Hotel 2/5 Vietnam Veterans Newsletter

March/April 2026 Volume 26, Issue 2

Hotel Co. 2/5 Celebrates National Vietnam War Veterans Day 2026.



National Vietnam War Veterans Day 2026 is observed on **Sunday, March 29, 2026**. This annual, non-federal national observance honors the 9 million Americans who served during the Vietnam War era, recognizing their service, sacrifice, and the belated "welcome home" they deserved. The date marks the withdrawal of the last U.S. combat troops in 1973.

The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines (2/5) returned to Camp Pendleton in 1971 after a five-year deployment in Vietnam, where they engaged in intense combat operations. The unit left South Vietnam in April 1971, with elements participating in operations at places like Hue, Phu Bai, and Dong Ha before returning to the USA.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Vietnam Veterans Day..... 1
Radio Operators Interviewed 3
Recent Departures.....9

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

Featured Marine 2
Family Time.....10



Our next reunion will be in San Diego, CA.

Oct 7 - 10, 2026

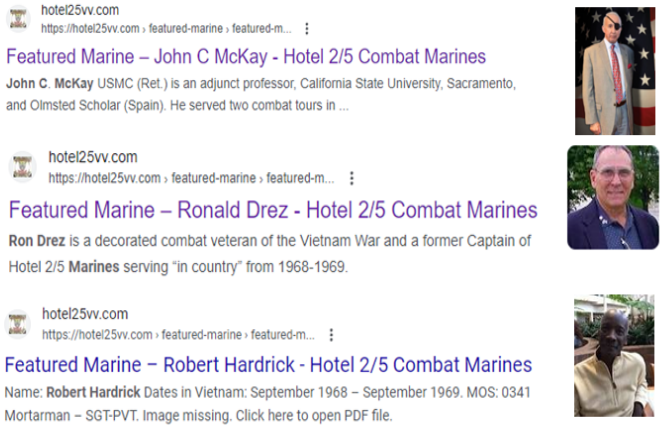
How to Become a *Featured Marine*

HOTEL 2/5
UNITED STATES MARINES
The Few, The Proud
Always Faithful
Vietnam Veterans

Website: https://hotel25vv.com

What is a Featured Marine?

A complete page set up on the Hotel25vv.com website that features information about you. When you Google "Featured Marine — your name, you will find yourself listed in the Google search.



They have served not only on active duty in a combat environment, but during their civilian life they have proudly worked and served in their local communities throughout the United States of America protecting, encouraging, and helping American citizens. Our members are from all walks of life with a common heritage and bond of brotherhood. They served in Vietnam from 1966 – 1971 to serve where Freedom was challenged. They fought in the Vietnam War the local South Vietnamese people and to help stop communism from spreading throughout Southeast Asia.

The American people owe them a great deal of gratitude. We salute You. God Bless, and Thank You.

Our section of "Featured Marines" is dedicated to all the MARINES AND CORPSMEN of the Hotel 2/5 Vietnam Era. These men have served our country and our Beloved Corps with Honor.

How to Become a Featured Marine?

Gather together copies of all the information you would like to have displayed on your "Featured Marine" web page. Your information should include:

- A copy of your DD214
- Written information about your involvement in Vietnam
- Dates you were in the Vietnam War
- Your rank when involved with Hotel 2/5
- Copies of all your medal awards
- Clippings from newspapers, books, written materials mentioning you
- Internet links from others mentioning you
- A current picture of yourself
- A Vietnam War picture of yourself
- List of your publications, if any
- Picture of your military medals and awards
- Documentation about your Purple Heart Award if you received one or more
- Copy of Biography or Autobiography
- Digital pictures of your Vietnam pictures

Submit above information to:

Larry D. Tyler
17242 Sierra Sunrise Ln
Santa Clarita, CA 91387
Email: ltyler@apellestech.com
Phone: (661) 373-1949

Radio Operators Interviewed—by Dennis Casey, Editor

Recently, a high school student, William Harry, from Ohio wanted to interview some Vietnam Veteran radio operators. He saw our radiomen video from our Seattle 2024 Reunion on our website. There was a zoom meeting where William interviewed Larry Tyler, Jay Peterson, and Dale Pappas who all participated in the zoom call . This newsletter contains the following written interview. These are my answers to the interview questions.

It seemed a good time to include it with Vietnam Veterans Day soon to be here (March 29th). May you all have a memorable and enjoyable Vietnam Veterans Day. You have earned your place in history. It's a history to be remembered!

1. **What is your name, and when were you born?** - My name is Dennis Casey. I was born on December 31,1948.

2. **Tell me about your parents, siblings, and where you grew up.** – My father was born in 1918. My mother in 1923. Both were born in the rural part of Walton County, Florida. They divorced in 1952, which was very uncommon in those days. My oldest sister was born in 1941. My brother in 1943 and my other sister in 1944. I have two younger half-sisters from another marriage of my father. My mother didn't have any more children.

3. **When were you a soldier in the Vietnam War? What years?** - I arrived in Vietnam on September 1,1968 and left on or about May 1,1969, after being wounded on April 26, 1969.

4. **Did you enlist or were you drafted?** - I joined the Marine Corps in November of 1966. My older brother had been drafted earlier that year. He served in Vietnam 1967-68. I 'went over' about six months after he came home.

5. **How did you find out you were drafted?** - How did you feel when you found out? Why did you enlist in the army? – I joined because I felt that I owed something to my country. I could have been born anywhere in the world (we don't choose our parents), but I was born in America and felt very lucky that I was. I guess you could say, "That it was about gratitude!"

6. **What was your training like to prepare for war, and how long did it last? Where did you go to train? – I guess you could say it began in boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. Our drill Instructors had been to Vietnam and told us about certain firefights and what happened in them. For me, in August 1968, I went to Camp Pendleton in California for what we called "Staging Battalion". We were there about a month and received more training about "how things would be in Vietnam".**

7. **Tell me about the family you left behind when you went to war. How did it make you feel?** – By the time I was leaving for Vietnam, my mother had remarried. I was going away from her, my stepfather, siblings, and other

Continued on page 4

I vividly remember the night before departing for 'Staging Battalion'. I thought to myself, "It's a lot easier to support a war, no matter how just you may think it is, than to board that plane and go to that war." I was nineteen. I was afraid. I didn't know if I would ever see my family again. Vietnam was twelve thousand miles from my home in Florida. But this was something I had to do!

8. **Can you describe what it was like when you first arrived in Vietnam? And where were you stationed?** – Like most Marines, I flew into Danang. I think I was there two days before I was assigned to a unit. I was sent about twenty miles south of there to a place called 'An Hoa'. I had never heard of it. I was sent to an artillery outfit, Echo Battery, 2/11, as it was called. Upon arriving at the base, the smell of diesel fuel was 'hanging heavy'. I've hated that smell ever since. I equate it with death and suffering.

9. **How did you become a radio operator, and what were you thinking when you learned this?** – Well, that's kind of a long and convoluted story. I won't tell it all here. The MOS for a Field Radio Operator is 2531. That's what I became, by 'hook or crook'. Or, as an old saying goes, "I fumbled left, then fumbled right, and then I kicked a field goal!" A Field Radio Operator is supposed to go to 'comm school'. I never did. I was trained 'OJT' (on the job training). My official orders actually used the term 'OJT', but anyway. While I was serving with Fox Company 2/8 in Cuba (early 1968) I was trained by a 'grunt radio man' who had already been to Vietnam. I was surprised when I was made a 'radio man'. It seemed contrary to my personality, and more importantly, to my abilities. But in the military, we do as we are told.

10. **What did you have to do as a radio operator? Day to Day.** – The first two months in Vietnam, I was in the artillery unit. There, I did LPs (listening posts) and 'feces details'. My platoon sergeant and I got off to a bad start upon my arrival there. So, he kept me and my first friend in Vietnam, 'Rock', doing dirty jobs, so I didn't do much radio work. Around the first of November, my platoon sergeant sent me to join Hotel Company, 2/5, where I remained for the next six months. That was my lucky day. I was so glad to be gone from Echo Battery! In Hotel Company, I was the radioman for the Artillery Forward Observer. I had four of them. The first one was short (his combat tour was almost over), so he left soon after I arrived. The second one was wounded. The third one didn't stay long. He was transferred to another unit. Then my fourth and final one came on board. He and I were together until I was wounded. Radiomen always have to make sure our radios are working well. We clean them, inspect them, check our spare battery for any problems, too. We would go out with the platoons from time-to-time, for various reasons. Often, the two of us would go out on

Continued on page 5

Interdiction Fire). We stayed busy. Quang Nam Province, where Hotel 2/5 operated mainly, had the most battle deaths of all the 47 provinces in South Vietnam. Over 8500 KIAs were registered there. Counting non-hostile deaths, that number was about 10,000. So, we had plenty to keep us busy.

11. **Were you scared? What was the scariest part?** – Lt. Hartneady, my last Forward Observer, was a fearless man. If he was ever afraid, I never knew it. That was okay, though, because I had enough fear for the both of us. I've never been a brave person. Something happens, however, when you're around brave people. They teach you how to be 'better than yourself'. If I ever did anything which was remotely brave, it was because I didn't want to let down my fellow Marines in Hotel Company. To have done that, would have been worse than death!

12. **Can you describe what you remember most about your service? What was Vietnam like, and what were your fellow soldiers like?** - I could probably write a book on this question, but I'll keep it short. Being around the people of South Vietnam, seeing them doing their daily chores and living their lives in the simplicity of the 'Middle Ages', it made me appreciate America even more. But it went beyond that, too. I realized that 'people are people', no matter where they live or how they look or how they speak. We're 'all in this together', here in this life. Above all else, we need to love one another and, yet, sometimes we have to 'make a stand' because some things are inherently wrong and need to be rejected. In other words, we have tough choices to make. Men can take part in war and keep their humanity. That's a tough needle to thread. But love can see us through. The men of Hotel Company, 2/5, are some of the finest people who have ever walked this Earth! I would tell anyone, anywhere, at any time, of their bravery, their suffering, their sacrifice, their dedication, their love for their fellow man. They were heroes before the first shot was fired. If there is ever anything closely resembling peace in this universe, it will be because of men like them.

13. **What would you consider to be your contribution to the war?** – As someone once said, and I paraphrase, "If you want to make a difference in this world, you first have to show up." Well, I showed up. I didn't 'let George do it'. I became one of the 'Georges'.

14. **How did you learn you would be coming home, and how did you feel?** – Well, I got hurt and was shipped to a U.S. Naval Hospital in Guam. I was there about a month. Almost every Marine in my ward had one or more limbs missing. So, I felt very lucky. My arm and leg were broken. My knee was about

Continued on page 6

the size of a basketball, but I was able to keep my leg. The doctors had contemplated amputation, but, thankfully, I was spared. I was very happy to be going home. It was like a dream. And, yet, part of me was sad. I felt like I was abandoning my Marine Brothers, but I knew I was in no shape to be any help to them now. Going home was a surreal feeling.

15. **What was it like when you got home? How did people react to you and treat you?** – There was a strange stillness, quietness. It was like I had been to 'Summer Camp', or something, like everything was 'business as usual', but it wasn't. My close family was 'okay'. Nothing was said about the war. The subject was avoided. One day, I said something to my mother, it was harsh and unpleasant and she began to cry. She said, "Denny (my nickname), I don't know what to say to you. I wish I could help you, but I just don't understand!" I told her, "Mama, that's okay. That's how it should be." She passed away 45 years later. We never spoke about it again. I was in the Pensacola Naval Hospital for almost a year. Oddly, some of the staff there were not very cordial. Pensacola is one of the most 'traditional' places in America, yet, I encountered overt hostility on several occasions. The guys who were from more 'liberal' areas had it much worse, I'm sure. There were other repercussions for 'being in 'Nam'. They would pop-up at unexpected times and places. As the years passed, I was careful not to divulge 'my secret'. It surely wasn't shame, that was never an issue for me. I simply didn't want to hear 'the same old story' I had heard so many times from people who were teaching me the 'conventional wisdom' of the day. There wasn't much wisdom in it.

16. **Can you explain the lasting health impacts your service had on you?** – As I've mentioned, my arm and leg were hurt in the war from a mortar round. My arm healed fine, but my leg gave me a limp. As I have aged, my leg has bowed out and gives me considerable pain. I'm still able to lift hay and carry feed while I work on my farm. I'm very fortunate to be able to still do manual labor. I regularly remind myself of one of my favorite songs which seems to apply to my physical state. "All I knew how to do was to keep on keeping on like a bird that flew."

17. **Knowing what you know now, would you serve again if you had to do it over?** – This is always an interesting question. Back in 2019, one of our Marine Brothers said he was asked that question. He replied, "If I could serve with the same people." Most likely, combat veterans feel that way about their comrades from any war. It's human nature. The answer is 'yes'. It would be difficult to do because war is such an aberration for the soul. Knowing that I would be back in Hotel Company 2/5 again, would see me through, as it did the first time.

Continued on page 7

18. What would you want future generations to know about your Service? – That's a tough question. I don't feel that I have any special information to give them. For me, my love of American history played a large role in how I reacted to the times. Our history isn't perfect by any means, but America is a great land. The Sixties were very unique. Bittersweet might be a good term for them. My Marine Brothers and I went far away to help a country stay free. That country, South Vietnam, was willing to fight for their freedom, as well. They incurred over a million casualties in their struggle. As I said earlier, I have no shame for my service to my country and to the people of South Vietnam. It was a battle in defense of human dignity, of liberty and a strong stand for the worth of the individual. Why would anyone apologize or feel shame for such a feat?

19. Do you think veterans are treated well by the government post-service? – Overall, yes.

20. What would you want people to know about veterans and what they go through? – To a large degree, I would prefer that the general public not know too much. War is terrible. No one, who is sane, goes through combat without being damaged! It's an affront to the human spirit. When we serve, there is a sense of sacrifice. Part of that sacrifice is to spare others knowledge of what we have endured. That's probably not a reasonable hope. Every Marine, Soldier, Sailor or Airman want their war to be the last one. But, of course, it never is.

21. What makes you most proud about your service and your life? – Another tough question. In reference to the war, I'm thankful that I followed my own code and didn't listen 'to the crowd'. The best part of that was, it was so easy to disregard them because they were so wrong and selfish. I was 17 when I joined the service. At that age I wasn't a child. I could see, I could hear, I could think. I could study. I made my own way with some sage advice from people I trusted, like my grandmother and one of my aunts. They served me well. The people from the past are a gift to us, one which we usually ignore. The second part of the question, I really can't answer.

Another person who inspired me to serve is one I never met. I listened to his inaugural address by accident when I was twelve years old. I was wanting to see the poet, Robert Frost, and I did. He was great, btw! Just before I could turn off my TV set (I wasn't interested in politics) President Kennedy began speaking. He was the first president born in the 20th century. His famous request is in his speech of that day, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country!" He finished his address that very cold day with this paragraph:

Continued on page 8

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

- author: John F. Kennedy

Hi Larry,



I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but I heard from John "Cowboy" Lafley's wife, Jackie, that he passed away this afternoon 3/10/26. He'd been under Hospice Care since late October. They had moved to the Spokane area to be near his sons and their families. So that's where she is now.

I asked about a service/memorial and this was her response:

"John choose to do a whole body donations. I'll get his ashes back in about 5 weeks. He wants them scattered on his uncle's ranch in Montana.

I am planning to have a celebration of life later after the weather is more stable."

Her mailing address is:

(Stephanie will know what name she goes by from previous reunions)
8900 S Mullen Hill Rd #69
Spokane WA 99224

I told Jackie that I'd let you know so you could post in the 2/5 newsletter.

Please let me know if I can help in any way.

Sandy Benjamin &
Gary (Alan) Woodruff
(352) 816-4149

Brothers,



I am sad to report that our brother Al Gautsche reported to his last duty station in January. He was found beside the pond he created at his "ranch".

Al served with us in Hotel Company from September 1968 to October 1969. He was a gunner and his email address was H25hippygunner. Al had a tough time adapting when he returned to civilian life but despite that he started his own landscaping and tree service. He was very creative with landscape design and was an ardent arborist.

His passion was fishing. He spent a lot of time fishing for salmon in the rivers running into Lake Erie. He was a master at smoking salmon. I could never replicate his technique.

Al was instrumental in getting the annual Hotel 2/5 reunion off the ground. In 2008 and 2009 the reunions were held at his place in Hubbard, Ohio. I know that many of us have found the reunions to be very valuable in being able to share our experiences and honor our fallen brothers.

Please remember Al.

Semper Fi good friend.

250 (Joe Sonderman)

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

Editor-in-Chief & Senior Writer:

Dennis Casey
lcasey@benlomand.net

Assistant Editor:

Stephanie Casey
stephcasey2018@gmail.com

Copyeditor & Proofer:

Lois Casey
lcasey@benlomand.net

Published by:
Larry Tyler
17242 Sierra Sunrise Ln
Santa Clarita, CA 91387

Phone: (661) 373-1949
E-mail: ltyler@apellestech.com

FAMILY TIME

Special Days

If you would like to be added to our birthday or anniversary list, please contact Stephanie Casey at stephcasey2018@gmail.com.

Happy Birthday to Our Hotel 2/5 Veterans and Their Lovely Ladies!

As we turn the pages of our calendar to March and April, we are filled with excitement and gratitude to celebrate each of you on your special day. Birthdays are a time to honor the journeys you have undertaken and the love that surrounds you through every chapter of life. May this birthday bring you joy, laughter, and cherished memories with loved ones. Here's to a year ahead filled with health and happiness.

Birthdays:

Ronald Drez - March 2

John Barber - March 8

Susan Noah - March 14

Rita Tyler- March 27

Anniversaries

-by: Stephanie Casey

SAN DIEGO HOTEL 2/5 REUNION—OCT 7-10, 2026

Be sure to check out Jay Peterson's 'Call to Muster' on our website at:

https://hotel25vv.com/2026-call-to-muster

YOU CAN NOW REGISTER AT THE HOTEL IN SAN DIEGO

Go to https://hotel25vv.com/hotel-reservation-san-diego

to register at the hotel.

Our theme is: "RETURN TO OUR BEGINNING"

We have a block of 30 rooms available for the reunion Wednesday October 7, Thursday October 8, Friday October 9, and Saturday October 10, 2026 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel San Diego, 2270 Hotel Circle North, San Diego, CA 92108

$149.00 Single/Double, $164.00 Triple, $179.00 Quad

Daily Buffet Breakfast is included in the room rate.