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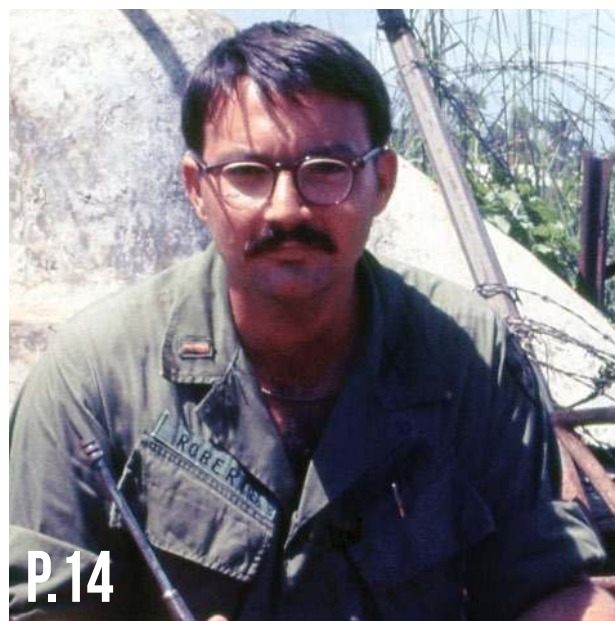
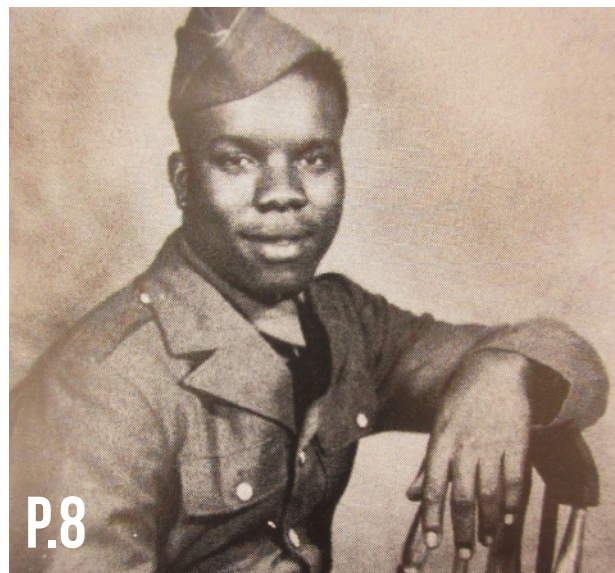
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Cover: Henry Parham, Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh
Oral History Initiative (Farkas Collection)

VBC Magazine is published quarterly by
The Veterans Breakfast Club, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that harnesses the
power of storytelling in order to connect, educate, heal, and inspire.

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(412) 623-9029
veteransbreakfastclub.org

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

On July 14 at Two Mile Run Park in Beaver County, PA, the VBC held its first in-person event in over 16 months. WWII veteran Gene Bowser, pictured here, attended along with over 130 others. (Gene was a "Jack of the Dust" on the *USS Bremerton* CA-130 where he fed the crew for 68-cents per sailor per day) We shared stories, re-connected, and even managed to livestream the event as an experiment. We'll continue to tweak our livestream set-up in order to bring the joy and fascinations of our in-person events to those who join us online. And, of course, we'll continue our great online programming even as we hold more

in-person events this fall. Nothing can replace our face-to-face breakfasts. Then again, where but online could we have welcomed the only surviving WWII Medal of Honor recipient Woody Williams, Tuskegee Airman P-51 pilot Harry Stewart, VA Secretary Denis McDonough, or Francis Gary Powers, Jr.? So far this summer, we've debated the withdrawal from Afghanistan, discussed the Fall of Saigon with ARVN veterans, and had an unforgettable evening with Vietnam veteran triple amputee Capt. Tommy Clack. If you live in the Pittsburgh area, please attend one of our Saturday morning events listed on the next page.

And wherever you are, join us on Zoom for our VBC Happy Hour every Monday at 7:00pm. Or, Greatest Generation Live and A Veteran's Story with Pete Mecca other evenings. Everyone is welcome, and you never know what you're going to hear!



Todd DePastino
Executive Director



(Lucy Shaly/for Beaver County Times)



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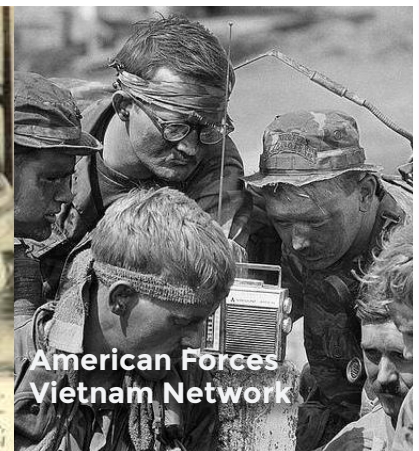
TUNE INTO THESE UPCOMING ONLINE PROGRAMS!

These events are online only--
join us on Zoom, Facebook or
YouTube! Event dates and details
at veteransbreakfastclub.org!



USS Pueblo Veterans

The North Koreans are having a hard time proving to the world that the captive crewmen of the U.S.S. Pueblo are a contrite and cooperative lot. Last week to the U.S. Navy. In this class-reunion picture, three of the crewmen have managed to use the medium for a message, furtively getting off the U.S. hand signal



**American Forces
Vietnam Network**



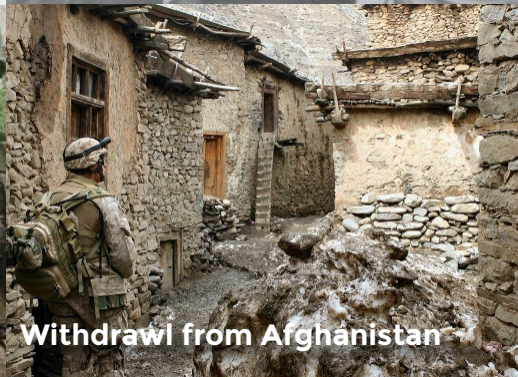
Ritchie Boys



**American Red Cross
Donut Dollies**



ARVN Veterans



Withdrawal from Afghanistan



Operation Red Wings

OUR ONLINE PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

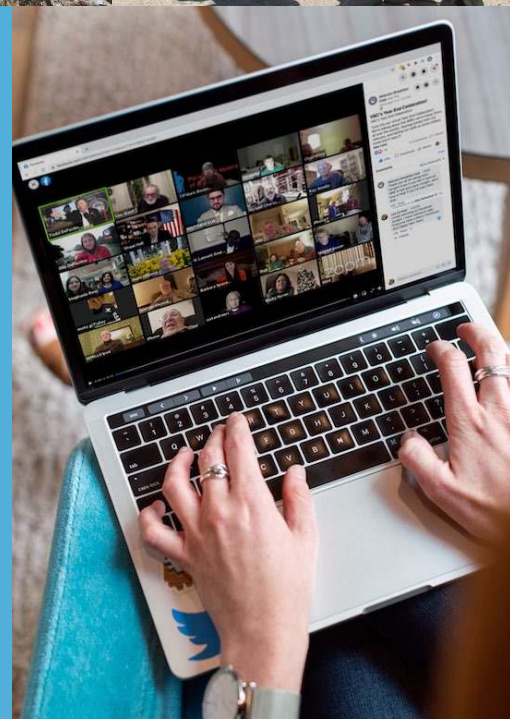


VBC HAPPY HOUR Monday nights at 7pm ET on Zoom; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. BYOB(verage). Veterans stories, conversations, special topics, and guests.

GREATEST GENERATION LIVE WWII ROUNDTABLE One Tuesday a month at 7pm ET; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. Conversations about all things WWII, including the stories of WWII veterans.

A VETERAN'S STORY WITH PETE MECCA One Thursday a month at 7pm Eastern on Zoom; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. In-depth interviews with remarkable veterans of all eras, branches, and backgrounds.

STARTING NOV. 3: VBC COFFEE HOUR Every Wednesday at 9am ET on Zoom; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. Just like our usual veterans storytelling breakfasts, but made virtual! BYOB(reakfast)!



IN-PERSON VBC BREAKFASTS ARE BACK!



All breakfasts begin at 8:30am. Prices listed below. RSVP to 412-623-9029 or shaun@veteransbreakfastclub.org

Saturday, August 21, 8:30am-10:30am: Christ Church at Grove Farm (in the Event Barn to the right of the church) (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143) \$15 per person.

Saturday, August 28, 8:30am-10:30am: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102) \$15 per person.

SPECIAL EVENT

Saturday, September 11, 5pm-10pm: Rivers Casino (777 Casino Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15212), see below.

Wednesday, September 22, 8:30am-10:30am: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, PA 15009) \$15 per person.

Friday, September 24, 8:30am-10:30am: Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15235) \$20 per person.

Saturday, October 9, 8:30am-10:30am: Christ Church at Grove Farm (in the Event Barn to the right of the church) (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143) \$15 per person.

Saturday, October 23, 8:30am-10:30am: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102) \$15 per person.

SPECIAL EVENT

Thursday, November 11, 8am-10am: Duquesne University Student Union Ballroom (1000 Locust St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219), see p. 13

Saturday, November 20, 8:30am-10:30am: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, PA 15009) \$15 per person.

Saturday, December 4, 8:30am-10:30am: Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15235) \$20 per person.

Saturday, December 18, 8:30am-10:30am: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102) \$15 per person.

Wednesday, December 15, 8:30am-10:30am: Christ Church at Grove Farm (in the Event Barn to the right of the church) (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143) \$15 per person.



**UNITED WE
REMEMBER**
20 YEARS LATER

SAVE THE DATE: SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

September 11 Dinner
Saturday, September 11,
5pm-10pm
Rivers Casino
(777 Casino Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15212)

The Veterans Breakfast Club is joining the Military Community Support Project for a special event on Saturday, September 11, 2021, to remember our national day of infamy 20 years ago. The focus of the dinner event will be to recognize and honor those that have served our country since 9/11.

The dinner will be held at the Rivers Casino (777 Casino Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15212) from 5 PM - 10 PM on Saturday, September 11, 2021. Cost is \$125 per ticket and \$40 per active duty and reserve ticket. More information and ticket ordering can be found at the Military Community Support Project's website: militarycsp.org/remember

Table sponsorships, program ads, and gift basket donations are welcome and can be arranged by emailing Dave Skomo at secretary@militaryCSP.org.



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE VBC IN 2022! Beginning next year, the VBC will invite you to become a member of the Veterans Breakfast Club. We're planning a simple membership program offering discounts, admission to special events, and access to content and swag for modest annual dues. Our regular events and VBC Magazine will remain available to everyone. Stay tuned for more details this fall!

OVERNIGHT TO NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE US ARMY & NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MARINE CORPS



SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 1, 2021
\$289 (DOUBLE OCCUPANCY; \$60 SINGLE SUPPLEMENT)

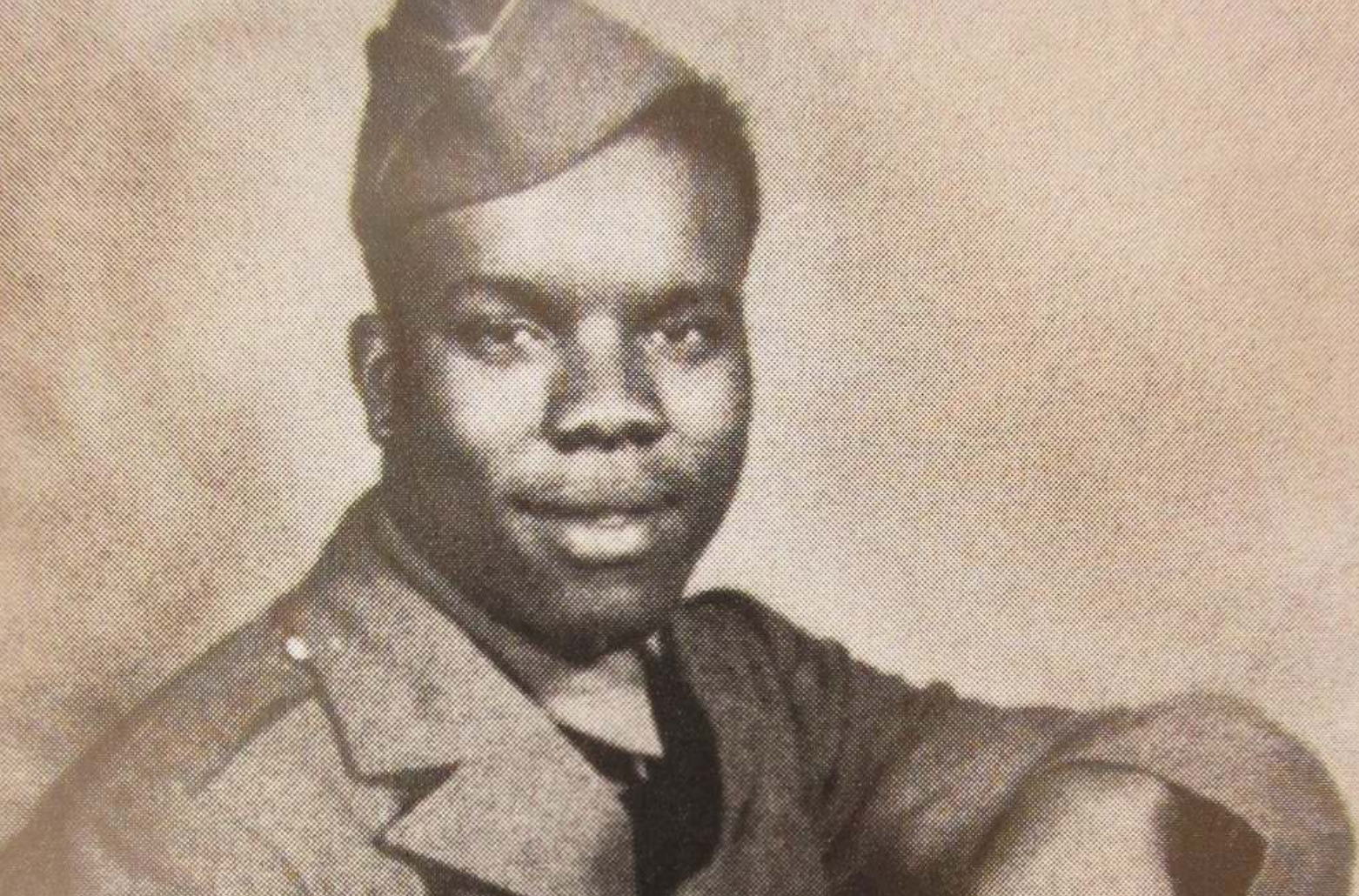
Join us on our overnight trip to tour the new National Museum of the US Army at Fort Belvoir and the National Museum of the Marine Corps near Quantico, Virginia. Both are state-of-the-art, 21st-century museums that immerse visitors in the sights and sounds of the Army and Marine Corps experiences through history.

Trip includes three group meals, motorcoach transportation, and overnight and breakfast at the Fairfield Inn and Suites. **Reservations and full payment of \$289 (\$349 for single room) are due September 10.** Make your reservation by paying for the trip in full either by credit card through our PayPal account (access at veteransbreakfastclub.org; include a message that the payment is for the trip) or by sending your name, address, email, and cell phone information, along with a check made out to "Veterans Breakfast Club" for \$289 (\$349 for single supplement) to:

Veterans Breakfast Club
200 Magnolia Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15228

Contact Todd with any questions: 412-886-8531 or todd@veteransbreakfastclub.org.





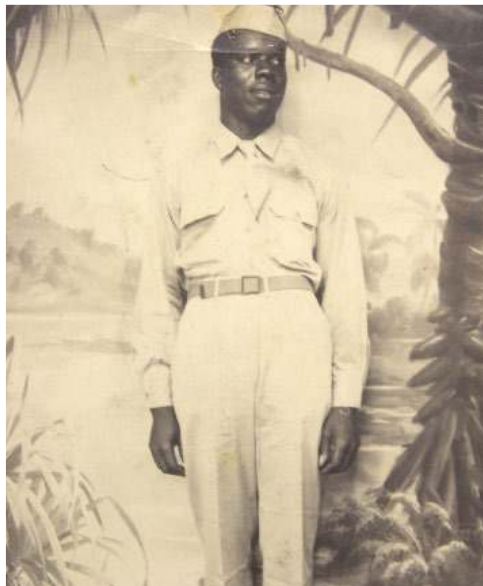
DOUBLE VICTORY

THE LAST BLACK D-DAY VETERAN OF OMAHA BEACH, HENRY PARHAM

Henry Parham, with Todd DePastino

When VBC veteran Henry Parham passed away on July 4 at age 99, an important chapter of American history slipped into the past. Henry was the last surviving African American soldier to land on Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944. He was a member of the all-Black 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, part of a segregated US military. In 1942, the nation's largest black newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, called upon readers to embrace a "Double V" campaign for democracy and freedom at home and abroad. This challenge to Jim Crow sparked a modern Civil Rights Movement and enlisted the millions of Black men and women who served in the Armed Forces and worked in defense plants during World War II. We're grateful that Henry lived long enough to be honored publicly for his service. He told his story at VBC events over the years, including a sit-down interview with Todd in 2012. You can read his edited account below. We'll miss you, Henry!

I grew up in rural Greensville County, Virginia, on the North Carolina border during the heyday of Jim Crow. My parents were sharecroppers. Segregation was a part of everyday life, and you couldn't do anything about it. I grew up knowing there were certain places I couldn't go, and certain things I couldn't do. Black people in my county, for example, couldn't vote. We weren't full citizens. That's just the way it was. That was the law.



In November 1942, I was working as a porter in Richmond for Trailways bus company making seventeen dollars a week plus tips when I got drafted into the Army. Even though we couldn't vote, the government considered us good enough to fight in a segregated Army.

Soldiering was unknown where I came from, so I was totally unfamiliar with the ways of Army life. I reported two days before Christmas, passed the physical, and then shipped immediately with several other guys to Fort Meade, Maryland. Our train got in at 3:00am, and we marched to our barracks. A sergeant announced we had until 0700 hours to sleep. When 7:00am came, that same sergeant stormed in and started turning over cots to wake men up. I thought, "Wow, what have I gotten myself into?"

It took all of a few days for me to be assigned to a brand new unit, the all-Black 320th Coastal Barrage Balloon Battalion. I had no idea what that would entail. I boarded a segregated train for the Barrage Balloon Training Center at Camp Tyson, Tennessee, where we lived in segregated barracks and ate at segregated mess halls. Camp Tyson was enormous and set down in the middle of nowhere. The Army didn't want our balloons interfering with aircraft, so we were well outside flight paths. Also, that part of Tennessee is a place where the four winds blow. If we could handle those balloons there, we could handle them anywhere.

These balloons were huge, eighty-five feet long, tethered by steel cables, which wound around a gasoline-powered winch. We practiced inflating and launching these mini-blimps up to 12,000 feet in the air under all sorts of conditions. It was heavy, dangerous work, and one in our group was electrocuted when lightning struck his balloon.

Our initial training was to protect big coastal cities vulnerable to air attack. After a few months, our mission changed. Our "Coastal Barrage Balloon Battalion" was re-designated as

an "Anti-Aircraft Barrage Balloon Battalion, Very Low Altitude." That meant we were going overseas and into combat. Our balloons became smaller and more maneuverable. And we raised them to 200 feet only, anticipating dive bombing and low altitude strafing.

In an American military where most Black men were restricted to driving trucks, mopping floors, and loading ships, we in the 320th Battalion were proud to be among the few African Americans designated for combat. In November 1943, we lined up on Pier 86 in New York to board the *HMS Aquitania*, a luxury passenger vessel built around the time of the Titanic and pressed into service to haul 8,000 troops across the Atlantic. We packed into steerage, which was completely filled with stacked hammocks and canvas bunks stretched across metal frames. I passed the seven-day crossing playing poker. I didn't get seasick, even when we ran into a fierce galestorm that tossed our enormous ship like a cork, but many of my comrades did. Then, a depth charge was dropped against what we assumed was an enemy U-boat. We were relieved when we landed in Scotland.

Conditions were rough as we made our way south to the English coast. Our rations were skimpy, our showers cold, and our quarters heated by a half-helmet of coal a day, if that. Only marching and drilling kept us warm that long winter.

In spring, we crowded into camps along the Channel coast and waited for the invasion. We couldn't leave or communicate with the outside world. Our pay was held until we reached France. We were on edge.



Courtesy The Pittsburgh Courier

We shoved off on a small transport ship on June 5. I had never been that close to the sea before. Except for the *Aquitania*, I had never been on a ship. In the dark, I climbed down a rope ladder with thirty others into an LCV "Higgins boat."

We bobbed around for hours off Omaha Beach, waiting for our turn to land. The beach was bedlam, and everything was behind schedule. Bodies floated in the water, smoke covered everything. Finally, around 2:00pm, the ramp went down, and we were ordered off by an officer who waved a pistol just in case any of us had second thoughts.

Bullets flew by and artillery shells exploded all around. I could actually hear the bullets traveling through the water next to me. How I wasn't hit, I don't know.

CONTINUED FROM P. 9

We went down the ramp into neck deep water. Some of the guys drowned. I helped carry one who was too short. We staggered to the shore, which was littered with bodies and body parts, mines and obstacles. A few men went crazy when they hit the beach, paralyzed by fear. Most of us dug foxholes and kept our heads down. No one told us about the tides. I dug my hole too close to the water. As the tide came in, my hole got swamped, and I didn't know whether to lay there and drown or jump up and take my chances getting shot.



Barrage balloons protecting Normandy beaches as supplies unload (National Archives and Records Administration)

The infantry was supposed to push forward over the bluffs and to the roads beyond. But we had to stay put and raise our small balloons to protect the beach and the stream of soldiers and supplies expected to pour in over the coming days and weeks. Some of us brought balloons when we landed, but most of us waited until transports could deliver them, already inflated. By dawn the next day, the 320th had raised twelve balloons over Omaha Beach. The Germans shot some down, and we were able to replace them. Over the next sixty-eight days, we raised more and more balloons, moving them constantly, and protected Omaha Beach from enemy strafing. The Luftwaffe attacked us, but was never able to get low enough to strafe because of the work of the 320th Anti-Aircraft Battalion.

We moved on to Cherbourg in late July to fly a barrage before heading back to the United States in November. After a thirty-day leave, we assembled at Camp Stewart, Georgia, where we trained for jungle duty. We knew we were heading to the Pacific. I landed in Oahu on V-E Day 1945, and I was still there, in Hawaii, when the Japanese surrendered in August. Most of us guessed we had been slated for the invasion of the Japanese home islands. I'm thankful we didn't have to go.

. . . .

For more on the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, see Linda Hervieux's *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War*. Published in 2015, Hervieux's book, which includes information on Henry Parham, is the first devoted to this African American unit that assaulted the enemy on D-Day.



320th Barrage Balloon on Omaha Beach (National Archives and Records Administration)

Target has selected the VBC as one of the non-profit beneficiaries of its Target Circle charitable campaign.

We've partnered with Target Circle.

Vote by September 30.

Target Circle

NONPROFIT PARTNER



You can help by voting for the VBC at target.com/circle. Scroll down, click "Vote" and then scroll down to the VBC icon and cast as many votes as you have!

The voting lasts through September 30, 2021. You earn votes by shopping at Target online or in-person. Thank you!



WHAT ARE BARRAGE BALLOONS?

Three years after Germany launched the first airplane attack in history—the bombing of Paris on August 30, 1914—British air defense forces invented the barrage balloon.

The concept was simple: block enemy planes by raising steel cables tethered to lighter-than-air blimps. The higher the balloons went, the more airspace you could deny to the enemy, forcing pilots to higher altitudes and less accuracy. The cables themselves were deadly. Merely touching one with a wing could send a plane spiraling to the ground. If shot, the hydrogen-filled balloons could explode, taking out nearby aircraft.

When, on September 7, 1940, Hitler launched the Blitz—a massive strategic bombing campaign against British cities—Britain had over 2,000 barrage balloons at the ready, and tens of thousands of men and women to deploy them, to protect ports, harbors, cities, and industrial sites.

The gasbags spooked Luftwaffe pilots, who believed they were aerial mines designed to electrocute air crews. When German planes shot them down, crews often raised new ones the next day. The barrage balloons also proved effective against German V-1 rocket attacks in 1944. Almost 2,000 “strato-sentinels” curtained London and brought down hundreds of the flying buzz bombs.

The United States’ lack of preparedness for World War II included a wholesale neglect of barrage balloons. There was none at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked on December 7, 1941. Almost immediately afterwards, the Army ordered all available balloons to strategic sites on the coasts and asked that Britain send as many as they could spare.

The US military took its new barrage balloons overseas into combat and used them to protect convoys, beachheads, and any other large operation susceptible to enemy attack by air.

Henry Parham of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion was one among several thousand Allied soldiers landing on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944 whose job it was to forest the skies with floating pickets. One downside to blimps was that they gave away positions, allowing German artillerymen at Normandy, for example, to fire effectively at the armada in the English Channel before they ever spotted the ships themselves.

Although blimps didn’t disappear, the heyday of the barrage balloon ended with jet planes and sophisticated tracking technologies. The balloons themselves became government surplus, sold off to car dealers for advertising or recycled into dresses, raincoats, tarps, and tents. Few today remember when they stood watch in the skies, a critical defensive weapon of World War II.



In Gratitude

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING FOR YOUR RECENT DONATIONS!

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Merle & Sharon Apel

Dolph Armstrong

John Barber

Dorothy Barnistin, In memory of WWII veteran Henry Parham

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Walter Beloncis, In memory of Ronald Skov-
iak, USMC helicopter gunner E4, shot down
Vietnam, Oct 8, 1963. Panel E1 Line 31 Order
515 on Wall.

Elodie Beloney, In memory of WWII veteran
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an Henry Parham

Clayton Slater Design, Thank you for pre-
serving our veterans' stories!

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of WWII veteran Henry Parham

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piano

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eesport 23

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seph T. Capone and in honor of his family

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Navy veteran Andy Ogradnik

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Freas, WWII Navy-- "unabashed patriot and
best friend"

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Veterans Breakfast Club Blood Drive



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THE VBC GETS A DONATION FOR EVERY DONATION!

The Veterans Breakfast Club has partnered with Vitalant (formerly Central Blood Bank) to address our nation's critical blood shortage. The VBC Blood Drive is part of Vitalant's "Give Blood Give Back" campaign. For everyone who gives blood through the VBC, the Blood Science Foundation will make a donation back to our organization.

Schedule an appointment at any of 127 Vitalant Blood Donor Centers across the nation. You must either use this link to make an appointment: https://northeast.vitalant.org/LP=28?drive_code=D062&division=NORTHEAST@ion=PIT Or call Vitalant and tell them you want to donate blood with the VBC. Call Rachel at 412-736-5506 or Vitalant at 412-209-7000. You can find a map of Donor Centers in the US: vitalant.org/Donate/Locations

The VBC gets a donation for every donation!
For questions of medical eligibility, call 1-800-310-9556

NOTE: The FDA has lifted the ban that prevented some 4.4 million Veterans, service members and civilians stationed in certain parts of Europe between 1980 and 1996 from donating blood. Most Veterans who served in Europe are now eligible. See <https://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/stories/many-veterans-who-served-in-europe-can-now-give-blood-fda-lifts-ban/>



VETERANS DAY BREAKFAST

23rd Annual Veterans Day Breakfast
Thursday, November 11 at 8:00am
Duquesne University Student Union Ballroom
1000 Locust St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

SAVE THE DATE: NOVEMBER 11, 2021

The VBC is proud to partner with VLP and Duquesne University for the 23rd Annual Veterans Day Breakfast on Thursday, November 11th!

This year's guest speaker will be USMC Veteran, Eric McElvenny.

Eric McElvenny is a local Veteran who served as an Infantry Officer in the United States Marine Corps. After graduating from the United States Naval Academy, Eric deployed three times. On his final tour in Afghanistan, Eric was wounded after stepping on an IED. Eric suffered the amputation of his right leg below the knee, a life-changing opportunity that began his next journey.

Faced with a physical challenge and an uncertain future, Eric made a promise to himself to run an Ironman Triathlon. On his journey from the hospital bed in southern California to the finish line in Kona Hawaii, he realized that the challenge and adversity he was up against and the techniques he used to reach the finish line could be used against the challenges we all entertain. Eric travels across the country to speak, inspire and motivate others to grow from challenges. To learn more about Eric, visit ericmcelvenny.com.

Event details to follow at veteransbreakfastclub.org

For information about sponsorship opportunities, contact Toshua Jarrett at jarrett@vlpwpa.org.



Perhaps the most successful US initiative in Vietnam is also the least known. In 1968, the Army launched a new program to enlist thousands of local militias in South Vietnam to take the fight to the Viet Cong. Five-man Mobile Advisory Teams (MAT) fanned out to South Vietnamese hamlets and villages and embedded themselves, often far away from US forces. It was a final attempt to win the “Hearts and Minds” of South Vietnamese peasants before the US pulled out of the country and entrusted the war to the South Vietnamese themselves. The program (and its Marine Corps counterpart “Civilian Action Program”) was a bright spot in the US war effort, but historians have largely ignored Army MAT’s history. Luckily for us, we have Vietnam veteran Jim Roberts, who has written one of the few books on the subject, *MAT 111 Dong Xoai, Vietnam 1971*. Jim’s memoir tells the up-close-and-personal story of his year fighting a war with the South Vietnamese. We’ve adapted selections from the book here.

Jim Roberts with Todd DePastino

A LONELY WAR

Vietnam 1971

Just as the US is handing over its war in Afghanistan to the Afghan National Security Forces, so, fifty years ago, we transferred the Vietnam War over to the South Vietnamese. We called it “Vietnamization.” I was a part of the handover.

I was an Infantry Lieutenant on a Mobile Advisory Team – MAT 111. We were five men living with the Vietnamese in the village of Dong Xoai. Our job was to advise the locals in fighting the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA). We didn’t deal with the South Vietnamese Army, known as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), but with local militias, the Regional Forces (RF) and the Popular Forces (PF). Some Americans called them “Ruff Puffs.” We never did. They were our (mostly) trusted allies.

“Welcome to Dong Xoai, LT.”

These were the first words I heard over the THUMP, THUMP, THUMP of the Huey helicopter’s rotor blades at Dong Xoai. It was the first time I had been ever addressed as “LT,” and it may be the proudest moment of my service.

A young Sergeant shook my hand, took my bag, and flung it on the hood of a jeep. There would be no saluting here. Salutes gave away officers to enemy snipers.

I was joining MAT 111 as the Assistant Team Leader. The camp at Dong Xoai was home to two RF companies and their families. Most lived dismally right next to the outer perimeter.

Our jeep pulled up to the team houses I would call home for the next year.

My new team members greeted me cordially but with little warmth. After all, I was a green Lieutenant replacing a seasoned one. I had to earn their respect.

Almost a month into my tour at Dong Xoai, I was drifting to sleep after midnight when the distinctive breathy pops of mortars leaving their tubes bolted me awake.

WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP!

Then came the tell-tale staccato of AK-47 fire.

All my training at “Tiger Land”–Fort Polk, Louisiana–kicked in. I knew I had ten seconds to hit the ground.

I rolled immediately out of my bunk onto the concrete floor. Laying there within easy reach were my steel helmet, trousers, boots, web gear (ammo, flashlight, field dressing, pistol, grenades, and other items on a belt and suspenders), flak jacket, and M-16—all carefully placed before lights out.

First on was the helmet, followed by the pants, which I found tricky to slip on in the dark. Then came the boots and web gear,

flak jacket and rifle. I donned all this while pressing as closely to the concrete floor as possible.

My ten seconds were up while I was still on the floor, and the first mortar rounds started hitting. More WHUMPS! and AK-47 and machine gun fire answered now by our side’s M-16s and M-60s.

I rose to a stoop, stepped into the hallway, and turned left, checking each room between me and the exit as I went. Each was empty. The team had beat me out of the house.

The gap between our two MAT team houses was only about twenty feet, but it seemed much larger that night. I waited alone at the door before crossing because I could hear machine gun fire.

Again, my Tiger Land training had prepared me. A good machine gunner operates his weapon carefully—not the way John Wayne, Rambo, or Schwarzenegger do in the movies. The attacker can’t fire long, extended bursts. No one can carry that many bullets, the recoil skews your aim after the first few rounds, and the gun barrel risks melting if you don’t keep your bursts short.

One of the enemy gunners was targeting our .50-caliber machine gun position behind me. I could hear the CRACK! sound of bullets passing in front of me. It was a sound I’d heard at Fort Polk. We called it “Crack-and-Thump.” The crack was the bullet passing you. The thump was the sound from the weapon that fired that bullet. The time between indicated the distance of the gunner.

The bullets came in short bursts of three to five rounds, one or two being a round filled with phosphorus that glowed green. These tracers allowed the gunner to know if he was on target. The VC used green, we used red. I saw a set of tracers pass by, then heard the thump. The gunner was not too close. After a pause, a second set of tracers arrived. There were no tracers or cracks before the next set of thumps, so I made a quick crossing to the main team house.

I was the last to arrive at our rally point.

“Where is YB?” someone asked.

“Shit,” I muttered. “I’ll get him.”

YB was the youngest American at Dong Xoai. He was an E-5, a so-called “Buck Sergeant.” He was called “Young Buck,” which soon became “YB”.

YB’s room was to the right of mine. I’d turned left heading out and had failed to go back and make sure his room was clear. It was a major mistake for an Infantry Lieutenant. As the ranking officer – in fact, the only officer – in the house, it was my duty to clear the building before leaving it. Just as the captain of the ship is the last in the lifeboat, so was I supposed to be the last man out of the house. I’d left YB behind.

I repeated the process for crossing back over to the other team house: waiting, counting, listening, and observing machine gun bullet tracers.

"YB!" I called as I ran down the hallway in total darkness, and he replied.

As I approached his room, something happened. I found myself on the floor struggling to get up. The air around me was heavy with dust and smoke. I groped toward YB's room. I could hear him trying to speak, but it was garbled. My first thought was that YB was in a death match with a VC intruder.

"Damn," I thought, "I'm gonna die tonight."

I dared not use my M-16 in the dark. So, I pulled my bayonet and entered his room.



YB was alone. He began to speak just a bit more clearly.

"I think I can walk," he said weakly. I helped him up and led him toward the exit.

"Rifle," he mumbled, before breaking away from me and disappearing back toward the darkness of his room. Army training – never get separated from your weapon.

YB rejoined me at the door. We counted machine gun cracks, watched the green tracers, and crossed to the other team house where our medic was waiting. He asked if I was ok, and I replied, "Take care of YB."

Things were chaotic. Our emergency generator was dead, and one of our NCOs was out trying to get it started under fire. Without that generator, we had no way of contacting our Advisory Team Headquarters for help.

The VC attack failed to penetrate the outer perimeter. The fighting ebbed, and things fell quiet. We relit the Coleman lantern in the team house and checked each other out. I found out why I had trouble putting my pants on. They were on inside-out—another mark of a green Lieutenant.

YB had a hole through his cheek, and the medic removed a three-inch-long shrapnel splinter from his tongue. I pulled a metal splinter out of the base of my right hand and brushed more splinters from my flak jacket and helmet cover. (Years later, I would squeeze a small rough piece of metal from near the third knuckle of my left hand). I was lucky.

Inspecting YB's room, we saw that a mortar shell had hit a wooden support member of the roof and exploded about 5 feet away from him. When he heard the mortar pops, he had rolled out of his bunk onto the floor. He was on his knees putting on

his flak jacket in such a way that it blocked the shrapnel that could have killed him. The blast knocked him down, wounding and stunning him. He was on the floor trying to gather his senses when I entered his room. The metal splinter in his tongue had made it difficult for him to speak.

I still think about my failure to clear YB's room first. Had I done that, both of us would have been in the main team house when the mortar hit his room, and YB would not have been wounded. The list of mistakes I made in Vietnam is short, but this is at the top.

Although we got most of our food from village markets, we ordered all of our meat from S-4 (Supply). Once, we requested a month's worth of meat, 47 pounds, everything from hamburgers to shrimp. S-4 came through with the 47 pounds. But it was all hot dogs. The next month, it was hot dogs for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, on pizza, in eggs, you name it. Some of us haven't had hot dogs since.

Soda and beer were separate. We paid five-cents a can except for Budweiser, which was ten-cents.

One month the entire shipment of soda was flat – absolutely no carbonization in any of the flavors. Apparently, the company (you'd know the name) had managed to can an entire lot of flat soda. Instead of dumping it, they shipped it to Vietnam and sold it to the soldiers. We drank it, of course.

Our payday worked like it did elsewhere in the Army. On the last day of the month, the payroll officer from Finance would arrive by helicopter. He had a .45 on his belt, a briefcase in one hand, and a paper bag in the other. The briefcase carried paperwork, the bag held cash. The cash was all paper, no coins, in the exact amount of our unit's payroll.

We lined up in reverse rank order. The next in line would step forward and state his name and serial number, then sign his name and take his cash.

From time to time the paperwork for a team member indicated that he owed the Army money – usually some fantastic amount containing many zeros. Or, conversely, the payroll officer paid out an absurdly large amount to a soldier. The officer had no leeway – he had to deliver or collect the amount indicated on the form along with a signature. If the form showed that a team member was owed a huge sum, the payroll officer would pay it out one month and take it back the next.

Sometimes, a soldier would refuse to sign the paperwork. This happened to me once. The Army wanted a lot of money from me for a 16-foot aluminum boat, which I'd never ordered. But the Army claimed I had. I refused to pay. That meant I had to hitch a ride to Saigon with Air America, an airline covertly owned and operated by the CIA. I managed to stretch the trip to cover two nights at the MACV Annex so I could eat well and sleep in an air-conditioned room with no mosquitoes.



One thing we couldn't beg, borrow, or steal was peanut butter, except for the tiny amount in C-rations. I wrote to my wife, Linda, to find the corporate address for the Skippy Peanut Butter company. Two weeks later, a letter from Linda arrived with the contact information I needed.

I drafted a letter to Skippy explaining our plight. "Could I please purchase your wonderful peanut butter that reminds us of home?" I put the letter in the outgoing mail and crossed my fingers

A month later, a large and well cushioned carton arrived containing 24 jars of peanut butter and a letter from company brass thanking me for the request. There was no charge.



We handed out jars to our interpreter, cook, house maids, and RF counterparts.

YB took a photo which I returned to Skippy with a thank you note signed by all.

A call came in on the land line: RF soldiers in a truck had hit a mine on the road to Ben Hoa. Our medic, whom we called Bac Si (Vietnamese for "doctor"), found YB, our interpreter, and me and briefed us. The four of us went to the medical bunker and loaded two litters with first aid supplies and plasma. YB and I put a portable field radio on our litter and followed Bac Si to the camp aid station as the first wounded were arriving.

The mine had been a big one, packed with gravel. It had blasted off the rear axles and flipped the truck on its side. Some troops were killed by the initial blast. Many others suffered bad head and upper body wounds.

YB and I helped unload the wounded, many more than the RF aid station could hold. We put the overflow on litters outside, then, when we ran out of litters, on the ground. Families began arriving to see if their sons or husbands were among the wounded, and if so, how bad they were.

Bac Si and the senior RF medic conducted triage to determine which ones should be treated first. We helped others applying tourniquets, bandaging wounds and starting plasma IVs. We moved the dead off their litters and on to the ground, covering them with ponchos if we could. We also moved the dying-and-unable-to-be-saved off their litters and marked their foreheads or chests with Xs . . . written in blood. The ones who might be

saved, we prepared to load on a Huey helicopter for evacuation to a nearby hospital.

"You two will have to decide the order of evacuation," Bac Si told YB and me. "Don't load anyone marked with an X. And don't transport any dead!"

As we chose which wounded to load, wives and mothers pleaded with us to take their loved ones first. Difficult does not begin to describe the situation. YB and I made our selections and started loading the soldiers, all the while trying to ignore the pleas of the families.

After one trip, we stood back and signaled the pilot to take off. Turning away from the helicopter's rotor wash, I noticed that my hands felt sticky. I looked down. Blood.

And blood soon covered the helicopter cabin floor. I slipped on it once and almost dropped my end of the litter on to another wounded soldier. Blood on the hands was sticky. On the floor, it was slick.

After all the wounded had been evacuated, YB and I walked back to the edge of the helipad to wait for the helicopters to return. We were soaking with sweat and mentally exhausted. As we stood there silently, our two house maids walked up. Each was carrying two buckets of hot water and a cold can of soda. When the chopper landed, each maid took one of their buckets and flushed out the blood on the cabin floor. The water ran red as it drained.

Another medical call came at night. Bac Si woke me up and took me to the aid station, where some Vietnamese medics were tending to an unconscious soldier.

I stepped inside to get a better look at the patient – I knew him. He was a young Vietnamese platoon leader, bright and talented. He'd wanted to be a teacher. But because of the war, he was a soldier instead. He had earned the respect of his men and superiors and got promoted to Lieutenant. He and I would meet every week and help each other with our language skills. I helped him with his pronunciation, and he helped me with mine.

Seeing him lying there, I realized that his outlook had been slowly darkening. Recently, he had asked if I thought the war would ever end. My language skills were not strong enough to clearly explain my thoughts. I encouraged him to keep doing the good job he was doing for his men. I told him it would help keep them alive.

Bac Si walked over and explained that the young Lieutenant had bought a bottle of whiskey and a jar of pills at the local pharmacy. There was nothing anyone could do. We didn't have the medicine, equipment, or the knowledge to revive him.

I walked silently back to the team house. Dawn was just two hours away.

"We need a drink," said Bac Si.

I'm not much of a drinker, but now his offer sounded good. We walked to his room, and I sat in the chair. Bac Si poured two fingers of whiskey into two coffee mugs, and handed one to me.

Looking down at the whiskey, I understood how this young Lieutenant with such a seemingly bright future could only see darkness at the end of the tunnel. I also understood his decision to slip into it.

I drank the whiskey.

I cried.

I should have done more.

* * * *

Writing letters was a good way to pass an evening, but most of my letters contained one big lie – a lie of omission. I accurately described the setting of Dong Xoai, the weather, the team members, the people of the village. But I never mentioned our tactical situation. My wife Linda thought that Dong Xoai was just a small village in Vietnam with little military activity. I kept this from Linda because she was in her third year of medical school which focused on actual medical care for real people. Telling her the truth would have been a worry she didn't need. She was upset when I got home and told her some of the truth. And she was even more upset when she read the drafts of these stories.

Because I tried to write Linda almost every night, preparation for an operation included the writing of a letter for each day I would be in the field. I dated these and gave them to our medic so he could mail one each day to make it appear that I was at Dong Xoai.

I also wrote one letter that he never had to mail. It was always the same, but I always wrote a new one for each mission. When I returned from the field, he would meet me, hand me the letter, and I would tear it to pieces.

That letter began something like this, "If you are reading this, then you know I won't be coming back. I am sorry I broke my promise . . ."

I made cassette tapes, usually in the middle of the night when I was on Radio Watch. It was one way to pass time in the dark waiting for a Viet Cong with an explosive backpack to rush through the team house door. The tapes I made had the same lies of omission.

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Thursday, December 2, 1971: Thanks to Vietnamization, I was leaving Vietnam four months ahead of my initial DEROS (Date Eligible for Return from Overseas). I had no mixed feelings about leaving early. I was the last man on MAT 111. The other members had DEROSed before me and were not replaced.

Out-processing was a lengthy bureaucratic exercise that took several days.

One item on my clearing check list was turning in my M-16. The armory was a short walk from where the helicopters landed near the MACV Annex.

There were two doors on the building. One was marked, "Temporary Storage," the other, "DEROS: Turn Weapons in Here." The "DEROS" room had a counter with two enlisted men as armorers behind it. On the other side of the room were several work benches with weapon cleaning supplies. I put my duffle bag along a wall and joined a line of about eight soldiers, NCOs and Lieutenants who were wearing faded jungle fatigues like mine. All had MACV patches on their shoulders and several had CIBs (Combat Infantry Badges) above the chest pocket on their shirts. These badges marked you as having served in combat.

The line moved slowly, but we weren't in a hurry. An armorer would take the weapon, check to insure it wasn't loaded and give it a cursory inspection. He'd fill out a form and ask the soldier to sign it. The soldier would then produce his own clearance form for the armorer to sign, along with a copy of his orders. The armorer returned the signed form, put the copy of the orders with his form, and it was done.

I was about fourth in line when two Majors entered. They too had MACV patches on their shoulders, but no CIBs, and their fatigues were dark green, not faded like ours. Their uniforms looked pressed, maybe even starched, and had no stains or tears. They walked past us to the counter.

"Rank has its privileges," one of the Majors remarked smugly, as they cut to the front of the line. We stood quietly, but I'm sure we



were all mentally screaming the same obscene thoughts.

The armorer looked at the first Major, inspecting his neat uniform as he took the weapon. In addition to giving the M-16 a cursory review, the enlisted Spec-4 armorer pulled off the hand guards that surround the barrel. These are difficult to remove, and it is almost never done. Even during weapons inspections in Officer Candidate School, the hand guards were never pulled.

The armorer handed the rifle back to the Major.

"Sir, you will have to clean this weapon before I can accept it."

He pointed to the cleaning benches on the other side of the room.

"You can clean it yourself," responded the surprised Major.

"Sir, I cannot do that," answered the armorer, thumbing back at a sign in large letters on the wall behind him.

ALL PERSONNEL REGARDLESS OF RANK WILL CLEAN THEIR OWN WEAPONS PRIOR TO TURNING THEM IN [Signed Colonel So-and-So]

The other Spec-4 did the same thing to the second Major.

Those of us with faded, wrinkled, torn fatigues smiled to ourselves and proceeded to turn our weapons in one at a time with no problems. Rank does indeed have its privileges.

The two Majors were still standing at the benches cleaning their weapons when I left the facility.

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Our "Freedom Bird" waited on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut. About 150 of us soldiers boarded in no particular order. We were all heading home, and many of us were also separating from the Army, so rank was not considered.

We walked out of the departure lounge across the tarmac and up the stairs into the plane. There was no first-class, just rows of seats and an aisle down the center. I found a window seat somewhere in the middle of the cabin. I put my field jacket in the overhead bin and sat down.

The cabin was quiet. The crew, all women, moved up and down the aisles. Many of the soldiers just gazed at them as they walked. The plane taxied to the long strip of concrete and began its acceleration. Once the wheels left the pavement, the cabin erupted in cheers. Our trajectory was so steep, it thrust us back into our seats as the pilot rushed to gain as much altitude as possible to avoid enemy fire.

The next twenty-five hours passed slowly in flight and on the ground in Guam and Hawaii for refueling and engine repair. Our final destination was Travis Air Force Base in California, where they told us a steak dinner awaited.

We landed in Travis and taxied up to a jetway. At the end of the darkened tunnel was a lighted sign:

WELCOME HOME, SOLDIER. YOUR COUNTRY IS PROUD OF YOU.

We would soon learn a different truth.

We exited the tunnel to another Customs check – this one manned by Custom Agents instead of Military Police. Our agent was in a sour mood.

“Why did you have to land in the middle of the night?” he barked to the first soldier in line. “Couldn’t you have just slept on the plane until morning?”

After Customs, we learned there was no steak dinner--no dinner or snack of any kind--because it was so late.

We rode buses to our barracks to await Out-processing at 0700 hours. We crashed for a couple hours, not bothering to remove our khakis.

Someone flipped on the lights at 0500 hours followed by a few shouted obscenities. We walked to the mess hall, then back to the buses for the short trip to the Out-processing Center.

A Major began his briefing by chastising us for traveling in khakis at this time of the year. Khakis were the warm weather uniform, and the regulation dress at this time of the year was Class A Greens.

I looked at the decorations on his uniform jacket. No Vietnam Campaign ribbon.

The men around me started to grumble. The Major continued, ignoring the sounds. He outlined the process and turned the room over to a Spec-5, who had Vietnam ribbons on his chest. The Specialist sighed as he stepped up, welcomed us home, and we began the process of separating from the Army.

The last stop in Out-processing was to receive my final pay. I gave the cashier my voucher and received my money. I also surrendered my Army ID Card. Without the ID card, I was actually out of the Army. I was now a civilian, though still in uniform.

There was no formal separation ceremony, no certificate, no “Thank you,” no hand shake or even a salute. For those working at Travis, it was just another day. For us, the dream was finally reality.

Outside, waiting for a cab in the cold rain, the air smelled fresh. No one wearing web gear. No barbed wire. No protective mesh over bus windows. I felt disconnected and out-of-place.

I caught a cab with four other soldiers to the airport. There were protesters when we arrived. Maybe it was the rain and cold, or maybe the sight of five American Army soldiers getting out of one cab as a unit was too intimidating for the crowd, but I don’t recall any problem with the protesters. If there was chanting, I didn’t hear it. All I remember is an odd silence. No one got in our way – it was as if the seas had parted.

I stopped at a snack bar and got something to eat. If there were stares, I didn’t notice. In the concourse were other veterans in uniform, but we didn’t talk. Again, a strange silence.

I didn’t rush to board. I waited until almost all of the others had entered the jetway before handing my ticket to the gate agent. A member of the cabin crew welcomed me and told me to choose an empty seat. The passengers had scattered themselves throughout the plane. The area in the middle of the cabin had an open row of three seats on one side of the aisle – I chose that one. I climbed over to the window seat. Buckling my seatbelt, I

sat back for the five-hour flight to the east coast – almost home.

My mind drifted away until a stir brought me back to my surroundings. All the people around me—those in front, those in back, those across the aisle—got up and moved to more distant seats. No words spoken, no hushed whispers, just heads nodding to empty seats farther away.

Suddenly, I was an island. They didn’t want to sit near a baby killer – one with a deep suntan in December and a handle-bar mustache. I was in no mood for idle conversation anyhow, so, at the time, I didn’t give it much thought.

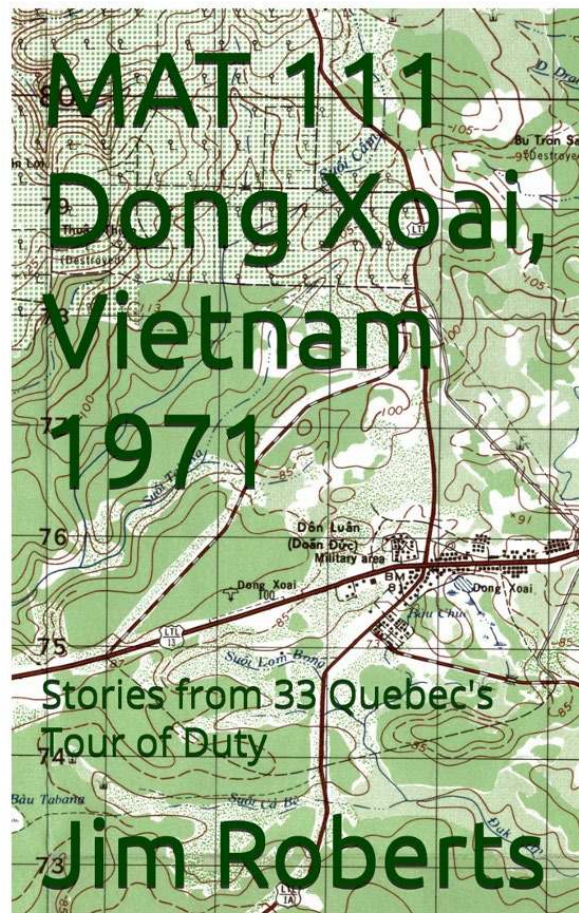
I had forgotten about this incident until a Veterans Breakfast Club event several years ago. I was telling some of my story, and Todd asked to describe my trip home.

It all came back to me right then, painfully. That memory inspired me to remember more and write this book.

Our plane landed at Philadelphia, and I waited on board until the others were out. No need to bother the passengers by mixing with them.

I walked down the jetway into the gate area. On the far edge of a sea of people, I spotted Linda wearing a smile I’ll never forget. That was all the welcome home I needed.

You can buy Jim’s book on Amazon here: <https://www.amazon.com/MAT-Dong-Xoai-Vietnam-1971-ebook/dp/B092L17XM9>. You can also watch Jim and his MAT 111 team members share their memories of Vietnam on our VBC Happy Hour here: <https://youtu.be/JAWBwJKXPXE>





Dana Swift Plummer

REMEMBERING THE EDISON 64

In May, author Richard Sand joined our VBC Happy Hour to talk about his award-winning book, *Edison 64: A Tragedy in Vietnam and at Home*. Thomas Alva Edison High School in Philadelphia suffered more Killed in Action during the Vietnam War than any high school in the nation. Having grown up in Philadelphia, Richard took the story of the Edison 64 personally and spent months meeting in the kitchens of Edison High alumni who served in Vietnam or who lost family members in the war. "I have tried my best to pass on what was given to me and to share the emotions and tone," Richard says. "I will never forget any of what I have heard. I hope you too will always remember the Edison 64 and all those who served."

WITH RICHARD SAND AND
DANA SWIFT PLUMMER

One of the stories Richard gathered was of Cpl. James "Jake" Smith, Jr., of the 4th Infantry Division. James' sister, Dana Swift Plummer, has never stopped grieving. She lost her big brother to Vietnam. The other 63 Edison fallen, she says, are like honorary big brothers to her. I'm grateful to Dana and Richard for permitting us to share her story here.



It wasn't Corporal James Swift, Jr., who was killed in action on August 27, 1970. It wasn't E-4 James Theabert Swift of the 4th Infantry Division of the United States Army who lost his life in Binh Dinh, South Vietnam. He was my big brother.

My family called him Jake. He was my "gentle giant," so even tempered and such a good big brother. He was older than me, and so big, 6'5", I would say. I grew up with my dad, James Swift, Sr., my mom, Francis, my big brother, Jake, my next brother, Butch, and our little brother, Teddy, who was only two years old when Jake went off to war.

We lived at 2536 N. Sartain Street, right in the middle of the block. Our row house was two stories and we had a basement, which was good. Our home was built in 1920 and had six rooms altogether, including three bedrooms. It was between 11th and 12th Street, and you could walk to the train station.

Where we lived was called, North Philadelphia, but we called it "North Philly" and it really was what "The City of Brotherly Love" was and mostly still is, except for what they now call 'gentrification.' What I mean is, it is neighborhoods of families living in row houses, surrounded by other families doing the same. There was the neighborhood store where you could buy milk, bread, and lunch meat and run a tab if you were "short," which we never were because my father worked so hard. We knew everybody nearby and when a stranger came along, somebody would ask him what he was doing there.

There wasn't any supermarket or shopping center anywhere nearby, but a few blocks away, there also was a drug store where you called the pharmacist, "Doc," and he could tell you what to do if you asked him. The gangs were still at it, so you had to be careful, but for some reason, we never got bothered, which was just as much luck as anything else.

I don't think it was an exaggeration to say that my brother, Jake, was the best of all of us. Edison High School was all boys like Ben Franklin and Central. Even so, my big brother was able to do so many things well. He earned varsity letters in three sports: foot-

ball, track, and fencing. I didn't really understand fencing, never having seen it before, but Jake, he told me, it was more planning and thinking than pirates were in the movies or like Zorro was.

He was in the Civil Air Patrol too, where they taught you about leadership and following orders, he told me, and about flying and space. As much as anything, my "gentle giant" loved music. He played the piano and saxophone like he was born to do it, whether it was jazz or rhythm and blues, or sometimes music he just made up. But what he really did best, better than anything else, was being my big brother.

The story of my first pair of "big girl" shoes is an example of that, although he did lots of other things, like help me with my school work and make sure nobody in the neighborhood or anywhere else, gave me any trouble.

The thing about the shoes was that the ones I was wearing were black and white, like "saddle shoes," but they were flats, without any heels at all. I wanted to wear shoes with heels, even low ones, so I wouldn't feel so much like a kid. My father said it was up to my mother, and my mother said the ones I was wearing were "just fine."

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Jake knew he had to do something, so he went into the Army. "The service," my father called it.



My big brother saw how unhappy I was, and I know he must have talked to Mom because there was no way he would do anything behind her back. Anyway, one day he said to me that tomorrow he's "taking me up to the Avenue," which I could guess meant Germantown Avenue, which was where all the stores were, including the shoe store!

I was so excited about the thought of those shoes with the "kitten heels," which is what they called

the ones I asked for. But I was worried too, which I'm pretty sure now was about growing up. I worried about where the money was going to come from and getting into trouble with my parents.

So, after dinner, when Jake and Butch were playing stickball in the street, I got my big brother's attention, but I'm not really sure how.

"Time!" he said as he brought the game to a halt and came over to the stoop where I was sitting. One of the other kids had something to say, but Jake turned around and gave him a look which made him not say another word.

"Dana, you okay?" my gentle giant said.

I just shook my head. "Yes," I answered, but he knew I wasn't.

"Everything is good, little sister. Now you just stay right here," he told me. "And if you need me, just say so. Meanwhile, I'm going to end this game with the longest home run you ever saw and then we can talk all you want."

He started back to the other kids and then turned around. "I'm going to make Willie Mays jealous," which I figured was a good thing.

The pitcher, who lived across the street, pitched the ball, which was a "pimple ball," we called it because it had little bumps on it and you played with

it cut in half. Jake hit it almost into the next block and I started to cry for some reason. Then after all the kids left, we went for a walk. I really wanted him to hold my hand, but I knew that was too much.

"What's wrong, little sister?" he said.

I shook my head, but when he started to ask me again, I asked him if we were really going tomorrow.

"We are, Dana. We are. Ten o'clock when I'm back from delivering my papers, we're going up to the Avenue. Mom said it's okay since the money's coming from my paper route, which is what a big brother's for."

And the next day we did. The shoes were just what I wanted, and I felt so happy having them and Jake. I have never forgotten that time. It was like magic.

Jake did well in high school, too, even with all his activities and his paper route and he was popular with the boys and girls, what with how big and nice he was, but it was hard for him to get a job after graduation. He tried SKF where Daddy worked. They made ball bearings, but there were a lot of people ahead of him. Then TastyKake, on Hunting Park Avenue and The Budd Company, which made cars and trains, and subway cars for the EI, but there was nothing there either.

Then he tried a bunch of other places like the department stores which were Lits, Gimbels, and Snellenbergs and a lumber yard and even the grocery store in the neighborhood and on the Avenue and Broad Street, but there was nothing for him. Jake knew he had to do something, so he went into the Army. "The service," my father called it.

Soon, the whole family made the short trip to N. Broad Street where James Swift, Jr., my big brother, joined the Army. After he was inducted, I learned it was called, he was sent to Fort Lewis near Tacoma, Washington. I looked it up later and learned that it had been built almost fifty years before when it was called, "Camp Lewis" and now it was where Army soldiers came and went from.

Soon my big brother, who played the saxophone and the piano and did fencing and football and track and bought me my first big girl shoes, was on his way to the other side of the world.

Butch told me Jake was in the 4th Infantry Division's 704th Maintenance Battalion and was going to Pleiku. His battalion's motto was "Skilled and Steadfast," but none of that meant anything to me, except that he was so far away.

JAMES T SWIFT Jr

Everything went okay because Jake wrote us letters and we knew he'd be coming home when he got "leave" they called it. We were all so happy to see him and he told us some about his battalion which he said went all the way back to World War II in 1943, which I didn't know anything about. He also told us that they provided "direct support" for the rolling stock and equipment, but I didn't understand that, either.

One day, my mother looked out the window and there were two soldiers, one black and one white. She knew the horrible, horrible thing right away and started yelling, "You killed my baby! You killed my baby!"

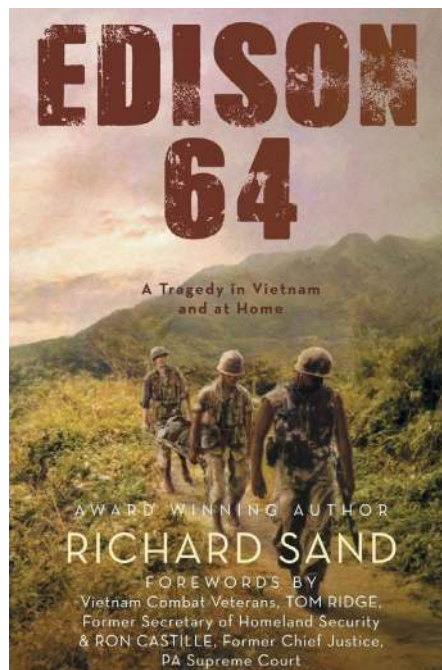
The two soldiers came in and told my mom that Jake was dead. Butch and I tried to do something, but it was too awful. Butch called my father at work, and he had to come all the way from SKF on public transportation, knowing that his son was dead.

It took two weeks for my brother's body to get home. My Uncle Sylvester, who was a captain, accompanied it. Mom couldn't bring herself to go identify the body, which was just as well, because we learned later that Jake had lost an arm and leg and had a bad head injury.

When Uncle Sylvester got here, he told us that Jake was probably dead when they sent us the first letter, which didn't much matter to me. The funeral at Nimmons over near Broad and Lehigh was so sad and then there was the burial at Arlington Cemetery. There were lots of flags and a ceremony, which I guess was to make you proud, but it only made me so sad that my big brother was in the ground in Virginia with all those graves around instead of alive at home in our living room.

Nobody could say much. We hurt so bad. My dad, who was a very strong man, was upstairs a couple of weeks after and he just started wailing. I had never heard a sound like that before or even my father crying at all. But it was him who said it best when he was able to, years later. What mattered to us was not the medals, or the ceremonies or my gentle brother's name on the Wall, but what my father said, "The War. It took him from us." And as I think about my big brother, Jake, that fine young man, the pride of all of us, the joy of our family, so it did.

Richard Sand has generously donated autographed copies of his book to the Veterans Breakfast Club. You can order a copy for a suggested donation of \$25, which includes shipping. You can watch Richard and others talk about Edison 64 on our Veterans Breakfast Club program on our VBC YouTube Channel: [youtube.com/veteransbreakfastclub](https://www.youtube.com/veteransbreakfastclub).



Check out the VBC Book Club!



Our VBC community brims with talented people of extraordinary experience. Some of them have written books.

Visit our website to see our collection of books written by veterans and experts who have joined us at our online or live programs.

A few of these are best purchased through outlets like Amazon. Others can be ordered directly from us, and we will ship them out to you.

We're grateful to the authors who have donated books to the VBC so our readers can broaden their understandings of war, military service, and history. After you read a book, let us know what you think by writing a review.

BEYOND “THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE”

by Kathy Lowrey Gallowitz

Kathy Gallowitz is a friend of the VBC who retired as a Lieutenant Colonel with 30 years in the US Air Force. She's won numerous awards in and out of the military for her work in business, public affairs, community relations and supporting the Employer Support of Reserve and Guard. She's author of Beyond “Thank You for Your Service”: The Veteran Champion Handbook for Civilians and founder of Veteran Vanguard, which equips civilian “Veteran Champions” to strengthen our workforce and community in ways that benefit us all. We asked Kathy to contribute regular columns on what civilians need to know to better support military connected people and how they can help veterans reintegrate into civilian life.

It hit me like “a ton of bricks,” at age forty, while attending the funeral of a prominent local businessman.

Outside of family, I'd never been to a funeral. My whole life had been wrapped in the military. It was part of my DNA.

I was born at Naval Air Station Pensacola but spent my earliest years in France. I spoke French before I did English. When we returned to the US, I greeted the Statue of Liberty like I was an immigrant. I lived on military bases around the world and moved every three or four years.

The moving didn't stop when I reached adulthood because I followed in the footsteps of my father and grandfather and joined the military myself (the Air Force). I married an Air Force doctor. Before I reached thirty-five, I had already lived in over twenty towns and cities.

I was in these places, but not of them. The military was my only community. The towns I lived in were merely places I worked, got my car fixed or bought groceries. I didn't get to know people long enough to get invited to attend their funerals when they died.

At this funeral, I felt disconnected. I knew I was American, but I didn't feel like I totally belonged. I realized I didn't understand how America worked. I didn't know what a city council was or what a county commissioner did. I'd taken Civics in school, but it was all abstract. I hadn't lived it.

How tragic it is that those of us who serve and sacrifice most for our country often don't fit in when we separate from the military or return from war!

Stepping from service into the civilian world can be a jarring experience. The community we knew is gone. Our network is scattered across the nation, if not the world. When we start looking for a job or a lawyer or a church or just a friend to have coffee with, it is often frustrating figuring out where to start.

The problem becomes acute in times of crisis, when we need to reach out for help. A troubled marriage, a sick child, a death in the family, an addiction—these can be catastrophic for those without a lifeline, a friend, or a place to turn when they're in trouble.

Veteran Champions are advocates who have never served and are dedicated to

helping Service members and Veterans make the transition to civilian life. Veteran Champions are employers, clergy members, educators, lawyers, friends, and other ordinary citizens who understand the unique dynamics of military culture and can anticipate how to assist. Through their actions, Veteran Champions make a positive difference in the lives of military connected Americans.

Our nation loves its Veterans, even if it doesn't fully understand them. You frequently see it in grateful handshakes and hear it in “Thank you for your service” uttered in coffee shops across the country. More than 40,000 non-profit Veteran support organizations testify to our citizens' appreciation for the sacrifices of its Service members.

But we need more. We need a robust, consistent network of prepared civilian neighbors and experts who are ready and willing to support veterans and their families. Everybody can and should do something. We need to be there for those who sacrifice so much for us.

We don't need to look far to see how fragmented our country has become. Social isolation is rife, as is civic mistrust. Addiction, loneliness, and suicide have become endemic in our society. The gap between returning Service members and the country they serve contributes to our fraying social fabric. Let's start repairing it by connecting those who have served with supportive neighborhood and professional networks. This is how we narrow the military-civilian divide.

The public's admiration for its military members provides a solid foundation on which to build a Veteran Champion movement. And launching the movement isn't rocket science. It's “people science.” It's as easy as coaching civilians on military culture and family life, introducing them to Veterans, and encouraging them to share their expertise, connections, and knowledge with Veterans and Service members.

Every year, nearly 200,000 people separate from military service. Half of them feel disconnected from mainstream America. Many have unmet needs arising from physical or emotional injury or career stagnation. Veteran Champions help bridge these and other gaps.

Our nation's defense is everyone's business. Our country will always need defenders. Only three out of ten US citizens are fit for military service. Those who don't serve have a moral obligation to those who do. We're all in this together.

You can find and purchase Beyond “Thank You For Your Service”: The Veteran Champion Handbook for Civilians on Amazon by going to: <https://bit.ly/BeyondThankYouForYourService>

You can learn more about the Veteran Champion movement at the Vanguard Veteran website, <https://vanguardveteran.com>, or by emailing Kathy at kathy@VanguardVeteran.com And, watch Kathy talk with Shaun Hall about Veteran Champions on the VBC Scuttlebutt podcast: <https://youtu.be/7wcAhLbtjdk>





16 THINGS I'VE LEARNED FROM *THE SCUTTLEBUTT*

by Shaun Hall

I started as Program Director with the Veterans Breakfast Club over a year ago, and since then I've hosted almost 40 episodes of *The Scuttlebutt* podcast. The show's premise is that the non-veteran host (me) doesn't know much about military life and culture but is eager to learn. Well, let's just say my learning curve continues on its rocket-like trajectory.

Every week, veterans of different backgrounds join me to talk about why they joined, where they served, and what they think about the military and their service now. Along the way, we discuss PTSD, the VA, the "Forever Wars" in the Middle East, and the inaccuracies of Hollywood movies like *The Hurt Locker*. Nothing is off limits, and no topic is too obscure.

Here are 16 insights I've gained through these conversations. And head to veteransbreakfastclub.org/scuttlebutt to watch the corresponding episodes.

- Military families make huge sacrifices that most Americans don't understand, let alone appreciate.
- The #1 factor determining a person's choice to join the military is whether they have a close relative who served.
- Almost one-half (43%) of the 1.3 million on active duty are people of color, compared to 10% fifty years ago.
- Veterans are much more likely than non-veterans to volunteer, give blood, and be civically active. Service, for them, is for life.
- Older veterans like hearing, "Thank you for your service." Younger vets, not as much. Learning about their service is most important, I think.
- Marines are a special breed. I'll leave it at that.

- The Coast Guard cleans buoys in local rivers.
- *The Hurt Locker* isn't nearly as accurate as I'd hoped.
- The Merchant Marine is well paid but works hard and faces special danger in war time.
- The term "Military Brat" isn't derogatory. In fact, it's a term of endearment.
- The vast majority of veterans do NOT have PTSD.
- War is bad, but it can inspire great art.
- If you want to know what makes Afghanistan society tick, you need to understand the timber trade.
- That soundtrack you hear on Hollywood Vietnam War movies really played on the ground in Vietnam itself during the war.
- The US is currently conducting counterterrorism operations in at least 85 countries that we know of.
- If you want to memorize Marine Corps Leadership Traits for testing in OCS, think: "JJ DID TIE BUCKLE" (Justice, judgement, dependability, integrity, decisiveness, tact, initiative, endurance, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty, and enthusiasm).

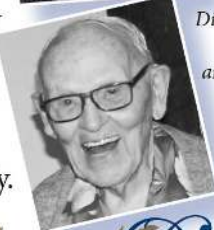
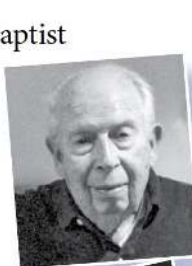


You can download *The Scuttlebutt* whenever you get your podcasts or check us out on YouTube. It's easy to find us simply by visiting VBC's website www.veteransbreakfastclub.org/scuttlebutt. Be sure to leave us a review or comment, and like, share, subscribe. You can contact Shaun at shaun@veteransbreakfastclub.org.

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Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SHIP AND A BOAT?

by Todd DePastino



Swift Boats in the Vietnam Brownwater Navy

The Navy, more than any branch, harbors mysteries. How long is a fathom? What is “gedunk”? How do you pronounce “boatswain” or “fo’cle”? What do I have to do to become a “Shellback”?

But even the Navy has a hard time explaining the most fundamental mystery of all: what is the difference between a ship and a boat?

In the days of sail, the rule of thumb was: a ship has three or more masts. Anything else is a boat. But how does that translate into the modern maritime world?

Put simply, it doesn’t.

And, yet, woe unto anyone who mistakenly calls a ship a “boat” in the company of Navy veterans. I’ve done it several times over the years, and it’s never gone unnoticed.

Usually, the veteran explains the distinction this way: “You can put a boat on a ship, but you can’t put a ship on a boat.”

That’s a fun way of saying, “ships are big, boats are small.”

Occasionally, I’ll hear a different explanation: “A ship has a commander and a crew. A boat just has whomever is on it at the time.”

One friend of mine, a Navy vet with a brain for design and engineering, dismisses these explanations and claims it’s all about hull shape. You have displacement hulls, planing hulls, round-bilge hulls, and others. These can be hard-chined or soft-chined or semi-displacement or

semi-planing. The variations seem endless, and I understand none of them. To keep it simple, my friend says, just remember that a V-shaped hull for deep water belongs to a ship. A flat-bottom, to a boat.

The problem with all these explanations is that they are riddled with exceptions.

Take the WWII PT Boat. It could carry a lifeboat on its foredeck. It was made for deep water and had a permanent crew with a commanding officer. Yet, no one calls a PT Boat a “ship.” Same goes for so-called Vietnam “swift boats” (Patrol Craft, Fast or PCF). They had crews, but were definitely “boats.”



PT Boat 109 commanded by LT John F. Kennedy

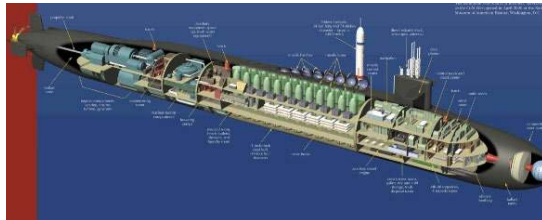
On the other hand, LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) or LSMs (Landing Ship, Medium) have the very word “ship” in their names. Yet, they have flat bottoms. **CONTINUED P. 28**



LST-325 from WWII

Non-Veterans Want to Know

CONTINUED FROM P.25



Ohio-class Boomer submarine

And how about submarines? Here's where things get really confusing. Submariners conspicuously refer to them as "boats." (A good way to out yourself as a "surface puke," as submariners refer to non-submarine sailors, is to call a sub a "ship.") Yet, by any measure, submarines are ships.

Fleet ballistic-missile submarines—called "Boomers" in sub-speak—are over 500 feet long and have crews of 150 or more. Webster's dictionary will tell you plainly: they're ships. But Boomer crews will insist they're "boats."

After studying the problem, I'm more confused than I was before, except for one thing: I'm certain I'll never understand the Navy.



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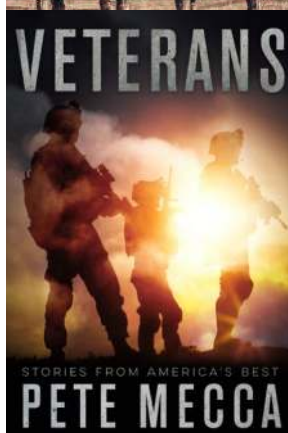
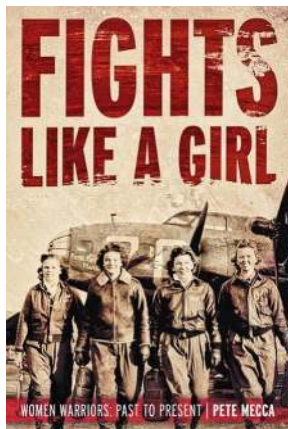
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Photo # NH44923 William S. Sims, Jr., son of Adm. Wm. S. Sims, 1919

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GOODBYE, NAVY PEACOAT

by Todd DePastino

On October 1 last year, the US Navy completed the phase-out of the venerable Navy peacoat in favor of the "Black Cold Weather Parka."

The new parka is superior in every way: warmer, lighter, more versatile, and able to be stuffed into a seabag.

It has only one drawback: everyone hates it.

Here are just a couple responses from our VBC Navy veterans:

"What a crock! [The peacoat] is a symbol for the Sailor and his sacrifice."

-Rick Erisman, RM2, 1969-1975

"Hey! Nobody asked me if this was okay, which it is not. I had a deal with the Chief of Naval Operations to pass all his decisions by me. I guess it was a 50-year expiration time frame on those courtesies. My mother-in-law, God bless her 89-year-old soul, laid claim to my peacoat when we moved back to Pittsburgh. At first I was very proud that she wanted it, then I saw the "stylish improvements" she made to it. Leopard fur around the cuffs and the collar. It looks as ugly as the new all-weather parka piece of crap that the Navy is issuing. . . . The next thing you know they'll want to put air conditioning on the ships."

-Dennis McCarthy, Sailor/Seabee in days gone by.

Rick and Dennis have a point. The United States Navy Memorial has sixteen bronze castings of "The Lone Sailor" sculpture around the world to honor those who've served. The statue stands seven-feet



National Archives

tall with a seabag at his ready. His eyes are fixed on the horizon, serene and determined. His hands are firmly planted in the vertical pockets of his peacoat. His collar is turned up for effect.

The peacoat is an enduring piece of military chic, perpetually cool for civilians to wear. Think of Robert Redford in *Three Days of the Condor* or Daniel Craig in *Casino Royale*.

But the peacoat would have never lasted as long as it did if it hadn't performed the function for which it was designed: to keep sailors warm and mostly dry in all kinds of weather.

The first appearance of a double-breasted, hip-length coat with an oversized collar made of Midnight Blue wool can be traced in America to the 1720s, a half century before the birth of the US Navy. The Navy states that the term "peacoat" comes from the letter "p," which, it says, stands for "pilot," a kind of fabric. The Royal British Navy begs to differ, claiming that the "p" stands for "Petty," as in Petty Officer.

They're probably both wrong. Most likely, the word comes from the Dutch *pijjakk*—*p*ij referring to the course twilled cloth and *jakker* meaning jacket. The design was born in Holland and then spread around the world.

The Navy says it's replacing the peacoat "to reduce current Navy seabag uniform component requirements" and to update the look of sailors with a lighter-weight and more protective synthetic fabric. While more expensive, the new parka is really two coats in one: it replaces not only the peacoat but what sailors call the "foul weather jacket" (officially known as the "Jack-et, Shipboard, Cold Weather, Flame Resistant," preceded by the N1 and A2).

While sailors will no longer be issued the peacoat, they can still buy them, and the Navy is keeping the *pijjakk* as an optional clothing item.

So, when you're drinking to the foam on the Navy's 246th birthday (October 13), raise a toast to the great peacoat and maybe pick up a good used one on eBay for the coming winter.





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Humor

The Story of MY TATTOO

by Jack Brawdy

I met Jack Brawdy in 2008 when the Veterans Breakfast Club began. He served as a Torpedoman aboard the USS Hart and the USS Champlin in World War II. A consummate storyteller, he offered this short tale of how he got his tattoo at a breakfast in 2009. Jack passed away in 2012. - Todd

Four of us were enjoying a liberty in San Diego while attending advanced torpedo training school. While walking down the street one afternoon we saw two lines of sailors: one going into a brothel, the other a tattoo parlor. I won't tell you which one was longer.

I'd often thought of a tattoo while in the Navy but my mind was made up that particular afternoon. The tattoo artist was young, very beautiful and dressed in a manner that attracted virile, young and slightly inebriated sailors.

I qualified on all counts, waited in line, got my tattoo and survived the wrath of my mother next time I got home.

What's the tattoo? It's an eagle in flight carrying a banner of an American flag in its beak on my left forearm.

We were cautioned then if tattoos became infected it was a court martial offence. I wonder if this is still true in the Navy today?

By the way, that American flag, after 66 years, is faded but still flying!



Jack Brawdy in 1943

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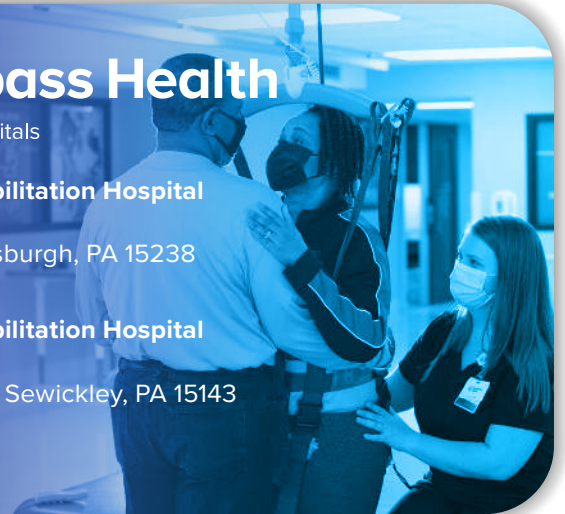
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