

FEBRUARY 2024

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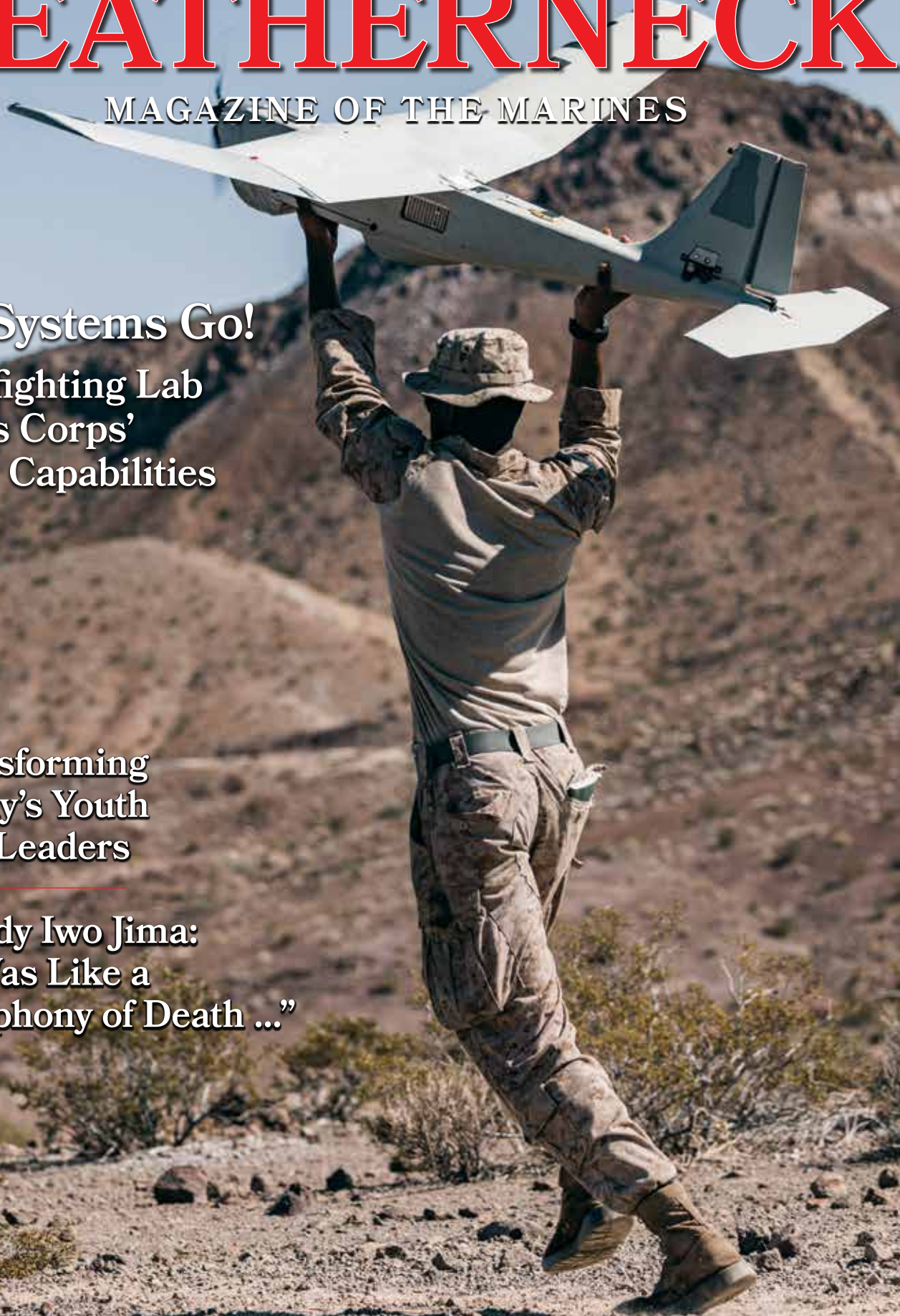
MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

All Systems Go!

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Tests Corps'  
UAS Capabilities

Transforming  
Today's Youth  
Into Leaders

Bloody Iwo Jima:  
"It Was Like a  
Symphony of Death ..."





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# From the Publisher & Editor-in-Chief



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**A wave of 4thMarDiv Marines hit the beach on D-day at Iwo Jima as another boatload of battle-tested leathernecks disembark an invasion craft.**

## Remembering Iwo Jima

**T**his month marks the 79th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima. This 36-day struggle in 1945 remains one of the Corps' "touchstone battles." According to the National WWII Museum, in New Orleans, La., approximately 70,000 U.S. Marines and 18,000 Japanese soldiers took part in the battle. In the days of concentrated fighting on the small island, nearly 7,000 U.S. Marines were killed. Another 20,000 were wounded. Marines captured 216 Japanese soldiers; the rest were killed in action. The legacy of Iwo Jima stays with us to this day in sculpture, photographs, film and print. We mark this month's anniversary with three new articles: "Bloodbath at the Blockhouse: Marines Meet Massive Resistance on Iwo's Yellow Beach 2," by Steven McCloud, "Trapped: Marine Tankers come to the Rescue on Iwo Jima" by Colonel Robert D. Heintz Jr. Award-winning author Jonathan Bernstein, and "Crafting Fiction out of Real-Life War Tales" by Ray Elliott—a look at how firsthand anecdotes can be used to write historical fiction.

We recognize another "combat anniversary" this month with *Leatherneck* staff writer and Heintz award winner Kyle Watts' story "Enemy in the Wire: The Fight for Survival

on LZ Russell." Also known as Firebase Russell, this fire support base and landing zone were first established by Marines in 1968 northwest of "The Rockpile" in Quảng Trị Province, Vietnam. The official history notes that on Feb. 25, 1969, People's Army of Vietnam sappers attacked Russell, killing 27 Marines from the 2nd Bn, 4th Marines and 3rd Bn, 12th Marines plus two corpsmen. The Marines of 2/4 and 3/12 defended tenaciously, and the Marines would hold the firebase and LZ for seven months until ordered to dismantle it and evacuate in September 1969.

A final highlight this month is a feature on the Young Marines youth program. Author Abra Hogarth details the mission of the decades-old organization and presents the stories of several Young Marines who went on to join the Corps and continue to use the leadership lessons learned in the program to contribute to our service and the nation.

Semper Fidelis.

Colonel Christopher Woodbridge,  
USMC (Ret)

**LEATHERNECK**  
MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

MARINE CORPS  
**Gazette**



# Contents

LEATHERNECK—MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

## Features

FEBRUARY 2024  
VOL. 107, No. 2

### 18 Trapped: Marine Tankers Come to the Rescue On Iwo Jima

By Jonathan Bernstein

The tanks of the 5th Tank Battalion played a pivotal role in the U.S.'s successful invasion of Iwo Jima. Learn about Silver Star recipient 2ndLt Leonard Blake and his harrowing ordeal on the Japanese-held island.

### 26 Bloodbath at the Blockhouse: Marines Meet Massive Resistance On Iwo's Yellow Beach 2

By Steven D. McCloud

From the moment they landed on Iwo Jima, "Fox" Company, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines were in a slugfest with their Japanese opposition. Read about their terrifying first day of an effort to gain a foothold on the island.

### 30 3rd MLR Paves the Way with Force Design 2030 Capabilities

By 1stLt Anne Pentaleri, USMC

With multiple exercises under their belt in the last few years, the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment can provide stand-in force operations as well as an agile and persistent presence inside an adversary's engagement zone.

### 36 Enemy in the Wire: The Fight for Survival on LZ Russell

By Kyle Watts

In February 1969, Marines on a remote hilltop in Vietnam fought for survival as their outpost was overrun by NVA. Read here how the veterans of LZ Russell endured the battle and its haunting memories for 55 years.

### 50 Creating Leaders and Leathernecks: Young Marines Program Focuses on Community Service, Citizenship

By Abra Hogarth

From Memorial Day parades to disaster-related cleanups, the Young Marines organization is preparing tomorrow's leaders for a life of service. Read how the 65-year-old program that started in Connecticut is still making model citizens—and Marines.

### 58 "In the Blood": The Untold Story of the Life-Saving Invention of QuikClot

By Charles Barber

In this book excerpt, learn about one Marine's efforts to make QuikClot the top choice for treating wounds on the battlefield despite initial opposition from the U.S. Army.

### 64 Crafting Fiction Out of Real-Life War Tales

By Ray Elliott

A leatherneck himself, the author creates fictional characters based on real people to present realistic portrayals of veterans and the hardships they endured during wartime.



## Departments

- 4 Sound Off
- 10 In Every Clime and Place
- 16 Corps Connections
- 46 We—the Marines
- 56 Sea Stories
- 62 Passing the Word
- 67 Leatherneck Laffs
- 68 In Memoriam
- 70 Reader Assistance
- 72 Saved Round

**COVER:** Cpl Cameron Lewis, a small unmanned aircraft systems operator with 3rd Bn, 4th Marines (Rein), 7th Marine Regiment, launches a RQ-20B Puma during Exercise Apollo Shield at MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms, Calif., Oct. 19, 2023. On page 11, read how these unmanned vehicles will make the Marines of the future a safer, more effective fighting force. Photo by LCpl Justin J. Marty, USMC. Copies of the cover may be obtained by sending \$3 (for mailing costs) to Leatherneck Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134-0775.

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*Sponsored By Colonel Charles Michaels, USMC (Ret)*

## Letter of the Month

(Leatherneck will pay \$25 for a "Sound Off Letter of the Month" submitted by an MCA member or provide a one-year courtesy subscription to a non-member whose letter is selected.)

I have piles of "stuff" I have written over the years. Most are just for me. When I read "Holding the Line: Marines Confront Abbey Gate Memories Two Years Later" in the August 2023 issue of *Leatherneck*, the phrase "think of it as a duck walk" came flooding to my mind.

Like many of us old guys, I was in a rage when our young Marines were killed. Upon reflection, and discussion with other former Marines, it became clear that they did exactly what we would expect Marines to do. Dropped into the middle of chaos, they represented one nation in a manner of which we should be very proud. As my DI said, "you may be called upon." And they were.

Gary A. Greenough  
Mobile, Ala.

*The story you sent us along with this letter explaining your "duck walk" at boot camp can be found on page 56 in Sea Stories. Thank you for your continued support of Leatherneck. —Editor*

## A Letter to the Fallen Heroes of Beirut

They came not as warriors, but as peacekeepers for the people of Beirut, to free the country's people from tyranny and restore their freedom. On Oct. 23, 1983, 220 of our Marine brothers, along with 18 Sailors, and three soldiers lost their lives when a truck loaded with 2,000 pounds of explosives detonated and destroyed the Marine barracks in Beirut. They were all part of a large multinational peacekeeping operation.

We will always remember and pay honor and tribute to our fallen peacekeeping heroes, for they came in peace. Our pledge to our fallen personnel is to always remain vigilant and ready, and above all, that they will remain etched in the minds and hearts of every Marine, Sailor, and

Soldier forever. May the Lord hear our prayers for them and bless them all. Let them rest in peace for eternity.

Cpl John Messia  
USMC, 1950-1954  
Brockton, Mass.

*Great sentiments. Thanks for sharing—  
Publisher*

## I Had to Make a Fateful Decision In 1966

At the end of the summer of 1966, I had to make a fateful decision. On the day of graduation from Marine Corps officer candidate school (PLC) that August, my platoon sergeant announced that if anyone was interested, the Marine Corps had openings in a law program (PLC-Law).

At age 21, I realized I had to decide. Should I continue down the road I had planned on and either be commissioned as a second lieutenant upon graduation from Texas Tech University in 1967 and go on active duty? Or should I be commis-

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sioned similarly to my first choice but spend three additional years in law school; eventually becoming a Marine judge advocate (JAG).

In the end, I chose the second option and as fate would have it, I spent the worst years of the Vietnam War, 1967-1970, in law school at SMU. Meanwhile, a close friend of mine, Lee Herron, also completed Marine Corps officer candidate school in the summer of 1966. But he was determined to follow through with the first choice and went to Vietnam in 1968. He was heroically killed in action on Feb. 22, 1969, receiving the Navy Cross posthumously.

In a sense I took the "road less traveled" and that "has made all the difference." Likely my choosing the second road was the most fateful decision in my life.

I naively thought our troops in Vietnam would "be home by Christmas." What a turning point in my life that summer proved to be!

Capt David Nelson

USMC, 1971-1973

Houston, Texas

*Capt Nelson, thank you for the note and belated Happy Birthday. We all face choices at times in our service as Marines and you should never doubt you made the right one at a fateful time. I think even Robert Frost would recognize how great this decision was for such a young man now that you can "be telling this with a sigh ... somewhere ages and ages hence ..." (from "The Road Not Taken," by Robert Frost).—Publisher*

### Reader Creates Etchings In Memory of Saigon Heroes

I read page 46 in the November 2023 issue of *Leatherneck* about how the dedication of the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group named its Marine Security Augmentation Unit (MSAU) building in honor of Corporal Charles McMahon Jr., and Lance Corporal Darwin Lee Judge with great interest.

In 1975, I was a young sergeant stationed at MCAS El Toro with the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. In the disaster leading up to the collapse of the Saigon Embassy, my unit had a portable television set up for the S-1 section, and for days we were consumed with watching the end. I have a vivid recollection of the evacuation that eventually led to the deaths of these two brave Marines. As the years went by, I thought about them. I was slightly older than Judge, and younger than McMahon.

I recently had the occasion to visit the Vietnam Wall during my visit to Washington, D.C. on Lake County (Illinois) Honor Flight 23. Before my departure, I

decided that I would make an etching of both their names on the wall and return them to their families, so they knew that the memory of these warriors was valued by Marines of that era.

The article mentions the presence of Lori DeSaulnier (Judge's sister), and George Holland, a close friend of McMahon being present at the dedication. I would like to know if you can refer my name, email address, and telephone to the family of both heroes, so that I can forward the new etchings to them. I believe it would bring that chapter of my life to a satisfactory resolution. Anything you can do to facilitate this exchange, it would be greatly appreciated.

William J. Wallace

Highland Park, Ill.

*We will try to get you in contact. Thanks for taking time to help bring closure to the families of these Marines. Semper Fidelis.—Publisher*

### Ode to a United States Marine

In dress blues, a silent stance so keen, awaits a Marine, brave and serene.

From home to battle, they are steadfast and true, courage ablaze with the red, white, and blue.

In the crucible, where their skill is refined, discipline etched in heart and mind.

With "Semper Fidelis," where their oath is deeply sworn, through every battle and hardship, a brotherhood is born.

From dry sandy deserts to salty oceans wide, Marines take duty, with valor as a guide.

A symbol of hope and strength, resilience ever unyielding, while on the front lines, or silently shielding.

They march on with purpose, their legacy clear, defenders of freedom, drawing ever near.

In the echoes of history, the heroic stories unfold, of a U.S. Marine, noble and bold.

Cpl Daniel Bentley USMC

4th ANGLICO

West Palm Beach, Fla.

*Thanks for sharing your poetry, Corporal. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

### Reader Reacts to the Deactivation of VMFAT-101

Your coverage on page 16 and 17 in the December 2023 issue of *Leatherneck* concerning the deactivation of VMFAT-101 brought back memories. I came back from the Vietnam War to MCAS Cherry Point and the same squadron I flew from; H&MS-20, MCCRTG-20, 2nd MAW.

I was an intermediate level maintenance





COURTESY OF SSGT KEN "CHRIS" CHRISTESON

**Two F-4 Phantoms with VMFAT-201 sit on the runway. SSgt Christeson helped merge all VMFAT-201 aircraft with VMAT-101 in 1974.**

members to serve with the squadron and all those over the years who trained to fly the Phantoms and hornets of VMFAT-101. Mission accomplished, Marines.

SSgt Ken "Chris" Christeson  
USMC, 1971-1977  
Gladstone, Mo.

*Thank you for your service during that important period when the Corps transitioned aircraft.—Publisher*

**Leatherneck Writer Receives Overwhelmingly Positive Feedback**

The feedback I have received on my article published in the September 2023 issue of *Leatherneck*, "The Healing of a Marine," has been shockingly surprising in the most profound way! As of Dec. 4, 2023, there are 11,165 LinkedIn impressions, which is an indication of the need to openly address PTSD, disarm the stigma, and urge combat veterans to seek help.

Needless to say, it's been absolutely liberating and extremely rewarding to

electrician and our group serviced VMFAT-201, VMFAT-AW-202, and VMAT-203, which consisted of F-4Bs, A-6As, and A-4Ms respectively. In May of 1974, I was sent TAD, along with several others from my shop, to support the move of VMFAT-201 to MCAS Yuma, Ariz., where that F-4B squadron would be deactivated and merged into VMFAT-101, MCCRTG-10, 3rd MAW. The training of Phantom crews would continue only with VMFAT-101 at MCAS Yuma, and MCCRTG-20 began receiving the

AV-8A Harrier jets of VMA-231 at MCAS Cherry Point.

I was kept at H&MS-10 in Yuma for six months until the transition was complete and VMFAT-101 was up to strength. I was an E-5 at the time and answered to a master chief petty officer who was the noncommissioned officer in charge of the H&MS-10 ship. Although I enjoyed my time at Yuma, I was glad to get back to my shop at H&MS-20 and be under Marine chain of command. I can relate to both of those Marines who were the last

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TO CIVILIAN LIFE, TOO.



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share my PTSD story. I feel so empowered and triumphant over my PTSD by writing my story and publishing it. Truly cathartic! Thank you, Nancy, and Vic, the deputy editor at *Marine Corps Gazette*, for the opportunity to speak to you both on the Scuttlebutt podcast and thank you *Leatherneck* for publishing my article in the magazine. I give my gratitude to you!

Col Patty Klop, USMCR  
Wauconda, Ill.

*Thank you Col Klop!—Publisher*

### Marine Aviation Landmark Catches Fire

I'd like to notify readers of a huge Marine Aviation iconic landmark that caught fire and was destroyed. I was on vacation in California watching the local news when the story appeared. The north blimp hanger on the former MCAS(H) Tustin was on fire. The local fire department was called just after midnight on Nov. 7, 2023.

I was in the area on Nov. 14, so I decided to check out the damage in person.

Most of the hangar had burned and was still on fire. Newspaper articles indicated that the intention was to let it burn as long as possible and destroy the remains.

For more information, the *Orange County Register* has some excellent articles. I have attached two pictures. One from a previous visit, and the other during the fire. It was a sad day for Tustin Marines who had many great memories of LTA.

Guy Greenquist  
Florence, Wis.

*Sad news about the loss of a Tustin landmark.—Publisher*

*Readers, we would love to see more of your photos from MCAS Tustin and hear more of your stories about your time there. You can email us at: leatherneck@mca-marines.org—Editor*

### A Response to "Chesty's Thoughts On the Vietnam War"

I am a veteran of the Vietnam War and am glad to comment on the Sound Off letter that appeared in the December 2023

**Photos of the historic hangar at MCAS Tustin taken by Marine Corps veteran Guy Greenquist. The photo on the left shows the hangar in the 1970s while it was still in use. The photo below shows the hangar in the aftermath of the fire in 2023.**



GUY GREENQUIST



GUY GREENQUIST

issue of *Leatherneck* titled “Chesty’s Thoughts on the Vietnam War” submitted by reader Greg Paspatis.

I believe Chesty’s comment that appeared in the *Evening Star* in 1966 was his short answer to a civilian reporter he knew did not have a clue as to what it would take to win a guerilla war that was quickly becoming a conventional war. Chesty came up through the ranks fighting guerilla forces during the Banana wars in Haiti and Nicaragua. He was a battalion commander in World War II on Guadalcanal and later led Marines at Peleliu and commanded the 1st Marine Regiment at Inchon, Korea. He had seen considerable heavy fighting, so I am sure he had no illusions that winning a war in a country as large and with such diverse terrain as Vietnam could be won by having “troops advance in a column to the sound of guns, destroy the enemy and come home.”

Chesty was correct in saying that the Vietnam War was no different than any other war. My advice is to file Chesty’s comment about the Vietnam War with Civil War General Nathan B. Forrest’s comment that the best way to win battles is to get there the “firstest with mostest.”

Sgt Ronald G. Goddard  
Mason, Ill.

*Thank you for your response and insight into LtGen Puller’s comments. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

### Whispered Prayers

In the stillness around him, he heard heartbeats and sighs and barely whispered prayers, issuing from the stones, that marked the graves of men who had died for him.

With great reverence he laid the wreath on a deep and lonely mound, stepped back, and saluted.

Richard Budig  
Skiatook, Okla.

*Amen! Semper Fidelis.—Publisher*

### Regarding Attitude and Spirit

I thoroughly enjoyed Kyle Watts’ article in the December *Leatherneck* “Attitude and Spirit: Marine Reconnaissance Veterans Combine Efforts to Inspire Next Generation” about the Marine Recon community. I had no idea there was such a comingling of the veteran recon community and the new. Integrated into the new training no less! Outstanding idea to have a lessons learned approach and actual relaying of stories of what the new breed of recon can expect. Nothing could drive home the point better of what

the importance of the legacy to be carried on these young Marines shoulders! Before I became a Marine, during, and after my time, I have always been fascinated by Recon Marines. Their physical and mental stamina is more than I can fathom! Thank you for such a great article.

Cpl Jerry Tomaschik  
USMC, 1981-1985  
Pampa, Texas

*Everything the Corps can do to prepare these select warriors for their demanding and crucial role in combat is worth the effort. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

Feel like sounding off? Address your letter to: Sound Off, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or send an email to: leatherneck@mca-marines.org. Due to the heavy volume, we cannot answer every letter received. Do not send original photographs, as we cannot guarantee their return. All letters must be signed, and emails must contain complete names and postal mailing addresses. Anonymous letters will not be published.—Editor 📧



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CPL JUAN K. MALDONADO, USMC

**Marines with CLB-31, 31st MEU, brace as a CH-53 Super Stallion approaches for loading during a helicopter support team exercise at Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan, on Nov. 7, 2023. The HST exercise was conducted to refine key skills for pilots and landing support Marines in sling loading operations.**

## **Camp Pendleton, Calif. Vipers and Heavy Haulers Return Home from Deployment**

The Marines and Sailors of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 169 and Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 462, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), recently returned to their home stations of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Camp Pendleton and MCAS Miramar, Calif., respectively, after deploying in support of the Unit Deployment Program and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU).

The HMLA-169 “Vipers” and HMH-462 “Heavy Haulers” demonstrated adaptability and versatility by organizing their squadrons into elements for two different deployments each. The Heavy Haulers also attached the remaining third of their squadron to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 163, yielding a reinforced assault support squadron, which supported a bilateral exercise

and relief efforts in the Philippines this summer.

The Unit Deployment Program (UDP) enhances the United States’ forward presence and provides a consistent and rapid response capability. The program aims to maintain combat readiness, deter aggression and strengthen alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. UDP reinforces the Marine Corps’ ability to rapidly maneuver to key maritime terrain, establish resilient air command and control and generate aviation combat power from distributed locations. The 31st MEU is the Marine Corps’ only permanently forward-deployed MEU and is the nation’s expeditionary force in readiness in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Vipers’ UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z Viper aircraft and the Heavy Haulers’ CH-53E Super Stallions operated across the Indo-Pacific, demonstrating the operational reach of Marine aviation. They participated in exercises including Ma-

rine Aviation Support Activity, Talisman Sabre, Fuji Viper, Super Garuda Shield, and Korean Marine Exchange Program, and conducted training in Okinawa including a variety of flight operations and qualifications; maritime integration; and joint and Marine Air-Ground Task Force integration.

“The Vipers executed an aggressive campaign that emphasized distributed operations across the Indo-Pacific theater,” said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Duff, the commanding officer of HMLA-169. “We utilized strategic airlift, amphibious shipping and self-deploying detachments to support five bilateral exercises and enhance interoperability with our partners in the region.”

“Mobility is an identified challenge in the Western Pacific, specifically in the First Island Chain, that is crucial for the United States to promote regional stability and strengthen alliances with partner nations while in great power



**A Marine with Amphibious Reconnaissance Platoon, 31st MEU, gives the signal to begin rappelling during a fast rope exercise aboard the amphibious transport dock ship USS Green Bay (LPD-20) in the Pacific Ocean on Sept. 15, 2023. The training refined Marines' fast roping skills and prepared them for quick insertion into austere environments. (Photo by Sgt Marcos A. Alvarado, USMC)**

competition,” said LtCol Jonathan Bryant, CO of HMH-462. “Over the past seven months, the Marines and Sailors of HMH-462 met this challenge head-on by continuously demonstrating the Marine Corps’ ability to conduct long-range assault support and heavy lift operations for III MEF as the Stand-In-Force in INDOPACOM.”

Marines and assets from 3rd MAW, the largest wing in the Marine Corps, are constantly forward deployed in support of operations and training around the globe.

Maj Natalie Batcheler, USMC

**Twentynine Palms, Calif. The Combat Center Hosts Unmanned Force-on-Force Exercise Apollo Shield**

Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Twentynine Palms, Calif., assisted in Marine Corps modernization efforts by hosting Exercise Apollo Shield throughout the month of October.

Joint Training Exercise Apollo Shield represents the peak of the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab’s (MCWL) year-long, crawl-walk-run initiative to assess equipment capabilities and refine tactics, techniques, and procedures focusing on the use of Unmanned Systems (UxS). The



LCPL JUSTIN J. MARTY, USMC

**Cpl Jakob Santos, small unmanned aircraft systems operator with 3rd Bn, 4th Marines, 7th Marine Regiment (Rein), inspects an R80D Skyraider drone during Exercise Apollo Shield at MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms, Calif., on Oct. 19, 2023.**

Combat Center boasts unique training facilities ideal for equipment testing. Major Steven Atkinson, Robotics and Autonomy Branch Head, Science and Technology division of MCWL, explained that MCAGCC hosts the Infantry Battalion Experiment 2030 (IBX-30), 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, under the 7th Marine Regiment, the first unit to be outfitted with the groundbreaking equipment tested by MCWL.

IBX-30 is a deliberate and iterative service-level campaign plan designed to experiment with three different battalion staff constructs to assess the ideal makeup for the infantry battalion of the future. MCWL, Futures Directorate conducts experiments with the three designated battalions on specific warfighting functions. Focus areas include enhanced command and control, sensing, lethality, and sustainment to refine the design of the Infantry Battalion Experiment 2030.

On Oct. 21, 2023, MCWL conducted an unmanned logistics convoy using multiple autonomous unmanned ground vehicles to demonstrate the advanced autonomous capability of tactical vehicles and their valuable application on the battlefield. The MRZR, a lightweight tactical vehicle, and “Mission Master,”



Marines and civilians with Marine Corps Warfighting Lab conducted an unmanned convoy during Exercise Apollo Shield on Oct. 21, 2023. The convoy traveled 50 kilometers into the training area and back to demonstrate the advanced autonomous capability of tactical vehicles and their valuable application on the battlefield.

LCPL JOSHUA SIMMONDS, USMC



CPL JONATHAN WILLCOX, USMC

Above: LCpl Jeremiah Cottier, a rifleman with 3rd Bn, 4th Marines, 7th Marine Regiment (Rein), operates a radio agile integrated device (RAID) during Exercise Apollo Shield on Oct. 11, 2023. RAIDs allow Marines to control up to four different unmanned vehicles at once.

Right: LCpl Benjamin Hernandez, a rifleman with 3rd Bn, 4th Marines, 7th Marine Regiment (Rein), holds a drone 40 during Exercise Apollo Shield on Oct. 11, 2023. The drone 40 is a small, unmanned air surveillance drone that can also act as an indirect, remote-controlled grenade. (Photo by Cpl Jonathan Willcox, USMC)





**LCpl Hayden Frank, an infantry Marine with 3rd Bn, 4th Marines, 7th Marine Regiment (Rein), transports gear with a “Mission Master” unmanned ground vehicle during Exercise Apollo Shield on Oct. 11, 2023. The Mission Master is an autonomous vehicle that increases logistical flexibility. (Photo by Cpl Jonathan Willcox, USMC)**

an unmanned ground vehicle, conducted an autonomous unmanned convoy to execute several logistical movements throughout the training area. Unmanned convoys remove the burden on manpower commitment and a high-risk mission set from commanders.

“The success of the unmanned logistics convoy during Apollo Shield represents a pivotal stride in the Marine Corps’ pursuit of modernizing warfare,” said Atkinson. “These autonomous systems, combined with the integration of tools like the Radio Agile Integrated Device (RAID) plate, not only mitigates risks to the Marines, but also amplifies our force’s ability to respond to multifaceted operational demands rapidly and efficiently. It’s about seamlessly fusing the strengths of technology with the unmatched skills of our Marines to dominate the battlespace.”

The RAID Plate is a groundbreaking tool that permits Marines to simultaneously oversee and control several UxS with a single worn device, enhancing battlefield efficiency. Notably, it also features the capability to integrate third-party Artificial Intelligence solutions, increasing its versatility and ensuring

our forces remain at the forefront of technological advancements.

“Exercise Apollo Shield was an integral first step for IBX-30 experimentation for 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines,” mentioned Captain John Rees, Company Commander for “Kilo” Company, 3/4. “This exercise provided a glimpse of how the future infantry companies will fight. The use of unmanned and autonomous vehicles provides capabilities and options to the company commander to increase combat survivability. In addition, the ability to operate UAS on a single interface and push full motion video and position, location, and information to the squad and fireteam increases information which reduces decision-making time.”

Sgt Makayla Elizalde, USMC

### **Philippines Kamandag 7 Cements U.S.-Philippines Defense**

As part of the expansive Kamandag 7 exercise, Marines with Marine Rotational Force-Southeast Asia (MRF-SEA) and their Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) counterparts, 3rd Marine Brigade, forged a deeper alliance on the island of Palawan on Nov. 18, 2023.

As part of the broader bilateral exercise, subject matter expert exchanges on the island of Palawan highlighted the unique terrain of the island as a proving ground for interoperability and shared military objectives. The collaborative events encompassed a range of military expertise, from Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (SUAS) exercises along the picturesque coastlines, to jungle survival training and maritime sensing drills, integral for regional security.

“These exercises in maritime sensing and SUAS are more than just training—they are a gateway to enhancing our bilateral capabilities in real-world maritime security scenarios,” said Captain Philip Badrov, exercise force officer-in-charge with MRF-SEA, reflecting on the importance of the drills.

Taught by the Philippine Marines, jungle survival training tested and improved the adaptability of the U.S. Marines. The PMC showcased its deep-rooted jungle warfare expertise, sharing invaluable skills with its U.S. counterparts on constructing hasty shelters from the abundant natural resources, identifying and sourcing proper nutrition directly from the dense underbrush,

**Philippine Marines with 3rd Marine Brigade, Philippine Marine Corps, lead a period of instruction on tactical splints during a tactical casualty care subject matter expert exchange during Kamandag 7 at Marine Base Rodolfo Punsalang, Puerto Princesa, Palawan, Philippines, on Nov. 13, 2023.**



CPL SAVANNAH NORRIS, USMC

and demonstrating their minimalist approach to packing for operations in the unforgiving jungle.

Concurrently, medical teams from both nations engaged in exchanges, enriching each other's knowledge in trauma care and humanitarian assistance—key components of the allied forces' readiness for disaster response.

"We are situated in a very dynamic operating environment with vast and porous borders," said the Commandant of the Philippine Marines, Major General Arturo Rojas, emphasizing the symbiotic nature of the exercises. "We believe that engaging in exercises with our partners will help us achieve our goals not only for a safer and more secure Philippines but for the South East Asian Region as a whole."

KD7's focal point in Palawan illustrated the essence of the alliance—cooperation, skill, and mutual respect were on full display. "Our time here in Palawan has not only honed our skills, but also cemented our bonds with the Philippine Marines," said Lieutenant Colonel Steven Sprigg, the executive officer with MRF-SEA. "We stand together, not just in exercises but in our ongoing commitment to peace and stability in the region."

MRF-SEA is proud to have participated

in the Philippine-led exercise to enhance their capabilities through strengthened cooperation among participating forces and will continue supporting regional allies and partners in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

1stLt Charles T. Kimbrough, USMC

### **Miramar, Calif. Joint Digital Interoperability Showcased by USMC and U.S. Space Force**

In a demonstration of U.S. Marine Corps' evolving joint capabilities, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) showcased the compatibility of the Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) with CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd MAW, on Nov. 16, 2023. The technology showcase brought together U.S. Space Force Guardians with Space Systems Command (SSC), MUOS Program Office representatives and Marines from across 3rd MAW and I Marine Expeditionary Force.

The demonstration unfolded in line with SSC's commitment to generate a new and powerful unity of effort across space systems' mission areas, partners and joint forces. The participating teams discussed the use of space-based capabilities and

the direct operational support of MUOS with Marines and aircraft of 3rd MAW.

"The Space Force ensures the communications requirements of the Joint Force, including the U.S. Marine Corps, are met in a resilient and relevant manner for the tactical warfighter," said U.S. Space Force Major Kevin Champaigne, the deputy for ground modernization with Space Systems Command.

MUOS is a USSF narrowband military communications satellite system that supports a worldwide, multi-service population of users, providing increased communications capabilities to newer, smaller terminals. Since 2019, MUOS has supported users who require greater mobility, higher bit rates and improved operational availability.

"Narrowband satellite communication is often the only source of reach-back communications available to tactical warfighters once they are out of range of terrestrial-based communications, making it a critical enabler for operating around the world in austere environments," Champaigne said.

MUOS expands not only wide-range communication, but also the operational reach of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force in support of the Joint Force. MUOS's ability to provide beyond line-



**U.S. Space Force Guardians attend a Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) demonstration in a CH-53E Super Stallion from HMH-361, MAG-16, 3rd MAW, at MCAS Miramar, Calif., on Nov. 16, 2023. MUOS elevates Marine Corps warfighting capabilities by enhancing long-range communication and expanding the operational reach of the U.S. Armed Forces.**



CPL DANIEL CHILDS, USMC

**Right: Marines with 3rd MAW and I MEF, U.S. Space Force Guardians with Space Systems Command, and Mobile User Objective System Program Office personnel attend a MUOS presentation at MCAS Miramar, Calif., on Nov. 16, 2023.**

of-sight communications on the move offers a lifeline for mounted and dismounted forces in austere and contested environments across the globe.

The demonstration illustrated how MUOS allows Marines to talk and share data in two directions at the same time. This is vital when operating MUOS in an austere environment from Marine Corps aircraft, such as the CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter used in the demonstration. Additionally, the system helps manage the transmission of signals or information during communication and enables Marines to connect back to tactical networks, strategic networks and weapon systems from the field. This allows for quick updates and enables rapid decision making in the field or forward locations.

“Marine Corps aviation has done an outstanding job leveraging the adaptive acquisition framework to rapidly develop field capability solutions while keeping pace with the exponential acceleration of technological change across multiple



CPL DANIEL CHILDS, USMC

industries,” Champaigne said. “Benefits of MUOS will include cohesive support and operations of space-based system to meet service operational needs, resilience, and availability of space capabilities, and shorten the delivery of space-based systems and enhancements to deployed systems.”

MUOS has been operational and deployed into various theaters for several years. The MUOS demonstration at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar stands

as a testament to the collaborative efforts between the Marine Corps and U.S. Space Force. The event not only showcased the cutting-edge digital interoperability capabilities of MUOS and Marine Corps aviation, but also highlighted the commitment to advancing communication technologies to ensure the readiness and effectiveness of the joint force in future operations.

Cpl Daniel Childs, USMC



## Quantico, Va.



MSGT CLINTON FIRSTBROOK, USMC

### Marines Take Part in the Quantico 24-Hour Walk-Run

SSgt Rebecca Beltran, flanked by her 10-year-old Labrador retriever named Max, and Capt Joshua Blythe, celebrated their win at the second annual Quantico 24-Hour Walk-Run on Oct. 15, 2023. Blythe, currently serving with Marine Corps Systems Command, completed the event with 76.28 miles, and jokingly said he “wished it would have rained harder and was colder.” Beltran, currently with Marine Corps Embassy Security Group, participated in what would be her first ever long-distance race without any training, ultimately walking 36.62 miles. Beltran said she did not have a set goal but wanted to challenge herself and see if she “could go for all 24 hours straight.”

Multiple teams surpassed 100 miles, but the group officially recognized for completing the most came from the Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Branch of Marine Corps Air Facility Quantico. The five-person team, led by MSgt Justin Curl, rotated runners every 30 to 60 minutes to come in with 138.53 total miles, according to their GPS data. Curl said his Marines are already talking about participating next year.

More than 200 people attended the community event, which raised nearly \$3,000 for Semper Fi & America’s Fund.

MSGt Clinton Firstbrook, USMC

## New Orleans, La.

### Montford Point Marines Posthumously Awarded Congressional Gold Medal

Seven African American Marines originally from Louisiana were posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal on Nov. 13, 2023, for their service during World War II. Montford Point Marines Granville Alexander Sr., George A. Dupré Sr., Andrew J. LeBlanc, Nolan A. Marshall Sr., Melvin O. Parent Sr., Gilbert O. Smith Sr. and Lloyd B. Wills Sr. were honored at the gathering for their service to the nation and for their role in the advancement of civil rights. Of the approximately 20,000 men who earned the title Marine at Montford Point, many went on to serve honorably in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Those Marines opened the door and inspired thousands of Marines to follow their path.

In 2011, President Barack Obama signed a law authorizing the Congressional Gold Medal to be awarded to all Montford Point Marines, and about 3,500 of the 20,000 Montford Point Marines to date have been recognized. Despite many of the Montford Point Marines having died, the National Montford Point Marine Association, through its local chapters, continues to work to



CPL RYAN SCHMID, USMC

identify and recognize these Marines. With each award ceremony, the association continues its work to educate people on the history of Montford Point and the legacy of its Marines.

1stLt Gregory Dreibelbis, USMC



CPL RYAN SCHMID, USMC

San Diego, Calif.

### Three-War Veteran Honored at Age 97 With a USMC Helicopter Flight

On Veterans Day 2023, retired Marine Corps and Army veteran MAJ Billy Hall celebrated the 82nd anniversary of his graduation from Marine Corps Recruit Training with the Marines of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 267 during an honor flight over Camp Pendleton and Laguna Beach, Calif.

Hall and the Marines of HMLA-267 flew over Heisler Park in a UH-1Y Venom helicopter, waving at the crowd during the Laguna Beach Veterans Day celebration ceremony. Hall enlisted in the Marine Corps in August 1941 at 15 years old. As a Marine and Army officer, Hall has seen combat in three wars: World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

"The Marine Corps is the epitome of having the ability to do whatever is necessary, to move in and go wherever you are needed," Hall said. "It is the place to be."

The Marines of HMLA-267 volunteered to fly Hall for the Laguna Beach Veterans Day celebration to honor his service, legacy and dedication to the Corps, and as a tangible salute to the nation's heroes. At 97 years old, Hall is believed to be the last living veteran to have enlisted before Pearl Harbor and see combat action in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. He served his country from

1941 to 1967 and his awards include the Bronze Star, Combat Infantryman Badge, World War II Victory Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal, Korean Service Medal and Vietnam Service Medal.

2ndLt Madison Walls, USMC



SGT SEAN POTTER, USMC



SGT SEAN POTTER, USMC

**"Corps Connections" highlights the places and events through which active-duty and veteran Marines connect with one another, honor the traditions of the Corps and recognize the achievements of their fellow leathernecks. We welcome submissions of photos from events like the ones featured here. Send them to: *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or email them to [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org). Submission does not guarantee publication, and we cannot guarantee the return of photos.** 📷

**Marines with Co C, 5th Tank Battalion walk across the sands of Iwo Jima's Red Beach. Third platoon, led by 2ndLt Leonard Blake, joined the fight on Iwo Jima in support of 2nd Bn, 28th Marines. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)**



# TRAPPED:

## Marine Tankers Come to the Rescue On Iwo Jima

By Jonathan Bernstein

**T**he moment the bow doors opened, and the ramp dropped on LSM-44, Company C's tanks from the 5th Tank Battalion were on the move into the gritty black sand of Iwo Jima's Red Beach 2. There had been six tanks aboard—a mix of Headquarters' and 2nd and 3rd Platoons'—and they had been called on at 11:48 a.m. to hit the beach in support of 1st Battalion, 28th Marines.

Co C turned right as they disembarked, following the

beachmaster's directions to the safest egress point. However, the loose volcanic sand wreaked havoc on the tank tracks, and one of 3rd Plt's tanks threw a track as they headed up the beach. They were under mortar fire almost immediately, but the rise in the beach protected the crews from direct fire enough to enable them to dismount, drop their tanks' wading stacks and remove any waterproofing that might hinder them in the fight.

Co C, split evenly between LSM-43, -44 and -46, landed with 14 tanks, one tank dozer, two flame tanks and an M32 Recovery Vehicle. The company broke down into the Headquarters Plt with two tanks and the dozer, four line platoons with three tanks each, and two attached flame tanks, to be used wherever they were most needed. Second Lieutenant

Leonard Blake from Pennsylvania led 3rd Plt. His three tanks, "Jeannie," "Killer" and "Lucky," were all brand-new M4A3 Shermans, the Marine Corps' new standard tank which was making its combat debut on Iwo Jima. Jeannie, driven by 19-year-old



Corporal Leighton Willhite, would be the first from LSM-44 on the beach.

Issued to the battalion in October 1944, the new tank had better armor protection, better and safer internal ammunition stowage, and a gas-powered Ford V-8 engine that replaced the M4A2's twin diesel. In addition to these improvements, each company in the 5th Tank Battalion utilized materials on hand in Hawaii to better defend against Japanese magnetic and shaped charge antitank mines that had been encountered in previous campaigns. Co C's report outlines the basic modifications: "2-inch planking with a 2-inch air space between planks and hull were placed on sides of tanks. Drivers hatches had a frame welded to them which was covered with chicken wire. The hatches on the turret and the area around them had 10 penny nails welded to them so that they resembled a 'bed of nails.'"

Wooden planks were also mounted on the suspension, and corrugated sheet metal, cut into jagged patterns, was nailed to the upper edges of the hull-mounted planks, making it difficult and hazardous for enemy infantry to grab or climb onto the tank. The upper surface of the tank's hull was also covered in sandbags, held in place by chicken wire, to further deter magnetic mines from adhering flush to the hull.

Co C's mission was to support the 28th Marine Regiment's drive westward across the island to the western beaches before turning south and heading for the most significant terrain feature on the island: Mount Suribachi, code-named "Hot Rocks." With the infantry landing almost three hours prior to the tanks' arrival, they had already gained a foothold, with 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, leading the way and 2nd Bn deployed east of them, oriented to the south and Suribachi. The tanks were a welcome sight as they crested the beach and entered the fray.

**Above: Tank number 31 "Killer" leads a group of Marines from 1/28 against Japanese positions on Hill 362. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)**

**Right: 2ndLt Leonard Sokol assigned to 2nd Bn, 28th Marines, stands in front of Lt Blake's tank "Jeannie," on March 1, 1945. Sokol would be killed in combat two days later on Nishi Ridge. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)**



The tanks' 75 mm guns gave the 28th Marines a significant increase in firepower and a better means for taking out bunkers and machine-gun nests. Each tank carried 100 rounds of ammunition: 60 rounds of high-explosive M48; 30 rounds of armor-piercing, capped-tracer M61; and 10 rounds of white phosphorus. While the armor-piercing round did give Co C's crews the ability to penetrate concrete bunkers, it was the M48 high-explosive rounds that would see the highest rate of consumption in the assault on Suribachi.

With the whole company ashore, Co C's commander, Captain Edward Nelson, found the command post and spoke to the first sergeant, who was the senior surviving man. According



to Nelson, Marines of the 1/28 had reached their objective “but were pinned down and receiving heavy casualties from pillboxes and block houses bypassed in the attack.” He and the 1st Sgt agreed that the entire Tank Co would eliminate any enemy positions between the command post and the front lines. However, immediately after moving out, the tank column came under fire from a hidden 47mm antitank gun. Four tanks were hit before the gun was destroyed. Two of those tanks received penetrations through the front face of the turret on the right side of the gun shield.

In 3rd Plt, Sergeant Donald North’s tank, Killer, took two 47mm antitank rounds through the front of his turret, badly

wounding him and his gunner. They were lucky, though, because their tank was still functional, and they drove back to the assembly area where they could be tended to.

Moving the wounded out of harm’s way was critical. Because there was minimal cover anywhere on the island, crews using the tank’s upper hatches were exposed to enemy sniper and artillery fire; climbing onto a tank to get a wounded crew out was almost impossible. It was suicide to leave the tank through the upper hatches. As a result, all ingress and egress on the battalion’s tanks was routed through the bottom hatch for the entire campaign. Wounded crews in an immobilized tank would either have to be taken out through the bottom hatch

**Armed with a Thompson submachine gun, Lt Blake clears the side of the "Lucky," while Cpl Leighton Willhite keeps an eye out for the enemy.**



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

or wait for a recovery vehicle to move the tank to a safer area.

North and his gunner were on their way to a hospital ship by the next morning, while Killer was repaired by battalion maintenance. Since the tank had not burned, the armor was not compromised and could be repaired. The 47mm shell holes were patched, the fire control was repaired, and Killer returned to the front lines with a new commander and gunner two days later, bringing 3rd Plt back to full strength.

Over the next three days, 3rd Plt would be on Co C's right flank, supporting landing team 128's advance on Mount Suribachi, firing high explosives at targets on the mountain's slopes. By noon on D+4, Co C was sent back to the bivouac area for refueling, re-arming and maintenance. One of 3rd Plt's most intense actions came on March 1, when they were in support of 1st Bn, 28th Marines during the assault on Hill 362. Blake's three tanks approached a cave complex on the western side of Iwo Jima and attempted to engage Japanese forces. Platoon Sergeant Robert McIntire's tank, Lucky, was in the lead, with Jeannie behind and to the right. Killer and the flamethrower tank "Torch" followed closely behind. As they advanced, McIntire sighted a cave with several Japanese soldiers in it and moved his tank to engage. However, what he didn't see was the Japanese machine-gun emplacement dug into the ground ahead of his tank. When the tank drove over it, the roof collapsed, trapping the tank and its crew.

As the tank nosed down into the hole, Japanese infantry

swarmed out and onto the tank. Blake quickly grabbed the tank commander's override and slewed his tank's turret to engage the enemy infantry. Its coaxial .30-caliber machine gun killed a number of the Japanese soldiers climbing on McIntire's tank, but he and his crew were still trapped inside. They couldn't go out the bottom hatch because it would open right into the pillbox of more enemy soldiers. With the potential for Japanese soldiers on top of the tank or waiting just outside, hidden from Blake's view, McIntire realized his crew had no place to go. Grabbing the radio mike, McIntire called Blake for help.

Blake realized the only way to get McIntire and his crew out was to go over to the tank, climb on top, and let them know it was safe to come out. He turned to his crew and asked for two volunteers to accompany him and attempt the rescue. While initially no one volunteered, Corporal Willhite grabbed his .45 and said, "I'll go with you, Lieutenant."

The pair cautiously made their way over to the disabled tank, Blake moving left toward the rear of the tank and Willhite covering him. Neither knew how many Japanese soldiers were on the far side of the tank. A burst from Blake's Thompson killed three soldiers as he rounded the corner. Willhite covered him as Blake then climbed up onto the tank's hull and banged on the driver's hatch.

"Two Japanese came out of nowhere with their rifles and bayonets," Willhite recalled. "I shot them, but I don't know





**After safely extracting the crew trapped inside the “Lucky,” Lt Blake and PltSgt Robert McIntire devise a plan to safely remove both crews from the combat zone. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)**

if I killed them.” McIntire and his four Marines climbed out of the tank and rallied at its rear with Blake’s crew. They removed the gun’s breechblock and the critical radio components before abandoning the tank.

Meanwhile, Torch, their accompanying flame tank, moved up to cover the crew’s extraction. According to Torch’s commander, “The [enemy] dived into a shell hole and [that] is where they met their doom with our flame.” McIntire’s crew piled into Killer and Jeannie as the platoon pulled back to safety. McIntire took over as the commander of Killer, and 3rd Plt operated with two tanks until Lucky could be recovered. Because of the intensity of combat in the area—and the severity of how deeply Lucky was stuck in the hole—it would be a full three days before the tank was retrieved.

Third Plt and Co C continued to support both the 28th and 26th Marines as they pushed north on Iwo Jima’s west side. Three weeks after rescuing McIntire, Blake’s platoon was called upon to destroy an abandoned Co A tank so the Japanese couldn’t get any information from it. As they neared the target, Blake’s tank hit a mine, breaking the track and immobilizing them. His gunner quickly fired upon the abandoned tank,



## **Nails Sharpened Tank’s Defenses**

While the nails welded to the roofs of Co C’s turrets served to deter enemy infantry from climbing aboard, that was not their primary purpose. The armor on top of the tank’s turret is usually significantly thinner than that of the front or sides. In the case of the Sherman, the roof was roughly an inch thick, but in some areas, like hatches or optics, it was less so. The Japanese Type 99 antitank mine was designed specifically to punch through three-fourths of an inch of rolled homogenous steel armor. All a Japanese infantryman needed to do was throw one on top of the tank and allow the magnets to secure the mine flush with the turret’s roof. The explosive would do the rest. Two mines stacked together could almost double the explosive power and penetrate over an inch of armor.

However, if you could prevent the mine from landing flush against the top of the turret, it was possible to deflect most of the blast. So, while the nails prevented enemy soldiers from grabbing on to the top of the turret and damaging optics, the real purpose was to prevent magnetic mines from attaching to the turret surface and potentially put enough standoff distance between the mine and the turret that the blast would be ineffective.

Jonathan Bernstein



USMC

Flamethrower tanks provided assault support for Marines on the field during the heat of battle against enemy forces.



USCG

Many tanks like "Lucky" were put out of action on the first days of battle on Iwo Jima.

setting it ablaze, while another 3rd Plt tank crew hooked up their tow cables and prepared to pull Jeannie to safety. As they were leaving the area, a Japanese infantryman threw a satchel charge under the engine, knocking it out but not stopping the two tanks from making it back to friendly territory.

The battle officially ended five days later. After the battle, the entire 5th Marine Division returned to Hawaii for refitting and training for the invasion of Japan. The 5th Tank Battalion turned in their tanks to the depot on Oahu for maintenance and refurbishment. Blake and Willhite received the Silver Star and Bronze Star, respectively, for their heroic actions on Iwo Jima.

The after-action reviews from both 4th and 5th Tank Battalions, which had used the POA-CWS-H1 flame tanks like Torch, were unanimous in their comments that more flame tanks were required. The 4th and 5th Marine Division comments echoed those sentiments, and as a result, 72 tanks were pulled from existing stocks on Oahu to be converted into the new POA-CWS-H5 flame-thrower tank. This new variant was built on the existing M4A3, but unlike the eight POA-CWS-H1 tanks used on Iwo Jima, the new H5 mounted a flamethrower coaxially with the main gun. This was intended to give Marine tank crews the ability to engage with both the 75mm cannon and the flame thrower.

Jeannie was the 50th tank selected for this conversion, so in August 1945, the ammunition stowage bins under the turret floor were removed and two massive napalm storage tanks were added. The ammunition capacity for the main gun was reduced by 60%, retaining roughly 40 rounds. She would be ready for combat by the end of the month, but fortunately there would be no need for her further combat service.

Jeannie—or M4A3 serial number 49617—then returned to the States and made her way to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., where an attempt was made in the 1970s to preserve her. But because of a lack of funding, she was moved off into the woods in one of the 2nd Tank Battalion's training areas, where she remained until being rediscovered in 2000 and shipped to the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va., the following year. The tank remained in storage until 2020 when, due to a reduction in storage buildings, it was sent out on loan to the Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson, Ariz., where it currently sits. A curatorial visit by museum staff in June of 2023 identified the weld scarring patterns on the turret roof as unique to the 5th Tank Bn on Iwo Jima, and from there, research into the 5th Tank Bn and this tank's history was underway.

*Author's bio: Jonathan Bernstein is the arms and armor curator for the National Museum of the Marine Corps. Previously he was the director/curator of the Air Defense Artillery Museum. Bernstein began his museum career in 1991 at the USS Intrepid Sea Air & Space Museum and has served in numerous museum roles since then. He was an Army aviation officer, flying AH-64A and D Apache attack helicopters with the 1-104th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, PA NG from 2006-2012. He has published a number of books and articles on military and aviation history. He is the 2023 winner of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation Robert Debs Heintz Jr. Award.*



JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

**“Jeannie,” 3rd Platoon’s Tank 30, is currently located at the Pima Air and Space Museum in Tucson, Ariz. The National Museum of the Marine Corps is working on a restoration plan for the tank.**



JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

After landing with the sixth wave on Iwo Jima's Yellow Beach 2, SSgt Bob Cooke and Maj Bob Davidson's Marines of Headquarters Company duck for cover upon encountering heavy enemy fire. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)



# Bloodbath at the Blockhouse

## Marines Meet Massive Resistance On Iwo's Yellow Beach 2

By Steven D. McCloud

**I**t was 9:05 a.m., Feb. 19, 1945. First Lieutenant Charlie Ahern looked up with disgust at the enemy blockhouse overlooking the beach. “It didn’t seem to have a scratch on it,” he said later. As the executive officer of “Fox” Company, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines, he was positioned at the center of the company’s first wave of 132 Marines at Yellow Beach 2 on Iwo Jima. So was that blockhouse.

Ahern and his Marines had been told the island had been bombed for 72 days and that the Navy would have knocked out any enemy positions near the beach. “We had these cruisers and battleships out there point-blanking these things,” he explained. “It was not decommissioned whatsoever. It was firing to the left and right when our LVT landed. I could see the kids falling like pins in a bowling alley.”

The sector of beach happened to be

flanked by two Japanese blockhouses, 125 yards from each other, each housing 25mm automatic weapons and placing enfilading fire along the terrace. One lay precisely at the center of Fox Company’s half of Yellow Beach 2, the other at the company’s left flank. Landing between the two was the Platoon Sergeant Leo Kelley and the 2nd Platoon.

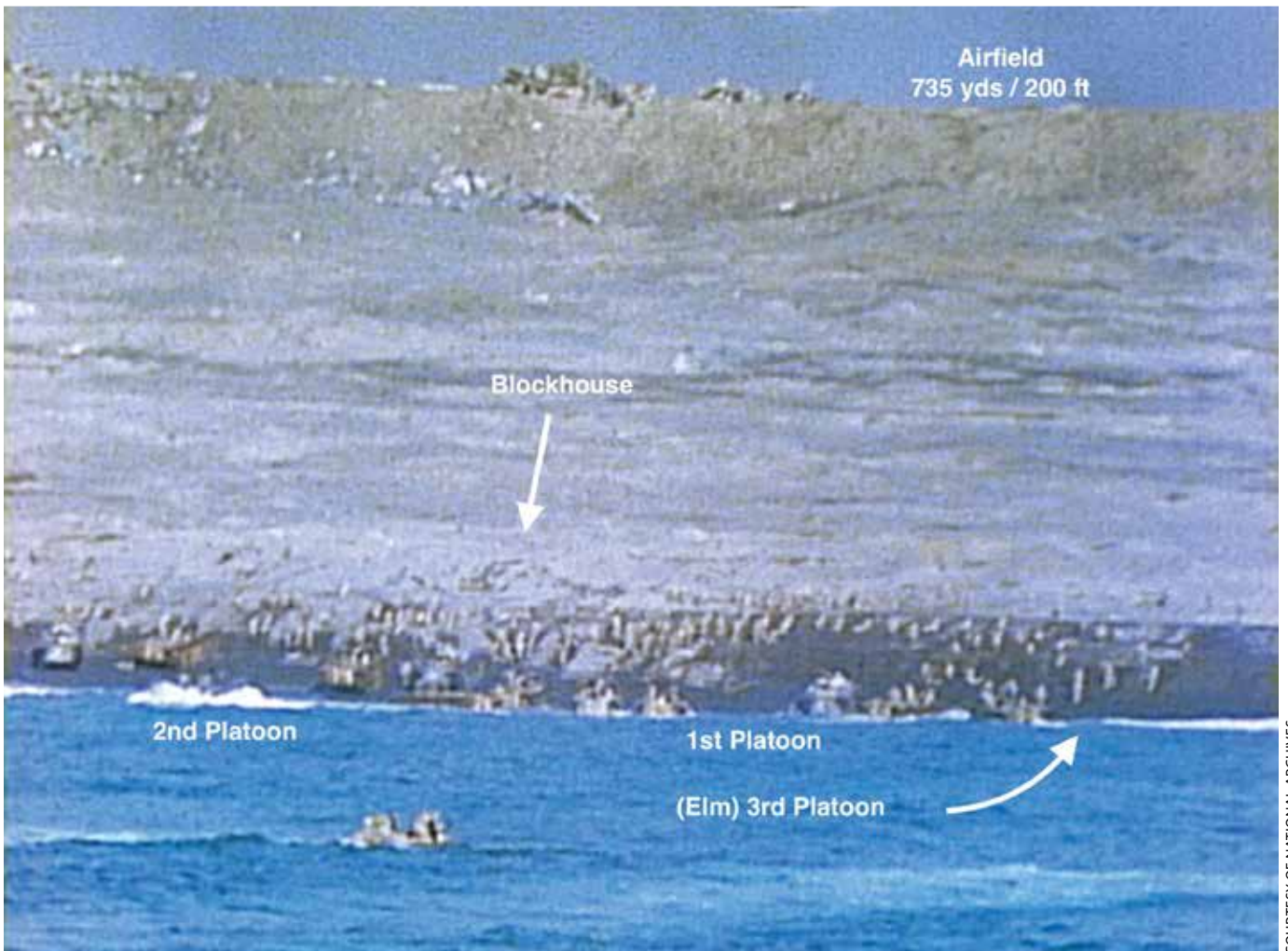
“Moose” Kelley was already on the move to get things going, his boots churning into the dark cinders as he clawed his way over the terrace and into the unknown beyond. Immediately, his Marines of the 2nd Plt heard an automatic weapon open up. Private First Class Addison Johnson was to Kelley’s left. “I remember looking up and I could see bits of helmet liner and rifle go flying in the air,” Johnson said.

Only a breath earlier, one of Fox Company’s most highly regarded and indomitable leaders was trying to get Fox Co into the fight. Now he was gone. Kelley

had spent only seconds alive on Iwo Jima.

Moments later, Fox Co’s commander, Captain Lawrence F. Snowden, arrived with the second wave and joined Ahern at the embankment. It was 9:10 a.m. The second wave had also brought ashore the 3rd Platoon. Much of that platoon fanned out to the right. PFC Don Swindle was one at the far end. There was substantial distance between him and any of the 25th Marines on his right.

Swindle, carrying the platoon’s bazooka, was a veteran of the pounding at Saipan. Beyond the embankment, enemy fire was sparse enough that he could hear distinct, scattered firing of individual machine guns. He had a replacement Marine with him, Private Charles Barth, who had only been with the company since Thanksgiving. Swindle knew they had to get off that beach and keep pushing. “We passed by a Fox Company unit that was held up on our left,” he recalled, “but we weren’t receiving too much fire at first.



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**A bird's-eye view of platoon movements of Fox Company, 2nd Bn, 23rd Marines after landing on Yellow Beach 2.**

So, we moved on up pretty quick. Before long we were beyond the rest of the lines, up there by ourselves for a while.”

Also ashore with the second wave were the company’s new flamethrower men who had joined Fox Company the same day as Barth. Crawling up to one of them, Snowden’s runner, Field Music First Class Eddie Davis, twisted the valves to bring the tanks to life. The first combat experience for the hastily trained Marine was to crawl up to the blockhouse and set it and its occupants ablaze. Fox Company moved forward.

Davis struggled over the embankment and to his feet. “We got up and started over and immediately the person on my left stepped on a landmine. All I saw was a poncho floating down. It was a tremendous, tremendous explosion.”

Marines slogged through the ankle-deep cinder to the nearest shell hole, then to another, covering the 100 yards to the next terrace, where they collapsed in exhaustion. It was 9:20 a.m. Behind them, Co G was ashore, along with battalion’s 81mm mortar platoon under 1st Lieutenant Henry “Buck” Finney. BLT 2/23 now tenuously occupied 10.3 acres

of Japanese homeland, part of the Tokyo Prefecture.

Now a deadly scythe of enemy machine-gun fire lay over that terrace. Except for those few who had moved up quickly, Captain Snowden’s company was held up by a line of invisible pillboxes. Two hundred yards to his left, Easy Co was in a similar predicament. Both commanders, Snowden and Major Lester Fought, radioed Maj Bob Davidson for tanks. At 9:27 a.m., Davidson made the call to regimental commander Colonel Walt Wensinger, requesting that tanks be landed immediately. Eight minutes later, they were on the way.

For 10 minutes, Davis watched with hope as LST 216, bringing half of Maj Robert Neiman’s tank company ashore, approached the beach under fire. Finally, it lowered its bow ramp right where Swindle and Barth had landed. He watched Neiman ease his tank downward and into Iwo’s black sands. Then his heart sank. “The first tank just buried itself,” he explained. “And I thought, ‘My god, what are we going to do now?’ ”

Neiman and his men struggled to free the tank for over a half-hour while the

Japanese strafed the vessel. Ultimately, he had to remove the breech block, lock up the tank, and leave it. Meanwhile, wounded Marines had crawled aboard the LSM. The skipper, Lieutenant Charles Haber, had to take them out to the hospital LST and return. The Marines ashore were on their own. They would need all the help they could get from Finney’s 81mm mortars.

The first of Finney’s four sections to get into action had opened fire at 9:40 a.m., just as Haber’s LSM touched shore. For the next 20 minutes, their single mortar tube searched for targets along the base of the airfield. It was all the fire support that Davidson’s Marines had until the others could get into action.

Third Platoon’s Don Milleson had raced up the company’s right “side. “After about an hour into this thing,” he explained, “I had hauled ass to get close to the airfield, and I was maybe half-way, but I was by myself. And off to my left I watched guys popping up. Well, somebody would cut loose and down they’d go.”

Determined to advance, the Marines had to find their way forward any way

**Marines with Fox Company push inland to reach an uphill airfield, more than 700 yards from the shore.**



they could, from one shell hole to the next. And they did so as individuals. “Staying in our own units was almost impossible,” explained Doc Raoul “Lou” Coulombe, a 2nd Battalion Corpsman. “You ended up all over the place, then tried to get back. They tell me that, for two days, I was with the 5th Marine Division.”

“There was nothing in the attack that kept them together,” explained Platoon Sergeant Sam Haddad. “I wouldn’t know, really, what a small team, two or three persons to my right, would be doing. My concentration was to get to that airfield.”

Marines called on every instinct for survival. Haddad avoided the larger shell holes, thinking they might indicate a fixed position that had been hit repeatedly. Johnson was more concerned with the number of a hole’s occupants. As hot as the fire had become, if he saw three or four Marines in a hole, he kept moving. “They’re not gonna fire at one guy,” he explained. “But you see a bunch of guys jump in that hole, there’s a target.”

By 11 a.m., many of Snowden’s Marines had made it 350 yards inland, almost halfway to the airfield. But the Japanese fire was building to an intensity none of them had ever witnessed. The advance came to a halt. Marines buried themselves into Iwo’s cinders as machine-

gun fire pinned them down and mortars and artillery shells pounded them. They could go nowhere.

At 11:40 a.m., Davidson radioed Wensinger again. “Please let us know time of arrival of tanks.” The colonel’s reply came 13 minutes later. They were trying to land on the opposite side of Yellow 2. It would be another unsuccessful attempt. Iwo’s ash and embankment simply would not let them ashore. One hour later, Wensinger radioed Davidson: “Unable land 4thTnkBn your beach. Landing Yellow 1.”

Somewhere out there in no-man’s land, Snowden and Gunny Harold Douglas were caught in the same shell hole while the Japanese pounded the area with mortars and artillery.

“They were really laying it on,” recalled the Gunny, “and we just lay there across from each other in that great big shell hole, curled up as low as we could get, just looking at each other through all of this pounding. The two of us were laying there making that same decision that all the other boys were having to make, and that was whether to stay there, or get up and try to get out of that fire. You just didn’t know which one was the right decision. But we both just stayed there.”

Davis lay low in a shell hole, with open

sky above him, listening to the full fury of weapons, both friendly and enemy, the likes of which he had never heard before. “It was like a symphony of death, if you want to call it that.”

“All you could do was lay there, recalled 1st Sergeant Pete Benavage. “To pick your head up or try to advance or something like that was just sure fire. So, we had to just wait it out. They really threw it at us.”

For four hours, Neiman and Haber struggled to find spot on the beach where the tanks could land and move inland. Though they would finally get ashore, they would never reach their brothers in 2/23 on D-day.

Finney’s 81mm teams struggled in vain to influence the situation. Then the Japanese destroyed two of his mortars and killed his executive officer and several other Marines. Finney hoped to get the battalion’s new rocket jeep into the fight. It never fired a shot before the Japanese knocked it out. The floating dump carrying his six 60mm mortars and ammunition was destroyed, and Iwo’s hammering surf clawed a third of his mortar ammunition back into the sea. And all four of the regiment’s 37mm guns were knocked out.

For the Marines, getting to that airfield



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**Cpl Allen O. Clark and other Marines lay low on the ground while under attack. The constant fire from Japanese artillery made climbing the hill toward the airfield an arduous task.**



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

meant no longer being alone. There was no path to follow. It was shell hole to shell hole and a lot of instinct, timing, guess work, and luck. Each man who made it, made it his own way, and ended up who-knew-where.

“Every now and then,” recalled Haddad, “when I would cross one of these fields of fire, I would feel the tug on my pack—actually the bullets going by—and not get wounded. And that’s the chance that everybody took.”

To lend renewed energy to the advance, Major General Clifton Cates ordered the 2nd Battalion 24th Marines to land and pass through Davidson’s BLT 2/23 and press the attack on the airfield. It was 4:55 p.m. But Davidson’s battalion had surged forward to 100 yards of the airfield and spent the next hour completing the advance. An hour later, he radioed Wensing: “F now on airfield not in contact with 1/25. E moving up.”

Irby Hipp was one of Fox Co’s machine-gun section leaders. He happened upon only one of his gunners, Dutch Wessner. The pair scurried right, along the base of the steep embankment, looking for the rest of the company. They failed to find anyone they recognized.

They were out of daylight and out of time. Wessner looked at his corporal.



USMC

**2ndLt Samuel Haddad**

“What do we do now?” Hipp was a veteran of three operations. “We dig in,” he replied. “They’re gonna counterattack and run our asses off this island. Do you want to die asleep or awake?”

PFC Mel Hammon, a 2nd Platoon BARman, huddled beneath the wing of a wrecked Japanese aircraft, burying his personal photos in the grit. “I didn’t want [the enemy] taking them as souvenirs. We had lost so many men and were disorganized, if the [enemy] counterattacked that night, I saw no way we could stop them.”

Snowden’s Fox Company had hit Iwo Jima’s shore with 235 Marines, tremendous training, firepower, strong leadership, experience and resolve. The battalion even brought along its own jeep fitted with a rocket launcher. After three operations and focused training, BLT 2/23 was “bringing a hammer” to Iwo Jima,

ready to take it to the enemy. It had all been undone. By dark, the survivors were scattered and intermingled all along the airfield, looking for their buddies and their units. The invasion had, in their view, been a disaster.

Some 80 Fox Company men were casualties. Nineteen of them lay lifeless somewhere out there in “no-man’s land.” Machine-gunners who represented 20% of the company roster, suffered 44% of the company’s casualties that day. Unlike the others, they had to stick together. Some wounded had made it back out to a ship and were under the care of ship’s medical staff. Others were lying on the beach close to a blockhouse, enduring continued mortar fire, praying to survive until daylight when they could be evacuated. Some were bandaged up and in the holes with their Fox Company brothers, gripping weapons and ready to fight for survival.

They were not alone in their assessment of their situation. The Task Force Intelligence team assessed the Japanese as fully capable of launching a heavy counterattack, supported by heavy artillery and mortar concentrations, and that they were most likely to do so.

The fight had only just begun.

*Author’s bio: Steven D. McCloud, is a leadership consultant and tour director, founder of Trident Leadership.com and author of “Black Dragon: The Experience of a Marine Rifle Company in the Central Pacific.” He also conducts PME’s and battlefield staff rides for corporate and government agencies.*

*He plans to lead a group back to the Pacific in June 2024 for the 80th anniversary commemoration of the Saipan-Tinian operations.* 🇺🇸



Marines with 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment, 3rd Marine Division march during the regiment's redesignation ceremony to 3rd MLR aboard Marine Corps Base Hawaii, March 3, 2022, in accordance with Force Design 2030. (Photo by Cpl Patrick King, USMC)

## 3rd MLR Paves the Way With Force Design 2030 Capabilities

By 1stLt Anne Pentaleri, USMC

In the summer of 2020, the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David H. Berger, introduced the Marine Corps to Force Design 2030, a 10-year plan to prepare the force to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations. The concept directed the transformation of traditional naval and expeditionary formations. The III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), headquartered in Okinawa, Japan, was identified as the ideal Fleet Marine Force for Force Design 2030's modernization efforts.

One such effort was the creation of the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR), a naval formation capable of conducting several

mission-sets that support and enable the joint force across multiple domains. The MLR would be able to execute stand-in force operations and provide 3rd Marine Division and III MEF with a mobile, low-signature, and persistent presence inside the adversary's weapons engagement zone.

In March 2022, Colonel Timothy S. Brady Jr., CO of 3rd MLR, presided over a redesignation ceremony on Marine Corps Base Hawaii, marking the transition of 3rd Marines, a traditional infantry regiment, to 3rd MLR—the first of its kind. Over the next year, 3rd MLR would adopt three subordinate battalions—3rd Littoral Combat Team, 3rd Littoral Logistics Battalion and 3rd Littoral Anti-Air Battalion. The unit's

unique construct was designed with potential adversaries in mind. 3rd Littoral Combat Team—redesignated from 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines—adopted Force Design 2030's restructuring of the infantry battalion. More lightweight and maneuverable than the legacy model, 3rd LCT adopted lessons learned from Infantry Battalion Experimentation 2030 and employs three rifle companies, a headquarters company and a medium-range missile battery. The 3rd Littoral Logistics Battalion—redesignated from Combat Logistics Battalion 3 under 3rd Marine Logistics Group—is organized and trained to provide 3rd MLR with tactical logistics and explosive ordnance disposal support. The reactivation of 3rd Littoral Anti-Air Battalion was a historic





**Left: On Range 410A at Twentynine Palms, Calif., on Feb. 7, 2023, 3rd MLR Marines participate in Marine Littoral Regiment Training Exercise (MLR-TE), a large-scale, service-level exercise designed to train, develop and experiment with the 3rd MLR as part of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force.**

**Below: U.S. Army and Marine Corps High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems assigned to 1st Battalion, 94th Field Artillery Regiment, and 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines, 3rd Marine Division conduct a combined arms live-fire exercise during Balikatan 22 at Colonel Ernesto Ravina Air Base, Tarlac, Philippines, March 31, 2022.**

CPL SCOTT ABUCHON, USMC



LCPL JONATHAN WILCOX, USMC

Marines with 3rd MLR prepare to disembark equipment from the USNS *City of Bismarck* (T-EPF-9) during a Force Design Integration Exercise at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Sept. 28, 2023. A Naval platform was employed to facilitate the expeditious transport of equipment to and from the Hawaiian Islands of Oahu and Kauai.



SGT PATRICK KING - USMC

Marines with the 3rd MLR Combat Team clear a room during a demolition urban operation exercise as part of MLR-TE at Twentynine Palms, Jan. 28, 2023.



CPL ERIC HUYNH, USMC

milestone, as the unit inherited the lineage of 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Battalion—a decorated unit with history dating back to World War II. While 3rd LAAB’s mission is not new to the Marine Corps, the unit’s alignment under 3rd MLR reflects the formation’s innovative way of employing air defense, air surveillance early warning, and air control to increase the commander’s overall battle space awareness.

Immediately following redesignation, 3rd MLR executed its inaugural deployment to the Philippines to train shoulder-to-shoulder with the Armed Forces of the Philippines during exercise Balikatan 22. The exercise tested 3rd MLR’s ability to command and control multiple expeditionary sites, while conducting distributed operations in an austere environment. Following its successful execution of Balikatan, 3rd MLR returned to Marine Corps Base Hawaii in time to establish a combat operations center in support of Rim of the Pacific 2022—the world’s largest international maritime exercise. RIMPAC culminated with a multinational amphibious demonstration during which 3rd MLR conducted a naval strike missile

raid in support of combined-joint maritime force maneuver—another first for the formation.

3rd MLR’s second joint training opportunity came in October of 2022, when the regiment deployed to various training locations around the island of Oahu to conduct stand-in force operations for the Army’s annual Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center exercise. JPMRC was key for 3rd MLR’s rehearsal of expeditionary advanced base operations prior to the Marine Littoral Regiment Training Exercise (MLR-TE), which took place in February of 2023 in Twentynine Palms, Calif. It was the first time the inaugural Marine Littoral Regiment operated as a Task Element under 3rdMarDiv, supporting sea control and denial objectives. By testing the unit’s employment of its “fight now” capabilities in a simulated combat environment, the exercise enabled 3rd MLR to refine its standard operating procedures and advanced operating concepts.

Upon its return from MLR-TE, 3rd MLR geared up for its second deployment to the Philippines for Balikatan 23. The regiment’s second iteration of the exercise marked 3rd MLR’s first overseas deploy-

**Below: A 3rd MLR Marine operates UAS technology during Marine Air-Ground Task Force Warfighting Exercise (MWX) 2-23, Twentynine Palms Calif., Feb. 23, 2023.**



CPL RYAN KENNELLY, USMC

As part of Exercise Noble Fury, 3rd Bn, 12th Marines prepare to launch a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System from Okinawa.



LCPL TYLER HARMON, USMC



CPL JERRY EDLIN, USMC

Marines with 3rd MLR extract a simulated casualty during Marine Littoral Regiment Training Exercise (MLR-TE) at Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow, Calif., Feb. 16, 2023.



Marines with 3rd MLR run toward a notional impact area during Force Design Integration Exercise on Dillingham Airfield, Hawaii, Sept. 27, 2023.

SGT JACQUELINE C. PARSONS, USMC

**Right: LCpl Paul Ruiz, left, and PFC Engel Ogandociprian, right, use the FIM-92 Stinger to notionally conduct short range air defense during Force Design Integration Exercise at Pacific Missile Range Facility, Barking Sands, Hawaii, Sept. 26, 2023. Through the demonstration of Force Design 2030-enabled capabilities, 3d MLR showcases the implementation of technology, doctrine and policy initiatives.**

ment as a fully-formed unit—the first iteration having taken place prior to the redesignation and realignment of 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines and Combat Logistics Battalion 3. The focus of Balikatan 23 was to bolster civil-military relations and enhance the collective security and defensive capabilities of the alliance. When 3rd MLR returned to the Philippines for Marine Aviation Support Activity 23 in July 2023, the regiment shifted focus to integrating into the command-and-control node of any unit in the Fleet Marine Force in support of Marine Air Ground Task Force operations alongside the Armed Forces of the Philippines. After demonstrating the ability to rapidly deliver tailored capabilities from the third island chain to the first island chain, the forward deployed Marines and Sailors of 3rd MLR made their way back to Marine Corps Base Hawaii to begin staff planning in support of exercise Pololu Strike. Pololu Strike gave the battalions one final opportunity to refine their training and readiness standards in a field environment before executing the cul-



LCPL MALIA SPARKS, USMC

minating exercise of fiscal year 2023—Force Design Integration Exercise.

Led by U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, Force Design Integration Exercise validated the concepts outlined in Force Design 2030 by integrating surface, sub-surface, ground, and air-based capabilities on and around the Hawaiian Islands of Oahu and Kauai. Through the successful execution of Force Design 2030-enabled capabilities, 3rd MLR allowed the force to understand the battle space, seize and hold key maritime terrain, and conduct reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance. The successful execution of Force Design Integration Exercise by 3rd MLR and participating units demonstrated the Pacific Marines' firm grasp

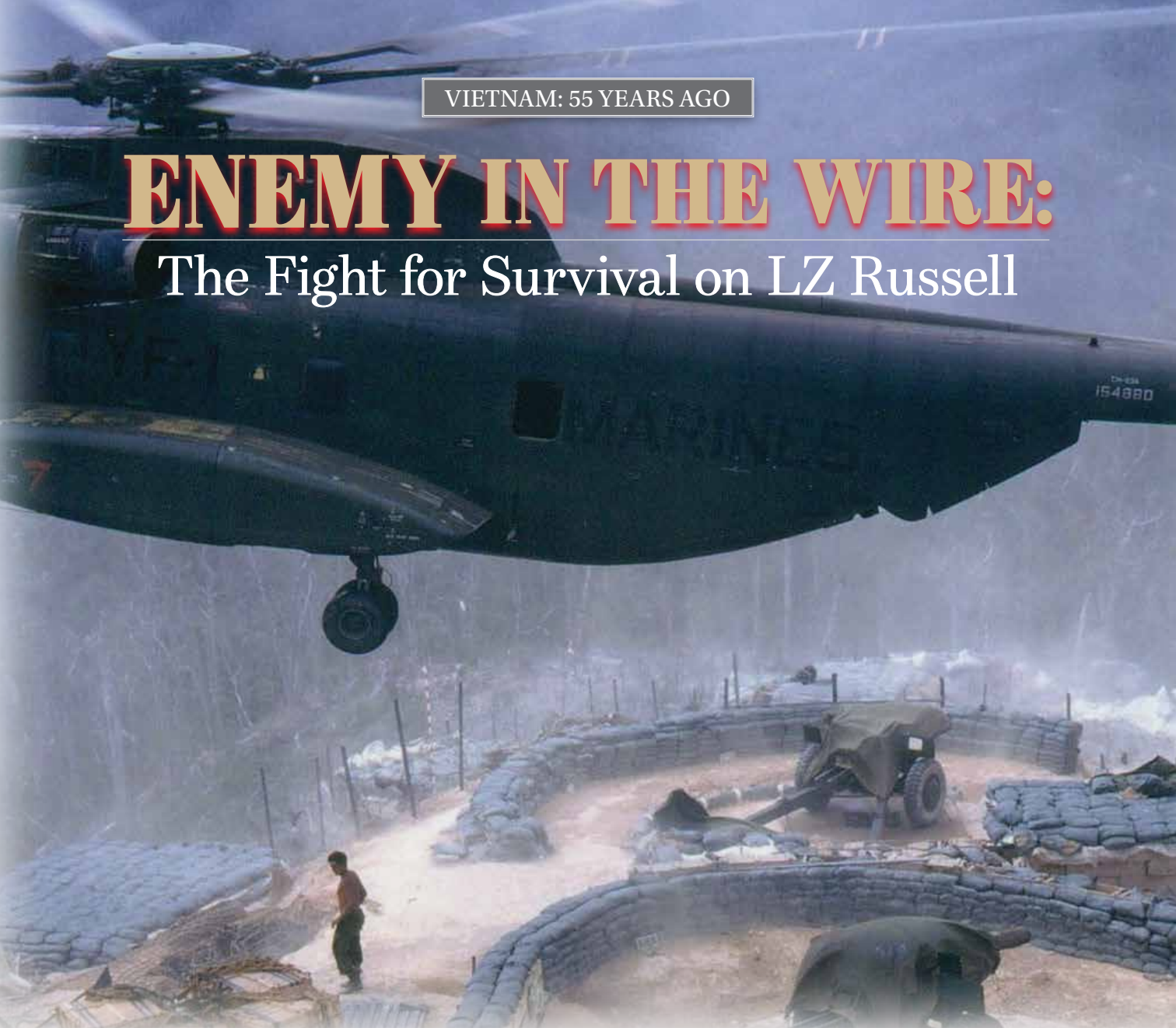
of Force Design 2030's operating concepts.

The formation's ability to conduct distributed operations while enabling the joint force is fundamental to the future employment of the Fleet Marine Force in the Indo-Pacific region. As 3rd MLR remained fit to serve the needs of its higher headquarters, 12th Marine Regiment prepared itself for redesignation. Based in Okinawa, Japan, the newly named 12th Marine Littoral Regiment activated on Nov. 15, 2023. The addition of a second Marine Littoral Regiment to the region will enhance the overall security of the Indo-Pacific, giving the Fleet Marine Force the ability to leverage the full spectrum of conflict in contested maritime domains. 🦁

VIETNAM: 55 YEARS AGO

# ENEMY IN THE WIRE:

## The Fight for Survival on LZ Russell



By Kyle Watts

**D**usk settled over the hilltop on Feb. 24, 1969. Lance Corporal Patrick “Mac” McWilliams examined the Marines assigned to him for listening post (LP) duty. All of them were green, recently arrived in country and shuttled out for their first stint in the bush. Mac’s four months in Vietnam made him an old salt in their eyes, with experience to help keep them alive. He previously spent time on the hill, and already acquainted himself with the menacing jungle beyond the perimeter. The grunts were exhausted from patrols over the last few days. Some in the company treated LP duty with complacency, despite the inherent danger being isolated outside the wire. Mac resolved to teach the new guys correctly. He passed out grenades and trip

flares and performed final checks. The four-man team proceeded down a finger, beyond the final defensive web of wire and into enemy territory.

Mac found a spot 100 yards into the jungle and set up the radio. Private First Class Dennis Gardner moved farther ahead to set up a trip flare across a trail.

“If that thing goes off, we need someone to throw the first grenade,” Mac said.

“I used to play quarterback,” Gardner told him. “I’ll do it.”

For Mac and numerous other veterans from “Echo” Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, their return to guard duty on the hill 10 days earlier proved apprehensive and unwelcome. In November 1968, their platoon scaled the mountainside to carve a remote base out of the Vietnamese jungle. They strung together C4 explosives and blew down trees in

the rough shape of a landing zone (LZ). Helicopters lifted in heavy moving equipment to finish off the stumps and flatten the crest. Marines dug fighting holes and constructed bunkers out of old ammo boxes while more choppers offloaded a battery of 105mm howitzers into newly constructed gun pits. The position, named LZ Russell, became the newest fire support base in a nexus of interlocking artillery. Multiple hilltops similar to Russell blanketed the jungle, covering infantry operations along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Since Russell’s establishment, nearly 300 Marines continuously occupied the hill. Mac’s platoon departed to fight in other battles along Mutter’s Ridge and near Con Thien shortly after the artillery pieces arrived. They returned to Russell for their turn on guard duty less than three months later.

**The Marines understood, without a doubt, that NVA soldiers broke through the perimeter and were already overrunning LZ Russell.**



LTCOL CHARLES PERRIGUEY, USMCR

**Above: An aerial view of the main landing zone at LZ Russell, with several howitzer gun pits extending down the finger of land. Note the sandbagged paths and bunkers built into the steep hill on either side of the flattened top.**

**Left: A CH-53 helicopter resupplies 105mm ammunition to the gun pits of Hotel Battery, 3/12, stationed at LZ Russell. (Photo by LtCol Charles Perriguet, USMCR)**

Six guns from “Hotel” Battery, 3/12, occupied the crest. They presented an attractive target for North Vietnamese Army (NVA) fire. The base sat in the remote northwestern corner of South Vietnam, a stone’s throw away from the DMZ and within view of the Laotian border. Daily ground operations in the vicinity generated fire missions around the clock. In the month of January 1969, the three 105mm batteries of 3/12 fired nearly 30,000 rounds. Totals from later months that year reached closer to 40,000 rounds.

Three gun pits surrounded the main LZ at the summit. The remaining three stretched out down a long finger protruding east. The entire position lay exposed to enemy view. Enemy soldiers probed the grunt perimeter and fired mortars sporadically around the hill, mapping

out Marine positions and registering their fires. By the end of February, platoons from Companies E and F, 2/4, and one platoon from Co K, 3/4, defended Russell’s perimeter around Hotel Battery.

Shortly after midnight on Feb. 25, a fire mission crackled to life from the radio. Fire Support Base (FSB) Neville, located just 5 miles west, called urgently for help. The voice on the other end reported the news most dreaded by Marines on an isolated hill; NVA sappers penetrated the wire and overran the base. Hotel Battery sprang to action. All six guns opened fire on pre-registered targets surrounding Neville. For three hours, the battery pounded Neville’s entire perimeter, firing over 300 rounds of high explosives or illumination. The artillerymen endured the work, many without even knowing what was happening on the

nearby outpost. To them, it was just another midnight fire mission.

The roaring howitzers kept Mac and his Marines awake at the LP. They rotated through radio watch as the hours passed and tried to sleep. Around 4 a.m., the fire mission ceased and the jungle fell quiet. Before their ears adjusted to the silence, without any warning, mortar rounds impacted behind them inside the perimeter at the top of the hill. Mac, Gardner, and the others bolted upright and clinched their rifles. A chorus of small arms fire punctuated the space between explosions. The Marines understood, without a doubt, that NVA soldiers broke through the perimeter and were already overrunning LZ Russell, even under their own mortar fire.

Mac tried to raise the command post (CP) but received no reply. He ordered

the others to grab their gear and move out. He figured their original position had been spotted and set up again near a large fallen tree. Gardner hit the deck, sheltered behind the uprooted base. The trip flare he placed earlier in the night suddenly ignited down the trail in front of him. A blinding light illuminated numerous NVA moving up the hill. Gardner pulled the pin on his grenade, cocked his arm back, and let it fly. The perfect toss landed on the trail and exploded amongst an enemy group. More unseen NVA opened fire in the LP's direction. The four Marines fired rapidly at sounds of movement in the surrounding jungle. Heavy impacts from a .50-caliber machine gun threw up dirt in mini explosions all around them. With nowhere to run and no one to help, the LP stayed put and fought for their lives. They were not alone in their plight, as the sounds of battle from the hilltop increased in a terrifying pitch.

Lance Corporal Bruce Brinke stood radio watch in the platoon CP bunker, having checked in with the LP throughout the night. When the howitzers ceased fire, the "Thoomp, thoomp, thoomp," of mortars in the distance resonated soon after. The first explosion struck right outside the bunker, with a second scoring a direct hit. Brinke and the other Marines inside dove for cover as explosions enveloped the hill. He landed halfway through the door of another adjacent room inside the bunker. A satchel charge flew through the open bunker door, falling next to Brinke's platoon commander, Second Lieutenant William Hunt. The bunker erupted in a ball of fire. Shrapnel ripped a large gash through Brinke's leg, but the wall of the adjacent room protected his upper half. He tried to move as the bunker burned and collapsed around him. In the chaos, he discovered the remains of Hunt, who absorbed much of the blast and died instantly.

Another Marine assisted Brinke outside the burning structure. As they exited, muzzle flashes pierced the darkness within inches of Brinke's face. An NVA sapper waited outside against the bunker wall within arm's reach. He unloaded on Brinke and his companion as they walked out. The two Marines fell back, hitting the ground outside the doorway. Miraculously, Brinke suffered only one



USMC



COURTESY OF ALVIN WINCHELL

**Above: Marines from Hotel Battery 3/12, fire their 105mm howitzer from LZ Russell. Around-the-clock missions kept the artillerymen busy, firing thousands of rounds per month.**

**Left: Cpl Alvin Winchell in his bunker, constructed of dirt-filled artillery ammo boxes, at LZ Russell. Winchell was one of numerous Marines from 2/4 that carved Russell out of the jungle in November 1968, then returned to guard the hill in February 1969. For his actions the night the LZ was overrun, Winchell received a Bronze Star with combat "V."**

gunshot in the arm near his shoulder. The other Marine was hit once in his leg. The enemy soldier scampered off to find his next victims, believing the two Marines were dead. Brinke lay bleeding from his wounds, waiting for another enemy to find him and finish the job.

Corporal Alvin Winchell took shelter in a fighting hole with his squad as the mortars impacted. A bunker nearby suddenly exploded and collapsed, burying six Marines inside. In the flashes of light, Winchell saw NVA sappers advancing

up the hill under the fire of their own mortars. Some of the enemy carried no weapons, but cradled explosive satchel charges in their arms and tossed them in each Marine bunker they passed. Winchell's platoon sergeant ordered him to move his squad down the hill to a breach in the wire where sappers streamed through. Winchell gathered his machine gun team and sprinted toward a bunker near the breach. He set up the gun on the roof and scanned for targets.

"You could only see shadows in the dark until somebody popped up a flare," Winchell remembered. "You don't know if it's a Marine or NVA, but it was just like ants coming up that hill."

The machine-gun team opened fire on the shadows swarming from the jungle. The rattle of violence filled the air behind

**"You could only see shadows in the dark until somebody popped up a flare," Winchell remembered.**

**"You don't know if it's a Marine or NVA, but it was just like ants coming up that hill."**



**LZ Russell occupied an exposed hilltop in the northwestern corner of South Vietnam. It sat less than 4 miles from the DMZ along the border with North Vietnam and within view of the Laotian border to the west. (Photo by LtCol Charles Perrigey, USMCR)**



**Marines from 2/4 fire an 81mm mortar from LZ Russell. Note how the hill disappears steeply downward just beyond the parapet wall, with the jungle nearby marking the edge of the perimeter.**

**“Hey Gunny Huk! Can you help me?” Brinke cried. “I need to get up!” Balignasay approached. ... He hastily triaged Brinke and saw that he would survive. ... “Sorry Marine, I can’t do anything more for you. I gotta go kill some NVA.”**

Winchell as the NVA overran LZ Russell and the battle devolved into utter chaos. Wounded and dying men screamed for help. American and Vietnamese weapons chattered back and forth. Darkness veiled the horrifying realities of hand-to-hand combat from a broader view. Through this phase of intensely personal killing, every Marine on the hill experienced his own unique version of the battle, and cemented in their minds the memories that would haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Numerous stories from the savage fighting that night later emerged. The overwhelming volume of simultaneous events, the darkness and the unmitigated confusion shrouded the details. Many of the Marines who inspired their legend are now gone. To many more, Feb. 25, 1969, remains a night too painful to discuss, even 55 years later. The stories that have come to light illuminate the ferocity of the battle, and how the actions of individual Marines across the hill turned the tide against the enemy.

As Brinke lay on the ground, after being blown up and shot outside his bunker, Gunnery Sergeant Pedro Balignasay

eventually passed by. By this point in his career, Balignasay earned renown as an old breed legend of the Corps. The Marines affectionately referred to him as, “Gunny Huk,” in honor of his Filipino roots. Born in the Philippines in 1927, Balignasay immigrated to the U.S. and enlisted in the Marine Corps. He served in WW II, Korea, and saw three combat deployments in Vietnam before he retired in 1973. He was widely known by the grunts of 2/4 for his weapon of choice, carried at all times; a Filipino bolo knife.

“Hey Gunny Huk! Can you help me?” Brinke cried. “I need to get up!”

Balignasay approached. He held his bolo knife in one hand and a shotgun in the other. He hastily triaged Brinke and saw that he would survive, and he lay in a covered position.

“Sorry Marine, I can’t do anything more for you. I gotta go kill some NVA.”

Balignasay’s Silver Star citation describes multiple times he was wounded that night as he roamed the hill directing uninjured Marines or helping move the wounded to cover. It alludes to his instrumental role in, “killing numerous enemy and successfully defending their



COURTESY OF ROBERT SKEELS

**GySgt Pedro Balignasay, Company Gunny for E/2/4, at LZ Russell. A three-war veteran and legend in his own time, he received a Silver Star for his actions on Feb. 25, 1969.**

position.” At least five of these enemy reportedly fell victim to Gunny Huk’s beloved bolo.

Captain Albert Hill, the Echo Co Commander, survived the initial barrage of mortars and satchel charges and entered the hand-to-hand clash over the hill. At one point, Hill pulled the pin on a grenade to hurl at an enemy. At that very moment, another NVA sapper rushed him. Hill locked into mortal combat, the live grenade still clutched in his hand.



LTCOL CHARLES PERRIGUEY, USMC

**In a glimpse from one Hotel Battery gun pit on LZ Russell, a friendly airstrike explodes on a nearby hill. NVA occupied the jungle surrounding LZ Russell, routinely harassing the Marines with mortars and small arms fire.**

**Right: LCpl Rick Davis in his bunker at LZ Russell. Davis took shelter in his bunker during the initial onslaught of Feb. 25, 1969, before exiting and discovering his gun pit overrun by NVA.**

**Below: Capt Albert Hill, Company Commander of E/2/4, at LZ Russell. He was one of many Marines intimately involved in the hand-to-hand fight over the hill on Feb. 25, 1969. For his actions, Hill received a Silver Star.**



COURTESY OF BOB SKEELS



COURTESY OF RICK DAVIS

Unable to let go, lest he blow himself up alongside the sapper, Hill prevailed over his foe and used the grenade like a rock in his hand to bludgeon the enemy to death. Like Balignasay, Hill received a Silver Star for his role in defending the hill.

LCpl Rick Davis served as an artilleryman with Hotel Battery. His reinforced bunker withstood multiple direct hits during mortar barrage, and a thick wool blanket hung across the doorway de-

flected satchel charges tossed by NVA sappers. The bombs detonated outside, disorienting the Marines, but leaving them unharmed. Davis searched the bunker for a rifle as an NVA officer boldly barked out orders from somewhere nearby. Davis and the other Marines pushed through the doorway with rifles ready. They killed several NVA outside their bunker as they moved a short distance over the parapet into their gun pit.

The enemy soldier shouting orders stood on the parapet wall. Davis fired several rounds into him. Another Marine shooting from the opposite direction fired into the soldier at the same time, and he fell dead. The Marines arranged in a small defensive position around the gun. Wounded men called out for help all around them. Amidst the explosions, gun fire, and hand-to-hand combat, Davis set out with the others to rescue them. They recovered several Marines, some lying wounded around their gun pits, others partially buried inside the collapsed bunkers.

When not preoccupied with beating back the NVA sappers, many like Davis undertook the enormous effort of saving the lives of their fellow Marines. Doc Rich Woy, a corpsman assigned to Brinke's 3rd platoon, found Brinke lying outside the bunker door where he fell.

**Typical bunkers constructed at LZ Russell and dug into the hillside. Tragically, numerous Marines died in bunkers such as these as NVA sappers demolished them with satchel charges once they penetrated the wire.**



LTCOL CHARLES PERRIGUEY, USMC



LTCOL CHARLES PERRIGUEY, USMC

**Looking up from a position down the hillside, a CH-46 prepares to land on top of LZ Russell.**

Woy bandaged his wounds before proceeding onto other patients.

“I could see Doc Woy working on one guy up by a mortar pit behind us,” said Winchell, recalling a scene from memory as his squad held the line. “Doc had a tube in his throat trying to keep him alive.”

Woy survived the same satchel charge that killed Hunt and wounded Brinke in the CP bunker. He extricated another platoon corpsman from the CP and moved him to safety near Winchell’s squad. From there, he worked his way up and down the hill treating wounded Marines. Eventually, he remained at the LZ triaging and loading critical patients on medevac choppers. For his tireless work, Woy received a Silver Star.

Many of the wounded lay trapped in bunkers, collapsed from the onslaught of satchel charges. Private Michael Harvey, a radio operator with 2/4, discovered two partially buried Marines. He worked

feverishly removing the heavy debris. A bullet pierced a nearby fuel drum, lighting it on fire. Without hesitation, Harvey threw himself across the wounded Marines as the drum exploded. His body shielded them from the resulting fireball. He died as a result of the injuries he sustained. For his incredible actions, Harvey was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Private First Class William Castillo, a mortarman with 2/4, freed several Marines from a bunker destroyed in the initial moments of the attack, then single-handedly returned to firing his mortar. Incoming rounds blew him off the tube twice, but he got up and returned each time to continue firing. When another bunker exploded and started burning, Castillo ran to the entryway and pressed ahead through a thick cloud of black smoke rolling out the door. He discovered five Marines inside, blinded by the smoke and in shock. Castillo led all five outside

to safety. He survived the night, and for his heroic actions, received the Navy Cross.

Winchell remained with his squad on the perimeter mowing down sappers as they appeared from the jungle. For his courage and leadership over his squad through the battle, Winchell received a Bronze Star with combat “V.” He heard a scream for help up the hill behind him. He moved toward the voice and found the severely wounded corpsman moved to safety by Doc Woy. In excruciating pain, the corpsman instructed Winchell to grab two morphine syrettes from his bag and inject them into his buttocks. Winchell administered the medication, then rubbed his finger in the Doc’s blood and drew a “M” on his forehead. A new and deafening roar of explosions suddenly split Winchell’s ears and lit up the jungle around him. Friendly artillery fire, similar to the barrage Hotel Battery provided for FSB Neville earlier in the night, began raining down.

“It sounded like a freight train coming in,” Winchell recalled. “They rang the hill all around the perimeter. Some landed inside. I looked at the corpsman and told him, ‘I think we’re f—ked.’”

Mac, Gardner and the others on the LP willed their bodies into the dirt through the barrage. Still outside the wire, they lay directly under the intended impact zone.

“It was raining hell fire!” said Gardner. “Arty was landing all around us. The ground shook, the darkness lit up, and shrapnel was flying from the explosions striking the trees. All we could do was hug the ground and hope a round didn’t land on top of us!”

After what seemed an eternity, dawn broke mercifully over the hilltop. The friendly barrage ceased, and the fight for LZ Russell trailed off. The only NVA remaining inside the wire lay dead. The rest vanished back into the jungle. The morning revealed the battle’s horrific aftermath. The enemy successfully disabled three of the six howitzers. Bunkers around the hill crumbled in ruins with screaming Marines trapped inside. American and Vietnamese bodies lay intermingled in a grotesque spectacle attesting to the savage combat. Unidentifiable body parts littered the hill, remnants of the many satchel charges employed by the sappers with devastating effect.

Miraculously, the four Marines on LP

**A bullet pierced a nearby fuel drum, lighting it on fire. Without hesitation, Harvey threw himself across the wounded Marines as the drum exploded. His body shielded them from the resulting fireball. He died as a result of the injuries he sustained.**

duty survived the night unscathed. They remained outside the wire waiting permission to reenter friendly lines, lest they be mistaken as enemy and gunned down. Their anxiety soared as they sat in the quiet jungle. The peace was broken by a lone Marine somewhere nearby up the hill, calling out to God for help. Finally, they received the all clear.

The body of an NVA sapper shot through the head greeted them as they passed through the wire. Almost immediately, Mac directed the others toward a collapsed bunker to retrieve the body of a Marine buried inside. Gardner discovered the bunker was his own, which he shared with three others. They moved sand bags and ammo boxes to create an entrance. Inside, Gardner found the remains of another Marine from his squad who was up for LP duty the previous night, but Gardner went in his place. He suffered the initial onslaught of survivor's guilt as he dug the Marine out and dragged

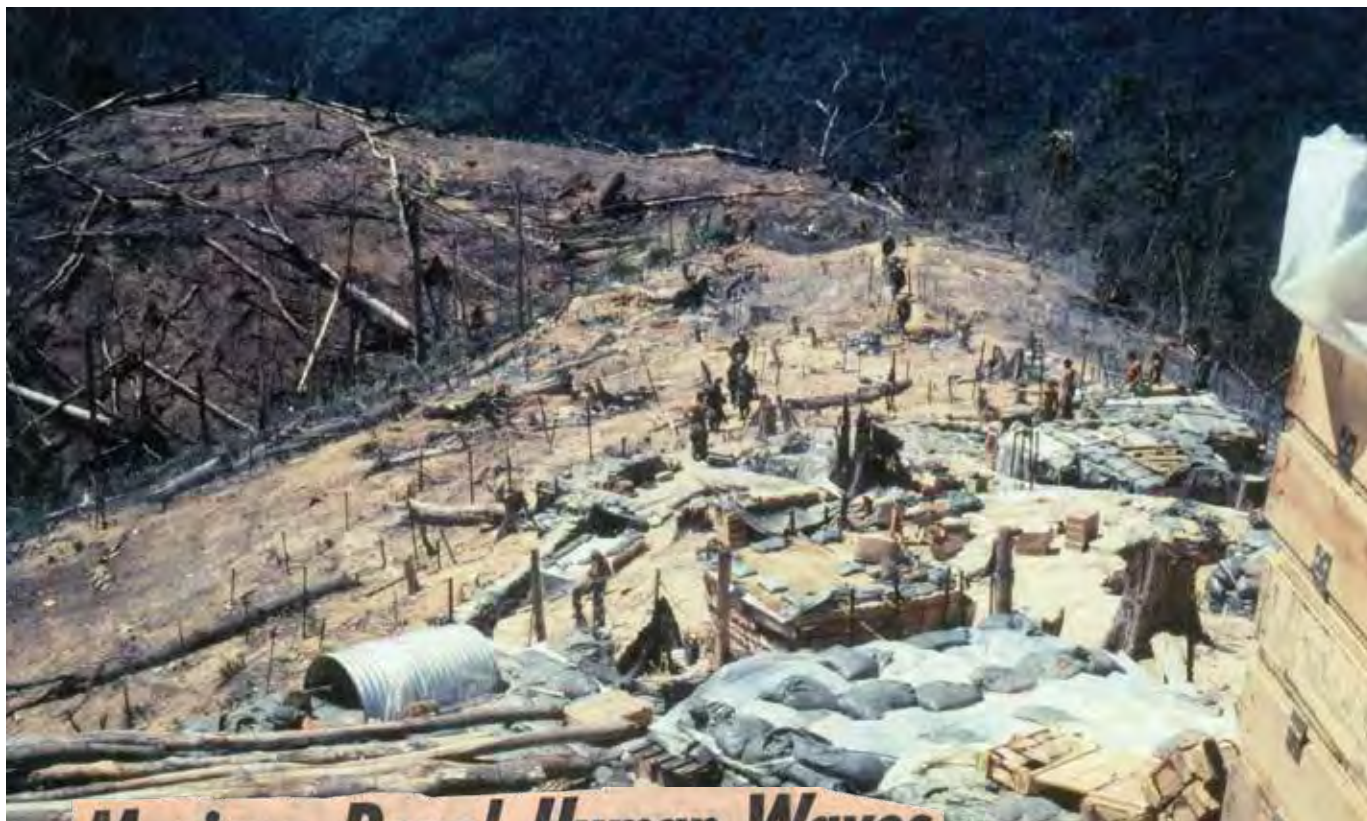
the body up the hill to the LZ for evacuation. His squad mate was the first dead body Gardner had ever touched. Afterwards, Gardner and the others continued from bunker to bunker carrying dead Marines to the top of the hill.

The LZ shrank as bodies collected near the crest. Dead Marines were lined up awaiting their turn for evacuation, with dead NVA stacked nearby. Marines and corpsman triaged the wounded for evacuation as helicopters trickled down through a thick haze that settled over the hill. Twenty-nine Marines and Navy corpsmen were dead. Nearly 80 more were wounded. Those who remained piled the enemy dead high on a cargo net in an unsuccessful attempt to lift them from the hill under the belly of a helicopter. Finally, Marines were forced to toss the bodies over the steepest side of the hill to be burned. The helicopter squadrons stretched thin as they simultaneously evacuated casualties from LZ Russell

and the fight at FSB Neville, where 14 died and almost 30 were wounded. In one night between the two hills, the price paid by the Marines and Navy corpsmen defending them amounted to 43 killed, and over 100 wounded.

In the weeks following Feb. 25, the infantry platoons that guarded the hill moved on quickly. In typical grunt fashion, no significant period of rest or reflection could be afforded. The Marines moved on to other hilltops, other jungles, other battles. For many, the experience at LZ Russell stood out as a defining moment of their time in combat and would forever dominate their dreams. In contrast, many artillerymen of Hotel Battery remained at LZ Russell through the spring and summer of 1969, daily reliving the fight they had all survived.

"I never slept after that night," said Rick Davis, who remained on the hill with Hotel Battery for several months after the attack. "I just never would have



LTCOL CHARLES PERRIGUEY, USMCR

## Marines Repel Human Waves

# RED SUICIDE ATTACK

Compiled From AP and UPI

SAIGON—North Vietnamese infantrymen, attacking behind suicide volunteers who turned themselves into human bombs, slashed into two U.S. Marine outposts near the Demilitarized Zone early Tuesday but were driven out in vicious hand-to-hand fighting.

A view of Marines entering the wire at LZ Russell, taken in the summer of 1969 after the base was overrun on Feb. 25. This headline ran in *Stars and Stripes* within a week after the attack, succinctly describing the horror the Marines faced.

COURTESY OF ROBERT SKEELS

**Survivors fought to move on from the battle. ...  
They fought for a return to normal life. ... Today, even  
five and a half decades later, they still face the demons  
of LZ Russell on a daily basis.**



COURTESY OF ALVIN WINCHELL

**Taken after dawn on the morning of Feb. 25, 1969, two Marines observe the body of a dead NVA soldier left inside the wire. These Marines and many other survivors endured the monumental task of evacuating their dead and wounded, removing the NVA bodies, and rebuilding LZ Russell to fight again.**

put it past the NVA to come back and try to finish off the rest of us. We got resupply of some new guns, new ammo, new people. There was a lot of work to do.”

Some Marines, like LCpl Ken Heins, spent nearly their entire 13-month deployment on the hill. During the battle, Heins was blown up inside his bunker and trapped after he blacked out. He came to after daybreak when Marines entered the ruins and rescued him. Other Marines inside with him reported that NVA soldiers had entered the bunker during the night and stolen items off them as they played dead. Miraculously unscathed, Heins stayed on the hill and helped rebuild some of the bunkers where his friends were killed or maimed. The artillerymen started carrying loaded rifles and grenades to defend themselves at a moment’s notice, rather than relying solely on the grunts for protection. The NVA continued probing the lines and

firing sporadically into the perimeter, but another assault like the night of Feb. 25 never materialized.

The battery fired thousands of rounds per month as the year wore on, staying busier than they had ever been. At one point, the work so thoroughly exhausted Heins that he slept uninterrupted through the awe-inspiring and earth-quaking devastation wrought by a nearby B-52 “arc light” bombing run. In September, the fire missions unexpectedly came to an abrupt and definitive halt. The Marines received orders to vacate the hill and destroy the base. Reasoning behind the decision failed to disseminate through the ranks. To a Marine like Heins, after spending his entire deployment on the hill, surviving the February assault, and grieving the friends he’d lost there, the abandonment of LZ Russell made all of it feel like a tragic waste.

Hotel Battery prepared their guns and equipment to be hauled out. Engineers

rigged explosives to all the bunkers and piled high the extra powder bags, fuel, ammo, and any other gear condemned to destruction. They drenched everything with gasoline in preparation for the great conflagration that would render the hill-top useless to the NVA. On Sept. 21, Heins loaded the last of his gear onto a helicopter and climbed aboard. LZ Russell shrank beneath him as the chopper ascended. Without warning, a massive explosion detonated on the LZ. Heins felt and heard the “BOOM” over the sound of the helicopter. A mushroom cloud expanded into the sky.

“Holy shit!” he yelled. “They just blew the hill up! They didn’t leave us much time to get the hell out of the way!”

When the chopper landed, Heins learned the explosion happened prematurely, and by accident. Reportedly, a Vietnamese Kit Carson Scout on the LZ flicked a burning cigarette butt into a pile of powder bags. The powder ignited, sparking a monumental chain of explosions. Two Marines and two Kit Carson Scouts perished. Numerous others were severely wounded. One Marine, PFC James W. Jackson Jr., was evacuated to a hospital in Quang Tri alongside the other wounded, but somehow mysteriously vanished from the emergency room. Investigators never discovered any evidence or sign of him, and to this day, Jackson is listed as missing in action, presumed dead. The victims of Sept. 21, 1969, marked the tragic ending to the existence of LZ Russell.

Survivors fought to move on from the battle. Other veterans from Vietnam or later wars who endured similarly horrific events are the only ones who can truly understand the struggle these men endured. They fought for a return to normal life. They fought for their families and fought for themselves. Today, even five and a half decades later, they still face the demons of LZ Russell on a daily basis. Tragically, a few of these veterans ended their own lives, becoming the last victims claimed by the long-forgotten hill.

“There are veterans from LZ Russell all around the country, and they are all wounded,” reflected Rick Davis. “They’ve been wounded for a lot of years, and everybody is on a mission to help everybody else. Everyone saw what happened that night in 100 different ways and has been affected differently. There have been divorces, people getting fired and losing everything they have, people getting sick, committing suicide, families left with questions. There was a lot of stuff going on, and it was a mess.

My buddies in arms,  
 So valiantly you fought.  
 So bravely you wore your armor,  
 You left me without a sound,  
 Yet now I hear your laughter,  
 And I look for you, but you're gone.  
 You were so young, and you were here for such  
 a short time.  
 Even now the whisper of your life haunts me,  
 and I walk through time as a  
 shallow sometimes empty man.  
 I've grown older, but  
 My presence is not present.



It is with you my friend who  
 died so long ago  
 with a gasp and eyes rolled back.  
 So why can't I feel? Because  
 my presence is not present.  
 My presence is with you.  
 You left me, and I never got to say good-bye  
 to my friend, my comrade in arms.  
 I'm searching, searching for you.  
 Let me touch the Wall where your name is,  
 and recall the face and the voice with a silly grin.  
 Let me reach out to touch you, instead  
 of a black granite slab.  
 I'm searching for you, and searching for me.

*Dennis Gardner*  
 Capt. MC7 USMC  
 1/11/96

Somebody had to pay the price for what happened that night. We've been paying it ever since."

In the late 1990s, a Marine from Hotel Battery named Skip Poindexter published a website in memory of LZ Russell. The site evolved into a repository of photographs and written memories of veterans who spent time on the hill. In August 2000, the LZ Russell Association was officially founded, with Heins as president. The organization scheduled the first reunion of LZ Russell veterans in Las Vegas. Marines gathered from around the country. For some, the initial excitement faded quickly as they sat face to face with other veterans, some of whom they had not seen since Feb. 25, 1969. For years, they buried memories that they hesitated to unearth. Old animosities between the artillery battery and the infantry units reared. The Marines spent their lives after Vietnam refusing to speak of the events with people who could never understand them, and now

suddenly faced the only ones who could. After a time, and with enough alcohol, the tension dissipated. The Marines pieced together the puzzle of the battle, filling in gaps for each other that had bothered them for years. More reunions took place, aiding greatly in the healing process. For numerous veterans of LZ Russell, however, attending the reunions and the passage of time remains inadequate, and they refuse to discuss the battle to this day.

Heins returned to Vietnam on several occasions in the years after the war. On five different trips, he scaled the old hill back to the top where LZ Russell once stood.

"Personally, I feel like half of me died up there."

In this sentiment, Heins is not alone. On two of his trips to the hill, Heins took with him the ashes of other LZ Russell survivors to spread on the hill. Their final wishes were to be reunited with their brothers lost there, and the part of their youth that never returned home.

"It is with you, my friend,  
 who died so long ago  
 with a gasp and eyes rolled back.  
 So why can't I feel?  
 Because my presence is not present.  
 My presence is with you...  
 I'm searching, searching for you.  
 Let me touch 'The Wall' where your  
 name is,  
 and recall the face and the voice with  
 a silly grin.  
 Let me reach out and touch you,  
 instead of a black granite slab.  
 I'm searching for you, and searching  
 for me."  
 (Poem by Dennis Gardner).

*Author's bio: Kyle Watts is the staff writer for Leatherneck. He served on active duty in the Marine Corps as a communications officer from 2009-2013. He is the 2019 winner of the Colonel Robert Debs Heintz Jr. Award for Marine Corps History. He lives in Richmond, Va., with his wife and three children.*



CPL CHANDLER STACY, USMC



CPL CHANDLER STACY, USMC

**An upgraded M252 81mm mortar training system on display (left and above) at the Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainers, Marine Corps Base Hawaii, on Aug. 25, 2023. Upgrades to the mortar ISMT will enhance simulated training by reducing firing errors and increasing the realism of the user's input to provide ultra-realistic feedback.**

## **MCB Hawaii Mortar Simulator Receives Upgrade**

Marine Corps Base Hawaii's Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainer (ISMT) enables Marines across the installation to maintain skills and proficiency with a variety of weapons systems without firing live ammunition. The ISMT is an interactive audio/visual weapons simulator that provides basic and enhanced marksmanship training, weapons employment training and tactical decision making for a variety of small arms and crew served weapons. Recently, mortar-men assigned to 3rd Marine Littoral



Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, conducted training using the newly upgraded M252 81 mm mortar ISMT. Upgrades to the mortar ISMT enhance the value of simulated training by reducing firing errors and increasing the realism of the user's inputs to provide ultra-realistic feedback.

"The upgrade we just got solved a lot of issues the legacy system had," said Marcellus Gilmer, the training systems liaison officer from Marine Corps Systems Command. "We upgraded the foot pads with these new anti-skid plates that allow the mortarman to adjust fires. We upgraded the base plate for a more snug fit so the system wouldn't slide around when they use it, and we increased the number of contact pins so that we would have less misses and less missed connections."

This innovative technology not only accelerates and expands the development of a Marine's skills, but also sustains unit readiness while Marines aren't deployed for training elsewhere like Twentynine Palms, Calif., or the Pohakuloa Training Area on the Big Island.

"Marine Corps Base Hawaii doesn't have the ability to live fire 81mm mortars," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Harry Taylor, the regimental gunner of the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment. "This system greatly enhances the ability for the Marines to continue to train and be combat ready on the 81mm mortar system."

Ultimately, Marines become more capable warfighters by using the ISMT. The live-virtual-constructive training environment is available around the clock, rain or shine.

"The purpose of this system is to allow the Marines to be able to maintain peak readiness at all times," said Taylor. "There's no weather restrictions, there's no range restrictions, there's no environmental restrictions. Marines can come in here anytime as long as they schedule it, allowing combat readiness to be at its peak."

Cpl Chandler Stacy, USMC

### **Military Medical Training Proves Lifesaving**

It was an ordinary Friday evening, Sept. 15, 2023, as Corporal Nicholas Christensen was driving back to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., chatting with his buddy Lance Corporal Ethan Feaster when suddenly a car turned left into traffic causing a horrific collision. Two of the motorcycle riders directly in front of Christensen's truck swerved to miss the car, and a third motorcycle rider attempted to avoid a collision, but it was unavoidable.



**Cpl Nicholas Christensen executes infantry maneuvers during a training exercise in Okinawa, Japan, in 2021. Christensen provided lifesaving medical care to a gravely injured Marine after a vehicle collision in Oceanside, Calif., on Sept. 15, 2023. (USMC photo)**

"I blocked the road with my truck and ran to him," said Christensen, field instructor with Weapons Field and Training Battalion. "I saw the rider was severely injured and ran to get my medical bag."

Christensen, primarily a machine-gunner, had gone through extensive military medical training that included the basic Combat Lifesaving Course and Tactical Combat Casualty Care and the more advanced course called Valkyrie, which teaches phlebotomy and transfusions. Due to his medical training, he had maintained a medical supply bag in his truck for the past two years but never had an occasion to use it.

"Thank God he had his medical bag," said Feaster, a Marine rifleman. "He really saved the day."

Christensen immediately began triaging the motorcycle rider. One of the other motorcycle riders, LCpl Ramyar Mohammedali, a land surveyor with 7th Engineer Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, ran over to assist. Christensen noticed the motorcycle rider had an eagle, globe and anchor on his jacket and assumed the rider was either an active-duty Marine or Marine veteran.

"We realized he was not breathing, so I took off his helmet to help open an airway and blood poured out," said Christensen. "We learned the motorcycle rider's name was Mike."

While holding Mike's head, Christensen turned him into a recovery position on the asphalt with the gash in his head facing upward to help stop the bleeding. It was at this time that Mike started breathing. Blood poured out of his mouth with every breath. Feaster held Mike's head as Christensen wrapped it with bandages. Christensen then moved to wrap and splint both of Mike's arms, which were mangled and shattered badly. Within about five minutes, local police arrived on the scene.

"We thought the police department officers would take over, but they didn't have medical supplies," said Feaster.

The police officers observed the situation and decided to let Christensen continue to take the lead on the care he was providing to Mike. Feaster continued to hold Mike's head as the Marines did not have a neck brace.

"I talked to Mike; I told him he is a fighter, and you are a Marine," said Christensen. "If I stopped talking to him, his breathing would slow."

Christensen said the medical training he received in the Marine Corps just kicked in. Christensen continued to stabilize and talk to Mike.

"It is pretty intense and remarkable what Christensen and Feaster did," said First Sergeant James Grunbacher, company first sergeant from Weapons Field and Training Battalion. "Fortunately

for that Marine, these two were there. If they wouldn't have been there, a very different outcome likely would have happened."

About 10 minutes after the collision, emergency medical systems arrived on the scene. As soon as they saw the situation, EMS personnel immediately called for a helicopter. Christensen briefed EMS personnel on the medical care he had provided, and EMS immediately lifted Mike onto a stretcher.

"I know when someone is airlifted it is never a good sign and there was a chance he may not make it," said Christensen.

Christensen said he typically traveled Interstate 5 back to Camp Pendleton when in town and never drove through the city. But this night, he drove through the city back to Pendleton.

"God puts you in the right place at the right time," said Christensen.

Christensen's actions demonstrate how all courses and training in the Marine Corps can be applied to everyday scenarios.

"If it wasn't for that medical kit and Cpl Christensen's expertise, we wouldn't know if he [Mike] was going to survive or not," said Mohammedali, who has visited Mike every day at the hospital and has kept Christensen updated daily. "It looked ugly."

Christensen's Marine Corps service is coming to an end this year. However, he envisions a future marked by continued service, with plans to attend the fire academy early next year and then pursue EMS training near Houston, Texas.

"Cpl Christensen is a true hero. He not only provided lifesaving aid but took charge of the situation and did so regardless of his own safety," said Mohammedali. "Cpl Christensen's actions saved the life of a Marine that evening."

Throughout Christensen's actions, he exemplified our Corps' values. His unwavering dedication exemplifies the caliber of individuals who proudly wear the eagle, globe and anchor. As Christensen moves forward with his life goals, his actions show limitless potential

for those who answer the call to serve and may inspire future Marine recruits.

SSgt Melissa Karnath, USMC

### Recruit Ties Marksmanship Record At Parris Island

Growing up in the suburbs of South Plainfield, N.J., Private First Class Francis J. Flannery decided early in life that the Marine Corps was going to be part of his future.

"The older I got, I realized that becoming a Marine was what I wanted more than anything else," said Flannery.

He arrived at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in August 2023 and was assigned to "Charlie" Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion. As he progressed through recruit training, Flannery's ambition led him to outperform his peers. So much so, his drill instructors assigned him the billet of squad leader, a leadership role designated to the four most qualified recruits in the platoon. Sergeant Bryan C. McGuigan, one of his drill instructors, described him



SGT EZEKIEL JAY CORREA, USMC

Sgt Juan C. Jimenez, left, was the primary marksmanship instructor in charge of teaching PFC Francis J. Flannery, right, the fundamentals of marksmanship at MCRD Parris Island, S.C., on Oct. 16, 2023. Flannery tied the record for the highest marksmanship score in depot history before graduating from boot camp last November.

**PFC Francis J. Flannery visited with his family during Family Day at MCRD Parris Island, S.C., on Nov. 8, 2023.**

as “an above average recruit ... able to retain knowledge quicker than most ...” and that extended to the shooting range.

Growing up in New Jersey, Flannery had never handled a firearm. His first time firing a rifle came during the second phase of recruit training as part of the company’s marksmanship course of fire. Sgt Juan C. Jimenez, a primary marksmanship instructor, was the Marine responsible for teaching Flannery the fundamentals of marksmanship. As a marksmanship instructor, Jimenez’s role was to instruct recruits on the proper maintenance and maneuver of a weapon, specifically the M16A4 Service Rifle. Aware that recruits share different experiences with firearms, Jimenez uses the fundamentals of combat marksmanship to instill the same discipline and shooting habits within all recruits.

“They see movie scenes of Marines kicking in doors and sending rounds downrange. But to get there, they have to first learn the fundamentals. So that they can do it fast, but right,” said Jimenez.

On qualification day, Flannery applied everything Jimenez taught him.



SGT EZEKIELJAY CORREA, USMC

Flannery shot one point shy of perfect, tying the depot record for the highest marksmanship score in the history of the base. Reflecting on his performance, Flannery said he was in disbelief.

“I guess when you do what you’re supposed to, you do it right. You do no more or no less, you get it perfect.”

Flannery graduated from recruit train-

ing in November 2023 and was awarded as the company high shooter. Flannery believes his achievements in recruit training exemplified the continuation of Marines upholding the Marine Corps reputation as the world’s most lethal fighting force.

Sgt Ezekieljay Correa, USMC



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# Creating Leaders and Leathernecks

## Young Marines Program Focuses on Community Service, Citizenship

By Abra Hogarth

**T**he philosophy of the Young Marines still resonates with today's youth—64 years after the organization's inception. In the last decade-plus, numerous Young Marines have gone on to serve in the Marine Corps, crediting their time participating in the leadership building nonprofit as the reason for serving their nation.

Lance Corporal Macie Ross was a Division Young Marine of the Year in 2019 and later, the honor graduate of her boot camp platoon. Currently serving as a combat photographer at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., Ross said her military career has been influenced by the time she spent in the Young Marines.

"Young Marines is a one-of-a-kind type of program," Ross said. "They teach us to honor our veterans, help our

communities, and to become a better version of yourself. We learn core values—leadership, teamwork, and discipline—which transfer to anything you do in your future."

Volunteerism and community service is at the heart of the Young Marines program. From a young age, the youth participants are exposed to events and experiences where they honor veterans and volunteer their time in their community. Young Marines participate in color guards, veteran appreciation events, community events, assist at food pantries and soup kitchens, help other nonprofit organizations and teach drug prevention and resistance classes in schools and religious organizations. Many units have created events that bring their communities together and raise awareness for the needs of their specific community.

The last few years have seen Young Marines participate in disaster response cleanups from tornadoes in Tennessee



Pyramid Rock Young Marines Commanding Officer LtCol John DiGiovanni, right, marches to the front during a graduation ceremony for Young Marine Recruit Platoon 2-14.

to hurricanes in Florida. Toys for Tots is a major element of community service in partnership with the Marine Corps League. Youth members helping other youth makes an amazing impression on the members.

Young Marines support Veterans Day and Memorial Day events around the country, visiting veterans in homes, mailing out cards, and helping pack gift boxes. At the national level, the Young Marines program supports the national Memorial Day parade in Washington, D.C., helping carry all the parade banners and other parade elements as needed.

Some of the other more notable annual events that Young Marines take part in include the Navajo Code Talker Day in Window Rock, Ariz., and the Pearl Harbor Remembrance Parade in Hawaii. In Arizona, Young Marines perform community service projects, participate in the parades and ceremonies and support the Code Talkers and their families where requested. A plankowner of the Pearl Harbor Remembrance Parade, Young Marine units across the country fundraise to come to Hawaii in December to be a part of the remembrance activities and the parade. They complete a community service project (usually a beach cleanup at MCB Kaneohe), perform their own memorial service at the Cemetery of the Pacific and support the annual parade by carrying banners and all the parade balloons.

At the end of each year, Young Marines support Wreaths Across America at national cemeteries across the country. These events have introduced Young Marines to veterans from World War II to the present, giving them firsthand knowledge of the service and sacrifices made on behalf of our country and others around the world. They have learned history from those who were there, including Hershel “Woody” Williams, who



LCpl Macie Ross

COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES

**“Young Marines is a one-of-a-kind type of program. They teach us to honor our veterans, help our communities, and to become a better version of yourself. We learn core values— leadership, teamwork, and discipline—which transfer to anything you do in your future.”**

**—LCpl Macie Ross**



COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES



COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES

**Above: National Executive Director of Young Marines, Col William “Bill” Davis, USMC (Ret), far left, and LCpl Macie Ross, right, with Young Marines at the National Leadership Academy.**

**Left: LCpl Macie Ross, a Marine combat photographer, speaks with members of Young Marines of the LCpl Caleb J. Powers unit. The Young Marines teach today’s youth valuable leadership skills.**



COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES

**SgtMaj Carlos A. Ruiz, the 20th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, meets with members of the Potomac River Young Marines unit at the Pentagon in December 2023. The Young Marines were there to accept the Fulcrum Shield Award for excellence in youth anti-drug programs.**

explained firsthand about the landings on Iwo Jima; Thomas Begay, who talked about becoming a Code Talker; and Pearl Harbor survivor Jack Holder, who talked about watching the enemy aircraft descend on them. These are lessons they will never forget.

“Although Young Marines is not an official recruiting program for the military, you are surrounded by Marines and veterans,” said Ross. “Their stories and attitudes towards the Marine Corps definitely influenced me into looking into the Corps. The Young Marines program also allowed me to explore my passion for photography through a public affairs ... course that I was able to attend. All of the people I met and the opportunities I had in this program is why I am a United States Marine.”

The Young Marines program began when a group of fathers wanted to encourage their children to be good citizens and role models for other youth. Many of these parents had served in the Marine Corps and wanted to use the values and experiences they had adopted from their time in service to make the world a better place. So, in 1959, the first Young Marines joined the program in Waterbury, Conn., where the Brass City Detachment of the Marine Corps League (MCL) took a huge interest in the program and has been a staunch supporter ever since.

In 1965 a member of the MCL Valley Detachment in Connecticut raised more than \$5,000 to fly an entire Young Marine unit to the MCL National Convention in Kansas City, Mo., where the MCL adopted the Young Marines as its national youth program. Though originally chartered as a subsidiary organization of the MCL, the program grew exponentially. In 1980, the Young Marines branched off and became its own

entity, with its own national non-profit 501(c) (3) status as a youth education and service program.

In the 1990s, Young Marines was competitively selected as the youth drug demand reduction (DDR) program for the Marine Corps, when each military service was tasked to have a similar program. Young Marines has continued and expanded the DDR mission to this day. In 2014, the Young Marines took its DDR efforts to the next level by launching a successful program called Closing the Gate on Drugs. The word “gate” links to “gateway drugs” which are tobacco, marijuana, prescription medication, inhalants, and alcohol.

This drug prevention and resistance program remains a positive, flourishing piece of the Young Marines program that has steered tens of thousands of young people away from drugs. Each Young Marine receives a minimum of 12 hours of DDR education and training each year to include using peer to peer education. Young Marines are consistently going out into their communities and sharing information about why it is important to live a healthy, drug-free lifestyle.

Young Marines start their leadership journey at entry-level recruit instruction. They learn the fundamentals of leading through drill and other opportunities to take the lead in daily activities or service events. As leadership is so important to the program, the Young Marines hold three specific leadership schools with a designated curriculum: Junior Leadership School or JLS, Senior Leadership School (SLS) and Advanced Leadership School (ALS). Successful completion of leadership schools is a requirement for promotion.

There is a National Leadership Academy that is typically

**“My time in the Young Marines helped to set me up as I grew into the adult I am today by teaching me how to think and make decisions for myself. Another great benefit is that I had many experiences working with a lot of different people from a lot of different backgrounds.”**  
**—LCpl Abbigail Waters**



held in the summer over a two-week period. Young Marines must qualify to attend and then learn strategies and skills that they take back to their units to put into use.

“Having had so much practice with bearing and drill really helped me make it through boot camp and thrive,” said Lance Corporal Abbigail Waters, who was the 2020-2021 National Young Marine of the Year and is now an aircraft mechanic at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. “My time in the Young Marines helped to set me up as I grew into the adult I am today by teaching me how to think and make decisions for myself. Another great benefit is that I had many experiences working

Camp Pendleton from 2010-2015. Lewis said his time in the Young Marines helped give him a leg up when he went into the Corps.

“I already knew that I was going to be a Marine because I was third generation, but the Young Marines program better prepared me for my military service. The program helped me to come out of my bubble. I was a very shy kid, and the program was instrumental in making me more outspoken and not afraid to be a leader. The Young Marines is the only youth organization that I can think of that gives the opportunities it does. No other youth organizations rival the Young Marines



**Before becoming an aircraft mechanic at MCAS Miramar, LCpl Abbigail Waters was in the Young Marines program and was the 2020-2021 National Young Marine of the Year.**

Participants with the Young Marines program collect debris during a beach cleanup at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Dec. 2, 2022, in commemoration of the 81st anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.



LCPL CHANDLER STACY, USMC



SGT TERRY RAJOMBATH, USMC

The Rhode Island National Guard hosted members of the Young Marines for an orientation and open house on Camp Fogarty. These Young Marines traversed an obstacle course, set up a rope bridge, and received an orientation flight in a Blackhawk helicopter.





COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES

**Left: Former Young Marines unit commander Devin Lewis, left, with Logan Nelson, the 2018 Young Marine of the Year.**

**Below: Devin Lewis participated in the Young Marines program before joining the Corps. Even after leaving active duty, Lewis continues to volunteer for the Young Marines program as the Arizona Grand Canyon Regiment Commander.**



Devin Lewis

COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES

**“The Young Marines program better prepared me for my military service. The program helped me to come out of my bubble. I was a very shy kid, and the program was instrumental in making me more outspoken and not afraid to be a leader.”—Devin Lewis**

when it comes to leadership, teamwork, and discipline. All three core values were important to me. I still use the Young Marines and the Marine Corps core values to this day; they help to remind me who I am and who I want to be.”

Lewis still carries on the Young Marine attitude of giving back and serving.

“I continue to volunteer with the Young Marines program,” Lewis said. “I was a Unit Commander of the Lewis & Clark Young Marines in Vancouver, Wash., from 2017-2022, and I am now the Arizona Grand Canyon Regiment Commander ... I look at it this way, the Young Marines gave me so many opportunities that I would have never had. So now that I am an adult, I want to give those same opportunities that I had back to the youth of today.”

Staff Sergeant Joseph Harding was a Young Marine with the Mid Cumberland Young Marines in Mt. Juliet, Tenn., from 2010 to 2016. He is still involved with the Young Marines as an adult volunteer with the Fall River Young Marine unit in Fall River, Mass., and previously, with the Cherry Point Young Marine unit in Havelock, N.C. Harding said he had many mentors from the Corps during his time as a Young Marine.

“These Marines taught us what it meant to truly be a Marine,” Harding said. “Being a Marine is about selfless service, giving back, steadfast commitment to our nation and its people, and that you are a Marine for life. This resonates with me daily. I wake up each day, knowing the shoes these gentlemen, and thousands of other Marines, have left are hard to fill. However, I do my best to live up to their legacy to honor their selfless service, steadfast commitment to our nation and its people, and to embody ‘Once a Marine, always a Marine.’”

The Young Marines is always looking to add youth mentors



COURTESY OF YOUNG MARINES

**Devin Lewis enlisted in the Marine Corps and was a heavy equipment operator with CLB-5 at Camp Pendleton, Calif. He now serves as a Border Patrol Agent for U.S. Customs and Border Protection.**

to the program. If you are interested in volunteering as an adult or have a young relative you think would benefit from the program, please visit [www.YoungMarines.org](http://www.YoungMarines.org).

*Author’s bio: Abra Hogarth is the director of strategic communications for the Young Marines and has worked in the communications field for over 25 years. She has a communications degree from George Mason University and has been writing articles and short stories her whole life.*

## SEA STORY OF THE MONTH

### A Duck Walking Drill

In 1955, I was a boot at Parris Island. One of our DIs was a corporal who proudly told us he had been a machine-gunner in Chesty's 1st Regiment in Chosin. One Sunday during our seventh week of boot camp, we completed a special drill before chow. We fell in and were told to march to chow and duck walk back while singing the "The Marines' Hymn." Contemplate that for a moment. We nearly ran ourselves to death. All sorts of things were yelled at us as we raced each other. Finally, we were told to halt! After chow, we went back to the barracks. The DI told us to remember this day. He said:

"You have just been put through what cannot be expected of anyone, but you got through it, at least to some extent. Learn this, as Marines you may be called upon to do things that most would consider foolish or crazy. You will do them to the absolute best of your ability, even unto death. Remember this drill. Think of it as a duck walk."

Now I am 85. I have often wished that there was a video of the event, so we could look back and laugh at ourselves.

Gary A. Greenough  
Mobile, Ala.

### Our Lips Are Sealed

It was late spring of 1970 with D/1/3 at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, which we affectionately referred to as "K-Bay." We were greeted in the company office one day by a newly arrived second lieutenant. He looked fresh out of

OCS. He was wearing wire-rimmed glasses and was in desperate need of a Marine haircut. I showed the lieutenant to the CO's office. The door was closed, but it wasn't difficult to overhear the CO's speech about proper attire and appearance. The lieutenant's face was red as he left the office, but he nonetheless did not hesitate to give us orders as to who would take care of the items

**He pointed to several crates and ordered us to put them in the jeep. We replied "Yes, sir." But we did not move. "What's holding you up, girls?" were his next words.**

on the list that the skipper gave him, such as a haircut, shoeshine, brass shining, positioning of his fire-watch ribbon, etc.

The following week we did qualifications at the rifle range. The lieutenant was directed to be the OIC of those of us who went to the range. K-Bay still had several concrete bunkers that most likely had been put in place, for protection and observation posts prior to World War II. The lieutenant hastened me to find the company jeep and driver. We had no idea what was in store for us. He directed us to one of the bunkers, which is where ordnance was kept. He pointed to several crates and ordered us to put them in the jeep.

We replied "Yes, sir." But we did not move.

"What's holding you up, girls?" were his next words.

We informed the lieutenant that we would rather not go near the crates because there was a scorpion sitting on top of the first crate. He looked at it and drew his .45-caliber pistol.

"I want you to know that I qualified expert with this baby. Watch me hit it!"

The driver and I double-timed out of the bunker. When he asked us where we were going, our answer was to ask the lieutenant if he really knew what he was attempting to do. He thought for a moment, looked at the crates and then holstered the pistol.

"I guess it's not a good idea to shoot the scorpion in here, is it?"

When we returned to the firing line, he took us aside. His only words were, "Please don't tell the skipper about this incident. There's \$20 in it for each of you if you stay mum."

We turned down the money and told him our lips were sealed. He chose to walk alone back to the company CP. The driver and I laughed all the way back to the barracks and enjoyed our evening. I smiled a few days later when I found a bottle of Jack Daniels had been placed under my bunk.

GySgt M.P. Gregor  
USMC/USMCR, 1968-1981  
Oak Park, Ill.

### Mismatching Gear Mishap

The first week of boot camp is always a busy time. That is when we pick up our uniforms, shoes, 782 gear, etc. Looking back, I wonder if sometimes the Marines passing out gear intentionally gave us the wrong gear knowing that it

would cause problems for some of us in the future. For example, every recruit was to be issued two pairs of boots or one pair of boots and one pair of low cut "clodhoppers" which couldn't be bloused.

I was issued two pairs of low cuts which meant I had to sew up my trousers which were about 4 inches too long. I was also issued a poncho which was badly torn, but I didn't know that until six weeks later when we were ordered to break them out. But the recruit in front of me in formation had a more serious problem when he was questioned as to why he was wearing two left boots. He responded that he had been issued four left boots. Was that an honest mistake? I'm inclined to think not!

SSgt Paul Gill  
USMC, 1964-1968  
Shippensburg, Pa.

### A Smelly Mine Removal

During the Vietnam War, the draft was reinstated. In order to enlist "warm bodies," the Secretary of Defense created a program called "Project One Hundred Thousand." The purpose of this program was to induct thousands of able-bodied men to fill the ranks. They were slow to learn and lacked the mentality to pass the tests required for entry into the various branches. As a combat engineer, I had a few that were assigned to my unit. During my second tour in 1969-1970, I was assigned to the 7th Engineer Battalion. We were situated on Hill No. 34, which was outside of Da Nang. As a sergeant, I oversaw a mine sweep team just south of the city. We were supported and billeted with the South Korean Marines,

and they provided security for our team. On the team was a Marine from South Carolina, who was one of the enlisted from Project One Hundred Thousand.

One morning, we were on the road “sweeping” and probing the road and came across a huge pile of water buffalo poop. We avoided the pile as it was a disgusting and smelly sight. Everyone but the South Carolina Marine passed the pile. He went over to the pile and said, “This here is the biggest pile that ever came out of any animal.”

He knelt next to the pile and removed the poop with his bare hands. Sure enough, there was an enemy made mine hidden there. He disarmed it and safely removed it. I was happy to have him on my team!

CWO-3 Jack Wing,  
USMC (Ret)  
Apopka, Fla.

### Boot Camp Culture Shock

You want to talk about culture shock? I was sworn into the Marine Corps on July 29, 1956, a few weeks shy of my 18th birthday, and I can say without reservation that nothing can prepare a young man for what soon followed. My dad had yelled at my sisters and me when necessary and had administered corporal punishment occasionally, but overall, I had always been treated with an adequate amount of respect and courtesy by family, friends, neighbors. I was certainly not prepared for the unrelenting, ferocious, calculated blast of profanity, and top-of-the-voice yelling that blew through our astonished ranks in those first couple months of boot camp.

The first few days after our arrival at MCRD San Diego, Calif., were spent drawing every piece of personal clothing and articles a young man would need; from hats to

boots, from underwear to a toothbrush, a comb, a razor and even stationery. We were poked, prodded, and injected many times with heaven knows what. The technicians, usually Navy corpsmen, were just doing their repetitious jobs. All in all, we were treated efficiently but impersonally; indifferently, but overall, civilly. Then we met our drill instructors.

All 75 of us, designated training platoon 2022, were lined up in what we assumed were ranks on the huge parade ground, “The Grinder,” in front of the receiving barracks. Looking back at it now, we were pathetic: new, never-washed dungarees, baggy still with storage creases and little white inspection stickers and not yet shrunk-to-fit. Ill-fitting caps, and pasty white faces. We had, of course, only the vaguest idea of the position of attention or how to snap a sharp left or right or about face and our vague ideas only made us nearly “Laurel and Hardy” bumbling. The DIs saluted the officer in charge of receiving barracks after he gave us over to

their tender mercies and waited patiently while he strode away. Now we were theirs. Now nothing stood between us and them and long training and tradition had prepared them well for this very moment.

We arrived, very intimidated, at the Quonset huts. The next few hours were just a confused jumble, but I do remember after getting our gear into the huts, we were ordered to line up in alphabetical order outside the center hut which was the DIs’ home and headquarters. My last name begins with “B,” so I was about third or fourth in line. One of the DIs showed us the proper and only acceptable way for a recruit to enter the duty hut. First, pounding firmly three times with the heel of our left fist on the wall next to the open door. We weren’t the first to learn this procedure. Upon the DI’s order to “get in here, turd,” we were to take one step into the hut, smartly remove our cover, slapping it against our right thigh, take three steps forward, stop, then a smart left face and a step forward to bring you up

in front of the duty desk. Then, at rigid attention with eyeballs straight ahead, you would say loudly “Sir, Private Bonkosky reporting as ordered, sir!” and await your orders. I remember exactly how to do this after 42 years.

Well, the line outside had formed off to the side of the door so we couldn’t see what was going on inside. The first poor guy tried to overcome his confusion and fear, banged the regulation three times on the wall and requested permission to enter. He stepped inside at the command. A terrible roar! He must have blown the one step, three steps, one step routine and he flew headfirst, three feet off the ground, back out the door. We were now thoroughly intimidated. No, no, we were just flat scared! What was that routine again? Ask the guy next to you; practice with him, quickly, quickly. They had us in exactly the state they wanted.

God, we were green! We would have to earn our way in, and they had very serious doubts about that ever, ever happening and they reminded us of that, both verbally and by their attitude, several times an hour. This attitude slowly changed as we became more militarily proficient and the men unable to adjust were weeded out.

Wayne Bonkosky  
Santa Rosa, Calif.



GYSGT CHARLES B. TYLER, USMC

**Recruits of platoons 186 and 187 at MCRD San Diego in 1961 stampede outside of their Quonset huts in response to the DIs yelling “Everybody outside on the double!”**

Do you have any interesting stories from your time in the Corps that will give our readers a good chuckle? We would love to hear them. Write them down (500 words or less) and send them to: Briesa Koch, *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or email them to [Leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:mca-marines.org). We offer \$25 or a one-year MCA membership for the “Sea Story of the Month.” 🦖

Navy corpsmen from 1st Medical Battalion assess a patient's simulated combat-related trauma aboard Camp Pendleton, July 29, 2016. Navy medical personnel participated in the exercise during the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab Marine Air-Ground Task Force Integrated Experiment that tested the capabilities of new deployable medical equipment and the control and resuscitative surgery in patients.



PFC NADIA J. STARK, USMC

## “IN THE BLOOD”: The Untold Story of the Life-Saving Invention of QuikClot

By Charles Barber

*Editor's note: This excerpt is adapted from the book “In the Blood: How Two Outsiders Solved a Centuries-Old Medical Mystery and Took on the U.S. Army” by Charles Barber, published by Grand Central Publishing. It's the story of how QuikClot helped solve the problem of bleeding out on the battlefield and has also gone on to save thousands of lives in civilian emergencies, as well. “In the Blood” is available for purchase on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/3GgvuN3>.*

Sometime in February 2002, Bart Gullong, an entrepreneur and inventor in Connecticut was on the phone with Navy Master Chief Thomas Eagles. Eagles was in his office at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory in Quantico, Va. Gullong and Eagles knew each other well: they had been working together for some time on developing a

portable oxygen system that was eventually deployed in a portable surgical center for wounded Marines on the battlefield.

On the phone that day, Eagles—or “Tommy” as everyone called him—was saying to Gullong, “I have this bullshit thing I have to do this week. The . . . brass want me to take part in the blood clotting trial. You know the military is always

looking out for the next thing to clot blood and these things never work . . . it is just a big waste of time . . .”

Indeed, by 2002, the entire American military was well into a 10-year long campaign to stem traumatic bleeding on the battlefield. The race to find the ultimate clotting agent had started after the “Black Hawk Down” conflict in Mogadishu in 1993, during which a number of Army Rangers had bled to death. Since then, the military had spent tens of millions of dollars to develop multiple techniques to stop bleeding: all of them expensive, sophisticated interventions created by distinguished Ph.D.s and medical doctors, many of them at the Army's Institute of Surgical Research.



SGT BOBBY YARBROUGH, USMC

**HM John Wheary treats a mock casualty during a riot control scenario at Fort Pickett, Va. Applying QuikClot is one of many techniques used to stop traumatic blood loss in combat zones.**

Gullong immediately interrupted Eagles. “You know Tommy, we might have something that clots blood,” he said.

Eagles snapped, “You’re doing a great job with the oxygen system. Don’t screw it up by chasing after the next thing. Don’t be like all these other contractors just trying to get on the gravy train . . .”

But a week later, Eagles called Gullong back. He said that one of the attendees in the upcoming trial had unexpectedly cancelled, and he could possibly get Gullong’s product on the docket—if Gullong was really sure he had something.

In truth, Gullong wasn’t actually sure he did have something. All he had was his business partner’s word for it. Gullong’s partner in Connecticut, Frank Hursey, had been tinkering for decades with a simple mineral called zeolite—a cheap inexpensive rock strip-mined in the American South—that he, and he alone, believed had the ability to clot blood. Twenty years earlier, in 1983, Hursey had bought a mouse at a pet store, opened it up, and applied ground-up zeolite into the wound. The mouse’s blood turned almost instantly into a Jell-O like substance, and the bleeding stopped. Hursey knew that zeolite was a perfect natural sieve, and his theory, which turned out to be correct, was that it would absorb the water in blood, but not the platelets and clotting factors. In this way, the body’s natural clotting process would be put on steroids. No one in human history, least of all trained doctors, had ever thought of such a thing. The mouse lived, scampering away in his backyard. But Hursey had

sat on his invention for decades. He was an engineer by trade, and a rather absent-minded one at that, and had a very limited ability to market his idea.

On the morning of the trial led by Eagles, Gullong flew from Connecticut to the Navy Hospital in Bethesda, Md. In the experiment, dozens of 150-pound swine were going to be cut in the femoral artery, a 100% fatal injury if left untreated. (The trial was in fact based on one of the fatal injuries in the Battle of Mogadishu.) Gullong watched nervously as the Navy surgeon poured a packet of

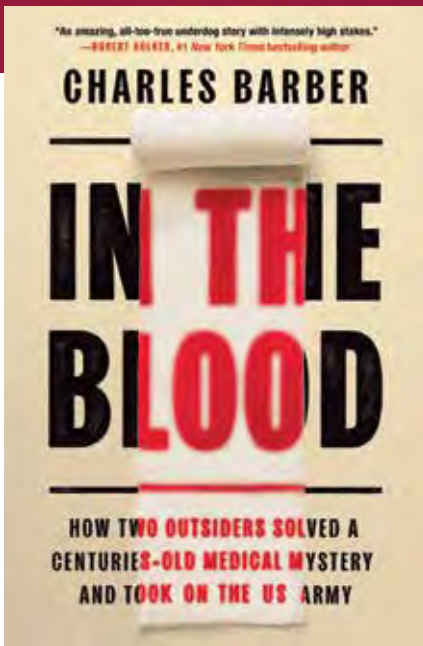
**All he had was his business partner’s word for it. Gullong’s partner in Connecticut, Frank Hursey, had been tinkering for decades with a simple mineral called zeolite ... that he ... believed had the ability to clot blood.**

ground-up zeolite—resembling kitty litter—into the massively gushing wound. He watched in amazement as the zeolite absorbed the water in blood with rapid speed, thickening the remaining liquid, and then creating a seal over the wound in a matter of minutes. Each of the six pigs treated with zeolite survived, whereas multiple pigs died when treated with every other agent that was evaluated in the trial.

Immediately after the trial, Eagles convinced the Commandant of the Marine Corps that zeolite, soon to be marketed as QuikClot, was “mission critical” to the war on terror. Everything about Gullong and Hursey was unusual, including how they had literally showed up at the last minute and had no scientific and military credentials. But if the Commandant needed convincing, Eagles was the perfect person to do it. At the Warfighting Lab, Eagles was in charge of the first



**Marines with HMM-361 assist in the medevac of wounded ground troops in Vietnam. HMCN Thomas Eagles served in Vietnam before helping to implement the use of QuikClot in the Marine Corps decades later. (Photo courtesy of Charles Barber)**



redesign of the individual first aid kit in decades, a role for which he was uniquely qualified. He flew on 221 combat missions in Vietnam and received three Purple Hearts and multiple Bronze Stars. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for helping to land a helicopter after the pilot had been killed. Eagles was shot on four separate occasions in Vietnam, once when he ran into an open field to save a wounded Vietnamese child.

Within six months the product was deployed in Iraq with Marines and Navy, and it immediately began saving lives.

But the Army fiercely resisted QuikClot.

The Army chose to deploy HemCon in the warzone, even though QuikClot had soundly defeated HemCon in the experiment. The HemCon company was co-led by a former Army doctor, and it had received \$70 million in Army and government funding. HemCon could clot blood under perfect conditions, but it proved impracticable in the field. It was a rigid bandage that often did not conform to actual battlefield injuries, which of course, by their very nature, are jagged and messy. Army medics soon, quite literally, were tossing HemCon away on to the desert sands of Iraq. Back at Quantico, Lieutenant Commander Joseph Dacorta, one of Eagles' colleagues, began fielding requests from Army medics to send them some QuikClot.

The Army also exploited QuikClot's one drawback: namely, that in the intensity of the liquid absorption process, the administration of QuikClot could cause heat, and at times burns in the surrounding flesh of the wound. However, in the risk-reward calculus of war—death or a burn—soldiers and Marines were picking the latter. The Army nonetheless jumped on the issue, telling Gullong and Hursey that they were “burning soldiers.” Gullong and Hursey never denied the fact that QuikClot could cause heat, but the issue was blown out of proportion. In a field study of 103 uses of QuikClot,

**They needed to find a product that didn't create any heat, and they also knew from their experience in combat that QuikClot was messy, requiring the loose granules of zeolite to be washed out of the wound after application.**

only three resulted in burns, and only one required significant treatment.

But still the Army resisted. After HemCon's failure, the Army went in yet another direction, adopting an obscure but very expensive injectable drug called Factor Seven. Factor Seven was approved by the FDA only to be used on hemophilia patients and cost \$5,000-\$10,000 for a single dose. The FDA warned that Factor Seven could cause strokes and heart attacks when used for purposes outside of hemophilia. Indeed, witnesses in the field reported on soldiers dying of heart attacks and strokes not long after administration of Factor Seven.

While these conflicts were transpiring, Eagles, along with Joseph Dacorta and



**There is no need to use a tourniquet or seek assistance from another person when applying QuikClot to a wound.**



PFC NADIA STARK, USMC

**A Navy corpsman from 1st Medical Battalion transports a victim of simulated combat-related trauma into the operating tent aboard Camp Pendleton in 2016. These exercises help test the capabilities of potential lifesaving technologies like QuikClot.**

Commander (and emergency surgeon) Timothy Coakley, who had used QuikClot in combat in Iraq, knew that the product needed improvement. They needed to find a product that didn't create any heat, and they also knew from their experience in combat that QuikClot was messy, requiring the loose granules of zeolite to be washed out of the wound after application. In 2008, the Office of Naval Research, working very closely with Gullong and Hursey, discovered that another mineral—kaolin—clotted blood just as well but caused no heat.

Thus QuikClot Combat Gauze was born, and in 2008, it was named 'the "hemostatic agent of choice" by the entire military, including the Army. Meanwhile HemCon was on its way to bankruptcy and Factor Seven was soon

at the center of federal lawsuit in which its manufacturer paid the Department of Justice a settlement of \$25 million. Gullong, Hursey, Eagles, Dacorta and Coakley had prevailed, and Gullong and Hursey, who once were barely getting by in a dismal industrial park in Connecticut, sold their company for \$200 million in 2012. Sadly, Eagles died from the effects of Agent Orange a few years later.

QuikClot is now standard issue in the first aid kits of all military personnel and many first responders around the world after an epic struggle to get there.

It was estimated that the Navy's budget for trauma medicine over the course of the Global War on Terror was about one tenth of that of the Army. But at the end of the day, it was the Navy and their Marines brethren that brought the life-saving

product to the war zone. In reflecting on the story, Dacorta (who was himself once a Navy corpsman) said, "When faced with an obstacle, a Marine will either go around it or through it. Or if that doesn't work, he will simply remove it." In the case of solving the age-old obstacle of traumatic bleeding, the Marines and Navy did all three.

*Author's bio: Charles Barber, a writer in residence at Wesleyan University and a lecturer in psychiatry at Yale, is the author of multiple books, including "In the Blood: How Two Outsiders Solved A Centuries-Old Medical Mystery and Took on the U.S. Army," from which this essay is adapted. "In the Blood" has been named one of the Best Books of 2023 So Far by Amazon.*

## VA Adds Three Vet Centers And Six Satellite Locations

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced the addition of three new Vet Centers and six Vet Center Outstations (smaller satellite locations) to improve access to counseling for veterans and servicemembers.

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services, including no-cost professional counseling to eligible veterans, servicemembers and their families. Services include counseling for needs such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and the psychological effects of military sexual trauma. Vet Centers also provide referrals to connect veterans with their VA health care or benefits. In fiscal year 2023, more than 115,000 veterans, servicemembers and their families received counseling at more than 300 Vet Centers nationwide.

“In 300 communities across the country, Vet Centers provide veterans, servicemembers and their families with quick and easy access to the mental health care they need,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “We’re expanding this program to make sure that these heroes get the support they so rightly deserve—no matter where they live.”

“Vet Centers provide veterans with high-quality counseling, community en-

gagement, and referral services in nearby and comfortable environments,” said VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal. “Expanding this program throughout the United States and its territories reaffirms our commitment to meeting veterans, servicemembers and their families where they are and improving the overall mental health and well-being of those who served.”

**“Vet Centers provide veterans with high-quality counseling, community engagement, and referral services in nearby and comfortable environments.”**

—Dr. Shereef Elnahal  
VA Under Secretary for Health

Vet Center counselors and outreach staff, many of whom are veterans themselves, are experienced and prepared to discuss the tragedies of war, loss, grief and transition after trauma. Vet Center teams proactively work in the community, reducing barriers to care and improving access to care.

The newly approved Vet Centers and Vet Center Outstations are the Sierra

Vista Vet Center Outstation, in Arizona with an anticipated opening date in 2024; Solano County Vet Center Outstation, Fairfield, Calif., anticipated to open in early 2024; St. Cloud Vet Center Outstation, in St. Cloud, Minn., is anticipated to open at the beginning of 2024; Vine-land Vet Center Outstation, with the anticipated opening date to be determined; Clarksville (Tennessee) Vet Center, where the current Clarksville Vet Center Outstation will convert to a full-sized, independent Vet Center; Fredericksburg Vet Center, in Virginia, with the anticipated opening date to be determined; Leesburg (Virginia) Vet Center Outstation, with the anticipated opening date to be determined; U.S. Virgin Islands Vet Center, where the current St. Thomas Vet Center Outstation will convert to a full-sized, independent Vet Center located in St. Thomas, is planned to open by early summer 2024; and the Saipan (Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands) Vet Center Outstation, with the anticipated opening date to be determined.

In the coming years, VA will continue to expand the Vet Center program to meet veteran demand and provide local support to those who served. To locate and connect to a Vet Center nearest you, visit the Vet Center directory.

VA News







COURTESY OF TUN TAVERN FOUNDATION

### Foundation Unveils Plan To Rebuild Corps' Birthplace

The Tun Tavern Legacy Foundation is rebuilding one of the nation's most historic destinations. The Tun™ is scheduled to open in November 2025, coinciding with the Navy and Marine Corps 250th Homecoming Celebration in Philadelphia. A groundbreaking ceremony is planned for November 2024.

The Tun Tavern Legacy Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to rebuild and re-establish The Tun. The foundation needs to raise \$19 million to complete the project. When completed, it will serve as a functioning tavern reminiscent of the colonial Philadelphia mariners' tavern that it was, serving period-influenced refreshments, food, and entertainment while offering an educational experience through exhibits, historical documents, and special events. The new location will be approximately 250 yards from the original site, in the heart of Philadelphia's "Old City" district. Many organizations whose history began at The Tun, such as the United States Marines (1775), Pennsylvania, Freemasons (1731), St. Andrew's Society (1747), Society of St. George (1729), The Friendly, Sons of St. Patrick (1771), United States Navy (1775) are involved in re-establishing The Tun in Philadelphia to

support veteran causes, Shriner's Hospitals, educational scholarships, and qualified charities.

Several attempts have been made to rebuild the Tun since it was razed in 1781, however this is the first time that a coalition of members of the organizations with a heritage at The Tun are joining together in the effort. The Foundation aims to rebuild the building while commemorating the architecture, materials, and layout as it existed in the 1770s to offer a homecoming place for the millions of Americans who can trace their organization's lineage back to this one tavern.

Donations will be used to rebuild the Tun Tavern, Peg Mullan's Beefsteak Club, a museum, and Tun Alley. All profits from operations of The Tun will be donated in perpetuity to support veteran causes, Masonic charities, educational scholarships, and qualified charities as determined by The Tun Tavern Legacy Foundation's independent Board of Directors. Marines of all ranks and statuses can participate in the rebuild of the Tun through donations with gifts, volunteering for the "Tun Militia," or helping spread the word about The Tun to fellow Marines.

"It will undoubtedly be a destination for Marines, Freemasons, military historians, and history buffs. Significant

**An artist's rendering of the rebuilt Tun Tavern, scheduled to open in Philadelphia, Pa., in November 2025.**



events in American history occurred at The Tun, and these events as well as the story of the tavern, the men & women who operated it, and the stories of the organizations with a heritage at The Tun will be shared with visitors" said Patrick Dailey, Chair of the Tun Tavern Legacy Foundation and veteran Marine.

To learn more, contribute or volunteer, visit [www.thetun.org](http://www.thetun.org).

Tun Tavern Foundation 

# Crafting Fiction Out of Real-Life War Tales

By Ray Elliott

**G**rowing up in a farming village in southeastern Illinois in the post-World War II period, I was surrounded by veterans who had served and fought in the Pacific and European campaigns. An older cousin of mine, Bruce Elliott, had landed on Omaha Beach with the 741st Tank Battalion and fought on through Europe to Czechoslovakia until the end of the war. After many years on disability as a result of his war injuries, he chose June 6—the anniversary of the D-Day landing—to take his own life.

He drove a truck for my father after the war. As a young boy, I rode with my cousin to the Indianapolis stockyards and anywhere else that I could tag along. One time I asked him if he'd been in war. He looked over at me with a strained look on his face, then grinned and said, "Oh, I reckon, you little dickens." He later told me that he "wouldn't take a million dollars for what he had seen, but he wouldn't take a million dollars to do it again."

I saw him dive under the truck once after a loud crack of thunder as we were loading a calf at the farm of a man whose son had served with my cousin from basic training on through Europe. I was about 8 years old and jumped back, scared.

"He was in the war, son," the farmer said quietly.

Even as a young boy in those early days, I was interested in how war affected people, both those in the military and those at home supporting them. When I was in college after my Marine Corps service, I worked during weekends in a small-town bar that would be full of older working-class men who had fought in the war, had seen the flags raised on Mount Suribachi, had seen Patton piss in the Rhine, and had seen much of the destruction of war on both man and country. The atmosphere at times was like that of the old Marine Corps slop chutes I remember.

In my first novel, "Wild Hands Toward the Sky," I based characters on my own father, my cousin, veterans I grew up with, worked on construction with, or served a drink to in a bar—all coming together in a fictional story about a young boy in the rural Midwest whose Marine father was killed on Guadalcanal when the boy was 2. By being around the local veterans who had returned home, the boy learns about life and searches for his own place in the world in his father's absence.

Many young children did experience the loss of a father in the war. Marine veteran John Butler was 5 years old when he lost his father, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Butler, who was killed on Iwo Jima as battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 27th Regiment. John remembers his father and knows much about his life and how and where he died, but said he "has met others who lost their dad in World War II and knew nothing about him."

Many of those children continue to search long into their



**Oral "Ben" Correll, standing, far right, and other Marines of E/2/28 during WW II. Years later, although they served in different eras, author Ray Elliott and Correll became friends and traded stories of their days on active duty.**

adulthood for any inkling about their fathers, trying to piece together every detail they can to build a more complete picture in their minds.

Other children who were fortunate to have their fathers return home to them often never knew much about what their parents endured because many veterans simply didn't—or wouldn't—talk about the war.

Having spent a lot of my childhood hanging around veterans, serving in the Marine Corps, working with a number of

**By writing historical fiction, I'm able to share the experiences and realities of many veterans through one story. My intent is to create an accurate narrative of the period and provide a broader understanding about the cost of war and the effect it has on the combatants and their families.**

veterans organizations, and interviewing numerous individual veterans through the years as a columnist, I've appreciated the friendships and the trust that have developed between us. I consider it an honor and privilege to have been granted access to their stories and raw, unfiltered experiences at a time when many of them were at a more reflective point in their lives but still active enough to travel and attend reunions.

Delmar "Dick" Lewis, one of our neighbors on the farm was a Marine air wing veteran who served in what became Marine Fighting Squadron 221 through the first years in the Pacific. He was first wounded as he was relieving the guard a little before 8 a.m. on Ford Island as the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

"At first," he said, "I thought what the hell is the Army flying maneuvers on Sunday morning. Then I saw the meatballs on the wings and knew we were under attack, just as I got hit in the shoulder with a ricocheting round."

Another friend, Ben Corell, was wounded on Iwo Jima with the 5th Marine Division and told me about seeing the American flag on Mount Suribachi when he was being evacuated to a hospital ship on the morning of Feb. 23, 1945.

"As I was being winched over the side of the ship," he told me, "I turned on my side and looked back at 'the rock.' It was just around noon. And there on the top of Suribachi, a bleak background with the sun's rays shining on it just a little, was one of the most beautiful sights I'll ever see: The flag stood out in technicolor against the drab background.

"It had to be the second flag," he said, his eyes watering as he spoke. "But it was a real tearjerker. I'll never see anything like it again."

By writing historical fiction, I'm able to share the experiences and realities of many veterans through one story. My intent is to create an accurate narrative of the period and provide a broader understanding about the cost of war and the effect it has on the combatants and their families.

"Iwo Blasted Again" is a short novel I wrote about an aging Iwo Jima veteran in the last 36 hours of his life who lost buddies in the battle and his wife in childbirth, and had to raise their son alone while questioning his own fate and self-doubt. Much of the narrative was inspired by the stories of Iwo Jima veterans I met at reunions around the country and tours to Guam, Iwo Jima, Saipan and Tinian over the years. While I was writing the novella, I often spoke with Bill Madden, an E/2/27 Iwo Jima veteran and retired English teacher who wrote the poem from which the book gets its title.

Publishing these kinds of works, as well as individual memoirs and other

nonfiction, paints a richer, more complete picture of what many of these veterans went through.

Before I wrote "Wild Hands," I met Charlie Dukes, a 104th Timberwolf veteran who was one of the last American prisoners of war to reach Allied lines days after the end of the war. He was taken prisoner by the Germans on Thanksgiving Day 1944. Charlie reached Allied lines at the Elbe River in Wittenberg, Germany, 20 days after the Germans surrendered. I first met him after he'd called me and left a message one afternoon when I was on a run. When I returned his call, he answered the phone in cheery voice, "Good morning."

"You have your mornings and afternoons mixed up, don't you?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said. "It's always good morning to me."

I taught English and journalism at the local high school and had just written a column about veterans in the newspaper. Charlie often visited with students in their classrooms and wondered if I would be interested in having him speak to my students. I could tell he had much to say that would be beneficial for them and me to hear.

His division had landed in France about D+80 and first saw combat in Belgium. He and a buddy were walking point and got pinned down between American and German lines one night by machine gun fire that literally shot the pack from Charlie's back. His buddy got killed, and Charlie hugged the ground the rest of the night.



**During the annual "Reunion of Honor" tour on Iwo Jima, Ray Elliott, center, meets with Alfred "Al" Pagoaga, right. Pagoaga's experiences in the Marine Corps as an infantryman inspired Elliott's novella "Blasted Again."**

COURTESY OF RAY ELLIOTT



COURTESY OF RAY ELLIOTT

**Delmar “Dick” Lewis, a Marine aviator, was wounded during the attacks on Pearl Harbor. During the war, he served in the Pacific until he was wounded. Elliott was influenced to become a storyteller by the veterans—like Lewis—he knew growing up.**

End,” and Charlie held book signings and continued to speak to students and other groups around the area. After the book was published and well-received, Charlie told me, “The nightmares have pretty much stopped.”

Words—whether writing them or reading them—can be very cathartic.

Historical fiction may not be as popular in the bookstores as memoir and non-fiction, but if I ever doubted the value of this approach to helping post-World War II generations understand the impact of that period, I just have to recall the time at one 5th Marine Division Association reunion in the early 2000s when I was sitting at a table of “Easy” Company Iwo Jima veterans. These aging men surrounding me were once the young men who charged up those sulfur-smelling dunes of sand and volcanic ash that gave way under their feet with every step. They saw their friends get blown to bits. They fired on the enemy with unrelenting determination. They longed for sleep and a bath. And they cheered at the sight of the American flag at the top of Mount Suribachi. Years later, they welcomed me into their midst and trusted me to hear and share their stories. While expressing my honor and gratitude, one of

them said, simply, “You’re one of us.”

Of course, I begged to differ, but it galvanized a responsibility in me to help others understand what these veterans did for the world and the price they paid—a responsibility I’d not even realized was beginning to take root when I was that curious young boy driving around in a truck with my war-weary older cousin.

*Authors bio: Marine veteran Ray Elliott is an English and journalism educator who has written three novels and edited numerous others. He was communications director of the Iwo Jima Association of America and Black Sands editor, and three-time president of the James Jones Literary Society.*

*Editor’s note: Titles published by Tales Press are available for purchase at [talespress.com](https://talespress.com) or Amazon. 📖*

“I’m not really a religious man,” he told me, “but I promised the man upstairs that if I ever saw the sun come up again, I’d say good morning for the rest of my life. When the sun came up, I said, ‘Good morning.’ I’ve been saying it ever since.”

He responded that way until he died in 2021, at the age of 98.

It was obvious that speaking to students was important to Charlie. He wanted them to know what he and his generation had done in World War II for our freedom. He was charming and happy but serious in what he said. The students were impressed and wrote letters to him. One student told me later that he’d remember what Charlie said for the rest of his life.

Charlie also suffered from recurring nightmares for years. We met and decided that he should write the memoir he’d been thinking about. He wrote 20 to 25 pages at a time, and we went over them until we had a manuscript. One of his granddaughters designed the cover for “Good Morning But the Nightmares Never

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**Historical fiction may not be as popular in the bookstores as memoir and nonfiction, but if I ever doubted the value of this approach to helping post-World War II generations understand the impact of that period, I just have to recall the time at one 5th Marine Division Association reunion**

# Leatherneck Laffs



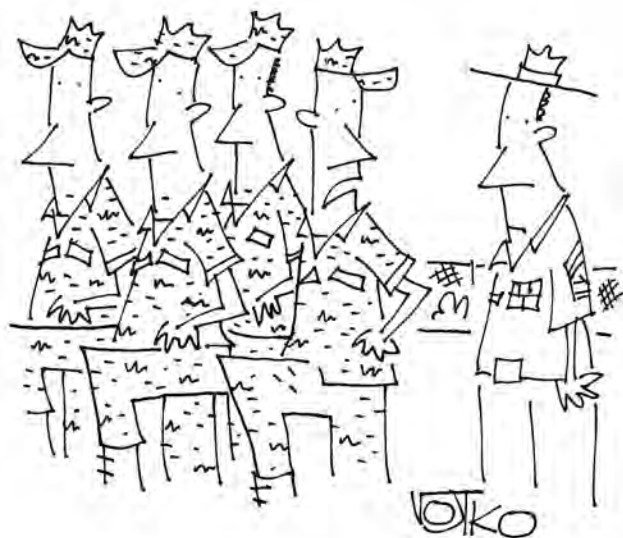
"If you sign up for the three-year option, you'll get your choice of deploying to two different hot spots."



"Ever get the feeling we're not alone?"



"I just asked him if the eggs came from non-GMO-fed chickens."



"Everybody but me was out of step. Someone should tell them."

# In Memoriam

Compiled by Briesa Koch

## Tactical Vehicle Rollover Causes Death of a Marine

Marine Corps officials identified **Sgt Matthew K. Bylski**, as the Marine who died in a tactical vehicle rollover on Dec. 12, at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Sgt Bylski, of Royal Oak, Mich., was trained as an Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) crewman assigned to Battalion Landing Team 1/5, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), serving as a vehicle commander. Bylski joined the Marine Corps in January 2019. His awards and decorations include two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon.

“Words fail to express our sorrow at the tragic loss of Sgt Bylski; an outstanding Marine and a leader within his platoon,” said Col Sean Dynan, commanding officer of the 15th MEU. “The

MEU—the Marines who lived, trained, and learned from Sgt Bylski, mourn alongside his family and friends. The entire 15th MEU ‘Vanguard’ family is affected by his absence.”

The ACV rollover occurred as the vehicle was making a ground movement during training with 14 other embarked Marines. One Marine was hospitalized, the others were treated and released.

The incident is currently under investigation.

I Marine Expeditionary Force

## Funeral Held for Marine Killed on Dec. 7, 1941

**PFC Charles R. Taylor**, 26, from Oklahoma, was buried Dec. 12, 2023, at Carnegie Cemetery, Carnegie, Okla., 82 years after he was killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor. On Dec. 7, 1941, Taylor was assigned to USS *Oklahoma* (BB-37) moored at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. *Oklahoma* sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to capsize quickly.

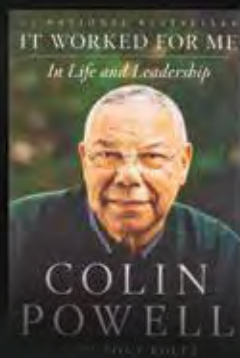
The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Taylor. Following the attack, his remains were recovered from the ship, however, they could not be identified at the time of their recovery. Taylor’s remains were buried as unknown remains at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In 2015, the DPAA received authorization to exhume and re-examine remains associated with USS *Oklahoma* using advances in forensic technology. Taylor was listed as Missing in Action until July 26, 2021, when the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency successfully identified his remains.

Taylor was laid to rest on the 82nd anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor with full military honors supported by Marines assigned to the Marine Artillery Detachment and is memorialized on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

*Leatherneck*

## Good Reads The Marine Shop Recommends for BLACK HISTORY MONTH



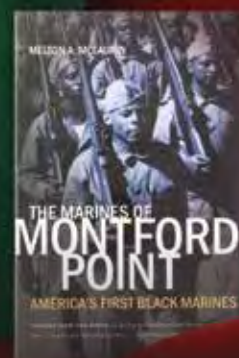
It Worked for Me: In Life and Leadership  
by Colin Powell with Tony Koltz  
\$16.99



Faith Through the Storm  
by Maj James Capers, Jr.,  
USMC (Ret)  
and Buz Sawyers  
\$25.95



Performance Conversations  
by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D.  
\$29.99



The Marines of Montford Point  
by Melton A. McLaurin  
\$23.00



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**Sgt Darryl P. Anderson**, 77, of Aumsville, Ore. He was a Marine who served during the Vietnam War. He was an active member of the Marine Corps League and the VFW. His awards include the Purple Heart.

**Wayne R. Ballinger**, 84, of Hamilton, Ohio. He was a Marine who served aboard aircraft carriers and in Japan. He later had a 30-year career as a bus driver with Fairfield City Schools.

**VADM Michael L. Cowan**, 78, of Bethesda, Md. He was commissioned as a Navy medical officer at Camp Lejeune in 1971. During his 33 years of active-duty service, he held multiple clinical, research, operational, staff and leadership positions including: deputy director and chief operating officer of TRICARE Management Activity for the Department of Defense, the chief of staff for the office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, the deputy director for medical readiness, commanding officer, Naval Hospital, Camp Lejeune, and Task Force Surgeon for Operation Restore Hope, among many others.

He acted as a leading voice in the concept of Force Health Protection, which redefined deployable medicine in the 21st century, and served as the 34th Surgeon

General of the Navy from 2001 to 2004. His awards include two Legion of Merit medals and two Defense Distinguished Service medals.

**Craig J. Downing**, 101, of Oskaloosa, Iowa. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1942 and served in the Pacific and saw action on Iwo Jima. His awards include the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. After his service, he studied physical education at the University of Dubuque and worked as a teacher, coach and later a superintendent for multiple public schools before retiring in 1977.

**Albert W. Hinkley**, 89, of Hubbard, Ore. He served in the Marine Corps and later had a career as a handyman.

**Maj Bryan M. McGill**, 81, of Round Rock, Texas. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1950 after graduating from high school. He served as an artilleryman with the 11th Marines, and with HMH-462 during the Vietnam War. He was later commissioned a second lieutenant. During his career, his duty stations included Camp Schwab, Camp Pendleton, MCAS Yuma and Camp Courtney. He was stationed at Headquarters Marine Corps and served there until retiring in 1981. He later had a career as a national account manager for IBM and Siemens Corporation in the Washington, D.C.

area. He was an active member of the Marine Corps Mustang Association and the USMC Combat Helicopter and Tiltrotor Association.

**Vernon Theiss**, 87, of Hamilton, Ohio. He was a Marine who served after graduating high school. He later had a 42-year-long career with Champion Paper Company.

**Gerald "Jerry" L. Wells**, 81, in Richmond, Va. He was a Marine who served from 1960 to 1969 with the 2ndMarDiv as a forward observer in Vietnam. He later worked at Firestone as a territory representative before retiring in 2002.

**Daniel L. Whitesell**, 82, of Keizer, Ore. He was a reservist who worked at Salem Equipment as a welder for 50 years before retiring in 2006.

In Memoriam is run on a space-available basis. Those wishing to submit items should include full name, age, location at time of death (city and state), last grade held, dates of service, units served in, and, if possible, a published obituary. Allow at least four months for the notice to appear. Submissions may be sent to *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, Va., 22134, or emailed to [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org).

## HONORING HISTORY

### Marines from 2d Bn, 2d Marines Journey Through the Battle of Okinawa



In November 2023, **98 Marines and Sailors** of Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines embarked on a profound journey through history as they toured the significant sites of the Battle of Okinawa. Their exploration offered a glimpse into the intense past and profound sacrifices made during one of World War II's most pivotal conflicts.

Capt S. C. Momaney, Company Commander said "On behalf of the Marines and Sailors of Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, our Commanding Officer, and the entire team, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Marine Corps Association for our Okinawa Battle Sights PME trip. The PME reinforced the importance of our role here in the First Island Chain, and highlighted to the Marines and Sailors their connection to the WWII heroes who went before them. **The generosity of your donors made it possible. Thank you.**"

Learn more at  
[mca-marines.org/foundation](https://mca-marines.org/foundation)



MARINE CORPS  
ASSOCIATION  
FOUNDATION

# Reader Assistance

Edited by Briesa Koch

## Reunions

• **East Coast Drill Instructors Association**, April 11-14, MCRD Parris Island, S.C. Contact SgtMaj Kenneth D. Miller, USMC (Ret), (828) 499-0224, [usmcpidi@charter.net](mailto:usmcpidi@charter.net).

• **Embassy Guard Association**, May 16-19, San Antonio, Texas. Contact Bob Lighty, (717) 433-1105, [bob.lighty@embassymarine.org](mailto:bob.lighty@embassymarine.org).

• **Marine Corps Weather Service**, June 16-21, Billings, Mont. Contact Kathy Donham, (252) 342-8459, [kathy.donham@hotmail.com](mailto:kathy.donham@hotmail.com), or Dave Englert, (812) 630-2099, [englertd@psci.net](mailto:englertd@psci.net).

• **Mike Co 3/7 (1965-1970)**, July 31-Aug. 4, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact David Ray, (612) 860-8932, [davidrayray49@gmail.com](mailto:davidrayray49@gmail.com).

• **1st Bn, 5th Marines, 1985-1992**, Sept. 5-8, Macomb, Ill. Contact Scott Hainline, (309) 351-2050, [ptimfi@yahoo.com](mailto:ptimfi@yahoo.com).

• **USMC A-4 Skyhawkers**, Nov. 11-13, Pensacola Beach, Fla. All drivers, maintainers and aficionados welcome. Contact Mark Williams, (702) 778-5010, [rogerwilco14@gmail.com](mailto:rogerwilco14@gmail.com).

## Mail Call

• Louis "Monday" Monoscalco, (312) 439-5253, is looking to hear from **LtGen Robert B. Johnston, former platoon commander of Co M, 3rd Bn, 9th Marines, Vietnam 1967.**

• Lawrence Petersen, [rebecca.b.may@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.b.may@gmail.com), is looking for a **recruit graduation book from Plt 25, MCRD Parris Island, 1957.**

## Wanted

• Mark Pacey, [markp@mstn.govt.nz](mailto:markp@mstn.govt.nz), is looking for **photographs, interviews, letters, and any other information on Americans stationed in New Zealand during WW II.**

• Louis "Monday" Monoscalco, (312) 439-5253, is looking for a **Marine Corps Security Guard Bn, HQMC, graduating class photo, 1970, class number unknown.**

• *Leatherneck*, [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org), is looking to hear from **Marines who served at Marine Barracks Washington from 1961 to 1964 and Marines who served security detail at Camp David or had any special**

**assignments related to President Kennedy or the Cuban Missile Crisis.**

## Sales, Trades, and Giveaways

• GySgt Ray Harris, [ray@honorfirst.com](mailto:ray@honorfirst.com), has a **recruit graduation book from Plt 341, MCRD San Diego, between the years 1956-1959.** Will give to any member or their family for the cost of shipping.

Entries for "Reader Assistance," which include "Reunions," "Mail Call," "Wanted" and "Sales, Trades and Giveaways," are free and printed on a space-available basis. *Leatherneck* reserves the right to edit or reject any submission. Allow two to three months for publication. Send your email to [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org), or write to Reader Assistance Editor, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134. 🦅

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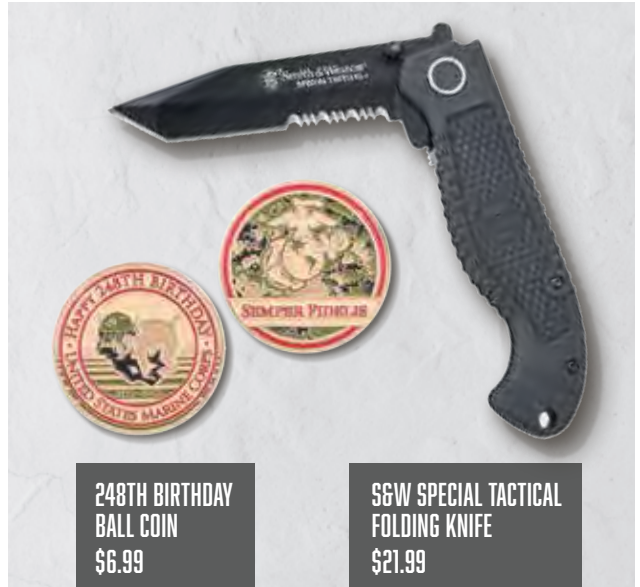
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# Saved Round

By Kipp Hanley

**THE TOTAL PACKAGE**—The name of Private First Class James Anderson Jr. will soon adorn a U.S. Post Office branch in Compton, Calif., one of the many honors bestowed upon the first African American Marine to receive the Medal of Honor. At the tender age of 20, Anderson sacrificed his own life and saved numerous Marines by absorbing the blast of a grenade on Feb. 28, 1967, in Vietnam.

In addition to the post office renaming, a park in Anderson's hometown of Carson, Calif., bears the name PFC James Anderson Jr. Memorial Park. His name also appeared on the cargo ship *MV PFC James Anderson Jr. (AK-3002)*, and is on a barracks building that opened at Marine Corps Base Quantico in 2008.

"I feel so incredibly proud," said niece and family spokesperson Denise Cross of Anderson's most recent recognition. "He was so selfless."

Anderson joined the Corps in 1966 and served in Vietnam with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. On the day he was killed, he was helping to rescue a reconnaissance team that had been ambushed near Cam Lo. His platoon came under heavy fire in a close quarters engagement with the enemy. During the firefight, a grenade landed near Anderson's head. He immediately pulled it into his body to protect his fellow Marines, who survived the explosion with only minor injuries.

"He was the kind of person that would extend himself," Cross said. "He was compassionate, kind and had a concern for others."



PFC James Anderson Jr.

Cross grew up in the same household as her uncle, who was a gifted student, dancer, and choir singer. Anderson would often drive her to school and exhibit kindness to the neighborhood children. That included buying ice cream for a less fortunate kid one particular summer day.

"Bobby only wanted Topps trading cards, but my uncle threw in a chocolate ice cream bar so he could eat with the other kids," Cross said of that day. "I was at a reunion a couple of years ago when Bobby told me this story with tears in his eyes. What James did for him that day meant so much to him that he still felt the emotion over 50 years later."

The post office that is being named in Anderson's honor is in the same community where Sergeant Major Charles Cook, USMC (Ret) worked as a Marine Corps recruiter in the late 1970s. Now serving as the president of the Los Angeles area chapter of the Montfort Point Marines Association, Cook said he would often reference Anderson in his recruiting pitches.

Last May, Cross and Cook participated in a flower garden planting at the PFC James Anderson Jr. Memorial Park organized by the Defense Contract Management Agency. The garden surrounds a plaque detailing Anderson's heroics.

"If he was here, this is exactly the kind of thing he would be doing for his community," said Cross that day. "He would have loved doing this." 🇺🇸



Above: PFC James Anderson Jr.'s name will soon adorn a post office in Compton, Calif.

Right: PFC James Anderson Jr.'s parents accept his Medal of Honor in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 26, 1968. Anderson died Feb. 28, 1967, in Vietnam when he absorbed the blast of an enemy grenade, saving the lives of his fellow Marines.



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