



## The 2/4 Association

# Sea Horse

First Quarter, 2006

### The Newsletter of the Second Battalion, Fourth Marines Association

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#### President's message

Peggy and I hope that you all had a very good beginning to this new year. As with any new year there is much joy to look forward to and also, sadly, much pain to remember. We have lost a few good Marines both at war and at home and we have experienced the beginning of another new generation of Marines in the birth of our children and grandchildren. We mourn those who were lost and celebrate those new additions to our Marine ranks.

The 2/4 Association is facing a crisis and we need your help. We all look forward to the next edition of the *Sea Horse* but our present editor, Ken Sympson, who only signed on to do a short hitch is ready to grab his separation papers and move on. Ken Sowder, who was going to replace him, has begun a new facet in his life and can not take on the additional responsibility of trying to get an informative and interesting newsletter out with any regularity. While we wish them both well in their future missions, we are left without anyone to do the **next** newsletter. I have tried to put

out a regular publication before, and my literary abilities leave a lot to be desired.

Marines have a history of taking care of their own, and this is a time for someone to step forward. Although I am not much of a computer geek, I am constantly getting e-mail from members who could use their talents to edit a quarterly newsletter. Hell, just with this column I filled maybe half of this issue and the president gets to speak in every one. I know that sometime ago we decided that the *Sea Horse* would be a 12-page publication, but, if someone can only do six or eight pages, so be it. Please guys, we need help.

Our 2006 reunion is coming together real well in Quantico, and Jim Rogers and his squad have everything well in hand. If you have never attended a reunion, *this* is the one to come to. I have heard from a representative of General Livingston's 2007 team and they are well on their way to locking up another great reunion in South Carolina. I think that 2008 will be mine, and I have many ideas.

One more thing and I will say adios until next time. This year is an election year for our association. It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to have been your president for the last two years, and I would like to remain in that position for another term if you will let me. My support team is the best, and although they have suffered many setbacks this past year with injuries and hurricane-related issues, I hope that they will continue to serve with me for two more years, if the membership so chooses. If any member in good standing wishes to be part of the 2/4 team and wants to run for an elective office, please send your name (or the names of whoever you wish to become an officer) to our secretary at the address listed elsewhere in this issue.

Until our next issue, I want to say thank you and Semper Fi.

Jack

## Help wanted at the association

Submitted by Ken Simpson

We again have an important 2/4 Association position to fill—newsletter editor. I've enjoyed this assignment over the past several years, but personal reasons make it necessary for me to pass the baton. If you have the qualifications and are up to the challenge, please let Jack or me know. If you have questions, send me an e-mail or give me a call. ***Time is running short.***

## Lost and...well, lost!

Submitted by Ken Simpson

We need your help to keep track of you and your friends in the association. Jim Mazy, our roster manager, reports to me that when he recently sent out e-mail to 84 members from the Dai Do era, he almost immediately received 16 rejects.

Obviously, if you and the association are to remain in touch, the members must keep the roster manager informed about any change in your contact information. Please, if any

of your address information changes, make sure you pass that on to the roster manager as soon as you can. That goes for U.S. mail as well as e-mail addresses.

And with regard to e-mail, please remember to regularly clean out your folder at your e-mail provider. If you don't, the folder may become full, and subsequent mail sent to you will be rejected by your e-mail provider.

Another warning: some e-mail providers will block e-mail that they have reason to suspect is spam. This sort of "service" is far from fool-proof. If your provider offers this capability, make sure that you inform the provider not to block e-mail from the association addresses. The primary e-mail address is:

<assocrosters@www.2ndbn4thmarines.com>

To pass on any changes to Jim, give him a call, send him a note, sent him an e-mail, or go to the association web site:

<[http://www.2ndbn4thmarines.com/address\\_change\\_2.htm](http://www.2ndbn4thmarines.com/address_change_2.htm)>

### 2004–2006 2/4 Association Officers and Chairs

President	Jack Petrowsky, P.O. Box 7214, Las Cruces, NM 88006-7214. Phone: 505-373-8621. E-mail: <jackny@webtv.net>.
Vice President	Yahya A.A. Kariem, 7717 Reed Street, Jacksonville, FL 32208. Phone: 904 764-2241. E-mail: <ykariem50@aol.com>.
Secretary	Philip Skaggs, 9005 West 133d Avenue, Cedar Lake, IN 46303. E-mail: <skaggs99@msn.com>.
Treasurer	Dale Robinson, 3814 Jocelyn Drive, Woodbridge, VA 22192. Phone: 703 590-7441. E-mail: <mrdalerobinson@comcast.net>.
Board of Directors	Ron Isaac, 2652 East Mullen Avenue, Post Falls, ID 83854. E-mail: <risaac6324@aol.com>. Ed Brummett, 10627 E 113th Street North, Owasso, OK 74055. Phone: 918 371-0744. E-mail: <edsfords@aol.com>.
Chaplain	Frank Valdez, 8221 East Birch Tree Lane, Anaheim Hills, CA 92808. Phone: 714 281-2846. E-mail: <valcone@hotmail.com>.
Historian	Bill Weiss, 6125 Beech Tree Drive, Alexandria, VA 22310. E-mail: <wwise2@aol.com>.
Membership	Jim Mazy, 6122 Shasta Street, Englewood, FL 34224-8161. Phone: 941 474-9431. E-mail: <Marine-2-4@comcast.net>.
Newsletter Editor	Ken Simpson, 303 Willows Drive, Rochester, NY 14609-3235. Phone: 585 482-0717. E-Mail: <kens@www.2ndbn4thmarines.com>. Web page: < <a href="http://home.rochester.rr.com/kensimpson/">http://home.rochester.rr.com/kensimpson/</a> >.
PX Sales Manager	Jack Petrowsky, P.O. Box 7214, Las Cruces, NM 88006-7214. Phone: 505-373-8621. E-mail: <jackny@webtv.net>.
Roster Manager	Jim Mazy, 6122 Shasta Street, Englewood, FL 34224-8161. Phone: 941 474-9431. E-mail: <Marine-2-4@comcast.net>.
Webmaster	Jim Mazy, 6122 Shasta Street, Englewood, FL 34224-8161. Phone: 941 474-9431. E-mail: <headwebguy@www.2ndbn4thmarines.com>.
Health & Welfare Officer	Steven O'Shields, 3151 Lake Forest Drive, Apt #86, Augusta, GA 30909. Phone: 706 729-0043. E-mail: <chesty84@usmc.net>. Web page: < <a href="http://www.geocities.com.chesty84">http://www.geocities.com.chesty84</a> >.
Sergeant at Arms	TBD.

*The 2/4 Association Sea Horse* is published quarterly, and is the official newsletter of the Second Battalion, Fourth Marines Association, Inc.

## 1st Marine Division Association 2006 reunion

The 2006 reunion of the 1st Marine Division Association is scheduled for August 21–27, 2006. It will be held in Denver, Colorado at:

Marriott Denver City Center  
1701 California Street  
Denver, Colorado 80202

Phone 303 297-1300 or 800 228-9290 for reservations. For more information, visit:

<[www.1stmarinedivisionassociation.org/reunions/index.htm](http://www.1stmarinedivisionassociation.org/reunions/index.htm)>

## 3d Marine Division Association 2006 reunion

The 3d Marine Division Association 2006 reunion will be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 8–13, 2006. The hotel for the reunion is:

Hyatt Regency Milwaukee  
333 West Kilbourn Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53203

The hotel telephone number is 414 276-1234. For more information and registration forms, check:

<<http://www.caltrap.com/>>

## 2/4 Association 2006 reunion hotel information

Submitted by the 2006 reunion committee

(Editor's Note: A reunion registration form is included on the last page of this issue of the *Sea Horse*. Please fill it out and return it to Dale Robinson as soon as possible, preferably prior to June 12, 2006.)

The 2006 reunion of the 2/4 Association is scheduled for July 12–16 in Quantico, Virginia. The Command Post, PX and Hospitality Room will be at the Comfort Inn Hospitality Room located in Stafford, Virginia.

The Comfort Inn has blocked 70 rooms and five suites. Rooms are \$80, plus 10% tax which equals \$88.00. Suites with a kitchen are \$89.99, plus 10% tax which equals \$98.98. Suites with a Jacuzzi are \$99.99, plus 10% tax which equals \$109.98. When you make reservations, be sure you tell them that you are with the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association. These rates at the Comfort Inn are good for the entire week in the event someone wants to come in early. Their phone number is 540 659-8999.

If the Comfort Inn has run out of rooms, the Country Inn (540 659-4330), will have rooms available at special rates for those attending the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association reunion. The Country Inn will provide rooms from \$80 a night, plus the 10% tax. This hotel did not have enough rooms for the reunion but can provide rooms as a backup. The hotel is next door to, and walking distance from, the Comfort Inn. When you make reservations, be sure you tell them that you are with the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association.

Both the Comfort Inn and the Country Inn will provide continental breakfasts until 1000 hours. The prices above will be honored at both hotels until June 14, 2006, so please make your reservations early.

The Cross Roads Inn on Quantico base did not have enough rooms but also will serve as a backup. Their phone number is 703 630-4444. They have not yet decided on a price. Their current price is \$53 for military, plus 10 % tax on a standard room. They will only take reservations six months in advance.

Hope to see you there.

Semper Fidelis,

2006 Reunion Committee

## 2006 reunion schedule of events

Submitted by the 2006 reunion committee

### Wednesday, July 12, 2006

Check in and registration at Comfort Inn in Stafford, Virginia.

### 2/4 Association PX Merchandise

General Items	Price
<b>Logo patch. 2".</b>	\$3.50
<b>Logo patch. 4".</b>	\$5.00
<b>Logo pin.</b>	\$5.00
<b>Sweatshirt.</b> Red with EGA on back and Sea Horse silhouette on front.	\$35.00
<b>Polo shirts.</b> Red, white, blue or maroon.	\$25.00
<b>T-shirt.</b> Black, green or gray, with full color logo on front.	\$15.00
<b>T-shirt.</b> 2004 reunion.	\$10.00
<b>Coffee mug.</b> Black with white logo	\$5.00
<b>Thermal mug.</b>	\$5.00
<b>2/4 molded plastic tumblers.</b> Various sizes (rocks, hot/cold). Logo patch between molded plastic. Sets and singles. Check with Jack for sizes and prices.	
Books	Price
<i>What a Life</i> , Randy Kington.	\$22.50
<i>Images from the Otherland</i> , Ken Sympton.	\$22.50
<i>The First Battle—Operation Starlite</i> , Otto Lohrack.	\$25.00
Videos	Price
<b>Dai Do Memories.</b>	\$25.00
<b>2001 Reunion, Quantico, VA.</b> Includes visits to The Wall, Iwo Jima Memorial, etc.	\$10.00
<b>Ordering Instructions:</b>  <b>Please e-mail Jack for sizes and item availability.</b> We are looking for suggestions for additional PX items. I am looking at windbreakers, but am being put off by the price. Keep in mind that the PX is stocked by funds from the Association, so we must stock items that will go quickly, both at reunions and during the following year. Shipping and handling equal to USPS charges will be added to each order.  <b>2/4 Association PX</b> <b>c/o Jack Petrowsky</b> <b>PO Box 7214</b> <b>Las Cruces, NM 88006-7214</b>	

1800: Command post briefing in reception room.

### Thursday, July 13, 2006

0730: Continental breakfast.

0900–1430: Tour of Dulles Air Museum.

(Reunion schedule of events for Thursday, July 13, continued)

1430–1530: Return to Quantico.  
1600: Visit to Marine Corps Heritage Center.  
1800: Command post briefing in reception room.

#### Friday, July 14, 2006

0800: Continental breakfast.  
0900: Depart for Iwo Jima Memorial.  
1000: Arrive Iwo Jima Memorial.  
1030–1100: Memorial service and wreath laying.  
1130–1200: Iwo Jima picture taking.  
1230–1330: Lunch at the food court of the Ronald Reagan Building.  
1400–1630: The Wall; Korean War, World War II and Lincoln Memorials.  
1700–1800: Dinner at the food court of the Ronald Reagan Building.  
1815: *Promptly depart* for 8th and I Marine Barracks.  
Dusk: 8th and I Evening Parade.  
Return to Quantico after parade.

#### Saturday, July 15, 2006

0800: Annual business meeting and continental breakfast.  
1000–1400: Picnic at Lunga Lake.  
1800–1850: Happy hour (cash bar) and picture taking at the All Hands Club.  
1850: First call to dinner.  
1900: Call to attention.  
Chaplain's blessing.  
Guest speaker.  
Chaplain's closing.

#### Sunday, July 16, 2006

0800: Continental breakfast and farewells until we meet again.

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### 21 March 1966, Phuong Dinh (2)

Submitted by Ken Symphon

This *Sea Horse* will be distributed to the membership shortly before the 40th anniversary of Operation Texas. I felt it fitting to dedicate this issue to that battle.

On 21 March, 3/7, 3/1 and 2/4, with artillery and aircraft support, engaged the enemy. Phuong Dinh (2) became the responsibility of 2/4, and then-LtCol P.X. Kelley was in command of the battalion. As all of you know, LtCol Kelley became General Kelley and the 28th Commandant of the Marine Corps. His brief biography in the next article gives you only a glimpse of his illustrious career, in and out of the Marine Corps.

The official Marine Corps version of what occurred is contained in *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, an Expanding War, 1966*, Jack Shulimson, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. I've included excerpts from that description in the article, below, title "Operation Texas—the historian's story." The official story, of course,

doesn't tell all. For example, in LtCol Kelley's review of the draft manuscript, he noted:

"I believe it extremely important that history should record the fact that the majority of the Marine battalions during this period were at reduced strength. When one thinks of 2/4, as an example, one normally thinks of 1,200 or more Marines; for Texas, 2/4 in the field had a total strength of 556, which included attachments. I mention this only because later intelligence indicated that for Texas, 2/4 had contacted the Regimental Headquarters of the 1st VC Regiment, defended by one VC battalion and two engineer companies, for a total estimated strength of over 600 enemy in Phuong Dinh (2). Basically, then, the Marines of 2/4 did a magnificent job. Against a superior enemy force in an extremely well-fortified position, 2/4 racked-up a 10:1 kill ratio. And this was accomplished without the benefit of tanks or any other direct fire weapons for support."

General Kelley sent us those comments, together with after action reports and other materials, in a letter dated July 25, 2005, addressed to "My 'Magnificent Bastards'" on the subject of "After Action Reports from RVN—1966." One of the enclosures to that letter was a message from the Chief of the U.S. Delegation to the Four Party Joint Military Commission. The commission was set up by the Paris Accords, and it included members from the United States and South Korea on one side and the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese on the other. P.X. Kelley was the Chief of the Southeast Asia Branch for the Joint Chiefs of Staff at that time, and he was the U.S. point of contact. General Kelley noted in his cover letter:

"The National Liberation Front claimed that over 250 Viet Cong soldiers were never located after that operation. In view of the extensive tunnel complex we destroyed, one can assume that they were there at the time."

So in considering the enemy casualties at Phuong Dinh (2), you might want to add that number to the KIA count presented in the 2/4 after action report for Operation Texas: 168 VC KIA (confirmed), 50 VC KIA (possible). Extraordinary.

What we tend to focus on, though, are the Marine casualties that day: 16 KIA and 77 WIA. As those of you who were there recall, it was a terrible sight. Then-Sgt Ted Gray brings it back for us in his article in this issue, "Operation Texas—a sergeant's story." Following that, Bill Van Zanten portrays that day in poetry with his piece titled simply "Texas." General Kelley put it into perspective for me about 15 years ago when he wrote the Foreword to my book *Images from the Otherland*:

"Because of its relatively short duration, Operation Texas has never been given its rightful place in history. For those who were there on March 21, 1966, however, it is a day they shall always remember. In the words of Major Ernie De-Fazio, who was my executive officer at the time and who landed on the beach at Iwo Jima as a young enlisted Marine over two decades before, 'Texas was the longest and toughest day of my life.'"



I was LtCol Kelley's artillery liaison officer on Texas. I spent several hours that day less than 50 meters from that village calling in several thousand rounds of 105mm and 155mm howitzer fire from four artillery batteries. Some of those were white phosphorous rounds intended to provide a smoke cover to help permit Echo Company to disengage from the enemy. I've written enough about that, and I'll write no more. But I will never forget the brave Marines who lived and died that day at Phuong Dinh (2).

## General Paul X. (P.X.) Kelley, USMC (Retired)

Submitted by P.X. Kelley

(Editor's Note: In the first quarter 2005 issue of the *Sea Horse*, I began a series of articles on 2/4 commanding officers. This is the last in that series, and it is fitting that it focuses on the man who commanded 2/4 during Operation Texas. Then-LtCol P.X. Kelley served as the commanding officer of 2/4 from February 22, 1966 to July 6, 1966. I had the great honor to serve as his artillery liaison officer from when he took command until March 31, 1966.

The story of P.X. Kelley could well fill several volumes. His energy refuses to wane, and he is currently working full-time at Cassidy and Associates in Washington, D.C. Semper Fi, P.X.!

General Kelley served as the 28th Commandant of the Marine Corps and Member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1983 until his retirement in 1987. Subsequently, he served under three Presidents as Chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission. In this position he was responsible for the design and construction of the Korean War Veterans Memorial, and the legislation, construction and dedication of the National World War II Memorial. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics from Villanova University, is a Distinguished Graduate of the Air War College, and has received honorary doctoral degrees from his Alma Mater, Norwich University, Webster University, Jacksonville University, The United States Sports Academy and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

During his 37-year military career he commanded Marine Corps organizations at every echelon from platoon through division, including command of an infantry battalion and infantry regiment during two separate combat tours in the Republic of Vietnam. He also has had the unique experience of duty with the Army, Navy, Air Force and Royal Marines, where he commanded a Commando Troop in Singapore, Borneo and Malaya. In December 1979, he was appointed by the President as the first Commander of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, and spearheaded the initiative which eventually culminated in its re-designation as the U.S. Central Command. General Kelley was selected twice for accelerated promotion, once to the rank of Colonel and again to the rank of Major General. He remains the youngest Marine to be promoted to the rank of General, and is a Marine Corps Parachutist, Army Master Parachutist, and Navy SCUBA Diver.

General Kelley's military decorations include Distinguished Service Medals from the Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy, the Department of the Army, and the Department of the Air Force; the Silver Star Medal; three awards of the Legion of Merit; and two awards of the Bronze Star Medal. His foreign decorations include the Republic of Vietnam Distinguished Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with two palms and three gold stars, the Philippines Legion of Honor Medal, the Korean Order of Security Merit Tong Il Medal, and the Republic of China Order of Resplendent Banner with Grand Cordon.



**General Kelley at the dedication of the World War II Memorial on the National Mall**

On May 29, 2004, General Kelley shared words from Presidents Washington and Lincoln with the attendees of the World War II Memorial dedication program at the Washington National Cathedral. General Kelley served as the Chairman, World War II Memorial Committee, American Battle Monuments Commission.

You can view the video of the entire program by going to:

<http://www.cathedral.org/cathedral/worship/wwii/4.shtml>

General Kelley's address follows the opening music, about 14 minutes into the video.

His major awards include the American Academy of Achievement Golden Eagle Award, Veterans of Foreign Wars National Armed Forces Award, Reserve Officers Association Minuteman Hall of fame, National Geographic Society General O. A. Anderson Award, Young Republicans Freedom Award, United States Marshal's American Star Award, Beta Gamma Sigma Award for Excellence in Management, The Union League Silver Medal Award, National Defense University Lyman L. Lemnitzer Award, Navy League Admiral John M. Will Award for the Armed Forces, Washington Times Freedom Award, Atlantic Legal Foundation's Honoree for 1999, and the Saint Thomas of Villanova Alumni Medal.

General Kelley is Chairman Emeritus of the Irish American Partnership, where he served as Chairman of the Board of Directors from 1989 to 2000. In recognition of his Irish

heritage, he was named Southern California's Irishman of the Year, 1986; one of America's 100 Leading Irish Americans, 1990; Chicago's Guest of Honor for St. Patrick's Day, 1990; Baltimore's Irish American of the Year, 1992; Charleston, South Carolina's Hibernian Society Keynote Speaker, 1994; and Trustee for New York City's St. Patrick's Day since 1999. On October 30, 2003, he was acclaimed by America's Irish American Community for his success in gaining posthumous citizenship for 28 sons of Ireland who gave their lives in the service of the United States Armed Forces during the Korean War.

In the private sector, he has served on ten New York Stock Exchange boards, and twelve other private corporate boards. Currently, General Kelley is on the Board of Advisors for J.F. Lehman and Company, and serves as a Director with London Life Reinsurance Company; Saul Centers, Inc.; OAO Technology Solutions, Inc.; and The Non-Proliferation Trust. He is a member of The Advisory Board of Governors for the Partnership for Public Service, The Advisory Board of The First Jobs Institute, Beta Gamma Sigma, The Alfalfa Club, and The Council on Foreign Relations.

## Operation Texas—the historian's story

(Editor's Note: The following has been excerpted from *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, an Expanding War, 1966*, Jack Shulimson, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C. 1982. Meaning no disrespect to the other units involved, I have selected text which focuses on the actions of 2/4.)

A few weeks after Operation Utah ended, the Marines engaged another Communist regiment in the Binh Son/Son Tinh region. Unknown to the allies, the *1st VC Regiment* had moved south from the Que Son area north of Chu Lai into northern Quang Ngai Province. On the night of 18–19 March, the enemy regiment overran a remote outpost on Hill 141 about 2,000 meters south of the Tra Bong River and 12,000 meters west-southwest of Binh Son District town. The position was known as the An Hoa outpost taking its name from a nearby village.

\* \* \*

Faced with the fact that An Hoa position was now in enemy hands, General Lam asked III MAF for assistance in retaking the outpost. General Kyle, the 3d Marine Division's commanding general, ordered Colonel Peatross, the 7th Marines commander and senior officer at Chu Lai since General Platt's departure to become the III MAF Chief of Staff, to establish liaison with the 2d ARVN Division. On the afternoon of the 19th, Lam and Peatross had agreed to a concept of operations similar to that used for the Utah operation.

\* \* \*

The two commanders alerted their respective assault forces, the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines and the 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion, for the combined operation, codenamed Texas.

By early morning on 20 March, Colonel Peatross and Colonel Johnson had established the forward command

posts of the 7th Marines and MAG-36 at Binh Son. Colonel Johnson was once more the tactical air commander for the operation. The 2d ARVN Division also collocated its forward headquarters with the Marines. A battalion artillery group formed around the headquarters of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, and consisting of a 105mm howitzer battery and a 155mm howitzer battery, moved into firing positions 5,500 meters southwest of Binh Son. After fixed-wing strikes in the objective area, the 155mm howitzer battery, Captain James O. Black's Battery M, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, started firing the landing zone preparation mission at 0730.

Following the air and artillery bombardment, MAG-36 helicopters landed Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Bodley's 3d Battalion, 7th Marines and the ARVN 5th Airborne Battalion. The two units moved east with the ARVN battalion on the left flank and the Marines on the right. Neither unit met any serious opposition. The 3d Battalion's Company I was helilifted to the top of Hill 141 where the Marines found the bodies of 31 of the outpost defenders; the other 85 were missing. The enemy had departed.

That afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel "P. X." Kelley, whose 2d Battalion, 4th Marines had been designated the backup force for Operation Texas, decided to visit Binh Son to check the course of the battle. After an unscheduled stop-over at the positions of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, he arrived at the 7th Marines command post. Discussing the situation with the regimental staff, he learned that the allies believed that the enemy force, suspected to be the *NVA 21st Regiment*, had escaped to the west and that his battalion "would most likely not be committed."

According to Kelley:

"I then talked with Colonel Bruce Jones, the senior advisor to the 2d ARVN Division and suggested that the VC might have moved towards the Vinh Tuy Valley, an area which had considerable activity in the past. My original suggestion at the time was to have 2/4 land there. After considerable discussion, I mentioned the fact that possibly the VC may have done the reverse of the obvious—that they may have moved in an easterly direction from Hill 141, towards the coastal plain. I then suggested the possibility of 3/7 changing its axis of advance to the Vinh Tuy Valley, and once it had passed through the valley it could join with 2/4 for a two-battalion sweep eastward to National Route 1."

Colonel Jones and Kelley decided to present this concept to Colonel Peatross. Kelley later recalled that Colonel Peatross agreed in principle, but wanted to discuss the new plan with General Lam. The three officers then boarded a helicopter, piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik, commander of VMO-6, and Colonel Johnson, and flew to Quang Ngai City where they "... received General Lam's blessing." On the return flight to Binh Son, their course took them over Phuung Dinh (2) hamlet, 4,500 meters southeast of the An Hoa outpost. Colonel Peatross and Lieutenant Colonel Kelley, with the concurrence of Colonel Johnson, selected a large open field 1,000 meters west of the hamlet as the land-



ing zone for the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines on the following day.

\* \* \*

The allies planned for the ARVN and Bodley's battalion to attack southeast from An Hoa on 21 March, while Kelley's battalion landed near Phuong Dinh (2) further to the south. General Lam reinforced the 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion with the 4th ARVN Regimental Headquarters; the 2d Battalion, 5th ARVN Regiment; and an APC company. This ARVN task force was to advance until it reached Route 527 and then follow the road until it linked up with another ARVN battalion, the 3d Battalion, 5th ARVN Regiment, in blocking positions west of Route 1. Operating west and southwest of the ARVN forces, Lieutenant Colonel Bodley's battalion was to march through the Vinh Tuy Valley and tie in with Kelley's battalion at Phuong Dinh (2).

\* \* \*

On the 21st, both Kelley's and Bodley's battalions encountered large enemy forces in strongly fortified positions. For Kelley's 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, the battle began as UH-34s from MAG-36 carrying the battalion's lead elements approached the landing area. The enemy reacted with small arms and machine gun fire. Company F, which landed first, repulsed attacks from north, east, and south of the landing zone. While the company maneuvered to secure the area, MAG-12 A-4s struck Phuong Dinh (2). Armed UH-1Es from VMO-6 flew suppressive fire missions while controlling the MAG-12 jets.

By 1115, the battalion command group, Company D, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, attached to the 2d Battalion for the operation, and Company E had joined Company F on the ground. At this time, Kelley called for artillery bombardment of Phuong Dinh (2) from where most of the enemy resistance was coming. Once the artillery fire ended at 1230, the 2d Battalion began its assault on Phuong Dinh (2). Company D maneuvered toward the slightly higher ground north of the hamlet, while Companies E and F, with Company E in the lead, attacked due east. Aerial observers overhead detected no movement in Phuong Dinh (2). Five minutes after the attack started, one of the pilots from VMO-6 radioed Lieutenant Colonel Kelley exclaiming, "My God, I can't believe it! They're erupting from the ground! There are hundreds of them."

Simultaneously, the advance elements of Company E were hit by massed enemy infantry weapons fire. While the rest of the Marine company established a heavy base of covering



**MajGen Kyle and LtCol P.X. Kelley**

MajGen Wood B. Kyle, Commanding General, 3d Marine Division, walks with LtCol Paul X. (P.X.) Kelley, Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines after the battalion secured Phuong Dinh. The strain of battle is reflected on the faces of the exhausted Marines on each side of the path. (Official Marine Corps photo A186816. Photo and caption courtesy of the History and Museums Division, Headquarter, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C.)

fire, one platoon fought its way through the hamlet's outer defenses, only to discover three more interior defensive perimeters, including mutually supporting bunkers and three bands of tactical wire entanglements. Commenting on the situation, Lieutenant Colonel Kelley later wrote:

"Since ammunition was running low, I ordered Company E to withdraw to a covered position near the line of departure so that more artillery and air could be delivered on the target. At the same time, I ordered Company D to ... establish a base of fire to relieve the pressure on Company E."

Company D also ran into heavy enemy resistance and was unable to advance, but the company was able to place enough fire upon the enemy to afford some relief for Company E. At this time, Lieutenant Colonel Kelley and his command group were on a small rise about 50 meters west of the hamlet, caught in a cross fire. Fourteen Marines in this group were killed or wounded. The situation for the 2d Battalion was so critical that Kelley called in air strikes which dropped napalm unusually close to his frontlines.

Marine air and artillery engaged in an all-out effort to support the stalled infantry. Lieutenant Colonel Paul B. Watson, Jr., the commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, added two new batteries, one 105mm howitzer and one 155mm howitzer, to the battalion artillery group supporting the operation. The original two batteries fired 1,346 rounds in support of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines during

one continuous firing mission lasting from 1330 to 1500. Marine jets at the request of Colonel Johnson supplemented the artillery effort. By 1600, A-4s and F-4s had flown 51 strikes against the enemy. The 1st MAW Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) reported that it had diverted all Marine jets to the Texas operation. Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik remembered that the requests caused some disruption "at the TACC, but all were provided and utilized."

With this support and the arrival of additional supplies by 1800, the 2d Battalion was able to consolidate its positions west of Phuong Dinh (2). Kelley later recalled:

"I seriously considered a night attack, but with the average company strength down to 80-90, and pitted against a numerically superior enemy in well dug-in positions, with no reserve battalion to back up, I opted to continue the attack by fire."

\* \* \*

The allied plan of action for 22 March was to continue the attack. ARVN forces were to advance toward Route 1, while the Marine battalions cleared their respective sectors in the southern area of operations. If the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines and the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines met further resistance in Phuong Dinh (2) and Thach An Noi (1), Lieutenant Colonel Young's battalion was to attack north, otherwise it was to seize Hill 65, 2,000 meters southeast of Xuan Hoa, and then advance to the northeast.

As planned, the allied battalions renewed their attacks at daybreak, but encountered little opposition. The Communist forces had slipped away during the night. The 4th ARVN Regimental Task Force secured Khanh My (3) and continued, uncontested, eastward along Route 527. Lieutenant Colonel Kelley's 2d Battalion took Phuong Dinh (2) and began searching the hamlet and destroying the enemy's defenses.

\* \* \*

On 24 March, General English deactivated Task Force Delta, and the 7th Marines reassumed control of the operation. The Marines closed out Texas the following day. From captured enemy documents, the allies determined that they had encountered elements of three battalions, the 60th and 90th from the 1st VC Regiment and the 11th from the 21st NVA Regiment. The Marines reported killing 283 enemy troops while sustaining casualties of 99 dead and 212 wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Kelley's 2d Battalion found 168 of the enemy dead in Phuong Dinh (2).

\* \* \*

General Westmorland visited Phuong Dinh (2) on 24 March and observed the extent of the enemy defenses. He had Colonel Peatross assemble the two battalions in the area and thanked them personally for their performance. Later, he sent a congratulatory message to General Walt. The MACV commander complimented the Marine units in the operation for their aggressive spirit and close coordination. General Walt added his "well done."

## Operation Texas—a sergeant's story

Submitted by Ted Gray

(Editor's Note: On March 21, 1966, then-Sgt Gray was the squad leader of the second squad, second platoon of Echo Company, 2/4. This is his story of Operation Texas. Thanks, Ted, and Semper Fidelis.)

I believe it is best for me to start this narrative from Hill 69. We had just moved to that location soon after Operation Double Eagle. I was amazed at the transformation of the hill from the previous year. In 1965 the hill was known to us as (I believe) Catfish 3. All supplies had to be passed thru a chain of men strung out from the bottom to the top at the CP. When we got there in March of 1966, the whole hill had been reworked. It had been terraced, and hard back tents were in place. Where the trash dump used to be, there was a chapel, a laundry service, barber shop, and, of course, the battalion CP. The trench line and fighting holes were first class. It was in fact paradise compared to our previous locations.

We started to lose a lot of Marines with good combat experience that began with Operation Starlite. Some were rotating as their tours were up; others were being sent to Phu Bai to 1/4 or 3/4 that had just taken over that TAOR. We of course were refitted after Double Eagle, but we did lose a lot of experience. The replacements were from all over the map. All seemed eager to get it on, so the training of these Marines was helped by their zeal. They paid attention. I was truly blessed to have such good Marines. They did what was in front of them and did it well.

Our officer corps also took a pretty big hit. We lost our battalion commander as well as our company commander. These were replaced by LtCol Kelly and Capt Frederick. We had a new platoon sergeant and a couple of Corpsmen.

In all honesty, I had no idea of any upcoming operations. Things began to move pretty fast. I don't remember getting a "frag" or warning order in regards to mounting out on 3/21/65. In fact, I was getting a haircut when I got the alert. My recall is that I was told we were going to be inserted as a blocking force for the Seventh Marines.

The company was trucked to Chu Lai where we boarded those old 34s and lifted off. It seemed like a long ride on that chopper and I know you know what I mean. Damn they were slow. Good for sure, but slow as hell. Most of us pretty much could tell where we were from the landmarks as we followed Route 1. It at least seemed like we were going back into the Starlite area, until we turned inland and began our decent to the LZ.

We were the last platoon from Echo to disembark to the LZ. The LZ was under fire as we got off the choppers. They were putting wounded on as fast as we got off. No one was standing upright. Everyone moved about in a crouch to prevent getting hit. I could hear those 12.7mm hammering away and I knew that this was not going to be pleasant. Today I believe they may have thrown a few shots at the choppers, but most incoming rounds were overshots from the



front. I feel we had landed in the beaten zone of the over-shots.

I got my people away from the LZ, set up a half-ass perimeter, told them to hold tight, and went to look for my platoon commander. When I found him, he had assembled the rest of the platoon in a column. I was told to have my men drop their packs, LAAWs and extra ammo, and follow the platoon in. Gary Brown's platoon had taken casualties and we were going to carry them out.

To be honest with you, I did object to dropping our packs. I felt we could drop them if we needed to after we got to Lt Brown's position. My people knew the importance of carrying lots of ammo. Each man with an M-14 carried around 350 rounds plus 12 M-79 rounds. Spread out in the squad were five LAAWs. I carried the M-79 with 60 rounds in my pack and 12 around my waist. I learned a lesson that day. In two future tours my people were never far from their packs.

My squad was spread out well, in column and pulling "drag." The first two squads with the platoon commander went out of sight into a hedgerow. My people were still in the open paddies. We were about 60 yards from the village perimeter when we were taken under fire. The reaction drills we had practiced kicked in, and we wheeled and assaulted.

There was a high, wide dike about 30 yards from the "ville." I held my people there. The dike was perfect cover. We were lower in the paddies than the built up area of the ville perimeter. I spotted some wire woven into the hedgerow and knew we could not continue our assault.

To my right I had no contact with the rest of the platoon. I could see a hell of a long way to my left down the dike, but I saw no one. I guess the look on my face said it all, as one of the guys said, "We're fucked, sarge." My response must have been clear, because the statement was not made again.

I spread my people out along the dike. I remember telling them to put their selectors on semi and pick their targets. This they did. There were three things I new for sure. 1) We could not move back without getting clobbered. 2) If we would have to breach the wire to get into the ville, they would have to breach it to come out. 3) We only had the ammo we had around our waists. All in all, I felt pretty secure; scared shitless, for sure. We may have been pinned down, but, we had them penned up.

It did not take long to realize that we had NVA troops in front of us. The angle on us was all wrong for them. They would have to stand out of their trench to fire with any accuracy. We only had to wait for one to expose himself and his ass was ours. The first pith helmet we saw told us what was in front of us.

The way they were firing, told me they were not short on ammo. They were burning it up. Most of the firing was like "spray and pray" from them. It makes me so proud to remember the way my Marines conserved their ammo. Years later, I was told we had done significant damage to them in our sector.

I continued to evaluate our position. The dike was about 30 inches deep by 20 inches wide. The area between us and the ville was clear and clean for about 30 yards. It resembled

a dry moat. I could see two strands of wire woven into the bamboo of the ville perimeter. I passed the word, "No frags." I wanted that wire intact for the time being. I began to see movement to my left rear 300 yards down the dike. We still had no contact to my right. Two of my squad had entered that hedgerow with the rest of the platoon. I prayed they were safe. It dawned on me that we were in front of the scrimmage line. But we were in fine shape.



**Sgt Gray receives Purple Heart from LtGen Krulak**

Then-Sgt Gray is shown here receiving the Purple Heart he earned on Operation Texas. LtGen Victor Krulak presented the award aboard a C-141 carrying over 90 wounded from Subic Bay to various hospitals in the United States. The plane had landed briefly on Oahu where the informal ceremony took place.

Our position must have been opposite a corner or a turn in their trench line. The volume of fire going in and out was destroying the brush in front of the ville. We could see them send in people to replace the ones we knocked out.

I really don't think they realized this. At one point they threw up a light machine gun on top of the trench and depressed it in an attempt to get at us. It was funny as hell. All you could see was a hand and the barrel of the gun swiveling back and forth. The rounds were landing in the middle of the moat. The gun was taken out with my 79. I still laugh as I remember that guy.

We spotted an OV coming from my right, flying right over their trench line. He was so low and so slow that I don't know how they kept from shooting him out of the sky. As he flew, he was dropping frags and smoke down the line and waved at us as he passed. I would love to meet that guy, I thought—he had balls.

My Marines continued to hold on the gaps in the brush that had been created. They would nail them as they crossed these openings. Again, I don't believe they knew how exposed they were. The bad news was I was out of 79 rounds.

My men were drawing down fast to critical short. Tactics were changing, as they were trying to get up into the trees to get a better angle on us. One Marine alerted us to this and took them under fire, also.

A Marine kept calling me and pointing to the rear. I squirmed around to see. On a knoll was my platoon commander. He was kneeling next to a bush about 30 yards to my rear. He was yelling and gesturing. I could not understand him, and was not about to cross that open ground to find out. I kept motioning him to get down. I knew he would get hit if he stayed there. I saw the tracer round as it hit him right at the belt line. The lieutenant went down. My men gave me cover fire as I crossed the ground to the lieutenant.



**Ted Gray with the "SgtMaj" at the 2003 reunion**

Ted is shown here with his wife Madeline (he very fondly refers to her as "the SgtMaj") aboard the Carnival cruise ship that was used for the 2003 association reunion.

When I got to him, he was in a lot of pain and his color was gone. His first words were "Don't move me. How bad is it? Did it come out?" I got his blouse open and took his bandage and rolled him to see the projectile protruding from his back.

I was able to dress his back and was using my bandage for his belly. I had just tied it off when I was hit in my left arm. It was broken, I knew. I straddled my lieutenant and told him to hold my neck. He said again "Don't move me."

Don't move me, my ass. Every AK in Nam was shooting at us. We moved. It was not pretty, but it got us off the knoll and behind the dike.

My chest hurt like hell. I thought the lieutenant had punched me. I reached inside my blouse to move my holster around, and it was soaked with blood. My .45 had stopped a round. The wound was superficial and it was years later that the damaged showed up. This is foggy for me. I must have passed out—I really don't know.

My next recall was it was hot as hell. My helmet was gone. I remember soaking my soft cover from my canteen; I drank some and poured the rest over my head. God it was hot. There was smoke being laid into the ville (yours I guess) and two Corpsmen were working on the lieutenant. I did not recognize them. They kept telling us to hang in there. One Corpsman threw me a morphine Syrette, and I injected it and put the empty through my blouse lapel. I used the lieutenant's belt for a sling. I thought they would carry him, but he insisted on walking out. Leaning on me, we walked out together.

I really was not prepared for what I saw at the LZ. It was one big pile of people. Packs, bandages, weapons, empty boxes all covered with blood. There were Marines on the ground all over. Some were being worked on, others were screaming in pain and still others were lying under ponchos. It was heartbreaking.

They took the lieutenant, and I never saw him again until 36 years later. I sat down and a doc bandaged my arm and my chest telling me how lucky I was. One of my corporals found me and told me all our people were okay; one had been hit in the back but was okay. I was soon medevaced to Chu Lai. It was 1500.

\* \* \*

Note: Ken, when I first wrote this I had a lot of the names of the Marines who were involved. I have reread this ten times or more, but something continued to bother me. I remember what you had written when you sent me the after action report and casualty list. You wrote, "Ted, I hope this will help and not harm." This is the gauge I had not even considered in preparing this piece for you, so I have removed the names for that reason.

I have met a lot of these Marines at our reunions. I have talked with many on the phone and on the internet. Most talk about Texas and their experience. There are others who just don't remember, but want to know what the outcome was or what happen to a buddy. There are some who will flat out tell you, "That part of my life is over. I have moved on."

Myself, I have been in all these stages. I doubt if I could have written this ten years ago. It has helped me to write it today. However, I do not care to help myself if it will bring harm to another Marine. I trust you, Ken, to keep this in mind if you use any of this piece for your project.

God bless you and yours.  
Semper Fi,

Ted

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## Bravery

"If we take the generally accepted definition of bravery as a quality which knows not fear, I have never seen a brave man. All men are frightened. The more intelligent they are, the more they are frightened. The courageous man is the man who forces himself, in spite of his fear, to carry on."

General George Patton

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## Texas

Submitted by Bill Van Zanten

(Editor's note: Bill was the executive officer of Echo Company at the time of Operation Texas. His book, *Don't Bunch Up*, chronicles his time in the Marine Corps and includes his story on what happened that day.)

The first and twentieth day of March,  
Marks for us the oncoming Spring.  
The sun turns toward the warm,  
And robins make their voices sing.

Hearts do rise and hopes expand,  
That winter's ice is mostly past.  
Flowers bloom beside the road,  
And every love is meant to last.

But I recall another time,  
Vernal first this day, as well.  
More than thirty years have now gone by,  
When life was turned from bright to hell.

There never was a morn like this,  
To pass along my way.  
Both good and bad did soon arrive,  
On this one quite special day.

Texas what we called that march,  
Much danger lay ahead.  
Colonel Kelley blew the trumpet call,  
These Marines were all well led.

Two of Four our units name,  
Magnificent Bastards all.  
Whenever trouble came our way,  
Not one refused the call.

The world knew little of this fight,  
Or how we felt the pain.  
I never leave it far behind,  
My pride will never wane.

War oft brings the worst to man,  
But also tests the heart.  
Each man that day did play for me,

A uniquely heroic part.

Charlie wished he never saw,  
So many standing tall.  
He played a deadly, hurtful game,  
When Echo came to call.

The Corps had trained us all so well,  
We knew our parts to do.  
I'm so very glad my way,  
Was with the Proud, The Few.

The Gunny died and many bled,  
As bullets filled the air.  
The village bulged with Charlie full,  
Untouched was marked as rare.

The earth did shake by woeful noise,  
That planes and guns did leave.  
The day left little precious time,  
For wounded friends to grieve.

I think of Fred and Gary and P.X., too,  
And how they did so well.  
I'll never leave behind the tale,  
Or fail the Texas story tell.

Many days have passed this way,  
And memories stay close by.  
I often search a reason why,  
Which ones were picked to die.

I miss the friends I lost that time,  
And wish I could recall.  
Their homes and names and faces strong,  
Those heroes one and all.

So when the Spring does come again,  
Remember well this day,  
Let's raise our glasses very high,  
Their names in toasts we say.

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## War

"War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

John Stuart Mill



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