

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES
ABOUT THE CORPS
AND MORE

By John F. Harris
Former SGT. USMC

REFLECTIONS ON THE FEW AND THE PROUD

‘The Lifers’

By John F. Harris
Former Sgt. USMC

As a Marine in the mid sixties, I learned early on that the Marine Corps was run, not by officers, as one might think, but by the Lifers. The Lifers were Non-Commissioned Officers, with the rank of Staff Sergeant and above. In the Corps it took more than one four-year hitch to make Staff Sergeant. And, a Marine willing to invest more than four years of his life in the Corps, was more then likely going to make it a career . . . hence ‘Lifer’.

Of course I’m basing my original statement, only on my personal experience, which was as a 03 (grunt), in which I hold to be the core of the Corps - a Marine Rifle Company. Case-in-point: Everybody, who has ever served in a Rifle Company, knows that it is really the First Sergeant that runs the Company.

Affectionately called ‘Top’ - he has been in the Marine Corps since its conception. His ribbons, or lettuce patch, usually extend from his chest to his knees. And, he is usually old enough to be the Company Commander’s father. A smart Commanding Officer, whenever in doubt about something, will always (unofficially and out of sight of course), ask the Top his opinion - with the knowledge, that if he doesn’t know . . . nobody does.

It is my intention to record, for posterity sake, my observations of ‘A Few Good Men’ who I was privileged to serve under - in my brief, but active career as a Marine.

The first NCO that I was actually aware of, in my young (and naive) life - was my recruiter. He was a Gunnery Sergeant, and a real nice guy (always shook my hand), who, after I had passed all of the written and physical tests . . . smilingly informed me . . . that I had what it took to be a Marine. And, if I would just sign this little piece of paper . . . I too could be a member of the Worlds Finest-fighting Machine. And, yes, I too could wear a Dress Blue uniform - like the guy in the recruiting poster.

It wasn’t to long after that, that a Major swore me in (the Major had one ribbon on his chest, as opposed to the Gunny’s two dozen). Then the Gunny shook my hand, and informed me how very lucky I was to have been accepted by the Marine Corps.

They just don’t take anybody - he’d said. I remember feeling very special about that. And, then he told me, that he had promised I’d get a chance to travel, and being a man of his word, he was going to fly me, at the Marine Corps expense - down to San Diego. I would spend a few weeks at this place called USMCRD, which was kind of like a school, that the Marine Corps used, to better evaluate my many talents, and therefor be able to better place me in the overall infrastructure, so to speak.

Well, I’ve got to be honest, I had enlisted in the Corps to get into Force Recon (there was a lot of hoopla about the Green Berets - and I just had to be different), and I was fed up with school (having just finished twelve fricking years). But, then again it was a chance to blow this danged place - so I graciously accepted the kind offer!

So, you can certainly understand my surprise, when I got there, and was met by another Gunnery Sergeant . . . this one wearing a Smokey-the-bear hat. He even had more ribbons than the recruiter on his chest, and was apparently in a bit of a mood. In fact when he got us all together, and away from the passenger terminal, and headed in the direction of this really ugly bus - he became downright rude! I mean, I had never before heard some of the words spilling from his mouth! I was certain, had his mother heard him, she would certainly have washed his mouth out with soap. I guess none of the others had heard language like that either - cause we found ourselves falling all over each other, trying to get aboard that bus - and thus hopefully making the Gunny feel better. By this time, I was pretty certain, that somebody had made a mistake . . . (Me?)

Somehow, I had mistakenly got on a bus to HELL!

I would straighten it all out when I got to wherever I was going. Boy, that sergeant ranted and raved all the way to this bunch of Spanish looking buildings.

Maybe, he'd just had a bad day, I thought, or if he had a wife - she'd spent too much money at the store or something. My dad could be like that, now and again.

But no, as we passed through an arch in one of the buildings, there was on a wall, in big bold gold letters - United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, CA. - USMCRD.

When we came to a stop - there we were again; falling all over one another trying to get off that bus, and onto a bunch of yellow footprints painted on the blacktop. There were other Sergeants there, and they began yelling at us too - even worse than the Gunny!

I can't remember too much about the next couple of weeks - I may have been in shock, or something. But, as I recovered, I came to realize, that these guys (my Drill Instructors) were really going out of their way to be like, well, like family.

All they wanted was to be our fathers, mothers, and sisters and brothers.

This we ALL came to understand, and so, out of respect for them, always made sure the first and last word, out of the sore beneath our noses, was - 'SIR'.

I figured out early on, that the reason they were upset all of the time, was because they had to cram into our slimy skulls in eight weeks, that which normally took ten. This due to escalating the war in Vietnam (it was Sept. of '65). So obviously, in trying to do their jobs to the best of their abilities - were experiencing some stress. But, they taught me a great deal . . .

To this day, I can still remember my Service Number . . . And their names! In all fairness though, they did teach us to be Marines. Much of that initial dose of the Corps is still with me today. Once a Marine - Always a Marine.

They actually turned out to be pretty nice guys.

On graduation day, they called us Marines - instead of MAGGOTS. And they hardly swore at all, but that may have been because some of our folks were present.

When I headed home on Boot Leave, I was fifteen pounds heavier (all solid muscle), several inches straighter . . . And a Private in the United States Marine Corps.

And, I thought I should look-up that recruiter. Maybe make a few subtle suggestions, based of course on all of the wisdom I had obtained over the previous two months in the Corps. This advice, I was sure, would allow him to sleep better at night, thus rendering the Corps a great service.

But, by this time in my life, any Marine above the rank of Corporal had attained the rank of God - A Gunnery Sergeant being high up in the order of things.

Of course the first word out of my mouth, when I walked into his office, was . . . "SIR! Private Harris . . ."

"Don't call me sir!" he snarled. "I work for a living!"

Caught me completely off guard.

The Marine Corps had been, and was, becoming slightly confusing.

And, I had the distinct feeling - we were no longer on a hand-shaking basis.

RICE PADDIES AND MACHINEGUNS

By John F. Harris
Former Sergeant, USMC

I'm standing tall in front of the Orlando Airport. Dressed in black short-sleeve shirt, Levi's, and black Tony Lama deerskin boots spit-shined to a high gloss. I don't exactly fit into the hot, humid Florida environment. But when I travel by air, I always wear my cowboy boots. (That plane goes down - I'm goin' in with my boots on.)

A black sedan pulls up in front of me, and I recognize the men inside. Skip St.Clair at the wheel, Jim Gullede (Alabama) ridin' shotgun, and Bob (Hank) Henry in the back seat. After hugs and handshakes, I throw my gear in the trunk and hop in the back.

As we hit the Interstate, I pull a bottle of Yukon Jack out of my travel bag and pass it around. My guys had driven all the way from Daytona to pick me up. At least forty miles or more, and I wanted to show my appreciation.

It's Reunion '94, and I had flown in a day early - couldn't wait for the official opening.

Nancy and Bob Snowden had invited the 'earlybirds' for dinner, and all of us were sitting out on their veranda enjoying the evening. A lot of laughter, camaraderie - These Reunions are very special. And Skip, Alabama, Hank and I (By this time) - are feeling 'no pain'.

The next thing I know Alabama has a camcorder, and he's aiming it at me.

"Don't point that thing at me, boy - you're making me nervous."

{Don't like ANYTHING pointed at me.}

"Ah come on, Yukon say something." He grins.

"Just did. Now get that thing away from me!"

"Yukon, ya always have somethin' ta say!", He chides, with his thick southern drawl.

{I'd been rehearsing a little something on the five-hour plane ride - so I figure I'll drop it on him.}

I belt it out.

"My name is Johnnie 'Yukon John' Harris, 2158952! (My service number) - 0311! (MOS - military occupational specialty) - And a Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps. In 1966, I had the honor of serving as a Rifleman Scout in the third fireteam of the third squad in the third Platoon of the third Company - Lima Company, of the Third Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment. You'd usually find me at Point! (The Pointman was out in front of the others, sometimes as much as 200 yards, looking for signs of the enemy) - where I could track the enemy, and tell you if he was carrying an AK-47 or bandoleer of grenades. I've been shot in the head, and blown away by a landmine . . . But I can still eat concertina wire, piss napalm, and shoot the ass off a flea at two hundred yards! O-O-H-R-R-R-A-A-H-H!"

{By this time he's chuckling - to the point of having a hard time holding the camera steady.}

"Is that all you have to say?" He quips, laughingly.

"Well, I've had three wives . . . Got three kids, had three dogs, three cats - And right now I'm about three sheets to the wind. So get that gun off me!"

{Leveled him. Everybody's laughing. That crazy Yukon flipped out again. About the only positive thing about getting shot in the head is, it gives me an excuse for acting crazy when I feel like it.}

Alabama was a machinegunner, and was badly wounded in the 'Mothers Day Massacre' May 12th - 13th, 1969.

He calls me up sometimes just to talk. We discuss things as they were then - and as they are now. Camaraderie. He was still in high school when I was going through my war ('66) - but I'd have been honored to have had him by my side.

People have asked me over the years what it (the war) was like.

I'd inadvertently say - "The most exciting time of my life!" (WHAT!)

And, I'd try to tell them that it was the only time in my life when I've been MOST alive. (WHAT!)

"Well, you see . . ." I'd try to explain . . . "All my senses - and I mean ALL of my senses - were more acute - than ever before . . . or since. My site - hearing - smell - touch - or taste . . . were on one hundred percent alert, twenty-four hours a day - every day. For Survival! Exciting!"

If they persisted, I'd tell them a short story. Not about the Hill. (Hill 362 - Operation Hastings) - or any number of other heavy battles. But, about rice paddies and machineguns . . . The everyday occurrence. (Maybe not everyday - but often enough!)

I had just come off point, and had taken my position towards the end of the column. Kind of a reserve position. Still had to hump it, physical exertion but didn't have to be as alert. Couldn't be on point all the time - your sharpness would waver. Might miss something crucial.

We were on a company-sized 'operation' of search and destroy. Each of the three platoons in a tactical position of some sort within the Company.

My platoon (Third.) was spread out along a rice paddy dike - in a column. I was second from the end. Guy by the name of Poole was tail end Charley - the last man. He carried an automatic. (M-14 rifle with selector, enabling him to shoot rapid fire.)

We were coming across a fairly large area of rice paddies, all interconnected with a series of ditches and dikes.

I could see the bullets kicking up the water around us - before I heard the first shots. Dove off the dike, and flattened my body in the water next to it. (I can't remember if anyone got hit - this time. Again, this happened more than a few times.)

The nearest village was maybe three or four hundred yards across the paddies. I could see the muzzle flashes. Damn! Maybe four - five machineguns!

They're raking us real good. Water spouts flying out of the paddy everywhere! I can hear the bullets whipping by me. Smell the stench of the rice paddy.

"GUNS UP!" (Machineguns - ours)

"MORTARS UP!"

They blast the hell out of the ville. I pump two magazines into it, and stop firing. No use! Just wasting ammo - can't see anything of the enemy or define his positions.

I take out my canteen, and take a long pull of hot foul tasting water. I know what's coming next . . . Been there before.

"CEASE FIRE! - CEASE FIRE!"

The mortars and machineguns stop.

We stop.

Time stops . . . I can feel my heart pounding against my chest.

"PLATOON! - ON LINE! . . . CHARGE!"

As this order is being given, we cautiously get up. It's quiet - no enemy fire. Maybe we got the little bastards this time . . . I think to myself. No - they probably hauled ass out of there, like they always do. Maybe I'll get lucky this time and find a trail.

I look at Poole and wink - grin. He gives me that gaunt hillbilly glare - and nods.

We go charging across the rice paddies. Mud sucking at every strenuous step. Hot! At least a hundred and ten. The smell of cordite (From the gunfire.) - heavy in the air. We get maybe fifty yards across lung wrenching muck . . .

AND . . .

THEY OPEN BACK UP ON US! . . .

In these situations you don't stop and hit the ground. There's no cover!

All you can do is charge at the enemy - yelling at the top of your lungs - fire off a few rounds. Psych him out!

He sees a bunch of crazy Marines coming at him - his accuracy will falter. Maybe he will run!

Bullets are slugging the rice paddy all around me. Whipping past my ears.

"YOU CAN'T TOUCH ME, YOU MOTHERF--KERS! I'M INVINCIBLE - BULLETS BOUNCE OFF ME - YOU BASTARD MOTHERF--KERS! YOU'RE GONNA DIE!" . . . I'm yelling at the top of my lungs! (Always tried to psych myself out as well . . .)

I look over at Poole - spread out maybe twenty - thirty feet from me. As a feeling of amazement and fear overwhelms me.

I don't know why they aren't hitting him! Water spouts churning all around him!

GOD DAMN IT! Don't get hit Poole! (The thought spurting through my brain in the intense heat.) I need you! - Your gun! YOUR FIREPOWER!!!

Then it happens...first time ever! My rifle jams! SHIT! I struggle to pull the bolt back. NOTHING! STUCK SOLID! F--K! . . .

The fire is getting even more intense! Muzzle flashes all along what appears to be a trench line.

I see a dike coming up as I'm weaving and dodging through the mud. (Mounds of earth separating paddies.)

If I can swing the rifle down as I go across . . . I might be able to kick the bolt open with my boot. I do it. It works! Fire two more shots . . .

JAMS AGAIN! . . . MOTHERF--KING-SON-OF-A-BITCH!

We're almost to the ville. Poole and I are closest. I figure I've got bad ammo - a bad magazine or both. Has to be! I rip the magazine from my rifle - and throw it! Grab another from my cartridge belt - 7.62 NATO - twenty rounds. Another dike coming up, the last one before the ville.

One more chance to kick the bolt and eject the round - before the trenches. I do it. It works again!

By now, there's only enough time to leap over the first trench. There is a bend in it. And as I land on the other side, I pick up movement out of the corner of my right eye.

A Gook coming up from the trench - from the waste up - In the space of a heartbeat I register the movement and realize - I CAN'T SEE HIS HANDS!

I pivot, and fire at him. Trigger jerking - rifle jumping - unleash the whole magazine. Gook pieces flying everywhere.

I CAN'T STOP!

The bolt of the rifle comes to an abrupt metallic halt and spring wound thump as the last shell ejects. Twenty rounds expended in a flash. The roar of the fire ringing in my ears.

I pop the magazine and start to reload another.

I hear Lieutenant Anderson (My platoon commander.) yelling at me as he comes running up behind me.

"HOW MANY HARRIS!!"

"ONE!" I yell back briefly turning my head. Not daring to leave the scene before me.

"KEEP MOVING HARRIS! DON'T STOP! GO! GO!", he yells.

I run another twenty-five yards or so. There are two guys with a LAAW that had gotten in front of me during all of this – starting to let it go. (A LAAW is like a small rocket launcher. Cradled on the shoulder when fired – with a back blast that can cut a man in two. They instinctively look back to make sure no one is within the back blast area. And, see me drop to my knees and throw up. Retching violently.

"What the f--k is your problem?!" One asks.

"I don't f--king know?!" I gasp between heaves.

I later figured out: That with all of the stress involved, along with anger, exertion and heat – not to mention the act of just killing someone . . . My body had to let it all out.

It would be the only incident in the war that would haunt me with a feeling of guilt. For years . . .

I never gave the gook a chance to show me if he had actually had a weapon or not. I had lost my cool. He might have been getting ready to put his hands up!

He might be alive today if I hadn't lost my cool . . .

Over the years I would look back on this one incident. And feel bad.

Five years went by with this guilt. There was a nightmare that I attributed directly to this particular incident. ('The Nightmare' . . . another story.)

One day I was attending a party as a guest of Gil Velasquez who had been with me in the war. Gil had been our platoon runner.

(We always affectionately called him Mouse, because he was constantly scurrying about with messages from Lt. Anderson. Usually under fire.)

I was relating to him this one incident that had so bothered me over the years.

"I remember the situation well!" He told me.

"I remember Lieutenant Anderson yelling at you as we came up to that trench line. HOW MANY HARRIS? And, then telling you to MOVE ON!", He reminisced.

"We could never understand why you had yelled back – ONE! There were three enemy dead in that trench. All of them had AK-47's!"

How powerful the mind can be. To see only what you want to see. I was able too perform the act of killing the enemy. But, after one - my mind would shut the rest out. Like I had crossed some invisible barrier. It was to be the same on Hill 362. Some were so close I had to have looked into their eyes. Before wasting them. All I ever saw mentally - was one. That seemed to be enough.

I would never have that one particular nightmare again.

THE NIGHTMARE

By John F. Harris
Former Sergeant USMC

We all experience dreams, and occasionally - nightmares. Of the latter, I have known of people who will repeatedly have the same phenomenon over and over again. Possibly it's our subconscious mind's way of releasing excess baggage, or unknown fears. I know as a kid, up into my teens, I would experience a reoccurring nightmare of drowning. I would be struggling to reach the surface of some horrifying body of water - all the time fighting to get untangled from a rope that was wrapped around me. I would always wake up in a panic before I got to the surface. I have always been an excellent swimmer. Didn't figure.

But I guess I eventually grew out of it.

I would have many nice dreams, too. Like running forever through forests and valleys, effortlessly. Never getting tired, and always in slow motion. Or of flying. Without wings - over mountains, and lakes, and through puffy white clouds.

Then again, every now and then, there would be a been-there-before nightmare. Like being in a fight with some faceless person(s). I would be trying to hit them, only to have my blows land like feathers on a pillow, and again - in slow motion!

Maybe, these dreams (and nightmares) were premonitions of things to come. For although I've close to an actual drowning (On several occasions), I have also spent a lot of my life in the water. On boats and ships. Waterskiing, surfing, long distance swimming, and beneath the surface - free diving, and SCUBA diving.

In the Corps, we'd fly off a carrier by helicopter in our assault attacks against the enemy. Our choppers were so beat up by the war that there was always a chance they could (And did) go down. In fact, there were more than a few instances where choppers went into the China Sea - within sight of their ship. Marines who, just hours - sometimes minutes before, had escaped death under fire - drowned. Some, only yards from safety.

I used to surf a lot, and more than a few times got nailed by my board - or someone else's. Once, I was knocked out! The only thing saving me from drowning was my wet suit, which kept me afloat until I came to.

There were other times when I could feel my lungs about to burst, after being pinned down by a wave.

And, after twenty-five years of diving . . . well, there were a few close calls.

Running? Boy, there were times I could take off and run effortlessly - swift as a deer - and just as agile. Could jump over logs, and from boulder to boulder. I lost those desires when, in the Corps, we had to run for miles - with all our gear.

Flying? Yeah, there were times I felt I could fly. Like jumping off a roof as a kid, pretending I was Superman (A wonder I didn't break my neck!). Or, making my first 'free-fall' skydive. I was so enthralled, I (briefly) felt I could release my harness . . . and fly.

And, I've had my share of fights - both brawling, and organized boxing. But my blows always landed with some weight. I almost always walked away unscathed.

Most of the above instances are stories in their own right, and although may be of interest to some - have little to do with my worst nightmare.

It was always the same nightmare. Just didn't always end the same. I don't know for sure what brought it to the surface of my unconscious sleep.

But I attribute it to an incident that happened to me in the war (Vietnam), because it strangely stopped - after being absolved of a guilt I had felt for about five years.

The first time I experienced it - was about a month after being med-evaced out of the war zone. I had been sent to the island of Okinawa for further physical therapy.

This after stepping on a landmine and spending nearly two months in the Chu Lai and Da Nang hospitals.

The Marine Corps had sent me to Okinawa because they didn't quite know what to do with me. I was so Gung Ho, I had refused a medical discharge and had expressly made it clear that I didn't want to be sent back to the States.

At this time, I was lucky to have remained in the Corps. The only reason they didn't press the medical discharge was because I had some typing experience (high school), and the Corps was very much in need of experienced office personnel. Which I wasn't - but I led them to believe that I was.

Anything to buy time, as I was sure I could get back to my outfit once I was all healed.

{I found out years later that wouldn't have been possible, anyway. My parents had a congressional letter inserted into the record, because of my being the only son and now twice wounded.}

Thus the painful, but necessary, physical therapy program.

Anyway, I'm in Okinawa and they send me to this Maintenance Detachment. I'm walking wounded by this time. Limping around with a cane, and still can't fully use my right arm. But I can type - even if its pecking with my two forefingers. Pretty good duty, and I'm in charge of civilian workers (Okinawan's). Through them, I learn some of the language - enough to get around.

I meet this girl Yoko, who has a small place in the little village of Fatima. It isn't long before we shack up together. Life is good . . .

I'm sitting up against a tree, my legs out in front of me. It's painful, because my arms are tied around the tree, and my feet and legs are all trussed up. My mouth is extremely dry. There is a gag in it, and I can hardly breath. As I desperately try to gulp down air, I realize my throat is in pain, because it too, has a rope stretched around it, and the tree.

Every time I struggle to get free - the pain intensifies. A ground fog starts to lift up - covering my legs. Spooky! It's like dusk, and getting darker - can barely see. Some dark figures start to rise out of the ground fog, some distance away. Can't see them too clearly. Must be my men coming to get me free. Why are they moving so slowly? Must think the enemy is close by. Hurry up damn it! I can hardly breath!

They're getting closer now . . . about a half-dozen of them, barely visible in the waning light. Wading through the fog as if it were water. Can't see anything from the waist down . . . because of the fog.

WAIT A MINUTE! . . . WHAT THE?! . . . GOOKS!!! Black pajamas . . . but . . . NO FACES!!!

Reaching for me - fingers knarled with hatred!! They're closing in . . . as I struggle harder to break free . . .

NO!! . . . please . . . NO!!! . . . A-A-A-A-G-G-H-H!!!

I awake, sitting bolt upright, and screaming at the top of my lungs! Scares Yoko right out of bed. She lands with a thump on the floor - dazed. Every dog in the village is barking because of the noise. Lights flick on in the houses around us. People cautiously looking out of their windows, peeking from their doorways.

I'm laying on the bed trying to catch my breath. Panting. Sweat all over me. Confused. Yoko slowly gets up off the floor. She turns on the light - staring at me . . . Fear in her pretty brown eyes.

She slowly puts her hand on my shoulder, as if I might do it again.

A nightmare I tell her - realizing it for the first time myself. She leans out the window and speaks in Okinawan.

"It's OK", she tells the neighbors - "He had a nightmare!"

Embarrassing! Yoko asks me what the nightmare was about. Can't tell her . . . she wouldn't understand . . .

This happened to me about two more times, before I was eventually sent back to the States. Each time it happens, I scare Yoko half-to-death. The neighbors lose sleep. To make matters worse, I get shot, or blown up, just about every month. Not a full nightmare . . . just a loud noise in my head, that causes my whole body to jerk awake.

I still get it to this day. I've had to explain to my bed partners over the years why my body will jerk like that. So violent a jerk - it wakes them up, as well as myself. I guess it's because of the war - I'd tell them, embarrassingly. And leave it at that.

Poor Yoko. She was probably glad to see me go. She could at least get some sleep.

Poor Yvonne (My first wife) - she went through much the same experience. Actually levitated out of bed during one such episode.

Five years after the war, I was at this party. A discussion took place between me and one of my buddies, who had been in the war with me. A discussion about guilt.

After that party, I never had 'The Nightmare' - again . . .

A VERY SPECIAL SHIP

By Former Sergeant John F. Harris

I'm standing there in the pitch-black darkness of the dock. Before me lays the most beautiful gangplank I have ever seen. It is brilliantly lit up by the ship's light at the other end. I couldn't really make out the ship . . . Kind of like trying to see a car behind it's headlights.

But I knew it was a ship. I could smell the sea . . . and I could hear the faint lapping of waves against her hull in the stillness of the night.

The silence was suddenly and rudely broken by a singular loud and very long blast of the ships horn. As the final steam-fed sounds were left echoing into the dark - I knew -

It was time to go . . .

I turned and waved to my children. I could see their beautiful faces clearly - although some distance away - against the fringes of darkness. They were smiling and crying at the same time, as they waved in return.

Why are they crying . . . ? The ship's light reflected off their tears . . . like diamonds.

I was somewhat puzzled by this, as I reached down to grab my luggage.

But it wasn't the kind of luggage you might expect . . .

It was a seabag! And . . . it was made out of the American flag!

It was then that I noticed the white gloves, and realized that I was wearing a full set of Dress Blues! I mean everything . . . from medals, to pogy-rope. Chevrons and hashmarks of ruby and gold. Spit-shined shoes, like black onyx - reflecting the light. I was a bit startled at first. But, as I straightened up with the seabag in hand . . . all of the stiffness and pain I had known for years . . . seemed to flow from my body.

I moved towards the gangplank. Slowly at first . . . Awed by it's beauty.

As I stepped lightly and sharply onto it's glossy surface and started across . . . I could see it was made of polished teak - riveted together with solid gold!

The stanchions on either side were also of solid gold . . . and the rope that was draped between them through ivory eyelets . . . were of braided silver!

Inlaid into every tenth plank was the Eagle, Globe and Anchor in gold . . . against a world of mother-of-pearl.

As I approached the light at the head of the gangplank, I instinctively did a left-face and sharply saluted Old Glory. Her colors showing brightly as she waved gently at the aft.

I then turned back with a right-face and snapped off another salute . . .

And although I couldn't really see anybody with that light in my eyes . . .

I said, "Sir! Sergeant Harris reporting for duty. Permission to come aboard, Sir!"

"Permission granted, Sergeant Harris!" Said a very deep . . . but kind voice. "We have been expecting you . . ."

I stepped on deck and through the light which was comfortably warm behind me. I noticed immediately that the deck was like nothing I had ever seen before. It appeared to be made of highly polished black stone of some sort . . . marble . . . or maybe granite. My reflection on its surface was quite vivid.

At first I couldn't see anyone. As it took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the semi-darkness. But I could hear voices . . . And . . . laughter!
And then, to my astonishment, all about me . . . appearing out of the darkness and into the deck's reflective light . . . came men.

They were men I had once known! I recognized their faces right away, although I hadn't seen them in . . . God knows . . .
How long ago had it been?

Why . . . they were the men of Lima Company; Third Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment! They also had on Dress Blue uniforms . . . with twelve or so hash-marks on the sleeves . . . But . . . they were whole? And . . . they looked young and . . . happy!

I was marveling over this as they began to gather around . . . God, it was good to see them again.

"Where have you been Sergeant?" One asked.

"Yeah, Sarg . . .", said another. "You've been missing a lot of good Liberty!"

I was dumbfounded . . . Speechless - you could say.

"Temporary Assigned Duty . . . I - I guess?" I finally stammered.

And I was about to ask them the same question, when the voice . . . at the light . . . bellows out!

"ATTENTION ON DECK! - ALL HANDS - COMPANY FORMATION! - ROLL CALL! . . . PREPARE TO CASTOFF!"

Everyone immediately came to attention, while at the same time forming a straight line.

And, so it was - just like the old days. Roll call was taken.

After each name, the reply, "PRESENT!" . . .

And, an occasional . . . "HE'S T.A.D.!" Are bellowed out in return.

I hear someone whisper, "Man, are they missing some good Liberty!"

When the roll call is completed . . .

A voice booms out . . . "ALL PRESENT! AND . . . ACCOUNTED FOR, - SIR!"

Then . . . "C-O-M-P-A-N-Y! . . . DISMISSED!"

All of a sudden you could feel the ship vibrate, and knew she was underway. We kind of gathered together and drifted to one side of the ship . . . all the while babbling on about this and that.

"Where do you guys pull . . . Liberty?" I ask, my curiosity has the best of me.

"Oh, you know? All over." Someone replies.

"Aye!", says another, "You name it . . . We've been there; France, China, the Med., and the South Seas . . . You know . . . the Canal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima and Okinawa . . . Places like that . . . And . . ."

"We just got in from the Caribbean. Talk about a great place!" Another chimes in.

"And scuttlebutt has it - we're headed for the Indian Ocean . . . We haven't sailed there for a while." Says yet another.

As we stood there at the gunnels, jabbering away at the night . . . I remembered how comforting it was at sea . . . to gaze at the ship's wake.

It's frothy foamy trail lit up like stardust - with phosphorus, as she knifed through the water.

As I was watching this phenomenon . . . In awe - I noticed that each time the ship's bow lunged into the black depths of the sea - and then rose-up again . . .

There was etched into her massive black hull, in glowing white phosphorus . . .

The names of those that had been called out during roll call!

And then . . .

My name started to appear!

I woke up.

Why . . . it had all . . . been a dream . . . I realized.

You know how it is with some dreams? You're just not finished yet. You don't want to wake up? . . . I didn't want to leave that ship. I tried to go back to sleep. But, I couldn't - Just laid there, and thought about it . . . for the longest time . . . Still do.

It was one of the most wonderful and memorable dreams I have ever had.

Several years later - I had an opportunity to visit the 'Moving Wall'.
It had been set-up at Camp Pendleton, California.

I had gone there with a friend of mine who had been in the Army. Fred, like me, had seen a lot of action in the 'Nam. He'd been there in 1969.

When we saw the Wall - both of us just stood there for a while . . . with lumps in our throats. Just stood there for the longest time. Staring at it . . .
I understand you don't necessarily have to be a Veteran . . . to have those feelings.

After a while, when it looked like neither one of us was going to make the first move . . .

Fred says, "Guess I'll go look up some buddies . . ."

"Yeah. Guess I will, too." I said quietly.

And I didn't see him again for about an hour . . . Lots of names between '66 and '69.

Somehow, we ended up sitting on a bench in front of that memorial - patting each other on the shoulder. And of all things . . . crying . . . like a couple of babies!
Took us awhile to regain our composure.

Finally Fred asks, "You . . . uh . . . find your guys?"

Now, as I've said before, I'm not religious or anything. And now when I think back on it - It was probably the way the sun was hitting the tears in my eyes . . .
But I swear to you - While we were sitting there - I could see my reflection against the 'Wall' . . .
Just like on the SHIP'S deck!

"Yeah." I finally answered.

"I found their names alright. But, you know Fred - and I don't know how things go in the Army. But I have a pretty strong suspicion . . . my guys are pulling some pretty good Liberty right about now."

Naturally you could imagine his reaction. So, I told him of the dream I had experienced a few years before.

Well, there you have it. And I've got to say . . . I've kind of gotten used to this T.A.D. assignment.

And I'm always looking forward to pulling some 'Liberty' with the rest of you T.A.D.'ers.

But when the time comes . . . And I have to report in for duty . . .
I have a feeling I'll be requesting permission to board . . .

A VERY SPECIAL SHIP!

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

A story of camaraderie, admiration and gratitude

By John F. Harris
Former Sergeant USMC

ACQUAINTANCE n. 1. Knowledge got from personal experience 2. A person whom one knows slightly (Webster's New World Dictionary - pocket edition.)

FEBRUARY 1993

When I first came across the ad in the Reunion section of DAV Magazine I couldn't believe it. Had to read it several times before it finally sank in.

Read: **LIMA COMPANY 3/5; 1965 - 1971 (Vietnam)**

Daytona Beach - Contact Dave Grady - etc., etc.

Always knew there would be a reunion one day, we were just too good as an outfit to go unnoticed - but there wasn't enough of us left to even have a good old beer bust. Had figured if it were to happen - they'd have to pool all of the companies from the original battalion to make it work - India, Kilo, Lima and Mike, and Weapons. Couldn't work any other way - there just wasn't enough out of all of them to even tilt a mug of beer - let alone a pitcher. WRONG!

Let me explain: For years I had come away from the war with a lot of loss (Not me - I had survived . . .), but I missed the action and camaraderie that had once been the most focal point of my earlier life. As young warriors we had won the battles - small unit actions of incredible ferocity and tenacious inhumanity - only to come home to a world that had changed. I could read sign (in tracking the enemy), but I couldn't figure out this country of mine at all. And, they couldn't figure me out either.

But, for years I was motivated to grasp at trying to put my life back together - long story - but mostly for those that I had left behind. A purpose. Couldn't just leave it unsaid and undone. And like so many of us - had to go on . . . (Duty, Honor, Commitment . . .)

And, so I called Dave Grady. At this time I had so removed myself and my family from society - that I was living in the mountains and in the same wilderness area that used to keep me alive in my dreams while 'In Country'.

I Said:

"What da ya mean '65 to '71 - I thought they had folded the Company after I left". (For some reason I had figured that once our tour was completed L 3/5 would be rotated out. Never imagined it would stay and be fed new blood until 1971. Such was my ego.)

Dave put me in contact with some of the original Company. Ray Pastrick's name rang a big bell - we had done some hard time together while serving in the third platoon.

Conversation: (Long distance - New York/California wilderness . . .)

"John, you have to remember the GUNNY - he'll be there. Hasn't changed a bit after all of these years." He continued, "Runs three miles a day and wears this hat that plays the Marine Corps Hymn when he salutes".

"Yeah", I said thinking back - wheels spinning - "How could anyone ever forget the GUNNY!"

Remember thinking after our conversation of at least an hour: "Wow! My family is still alive!" (I was so overwhelmed that after hanging up the phone I took a long walk through my mountains - into the wee hours of the night. So many memories - so much loss.)

Ray's last words to me had been: "If you don't show up - I will be forced to come and get you." (Somehow I had to get there - Daytona '93)

FEBRUARY 1966:

Reporting into LIMA Company - 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment located at Camp Margarita situated on a wide plateau on Camp Pendleton, California. In February, the Santa Margarita river (for which the camp was named) flowed over the roads leading to this quagmire of quonset huts and drab buildings that would become my home for just a short stay. (By March 1st we had formed up as a TO - Tactically Operational battalion, and boarded the USS Renville for a month long jaunt across the 'pond'.)

After checking in with the chief clerk of the Company, Sergeant George Semrau, we were told to knock on a door towards the end of the Quonset hut that served as the company office. There were about three or four of us - raw recruits right out of ITR (Infantry Training Regiment). I being the tallest did the knocking . . . Three loud knocks.

"ENTER!"

"SIR! Private Johnnie F. Harris reporting as ordered - SIR!" (And the others reported in accordingly, and in the same manner - standing at attention our eyes focused straight ahead not daring to look down at the voice behind the desk in front of us.)

"Well," he said, and he had a way of drawing it out as if it were the last well in the desert. (And still does.)

"I don't SEE any railroad tracks or gold bars in here. You men don't call me SIR. I happen to be a GUNNERY SERGEANT - see the two rockers below the crossed rifles", He said pointing to his shoulder. (I quickly glanced down.) Adding, "And I happen to WORK for a living!"

He spent about fifteen minutes with us - talking about what he expected from us while serving with Lima Company. He spoke slowly and with an even tone while looking us over - making eye-to-eye contact with each one of us. You could tell he'd been there - had done that.

One of the last things I remember him saying - to give you an idea as to what life was about in the Corps of this era . . . (Because things would change rapidly from then on.)

"You men keep your noses clean, work hard and give this Company a hundred percent - you might make Corporal before your first hitch (four years) is up". (I made sergeant E5 in two and half. I was private E-nothing at this time. Only went as far as Lance Corporal with Lima Company - before being med-evac'd to Okinawa.)

This was still an era where when you joined a rifle company in the Marine Corps - you would usually stay with that Company (or in the Battalion/Division) indefinitely. The Company would be rotated anywhere in the world within that Division's influence. You might be on a Med cruise one year (cruising throughout the Mediterranean - pulling joint operations with the NATO powers), and stationed in Okinawa or Japan the next. Any number of possibilities depending on world events.

But, unknown to any of us in the Gunny's office that day (including the Gunny) -President Johnson, his cabinet, and an Army General by the name of Westmoreland were already effecting Marine Corps history - and policy.

Lima Company would find itself pulling a five year hitch in a little known nor understood country - called Vietnam. Marine Corps policy at that time (and first recommended by General Krulak in 1962) - was the pacification of the lowlands of Vietnam where most of the population was located.

The care and nurturing of these people with supplying medical and physical help throughout the various villages. Helping them with their rice harvests and so on. Gaining their confidence by working among them. Guarding them - so that this work could be done. Continuing the Marine Corps tradition of leading by example and utilizing vision as a means of investing in the future.

We had already proved through nearly two centuries of warfare that we were the best fighting force in the world. And, being a relatively small force at that - we had to incorporate more than just blood, guts and courage. We had to be innovative. Had to add-lib, improvise and adapt. Could not afford to squander our 'few' needlessly and stupidly. And, as usual, we had to do it under budget.

Oh, we would learn the art of war - how to kill with a well placed shot, a knife, your hands - or a rifle butt. It would be passed down from generation to generation. Marine veteran to Marine boot. Each generation would be there (by Marine Corps policy) to insure the next. Leading by example . . . Be thinking of your enemy. Be thinking of your foe . . . Be one step ahead of him. ALWAYS! . . . Don't just outgun him - outsmart him. Get the job done - and done right.

This was the era of Lima Company 1966. I had joined one of the most decorated outfits in the Corps. I couldn't have been happier - nor more honored and privileged.

But, along with that came the responsibility - of the tradition (history) this unit had earned and acquired, with blood, since WWI. (And maybe before.)

I soon realized that I was a part of a team that was put together with men that had been there - HAD done that. Veterans of WWII and Korea. Our insurance policy. It was more than just an honor to train with them, and fight along side of them. They were looking out for us - they were watching over us. They would teach us everything they knew about war. To insure MY survival. And therefore . . . theirs.

And they trained us hard. They hadn't survived this long to have it thrown away by some boot that didn't know his job. To 'buy it' in this next war - because of some boot that wasn't listening - or paying attention. So they were hard on us.

The Gunny - and those next to him were always on us. We evolved into a team of men that were as sharp as a sword. But, through all of that training we had become very close. Almost like family.

There were times when although I was physically exhausted, and tears of pain were streaming down my face from the training we endured - I would muster up whatever I had left, and give it to them - and the Corps. 'They' had been there - and done that - and I was going to pay attention, and learn.

This would become the wealth that I would inherit for the rest of my life - and this, too, would be what I would pass on.

No matter what I was doing or where I was at - I would see the Gunny. Sometimes nodding his head with approval - or often as not shaking it with disgust. (Come-on you guys - get with the program - our lives depend on it!).

June 25th 1993

These would be the thoughts that followed me to Daytona Beach, Florida. A five hour plane trip back to the past (and without knowing it at the time - a boost into the future), and a reunion of which I could not even begin to fathom. But, it would (by reestablishing me, once again, with the men of L 3/5) change my life FOREVER.

I met Ray Pastrick, Jim Yakubson, Don Fied, Bob Bragolie, Skip St Clair and Jim Bramlage - men that had fought with me from the original company - some twenty-seven years before. (I would meet Larry Gaskins just before the banquet.)

And, I had met a few of the men that had taken over our positions for the next five years after we had left - or had been wounded - or killed. Men like Alabama, Meatball, Gunny Loucks, Dan Cantrell, Hank Henry, and Capt. Bob Snowden - and so many others that made me feel right at home from day one.

In fact I had partied hard with them the night before. Those men that had continued on where we had left off - and had carried the honor of Lima Company 3/5 to even higher plateaus, and during some most difficult times in our Nation's history.

But, one of the greatest moments, for me (there were just so many) - was meeting an old acquaintance - my Gunny. Company Gunnery Sergeant, Lima Company 3rd Battalion; 5th Marine Regiment; 1st Marine Division.

This wasn't his first reunion, but the first time he had brought his soul-mate Phyllis. And the first time I had seen him in over twenty-seven years.

When he arrived and checked into the Hospitality Room - I was there to greet him.

While shaking his hand I said to him, "You know, I understand you retired as a Sergeant Major after thirty-six years on active. But if you don't mind - I will always respectfully want to call you GUNNY."

I continued, "I remember horsing and joking around in the squadbay at Camp Schwab, Okinawa - as an eighteen year-old boot, after NTA (Northern Training Area), and some particularly hard training. Saying stuff like, "When I grow up . . . I'm going to be just like the Gunny!"

But I now looked him in the eye - and said, "Sir! I have thought often of you over the years - and what I had said back then. But I couldn't even begin to touch your shadow. Good to see you again, sir, you're holding it well".

Shaking my hand warmly he said, "Sure you can call me 'Gunny'. In fact I would consider it an honor . . . Just ease up a bit on the 'SIR stuff' - I still work for a living".

The 'Gunny'?

Gunnery Sergeant Albert Ross Jr. (1966) - SGT MAJ USMC (RET)

We stay in touch throughout the year. I'll usually call him on the Marine Corps Birthday. And I always get a Christmas card from him with a nice letter.

Sometimes he'll call me out of the blue (and usually when I've been feeling a little down), just to touch base - and always with an encouraging word..

And, I'm not the only one. He's that kind of a guy. A Marine that leads by example. And, whose example over the years, has served as a pinnacle of inspiration for me personally.

When times have been tough in my life (and there's been a few) I need only to look back on my life to a time when it was 'REALLY' tough (training for war) and very VERY hard (the war) - and be appreciative of men like the 'Gunny' - 'THE LIFER'S'. Who through their care and perseverance got MOST of us through it.

I want to tell you this . . . 'GUNNY' . . . As a senior Non Commissioned Officer you rate the admiration . . . and respect of 'SIR' - at least once in a while.

We both have hung up our swords . . . A long time ago . . . But!

. . . If it ever comes down to another war . . . I'll follow you into HELL any day . . . SIR!

And bye-the-way. . . Thank You, Sir!
I never got a chance to tell you that in 1966 . . .

Sincerely my friend - SEMPER FI -YUKON -

REMARKS

I can't begin to describe what a high it was - still is (will always be) to be amongst men, women and families of the Corps - of Lima Company 3/5. Of the love and camaraderie, and warmth so openly shared. Of the laughter, and once in a while sadness . . . And, of pride that is so thick - you can cut it with a sword.

People that have one thing in common. A brotherhood beyond compare - that has taken us through some of the most challenging times of our lives and will always continue to temper us in mind and spirit.

As part of a speech that I was able to humbly make during an emotionally charged reunion last year (1997) in Washington, D.C. Let me reemphasize:

To the children of the Corps - to the children of this country and to the children of this world: CARRY ON! You ARE what we are all about! LEARN! Work hard at it! Through education this world is at your fingertips. There is nothing you CAN'T do.

'THE MORE YOU SWEAT AT PEACE - THE LESS YOU BLEED AT WAR'

CAMARADERIE (Personal excerpts and observations)

Setting: Friday night June 25th 1993

We had gone out for dinner earlier. A few of the old company just wanting to spend some time together. Drove clear across Florida (might have been in Louisiana for all I know) - the Gunny at the wheel. Phyllis the navigator. What a beautiful couple!

Kicking back in the banquet room afterwards - just talking - enjoying the night.

Among old friends; The Gunny and Phyllis; Ray Pastrick and Donna; Jim Yakubson (Linda had gone to check up on Jamie and Matt - a never ending chore). And, Spiderman Bob Bragole and Jerry his wife. Just having a wonderful time.

I brought up Hill 362 (maybe wanting to know if it had existed, and if so what had my other friends thought about it over the years. How had they dealt with it.).

Gunny Ross: "Yeah. That was a tough one. I'll never forget the mortar barrage the night before. Remember that? (How could I ever forget.) The fastest I ever dug a fighting hole - with a bayonet!"

Me: I'm looking at Phyllis during all of this. Notice the amazed look on her face..

"Phyllis. Did you have any idea as to what was happening during this time?"

Phyllis: "Why, no. He never talked about 'that' in his letters".

Me: Looking at the Gunny; "What is it about you 'lifers'? You go through Korea. Then you do three tours in the 'Nam."

"I can almost picture it. You come home after thirteen months in hell. - Like it's another day at the office. I can see you walking through the front door - seabag in hand - and throw your hat on a peg in the wall - and say to Phyllis, 'Hi, honey. I'm Home'."

Gunny: "Naw, John. It wasn't like that at all. I'd come through the door after my thirteen months in hell - seabag in hand. COVER on straight. And then I'd take Phyllis to the back room for about two hours . . .

Then I'd set my seabag down - and throw my COVER at the peg on the wall!"

(Sorry, Phyllis. Couldn't leave that one unsaid. It's a 'Gunny' classic.)

Later that evening:

A few of us had decided to move outside to the patio that was sandwiched between the tenth floor hospitality room and the banquet room. The hospitality room was filling up rapidly and was deliciously filling the room with a lot of noise. It was a bit cooler outside as we pulled up chairs and sat down. There were others there that had gone out to enjoy the evening and the quiet. There was talking and laughing going on, but it was at a low ebb compared with being inside.

At our table sat a few of the original Lima Company ('66). There was gunny Ross, Jim Yakubsin, Bob Bragolie, and Ray Pastrick. I looked through the sliding glass doors of the hospitality room a one point and saw some guests that I had invited wondering around looking for me. I caught their attention and beckoned them outside. No one knew what was going on.

Earlier that day I had been on the elevator headed down to the pool. I had on my swimsuit - a towel over my shoulder and a cold beer in my hand. (That's one of the many things I like about Daytona - it's casual.)

On the way down, three young men got on board dressed for the pool. You could tell they were young Marines - had 'high n tight' hair cuts, bright new Marine Corps tattoo's, and all three looked like body builders.

I said to them:

"You men must be with the 'new' Corps."

"Yes Sir!", said one who appeared to be the leader - or with the most rank.

"Don't call me sir.", I said grinning at him, "I'm a sergeant in the 'old' Corps - I work for a living.", adding while sticking my hand out to shake their hands, "Name's Yukon. I'm attending a reunion here - honoring that era."

"Are you with Lima three five?", he asked while shaking my hand, and continued, "We saw the billing on the marquee when we arrived."

"Why, yes I am.", I said surprised that anybody but us would know what it meant (the marquee simply said: **Welcome Lima Company 3rd Battalion 5th Marine**).

"How about you Marines?", I said, "Where are you stationed?"

"We're stationed up in Kings Bay, Georgia. We're with a guard detachment. Just came down here for a little weekend liberty.", said the leader, who looked like he could bend the barrel of an M-14 without raising a sweat.

"Copy that lad!", I said as the elevator was rapidly approaching the lobby, "You men enjoy the weekend."

"Tell you what.", I said as the elevator doors opened, "You guys come up to the tenth floor hospitality room this evening - say after twenty-two hundred, and I'll buy you a beer. I'd like to introduce you to some mighty fine men of the old Corps. We fought together in Vietnam from 1966 to 1971."

"We weren't even born then!", exclaimed the leader.

"Yeah, I figured.", I said (feeling my age), "But we have one thing in common - The Corps."

"I'll see you this evening.", I added walking off in the direction of the barefoot bar and patio, where I had spotted some of my brothers.

Now as they came out into the patio area on the tenth floor I addressed those that were out there:

"I'd like to introduce you to some Marines of the new Corps!"

Except for the people at my table nobody was paying attention. I realized everybody was deep into their own little worlds. Most of them (like the 'Nam) very far away.

So I continued, directing my conversation to the one Marine I had talked to earlier, who was also a towhead and about five foot eight. He was a handsome kid:

"You know, I once looked like you. But that was before I stepped on a land mine. And, as you can see the Navy didn't do a very good job of putting me back together." (This got some laughs from my table as well as from the young Marines.)

"And, I used to be about six foot three -", I continued, "Until I was shot through the upper neck - and they had to shorten me down a couple of inches." (With this everyone was starting to pay attention. What's that crazy Yukon bullshitting about now?)

But it broke the ice so-to-speak and these young Marines soon found themselves right at home - partying with the 'Old Corps'. Later they would fetch their cam-corder and film us all jumping up on a couch in the hospitality room - shouting off our name rank, service number, MOS (military Occupational Specialty), and the date we served Lima Company in Vietnam. I think it was one of the highlights in their young careers. And all of us had a great time that night.

Skip St Clair and Bob Henry, who were living in Brunswick, Georgia at the time, later attempted to get a copy of the video. But were unable to, because these fine young men had been transferred.

It was the events of this evening that led to my now infamous spiel of the following year (Daytona '94).

I once asked the Gunny:

"Did you get into any of those conflicts - like Granada or Panama before you went off active?"

Gunny:

"Hell, John . . . Been in bar room brawls worse then them two. Vietnam - was the last good scrap we ever got into!"

(Yes sir - Gunny. It was sure-as-hell the last one that I ever got into!)

Another time:

"What did you think of that 'botch' in the desert - trying to free the Americans after the fall of Iran?"

Gunny:

"Botch isn't the word I would have used. Too may idiots trying to capitalize on some sort of glory - when WE could have pulled it off. SHOULD have pulled it off - and WOULD have pulled it off - had it not been for the HELP of the Army, Airforce and God knows who else was involved with it!"

Setting: Sunday June 27th - about 1400, 1993

The hardest thing I found out early on - about reunions - is leaving. Ray and Donna Pastrick were in the Treasure Island Inn lobby with me while I was waiting for a cab to take me to the airport - and gone. We had laughed so hard the night before - my stomach was still sore.

Ray leans over, and looking me in the eyes says to me seriously (rarely, ever, is Ray serious), "What's going to happen to you!"

Me: "Aw, Ray. I'll get back to the mountains, and with the Fourth-of-July weekend coming up - probably catch up on some sleep (Hadn't slept in about three days), and maybe do a little fishing on Trinity lake.

Ray: "No! You idiot!", He says with a gentile almost father-like smile. "I mean - what's going to happen to you after you're done. I mean over. Finished - Kiputz."

Me: "Oh that.", I said (realizing that I had inadvertently uncovered a weak point).

"Well, whatever woman is with me (and I don't know why I said it this way - because I was still married at the time -) will have orders to dress me up nice and pretty in my Blues (Dress Blues - Marine Corps uniform) - place me in my little row-boat - pour napalm over me. And, light me off - with a Zippo lighter - in a blaze of glory across Trinity lake!"

Ray (got HIM laughing): "Oh yeah! No foxholes for you, buddy. Viking style - I'm going the same way!"

We hear this chuckling behind us, and realize that the Gunny and Phyllis are sitting on a couch right behind us.

Ray: "Well, how about you Gunny?"

Gunny: "Boys, I always thought Arlington would be my final resting place. Goes with the job. But, then they buried that 'Squid' (Marine Corps jargon for Navy) J.F. Kennedy there. Put a little candle over his head. And I was just getting used to that - when they buried his little brother 'Bobby' there. And he hadn't even been in the armed services!"

"So . . .", He continued on seriously, "I found this veterans cemetery in Kansas, where I live. (Garnett, Kansas. What a gem they have - and probably don't even know it.) But I'm having the damnedest time getting them to bury me **STANDING** at **ATTENTION**."

Me: Couldn't resist it. "Shoot, Gunny, don't let that get to you . . . Terry Benton over there (pointing further into the lobby where Terry and his wife Nancy were also waiting to catch a ride out) - is a taxidermist on the side. Why, we could have you stuffed - put you on a brass plaque in the middle of Kansas . . . And salute you every time we drive by!"

Gunny: "Damn, Yukon, that's a great idea!"

(Phyllis just rolled her eyes - 'Like . . . When are you guys ever going to bury that shovel!')

You really didn't think it would end here. Did you?

Two years later: Imperial Palace - downstairs bar - Las Vegas . . . Reunion 1995

I run into Bob (Hank) Henry. It's about 0400. The town never sleeps . . . I never sleep. We're both a little lit - but I can still remember:

Hank: "Yukon!" (It's because of him that I got that nickname - long story. My nickname during the war was - 'Slice' - because I carried a lot of knives. Don't know why anymore - maybe the Indian in me. But, long time friends have said to me 'Yukon' fits just fine.)

"Heard some rumor that you were planning to pollute the planet with your ashes - or something." He continued, "It could be an environmental issue of unknown consequences . . . Could be of universal consequences!"

Me: "Yeah well, I wouldn't be the only one . . . now. Would I?"

Hank: "No - wait a minute. I got an Idea. You could put those ashes in a bottle - thus saving all of humanity. You could label the bottle YUKON - and we will put it in our footlocker, and take you from reunion to reunion."

Me - scratching my head: "Yeah - sounds good - at least I'd have a home. But, I don't know, Hank. What if it comes down to the last survivors of the Company? What if these old farts pop the lid on the wrong bottle? Did you consider that? Huh?"

(Always looking for that land mine . . . that's going to get me.)

THE END

(Well, maybe - I don't think so . . . BEEN THERE - DONE THAT!)

'MURPHY'S LAW' – as it is applied to COMBAT...

1. YOU ARE NOT SUPERMAN.
2. RECOILESS RIFLES - AREN'T.
3. SUPRESIVE FIRE - WON'T.
4. IF IT'S STUPID, BUT WORKS, IT AIN'T STUPID!
5. DON'T LOOK CONSPICIOUS - IT DRAWS FIRE.
6. NEVER DRAW FIRE - IT IRRITATES EVERYONE AROUND YOU.
7. WHEN IN DOUBT - EMPTY THE MAGAZINE.
8. NEVER SHARE A FIGHTING HOLE - WITH ANYONE BRAVER THAN YOU ARE.
9. REMEMBER, YOUR WEAPON WAS MADE BY THE LOWEST BIDDER.
10. IF YOUR ATTACK IS GOING REALLY WELL - IT'S AN AMBUSH!
11. IF YOU CAN'T REMEMBER....THE CLAYMORE - IS POINTED TOWARDS YOU.
12. ALL FIVE-SECOND $\square\square\epsilon\square\square$ GRENADE FUSES - ARE THREE SECONDS.
13. TRY TO LOOK UNIMPORTANT. THEY MAY BE LOW ON AMMO.
14. IF YOU ARE FORWARD OF YOUR POSITION - THE ARTILLERY WILL BE SHORT.
15. THE ENEMY DIVISION YOU ARE IGNORING - IS THE MAIN ATTACK.
16. THE EASY WAY - IS ALWAYS MINED.
17. THE IMPORTANT THINGS - ARE VERY SIMPLE.
18. THE SIMPLE THINGS - ARE VERY HARD.
19. IF YOU ARE SHORT ON EVERYTHING EXCEPT ENEMY - YOU ARE IN COMBAT!
20. NO PLAN SURVIVES FIRST CONTACT - INTACT.
21. WHEN YOU HAVE SECURED AN AREA, DON'T FORGET TO TELL THE ENEMY.
22. INCOMING FIRE - HAS THE RIGHT-OF-WAY.
23. NO COMBAT READY UNIT, HAS EVER PASSED INSPECTION.
24. NO INSPECTION READY UNIT - HAS EVER PASSED COMBAT.
25. TEAMWORK IS ESSENTIAL, IT GIVES THE ENEMY OTHER PEOPLE TO SHOOT AT.
26. IF THE ENEMY IS IN RANGE - SO ARE YOU!
27. BEER MATH: IF YOU NEED TWO BEERS FOR EACH MAN, AND YOU HAVE 37 MEN - YOU'LL NEED 49 CASES.
28. BODY COUNT MATH: IS 2 VC PLUS 1 NVA PLUS 1 WATER BUFFALO EQUALS 37 KIA'S.
29. FRIENDLY FIRE - ISN'T.
30. ANYTHING YOU DO CAN GET YOU SHOT - INCLUDING, DOING NOTHING.
31. MAKE IT TOO TOUGH FOR THE ENEMY TO GET IN....AND, YOU CAN'T GET OUT.
32. TRACERS - WORK BOTH WAYS.
33. THE ONLY THING MORE ACCURATE THAN INCOMING ENEMY FIRE - IS INCOMING FRIENDLY FIRE.
34. RADIOS WILL FAIL, AS SOON AS YOU NEED FIRE SUPPORT DESPERATELY.
35. IF YOU TAKE MORE THAN YOUR FAIR SHARE OF OBJECTIVES - YOU WILL HAVE MORE THAN YOUR FAIR SHARE – TO TAKE.
36. IF BOTH SIDES ARE CONVINCED THEY ARE ABOUT TO LOOSE - THEY ARE BOTH RIGHT.
37. PROFESSIONALS ARE PREDICTABLE - BUT, THE WORLD IS FULL OF AMATURES.
38. MURPHY WAS A GRUNT . . .

IN THE BEGINNING

By Sgt. T. L. Wampler

IN THE BEGINING was the word . . . and the word . . . was GOD.

In the beginning WAS GOD! . . . and all else was darkness, and void, and without form. So GOD created the Heavens and the Earth. He created the Sun . . . and the Moon, and the Stars . . . so that light might pierce the darkness. And, the earth GOD divided between the land and the sea, and these he filled with many assorted creatures.

And the DARK, SALTY, SLIMY creatures that inhabited the murky depths of the oceans, GOD called SAILORS, and . . . he dressed them accordingly.

And the flighty creatures of the air he called AIRMEN. And, these he clothed in uniforms which were ruffled and fowl.

And the lower creatures of the land . . . GOD called SOLDIERS . . . and, with a twinkle in his eye, and a sense of humor that only he could have . . . GOD gave them trousers to short, and covers to large, and pockets to warm their hands. And, to adorn their uniforms . . . GOD gave them badges. And, he gave them cords. And, he gave them ribbons . . . and patches . . . and stars . . . and bells. He gave them emblems . . . and crests . . . and all sorts of shiny things that glittered . . . and devices that dangled. When your GOD, you tend to get carried away in a big way.

And on the seventh day, as you know . . . GOD rested. And on the eighth day at 0730, GOD looked down upon the Earth, and, was not happy! GOD was NOT HAPPY! So he thought about his labors, and in his infinite wisdom, GOD created a divine creature . . . and this he called a MARINE . . . and these Marines . . . whom GOD created in his own image . . . were to be of the air, the land, and the sea. And these he gave many wonderful uniforms. He gave them practical fighting uniforms . . . so that they could wage war against the forces of Satan . . . and, evil. He gave them service uniforms for their daily work and training . . . that they might be sharp, and ready . . . And, he gave them evening and dress uniforms. Sharp, stylish, handsome things . . . so they might profile with the ladies on Saturday night . . . and impress the hell outta everybody!

AND AT THE END OF THE EIGHTH DAY, GOD . . . looked down upon the Earth...and saw that it was good. But was GOD happy? . . . N-o-o-o! GOD was still not happy! Because, in the course of his labors, he had forgotten one thing...He did not have a MARINE uniform! But he thought about it, and thought about it...and finally satisfied himself in knowing that, well, not everybody can be a MARINE.