

NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE

SEALS EVOLVE INTO NIMBLE, DIRECT-ACTION UNITS IN VIETNAM

Everything went smoothly for then-Lieutenant Junior Grade Charles Sanford “Sandy” Prouty ‘67, USNR (Ret.), and his MIKE platoon on a raid in Vietnam until evacuation time.

The freshly minted SEAL had been in Vietnam for less than three months when his 10-man unit received significant and credible intelligence. A former Viet Cong fighter turned informant relayed the location of a large medical cache.

On 3 November 1969, Prouty led a SEAL heliborne operation into enemy controlled territory. The medical supplies—bandages, medicines, surgical instruments, stretchers—were exactly where the informant indicated. The supplies were being loaded into a helicopter’s cargo net when the pilot said he thought the rotor had been hit by enemy fire and could no longer stay on station.

So began a tense evacuation process in which Prouty’s team persevered in the face of enemy fire, a close call from their own air support and multiple harrowing helicopter endeavors. Throughout the three-hour ordeal, Prouty demonstrated unflappable leadership.

His platoon successfully completed its mission without a single injury. This mission earned Prouty a Silver Star and exemplifies the effectiveness of SEAL teams during the Vietnam War. These small

autonomous platoons were nimble and potent enough to engage guerilla warriors using their own tactics but with greater coordination and firepower.

The evolution from World War II frogmen into elite strike groups began in Vietnam with SEALs partnering with the brown water Navy and often helicopter units, including the Seawolves. Prouty’s mission involved air support from helicopters, OV-10s and A-37 bombers.

Once the medical supplies were helicoptered out, Prouty’s team remained in a precarious situation. He directed air support by moving to different vantage points while exposing himself to enemy fire. Heavy cloud cover and a rainstorm obscured the patrol’s location.

Prouty accurately directed a gun ship to his location while attracting gunfire.

“We jumped in, breathed this big sigh of relief,” Prouty said.

But it was premature—the helicopter could not get off the ground. It bounced along a rice paddy, Prouty said. The pilot turned around with a panicked look and said they were too heavy—somebody had to get off.

“I thought, I’m the platoon leader, I’m afraid that’s going to be me,” Prouty said. “I took my radioman and machine gunner, and my loyal leading petty officer joined us too.”

Prouty began to devise an escape and evasion plan. Then, a SEAWOLF pilot, who had overhead said he’d try to pick them up. The pilot dumped everything he could off the helicopter to lighten the craft, including guns and ammunition.

“He picked up a few holes coming in,” Prouty said. “But, he got us.”

But it turned out they were still not out of it. The helo ascended about 1,000 feet and the pilot informed Prouty that his red fuel light has been on for five minutes and they were nearly out of gas. Thirty seconds later, the craft’s engine sputtered, coughed and quit.

“He was able to auto rotate—we were far enough out of the (danger zone) perimeter—and get us into a government outpost,” Prouty said.

Intel gathered after the operation found Prouty’s unit had been surrounded by about a 70-man Viet Cong company and they had killed 24 in addition to recovering the medical cache.

CAPT Charles S. Prouty ‘67, USNR (Ret.), standing in the center wearing a hat and holding an M-16, arrived in Vietnam in August 1969 and led SEAL Team Detachment GOLF, MIKE Platoon. He enjoyed the relative autonomy of leading a SEAL team, which allowed him to gather intelligence and swiftly plan missions based on that information.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT CHARLES S. PROUTY '67, USNR (RET.)

Prouty arrived in Vietnam in August 1969. He credited the success of the mission to preparation and training. He never wavered from his main obligation while leading his platoon under duress.

"Knowing that it was my responsibility, I had to do the very best I can for my platoon and to get everybody out of there safely," said Prouty, who retired as a captain and joined the FBI in 1973 where he would eventually become the agency's third in command. "I tried to live up to my responsibility."

SEALS RISE

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy wanted a new breed of warriors. With an emphasis on unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency operations, the Navy created two Sea Air Land (SEAL) teams. The SEALs were successors to the Underwater Demolition Teams formed during World War II.

SEALs would prove to have the flexibility and specialized skill sets and initiative for direct combat that allowed them to operate successfully in the guerilla warfare environment of Vietnam. Using innovation and improvisation, SEAL units are designed to quickly adapt when battlefield conditions change.

Admiral Robert J. Natter '67, USN (Ret.), was the officer in charge of a SEAL boat support detachment in the lower Mekong Delta. In 1971, he earned a Silver Star for his actions following an ambush in the Nam Can region of Vietnam while supporting a Vietnamese SEAL platoon.

Natter said specialized training prepared SEALs to successfully combat the tactics they confronted from enemy fighters in Vietnam.

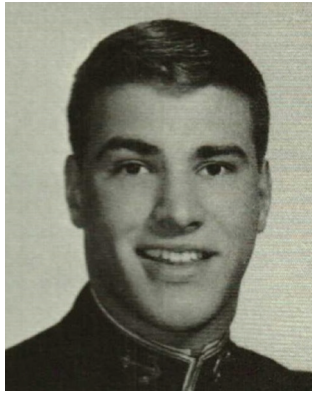
"The relentlessly demanding training of these very young but committed officers was the basis for their squad level successes in a new very foreign kind of warfare," Natter said. "From Naval Academy training for service in ships and aircraft to the reality of close-in combat, these officers led other inexperienced but equally committed young American sailors into the canals, rivers and jungles of Vietnam."

Prouty said SEALs were a "much more potent and versatile force than their predecessors in World War II." The World War II frogmen, naval combat demolition teams, were essentially waterbound. Their primary job was to do hydrographic reconnaissance prior to an amphibious assault and to blow up obstacles, Prouty said.

In Korea, these special forces rarely engaged in direct action but ran demolition raids, blowing up bridges, railroad tracks and tunnels.

"It was a natural evolution to get into the direct action that the SEALs had in Vietnam," Prouty said.

Captain Tom Murphy '66, USN (Ret.), said U.S. military leaders were initially trying to engage



Then-MIDN Sandy" Prouty '67

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North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong combatants in conventional warfare. They were using tactics from a previous war and their foes would not oblige.

The Viet Cong specialized in ambush warfare—particularly in jungles and on rivers. Murphy said traditional strategies did not apply in Vietnam. SEALs were tailor-made for abbreviated operations where an objective was set and plans drawn up mere hours before missions were conducted.

SEAL teams were designed to covertly enter a targeted area, complete the mission and swiftly exit.

"SEALs came over there specifically to try to take the war to the enemy and to do it in a very dramatic way," Murphy said. "Our war was a different kind of war than some of the Army units or Marine units and certainly some of the pilots' experiences bombing in Vietnam. We were right on the ground and right in the thick of it."

Murphy quickly learned miscalculations on this new and evolving battlefield could have dire consequences.

FATEFUL FOOTSTEPS

In 1968, Murphy was on his first deployment in Vietnam when his seven-man SEAL squad was ambushed. The unit was equipped with three machine guns, three M-16 automatic weapons, a grenade launcher, hand grenades and claymore mines.

It would be the simplest clue that led the Viet Cong to their position.

"They traced our boot tracks down to where we set the ambush," Murphy said. "As we broke the ambush to move on in the morning, they opened fire."

Murphy was the squad leader. He was shot along with two of his teammates. He lost all function in one of his legs. His platoon chief petty officer suffered a head wound that would lead to the loss of an eye.

The squad sought refuge in a latrine ditch awaiting gunship helicopters to strafe the area.

With air cover, they made their way along the ditch toward the cover of the jungle. A medical evacuation helicopter was able to land and extract Murphy's team.

In his book, *Beyond the Trident*, Murphy said he was haunted by the ambush and felt personally responsible for leading his team into an ambush.

"I had fallen short of the 'be the attacker, not the attacked,' objective," he wrote.

During an October 2024 interview in his Texas home, Murphy said he implemented a critical rule for all future missions. His team would mimic the locals.

"From that point on, we started going barefoot," Murphy said.

Although there was a learning curve for SEAL teams, particularly those who served in the early years of the Vietnam War, Murphy said part of the attraction was the leadership autonomy provided to junior officers. He said individual squads determined their missions and executed them every two or three days.

The small-team dynamic afforded SEALs flexibility and freedom to turn intelligence into operations.

"We determined, more or less, what we were going to do every night. Where we were going to go. We were pretty much—in that era—our own boss," Murphy said. "We attempted pilot rescues directed from above but everything else was left to us on how to figure out how we would go out and mix it up with the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese forces.

"The idea of being in direct combat is a thrilling experience. I was very excited about it."

Leading the Fifth Platoon, SEAL Team Detachment ALFA on 2 March 1969, Murphy took decisive action that neutralized a heavily defended Viet Cong base camp area. Then-Lieutenant Junior Grade Murphy was the point man for his seven-man squad.

A Viet Cong unit holed up in a house spotted Murphy's squad approaching and fled. Murphy,

the closest squad member to the escaping enemy, chased a group of five armed men without supporting fire. He killed four in the group and led his unit in capturing other Viet Cong members. The successful operation included securing individual weapons and five B-40 rockets. Murphy was awarded the Silver Star for his actions during that encounter, in which there were no American casualties.

'CULTURE OF NEVER GIVING UP'

Like many of his peers, Murphy was drawn to the SEAL community because it offered a chance to lead in a small-group setting. In Vietnam, he led a platoon just a couple of years after commissioning.

Only about 25 percent of candidates earn the Navy SEAL Trident. This exclusive club is linked by shared experiences of grueling training and dangerous missions. Murphy said anyone considering joining the SEAL community should understand it will be difficult. Hell Week is designed to push SEAL candidates to their breaking point with extreme physical and mental tests over 5½ days in cold and wet conditions with just a few hours of sleep.

Finding a way to complete missions while mentally and physically fatigued requires candidates to rely on each other, just as they will in the field.

"It's very team oriented, it's very closely knit," said Murphy, who retired after 25 years as a SEAL. "It's a very competitive organization but some of the finest human beings I know are SEALs."

After completing his SEAL training, Prouty said he felt invincible. He was convinced he could overcome any obstacle.

"I believed I was the toughest guy on the battlefield," Prouty said. "Training gave me this tremendous confidence that I could handle anything."

That belief coupled with an unwavering commitment to complete the mission is what makes SEALs unique, Prouty said.

"There's a culture of never giving up," he said. "You know you have to uphold the culture. You might want to give up, but you know SEALs just don't. SEALs keep going, no matter what."

Captain Dick Couch '67, USN (Ret.), completed about 50 missions during a six-month deployment in Vietnam. When he retired in 1997, he held the senior command billet in the SEAL reserve community.

Couch said President Kennedy's call for units that could dominate in a more robust, unconventional warfare environment came to fruition with the SEALs in Vietnam. Their weaponry and infantry training separated SEALs from their predecessors, Couch said.

"Our war was a different kind of war than some of the Army units or Marine units and certainly some of the pilots' experiences bombing in Vietnam. We were right on the ground and right in the thick of it."



Then-MIDN Tom Murphy '66

"You're going to do direct-action missions," Couch said of SEAL assignments. "SEALs were ready made for Vietnam because we were going into an escalating conflict where they needed guys to conduct small unit operations in some of these areas that were basically controlled by the enemy in a guerilla environment. It was a sign of the times.

"Navy frogmen were good at improvising—so all the tricks of the trade, small unit tactics, standard operating procedures were built upon. Each platoon that went over came back with a little bit more expertise and passed that on to the people who were relieving them. We kind of grew into the job."

BOLD RESCUE

Growing up in southern Indiana, Couch became enamored with Navy frogmen at an early age. When he was at the Naval Academy, there was no direct accession into the special operations community. The Class of 2025 has 48 midshipmen assigned to either SEALs or Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD).

Couch was assigned to a destroyer post commissioning where he absorbed valuable leadership lessons. He deployed for four months to northern Europe with Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) 22 to conduct survey work in the North Sea. He then sought a transfer to SEAL training.

SEAL Team 1 needed officers. Couch said his orders were in hand the same day he submitted his name for consideration. He graduated first in his class in 1969.

While his dream was about to become reality, Couch appreciated his time at sea.

"I thank my lucky stars that I was aboard a destroyer for a year and a half," he said. "I made a lot of mistakes in handling enlisted men and being a division officer, that seasoned me. I hate to think of how poorly I would have done my job had I not had that experience aboard that ship before I went to BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/ SEAL Training)."

During predeployment training, Couch and his team practiced patrolling, learned basic infantry tactics and how to paddle flat-bottomed wooden boats known as sampans. Most of his platoon hadn't served in Vietnam. Luckily, he had a first-class petty officer who was a veteran of six rotations in Vietnam. Couch tapped him for institutional knowledge.

Couch's platoon chief was right out of training and two of his petty officers were on their second tours.

"I had a pretty green bunch," Couch said.

While he and his team might have been learning as they went, Couch had the luxury of mining intelligence from local Vietnamese



Then-MIDN Dick Couch '67

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collaborators. A village chief tipped Couch's platoon to the location of a Vietnamese prisoner of war camp a few weeks after they arrived in Vietnam.

Couch's 14-member platoon paddled sampans at night up a canal leading to the camp. They slipped past two checkpoints and into the main part of the camp undetected thanks to sleeping guards. The American force quickly overran the unsuspecting Viet Cong and freed the POWs without any problems.

The POWs were escorted to evacuation helicopters. Couch said the riskiest portion of most missions was the exit. Their entry is based on stealth but once the enemy has been engaged, using the same route for exit is harrowing.

"We were always worried about getting out, because now they know you're there," Couch said. "They know how you will probably try to get out. My job, especially being on the road, was making sure we had good helicopter coverage. They were orbiting around in case the bad guys tried to intercept us on the way out."

A light SEAL support craft, skippered by Couch's Academy company mate then-Lieutenant Natter, got the team out of the camp. Reflecting on the operation, Couch attributed its success to planning, predeployment training and a bit of luck.

But it also highlighted the nature and expertise of the burgeoning SEAL community.

"It was kind of a bold thing to do," Couch said. "We operated at night and we kind of knew what we were doing. Nobody else could do what we could do—going out at night in sampans along those canals. It was serendipitous that we could pull that off given how green we were in experience within the platoon and our time in country." 🚢

Editor's Note: As part of the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association & Foundation's Legacy of Valor: Vietnam War series, Shipmate staff interviewed and solicited stories from alumni. We gathered stories from more than 40 alumni and are sharing them in the pages of Shipmate in 2025 and online, by scanning this QR code.

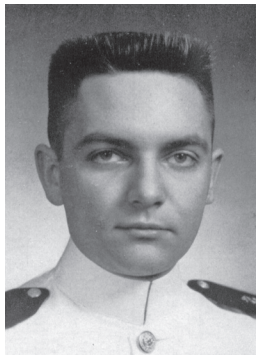


Starting with this issue, we will publish selections from individual alumni classes ranging from 1954 to 1973.

NOT FORGOTTEN

ALUMNI VIETNAM EXPERIENCES

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ED TIPSHUS '54, DVM, USMC (RET.)



Shipmate: Can you describe your experience when you volunteered to go to Vietnam?

Tipshus: In the late 1950s, I volunteered along with a group of officers and Marines. We flew from Okinawa to Vietnam, refueling in the Philippines, and landed in Da Nang. I was assigned as an artillery advisor to the ARVN's (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) 1st Division, part of the Naval Advisory Group in Saigon.

Shipmate: What was your role while you were stationed in Vietnam?

Tipshus: I was an artillery adviser, working in the Rung Sat Special Zone, which was a mangrove swamp near the South China Sea. My job was to provide support to the local units, including infantry, intelligence and other advisers. It was a dangerous and rugged environment with frequent helicopter operations.

Shipmate: What were some of the dangers you encountered during your time in Vietnam?

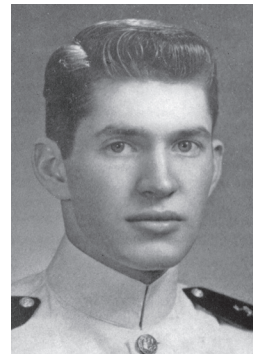
Tipshus: The area was infested with snipers, sea snakes, crocodiles and the Viet Cong often used the swamp as a rest area.

Shipmate: Did you face any personal challenges during your service?

Tipshus: Yes, there were times when we had to deal with rats during the night in the jungle. I remember waking up to them

pulling at my shoes. I didn't want to shoot them as I feared I might shoot myself, so I just brushed them off. It was a rough environment, and personal safety was always a concern.

MAJOR GENERAL BILL HOOVER '54, USAF (RET.)



Shipmate: What were your initial experiences like in Vietnam?

Hoover: I arrived in Vietnam in February of 1972, at the tail end of the war. I was stationed at Da Nang, one of the northernmost air bases, and our base was often subject to rocket attacks—three times a week, sometimes more. The base was isolated, and we were given the autonomy to make decisions and solve problems creatively.

I was director of operations for the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing, which had four fighter squadrons. My training had prepared me for this role, where I had to be flexible, make quick decisions and sometimes take unconventional actions to maintain operations. The F-4 fighter jets we had were deemed too vulnerable to enemy fire, so we had to adapt quickly to new threats, all while being under constant threat from rocket attacks.

The enemy was ramping up their attacks. My first mission was up north, near Hanoi, where I was involved in a dogfight with six planes. It was intense and eye-opening, but it was exactly what I had volunteered for. Later, I was assigned as the director of operations for the F-4 wing, and eventually, I became the commander of a provisional wing at Da Nang, overseeing

5,000 people and 100 aircraft, including forward air control and electronic warfare planes.

Shipmate: What experiences stand out the most during your time during the Vietnam War?

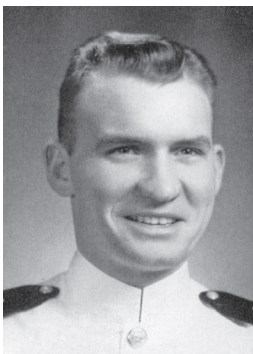
Hoover: One of the most memorable experiences was the constant threat of enemy rocket attacks. These were indiscriminate and often came at night, causing a lot of tension. We had a strong sense of self-reliance at Da Nang, especially since our headquarters was based in Saigon, far to the south. Another significant moment was the closure of Da Nang and the last flight out in March of 1973. We were among the last to leave the country, marking the end of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Despite the risks and challenges, there was a sense of duty and camaraderie that stood out.

One moment that really stands out was the intense dogfight with six planes near Hanoi, which was a clear reminder of the dangers of the conflict. Another unforgettable experience was when a four-star general called me aside and entrusted me with the responsibility of commanding the provisional wing at Da Nang. There was also the emotional experience of meeting a classmate from the Naval Academy, a Marine officer, who was stationed offshore and prepared to come to our aid if necessary. That gave me a real sense of reassurance during such a dangerous time.

Shipmate: How different was life/combat in Vietnam than you anticipated?

Hoover: Combat in Vietnam was different from what I had expected. I had anticipated more conventional warfare but instead found myself dealing with asymmetric threats, such as frequent rocket attacks and a constantly shifting political and military landscape. The isolation of Da Nang made things even more challenging—without much support or resources, we had to figure out solutions on our own. The most difficult part was the unpredictability of the conflict; you could never really be sure where the next danger would come from. It was a stark contrast to what I had trained for, but the adaptability I learned at the Naval Academy proved invaluable.

COLONEL BILL MARTIN '55 USAF (RET.)



By the end of his second tour in Vietnam, Colonel Bill Martin had completed 243 combat missions—earning the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross and more than 11 Air Medals. The Silver Star Citation read that Colonel Martin distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force in Southeast Asia on 16 April 1968. On that date, Martin attacked a heavily defended hostile

Major General O'Keefe Presents Silver Stars To 4424th Personnel

Maj. Gen. Timothy F. O'Keefe, Ninth Air Force commander, decorated two members of the 4424th Combat Crew Training Squadron in a special ceremony May 16 on the flightline. Those receiving awards were Maj. William C. Martin and Capt. James C. Wagner.

The Silver Star was awarded to Major Martin who distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force in Southeast Asia April 16, 1968. On that date Major Martin attacked a heavily defended

hostile truck convoy, despite intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire, he was credited with destroying five trucks, probably destroying one truck and starting 22 secondary fires.

Major Martin also received the Distinguished Flying Cross for participating in aerial flight as a B-57 pilot in Southeast Asia March 27, 1968.

Also for duty in Southeast Asia Major Martin received the Air Medal (AM) and the First thru Eleventh Oak Leaf Clusters to the AM.

Captain Wagner received the Silver Star for gallantry

in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force in Southeast Asia Jan. 30, 1968. On that day Captain Wagner successfully attacked and destroyed a heavily defended hostile convoy laden with supplies for hostile forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Despite intense ground fire, marginal weather conditions, and the added problem of a malfunctioning aircraft, he directed his pilot against the hostile convoy until he had destroyed 18 of the trucks and ignited a multitude of secondary fires in the target area.



HIGHLY DECORATED — Maj. William C. Martin, 4424th Combat Crew Training Squadron, receives the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and the First thru Eleventh Oak Leaf Clusters to the AM from Maj. Gen. Timothy F. O'Keefe, Ninth Air Force commander, during ceremonies May 16 on the flightline. (U.S. Air Force Photo by A1C Robert S. Swanson)

Col Bill Martin '55 USAF (Ret.), earned a Silver Star for gallantry for his actions on 16 April 1968. Martin attacked a heavily defended hostile truck convoy, despite intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire, was credited with destroying six trucks and starting 22 additional secondary fires.

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A paper written by his son Captain William C. Martin Jr. while he was a Secretary of the Navy Resident Fellow from July 2001 to July 2002 in the Ethics Department at the United States Naval Academy, started off with this excerpt:

"It was another dark and muggy night in Phan Rang, South Vietnam, when Major Bill 'Marty' Martin (United States Air Force), called for taxi for a flight of four B-57 Canberra. Those who stopped and turned as the aircraft taxied by, noted the typical bomb load out of Mark-82's and napalm, and silently

PHOTO COURTESY OF CDR RICK MARTIN '81, USN (RET.)

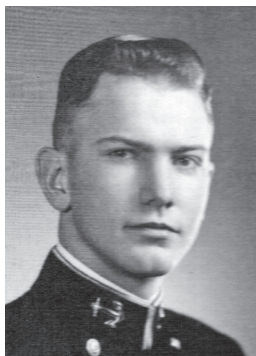
said a prayer for their safe return. The target tonight was another insignificant ammo dump in a remote corner of North Vietnam that possessed no real strategic importance. Their route of flight would be predictable, for they had flown it countless times as dictated by the route packages and rules of engagement, formulated by both politicians, and detached military planners. The Viet Cong would be expecting their arrival, for they had seen this scenario played out numerous times before.

With an attrition rate of almost 20 percent, the first act of bravery these aircrews would display would be the brake release on their takeoff roll. One of these aircraft would probably not return home tonight. ... These men of the Eighth and 13th Tactical Bomb Squadrons, who flew up North after dark, proudly wore a patch on their left shoulder, an embroidered head of a big yellow cat with pointed ears and a black patch over the right eye. The left eye was a luminescent green and clenched in its jaws was a B-57 Canberra. In green letters around the border was emblazoned: 'Trong Mieng Cua Con Meo Cua Dinh Mang,' which translated means, 'I have flown into the jaws of the cat of death.'"

On the ceiling of the Officer's Club in Phan Rang, each newly arriving squadron member wrote his name in carbon from a lighted candle. When a member failed to return from a mission, someone would climb up on a bar stool and circle the name. This paper is dedicated to my father, and to those men whose names were circled on that ceiling in the Officer's Club in Phan Rang, Vietnam. They fought bravely and courageously in a war; they were not allowed to win.

—submitted by his son, CDR Rick Martin '81, USN (Ret.)

REAR ADMIRAL ROBERT A. PHILLIPS '57, SC, USN (RET.)



In June 1965, then-Lieutenant Robert Phillips reported to Da Nang as part of a team charged with crafting the logistical support for the anticipated surge in Marine Corps, Army, Navy and Air Force personnel into Vietnam. Phillips was responsible for determining the scope of supplies needed to accommodate an 80,000-strong U.S. force, up from 20,000.

"One area not covered by the Advanced Base Functional Component (ABFC) procedures

was the determination of what and how much of ordinary consumables would be required by the supported forces. Lieutenant Harvey Nix, SC, USN, and I spent many days and nights going through the GSA Catalogs line item by line item and estimated what the requirements would be.

We did consult with the Marines when forecasting items like the number of rolls of concertina barbed wire, and with the SeaBees on lumber, rebar and cement needs. We also saw the incredible demand for soft drinks given the working and weather conditions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RADM ROBERT A. PHILLIPS '57, SC, USN (RET.)

RADM Robert A. Phillips '57, SC, USN (Ret.), served in Da Nang in 1965. He designed a ramp on the Han River to allow amphibious vehicles to exit the river without having a 500-pound bomb slip over the side.

We needed a deep water pier to help handle the volume of cargo offload. There was an ABFC component for a deep water pier called the DeLong Pier. It was transportable and once in location there were support columns, which could be mechanically extended downward until they were solidly planted. The problem was that once installed in place, the remaining upper portions of the columns interfered with the cranes and booms used for offloading ships cargo. The SeaBees fixed the problem by cutting the columns flush with the pier deck with oxy-acetylene torches. That later became an issue when the Army apparently had planned on using the transportable DeLong Pier at Cam Ranh Bay.

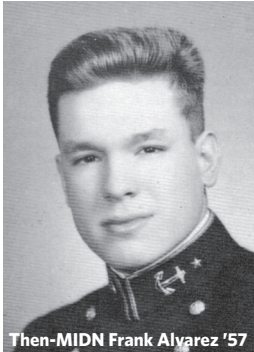
Lieutenant Commander William Dickey, SC, USN, was instrumental in finding a suitable location for the warehouse and cold storage facilities on the east side of the Han River just south of the Republic of Vietnam ammo dump. Tactically that may have been a little too close for comfort.

On the riverfront street just south of the fishing docks there was a museum. At that location, the seawall had deteriorated and was used by the amphibious vehicle DUKWs to exit the river and come up onto dry land. The DUKW has only canvas side walls to the 2 1/2 ton cargo platform. They transported the 500-pound bombs for the Air Force from ship-side to the airport bunkers. About once a month, traversing the angle of the river exit would cause a bomb to slip off a DUKW, which always was a tense moment. I was directed to design a multiple use ramp and dockside facility just north of the Han River bridge.

When I had finished the sketch and described to Dickey the rationale for boom arcs and ramp dimensions to accommodate barges, LSTs and LCMs, he told me to give it to the SeaBees and ask them to build it. In short order the pilings were driven, dredge sediment was placed and the facility was put into use. No more DUKW bomb dropping."

The following two Class of 1957 stories are excerpted from the book Shaking up the World, which was compiled by James D. Paulk Jr.

LONG CARRIER DEPLOYMENT



Then-MIDN Frank Alvarez '57

Frank Alvarez '57 was chief engineer in the aircraft carrier MIDWAY when it arrived at Alameda Naval Air Station on 3 March 1973. MIDWAY was returning from a record-long 11-month deployment that began on 10 April 1972.

"We all knew this was would be a very successful deployment even though we did not complete our training and only had three days to load out ... We soon settled into a routine of long periods on Yankee

Station with short visits to Subic Bay in the Philippines for much needed mature material upkeep. While on station, we would launch aircraft every day and replenish for about five hours every other night, refueling, taking on aviation gas, replenishing bombs and loading new stores.

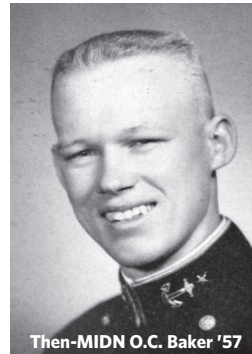
While the aviators were putting their lives on the line every day, the best thing we could do in engineering was to maintain

the ship in tip-top material condition. This made it possible to always make enough speed to provide sufficient wind over the deck for safe flight operations, provide enough reliable steam to the catapults for hot shots every time, keep the arresting gear measuring machinery in excellent working order, ensure good working aircraft and weapons elevators, maintain well air conditioning spaces, keep the galley equipment in proper working order so excellent meals could be prepared and provide safety in the way of firefighting and damage control. This we did outstandingly.

The diversion of a port call in Singapore was greatly appreciated by the whole crew. Not only did it take place over Christmas, but it turned out to be memorable because Bob Hope and company came on board and put on a wonderful show.

Our success during this deployment came with a high price for the air wing. Eleven members died or were lost at sea. Seven aviators were missing in action, and six more were prisoners of war ... MIDWAY and Attack Carrier Air Wing Five did receive outstanding recognition for all of our accomplishments in that we were jointly awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for the period 30 April 1972 to 9 February 1973."

HELICOPTER DOWN



Then-MIDN O.C. Baker '57

O.C. Baker '57 flew Marine CH-46 helicopters in the Purple Foxes detachment in Vietnam. He shared a story about the bravery of one of his crewmembers.

"Corporal King was my .50 caliber machine gunner the day we were shot down near An Hoa. The rest of us left the helicopter and were lying down for protection in the rice paddy, but Corporal Jim King stayed exposed in the helicopter with his machine gun and was firing these impossibly long

bursts that were sure to burn up the barrel.

I finally got up and ran back to tell him to fire shorter bursts.

What I found was that the firing mechanism on his machine gun was sticking so as soon as he started firing, he had to then pick up a nearby M16 rifle and start beating on the .50 caliber to get it to stop firing. Naturally, he couldn't point the .50 caliber very well while he was beating on it, so he was very frustrated with the situation.

I found the scene very amusing. We were picked up by the wingman within about 30 minutes and the aircraft was recovered later. We had been shot down with one AK-47 round that penetrated the transmission oil cooler. I have that round fastened to a plaque hanging on the wall in my home.

Corporal King was one of the very fine young, enlisted Marines that volunteered to be a helicopter crewman in Vietnam. To this day, I continue to ponder the motivation and be amazed by this purely voluntary act. It was dangerous, we suffered many aircraft losses and Marine fatalities. The enlisted



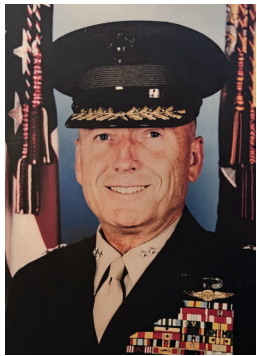
Frank Alvarez '57 was chief engineer in MIDWAY, when it deployed for a record 11 months starting 10 April 1972.

men were under absolutely no pressure or requirement to fly, and the additional flight pay was trivial.

I attribute their actions to the fact that they realized such flying crewmen were essential to the success of the helicopter's mission (unlike jet aircraft where the enlisted stayed back on the ground) and their desire to be with fellow Marines who were actually confronting the enemy.

Their faith in the ability of the (sometimes very young and inexperienced) Marine helicopter pilots up front and their steadfastness in the face of long mission hours and extreme danger during the missions have earned my undying respect for every enlisted Marine helicopter crewman."

MAJOR GENERAL BILL ESHELMAN '59, USMC (RET.)



In December 1967, I was ordered to travel to Saigon and report to the Marine Advisory Unit. I was assigned to the 4th Vietnamese Marine Battalion. At that point in my career and for the rest of the year, I needed to reach all the way back to the Academy for those early concepts of leadership, as well as the tactical knowledge and experience that I had subsequently learned, to survive and succeed on the battlefield.

For the next 10 months, I lived with, ate meals with, attempted to speak the language with, fought along with, and with my counterpart, won battles against the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army.

The following excerpt from my book, *Letters to Pat*, describes in part our first big battle:

"As darkness fell, we tightened up our security inside the compound and I lay down on the porch of one of the buildings and fell asleep. I had been up for almost two days.

At 3 a.m. on 3 February, my world came apart again, but this time with deafening explosions. I rose up to grab my radio as two more mortar rounds exploded nearby. The concussion picked me up and bounced me against the side of the building. I didn't feel any pain at the time but knew I had been hit.

My 'cowboy' and radioman had both been hit and were hard down. I steadied myself, located my radio, which fortunately had not been hit, and started to look for my counterpart, who

was behind me flat on the ground and up against some steps. He was ok.

We determined that a counterattack was underway with incoming mortar and rocket fire. In fact, by then, the NVA were coming over the back wall of the compound. Our young Marines were holding their own, but I knew we needed additional fire support quickly if we were going to survive the night.

The 1st Battalion next to us was also under attack and the advisor with that battalion and I started taking turns calling in air strikes and artillery rounds. We were calling for anyone who would answer and fire for us. Thank goodness for illumination rounds. They gave us the ability to turn night into daylight and to be able to see where to fire against the enemy. It also allowed the aircraft to see what we were marking and asking them to shoot and bomb.

At one point, the NVA broke through the wall and were inside the compound. Fortunately, I was coordinating with a young U.S. Army adviser with the Vietnamese Army artillery compound next to us, and he lowered the barrels of his 105mm howitzers and fired directly down the length of the wall. That gave us time to clean up the few bad guys that had penetrated our front line.

I've never waited so long nor been happier to see dawn arrive. With daylight, I could coordinate with an airborne USAF forward air controller (FAC) to direct Vietnamese bombers to drop 500-pound bombs and napalm within 50 yards of our front lines.

I sent First Lieutenant John Hainsworth (who had just been sent from our Marine adviser HQ to help me) forward with our lead company to mark our position with colored smoke for the pilots to see ... and then we all got down low and prayed. It worked, and at about 8:55 a.m., what was left of the North Vietnamese appeared to break contact and retreat. However, as we rose up and took a long breath, the NVA brought up a reserve unit and renewed the attack.

This time, the FAC linked us with a USAF C-130 aircraft that had a 105mm howitzer that could fire from the side door. We marked our front lines again and asked him to fire at anything that moved on the other side of the wall. By noon, things had settled down, and there was no sign of enemy movement. We sent one company forward to search the battlefield and found another 75 enemy KIA. We only had nine KIA, but more than 100 wounded, including John and me. I had been hit in my left leg and both arms ... and still had a piece sticking out of one arm." 📌

From the Editor

ALL HANDS EFFORT

Gathering and sharing the stories of Naval Academy alumni who served during the Vietnam War required an all-hands effort by the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association's communications team. During the fall of 2024, the communications team conducted more than 40 interviews including meeting alumni in Colorado, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Texas, Alabama, Florida, California and Maryland. Thanks to

assistance from class leaders, we were able to identify candidates and conduct interviews in person and virtually.

Producing the *Legacy of Valor: Vietnam War* series would not have been possible without the contributions of Grace Doerfler, Jackie Furton, Emily Lucht, Hannah Munnely, Maria O'Shea, Heather Payne, John Schofield, Anne Sharpe, Sandy Spadaro, Sarah Trimmer and Timothy Woodbury.

—Jimmy DeButts, Shipmate editor