time we go out its going to be a long one. It rained today. We stand 2nd PLT lines. Tex & I built a tent together. Its a lot better than our old ones. We heard today that Spanky died on the way to Dong Ha. He was a great little guy. It's a shame. We got incoming motar rds in the wind driven rain last night.

July 1
We got to take baths. We got mail, first time in 4 days. I got 3 letters from Mom. Sure glad to hear from her. We had a patrol from 1630 to 1930. The other fireteam got an ambush.

July 2
We got pay. I left $140 on the books for R&R. Wrote Carol. We got SP. Rain everyday for almost a week & most every night.

July 3
Patrol from 0730-1645. We went looking for gooks down in the valley but only found one weapon. We had some thick & high going. All that climb made me feel pretty good. Took 29 leeches off me today. Got a letter from Mom. Everything seems to be going pretty good back home. I'm thinking more & more of extending so I can have Christmas home.

July 4
Cloudy & windy. Got a patrol from 1500-1810. The new E-4 in rockets fell out again today for second time in two days. We blew some bunkers. At night around 2000, the hills around us & KS shot up many flares & pop ups. Kind of looks like 4th July.



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

Men of 2/1 patrol through a village while a Vietnamese woman goes on with the work in her garden.

July 5
We got our gear ready. Hill 689 was getting hit. Our PLT went over to help them. We were all wanting to fight. Our spirits were high. We left at 1330. Our PLT got two WIA. The E-4 that always falling out shot himself in the foot. D Company 1-1 on hill 589 had 10 KIA out on a point. At 1920 3rd & 2nd PLT got 2 WIA. We came in at 2230. They held air strike all day on the gook, but we still got incoming 60's.

July 6
We were supposed to go out and get the dead. We got word to move back to hill 552 instead. We were sure glad. "A" Company 1-1 came in instead. We got helicopter out at 1715 to Ca Lu. We went swimming--sure felt good. We sure were scared up there on the hill. We made a recon by fire on the point yesterday and we wanted kills, even when we got sniped at we still wanted some. We wait until dark. The lifers piss us off. GLAD to get off the hill.

July 7
Got a letter from Carol. We moved out to My Tie at 1645. We got cold beer & soda, ice cream & milk today. It was great. It was hot, if it wasn't for the wind we would be
burned.

July 9
Had a patrol from 1500-1800. First chance I've had to look at the people. Wrote to Dana, Jean & Carol. The flies make the days unbearable.

July 10
Had a patrol from 0700-1130. We get one hot chow a day. It's pretty good & with cold cool aid too. We got 2 beers. We went swimming today. My name was put in for a school on 20. I'm supposed to have R&R 23.

July 11
The lifer's are getting worse. Wrote Mom. Got a patrol from 1700-2000. It was my turn to stay behind. I'm hoping to go to that school. I can always put in for R&R later.

July 12
Stole 2 case of chow last night. We lay around trying to sleep but the flies see that we don't. No mail, pisses me off.

July 13
Had a patrol from 2000-2300. We left 3rd squad out on an ambush. Got my money for R&R today. I guess I won't need it now. Tex came back today.

July 14
Had a patrol from 0800-1200. We moved back to Cua Viet today at 1630 to 1800.

July 15
We had an operation from 0700-1915. We walked at least 20 clicks. We went through about 5 villes. The little children beg for chow or smoke. The older people just carry on like we weren't there. The lifers

piss us off. We were supposed to come in at 1300 but they keep moving on. We are the only company in 2/1 that wear helmets.

July 16
Left Cua Viet at 1100. Got to Dong Ha at 1145. Left at 1215. Arrived at Phu Bai at 1330. Told that there a mix up about school. But I still got R&R the 23. Went to the club the cold beer was great.

July 17
Lay around, went to PX. Stand lines tonight from 1730-08:15. Wrote Jean.

July 18
Got some cold drinks. Sleep & read.

July 19
Went to club tonight it took me 25 min. to get a beer. Took a shower & cleaned up. Saw a movie tonight.

July 20
On a working party from 0800-1430. We work on a bunker.

July 21
Got half tanked tonight at the club, met some buddies from ITR. Rain tonight.

July 22
Got my orders. Got pay $275 & got my shot. Left Phu Bai at 1230 after 2-1/2 hours wait. Got to Da Nang at 1300. Went to PX & got some STATE side chow. Report into R&R center at 14:40. Rained a little.

July 23
Let Nam at 2110. Got to Japan at 0300.

July 24
Have good time. [*The next 5 days--the 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29--are the only days of the thirteen months missed in this diary.*]

July 30
Left Japan at 130, got into Da Nang at 0555. We messed around rest of day, saw movie.

July 31
Didn't get flight out, Slim & I messed around Da Nang & spend night at air base.

Aug 1
Flight to Phu Bai. Got L/Cpl warrant. Heard Ski got killed by own arty. Went to club, saw some of my old buddies from ITR.

Aug 2
Got flight to Dong Ha at 1105 to 1145. Couldn't get ride to Con Thien so spend night here. It rained most of afternoon & night. Went to club.

Aug 3
Got to Con Thien at 1000. Company out on operation. It rains today. Got about 20 incoming rounds.

Aug 4
Company got back today. I was made fireteam leader.

Aug 5
Left Con Thien at 1100, got to Dong Ha, took boat to Cua Viet. Had night patrol. Tex got killed. I sure sorry. I cann't say how I felt. We left at 2200, got back at 1000.

Aug 6
It rains. We got to sleep some.

Aug 7
We had a night ambush. We moved to My Tide. Lt Puller our new PLT commander.

Aug 8
We had a PLT ambush. Still waiting for my backup mail. Ambush from 2000-0700.

Aug 9
Wes got back today, its great to have him back. Another PLT size ambush tonight. We went swimming today.

Aug 10
Took lines today. Had a squad patrol from 2030-2300. Feel pretty low because of the loss of Ski & Tex.

Aug 11
Patrol from 1300-1530. Got a letter from Carol. We got beer tonight. We bought it, so everyone got 12 beers a piece. Some of the guys were messed up. All in all we had a pretty good time.

Aug 12
Had an patrol on Am Track from 1300-1530. We killed a boar today. Rain tonight. Got letter from Carol.

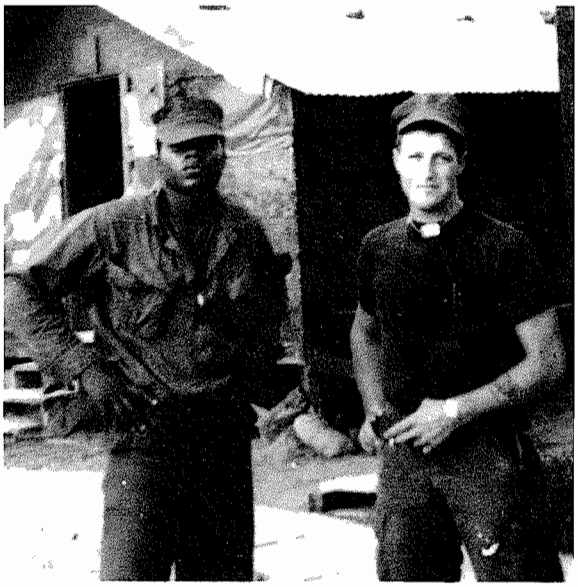
Aug 13
Had patrol from 0900 [of 13th]-1100 of 14th. Went to villes. The people were friendly to us. Pete left! Turner squad leader.

Aug 14
Got back today. Rain tonight. Turner will be a better squad leader then anyone else.

Aug 15
Patrol from 1300-1530. It pretty hot. No mail.

Aug 16
No Patrol. Tonight we got one from 2200-0300. Squad size. Hot, slept today.

Aug 17
Rain today. Squad size patrol. From 1300-1530. We



(Courtesy of Gary Belden)
TURNER AND "COWBOY"

got operation in two days.

Aug 18
Am Track patrol to the same ville today. The two boys I met today [*yesterday?*] hang around me today.

Aug 19
BN size sweep in DMZ. 3 squad killed 2 gooks. We had no one hurt. Out from 0745-1745. Copter took some rounds. Got some 82mm incoming. Walk point, weather hot and little water. Going was slow & hard. Only 1 click from North Vietnam.

Aug 20
On stand by for Fox Company & Hotel who still out there. Got to take baths and sleep. 2/26 standing lines.

Aug 21
Back standing lines. Wind, but no rain. We got beer & soda tonight. We stole case of "C" & got some ice from mess tent. Had a little party. Hear tonight we be in Da Nang the 23th. It about time.

Aug 22
We policed up the area, and got our gear ready to move. Had a patrol from 1200-1400. We got an Engineer who came to our squad now named Wright.

Aug 23
We left Mi Xu Thi at 1730. 5 hours late. We got on trucks and taken to tent area in Dong Ha for the night.

Aug 24
We flew out on C130 at 1430, got to Da Nang at 1710. We stay the night at the old R&R center. We all--Hotel & Golf Company--went to the club. Some guys got messed up. We all enjoyed our self & saw a movie.

Aug 25
We got our new area today at 1000. We got to watch out for booby traps. Sandy & hot. Got a patrol from 1930-0530.

Aug 26
Sleep part of day. Club call, then had patrol from 1730 to 1940 tomorrow. Sent film to get developed.

Aug 27
Supposed to go in at 0600 this morning but they used us as a blocking force. We sat along the road till got ready to go in. And we got fired on. Fire fight lasted from 1350-1710. We went in and got sniped at on the way in. Got in at 1940 went out at 2030 for patrol. We're beat & pissed off. We got messed with.

Aug 28
Went out at 1200. We sat up for the day at an ville. Moved out at 1930. Ran into ambush. If it wasn't for a gook taking his safety off we would have had some KIA. We set up for the night at 2045.

Aug 29
Set out at dawn, moved 1000m, set in. We got sniped at. Waits the PLT radio man got nipped on the ass. Moved out, got sniped at again. We moved out at 1930 for our night camp spot and got ambush again. Found 2 booby traps.

Aug 30
When we moved out got hit again. 1 squad 2 point men hit a booby trap. They were shook up but not hurt bad. Took 5 hours for Medivac. Moved out and took some Vietnamese people with us. Got to bridge at 1420. We just jumped into the water not even taking our gear off. The VC get on your mind. I going CRAZY.

Aug 31
Had Road LP. Hot.

Sept 1
Moved back to Camp area. Had patrol from 2000-0600. One guy in 3rd sqd hit a booby trap, he got a busted leg. He got medivac. We found 3 other also. Our company has taken 15 WIA & 2 KIA in 6 days. My PLT has taken 6 WIA itself.

Sept 2
Had squad size patrol from 1030-1230. Patrol from 2000-0600. I walked point a short way & found one booby trap. It rained some.

Sept 3
Went out at 1600. Set in, got sniped at. Moved out to our PPB at 1930. Catch a possible VC. It started raining at 2400.

Sept 4
Out of our PPB at 0930. We had to wait on 3rd sqd to get back from taking POW in. We got sniped at. Ski & another man in 3rd sqd got wounded from a booby trap. They got medivac. We set in at a ville. Got sniped at. It rainy & cold as could be. We got to go in at 2000. We were glad as hell. We got dry & got some chow.

Sept 5
Went out at 0530 for a blocking force for the ARVN. We got pissed off cause we had to put wet clothes on & go out in the cold rain & ARVN didn't show up. Went out to the bridge at 1600 on trucks. We live in a tent & there are 20 of us in there. It not much but better then nothing.

Sept 6
Rain stopped. We had road LP. From 0600 1200. Bought some beer & soda. Wrote Mom. The Lifers are getting bad again.

Sept 7
Move from bridge to an ARVN compound. The place is small. There are about 60 ARVN's & 1 platoon Marines. We live in tents made out of ponchos. Got a letter from Aunt Nancy. We killed a snake in the compound tonight. 5 of us & 1 ARVN had patrol from 2100-0100.

Sept 8
We went to seabees' compound for noon chow & make club call. 4 Marines & 2 ARVN had patrol from 0100-0400.

Sept 9
Got a letter from Boyd & Mom. Had a patrol from 2000-2230. I walked point. There were 5 Marines & 5 ARVN.

Sept 10
Wrote Boyd & Slim. I had patrol from 2400-0145. I led it. There were 4 Marines & 4 ARVN.

Sept 11
Got pictures back. They came out great. Wrote Craig Moore. Reese, Wright & Gary got back today. NO PATROL.

Sept 12
Got letter from Ronnie & wrote him back & the Leader. 1st PLT made some contact last night.

Sept 13
Hot. No patrol tonight.

Sept 14
Got a package from Mrs. Allen & letter from Carol & Mom. Had patrol from 2230-0230.

Sept 15
Wrote Carol. Got some pictures back. I spend most of my time here reading, till its time to go to Seebee CP for chow, which is once a day. Other fireteam got the patrol.

Sept 16
We got to go to China beach for the day. I went to Freedom Hill and saw a movie. We had a great time, but we had little money.

Sept 17
Hot. Got film back. Pictures didn't come out. Had squad size patrol 2100-2330. ARVN left today for 4 day operation. Reese squad leader now, Turner right guide.

Sept 18
Hot. Lay around & read. Patrol 0900-1230.

Sept 19
Got a letter from & wrote Mrs. Allen thanking her for package. No patrol tonight.

Sept 20
Day patrol 1200-1400. Hot so we ended up going swimming. Night patrol from 2100 to 0615. We had our own fire fight! So we ended up staying out all night.

Sept 21
We were supposed to leave this area today, but we will be here a few more days. We don't mind this area. Patrol from 0100-0530. They had movements in area.

Sept 22
Tonight 3 Charlie coming in from a patrol saw 4 bodies laying outside the wire. They went to look them over and they jumped up and ran. They got one body and from blood tracks there must be 2 more dead dragged off. We captured one AK-47.

Sept 23
We checked area out. We found SHAPE chargers & 3 Chi com grenades & other things. There were many paths leading away from the area. Had patrol from 0100-0400. Rain tonight.

Sept 24
Got letter from Carol & Mom. 3 Charlie saw 14 VC 500 yds from them. 3 Bravo were on stand by most of the night in case they got hit.

Sept 25
Patrol from 2200-0130. Felt a little sick.

Sept 26
Patrol from 2230-0230. Got a letter from Mom.

Sept 27
Spent the day reading "The Don Flows Home To The Sea" by Mikhail Sholokhov. Wrote Mom.

Sept 28
Got a letter from Craig Moore. Had Patrol from 2000-0115. Tonight Turner now right guide told me that some members in the squad wanted me as squad leader, that Reese is messing up & that if I say the word he'll make me squad leader. Good to hear

his faith in me, but I don't want the job, even if I make E-4.

Sept 29
Getting colder. We had patrol from 2230-0100.

Sept 30
Read. Got gear ready to move tomorrow. The time passed pretty fast here. And chow at the seabees was pretty good.

Oct 1
Move to Battalion area at 1035. Got a letter from Carol. Move out to area at 1615. We set in at 2100. Squad had patrol, but I stayed behind cause of my foot.

Oct 2
We stayed here at our PPB till 1930 then moved to our new PPB. I had to stay back again cause of my foot.

Oct 3
We left PPB at 0700 to go back to Battalion CP. Got there at 1045. S/Sgt Lester stepped on booby trap. He was only wounded on the ass. Got pay $180 check $15 cash. Got 2 needles. Saw movie & went to club.

Oct 4
Got package from Mom. Sent 3 rolls of film to get developed. PLT went out. I stayed behind cause of my foot. Made club call & movie.

Oct 5
Got rainsuit. Got half tanked at the club. My foot still sore. We heard tonight Wright got wounded.

Oct 6
I was on working party all day. The PLT came in & went out again. I'm still on light duties. I got lines tonight. Got letter from Mom & got state flag. Wrote Mom. Last night watched TV.

Oct 7
Wrote CP Moore. Had guard all day. Went to movie tonight. One guy in 3 Charlie died. We thought he was putting on an act to get out of the bush. They don't know what killed him.

Oct 8
I was on working party this morning. I filled out AA form for Norfolk Va. We went out at 1600 on Amtrack. Had squad patrol from 2100-0100.

Oct 9
Today hot. This area reminds me of home. Its flat, has pine trees & sand. We sat in our daytime PPB at 1300 them moved to night PPB at 1930. Had squad patrol at 0100-0400. We're lucky we didn't get hit.

Oct 10
Came in at 1115. Supposed to go on operation today, but they changed it till tomorrow. Go out at 1900 went 300m outside the lines, set in. Then came back in at 2015. Got the captain then went back at 2130. We walked 4 clicks down the road then cut across the rice paddy to 3rd LVT, got there at 0100. Waited for 2nd & 1st PLT. Then settled down for the night. It rained & I got wet.

Oct 11
Got helicopter to LZ at 0630. We set up as blocking force for 2nd & 3rd PLT. LT Puller stepped on an mine & lost both legs. We pulled back at 1300 to our PPB. We set in along the beach & what a view. It makes me homesick watching the water. It rained part of the day.

Oct 12
Came in from LVT on Amtracks at 1020. It rained all day & its pretty cold. We had to walk 5 clicks to LVT. Got package from Mom today & wrote her back. Went out at 1800. Set in our PPB at 2100. Had sqd patrol from 2130-2400. 1st PLT had 20 WIA when an Amtrack hit a mine. Sgt our new PLT commander.

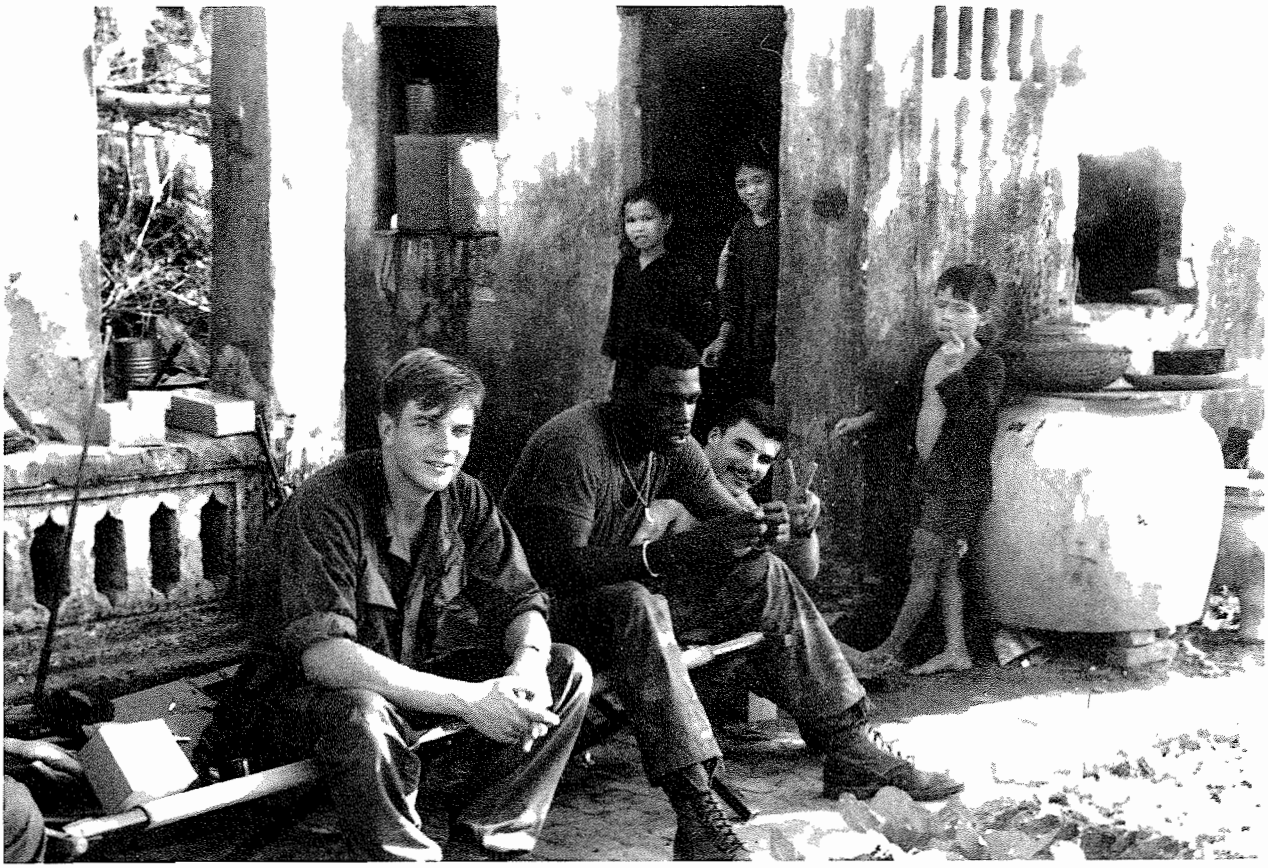
Oct 13
Came in at 0730. On the way in we find a mine, then I find another one. We slept most of day. Had patrol from 1900-2400. My sqd had a patrol from 2100-2315. It rained most of night. Hot chow was great. There a good chance I'll make E-4 next month.

Oct 14
We got up at 0500. We supposed to get helicopter to the fishing ville by LVT for an operation. We went out in the rain at 0545 but came back in at 0700. Got chow & slept some till 1000 when we took Amtrack to 3rd LVT then walk to the fishing ville. We set in in the huts to dry off. The children bug us for chow & smokes. We ate rice & fish in one house. We left ville at 0300 to join up with 1st & 2nd PLT.

Oct 15
We set up a blocking force for the PF. We ran out of chow this morning. We set in on the hill behind the ville at 1030. 1st & 2nd PLT went into BN CP. The sun came out and we dried off. At 2400 the PLT left to go 3 clicks down the beach--it took us 1-1/2 hours.

Oct 16
At 0430 we moved inland to join up with 1st & 2nd PLT for a blocking force. It started raining hard early this morning. 2nd PLT got one gook. Reese had a bullet nick his canteen. We came in on Amtrack at 1230. We got chow, it wasn't to good but not bad after 2 days without chow. While we were out on the blocking force we begged for smokes & chow from the ARVN. For a change we went out at 1800 for our night PPB. We were all pissed off about going back out in this weather. It pretty bad. The water is about chest high in some places or higher.

Oct 17
We move to a ville for our day PPB. The people pretty good but keep begging for chow. The rain stopped and we all got day off. At 1900 my sqd had to take Walling in to BN area cause he was sick. We



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

IN A FRIENDLY VILLE
Large clay pot (on right) holds rice.

saw one boy run from the ville to the tree line. We thought he was warning the VC. It only took 1/2 hour but we got a few sniper rounds. While we were in the BN area Reese fell and hurt his knee. So we went out without him. It was pretty hairy going back but made it okay. At 2100 we move to our night PPB. We were supposed to go to a ville but they messed up & we ended at the same place as night before.

Oct 18
Came in to BN area at 0800. First day off in a month or more. Went to club. Wrote Mom & Judy. Still raining. Sqd patrol from 2100-2400.

Oct 19
The rain stopped & its getting warmer. We really enjoy this day off. We got three new guys, Weeks, Crider & Dawson. Everyone was pretty cheerful about the boots. It makes us look short time. Six of us had Tower watch. We had it from 1800-0800. It rained most of night.

Oct 20
Windy & rainy. Got one roll of film back didn't develope. Pissed me off. Got SP today had formation for promotion. Watched fight on TV at club.

Oct 21
Signed pay roster, had $160 It's wrong! We went out on a patrol. Some doggie copter thought they kill some VC. We checked area out but found none, but 3rd Charlie got one. Had patrol from 2000 to 2400. Hand in old MPC for new MPC.

Oct 22
Had Tower watch from 0900-1745. Went to movie. Got free soda from club. PLT had patrol, I got back too late to make it from the Tower. Wrote Carol. Watched some TV.

Oct 23
Got new MPC today. We played some football. Went to movie it was pretty good. Got a letter from Carol & package from Mom.

Oct 24
We, my sqd, set up a blocking force along the NSA Road from 0900 to 1330. Today was hot. Had patrol from 1900 to 2300.

Oct 25
Wrote Carol. Had PLT patrol from 1700 to 0730. My

sqd had patrol from 2000 to 2330. Hot. The weather sure changed quick. We got a new E-5 in the PLT & SSgt Lesley is back as PLT CO.

Oct 26
Got in at 0730 this morning, went to chow, then got some sleep. Got film back. Pictures were pretty good--some of them didn't come out. Had patrol from 2400 to 0300. We were on stand by for 2nd PLT who killed a gook, captured 2 others and found M-1, M-14, AK47 & 3 box mines. Played football.

Oct 27
Hot. Wrote Mom & sent pictures home. Got letter from her. We got an operation tomorrow. Got patrol from 2000-2300.

Oct 28
We moved out at 0530. We moved down Tu Cau Road for 3 clicks, then another click off the road. We set in at 0900. We were a blocking force for 1/1. We moved to our night PPB at 1600. We had a patrol from 0100 to 0500. There was supposed to be a large enemy force in our area.

Oct 29
Got a letter from Mom. Wrote her back. Today hot. The captain brought the PLT soda & beer and Bravo showed who had the drinkers. Five of us had about 10 ea. We all got half tanked or more. Went to movie.

Oct 30
We went out at 0530 for a blocking force for the ARVN. The ARVN's got 4 VC. Came back in at 1520. Got a letter from Carol. We took a few sniper rds. Had sqd patrol from 2000-2400.

Oct 31
Wrote Lisa from Wilmington, a pen pal, & Carol. We went out on our night PPB at 1630, set in at 1820. We had a sqd patrol from 2400 to 0400.

Nov. 1
Came in at 0630. We had to take EOD people out to the same site as our night PPB to blow 2 155mm rds. Got pay $50 cash today. We got a sqd patrol from 2400-0300.

Nov 2
We went out on an operation at 1330 by helicopter. Thomason & Oncay got wounded while we were going in to the LZ. We were scoping out the area when the gunship ran out 15 VC. We got on line and swept the area. We saw a VC run out in the open and about 10 opened up on him. There's a good chance I might have hit him. He had 5 rds in him, but very much alive. I & one other man stayed with the POW while PLT went on with the sweep. They picked me to go with the POW back to NSA to guard him. A Ch34 picked us up. The gook then turned out to be a NVA, he had 2 Chi com and 11-9mm rds & papers. I turned him over to ITT man & turned weapon in at amorer. Try to get rack at R&R but all filled so spent the night at NSA. Went through Da Nang City, lot different from rest of Nam I've seen. Watch TV. The Navy over here live great. Like back in the States.

Nov 3
Got up at 0700. Went to chow. It was great, the Navy knows how to eat! Got my weapon from armoror, went to see Thomason & Oncay, they both alright. Got a ride to Marble Mountain. It took awhile to get a ride, because of 2/26 was holding a sweep. Went to S-2--when I got back turned papers in. Went to chow, then to helicopter pad for a lift to my company. Got out to them at 1730. My sqd had an all night ambush. Got little sleep.

Nov 4
We found rice this morning. In all, my com. has found 8-122mm rockets, 3 tons of rice and captured AK-47, Chi com & the 82mm rds & 5 fuses not counting the 5 sodas I found. We came into BN CP at 1500. Went back out at 1615. Got a letter from Mom. We set up across from "No Man Island" on the big rice paddy. We set up as a blocking force.

Nov 5
At 0145 we saw 8 gooks crossing the rice paddy. Everyone opened up on them. One ran by our position only 25 yds away. I'm sure Crider got him. At dawn we heard a gook breathing hard from a chest wound. One of the guys blew him away. We sat all day until 1600 we came back to BN CP. We got hot chow and much needed showers. Went to film tonight. Got a locker box, not that I needed it that much. Got the Leader in the mail. We go out on another operation tomorrow but at least we got tonight off. 3rd PLT doing pretty good on these operations.

Nov 6
Went on an operation at 0175. We founded alot of rice, kind of sad cause it was the ville rice not VC. The people came up to us crying. We dug up some fresh graves, didn't like that job but the VC make us. Came back in at 1630. We were supposed to come in tomorrow but we didn't mind. Got a letter from Mom. At film tonight a gook fired a few rds & most guys ran for cover all but the grunts. We knew the rds couldn't hit us so we just sat there watching the movie.

Nov 7
We got the day off. I feel kind of sick. Got Tower tonight from 1730 to 1130.

Nov 8
Came in at 1130. Spent couple hours in the villes before coming in. It not so bad, in friendly villes people aren't to bad. Rested up & read some. Had patrol from 2100 to 2400. Someone got in a firefight about 1 click out of the wire. We watched the gunships work out, pretty neat.

Nov 9
We were supposed to have a PPB but they changed

it to an operation. We moved to 1/1 area at 1730. We had a USO show and it was pretty good. They had a pretty good meal celebrating the Marine Corps birthday. It rained all day. We're in pretty good spirits. Don't care to much for next operation.

Nov 10
At 0230 we moved out of 1/1 area. We went through rice paddies waist deep. At 0530 we set up a blocking force outside a ville. Sgt Meade got wounded by a booby trap, he was hurt bad. At 0800 the captain, a FO, a radio man & a man from mortars got injured by a booby trap. A real shame. They were pretty messed up but they should make it. We moved to a big ville at 1200 then got truck back to BN CP. Went to movie tonight. It lasted till 2400. Got a letter from Jean.

Nov 11
We slept late, and really enjoyed it. Got a letter from Jean & wrote her back. Got a 2 LT as our new PLT commander. Went to the USO show took some pictures. Rain most of the day.

Nov 12
Had sqd patrol from 1145 to 1330. Went to movie, it was "Tarzan & Jungle Boy." It was pretty good.

Nov 13
We got free soda & beer from the company. Was on a working party building a bunker. Got package from Carol. We had a formation to meet our new CO. Company went out at 2200 for a blocking force. We walked down NSA Road to Tower 3 then walked & walked for over an hour in the rice paddies sometimes shoulder deep. In the morning we were only 10 yds off the road and we didn't even have to even get wet if we went the short way. The Lifers are messed up. Wrote Carol. The Lifers don't want us to skate, they try to work us when ever we get a day off. Heard that a buddy from ITR got blown away.

Nov 14
Came in at 1230. We took some pictures. Went to club & movie. NO MAIL. But for a package from Carol yesterday mails been pretty bad. Played football.

Nov 15
Got a letter from CP Moore. We worked more on the bunkers, it's been so long with no hard work like that everyone seems to volunteer to work up a sweat. Got some good pictures. There's talk about going "afloat" again. Every month there's talk about it, just talk. Wrote Mom. Played football went to movie.

Nov 16
We got up at 0100, went out front gate at 0210. We went in the Tucau area about 800m from BN CP. We walked in circles, so by the time the Lifers got us set in, it was 0445. We came in to BN CP at 1145. Got film back. The pictures came out great. Some of the guys want me to order more prints. Took more pictures of Ames and me. Played football.

Nov 17
We were supposed to go on a convoy as its security. But the Gooks didn't show up that we were escourt. Got a letter from Mr. Russel. It was great to hear from him. I sent a roll of film to get developed. We fanfired our weapons. The VC were firing at the lines, some rounds came close.

Nov 18
We got up at 0445, left at 0530. Reese couldn't go out so I took the sqd out. We went into the Tucau area. A man in 2nd PLT set on a booby trap 105 Rd. He lost both legs & one arm. He died a few minutes later. It was his last day in the bush. We founded 3 other booby traps. We moved on to Booby Trap Alley. 2nd Plt opened up on some gooks. We swept the area & c. Found AK-50. While sitting there we saw 5 gooks run across the open area across the river. We opened up & Kohl might have hit one. We moved to checkpoint 2 at 1100. We swept the area but found nothing. We came in at 1730. Got beer & soda, found the LT. Went to movie & hit the rack early.

Nov 19
We moved down the road to Tucau bridge. We had to carry all our gear plus our WP bags. We were hurting by the time we covered the 2-1/2 miles. Weeks, Crider & I set up a tent together. We had a sqd size patrol from 0200 to 0630. Da Nang got rocketed & our BN-CP got mortar so it was a busy night in our area. Got a letter from Mom, Slim & Mr Russel. It was sure great to hear from Mr Russel, I'll write to him as soon as I can. I ran the patrol cause Reese couldn't go out.

Nov 20
Our PLT moved into the Tucau area. We moved out at 1200. We set up our day PPB at 1530. We had a sqd patrol from 1640 to 1745. Reese didn't go out, so I had the sqd again. On our sqd patrol we got sniped at, when going to check point 3. We returned fire and headed back to our PPB. At 1700, when we started to move to our night PPB the lead sqd got hit, by about 2 sqd of gooks. They had "AK" & a "BAR". We returned fire with M-16, M-60, M-79. The gooks pulled back, and we called arty on them. I don't think we got any. It took to long to get it. We set up a 360 and cancelled our night PPB & sqd patrol. It was a hairy night and we were on 100% most of it.

Nov 21
At daylight we searched out the area we got hit from and saw what looked like 2 gooks dragging away one gook that got hit last night. We opened up on them. We got 3 gooks which turned out to be NVA & 2 AK-47 and one SKS, & also a dozen Chi com. grenades & packs with papers. We moved out at 0900 and got to the bridge at 1030. We moved across the river & set up our tents again. We were given 6 confirmed kills. I don't know where they got the other bodies from.

Nov 22
We had gate watch from 0800 to 1030. At 1130 we went to a ARVN Compound down RD 1 about 1 mile down the road from Tucau. Crider & I set out to get soda. We went in to Da Nang, to Freedom hill. We ate in the cafeteria. It was pretty good, alot better then C-ration. We got a ride to China beach PX. Coming back we got left off at 3/1 area near hill 55. We got a ride to 1/1 then back down to the ARVN CP. We got 2 cases of beer & a bottle. We did some drinking.

Nov 23
We got C-rations brought out to us. We stay here till tomorrow. We slept & wrote.

Nov 24
3 Alpha came and relieved us at 1130. We came back to Tucau bridge. Got a package from Salvation Army & radio from Mom. I feel real "low" today. My PLT is getting it sticked to us by our new asshole CO. This is about as low as I've been in a real long time, if I wasn't getting short I don't know what I'd do. Reese not going out so I'll have the sqd. I'll have to keep my feelings from them. I really miss home & now almost every thought is about going home. God help me! I might need it. If I get killed make it fast. Well only God knows. Tonight Da Nang got rocketed & BN CP got mortar. It was a pretty busy night. We could see the rockets being launched.

Nov 25
We moved out at 1030. Set up our Day PPB at 1330. We spent our first day in Tucau area. We found 4 booby traps. At 1830 about 3 gooks got close to our position & opened up with automatic weapons on us. We returned fire & they fired 8 M- 79 rds & withdrew. They caught us flatfoot & standing around when they opened up on us. We moved to our night PPB at 1930 & after moving out called arty on our old PPB. We got to our night PPB at 2040. Had sqd patrol at 2100 to 2400. Reese didn't go out so I've got the sqd.

Nov 26
We moved out at 0800. We moved across the road--where we feel safer--and set up our Day PPB. We had a sqd patrol from 1600 to 1800. We moved to our night PPB at 1920. I realize that there only about 25 guys, if that many, with the company at Khe Sanh. Seems funny. Most rotated, some wounded, others killed. I still remember some that been killed--really sad, some close friends.

Nov 27
Came in at 0745. Got letter from Jean. Wrote her back. Lay around most of day. Got pictures back I had made from negatives. Had sqd patrol from 2200 to 0145. Pissed us off. We were supposed to have the night off. Crider got a puppy we named "BRAVO." We heard we'll be here till Dec 5. Everyones feet are in bad shape. Mine are too sore to walk on.

Nov 28
We built a bunker for my fireteam. It's a pretty good one, better than tents. The work felt pretty good but what a way to spend Thanksgiving. We got a hot meal which wasn't to bad.

Nov 29
I went in to BAS, & they sent me to NSA for a check up. I ate in the canteen, it was pretty good to eat state side chow. Won't be long before I will again. Got a letter from Mom. Got pictures back from being developed. They came out pretty good. The weather is getting colder & it rains alot at night. Got a letter from Mom.

Nov 30
We went to the ARVN's Compound. Wess & I went into Da Nang to get soda & sandwiches. We had a hard time getting ride. Pissed us off. Got some VC money off the ARVN.

Dec 1
Came back to the bridge at 0730. Went out at 0930. Set up our Day PPB at 1100. We had to carry alot of extra gear. We sat in around a hut. At 1855 an VC fired a burst at our position more or less to let us know he's around. At 2000 the PLT pulled out to go to our night PPB. They got fired at from 2 differ. positions. We, my sqd, doubled back and set up an ambush on a well used path. We set in at 2030. It was a long & hairy night. We didn't see nothing. Weser set off a booby trap, only it was delayed action. No one was hurt.

Dec 2
We met the rest of the PLT at 0830 and went to our Day PPB. There was a battalion of ARVN's working our area where we were supposed to set up our PPB so we set up about 100 yds off the roads. We got some sleep & just lay around & ate all day. Pretty peaceful where we were & only 1 click from Tucau which we all dread. We made it our Night PPB to.

Dec 3
Came in at 0800. Wrote Mom, Carol, Boyd & Dana. Got pay $40 cash & $400 check. Got package from Dad, really great to hear from him. Got a Christmas card from Cale & Bess Boggs. I can't remember who they are. Last night 2 gooks ran across the river bank. We caught them & tied them up till tomorrow. Had sqd patrol from 2200-0200. We got a good hot chow tonight.

Dec 4
Watson & Turner went by on their way to Da Nang. They go home tomorrow. Weser goes on R&R tomorrow. We didn't do anything so the day dragged on. Better than going on patrol, but it was a long day.

Dec 5
We stood gate watch. The day was hot. Some gook kid stole my radio, pisses me off.

Dec 6
10 guys of the PLT went in to clean up the tents at the BN CP. They were messed up & alot of guys gear

stolen. I went to NSA on the way back to get chow for the guys. I got a Christmas card from Mr & Mrs Gary L Smith. I don't remember who they are. At 1830 we had to go out with some Tom Dooley personal who was showing movies to the Vietnamese people. The first place was deep in the bush. We thought sure we'd get hit, but luckily we didn't. The next place was on US 1--in a big ville. We got back at 2145.

Dec 7
We left at 10:10. We went north side of the road. We were carrying mortar rds, laws, & alot of other gear. It was hard going. We set in at 1100 for our day time PPB. We had a sqd patrol from 1200 to 1500. We moved to our night time PPB at 1900. We set in at 2000.

Dec 8
We set out for the Tucau area. This is the area we're so scared of. Seems funny, north side of the road doesn't have booby traps or contact. Tucau has alot of both. We started out at 1030. Cagle & Thomasen in guns got wounded by a booby trap at 1115. They weren't to bad off. They got medivac at 1300. It was slow going cause we stayed in the treelines, called arty on area that look like an ambush site. We made it across Booby Trap Valley alright. Crider our point man got sniped at we returned the fire. We set up in a few huts. At 1815 we got sniped at. I fired a magazine at him. There were no patrol cause of friendly in the area.

Dec 9
We started back in at 0800. We got almost to the road when we got a sniper rds. We got to the bridge at 0930. This was the third time we been told this was our last PPB. Looks like we might be here for Christmas. Hope not. Weeks got me a pen pal named Mary Diangikes. Got a letter from her & wrote her back. Got a package from Mom & a letter from Carol & Christmas card from Mr Shockley. It was about the best mail call I've gotten. Great to get the card from Mr Shockley. Had Sqd Patrol from 2000 to 2400. Reese couldn't go out so I had sqd.

Dec 10
Wrote Mom. Read most of day. At 1000 we had promotion, maybe I'll be promoted next month, if the Lifers will get their shit together. The Lifers were drinking tonight & they got messed up bad. Got letter from state senator.

Dec 11
Had gates today. Gary & I went into Da Nang. Got a couple of bottles. Got a letter from Jean, Governor & a package from Red Cross. Went in to Da Nang. Got 2 Bottles. We drank one bottle tonight. Wrote MOM. Got a new guy in sqd. Patton.

Dec 12
Got package from Mom. We came into BN at 1430. Its great to be back here. Its a little more like living with showers, tents, hot chow, no lines & just lay around & do what you want.

Dec 13
Today is Friday 13. Hope its not unlucky. Wrote Mom. Took rest of the pictures on my roll of film. Got a new guy named Cotton in the sqd. We got rear for tomorrow.

Dec 14
We moved out on the operation at 2400. We finally set in at 0530. We seem to have walked in circles. We lay around & slept most of the day. We moved out for a PPB at 1830. The other 2 PLT are going in. We are getting it sticked to us again. We settled in at 2100. The nights get cooler, it seems to be as cold as back in the world.

Dec 15
We came in at 0830. I went in to Da Nang. I saw a real good movie & got a bottle for tonight. Great to sleep in a rack & under a tent.

Dec 16
At 1400 we went to Camp Faulkner. The chow is great, almost like home. Got a new guy named Jones in my sqd. Cotton went to 3/26. Went to the club. Had patrol from 1930 to 0100. Took some pictures. I'm hoping to get out of the bush by the time we leave the mortar belt. Seems I'm getting "shorter," but not short yet.

Dec 17
Had patrol from 0830 to 1200 & 1300 to 1600. 3 patrols in less than a day. Wrote Mom & Kodak about the bill I was sent. Supposed to have night off. We went to the club and partied. At about 2230 Marble Mountain got hit, & Da Nang got some rockets. We saddled up & went out to the Tower to help them in case they got hit. Couple guys were drunk. We got to the Tower & the Lifers messed everything up, they were so messed up. We went back in at 0130.

Dec 18
We went out to the Tower at 1030. We went swimming, washed our clothes. Slept some.

Dec 19
Got a Christmas card from some one I don't know. Went to Freedom Hill and saw a good movie. Had patrol from 2200 to 0600. We stayed at the Tower.

Dec 20
Had patrol from 1330 to 1630. We went swimming. Got a letter from or should say Christmas cards from Carol Les & 2 kids & also Mr Russel & family. Went to a good USO show, it was really a great show & later a movie.

Dec 21
We went out to Tower at 1200. The weather is

warm. Seems funny it being 85° out and only 4 days before Christmas. Rained some tonight.

Dec 22
We came in at 1030. I went to NSA for chow, got a letter & card from Mary & a card from Dad & State Representative. Had sqd patrol from 2130 to 0100. They moved the time up so we missed the last half of a great movie. The weather is cold, windy & raining. We got [*blank here*] as sqd leader.

Dec 23
Weather is still pretty bad. The Lifers cheated me out of E-4. The only way to get rank is to kiss ass in this PLT. The PLT is really going to pot. I glad I'm getting out of here soon. Got letter from Aunt Nancy.

Dec 24
Went out to Tower at 1000. I could have gone to Bob Hope USO show but let other guys go instead. The weather is warm with a breeze. We went swimming tonight. All over Da Nang, "pop ups" of all colors went off, it was really good. At 12 o'clock we popped all the pop ups we had. We had 4 bottles & killed them in no time.

Dec 25
We went in at 1000. They had a good Christmas dinner. I lay around & read. The day was warm. Got a letter from Dana. Seven of us went to a doggie camp to drink. We left with 8 bottles & partied. We had a patrol from 0100-0400. This Christmas was really differ.

Dec 26
We had sqd patrol from 1300 to 1600. We went swimming. We had the night off so we went to the club. Wrote Dana.

Dec 27
We moved to the POW camp at 0930. Went into Da Nang to see a movie. Read. Had a fireteam LP from 1830 to 0630.

Dec 28
Had Tower watch from 0930-1330. Went into Da Nang & ate. Wrote Mom. Went to movie at Army CP but half way through, they had an alert and that the last of the movie. No mail tonight cause of the plane crash where our mail was "all burned up." I hope I didn't lose any.

Dec 29
At 12:45 we moved to the French Fort only we moved down to a small ville. This where we'll be for the next 8 days. Took some pictures. We got a new guy named Anderson. Kohn, Holland & Mill went to the rear. If they're out of the bush, I'll be next. Had fireteam patrol from 0200-0400.

Dec 30
Got a letter from Mom. We lay around, played cards & read. Had patrol from 2400 to 0100. Kohl came back today.

Dec 31
Wrote CP Moore, & Mary. The day is warm & windy. Tonight at 2400 all outposts around here shot up pop up's & fired M-16, M-60. Had patrol 2300 to 0100.

Jan 1
Slept most of day. Had patrol from 0300 to 0600, fireteam size. At 0145 we watched Da Nang get rocketed. 106's out up on rocket sites.

Jan 2
Got pay $31. Tonight we were supposed to get hit. Everyone was up for it. We had patrol from 2200 to 0100. It was kind of hairy.

Jan 3
Weser, Kuhn & I was sent into BN-CP to stand lines & be on working party. I should be getting out of the bush soon, but after seeing what its like here I don't think I'm in any hurry. Got pictures developed. The day was hot. Had lines tonight from 1800 to 1800 tomorrow. We watched a good fire fight. It rained tonight.

Jan 4
Went into Da Nang from 0900 to 1200. Rain most of afternoon. Went to club. Oncay got back from R&R.

Jan 5
Slept some. Went on some working party. Had lines tonight at 1800 for 24 hours. No mail again. Its been some time since I've gotten any mail. Pisses me off.

Jan 6
Rain most of night & day. Got off lines at 1800. Read some. They didn't have a film. Waiting for some mail.

Jan 7
Got lines tonight at 1800. Miles & I went into Da Nang today to watch a movie. Still raining & damp. No mail, I've about gave up on any mail.

Jan 8
Still raining. Saw a good movie tonight. Pretty cold here, just like back home.

Jan 9
Got 24 hour post tonight at 1800. Saw a good movie. Went into Freedom Hill & saw a damn good movie.

Jan 10
Got off lines at 1400 today. Today is warm. Got a package from a church back home.

Jan 11
Today is very hot. Was on all day working party building bunker. Got lines tonight for 24 hours. Got a letter from Carol. At 2130 tonight Hotel Company had about 20 guys going out the back gate. They just got outside the wire & 3 or 4 gooks with AK's opened up on them. I was on watch and some of the rounds came close. No one was hurt.

Jan 12
Stood lines. Wrote Carol. Went to club & movie. Tonight was very cold.

Jan 13
I was on working party rebuilding a bunker. Got a letter from Mom. Had 24 hours lines. Today was hot. Mail been pretty bad. I'm getting used to the rear, better then the bush.

Jan 14
Had lines all day. Wrote Mom. Went to movie tonight.

Jan 15
They had a big fire fight outside the BN CP. In a villege they got about 10 NVA & VC kill, & 10 POW with weapons. Rounds were going over our head here. Had lines tonight for 12 hours. Got a letter from Carol. Had working party all day.

Jan 16
Working party all day. Went to club which serves free beer & saw a good movie. About 9 guys including Wesser went out to the company. Wrote Mary.

Jan 17
I was in charge of a working party building a new trash pit. Got a checkup for mess duty. Got lines tonight.

Jan 18
Went on mess duty today. Its not too bad. I work in the reefers [*refrigerators*]. I got it made.

Jan 19
I worked pretty hard today, cleaning the reefer & moving supplies. Got a letter from Mary. I was glad to hear from her. Wrote her back.

Jan 20
Today I worked pretty hard. Looks like mess duty not going to be so easy. Went to movie.

Jan 21
Busy day. Took a shower. Went to movie & club. Signed pay roster. No mail. Talked with Jim P tonight, he leaves tomorrow for the States. I'm not to far behind.

Jan 22
Mess duty is hard but I'm getting the hang of it. Got a letter from Carol & a picture of her children. Also my radio.

Jan 23
Today went pretty well. Got a pair of boots from Sears. I wish I knew who sent them. Wrote Carol & Mary.

Jan 24
Today I've been very busy. Wrote Mom. Wesser in rear. He shot Weeks with a .45 in the elbow. He didn't mean to, but he's in a world of trouble. Weeks alright. I bet he's glad it happened. He always saying how he'd like to get out of the bush.

Jan 25
Today I turned 20. I'm getting old. I'm supposed to be a man now. It funny I've been a man for months. Being over here you grow up fast or NOT AT ALL. I got the town paper. I read where a buddy of mine is getting married. I can't help thinking how everything has changed since I joined up. Back home will never be the same.

Jan 26
Went to movie. NO MAIL, pissing me off. Days are hot.

Jan 27
Got a letter from Boyd & a paper. Great to hear from him. Wrote Mary & Boyd.

Jan 28
I had to move to the mess man hut. Not as crowded & the guys are pretty nice.

Jan 29
I was busy today. Day went by real quite. No mail again.

Jan 30
Got a letter from Mom. Wrote her back & went to the movie.

Jan 31
Day was a bore & weather getting worse. Green & I drank some beer tonight.

Feb 1
Got my flight date today, its for the 28th MAYBE sooner. Got a letter from Mary. Wrote her back. Got pay $75 cash, $100 check. Tonight it rains some.

Feb 2
My reefer broke down & I had to work my ass off. Went to movie & club.

Feb 3
Today was hell! Gunney gave me hard time, got off work at 2115.

Feb 4
Got my reefer fixed. Saw the movie. Its been very cold the last 2 days.

Feb 5
Still cold. Got a newspaper today. Been busy all day.

Feb 6
COLD. NO MAIL, getting short about all.

Feb 7
Today was slow & boring. Time went slow.

Feb 8
NO MAIL.

Feb 9
Got to go to China Beach for a beach party. Lots of food & drinks. Lots of fun also. Got a letter from Mom. I've about gave up on mail.

Feb 10
Got a letter from Aunt Nancy. Busy day. Wrote her back.

Feb 11
Got a letter from Mark Jones & Mary. Wrote Mom & Mary. Best mail call in a long time.

Feb 12
NO MAIL. Tonight someone threw a grenade on hotel gunnery huts. I was in company area & we thought it was incoming. Went to movie & club.

Feb 13
Worked my tail off. Went to club & movie. The Company sending everyone back to the field counting short timers. Thats wrong. I don't mind going out, in fact I kind of want to. But I don't want to get messed with.

Feb 14
Lots of work. Got pictures back. Got half tanked. NO MAIL. People back in the world must have gave up on me.

Feb 15
Company came in today. Heard Company X-O stepped on box mine and lost both legs. I'm sorry to hear that. Wrote Mom.

Feb 16
They had me running around in circle. Anymore I don't give a damn. I been messed with so much. Wrote Carol.

Feb 17
Went to movie, it was pretty good. Wes came in today. Heard Lt Bundy got hurt today & couple new guys wounded by booby traps.

Feb 18
Got a letter from Carol. Went to movie, it was pretty bad. Reese came in today with some POW. Howard left today.

Feb 19
Mills supposed to have left today. Won't be long. The mess hall is getting to me. Mills has to wait 48 hours cause of shots.

Feb 20
Worked my tail off today. Can't wait to get out of here.

Feb 21
Tonight they brought in 27 boots just got in country. Poor guys. I guess you call them my replacement. Mills left today.

Feb 22
LONG DAY. NO MAIL. Pisses me off. The people back home must have gave up on me. I'm waiting on my orders, & flight date should be in 3 to 6 days.

Feb 23
No movie last night. At 0200 (tomorrow) we got hit by B-40's & ground troops. We killed 19 & captured 4 & 2 B-40. Launched dozen or more AK. 3 guys got hit. Most compounds in the area got hit including Da Nang & its air base by rockets.

Feb 24
Everyones talking about last night. We are supposed to get hit tonight. I heard that Coleman got killed this morning. Got 2 letters from Mary.

Feb 25
Got pictures back. Got letter from Aunt Nancy & Mary with a picture. She's cute. Wrote Mary. Still waiting for my orders.

Feb 26
Tonight the gooks were messing around the wire. Everyone in the compound got on the wall.

Feb 27
Still waiting Kohl left today. Platoon got in today. Great to see them again. I guess it'll be for the last time.

Feb 28
Platoon went out. Wesser got out of the bush. I got my orders & flight date. I'm happy as I could be. It's been a long time. Sometimes I wondered if I'd make it.

March 1
CHECK out. Fooled around in Da Nang. GREAT to be leaving. I'll miss the Guys. I can't wait to get home.

March 2
LEFT "NAM" AT 0800. Got to Oki at 1035. Met Ames. Went to club.

March 3
Got our seabags. Got uniform done. Went to club. Met Kohl, Hollow, Donavon. §

* * * * *

"As the rifleman climbed higher they grew fewer until only a handful of men still climbed in the lead squads. These were . . . the few men who would go forward no matter what. . . ." --S. E. Smith (From The United States Marine Corps in World War II)

Ambush at Con Thien

By David Dillberg

*B*efore the big Tet Offensive of 1968, the NVA had to push their troops southward toward their objectives. We had reports of an enemy buildup between the DMZ and us at Con Thien, so the plan was to put a company and a supporting platoon in tactical formation and sweep around Con Thien to find the enemy and clear him from our direct front. To attempt this, Fox Company was sent out the main gate south of the combat base, along with one platoon of Golf Company, directly behind and ready to support Fox. I was a fire team leader in a squad from Golf.

I estimate that at the time Fox consisted of about 150 Marines; they were in good tactical formation, with one platoon in the lead, spread out, and two behind, also spread out. Our supporting platoon behind, from Golf, was also spread out. Colonel Duncan, the battalion CO, and Major Daugherty were watching from OP#2.

We proceeded around Con Thien and had gone about halfway--so that we were facing north, toward the DMZ--and the area was open, with only very sparse cover consisting of small bushes and grass.

About mid-morning we rounded the front of Con Thien and ran into an enemy trip-wire booby trap: a TNT charge that was exposed by the lead elements. The explosion was the command for the ambush to begin, and the NVA responded with machine guns, small-arms fire, rockets, mortars and artillery. The eyewitnesses all confirm this today, although the report from the S-3 Journal states that there was only small-arms and machine-gun fire. The Journal also reports the enemy to have been only a company; during the episode, I was told we were facing a regiment. (It's hard to believe that a company would have artillery.)

In a matter of seconds, the whole NVA unit opened up on Fox Company. From my position, I could see everything. And what I saw was a real slaughter. It looked like the earth was throwing up dirt, metal, explosions, flesh, and flying bodies. I cannot remember individual shots and explosions, but a roar, a roar of all the sounds of battle at the same time. The roar of death.

Fox Company didn't have a chance to fight back. The Marines panicked and ran in every direction away from the impact zone. They were yelling, and screaming, and crying for God and Mom. I had thought we were all men who could take it, but I saw then that we were only boys who couldn't stand the ugliness and pain of the reality of combat. Our platoon reacted by hitting the deck, but it came to me then that when fired upon, you instantly attack and return fire. Just like in training. Since I had not been in a large firefight before, I didn't realize we should have estimated the size of the enemy and responded with artillery. Instead, I reacted like in training. I was only a squad leader, but I stood up and yelled, "Charge!" From our platoon, which was trying to hide like those in Fox Company, only a squad of us charged.

We had three fire teams, and we attacked in the direction of fire. We advanced with fire-team coverage and proceeded through the impact zone, which was littered with bodies and pieces of bodies and saturated with explosions and concussions and flying bullets. We approached two machine-gun bunkers; while two fire teams fired into the aperatures of the bunkers, one fire team rushed. Then we alternated all the way up to within throwing distance of the aperatures.

There were four machine guns in the bunkers and small-arms fire from outside in the

bush line. Mortars, rockets, and artillery were exploding all around us. I would say we rushed about 300 yards. During the rush, we temporarily suppressed the machine guns so as to aid in the evacuation of the casualties and enable our movement forward.

We were getting ready to throw grenades into the bunkers when the command group called us on the radio and ordered us to retrograde immediately. I told them that we were going to knock out those two bunkers with grenades, and they came back with, "No, don't do that. Just retrograde." They said they would explain later.

While the men looked at me like I was crazy, I yelled at them not to blow up the bunkers, but to use fire-team coverage and retrograde immediately. We pulled all the way back to the impact zone; most of the rest of the men had already pulled back. Our squad was the last, and we helped pick up the wounded and the guns. We left the ammo. Incoming was still around, but nothing like earlier. Marines were running in all directions--total confusion. On our way back, we had seen some of the men run into the mine field through holes blown in the fence. We ran in and got them. They were wounded and traumatized and exhausted.

At the time, my estimate of casualties was, for Fox Company, half of the men dead and a fourth of them wounded--and one fourth who ran away. That is approximately 70 dead, 35 wounded, and 35 who ran. But the records today show only four KIA and 37 WIA. My eyes saw many men get direct hits with rockets and mortars and artillery, and I saw them blow apart so there were not even pieces to pick up. But the records do not reflect my memory.

Maj Daugherty has said that when a tank went around to the east side to pick up casualties, it received a direct hit from our own mortars, resulting in two (friendly) KIA. Greg Lewis says he remembers going back out and picking up 28 or 29 men--most dead, some still alive, and some in pieces--and bringing them back on top of tanks. He says he remembers the blood driping off the tanks. I remember leaving all the dead and the pieces. One man has said it was foggy that day, and I thought it was clear. One said the battle lasted a couple of hours, and I say it took only a matter of minutes. For different reasons the stories are all different.

I do know for certain that after it was all over I went into my bunker and had traumatic shutdown. And I don't remember anything after that.

The official record of that day begins with: "Incoming of five rounds of 82mm inside the perimeter at 0110." Then the record says that we returned fire. At 0210 we received 12 more rounds of 82mm. We returned fire with 150 81mm mortars, 40 rounds of 4.2 mortars, and 90 rounds of 105mm. Then at 0511 there was an accidental discharge. One medevac. "At 0708 and 0710, F & G units departed CP. At 0841 E [F] & G units are in the field taking mortar and small-arms fire. At 0845 received incoming."

Spot Report #8 states that "at 0949 a unit on patrol received heavy fire from [coordinates] 115715 and mortar fire from 114724. The unit disengaged and 28 medevacs were called in." Spot Report #10 states that an aerial observer spotted bunkers and trenches, and a fixed wing dropped one 250-pounder and 1 napalm. Spot Report #11 states that another fixed wing dropped two more 250-pounders.

Spot Report #13 states that "we received 100 rounds of 82mm, 130mm, and 252mm." So our side returned fire with 1,882 rounds of 81mm mortars, 4.2-inch mortars, 105mm and 155mm artillery. Maj Daugherty, the S-3, says he had 81mm mortars fire 2000 rounds out of six tubes in one hour. He fired so many the tubes were barely sticking out of the ground. I believe that a lot more rounds were fired than officially reported.

A later, more complete summary, spot report (#15) explains that "Foxtrot, on a scheduled patrol, made contact with an estimated company of enemy. The enemy initiated a firefight with command detonated TNT charge and small-arms and machine-gun fire." It goes on to say that Foxtrot returned fire with small arms and 60mm mortars and 3.5 rocket launchers.

Then the enemy attempted "to encircle the lead elements of Foxtrot. Trail elements of

Foxtrot and lead elements of Golf countered this move, and the enemy fell back. The enemy fired 60mm mortars as Golf and Foxtrot withdrew with their casualties.

"Carousel (Con Thien) units destroyed three enemy bunkers and one enemy 60mm mortar team. Carousel units continue to attack with air and artillery."

Normally the S-3 Journal reports the number of casualties for friendly forces. But there is no report in the S-3 Journal of how many wounded or killed we had that day. The unit diary reports 37 WIA (close to my estimate is 35). But it reports only four KIA, and I thought I saw about 70. In addition, we did not knock out those bunkers with mortars, as reported. The command group would not let us. And the only Marines close to the enemy was our squad.

The common reaction to battle is to be confused. Whether the ambush at Con Thien happened the way I saw it or the way it is recorded, I cannot put my memories of it out of my mind. They linger there. I've thought about that day thousands of times. The area of Con Thien, Khe Sanh, and the DMZ was perhaps the worst place to have been in that war. It was the area closest to North Vietnam and so contained the biggest threat to our troops, troops who often were pinned down or surrounded by NVA. Up in that area we could hear battles taking place, but we couldn't do anything about it, just listen--and wait. §

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(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

FIFTEEN METERS

Marines of 2/1 try to keep their distance on patrol.

Incident at Con Thien

By Charles "Chuck" G. Estes

2/1 was supposed to rotate out of Con Thien on 22 January 1968. We had relieved 1/1 22 December 1967--they had gone back to Quang Tri--and we were to be relieved 30 days later. But we ended up serving an extra "tour" at Con Thien because intelligence reports indicated that something big was about to happen to one of the "A" positions on the DMZ. (As it happened, Khe Sanh caught the heavy heat.)

On the morning of 22 January 1968, Fox was running a company-sized patrol north and east from Con Thien in an area known as the Trace (a cleared area a thousand meters wide, running from Con Thien to Gio Linh, bordered on the north by the Ben Hai River).

As I heard the story, Fox came across an NVA communications wire and followed it. The NVA caught them in the open and hit them hard with mortars and arty fire. Fox took a tremendous number of casualties in a very few minutes. The number 46 sticks in my mind. Either Hotel or Golf went to their aid--I believe it was Golf. We in Echo saddled up and were held in reserve. After a while we were told to stand down, and everybody took off their gear and went into their bunkers.

A short time later we took some very heavy arty fire. During this incoming, Byars (from Echo's weapons platoon) and Gunny Weathers (Echo Company's gunnery sergeant) were killed. The gunny had been wounded earlier on Medina, shot in the head. He was lucky then--the same automatic weapon that killed Terry Fenenga wounded the gunny and one of our snipers. A round hit Gunny in the helmet, travelled completely around his head and came out the other side. He went out on the medevac, but was more dazed than hurt.

On this day Byars' 60mm mortar team was trying to set up and shell a suspected NVA arty-spotter position. The gunny was helping them when a round landed almost on top of their mortar position. It killed the two and wounded the others. A guy in my squad, Christen, carried Gunny in his arms to the battalion aid station in Death Valley, a short distance away. Chris told me the gunny was blown almost completely in two, suffering a huge wound in his stomach. Gunny was about 30 years old, black, and a first-class guy. He wasn't the type that tried to screw you around.

Byars took a severe hit, too. He had just come back from R&R the day before, and that morning the guys in my squad were giving him a hard time about what he might have been up to while he was gone. I don't remember him saying anything in reply. He just grinned and walked away. I knew him, but he wasn't a personal friend. He did his job and I did mine, but I knew he was a good guy.

I was 20 to 50 yards away from the mortar pit, monitoring the squad radio from inside my bunker, when I got word over the radio that the gunny had been killed. Until then, I didn't know that Echo had taken any casualties.

A red-headed, white-faced engineer I had never seen before--nor have I since--ran into my bunker during the shelling and asked if he could wait it out there. We passed the time lying facedown on the bunker floor, shaking in our boots as the stuff hit all around us.

Suddenly, this engineer said, "Now I know what it is--it's a knee." He had seen a body part lying outside our bunker as he ran

through the door. It took him a while to figure out what it was.

The first word we received on the radio about casualties that day made us think that Fox was being completely wiped out. They did take a lot of casualties--I personally saw a line of 30 or so walking wounded--but I believe the figure of four KIA is correct. Golf or Hotel--whichever it was that went to Fox's aid--also suffered casualties--eight or so WIA, if I remember correctly, and no dead. I remember thinking how ironic it all was. Echo had never even cleared the wire, and still we had taken two dead; Fox had fought the battle, had suffered a great number of wounded, but actually lost no more than we had. §

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"The Marines' best propoganda has usually been the naked event."
--Lindesay M. Parrott, Jr.

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'Gunny' Epitomized SNCO Duties

By Sgt. Steve Berntson

CON THIEN — In a Marine rifle company there is one man who deals with and influences every Leatherneck at some time. He is a man who everyone listens to and knows as the company gunnery sergeant. As Gunny he is the important middle-man for the company commander and the troops.

The death of GySgt. Nathaniel Weathers (Cleveland, Ohio), found Marines later reflecting commemorative comments — epitomizing both the man and the continuing position. Weathers, the "gunny" for "E" Co. (2/1), was killed by an enemy artillery blast while the unit manned Con Thien.

A few days after his death, four Marines taking a smoke break from their job of filling sandbags sat talking.

"You know," said a young Marine, "Gunny was what I will always picture as a real Marine. He was always doing his job and helping others with theirs. He never got excited over anything and he could control any situation."

"I remember the time one of our platoons got ambushed," recollected a second Leatherneck. "A couple of the point men got hit bad, the corpsman and the gunny took off running towards them. Gunny took a bullet through the helmet and it knocked him down, but he got back up, wiped the blood out of his eyes and ran over to help 'Doc' with the wounded. He was a real tough one."

"It just seemed that there wasn't a question in the world that the Gunny couldn't answer or find out the answer for," remarked a skinny, bespectacled Marine. "And in a firefight, there he was running back and forth telling us where to fire and warning us about some hidden sniper. He was always keeping an eye on the new guys and helping them out."

"The old Gunny was a Marines' Marine," continued the fourth man. "He was like a friend, a father, and an Ann Landers—but most of all he was 'our Gunny.'"

Gunny Weathers had been with "E" Co. for more than 11 months. In between welcoming and bidding farewell to all company Marines, he was their "Gunny."

SEA TIGER 5

(Courtesy of Steve Berntson)

First Firefight

By Carl King

*T*welve days in country and counting. I've been assigned to the 1st platoon, Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines and sent to join them at Con Thien. I really haven't had a chance to get to know the troops yet, but my first impressions are positive. First Lieutenant Johnson, the platoon commander, is a good man who cares about the troops, and the squad and team leaders are good Marines who want to do a good job. Supplies suck. The living conditions are awful, and everyone is bored due to no activity other than standing watch and cleaning weapons.

We get word that we are going out the next day to act as a blocking force for a larger operation. Everyone (well, really, it's the new men) is fairly excited about the possibility of making contact with some real live NVA. The night is spent briefing the squads, putting on our camouflage paint, cleaning weapons, and in general getting ready to move out at dawn.

We leave the compound and start our company-sized operation with no significant incidents. As we patrol through the countryside, headed toward our blocking position, we note round holes in the ground that go down at an angle, are smooth on the sides, and don't seem to have a bottom. Being good Marines, if we find something we don't know what to do with, we throw grenades into it; we put our fingers in our ears and wait for the explosion.

We later found out that those deep, round, smooth holes that went into the ground at an angle had unexploded 500-pound bombs at their bottoms. Who says the Lord doesn't take care of the dumb shits? I still have this vision of us standing there with our fingers in our ears waiting for the grenade to go off when a 500 pounder goes off instead. Not a pretty sight!

At any rate, we survived our search efforts on our movement toward the blocking position and got there without incident. We immediately set up our perimeter and began watching for NVA activity.

Soon enough, there was some. We spotted what appeared to be an NVA squad moving through a clearing about 600 meters from our position. Given that they were out of rifle range, which should have been our first clue, we decided to take a platoon-sized unit out to investigate. Of course, the 1st platoon got picked.

As we moved out, I pointed out to Lt Johnson that we should deploy to a wedge formation and take great care, as I felt that our spotting them had been too easy and that we might be being sucked into a trap. He agreed and we moved the troops into the wedge. The LT was up front near the point and I was in the back bringing up the rear.

Not too long after we moved through the area where we had spotted the NVA, the point units ran into some NVA and a firefight started. The wedge was moved to a platoon on line and I moved forward to join the LT. He was standing beside a large tree which was getting the shit shot out of it. Charlie obviously knew where the CP was located. Generally speaking, all hell was breaking loose. Lots and lots of gunfire all up and down the line. We ordered a cease fire so that we could find out what the hell was going on, and except for the right-hand flank it got quiet. On that flank the shooting continued, so I went to see what was up.

When I got to the squad, I found that they were still engaged and had had a couple of men hit. There was quite a bit of shooting going on, and it was hard to determine just what was what. I saw one man down and moved toward him when an NVA jumped up and started running away from me. I fired about 15

rounds at him without any noticeable change in his behavior. I later decided that either I had missed him (something about being so excited that I forgot to aim), or that he was one tough son of a bitch. Anyway, I got to the Marine and he was hit but OK. Donavan was his name, a fine Marine who came back to the unit to fight some more.

I noticed that the grenadier was pinned down and needed some fire support to get out of the spot he was in. Having already proven myself to be a fine shot, I decided to move forward and help him and started looking for cover to run to. I spotted a very small tree. I thought, *That's too small to protect you*, but ran to it anyway. And for a while the grenadier would shoot a round, duck, and Charlie would shoot the shit out of the ground around him. While they were shooting at him, I would shoot at them. Great game that they soon tired of, so they shot me (in the right calf). I knew that damn tree was too small.

Given that I was in an exposed position, I would not let anyone come get me, so I put a bandage on my leg and had the troops lay down a base of fire so I could get my ass out of there.

At about this time, the LT and I called in mortar fire on the NVA that weren't in our lines--and we got word to disengage or pull back. Now, I got to tell you, that's much easier said then done. I thought about trying to tell Charlie that it had all been a mistake, we were going home now, thanks for the fun time. But they weren't really in the mood to listen, so we shot our way out.

Good thing we left when we did. They were in the process of surrounding us when we pulled out, so we got to do like old Chesty Puller at the Chosin Reservoir in Korea: "They are on our right, on our left, to our front and to our rear. The poor bastards can't get away now."

The grenadier and I brought up the rear, shooting at anything that moved and keeping Charlie off our asses. We got back to the company lines without major incident, and I got treated by our friendly platoon Corpsman.

Funny how adrenaline works. While I was in the fray, my wound was not an issue. I ran and fell and ran and fell, keeping the rear clear for over 600 meters, yet once I was "safe," I could not walk, and had to be carried to the medevac chopper. Thirteen days in the country and already hit. Was that a bad sign or what?

The medevac was fast and efficient. Great guys those medevac folks! They took me to Dong Ha for my initial treatment. What a joyful process. The place was full of Marines who had been hit elsewhere in the country--many were in much worse shape than I was.

Interesting process the forward medical treatment units have. Everyone gets put on a stretcher and then the stretcher is put on saw horses. Doctors come by and decide "too serious, probably won't make it, put him aside," or "not too serious, put him aside." I was a "not too serious, put him aside," and aside I went for hours on my stretcher--feeling very sorry for myself. You know, wounded warrior and no one gives a shit. At one point I got to feeling so sorry for myself that I actually started going into shock--pale, cool and sweaty. Realizing it (I used to teach first aid), I talked myself out of it and got a Corpsman's attention so I could get treated. They took me to an X-ray room where a Corpsman told them to "put the project on the table." I informed him I was not a fucking project but a goddamned Marine and wanted to be treated like one. I think I was getting a little short with people.

They X-rayed me and took me to the wound debriding room (probably not called that but that's what was done there; they cut all the meat away from the entrance and exit holes that might have been impacted by the shock waves of the projectile striking the body), where they put me on the floor to wait my turn for the cutting game.

Great place to wait. You get to see the whole process being done on other people before they do it to you--shit! Anyway, after they cut and bandaged my leg, they put me in a wheelchair, pushed me out in a hallway and left me. By this time, I'm tired (up since 0430 and it's 1900 at night), I'm hungry, (haven't eaten since breakfast, and, oh, for some more tasty C-rations), and I'm pissed off at the world in general and Vietnam in particular, so I decided

to manage myself and quit waiting for someone else to take care of me. What a concept! I found the mess hall, got myself fed, found a rack and almost got in it when they decided that they needed to move anyone they could to make room for more wounded coming in.

So, onto C-130's we went and off to an Air Force hospital in Da Nang. We arrived at some ungodly hour--0200-0300, who knows or cares--at a very neat, clean and orderly ward, except now we're mixed with Army troops and being treated by Air Force medics.

Soon after first light, they bring us breakfast and serve everyone but a soldier in the rack beside me who had been gut shot and was not supposed to take anything by mouth. He kept begging me for some of my food and my drink. I would not give it to him, so he started harassing a Corpsman who was swabbing the deck for something to drink. At first the Corpsman said no, but gave in and got the guy some water. Within five minutes, the soldier was throwing up, and going into convulsions. They tried to save him but could not. Just like in the movies: mouth to mouth, electric shock, shots, prayer, etc. Only none of it worked! He died! A waste, God, what a waste!

We were taken out of Da Nang that day and flown to Cam Ranh Bay, another Air Force hospital, but way to the rear (if there was such a thing in Vietnam). Here the treatment was consistent and professional. Shots every day, three times a day, wounds cleaned out twice a day. Nothing like having your wound cleaned out. Something you really look forward to. You know, rip the tape off the skin and pour something into the wound that burns like hell.

There was one soldier in particular that we all enjoyed watching get his wound cleaned out. Seems that he got shot through and through in the ass. What this means is that the bullet went in his ass and out his ass, leaving a neat little tunnel. I think it was the debriding that made it neat, so he got the pleasure of having the demon liquid poured into the tunnel and cotton swabs run through it twice a day. Great fun for us, not much for him. If it weren't for the cleaning part, I think a guy could get into doing a tour in the hospital. Clean sheets, hot food, showers, female nurses, and the Red Cross to play bingo with.

After a couple of weeks at Cam Ranh Bay, a bunch of us were transferred to Japan. Not so much because our wounds were bad as because the hospitals in country were filling up so fast they had to keep moving those they could further and further to the rear, and Japan was really in the rear.

After several weeks in Japan, I was declared fit for duty and sent back to Okinawa and on my way back to good old 2/1 in Vietnam, only now *they* were on their way to Khe Sanh where I would join them.

Something I would like to say about my first tour in the combat treatment assembly line: I never met a Corpsman or nurse that deep down inside didn't really care about the troops he or she was taking care of. Even the one cared who gave the kid a drink when he should not have. Maybe too much to be a hard ass when he needed to be.

I watched Corpsmen and nurses cry when men died, and I watched Corpsmen get killed trying to get to wounded Marines. I saw them in utter frustration at having to deal with all the WIA, but deal with them they did. I will never meet a Corpsman that I don't say thanks to for the work he did. They were professional and saved our asses when they could. Thank God for them!

The troops, both Marines and soldiers, I met in the hospitals were simply great. Proud to be serving their country, even the ones who were drafted, and ready to get back into the fray. I was and am truly proud to be an American and to have had the opportunity to meet and serve with such goddamn fine men! §



Places of Death

By Ron Cagle

The thought of writing about Vietnam has crossed my mind often since I got home in April of 1969. But writing about it has always frightened me, because memories start to flood my mind. There is so much to say, and yet the things I remember were experiences that produced rooted feelings that changed a teenaged boy full of dreams and life into a person with a twisted mind and a broken heart, a heart no longer capable of joy or happiness. My experiences left me frozen in time, and although through the years I have tried to venture back into the world I came home to that April, I have always slipped back into my self-made shell. It hides me and protects me and has done so since I left country. It is my prison where loneliness, dreams, and fears are my only companions.

I was a Marine in 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, Fox Company, 3rd Platoon. I remember landing in country at Da Nang. The smell and heat were overwhelming. I was pumped with adrenaline, not knowing what to expect. I spent a sleepless night at the side of the Da Nang runway while fighter jets ran sorties all night.

Soon I was with my division at Phu Bai and then on to my company at Con Thien. I was on Hill C2. I remember my first night on watch, staring out over the edge of a foxhole into the pure blackness. I heard every sound. The next day I was talking with some of the other new guys when I heard what I thought were jets overhead. I saw guys running and wondered why. Then the explosions started. I saw a guy running and followed him into a bunker. It was rockets. I guess that's why so many new guys got wasted. I still felt no fear then, nor could I understand the fear on the face of a soldier who had been in country for some time. Later I saw body bags with dead men in them, but still felt no fear nor had any understanding.

Next we were off to pull guard duty around an airstrip at Ca Lu. Soon after, we were off on Route 9--the road that led into Khe Sanh. Operation Pegasus. Tanks, helicopters, gunships, trucks, mules with COG's on them. The whole show.

We were point on that highway and had a tank with us that fired harassment fire at likely hiding spots. We found several large tank mines, and crossed by streams where the bridges had been blown. Men were left at each bridge for security until the bridges could be rebuilt.

Then things began to change. And one day my partner and I were talking as we were slowly moving down the road when we heard a huge explosion. In front of our faces a guy who had just passed us on his mule was now a rag doll. Clothing and parts of his body and the machine he'd been on were going everywhere. The explosion blew him so far we had to show the Corpsmen the ditch he was blown into. He had hit a tank mine. All at once fear hit me. Fear like I had never felt before in my life. A memory forever imprinted in my mind.

The next day I watched while an old gunny sergeant pulled a guy up the hill with his rifle. The barrel was pointed at the Marine as he pulled on the rifle to get up the hill. The rifle went off and the young Marine was dead. Rumor had it that the gunny had it in for the guy, but that's as far as it went--rumor.

Things began to get hot. We spent several nights more on the highway, stopping at blown bridges and setting up a perimeter each night. One such night we heard movement near the creek. A few shots were fired and our M-79 man shot a few rounds into the general area.

Still, there was much noise. The M-79 man fired a couple more and caught shrapnel from his own round.

The next morning we found in the creek a huge boa constrictor 17 or 18 feet long. We hung him over a tank and took a few pictures. I think one made it into *Stars & Stripes*. We also managed to call in air strikes on a bunch of rock apes in the hills south of us; they had appeared from a distance to be people. I often think of those crispy apes who were minding their own business.

Speaking of apes, I learned a valuable lesson. I went to take a crap in the brush one evening and left my rifle with a guy named Russ. He and I had hole watch together and were in the same fire team. We were in rockets, still using the old 3.5 rocket launcher. Anyway, I had just squatted when the brush opened up and there was a face. I was scrambling with my pants around my ankles when I realized it was an ape. Never again did I leave my rifle.

An evening or two later the battalion wanted three men to recon in advance of the main force. I was new but somehow got picked. We went forward and up into the bush above the road. It was getting late in the evening when we ran into bunker complexes and a well-used camp. We were down to a crawl. We crawled through bushes, coming upon woven sleeping mats still lying around foxholes and bunkers. The hair on our necks must have been standing straight out. We spent a sleepless night. I remember having to take a leak in the middle of the night. I lay on my side and urinated into the ground slowly so as not to make noise. Daylight came, and we were glad that the NVA had moved on.

Soon we went into the mountains above the highway in company strength. Fox Company was now in full search and destroy of the enemy. We assaulted hills where the enemy was dug in tight, with claymores going off in our faces, gunships firing their rockets nearly in our faces, days and days of humping. Digging in at night. Searching for water in the evenings. Two or three of us would take canteens and the belts that held our pants up and go search for water. The springs were usually always downhill. We stripped down our gear to one bandolier of full magazines each, so we could handle the weight of full canteens. It usually took three men per squad to bring back enough water.

The mountains were steep and thickly covered with elephant grass that could be seven feet tall and a canopy of forest that was dark and eerie at midday. Leeches on our ankles were comon. Heat exhaustion was always a factor. I remember that my pants rotted off my body, the crotch ripped out, and I had to stuff a towel into my pants to keep my privates from getting cut to shreds by the elephant grass, which cut like a razor at times. Our arms would be cut, even our eyelids. The mosquitoes could be horrible. Many men were allergic to the insect repellent and suffered blisters on the insides of their arms. But our physical suffering was far in the back of our minds. Staying alert meant staying alive.

Sometimes we slept on hilltops that had been hit with air strikes. Some hilltops had dead gooks that stunk awful. We would cover their bodies with dirt to help keep down the stink. Once we had to dig up a graveyard in hopes of finding arms caches or some such. It wasn't so great for the guys digging, because they only found badly decayed bodies that still stunk.

The mountains could be cold. Sometimes we wrapped our arms around each other to stay warm. The rain soaked us to the bone, and the sun dried us. I remember many mornings waiting for the sun to dry me and put warmth back into my body. We went days without taking our boots off, and we hardly ever took a bath. If you found a bomb crater with water in it and there was time, you could wash. I remember that for a while several of us were down to one toothbrush among us. We seldom brushed our teeth. No time, too tired, not enough water to waste.

The best I can remember is that we were in the bush 25 days before our real hell began: we landed outside the wire at Khe Sanh. Before we landed, we had thoughts of watching the shelling at night and the air strikes around Khe Sanh. To a Marine, Khe Sanh was a mystical place if you hadn't been there. It was a place we feared because of all the stories of death in

and around Khe Sanh.

Now we were there, walking on a dirt road at the north end of the place we didn't especially want to go to. Out of the original 154 in our company, we were--the best I can remember--then down to 105. But we still had fair company strength and had some seasoning on us.

Our time at Khe Sanh and the operations we pulled all around Khe Sanh--on hills like the 881's--all of it was terrible. Firefights, heat exhaustion, hot LZ's, constant mortar attacks as we left the choppers and were caught in the open with artillery exploding all around, rats with rabies in the bunkers and in the trenches around the perimeter. Many men stressed out to the max. Just staying alive from day to day seemed the only thing that mattered. I can't and won't go into any details about Khe Sanh and the hills surrounding her. The memories are too painful and the places of death are still inside my mind and my very soul. I lost just about all my friends and became numb and cold. My mind was changed forever. The many months ahead just passed sunrise to sunrise. I still look at a sunrise and think, *I have lived to see another.*

I still wonder why the killing and the pain? I have never heard an answer that even begins to make sense. We were young boys who were used and came home as villians to our peers and adults alike.

I now sit day after day in my self-made perimeter, staring out the window. I am alone, just like the day I stepped off the plane at El Toro, California. My pain is still there inside. So much pain I can't deal with so many memories. Maybe someday I will be able to pull these memories from within and deal with them. For now I sit and wait. God bless those who perished and may God bless us all who perished within.

I end my story here. God bless us all. §

Contact

By George Daher

*O*n 19 May 1968, a platoon of Fox Company was ambushed just outside the main gate of Khe Sanh while executing a routine mine sweep. Eventually the entire company and reinforcements were engaged in a firefight from 7:00 am until 6:00 pm. As I recall, we sustained 16 KIA and 48 WIA.

What really got to me about this day . . . was the fact that intelligence had picked up a lot of NVA movement outside the perimeter of Khe Sanh the night before, and they never told us. We hadn't had any NVA contact in several weeks (except incoming, of course), and the men were getting lax, as Marines tend to.

We were really packing light that day--I don't think we had one grenade in the whole platoon. I had only 200 rounds for my M-60. Everyone was short of ammo. As I said, it was a routine mine sweep--maybe an hour and take the rest of the day off. Battalion had to know there was an ambush set up and they never told us. A corporal who was working the radar during that time told me later that battalion headquarters had been aware. §

Firefight at Khe Sanh

By Phil Leslie

Secretary of Defense (under President Johnson) Robert S. McNamara had a plan to build a series of strong points along the southern edge of the DMZ to keep the NVA out of the Republic of South Vietnam. Beginning with Gio Linh on the South China Sea and heading west generally along Route 9 were Con Thien, Cam Lo, Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, and, at the very end of the border with Laos, Khe Sanh. When the Marines arrived at Khe Sanh, the Army's Special Forces moved their special operations camp to Lang Vei (west of Khe Sanh). Some military writers have suggested that McNamara wanted to use the Marines as "bait" to lure the NVA to attack--and when they did they would be destroyed by B-52 bombers.

By early 1968, Khe Sanh was being defended by the 26th Marine Regiment, the 1st BN 9thMar, and the 37th ARVN Rangers. In January of that year the NVA attacked the combat base as part of the '68 Tet Offensive. The NVA 66th Regiment hit the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, and the Special Forces defenders were history.

The Marines were in the hills around the combat base: on 881 North, 881 South, 689, etc. Because Lang Vei had been overrun by the NVA, General Westmoreland was "ticked off" at General Cushman, the USMC commander in RVN, the end result being that the USMC "lost." Westmoreland tightened his grip on the operational control of USMC forces in RVN, and initiated Operation Pegasus.

According to some written accounts, the Marines at Khe Sanh didn't feel as though they were being overrun, but Westmoreland wanted to "save" them. Pegasus was a very mobile Air Cavalry leapfrog exercise for the Army--while USMC forces marched and battled their way on the ground along Route 9. One of those units on Route 9 was the Second Battalion, First Marines.

On Easter Monday, 15 April 1968, the seige at Khe Sanh was declared over, and the 26th Marines were "saved." They then went south, while 2/1 stayed on at Khe Sanh until sometime in July.

Although the siege at Khe Sanh was over after mid-April 1968, the area around the combat base was still Indian Country; all USMC activity was to be carried on with nothing smaller than company-sized units.

In addition to the NVA still operating near the combat base, they would hit us with 122mm guns and 140mm rockets from the nearby hills, and shell us with 152mm guns from the reverse slope of Co Roc in Laos. And there were the usual mines and booby traps. One of the USMC daily activities was to conduct a mine sweep of the MSR from the combat base to Route 9. This was always done by an engineer unit with a reinforced company for protection.

After a while, the Marine units going outside the wire got down to platoon-size. This was the case on 19 May 1968.

This day was bright and sunny, the sky blue and crystal-clear, as a platoon of Foxtrot Company, 2/1 went out on the regular road sweep. As I recall, Golf Company (I was 3rd-platoon sergeant in Golf) was supposed to be a response unit for whoever was in need. And sometime in the morning we got the word to saddle up--get ready to move out.

At the CP we were told that the road-sweep platoon had been ambushed by an NVA unit and that as the other Fox platoons were sent out, they were also being shot up.

Golf Company was to move out and join the fight--at least, as I recall, two platoons of Golf were to go, Golf 3 and, I think, Golf 2.

Along the way to link up with Fox Company, Golf 3 relieved an NVA machine gunner of his existence and his weapon. By the time Golf 3 linked up with the right flank of Fox Company, we had managed to salvage three M-60 machine guns that belonged to Fox. Golf 3 began to work out on Mr. Charles with our new-found firepower--two M-60's of our own, three belonging to Fox, and the one that had belonged to the NVA. Hell, everyone in Golf 3 was a gunner that day.

The Marines had helo gunships with rocket pods, fixed wing with napalm, tanks, etc. Our battalion commander was there--up front--directing the battle. I don't think any other units were there except those from 2/1.

During the course of that battle, the battalion commander appointed me CO of Fox Company, as all their officers and SNCO's had been killed or wounded (except for Staff Sergeant Montjoy, who I found while reorganizing what remained of Fox Company).

By that evening the battle was over. A lieutenant assumed command of Fox Company, and I returned to Golf 3. Just another day in that damn war. That night the stench of crispy critters lingered in the air.

Sometime in the early '70's I saw a citation indicating that Fox Company had been awarded a Meritorious Unit Citation for that action of 19 May at Khe Sanh. Golf Company was not mentioned as one of the participating units. This must be corrected.

Ho Chi Minh's birthday was 19 May. On that day in 1968, the Second Battalion, First Marines gave the President of North Vietnam a very appropriate gift. §

Part of the Action

By Charles W. Springer

I remember 19 May 1968 as being a cloudless day. At the time I was a squad leader in an 81's mortar platoon, and, unknown to us, our guns at the other end of the airfield at Khe Sanh had been firing that day in support of Phil Leslie (from Golf 3 but commanding officer of Fox Company at the time--all officers and SNCO's from Fox having been killed or wounded earlier in the day). They had been firing for some time before our gun was called in to provide some rounds.

The sight on my gun was being repaired, so my men assisted the squad leader from another gun in firing their mission. I stood by my gun, calling out the deflection and elevation about 25 yards away, since the phone line was out to the other squad. I was in trousers, boots, and a T-shirt doing this.

The mission called for 50 rounds of HE at charge 9, which meant we were probably very close to the limit of our firing range. Towards the end of the mission, I heard an explosion behind me and, turning around, saw a cloud of dust about 30-35 yards distant. At this point I was told that the men should get in their bunkers; I got down in a shallow trench line, but then realized that I needed to get my flak jacket and helmet (incoming-wise, Khe Sanh was a picnic for us compared to Con Thien--where we always had flak jackets and helmets with us).

I took the phone to an old, open, exposed bunker I had once occupied and waited for instructions. A few rounds came close, and dirt was thrown into my position. One round hit the land line, severing communications with the FDC. At this point I ran back to my bunker to wait out the incoming. We liked to think the bunkers would have been able to withstand a direct hit, but this one probably would not have. Still, the roof gave me a (false) sense of security. I remember sweating a bit, but I think it was more from excitement.

We later found out that when our radioman--with our FO, Jack Porter (I believe)--inquired about getting the 81 rounds out fast to hit the enemy positions, he was told the bubbles had to be leveled. His response to that was supposed to have been: "F___ the bubbles, f___ leveling up. Get those f_____ rounds out here fast."

We were told that our FO was calling in 81's fire to within 25 yards of Phil Leslie's position. This, of course, is a risky venture with 81's, even with the bubbles leveled. I believe our other gun section fired over 700 rounds, and they deserve all the credit. We heard that 19 May was Ho Chi Minh's birthday, and we were glad that Phil put a damper on it. That night we listened to Hanoi Hannah claiming that 36 Marines were killed and 96 wounded. Our figures were eight dead and 32 wounded.

On the next day, which was overcast, our section leader volunteered us to go on a resupply mission to Phil's company. This was no problem for us. As we were waiting in the trucks, I was told we had too many and had to send two back. I told Andy Green he couldn't come with us, and he protested. It wasn't that he was looking forward to a firefight, but I think it was that we had all shared a lot since we were in Con Thien and it didn't seem to him that he should be left out.

Since I had only a .45, I had to borrow a rifle from a new guy who hadn't had a chance to fanfire it yet. As it turned out, after waiting a couple of hours, we never made the resupply run after all. A few days later, the guy I borrowed the rifle from got a chance to fanfire that M-16 on Hill 476, and it wouldn't fire a single round. I must admit, I was lucky like that several times during my tour. There were times when I could have or should have been killed or wounded but wasn't. It helps me put a lot of things in perspective now, and not get excited over things which, when you come right down to it, aren't that important.

This is just another piece of that day when Fox Company got ambushed outside of Khe Sanh. To some people, our part in that action might not seem like much. But to us it wasn't small. §

A Bloody May at Khe Sanh

By Carl King

19 May '68

*H*otel was operating a company-sized patrol outside of Khe Sanh and had set up on Hill 471, which overlooked the MSR between Route 9 and Khe Sanh combat base.

We had spent the day checking out bunkers and tunnels in and around Khe Sanh village, without any enemy contact. We did, however, discover one very important aspect of searching a bunker. If you throw a grenade in it, the dust never settles, at least not in a time period that allows for any kind of orderly search process, so we opted to search each bunker without the aid of the trusty grenade toss. Needless to say, there are not a lot of things that are more exciting than climbing down into a black hole and having to sit there until your eyes adjust to the darkness, if they ever do. Yes, indeed, nothing like searching a dark bunker to give one a true appreciation for electric lighting and privates.

The night was spent on Hill 471 without incident, and the morning started out quiet enough--until the road-clearing detail left Khe Sanh combat base, sweeping the MSR to route 9. It seems that during the night an NVA company had moved into the area between 471 and the MSR, had dug fighting holes, trenches, etc., and set up a very nice ambush for the unsuspecting platoon doing a business-as-usual road sweep. Except that this time it would not be business as usual.

My facts here may be off, but this is what I remember from my personal observation and from stories related to me about that day.

The firefight started with a sapper team knocking out the lead tank with an RPG. The second tank pulled up beside the first tank and got hit also. At this point, things were moving pretty fast. The infantry platoon moved into formation and took off after the sappers, only to run into a well dug-in NVA company. Needless to say, the shit had hit the fan!

We were not engaged in the fray, but, given that we were between the engaged units and the DMZ, we were in an excellent position to act as a blocking force should the NVA try to reinforce or to retreat. So we settled in and listened to the action on the radios.

More units were committed, artillery and air was called in, and, in general, the NVA had the shit pounded out of them. Most of them fought well and died in their positions. However, a few tried to break out of the fray, which is where we got to play.

We spotted a small group of NVA moving away from the action and got our forward observer to call in some artillery fire on them, which is where Lieutenant Lucy got his name: Two-for-Them-One-for-Us Lucy. He did a great job of calling in the spotting rounds to zero in on the target and calling for his fire-for-effect. We, the command group, were standing there, watching for the rounds to land, when two rounds landed on the NVA and one round landed about 50 yards (seemed like one yard) behind us; at first we thought the NVA were shelling us, then we figured out that it was only us shelling us, so we got it stopped. But not before we all said a few things to old Two-for-Them-One-for-Us Lucy.

Not too long after this incident, I decided I should check the troops, so I started checking the line. As I moved from one position to the next, I spotted four NVA coming toward me on the same trail I was on. They had not spotted me but had passed the position I was

headed toward. At first, I thought they were our guys (oh, maybe for two seconds I thought that), then I realized they weren't and did a quick inventory of my options: take on four NVA at close range (25 yards) with my trusty .45-cal. pistol, fall and play dead, surrender, turn and run like hell, or scream for my mother.

I was reaching for my .45 when the shooting started. I thought they had fired on me, but my guys had spotted them--and not knowing I was out there, took them on. Thinking I had four NVA firing at me and my trusty pistol still in its holster, I did a 180° turn and ran for the nearest hole, which turned out to be a medium-sized bomb crater, 20 feet across by ten feet deep. Reaching it on the fly, I did an ass-over-tea-kettle dive for the bottom, got my pistol out and started watching for them to come after me. One poked his head over the edge, and I did a quick shot at him, then it got very quiet--you know how it feels, one minute all hell is breaking loose, then nothing. The nothing is a lot harder to take.

At any rate, I decided that I was truly fucked--outside my own lines, in a large hole in the ground with NVA being the only ones who knew I was there. It didn't take long for me to decide that they were going to throw a grenade in the hole with me. *Oh shit!* I thought. *I got to get the hell out of here. But how? If I come out, my own troops may shoot me thinking I'm an NVA attacking the lines. If I stay here I'm fucked; if I go out I'm fucked. Choose! Better to be shot doing something than sitting on my ass.* So, I started yelling like hell that here I come--don't shoot--don't shoot--oh, please don't shoot!

I got out of the crater and set some sort of world record running the short distance to our lines, and did a great imitation of a tuck-and-roll landing once inside the lines. God, how great friendly troops look, even when they are laughing at you.

Once I could breathe again, we put together a search team and started looking for the NVA. Finding only one, what appeared to be a 12-year-old boy in full uniform, no weapon (he had been an ammunition carrier), we turned him over to counter-intelligence (some thought we should have killed him) and went back to our blocking positions.

While I was playing hide-and-seek with my NVA buddies, the troops engaged on the MSR had pretty well kicked ass--killing most of the NVA and chasing off the rest. The ones that were killed were left in their holes, much to the dismay of everyone who drew road sweep duty after that. Nothing like stepping through a bush and seeing an NVA lying there with his legs crossed, his pith helmet over his eyes and a newspaper lying on his chest. Was our sense of humor sick?

Shortly after this, I started carrying a shotgun! ALWAYS! Like most lessons I have learned in life, I learned this one the hard way: pistols don't do well against groups of men armed with automatic weapons.

Payback

When I first heard that we were going to conduct a daylight raid on Hill 881, I was more than a little apprehensive. Hill 881 had been in the news before; Marines had already fought and died for this particular piece of real estate.

Our part of the plan was simple enough. Helicopter right to the hill, off-load and take up defensive positions, set up for the night and conduct patrol operations in the area around the hill and then helicopter back to Khe Sanh.

Simple plans don't always stay simple, especially in Vietnam.

Charlie either knew we were coming or was lucky enough to have a couple of mortar crews within range of the hill, because when we got to the LZ, it was hot. Charlie was dropping mortar rounds into the LZ at a furious pace.

Jumping out of a helicopter that's hovering 10 to 15 feet above the ground into a hot LZ is fairly exciting. Unless you have experienced it, you can't truly appreciate how fucking confusing and scary it can be. Lots and lots of noise and confusion, helicopter-generated noise, wind and dust, mortar rounds exploding, everyone yelling, and people falling over each other coming out of the helicopter. It's so loud

you can't think or communicate; all you can do is what you've been trained to do. You go on automatic: No need to think, just do the drill; run away from the chopper; keep your head down (so it won't get cut off by the chopper blades); form a 180° perimeter when you hit the ground; catch your breath and wait for what's next.

The training paid off. We got everyone off of the choppers and in position fairly quickly, only now we had to get the hell out of the LZ. Charlie was still pumping rounds in on top of us, and the thing to do was to move out of the LZ to the southern reverse slope of the hill where we would join up with other Hotel units already on the ground. Easier said than done. It meant standing up and moving through exploding mortar rounds.

We got the troops up and started them toward the southern side of the hill. Rounds were exploding all around us, but so far everyone was OK. Then a round hit a tree over our heads and exploded in the air, sending a shower of metal to the ground which hit people directly in front and behind me. We kept moving through the killing zone until we reached the reverse slope and its relative safety from the NVA gunners. I put everyone in positions and did a quick head count. Half of the platoon was missing. *Shit, someone must have stayed down when we took off and everyone behind him was still in the LZ.* God, I hated to go back and get them but someone had to, and it was my job.

Running back to the LZ, I tripped over a boot with part of a leg still in it. A Marine's foot from a previous fight for old 881. I can't say that it didn't affect me. I really didn't want to expose myself to more enemy fire. I don't know what takes over in times like this--training, duty, honor, love of Corps? But something does; on I went, anyway. What I found at the LZ was not good news. Seems like someone had jumped into a bomb crater for cover and everyone had followed him into it. Nice deep hole, but not a good place to be in a mortar attack.

A round had landed in the hole with them, killing one and wounding most of the rest. Fifteen men out of action in the first five minutes of the fight.

We got the shelling stopped, the dead and wounded medevaced, and what was left of the platoon in position with the rest of Hotel.

The night was long but uneventful except for harassing and interdiction (H&I) fires from Charlie. Rounds shot at you on a random basis to keep you up and nervous all night. (It works!)

At early light I requested and received permission to take a radio operator back to the area of the LZ in an effort to spot the mortar crews that had raised so much hell with us. We moved to the forward slope of the hill that was facing the valley where the mortar tubes had to be. There was an early morning fog that lay over the floor of the valley like a white comforter. We could not see below it, but we could hear the tubes when they fired--so I moved to different locations on the hill, taking compass readings on the sound and drawing intersecting lines on my map. After about an hour of this, I was pretty sure I had their location nailed. All I had to do now was wait for the fog to lift, spot the tail--the white smoke that comes out of the tube when it fires--check my data, and call in the artillery.

We didn't have to wait too long before the fog started to lift and good old Charlie fired off a few rounds for me to confirm his location. We had his ass nailed. I called in one spotter round to be sure that the rounds would land where I wanted them to. It landed right on target. I immediately called for a fire-for-effect and sat back and watched as Charlie got a very big dose of what he had given to us. We got secondary explosions which meant we had hit their ammunition storage. I loved it! As I watched the explosions going off all around Charlie's position, I couldn't help but think payback is a mother-fucking asshole! §



Just Another Day in Nam

By Billy "Crash" McCoy

We were on our way back up to Cua Viet from an S&D sweep relating to reports of NVA sightings in the area west of Highway 1. Intelligence believed the NVA were building up for an attack on a convoy that was carrying replacements to us. We had been out two days and were heading for our rendezvous point with the convoy when our LT said to break off the trail which we were on and head into the bush and spread out in a V formation--with yours truly at the top of the inverted V. We'd moved along about five clicks when our RTO halted us and said something was coming in on our "freak." The LT said it was about time we took a break anyway, and we proceeded to set up our perimeter about 50 yards from a swollen creek, figuring that was as good a place as any: we had decent cover, and we had not made any contact at all yet.

The LT and Sarge used this time to go over the "comics" and to see what our further route would be. The rest of us just checked our weapons and kept our eyes and ears open for Charlie and/or NVA Regulars. The AO we were in was known for unexpected intrusions of VC, and we were cocked for sure all the way around.

Our RTO checked the "net" and reported to the LT that a "C&C" chopper had spotted movement in our immediate area and advised us to keep our heads down because it seemed that Mr. Charlie and his NVA brothers were within our vicinity. The LT asked if a "white bird" was available to further check it out, and we were told "not at this time."

All of a sudden all hell broke loose--we got mortars coming in on us, guys were scrambling for cover, the wounded were screaming, and you could smell flesh burning. The RTO called in for arty with the best coordinates the FO could muster. We were firing our weapons and "thumpers" and doing the best we could.

Off to the left of me about 20 yards, I made out some kind of movement in the bush, and sure as shit I spotted the gooks heading our way. I screamed for a line of fire in that direction, and yelled to my buddy, "Crazy Zatrene," to follow me. What a mistake that was!! We had arty coming in on the dinks--we were almost chopped up by that and the gooks' mortars--and me and Crazy were now cut off from the rest of our guys. Get the picture? The next thing I knew, me and Crazy were sliding along on the ground trying to find some cover in the grass and bush. Then we spotted an opening that led over to the creek. Meanwhile, all hell was breaking loose again; and we saw an occasional body flying overhead from in front of us, so we knew it was the dinks, and we were glad and scared, and cursing at the same time!!

We made our way through the path, and sure as shit there was the creek dead ahead, and, man, what I saw has never to this day left me. Our arty had been right on most of the time; arty craters were all over the place filled with remnants of bodies, and the stink of the burn was indescribable.

We kept our cover and looked around as best we could, and to our surprise, the dinks fell back. Our arty was following on their heels, and unbeknowst to me and Crazy, an LOH was scrambled and sent over, and thanks to him our asses were saved, most of our asses anyway.

When we hooked back up with the rest of our guys, they were happier than hell to see us--our sarge thought we'd been wasted in the confusion. We lost five KIA, and about seven wounded, who were medevaced out along with the dead. Command ordered us back to our firebase and scratched the link-up with the convoy. The choppers picked us up about 40 minutes later, but before they did we could

still hear some of them with their mini-guns blasting a little further up from us and across the creek.

Once we got back to our bunkers at the firebase, it all seemed like a dream once again. We had a PIO on the base, and he came over to us that night and asked if we would mind telling him what went down. To my surprise, this guy said he heard it was one of the worst firefights in the past month.

I said, "Yeah, but you should have seen how surprised the gooks were when they realized that we were there! According to some of the captured ones, they thought that we were replacements for them!! Their scouts realized too late that we were US Marines, and that's why they opened up with mortars on us so close to their positions! The dumb bastards went crazy, and it was partly for that reason that we were not wiped out entirely. Our quick reaction saved our asses all the way around, and for your information, Mr. PIO, that goddamn area was not supposed to be heavy with gooks--Semper Fi, pal!!"

After that we all looked at one another, and slowly, one by one, drifted off to our mats and fell asleep--just another day in Vietnam, Republic of. §

* * * * *



[USMC photo, submitted by Roger Goss]



(USMC photo, submitted by Roger Goss)

ON A SWEEP IN THE TRACE

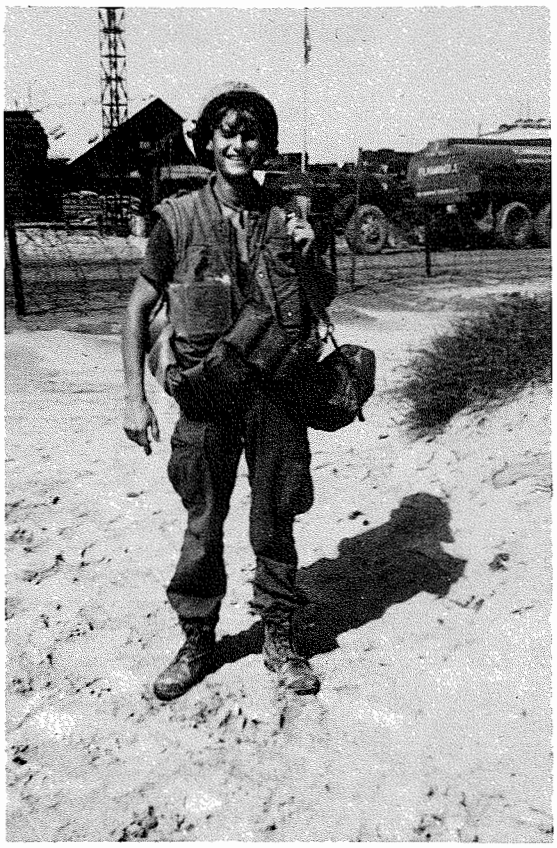
Cannon Fodder: A Corpsman's Point of View

By Michael A. Pipkin

*B*eing the Navy dependent of an old China hand (Dental Chief Petty Officer--two tours in Vietnam on the USS *Oriskany*, an aircraft carrier), as a child my first taste of the USMC was in 1955 at the Kaneohe Marine installation on Oahu, Hawaii. In the foothills around the base, I would watch the tracers of M-60's during night training. I had my own helmet liner and cartridge belt. And when, at the age of ten, I returned to Seattle in 1957, I built my own underground bunker.

I joined the Navy in late 1966, went to boot camp, where I was posted to Hospital Corps School. (I had wanted to be a mechanic.) Everyone in my boot company voted me "Outstanding Sailor," maybe because they knew where I was going. I survived boot camp, then went to Corps School and Field Medical Tech School--all in the Oceanside area. I spent the next year at the Balboa Navy Hospital Emergency Room in San Diego. My orders were cut for Vietnam in February 1968.

While home for 30 days' leave, I received a telegram ordering an earlier reporting date. Like a good soldier, I followed instructions--reporting to Travis AFB, California. I flew the polar route to Vietnam on chartered airlines, stopping in Seattle, Anchorage, Keadna (Japan) and on to Okinawa.



(Courtesy of Michael Pipkin)

Corpsman Michael Pipkin ready for patrol. "I wasn't the best soldier, and I wasn't the worst. I always went to the wounded." --Michael Pipkin

The group I was traveling with spent three days in transit, on Okinawa, processing returnees in; these returnees were straight out of the jungle, filthy--and different from anyone I had laid eyes on before.

Then we were processed ourselves. Dress uniforms, personal gear--anything we didn't want to take with us--was put into cardboard boxes and stored. (I was surprised on coming back through a year later that everything was returned. It was like a small miracle.)

In April of 1968, I found myself in Da Nang, awaiting assignment to my unit. Flying into Da Nang had been a new experience: looking out at the craters around the airport was strange, and the airport itself was Hicksville. The whole country was backwards, from my point of view.

First Medical Battalion was the

processing point for the new Corpsmen. I remember looking out over the rice paddies there, wondering if I would ever make it back.

A day or two there, and then off to our battalion aid stations to be briefed and outfitted for combat: flak jacket, helmet, gas mask, pistol or rifle (a .45 semiautomatic pistol for me). Most important were our medical supplies. The standard issue medical bag was too small, so finding a larger canvas bag, I used that to carry medical supplies. (Later, up north, I packed ammo bandoliers with battle dressings and put a tourniquet within easy reach.)

Fox 2/1 was my AOR--they were at Khe Sanh.

From Da Nang we flew to Phu Bai, where we dug rain ditches for in-country conditioning. Then by chopper to Khe Sanh. Flying into Khe Sanh, I thought the sight from the air was unbelievable. (What a hellhole! Mom said before I left for me not to go there!!) From the air, the jungle looked like it had been plowed: bombs and artillery had churned the red earth and jungle into patches of red and green. Years later I read that over a quarter-million tons of explosives had been dropped around that outpost.

After we landed at the airstrip, we just milled around for a while. Then someone yelled "incoming!" We stood there not knowing what to do, not knowing enough to take cover, that death was on its way. The explosions put us on our faces in the dirt. It's beyond words to describe what it's like being the target of an artillery piece. You can't get low enough or small enough. You get religion fast.

From BAS, individual platoons were assigned. Mine was 3rd platoon. Walking down to the platoon area with the Corpsman I would relieve, we took sniper fire. We went down to the ground, looking for the quickest route to a trench line or bunker.

"Doc" Campbell (also called "Doc 7-Up") introduced me to the other Marines and I was assigned a bunker. We were five miles south of the DMZ and close to the Laotian border. There was one road from North Vietnam and a road from the interior of Laos, the Ho Chi Minh Trail on which we were to stop all infiltration.

The base at Khe Sanh was a dump, a great big garbage dump; everything was torn up. Ripped and torn sandbags, badly hit and collapsed bunkers, engineer stakes. Only underground was there any order, and you shared the underground with the rats--they overran our positions all the time. I liked to sleep with a K-bar in my hand, ready to take on hungry rats during the night.

Ninty percent of the camp was buried underground, deep. There was a trench line around the base with fighting positions, sleeping and living bunkers, ammo storage. The outside wire was peppered with mines, homemade bombs, claymore mines--all command detonated--flares, and booby traps. There was a path out to our position; a machine gun guarded that position.

On my first night watch, I sat in a bunker looking out over Fox's line with an M-60, a box of grenades, five or six claymore clickers--command detonating devices hooked up to 55-gallon barrels full of C4, dirty ammo and diesel fuel--hoping I wouldn't have to fire. The base was in the NVA gunsights. I liked having the grenades, and got used to carrying them.

The construction of the bunkers at Khe Sanh was interesting. Hole dug in the ground, usually lined with parachuting, metal mat, timbers, sandbags, and ammo boxes and barrels filled with dirt to stop, absorb or deflect rockets, machine-gun and rifle bullets.

The hills around Khe Sanh were quite beautiful--with forests, and meadows of elephant grass. Of all the places I saw in Vietnam, I liked the area around Khe Sanh the best. It was dangerous, but peaceful to the soul.

The village of Khe Sanh was empty. All the people had been moved out, or killed, or made slaves by the NVA. But the village was still a place to write poems about, a place rich in history, a crossroad of Laos, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam. A place of coffee plantations started by French colonists--coffee trees with their green, shiny leaves all around. Khe Sanh ville had sweet pineapples to pick. When we ran patrols in the area the stunted (Agent Orange?) pineapple plants offered small, ripe fruit. No one but me picked them; having lived in Hawaii, I knew what a pineapple was.



(Courtesy of David Johnson)

KHE SANH

Charlie Med in center. In bottom left is the casualty holding area next to the airstrip where the choppers came in to load. "The part that has the parachute material over it is graves registration where we warehoused the dead." --David Johnson

C-rations were our usual food supply, warmed up with plastic explosive (C4), which burned just like a heat tab. Peaches and pound cake were #1 on everyone's list.

Our occupation was night ambushes and daytime platoon-sized patrols, radio watches and line duty. The day patrols were long, all-day patrols. We covered a lot of ground checking the enemy bunkers and trenches in the area that had been pounded earlier during the seige. The NVA had a lot of manpower out there. We often came across abandoned enemy trenches and ammo staging areas where we would find stockpiles of ammo sticking out of the pulverized ground. Sometimes, even if off the trail, we would locate enemy bodies by their smell. God, they stunk.

Hand grenades and a .45 pistol were my weapons of choice. When called, I moved up or down the line to the wounded. I didn't spend too much time with my head over the edge of the bomb craters--or whatever it was that we might be using for cover at the time. I stayed low. As a Corpsman, I didn't have to look for targets; that wasn't my job. But when I used to go on night ambushes, I'd go out and throw hand grenades with the others. At night, to be able to look over the area bathed in the glow of illuminating flares was a treat. The countryside was beautiful.

We saddled up (going by chopper) for Hill 881 North, I think sometime around 5-10 May. We made a landing with NVA long-range artillery trying to push us back. We lost some men that way. As usual, we went in on choppers and walked back out. It was a long walk back--up and down those hills, hills that

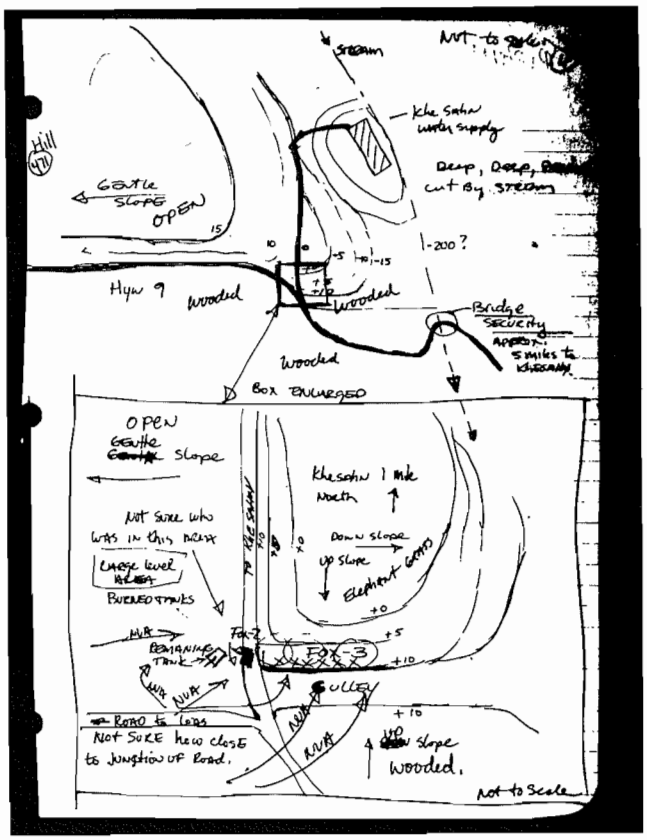
were straight up and down, covered with trees, jungle roots, bomb craters and empty NVA bunkers. The hot weather, lack of water, and heavy humping caused a lot of heat exhaustion. It was a two-day walk out. Once we made a wrong turn, and I started down a long finger ridge. Then the order was given to go back up. I was so tired and mad I just kept throwing my helmet down and cussing.

Back at the base, we rested for a couple of days, then were off patrolling again. As usual, the patrols were long and far-ranging. B-52 arc lights had dropped bombs that plowed and re-plowed the earth, leaving craters, and napalm that left burn marks.

On 19 May 1968 (I remember the date, because 18 May is my sister's birthday), 3rd platoon was going to ride convoy to Ca Lu, or Camp Carroll, for supplies. We were loaded up in six-by's, and 2nd platoon was preparing, I think, to sweep the road southeast of the base, on the MSR. But while staging, the road sweep was ambushed. Our platoon heard the contact, dismounted, and took off on foot, going about a mile or so down the road, which was a clear line at the bottom of a shrub-filled, grassy V. At the point of contact, the ground rose and crested, forming a natural gully. We ran and took over the left flank, positioning ourselves in bomb craters. The NVA took out two tanks and some trucks. We took positions shooting, firing light rockets, throwing grenades. The lead was flying pretty hot and fast. The Marines were firing everything they had. I passed my grenades to the Marines when theirs ran out. They started fixing bayonets.

We were strung out in a ragged line 30 or 40 yards from the crest of the road. I heard "Corpsman up!" and headed towards the road, then dove into the crater by the side. Sergeant Thompson and the radio were there. After the Marines in the crater had received medical attention, Sgt Thompson moved out, and I followed. In the road were six-by's for medevac--and the tanks. All of the tanks but one had just melted in the road. The one remaining reminded me of a mad bull with its head down, just waiting for movement.

Our platoon commander was killed and Sgt Thompson took over, rallying the men, running out into the open to direct tank fire, using the phone at the rear of the remaining tank (that's the first time I knew about that phone). I remember one grunt getting an NVA/VC with a LAW.



Hand-drawn diagram by Michael Pipkin depicting the ambush of 19 May 1968.

The Marine fighter jets finally made it in, dropping napalm dangerously close. We were instructed to get down, to take deep breaths of air when the jets made their final approaches. I love fighter jocks.

Then contact was lost. The enemy melted away, only some snipers staying behind to keep us low. A sweep of the area showed that all was calm again. That was a long day. We had stayed there from approximately 0700 until dusk-dark,

approximately 1900.

My friend Pete Gaylord, F-2's Corpsman, was grazed on the forehead, and he had a concussion. His medical bag was given to me. It had taken a full magazine of AK-47 and was saturated with bullet holes. He was a lucky, lucky person.

Night fell, and since we were the rear guard while the wounded were medevaced back to the base on six-by's, we returned to Khe Sanh in the darkness. Things were a little tense when we were spotlighted by a tank crew from inside the base. The nature of the entrance exposed us to the tank's fire, and they were edgy. For anxious minutes we lay in the plowed, red clay, hoping our positions had not been given away to the NVA. Finally, radio contact with the tank allowed us to move on.

The Marines were quite upset after this action. Rumor had it (and rumor was usually real close to the truth) that radar had picked up 300 or so troops moving through the area. I suppose they had doubled back and set an ambush.

After the 19 May contact, we kept running into NVA bodies lying pointed toward Laos. Apparently these were the bodies of stragglers who never made it back. One Marine started to carve his initials in the head of one of the dead NVA's. He stopped when he was warned that some Marines in 9/1 had tried something like that once and the payback had not been nice.

Co Roc was a location inside Laos, a limestone cliff pockmarked with caves that held long-range NVA 130mm artillery. And the NVA forward observers were good; the shells could be accurate. We would hear a faint "pop," and then we knew we had two seconds to find cover.

The shells might land on the far side, or they might land right on top of your position. If we could hear them screaming as they displaced the air, then we felt we could survive. The ones you couldn't hear were death.

The NVA fired a lot of shells. I really got to hate the firing. It scared the hell out of me being pinned down by artillery fire. It was even worse out on patrol where the only shelter was ground level or open bomb craters, where we felt very exposed.

We rotated to Hill 471, a huge mound south of the base. Straight up and down. At the end of a long patrol, that hill really tightened up your legs. Best duty was at the pontoon bridge down the road a bit southeast of the base. F-3 loved it when we had bridge security. We could wash and swim, and there was no artillery, either--though there was still no hot chow. Hill 471 was the same, an artillery shadow: we could hear the shells fly by, but they couldn't touch us.

One night at Khe Sanh Base, I went one-on-one with an artillery shell. During sporadic shelling a Marine was hit, and I offered to walk him to Charlie Med. We'd been walking about five minutes when I told him to get down. I started toward the trench line, tripped, and just then a shell blew up right in front of me. I was in shock. I started to act funny after that.



(Courtesy of Michael Pipkin)
Michael Pipkin in trench at Khe Sanh.

I guess it was toward the end of June 1968 when we were given the word to tear the bunkers down, fill up the fighting holes. While tearing down the bunkers and filling up the trench line that ran around the base, we

disturbed a lot of rat nests and ran across these little green snakes tucked in the sandbags. Of course, we presumed they were "two-step" snakes: one bite, two steps, then your death. We felt very exposed as we tore down the bunkers, filled in the trenches, trucked the equipment--the artillery and tanks--and blew up the huge command post.

Then the base was closed down and we saddled up for the walk out. We walked out at night under the canopy of flares and Spooky for security. The next morning we loaded up on six-by's and were taken to an ammo dump under construction at Quang Tri. We set up a perimeter and had a beer blast. This was around the end of June 1968.

F-3 did security at the ammo dump at Quang Tri for a week or two, then by truck and finally boat (down the Cua Viet River) to Cua Viet for a month or two. Disembarking at a deserted, destroyed village with plaster walls, we picked out the houses we wanted to camp in--only to be told to move out to the edge of the rice paddies and dig in.

After the mountains, elephant grass and jungle, we were on a flat, sandy coast with tree lines. Coastal sand dunes, dry rice paddies, brackish rivers to swim and wash in, deserted villes (rich and poor), Vietnamese drifting by going to market, spider holes dug in tree lines, fighting holes elsewhere, NVA equipment dropped during the night when we cut their trail.

We checked the ID's of the farmers in the area. They would come into the destroyed villages from time to time and dig up huge clay pots full of rice. Once Sgt Thompson set up a wooden 105, and that drew rocket fire.

We patrolled on foot, or riding on tanks, amtracs, or in little boats. Best of all were the WWII amtracs that were high-centered and rocked back and forth in the water like they were going to roll over and sink at any time.



(Courtesy of Gary Belden)

KHE SANH DESERTED

Airstrip at Khe Sanh after Marines left. June 1968.

In August the battalion made a sweep of a portion of the DMZ. A BLT took over our area, and we moved north in choppers. We took fire just before landing--our pilot was hit in the knee--and we turned to Con Thien for a replacement crew. Inside the chopper, our first reaction was to hit the deck. Then we looked at each other sheepishly and swallowed.

At the end of the day, no contact, but enormous heat casualties. Elephant grass and bomb craters, hot, no moving air, and a blazing sun.

The LZ took a lot of mortar fire and then was quiet. We bunched up for the airlift out. As one 46 lifted off with a load of Marines, the side blew out. The second chopper coming in broke in two, falling south of us. Fox-3 lost one Marine from an explosion on my left, and the choppers were hit on my right.

I jumped into a bomb crater, ending up with battalion command. I had started up and over the lip, heading north, when an officer told me to stay, that we were pulling back. As we pulled back to another ridge line, I came upon the front of the chopper that had fallen. I checked it. No one there, but a map on the floor which I picked up [*see map on facing page*]. About 100 or 150 feet away was a dying pilot or crewman.

We had three choppers hit altogether. One on the ground, two hit bad but flyable. F-3 lost our M-79 man. I don't know what the explosions were from. Some say command detonated dud bombs. Command identified the explosives as mines--rockets or B-40's.

We pulled back to another hilltop and waited out the night, which was dark and long; daybreak was a welcome sight. Then we walked back into Con Thien.

From Cua Viet I believe we were trucked to Quang Tri, and finally we were loaded on C-130's. The cargo master packed us in like sardines, closed the door, and told us to sit down. We were taken to Da Nang and trucked through the city, past China Beach--pallets of beer and soda there--past Freedom Hill, past the Marble Mountain area, out to battalion headquarters.

The 2/1 area was an artificial fortress island in a sea of sand, with a ten-foot high berm to spoil the aim of the local VC. Right outside the berm was VC country. Booby traps and mines in the sand. Snipers in the tree lines who rarely fired more than one shot at a time to make it hard, if not impossible, to locate them. The snipers didn't scare me, but the booby traps (made of grenades, C-ration tins, string and cardboard) did. They were silent, and when awakened they were cruel. During the day, the point man would probe the ground with the cleaning rod from his rifle, then, following him, we would walk in each other's footsteps. But on night patrol, we just walked. That was another thing that just scared the hell out of me.

We lost a lot of men and limbs to booby traps in that area. Boots that had been blown off of Marines' feet littered the countryside. Up north we kept our dogtags laced onto our boots because artillery fire often resulted in severe upper-torso wounds. Down south, the uniform of the day called for the dogtags to be around the neck.

Our patrols were mostly along the coast and north to the Marble Mountain area. Tree lines, hedge rows, rolling sand dunes. Civilians scratching out a living. We didn't trust them; they didn't trust us. Children would try to steal ammo, hand grenades, anything. I had a couple of Med-Caps for the children in the field, and while I was occupied with one child, the others would run off with my supplies.

One day an old *mamasan* asked the patrol leader for medical assistance. When I walked into her grass hut, I saw a water buffalo standing there chewing on its cud. Its upper-backside had surface wounds from shrapnel. My needles were too small to sew up cowhide, so there was nothing I could do.

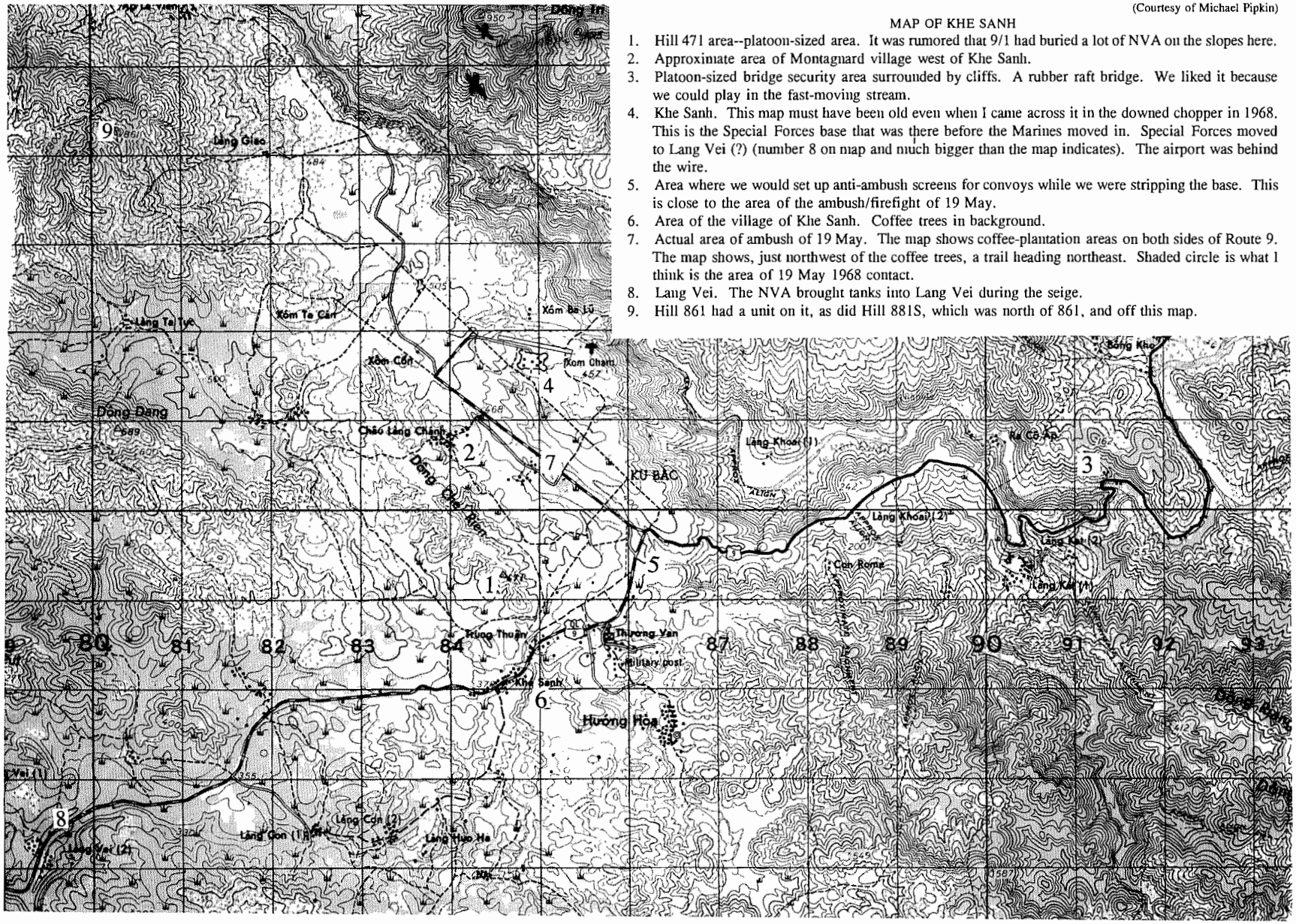
Once we were on patrol northwest of our AOR when our lieutenant, a great guy, figured he could shoot a 105 smoke to find out exactly where we were. Like the rest, I was digging my night hole at the time when I saw--heard--felt--that smoke round drop on the edge of our perimeter. Like I said, we were digging in for the night, and the dirt really flew.

Another time, during what was either a typhoon or a large tropical storm, we were dug

(Courtesy of Michael Pipkin)

MAP OF KHE SANH

1. Hill 471 area--platoon-sized area. It was rumored that 9/1 had buried a lot of NVA on the slopes here.
2. Approximate area of Montagnard village west of Khe Sanh.
3. Platoon-sized bridge security area surrounded by cliffs. A rubber raft bridge. We liked it because we could play in the fast-moving stream.
4. Khe Sanh. This map must have been old even when I came across it in the downed chopper in 1968. This is the Special Forces base that was there before the Marines moved in. Special Forces moved to Lang Vei (?) (number 8 on map and much bigger than the map indicates). The airport was behind the wire.
5. Area where we would set up anti-ambush screens for convoys while we were stripping the base. This is close to the area of the ambush/firefight of 19 May.
6. Area of the village of Khe Sanh. Coffee trees in background.
7. Actual area of ambush of 19 May. The map shows coffee-plantation areas on both sides of Route 9. The map shows, just northwest of the coffee trees, a trail heading northeast. Shaded circle is what I think is the area of 19 May 1968 contact.
8. Lang Vei. The NVA brought tanks into Lang Vei during the seige.
9. Hill 861 had a unit on it, as did Hill 881S, which was north of 861, and off this map.





(Courtesy of Michael Pipkin)

Michael Pipkin (left) and Sgt Thompson (right) walking behind ontos.

in along the coast. That night ROK (Korean) artillery walked back and forth around us. Some of the guys must have dug all night, because some fighting holes were *huge* the next morning.

After my six months in the field I went to 2/1 BAS. By that time I had become a different person, and my last one-and-a-half years in the Navy were very hard on me.

Vietnam was a paradox. Then I became a paradox. The war caused problems for me, but I knew that because I had made it in Vietnam, I could solve my problems at home.

A lot of good people were lost over there, and a lot were lost when they came back.

I would probably do it again.

In the spring of 1970, I was at a Naval dispensery softball game. A pop fly was hit in the direction of the bleachers where I was sitting. I knew it was going to hit me. All I could do was hold my arm up and scream as the ball bounced out of my open hand.

In 1976 my leg was crushed by a log. My doctor used Vietnam medical reports to save my leg.

No one ever wanted to talk about Vietnam with me, so I just kept it all inside. I've had to do a lot of the working through it myself, but I don't think I did a bad job.

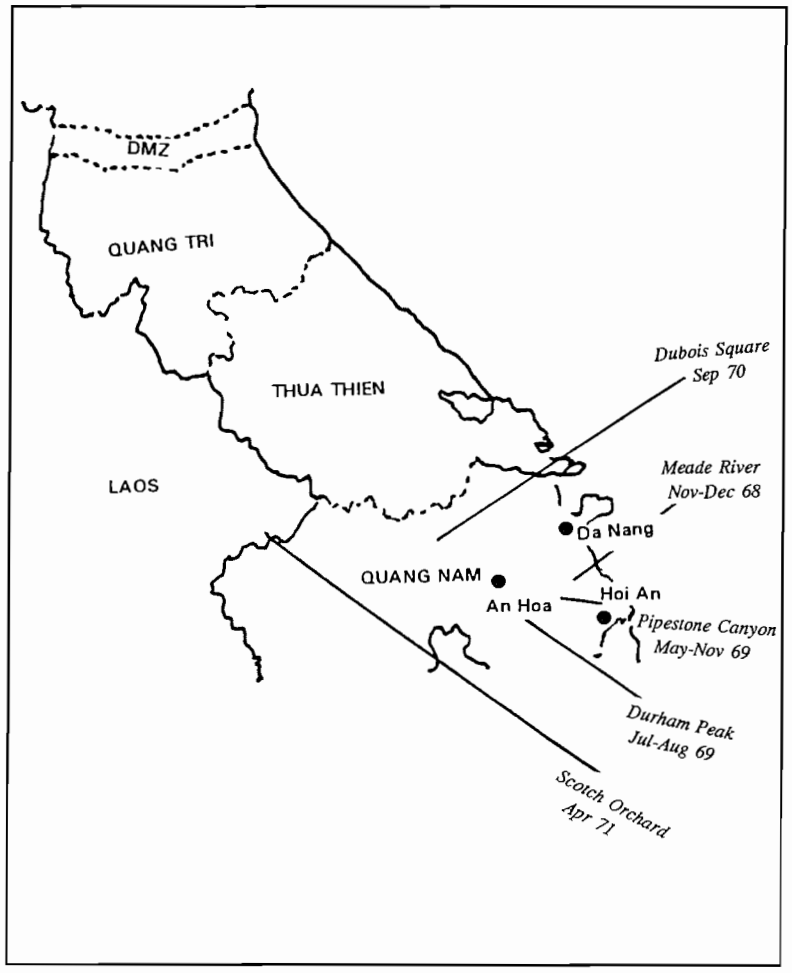
My last words on Vietnam are these:

We came with victory in mind,
To leave with sorrow in our hearts. §

PART III

Down South

August 1968-May 1971



"The front is everywhere."
--Maxim of guerrilla warfare



(Courtesy of Paul Stenzel)

LIFTOFF OVER PHU BAI
And then we moved south.

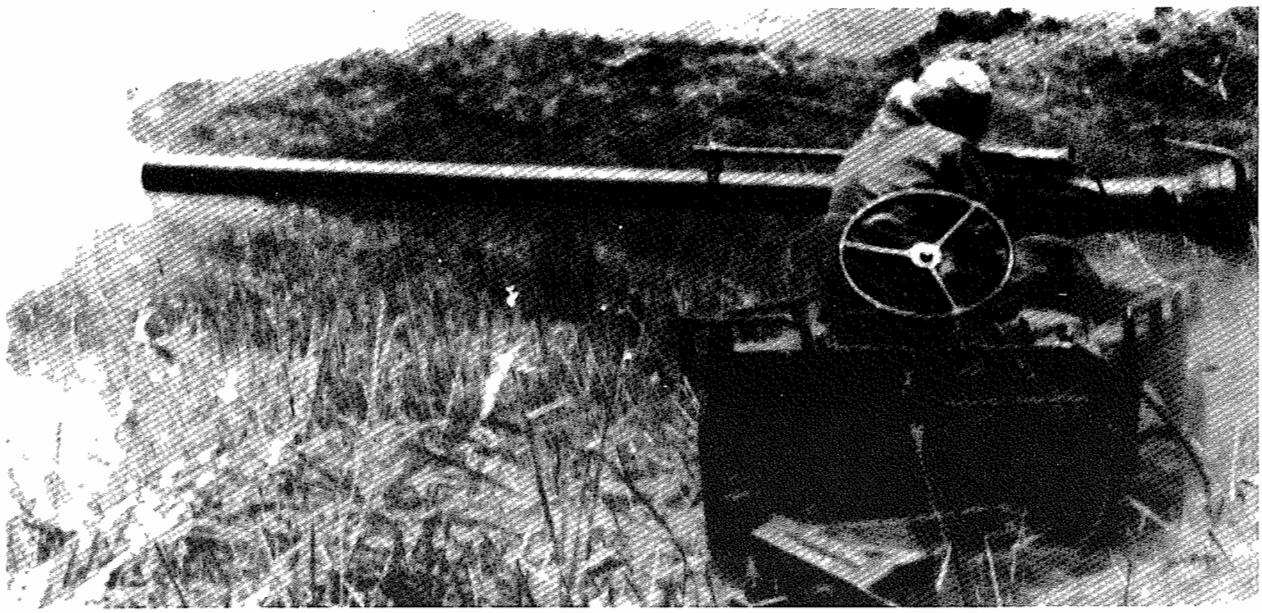
With the Dragon That Breathed Fire

By Harvey Weishuhn

I arrived in Vietnam on 25 July 1968, at Da Nang where I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. I was then loaded on a C-130 and flown up to Phu Bai, the battalion rear area for 2/1. Phu Bai was a large base that had seen a lot of action, especially during the early part of the year when the Tet Offensive was on. All the relief efforts for Marines fighting in Hue City came out of Phu Bai. Phu Bai was a large base out in the middle of nowhere, and it was hot, dry and dusty.

Orientation to the country took time. Those of us who were new went to daily lectures, where we learned about local customs and the way things were done. We stood a lot of night watch--being new, we weren't worth a lot in those days. They gave us brand new rifles, right out of the crate, and we had to get the cosmoline off of them and unwrap them. They let us fanfire them a little bit. I rapped five rounds through mine, then the injector ripped the back off the casing of the shell and she jammed. A guy told me to go back and see the armorer to get it fixed, but I never got to test the rifle out again before they sent me up country. I'd heard tales of guys who had died with the prod rods out trying to get shells out of the chamber of their 16's. It was not an encouraging thought.

I was assigned to H&S Company and sent to the 106/flames platoon. That was my MOS, and what I had heard about the 106's



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

THE DRAGON

The 106 recoilless rifle: the Vietnamese called it "the dragon that breathed fire."

made me extremely happy to be with them. Before we went over, they kept telling us in boot camp that MOS didn't mean a thing. We all knew it; we'd all learned for months that every Marine is a basic rifleman. But I felt a little more secure knowing I was assigned to a platoon that was not going to necessarily be in the field all the time.

Around the first of August 1968 the Marine Corps decided it was time to move some fresh blood up to the front. We boarded another C-130 in Phu Bai for the trip to Dong Ha. I had a good view out of one of the porthole windows and the country never seemed to change. It was brown and scrubby.

Once in Dong Ha we proceeded to board some Navy boats for a relatively short trip down the Cua Viet River to a village called Mai Xa Thi, which was the forward area of 2/1 at that time. We saw children with water buffaloes playing in the river, rice paddies and farmers, and a few small villes as we went along, and it just didn't seem like it was a war zone. The country was a bit torn up from bombing runs and artillery, but all in all it was peaceful.

The village of Mai Xa Thi was a bombed area like most up north. It was within about 15 to 20 miles of the DMZ, on the Cua Viet River between Dong Ha and Cua Viet. There were three or four good-sized buildings in this compound which served as the COM center and COC and battalion aid, etc. Most of the troops lived in either shelter-halves or makeshift bunkers--anything that would provide protection from the wind and the constant (at that time of year) rain. The first thing you did was to build a place to stay. There wasn't anyone who was going to help you--you filled a lot of sandbags, built a little personal bunker, and that was home.

Like most frontline areas, the battalion area was not secure. We were mortared almost daily--mainly for harassment. One day the ammo dump got hit, and it blew up for about one full day. We lived in flak jackets and helmets and anything that was protective. Every minute or two you'd hear another explosion and rounds of metal would come raining down on everything.

The mission of 2/1 at that time was very simple: search and destroy. The grunt companies would run one-, two-, or three-day



(Courtesy of Harvey Weishuhn)

Camp Big John at Mai Xa Thi on the Cua Viet River, between Cua Viet and Dong Ha. Battalion forward area--rear area was at Phu Bai. S-4 (supply) hut on left, COC (battalion HQ) building with antennas.

patrols and sweeps; we would go out and hit Charlie where he was in the field, and then come home. I quess this was our form of harassment.

Some good things happened at Mai Xa Thi. We used to get beer and bury it in the sand to make it cooler. That would lower the temperature about 20 degrees. It'd still be 50, 60 degrees when you drank it. But it *seemed* cold.

One day the rain seemed to drive every frog for 300 miles out into the open, and we ended up chasing those babies around, trying to throw them into a bunker that was half full of water.

On 23 August, 2/1 pulled out on reassignment and headed for Da Nang. I like to think that the Marine Corps decided that 2/1 had done enough up north. It had spent time at Con Tien and all the other hot spots that were up there, and it was, or so we thought, time to give us a little easier duty. They put us on a river boat and sent us to Cua Viet. There we were loaded on a Navy landing boat, and we took the long, leisurely overnight journey by sea to Da Nang. That is, H&S, the equipment and battalion aid did. The whole ship was crammed with equipment. The grunts were pulled out the next morning and flown down. They were too valuable to give up ground before it had to be.

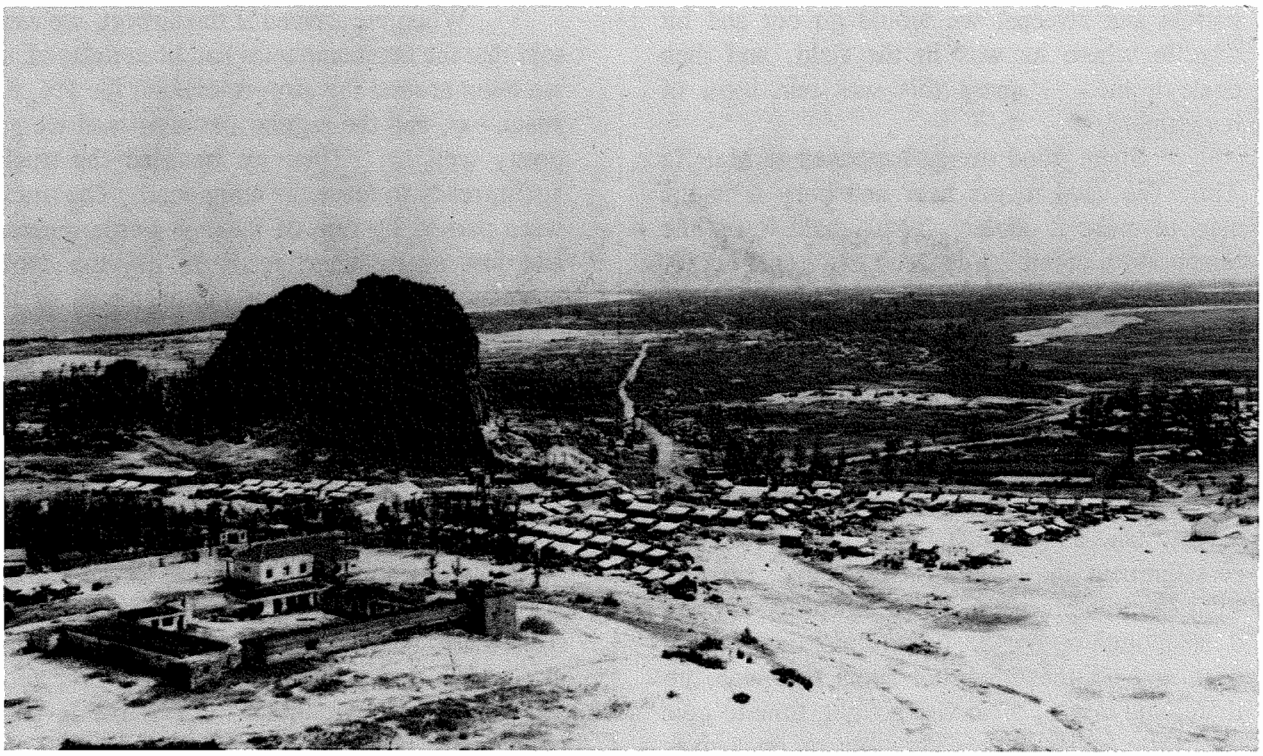
We left late in the afternoon, and sometime after midnight, when everybody was kind of half-dozing off, half-awake, I saw the hospital ship *Sanctuary*. A white ship with a big red cross on the side, and it was lit up like a Christmas tree. I figured any enemy gunner in the world could have hit that thing. I don't know if they'd ever tried--it was quite a sight.

We arrived at Da Nang the next morning and pulled into one of the docking facilities there and off-loaded. That was really my first view of Da Nang. You could see the old city across the river and a lot of civilians walking on the other side of a fence at the same landing area we were. Military were kept separated. Somewhere around late morning, we were boarded on trucks and sent over to Da Nang Air Force Base to link up with the troops that were being flown down.

When we arrived at the airport, we were told that the line companies had been delayed, so we hung around the airport--around the PX, the snack bar, and the regular bar area--and we got pretty well lit. Then we boarded the trucks again, ready to leave the compound. The trucks were parked by one of the Air Force messes, and just as we were ready to go, the cooks brought out about two or three gallons of ice cream and flipped them over the fence to us. The guys dug in with about everything they had handy--mostly spoons and forks, which all the grunts carried. And we headed off to our new area south of Da Nang.

The ride took us through most of the southern end of Da Nang. We went by most of the military complexes and came to the Marine Service Road, or the MSR. We headed south from there, heading down towards our new area at Ca Ha. It was then that I had my first good view of Marble Mountain. I was riding on a truck with most of the 106 gear, and as we approached the south security gate of Da Nang, the driver got a little off to one side of the road, probably to avoid the hundreds of civilians that were always coming and going, and he clipped one of the 106 barrels on the fence and sent it sprawling across the ground. He was not real happy that he had to stop and get out of his position in the convoy. We reloaded the 106 on the truck, secured it, and I remember staring up at Marble Mountain and thinking what a great view it had, and that if Charlie ever got up there he could do a lot of damage. It was comforting to know that Marines were stationed on two of the hills, Army Green Berets on one, and a CAP unit and some local PF's on the other. The mountain was an awesome sight. It was about the only high ground for as far as you could see south of Da Nang.

We arrived at Ca Ha late in the afternoon. It was the old 327 area, the area set up shortly after the Tet Offensive to be guard on the southern flank of Da Nang and to protect it from infiltration routes and harassment from enemy gunners, rockets, mortars and whatever else they could throw at us. The camp was a rounded triangular shape--it had about a four- or five-foot high sand berm. We had three 106's



(Courtesy of Harvey Weishuhn)

MARBLE MOUNTAIN AREA

Photo taken from Alpha-6, looking southeast. South China Sea in background; No Name Hill center left; village of Nui Kim Son and Old French Fort lower left; MSR through village and then south two miles to battalion area at Ca Ha. "The VC and NVA operated out of Marble Mountain. We knew they had underground facilities there. At night there was always a lot of activity around the mountain. We weren't allowed to conduct operations there because of the Buddhist shrines." --Paul Stevens

around the perimeter, manned 24 hours a day. I was assigned to one of those positions and we commenced to build a little hootch and to beef up the gun positions in the ammo bunkers.

One day at about 3:30pm, the battalion XO came strolling around, checking out things. We were filling sandbags in front of the berm; most of us were wearing just boots and shorts, and we didn't really have anyone standing watch (you always kept a watchful eye out over your shoulder). The XO thought that helmets, flak jackets and an armed guard would be much more suitable. We had been there a week or so and tried to explain to him that we felt quite secure until 4:00pm or so.

About 4:00, we pulled ourselves in and nestled into our positions, and almost right on schedule the VC took a shot at us. A good VC wouldn't be caught out early in the day with a weapon; he felt more secure firing late in the afternoon, and mortaring us at night.

On the night of 3 September the true reality of war came to us. We were huddled together when a mortar round hit close. I wrote the following letter home:

Someone back in the world said 106's see very little action, but in the 10 days we've been here we've had one man killed and two wounded. The guy that was killed was in the squad I'm in.

We were all huddled under the roof of our bunker. The VC started mortaring the camp. One round landed about 10 feet from our bunker. He was a little bit behind the sandbag wall. He caught a piece of shrapnel in the head. He died the next afternoon.

It was the worse thing I've ever seen. The poncho he was wrapped in to keep dry was just covered with blood.

War is tough, but to see a 19-year-old kid get killed without a chance to fight back

seems worthless. But the smell of death passes by quickly. You have yourself to worry about. That may sound heartless, but Charlie is heartless, too.

I'm OK. I guess I'm just lucky. A direct hit could have killed all four of us. I'll be frank and say I did a lot of praying yesterday.

This was the first time in my life that I'd seen a human being die, and that's when I knew that Vietnam was not a place to be.

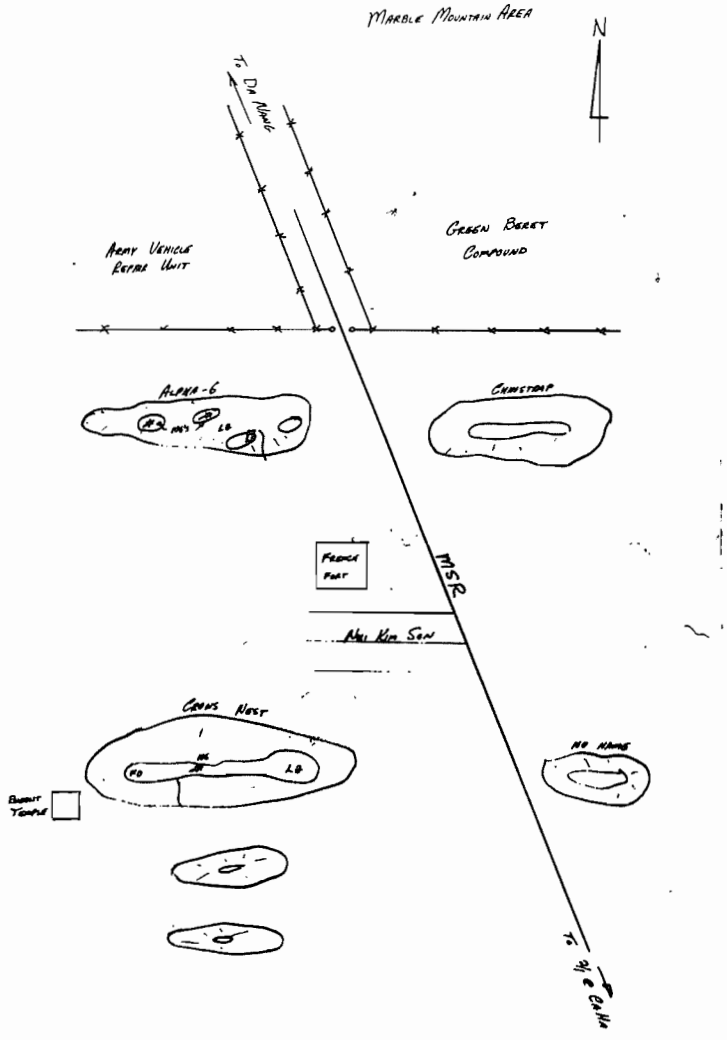
On 4 September I was reassigned and sent to join the 106 squad stationed on Alpha-6. (My first helicopter ride, and to this day I wonder why they always had to bank the thing with the door facing down.) We landed on the saddle of Alpha-6, between two of the hills there, which was barely big enough for the helicopter. Over the next months in Vietnam I learned to really appreciate helicopter pilots. They got in and out of tight spots, and they flew aircraft that weren't airworthy--that were held together with baling wire and shoestring.

I jumped off that helicopter wearing a white T-shirt and was promptly informed that the new guy wasn't too bright. I turned the T-shirt into a gun rag.

Alpha-6 was at the northeast end of the Marble Mountain area. There were four large mountains--Alpha-6, Crow's Nest, No Name and Chinstrap, all of which were manned. The view was fantastic from up there: You could see west to the Da Nang airfield, south down into the Dodge City area, the entire Da Nang area to the north, and the South China Sea to the east.

Alpha-6 was kind of a long east-west set-up. It had four rather large bumps, probably 40 or 50 feet high, jutting up out of the mountain area. We had 106's on two of the hills to the west side of the mountain, a hootch and a security area on one of the middle ones, and we didn't man the one to the east. The LZ was between the hootch and the first gun position. We felt quite secure up there. The entire mountain was ringed in wire and we had a lot of trip flares and trip grenades out--booby traps all over the place. We had one way up and one way down.

Our primary mission was to destroy enemy rockets and mortars. Being 50 meters in the air, we had a good view--we could see the terrain that Charlie used for cover to fire rocket missions and mortars against Da Nang, and we were to react to these without orders and destroy the enemy before he could inflict a great amount of damage on the city of Da Nang.



Harvey Weishuhn's drawing of the Marble Mountain area.

I served with some great guys on Alpha-6, and I'll never forget them. Ed "Baby Huey" Southern was from Newton, Kansas, and he got his nickname because he was a tall, fair-

skinned, red-headed Midwesterner who wore glasses and had a little bit of a dumb look to him at at times. He was a good friend; I had served with him through training in California.

Ed's association with the Marine Corps came about because of trouble with the local police in Kansas. In those days judges flooded the military's ranks with people who would have otherwise taxed an overcrowded prison system. Ed wasn't a hard-core criminal, but he couldn't stay out of trouble. A bad reputation made life hard for him. He never finished school, but he wasn't stupid. He was a 19-year-old kid trying to reach manhood.

The Marine Corps provided an outlet for many a troubled young man. Eddie took to learning the art of war seriously, but he lacked that common sense that controls the inward emotions. He wasn't out of control; he just didn't know how to be under control. He held the power of life and death in his hands, and it excited him.

Like many in Vietnam, Ed had a matter-of-fact attitude toward the war. He'd crimp blasting caps with his teeth, melt down a machine gun barrel with several hundred continuous rounds, and he seemed to have very little remorse when a ricocheting round hit a local child. The war zone allowed him to unleash all the pent-up rage of a troubled young man.

Then there was Doc Sturiano; he was and is from Long Island, New York. He was a medic of good proportion who carried an M-16. For a medic that was not heard of--they liked .45's. But Doc wasn't comfortable with that (he'd stand watch when dusk came, when we didn't figure anything was going to happen). He wasn't jumpy; he just wanted to go home alive, like the rest of us. He'd spend days down in the



(Courtesy of Harvey Weishuhn)

On Alpha-6 in Marble Mountain area, 22 October 1968. (Left) Ronald Jordan; (left rear) Jack "Doc" Sturiano; (center) Harvey Weishuhn; (top center) Carl Smith; (lower center) Walter "The Polack" Mosurick; (right) Clyde Near; dog in Wally's lap is "Slut."

dump below us, scrounging up building materials, things he could use on the mountain. He buried all his medical supplies on the dunghills so if he had to run across them in the middle of the night, he didn't have to carry anything with him but his pack--stuff was there. Like all the doc's, he'd spend time down in Nui Kim Son once in awhile. He'd treat the kids and the old people and the sick people. You couldn't say enough about the Corpsmen we had in Vietnam.

And there was Wally "The Polack" Mosurick from Summerville, New Jersey--one of my better friends over there. He was an easygoing guy. You couldn't ask for a better friend in the war zone. And Ronny Jordan of Huntington, West Virginia--a real, real good friend, probably the best friend I had. We served together at Camp Lejeune when we came back. He was another rawboned, country boy. A terror in battle.

Clyde Near was a tall, lanky kid out of Scullykillhaven, Pennsylvania. He went to the Philippines on R&R and came back wanting to marry a woman he met. It took us three weeks to talk him out of it.

C. W. "Grandpa" Moore was from a town in Mississippi whose name (Pontotoc) I couldn't pronounce. He still lives there. He looked 40 or 50 years old in those days, and he wasn't any older than the rest of us--20, 21, 22.

Larry Cole was a good friend of Moore's from Florida. They had served together in First Med Battalion in Hue City during Tet earlier that year.

Carl Smith was out of Long Beach, California. He was a little different than most of us, not as fun-loving, of a different dispostion. I heard he re-upped.

Dale Larson was from White Bear Lake, Minnesota, and was an all-American boy. C.W. Stengle was the first man I ever met in the platoon--he was on the boat ride from Dong Ha to Mai Xa Thi. He'd done some hard time over there and was a short timer when I met him. He was replaced by a guy named Gary Shoopman out of Zanesville, Ohio. "Shoop" was a quiet person; you always liked him in your corner when you needed someone.

The radioman on the mountain was Martin. He was later replaced.

These were the people I served with on Alpha-6. They were good people you could count on. We overlapped some, but basically we spent most of our tour together. We relied on each other, and that was what you had to have in Vietnam. You had to have the people you served with to be there when you needed them.

Daily life, at least in the daytime, on both Alpha-6 and Crow's Nest was, to say the least, boring. Life settled around the 106 maintenance and just trying to keep busy at



(Courtesy of C. W. Moore)

106 PLATOON

Left to right: Unidentified; King; Dixon; Baby Huey; Larry Cole; C. W. Moore; Unidentified; (kneeling in front) B. A. Wilson. "I can't remember Baby Huey's given name. I just remember we called him Baby Huey. He was killed. I have some very fond memories of all these guys and feel very lucky to have served with them . . . I remember how well everyone did their job, no matter the conditions." --C. W. Moore

something--playing cards, reading, catching up on lost sleep. And you could always fill sandbags to reinforce the gun positions, restring wires, or check the area for enemy infiltration.

The mountains were resupplied weekly, except when the weather didn't permit. And even in the bad weather, there were pilots who thought about the troops. One in a CH-34 brought us resupply during a lull in a monsoon storm. He came in from the west, which seemed strange. He touched down, we got everything off, and he grabbed the mail out. Then he lifted off and headed straight for Da Nang. We learned later that he had almost run out of gas, and literally risked his crew and bird to help us out. But he got down okay, and, I tell you, that was the best pilot I ever saw in Vietnam.

Vietnam was a pretty country. But at night it was especially quiet and peaceful. Da Nang to the north had an eerie lighting effect on an an otherwise black and starry scenery. You could easily be lulled to sleep by it all. But the reality of it was the thump of the mortar tube or the whine of a rocket engine that shattered the still night air. Rounds that struck quickly and randomly. It was our job to inflict that death on Charlie with the roar of the 106.

We had three dogs on the mountain, "Scum," "Slut," and "Bitch." We had rescued them from what we liked to call the frying pan of Nui Kim Son. One night some rockets and mortars went up at 2:00 or 3:00am, the normal firing time for Charlie. The gun crew on #2 hill locked and loaded and blew off a couple of 106's, and one of the dogs came running up the mountain, just literally ran me over and went into the hootch where he shook for days. We found another one in the morning, still up on #2 hill. His hair was singed off. The other dog came back three days later. We didn't know where he'd been.

None of the dogs ever went near that hill again. And they never again slept under the rear end of a 106, which sometimes is just as deadly as the front end.

Another night Crow's Nest was attacked by Charlie blasting B-40's and whatever else he had from the base of the hill. Command called in some Huey's, and they strafed the bottom of the mountain, right over the top of us. It was a fabulous sight. They dropped some flares from a gunship up there and one of them fell on a hootch down in the ville and burned it to the ground. We got to fire 106's into the bottom. As usual, we came up with a lot of empty-handed results: blood, no bodies.

There was a hootch directly below Alpha-6 on the south side. About once a week some guy would step out of the place and pop half a dozen rounds up at us. That hootch was supposed to be a nice little farmer's home--the owner had rice paddies and the like. We dropped some grenades down on him one time and killed a cow and a pig, which we paid for.

Everybody got tired of that place, and one day we were sitting on the mountain when all of a sudden we heard a loud explosion. We got up and ran over to the edge, guns in hand, looked down and saw a bunch of guys from a Navy unit that had a base out along the beach. They, too, were extrememly tired of sniper fire. They had just literally moved the man out of that hootch and blown it up. They put an end to a headache for them *and* us.

There was an old French fort left over from the colonial days in Nui Kim Son that was manned at night by PF forces. We were sitting on the mountain one night and we took fire from that fort. We didn't waste any time--we cranked the 106 around and we blew about four or five rounds into that place. The next day we caught hell for it. I don't know who those people in the fort were working for at that time, but we never trusted that position again for support or anything else.

Once we were sitting up there on Alpha-6 when there was a great explosion in Da Nang. Enemy sappers had put some satchel charges to an LST loaded with ammunition, and that place exploded for days--and the biggest thing that I remember about that was that parked right next to that thing was another LST full of beer. All the Budweiser and Miller that you could believe. It didn't blow a single can open, but that ship went down, and they took all the

beer off, hauled it out in the South China Sea, and dumped it. After that we got stuck with all the crappy beer you could see in your lifetime.

We returned to the rear--as they like to say, with the gear and beer--and all the bullshit that goes with it. Our gun crews were assigned to line posts and we were back filling sandbags, doing the routine things that were being done in the battalion area during the day, from burning off shitters to stringing wire and humping ammo and whatever else went on.

There was a thing in Vietnam at that time about having your state flag around. It took me a while, but a little by hook and a little by crook either my mother or my sister obtained one from the American Legion Post in Saginaw, and it was sent over to me and I flew it. I think sometimes we Northern boys were a little overwhelmed: there semed more Stars and Bars and California flags than we knew what to do with. But that little, drab, blue Michigan flag meant something.

I had a cousin whose family lived around Detroit, and his class at school (sixth grade, I think it was) sent me 23 Christmas cards, and I put them up on the side of a poncho, or shelter-half, and took a picture which I sent back to them. We greatly appreciated knowing that at least somewhere there was somebody that was thinking about us guys overseas.

As it turned out, being in the rear wasn't any safer than being on Alpha-6 or at the air station in Da Nang. In November of that year, the Marines launched one of their larger operations, this one called Meade River. It was an operation that probably included several battalions. As an outfit, 2/1 did not place up front in it; our names are listed in the annals, but we always seemed to be "attached" when we did things like this. We had a flame unit and several 106's mounted on the old, trusty mules out on that operation.

I can remember sitting back in the base during the day making napalm in 55-gallon drums. I remember once reading the label on the dry napalm mixture that you mixed with gasoline and seeing that it came from the Dow Chemical Corporation in Midland, Michigan, which is just down the road maybe 15 miles from my home. I got a little kick out of seeing that at least some of the war effort was in my hometown.

Prisoners captured on operations like Meade River would always talk about the "dragon that breathed fire." That, I quess, is one thing that we always liked about the 106's. They inflicted pain and punishment against the enemy, and they were something that was a little bit better support than artillery at times.

Operation Meade River, being a large operation, lasted almost two months. Again, it was a search-and-destroy mission and also a semi-defensive operation. We did not search the enemy out in a far-flung area; we just tried to clear him out of our neighborhood.

In the rear we had to stand inspections. Finding a pair of spit-shined boots in the mud and the sand of Vietnam wasn't easy. Seemed like a lot of bull, but I always remembered something my dad told me about the time when he was in Europe and WWII: When they got a lull he used to drill his men, and he did it to maintain discipline and order. They never liked it, and we didn't either, but it was something that in the long run was a necessity to maintain what you had as a fighting outfit. We didn't like to do it, but it had to be done. It goes back to what we'd learned in basic training, that a unit without discipline is nothing. At times we looked on discipline as something that we didn't really need, but when you served out in the field and when the shit hit the fan, discipline was all you had that kept an outfit together. Air power and courage and everything else didn't mean anything if the unit didn't function as a cohesive unit.

When 1968 ended, I had served five months in Vietnam. I had been wounded. I was becoming a veteran. I was serving with good people, but the war in Vietnam--as was the case for the entire period after 1966--probably was not going that well for our side. We'd lost a little purpose or something, and our tactics had changed. It seems to me that we did more defensive work than we did offensive work. That's hindsight, of course--at the time I don't think I felt that way.

One of my prized possessions at that time was a ring of grenade pins. I put them together--one for every week I was over there, up to five months' worth--and I really wish I had brought that thing home. But I didn't; like other things, I left it behind.

In January we moved to Crow's Nest, rotating another platoon off there. Crow's Nest was the largest and highest of the Marble Mountain areas. It had one way up, like most of them, and it was a steep climb. Many a gearpack was dropped and fell to smithereens on that hill.

We had one 106 on the hill. There wasn't a lot of room--the width of the top was maybe only a meter wide. The top slopes were extremely steep all the way down the sides. The hootch, the building that we called home, was built out over the ledge. It was quite a sight to lie out there in the monsoon and high winds and rain and have that thing shaking. I don't know how it stayed on the mountain, but it did.

Also on the hill at the same time were several other units. A Navy FO team kind of held the west end of the mountain. They did spotting for aircraft and also for the USS *New Jersey* when it came on station offshore. A battleship firing is quite a sight. She used to sit a mile or two offshore at night and lob those one-ton shells about 20 miles inland. Believe me, when that happened I was glad we were on the mountain: It sounded like a freight train going over us; I can imagine what it felt and sounded like to the grunts and the enemy out in the field.

Also on the hill was an Army searchlight team. They were a strange breed. They had a full jeep up there with a huge searchlight on it that they used to shine through the villes and out into the rice paddies at night. I never felt safe around that thing when they kicked it on. It got shot out on numerous occasions.

The view from Crow's Nest was probably the best. You could see perhaps twice as far and with a better perspective than you could from Alpha-6. You could definitely put a round out a lot farther. We controlled basically south of the Marble Mountain area, because we were the only mountain that could shoot in that direction; Alpha-6 couldn't fire over us.

Life on Crow's Nest wasn't much different than it had been on Alpha-6. There was a great deal of boredom during the day. We played a lot of cards, read a lot, wrote letters. A particular observation of mine is that mail kind of slowed down at the mid-point of my term over there. There wasn't a lot to write home about. And I imagine the people back home were thinking the same thing: There wasn't a lot to say that hadn't been said before. At times it hurt not to get mail, but we lived through it.

There was a Buddhist temple right below the west end of Crow's Nest, and every so often Charlie would run around in that area, where he felt a little more secure. We lobbed grenades down on him to shake him up a little bit at night. The monks must have had a pretty good bunker to hide in.

We went down there one day to visit the monastery, and inside the main area was a huge jade statue of Buddha in what had been a glass case--the glass had been shattered by bullets and fragments from grenades and everything else. But there wasn't a scratch on Buddha and that amazed me. I've been to some other religious places, such as the Vatican in Rome, and when you look at some of the shrines they have, you just have to wonder how they survive wars.

The monks were always nice to us. They raised vegetables, which we used to buy from them. We felt bad about having to drop stuff down on them from time to time, but they took it with a casualness that came with their religion. They weren't activists like some of the earlier monks who had burned themselves up; they just tried to continue with their faith and live a peaceful life in that war-torn country.

I turned 21 in the Nam on 18 January 1969. We had a slack day and three or four of us went down to the Green Beret compound where the Green Berets put out a good dinner and bought all the drinks. It was a nice way to spend a twenty-first birthday. They gave me a case of beer to take back with me, and we were going to stop off at Alpha-6 and share it with the

guys out there.

But some local kids were following us around, and they mugged me. I was trying to get up the mountain with my case of beer and my M-16 and everything else I had to carry, and they got my case of beer and ran off with it. Well, I'd had enough beer in me already, and I just let loose with a full magazine. I thank God to this day that I didn't kill any of them. Anyway, they dropped my case of beer and we retrieved it and went up and had a birthday drink with the guys on Alpha-6.

With the '69 Tet coming, everybody was a little uneasy. There were a lot of ugly rememberances from Tet of '68, and no one had any reason to doubt that Charlie would launch some kind of an assault, even though it may not have been on the grand scale that Tet of '68 was.

There was a semi-general offensive against us during the week of Tet. There was supposed to be a cease fire, but, of course, it didn't hold very often. You had to be careful in the villes; the enemy would use all the cover he could get and fire from nearby hootches to dissuade you from firing back. The compound back at Ca Ha was hit quite heavily in February.

A CAP unit in Nui Kim Son got hit one night. We had flares up to see if we could spot anyone, and lo and behold two guys came running down the path right below us. We put a barrage down on them that should have wiped both out. But when we went down there the next morning, we only found one body, and it seemed like everybody had put a hole in it. We'd lobbed a lot of grenades at the other guy the night before, and we'd seen him jump into the bushes. There was so much blood from the first guy we couldn't really tell if we'd hit the other one or not.

The dead guy was an NVA soldier: We found papers, and he had a lighter with his regiment number on it, the 375th; he also had some North Vietnamese money. He'd bled to death. He'd probably been hit a hundred times. He'd put a tourniquet around both legs and around one of his arms, trying to save his own life. But he died there. That was the first time I'd seen an enemy casualty up that close. We were all milling around and some of the guys had their cameras out, but it was not a pretty sight. It was what bodies look like in a war zone--mutilated and destroyed.

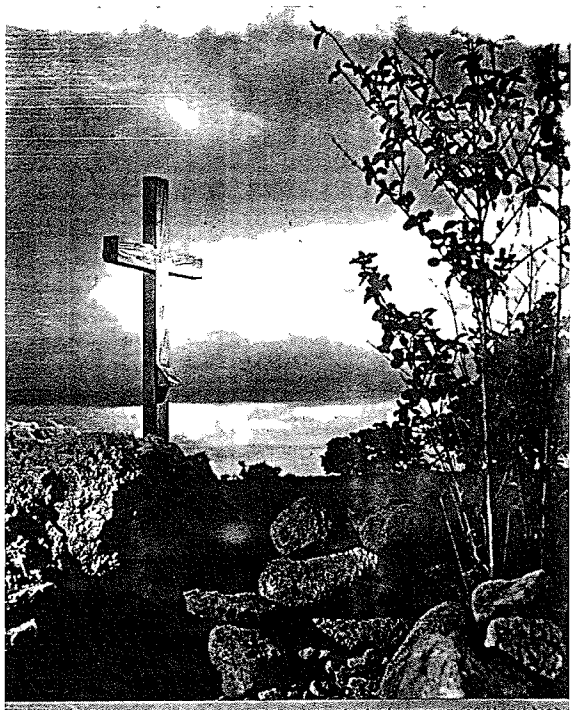
In the late morning of 26 February, when I was on Crow's Nest, Edward Southern, "Baby Huey," was shot on Alpha-6. He later died of his wounds. Ed should not have died over there, but he did. He died from accidental discharge, or friendly fire, as they like to say. The following is the official 2/1 diary report of the incident: "Spot report DTG 260930H. Alpha 6 at 260930H at 069711. While awaiting resupply one USMC was shot in the chest as the result of accidental discharge. Medevac was requested and completed at 1055H."

Ed Southern was dead at 19. He died not on the field of battle, but in a hospital after an accident. He died because of the war, not in the war. He was young and inexperienced, and belonged more on a farm in Kansas than on a hill in Nam. He was just an average Marine in the Nam--there trying to stay alive. But he didn't succeed.

I remember my first trip to the Wall in DC, panel 31W, line 73. I could see his wry smile, the red hair and the carefree attitude. I cried, not just for Ed, but for all those young men who died where Ed did.

After Ed died, we took up a collection in the platoon and sent the money to his family for whatever they needed or wanted it for. But they sent it back to us. That has always bothered me. I don't know if they simply wanted to distance themselves from the war and the fact that Eddie had died over there, or if they really just didn't care for us and the effort we'd made. We sat around for a few days not knowing what to do, and then we decided to give the money to the chaplain and he gave it to one of the local orphanages or something like that. We thought about it a lot. We had tried to do something nice for a fallen comrade, and his family didn't seem to understand.

On 3 March 1969, the platoon was rotated off of Crow's Nest and back to the battalion rear at Ca Ha. That month there was a memorial service. Ed, Baby Huey, was one of the men remembered.



BATTALION MEMORIAL SERVICE
2nd Battalion, 1st Marines
FPO San Francisco, Calif 96602

+ ORDER OF WORSHIP +

6 March 1969 1400

Invocation "F" Company

Memorial Roll Call LtCol H. G. Glasgow, USMC
Commanding Officer, 2/1

*Hymn: "Eternal Father"

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep.
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

Eternal Father, grant we pray,
To all Marines, both night and day,
The courage, honor, strength, and skill
Their land to serve, Thy law fulfill.
Be Thou the Shield forevermore
From ev'ry peril to the Corps. Amen.

Scripture Old Testament "H" Company
New Testament "G" Company

Responsive Reading: "E" Company

Prayer LCDR A. B. Pepper, CHC, USN

*Rifle Volley "H&S" Company

*Taps

*Benediction "H&S" Company
*Please stand

* *

[Submitted by Harvey Weishuhn]

A few days later I got to see Duane Pretzer, a friend since childhood. Duane was with 1/1 at the time. We hadn't seen one another for approximately two years. On 8 March I wrote home: "I got to see Duane. He came over and I almost missed him. He was just ready to leave when I got back from a road sweep. I was sure glad to see him. . . We talked about everything--from experiences in Vietnam to being kids on the block many years ago. He looks great. . . ."

Sergeant Miller, our platoon commander at the time, left about then and one of his last acts was to appoint me squad leader and assign me to the two 106's we had down at the Tu Cau bridge. We had Sgt Miller's good-bye party, we put him on a six-by heading in, then Wally and I--who were going to be running the squad out there--hopped on a mule and headed to Tu Cau. Tu Cau was a few miles straight down the road due west of the Ca Ha base. The Tu Cau bridge was brand new. It had been blown up several times, but protection of the bridge was very necessary. It was really the only link between Highway 1 and the MSR south of Da Nang until you got way down to Hoi An. It allowed 2/1 and 3/1 to bounce back and forth in support of each other with mechanized travel instead of the helicopters. Like most places over there, it was not a fun place to be. But we did our job and we did it quite well. The bridge was never overly damaged or destroyed in the time 2/1 was in that area while I was in country, and it was not because the enemy lacked a chance to try.

I only spent two weeks at the bridge, returning 10 April when I was called back by the new platoon commander (I think I went through seven platoon commanders while I was in country). I was offered and I accepted the job as maintenance NCO for the platoon. Maintenance NCO was, I quess, the jack-of-all-trades: He kept the guns running, he served as gofer, supply man, and about anything

else at the platoon commander's discretion.

I wrote home and asked my mother to send me paint brushes, Allen wrenches, and a couple of other little things that we were always short of. The Marine Corps never seemed to be supplied like it should. I valued these things and rationed them out to the troops. The guys loved to lose Allen wrenches, and without Allen wrenches you couldn't do anything to those 106's. We also needed them to work on those darn mules. I think that vehicle was so-named because it was stubborn. We had to learn how to pack them with 106's and gear and everything else. They were a simple machine with a little ugly Briggs and Stratton motor, but they'd go all day in the field, and they'd go just about anywhere.



(Courtesy of Harvey Weishuhn)

Harvey Weishuhn (left) and Duane Pretzer (right).

"Photo taken one or two days before Duane rotated. Friends since childhood, we joined the Marines together. Duane was with 1/1 at the time. We got together after not seeing each other for approximately two years." --Harvey Weishuhn

When I got back from R&R, the Marine Corps in its infinite wisdom had chosen another assignment for us. We were packing up and moving out, going to what had been the 3/1 area, Phuon Luc. We were about to participate in several large operations, and I think in a way we were looking forward to it. We'd been a static outfit for quite a few months and that took the edge off of a lot of us. Now we were getting ready to get back in the thick of it.

We were preparing to move on 12 May, but on the night of 11 May, or the early morning of 12 May, the enemy launched what was considered the second Tet Offensive of that year. Our perimeter had been under constant night probing for several weeks. Our night watches reported seeing sappers or watchers in the wire every night, and some of the sightings were probably true. Between trying to pack the gear and manning our defensive positions, the entire outfit was worn out.

The day of 11 May was very busy. On that day we prepared all non-essential gear for shipping the next day. It was well into the night before we stopped our preparations. Like everyone else, I was extremely tired that night. Around midnight, I lay down with all my clothes on (a premonition?) and tried to get some sleep.

About 2:00am the camp came to life. Explosions woke me. I grabbed my helmet, flak jacket, 16 ammo and was out of the hootch in a flash. Sergeant Ward and several other Marines joined me in the bunker by the barbershop. Shouts of "VC in the camp!" were heard coming from all over the area.

Several 1st MT trucks were parked near our area. Cries for help took me over to them, where I found one of the drivers with shrapnel in his leg. A couple of us bandaged him up and got him to the BAS. We moved about cautiously, not knowing when we'd run into a VC or a trigger-happy Marine. We got back to our bunker safely.

We maintained our positions till dawn and then cleaned up the mess: 12 VC dead and many captured weapons. We had two Marine

KIA and more than 40 WIA.

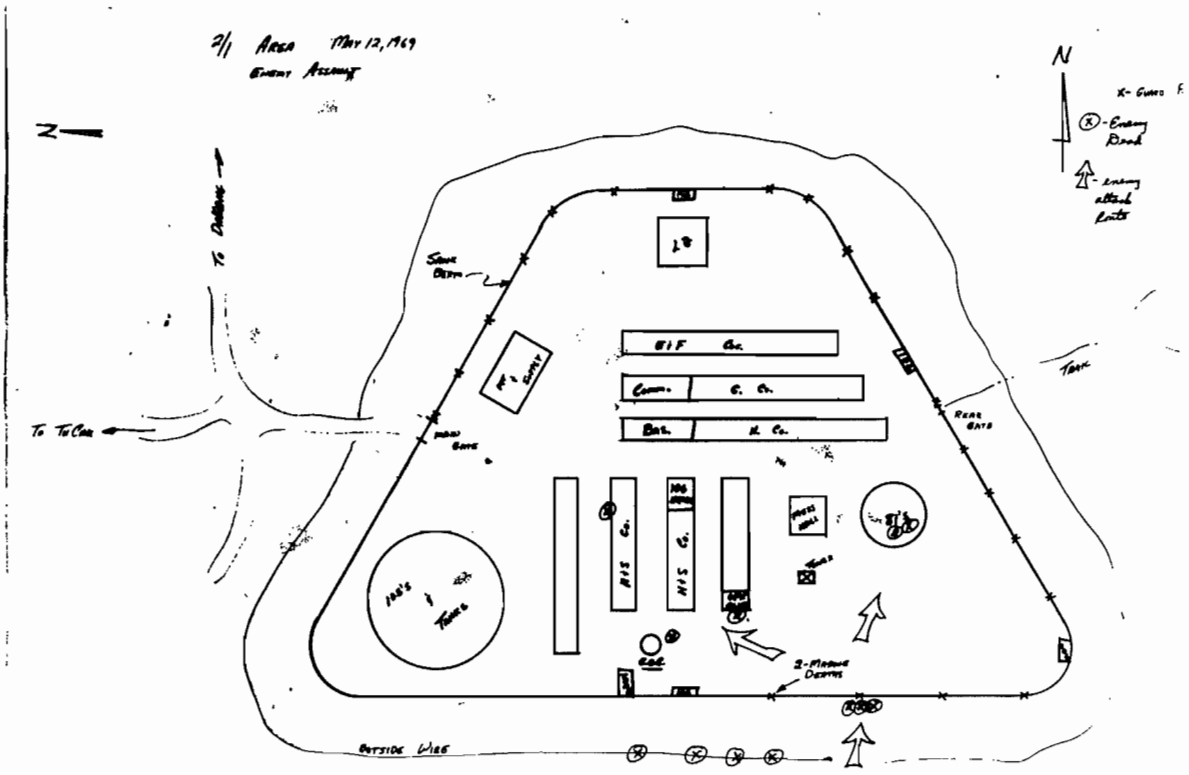
The attack had come from the south side of the camp. The CP was the probable objective. The enemy put an RPG into a watch post about 100 yards east of the CP. One Marine was killed instantly, and I believe the second KIA was wounded on that post. They tried to overrun another post 50 yards to the west, but three VC were killed there by Lance Corporal Weir. He'd only been in country a day or so, and I believe he left shortly after, due to the shock and mental strain of this attack.

The whole attack and firefight lasted less than an hour. Three VC were killed at the defensive berm, two were killed by hand-to-hand in the mortar pits, and one was killed by a cook as he was running out of the officers and staff club. The cook's fire hit him in the chest and pushed him back into the club; the satchel charge he carried blew up the club and burned it with him in it. Another VC was killed by Sergeant Major Viera near the CP, one was killed near our hootch, and the rest died in the wire.

Most of our wounded came from shrapnel from enemy mortars. I remember seeing several Corpsmen and MT drivers taking BAS vehicles toward the CP area and back with wounded Marines. They drove at high speed, the Corpsmen with their .45's hanging on for dear life. They had to zig-zag through the camp, as their big red crosses served as targets for the enemy. The actions of those drivers and Corpsmen saved the lives of many Marines that night.

The next morning we spotted an unexploded mortar round in the roof of the barbershop. The barbers were locals, and the building was probably an aiming point. We had several hundered 106 rounds piled next to our hootch near the shop, and a direct hit there would have wiped out a great deal of the area. The barbers were not allowed in the compound again.

The attack on us at Ca Ha was part of a large-scale assault on a lot of bases in and



Harvey Weishuhn's drawing of the battalion compound on the night of 11 May 1969.

around the Da Nang area as well as other places in the country, all timed to happen at once.

From Phuon Luc we were to go out on Operation Pipestone Canyon. Pipestone Canyon was a large, several-batallion, more than regimental-sized operation designed to go in and clean out the Dodge City and Go Noi Island area. The area lay south of Da Nang between Highway 1 and An Hoa and had always been a source of extreme trouble to the Marine Corps. It was a major staging area for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Regulars, and they felt very much at home there.

We took several 106's to the field, along with our flame unit, and all the line companies (except for some rear echelon people). Other units such as 3/1 and a couple from the 5th Marines and ARVN's were involved in the campaign also.

The fighting was quite intense at times and the men were out for close to a month. We did a lot of supply work in the rear sending things out, trying to get them ammunition, everything else that they needed out there, and we made a lot of napalm again. The counts were good when we got done with this, and Pipestone Canyon was quite a major success for us in 1969.

When the guys came in off Pipestone Canyon, we had a new platoon commander, Staff Sergeant Niven. And out of his own pocket he secured some extra steaks and beer so that everyone could wind down a bit. We had about a two- to three-week layoff after Pipestone Canyon, to prepare for Operation Durham Peak.

We had a lance corporal named Partridge. He was from Washington State and he had written home to his sister that he needed a pair of glasses, and he had written for something that didn't look military. He was preparing to go on R&R and just didn't want to look like he was in the service. His sister misinterpreted his appeal and thought he wasn't wearing glasses--and this kid was blind without them. Pretty soon there was a call for Partridge to go down to the company headquarters. It seems some congressman had shaken up somebody from Headquarters Marine Corps, and from 20,000 miles away Partridge was going to get glasses in six hours or less.

He paid a price for that. They kept an eye on him for a while; they thought he was a troublemaker. But he was a good kid. It was just one of those things. Sometimes when you wrote home from the Nam, the people back there just didn't understand what you were doing or how you were doing it. He had about four pairs of glasses in his pocket after that.

With less than a month left in country, I wrote home less and less. I was anxious to get home, but it just seemed like the days weren't going anywhere. And after much nagging and I quess just shooting off too much, I was allowed to accompany the platoon on Operation Durham Peak. It seemed foolhardy to a lot of people that I would want to go out and spend another two or three weeks in the field, being as close as I was to going home. My rotation date was very early in August, but it just didn't seem like it would ever get here if I just didn't get out and do something. I had to go out and I'm glad I did. The time went by quite quickly on Operation Durham Peak.

2/1 joined Operation Durham Peak in its second phase. Durham Peak was a multi-branch operation being held in the Que Son Mountains southwest of Da Nang, in a place we called Antennae Valley. We arrived in the field 21 July, and brought along two 106's plus our flame throwers. Travelling with the headquarters unit, we landed on an island down in the valley and set up our 106's.

We were strictly a headquarters unit. We were formed into small platoons to do defensive perimeter work at night, and during the day we did our normal bit of business, whether in communications or battalion aid, or S-1, S-2, S-3, or S-4.

We were in the valley when Americans landed on the moon. We were lying on the ground when we heard the accounts on the radio telling us they had landed there, and we just kind of lay back and looked at that full moon and wondered how man could do such a thing. You had Marines standing on the moon and Marines standing hip-deep in mud in Vietnam at the same time.

We had the chaplain with us. It wasn't very often that the chaplain went in the field, but he probably felt like I did, that he wanted to get out and be a part of what was going on sometimes. We were sitting around cleaning our weapons and preparing the 106 for nighttime, and the chaplain had a .45 on and he was looking at us and he said, "You know, if you guys covered those things up a little bit you wouldn't have to clean them all the time." We asked him what he did with his .45, and he said he kept it in a plastic bag. One of the guys asked him for it, and he pulled it out and the thing looked like a gold-plated revolver. The humidity and everything else had rusted it. We told him we'd take care of it, and someone field-stripped it, cleaned it, and put it back together for him in two minutes. The chaplain just sat there in amazement. I think he took a little bit better care of his weapon after that.

We'd been on the island about four days when the colonel thought we should be closer to the action, and so we moved to a mountain top. The mountains were covered in lush vegetation, and the line companies, the grunts, were up there sneaking up mountain trails, and those mountains swarmed with NVA soldiers. The grunts had a rough time in the field. They spent a lot of time taking ground and re-taking it. It was the way things were in the mountainous areas in that part of Vietnam. From the A Shau Valley down through the Que Son, even into the Central Highlands, the enemy was at home. We were on his territory, and he thought nothing of hitting us, retreating and coming back to hit us again.

The weather turned very bad. Another typhoon came through, there was a lot of rain and the weather was cold. And the operation continued on. We took fire even in the "safety" of the area we held. I'd be remiss if I didn't say that I had second thoughts about going out. We were in the field for about two weeks. I think the weather brought an end to the operation more than anything else.

Durham Peak was the only large-scale operation that I participated in. It was a support role that the 106's and flame throwers played. But as everyone would know that's been there, it didn't matter. I was glad I went on Durham Peak; I felt more a part of the war at that time. I'd like to think that what we did with the 106's and other chores we had with the headquarters unit helped the men who were down doing the hard fighting. We supported them and the operation was considered a success, though probably only on a limited scale.

On 3 August of that year, we lifted off the top of the mountain and returned to the combat base at Phuon Luc. When I returned to the platoon office that day, Sergeant Nivens told me I had orders to go home; it was just a matter of waiting for a flight date and being prepared to get out of country. But in the Marine Corps' wisdom again, we were going to move. We were going back to the Ca Ha base. So on 6 August we returned to Ca Ha. The CO of 3/1 had torn down most of the line hootches and had rearranged the battalion area to his liking. We set out to put it back the way we had had it.

On the morning of 10 August, the administrative chief handed me what every Marine, soldier, and sailor in Vietnam at the time wanted: orders home.

I had a letter already written and addressed to my mother, and I added the date. It read very simply: I'm coming home. I put it in the mailbox, went and got rid of my gear and rifle, came back, said my good-byes to the guys that were in the base then, and went to the main gate to catch a ride. I had just hopped on a six-by when the other guys came back in off a mine sweep. There were the usual catcalls to the guy who was going home, a lot of handshakes. As I rode out the main gate of the Ca Ha base, I felt naked--I had no weapon--but it was a relief to know I was going home.

We headed down the Tu Cau Road, and when we got to the bridge there were more good-byes, quick shouts off the truck to the guys there. A couple of them flipped me the bird.

The next day I flew home. My tour was over.

I think we all went to Vietnam with a sense of purpose, whether it was to fight Communism, serve our country or just simply to stay alive. I still believe that what we fought for

was just and right. But somewhere along the line we just lost our purpose for being there; we didn't as much lose the war as we just walked away from it.

No matter what the outcome, I never felt bad about my service or actions during the war. I was doing my duty no matter how hopeless or frustrating it became. I think that attitude helped keep me from any post-traumatic syndrome. I never let anything that was said or done back here in the World get me down. I did what I had to do and those here did the same. This is, after all, a country where you can have varied and different opinions.

I could always--and still do--talk freely about the war. I choose not to do so with people that would belittle what we did. Those willing to listen and discuss the experience can always talk to me.

I believe time has lessened the ill feelings about the war. Younger people seem to be more interested in it than their parents were or are. The young weren't affected by the great media blitzes that went on during the war. They've only been exposed to the results of the war, and they wonder what it was like and why it turned out so badly.

I'm not a die-hard right winger, but I'm patriotic enough to know what I felt was my duty to my country. I once told my father that if he and all his fellow World War II veterans had marched in DC instead of the peaceniks, the peace people wouldn't have seemed as important as they thought they were.

I like to think that the Vietnam experience was the step in the ladder of life that made me a better person. It allowed me to learn and experience things that I couldn't begin to here in the States. It gave me a greater respect for life and death, and provided a way to know and understand them. Because of this knowledge, I've been able to help other Vietnam veterans come to grips with their feelings and fears about the war, and I've been able to handle the loss of my friends and others who didn't return.

As for the Second Battalion, First Marines, we plodded along doing what we could as a unit to try and achieve a goal, even though at times no one was quite sure what it was. In those days frustration was what 2/1 felt most constantly. I can remember times when we would be sniped at and taking mortar fire in the field, and we could not return fire because of the rules of engagement. The frustration took its toll, not only on the sharpness of the military edge that we had as a unit, but also on the command structure and the mental readiness that troops need to have when they are in the field.

We did our duty as best we could. Sometimes when we inflicted death upon the enemy we were unfortunate enough to inflict death on the civilian population as well. We never intended to do harm to those people, but in that war zone that had no front line or rear line, civilians suffered badly. It is probably one of the few things that I really regret about the war: what it did to a country and a people, some of whom would die needlessly because of the actions of armies.

It is truly sad that the country we served did not always feel the way that most of us did about our service. Some at home were more interested, I think, in the preservation of their ideals than they were in the serviceman who was in the field. We servicemen did what our country deemed necessary at the time, and I think that time will prove that what we did was right. But whatever the view of history, I am proud to have served in Vietnam and am proud of the Marines I served with. §



Maybe It's Time

By Jack V. Sturiano

I was formerly "Doc J.V.," and I served with Second, Battalion, First Marines from 4 August to 27 June 1969.

I didn't serve with a line company. On my arrival in August of 1968, the battalion was beginning preparations to move south from Phu Bai. I arrived, so to speak, as a short timer: I had only 11 months left in service--my EOS 12 July 1969. Since I was E-5, I was to await a senior Corpsman's position when someone rotated out of the bush.

We moved south in late August, to an area south of Da Nang. I can't remember the name, but we called it the Riviera because it ran from the ocean inland a couple of miles, and from the Da Nang city limits (at Marble Mountain) to the battalion area. In any event, I was sent to one of the four mountains that comprise the Marble Mountain Complex. I went to Alpha-6, and another E-5 Corpsman named Kosoff went to Crow's Nest. We were with the 106's of H&S Company, and we had two guns on our mountain and one on Crow's Nest. The nine Marines and myself on Alpha-6 were to fire on mortar and rocket sites set up to fire on MAAG-16.

I went up to the mountain in early September and stayed until two days after Christmas 1968. Then I stayed with the BAS staff as a jack-of-all-trades. I was battalion summation officer and training officer; I drove the jeep for the surgeons, went on road sweeps, and S-2 shop patrols.

On 11 May 1969, the battalion swapped areas with 3/1 and moved to an area near Hill 55. I was in the advance party that went to the new area, and that night 2/1 was hit and overrun, which resulted in hand-to-hand fighting in the compound. As I understood it, either Fox or Golf's company office was blown up.

I stayed with BAS until I went home in late June.

After the war I bummed around different hospitals, working as ER tech and OR tech, till I came back to Long Island. I enrolled in the physician's assistant program at the state university at Stony Brook--they were looking for Vietnam medics--and I have been a PA since.

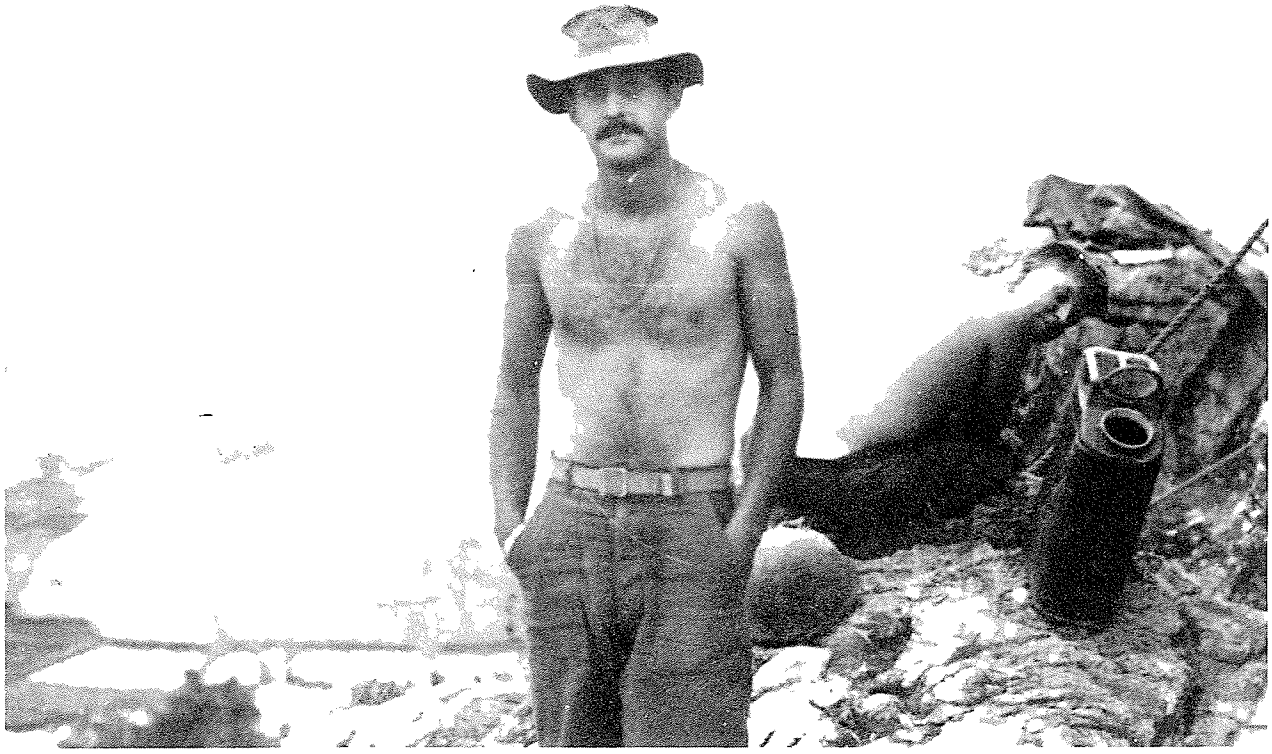
One of my classmates, Ken Dodge, was a Corpsman with 3/1, and he had come with his battalion advance party to 2/1's area the night of 11 May, when 2/1 was overrun. We are still friends, and I see him from time to time.

I'm currently [*1990*] employed as the Senior Physician's Assistant/Forensic Investigator for the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's office. I have held this position for 11 years. In many ways this job is similar to being a Corpsman in Nam. I go to scenes of homicides, suicides, accidents; I pronounce people dead, search the body for injury, get the valuables; I fill out tags and reports, zip the body into a bag, unload weapons, and talk with next-of-kin.

The police department personnel are just like Marines. I'm called when I'm needed and have to get there quick. It's like a permanent graves-registration job.

I often wonder why I've stayed at it so long. I stay, I think, because nothing makes any sense since I came back, and I got used to doing life's little dirty jobs--and I got used to being where the action is. I am, so to speak, a Corpsman in civilian life.

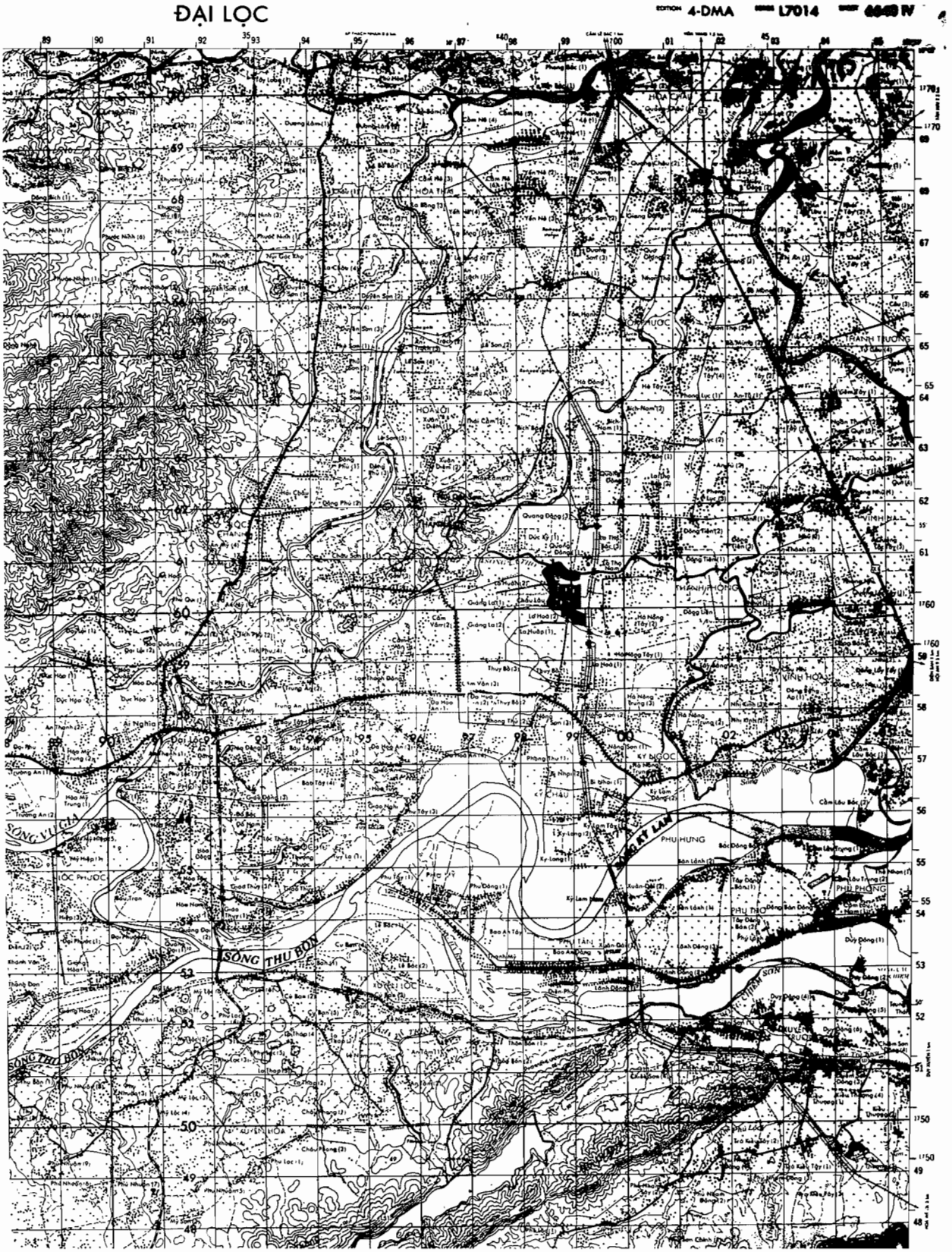
I haven't been involved in any public or private veterans things since I put my seabag away over 20 years ago. Maybe it's time. §



(Courtesy of Jack Sturiano)

Jack "Doc" Sturiano on Crow's Nest, 1969.

We have done with hope and honor
We are lost to love and truth
We are dropping down the ladder
rung by rung
And the measure of our torment
is the measure of our youth
God help us for we knew the worst
too young
--Rudyard Kipling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A Bronx Reunion in Nam

By Jim Kirk and Mike Flood

Mike: When I got to Vietnam in September of '68, I was feeling pretty strange--confused, out-of-place, and basically scared shitless. I spent the first few days in Da Nang filling sandbags. After that I was put on a truck and sent to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines area at Tu Cau Road and the MSR. There I combed the faces of the crowd looking for familiarity--but found none.

I was assigned to Hotel Company and finally issued an M-16, which I had felt naked without, but I still felt like a boot--with my combat fatigues straight out of the cleaners. On my way to the PX a familiar face from boot camp appeared on the horizon. It was James Kirk, my buddy from the Bronx, NYC, whom I had gone through boot camp with at Parris Island. After PI we had gone to ITR and BST at Camp Lejeune together, but we were separated at Camp Pendleton; I was sent to .50-caliber school at Twenty Nine Palms and Kirk went on to Vietnam.

Now, here he was 30 days later, with a fearful look on his face and leaning on crutches. I rushed over to him and said, "What the fuck happened to you?" He replied, "I got hit! We've got to get the fuck out of here--we're all going to be killed! My mother's gonna write to my congressman to get me out of here!" Then I said to myself: *Holy shit, if he's only here a month and wounded already, I'm going to be killed. Welcome to Vietnam, Mike!*

Jim: From that day on, we found God and went to mass and communion on the few occasions when we could. Leaving the compound or PPB's with a rifle in one hand and a rosary in the other, I knew why there are no atheists in foxholes!

It's now 24 years later, and Mike and I, together with our families, are still the best of buddies--and godparents to each other's children. We visit regularly and we always remember that day in Nam when we had our Bronx reunion--only now we can laugh about it! And Mom is still writing to my congressman! §



(Courtesy of Jim Kirk)

Mike Flood and Jim Kirk, H 2/1 rear in 1969

Dewayne T. Williams and the Medal of Honor

By Malcolm Creelman

This is the story of how Dewayne Williams of sniper team one (Sierra-Tango-Uniform) earned the Medal of Honor.

Five of us were sent out on the team on 16 September 1968. First platoon of Hotel Company walked us out to an area west of Cam Sa and dropped us off. The team consisted of Lance Corporal Anthony Seiber, Private First Class Malcolm Creelman, Private First Class Dewayne T. Williams, Private First Class Steve Ort, and Private Holmes, the radioman. We spent the night west of Cam Sa with no action. The next day we moved around the area west of Cam Sa looking for a nighttime place to hole up, but trying to hide in the sand dunes proved to be rather hard. By the way, that's what we were told to do, being a sniper team and all. But as I said, trying to hide in the sand dunes was a little hard, to say the least.

Late in the afternoon of the next day we moved to an area about 1000 meters south of Cam Sa and finally found a place to set up for the night. We must have done a good job, for, again, on the night of 17 September we had no action.

On the morning of 18 September, about 0800, we had movement about 150 meters south of us. Seiber and I opened up, and I think we wounded whoever it was, although we couldn't find a body. There were a lot of tunnels in the area. Lieutenant Tom Edmonds of 3rd platoon came out to see us and to ask if he could be of any help. But at the time there wasn't a lot going on, so he left (although his platoon stayed in the area the rest of the day and that night). There was a lot of movement to the south of us that day, but it was out of range.

Around dusk, we were getting ready to move to a new area, a place about 300 meters southwest of our position where there was a small cone-shaped hill. I think there was some type of temple at the base. I was sitting next to Williams--on his right--putting on my gear. I bent down to pick something up, and just then they hit us.

From then on, things happened pretty fast, and so I'm not sure of the exact order of all the things that took place. But I heard three or four rounds hit Williams, and he went down. Ort was also hit, mortally wounded. Seiber shouted "Get going!" He had taken the 79 and started putting out rounds. I guess he got off one or two before he was hit in the head and went down. I don't know how many of the enemy there were out there, but it seemed there was a platoon of them to our west. They were hitting us with rifle and 79 fire and RPG's.

Just south of us on a downhill slope, there was a small stream in heavy brush and jungle. That's where the guys with the grenades were. Things had slowed down some when Williams spoke to me. He was on his side, kind of sitting up, speaking to me. He said, "Don't let me die." That's when the grenade came in. Williams saw it, and he threw himself on it. If he hadn't done that, Seiber and I would have been killed. Williams had come from the 27th Marines only the month before, but he'd fit in well. He was easygoing and dependable, a good Marine. And 18 September was his birthday--Williams died on that hill on his nineteenth birthday.

I threw a lot of grenades down toward the stream. I am sure I got the guy that killed Williams, because I heard a scream--and then I threw three or four more just to make sure. I also put out a lot of rifle and 79 fire. The 81's put a lot of fire down there. We made contact with Captain Jones at the 2/1 area, and about

0200 a chopper came and we got out--with all the weapons and most of the equipment.

The next morning, Lt Edmonds went out to our area, and I went along as a guide. The 81's of Hotel Company had really worked the area over after we left that night, and it was wall-to-wall craters. A lot happened between the beginning of that action and the end of it.

My thanks to Lt Edmonds and his platoon for the offer he made to the CO to come help during the attack (though I didn't find out about it until 10 March 1992). My thanks also to Bob Hingston for the offer of his team that night. §



(Courtesy of Malcolm Creelman)

This is about 1500 meters south of Cam Sa, and about 2500 meters south of the battalion area. The hill in the background is where Dewayne Thomas Williams earned the Congressional Medal of Honor, 18 September 1968. This photo of Malcolm Creelman was taken during a recent return trip to Vietnam.

Going Back

By Charles E. Lively, Sr.

I was with Echo Company, Second Battalion, First Marine Division from December 1968 until April 1969. At that time, our compound was about five to ten miles south of Da Nang. It had one road coming out of it which went for maybe a mile or two and then split: If you went to the right, it went back toward Marble Mountain and Da Nang; if you kept to the left, it went towards Golf Company.

We had towers on both roads where we would have to go in squad-sized or smaller units and spend maybe three or four days, even a week. The purpose of these towers, to my understanding, was to draw enemy fire. Once we drew enemy fire, we would call in for support, either artillery, helicopters or Phantoms. We mainly just located the enemy, and then we called in support to terminate them one way or another. Every now and then we'd send out a four-man team from the tower. That was rare.

I remember that sometimes we would stand bridge duty; maybe a platoon would go to the bridge and stand guard over it. To the best of my recollection, I think the bridge that I am talking about had a village on one end of it (I think it was called Lui Kim Son). We had bunkers on the other end, and we checked the people going back and forth across the bridge to see if they had weapons or whatever. One time I was on the bridge checking people when we caught three women that were spies. We brought them into our little compound there at the bridge, and then sent them in where they found out if they were enemy spies.

I always hated to do that bridge duty, because you were always out in the open--especially when you had to walk back and forth across the bridge. The days weren't too bad, but nights were really terrible, because you couldn't see nothing or nowhere, except you and the bridge and the people around you--and those because of the bridge lights. The enemy could be out in the boonies there and take a potshot at you anytime, and you'd have no idea where he was.

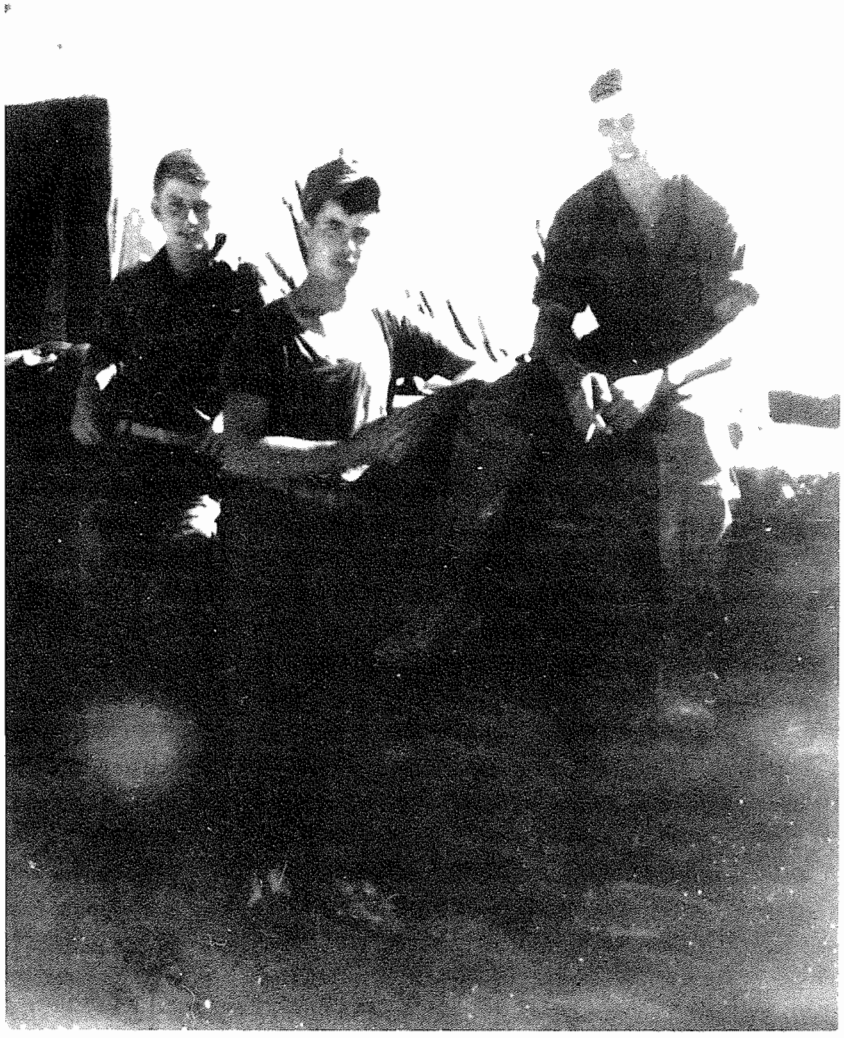
When we were at the bridge, we'd have to shoot our weapons all night long, shooting at those grass pods floating down the river. Every now and then you'd have to throw a hand grenade out in the river to make sure that the enemy wasn't under the water trying to plant a bomb on the bridge.

One day we had a patrol that went out, and I was on the bridge when they came back. They had a wounded woman with them--old Doc Taylor was carrying her, and he was exhausted, just really out of it, so I went over to give him a hand, to carry her from the bridge to the compound. I remember him giving her to me and how while I carried her I could hardly stand it--she stunk so bad. I don't know why--I know she chewed that old beetle nut (her teeth were black from it) and that stunk. I got her to where we were going to have the Doc look at her, but I remember getting so sick I couldn't stand it.

One night not too long after I was sent to Echo Company, my squad and I were in a tent, and for some reason I couldn't sleep. Then and all of a sudden I started hearing this little *poof* sound. I heard it about four or five times, so I woke up my squad leader, Guardien, and told him I thought we were getting incoming. Well, he didn't think so. He said to just forget about it, go back to bed. So I went back and lay down. And I heard it a couple more times. So I lay there, scared to death, not knowing what to do. Then I heard a couple more. So I walked over and woke up Scottie, the assistant squad leader, and I told him to listen, I was sure

we were getting incoming. About that time, a couple more rounds came in and Scottie opened the door to listen. Then he said we *were* getting incoming, and he started to holler for everybody to get up and get to the bunkers. I went up one side and he went up the other side waking people up--we definitely had incoming.

The next day when we got up and out of the bunkers, we found out that they had hit the mess hall and the officers' club and a couple of other places. We knew the only way they could have hit those was by somebody being inside and telling them exactly where the places were.



(Courtesy of Charles Lively)

Left to right: Unidentified; Lively; Scottie. Lively's feet are wrapped because of jungle rot.

Once we went to a compound a lot smaller than the main compound, platoon-sized and south of the main compound. I know it took us all day to get there. All I remember about this compound was that it was up on a knoll with a skyline, it had bunkers and concertina wire, had no latrines, and it wasn't very big. I think we kept our ammo stored in the bunker there. This little compound was named "Sugar Shack."

Our first night there we had to set up our mortar, and it started raining. So the squad leader, Guardien, and assistant squad leader, Scottie, set up the mortar. When they'd finished and come out of the rain, Guardien asked Scottie if he'd put the cover on the mortar. Scottie told him he had.

Well, about three or four hours later, after we'd all gone to sleep, we started getting incoming and AK-47 rounds in on us. It was pouring rain by that time. Guardien and Scottie went out and manned the mortar, and while they were out there, I was on top of the bunker helping spot. They started shooting the rounds from our mortar, which was a 60 mortar, and the rounds started falling short. Every time we'd shoot one, it seemed like it was coming back at us. Scottie *had* forgot to put the cover over the 60, and it had filled up with water. When they realized what had happened, they had

to take the mortar and dump the water out. After that we started making better contact with the enemy.

The attack lasted about an hour, I think, but we all stayed up the rest of the night on watch.

The next day we had to go on patrol out by a village called Leper Ville. We walked by there and then we took off to the right from the village, went through some rice paddies to hold an ambush or something of that nature.

The ambush did not turn out too well. On the way back by Leper Ville some of the guys who had been there longer than I had got tired of going past that ville and getting shot at and not being able to shoot back (because of the rules of engagement) no matter if we were getting shot, even if somebody got killed. Some of the guys just got fed up, and just as the last man was passing by the village, one of these old timers--an M-79 man--shot a round at us like it was coming from the enemy. That got us started, and all hell broke loose. They had AK-47's, SKS's; I don't know what all they had--there was so much going off at the time it happened.

I was an ammo humper then, and the squad leader hollered for me to bring ammo down to the edge of the ville. Then he told me to go back up to a little ridge where I could overlook the village to hold security. I remember shooting, and I think I got one. Then the squad leader came up and told me to change rifles with him, because his wouldn't fire. I didn't want to exchange rifles, but he made me. It turned out that he'd placed the pin in the bolt backwards, so that left me without a rifle. Three or four minutes after he left me up there with no rifle, I started throwing up real bad. So I just lay there not being able to do anything, because I had no rifle.

In about ten minutes he came back up and gave me my rifle and told me to go over to the other side of the ridge and hold rear security, that no one was there. But just as I started up the skyline, bullets started hitting all around me, especially at my feet. So I just fell to the ground and played dead.

I guess I lay there about ten minutes. I could hear the others hollering at me, and then I heard one of them say, "Well, he got it." I still didn't move. But when I did decide it was safe enough, I got up that damn hill like you wouldn't believe.

On the other side I could hear some Vietnamese beyond some trees by the rice paddies. I was all alone there, so I sat there with my rifle, just waiting for something to happen. I sat there by myself for about a half-hour or 45 minutes. Then things got quiet. Another member of the squad came sneaking down there and scared the shit out of me. I almost blew him away.

We had some tanks with us; they were way ahead of us, so we called for them to come and give us some assistance. And after a while, it got sort of quiet, just some light shooting coming from the village. Then the shit hit the fan again--the automatic weapons opened up again and we had planes, called Broncos, that came in and gave us some help.

After all that, we decided to go back towards the ocean, to the beach. From the beach we called in some support from the battleship *New Jersey*, and they sent in several rounds. Man, when those rounds went overhead you knew something went overhead.

After that a plane flew over to check things out; it flew back over and gave a report, and then we sent out a patrol, a squad to check things out. I can remember them saying that they found an underground hospital with (I think) a Russian nurse. They dug up some fresh graves which held some automatic weapons and ammunition. I remember one guy saying he was digging one grave up when he felt this little baby's hand wrapped up in paper. I remember him telling me how bad he felt about that. That made me feel real bad, too.

As far as I know, we never did hear any more from Leper Ville after that. I guess we got rid of the enemy there. We all knew they were there and that something had to be done sooner or later. That was an operation that was not supposed to happen--and even afterwards was not supposed to *have* happened. We were always told that it never happened, that it never took place. This is the first time that

I've ever talked about it. Among ourselves we just called it the Battle of Leper Ville.

On 21 December 1968 we had an operation in Booby Trap Alley. The French were there to help us, but I don't know how much help they really gave us. We left the compound and went down like we were going to Golf Company. When we got about halfway, I quess, we crossed some tank tracks off to the left. We walked I don't know for how long along those tank tracks out into the boonies. After a couple of hours we came to this skyline on both sides of us. We all got up there and came to a halt, and then some of the guys went along and probed the skylines for booby traps.

While they were doing that, I had to take my bayonet and sit up over on the skyline on the left. I took my bayonet and probed way up. People had been there before--other companies. I probed my way all the way up and down and around one hole. I remember getting it squared away and setting up there; everybody else was doing the same thing. Part of my squad was over on the other skyline.

They told us all to chow down, so I started eating and at the same time watching out over the front of me, towards the compound. But I couldn't see very far because of shrubs and brush and trees. And then as I was getting ready to eat, just ready to take a few bites, I heard the damndest explosion I'd ever heard and I remember stuff hitting me. I think that the only thing that saved me was that I had my helmet cocked back, covering my neck. I remember shrapnel and what turned out to be body parts (though I didn't know it at the time--later I found blood spots all over my back) hitting me. Our lieutenant had been walking up on the skyline, and he stepped on a 175mm round booby trap that somebody hadn't checked out.

When I heard the explosion, I ducked down and then I turned around. Just then something hit the ground, and I could see it was a Marine, the LT. I didn't know who it was at the time, but the explosion had blown off both his arms and both his legs.

We called in a medevac chopper, but there was nothing anyone could do. He died there on the spot. We wrapped him up in a poncho.

One of the guys in my squad was over there on the same skyline when the LT got blown up. I remember he was sitting there eating, sort of facing the lieutenant when the LT hit the booby trap. And when it blew him up, it blew one of his boots off with part of his foot still in it, and that boot hit the guy in his chest as he was eating. That was something.

Not too long after that we took the same trail back that we'd taken out, and--to show you how fast those little gooks were--they had booby traps set up all the way back, ones that weren't there on the way out. But on the way back there were booby traps everywhere.

I don't know what that operation was called; I doubt it was called anything--it only lasted a day.

On Christmas we were sent out on patrol. I forget where we were--I don't know if we were on a tower or were out on patrol. I remember we were set up and it was pretty quiet that night, and then all hell broke loose in the compound. They had everything shooting that night. Come to find out, they were celebrating. They had us all scared to death. I remember thinking, *What the hell are we going to do? The compound is being overrun*. We later found out that a couple of guys had got drunk and started shooting everything that moved. Next thing they knew, everybody was shooting just to celebrate.

On New Year's Eve we were sent out on just a regular patrol. We were supposed to find rockets or something, so we spent the night out in the boonies. It was raining like crazy that night, and those damn mosquitoes, they loved the rain, because they'd eat you up in the rain worse than they would any other time. We got dug in. It was dark, and we had all started to relax, except the ones that were in their foxholes taking their night watch.

I was sitting in a foxhole. Guardien came around and checked us out and then everything got quiet after that. I don't know where in the hell the artillery came from, but then somebody called artillery in on top of us.

Guardien was lying there--he was going to rest and take watch later on--and he had just taken his helmet off and laid his head on it. And he said when the artillery started going off, his helmet disappeared and he never could find it. A piece of shrapnel had knocked it out from under his head. Boy, was he lucky.

That night, too, all hell broke loose in the compound. I know on both Christmas and New Year's all hell broke loose. And while my platoon was out on patrols on both Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, the compound lit up like somebody had dropped a bomb in on the ammo bunkers.

I remember another incident when a patrol went outside the compound. It was a killer team, a four-man team; they had one radioman with them and the rest of them carried weapons. They went out just to see what they could see, and destroy whatever they needed to destroy. They went out at night, and next morning they hit a little village and they ran into something they didn't expect. There happened to be a large enemy force in that small village, and that team got the shit kicked out of them, the four of them.

Luckily they called in, so they sent out a squad. When they got there, they got in over their heads too, and they lost half of the squad. So they sent out a platoon. Well, the platoon got out there and they got the shit kicked out of them, so they had to send a company out. When the company got out there they were in *deep* shit then, so they had Echo Company stand by--we were going out next. I decided to go to one of the bunkers and watch to see what the hell was going on. And all you could do was hear a bunch of racket out there, mortars, M-79's, all kinds of automatic weapons, rifles. They told us to saddle up, get ready. Then they called in and told us they had everything under control out there, so we had to stand down. I went back to the bunker. It got quiet out there, so they called in medevac choppers. I remember a medevac chopper landing and picking up some of the wounded. And I remember watching him go, and he got up about 200 feet and got caught in a triangle of fire. The chopper started smoking, and then I saw flames coming out of it. All of a sudden it turned straight up and just took off. That chopper looked just like a rocket. I didn't know one of those medevac choppers could do that. That was just unbelievable.

When everything died down, they brought the men back in. One of the men--a blond-haired guy; I never did know his name--was missing. I noticed that I didn't see him around. So the next day I asked some of the guys about him, and they told me what happened. They said that when everything died down, three or four of them were sitting around in a little bomb crater. They were sitting there eating, resting a little bit. And they told him to stick his helmet on. He said, "Well, nothing's going on now." And they told me that just about the time he said that and was getting ready to eat something, a gook popped a cap on him. Shot him right in the head and killed him instantly.

That made me realize one thing: anybody could get dinged over there real quick.

On another operation, Echo Company had to saddle up, go outside the compound and break up into groups. They were going to send choppers in to carry us to the operation--a top-secret operation. They used medevac choppers to pick us up and chopper us in. I wasn't prepared for anything like that and it really scared me.

We got in the choppers and they lifted us off. From the air I could see out of the windows every now and then, and there was red smoke all over the place. I knew what the hell that meant. That meant a hot LZ.

The first chopper went in, and I remember him trying to get out as fast as possible. And I remember hearing him getting hit.

Then we were getting ready to come in and I kept hearing these noises, like something hitting the chopper, and I asked somebody what was that? And they said, "That's bullets hitting the chopper." One guy slumped over as we were sitting there, and I asked somebody what was wrong with him--and they said he'd just got

killed. There was nothing we could do. I mean I was scared, real scared.

When we landed and got the hell out of the choppers, we all spread out along the trench. I guess it had been a river at one time. We all got up along there and returned enemy fire. There was nothing secret about that top-secret operation, I tell you: they knew we were coming.

The squad leader came around and got some ammo for me. We had another chopper coming in and picking up some wounded, and I remember seeing that chopper getting hit with bullets; they couldn't pick up all the wounded because they were getting hit so bad. The attack lasted for a little-bit longer. This short timer--I knew him but didn't know his name--was running back away from the line, running around the other side of the line. About that time, I saw him hit the dirt and then I saw an explosion. An M-79 round had hit him on the ankle and blown his foot off. I know we all felt bad about that, because I think he only had less than seven days before he went back home. And they made him go out on that operation. I know we all really felt bad over that.

I was medevaced from 23 January 1969 to 17 March 1969. I was in the 249th Army Hosptial in Kooska, Japan. I was the only Marine on my ward with about 100 Army men. Did they ever put me through the mill! I mean, they tore me up one side and down the other. Called me everything. But I guess it was all right.

After I'd been in the hospital for about 30 days, they sent me back to Okinawa, where I was made an MP. That was an experience, let me tell you. That was something.

When I got back to my company, I learned that our compound had almost gotten overrun. Three guys had been on watch in the corner of one of the bunkers. Two of them had done their standing watch, and then while the other guy was out on his watch, those two were inside, smoking pot.

When the third guy's watch was over, he lay on the outside of the bunker, the backside, to go to sleep--the other two were still inside smoking pot. And then they fell asleep, too.

The enemy snuck through the concertina wire there on the corner bunker and cut all three men's throats. They had about a company inside the wire before anyone knew what had happened. They were shooting everybody. They blew up tents and threw hand grenades everywhere.

When the men finally got organized, they realized there was a battalion outside waiting to come in, a battalion coming over the concertina wire. One guy told me that he ran through one tent waking everybody up, telling everybody that they'd been overrun, and when he ran out the back door he saw a gook standing there with an automatic weapon. He shut the door real fast and I guess the gook got scared and ran off.

I heard a lot of other stories about that night. One whole platoon got wiped out with one hand grenade. The enemy threw the hand grenade inside a tent, and everybody inside got hurt. I guess we lost about two platoons that night, dead or wounded.

One of the guys in our platoon was a full-blooded Indian we called Chief. Some people picked on him, called him names, but I don't know that it bothered him. I never did bother him--I always just talked to him. He told me that he respected me because I treated him all right, and I said, "Well, Chief, the only thing I ever knew to call you was Chief." And he said he didn't mind me calling him Chief at all.

Once he got me off to the side and told me about something that had happened, that'd I'd already heard about, but he wanted to tell me what really happened. He'd got into some liquor one night, and he lined up two of the guys out of my squad and I think the first sergeant, too. He was ready to kill them all. I mean he had these M-16's turned on full-automatic and he *would* have killed them, but they talked him out of it. But the Chief was a good guy, and I don't think they court-martialed him or anything. (That first sergeant was a rough, rough guy; they fragged his bunker a couple of times because he was such an asshole about inspections and stuff.)

As far as I'm concerned, Chief was one

of the bravest men that I have ever seen. Once I had to go into Da Nang to see a doctor, and on the way back this jeep stopped to pick me up and the driver had one of these little trailers behind him with some mail and some ammo in it. He also had another rider besides me.

When we were about a mile from the compound, we got ambushed. Rounds started hitting the jeep. We were the only vehicle on the road at the time, so the driver pulled off, and we all jumped out--the driver, myself and the other guy. But the driver and the other guy didn't get their dumb rifles, like dummies, so I was the only guy with a rifle. I couldn't find out where the fire was coming from, so I finally told the driver to run up to his jeep to get his rifle. I said I needed some help. By then I could spot where they were shooting from, so I returned fire to cover him, and when I did that they lit in on me. I told the driver to go ahead and call for help. So he ran to the jeep and called in.

I quess it was no longer than five minutes before rat patrol was there. Rat patrol is usually two or three men in a jeep with a machine gun mounted on the back of it on a post. And of all people to send out, it had to be Chief on the gun at that time. We were still getting fired upon as they came up the road, and, man, I mean to tell you, when those guys found out where that fire was coming from, they took out across that goddamn area across the road, and you could see that jeep just jumping, and old Chief laying down a pattern of fire like you wouldn't believe. He was just hanging on and putting rounds in there. I mean, they ran that jeep right up to where the enemy was, and that was the end of that. They got what they were sent out to get, and then they came over to check us out to see if we were all right. Then they escorted us back to the compound.

And that's when I learned to respect the rat patrol and Chief. He's a real brave man.

I remember we were out in the boonies one day--I think it was a squad-sized patrol, just a regular patrol. They called in and told us that there was a plane that had been shot down. And they told us the area it was in, so that's the way we headed. We were nearby, so on our way to the plane, we could see it; it had crash-landed--it wasn't blown up or anything. It was a mail plane, and that pissed us all off. So we went to where it was and a fire team, which was a killer team, happened to already be in there at the time. They'd got to them before we did. I remember the pilots telling us how glad they were to see us Marines, us grunts, that they hadn't have much respesct for us until then.

About that time, the enemy (who were still around) saw the that the plane had crashed, so they went over and blew it up. We got the pilots out of there, but that was something--the first time I ever saw a plane get shot down.

I'm still laughing about something that happened. One night out on patrol, we'd got all set up and I was sitting on this little mound--I quess it was a grave; it was a round thing. I sat there on watch in the middle of the night, not being able to see my hand in front of my face, it was so dark. And I kept hearing something--pebbles--hitting the ground. I got my squad leader, Guardien, and Guardien got Scottie up there. And Scottie finally heard it, too.

I got tired of it, and the next time I heard a pebble thrown, I threw one back. I scratched around and found some more pebbles and threw them back.

I talked to the squad leader about it again, and about that time the lieutenant showed up and I told him--I showed him--what was going on. I picked up a few pebbles and threw them into the dark, and a couple came back. We knew there was something out there.

They finally sent two men out, and they found out it was damn rock apes up there playing games with me in the middle of the night. All the stories I heard about rock apes I believe now. They always told us that if you throw something at rock apes, they throw something twice as big back. Believe it. It's true.

On 18 April 1968, which happened to by my birthday, I had to stand bunker duty. Everything was all right. Things got dark and I had to put my time in at the bunker, watching outside the compound.

It got real dark and I couldn't see anything; I could barely see the tree lines. I was sitting there just looking out, and all at once I heard a crack. (There's nothing like a single-shot rifle--I guess it was an SKS.) My head was sticking up above the sandbags and the bullet hit the sandbags three inches below where my head was. When it hit the sandbags, it made the loudest crack I'd ever heard. It scared me to death, and I started looking all over my body to make sure that I wasn't shot. I finally got control of myself and called it in.

Then the lieutenant, the sergeant and several other people came along, and I told them to pop up a pop-up--but they never did. I was wanting to see the sniper while he was still there. But those snipers are fast--they disappear as soon as they pop off a round.

About two hours later I'd got over it and things had started to calm down--everybody was back doing what they'd been doing--when I heard the damnedest racket. It went *schwoo-schwoo*, real fast. And I didn't know what to think about that, so I turned around and looked back across to the other side of the compound, and I could see a flash of light--and that was it: when I saw the flash of light I heard the *schwoo* sound.

I counted 11 of them, 11 rockets less than a hundred yards from our compound going off, and all of them hit Da Nang. It wasn't long and they had a squad out there checking it out, but they didn't find anything.

That was my last night there. I got medevaced to the States that night. I guess that that was my sendoff. The first night I landed in Da Nang and was there along the airfield trying to get a unit, 11 rockets hit the airfield. And my last night in Nam (at Da Nang) 11 rockets hit Da Nang again. What can I say?

On my way home, we landed in several different places, and I started hearing these things about people throwing things and saying things to us vets. I really felt bad about that.

When I got to Bethesda Naval Hospital, I remember there was a girl--I think she was a Red Cross worker--and when they wheeled me in on the gurney, she bent over me and thanked me and gave me a kiss on my cheek and gave me one of those little key chains--it has to do with a club or something, has this little medal on it. Of all the things that I received when I was in the service for being over in Vietnam, I appreciate that more than I do all of the rest.

This is the first time that I've told anybody about any of this. I guess there's some of it I still can't tell or write.

When I was in the hospital recuperating, for some odd reason I wanted to go back to Vietnam. I really don't know why. I don't know if it was because I felt guilty for leaving all my comrades behind--my friends, my buddies, the people I trusted and who trusted me. About the time I was able to go back (I had really decided I was going to go back), they started giving all of us short timers discharges, what they called "early-outs."

And then the war was over.

I guess I still feel a little guilty over that--for not going back. I don't know why. §

"[Marines] often . . . were not so well supplied as other troops. But a Marine still considered himself a better soldier than anybody else, even though nine-tenths of them didn't want to be soldiers at all. . . ." --Ernie Pyle

KIA's and WIA's

By Robert J. Shand

As a Corpsman, KIAs and WIAs were and are especially important to me. I remember several deaths and woundings in particular.

Six or eight weeks in country we (2nd platoon, Hotel) were on a routine patrol from a "berm" position five or six clicks inland from Marble Mountain. We were in three columns, spread thin, when we were hit hard from our exposed right flank at point-blank range. The man behind me and the one ahead both took small-arms hits on the first bursts. Both died before they hit the ground.

I was called ahead two positions to tend to a gunshot wound, a compound fracture of the left forearm, but my partner was already there, so I continued to the next call. Our right flank column's point had been shot in the head, dying immediately, but the next man back panicked and continued to call for a Corpsman. I arrived in time to see the man who was calling taken out by the direct hit of an RPG. I was pinned down in a hole for what seemed like hours (ten minutes, maybe), then the battle was over.

We were ordered back 100 meters, and jet support came in with rockets, bombs, and napalm. As the napalm hit, we noticed we had left the wounded Marine with the broken arm where he had fallen. Another Marine ran to get him and brought him back. My memory blurs here. My partner-Corpsman lost it and had to be restrained. Choppers came in, medevac and ammo re-supply; tanks and tracs were on the scene.

In hindsight, I can see that the VC ambushed us and left in about five minutes. The remaining three to four hours of the "battle" was us blowing smoke at ghosts. We found *no* enemy traces. They were gone before we fired our first shots.

Of the 19 Marines and two Corpsmen on the patrol that day, nine were dead and six medevaced by chopper (four later died). The four remaining included the second looie, two 0311's and myself.

The remainder of my hitch with H 2/1 was remarkably uneventful compared to the above action. The one event that sticks in my mind from the last months involved a death by "accidental discharge."

We were a squad-sized outpost at the first tower position on the road south through Marble Mountain. Night patrols and ambushes were sent out every night, to return after sunup. On the return of one patrol, a Marine was clearing his .45 sidearm (he carried an M-79) when it discharged. It wasn't until almost an hour later that it was discovered the round had hit and killed a sleeping Marine within the compound. One of the reasons no one noticed was that there had been a fight going on between the Marine who had recovered the wounded man during the air strike discussed above and the Marine who had the accidental discharge. The first Marine argued that the second had attempted to kill him. A fistfight ensued, distracting everyone from the fact a Marine had been killed by the discharge.

This death is important to me for one reason. I had become so callous to death I didn't feel anything when I found out about it. This death "ain't no big thing." I died emotionally that day. §

Booby Traps

By Roger Goss

The following is a transcription of a newspaper article written by Roger for his hometown paper while he was serving in Vietnam.

Viet Cong booby traps. Sometimes they seem to be everywhere. Some are deadly; some only maim. Some are primitive and crude, others are ingenious and sophisticated. They are all dreaded.

Aside from the injuries they inflict, they are also a nemesis to the nerves. Sometimes you think each step may bring the blinding flash, noise and pain--or the indescribable black nothingness.

The crude VC traps are merely Stone Age animal traps set for man. The Chinese man trap is a deep pit with sharpened stakes at the bottom to impale a man who might step through the camouflaged covering. The spikes are called punji stakes and are usually covered with a crude poison: human defecation. Deadfalls, weighted platforms with punji stakes, are suspended above a path. Trip the wire strung across the path and one falls on you.

The Malay gate is a strong sapling bent back into the brush alongside a trail. Spring the string across the trail and the sapling with punji stakes snaps into you.

The trap may be just a small hole filled with downward-pointing barbed stakes. Step into it and you're caught and can't get out. Then there are the cross bows and plain old bear traps. . . .

One of the VC favorites is to insert a grenade into a tin can. Tie a wire to the grenade and stretch and tie it to something across the path. Then pull the safety pin on the grenade. A soldier catches the wire on his foot, pulling the grenade out of the can, letting the spoon fly--and the grenade explodes. Or they may suspend a mortar round in a tree. A wire is tripped, allowing the round to fall to the ground and explode on impact. A mine may be electrically detonated (by a VC hidden at a safe distance) when it would do the most good.

The entrances to Charlie's caves are especially dangerous. If the bottom is not booby-trapped, there may be deadly cobras or bamboo vipers [attached] by their tails to the ceiling and anxious to strike at anything entering the cave.

The Viet Cong know where to set the traps to take advantage of American traits: [in] places of comfort (a shady spot on a trail); [in or around] objects of value or curiosity; or [on] a short cut through the jungle. And they are experts at camouflage. A trip wire may be only a vine.

The only defense is extreme caution. Watch every step. Carefully inspect each thing you [are about to] touch. Step in the tracks of the man in front of you.

Try to second guess Charlie. If I were Charlie, where would I put a booby trap?

Sometimes even the greatest care isn't enough. Sometimes all you can really do is hope. §

"We were told, upon leaving our native land, that we were going to defend the sacred rights of our citizens . . . [Because this] was true, we did not hesitate to shed our share of blood, to sacrifice our youth and hopes. We regretted nothing, but whereas we over here are inspired by this thinking, I am told that [at home] factions and conspiracies abound . . . that many in their uncertainty and confusion lend a willing ear to the terrible temptations of relinquishment and vilify our actions. . . .

"I beg you to quickly reassure me that our fellow citizens understand us, support us . . . If it should be otherwise, if we should leave our bleached bones on these desert sands for nothing, then beware the anger of the legionnaires. . . ."

--Marcus Flavinius, in a letter to a cousin, Tertullus of Rome (2nd Century AD)

With Fox in Nam

Norman W. Crowe, Jr.

15 July 1969. Operation Pipestone Canyon was my first helo assault, plus being my first hot LZ. The day turned into a long, hot day of many brief firefights, including a frontal assault on an NVA machine-gun bunker by 1st squad (three KIA, some WIA, including "Doc Crazy"), and a ten minute, or so, firefight between a tank from C Company, 1st tanks, G Company, and F Company--shooting at each other and the NVA shooting at everybody. *No one was hurt!*

October 1969. The company, minus 3rd platoon, was located on Trash Hill (the old 3rd Amtrac CP) during the month of October. One evening my platoon was assembling and getting ready for an all-night ambush in the No Name Island area. Most of the platoon were bullshitting and getting ready to leave the wire. I was standing next to Frank Chavez, one of the platoon's machine gunners. The platoon commander gave the order to "lock and load," so Frank attempted to load his .45-cal. pistol. He grabbed the slide of the weapon, pulled it to the rear, and released it. When the slide returned home, the weapon fired. As the round proceeded to pass through the meaty part of Frank's left hand, the rest of the platoon hit the deck.

Frank was standing up, with a surprised look on his face, looking from the .45 in his right hand to his bloody left hand, and then he said, "Son of a bitch"--with no pain in his voice.

The rest of the platoon was in shock. Old "Doc Crazy" jumped up to administer aid to the wounded Marine. He whipped out a first aid dressing from his aid bag and placed the plastic wrapper in his mouth to rip it open. As Doc Crazy reached Frank, he threw the first aid dressing in the sand, and began to place the plastic wrapper on Frank's bloody hand. In a calm voice, Frank said, "Hey Doc, I think you got the wrong part." Doc was more shook up about the incident than Frank was.

Frank was lucky, the .45 round blew a piece of meat away from the heel of his hand, but there was no real damage except for a sore hand and a pride bruised because he had shot himself.

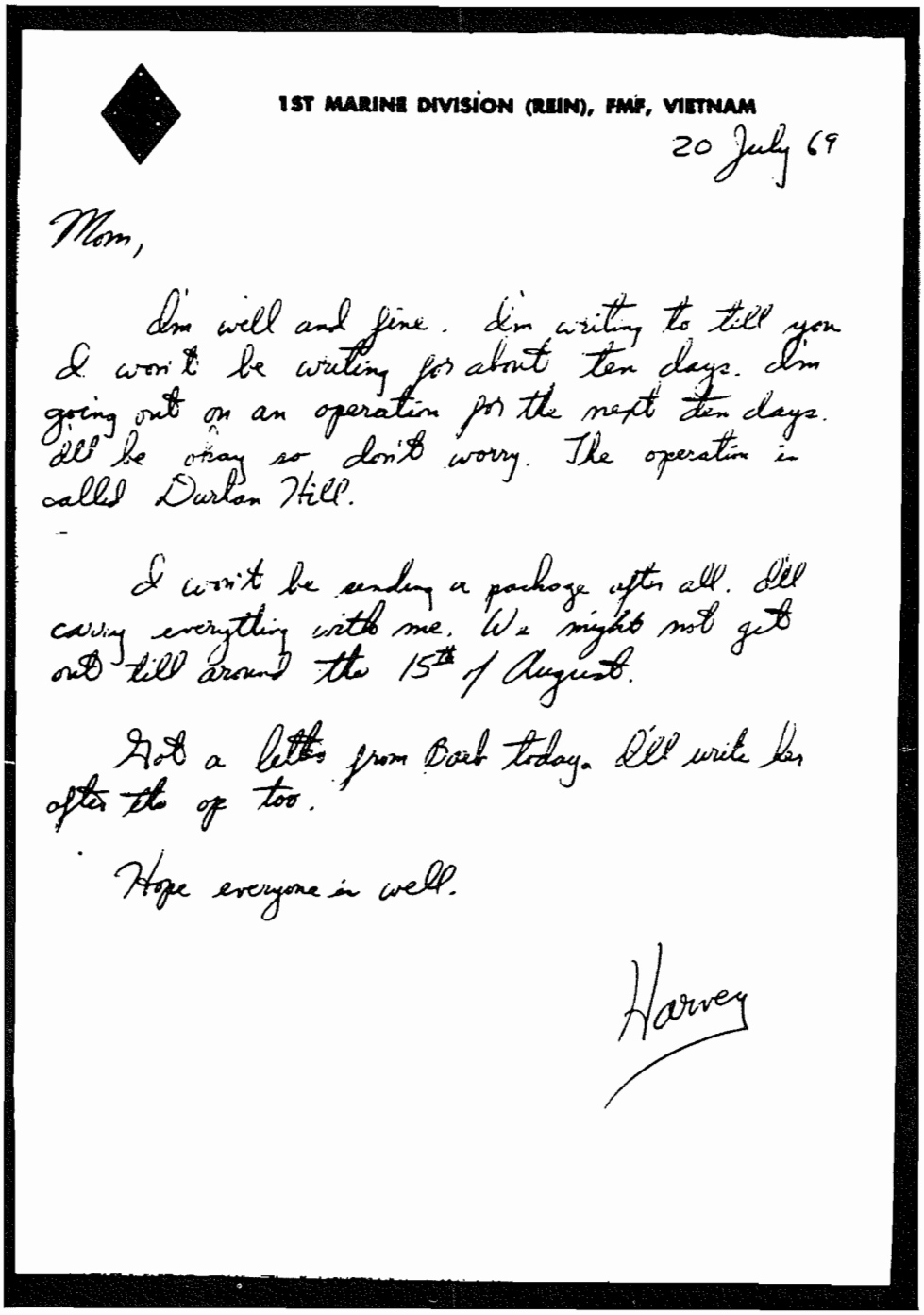
December 1969. One night while my squad was on an ambush, we heard an explosion on Fox Hill. After returning to Fox Hill after the ambush, we learned that four men had been killed and two others wounded. Some of the company heads had been smoking dope in a bunker, and one of the men from 1st platoon pulled the pin on a grenade and let the spoon fly. One of the men that was killed by that asshole was my friend.

During the week before Christmas 1969, we lost 20 men at Fox Hill, mostly to booby traps and the incident in a bunker. I think six or seven were killed and the rest were wounded.

22 January 1970. While on a land-clearing operation, we were providing security for Marine and Army engineer companies. The engineers built a berm, and then they stayed inside and left us outside.

On the night of 22 January '70, our defensive line was hit by an explosion, and the firefight was on. After ten minutes or so it stopped. We suffered one KIA and one WIA. We found nothing but blood trails--no NVA bodies.

The really sad thing was that in this firefight Corporal Beatty was killed by a 40mm round from the NVA. I knew Beatty, and I really felt bad about his death. He was a very nice kid, and he only had 22 days left in country. §



1ST MARINE DIVISION (REIN), FMF, VIETNAM

20 July 69

Mom,

Im well and fine. Im writing to tell you I won't be writing for about ten days. Im going out on an operation for the next ten days. Ill be okay so don't worry. The operation is called Durham Hill.

I won't be sending a package after all. Ill carry everything with me. We might not get out till around the 15th of August.

Got a letter from Barb today. Ill write her after the op too.

Hope everyone is well.

Harvey

(Courtesy of Harvey Weishuhn)

LETTER HOME

This letter is fairly typical of the kind of letter written home before going out on an operation--in this case Operation Durham Peak.

Notes of Service with 2/1

By Paul J. Brown

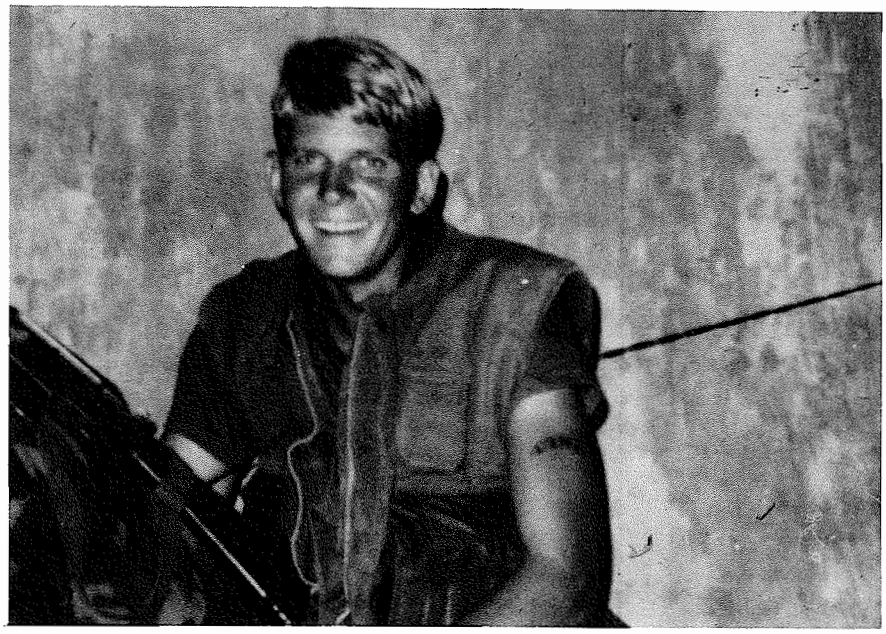
I served as an infantry Marine with G 2/1 from early January 1969 until July 1969, at which time I was sent to Scout Sniper School in Da Nang and transferred to Scout Sniper Platoon, H&S Company, 1st Marine Regiment. I served with scout-snipers until January 1970 and returned home upon completion of my tour. I received an early out in Atlanta, Georgia (my hometown) in February 1970. My discharge was honorable and my rank was lance corporal.

I was wounded 2 March 1969 while on a volunteer five-man recon patrol near the village of Cam Sa. Our patrol was ambushed upon leaving the village while I was on point. Lance Corporal Clyde Ganzy, the squad leader, was killed in this ambush by a gunshot wound in the forehead. Clyde was my friend and a brave and quiet man. He was from Tallahassee, Florida. He displayed coolness and courage at all times.

I spent about three weeks recovering from a gunshot wound and shrapnel wounds (from a hand grenade) at the USAF hospital at Cam Ranh Bay and returned to G 2/1 at the end of March.

I participated in Operation Pipestone Canyon in approximately April-May 1969. We had many casualties during that operation, as 2/1 was point battalion. I cannot remember all their names (blocked out, I suppose). We had at least ten KIA's from friendly fire and many more from booby traps and firefights. This was a very rough operation.

After that, my tour was fairly routine (rice paddy patrols, etc.) until I left for snipers. Since my activities with scout snipers were assigned by Headquarters First Regiment and involved other units than 2/1, my 2/1 story ends here. §



(Courtesy of John Davis)

John Davis back from Operation Pipestone Canyon on Go Noi Island, 1969.

The Ultimate Hand-Me-Down

By Michael J. Sadlowski

*M*arines--and just about everybody else, too--knows that we usually got hand-me-downs. I still get a laugh when I think about one real clear example of this in Vietnam.

A few days after my arrival at 2/1, I was put on a strange work party. The sergeant handed me and two other guys toothbrushes and said, "Let's go." We didn't know what we could have done to deserve it, but we thought we were in a world of shit.

The sergeant led us to the back of the company office, where cans of all kinds of soda and beer sat in the sand. They were filthy. The sergeant explained that the chaplain had scrounged them up, and we were to clean them up--brush off all the dirt and fungus. We thought he was going to give them to the local villagers.

One Sunday after we had been out in the bush a couple of weeks, here came the re-supply chopper. After passing out the C-rations, I was handed two semi-clean cans of beer and one of soda.

I did learn one thing, and to this day I am still grateful for it--and I get a kick out of showing my friends what to do when the cold beer runs out: That old "roll the can on a block of ice" still comes in handy. §



(Courtesy of Jim Kirk)

BEER BUST IN CAMP

"The fourth guy from the left is Michael A. Lackner (wearing bush hat), who was killed in action in the Dodge City area on 15 July 1969. He was from Deer Park, Long Island, New York." --Jim Kirk

All the Hell

By Landar G. McGill

The day I got to 2/1 I was an M-60 gunner. We went on Operations Pipestone Canyon and Durham Peak. Our captain was a man from Dune, North Carolina, named Captain White. The second week we were in the rear, we were getting hit every night. On watch one night I was awakened by the shock of the lieutenant hitting me on the head with a rifle. He said, "If I ever catch you again, I'll kill you." I was given the nickname "Sleepy."

I finally got into a rifle platoon as a tunnel rat. And when "Bowler" got killed in Dodge City, I took over his M-79. I took Corporal Olsen's job as squad leader, Little John from Boston, "Bear," took over my M-60, and Corporal Rodriquez from Texas was our M-60 squad leader. My point man was Lance Corporal Frank Turner from Georgia. I would always leave an ambush site just before the sun came up. Little John would put ten M-79 rounds into the direction we were heading.

Once I heard a gun go off, and Lance Corporal Buddy Stowe from Gastona, North Carolina, came up and said, "Corporal Gardner just blew off his firing finger." I called the LT. He told me to tell Gardner that he was now a lance corporal.

After all the hell, I was finally medevaced with battle fatigue. §



(Courtesy of Alan Titleman)

"THE ONLY GOOD PART OF A HOT AND TIRING DAY"
--Harvey Weishuhn

"During May, June, and July of 1969, 2/1 was in the bush non-stop, except for a few days between Operations Pipestone Canyon and Durham Peak. We spent maybe four days in our battalion area, which is where this picture was taken. The men earned every beer on that table. My tour ended on 26 July 1969 when part of Hotel Company was ambushed twice that morning. This was one battle we lost. We had many KIA and wounded, one of which was myself."
--Alan Titleman

From May to November

By Bruce R. Janis

I served as an FO, attached to Fox Company from May until November of 1969. During that period I was involved in Operations Pipestone Canyon and Durham Peak, not to mention a number of smaller operations which were nameless, and a whole bunch of patrols and ambushes.

My introduction to the field occurred during Pipestone Canyon. I choppered out to Fox while it was taking incoming. What makes this story unusual is that the company was in the middle of a graveyard which must have stretched for miles. From the air it looked like a maze. Because of the high-water table, the graves were built above ground with pathways between them. One spooky place to start out. Or as one grunt told me, "Welcome to Vietnam, Marine."

A few weeks later, the company was operating on the southern border of Go Noi Island when a recon outpost radioed us that a VC unit had seen us coming and had hidden on a small island near the shore. At first we had our doubts, as small-arms fire drew no response. But as one platoon crossed the shallow estuary and began searching for them, the VC popped up like rabbits. There was little return fire, as the VC had evidently stashed most of their weapons. The rest of the company became spectators on the riverbank and directed those combing the island. This went on for probably half an hour.

As an FO, I had no chance to direct any artillery fire, so I just watched. I did get a little action when one of the 81mm FO's spotted a refugee who had swum the river and hidden in a small cave. We shot him several times when he tried to jump at us with a live 60 mortar round in his hand.

The final count was a dozen or so VC KIA's and about the same number of wounded and uninjured. Many of them were nurses who had been heading towards frontline VC units. A strongbox full of poor quality VC money was recovered and samples distributed to any who wanted them.

I ended up in several shootouts, but this was the only one in which I was able to sit and root for our side during the action.

Months later, again on a nameless operation, Fox was ambushed and had several dead and wounded down within feet of a bunker hiding VC. An assault killed what we thought were all the VC. When the shooting had stopped, everyone crowded around the bunker, and one of the grunts borrowed my .45 to check it out. He jumped in and popped out about as quickly. There were several VC still inside, and they were very much alive.

I tossed in a Thermit grenade, and the heat soon caused activity. The first VC tried to run for it, but only got a few feet. The second tried to surrender and stood up waving a dirty rag, while yelling, "*Chieu hoi*!" I was about 25 feet from him. His surrender didn't work, and he was shot to doll rags in front of me. Amazing sight. He just stood there while parts flew off! The third waited a minute and also tried to surrender. Someone yelled, "Don't shoot Charlie," and he was taken alive. In retrospect, Charlie Company had joined us, and someone had been afraid they would be hit by our fire if the third VC was gunned down. Luck was with him that day. Because of our casualties, there was little sympathy for Charlie's decision to surrender when he ran out of ammo.

On Durham Peak, we had been stuck on a high ridgeline. It was so steep and narrow, Charlie's mortars couldn't hit us. I dug a foxhole the first night and every day kept

digging it deeper. By the time we left there five days later, the foxhole was deep enough for me to stand up in and barely look over the edge, and I'm six feet, seven inches.

We were also supposed to be supplied by the Army. You can guess what happened. No chow, no water, no ammo, nothing. Made for a miserable operation.

Two incidents come to mind which occurred while Fox was guarding Tu Cau bridge. I was in the OP and observed a group of armed men sneak into a grove of bamboo trees. I called the TOC to ensure they were not friendlies and was told no one was in the area. An OV-10 also checked it out and I directed 105mm fire onto the grove. A "cease fire" quickly came over the radio.

An ARVN platoon had decided to reroute their patrol and lie low for a while. My rounds evidently reduced them by nearly half their strength.

In the second incident, the VC sneaked a dozen 122mm rockets, aimed at Da Nang, within a couple hundred meters of the compound. They were screened by bamboo and no one knew they were there--not until they fired off the rockets about midnight. They went right over the OP and some of the Marines up there 40 feet in the air were sure they were the target. Evidently one almost jumped before he was restrained.

Those 122's made a hell of a racket. To make things worse, it was SOP for all nearby artillery units to automatically fire on the observed firing position. We were just recovering from the 122's when three or four batteries dumped their rounds on or near the compound. Only one bunker was hit and no one hurt--and I managed to stop the rounds after only one volley.

The next morning, a patrol recovered the only casualty, a dead duck. There weren't even any blood trails. Charlie had gotten clean away.

After I left Fox company, I was reassigned to the S-2 shop at 11th Marines Headquarters. I took out the first IOD (integrated observation device) team in country. The IOD was a laser rangefinder coupled with a NOD and a pair of ship's binos. What made it great was it made it possible to get first-round hits. While with Fox, I'd had to adjust my rounds onto the target. Charlie didn't always wait for me to hit him and would *didi* as quickly as his Ho Chi Minh's would carry him. With the IOD I just ordered fire-for-effect and the results were gratifying. We even had the 1st Marine Division CG fly to our OP on Hill 37 for a demonstration. He called in a fire mission and was visibly upset by the delay in "rounds out." After that, if we didn't receive our first rounds within five minutes, he had to be notified of the reason why! There were eventually six teams in operation, alternating between forward compounds and recon outposts.

This piece started off being a short one but just seems to have grown and grown. Once you start putting the words down on paper, you remember more and find it difficult to stop. §



(Courtesy of Al Schaudt)

Left to right: Dan Kimbro; Al Schaudt; Don Pirtle. October 1969, north of Da Nang, first platoon, Fox Company.

Thoughts of a Platoon Commander

By David Siff

I volunteered for the Marine Corps in 1968, and I assumed that I would go to Vietnam. My view was that you served if called. And the call was out.

When I got to Vietnam, I was still full of hope for the sacrifices that I and a lot of my friends were making. But very quickly I realized that the enemy was willing to sacrifice more than we were. And you cannot make an agrarian society interested in fighting for democracy when its people are trying to feed themselves from day to day.

In Vietnam, I was a platoon leader, and as such my responsibility was for my men, for their safety and health--not just in combat, but all the time. For example, when I first got there, it was the rainy season. That meant that there was a standing order that I had to look at every man's feet every day to make sure that trench foot wasn't developing.

I was on duty 24 hours a day, almost every single day I was there, and I was paid about $400 a month. (After Vietnam I played football on a Marine football team. I was on duty about four hours a day, and I was making about $800 a month. I found this very amusing.)

A platoon was supposed to have about 45 to 50 men in it. In actual fact, I usually had about 30. In the service at any given time, you have the sick, the lame, the lazy, and guys in transit to and from the unit. And there were guys on R&R. You had guys with pay problems that had to go back to the rear. You had people in trouble, and people in school.

My unit was mostly in what would be called stationary positions. We were in an area of sand dunes and rice paddies--a lot of dunes and then swamp where the rice paddies were. Further along the river there were jungle thickets. About a month or two after I got there, they brought bulldozers in and plowed those down. One morning there would be a nice forest, and the by the next night we would be lucky to find wood bigger than a matchstick.

One of the reasons they did this was there were mines and booby traps in that area. The bulldozers would hit those mine fields and it was like they were riding over popping corn, just going *pop, pop, pop, pop*. And it wouldn't hurt the bulldozers at all.

I once saw a bulldozer hit an eight-inch naval gunshell, and the explosion didn't even dent the blade. Two guys on the bulldozer got concussions. One was bleeding from the ears; he was unconscious. The other guy was stunned, and all the explosion did was stall the bulldozer. They medevaced those two guys, and another guy got on the bulldozer and drove it away.

In that area, my platoon was doing what was called anti-rocket patrol. This was south of the air base at Da Nang; we were guarding the southern door of the Marble Mountain Air Facility, and the North Vietnamese or VC would try to rocket the base to make the military cost for us as high as possible. When you blow up a plane, it does a lot more economic damage than killing five troops. So the enemy was constantly trying to shell the air base with rockets, mortars, that kind of thing.

We would patrol to try to deny the enemy the opportunity to set up their rockets. We patrolled mostly at night, when it was very dark. Sometimes it was difficult to see your hand in front of your face. Sometimes you would have moonlight.

You didn't get an evening weather report, because the enemy could listen to that, too. So you had to determine for yourself what the weather was going to be--whether it was going to be clear, or cloudy, whether it was going to rain, when the moon was going to

come up or go down, and at what stage it was going to be. You did not want to be walking around in the open in a full-moon silhouette.

You had a very earthy orientation in the bush, a very earthy existence. You were always glad to see the sun come up--not because you were safer, but because you could at least *feel* safer.

We were a platoon largely separate from our company. We basically camped out for six months, just walking around looking for contact. We usually didn't find it. A lot of the contacts we did have were quick, hit-or-miss contacts. A firefight would start, a lot of rounds would go off in about 30 seconds, and then everything was quiet. And nobody could find anyone.

At that time in the war the enemy was not attacking the air base. I saw rockets launched a couple of times, but they were not launched in my area. But each night we were supposed to go out on patrol, set up an ambush, wait for the enemy and try to stay awake.

We believed that the enemy was largely underground, in underground tunnels. And as long as the colonel wasn't on our butts about finding them, we weren't that interested. My perception was that the most important thing was getting everyone out alive, in one piece.

We were human mine sweepers. We got very good at walking with a point stick and feeling for foot traps that could blow your ankle off, take a leg off.

Once one of my squads got ambushed, right in front of me. We were up on the sand dunes looking over the rice paddies. The squad was going out for the night ambush, and all you could see were tracers going in all directions. And we couldn't help because we couldn't tell who was what.

One night when some troops of a Vietnamese company were next to ours, they happened to walk their ambush into the same place as ours. Luckily we knew. We told our guys not to shoot, and they told theirs to withdraw. One Vietnamese blew himself up because he was holding a hand grenade with the pin out, and he forgot to put the pin back in.

We did get some time off, for R&R. One time I had been 90 days straight in the field, without a break, and the battalion commander came out and said, "How come your hair is so long, Marine?" And I said, "Well, sir, last time I was in the rear I got a haircut and haven't been since." And he said, "How long is that?" And I said, "Three months." His jaw dropped and two days later we were on R&R. And we all got haircuts.

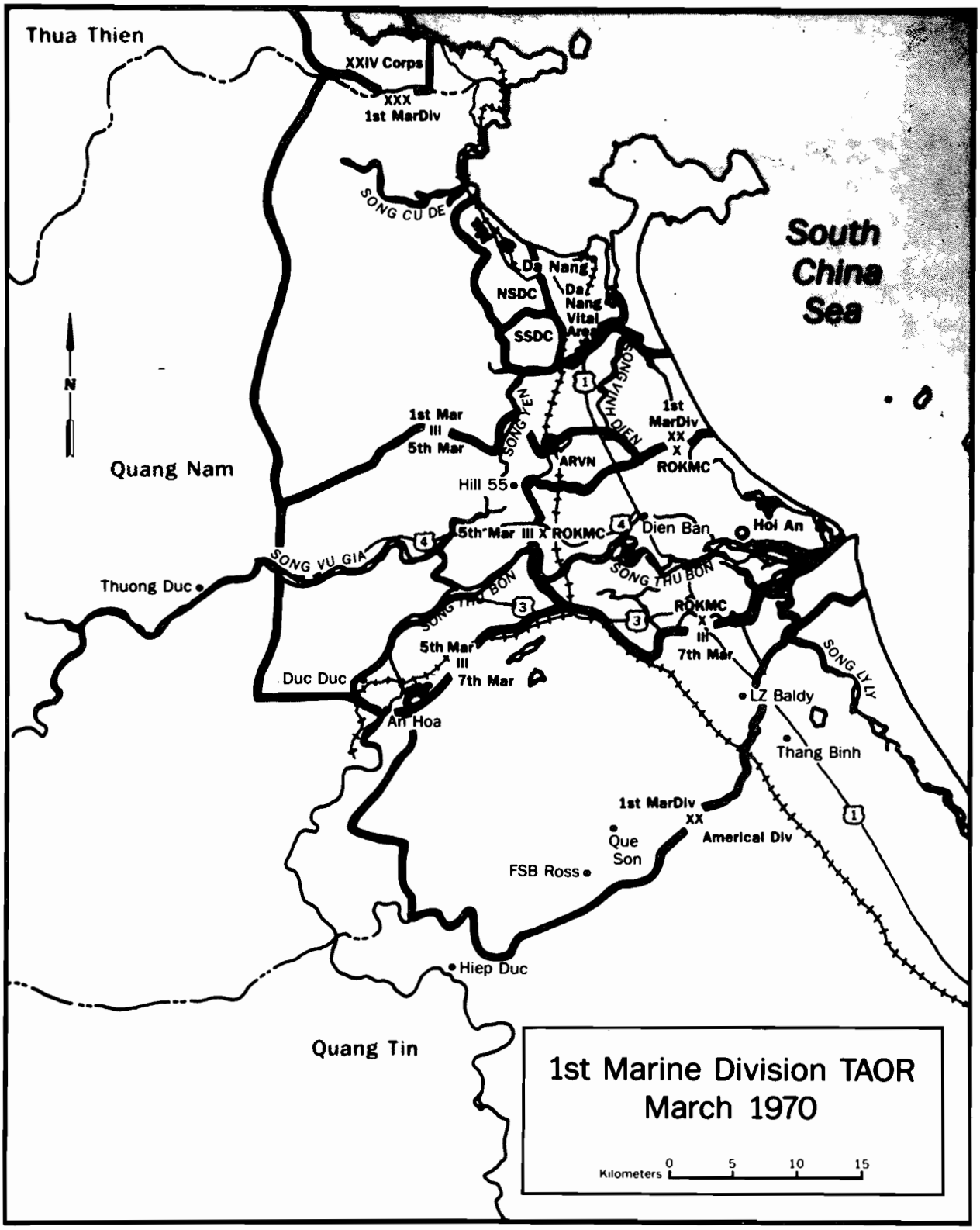
I didn't make many friends in Vietnam. Friendships were shattered there--by wounding, by death. And I was a platoon commander. The entire time I was in Vietnam I was alone with my men in the bush, the jungle, or the field. I had one good friend who was a platoon commander in another company. When I got bored and had nothing to do, I'd go up on the radio net and listen to what he was doing. But you very rarely conducted any socially oriented business over the radio. The radio was for calling medevacs or trying to resolve some other problem.

Today I am not in actual contact with any of my troops from Vietnam--most of them live too far away. But I feel spiritually in touch. I can say that I benefitted from my experience in the war, from what I learned from it. I learned a lot about myself, a lot about other people, and a lot about the world. §

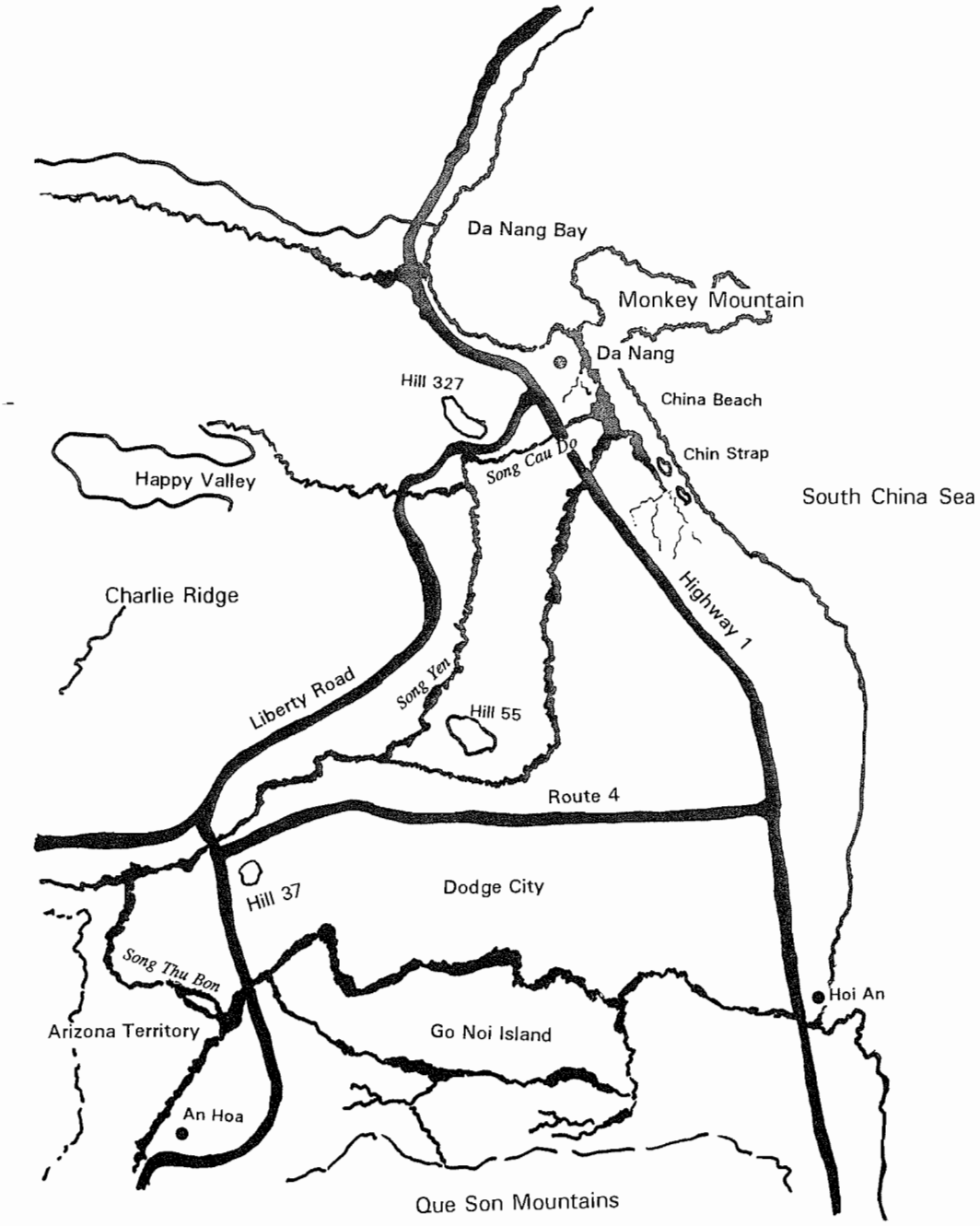


(Courtesy of David Siff)

David Siff (on right) with Lance Corporal Valles of first platoon, Fox Company. Marble Mountain area.



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)



(Hand-drawn after a map contributed by Pat Morris)

DA NANG AND THE AN HOA BASIN

Short and Painful

By James H. McAuley, Jr.

I was brought up in Boston, Massachusetts, and found the Crotch from there. My family still lives on the South Shore. I'm in prison right now, and will be for a few more years.

My experience in the Nam with Golf 2/1, 3rd platoon, Bravo squad was short and painful. I arrived in country in February of '69, around the middle of the month, and left the first week in June of '69 with a shattered arm. No big deal; I have full use of the arm now.

While in Nam, I walked point all the time. One time we got fire from a tree line. We were on a paddy dike; stupidly I hit the dike on the wrong side. Was in the middle of a firefight--my guys on one side of the ditch firing into the tree line, the gooks firing at us, and I'm in a ditch in the middle. What a trip--didn't get hit, but I don't know why not. It's funny as hell now, but it wasn't then.

In late April of '69 we had just set in when Sergeant Reese said, "Let's check this area out." Six of us dropped our gear and started out. All I had with me was my 16 and about ten magazines. So we cruised the area, me at point, when these three NVA broke from cover and started running. *Yay! We got ya now!* We gave chase. Came into a desert-type area, all sand. I was way ahead of everyone else. I was shooting on the run. Every once in a while I'd stop and aim. Hit the gook at least five or six times dead in the back, and he was still running.

I was pissed off by then, could see the blood spurting out his back onto his khaki shirt. I heard rounds zing past me, and I thought of the guys behind me. That rice-propelled zipperhead finally fell about 20 feet from a tree line. That made me happy--until a few NVA came out of the tree line to get him. *Oh shit.*

I hit the deck. Those rounds zinging by me were incoming. Ever try to dig a hole with your belly? I did. By then I had maybe four clips left. We pulled back to an abandoned NVA bunker complex and set up a perimeter.

We had chased those punks into the ROK Marine area, and the ROK's killed everything around. So we were on the horn getting the rest of the platoon out to us. We had to be about five clicks from where we'd started.

Well, those little buggers did hit us, and hit us good. I broke from a flank--and it was just like in the movies: rounds kicking at my heels. We fought them off and called in a medevac. Doc and Hillbilly got hit, so I was thinking, *Yeah, all right. We're all just going to get on this chopper and get the fuck out of here.*

Think again, grunt. The chopper took Doc and Hillbilly out and left four of us there. I had one clip of ammo in my 16, and that was all except for Doc's 16 with half a clip in it. Sgt Meese said *head out*, so off I went at point with the two 16's. Come to find out Larry Hoch, our squad leader, had also been hit, but he didn't tell anybody. He couldn't see and was hanging onto me so I could lead him. He wasn't bleeding--I still don't know what happened to him that day. We were a click and a half down the trail when we ran into the rest of the platoon. They were on line and hauling ass; I don't know how they managed not to hit any booby traps. I was sure happy to see them.

We lost Hillbilly. We never saw him again. I heard that he'd gone home. Doc came back after a few weeks. Smitty did his full tour and went home, and Sgt Meese made staff and was still there when I left in June. He finished that tour and probably a couple more, too. He was a lifer. Larry was killed later.

For some reason a guy named Kersey keeps popping into my head as I write this. There may have been seven of us that day. I can see Kersey right now, breaking for the left flank at the same time I broke for the right.

I remember Easter of '69 when myself and a buddy (Ski from Chicago--I think his real name was Mike) hitched a ride into Da Nang to the Green Berets' club. Needless to say, we got

snot-slinging drunk. They made us check our weapons. When we left, we went to the storeroom where they'd been keeping them, and while we were in there, we filled our pockets, our shirts, etc., etc., with Army whiskey. They should never have let us into that storeroom.

Later that night--actually around dawn--I was bringing an LP in and some asshole was asleep on watch and didn't get the word we were coming in. The dummy woke up, saw us coming in, and tossed a grenade. Got me and quick-draw McGraw. Spent a couple of weeks in NSA in Da Nang.

It was about 24 years ago now--5 May 1969--that I had the worst day of my life. Back then I knew it was bad, but I had no idea how it would follow me all these years.

We were on a platoon-sized patrol and had set up for the night in this bullshit little--*real* little--ville. We set up our perimeter, and I was just ready to lie down when Winnie (Stanley Winespender) came hurrying over. "We got movement," he said.

I looked up, and, sure enough, two NVA were *didi*-bopping down the trail. The whole fucking line opened up on those punks. When we stopped shooting, we couldn't find a trace of them. I was sent out with a couple of other guys to look for blood trails and such. But the two gooks had disappeared.

Just as I got back in the perimeter and had sat down next to Tex (Tex Ramsey--Waco, Texas), the shit hit. They started to walk mortars into us. Tex was the 79 man, and he got off a few rounds, but I think they had more than one tube out there. The next thing I knew, I was flying through the air, and Ski was on top of me, telling me, "It's OK, Boston [meaning me], I got ya covered!" I was covered with blood and brains.

I finally got Ski off of me, and then realized that I could see what was happening, but I couldn't hear a thing. Tex had taken a direct hit in the head. The rounds kept coming in--we were getting slaughtered. Finally, someone got arty on their asses, and we could get a medevac chopper in.

I attacked our Corpsman (new guy with us), because I saw him with a K-bar getting ready to cut a guy's throat. Hell, I didn't know he was doing a tracheotomy. My hearing was coming back, and he finally got through to me what he was doing.

We scurried around trying to put people together. The chopper came in, and the gooks started again with the tube. The pilot (who was a Marine major, I believe) was one of the bravest or craziest people I have ever seen. He jumped out of the chopper and helped us load people on it while rounds were landing everywhere.

We lost 22 people that night. Hard to believe. We were only about three clicks east of the battalion rear. At dawn they pulled what was left of us back to the rear and formed up the whole company to go back out. Like I said before, I walked point. And when we got back to that little ville where we'd got hit and a *mamasan* there started yelping at me, I hit her in the chest with my point stick. The CO yelled, "Boston, no!" Then he came forward and told me, "I didn't see that, Mac [for McAuley], but don't let it happen again." Of course, we found nothing in the village.

Back at the rear a friend of mine whose name I've forgotten stole a jeep, and he and I headed for Da Nang and the NSA. I was going to look for Larry Hoch, my squad leader.

He wasn't at NSA, so we went over to First Med on the west side of Da Nang. Larry was there. Only problem was, he was dead. And in the Crotch's infinite wisdom, they told me that seeing as I was already there, they had a job for me. They wanted me to identify the bodies of our people who had gotten killed. That sure fucked me up.

I was a raving Marine in Nam. I loved it over there (and I sure wish I could find Ski again); I was really pissed off they wouldn't let me go back. In hindsight, I'm glad they didn't let me go back. I got wounded three times in four months. Probably would have gotten myself killed if I'd gone back.

As I write this (4 September 1990), the USMC is back in the Middle East for Desert Shield. Wonder if they'll let us fight this time, or is this going to be the same thing all over again? Should just kick ass and forget the names.

Wonder if President Bush will let me out of jail to go back to the Crotch. Wishful thinking, huh? §

Brush with Death

By Dennis Harter

After the monsoon season of 1969, Second Battalion, First Marine Regiment pulled out of Ca Ha combat base and moved two miles north to what was known as Sea Anhor, by Marble Mountain. We were about five miles south of Da Nang. Third Amtracs pulled out and went home, so 2/1 took over their lines.

Sea Anhor was on the northern edge of what was called the Vietnam Riviera. It was an area of beach on the South China Sea that lay stretched for miles with white sandy beaches, tall spruce-pine trees, and a constant, warm breeze coming off the sea. The beach had a high, sandy sea wall. The water was cool on your hot, sore feet, but we always had to have three or four armed men on the beach standing guard for security. You never knew when you were going to get shot at or blown up, because this was also known as "Booby Trap Alley."

We didn't see too many bad guys in this area, but we did see a lot of blown amtracs, burned out hulls, box mines, trip wires, medevacs, and leg stumps. We moved through with our eyes peeled alternately on the ground and on the closest tree line. We walked very lightly, with caution at every step. We had firsthand knowledge of this area, because we humped it every day and night, and we feared it.

2/1 was spread out south of Da Nang--starting on the other side of Marble Mountain and stretching along the beach to the South Korean area and westward to the river. Then north up to the flat rice paddies in front of First Medical Battalion. The four rifle companies of 2/1 were rotated from Sea Anhor to Leper Ville, to Ca Ha, to the bridge, and then to the Pig Pen (which was correctly named).

The Hotel Company CP and second platoon went on a small operation that started at Ca Lu southwest of the combined action platoon at Binh Ky. We humped southeast past the old Ca Ha combat base. We marched all day under a hot sun, sweating and laboring through damp, hot, soft, white sand. It was getting dusk so we stopped and made night defensive positions. The ground was fairly open and flat, except for the northeast corner of our perimeter which was on a four-foot high narrow trail that ran north and south. There were a lot of bushes on the sides of the trail with interconnecting tree lines all around us.

I was the platoon sergeant then. Twenty-one years old and on my second tour in the Nam. I assigned three men to a hole and ordered everyone to clear fields of fire before it got dark. Well, being Marines in the field, running day patrols and night ambushes with work parties in between, the men would naturally rather chow down, write letters and listen to the sounds on the radio coming out of Monkey Mountain than dig holes in the sunbaked ground and dry mud. So I had to kick ass once in a while to keep my men sharp, and to keep them from getting sloppy.

Our commanding officer was a mustang and a Bronco pilot. (A mustang is any officer who works his way up through the enlisted ranks first and then gets promoted to officer). He knew what he was doing in leading the company. We had confidence in him that he wouldn't do something stupid. He was what we called a Gung Ho Mother. Where the VC were, he was there also with his .45 in one hand and giving directions with the other. A real reincarnated General Custer.

I made my last spot check after dark about 9:30pm. I didn't want to be moving around too much after dark. A person could get mistaken for a VC and shot. It had happened before. Everything was quiet, the only sound

was 105 arty dropping illumination rounds off to the northwest a couple of clicks away. That made everything silhouetted and the bushes move. The guys were jumpy and keyed up.

I don't remember what time it was, but all of a sudden all shit broke loose with explosions on the north side. Sappers came up along the trail on the east side of the bushes. They were in the shadows away from the artylight and they started lobbing grenades. Men were hollering in pain! Other men started returning fire into the bushes. The platoon Corpsman was the first to run to the wounded Marines. I came up on his heels. It was pitch dark then as we both stumbled over a pair of legs. It was Clark and he was dead. My next thought was that this was a diversionary attack. I gave orders for everyone to stay put in their holes and to keep their eyes out for sappers, orders which were needless, because everybody was up by that time and on the alert anyway.

Adrenaline dumped into the bloodstream. The heart kicked into overdrive; it was one of those times when you grabbed your M-16 in a rush to get some. You lapsed into temporary insanity. Was time to kill! Kill! Kill!

A second man was hit and down. In the cold blackness of early morning I started to feel his body for puncture holes, starting with his feet. He had a gusher wound where a piece of fragmentation had cut an artery on the inside of his left leg. I took my K-bar and ripped his pants up to his crotch and stuck my thumb over the gaping hole in his leg. Doc said, "There aren't any more wounded." The third man was in the hole and untouched. He returned M-16 fire into the blindness of the night and squeezed off his claymore with a pound of C4 explosive and 700 steel balls that tear up anything that gets in their way.

An emergency medevac was called in, and a CH-46 chopper landed in the middle of the perimeter. The pilot was guided in by the light coming from lit heat tabs that we had laid out in a circle. When he touched down we loaded the body of our friend, then our wounded buddy after him. The next morning we saw where the claymore had mowed down the grass in front of Clark's hole. We counted one dead VC and a couple of dried-up blood trails that vanished into the dry, sandy ground.

Then some of the guys did the only thing that grunts can do under the circumstances. They took our VC buddy and hung him up in a tree upside down for all his buddies to see, as if to say, *This is what payback means when you fuck with us.*

Later in the morning--when there was more light--Doc said that I had blood encrusted on the side of my head, and he started poking around. "Ouch", I said. "Doc, what are you sticking me with?" I had taken some shrapnel during the excitement of the sapper attack. I knew I'd been hit, but it wasn't much to mess with. Doc made out a walking wounded report for me to give to battalion aid station. This made my third Purple Heart.

My time was getting short. I had a flight date to meet. I was going home to the World in a few days. I had brushed with death in combat for the last time. I had had enough, and my sanity was beginning to slip. I had to get out of there. We were not wanted, and we were simply being used for VC booby-trap targets, not accomplishing anything. If I hadn't gotten out when I did, I might not have been able to leave at all.

Grunts get fed up with frustration, anxiety, and are generally pissed off at the world, a world that doesn't understand us for being the way we have become. We can understand the guys at My Lai and any other place where ground combat troops tread. We are from the same mold. At the time, we didn't understand what was happening back in the World and the policies that governed the war up to that time. Being misunderstood doesn't make existence any easier for any of us. Still we will do our job, adjust and overcome the times that we live in.

I'm a few years older now (like about 24), and I look back on those days with warmth, because I loved those guys I was with. They will remain inside my mind for as long as I live, for I do think of them often. §

Remembering Vietnam

By Karl Rhines

I was not in the infantry--my specialty was the repair of radios, portable backpack radios. PRC-25's and PRC-77's. Anything an infantry battalion was authorized to have, and some they weren't.

In the 12 months I was in Vietnam (November '69-November '70), I wandered outside the wire for night activities on only a very few occasions. Somewhere along the line, I came to the conclusion that one could get killed out there, especially if one had no idea of what he was doing. I was a bit older than the average Marine (I was 21-22 at the time), and, besides, I wasn't the best shot in the world. (Of course, this might just be what I think today. Hell, 23 years is a long time ago.)

In February of 1970, the battalion moved from the combat base at Ca Ha to (I think) Camp Lauer. Anyway, it had been the home of the 3rd Amtrac Battalion, and since they were leaving--headed for the World--we got their base, which was a lot bigger than our old one.

The former communications area, called Sea Anhor, was located in the southern half of the compound. All those antennas, and nobody using them. We did inherit swimming privileges--we were located right on the South China Sea, with approximately a mile and a half of beach front. Hell of an undertow, and--though rarely--sharks. But the water was great. Not a bad life. I took my R&R in Australia and brought back two snorkling outfits: goggles, snorkles, and fins. At least I got the masks and snorkles on R&R. Can't really remember where I got the fins. It didn't matter--I couldn't swim anyway. The snorkling outfits were for others.

We who lived in the battalion rear lived like kings compared to the grunts in the field, if you consider sleeping on a cot and a rubber lady living like a king. Once I was sent on an assignment to division headquarters to sort out some communications equipment, and another time I went to regimental headquarters to attend a radio equipment school. I learned then that the people at regimental and divisional rear slept on real beds with sheets. At division, the area was obviously secure as well as comfortable, because they chained their rifles to the walls. I found this rather strange, because even at battalion rear we were required to take our rifles with us everywhere, except to the shower and the club.

But I guess I can't say I had it rough--because I didn't. In fact, the battalion rear only got mortared twice while I was there. And the first time that happened, I was out with some other fools on a killer team looking to shoot other fools. The second time, we were on 100% alert and were sleeping out by the bunkers. That time they got a little closer. But the only thing to come out of it was that the top, the lieutenant, and the section chief sergeant, R.P. Zimmer, decided that our hole wasn't deep enough and that maybe two would be nicer. So we deepened the first and dug a second. It's neat to see officers and staff NCO's work.

I volunteered to clear grids at Dien Ban, a MACV compound. There was a Combined Action Company there, too, US Marines and ARVN's working together. Also there was a CAP (Combined Action Platoon), ROK Marine artillery, and National Police. I guess Dien Ban was a regional headquarters.

I worked in the communications center for three weeks, six hours on and twelve off. I got artillery grid coordinates from the battalion and gave them to my counterparts--in the ARVN's, the ROK Marines and CAP--for clearance to fire. It was not a bad life, at least no guard duty. I got to sleep on a bed with sheets. With the National Police right next door, security was good. I didn't worry. §

Mortars in Nam

By Michael Fire

As I left the recruiting office in 1969 I remember asking my mother, "Where in the hell is Vietnam?" My name is Michael David Fire. I was born in Palmdale, California, which is in the Antelope Valley in LA County of southern California. My mom and dad were divorced when I was twelve. My mom had eight kids. I was very bored with school; so I quit when I was 17 years old, but I couldn't find a job. I told my mom that I wanted to go into the Marine Corps. I was going to make a career of it. I was seventeen years old, and she said she'd sign for me. We went down to the Marine Corps recruiting depot in Lancaster, California. I passed my test. They said they'd take me. My mom asked the recruiter, "Is my son going to go to Vietnam?" He said, "No. They're bringing kids home from Vietnam." This was March, 1969.

I asked my mother on the way home, "What's Vietnam?" She said they were having a war over there. It wasn't a war; it was a conflict. That's what she said. I didn't pay much attention to it. I wasn't going anyway; the recruiter said so.

So on April Fool's Day 1969 I went into the Marine Corps. I went through boot camp at MCRD (Marine Corps Recruiting Depot) San Diego. I graduated one of the highest in my class, and then I went to Camp Pendleton where I continued my training: jungle warfare, guerrilla warfare, conventional warfare, Marine Corps kill-karate, judo, hand-to-hand combat, booby-trap school, and jungle school. I was being trained for Vietnam. My MOS out of boot camp was 0300: a grunt, a ground-pounder, an infantryman.

After I'd finished all my training at Camp Pendleton, I went into the M-60 machine guns (0331) and graduated highest in my class. Then they shipped me off the first week of September 1969 for Vietnam.

Before I left for Vietnam I got a five day extension on my leave. When I returned I found out that some of the guys that I had gone through training with had been shot down over Da Nang. On their way into Da Nang their plane was hit by a rocket and split in half. This was going through my mind as I landed in Da Nang.

During the first week of September 1969, I was shipped to the First Marine Division rear. I spent two days there and then they shipped me out to Hotel Company, Second Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division. Our battalion rear was south of Da Nang near China Beach and outside of a little village called Nui Kim Son, which was south of Razorback Mountain.

I carried the M-60 machine gun for a while. I ran patrols and ambushes. Most of the time I had no idea where I was. They'd ship us out to places with names like Lepersarium, the Pig Pen, and the French Fort. And I can go on. We'd do our time there--one, two, or maybe three weeks at a time in each place. Ran ambushes and patrols and kept the underground guerrillas out of Da Nang.

Then they stuck me in the LAWS rockets and I carried LAWS rockets for a while. Next they stuck me in the 60 millimeter mortar team. Well, I'd been familiarized with mortars (I went through familiarization with every weapon the Marine Corps had) when I was in training. But I didn't know how to operate the mortar tube. I knew nothing about the mortar tube. Our section leader and my squad leader drilled me into the dirt. Every night--one

o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock in the morning--we'd have a "fire mission." I'd jump up, get on the tube, and set up. They drilled me so hard that I hated the mortar tube. But I didn't have a choice; I was in the United States Marine Corps.

They'd pick us up in choppers and drop us off wherever there was a hot LZ. Any time someone drew fire, we'd hit the ground. We'd mop up the area and they'd pick us up and drop us off somewhere else. We'd set up a CP, put the mortar tube in the center, and then the guys would run patrols and ambushes. I would take turns running patrols with my M-16 and setting the tube at night. We'd have a designated gunner. We had three tubes, one attached to each platoon: first platoon, second platoon, and third platoon of Hotel Company. When Charlie hit an ambush or Charlie ran into a patrol, our job was to get illumination out as fast as we could. Then we'd drop HE on Charlie's ass to keep him from getting to our guys. Well, it wasn't very long before I was a squad leader. Then within 60 days, I was a section leader. I was in charge of three squads.

Most of the men in the 60 millimeter mortars were killed on operation Durham Peak; so there weren't very many men and we were training a lot of guys. Before I knew it, I had 15 boot Marines to teach how to operate a mortar tube. I drilled them in the dirt every night and every day like I had been. There were guys that hated my guts and didn't want a thing to do with me. A few of the guys transferred out. But the ones that hung in there learned their tube just like I learned my tube. And they got good. Within three seconds they could have the tube set up and fire illumination in the air to light up the area at night so we could see Charlie. Then we'd drop HE on him.

And we never had a casualty of our own. We never hit one of our own men with the mortar tube. These guys were good. And I want to thank the guys who trained me. They taught me how to train these guys. They taught me good. They taught me that tube. That tube was my life and also everybody else's life. Because without that tube a lot of guys would have died. I'm proud to say that the commanding general of the First Marine Division shook the hand of Captain Dufram, CO of Hotel Company, and told him that he'd never seen a better operation on the 60 millimeter mortar tube than ours. Hotel Company's mortar team was good. Charlie knew we were good and Charlie hated us. My captain, Skipper Dufram, was very gung ho. He'd been in the Marine Corps for a long time. He was crazy. He loved the war, he knew how to fight war, he knew how to keep his guys alive, and he knew how to find Charlie. We had plenty of captures and plenty of kills.

I remember one time they sent us out in the middle of the jungle some place--God knows where we were, but this place looked like a park. There was grass and trees and I thought, "Oh, man, this is great." They had dropped us off someplace in the middle of nowhere and we humped in about 20 miles with our gear on our back.

I carried three or four days worth of supplies (C-rations). I carried a .45 with 20 clips for it and I also carried 20 clips for my M-16. And I humped the mortar tube, the sights for the tube, and the maps. Our job was to set up the tube, and make sure where our men were. We would mark their location on the map. Within three seconds of the men getting hit, we could have the area lit up for them. Within ten seconds we could have HE up Charlie's ass.

One night a Huey gunship went by. It landed over by us, and I thought that was kind of strange. Out in the middle of nowhere, in an opening, a Huey gunship landed. The pilot of the chopper ran over to Captain Dufram. The Captain said, "What's up, guys?" And the chopper pilot says, "You got a machine gun nest over in that tree line getting ready to blow you away." The Huey gunship couldn't fire at the machine gun because the tree line was in a village.

Skipper Dufram grabbed Sergeant Shirley and two squads and sent them in there, one squad on each end of the ville. Guys started hitting booby traps left and right. It was a bloody mess. Skipper Dufram grabbed the legs of a spider chopper and flew into that tree line hanging from the chopper. He risked his life to

go down into the jungle with a hot LZ, put bodies and guys that were still alive on that chopper, brought them back out, and got them to a safe spot so they could be medevaced. In my eyes that man was a hero, and he had more guts than most of the men I've met in my life. I honor and worship that man. I was glad to fight with him, and I'd go back to the war again if he was beside me.

Well, after the medevac, Captain Dufram came over to me and said, "Fire, I want two guns set up. I want 75 rounds on each gun, and when you see the marking round come out of the battalion area, I want you guys to bust loose with the mortars."

When the first marking round hit, before they'd got their next round in, we'd dumped 150 HE mortar rounds into the tree line. Completely annihilated the tree line. Annihilated the village, too. Of course the skipper had gone in and told the people to get the hell out of there. We leveled it. Got our revenge for what happened to our men. Hotel Company got to be pretty well known.

I'd like to go back and talk about heroes. There was a little guy that we called Tubbs--his real name was Alfred Herring. He had transferred into our outfit from the States. He didn't know anything about a 60mm mortar. So we trained him like we did everybody else. He got very frustrated with me. He didn't understand my motives, what I was up to, or what my objective was. He wanted to transfer



(Courtesy of Mike Fire)

"A group of my closest friends in Nam (I'm the one with the cigarette). We were awaiting the choppers to take us on a 30-day operation in December of 1969." --Mike Fire

out, but I tried to talk Tubbs into staying. I told him he was good, and that he could do a lot of good for the grunts out there in their ambushes and their patrols. Well, Tubbs insisted on transferring out; so I signed the transfer form for him. He transferred into a grunt squad and they gave him a radio to carry.

It was the first week of September 1970. I'd left Vietnam. I landed in Okinawa, and the next day a guy from my outfit landed--I don't remember the gentleman's name now--and he told me about Tubbs, who was also known as Baby-san. They had gone out on patrol one night with a new lieutenant who had never been in the bush. He wanted to earn his combat action ribbon before he was sent home; so he decided to go out on a patrol with these guys. Well they ran right into an ambush. The Viet Cong hit them with claymores. Everybody was hit; even the Corpsman was down. Tubbs was the only one left even semi-concious.

He tried to get a chopper in. The medevac chopper was a little bit leery about landing. There was no security whatsoever. There was only Tubbs down there on the radio firing back at Charlie to keep them off the chopper. Skipper Dufram got on the radio to the chopper and said, "You put that chopper down there and you get them boys out of there." Well, they did. They landed the chopper. And Tubbs, Alfred Herring, helped load everybody onto the chopper, and also kept firing at the Viet Cong--trying to keep them down while he loaded up his friends. Alfred Herring died on the way to the hospital.

Well, Tubbs, I think about you every September. Sometimes I feel guilty; maybe I was too hard on you. Maybe I pushed you too hard, and if you'd stayed in the mortar team, you'd still be here today. My wife eased my pain about this a little bit when she said that if Alfred hadn't been there, the guys that survived wouldn't have gotten out.

Alfred, I want to thank you for being such a hero in my book. And Alfred, I would like to tell your parents that they had quite a boy, one who is a hero in my book and everybody else's. God bless you Alfred Herring.

I used to spend a lot of time in the little village of Nui Kim Son when I was in the battalian rear and had some free time. I would meet the people and talk with them. Nui Kim Son had some real beautiful people that lived in that little village. I met a lot of the kids there and became very close friends with them. There were two special little boys--I don't remember their names, but one was 12 and the other was 13--who really liked me, and I liked them. I used to give them C-rats. They would tell us that Hotel Company's 60 mortar team was "bad." That the Viet Cong knew about us and what we were doing. They told me to be very careful, that the Viet Cong were going to try to take the 60 mortar team out. And I believed this. The VC did try to get us on several occasions. We captured Viet Cong and underground guerrillas, and during interrogation they said that they were going to take out Hotel Company's mortar team.

One night they sent the mortar team to the top of Razorback Mountain. We got hit that night. We were standing on the edge of the mountain talking and they shot rockets at us. The rockets hit on the side of the mountain. They hit about three feet below us on the side of the mountain and blew up in our faces. The hair on our face was singed. Dirt flew in our eyes from the explosion. But nobody was hit, thank God. The next day we went down off the mountain and the little boys told me again that Charlie was there and was trying to take me out.

On another occasion we were out in the middle of the jungle and the kids told me again to be careful because Charlie was in the neighborhood and they were going to try to take us out. Well, Charlie came in and threw about four hand grenades. We got Charlie; we killed the little bastards. But they took out two guys. They were in the wrong hole that night. One guy was killed and another guy lost his legs.

As my time in Vietnam grew short--I had three days left in country--they stuck me in the battalion rear. I had an outpost on the southwest side of the battalion area out of Nui

Kim Son that was shut down at night. During the day, I'd go back there and open up the post. I had to stand guard there the rest of my time while I waited for my flight home.

One morning I was walking out to the post and the little kids came up through the barb wire screaming and telling me to freeze. And I froze. I didn't move, and the kids came up and showed me where there were three booby traps. There was a hand grenade with a trip wire and a blasting cap that was set so if you walked around the post you would trip it. There was another trip wire hooked up to two sticks of C4 that came from the top of the sandbags at the front of the post down to the bottom of the post. Then there was another trip wire in a little hole in the ground where we urinated with a blasting cap hooked in the nose cone of a four-deuce mortar round. They told me that Charlie was there, knew I was on the post, and was going to try and take me out before I went home. Well, I thank God for those little kids, because if it wasn't for those little kids, I probably wouldn't be here. God bless those little kids.

God bless all the Marines and all the Navy, Army, and Air Force. All the guys that were in Vietnam. And to all the ones that made it home alive, God bless you all.

Vietnam ended, but it didn't end for the men in Vietnam. We all suffer from some form of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. I don't think Nam will ever end in our minds, or in our souls. We fight every day to keep it blocked out, to try to keep it out of our minds, but it's always there. I spent some time in the VA hospital in a ward, because I suffered from post-Nam stress. Any woman I've ever known, girlfriend or wife, I've lost because of my stress.

Very few people out there understand the Nam vets. My brother Steven understands. I could never talk to anybody about Nam but my brother Steven. He is four years younger than me, and he was always there to listen to me. He understood what I was going through. He knows some of the stories and incidences in Nam. Stories that I never told anyone but him. He told me one day about a movie called *Platoon*. We went to see it. The next night I got into a lot of trouble with the law because I was very angry, got drunk, and got into a fight. My brother Steve talked me into going to the VA hospital, and they put me in the mental ward for three weeks for evaluation. They discovered that I was suffering from post-Nam stress.

I have to be very careful about drinking alcohol, being depressed and, on certain days, getting into a lot of trouble. I still fight my inner self trying to understand what Nam was about. And I still to this day don't understand what Nam was about. I do know that there were over 57,000 Americans killed in Vietnam, and over 100,000 comitted suicide after they came home. So the stress factor is very strong. All of us Nam vets need to be proud of where we were. Be proud that we were there. Be proud that we came home alive. And I'd like to say to all the Marines that I knew while I was in Vietnam, "Semper Fi." §



The Propaganda War

"I picked up propaganda while walking through the villes in Nam. There were three different kinds: American, South Vietnamese, and North Vietnamese." --Jack Sturiano

(Propaganda pamphlets contributed by James Page, Pat Saraceno, Jack Sturiano, and Randy Vance; translations done by Christine Truong)

SAFE-CONDUCT PASS TO BE HONORED BY ALL VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ALLIED FORCES



MANG TẤM GIẤY THÔNG HÀNH nầy về cộng tác với Chánh Phủ Quốc Gia các bạn sẽ được :

- **Đón tiếp tử tế**
- **Bảo đảm an ninh**
- **Đải ngộ tương xứng**



NGUYỄN VĂN THIỆU
Tổng Thống Việt Nam Cộng Hoà

TẤM GIẤY THÔNG HÀNH NẦY CÓ GIÁ TRỊ VỚI TẤT CẢ CƠ-QUAN QUÂN CHÍNH VIỆT-NAM CỘNG-HÒA VÀ LỰC-LƯỢNG ĐỒNG-MINH.

SAFE CONDUCT PASS

[Bring this safe-conduct pass back; if you cooperate with the government you will be
--Nicely received
--Safely protected
--Well-treated]



[The soldiers are protecting the people's harvest.]



[For years you lay here.]

[Now you are dead--and where are you buried?]



LỜI THAN CÙNG MẸ CỦA MỘT CÁN BINH VIỆT CỘNG.

Mẹ ơi, con tin chắc rằng con sẽ chết ngoài chiến-trường và mẹ sẽ không hay biết gì về cái chết của con. Lắm bận con nghĩ rằng thà chết còn hơn là sống, với cảnh đời vất vả này. Nhưng con lại ân-hận vì con còn mẹ mà mẹ cần đến sự phụng dưỡng của con. Con không dám hé môi để các đồng chí của con hiểu nỗi lòng chân thật của con, vì con sợ họ sẽ báo cáo lên cấp trên. Nhiều bạn bè của con đã chịu bao nhọc-nhằn đau khổ như con vì thiếu ăn và thiếu thuốc. Con ân hận vì phải lìa mẹ, mẹ ơi, nhưng con cảm thấy cái chết còn tốt đẹp hơn là sống chung với Việt-cộng.

The Lament of a VC to His Mother

[Mother, I'm sure that I will die on the battlefield and you will never know of my death. Sometimes I think I would rather die than live this wretched life. I dare not open my mouth to share my true feelings with my comrades, because I am afraid they would report me to the officers. Many of my friends have suffered pain and fatigue due to lack of food and medicine. I deeply regret having left you, Mother, but I feel that death is better than life with the Viet Cong.]

SAFE-CONDUCT PASS TO BE HONORED BY ALL VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ALLIED FORCES



Đây là một tấm Giấy Thông Hành có giá trị với tất cả cơ quan Quân Chính Việt-Nam Cộng-Hòa và lực lượng Đồng-Minh.

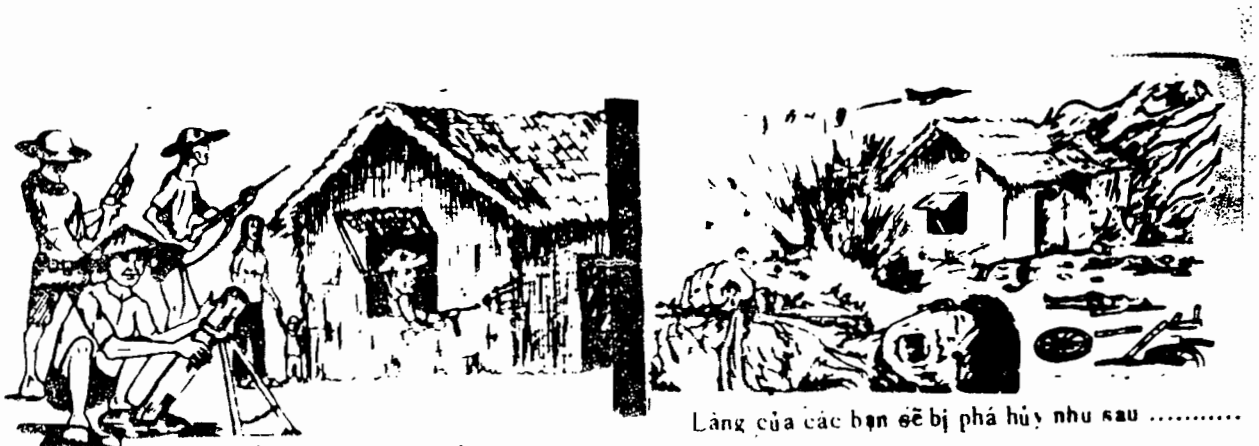
Nº 756725 BP

이 안전보장패쓰는 월남정부와 모든 연합군에 의해 인정된 것입니다.

SAFE CONDUCT PASS



[Refuse to hand over your rice to the Viet Cong. Please notify government troops and allied forces immediately of any robberies by the Viet Cong.]



Nếu V.C. ẩn nup trong thọn ấp .....
[If VC is hiding in your village . . .

Làng của các bạn sẽ bị phá hủy như sau .....
Your village will be destroyed as above . . .]

BÀ CON NÔNG-GIA CHÚ-Ý !

Quân-đội Chính-phủ và Đồng-Minh hiện đang mở những cuộc hành quân trong khu-vực nầy nhằm mục-đích bảo-vệ an-ninh cho đồng-bào trong khi ra đồng gặt hái. Quân-đội cũng cương quyết bảo-vệ những vùng chứa lúa gạo được an toàn.

Lực-lượng hành-quân sẽ thiết lập những trạm kiểm soát dọc theo để chận đứng sự di-chuyển của bọn Việt-Cộng.

Vậy đồng-bào hãy báo-cáo tất cả những tin-tức liên quan đến hoạt-động phá hoại của Việt-Cộng để giúp Quân-đội Chính-Phủ và Đồng-Minh bảo-vệ an-ninh hữu hiệu cho khu-vực nầy, đồng-thời giữ cho lúa gạo của đồng-bào khỏi phải lọt vào tay bọn Việt-Cộng. 7-133-69

[Attention Farmers!
Our government troops and allied forces are patrolling this area in order to protect the safety of the people during the time of harvest. The troops are committed to protect the areas of rice storage.

Patrolling troops will set up check points along the public roads in order to stop the Viet Cong's movement.

Bring all news relating to the activities of the Viet Cong to help government troops and allied forces protect this area and at the same time keep your rice harvest safely away from the Viet Cong.]

Thủy Quân Lục Chiến Mỹ có mặt tại đây để giúp đỡ đồng bào, để đánh đuổi bọn Việt Cộng bằng cách giết hay bắt sống bọn chúng và lấy lại lương thực và vũ khí. THỦY QUÂN LỤC CHIẾN MỸ SẼ KHÔNG LÀM HẠI BẤT CỨ MỘT NGƯỜI DÂN VÔ TỘI NÀO!

ĐỪNG CAN THIỆP VÀO HÀNH ĐỘNG CỦA THỦY QUÂN LỤC CHIẾN!
HÃY ĐỨNG THẲNG VÀ HAI TAY ÔM LẤY BỜ VAI!
ĐỪNG CHẠY HAY CỐ GẮNG TRỐN THOÁT VÒNG VÂY!
HÃY TRÁNH XA BỌN VIỆT CỘNG!
HÃY TRÁNH XA VÒNG CHIẾN TRẬN!

Thủy Quân Lục Chiến Mỹ sẽ có mặt tại đây một đôi ngày. Họ sẽ đi nơi khác sau khi lục xoát, nhưng họ sẽ trở lại nếu bọn Việt Cộng [illegible] quấy rối đồng bào.

[*Front*]

[US Marines
HELPING
The Government and People of the Republic of Vietnam]

[*Back*]

[US Marines are here to help you in your fight against the Viet Cong by killing or capturing the VC and confiscating his food and weapons.

They do not wish to hurt innocent people!
Do not interfere with the Marines' actions!
Stand with your hands on your shoulders!
Do not run or try to leave the area!
Keep yourself and your children away from the VC!
Stay clear of the fighting!

The Marines will be here a couple of days. They will thoroughly search the area and leave, but *they will return* if the VC activity continues.]

Thủy quân Lục chiến Hoa Kỳ



GIÚP ĐỠ

Chánh phủ và đồng bào Việt Nam Cộng Hòa



GIỮ CHƯA PHẢI LÚC TRỞ VỀ VỚI GIA ĐÌNH SAO ?
ANH CHỌN CẢNH NÀO TRÊN NÀY ?

[Isn't it time to return to your family?]

[How can you withstand the horrible condition of hiding deep in the jungle day and night, always worrying about being bombed and shelled? Along with the feeling of homesickness and missing your parents, wife, and children . . .

You have suffered too much, and have you yourself actually enjoyed anything? While the aggressive, inhuman live carefree in the North, urging and telling you to fight. Everywhere you troops appear come death and destruction. People flee from their homes and villages. How can you call that fighting for justice?

You should consider carefully in order to choose:

--A cozy home or cold tunnels deep in the jungle or up in the mountains.

--The love of your family or a suspicious, secretive atmosphere.

--A beautiful, bright future or a dark road filled with death. These await your decision.]

LÀM SAO BẠN CHỊU ĐỰNG NỔI CUỘC SỐNG KHỔ CỰC, CHUI RÚC NƠI RỪNG SÂU NƯỚC ĐỘC ĐÊM NGÀY LO SỢ BOM ĐẠN ? CÙNG VỚI NIỀM THƯƠNG, NỖI NHỚ XA CÁCH CHA MẸ, VỢ CON ...

BẠN ĐÃ CHỊU ĐỰNG QUÁ NHIỀU, NHƯNG CHÍNH BẢN THÂN BẠN ĐÃ ĐƯỢC HƯỞNG NHỮNG GÌ ? TRONG KHI BỌN ĐẦU SỎ HIẾU CHIẾN VÔ NHÂN ĐẠO SỐNG PHÈ PHỚN Ở NGOÀI BẮC CHỈ HÔ HÀO CHIẾN ĐẤU BẰNG MỒM ! ĐƠN-VỊ CỦA BẠN ĐI ĐẾN ĐÂU GIEO RẮC CHẾT CHÓC, ĐIỀU TÀN ĐẾN ĐÓ, DÂN CHÚNG PHẢI TRỐN CHẠY, BỎ CẢ XÓM LÀNG, NHÀ CỬA . VẬY SAO LẠI GỌI LÀ CHIẾN ĐẤU VÌ CHÍNH-NGHĨA ?

BẠN HÃY SUY NGHĨ KỸ ĐỂ CHỌN :

— MỘT MÁI NHÀ ẤM CÚNG HAY NHỮNG HẦM HỐ LẠNH LẼO TRONG XÓ RỪNG HOC NÚI ?

— TÌNH THƯƠNG YÊU VỢ CON, HAY BẦU KHÔNG KHÍ NGHI KỴ, THANH TOÁN ÂM-HẠI LẪN NHAU .

MỘT TƯƠNG LAI ĐẸP ĐẼ, SÁNG LẠN HAY MỘT NẺO ĐƯỜNG ĐEN TỐI, ĐẦY TANG TỐC ĐANG CHỜ ĐÓN BẠN TÙY THEO SỰ LỰA CHỌN CỦA BẠN HÔM NAY .

What's in it for you, G.I.

Mc Namara says Americans will have to learn to accept casualities. And that means you, G.I. !

You won't find him sweating in the jungle or going home in a coffin. There aren't yet any bombs planted in the Pentagon. Like there will be in your barracks, your base or the local bar.

SO WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU ?

Combat pay and a Purple Heart if you're one of the lucky ones.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS ?

The Marines who don't come out of the jungle.

The pilots who don't make it back from their missions.

The guys who get hit in the Saigon, Danang, Chulai airports etc...

Their combat pay doesn't do them much good when they go home in a box.

Better think it over, soldiers ! ...

There's not much in it for you.



(Courtesy of David Ayres)



(Courtesy of David Ayres)

MARINE POSTERS "BY JACKSON"

Not produced for distribution, but popular with the grunts. Done on a C-rations box.

My Tour in Nam

By Donald Otterbein, Sr.

I can remember growing up in the town of Glen Burnie, Maryland,and watching the nightly news on the television about a place called Vietnam. I would watch the reports and wonder what it was all about. I even had a map of Vietnam pinned up on the wall behind my bedroom door. Whenever I read an article in the paper about a battle that had taken place, I looked on the map and placed a pin in that location. I decided to enlist in the Marines Corps instead of finishing my senior year in high school, knowing full well that I would probably end up in Vietnam, yet wanting to know firsthand what was going on over there.

After attending boot camp at Parris Island and radio operator's school in San Diego, I received my orders to report to the liaison Officer at Norton AFB for further transportation to the Republic of Vietnam. I can remember my exact feelings to this day. They were feelings of doubt and apprehension. I didn't know how to handle the way I felt, so I held things inside and tried to appear like I wasn't affected at all. However, my dad could see that it was bothering me.

I finally arrived in Vietnam after stopping for a few days in Okinawa, Japan. The stop in Okinawa was an experience in itself for someone who had just recently left home and was on his own for the first time in his life. My first taste of Vietnam was the off-loading of the civilian airliner in Da Nang. It was during the month of November 1969. The weather wasn't so much hot as it was humid. I didn't think that any place could be that humid. I started to sweat as soon as the doors of the plane were opened.

My first couple of days in country weren't too bad, because I wasn't put on any details. We just sat around in the receiving station at the air base and waited until someone made up their minds as to where we were to be sent. I wound up being sent to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment. If I remember correctly, their CP was about five clicks south of Marble Mountain.

After I arrived at the CP, I was assigned to H&S Company, then I was introduced to the radio chief and was given a place to sleep. Since I was not acclimated yet, I wasn't put on any details for about three to four days. The first detail I was put on was a typical "police call" around the perimeter of the CP. I couldn't believe that we had to pick up the garbage of the local villagers.

The next event that has stayed in my mind all of these years was when I was put on perimeter guard. I had only been in country about a week. My foxhole was about two positions down from a 106. I was on watch when someone made the decision to test fire the 106. When it went off, it literally scared me to the point where I relieved myself in my pants. I was immediately relieved from my post to change my pants. It seems funny now, but at the time, it wasn't.

One of the hardest times for me was during Christmas. I was extremely homesick, especially when they played Christmas songs over the radio. Even mail from back home didn't seem to help.

While the CP was located south of Marble Mountain, I spent my time standing radio watch and perimeter watch for the first five or six months. I kept quite busy writing letters to friends and family back home and to other people in the US. In fact, at one time I was writing to about 12 different females along with my own family. I usually had at least one letter in the mail every other day. That sure

helped make my tour go faster. Also, during my time with H&S Company, I was sent to the III MAF Headquarters for about two weeks of security duty. That was kind of nice because I got to see the city of Da Nang.

About five months into my tour in Vietnam, the battalion CP was moved north to an amtrac compound. This was where the in-country R&R center of China Beach was located. It is kind of interesting to watch "China Beach" on television now, because it doesn't remind me of the China Beach that I knew at all. I sometimes wonder if there weren't two China Beaches.

Just north of the battalion's compound was Marble Mountain. There was an OP on top of it that was called Crow's Nest. I was lucky enough to spend a month up there. The view was really kind of pretty. About the only time that it wasn't was when the VC fired off mortars and rockets into the airstrip. Then things got hairy. I only saw one of these attacks from Crow's Nest. Even though it was the enemy's rockets being fired, it was kind of pretty seeing all those streaks of different colors going through the air.

We had several dogs with us up on this OP. One of them was named "Bitch." I can't recall the others' names. Bitch was my favorite. I can still remember one Sunday when I was fixing up my favorite meal: boned turkey, peanut butter on crackers, pound cake with either peaches or pineapple bits on top, and finally the little round chocolate candy. Anyway, my attention was diverted for some reason as I was heating up my turkey, and when I turned back around to pick up my meal, it was gone. Bitch was carrying it away. Boy, was I mad. I ran after that dog just knowing that I would get



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

A MARINE AND HIS DOG, BRAVO

Marines in Vietnam managed to have dogs in spite of the rules.

my meal back because there wasn't anywhere for her to run.

Well, she went under one of our hootches and hid. And there she finished eating my meal. What made me even more angry was the fact that when I was able to reach in and try to retrieve what was left of my meal, the can was too hot for me to pick up--but that hot metal didn't seem to be bothering her.

I had a seemingly easy tour compared to some others. I didn't participate in any major operations. I did however spend six months in the bush with Echo Company. I enjoyed my time with them, and I made quite a few friends. I can even remember the CO that I worked for. His name was Captain Pound. He was a very fine man and a competent officer.

Since I was the only school-trained radio operator in the company, I was never allowed to go out on any patrols with any of the platoons. Which was fine with me. I didn't particularly want to get into the fine art of patrolling.

After I had been in Vietnam about eight months I finally put in for R&R. I wanted to go to Australia, but all of those quotas were taken already, so I wound up going to Bangkok instead. But that was all right. I had a great time anyway.

Finally, in October 1970, I received notice that I was going home in November. I received about a three-week cut. I was real happy to be going home. However, at the same time, I didn't want to leave. I asked the radio chief when I could come in out of the field (back to the battalion CP), and he told me that I would have to stay in the bush until my relief showed up. He either couldn't or wouldn't tell me when that would be.

About three weeks to my flight date, I was talking to Capt Pound about his flight when he asked me when I was going back to the rear. I told him that I had to wait until my relief showed up. Then Capt Pound told me that I was relieved right then and there, even though the man who was to replace me was not there yet.

When I walked into the radio hut back at the battalion CP, the radio chief asked me what I was doing in the rear. I told him that I was coming in to stay until I rotated back to the States. He got real mad and told me that I would have to go back out to Echo Company until he had someone to replace me. I told him that I had been relieved by the commander of Echo Company and that I was not going back out there when I was so close to going home. He didn't like it, but there wasn't a heck of a lot he could do about it.

During my final two weeks in Vietnam, I refused to sleep at night. I took all the midnight shifts on radio watch in the battalion TOC. I didn't even drink any beer for fear that I would be too drunk in case of an attack. I never took off my flak vest or helmet, except to take a shower.

I really became paranoid when I had to report to the center at the airport in Da Nang--because then I didn't have a weapon. The only things they gave us were a helmet and a flak vest in case of an attack. I didn't wander too far from the building where our bunker was that last day.

I only started to relax completely when we were about an hour's flight away from the coast of Vietnam.

I can't say that I'm sorry about going to Vietnam, but neither will I say that I had the most fun. I met a lot of fine men and women who truly believed in our being over there. I'll just say it was an experience that I will never forget or regret. §



Back to the World

By Jack V. Sturiano

*M*yself and Doc "Ike" Eichler were rotating home. The great day came, and after saying good-bye to all, and finally getting into Da Nang, it must have been about noon. We checked into the Da Nang Hilton, where we met some former 2/1 Corpsmen who'd been at 1st Medical Battalion after coming out of the bush. Since they were already in Da Nang, they had arrived at the hotel early, had checked in early and had already gotten over to the manifest desk for the freedom-bird flight.

As a matter of fact, the crowded Hilton was filled with Corpsmen and Marines who'd signed in hours before us, and it looked like we wouldn't make it out. Our late arrival and the prospect of a filled manifest made us the butt of many jokes by these former bush but now REMF's, and I was getting steamed.

We dumped our stuff and went to the manifest desk, and to my surprise I ran into a staff sergeant that I knew very well. Months earlier this 45-year-old staff sergeant with high blood pressure had been sent to 2/1, but due to his high blood pressure had been sent to the rear--and I had been instrumental in this, so he was grateful. He told us he had a C-47 leaving at 5:00pm. It was then 2:00pm, and if we could get our paper's squared, money changed, etc., in time, we'd be on it.

While the other Corpsmen and Marines were at a movie at Freedom Hill, Ike and I ran back to Da Nang Hilton and quietly got our stuff. Then we ran back to the manifest center. It was close, but we made it, and at 5:05pm we were seated in the belly of a C-47 in the web-slung seat heading for Okinawa--five hours away. We laughed about how we were going to be sitting near the check-in back at Camp Hansen when those Corpsmen came in on the freedom bird in the morning. That laughter turned to terror, when three hours out we were in the middle of a thunderstorm. The plane was pitching, and you could see the lightning and the rain hitting the metal hull.

But we made it, landing at Kadina at 10:00pm. We had a two-hour bus ride to Camp Hansen, arriving about 1:00am. We checked in, turned in our clothes and boots; they handed us two medals, and we walked outside. We'd made it.

Next morning, long after we'd manifested for the freedom bird heading home, we were sitting by the check-in hut, watching the new arrivals. Our Corpsmen friends were stunned to see us, and now it was our turn to hoot and jeer. As a matter of fact, I was senior enlisted man on the freedom flight three days later and was the first to enter the plane. Got two seats in the tail and rode comfortably in the big 707 to TRAVIS--the World. §



Fox in the Field

By Paul Stevens

When I got my orders for my second tour in Vietnam, I was glad to see "First Marines" stamped on them. I was proud to be a member of "Chesty" Puller's regiment, the oldest regiment in the Corps. Although the First did not get as much recognition as the Fifth and Seventh enjoyed (well-deserved, too), the record speaks for itself: 11 Presidential Unit Citations, five in Vietnam alone (two in 1968).

Two battalions of the First Marines arrived in Vietnam in August 1965 along with the Seventh Marines--the entire regiment was in country by the winter of 1965. The First Marine Division--what can I say? The most decorated infantry division in United States military history.

In early August of 1970, while I was still in indoctrination at Camp Lauer, I was in the club having a beer when suddenly a platoon from G 2/1 came running in, yelling, laughing, all excited. They had killed 11 enemy, all VC *infrastructure*: a lieutenant colonel and captain were among the dead! I remember seeing the bodies laid out neatly on a road near Camp Lauer. It made an impression.

On 7 August I went out on a resupply chopper and joined first platoon. Fox was working an area called the Pig Pen, about seven or eight clicks west-southwest of the battalion area. It was mostly open rice fields, scattered tree lines and bamboo thickets, and numerous streams and rivers. There was guerrilla activity, and the area was heavily booby-trapped.

Lieutenant Richardson greeted me and seemed friendly, but I could sense that both he and the platoon sergeant were disappointed when they learned that my first tour in country had been with a security unit. The lieutenant informed me that I would take over the second squad in two weeks. I was a corporal and hoped to be a squad leader someday, but not so soon. I went on my first ambush with Fox that night as the assistant squad leader. The squad leader, Corporal Garza, informed me that as I would soon take over the squad, I had better learn fast.

We went out about midnight, and Garza decided to sandbag the ambush site and set in several hundred meters away, to keep us out of flooded rice fields. We were not even set in when 81mm mortar fire came in, impacting within 50 meters. I put my face in the dirt, grabbed the back of my helmet, and begged God to save me--while the squad leader screamed over the radio to check fire. We would have taken casualties if we had not been up against a paddy dike. We picked up and moved to an alternate ambush site and set in until daylight.

That was not a good way to get started in the field, but I did learn two things that night: it is dangerous to sandbag, and always use cover.

On 24 August, Fox Company moved to an area east of Hill 55, about 12 miles southwest of Da Nang in the An Hoa Basin. First platoon was ordered to set up its patrol base at the 51st ARVN compound. The company was lifted out by CH-46 helicopters. During the short ride I became aware of the beautiful but forbidding countryside: Charlie Ridge to the north, the high, rugged mountains to the northwest that disappeared into Laos, the Que Son Mountains to the south--and to the southwest, beyond Hill 55, the Arizona Territory.

I didn't know it then, but before my tour was over, Fox Company would operate in all these areas.

At the compound, we worked with the ARVN's for two weeks as part of Nixon's Vietnamization policy. Our job was to train the ARVN soldiers to be aggresive and combat efficient. A difficult job--most were inefficient and many were cowards. I learned to feel contempt for many of the ARVN and respect for the Viet Cong and the NVA as fighters. But though I had respect for the enemy, in no way did it blunt my desire to seek out and destroy him. After weeks and months of seeing Marines destroyed by booby traps and killed by sniper fire, my wanting to kill the enemy grew day by day.

In September 1970 we went on Operation Dubois Square--in Elephant Valley about 20-25 miles northwest of Da Nang. Very rugged territory. On the third or fourth day of this operation, first platoon set in on the side of a mountain with a dry stream bed running through part of our perimeter. It had been raining all night and day.

Several hours or so after we had set in, we suddenly heard a loud, crashing noise coming from above us, higher up the mountain. At first I couldn't figure out what the hell it was, and then I saw it: a three- to four-foot wall of water rushing down the mountain in the dry stream bed! Some of us had to scramble to keep from being washed away with the tents and lean-to's and gear. Where seconds before there had been a rocky, dry stream bed, there was now a rushing stream 25-30 feet across.

Later that night, around midnight, the weather cleared. I was on watch then, and along with several others on the perimeter I saw what appeared to be a bright light shining through the jungles and trees, coming from the top of the mountain. It continued to get brighter, and we thought the gooks had a searchlight and were looking for us.

A few minutes later, we realized that we had been watching the bright moon rise.

Sometime in early November, Fox had been brought in to stack arms and take a short rest, but as soon as we arrived at the compound we were told to prepare to leave ASAP for the Arizona--the choppers were on the way.

The company landed on Football Island, a few clicks north of An Hoa. We encountered ground fire at the LZ, and within minutes of leaving the LZ, suffered our first casualties from booby traps. The three or four days Fox was on Football, sniper fire was constant throughout the day and we encountered many, many booby traps.

Each night we had several firefights, some involving Fox, others involving Marines across the river. On the third or fourth day, Fox was picked up and lifted across the river where we linked up with C 1/1. We continued to encounter sniper fire and booby traps. This kind of contact continued until the last day, 20 November 1970, when Fox was preparing to be picked up and moved to Hill 37. Then the shit hit the fan, big time.

This turned out to be the heaviest fighting I participated in during my 22 months in country. It approached being a battle. For both companies, the total number of casualties for the day was between 30 and 40.

From September 1970 to May 1971, Fox took part in many special operations. On 24 December while in an operation on No Name, my squad came in from an ambush at approximately just after midnight--Christmas morning. I had just lain down under a hootch lean-to when grenades started exploding everywhere, accompanied by some automatic fire. We had four emergency medevacs that early morning.

Over the next two hours there were several more firefights. After daylight, a gunner found an M-26 with no spoon under his M-60. It was a dud (yay!).

One Marine, John Robertson, was put in for the Navy Cross for the action that night.

From the latter part of January through February 1971, first platoon was ordered to support three CUPP units operating around Hill 55. My squad went to Malcolm, south of the river in the Dodge City area. In the course of 20 days we engaged in 18 firefights.

February through March 1971 Fox choppered into an area south of Hill 37. We waited until dark, and then the company humped

approximately ten clicks to a company ambush site in the Arizona Territory. Intelligence claimed a company-sized (or larger) force of NVA would move through this area in the early-morning hours, and Fox would intercept them.

We were set in around midnight. Suddenly there was panic within the CP. The word was passed to saddle up and haul ass back to the LZ: At any moment the ARVN's were going to start a heavy artillery barrage on our position! We ran the first couple of clicks. Men were hurt falling in holes or tripping over each other and obstacles. Marines were yelling obscenities, cursing all lifers, and threatening to kill anything that wore an ARVN uniform.

Fox reached the area south of Hill 37 about an hour before daylight. We were exhausted, and many had been hurt from falls. Each platoon formed a fast perimeter and then everybody crashed.

I was the first awake, at approximately 0900. I stood up, looked around, and all I could see everywhere were bodies--asleep. It looked like a massacre had taken place, and I checked a couple of my men to make sure they were just sleeping. The *entire* company had fallen asleep in the Arizona! We were so tired that we just didn't give a f___.

Later that day my squad was sent for water, and we found some bomb craters about a click west filled with rain. As we were filling our canteens, my radioman advised me he had some gook on the hook speaking English, saying something like, "You Marines, we see you come for water. Today we let you live. We see you, but no shoot. Maybe tomorrow we kill all of you! But today we let you go. Be very careful, Marines." Strange.

In March, 2/1 moved from Camp Lauer to Hill 34, and Camp Lauer was turned over to the 196th Light Infantry and the ARVN's. (Within weeks it was overrun.)

During 2-12 April 1971 Fox was on Operation Scotch Orchard, a POW raid into Laos. This was the last major operation conducted by Marines in Nam.

We were picked up at Hill 34. According to written accounts, Scotch Orchard took place in Quang Nam Province of South Vietnam. But as I remember, when Fox was lifted from Hill 34, the choppers flew to the northwest for an hour or more. The cruise speed of a CH-46 is about 110-120 KTS. I figured we were at least 100 miles northwest of Da Nang, well north of Quang Nam. We landed on the border between Vietnam and Laos and walked to the west for five days. I remember the "six" telling the gunny on the first day that we were officially several clicks inside Laos.

We were continuously--for the *entire* operation--in and out of built-up and fortified



(Courtesy of Paul Stevens)

LAOS

Operation Scotch Orchard, April 1971. Sam Ludwig, point; Paul Stevens, squad leader; Robert Trautman, M-79 man. Marines in Laos (where Marines were not supposed to be) searching for American POW's.

areas such as base camps and bunker complexes, and on and off of roads and large trails. The jungle was tramped down everywhere. Streams had hundreds of footprints, sandal and boot prints in and around them, and the water was muddy from the gooks crossing it. Our Kit Carson scouts said we had 200-300 NVA on the run.

First platoon found and dug up several fresh graves. I'm not sure, but I don't think they were the graves of Americans. I have no idea at all about the graves that second and third platoons found.

In all, Fox destroyed three enemy base camps, one R&R center, and killed four NVA.

About this same time--late April or early May of 1971--we were working the Rocket Belt looking for launch sites. An ambush had killed some gooks, and documents found indicated that at midnight on such-and-such a date the Da Nang air base and Marble Mountain would be hit by rockets. We patrolled and patrolled, but never found anything. First platoon dug in for the night approximately 200 meters from an ARVN compound.

We figured nothing would happen, but around midnight firefights started breaking out everywhere. Suddenly the ARVN compound got hit. RPG's and heavy automatic-weapons fire was intense. And then 122mm rockets started taking off. A large group of them took off less that 100 meters from where we were. And more rockets were being launched about a click south of us. There was action everywhere that night: firefights, rockets, and the large fuel dump at Da Nang was burning and lighting up the sky.

Rockets went off for at least half an hour, and first platoon had a ringside seat. I saw the watchtower at the ARVN compound close by take a direct hit from an RPG, which produced a shower of sparks and knocked out the M-60 and killed the gunner.

It was a wild night, but what was really strange about it was that first platoon was not touched. I'm not sure why. We were surrounded by action most of the night, but only the ARVN units in the vicinity were hit.

At about this time we also were lifted to OP 785, north of Thung Duc in the mountains, about 25-30 miles northwest of Da Nang. We were to support the last operations that First Recon was conducting. It was a rugged and hot area.



(Courtesy of Paul Stevens)

Paul Stevens (of 1st platoon, Fox Company) in Laos, April 1971.

The observation post looked over a valley that was heavily used by the NVA as a route to move troops and supplies toward the Da Nang area. Every night there were lights in the valley, and sometimes on the mountain on the opposite side. Each night we fired .50-caliber and 81's on the lights that were sighted.

Several times after a cease fire we heard screams coming from the valley. It was eerie. I remember the remains of a 46 that had been shot down and had crashed and burned on 785. A small section of the tail that hadn't burned had a picture painted on it

of a purple fox. We knew the call signs of a few of the squadrons we flew with: Peach Fuzz, Scar Face, and Purple Fox. . . .

Fox ceased operations in Vietnam on 7 May 1971. It's ironic, but the last area where we operated was the same place that the Third Battalion began combat operations in 1965, and where Morley Safer made his famous broadcast.

Some refer to the 1970-1971 period in Vietnam as "quiet." But while there were fewer Marines in the bush during that period than there had been previously, they were in a great deal of action; the casualty percentages were still high. Over the last few months of 2/1's tour in country, the phrase "a few good men" really meant something. And in the spring of 1972, after all Marine ground forces were out, the NVA assaulted and overran many areas that the Marines had held for so long.

There is so much to tell. We *all* have so much to tell. §

Vaguely I Remember, Too Well

There's a time I vaguely remember,
A time when I looked forward to May
or December.

There's a time I vaguely remember,
A time when we'd slide down the hill
on an old car hood.

There's a time I vaguely remember,
of football games and dances,
and youthful pledges, and
taking chances.

There's a time I vaguely remember,
Of Patriotism and Honor, of Heroes
and Glory, of a President killed
in November.

There's a time I remember all too
well,
I'll never be able to forget the
smell.

There's a time I remember all too well,
That's the day I landed in a place
called HELL!
--VIET NAM--

There's a time I remember all too well,
But still, I vaguely remember. . . .

--Hugh W. Niles



Tunnel Rat

By James Sturdivant

I was a tunnel rat with the engineer platoon attached to 2/1 at Marble Mountain during 1970-1971. I appreciate the opportunity to add my memories to our collection.

My engineer platoon ran the mine sweep around Marble Mountain and we also ran the MSR/Tu Cau sweep. My first memory is of my sweep team leading the batallion out on an operation during the monsoons. We encountered a beautiful little girl who was walking into my sweep. The little girl was crying and too large for her age. I instinctively shot the child with my .45. She blew apart. The VC had wired her with explosives.

Two experiences I remember involve Operation Upshur Stream. In the first, myself and Corporal Pui were attached to a platoon that was "led" by a Forty-Day Wonder. This particular LT's strength was not map reading, and we became very lost. The LT was unwilling to use the radio and admit his mistake. We lost seven people to snipers and booby traps in two days of aimless wandering. We never, as usual, saw Charlie.

The other incident on Upshur Stream took place as we made a camp on a large mountain stream. All of us took turns bathing for the first time in a very long time, and we were in the process of being resupplied when the all too familiar sound of a 122mm rocket pierced the air and took out the CH-46. I remember seeing the bird take the hit and go down in flames. I remember the screams of the guys inside the bird. I remember going into the bird and getting one guy out--but I also remember the helpless feeling of being unable to get back into it because of the flames and the ammo cooking off.

After rains doused the fire we tried to recover bodies. I remember grabbing a burned arm and having charred flesh all the way from the hand to the upper torso coming off in my hands. I remember throwing up, picking up cooked off but unexploded ammo, placing it near the bird, and blowing the bird.

I was the engineer who had a bare butt from a lack of jungle boots which forced me to slide up and down the mountains on my backside. §

James Sturdivant died 21 February 1991.

In the Field with Hotel

By Robert L. Jack

I left for Vietnam in July of 1970 and went to a place called LZ Baldy, which was the home of the First Battalion, Seventh Marines. I spent about three months with the Seventh Marines, until in mid- or late-September the Seventh Marines were withdrawn and went home. But people who had been in country only a few months--as I had been (there were quite a few of us)--were reassigned to various battalions of the First Marines. At that time I was assigned to Second Battalion, First Marines, H&S Company at the Marble Mountain area. We had a camp there just south of Da Nang. I was assigned to a 106 platoon and stayed there a short time. During this time the different battalions of 2/1 worked in the area south of Da Nang.

There were huge marble mountains there; they just jutted right out of the ground. You were in a real sandy area, and here were these four mountains jutting up several hundred feet high. Because of their height and the vantage they gave of the area, they were occupied on top by the Marines. There were three different mountains that had Marine outposts on them. Two of these outposts, where the Marines had set up OP's, or observation posts, were together on one mountain that kind of had a twin-peak area, and these were called "Ostrich" and "Road Runner."

In these mountains was a big Buddhist area. There were Buddhist temples and caves with statues of Buddha in them. Most of the Marines that were assigned there out of the 106 platoon just more or less did observation at night to make sure that the enemy didn't get on top of these hills to fire down on our battalion area, because the battalion area was right below; and the Green Berets had a big camp right below it. We were there for protection.

There was also a lookout post on the biggest mountain, which was called Marble Mountain. I was never assigned to Marble Mountain itself--I was on the one we called Road Runner. One of the peaks of the Marble Mountain complex had a 106, and they would observe at night the rice paddies and the river areas that were south of the Marble Mountain and south of Da Nang. The 2/1 area was the last large American compound on the south edge of Da Nang and their AO was responsible for the protection of the southern end of Da Nang. The Da Nang airfield was nearby and the Green Beret camp was down there--a lot of military--but we were the far southern ones, so we patrolled south of there.

The 106 would watch at night through a starlight scope, and if they saw a boat or anything crossing the rivers they would fire at it. I stayed with the 106 platoon probably only a period of a couple of weeks. Then I was transferred back to H&S, just to a guard section--to guard the front and rear gate. There were four of us assigned there, and we took turns every other day standing guard at the front and back gates. Then at night the regular line people would come out and take over, and the next day we would be off--except for giving our people a break at lunch and things like that.

So I spent from somewhere about the first or middle part of October till about the first of January with this guard unit. It was basically the same thing day in and day out, and day in and day out: that was just sitting on the back gate watching the ocean roll in. Nothing really ever went on--there were no problems or anything like that.

In early January, I was transferred out of the guard unit. Because I had a friend in Hotel Company--from my time in Bravo Company of 1/7--I got myself transferred to Hotel, too.

My friend's name was Lance Corporal Larry Haynes. He was always referred to as "Alabama," because he was from Alabama. Alabama got me assigned to the third platoon of Hotel Company, feeling that I would probably be in his squad--he was a machine gunner. When I got out there in the field the first day there was a lance corporal named Emeelton. Emeelton was a mortarman. The third platoon had a 60 mortar with it. Well, I guess they'd been short-handed, so he got with the staff sergeant and the gunny--whoever was there at the time--and he convinced them that mortars should get the next replacement, which was me.

I was trained on the 106 recoilless rifle, so I didn't know anything about mortars. But really all they needed were ammo humpers, so I was assigned with the mortars--the 60 mortars. At the time there was myself, Emeelton, a lance corporal by the last name of Williams, and another lance corporal by the name of Ron Raap assigned to this mortar tube.

The third platoon of Hotel Company mostly stayed by itself; we only came together with the whole company one time, for one operation. So the rest of the time we were pretty well a platoon-sized unit, and I stayed with third platoon the whole time. The platoon had basically anywhere from 20 to as many as 35 people at a time, depending on losses and sickness and things like that.

We were assigned to an area south and probably west of Da Nang. The first AO we operated in was an area of a lot of small brush--probably bamboo, no real forests, and a lot of rice paddy fields that were dried up--some were planted, but a lot were dry. And I patrolled this AO with third platoon for about a month, through the middle of February. It was mostly back and forth--ambushes, basic field patrolling. We would stay out in the field about a month at a time. Then we'd go back to the rear area, change clothes, drink some beer, and eat some steaks. Then we'd go back out.

In February of '71, there was a CUPP (Combined Unit Pacification Program) outfit called Whiskey CUPP. It was working in a village called Bic Nam. Bic Nam was east of a



(Courtesy of USMC History and Museums Division)

2/1 Marines and ARVN troops patrolling near Hill 55 south of Da Nang in 1970 as part of the Combined Unit Pacification Program (CUPP).

USMC area called Hill 55; Hill 55 had supporting artillery on it. We were about five miles east of Hill 55 which was also southwest of Da Nang. We moved in with Whiskey CUPP, which consisted of about five Marines and ten ARVN soldiers who were supposed to function like a security faction to live in the village and try to pacify it.

It seemed like about every third night Whiskey CUPP would get hit. As long as Whiskey CUPP stayed on the northern side of Bic Nam it was OK; then the VC could come and go as they pleased from the south end of the little village. But if Whiskey CUPP moved to the south side of Bic Nam and set up their night positions, then they were hit.

So the third platoon, which I was with, was sent down there with their 60 mortar. And we set up with Whiskey CUPP on the south end of the village. We were to stay there about a month. We moved in, got set up, and started running patrols. During this time it seemed that about every second or third night we would get hit. We'd have mortar fire, RPG fire, machine-gun fire, small-arms fire; ambushes would get hit. For a constant month, every second or third night we had a short firefight.

The ARVN's there went on an ambush one night just south of our area--they couldn't have been more than a half mile at the most just south of where we were in our night positions. Myself and another Marine moved out to the west about 50 yards or so for the purpose of setting up a listening post. All of a sudden, a bunch of shooting started down near where the ARVN ambush was. We had a radio with us and we could hear what was happening, and what the ARVN's did was they just packed up and left--left everything, all their guns, ammo, machine guns--and just came running back in with their hands open.

Out on this LP with this other guy (it's funny how things go through your mind) all I could imagine was that when it was our turn to go back into the compound we'd have to be careful. Because we had to enter an area we usually never entered--the ARVN area. And they'd jump you and shoot and throw grenades at about anything that walked, even though they knew you were out there.

We were in front of the ARVN area that night--in a part-USMC, part-ARVN area. So we called back in and they told us to come back in, that they'd pass word on the line that we were coming. I can vividly remember how I just felt that somebody wouldn't get the word, and we'd be shot up if we came back into the lines. But we weren't. We got back in.

After that night, whenever we'd get hit there'd always be a machine gun shooting at us. We'd stay on alert every night until midnight--it seemed like the villagers always told the ARVN's what night we were going to get hit. So we'd all stay up. And I remember finally lying down in a peanut field one night, lying between the rows--the plants were in rows about a foot high and a foot wide and you'd lie between them and it made you a pretty nice area. And the shooting started.

I assumed it was the ARVN's, who were right next to us, but it wasn't. The shooting was coming from the south. It was that M-60 the ARVN's had left down there, and the gooks were shooting it. But I guess they were shooting high, because the rounds were going over the top of us. There was a hole right in front of the area where I was going to sleep, and four of us were assigned to it. So we got into the hole. And there was an M-60 assigned there, too, which was one of the Whiskey CUPP member's. But we hadn't dug the hole deep enough--the ground was hard, and we hadn't got it deep enough, and there wasn't room for everybody. When I crawled to the hole two guys were already in it, so I was lying on top of them, exposed. I could see a guy right out in front of us shooting at us with a rifle; you could see the flashes. As he was shooting, I decided that I could pick up the M-60 and really give him a rake-over. So I picked up the M-60, and I fired back about five shots and it jammed. I didn't know how to clear it, so I put it down.

This whole time I had it in my mind that I needed to get a helmet on my head, and a flak jacket to wear, too. So I found me a helmet and put it on, and I found a flak jacket--which I thought was mine--and I put that on. Then I decided that I needed to start shooting, so I fired the M-16 about five times, and then it jammed. So I popped out the magazine and loaded

another one. I did this about four times before I decided there was something wrong with the rifle.

Then, thinking they were probably going to slip up on us pretty soon, I started throwing hand grenades. I threw about three of those. The fight was pretty much over--those things didn't last more than a couple of minutes. So they broke off and we broke off.

The next morning we got up and started checking things, and come to find out the machine gun that belonged to the Whiskey CUPP guy had had not been cleaned. It was so dirty it automatically jammed. And when I put the flak jacket on, I'd put *his* flak jacket on and he was only carrying five rounds in each of his magazines, for light weight. I couldn't believe it. This was a Marine that had four other Marines with him and ten ARVN's, and they depended on him.

He didn't get court-martialed, but he was as close as they come. Needless to say, he spent that day cleaning that gun and getting ammunition ready for inspection that night. And we all spent the next day digging that hole a little deeper.

That's the way it went almost every night--we'd get mortared or hit by small-arms fire, or the ambushes would get ambushed. It was always something.

We stayed with Whiskey CUPP for about a month. What happened to it after we left, I really don't know. But we left them and moved farther north and got back to the BAO. I'm not sure how many miles south of Hill 55 we were, but we worked that area back and forth, back and forth--on into the month of March.

In March of 1971 third platoon went back to the AO south of Da Nang; we moved farther north until we were in an area about five miles south of Freedom Hill. Freedom Hill was the big USO complex at Da Nang. When we were in this AO we could look up and see Freedom Hill and see most of Da Nang, or the outskirts, the military bases that surrounded Da Nang; you could never really see Da Nang itself. We moved onto a hill we referred to as "Tugboat" or "Tadpole." Tadpole was just a small hill that sat out in the middle of the rice paddies. It probably stuck up 40 or 50 feet above the surrounding ground. Third platoon occupied this with some ARVN's. We'd run our night and day patrols off of it. We set our mortar up on it. It had a big tower in the middle that probably stuck up 25 or 30 feet. And there was a big night-vision scope on it. At night the mortar squad along with the CP group would be assigned the use of this infra-red scope to watch the surrounding countryside. The machine was large--it was about three feet long and a foot-and-a-half in diameter. You could really see clear through it at night for about five miles. We'd watch our night patrols go out, tell them if they needed to move right or left. Trouble was, when you were done looking through it, there was a green spot in front of your eyes for a while, because everything was green when you looked through it.



(Courtesy of Robert Jack)

Tadpole--five miles south of Freedom Hill--was once a Marine compound and then an ARVN and US compound. During March 1971, 3rd platoon, Hotel Company along with 60mm mortars worked out of here.

Third platoon spent quite a bit of time on Tadpole. On and off over the next several months we'd patrol the area south of Da Nang commonly referred to as the Rocket Belt. Every so often the gooks would get a rocket set up and they'd fire at Da Nang. Mostly they were shooting at the air base. I can remember one night they shot several rockets off almost under our noses in a big thicket. And there were some big jet-fuel storage areas at the Da Nang air base which lit up the sky for much of the night. But while we stayed on Tadpole, it was pretty much the same routine all the time, with the patrolling and ambushing.

We stayed on Tadpole off and on for quite a few months. When I'd been in country for about nine months, a lance corporal named Robert Bishop--I think he was from Michigan--and I went on R&R together in late March or early April, just before Easter, of 1971. We went to Taipei, Taiwan.

While our unit had been in the field the month before, the Marines had pulled off of the Marble Mountain complex and moved to Hill 34, more to the western side of Da Nang. When Bishop and I got back to our unit after R&R--we got in late in the day--there was a big operation in the planning. When all the *mamasans* and *papasans* left the base that night, it was locked up. And for the first time all the companies of the Second Battlion, First Marines came together on the hill. What was up was what turned out to be the last Marine operation of the Vietnam War. It was named Scotch Orchard. This operation was going to take place to try to rescue some Americans and ARVN's that were being held in the mountains near the Laotian border.

That night they pulled all the companies in, and about midnight they started passing out more canteens, more ammunition. At midnight they started having meetings of the company



(Courtesy of Robert Jack)

TADPOLE
February, 1971. Left to right: Causten; Lewis; Rameriz; Jack.

commanders on down through the squad leaders and everybody else. We learned that that day the artillery had already gone in and set up a couple of fire-support bases and moved some artillery in. The next morning they were going to start firing to open up some LZ's in the mountains. The Marines were then going to land at four different points like the corners of a square and then go to the center. At the center would be where the enemy base camp and prison camp were.

Everything went fine. We landed on our four corners, and the fire-support bases were set up and firing. We walked all the next day--the day after Easter--and we moved that whole day mostly down mountain trails. The jungle was so thick you couldn't have flanking people out, and so you pretty well just followed the trails. As you followed the trails, you'd come across small base camps the NVA had set up and places where they had slept among the streams. That night we moved closer into the center of the square and set up our night defenses. We actually were to spend two nights in the mountains.

The first night the mortar crew moved off the trail up the side of the hill not more than 20 or 30 yards. We were to set up as an observation post out there, the main body of troops being stretched out along the trail several hundred yards. We had decided--myself and a lance corporal named Williams, kind of a squad leader of mortars--that since we had the first two watches, we'd stand them together, because it was totally pitch black; you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. So we set up the two watches together.

Well, old Williams gets his .45 out and he's fooling around with it. We're sitting on a big rock talking about the rock apes and what



(Courtesy of Robert Jack)

FLAG FROM HOME

Robert Jack of Hotel Company at Tadpole in March of 1971. Five miles south of Da Nang.

we'd do if the rock apes came and started throwing rocks. And all of a sudden Williams fires a shot with that pistol. We figured they'd be calling in and we'd be in deep trouble--the radio was right there. But nobody ever called. We got to thinking that nobody even cared that we were up there.

The rest of the night went on. The whole countryside was in total, total darkness. No house lights or anything. Just pitch black.

We moved again the next day and got to the area we'd been trying to reach. But no one was there--it was an empty base camp. The VC or the NVA or whoever it was had those prisoners had started chopping trail across the top of the mountain and had gone right between the two legs that we were coming up. They were gone, and we didn't get anybody.

The next night we set up again. That night I got the last watch of the day--actually in the morning it would have been, from 4:00am to 6:00am. That was great, because it would be getting light by then and I'd get a shorter watch.

I stood that watch that night, and by 6:00am it was still pitch black and I was still standing watch. I ended up having the longest watch of the night. I'd never seen such darkness. The mountains were so full of vegetation, if you looked up you could hardly see the sky. If you haven't experienced it, it's hard to comprehend that absolute darkness.

The next day we moved back to an LZ to be picked up. I was still a gunner on the 60 mortars and we'd been carrying extra rounds. So we moved back to where we were going to be picked up in a little valley that was clear. We asked our staff sergeant if we could just drop those extra rounds we'd been lugging around back down the tube and just put them up against a hillside there when we got back on the choppers so we could get rid of them and wouldn't have to carry them around so much. He said, "Yeah, there's no problem with that."

We set up the 60 mortar and commenced to get rid of the extra rounds against the hillside. But I guess the sergeant didn't tell anybody what we were doing. Because there were Cobras overhead, and when they saw the explosions on the hillside, they decided that the LZ was being attacked and they started making gun runs up and down that hillside. Then we figured, same as they had, that we were being fired on from the hillside. So it commenced that everybody spent up all their ammunition on the hillside when really nothing was happening. Just us getting rid of extra ammo.

The helicopters came in to the LZ where all the troops of Hotel Company were circled around waiting, and as the choppers came in and picked up troops, the circle got smaller and smaller. I was supposed to climb on the last chopper. We were still fully loaded; even though we'd gotten rid of all that ammunition, we were still fully loaded troops and packed on the choppers like sardines.

You always think about the worst in cases like that. Like what if the helicopter couldn't get off the ground.

The pilot started it up, it lifted up off the ground about three feet and then came back down again. That's when you just knew everybody was thinking that somebody was going to have to get off. But the Marines would never have let that happen; they'd never have left anybody. So the pilot just poured the coals to it, and the chopper finally lifted off and away it went. We all headed back in.

That was the last time, and about the only time, that Hotel Company was together as a group in Vietnam while I was with it. My unit got our stuff and moved back out into the Rocket Belt and continued to patrol there until the first of May; then we were pulled to the rear for stand down. The ARVN's and the US Army took over our AO's.

As I look back and remember, '70 and '71 for the Marines in Vietnam was a time of no big military operations or any major action. It was mostly day-to-day patrolling. During that time, in late '70 and early '71, the Army was having a lot of problems with race relations, fraggings, and people refusing to go out on operations or up hills, etc. But as I remember, we Marines never really had those problems. We had a lot of black Marines who were just generally basically good people with the same number of slouchers among them as the whites had. And like slouchers of all kinds, they generally just stayed in the rear; those kind of people almost never came to the field, and we

didn't want them there. Of the people we had in the field, I can honestly say there was no one I would have been afraid to have sit to my back and guard my back at any time.

I became best of friends with two black Marines, Lance Corporal R.C. Everett and Lance Corporal Lee. And it's an odd little thing I particularly remember about that.

Back when we were Whiskey CUPP, we slept with a poncho liner as our sleeping bag. Not the poncho itself, which you usually only used if it was raining, but the liner. It was good for keeping the mosquitoes off. Well, somebody took my liner--one of the ARVN's ripped it off. So I ended up sharing a poncho liner with R.C. Everett.

Finally I got half of a poncho liner, which was better than none. At least I could keep my face covered and protected from the mosquitoes, which would just about eat you up. But I remember the times I shared a liner with R.C. He was just like a brother to me. I wish I had kept in touch with both him and Cpl Lee. About 15 years after the war I tried to find them, but couldn't.

Another "small" thing I remember about my time in Vietnam is that it seemed like in the field we never had enough of anything. For whatever reason, the rear people always had plenty of this and plenty of that. But once I tore my jungle utilities--the trousers ripped from the zipper all the way up the back. We never wore undershorts because of heat rash, so you can imagine having the whole bottom of your trousers ripped out under those circumstances.

I put in a request for a resupply, but we only got resupplied every other day. And after the resupply had come and gone for the second time and there was still no jungle utility trousers, I got permission to go with a couple of other guys and walk to Hill 55--about five miles--the nearest base of any kind near us. There were Marines there and also ARVN's. And so myself and about two or three other fellows had to walk those five miles. We walked three miles, ended up on a road, and then hitchhiked the other two miles.

There was one thing about hitchhiking in Vietnam, and that was that anywhere you were and no matter who it was that came by--ARVN, Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines--when you stuck out your thumb, you had a ride. We stuck out our thumbs and some ARVN soldiers came by and picked us up.

You'd think that at Hill 55 they'd have supplies. But when we got there and I went to some supply company's headquarters and told them I needed a pair of utility trousers--I mean, there I stood with mine all ripped out all around the bottom--some guy there told me, "We haven't got any." Some company had just been in there and took everything they had. While I was standing there I was looking at a pile of dirty utilities that that company had discarded (piled there to be burned, since they were too dirty to be saved). I asked the guy in charge there if it would be all right if I just looked through that pile and found myself the cleanest pair. He said I could, so I did. I looked through that pile and found the cleanest pair, one that looked like it might fit, and I took them outside and I washed them so they were reasonably clean. I put them on and we commenced to walk back, and by the time we got back to Bic Nam they were fairly dry.

Little things like that irritated you. A lot of people had a relatively easy tour in Vietnam, but some of us didn't, and a lot of people don't realize this.

As I remember, Hotel was the second to the last company of 2/1 to leave Vietnam; one other company left after we did. Of the four companies in the battalion, we were the third out.

Hotel left as a group on one airplane--went back together to Okinawa. In Okinawa we cleaned up and everybody was going to go to town, but in May of '71 the Japanese were more or less revolting, wanting to take Okinawa back. There were riots in the streets and such. So they locked the gates of the compound, locking everybody up--you couldn't get off. A few guys jumped the gates and went on into town, but I'd say about 95 percent of the company, lieutenants and everybody, ended up in the enlisted men's club. You could buy a mixed drink for 25 cents. For 50 cents you could buy a double shot--in the same size glass, but then there was no room for soda. We all sat around and drank and talked, and when you fell

off your chair, someone would carry you and put you in the rack and then go on back and sit and drink until they fell off their chair. About half the company got pretty well under the weather.

I got hauled back, and I remember sometime in the night the bed spinning and in the bathroom people puking all over. And there were also old *mamasans* in the bathrooms ironing uniforms for the next day. We'd been in Okinawa two nights, and the next morning we had to stand inspection; if you couldn't stand the inspection and pass, you didn't get on the airplane home.

There were probably about a half-dozen to a dozen men who were so inebriated they couldn't get out of bed by themselves, and one of them was old Alabama, the fellow who got me into Hotel Company in the first place. I got him dressed. Found him a tie, put his summer uniform on him. There were others in the same shape, and we more or less just told them to keep their mouths shut once the roll call started: when their name was hollered, somebody would answer for them.

Well, when old Alabama's name was called out, I answered for him. But he answered, too.

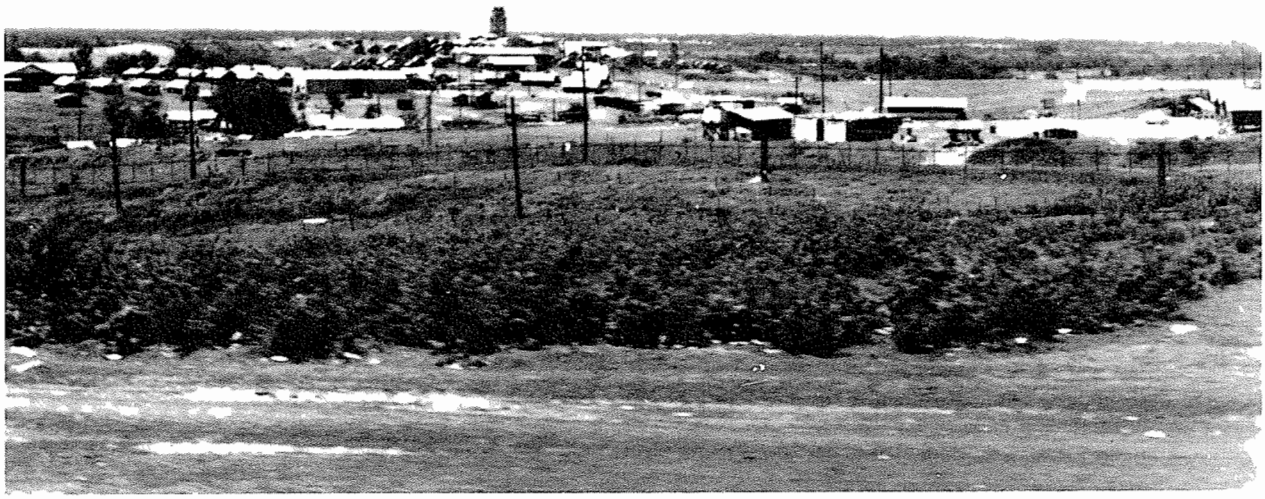
They didn't kick him off the plane, but they came awful close to doing it.

The plane went out that day. We got into San Francisco, to the air base, late in the evening. By the next day most of us were on our way home. We had leave or orders for home.

That was over 20 years ago. For 20 years no one in my family--no one, not anyone in my family, including, when I got married, my wife--ever talked about Vietnam. I guess they figured that if I didn't say something, they wouldn't say something. I can honestly say that for 20 years I never spoke with my family about what went on over there. I guess a lot of people have been like that.

But then the Wall was put up, and when my children were old enough to ask questions about it, I talked with them about Vietnam. I have talked with them more about it than I have with adults.

It was good that the Wall brought Vietnam out in the open. Vietnam was a sore spot for too many years. §



(Courtesy of Robert Jack)

2/1 rear at Hill 34, May 1971. The photo was taken on the day Hotel 2/1 departed from Vietnam.

Notes from the Rear

By David Nelson

I was stationed at MCAS El Torro Correctional Facility in 1970 when I received orders to Vietnam. I was married, and my wife had muscular dystrophy. I went through all the processing at Staging Battalion, Camp Pendleton. I was scheduled for a flight the first of September; that's the same time of the year the Jerry Lewis Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy is scheduled. So my wife dropped me off at Norton Air Force Base and returned to Orange County, where she was a volunteer for the MDA Telethon. Because of her medical condition, everyone at the telethon thought it was a tragedy that she had to be parted from her husband. CMC received a lot of letters about her and me and muscular dystrophy after that.

In Okinawa, we all went through processing at Camp Haig. It was real interesting seeing how things had changed over the years since I had been there at Camp Hansen with Golf 2/9 in 64-65. It was amazing to see how all the monies the troops had carried back from Vietnam had changed Okinawa. No more cheap thrills. Kim Village (outside of Camp Hansen) was no longer a ville: it was a town.

When the doors of the airplane opened up at Da Nang I could feel the 125° heat. Being an 01, I was taken to division headquarters. I wasn't sure if I would be assigned to the correctional facility, graves registration, or a battalion. There were several adjutants from battalions wishing to interview me for jobs, the first of which was Captain Johnson from Second Battalion, First Marines. I was scarfed up and we were on our way to 2/1, where I was assigned to be the administrative chief of Headquarters Company. We were located at Camp Lauer, which was on the other side of Marble Mountain and backed by beautiful beaches, one of those being China Beach. When the TV program "China Beach" aired on television, it brought back lots of memories of that area. That was the same area used for R&R for troops coming back from the field.

There was lots of work to be done, some of it work to be caught up on; we also had to prepare for an IG inspection.

The first real interesting thing that happened to me was that I was recognized by three Marines in the battalion that had been lucky enough to have been in the corrections facility at El Torro. They put the word out that I was undercover CID. Within a day or two, word got back to me that my life was being threatened because I was an undercover agent in the battalion.

I immediately called in those Marines who had previously been confined to the brig, and we had a long talk. I told them that the three of them had passed bum information to their buddies, and that if anything should happen to me, there was a statement in my service record naming the three of them and that they would be arrested, confined, and charged.

For a week or so I slept with my .45 underneath my pillow, waking at any noise, which meant getting any rest at all wasn't too easy with all the noise from the battery beside us that fired rounds off all night. However, soon after my talk with those individuals everything quieted down.

My first commanding officer was great. Anything that I came up with he would go along with. When he wasn't around, I had approval to sign anything that needed his signature. He had a list of airline stewardesses coming and going, and he would occasionally disappear to have a rendezvous with one of them, and I would cover for him.

It wasn't long before the battalion administrative chief was gone on emergency leave. He was within 120 days of his RTD, so he would not be returning, and I was assigned to the S-1 billet.

One of the main tasks for the recreation of all was keeping the R&R program going full swing: receiving quotas from division, receiving input from the companies, and trying to keep all requests for R&R honest. You were not supposed to get R&R until after you had been in Vietnam a certain amount of time; but it seemed that a lot of officers were trying to get R&R within only a month of being in country; and after only three months or so the enlisted would be trying to get it.

I could see why Captain Johnson had been at division headquarters to interview 01's. As time went by we received other 01's. One that we were assigned was a sergeant who was representing the Marine Corps as a surfer. He had surfed in Hawaii, Australia, and in competitions in several other places throughout the world. He was not usable as an 01.

Because of cases like this, I carefully screened the service records of troops coming in and was able to select some very fine, outstanding troops to work in S-1 and in the other company offices. For example, I had a Marine that was a draftee who had certified as a chiropractor; he had between six and eight years of college and was one of the most intelligent and loyal persons I have ever worked with. He was a very beneficial selection for more than one reason: if you were stressed and uptight, he would give you a good massage and possibly even an adjustment that would instantly make you feel 100% better, taking care of all the tensions.

One interesting thing was how we produced casualty letters. A casualty letter was a letter written about a KIA--we did one for every KIA in the battalion--and sent to parents or wives. This letter had to be typed letter-perfect. We did not have computers or word processors--we had typewriters. The letters had to be typed perfectly, no corrections, no sand, no marks or oil spots. And there was always a game with words. Depending on who the duty officer at Division Casualty was, the sentence "There will be a memorial service held and all personnel *will* attend" might be kicked back and they would want "There will be a memorial service held and all personnel *may* attend." With today's technology, it's no problem to change one word. But back then, with helicopters landing just across the road, sand flying everywhere, and the fact we had to type the letters by hand, sometimes just changing one word and then getting the whole letter perfect again could take hours.

I always looked forward to Sundays. The first reason was for the great food they served for dinner in the mess halls--big, juicy steaks and lobsters. It was always comical to watch people that had never eaten lobsters before, because they didn't know what to do with them. The lobsters didn't come to the table already cracked like they often do in restaurants, so you had to use the sugar container or salt shaker to pound them; then you'd grab the lobster to pull the luscious white meat out. After you'd touched it with your dirty hands--dirty from being in country--the meat would be tinted. But who cared? The lobster was great and you got used to the dirt.

The second thing I looked forward to on Sundays were the occasional guided tours up Marble Mountain we gave to groups of nurses from the German hospital ship. We would have tea with the monks and then go into the mountain to see the beautiful carved temples inside. Just the thought of seeing a round-eye [*a Western woman*] was great.

As the months went by and the reduction of forces in Vietnam was going strong, 2/1 seemed to be a transit battalion. We were transferring our senior in-country personnel with RTD's to other battalions that were rotating, and in turn were receiving their personnel with less time in country. This created a lot of administrative burdens as we got closer to our return to CONUS. I was on the intercom a lot trying to get personnel to their assigned places, trying to get them hooked up with their transportation--on helicopters, on trucks--to get them out of the battalion and on their way to

new battalions. Many times this was early in the morning when I was trying to get personnel motivated to get to their appropriate, assigned places.

As we got closer to the end and we were the only battalion left, we had to work with the personnel in Da Nang to get IBM cards punched on everyone in the battalion--to get manifests done up. This entailed a lot of traveling from the battalion area to Da Nang. It also entailed the company clerks having to get a copy of movement orders into everyone's service records, having to make sure that all the entries in their service records were up to date, and receiving and sending messages to CMC concerning personnel who would not be staying with the battalion on return to CONUS. Everything had to be boxed and wrapped in waterproof boxes. All our files, equipment, and weapons were coming back by ship.

After two or three sleepless days and nights we got everything shipshape to go from our wonderful base to Da Nang for processing and on to the freedom birds. As I was lucky enough to retrieve the last flag that flew over the battalion in Vietnam, I folded it up and put it in with my belongings. As of today I still have it among my treasures. This flag was displayed at the 2nd Bn, 1st Mar Vietnam Era Reunion in November 1991.

Everything went well leaving Da Nang. Several of our officers were enlisted who had been picked up for temporary commissions, and upon arriving in CONUS these officers were reverted to enlisted. There was a lot of dissatisfaction on the part of most of these officers. In fact, some of them were quite bitter, and their actions showed it during the last few weeks; they knew that many of the officers that they had worked with were waiting for the day when they would no longer be officers and would be under them again. While in Okinawa, one of these temporary officers somehow arranged for me to be bumped so I would not be in the advance group--strange, since I had all the knowledge of the paperwork and the schedules of what people would be doing.

On arriving at Camp Pendleton, we were redesignated to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines; at that point someone authorized everyone to go on leave. Since I had been bumped off that airplane, there was total chaos at Norton and at Camp Pendleton concerning assignments; personnel were allowed to go on leave who were not supposed to be authorized leave. When I arrived at Camp Pendleton, I had to spend a lot of extra time corresponding, sending modifications to the orders on these individuals. We are not talking about only a couple of individuals--they were in the hundreds.

When the equipment arrived and we opened up the crates, we found that, even though boxed and wrapped, most everything had gotten wet and stunk like mildew. All orders and publications had to be laid out in the wonderful California sun to be dried out and, page by page, had to be wiped down to get the grime from them. We had to order all new orders and regulations so we could get rid of the stench. As long as the stink was still in the files, the offices would stink and be musty.

I was not allowed to go on leave at first since I was designated as key personnel for the battalion. I was finally allowed to go on leave about three months later, and when I was home in Portland, Oregon, I accompanied my mother to bingo games at the Moose Lodge and the Eagles' Lodge, where they made announcements that her son had been in Vietnam and had come back--and they all gave me a great welcome. I felt I had to put this in because of all the hoopla and all the grandstanding that President Bush made over the return of the troops from Desert Storm. I've heard many, many times that this was not done for our boys in Vietnam; that is a bunch of hogwash in my case, because I was made to feel very special many times.

Back in '65 when I returned from Vietnam by ship, we arrived at the docks in San Diego and there were several hundred proud wives, parents, children and friends waving flags and holding babies and banners up--and the MCRD Band was there, too--all to welcome 2/9 back home. So upon returning from Vietnam on two occasions, both times I was warmly welcomed back, and I would like to have it known that the treatment wasn't just a big put down like the press and the President tried to portray during the winter and spring of '91. §

The Way It Was

By Mike Dunn

*R*ight before we went to the Nam, they told us at the staging battalion that one-third of us would come home in a box, one-third of us would come home seriously wounded, and one-third of us would come home without a scratch.

I spent a lot of my time in country just humping over the bush around Hill 55. I was with Echo Company, and we were on sweep operations trying to snoop out the gooks. That's what our job was, just humping around looking for gooks. I was there from February of '69 until February of '70.

After every firefight we would have to police our ammo shells, our empty shells, and I had a hard time understanding why. But they told us the gooks would use the empty shell cases to make booby traps. And sometimes with the M-16's the magazines would jam. In a case like that, you would take the magazine out and then you might lose a couple of rounds. And the gooks would take those rounds and make booby traps out of them. So after every firefight we would pick up all the shells. I couldn't believe it--the empty shells.

You could never leave anything behind because the gooks would use anything and make something out of nothing.

I was attached to Echo 2/1. Captain Anderson was the company commander, in charge of the whole thing. My MOS was 1381. We were originally trained as combat engineers, and when the Marines did a landing on a beach they would send us in and we'd put up these big flags to tell all the landing crafts where to drop guys off, where to drop ammo off, where to drop fuel off, whatever. But because they didn't do amphibious landings in the Nam, they had changed our MOS from 1371 to 1381, which was shore party, and changed us to work with helicopters. There were two team members that went with the grunt company.

When I first got there I was a team member, but my team leader, Auggie, got hit and then I became the team leader. My job was to evacuate any casualties. My CO would give me coordinates for where to come in, to land the chopper, to get guys out, or get supplies in. So that was my job. We talked on the radios to helicopters, and went out and placed strobe lights or flares or whatever the case may be, to land choppers, to make my own LZ, to find a secure area someplace where there was an open field without trees in the way, and to get choppers down. Get guys on the chopper, get the wounded out, or new guys in, or food, or water or whatever. That was my job.

It was funny, but Capt Anderson came from Wellesley, Massachusetts, and I was from Canton, Massachusetts. We got to know one another because I was more or less by his side an awful lot. He would give me a list of any supplies that we had to get, and it was my job to get the chopper in; or in an evacuation he would have to give me the coordinates and I would talk to the chopper, let them know where we were. So Capt Anderson and I spent a lot of time together, because it was my job to get the chopper--it wasn't his job, it was my job. He'd say, "I want a chopper here, I want it now," and I'd have to get it. You know, guys were wounded.

Capt Anderson and I got along pretty good. It was kind of unusual for an enlisted man to get along with an officer--not on a first name basis, but to be pretty close to him. But he was a real nice guy, and he got along with all



(Courtesy of Mike Dunn)

Mike Dunn bringing in a CH-53.

his guys. He just kind of hit it off.

We had CH-46's--those are the double props--and CH-53's, normally 46's, and there would be at least one or two, but then there would be two Cobra gunships that would be flying around in circles every time a chopper came in to evacuate casualties. If we were getting fire from a tree line or whatever, one of the Cobras would go by and make a pass with rockets, and then the other would be right behind him to wipe out that tree line so the chopper would come in so we could get guys out.

There would also be F-4 Phantoms. There would be a lot of stuff in the air, and we'd be trying to get guys out, under fire. It was very confusing. I would talk to the different choppers, the Cobras and the Phantoms, because Anderson would give me certain grids of where the fire was coming from. He would give me certain numbers which meant longtitude and latitude, lines from where the estimated fire was coming from in the tree lines. He'd give these coordinates to me, and I'd just say to the choppers "9-6-5-5-9-4" or whatever the numbers were, and next thing you knew they'd wipe out the tree lines.

Even now, every time I hear a helicopter I'm the first one out the door. It got to the point in the Nam that I could tell from two or three miles away what kind of helicopter it was, whether it was a Huey, a Cobra, a 46, a 53. From just the noise. I couldn't even see it, but I could hear it and know exactly what kind of chopper it was. And I could do it today, because all choppers sound different. A Huey is a single prop, and a 53 is a big chopper that has a bigger sound.

When I first got in country there were a few 34's, but they were starting to be obsolete. The 46's came on then. We didn't really use Hueys. I saw Army Hueys, but basically the Marines used 46's and 53's and Cobras.

The choppers came out of Marble

Mountain; it would take them ten to fifteen minutes to get from the air base at Marble Mountain out to where we were. They didn't really have choppers at Hill 55. Hill 55 was out in the bush some ten miles from the air base at Marble Mountain where the choppers were. We would call to our communications bunker, and they would call Marble Mountain. I didn't go directly to the choppers but right to the command post.

If it was really bad, they usually wouldn't bring choppers in under fire; they'd wait. You just couldn't risk choppers going down while you were under heavy fire. You'd have to wait until you got rid of some gooks. You'd stay right where you were until the battle died down--you wouldn't wait in the LZ.

Several times, though, I brought choppers in under fire--when I was being shot at myself. I was always scared, I was never so scared in my life. I'm still scared. My back's always going to be to the wall, so I can make sure there's no one behind me. Sounds weird, but that's the way I am now. I still believe that it's right here, right now--we could get hit with rockets. In any place, in Massachusetts, or any other place in the country. I have that feeling of war, that it could happen at any time.

I've got this friend Billy, an actor, who doesn't even want to talk about the Nam. He saw all the stuff that I saw, but he just doesn't even talk about it. But I live this thing every day; it's still on my mind. It's just with me.

Looking back on it, I really didn't want to talk about it either, because people didn't really know what I'd done. Of all the people you grew up with, that you came from, there were just a few that went through that. You get married and your in-laws don't know, and your wife doesn't know. I have a brother Bobby who was in the Nam in the Marines, and we're very close, probably because we understand each other. Bobby and I can relate to each other.

For years I had trouble sleeping, so I talked with some guys who were veterans, and they said, "You ought to go to the VA. You know it's free, it doesn't cost anything, and you can find out why you can't sleep." So I went to the VA, and they sent me to see a psychologist. And it goes on and on and on. I had to fill out this form, and then they told me I have to see more guys, who interviewed me then--sat down with me, asked me all these questions, for six or seven weeks. And they came to the conclusion that I have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It just happened to me after 20 years.

It bothers me that we lost the war--we really did. I mean it was senseless, and then the whole thing is all over and done with and for what good? Over 57,000 guys were killed, and hundreds of thousands wounded, and basically nothing happened. That had a big influence on my mind, the fact that all that happened for nothing.

It might have been different if we had come home and been told that we'd done our duty and done it well and were respected. But when we came off the ship in California from the Nam, there were no banners, there was no welcome home, no nothing. And then everyone gets discharged and goes their separate ways. And don't forget, we were very young. I was 19 years old when I got out of the Nam. I was sent over when I was 18. I was still a kid! But I went through manhood there. I was still a very young man--I wasn't old enough to vote or drink--but I was in a combat situation.

There were a lot of guys who were in the Nam and weren't affected by it, but they were in Da Nang at a typewriter, or they were with the air wing and didn't see any combat, didn't see any incoming. They had hot meals, clean clothes.

It was a different story where I was. We ate C-rations and that was it. We humped every day; we went from one place to the next. We might have stayed at one place two or three days, a week at the longest, set up a CP, and stayed there and gone on patrols at night, coming back at daybreak. But basically we just humped, though I did go back to batallion a couple of times, for R&R or to get mail. Once when we had an in-country R&R, we went to a beach just south of Da Nang. We had a cookout: hamburgers and hot dogs, and beer.

We used to have beer-ration cards out in

the field--it was 3.2 beer. They'd get a pallet of beer, maybe 80 cases, and they would give you beer cards and they'd stamp you--you could only get three or four beers. This was out in the bush, and not everyone could drink; they'd do it on rotation. A lot of guys--not everyone, but a lot--were doing marijuana. I didn't, but I didn't mind if other guys did it, because it was a way of life--it grew right there and so was easy to get. But I've always loved beer.

Of course that was when I was young and beer cans didn't have flip tops. You had to use a P-38 to open a can of beer. We would open one up, and half of it would foam out because it was so hot. So if we knew we were going to be in the same place for a couple of days, what we used to do with the beer was the same thing we did with our cans of fruit cocktail, pears and peaches. We dug a foxhole every single night. Every night we dug a hole, and we'd dig a little hole at the bottom of our foxhole, a little bit deeper, a foot or eight inches deeper, and we put our fruit or our beer or whatever in there. The next morning when we woke up, we'd have cool peaches or pears or a cool beer.



(Courtesy of Mike Dunn)

DIGGING IN

A Shau Valley, 1969. Using pick and regular shovel to dig foxholes.

I'll never forget being in a firefight and seeing guys getting hit all around me. I remember putting my fingers in the dirt and begging, just begging and scratching the dirt, and begging God to please not let me get hit, please let me slide. And my buddies right next to me were getting blown away and killed.

And all this stuff I just can't forget. It just stays in my mind, it really does.

We had these ponchos, and if you took two and snapped them together you made a little tent. One night during monsoon season--it wasn't pouring out, but it was raining out, drizzling--at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, my buddy Auggie and I were in our little tent when we got hit with incoming. It was mortars, and Auggie got hit with shrapnel. He got up yelling and screaming, and I knocked him down, because we started getting small-arms fire, too. Things like that I'll just never forget.

I have a big piece of shrapnel that I snuck home which almost killed my best buddy, and me too. A big, huge piece of shrapnel that almost hit me. It's weird that this piece of shrapnel means so much to me. Picture it when it explodes from a rocket or a mortar, millions of little pieces, red-hot and all jagged edges, and they go tumbling through the air. And that's how we got most of our wounds.

They say that's why we had flak jackets, because anything in the chest area could be very serious, but if you get hit in the arms and legs that could be repaired. They had the flak jackets to prevent any injuries in the chest area.

There were three parts to our helmets: the shell, the liner, and then the camouflage. You'd take just the shell, and then you'd take

some C-rations and throw the stuff in and mix it up and make a stew or something like that. We'd throw in whatever we had, like beans and franks, and heat it over a little fire. Then we'd use the same helmet to shave and wash our face in the next morning. This is how it was. You cleaned it out the best you could, and then you'd eat out of it again.

We used to get a couple of packs of Chiclet gum, four cigarettes, and a couple of cookies in the C-rats. Once someone sent us some K-rations. They're dehydrated food--you mix them up with water in your helmet. They were great; they were what the Army got all the time. And we'd see Army choppers flying over and they'd have these big things with ice cream in them. But we didn't have them. We got C-rats.

All I carried was a pair of pants, a shirt, some socks--maybe two other extra pairs. We'd take the C-rations and put them in the long green socks, because you just couldn't go walking through the bush with a bag full of groceries. So we'd stick four or five days' worth of food into our socks, and tie up the ends, and tie them on our pack. You didn't get resupplied all the time, so what you had probably had to last you.

The armpits of my jungle fatigues were completely rotted out. I had no laces in my boots--the tongues were just flopping out. If you were lucky you might have a few pieces of laces that you tied together. You did what you had to do.

Even though we got regular paychecks there were no stores, so you couldn't go shopping for things. I think I came home with $2600 saved up. And if I spent $100 in the Nam, it was a lot of money. Everything went home. They'd have the pay roster right out in the field--I think you could cash your check right out in the field. But there was nothing to do with the money, so you sent it home. I think we got paid once, maybe twice a month.

We got mail maybe every two or three weeks. Once in a while maybe twice a week, but we didn't get it every day. And a lot of the guys didn't get any mail at all because they didn't have girlfriends or whatever at home--they just didn't get mail. But I was engaged at the time, and my fiancee wrote me every single day. Every day she'd go to the card store and buy a card and then write me a letter. Every single day, honest to God. When we got mail, I got a whole big, huge bundle, because she wrote every day. And some guys wouldn't get anything. So after I read one of my fiancee's letters I'd say to some of my close buddies, "Here, read this." And they'd read my letter because they didn't get mail. Mail was a big thing, a huge thing.

I didn't see any running water or anything close to it for almost a whole year living out in the bush. After five or six months in the bush I got R&R in Okinawa (to see my brother Bobby, and I missed him--he'd been sent to Guam). I was leaving for R&R, and I went into Da Nang and they had these military heads there: 30 toilets lined up and 30 sinks lined up. I was amazed. I looked at myself in the mirror, and then I flushed all the toilets and turned the water on in every single one of the sinks. I was very excited to see this, after having been in the bush so long. And seeing lights and everything--it was like a whole new world. You live out there in the bush for six months, and live without, and then see all this and say, "Wow, this is great!"

In Okinawa I got pretty well drunk one time, and I was leaning up against a telephone pole down the street, with my hat, my cover, and my tie cocked to one side. I was really drunk, and I was leaning up against this telephone pole just watching cars go by, because I was so excited to see cars--I hadn't seen cars in so long. When I was a kid--before I went into the Marine Corps--we used to hang out uptown and smoke cigarettes and watch cars go by. So I was very excited to see these cars go by. Then these two MPs came up to me and they said, "Hey, buddy, you're not squared away," and I said, "Get out of here you bunch of squids," and I took a swing at them. They threw me up against a car and wanted to see my papers. They brought me back to my hotel room, got my papers, and then they said, "Okay you're all right, just square away." They knew

that I was half-loaded.

We had 13 months. The Marines did 13. I believe I did just a couple of weeks under the 13 months because that's when Nixon was saying "out," and they started to pull the First Marine Division out. They flew us out on choppers, and they said everyone's going home on a ship.

Coming home on the ship, I couldn't believe we were out of the Nam. They'd get on the speaker and say, "We're 20 miles from the coast, and you're out of a combat environment now. You're safe and sound."

We had PT on the flight deck on the way home. They didn't talk to us about going home and what to expect. But we had PT classes.

On the ship there were a lot of nights when I think I just wanted to kill myself, just wanted to jump off the ship and die. I couldn't believe that I'd left, that it was over just like that, and I couldn't believe all the lives that I'd seen lost. And I felt like it wasn't worthwhile living myself. I actually wanted to jump off that ship and do myself in. I really did. I couldn't believe it--it was over, just like that. That bothers me today, knowing that I left there, and I left all these guys that got killed.

I brought my boat down to Florida a couple of years ago, and we were on the inter-coastal waterway going through Camp Lejeune. We were probably ten miles from Camp Lejeune when we stopped at this little fuel pump, to get fuel and some ice and beer. There were six guys with me. We had just gone through a driving, heavy rainstorm five or six hours before where there had been thunder and lightning, and one of the guys said, "Did you hear that? Another thunderstorm we've got to go through."

I said, "That's not thunder--*that* is incoming." I hadn't heard that noise in over 20 years. It was incoming--you could hear it coming in. It was probably 155 or 105 rounds. That was a noise I hadn't heard in years, but one I'll never forget as long as I live. I hadn't heard it in Massachusetts because I haven't been around any battery companies like they have there in North Carolina. He said, "What's that? More thunder and lightning? And I said, "No, that's incoming. It's a certain noise you'll never forget."

We had incoming and a firefight one night, and there were a lot of guys that were really blown away. The next day we got resupplied, and there were these big crates of ammo--big crates with a rope and a wooden handle that take two guys to lift. So one guy says to me, "Hey, Dunn, give me a hand with this ammo." I've been in country eight, nine months at this time, and I'm really salty, I've seen a lot of stuff. So I look down and I see this hand cut off by shrapnel, and I pick it up and I throw it at this guy--you know, as a joke. "Give me a hand," he said, so I threw this hand at him. Think about that--that's sickening.

I thought the guy was going to kill me--he was a new guy, and he didn't laugh. I even think about it today. I've been back in civilian life, in the World, now for more than 20 years, and I think back on it and it was pretty sick to do something like that. But at the time it was a humorous joke. The guy says, "Give me a hand," and I pick one up and throw it at him.

When we got discharged, it was basically stamp your hand, stamp your card, and you're out. There were no classes. They taught you how to more or less be an animal, to live like an animal, but they didn't teach you how to come back into the World--how to be polite and all that stuff again.

I'm still confused, thinking about all these things. You try to do good, you try to be honorable and everything, but you still have this blockage. It's not a chip on my shoulder--it's just something that's there, that's always with me. No matter what I do, or where I go, I constantly think about it. All these things. And I just put them in one bag and that one bag just follows me around wherever I go. And I can't shake it off, I've tried. §

The Last Enlisted Marine

By Paul Stevens

The Marines of Fox Company, Second Battalion, First Marines were the last combat Marines to leave the field in Vietnam. On 7 May 1971 there was a ceremony marking this, with the Assistant Commandant present, along with the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, various politicians, newspeople, and cameras. This ceremony took place in the same area where the 9th Marines had started the first combat operations against the Viet Cong in 1965.

First platoon had security that day, so we didn't get in on any of the honors. But first platoon was the last platoon to leave the bush, and my squad was the last Marine rifle squad to leave the field. I tried to be the last combat Marine to leave the field: My platoon commander, Lieutenant Timberlake, had to give me a direct order to board the chopper before him.

But I was the last enlisted Marine out. §



(Courtesy of Robert Jack)

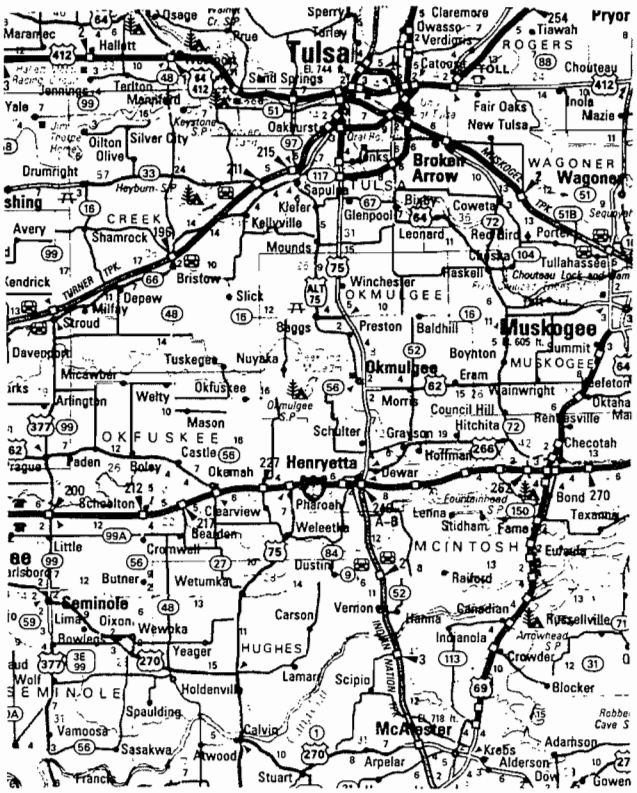
GOING HOME

The battalion's tour of duty is over, and Marines of Hotel Company welcome the freedom bird that will take them home. Da Nang, May 1971.

PART IV

Back in the World

From Then--Till Now


Tulsa
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Seminole
McAlester
Claremore
Pryor
Sapulpa
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Haskell
Checotah
Eufaula
Stidham
Dewar
Preston
Boynton
Council Hill
Hitchita
Grayson
Schulter
Castle
Okemah
Weleetka
Pharoah
Clearview
Beaman
Dustin
Vernon
Carson
Lamar
Scipio
Holdenville
Wetumka
Wewoka
Yeager
Mason
Welty
Okfuskee
Tuskegee
Nuyaka
Depew
Slick
Beggs
Winchester
Kellyville
Glenpool
Leonard
Mounds
Shamrock
Avery
Drumright
Oilton
Silver City
Oakhurst
Sand Springs
Jennings
Tarlton
Manford
Hallett
Osage
Sperry
Owasso
Verdigris
Catoosa
Fair Oaks
New Tulsa
Inola
Mazie
Chouteau
Tullahassee
Porter
Redbird
Coweta
Bixby
Braggs
Muskogee
Summit
Eram
Wainwright
Oktaha
Rentiesville
Bond
Texanna
Fame
Taft
Canadian
Hanna
Indianola
Crowder
Blocker
Russellville
Arrowhead S.P.
Adamson
Krebs
Alderson
Gowen
Arpelar
Stuart
Atwood
Calvin
Sasakwa
Vamoosa
Spaulding
Wolf
Oixon
Lima
Rowland
Butner
Little
Cromwell
Arlington
Micawber
Paden
Boley
Schoolton
Bearden
Welletka
Dustin
Railroad
Hoffman
Dewar
Lenna
Fourteenmile
Pharoah
Okemah
Castle
Schulter
Grayson
Hitchita
Council Hill
Morris
Okmulgee S.P.
Eram
Boynton
Preston
Baldhill
Haskell
Winchester
Slick
Depew
Milfay
Stroud
Davenport
Kendrick
Turner Tpk.
Shamrock
Avery
Kellyville
Glenpool
Leonard
Mounds
Sapulpa
Bristow
Kiefer
Creek
Heyburn S.P.
Drumright
Oilton
Olive
Silver City
Oakhurst
Sand Springs
Jennings
Tarlton
Manford
Yale
Keystone
Hallett
Osage
Sperry
Turley
Prue
Owasso
Verdigris
Catoosa
Claremore
Pryor
Tiawah
Rogers
Toll
Chouteau
Inola
Mazie
Fair Oaks
New Tulsa
Oral Ho.
Broken Arrow
Wagoner
Coweta
Bixby
Redbird
Porter
Tullahassee
Choutau Lock and Dam
Muskogee
Summit
Eram
Wainwright
Oktaha
Rentiesville
Checotah
Bond
Texanna
Eufaula
Stidham
Fame
Taft
Canadian
Hanna
Indianola
Arrowhead S.P.
Crowder
Blocker
Russellville

The War That Never Was

Vietnam
Was an unlikely obscenity.

I remember,
In the gentle cradle of Missouri hills,
Warm-smelling children's days
On shade-streaked park benches,
Rainbow bits of cloth suspended
Bright stars, black bronze
Against faded tunics
Too large for the emaciated traditions
They clothed,
While we shyly touched
And watched in whispered awe.

While I lay among the grass,
A band in a whitewashed cupola
Struck stirring tempos,
And in response
Traditions stood,
And standing grew full fleshed
Urging us
Toward promises.

When our fathers returned
Tight-ranked
Down narrow Main Streets
In proud cadence,
The dignity of duty satisfied,
We loved them
In their glory.

We listened while
In Flanders Field and Arlington
A bugle's tears
Washed white-cross fabric
Into gentle hills.
Dulce et decorum.

Deaf to the darker litany of Gettysburg,
Could we believe
That heroes died
In that last full measure of devotion?

So we were drawn
To Vietnam,
Synonym, we thought,
For glory, battle, courage.
Lacquered masks, we learned,
That coyly hid the face of war.

We children
Learned old lessons
In that schoolhouse of age:
The sweetness of life
In the presence of death,
The sharpness of fear
Beyond our nightmare's worst,
The subtle symbiosis
Of men at war.

Warriors, we returned
To find ourselves
Unwelcome
At our country's fires
Or among its honored dead,
Shunned by those who called us
To serve.
Expecting glory
We received indifference.

In the war to end all wars
They lost a generation
No longer there.
In the war that never was
You have lost a generation
Who are all around you.
--Charles E. Patterson

Welcome Home

By David "Doc" Johnson

*V*eteran's Day, 1992, 25 years after spending Veteran's Day in South Vietnam. New to the area, but remembering that in Jamestown, North Dakota--where I had come from--a free beer was given to people that wore any part of their military uniform into the VFW on Veteran's Day, I, anticipating the need for a beer after a day's worth of hunting, had brought along my campaign ribbons. I kept the ribbons concealed in my shirt pocket until my friend and I drove up to the Zahl, North Dakota, VFW. Then I pulled them out and hung them on my shirt in clear view.

"Wait a minute," was my friend's reaction. "You're not wearing those things, are you?" I glanced over at him, surprised, not saying a word. "What a dork," was the next thing I heard. "You are such a dork, Johnson!"

This . . . from my friend. But this wasn't the first time. I remember that when I was only a few days home from Vietnam, I pulled myself up to the VFW bar in my hometown of Enderlin, North Dakota. I was sitting there, alone with my thoughts, when a lifelong friend walked in. Spotting me, he came straight over to where I sat, threw his arms around my shoulders and blurted out, "Johnson! Where the hell have you been? I haven't seen you around here for quite a while."

I was shocked. A friend from first grade on, part of a graduating class with me of only 46 kids, in a town of merely 1500 people where everyone knew everyone else's business, in the VFW where veterans were supposed to be revered didn't know that I had been fighting a damn war for the past year. "You mean it's a secret?" I muttered perhaps a bit sarcastically. Then I added, "I've been in Vietnam."

He pulled his hand off my shoulder, looked at me like I had done something wrong, then turned to the guy on the other side of him and started talking to him about the night before. I expected him to turn back to me, but he never did. So after about 15 minutes of staring at his back, I got up to see if I could get myself back into the conversation, only to be told, "Look, I don't want to hear any war stories, OK?"

I've been asked, "Did you expect a big brass band to welcome you off the plane?" No, I did not! In fact, I expected very little. What I did not expect, however, was for a lifelong friend to treat me as if I had the plague the instant he found out I had been in Vietnam. Nor did I expect to called a "dork" for displaying ribbons that I earned doing what I once thought was my duty for my country.

Oh, by the way, I've been called stupid for that, too--thinking that I was doing anything for my country by serving in the military. It seems, according to many circles I have been exposed to, that anyone with any brains at all found a way out of the service during the Vietnam War. I did not expect that serving my country would imply that I was stupid. So what *did* I expect? A simple "thanks" for a job well done would have been nice. (I thought I did a good job, anyway.) But it seems that Vietnam veterans weren't entitled to that, either. We lost the war, or so it has been said. I've also been asked, "How could we have done a good job--us, the most powerful armed forces in the world--and lose?" I did not expect to be accountable for that, either. And even today, when I hear someone state that we lost the war, I feel this quiet rage boil up inside me. We were never allowed to fight. How can any other outcome be expected?

Yet, to say that I have never received an honest "thank you"--something other than a

token "cash bonus"--would be a lie. Several years ago I was up in Canada, at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, at a large Alcoholics Anonymous Round Up, when from right off the top of the master of ceremony's head came a speech about how much everyone in the audience had to be thankful for. "We have so much to be thankful for. . . " he said, and he went on and on while I sat there wondering how much longer he was going to go on. And then he was saying, ". . . and speaking of things to be thankful for, are there any Vietnam veterans out there in the audience? How about it? Can we get you guys to just stand up and be recognized?"

And when we did, the whole place exploded in this big applause, like John Lennon had just walked out on stage or something. "We in Canada have so much to thank you guys for," the master of ceremony said, "for without the sacrifices guys like you have made, we would not be gathered here, free people, today."

Perhaps this should have been enough, but I left there that night more depressed than had anything not been said at all. All I could think about was why that "thanks" had to come from Canada. Why couldn't my own country have given Vietnam veterans that same honor?

I suspect that had my country done so, many Vietnam veterans wouldn't still be hurting so bad today, a quarter of a century later. §

* * *

On Looking Down on the California Coastline from My Plane Returning from Vietnam

Oh Lord, my year's prayers have now you blessed
Upon my doleful eyes shedding the same
Melancholy mist weeping to the breast
Of this longed-for shore below this plane I came
Winging back the day. Look upon its piers,
Sad Heart, as alone they brave the wave rolls;
Likewise you're alone for you know not where
Fall your happy tears, just these that burn your soul.
The left-behind fire still rages uncontrolled,
The leeches still grow fat feasting
Off the land. The dead, still dead; the young, the old.
The child still weeps, his father still deceasing.
So mourn, Sad Heart, this shore ends not your search,
As Ares' Vulture glides back upon his perch.

--David Johnson, July 1967

Back to the World

By Jack V. Sturiano

*M*yself and Doc "Ike" Eichler were rotating home. The great day came, and after saying good-bye to all, and finally getting into Da Nang, it must have been about noon. We checked into the Da Nang Hilton, where we met some former 2/1 Corpsmen who'd been at 1st Medical Battalion after coming out of the bush. Since they were already in Da Nang, they had arrived at the the hotel early, had checked in early and had already gotten over to the manifest desk for the freedom bird flight.

As a matter of fact, the crowded Hilton was filled with Corpsmen and Marines who'd signed in hours before us, and it looked like we wouldn't make it out. Our late arrival and the prospect of a filled manifest made us the butt of many jokes by these former bush but now REMF's, and I was getting steamed.

We dumped our stuff and went to the manifest desk, and to my surprise I ran into a staff sergeant that I knew very well. Months earlier this 45-year-old staff sergeant with high blood pressure had been sent to 2/1, but due to his high blood pressure had been sent to the rear--and I had been instrumental in this, so he was grateful. He told us he had a C-47 leaving at 5:00pm. It was then 2:00pm, and if we could get our paper's squared, money changed, etc., in time, we'd be on it.

While the other Corpsmen and Marines were at a movie at Freedom Hill, Ike and I ran back to Da Nang Hilton and quietly got our stuff. Then we ran back to the manifest center. It was close, but we made it, and at 5:05pm we were seated in the belly of a C-47 in the web-slung seat heading for Okinawa--five hours away. We laughed about how we were going to be sitting near the check-in back at Camp Hansen when those Corpsmen came in on the freedom bird in the morning. That laughter turned to terror, when three hours out we were in the middle of a thunderstorm. The plane was pitching, and you could see the lightning and the rain hitting the metal hull.

But we made it, landing at Kadina at 10:00pm. We had a two-hour bus ride to Camp Hansen, arriving about 1:00am. We checked in, turned in our clothes and boots; they handed us two medals, and we walked outside. We'd made it.

Next morning, long after we'd manifested for the freedom bird heading home, we were sitting by the check-in hut, watching the new arrivals. Our Corpsmen friends were stunned to see us, and now it was our turn to hoot and jeer. As a matter of fact, I was senior enlisted man on the freedom flight three days later and was the first to enter the plane. Got two seats in the tail and rode comfortably in the big 707 to TRAVIS--the World. §



The Last Red Cent

By John T. Leuning

I stood on the runway awaiting my freedom. I was tanned to a crust of red dust, dirt, mud, all mixed with sweat from the relentless sun and a painful heat rash from the never-ending humidity. I was tired. I was wasted and drained from the effort of surviving. Looking out over the South China Sea, I saw a reflection--a glimmer of hope. Was it to be my salvation? The war rumbled not a mile away. The war of the Nam!

How had I survived so many battles during my tour of the Nam? What was this Nam? Just what was I? The Nam was a crusade of sorts purposed in history, in religious, militaristic, and revolutionary rights. I was a simple fighting machine with one forward gear, a tool of war, a weapon of higher powers. Having not been stopped in this forward gear, had I beaten a system of madness designed by notions of nations? I may have beaten the system of design--but not the madness!

I survived the system of design through a combination of common sense, skill, enduring strength, some courage, a lot of fear, great caution, luck, along with a little bit of Divine Intervention. I learned early in madness that one must look like the Nam, smell like the Nam, and I learned to act insane within the madness of a war without rules. *One had to become one with the Nam.* Through all of this, however, my thoughts and heart were always of the World.

The World? It was the place of my birth--my life. I knew in the World there would be no deprivation, no hurt, no life-and-death battles. In the World I would try to regain my strength, my hope for life, love, and eternal peace. The "American Dream"--the World--my home. But here, this was the Nam.

I inhaled a breath of relief--but breathed a breath of rot, decay, and with it the stench of death from a millenium of war and destructiuon in the Nam. When would this design, this madness end? Could it? Not forgetting the present, I instinctively scanned the horizon for anything out of measure. I wanted nothing in the thirteenth hour of the thirteenth month to prevent my departure from this endless, ageless cesspool. My months and hours were now to be the past, neatly compacted into centuries of war after war. How significant or insignificant was my role as an individual warring in time? I had found my humanity, given my sweat, and lost my innocence and blood in the bush of the Nam.

This day, however, I did not wipe the sweat from my brow; it evaporated in an instant as did the hundreds of Marines I had fought beside in the bush. This day I could cry! The sweat became the tears I could not shed from my war-shocked, battle-hardened eyes; to each of those hundreds of Marines, cradled in my arms--arms of anguish--I whispered a prayer. Just whose freedom was this? Was it the dead's, free from the deprivation and eternal suffering that were theirs as lost "grunts" in the bush of Nam? Or--was it my freedom, gained by surviving the killing zones? Nothing could be worse than the bush. Was my freedom that from cheating death and watching and feeling the grip of death stealing my friends in real time?

I know that death comes and death goes. The grunts coming in on the airplane were death coming. They too would find their humanity, and along with that *some* form of freedom. The jet cargo would be jammed with freedom, that of death going. My reserved seat next to the wing was freedom from coming and going.

The going, the death bags, were loaded

before the coming were allowed to depart from the plane. The coming from the plane, spit-shined boots, fresh starched hats, clean new uniforms, and baby-soft skin. Disembarking, they gazed at me in mortal silence. They did nothing. They said nothing. Unlike the going, their eyes could see. What remained of me was the answer to all their questions. . . .

My skin was tight and crusted around my sunken, empty eyes. My shriveled body was their hunger, thirst, rot, and fear. I was the face and the body of their war. I had no uniform. It did not matter. It had decomposed weeks ago. My belt loops trapped a few shreds of faded jungle fatigues. Bloody toes wiggled beneath my soleless jungle boots. I was clothed for the coming and going of death. I was their months to come. Lowering my head in a fleeting prayer, I knew what was to be. All of them would perish in some way, in some form, as grunts in the bush of the Nam. Of every seven Marines, two would die here; three would be severely wounded; two would return to the World, where one would lose his mind and one could only hope to escape the horror of it all. Few would escape the madness.

On top of the ladder I looked back to the Nam. My fear was behind me. My fear was ahead of me. In formation death coming were still looking at me. I was looking at the stacks of combat gear, weapons, and ammunition which once belonged to the dead, the wounded, and of course to me. This was the changing of the guard in the Nam.

Before stepping into the hatch of the plane, I inhaled the red dust of the Nam. "The last red scent." I thought of the enemy and the North of the Nam. What would be the thoughts of the last Communist to cross the demilitarized zone separating the North and the South of Vietnam, "the last red sent" to celebrate another endless victory in time? In the hatch I felt my coin bag. It was never empty. I reached for and felt my lucky penny. It had been with me in my time. It had been with me in my steps across the bush of the Nam. It belonged in the Nam. It was part of the experience. I flipped it onto the runway for some other grunt. "The last red cent!" Now the World!

Four-and-one-half million American soldiers served in loyal duty in Vietnam. *Sixty-thousand soldiers* died from combat-related injuries. The United States of America relegated these soldiers to combat because of the fear of Communism and the wealth war brings to both the military and the industrial complex of our capitalistic society. Aside from the wealth this untidy war brought, the military was able to expend stockpiled, outdated weapons and supplies from earlier American wars and conflicts of the twentieth century. The monies appropriated by Congress for the Vietnam War went to re-arm the military with fresh stockpiles and to develop new "smart" weapons to be used in future conflicts of U.S. interests. I fought a war with leftovers.

And in discussion of leftovers, back in the World I found that I was a heathen good for one thing--killing! I was instructed by America to kill or be killed. There were no rules. There was no honor . . . Nam was the World and the World was Nam! The only difference was the type of ammunition used. The effect was and still is impossible to cope with. Guerrilla vs. conventional warfare? This was the horripilation displayed by the American news media to the American public, at the cost of the Nam vets. While the leadership of America was to blame, America blamed the Vietnam veterans. This all created runaway emotions for the Nam vets who did not fit and blend within contemporary society. What followed became a negative evolution of sorts, further disabling the suffering Nam vets, the few who survived to *live* in the World!

By the time the war had been over 20 years, *nearly 100,000 Vietnam veterans* had committed suicide. The survivors of the bush are not! Their milk and honey were not to be. The World as well as the American Dream changed during and after the Nam.

At this moment, a generation of Nam vets is stumbling the outskirts of America, half in the Nam and half in the World. Why so much anger and confusion to this day? How about an ungracious nation? The World! §

The Faces of Men

By Terry Maddrell

For many of us, it's been 25 plus years since we served in the Nam. Some memories and impressions fade as we get older, but some (both good and bad) will stay with us forever. Two memories that have stayed with me come from the faces of men.

In March 1968, I had just completed Staging Battalion duty, and they had boarded all of us on buses to go to El Toro Air Base in California. From there we were to fly to Vietnam (with brief stops in Hawaii and the Philippines). Like so many Marines before and after us, we were a cocky and gung-ho group. There was a lot of "jaw jacking" and "grab assing" on the bus.

As we were pulling out of Camp Pendleton, a car pulled alongside us. I remember it as a blue convertible, and the driver was the father of one of the Marines on the bus, a guy named Alexander. Alexander was a pretty good guy whom I'd served with in ITR and Staging Battalion. He usually just did his job and kept out of trouble. I remember that he was easy to engage in conversation.

His father, like some other parents and loved ones (mostly from California, I presume), had come to see his son off to Vietnam. As the bus and the car came to a stop sign, Alexander's father stood up in his convertible and extended his hand to Alexander, who--reaching out the window--grasped it tightly. This seemed to last, to my memory, for several minutes, but in reality it was only a few seconds.

The Marines on the bus let out a tremendous cheer as the father's car pulled away. Alexander was crying--crying hard. A big black gunnery sergeant stood up and gave him a tissue, patted him on the shoulder, and said, "Don't worry. You're coming back." From that moment on you could've heard a pin drop on that bus. We were young and naive, but all of us had understood the significance of that handshake.

Alexander's face is one I'll always remember.

Another face I still see to this day is that of Sergeant Garcia, who was also in my Staging Battalion. He was going to Nam for a second tour, and so was different from many of us because of his rank and his experience. But he also had a look on his face that, at the time, both puzzled and scared the rest of us.

When we landed in Da Nang (we'd flown on Flying Tiger Airlines), there was a lot of confusion and standing around. After we were assigned to our units--mine being 2/1, I'm proud to say--I remember being put on a four-by truck with Sgt Garcia, who was going to another unit. Believe it or not, we had flak jackets, but no weapons, and Sgt Garcia brought that to the attention of the driver. When we reached Sgt Garcia's destination (I have no recollection of where or with whom this was), he grabbed his gear and prepared to get off. I shook his hand and wished him luck. He didn't say anything, but the look he gave me was one I came to realize was one of fear and anticipation. He'd been here before! I'll always remember Garcia's face.

In 1989 I visited the Wall in Washington, D.C., for the first time, and among the names I looked up were those of Alexander and Garcia. Alexander's name wasn't there, and I remember how relieved I was. Since Garcia is a common Mexican-American name and I didn't know Sgt Garcia's first name, I wasn't able to determine his status. It's strange, isn't it? Although I barely knew him and obviously haven't seen him since that day in 1968 in Vietnam, I pray to God he made it! I'm thankful I did, and I'll never forget those who didn't.

We just did our job and looked after each other in the Nam--we left the politics and the debating up to others.

Semper Fi. §

Farewell to a Comrade In Arms

By Ron Cagle, with David "Doc" Johnson

[The following originally appeared in 2/1's Newsletter, *founded and edited by David "Doc" Johnson.]*

Doc Johnson: Ron Cagle wrote me regarding one of 2/1's two MIA's, Theothis Collins [the other is Roger Hamilton, MIA-KIA 21 April 1967]. Ron remembered a black named Collins who, in the summer of '68, apparently stepped on a large explosive device outside of Khe Sanh, and, except for a few pieces of ribs, was never--in Ron's mind--found. "Was this Collins and 2/1's MIA Collins the same person?" Ron wanted to know.

So I called the USMC History and Museums Division and compared notes. Yes, Collins was black. Yes, Collins did in fact step on a large explosive device and no body was ever recovered. Yes, the incident happened outside of Khe Sanh. I therefore concluded, yes, the two Collinses are no doubt one and the same. I called Ron back and informed him of what I had learned and asked if he'd like to write something in his friend's memory. The following is Ron's reply:

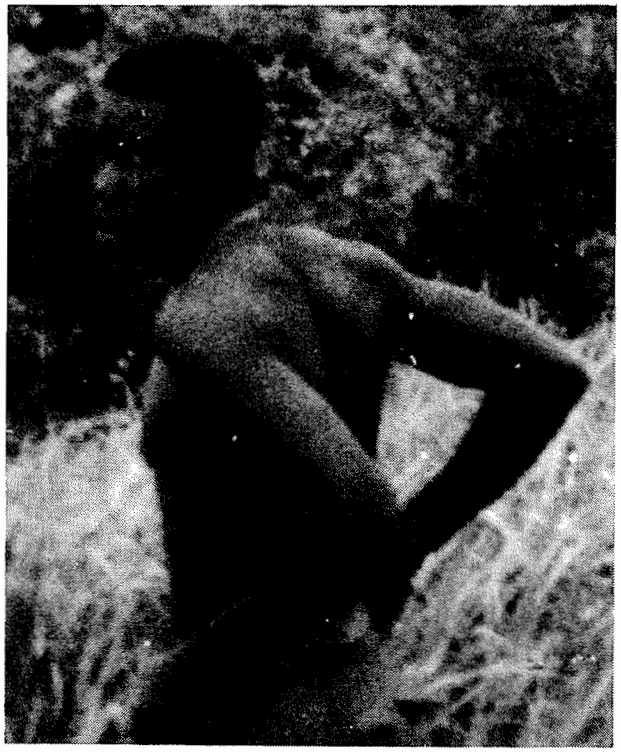
Ron Cagle: I really don't know how to write about a good Marine doing his job and ending in such a violent death. We had spent countless days and nights since Operation Pegasus searching the enemy out in the mountains and valleys around Khe Sanh.

It seems the days lasted forever with artillery, rocket, and mortar attacks when on patrol, or in the confines of Khe Sanh. The terrain was steep, thick and ever-changing. One minute you were in the hot sun in elephant grass over your head and the next in canopy rain forest. We searched bunkers, tunnels, caves; we assaulted enemy positions, and were assaulted ourselves. We went without water, food, and baths. We fought off leeches, snakes, infection, rabid snake bites in Khe Sanh, torrential rain, and nights so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. During the summer days of '68, men went down from heat stroke, mines, bullets, malaria, mental breakdowns, and all of us were tired and afraid.

It was just such a morning when Collins tripped a wire that was rigged for a helicopter booby trap. We all hit the ground. When we got up, we searched for his body and only found small remains. The hill was lousy with trip wires and elephant grass that made the search slow. It was hot and muggy, and the search for a friend who had been through so much shit was extremely difficult.

To see someone blown to bits on some damn hilltop was a damn shame. Collins had fought gallantly beside me and had always been there. Now he was gone forever, like so many other friends.

I will always remember my brave comrades--if not all their names, at least their faces. Once joking and laughing young men who fought like animals--which they had become--now are home in heaven. §



Right: THEOTHIS COLLINS
MIA-KIA 19 August 1968.

THE SOUTH VIETNAM NATIONAL FRONT FOR LIBERATION GIVES LENIENT AND HUMANE TREATMENT TO CAPTURED G.I.s.

American soldiers and officers who surrender in combat and let themselves be captured by the Liberation Armed Forces will have their lives insured and be quickly led to a safe area.

— During their captivity, they will receive a humane treatment. They will not be beaten or humiliated. They will receive enough food, and medical treatment if they are sick or wounded.

— They will not be deprived of their personal possessions.

— They will be allowed to correspond with their families and friends.

— Soldiers or officers who are tired of the war and cross over to the side of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation will be welcome and will receive favoured treatment.

HOW TO SURRENDER :

— Gun on the ground or slung across the back.

— Hands up above the head.

— If still at some distance from the Liberation troops, tie a white cloth to the tip of your gun.

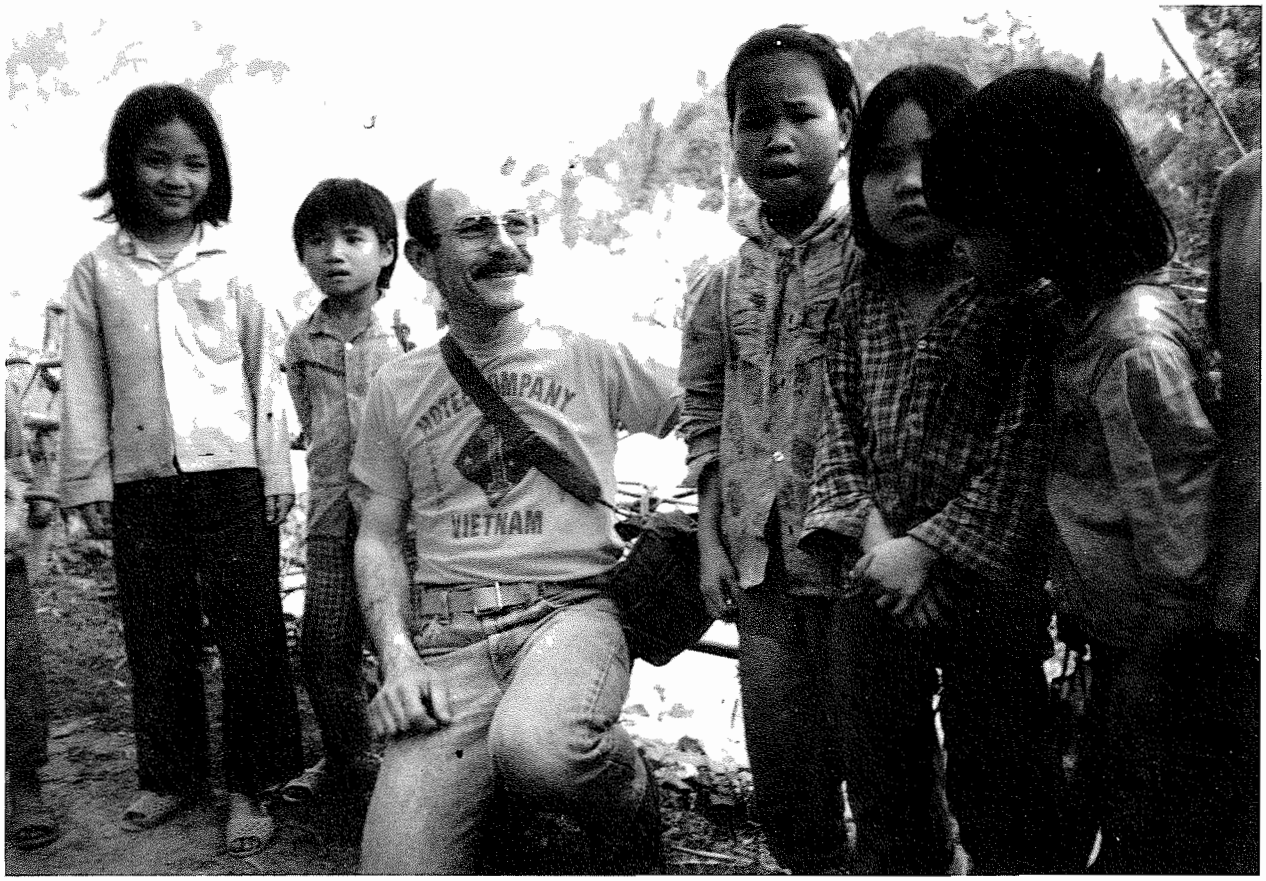
AMERICAN G.I.s !

If you have seen the truth and are sincerely tired of this dirty and criminal war of aggression, seek a way in combat to cross over to the side of the Vietnamese Liberation troops or let yourselves be captured by them. Your lives will be insured, and you will be given humane treatment. **This is how you can remain alive and return to your families !**

Truyền đơn giải thích chính sách, dành cho binh lính Mỹ

(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

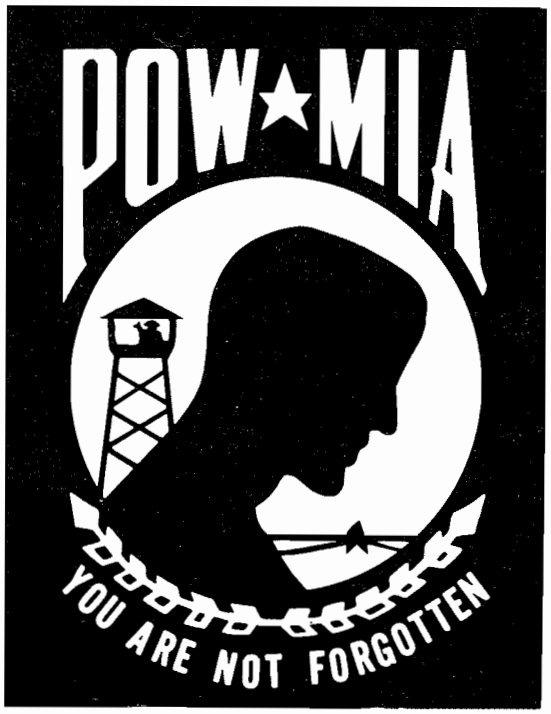
[Propaganda leaflet explaining the policy designed for American soldiers.]



(Courtesy of Paul Gloria)

TWENTY-FOUR YEARS LATER

This picture was taken at a Muong village in Hoa Binh, approximately 120 kilometers southwest of Hanoi on 23 March 1993. "The irony is I was medevaced out of country 20 March 1969. In questioning the parents of these children, I learned they had seen ten Americans on a work detail being marched up Highway 6 through this community in 1990. One of, I'm sure, many firsthand sightings never reported." --Paul Gloria





Thanks . . . But Where Were You?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for your pride in and support of our troops during Desert Storm.
. . . But where were you some 25 years ago when proud young men with a sense of duty, honor and love of country were shuttled off to Southeast Asia?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for the flags flying, yellow ribbons and singing of the National Anthem.
. . . But where were you when brave young men lay bleeding in rice paddies?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for assuring today's military men and women that they are loved, respected and appreciated.
. . . But where were you when maggots, rot and leeches ravished young American bodies, jungle boots were worn to shreds with no hope of replacements and you cheered as some trooped to colleges or Canada?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for demanding truth today.
. . . But where were you when lies with official sanction were being spoon-fed to us at home?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for the grand ceremonies and beautiful words of praise for returning dead and wounded.
. . . But where were you when thousands of broken, maimed and dead were returned to us and when many were never returned at all?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for the caring you've shown for families of servicemen and servicewomen.
. . . But where were you when those of us wept alone in fear and anguish and were hurt and angered by you?

Thank you, loyal Americans, for trying to dispel the Vietnam syndrome for us.
. . . But the stench of death in jungle mud will never be dispelled from so many memories. The disloyalty you displayed toward courageous young men cannot be forgotten in this lifetime.

Today I praise you, loyal Americans.
. . . But where were you yesterday when you were so sorely needed?
Why didn't you care?

Semper Fi, loyal, Americans. Semper Fi.
--Wanda Clarke, the mother of 2/1 Marine John P. Clarke

Semper Fidelis

By Paul C. Mangan

I joined the Corps in May of 1964 on a 90-day deferral and entered boot on 5 July at MCRD, San Diego.

I made platoon guide shortly after the platoon organized, and remained that until we got to the rifle range at Camp Matthews. Then fate or bad luck got me. I broke my left thumb. (It was a glancing blow off Private Caldwell's chin into the side of a Quonset hut). Off to "Casual Company" for six weeks I went.

I was finally released to duty and was assigned to a new platoon--Second Battalion, platoon 273. I joined them a week before they went to the rifle range.

About two weeks after we returned from the range, I was made platoon guide and a new member joined the platoon from Casual Company, John P. Clarke. It was just a coincidence that we were both Casual Company rejects, but we became friends.

We graduated from boot camp, completed ITR (infantry training) at San Onofre in Camp Pendleton and "locked on" with Fox 2/1 at San Mateo, over the mountain from San Onofre. I was a "grunt" with 1st squad, 1st platoon. "J.P." went to weapons as a gunner.

Joined by three others, J.P. and I went on liberty together as well as taking part in plenty of base activities. The five, including J.P. and me, were John Crist (J.C.), Bob "Chicken Hawk" Craft, and Billy Joe Holt. All of them were in weapons but me. They made great backups.

In mid-August 1965, the battalion was loaded into "cattle cars" and taken to San Diego and on-loaded aboard the USS *Bexar*. For the next 26 days we spent our time playing "hearts" (and winning some good liberty money), watching the capture of the elusive "Sea Bat," and checking the colors of our "chits" to see whether we lined up on the port or starboard side for chow. We "wet netted" into Okinawa in mid-September and spent two weeks in training. There was no liberty allowed (though some of us did find the hole in the fence and made it into town).

The call finally came for us to load up. We were trucked back to the beach, and again we wet netted onto our ship, this time the USS *Valley Forge*. The *Valley* was a real barge. A converted WWII aircraft carrier, it was now an LPH (land platform helicopter). We were making history and didn't know it. We were the first BLT (battalion landing team) in Vietnam. By this time I was a grenadier (M-79 grenade launcher) and J.P. was humping the 60 (M-60 machine gun). J.C. and Billy Joe were A-gunners and Chicken Hawk was an ammo humper.

We floated up and down the South China Sea and made several chopper drops into Nam on search and destroy's. We made contact several times, but nothing like what was coming.

One evening after chow, I started having pains in my stomach. I went to see Doc Gredding and he sent me to see the ship's doctor. After blood tests and a few other painful explorations, I was told I had an appendix that was about to burst and I was scheduled for surgery.

Early the next morning while I was getting my guts sliced open, the battalion went on another search and destroy. When I woke up several hours later there was a lot of activity around, but no one paying attention to me. By evening I still hadn't seen anyone. I wasn't fed or given any pain medications. When a Corpsman finally got around to me, I asked him

what the hell was going on. He told me the search-and-destroy operation had gone real bad and there were a lot of wounded and a bunch of KIA's.

It must have been a day or two before the unit got back aboard ship. Some of the guys came down to see me and told me how bad things got. We were shot up pretty bad and a lot of men were gone. Then I heard the bombshell: "J.P. got hit, a .50-caliber in the chest." He was one of the first to get it. Jumping out of one of the choppers, he got hit. He didn't know what hit him--he was gone. Later I heard the operation was called Harvest Moon.

We had a few more operations after Harvest Moon. Changed ships to the *Iwo Jima* and finally, after additional loss of men, we were sent to Hill 41 outside of Da Nang. I pulled a lot of combat and ambush patrols. My squad leader Don ("Donkey") Kinard was good at patrols and didn't lose any men; so we got all the nighttime patrols and what seemed like most of the daytime patrols. We didn't get a lot of sleep.

Just after Christmas we moved off Hill 41 and again participated in search and destroy's in the Hue/Phu Bai area. One operation proved to be the last operation F 2/1 would participate in as a unit: Operation New York. New York turned out to be a repeat of Harvest Moon. We took such a high casualty count that it was decided that F 2/1 would be disbanded and those of us remaining would be assigned to new units.

Because of my combat and ambush patrol experience, I was assigned to the newly organized CAC (Combined Action Company) unit. My squad was organized and sent to the village of Phu Bai. During the time I was the squad leader, our time was spent patrolling the six districts within the Phu Bai area and guarding Highway 1 through our area.

I ended my tour with my CAC squad, flying home at the end of September 1966. Of the five musketeers, three were KIA: J.P. Clarke, Billy Joe Holt, and Bob "Chicken Hawk" Craft. As I flew out of Nam I vowed never to forget my comrades and friends, and for 24 years have drunk a single shot of whiskey to my departed brothers each 10 November.

April, 1989. I was thumbing through my copy of *The Old Breed News* when I came across a name on the new-member roster: *Sgt John P. Clarke F 2/1 RVN.* The first thing I thought was that there was more than one Clarke in the Corps, but in F/2/1 RVN? The logical explanation was that if it was J.P., then his parents had sent his name in as a memorium. The next day I decided I should contact his relatives and let them know I had served with him. (If it *was* the same John P. Clarke).

I needed the courage to call. On Friday night I had an Optimist softball game and consumed mass quantities of pizza and beer afterward. With the courage in my gut, I called information for the state of Kansas. The address I had was just a PO box in Hillsdale, Kansas. No such listing, was the operator's reply. "Listen," I said, "I think the name is someone I served with in Vietnam--is there any way you can help me?" "Oh!" she said. When she came back on the line she said she had found a John P. Clarke in Overland Park, Kansas, and gave me the number.

I had butterflies when I called. I didn't know what I would say to his family. And what if. . . .

I made the call at 11:30pm PST. It was 1:30am in Kansas. On the second ring a male voice answered the phone.

"Uh, excuse me," I said, "I'm trying to locate a J.P. Clarke."

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Are you J.P. Clarke?" I said.

"No, sir."

"Is there a J.P. Clarke there?" I said.

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

"May I speak to him?" I asked.

"No, sir," the voice said.

I asked the voice if I could ask him a few questions, and he said I could. "Do you know if J.P. Clarke was in the military?"

"Yes, sir."

"Marine Corps?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he serve in Vietnam?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"Around 1966."

"Look," I said in a quavering voice, "I think I may have served with him in Vietnam. May I talk to him?"

"No, sir," came the reply.

"Well, can I leave my name and phone number for him and can you ask him to call me tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir."

J.P. hadn't called me by 9:00am the next morning, so I decided to call one more time. When he came on the line I recognized his voice immediately.

"Is this J.P. Clarke?"

"Yes it is--is this Mangan?"

"Yeah, man!" was all I could say. It was a real shocker. We talked for a few minutes, and then J.P. got real quiet. He finally told me he hadn't called me back earlier because he was afraid to talk to me.

When I asked him why, his answer floored me. He said he had heard I had stepped on a land mine on one of my frequent combat patrols, and did not make it home. Then I told him what I had been told about his getting it during Harvest Moon. There was silence on the phone that seemed to last for hours. All I could think of saying was, "Welcome home, John."

"Yeah. You too, man."

I had a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes, and I'm pretty sure J.P. did too.

Three months later I flew to Kansas and spent a week with John and his family. I spent another long weekend with him a few months later while on a business trip. J.P. and his wife have visited me and my two daughters in California.

It's like there was no 24-year separation between us. When we talk on the phone (which is frequently) or meet together, the bond is immense. The epitomy of "Semper Fidelis."

This is a true story about two Marines that became reacquainted 24 years after each had thought the other was KIA in different operations. §

Do You Know Me?

DO YOU KNOW ME?
Can you help me understand?

Why did we give so much for an
Ungrateful land?
Why did so many suffer and die?
Where was GOD with His helping hand?

We gave our ALL, our HEARTS and SOULS,
While WASHINGTON played its role.

They went to banquets and parties
While we lived in foxholes.

I lost my girl, my youth, and very soul,
Not to mention my FAITH in GOD and
COUNTRY as a whole.

So I ask again, DO YOU KNOW ME?
Can you help me understand?

Can you give me back my youth,
So uselessly spent?
Can you give me back my FAITH in GOD,
And this GREATEST OF LANDS?

PLEASE, HELP ME IF YOU CAN. . . .

--Hugh W. Niles

Together Again

By Dennis Grall

[*I* was just a basic grunt and radioman with Fox 2/1 in 1966-1967, and nothing special really happened during my tour. Other than being wounded twice and seeing some amount of combat, I just had a routine time. The following is adapted from an article I wrote for my local newspaper, the *Daily Press Staff* of Escanaba, Michigan.]

Getting Together Eighteen Years after Vietnam

While many of my high school friends were conducting panty raids in college dorms, I was conducting raids on Viet Cong villages in South Vietnam.

While many of my high school friends spent vacations bathing in the Florida sun, I spent my time dreaming of life in "the World" while traipsing through rice paddies.

While many of my high school friends spent fall weekends cheering for their college's football team and partying, I tried to keep up with the sports world via Armed Forces Radio and *Stars and Stripes*.

While many of my high school friends spent time in succeeding years attending college reunion blasts, I essentially lost track of the people who I had lived and bled with, and agonized over deaths of comrades in arms with.

That period in Vietnam, 1966-1967, was a part of my past, resurrected occasionally when someone brought up the war.

That is, until a day in 1985, when a totally unexpected letter brought back a flood of memories from those long ago days in the Marine Corps: Plans for a reunion of Foxtrot Company (Second Battalion, First Marine Regiment) were given in the letter from one of my old foxhole buddies.

Suddenly, all my thoughts turned to those eight and a half months of humping through Nam, baked by the burning sun, drenched by monsoons and frightened by the ever-present threat of death or injury.

Memories of helping carry Tony Wagner, who sent the reunion letter, through waist-deep rice paddies in a litter so he could get a medevac chopper after getting shot in the knee.

Memories of participating in Operation Teton in the shadow of Marble Mountain near Da Nang shortly after my arrival in country and marvelling at the sight and sound of Puff the Magic Dragon unleashing its volley from the darkened skies.

The letter from Wagner (like me, a native of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, although I never knew him until our paths crossed in the rice paddy) prompted memories of carrying the PRC-25 radio, which was also Wagner's job. I had started as a rifleman, even though I had never touched a gun before joining the Corps and have not touched one since. I volunteered to carry the radio.

On one of my first missions with the radio, I had to make contact with a forward air observer to arrange an air strike on enemy positions across the river. The sight of two F-4 Phantom jets banking into their turn against a brilliant sky, then swooping in and unleashing a tremendous volume of fire--followed by a bombing run some 200 yards from our position--is something I have never forgotten.

One slight miscalculation on the coordinates and our platoon could have been the target. Not a great thought, considering how often "friendly fire" hit the wrong targets.

The most vivid memory of Vietnam brought forth by the letter was the reason for the November reunion planned in Washington, D.C., that year. On 21 April 1967, a portion of our company stumbled head-on into a well-concealed and entrenched North Vietnamese regiment in the Nui Loc Son Valley, the same area where former Pittsburgh running back Rocky Bleier of Appleton, Wisconsin, earned his Purple Heart a couple of years later.

More than 30 Foxtrot Marines were killed and another 80-plus were wounded in the vicious battle. I was just an observer, fortunately, as the regimental radio operator had volunteered to take my place on what was supposed to be a routine patrol. He survived, but several good friends did not.

Again I had to relay the radio messages, calling in air strikes and getting reinforcements. The jets arrived quickly, but it was almost an hour before the helicopters could ferry in help from Da Nang. When those 18 choppers flew into sight, my heart took a leap, and a lump stuck in my throat.

They were too late to help save everyone, but they eventually turned back the enemy and allowed my friends to return to safety. One of them, Dave Pettine of Philadelphia, was separated from the rest of the group and finally--three days later--got back to the hill about a mile away from where I had viewed the fighting.

Perhaps the best piece of news in the reunion letter was that my company commander, Captain Eugene Deegan, was alive and a brigadier general. I had been told that he had been killed in the initial volley of what became Operation Union. I had drawn close to him as his radioman, but never knew he had survived.

So in 1985 we Marines of Fox 2/1 had our first meeting since 1967. In Washington, DC, we shared war stories and proudly showed the scars from our wounds--which provided lasting memories--as we relived together our memories of what it is like to spend time in Hell. Finally, after all the years, we were together again. §

VA Blues

I'm finally getting hip to the VA jive,
for I first filed for benefits in '85.

A VA doctor confirmed my condition, but
the board said no, which raised some
suspicion.

So, I was down for the count, but not
ready to quit, some outside help, pulling
me out of the pit.

Appeal #2, was denied like the first,
psychotherapy, medication, my condition,
got worse.

'86-'87, my case still on hold, I'm
beginning to feel like a hundred years old.

With no pleasure or comfort, the days
seem like years, sometimes I breathe
anger, sometimes I shed tears.

'88, was my trip to the BVA--another year
gone by, I'm sorry to say.

The verdict, a remand, sent back to my
state, two more doctors would see me,
at some future date.

When I finally got privilege to the last
two reports, these were the examination
doctors' retorts:

Severely, both socially and industrially,
this man is impaired . . . *even* unemployable,
one doctor dared.

My case is mild against others I've heard--
they range from the ridiculous to the absurd.

I don't know what's happening, my mind's like a fuse.
Oh Lord, please help fight off the VA Blues.

--William LaVonture

Aftermath

By Larry E. "Doc" Marshall

I was a Corpsman with Golf Company 2/1/1 from November 1968 until December of 1969. Since then, my life has become a quest for life. If you'll bear with me, I'll try to explain. My concentration isn't what it used to be.

I, like so many other veterans, thought for 20 years I was crazy. I thought my inability to keep relationships, jobs, or worldly goods was a spinoff from the increasing consumption of alcohol. My never ending nightmares and not-so-infrequent flashbacks were added proof of my insanity. And the alcohol wasn't working any longer. I had been committed to a psychiatric unit on more than one occasion by the time I'd heard the term PTSD. Thoughts of suicide had been my only haven for rest for over a year until I learned of PTSD. Then I began to believe that there might be a relief from this affliction and thus began my quest.

I have completed a PTSD program of three months as an inpatient at the VAMC in Topeka, Kansas, and am now residing at the VAMC in Leavenworth, Kansas. I am very new at the process of group therapy, or therapy of any sort for that matter. I am not at all, at this point, convinced that relief from the Vietnam experience is possible, only that with much work it can be understood.

Upon entering the program at Topeka, I was asked why I was there. I simply stated that I'd been told there was such a thing as overkill in controlling one's emotions. I was accepted and scheduled for an initial assessment by the treatment team. Not keeping a daily journal, as many do, I write when the urge strikes me. Immediately after my first and second assessments the urge struck me. I am in hopes these writings will be of some insight to anyone with similiar circumstances.

Assessment #1 (2-19-90):

It was like being tied to the chair and whipped with my own testimony; naked, and eight strangers looking at me and asking in silence, *What makes this guy tick*? There was fear down deep, fear of rejection, that I wasn't appropriate for the program. Then what would I do, where would I go? There was also fear that I was appropriate and would have to continue with my commitment to it.

I felt anger, anger at the sound of my words, my thoughts and memories being tossed into the room and sorted, categorized and recorded by all these strangers. Anger at losing some of my control and being exposed to yet another stranger--trust.

The underlying meaning of this . . . is that there was feeling, definable and emotional feeling in me, and that's a start!

Assessment #2 (3-5-90):

It was my turn to read my thoughts aloud to these now less distant strangers. Concern of direction was my intent. I heard no words leave my lips as I spoke. Fear and skepticism were driving forces as I sat in the same chair as three weeks prior. I was embarrassed by my poorly composed statements and feared misinterpretation.

I was told to interact and bond with my peers through similiar experiences they and I have. Yet, there are lies and emptiness of understanding from all but a few. I found our compassion for others, our Marines, to be as unique, yet damning as any emotion or feeling could be.

I asked, "Who doctors the doc's?" We are the doc's and well deserving of rest. §

After the War

Dennis Wasson

I went home from Vietnam on emergency leave; my father had heart trouble and had to have an operation (he came out OK). To save leave, I went to the reserve center in Columbus, Ohio. Worked there and lived with an uncle. Tried to get back to Nam. Denied. Tried for a humanitarian reassignment to the reserve center in Columbus. Denied. I had become engaged by mail while I was in Vietnam, so now my fiance and I got married.

Got orders for Barstow, California, the west coast supply center. Worked at the building where they reconditioned tanks and tracs from Vietnam. I cleaned and checked cables. I was very busy. My wife joined me at the end of January 1969. We got base housing. We settled in pretty good.

Then my problems began. Waking up with cold sweats. Dreams of my friend La Monte Horsley being killed. Even tried to strangle my wife in my sleep.

So my wife tried making an appointment for me with a psychiatrist. She couldn't, but tried to get me to do it. No luck. To top it all off, I was drinking heavily. But these things were just the start--the tip of the iceberg.

I took an early out in April 1969. Came home and tried civilian life. Had four jobs in three years. I went back to the Corps for two more years. Dropped one stripe to PFC. Was drinking more. Ended up divorcing.

Got out of the Corps--did make corporal before I did. Really did have a great chance at a great career. Gave it up--another mistake.

Stayed out less than a month. Stayed drunk most of that time. My mother said go back to the service. So I joined the U.S. Naval Seabees. But there were still problems. Alcohol abuse increased the intensity of memories relating to Vietnam. Thus, I couldn't drink enough to forget. As time went on, things got worse. Wasn't getting any help.

One time I actually lost it all. Was screaming, throwing chairs, just going wild. A chief (E-7) and senior chief (E-8) sat me down. Calmed me down. Then covered it up. No help for the problems.

I even went through alcohol rehab with no help. Didn't do much to stop my drinking, and no help at all for the nightmares and the cold sweats.

Finally, near the end of my 20 years (I did retire), I got help. But it was too late to help with my promotions. I retired a very unhappy Seabee and former Marine. I only gained one stripe over what I'd left the Corps with. I was up and down between E-4 and E-5 several times.

I'm still troubled with PTSD, but I have learned to live with it. §

Broken Dreams

I once had dreams, I did you see.
I once had dreams of what I would be,
but now I sit a broken man,
for I've been to a place called Vietnam.

A Marine, I fought courageously,
in a land fraught with beauty and mystery.

Desensitized from the human race--was
the only way in which to face the
things I've done, been witness to;
if the cards were dealt differently,
it might have been you.

To death and horror, we've given chase.
We air-lifted and humped to every place.
We left our mark for all to see,
for it was broadcast on TV.

A guerrilla war, for those who don't know,
is fought by Sally, Mary and Joe. Their
names may be different, their faces, too,
but men, women and children, they're all
gunning for you.

Our peers at home were not aware, or
perhaps too brainwashed, they just didn't
care.

The jungle, the leeches, they all took
their toll, but the shrapnel and bullets,
would take a man's soul.

Over fifty thousand, they say in all--you
can see for yourself, it's on a black wall.

A monument to the dead, in Washington, DC--
you might say I'm lucky, it could have been me.
My name chipped in marble for all those
to see, and sometimes I wish, I wish it could be,
for my dreams have all broken, I have PTSD.
--William LaVonture

The Corporal's Resume

CITATION: ". . . [W]hile serving as a Fire Team Leader with Company E, Second Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 6 June 1969, the Second Platoon of Company E was participating in Operation Pipestone Canyon when the Marines came under a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire from a large and well-concealed North Vietnamese unit. Slashing his way through the thick brush in order to assault the enemy position, Private First Class [Ronald J.] Schiattone. . . ."

CITATION: ". . . [W]hile serving as Fire Team Leader with Company E, Second Battlion, First Marines, First Marine Division in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. During the early morning hours of 20 August 1969, a squad from Company E was conducting a patrol near Phong Ho (1) in Quang Nam Province when the radio operator was seriously wounded by the detonation of a well-concealed enemy explosive device. Reacting instantly, Lance Corporal Schiattone. . . ."

CITATION: ". . . [W]hile serving with Company E, Second Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division. On the night of February 1970, while leading a six-man patrol to a selected ambush site deep in enemy-controlled territory, Corporal Schiattone. . . ." §

Guilt and Vietnam

By Jerry Woods

*O*n 10 November 1989 I retired from the U.S. Naval Reserve after 25 years, five months, and four days of *"Having Served Faithfully and Honorably,"* as the certificate says, and having lived for 21 of these years with a very severe case of *I-fucked-up* in the back of my head. It has honestly taken me all that time to realize that I can never make up for the fact that I was sent to Vietnam in January of 1967, and in the last week of February 1967 I was sent to the U.S. Naval Hospital on the island of Guam with a small hole in my right forearm from a piece of hand-grenade shrapnel which severed the median nerve and medial artery in my arm. I had no feeling, sensation, or movement in my hand. I had received the "Million Dollar Wound." Short time in the bush, a wound I'd recover from with time, and no chance of going back for more. Lucky guy, huh? Sure.

In the latter part of March '67, I was doing my chores of delivering drugs in the hospital (the Navy puts walking wounded to work as soon as they can while in the hospital), and as I walked into the orthopedic ward where everyone was in some sort of traction to some part of the body, three or four Marines called out to me, "Hey! Doc! Doc Woods! You OK? God! We thought you were dead!" And so on. It seemed that half of my company was there, trussed up in casts, long bone splints, tractions and body casts. Seems that a week or so after I got hit, my company (Fox) went on a company maneuver to where I (and seven others) had gotten it, to drive the rascals out. Why the entire company? Well, military intelligence told Fox Company there was a "large group" of North Vietnamese regulars there that a company of Marines with 81mm mortar backup could take care of.

With all due respect to the United States Marine Corps, even a reinforced rifle company of Marines ain't no match for a battalion of regular soldiers. Fox Company was basically wiped out.

I was discharged from active duty in January of '68, and, as a reservist, I had two more years on my contract. As a Marine Corpsman, I was assigned to a Marine Corps reserve company (H&S and Echo of 3/24/4) in St. Louis, Missouri, my home at the time. And when it came time for discharge in June of '70, the rumor mill had it that Marine Reserves were being called up to go to Nam, and reserve Corpsmen with the Marines were prime meat. "No way," said I. Going to war once in one's lifetime is enough. So, I walked across the street and joined the Missouri Air National Guard Band, and there I sat for ten years.

During those ten years I learned how to drink--lots of beer. Two marriages down the drain. A new job every two or three years. And always thinking of the goddamn Marine Corps in the back of my head.

In 1980 I got married again (#3); my wife joined the Navy and was posted to the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. With my then 16 years in the reserves, I was too close to retirement to give it up, so I went back to the Naval Reserves, took a drop in rank (E-6 to E-5) and joined up with a Naval Reserve Hospital Company attached to the Marine Corps. Something inside said, *"Marine Corps! Marine Corps!"* Back to Lejeune for three summers in a row. I volunteered for rifle companies that needed Corpsmen. I went drinking with young Marines that had never been to war, and with staff sergeants and gunnys that had. I told war

stories to the reserve lance corporals and corporals and shared some with the gunny. Damn good times . . . I thought.

When #3 was discharged we moved to Texas, and I transferred to Bravo Company, 1/23. I was with them until my discharge last year. Six years with a damn good reinforced rifle company. Every month out in the field. I dropped many rounds down the 61mm tubes. I found myself teaching Marines basic land navigations, how to level a tube, how to take care of their buddy when he got hit. I preached self first aid and buddy aid. I urged my Corpsmen to do the same. We gave lectures in the field on first aid, medevacs, anything and everything to keep those damn Marines alive. How to shoot left handed if you're right arm didn't work. (Me? Expert marksman M-16, M-14 and damn good with a .45 and 9mm--expert by Navy qualifications.) God almighty, I pushed those grunts! And I kept up with them, too!

I turned 40 the year I went with Bravo Company, and when I realized it was *hard* to hump with kids half my age, I went to a gym, dropped 10-15 pounds, and got strong. Then I *could* indeed put 75 pounds of gear on my body, hump with those kids, drop my gear, and take care of the sick, injured, blistered, and sore. They rest; I troop the line making sure the troops are OK. "Get them boots off! Get some water in your bod! Get that damn flak jacket and helmet off! It's hot in Texas (or California, or North Carolina, or Hawaii, or in the hold of the USS *Belleau Wood*)!" Look, look, look, hump, hump, hump, teach, teach, teach. Push my Corpsmen, teach them the realities of war, of blood, of amputations, of what to do with a small bag of battle dressings, how to get those damn Marines well, or patched up, or get them out of a hot zone.

Guilt. Guilt that I hadn't done my job in Nam. Guilt that I wasn't there long enough to call myself a "combat vet." Guilt that I could have helped those guys in Fox in '67 when they got the shit reward for being a Marine. Guilt that I wasn't "good enough" to wear Marine green with blue Navy rank and hash marks. Guilt that I was "showing off" when I did wear greens with four rows of ribbons on the left breast. Guilt that I was "inexperienced" in war and didn't know enough to keep people alive.

I avoided it. I drank a lot. I lived inside myself for 20 years! Twenty goddamn years carrying around this huge guilt complex! I felt guilty that I didn't spend a whole year in Nam. I felt guilty because I wasn't there to help my Marines when they needed me. I felt guilty because I couldn't teach my Reserve Marines enough about war. About killing. About life on the edge between life and death. I just felt so damn guilty.

I went to war because my country called me. I went to war in 1967 because it was "cool" to "kill a Commie for Mommy." "The flag, Mom and apple pie." Don't let the "domino effect" happen. Block Communism now, so it doesn't spread, so it won't take America by the ass.

Hmm. In 1989, the wall came down in Germany. Europe is rebelling. Russia has noticed their system isn't working too well. Saw cops beat people in Chicago in '68, saw Martin Luther King killed, saw the entire mood of the country change during and after Vietnam.

And you know what? I still feel guilty. Only today, not quite as much. And I can live with it. §



Marines

Red blooded, suits of green, proud American men and women. Born of a need of a yet to be founded nation, by men who had to be free.

Standing tall for 200 and more years in sailing ships, battleships, and assault ships. Jumping from gunnel to gunnel, ship's side to landing craft, flight deck to choppers, onto the beach of the enemy.

They stand above all others. Small force, big job. Take the hill and move on. Virgin Islands, Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir, Khe Sanh, Nui Loc Son, Grenada.

Sabers and cutlass'. M-1's, M-14's, .45's, M-16's, 9mm's, rocket launchers, artillery, F-4's and jump jets. The tools change.

But not the Marines. Tall . . . Proud . . . Ready. A Few Good Men. Leaders of Men. "Gimme 20 boat!"
"Corpsman up!"
Proud of their country, proud of themselves, proud to defend their nation and its constitution.

Blood on the green.
Warriors true.
Marines.
--Jerry Woods

Ghost Battalion

By Paul Stevens

[Two possible explanations for the "Ghost Battalion" name sometimes given to 2/1 are: (1) A great portion of the time we fought mines, booby traps, and snipers--that is, we fought "phantoms" or "ghosts"; or (2) we were often detached from First Marines and attached to other units--particularly for some of our major battles--and thus were often an "invisible" battalion. Here is one Marine's thoughts on the subject.]

We talk of ghosts! I *felt* the ghosts of Marines who died in the Arizona territory, Dodge City, Elephant Valley. And when we found the remains of a recon team in Laos that had died in combat in 1968, I felt the presence of ghosts. Dead Marines who were watching us. I had such deep feelings then--feelings of sadness, wonder, and fear. And when we lost someone in an area where I knew other Marines had died, I wondered, *How many times from '65 until now had we locked and loaded, called in the rolling thunder of arty and air strikes*?

The numerous assualts we made, the snipers we encountered, the booby traps we faced, the medevacs we called in. The shock of seeing comrades critically wounded. Or the sudden finality of losing friends to death. And all the ghosts.

Even though the war has ended, the visits from the ghosts have not--though they are not as frequent now as they have been in the past. But I still see the ghosts of Marines and Corpsmen at night in my dreams, and sometimes in the day in my daydreams. §

The Party on the Mountain

By Michael W. Rodriguez

The 2nd Battalion of the 1st Marine Regiment left their pleasant TAOR in September of 1967 for the dubious honor of assisting the 3rdMarDiv in its mission to keep the NVA from decivilizing (and depopulating) the DMZ. We set up on our mountain (just where I never did know, and did not very much care) and ran a few patrols, company-sized. What guys who followed us (after 1967) have to remember is that, to us, anything larger than a company in the Badlands was an operation; up at the Z anything smaller than a battalion was a patrol.

Parker (Luis Alejandro) was sent on R&R soon after we went north, so he missed the impromptu party held late one afternoon by the battalion's Chicanos on our mountain. Who started it is lost to time and memory One *vato* (dude, guy) passed the word to some other dude who passed it to somebody else. One Chicano brought his guitar, another his tortillas-in-a-can sent to him by his mother, and someone else brought the hot sauce and refried beans. We sang *"Ojos Verdes"* ("Green Eyes") and *"Sabor A Mi"* ("Good Fortune to Me") and told each other about the Girl Back in the World. We swapped lies and war stories about chicks and cars and bars and growing up in *SanAnto* (San Antionio), *SanJo* (San Jose), *East Los* (East Los Angeles), El Paso, Fresno, Santa Fe and wherever else we came from. There was even some *cholo* (*pachuco*, not necessarily a gang member) there from Kansas City. *Kansas*.

We reminisced about Whittier Boulevard and the Plush Bunny (nightclub) in L.A. and Saturday night dances at the National Guard armory in small Texas towns. We agreed on green-eyed *Chicanas* (highly-desirable, almost always very beautiful young women) and disagreed on *Hueras* (fair-skinned girls with very little Indian blood). Yes, the '57 Chevy was the coolest automobile ever built and Coors beer was highly prized.

We talked about pumping gas and cotton fields and orange groves where most of us had worked at one time or another, agreeing that picking cotton or fruit was just like the Nam: it sucked.

We slipped easily into the idiom of the *Barrio*, calling each other *carnál* (bro'), *camarada* (buddy) and *esé* (hey, you). We ate our refried beans and tortillas and wondered what our *jefitas* (moms) would think of our table manners.

Individually, we were aware of being . . . different. We were a minority. We spoke a minimum of three languages: Chicano, English and Marine. Some of us, like me, even spoke Spanish. We spoke and understood Chicano; some of us could speak English with difficulty; and all of us understood Marine.

We came out of the *Barrios* and the rural countrysides. (There was even a grunt or two, who, before joining the Marines Corps, had never been off the King Ranch in South Texas. And they vowed, once they returned to the ranch, they were never going to leave again.) We knew gang fights and being refused service in restaurants. We knew discrimination (although we did not know it by that name: we just thought it was the the way of the *Gabácho* [the white man].)

We did not, that night, talk about why we were in the Nam. Heavy duty, psychological *cabula* (bullshit) like that we left to the chaplain or the Navy doctors down in Da Nang. Serving in the armed forces of the United States was something we grew up knowing we were going to do, so we did it. Many of us had

grandparents who had left war-torn Mexico in the 1920's for a better life in the United States. Some achieved it; many did not. All had their chance, such as it was. My own grandfather worked in a dairy in Seguin, Texas, after leaving Mexico and Francisco Villa's army. When my mother graduated high school, she could not attend the party at the city park because Mexicans were not allowed--even though Seguin, Texas, was named for a hero of the Texas Revolution and the Battle of the Alamo in 1836: Juan Seguin. And Juan Seguin was a Mexican.

We did, that night, ask each other why we decided to join the Marine Corps. Enlisting in the Army or Air Force to learn a trade was one thing, but this? *¡Pendejada!* Incredible stupidity!!

Some of us joined the Marine Corps to avoid the draft, although I could never figure out that one. Some of us joined because it was a tough outfit and we were tough dudes. Some of us joined because it was a way out, out of the *Barrio*, out of town--to see something different, to go to new places and meet new people.

Some of us enlisted because the United States of America was calling. We owed a debt and it was time to pay up. It really is as simple as that.

Acknowledged, however, was the fact that none of us could conceive of serving in Vietnam as anything other than a Marine.

As the sun set, the music slowed and conversation became desultory. To be Chicano and Marine, someone remarked, was as good as it got. The best of every world. We had a good time enjoying the camaraderie of fellow grunts and fellow Chicanos. Brothers all. We did not think about tomorrow or the day after. Vietnam would take care of itself, and the Marine Corps would take care of us. For a few hours, we were very content.

Some days thereafter, the First Marines mounted Operation Medina and got shot to pieces by the NVA in the Hai Lang National Forest. Among the dead and wounded were many of those Chicanos who had attended the party on the mountain. Perez was killed, Rodrigues was wounded, Sanchez was wounded.

The war went on. We grieved for our friends and comrades--*camaradas*--and opened a can of C-rats and chowed down. We saddled up because the skipper said so and the gunny said so and we humped one more mountain and then one more mountain.

But that one night. . . .

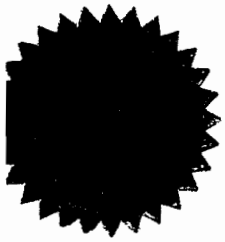
Late at night, just before I rotated, I swear I could hear the mournful tune of some guitar in some distant valley playing *"Ojos Verdes."*

"Yo nunca olividaré. . . ." "I will never forget. . . ." §

* * * * *

"Often the test of courage is not to die but to live." --V. Alfieri





Steve Wrote this in the 7th Grade February-1976 / 1st A English Assignment

My Unsung Hero

My greatest unsung hero is a friend, as well as a brother, Larry Belden. Larry was born on November 10, 1949. This was thirteen years before I was born. The first thirteen years of Larry's life and really more, I know only what has been told to me.

Larry went to a country school until his sixth or seventh grade. He then attended the Lebanon School until his sophmore year. He then transferred to the Esbon High School and graduated at Esbon in 1967.

I was born two months after his eighth grade graduation. Larry was a loving and helpful brother. He always helped or played with me. He willingly walked and sledded with me when I wanted him to, and when ever he could.

Larry started to college at Manhattan when I was ready to start to school at Esbon.

Also in 1968 Larry joined the marines, and he fought in the Veit nam War about four months. He was killed on July 26, 1969, by small arm fire. The rough details are as follows: Larry's platoon was down in a valley, when attacked by Veit Cong, the first machine gunner was killed, and Larry took over. He was hit in the leg. He went back to some cover and dressed his leg, and then went back to the machine gun. He tried to hold the Veit Cong off so the others could get to more cover. Thus Larry was killed by small arms.

The day we found out Larry was killed, the thought that I would see my unsung hero never again raced though my mind. It was hard on Mom, Dad, and my sister, but I think I suffered more during the years to come while I was at home.

The idea that I would never have a hero, or brother, to look up to and do things with, too help me with work and sports. I know Larry gave his life, so I would not have to go to war and fight. He gave his life for his country. This is why Larry, my brother, is my greatest unsung hero of all time.

Steve Belden

* * * * *

"Our son, Larry Gene Belden, was killed 26 July 1969. How time flies. Sometimes it seems so long ago. And other times like only yesterday. Our son Steve was in the seventh grade when he wrote this essay about his brother." --Marion and Wanda Belden

* * * * *

Living the Legend

[The incident described in this poem is fictional; the feelings are true.]

The scarred, black earth ran down the hill,
and silence fell upon his ear.
The fighting done, he watched them run,
as smoke-filled air began to clear.

They would return--he knew for sure--
to claim their hard-won spoils,
Too many dead, on the hill ahead,
would send them back with flag unfurled.

How long had he and his brave men
said "No!" to the Cong's advance?
The long hard days and war's mad craze
pushed time to an eerie trance.

Was it days ago this calm field lay
in peaceful wonder to the gaze?
Or was it an hour since death deflowered
this ground in a ghoulish haze?

He stood and stretched to his full height,
and rubbed the soreness in his bones.
He tried to feel those muscles of steel
whose strength and vigor had now flown.

He called for Pancho, and Sarge and Nick,
But silence answered for his men.
Again he tried, and though he cried,
Not one would speak to him again.

His men were gone and he was alone,
facing a terrible horde.
He'd die if he must, but all could trust
in him to lift high the sword.

The will and the courage of all Marines
rose in his breast and came to the fore.
He knew that he could, and knew that he would
live to the legend of his great Corps.

He dressed his wounds as best he could
and set about the task at hand.
With ammo piled high and destiny nigh
he waited for the "Charge!" command.

His wife's parting words were in his ear:
"Come home safely to raise our son."
"Lord, I ain't been good, but if you could,
watch over them when I am gone.

"And I guess you know I'm the only son
of a father who lives for me.
Please don't shroud his life in a cloud
of sorrow and misery.

"Let him be proud of the son that he had
and proud of the way that he died.
He did his best in his country's quest
and with full heart passed to the other side."

A shrill sound broke upon his ear
as the enemy horn blew attack.
Like bees from a hive, the bush came alive
with hordes of warriors dressed in black.

With ungodly screams, they rushed up the hill
in fury and rage to gain their end.
An end that was blocked by a pillar of rock . .
a lone Marine that to Hell they must send.

He fired grenades into the wave,
and watched bodies tear apart.
He heard the screams and ended the dreams
of many young men of heart.

Still they came, though slower now,
and he could see fear in some eyes.
His M-60 roared as they tried to ford
their river of death that grew ever wide.

Row after row fell to their death
but he could not stem the tide.
Closer they came, for death before shame
gave an honor to suicide.

With ammo gone and the end so near,
still he would not quit the fight.
Into the hole where Nick had been bold,
he shut his eyes to the grisly sight.

He took Nick's weapons and stayed the course,
with point-blank fire that found its mark.
There seemed no end to black-clad men
and rifles that spit and barked.

"I'll die in this hole," he thought to himself,
"but you'll never forget the Marines.
For these brave men will never bend
from their sacred and holy tontine."

Again and again, he fired Nick's gun
till the kick in his hand did cease.
His rounds were gone, each taking a pawn
of the Cong's bitter fight against peace.

He lept to the hole where Sarge had died
and picked up his forty-fives,
with one in each hand he fought to withstand
those who would still take his prize.

Backwards he strode to the wall of sand,
each step brought the death of a Cong.
Nine more down dead, he just stood and bled,
as the gods sang his own death-song.

His empty guns, too heavy to hold,
slipped from his hands to the ground.
He straightened tall, and would not fall
as black-clad men gathered round.

A wild-eyed Cong, with rage on his face,
drew down on the beaten Marine.
And caring not, he fired a shot
into the chest of the man in green.

They stared in awe as he made no sound,
and with blazing eyes he defied them.
Standing tall still, he dared them to kill
the soldier that had decried them.

What kind of devil was this to stand
in the face of certain death?
What courage was this that seemed to dismiss
the drawing of life's last breath?

They raised their rifles to fire again,
but were stopped by a sharp command.
Pushing aside that human tide,
their leader came forward to stand.

His eyes held the soul of that last Marine
as if trying to understand
the absence of fear though death was near
in the dusty and blood-soaked sand.

The man in green held his eye in kind.
Though strangers, they each knew the other.
Soldiers they were and each would confer
The honor due to a Brother.

With side-arm raised, he cocked the black gun,
and spoke strange words to his troop.
With questioning looks, his order they took,
and moved down the hill to recoup.

With a wary eye, he watched them depart
till the last black head disapperaed.
Then he faced the Marine, that death machine,
whose courage the Cong revered.

He pointed the gun at defiant eyes
and made certain that they were alone.
With no one there, he moved it a hair
so the round would not find a home.

The loud shot broke upon their ears
and the pistol jumped in his hand.
But there came no death, no ceasing breath--
for the bullet found nothing but sand.

The Marine was puzzled by the miss,
till the Cong spoke English words,
"You shall live this day and go your way.
And my deed will remain unheard.

"Courage that lives and beats in the breasts
of you and those that lie here
will be revered and forever feared
by all who have not died here.

"Your strength and courage honor your foe.
To a comrade I give my hand.
You shall not die and forever lie
in this dusty and blood-soaked sand."

Sheathing his pistol, he stood erect.
There was no more to be said aloud.
With no disguise in his sharp black eyes,
he bent at the waist and bowed.

He lept from sight, and when he was gone
the Marine found himself all alone.
He gazed again at his fallen men,
and said, "Sleep well--you are home."

--Peter Meadows

Gerald

By Bobbie Long

This is about a young man very dear to me. He died in Vietnam on November 19, 1967, when he was 22 years old. We were raised as brother and sister. He is my Knight in Shining Armor, my cousin Gerald T. Dobbs.

He is my "Eternal Soldier" and will always be. So are the boys who returned and the ones who may go again to a far away place to be our brave heroes. To walk so bravely, to lay their heads down not knowing when they will meet their Maker. To continue in the face of hardships, to walk a path riddled with mines and explosions. To wonder why they and thousands like them are in a foreign country--like that Godforsaken country that took our beloved heroes.

I can see Gerald smiling now--he always smiled. His love for the Marines and his dedication to his country and to his fellow man overshadowed any fear he must have felt. He knew he would not be returning. He said so a few days before leaving--he said, "I will see you



(Courtesy of Bobbie Long)

GERALD, ROSIE, BOBBIE, AND LINDA

". . . A very old picture of Gerald and the girl cousins he grew up with and had to put up with every day."
--Bobbie Long

again, but not on this earth. I have a feeling I won't be coming back."

The pain of losing this young man has taken its toll on his family. We are not the same--not a day goes by without our thoughts and memories of him flashing before us. We would give all we have and more to put our arms around him once again, to tell him one more time how much he was loved, how dear he was to all of us. The missing place at the table, the unopened Christmas package, the smile not there. . . .

The pain is here, the awful, searing pain of loss that will never go away. I cry, I pound my fist, I scream, I dream and wake up crying. All to no avail. He is gone--my hero, my "Eternal Soldier."

And those brave young soldiers who fought in front of him, in back--wherever they are, they are my beloved heroes who will never be forgotten, not now or ever in this family. "Thanks" is not enough, never will be.

Gerald was gentle, kind, and brave. He was someone who smiled all the time, who loved his mother dearly, who helped her raise seven other children, someone who never learned to drive a car, who worked in a cotton mill and sent his check to his mother, someone who loved his family, and the Marines, his uniform, his country and flag. He was someone who gained the respect of his comrades.

He did his job the best he could. He was not afraid of anything or anybody. He was a man in the horror of war, in the midst of bombs and shooting, walking and talking with his God.

I wish we could have grown old together. It is hard to accept even after all the years that we will not. §

The Death of Dobbs

By David Dillberg

I started out in Quang Tri, in 1st platoon, Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. At first I was a fire team leader--only because I was already a corporal. Nobody trusted me because I was a "new guy."

Before I arrived, when the company was still at Quang Tri, an incident took place that left a big impression on the men I was with, something that affected them deeply. This was the death of Dobbs.

The platoon was leaving a village one day, walking in the tracks in the road, when Dobbs took his camera out and moved to cross the road to take a picture. But as soon as he stepped off the track, he stepped on a large mine. It blew him up very high, and when he came down he was gone from his hips downward. His arms were gone, too. The men ran up to him and cradled him. Dobbs asked them not to let him die. They told him he would make it, and then he died in their arms.

This episode left a big impression on the men. They told me about it as soon as I got to the company. Dobbs was the man I replaced. I thought about him a lot.

The record says: "19 Nov. 1967, 1715: while moving to a new location man stepped on anti-tank mine, taking off all lower and upper limbs, critically wounding man. Mine left hole six feet in diameter and three feet deep. Set up LZ and medevaced man. Man died before evacuation. One US KIA. 1630 medevac completed." §

Faces and Places

By Michael W. Rodriguez

Khe Sanh and Con Thien. Hue City and A Shau Valley. Famous places all. Huge battles and firefights that burned themselves into the memories of grunts and earned a few lines in the history books.

The battles and operations not quite as famous: The Rockpile and Go Noi Island. Medina and Gio Linh. The Van Toung Peninsula, remembered by Marines for the first regimental-sized operation, "Starlite" (it should have been Operation Satellite; a clerical error by candlelight), since the Korean War.



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)
MICHAEL RODRIGUEZ

Then there were the smaller, much smaller, firefights, patrols and areas of operations that could, and did, kill and wound and maim as swift and sure as any major locale or battle. These had names like Arizona Territory, Dodge City, Hill 55.

And there were still others. Nameless bamboo bridges and rice paddies, triple-canopy jungle, and hills that were of no importance to anyone, except to the men who humped them, patrolled and risked their lives in or on them.

These were the places where a sniper's bullet could kill you, where a mine could and did dismember your buddy, letting him live with the memory of where he had been, and only vaguely able to recall what had happened to him.

Faces and places. The faces, if not always the names, of your buddies; the places you served in the Nam. For every Khe Sanh or Tu Cau, hundreds of firefights, medevacs and tired, frightened grunts. Every chopper that took a buddy away meant one less bro' in the bush with you. And in the years since, the faces of your friends. Always the faces of your partners.

The little bamboo bridge that spanned a river (whose name is long forgotten), or the bridge (did it allow traffic over the same river?) that was guarded by a platoon of Marines (pick a platoon, any platoon; it was probably their bridge). The Bridge. It was blown up in 1967. Bridges, villes, and jungle trails--all promised death and injury.

Faces and places. You watched while choppers carried away the ones that were hurt, and you asked yourself (if not then, later), What *was* his first name? And then you glanced around and wondered, Where the hell *are* we?

And, thankfully, one day it's over. No more Vietnam, no more bush, no more grunts,

or medevacs, or having to "buckle for your dust"--it's just . . . over.

You go back to the World. You go home. You put it all behind you. Too many of us were told by loving and caring families, "It's over now; forget about it. Get on with your life."

But always, late at night, the faces and places. *What was his first name?*

Bob Hughes called me one night, back in 1984. It was a jolt (he's going to hate me for this), because I thought he was dead (it's a long story). After the initial shock wore off, the first thing I wanted to know was, asking after one of our Corpsmen, "We lost him at the Bridge. What was his name? His *first* name?"

Hughes told me. Finally, I felt comforted. After so many years I had a name to associate with the face I remembered so well.

And because I now had a full name, I had a monument where I could go, a line and a panel number to find, a place where I could visit and pay my respects to a fine young man. I had the Memorial.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. A place, a final resting place for all our friends who died in places the names of which we can't recall and which probably no longer even exist.

Faces and places. We remember the faces, and their names are on the Wall. §



(Courtesy of David "Doc" Johnson)

THE LITTLE BRIDGE

[The above article is adapted from one Michael wrote for the Vets' Gazette, *published and edited in San Antonio by Michael W. Rodriguez.]*

PLACES AND FACES



(Courtesy of Paul Gloria)

PAUL GLORIA
Marble Mountain, December 1968



(Courtesy of Dennis O'Rourke)

LZ ON MOUNTAIN TOP
CH-34 landing on mountain top near Nui Loc Son, April 1967.



(Courtesy of Pat Morris)

HIS NAME WAS JOE

Joseph John Keller of Echo Company was KIA on 29 September 1967.



(Courtesy of David "Doc" Johnson)

WHAT A FACE!

Putting on camo at Con Thien.



(Courtesy of Pat Morris)

GARY WAYNE OLSON

A 3.5 rocket man nicknamed "Crazy," Gary was KIA 15 March 1967. "He liked to take something white and do jumping jacks when we were shot at by snipers." --Pat Morris



(Courtesy of Lynda Novak)

DAVID NOVAK



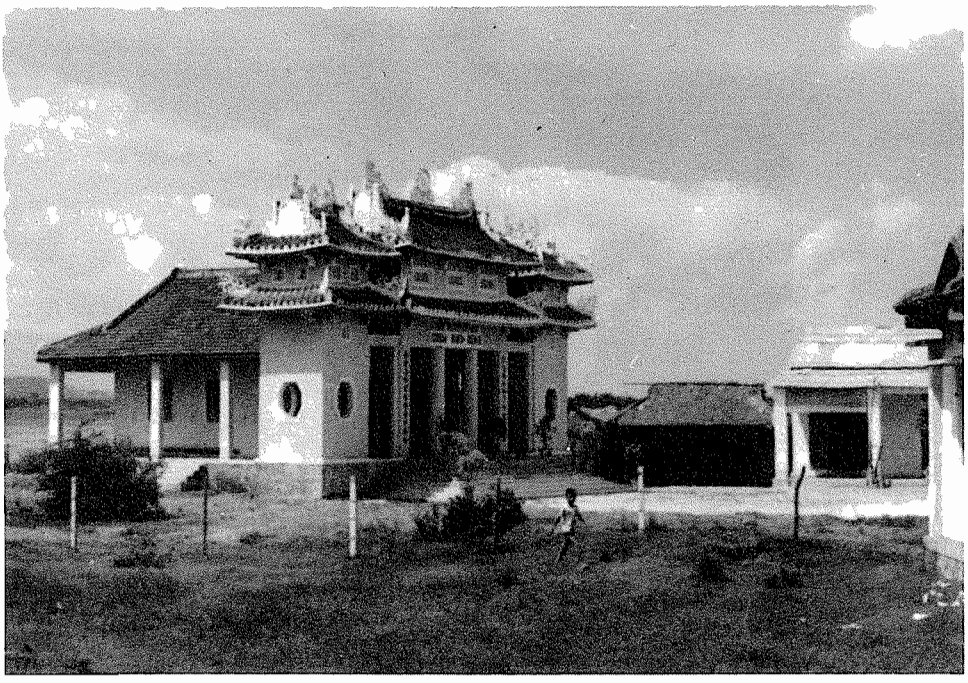
GUNNY

Gunnery Sergeant Jon Ray Summers died from a booby-trap hand grenade on 20 May 1969.

"To climb Crow's Nest there was a rope; it was about 300 feet straight up, although as you got near the top you could climb on the rock. The enemy booby trapped the rope."

--Jack "Doc" Sturiano

(Courtesy of Jack "Doc" Sturiano)



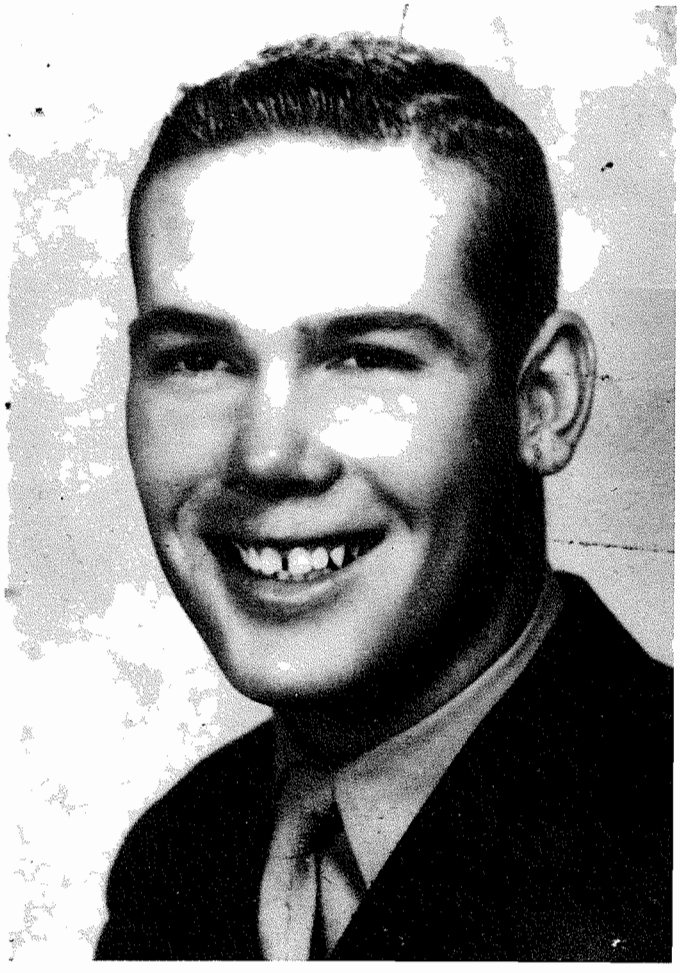
(Courtesy of Brad Robinson)

Buddhist temple on road from 2/1's base camp (1967) to Da Nang.



(Courtesy of Anthony "Jake" Jucentis)

Golf Company formation at Old French Fort, spring 1970.



(Courtesy of Steve "Ski" Krasowski)

JOHN MILTON RISNER, RADIO OPERATOR
"My radio operator, 19-year-old John Risner from Las Cruces, New Mexico, was killed by a sniper on Operation Jay, 26 June 1966. He was the 81mm radio operator attached to Golf Company." --Steve Krasowski



(Courtesy of Lou Parker)

Hotel Company sign, south of Da Nang.



GEORGE "DOC" GALLAGHER
George Gallagher in his Marine greens with Corpsman insignia, leaving for the war. George was a Corpsman with Hotel Company and was KIA on 29 August 1967.

(Courtesy of Olive Gallagher)

Gallagher's Grave

By Marian Faye Novak

They shall not grow old as
We that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning we
Will remember them.
--Laurence Binyon, Stanza Four of
"For the Fallen," engraved on the
Barre War Memorial, Barre, Vermont

It begins where we are reminded of so many endings: at the Wall. This is the second time my husband and I have come to this place. We were here the first time when the Wall was very new, a scar in the scarred earth. The ground was mud then, from an early March thaw, and one lone index, its pages fluttering in the wind under its plastic cover, stood on a post at the top of the walkway that dips past the black line of granite. We were alone at the memorial that day--this was shortly after its dedication, before its discovery as a healing wall--and my husband, a former Marine platoon commander, told me he liked the solitary pilgrimage.

So the next time we are at the Wall--during the 1988 semester break at the Boston school where we teach--it is 7:00am on the coldest January day Washington has seen in a long time. The sun is just rising in a frozen, gold haze over the bronze statue of three war-weary soldiers, new since we were here last. Around the edges of the faint glow that is the sun, the sky is dark pink and blue-grey. Once again Dave stands alone in front of the names of his friends, he walks the entire length of the wall alone, and he remembers in the quiet dawn whatever it is such men remember.

Most of the names he looks for are the names of men I also have known, men we both learned to care for when Dave was at Basic School in the Virginia fall, winter, and early spring of 1966-1967. There are too many of these familiar names on this wall. But there is one name Dave finds I do not know. Panel 25 east, line 62. I have heard about this boy, but I did not know him. *Gallagher*, the Wall reads. *George F. Gallagher.*

Dave turns to me on this bleak, icy morning in front of this name chiselled in bright letters on dark stone and says, "I'd like to find him--to put flowers on his grave or something." I look up at him and say nothing, but he shrugs and answers the question I feel I have no right to ask. "I don't know why. It's just something I want to do." Then he corrects himself. "Have to do," he says. In the twilight of this morning I cannot see his face. His cowboy hat sits low on his forehead, and he has pulled his jacket collar up around his bearded chin. But his voice is steady and low--calm--and there is a solemnity in it that is a promise.

Yes, Dave has told me about Gallagher. Gallagher was one of the two Corpsmen assigned to his platoon during the spring and summer of 1967. First Platoon, Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division. The platoon was in the field

[*This piece first appeared, in a slightly different form, in* Yankee *magazine (May 1989) and appears here with the kind permission of* Yankee's *publishers.]*

that May and June and July, and of course, there were casualties. Gallagher and the other Corpsman, Cochran, were Navy hospitalmen, Marine-Corpsmen trained to take care of Marines in combat. "You felt as comfortable with a Corpsman in the field," Dave told me once when he was talking about Gallagher, "as you would in the emergency room at Massachusetts General with a doctor from Harvard."

Gallagher was a slight, sandy-haired boy, just 20 years old when Dave knew him. "He liked to joke around," Dave said. "But when he was working, he was all business. We kidded him a lot, too. But when he worked on someone wounded, he was boss. When someone was down we all listened to Gallagher, and Cochran, too, and we did whatever they said. I remember when Cochran went down, with the M-79 man, Dukala. They had tripped a mine--eventually each would lose a leg. They lay near one another on the ground in the elephant grass matted by the explosion and splattered with blood, one screaming and the other just moaning a little, both of them in danger of dying. And there was Gallagher, all business, working furiously to save them.

"We loved the Corpsmen. I think all Marines love Corpsmen. Gallagher looked so young and he was so small--five-foot, eight inches tall and 120 pounds at the most--when you looked at him you thought he should be at the beach with his friends, not in the dirt and the muck scooting around on his hands and knees trying to keep people in one piece. But we were glad he was there with us. Just having a Corpsman around made us feel we had a fighting chance. We were scared most of the time, maybe all the time in the field. It's hard to think of a time when we shouldn't have been scared. But when Cochran and Gallagher were around, we felt better about things.

"Gallagher patched me up when I got shot, and he sent me off on a medevac. I didn't want to go. I didn't feel all that bad. We were on a sweep, and I thought I should finish things up first, but Gallagher said, 'Please, sir,' and the way he said it, I knew I had to go. I was his lieutenant and four years older, too, but he had an authority at times like that you didn't argue with. They made me stay in the hospital at Da Nang over a week and they tried to keep me two, so he was right. But then I knew he was. I had seen it in his eyes when he told me to go. He always knew what he was doing."

Gallagher died one sweltering August night at an encampment near the Phong Le Bridge south of Da Nang. The enemy attacked and almost overran the platoon. Dave was no longer the platoon commander, but at company headquarters the radioman heard the call for help in the middle of the night and woke him. The frightened voice of his former radioman crackled through the air. "We're getting hit," he called. "We're getting hit bad."

By the time Dave and a relief squad reached the camp, Gallagher lay dying among the other wounded. That is how his name has come to be on this wall.

From one of the many indexes they have now, this one near the information booth which is also new, we learn that George Francis Gallagher's hometown was Barre, Vermont. "Does that mean he's buried there?" Dave asks me. "I think it means there's a chance," I say.

When school is out for the summer Dave calls the Pentagon. He reaches Information, is transferred to the United States Marine Corps Office of Public Affairs, who tells him to contact the National Archives Administration. Specifically, the voice on the phone says, address your request to the National Personnel Records Center.

The National Archives are in St. Louis. Dave calls the National Personnel Records Center and is transferred to Military Personnel Records. "I am looking for a burial site," he says. "Put your request in writing," the woman in St. Louis tells him through the wire. "Include the person's service number."

"I don't know his service number," Dave says.

"Then we can work with his social security number."

"I don't know that either," Dave says.

There is a sigh and a short silence, and then the woman says, "Well, our computer is set up to search with those two numbers, but if

you'll write us a letter and put in all the information you have about this person--full name, birth and death dates and so on--explaining what you want and why you want it, we'll do what we can." Then she adds, "And tell us how you're related to him, too. We don't like to release information except to family members."

For a month Dave does not mention looking for Gallagher. Finally, though he knows the odds are against him, he writes to the Military Personnel Records Center at the National Personnel Records Center. He does not have the numbers the computer needs, and he is not family, but Gallagher was one of his men, one of his own. "I would like to know," he writes, "where the Corpsman who patched me up for evacuation from the field in 1967 is buried. I want to put flowers on his grave." He includes all the information he has.

A week passes and we hear nothing from St. Louis. Then another week is here, and with it a form letter from the Personnel Records Center. They have decided not to do the search. It is July now and this coming August it will be 21 years since Gallagher's death.

Dave calls the office of vital records for the state of Vermont and learns they do not keep burial records. The towns have those. But when he calls the town clerk in Barre, he is told there is no record of the death of a George Gallagher. "However," the clerk tells him, "that doesn't mean your friend is not buried here. It only means he didn't die in Barre. You could try the local cemeteries."

There are three cemeteries in Barre, Vermont. Hope, Elm Street, and one listed, the operator tells Dave, as simply Catholic Cemetery. He calls the numbers she has given him and no one answers at two of them. At the third a worker tells him he does not have a list of who is buried in the cemetery and doesn't know who does. Perhaps, the man tells Dave, he could call later. Someone else might know.

Dave has grown impatient with phone calls and letters to people who don't seem to care. One Sunday morning he asks me if I can get away the following Tuesday to go with him to Barre. "If he's there, I'll find him," he says.

The road from Georgetown, Massachusetts, to Barre, Vermont, is one long curving stretch of six- and four-lane highway that cuts through some of the loveliest countryside in America. The day is unusually hot even for July. The purple loose strife and the creamy, spidery Queen Anne's lace are in full bloom by the sides of the road.

We pass through the meadows and marshes of northeastern Massachusetts over the New Hampshire border and we turn slightly westward toward the New England Upland. Now dense forests of thick-branched white pine fronted by maroon-berried sumac line both edges of the highway and are broken only by streams, rivers, lakes, and an occasional farm or small village. We travel northwest into Vermont where the pine give way to birch, sugar maple, oak, beech, some fir, and lots of cedar. The road has been blasted through hills of granite, and here and there we can see exposed rock on the roadside. I look out the car window when the car reaches the top of a ridge and I can see, for miles--mountains, forests, lakes and sky. This land is all blues and greens.

The highway into Barre is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway. In fact, the bridge we crossed over the Connecticut River which divides Vermont from New Hampshire is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge. Dave sees the sign for the bridge and says to me, smiling, "I feel right about this. I know it's something I'm supposed to do." Is he trying to convince himself, or me, or does he really feel this way? It has not been easy for him, this going back to meet his past. It has been hard to meet his young unsure self, to judge the young lieutenant he was with the wiser, sometimes jaded mind of the middle-aged mathematician he is now.

But he is compelled. We do not even know if we will find Gallagher in this peaceful Vermont countryside, but it is so beautiful we are happy he was from this place.

The highway rises to the top of a hill and the green-and-white road sign tells us Barre is six miles away. We can see the sparse town perched among the hills, and far ahead the Green Mountains, misty blue shadows bumping

along the horizon. The sky above is a clear blue, broken by a few vapor-like clouds that hang above the mountains.

We turn off the highway onto a two-lane road that goes into South Barre. We pass homes of all kinds on this street--rambling Victorians, stately Georgians, prim capes and ranches. Their lawns offer another shade of green, a bright, light green. They are well-kept lawns.

At the end of this road South Barre runs into Barre proper. Barre's town center is a typical all-American Main Street. We are struck by the movie-set quality of this town. As we stop for a red light where Highway 14 and Main Street intersect, we see an old stone building on a small rise across the street from us. A sign on the lawn says "Aldrich Library." On the corner on the other side of the street is a large graceful war memorial, a concrete circle with a statue of a classical-mythical warrior in the center and a circular stone bench behind him. Above the bench are the words: ". . . *to the spirit and sacrifice of our country's youth.*" The date on the memorial is 1924.

We turn onto Main Street and park in front of a small bookstore. The digital thermometer-clock on the bank down the street alternately flashes 12:03 and 98°. The day burns so bright it is hard to read the small yellow dots that form the sign's numbers. Outside the air-conditioned car we feel the heat, but the air is not humid, and so bearable in spite of the temperature. Over lunch at a small diner on Main Street we discuss the best way to go about finding Gallagher. Dave is nervous and excited, and I am too, but mostly for him. We decide to start with the local newspaper. The waitress at the diner tells us the offices of the local paper, the *Times-Argus* of Barre-Montpelier, are just up the street from where we are. Newspapers have "morgues," don't they? I have never used one, and neither has Dave, but we know about them from TV shows.

We eat quickly, pay for our salads and fish chowder and walk to the offices of the *Times-Argus*. But there we are disappointed to learn the paper does not have back copies of issues from before 1975. "Well," I say, "we can try the town library."

Fluted columns carved from white oak flank the inner doors of the Aldrich Library in Barre, Vermont. Inside, a massive, intricate mantel carved from the same wood surrounds a fireplace opening no longer in use. There is charm and elegance in this room. Dave tells the teenaged girl at the counter that we want to look at back issues of the local paper. We need issues from around 30 August 1967. "Yes," she says. "We have them on microfiche." She disappears up a black metal staircase to our right and returns with a small, square, yellow box marked "*Times-Argus* Barre-Montpelier, Vt., July 1-Sept. 30." Inside is a mint-green roll of microfiche film.

The microfiche machine is on a desk by one of the oak columns. While Dave watches, I thread the machine and turn it on. Nothing happens. The young girl consults a short, grey-haired librarian who tells us the outlet in that corner of the room is dead. She directs Dave to move the machine to a table near another outlet. But that outlet is dead, too. She asks us what we are looking for. Perhaps there is another source. I tell her we are looking for information about a boy from Barre, George Francis Gallagher, who died in 1967 when he was 20 years old. We want to find his grave. She nods and leaves. A few minutes later she returns and tells us there is no trace of him in the Barre Directory or in any of the high school yearbooks from the years 1963, 1964, or 1965. "Either he didn't graduate locally, or he didn't graduate at all," she says.

Not only will we not find Gallagher in Barre, we don't know where to look next. I slump in my chair. I am hot and sticky and discouraged. Dave sits next to me at the wood table and stares at the blank machine. Another librarian, a tall woman whose hair is the same shade of blue-grey as that of the woman who is already helping us, comes into the room from a back office, looks at us and asks us if there is a problem. "The outlets are dead," the first woman answers for us.

"There is a live one in my office," she says.

Dave moves the machine once more, this

time to the table nearest the office door. The tall librarian runs a thick orange extension cord from the machine to an outlet near her office desk. We are embarrassed to be causing so much trouble, especially since we know there is now no point in looking at the old papers. But the women are eager to help. And they are so gracious we feel the need to be gracious, too. Dave flicks the switch and finally the screen lights up.

I whirl the small arm that moves the film until I see the date "*August 31*." I have stopped on page six, so I move the arm in the opposite direction. "Go slower," Dave says. "Maybe the Barre paper reported his death even if he didn't live here anymore." I slow down. Page three, two, and then one. And there it is. A large picture of a young blond boy in a sailor suit, his white sailor's hat low and jaunty over his forehead. His eyes meet the camera's. He smiles a small, shy smile. "*Second Barre War Death*," the headline says.

It *was* news. The article is long, two columns to the center of the page. The story is about Gallagher's training in the service, about his family, and about his death: "Hospitalman George Gallagher was assigned to the 2nd Battalion of the First Marine Division at Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam, and was killed by enemy rifle fire . . . while in a defensive position there. . . ." There are no details.

Gallagher is described as "good natured" and "all boy." And we read that he graduated from Marian High School in 1965. The last line of the newspaper article says, "It will take about ten days for the body to arrive home." Dave goes to the counter to ask whether the library has the yearbooks from Marian High School, and I move the microfiche ahead to 7 September, 8 . . . and suddenly--not on the tenth or the eleventh as I expect--but there in the 8 September 1967 issue of the *Times-Argus*, on page 12, is Gallagher's obituary: "*Solemn High Mass at St. Monica's for Twenty-Year Old.*"

Gallagher had a military funeral with a gun salute and taps. He is buried, we learn, at St. Monica's Cemetery in Barre. Dave smiles at me. "He's here," he says.

I want to take notes from the microfiche, but before I can start, the librarian places an open book in front of us. "Marian High is closed," she says. "I didn't think to look for him there." On page 67 of the 1965 Marian High School Yearbook, on the bottom right-hand corner, is a 2"x3" black-and-white picture of a baby-faced blond boy. It is Gallagher. And below, someone from the yearbook staff has written for posterity: "This good-natured classmate has earned the enviable title of the class comedian. Who is not familiar with his comical gestures and witty remarks? George is all-around boy and he has a great many friends who will miss him after graduation."

The librarian gives us directions to St. Monica's Cemetery, and on the way we stop at a flower shop. Dave knows what he wants. "Something red and yellow," he tells the man. And I think, *The colors of the Corps for the Corpsman*. Then he adds, "Something that can stand this heat." The florist goes to his backroom and comes back with red carnations, white and yellow mums, and for greens he has included a bundle of small cedar boughs. It is a lovely bouquet. "Can we have a red-and-gold ribbon, too?" I ask. The florist wraps the flowers with the cedar boughs in pale violet paper and gives the package to Dave. Then he hands me the ribbon and a green plastic vase with a spike attached to the bottom and tells us where to get water at the cemetery.

St. Monica's Cemetery is at the top of a hill. As we drive up to it, I think how small it is, a few graves scattered over a hillside. We drive to the end of the road that leads from the entrance and stop in an asphalt circle in the center of the cemetery. In the middle of the asphalt circle is another circle, this one of grass. The grass circle is the base of a 20-foot stone cross, and near the cross we see the water spigot the florist told us about. There is no one else here.

Dave spreads the flowers on the ground and using his pocketknife cuts them to fit the vase. Then he fills the vase with water while I gather the pieces of the stems and trimmed leaves and shove the trimmings and the florist's paper into a small trash barrel near the spigot. Then we stand on the grass circle, in the narrow shade the cross throws down, and look around

us. The cemetery that seemed so small from the road looks immense from the middle. I read the headstones nearest us: *Gagnon, O'Neil, Murphy, Pelletier*. French and Irish names.

Dave walks over to one which has a tiny American flag flying next to it. The brass star on its thin pole says *WWII*. He moves up the hill to another grave with a flag beside it. He holds the plastic vase with his flowers with both hands, straight up. The flowers will not last if he spills their water. Watching him, I think I understand his mission. On this hillside he is not husband, or father, or teacher, or friend. He is a Marine lieutenant looking for his Corpsman.

The rest of Dave's platoon has gone on. Gallagher is the only one of his men who did not. Some were wounded, some wounded horribly, but they lived. They had lives. And though he loved them as much as he loved Gallagher, Dave has let them go. But Gallagher lives only in memories, and Dave cannot forget Gallagher, cannot let him go.

I want to help my husband look and wander past him, away from the center cross. And there it is. It is a large white rectangular stone with one word carved into its smooth surface: GALLAGHER. I call to Dave and he comes to me across the grass, careful still of the vase of flowers, careful of the other headstones. He reads the other side of Gallagher's stone: GEORGE FRANCIS GALLAGHER, MARCH 21, 1947-AUGUST 29, 1967. There is a flat marker in the ground, too, at the foot of the grave. Both the headstone and the marker note that Gallagher was a hospitalman in the Navy.

Dave leans down and pushes the spike of the vase into the ground in front of Gallagher's headstone. Then he pulls some long grass from its base. The cemetery, like the lawns in town, is well-kept, but it is difficult to edge so close to the stone, and a few long stray blades have survived there. There is a pot of red geraniums, too, and their earth is dry, so Dave takes them down the hill to the water. While he is gone, I arrange the bow on the flowers so that the long trails of gold and red ribbon hang in front.

When I stand up, I see Dave looking at the grave. I do not belong, but when I turn to go, Dave tells me to wait. "Don't leave," he says. "I'll just be a second."

So I wait in the white heat that shimmers in front of the white headstones all around me, that bleaches the sky white above. The day is so bright everything seems faded. I can feel the sweat sticking my blouse to my back.

Dave stands motionless. His head is bowed over Gallagher's grave, and I can see drops of sweat on the skull below his thin hair. And then I hear him--it is almost a whisper, but in the silence all around us I can hear him clearly. "Semper Fi, kid," he says. When he looks up I am beside him. He reaches out and takes my hand, and we walk down the hill to the car. §

"He's not there now, or anywhere;
Nor has to be, as long as I
Keep on this earth
And can remember."

--Mark Van Doren



BAND OF BROTHERS

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. . . ."
--Shakespeare: *King Henry V,* iv, 3.



RADIOMEN ON PATROL

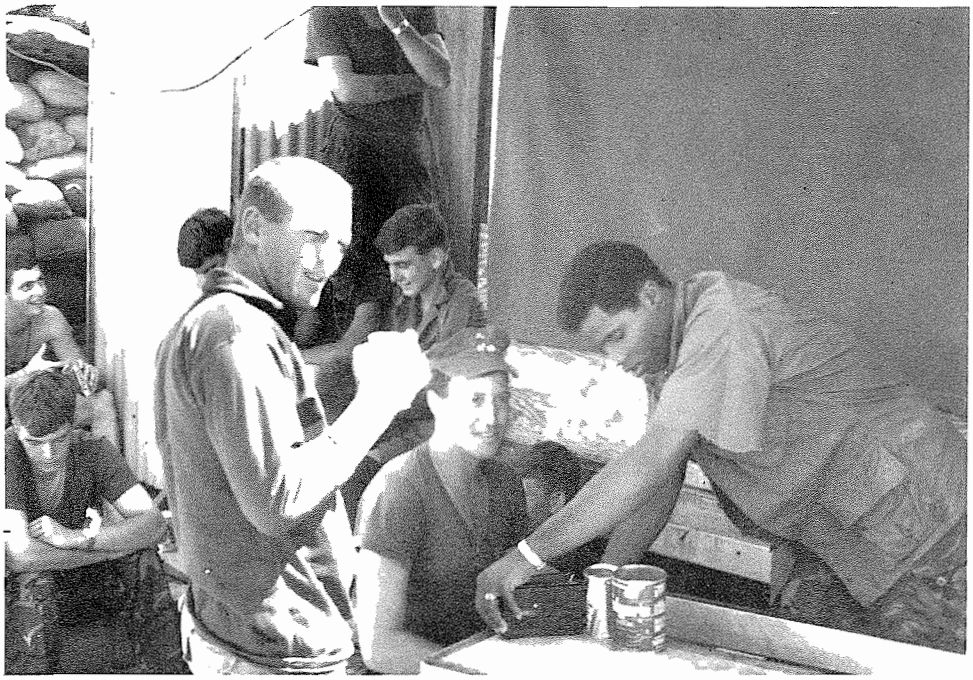
(Courtesy of Ross Liscum)



(Courtesy of R. D. Couch)

SQUAD

From Echo Company, third platoon, left to right: Couch; Unidentified; Melendere; Simmons (rear); Patterson (squad leader); Antonelli; Unidentified. "I was wounded and medevaced a few days after this picture was taken." --R. D. Couch



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

Hillbilly (with drink); Cowboy; Turner; Kelly (in back without shirt); Dawson (in front of him). We knew one another by first names or last names and often only by nicknames, and sometimes we knew one another by the job we performed.



(Courtesy of Mike Caltagirone)

Frank Mullen (left) and Mike "Cal" Caltagirone (right) by mortar pit.



BROTHERS AT THE BRIDGE
Left to right: Mike "Doc" Blatt; Pat Morris; Adam Ballard in January 1967.

(Courtesy of Pat Morris)



(Courtesy of Don Dennis)

BROTHERS AT BIG JOHN
Left to right; Johnson; Wesser; Dennis.

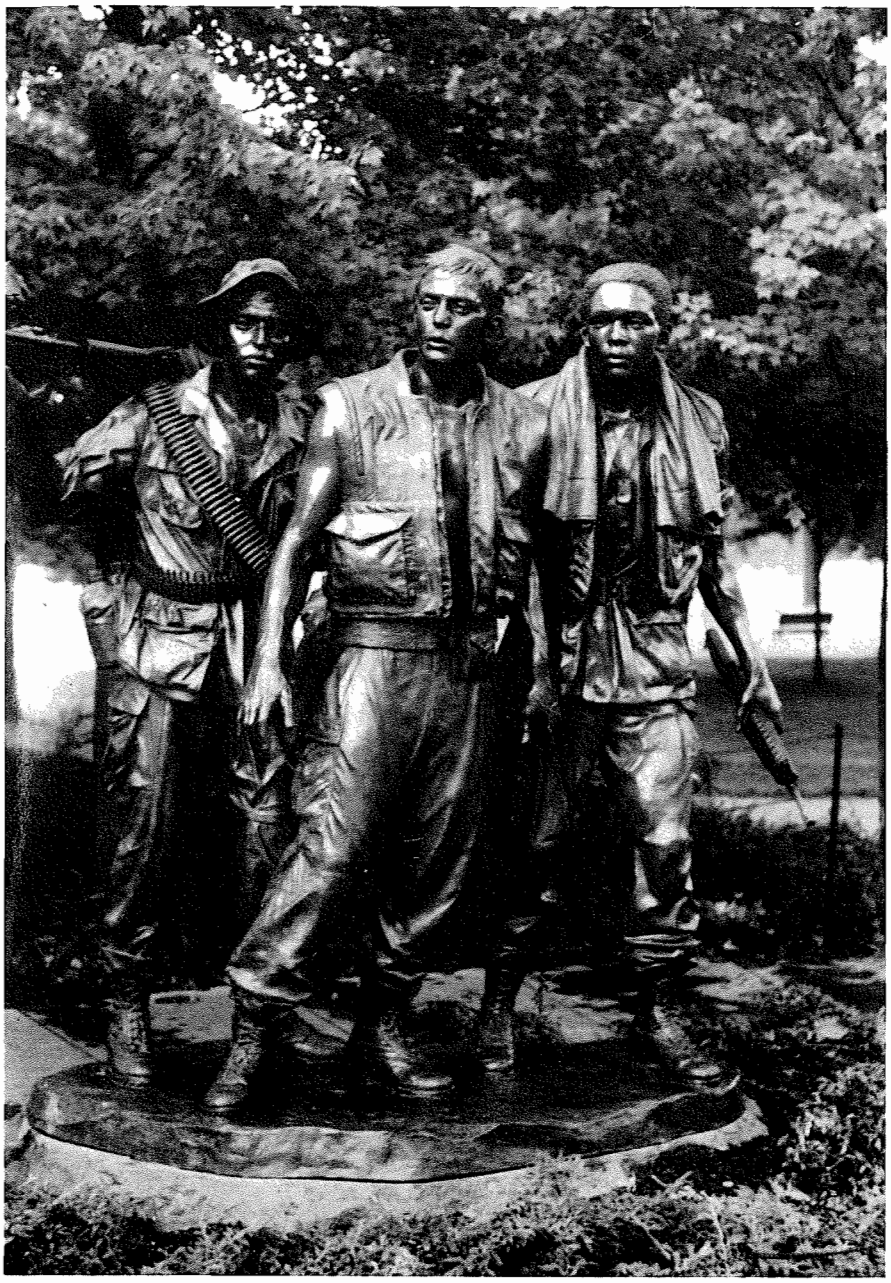


(Courtesy of Michael Pipkin)

BROTHERS IN THE FIELD
Left to right: "Rap"; "Limey" (a British Corpsman); Moriarity.

(The photo on the following page courtesy of Marian Beth Novak)

FALLEN BROTHERS



KIA of Second Battalion, First Marines, Vietnam Era

The following, painstakingly compiled by David "Doc" Johnson, is a list of the known KIA 2/1 suffered during its tour in Vietnam, 1965-1971. Any additional information is welcome.

NAME	RANK	UNIT	HOME	DATE	LOCATION
Aasen David K	LCpl	E	Longview WA	22 Aug 67	25E 27
Adams Frank H	Capt	G	Nashville TN	23 Mar 70	12W 34
Agri Joseph J	LCpl	E	So Boston MA	19 Apr 69	26W 5
Allen Billie A	LCpl	E	Prentiss MS	02 Nov 66	12E 9
Allen Charles R	LCpl	H&S	St Louis MO	01 Jan 66	04E 47
Allen Richard J	Pfc	H	Grand Rapids MI	17 May 68	61E 22
Amos Willie F	Pvt	H	Atlanta GA	19 Apr 67	18E 46
Arredondo Thomas A	Sgt	F	Fresno CA	21 Apr 67	18E 55
Atkins James	LCpl	F	Wichita KS	21 Oct 69	17W 39
Austin Eddie P	Cpl	F	Coachella CA	21 Apr 67	18E 55
Backer William	Pfc	F	Mandan ND	12 Jan 68	34E 33
Baker Donald	LCpl	F	Philadelpia PA	16 Jun 68	58W 16
Ballard Adam D	Cpl	E	Olathe CO	23 Apr 67	18E 73
Barnes James W	LCpl	G	New York NY	20 Apr 67	18E 51
Barr John F	LCDR	H&S	Hope AR	18 Oct 67	28E 33
Barrows Irving	Pvt	E	De Ridder LA	21 Apr 68	51E 16
Bastyr Douglas B	LCpl	H	Chatsworth CA	25 Feb 69	31W 43
Beattie Erick W	LCpl	F	New York NY	27 Jan 70	14W 70
Becerra Javier	LCpl	H	Weslaco TX	20 Apr 67	18E 52
Belden Larry G	Pfc	H	Esbon KS	26 Jul 69	20W 46
Benegas Vincent	LCpl	F	Riverside CA	21 Apr 67	18E 55
Bergeron Douglas	2Lt	H	Tillamook OR	04 Nov 68	39W 15
Betty Claude C	Cpl	H	Webster MA	18 Oct 67	28E 33
Bingham David A	Pfc	F	Melrose MA	22 Jan 68	35E 10
Blissett Robert A	Cpl	F	Lapeer MI	30 Nov 67	31E 9
Blosky Gene O	GSgt	H&S	Los Angeles CA	25 Mar 69	28W 39
Blumer Wilford L	Pfc	G	E St Louis IL	31 Aug 68	45W 12
Boley Ronald M	Pfc	F	New Lexington OH	21 Apr 67	18E 56
Bolton Willie E	LCpl	F	Richton MS	20 Mar 69	29W 95
Bond Theodore C	LCpl	F	Columbus OH	16 Jun 68	56W 1
Bonds Byron D	LCpl	F	Evansville IN	21 Apr 67	18E 56
Boryszewski Stephen	LCpl	H	Buffalo NY	10 Apr 69	27W 47
Bourg Miller J	LCpl	H	Houma LA	25 Jun 66	08E 91
Bowman Arthur B	LCpl	H	Mount Vernon NY	10 Sep 68	44W 14
Bradley Gerald G	Cpl	E	Braintree MA	15 Jan 69	34W 4
Bragg Paul J	LCpl	H&S	Omaha NE	15 Jul 69	21W 123
Brandon David B	Pfc	G	Lake Oswego OR	29 May 66	07E 115
Brannen James R	Pfc	F	Statesboro GA	20 Sep 66	10E 123
Branson Jerry L	Pfc	H	Owensville MO	19 Sep 66	10E 116
Brantner Wayne	LCpl	H	Altoona GA	16 Mar 69	29W 51
Braun Harry W	Pfc	F	Hebron IL	19 May 68	63E 5
Breedlove Rodney	LCpl	F	Alkol WV	21 Apr 67	18E 56
Briggs Gordon M	Pfc	G	Seattle WA	29 May 66	07E 115

Brigham Albert	LCpl	E	Savannah GA	14 Dec 66	13E 42
Briles James W	Pfc	G	Portland OR	29 May 66	07E 115
Britton Thomas	Pfc	G	Great Neck NY	29 May 66	07E 116
Broderick Patrick	LCpl	G	Chicago IL	23 Sep 67	27E 2
Broegeler Herman	LCpl	F	Virgina Beach Va	01 Aug 67	24E 59
Brown Dennis L	LCpl	H&S	Milwaukee WI	19 Aug 68	54W 14
Brown Richard S	Cpl	G	Ashville OH	05 Jul 68	53W 16
Brown Roger C	Pfc	H	Newark NJ	20 Nov 68	38W 14
Brownfeld Phil	LCpl	G	New York NY	16 Mar 67	16E 88
Bryant Charlie P	LCpl	H	Detroit MI	20 Apr 69	26W 13
Bulifant Roger D	Pfc	F	Belleville MI	28 Feb 66	05E 84
Bunn Benjamin	Pfc	F	Washington DC	21 Apr 67	18E 58
Burks Gary A	Pfc	F	Covington VA	29 Apr 67	18E 112
Burks James C	LCpl	H	Raymond MS	03 Mar 69	30W 22
Burleson Michael F	LCpl	F	Waxahachie TX	19 May 68	63E 6
Burnham Joseph_	Pvt	F	Bloomfield NJ	19 May 68	63E 6
Burns James E	Pfc	H	Buffalo NY	07 Dec 67	31E 57
Burri Miguel R	Pfc	E	La Mirada CA	18 Dec 66	13E 58
Byars Richard S	Cpl	E	Rye CO	22 Jan 68	35E 10
Byrne Paul R	Pfc	H	Lorton VA	11 Dec 66	13E 32
Cain Dennis R	Pfc	H	Council Bluffs IA	22 Oct 68	40W 18
Campestre Albert	Pfc	E	New York NY	17 May 68	62E 1
Carey James D	Pfc	E	Pensacola FL	15 Jan 69	34W 5
Carey James E	LCpl	F	Altoona PA	21 Apr 67	18E 57
Carlson Vernell D	Pfc	H	Mora MN	26 Dec 66	13E 80
Carroll Peter R	LCpl	H	Winters CA	15 Jan 69	34W 5
Carter Shelby	Cpl	G	Dry Prong LA	08 May 70	11W 130
Carter Timothy	LCpl	F	Ely NV	15 Jul 69	21W 122
Cartwright Thomas C	1Lt	G	Honeoye Falls NY	26 Jun 67	22E 64
Case Orson H	Cpl	E	Johnstown NY	15 Jul 66	09E 21
Casebolt Henry C	Cpl	F	St Joseph MO	28 Feb 66	05E 84
Navy Cross Recipient					
Cerrano Louis F	Pfc	F	New York NY	22 Apr 67	18E 67
Chamaj Andrew P	HM3	E	Scenery Hill PA	15 Jul 66	09E 22
Chambers Paul R	Cpl	E	Scottsboro AL	15 Jul 66	09E 22
Cherrick James W	Pfc	E	New York NY	15 Jul 66	09E 22
Churchill Lawrence	LCpl	H	Tustin CA	18 Oct 67	28E 34
Christensen Warren	Pfc	F	Hooper Ut	28 Feb 66	05E 85
Ciborowski Thomas	Pfc	F	Maspeth NY	09 Apr 67	18E 2
Clark J C Jr	LCpl	G	Fairfield AL	24 Aug 65	02E 66
Clifford George H	Cpl	H	Grand Rapids MI	26 Jul 69	20W 48
Clinton Larry E	Cpl	H&S	Columbus OH	03 Aug 66	09E 102
Coleman Daniel	Pfc	G	Rockford IL	24 Feb 69	31W 33
Coleman James J	Cpl	G	Jacksonville FL	26 Jun 66	08E 97
Coleman Lynn B	Pfc	F	Ashland MS	19 May 68	63E 6
Collins Theothis	LCpl	F	Asbury Park NJ	19 Aug 68	48W 52
MIA/KIA--body never recovered					
Connor Glen	Pfc	H	Danville VA	08 May 68	56E 36
Cooper James W	Pfc	F	Nansemond VA	19 May 68	63E 7
Cope Robert J	LCpl	H	Kennewick WA	19 Apr 67	18E 48
Corkill Robert	LCpl	G	San Benito TX	29 May 66	07E 117
Cormier Ronald R	Pfc	F	Portsmouth NH	21 Apr 67	18E 57
Cortez Richard	Cpl	H	Los Angeles CA	06 Dec 66	13E 15
Cottrell Darrel W	LCpl	G	Rockville IN	04 May 68	54E 32

Craft Robert L	Pfc	F	Salt Lake City UT	10 Dec 65	04E 8
Craney Leslie L	Pfc	F	Portland ME	03 Apr 68	47E 48
Cronin John E	Pfc	E	Chicago IL	14 May 67	19E 116
Crowe Richard E	LCpl	E	Long Beach CA	29 May 66	07E 117
Crump Jessie L	Pfc	F	Bonnieville KY	28 Oct 66	11E 121
Crutchley Donald	Cpl	G	Baltimore MD	18 Dec 65	04E 22
Cummings Ronald	Pfc	F	Stockton CA	10 Dec 65	04E 7
Cunnion Michael A	Pvt	E	Mt Vernon NY	15 Jul 66	09E 23
Daniels Earl G	SSgt	G	Thomasville GA	26 Jun 67	22E 65
Daniels Tommy L	LCpl	H&S	Santa Ana CA	26 Dec67	32E 62
Daugherty James	Cpl	H&S	York PA	09 May 68	57E 13
Davis John Larry	LCpl	F	Conemaugh PA	21 Apr 67	18E 57
Daw Cecil E	HN	G	Anacoco LA	25 Jun 66	08E 91
Dawkins Clarence	LCpl	E	Columbia SC	24 Mar 68	45E 64
Decker Robert H	HM3	H	Marshfield WI	18 Oct 67	28E 34
Dennis Mark V	HM3	E	Miamisburg OH	15 Jul 66	09E 23
De La Garza Emilio	LCpl	E	E St Louis IL	11 Apr 70	12W 121

CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

Diakow Robert	Pfc	E	New York NY	09 Jul 69	21W 88
Dicken Perry	LCpl	E	Danville IL	11 Apr 68	49E 20
Dibb Stephen K	Sgt	F	Milwaukee WI	21 Jul 67	09E 51
Di Roberto Robert	Cpl	H	Mamaroneck NY	15 Dec 66	13E 47
Dixon Lee A	LCpl	H&S	Saraland AL	07 Nov 67	29E 40
Doane Michael L	Cpl	F	Browning MT	27 Mar 68	46E 45
Dobbs Gerald T	Pfc	G	Etowah TN	19 Nov 67	30E 24
Dolin Danny J	Pfc	G	Lake WV	10 Sep 66	10E 82
Dorr Gerald B	Pfc	F	Middleboro MA	15 Apr 67	18E 28
Dorsey William	Cpl	F	Younkers NY	20 Nov 66	12E 94
Dumas David	Cpl	H	Syracuse NY	27 Oct 68	40W 43
Dumas William R	Pfc	H	Bellevue OH	29 Jan 67	14E 95
Dunbar Robert S	Cpl	H	Outlook WA	31 May 70	10W 124
Dunkel Michael R	Pfc	G	St Paul MN	07 Oct 68	41W 23
Dwyer Robert Martin	LCpl	E	Troy NY	23 May 67	20E 89
Dycus Rickey D	Cpl	G	Long Beach CA	02 Jun 69	23W 43
Edwards James W	Pfc	E	Normal IL	18 Jul 66	09E 33
Egan Edward T	Pvt	F	Roslindale MA	21 Apr 67	18E 58
Eggleston Robert R	GSgt	H	Los Angeles CA	25 Jun 66	08E 92
Emery Donald C	LCpl	E	Portland OR	27 Mar 68	46E 45
Ephriam David B	Pfc	E	Los Angeles CA	09 Sep 66	10E 79
Eppley Gerald V	Pfc	G	Newark OH	06 Aug 66	09E 107
Esquivel Jaime	Pfc	F	San Jose CA	13 May 67	19E 105
Evans Eric W	Cpl	H	Rexford NY	13 Dec 66	13E 40
Evans Jeffery W	Pfc	H	Chicago IL	22 Oct 68	40W 20
Evans Sammy G	Pfc	F	Hampton AR	21 Apr 67	18E 58
Evenhus Gerald W	Pfc	H	Salem OR	16 Sep 66	10E 100
Ewing Lon B	Pfc	F	Chula Vista CA	19 May 68	63E 18
Ezell William B	LCpl	G	West Monroe LA	18 Nov 68	38W 7
Fenenga Terry H	Cpl	E	Iona SD	18 Oct 67	28E 36
Finley Nick A	LCpl	F	Jackson TN	16 Dec 69	15W 63
Firmneck Allen P	HN	F	Hartford CT	22 Apr 67	18E 69
Firth Allen E	Sgt	H	Mission Home VA	18 Oct 67	28E 34
Fischer Roy S	Pfc	G	Lakeland FL	09 Oct 68	41W 34
Fisher La Marr	Pvt	H	Los Angeles CA	20 Aug 66	10E 21
Fletcher Donald E	Pfc	H	Mount Airy NC	26 Jul 69	20W 52

Fogleman Johnny	Pfc	H&S	Indianapolis IN	02 Sep 68	45W 25
Foley William L	Pfc	G	Ft Towson OK	27 Jul 68	50W 18
Fontaine Larry	Pfc	E	Lincoln NE	07 Nov 66	12E 37
Foran William P	LCpl	F	Decatur IL	01 Mar 66	05E 93
Forbes Arthur K	LCpl	F	Chicago IL	20 May 69	24E 59
Fowler John K	Pfc	H	Garden City MI	11 Nov 69	16W 57
Fraley Charles	Pfc	E	Milledgeville GA	08 Apr 70	12W 107
Franklin Michael	LCpl	H	Aurora CO	18 Oct 67	28E 37
French Douglas R	LCpl		South Houston TX	21 Jul 66	09E 51
Fuchs William	Pfc	F	Milwaukee WI	28 Feb 66	05E 85
Gage John T	SSgt	F	McCook NE	16 Dec 69	15W 63
Gaines Charles	2Lt	F	Newton MS	20 Nov 66	12E 95
Gallagher George F	HN	H	Barre VT	29 Aug 67	25E 62
Buried at St Monica's Cemetery, Barre VT					
Gandil Robert P	Pfc	E	Hackensack NJ	18 Dec 66	13E 58
Ganzy Clyde W	Pfc	G	Jacksonville FL	02 Mar 69	30W 12
Garrett Robert L.	Pfc	H	Zanesville OH	22 Oct 68	40W 19
Gass Charles L	LCpl	H	Hobbs NM	18 Oct 67	28E 35
Gasser James E	Pfc	H	Detroit MI	30 Jul 69	20W 75
Gillespie Albert	Pvt	F	Streetsboro OH	19 May 68	63E 10
Glaze Kenneth L	SSgt	G	Hutchinson KS	23 Aug 66	10E 29
Gooden Michael	LCpl	E	Bellflower CA	15 Jul 66	09E 24
Gordon Johnny L	LCpl	H	Los Angeles CA	13 Dec 66	13E 41
Gould Edward D	SSgt	F	Bateville AR	21 Apr 67	18E 59
Grannan Michael	Pfc	F	Canoga Park CA	10 Dec 65	04E 8
Green Claude H	Pvt	E	Margaretville NY	09 Aug 68	49E 1
Grego Phillip H	Pfc	G	Council Bluffs IA	23 Aug 66	10E 29
Griffin Louis F	Pfc	H	Oxnard CA	25 Feb 69	31W 42
Griffin Robert A	Pfc	G	San Antonio TX	04 Jul 69	21W 60
Grimes Gary D	LCpl	F	Houston TX	21 Apr 67	18E 63
Grimstad Sigard	Pfc	E	Teaneck NJ	19 May 68	63E 10
Gulla Dennis J	Pfc	H	Warren MI	03 Feb 69	33W 48
Gulliver John J	Pfc	G	Schenectady NY	29 Jun 67	22E 83
Guseman William	Cpl	H	Finleyville PA	25 Jan 67	14E 78
Guthriee Frank	Pfc	E	Azle TX	14 May 67	19E 117
Hadley Thomas J	LCpl	E	Pittsboro NC	06 Dec 68	37W 50
Hall Acie D	LCpl	F	Lake City TN	10 Dec 65	04E 7
Halt Ardon	Cpl	F	Houston TX	05 Nov 68	39W 21
Hamilton Roger D	GSgt	F	Baltimore Md	21 Apr 67	18E 59
MIA/KIA--body never recovered					
Hammond Jack M	LCpl	H	Marysville WA	18 Oct 67	28E 35
Hap Edward F	1Lt	F	E Chicago IN	20 Jul 66	09E 46
Harrell James E	LCpl	G	Cortland IN	29 Mar 67	17E 68
Harris Benjamin	LCpl	E	Marcus Hook PA	07 Nov 66	12E 37
Hartman Gary R	Cpl	F	New Port NY	21 Apr 67	18E 59
Hauch James M	LCpl	G	Akron OH	31 Jan 68	36E 13
Heaps John W	Pfc	H	Bensenville IL	14 Sep 68	44W 56
Heath James R	LCpl	E	Bala Cynwyd PA	29 May 66	07E 118
Henderson Derrick	Pfc	F	Gary IN	04 Nov 68	39W 17
Herbstritt Ronald	Pfc	G	Bradford PA	25 Jun 66	08E 90
Herfel Laurence C	LCpl	E	Madison WI	24 Feb 68	41E 14
Hernandez Alexander	Pfc	H&S	Compton CA	07 Sep 66	10E 74
Herrera Norciso F	LCpl	H	Alcalde NM	02 Jul 66	08E 119
Hickman Robert	Sgt	F	Wheeling WV	10 Dec 65	04E 8

Hixson Carl	Cpl	H&S	Philadelphia PA	05 Jan 68	33E 48
Hoch Larry D	LCpl	G	Topton PA	06 May 69	25W 12
Holeman Ray W	Pfc	E	North Jackson OH	23 Sep 66	11E 3
Holt Billy J	LCpl	G	Cameron TX	29 May 66	07E 118
Holtzclaw Thomas	Pfc	F	Atlanta GA	21 Apr 67	18E 60
Homer Ward E	Sgt	F	Oil City PA	20 Mar 69	29W 78
Horsley LaMonte	Cpl	H&S	Lennon MI	09 May 68	57E 23
Houston Marvin	LCpl	F	Little Rock AR	16 Jun 68	58W 9
Howe Larry W	LCpl	H&S	Fresno CA	01 Aug 68	50W 43
Hubbard Tony G	Pvt	E	Orlando FL	22 Nov 68	38W 35
Huckabee James E	LCpl	H&S	Lewisville TX	21 Jul 67	23E 100
Huffer Kenneth K	Pfc	G	Kempton IN	19 Dec 65	04E 28
Hunt William D	Pfc	F	Birmingham AL	21 Apr 67	18E 60
Hurd Charles E	Pfc	H&S	Sandyville WV	03 Aug 66	09E 103
Hutchings Steven	LCpl	G	Dallas TX	06 Aug 68	49W 19
Ing Herbert E III	2Lt	F	Camp Lejeune NC	23 Dec 68	36W 69
Ingels Charles W	Pfc	H	Cinncinnati OH	18 Oct 67	28E 36
Ingram Lafe	Pfc	G	Crum WV	05 May 69	25W 6
Jackson Billy L	SSgt	F	Saraland AL	09 Apr 68	49E 2
James Daniel R	Pvt	E	Loup City NE	26 Feb 66	05E 80
Jason Bruce E	SSgt	F	Boston MA	13 Sep 66	10E 91
Jennings Bobby D	Pfc	H	Granite City IL	25 Mar 69	28W 37
Jeremicz Gregor	LCpl	G	Philadelphia PA	18 Dec 65	04E 24
Johnson Charles E	Cpl	F	Batavia IL	28 Feb 66	05E 86
Johnson Charles T	Pfc	G	Cadillac MI	04 May 68	42E 67
Johnson Clarence	Pfc	F	Allen Park MI	20 Sep 66	10E 124
Johnson Donald V	Pfc	F	Dallas TX	19 May 68	63E 11
Johnston David W	Pfc	G	Tucson AZ	29 May 66	07E 119
Jones Anthony B	Pfc	G	Miami FL	05 May 69	25W 6
Jones Daniel	LCpl	E	Savannah GA	28 Sep 66	11E 25
Jones James R	LCpl	F	Long Beach CA	22 Oct 67	28E 49
Jones Marvin C	Pfc	F	Interlaken NY	04 Nov 68	39W 17
Jones Ronald	Pfc	H	Washington DC	27 Mar 69	28W 62
Jorgensen Rolf W	LCpl	H&S	Seattle WA	20 Jul 66	09E 47
Joyce Daniel T	GSgt	E	North Tarrytown NY	14 May 67	19E 119
Justice Edward J	LCpl	H	Cincinnati OH	08 Jan 70	14W 13
Kari Jarmo A	Pfc	H&S	Royal Oak MI	09 Feb 66	05E 20
Keegan Richard	Pvt	E	Norfolk VA	09 Dec 68	37W 75
Keller Joseph J	Cpl	E	Newark NJ	29 Sep 67	27E 29
Kidd Melton L	Pfc	F	Chesapeake VA	09 Jun 68	58W 10
Knoppert Andrew	LCpl	F	Salt Lake City UT	08 May 69	25W 23
Knutson Robert	Pfc	F	Norfolk VA	27 Mar 66	06E 54
Koester Joel R	Cpl	H	Phoenix AR	10 Jan 68	34E 22
Krage Lanny R	LCpl	F	Columbia SC	21 Apr 67	18E 61
La Duke John	LCpl	G	Paterson NJ	20 Apr 67	18E 53
Lackner Michael	Pfc	F	Deer Park NY	15 Jul 69	21W 125
Ladner Jay W	LCpl	G	Jupiter FL	07 Mar 70	13W 93
Laird James B	Pfc	F	Davenport IA	28 Feb 66	05E 87
Lamon Francis W	Pfc	G	Philadelphia PA	17 Apr 68	50E 30
Lavelle Terrence M	Cpl	E	Cleveland OH	25 Aug 67	25E 43
Lawrence William A	Pfc	G	Mann WV	17 Apr 68	50E 32
Le Compte John A	LCpl	E	Albuquerque NM	20 Aug 68	54W 31
Leahy Richard J	LCpl	H&S	Albany NY	06 Mar 69	30W 56
Leftwich William G	LtCol	H&S	Germantown TN	18 Nov 70	06W 68

Lenartowicz Charles	Cpl	F	Philadelphia PA	13 Sep 66	10E 92
Lewellin Lawrence F	LCpl	E	Brook Park MN	23 Apr 67	18E 75
Light Joseph M	LCpl	H	Pittsburgh PA	16 Sep 66	10E 101
Lloyd Ronald E	Pfc	H	Mobile AL	01 Jan 68	33E 14
Lowe Barry	Pfc	F	Farmington MA	09 Jun 68	58W 10
Luca Patrick C	LCpl	H&S	Lyndhurst OH	24 Feb 68	41E 10
Lucas Robert E	Pfc	F	Oak Grove VA	27 Mar 68	46E 47
Mackay Paul A	Pfc	H	New York NY	18 Jul 67	23E 87
Mahan Darrel U	Cpl	G	McKinney TX	19 Aug 67	25E 17
Majeski Michael T	LCpl	G	Jersey City NJ	27 Jul 68	50W 19
Mallon James J Jr	2Lt	F	Indianapolis IN	24 Oct 67	28E 61
Manger James A	Cpl	H&S	Anderson IN	30 Aug 68	45W 7
Manning Dennis	LCpl	E	St Clair MI	11 Dec 65	04E 12
Marchbanks R B	Pfc	G	Moriarty NM	29 May 66	07E 119
Marcum Harold	LCpl	H&S	Cleveland OH	01 Aug 68	50W 44
Markey Christopher	2Lt	H	Birmingham MI	06 Jan 70	14W 5
Marquardt Wayne J	Cpl	F	Lindenhurst NY	02 Sept 67	25E 86
Marsh John R	Pfc	H, G	Newark NY	06 Oct 68	41W 18
Martin Bruno L	Pfc	H	Wayne MI	25 Jun 66	08E 93
Martinez Pedro	Pfc	H	Mercedes TX	11 Jul 66	09E 53
Martinez-Soto Jos	Pfc	H	San Sebastian PR	19 Sep 66	10E 120
Martini Gary	Pfc	F	Portland OR	21 Apr 67	18E 61
CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT					
Matson Howard V	LCpl	F	Brookfield WI	04 Dec 66	13E 11
Maul Richard A	LCpl	E	Chicago IL	16 Jul 66	09E 28
Maxwell William	LCpl	H&S	Tuscaloosa AL	27 Dec 68	36W 81
Mediate Alan W	Pfc	E	Riverside CT	12 Aug 69	19W 8
Menard Douglas	HN		Denver CO	02 Mar 69	30W 14
Mennone Michael G	Pfc	G	New Haven CT	27 Jun 69	21W 24
Miller Burrnon E	Pfc	G	Indianapolis IN	18 Sep 67	26E 89
Miller Phillip	Pfc	F	Oklahoma City OK	04 Oct 66	11E 46
Mizner Darrell	Pfc	F	Akron OH	09 Jun 68	58W 11
Molaison Gordon	Cpl	E	Thibodaux LA	19 May 68	63E 13
Montoya Anthony	LCpl	E	Rome NY	27 Sep 68	42W 31
Montoya Joe H	1Lt	H	Santa Fe NM	20 Sep 70	07W 78
Montz Roger E	Pfc	F	Tonawanda NY	19 May 68	63E 12
Moody Paul J	LCpl	F	E St Louis IL	27 Mar 68	46E 48
Moore Carter L	Cpl	F	Ilion NY	27 Mar 68	46E 48
Moore John B	Pvt	E	Geneva NY	21 Dec 68	36W 57
Moreno Joe	Pfc	F	Austin TX	10 Dec 65	04E 9
Morgan Mark L	LCpl	F	San Bruno CA	28 Feb 66	05E 87
Morina Anthony J	Pfc	G	Havenstraw NY	15 Mar 69	29W 46
Morse Charles A	LCpl	H&S	Davenport IA	27 Mar 67	17E 58
Mount John E	LCpl	E	Vineland NJ	07 Apr 68	48E 44
Mullins Jimmy M	LCpl	G	Del City OK	21 Apr 67	18E 61
Muniz Carlos N	Cpl	H	New York NY	06 Feb 67	14E 130
Muraco Francis J	Cpl	H	Winchester MA	23 Nov 67	30E 72
Murphy Robert E	Pfc	E	Compton CA	21 Dec 66	13E 68
Muvich Dennis R	2LT	E	Whiting IN	19 May 68	63E 14
MacKenna James	SSgt	E	Denver CO	29 May 66	07E 120
MacDonald Larry E	LCpl	F	Detroit MI	28 Feb 66	05E 88
McArthur Jerome D	Pfc	H	Baltimore MD	19 Sep 66	10E 120
McCall Douglas H	Pfc	G	Hayward CA	22 Apr 67	18E 70
McCarthy Edward	SSgt	F	Chicago IL	28 Feb 66	05E 88

McClain Fred J	Cpl	H	Jacksonville FL	26 Jul 69	20W 51
McGuire Andy	LCpl	F	Chicago IL	28 Feb 66	05E 89
McKnight Joseph	Pfc	H&S	St Paul MN	13 May 69	25W 79
McKnight Matthew O	1Lt	H	Opa-Locka FL	18 Oct 67	28E 37
McLemore James R	Pfc	G	Knoxville TN	28 Feb 66	05E 89
McMullin Charles	Pfc	H	Willard MO	17 May 68	62E 9
McNichols Richard	Cpl	H	Philadelphia PA	21 Jul 66	09E 54
Naranjo Miguel	Pfc	F	Peublo CO	28 Feb 66	05E 91
Nash David E	Sgt	F	National City CA	16 Jun 68	58W 12
Nash Thomas S	Pfc	E	Atlanta GA	07 Apr 68	48E 45
New Morris D	LCpl	E	Austin TX	24 May 67	20E 94
Nielsen Michael	LCpl	H	Beliot WI	26 Jul 69	20W 51
Noland Jerry L	LCpl	E	Houston TX	29 May 66	07E 120
Norton Kenneth	Cpl	F	Laurel Hill NC	08 May 68	57E 7
Nugent Richard	Pfc	F	Westwood NJ	28 Feb 66	05E 92
Nunez Santos S	Pfc	G	Ft Sam Houston TX	03 Jul 69	21W 55
O'Callaghan Maurice	Pfc	F	Iselin NJ	21 Apr 67	18E 62
O'Connor Brian R	2Lt	H	Andover MA	31 Jan 67	14E 1
O'Reilly Timothy	Pfc	H&S	Chicago IL	12 May 69	25W 80
Oberle David A	LCpl	H	Walnut Creek CA	18 Oct 67	28E 39
Oesterreich Tilo	Cpl	E	Philadelphia PA	07 Apr 68	48E 45
Oliver Troy R Jr	Capt	F	Boise ID	19 May 68	63E 15
Olson Gary W	LCpl	E	Milwaukee WI	15 Mar 67	16E 85
Ort Steven M	Pvt	E	Columbus OH	18 Sep 68	43W 80
Ortega Ernest	Sgt	H	Wichita KS	21 Dec 66	13E 69
Overturf Philip	Pvt	G	West Frankfort IL	20 Apr 67	18E 54
Owens James Joseph	Cpl	F	Woodside NY	21 Apr 67	18E 62
Owens Robert E	Pfc	H	E StLouis IL	10 Nov 69	16W 53
Pahcheka Robert C	Pfc	H	Indiahoma OK	22 Oct 68	40W 22
Parker George J	Sgt	H	Rochester NY	20 Apr 69	26W 15
Pastrovich Eugene	Pfc	F	Walshville IL	21 Apr 67	18E 63
Patterson William A	Pfc	F	Superior WI	09 Jun 68	58W 16
Paul Ernest G	Pfc	E	Concord NH	29 May 66	07E 120
Pawlowics Dennis	Pfc	F	Duluth MN	21 Apr 67	18E 62
Pearce Jerry D	LCpl	E	Celeste TX	15 Jan 69	34W 9
Peckham George R	LCpl	F	Wyoming MI	04 Apr 68	48E 8
Pederson Arthur	LCpl	F	Minneapolis MN	28 Feb 66	05E 90
Pendergrass Vernon	Pfc	G	Birmingham AL	04 Mar 68	42E 70
Perez Anthony	Pfc	H	Brownsville TX	18 Oct 67	28E 38
Perez Raul B	Pfc	F	El Paso TX	21 Apr 67	18E 71
Peterson John A	LCpl		Brookings SD	28 May 67	21E 6
Pettaway Larry C	LCpl	F	Dayton OH	21 Apr 67	18E 63
Pierce Donald J	Cpl	G	Aliquippa PA	18 Mar 70	12W 18
Pierce William	LCpl	G	Azusa CA	13 Feb 71	05W 101
Pike Dennis E	LCpl	E	Petersburg IL	15 Jan 66	11E 77
Piotrowicz David	Pfc	H&S	Philadelphia PA	15 Dec 68	36W 26
Pitts Joseph W	LCpl	E	Philadelphia PA	04 Dec 68	37W 41
Podmaniczky Chris	Pfc	F	St Louis MO	21 Apr 67	18E 65
Polk Robert L	LCpl	F	Sherman TX	09 Jun 68	58W 13
Poole Perry L	LCpl	G	Helena AR	16 Oct 66	11E 80
Prange Thomas C	Pfc	H	Kalamazoo MI	12 Mar 69	29W 22
Prater Calvin R	Pfc	H	Kerman CA	25 Feb 69	31W 55
Proue James T	Pfc	G	St Paul MN	01 Jul 67	21W 43
Pugh David J	LCpl	G	Charlestown MA	15 Mar 69	29W 48

Puzyrewski Leslie	Cpl	F	Chicago IL	10 Dec 65	04E 10
Quinn Anthony L	Pfc	H	Gardena CA	04 Feb 69	33W 58
Quinn John F	Pfc	H	El Paso TX	26 Apr 69	26W 56
Ralich Ronald	Pfc	G	Lorain OH	29 May 66	07E 121
Ramsey Henry C	Pfc	G	Waco TX	05 May 69	25W 7
Rankin Andrew B	LCpl	E	St Peters MO	29 Apr 69	26W 79
Ray Darrell T	Pfc	E	Olympia WA	28 Feb 66	05E 90
Reece Walter J	Sgt	F	Marshall NC	19 May 68	63E 17
Reyes Douglas C	LCpl	E	Memphis TN	17 Feb 67	15E 55
Reyner David E	Cpl	H	Houston TX	25 Jun 66	08E 94
Richard Roy J	Pvt	G	Lafayette LA	29 May 66	07E 121
Riehl Harlan C	HM3	F, E	Spring Valley MN	27 Mar 66	06E 54
Riordan Patrick C	Pfc	F	Des Plaines IL	19 May 68	63E 17
Risner John M	Pfc	H&S	Las Cruces NM	26 Jun 66	08E 99
Roberts John E	Pfc	E	Friendly WV	15 Mar 69	29W 48
Rodriguez Francisco	Cpl	E	San Antonio TX	29 Apr 69	26W 79
Rodriquez Reynaldo	Pfc	H	Snyder TX	26 Jul 69	20W 51
Rogers Willis	Pfc	G	Chicago IL	03 Jul 69	21W 56
Romano August	Pvt	F	New York NY	09 Jun 68	58W 14
Rowe Arthur M	Pfc	F	Phillipsburg NJ	01 Jun 68	61W 6
Roy Allen J	LCpl	H	E Hartford CT	18 Oct 67	28E 38
Roy Peter William	Pfc	E	Fairhaven MA	05 Dec 67	31E 41
Ruckle Clinton	Pfc	G	Wichita KS	06 Jan 70	14W 6
Rudd Richard J	Pfc	H&S	Keokuk IA	21 Apr 68	51E 25
Ruiz Thomas	LCpl	H&S	New York NY	01 Jul 68	54W 32
Runnels Lloyd C	2Lt	H	San Diego CA	23 Nov 67	30E 73
Russell Gordon W	Pfc	F	Danvers MA	01 Feb 67	14E 106
Sanchez Santos	Pfc	G	Selma CA	25 Jun 66	08E 94
Sanchez Uvaldo	LCpl	F	Albuquerque NM	21 Apr 67	18E 64
Sandvig David J	LCpl	F	Tacoma WA	20 Mar 69	29W 92
Scheib Ralph E	LCpl	F	Rochester NY	21 Apr 67	18E 64
Schloemer Carl	LCpl	E	Bellefontaine NBRS MO	15 Jul 66	09E 26
Schneller Steven O	Pfc	H	Marysville CA	07 Oct 68	41W 26
Schrader Franklin	LCpl	G	Newton IA	19 Jan 70	14W 47
Schultz Steven O	HM3		International Falls MN	23 Jul 66	09E 63
Scott Patrick	LCpl	H	Decatur TX	06 July 69	21W 71
Scritchfield David	LCpl	H&S	Buffalo NY	11 Sep 67	26E 57
Sexton Edward C	Pfc	G	New Buffalo MI	29 May 66	07E 122
Sharpless John P	Pfc	H	Macon GA	28 Jun 70	09W 100
Shepherd Harry	Sgt	F	Largo FL	20 Nov 66	12E 97
Shelleman Kenneth	2Lt	H&S	Huntington WV	02 Feb 69	33W 44
Shelton James H	2Lt	F	Hominy OK	21 Apr 67	18E 64
Sigsbee Michael J	Pfc	H	Elkhart IN	18 Oct 67	28E 38
Simmons Harry J	LCpl	E	Langhorne PA	08 Apr 67	17E 129
Simmons Herolin	SSgt	E	Ahoskie NC	15 Jul 66	09E 26
Simmons Tom W	Pfc	F	Trinity TX	22 Jan 68	35E 12
Simonds Harold R	Pfc	H	Gloversville NY	11 May 69	25W 55
Sitler Barry J	LCpl	F	Compton CA	10 Dec 65	04E 11
Sloan Max E	LCpl	E	Moultrie GA	22 Dec 66	13E 73
Sluder Donald T	Cpl	H	Mountain City TN	18 Oct 67	28E 37
Smith Gary E	Pvt	E	Rockhill MO	14 May 67	19E 122
Smith Henry Edward	Sgt	H&S	Harrisburg PA	09 May 67	19E 74
Smith James E	Pfc	E	Canton MS	25 Feb 69	31W 59
Smith Jimmy H	LCpl	H&S	Ft Pierce FL	10 Jun 68	58W 20

Smith Paul R	Cpl	H&S	Pen Mar PA	06 Mar 67	16E 31
Snyder Harold	Pfc	F	New York NY	01 Aug 67	24E 64
Soto Ismael	LCpl	F	New York NY	06 Apr 70	12W 100
Southern Edward C	Pfc	H&S	Newton KS	26 Feb 69	31W 73
Spaulding Jack	LtCol	H&S	Buffalo NY	14 Oct 66	11E 75
Speer Byron M	2Lt	F	San Marine CA	13 Jun 67	21E 99
Spiller Leroy	LCpl	G	Galena Park TX	29 Aug 67	25E 66
Spivey Harley E	2Lt	G	Samson AL	21 May 67	20E 79
Staneart Ronald	Pfc	F	Piqua OH	04 Oct 66	11E 47
Starcher Eddie D	LCpl	H	Letherbark WV	15 Nov 66	12E 77
Stelle Gerald C	Sgt	F	Temple City CA	13 Jun 67	21E 99
Stevens Walter B	Sgt	G	San Diego CA	29 May 66	07E 122
Steward James H	Pfc	E	Columbus OH	29 May 66	07E 123
Stewart Richard	Pvt	G	Gary IN	29 Apr 71	03W 19
Strange Richard L	Sgt	G	Richmond VA	25 Jun 66	08E 95
Strong Gridley B	Pfc	H	Ontario CA	21 Apr 68	51E 25
Stubstad Gerald	Pfc	E	Chicago IL	15 Jul 66	09E 26
Summers Jon Ray	GSgt	H&S	Helena MT	20 May 69	24W 62
Swartz James A	LCpl	G	Elliottsburg PA	02 Apr 70	12W 85
Sweeney Michael	Pfc	G	Columbia SC	11 Feb 68	38E 81
StGeorge Fred D	Sgt	H&S	Hinesburg VT	10 Sept 67	26E 52
Tadevich Emil J	Cpl	G	Waltham MA	31 Dec 65	04E 47
Taurisano James	LCpl	F	Everett MA	20 Jan 66	04E 81
Taylor James	LCpl	G	Miami FL	05 Jul 68	53W 25
Tebault Benjamin L	Capt	H&S	Portland OR	04 Jun 72	01W 35
Tennill Larry E	Pfc	F	Slater MO	10 Jan 66	04E 62
Thompson Albert C	Pfc	F	Columbia SC	13 May 69	25W 112
Thornton Kenneth E	Sgt	G	Shelby OH	15 Nov 66	12E 77
Thimm Joseph M	Cpl	G	Armada MI	18 Dec 65	04E 26
Torres Jose	Pfc	F	Sinton TX	28 Feb 66	05E 89
Townsend George H	Pfc	G	Philadelphia PA	17 Oct 67	28E 32
Trantham Raymond	LCpl	F	Murphy NC	19 May 68	63E 15
Trevino Juan R	Pfc	F	Calwa CA	29 Mar 66	06E 61
Tucker Carl W	LCpl	G	Acksonville FL	20 Aug 66	10E 23
Ullmer William A	Pfc	E	Escondido CA	14 May 67	19E 123
Valrie Dwight T	Pvt	F	Ocala FL	19 May 68	63E 19
Vannatter Lloyd	Cpl	F	Ettrick VA	10 Dec 65	04E 11
Van Reypen Robert	Pfc	F	Rochester NY	27 Mar 66	06E 54
Vicalvi Timothy L	LCpl	H	Worcester MA	18 Oct 67	28E 39
Wade Michael	LCpl	G	Chicago IL	30 Mar 71	04W 95
Walker Charles E	LCpl	E	Magnolia AR	29 May 66	07E 123
Walker Clovis B	Cpl	H	Martinsville VA	30 Jun 69	21W 40
Walker Richard H	Pfc	H	Sparks NV	26 Apr 69	26W 58
Walter Clifton M	Pfc	G	Erie PA	23 Aug 66	10E 32
Ward Robert D	Cpl	H&S	Yucaipa CA	09 Jan 66	04E 61
Wargo Dennis M	Pfc	H&S	Clairton PA	09 May 67	19E 76
Weathers Nathaniel	GSgt	E	Cleveland OH	22 Jan 68	35E 12
Webb Wilson L	Pvt	H	Charlotte NC	29 Apr 70	11W 71
Whipple Clifford L	LCpl	G	Downey CA	18 Dec 65	04E 27
White Wesley W	LCpl	E	Carteret NJ	02 Apr 68	47E 44
Weir David	Pfc	H&S	Bristol RI	10 Dec 69	15W 46
Wickel Kenneth W	Cpl	G	West Lawn PA	29 May 66	07E 124
Williams Dewayne T	Pfc	H	St Clair MI	18 Sep 68	43W 25

CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

Williams Johnny E	Pfc	H	Charleston SC	19 Sep 66	10E 122
Williber Gerald	Cpl	F	New Orleans LA	19 May 68	64E 1
Williams Curtis L	Pfc	G	Catron MO	04 Mar 68	43E 2
Wilson John W	Pfc	F	St Paul MN	10 Dec 65	04E 11
Wise Elwin C	Pfc	F	Valleyford WA	27 Mar 66	06E 53
Wylie Joseph D II	Pfc	G	Belleville IL	21 Apr 67	18E 66
Yanez Jesus Jr	Cpl	E	Corpus Christi TX	12 Aug 67	24E 105
Yurgaitis Stanley	Pfc	F	Harvey IL	27 Mar 66	06E 55
Zutter Daniel R	Cpl	F	St Cloud MN	06 Dec 69	15W 34
Zywicke David L	LCpl	H	Manitowoc WI	07 Dec 67	31E 62
Additional Identified KIA's of 2/1					
Dycus Rickey D	Cpl		Long Beach CA	02 Jun 69	23W 43
Garcia Juan R	LCpl	G	New York NY	17 Nov 65	03E 77
Groshong Allen E	HN	F	Newport News VA	08 Apr 68	48E 52
Lanski Joseph W	Pfc	G	Philadelphia PA	05 Dec 65	03E 129
Logue Robert D	LCpl	G	Warren OH	05 Dec 65	03E 130
Scott Patrick R	LCpl		Decatur TX	06 Jul 69	21W 71
Spenard Norman J	LCpl	G	Springdale CN	05 Dec 65	03E 133

* * * * *

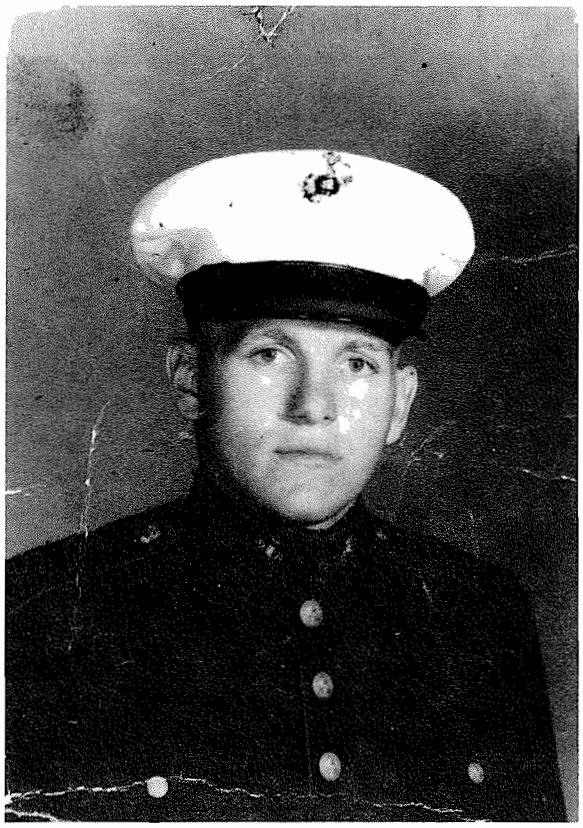


(Courtesy of David "Doc" Johnson)

REMEMBERING AT THE WALL

"The pain was eased a little when I saw his name on the wall." --Dennis Paul Wasson

A FEW OF THE GOOD MEN



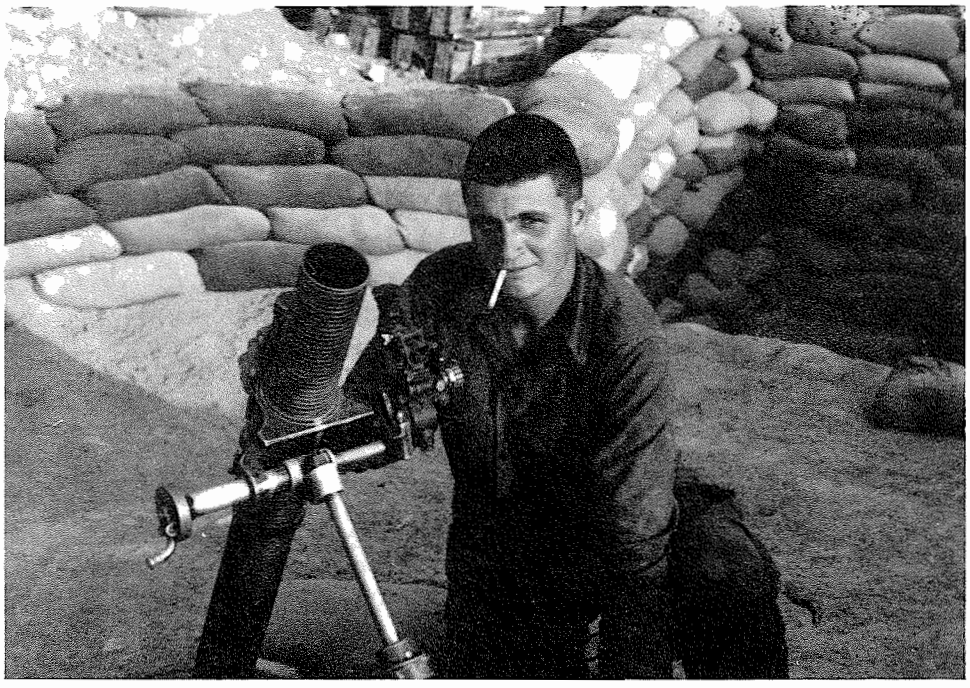
(Left)

BEFORE NAM
Randy Vance in dress blues.

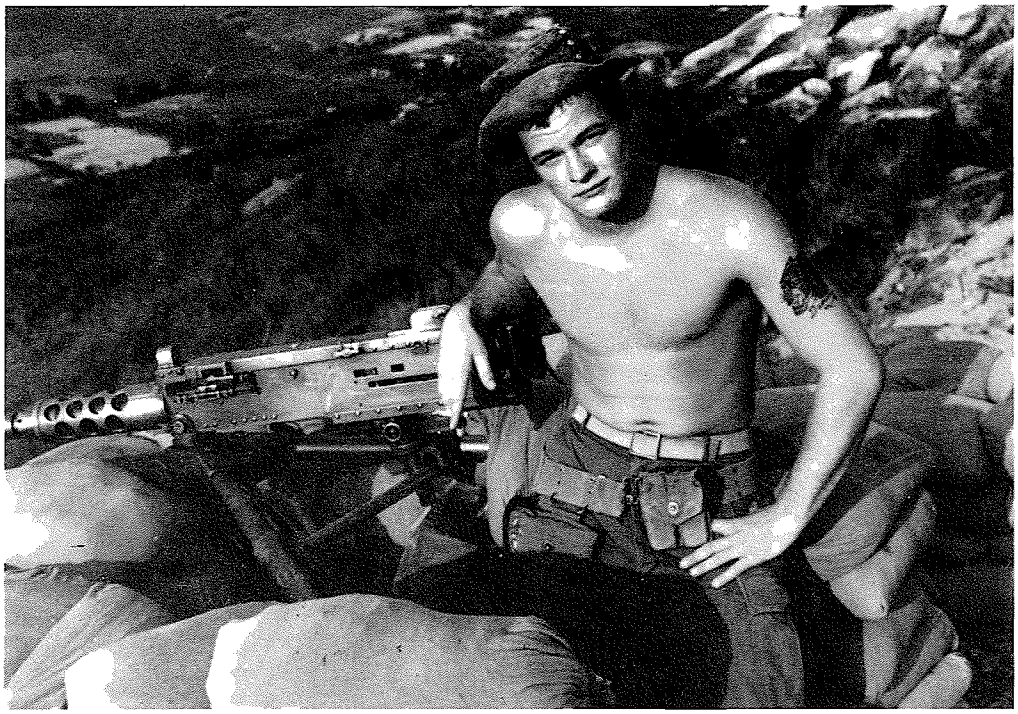
(Below)

MORTARMAN TONY ZANITI

(Courtesy of Randy Vance)



(Courtesy of Dennis O'Rourke)



(Courtesy of Dennis O'Rourke)

MACHINE GUNNER O'ROURKE

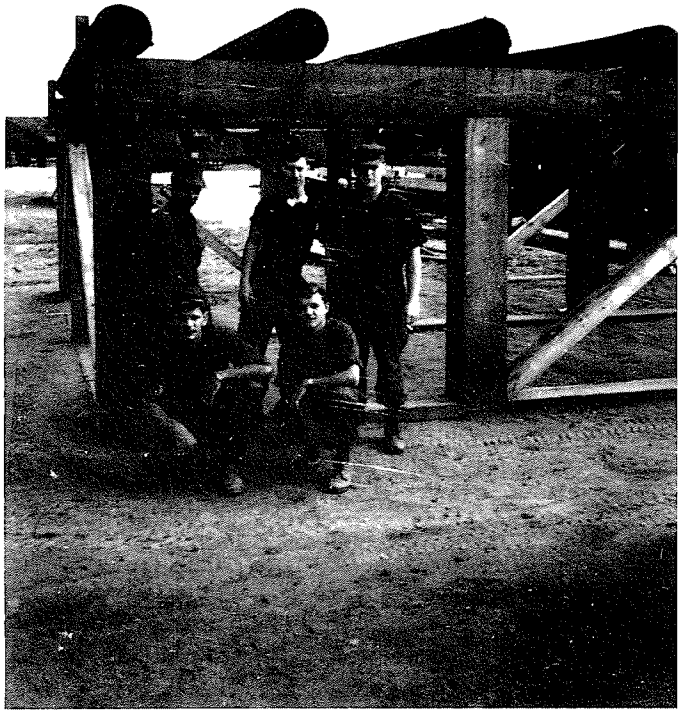
Dennis O'Rourke on top of Nui Loc Son, April 1967.



(Courtesy of Al Schaudt)

RIFLEMEN

Call (left) and Schaudt (right) of Fox Company at Phuoc Nham, January 1970.



(Courtesy of Randy Vance)

(Left)

WIREBOYS

"I was in two firefights and two mortar attacks with 2/1. When one of the mortar attacks occurred I was taking a shower and found everything to fight with except my trousers."

--Randy Vance

(Below)

RADIOMEN OF GOLF COMPANY



(Courtesy of Ross Liscum)



(Courtesy of Paul Gloria)

(Above)

SADDLE UP

Lower left corner is Mike Flood; above him, Jackson; behind Jackson, Burke (M-79, KIA); left to right: Gloria; Moore (back to camera); Hathaway (facing camera); Bickle (far right). "Hotel-1, Charlie squad ready to kick off on one of our daily patrols." --Paul Gloria



(Right)

RADIOMAN LISCUM WITH HANDSET

(Courtesy of Ross Liscum)



WEAPONS PLATOON, GOLF COMPANY
Southeast of Da Nang, mid-1970.

(Courtesy of Pat Saraceno)

Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients
Second Battalion, First Marines
Vietnam War

PFC Gary Martini

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On 21 April 1967, during Operation Union, elements of F Company conducting offensive operations at Binh Son encountered a firmly entrenched enemy force and immediately deployed to engage them. The Marines in PFC Martini's platoon assaulted across an open rice paddy to within twenty meters of the enemy trench line where they were suddenly struck by hand grenades, intense small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire. The enemy onslaught killed 14 and wounded 18 Marines, pinning the remainder of the platoon behind a low paddy dike. In the face of imminent danger, PFC Martini immediately crawled over the dike to a forward open area within 15 meters of the enemy position, where continuously exposed to enemy fire, he hurled hand grenades, killing several of the enemy. Crawling back through intense fire, he rejoined his platoon which had moved to the relative safety of a trench line. From this position he observed several of his wounded comrades lying helpless in the fire-swept paddy. Although he knew one man had been killed attempting to assist the wounded, PFC Martini raced through the open area and dragged a comrade back to a friendly position. In spite of a serious wound received during the first daring rescue, he again braved the unrelenting fury of the enemy fire to aid another companion lying wounded only 20 meters in front of the enemy trench line. As he reached the fallen Marine, he received a mortal wound, disregarding his own condition, he began to drag the Marine toward his platoon's position. Observing men from his unit attempting to leave the security of their position to aid him, he called to them to remain under cover and through a final supreme effort, moved his injured comrade to where he could be pulled to safety, before he fell, succumbing to his wounds. Stouthearted and indomitable, PFC Martini unhesitatingly yielded his life to save two of his comrades and insure the safety of the remainder of his platoon. His outstanding courage, valiant fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty reflected the highest credit upon himself, the Marine Corps and the US Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

(Information on Congressional Medal of Honor and Navy Cross recipients submitted by Jim Elbrecht)

PFC Dewayne T. Williams

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a rifleman with the First Platoon, Company H in action against communist insurgent forces. PFC Williams was a member of a combat patrol sent out from the platoon with the mission of establishing positions in the company's area of operations, from which it could intercept and destroy enemy sniper teams operating in the area. On the night of 18 September 1968, as the patrol was preparing to move from its daylight position to a preselected night position, it was attacked from ambush by a squad of enemy using small arms and hand grenades. Although severely wounded in the back by close intense fire, PFC Williams, recognizing the danger to the patrol, immediately began to crawl forward to a good firing position. While he was moving under the continuous intense fire, he heard one of the members of the patrol sound the alert that an enemy grenade had landed in their position. Reacting instantly to the alert, he saw that the grenade landed close to where he was lying and without hesitation, in a valiant act of herosism, rolled on top of the grenade as it exploded, absorbing the full and tremendous impact of the explosion with his body. Through his extraordinary initiative and inspiring valor in the face of certain death, he saved the other members of his patrol from serious injury and possible loss of life and enabled them to successfully defeat the attackers and hold their position until assistance arrived. His personal heroism and devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the US Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

L/Cpl Emilio De La Garza

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a machine gunner with Company E. On 11 April 1970, while returning with his squad from a night ambush operation, L/Cpl De La Garza joined his platoon commander and another Marine in searching for two enemy soldiers who had been observed fleeing for cover towards a small pond. Moments later he located one of the enemy soldiers hiding among the reeds and brush. As the three Marines attempted to remove the resisting soldier from the pond, L/Cpl De La Garza observed him pull the pin of a grenade. Shouting a warning, L/Cpl De La Garza placed himself between the two Marines and the ensuing blast from the grenade, thereby saving the lives of his comrades at the sacrifice of his life. By his prompt and decisive action and his great personal valor in the face of almost certain death, L/Cpl De La Garza upheld and further enhanced the highest tradition of the Marine Corps and the Naval Service.

Navy Cross Recipients

Cpl Henry C. Casebolt, Fox Company, 28 February 1966 (Posthumous)
L/Cpl Donald L. Feerrar, Golf Company, 20 March 1967
L/Cpl Billy K. Henderson, Hotel Company, 17 July 1969

END PIECES

Album

Historical Background of the Vietnam War

Major Operations Involving Second Battalion, First Marines

List of Contributors

Glossary



(Contributed by Don Dennis)

ALBUM



(Courtesy of Hank Van Laarhoven)

(Left)

MAKING MUSIC

Cannon (left) and Van Laarhoven (right)

(Below)

WAITING FOR MESSAGES

Mike Dunn reading a copy of Leatherneck *while listening to his radio.*

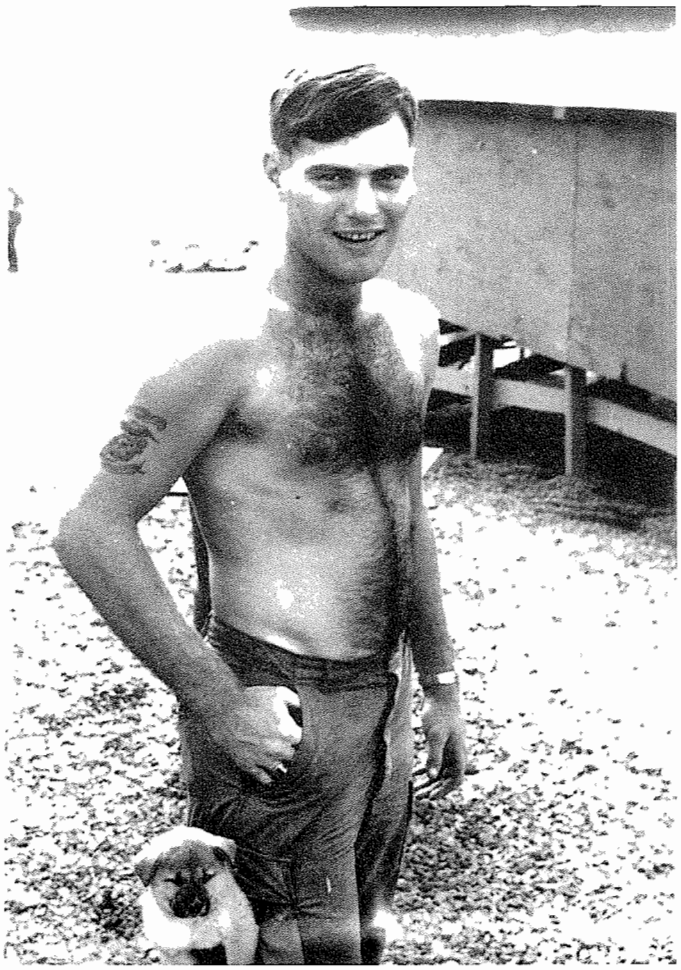


(Courtesy of Mike Dunn)

(Right)

A BOY AND HIS DOG

Mike Dunn with puppy (Ralph) in side pocket.

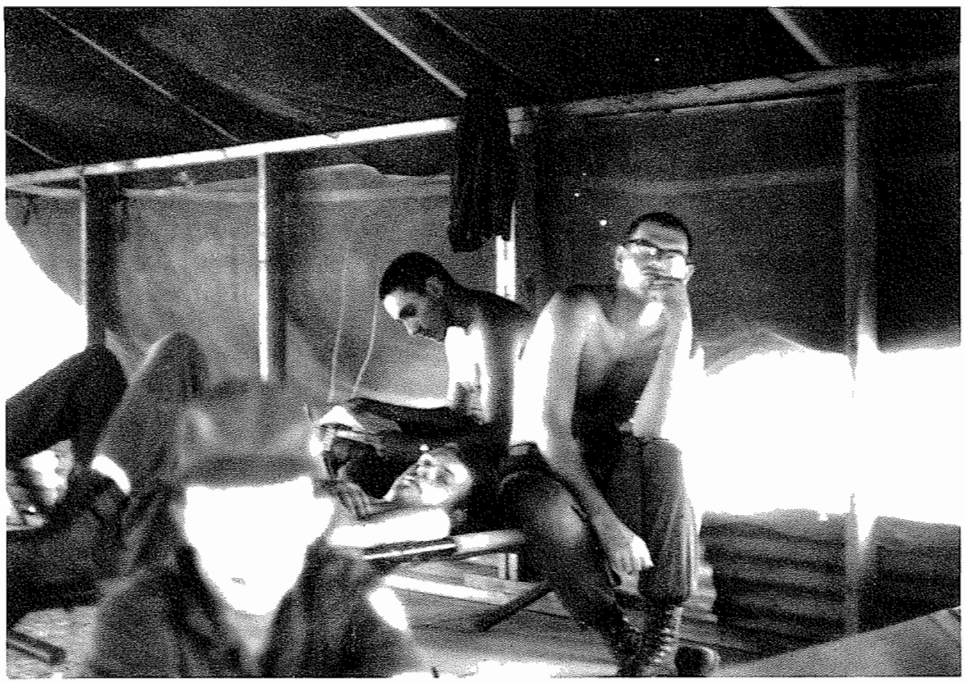


(Courtesy of Mike Dunn)

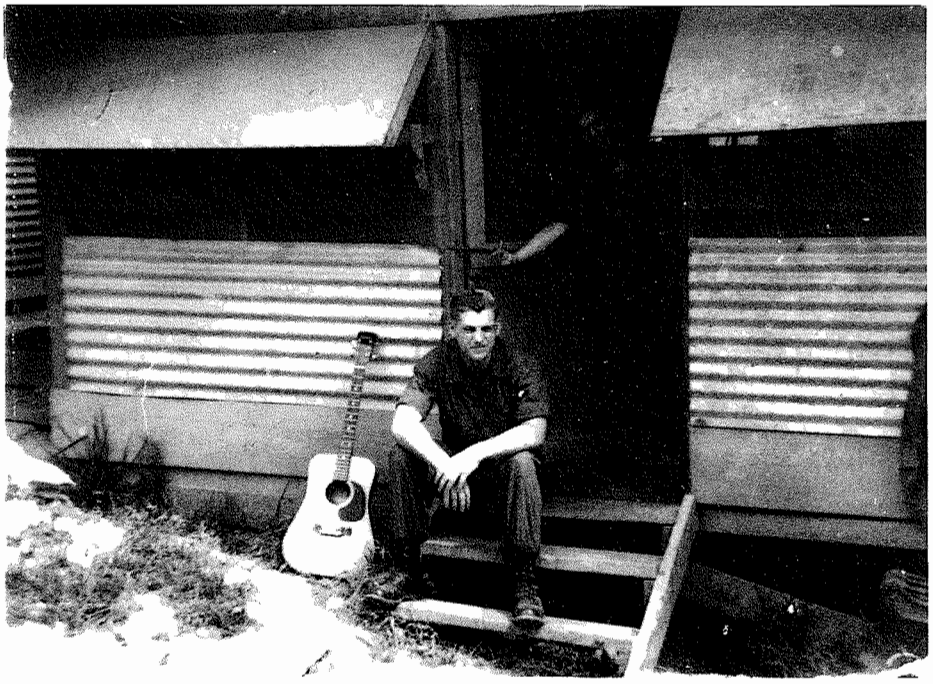
(Below)

HANGING OUT

Inside tent at Cau Do Bridge, south of Da Nang.



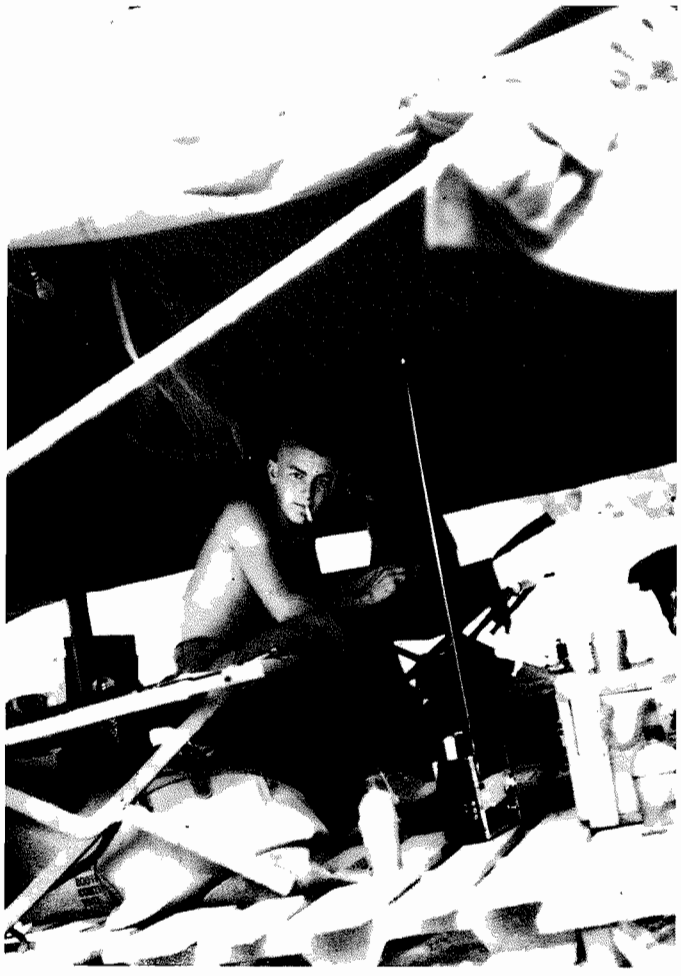
(Courtesy of Lou Parker)



(Courtesy of Randy Vance)

(Above)

QUIET TIME
Randy Vance with guitar.



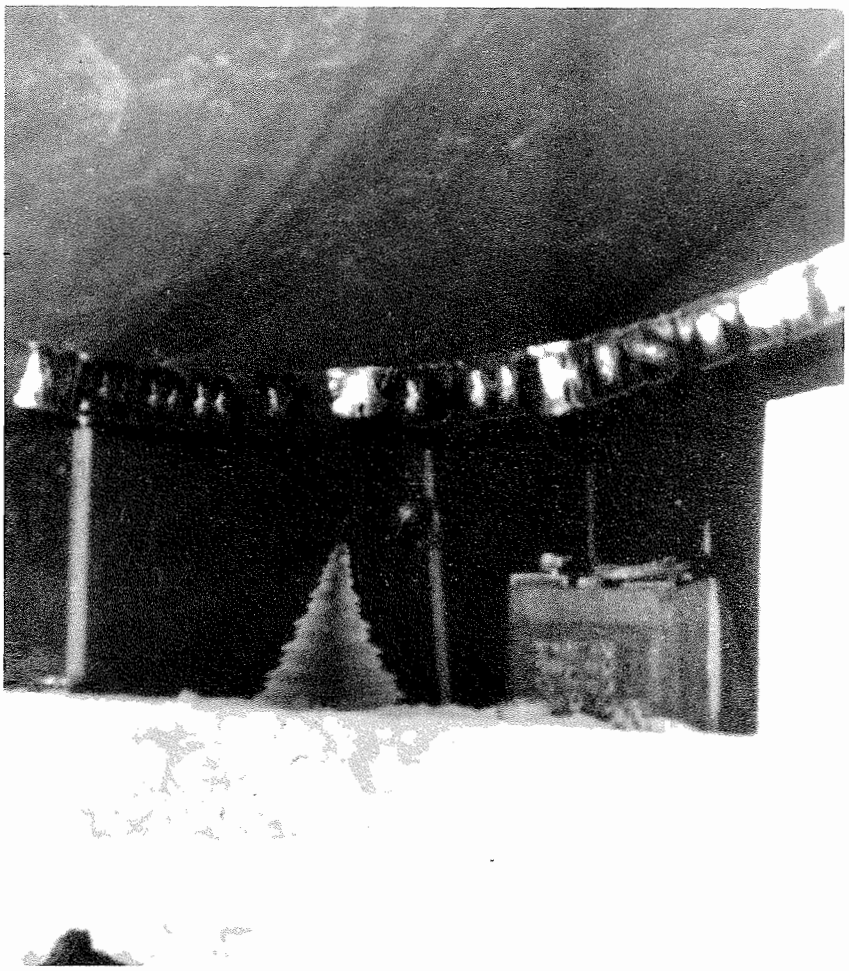
(Courtesy of Lou Parker)

(Left)

SPARE TIME
Listening to music from Monkey Mountain on radio.

We had some fireworks Christmas Eve. About 9 P.M. everyone started popping illumination, white, green, red; it was really pretty. Some of the guys from Comm section (radiomen) thought they'd go to the perimeter and shoot a few rounds. Well, we were in a cease fire, so everyone thought we were getting hit; so the general alarm was given. Everyone headed for the perimeter in full battle gear. Men were almost shoulder-to-shoulder around the whole perimeter. . . .

[Letter home from Harvey Weishuhn]



(Courtesy of Jeannie Novak)

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Christmas decorations in Vietnam, 1967.

"I was working up the defensive fire plans when all of a sudden I realized it was coming up midnight . . . I remembered that flask and went over to my hootch, picked it up and brought it back to the COC and passed it around . . . and wished everyone a Merry Christmas."

--Chuck Daugherty

Dec 25
They had a good Christmas dinner. I lay around & read. The day was warm . . . This Christmas was really differ[ent].

--Diary of Don Dennis



(Courtesy of Paul Gloria)

CHRISTMAS PARTY 1968

Paul Gloria playing guitar, Mynette singing (lower left), the rest are unidentified. "After spending Christmas eve night on ambush we had a choice of going to Da Nang for 'The Bob Hope Show' or staying in the rear for Christmas steak-dinner and beer. Needless to say, we made the right choice." --Paul Gloria

"Right before midnight [1967-68], *I went outside again. It was drizzling and completely dark . . . Suddenly flares popped up and lit the whole area. Our flares. And everybody took this as a signal to fire everything we had. Soon the whole battalion was lit up with the glow of tracer rounds, machine guns--big and small--from tanks, mortars, and pop-up flares of all colors. Con Thien looked like one big Roman candle . . . We were all screaming "Happy New Year!"*

--David Dillberg

"Jerry Was Here This Day"

Con Thien, Vietnam--It was a beautiful, if unseasonal, Christmas.

There was no blanket of snow, so this beleaguered Marine bastion settled for a two-foot plastic Christmas tree and a paper banner over the command bunker reading, "Season's Greeting."

The banner had a postscript: "2nd Battalion, 1st Marines--a great place to visit, but we wouldn't want to live here."

But for the U.S. Marines facing Ho Chi Minh's crack Red regiments across the DMZ, there was an unaccustomed peace and an eerie silence. Communist heavy guns that had hammered the outpost for months were quiet, and the American guns that had answered them were also idle.

Peace on earth began here at precisely two minutes before six p.m. Christmas Eve. Maj. Chuck Daugherty, operations officer on the three muddy hills that form the outpost, reported that a Marine barrage triggered a heavy secondary explosion five minutes before the truce began. Leatherneck gunners then threw 30 more rounds for good measure. The guns have been quiet since.

A burst of Communist machine-gun fire directed at the Marine perimeter on Christmas Eve was not returned.

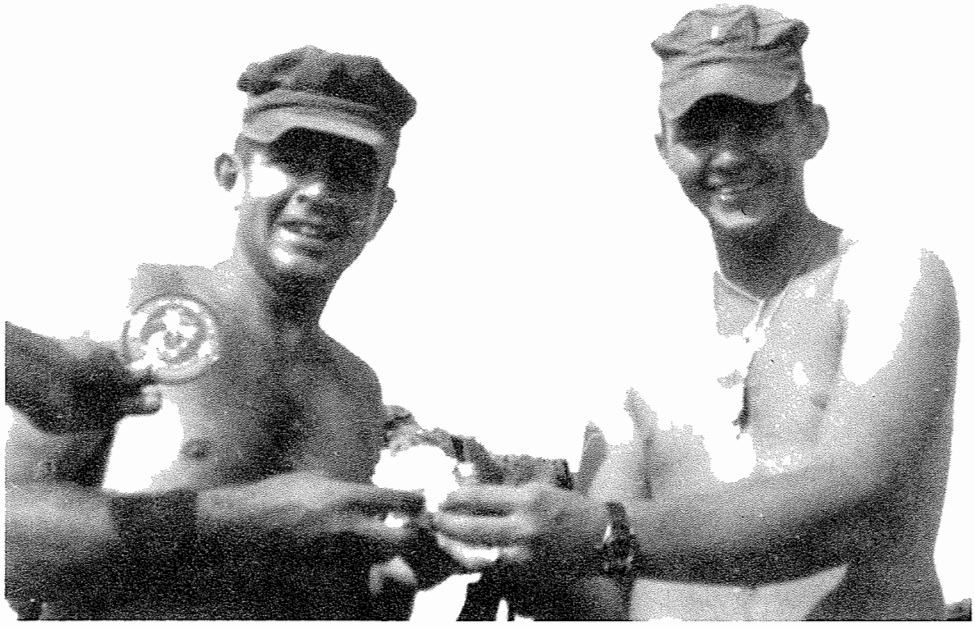
U.S. reconnaisance Christmas morning disclosed Red troop movements in and around the trenches that encircle Con Thien, but again, the Marines held their fire.

[By Donald Pratt in Stars and Stripes, 27 December 1967 and submitted by Jerry McCarthy. The title used here was taken from handwritten note on original.]

* * * * *

"Some ARVN widows came bringing cake and presents for Colonel Ing and some of the staff officers. They had embroidered some handkerchiefs . . . these were the gifts they gave. It was quite touching to see these ladies helping us celebrate our Marine Corps Birthday."

--Chuck Daugherty



(Courtesy of Anthony "Jake" Jucentis)

10 NOVEMBER 1969

Jake Jucentis, platoon commander, second platoon, Golf Company, presents a piece of birthday cake to the oldest Marine, Staff Sergeant LaChance, at Pig Pen, south of Da Nang, west of Marble Mountain.

MY PHOTOS

MY PHOTOS

MY PHOTOS

I REMEMBER

I REMEMBER

I REMEMBER

VIETNAM PRIOR TO 2/1's ARRIVAL

By Phil Leslie

THE BEGINNING

In ancient times the Vietnamese people lived in what is now northern Vietnam. About the year 200 BC, the Chinese general Chao T'o established a kingdom that included a portion of southeastern China and extended southward to the present city of Hue. He called his kingdom Nam Viet. Less than a hundred years later it was conquered by the Imperial Chinese, who called it Annam and made it part of China for the next thousand years. In 939 AD the Chinese departed Annam and the Vietnamese were able to establish an independent state which gradually expanded southward to the Mekong Delta. In the early 1800's the country was united and the kingdom of Vietnam established.

The Vietnamese way of life changed little during this period. For the most part the Vietnamese were an agricultural people who lived in villages and farmed the land and whose society was based on family relationships--an individual's loyalty was to the family above all else and the interest of the family was placed above that of personal needs. As a result, powerful family clans evolved who established control over vast regions of territory in both the north and the south. The more powerful of these families fought each other for control of the country until the year 1802, when Nyugen Anh, head of the Nyugen family that controlled the south, defeated the Tay Son family from the north. Nyugen Anh declared himself emperor and named the united empire Vietnam.

The French came to this part of Southeast Asia during the 1600's and were successful in establishing trade with the Vietnamese. With the traders came missionaries who were successful in converting large numbers of the Vietnamese to Christian (Catholic) beliefs. However, there were some Vietnamese rulers and local officials who became suspicious of the missionaries' activities and persecuted them. Because of this persecution, Napolian III of France sent a military expeditionary force to Vietnam in the year 1858. French forces seized Saigon in 1861, and by 1883 they controlled all of Vietnam; the emperor was forced to sign a treaty giving France complete control of the country. France then split Vietnam into three parts: Tonkin with its capital at Hanoi and Annam with its capital at Hue became French protectorates; Cochin China with its capital at Saigon became a French colony. In addition, Cambodia became a French protectorate and Laos was divided into part-protectorate and part-colony. These countries of Southeast Asia became known as French Indochina.

The French brought industry to Vietnam, and many of the people left their villages for the industrialized cities. However, the French dream of a prosperous colonial empire in Vietnam never materialized, and most of the Vietnamese people--disillusioned by their failure to prosper individually--came to dislike the French. The economic situation in Indochina and the conditions for the Vietnamese people continued to deteriorate, made even worse by the worldwide depression of the 1930's. The Vietnamese wanted independence from France, but were without the resources or leadership.

During World War II, France fell to Nazi Germany in 1940, and the French Vichy government--which collaborated with the Nazis--permitted the Japanese to occupy strategic parts of Indochina from which to continue their war with the Chinese. It wasn't long before the Japanese controlled much of French Indochina; they did allow the French to govern, but only under the authority of the Japanese Imperial Army.

On 19 May 1941, a coalition of Vietnamese political parties publicly announced the formation of the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi). This political coalition, better known as the Viet Minh, had wide political support from all the Vietnamese political parties; however, the real power behind this movement were the Communists under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The Viet Minh declared as its goals the removal of the French as colonial ruler, the removal of Japanese occupation forces, and restoring independence to Vietnam.

When Japan surrendered in 1945, the French were not prepared to resume control of their Indochina colonies and protectorates. As previously determined by the Allied Powers, the British

accepted the surrender of Japanese forces south of the 17th Parallel, and the Nationalist Chinese accepted the Japanese surrender north of the 17th Parallel. Because of the absence of an established government to assume control of Indochina, the Viet Minh, who had been trained and equipped by the United States to conduct small-scale combat operations against the Japanese Army, were able to march into Hanoi, establish a government, and declare complete independence from France. Emperor Bao Dai was forced to step down in favor of Ho Chi Minh, who declared the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September 1945. When French representatives finally arrived in Hanoi, the Viet Minh were established as the government.

While full independence from France was the primary goal of the Viet Minh, the immediate problem confronting them was the 200,000 troops from Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese Army who were now occupying the country north of the 17th parallel. Ho Chi Minh's concern over Chinese troops in Vietnam was far greater than his disaffection with the French. Recalling Vietnamese history, Ho Chi Minh reminded the pro-Chinese Viet Minh that the last time the Chinese came to Vietnam they stayed for a thousand years, whereas the French had been there for less than a hundred years. Ho Chi Minh believed that he would be successful in obtaining complete independence from France because colonialism was dying out and the French were weak foreigners who could not withstand worldwide pressure to grant the Vietnamese full independence.

On 6 March 1946 Ho Chi Minh and the French agreed to a compromise worked out by the Allied Powers: France was to recognize the former protectorates of Tonkin and Annam as a combined free state within the French Union, but it was to be governed by the Vietnamese people; The Nationalist Chinese occupation troops were to withdraw, but would be replaced by 15,000 French troops; The French troops would be withdrawn in five annual increments until they were completely gone by 1952; and, the Viet Minh were to cease guerrilla war activities south of the 17th parallel. At this same time, France declared the formation of the Republic of Cochin China as a free state within the French Union to be governed by non-Communist Vietnamese.

In pursuit of his goal of full independence from France, Ho Chi Minh requested that the United States provide him only with moral support in his pursuit for independence. The moral support he requested from the United States never materialized, nor was he able to win any additional concessions from the French. On 20 November 1946, fighting broke out between French and Viet Minh forces in the port city of Haiphong over the control of the customs house. On the 23rd, the French bombarded the port city and occupied it. By December the fighting had reached Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh made one last request for moral support from the United States. It never came and he and the Viet Minh fled to their former hiding places in the western mountains, from where they conducted guerrilla war operations against the French.

In April 1954, after almost eight years of guerrilla warfare, an international conference prepared to meet in Geneva, Switzerland, to find a peaceful solution to the fighting between the French and Viet Minh. Representatives of the French-backed South Vietnamese, the Viet Minh, China and the "Big Four" (United States, Great Britain, France and Russia) were invited to attend this conference. On 7 May, the day before the opening of the conference, the Viet Minh won a great military victory over the French forces at Dien Bien Phu in northwestern Vietnam. Militarily, the French were thoroughly defeated in Vietnam.

In June the conference developed the Geneva Accords which provided for a temporary partition of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel, the northern sector to be controlled by the Communist Viet Minh and the south controlled by non-Communist Vietnamese. The Accords also called for the country to be reunited by elections in 1956. The United States and the South Vietnamese did not sign the Geneva Accords; however, the United States did agree to support the non-Communist South Vietnamese through the French.

Ho Chi Minh was recognized as an easy winner in any future election by both the French and the United States. Just as France did not want anything to upset the delicate situation on future reunification, the United States was embarked on a firm policy of preventing a Communist takeover of

Vietnam. The US position was that the Communists were attempting to prevent the orderly development of independence and were trying to confuse the matter before the world. Both the Soviet Union and China had recognized Ho Chi Minh and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam since 1950 and by this time were supplying them with ammunition and artillery. In addition, China had provided Ho Chi Minh with an estimated 2000 military advisors who had been placed in staff positions at the senior command and division levels. Other technicians provided assistance in communications, engineering, and transportation. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated that the Communists were using anti-French slogans to win local support, and that if they achieved military or political success, it was certain that they would subject the Vietnamese people to a dictatorship taking orders from Moscow and Peking; and, that if Communist forces were to win uncontested control over Indochina or any substantial portion thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against other free peoples of the area. President Eisenhower stated that the US would take a grave view of any future Chinese Communist aggression in Southeast Asia, and that if such aggression occurred, it would be a deliberate threat to the United States.

France had major investments in coal, cement, and heavy industry in the north, and plantations in the south. At this time, more than 6500 French businessmen and technicians were in Hanoi. Ho Chi Minh knew that the economic survival of Vietnam depended heavily on these individuals, and that it was in the best interest of Vietnam that he reach a political agreement with the French. During the three-month period just prior to the temporary partition of Vietnam, while approximately 850,000 Vietnamese moved to the South and about 80,000 moved to the North, the United States made it known that any French business operating in the North after the partition of the country would be blacklisted. After the formal partition on 11 October 1954, only 114 French business men and technicians were still in Hanoi; this served as a major setback to the Paris-Hanoi negotiations. The United States announced that all future US aid would be directed to the Vietnamese rather than through the French.

In addition to the rapidly deteriorating situation in Vietnam, France was also having difficulties with its colonial territories in Africa. The impact of these territorial problems half a world apart and the fact that France was dependent on US assistance resulted in France bowing to economic pressure and giving up its political authority in the South. On 1 January 1955, France dissolved the Republic of Cochin China and gave complete sovereignty to the people of South Vietnam. The former emperor, Bao Dai, was named the first head of state, and he appointed Ngo Dinh Diem as the prime minister. Bao Dai proved to be a very weak leader; Diem was elected president in October 1955 and announced the formation of the Republic of Vietnam. President Diem then appointed his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu as the chief advisor, his sister-in-law as the official hostess, his father-in-law as ambassador to the United States, another brother as the Archbishop of Hue, and various other relatives to cabinet or senior regional and provincial posts, until the key positions of government were filled with his relatives and close associates. Diem also announced that he would hold parliamentary elections in the South rather than the joint elections with the North as called for in the Geneva Accords, and in March 1956 established the National Assembly. Hanoi responded to Diem's actions by declaring that it was a US conspiracy and a blatant violation of the Geneva Accords. The last French military advisors departed Vietnam in 1957, and from that time on the total effort to support the South Vietnamese came from the United States. Ho Chi Minh wanted a united, Communist Vietnam, and active guerrilla war was being waged by 1960.

PRELUDE TO WAR

Soon after his inauguration in 1961, President Kennedy instituted a series of political and military measures to strengthen the South Vietnamese. This resulted in vast amounts of military equipment, advisers, and support units being sent to Vietnam. The United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam was established in 1962, and by the end of that year more than 12,000 US personnel were in the Republic of Vietnam including 18 USMC advisors to the Vietnamese Marine Corps and a Marine helicopter unit code-named SHUFLY. By 1963 the policies of President Diem and the activities of officials at all levels of the South Vietnamese government had the country in utter disarray. His brother

Nhu, the main presidential advisor, created a secret police organization called the Can Lao that became the eyes, ears, and iron hand of the president. In opposition to the government, six Buddhist monks committed suicide in public in August, and other Buddhist monks led students and other disgruntled Vietnamese in violent demonstrations. Diem responded by having the Can Lao raid Buddhist Temples throughout South Vietnam including the Xa Loi pagoda, the most sacred pagoda in Saigon. Many monks were injured and more than 1400 monks were arrested. Senior South Vietnamese generals received information that led them to believe that the Can Lao were planning a purge of the military command. They passed this information through diplomatic channels to President Kennedy's senior advisors and to the CIA in Saigon. The US response, approved by President Kennedy, was that the US would no longer tolerate Nhu's influence over Diem; Nhu had to go or US economic and military assistance to South Vietnam would be suspended.

Diem was unreceptive to diplomatic attempts to get rid of his brother, leaving his military commanders believing that the only choice they had was to choose between Diem or continued US assistance. Believing they had US backing, the generals attacked the Presidential Palace on 31 October and assumed control of the government. Diem and Nhu refused an offer from the US for a flight to freedom and escaped the initial attack; however, they were taken into custody the following day and assassinated. A military tribunal was formed to assume control of the government. Many of the military commanders and civilian government officials who previously supported Diem were replaced.

Although the military tribunal returned the government back to civilian control within three months, it was too little, too late. The chaos and anarchy that infected Diem's regime continued; over the next 20 months the government changed hands ten times, and by mid-1964 the US assessment of the situation was that the Communists would win their guerrilla war in 1965.

Marine Advisory Team One, a radio detachment supported by a reinforced infantry platoon, was the first USMC unit to conduct independent operations in South Vietnam. Beginning in May 1964, Advisory Team One operated north of Khe Sanh and northwest of Da Nang prior to being disbanded in September. On 2 August, the Pentagon received an urgent message from the US Pacific Fleet Headquarters in Honolulu that the destroyer USS *Maddox* had been attacked by three North Vietnamese patrol boats, but had repulsed the attack. The USS *Maddox* had been engaged in an intelligence gathering mission code named DE SOTO, but was in international waters off of the coast of Vietnam when the attack occurred. The destroyer USS *C Turner Joy* was then ordered to join with the USS *Maddox* and continue the DE SOTO mission. On 4 August, the DE SOTO destroyers notified Honolulu that they had been attacked a second time by North Vietnamese patrol boats. When notified of this at 0300, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized the go-ahead for launching PIERCE ARROW, a pre-planned naval air strike on selected North Vietnamese military targets. One hour later the Pacific Fleet Headquarters notified Washington that they were not certain if a second attack had actually occurred on the DE SOTO destroyers, and because of stormy weather and rough seas any actual damage received could not be confirmed. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamera convinced President Johnson that in the absence of a confirmation that the second attack did not occur, the countdown for launching PIERCE ARROW should continue. In addition, other presidential advisors insisted that, based on intercepted North Vietnamese military message traffic, there had been a second attack on the DE SOTO destroyers. On 5 August 1964, 64 naval aircraft were launched from the decks of the US Pacific Fleet carriers and attacked and destroyed oil storage and port facilities at Vinh, North Vietnam, located just above the 17th parallel (DMZ). The United States of America had just entered the Vietnamese conflict as a combatant.

Because of this crisis, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade was activated, and on 6 August more than 6000 members of the 9th MEB were embarked aboard amphibious shipping. Thus, the 9th MEB was changed from an organization existing only on paper to that of an operational Marine landing force. USMC fixed-wing squadrons based in Japan and helicopter squadrons in Okinawa were alerted to support the 9th MEB, but were not embarked. The US Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in which it approved and supported ". . . the determination of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to take all

necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The Gulf of Tonkin crisis faded and the Seventh Fleet amphibious task force carrying the 9th MEB returned to normal operations; one of the BLT's remained with the fleet as a special landing force (SLF), one returned to Okinawa, and the other went to the Philippines.

On 28 December 1964, the Viet Cong entered a new phase of their insurgency. At Binh Gia, about 40 miles east of Saigon, they engaged and fought RVN forces rather than their usual hit and run guerrilla tactics. In this battle, two regiments of the 9th VC Division ambushed and virtually destroyed two battalions, including the 4th Bn Vietnamese Marine Corps. The VC also inflicted heavy casualties on the armored and mechanized forces sent as reinforcements. General William C. Westmoreland, Commanding General MACV, stated that the battle of Binh Gia marked the start of the final Communist offensive, " . . . an intensive military challenge which the Vietnamese government could not meet with its own resources."

Advisors to President Johnson were busy trying to convince him that the North Vietnamese could be brought to their knees and forced to seek peace within two to six months solely with superior US airpower employed to bomb them into submission. In this concept, code named ROLLING THUNDER, the bombing raids would gradually increase in intensity and frequency until Hanoi had enough and called it quits. In addition, the use of such a tactic would eliminate the need to employ US ground combat troops in South Vietnam, which was a goal of President Johnson.

The very unstable conditions in the South Vietnamese government contributed to the confusing alert status of the Pacific fleet's amphibious forces. In January 1965, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the alert status of the 9th MEB be relaxed. BLT 1/9, then embarked as the 7th Fleet's SLF, reverted to a 96-hour reaction time, and BLT 3/9 resumed normal operations. This reprieve was of short duration; Buddhist-inspired riots with anti-American overtones in Saigon and Hue resulted in the removal of Premier Tran Van Huong on 27 January, and BLT's 1/9 and 3/9 were once more placed on an alert status. The BLTs were in position off the coast of Vietnam, ready to land at Saigon and Da Nang on 29 January, but by the 30th the SLF reverted back to a 72-hour alert status.

During the early morning of 7 February, the VC launched a mortar attack against the US military compound at Pleiku in the Central Highlands--US losses were 9 KIA, 128 WIA, and 128 aircraft destroyed or damaged. At the urging of the JCS, President Johnson ordered the launching of FLAMING DART, a retaliatory strike by US Naval air against the military barracks at Dong Hoi, North Vietnam, and the withdrawal of all US dependents in South Vietnam. In addition, he also ordered the deployment of a Marine HAWK (Homing All the Way Killer) Air Defense Battalion to Vietnam, and that the JCS begin preparations for launching ROLLING THUNDER. On 8 February, Battery A, 1st LAAM Bn (Light Anti-Aircraft Missile) arrived in Da Nang from Okinawa.

On 10 February, the VC attacked and destroyed the US compound in the coastal city of Qui Nhon, killing 23 US soldiers and wounded 22 others. Once more at the urging of the JCS, President Johnson directed retaliatory air strikes at North Vietnam, and on 11 February, 100 US Navy aircraft struck selected military targets in North Vietnam.

The political situation in South Vietnam wasn't getting any better. In mid-February there was another power struggle, which resulted in the removal of the Commander-in-Chief of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces by Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky. There was no stability in the South Vietnamese government, and both US military commanders and civilian advisors to the President felt that the Communists were about to overrun the country. General Westmoreland assessed the deteriorating military and political situation and requested that two battalions of Marines be landed for the protection of the Da Nang airfield, and that a third battalion be kept on ships off the coast. He believed that the North Vietnamese would strike US installations in South Vietnam in retaliation for US air strikes and wanted the Marines to protect these facilities. The Da Nang air base and port facilities were considered especially vulnerable, and General Westmoreland did not think that the South Vietnamese military could be counted on to protect such facilities. In support of General Westmoreland, senior US military commanders in the Pentagon said that US ground combat troops were needed to "deter overt retaliation

to air strikes." The JCS recommended that Marines be committed to protect the Da Nang air base and port facilities as a one-shot fix.

By the end of February President Johnson made the decision to land two battalions of Marines. Negotiations were held with South Vietnamese military and political leaders, and permission was granted to land the Marines; but they were to be brought into Da Nang in the most inconspicuous manner. President Johnson held a news broadcast on 2 March 1965, but did not inform the American people of his decision to land the Marines at Da Nang. However, information of the planned landing soon leaked out to the press and in an attempt to calm public sentiment, Secretary of State Dean Rusk announced that the Marines would not engage in any combat operations; they would only fire their weapons in self defense if fired on.

The JCS issued a landing order for the Marines that directed that, "The US Marine forces will not, repeat will not, engage in day-to-day actions against the Viet Cong." Although the Marines would have the responsibility of protecting the Da Nang air base, General Westmoreland emphasized that the overall responsibility for the protection of the Da Nang area rested with the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces.

THE MARINE CORPS BUILD UP

In the early morning hours of 8 March 1965, Amphibious Task Force 76 commander Admiral Wulzen issued the command "land the landing force." At 0903, the first wave of BLT 3/9 landed across RED Beach 2 in 11 LVPT amphibian tractors; the forth and final wave of the administrative landing was on the beach at 0918. The battalion was then taken to the Da Nang air base by truck. At 1300 the first elements of BLT 1/3 arrived at the Da Nang airfield by air from Okinawa. While in the landing approach, they received some sniper fire, but no aircraft were damaged. Thus, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (9th MEB) was the first US ground combat unit to enter South Vietnam. The Brigade's tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) was confined to approximately eight square miles of territory; 1/3 manned the airfield defenses and 3/9 took up positions on hills 268 and 327 west of the airfield, and also provided security for Battery B, 1st LAAM Bn which was also on hill 327. A "rules of engagement" agreement directed that the Marines would not fire at persons beyond the air base defensive wire.

During March it became obvious from the amount of resistance the ARVN were receiving that the Viet Cong were moving into the Da Nang area in strength and that the situation was changing. On 1 April, President Johnson met with the National Security Council to discuss General Westmoreland's estimate of the situation. As a result, the President approved an 18,000- to 20,000-man increase in US forces in RVN and permitted a change in the mission of the 9th MEB which would allow the use of the USMC in active combat under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State.

Regimental Landing Team 3 (RLT 3), composed of BLT 2/3 and BLT 3/4 and supported by Marine Air Support Squadron 2 (MASS 2), and VMFA 531, an all-weather fighter/intercepter unit flying the F-4B Phantom II, were asked to be the USMC reinforcements authorized by the President. From 10 April to 15 April, RLT 3 arrived in Vietnam and took positions near the Da Nang airfield and Phu Bai.

On 14 April, General Westmoreland provided the 9th MEB with a revised concept of operations: The Marines were to establish defensive bases; conduct deep reconnaissance patrols of the enemy's avenues of approach; conduct offensive operations as reaction forces in coordination with the RVN Armed Forces; and, in coordination with the RVN Armed Forces, undertake a program of intensifying offensive operations to fix and destroy the Viet Cong in the Da Nang area. However, after two days of negotiations with the I Corps Commander, General Thi, General Karch was able to obtain only an increase of four square miles to the Marines TAOR in the Da Nang area, none of which was south of the air base.

On 25 April, President Johnson authorized the establishment of the third USMC enclave at Chu

Lai. RLT 4, consisting of BLT's 1/4, 2/4, 3/3, and the 3rd Recon Battalion were tasked for the mission. Marine Air Base Squadron 12 (MABS 12) and Mobile Construction Battalion 10 (MCB 10) were attached to RLT 4 to construct the airfield.

The 3d Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) was established at Da Nang on 6 May; The 9th MEB was deactivated as an operating unit and the 3d Marine Division (Forward) was established and assumed command. However, on 7 May III MEF was redesignated as the 3d Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), just in case the Vietnamese might take exception to the term "expeditionary"--which was a term used by French military forces in Vietnam.

USMC contacts with the VC increased during the month of June, and by the 15th General Thi agreed to let the Marine units expand their TAOR's to give them more maneuvering room, and MACV permitted the Marines to conduct search-and-destroy operations within the TAOR's. President Johnson gave General Westmoreland the authority to employ US ground forces when RVN forces were faced with an aggressive attack and reserves were not available, or when the military situation required it. The TAOR at Chu Lai was extended so that the airfield was out of mortar and light-artillery range.

Because the configuration of the TAOR and the terrain features in the Phu Bai area made it difficult to defend against enemy mortar attacks, General Krulak believed that two additional Marine battalions would be necessary in that area. By the end of the month, General Walt requested the two remaining infantry battalions of the 3d Marine Division for duty in RVN. The JCS approved the request.

After the Da Nang air base was attacked on 1 July, and knowing the limited capability of the RVN Armed Forces to provide protection for the airfield, General Thi gave his approval for an expanded Marine TAOR in the Da Nang area on 21 July. The new TAOR extended four miles south of the Cau Do River, 19 miles north to the Hai Van Pass, and east to the South China Sea--including Monkey Mountain on the Tiensha Peninsula--to the north face of Marble Mountain, and west to the Yen River.

Many of the people who lived in the expanded TAOR, especially those living south of the Cau Do River, had been part of the VC structure for more than a generation. A Buddhist priest living in one of the Doung Son hamlets informed the Marines that a 40-man VC force living in the village was engaged in the construction of bunkers, fighting holes, punji traps, and setting booby traps; a four-man VC squad manned a roadblock between two of the hamlets; VC tax agents collected 270 piastres from each family on an annual basis; and VC political cadres educated the villagers. This was the typical strength and organization of the VC in this area. The priest told the Marines that, "the attitude of the people is generally friendly to the VC and unfriendly to government forces."

On 14 August, a four-month involuntary extension of duty was announced for all USMC/USN enlisted personnel. The headquarters for RLT 7 and 1st Battalion, 7th Marines came ashore at Chu Lai.

Second Battalion, First Marines arrived on Okinawa from Camp Pendleton, California, on 27 August 1965. On the next day, First Battalion, First Marines arrived at Da Nang to relieve 1/3. Total III MAF strength in RVN at the end of August was 32,162 (not including Navy Seabees).

It was at this point that Second Battalion, First Marines entered the conflict. §

"War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things; the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing he cares about more than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free--unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

Sign on wall of the Globe and Laurel (restaurant) at Quantico, Virginia

Major Operations in Vietnam Involving 2/1

Compiled by Paul Gloria, Phil Leslie, Paul Stevens, and the editors

DAGGER THRUST RAIDS

The concept behind this operation was to use the Seventh Fleet's SLF (in early September 1965 2/1 became the new SLF battalion, having recently arrived in Okinawa) in a series of amphibious raids on VC/NVA infiltration and marshalling points along the coast of South Vietnam. The first series of Dagger Thrust Operations was to consist of three raids in rapid succession on widely dispersed coastal objective areas. The first raid was to be carried out on the Vung Mu Peninsula, 20 miles south of Qui Nhon; the second raid was to strike a second target in the Ben Goi area, 27 miles north of Nha Trang; and the third objective was Tam Quan, 30 miles south of Quang Ngai City.

On 25 September, 2/1 landed over the beach and, by helicopter, on Vung Mu Peninsula. After searching the peninsula and finding no sign of the enemy battalion that was supposed to be there, the Marines reembarked and sailed for Ben Goi Bay. During the second raid at Ben Goi, 2/1 did not even land. During the evening of 27 September, recon teams were sent in and reported no sign of the enemy. Since there was no enemy and the element of surprise was gone the battalion was not landed. BLT 2/1 came ashore at Tam Quan on 1 October for the third raid and met some resistance from local guerrillas. The next day, 2/1 was ordered withdrawn and sailed for Indonesian waters because of a Communist attempt to overthrow the government there. The first series of Dagger Thrust Operations was over and had been a disappointment.

The second series of Dagger Thrust Operations consisted of two more raids. On 30 November, the fourth raid took place at Lang Ke Ga. While landing, 2/1 encountered some scattered tank traps and some isolated small-arms fire. The fifth and final raid was near the Phu Thu village complex, 40 miles north of Qui Nhon. This time, 2/1 was moderately successful and surprised a small force of VC, killing 26 enemy while losing three KIA's of our own. The operation lasted for two days.

OPERATION HARVEST MOON

In the fall of 1965, during the monsoon season when the weather hampered air operations, the Communists managed to gain the initiative and threaten ARVN outposts in the Nui Loc Son Basin. In response, General Westmoreland ordered General Walt to, at first, hold two battalions on 12-hour alert so that they might be deployed rapidly if and when necessary. Five days later, Westmoreland ordered Walt to "conduct search and destroy operations against more distant VC base areas to destroy and drive the VC out." In a 4 December meeting with General Thi, the South Vietnamese I Corps Commander, the decision was made to launch a sizeable attack against the VC before the enemy was able to establish a firm base of operations. The result was Operation Harvest Moon/Lien Ket 18.

The plan for Operation Harvest Moon was for the 5th ARVN Regiment (headquarters of the 1st Battalion and the entire 11th Ranger Battalion) to enter the Que Son Valley along the Thang Binh-Hiep Duc Road on 8 December. The first-day objective was a point south of the village of Que Son, southwest of Highway 1 some eight miles. 2/7 was to land behind the enemy and force him into the advancing ARVN. On 5 December, III MAF activated a temporary command, code-named Task Force Delta, under Assistant Division Commander (3rdMarDiv) Brigadier Melvin D. Henderson. This command was to control the upcoming operation. Two battalions (2/7 and 3/3) were assigned to the task force. Second Battalion, First Marines was held in reserve. The plans were to be kept even from most of General Thi's

own staff.

But on 8 December, the 11th Ranger Battalion was ambushed and overrun. Marine air support was called in. On 9 December, the 5th ARVN Regiment and its 1st Battalion were attacked and overrun by the 60th and 80th VC Battalions. It was then that General Henderson committed the Marines.

On 10 December, General Henderson ordered 2/7 to drive east and 3/3 to push northwest to catch the enemy between them. 2/1 (the SLF battalion) was to be lifted into the area to close off the avenue of escape. Elements of Fox Company were heli-lifted from the *Valley Forge* to a spot near the village of Cam La, itself near Que Son.

OPERATION NEW YORK

At the beginning of 1966, Second Battalion, First Marines were patrolling to keep secure a 76-square mile enclave around Phu Bai, where there was an airfield and an American Army radio research unit (8th RRU) facility. Up to January of 1966, the threat from the enemy in this area was primarily from guerrilla activity such as harassment and booby traps. As far as the Marines knew, there was only one enemy battalion in the enclave (the 360-man 810 VC Main Force Battalion).

In January, however, intelligence estimated more than twice the number of Communist forces in the two northernmost provinces than the Marines had previously thought. As a result, the 3rd Marines were called into the area.

In February, it became clear that the enemy was building up around Phu Bai and Hue. Intelligence reported that a major attack against the Marine base at Phu Bai was planned for March. The Marine response was Operation New York, in which (under LtCol Hanifin) Fox and Golf Companies were trucked to positions southwest of Pho Lai (arriving 26 February) from where they advanced, but met no enemy. Three days later the units returned to Phu Bai, where they learned they were needed immediately to assist a South Vietnamese battalion which had boxed the enemy in on Phu Thu Peninsula. Though tired, Fox and Golf were heli-lifted at night to the peninsula where they attacked and drove out the VC, completing the job by 3 March.

OPERATION JAY

On 23 June 1966, an ARVN patrol in the Quang Dien District of Thua Thien Province, operating just north if the O Lau River, ran into a strong enemy force and sustained heavy causualties. After looking at the available intelligence, it was believed that both the 806th and 812th had entered the old Operation Oregon area and were deployed along Route 597.

Acting on this information, 4th Marines and 1st ARVN Division decided on a combined operation. The resulting plan called for a heli-lift of the two Marine battalions into an area of operations bordered by Highway 1 on the south and the O Lau River on the north and west. 2/4 would land in the northwest sector and attack along Route 597 toward blocking positions established by 2/1 some 6000 to the southwest.

On the morning of 25 June, the operation, now code-named Operation Jay, began. 4th Marines' CP and 3/12 (artillery) were in place. Two ARVN battalions were in position across the O Lau. At 0800 the lead elements of 2/4 landed in LZ Raven, 8000 meters north of the 4th Marines' CP. At 1015 they crossed the line of departure.

At 1100 LtCol Hanifin's 2/1 Marines arrived at LZ Shrike, some 9000 meters southeast of Raven. 2/1 established its blocking positions at Phase Line Delta, about 3500 meters northwest of Shrike. At 1420 Hanifin, per orders, moved 2/1 1500 meters to the northwest to reinforce 2/4. When 2/1 (with Golf on the north of Route 597 and Hotel on the south) moved, they met strong enemy resistance near My Phu. While Hotel went to the rescue of a downed helcopter, Fox reinforced Golf in the attack on My Phu. When Hotel had completed

the helicopter rescue, the company joined 2/4.

Throughout the night and early morning of 25 and 26 of June, both 2/4 and 2/1 continued heavy fighting around My Phu and Ap Chinh. The result was that most of the enemy forces pulled out during the night of 26 June, and Marine ground troops cleared out those remaining and captured the two hamlets of My Phu and Ap Chinh.

OPERATION HASTINGS

During July of 1966 the Communist reacted to III MAF's increasing control of the rice producing area in northern Quang Tri Province by sending the North Vietnamese 324B Division across the DMZ. Seven Marine battalions, including 2/1, consisting of 8000 Marines and 3000 South Vietnamese participated in Operation Hastings (15 July-3August) against this North Vietnamese division in the rugged hills of Quang Tri Province less than two miles from the DMZ. Up to this point, this was the most savage battle of the war. The Marines met a new kind of enemy in this battle: fresh, regular North Vietnamese troops who were well equipped and stood and fought. The NVA were defeated, but not without a price--one Marine company was badly battered and five troop-carrying helicopters were damaged or destroyed.

OPERATION INDEPENDENCE

On 31 January 1967, near the hamlet of Thuy Bo Hotel Company came under heavy fire from a Viet Cong main-force battalion. The incoming included heavy automatic fire and .50-caliber fire. Air strikes and artillery were called in, but Hotel continued to receive fire throughout the day and that night. Evacuation of the casualties proved difficult and only one chopper made it in.

The following morning the company swept through the hamlet, but the enemy battalion had mostly withdrawn.

OPERATION STONE

The Marines followed up the 31 January battle with Operation Stone. The First Marines conducted this operation 12 miles south of Da Nang, a two-phase operation which ran from 12 February to 22 February. In the first phase, units from the 4th and 26th Regiments destroyed large portions of the enemy underground tunnel complex on a VC stronghold (Go Noi Island).

In the second phase, which began the night of 18 February, elements of 1/1 and 2/1 surrounded the village of La Huan, two miles north of the island, and in four days of fighting surrounded and closed off the VC.

OPERATION UNION

This operation was initiated on 21 April 1967 when Fox Company moved out of Nui Loc Son towards the village of Binh Son. Fox Company had seen a large enemy force move into the village of Binh Son; they assaulted the village, but drew extremely heavy enemy fire. Air strikes and artillery were called in, but Fox was stuck and had difficulty moving because of the heavy enemy fire. Fox had also sustained a number of casualties.

Reinforcements were called in, and eventually 3/1 and 1/1 along with additional artillery support joined the battle. The enemy was driven out of Binh Son and suffered heavy casualties in their retreat.

OPERATION MEDINA

Operation Medina was run in the rugged Hai Lang National Forest south of the city of Quang Tri from 11 October to 19 October of 1967. The Hai Lang Forest was the enemy's Base Area 101 and supported the NVA's Fifth and Sixth Regiments. The Second Battalion and First

Battalion of First Marines started the operation by making helicopter assaults into LZ Dove. The next few days consisted of a search and destroy operation with 1/1 engaged in most of the heavy fighting, at least until the ambush of Hotel Company, 2/1 on 18 October as the battalion was leaving the Hai Lang Forest. Hotel lost 18 Marines KIA in this ambush.

CON THIEN, KHE SANH, and OPERATION PEGASUS

Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense under Lyndon Johnson, had built a series of fortified strong points along the southern edge of the DMZ. These fortified positions began with Gio Linh on the coast and proceeded then generally west to include Con Thien, Cam Lo, Camp Carroll, The Rockpile, Ca Lu, and ending at Khe Sanh. All these strong points were important for denying North Vietnam easy access to the two northern provinces of South Vietnam. This line of bases allowed us to interdict the movement of men and supplies to the south and also provided protection for our left flank. By mid-January of 1968 the enemy (NVA regulars, Viet Cong main force, and hard-core guerrillas) strength was estimated to be between 75,000 and 90,000. Facing the enemy were five (three Army and two Marine) divisions.

Of all the fortified positions along the DMZ the closest to the DMZ was Con Thien. What this meant was that the enemy could fire artillery, rockets, and mortars from "safe" areas along the DMZ. It was policy not to allow Marine forces to go after the enemy. Thus the Marines at Con Thien, for the most part, had to be in a defensive position and withstand the thousands of shells that came their way. Since Con Thien was such a difficult place to endure, the policy of the Third Marine Division was to rotate battalions every month at Con Thien.

Second Battalion, First Marines took over control of Con Thien on 21 December 1967. Because of all the activity along the DMZ during this TET-period, 2/1 was left at Con Thien until 8 March 1968, an extremely long stay.

After leaving Con Thien, 2/1 took part in Operation Pegasus (31 March-15 April) to help relieve the garrison at Khe Sanh (although it's debateable whether they needed relieving). Operation Pegasus was a joint Army and Marine Corps operation, with the Army going in choppers and the Marines on the ground--fighting their way up and down the hills along Route 9, often short on water and chow.

OPERATION MEADE RIVER

Operation Meade River, run in the "Dodge City" area, began on 20 November 1968 and ended on 9 December. The operation involved six Marine battalions (five from the First Marine Division). The operation was basically a cordon and search, with the six battalions forming a large circe around the estimated 1300 enemy in the area.

The fighting began at first light, as small enemy units tried to escape the tightening noose. Towards the end of the operation, as units of enemy were discovered, the fighting intensified. As Paul Gloria says, "It was the largest helicopter assault operation in the history of the Armed Forces . . . 2/1 played a significant role."

OPERATION PIPESTONE CANYON

The Go Noi Island and Dodge City areas had been VC strong holds for years and were used as staging areas for attacks into the lowlands between Hoi An and Da Nang and then as base camps for the retreating enemy. Operation Pipestone Canyon, whose different phases lasted from May 1969 until November 1969, was designed to clear out the enemy areas and establish a "friendly" presence.

Two battalions were to start the attack on 26 May and then the second phase would commence five days later, with five additional battalions (including 2/1) joining the battle. The operation was a success and the Go Noi Island area was made more secure. The fighting was

difficult in that most of the casualties were from mines and booby-traps. The heat was also a factor, reaching 115° during the day.

All of the major objectives were met in that all major NVA and VC forces were driven from the area, a friendly presence was established, Route 4 was upgraded and reopened from Dien Ban to the railroad berm, and the heavy vegetation on Go Noi Island which was great for hiding enemy movement was cleared.

OPERATION DURHAM PEAK

Operation Durham Peak kicked off as an attempt to get at the NVA and VC who were driven out of the Go Noi Island and Dodge city areas by Operation Pipestone Canyon and into the Que Son Mountains, Antenna Valley, and Phu Loc Valley areas. The second and third battalions of Fifth Marines started the operation on 20 July 1969 and were joined by 2/1 the next day.

Second Battalion, First Marines heli-lifted into three landing zones in the Phu Loc Valley and established blocking positions along escape routes from the Que Son Mountains. As 2/1 moved out on company-sized patrols, enemy activity was light, but extensive bunker complexes, supply caches, hootches, and enemy graves were discovered. There had been a lot of damage to the enemy and their living complexes by the B-52 bombing raids.

As elements of 2/1 moved to higher ground, enemy activity intensified, particularily sniping and ambushes. Hotel Company ran into well-concealed snipers on the narrow, well-used mountain trails. It was difficult to fight in such terrain and also difficult to get reinforcements in. It was particularily hard to get in resupply and get out medevacs.

On 31 July, 2/5 was committed to the operation, and three days later 1/1 relieved 2/1 in place. The operation was successful.

OPERATION DUBOIS SQUARE

This operation in September of 1970 was a recon-in-force with three rifle companies. Fox Company represented 2/1 on this operation. The mission was to see if the enemy was massing troops in the mountains northwest of Da Nang. For six days the three companies searched the rugged, tropical rain forests and steep, crevice hidden ravines. No sign of an enemy buildup was found and no NVA or VC were encountered.

OPERATION SCOTCH ORCHARD

This operation was an attempt to free allied prisoners who, according to intelligence, were being held in a prison camp in the hills of western Quang Nam Province (the Marines on this operation claim that the real location was inside Laos, but for obvious reasons no one in authority would confirm this). A reinforced battalion (three companies from 2/1 and one each from 1/1 amd 3/1) conducted this operation in April of 1971.

No prisoners were found, nor was a prison camp. However, as Paul Stevens reported, "Though the kills were not spectacular, it was a very successful operation, and a very aggressive action for the time (April 1971). The most impressive results were that we found and destroyed three base camps and an R&R center . . . We had more than 200 NVA on the run. Fox pursued them for four days . . . They had literally trampled streams and jungle to get away from us!"

* * * * *

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[Dates listed refer only to time served with 2/1 and in Vietnam.]

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Dillberg, David G 67-68
Dunn, Mike (Peaches) E HST 2/69-2/70
Dunn, Tim H sniper 8/66-1/67
Elbrecht, James J. 69-70
Elliott, Michael F, E 66-67
Estes, Charles (Chuck) E 66-68
Fire, Michael H wpns 9/69-10/70
Flood, Mike H 9/68-8/69
Gilmore, H.M. BN SMaj 66-67
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Goss, Roger E 60mm 3/67-4/68
Grall, Dennis F 9/66-6/67
Gren, Fred FO 81's 66-67
Hannon, Ray H 9/66-5/69
Harter, Dennis H 8/69-11/69
Jack, Robert H 60mm, H&S CUPP 70-71
Janis, Bruce R. H&S (F) FO 5/69-11/69
Johnson, David (Doc) H 67-68
Jucentis, Anthony (Jake) G-2 69
King, Carl E. H 68
Kirk, Jim F 8/68-9/69
Koss, Albert F 67-68
Krasowski, Steve (Ski) G,H 81 FO 66-67

Lanham, Roy J. E-1 66-67
LaVonture, William (Bill) H wpns 66-67
Leuning, John T. H grunt 69-70
Liscum, Ross radioman 4/69-4/70
Lively, Charles E., Sr. E 12/68-4/69
  Long, Bobbie, cousin of and raised with
  Dobbs, Gerald G KIA 11/19/67
Maddrell, Terry H&S 81mm 68
Mangan, Paul F 65-66
Marshall, Larry E. (Doc) G 11/68-12/69
McAuley, James H., Jr. G 69
McCarthy, Jerry 67-68
McCoy, Billy (Crash) H&S
McGee, David H&S 65-66
McGill, Landen H-2 A Sqd.
McNeely, Mike E,F,H M-60 65-66
Meadows, Peter G 8/65-12/65
Moore, C.W. H&S 67-69
Morris, Pat E-2 10/13/66-67
Murray, Brian (Doc) F 68-69
Nelson, David H&S 70-71
Niles, Hugh W. (Hughie) H FO, sniper 69-70
Norman., John W. G-1 C Sqd. 66
Novak, David H 5/67-10/67
  Novak, Marian, wife of David
O'Rourke, Dennis H&S 67-68
Otterbein, Donald H&S comm 11/69-10/70
Page, James E. CO of F 65
Parker, Luis A (Lou, Alex) F RO 3/67-3/68
Pipkin, Michael (Doc) F-3 HM3 5/68-11/68 BAS 12/68
Rhines, Karl E. H&S comm 11/69-11/70
Robinson, Robert (Brad) BN S-3 9/66-10/67
Rodriguez, Michael W. H 66-67
Rosenbusch, John E 67-68
Ross, Jim (Doc) G 65-66
Sagastume, Mario F wpns 4/67-8/67
Saraceno, C.P. G 1/70-1/71
Schaudt, Al F-1 8/69-8/70
Schiattone, Ron E 69-70
Shand, Robert H 2/69-2/70
Siff, David F 12/69-8/70
Smith, R.J. E,F,G,H 66-67
Springer, Charles W. H&S 81mm 68-69
Stenzel, Paul E-1 9/65-7/66
Stevens, Paul F 70-71
Sturdivant, James Engineers, tunnel rat, attached 70-71
Sturiano, Jack V. (Doc) H&S wpns 8/4/68-27/6/69
Thoemke, John G-3 C Sqd. 3/67-9/67
Titleman, Allen (Doc) F, H 69
Vance, Randy RO 11/12/66-12/4/66
Van Laarhoven, Hank H-1 5/66-6/67
Voyer, Louis A. H&S 10/66-6/68
Wasson, Dennis Paul H&S wireman 67-68
Weishuhn, Harvey H&S 106's 68-69
Woods, Jerry (Doc) F 67

GLOSSARY

Compiled by Kenneth "Sandy" Carlson, with Lou Parker, David Mix, and the editors.

actual: Or "six actual," the unit commander. Used to distinguish the commander from the radioman when the call sign was used.

"Ain't no big thing.": Or "It don't mean nothin'." Combat Marine's response to indescribable, emotion-deadening tragedy.

amtrac, amtrack: An amphibious track vehicle with a .30-caliber machine gun mounted on the front.

Agent Orange: The most widely-used defoliant (spray), used to clear large areas of northern South Vietnam, mainly around bases and along rivers. Its name came from the orange markings on the containers.

AK-47: Russian-made, gas-operated automatic rifle (Avomat Kalashnikov) which was the standard rifle of the North Vietnamese Army. (Chinese also made a version.)

ammo: Abbreviated term for ammunition.

AOR: Area of operational responsibility, more commonly known as AO, area of operations, is the defined geographical area of military operations conducted for a specific period of time. See TAOR.

APA: Attack transport ship designed for combat loading elements of a battalion landing team (currently designated as LPA).

APC: Armored personnel carrier.

ARC Lite: B-52 bombing strike.

arty: Common term for artillery.

ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). (Pronounced "Are-ven.")

B-40: Shoulder-fired, rocket-propelled grenade launcher carried by Viet Cong and NVA soldiers and used against tanks and personnel.

bac-si: Vietnamese for doctor, what the Vietnamese called a Corpsman.

bandolier: A belt worn over the shoulder consisting of many pockets in a row which hold clips of rifle ammunition. When a Marine uses up all the ammunition in his magazines, he reloads with the ammunition from his bandolier.

BAS: Battalion aid station, where minor injuries and sicknesses are treated in the battalion area.

battery: An artillery unit that supplies indirect firepower for the grunts in the field.

BLT: Battalion landing team.

BN: Abbreviation for battalion.

bird: Any kind of aircraft. The freedom bird was the one that took you home.

bird dog: Light observation plane.

boonies: The boondocks, the bush, the toolies--(way) out in the field.

bouncing bettie: An anti-personal mine that flies up out of the ground when triggered by pressure or by trip wire and explodes waist- and/or head-high.

Bronco, bird dog: A twin-engined observation aircraft equipped with rockets and miniguns.

"to buckle for your dust": A phrase meaning "to move out quickly," or, strangely enough, "to earn the respect of your fellow Marines."

CAC: Community action cadre. A combined action platoon made up of 13 Marines, a Corpsman, and members of the South Vietnamese popular forces. The platoon lived and worked together as a unit in the villages of South Vietnam to help protect the villagers from the Viet Cong. Also, Community Action Company, the full unit.

C4, C-4: Putty-like, plastique explosive, used for blowing things up, cooking, and sometimes keeping warm.

CAG: Combined action group, USMC Civil Action Program.

cammie: Camouflaged jungle fatigues--shirts, trousers, and hats.

camouflage: To make oneself and equipment blend in with the environment.

Charlie: The letter *C* in military phonetic alphabet used over radio, eventually used to designate the Viet Cong, after *Victor Charlie*, the radio "spelling" of the enemy's initials. Also "Chuck" and "Mr. Charlie."

Charlie Med: The medical facilities at Da Nang.

cherry: A new, inexperienced Marine just arriving in a combat zone.

Chi-com grenade: Chinese-Communist grenade, a hand grenade made in China. Used in Vietnam in the earlier years of the war, before the Russians began supplying the NVA.

chieu hoi: Vietnamese for "open arms," or Marine for "I surrender." Also the name of a program whereby enemy soldiers could surrender without penalty--and what Marines called an enemy soldier who surrendered.

Chinook: A large transport helicopter, powered by two rotors

and shaped like a bread box.

chopper: informal term for any helicopter.

claymore: A US-made, command-detonated, anti-personnel mine designed to spray 750 steel ball bearings six to eight inches above the ground in a fan shape.

click: Or klick. A kilometer, 1,000 meters. One grid square on the map. (Also could refer to one adjustment of the sights on a weapon.)

clip: Slang for a magazine.

CO: Commanding officer.

concentrations: The massing of troops in one area, or the directing of concentrated weapons fire in one area.

concertina: Coiled barbed-wire strung for perimeter defense.

CP: Command post.

contact: Firing on the enemy or being fired upon by the enemy.

C-rations, C-rats: The Marine's main source of food in Vietnam. Individual meals in boxes, consisting of a canned main course, a can of fruit, and a can of some kind of baked goods such as pound cake--also instant coffee and cigarettes. There were some 12 different meals to a case. The dates on some of the cans indicated they had been processed in the 1940's.

crispy critters: What enemy forces destroyed by napalm were called.

the Crotch: Slang for the United States Marine Corps.

daisy chain: More than one claymore mine (or similar device) wired together with det cord--to effect a simultaneous detonation.

the deck: In Marine Corps terms, the floor or the ground or about anything else that can be stood or lain on.

DEROS: Date of estimated return from overseas, in our case from Vietnam to the USA.

det cord: Detonation cord--a high explosive packed in a waterproof cord used for priming explosives.

diddy bop: From Vietnamese *didi*, meaning "to move," and English slang "to bop," meaning "to go casually." The term means to move about foolishly, without taking care.

doggie: An Army term, meaning a foot soldier.

DMZ: The demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam during the war. Sometimes sardonically defined as the "dead Marine zone."

dustoff, dust off: A helicopter conducting a medical evacuation.

dye marker bunker: A bunker that was part of the strong point obstacle system along the DMZ. These bunkers were made of heavy timbers with thick layers of dirt and sandbags on top, built to (hopefully) withstand enemy artillery and rocket fire.

Echo, E: The letter *E* in the military phonetic alphabet.

E-tool: An entrenching tool, a folding shovel issued to each Marine.

F-4 Phantom: A Marine fighter-bomber aircraft. When flying close-air for the grunts, it was not uncommon for them to come in at treetop heights.

field of fire: The area which a weapon or group of weapons may cover effectively with fire from a given position.

fire base: A temporary base set up in hostile territory from which patrols are sent out to search for the enemy. These bases were usually platoon- or company-sized.

firefight: Intense small-arms battle.

"Fire in the hole!": Warning called out to indicate that an explosion is about to take place (for example, in a tunnel, cave or bunker) and that cover should be taken.

fire mission: Directed artillery/mortar barrage.

flak (flack) jacket: A vest made of overlapping fiberglass and worn to stop shrapnel from penetrating the upper body.

FNG: Fucking new guy, a cherry, new meat, a boot.

FO: Forward observer, a trained Marine usually provided by the supporting artillery batteries/mortar platoons to the rifle companies for calling in and adjusting supporting fire.

Foxtrot, Fox, F: The letter *F* in the phonetic alphabet.

four-by: Also 4-by or 4x. Short for 4x4, a four-wheel truck, similar to a pick-up truck.

four-deuce: The American-made 4.2-inch heavy mortar.

frag: A fragmentation grenade. Also a fragmentary order for a unit action or movement. Also, verb meaning to throw grenade into the living quarters of an unpopular officer or NCO, with intent to do severe harm to same.

freedom bird: The plane that took you back to the World.

free-fire zone: Any area declared off-limits to all personnel. Anyone encountered within its confines was assumed to be hostile and could be fired upon without verification or authorization.

friendlies: Our guys and other people on our side--or at least those not trying to kill us.

friendly fire: Our own fire (artillery or otherwise) uncomfortably and sometimes tragically close to our own units.

Golden Fleece: The name of the operation that involved Marine protection of the rice harvest in an attempt to keep it out of the hands of the VC and the NVA.

Golf, G: The letter *G* in the military phonetic alphabet.

gook: Term used in an unflattering way to refer to Asians, but during the Vietnam War especially the Viet Cong and the NVA. Also used in like manner: dink, slope, or zipperhead. "Luke the Gook" meant specifically the enemy.

a grunt, grunts: The rifleman, the basic infantryman of the United States Marine Corps. Rarely found enjoying the fringe benefits of civilization.

gunny: Short for gunnery sergeant, a senior non-commissioned officer in the Marine Corps.

the head: The toilet, the latrine, the john, etc.

Headquarters & Service, H&S: The part of the battalion with over-all command of several grunt companies--also keeps them supplied.

HE: High explosive.

H&I: Harassment and interdiction. Pre-plotted artillery fire designed to keep the enemy on the edge and possibly to catch him off balance.

Ho Chi Minh sandals: Sandals whose soles were made of rubber tire and which were usually worn by the Viet Cong.

hole watch: Sometimes used to designate perimeter watch, because the on-duty Marine usually ends up sitting in a fighting hole while on watch.

hootch: Slang term for small shelter in Vietnam, civilian or military.

Hotel, H: The letter *H* in the phonetic military alphabet.

to hump: To walk on patrol, usually heavily laden and heavily armed; to march to the position where the choppers were supposed to have let you off in the first place. Also, to perform any difficult task.

I Corps: Northern-most military district of South Vietnam, where 2/1 operated.

Indian country: This term refers to hostile (enemy) territory, areas in which combat is taking place or might be expected--often used specifically to denote the area below Da Nang. Used by all branches of the U.S. military, it comes from the time of the "Indian" campaigns, those in which the U.S. military fought against native North American tribes.

incoming: Incoming fire from the enemy.

in country: A phrase meaning "in Vietnam."

Jody: The guy who didn't go, who stayed home and got your girl.

John Wayne can opener: A P-38. A very small can opener that came with C-rations. Only a few came with each case, so when a Marine got hold of one, he usually hung onto it by putting it on the chain with his dog tag. New guys could be separated from the vets by their level of expertise in using the P-38.

Jolly Green Giant: The HH-53 heavy rescue helicopter.

K-bar: A combat sheath knife with an overall length of 11 and a half inches.

K-rations: Military rations that came in large, mess-hall size cans (perhaps the *K* stands for "kitchen"? Too logical??)

KIA: Killed in action.

killing zone: The area within an ambush where people are killed or wounded.

Kit Carson scout: Former enemy soldier who defected and actively aided American Marines against the VC and NVA.

LAAW: Light anti-aircraft weapon. (Single-shot, disposable rocket launcher.)

LAW: Light anti-tank weapon. (Single-shot, disposable rocket launcher.)

lifer: Someone whose career is in the military.

lock and load: To chamber a round in weapon.

LP: Listening post, usually positioned outside a perimeter, manned by four or five Marines.

LPH: Land platform helicopter.

LT: Lieutenant. (Pronounced "El-tee.")

LVT: "Landing vehicle tracked." Lightly armored, landing assault amphibious vehicle.

LZ, hot LZ: A landing zone (somewhat clear area) for helicopters. A hot LZ is one receiving enemy fire.

"Make a hole.": Term that means to move aside and let someone through.

M-16: A light-weight (6.5 pounds), air-cooled, magazine-fed, shoulder or hip weapon (rifle) that can fire on either automatic or semiautomatic.

M-14: Gas-operated, magazine-fed, air-cooled, semiautomatic shoulder weapon (rifle) that weighs 12 pounds.

M-60: American-built, belt-fed, gas-operated, air-cooled, 7.62mm automatic weapon (machine gun) which weighs approximately 20 pounds without mount or ammunition. It has a sustained rate of fire of 100 rounds per minute and an effective range of 1000 meters.

M-79: A single-shot, 40mm grenade launcher. Also called a "blooper" or a "thumper."

Med-CAP: Medical Civilian Affairs Program.

medevac: The medical evacuation of WIA's and KIA's.

MIA: Missing in action.

Montagnards: The hill-dwelling people of Vietnam.

MPC: Military payment certificate(s)--scrip issued for military

personnel to use in country instead of American dollars. "Funny money."

mule: A small, motorized platform originally designed to carry the 106 recoilless rifle, but used instead most of the time to transport personnel and supplies.

MOS: Military occupational speciality, designated by a four-digit number such as, for example, 0331 for machine gunner.

MSR: Military security road. Military service road. Marine security road. Marine service road. Take your pick.

NAS: Naval air station.

number one: The very best.

number 10: The very worst.

NVA: North Vietnamese Army, or a member of the North Vietnamese Army.

ontos: Tank-killer vehicle on which six 106mm recoilless rifles were mounted.

OP order, OP: An operations order, stating the mission of the operation.

P-38: See John Wayne can opener.

Papa Sierra: The platoon sergeant, from military phonetic alphabet.

payback: Revenge.

pogue: Non-combat Marine.

point stick: A long, narrow, light-weight stick of some kind carried by the point man (the lead man) on patrol and used by him to probe the ground in front and around him to locate possible trip wires or other booby traps.

pop-ups: Hand-operated flares which fire star clusters into the air. They come in several different colors and so can be used for various signals.

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or Syndrome).

Puff the Magic Dragon: Also "Dragon Ship" and "Spooky." A C-47 aircraft (WWII cargo plane) with side-firing cannons and machine guns. This gunship could concentrate firepower by orbiting the target and focusing the lines of fire in a spoke-pattern for up to 20 minutes at a time.

PPB: The platoon patrol base.

pungee sticks: Punji stakes. Sharpened bamboo (sometimes metal) stakes hidden in grass, in covered pits, underwater, etc., to penetrate the feet and lower limbs of unwary Marines. The stakes were often covered in human feces to cause infection in the resulting wounds.

recon: Short for reconnaissance, an exploration of an area for the purpose of gathering militarily useful information. "To recon" is short for "to reconnoiter," to make such an exploration.

REMF: Rear-echelon mother-fucker.

re-up: To re-enlist.

the Rockpile: A Marine artillery base located at the base of a jagged mountain located in the northwest section of South Vietnam.

RO: Responsible officer, sometimes reporting officer.

RPG: Rocket-propelled grenade. Communist-made rocket launcher, used both by NVA and the VC.

ROKS: Republic of Korea Army Soldiers.

R&R: Rest and relaxation; rest and recuperation; rest and recreation. Five days and six nights in an exotic place (sort of) of your choice (sort of)--away from the war zone. Time granted to in-country military personnel about mid-way through their tour of duty.

rules of engagement: Regulations which specified the conduct of warfare, meant, quite understandably, to confine action to the benefit of the local civilian populations, but often detrimental to the overall success and welfare of our troops.

sapper: A person trained to covertly attack fortifications with explosives, usually satchel charges.

satchel charge: An explosive package fitted with a handle for ease of handling or throwing.

scuttlebutt: Gossip. The word derives from the drinking-water source aboard early Naval vessels, a scuttlebutt (the cask used for holding the day's supply of drinking water). Rumors were swapped while men gathered around the scuttlebutt.

short: Used to describe a Marine whose tour of duty is almost over.

short timer: A Marine with less than 30 days in country.

shrapnel: Fragments from an exploding bomb, shell, grenade, booby trap, etc.

Sit-Rep: Situation report.

skipper: The CO of a company.

skivvies: Underwear, from and old trademark ("Skivvies") for a brand of underwear. ("Skivvy house" was a whore house.)

SKS: Soviet-made rifle which fired a 7.62mm round, was light, gas-operated, self-loading and had the unusual feature of a permanently-attached folding-blade bayonet. The Communist Chinese also made a version of this weapon.

six-by: Also 6-by or 6x. Short for 6x6, a five-ton truck, the type of truck used to transport troops and supplies and to tow 105's.

SLF: Special landing force.

SOP: Standard operating procedure.

SP: Shore patrol, the Navy's military police.

SP-Pack: A supply pack in which toilet articles, candy, cigarettes and other personal items are supplied to troops in the field.

sparrow hawk: A small reaction force on standby, ready for insertion by helicopter for reinforcement of units in contact with the enemy. A larger reaction force was called a bald eagle. To be "sparrow hawking" is to be on standby for such an action.

spider hole: A camouflaged, one-man foxhole.

Spooky: See Puff the Magic Dragon.

steel pot: Helmet.

Tet: Vietnamese New Year.

TAOR: Tactical area of responsibility

T&E: Transversing and elevation mechanism, used to control a machine gun when mounted on a tripod. Also, T&E's were used to control and adjust the fire of other types of weapons, such as mortars.

TDY: Temporary duty.

T/O: Table of organization, which sets up the structure, for example, for a company and tells what equipment will be needed.

tracer: Ammunition containing a chemical composition to mark the flight of the projectile by a trail of colored smoke or fire. American tracers were red, and enemy tracers were mostly green but occasionally red or white.

triple canopy: Mature jungle or forest with a third (the top) layer in ancient trees, often reaching heights of 200 feet or more, blocking out the sun.

tunnel rat: A Marine who explored the enemy tunnel complexes, looking for the enemy and/or information, equipment, supplies.

VC: Viet Cong, also Victor Charlie after the military phonetic alphabet for the letters. Members of the Poeple's Army of Vietnam.

ville: A village, from the French.

WIA: Wounded in action.

Willie Peter: Also Willie Pete, Willie Papa, WP: White phosphorous grenades, mortar rounds, artillery rounds that explode into a spray of chemical fire which ignites upon contact with air and can only be doused by removal of the source of oxygen. Willie Peter comes from the military phonetic alphabet for WP, the initials.

Willie Peter bag: A waterproof bag (rubber-coated) used to carry possessions such as maps during the rainy season or when crossing rivers.

the World: 1) Home; 2) the only place we knew before going into the service; 3) the Land of the Big PX; 4) any place but Vietnam.

zap: To kill (especially in combat).

zapped: Killed in combat.

* * * * *

Litany

By Charles "Chuck" Estes

*H*erfel (arty fire) was my best friend in Vietnam; Levelle (booby trap) was in my squad and killed an arm's length from me; Keller (booby trap and gunfire) was in my platoon; Byars (arty fire) was with 60mm in weapons and killed the day after he returned from R&R; Weathers (arty fire) was my company gunny and killed in the same mortar pit as Byars; Fenega (gunfire) was killed on Medina (the day before Hotel was ambushed), shot five times in the chest--he was 26 and had already been discharged from the Corps but reenlisted to fight in Vietnam; Hopper (grenade ambush) was killed shortly after we came off Medina--he was 18; Mahan (booby trap) was killed and his entire squad, save the gun team, was wounded by a booby trap in an abandoned church before we left the Da Nang area for Quang Tri. §

This Is Vietnam, and It Is War

By 1st Lt. Crane Davis

Da Nang--It was a warm and sunny day in the Republic of Vietnam. In another time, another place, people would have remembered it as a beautiful day. But this is Vietnam and it is war.

Eight miles south of here, the Leathernecks of the 2nd Bn., 1st Marine Regt. gathered in the sun for a very special ceremony. In the center stood the very simple white crosses, representing the ten members of the battalion who had fallen in the past month's hard fighting.

For many people Memorial Day is just another holiday. In Vietnam, where today's white cross is yesterday's companion, it is quite a different thing.

Solemnly the men formed up, each looking at the crosses and thinking his own private thoughts as the Chaplain read a short, moving eulogy.

LtCol Harold G. Glasglow . . . the battalion commander, spoke of the men and named them one at a time. To the muffled roll of the drum, a lone Marine marched forward for each of the names, drove his bayonet home at the base of the cross and placed his helmet on the erect rifle. Ten white crosses and ten young Marines.

Another young Marine stepped forward, cleared his throat and burst into a hymn with no accompaniment. As he sang his voice grew stronger, his eyes moved skyward and he was no longer singing for the departed. He was singing to them.

His song completed, a lonely trumpet filled the air, mourning "Taps," and once again the sounds of gunfire filled the land as an honor guard paid its final tribute.

The ceremony had ended. But each man moved away more slowly than he had come, taking a long last look at the ten simple crosses in the sun.

The Marines were gone from the ranks of the 2nd Bn., 1st Marines, but they would never be forgotten. §

[From *Sea Tiger*, 6 June 1969. Submitted by Harvey Weishuhn]