



# River Currents



Images are done by Dwayne Peterson C Co. 4th/47th. Thanks Dwayne

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## From the Galley

Hope one and all had a great Holiday season and a MERRY CHRISTMAS and looking for a great New Year. I'm sitting waiting for the snow and ice to melt. We don't have snow that often where we live but when it does everything comes to a halt. Those brave souls who do go out are really not all that brave when it comes to driving in the snow and ice. They all have to speed for some reason so we have lots of wrecks and loss of lives. Sara and I stay inside where it's warm. Enough of my weather report.

As for your association we are doing real well, although the winter months are slow months for us. Some of you may be wondering why you haven't been receiving my weekly Vietnam updates. Well our computer crashed and I lost all my group e-mails 3,200 of them. We tried to retrieve them but for some reason that didn't happen.

We had to purchase a new computer and had to go to Windows 10 which I won't say what I really would like to say, but it's a lot different from Windows 7. I also had to change to a different provider and I now have a new e-mail address. It's mrfa35@outlook.com so it will be awhile before I can get back to my updates.

We have received numerous comments from you the members on our web site that it's hard to find information on it. Mike Harris, who does a great job with the web site, has been working with stuff from the '90s. Mike is in the process of finding someone we can use to redo the web site and bring it up to where it belongs. This is going to cost the association big bucks but we will have to bite the bullet and bring the web site up to where it will be easier to use, etc.

I will say again Mike has done a great job with what he's working with and it's not easy working with things that are 10 and 15 years old in our case closer to 20 years. That is ancient in this day and time in the computer world.

Other than the above as I stated earlier, it's a slow time for us. We are still receiving good reports on the reunion and the hotel and they are all appreciated. I want to thank each and all of you for your continuing support it's greatly appreciated. Hope you enjoy your issue of *River Currents* and we continue to strive to make *River Currents* one of the better Veterans Association's newsletters out there. Georgie and Robin do a great job for us as do all your Officers and Board members. Have a great upcoming spring. **Albert**



Al Moore

## A Journey to Honor Three Fallen Brothers

By Milford Traber and Doc Todd

After having a great time at the MRFA reunion in Indianapolis (Thank you everyone who put it together) and seeing brothers that I haven't seen in years, I needed to pay respects to the graves of our fallen brothers Merrill Suedmeyer, Don Leroy Deathrage, and Donald Long. All three were with me in the 3rd Platoon, Co. B, 3rd Bat. 47th Inf. I had spoken to Doc Todd, our company Medic about this when we got together in Missouri where he lives. We made plans to do that. Our mission was to hopefully bring some comfort and closure to the family and friends of our fallen brothers. We loaded up the truck and left the hotel to begin our journey. Merrill Suedmeyer came from Nashville, Illinois, which is on U.S.

70 about 60 or 70 miles east of St. Louis, MO. The other two were from little towns in southern Missouri close to Springfield. Merrill Suedmeyer was a replacement and had not been in the company very long before he was Killed In Action on June 19, 1967. He died in my arms as I was trying to comfort him and keep him from going into shock. I kept telling him he was going to be OK and we were going to get him out of there but he didn't believe me. I live this every day of my life.

We drove through Indiana and headed south to U.S. 70. When we reached Nashville, Illinois, we pulled off U.S. 70 onto the main road to town. We stopped at a local gas station

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Michael Eggleston Vietnam Gunner



Michael Eggleston Today

## Life Can Sometimes be Funny

By Michael Eggleston

After 45 years, I made contact with a friend I went through Mare Island with, Curt Shepard, formerly of North Creek, NY. Curt and I were buddies through training at Mare Island, Whidbey Island SERE, and Camp Roberts gunnery training. We both shipped over in December 1969 and were sent to Dong Tam and then out to our boats. As was the practice then, they used our training class as replacements, instead of keeping us together as the crew we trained with, which I still to this day think was a major mistake on the part of the Navy. We got thrown into crews who didn't know us and disliked us because we were taking the place of one of their comrades, and we in turn felt alone for the first month or so. I was assigned to Tango-3 as a radio operator/gunner/seaman, and Curt as he had been to Engineman School was assigned to Mike-3.

On January 21, 1970, while we were on waterborne guard post (WBGp) along the Grand Canal, we heard a helluva roar about 3 clicks away. The VC had fired 7 RPG rounds into Mike-3 and we were ordered to head east and assist. Unknown to me at the time, my friend Curt Shepard, manning a 20-mm mount, was severely wounded from both the RPG rounds and the ammunition exploding in his gun tub. Mike-3, with everyone aboard wounded, managed to extract itself from the beach and started heading west toward the command boat area. On the way we received a radio message from the command boat to put fire on the beach, and we continued past Mike-3 and an Alpha boat, which had just left the ambush area after putting down fire and was assisting the Mike boat. We made about four or five passes on the beach firing everything we had—20 mm, 50 cal, 7.62 mm, and M79 grenades—then we headed back to the stricken Mike boat and tied up alongside so that the Dust Off helos could use our helicopter deck to take the wounded out.

As they were bringing the helos in, I walked along the deck and found Curt bleeding profusely and most of his left ass cheek had been blown away. I asked him if there was anything I could do

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# Once Upon A Time in Southeast Asia Vietnam: One Sailor's Story

By R. L. Bertram

## Chapter Eighteen Fire in the hole! Cease-fire!

The *White River* had received many firing missions and her Captain and crew answered each call for help, with all urgency and with pinpoint firing accuracy. Often, the enemy targets were located and then shelled with the aid of airborne spotters directing the firing from above. We often worked with experienced Australian bush pilots, who would fly in low above the treetops and call in with the coordinates for our strikes. We admired the bravery of these Aussies pilots who flew small piper cub airplanes with little protection. They were fearless fighters. These missions required good teamwork and everyone had to do their part for the missions to be successful.

We returned to Cam Ranh Bay for refueling and to replenish our munitions and food rations. The Captain granted liberty and many sailors went ashore to eat a good meal and relax at the club for a few hours by playing darts or shooting pool with shipmates. Some headed for the beach to catch some sun and others went to play tag football or enjoy a game of volleyball. Many wanted to stock up on snacks before going back to sea. Once the rockets were loaded and the refueling completed, we sailed back out to sea.

It was at this time that the *USS White River* was called upon to provide support fire for one of its most ambitious missions to date. We were to be part of a larger military strike force going up into the rivers and waterways leading to active VC areas. As a result of previous allied operations in the Mekong Delta region, the supply routes of the North Vietnamese forces in the delta were severely limited to the

rivers and canals leading into and from their base camps in Cambodia. Our mission was to penetrate deep into those waterways to attack and destroy the remaining communist supply lines.

The *White River* was ordered to the port city of Vung Tau at the mouth of the Mekong Delta to await an escort of Navy swift boats and airborne spotters. On the night of March 16, 1970, we arrived at

***Americans love to fight.  
All real Americans love  
the sting of battle.***

General George S. Patton

Vung Tau, anchored in the harbor and made final preparations for the mission. The watch was set and the armed sentries walking the main deck were told to keep close watch for possible VC swimmers attempting to attach mines to the ship's hull. That night everyone onboard was unusually quiet. We all knew the coming mission was going to be big and very difficult. I was up in the chart room, speaking into a small tape recorder. I was making a tape to send to my mom back home. I was in a very somber mood. I didn't know what the new day might have in store for us. We all knew one thing though; that the mission was going to be big and it was going to be bad.

Early morning March 17, 1970, the *White River* was joined by our river escort of several patrol crafts, as well as the airborne support. The combined unit slowly made its journey deep into the Rung Sat Special Zone, southeast of Saigon. We were sailing some 20 miles up the Long Tau River to support U.S. and allied forces that were participating in Operation Chuong Duong. The river became very narrow in places and the mangrove trees were so thick

it would have been impossible to see any VC insurgents waiting in ambush. As we went further up the river it began to widen and we were able to maneuver into position for our attack on suspected Viet Cong positions. The Captain ordered us to battle stations and the shelling began. This bombardment required us to initiate an all-out attack, using all eight rocket launchers, in a continuous firing mode until we received the order to stop the attack. It was deafening to hear the sounds as the rockets flew away with flames shooting out the back of the launchers as salvo after salvo was sent flying off to its target.

The shelling continued through the morning and into the afternoon; our launchers began to glow from the extreme heat of nonstop firing and we began to have multiple misfires. Our dud man, Rick, was trying to keep up with the growing number of misfired rockets. The Chief Gunnersmate, who was on the main deck, began helping Rick remove the duds. It was touch and go and we all knew if one of the duds was not immediately removed and tossed overboard before it overheated, it would explode inside the launcher, sending flames down the launcher shaft to the rockets below.

The relentless shelling had gone on for hours and all the while Rick and the Chief were working feverishly trying to keep ahead of the duds stuck in our launchers. At this point, the Captain became very concerned. He knew that if anything went wrong and there was an explosion, it would sink the ship, killing many sailors and he knew the patrol boats protecting us from enemy ground fire would also be destroyed. The Captain had grown nervous and impatient with the increased rocket failures, so he left the bridge and went down to help. Just as the Captain began walking across the deck, another launcher failed and he took it upon himself to

remove the dud. As he approached the launcher, there was a loud thundering sound and suddenly a long flame shot out of the back-end of the launcher, nearly blowing the Captain's head off. The Captain was knocked off his feet by the intense heat of the flaming rocket. The Captain jumped to his feet, turned to look up at the XO on the bridge, and he shouted, "Cease fire, damn it, cease fire!" The Captain's face had turned beet red at this point, he held his hand up in a tight fist shaking it at the XO. While, everyone on the bridge knew the seriousness of the situation, we couldn't help but laugh. Thank goodness the Captain was not injured in the mishap.

This had been the most ambitious firing mission undertaken by the ship and crew to date. On this day, the *White River* fired over 2,500 rockets at the VC insurgent strongholds and the damage had been significant, with multiple explosions and fires burning throughout the targeted strike zone. As the ship sailed back down the river to the open waters of the delta basin with the mission accomplished, every sailor onboard knew he had given his all that day. We were physically



***USS White River firing rockets at enemy target.***

drained, but we had a feeling of a job well done. The patrol boats, spotter planes, and the *White River* would all return safely to their base and for that we were all thankful! ★



***Mike-3 on the Mekong, transiting to the "Benewah" with our boat Tango-3 (less than 2 weeks before Mike-3 was attacked)***

### **LIFE IS FUNNY** Continued from page 1

for him, and he turned to me and said, "Just keep your ass DOWN!"

After I got home, I tried contacting him, but this was in the days before the Internet, and I just couldn't find out anything except that he had been evacuated to St. Albans Hospital in Brooklyn.

About a month ago, I was on a train trip to North Creek, NY, and by sheer luck, I asked one of the locals if they knew a family named Shepard. One gentleman did. He contacted Curt's

sister, and this evening I had a long talk with a dear old friend.

He survived, had a long recovery in Japan and St. Albans, and received 100% disability after he fought with the VA until 2006. He educated himself and had a son who served in Afghanistan. He also worked as a social worker, counseling other wounded veterans, and ran his own business until he recently retired.

I can't tell you how proud I am of Curt Shepard for the pain and suffering he endured and eventually triumphed over. And how genuinely pleased I am that I finally got to talk with an old Navy shipmate, Riverine

Sailor, and friend, 45 years later. Life can sometimes be funny. ★



***Tango-3 on the Grand Canal, January 1970. The two VN Navy crewmen sitting on the helo deck were assigned to us after the January 21, 1970, attack on Mike-3.***



## JOURNEY

Continued from page 1

and inquired if anyone knows or remembers the Suedmeyer family and explained why we were there. Nobody at the station knew them so Doc Todd asked for a phone book which they gave him. Doc found two Suedmeyers in the book. He called the first one and no one was home. When he called the second number, they answered and it was the family. It was Sunday and we just happened to catch them at home. It was like a gift from God because without the family we never would have found the graveyard much less the grave. The Suedmeyers are wonderful people and they were very much interested in hearing what we had to say. They gave us directions to the grave site and said they would meet us there in 15 minutes.

We tried to follow the directions that they gave us to the site but

oldest son was and how proud of him the family has the right to be. Of course we had time. That's why we were there. We all piled into our respective cars and drove the short distance to where Mrs. Suedmeyer was living. We talked to her and visited for about 30 minutes until she became tired and needed to rest.

It was midafternoon by then and they asked us if we wanted to get a beer and a sandwich. We thought that sounded good so they took us to a nice little bar and grill just a few blocks up the road. Merrill's younger brother told his friends who we were and why we had come. People wanted to talk to us and buy beers. Everyone was so nice and gave us a feeling of wellbeing. We stayed about an hour or two but we had to move on to Springfield, MO. We went outside the bar and took some pictures with that wonderful family which I will cherish for the rest of my life.



**ABOVE: Milford and Doc with Suedmeyer Family**  
**LEFT: PFC Merrill L. Suedmeyer's Headstone**



made a wrong turn and got lost. We called them back and told them we couldn't find the graveyard. They were already at the site and they came and got us and took us to Merrill's grave. I told them that I was with their brother when he died and explained the circumstances of his death. There were some emotional moments and it was good for everyone. Doc Todd had brought along a bottle of homemade wine and purchased some plastic glasses for the ceremony. We handed out glasses to everyone and one for Merrill. Doc then poured a little wine into each one and we drank. When we were through, Doc spilled Merrill's over the grave and we placed quarters on his headstone indicating we served with him in combat. The Suedmeyers were so gracious and happy that we took the time to make the trip and share, perhaps answer or bring to conclusion some questions they may have had.

They told us that their mother was just half a mile away in an assisted living facility where one of the Suedmeyer girls worked and asked us if we had time to talk to her. I was elated. Most of our parents are gone and both Doc and I were surprised that there was still time to tell her what a fine man her

We said our goodbyes and then saddled up for Springfield.

We ran out of daylight about 1½ hours from Springfield so we got a motel for the night in Cuba, MO. Bright and early the next morning, we grabbed some breakfast and continued on our journey. Next on the list was LeRoy Deathrage, who was part of the originals from Boot Camp. He was Killed In Action June 17, 1967. LeRoy came from Ozark, MO. A small suburb just a little south of Springfield and he was buried somewhere near there. It turns out that there were no Deathrages in the area anymore. They had all moved away. Fortunately, a year earlier Doc Todd had run into a guy who had gone all 12 years to school with LeRoy. His name is David Cobb and he told Doc that he and LeRoy's 50th high school reunion was coming up and did anyone of us have any funny stories about LeRoy that he could share with his classmates. I had one that he could use so I sent it to him via Doc Todd. LeRoy was a prankster and he loved having fun. LeRoy had the bunk above mine at Fort Riley and just to piss me off he would take off his stinky old socks and put them under his mattress in such a manner that they would hang down over my face. One day I

grabbed them and shoved them into his pillowcase where he could enjoy the fragrance.

As we pulled into Ozark, I said to Doc, "I should have brought some dirty old socks to put on LeRoy's headstone." We got a chuckle out of that. Doc had David's address but no phone number. Doc put David's address in the GPS and sure enough we pulled up into his driveway a short time later. David answered the door and said he better take us there because we probably would not be able to find it on our own and he was sure right. We all got into Doc's truck and headed down the road to the graveyard. David gave us direction where we traveled for about 20 minutes down a main highway and then told us to turn on a rural farm road where a local farmer had donated some of his land to be a public cemetery. We drove for about a quarter of a mile and there it was. We parked the car

and David led us to LeRoy's grave. As we walked towards the grave, David looks down and picked up a piece of cloth and said, "Here's what's left of that dirty old sock that I left on LeRoy's headstone the last time I came to visit." And he placed it back on the headstone. Apparently he enjoyed the story that I sent him. We all got a good laugh out of that.

Doc brought out the wine and some glasses for the ceremony and we stood by the grave and told stories about LeRoy for about 30 minutes. When we finished the wine, we spilled LeRoy's glass over the grave and placed the ceremonial quarters on his headstone. We drove David back to his home and thanked him for his kindness.



**LeRoy Deathrage's Headstone**

After we dropped David off at his home, we headed out for our third and final destination the grave of Don Long.

Don was also one of the originals from Boot Camp and as I recall the

first one to be Killed In Action. He was KIA May 10, 1967. Don Long was listed as being from Dunnegan, MO, so Doc entered the data into his GPS and off we went in search of the grave. Dunnegan is a small rural town about an hour's drive north of Springfield and a little off the beaten path. When we pulled into the town, we noticed that the whole town was only four or five blocks long and three blocks deep. Almost the entire town was west of the main street with a few buildings on the east side. One of those buildings is the church. Just north of the church was a little rural road headed east with a sign that said Dunnegan Cemetery. We turned onto that road and drove about half a mile passing a farmhouse where people were on the front porch talking and relaxing. We drove on a little further until the road started to narrow and thought we missed a turn and became lost. We went back to the farmhouse to ask directions. We told the people who we were and why we had come and asked them if they knew Don. They did not but they told us to stay on the road; it was only a little farther down then where we had stopped thinking we were lost. They thanked us for our service and wished us luck. We got back in the car and started back down the road to the cemetery. Sure enough there it was. A tiny rural cemetery with less than a 100 people buried there. At one end there was a covered shelter with a 3-ring binder that functioned as a grave locator. There was only one Long buried there and it was not Don. We decided to head back to town and knock on some doors hoping someone would remember the Long family. We knocked on the first door and the owner said that he was only in town for a couple of years and pointed out a house with people who had been there many years. Those people did not know him either and sent us to another house. After few more times, we found a lady who said "Yes. I remember him well. He used to help me with the farm." She told us that the Longs did not live in Dunnegan but it was where they had to come to get their mail. That was the reason that the Army had him listed as living there. The Longs actually lived on their farm in Stockton, MO, which is now underwater as part of Stockton Lake, a huge recreational facility in southern Missouri. She told us that Don had a brother named Dan who lived not far from where we were. She went into her house and came back with a phone book. She looked up his name and gave us the address. Dan Long and his wife lived in the small community of Lebanon, MO, about 5 to 10 minutes away from where we were.

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# MRFA Army and Navy Reaching Out To Help Family Of Larry D. Rickey D Co 3rd/60th Inf KIA April 15, 1969

Hello,

My name is Mark Westerbeck and my uncle was Lawrence D. (Larry) Rickey Spc 4 D CO, 3rd BA, 60th INF, 9th DIV ID51803503. He was killed in Kien Hoa province on 15 April, 1969. I have been attempting to learn more of the MRFA of which my uncle was a part of, but unfortunately, I have almost no other information.

I have looked through letters that Larry sent to my mom, but he never referenced much about what boats/ships he was on, or even divisions he was in. Although I was only 7 when he was killed, I have a huge interest in where he was, what he experienced, and of course what he went through. In the Internet age, I believe that I can learn so much more about that time, but I've hit a wall. I've seen many rosters posted, but again, not knowing where to hone in, I have been reviewing page after page of rosters in the March-April 1969 time frame.

When I search the MRFA web site, I tried to find Larry's name, but I don't know RAS (River Assault Squadron?). There is an RAS 15 roster (this led me to this email) that is from March 1969, but I didn't see any of the names I'd recognize. Am I looking in the wrong place? Also, is the Task Force 117 the correct one? I see there are three Squadrons (117.1, 117.2, & 117.3) that each have divisions within. I think if I knew the division that may help as well.

Again, I am sorry for intruding; I just have a huge interest in understanding. I've gone as far as I can, and even my mom doesn't know how to help. My mom still lives in Ohio, and my wife and I currently reside in Florence, SC.

Thanks again for your time, and of course thank you for service.

**Sincerely,** **Mark Westerbeck**

★★★★★★

Hello Mark,

Albert forwarded your email on to our Mobile Riverine Force Association (MRFA) email list. I will do my best to research your uncle's death. Please accept



**Larry Rickey**

our condolences for your loss.

I am placing a CC: on this email to (1) Albert Moore, MRFA President, (2) CWO-3 Ralph Fries (USN Ret.)—Ralph has tirelessly research and documented Vietnam KIAs for years now, and (3) Luis Peraza (USA Ret.)—Luis was the 1st Sergeant of D Company/3/60th when your uncle was KIA.

Your uncle was a Specialist 4th Class SP4 at the time of his death (see below).

Larry would not have been associated with any Navy squadrons or divisions. They were related to our Navy riverine craft. The "117.1, 117.2, & 117.3" were breakdowns of Navy operations. Task Group 117.1 may be in the Plain of Reeds, Task Group 117.2 may be operating in Combat Base 430, etc.

Our Armored Troop Carriers (ATC or Tango) boats moved riverine infantry battalions throughout the IV Corps Combat Zone.

**Mike Harris**

★★★★★★

"At the time your uncle was killed we were aboard the APL-30 a Navy ship. The 3/60 was a unit of the 9th Infantry Division. We were a regular infantry unit. The Navy gave us support but we did not have any other ties with them. Any information you want to get has to be through the Army. At the time of your uncle's death, I was the First Sgt of D Company 3/60. I can tell you that you can be proud of your uncle as I am proud of all those young men that were the members of that outstanding unit. I am sorry for your loss. I hope in a way this could help you in



**Larry Rickey**

your search for information about your uncle.

**Luis F. Peraza 1SG. 3/60th**

★★★★★★

The "APL-30" (nicknamed "Apple") was a non-self-propelled barracks ship that was moved around the major rivers in the Mekong Delta by two Navy tugboats. U.S. Army infantry troops would billet on them and launch out for operations either via our riverine craft or helicopters.

3rd Battalion 60th Infantry was a part of the joint Army/Navy Mobile Riverine Force Task Force 117 (<http://mrfa.org/TF117UnitList.html>).

★★★★★★

My first response was to search out the online Coffelt Database that Ralph is associated with. I located Larry who was a SP4 when he passed. He had been in-country about 9½ months.

Type <http://www.coffeltdatabase.org>;

click on "Search CDB" in the upper left-hand corner; click on "Name Searches;" Type in the first and last name of the individual; click on the "GO" button; and once in the individual's page, click on the "View Document" box to see copies of original documents.

I noticed that there were no other 3/60th soldiers listed. To me this seemed odd with a booby trap/mine. I then did a "Date Search" for April 15, 1969 and came up with 2LT Ronald M. Montapert, who also died of a booby trap/mine. I believe these were in the same incident when looking over

the documentation. Please check this out Ralph (see more information below).

My first thought was perhaps SP4 Rickey was 2LT Montapert's Radioman (RTO). Unfortunately, the 2LT was only in-country for about 1½ months. If Larry was his RTO, then I would assume that the 2LT was relying heavily on Larry's experiences as they worked together.

Here are links to 2LT Montapert: (1) <http://www.virtualwall.org/dm/MontapertRM01a.htm> (Note that SP4 Rickey is two rows below 2LT Montapert on The Wall), and (2) <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/34685/RONALD-M-MONTAPERT>.

While searching further, I came across this very interesting web page. Several folks have commented on 2LT Montapert. I removed the non-relevant posts.

Dewayne Beltran, who was in the same Company with 2LT Montapert and SP4 Rickey, states that they were in a helicopter that was shot down. As it hit the ground, it triggered a "mine" causing the two to be killed and several others injured.

**"The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds the Daily Reports/Daily Logs for the U.S. Army. Since you have a specific date then it will be an easy search for the archivists."**

Dewayne also confirms that SP4 Rickey was 2LT Montapert's "radio man." This is all "hearsay," but it is coming from a very good source. At the time of this posting, Dewayne had a Hotmail email address. Perhaps he still uses it: [menudo@hotmail.com](mailto:menudo@hotmail.com).

I first learned of Ron's death while I was a patient recovering from my own wounds at Camp Zama, Japan, in June 1969. I was saddened to hear the news. Ron and I were in the same OCS platoon, graduating and receiving our commissions as Second Lieutenants

in August 1968. He was the second member of the platoon to be Killed In Action in Vietnam. "Hail-fellow well met!" I cannot think of a better phrase to describe Ron Montapert. He is missed. **Posted by Bill Cooley 1LT (USAR, Ret.), C/1(M)5 INF, 25TH INF DIV, 29 March 1969-29 May 1969. stay-in-alive02@yahoo.com; OCS Classmate, Ft Benning, GA 1968; Relationship: We served together.**

★★★★★★

I was in Lt. Montapert's infantry company. He lost his life in the Mekong Delta with Company D 3/60 9th Infantry Division. We were being moved with Huey choppers when his chopper landed on an enemy mine. Montapert was killed and his radio man Lawrence David Rickey was also killed. Everybody on that chopper was hurt. I think of that incident often. **Posted by: DeWayne Beltran; Email: [menudo@hotmail.com](mailto:menudo@hotmail.com); Relationship: We served together**

★★★★★★

This is pretty solid information Mark. I hope that you can make contact with Dewayne. Aha, I looked him up on our MRFA roster and he is a member. This does not mean that he is on the MRFA Email List. He lives in Colorado. His phone number is 970-249-4672. Tell him that I took the liberty to pass it along to you since the information is also located on the Internet White Pages.

Here are a couple of avenues to pursue if you have not already seen:

(1) As Next of Kin (NOK), your family can request Larry's military records from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis.

Please note: Next of Kin (the un-remarried widow or widower, son, daughter, father, mother, brother or sister of the deceased veteran) must provide proof of death of the veteran, such as a copy of the death certificate, a letter from the funeral home or a published

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**RICKEY**

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obituary." I hope someone is still living who can sign for this request (<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html>).

(2) The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds the Daily Reports/Daily Logs for the U.S. Army. Since you have a specific date then it will be an easy search for the archivists. I would suggest records for a few days before and after the incident date.

NARA asks that you call them first and they will line things out for you. Anyone can make this request (National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, 866-272-6272).

The above should provide you with several avenues to pursue.

**Warm Regards, Michael A. Harris, River Assault Squadron 15 (7/68 to 7/69)**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Wow, tremendous amount of information quickly. I have already looked up the Coffelt site, never knew of that document. I will contact NARA on Monday via phone and make the request for the days just before and after 15 Apr 1969.

Regarding Mr. Beltran, my mom and my uncle Bill (Larry's younger brother) actually met Dewayne many years ago. To this day, my mom is not certain of some of the discussion. A few years ago, I also reached out to Mr. Beltran via phone, but at that time, I wasn't all that familiar with the MRFA and didn't ask many of the questions I should have. I actually emailed him again the same day I sent the email to Mr. Moore. I used that menudo@hotmail email, but have not gotten a response from him as of yet.

My mom is traveling to South Carolina to visit the end of this month, so that's why I am trying to put together even more information. I have been making maps and collecting data for a while now.

Thanks again for your help! It has been extremely interesting seeing where my uncle Larry was and who he was with.

**Regards, Mark Westerbeck**



**Mom and Mark Westerbeck**

**JOURNEY**

Continued from page 3

We thanked her for her help and went on our way.

Doc programmed the address into the GPS and within 10 minutes we pulled into Dan's driveway. We got out of the car and Dan came out on the front porch to meet us. We asked him if he was Don's brother and he said yes. We told him who we were and why we had come and he invited us into his house. Doc talked to him and I talked to his wife for a short while. During that time, Dan told Doc where Don was buried and gave directions on how to get there. It was only a short distance from his house. We asked him if he would like to go to the gravesite with us but he declined. He said he hated the Vietnam War and did not want to bring



**Mrs. Veral Long with Milford**

up bad memories. He said that his mother would like to join us at the gravesite for the ceremony if we didn't mind. Once again we were pleasantly surprised. We said we'd love that so he called his mother



**Donald Eugene Long's Headstone**

and said she would be waiting for us at the cemetery.

We got in the car and drove the short distance to the cemetery and when we arrived Don's Mom was waiting for us. We introduced ourselves and she told us her name is Veral Long. She reminded me of my own Mother. She's 87 years old, sharp as a tack, and a very independent lady. She gave me the impression she could still do all the things necessary to make a farm run. She was sweet and loving but tough as a keg of nails at the same time. The Longs are deeply religious and never drank so we did not do the wine part of the ceremony. Mrs. Long led us over to Don's grave and told us some stories about Don when he was a kid. She started to cry a little bit so I gave her a hug and held her for a couple of minutes. We told her what a fine young man he was and how brave he was in action. She said that it disturbed her that they would not open the casket so she could make sure that it was her son in there and not someone else. She said "I guess if I buried someone else's son then someone else buried mine." I just kept my big mouth shut. She did not need any more grief. We assured her that he never suffered or felt any pain. Doc and I walked over to the headstone and placed a couple of quarters on it. Doc took some pictures and we walked back to our cars. Mrs. Long thanked us for coming. We thanked her for being so gracious and said, "I wish it hadn't taken so many years to come." She replied, "I'm glad it did." If we had come last year, she probably would not have joined us. She would not have been ready.

We said our goodbyes and saddened up for home. As we were leaving the cemetery, a big beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky as if the spirits were smiling down on us. A good feeling came over us as we headed towards home. Mission complete!

I think **These Good Men** (see inset) is most appropriate for the above article for these good men who will never forget. ★



## "These Good Men"

*By Michael Norman*

I now know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite. Not to tell stories or look at old pictures. Not to laugh or weep. Comrades gather because they long to be with the men who once acted their best, men who suffered and sacrificed, who were stripped raw, right down to their humanity.

I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate and the U.S. Marine Corps. But I know them in a way I know no other men. I have never given anyone such trust. They were willing to guard something more precious than my life. They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me. It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another.

I cannot say where we are headed. Ours are not perfect friendships; those are the province of legend and myth. A few of my comrades drift far from me now, sending back only occasional word. I know that one day even these could fall to silence. Some of the men will stay close, a couple, perhaps, always at hand.

As long as I have memory, I will think of them all, every day. I am sure that when I leave this world, my last thought will be of my family and my comrades.

*...such good men.*



## Picture Tells and Shows A Lot

(Info By Bryan Swisher)

The people in the picture are far left Charles Hess from Glenville, WV, just to his right is Ron Gerkin from Red Wing, MN, and the one to his right is me Jimmy Davis from Sharon, TN. We were all in White platoon, B Co 3/47.

## Zippo Boat

On 13 February at 0750H, a Zippo boat (HQ 6533) of RAID 75 was mined with explosives placed by sappers while the boat was in a normal night position, 25 km northwest of Ca Mau (VR 990 382). After the explosion, the Zippo sank at the stern with the attendant loss of one Vietnamese sailor killed and one USN and six Vietnamese sailors wounded. One VC was killed, possibly the sapper who placed the mine on the Zippo boat.

## MRFA Mobile Trailer & Museum Schedule 2016

As of right now, we have two scheduled events for the MRFA trailer. (1) Garnaville, Iowa, Friday July 1 to Sunday July 3, 2016. The MRFA trailer will be open from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. daily. (2) Western Days Saturday August 13, at Chatfield, Minnesota. Your driver, Bruce

## Mekong Mud Dogs

By Ed Eaton

### "Trick or Treat" The Mining Of The USS Westchester LST-1167

We went back down the hatch in the floor and down the ladder to the bottom hole of the *USS Westchester*. We wriggled our way through the mess of a torn-up area strewn with dirty uniforms, sleeping grunts in precarious positions, and duffel bags. I finally pulled and worked my way down to my bottom bunk, which would hit bottom, my clothes absorbing moisture every time I moved. I finally fell asleep wondering what tomorrow would bring. This was no treat for Halloween, I was thinking.

At 3:30 a.m. a large explosion rocked the ship, and I was immediately awakened by diesel fuel filling up the area. For some unknown reason, I stuffed my billfold in my mouth as I arose from the floor and the diesel fuel that was fast filling up the berthing area. One wall in the area had collapsed, pinning men in their racks, condemning them to their last breaths. Men were yelling for help, some screaming, but most just trying to make it to the hatch and then to the vertical ladder leading to the hatch on the upper level. Within seconds, the level of fuel was to the top of the room, leaving only a cushion of air among the pipes and cables attached to the ceiling. The duffel bags, mattresses, and all floatable material further became obstacles to our progress to the exit. The main lights were off, and the emergency lights dimly lit the room. Panic was setting in, and I was a part of it as I swam, pulled, clawed, and reached for a way out.

Finally, Sergeant Reed took command, controlling the exodus in a steady, sure voice, demanding orderly control of ourselves. He saw that I was panicking and pulled me to the hatch, which was now below and under the diesel level. With a reassuring voice, he said, "Take a deep breath, pull yourself down and through the hatch, and then up the ladder." I was on it like stink on shit; I wanted the fuck out of this Poseidon Hellhole. However, mentally, I was only prepared for the same level of diesel on the other side as I had experienced on the berthing area side. As I pulled myself up the ladder, I could see the light of the hatch hole above where 4th Platoon's berthing area was, but there seemed to be no end to the diesel as the pressure had pushed it up into the ladder well to a much higher level than the level below in the berthing area. I panicked and gave a big pull of the ladder rungs, throwing my hands ahead of me. I soon broke out and was immediately grabbed by my arms by John Beck, Dan Hendricks, Willy Perez, and others from the 4th Platoon, and then I was thrown across the room into the pile of those before me. As we made it to our feet and tried to make sense of our environment, through our now fogged and burning eyes, it was evident that there was a fight going on between the Army and the Navy. The Navy personnel were trying to close the hatch to save the ship from sinking, and the 4th Platoon guys were not having anything to do with that. As the Navy personnel were physically ejected, I took it upon myself to grab a naval officer and pull his shirt out for a rag to wipe the diesel from my eyes. He just kept going, and I just kept wiping to no avail as I made it through the ship with burning, fouled eyesight, following those who knew the route. As we made it to the top deck, I could hear the loudspeaker order us to the port side, what the hell ever that meant. We soon found our way to the high side of the listing *Westchester*, where we huddled in a naked mass of diesel-drenched bodies still rubbing our eyes, hoping for our sight back. The ship had hit the bottom of the river Song My Tho and had listed 40 degrees to its right side, making standing difficult.

Reed stayed in the bottom hole until the last capable man was out. He then returned to the area and found three men with broken limbs and internal injuries. He helped them navigate the obstacles as they dived and clawed their way to the hatch. Reed got all the men out and went back a third time to search for any survivors. He disregarded his own safety and the possibility of fire. Reed managed to do what none of the rest of us would. He found deep inside a way to disregard his own fears for the good of the brotherhood. Reed was truly our hero on this night of Poseidon Hell. Without his calm leadership and returning bravery, the story would be different for many of us. Larry later received the prestigious Soldier's Medal for his action this night.

The Navy ship's crew was busy as we just tried to keep out of their way; they were in search-and-rescue mode. Gunboats circled the wounded *Westchester*, dropping charges into the water to deter any enemy divers who might be in the area. They shone their searchlights, looking for survivors as the attached River Division of gunboats and Tango boats detached themselves from the attached barge on the right side of the ship. The blast had blown a hole the size of a large room just under the waterline now visible because of the listing of the ship. The blast was a direct hit on the Navy's first-class berthing area. Bodies were askew in torn and dismembered state within as the Navy tried to put a Tango boat inside the hole for rescue. While we didn't appreciate the actions of the Navy trying to close our hatch, we now understood that they were trying to save the ship and the rest of the crew as procedure would require in Open Ocean. The ship, however, was in a shallow river. We were impressed with their attention to the job at hand as they did everything they could outside and inside the ship to rescue their brothers. The night was busy as we contemplated our chemically

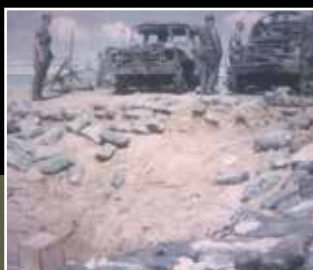
CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



# Boom!



Tango 6



'Around the bend'

Tango 6 leaving Nha Be  
(see Santa flying)

Base personnel

By Richard E. Lorman  
T-152-6 (1968-69)

Our Armored Troop Carrier, Tango 6, along with another Tango, had been operating out of the large base of Nha Be for the months of November and December 1968. We had been "chopped" from ongoing heavy action in the farther south Rach Gia area.

During those 2 months of temporary duty, we had routinely tied up alongside the long earthen-backed pier of the Nha Be Naval Base with several 57' Navy MSBs (wooden minesweeper boats). PBRs were around the river bend. Near them were operations of the famed Navy "Black Ponies" helicopters.

Before we were about to leave Nha Be, we got orders to go from the long pier to "around the bend" to a much more protected and secure berthing area: inside of a large pier of pilings with floats inside to tie up to. On top of all that, the weather was perfect. I looked forward to our brief period of comfort and rest. Only two crewmembers were needed aboard to

keep an eye on Tango 6. I was a teetotaler in those days and happily volunteered to stay aboard to read and hit the sack for a good night's sleep while the others hit the EM Club.

That sleep goal began with putting a stretcher out on the flight deck along with my poncho to ward off nightly dew...and dream of Home. I drifted off to dreamland, enjoying a cooling breeze under a starry sky and puffy clouds and slept soundly. At that point, our original plankowner crew was roughly halfway through our year's tour.

Then, BOOM!! At 2345 before the sound of a huge blast actually hit me, I found myself waking up while in midair, along with the stretcher and landing on my bare feet almost standing up. My fellow crewman and I instantly reasoned the base was under rocket attack [commonplace] and we quickly got Tango 6 underway out into the large river.

In the morning's first light seeing the large crater and serious debris and sorting through explanations told by base personnel, we laid out

the general situation: a floating "mine" had been retrieved from the river, brought ashore, around 150 ft. from Tango 6, to be unsuccessfully disarmed.

Base personnel at this late time of night rushed to the sandbagged sandy beach, using the headlights of several semi-circling vehicles to illuminate the work on what turned out to be a 500-lb bomb and stood by watching as things went quickly to tragically bad. I was told the cardboard box at the bottom of the blast hole was covering a boot with a foot in it and a belt buckle...the man was vaporized. Such is the power and quickness of explosive force.

Note "Operating in the RSSZ on the evening of 17 January about 4 miles southeast of Nha Be, PBRs and PRUs killed seven occupants of two sampans. The PRU reported one of the sampans had been towing an object and requested to be re-inserted. The PBRs returned with LHFT overhead and found the object in question which was 6 feet long and 1½ foot across. Noises from the banks caused

the units to retire from the scene temporarily. After boarding additional PRUs and EOD personnel at Nha Be, they again closed the area and located the object. The EOD officer evaluated it as a mine and requested permission to take it back to Nha Be for disarming. The PBRs arrived back at Nha Be at 2330 and the mine was brought ashore and disarming began. At 2345 the mine exploded causing the following casualties: 3 USN personnel were reportedly killed outright: two of EOD Team 33 and probably an onlooker, 6 USN seriously wounded, and 12 USN slightly wounded.

Leighton, Earl L., Omaha, NE; Eo2 Equipment Operator Seabee, Age 31, Cedar Lawn Cemetery, Council Bluffs, IA; Mc Fadyen, Bruce S., Montclair, NJ; Lt EOD Team 33, Age 33; Melady, Richard R Dumont, NJ; Tm1 EOD Team 33, Age 30; and Nolan, Michael F Schuylerville, NY; CE3 Seabee, Age 21, Beverly National Cemetery, NJ, KIA 01/17/1969. ★

## MUD DOGS

Continued from previous page

burning bodies and our fortune at the same time. We had no water to wash the fuel away from our skin; the experience was miserable.

As the sun rose and hopes of some attention to our dilemma rose, we could see the rashes growing on our bodies. Finally able to see, we were put in formation for a body count. Rows of naked men with distorted scrotums, at a 40-degree angle to the deck were a somber sight with no humor to be found. Our losses were estimated at six, all from my small berthing area. I stood there with my only possession, my billfold. For some reason I had put it in my mouth when I was awakened. I then noticed Willy Perez had retrieved his pictures. It cracked me up for a second. Why would anyone care about such things when survival was at such a premium?

The rising sun only made the matters worse. Few of us had any issued underwear; I had kept my socks on but threw them overboard because they were soaked with fuel. Fuel-soaked clothing only made skin irritation worse, but cover was needed from the burning sun that

only made the burns grow. Those with light skin were hit the worst, I noted, when seeing a redhead's scrotum blowing up to grapefruit proportions. The misery continued as the sun rose with the temperatures rising and rising. We didn't want to complain because we knew there were still hopes

of finding survivors, and every man was needed for the rescue. The Navy was now growing weary from exhaustion and fruitless efforts as they estimated their losses at over 20.

We had no communications with battalion, as all of our gear and radios were now on the bottom of the river from being blasted off the barge by the mine. But it was now

time for us to be attended to. We were thirsty, and our burns grew with the rising afternoon sun: scrotums, lips, and eyes were swelling up to unrecognizable proportions. Our officers were demanding that we be taken off the ship and soon.

It was almost 12 hours after the blast when relief came in form of clothing and a trip to the USS Washtenaw LST-1166. Our Poseidon Hell-hole Halloween nightmare was over. ★

**"We soon found our way to the high side of the listing Westchester, where we huddled in a naked mass of diesel-drenched bodies still rubbing our eyes, hoping for our sight back."**

## Mobile Riverine Force Association Membership Application Form

- ☐ New Member ☐ Associate Member ☐ Renewal ☐ Sponsor  
☐ Donation ☐ CCB-18 ☐ Mobile Museum  
☐ Change of address below.

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☐ WW-II ☐ Korea ☐ Vietnam

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 Unit (Division, Brigade, Battalion, Company, Platoon, Battery)

☐ Navy Member  
 Unit (Ship, Boat Hull Numbers, Navy Activity/Detachment, etc.)

Dates Served in Unit (mm/yr - mm/yr) \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBERSHIP RATES

☐ 1 Year \$20 ☐ 3 Years \$50

### DONATION

☐ \_\_\_\_\_

To become a member, mail your check or money order (payable to MRFA) to Charlie Ardinger, MRFA Membership Chairman, 1857 County Road, A14, Decorah, IA 52101-7448.

## From The Membership



**Kinser**

### Larry Kinser—18-years-old Machine Gunner

I think about those days from NAM every day it seems like. I can be thinking about something that has nothing to do with Nam but for some reason I seem to find something that relates back to it in some way, it may last only a few minutes

but it happens just the same. Guess just getting old, that is what I like to blame things on, people say something to me and I tell them I am just getting old, and I guess I am getting old. Hope you are all doing well, or as well as we can be under our circumstances.

Does anyone know what happened to SGT. Raper? He was with B Co. 4th/47th, got shot in the left shoulder the end of '68 or beginning of '69. I was right next to him when he was shot. We were ambushed the same time or day after Lt. Baines. Ran out and grabbed a Chico claymore. I can't remember all the details.

★★★★★★

**From Bobby Jefcoat:** Gary Raper is in Vina, AL. I have talked to him a couple of times since Nam. His son is on Facebook, but Gary is not. After he was dusted off and we came in off the Operation, he was in the Med Station in Dong Tam. I received my Orders for SGT and his name was on them. Me and someone else went to the Med Station and took him copies of the Orders. I found out later that Orders like that most of the time never caught up with the wounded guys who were



**Sgt. Raper and Son**

sent to Japan or home, as I had a real close friend who was sent to Japan for a year. His name was on my Spec 4 Orders and he came to my home while I was home on leave and picked up copies—he was still a PFC at Fort Campbell, but when he presented the Orders they paid him back pay and gave him Spec 4.

I remember Lt Baine running out and pulling wires off the Chinese claymore. I also remember him throwing two grenades in a Bunker and the first one went off blowing the second one almost back out; he got a piece of shrapnel in his spine and we had to get a flat board to dust him off.

**William L. Reynolds:** C Co. 4th/47th lost 27 brave soldiers during my tour of duty in 1967 and since then we have lost 26 ole troopers; mainly it was cancer. The average age at death of these fine ole troopers is 62.5 years. All of us brothers in war must cherish each day because life is good in this great Country we fought for so many years ago. Stay healthy my brothers.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Loren Salzman** (Echo Co. 4th/47th 9th Inf. Division/MRF): Posting this in response to a question about VC flags, so thought I would share it here too. This was a flag we captured along with weapons. Picture was taken on the pontoon tied up to the *USS Benewah* in 1968.



## Note from Charlie Ardinger, Membership Chairman

*When you get your renewal notice or when your service member or spouse pass away, please let us know so we can put the information in the newsletter and web site.*  
Thanks, Charlie

## Seeking Info on Father

Mobile Riverine Force Association  
106 Bellevue Drive NE  
Conover, NC 28613

Hello,

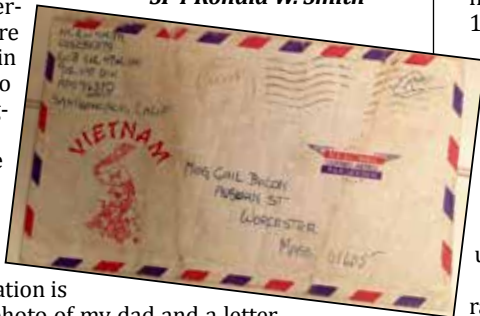
My name is Shawn Smith the son of SP4 Ronald W. Smith. His friends and family called him Ron. I am trying to find someone who might have known my dad or maybe remembered him in B Company 4th/47th Riverine Infantry 1967. I'm not sure what platoon/squad he was in but I have attached a photo to see if someone might recognize him.

If anyone is willing to share anything about my dad, I would be greatly interested in talking with you. I can be reached either by email or by phone. My contact information is listed below along with the photo of my dad and a letter he wrote my mom when they were dating (Postmarked: October 1967).

Thank you for your time and please feel free to call or write by email. Shawn M. Smith, 910-584-2931 (cell phone), shawn.n.dawn.s@gmail.com. ★



**SP4 Ronald W. Smith**



## Historical Data Project

The MRFA is making a consolidated effort to collect and post as much MRF TF-117 historical data as a means to assist those who served with the unit. It will also help in documenting our unique joint Army and Navy History.

We are soliciting originals or copies of documents, photos, and film footage.

Through the years our Lay Historian, Mike Harris, has gathered quite a bit of River Assault Squadron/Division documentation via several visits to the Navy Historical Heritage Command (NHHC) in Washington, DC, and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, MD. Being our current Webmaster, he is willing to scan and post many of the documents on the MRFA website. All items will also be categorized and saved for generations to come.

We are asking for one or more individuals to volunteer to take on each of these portions of the Project: (1) U.S. Army Riverine history, (2) Support Ships/Units, and (3) CTG 194 Crews and Naval Advisors attached to VNN boats. Here is a link to our "Historical Data Project": [www.mrfa.org/Historical.Project.htm](http://www.mrfa.org/Historical.Project.htm).

Many years ago Albert Moore was provided with Bupers Rosters for RAS 9, 11, 13, & 15 for dates from early 1967 into 1970. He passed them out to individuals who served in those Squadrons. At this writing, we have confirmed that Don Blankenship and Mike Harris have possession of the RAS 11 & 15 Rosters. We are trying to locate the RAS 9 & 13 folders. If anyone reading this received them from Albert or copies of them, we would appreciate copies to share with all who served.

If you have any forms of historical data that you would like to share with the MRFA, please send them to Mike at the address below. If you have the ability to scan documents and send via email then please do so. Mike recommends that you contact him first with what data you have so we do not duplicate what is already in our possession.

Mike Harris, 96350 Territorial Rd, Monroe, OR 97456, mekong152@99w.us.

Thank you all in advance for taking the time to go through your memorabilia and sharing it with those whom you served with! It took a Team Effort during the War and this project will take the same kind of effort. "Together Then...Together Again".

Hopefully this message will generate some responses.

Thanks, Mike Harris, Lay Historian and Webmaster



I want to thank the MRFA membership for their support of the Gear Locker product sales. It pays the bills for the Association.

The Gear Locker is in the process of reducing the number of shirts we have for sale. They are listed in this issue of the River Currents.

The shirts listed will be discontinued when they are sold out. I have limited sizes of all of them.

When placing an order, please give your phone number in case the item is on back order or I don't have it. I will keep the member updated on the status of the order. If you have any questions or plan on placing an order for any of them, you can call, write, or e-mail me at the following:

Chet Stanley, 205 Carolina Ave, Easley SC 29640-1409  
Home 864-306-8400 • Cell 864-419-4555  
e-mail gunnerstan@aol.com

## GEAR LOCKER UPDATE

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T007 2nd BN (Mech)  
47th Inf



T008 MRF Monitor



T009 MRF ASPB



T010 MRF CCB



T011 MRF PUC



T012 MRF Army/Navy



T013 RAF TF-117



T014 CAR Vietnam



T015 CIB Vietnam



T017 9th Inf. Div PUC Vietnam

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3. Mail Gear Order Form and check to Products Chairman, Chet Stanley Jr., 205 Carolina Ave., Easley, SC 29640-1409; 864-306-8400; gunnerstan@aol.com.

Visit [www.mrfa.org](http://www.mrfa.org) to download our product catalog from the MRFA Gear Locker!

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NOTES:			
Total items ordered _____			
Grand Total			\$

# A Bad Day in Mo Cay City

By Harry Hahn

It was June 11, 1969. Monitor 131-1 was taking an unusual rest for a couple days at the Mobile Riverine Base near Ben Tre. I say unusual as the 105 Howitzers were normally always in combat, with little down time. There were too few to go around. Only two 105 Howitzer Monitors per river division, and with so many ops taking place each day and night, commanders always wanted a 105 Howitzer support. Zippo Monitors were also in high demand, but only carried a little more than 4 minutes of napalm burn time, and required a lot of support for refueling.

We had just come off of Operation Giant Sling-shot. Lt Kahn, our Division Commander, gave us a day mission to go to a fire support base near Mo Cay City for the purpose of delivering diesel fuel to the boats that were there for base defense. In addition to the two 200 gallon "day tanks," the Monitors had an extra 1,200 gallon diesel reserve capacity in a huge storage tank that was under the berthing compartment. M-1 fueled up the night before and headed out early in the morning. We had never been down this river before, but had heard that it was "Charlie Country." Alpha Boat 132-6 was to accompany us. Our mission started just before sunrise. The fog was thicker than I had ever seen before. Using our radar, we followed Alpha 6 to the edge of the Mekong and entered a narrow river. Something wasn't right. I was looking at the river on the charts. The one we were to be in had a hard 90 degree bend to the left about 500 meters in that I did not see. The fog had lifted now and I was still getting bad vibes as to our location as the river was getting very narrow. I told the Chief that we were in the wrong river. He questioned me and told me that the Alpha had been here before. The river continued to narrow and I knew I had to prove this was the wrong river. I found a river on the charts that took the same bends that we had just gone through, south of where we should have entered. I told the Chief that if I was correct, there would be a small creek on the port side in 100 meters. Bingo, I was correct and we radioed the Alpha we were "in the wrong ball park." The Alpha was ahead of us, but drew less water than the Monitor. The river at that point was so narrow that Adkins, who was on the wheel, had to place the bow of M-1 on one bank and swing around, kicking up mud on the opposite bank. We had just turned around in the nick of time as we were running out of river!

Transiting north, we entered the proper river and made our way to Mo Cay City. Mo Cay City was located at the intersection of four rivers and the swirling currents at that intersection were interesting for even a good coxswain. Being on a supply mission, something we had never done before, we gave the boats and Army guys the C-Rats we had and let them use our hand pump to pump out the 1,200 gallons of diesel, one boat at a time. We then returned to the MRB. Aside from the "wrong river" incident, we had a fairly uneventful day, so far. Not a shot was fired. Then we got the word that we were going down that river again, to take more supplies to them. I couldn't believe it! I then had the ill feeling that we were lucky enough to have Charlie let us go down there one time, but not two. I had asked

an RM2 who was on the Alpha if he would sign me off for my practical factors to advance to RM2 and we talked about doing that when we returned again from Mo Cay City. That was to never happen! My bad feelings about this trip had me do something I had never done before! Rather than making a Dust-Off request through command, which was SOP, I put Dust Off Dong Tam's frequency up on the spare radio so I could call them directly to get immediate Dust Off support after we were hit. I was that sure of it! I felt that I would be one of those hit, so having the radio already to go would allow me to make the Dust Off request expedient. I had the co-ordinates almost memorized so that would be ready too!

We made the 90 degree turn to port 500 meters off of the Mekong and into the river to Mo Cay. Passing a small village on the starboard side something seemed strange to me. The lack of people from the last trip down this river was obvious. I was sitting in the starboard seat of the Monitor. Seaman Cole was on the wheel and I was giving him coxswain training this day as he had never been at the wheel of this boat. Adkins had moved to the middle 20 mm and Lurz was on the aft 20 mm. Following behind Alpha 6, it was just then that the ambush hit. More B-40 RPGs than one could count were fired off of the port bank of the river. I watched as Alpha 6 took a direct hit on the engine cover from the B-40s. Every person I could see on the deck of the Alpha was hit badly. The Alpha boat was drifting into the bank as the coxswain was also hit. The forward gunner came to the wheel and controlled the boat. I knew that we had been hit by the big bangs that I had heard, but didn't know the extent just yet. We had a boat captain at that time (who shall remain nameless) who had a bad habit of crouching down and hiding next to the instrument panel every time we were in a firefight. The 105 fired one round to port and jammed. This had never happened before. The sound of a large firing pin going home and nothing happening is deafening! Adkin's 20 mm was covering the port side where we were fired upon. This was our 20 mm we



*The ammo rack under the 105 Howitzer Mount that took a B-40 hit through two empty tubes.*

had had issues with and it stopped firing after about 10 rounds. EN striker Lurz had the only gun between two boats that would fire. I yelled to him to get his 20 mm on the port bank and open fire. "Do not stop firing until I tell you to." Lurz started firing while he was still cranking the gun turret around and it was a good thing there were no boats behind us! Lurz emptied that whole box of 20 mm into the jungle from which the B-40 attack had occurred. I was on



*Monitor 131-1*

the radio to Alpha 6. He had four injured and I had also learned we had one to go from our rocket hit. I ordered up two Dust Offs from Dong Tam to meet us at the fire base as we were now just minutes away from that location. They landed just as we arrived at the Forward Arty Base. Rich Santone had been busy on the Alpha patching up Jose Borden who was the most seriously wounded. Once Jose got to Dong Tam they sent him to Japan immediately. Al Ormsbee was also injured. What I didn't know was that our rocket hit that we took was in the 105 magazine and was about to send us to the bottom of the river. I could not leave my station and had taken control of the boat, both from the boat captain and had taken the wheel from Cole when I saw that we were listing badly to the port side. The report from below deck was that we were taking on water fast and that our engineman "Mac" was wounded in the leg. Without hesitation, I saw a place on the shore near the firebase where we could beach alongside the Alpha, but there was a sampan there. With no other place to beach and our gunwales just above the water line, I powered the Monitor at our whopping 8 knots up onto the beach and crushed that sampan into muddy river history. The bow of the Monitor came out of the water to bring the hole left by the rocket above the water line. The stern almost went under, but was just above the water line. The medevacs had arrived just as we did. After medevac'ing the wounded from both boats, and with the help of an Army welder, the crew made M-1 seaworthy again. The one problem would be the port, forward, void would be filled with water, and we would have a port list until we got to the repair ship.

As things calmed down I got off the radio after encrypting numerous messages to command. My crew now had time to talk to one another. I went below and saw just how lucky we had been. We had a full complement of 105 rounds onboard, 254 rounds. There were about 6 tons of explosives in that magazine! The B-40 rocket that entered M-1 on that day came through the port side between two vertical racks that held 105 ammo, glanced off the deck and went through the ONLY two empty 105 rack tubes on the boat. These tubes were located directly under the 105 mount. We were very fortunate. Had a 105 round been hit, God only knows what would have happened!!

Lt. Kahn personally came down with an armada of boats to get us at 2400. We left Mo Cay City with two Tangos, a Zippo, and another 105 Howitzer. Lt. Kahn was hoping Charlie would try something again so he could get payback. That didn't happen. We exited the river without another incident and went directly to the ARL for repair!

My boat crew, along with Rich Santone, from A-6, who was also medevac'd off with the others, have relived that Bad Day in Mo Cay City many times. ★



## TAPS Tribute to a Fallen One



**Gill**

**Charles Gill** passed away November 24, 2015. Charles served with C Co. 2nd/47th Infantry (05/69-04/70). You may contact the family c/o Mary Martin Gill, 107 Hammond Ave, Santa Cruz, CA, 95062-1121, 831-427-1281, ind2run2@yahoo.com.



**Bledsoe**

**Colonel James H. Bledsoe** USA (Ret.) passed away February 25, 2015. James served with the 2nd Bde 3rd/60th Inf 9th Inf Division (1967-68). You may contact the family c/o Penny Bledsoe, 1329 Fall River Rd, Goodspring, TN 38460, 931-363-8746.



**Weema**

**Henry Larry Weema** passed away March 13, 2015. Henry served on T-112-12 and later T-152-10 (02/69-02/70). You may contact the family c/o Mary Weema, 94 SJ Kellner Blvd, Beverly Hills, FL 34465-4135, mweema@tampabay.rr.com.

Member **Kendall A. Larsen** passed away

April 10, 2014. He served with the LST Support RivFlot ONE (03/68-03/69). You may contact the family c/o Mary Ann Larsen, 1911 Aspen Ct, Northfield, MN 55057-3210, 507-645-7770.



**Lehne**

Member **James H. Lehne** passed away December 20, 2015. Jim served with C Co. 2nd/60th Inf (12/66-10/68). You may contact the family c/o Zoe Heaton-Lehne, 142 Riverview Dr, Wamego, KS, 66547-1931, 785-456-9399, jhlehe@gmail.com.



**Smith**

**SP4 Ronald W. Smith** passed away June 29, 2011. Ron served in B Co. 4th/47th (1967). You may contact the family c/o his son Shawn M. Smith, 910-584-2931 (cell phone) or shawn.n.dawn.s@gmail.com.



**Knight**

Rev **David E. Knight** passed away June 17, 2015. David was Chaplain in the 4th/47th Infantry (11/67-11/68). You may contact the family c/o Betty Knight, 1221 N. Sherwood St, Spokane, WA, 99201-3044.

Member **William J. Diggins** passed away. At this time we do not know the date. Bill served with RivRon 15 on T-51 (06/70-04/71). Bill was

residing in Glenwood, NY, at the time of his passing.



**Schneider**

Member **Thomas Frank Schneider** passed away November 25, 2015. Tom served with A Btry 1st/11th Artillery & B Co 2nd/39th Inf (01/66-11/67).



**Middendorf**

**Daniel J. Middendorf** passed away January 30, 2016. Dan served in B Co. 3rd/60th Riverine Inf. 9th Inf. Div. (05/68-05/69). You may contact the family c/o Mary Middendorf, 1591 Brookstone Dr, Little Elm, TX 75068-5518, 972-668-3770, chickenmandan@hotmail.com.



**Hansen**

Member **Verlyn Hansen** passed away May 5, 2014. Verlyn served in D Co. 3rd/47th Inf (1968-69). You may contact the family c/o Donna Hansen, 104 Chatham St N, Independence, IA 50644-9165, 319-827-2661.

Member **Donald E. Bickhart** passed away August 23, 2015. Don served in RivDiv 91 (1967-68). You may contact the family c/o Patricia Bickhart,

1320 E. Walnut St, Annville, PA 17003-2019, 717-867-4726.



**Hauser**

**Robert W. Hauser** passed away February 22, 2014. Robert served in River Division 152 T-49 (1970-71). Robert was residing in Mount Pleasant, PA, at the time of his passing.



**Lazzell**

Member **Robert Allen "Bob" Lazzell** passed away August 7, 2015. Bob served in HQ Co. 15th Combat Eng. (02/68-02/69). You may contact the family c/o Mary Anne Lazzell, 14979 Rialto Ave, Brooksville, FL 34613-5067, 352-597-3912, hcfcheyyou@yahoo.com.

## 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 instances, 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.

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Ron Easterday for Marco A. Serrano Jr. and Franklin D. Hite HHC 2nd/47th Inf (Mech) KIA 03/13/67 and William B. Cronin (LTC) HHC 2nd/47th Inf (Mech) KIA 04/27/67  
Ted Fetting for Eloy "Stevie" LeBlanc, Roy Phillips, and Fred Jansoni B Co. 2nd/60th KIA 02/02/68  
Sgt Robert Flaige for SP4 Robert "Bob" Jenks E Co. 3rd/60th KIA 03/03/68  
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Tony Garvey for Wes Sade, Billy Olsen, and Staff Sgt. James Williams C Co. 4th/47th 9th Inf John W. Gerbing for Noel T. West A Co. 4th/47th KIA 06/19/67  
Regina Gooden for Sgt Lloyd Earl Valentine B Co. 3rd/47th KIA 09/05/68  
Mrs. Elizabeth M. Hayes for LTC Daniel P. Hayes HQ 3rd/34th Artillery (06/67-01/68)  
Leo Haynes for my fellow plank owner and buddy Don Grier GM2 USS Benewah. He died in a car crash in 2003  
James Henke, Dave Nelson, James Callan for Sgt Tony Spradling, Sgt Gerald Thurman, Spec James B. Johnson, and all our Brothers lost on June 19, 1967, from A Co. 4th/47th 9th in AP BAC, Long An Province  
Gordon Hillesland for Pat Lawson NSA Dong Tam (1967-68)  
Joe Hilliard for Joe Benack from Florida and Donald Hartzell from Pennsylvania  
Bruce Jensen in memory of Frederic Peers Webb A-111-4 KIA 12/21/67  
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Dave Justin for Robert "Bobby" Scharpnick A Co 2nd Platoon 3rd/60th and Dennis McDougall A Co 3rd/60th  
Bob Land, Rich Lierman, Jim Zervos, and Pete Oakander for Frank Dettmers, our boat captain on CCB-131-1 (May 69-May 70). We do this in his honor and remembrance.  
Richard MacCullagh for John (Doc) Phillips, HMC, USN (Ret) RivRon 15  
Richard MacCullagh for Chaplain Rene L. Petit, LT, CHC, RC, RivRon 13 and 15  
H. Bruce Molver for HMT Zeph Lane who was severely wounded 03/31/69 and unfortunately killed in a private plane crash 05/20/85  
Adam Metts for Donald L. Bruckart T-111-2 KIA 03/31/69  
A. R. "Monti" Montillo for William "Bulldog" McLaughlin B Co 3rd/60th KIA 10/03/68 and Barry "Butch" Copp B Co 3rd/60th KIA 10/28/68  
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Maj J. D. Nichols III CMDR C Co. 3rd/60th Inf (12/66-11/67) for Alfred Cornejo, Anthony Galeno, Richard Lasher, Rudolph Melendez, Sigfredo Pinto-Pinto, and Darrell Reid KIA 08/20/67  
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Luis Peraza for SSG Michael K. Lewis KIA 06/13/69, SGT Harold H. Hunter KIA 01/27/69, and brothers of D Co 3rd/60th KIA during 1968-69  
John Smith for Paul D. Jose B Co. 3/60th KIA Westy 11/01/68  
Aaron R. Spurway for Chief Ray  
Chet "Gunner" Stanley for all the USN and USA KIAs of the MRF (1967-70)  
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Robert Sutton for LT James F. Rost Jr. Vin Te Canal Chau Duc KIA 11/69  
Robert Thacker for SFC Earl T. Pelhan, Jr., 15th Eng, 9th Inf Div, KIA in Delta Lo Okey Toothman in memory of Sgt Dick Arnold A Co. 3rd/47th, Max Delacruz and G. P. Jones C Co. 3rd/47th  
Steven Totcoff for my brother CPL Dennis S. Totcoff B Co 3rd/47th 9th Inf Div KIA 5/2/68  
USS Benewah shipmates: John Long EN2, Craig Bronish MR3, and George Schnieder MR2  
USS Guide MSO-447 for Shipmate and Brother Harold Foster  
Henry Velez for my fallen brothers, B Co. 2nd/39th Inf  
Ron and Judy Wallace for all those lost from 3rd/47th Inf  
Gary Williams for Dale Winkel C Co. 3rd/60th 9th Inf (01/68-01/69)  
CPT Steve Williams and MAJ Bob Bischoff in memory of 2LT David George Williams, Co A, 4/47th, KIA 9/21/67  
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George R. O'Connell USS Terrell City LST-1157  
John C. Oxley Recon E Co 3rd/47th Inf (11/65-11/67)  
Capt Jerry Pape USN (Ret) Staff COMRIVFLOT ONE (01/68-12/68)  
Rodney Peeler 2nd/60th Inf (04/69-08/69)  
Luis F. Peraza D Co. 3rd/60th Inf (11/68-08/69)  
Anthony Perez USS Iredell County LST-839 (11/69-07/70)  
John "Ron" Perry T-132-11 (06/68-09/69)  
Col Pete Petersen USA (Ret.) Cdr 3rd/60th Inf (11/68-08/69)  
Michael Howard Phillips D Co. 15th Combat  
Engineers 9th Inf (08/68-06/69)  
BM1 W. R. Posey Craft Master YTB-785 (1967-68 1970-71)  
William "Bill" Powell USS Askari ARL-30 (08/69-09/70)  
LCDR Leonard Previto CTF-117 (08/67-08/68)  
Bryan and Dolly Rasco USS Indra ARL-37 (09/67-01/69)

Paul Ray M-151-5 (06/69-07/70)  
Donald and Marjio Robbins USS Benewah (APB-35)  
William Robinson Jr. CO USS Mark AKL-12 (06/70-05/71)  
Greg Rockow USS Harnett County LST-821 (1968-69)  
Jerry Ross T-131-1 (08/69-08/70)  
Durwood D. Rosser M-91-1 (10/67-08/68)  
Robert Roth USS Benewah APB-35 (08/68-09/69)  
Matthew F. Rovner USS Colleton (09/66-12/67)  
Ronald Rulon D Co. 15th Combat Engr. Bn (03/6-10/67)  
Billy Sanders RivRon 11 RAD 112 T-112-1 & CCB-112-1 (Vietnam 1967)  
Norman Saunders B Co. 3rd/39th Inf (01/69-08/69)  
Paul Schaut COMRIVFLOT ONE USS Benewah APB-35 (1967)  
Dave Schell RivRon 15 Tango 49 (07/69-07/70)  
Robert "Bob" Schrader D Co. 9th Med BN (07/68-07/69)  
F. Thomas Schuster LTJG USS Indra ARL-37 (1968-69)  
Thomas D. Scott USS Colleton APB-36 (12/66-04/68)  
Bob Shawen Friend of the Ardingers  
Jerry Shearer C Co. 3rd/60th 9th Inf (04/67-04/68)  
Clarence Shires Jr. C-1 4th/47th Inf (01/67-01/68)  
Richard Simpson C Co. 3rd/47th Inf 9th Div (05/67-05/68)  
John Smith B Co. 3/60th (05/68-06/69) for all Riverines  
Thomas E. Smith 9th S and T Battalion (03/67-06/68)  
Marc Spilberg 4th/47th Inf (01-68-01/69)  
Aaron R. Spurway USS Vernon County LST-1161 (1966-68)  
Chet "Gunner" Stanley C-111-1 and M-111-3 (1966-68)  
John Swart T-132-1 (04/68-04/69)  
Bryan Swisher B Co. 3rd/47th Inf (12/68-06/69)  
Jack Terry USS Colleton APB-36 (1966-68)  
Thanks to 155 mm (Mech) Arty  
Charles Thompson 9th Admin Co. (02/66-11/67)  
Harry Timmerman T-132-10 (06/68-06/69)  
Milton Turnage M-151-1 (07/68-06/69)  
Erol Tuzco A Co. 3rd/60th Inf (1968-69)  
USS Terrell City LST-1157  
Roger Valentine USS Askari ARL-30 (07/67-05/68)  
Bob and Nancy VanDruff T-91-5 and T-92-4  
GMGI Ricky Vice USN (Ret.) T-131-7 (03/68-05/69) and NAG (01/71-06/72)  
Ron Wallace B Co. 3rd Plat 3rd/47th Inf (05/66-08/67)  
Hank and Becky Washburn USS Colleton APB-36 (01/67-09/68)  
Bill Weidman T-111-12 (02/67-02/68)  
Gary Weisz A-91-4 (10/67-07/68)  
Captain Chaplain Lester Westling Jr. NSA Saigon  
in IV Corps (05/69-05/70)  
David H. White USN (Ret) USS Satyr ARL-23 (08/69-08/70)  
BMCM Donald Wiita USN (Ret.) T-111-13 (03/67-02/68)  
Norm Wilkinson B Co. 4th/47th Inf (03/67-03/68)  
Tom Wischman USS Indra ARL-37 (1967-70)  
Rhett Wise A Co. 3rd/47th Inf (03/67-04/68)  
Jeffrey L. Withers RivRon 11 A-112-8 and M-112-12 (06/68-06/69)  
William H. Ziebarth 9th Signal, 34 Arty (1966-68)  
James Zierniski EN2 Boat Captain RivDiv 153 ASPB 6854 (04/69-04/70)  
Robert Zimmer XO USS Mercer APB-39 (02/68-07/69)  
Admiral Erol Zumwalt ComNavForV