



THE THUNDERING THIRD

NEWSLETTER



THIRD BATTALION, FOURTH MARINES ASSOCIATION

44 Old Marlborough Road, Maynard, MA 01754

Letter from the President

Dear Fellow 3/4 Marines:

As most of you are aware, 3/4 has returned to Iraq for a second tour of duty. Let us keep them in our hearts and prayers during the next year as they undertake this dangerous mission. The Association has pledged to provide any support that may be possible. On your behalf we will send periodic care packages and other needed items. Dennis Thun and Oscar Kergalvis have agreed to coordinate this program. Your donations would be appreciated and should be directed to the Association, c/o Treasurer Chuck Lear.

The battalion initially deployed to Okinawa in mid-December. In order to accommodate the battalion, the annual sword presentation to the top NCO for the year 2003, was held early. On November 4, I traveled to 29 Palms with several Association representatives including Vice President Frank Pederson, Doc Cook and about 8 others. Once again we were provided great hospitality and a tour of the 3/4 CP. We met with Battalion Commander Lt Col McCoy and Sgt Major Howell, as well as all the officers, staff and troops. This year's recipient was Sgt Hartman. The full formal parade was held and our own Doc Cook presented the sword.

For those of you who were not able to attend our Seattle reunion, Doc Cook was presented the same sword for the outstanding support he has rendered this association. However at that time, Doc requested this sword be given to a young marine in memory of a fallen comrade, Cpl Merlin Legaux, (KIA 10/05/1966). I'm sure both Sgt Hartman and Cpl Legaux were pleased with this honor. Doc Cook has written a memorial to Cpl Legaux which is included later in this newsletter.

Following the sword presentation, the battalion S-2 provided a briefing of the initial Iraq war and 3/4's drive to Baghdad. The Battalion had captured the events on a VDO, which is truly fascinating. We hope to obtain a copy to show next year during our reunion. The proud tradition of 3/4 continues!

Doc Cook's memorial tribute provided a great idea for all future newsletters and I've asked Editor Doc McNiff to design a memorial section to appear in this and future newsletters. This is something each of us can do and will assist in preserving the memory of our KIA's. So take some time to write a tribute about a fallen comrade to appear in future publications. Your recollections are important; if possible add photos and other memorabilia. Please forward to Editor McNiff.

Guys, it is March already. The time is here to make plans for our reunion in San Antonio. Last year in Seattle I was impressed with many new members, but also disappointed in not seeing several old faces. We're not getting any younger and I'd like to see everyone next year. God only knows how many more reunions we can make. Reunion chairman, Larry Carpenter is busy perusing the hotels nearby the famous River-walk to insure we will have great accommodations. Begin advance planning now to keep costs down. See you there!

Semper Fi

James B. Conklin
President

For Immediate Release, 03 October 08 Press Release 031007L10**3/4 Association visits Combat Center****Lance Cpl. Heidi E. Lored****Combat Correspondent**

3rd Battalion 4th Marines Association invaded the Combat Center during their annual visit to honor the 3/4 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year and to observe the advancements of the Marine Corps.

For members of the association, the gatherings offer a chance for past and present Marines and Corpsman to come together and share insights and memories with one another and also to preserve the memory of those killed in action. "We're a group of 3rd Battalion 4th Marines veterans who found each other after a welcome home parade in Chicago around 1985," said Dennis Thun, a 3/4 Association member. "The original group of seven founded the organization, wrote the charter and incorporated it as a non-profit veterans organization. From those seven, the association has grown today to over 1,200 members."

"In the past we have visited the base and gone to the ranges to see the new weapons systems, sometimes fire them," said Thun. "Then a battalion formation is usually held where we present the NCO of the Year with a sword." This year the 10 retirees and former Marines dined at the 7th Marines mess hall for lunch with junior Marines who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Afterward, the battalion presented a video and slide show highlighting 3/4's actions in Iraq. Later, the members had a social with Staff noncommissioned officers at the Staff NCO Club for the rest of the evening. Despite being up late at the club the association members still managed to get up early enough to eat breakfast with their fellow brothers. This year's NCO of the Year is Sgt. Timothy A. Hartmann, India Company.

"Sgt. Hartmann is a well-rounded Marine," said Sgt. Maj. Dave C. Howell, Headquarters and Service Company. "He showed exceptional leadership in Iraq and in his ability to train his Marines." This excursion proved to be memorable for the former Marines as they witnessed first hand the Marine Corps progression in both camaraderie and technology.

"Needless to say, the technology seems to have grown faster than one could imagine. Global Positioning System Navigation Tool and laser designators are very impressive," said Thun. "What's really quite impressive is that the Marine Corps seems to have the same hi-tech gear as the other services, which is quite the contrary from the Vietnam era. We had to acquire good equipment using midnight supply raids." "I love coming back," said retired 1st Sgt. Bob Weightman, "Leaping Lima." "The Marine Corps is ten times better with the equipment they have today. It's ridiculous."

The association displays a great deal of pride in their history, especially in their crest which was originally conceived in 1967 by Cpl. Ned Broderick, a radio operator with the 81 mm Mortar Platoon. The laurel wreath depicted in green signifies "victory" and harkens back to the crowns worn by emperors and noblemen of the Roman Empire. The crossed officer and NCO swords signify the ties between the groups of Marines as the leadership of the battalion. The Torii Gate within the shield signifies the battalion's links to service at Camp Schwab, Okinawa, Japan, and the bull's head represents the battalion motto, "Thundering Third."

"One thing we all do is complain how the corps has gone to hell," said Thun. "Bootcamp is too easy and our Marine Corps is going down the tubes. Then we come and visit the 3/4 and leave with just the opposite feelings. The Marines in the fleet are far better trained and more Gung Ho than we were. Not taking anything away from us, we were still Marines and all but just didn't train for war as much as they do now. It seems back in the old corps when we had some free time we'd be down at the club or in town on liberty. Nowadays Marines are out jogging or lifting weights during free time. All said and done, we all feel that today's Marine Corps is in good hands, we just need to visit 3/4 once a year to feel secure about that."

“We want to let them know we think of them whole-heartedly, and we’re glad to see they’re still the best,” said Oscar Kergaluis, 3/4 Association member. “We are proud of our Marines. 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines has always been one of the best infantry battalions in the corps. I can say as an organization, we followed every move 3/4 made once the war started and we are proud of them, especially when we saw our guys pulling the statue of Saddam Hussein down. We brag about 3/4 as if they were apart of our family – which they are,” said Conklin.

At the end of the ceremony, an astonished Weightman had a few comments to tell his fellow brothers. “Remember the camaraderie. Never forget our fellow Marines and Corpsman that were killed in action. And always carry on the traditions of the Marine Corps with pride,” said Weightman.

“The corps never leaves someone,” said Thun. “If anything, the attachment to it increases. This is especially true for combat Marines. The bonds they have made during their time under fire are as strong as family ties – maybe stronger. My closest friends to this day are guys that I was in Vietnam with. I’m sure the Marines who are part of 3/4 today will have the same strong bonds 30 years from now. They may not realize it now but they will. I can speak for the association members in that these guys are family to us and always will be as 3/4 is as much of us as anything will ever be.”

Thanks to L/Cpl Loredo for pictures and article.
(fyi Thun aka Dawg)



Jim Conklin (right) with Doc Cook address Battalion.



A Squared away Marine



Doc Cook Presents Sword to Sgt. Hartmann

Chaplain's Corner

*Submitted by
Chaplain Stan Beach*

I was presented, at Camp Lejeune last month, with a USMC poster honoring chaplains serving with Marines. Superimposed on a photo of Marines at prayer in Iraq was a '66 Newsweek photo on Mutter's Ridge of me helping a wounded Marine. It was taken from my best side – the rear! The Marine from Kilo and I had just shared a hole during a mortar attack, when his leg was broken. Anybody recall his name?

Chaplains have a long heritage of serving with Marines since 1832. Each of us regard it a special privilege to serve Marines in combat. That was the prevailing spirit we heard from the current active duty 3/4 Battalion Chaplain at the Seattle reunion. One privilege I have in speaking to groups is telling them about the unique courage and bonding I saw among Marines in 3/4 in Vietnam. I had an opportunity to do this at a PME for Recruit Training Battalion at MCRD San Diego recently. The DI s was humbled hearing your names and acts of courage and loyalty to one another under fire. They expressed their gratitude for the heritage you left for them. And that quality doesn't quit – recently Gary Hinz's wife died, and Vietnam buddies flew from CA to Chicago to support him. Thanks, guys, for being there!

Some of our brothers are facing loss and grief in illnesses and death in their family. Let's remember them in our prayers, and be there for them if we can. Please let me know if you know of friends with such need. Thanks to all of you who have already done that.

Two other chaplains who were in 3/4 in Vietnam have joined the Association and plan to be at the next reunion. Chaplain Muenzler was with the Battalion when they entered Vietnam from Hawaii. Chaplain McHorse relieved him, and I followed McHorse as Operation Hastings wound down. Both live in Texas, near San Antonio.

Buddy Search

Mr. Michael E. Jones of Louisville, KY is looking for anyone who knew his uncle, **HN Dale Cruise** who served with Mike Co. 3/4 from March to June 1968. **Doc Cruise** was killed 6/15/68. He was awarded the Silver Star. Anyone knowing **Doc Cruise** please contact his uncle at KyFisherman@aol.com
Or me, at the Association address. Doc McNiff

Report of the Battalion Historian

*Submitted by
Steve Emmanuel*

I have compiled a CD that contains the following: Brief history of the Battalion, Map of Northern I Corps 1967, September 1966 Newsletter followed by Newsletters from October 1967 through April 1968, PUC, NUC, MEU Citations, Letter from General Davis commending India Company (Battle of Foxtrot Ridge, July 1968) Gunny Courville (Kilo Company) speech of the Battalion's part in Iraqi Freedom delivered at the reunion in Seattle, "Maxie" letters from Vietnam.

In addition I have taken the dog tags of the KIAs from Iraqi Freedom that were presented to the battalion by Gunny Courville, and placed them in a display case (11x10). The top of the case has the battalion crest followed by the title "Operation Iraqi Freedom, KIAs". Underneath on a black background are mounted the five dog tags.

As I receive more documents, they will be entered onto the CD.

We Will Never Forget

This is a new section of the Newsletter, suggested by President Jim Conklin, where our members are free to submit short articles telling of friends who were killed in action. The idea was born after Doc Cook was presented with an NCO Sword at the last reunion in recognition of the outstanding work he has done for many years to benefit the Association. Cook was so grateful and overcome with emotions that he decided to donate the sword to be presented to the outstanding NCO of the active duty 3/4 at the ceremony at Twenty-nine Palms the following November to honor his friend, Cpl. Merlin Phillip Legaux. A thanks again to Doc Cook, here is his story.

Cpl. Merlin Phillip Legaux, USMC

Cpl. Merlin Phillip Legaux was born in Mobile, Alabama February 3, 1947. He graduated from John McDonough High School in 1965 in New Orleans, LA. He was known as "Gung Ho" and was a small Cajun kid with a lot of guts. He enlisted in the Marine Corps and served as a team leader in the third platoon of Kilo Company. In July 1966 during "Operation Hastings" he was awarded the Silver Star for bravery for crossing a waist deep river three times under enemy fire to re-supply his team with ammunition. That Silver Star, as well as a Bronze Star and Purple Heart earned during "Operation Prairie" in September 1966 were presented posthumously to his surviving parents on March 17, 1967. Merlin was killed on the morning of October 5, 1966 in the LZ on Hill 400 along with Capt. J.J. Carroll and several other fine Marines. Generals Dave Richwine and Ted Hopgood remember Merlin as a "Marine's" Marine. I remember him as my friend and my mentor, directing me, and putting my rusty, trusty .45 back together again. He rests in Matarie Memorial Park, New Orleans, LA. The Honor NCO Sword was presented at 29 Palms MCB 2003 in his memory.

This submitted by Battalion Historian Steve Emmanuel

Did you see the Marine officer in Haiti who, when asked on Sunday what he knew about the Haitian gunman who was part of the shooting into the crowd on Saturday, said, "I only know two things about him; he shot at my Marines...and he is dead."

San Antonio Reunion Report

*Submitted by Larry Carpenter
Reunion Chairman*

Reunion dates: July 27th – 31st, 2005

Hotel: There is not much point in coming to San Antonio if we are not on the River Walk. So far, we have two great bids – Hilton for 109/day, or, my favorite, Hyatt for 89/day. Both have the goods we require. We will need to nail down the hotel ASAP. Unlike some cities SA Hotels stay booked. Normal rates for rooms at this time of the year are 270-320/day. The weather will be hot – damn hot and muggy during the day, a little cooler in the evenings. Shorts, t-shirts and flip-flops will be the UOD. Fiesta Texas Amusement Park, Sea World, The Alamo and various war memorials are just a few of the attractions. Staying on the river walk puts most things in walking distance. Did I mention some of the finest restaurants in the world, and if you like Mexican food, you will think you have died and gone to heaven. No need for a car. I am working on a remote parking arrangements, as downtown parking is 14-16/day. SA is the hub for Southwest Airlines and the town loves the military. I think we have 5 bases. Any suggestions are appreciated.

Operation Comeback

*Tragedy for 3/4 Marines at the end of the Korean War
An eyewitness report*

The following letter was received by President Jim Conklin from Thomas S. Malone, former member of H 3/4 in '53 and '54. It is a first person report of how so many Marines lost their life in Inchon Harbor.

Dear Jim,

Enclosed are pages from the 1953-54 Third Marine Division history book. They describe in photographs and narrative the assignment of the 3rd Battalion 4th Marines in "Operation Comeback", the job of returning 16,000 Chinese prisoners of war from Korea to Formosa.

That moment in history happened 50 years ago in January, 1954. The Marines of 3/4 experienced a terrible tragedy during the operation and it seems to be a little known fact in the history of the 3rd Marine Division. It is however, a time that should not be forgotten.

It happened on January 21, 1954. It was a very cold and snowy morning when we went over the side of our transport ship the MARINE SERPENT to our LCM's. We were fully loaded with our weapons and packs but without life jackets. When our LCM approached our LST to board we collided with her bow. She lifted us up, tore a huge hole in the boat's bottom and turned us upside down. We immediately sank. Most Marines never came up. Those of us that did and managed to stay afloat were swept away by one of the world's fastest tides. The swift current, space between us, a cumbersome gear, extreme cold and injuries prevented Marines from helping one another.

Most of my platoon were killed. We lost 27 Marines and 2 Navy Corpsmen. Only 16 Marines, One Corpsman, one doctor, two soldiers and one Korean civilian survived.

Longboats from allied ships picked up survivors. I was picked up, along with one dead and one frozen Marine, by two Korean fishermen in a sampan. Sailors from the MARINE SERPENT removed us and brought us to their ship where well trained sailors saved our lives.

Shortly thereafter we were transferred to the hospital ship, USS CONSOLATION where we were treated for shock, submersion, exposure and various injuries.

We returned to Nara, Japan to a nearly empty squad bay. We participated in interrogations, had a memorial service and returned to our duties.

The role of the 3rd Battalion 4th Marines 3rd Marine Division in Operation Comeback and the loss of 29 who made the supreme sacrifice for the repatriation of enemy soldiers should always be remembered. I hope that you will help in ensuring the memory of the Marines and Corpsmen.

Semper Fidelis
Thomas S. Malone
H-3-4-3

(Mr. Malone now lives in Woodcliff Lake, NJ. Doc)

Jim Wright who put on such a great reunion in Seattle last summer sent this poem to us.

The Guard At Heaven's Gate

Copyright by Robert A. Gannon

My name is Samuel Nicholas.
I go back a way.
To when the Corps I call my own
First saw the light of day.
My duty here is different
From what it was back then,
When my main occupation was
To fill the ranks with men.

I now command a station
Beside the Heavenly Gate,
To welcome those Marines aboard
Who've come to terms with fate.
Some of them are rather old,
Others, much too young.
But all the report with record books
Of duty bravely done.

Some here are that I once knew
From fighting days of yore.
Like Sergeant Major Sommers,
A sergeant major of the Corps.
We stand together, side by side,
With others of our kind,
And sailors such as John Paul Jones
Who share our turn at mind.

They've come to us in tricorne hats
Whose brims were brushed with brine,
Or iron helmets they had worn
When Pershing crossed the Rhine.
They talk about Chapultepec
And Iron Bottom Bay
Of Nicaragua, Haiti
And the street of Monterey.

There's a lot of jubilation
As they speak of foreign lands,
But they stand in awestruck silence
When "Chesty" shakes their hands.
Their uniforms may differ,
But we trade them in for Blues
The only one they will need
On this, their final cruise.

So, as your years move onward,
Don't worry, fuss, or fret.
For no Marine assigned to me
Has asked for a transfer yet.

Samuel Nicholas was the first Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1775 to the early 1780s.

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This year's NCO of the Year is Sgt. Timothy A. Hartmann, India Company

