



River Currents



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THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE ASSOCIATION

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The 2/60th Infantry

The children of South Vietnam were precious to the soldiers of the 2/60th and the Mobile Riverine Force, attached to the 9th Infantry Division.



I saw many acts of kindness by the soldiers of the 2/60th as they built a swing set at a local school near Tan Tru. I remember going on patrols to villages where the soldiers would give the children candy and food while the medics would care for the sick. I remember on one special occasion where a U.S. Army band was airlifted into the Tan Tru area, and they played music for the people in the village in hopes to raise their spirits and morale.

I am proud of the soldiers I served with and their actions that reflected the highest regard

for the love for their country and the people of South Vietnam. On the other hand, I also saw the actions of the VC on the same children and people.

Boys, girls, and women were used by the VC to set booby traps for the American soldiers. A soldier might feel sorry for a child dressed in rags and buy a soda from that child on a dusty road. Inside the soda, you might find broken glass or acid. A shoeshine from a kid could cost you your leg from a booby trapped box that your foot rested on.

The VC were a ruthless people who wanted to win the war by demoralizing the will of the people of South Vietnam. The VC would come into villages and capture young men and take them to North Vietnam and train them to fight for the communist. Refusal to do so resulted in death for them and for family members. The VC would invade villages in Vietnam and kill the village chief after they had raped and tortured the chief's wife and daughters in front of him and the people that lived in the village. This act was used by the VC to terrorize the people and



to disgrace the village chief and undermine his authority over the village and to obtain information about the location of U.S. soldiers.

Children did not escape the savage ways of the VC. Children were killed and schools were targeted by the VC rifles and mortar rounds. I witnessed these actions in Tan Tru and as I traveled on conveyors and helicopter flights throughout the delta area and up into the central high lands.

Ron Rutowski

Memorial for Seven Men Who Died on YRBM-16

This article is dedicated to the seven men who died on YRBM 16 from a bomb that exploded against the hull of the YRBM 16 on Thanksgiving night, 1:15 a.m. November 24, 1967, in the middle of a river at Ben Tre, Vietnam.

MEMORIAL

YRBM 16 CREWMEN

ETN3 Robert Lyndon Gray
EN2 Wilson Nathaniel Flowers
(both flown to hospitals in Japan)

PBR CREWMAN

SN George R. Ycoco
BM1 Joseph J. Simon
GMG3 Lonnie B. Evans
SN Dale E. Egbert
GMG3 Ronald E. Crose
May they rest in Peace

Message from Albert

Fellow members here we are and another year has gone by and as we look around us and ask where did it go and why so fast. Folks, it seems as we get older that time flies by faster. Some of the year has been good some not so good. We had a great 2009 reunion, picked up some new members, and lost some as well. We always enjoy picking up new members but hate to see Taps. We have lost a number of members over the last few years and some spouses. Some served with us in Vietnam on the Boats, Ships, Infantry, Mech Infantry, Artillery, Aviation, on the Army and Navy bases, etc. Some had been with us since our beginning and some only a few years but no matter how long they were with us it's always the hardest thing we have to do is post Taps in the newsletter.

Let's start off the New Year 2010 remembering our brothers and sisters we have lost since Vietnam and especially those we lost in Vietnam.

As for the association, we're doing just fine.

We still have the good name of one of the better Vietnam Veterans Associations out there. Due to a few dedicated members who are very knowledgeable in Veteran's affairs, we have been able to help a number of you, the members. Our web site received rave reviews. Our newsletter *River Currents* is probably one of, if not the best out there... but most of all we have you the members who make the association flourish by giving us your full support. We, the officers and board members, can only do so much. It's you the members who make, and have made, the association the association it is today. Although we're all getting a little older, a little grayer, and a little slower in our walk, don't sleep as well as we once did, or see or hear as well, we're still looking after our fellow brothers of Vietnam. I can remember years back when we were the younger veterans' generation; now we are the older generation as the WW II and Korean War Veterans pass on at a rapid pace. We need to give thanks to all who have gone on before us and those still with us today. In closing, Army and Navy rocks!

Albert Moore National President (MRFA)

YRBM-16 1969-70 Time Frame

This is the starboard side of the YRBM-16. When I was on the YRBM-20 in 1969 and 1970, I traveled past this YRBM many times.

The YRBM-16 was located on a wide spot in the Bassac River upriver from the YRBM-20 and near the town of Chou Doc and the Cambodian



Border. It was there from October 1969 until spring 1970. I do not know where it was towed. The Bassac River is the major west tributary of the Mekong River. YRBM stands for "Yard, Repair, Berthing, and Messing." It was not self-propelled. A pusher barge tied to the stern had diesel outboards to move the YRBM when needed.

The YRBMs were vulnerable to mines. A swimmer could float down the river in the 1- to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

What To Do If...

I'm sure that most of us have heard the expression "Time is Money." Well, that is especially true for some folks who may be affected by the change that is about to be implemented by the VA, to its list of diseases possibly resulting from exposure to Agent Orange.

On October 13, 2009, Secretary of Veteran's Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that the VA will add three new diseases to this list. These diseases are

1. Ischemic heart disease (including coronary artery disease)
2. Parkinson's disease
3. B cell leukemias (such as hairy cell leukemia)

This announcement means that veterans suffering from one of these diseases are entitled to service-connected disability compensation from the VA. This has been clarified to mean anyone who stepped foot on land in Vietnam during active duty, between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975. Other veterans who suffer from one of these diseases will become entitled to these benefits if they can show that they were exposed to Agent Orange. In some cases, that may mean having served on one of the bases that was defoliated with Agent Orange in this country. An up-to-date list of those bases should be available through the VA.

Qualification is not based on when the disease first appeared. So, if a veteran is diagnosed with one of these diseases many years later, they are entitled to VA disability compensation benefits if they fit the Agent Orange criteria.

This change will also impact death benefits for qualified family members of veterans who have died or will die in the future from one of these diseases. They are or will be entitled to service-connected death benefits, including Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, burial, and others.

This is where the time factor kicks in. Once the VA amends its Agent Orange regulations, which should be in the next few months, it will begin paying benefits dating back to when a claim was filed for any of these newly approved diseases, if your claim is successful (see end of this article). So, it behooves anyone who has any of these diseases to file a claim with the VA IMMEDIATELY, as the sooner you file, the more retroactive benefits you will receive. This includes widows of veterans, who were exposed to Agent Orange and who have died from any of these three diseases. What this means is that for every month that you delay filing a claim, you will not be entitled to compensation for that month.

If you have previously filed a claim based on any of these three diseases and been rejected or not yet been approved or rejected, then your benefits should be retroactive to your filing date. But, you should request a review under the new rules.

Be aware, however, that approval is not automatic. The VA may reject some claims, individually, based on other circumstances such as someone suffering from Ischemic heart disease, "who has smoked for 40 years and is morbidly obese." The VA has said "that common sense is going to have to prevail."

Paula Wright (Scott)
thewrightthings@verizon.net

Veterans Day 2010, Washington, DC Wreath Layings at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the U.S. Navy Memorial

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will be placing wreaths at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, on Veterans Day, Thursday, November 11, 2010. We will be gathering at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at 8:30 a.m. on the 11th and proceed to the Wall at 9:00 a.m. We will also have a ceremony at the U.S. Navy Memorial at 3 to 4 p.m. honoring the MRF and 9th Inf Div; complete with speakers and placing of wreaths at the Lone Sailor Statue in honor of all our fallen brothers, Navy and Army Veterans of the MRF and 9th Inf Div.

A first for the Navy Memorial—they have okayed our doing the Missing Man Table Ceremony same as we do at our reunions. We will furnish our own speakers, chaplains, bugler, and wreath layers. More information on our speakers and other events at the Navy Memorial will be in upcoming issues of River Currents. If you have never been to one of our ceremonies at the Navy Memorial, it's something you do not want to miss. The U.S. Navy Memorial is located at 7th Street

between Pennsylvania Avenue and Indiana Avenue in Washington, DC (701 Pennsylvania Ave, NW).

We have blocked 80 rooms at the Hilton Garden Inn Arlington/Courthouse Plaza in Arlington, Virginia, for November 8-12. Room rates are \$119 (plus tax) per night. For reservations, call

1-703-528-4444 and refer to our group reservation code "MRF." Reservations may also be made on-line at www.arlingtoncourthouse.gardeninn.com. Be sure to enter the on-line reservation code "MRF" in the booking box labeled Group/Convention code. Reservations under these group codes must be made before the cutoff date of October 29, 2010, so make your reservations soon. The Hilton Garden Inn Arlington/Courthouse Plaza is located at 1333 North Courthouse Road, Arlington, VA 22201.

Come join us as we honor our fallen Brothers on Veterans Day 2010. We look forward to seeing you in DC. For more information, contact Board Member Bob Pries at 5832 NW Windy Pines Lane, Port Saint Lucie, FL 34986-4637, (513) 659-4974.



LCU-1500

The piece to the left of the bow of the YFU-78 is the bow of the LCU-1500, which was also blown up at Bridge Ramp in Da-Nang. The stern of the 1500 is back by the stern of the 78 under the water.

Richard Sherley BM2/DV S.C.R.F Diving Barge, DaNang, RVN, rdiverdan@aol.com.



M-1 Historic Picture

End of an era not seen since the Civil War or since we left the rivers in 1971. This picture shows the last American-crewed monitor in Vietnam, Mike-1. It too would soon share the same fate as Monitor 6, the next to last monitor to turnover to the South Vietnamese Navy. Mike-1 turned over in Dong Tam with what was left of RivRon 15 in late November or early December 1971, ending the historic use of "Monitors" by the U.S. Navy, not seen since the Civil War. It also included a black sailor, RM-3 Higgins, who was in my boat class and came from the USS Alamo-LSD-3 with me and picked up duty on Mike-1. Two connections with Civil War history there, if anyone keeps track of it?



Dave McCann

Send Us Your Memories

We want to hear from you! *River Currents* is all about the members. Stories from our members make up a major portion of our newsletter.

We can't guarantee we'll print all of them, there just isn't enough room for that, but we'll post all the stories and comments we can.

Stories and articles should be kept to a maximum of 1,500 words. Unfortunately stories longer than this would take up too much space.

You can email your photos and story, or comments to Al Moore at mrfa@bellsouth.net. You may contact Al for mailing address if necessary.

PLEASE NOTE: YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE is printed on your issue of *River Currents* just above your name and address.

How a Cook Found a Berth on the LCU-1499 in I-Corps

Authorized by Joe Criscione, MRFA member and former LCU-1499 crew member; January 2006, as told to Tom Lanagan, MRFA member and former YFU-79 crew member.

I don't know how it happened but there I was sitting on a jet going to Vietnam. The date was August 25 1968 and I just turned 21 years old and had been recently married. The airplane was filled with sailors, soldiers, and marines with most of us going to 'Nam for our first tour. The plane was very quiet for most of the flight. Most of the guys were probably thinking the same thing that had crossed my mind. What lies ahead, what's it going to be like, are they going to be shooting at us as we land at DaNang airport? We had already heard that DaNang had mountains on most sides and that landing could be tricky especially if there was any incoming fire from the NVA. Through much of the flight, my mind was racing and playing tricks on my common sense.

The plane was like a big tube and you could see from one end to the other because there were no partitions and no first-class section. Gee, I guess there is no first class on the way to hell? The flight was to take about 20 hours with our first stop in Hawaii. I thought to myself, Wow I'm finally getting to Hawaii. I could think of nicer circumstances or an easier way to get there. We landed in Hawaii about 1 a.m. and we were scheduled to be refueled and be on our way in about 1 hour. They told us to deplane because the plane needed something repaired. We were glad to get out and stretch our legs and see Hawaii (the airport anyway). It was August and there was a very moist warm breeze. Most of the guys headed for the nearest bar for a quick brew or drink. I wasn't much of a drinker so I just walked around the airport and took in the sights. Most of the people we found were servicemen also going to you-know-where. The luckier ones were on their way home. That seemed like a lifetime away. About 3 hours later, we were on our unimpressive way. Next stop Guam.

When we landed at Guam, the airfield was surrounded with B52 bombers. I had never seen a B52 before, and it was an awesome sight. The design of the plane made it appear as though the tips of the wings were touching the ground. They looked like giant vultures sitting on the side of the road waiting for their next unsuspecting meal. These were the bombers that were called for air strikes throughout North and South Vietnam. There had to be at least 50 of them just sitting there, waiting! We were not allowed to get off the plane in Guam because all our aircraft had to do was to refuel. Next stop, that place we heard so much about in the news--Vietnam!

"Gentleman, we will be landing at DaNang airport in a few minutes. The temperature is a balmy 115 degrees and it's sunny and humid. Good luck to all our servicemen and we wish you all a safe return. Thank you for flying Continental." Like we had a choice what airline we were flying, the Transportation Officer had arranged the whole thing. Have you ever gotten off an air-conditioned plane into 115-degree heat with 100% humidity? All I wanted to do

was get back up that stairway. When I turned around to look at the plane, I saw some of the stewardesses standing in the doorway waving and crying. This job must have been hard for them. While I was on the flight, I overheard one of the stewardesses talking to another sailor about the flights when they bring men back to "The World." She said those flights are even quieter than flights to Vietnam.

When we left the plane, they herded us into a building they called a terminal. It was a large hanger type building where they separated us by branches of service and destination. The marines went one way, the soldiers went another way, and all of us sailors went to Camp Tien Sha by bus with wire over the windows. This was the Navy's largest Naval Support Activity Command with Headquarters NSA DaNang located in an old French Colonial building along the river known affectionately as the White Elephant.



NSA DaNang's Camp Tien Sha from Monkey Mountain, 1969

The gray military bus approached the main gate of Camp Tien Sha and came to a stop. One of the marine guards got on the bus and looked around. He gave the driver a kind of salute and said, "OK you can go ahead." As we drove through the gate, I thought to myself that was not a real close inspection for a base in a War Zone. It was the middle of the afternoon and a sunny day and oppressively hot. As I was getting my duffel bag off the bus, I could not help noticing how dingy the base looked. This was a first impression, and you have to remember I had just left a modern, shiny, Boeing 707 and the United States. It wasn't many days later that I began to realize that Tien Sha was one of the nicer spots in DaNang with many of the buildings having been built by the French. After awhile, it would not look so bad. As it was, I was assigned to a temporary barracks and I thought that was just fine because I would not want to be here permanently.

That night I was given my first assignment. They told me I was going to ride shotgun on an 18-wheeler flatbed delivering ammunition to local areas throughout DaNang. The best part of this assignment was we were going to do it at night with almost no lights. I remember thinking, oh great; I'm going to buy the farm on my first night in Vietnam. Well I lasted the night, but needless to say I was scared. I did that for three nights in a row and by the third night it didn't seem too bad, but I was a cook, what the hell was I doing here riding shotgun? The driver of the truck was a little uneasy, too when they assigned him a cook for his shotgun. I decided

to put his mind at ease and told him I was an excellent shot and would have no trouble using the M16 if I had too. Whether my bravado made him feel any better or not, I never did find out but sitting shotgun and driving through the streets of DaNang at night was really strange. Even our worst neighborhoods back in the States looked better than downtown DaNang. Also, in the distance, you could see tracer fire and the outgoing marine artillery firing into the hills and occasionally see incoming rockets from the NVA. Great place!

Finally, I learned that the Navy intended to assign me to the "U boats." Well "U boats," what the hell were they? I didn't know they had submarines here in 'Nam. I came to find out there were 60 or so flat-bottomed riverboats with crews on them that delivered supplies up and down the coast and up the rivers throughout all of I Corps.

When I received orders for a boat, it was LCU-1499. I was told it was a "tar baby." What the hell was a "tar baby?" It turned out a "tar baby" was one of the older boats that would be sent in a few months to Subic for overhaul

but in the meantime it was used for hauling all of the nasty cargo including everything from asphalt to napalm canisters to barrels of Agent Orange. I had no idea what to expect when I got the orders. The first thing I thought of was how they could keep the boat clean with all that tar onboard. All I knew was that I was going on a boat that traveled the rivers of Vietnam and that has got to be something dangerous. Let's see now, I joined the Navy so if I went to Vietnam I would be on some nice big ship sitting

off the coast. Then I became a cook, thinking that cooks are in the galley and it's very hard to get shot there, while on duty. No one told me the Navy had cooks on riverboats in Vietnam. Oops—oh well! As I unpacked my gear, I had no way of knowing what was ahead. I had a feeling I wasn't going to be bored! It could have been worse; I could have been drafted.

After catching a ride over to the Tien Sha Annex and the Sand Ramp where the boats stayed in DaNang, I walked up the bow ramp of 1499. The boat was in the process of being loaded with barrels of asphalt. Yes, the 1499 was definitely living up to its name as a "tar baby." As the forklifts ran up and down the bow ramp with the pallets of barrels, the boat would go up and down in the water from the weight of the load. Some of the barrels were leaking from either heat expansion or punctures in the sides. The whole well deck was sticky and black with tar. As I approached the hatch to the living quarters, the crew had built a makeshift wall of large railroad ties about a foot high. This was done to try to hold the tar back from the living quarters. The operative word here was "try" since there was plenty of tar that had flown past the makeshift barrier. All I could think of was how was I going to keep the galley clean? After a while, I realized I would have to live with the problem.

The boat was painted battleship gray since it didn't make much sense to even attempt to hide a 180-ton 118-ft-long boat that would haul a couple hundred tons of ammo or tar. The PBRs and some other small boats were

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A Cook's Berth

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

painted a flat black so they could not be seen so easily at night. However, our hull numbers — 1499 — were painted in 6-ft numbers on both sides of the bow as well as on the stern. I guess that this was done so that Hanoi Hanna would know who to blame, and she would periodically threaten various boats and their crews over the radio. I don't recall any of those call-outs by Hanoi Hanna actually resulting in a boat loss during my tour but I do know that the YOG-76 was sunk at Cua Viet just down river from Dong Ha some months after I rotated stateside after Hanoi Hanna called her out by hull number. In any event, as I walked up with my duffel bag, several of the guys greeted me and they were damn glad to have a new stewburner since they had been without a cook and had been living on sandwiches and beer.

Now, one of the wrinkles about being assigned to a U-boat was that we were never out to sea for very long before we would head back



YOG-76 sunk by NVA swimmers with mines in Song Cua Viet, 1969

up a river. So what's the problem with that for a cook you say? Well, this means that getting your sea legs takes awhile. Typically, after picking up a load of ammo, we would go up or down the coast to a river or another small bay and drop off the load and return to DaNang for another load. Then do it all over again. Since we were only out on the ocean for 12 to 15 hours before we were up a river to calm waters, it means that it's difficult to get a good sense of balance from all the rocking and pitching of the boat. Well, it took me about a month to get my sea legs. Somehow, I managed to cook meals during all this rocking and going up and down. Between the seasickness and looking at the food, the smell of the cargo, the heat, and let's not forget the diesel fumes, I lost a little weight. Not that I couldn't afford to lose weight, I was always a little chunky anyway. Most sailors get their sea legs in about 3 to 4 days when assigned to a real ship, but most ships stay out for more than 12 to 16 hours at a time. Since the U-boats were all flat-bottomed craft not really made for coastal runs of any distance, it made our coastal runs interesting since we did not cut through the waves. Instead, we floated on top with the wave and given our lack of power or speed, it was kind of like riding a giant surfboard. This all contributed to a rough ride, even in relatively calm seas. When we hit a large wave, the bow would come out of water and slam back into the sea like a giant belly flop. Yes, that first month on the 1499 was fun.



DaNang Harbor, 1969

Some time later after I had gotten my sea legs on the 1499, we were on our way to Dong Ha again with a load of napalm canisters. The sea was starting to get

pretty rough and some of the newer crew members were getting green about the gills. Even if you had previously been assigned to a real ship and had gotten use to the seasickness, it didn't ride like these U-boats. Some of the guys were in bad shape, and I could sympathize with them because I'd been there not too long before. As it turned out, we heard on the radio that there was a bad storm bearing down and that all boats should head for the nearest bay or river as soon as possible. Well, the trouble was the storm was not coming; it was already on top of us as we steamed north to the DMZ. We were almost to the mouth of the Cua Viet River, but we couldn't put into the river. Sounds ridiculous don't it? The problem was we didn't have enough power to fight the storm and the current. Being a flat-bottomed boat was not good in this situation because we did not cut through the water. If you looked aft, our wake was zigzagging back and forth like a snake. This meant we were getting nowhere fast or "slow." Through the rain and sea spray, we could see about where the mouth of the river was, but it was hopeless. The ocean by this time was running pretty ugly with 10-meter waves breaking over us as we rode about a mile off the coast. The waves were not just breaking over the bow of the boat, but also over the living quarters and conning tower. We found leaks we never knew we had. The water was leaking in the port holes and hatch covers. The engines were straining one second and running free the next with boat's screws chewing air. Our cargo was not that heavy and that did not help either. If we had more weight in the bow, we would be cutting the water better. The storm could not sink us but we could capsize if the waves got any bigger. The bow was coming out of the water and slamming back into the ocean like a belly slam in a pool. When we slammed back into the water, the whole boat would shake and everything that was not tied down would become airborne. It seemed that we were under the water more than on top so maybe the name U-boats made sense. As we went up and down in the ocean, we could see the USS New Jersey a few miles further out seeming to ride just fine through this storm. I guess size does make a difference.

Our helmsman was strenuously working to keep the boat



YFU-1499 in DaNang Harbor, 1969

on the right compass heading so we would not zigzag, but it was not working. After about 7 hours of sitting in the same spot on the radar, they asked me to take the helm. By this time, I had been on the boat the longest and had the most experience on the helm. I was also a graduate of the Assault Coxswain School the Navy had so graciously sent me too after I graduated from boot camp before they made me a cook. Not that this made me an expert but I liked to man the helm. I was having a good time with this weather. I thought it was really neat to look up and see the ocean on both sides of you 1 minute and be on top of a mountain of water the next. I was flattered to take the helm, besides I could not do anything in the kitchen under these conditions.

It was dangerous down there with things flying all over the place. The head was a real bad place where three guys were sick as dogs.

In order to keep the compass straight, I had to spin the wheel back and forth as fast as I could. I had to anticipate the movement of the boat just as a big wave was about to hit us. If I remember correctly, it was quite a workout, but I was young then with the energy of our youth. Whatever I was doing, it seemed to be working, and we were getting closer to the river. After about 2 hours of spinning the wheel back and forth, we reached the mouth of the river. Now it was just a matter of how good our aim was as we became the world's largest surfboard. We rode one wave all the way into the mouth of the river. It was the fastest that boat had ever traveled. We must have been doing about 30 knots when we hit the river. There were some Marines on the shore watching us surf in and probably couldn't believe what was happening.

I learned later that another boat—the LCU-1622—had been in a similar predicament a year earlier. In that case when they reached the mouth of the Cua Viet River, they missed the channel as they surfed in and instead the boat wound up breached and battered by the rough surf for 2 days. Eventually, a salvage crew pulled her off the beach and refloated her for a



YFU-79 just entering Song Cua Viet River from the South China Sea with ammo 1969

tow back to DaNang where the machinists and electricians got her back on duty in 2 weeks. In our case, we considered ourselves lucky for aiming the boat correctly at the mouth of the river. When we finally slowed down and moved up river far enough to avoid the coastal storm surge, we tied up alongside three other LCUs not far from the wreck of the YFU-62. The YFU-62 had been sunk by an NVA command detonated mine with the loss of eight sailors. Since its keel had been broken, the craft had been left in the river as a reminder to the rest of us to not be careless. Inattention in Vietnam could easily bring disaster and death.

Initially I was unsure as to why Uncle Sam had sent me to Vietnam as a cook for a U-boat crew. However, after serving on the LCU-1499 and working with the other U-boat crews, such as the YFU-79 in and about the waters of I-Corps, I developed a strong sense of duty and brotherhood that I carry with me to this day. I'm proud of what we accomplished and am still glad to say to all of those guys who were called and who went to Vietnam, my brothers-in-arms and we stand tall in memory of those who did not return.

Contact info:

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Lighterage Div., Tien Sha, NSA DaNang

Seeking

Seeking information on Sgt Smith

I believe Sgt. Smith was in the 4 of the 47th but I don't remember which Company. I, Fred Sholtes, was in support of his platoon as an Engr to disarm mines and bobby traps. I know Sgt Smith in Camp Bearcat (Martin Cox).

In 1967 July ?, I went on R & R and upon return I was sent to Vung Tan to board the USS Benewah. I think there was another ship we boarded first but ended up on the Benewah.

On one of my missions with Sgt Smith in the Delta, the platoon Sgt ? had a fire team from his platoon follow some footprints that ran vertical to our approach (between August 1967 and December 1967).

This is the second time the platoon Sgt sent a fire team out. The first time 3-4 man fire team left our position to follow footprints and within 10 minutes of departure all hell broke loose. It



Sgt. Smith



sounded as though they walked into an ambush. We never went to recover those men.

Now when Sgt Smith went out, I spoke with him first. He insisted on going because he said, "I signed up for this." He also never came back nor did the rest of his fire team. We never went after them either.

I'm trying to locate someone that knew him.

The other two photos are of men from his platoon. They may or may not be alive but if anyone recognizes the men, it may be of help to me.

I attended the reunion in Indiana in August 2009 but didn't have the photos.

I checked the WIAs and KIAs but couldn't

place Sgt Smith.

Please help me.

Sincerely

Fred Sholtes, 123 Fox Hunter Rd, Maynardville, TN 37807-4435, 865-992-6188.

If anyone has any information, please send the information to Fred by regular mail or by his e-mail (sholtes@att.net).

Fred Sholtes, SSG U.S. Army Retired

From the Membership

I just received my copy of *River Currents* and was immediately surprised and pleased with this edition. Along with the stories, the fact that it was on glossy paper and in color was really a Christmas gift...It's a beauty, thanks Albert.

I loved the "History of the MRFA" article...

Note: You've got my Betty Crocker Seal of Approval my friend...I always believed if it tasted right to me; it was good enough for everybody else...and this new issue "Tastes Right." I've been delinquent with my current dues to Charlie Ardinger so next week I'll send him two checks...one for my dues and one for the "New Taste in *River Currents*."

Holiday Greetings to you and Yours, Albert
CKM-2 AKA (Tom)

I want to thank Albert Moore for sending all of these pictures out to us. I was with the 2/60th in Tan Tru 67-68 as RTO and infantry support. I did not work with the MRF but through these pictures I have gained a greater appreciation for all that you did in Vietnam. I want to thank all of you for serving our country.

A lot of my friends that died were in A and B Companies and I worked with E Company as well. These guys were all heroes to me for facing all that they did.

I now add you all as my heroes as well. Merry Christmas to all of you and your families.

Ron (Ski) Rutowski

Dear Albert and Family,

Thank you for all your hard work this year keeping me and the other members informed of all the latest information from the VA. Your photos and news of members keep our organization together. May you and yours enjoy a Merry X-MAS and a Healthy and Happy New Year.

Ed Brennan

I wanted to take a minute to let you know how much you have helped me, even though you are not aware what you did. I have been receiving updates and information from MRFA for a few years as a member. In addition, you have kept me updated with current events and news concerning the Navy and military in general. For this, I thank you and I am forever in your debt. I discovered that I had leukemia about 3 years ago. It was a shock but after I started thinking more clearly I remembered reading about the VA awarding disability benefits for this disease on the assumption of exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange for Brown Water Navy personnel. I read this from the information you had sent me via e-mail. I contacted the local VA office here in Indianapolis to file a claim. I was not encouraged or impressed with their people. I was told that I needed proof that I was actually "boots on the ground in Vietnam." This seemed to be contrary to the information I had read from what you had sent to me. I told the VA I really did not have "proof" and did not think this burden should be my responsibility and in my opinion the best proof would be for them to read the log-book from the USS Monmouth County LST-1032 and it would verify that I was on the ground in Vietnam as I claimed. Against my better judgment, I filled out the paperwork and waited. About 3 months later, I was informed by the VA that I needed proof I was actually on the ground in Vietnam. At that point, I pretty much gave up and resigned myself to the fact that the VA did not want to help me and I would not be awarded any benefits. I did not respond to the VA and filed the paperwork away and forgot about it. To my surprise, a couple months later I received notice from the VA that I had been awarded disability benefits based on contracting leukemia from exposure to Agent Orange while serving in Vietnam. They also indicated that my ship, LST 1032, was or had been anchored in DaNang

harbor. I'm sure we were at some point in time anchored there but we were also at a heck of a lot of other locations in Vietnam. Thank you Albert for providing me the information I needed to take the first step. It is amazing how people can touch other lives in major ways and not know it is happening. God bless you!

Dale E. Ashley

Hello Albert,

I am searching for BM1 J.O. Hood (believe his first name is John) who on 15 February 1967 was the boat captain of MSB-51, which along with the MSB-49 engaged in a firefight with Viet Cong hidden in foliage along the Long Tau. He was awarded a Silver Star for his actions that day. I am trying to find him or a copy of his certificate for the medal, as I'd like to use it in my third and final book in the Wooden Ships and Iron Men series.

Is he perhaps one of your members? He was assigned to Mine Squadron 11 Det. Alfa, so it's probably unlikely. If not, do you have a means to put out the word among veterans that I'm trying to contact him? A chapter describing the above event is the lead-in for the book, and Richard DeRosset is preparing to start work on a painting of it that will be the cover art for the book.

By the way, Capt. Bob Kermen, USNR (Ret.), a gunner aboard a riverine boat in the Vietnam War and I believe one of your members, is now a fellow instructor at my high school NJROTC unit.

Sincerely,

David Bruhn, 2628 Escallonia Way
Chico, CA 95973, dnnbruhn@digitalpath.net

My name is Robert Thacker, D Co 15th Engineers. I have been a member of the MRFA for some years. I received the winter newsletter and got to thinking. I did 18 months with Delta Co 15th and spent a lot of time on the boats. As I understand it, we were the only engineer company to support all the Army infantry units that served on the boats--3/47th, 4/47th, 3/60th, and others. I am proud to have served with the 9th and to have served on the boats and be a member of the MRFA. The Navy people that served on the boats and infantry did a great job, and I am glad I served with them. One time that comes to mind was the FSB David in Sept of 68. The supply boats were hit just about every time supplies were sent in. FSB David was a mess for both Army and Navy. I did not care to be on the boats when they took us to our drop-off location but was glad to see them for pick up even though it was a toss up getting out of the canals without the boats getting fired at. Every company of infantry that we supported was great but always seems to leave us on our own. We would be blowing up a complex of bunkers or whatever and would look up and the infantry always seemed to be gone. We always seem to find them before dark, which I was glad we could always do. There were sad times and good times being at Dong Tam and working off the boats. I was 18 and am now 60 and if I was able, I would be happy to serve my country again. I want to thank the young men that serve and the older men that have served this country. We did well.

Robert Thacker, SSG at the time
15th Engr. Bn, 9th Inf Div

YRBM-16

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

6-knot current and place the mine on the hull. In the daytime, the bow watch would shoot with a carbine any debris or water plants floating near. At night, an outboard motor boat would circle and the bow watch would randomly toss concussion grenades into the river. When the current stopped in the dry summer season, there was also a stern watch with a carbine and grenades.

Lionel Burns CS3, who was there, supplied these photos (taken in Binh Thuy) and much of the information on this page.



It is assumed that a VC swimmer evaded the nets and placed the bomb there.

The explosion's hull rupture is shown here. A fire also damaged much of the interior.

History of the YRBM-16

Tan Chau was the first location in-country near

Cambodia on the Mekong River

In 1967, the YRBM was moved to Can Tho on the Bassac River. There it supported the building of the Binh Thuy PBR Base.

After that, it was moved to Ben Tre on the Ham Luong River. It was moored in the middle of the Ham Luong River. The bombing occurred here at 1:12 a.m., the morning after Thanksgiving Day. Flooding and a fire occurred also.

The explosion occurred at the bulkhead between the engine room and RD 522s berthing space. The double hull in the area was a diesel fuel tank. The explosion ripped a hole big enough to drive a truck through. The explosion also blew the hell out of the double hull fuel tank topped off with 3,000 gallons of diesel the day before from a costal AO. Fuel was thrown all over the decks and erupted in flames. Smoke filled the ship's passages. Flames may have leaped more than 100 feet in the air. Fire, extreme heat, and smoke hindered rescue efforts and forced evacuation. The crew escaped on Mike boats and returned with fire hoses. PBRs of Squadron 522 began the fire-fighting efforts. In addition to 7 deaths, 14 crewmen were injured.

According to Lloyd Tutor, his boat PBR-65 in Squadron 521 was scrambled from the Hunterdon County LST-838. PRB-65 arrived first at the YRBM-16 and began fighting the fire. The rest of the squadron followed and LST-838 arrived later. The PBR crews did not find survivors or casualties before their OBAs ran out. The PBR crew spent the day fighting the fire. They were the first to enter the area between the Machine Shop and the Berthing Space.

The YRBM-16 was towed to Dong Tam for a sea patch. It was towed to Japan for a refit. It was almost lost in heavy seas.

I first saw it in Chou Doc in fall 1969. In summer 1970, it left Chou Doc.

Miller Newsletter--Sgt. Leonard B. Keller from Congressman Jeff Miller, November 30, 2009

Many Americans woke up this morning and turned on the television or searched the Internet to find out the latest on Tiger Woods and his wrecked black Cadillac Escalade. However, on this rainy morning in northern Virginia, another black Cadillac meandered through rolling hills on hallowed ground. This vehicle carried Medal of Honor recipient, Sergeant Leonard B. Keller, to his final resting place at Arlington National Cemetery.

While a high profile athlete remained ensconced in his luxury mansion behind the walls of his gated community, a caisson with six black horses slowly walked along the rain-soaked asphalt. Family members followed, huddled close to each other beneath umbrellas trying to shield themselves from the rainy and dreary cold morning. They came to pay tribute to a father, grandfather, brother, and friend.

As the cars drove past on State Road 110 and planes flew overhead leaving Reagan National Airport, I am sure no one knew who was being buried, their name, age, or hometown. On this day, it was a man who showed uncommon valor in the jungles of Vietnam.

On May 2, 1967, Sergeant Leonard B. Keller and his unit were sweeping through an area in Vietnam where an enemy ambush had occurred earlier. The unit suddenly came under intense automatic weapons and small-arms fire from a number of enemy bunkers and numerous snipers in nearby trees. Sgt. Keller quickly moved to a position where he could fire at a bunker from which automatic fire was received, killing one Viet Cong who attempted to escape. Leaping to the top of a dike, he and a comrade charged the enemy bunkers, dangerously exposing themselves to the enemy fire. Armed with a light machine gun, Sgt. Keller and his comrade began a systematic assault on the enemy bunkers. While Sgt. Keller neutralized the fire from the first bunker with his machine gun, the other soldier threw in a hand grenade, killing its occupant. Then he and the other soldier charged a second bunker, killing its occupant. A third bunker contained an automatic rifleman who had pinned down much of the friendly platoon. Again, with utter disregard for the fire directed to them, the two men charged, killing the enemy within.

Continuing their attack, Sgt. Keller and his comrade assaulted four more bunkers and eliminated the enemy threat. During their furious assault, Sgt. Keller and his comrade had

been almost continuously exposed to intense sniper fire as the enemy desperately sought to stop their attack. The ferocity of their assault had carried the soldiers beyond the line of bunkers into the treeline, forcing snipers to flee. The two men gave immediate chase, driving the enemy away from the friendly unit. When his ammunition was



exhausted, Sgt. Keller returned to the platoon to assist in the evacuation of the wounded. The two-man assault had driven an enemy platoon from a well prepared position, accounted for numerous enemy dead, and prevented further friendly casualties. Sgt. Keller's selfless heroism and indomitable fighting spirit saved the lives of many of his comrades and inflicted serious damage on the enemy.

People fall from grace from time to time--politicians, athletes, pastors, and others. We are human and far from perfect. Why is it that so many are more interested in the tabloid news of today than the true life stories of real Americans, real heroes? Those who always give more than they take and are determined to leave this world a better place than they found it.

This morning a man was buried in the hallowed ground of Arlington National Cemetery; a man of simple means. Not a billionaire or a star athlete. Too often we put more attention on work or the material things a person has rather than the things a person does.

As I stood at the gravesite this morning and watched the four other Medal of Honor recipients in attendance salute as soldiers slowly folded the American flag that draped Sgt. Keller's casket, I was reminded of the thousands of men and women who make tremendous sacrifices defending this great nation. Sgt. Keller and the 92 living Medal of Honor recipients are heroes in every sense of the word. They have all answered the call of duty, but more than that, they have placed the lives of others and the liberty of an entire nation above their own lives. They were all willing to make the ultimate sacrifice so that we may all enjoy the fruits of freedom.

On this week after Thanksgiving, I am thankful for heroes like Sgt. Leonard B. Keller. May God bless Sgt. Keller and his family. Sgt Leonard B. Keller served in A/CO 3rd/60th 9thInfDiv.

What Became of the YRBM-16?

NO NAME (YRBM-16)
(ex YFNB-21)
REPAIR, BERTHING & MESSING BARGE (N-S-P)
UIC: 18924
Class: Fleet:
Status: Disposed of through the Security Assistance Program (SAP), transferred, Military Assistance Service Funded, ex U.S. fleet hull
Homeport:
Date status changed: 10/01/1973

The above report indicates the YRBM-16 was transferred to another country in 1973.



YFU-79 just entering Song Cua Viet River from the South China Sea with ammo 1969.

The Mine Explosion Continued

From Pete Oakander

The article in the winter edition of *River Currents* had the article titled "The Mine Explosion." Boy, did it bring back memories that I had long since forgotten—like the mosquitoes, the heat and humidity, and the action that those of us there encountered with Charlie. In addition to what was already covered in the original article, here is what I remember.

I was on the CCB mentioned—although it wasn't CCB-152-1; it was CCB-131-1. I (Pete Oakander) was the radioman onboard. The Boats was Frank Dettmers, the Gunnersmate was Jim Lierman, the Engineman was Jim Zervos, and our Coxswain was Bob Land. We had some others but their names escape me now.

I do remember the long transit down canals and jungle no one had gone down before. We were not sure if we could make it. One of the events that I do remember once we got on station was running into a modified tango boat that the Seals had. They were operating down in the Song Ong Doc by themselves—mixing it up with Charlie—a ballsy bunch of guys—and how they got down there only they know. It

was the first time I had ever seen a mini-gun in action. They had this three barrel mini set up in a turret amidships of their boat and gave us a real show by letting it rip. Down in the SOD, every direction was a free-fire zone so it was just point and shoot. The other thing I will never forget is their liquor supply. I don't remember how that subject came up but we swabs do like our booze and the selection they had was like going to your local liquor store. We didn't indulge as we were on patrol and it was during daylight which doesn't make sense now—but hey that was 40 years ago.

That fateful day—October 23, 1969—when the mine went off. Here is what I remember. There were about six or seven boats. We were all beached bow forward and all lined up in a row next to one another as the original article pointed out so that we could walk between boats and stay off the beach and out of the mud. The Mike boat was on our portside and the Tango on our starboard. It was mid-day. Charlie boats were the only boats in the force that had air conditioning that I was aware of. They were there to keep the bank of radios and the officers happy. Each Charlie had two Lister generators whose sole purpose was to keep the air conditioners running. The below deck operations compartment had four air conditioners. One of the Lister's no longer worked and the remaining one was on its way out too. It only had enough power to keep one of the air conditioners running—barely. But down there in that heat and in the middle of the day, it was a real ben-

nie. To keep the generator from having to work any harder than it had too, I made sure that the hatch for access topside was dogged down good and tight. I personally took a sledge hammer to it to keep it shut because the crew kept trying to access the compartment through that hatch and let all the cool air out. The only other way was to access it via the coxswain flat or from the engine room—both of which were usually avoided. It was noonish—I was sitting on the raised supposedly concussion-proof platform on the deck of the compartment, listening to a little East West by Paul Butterfield on my headphones and just beginning to write a letter home when BOOM—all hell broke loose. There were a bunch

of us down in there taking advantage of the cool air the air conditioners were providing. It was weird because the compartment went pitch black and yet I could see everything and everyone. The blast pitched me into the air and head first into a single side band radio that was on its way to the deck. I got to my feet and went to the dogged-down hatch and through the dogs open by hand and pushed like hell to get the hatch open. Up top it was havoc. There was

a bunch of stuff piled on the hatch and bodies lying everywhere. We had a contingent of Vietnamese Navy guys who were onboard as a part of the Vietnamization program. I worked my way to the stern of the boat and the force of the concussion caused all the fire extinguishers to release. Too bad because as I worked my way to the stern to look down into the engine room, I passed some fires that were ignited and the engine room was a cauldron of smoke, water, and battery acid. The 671's were split in two at the transmission. The batteries were all split open. The magazine was wide open and ammo was everywhere while water was pouring in. Within minutes, the stern was on the bottom. We got the fires out and then turned our attention on the Mike boat and the Tango. It was the Tango that was in the most trouble. I remember the Tango being tied on to our boat and it was starting to turn over onto its port side. Guys were down in the well deck and scrambling like crazy to get out. I remember one of the guys who didn't make it out when the boat turned over. We were all yelling like crazy and then his head popped out of the water. The Mike boat took a big hit too but it being so heavy it held its own, although it did sink stern first too. It was amazing that no one got killed because as I remember there were people in the water. But after reading the original story—the guys I saw in the water were probably Dale Walker and Don Blankenship who got pitched in. There was a lot of confusion. One of the first things we had to do—and it wasn't our radios on the CCB that

were used—all junk—was to call the hit in and get some helos down there and set up a perimeter. Charlie had to be sitting out there somewhere watching the show. The Doc who was with us started gathering those that needed to be medivaced out and pointed at me to get in line. My reaction was why? He says—don't you know. I say—know what? He says—the back of your head is split open and you need attention. I say—can you do it—I don't want to leave the boat. He says—yea and stitches me up. My adrenalin was going strong enough that I didn't even feel the stitches. Once the helos arrived and got all those needing to get the injured out—the rest of us got to work doing what we could do to get things back together. The sunken boats—Tango, Charlie, and Mike—weren't going anywhere. We got through that night and the next day one of the boats made its way down the Song Ong Doc to the coast where either the repair ships Satyr or the Askari were anchored in support of our operation. To get us all afloat was going to take a bunch of pumps and the plugging of a bunch of holes. We got Charlie 1 floated and watertight enough to get us towed down to the repair ship where they immediately lifted us out of the water and put us on a barge. The ship's crew welded up all the holes and buttoned up the boat. This is when we learned that the possibility existed that Charlie 1 and its whole crew were going to be sent to Subic to get the ship repaired. For the time being, they put Charlie 1 back into the water and hooked her up to one of the intercoastal resupply ships for a tow back to Vung Tao. I don't know the name of the ship. The whole crew went along for the ride, and it took a couple of days to get around the tip of Vietnam and back up the coast to the mouth of the Mekong. We arrived there during an afternoon and the ship anchored there for the night. We of the crew had to maintain an anchor watch on our boat. I happened to be on watch that afternoon and noticed that the bow of our boat started to lift out of the water. I ran like hell up to the bridge to report the situation and then the Captain and I ran back to the stern. We got there just in time to see Charlie 1 sink—with only its bow sticking out of the water. It was decided that an air pocket was keeping the bow above the water line. Now what to do? Well a bunch of messages were sent back and forth, and the decision came down to cut Charlie 1 loose and leave her there. I think we may have put out a marked buoy and then we headed to Vung Tao. That was the end of the story. They helo'd us back to Dong Tam—no trip to the Philippines—and the crew was split up to man other boats. I ended up becoming one of the staff radiomen for RivDiv 13 and was stationed in Dong Tam for a while before they moved the squadron headquarters out to the Benewah. I stayed there right up until the day of the invasion into Cambodia when the Benewah and all the boats headed up to the border to go after Charlie.

There were actually two lessons learned with this event. The original article mentioned one of them—the spacing of beached boats—the further apart the better to avoid mine damage. The other and even more important was the fact that the squadron made the error of beaching in the same spot twice. The mine must have been placed after the first night beach. Had to be or

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Albert

I just received the winter edition and the article "The Mine Explosion" really brought back memories as I was the radioman on the CCB. And it wasn't CCB-152-1; it was CCB-131-1. I have put together an article that I have titled--The Mine Explosion Part 2--which I was thinking would be an interesting follow up to the original. It recounts my remembrances and tells the story of what happened to Charlie 1 after it was re-floated. I have attached the rough draft if you care to take a look. Let me know what you think.

Pete Oakander

RM3, CCB-131-1, May 69 - May 70

Mine Explosion

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Charlie wouldn't have known where to place it. He did so on that assumption and hope that we would beach again at the same spot. He lucked out or Charlie had some swimmers who somehow got the bomb in place while the boats were in place. I gotta believe that that could never

with Don Blankenship though—it sure seemed like a lot more than that to lift the sterns of a Tango, a Mike, and a Charlie boat clear out of the water. And cracking a 671 diesel in half is quite a feat. The second was that the Navy sent a group of divers down to check Charlie 1 out and they couldn't get a good look as a family of Moray eels had taken up residence and they

Received on Christmas Day 2009

Albert

A big Merry Christmas to You and Your Family too.

That article—The Mine Explosion—has done more for me to get back and deal with my Navy/river boat past than anything I can think of and I want to thank you for all that you do. Since that article came out, I have spoken to Bob Land and Gerry Vroman who were both one of us. All of us went through NIOTC together and Bob and I were on CCB-131-1 and Gerry manned an Alpha boat in RivDiv 11. I hadn't talked to either of them in 40 years. Gerry is not a member of the MRFA but I gave him the sales pitch to join. He hadn't given much thought to that past in 40 years until I called yesterday. He was really glad to hear from me and in all this time we really don't live that far apart. Anyway keep it up.

Pete

have happened.

As one of the staff radiomen, I was privileged to see a lot of radio traffic come across our desk. Months later while on the Benewah, two messages came across about Charlie 1. The first was that it was determined by EOD that it had to be at least a 100 pounds of explosives to do the damage that was inflicted to the boats. I agree

decided to leave well enough alone. That was the last I heard of her and to this day she may still be a navigation hazard at the mouth of the Mekong. I don't know what medals those of us who were there got—but once I got back home and was attending reserve meetings—I think a lot of us on the boats were reservists—especially radioman—I was notified that I was to receive the Purple

Heart and the Navy Commendation Medal for my services. I am more proud of having received them today than I was then—back then all I wanted was out and to get on with my life.

From Don Blankenship, author of the first article of Mine Explosion Winter Issue of *River Currents*:

Peter is probably correct. When I added the boat numbers to my story after writing the original story on my web site, I got them from someone else. After June 1969, the numbers on the boats eliminated the division numbers. I should have recognized that C-1 would have been the old C-131-1 boat and not the C-152-1. The old C-152-1 would have probably been C-5 or C-6 under the new numbering scheme. It is also quite possible that the T-5 boat was a 131 boat as well instead of a 152 boat. I probably shouldn't have trusted my original source for those boat numbers without doing some further checking. It never made sense to renumber the boats but I guess that was some *&^% shit officer's idea under TF 194 when all the TF117 divisions were put into 194. He did it just to confuse all of us in our later years.

The Army's Best Invention

by Maj. Renita Foster

It was developed in just 30 days in summer 1942 by the Subsistence Research Laboratory in Chicago. And never in its 52-year history has it been known to break, rust, need sharpening, or polishing. Perhaps that is why many soldiers, past and present, regard the P-38 C-ration can opener as the Army's best invention.

C-rations have long since been replaced with the more convenient Meals, Ready to Eat, but the fame of the P-38 persists, thanks to the many uses stemming from the unique blend of ingenuity and creativity all soldiers seem to have.

"The P-38 is one of those tools you keep and never want to get rid of," said Sgt. Scott Kiraly, a military policeman. "I've had my P-38 since joining the Army 11 years ago and kept it because I can use it as a screwdriver, knife, anything."

"The most vital use of the P-38, however, is the very mission it was designed for," said Fort Monmouth, N.J., garrison commander Col. Paul Baerman.

"When we had C-rations, the P-38 was your access to food; that made it the hierarchy of needs," Baerman said. "Then soldiers discovered it was an extremely simple, lightweight, multipurpose tool. I think in warfare, the simpler something is and the easier access it has, the more you're going to use it. The P-38 had all of those things going for it."

The tool acquired its name from the 38 punctures required to open a C-ration can, and from the boast that it performed with the speed of the World War II P-38 fighter plane.

"Soldiers just took to the P-38 naturally," said

World War II veteran John Bandola. "It was our means for eating 90 percent of the time, but we also used it for cleaning boots and fingernails, as a screwdriver, you name it. We all carried it on our dog tags or key rings."

When Bandola attached his first and only P-38 to his key ring a half century ago, it accompanied him to Anzio, Salerno and through northern Italy. It was with him when World War II ended, and it's with him now.

"This P-38 is a symbol of my life then," said Bandola. "The Army, the training, my fellow soldiers, and all the times we shared during a world war."



Sgt. Ted Paquet, swing shift supervisor in the Fort Monmouth Provost Marshal's Office, was a 17-year-old seaman serving aboard the amphibious assault ship USS New Orleans during the Vietnam War when he got his first P-38. The ship's mission was to transport Marines off the coast of DaNang.

On occasional evenings, Marines gathered near Paquet's duty position on the fantail for simple pleasures like "Cokes, cigarettes, conversation and C-rations." It was during one of these nightly sessions that Paquet came in contact with the P-38, or "John Wayne" as it's referred to in the Navy.

Paquet still carries his P-38, and he still finds it useful. While driving with his older brother, Paul, their car's carburetor began to have problems. "There were no tools in the car and, almost simultaneously, both of us reached for P-38s attached to our key rings," Paquet said with a grin. "We used my P-38 to adjust the flow valve, the car worked perfectly, and we went on

our merry way."

Paquet's P-38 is in a special box with his dog tags, a .50-caliber round from the ship he served on, his Vietnam Service Medal, South Vietnamese money, and a surrender leaflet from Operation Desert Storm provided by a nephew. "It will probably be on my dresser until the day I die," Paquet said.

The feelings veterans have for the P-38 isn't hard to understand, according to 1st Sgt. Steve Wilson of the Chaplain Center and School at Fort Monmouth. "When you hang onto something for 26 years," he said, "it's very hard to give it up. That's why people keep their P-38 just like they do their dog tags. ... It means a lot. It's become part of you. You remember field problems, jumping at 3 a.m. and moving out. A P-38 has you reliving all the adventures that came with soldiering in the armed forces. Yes, the P-38 opened cans, but it did much more. Any soldier will tell you that."

Small Wonder that decade after decade, a Milwaukee-made can opener served generations of soldiers

by Dick Dickinson Monday 3/2/2009

Even with billions of dollars spent annually on defense technology, the most iconic piece of military equipment might be a 1.2-cent can opener.

Beginning in World War II, the P-38 was standard issue in every box of rations. Veterans carried it to Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, and with its elegant simplicity, indestructibility and versatility, it was treasured by soldiers.

"I opened a lot of culinary delights with my P-38," says Fernando Rodriguez of Watertown, Wis., a Marine in Vietnam. But that's not all. "It was a screwdriver, a bottle opener, and you could cut things with it. I carried it on my key chain for years. I still have it."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

The Men in the Boats

The mist of the morning cools and softens the air
The last of the soldiers have gone down the steel stairs
He crossed the barge that lay along side the big ship
And boarded the craft making sure he did not slip.

Now all assault craft and boats are well underway
They are executing the plan briefed yesterday
The boats flow out smoothly and take their place in line
From the air their formation is dark serpentine

Up the brown muddy river they move with the tide
Some sense the jungle beauty on this their first ride
Some seem not to look, unaware of the beauty
They limit their thoughts to just those of their duty
They are veterans, they have been out here before
They have seen the hot fights, they want not to see more
But if a fight come, these men are very good
Their skill by their foe is very well understood

Their force is our history is not often seen
They fight from the water and are called riverine
Grant used them at Vicksburg in the great Civil War
The French used them also on the Red River shore
They combined the power of Army and Navy
Their thoughts of each other at first were quite cagey
But that didn't last long when there was a real fight
Petty Officers and sergeants know what is right

Soldiers saw water as moats around a castle
An obstacle that would cost them in a battle
Sailors saw these moats as the track at Daytona
Take some care for mines and then blast right on down 'em

Attacks from the water their foe was not used to
They aimed at highways and watched for land-locked crews

For Riverine, it was the way to start a fight
To attack with surprise from water at first light
And this they were doing on their attack today

They thought would their plan work or go some other way

Very early some doubt about the plan arose
When they learned they'd be running right by Snoopy's Nose

An elaborate plan that probably worked well
But for boat crews and platoons, it was hard to tell
The artillery was firing, of this they'd been told
A battalion in choppers found an LZ cold

But what is that pounding on the side of the craft
And where we were once heading is now pointing aft
The antitank rocket that exploded top side
Has sprayed steel on a platoon but they're still alive
There's a monitor turning in a stream ahead
No one at the helm, just a slumped figure instead
The assault craft turns wildly, rams into the bank
The captain's quick decision before the craft sank
The infantry platoon and the whole boat crew too
Scramble ashore where their last artillery blew
Their foe is retreating crawling over a dike
That's getting chewed up by a boat's forty mike

There's plenty of action, the new guy's have their fill
The artillery pounding, the jets streaking shrill
Guys still in boats to their foe must see evil
Blazing away in clouds of cordite and diesel

But the noise of battle passes slowly away
There are men to be cared for and some need to pray
Some pursue the enemy by chopper and boat
Medics work wonders but there are lumps in their throats

It seems forever, but then they're back on the ship
They talk of light hurts, swollen finger and bruised hip
But they're thinking of Willy who made them all laugh
And of Stan, Jose, and Bob who did not come back

They laugh at Frank's letter that he just got from home

The candy his wife sent has been missent to Nome
The mailman said he he'd sent it on although quite tattered

They knew for Frank that the letter was what mattered

They laughed and they joked and there were a lot of pranks
And a few good jokes about guys in higher ranks
But they were glad to know that the brass had announced

It was a main force enemy that they had trounced
That was good, they'd put that fact in their next letter
But what mattered most was they had fought even better
There was this deep sense of sharing great danger
Of meeting a test, risking life for a stranger

Most pictured the stranger as a child, maybe six
Who didn't want much, food, home, and not to be sick
And of course for their lives is what most of them feared
It was worth fighting in hopes they would not be scared

Many years have passed since the days of these battles
For each old Raider and Rat the memory still rattles
And a few of these warriors have even gone back
For with they recall, there is something they lack

Not as a warrior they feel good for their people
It was always their aim to free them from trouble
And they are warmed by smiles of kids three or four
But in old U S A they have even more

But the main experience that gives them a chill
Is to fly over the land, lush, green, and still
To feel tears sting their eyes looking down at brown moats

Feel the chest swell thinking of the Men in the Boats

*This story was written by Lt/General Johnnie Corns
U.S. Army (Ret.) Operations Officer 2nd/Bde 67-68.*

Dear Albert:

I finally found some time to look at this and other batches of photos you have been sending out. I just want to say--once again--thank God for Albert Moore--and to say thank you personally to you Albert for pulling so many disparate groups and individual people together and for keeping our common bonds bound tightly together.

I also appreciated very much seeing the vid-

eo tribute to Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez, Medal of Honor winner...a wonderful inspiring example of overcoming what might be called a "tough start" in life (an understatement), to finally become a symbol of great heroism and courage...despite outrageous prejudice and bias against him. I know firsthand that many Vietnam Veterans had tough starts in life and did individually and collectively rise above their limited beginnings--although Roy's story must rank

with the best of them. Thanks for that too.

As far as I'm concerned--you may be a Navy man but you have become a very fine "Soldier." Thanks again for all you do to keep the Mobile Riverine Force Association flame burning bright and for helping all of us to feel connected and proud of our service--no matter what it was.

I hope 2010 is the best year ever for you and your family Albert

Lt/Gen Pat Hughes U S Army Ret.

Army's Best Invention

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

In 1942, the U.S. Army Subsistence Research Laboratory in Chicago was presented with the challenge of creating an opener small enough to carry in the pocket. Moreover, it couldn't break, rust, and need sharpening or polishing. It took the lab 30 days to invent what was originally dubbed "Opener, Can, Hand, and Folding." U.S. Army Col. Renita Menyhart once called it "The Patron Saint of Army Inventions."

The J.W. Speaker Corp. of Germantown, Wis., was one of the first companies to manufacture the P-38, and it produced millions. The company's founder, J.W. Speaker, actually improved the design by adding tabs for the hinge, which held the blade securely open or closed as needed. J.W. passed away in 1960 and his son Jack Speaker took over.

"The first contract I bid on was a Department

of Defense solicitation for 10 million P-38s, with a rider for 10 million more," Jack Speaker says. "The bid was about \$12 per thousand." He estimates that between 1960 and the late '80s, his company made around 50 million P-38s.

Luther Hanson, curator at the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum in Fort Lee, Va., estimates that "750 million P-38s were produced for WWII" and "at least a billion" from Vietnam to the present.

Beginning with the first Gulf War, the P-38 was phased out. Today, the Speaker Corp. manufactures electrical lighting components for vehicles, but still has about 100,000 P-38s in stock. Or you can buy one at most Army surplus stores for about 50 cents.

This article on the P-38 can opener was submitted to the Officer Review Magazine by Col. Fremont Piercefield from the Chicago, Illinois Chapter. His comments are as follows: "I read

the enclosed article (see above) about a GI can opener fondly known as the "P-38" to literally millions of American servicemen beginning in 1942 until probably 2001. It brought back to me possibly 30 years of mostly pleasant memories that I may not have had reason to recall.

After reflecting on what I had read, I felt that the article should be shared with your many readers, who undoubtedly will recall the many times the P-38 came into play in peace and war. Often times the P-38 was hung on a chain with the dog tags so as to be readily available at meal time. It took me a bit of rummaging in my memorabilia to find my surviving P-38. I was thankful to be reminded."

As an aside, Major Thomas Dennehy USA was the inventor of the P-38 can opener.

See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXuWNCkuHV4> -

TAPS *Tribute to a Fallen One*

This is to inform you that **Chief Robert Martin** died on December 26, 2009. He was 82 years old. He died in Mount Pleasant, SC. He will remain at the funeral home there until arrangements can be made for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. There will be a small service in SC at a future date. Chief Bob Martin served on the USS Benewah APB-35 (1966/1968). Bob was the leading Chief Petty Officer for the Deck Force and was the ship's Chief Master-at-Arms. Bob was very instrumental in getting the ship ready for deployment to Vietnam and spent many, many hours doing so on the way over. So the ship would be ready for the Navy boat crews and the Riverine Infantry of the 9th ID when we pulled into Vung Tau, Vietnam. Chief Martin took his job seriously. He was really the last of the old sailors of yester years. Boats Martin served his country during three wars with distinction and pride having served in the Pacific during WWII and in Korea during the Korean War and later on the Benewah during the Vietnam War. Although he will be gone, he will never be forgotten by his USS Benewah APB-35 shipmates. May Chief Bob Martin rest in peace. You may contact the family c/o Robert Martin Jr., 902 Walker Road, Parkton, MD 21120.

Folks another shipmate, our own **Larry "Cowboy" Rodgers** (1947-2009) passed away December 12, 2009. Larry served on Tango-92-8 and ASPB-92-4 (10/67-12/68). You may contact the family c/o Pat Rodgers, 2500 Crestwood Dr., Burleson, TX 76028, 214-215-1983, patrodgersjm@aol.com. May our brother rest in peace and suffer no more. *Please let's support our sister and her family, we're losing way too*

Get Well Wishes

Member **Wesley K Lamham** is recovering from a stroke. He still can't talk clearly but he can read. His right side is paralyzed. He is learning to walk. His wife said he said to say hi to everyone and that he missed going to the reunion. You may contact Wesley K. Lanham c/o 2630 NNW 1st St, Boynton, Beach, FL 33435, 561-586-2746. Wesley served on the USS White River LSMR-536 (3/67-7/68). May our brother have a good and speedy recovery.

Dear Mr. Ardinger:

As a new member of MRFA, I was very pleased to receive my first edition of **"River Currents"** and look forward to more.

My check for \$25 as a sponsor is enclosed. It isn't much, but hopefully it will help.

I was just completing basic training at Ft. Riley, Kansas, in February 1966 when the 9th Infantry Division was re-activated and was a member of the honor guard at the ceremonies.

Thereafter, I was assigned to the 9th Administration Company and served in that company from February 1966 to November 1967. I went to Vietnam on the USS General John Pope naval troopship and was primarily stationed at Camp Bearcat.

Keep up the good work.

Charlie Thompson 9th Adm. Co. (02/66-11/67)
301 E Bates #A6, La Plata MO 63549
I'm an old-fashioned guy that doesn't have e-mail.

many good men and women way too early. Albert

My very good friend **Dale Ogdahl** passed away yesterday, at the age of 60, December 6 at 12:30 a.m. from various cancers throughout his body. Dale served with Charlie Company, 2nd platoon, 4/47 (9/68-7/69). He carried my radio and the platoon leader's radio. He came home as Sgt E-5. Dale lived in Minnesota and father of four. His wife passed away several years back. He had planned on coming to the MRFA reunion in September, but the cancer had the best of him. He just recently retired from the railroad. He was a damn good man. I loved him truly as a Brother. Dave Schoenian hschoenian@comcast.net. You may contact the family c/o 27406 Old Mill Pond Rd, Glenwood, MN 56334, 320-278-4735. May our Brother rest in peace.

Lori Ottney, wife of MRFA member Ed Ottney, died October 22, 2009, from a sudden illness. Ed served with the 120th Aviation Company from 1965 to 1968. You may contact Ed at 602 South Ave, Decorah, IA 52101-1440, 563-382-5893.

Ronald T. Kemp passed away October 7, 2008, after a car accident. Ronald served on Tango-132-5 (1969). You may contact the family c/o Janis Kemp, 18562 Eagles Bend Dr, Springdale, AR 72764-9738, 479-927-2367.

Member **Sydney Connick** passed away. Sydney served with A Company Platoon 1 of the 3rd/60th (04/68-04/69). You may contact Susan Dunn at 1450 9th St Room 53, Ogden, UT 84404-5225, 801-394-4804.

MRFA
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In Memory Of

This section is for members who wish to sponsor the MRFA by placing a notice in memory of one of their fallen comrades. In some cases, the name of the sponsor will precede the name of the person who was KIA, or has passed on since Vietnam. It's \$25 for four issues.

G. Edward Arledge for LCDR Loren Cobb USN Executive Officer and Commanding Officer of USS Indira ARL-37
MajGeneral Lucien Bolduc, Jr. USA (Ret) for Guy Tutwiler
Bill Brennan for Tom Swanick GMG3 USS White River LSMR-536
Brothers of the 2nd/47th Inf for all Army and Navy KIAs
Frank Buck for son Frank H. Buck ENFM USN T-92-10 KIA 12/28/67
Michael Connolly for LTJG James Francis Rost, Jr., RivDiv 132, KIA November 1969
Gene Cooper for Steve Brichford FT2 1968/69 and Jerry Roleofs 1967-68 USS White River LSMR-536
Nan Fulton for LtGen Bill Fulton Cdr 2nd Bde Asst Div Cdr 9th Inf Div (1966-68)
Ray Funderburk for LTC John B. Tower CO 2nd/47th Inf
Regina Gooden for Sgt Lloyd Earl Valentine B Co 3rd/47th KIA September 5, 1968
David Hammond for Lt Willie Kitchen C Co 3rd/47th (1967/69) killed in an automobile accident 1992
Joe Hilliard for Joe Benack from Florida and Donald Hartzell from Pennsylvania
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John and Barbara Iannucci for Mitchell Perdue B Co. 3rd/60th (01/68-09/68)
Lee "Tex" McKean GMG2 for James "Buddy" Hood GMG2 USS White River LSMR 536
Men of C Co 4th/47th 1967 for our Brothers KIA 03/19/67 Benito Alaniz; KIA 04/09/67 Ronald P. Schworer; KIA 04/13/67 Charles "Duffy" Black; KIA 05/15/67 Donald M. Peterson; KIA 06/19/67 Robert J. Cara, Robert J. Jindra, Timothy A. Johnson, Forrest L. Ramos, Cameron A. Rice, David A. Robin, Sheldon B. Schulman, Hubert J. Fink, Kenneth D. Frakes, William M. Geier, John L. Winters; KIA 07/11/67 Marion "Butch" Eakins, Elmer F. Kenney, Harold W. King, Philip A. Ferro, George E. Smith; KIA 07/29/67 Cecil B. Bridges; KIA 09/29/67 James M. Sunday; KIA 10/06/67 Gale A. Alldridge, Danny D. Burkhead, Charles W. Davis; KIA 11/10/67 Charles W. Grizzle; and KIA 05/06/68 John T. Hoskins
Adam Metts for Donald L. Bruckart T-111-2 KIA 03/31/69
VP Roy Moseman for Oscar Santiago C-2 4th/47th (10/67-10/68)
Jasper Northcutt for SSGT Henry T. Aragon B-2 2nd/47th KIA 08/23/67, SGT James E. Boorman B-2 2nd/47th KIA 08/27/67, SP4 James D. Bronakoski B-2 2nd/47th KIA 04/27/67, SP4 Michael G. Hartnett B-2 2nd/47th KIA 04/27/67, SGT William D. Mize B-2 2nd/47th 5th/60th KIA 10/28/67, CPL Harold K. Southwick B-2 2nd/47th Inf KIA 03/02/67 (first KIA in B Co. 2nd/47th in Vietnam), and PFC Robert C. Voltz B-1 2nd/47th Inf (Mech) KIA 3/11/67 (first KIA 1st Platoon B Co. 2nd/47th in Vietnam)
Dave Remore for Paco 3rd/60th Inf KIA 05/02/67 and Bandido Charlie 5th/60th Inf KIA 07/30/67
Tom Sanborn for Spec4 Thomas H. Williams A Co 4th/47th Inf KIA 08/24/68 near Kia Lay, Spec4 David Thorton A Co 4th/47th Inf KIA 11/07/68 on Toi Son (VC) Island, and 1st Lt James L. Tarte A Co 4th/47th Inf KIA 8/24/68 near Kai Lay
Chet "Gunner" Stanley for all the USN and USA KIAs of the MRFA (1967-70)
Ken Sundberg for Michael David Sheahan 5th/60th KIA 02/25/68, Robert L. Conley 5th/60th KIA 02/01/68, and Glenn Dean Taylor 5th/60th KIA 02/01/68
Robert Sutton for LT James Frost Vin Te Canal Chau Duc KIA 11/69
Robert Thacker for Earl T. Pelhan Jr. SSG KIA 15th Combat Engineers
Sgt. Okey Toothman for Sgt Sam Saavedra 3rd/47th and Sgt Booker T. Myles 3rd/47th
Steven Totcoff for my brother CPL Dennis S. Totcoff B Co 3rd/47th KIA 5/2/68
USS Guide MSO-447 for Shipmate and Brother Harold Foster
Tommy Walker USS Haverfield DER 393 (12/63-07/67)
Ronald Wallace for all those lost in 3rd/47th

USS Westchester
City LST-1167
VIETNAM

H1 - Westchester

USS Holmes City LST-304
VIETNAM

H5 - Holmes

USS Krishna ARL-30
VIETNAM

H10 - Krishna

USS Hickman
City LST-825
VIETNAM

H14 - Hickman

TASK FORCE 116
PBR's
"VIETNAM"

H19 - TF 116

SHORE
PATROL

H23 - Shore Patrol

U.S. NAVY CORPSMAN
VIETNAM

H25 - Navy Corpsman

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of both Navy and 9th Infantry hats!

All are made of quality 100% cotton with pewter
finish clasp. Each has gold and/or silver
embroidery on a black base.

COMBAT MEDIC
VIETNAM

H30 - Combat Medic

9th Medical Bn
Dong Tan
VIETNAM

H33 - 9th Med. Bn.

9th MP CO.
9th Inf Div VIETNAM
Dong Tam

H31 - 9th MP Company

MILITARY
POLICE

H34 - Military Police

2nd BN (Mech) 47th INFANTRY
9th INFANTRY DIV. - VIETNAM

H32 - 2nd/47th Mech.

H29 - 9th Infantry Patch

MRFA and 9th Infantry hats are nylon blend with
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Service Award hats are
available in five styles
on an olive drab base.
All cotton, washable
with pewter finish clasp.

MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE
VIETNAMH38 - 9th Presidential
Unit Citation (PUC)MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE
VIETNAM

H39 - MRF Svc. Ribbon

9th INF. DIV.
VIETNAM

H40 - 9th Svc. Ribbon

9th INF. DIV.
VIETNAMH41 - MRF Presidential
Unit Citation (PUC)Get Yours Today
for Only\$21⁵⁰
FREE SHIPPINGUSS Benewah APB-35
VIETNAM

H7 - Benewah

SILVER STAR
VIETNAMBRONZE STAR
VIETNAMPURPLE HEART
VIETNAM

H16 - TF 115

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Perfect for any occasion. We have many ships hats. All are
dark navy blue with pewter finish clasp
with high-quality gold embroidered text and
are made of comfortable, long wearing
cotton. We have the hard to find items
the other guys don't!

H26 - Benewah Patch

USS Tom Green City LST-1153
VIETNAM

H3 - Tom Green

USS Hampshire City LST-105
VIETNAM

H4 - Hampshire

USS Carronade
IFS-1
VIETNAM

H8 - Carronade

USS Sphinx
ARL-24
VIETNAM

H9 - Sphinx

USS Mercer APB-39
VIETNAM

H12 - Mercer

USS Satyr ARL-23
VIETNAM

H13 - Satyr

USS Nueces
APB-40
VIETNAM

H17 - Nueces

USS BRULE
AKL 28
VIETNAM

H18 - Brule

USS Indra ARL-31
VIETNAM

H21 - Indra

USS Colleton APB-36
VIETNAM

H22 - Colleton

USS Whitfield City
LST-T169
VIETNAM

H24 - Whitfield

IUGW-1 Patch

H27 - IUGW-1 Patch

U.S. NAVY CORPSMAN
VIETNAM

CIB White

H43 - CIB White

H44 - CIB Olive
Drab

Combat Infantry Badge hats are available
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olive drab green. Made of high
quality woven cotton with fully
adjustable pewter clasp.

H42 - MRF
Combat Action RibbonSTABRON-20 VIETNAM
TF 116

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47th INFANTRY REGIMENT

USS WHITE RIVER LSMR-536

33rd INFANTRY REGIMENT

MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE
VIETNAMMOBILE RIVERINE FORCE
VIETNAM

H46 - MRF Tango

MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE
VIETNAM

H47 - MRF ASPB Alpha

RIVERINE INFANTRY
9th Division Vietnam

H45 - 9th Riverine

Riverine Infantry hats
are tan base with rope braid trim on the brim.

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RIVER ASSAULT FORCE
ARMY NAVYH36 - RAF -
Army/Navy

OLD RELIABLES

H35 - Old Reliables

RIVER ASSAULT FORCE
TF 117

H37 - RAF - TF 117



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 Alan Strickland A Co. 2nd/47th (Mech) Inf
 John P. Sturgil USS Colleton APB-36
 Robert Sutton RivRon 9 M-92-2, Z-92-11, and R-92-1 (11/68-05/69)
 John Swart T-132-1 (04/68-04/69)
 Wynn Thies C Co. 2nd/39th Inf (09/67-09/68)
 Charles Thompson 9th Admin Co (02/66-11/67)
 Harley G. Timmerman T-132-10 (06/68-06/69)
 William "Doug" Turner USS Askari ARL-30 (05/67-05/68)
 Erol Tuzcu A Co. 3rd/60th Inf (1968-69)
 USS Terrell Cty LST-1157
 Ernest Valdez B Co. 4th Platoon 3rd/39th Inf (11/67-11/68)
 Roger C. Valentine CS1 US Navy (Ret) USS Askari (07/67-05/68)
 Bob and Nancy VanDruff T-91-5 and T-92-4
 GMG1 Ricky Vice T-131-7 (1968/69)
 Ron and Judy Wallace 3rd/47th Inf (05/66-08/67)
 Henry Washburn USS Colleton APB-36 (01/67-09/68)
 Gary Weisz A-91-4 (10/67-07/68)
 Stephen G. Wieting USS Benewah APB-35 (11/66-2/68)
 Norm Wilkinson B. Co. 4th/47th Inf
 William Ziebarth 9th Signal Batt/39th Ant (1966-1967)
 Robert Zimmer XO USS Mercer APB-39 (1968-69)
 John Zivic USS Vernon County LST-1161 (1967-69)
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