

MAY 2023

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MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

Training for a Dogfight
USMC's Adversary Squadron
Plays Role of Enemy in the Sky





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Three Marines, with a combined total of 67 years on active duty, completed an epic journey late last year by walking 3,365 miles across the country in honor of our nation’s prisoners of war, missing and killed in action personnel, and their Gold Star Families. They sat down with *Leatherneck* to talk about their six-month odyssey and what they learned on “The Long Road.”

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COVER: Two Marine pilots with VMFT-401 fly over the Cactus West Range southeast of MCAS Yuma, Ariz., during WTI 2-11, April 4, 2011. Read more about VMFT-401, the Corps’ adversary squadron, on page 14. Photo by Scott Youmans. Copies of the cover may be obtained by sending \$2 (for mailing costs) to *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134-0775.

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Letter of the Month

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

I enjoy reading *Leatherneck* articles which relate to an event or an individual otherwise not generally known to your tradition-focused audience. This was the case with "Guerilla" in the March 2023 edition featuring Marine Corporal Reid C. Chamberlain. It read as something I thought vaguely familiar until the reference to Colonel "X," then I absolutely knew the rest of the story.

Colonel "X" unquestionably was Army Colonel W. Fertig, who became MacArthur's guerilla leader in the Philippines during World War II. I immediately went to my copy of his biography, "They Fought Alone: The True Story of a Modern American Hero" by John Keats. Cpl Chamberlain is acknowledged in the book's appendix.

The reason what I read was so familiar, is the fact that the colonel's family lived near me in Golden, Colo., my hometown during the war. His daughter and my older sister were high school classmates, and she often visited our home.

Colonel "X" was a mining engineering graduate of the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colo., who was working in the Philippines when war broke out. He had a reserve commission in the Army and had been activated in the summer of 1941. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, he refused to surrender and became a senior leader in the Philippines and had to be the guerilla leader Chamberlain worked under.

After the Philippines, he also served the school as Reserve Officer Training Corps Senior Military Science Professor from 1947 to 1951.

LtCol C.G. "Jug" Gerard, USMC (Ret)
1955 to 1981
Brevard, N.C.

Readers Respond to the February 2023 Article About LtGen Frank Petersen

The February Sound Off [Letter of the Month] from 1stLt Kominus and the exceptional article about Lieutenant General Frank E. Petersen Jr. in that same issue brought back a startling memory. I grew up in the Bronx, and the first time I had ever been south of New Jersey was when I arrived at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., on April 23, 1964.

After boot camp and infantry training, I was headed home on leave with another Marine from the Bronx. We were at the bus terminal in Jacksonville, N.C., and were hungry. We saw the food shop had a line, so we went outside and found another shop that was only half full, so we ate and went back inside the terminal. Passing the first food shop, I realized the customers were all white, while we had been the only white customers in the shop outside. It was my first experience with segregation.

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Marine Corps Association

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Quantico, VA 22134 or email to:

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POSTMASTER

Send address changes to: *Leatherneck* Magazine,
Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134.



Leatherneck (ISSN 0023-981X) is published monthly by the Marine Corps Association, Bldg. #715, MCB, Quantico, VA 22134. Copyright 2023 by MCA.

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I grew up in an integrated neighborhood, went to integrated schools, and always got along with the Black and Hispanic Marines I served with thanks to my dad, who taught me about racism. He was a New York city firefighter from 1939 to 1974, retiring as a deputy chief with a brief interruption for 11 months of Navy service during World War II.

He said that when firefighters arrived at a fire, they never asked who was in there; they asked *is anyone in there?* If they didn't get a definite no, they went in.

During Vietnam, I always thought it was ridiculous to worry about the race of a Marine who had my six. He was a Marine just like me. That was all I ever needed to know.

Sgt Joe Doyle
USMC, 1964-1970
Scottsburg, Va.

Well done on the article "The Life of Lieutenant General Frank E. Petersen—The Marine Corps' First Black Aviator," February 2023. He showed outstanding character both as a Marine officer and as a man to contest with and overcome the racial obstacles in his path. I think his parents deserve a lot of credit for instilling the character in him that helped him achieve so much in his life in service to our country.

By the way, I counted that he qualified to fly at least five different aircraft. Was that typical of Marine aviators during his years of service?

Doug Caldwell
Plano, Texas

A Question to the Chain of Command

Could someone let the troops, active-duty and retired, know what is being done to get the U.S. Marines being held by the Russians released?

I am sure an update on what is being discussed would be appreciated by this former active servicemember. My kids and grandkids keep asking me if the U.S. government would get them back if they were prisoners to a foreign power. It would be nice to have a positive answer from the brass on this question!

John Sanchez
USN, 1961-1966
Hanford, Calif.

First and foremost, I would make sure that your grandchildren understand the difference between an American citizen being charged with a crime in a foreign country and a servicemember being charged with a crime or held as a prisoner of war. The U.S. has status of forces agreements with many countries

that provide specific protections to servicemembers in various circumstances including when criminal charges are involved. Prisoners of war rate different protections, and their return is and should be the highest priority.

I think, however, you are referring to Marine veterans who have recently traveled to Russia on their own for business or pleasure and were jailed on various charges. While there are no active or reserve U.S. Marines being held by Russia, there is at least one veteran Marine. Paul Whelan is currently held on charges of espionage by the former Soviet Union, and, as was brought to light after the recent release of Brittany Griner, the State Department is working to bring him home. As much as many of us would like to know the details of the discussion to get Whelan back to the U.S., it's not always helpful to publicize the negotiations. Trevor Reed, another Marine veteran, was freed in a prisoner swap in the spring of 2022, and most negotiations for his release were held in relative secrecy. Frustrating to those of us concerned about our fellow Marine, but often necessary to ensure success.—
Editor

Regarding the Naturalization Ceremony Pictured in the March Issue

I just finished reading my March 2023 issue of *Leatherneck*. On page 48, there is an article about Marines becoming naturalized citizens with a photo of Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines who appear to be wearing the French fourragère. When I was in F/2/6, I was told that only the 5th and 6th Marines were awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French government in World War I, and only the 5th and 6th Marines were allowed to wear the fourragère and that it was not transferable if you were assigned to another regiment.

Davis Yates
USMC, 1958-1961
Sebring, Fla.

I question the fact that the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines are pictured in the photo. Last I heard, only the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments were authorized to wear the French fourragère. When did the 8th Marines receive the authorization to wear it? I do believe a congratulations should be given to all of the Marines who became citizens, but maybe it needs to be checked to see if command is correctly shown.

GySgt Kenneth R. Hardy, USMC (Ret)
1962-1983, 1991-1993
McGregor, Texas

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While reading the March 2023 issue of *Leatherneck*, I saw two photographs that caught my attention. On page 40, there is a Marine who just received the Spirit of Basilone Award. Do the two Marines flanking him have their hands in their pockets? Also, on pages 48-49 there is a photograph of the naturalization of Marines from 1stBn, 8th Marine Regiment. Are those Marines wearing the French fourragère? It is hard to tell but I thought only the 5th and 6th Regiments wore that award.

Maj Earl W. Hacker, USMC (Ret)
1969 to 1997
Blacksburg, Va.

Yes, the information listed in the We—the Marines department in the March issue is correct and those Marines are authorized to wear the fourragère. As detailed in the Marine Corps Uniform Regulations, the French fourragère was awarded to 5th and 6th Marine Regiments during World War I by the French Ministry of War, and all Marines serving in these regiments are authorized to wear it. Sixth Marines is currently comprised of its regimental headquarters and four battalions: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions, 6th Marines and 1st Battalion, 8th Ma-



A U.S. Marine with 3rd Bn 6th Marines, 2ndMarDiv, stands at ease prior to participating in a French fourragère ceremony on Camp Lejeune, N.C., Dec. 15, 2020. Both the 5th and 6th Regiments were awarded the fourragère by the French military for their vicious fighting and heroism during the battle of Belleau Wood, World War I. (Photo by LCpl Patrick King, USMC)





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SgtMaj Lewis Layton III, 3rd Bn, 6th Marines, 2ndMarDiv, congratulates Marines during a French fourragère ceremony on Camp Lejeune, N.C., Dec. 15, 2020. The ceremony was held for the Marines and Sailors newly assigned to the battalion. The only servicemembers permitted to wear a French fourragère in the Marine Corps are with 5th Marine Regiment or 6th Marine Regiment.

LCPL PATRICK KING, USMC

rines. It's not uncommon for a battalion to be assigned to a different regiment due to a reorganization, the unit deployment program or a deployment for other purposes. As members of 6th Marines, the new citizens of 1/8 and the rest of the battalion are authorized to wear the fourragère.—Editor

“Chesty”: A Marine’s Marine

I read with great interest the part about Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller in the article “Notional Leader” in the March issue of *Leatherneck*. During weightlifting sessions, I usually do three sets of 10 to 12 repetitions plus one for Chesty. This is also what I do with free exercises; it’s been a habit since my days in the Marines—always one for Chesty.

I also enjoyed visiting General Puller’s grave at the Christ Church Historical Cemetery, east of Saluda, Va. Visiting his burial site during my travels to Deltaville, Va., was one of the highlights of the trip. The peaceful setting of the burial site makes you feel that Chesty, a Marine’s Marine, is standing right there with you.

Palmer C. Sweet
USMC, 1964-1970
North Garden, Va.

[continued on page 68]

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WHERE THINGS START TO GET BETTER.

Fort Meade, Md. Marine Corps Activates Information Command

The Marine Corps activated a new information command on Jan. 13. Commanded by Major General Ryan P. Heritage, the current commander of Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace and Marine Corps Forces Space Command, Marine Corps Information Command (MCIC) will integrate, synchronize and enable information activities that deter adversaries and set conditions for the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) across the range of military operations.

“The activation of the MCIC is all about warfighting, integration and enabling the Joint Force to meet our national security objectives” said Lieutenant General Brian Cavanaugh, Commanding General, Marine Corps Forces Command.

The Marine Corps Information Command also will encompass units previously assigned to the Deputy Commandant for Information including the Marine Corps Information Operations Center, the Marine Corps Cryptologic Support Battalion, and the Marine Corps cryptologic office.

“A single commander who can leverage the authorities and approvals needed to synchronize global cyber, space, influence, and intelligence effects creates unity of support for the FMF

and generates advantages in support of commander’s objectives,” according to MajGen Heritage.

The MCIC will serve as the link across the commands that conduct operational level planning and will enable the commander to provide task-organized detachments leveraging authorities across the range of military operations.

Ryan Lowcher, MARFORCYBER

Camp Blaz, Guam USMC Reactivates Base on Guam

The Marine Corps reactivated a new base on Guam in a ceremony on Jan. 26, honoring the long-shared history of the Marine Corps and Guam and establishing a forward presence in the Indo-Pacific that will endure into the future.

Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz is the first newly constructed Marine Corps base in 70 years and is a testament to the U.S.-Japan alliance. Guam was chosen as the location for the base during the 2012 Bilateral Agreement between the U.S. and Japanese governments, under the Defense Policy Review Initiative, which set the framework for the relocation of Marines from Okinawa to Guam.

“Today is an important day that marks the future of the Marines on Guam, and it is also a day to reflect on the century-long history of the Marine Corps in this beautiful place we call home,” said

Colonel Christopher Bopp, Commanding Officer, MCB Camp Blaz. “On this island, Marines and their CHamoru brethren have lived in peace and fought in war together and we are proud to carry on this legacy of honor and courage.”

The U.S. territory holds immense value to Marine Corps history, dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1901, Marine Barracks Guam was established in the village of Sumay. During World War I, the first shots fired by Americans were in Apra Harbor by U.S. Marines as Marines from the barracks fired warning shots against German sailors from the interned ship, SMS *Cormoran* on April 7, 1917. This German ship, along with many other sunken artifacts, can still be seen off Naval Base Guam.

In the Second World War, Marine Barracks Guam was forced to surrender to Imperial Japanese Forces on Dec. 10, 1941. The Marines returned with a vengeance when the III Amphibious Corps landed to retake the island on Jul. 21, 1944. The island was declared secure on Aug. 10, and the Marine Barracks was reactivated in June 1946, remaining an integral part of the U.S. presence on the island until it was deactivated on Nov. 10, 1992.

MCB Camp Blaz is named in honor of the first indigenous Marine from the Marianas Islands, CHamorro Marine,

MGen Ryan P. Heritage, Commander Marine Forces Cyber, speaks at the activation ceremony of the Marine Corps Information Command, in a ceremony held at Ft. George G. Meade on Jan. 13. The MCIC is comprised of a Headquarters, the Marine Cryptologic Office, and two Major Subordinate Commands; the Marine Corps Information Operations Center and Marine Cryptologic Support Battalion.



Marines salute during the MCB Camp Blaz Reactivation and Naming Ceremony at Asan Beach, National Historical Park, Asan, Guam, on Jan. 26. The Reactivation and Naming Ceremony officially recognized the activation and naming of Naval Support Activity, MCB Camp Blaz after Marine Barracks Guam was deactivated on Nov. 10, 1992. MCB Camp Blaz is the first newly constructed base for the Marine Corps since 1952 and will serve as an enduring symbol of the continued partnership between the Marine Corps and the Government of Guam. (Photo by LCpl Jonathan Beauchamp, USMC)



Brigadier General Vicente T. “Ben” Garrido Blaz. General Blaz endured the Imperial Japanese Force invasion and three-year occupation of Guam during World War II. He earned his commission in the Marine Corps and in 1977, he became the first CHamorro Marine to attain the rank of brigadier general. Following his military career, he served Guam as a delegate to the House of Representatives for almost a decade.

“I believe that on the horizon lies the opportunities that Ben [Blaz] wished for our people,” said the Honorable Leon Guerrero, Governor of Guam. “No longer are we dealing with challenges and isolation, we are cultivating a more sustainable and comprehensive Indo-Pacific allyship. The future of Guam is inseparable from the future of the broader Indo-Pacific and the success of the Marines is inseparable from the success of Guam’s people. Together we are an island and an ocean united; together we are always better and always stronger; together we are always faithful. Semper Fidelis.”

Situated on Guam’s northern plateau, Camp Blaz will serve as a strategic hub as the Department of Defense realizes the vision of the 2022 National Defense Strategy. The base construction projects currently underway are partially funded by a large monetary contribution from the Government of Japan.



LCPL JONATHAN BEAUCHAMP, USMC

Vence Blaz, left, grandson of retired BGen Vicente Tomás Garrido Blaz, speaks with Gen David H. Berger, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, during the MCB Camp Blaz Reactivation and Naming Ceremony at Asan Beach, National Historical Park, Asan, Guam, on Jan. 26.

“Forward, persistent presence is key to the regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz is a critical part of that. More than that, it shows our undivided relationship with the Government of Japan,” said the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen David H. Berger.

Camp Blaz represents a significant milestone for the future of both the Marine Corps and Guam. The base’s forward presence and engagement in the Pacific will play an essential role in strengthening the ability of the U.S. and its allies and partners for a collective defense and to promote regional security.

“The Japan and U.S. alliance is the cornerstone of the people, the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the linchpin of Japan’s foreign policy,” said Yoshikawa Yuumi, the Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Marine Corps is committed to upholding the legacy of BGen Blaz, prioritizing environmental and cultural stewardship, and building on the established relationships with the people of Guam.

“Guam has been a place we fight from. It’s always a place we’ll fight for,” said the Honorable Meredith Berger, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment. “As we increase our capability to deter and defend and sharpen our opportunities in the region, we do so on the strength of the history, priorities, and people of the community that we call home.”

Compiled from stories by Taylor Massey, MCICOM and GySgt Ruben Tan, USMC

Andersen Air Force Base, Guam: VMFA-312 Takes Flight in Cope North 23

Right: Marines with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312 greet aircrew before conducting post-flight checks at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Feb. 9. Cope North 23 is an annual field training exercise that allows partner nations such as Australia, Japan, the U.S., and France to hone vital readiness skills while enhancing interoperability among multiple mission areas to include air superiority, interdiction, electronic warfare, tactical airlift, and aerial refueling capabilities.



CPL CALAH THOMPSON, USMC



USMC F/A-18 Hornets take off from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Feb. 9. More than 2,000 servicemembers and 100 aircraft from four nations participated in the exercise. The 15-day event involved over 1,200 sorties planned across seven South Pacific islands and 10 airfields.

CPL CALAH THOMPSON, USMC

Okinawa, Japan: Marine Helicopters Support JWX 23.1



CPL MICHAEL TAGGART, USMC

Above: Marines with Combat Logistics Battalion 4, 3rd Marine Logistics Group direct a CH-53E Super Stallion with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465, Marine Aircraft Group 36, in loading a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle during Jungle Warfare Exercise (JWX) 23.1 at Kin Blue, Okinawa, Japan, Feb. 16. JWX 23.1 is a large-scale field training exercise focused on leveraging the capabilities of joint and allied partners to strengthen awareness, maneuvers, and fires across a distributed maritime environment.



LCPL JUSTIN J. MARTY, USMC

Above: LCpl Bernard McPherson, a crew chief with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 267, scans the horizon during a live-fire training event in support of JWX 23.1 off the coast of Okinawa, Japan, Feb 17.



Marines stand outside a UH-1Y Venom Helicopter assigned to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 267 following a live-fire training event in support of JWX 23.1 at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, Feb 17. (Photo by LCpl Justin J. Marty, USMC)



LCPL ORLANY DIAZ FIGUEROA, USMC

Above: Marines with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 261 and Combat Logistics Battalion 7, practice external lifts with an MV-22B Osprey at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Jan. 25. VMM-261 trained to support Marine ground units during Service Level Training Exercise (SLTE) 2-23, a series of exercises designed to prepare Marines for operations around the globe.



LCPL ORLANY DIAZ FIGUEROA, USMC

Marines with 3rd Bn, 5th Marines, 1stMarDiv, exit an MV-22B Osprey, assigned to VMM-261, at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Feb. 21.



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For the first few years after its formation in 1986, VMFT-401 flew the Israeli F-21 Kfirs, shown here in a variety of dissimilar paint schemes. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)



VMFT-401: The Corps' Adversary Squadron

By Patrick Reed

At first glance, with their dissimilar camouflage and a red star on the tail, the F-5 Tigers on the flightline don't appear to be American aircraft. A closer look will reveal "Marines" emblazoned boldly on the fuselages. These F-5s belong to Marine Fighter Training Squadron 401, currently the only adversary squadron in the Marine Corps. Stationed aboard Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, VMFT-401, the "Lucky Snipers," are an expert team of pilots and support personnel who play an integral role in honing Marine Corps readiness through their use of dissimilar air combat training (DACT). In other words, they play the "bad guys," and they are very good at it.

Squadron History

VMFT-401 was activated in 1986 in response to a growing need for DACT for Marine Corps aircrews. DACT places aircraft of different types against each other in simulated combat with the goal of providing realistic training and sharpening the ability of American aircrews to counter peer or near-peer threats. For this training to be successful, the adversary needs to present an authentic opponent, and adversary pilots need to be expert in the employment of "red" tactics as well as their own.

Beginning in the 1960s, following losses in the skies over Vietnam, the Air Force and Navy began to develop and implement more intentional air combat training as they stood up their adversary squadrons. In the 1980s, as the Marine

Corps adopted the F-18 Hornet, a fourth-generation fighter, the need arose for those Marine aircrews to train against a peer or near-peer adversary, and VMFT-401 was created. The first aircraft to come to the squadron were F-21 Kfirs from Israel. The Israeli pilots worked closely with the Marines of the squadron to integrate the aircraft, and the pilots trained with Navy and Air Force adversary units. In 1989, the squadron transitioned to the F-5 Tiger, a simple but robust aircraft capable of Mach 2 with a service ceiling of 50,000 feet.

Lucky Sniper Pilots

Today, VMFT-401 flies many types of missions with the F-5, all in support of the Fleet Marine Force. Though they focus heavily on air-to-air combat train-

Right: Maj Benjamin VanWingerden conducts a preflight inspection on his F-5N Tiger II before a training exercise.

Below: LtCol Eric Scherrer, the commanding officer of VMFT-401, taxis in the F-5F, the two-seat version of the F-5, before participating in a training exercise, Oct. 28, 2022.



LCPL JOHNATHAN BAEZ, USMC



LCPL JADE VENEGAS, USMC

ing, the Lucky Snipers also fly sorties to train ground defense units to hone their aircraft detection and neutralization skills, help train rotary-wing aircrew to counter air-to-air threats, and aid in the development of training programs. “Our job is to keep the Marine Corps from fighting the last war,” said Lieutenant Colonel Eric Scherrer, commanding officer of VMFT-401. “We don’t know exactly the enemy that we’re going to fight next, and we don’t know exactly what they’re going to do. That’s where I come in. I study that enemy. And so when I go, when I provide fleet support to squadrons across the Marine Corps, I’m going to fight them

★ **“Our job is to keep the Marine Corps from fighting the last war.”**
—LtCol Eric Scherrer

in a way that one of our peer or near-peer adversaries will fight.” As the Marine Corps’ only squadron dedicated to acting as the opposing force in simulated air combat, VMFT-401 most often provides support for Marine fighter/attack squadrons, fleet replacement squadrons, and for large scale exercises, like Weapons

and Tactics Instructor Course and Marine Division Tactics Course.

A defining feature of the unit is their wealth of experience, which greatly enhances their ability to carry out this mission. Each of the pilots is seasoned, having already flown multiple tours in the fleet. “There are so many deployments in the squadron. I don’t know how many combat tours or real-world tours that we all have,” said Major Joel Adolphson, a pilot with VMFT-401. “And the goal is to use our experience, our knowledge, to better train the fleet. There are thousands of hours of experience between everybody that flies here, so we use our experience



SGT ALLISON LOTZ, USMC

Above: Four F-5N Tiger II aircraft with dissimilar camouflage paint schemes conduct a fly-by during the 2018 Yuma Airshow hosted by MCAS Yuma, Ariz., March 17, 2018. The F-5N Tiger II is a highly maneuverable and reliable fighter jet used in more than 30 countries worldwide.



SGT DENGRIER BAEZ, USMC

An F-5N Tiger II with VMFT-401 taxis after landing aboard MCAS Beaufort to support VMFAT-501 in air-to-air training in 2015.



LtCol Eric Scherrer climbs into the cockpit of an F-5F Tiger II at MCAS Yuma, Ariz., before a training exercise in 2022. The F-5F is the two-seat version of the Tiger II. VMFT-401 is the only adversary squadron with the mission to act as the opposing force in air combat. (Photo by LCpl Jade Venegas, USMC)

and expertise not only to accomplish their training, but also to increase the quality of their training.” Pilots come to the squadron from all over the Marine Corps, including from the active-duty and Reserve components, integrating the individual skills and specialties they’ve developed over the course of their careers into the mission here. Major Benjamin VanWingerden, a pilot currently assigned to VMFT-401, flew the F/A-18 in Iwakuni, Japan, before coming to the Lucky Snipers. “China was one of the threats, and it definitely ramped up while I was there,” Maj VanWingerden said, “so we had quite a few briefs when I was there. I leveraged that when I got here to try to push to the local squadrons to up their training. Because we don’t want you to go out trained to a minimal threat. That’s the mentality I bring to the Snipers—give the hardest threat available even though sometimes they don’t like it. I’d rather

★ **“Because we don’t want you to go out trained to a minimal threat. That’s the mentality I bring to the Snipers—give the hardest threat available even though sometimes they don’t like it.”**
—Maj Benjamin Van Wingerden

have them survive than get shot because they’re not upping their training.”

The squadron is also unique in its manpower. Assigned to the 4th Marine Air Wing, VMFT-401 is a reserve squadron with a roughly even mix of active duty and reserve pilots. “All of my

Reserve aircrew are also airline pilots. They’re very, very good aviators,” said LtCol Scherrer. “They add a lot of safety and a lot of maturity to the squadron, and experience that you wouldn’t always have. So, I see it as a great gift.”

Knowledge of Tactics

Adversary squadrons, and VMFT-401 in particular, are characterized by a deep knowledge of the tactics of peer and near-peer threats. This knowledge is acquired through study and experience. The pilots not only need to *know* red tactics, they need to be able to *employ* them in order to provide formative training. “I’m very fortunate because all of our pilots are very experienced. They’ve done at least one full fleet tour before they come to us. So, they’re very well versed in blue tactics, and they’re very experienced in the airplane.” said Scherrer. “They have to learn how to fly the F-5, but

they already know blue tactics, and they already have a basic understanding of what red tactics are. Then it's just a matter of taking them from the blue side and indoctrinating them into the red."

To become expert in red tactics, every pilot goes through further advanced training to hone their adversary abilities, usually including either the adversary course at the Navy Fighter Weapons School, more commonly known as TOPGUN, or through Marine Corps Weapons and Tactics Instructors Course, where they'll serve as adversary mission commanders. Each of the pilots also becomes a subject matter expert in a relevant field. "We're very closely tied in with the 64th Aggressor Squadron out of Nellis Air Force Base," said Scherrer. "They're really the red adversary subject matter experts. Every one of our pilots goes up there to be a subject matter expert in everything from doctrine, to aircraft and missiles, to tactics. So, everyone that's here, including myself, goes to train in that capacity."

After becoming a subject matter expert in a particular area, whether it's a specific aircraft or weapons system, each of 401's pilots can pass that knowledge on to

★ **"Sometimes people say 'red punishes blue mistakes.' If blue wins every time, no questions asked, what will be masked by that overall win are execution errors or things that they could have done better.**
—LtCol Michael Webb

others in the squadron and share it with other squadrons. They provide presentations on their area of expertise to pilots in the fleet and use this expertise to enhance the realism of their training scenarios. "Rarely do we have a vanilla problem for them to solve. Most of them are very difficult, especially for the weapons course," said Maj Adolphson. "It's extremely difficult sometimes, so that they're better prepared when they actually go do the real thing, if that does happen." The scenarios themselves are

not difficult just for the sake of being challenging. It's all directed toward the formation of top-of-the-line combat aviators. The squadron's pilots use their knowledge to hone the abilities of aircrews and provide them with training experiences to call back to in the future. "Sometimes people say 'red punishes blue mistakes.' If blue wins every time, no questions asked, what will be masked by that overall win are execution errors or things that they could have done better. If somebody is always telling you you're doing a great job, naturally you're going to think you're doing a great job, and you might get a little lax in your execution," said LtCol Michael Webb, VMFT-401 executive officer. "Maybe we're going to go to combat someday and that's going to bite you. So, I see us as the best way to not critique blue verbally, but to give them critiques of themselves. And to build confidence in their airframe, confidence in their weapons systems, and an understanding of what they can and can't do well. It's our job to kind of pick at that perspective that they have, figure out ways to beat them so they eventually fix that gap and then they're unbeatable."

LtCol Michael Webb, the XO of VMFT-401, conducts a briefing for pilots in the ready room before participating in a training exercise.



LCPL JADE VENEGAS, USMC

Captive Air Training Missiles allow the Lucky Snipers to simulate attacks on “blue” aircraft.



LCPL ASHLEY PHILLIPS, USMC



LCPL JADE VENEGAS, USMC

Marcel Gaud is a Marine veteran who has been a maintainer with VMFT-401 since 1987.

Maintainers

The pilots aren't the only ones at VMFT-401 with a wealth of experience and expertise. The squadron's maintainers are civilian contractors, many of whom have been working with the squadron's F-5s for well over 20 years. "We've still got maybe 12 or 15 guys that have been here since 1989," said Marcel Gaud, who has been a maintainer with VMFT-401 since July 1987. He and the other maintainers credit much of their success to this longevity. They're experts with the airframe, and they work well as a team, drawing on each other's strengths to keep the squadron flying. Like many of the other maintainers, Gaud is a veteran Marine, having served with VMAT-102 from 1983-1986 in the same hangar he works in today. "It's longevity ... most of us are Marines here. I really think that that has something to do with it. Most of us are former jarheads, and we have the bar pretty high." Many of the maintainers are also able to cross-train in positions besides their own and qualify to operate in positions besides their regular specialty. Their work exceeds expectations, and it allows the squadron to keep up an incredible mission capable rate for their

This F-5N Tiger II is flown by a VMFT-401 pilot during the Marine Division Tactics Course at MCAS Beaufort, Jan. 26, 2017. VMFT-401 provided adversary air while the MAWTS-1 instructor pilots taught and evaluated F/A-18 pilots during the exercise.



LCPL ASHLEY PHILLIPS, USMC

aircraft. This isn't taken for granted by the Marines of the squadron, and the pilots acknowledge the maintainers' skill as integral to their success. "Our aircraft health is very good," said LtCol Webb. "We can have a pretty robust flight schedule because we have such a good maintenance footprint." VMFT-401 hasn't had a mishap since 1995, in part because of the dedication and expertise of the maintainers. "I've seen some amazing things done by just a group of six or seven of us," said Gaud. "I'm very proud of the work we do here."

F-5 Tiger

Though the F-5 Tiger isn't a fifth-generation fighter, it lends itself incredibly well to an adversary role for fifth-generation fighters like the F-35. In addition to the exceptional skill the pilots have for mimicking adversaries, the Tiger is a platform for a handful of technologies that contribute to effective and safe training. One of these, the Tactical Combat Training System, or TCTS, allows pilots to track other aircraft in the training exercise through a TCTS pod mounted on each aircraft. The pilots also have access to "RedNet," which is tied in to the TCTS system. RedNet allows for the real time tracking of any aircraft carrying a TCTS pod, increasing situational awareness and precision during training

scenarios, but it also allows for playback. This is a valuable tool because it gives pilots an opportunity to debrief where and how they made their good shots on "blue" aircraft, enhancing the depth of understanding pilots have of their tactics, and helping them to refine their training scenarios. The enhanced situational awareness also creates a safer training environment in what can become very dynamic and crowded airspace.

And the Lucky Snipers love what they do. "It's almost like this finishing

★ "It's almost like this finishing school for not just red air, but for being a proficient aviator."

—LtCol Michael Webb

school for not just red air, but for being a proficient aviator," said Webb. "VMFT-401 is everything I ever wanted in a fighter squadron. And we don't have a gun, we don't have any missiles, we don't drop any bombs, but we get to do the fun stuff. All we do is dogfight; fight other people, fight each other, plan these large force exercises and go out and execute, and we have such a good enlisted component here. This is an awesome place to be."

Adversary units have an increased relevance as the Marine Corps looks toward the future. Later this year, VMFT-402 will be activated at MCAS Beaufort in South Carolina, increasing the availability of adversary training to squadrons across the fleet. The aircraft will also continue to develop with new technologies being integrated to provide the most realistic training available. And the Marines of VMFT-401 will continue to study, train, and perfect their role as red air, all with one goal in mind. "Just trying to polish the diamond, right?" Webb said. "That's what we're trying to do—to make them that much better so that the first time they see something in combat, they'll realize they've seen it before. We're just here to make the fleet better combat aviators in any way we can."

Author's note: Special thank you to LtCol Eric Scherrer and the Marines and civilians of VMFT-401 and MCAS Yuma for their assistance with this article.

Author's bio: Patrick Reed is a historian and graduate of Abilene Christian University. He has a particular interest in the Marine Corps and Marine Corps history and travels to speak with World War II veterans about their experiences. 🇺🇸

CAMP LEJEUNE JUSTICE ACT OF 2022



From 1953-1988 people living or working at the U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune were exposed to toxic water contaminated with harsh chemicals, benzene, solvents and more...

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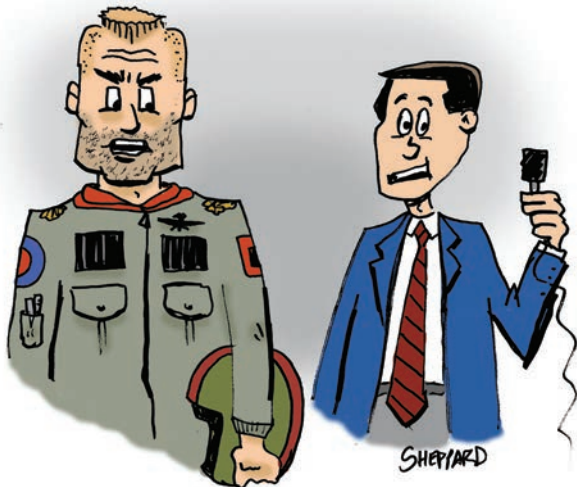
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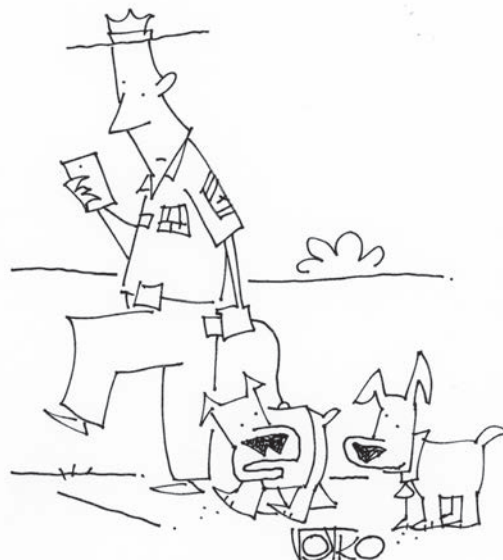


"We bombed the crap out of them. They were running and screaming like little girls. Their huts went up in flames like tinder."

"What the major means is that ordnance was released on the enemy. They executed a tactical exit while their structures were subject to extreme heat."



"Seen any action?"

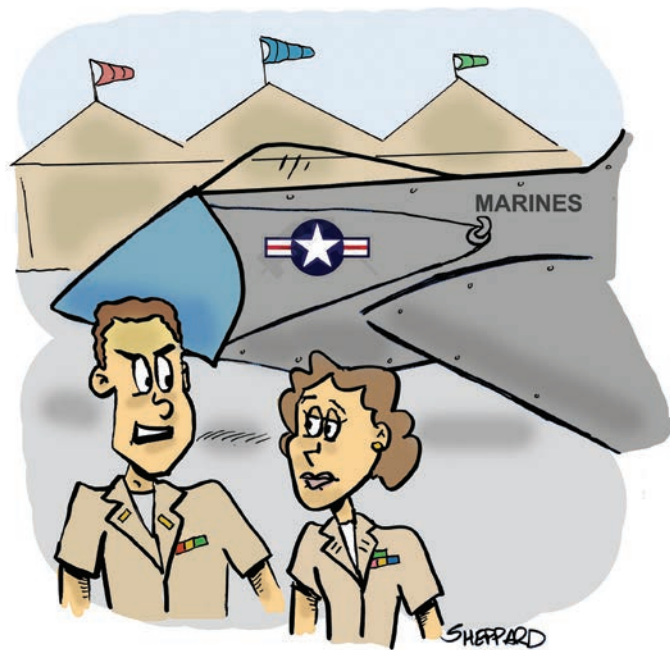


"It's never a walk, it's always a march!"

SUPPLY CLERK



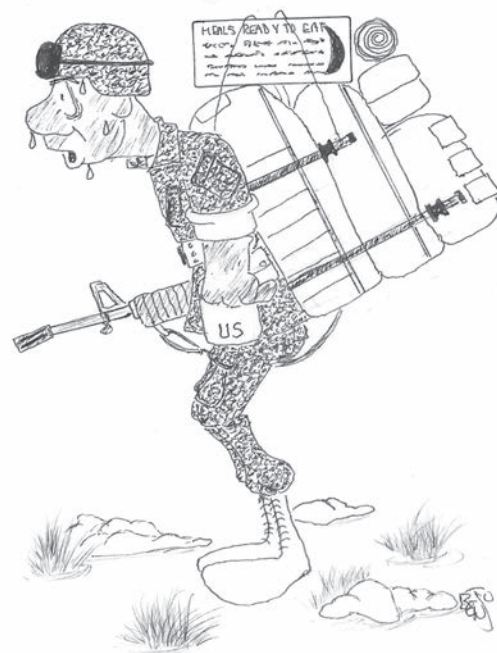
"Your uniform fits perfectly. We'll need to replace it."



"We've reduced the maintenance budget during COVID due to reduced nose art."



"Think about it. Why is it necessary to guard a base full of Marines?"



"Will someone tell the Gunny that this stopped being a little stroll 20 miles ago!"

From on High:

The Development of USMC/USN
Air-to-Ground Rockets 1941-1945



CAP 1a

By Jonathan Bernstein

Accurate, on-call firepower has been the domain of the artillery for decades. When Marines needed fire support, they called upon the big guns to suppress and destroy immovable targets with generous applications of high explosive. But as the operational realities of World War II began to crystallize in 1942, it was clear that artillery gunfire (whether artillery or naval gunfire support) would not always be available to troops on the ground.

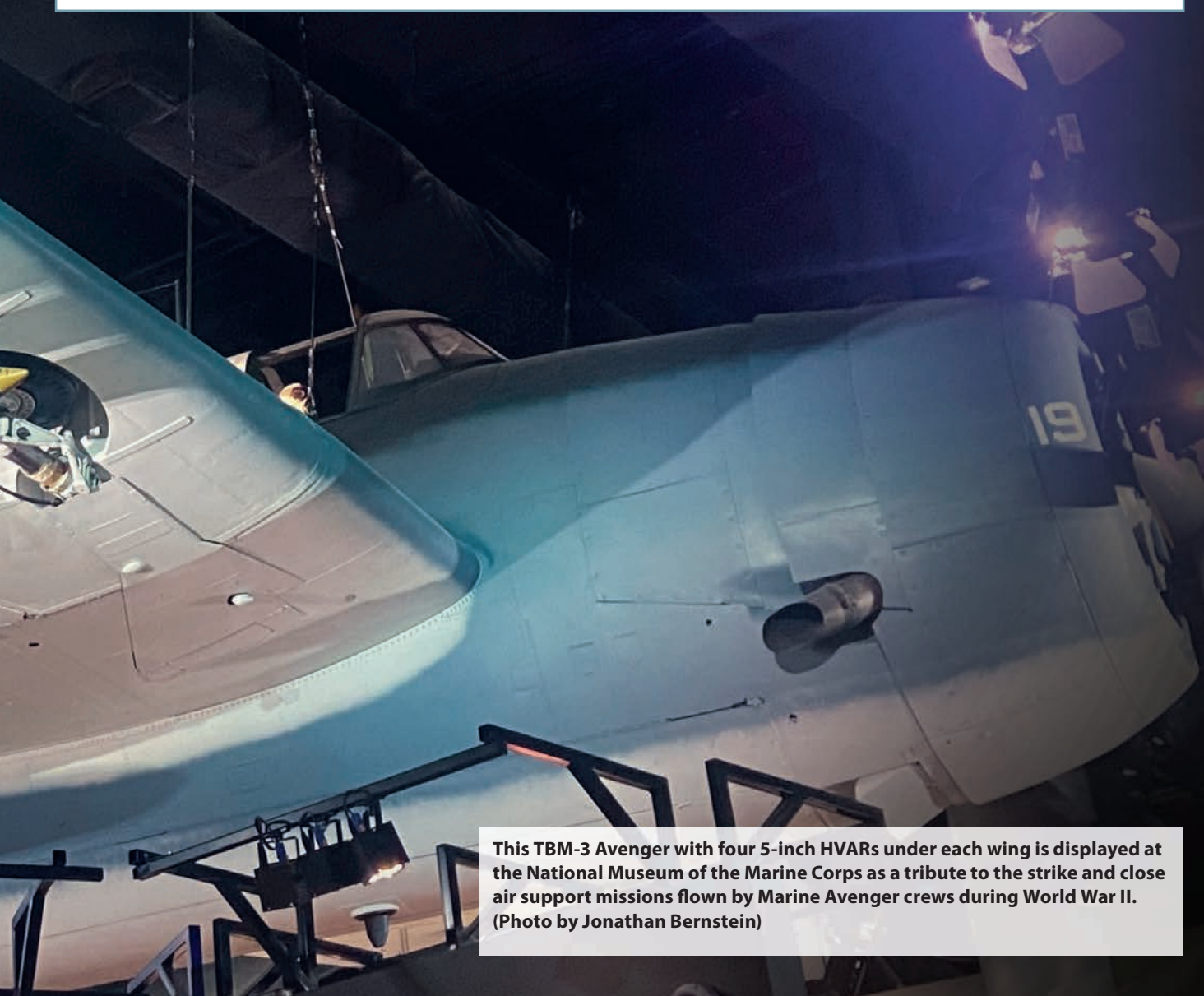
Marine air doctrine had taken lessons learned in World War I and developed an integrated plan for using aircraft in support of Marine landing operations. But Marine aircraft in the early days of World War II were limited to two methods to attack enemy ground positions by air: strafing or bombing. Strafing, or using the airplane's machine guns to attack a pinpoint target, was accurate but limited in destructive capability. Conversely, bombing was inaccurate but highly destructive. Methods of bomb delivery (dive-bombing, skip bombing, etc.) were created to improve accuracy with varying degrees of success. Dive-bombing

was the most accurate, and the Marines' ubiquitous SBD Dauntless dive bomber fought across the Pacific for the entirety of the war as a result.

Despite the improvements in bomb sighting and delivery, another weapon was needed that had the accuracy of the airplane's guns, the explosive yield of a bomb, and the impact of a battery of artillery.

Rockets had been used as artillery since the late 18th century, and by the dawning of the Second World War, the technology had advanced significantly. With the invention of the airplane and its subsequent use as a weapon of war, it did not take very long before rocket armament was tested. France and Germany met with some success with rockets in the anti-balloon role during World War I with both sides scoring some air-to-air victories with rockets. But the adoption of more reliable incendiary machine-gun ammunition made the heavier and less reliable black powder-fueled rockets obsolete.

It was not until the interwar years that U.S. scientists perfected better rocket propellants. As early as 1918, Dr. Robert Goddard was demonstrating the potential for a



This TBM-3 Avenger with four 5-inch HVARs under each wing is displayed at the National Museum of the Marine Corps as a tribute to the strike and close air support missions flown by Marine Avenger crews during World War II. (Photo by Jonathan Bernstein)



The exhaust flares of two 3.5-inch aircraft rockets are all that can be seen of the projectiles as they streak toward the German submarine U-758.

USN



JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Several types of early air-to-ground rockets are held in the collection of the National Museum of the Marine Corps. This type of armor piercing/target practice 3.5-inch rocket was used during Jan. 11 and Feb. 17 combat missions in 1944 at Keravia Bay, New Britain. Eventually, the warhead at the top was combined with a 3.5-inch motor with an adapter ring to create a forward firing aircraft rocket, which was used throughout the rest of World War II.

rocket powered antitank weapon at Aberdeen Proving Ground, the concept of which eventually led to the bazooka decade and a half later.

Propellant reliability was one of the major issues with early rockets. Due to storage and operational requirements, solid propellant was the logical choice, but getting a constant thrust burn from granular powder was difficult. The introduction of Ballistite, a singular, extruded rocket propellant was the solution. The new manufacturing technology produced a solid, one-piece propellant that could be cut to the length of the interior of the rocket motor, thereby allowing a uniform burn of the propellant and allowing the rocket (and the American rocket program) to move forward smoothly.

Of course, what happened was anything but smooth.

The Army and Navy had very different views on how to proceed with the prospect of an air-to-ground rocket. The Army was focused on tube-launched 4.5-inch rockets developed from the 4.5-inch artillery rockets that were just entering service in 1942. While the artillery rockets were spin-stabilized by angling the rocket nozzles to impart a spin on the projectile in flight (like a football spiral), the Army chose to modify the projectile design to incorporate stabilizing fins that popped out when the rocket left the tube. Fin stabilization simplified the weapon's manufacture and allowed for just a single nozzle rather than the latter's nine nozzles.

The Army's focus on tube-launched rockets added a significant amount of drag on the airframes to which they were mounted. The M8 and M10 triple rocket tubes were mounted underwing and remained on the airplane after the rockets' launch. This cut down on maneuverability and raised fuel consumption. In 1943, however, the Army's program was still moving forward full tilt.

The Navy's program took a somewhat different development tack starting in 1941 and working in tandem with the physics labs at the California Institute of Technology (CalTech) through the newly established National Defense Research Council (NDRC). Head of the NDRC's Armor and Ordnance Division was Dr. Richard Tolman, formerly of CalTech and a close friend of Dr. Charles Lauritsen, who would head up the CalTech side of the Navy rocket program.

In 1941, Tolman sent Lauritsen to the United Kingdom to be briefed on the Royal Air Force's development of the RP3 rocket projectile and attempt to secure a small number of rockets for U.S. testing. The British had converted their 3-inch antiaircraft rocket projectile into an air-to-ground weapon for the specific purpose of engaging U-boats. An accurate, high-speed projectile with an explosive or armor

piercing warhead was the ideal weapon to penetrate the pressure hull of an enemy submarine.

Lauritsen was able to secure a small number of the British RP3 rockets for testing, and the CalTech labs began study and design work on the American rocket projectile program by the end of 1941. CalTech already had a few prototypes underway, including a 7.2-inch antisubmarine rocket, 2.25-inch air-launched antisubmarine rocket, and a 3.5-inch aircraft rocket similar in design to the British RP3. With the focus on the RP3 and the 3.5-inch rocket motor, CalTech



While the Navy's development of aircraft rockets primarily took place on the West Coast, the first combat mission was flown by Avengers from VC-58 aboard the USS *Block Island* (CVE-106). LTJG Leonard McFord, right, along with his radio operator ARM3C Charles M. Gertsch, left, and gunner AMM2C William H. Ryder, center, were the first crew to fire rockets in combat. (USN photo)

followed in the British footsteps by adopting a solid armor piercing and a filled high explosive warhead for the new 3.5-inch aircraft rocket (AR).

In April 1943, the Navy was tasked with establishing a new test unit on the West Coast to support the CalTech projects and facilitate proper testing with Navy aircraft. The Experimental Unit, Headquarters Squadron, Fleet Air Wing 14 under the command of Lieutenant Commander Thomas F.



Marine Avengers based on Bougainville taxiing out on another combat mission, most likely to strike a Japanese stronghold at Rabaul.

Pollock stood up the following month. Pollock served double duty in the small unit as both the squadron commander and its chief test pilot. The composite organization fired the first 3.5-inch AR from a section of Grumman TBF Avenger wing on a ground stand on June 18, 1943. LCDR Pollock test fired a British RP3 from one of the squadron's Avengers nearly a month later on July 14. A month after that, Pollock fired the first 3.5-inch while airborne. The unit's side-by-side work with CalTech's scientists gave it a distinct advantage and allowed development to proceed quickly.

The early 3.5-inch rocket and the British RP3 used a launch rail to keep the rocket stable as it departed the aircraft. CalTech and the Experimental Unit (redesignated the Aviation Ordnance Development Unit or AODU-1 in December 1943) came up with a new design in the summer of 1943 that simplified the launch and relied on the forward

momentum of the airplane to keep the rocket on a straight course. Instead of a rail, the new launch system just had vertical posts mounted to the underside of the airplane's wing that two buttons on the rocket (one forward, one aft) would lock into. Once the rocket left the launch posts, drag would be minimized, allowing the aircraft to maneuver without penalty. The first launch from these "zero-length" launch stubs occurred on Oct. 8, 1943, when LCDR Pollock took up an F6F Hellcat fitted with the new launch stubs. The rockets performed as expected—as long as the aircraft was properly in trim. Out of trim conditions would have a significant impact on the rocket's flight path. After successful testing of the zero-length mounting stubs, both rocket and launch system were ready for full production.

By November, three squadrons were fully equipped with rockets and the hardware to launch them. Several more



VMTB-134 Aircrews: Strike on Keravia Bay, New Britain, Feb 17., 1944			
Aircraft Number	Pilot	Radio Operator	Turret Gunner
230	Maj Alben C. Robertson	Sgt John F. Dumelle	Sgt Louis C. Ballard
236	1stLt James E. Ball	PFC Richard C. Berryman	Cpl Paul K. Kane
231	1stLt Frank D. Boll	PFC Roman Bruzuskiwicz	PFC William Hickman
232	1stLt Ray T. Lemmons	Cpl Bob D. Sutton	PFC Michael J. Becher
235	1stLt William H. May	PFC John G. Hull	PFC Joseph C. McKenna

COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS

Maj Alben C. Robertson, commander of VMTB-134, led the Feb. 17 strike on Keravia Bay and was one of the first Marines to launch rockets in combat. He commanded the squadron through most of 1944 before returning to the States. He later died in the crash of a Curtiss R5C (C-46) Commando while on active duty on Dec. 10, 1946.



COURTESY OF U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY

Navy and Marine squadrons were slated to receive the new mounts and weapons as they became available. The Navy's Composite Squadron 58 (VC-58) began training with rockets that month, firing both the sub-caliber 2.25-inch training rocket and the 3.5-inch before deploying aboard USS *Bloch Island* (CVE-21) on Dec. 14 for antisubmarine duty.

The first combat use of the 3.5-inch rocket came 11 days

into the new year when two VC-58 TBF-1Cs caught a U-758 on the surface and attacked with a mix of AP and HE rockets and bombs. Lieutenant Junior Grade Leonard McFord fired the first salvo, followed closely by his wingman LTJG Willis Seeley. Both crews observed hits on the sub and claimed it sunk. However, the U-758 limped back to Sainte-Nazaire after suffering some damage from at least one rocket hit and survived until March 1945.

Meanwhile, rocket systems began arriving in the Pacific and crews hastily trained on their use. VMTB-134, which arrived at the airfield code named "Piva Uncle" at Torokina on Bougainville on Jan. 17, was the first Marine squadron to be fully outfitted and trained up on the employment of rockets. A month after they arrived on Bougainville, five Avengers would be the first American combat aircraft to carry rockets on a strike mission in the Pacific Theater.

The Japanese stronghold at Rabaul, New Britain, was a constant threat to U.S. positions to the south in the Solomon Island chain. Strikes on the air and naval facilities there had become a significant priority as Guadalcanal had been built up as the main American logistics hub in the Southwest Pacific. As U.S. forces pushed north up the Solomons chain, taking Bougainville beginning in November 1943, greater combat power could be brought to bear on Rabaul.

On the morning of Feb. 17, 1944, Commander, Naval Air, Solomons (CONAIRSOLS), ordered a 70-airplane strike on shipping in Keravia Bay off Rabaul. Three SBD and

four Avenger squadrons were tasked with the mission. Among them were five rocket-armed TBF-1Cs from VMTB-134 led by the squadron' commander, Major Alben Robertson. Like their Navy counterparts the previous month, they carried a mix of AP and HE warheads.

Takeoff was at 7:05 a.m. and the strike group formed up over Torokina heading northwest for the nearly two-hour flight, dodging bad weather all the way. A handful of Dauntless aircraft were forced to turn back along with one Avenger with an armament issue. One of the planned six Avengers from VMTB-134 didn't take off.

They climbed through 13,000 feet and crossed Rabaul before turning south and descending to 8,000 feet to begin their attack runs from the northwest on numerous cargo ships in the harbor. Maj Robertson's Avengers dove on their targets as enemy flak came up to meet them. "We fought through unusually heavy ack-ack and gained a lot of speed in a long downward glide. I was doing over 300



Below: Capt Ray T. Lemmons, a VMTB-134 pilot, flew Avenger No. 232 during the strike on Keravia Bay on Feb. 17, 1944, and was the only pilot whose airplane was hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire. He survived the war and continued serving as a Marine aviator throughout the 1950s.



COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS

A mixed weapon load of bombs and rockets was the standard for Avenger crews after their arrival at “Piva Uncle” airfield at Torokina on Bougainville, Jan. 11, 1944. This Marine Avenger was armed with eight 5-inch Forward Firing Aircraft Rockets, which incorporated a 5-inch warhead and a 3.25-inch Mk7 rocket motor in addition to four 500-pound bombs.

mph when I lined up on the ship’s superstructure. Some of my rockets exploded in the water just a few feet short of the ship. At the speed I was going, I was almost on top of the ship before I jerked the bomb lever.” While his first pair of rockets fell short, the next two pairs found their mark and the final pair went long.

First Lieutenant Ray Lemmons observed several of his rockets hit. “Coming out of the dive, I sighted in on the ships side and let the rockets go. There was a boom, then a swishing sound that I could hear over the engine. A second later I pulled the bomb lever. The rockets and bombs smacked the ship like the old one-two in boxing. The delay on the fuses gave me time to get out of range.”

Lemmons’ airplane was the only one of the five that was hit during the strike, taking hits in both wings and the cockpit. “Those [Japanese] weren’t kidding with that ack-ack. I felt one piece of shrapnel whip past my face. When I landed, I found another piece in my chute right under me!”

In all, Robertson’s Avengers confirmed that rockets from at least two of the five airplanes hit their targets. Post-strike damage assessment revealed several of the transports attacked were no longer present in the harbor and presumed

sunk. Among those was the 450-foot cargo ship that Maj Robertson had sighted in on. He likely was unaware of the impacts of his second rocket volley as they were non-explosive armor piercing rounds. The HE rounds that followed each exploded with the force of a 75 mm artillery round.

As the word of successful combat employment of the 3.5-inch AR reached higher commands, the demand for more rocket equipped squadrons skyrocketed.

By the spring of 1944, AODU-1 had successfully launched rockets from all major Navy types of combat aircraft and borrowed Army airplanes to figure out installation and handling on the three major types of Army fighters (P-38, P-47, P-51), and had all test launched from them too.

The armor-piercing variant of the 3.5-inch rocket was withdrawn from frontline service very quickly after this mission and used almost exclusively as a training rocket after that. While useful for putting holes in submarine hulls, the 3.25-inch Mark 7 rocket motor was far more effective at delivering high explosives on ground targets. AODU-1 had taken the lessons learned from the early rocket strike missions and developed the new 5-inch Forward Firing Aircraft Rocket (FFAR) which mated a Navy standard 5-inch artillery round with the Mark 7 to create a much harder hitting weapon. The 5-inch FFAR was only an interim solution, however. The increased weight both decreased velocity and caused the rockets to fall short once the motor had burned out. However, a salvo of 5-inch FFARs fired from a Marine Avenger had more explosive power than a salvo from a battery of Marine 105 mm artillery.

While the 5-inch FFAR went into production and saw

combat in both Europe and the Pacific through the rest of the war, the ultimate 5-inch rocket began test firing on March 29, 1944, when Lt Vossler fired the first example with a 5-inch Mark 1 motor from an AODU-1 F6F. By the end of the year, the most widely used rocket in the Pacific was the 5-inch High Velocity Aircraft Rocket. The HVAR's combination of 5-inch warhead and 5-inch rocket motor gave the best speed and accuracy of any U.S. rocket combination during WW II. A flight of four Marine F4U-1Ds, each armed with eight 5-inch HVARs, could provide direct-fire air support over Marines on the ground with better accuracy than a salvo from a battalion of Marine 105 mm howitzers. It would continue on as the standard air-to-ground rocket through the Korean War.

AODU-1 and CalTech went one step farther in creating a capable air to ground rocket during World War II. The purpose of the air to ground rockets was to be able to put a direct-fire artillery round accurately onto a target from an airplane. In mid-1944, someone wondered what would happen if they were able to put a 500-pound bomb on a rocket and launch it from an airplane? Thus the "Tiny Tim" rocket was born. Weighing in at nearly 1,300 pounds and carrying a 500-pound warhead, the Tiny Tim was first fired from an F4U Corsair in July 1944. Due to a number of issues during testing, the type was not declared combat ready until early 1945, but a few were fired from Marine F4Us in combat against Japanese positions on Okinawa.

After the Army saw the difference in performance between the zero length 5-inch rockets and their slower

tube launched 4.5-inchers, they formally requested to receive the new weapons as well. By mid-1944, roughly 1/3 of zero-length rocket production was allocated to Army Air Force requirements. The 9th Air Force fighter-bomber squadrons in Europe received the bulk of those, which was almost enough to equip one squadron per Fighter Group through 1944.

However, the bulk of both FFAR and HVAR production was destined for the Navy and Marine squadrons in the Pacific, where the 5-inch rockets became synonymous with late-war close air support operations against Japan.

As WW II drew to a close, 5-inch HVAR production continued. By the end of the war, nearly every type of Army, Navy and Marine tactical aircraft had been configured to carry rockets. Even as jet aircraft began arriving in frontline units in the late 1940s, the HVAR would continue to be a primary weapon system for all service branches. With the outbreak of hostilities in Korea in 1950, the 5-inch rocket again was at the forefront of close air support and battlefield interdiction missions against North Korean and Chinese forces, providing on-call, accurate, high explosive support for Marines and soldiers on the ground.

Author's bio: Jonathan Bernstein is the arms and armor curator for the National Museum of the Marine Corps. He was an Army aviation officer, flying AH-64A and D Apache attack helicopters with the 1-14th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, PA NG from 2006-2012. He is the 2023 winner of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation Robert Debs Heintz Jr. Award. 🇺🇸



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SGT PATRICK KING, USMC

Sgt Amed Issa, a rifleman with 3rd Bn, 3rd Marines performed first aid on a shooting victim while the gunman was still a present threat. His actions helped save the victim's life. Issa is currently pursuing an officer's commission through the Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program.

Marine Runs Toward the Gunfire In Waikiki Shooting

Sergeant Amed Issa, a rifleman with 3rd Bn, 3rd Marine Regiment, was at the back of a bar when loud popping sounds sent the room into chaos on Jan. 6. At first, Issa didn't understand what was happening, but when the shouting began and the mob frantically herded toward the back exit, he understood.

Issa had not intended to be in the bar. An hour earlier, he had left a local restaurant and decided to walk down the lively, Friday-night Waikiki strip. He only entered the bar to use the restroom.

"I was there for maybe three minutes when the shots began," said Issa. "I don't know how to explain it; I just acted." As the sea of people pushed toward the back, Issa moved against the crowd.

"I ran toward the shots, pushing people down to cover. It was hard to tell what was going on. I thought someone was trying to come into the bar with a gun. I ran out of the bar as the first gunman shot a man on the sidewalk at close range."

The man fell to the ground as the first of the two shooters sprinted to a waiting vehicle. The wounded man was lying on the sidewalk to Issa's left as the second shooter, located to Issa's right, began



USMC

firing frantically at the downed man. "He was shooting sporadically, toward me, but at the man—most of them [the rounds] missing the guy. He wasn't aiming; he was moving quickly back toward the car while shooting," said Issa. "It seemed to happen slow, but the whole thing happened in seconds. I immediately turned my attention to the victim on the ground."

Issa began searching the man for injuries. "He was littered with gunshot wounds," said Issa. "I removed his shirt so I could better assess the wounds on his chest." Noticing multiple shots to the torso including one of which had caused a sucking-chest wound, Issa began treating a wound that had started to pool blood.

"I applied pressure to the torso until a man came over to help. I instructed him to take my place applying pressure

so I could continue assessing the man." The man's legs also had multiple gunshot wounds with the right leg in worse condition.

"I took off my shirt and did my best to makeshift a tourniquet. I was yelling for a pen or fork, anything really, so I could cinch it down even tighter."

Issa used a fork to cinch down the makeshift tourniquet and held it shut with his hands. He used his knees for applied pressure while verbally assuring the man everything would be OK. He kept talking to the victim, asking questions to ensure he did not close his eyes.

"Two police officers arrived on the scene. They were asking me where the shooter was. I told them they'd left. I asked them for their tourniquets; I told them I was a Marine."

Issa applied the real tourniquets to

both legs. “My friend had come out and helped apply a chest seal. Then a nurse came over and helped us apply pressure to the wounds. I was able to get gauze and was able to fill most of the wounds,” said Issa. “A police medic arrived shortly later and checked that we’d applied everything correctly.” After a few more minutes, an ambulance arrived, and emergency medical professionals rapidly evacuated the victim to a higher level of care.

“At the beginning, when I saw everyone get down and I heard the shots, I didn’t think, ‘I should get up and help.’ I just started running that way. It just felt like training,” said Issa. “I tuned out the fact that there were two shooters, and they were shooting while I was outside.”

“It takes tremendous courage to do what Sgt Issa did,” said Lieutenant Colonel Felix Guerra, Issa’s former battalion commander. “Despite being off duty and on liberty, he still acted like a Marine. While most ran for safety, Sgt Issa ran toward the fight; he ran into the chaos. He risked his life and took action for a complete stranger. He embodied what it means to be a Marine.”

Issa graduated from the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School in August 2022 as part of the Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program. MECEP is an enlisted-to-officer commissioning program designed to provide outstanding enlisted Marines the opportunity to serve as Marine Corps officers. Issa is currently applying to universities and will begin his college education this fall.

1stLt Isaac Liston, USMC

Veteran Remembers Battle of Khe Sanh

This year the Marine Corps commemorates 55 years since the Battle of Khe Sanh, which lasted from Jan. 21 to March 31, 1968. Khe Sanh Combat Base gained worldwide attention as roughly 6,000 Marines defending the base were encircled and besieged by three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiments. For 77 days, the Marines and their South Vietnamese counterparts, with support from a contingent of U.S. Army soldiers and U.S. Air Force bombers, endured one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War. Among the Marines defending the base was Sergeant Ronald Echols, who served with Company M, 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines, 3rd Marine Division on Hill 881 South.

“We had Marines at Hill 661, and we had Marines at a radio relay tower, which was on Hill 950, and my company was on 881S,” said Echols. “There were two 881s, 881 South and 881 North. We maintained those hills because we wanted to keep

the high ground away from the North Vietnamese that overlooked Khe Sanh.”

North Vietnamese forces conducted a massive artillery bombardment on Khe Sanh, located just 10 miles from the Sepon River, which marked the border between Laos and South Vietnam. “I remember that during dawn it would still be foggy and as soon as the fog burned up, they would start hitting us with mortars and artillery. If there was daylight, we would get hit,” Echols said.

Due to the constant attacks, Marines at Khe Sanh faced significant supply challenges, but their training helped them find ways to capture water and overcome the lack of supplies. “For the first 30 days they couldn’t get us resupplied; seven helicopters got shot down bringing supplies into us,” said Echols. “We went nine days one time without anything to eat. Fortunately, with the thick fog, we were able to spread plastic down the hill and catch condensation. We needed to have about two 12-ounce cans of water to last until the next morning, but guys were still dehydrated, they weren’t getting enough to drink.”

During the siege, Marines created an air delivery method called a “super gaggle” to provide supplies to areas cut off from land supply routes after several aircraft were lost during resupply missions. The super gaggle method coordinated air and artillery strikes to occur simultaneously

during resupply missions, providing a shield for aircraft delivering much needed ammunition, food, water and evacuating the wounded.

“The air wing came up with the idea they could come in and bring jets in and bomb, then come around the hill, put up a smoke screen, and then the helicopters would come in five-at-a-time with the resupplies; they looked like geese coming through there, so they called it the super gaggle, and that’s how they started getting us resupplied,” said Echols.

Echols added that helicopters often had just 20 seconds to land, evacuate the wounded, and get airborne before the mortar attacks resumed. Echols also remembers the air support provided by American bombers and how close they were to his positions on Hill 881S.

“We had a couple of North Vietnamese soldiers surrender. We asked them why they surrendered, and they just pointed up to the sky,” said Echols. “You just can’t imagine what these B-52s do. They called it an Arc Light, and they would just drop hundreds of bombs out of one plane, and there was three or four planes at one time. It was just devastating.”

By the end of the battle, U.S. Air Force assets had flown more than 9,000 sorties and dropped 14,223 tons of bombs on targets within the Khe Sanh area. It would not be until April 14, 1968, that Marines from 3rd Marine Division, soldiers from



2ndLt Ronald Echols gives a watch to 1stLt Mike Bonacci as they reunite on Jan. 29, 2020, after serving together in Khe Sanh, Vietnam. During the battle, Bonacci was medically evacuated and gave Echols his watch, saying he wouldn’t need it in the hospital. Echols conducted an internet search and found Bonacci in the Fredericksburg area. Echols lost the original watch but replaced it with the one in the photo which has the eagle, globe and anchor. Echols received the Bronze Star and a battlefield commission for his actions during the Battle of Khe Sanh.



BILL INGALLS, NASA

Joe Acaba served in the Marine Corps Reserve prior to joining NASA's astronaut corps in 2004. After nearly 20 years with the agency and three missions for a total of 306 days in space, Acaba is taking over as NASA's chief astronaut.

the U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division, and South Vietnamese soldiers would be able to break through and push back NVA forces from the area. Khe Sanh would continue to see combat until the end of July 1968, after which the base was destroyed and abandoned by American forces.

“On April 14th, my company moved off of the hill, and they had showers set up outside for us,” said Echols. “You get a bond with your fellow Marines that’s indescribable. I’ve got two brothers, but I’ve never had with them the bond I had with the guys I was in combat with. They were my brothers.”

Echols received a battlefield commission and the Bronze Star for his actions during the Battle of Khe Sanh. According to his Bronze Star Medal citation, “On numerous occasions, SSgt Echols served as a platoon commander, a billet normally assigned to a commissioned officer, and repeatedly disregarded his own safety to maneuver his unit against the enemy. While his company was deployed on Hill 881 South during the siege of Khe Sanh, he worked tirelessly to ensure the safety and welfare of his men despite constant North Vietnamese mortar and artillery fire.”

Petty Officer 1st Class Pedro Rodriguez,
USN

Editor’s Note: Stay tuned for a Leatherneck feature article later this year covering Ron Echols and the Battle of Khe Sanh.

Marine Reservist to Serve as NASA’s Chief Astronaut

NASA has selected veteran astronaut Joe Acaba as chief of the Astronaut Office at the agency’s Johnson Space Center in Houston. A decorated veteran of multiple spaceflights as well a veteran Marine and former educator, Acaba is the first person of Hispanic heritage selected to lead the office.

“Congratulations to Joe Acaba on being named the new chief of the astronaut office! Joe is an experienced space flyer and a proven leader, and he will undoubtedly inspire the next generation of NASA astronauts. As we build on the International Space Station’s unparalleled success in low-Earth orbit with our eyes on the Moon and then Mars, Joe will play an integral role in ensuring our NASA astronauts are prepared for the challenges ahead,” said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

In his new role, Acaba will be responsible for managing astronaut resources and operations. He also will help develop astronaut flight crew operation concepts and make crew assignments for future spaceflight missions, including astronauts assigned to fly on Artemis missions. A veteran of three spaceflights, Acaba was born in Inglewood, Calif. He earned a bachelor’s degree in geology at University of California in Santa Barbara, one master’s degree in geology from the University of Arizona, and another master’s in education, curriculum and instruction from Texas Tech University, Lubbock. Before his selection as an astronaut

candidate in 2004, Acaba spent time in the Marine Corps Reserves and the Peace Corps, worked as a hydrogeologist, and taught high school and middle school.

“Joe is an excellent leader who brings a wealth of experience to the Astronaut Office,” said NASA’s Director of Flight Operations Norm Knight, who made the selection. “Knowing the significance of this position and the integrity of those who have previously served, I am confident Joe will be an outstanding chief for the Astronaut Office who will successfully lead our astronauts through an exciting future.”

During his NASA career, Acaba spent 306 days in space, serving as mission specialist on Space Shuttle Discovery’s STS-119 mission and as flight engineer aboard the International Space Station for Expeditions 31 and 32 in 2012, as well as Expeditions 53 and 54 in 2017-2018. During that time, he took part in three spacewalks building and upgrading the space station, supported the arrival of the first commercial resupply spacecraft, SpaceX’s Dragon, in May 2012. He was aboard the station when its standard crew complement increased from three to six, enabling NASA and its international partners to double the amount time dedicated to research. Since returning to Earth, he has supported the astronaut office in a number of roles, including director of operations in Russia, and chief of the Vehicle Integration Test Office.

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“The Gift”

Revealing the Lasting Impact of Corporal Jason Dunham

By Kyle Watts

In 2003, film producer and director David Kniess caught a red-eye flight from California, bound for the East Coast. A young Marine took the seat next to him. They struck up a conversation, and Kniess soon abandoned any thought of sleeping on the plane.

“He was just one of those people that you meet, and you immediately know there’s something special about them,” Kniess recalled in a recent interview. “Very courteous, charismatic; one of those people you meet, and you don’t want the conversation to end.”

The two stayed up talking through the night as the flight crossed the country. Kniess learned the young man’s name was Jason Dunham. He would soon be deploying to combat with “Kilo” Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. When the plane landed and they caught different connecting flights, Kniess shook Dunham’s hand and told him to take care of himself.

Several months later, in May 2004, Kniess received a call from a friend.

“Did you see *The Wall Street Journal* today?”

“No, why?”

“Remember that kid you told me about? Do you know what he did? Go get the paper.”

Kniess picked up a copy and saw Dunham’s portrait on the front page. He read on to learn

how Dunham had been gravely wounded in Iraq and died eight days later after smothering a grenade with his Kevlar helmet to save the lives of two of his Marines.

Kniess wrote a short story about his experience meeting Dunham on the flight and published it online. The story made its way to Jason’s parents, Deb and Dan Dunham, in Scio, N.Y. Before long, Kniess found a voicemail on his phone from Dunham’s mother. He initially ignored the message. What would he say to her?

When she called again, he realized he could not continue putting off the conversation. Kniess returned the Dunhams’ call, speaking with them about the story he wrote and reminiscing about their son. A friendship developed quickly, and within a month, Kniess was on his way to their home in western New York.


The relationship with the Dunham family expanded in the following months. In September 2004, Kniess met Dunham’s fellow Marines as they returned from their deployment in Iraq. He listened to their stories and learned the full details of what Dunham had done and became determined to create a documentary about Dunham and the Marines who served with him.

As the years passed, he maintained a close relationship with the Dunham family and the



Dan Dunham, left, adopted Jason as a baby. He and his wife, Deb, right, raised Jason in Scio, N.Y., with his siblings. In the film, Dan and Deb recount Jason’s history, what drove him to the Corps, how he grew into the selfless and charismatic man that he became.

COURTESY OF THREE BRANCHES PRODUCTIONS, LLC

A composite image featuring a young man in a Marine uniform and a close-up of a camouflage uniform with a name tag. The man is wearing a white officer's cap with the Marine Corps emblem and a dark blue band. He has a serious expression. The background is a blurred camouflage pattern. In the foreground, a name tag with the name "DUNHAM" is visible on a camouflage uniform. The text is overlaid on the image.

In the years following Jason's death, the Dunham family donated several items to the collection of artifacts housed at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, including his woodland MARPAT blouse. (Photo by Kyle Watts)

Marines Dunham served alongside. One by one they left the Marine Corps, while Kniess waited for the right time to tell Dunham's story.

Shortly before Kniess met Dunham's family and began developing relationships with his Marines, he had worked on a separate documentary covering Vietnam veterans in the battle of Khe Sanh. One of the Marines being interviewed, a Bronze Star with "V" recipient named Bob Arotta, struggled as he recounted the friends he'd lost.

"He told me some very graphic stories from his time during the siege," Kniess remembered. "He told me, 'You know, the things that happened then affect me more now than on the day they happened.' That message was fresh in my mind as these guys started coming home from the war. I kept thinking, when is that day going to come for them? They were still in the Marine Corps. They still had the

brotherhood. But I knew that day would come when the full effect of the war would hit them, and I worried about all of them. Sure enough, over the years I've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. A lot of these guys are doing great now, but some of them aren't with us anymore. It got to a point where they became old enough and a lot of this reflection had already happened."

In 2020, 16 years after Dunham's death, Kniess felt that enough time had passed, and it was time to tell the story. Not just the story of Dunham's service and heroism, but also how his actions formed the foundation of life-altering events for so many others who served with him. Filming and production of the documentary began despite significant delays brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic. Travel and gatherings were restricted, but the team found a way to make it work as they



LCpl Bill Hampton (left) and PFC Kelly Miller (right) fought alongside Dunham in Iraq and were wounded in the grenade blast that Dunham smothered with his Kevlar helmet. These Marines, along with numerous others from Kilo, 3/7, share the gripping details of what Dunham did on Apr. 14, 2004, and how his sacrifice changed their lives. (Photos courtesy of Three Branches Productions, LLC)

traveled around the nation interviewing everyone necessary to tell the story.

The film opens with Dunham's family background. Dan and Deb Dunham are not his biological parents, and the film details how Dan came to adopt him. From a young age, Dunham learned what responsibility and a strong work ethic looked like as he watched over his younger brother and worked with his father on a dairy farm. His parents encouraged Dunham's enlistment in the Marines. They understood, even before he graduated high school, Dunham needed a challenge to thrive; not a contest against others, but to continually challenge himself.

"We get a lot of credit for what he did," Deb Dunham states in the film. "We don't deserve that. We sent them [the Marine Corps] a young man that had a lot of good values. He went to the Marine Corps and the seeds that we prayed we had planted and would [grow] well, they blossomed, and the Marines polished what we gave them. Whenever people would say, 'Are you a Marine?' Jason would flash that grin and say, 'You bet your sweet ass I am.' He was proud of it. He was a Devil Dog, and that was what he wanted to be and do."

The film proceeds into Dunham's service in the Corps and eventual deployment to Iraq with Kilo, 3/7. One lesser-known fact emerges from the film; Dunham extended his enlistment so he could deploy to Iraq with his Marines.

The documentary covers the details of Dunham's heroism and the events leading up to his final act of smothering a grenade with his Kevlar helmet. The two Marines next to him that day, Private First Class Kelly Miller and Lance Corporal Bill Hampton, describe what happened and reflect on Dunham's his actions, as he traded his life for theirs. Other Marines who watched Dunham's patrol leave the wire that day reveal the aftermath of the loss and how the details of his actions came to light. Stunning images of Dunham's



Sgt Mark Dean, right, one of Dunham's close friends, and Maj Trent Gibson, left, Dunham's former company commander, carefully sort the pieces of the Kevlar helmet Dunham used to absorb the blast of a grenade in Iraq. The pair delivered the helmet to the National Museum of the Marine Corps in 2009 to be displayed. (Photo by PFC Michael Gams, USMC)



helmet, ripped to shreds, play alongside Marines' descriptions of how they tried to process the day.

Much of the later portions of the film demonstrate precisely how Dunham's actions continue to impact a growing number of people. Many of the Marines interviewed have battled guilt and post-traumatic stress. Dan Dunham describes his own bout with guilt following his decision to take his son off life support eight days after he was wounded.

Another perspective offered by the documentary comes from the spouse of a Marine who served with Dunham in Iraq. Becky Dean, the ex-wife of Marine veteran Mark Dean, participated in the film and described her former husband's significant battle with PTSD in the years following his deployment in the hope of helping to demonstrate the tragic effects of war on the families back home.

"A lot of people don't realize that PTSD is transferred to the kids and spouse," said Knies. "Especially the spouses. They are front and center. They get the brunt of it. Having Becky's story included is something I think a lot of people out there will relate to."

Perhaps the most powerful part of the story centers on a Kilo 3/7 reunion organized for the film. In September 2021, 3/7 Marines from across the nation gathered in the Dunhams' driveway in New York before marching to the local cemetery where Dunham is buried. The candid remarks captured for the film on that occasion are both heartbreaking and inspiring, revealing the true extent to which Jason Dunham impacted the people who had the privilege of knowing him.

The production crew endured numerous hardships and setbacks filming during the pandemic but despite these challenges, Knies reflected that the most difficult part of making the documentary was conducting the interviews. Month after month, interview after interview, Knies and his team relived Dunham's story with Kilo 3/7 veterans around the nation. Each time felt like opening an old wound. He knew it would be difficult for the Marines to relive that day. Knies did not fully expect the emotional toll it would take on him. He saw it in the faces of his team as well. Tears flowed freely on multiple occasions, and heavy-hearted interviews ended with the team hugging

In September 2021, Marines of Kilo, 3/7, gathered for a reunion in Dunham's hometown of Scio, N.Y. The film captures their candid remarks as they remember Dunham's sacrifice and follows them as they marched to the local cemetery where Dunham is buried to pay their respects. (Photo courtesy of Three Branches Productions, LLC)



Sailors aboard the Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer USS Jason Dunham (DDG-109) on Dec. 2, 2018, while deployed in the Mediterranean Sea.

the interviewee one by one and thanking them for sharing their story.

Healing emerged through the pain, however. The process of reliving and celebrating Dunham's story held enormous therapeutic value for some. Jason Sanders, one of the Marines with Dunham on his final patrol in Iraq, offers a profoundly insightful view during his interview in the film.

"It's kind of hard to give up your stories to someone who has never been involved in anything like that," Sanders says. "It's real hard to, because you're sitting there wondering, I don't think they're really comprehending what the hell I'm saying, you know? And you can't expect anybody else to know the feelings that you felt that day, because it's not normal. You kind of have to let your guard down and let people help you."

The difficulty of the interviews also played a role in naming the film. One of the cameramen working on the production team spent time as a combat photographer in Iraq, Afghanistan, and, most recently, Syria in 2018. The interviews with Dunham's Marines brought back gruesome mem-

ories of his time as a combat photographer and drove him to tears.

"You need to call this thing 'The Gift,'" he told Kniess one day after an interview concluded. "What Jason did was a gift. You've got children being born, families being started, and people who were able to go on and do things with their lives because of this gift." As Kniess expanded the interviews, more and more people referred to "the gift" that Dunham had given them. By the time filming was complete, there could be no other title.

Dunham is recognized today through many tributes. Most notably, the U.S. Navy named a guided missile destroyer in his honor, USS *Jason Dunham* (DDG-109). Even so, in the years since he became the first Marine to receive the Medal of Honor since Vietnam, Dunham's story has been largely overshadowed by later recipients perhaps because a surprising number of Medal of Honor recipients from the global war on terrorism survived to receive their medals.

"The Gift" documentary succeeds in rejuvenating Dunham's story in a moving and relevant way.



MC2 JONATHAN CLAY, USN

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor (posthumously) to
CORPORAL JASON DUNHAM
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
for service set forth in the following citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Rifle Squad Leader, 4th Platoon, Company K, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines (Reinforced), Regimental Combat Team 7, First Marine Division (Reinforced), on 14 April 2004, Corporal Dunham's squad was conducting a reconnaissance mission in the town of Karabilah, Iraq, when they heard rocket-propelled grenade and small arms fire erupt approximately two kilometers to the west. Corporal Dunham led his Combined Anti-Armor Team towards the engagement to provide fire support to their Battalion Commander's convoy, which had been ambushed as it was traveling to Camp Husaybah. As Corporal Dunham and his Marines advanced, they quickly began to receive enemy fire. Corporal Dunham ordered his squad to dismount their vehicles and led one of his fire teams on foot several blocks south of the ambushed convoy. Discovering seven Iraqi vehicles in a column attempting to depart, Corporal Dunham and his team stopped the vehicles to search them for weapons. As they approached the vehicles, an insurgent leaped out and attacked Corporal Dunham. Corporal Dunham wrestled the insurgent to the ground and in the ensuing struggle saw the insurgent release a grenade. Corporal Dunham immediately alerted his fellow Marines to the threat. Aware of the imminent danger and without hesitation, Corporal Dunham covered the grenade with his helmet and body, bearing the brunt of the explosion and shielding his Marines from the blast. In an ultimate and selfless act of bravery in which he was mortally wounded, he saved the lives of at least two fellow Marines. By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty, Corporal Dunham gallantly gave his life for his country, thereby reflecting great credit upon himself and upholding the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.



The Marines interviewed unanimously echo a resounding fact; Dunham's sacrifice affects them more now than it did the day it happened. "There are two things I want people to get from this documentary," Kniess said. "The general public, I want them to gain a better understanding of what it's like for Marines and Soldiers to go to war, what they experience, and how it affects them. Everyone in uniform these days has had the experience of someone coming up to them and saying, 'Thank you for your service.' I don't think a lot of people who do that really understand what those words mean. I don't blame them or fault them for that. I think it's great they take the time to say it, but I hope people will watch this film so the next time they say it, they will better understand what those words mean.

"As for the veteran community, I know there are still guys out there struggling. There's going to be someone out there watching this, and they're going to learn about some of the guys we interviewed, the drug addiction, all the things they went through, and how they turned their lives around. I'm hoping

that veterans like that will watch this and think, 'Well, if they did it, why can't I?'"

"The Gift" was produced by Three Branches Productions, LLC, a veteran-owned production company. The company was founded by three veterans: Kniess, who served in the Navy; Vincent Vargas, an Army Ranger; and Anthony Taylor, a Marine. The fourth member of the team, a civilian, is executive producer Chase Peel. "The Gift" won Best Documentary at the Utah Film Festival in January, has been invited to the GI Film Festival in San Diego, Calif., taking place this month. Kniess received the Santini Patriot Spirit Award at the Beaufort International Film Festival in February for his role as director, and the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation's Major Norman Hatch Award for best documentary feature. Three Branches produced two versions of the story, a two-hour feature length film, and a five-part series. "The Gift" will release on streaming media in spring 2023. Visit www.watchthegift.com for updated information about the release date. 🇺🇸

Casa Grande, Ariz.

Marine Corps Detachment 901 Pays Tribute to Marine Veteran

On Monday, Jan. 23, Casa Grande Marine Corps League Detachment 901 partnered with Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1677 to pay tribute to retired Casa Grande Police Department Deputy Chief and Marine veteran Reginald Winston for more than 40 years of combined service to his country as a Marine, Arizona Army National Guardsman, and dedicated police officer. Winston served in Mexico and the Ivory Coast as a Marine Security Guard and during Operation Iraqi Freedom where he was awarded the Bronze Star for exceptional meritorious service. After his military career, he spent the next decades with CGPD.

"The recognition meant the world to me because it's a community thing with the Marine Corps League and the VFW coming together to recognize my achievements over my career," Winston said. "It's also about the people that I've been with, the people that I've worked with and the mentors that I've had." Among the attendees were VFW Commander Hugues Byrne, far right, CGPD Chief Mark McCrory, right, Arizona Department MCL Commandant Roger Smith, center left, and MCL Detachment 901 Commandant Frank Alger,



JODIE NEWELL

far left, who cited Winston's achievements during the award ceremony. Winston was presented with a Marine Corps League Lifetime Achievement certificate and a championship belt as acknowledgment of his exceptional service.

Submitted by Frank Alger

Selbyville, Del.

First State Detachment Packs Food Boxes For Christmas

On Dec. 21, 2022, members of the Marine Corps League First State Detachment joined 150 other community volunteers at the Mountaire Farms facility in Selbyville, Del., to pack 3,000 boxes of food to feed more than 12,000 people for the company's Christmas program. The Christmas program is a part of a larger program called Thanksgiving for Thousands, which serves meals for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Mountaire Farms is the fourth largest producer of chicken in the United States, and their food programs have fed millions for more than 25 years. Each box contained a Mountaire roast chicken, canned corn, green beans, yams, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, and brownie mix for dessert, with portions big enough to feed a family of four. Volunteers from First State Detachment are pictured from the left: Tom Redding, Bob Broderick, Milt Warren, Rick Schumann, Gene Dankewicz, Don Coffin, as well as Delaware State Representative and retired Colonel Jeff Holovsky. The Marine Corps League First State Detachment



ED PINTO

is a non-profit organization that raises funds to support local community service programs in the Worcester and Sussex counties in Delaware.

Submitted by Ed Pinto

Fayetteville, N.C.



The Montford Point Marines were presented with the Congressional Gold Medal at a ceremony in the U.S. Capitol on June 27, 2012, in recognition of their service and sacrifice during World War II.



Montford Point Marine, Three-War Veteran Honored in North Carolina

On Jan. 12, Lieutenant General Walter E. Gaskin, USMC (Ret), Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NCDMVA) paid tribute to original Montford Point Marine and World War II Veteran, Cosmas D. Eaglin Sr., of Fayetteville, N.C., with a certificate of appreciation and the department's challenge coin. Eaglin's family was present for the gathering where the 108-year-old veteran was delighted to receive the recognition of his service.

Born Jan. 12, 1915, Eaglin joined the Marine Corps when he was 27. He completed training at Camp Montford Point, in Jacksonville, N.C., and was one of the first 300 Black recruits to break the color barrier in the Marine Corps after President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an Executive Order establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941.

Eaglin served two years in the Solomon Islands campaign during World War II. After WW II, Eaglin left the Marine Corps but returned to active-duty service and earned his paratrooper wings after joining the Army during the Korean War. He was assigned to Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1951 and later served two tours in Vietnam .

"When I learned of Mr. Eaglin and his service to our country, I found it truly admirable and an inspiration," said Gaskin, "As an original Montford Point Marine, he endured unimaginable obstacles in the segregated Marine Corps. Because he was a Marine, I am able to be a Marine. His contributions to the nation and the Marine Corps will be remembered and his legacy will live on for generations to come."

NCDMVA

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



RAY SHINOHARA

Calling themselves “Team Long Road,” SgtMaj Coleman “Rocky” Kinzer, USMC (Ret), left, and SgtMaj Justin D. LeHew, USMC (Ret), walked from Boston, Mass., to Newport, Ore., in remembrance of our nation’s prisoners of war, those missing and killed in action, and their Gold Star families.

THE LONG ROAD

Marines Walk from East Coast to West Coast To Raise Awareness, Money for MIA Recovery

By Nancy S. Lichtman

Early in 2020, Sergeant Major Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret) had an idea. It was a big idea. For anyone who knows LeHew, that’s no surprise. He wanted to take a rather unique road trip with his close friend and fellow Marine, SgtMaj Coleman “Rocky” Kinzer, USMC (Ret). The plan was to take a trip across America. They would be cycling with some hiking mixed in. And along the way, they would visit tourist destinations to check some of the boxes that had been missed during their busy years on active duty. Slowly an

idea began to take shape. Not only would they see America, but they planned to use the trip to raise awareness of Missing in Action (MIA) servicemembers and raise funds for History Flight, the nonprofit MIA recovery organization for which LeHew is the chief operations officer and Kinzer is the deputy operations officer.

Kinzer and LeHew started training for the journey, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to put their plans on hold—for two years. LeHew couldn’t let go of the idea, though, and in late spring 2022, he decided that it was now or never.

On June 6, 2022, LeHew and Kinzer finally took their first steps on a journey

that took them from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. In an adventure that they dubbed, “The Long Road,” the two Marines walked from Boston, Mass., to Newport, Ore., along U.S. Route 20. It took more than six months for them to cover the 3,365 miles on foot, and they arrived in Oregon on Dec. 17, 2022, where a crowd had gathered to cheer for LeHew, Kinzer and Ray Shinohara, a fellow Marine who joined his friends in Illinois.

Some of the specifics of the original plan changed—including the route and what “bucket list” items they would check off along the way—but perhaps



U.S. Route 20 goes through 12 states including: Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and Oregon.



SGTMJAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

Left: SgtMaj Justin LeHew, left, and SgtMaj Coleman "Rocky" Kinzer departed Boston on June 6 for a 6 1/2 month trek across the country.



SGTMJAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)



Team Long Road raised \$250,000 for History Flight. To donate to History Flight visit: www.historyflight.com/donate or www.teamlongroad.com/donate.

Boston

Above: Russ and Kim Hansen were the team's "Iowa family;" they bought the team replacement shoes and drove more than two hours to bring Kinzer his shoes, which had to be special ordered.

the biggest change was the mode of transportation. They didn't use bicycles; instead, they *walked* the entire coast to coast route.

U.S. Route 20 is the longest highway in the United States and goes through small towns and vast areas of farmland into the heart of America. Access to those small towns and farms is exactly why LeHew chose this route because one thing that didn't change from his original vision is the two overarching themes that were guiding and motivating the Marines during their odyssey: raising funds for History Flight and raising awareness about the more than 80,000 servicemembers from throughout the nation still unaccounted for.

History Flight is a nonprofit MIA recovery organization dedicated to locating and recovering U.S. military personnel previously deemed unrecoverable. LeHew has been with the organization since his 2018 retirement from the Marine Corps. Kinzer joined the group after he retired in 2019, and Shinohara will soon begin work as a History Flight team lead on Betio Island where recovery of Marines who were killed in the Battle of Tarawa is ongoing. History Flight teams combine historical and archival infor-



BENJIE KING

LeHew, left, Shinohara, center, and Kinzer reached the West Coast end of U.S. Route 20 on Dec. 17, 2022. The three Marines have known each other since they served together in 2009.



COURTESY OF SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

Above: The 3,365-mile journey took the Marines through small towns all across America. To carry supplies during the early part of the trip, LeHew modified a cart normally used for bicyclists.



SgtMaj Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret) is the National Commander of the Legion of Valor. For more information visit www.legionofvalor.org.



USMC

Above: When SgtMaj LeHew and Shinohara served together in 2011, they participated in the funeral of a Marine who was aboard USS Arizona (BB-39) when Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941.

Left: SgtMaj Justin LeHew received the Navy Cross for his actions in An Nasiriyah in 2003.

mation with technologies such as ground penetrating radar surveys, magnetometry and forensic archaeology to conduct searches. They currently have a 93 percent success rate in locating the remains they have searched for.

LeHew, a recipient of the Navy Cross for his actions with Task Force Tarawa on March 23, 2003, in An Nasiriyah, Iraq, chose to depart on the anniversary of D-Day for a few reasons. He didn't want to leave on Memorial Day so as not to detract from the solemnity of the day. "On Memorial Day there should be an attention on the people of this nation who

gave everything ... it shouldn't be the kickoff date to highlight somebody else's thing," he said. "I want to spend that day in silent remembrance ... thinking about my buddies," added LeHew, who is the National Commander of the Legion of Valor organization.

LeHew also had a more personal reason for choosing D-Day to begin walking. He thought it would be a good way to honor the memory of his father who served in the Army during World War II and participated in the D-Day landings. "On 6 June 1944, my father was a PFC in the 29th Infantry that came out of the front

end of an LCVP [Landing Craft, Vehicle Personnel] ... and he managed to cross Omaha Beach ... and survive," LeHew said, adding that his father and the others of his generation "came home [after the war] and built these roads, worked in these towns, and made the America of today for all of us that are sitting here today."

Kinzer and LeHew and their families spent a few days in the Boston area before kicking off the journey. Bright and early, on June 6, the two Marines went aboard USS *Constitution* and fired the deck gun for morning colors before they took their first steps on what would become the



Team Long Road went through 22 pairs of shoes/boots during their 6 1/2 month walk.

Elgin



COURTESY OF SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

Team Long Road made a lot of new friends along the way, but they also bumped into veterans they already knew, including Officer T.R. Williamson of the Iowa State Patrol. Williamson was a Marine with Weapons Co, 1st Bn, 2nd Marines, Task Force Tarawa where he served with LeHew.



SGTMAJ COLEMAN KINZER, USMC (RET)

Throughout their voyage, Team Long Road was cheered on by their families. In late September, Kinzer's mother paid a visit to Team Long Road near Sioux City, Iowa.



trip of a lifetime. They traveled through Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and part of Illinois before rendezvousing with Shinohara, west of Chicago in Elgin, Ill., in August.

Shinohara had some catching up to do. In the early days of the hike, Kinzer and LeHew had been through the breaking-in phase and had already worked out the kinks. They were averaging 20 miles per day, and they had a rhythm. But there was no way Kinzer and LeHew were going to leave Shinohara behind. Gradually, he became acclimated and fell in lockstep with "Team Long Road." Soon after,

he took up the job of monitoring the group's social media in the evening and documenting the journey with photos and video he took using a small drone.

"There [were] definitely tough moments, but I'm with a bunch of tough guys. We all supported each other and made sure that we were all moving forward and not backwards," Shinohara said. "The first week that I was out there I had huge blisters the size of golf balls, my back was hurting, my hips were hurting—I wanted to quit. But I knew I started this, and you know as a Marine I can't *not* finish it. That mentality that I got

U.S. Route 20 is America's Medal of Honor Highway, the first national veterans highway in America.



The middle of the route is approximately east of Newport, Neb. To learn more about U.S. Route 20, visit: www.historicus20.com.



During 6 1/2 months of walking, Rocky drank about 600 cups of coffee and smoked about 300 packs of cigarettes.



COURTESY OF SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

SgtMaj Coleman "Rocky" Kinzer retired from the Marine Corps in 2019. He is now the deputy operations officer for History Flight, a nonprofit MIA recovery organization.

from being in the Marines and being with other Marines alongside me, it helped push me forward," he added.

LeHew, Kinzer and Shinohara planned their route so they could go through small towns and talk to people. They wanted to reach as many people as possible to let them know about History Flight's dedication to live up to America's promise to men and women in uniform that if they should fall in service to the nation, they would not be left behind and they would not be forgotten.

Early in the journey when they were close to Attica, N.Y., a retired Marine drove by and offered to give them a ride to a hotel in Attica, which is several miles off the path of the highway, but not before sharing a cold beer with them on the side of the road in the late afternoon summer heat. Before dropping them off at a hotel, the fellow Marine took Kinzer and LeHew to his American Legion post in town where they talked about their cross-country trek with the members who were there. According to LeHew, after hearing the reason behind the walk, the Legionnaires passed a hat and collected \$1,500 to donate to History Flight. The next morning, LeHew and Kinzer were given a ride from the town back to Route

20 so they could continue westward. And that kind of encounter happened all across the country. "I wasn't prepared for 'Iowa nice,'" said Kinzer, adding that the people who live in the towns they walked through in Iowa really supported them in any way they could to include having kids come out of school to line the streets and cheer as the Marines walked by.

As the walkers covered miles, those small-town Americans came together to form an unofficial support system for the men. And it was all done using modern technology but in a very grass roots way, through a Facebook group LeHew set up called "The Long Road." The group grew in numbers, slowly at first, but the momentum picked up and the group swelled to more than 14,000 followers. Nearly every day, people would post messages in the group, not just to the walkers, but to each other. Posters would provide relevant information about road conditions, weather and lodging for areas LeHew, Kinzer and Shinohara were approaching. The Facebook group members would also coordinate with each other to give assistance to the men along the way.

And as the Facebook group grew, those



People in Jesup, Iowa, lined the streets to cheer for LeHew, Kinzer and Shinohara when they walked through the town in early September.

SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

early followers would answer questions asked by new followers. They also excitedly shared photos and details about meeting the men when they passed through their part of the United States. The Facebook page took on a life of its own according to LeHew. “This isn’t like every platform you find on the internet; this is a good one. There’s no finger pointing, there’s no politics. It was a community bulletin board that worked the way community bulletin boards are supposed to work,” he said.

The cross-country trek wasn’t without its complications. Early on in the journey, LeHew was infected with anaplasmosis from a tick’s bite. He had to leave the road for 10 days while he recovered. This was before Shinohara joined the group, so Kinzer had to power on by himself, which he said was more of a challenge than he had anticipated, adding that he was glad to have some temporary company as he was passing through one town when a resident came out and walked a few miles with him. “One thing I didn’t expect to happen to me was I did get lonely out there on the road. Obviously going with somebody makes it better,” Kinzer said.

Over the miles, they faced danger from drivers they shared the highway with.



The Marines walked through the farmlands of the Midwest during the heat of the summer months. (Photo by Ray Shinohara, left, and SgtMaj Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret), right.)



By the time they approached the end of their odyssey, it was winter and cold-weather gear was all important. (Photos by SgtMaj Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret))



Walking 20 miles each day required high-protein meals and, apparently, beer. (Photo by SgtMaj Coleman Kinzer USMC (Ret), left, and SgtMaj Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret), center and right.)



Team Long Road’s favorite meals on the road:
Justin: Bacon and Eggs
Rocky: Biscuits and Gravy
Ray: Anything homecooked



COURTESY OF SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)



There were times during the journey when no one else was around for miles and miles. (Photo by SgtMaj Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret))



In August, LeHew and Kinzer took in a Chicago White Sox baseball game where they were invited into the broadcast booth and LeHew threw out the first pitch. (Photos by SgtMaj Justin LeHew, USMC (Ret))



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

There were plenty of light moments during the trek. In the middle of Iowa farm country, a turkey joined Team Long Road and according to Kinzer, pictured here with his walking poles, walked along with them for several miles.

LeHew was quick to point out, however, that truck drivers on Route 20 were some of their biggest allies. “American truckers were the best people across 12 states,” he said, explaining that truck drivers would alert each other to be on the lookout for the walkers, while passing the word about their mission. The average automobile was more of a concern for Team Long Road. “When you walk a highway there’s not a time that you can take your eyes off the road for 3,365 miles ... [just in case] you have to dive over a guard rail because somebody is texting,” said LeHew. He explained that it was draining to do that all day, and that he hadn’t really thought about that aspect of the trip when he was planning it. “You had to really learn, even though it’s not land nav, and ‘all I’ve got to do is follow the road,’ so many different things are happening on this road that you are mentally exhausted at the end of every day,” he said, adding that the hyper vigilance was similar to being on patrol nearly every day for 6 1/2 months.

There were some light and funny moments on The Long Road. In September while they were walking by a cornfield in Iowa, a turkey accompanied them for 3 miles. In a video that LeHew posted

in the Facebook group, the turkey can be seen trotting along with the hikers. “The Long Road is for everyone, friend and fowl,” quips LeHew in the video, which was viewed 63,000 times and garnered dozens of comments and reactions.

Shinohara said there were other funny animal encounters besides the turkey trot. On one stretch of road, he looked behind him to see two Great Pyrenees dogs running toward him at full speed. He prepared for what he was sure was going to be an attack, but the two large dogs only wanted to play and walked along with the trio for a while. Shinohara said they had to backtrack about a mile to return the dogs to their home out of concern that the exuberant animals might be hit by a car.

When they didn’t have animal companions to laugh at, Kinzer said that during those long days on the road they had some entertaining conversations with each other, and they kept each other laughing with funny stories.

They didn’t walk side by side all the time. Sometimes, they spread out along the road so they could watch each others’ backs. LeHew said he developed an appreciation for the alone time during

those stretches. “Most people during their day, they are moving so fast they don’t have the think space to be able to weigh ... what’s working, what’s not working,” he said. “It allows you to sit there when you don’t have the distractions and everything else to get a certain amount of clarity that isn’t afforded to you anywhere else so you are not making rash, emotional decisions,” he added.

Along the way they accomplished a few of the “bucket list” items that led to the idea of the trip. They walked through Yellowstone National Park and saw the geyser Old Faithful, and their stay in Chicago included taking in a White Sox baseball game with Kinzer delivering the ball to the pitcher’s mound so LeHew could throw out the first pitch. “It’s something I’ll never get to do in my life again,” Kinzer said. “They interviewed us on Sox radio ... those are experiences some people never get in a lifetime, you know you can’t trade them for anything,” he added.

At night they slept in hotels or they camped. They ate in diners and small local restaurants and sometimes they cooked. LeHew noted that along the way, volunteer firefighters were incredibly



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

The 40-pound backpacks carried on the road represented the burdens carried by generations of U.S. military personnel.

Some of the most beautiful scenery they encountered, according to Kinzer (right), was in early December as they neared the West Coast (above).



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

Left: LeHew, left, said completing this journey reinforced his belief that he is on the right path working with History Flight to continue to bring home remains of previously unrecovered servicemembers killed in action. Shinohara, right, left his job as a social worker on Guam to be a History Flight team lead in the Pacific.



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

Part of the purpose of the trip was to enjoy the beauty of the United States and visit some of the national landmarks they missed out on seeing during their active-duty years.



LeHew, Shinohara and Kinzer served a combined 67 years in the Marine Corps.



Team Long Road By the Numbers

Pairs of Shoes/Boots 22
 States Traveled Through 12
 Miles Walked 3,365
 Funds Raised for
 History Flight \$250,000
 Number of MIAs
 Still Unrecovered 81,500
 Lives Touched Countless



Newport



COURTESY OF SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

Above: Team Long Road reached the West Coast on Dec. 17, 2022. When they arrived at the beach in Newport, Ore., they found this sand art created by a local woman in their honor.

Left: During the last few weeks of the trip, the cold temperatures and snow made the long days even more challenging.

Right: The motorhome they acquired in Iowa became the team's mobile support vehicle. They took turns driving it so that everyone had some respite from the elements.



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)



COURTESY OF LTC DICK TOBIAS, USA (RET)

Team Long Road stopped in front an Oregon Medal of Honor Highway sign near Bend, Ore. LTC Dick Tobias, USA (Ret), left, and other members of the Bend Heroes Foundation met them there to present them with a donation to History Flight.



Team Long Road's favorite pieces of gear:
 Justin: Lightweight Camp Stool
 Rocky: Backpack
 Ray: Camera Drone



SGTMAJ JUSTIN LEHEW, USMC (RET)

When Team Long Road reached the end of the road, they gathered for a photo before celebrating with family and friends.

accommodating, allowing the Marines to use the bathrooms, bunkrooms and kitchens in the fire stations. Perhaps their biggest game changer in terms of logistics happened in Merville, Iowa, when they welcomed a new member of The Long Road Team: a motorhome.

For the rest of the voyage, they took turns driving the 1985 Winnebago Chieftain that LeHew bought. It served as a forward operating base on wheels and provided them with the needed supplies when they traversed the more desolate stretches of the route. It also served as a source of shelter when no other accommodations were available.

All across the country, there were moments of absolute awe and wonder. “You’re standing in the middle of an American empty highway and you’re watching nature’s fireworks show go off at night and there’s no headlights that’s disrupting any of this ... the whole sky looks like it’s on fire,” said LeHew. “But it looks like it’s on fire because as the sun’s going down and it’s uninterrupted by all of these other influences from headlights or anything else,” he added.

“Until you actually lay eyes on a high alpine lake that’s frozen over, surrounded by snow-capped mountains on all sides

... a picture doesn’t do it any justice. Words don’t do it any justice. It’s one of those things where you have to be there, you have to see it,” said Kinzer. He said he made it a point to appreciate the natural beauty of every region they walked through but there was one place in particular that mesmerized him. “Really the place I think that got me the most was the western side of the Cascades ... getting into that rainforest area on the western side of them as you drop down into the coastal area that was otherworldly,” he said.

The journey came to a close on Dec. 17, 2022, in Newport, Ore. A large crowd of people lined the streets to greet the walkers as they reached their destination—the end of the highway.

“For the last mile, where everybody started coming in, it was amazing,” Shinohara said. “The craziest thing was seeing people we met along the way. We posted when we were going to get to Newport and there were people that we met along the way on Route 20 that came to see us and ... it made it more special because ... someone would say, ‘hey, remember me from Iowa?’ It was just an amazing feeling.”

While Kinzer, LeHew and Shinohara

have completed their journey on The Long Road, the intent behind their epic journey is still a driving force in their everyday lives. “This affects the living, not just the dead,” LeHew said, referencing the families of those fallen men who were never recovered and the sadness they live with.

With that in mind, History Flight continues its work locating remains of America’s MIAs. Recovery operations on Betio, in the Philippines and in Europe are ongoing and are nearly back to pre-COVID-19 levels. And on this Memorial Day weekend, LeHew and his family will be doing what has become a tradition for them. They will be at Arlington National Cemetery visiting graves, including the grave of LeHew’s father, LeHew’s Marines who were killed in Iraq, and the servicemembers who were killed in World War II, but only recently were brought home through the work of History Flight.

Author’s note: To learn more about History Flight, read “Until They All Come Home” in the Leatherneck November 2020 issue. To donate, visit www.historyflight.com/donate. 🐾

U-Bird to Whirly-Bird

By TSgt Robert A. Suhosky, USMC

In a way, the switch from fighter pilot to helicopter helmsman might be comparable to turning an old warhorse out to pasture. Master Sergeant Jack Pittman, Jr. doesn't mind when the simile refers to him. He asked for the change for a reason. The tall, affable flier from the Texas panhandle city of Amarillo is currently whirly-birding the new HOK 1 choppers belonging to Marine Observation Squadron Six, based at Camp Pendleton, Calif., but 14 years ago he was blasting enemy Zeros out of the skies over the northern Solomons. In a single mission, he shot down five of them.

That action occurred over Bougainville on Oct. 18, 1943. Guadalcanal had been secured and the Pacific campaign was moving northward, still a long way from the Japanese homeland, but the steam roller was picking up impetus. Enough that the Japanese sometimes were reluctant to leave the ground for a

dogfight against the American airmen until the Marines evolved a plan they hoped would taunt the Japanese into the air.

The day before Pittman's big kill, Marine Fighter Squadron 221, of which he was a member, sent only four F4U-1 Corsairs on a sweep over the Kahili airdrome near Bougainville. Pittman was in the number four position on the flight. Tuned to the Japanese frequency, the Marines laid on the language in denouncing the enemy's cowardice. The stunt worked and Zeros swarmed off the strip like flies. When they were airborne, they flew headfirst into a surprise. Seemingly out of nowhere came the Black Sheep squadron, led by Marine ace Major "Pappy" Boyington. Twenty Zeros never made it back to their base that day.

The next day, VMF-221 sent 16 planes over the same area. Again, the Japanese had to be coaxed, but they did come—25 Zeros, no doubt bent on avenging the previous day's losses. Pittman was in the trailing division. When the enemy came, the Marines rolled over and began diving out of the sun. A burst of antiaircraft fire rocked his airplane and Pittman had to drop out of the formation.

"It left me out on my own for a few seconds," Pittman recalled. "When I straightened out, there were the Zeros just below me, climbing in formation. I gunned my plane and went in."

The first burst caught a Zero dead and sent it down in flames. Pittman triggered his guns twice more in the next few seconds and scored both times. He had cut down the leader of the group and the pair behind him. Pittman made a pass at the far end of the formation and climbed upstairs to look over the situation. Down below him were 20 Zeros milling around as if trying to make up their minds who had the short straw. He solved their



SSGT E. HART JR., USMC

MSgt Jack Pittman Jr. flew 136 missions in World War II and 64 more during the Korean War.

dilemma by taking a deep breath and plunging the Corsair into their midst.

"I got on the tail of one and followed him in a steep climb. When he twisted off, I caught him in my sights and let go a burst. Smoke poured out of his plane, and he seemed to just slide away," he said.

Jack headed home "in a helluva hurry." There were four Zeros on either side of him, and three more bearing down directly ahead. One started firing at him out of gun range and the Marine had his doubts about the outcome. He sent a stream of bullets into the belly of the Japanese plane just as the Zero pulled up over him and saw the enemy fade off trailing smoke as he went. Then Pittman began making knots for home in earnest.

Four minutes of air combat had netted him five Zeros. And while he didn't lose any hair over the episode in the moment, Pittman figures it definitely loosened the roots. "Ten years in a U-bird," as he likes to call his Corsair time, have left him slightly thinned out on top at 38½ years of age.

Pittman's association with the Marine Corps began when he enlisted in September 1940. After boot camp, he joined Marine Aircraft Group Two at Ewa, in the Hawaiian Islands, as a rear gunner with Marine Bomber Squadron Two. The squadron was on Wake Island when the Japanese made their initial attack. Before they were pulled back to Midway, the squadron members got a taste of ground warfare, manning part of the beaches with .50-caliber machine guns from their airplanes. Civilian workers at Wake made tripods and ammo boxes for the emergency force.

When a request was published for physically qualified men

above the rate of private to go to flight school, Private First Class Pittman put up his hand. At Pensacola, Fla., he received his wings on Nov. 10 and reported to school in Miami for fighter training in the old Brewster Buffalo. "And then," Jack says when speaking of a jaunt overseas, "I went back to the war."

By March of 1943, the Wildcats of VMF-221 were flying local patrols and air strikes from Guadalcanal. "Scrambled" to repulse an attack by a bunch of Zeros on April 1, Pittman bagged his first enemy plane when he picked a Japanese fighter off his section leader's tail. On the seventh, he nailed an Aichi 99 dive-bomber headed for Tulagi. Jack got jumped on that hop, counted 129 dents in his armor plate when he landed, but his kill earned him another stripe from staff to technical sergeant. He "flew" every stripe on the way up but jumped from tech sergeant to second lieutenant in June, the same month the squadron advanced to the then-new Corsairs. In August, he helped sink a midget sub, nine gunboats and six float-type Zeros. Two months later came the memorable ace-in-one flight over Bougainville.

The following month, the ace was in Cherry Point, N.C., putting future aces through the intricacies of fighter tactics. When an opportunity to go on a bond-selling tour in Texas was presented, the native son went in his Corsair. Eighteen planes escorted him from Dallas to Fort Worth. Pittman evidently had a good pitch; he helped raise an estimated three-and-a-half million dollars for the Fifth War Loan drive.

He returned to the war after more Cherry Point instructing following the bond tour. He arrived in the Pacific in time for the Peleliu operation, then flew air strikes against the enemy at Okinawa.

Jack had a part in a couple of "firsts" when he made an escort run with the first B-25s to bomb the Japanese homeland since the Doolittle raiders, and again when he participated in the first land-based fighter strike against the same area in June 1944. When the war ended, he pulled occupation duty with Marine Aircraft Group 31 at Yokosuka.

"Wanted to see the place that all the fighting was about," he claimed.

Pittman was a captain when his temporary commission was terminated in September 1947. Reluctant to give up flying, he reverted to technical sergeant, figuring it was a far cry from the PFC status with which he had reported to flight school.

When the Communists started their assault against the Republic of Korea, Pittman was an instrument instructor at MCAS Cherry Point. His battle cry, "Back to the war," sounded in August 1951, when he joined the famed Checkerboard squadron, VMF-312, at K-1 airfield and began flying interdiction missions deep into enemy territory.

The job had lousy hours for late sleepers. Takeoff time was usually 3:30 a.m. The target: anything that moved. Each of

MSGt Jack Pittman downed five Zeros in four minutes over Bougainville to become an "Ace."



In combat, fighter pilots used the four-ship (division) configuration. These F4U pilots demonstrate the formation as they fly at medium altitude in search of enemy aircraft movement on the ground. (USMC photo)

the four planes on the hop carried a different payload: rockets, napalm, fragmentation bombs and demolition bombs. They were ready for anything.

One night while tooling along more than 100 miles beyond the bomb line, Pittman caught sight of four trucks barreling down a hillside. He went in alone, on the extreme right of the quartet, but the trucks disappeared behind a curve as he was diving. They were trailed by a tree.

"At least it looked like a tree," Pittman explained. "Had branches sticking out all over. It was moving, so I let go."

Just before the "tree" went flying over an 800-foot cliff, Jack was close enough to discern that his target of opportunity had been a three-wheeled motorcycle!

Pittman passed the word to the others that he had a "party going." Four Red trucks were quickly destroyed.

After test pilot duty at Itami, Pittman got in a few more licks at the enemy before heading Stateside.

"On one hop, flying close support for the kids, I got a peek at a tiny Bell copter pulling the wounded back to the rear," he said. "Guess I started thinking. Anyhow, my mind stuck



USN

Pittman became interested in helicopters after seeing them evacuate wounded Marines in Korea as depicted in this photo (above) of a Marine Sikorsky HO3S at Kari Son Mountain, Korea, 1951. He made the switch to piloting helicopters (right) in 1952, where he helped aid in the evacuation of refugees in one of the three HRS Sikorsky choppers sent to Haiphong, Vietnam.

on the thought that ... if I got into helicopters, I could start saving the kids.”

He'd been flying U-birds so long—more than 2,100 hours during which he racked up 136 missions in World War II and 64 more in Korea—that jets didn't appeal to him. There wasn't enough flying to go around while working as a line chief at the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, aircraft pool at El Toro, near Santa Ana, Calif., and the helicopter idea was still in his head. In September 1952, Pittman was at Ellyson Field, Pensacola, for helicopter training.

“Ten years later, I was back where I'd started,” he remarked.

But after 10 years in a U-bird, Jack Pittman was in a whirlybird. He had company. Jack estimated that there are about 20 enlisted pilots squiring helicopters throughout the Marine Corps. While flying choppers with Marine Helicopter Squadron 361 at Santa Ana, he piloted groundpounders from ship to shore in numerous vertical envelopment maneuvers as the Marine Corps continued to perfect its new doctrine. Marine Aircraft Group 16, of which Pittman's squadron was a unit, went overseas but this time Jack couldn't say afterwards that he went back to the war.

“They heard I was coming back though, and quit three days before I got there,” he said.

Trouble was popping up elsewhere and the flying sergeant had a hand in saving more than a few lives from Communist oppression when he piloted one of the three HRS Sikorsky choppers sent to Haiphong on the Red River delta of Indochina to aid in the evacuation of refugees.



MSGT H.B. WELLS, USMC

The humanitarian mission was a burden on the planes, and Pittman returned to Japan when his ship was cannibalized to keep the other two operating. Not, however, before thousands of people had been helped to freedom.

Last October, MSgt Pittman reenlisted for six more years. When he gets his 30 years of service, the 6-foot-2 veteran plans to put some money into the purchase of a trailer, and with his wife, Pat, roam the country leisurely.

When that day arrives, the dying breed, the enlisted Naval Aviation Pilots whose numbers have been dwindling since the end of World War II, will be losing the services of a colorful and talented member.

Editor's note: Pittman retired from the Marine Corps in 1962. He was working as a helicopter pilot for the Forestry Service of California when he was killed in a helicopter crash in the Grand Canyon in 1966.



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Marines in the Pacific:

A Time to Reflect and Read the Tea Leaves

By Amy Rupertus Peacock

Mark Twain said, *"History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes."*

While the United States is now allies with Japan, Germany, and Italy, things were very different in World War II. This year, the 80th anniversary of our entry in WW II, is an excellent time to revisit the past and lessons learned. Our current global situation with Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and China's military build-up and aggression in the Pacific should almost demand it. Different players, similar story.

Having spent the past seven years researching my grandfather, Major General William H. Rupertus, and the build-up to WW II, my mind turns toward the parallels to today, especially as our Marines and allies are training in the Pacific.

In the 1930s, aggressive, power-hungry leaders committed a violent offensive for dominance, land, and raw materials. In 1939, Europe and America were paralyzed by German aggression and their invasion of Poland. The world dragged its feet in the Pacific to confront Japan's regional militaristic conquests, growing imperialism, and brutality in war.



Maj William H. Rupertus

COURTESY OF RUPERTUS FAMILY

Having spent the past seven years researching my grandfather, Major General William H. Rupertus, and the build-up to WW II, my mind turns toward the parallels to today, especially as our Marines and allies are training in the Pacific.



LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

Left: A group of China Marines man a barricade near Soochow Creek in Shanghai.

Below: A landing craft, air cushion from Assault Craft Unit 5, operates near USS *Makin Island* (LHD-8). The *Makin Island* Amphibious Ready Group with embarked 13th MEU and the *Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group conducted a combined expeditionary strike force operation demonstrating high-end war fighting capability in February in the Indo-Pacific region. (Photo by MC3 Hannah Kantner, USN)





LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

Stringing wire along Soochow Creek was a frequent task for Marines in 1937 after Marine and Navy dependents were evacuated from Shanghai. The wire and other barriers were put up around Shanghai to protect the remaining U.S. citizens and assets.

On Aug. 17, 1937, the Congress of the United States approved funding to evacuate all Marine and Navy dependents, including my grandmother, “Sleepy” Rupertus. With Japanese warships in the harbor and a giant tsunami off the coast, they escaped Shanghai that same day. The 4th Marines and other countries’ guards stayed behind, working around the clock with rifles ready to guard their countries’ assets and remaining citizens.

It was so intense that the 6th Marines were called in to assist the 4th. They arrived by Sept. 19, 1937, but by Nov. 26, 1937, Shanghai fell to the Japanese. Throughout the late 1930s, Marine and Naval officers stationed in Shanghai wrote home to headquarters and family about the war playing out

before them. Some predicted that this alarming hostility could come to our shores, with prescriptive words to address the growing threat of war.

On Oct. 7, 1937, Colonel Clifton B. Cates wrote in a letter to his family at home, “The Jap[anese] have been giving our sector a lot of fire. A total of 28 shells have hit all around us.”

A few weeks later, Cates wrote home as the Chinese military pulled out of Shanghai, “I really can’t describe what I saw that morning. It was the most revolting destruction and murder that I have even witnessed. As they advanced, the Jap[anese] fired at practically everything and within a few minutes the town was a roaring inferno ... the Rules of Land Warfare meant nothing to the Japanese, and as far as we could see, they took no prisoners ... ”

Warning signs continued in China when Japan attacked Nanking in December 1937. During this terrorizing conquest, the Japanese also bombed USS *Panay* (PR-5) and three Standard Oil tankers, who were trying to rescue Americans, Standard Oil employees, and Chinese citizens. Three Americans died, and 43 sailors and civilians were injured.

America was outraged, and the American ambassador to Nanking demanded reparations, which Tokyo gave them four months later. Japan claimed their Japanese aviators never saw the American ships in the harbor. It became another “incident.”

In 1938, from Headquarters, Fourth Marines in Shanghai, Colonel Charles Price wrote to Colonel Alexander Vandegrift at Headquarters Marine Corps in Washington, D.C., in relation to the Japanese offense. “Please do not get the impression that I am anxious to go to war, but in calculating every possible line of development of those actions of international importance which are taking place here, I fail to see any logical development which will not eventually concern us in America most vitally.”

In 1939, from USS *Augusta* (CA-31) in Shanghai, Admiral Henry E. Yarnell wrote to Rear Admiral Snyder, then the

Then-LtCol William H. Rupertus, front row, left, and his wife, Alice “Sleepy” Rupertus, seated next to him, at a party held in Shanghai in 1937. Alice was one of the many Marine dependents evacuated from the city when the Japanese attacked.



COURTESY OF RUPERTUS FAMILY



LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

Above: This sandbag barricade constructed at the entrance to an old cotton mill was one of the many barriers built by Marines to stop Japanese soldiers. (Leatherneck File Photo)

Left: The 6th Marines arrive in Shanghai Sept. 19, 1937, to aid the 4th Marines in holding the city.

President of the Naval War College, “We need to be under no delusions as to the aim and policies of Japan ... their first step in their plan is the domination of the Far East ... We are all familiar with the unparalleled expenditure and prodigious waste on our part in the World War. This should not happen again.

“In this war, we will be dealing with a first-class Navy. Japanese officers and enlisted are well-trained and efficient ... Is it not about time that we come down to earth, try to picture the war as it will be fought in the future, keep foremost in our minds the after affect this war and its cost will have on our governmental structure and our future national welfare and plan accordingly?”

Two years later, these predictions came true. The final spark that propelled America into the war was a Japanese attack on the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, that killed more than 2,300 Americans, and the near-simultaneous offensives in the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island and Hong Kong.

On Dec. 8, 1941, all 203 remaining Navy and Marine personnel who were still in China at the Tientsin Legation were surrounded by the Japanese. With Japan’s disregard for the Boxer Protocol, and without the ability to defend themselves, they surrendered. The entire group became prisoners of war and were sent to the POW camp at Woosong. They were later moved to Wake Island to join the 1,100 Marines and civilians who were captured by the Japanese, many of whom would later become part of the Bataan Death March. They were not released until WW II officially ended.



Above: Japanese infantrymen move through Shanghai. By Nov. 26, 1937, the city fell to the Japanese. (Leatherneck File Photo)



A Marine sentry watches a building burn in Shanghai. The 4th and 6th Marines held the city for two months before it fell to the Japanese.

LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

The Marines Land in the Pacific

On Aug. 7, 1942, Major General Alexander Vandegrift commanded the 1st Marine Division's invasion of Guadalcanal. At the same time, the Division's assistant commander, Major General Rupertus, led an echelon of the Marines in a high-stakes amphibious assault on the coral-ridden Solomon Islands of Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo and Florida islands. Their mission was to secure the island of Guadalcanal and retain the airfield to protect the lines of communication and supply routes between America and her Australian and New Zealand allies.

While the Marines achieved the first WW II ground victory in the Pacific on Aug. 9 at Tulagi, the battle for Guadalcanal continued through the fall. The Army joined the action in October, and the fight for Guadalcanal ended on Feb. 9, 1943. America and her allies were on the offensive but paid a high price. The Japanese would refuse to surrender, and the Pacific war of attrition would slog on for another long and bloody three years.

Island after island, the closer the United States and her allies got to the Japanese homeland at Saipan, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, the more challenging it became.

Today, in 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Chinese buildup of her Navy, and China's conquests in the Pacific are concerning, and have been for years.

In March 2007, China announced an 18 percent budget increase in defense spending for 2007, totaling more than \$45 billion. Tensions have been high since then. During a 2007 tour of Asia, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney said, "China's

military buildup is "not consistent" with the country's stated goal of a "peaceful rise."

After Russia seized Crimea in 2014, the future Russian invasion of Ukraine was predicted by geopolitical analyst Peter Zeihan in his 2014 book, "Accidental Superpower."

Is the past repeating (or rhyming) itself? Like Japan's quest for land, resources, and domination before WW II, China is also making her ambitions clear with Chinese advancement in the Pacific, including building artificial islands atop reefs in the South China Sea and acquiring a critical airfield and port in the Solomon Islands at Guadalcanal.

Is Taiwan and our American and allied leadership and military prepared for a surprise Chinese attack on Taiwan? Or a Russian nuclear attack on Ukraine? What about North Korea setting off a bomb? Or an attack on our shores? We need to remain proactive diplomatically and militarily to avoid war.

If all else fails and we are launched into war, we have experience and mighty lessons learned from those brave Marines, soldiers and sailors who read the tea leaves in China and fought in the Pacific in WW II.

Author's bio: Amy Rupertus Peacock is the daughter and granddaughter of Marines and is co-author with Don Brown of "Old Breed General: How William H. Rupertus Broke the Back of the Japanese in WW II from Guadalcanal to Peleliu." 🐼



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Col William H. "Bill" Huffcut

William H. "Bill" Huffcut, a Marine aviator who was the recipient of the Navy Cross during the Vietnam War for providing critical air support to infantry Marines who were heavily engaged with the enemy, died Jan. 25, in Tallahassee, Fla. He was 87.

On Sept. 28, 1969, then-Major Huffcut was a pilot with Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) 6, Marine Air Group 36, 1st Marine Air Wing flying the UH-1E Iroquois, more commonly known as the "Huey," out of Chu Lai Air Base, Vietnam. While flying an aerial reconnaissance mission south of the Demilitarized Zone, Huffcut received an urgent request to provide support to Marines on the ground who were pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire. According to the award citation, while a heavy volume of enemy fire was directed at his aircraft, Huffcut "executed repeated attacks and delivered his ordnance with such devastating effectiveness that the hostile fire was suppressed sufficiently to enable the Marines to move to a more tenable position." After a flight of F-4 Phantom aircraft arrived on station, Huffcut coordinated air strikes and "carried out a series of strafing runs at right angles to the attack aircraft, a tactic which effectively distracted the enemy from firing on the Phantoms," the citation continues. When the first enemy machine-gun emplacement was destroyed, Huffcut and the F-4 pilots made repeated strafing and attack runs, which destroyed a second enemy position.

After both positions had been destroyed, Huffcut responded to an emergency request from a Marine recon team that was pinned down by a large enemy force. He "expertly maneuvered his aircraft on both simulated and live rocket and strafing runs and skillfully directed the air strikes of A-4 Skyhawk aircraft which routed the enemy."

Huffcut, born in Peekskill, N.Y., earned a bachelor's degree at Virginia Military Institute and a master's degree from Auburn University. He was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in 1958 and served as an infantry officer with 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, N.C., before beginning flight training. After being designated a naval aviator in 1962, he flew fixed-wing aircraft and was assigned to Marine Fighter Squadron (VMF) 251, flying the F8 Crusader. He flew six



In April 1966, Capt William Huffcut of VMO-6 shows the armor plate surrounding his seat, which stopped a .50-caliber round.

missions in support of the Cuban Missile Crisis while assigned to VMF-251.

He then transitioned to rotary-wing aircraft, flying the H-34 Seahorse with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM) 263 at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C. In 1965, he flew missions in the Dominican Republic in support of Operation Power Pack. He deployed with HMM-263 to Vietnam from July to October 1965 and later flew the H-34 and the UH-1E.

After a Pentagon tour, he completed transition training for the OV-10 Bronco aircraft and was again assigned to VMO-6, flying the Bronco and the Huey at Quang Tri.

Throughout his 31-year career he accrued 4,400 flight hours and flew more than 1,000 combat missions. He commanded multiple flying squadrons and served in a variety of staff positions. In addition to the Navy Cross, his awards included the Legion of Merit, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, 50 Air Medals, three Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star with combat "V."

After his 1989 retirement from the Marine Corps, he worked in the private sector for several years before being appointed to lead the transition team of Florida's comptroller elect in 1994. Huffcut was then appointed assistant comptroller of Florida, a position he held until 2003.

Nancy S. Lichtman

Sgt R.W. "Skip" Bishop, 77, of Moline, Ill. He served in the Marine Corps Reserve from 1966-1972. He later earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in social work. He had a career in family therapy and counseling.

MGySgt James D. Clanton, 97, of Jacksonville, Fla. He enlisted when he was 17 and served for 27 years.

Sgt Donald R. Crawford, 85, of Middletown, Ohio. He enlisted after his high school graduation and served for three years. He later had a 44-year career as an engineer at a paper company. He was a member of the American Legion and the DAV.

Cpl William G. Cox, 76, of Ridgeland,

Miss. He enlisted in 1968 and served with 2nd Bn, 26th Marines, 3rdMarDiv in Vietnam. His awards include the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with combat "V."

Joseph W. "Bill" DeBauche Jr., of De Pere, Wis. He served six years in the Marine Corps.

Gordon A. Gillens, 77, of Plainfield, N.H. Gordon joined the Marine Corps after graduating from high school and saw action in the Battle of Khe Sanh during the Vietnam War. He later had a career in law enforcement.

Ralph C. Keller Sr., 97, in Dublin, Ohio. He enlisted in 1943 after graduating from high school. He served until 1945.

Maj Ronald D. Kincade, 85, of Woodbridge, Va. He served more than 24 years as an enlisted Marine and later as an infantry officer. His awards include the Bronze Star with combat "V," Meritorious Service Medal with Gold Star, and Combat Action Ribbon. He was a member of the VFW and AMVETS.

Suzanne (Perrin) Kloman, 101, of Chestertown, Md. She enlisted in 1943 and taught celestial navigation to pilots throughout the remainder of WW II. After the war, she married Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr.

Donald Krouse, 63, of Snellville, Ga. He enlisted and served several years be-

fore becoming a professional locksmith.

William L. "Bill" Lemen, 96, of McAllen, Texas. He was a second-generation Marine who enlisted during WW II. He saw action in the Pacific, including on Okinawa where he was wounded. His awards include the Purple Heart.

MGySgt Gerald "Jerry" Lewis, 80, of Green Bay, Wis. He enlisted in 1965 and served 27 years in the Marine Corps Reserve.

LtGen Dennis M. McCarthy, 78, of Columbus, Ohio. He was the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs from 2009-2011. Before that, he had a 40-year career in the Marine Corps where he commanded Marines at all levels, including as a platoon commander in Vietnam and as the Commanding General of 3rd Marine Division and Marine Forces Reserve. He had a private law practice in Columbus.

Michael J. Palmer, 74, of Sherrard, Ill. He served in the Marine Corps for several years after graduating from high school. He later had a career as an electrician.

Gus A. Owens, 89, of Dallas, Texas. He enlisted in 1951 and served during the Korean War. He was a seagoing Marine and was assigned to the MarDet on USS *Quincy* (CCA-71).

Frank J. Pennica, 98, of Fredonia, N.Y. During WW II he was assigned to 1stMarDiv and served in the Pacific. He saw action on Peleliu and Okinawa, where he was wounded. His awards include the Purple Heart.

Adolph B. Saenz, 93, of Albuquerque, N.M. He served in the Pacific and in China at the end of WW II. During the Korean War he was an Air Force intelligence officer. He had a 29-year career in government, including working as a foreign service officer during the Cold War, helping countries resist communist aggression.

Carlos A. "Charles" Sanchez, 93, of Albuquerque, N.M. He served in the Marine Corps in Korea. He later became an insurance agent.

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

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SGT GARRETT L. DIPUMA, ANG

Military spouses can search for employment using a job search portal through the Department of Defense's Military Spouse Employment Partnership.

Job Search Tool Connects Military Spouses with Employers

The Defense Department's Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) connects military spouses with over 600 employers including corporations, small businesses, non-profits, and federal agencies who have committed to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses. According to C. Eddy Mentzer, associate director of Military Community Support Programs in DOD's Military Community and Family Policy office, this simplifies the career search process for military spouses, providing easy access to opportunities both in the civilian and federal space.

The partnership's job search tool can be found at <https://myseco.militaryone source.mil/portal/msep/jobs>, where thousands of employment opportunities are listed.

The tool pulls open positions each day from USAJOBS, the U.S. government's official employment site, in addition to non-USAJOBS postings. The Department

of Veterans Affairs (VA) is one federal agency that posts job openings to the partnership.

"Our goal at the VA is to ensure the broadest number of our talented military spouses have access to the full spectrum of employment opportunities we offer as the second largest government agency. Having our open positions feed directly to the MSEP jobs portal ensures that military spouses know that the agencies in the portal have committed to recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining military spouses in their workforce," said Cheryl L. Mason, executive director for Veteran and Military Spouse Talent Engagement in the VA's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer.

Since the partnership launched in 2011, it has gained new partner employers and it is anticipated that more will be added over time. "Expanding employment opportunities for spouses is a key priority in Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III's action plan to strengthen the economic security and stability of service

members and their families," said Mentzer. "The enhancements to the MSEP job search make it easier for spouses to find job openings and connect with federal employers who recognize their value."

In addition, the DOD established the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program to provide education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide, offering free comprehensive resources and tools designed to help spouses meet their career and education goals. This program also offers free career coaching six days a week and can be found at: <https://myseco.militaryone source.mil/portal/>.

Dave Vergun, DOD News

FY2024 Budget Proposes Historic Investments in Veterans, Families, Caregivers and Survivors

On March 9, the Biden-Harris administration released the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2024. This budget proposes critical resources to help the De-

partment of Veterans Affairs (VA) serve all veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. This is the largest budget proposal in U.S. history for the VA. The total FY 2024 request for the VA is \$325.1 billion, a \$16.6 billion (+5.4 percent) increase above the FY 2023 budget enacted level. This includes a discretionary budget request of \$142.8 billion, a \$3.0 billion (+2.1 percent) increase over FY 2023. The 2024 mandatory funding request is \$182.3 billion, an increase of \$13.6 billion (+8.1 percent) above 2023.

“As President Biden often says, our nation has a sacred obligation to support veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors—and this proposed budget will help us do exactly that,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “With these historic investments, we at VA can continue to deliver more care and more benefits to more veterans than ever before in our nation’s history.”

At the Department of Veterans Affairs, the budget will expand health care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans under The PACT Act, which expanded VA health care and benefits to millions of veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxins. The budget requests \$20.3 billion in 2024 for the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund—

\$15.3 billion above 2023 for health care, research and benefits delivery associated with exposure to environmental hazards for veterans and their survivors.

The budget will also invest in preventing veteran suicide, the VA’s top clinical priority. This budget provides \$16.6 billion in 2024 for mental health efforts, including suicide prevention—up from \$15.0 billion in 2023. As a part of that, the budget includes \$559 million for veteran suicide prevention outreach programs and an estimated \$2.5 billion in suicide-specific medical treatment. Among other efforts, these funds will support VA’s initiatives to provide free emergency health care to veterans in suicidal crisis at VA or non-VA facilities and help fund local organizations that provide or coordinate suicide prevention services for veterans and other eligible individuals and their families.

Veteran homelessness has decreased by 11 percent since 2020, and VA permanently housed more than 40,000 homeless veterans in 2022. The new budget invests \$3.1 billion in providing homeless veterans—and veterans at-risk of homelessness—with permanent housing, access to health care and other supportive services.

More women veterans are choosing

VA health care than ever before with the number of women veterans using VA services tripling over the last 20 years. The FY2024 budget invests \$257 million for women’s health and childcare programs to increase access to infertility counseling and assisted reproductive technology, eliminate copayments for contraceptive coverage, and support full-time women veteran program managers at all 172 VA medical centers. These investments support provide comprehensive specialty medical and surgical services for women veterans, including \$1.0 billion for women’s gender specific care.

Veterans deserve world-class health care facilities, but the median VA hospital was built nearly 60 years ago. The new budget makes a historic investment of \$4.1 billion (discretionary and mandatory) for construction to begin restoring VA’s aging infrastructure and providing veterans with state-of-the-art health care facilities, as well as a \$5 billion investment in medical care funding (discretionary) for non-recurring maintenance to improve medical facility infrastructure.

VA News



Are You Ready?



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Operation Meade River Brings Back Memories

On the interior bulkhead of my barn on Cape Cod is the enclosed photo of my Platoon Leader Class/Officer Candidate School class of July 1967 taken at Quantico, Va. That's me on the third row, right side. On the bottom right side is the platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Karl G. Taylor.

Karl Taylor was a fair, disciplined, squared away SNCO who pushed the troops hard to ensure that the men would "have their stuff in one sack." I was the only unit member going directly to The Basic School and then to the Fleet Marine Force as the rest had a year of college left until graduation. Karl Taylor kept the training real as he was headed "down South" again following the billet at OCS in 1967.

Karl Taylor's courage and leadership with 3/26 up at Khe Sanh during the siege as well as his heroic courage during Operation Meade River at Go Noi Island serve as a daily reminder to stand tall and never quit, whether I'm laboring on farm machinery, bush-hogging, lifting weights

or working on a beer. God bless you, SSgt Karl Taylor, for your inspiration and supreme sacrifice.

John Shea
Boston, Mass.

SSgt Taylor received the Medal of Honor for his heroism during his second tour in Vietnam while serving as a company gunnery sergeant for Company I, 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines during Operation Meade River when he worked to rescue wounded Marines who were pinned down by heavy enemy fire. According to his Medal of Honor citation, SSgt Taylor "took his grenade launcher and, in full view of the enemy, charged across the open rice paddy toward the machine-gun position, firing his weapon as he ran. Although wounded several times, he succeeded in reaching the machine-gun bunker and silencing the fire from that sector, moments before he was mortally wounded."

I can't think of a better Marine to serve as a source of inspiration.—Editor

The Camp Lejeune Justice Act Has Legal Caveats

As a Marine who drank contaminated water at Camp Lejeune during 1972 and

now suffers likely related health issues, I am disturbed that most trial-lawyer ads fail to mention caveats to filing a lawsuit. Nor do the ads describe the advantages of filing a normal administrative Veterans Administration (VA) claim before suing the government for damages.

With no outside help, I filed a VA claim on July 11, 2022, and received a favorable determination on Dec. 2, 2022. Given that reasonable time frame, plus the fact that a VA claim does not require a lawyer, and benefits occur shortly after favorable determination, one might first pursue this route before getting involved in a lengthy and potentially expensive tort claim for damages.

In addition to filing my VA claim for assistance, I recognize that I also could file a lawsuit; with no reduction of benefits from the claim. However, I have chosen not to file a lawsuit for a variety of reasons:

1. A lawsuit award would be reduced by any VA or Medicare payments or benefits I have received or will receive in the future, related to toxic water.
2. There likely would be substantial legal fees that would affect/reduce a lawsuit award (under current law there is not cap).
3. There is no guarantee that a lawsuit



A photo of OCS class of July 1967. SSgt Karl Taylor, bottom right, is remembered by John Shea as an exceptional leader who taught discipline and commitment to his platoon.

award, if any, would exceed my VA claim benefits, especially since under the Camp Lejeune Justice Act of 2022, no so-called “punitive” damages are allowed, just actual damages.

4. There is no guarantee as to when any lawsuit might go to trial or be settled and paid. So far, all lawsuits are just pending. No money to the plaintiffs yet.

Capt David Nelson,
USMC, 1971-1973
Houston, Texas

While many Marines can do as Capt Nelson did and submit and receive a favorable determination of a claim based on the Camp Lejeune water issue, others may need assistance especially if claims are denied. The Veterans Administration website contains important information on the PACT act and the benefits possibly available to those whose health was negatively impacted after serving at Camp Lejeune from 1953 to 1987. As most Marines know, you are your own best advocate, and educating yourself on the act and what the VA offers is the first step in determining your next steps. Visit www.va.gov for more information. We have an article in the works about this topic scheduled for an upcoming issue of Leatherneck.—Editor

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Cpl John Messia Jr.
USMCR
Brockton, Mass.



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

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Reunions

• **Marine Corps Disbursing Assn.**, May 21-25, Louisville, Ky. Contact MGySgt Kevin Gascon, USMC (Ret), (760) 458-2655, usmedisbursers@hotmail.com, www.usmedisbursers.com.

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

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

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

• **Hotel Co, 2/7 (RVN 1965-1970)**,

June 8-11, Oklahoma City, Okla. Contact Jerry Norris, (940) 631-7233, postalm16@hotmail.com.

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

• **East Coast Drill Instructors Association**, May 4-7, Parris Island, S.C., Contact Kenneth Miller, (828) 499-0224, usmcpidi@charter.net, for more info visit www.parrislanddi.org.

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

• **Holy Loch, all personnel, all eras**, May 10-14, Dunoon Scotland. Contact Gerry Haight, CharlieHaight@yahoo.com.

• **USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn.**,

Sept. 13-18, Colorado Springs, Colo. Contact John Wear, (719) 495-5998, johnwear2@verizon.net.

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

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

• **Bravo Co, 4th Tank Bn**, May 21, Naches, Wash. Contact Jeff Dacus, topdacus@gmail.com.

Mail Call

• Rose Knight, (210) 415-9441, rose.knight@me.com, is looking to hear from **Sgt Jeffery Allan Taylor, stationed with MSG Det., U.S. Embassy, Republic of Panama, 1979.**

Wanted

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

• Elizabeth Argue, liz.argue@outlook.com, is looking for a **recruit graduation book for Kilo Co, platoon unknown, MCRD San Diego, Nov. 7, 2005-Feb. 3, 2006.**

• Rob Swanson, swnsnr@b@yahoo.com, is looking for a **recruit graduation book for Plt 2039, MCRD Parris Island, 1985.**

Sales, Trades and Giveaways

• Vernon Martin, (717) 371-7864, vrmartin2000@yahoo.com, has a **Platoon 320, MCRD Parris Island graduation book, 1964**, free to any member of the platoon. Contact for more information.

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

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Saved Round

By Nancy S. Lichtman

A SWASHBUCKLING CORSAIR PILOT—Fighter ace First Lieutenant Christopher L. Magee, left, hands a stack of ballcaps to his squadron commander, Major Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, on Vella LaVella, in December 1943. During World War II, when they weren’t flying, Marine fighter pilots in the sunny, humid South Pacific wore ballcaps. In October 1943, when the members of Boyington’s Marine Fighting Squadron (VMF) 214 experienced a shortage of caps, the “Black Sheep” squadron contacted the Major League Baseball commissioner and offered to shoot down an enemy aircraft for every hat sent to them by World Series players. The Saint Louis Cardinals sent 20 caps to the South Pacific, although by the time they arrived, Boyington and his squadron of hard-charging Corsair pilots had already shot down more than 20 Japanese aircraft.

Marine Corps aviation has always boasted its share of characters. And while Boyington, who received the Medal of Honor in World War II, is among the most well-known of the Corps’ swashbuckling WW II fighter pilots, Magee has his own colorful story.

A cousin of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) pilot who wrote the famous poem “High Flight,” Magee entered naval aviation in a rather roundabout way. In early 1941, he began his flight training with the U.S. Army Air Corps but in the spring, eager to see combat, he left the training program for the RCAF. When the United States entered the war, Magee accepted an offer from the U.S. Navy to leave the RCAF and begin training as a naval aviator. He was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant and earned his gold wings in November 1943.

While in the Pacific, he is credited with shooting down nine enemy aircraft and received the Navy Cross for actions in the skies over the Solomon Islands from Sept. 12-Oct. 22, 1943.

After the war ended, Magee returned to Chicago and began a series of odd jobs. In 1948, he traveled to Israel to fight in the nascent state’s war for independence. He flew missions for the fledgling Israeli Air Force’s 101 Squadron but didn’t encounter any dogfights. Long periods of truce didn’t appeal to Magee’s desire for the thrill of aerial combat, so he returned to the United States in October 1948. For the rest of his life, he remained friends with the 101 Squadron’s other pilots—most of whom were American military veterans.

Once again, Magee struggled with his transition to civilian



TSGT DOUGLAS Q. WHITE, USMC

life, and in 1958 he was convicted of bank robbery; he spent eight years in a federal penitentiary. While he was incarcerated, he earned college credits through correspondence classes and upon his release, went to work as a writer and editor for a small newspaper. He lived the rest of his life in relative obscurity, occasionally attending reunions for VMF-214, and the 101 Squadron—even returning to Israel to be honored by the Israeli Air Force. Magee died in 1995 at the age of 78.

Author’s note: My father-in-law, Gideon Lichtman, flew with Magee in Israel in 1948. He always described him as an outstanding fighter pilot, and family legend has it that after Magee was released from prison, the American pilots who had flown with the 101 Squadron got together and threw him a party in Las Vegas, Nev. 🍷

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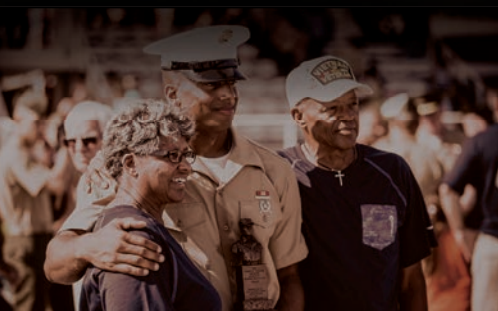
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