

The Life and Times of **Stan Wawrzyniak**

The road from the brig as a private, to retirement as a lieutenant colonel included a pair of Navy Crosses, a Silver Star, four Purple Hearts, a sock full of assorted campaign medals and a change of attitude.

Story by Tom Bartlett • Photos courtesy of Stan Wawrzyniak

If Stanley J. Wawrzyniak ever comes up and says, "Today's gonna be a good day," get away; put in for special liberty; get on a bus and head out of town. Do something, but get the hell away from him.

A good day for Wawrzyniak is getting hit by shrapnel, winning a high personal decoration, and scaring the bejibbers out of almost everyone by spraying .45 slugs with his Thompson submachine gun.

He's not tall, about 5 feet, 6 inches, but he has a wide, thick chest, and arms that can carry or smash a whiskey keg. He is a man of few words: many of them of the four-letter variety, and he has a voice like a drill instructor with a sore throat.

Some have difficulty pronouncing his name: Wawrzyniak, as in "wore-zin-knee-ack." His friends call him "Ski," but chances are you'll never get to be his friend, so call him "Sir," and be relatively safe.

His journey in the Corps, from the brig, through Korea, into the commissioned officers' ranks and to Vietnam and back is one of a kind.

When his troops found themselves facing an enemy machine gun, there was nobody in the world they'd rather have at their shoulder than "the Gunny."

He was talking. I couldn't see him, but his voice penetrated the thick, blue-gray cloud coming from his Manila cigar. He admitted being a young kid Marine private, having a good time, screwing up, and not accomplishing a hell of a lot, early on.

"Sergeant Major John Kozak calls

me into his office. I've never been afraid of any human being like I was scared of him. His muscles started at his ear lobes. And when you reported, you banged three times on the bulkhead and you'd march up to within three paces of his desk and stop at attention. "He was a hell of a Marine, got a Silver Star at New Britain in World War II.

"In China back in 1947, we were with 'Charlie' Company, First Marines. I had a bad attitude. I'd been in the Navy for three years. I'd been around. You couldn't tell me anything I didn't already know. I don't think the first four months I was in China that I had a legal liberty.

"But the old-timers weren't about to put up with my nonsense, you know? I ended up on bread and water and I worked on the rock pile. I had more restriction than you could shake a stick at, but as much trouble as I ever got into, I never got busted.

"We were at Tientsin, and the Marine Corps gave out a blanket promotion. All the enlisted Marines got promoted but me. And the company commander calls me in and says, 'Ski, when you work, you work like hell, but when you go on liberty, you're nothing but trouble. You keep your nose clean for six months and I'll promote you to corporal.'

"And then it sunk in. I thought to myself, 'Hey, you're not winning, you know?' It was time to get serious and make something out of myself. And that's what I did, but I didn't do it on my own. We had many senior staff NCOs who had served in the

Banana Wars or World War II who were willing to share their knowledge and experiences with a younger Marine trying to get ahead and make something of himself for the benefit of the unit or the Corps."

SgtMaj Kozak called PFC Wawrzyniak into his office and told the young Marine, "You asked for a transfer here, by God, and you're gonna become a good Marine." He handed the young Marine a stack of infantry manuals. "You start studying these damned books and you come back in two weeks and you'd better know everything in that Marine Corps Drill Manual."

Included in that stack of manuals were the bibles on the machine gun, Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), grenades, small-unit tactics, and more.

"Every non-working hour, I'd read from one of the manuals, and some senior ranking Marine would see me and say, 'Hey Ski, come on over,' and he'd have a .30- or .50-caliber machine gun or a BAR, and we'd go over different things in the manual. I read, I retained and before my 35 years were up in the Marine Corps, I used much of what I'd studied.

"I did a lot of growing up. I became a Marine, but it wasn't easy."

Time passed. He reported to Camp Pendleton, Calif., to train reservists, coaching on the rifle range. He was promoted to sergeant and ordered to the Marine Guard, Philadelphia Navy Yard, but he lasted only a couple of months there.

"Single Marines got the shaft with all the after-hours stuff and weekend

commitments," he recalled. "Like there were 19 of us Marines there and five of us weren't married. Once, I had just come off of weekend duty and went to the mess hall for a cup of coffee and some kid comes down and says, 'Hey, Sergeant Ski, you got your blues ready?' And I say, 'What?' And he says, 'You got the funeral detail up in Johnstown.'

"And I say, 'What do you mean? I just got off weekend duty.' And I got kind of boisterous, and the mess sergeant A. B. Collins [Silver Star, Okinawa, World War II] comes over and says, 'Keep your voice down. No yelling in my mess hall.' And without thinking, I turn around and tell 'Abie' what he can do with his mess hall and his serving line and the overhead fans, as well.

"And the next thing I know, old Abie is rolling up his sleeves and he says, 'Come on out to the spud locker.' I figure not only did I make a mistake, but now I'm gonna die because old Abie had this cook who had given him a rough time, and Abie took him out to the spud locker and beat the living daylights out of him, and that cook was a hell of a lot bigger than me.

"I had better sense than to go to the spud locker with Abie, so I apologized, and I didn't get stomped but I did get office hours with the captain.

"The skipper says, 'You seem unhappy here.' And I say, 'No, sir. I'm happy. The liberty is great, but the duty and work load aren't distributed fairly. The barracks catch the work load and the brown baggers skate on evening and weekend details. Married guys can't go on funeral details because they'd get back too late.'

"And the captain says, 'What you're saying is that you don't like it here.' And I say, 'No, it's all right,' and he says, 'Then why are you complaining like a Bolshevik private?' And the next thing I know, I'm on my way to Camp Lejeune.

"I get orders to Shore Party, and I say, 'What the hell is Shore Party?' Nobody knows, but one guy knows where their barracks is, so he points me in the right direction. And it's 1400 [2 p.m.] on a Saturday. I look around for an empty bunk and I start squaring away my gear. Sergeants had a cubicle to themselves, but the spaces were full, so I went into the open squadbay.

"I go to chow and get ready to go

to the movies and here comes this warrant officer and he says, 'Where're you going?' And I tell him and he tells me and everybody else in the barracks to go outside and fall in on the hardtop. By now, it's almost six. And he tells me to drill the troops until he tells me to stop. And he goes to adjacent barracks and shakes those Marines out of their racks and away from their card games, and next thing I know, I'm drilling 100 to 150 Marines.

"So I drill them for about an hour, and then I halt them and call another sergeant out and tell him to drill the troops for a while and he says, 'I can't. I don't know anything about drill.' And I can't figure this out. What kind of Marine sergeant doesn't know how to drill troops?"

Sunday, he squared away his gear, preparing for the work week. A Marine introduced himself and told Ski that Shore Party Battalion was a great outfit. "We play pinochle all day, don't make formations and don't have weekend duty."

"Hell, according to that guy, they don't work, they don't train, they don't do anything," Ski recalled. "The guy told me that they didn't get up until 0730 on weekdays.

"And I say, 'Well, I tell you what. You'll hear reveille tomorrow morning. So, at 0500, I get up, shower, shave and pull on a fresh uniform and at 0530, I get a Coke bottle and an empty GI can, and I held reveille. Guys were coming out of their racks

like you wouldn't believe. All except one character.

"So I go to his bunk and I say, 'Hey! Did you hear reveille go?' And he says, 'Yeah,' and he rolls over. So I grab one end of his rack and I dump the whole damned thing over on him and I say, 'Reveille ain't going. . . it's gone,' and suddenly I had his attention, and he's running for the shower and a quick shave."

At 0600, he marched Shore Party Marines to morning chow. At 0700, the Marines held a sweep down, fore and aft. The company gunnery sergeant entered the barracks and introduced himself to Ski. "Are you the one that held reveille?"

"Yes, Gunnery Sergeant."

"Are you the one who marched them to chow?"

"Yes, Gunnery Sergeant."

"Are you the one supervising the cleanup this morning?"

"Yes, Gunnery Sergeant."

"And he tells me that I'm kind of taking things upon myself. Hell, I thought that's what sergeants were supposed to do. And a few minutes later, here comes this master sergeant, and we go through this whole rigamarole all over again. And he says, 'Why did you hold reveille; why did you march them to chow; why did you order the cleanup of the barracks?' and I say I figured *somebody* ought to take charge to get things done, and nobody else seemed willing to volunteer.

"Later, I meet the commanding officer and he says, 'I've heard about events since your arrival and I like what I hear.' He made me platoon sergeant, and that's when Shore Party began military training. We had a corporal who knew machine guns, and I had him hold school; and we had a mortarman, and he held school, and so forth, right up through the BAR, grenades and bayonets and what have you, and we went on conditioning hikes.

"And we went on overnights and bivouacs and we started a staff NCO school; not as elaborate as the schools they have today, but suddenly the attitude of the whole battalion changed. They were being treated like Marines, for God's sake, and they liked it!"

He was promoted to staff sergeant on June 15, 1950. From Marine recruit to staff sergeant in four years. "But I can tell you one better than that," he said, grinning. "How about private to master sergeant in five



"In China back in '47, I was with the First Marines. I had a bad attitude. I'd been in the Navy. I'd been around. You couldn't tell me anything I didn't already know."

years eight months? The longest time I ever spent in grade as an enlisted man was two years and that was from buck to staff sergeant."

He landed on "Blue Beach" at Inchon, Korea, with Shore Party. "We had 56 in our platoon. After landing, we went to Kimpo [Airfield] and set up on the Han River. We had our own machine guns, BARs and M1 rifles. From there, we went to Wonsan."

At first, the unit moved supplies off the beach. Their secondary mission was as engineers. "We had Bay City cranes, bulldozers and what have you," he recalled, "and we laid culverts or built bridges."

"And one day they come to me and say, 'Ski, get your team. You're going up north,' and we go with Korean troops on small patrol boats. We help the South Korean troops unload and store supplies, and then we return to Wonsan. And me and my 19 Marines come back from that one, and they send us out again for another such operation."

"And that's how it went for a while until they send us to Hungnam to help with the evacuation of the First Marine Division and the Republic of Korea Third Division between December 10th and 14th, 1950. We provided security while the First Division pulled out, after their withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir."

"Meanwhile, I kept trying to transfer to an infantry unit and to make a long story short, I finally got switched to Fox Company [2d Battalion], Fifth Marines. Now it's March 1951, and I'm working for a brand new second lieutenant, Lucian L. Vestal [who would win a Navy Cross in Korea]. My company commander was a Reserve captain, James H. Honeycutt. Battalion commander was Lieutenant Colonel Glen E. Martin [who would win two Silver Stars in Korea]."

"Well, Lieutenant Vestal asks me, 'Ski, how come you turned down the chance to go home? You got enough time here to rotate home.' And I say, 'I'm not going home until I get an award of some sort,' and he says, 'Do a good job for me today and I'll see you get a Bronze Star.'

"Well, that turned out to be one hell of a fine day. I'll tell you. Dog Company was going up one ridge line on our right. Fox was going up the left flank, minus one platoon. There was a small finger, so Vestal's platoon (me included) was going to



"I'm just a little runt; about 5 feet 6 inches tall. That's me on the left on Guam in 1948. The big guy is PFC B. F. Marshall from Glendale, California. He was 6 feet 5 inches tall, and he was only 17, so I guess he was still growing."

take the finger."

As a staff sergeant, Ski began to see young Marines who reminded him of what he once was. "I had this kid that I totally hated and despised. Every time I saw him, I wanted to knock him up alongside his head. He was always doing something wrong. Tell him to put on his helmet, and he'd put it on backwards. I hated that kid."

"So we're going along these railroad tracks and I hear this 'kaplunk. . . kaplunk. . . kaplunk,' and I'm wondering, 'What the hell is that?' And I turn around and it's this kid, Pat Callahan, and he's dragging the butt of his BAR along railroad ties. And I lost all semblance of good sense. I go charging up to him and I tell him where I'm going to stick the butt of his rifle if he continues dragging it along."

"And the skipper says, 'Take it easy, Gunny. He's just a kid,' and I say, 'And he'll die a kid if he keeps dragging that rifle, cause I'm gonna kill him!'"

The company continued the climb. Nearing the top, the point man turned and yelled, "Grenades!" Small-arms fire quickly followed.

"I had a good idea of where the enemy was, so I took my Thompson and a handful of grenades and

headed for the right flank. I began tossing grenades, but it was rough, getting them through the heavy brush and all. All the enemy had to do was pull pins and roll them down the mountain."

"I saw this one grenade coming, and I'm next to the tree, so I slide around and damn! Here comes a grenade down that side, too. I put my hands over my head, hit the deck and start saying the Lord's Prayer. I get shrapnel in my face, neck, hands, back, buttocks, both legs, and my canteens had so many holes they looked like little showers. I reached up to feel my face, and I'm covered in blood."

But he could still walk. The platoon went into the assault. "We're clearing the enemy off the hill, and as the North Koreans run from Fox Company, they run into the guns of Dog Company who opened up and killed more than 200 of them. The Dogs were eating up whatever we scattered their way," Wawrzyniak said, chuckling.

"Now, let me tell you about Callahan. He got shot twice in the shoulder during the final assault. But the bugger never quit. He kept moving and shooting his BAR. And he was aiming; he wasn't spraying. He was delivering a base of fire with accuracy. I can't tell you how proud I was of that kid."

Callahan and Wawrzyniak were evacuated. "They lay me on this table and they're yanking shrapnel out of me. They patch up Callahan nearby. And the next day, I go over to see how this lieutenant is doing, and hell, they didn't wash him up or anything. Sure, they treated his wound, but the guy is lying there in the mud and crud that he brought down with him. So me and Callahan find a wash basin and we clean the lieutenant up, making him look better and making us feel better."

"We stayed there a couple of days and they were talking about sending us to another medical facility and I told Callahan, 'Let's get the hell out of here and go back to the company.' And he takes off. A couple of minutes later he comes back with this set of utilities all nice and fresh: washed and pressed. And I say, 'Where the hell did you get these?' And he says, 'You'll never believe it, but I walked into this tent, and there they were, just kind of waiting for me to bring to you.' We leave, and later, we each get a Silver Star."

"So we go back to the company, which wasn't easy because the company was in the hills, surrounded. This lieutenant colonel walks out of a tent and eyeballs me and Callahan and says, 'Where are you two going?' and I tell him, but he turns to Callahan, who is heavily bandaged with one wound bleeding, and the colonel says, 'Not him. He's going back to the aid station.'"

Arrangements had been made to send a pair of communicators up to the surrounded Marines. They hoped to string wire to forward positions from the battalion headquarters. Ski made arrangements to accompany them during the midnight patrol, conducted in a heavy rain.

"We didn't run into a thing all the way. It was so rotten a night the enemy figured they could dope off because not even idiots would be roaming around in no man's land in such crummy weather.

"I go over and wake the skipper up and he's obviously happy to see me. So I find a hole and get some sleep, rain or not. And the next morning, I make a fire and hold reveille on the troops. I'm brewing coffee and the troops climb out of their holes and welcome me back by singing 'The Marines' Hymn.' I was touched. [His voice cracked as he recalled the event.]"

The enemy had disappeared during the night.

The days and weeks passed.

September 19, 1951, was a good day for Wawrzyniak. Hill 812 was in the area known as the Punchbowl. One Marine unit operating in the area "got their clocks cleaned." They were replaced by another unit who got their clocks cleaned. Fox Co. was in reserve; it was soon their turn.

"During a three-day battle up there, units of the First Division suffered 33 killed in action and 235 wounded. Enemy losses were estimated at 972 KIA (265 counted), and 113 captured.

"We moved into position. It was a good day. I could tell. We got hit with our own mortars, four deuces, [4.2 inch], and then we got hit by our own artillery. Whatever could go wrong did go wrong. And then we call in an air strike, and they're bombing and strafing our guys.

"And I'm on the extreme left flank. When darkness came, we remained in position and waited for sunup. I look around and I see a corporal I've had trouble with before.

He never went to boot camp. He was a reservist, and when we were at Hill 884, before I took over the platoon, they got hit and he broke ranks and ran.

"So I get ahold of him and say, 'You run on me and I'll kill you myself,' and he says, 'Gunny, I ain't afraid, but if I think it's time to go, I go!' And I say, 'From here on out, you don't go anywhere unless I tell you, okay?'"

"And he made up for his past actions, I tell you. We go up [Hill] 812 and he takes a round in the neck, and he's happy as hell, because now he rates a Purple Heart. But he keeps on chuggin'."

"And I decided: first squad to the right; second squad to the left; third squad up the middle and let's go! And we went right up that damned hill. I led the final assault over the top, and then we set up a hasty defense. That's when machine-gun fire started coming from the left flank, and that damned hill was just as bare as the palm of your hand.

"Then grenades started falling. We had one hell of a grenade fight up there. They'd throw and I'd throw, and I was hoping I was hurting them as bad as they were hurting me, because I was full of shrapnel. My face was all cut up and I hurt like you wouldn't believe.

"To this day, I don't know why, but I ran over, grabbed a couple of grenades and I ran right down that hill line. I don't know why the North

Koreans didn't shoot me or whatever, but I ran right at that machine gun, about 60 to 70 yards, and I blew it and the crew away without getting hit.

"I put that old Maxim machine gun out of action. My head was killing me from the wounds and concussion, and we kept getting incoming artillery and mortar fire. And we got pulled off the hill and put in reserve. The corporal gets his wound treated and returns to duty. The corpsman gives me a handful of pills and some medicinal alcohol, and I sleep the night away like a baby."

That was the night Easy Co. got pushed off the hill. Fox Co. was asked to send reinforcements, and Wawrzyniak volunteered his second platoon. "So we go back up the hill and you know what? The North Koreans got another machine gun in the exact same place where I'd knocked out the Maxim the day before!

"And the guy I'd accused of being a coward says, 'I'll take care of the gun this time,' and he collects a sack full of grenades and yells, 'Never fear!' and he charges right into the mouth of that machine gun. After he stood up and did his John Wayne impersonation, the whole squad charged up the hill, following his lead, and we took that hill without suffering a single Marine casualty."

The corporal would receive a Silver Star medal. Stanley Wawrzyniak would receive his first Navy Cross.

Following the battle for Hill 812, Ski went to Camp Otsu, Japan, for some rest and relaxation.

"I'm in the gym one night watching a basketball game and in comes Ray Bowman. And immediately I think back to when I was stationed in China, and Bowman had me locked up. He was my company commander over there.

"After I got out of the brig, we got racing around with jeeps on the dock. The jeeps belonged to some air wing unit, and they were going to be loaded aboard the ships to return Stateside.

"We were drag racing, and somebody passed the word, 'Here comes the officer of the day.' I jam my foot on the brake pedal, but the damned thing's got no brakes, and the jeep goes over the end of the dock. I managed to jump, and the jeep ends up upside down on a floating causeway leading to the ramp of an LST. Everybody, including CID [criminal in-



Silver Star Awarded Buffalo Soldier
SOMEWHERE IN KOREA, Aug. 24.—For gallantry in action, Marine Staff Sgt. Stanley W. Wawrzyniak, 259 Chandler St., Buffalo, has been awarded the Silver Star. Presenting the medal to the Buffalo Marine during recent field ceremonies is Lieut. Gen. Edward M. Almond, former commander of the U. S. Tenth Corps, and now commandant of the Army War College. Sgt. Wawrzyniak is the son of Stephen Bodus of the Chandler St. address.

"Can you believe the caption under my picture in my hometown newspaper in Buffalo? They called me a 'Soldier.' Hell, I wasn't a soldier. I was a 'squid,' but never a 'doggie!'"

investigators] are trying to find the responsible party, but nobody squeals.

"At Camp Otsu, Bowman's a major, the camp operations officer. And he comes over and says, 'Ski, I hear you got a Silver Star and a Navy Cross in Korea. Now will you tell me about that jeep that rolled off the dock in China?'"

Ski was offered the opportunity to serve at Camp Otsu. He accepted and served as a troop handler and basic military subjects instructor. "But you can only party so much, so I started going to school. Hell, I had never finished high school. I figured it was time."

He took a math course and an English course, but then "tired of the whole damned thing. I figured I'd go back to Korea. Hell, I had a Silver Star, a Navy Cross and a couple of Purple Hearts. I figured I'd go back and get me a Medal of Honor."

Before leaving Japan, he went to the staff noncommissioned officer's club and bought a case of whiskey to take with him. "I'm going back in style," he said, smiling. "I fly to Korea and report in to [First Marine] Division Headquarters. I get assigned to Easy Company, Fifth Marines, and I arrive in time to make the move from the east to the west coast.

"My company commander is Captain Merlin "Terry" Matthews [who received a Silver Star in Korea]. He sends me to OP [outpost] -3 to help a brand new second lieutenant up there. We were 4,000 meters in front of the MLR [main line of resistance], the northernmost position at that time.

"We're there a few days and we start taking enemy mortar rounds. I couldn't figure what was wrong with those guys. They weren't hitting anything. And then it dawned on me. They weren't *trying* to hit us; they were bracketing us. We were located on three separate small knobs. Corporal Hart, a squad leader, had his men on one knoll. My position was center, and the lieutenant was on the right, slightly forward."

Enemy artillery fire began slamming into the Marine positions. "We got 2,000 rounds in a half hour's time," he recalled. "The barrage started right around nine o'clock one night, and when it quit, this Marine comes running down the hill yelling, 'Gunny. . .Gunny. . .' He's been hit and his position has been overrun. Says he pulled his guys



"You can tell that I posed for this picture that was taken of me in Vietnam in 1966 when I was with the Third Marines. I was a major, then. And look! I don't have a stinking magazine in my weapon, right?"

back to secondary positions, but the North Koreans are really giving them hell."

Ski began moving. He latched onto Cpl Arthur G. Barbosa [who would win a Navy Cross] who placed his machine gun overlooking a saddle on the left flank. "I figured Hart had been overrun, and the enemy would probably slide down the hill to hit us next," Ski said. "And then the bugles and horns sounded.

"I told the lieutenant that I'd moved Barbosa's gun. I told him the enemy was coming and I asked what he wanted us to do. Grenades started zinging into our positions, and the lieutenant says, 'Gunny, I don't know what the hell to do. Do what you think is best and tell me where you want me.' That was some smart lieutenant, huh?"

"I had Harris with his heavy machine gun [assigned from Weapons Company], and he started placing his guns. We were definitely organized. Technical Sergeant [Quinton T.] Barlow [who won a Navy Cross] went with his men around one side of our hill and I went around the other, and we were catching the North Koreans as they came down the middle.

"From the time the arty started falling and Hart said his position had been overrun, I knew what the hell was going on. It was one hell of

a night," Ski continued. "The moon was out and it was sort of cloudy.

"When the damned clouds covered the moon, the enemy would advance, and when the clouds cleared and the moon shined, they would halt in place and be almost invisible. But we kept them at a distance until our recoilless rifle got hit.

"We had one 60-mm. mortar up there, and I tell the Marine to run his tube up as high as he can without having the rounds tumbling back down on us. He cranks it up and I start dropping rounds. And I tell him to move [traverse] it 90 degrees, and we're spraying the area with mortar rounds. We slam in rounds and move it and slam and move. We had almost 200 mortar rounds up there and we put them to good use that night, let me tell you."

Their radio was knocked out. The Marines were running out of ammo. "Our supply dump was set up between the lieutenant's position and mine, and now we were isolated from each other. I crawl out [between the lines] and pick up a couple of cans of ammo, and on the way back, I get shot in the hip.

"The lieutenant comes out and helps me with the ammo and kind of helps me back. He asks, 'What can I do?' and I say to help the wounded when you can and shoot like hell when you can't, and that's what he did. He did everything right.

"A couple of enemy got into our lines and I figure if there's two there'll soon be 50. I killed one and our corpsman killed the other. And we had this kid, [Cpl Duane Edgar] Dewey who'd been shot in the neck and back. The corpsman was patching him up when a grenade came flying over the hill.

"Dewey pushes the corpsman out of the way and yells, 'I got it in my pocket' and grabs it. Then he rolls over on it, saving the corpsman and a couple of other wounded Marines nearby."

Ski stopped and drew deeply on the cigar. He didn't seem to notice that it had gone out. He exhaled and continued.

"Dewey survived and received the Medal of Honor.

"I keep moving. I figure if I stop, the leg will stiffen up. I guess I'm moving on adrenaline. When the sun comes up, we move to take our positions back again. Reinforcements start coming up the hill. Helicopters come in and take the heavy wounded. Me

and the lieutenant grab a ride in a jeep."

Pulling into the battalion compound, Ski immediately limped to the supply shed and got a clean set of utilities, borrowed a towel, bar of soap, set of skivvies and a razor.

"I go take me a long shower and get all cleaned up," he said, smiling. "I buy a couple of cartons of cigarettes and I see a stash of oranges, so I take a mittful and walk into sick-bay. Corpsmen are running around, going ape and I ask, 'What the hell's going on?' and this doctor answers, 'Where's this Sergeant Ski that's supposed to be coming in here that everybody's talking about?' and I say, 'I'm right here, Doc.'"

"And he says, 'Where the hell you been?' And I say, 'This ain't my first time to get hit. The other two times I came in dirty, and you guys cut off my clothes and patch me up, but you didn't wash me and I stayed dirty for days. This time I got cleaned up before you guys work on me,' and he tells me to get on that stretcher and he points.

"I say, 'Aye, aye sir,' and he thinks I'm a nut case."

After receiving preliminary care at the aid station, Ski was flown out to the hospital ship *Consolation*, where he remained for six weeks. It was there he learned he'd been recommended for the Medal of Honor.

"And I get off the ship and report back to division headquarters. And I'm in a grubby uniform; my boots are scuffy and all the guys there at headquarters are all shiny clean and wearing spitshines. I feel like a bum.

"I'm told the general [Major General John T. Selden, Commanding General, First Marine Division] wants to see me. And I'm heading towards the general's hooch and I run into an old China buddy of mine named Pekela and he says, 'You can't go up to the general's office looking like that' and I say, 'I got no choice,' but he fixes me up with a clean uniform and I wipe off my boots and I continue the march.

"The general hands me a warrant promoting me to meritorious master sergeant, and he says they're sending me home. I say, 'I want to report back to Easy Company. I got no reason to go back to the States,' but he says I got no choice because I'm a potential Medal of Honor winner, and they don't want me killed before receiving that medal.

"OP-3 is a place I'll never forget,"

he continued. "We'd gotten our heads and butts handed to us up there, but we killed a locker box full of North Koreans, I'll tell you.

"I come back to the States and report into the Sixth Marines at Camp Lejeune. The Medal of Honor gets knocked down to a Navy Cross and General Randolph McC. Pate presented it to me, and then he asks if I've ever considered taking a commission. Hell, I was a 25-year-old master sergeant and had the world by the fanny on a downhill drag, you know? But I went for it."

During the Vietnam War, he fought to return to combat. Eventually, in 1966, he reported to the 3d Marines as the battalion operations and training officer. Sound safe? Not if you stay with Wawrzyniak.

"It was a great day," he recalled. "We were on this operation and a company finds a whole mess of tunnels and enemy bunkers. Colonel Gary Wilder, the battalion commander, tells me to fly out and see what it would take to blow that place apart. So I call back and say they should send out 1,500 pounds of TNT and a mile of primer cord. The whole 'nine yards.' And we set up a defense and prepare to blow that whole damned place. And as night came on, we could hear drums from a nearby village.



"This picture was made at the Marine Corps Birthday Ball at Cherry Point in 1979. That's my wife, Adaline, and my dad. Adaline and I have been married 38 years and we have five kids. None were Marines. They said, 'Pops, we lived the Corps all our lives, and that's enough.'"

"Dark. We started taking mortars. And I'm counting the rounds that hit . . . 99 . . . 100 . . . 199 . . . 200 . . . 299 . . . 300! I couldn't figure when it was going to end. Anyway, we didn't get anybody killed, but we have four or five wounded. I got a minor 'ding' [wound]. I call for a medevac because we got one man hit bad.

"It's the middle of the night and I don't want the chopper landing in our defense, so I go out a couple of hundred yards and guide the chopper in with a cigarette lighter.

"It's darker than inside your locker box. I wait outside the wire to guard our rear while the rest of the squad returns to camp. I'm walking back to our lines and this Marine challenges me. I identify myself and he lets me in and asks what the hell I'm doing out there. I tell him and he says, 'Major, with all due respect, you got more brass than brains.' And you know, he was right."

For his Vietnam service, in addition to another two Purple Hearts, he also received two Bronze Star Medals with Combat "Vs." Wawrzyniak would retire later as a lieutenant colonel.

"I tell you what," he said. "The Marine Corps' been awful good to me. I was in 35 years, between the short Navy hitch and my time in the Corps. I got my bachelor's and master's degrees from college and I got a good job.

"But I tell you what. I probably couldn't cut it in today's Marine Corps. If I got into as much trouble today as I did back then, I'd have gotten a bad paper discharge. I was a hard individual to live with, but I've always tried to be fair, be tolerant, and be patient.

"I've seen guys who remember an injustice that happened years ago. They don't forget and they still look for 'paybacks.' That's nonsense.

"I came in at the right time. There were old-timers that I learned a lot from. But you have to be willing to listen. Even after I made staff sergeant, I still listened and learned from gunnies and sergeant majors [sic]. You should never stop learning."

He stopped and stretched. Relighting his cigar, he smiled and said, "Hey, it's gonna be a great day!"

I got the hell out of there. I've never stopped learning either.

