JUNE 2023

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LEATHERNECK

MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

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Contents

LEATHERNECK—MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

JUNE 2023
VOL. 106, No. 6

Features

Departments

COVER: LCpl Tristan Diazdeleon, a mortarman with 1st Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, carries an M224 60 mm lightweight mortar during the air assault portion of Marine Air Ground Task Force Distributed Maneuver Exercise (MDMX), on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, Calif., Feb. 13, 2023. MDMX, known as "Mad Max" is a maneuver exercise that incorporates air, ground, and logistics operations to create favorable conditions for the Joint Force. Read more about Mad Max on page 12. Photo by LCpl Anna Higman, USMC. Copies of the cover may be obtained by sending $2 (for mailing costs) to Leatherneck Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134-0775.

Sound Off

Compiled by Briesa Koch

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.)*

Remembering Our Time In the Corps

In March 2022, myself and three Marines who served with me from 1970 to 1973 got together in Orange Beach, Ala. It seemed like we had just seen each other the month before. We have gotten together every few years since 1990.

We laughed and we cried and tipped more than a few. Dan O'Reilly retired as a rocket scientist working for the shuttle program. Charlie Macalic went into the Marine Corps Reserve, then the Army National Guard to drive tanks and shoot cannons. What boy wouldn't want to do that? He whipped that unit into such good shape and outshot the regulars during maneuvers, so the Army wanted him back on active duty to train the regulars. He did just that and won the praise of state senators and Army generals. They pressed him to stay on even after his retirement as a civilian advisor.

I went on to be a chiropractor for 46 years, working with the state examiners and the national examiners for chiropractors wanting their license. We all credit our success on having been Marines first.

Mike Dunn couldn't make the reunion because of his wife's health issues. He joined by phone for more laughs and tears. Mac's son, also a Marine, joined us.

He said, "So, all those stories are true?"

He saw what we old salts felt; we were still loyal and proud of being Marines. Each of the families have gotten to know all of us and are tolerant of our antics. They just sit back and listen as we talk into the wee hours. They get to see a little of who were back then.

None of us regret our time in the Corps. It served us well through our lives and in our professions.

Howard Johnson
Elk River, Minn.

Possible Liberty Post Replacements For Subic Bay Sparks Interest

Any truth to the scuttlebutt that the brass of the Navy and Marines are pushing for liberty ports to replace Subic Bay, Clark Air Force, and other military installations that were affected by the Mount Pinatubo volcano? Yokosuka, Sasebo and other Japanese bases are a perfect example of like-minded ports. The Navy and U.S. Marines would be near the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, South China Sea, Yellow Sea, and the Sea of Japan. Air flights over the Himalayas would be a skip and a hop. Heck, I would try to reenlist like my son, who visited India last. He loved the people there!

Just think—liberty ports from Hokkaido to Arabia and Nepal. What a wonderful world this would be. I hope the scuttle is true.

John Sanchez
USN, 1961-1066
Santa Clarita, Calif.

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I've heard none of that scuttlebutt about liberty ports. The Marine Corps has been focused on the Pacific in this post-Operation Iraqi Freedom and -Operation Enduring Freedom world, but the only new base opened is Camp Blaz on Guam. We published an article in the May issue in the department In Every Clime and Place on the stand up of this strategically important base.—Editor

What's Wrong with This Picture?

For their sake, I hope their senior drill instructor and OCS platoon sergeant didn't see the picture on page 40 of the March 2023 issue of *Leatherneck*. If they did, I'm sure it would be 20 push-ups each!

LtCol Geoff Corson, USMC (Ret)
1976 to 2005
Rochester, N.H.

LtCol Corson is referring to the photo in the article "The Spirit of Basilone: One Marine's Unofficial Mission to Preach the Belt-Fed Gospel" showing Sergeant Taylor Mathis receiving the Spirit of Basilone medal. He is flanked by a SNCO on his right and a first lieutenant on his left. Both have their hands in their pockets.—Editor

Stogner's Heroism Deserves Higher Recognition

After reading the article in the February 2023 issue ["A Knife in a Gunfight: The Marine Who Defied All Odds in Vietnam"] on Lance Corporal James Stogner's heroic night in Vietnam, I feel that the Marine Corps has failed in honoring the Marine. James saved numerous Marines on the field by killing NVA soldiers, who were searching out the wounded and shooting them. Then, he went into the NVA stronghold to rescue his friend and his M60 and bring them back to safety. This was done with only a Ka-Bar, which is unbelievable. Rambo could have done no better, if at all.

I have read about other Medal of Honor recipients over the years, and, not to dishonor these men, I feel like LCpl Stogner's heroics were by far more dangerous than most of their deeds. I hope the Marine Corps reconsiders upgrading LCpl Stogner's Navy Cross to the Medal of Honor that I feel he rightly deserved.

Sgt Jim Biegger
USMC, 1961-1967
Elkhart, Iowa

Like My Dad

I am 86 years old, and I remember WW II clearly. Like anyone alive during that time, it made a lasting impression on me. I had aunts and uncles who served. I remember men who came home who couldn't walk, or who walked with great effort, men without limbs or eyesight. So, while browsing YouTube, I ran into this short video of a young boy saluting his father's headstone. It brought back my life in the 1940s, and my grandson's military funeral a few years ago and inspired me to write this poem:

Such a tiny little guy dressed in a U.S. Marine uniform put together by mom.

No doubt so he would look proper when he went to the cemetery on Veterans Day.

To honor his fallen father, he stood tall and brought up his arm.

Fingers touched his white cap, then fell slowly to his side.

Briefly, just briefly, a look passed over his face, his eyes moistened, but he held fast.

He did not break. Perhaps, he thought, perhaps like my dad.

Richard J. Budig
Skiatook, Okla.

Although we discontinued "Gyrene Gyngles," the section in Leatherneck *that used to feature poetry, we do occasionally publish poems sent in by our readers here in the Sound Off section. Here's another.—Editor*

I Am a Marine

I was born and raised in Neillsville, Wis. My Army dad served in the South Pacific during WW II (retired after 40 years). When I enlisted, two of my brothers were Marines serving in Korea. It was natural to me to join the Marine Corps following high school graduation. I am proud of my years of military service to our nation.

This is a poem that I wrote about my eight weeks of boot camp in 1952 at Parris Island, S.C.

Headed south when I turned 18.
To Parris Island to become a Marine!

Boot camp on the depot was my destination.

Two months of training was not a vacation.

They issued us uniforms, skirts below the knee.

Cause that was the '50s fashion, don't you see?

Instead of the bathroom, you went to the head.

Where we slept was named a bunk, not a bed.

Don't go into the kitchen, it's now the mess hall.

And the word bulkhead replaced the wall.

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What we ate in the mess hall, now is called chow.

And going there meant we were going to "chow now."

We wore not a hat, we called it a cover.

It sits straight on your head, or you will sure suffer.

We shined shoes and boots with a rag and our spit.

So shiny and bright you could see your face in it!

So much to learn, days sitting in classes;

We were ready to be really smart lasses.

Marine Corps history, laws and traditions,

How to salute and lead a platoon on a mission.

In uniform we stood straight and felt proud.

And knew that anywhere we'd stand out in a crowd.

For drilling we wore utilities and black shiny boots,

For physical training we wore "peanut suits."

From barracks to classroom, even to chow,

We marched to cadence; our DI showed us how.

When field day came, it was not held outside.

It meant that the barracks must be cleaned inside.

We dusted, mopped, and buffed decks to perfection,

We polished and cleaned heads for white-glove inspection.

To greet all those ranks above us "boots,"

We practiced daily lots of snappy hand salutes!

Then came the day our training was complete.

In spite of the sand fleas and PIs so-hot heat!

I stood at attention, sort of nervous inside.

Shoulders back, I felt such great pride!

I raised my hand, swore to protect and defend,

The Constitution, our country, our flag to the end.

I will be loyal, committed and always be strong.

Serve my country and never do wrong.

I loved the challenge, the discipline, the drill.

The friends I made, I think of still.

Those weeks were special, never had a regret.

For that decision to serve, now I am a vet.

Yes, I came south when I was 18.

And proudly earned the title of U.S. Marine!

Sgt Charlotte M. Ayers
USMC, 1952-1957
Beaufort, S.C.

Veteran Marine Shares Lifelong Hobby of Collecting Toy Soldiers

On my eighth birthday, I received a Marx Armed Forces Playset. In addition to Sailors, soldiers, and airmen, it had a small detachment of Marines marching in dress blues. Since my uncle Jake Rostock was a Marine, they became my favorites. Many hours were spent marching them around the house and in the dirt of my parents' garden. Along with my uncle, they were a big influence in my enlisting in the Corps.

Twenty years later, my parents presented me with a figure that had been AWOL. He was lost during one of the many battles fought in my parents' garden. It was then I decided to try and acquire more figures. I advertised in local papers and the only response was from someone who said he had some figures but not necessarily what I was looking

Jim Grimes received a small collection of toy soldiers as a birthday gift when he was 8 years old. Along with having his uncle as a role model, collecting these figurines influenced him to join the Marine Corps.

COURTESY OF JIM GRIMES

for. He had some metal Marine figures he thought I would be interested in.

My purchase of about 50 figures of toy soldiers became a lifelong hobby. Over the next 40 years, I collected what have been called "dime store toy figures." The term was coined because they were sold in bins at the local dime stores. They were produced from about 1930 to 1940. Production stopped at the start of WW II because of war restrictions on the use of any metal deemed essential to the war effort. Many of these figures were melted and turned into bullets for use against America's enemies.

Production began again after the war, but in the early 1950s, plastic supplanted metal for toys and the use of metal for toys became cost prohibitive. In the early 1960s, lead was banned from children's toys, so they disappeared altogether only to return in the late 1980s as collectibles not suitable for children. The metal toy

[continued on page 68]

Guerrillas Don't Have Victory Parades: The Story of Colonel Michael Wyly

By SgtMaj Daniel Heider, USMC

Editor's note: This article is the first-place winner of the 2023 Leatherneck *Magazine Writing Contest. Major Richard A. "Rick" Stewart, USMC (Ret) sponsored the contest through the Marine Corps Association Foundation. Upcoming issues of* Leatherneck *will feature the second- and third-place winners and honorable mention entries.*

France, June 6, 1918: Captain Donald F. Duncan of St. Joseph, Mo., a Marine's Marine, strode confidently in front of his company smoking his pipe and swinging his swagger stick. Death was all around as sharp thwacking noises of bullets flying by and a malevolent toxic smell of mustard gas was in the air. This did not phase Capt Duncan; his Marines watched him with admiration as his demeanor inspired uncommon bravery. Their objective was to take the town of Bouresches, which was tactically straightforward but would undoubtedly result in massive casualties.

As pulses quickened and panic surged, the Marines were ready to follow Capt Duncan to the gates of hell. Duncan waited for a barrage of shells to suppress the Germans, and then after a deep breath, he blew his whistle, which commenced a synchronized on-line assault on the enemy's position. Capt Duncan, beloved by every Marine in the company, was leading from the front when he was struck in the stomach by a bullet. His Marines dragged him to a small clump of trees nearby but as he rested on the ground, a German shell landed on their position, killing him. Duncan's extraordinary heroism would posthumously earn him the Navy Cross and cement him in the legacy of the Marine Corps. The story of Duncan, his heroism and his approach to defeating the enemy would play a significant factor in what influenced Colonel Michael Wyly years later.

Col Michael Wyly's impact on the Marine Corps is profound; he was the ultimate change agent who significantly influenced the Corps' fighting approach. His story contains examples that would result in a lesser person quitting and falling in line with the status quo; however, his dedication to maneuver warfare, or thinking warfare, would not yield.

Wyly grew up in Kansas City and heard many stories of his great uncle, Donald Duncan. He remembers stories like when Duncan reached a German machine-gun position, he took the pipe from his mouth, and said, "Hit their line together, boys. The guide is left."

Col Wyly always knew he wanted to be a Marine, and despite his father's wishes, he wanted to be an enlisted Marine. As a compromise, he sent his application to the U.S. Naval Academy and was shipped off to boot camp in 1957. At boot camp, he was indoctrinated into the renowned warrior culture of the Marine Corps, and after selection to the Naval Academy, he earned his commission in 1962, fulfilling his father's wishes.

USMC

Marines in trenches during World War I, circa 1918.

As his first tour, he served in Okinawa for a year and then received orders to the 1st Marine Division. Upon checking in, he was sent to the counter-guerrilla counter-insurgency school. There he would meet another one of his significant influences, Lieutenant General Victor "Brute" Krulak, who was the architect of the implementation of the school. When speaking at the Naval War College, LtGen Krulak once stated that, "The battle in Vietnam was not found on some classic area of tactical terrain selected by one of the antagonists, but in nameless village and hamlets, and the objective to be gained is not a hill or a city, but the hearts and minds of thousands of people, without whose support there can be no victory."

Wyly was a forward thinker and innovator and knew that if the Marines fought in Vietnam, it would be a guerrilla-style fight, starkly different from earlier wars. At the school, Wyly learned to immerse himself into reading about the enemy, including cultural aspects of their society, and trying to understand their thoughts. He attended the Army's psychological warfare school, which further deepened his understanding of the nuances of guerrilla warfare. He looked back at his great uncle's experience and started to foster ideas of bypassing enemy strengths, exploiting their weaknesses, and destroying their will to fight. The seed of maneuver warfare was planted, and the inefficiencies and needless casualties of attrition warfare became abundantly evident. Then, in 1965, Lieutenant Wyly got the call to go to Vietnam as a psychological warfare officer. During this time, he employed what he had learned and taught during counter-Guerrilla counter-insurgency training. He focused on the enemy, not the terrain, and would learn valuable lessons about them. He experienced firsthand what it took to break the spirits of a hardened insurgent force, which scorched lessons learned into his approach to warfighting.

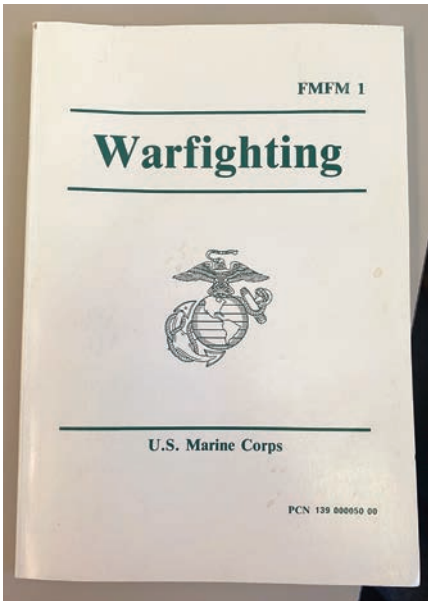
After a tour in Washington, D.C., he returned to Vietnam in 1969 as the company commander of "Delta" Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Under its pre-

vious commanders, Delta Company had been coined "Dying Delta" due to their heavy attrition and constant exposure to enemy fire. Wyly immediately went to work figuring out how to employ the tactics he learned during his training and studying of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare.

His tactics, however, contradicted the American approach to fighting in Vietnam. He found himself under constant pressure to provide body counts, search and destroy missions, and lay waste to all perceived as enemies. The tactics espoused in the higher headquarters were to scare the populace and punish them for lack of support vice earning their trust through security. The enemy was dispersed and would use any means necessary to maximize their advantage, which nullified technological advantages. For instance, one day, during his psychological warfare tour, Colonel Wyly was in an aircraft dropping leaflets, and he witnessed Marines below crossing a field. The enemy allowed them to pass and then attacked them from the rear. This tragic scene gave him clarity on the errors in the American approach to warfare. It was, in fact, attrition warfare, and he knew an innovative approach was needed. He would implement an unconventional strategy and rely on the street-smart enlisted Marines.

Wyly instilled a culture of decentralized decision-making and encouraged an innovative approach to win. His efforts culminated in a remarkably successful tour. He mentioned that the greatest compliment he ever got was when he turned over his command, one Marine said, "Skipper, we ain't the Dying Delta anymore."

Wyly was driven, humble, and committed to enhancing his warfighting astuteness. Throughout his time, he noticed a pattern that the Marine Corps was heavily focused on a culture that favored linear attacks and inflicting attrition on the enemy. While he was an instructor at The Basic School, he had noted that students were criticized for not advancing troops on-line when conducting field problems. He compared this approach to the blitzkrieg tactics that the Germans used during World War I. The Germans ultimately failed as they overextended their artillery support and logistics, but their style would spark Wyly's curiosity. Nonetheless, he was able to connect a variety of historical tactical examples to what was being taught at The Basic School. He knew that this fighting style would waste many good Marine lives, and something had to change.



USMC

FMFM-1 Warfighting, published in 1989 by Gen Alfred Gray, is the official Marine Corps manual of maneuver-style warfare. These fundamental principles serve as an aid to thinking, planning and executing warfighting tactics.

While attending night school at George Washington University, he wrote a study on the Battle of Tarawa. This study had several elements of maneuver warfare and had such an innovative approach that it caught the attention of Major General Bernard E. Trainor. MajGen Trainor at the time was the director of education for the Marine Corps, and he was so enthralled with Wyly's abstract thinking on warfare that he placed him in charge of tactics at the Amphibious Warfare School. This assignment would set the Marine Corps on a path to a dynamic approach to fighting wars, which would eventually be dubbed maneuver warfare.

MajGen Trainor was bold, brilliant, and an exceptional person. He believed in Wyly's ideals and provided cover for him to make the necessary changes that would lead to the Marine Corps adopting maneuver warfare as its doctrine. Upon Wyly's assignment to the career level school for Marine captains, he threw out the lesson plans, focused on teaching historical battles, and forced students into uncomfortable decision-making positions. One glaring issue was the


GYSGT CHARLES B. TYLER, USMC

Capt Ernest Crocker and other instructors of the Anti-Guerrilla Warfare (AGW) Course on Camp Pendleton, Calif., suggest harassing tactics to "guerrilla" Cpl Donald Talor, standing.

scripted nature of tactics and the flaw with how they were developed. They were designed in a way that resulted in disjointed manuals throughout the chain of command. As a major, Wyly was empowered to make sweeping changes, which caused some resistance from the senior officers at the school. He emphasized creativity and innovative approaches. He took the students to the local farms, where they would conduct free-play field exercises using unfamiliar terrain. This early form of maneuver warfare would focus on the enemy, their center of gravity, and defeating their will to fight.

To Wyly, it was about gaining that intellectual and mental edge and having the innovative shrewdness to defeat the enemy by any means presented. He developed these theories through his experiences and the countless hours dedicated to vicariously learning through study. It was through this process of change that he had a chance introduction to retired Colonel John Boyd, USAF.

William Lind, a Congressional staffer who was an expert on German history and their approach to warfare, had suggested to Wyly that he speak to the war philosopher John Boyd. Colonel Wyly asked himself what a fighter pilot could teach him about ground warfare, but remained open-minded and made the phone call. He invited Col Boyd as a guest lecturer, and Boyd would eventually go down in Marine Corps history as one of its great influencers. Boyd and Wyly developed a lifelong bond and joined forces to adapt Boyd's theories to ground warfare. John Boyd respected the Marines and commented that they were the only branch whose leaders were willing to speak their minds to their seniors, which is essential to effective maneuver warfare.

USMC

Gen Alfred Gray, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, is regarded as the father of modern maneuver warfare. By establishing Marine Corps University in 1989, Gen Gray set the Corps down the path of evolution that implements the continuous teaching of innovative maneuver warfare-related concepts to all Marines.

Two of Wyly's former students, Captains G.I. Wilson and William Woods, while assigned to the 2nd Marine Division, approached the Division commander, Major General Alfred Gray, with the teachings of maneuver warfare. This prompted MajGen Gray to visit Wyly and adopt this fighting style in his Division. MajGen Gray would make routine visits to the school. He later became the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

As the Commandant, Gen Gray drove the codification of maneuver warfare as the Marine Corps' approach to fighting. In addition, he established the Marine Corps University, which was Wyly's suggestion. Establishing a university would transform the Marine Corps into the most intellectual branch of the Armed Forces. This set the Marine Corps down a path of evolution that would see a succession of commandants implementing innovative maneuver warfare-related concepts to preserve the Marine Corp's elite status as the nation's 911 force. More importantly, it would also lead to a transformation in enlisted professional military education and a significant emphasis on sound tactical decisions at all levels. The cultural adoption of maneuver warfare undoubtedly contributed to preserving the Marine Corps' value to the nation.

Wyly would continue his career, relentlessly ensuring the Marine Corps maintained its title as the nation's force-in-readiness. He dedicated his life to defending this nation, never compromised his character, and never succumbed to careerism. He served heroically in Vietnam and championed an innovative approach to fighting wars. His intellectual curiosity and exceptional intelligence were backed up by common sense and courage. He also keenly understood the necessity that enlisted leaders were confident, smart, and could lead just as effectively as officers. The development of the enlisted force enables maneuver warfare and contributes to the Marine Corps' ability to adapt to any adversary. Col Wyly's unwillingness to compromise his beliefs and dedication to maneuver warfare would ultimately lead to his retirement; however, his life's work significantly shaped the culture of the modern-day Marine Corps.

As a student at George Washington University, Wyly's professor, Dr. Martin Blumenson stated, "Guerrillas do not march home to victory parades," referring to the Hukbalahaps in the Philippines. They were fighting for land for the landless. Col Wyly's fight for institutional change never wavered and he also fought for land for the landless. His story is a fitting example of having the courage to combat the status quo and the resilience and fortitude to see things through. He is a true patriot and embodies all the qualities that make Marines special.

LCPL CAITLIN BEVEL, USMC

Capt Kirby Mills, the testing and evaluation officer for The Basic School, sits down with instructors at the Light Armored Vehicle (LAV) Training Company, School of Infantry-West, aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 21, 2015.

Author's bio: SgtMaj Heider is currently assigned as the director of the SNCOA Camp Lejeune. He has deployed several times in support of the Global War on Terrorism and via the Unit Deployment Program. His current assignment includes overseeing the facilitation of professional military education of enlisted leaders within the Camp Lejeune area of responsibility.

CAMP LEJEUNE JUSTICE ACT OF 2022

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In Every Clime and Place

Compiled by Kyle Watts

Thailand

13th MEU Completes Exercise Cobra Gold 2023

The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), embarked aboard the *Makin Island* Amphibious Ready Group, finished participation in the 42nd iteration of the annual theater security cooperation event Exercise Cobra Gold 2023 in the Kingdom of Thailand on March 10.

Cobra Gold is one of the largest multilateral theater security cooperation exercises in the Indo-Pacific and reflects the U.S. commitment to allies and partners in the region. It strengthens the capabilities of participating nations to plan and conduct joint operations, builds relationships among participating nations, and enhances interoperability over a range of activities.

This year's exercise included approximately 20 nations participating either directly or as observers. Across the joint services, more than 6,000 U.S. personnel directly participated with approximately 2,000 Marines from the 13th MEU and III Marine Expeditionary Force.

Marines and Sailors with the 13th MEU participated in Cobra Gold ashore in the Chantaburi and Chonburi Provinces and in the waters off the coast of Thailand. Key events from Cobra Gold include a joint multinational staff planning exercise, humanitarian civic assistance projects, a joint multinational amphibious assault, a noncombatant evacuation operations scenario, a joint forward arming and refueling setup, and various field training exercises.

One of the key events the Marines and Sailors from the 13th MEU executed was a multinational amphibious assault at Hat Yao beach in the Chonburi Province. During the event, U.S., Royal Thai, and Republic of Korea Marines simulated an assault on an objective, inserting from air and sea, ultimately seizing and securing the targeted beach. This dynamic event allowed the partner forces to plan and execute a combined amphibious assault, as well as execute simulated casualty evacuation drills utilizing air assets on the beach.

The combined efforts for the amphibious assault included the integration of aircraft including Thai F-16 fighters with 13th MEU F-35s, movement of U.S. Army High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems aboard U.S. Marine landing craft, air cushion vessels, and the joint employment of Royal Thai and Republic of Korea owned amphibious assault vehicles.

The 13th MEU team also participated in a simulated noncombatant evacuation operation simultaneously with other participating nations, including Japan and the Kingdom of Thailand, across multiple locations. This type of training enables participating forces to refine command and control processes while fostering interoperability and are critical in identifying issues in the process prior to a real-world crisis.

"NEO is a noncombatant evacuation operation, where we would fly into a country or location and provide evacuation operations to get American citizens and evacuees out of that country as quickly and easily as possible," said Staff Sergeant Abigail Hamilton, an administrative chief with Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) 13, 13th MEU. "[Our] NEO tracking systems use a computer database in which we input evacuee's information based off of their passport, driver's license, things of that nature. We would scan this ID, and it would generate their information into the system. Anytime they go to staging or get to another country that has these entry requirements

GYSGT CHAD J. PULLIAM, USMC

MV-22 Ospreys assigned to VMM-362, 13th MEU, fly over multinational forces during an amphibious exercise as part of Exercise Cobra Gold 23 in Chonburi Province, Kingdom of Thailand, on March 3.

CPL AUSTIN GILLAM, USMC

Above: Marines with Battalion Landing Team 2/4, 13th MEU, handle a tarantula as part of a jungle survival class during Exercise Cobra Gold in Sattahip, Chonburi Province, Kingdom of Thailand, on Feb. 27. Jungle survival classes teach service-members from other nations the skills necessary to survive while responding to crises and operating in austere environments.

SGT MEGAN ROSES, USMC

Above: A High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) from 3rd Bn, 12th Marines, 3rdMarDiv, fires a M28A2 Reduced Range Practice Rocket during a combined arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX) at Cobra Gold 2023 in the Kingdom of Thailand, March 10. The CALFEX demonstrated long range precision fire support and interoperability between U.S. Marines, the U.S. Army and the Royal Thai Army.

SGT NICOLAS ATEHORTUA, USMC

CPL AUSTIN GILLAM, USMC

Above: Marines assigned to Battalion Landing Team 2/4, 13th MEU, drive a Light Armored Vehicle up a beach as part of an amphibious assault during Exercise Cobra Gold 23 in Chonburi Province, Kingdom of Thailand, on March 3. Participating nations conducted operations simultaneously across multiple locations.

Left: Royal Thai Reconnaissance Marines jump from a KC-130 with U.S. Marines from Maritime Raid Force, 13th MEU, in support of an amphibious assault exercise during Exercise Cobra Gold 23 in Sattahip, Chonburi Province, Kingdom of Thailand, on March 3.

as well, they can pull every bit of information about this person that has already been tracked, whether it's medical conditions, special needs, religious needs, anything you might need to know about this person while going into another unknown area."

As part of Cobra Gold 23, the Marines and Sailors with the 13th MEU also executed various ranges and training with the Royal Thai and Republic of Korea Marines. In the Chantaburi Province, Marines from Battalion Landing Team 2/4, 13th MEU, executed a variety of combined arms, live-fire ranges with their Royal Thai counterparts. The Marines were also able to participate in jungle survival training taught by Royal Thai Marines, in which they learned how to obtain water and nourishment through various vegetations in the jungle environment. Marines with CLB-13 also conducted maintenance and communication subject matter expert exchanges with Royal Thai Marine counterparts.

This iteration of Cobra Gold included a Combined Space Forces Component Command, the first time a cell of Space domain members of various nations and services worked as a component in a joint multilateral exercise in the Indo-Pacific region. Another element of this year's Cobra Gold was the defensive cyber operations training with eight countries, culminating in a cyber defensive training scenario simulating the defense of critical infrastructure against adversarial intrusions.

1stLt Manuel Mata Hernandez, USMC

Twentynine Palms, Calif.
SLTE 2-23 Lays the Foundation for Future Force Development With "Mad Max" Exercise

Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command (MAGTFTC) began the MAGTF Distributed Maneuver Exercise (MDMX) on Feb. 13, with 7th Marine Regiment leading the exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Twentynine Palms, Calif.

MDMX, also referred to as "Mad Max," is designed to test the MAGTF's operational capabilities in austere, multi-domain, offensive and defensive operations against adversaries at a regimental level.

Mad Max is a large-scale, live-fire combined arms exercise," said Major Nick Leeds, assistant operations officer with Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group, MAGTFTC. "It is designed to integrate all the elements of a Marine Air Ground Task Force. So, we are integrating all those assets into a complex and as close to a realistic environment as we possibly can to achieve a real-world tactical mission."

MDMX is a new addition to the six exercises within Service Level Training Exercise (SLTE) 2-23. The purpose of SLTE 2-23 is to provide commanders with training opportunities to increase readiness against peer adversaries in a dynamic environment through a series of phased exercises. These exercises train Marines for challenges they may face while operating in a deployed environment.

MDMX includes more than 10 different Marine units with U.S. Air Force support. These units include several ground units and aircraft support such as unmanned aircraft systems, fixed-wing and rotary-wing assets.

According to Leeds, MCAGCC is the largest Marine Corps installation in the world and has the largest and least restrictive live-fire impact areas. Because the training grounds are so far from the public population, the Combat Center is the ideal location for large-scale exercises that include the employment of direct and indirect fires, such as MDMX.

Mortarmen with Alpha Co, 1st Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, fire an M224 60 mm lightweight mortar during the air assault portion of Marine Air Ground Task Force Distribution Maneuver Exercise on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, Calif., Feb. 13.

SGT ARMANDO ELIZALDE, USMC

SGT ARMANDO ELIZALDE, USMC

Above: Marines with Alpha Co, 1st Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, hold a defensive position during the air assault portion of MDMX on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, Calif., Feb. 13.

SGT ARMANDO ELIZALDE, USMC

A CH-53E Super Stallion assigned to HMH-466, MAG-16, 3rd MAW, prepares to land during the air assault portion of MDMX on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, Calif., Feb. 13.

SGT ISRAEL CHINCIO, USMC

LtCol Felix Guerra, right, the commanding officer, and SgtMaj Ryan Eldredge, both with 3rd Bn, 3rd Marines, 3rdMarDiv, case the colors during the deactivation ceremony of 3/3 on MCB Hawaii, Jan. 13.

"Because of the level of training that [the Marines] are getting here, this is the closest, most realistic, complex training environment that the servicemembers are going to get," said Leeds. "So by providing the taxpayer funds to be able to support exercises like this, they are ensuring that service men and women are fully combat capable and ready to conduct their missions abroad."

While every exercise within the SLTE 2-23 is vital, the MDMX is another key step that allows Marines to remain a globally deployable expeditionary force and masters in combined-arms operations in any region.

According to the Training and Education 2030 report by General David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Transforming our Corps to prevail against a peer adversary at every point along the competition continuum requires monumental effort across the force, and particularly within the [training and education] enterprise, which lays the foundation and sets the pace for force development." The addition of the MDMX does just that.

SSgt Tristan Biese, USAF

Marine Corps Base Hawaii
3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines Holds Deactivation Ceremony

Third Battalion, 3rd Marines cased its colors during the unit's deactivation ceremony at Marine Corps Base Hawaii on Jan. 13.

The battalion was activated June 1, 1942, at New River, N.C., as 5th Training Battalion and was assigned to Division Special Troops, 1stMarDiv. During World War II, 3/3 participated in numerous battles in the Pacific theater including the Northern Solomons and Guam.

On Nov. 1, 1943, 3/3 stormed the beaches of Bougainville. Within five days, the battalion pushed 5,000 yards inland and secured 10,000 yards of beach. After 15 days of brutal combat, 3/3 broke out of the jungle and connected a road they had previously constructed with the Numa Numa Trail enabling continued support of the front lines. After 52 days of intense fighting, 3/3 was relieved.

The battalion also participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. During the Global War on Terrorism, 3/3 completed three combat deployments to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and three combat deployments to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"Deactivation is not an unheard of occurrence in the illustrious history of this battalion. V33 has deactivated twice previously," said Lieutenant Colonel Felix Guerra, the battalion's commanding officer. "Prior to previous deactivations, this battalion fulfilled the needs of the Marine Corps, to include participating in major combat operations. Today, we have safeguarded this battalion's legacy. Although the battalion's colors will fold … and the monitors will disperse the Marines and Sailors throughout the service, the memory of 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines will never be extinguished."

The battalion recently returned from its latest deployment to Okinawa, Japan, where they participated in the Korea Military Exercise Program 22.3, Fuji Viper 22.5, Resolute Dragon 22, and multiple Alert Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force drills. Throughout the deployment, 3/3 trained alongside key allies across the first island chain, strengthening international partnerships, mutual security, and the ability to respond

to crisis throughout the Indo-Pacific.

"The modern battlespace is more complex than ever before," said Colonel Timothy Brady, Commanding Officer, 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR). "The U.S. Marine Corps will continue to progress and modernize the force to remain the premier crisis response force. I know our Marine Corps is in good hands with the Marines of America's Battalion spread throughout the Corps."

In accordance with Force Design 2030, the Marine Corps deactivated 2nd Bn, 3rd Marines and 3/3 to allow for the transformation of 3rd Marines to 3rd MLR that took place March 3.

3rd MLR is optimized for conducting Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations in support of the Joint Force with allies and partners in austere and distributed maritime environments. The MLR is composed of a Littoral Combat Team, Littoral Anti-Air Battalion, and Littoral Logistics Battalion.

1stLt Erin Scudder, USMC

Above: Sgt Michael Graf, a squad leader with 3rd Bn, 25th Marines, 4thMarDiv, participates in a live fire event as part of the 4thMarDiv Rifle Squad Competition on MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C., on Jan. 30. The three-day event tested the Marines across a variety of infantry skills to determine the most combat effective rifle squad within the 4thMarDiv. (Photo by Cpl Alexis Sanchez, USMC)

Camp Lejeune, N.C.

MCB Camp Lejeune Hosts 4thMarDiv Rifle Squad Competition

"To locate, close with, and destroy the enemy," said Brigadier General Douglas K. Clark, Commanding General, 4th Marine Division, Marine Forces Reserve. "That is what it's all about."

Marine Corps Reservists from across the U.S. competed in the 4thMarDiv Rifle Squad Competition held on Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Lejeune, N.C., from Jan. 28-31. The three-day competition tested five squads' ability to accomplish various objectives to determine the 4thMarDiv's most lethal and effective infantry squad.

The competition kicked off with a 12-kilometer hike to evaluate the Marines' endurance. After the hike, each squad was tasked to conduct an ambush on contracted role-players to simulate combat conditions and were evaluated throughout various events, such as a call for fire, land navigation, patrolling techniques, and tactical combat casualty care.

The competing squads then navigated to Range G27 to establish defensive positions and conduct live-fire squad attacks, bringing back the left and right lateral limits many may not have seen since the start of their careers.

"In many cases, [the Marines] train on guard or Reserve bases, and they don't get a chance to train on a real Marine Corps base," said Clark. "The best opportunities for them to train to [the Marine Corps] standards are on a great base, a world-class premier facility like Camp Lejeune, designed with ranges and field opportunities that cater to the Marine standards."

CPL ALEXIS SANCHEZ, USMC

Marines with 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 4thMarDiv, participate in a 12-kilometer timed hike as part of the 4thMarDiv Rifle Squad Competition on MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C., on Jan. 28.

Not only did the Marines get the chance to experience MCB Camp Lejeune's training areas, but they gained new knowledge and improved on different warfighting skills throughout the competition.

"We all learned something new from this experience," said Sergeant Michael Graf, squad leader, 3rd Bn, 25th Marines. "It was an excellent training opportunity and covered much of what we thought we knew and didn't know."

The competition provided the Marines with opportunities to enhance their small unit leadership skills and employ critical thinking to navigate through the events with their respective teams. They learn a lot here, and it's about what they take

CPL ALEXIS SANCHEZ, USMC

Cpl Jacob Hennelly, a team leader with 3rd Bn, 23rd Marines, 4thMarDiv, engages simulated targets during an ambush as part of the 4thMarDiv Rifle Squad Competition on MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C., on Jan. 29.

back to their units," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael A. Presley, a Gunner with 4thMarDiv. "Those five squads will take back what they learned here, and that will make us five better companies, which will make us better battalions, which makes the division, overall, more lethal."

After facing the unknown, creating solutions to challenging problem sets, and walking 60 miles over three days, the Marines celebrated the culmination of the competition with a warrior's night which included an awards presentation, food and camaraderie. Marines with 3rd Bn, 23rd Marines were announced the winners of the Rifle Squad Competition.

"To see the looks on the faces of these Marines. They're tired, challenged, and motivated," said Clark. "And the opportunity for them to come to Camp Lejeune to train and test themselves in preparation for the ultimate prize, which is to be the super squad of the Marine Corps. It's invaluable."

The Marines will now move on to the next level of the competition and compete against rifle squads from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Marine Divisions in the 2023 Marine Corps Rifle Squad Competition later this year to determine, under simulated combat conditions, which Marine rifle squad is the most combat effective squad.

"This opportunity in this competition exceeded the expectations of myself and the sergeant major," said Clark. "It really accented the warrior ethos that we're trying to communicate, and to get to train here on [Camp Lejeune], we couldn't have asked for anything better."

Cpl Alexis Sanchez, USMC

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Corps Connections

Compiled by Kyle Watts

Inglis, Fla.

Vietnam Veteran's Dog Tags Returned to Family

Former U.S. Senator James Webb presented a dog tag belonging to Corporal Larry A. Hughes to his next of kin during a ceremony held in Inglis, Fla., on Feb. 17. Patricia Prickett, sister of Cpl Hughes, spoke during the presentation ceremony, which was organized by the town of Inglis to honor the Vietnam veteran who passed away in 2019. Webb, who received the Navy Cross for his actions while serving as a platoon commander in 1st Battalion, 5th Marines in Vietnam and later served as Secretary of the Navy, along with Michael Desch, a professor of international relations and the director of the International Security Center at the University of Notre Dame, recovered Hughes' dog tag while conducting a battlefield study at the An Hoa airstrip in Vietnam. From the left: Professor Michael Desch, Patricia Prickett, Carl Hughes, Larry Hughes Jr., and Webb.

Submitted by
PO1 Pedro A. Rodriguez, USN

PO1 PEDRO A. RODRÍGUEZ, USN

Philadelphia, Pa.

Marine Corporal Roland Scarinci Honored On His 100th Birthday

Corporal Roland Scarinci celebrated his 100th birthday on Feb. 18 at the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge No. 5 with his family, friends and more than 100 other guests. During this celebration, Marines with Marine Forces Reserve presented Scarinci with a Letter of Appreciation thanking him for his time and service to the Corps, signed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David H. Berger.

Scarinci enlisted on Dec. 14, 1942. He was stationed at Marine Barracks Washington and later deployed to the Pacific with 1st Marine Division where he participated in the Battle of Okinawa from April to May 1945. He also participated in the occupation of China from September 1945 to January 1946 and was discharged Feb. 19, 1946.

LCPL SARAH PYSHER, USMC

"This many years of dedicated and selfless service for our nation, to tell his story and what he did in the Marine Corps, I can't thank you enough for the stories that you've told," said Major General Len Anderson, the commanding general of 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. "He didn't know that the time he spent in the Pacific was just a very small influence of what he had on the Marine Corps. Decades since, young men and women have joined our Corps, joined this small club we love to be a part of, served our nation, and did it because Cpl Scarinci keeps telling his stories."

Submitted by LCpl Sarah Pysher, USMC

Princeton, N.J.

Marines Commemorate the Battle of Princeton

On Jan. 8, Marines, including Major General Jason Q. Bohm, center, Inspector General of the Marine Corps, gathered on the frost-covered battlefield in Princeton, N.J., to commemorate the 246th anniversary of Major Samuel Nicholas and the Continental Marines' contribution to General George Washington achieving a third decisive victory in what became known as "The 10 Crucial Days" of the American Revolution.

COURTESY OF MAJGEN JASON Q. BOHM, USMC

Following the Marines' first successful amphibious operation in New Providence, Bahamas, Congress directed Maj Nicholas to recruit four new companies to serve as the ships' detachments for four frigates under construction in Philadelphia.

As Nicholas continued his recruiting efforts, GEN Washington and the Continental Army experienced one defeat after another at the hands of the British in New York and across New Jersey. Washington retreated south of the Delaware River and paused to rebuild his army that had been devastated by disease, desertion, casualties and terminating enlistments. The new country faced a crisis. The loss of the army meant the loss of the nation. Washington requested help and the Marines responded.

In December 1776, Congress detached the Marines from the Navy and directed Maj Nicholas to form a battalion of Marines from the ships' detachments in Philadelphia to assist Washington's army at its greatest time of need. Thus began the Marines first protracted land campaign that culminated in turning-point victories at the battles of Trenton, Assunpink Creek and Princeton. Frederick the Great described the achievements of Washington and his band of compatriots between Dec. 25, 1776, and Jan. 3, 1777, a space of 10 days, as the most brilliant of any recorded in the annals of military achievements.

Washington moved the army and Marines to Morristown, N.J., following the Battle of Princeton and commenced a series of skirmishes known as the "Forage War." Washington's artillery chief, GEN Henry Knox, requested and received permission to employ the Marines in the artillery corps since they had experience in firing naval guns similar to his cannon. The Marines continued in this role for months before returning once more to service with the fleet, ending their first land campaign.

Submitted by MajGen Jason Q. Bohm, USMC

COURTESY OF THE COL CHARLES H. WATERHOUSE ESTATE, ART COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS

"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. Submission does not guarantee publication, and we cannot guarantee the return of photos.

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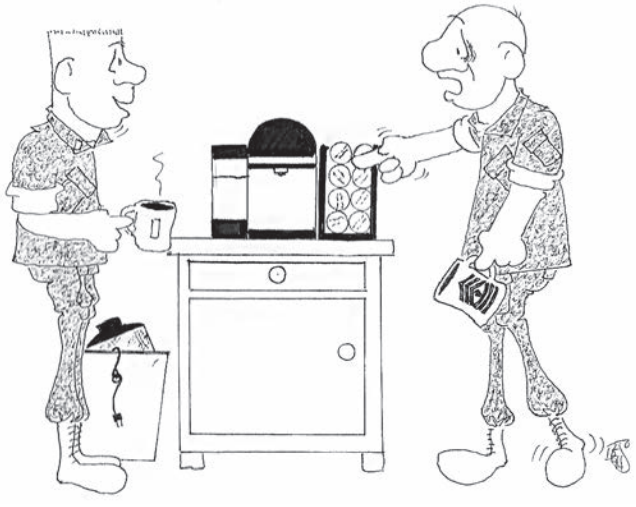
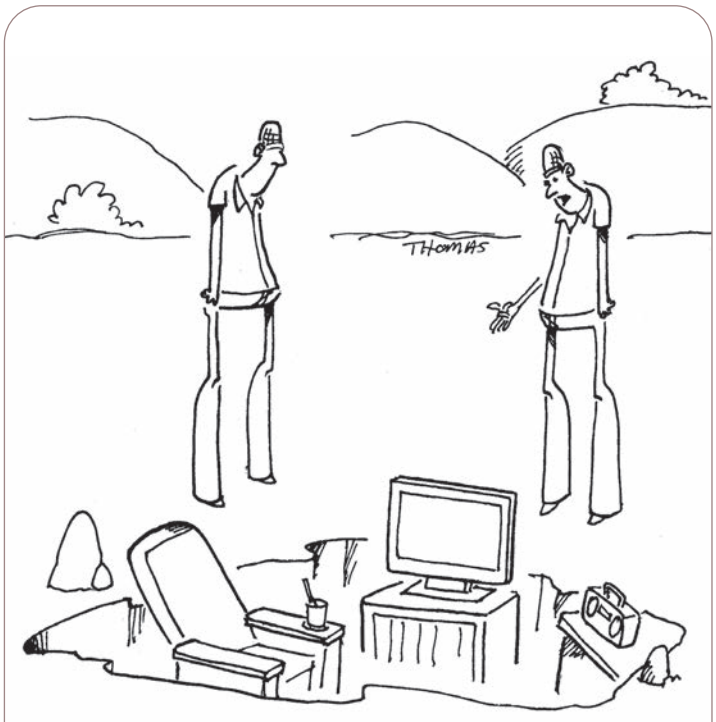


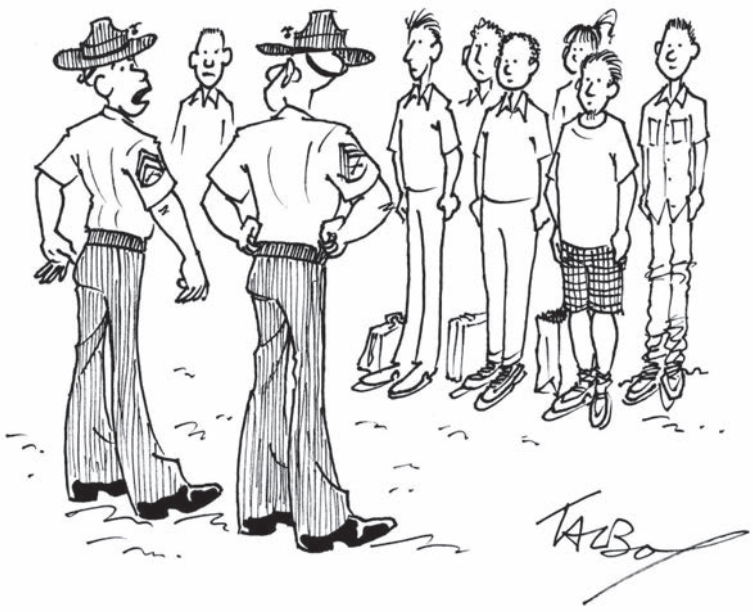
"It's the new coffee pot, First Sergeant. It's called a Keurig."

"He said his first two words ... Semper Fi!"



"It's the officers' foxhole."

"It'll probably take a couple of enlistments to make general."



"You have to keep in mind that they are descended from civilians."

Sea Rescue

By SSgt Norman Miller, USMC

A shrieking Marine-piloted Corsair dived on its Marshall Island target. Its bombs released, smoke and dust shrouding the atoll. Suddenly from the smoking blackness below, tiny red balls of fire streaked toward the sky from a well-hidden gun.

The Corsair shuddered as it dropped out of position. A hundred yards from the barely discernible beach the careening fuselage was swallowed by the treacherous surf.

Slowly an oil slick mixed with the green dye of a marker and the yellow of a life raft. The pilot's comrades circled overhead, radioed his position, and as gas ran low, turned homeward.

The man in the life raft was alone. His one salvation was the well-organized sea rescue service composed of the Navy's flying boat, the PBY Catalina, known fondly as the "Dumbo," and the swift destroyers that ply these waters.

In the past six months, 21 men of the 4th Marine Air Wing, commanded by Brigadier General Louis E. Woods, flying with squadrons neutralizing the Japanese-held islands of Mille, Jaluit, Wotje and Maloelap, had been rescued. Twenty of their comrades, shot down in similar actions, were lost. In other words, more than 50 percent of the men shot down in combat have been rescued, most of them to fly again!

Dumbos landed in perilously rough seas, cracking wingtips while effecting rescues, and, like giant crippled birds, the huge planes have taxied miles across the water.

American destroyers steamed defiantly into the range of Japanese shore batteries to pick up crash survivors, at times engaging in running battles with the enemy to accomplish their mission.

The vast reaches of open sea that these pilots crossed to bomb Japanese atolls do not seem impressive on a map, but they are incredibly long distances for single-engine planes.

After leaving their own base, the open sea was their only haven of safety if shot down since the only nearby islands were enemy held.

Once shot down, there was fear in their hearts. Fear of failure to be sighted. Fear of slight injuries becoming serious and the even greater fear of being discovered by the enemy. A man without fear is a fool.

They paddled with all the fury that fear inspires. They gave thanks to the heavy, tossing sea, threatening to engulf them, yet offering protective cover from the enemy. In the next breath they would curse it because it made them equally invisible to rescuers.

There was nothing to do now but continue to paddle in the direction of home, and wait.

The length of time pilots spent in the raft is not a matter fate. It may have been a few hours, a day, a week, all depending on the weather and visibility, but in 21 cases, their vigil was rewarded by hearing the drone of a plane, or the sight of the creamy wake of a destroyer.

Once shot down, there was fear in their hearts. Fear of failure to be sighted. Fear of slight injuries becoming serious and the even greater fear of being discovered by the enemy. A man without fear is a fool.

Once aboard the rescue craft the men were cared for, given clean, dry clothing and fed. At the same time, a laconic radio message, worded thusly, was sent out: "Pilot rescued by aircraft (or ship). Returning to base."

Despite being shot down and rescued, most of these men again took up the aerial cudgel against the Japanese in the Marshalls. Such was the case of Captain George Franck, former All-American halfback at the University of Minnesota.

His head injured in a crash landing, Captain Franck floated in his life raft for two and one-half hours. He was so close to enemy-held Wotje, that he "could count every coconut tree on the island."

He was picked up by a motor whaleboat from a Navy destroyer that slugged it out with Japanese coastal guns. The destroyer moved in after a Navy PBY, which landed to affect the rescue, was split in two by a 50-foot swell and its crew of six was sent scampering to a life raft. Overhead, Captain Franck's comrades,

SGT PAT DENMAN, USMC

This illustration by Sgt Pat Denman depicts a Navy PBY that was shot down by the Japanese. When it landed in the water, the PBY was badly damaged by the heavy tide and the crew was forced to board two rafts and join Lt Theodore Wyatt who was already in the water.

who had raced back to their base to refuel and re-arm, joined the fray. They strafed the enemy guns while Franck and the PBY crew were picked up.

Describing his rescue, Captain Franck said, "It was the best piece of teamwork I have ever seen."

It is not a usual sight to see an Army B-25 pilot affectionately kiss the hull of a battered, weather-beaten Navy Catalina.

First Lieutenant M.B. Watts of Richmond, Calif., did just that to the PBY which brought him and his crewmembers back to Tarawa one day in June 1944.

Shot down in a bombing run, Lieutenant Watts and his crew were picked up at sea by a patrol bomber piloted by Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade Olaf F. Holm, of La Jolla, Calif.

LTJG Holm landed the giant amphibian between two swells and popped 50 rivets in the hull.

By popping rivets, LTJG Holm meant that there were that many holes in the hull where rivets should have been. In addition, several supports were bent as he taxied toward the men on the raft and the PBY started "leaking like a sieve."

"Two of the Army men had broken legs and a third was badly cut up," Holm said. "We had a hard time moving them to our ship, but finally managed it by using part of the catwalk for a stretcher."

"The Army men kept saying, 'Thank God we're safe,' but we weren't so optimistic about the outlook. My crew kept plugging up the holes with pencils, pieces of wood, and even their fingers. By the time we were ready to take off, we had a foot of water in the plane."

With so heavy a load aboard and the water in the hull, Lieutenant Holm decided on a downwind takeoff, and

recalling his surfboard riding days, rode the crests of three swells until the heavily laden Navy craft was airborne. Tarawa was reached without further incident.

During the rescue of Marine Second Lieutenant Theodore Wyatt, of Chicago, Ill., another triple play was performed. Lieutenant Wyatt, a 4th Marine Air Wing Corsair pilot, was shot down less than 2 miles off one of the Japanese-held atolls he was strafing.

After hitting the water, he managed to get out of the cockpit and into his raft. Members of his flight sighted him and remained overhead until the Dumbo appeared. Also nearby was a destroyer, but as it neared Lieutenant Wyatt's raft, Japanese coastal batteries opened up. The Navy PBY landed, but was badly damaged by heavy seas, and the nine-man crew was forced to board two rafts and join 2ndLt Wyatt in the water. The shore batteries switched their fire to the plane and rafts, but a motor launch from the destroyer picked up the men without mishap, as Douglas dive bombers provided a curtain of protective fire.

A split second rescue saved the life of Marine Captain Edwin A. Tucker, of Lancaster, Calif.

Capt Tucker, a member of another 4th MAW Corsair Squadron, was shot down into the lagoon of an enemy base in the Marshalls. Capt Tucker was unable to inflate his life raft, and despite his frantic efforts, watched it sink out of sight. He abandoned his plane and was kept afloat by his Mae West. Twenty-five minutes later he was picked up by the ever-present Navy Catalina.

A destroyer, dispatched to the scene, was kept away by heavy shore battery fire. The destroyer lowered a motor whaleboat, which made its way, amid a shower of bullets to the captain and carried him to safety.

The rescue was accomplished without drawing fire from Japanese gun emplacements fringing the lagoon because of continued strafing by Capt Tucker's squadron mates, who kept the enemy gunners well pinned down.

Another thrilling rescue amid a hail of bullets was the one of Marine Captain Judson H. Bell, of Bel Air, Md., a member of one of the first units of the 4th MAW to use the Corsair as a fighter bomber. Capt Bell was forced into the water after his plane was set ablaze by enemy antiaircraft fire.

For two hours Captain Bell floated in the water, supported by his Mae West, his life raft having gone down with the plane. A destroyer, dispatched to the scene, was kept away by heavy shore battery fire. The destroyer lowered a motor whaleboat, which made its way, amid a shower of bullets to the captain and carried him to safety.

His 13th strike proved unlucky for Marine First Lieutenant Van A. Dempsey. Flying cover for a dive bomber, Lieutenant Dempsey's airplane was hit by antiaircraft fire. Unable to fly the stricken ship home, he pancaked into the ocean. He too, was unable to launch his life raft and had to rely on his Mae West. After 30 minutes of paddling in the water, he was picked up by a Navy flying boat.

These are only a scant few of the rescues of flyers downed at sea. All of them are victories against the ocean and the enemy. Experienced pilots and gunners were saved and went on with their mission of neutralizing the Japanese-held Marshall Islands.

www.LejeuneClaims.com

CAMP LEJEUNE JUSTICE ACT

Did you live or work on Camp Lejeune before 1988?

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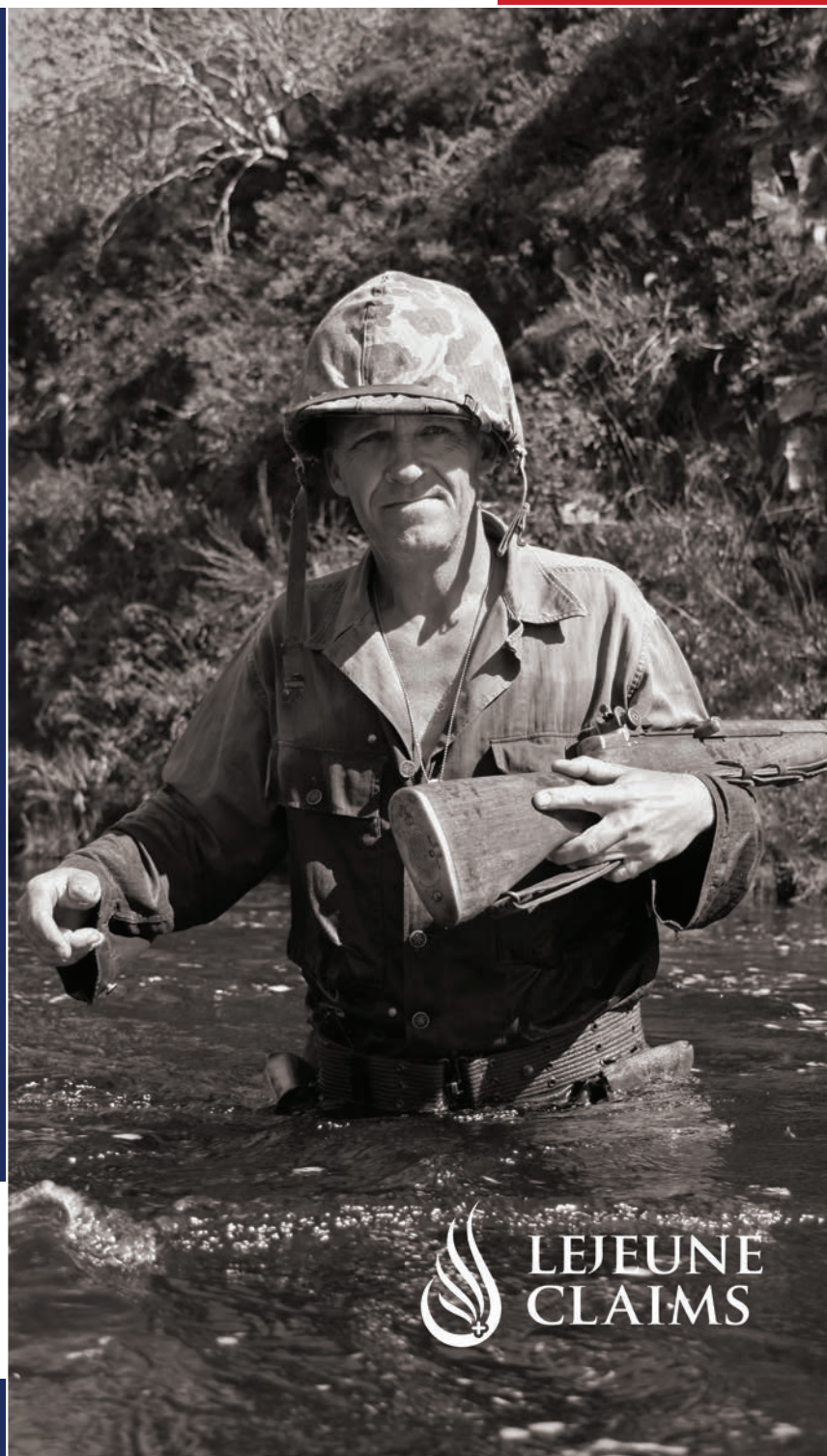

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Navigating Legal Waters

Camp Lejeune Justice Act Removes Hurdles but Questions Remain

By 2ndLt Kyle Daly , USMC

For Lisa Muckelbauer, a 60-year-old pre-school teacher from Texas, filing a claim against the government would potentially mean extra money—money on top of the federal benefits she's already receiving.

When her brother-in-law, John Muckelbauer, explained this to her, she was hesitant.

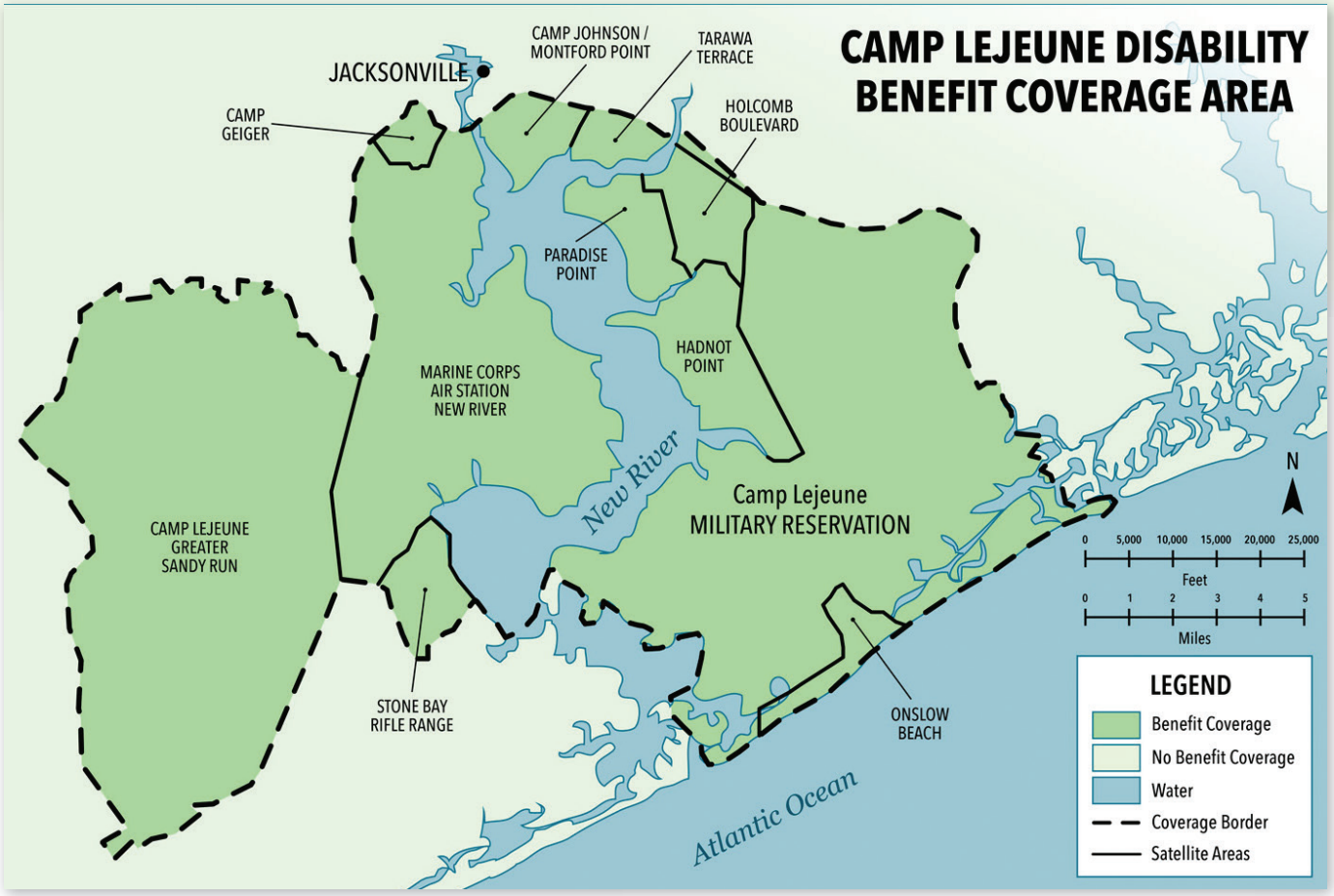
"I told John, 'I don't want to be greedy about it.' And he said, 'Don't think about it that way. This is something that you are entitled to,'" Lisa said.

Lisa's husband Matt, a former communications officer in the Marine Corps, died of cancer in December 2020. The loss had a financial impact. Matt was 57 and worked as a consultant at a business advisory firm before being diagnosed in 2019 with Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma, one of several diseases the government lists as being linked to contaminated water on Camp Lejeune in North Carolina where Matt was stationed early in his 10-year military career.

After his brother's death, John, also a Marine veteran who now works as general counsel for Veterans of Foreign Wars, initially advised Lisa to apply for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This tax-free monthly benefit is given to spouses, children or parents of servicemembers who die in the line of duty, or, in Matt's case, died from a service-related injury or illness. Lisa's application with the VA linked Matt's death with the Camp Lejeune water, and her benefits were approved.

VA benefits, however, are not the only entitlement servicemembers and their family members who were exposed to Camp Lejeune's toxic water may be entitled to. Thanks to the recently signed Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or PACT Act, healthcare benefits have been expanded and veterans who were harmed by certain toxic exposures related to their service now have the ability to apply for disability compensation. A small section of the law, called the Camp Lejeune Justice Act, tears down legal barriers that have been used to successfully defend the federal government against Camp Lejeune water contamination lawsuits in the past and allows people harmed by the Marine Corps base's contaminated water to sue the government in a North Carolina federal court. The law not only gets rid of certain defenses for the federal government, but also lowers the burden of proof for claimants who need to show a link between the water and a health condition. The evidence required will include medical records and records that the person lived or worked on the base.

USMC



COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

History of Camp Lejeune's Toxic Water

Around 1 million military personnel and civilians are estimated to have been exposed to contaminated drinking water on Camp Lejeune between the 1950s and 1980s, according to a 2017 public health assessment conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

Two water treatment facilities—Hadnot Point and Tarawa Terrace—supplied the contaminated water to family housing areas and barracks. The source of contamination included an off-base dry-cleaning business, leaking underground storage tanks and waste disposal sites. The contaminants found in the water included trachloroethylene (PCE); trichloroethylene (TCE); vinyl chloride; benzene; dichloroethylene (DCE), and lead. Some of these contaminants are known to cause cancer.

Drinking the contaminated water likely increased the risk of cancers and birth defects and other health issues for infants and children, as well as civilians and servicemembers who worked and lived at the base.

The Marine Corps discovered contaminants in the water in 1982 and most contaminated wells ceased operation by 1985. Since the early '90s, the federal health agency has been conducting studies on the health effects of those who resided at Camp Lejeune, all which can be accessed via ATSDR's website.

The case of Laura Jones exemplifies the various legal walls Camp Lejeune residents have run into.

The act, with many exceptions, waives this immunity. It allows a person to sue the U.S. government for personal injury, death, or property damage caused by negligence of federal employees.

In 2007, Jones, the wife of a veteran enlisted Marine who lived with her husband on Camp Lejeune in the early 1980s, filed a claim for monetary damages with the Department of the Navy (DON), arguing that the cancer she was diagnosed with in 2003 was caused by the base's contaminated water.

She took legal action through the Federal Torts Claims Act (FTCA) and in 2009, became the first person harmed by the Camp Lejeune water contamination to file a civil lawsuit against the government in court.

Before the passage of the FTCA in 1946, a person couldn't sue the United States for monetary damages because of "sovereign immunity," a legal doctrine that prevents a person from taking a sovereign state to court without the state's consent. The act, with many exceptions, waives this immunity. It allows a person to sue the U.S. government for personal injury, death, or property damage caused by negligence of federal employees.

The Navy Department initially tried to get Jones' case dismissed because the FTCA has a statute of limitation of two years for a person to file a claim based on when the injury occurred. The DON argued that the clock started when she was diagnosed in 2003. A judge ruled Jones did not have enough information at that time to link her diagnoses with the Camp Lejeune water contamination.

However, a special body within the federal court system consolidated Jones' case and more than 800 other Camp Lejeune water contamination lawsuits into a single federal district court in Georgia. The Georgia court dismissed all the cases in December 2016 because

LCPL CHRISTIAN AYERS, USMC

The Environmental Protection Agency did not have enforceable regulations that capped levels of contaminants found in Camp Lejeune's drinking water until 1989. Now, frequent testing is done to ensure the drinking water on MCB Camp Lejeune and MCAS New River and other Marine Corps bases is safe.

of a North Carolina statute of repose, which bars lawsuits from being brought forward 10 years after the act that caused the injury.

Issues related to time were a major legal barrier the Camp Lejeune Justice Act removed. Now, people have two years from Aug. 10, 2022—the date the law was enacted—to file a claim against the government.

"Any applicable statute of repose or statute of limitations … shall not apply to a claim," the law states.

However, the Georgia court also ruled in 2016 that even if the claims were not barred by the state's 10-year-limit, servicemembers themselves were not allowed to file claims because of what's known as the Feres Doctrine. This legal doctrine prohibits a servicemember from suing the U.S. government for injuries they sustained during their time in service.

Again, the Camp Lejeune Justice Act overrode this defense, giving "an individual, including a veteran" the right to sue.

Finally, the Georgia court decided that the U.S. government couldn't be held accountable because there were no federal laws that regulated the contaminants in the water at the time people were harmed by the wells. The Environmental Protection Agency didn't have enforceable regulations that capped levels of the contaminants found in Camp Lejeune's drinking water until 1989. And that was only some of the contaminants. DCE and PCE maximum levels were not established until 1992.

The DON, however, did have its own policies in place for safe drinking water that were not adhered to—a fact that has angered veterans and families for years. However, the court found that the act of providing safe water to drink was at the "discretion" of the Marine Corps and the federal government could not be held responsible.

An exception to the FTCA, called the discretionary function exception, preserves the sovereign immunity of the United States. It protects the United States from the discretionary actions of its employees who are free to make policy-based decisions without fear of the government—their employer—being sued.

The Camp Lejeune Justice Act, however, prevents the government from using this popular exception. The law prevents the federal government from "any claim to immunity" that would be available under the Federal Tort Claims Act.

American University Professor Paul Figley, who wrote the American Bar Association's book "A Guide to the Federal Tort Claims Act," told *Leatherneck*, in any normal FTCA case, the government is going to look at whether a special defense, such as the Feres Doctrine or the discretionary function exception, applies.

But for these cases, they don't.

"It's a much happier place for the plaintiffs' attorneys, because this time all of the things that could be set up to help them prevail, have been set up to help them prevail," he said. This also includes a lower burden of proof.

Claims

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the government will spend around $6.1 billion in awards and settlements until fiscal year 2031, and that an additional $15 billion could be paid out in the years after. Before suing the government, however, eligible servicemembers and their families must first file a claim with the DON, giving the department a chance to settle the claim without the court's involvement. It is separate from a claim filed with the Department of Veterans Affairs for health care, disability, or other compensation.

Earlier this year, Lisa connected with a law firm to assist her. Attorneys are not needed to file a claim with the DON, however, lawyers and veterans service organizations are advising potential claimants to have an attorney from the start of what is a complex legal process. The lawyer can handle the paperwork as well as track down documents needed to prove a claim, such as medical records. They can advise the person of their options if the DON denies their claim or does not respond within six months and can file a lawsuit if that's what the client wants to do.

Attorneys say one misconception people have about the Camp Lejeune Justice Act is that they can fill out a form, send it to the DON, and a check will appear in the mail. It's not that simple as the person has to prove, through medical records and other documentation, that contaminated water caused their condition and that a "causal relationship is at least as likely as not," the law states. Beth Middleton Burke, the attorney with the South Carolina law firm Rogers, Patrick, Westbrooke and Brickman, makes sure new clients understand this. "I tell them, there is no fund. There is no pot of money," Burke said. "This isn't just, you submit your claim form and wait for your check."

A person only has until August 2024—two years from the date the law was enacted—to start the process, which begins with filing a claim with the Department

For More information or to File a Claim

https://www.jag.navy.mil/organization/documents/CLJA_Directions_Procedures.pdf

https://www.jag.navy.mil/organization/code_15_Camp_Lejeune_Claims.htm

https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/camp-lejeune-water-contamination/

of the Navy. If the DON denies the claim or does not respond within six months of the claim being filed, the claimant has the option to file a lawsuit in court. The claimant could, however, continue to wait for a response from the Navy.

DON spokeswoman Lieutenant Commander Devin Arneson said in an email there is no deadline for the Navy to respond to a claim.

"The Navy is committed to resolving all claims related to this matter as fairly, thoroughly, and expeditiously as possible," Arneson said.

Thousands of Marine veterans and family members nationwide have already filed claims with the Department of the Navy and claimants must give the DON at least six months to approve or deny a claim before filing a lawsuit. Seven months after the law was passed, however, none of those 22,000 claims filed with the Office of the Judge Advocate General of the Navy's Tort Claims Unit have been adjudicated, according to a Navy spokeswoman.

At the end of March, media reports estimated about 200 claimants had already filed lawsuits.

When asked if the DON was facing manpower issues in responding to thousands of claims—22,000 as of late March—Arneson said the process of adjudicating claims is complex. Some involve information dating back more than 40 years.

"Claimants have to provide clarifying information to perfect their claims and the adjudication process can be iterative and time consuming; not necessarily due to resources, but due to the process established in the law," Arneson said.

A person only has until August 2024—two years from the date the law was enacted—to start the process, which begins with filing a claim with the Department of the Navy (DON).

Judge James Dever, one of four judges in the Eastern District of North Carolina, held a status conference on April 5 with attorneys for some of the plaintiffs who've filed lawsuits and lawyers with the government. The main issue discussed was how to handle the massive number of cases anticipated to come before the court. The judge expressed concern that the Navy had not adjudicated any of the claims and said if each case went to trial, it would take about 1,900 years—longer than the Roman Empire's existence—for the four judges at the district court to get through the litigation.

According to media accounts, Dever asked attorneys to find a way to streamline the process to settle the claims.

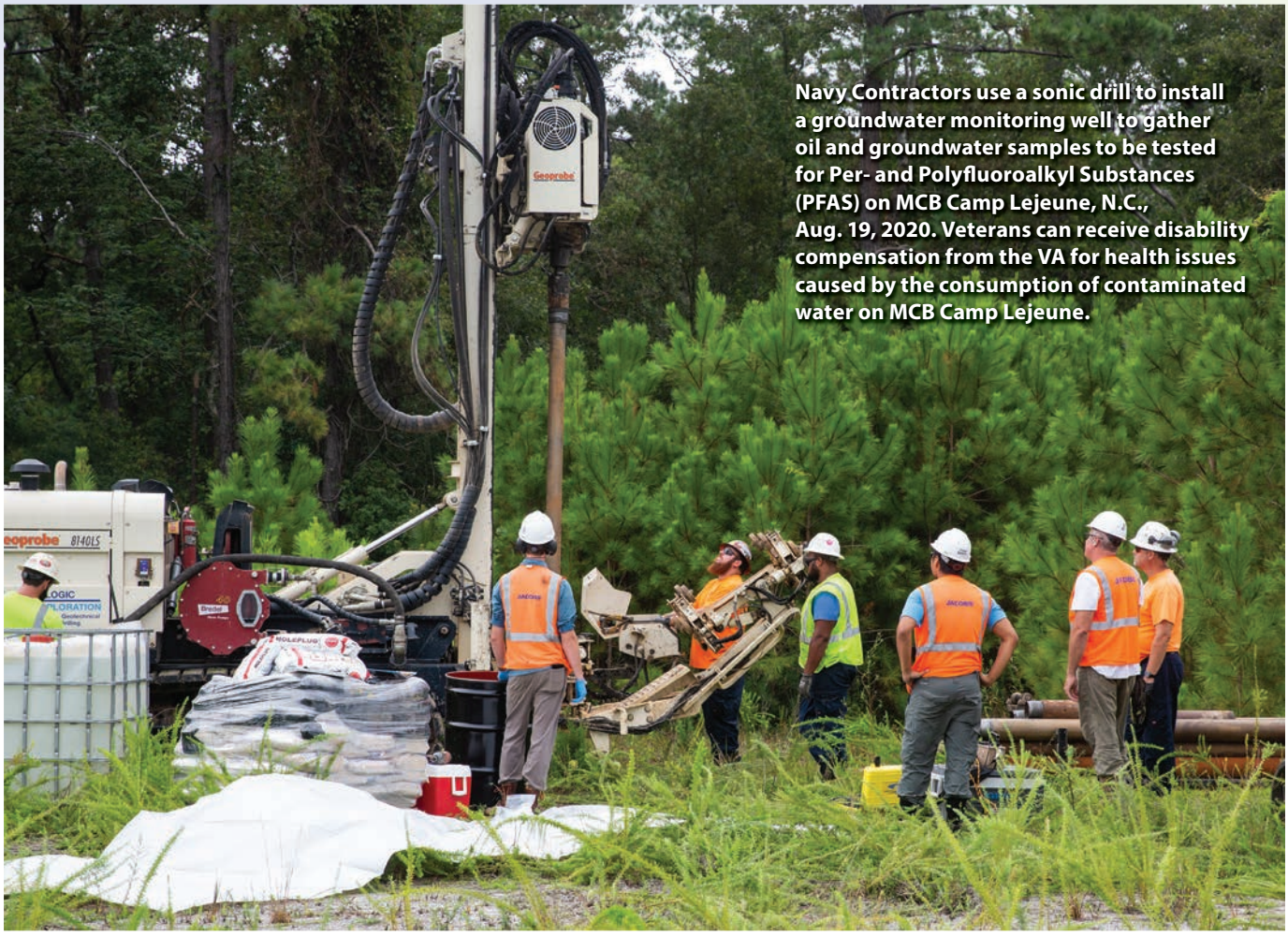
In late March, several plaintiffs' attorneys requested from the court that the Camp Lejeune cases be coordinated or partially consolidated to "avoid unnecessary cost or delay," according to a joint memorandum.

Beth Middleton Burke, whose South Carolina law firm started taking on Camp Lejeune cases a few weeks after the law passed, said she tells her clients that litigation could last a long time.

"I don't think we're going to get a resolution for three to five years, maybe

LCPL ANTONIO MAZZAMUTO, USMC

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, right, tours range G-36 with MajGen Francis Donovan, left, Commanding General, 2nd Marine Division, and LtGen William Jurney, CG, II MEF on MBC Camp Lejeune, N.C., Jan. 28, 2022. Servicemembers and their families who have filed a claim through the DON must allow six months for the department to approve or deny a claim before filing a lawsuit.



Navy Contractors use a sonic drill to install a groundwater monitoring well to gather oil and groundwater samples to be tested for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) on MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C., Aug. 19, 2020. Veterans can receive disability compensation from the VA for health issues caused by the consumption of contaminated water on MCB Camp Lejeune.

LCPL CHRISTIAN AYERS, USMC

more. I just don't know," Burke said. "Just given the volume of claims and the pace at which the government is moving to date, it does not suggest there is going to be a speedy resolution to this."

Burden of Proof and Presumptive Conditions

Typically, in a toxic tort case, the burden of proof is "more likely than not," or a chance greater than 50 percent. The words "at least as likely as not" means the burden of proof is met as long as there is a 50-50 chance of causation.

"One way to describe that is 'the tie goes to the runner,'" said Ken King, a former Marine JAG officer who has his own law firm in North Carolina.

"It's still a burden we have to meet, but it's a lower burden than we'd normally be faced with," he said.

Since March 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs has considered eight health conditions as being linked to the Camp Lejeune water contamination: adult leukemia, aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, Non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and Parkinson's disease. These are the presumptive conditions—health issues automatically assumed to be linked to a person's service—that will allow a veteran to receive disability compensation. "Presently, these conditions are the only ones for which there is sufficient scientific and medical evidence to support the creation of presumptions," according to the department's website.

King pointed to lung cancer as an example of a condition that would be more difficult to prove was linked to water contamination. A person who smoked a pack a day for 30 years would have a more difficult time making their case than a non-smoker who lived on Camp Lejeune.

Burke, the South Carolina attorney, started taking on clients a few weeks after the law was enacted. She used those weeks to call friends who'd taken on cases as well as educate herself on the scientific evidence by reading the ATSDRs reports. Burke specializes in personal injury cases related to pharmaceutical drugs and medical devices. Science is a prominent part of her work.

"A big issue for me was, looking at the science, 'What injuries do I think I can prove?'"

Burke said she has turned away clients—for example, those with pancreatic and prostate cancers—because, currently, there's not enough scientific evidence linking the water contamination to their conditions.

Attorney Fees

Veterans service organizations have been warning former servicemembers of "predatory" law firms taking advantage of claimants and are calling for legislation that caps attorneys' fees. The percentage of the award given to an attorney, called a contingency fee—a payment the attorney receives if a case is won—can vary depending on the law firm.

Despite provisions being in earlier versions of the bill, the Camp Lejeune Justice Act became law without any limits placed on how much attorneys could charge for their services. Some federal lawmakers are actively trying to pass legislation that would cap attorney fees.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Legal Reform, a group that advocates for civil justice reform, also supports fee cap legislation for Camp Lejeune cases.

Matt Webb, who serves as the Institute's senior vice president of legal reform policy, said as a matter of ethics, lawyers are only able to charge a "reasonable fee."

The American Bar Association's Model Rules for Professional Conduct state that a lawyer should not charge a client "an unreasonable fee or an unreasonable amount for expenses." The rules state that what is considered reasonable depends on time, labor, difficulty of the case, experience of the lawyer, and more.

"Unfortunately, what is considered reasonable is very much in the eye of the beholder and the beholder tends to be the lawyer," Webb said.

Bergmann and Moore, a law firm that handles veterans' disability benefits claim appeals, has entered into agreements with veteran services organizations, including The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. The firm has agreed to screen potential Camp Lejeune claimants and advise them whether filing a claim would be beneficial.

The Disability Offset

As of early April, many questions still lingered about one section of the Camp Lejeune Justice Act that has caused confusion for claimants and created unanswerable questions for attorneys.

The language of the law states that an award shall be "offset by the amount of any disability award, payment, or benefit" given to the person through a Veterans Affairs program, Medicare, Medicaid, or any health care or disability payments related to exposure of Camp Lejeune's contaminated water.

As of early April, many questions still lingered about one section of the Camp Lejeune Justice Act that has caused confusion for claimants and created unanswerable questions for attorneys.

In other words, a person cannot double dip into the government's coffers.

A Department of Veterans Affairs information sheet about the new law states that the offset would affect the award, not a person's benefits. The money would be taken from whatever the government offers the claimant.

"Despite this clear guidance, there's a lot of confusion," said Glenn Bergmann, managing partner of Bergmann and Moore. "Veterans are scared that if they file a one-time claim … that this will affect their VA benefits."

LCPL CHRISTIAN AYERS, USMC

A radiological engineer scans soil for radiation prior to collecting samples that will be tested for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) on MCB Camp Lejeune, Aug. 19, 2020. These man-made chemicals are commonly used for clothing, food packaging and carpeting, and have the potential to be toxic.

The Department of Veterans Affairs website also states that VA benefits unrelated to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune will not affect the award.

In agreements that Bergmann's law firm has with The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Vietnam Veterans of America, the firm must advise veterans or family members about how an offset could potentially impact an award. Veterans service organizations fear some lawyers might neglect to mention the offset to their clients, resulting in a smaller than expected award amount or, potentially, a financial loss.

However, many questions about the offset remain, including how calculations will be made.

Liz Hartman, an American Legion post commander and a CLJA spokeswoman for Bergmann and Moore, said clear guidance on how an award would be offset based on Medicare and Medicaid benefits had yet to be provided.

'Accountability'

Paula Armstrong's motivation for starting the process of filing a claim wasn't to relieve a financial burden, but to make a statement.

In the mid-1980s, the air traffic control Marine worked at Marine Corps Air Station New River, the air base next to Camp Lejeune that was also affected by the contamination. In a questionnaire Armstrong filled out for lawyers reviewing her case, she answered 'yes' to having a miscarriage and trouble conceiving. She also answered 'yes' to having developed skin cancer.

Fortunately, Armstrong ended up having three children with her husband, also a Marine. Her last occurrence of skin cancer was March 2020. She still goes to the doctor for frequent checks, she said, but she is well today.

Armstrong is a family friend of John Muckelbauer, whose brother's death was possibly linked to Camp Lejeune water. The same way he encouraged his sister-in-law, Lisa Muckelbauer, to file a claim, John also encouraged Armstrong.

For Armstrong, any money received from the government would be about "accountability" — holding accountable the people who harmed families like the Muckelbauer family.

Lisa Muckelbauer encourages any person who is eligible or potentially eligible to file a claim.

"Obviously the money is not going to bring back my husband, but it will give me more financial stability and security going forward."

Author's bio: 2ndLt Kyle Daly is a former journalist who enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2016. He was commissioned in 2021 and is currently stationed in San Antonio, Texas, training as a UAS officer.

Sea Stories

Compiled by Briesa Koch

SEA STORY
OF THE MONTH

The Two "Mighty Joes"

In 1981, I was ordered to Okinawa to serve my last tour prior to my retirement.

I was a chief warrant officer 3 assigned to Marine Wing Support Group 17 at Camp Foster. I was one of the S-3 members. Originally, my assignment was to be the fuel officer at the air station on base. Since that billet was already filled, I was sent to the S-3.

A little over a month into my tour, the squadron executive officer approached me and said "Jack, I just submitted your name to be interviewed for the position of general's aide."

He added that I was not to worry as I was a CWO-3 and retiring soon, but that he was required to select an officer to be considered. I forgot about it until a week later when the executive officer told me that I would have to go to Camp Courtney for the interview. We both sort of chuckled and smiled as we knew a warrant officer would not be selected to be a general's aide.

I drove to Camp Courtney in my "Okinawa Special" car, reported to the headquarters and saw there were numerous company grade officers there to be interviewed by the chief of staff, who was a colonel. When it was my turn, I told the colonel that I was retiring soon and did not desire to be the aide.

He said that he would talk to Major General Steve Olmstead and tell him that. The colonel saw the general and came out and said, "The general still wants to see you."

When I reported to MajGen Olmstead, he said, "A good Marine will always take an assignment."

I was chosen to be the aide! I then was introduced to Lieutenant "Joe." He was a very sharp, knowledgeable, professional Marine.

Joe and I both came from Boston, and we hit it off immediately. We worked well together as the two aides to MajGen Steven Olmstead, the commanding officer of the III MAF/3rd Marine Division.

We worked with a Navy lieutenant, also named Joe. He was the aide to Rear Admiral George Schick, the commander of the Amphibious Forces 7th Fleet. Navy Lieutenant "Joe" was a Seal and a squared away Sailor, who was extremely professional.

At first, the tour as aide was not my "cup of tea," but after a while I enjoyed it and met many famous people. Working with the "two Joes" was a pleasure! Marine Lieutenant "Joe" departed Okinawa a couple of months prior to me. We held a "sayonara" dinner for him at the CG's mess at Camp Courtney. I gave a toast and said "Joe is the most professional and dedicated lieutenant I have ever served with in my 22 years as a Marine, and if he makes the Marine Corps his career, I can bet he will be a general officer!"

Years later, while working with the JROTC at Apopka High School in Florida, I saw a picture of a lieutenant colonel with the 30th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Carl Mundy. The lieutenant colonel was my friend, Marine "Joe"! We have met a few times since then and I corresponded with him and his wife Ellyn. Both are fantastic people. When my Marine friend Joe Dunford retired, he was a four-star general who had been the 36th Commandant of the Marine Corps and the 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Navy "Joe" I worked with, Joseph McGuire, retired as a vice admiral. Serving with these two "Joes" was the highlight of my career!

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

Rank Has Its Limits

In the spring of 1969 upon returning from Vietnam, I was assigned to Camp Pendleton, Calif., as a sergeant in charge of the armory. One sunny day, in comes a gunnery sergeant helping a first lieutenant check out on his way to a new assignment.

They put the lieutenant's .45-caliber pistol on my counter and put the sign-out sheet down for me to sign. Looking down at the rusty, dirty pistol, I looked up at the lieutenant and the gunny and told them that there was no way I was going to accept this pistol into my armory.

The gunny said, "Oh yes you are!"

I repeated, "No, I am not!"

The gunny then signed the sign-out sheet himself for the armory, leaving the rusty pistol on the counter, and they went on their merry way.

I picked up the pistol and marched it over to the company commander's office, explaining to him what had just taken place. The major told me the pistol would be returned to the armory by the end of the day. I had no idea what the major's conversation with the gunny and the lieutenant was but before the end of the day the gunny brought a super clean .45-cal. pistol back to the armory. Rank has its limits in the armory just as it has at the MP's gate!

Sgt Mike Melroy
USMC, 1966-1972, 1980-1982
Eureka Spring, Colo.

Snake on a Plane

We were having a family get together last week, and while all of us were around the table talking, the topic of snakes came up. My sister asked me if I'd told anyone about Frank, my pet snake that I had when I was at Camp Pendleton. When I got my orders for Okinawa, I tried to find a home for him, but nobody wanted a snake, so instead of letting him go, I decided to take him home on leave with me.

Frank was a stowaway in my carry-on luggage from San Diego, Calif., to Saint Louis, Mo., then to Paducah, Ky. When I got home, I showed my younger brother, and he thought Frank was cool until the snake made his great escape.

My brother and I were looking for him when my dad asked what we were doing. He wasn't happy and neither was my mom when they found out I brought a snake home, especially now that a reptile was loose in the house. I told them it could have been worse, that he could have gotten loose on the plane which they didn't think about.

One of my buddies even showed up to join the search. That was in 1979 and I think my friend is still laughing over the ordeal. Months later, while I was on Okinawa, my parents sent me a letter telling me that Frank was spotted under the house by an exterminator who said it was the most

colorful snake he ever saw. My parents forgave me but told me not to bring any other pets to their house.

Mike King
Kevil, Ky.

A Dangerous Assignment

Nitroglycerin is a highly explosive, oily, clear liquid, used to make dynamite. It is extremely dangerous. Many have been killed just transporting the stuff. I was one of the "new men" in the platoon. A sergeant came into our quarters and asked for a volunteer. Everyone pointed at me.

We went outside and he asked me if I might be afraid of dangerous stuff. I answered, "No, I'll be OK."

He drove a truck out the back gate to a large concrete bunker, took a key and unlocked the door, went inside, and came out with a wooden ammo box with rope handles and gently sat it down. He opened the top of it and removed about 2 inches of cotton.

Under the cotton was about 20 small bottles of nitroglycerin. They were secured in such a way that the bottles couldn't touch each other. He very carefully checked every one of them to make sure the cork on top of each bottle was down against the liquid in each one. Then he replaced the cotton on top, closed the wooden lid, secured it, and told me to get in the truck.

When he handed it to me, he said, "Do not put this on your knees, suspend it in front of you by holding it by the rope handles."

He got into the driver's side, started the engine, and drove as carefully as possible toward our destination.

He asked me my name and I told him. He said, "Jim, don't worry, if that stuff goes off, we'll never know it." That was not reassuring.

My arms got very tired, but I never let it down. We got to where they were going to use it, and I was glad when he took it off my hands.

James Wade
USMC, 1955-1959
Quincy, Ind.

Hue City?

I was standing in the checkout line at our local Safeway grocery store. There was a well-dressed, pleasant-looking younger man in front of me. As he started to leave, he looked at my cover. It was my "Hue City, Vietnam" cover with the eagle, globe and anchor on it that I purchased several years ago. The fellow squinted as he read it. Then he said, "Hue City? That's where I was born."

"When were you born?" I asked.

He said, "In 1971. My father was in 101st Airborne Division and my mother is Vietnamese."

I said, "I was there in Tet in 1968 fighting the enemy who had invaded the city."

He smiled and said, "Thank you, Sir!" And then stuck out his hand to shake mine.

He then went on to say that he just retired from the U.S. Army after 20 years. He also said that he owed America his deepest appreciation.

I shook his hand and said, "Isn't America great?"

He smiled and said, "You bet!"

Sgt John Wear
USMC, 1968-1969
Elbert, Colo.

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90 Days a Grunt:

A Short-Term Assignment to the Infantry, the Jungle and the Battle at Mutter's Ridge

By Kyle Watts

In late September 1968, Bob Skeels stepped off a plane at Quang Tri Combat Base. The aircraft delivered three of Bob's friends to Vietnam alongside him. The four men shared much in common. All were young, newly minted second lieutenants. All had recently graduated from training as 1802 tank officers. For Bob's part, a surge of personal patriotism drove him to the Corps after college despite growing disillusion with the war at home. Vietnam was the war of his generation, and he wanted to play a part, just as his parents had in World War II. He pursued a career as a tanker. He preferred the idea of a heavily armored carriage with massive firepower carrying him to battle in relative safety.

The four lieutenants hauled their gear off the plane and entered a building to check in. Their crisp new uniforms and beaming golden bars stood out among the faded, drab background of the base. A gruff and weathered lieutenant colonel summoned them into his office. They lined up and snapped to attention. The officer got straight to the point.

"Sorry to tell you this, gents, but a curveball is coming your way. We are short on infantry platoon commanders, so for your first 90 days in country, you will be assigned to a grunt battalion. Welcome to the infantry."

Bob swallowed hard stifling a wave of emotion. Scuttlebutt had reached the states that 1968 was the war's worst year yet to be a new Marine infantry officer. Grunt lieutenants held a low chance of survival. Bob gathered his strength to remain upright and breathed a hardy, "Yes, Sir."

"We couldn't make a noise because we could tell the guy was a hard ass and he'd bust you right there on the spot," Bob recalled today. "I was in fear, but your eyes can't show anything, your words can't show anything. What are you supposed to do? You just obey your orders."

COURTESY OF BOB SKEELS

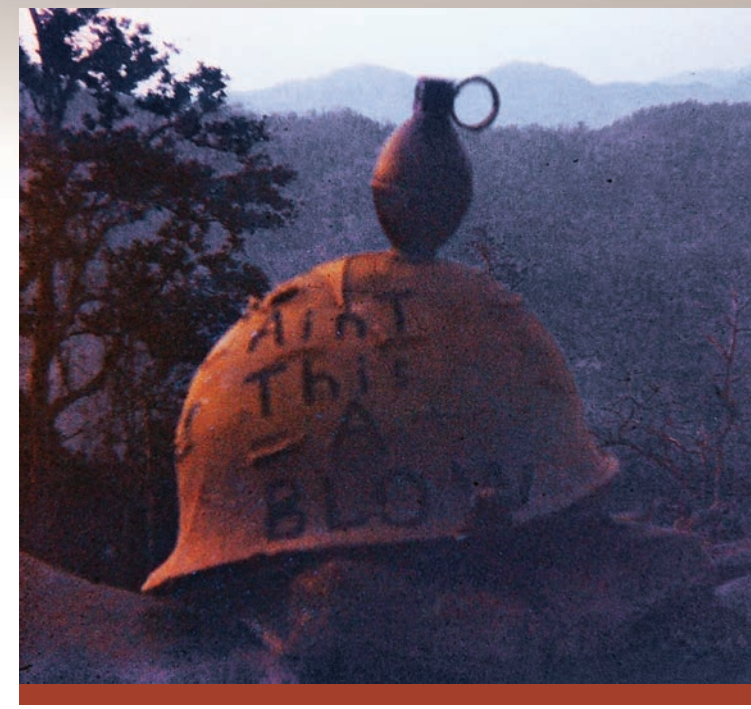
1stLt Bob Skeels following a successful ambush mission on Dec. 29, 1968. Less than a week later, Skeels left "Echo" Co, 2nd Bn, 4th Marines, after spending the first 90 days of his tour with the infantry and returned to his primary specialty as a tanker.

The four tankers left the lieutenant colonel's office and parted ways. Bob received his orders to "Echo" Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines and his spirits faded further when he learned the officer who had informed them of the temporary assignment would later be his battalion commander. The man seemed even less pleased with the situation than the tankers had been.

Bob collected the weapons, clothing, and 782 gear issued to a new grunt bound for the bush. He loaded onto a chopper heading west for Vandegrift Combat Base. The sun disappeared behind distant mountain tops as the helicopter set down. Someone directed Bob to a tent on the perimeter to spend the night. Another chopper would deliver him to his unit at Khe Sanh the following morning. Several NCOs invited Bob to join their card game and dealt him in. In the twilight, ridges and valleys extended for miles, nestled beneath a perfectly painted sky. Could a place like this really be a war zone?

Bob stripped down to his skivvies as they played. The oppressive heat seemed the only blemish on the otherwise beautiful country. An artillery round suddenly exploded 150 meters away. Bob scanned the table, gauging the reactions of other Marines. A second round hit 100 meters

Right: A view of the mountainous terrain immediately south of the DMZ, photographed by LCpl Pat McWilliams during a patrol with 3rd Platoon, Co E, 2/4. The words on his helmet capture the general sentiment of the Marines who endured and survived that jungle. (Photo by Patrick McWilliams)



away. Everyone ran outside. A third round came 75 meters away. Someone screamed, "Get in the goddamn trench! We're on the gun target line!"

Six Marines dove headlong into a water-filled hole next to the tent. Wearing nothing but his skivvies and hard-rimmed glasses, Bob plunged in after them. He sank to the bottom and struggled not to drown as the tangled mass of bodies all took cover. Someone knocked Bob's glasses off and they disappeared into the muck.

When the incoming fire finally stopped, the Marines clawed their way out of the trench. The tent which housed the card game hung in shreds. Naked, soaked, and blind without his glasses, Bob never felt so vulnerable.

"I was so embarrassed. I learned to never go to bed without being fully dressed. From that point on, I always went to bed with my boots on and rifle on my chest. I found out later the incoming rounds were misfires from friendly 105 mm howitzers nearby. That was my first night in country. What a hell of a night."

In the morning, Bob boarded another helicopter and flew farther west. The chopper descended into thick fog, completely socking in the jungle beneath him. The helicopter crew chief shouted back as Bob peered out the door.

"OK, Lieutenant, you're here!"

Bob stared, completely befuddled. A white sheet hung in the air, veiling what seemed the entire world outside of the chopper. "What?"

"You're here, Hill 881 North."

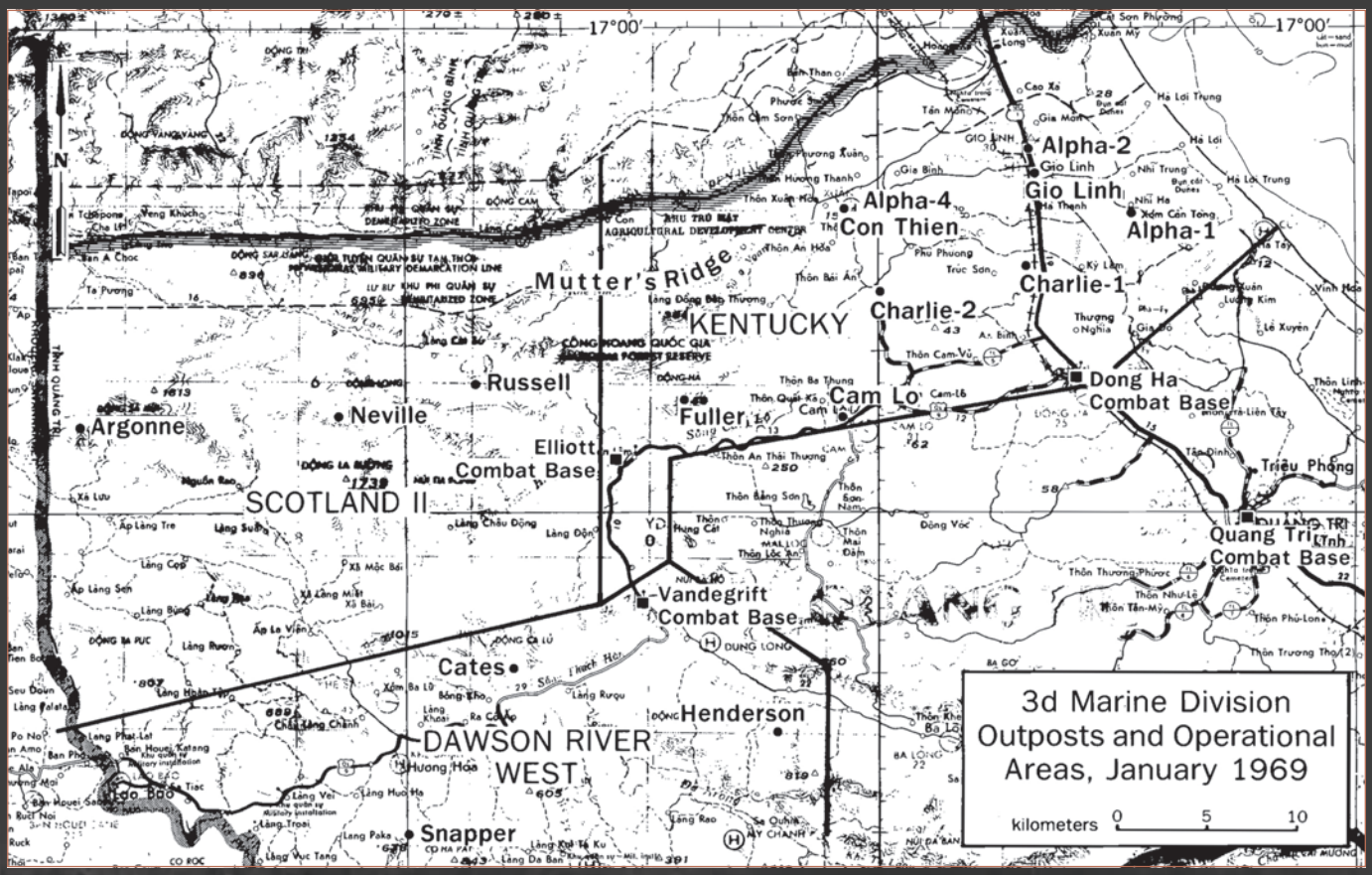
"Are we on the ground?"

"No, but we're only about 10 feet off. You'll be alright, go ahead and jump."

"Sorry to tell you this, gents, but a curveball is coming your way. We are short on infantry platoon commanders, so for your first 90 days in country, you will be assigned to a grunt battalion. Welcome to the infantry."

BOB SKEELS

One of only three photographs taken by Bob Skeels while he was in Vietnam captures the view from a hill on Mutter's Ridge looking down into the valley where his platoon would make the initial contact of a multi-battalion operation on Dec. 8, 1968.



An aerial view of FSB Russell in late February 1969 after the base was overrun by NVA sappers on Feb. 25. Skeels' platoon spent many nights on Russell in November 1968 carving the site out of the hilltop and were there the night it was attacked. (USMC map and photo)

Bob cursed the Marine, the fog, and the hill somewhere below as he slid into his pack. With over 125 pounds of gear on his body, he jumped. The helicopter noise muffled any cracking sounds from his body as he collided with the ground. He lay on his back catching his breath as the helicopter departed. A driving rain began, pelting his face as he stared toward the sky. Men snickered in the distance. Bob hurt too much to care. A Marine finally approached.

"You Lieutenant Skeels?"

"Yeah," Bob muttered. "My back hurts like hell."

"Jesus, sir. We gotta get you out of that dead cockroach position." He helped Bob roll over and get on his feet. "You're 3rd Platoon Commander. They're all waiting for you over there on the east side of the hill."

Bob located his Marines, collected under several ponchos tied together. The platoon sergeant stood as Bob entered their shelter. "Welcome, Lieutenant."

"Thanks. It's good to finally be here. I've had a couple rough days." The Marines smirked and shot glances around the group.

"Well, you're about to have tougher days. What do you want to do now?"

COURTESY OF PATRICK MCWILLIAMS

LCpl Patrick "Mac" McWilliams on patrol in Vietnam. McWilliams served as point man for Bob Skeels' platoon on Dec. 8, 1968, during the battle on Mutter's Ridge.

Bob gathered the platoon sergeant, squad leaders, and anyone who was on their second tour. The Marines arrived as Bob decided what to say. One of the grunts beat him to the punch.

"Lieutenant Skeels, before you get started, can I ask a question?" Bob braced for impact.

"Sure."

"How the hell did we wind up with a green tanker for a damn infantry officer?"

"You guys gotta give me a break!" Bob replied. "Sure, I am green, but looking at your brand new uniforms, some of you guys are just as new as I am. I'm here to learn from you guys that have been here the longest, and we're all going to be in this together."

A silence followed Bob's retort as the Marines traded looks and considered their new leader. Finally, the Marine who offered the challenge let on a smile.

"OK, Lieutenant. We'll let you have a chance. But no orders for crazy frontal charges!"

Echo Company departed Khe Sanh shortly after Bob arrived and headed north toward the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Bob's platoon separated from the rest of Echo Co and spent the next two months patrolling the jungle. The unit operated autonomously, rarely seeing other Marines in the bush. The shortage of true infantry officers became evident. Bob's company cycled through multiple commanding officers while he patrolled the Vietnamese mountains.

Bob learned quickly the hardships of a grunt in war. He and his Marines engaged daily in battle with the jungle. Rats three times the size of those stateside moved in from every corner of the country to follow Marines and feast on garbage left behind. Bob cinched his poncho high around his face every night, lest he find a rat perched on his chin in the morning looking for crumbs. Often, this happened anyway. Just like the rats, he constantly scrounged for food. Inclement weather often prohibited resupply and the isolated Marines survived many days on one C-ration.

Heat and humidity left the Marines constantly wet. Everyone developed jungle rot. Even as his knuckles seeped and split open, Bob called in medevacs for Marines with cases far worse than his own. Leeches dominated the environment, ready to suck out any amount of life the Marines had left. Bob developed his morning routine which included a full-body sweep and removal of leeches with a flame or salt, sometimes up to 30 leeches at a time.

"OK, Lieutenant. We'll let you have a chance. But no orders for crazy frontal charges!"

"It was like an extended camping trip with occasional periods of sheer fright," reflected Patrick "Mac" McWilliams, one of the grunts in Bob's platoon. "I tell people most of my time in Vietnam was spent battling the elements. We just lived out there, digging a hole every night."

"Everything we did, we did for our brother in the hole with us," remembered Bruce Brinke, another Marine serving under Bob. "We didn't have any grand ulterior motives, we just put one foot in front of the other and tried not to think of the whole 13 months. When you're a lance corporal, a ground pounder, you just do what the squad leader tells you, and he just does what the platoon commander tells him. You don't have much of a grand view."

One of Bob's squad leaders, Cpl Alvin "Twink" Winchell, struggled finding words to describe his time in the jungle as he recounted the memories recently.

"My daughter is a nurse with experience helping veterans,"

COURTESY OF BOB SKEELS

Bob Skeels at Mutter's Ridge on Dec. 9, 1968. The peaks of "Objective Bravo," the main objective of the operation, can be seen across the valley in the background.

Winchell said. "She helped me explain how I survived the jungle. She said, 'Soldiers are trained to go into survival mode mentally and physically. Some did it well, some caved. The jungle was a site like none other could imagine. Those of you that perfected survival mode attempted to come home. Most of you who are still alive are still in constant survival mode.' This is how I am to this day."

When his platoon was not patrolling, Bob received orders to help establish new fire bases on remote jungle hill tops. At the future sites of Fire Support Bases (FSB) Alpine and Argonne, the Marines dug holes and set up security as helicopters lifted in heavy equipment to remove the trees. Bob endured the drain of sleep deprivation on these long nights while checking his positions.

One night, as Bob watched through a Starlight scope, he picked up something unknown moving around the perimeter. He investigated in the morning and discovered fresh tiger tracks. From then on, Bob performed his nightly rounds with a pistol in one hand and a 12-gauge shotgun in the other. He had always worried about getting shot in the dark by a probing enemy soldier or even a trigger-happy Marine. Now, the thought of a 400-pound cat ripping him to shreds boosted his anxiety to a whole new level.

In November, the platoon humped all day to the top of another hill where the next FSB would become reality. Soon to be known as FSB Russell, the hilltop proved critical to supporting grunt operations in the surrounding area.

Nights at Russell brought sightings of a species other than tigers. Listening posts (LPs) set 150 meters out from the perimeter radioed in constantly reporting enemy movement. Starlight scopes revealed human forms moving slowly through the jungle, probing the new defenses and mapping out the perimeter. Bob requested permission to engage the targets but was denied so as to not give away the defensive positions. He walked the lines and out to the LPs each night on high alert, shotgun and pistol in hand. With all the enemy sightings, sooner or later, contact felt imminent.

Before dawn on Dec. 7, 1968, word came down of an upcoming operation. For the first time since Bob arrived with 2/4, the entire battalion would take part in an assault. Several other units would also join in the massive cordon and search. The objective was a well-known and well-fought over terrain feature immediately south of the DMZ known as Mutter's Ridge. Somehow, out of six participating battalions and their subordinate units, Bob's platoon drew the task of pushing across Mutter's Ridge on point for the entire operation.

"You're gonna get your platoon a lot of ribbons on this one," the battalion sergeant major told him. "That place is a hell hole. This happened in 1966. It happened in 1967. Now, it's our turn. We gotta go in there and clean them out."

COURTESY OF ALVIN WINCHELL

Cpl Alvin "Twink" Winchell, a squad leader in 3rd platoon, while recovering on USS *Repose* (AH-16) in December 1968. Winchell received his second Purple Heart after being wounded during the Battle of Mutter's Ridge on Dec. 8, 1968.

Bob tried not to dwell on the stupidity of an annual operation where Marines died to simply drive the NVA back across the DMZ. Less than eight hours after receiving the initial frag order, the Marines loaded into choppers and flew to their insertion LZs.

The main objective, designated "Objective Bravo," occupied the highest hill of Mutter's Ridge. The rushed timeline planned for Bob's platoon to secure Objective Bravo the same day the entire operation was conceived. The sun sank lower and lower into the western sky as 3rd platoon moved across Mutter's Ridge. When Objective Bravo finally came into view, Bob saw not one, but three distinct hill tops rising into the twilight. Storming a single enemy-occupied hill would be difficult. Tackling three such hills seemed nearly impossible—in the dark, surely suicidal. Bob called his platoon sergeant over.

"How the hell are we supposed to take that? It's got three tops! It would be crazy to try to take that in the dark."

The staff sergeant stared blankly back. "It's your call, Lieutenant."

Bob considered Objective Bravo in silence. Finally, he called up his radioman and raised the company commander. "Echo Six, this is Echo Three. Request permission to set up at our present location for the night and attack the objective in the morning, over."

An unfamiliar voice replied. "Echo Three, the CO's not gonna like that. He's gonna be pissed you're screwing up his operation."

Bob struggled to place the voice. Could it really be another new company commander? Whoever it was, Bob didn't care. "Just ask him."

An excruciating pause followed. Finally, the voice returned with orders.

"Echo Three, patrol over to the base of Objective Bravo, then return and hold your position for the night. Resume the advance tomorrow morning at 0630. Out."

Bob set down the radio and breathed a sigh of relief. He passed the word to his squads. They found nothing on their final sweep of the day to the base of Objective Bravo, then returned and dug in. Bob passed the night walking the lines.

Dawn broke over the jungle. 3rd platoon roused early and geared up for the coming assault. Shortly before the appointed hour, Bob's radio came to life.

"Echo Three, Echo Three, this is Six. Operational change. Foxtrot Company has been tasked with securing Objective Bravo. You will proceed east along the ridge and act as a blocking force for their assault."

Bob set the radio down. The Marines around him waited for his word. He wrestled with the sudden change in orders. Why now? He knew trying to understand was futile. Their job as point for the operation was now someone else's job, their fate someone else's fate. Third platoon's job now was to simply execute the new orders.

"You're gonna get your platoon a lot of ribbons on this one," the battalion sergeant major told him. "That place is a hell hole."

They marched out down a ridge line. The three peaks of Objective Bravo jutted out of the sky to the north with the rest of Mutter's Ridge extending west out of view. It took most of the day to reach the end of the ridge where it dropped off and opened into a valley leading north to the base of Mutter's Ridge. In the late afternoon, the point man suddenly called a halt. Bob moved forward. Ten pots of boiling rice sat abandoned on the jungle floor, still simmering. Bamboo tables and chairs surrounded them. Marines crouched on high alert.

"It was a pretty big outpost we encountered," Bob recalled. "You see something like that, and your sphincter muscle starts to fire. You know you're going to have contact very soon."

PATRICK MCWILLIAMS

FSB Russell on Feb. 26, 1969, the morning after it was overrun. Marines from Skeels' 3rd platoon, including Alvin Winchell, Bruce Brinke and Patrick McWilliams, occupied the site and survived the battle.

Bob called over Cpl Alvin Winchell's squad. He gave Winchell five map checkpoints in the vicinity to investigate. The six-man squad set out down a hill towards the first checkpoint on the valley floor. The rest of 3rd platoon started digging in for the night.

Patrick McWilliams took point for Winchell's squad. The 20-year-old lance corporal volunteered for the spot, even though he had never run point before and had not seen combat. They neared the first checkpoint in a thicket of bamboo and elephant grass. McWilliams crested an embankment running across the valley. The embankment revealed itself to be the edge of a trench line. In the trench directly below McWilliams, a NVA soldier sat eating. Before McWilliams could shoot, the enemy soldier bolted and fired wildly back towards him.

McWilliams considered jumping into the trench after him, then a bullet tore through the hand guard of his rifle, grazing his finger. Machine-gun fire peppered the embankment, creating a dust cloud behind McWilliams as he sprinted back toward the rest of his squad.

He reappeared through the elephant grass as a roar of automatic fire rose above the embankment. Before Winchell could learn what McWilliams had seen, AK-47 fire ripped apart the foliage around him. A sudden sting in his leg dropped Winchell to the ground. He grabbed the radio and found Bob already waiting on the other end.

"What's going on down there?!"

"We walked into something, it's a hornet's nest!"

Winchell switched frequencies to talk with the company's 60 mm mortars. He directed their fire into the trench and surrounding area. The NVA maintained such a rate of fire that he could not even raise his head to watch the rounds impact. He estimated their range from the sound of the explosions and swept rounds across the valley.

Now, with two Marines missing somewhere in the area, he couldn't risk jets dropping their bombs. He called the aircraft off and formed up his remaining Marines to move out toward Winchell and search for the missing men.

The machine-gunner in Winchell's squad opened up with his M60. Another Marine shouted, "They're flanking us!" Meanwhile, the NVA raked the Marines' position as they advanced. Winchell called the mortars in closer. Grenades suddenly landed between the Marines. Winchell grabbed his own grenades and threw them back. The back-and-forth went on until a grenade finally found its mark. Winchell's radioman screamed in pain as the explosion blew apart his knee. Winchell moved the radioman farther back, then called the mortars even closer.

"We called it, 'hugging the belt,' where they'd try to come in so close that you were afraid to call in mortars on your own men," Winchell remembered. "Well, I kept bringing them in."

When the battle opened less than 200 meters down the hill, Bob ordered his remaining two squads to saddle up. The new company commander radioed again demanding updates.

"We've made contact with the enemy down in the valley," Bob told him.

"Well, get someone down there to sweep," the voice replied.

"Already did. That's who is getting hit."

"Hold on, I'm coming up there."

BOB SKEELS

One of the enemy bunkers found by 3rd platoon during their sweep and initial contact at the Battle of Mutter's Ridge on Dec. 8, 1968. In total, more than 50 similar enemy positions were counted in the vicinity where the Marines made contact.

As the rest of 3rd platoon prepared to move, a second lieutenant appeared. Bob determined this must be his new company commander. Automatic fire raked the ridge line as Bob explained their current situation. Leaves and limbs rained down from the branches above their heads.

"Get your ass down there and get those guys!" The lieutenant ordered.

Bob bit his tongue. No point in getting into it with a senior lieutenant right now.

"On my way."

The platoon's remaining two squads advanced off the ridge toward the gunfight. They discovered three enemy bunkers built into a hill on their right flank as they worked their way down toward their fellow Marines. Bob realized they could not risk leaving them occupied by the enemy to chew his platoon apart as they moved toward his trapped squad. He adjusted course for the bunkers. Enemy fire slowed their progress as the platoon strung out through the jungle. The point squad finally reached the bunkers and found them unoccupied. Bob sent a runner back through the line to get a count and let everyone know they would resume course back towards Winchell. The runner returned with unexpected news.

"Lieutenant Skeels, we've got two missing."

"What? What do you mean, missing?"

"They went missing some time during on our movement. No one back there saw them."

Bob fought to keep his bearing as his heart sank to the pit of his stomach. His radioman approached. Fixed wing aircraft held station overhead, ready to pummel the valley floor. Bob still hadn't located Winchell's squad. Now, with two Marines missing somewhere in the area, he couldn't risk jets dropping their bombs. He called the aircraft off and formed up his remaining Marines to move out toward Winchell and search for the missing men.

Bob witnessed at least 20 uniformed enemy soldiers 400 meters away, safely perched on a hilltop near Objective Bravo and firing into the valley. They obviously felt impervious to the battle raging as they added their fire into it.

More Marines fell wounded as the platoon advanced. The man next to Bob was shot in the chest. Bob rolled him over and removed his shirt, revealing a large exit wound. He moved the Marine back uphill toward the abandoned bunkers where a casualty collection point formed.

A small observation plane soared in over at treetop level. The pilot came up on 3rd platoon's radio and advised he spotted a Marine lying motionless on the jungle floor, shot dead center in the chest. Bob called for volunteers.

"I need two volunteers to come down there with me to look for our MIA."

One of the remaining squad leaders chimed in. "Lieutenant, you can't go, you're the lieutenant!" Without hesitation, two other Marines spoke up. "We'll go, Lieutenant."

LCpl John Higgins and PFC Paul Dains stepped forward. Bob didn't know what to do. Two Marines were missing, at least one probably dead. One squad was trapped in a fight for their lives. Aircraft and artillery waited his word to obliterate the valley. Multiple casualties required evacuation. Darkness threatened to consume Mutter's Ridge at any minute. The senior company commander demanded answers.

"All right. Look, just get down there. Take a look and get back here. You've got five minutes. Just take a look and get back here!"

Back in the valley, Winchell continued calling mortars for what seemed like an eternity as the rest of 3rd platoon tried to reach him. He inched the explosions closer and closer. Mortars rained down merely 20 meters away. Shrapnel cut down trees and vegetation around the Marines. A piece of searing metal tore into Winchell's knee. When other Marines also suffered friendly shrapnel wounds, Winchell ceased the fire. The NVA retreated from the area. The mortar barrage saved them.

He rolled over and rose to his good knee. Suddenly, through the trees, he saw LCpl Higgins walking alone 30 meters away in the direction where the NVA fire had originated and where they had retreated. Winchell caught his attention and frantically pointed toward the enemy positions. Higgins acknowledged him and proceeded on, disappearing back into the jungle.

COURTESY OF BOB SKEELS

Bob Skeels, left, with several of his Marines in early 1969 after joining Co B, 3rd Tank Bn, 3rdMarDiv. During this time, Skeels learned of his old infantry platoon's involvement in the tragedy at FSB Russell.

Back with the rest of 3rd platoon, Bob checked his watch. Five minutes came and went. Five more minutes passed. As Bob debated what to do, movement down the hill caught his eye. A Marine staggered through the trees. Not Higgins or Dains, but one of the Marines who went missing earlier. He appeared badly wounded, purple in color, and missing his helmet and rifle. The Marine stumbled and fell. Bob rushed down the embankment and picked him up. He struggled back to the perimeter with the Marine over his shoulders. He ordered his radioman to call for a medevac as he lay the Marine with the other casualties.

Dusk settled in and it started to rain. The wounded had to get out now. The only chopper available or willing to come was an Army Chinook. Bob praised and thanked the pilot as he helped load nine Marines on board the helicopter.

More good news arrived shortly after the chopper departed. Winchell's squad made it safely back up the ridge and linked up with the other elements of Echo Company. All six Marines were wounded, but all six made it back alive. Winchell and his radioman were evacuated due to their wounds. The word helped Bob remain positive. Higgins and Dains had to be out there somewhere, waiting out the darkness, waiting out the NVA.

The sun rose quietly over Mutter's Ridge on Dec. 9. Bob moved out with his diminished platoon at first light. Echo's 2nd platoon joined them in searching for their missing Marines. The enemy had completely abandoned the valley, retreating to their stronghold on Objective Bravo. Bob's platoon located the Marine spotted from the air the day prior. PFC Charles Hall Jr., was no longer missing, but was now the platoon's first confirmed KIA.

COURTESY OF KYLE WATTS

Above: The author, left, first met Bob Skeels, second from right, in 2018 at the 50th anniversary reunion of Skeels' TBS Class. This was the first time the author ever heard of the battle at Mutter's Ridge.

Below: Patrick McWilliams, left, and Alvin Winchell, right, in 2010.

COURTESY OF ALVIN WINCHELL

Nearby Hall lay the lifeless body of PFC Dains, similarly cut down by a sniper's bullet. They proceeded on toward the trench where Winchell's squad made first contact. A later count revealed 52 enemy bunkers constructed beyond the trench line. Lying next to one of these bunkers, the Marines found the body of LCpl Higgins.

Echo Company spent the rest of the operation blocking the eastern flank of Mutter's Ridge as Foxtrot Company assaulted Objective Bravo. On Dec. 11, 1stLt Steven Broderick led the assault across the three-topped hill, his platoon in the position Bob's was intended for before the operational change. Broderick died in the battle, moving among his squads and directing them under fire. He posthumously received the Silver Star.

Twelve other Marines were killed and 31 wounded while taking the objective, later renamed "Foxtrot Ridge." Over 170 enemy bunkers were counted there, stuffed with ammo, weapons, and supplies. In all, less than 60 dead NVA were left on Mutter's Ridge to be counted. Commanders deemed the operation a sweeping success and a prime fighting example of the Corps' mighty air/ground team.

Bob remained with 3rd platoon through the end of December. He wrote up LCpl Higgins for a posthumous Silver Star. The citation recognized Higgins' bravery under fire throughout the day of Dec. 8, his initiative in volunteering to seek out the missing Marines, and courage for continuing on alone toward Winchell's squad, where he died trying to help them.

Bob's 90 days as a grunt ended as the new year rolled around. He left 2/4 for Bravo Co, 3rd Tank Battalion on Jan. 3, 1969.

Having adopted the mold of an infantry platoon commander, Bob struggled at first remembering how to lead a platoon of five tanks. Near the end of February, Bob and his tanks stood guard over a bridge along Route 1 near the DMZ. One evening, radio traffic trickled in about a fire base near Mutter's Ridge that had been overrun. Bob's ears perked up when he heard the name FSB Russell. Having spent several weeks carving Russell out of the jungle, Bob could never forget the place. His platoon occupied Russell, alongside numerous others, when Bob left

them. On the night of Feb. 25, over 200 NVA sappers broke through the perimeter and overran the outpost. In the ensuing terror, 26 Marines were killed and 77 wounded.

Bob begged his new CO to let him go to Russell and check on his old platoon but was refused. Winchell, McWilliams, Brinke and all the others would have been there. Bob did not know if any of them survived.

Bob supported infantry operations along the DMZ for the remainder of his tour. He worked with numerous grunt battalions moving in and out of the bush. Every time he went out, Bob loaded his tank with extra C-rations and passed them out to the grunts. He knew they were always hungry. When grunts were wounded in battle, Bob sometimes evacuated them, riding on the fenders of his tank. He knew helicopter evacuation was not always possible. Every time he went out for two or three days, he thought of the infantry enduring weeks at a time in the jungle.

Bob, like so many other Vietnam veterans, spent the next 40 years trying to forget the war. In the wake of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Bob found a patriotic spirit that inspired him to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He formed new bonds with veterans who shared experiences similar to his own. They inspired strength to dig deeper into his past. Bob visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He found John Higgins, Paul Dains, and Charles Hall on panel 37W of the wall. He searched each line for other names he'd recognize. He bowed his head in thankfulness, discovering that no more of the Marines he had ordered evacuated on Dec. 8 had died of their wounds.

Bob located a website published by the LZ Russell Association. Here, he finally connected once again with Winchell, McWilliams, Brinke, and other Marines from 2/4 who survived Mutter's Ridge and the nightmare at LZ Russell. Winchell received the Bronze Star with "V" for heroism on the night Russell was overrun. Brinke was wounded and received the Purple Heart. Bob learned that 2ndLt William Hunt, the lieutenant who replaced him in 3rd platoon, was killed there.

Bob located a website published by the LZ Russell Association. Here, he finally connected once again with Winchell, McWilliams, Brinke, and other Marines from 2/4 who survived Mutter's Ridge and the nightmare at LZ Russell.

The Marines asked Bob to fill them in on the operation at Mutter's Ridge and what had happened leading up to their making first contact of the operation. This proved yet another plight of the grunts, to obey orders without question, while not always understanding what they were doing, where they were going, and why they were there. Bob did his best to explain the broader picture and took the opportunity to tell them what they had meant to him all his life. "I came away from those 90 days with the belief that the grunts deserve everything," Bob reflected today. "They deserve all the support that anyone else can give them. Dec. 8, '68 was a terrible day in my tour. My worst day. I only spent 90 days as a grunt. I don't know how they endured that jungle for 13 months. It was truly the honor of my lifetime to serve alongside those Marines."

KYLE WATTS

Bob Skeels reflecting at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., in June 2018. Panel 37W holds the names of John Higgins, Paul Dains, and Charles Hall, the three Marines from Skeels' platoon killed at Mutter's Ridge on Dec. 8, 1968.

"Mickey Mouse" Mechanics

Pacific Problem Solving by Ingenious Marines

By Geoffrey W. Roecker

After two weeks in action on Saipan, Private First Class Glenn Buzzard realized he needed quicker access to heavy firepower. The burly teenager—over 6 feet tall and nearly 200 pounds—rigged up a sling for his assigned weapon, a .30-caliber M1919 Browning light machine gun. By bracing the weapon against his body and gripping the barrel with an asbestos mitt, Buzzard found he could fire from the hip. "It was a Mickey Mouse thing," he said, "but it worked."

"Mickey Mouse" entered Marine lexicon decades ago and evolved into a multi-purpose term that can be descriptive (as with cold-weather boots) or derisive (as with petty rules and regulations). One of its earliest uses was to describe an ad-hoc, creative, or even cartoonish solution to an otherwise unsolvable problem. Often applied to field expedients in arms and armor—an appropriate analogy, given Mickey's penchant for surreal gadgetry—the expression extended to any unorthodox situation where Marines had to make do. (There is also more than a passing nod to Murphy's Sixth Law of Combat Operations: if it's stupid, but it works, it isn't stupid.)

Field modifications are almost as old as warfare itself; men at arms have always sought ways to improve personal comfort and lethality, simplify their chores and combat boredom. "Gyrenes" of the 1940s, however, were unusually well-positioned to make use of such expedients. The logistically problematic Pacific theater was a perfect environment for experimentation—the expanded Marine Corps deployed thousands of potential inventors, each equipped with personal creativity, professional expertise, or simple horse sense. Some of their creations led to equipment changes, while others attained legendary status—one need look no further than the AN/M2 "Stingers" carried by Medal of Honor recipient Corporal Tony Stein (See Saved Round on page 72) and others on Iwo Jima.

For every Stinger, countless "Mickey Mouse" fixes have been forgotten: they solved everyday problems for average grunts, which rarely make headlines or history books. Fortunately, creativity tended to catch the attention of combat photographers. Their work, as shown here, provides a fascinating glimpse into the methods of Marines solving problems large and small, using whatever they had on hand.

Sgt Richard E. "Moose" Stansberry test fires the "blitz gun," a "cut down" Browning machine gun with a rifle sling which was designed by then-Sgt Mitchell Paige. During the battle for Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, in October 1942, Paige saw Stansberry, "hit in the shoulder … still firing his Tommy gun with ferocity, shouting 'Charge! Charge! Blood for Eleanor!' " Paige, an expert machine-gunner, created this modified LMG specifically for Stansberry to use in future campaigns. (Photo by PFC Lucian Thomas, USMC)

Marines from 1st Engineer Battalion prepare for combat by installing a "suit of armor" on an International TD-9 bulldozer. Drivers were prime targets for enemy snipers, and civilian-built dozers began sporting theater-made armor plating early in the war. While some vehicles were permanently encased, removable kits could be added or removed as needed—an important weight-saving consideration when faced with excessively muddy conditions. (Photo by TSgt Glen A. Fitzgerald, USMC)

A small fire and a simple metal box are all Cpl John A. Monck with the 24th Marines needed to make a field kitchen on Saipan in June 1944. On the menu: meat, beans, vegetable stew and coffee. (Photo by SSgt Mark Kauffman, USMC)

The "Galloping Gas Tank" was built by Sgt Andrew J. Moynihan, left, and Sgt Robert H. Oatley, right, VMF-115 crew chiefs at Emirau in July 1944. The sergeants owned a horse and cart on Guadalcanal, but had to leave their conveyance behind when the squadron moved. The inventive pair equipped a discarded fuel tank with a one cylinder motor and could cruise along the flight line at 20 miles per hour.
(Photo by TSgt Gordon G. Greitzer, USMC)

Only "Rugged Marines" were allowed to use this multi-purpose watering station on Tulagi. The main attraction is a shower built from a salvaged tank—complete with a pull chain fo easy use. The showering platform appears to be sections of Marston matting. The bucket-shaped objects on the left are washing machines commandeered from Tulagi's Chinatown. At least one is rigged to a motor for automated agitation. (Photo by MG Bert Lynch, USMC)

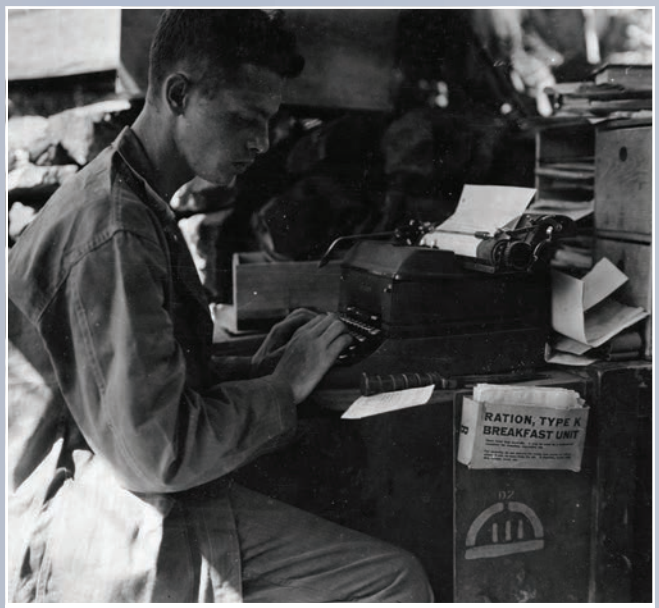
Marines take a break from advancing through Tinian's endless cane fields in July 1944. This well-armed group used a railroad flatcar to carry their gear in the sweltering heat. It also served as a shield against Japanese fire. (Photo by SSgt Roy E. Olund, USMC)

The Stinson OY-1 Sentinel provided great service as an artillery spotter plane, but in the words of 1stLt Thomas Rozga, the "frustrated fighter pilots" who flew it on Iwo Jima wanted to shoot back at their enemies. They mounted six bazookas on "Lady Satan" (above) and installed toggle switches for fire control. 1stLt Rozga worried that the bazooka backblast might set the plane's fabric tail on fire, but a test flight on March 9, 1945, proved the concept safe enough. "From then on, the biggest problem I had was breaking up fights between pilots because they all wanted to fly Lady Satan," recalled Rozga. "The procedure was to get up to altitude, select a target below, and then push the nose over into a shallow dive … honestly, they weren't all that accurate, but they made a hell of an explosion when they hit, and it sure made us feel like fighter-bomber pilots for a while!" Rozga later learned of Pentagon brass spending "an ungodly amount of money" to install bazookas on aircraft and sent off a letter: "From VMO-4. Reference to our bazooka mounted OY-1s. It didn't cost us anything—just some USMC ingenuity!" (Photos by PFC Budd Lindsley, USMC)

After a week of watching his battalion beat itself bloody on Iwo Jima, Capt Alexander F. "Sandy" Shaw asked inventive minds to figure out a new way to blast through Japanese emplacements. This spring-powered launcher catapulted a satchel charge toward the enemy, potentially sparing the lives of combat engineers. Little is known about the actual performance of the device; it appears rather large and cumbersome and was likely not a very accurate weapon. Records from Shaw's 1st Battalion, 24th Marines do not mention its use in action, and the unit withdrew from Iwo a week after these pictures were taken. (Photo by Sgt Nick Ragus, USMC)

Marines examine LVT-1 "My Deloris" after the Battle of Tarawa. The original "Alligator" LVT model was intended for use in a support role; it was lightly armored, with five large windows in the crew compartment. To prepare for an assault landing, the 2nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion hurriedly bolted 1/2-inch steel plates over the exposed cab, reducing visibility to small slits in order to protect the drivers. PFC Ed Moore guided "My Deloris" to shore on Nov. 20, 1943; as the right guide vehicle for the first wave, this vehicle is credited as the first to reach shore. Note the bullet holes in the armor plating. A Japanese 13 mm machine gun later punched a dozen holes in the unarmored underbelly, knocking "My Deloris" out of action. (USMC photo)

Looking like a pair of Boy Scouts, PFC Joseph A. Boehm and PFC James A. Webb use a simple tree branch to speed up the dull chore of filling canteens on Bougainville. Boehm and Webb were radio operators with Headquarters Co, 9th Marines; Boehm was later wounded in action on Iwo Jima. (Photo by Cpl Carl D. "Dave" Ohman, Jr., USMC)



Even the simplest solutions could make life in the field much easier. PFC Charles H. Carpenter, an intelligence clerk with the 4th Marine Division in June 1944, used a K-ration box as a personal organizer as he transcribed message slips into his section's journal. (Photo by SSgt Albert R. Morejohn, USMC)

Aviation ordnancemen at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, bore-sight an F4U Corsair using a custom-built apparatus. The coconut log structure simulated the trim of a plane in level flight. (Photo by Sgt Chester L. Smith, USMC)

Marines of Company A, 4th Engineer Battalion attach an explosive "snake" to an M4 medium tank. The snake appears to be an adaptation of a Canadian mine-clearing line charge of the same name—essentially an oversized Bangalore torpedo. The Marine version could be pushed or pulled into position by a tank. This photo was taken at Camp Maui in 1945; note the tank still sports additional armor from the fighting on Iwo Jima. (Photo by PFC James B. Cochran, USMC)

Tankers were among the most prolific equipment modifiers and only became more so as the war continued. "Nitemare II" of the 5th Tank Battalion shows a number of enhancements. The flanks are covered in wooden boards and poured concrete to ward off magnetic mines, while a serrated strip of corrugated metal makes it hard for attackers to find a handhold. If Japanese troops climb aboard, wire netting will prevent them from opening the drivers' hatches. Turret hatches are adorned with nails. Finally, spare track is affixed to the turret for added protection, and rebar welded to the sloping front armor could support additional gear, wood, or sandbags—anything that could stop a projectile from piercing the hull. (Photo by Cpl Richard H. Stotz, USMC)

Iwo Jima was the first battle for 18-year-old PFC William Frederick Karl, but the Albany, N.Y., native learned quickly. He secured an engine cowling from a wrecked Japanese airplane at Motoyama Airfield and built a reinforced roof for his foxhole. As a platoon messenger with B/1/23, Karl spent more time out of his foxhole than in; he suffered multiple gunshot wounds on March 4, 1945, and was evacuated. (Photo by SSgt H. Neil Gillespie, USMC)

These Marine tankmen make like ducks as they wear sandbags on their feet in an effort to combat the deep Okinawa mud. Struggling in the ooze are: Private Byron B. Barber, left, of Sedalia Mo., and PFC Melvin E. Johnson, of Springfield Ill. (USMC photo)

A Marine combat correspondent uses captured Japanese optics as a telephoto lens during the Battle of Peleliu in September 1944. (Photo by PFC Norris G. McElroy, USMC)

After his baptism by fire in the Battle of Namur, PFC Michael Soroka with Co B, 20th Marines, catches 40 winks in the tropical breeze. PFC Soroka used his issue blanket for the hammock, while his poncho protects him from the sun. The young Marine from Hartford, Conn., survived four campaigns with the 4th Marine Division. (USMC photo)

We—the Marines

Compiled by Kyle Watts

1st MLG Marines Awarded For Lifesaving Care

Feb. 21 started like any typical day when members of "Alpha" Company, Combat Logistics Battalion 1, Combat Logistics Regiment 1, gathered outside their barracks on Camp Pendleton, Calif., to start a group workout.

In the middle of the run, one of the Marines turned to Corporal Ricardo Cruzmontoya and grabbed him just before falling to the ground. In the moments after the Marine (whose name is being withheld) hit the ground seizing, Cpl Christopher Parris says he did what he was trained to do. Instantly directing LCpl Elijah Serrano to call 911, Cpl Parris simultaneously ensured that the seizing Marine was put into the recovery position to assist his shallow breathing. After the seizing stopped, Private First Class Thomas Godwin was able to locate a pulse, but it was observed that the Marine was no longer breathing. Cpl Parris started chest compressions and the Marine would start breathing on his own before once again ceasing to breathe.

When Cpl Diego Ruiz with the Camp Pendleton Provost Marshall's Office arrived on the scene, the Marines assisted in using an Automated External Defibrillator (AED). The Marine was transported to receive a higher echelon of care and is recovering. "I am confident that without the life-saving effort of these Marines and the AED, the outcome of this situation would be entirely different," said Cpl Ruiz.

Commander Janelle Marra, Force Surgeon for 1st Marine Logistics Group (MLG) further elaborated. "A Marine lived to see his next birthday because of his fellow Marines providing CPR and first responders using an AED."

According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, nine out of 10 people who experience cardiac arrest outside of a hospital die, typically in only minutes. Without intervention from Cpl Parris, LCpl Serrano, Cpl Cruzmontoya, and PFC Godwin, a member of their Marine family would not be alive today.

The Marines were recognized by BGen Phillip Frietze, the commanding general for 1st MLG, for their heroic actions.

Cpl Christopher Parris has been awarded a Navy Commendation Medal.

LCpl Elijah Serrano was awarded a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal.

LCpl Ricardo Cruzmontoya received a Certificate of Commendation.

PFC Thomas Godwin received a Certificate of Commendation.

The professionalism and bias for action displayed by young noncommissioned officers is a testament to their leadership and the vital role which noncommissioned officers fill throughout the Marine Corps.

2ndLt Tyler Judd, USMC

SGT ALDO SESSAREGO, USMC

Cpl Christopher J. Parris, and LCpl Elijah Serrano, motor transport operators with CLB-1, 1st MLG, I MEF, salute BGen Phillip N. Frietze, the commanding general of 1st MLG, on Camp Pendleton, Calif., March 10. Parris and Serrano were recognized for providing lifesaving actions on another Marine.

Right: Col Karin Fitzgerald, the commanding officer of 2nd Supply Battalion, 2nd MLG, leads a battalion hike on Camp Lejeune, N.C., March 10. Marines with 2nd Supply Battalion hiked while carrying canned goods for donation to a local charity. (Photo by LCpl Mary Kohlmann, USMC)

2nd Supply Battalion Marines Contribute to the Community

Marines with 2nd Supply Battalion, 2nd MLG, conducted a 6-mile battalion hike while contributing canned goods to a local charity in Onslow County, N.C., on March 10.

Marines hike as a unit to fulfill training and readiness requirements, which require Marines to carry a multitude of issued gear in their packs. This month, 2nd Supply Battalion Marines were given a choice to fill their packs with canned goods for donation, instead of the standard issued gear, as long as both weighed the required 50 pounds. Many Marines took advantage of the opportunity to participate in the charity event.

"It's good to build relationships with the local community," said Captain Christopher Schnackenberg, the future operations officer of 2nd Supply Battalion, "In doing this, we're putting on a positive face for the Marine Corps, especially in a time of peace, where we can buckle down and instill ourselves within the community as a positive force."

While a majority of charity events happen during the holiday season, 2nd Supply Battalion recognizes families in the local communities and their struggles all year round.

"We purposefully picked this part of the year, rather than the peak season where people tend to do a lot of charity events, specifically Thanksgiving and Christmas time," said Colonel Karin Fitzgerald, the Commanding Officer of 2nd Supply Battalion. "People are in need, but there's no event."

Marines hiked 3 miles to the halfway point and staged their packs. Those who brought supplies to donate unloaded their donations, placed them into designated boxes, and loaded them into a van. The ratio of canned goods and space allotted for the donations was underestimated, with supplies overflowing the boxes provided. Not only was there not enough space in the boxes, but the floor of the van was covered in donations as well.

"Donating with my fellow Marines makes me feel like I'm a part of something bigger," said Lance Corporal Yahir Arcia, a supply chain and materiel management specialist. "I feel like I've accomplished something important today."

LCPL MARY KOHLMANN, USMC

Marines with 2nd Supply Battalion, 2nd MLG, pass canned goods down a line on Camp Lejeune, N.C., March 10.

Strongly focused on core values, 2nd Supply Battalion showcased their commitment not only to Marines and the Marine Corps, but to their local community through their actions. Since Marines get stationed worldwide, they are dedicated to maintaining community relations, both home and abroad. 2nd Supply Battalion continues to involve themselves with the local community, giving support when possible, and proving that they genuinely care about the citizens in need.

LCpl Mary Kohlmann, USMC

I MEF Hosts OIF 20-Year Anniversary Commemoration

Approximately 100 veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and current I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Command Element personnel gathered to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the operation at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., on March 20-21.

The ceremony began with reflections of the early morning hours of March 20, 2003, when Marines and Sailors breached the obstacle belt on the Iraq-Kuwait border on the march to Baghdad to remove Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime from power. I MEF supported the initial invasion after nearly a year of planning, marking the first major Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) combat operation since Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

"When we crossed the line of departure from Kuwait on 20 March, we had roughly 81,500 people assigned to I MEF," said then-Lieutenant General James T. Conway, I MEF Commanding General. "Our [structure] was just short of 90,000, about twice the size of a normal MEF."

Conway would later become the 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps in 2006. His lead planner for the operation, then-Lieutenant Colonel George W. Smith, who detailed the battle plan for the MAGTF, currently serves as the I MEF Commanding General. Now 20 years later, LtGen Smith invited Gen Conway to commemorate the anniversary as the guest of honor, surrounded by I MEF Command Element Marines who fought in OIF and some still serving today.

"From a commander to his staff, you were absolutely fantastic," Conway said as he addressed Marines during the OIF reunion dinner. "I think it was something that we trained for our whole Marine Corps lives, and given the opportunity, you seized it ... You did your jobs in fantastic fashion, and we did some things that nobody would have ever said I MEF would be capable of doing."

The event gave past and current leaders the opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of I MEF during the Iraq War. What the MEF accomplished in Iraq was due, in large part, to its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. They emphasized how the MEF overcame environmental, distance, and logistical barriers to provide both ground and air support to coalition forces.

The MEF's ability to rapidly respond to changing circumstances, integrate multiple elements into a cohesive unit, and execute a wide range of missions ensures that it will continue to play a vital role in safeguarding U.S. national security for years to come.

During the event, LtGen Smith raised his glass and delivered a toast to those with whom he served during one of the most significant events in I MEF history—Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"To the most lethal Marine Air-Ground Task Force, past, present and future," said LtGen Smith. "I Marine Expeditionary Force."

1stLt Ana Chiu, USMC

CPL DEAN GURULE, USMC

Above: LtGen George W. Smith Jr., Commanding General, I MEF, discusses the current state of I MEF with Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans and current personnel during the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the start of OIF at Camp Pendleton, Calif., March 20.

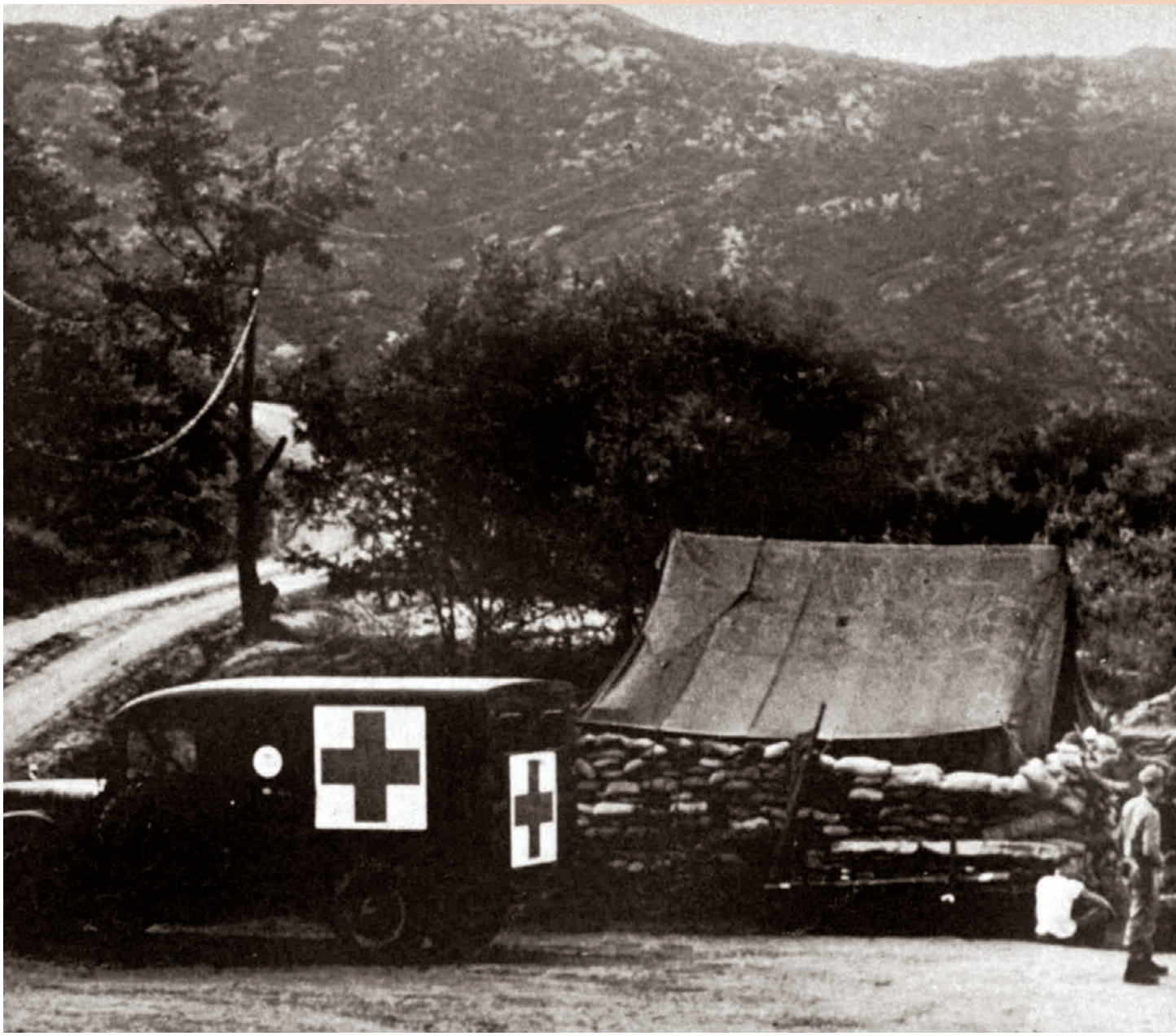
CPL DEAN GURULE, USMC

Left: Retired Gen James T. Conway, left, 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps, and LtGen George W. Smith Jr., Commanding General, I MEF during the 20th anniversary Operation Iraqi Freedom commemoration at Camp Pendleton, Calif., March 20.

Bass (above and below left), a multi-purpose canine, receives the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals Dicken Medal from his former handler, SSgt Alex Schnell, USMC (Ret), during the K-9 Veterans Day Celebration Ceremony in Washington, D.C., March 11. The Dicken Medal is the highest honor for gallantry in military service an animal can receive and is recognized worldwide as the animal's equivalent of the Victoria Cross. Bass was presented with the award for his bravery and life-saving devotion to duty after his six-year service in Marine Forces Special Operations Command. Bass is the 75th recipient of the medal. (Photos by Cpl Mitchell Johnson, USMC)

CPL MITCHELL JOHNSON, USMC

Above: Cpl Zachary Whisenhunt, a military police officer, renders a salute during the K-9 Veterans Day Celebration Ceremony in Washington, D.C., March 11. K-9 Veterans Day is a day to honor and commemorate the service and sacrifices of American military working dogs throughout history.



Battle of Vegas

By Dr. William E. Beaven

Shortly after graduating from medical school in 1952, I was sent to Korea as a battalion medical officer in a combat unit in 1st Marine Division. The Corps was then holding down the westernmost sector of the allied lines in an area about 35 miles due north of Seoul, only a mile or so east of the Panmunjom plain where the peace talks were in daily session. The unit to which I was assigned was 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, which comprised the extreme right flank of the Division in a sector called The Hook, so named because our frontline trenches, the main line of resistance, formed a gently sweeping arc around the base of Outpost Vegas some 500 yards away. The Chinese and North Koreans were a like distance beyond that.

The war was at a stalemate then, the military situation uncertain. Both sides had long since pulled into stationary, semi-defensive positions, awaiting either the end of the war or the renewal of hostilities in the spring. Fighting persisted, but it was mostly harassing in nature, interdicting in purpose, methodical in execution. At best, it was designed to give advantage to the bargaining tables at Panmunjom.

My principal duties consisted mostly of treating and evacuating casualties from combat and reconnaissance patrols which, almost nightly, engaged the enemy in fire fights in the rice paddies between the opposing lines. Of secondary importance—perhaps no less vital—

LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

was the daily inspection of trenches, impromptu sick calls in bunkers, and simply moseying around for sanitation hazards in general.

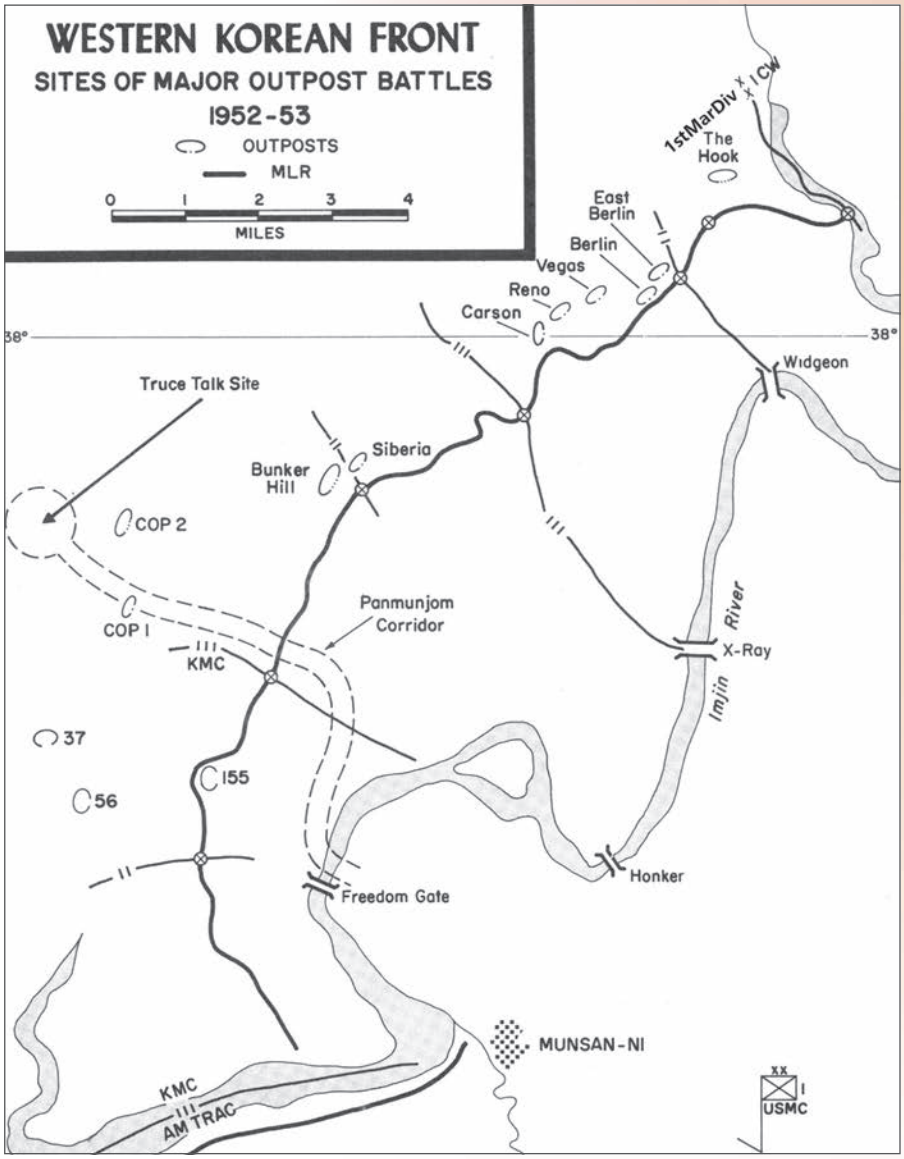
The dangers were minimal, at least for me, and the living reasonably comfortable. Nevertheless, it was with some relief that I learned our battalion was to move into reserve the first two weeks in March 1953. By the end of that time, man-for-man replacements from 3rd Battalion had completely taken over our positions, and 2/5 settled back for a well-deserved rest.

But there would be a slight delay.

On March 26, 1953, the military situation changed abruptly. During the daily officers' briefing that morning, the battalion commander announced that the

LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

Dr. Roger Milnes (left), served in Korea as a battalion medical officer. He and this article's author, Dr. William Beaven, were the only surgeons assigned to 2/5's forward aid station at Outpost Vegas (above).



U.S. MARINE OPERATIONS IN KOREA, 1950-1953, VOL V

enemy had opened up his spring offensive against 8th Army units to our right; that 20,000 incoming mortar and artillery rounds already had been reported by these units; and that, should there be any signs of a breakthrough, we were to proceed instantly to their relief.

But the enemy had other plans. The slight jab toward the Army was but a feint in hopes of catching the Marines off balance. Actually, the enemy's entire left flank was turned gradually in our direction. Indeed, all that day and for most of the next, we were conscious only of a steadily increasing roar from Chinese batteries as they veered more and more southward.

At 7:30 p.m., March 27, 1953, the Chinese struck. The Battle of Vegas began.

Approximately 3,500 Chinese communist troops struck simultaneously against the 10 outposts forming the vanguard of the 5 1/2-mile front covered by the whole 1stMarDiv. Old Baldy, Bunker, Dagmar, Esther, Berlin, E. Berlin, Carson, Reno, and finally the target point—Vegas. Under a barrage of 14,000 artillery shells, the crest of Vegas was assaulted, and the hill secured by the enemy at 10 p.m.

Despite a withering allied air and artillery barrage, the Chinese successfully repulsed four Marine counterattacks made throughout that night and the following morning. By 2 p.m., however, positions on the north side of the hill literally disintegrated from the incessant shelling and small arms fire. By 2:30 p.m., Marines had again secured the crest and dug into commanding entrenchments.

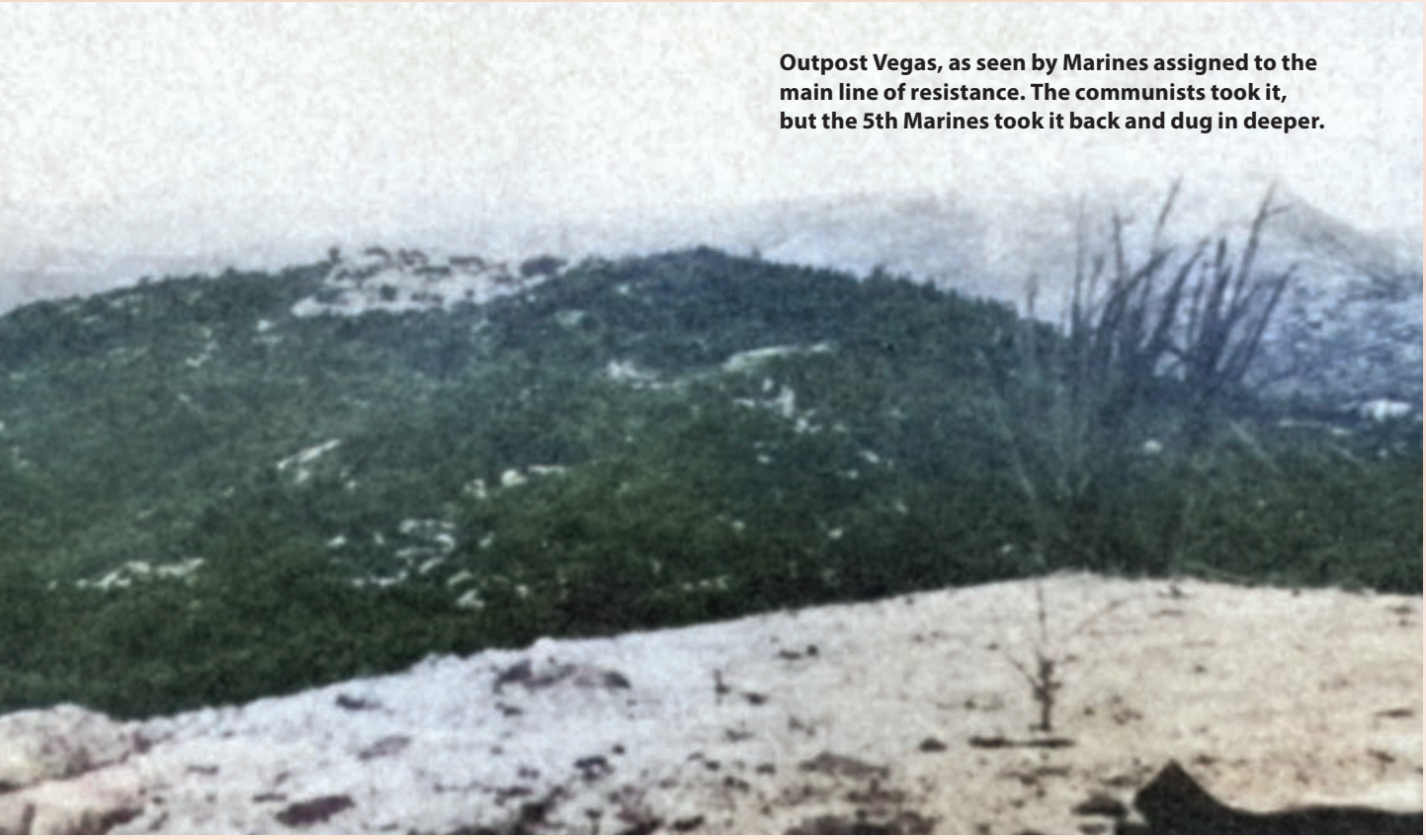
Back in our battalion area, the scene was utter confusion. Every conceivable trooper was being assembled and mobilized to withstand what seemed like an inevitable thrust of the enemy through 3rd Bn ahead of us. Trying to anticipate which routes would be most readily accessible for corpsmen returning casualties from the actual point of fighting, I set up several forward aid stations which consisted of little more than packs of battle dressings, tourniquets, gauze and splints, packed behind a few hastily constructed sandbag bunkers.

Yet, despite the evident ferocity of the fighting ahead, casualties were not coming through as expected, and it seemed important to find out why.

On hearing that Vegas had been retaken, I felt my only chance had arrived to survey the actual frontline trenches and find out for myself which routes the corpsmen were using in evacuating the wounded. I left our battalion area and stomped the mile and a half in what seemed like a matter of minutes.

I recall it was close to sunset when I left, almost pitch black when I reached the main line of resistance. So intent had I been on my objective, it was not until I reached the final hill, leading up to the command post of "Fox" Company, that I realized the growing enormity of the battle raging around me. The din and racket of the barrage overhead had stepped up considerably, and there were moments when it was impossible to distinguish from the melee such noises as the "boom" from our 5- and 8-inch cannons, the "thump" of mortars, the "snarls" of exploding shells, or the characteristic "rat-a-tat-tat" from enemy burp guns and our own carbines.

I scrambled up the small hill of Fox Co to its crest. There, straight ahead of me,



Outpost Vegas, as seen by Marines assigned to the main line of resistance. The communists took it, but the 5th Marines took it back and dug in deeper.

LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

some 300 yards away, sat Vegas, looming up like some monstrous whale, seemingly all the nearer because of its black shadow silhouetted against a gray-black horizon.

I darted into the entrance of the observation bunker. The company commander, Captain John Melvin, was screaming at some men to lay telephone cable out to the few survivors on Vegas. Abruptly he spotted me. "Doc! Thank God you're here. Go down to the company mess tent on the reverse slope. It's the only aid station we've got and we're shuttling all casualties through it. There's one corpsman down there already. Go!"

Outside, a light snow had fallen. Half stumbling down the slope, I came across the mess tent, a converted squad tent that had seen better days. The corpsman, HN Jim McKean, greeted me with incredulousness as no Navy doctors had been permitted to come so close to an actual combat situation. Already he was handling the first of the walking wounded arriving from around the hill on which Fox Co was located.

I surveyed the equipment at hand. Two multi-flamed gas burners were located under an old stove. Both were dragged out to the center of the dirt floor and lit, surprisingly, affording sufficient light. Boxes were lined along the periphery of the tent for some form of orderly arrangement of the wounded. Miraculously, one corner of the tent revealed an ancient depot of first-aid supplies, cartons of plasma, battle dressings and right-angled arm splints.

By now, casualties were arriving at regular intervals, and we fell to work. Stretcher cases in coma, profound shock or brutally mutilated were placed directly in "high shock" position, three abreast in rows on the floor of the tent. Bayoneted M1 rifles were rammed into the ground, providing poles from which plasma was hung.

The walking wounded were divided into two groups; those requiring immediate attention, or those who needed equipment we simply did not have. Among this group were the truly "shell shocked," so designated if they could remember neither their names nor the first three serial numbers of their dog tags. All were shuttled along one side of the tent in parallel rows. On the other side we placed all active bleeders, possible or actual forearm amputees, exposed fractures—indeed anyone we felt we

SSGT GERALD CHAMBERS, USMC

Casualties were treated in the aid station set up between Outpost Vegas and the main line of resistance.

The Marines fought back ferociously and dug trenches to shield themselves from enemy fire after regaining control of Outpost Vegas. Those reinforcements kept the Chinese at bay by keeping the outpost protected from incoming fire as the Chinese soldiers swarmed over Vegas like ants.

SSGT GERALD CHAMBERS, USMC

SSGT GERALD CHAMBERS, USMC

Baker Battery, 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, prepare a stockpile of ammunition for a barrage on Outpost Vegas. During the battle, more than 100,000 rounds of artillery from allied and enemy forces were fired.

could help with a moment's care. By 11 p.m. the numbers crammed in that bulging tent exceeded 200.

The dead were laid outside at the far end of the tent in face up position or some posture signifying respect. We tried not to stack the bodies although toward the end of the night, even this was impossible.

By 11:30 p.m., two armored vehicles broke through the heavily shelled rice paddies to our rear. All available hands turned to. Litter cases were stacked two abreast, one on another and five deep in the hold of each vehicle. Twenty, perhaps 30, of the wounded ambulatory scrambled aboard too, hanging on to any available projection. I recall hearing later, with intense satisfaction, that both vehicles made their return trip without mishap.

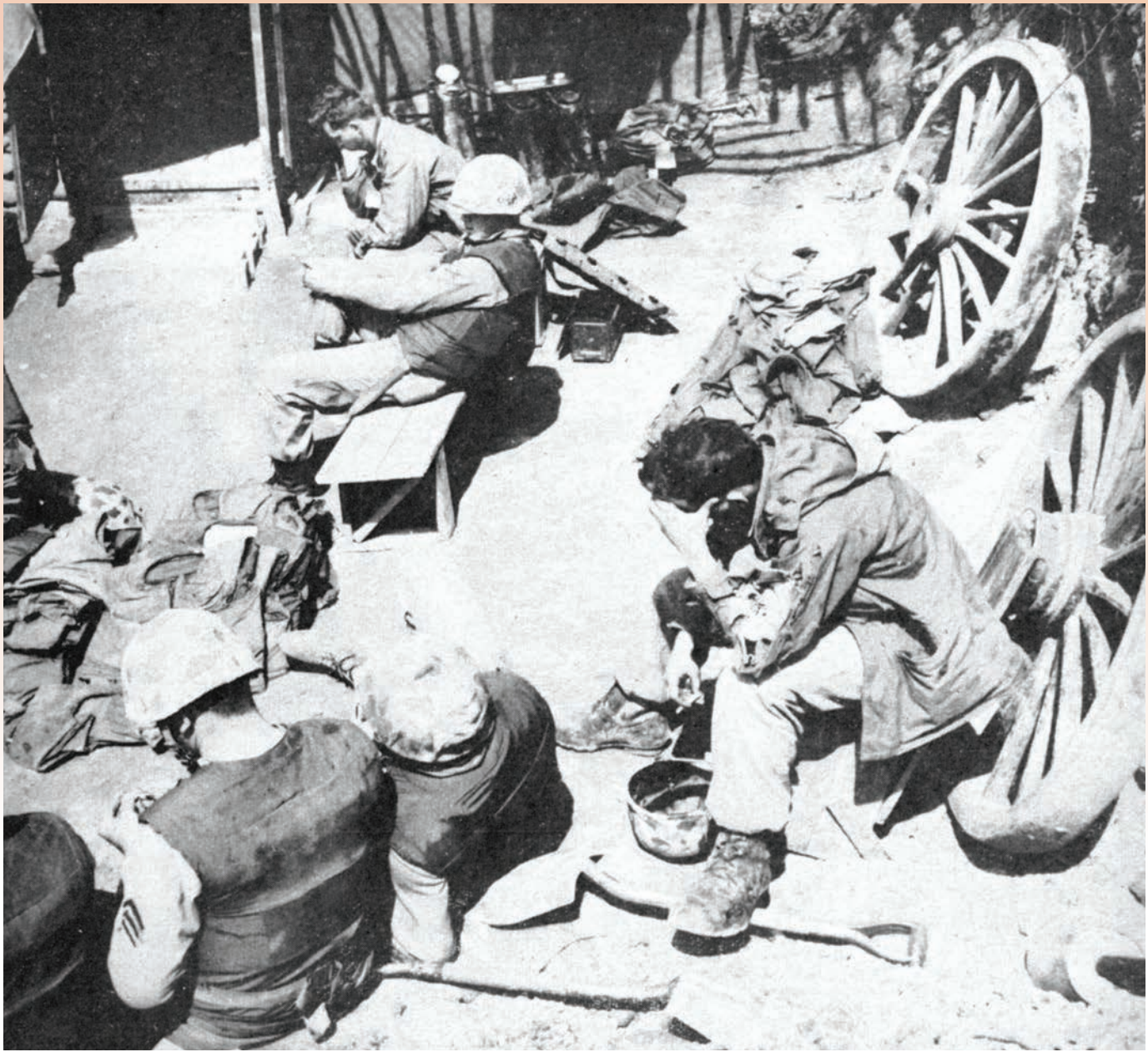
The break afforded by this event turned my attention back to the battle still raging. Indeed, by this time, it was raging with incredible ferocity. Around midnight a three-pronged Chinese drive of about two battalions assaulted Vegas again in a last desperate attempt to gain the commanding territory. The allied response was literally to "box in" the outpost. Militarily, this means that every available piece of artillery from 20 miles back was to be concentrated on ringing the outpost to make it untenable for enemy penetration. Over the next three hours, more than 100,000 rounds of artillery shells, from friend and foe alike, passed directly overhead. Allied air strikes dropped 200,000 pounds of bombs on terrain extending from Old Baldy, a mile away, to the valley dividing Vegas from Fox Co directly in front of us. The land was literally rent asunder.

The noise was so deafening that speech, even by screaming, was totally inaudible. All individual sounds were absorbed by a thunderous roar. Intermittent rocket barrages, passing no more than 50 to 75 feet overhead, created an eerie light which at times was sustained for minutes. Stars no longer twinkled, but danced in a weird fashion, occasionally blotted out completely by the metallic canopy.

By 2 a.m., Capt Melvin appeared through the far end of the tent flap, his arms thrown up in a gesture of utter futility. Unable to speak because of the incessant roar, he scratched out the following message, using a large black crayon: "[Enemy] bypassing Vegas; coming around your side … close to battalion strength ... laying down smoke screen first. Can't bug out! Load walking wounded with grenades ... send them down far path ... pitch them into smoke screen!"

With that he abruptly turned, ran through the tent flap and scrambled back up the hill to his observation post.

It would be impossible for me to relate the emotions that went through my mind in the next few seconds: abject terror to anger to indignation to a feeling of complete idiocy for having allowed myself to be caught in such an incredible position in the first place.



USMC

Exhausted corpsmen with the 1st Marine Division wait for another load of wounded to be brought in from Vegas Hill. The battle was reported to be one of the bloodiest of the Korean War.

Then, blessedly, a wave of compassion flooded my mind for this maimed and desecrated group of men before me. I began to reflect on the incredibly rich experiences I had accumulated as a doctor, working with the body and spirit of men under maximum stress and hardship. I felt privileged to have witnessed the marvelous retaliatory faculties, both spiritual and physical, nature holds in reserve for the mortally wounded. It is axiomatic that he who cries most is by far the least hurt; but extending this to the extreme, I had not expected to find an almost majestic dignity in the young who, though wholly conscious, are fully aware that death is but moments away.

The large cardboard on which Capt Melvin had scribbled his note to me had now been passed from hand to hand to each of the walking wounded around the tent. Their numbers were about 100. There was a moment's pause, then, spontaneously, the entire complement arose and without a word loosened the remaining hand grenades carried on their ammo belts. Deliberately, they filed out, traversed the 50-yard path to the end of the hill, entered a few yards into a thick smoke screen and pitched the grenades at the unmistakable garlic smell made by advancing Chinese troops.

For more than an hour, there was a continuous procession of men jettisoning explosives down the far end of the path. The dead were stripped of all remaining grenades which were loaded onto returning Marines who then returned to the edge of the smoke screen, and in a last act of defiance, hurled some 500 more grenades into the area. That was it. There was no more, and we waited for the end to come.

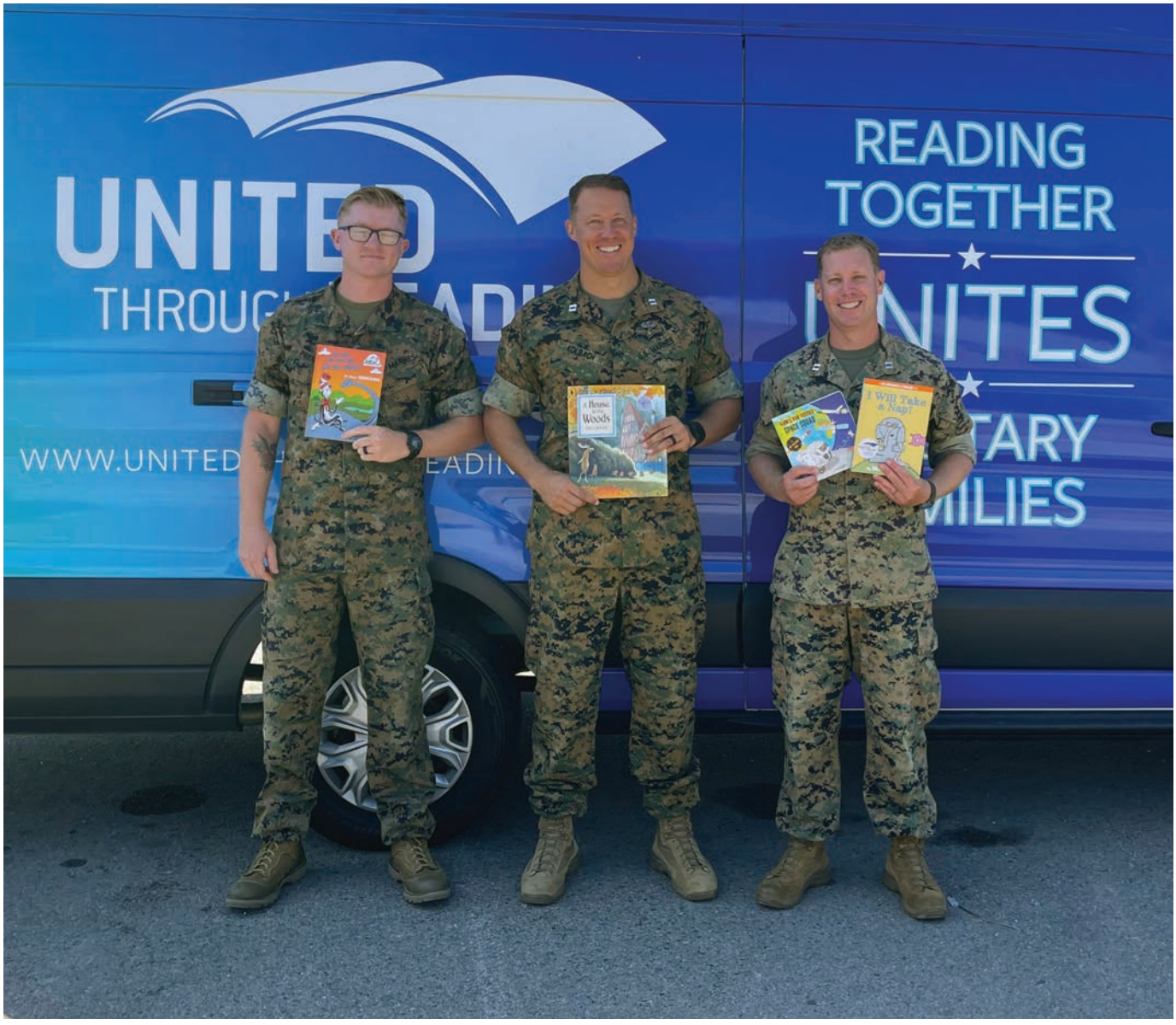
But the end never came. Miraculously, the screaming pitch of the artillery barrage dropped just perceptively, then dropped again, and again. The smoke screen began to drift apart, then disappeared completely. The garlic odor of the Chinese infantryman was no longer present. As if by a sign from the angels, a beautiful, melodious trill from a Korean meadowlark pierced the air, and abruptly a hush enveloped the entire land.

Simultaneously, men dropped to their knees and wept unashamedly. The Chinese had been stopped.

It was 2:30 a.m. and it was all over.

Passing the Word

Compiled by Kyle Watts



COURTESY OF UNITED THROUGH READING

Three Marines take part in a United Through Reading (UTR) which provides servicemembers the opportunity to create a video-recorded bedtime story for their children for use when parents are away from their loved ones.

United Through Reading Launches Operation Storytime

United Through Reading celebrated the Month of the Military Child in April with the launch of Operation Storytime, a major national initiative. The campaign will provide opportunities for service-members on a military assignment to stay connected to their children through reading aloud, no matter the distance. Operation Storytime, made possible in part by a $1 million pledge from the Reader's Digest Foundation, is a three-year campaign with the goal of reaching one million military families.

"Reading together is one of the most important things any family can do, and military families often sacrifice that time due to service to our country. By supporting United Through Reading's Operation Storytime, we at the Reader's Digest Foundation can help the next million military family members maintain their reading routine, no matter the distance," said Bonnie Kintzer, President and CEO of Trusted Media Brands and Chairman of the Reader's Digest Foundation.

The initial focus for Operation Storytime is Book for the Military Child. United Through Reading will rally the military community around reading the same book to celebrate military children across the globe. "The Kissing Hand," by children's author Audrey Penn, is this year's inaugural book. Over 13,000 copies will be distributed to military families through more than 400 United Through Reading Story Stations around the world.

Book for the Military Child will be an annual endeavor during Month of the Military Child. The campaign kickoff will be held at Carter's, Inc., headquarters in Atlanta, Ga. Carter's Charitable Foundation is supporting distribution of 5,000 copies of the book for the Military Child, and Carter's employees will be preparing those books for distribution. Carter's is the largest branded marketer of young children's apparel in North America.

"Operation Storytime will help children

COURTESY OF UNITED THROUGH READING

Servicemembers can visit one of the numerous UTR "story stations" to record themselves reading a children's story aloud. The recordings, along with a copy of the book, are provided free of charge to the servicemember's family.

read every day, unite military families, enable us to impact underserved members of the military community, and support our servicemembers and our nation," said Tim Farrell, CEO, United Through Reading. "We have always been focused on making significant, lifelong impacts in a military child's life in beautiful, emotional and unexpected ways."

The Department of Defense (DOD) honors military children during April, Month of the Military Child. Each year, the DOD joins national, state and local government, schools, military serving organizations, companies and private citizens in celebrating military children and the sacrifices they make. United Through Reading is honored to support military children every day and is highlighting this support by kicking off Operation Storytime during Month of the Military Child.

United Through Reading's launch of the three-year Operation Storytime campaign demonstrates the organization's commitment to facilitate the bonding experience of shared story time between distant serving military members and their loved ones. Through video-recorded bedtime stories, United Through Reading helps military children feel loved, setting them up for emotional, social and educational success.

In 2022, United Through Reading served 343,968 military family members through their free app, 417 story stations around the world and at over 500 events. Learn more at unitedthroughreading.org.

United Through Reading

How to Check Your PACT Act Claim Status

Many veterans, their families, and survivors have filed claims related to a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, radiation and other toxic substances—the PACT Act. It also added more health conditions that VA will presume are caused by exposure to these substances making it easier for beneficiaries to access VA benefits and services.

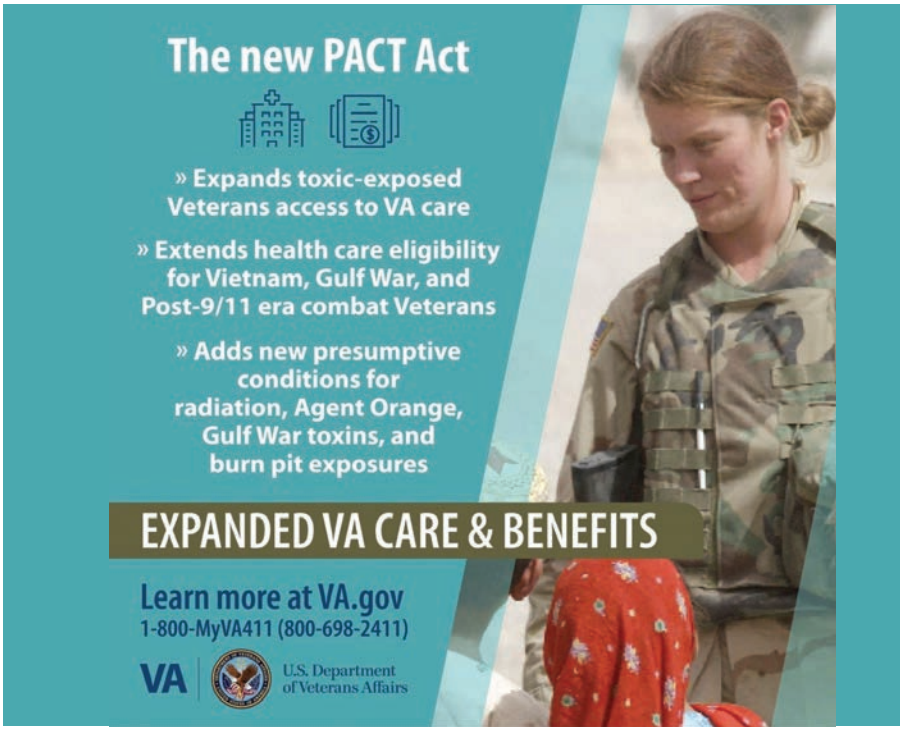
To check the status of your PACT Act claim, sign into your va.gov account with your existing Login.gov, ID.me, DS Logon or My HealtheVet account. If you don't have any of these accounts, you can create a free Login.gov or ID.me account. Once you are signed into your account, follow these three steps to check the status of your PACT Act claim.

First, go to your "My VA" dashboard. You will find the link for this dashboard in the top right corner of the page once you're signed in. Next, scroll down to the "Track Claims" section. There, you'll see a summary of the latest status information for any open claims or appeals you may have. Finally, click on the "View Status" button for a specific claim. You'll go to a page with more details about that claim's status and supporting evidence. Evidence may include documents like a doctor's report or medical test results.

After you log in and follow the steps above, you can find out where your claim, appeal or decision review is in the review process, which documents and forms VA needs from you, which documents have already been received, and details like your claim type, the date VA received your claim, and the name of your representative.

Veterans Service Officers are available to assist a veteran or their survivor in filing claims, reviewing information or answering questions. To learn more about the PACT Act, visit: https://www.va.gov/pact.

VA



In Memoriam

Compiled by Nancy S. Lichtman and Briesa Koch

Daniel R. "Dan" Aylward, 67, of Green Bay, Wis. After his service in the Corps, he became a welder.

Jackson W. Baumbach, 100, of Mechanicsburg, Pa. During WW II, he served in the Pacific and saw action on Iwo Jima. He later worked for USAID.

Franklin Beattie, 103, in Bridgeport, Conn. He enlisted in 1944 and served in the Pacific during WW II. He saw combat on Iwo Jima and was a member of the Iwo Jima Survivors Association. After the war, he worked as a sheet metal fabricator.

Gary P. Boltz, 78, in Port Orchard, Wash. He enlisted in 1962 and served until 1968. He was trained as an electrician and had his private pilot license.

MSgt James M. Brown Jr., 92, of Memphis, Tenn. He saw action at the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War and later served in the Vietnam War. His awards include the Purple Heart. He was a member of the MCL and was a frequent speaker in his local community about his Korean War service.

Cpl George V. Carroll, 101, in Littleton, Colo. He was a Marine who served in the Pacific with Co F, 2nd Bn, 24th Regiment, 4thMarDiv during World War II and saw action on Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima. His awards include the Purple Heart.

Sgt Elaine E. Cech, 76, of Kingston, Pa. After enlisting in the Marine Corps in 1971, she was stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C., where she served for three years.

Olga Chudzik, 100, of East Hartford, Conn. She enlisted in 1943 and served until the end of World War II as an airplane mechanic.

HMC Ronald Colucci, 73, in Leesburg, Fla. He served in Vietnam as a tanker and was later assigned to Marine Barracks Washington, D.C., for the remainder of his four-year enlistment. After attending college, he joined the Navy where he served as a Fleet Marine Force corpsman. During Operation Desert Storm/Shield he served aboard USNS *Comfort* (T-AH-20). His awards include the Purple Heart.

Capt Matthew J. Crehan, 86, of Hamilton, Ohio. He served in the Marine Corps before earning a graduate degree in business. In 1961, he joined the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a special agent. From 1988 until his retirement in 2007, he was a judge in Ohio.

Lawrence "Larry" Freeman Davis, 99, in Colorado Springs, Colo. He served during WW II in the Pacific theater with the 3rdMarDiv. After his return to civilian life, Lawrence was a Golden Gloves boxer in New York City before settling into a long-term career of over-the-road truck driving.

Col James Walter "Walt" Davis Jr., in Fredericksburg, Va. His 30-year Marine Corps career began after his 1969 enlistment. After a tour in Vietnam, for which he received the Bronze Star with combat "V," he was commissioned a second lieutenant after completing OCS in 1974. He later commanded 2nd Light Armored Recon Bn and 8th Marines in the 2nd Marine Division. He was a graduate of the Army War College and earned a master's degree at Georgetown University.

After his 2001 retirement, he continued to serve Marines as the vice president and chief operating officer of the MCA. "A trusted, loyal friend for over 40 years, a tremendous, respected athlete, dedicated to the growth and success of others, Walt Davis consistently placed the organization, the team, above self," said Col Walter G. Ford, USMC (Ret), former editor of *Leatherneck*. "He and his lovely wife, Susie, were an unbeatable team that meant so much to many, many Marine families," he added.

Davis was active in volunteer efforts in his community, serving as the president of the board of the Fredericksburg Rotary Club and the Thurman Brisben Center, a homeless shelter. He was a good friend to *Leatherneck*.

Barbara Finkbeiner, 90, of Auburn, Mich. She enlisted and served two years, fulfilling various clerical roles at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C.

James R. Folkman, 76, of Shawano, Wis. He enlisted after his high school graduation and served a tour in Vietnam. He later returned to his hometown to work on the family farm. He became active in local politics, serving on the Shawano County Board for 10 years. He was also chairman for the Angelica Town Board.

Jim Freel, 100, of Topeka, Kan. He enlisted in 1943 and was assigned to 3rd Marine Parachute Bn in New Caledonia and was attached to 3rdMarDiv on Vella Lavella and Bougainville. He later was assigned to 5thMarDiv and saw action on Iwo Jima, where he was wounded. His awards include the Purple Heart.

Helen T. Gibbs, 104, of Scranton, Pa. She enlisted during WW II and served in Arlington, Va.

Cpl Mary Louise Glann, 99, of Oklahoma City, Okla. She served from 1943-1945 and was an aviation machinist mate at MCAS Mojave, Calif., during WW II.

SSgt Gary G. Greiling, 78, of Winter, Wis. He left his college studies in 1966 to enlist. He served a tour in Vietnam with Force Logistics Command and was then assigned to MCAS Santa Ana, Calif. He later had a career as a park ranger with the National Park Service, eventually returning to his home state of Wisconsin to work as a conservation warden with the Department of Natural Resources.

Capt Richard Horner, 82, of Huntington Beach, Calif. He left his job as an engineer to serve in the Marine Corps. He was commissioned and was a member of TBS Class 6-67, a class that is well-known because so many of its graduates were later killed during combat and training incidents. He served a tour in Vietnam as a platoon commander with 2nd Bn, 5th Marines, 1stMarDiv. He was the recipient of the Silver Star for his actions at Hue City on Feb. 1, 1968. Then-2ndLt Horner exposed himself to hostile fire while directing the deployment of his Marines and continued to direct an aggressive attack after he was wounded. After the platoon's radio operator was killed, Horner "crossed the fire-swept terrain to retrieve the radio, which enabled him to maintain control over his men and the two tanks supporting his platoon," according to the award citation.

He later returned to his job in engineering, working on projects within the space industry including the Apollo project, the Saturn rocket program, the space shuttle orbiter program, and the Navstar Global Position Satellite program. His other awards include the Bronze Star with combat "V" and the Purple Heart. His son was also a Marine.

Chester "Chet" Hotkowski, 91, of Green Bay, Wis. He enlisted in 1952 and served until 1954.

GySgt John J. Mackey, 95, of Fredericksburg, Va. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1945. After completing boot camp, he served in the Pacific. After the war, he returned to civilian life. He reenlisted in 1952 and served for the next 13 years at a variety of duty stations including Albany, N.Y.; Okinawa, Japan;

Quantico, Va.; and Camp Lejeune, N.C. During the Vietnam War, John was assigned to Marine Air Group 12 at Chu Lai.

Sgt Mal Middlesworth, 100, of Fort Collins, Colo. He was in Pearl Harbor on USS *San Francisco* (CA-38) when the Japanese attacked the U.S. fleet on Dec. 7, 1941. During the war, he spent 27 months at sea aboard *San Francisco* and saw action during the Guadalcanal campaign. After his ship returned to the United States, he was assigned to the 1stMarDiv and saw action during the battle for Peleliu. He was a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, serving as the organization's president in 2005.

Jerry Fae Miller, 82, of Grand Saline, Texas. She served in the Marine Corps for two years. She later had a career in real estate.

Louis A. Mommaerts, 92, of North Port, Fla. After graduating from high school, he joined the Marine Corps and saw combat in the Korean War with the 11th Marines, 1stMar Div. After returning to civilian life, Louis worked as an architect for 43 years and was licensed in five states, specializing in commercial construction.

2ndLt Nancy Muirhead, 89, in Broken Arrow, Okla. After her 1955 graduation from SUNY Potsdam, she was commissioned a second lieutenant and served for three years at Parris Island, S.C. She later worked for the Dallas County Juvenile Department in Dallas, Texas.

Angelo "Sid" G. Olivari, 97, of Gardner, Mass. He enlisted during his senior year of high school. After boot camp at MCRD Parris Island, he fought in the Solomon Islands campaign and the Ryukyus Islands campaign. His awards include the Purple Heart.

James R. Pepe, 98, of Boca Raton, Fla. He was a Seabee during World War II in the Pacific theater and saw action in the Solomon Islands and the Bougainville campaign. His awards include the Bronze Star. After the war, he worked in the restaurant industry.

Sgt Leslie Kay Erickson Raven, 98, in Davis, Calif. She enlisted in 1943 and was the honor graduate in her aviation machinist's mate school. She later attended Michigan State University on the GI Bill.

John A. Richardson, 75, of Rock Island, Ill. He served in the Marine Corps in the 1960s before beginning a 30-year career with John Deere.

Dennis F. Ryckeghem, 72, of Milan, Ill. He was a Marine who served from 1969-1971. He later was ordained as a minister and performed weddings.

SSgt Roy J. "Jim" Spickelmier, 76, of Garden Grove, Calif. He enlisted in 1966 and served a tour in Vietnam.

Robert H. Sutton, 79, of Eldridge, Iowa. He enlisted in the Marine Corps after his 1963 graduation from high school.

Cpl Leon J. Vandygriff, 91, of Rock Island, Ill. He was veteran of the Korean War, serving from 1951-1953. After the war, he returned to his hometown and his previously held job at the Studebaker Corporation. He later had a career in electronics as a technician for the research and development department at Honeywell.

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.

soldiers and Marines never really died, which seems appropriate.

My favorites, as you can well imagine, have always been figures of U.S. Marines. The last 30 years of work allowed me to travel all over the United States. I learned early on that if you didn't have something other than work while you were traveling you would burn out quickly. To break the monotony, I began visiting every antique store, shop, or mall I would come across. The figures were small enough that I could put them in my suitcase and bring them home. At home I visited flea markets and auctions.

Over the years I branched out and began collecting all kinds of metal figures. I have managed to accumulate or, as my wife says, hoard, over 8,500 figures. Additionally, I found a playset with the Marines just like my original.

When we built our new home, a concession I received from my wife was one room dedicated for my figures. The room is about 25 feet by 30 feet and is completely filled with antique toy soldiers and other military toys.

Probably fewer than 10 people outside my family have ever seen them. All of the lights in the room are controlled by one switch. I have people wait at the door looking into the dark room and then hit the switch.

The first words out of most people's mouth are, "Oh my God."

The second is either "Where did you get all of this?" or "What are they worth?" My response is, "I have no idea."

Sgt Jim Grimes
USMC, 1969-1972
Wathena, Kan.

The March Issue Was a Great Read

Two articles hit the spot for me in the March 2023 issue of *Leatherneck*:

"The Spirit of Basilone": I referenced this article in my posting to the Marine Corps associated groups on LinkedIn. I hope it helps expand the good work by Adam Krick and membership to "Goons Up."

There is always something new to learn about Word War II and the photo essay "The Sandstone Sculptures of Iwo Jima" is proof of that. The sandstone sculptors were very talented artists and warriors.

Marines do it all.

Capt Doug Caldwell
USMC, 1965-1979
Plano, Texas

Has Vietnam Veterans Day Been Forgotten?

I wanted you folks down there at Quantico to see this article in the *Alexandria Gazette* about National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Sadly, I think the media largely ignores this day. I didn't see anything in the Washington newspaper about it at all. I think the public often forgets about the Vietnam War, and indeed they forget about history! Sad, very sad.

It was 43 years ago in April 1980, that I visited the Marine Corps officer selection office in Hyattsville Md., as part of my application process for the platoon leader's course. I was a 19-year-old history major at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., at the time.

Greg Paspatis
Alexandria, Va.

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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Reader Assistance

Edited by Briesa Koch

Reunions

• **Fox Co, 2/7**, July 9-13, Rapid City, S.D. Contact Tom Ciccariella, fox2seven@gmail.com.

• **USMC Motor Transport Association**, Sept. 17-22, Savannah, Ga. Contact MSgt Bruce Green, USMC (Ret), (910) 577-4230, secretary@usmcmta.org.

• **U.S. Naval Disciplinary Command**, Sept. 11-16, Portsmouth, N.H. Contact Don Ferry, (972) 334-0609, don.ferry1942@gmail.com.

• **Co A, 3rd Engineer Bn/BLT 1/9 (RVN, 1970-1971)**, is planning a reunion. Contact Gene Spanos, (847) 532-2963, genethemarine@gmail.com.

• **TBS, Co D, 4-73**, June 15-18, Arlington, Va. Contact Col Bill Anderson, USMCR (Ret), (540) 850-4213, binche57@yahoo.com, or Col Bob Donaghue, USMCR (Ret), (617) 840-0267, ip350haven@comcast.net.

• **Plt 2064, San Diego, 1965**, is planning a reunion. Contact Gary A. Gruenwald, (434) 609-3433, usmcgman74@aol.com.

• **Hotel Co, 2/7 (RVN 1965-1970)**, June 8-11, Oklahoma City, Okla. Contact Jerry Norris, (940) 631-7233, postalm16@hotmail.com.

• **TBS Class 3-67/41st OCC**, Oct. 26-29, Arlington, Va. Contact Paul Disario, (559) 273-9549, pdisario@comcast.net.

• **1st Marine Division Assn.,** August 13-20, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact June Cormier, (760) 763-3268, June.oldbreed@fmda.us.

• **USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn.,** Sept. 13-18, Colorado Springs, Colo. Contact John Wear, (719) 495-5998, johnwear2@verizon.net.

• **Marine Corps Engineer Assn. (MCEA),** Sept. 18-20, Branson, Mo. Contact LtCol George Carlson, USMC (Ret), (931) 307-9094, treasurer@marcorengasn.org or visit: www.marcorengans.org.

• **USMC Scout Sniper Assn.**, Aug. 18-20, Quantico, Va. Contact Tim Parkhurst, (833) 976-4737, reunion@scoutsniper.org.

• **VMO-6**, Oct. 24-28, Pensacola, Fla. Contact Ed Kufeldt, (703) 250-1514.

Mail Call

• George Slaughter, (302) 241-6546, is looking to hear from **anyone stationed with 2/10, 63-65, MTM 3rd FSR 66-67, and MABS 32, 67.**

Wanted

Readers should be cautious about sending money without confirming authenticity and availability of products offered.

• Jerry Tomaschik, (806) 440-1959, jtom142@yahoo.com, is looking for a **sticker or image** of the **Med Cruise 1982 logo for MSSG-32, 32nd MAU a**nd a copy of **USS *Nashville* cruise book.**

Sales, Trades and Giveaways

• Gary Niehans, glniehans@aol.com, has a **Platoon 1031, MCRD San Diego graduation book**, **August 1966**, free to the first platoon member who can identify the three DIs.

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, or write to Reader Assistance Editor, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134.

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- **Military Spouse Employment Resources and Information Event**
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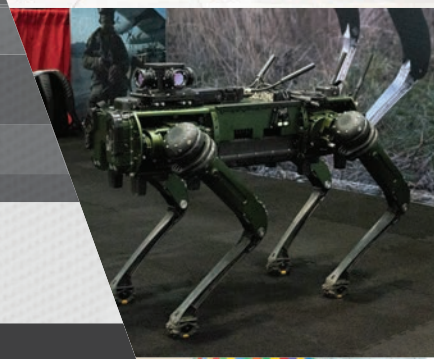


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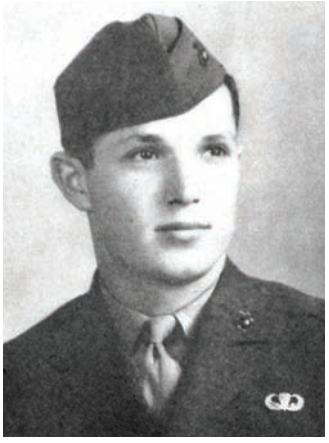
MARINE CORPS LEAGUE — SEMPER FIDELIS

MARINE CORPS ASSOCIATION — EST 1913

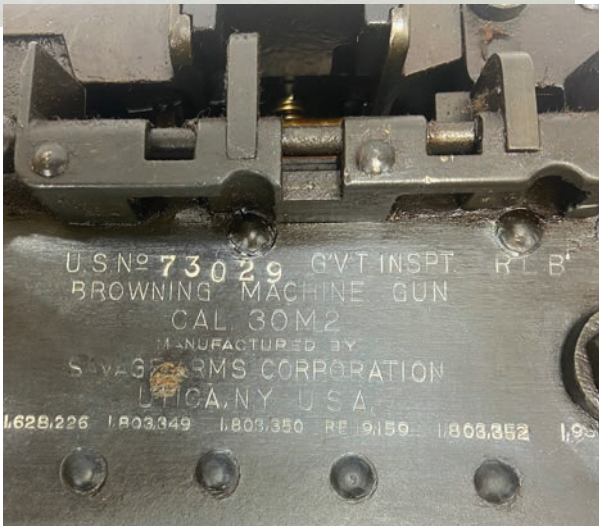
Saved Round

By Nancy S. Lichtman

COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS



USMC



COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS

A LETHAL ADAPTATION USED BY A COURAGEOUS MARINE—During the Battle of Iwo Jima, Corporal Tony Stein (right), assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 28th Marines, 5th Marine Division, was the first man from his unit to hit the beach on Feb. 19, 1945.

Armed with a personally improvised weapon, which was known as the "Stinger," Stein provided covering fire for his platoon while the Marines moved into position on D-day on Iwo Jima. The weapon he carried into battle that day was impressive. The Stinger was created by two innovative Marines serving in the Pacific, Sergeant Milan Grevich and Private First Class John Lyttle. They started with an aircraft machine gun, added to it a trigger mechanism, the bipods and rear sights from a Browning Automatic Rifle, and a shoulder stock from an M1 Garand. Only a handful of Stingers were built and used on the battlefields of the Pacific and there are not any surviving examples of the Stinger.

The photos here show the various parts that were used to create the Stinger, which Cpl Stein used to great effect on Iwo Jima. See page 46 for more battlefield ingenuity.

Carrying his unique weapon during the battle, Stein would become one of the 22 Marines to receive the Medal of Honor for heroic actions during the fight for Iwo Jima.

After moving up from the beach, he boldly exposed his position to the enemy in order to draw their fire and determine their exact location. Stein "charged the enemy pillboxes one by one and succeeded in killing 20 of the enemy during the furious singlehanded assault. Cool and courageous under the merciless hail of exploding shells and bullets which fell on all sides, he continued to deliver the fire of his skillfully improvised weapon at a tremendous rate of speed which rapidly exhausted his ammunition," according to the award citation. While under heavy fire, Stein then ran back to the beach at least eight times to replenish his supply of ammunition. On each trip, he assisted or carried a wounded Marine. Later during the battle, "although his weapon was twice shot from his hands, he personally covered the withdrawal of his platoon to the company position."

Stein was later killed in action on March 1, 1945.

A Run through Marine Corps History

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