1/5 Vietnam Veterans Newsletter – January 2021

To our fellow 1/5 Marines,

Due to the cancellation of the 2020 Reunion which was to be held in the Washington, DC area, there has been an absence of communication between our association and members. The pandemic of 2020 has disrupted many lives and we hope this will soon be behind us. This letter is an attempt to convey newsworthy and personal information that should be of interest to our members. If you have information that you feel is noteworthy for our group please forward same to our Treasurer, John Chang at **jschang1829@gmail.com** or the Interim Communications Officer, Jim Latta at **jlatta@aduiepyle.com**.

We look forward to hearing back from any 1/5 Vietnam Veteran who is willing and able to share any story, article, thought or photo for our newsletter. Thanks!

If you know a member who doesn't have an e-mail, please get a copy of this e-mail to them. For any member that does not have an e-mail, please ask them to provide an email address of someone who will be able to get future emails to them.

Sad News: The year 2020 will be one year few of us will ever forget. As most of you are aware, we lost our 1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association President (Jim Dougherty B 1/5) to a sudden heart attack back on September 9th. Jim's death was preceded in April by the death of another B 1/5 veteran, Randy Leedom. 1/5 Vietnam Veterans suffered yet other losses with the passing of Benny Benware (C 1/5) on March 9th, and on December 5th John (Doc) Loudermilk (C 1/5). Our sympathies go out to their families in the loss of these fine men who personified the most heroic traditions of the USMC and Naval service. These four men lived the USMC motto, Semper Fidelis. We are confident that heaven's gate has been suitably reinforced by Sergeants Dougherty and Leedom, Benny and Doc Loudermilk. In memory of these stalwart comrades, the survivors of Bravo and Charlie companies have written heartfelt tributes.

We are authorized to inform the members that two very generous friends of our association donated $5000 (a total of $10,000) to the Rodney Davis Scholarship Fund in memory of Jim Dougherty and Randy Leedom. These two donors have been supporters of our fundraising efforts since the memorial project was launched in 2012 and wanted to make this statement via donation concerning their high regard for Randy and Jim and their efforts to memorialize Sergeant Davis's heroism.

Randy Leedom

For some 1/5ers the Rodney Davis (MOH) Scholarship in Macon GA may be something you are not familiar with. The Davis scholarship program was initiated by one of the Marines (Randy Leedom) whom Sergeant Davis saved by smothering an enemy grenade with his body. We learned in April of Randy's passing after a long illness. Several of Randy's old buddies joined him and his devoted wife Kitty in February 2020 to say our farewells. Here is a picture from that weekend spent at Randy's and Kitty's beautiful home in Oregon.



As some of you may have met Randy at past reunions we wish to share the following:

In February 1968, during the TET Offensive and the battle for Hue City, Randy (an E-3, 19 year old Lance Corporal) assumed command of the remnants of his platoon after his lieutenant and senior NCOs became casualties. For the remainder of the battle Randy led his platoon. He directed support fire, evacuated casualties, distributed rations and ammo, administered first aid and attempted to manage the chaos and fear that accompanied the chaotic, close quarter combat in the city of Hue as casualties steadily eroded the ranks. There were no "safe spaces" for the Marines in Hue, for it was a brutal, terror filled 30 day battle.

Randy Leedom is one of many unsung American heroes who throughout our nations history rose to the challenges during horrific events. Characteristically, Randy sought no recognition but instead established a scholarship for his comrade, Sergeant Davis, who made the supreme sacrifice.

Had it not been for Randy's selfless concern that proper recognition be afforded to Sergeant Davis, the memorial that was spawned from that initiative, the cemetery cleanup that followed and scholarship program that evolved from the memorial fundraising would have never happened.

Randy was one of those few combat Marines in 1967 and 68 who actually completed a full 13 month tour. A 13 months that witnessed some of the most ferocious combat (Swift, Union and Hue City to name a few) for the 5th Marines in Vietnam.

I'll never forget that phone call. I was at home in North Carolina when the phone rang. The person's voice on the other end of the line was pure gravel, so I recognized my caller instantly, but I was stunned because he was crying. It was Randy Leedom, who had just spent several hours trying at Linwood Cemetery in Macon, Georgia, trying to find his hero, Sergeant Rodney Davis, USMC (MOH). He had been visiting friends in northern Florida and decided to drive north to pay his respects to the man who had saved his life, and the lives of several others, on that fateful day, September 6, 1967. When he finally realized that the Davis Family plot, the final resting place of Sergeant Davis, was under many years of jungle growth, he called me. Fighting back tears, he told me that we needed to do something, and immediately. I never argue with an NCO, I just do as they command. Within a few weeks the 1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association took action with our first Linwood Cemetery work party, alongside the volunteers from the Macon Cemetery Preservation Corporation, the Davis Family, and a number of Cadets from the local Jr. ROTC Detachments. Over the next decade, we hacked away at the jungle, built and dedicated the Sgt. Rodney M. Davis, USMC (MOH) Memorial Monument, and launched the Scholarship Program named in his honor. Randy was also the first 1/5er to dig deep in his wallet at every reunion to add to our fund-raising efforts.

Randy, like many U. S. Marines, was a doer, not a talker. He will be greatly missed.

- Nick Warr

Jim Dougherty

Jim "Doc" Dougherty died suddenly on September 9th. It was a shock to all as Jim had showed no signs of illness prior to the apparent heart attack he suffered that morning after his daily walk and while on his way to get his morning coffee at WAWA. Jim only drank WAWA coffee, it was part of his morning ritual. Our prayers are with Beth and his two daughters, KC and Sarah and their families.

As President of the 1/5 Association for the past several years, Jim and his wife Beth were a crucial part of our organization and instrumental in our many successful reunion events. Jim was "the organizer", making sure we had plenty of snacks, beer, sodas and conversation in our hospitality rooms. Jim also was the energy behind our annual fundraiser at Lehigh Valley Sporting Clays. Over the past five years that annual event has raised cumulatively about $250,000 for the Rodney Davis Scholarship Fund and the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation. Jim had the foresight to involve the MCSF in our fundraiser once the Davis Scholarship became self-sustaining.

No discussion about Jim is complete unless we acknowledge his heroic service in Vietnam. Jim served two tours (65-66 and 67-68). Wounded and medevacked to the US on his first tour, Jim volunteered to return in 1967 although he could have finished out his enlistment stateside. As an E-5 with Bravo 1/5 Jim's exploits are legendary. During Operation Swift Jim was in the midst of the fighting, at one point engaged in hand to hand combat with an NVA soldier. During the fight at Phu Loc village in early February 68, Jim and a squad fought their way into the CAG compound and helped the CAP Marines fight off the NVA until on the verge of being overwhelmed Jim led the survivors through the wire at the back of the compound. In the darkness they found their way to the lagoon and a fishing boat that they commandeered and sailed into the Sea where they were picked up by a US Navy patrol boat.

Returning to Bravo Company after his foray at sailing, Jim took command of his platoon after the platoon leader was KIA. Jim led his men in a desperate fight along the Troui River, suffering more wounds, the last of which nearly severed his leg (his 4th Purple Heart). For his heroic leadership in this engagement Jim was awarded the Silver Star. Once again medevacked to the US (Bethesda Hospital) Jim recovered, but the leg injury would force him to retire from the USMC.

After Jim's funeral, which was well attended by many of his 1/5 comrades, several Bravo company veterans got together to write a tribute to Jim. Thanks to Ben Drollinger, Jerry Stroud, Hugh Pankey, Ken Vitucci and Gary Petrous this story was completed and submitted to Jim's hometown newspaper the Norristown Times Herald where it received front page publication on Veterans Day. The story was also carried by three other Philadelphia suburban papers. Friends, neighbors and relatives were astonished by this story about the mild-mannered gentleman from Conshohocken PA.

Jim was a very humble man who spoke very little about his wartime experiences, so for many (even his family) they were hearing about Jim's exploits for the first time. The story was composed by the men Jim knew and loved, his fellow Marines. It was a fitting tribute to a fine man, a wonderful friend and a great Marine.



John "Doc" Loudermilk

Doc John Loudermilk is the only U. S. Navy Corpsman I know of who took command of a Marine Infantry Squad while under fire. John was with Sawaya's squad on the night of December 16, 1967, taking his usual place in the center of the squad as they left the Hoi An Combat Base for their assigned night ambush patrol route. At this point, Doc had been "In Country" for several months and was a very savvy "Doc" who had already saved many lives, so his Marines protected him as best they could. Suddenly, the night was shattered by the explosion of two 105mm dud artillery rounds that had been "daisy chained" together about 40 meters apart on the narrow road that the Marines were walking on. The horrific explosion threw John into the air and several meters into an adjacent dry rice paddy, where he was initially unconscious and suffering from a concussion. Blood was coming out of his ears, and he couldn't hear a thing, but John quickly recovered his faculties. Hearing the screams from those who were badly injured or dying, he realized that his squad was completely exposed to enemy fire, but that the squad leadership were either dead or dying. He found that only two other Marines on that patrol who were still combat effective, so he immediately assessed the situation, deployed the assistant machine gunner into an effective firing position should there be a follow-up attack by the enemy, and positioned the other rifleman. Then, he started saving lives.

Three Marines died that night, but all the rest, many badly wounded, were saved, thanks to Doc John Loudermilk.

I got a phone call from John's wife, Sandy, a few years back asking me for my help. She let me know that although John suffered from a traumatic brain injury that night, the U. S. Navy, in its inestimable wisdom, refused to award him the Purple Heart. It seems that John bled, but he did not suffer a penetrating wound. I told Sandy that I would do everything I could to help, but not to hold her breath.

I was able to get in touch with the Assistant Machine Gunner, "Irish" McShane, who survived that night, and he told me the complete story. I was also able to obtain affidavits from Mother Mullan, who took out the reaction force that night, as well as our company commander. With this support and information, I decided that John deserved recognition for his heroism that night, so I submitted a request to HQMC to not only award John the Purple Heart, but also the Bronze Star with V. After several months, the Navy finally decided that John deserved the Bronze Star, but not the Purple Heart. Go figure.

John "Doc" Loudermilk, along with all our terrific U. S. Navy Corpsmen, were the best of us. Every time they heard the cry "Corpsman Up!" they ran toward the gunfire and saved countless lives. Tragically, for them, the ones they remember most are the ones they lost.

-Nick Warr

Eugene "Benny" Benware

Benny Benware was the best darned RTO in Vietnam! I know because he worked for me as my Platoon Radio Operator for almost eight months. He had already been in country for a while when this green-behind-the ears brown bar arrived in I Corps in mid-November, 1967. Many years later I realized that Benny reminded me of the Radar O'Reilly character in MASH, the TV series. Even before I realized I needed to communicate with higher command, Benny was handing me the radio's handset.

Yeah, Benny was good at his job, but like many of our mud Marines, he bitched. A lot. I remember one time in early January 1968, we were out in the bush but in a relatively safe location. Orders came down to send out a squad patrol down the railroad tracks from Lang Co Village. Benny's squad was up, and of course he started bitching again. So, fool that I am, I decided to give him a break and volunteered to go on this patrol as their radio operator. Keep in mind that I had never carried the PRC-25 anywhere, let alone a couple of miles. Well, let's just say that after that patrol returned, I was almost crying with relief. Those damned radios are HEAVY!!

I never carried a radio again, and I never hassled Benny for his bitching. Benny, I love you man, and I miss you every day.

Semper Fidelis!
Nick Warr

I didn't know Benny in Vietnam, but I had the pleasure to know him through our 1/5 Association. Like many of us, I saw Benny's health decline through the years. Although humbling to see, he was always striving to maintain his independence. I have never heard Benny complain or even share anything about his struggles. I also saw Benny's generosity at our reunions. He was a force to be reckoned with during the raffle bidding wars and always made sure the "pot" got a substantial contribution. Benny was funny, quick witted, outspoken, and respectful. For me, and probably many of us, Benny was a real and true inspiration. God bless you, Benny.

John Chang

From Jerry (Doc) Stroud (Corpsman B 1/5):

"I was at a meeting at the Scuttlebutt Brewery in Everett, WA just prior to this COVID outbreak and spotted the ship's name plate from the frigate USS Rodney M Davis that was decommissioned in Everett, on the back wall of this meeting room. I later returned and took a copy of Rodney's citation to the manager who said they would donate this placard to the family or the foundation. If anyone is interested, I will obtain this placard and arrange to get this to anyone who can make better use of it rather than being on the wall along with a lot of other Navy memorabilia that no one knows about or cares about."

Dale Greene (CO Alpha 1/5) our point man with the CFCG, Community Foundation of Central Georgia, spoke with Dr. Josephine Davis (Rodney's sister-in-law) regarding this ship's nameplate which Doc Stroud uncovered. She suggested the Harriet Tubman Museum as they already have a display on Rodney Davis. Dale and Jerry to work out the details.

Rodney Davis Scholarship update from Dale Greene:

Working with the community foundation, we are continuing to gather information on how to incorporate Vo-Tech scholarships into the program. Thus far, I have received no negative comments regarding Vo-Tech. Our planning has been impacted by this unusual year but we anticipate having something in place for the 2021 school year.

As of September 30th, our scholarship fund has a balance of $236,534.60. I don't need to tell you how volatile the market has been and while on the surface this is a loss, I also want to let you know that the fund continues to do well under the skillful management of the Community Foundation of Middle Georgia. Using their five year rolling goal of 5% growth, we are still enjoying 6.9% growth. Dale went on to credit Jim Dougherty for his dogged determination in fundraising. If you desire to make a personal donation to the Davis Scholarship Fund the contact is as follows:

CFCG
577 Mulberry St, Suite 1600
Macon, GA 31201
Attn: Kathryn Dennis (President)

In the memo line of your check it is important to note:
Sgt. Davis Scholarship Fund

Our 1/5 Vice President, Glenn Borvansky, had contacted John Chang, our 1/5 Association Treasurer and me regarding the next step in selecting a replacements for Jim Dougherty and Benny Benware. It is our intent to address that at the next reunion (2021 in California). In the meantime, if you wish to make nominations for our slate of officers, the current offices are:

President: Jim Dougherty (deceased)
Vice President: Glenn Borvansky - glennski@mtco.com
Treasurer: John Chang - jschang1829@gmail.com
Secretary: Gerry Regan - reganrv@gmail.com
Master at Arms: Benny Benware (deceased)
Chaplain: Joe Andrews (no email)
Interim Communications Officer: Jim Latta - jlatta@aduiepyle.com

Donations & Annual Dues:

Our Treasurer, John Chang reports there have been no dues collected in 2020 due to the cancellation of the 2020 reunion. We would urge all who receive this newsletter to pay their dues. ***Dues are due and payable on February 1, 2021.*** Membership is optional but recommended. Our bank statement balance as of 12/31/20 was $13,237.15.

Annual Membership Fee: $25.00
Life Membership Fee: $250.00

Donations are also welcomed. We are a 501C 19 nonprofit, so all donations are tax deductible (EID # 20-2530254). We appreciate Gerry Regan's donation of $150 for flag framing. Gerry has been one of our strongest recruiters over the years as he searched for 1/5 veterans and encouraged them to join the association. These dues and donations provide the funds which enable us to support our reunions and our annual operating expenses. Checks made out to the 1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association can be sent to:

1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association
PO Box 8271
Surprise, AZ 85374
Attention: John Chang



Note: 1/5 Vietnam Veterans Coins are for sale: $10.00 for one, $50.00 for six, $100.00 for thirteen. Place orders with John Chang. Checks should be made out to 1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association.

Annual 1/5 Sporting Clays Fundraiser:

Since 2015 our 1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association has sponsored a Sporting Clays fundraiser near Allentown PA. Thanks to the encouragement and advice provided by a group of San Antonio Marines and the Marketing expertise of Nick Warr our first shoot in 2015 got off the ground successfully (a real achievement). Each year since 2015 our income from the shoot exceeded the prior year largely due to Jim Dougherty's energy and enthusiasm and the support from volunteer former Marines and community spirited friends. As a result of the successful fundraising the Rodney Davis Scholarship Fund reached a self-sustaining level about two years ago. At that point, Jim Dougherty had the foresight to invite the MCSF (Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation) to co-sponsor this annual event as he reasoned, "we are all getting older and need younger blood to carry on this endeavor." Jim felt that an organization which worked solely to provide educational funds for the sons and daughters of Marines and Navy Corpsman was the perfect candidate to both sponsor and share in the proceeds. For those not familiar with the MCSF we have provided a link www.mcsf.org.

The rise of the Wuhan Virus necessitated the cancellation of our 2020 event but we are optimistic that 2021 and a viable vaccine will enable us to resume these annual (last Saturday in September) events. Our Event Planning Committee has authorized us to change the name from the Blue Diamond Shoot to The Sergeant Dougherty Memorial Shoot. The Dougherty family was most appreciative of this thoughtful gesture.

Jim Dougherty's premature departure leaves a big hole to fill and we are hopeful other 1/5 Vietnam Veterans will surface as volunteers to support these efforts. If you have the time and inclination to do so, please contact Jim Latta at 610-909-6507.

Save the date!

First week in August 2021
Oceanside/San Diego, California
Blue Diamond 80th Birthday Reunion

In closing this newsletter we thought we would share this thought: Nearly all of us (1/5 vets) volunteered during a time of war to serve our country and in so doing put our bodies and minds at great risk for what we felt was a just cause. Many of us bear the physical and emotional scars from those dangerous times five decades ago. I would wager that hardly a day goes by for any of us that those memories don't march to the forefront of our minds.

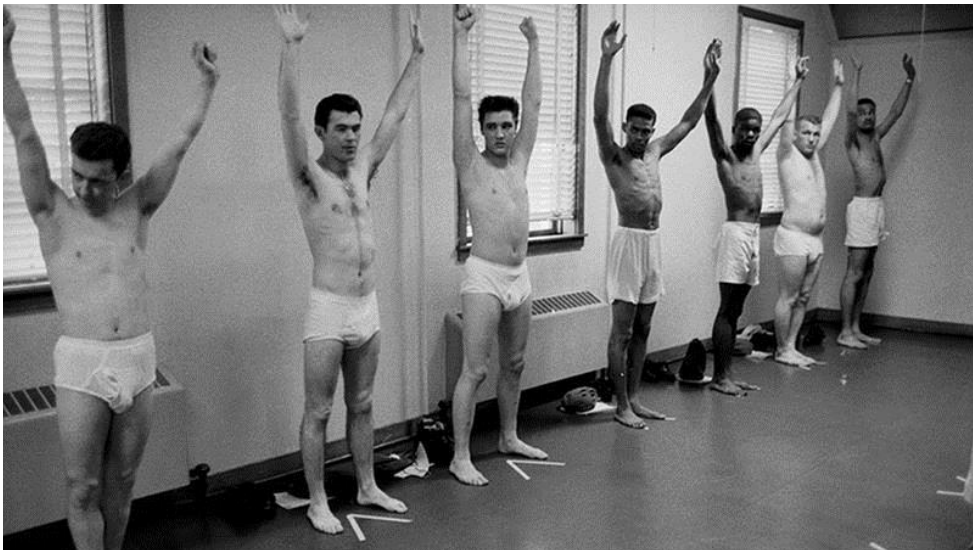
Young men of our generation and those previous to ours faced several options when completing high school. Volunteer/enlist (as most of us did), seek an educational deferment through college enrollment and enter an officer candidate program, await the Draft, or evade service through various nefarious means and shift the risk and burden to others. National Service, be it through draft or volunteering, was that great equalizer which taught young men accountability and all important life lessons and values such as teamwork, humility, leadership and self-sacrifice.

As we ponder those times of compulsory National Service, which began in 1940 and ended in 1973, consider this 1958 photograph of Elvis Presley (the most celebrated celebrity of his time) in his underwear enduring the humiliation of being photographed during an induction physical. Consider how today's celebrity youth would cope with such a requirement? Yes, there was risk and inconvenience involved in compulsory National Service (the Draft) but think of what today's youth are missing in lifetime friendships, adventures, self-reliance, independence, maturity, etc. Think of the benefits our country would be realizing from a large population of young men who had experienced the responsibilities and maturing of compulsory National Service. Are we better or worse for its absence?

We wish all 1/5 Vietnam Veterans a prosperous and happy New Year and please don't hesitate to send us your contributions for our next newsletter.

Semper Fidelis!





Elvis Presley, 1958 draftee.

1/5 Vietnam Veterans Association

Order Form for Dues, Donations and Commemorative Coins

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Annual Dues ($25.00) $_____

Life Membership Dues ($250.00) $_____

Commemorative Coins (1 coin = $10.00) $_____

Commemorative Coins (6 coins = $50.00) $_____

Commemorative Coins (13 coins = $100.00) $_____

I wish to make a donation in the amount of: $_____

Order Total: $_____

Please complete the order form, make your check out to "***1/5 Vietnam Veterans***" and mail it to Doc John Chang at:

John Chang

PO Box 8271

Surprise, AZ 85374