Hotel 2/5 Vietnam Veterans Newsletter

January 1, 2025 Volume 25, Issue 1



COLUMBUS OHIO 2025 REUNION

Our next Hotel 2/5 Reunion was chosen by our host Joe Sonderman for a reason. It wasn't a random act of throwing a dart at a USA map! Please read Stephanie's article below as to why Joe chose Columbus, Ohio for us to enjoy this October.

A HOME FOR HEROES: COLUMBUS OHIO

In the heart of Ohio, nestled among the rolling hills and vibrant neighborhoods, lies Columbus, a city that has become a beacon of light and camaraderie for its inhabitants. Known for its bustling economy, rich history, and diverse culture, Columbus has also earned a reputation as a veteran-friendly city, where those who have served in the armed forces can find a true sense of belonging and community.

Columbus became a city where military veterans could find help with the establishment of the Columbus Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, which opened its doors in the 1950s. Today, over 60,000 veterans live in Franklin County Ohio (over 10,000 are Vietnam veterans). As the city continues to grow, so does its commitment to veterans. In 2017, Columbus was designated as a "Veteran-Friendly Community" by the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. This designation came as a result of the city's efforts to implement programs and policies that prioritize the needs of veterans. Columbus also embraces its rich military history through events that celebrate veterans and their contributions. The annual Columbus Veterans Day Parade has become a cherished tradition, drawing thousands of flag-waving spectators.

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Its official, our next reunion will be in Columbus, Ohio.

Oct 9 - 11, 2025

BACK THEN AND NOW

We would like to continue to have this section in our newsletter. However, we need your participation in giving us your information about when you severed in what capacity and what you did for a living and what you are doing in retirement.

LCpl David Harbin received a Silver Star award during our fight in Hue City in February 1968. Now deceased, August 2018, he was a Rehabilitation Counselor for almost 35 years.

LCpl Dennis Casey was an artillery forward observer for Hotel 2/5 in 1969. Today, he is a local dairy farmer in Tennessee and editor of this newsletter.

LCpl Jay Peterson was a platoon radio operator in H 2/5 and also in H&S in 1969. Now retired, he was a criminal defense lawyer, in San Louis Obispo, California.

LCpl Larry Tyler received a Navy Marine Corps Medal for Heroism award during our stay in the Arizonia in November 1969. Now retired as a software designer/engineer, he enjoys teaching U.S. history to two of his homeschooled granddaughters.

Please submit your name to:

Stephanie Casey at stephcasey2018@gmail.com to provide your Back Then and Now job responsibilities. We need your input for this section of our newsletter.

THE INSIDE STORY - HOW I BECAME A RADIO OPERATOR



I can remember one of those exhausting days in ITR after boot camp, Las Pulgas, at Camp Pendleton, in the fall of 1968, when we recruits were in the classroom (a very old unairconditioned Quonset hut) learning about the PRC-25 radio. I heard a staff sergeant instructor talking about this radio in that class. He said something about that radio that day, that I have always remembered. He said, "that in 1965, General Creighton Abrams called the PRC-25, the most important tactical item in Vietnam today". "More important than the M-16 rifle, more important than the UH-1 'Huey' helicopter." That instructor got my attention, and I thought about his statement quoting a military general for many weeks to come, and then again when I got to Vietnam.

I was never assigned as a MOS 0621 – Radio Operator. I was a MOS 0311 – Rifleman when I left boot camp and while in Hotel 2/5 in Vietnam. After spending three weeks on Operation Taylor Common up in the jungle mountains, we had returned to a large flat valley with three mountain ranges around it, full of rice patties and its farmers known as "The Arizona Territory". It was early February 1969. We had humped all day down the mountain and out into the flat land when we engaged an NVA battalion size force shooting at us. Three Marines from my platoon had to be medivaced along with several others from Hotel Company wounded and dead. After the battle, after the medivac helicopters were gone, we began to clean up the battlefield, picking up gear left behind from those dead and wounded bodies. I looked around and noticed three backpacks with PRC-25 radios laying on the ground.

I looked at those radios and began to think back to what that staff sergeant in ITR Training said about the PRC-25 being more powerful than the M-16 I was using. I saw the need and was willing to accept the responsibility and sieged the opportunity at that moment. I stepped up immediately and told my platoon leader that I was willing and able to carry and use one of those radios. For some odd reason, I already knew the military phonetic alphabet and didn't have to learn it then. No one else volunteered to pick up any of those radios. My PL told me to pick out any one of them. So, I picked up the nicest newer one with the better backpack support. I wiped off the blood the best I could, threw it over my shoulders, and tightened the straps. It was a good fit. The only thing different that day was I still was a combat marine with the same responsibilities but now additionally carrying a radio, listening to the chatter and talking on it. Within two days, I had the lingo down and understood how to use it.

I underestimated the overall weight of the gear ratio. I underestimated the ten-foot whip antenna sticking out of the back of my pack which drew unwanted attention. The Viet Cong knew what it meant to take a guy out with a giant antenna sticking out of their back – you take out the radio operator and you effectively avoid dealing with air support. Additionally, it was well known that a radio operator's place in the marching order was at the heels of the offer-in-charge – two high-priority targets in one spot. It wasn't just the bullets that I had to watch out for. The antenna could get caught in a trip wire overhead in a tree line to set off a booby trap. I was always careful with the antenna and the handset, not to expose them when on patrols.

I had become a squad radio operator by default, then later a platoon radio operator. It was a gutsy move to have volunteered to pick up that radio. Little then, did I realize that God had a plan for me, and the PRC-25 radio (another story). From then on except for the time in late May – June 1969 for six weeks, I always had the PRC-25 radio near me or strapped on my back for the rest of my tour in Vietnam.

See the full article on our website at: https://hotel25vv.com/how-i-became-a-radioman-in-vietnam.

- Larry Tyler

PFC ELTON ARMSTRONG





SILVER STAR BY DATE OF ACTION:

May 11, 1969

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Private First Class Elton Armstrong (MCSN: 2424349), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Machine Gunner with Company H, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 11 May 1969, during a search and destroy operation near An Hoa in Quang Nam Province, Private First Class Armstrong's platoon came under a heavy volume of fire from a hostile force occupying well-concealed bunkers. Reacting instantly, he pinpointed a major source of enemy fire coming from one bunker and, with complete disregard for his own safety, moved across the hazardous area toward it. Although he became the target of concentrated hostile fire and hand grenades, he dauntlessly initiated repeated assaults against the formidable stronghold and, resolutely maintaining a dangerously exposed position, enabled his companions to execute an enveloping maneuver which resulted in the destruction of the emplacement. His heroic and timely actions inspired all who observed him and were instrumental in his comrades' accounting for four North Vietnamese soldiers killed, the capture of three individual weapons, and the destruction of an enemy machine gun. By his courage, bold initiative and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of grave personal danger, Private First Class Armstrong contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

ELTON ARMSTRONG

Lance Corporal Elton Armstrong, a machine gunner from Jamaica, also sought a souvenir from the Arizona Territory. He wanted a Soviet semiautomatic SKS enemy rifle, less well known than the AK47 but highly valued by Marines because they could take it home as a war souvenir. The rifle featured a folding aluminum bayonet and a wooden stock. During a nasty firefight involving NVA fighting from well-prepared bunkers, Armstrong assaulted a bunker firing his M60 machine gun from the hip as he advanced. Twice, Chicom (Chinese Communist) grenades were thrown at him and twice he outran them, never dropping his weapon. Armstrong continued the attack and, with the help of a few Marines, finally took the bunker.

Later, when asked why he risked his life several times to take the bunker, he said, "I heard an SKS firing from the bunker and I wanted that rifle." Armstrong's assistant gunner was Private First Class Steve Russell, a Marine from Birmingham, Alabama.

Russell and Armstrong formed a friendship that has lasted half a century. Russell still travels to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to see Armstrong, who now lives in a Veterans Administration hospital.

DID YOU KNOW?

Are you aware that Hotel 2/5 has its very own website? If you haven't visited it yet, you are missing out! The site includes information, personal stories, and pictures and its here for your use! You do not have to register to visit the website, but if you would like to comment or share stories you will need to register. The process is easy. It is also worth it. Here's the link: https://hotel25vv.com/.

The website is always being updated to capture the Vietnam War history, memories, and personal comments from those who served in H 2/5. This site is a work of art that is constantly being updated.

The website was constructed to honor those combat Marines and Navy Corpsmen that served in Vietnam in Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines Regiment, 1st Marine Division from 1966 – 1971. Here are their true stories and first-hand experiences of the Vietnam War.

- Stephanie Casey

NOTE: We need your current and past reunion pictures so we can place them on this website. Please send your pictures to Larry. Click here to see some pictures of Seattle 2024 reunion.

TRIUMPH REGAINED

1966



The Hotel 2/5 Newsletter is returning to discussing the Vietnam War book, "Triumph Regained." There is a lot of new information uncovered in the last several years concerning 'our war'. In addition, the author, Mark Moyar, looks at 'what was known' then through much more objective eyes than most of our news media did back in those days. From the beginning of the book, Mr. Moyar has given considerable praise to Army General William Westmoreland. Based on this fresh appraisal of Westmoreland, who apparently deserves a more respected place in America's military history, America was making solid progress in the second half of 1966 in the war effort.

A series of large battles, mostly in the southern provinces of South Vietnam, had severely damaged North Vietnam's army. The communist influence over the rural people of South Vietnam was beginning to wane. About 80 percent of the population lived in those remote areas, far from any city, large or small.

The author discusses how the Soviets, the Chinese communists and the North Koreans came to North Vietnam's aid. There was in-fighting among these three groups, as well as treachery from the North Vietnamese, themselves, towards their benefactors. And there was the incompetence of America's political leaders, which gave further aid to North Vietnam. When the author goes 'behind-the-scenes' and illustrates, relying on very reputable sources, just how inept our 'leaders' were, including the president, congress and appointed administrators, it can make our 'blood run cold'.



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Triumph Regained — Continued



When we go 'back in time' to reevaluate what occurred in 'our war', it can be very upsetting! When we think of those we lost, not to mention our own hardships and sacrifices, our emotions can go into 'overload'. But there are lessons here, too. Not just for us, but for our country, as well. We've heard it all (over these many decades). How the war was 'unwinnable', it was 'immoral', how we (the troops) were 'foolish and naïve'. The list goes on, and on, and on, in ad nauseum! The bystanders always seem to know more about it than we do! It was a strange time for our nation. But we held firm, then and now. We kept the faith with the 'best of America'. Maybe this is our final legacy. We inherited and respected what we knew was true and worth loving (while it was being denigrated, we protected it) and then passed it on to the warriors and other future citizens of today.

It's always hard to make a case for war! Maybe they're all immoral? This isn't a defense of it. We can believe that fighting is a crime and that killing is unkind, while still doing them! We can say those things to ourselves and feel its sting, while still knowing that certain values are worth defending! Yes, by taking up arms against our fellow man, we can also protect our fellow man! We can save his freedom, his dignity, and his very life. We can do that for ourselves, as well, and for our families. We did it for our 'Brothers' in Vietnam and they did it for us! Many of us wouldn't be here today, if it wasn't for many of them!

This Newsletter isn't trying to support war, in general, or in reference to our own. It's up to each of us to 'make what we will' of our individual experience in it. Maybe this book, "Triumph Regained", will help us in our journey of self-discovery. As J.R.R. Tolkien said (he, too, was a combat vet from WWI), "All those who wander are not lost." Very likely, many of us came to a resolution on this matter long ago. Hopefully, this book, and others like it, will become popular in the years ahead. Future generations, and many of our peers from our own generation, would do well to consider the points made with this newfound information. They could learn, too, that much of what "they think they know about the Vietnam War" is not necessarily so!

One final thought on this edition of the newsletter. Regardless of how history treats the Vietnam War and its veterans (it's still being written), all of us can say, 'we showed up'! We didn't "let George do it". When we heard our name being called, we knew it was meant for us. We didn't look down at our feet, hoping to become invisible and that no one would notice us. We walked right up 'to the man' and said, 'take me first'! We were young men 'of substance'. Most of us probably weren't all that brave in everyday life. When we got together on the battlefield, our love for our country and for each other sustained us. It still does, because what we 'believed-in' never dies.

- Dennis Casey

A HOME FOR HEROS: COLUMBUS, OHIO — Continued

The city's commitment to its veterans extends beyond traditional support programs and parades- Columbus is home to several veteran-owned businesses, showcasing the entrepreneurial spirit of those who have served. From coffee shops to construction companies, these businesses not only provide economic opportunities but also embody the resilience and determination of veterans. The local economy has thrived as veterans took the skills they learned in the military and applied them to their ventures, contributing to the community's growth and success. Some of these businesses that are owned/operated by fellow veterans are listed below, in case you would like to visit these establishments during our Columbus reunion.

- Sexton's Pizza
- Coffee Underground (coffee and a place to relax, read, talk)
- Ziggy's Beer, Wine, and Spirits (liquor store)
- Plus Size Pretty Boutique (vintage boutique for plus-sized ladies)
- Smitty's BBQ and Catering

Columbus glows with the warmth of a city that has never forgotten its heroes. Stories of resilience echo through the streets, reminding everyone of the sacrifices made by those who served. In Columbus, veterans are not just a part of the community; they are its heart and soul.

- Stephanie Casey

AN HÒA COMBAT BASE IN VIETNAM

The **An Hòa Combat Base** (also known as **Đuc Duc**) base was located approximately 28 km west of Hội An and 4 km west-northwest of the Mỹ Sơn temple complex, near to the Tinh Yen River and the An Hoa industrial complex. The base was first used by the Marines in January 1966 during Operation Mallard when the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines established a firebase there while the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, and a Company from the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines swept the surrounding area.



The 5th Marine Regiment of the 1st Marine Division settled their headquarters in the An Hoa Combat Base., mid year 1966. The runway was extended over the years in order to handle larger cargo aircraft.

An Hoa was known as the "Home Base" for most of us in Hotel 2/5 over all the years we were in Vietnam. It was also sometimes known as the "REAR". It was a place where we crashed and slept for a night or two before going back out into the Arizona Territory. For many of us in the later years, this was the location we first arrived at when we got assigned to Hotel 2/5.

It was our base camp where you came when your company needed a few days to rest or if you were slightly hurt or injured, or needed to see a medic or a dentist. We were usually served hot meals here in the local mess hall.

If one looks at a map of Quang Nam Province, you will see that An Hoa Combat Base is strategically located south of Happy Valley, east of Base Area 112, and northwest of Base Area 116. US Marines stationed at An Hoa CB posed a significant threat to all three of these enemy base areas, and, therefore, caused the enemy a great deal of concern. It also meant that Marine units were very close to the infiltration routes enemy units would use to launch attacks against Danang Airbase and the provincial capital at Hoi An.

Furthermore, Marines in the An Hoa Basin could hamper VC political organizing efforts; prevent rice harvests from falling into the hands of the enemy, and respond rapidly to enemy attempts to infiltrate into the coastal lowland areas, such as Go Noi Island or the Que Son Valley. In sum, the Marines in An Hoa CB were a serious threat to the enemy's plans and for this reason, the enemy launched a series of attacks against the base and the key supply route to An Hoa that ran from Liberty Road Bridge south to the base.

The 2nd NVA Division was never able to take An Hoa CB as long as it was manned by US Marines and they suffered huge losses whenever they attempted to take it. As long as US Marine units occupied the An Hoa Combat base, a major impediment to the communist strategy of controlling Quang Nam Province was thwarted.

An Hoa Combat Base was known for these reasons.

1. It was a place where our 2/5 battalion of troops came together.
2. It was a base with a runway for cargo planes and helicopters to come and go always bringing troops, supplies, and ammunition.
3. It was a base with lots of firepower with the 75mm howitzers and 60/80 mortars.
4. The airfield was capable of handling C-7, C-123, and C-130 aircraft.
5. Marine PFC Dan Bullock, the youngest American serviceman killed in action in the Vietnam War died at An Hoa on 7 June 1969.
6. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines handed over the base to the ARVN 1st Battalion, 51st Regiment on 15 October 1970.

Many of us have some great memories and not so great memories of our time spent in An Hoa. Please send me an email about your experiences in An Hoa and I will publish them here in our next newsletter. See full article on website at: https://hotel25vv.com/an-hoa-duy-thu

Submitted by Larry Tyler

NEW YEAR'S AROUND THE COUNTRY



New Year's Eve, celebrated on December 31st, is a time of reflection, celebration, and anticipation for the year ahead. Across the United States, this occasion is marked by an array of traditions that vary by region, culture, and personal preference. From grand public events to intimate family gatherings, the ways in which Americans ring in the New Year are as varied as the people who celebrate it.

I used to go out and celebrate in Nashville, but these days all I am up for is some blackeye peas and cornbread on Jan. 1st, which is pretty standard for the South, where Steve Russell, Bob Crowson, Joe Sonderman, Al Bresser, Dennis Casey, and "Raddy" Pate live, but other areas really go all out for the holiday.

In the northeast, where Frank Koerber and Dennis "Doc" Noah reside, is the biggest party in the country, the New's Years Eve "Ball Drop" in New York City (although, I don't know if either has ever been to the celebration). This event has been held annually since 1907 and draws hundreds of thousands of spectators to Times Square, with millions more watching from home.

As the clock approaches midnight, a 12-foot-wide crystal ball descends from a flagpole atop One Times Square. At the stroke of midnight, cheers erupt, and fireworks light up the sky, marking the beginning of a new year. That really does sound very exciting-maybe one day I will get to see it in person.

In New Orleans, where Captain Ron Drez and family reside, the celebration of New Year's Eve is often infused with the vibrant culture of the city, including live music, parades, and revelry in the streets. The iconic fleur-de-lis drop at Jackson Square is a highlight, where thousands gather to bid farewell to the old year. And in California, where much of the Hotel 2/5 family lives, cities hold huge celebrations, like the New Years Eve Los Angeles (NYELA's) Countdown to 2025, which is being billed as the biggest celebration on the West Coast.

One thing that all parts of the country seem to participate in is the making of New Year's resolutions. These are typically things that we would like to improve upon in the upcoming year like our health (quitting smoking), our weight (dieting), our finances (better budgeting) and things of that nature. I would promise myself that I will eat healthier, but since I don't want to, why stress myself out over it? That's it! My New Year's Resolution will be to give myself more grace this year.

Maybe your desire is more time spent with family or traveling to a new destination-whatever goals you decided to set on January 1, 2025, I hope that you are able to achieve them. I wish our entire Hotel 2/5 family many blessings in 2025.

- Stephanie Casey



HOTEL 2/5 VIETNAM VETERANS NEWSLETTER

We continue to add new information to our website each month. If you haven't been on the website in a while, take note of the "Recent Posts" section on the righthand column on the frontpage. It has some pretty cool information.

https:\\hotel25vv.com

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OUR VIETNAM MILITARY OPERATIONS



US combat and combat support operations were conducted in and throughout the Vietnam war. Direct U.S. involvement in the Vietnam conflict increased steadily from advisory in 1962 to full blown war tactics through 1969 when the U.S. began scaling down its troops in favor of Vietnamization through improving the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. Combat operations in later years in the Vietnam War, 1970 – 1971, were tailored to assist supporting the South Vietnam's ARVN, U.S. troop protection, and withdrawing from the war.

Beginning in our next newsletter in March, we will begin to write about the Operations we in H 2/5 were involved in from 1966—1971. Please email me and tell me about your participation in each of your operations so I can include your memories within this new section of the newsletter.

We will be providing information from such operations as Operation Allen Brook to Operation Tayler Common, taking a look at their purpose, operation, and results.

A PAGE OUT OF OUR PAST

2018 Reunion Auction

A lot of items were presented for auction in Charleston. Money was generously donated for these items by Hotel Company members and their friends and family. Raddy is the proud owner of one of the treasured items that followed us from Pensacola.



Raddy's Prize Pelican



Hotel 2/5 Blanket by Lois Casey

Carolin and Carlie hold a blanket crafted by Lois Casey, Dennis Casey's wife. I would love to get the story behind the finished product for the next newsletter. I can only imagine the time spent.

Here is a page from our January 2018 H 2/5 Newsletter. Lois Casey has been making H 2/5 blankets for over 7 years to bring to our reunion auctions each year.

We didn't get the story behind the finished product back in January 2018.

Does anyone know who owns this blanket now? Lois, please let us know how many hours goes into these blankets each year. We appreciate your dedication and your talent to create these each year!

We all appreciate Raddy (AKA Randy Pate) for faithfully attending our reunions each year.