PHOTO COURTESY OF RADM TOM SEIGENTHALER '54, USN (RET.)

LEGACY OF VALOR: VIETNAM

This is the fourth in a series of Shipmate *features commemorating the service and sacrifice of U.S. Naval Academy alumni who served in the Vietnam War. These stories will be featured in print, on a dedicated webpage, on social media and in videos.*

More than 40 alumni shared their stories to help further the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association & Foundation's Legacy of Valor series. For all who stood watch, we honor your service and will not forget.

An aerial view of the Da Nang Small Craft Repair Facility in Vietnam. What started as a floating dock evolved in the late 1960s into a fully functioning facility that could handle up to 10 craft at a time and had a 700-person crew.

DA NANG REPAIR FACILITY

KEPT SHIPS IN FIGHTING SHAPE

Navy ingenuity was in demand and on full display during the Vietnam War.

In the absence of necessary supplies and relying on World War II surplus equipment, the Small Craft Repair Facility (SCRF) in Da Nang kept the U.S. Navy's harbor craft and lighterage boats running and lent a helping hand to the other service branches. Coastal shipping from Da Nang was used to reach locations near the DMZ, Cua Viet, Tan My, Chu Lai and Sa Huyn, due to the difficulties and hazards of land convoys.

Captain Richard Kell '63, USN (Ret.), spent a year in Da Nang as SCRF's executive officer beginning in the fall of 1967. He said the facility, and its 500-person crew, was responsible for repairing all types of vessels.

The facility could handle up to 10 boats at a time. The crew worked 12-hour shifts and repaired hundreds of vessels per year as they endured extreme heat and frequent downpours during the rainy season. Their assignments weren't confined to watercraft, Kell said.

One day, an Army tank rolled up into the SCRF layout yard. The Army turned to the Navy to help install a guard around the turret base to the tank body. Tank turrets were vulnerable to rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) hitting just below the turret and just above the tank body where the turret column rotated. Cyclone fencing can stop an RPG as it lodges in fence weaving and detonates, without causing any damage to the tank.

"We designed and put one on, that rotated with the turret," Kell said. "The captain said he had a few more and could we do the mod on those? The next day 'a few' turned out to be 20-plus tanks we ended up fixing."

The SCRF was responsible for the uninterrupted operation of everything that floated in I Corps at Naval Support Activity Da Nang. They repaired yard oilers, tankers, barges, landing craft and utility craft. Their duties also included floating cranes, the lighterage craft, the harbor support-craft, the harbor security craft all of the private company lighterage and their harbor support craft and any ship from any friendly nation operating in the area that had a problem. There were more than 100 boats and craft with more than 400

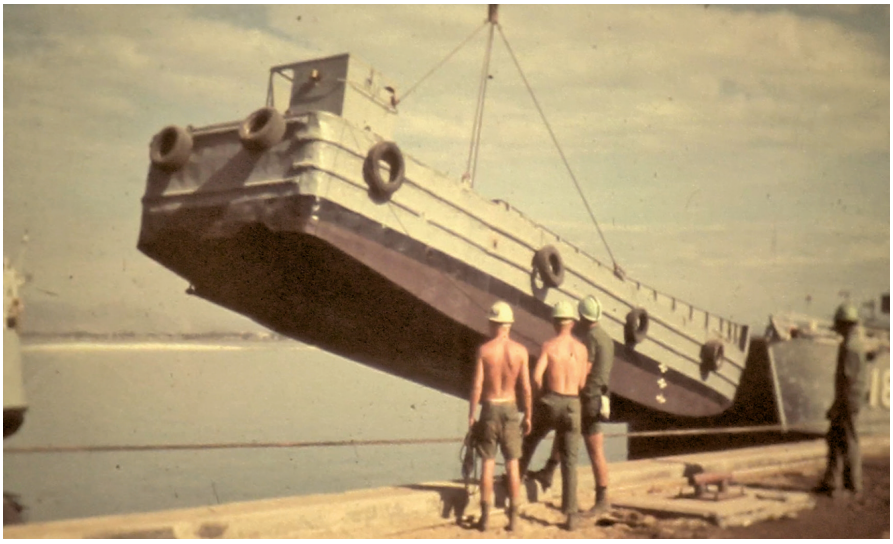


PHOTO COURTESY CDR JOHN FEENEY '58, USN (RET.)

The Da Nang Small Craft Repair Facility ran 24 hours a day with sailors working 12-hour shifts. They used cranes to pull boats out of the water and return them after being repaired.

diesel engines and more than 1,000 pieces of operating equipment floating on the rivers.

In addition to Navy personnel, it was supported by about 250 local Vietnamese workers and about 120 Korean machine shop personnel. It began as a floating facility in 1966 but with then-Lieutenant Commander Tom Seigenthaler '54, USN (Ret.), serving as officer in charge (1967-68), the site blossomed with a pier, a repair barge, a diving barge, a floating dry dock, four shop buildings and a supply building.

They also maintained emergency repair shops in four locations from Hue City to Cua Viet.

"When I left there after a year, we were basically all ashore," said Seigenthaler, who retired as a rear admiral in 1988. "It was far from a small craft facility. It was close to a Navy shipyard at that time. It was working beautifully well and the people that were out there were fantastic. They were out there working 365 days a year."

Commander John Feeney '58, USN (Ret.), served as an engineering duty officer at Da Nang in 1969. He said the operations at the repair facility were similar to what he was doing in the shipyard stateside after his deployment to Vietnam.

One difference was the dearth of parts, supplies and machinery in Vietnam. If a specialized piece was needed to repair a boat, that often meant cannibalizing a part from another vehicle or crafting something suitable from materials that could be salvaged.

Desperation met innovation as sailors did whatever was necessary to get ships back to the fleet. Actions that would've been frowned upon at a Navy yard 5,000 miles away—such as cutting up an anchor to carve a needed part—were standard operating procedures in Da Nang.

"In a very austere area, it's not like you go to the next yard and get the part you need," Feeney said. "The upside of doing all of that is you don't have a big bureaucracy. We would do things on our own.

"This is the stuff that really keeps the Navy together. There was nothing heroic or courageous it was just hard work."

Necessity was the mother of invention at the Da Nang Small Craft Repair Facility during the Vietnam War. The facility's roads were sand and wind would create sandstorms. Sailors suggested dampening the roads with bilge oil, which neutralized much of the dusty conditions.

PHOTO COURTESY CDR JOHN FEENEY '58, USN (RET.)

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Sand roads were a problem at the repair facility. Whipping wind would create sandstorms and could make life miserable for those working at the SCRF.

The Navy also had problems with bilge oil. That byproduct could not be discharged into the bay so it had to be transported across the entrance of the harbor to be dumped in the sea.

One solution solved two problems. Feeney credited sailors for crafting the plan to pour the bilge oil on the sand roads. A tanker was built and bilge oil was pumped into the tanker. They then used a cart to distribute it around the facility.

"That was creative," Feeney said. "You adapt to what you have."

Kell said success at SCRF depended on that adaptability. He said a nearby salvage yard was a reliable resource for the repair facility crew to locate items to repurpose.

"They would go through the salvage yard and say, 'we need that,'" Kell said. "They'd throw it on the truck and you drove off."

By scavenging, the sailors were able to keep the steady rotation of repair jobs moving forward. Sometimes those parts would find their way into projects that brought unexpected rewards.

Kell said one morning he arrived at the facility and a Marine lowboy was sitting in the parking lot. A lowboy resembles a flatbed trailer and was used to carry heavy equipment, including bulldozers and helicopters.

Checking on why it was there, Kell found out that a few days before, some Marines showed up in the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (AC&R) shop with a broken room AC unit.

"Room air conditioners were prized above all else," Kell said. "My guys knew that and had fixed a lot of them. The lowboy was the swap for a repaired A/C unit. The lowboy was discreetly returned that evening."

Seigenthaler said his crew received a sweet deal from Army personnel needing motorboat repairs.

He told the soldiers his men could overhaul the Army's electric outboard motors.

In turn, the Navy folks received milk and ice cream.

"Everybody took care of each other," Seigenthaler said.

REPURPOSED FOR THE MISSION

Untouched welding equipment, lathes, hand tools, a 24-inch horizontal boring mill and motor rewinding machines were pulled from wooden crates stenciled with "Navy Repair

Facility-Medium, Production Board." Kell said there was no information of what was inside each crate when they arrived in Vietnam. These machines were part of a kit originally intended to be used to build ship repair capabilities in the Pacific Islands during World War II.

The war was over before they could be used so they were placed in storage until 1967.

"There were probably 50 huge boxes in a big sand pile," Seigenthaler said. "They used the equipment, and it operated perfectly well."

"We had a piece of equipment we didn't know what it was," Kell said. "None of us could figure it out until a warrant electrician showed up. He looked at it and said, 'Oh, that's a radio frequency coil rewind machine.' They were used in WWII to repair radios.

The dedicated efforts of the personnel at SCRF kept vital supplies moving in I Corps on a routine basis and ramped up support, when required, such as the effort to supply the fighting units during the TET offensive. ⚓

PHOTO COURTESY CDR JOHN FEENEY '58, USN (RET.)

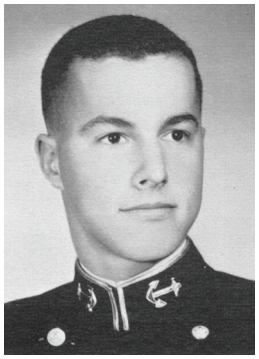
The Da Nang Small Craft Repair Facility relied on Vietnamese and Korean workers who helped get boats back into the fleet.

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.*

NOT FORGOTTEN

ALUMNI VIETNAM EXPERIENCES

GIL ZEMANSKY '65



Zemansky served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1971, first on amphibious ships and then on PBRs (Patrol Boat Riverine).

Most of my PBR operations were as an advisor to the Vietnamese navy. The first unit I was assigned to was split between Ha Tien on the Gulf of Thailand and Chau Doc on the Mekong River, and we patrolled mostly between the canals of those two on the Cambodian border and trying to interdict the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army infiltration routes.

I did that and one of the advantages I had in the situation was that I was the senior advisor to my counterpart, who was a lieutenant commander in the Vietnamese navy. When he wasn't there, I was his deputy. And, that gave me a command position.

We had a whole Vietnamese division and support from the Americans, a little bit of air support, but they were pulling air support out at the time. The operation I was involved in, before I rotated out of Vietnam, took about a year and a half before we fully controlled the U Minh Forest. It was a successful operation and mainly due to the Vietnamese Infantry Division, 21st Infantry Division.

They had a gung-ho major general in charge. He didn't do things the way we did it in the military, but I have to say he was successful.

We would take Vietnamese army units in and position them on an assault. Things were going slowly and I was on a boat with our patrol boats trying to figure out why it was taking so long to get that unit aboard. At that time, the general in charge flew in on a helicopter. We didn't hear exactly what he was saying. We could see him talking with the colonel in charge

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIL ZEMANSKY '65

Gil Zemansky '65 in front of his PBR (Patrol Boat Riverine) following a night ambush in Tan Kien, Vietnam in 1971.

of the Vietnamese army forces there. Then, the general left and all of a sudden things really started moving.

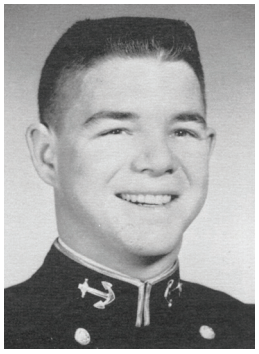
What we heard later, was the general had told the colonel that if he didn't get everything done real fast he would be shot and we'd get somebody else that could ... Most of the time we were operating on the river interdiction type of situation, and were pretty much left to do that ourselves.

My counterpart ran his own intelligence operation and I would go with him. We'd interview people, getting information. We usually operate at night, and we'd position our boats in an ambush position in the early evening, before it got dark.

Before we would position the boats, we would contact the local self-defense forces and make sure we were keeping our relationship going, which usually meant we drink moonshine with them and talk about things. We had a pretty good idea they would support us, and we'd support them if it came to it.

We also escorted supply and other forces into the central U Minh Forest with the operation to set up artillery bases. We could escort convoys in there to support them.

MITCH HENDERSON '65



Henderson served aboard DACE *in the late 1960s. The submarine was commanded by Admiral Kinnaird McKee '51, USN (Ret.).*

Then-Commander McKee was a stickler about attention to detail. When I first came on board, everybody had a little 3 by 5 inch card in their khaki pocket.

I said, 'what is that?' They said, 'it lists all list the things they had to do that day.'

We would have a meeting with the skipper after the noon meal and he'd pull out his standard green book, and we go down every single one of those items on what the status was. After you do that for about six months, it kind of got ingrained in your heart.

Our emergency buoy used to rattle a little bit, so before we went out on our missions, McKee would take the emergency buoy off. We would weld a plate on the hull where it used to be. And you'd say to yourself, well, you got to be kidding me?

That's what's supposed to save you if you go down, right? The thing is, a submarine was going to go down in 2,000 feet of water. So that buoy wasn't going to do you any good at all.

Another thing he was a real stickler about was we couldn't take showers for six days when we were on station. Six days of the week he wouldn't want to turn on the 8,000 gallon per day distilling unit because it made noise. More noise than he wanted to make.

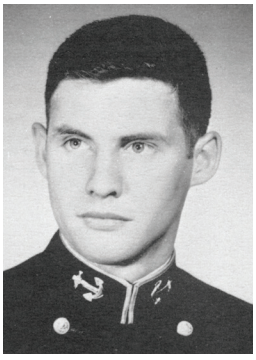
My first job as a junior officer on the ship was to go in the engine room and reposition the big coffee, sugar and flour cans that were underneath the turbines. The turbines were sound mounted so the noise didn't go out into the sea.

It took me hours to fix all that stuff. But, that was the attention to detail thing.

Submarine duty was all against the Russians. Basically, they had 400 or so submarines. They had us beat in numbers by a lot and we geared up and produced a little bit over 100 subs. They were out there with the deterrence mission and they were the ones that weren't supposed to be detected at all.

We were kind of just the opposite. We were out there looking for their submarines. Once we detected them, we would try to keep track of them. Before that, we did a lot of surveillance to find out exactly what the Russian tactics were. It helped us make better weapons and better tactics. We were always trying to stay ahead of them.

COMMANDER MICHAEL R. GOODWIN '65, USN (RET.)



Between August 1965 and 1970, Goodwin deployed four times to Vietnam, serving on two World War II-era destroyers. After that, he reported to LYMAN K. SWENSON *the week she arrived in Subic Bay from San Diego, CA. Goodwin made two deployments on* TISDALE. *He volunteered for swift boat duty but was sent to destroyer school in Newport on the basis that there were not enough adequate experienced second tour officers in WestPac deploying ships.*

After destroyer school, Goodwin joined JOHN R. CRAIG *in WestPac and made two deployments.*

***Shipmate*:** Please share some memories of your service during the Vietnam War.

Goodwin: We did a lot of shore bombardment. We did a lot of chasing carriers.

There was nothing more joyous than to watch a rescue of a downed pilot. We were visiting the ship we were guarding and my CIC called over said, 'Hey, we got an emergency squawk.' Their CIC officer turned to the CO, said 'Captain, there's no squawk out there. They don't know what they're talking about.'

A few minutes later, he came back and said emergency squawk is now at so and so location. Their CIC told the commodore the same thing. And about that minute, we heard this big explosion and looked over and the airplane had just gone in between us and the guy was floating down in his parachute.

And so I said, 'commodore, with your permission, we'll lower the boat, we got our crew standing by.' The CO of the other ship said, 'I'm going to pick him up.'

I also learned if a carrier says, 'I'm turning right,' it usually meant he was stopping or turning left.

***Shipmate*:** What were your assignments after not getting the swift boat assignment?

Goodwin: Lots of shore bombing, lots of chasing carriers. I learned relative motion, which served me. It gave me a certain degree of confidence in my ship handling, so when I was able to command my own ship, I taught my JOs the same thing.

And they were white knuckled as they were going in at night into through the Strait of Malacca up into the Indian Ocean area. It was thrilling because at night there are about 10,000 little bangka boats out there with lanterns as they're all fishing.

The first time we went through, I was just ahead of the carrier and that was OK. The second time, when we came out, they didn't know what an FFG could do as a guided missile ship. They sent us up and we counted Russian ships. But coming out, the admiral put us as the lead ship going back through the strait at night. My officers of the deck were white knuckled and asked 'Captain, what do we do? Look at all those boats.'

I said, 'Just keep going. They'll get out of the way.'

***Shipmate*:** Anything else during your time in Vietnam you want to share?

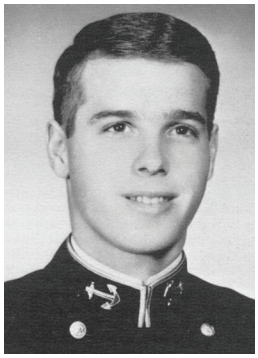
Goodwin: They were kind of free fire zones all over the place, and if you saw anything that looked suspicious, you were supposed to kill it. There's all kinds of sampans and small boats in the area we were in and we would watch their movements. There was no indication that they were running into the shore and back.

There was no indication they were smugglers, or most weren't smugglers, and so when they said, take them under fire, we shot over their heads to make sure we missed them to warn them.

When you would provide direct fire support and you'd get a report of five logistics vehicles destroyed, I think that meant we killed five water buffalo. It was exciting times, training times and learning times.

We got one where we were directing fire into caves that were using 105 recoilless rifles as Korean marines were making an assault on the area. It was good when you met somebody who had gotten direct fire from a naval ship who said, 'it was the most accurate call fire. The rounds were close, the responses were good' and things like that. On a twin-mount, three-mount ship firing six guns, five salvos blew everything that was attached to the wall onto the floor.

COURTLAND GRAY '65



Excerpted from A Filthy Way to Die, *a book by Ed Linz '65 that details Vietnam experiences from his classmates.*

After Basic School, Gray reported to flight school in Pensacola, FL, in June 1966.

The pipeline for fixed wing aircraft was jammed. It was not an option for me. So, all Marines flew basic training aircraft like the T-34 and T-28 and they transitioned to learn to fly helicopters. I completed training in May 1967 and received orders to the Marine Corps Air Station at New River, NC. On the day I checked in, there had just been a mid-air collision of two helicopters. One helicopter, a CH-53, was landing a Huey while a UH-1 E, was taking off. Because both pilots on the Huey were killed, I became one of the replacements. This was fine with me because I preferred to be a Huey pilot.

I was at New River until November 1967. I was then assigned to Vietnam with squadron VM-01. Two days before I checked into my squadron at Da Nang, two helicopters hit a mountain and the four pilots were killed. Because of this accident, instead of going north to a squadron near the DMZ, I was kept at Da Nang to replace them in VM-02. We were located just east of Da Nang at a helo base called Marble Mountain. The first day I flew, I was the copilot for the flight leader. It was a troop lift with us as a gunship escorting the troop-carrying helicopters, the CH-46s.

I flew 8.4 hours that day and saw four CH-46s go down in flames. When I got back, I said to myself, 'I can't do this. If this is normal and I have to do this every day, I'm going to shoot myself.' It turned out that those 8.4 hours in one day were the most I ever flew in one day in Vietnam.

I never again saw that level of carnage among our troops. Of course, we were taking fire ourselves during that initial mission and later during many others. In training they teach you how to fly, but they can never teach you how to react when you're getting shot at. There's no practice for that. My helo was hit several times and we had a crew member get wounded. I was just lucky I didn't get hit myself. We typically flew four days a week, enabling me to log more than 980 hours of flight time in that country. Although we got shot at a lot and our aircraft was hit occasionally, I was never wounded. Unfortunately, several others were not so lucky, and we lost a lot of our squadron mates.

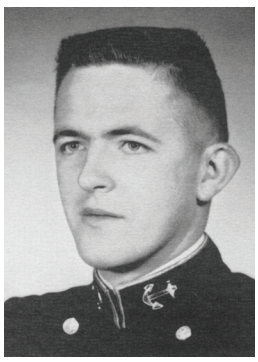
We had all sorts of missions when I was flying out of Da Nang. Most of my missions, however, were gunship escorts for troop movements. Our gunners always had to get the pilots' permission to fire. Often, we would be tasked to do Marine recon team inserts with us in charge. That way, all the CH-46 pilots flying with the recon Marines had to do was to concentrate on landing the 14 or so Marines on board. Sometimes, we would call in Navy support aircraft to drop bombs or napalm in an area prior to landing the troops to improve its safety. Most of these missions were in the jungle out west or southwest of Da Nang.

During close air support, we would begin firing at about 1,200-1,300 feet and then go down to 500 feet. When we were directing fixed wing aircraft, the A-4s and F-4s, those Marine pilots would decide which altitude they would bomb from. When the A-6s would come in from Da Nang or Chu Lai, they would bomb from 2,500 feet. The Air Force pilots we worked with would never have come in low.

There were frequent enemy rocket attacks on Da Nang. In fact, we had one during my first night there and I spent the night in a bunker. Ironically, on my last night in that country, I was also in a bunker for the same reason. Rocket attacks were a rather continuous feature of life in Da Nang. They would only last maybe 10 minutes. Most of us got so used to these attacks that when we heard 'incoming' and learned that it was on the other end of the field, we wouldn't even react.

One time, we were in the officer's club and there was incoming. We all hit the deck next to the bar, but as soon as it was over, everyone resumed drinking and the band immediately started playing, usually, 'We got to get out of this place.'

BILL FRIGGE '65



Excerpted from A Filthy Way to Die, *a book by Ed Linz '65 that details Vietnam experiences from his classmates.*

Frigge served as an ensign aboard the destroyer RUPERTUS *in the South China Sea. The captain put him in training to be the navigator.* RUPERTUS *was doing plane guarding operations for carriers* RANGER *and* INDEPENDENCE.

We also were providing a lot of gunfire support both off the coast and up some of the largest rivers. I recall us going 6 to 8 miles up the Mekong River. We did so much firing with our 5"/38 guns that we had to go to the shipyard at Subic Bay in the Philippines to have the barrels replaced. Those guns had a range of nearly 9 miles, but our best accuracy was at 6 miles or less.

While we were on gunfire support duty, we would get a call from the Marines asking for help. The captain would then have us maneuver the ship near the shore, often as close as 2 miles. These requests were usually at night so we would first fire a star shell to illuminate the target area so the Marine spotter could see where the shells were landing.

Their feedback allowed us to home in on the target. We would then fire 200-300 shells at six rounds per minute with, as you can imagine, considerable effect. RUPERTUS never ran out of ammunition or supplies because of what we called the 'conveyor belt.' This consisted of an oiler, an ammo ship and a food ship, which were running continuously up and down the coast to resupply ships like ours. Almost all of our gunfire was at night, because at that time in the war, most of the enemy were Viet Cong who tended to farm during the day and fight at night.

Upon completion of the overhaul in May 1967, we headed straight back to Vietnam. This was when we were involved in the FORRESTAL fire. We were plane guarding for FORRESTAL on 29 July 1967, and I was the officer of the deck. I would always give my junior officer of the deck the conn during these operations and I stationed myself on the bridge wing with binoculars so I could closely observe the carrier catapult during flight operations.

If something bad happened and the plane did not become airborne and went into the sea as it was being catapulted, I had to be prepared to respond instantly. Around 10:30 in the morning, I suddenly saw a streak of smoke go across the flight deck and then a ball of fire under an A-4. We immediately went to general quarters, and quickly learned the CO of a carrier wanted us to make an approach close to him to help fight the large fire, which was now raging as he turned the carrier into the wind and tried to keep the fire confined to the after part of the ship. Sailors were jumping off the stern of the ship into the sea to avoid being burned. We launched our whale boat and picked up at least six men out of the water. The entire stern of the carrier was now on fire. To make matters worse, some bombs went off on the flight deck, punching a hole in the deck, allowing burning fuel to pour below into berthing areas.

The carrier was now doing 25 knots into the wind. Because the fire was raging close to the after magazines, the FORRESTAL skipper asked us to come alongside as close as possible to aim our fire hoses at this ammo and oxygen storage machine magazine. If it went up, the carrier would undoubtedly go down with everyone aboard. Of course, as close as we were to the carrier, we probably also would have been seriously damaged.

As you can imagine, trying to keep our ship that close in the heavy smoke—we were only maybe 25 feet away—was extremely difficult due to the Venturi Effect. Our skipper now had the conn and did a magnificent job keeping us close, but safe. To make matters worse, the carrier crew started pushing burning planes off the deck in front of us causing us to have to dodge these flaming hazards! One of my jobs was damage control assistant, and once we began fighting the fire, a hose team and I took a 2 ½-inch hose to the forecastle to try to direct water onto that magazine area of the carrier.

It was already so hot that when my first stream of water from our hose hit that magazine, it instantly turned to steam. Due to the wind and the ship's speed, the water from our hose was being blown aft, creating sort of a relative motion problem as we tried to direct the water onto the magazine. I was wetting my pants knowing that if the magazine blew, we would go with it.

It seemed to me that we were fighting the fire all day, but by mid-afternoon the fires were somewhat under control. Unfortunately, there were numerous deaths and injuries among the carrier crew.

The FORRESTAL fire started when a Zuni rocket on an F-4 Phantom fighter aircraft on the deck ignited due to an electrical malfunction. It then flew into an external fuel tank on a nearby A-4 Skyhawk. Jet fuel was ignited, quickly ran across the flight deck and started other fires and explosions—134 sailors perished and more than 150 others were injured.

TED NANZ '65

Excerpted from A Filthy Way to Die, *a book by Ed Linz '65 that details Vietnam experiences from his classmates.*

Following commissioning, Nanz served aboard guided missile destroyer WILLIAM V. PRATT as an anti-submarine warfare officer in 1967. His first assignment was North SAR based at Yankee Station—they were the northernmost U.S. ship doing search and rescue missions, supporting aircraft carriers with pilots flying missions over North Vietnam.

While on North SAR we did successfully pick up two F-4 Phantom crews, one Air Force and one Navy, who had been shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin. All four were wet, but not seriously injured. I assure you that they were happy to see our helicopter and to be taken back to our ship. In November 1967, a major typhoon came through the Gulf of Tonkin. There were several PBR (Patrol Boat Riverine) boats near the shore and they were foundering in the high seas. We were called to try to rescue the boats. As we were in the process of trying to launch our helo, a large wave suddenly swept over the fantail. We were able to rescue two of our crew but lost two others to the sea. This event cast a somber pall over our entire crew.

While on North SAR, we would spend 30 days on station. Every third night we would go south to Yankee Station to refuel with the carrier group … Those typhoons were serious. Fall was the typhoon season. We would take 40-50 degree rolls and often our bow would go under, causing the whole ship to shutter. When I was the officer of the deck during those storms, I would grab a cable that went across above us and swing like a pendulum. I swear that my fingerprints are on that cable!

We began our return in December 1967 and returned to Florida in January 1968. As soon as we got back I received orders to FOX, also a guided missile ship but larger than PRATT. It was homeported in San Diego, CA, but as soon as I got there, the ship immediately headed to Vietnam. The call sign Red Crown was what was used for air traffic control over all of North Vietnam. Our job was to keep track of everything in the air over land and water. Red Crown saved a lot of aviators during those missions using our strong air search radar.

DAVID HUNTER '65

This is a story from the book THERE I WAS … Sea Stories from the U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1965, *a 320-page collection of active-duty memories from 78 classmates published in 2002. It is also posted on usna.com with the Class of 1965 Sea Stories.*

I can't say enough about the dedication and support of the men in our squadron that kept us up in the air, doing our job. The maintenance teams, ground support and flight line crews, ordnance crews and others, were motivated, hard working and ingenious, sometimes miraculously having a damaged F-4 up and ready to fly again after a short turnaround.

We broke it; they fixed it. The enemy ripped it apart with antiaircraft and small arms fire. Our guys patched it up, fueled it, loaded it for bear and saluted us back into the fray. Laboring under less than optimum conditions, working long and hard hours, scavenging for parts and making do with what they had to work with, they were as much a part of each mission as the aircrews. They cheered our successes and grieved for our losses as much as we did. Bonds were built between them and the aircrews that would last a lifetime.

It didn't seem long at all before I had progressed from FNG to section lead and had acquired the look … worn flight gloves, clean flight suits that still smelled, faded jungle utilities and a salty cover, and a Fu Manchu mustache … Of my 225 combat missions, by far the greatest number of mission assignments were for close air support. Of these, the most satisfying to me were in support of troops in close contact with the enemy. Usually, these missions came while standing hot pad assignments.

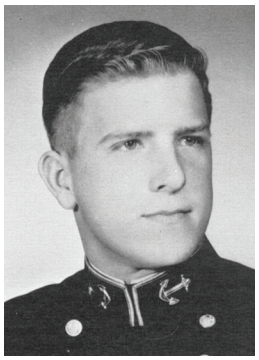
PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT DAVID HUNTER '65, USN (RET.)

David Hunter '65, flew F-4s out of Chu Lai, a U.S. Marine Corps military base. His missions included close air support for infantry units and interdiction bombing of enemy targets.

Technically, these were also the most demanding missions, requiring close coordination, limiting run-in tracks, continuous jinking maneuvers and pinpoint accuracy.

Typical ordnance delivered during these missions were napalm, rockets and .50 caliber. Compounding the risk inherent in these missions was enemy ground fire, terrain and sometimes weather. All of our squadrons lost aircraft and KIAs, which sadly were higher than average, were during close air support missions.

COMMANDER LLOYD HARRISON '65, USN (RET.)



Harrison served with the Vietnamese River Assault and Interdiction Division as an advisor to the Vietnamese navy in the Mekong Delta during two tours.

During a salvage operation deep in the U Minh Forest, we'd lost some boats. We were going to get them and take them away. We got one on a barge with a crane to a haul it out. Five days later, they'd set up for us and started shooting the heck out of us.

I thought I was really low in the boat. All of a sudden, the limb went 'bap' and fell down. It was within 4 inches of my ear. If the guy would have come a little bit more to the left, he'd have gotten me in the head. I got a lot closer to the paint on the bottom of the boat after that.

I had to medevac six of my teammates on that operation. The Seawolves came out and gave us fire support. Everything quieted down. We got the boat on a barge and moved out.

The American Riverine forces in 1969 had landing craft (LCM-8s) adapted for the firefights in the Mekong Delta. Their boats had max speed of 8 knots but generally came in at 6 knots and with loud V8 diesels, which you could hear for miles. Viet Cong would go 50-100 feet off the canal and cut a tunnel about 4 feet across. On the landward side they'd dig a hole straight down large enough for a man to be concealed.

They would set up a B-40 rocket and fire at boats that came by. Then, they'd drop in the hole. U.S. return fire would go over their enemies' heads. We used Zippo guns—two merged flamethrower lines that would send fire downward. They would kill or suck all the oxygen out of the hole.

I was on the Mekong Delta on guard post, about the time President Nixon announced American forces were going 7 miles into Cambodia for two weeks and return after North Vietnamese ammo dumps were eliminated.

My unit, since it was Vietnamese, would be going about 30 miles to a ferry landing where the Viet Cong had taken over a town. They wanted us to take the town back.

We came through a section that reminded me of a miniature Grand Canyon. We called in fire power. All of a sudden, two F-4 Phantoms came out of the sky. They came down from behind us and turned around. They each took one side of the canyon,

PHOTO COURTESY OF CDR LLOYD HARRISON '65, USN (RET.)

CDR Lloyd Harrison '65, USN (Ret.), was embedded, as an advisor, to the Vietnamese Navy in the Mekong Delta. He ate, patrolled the waterways and lived with his Vietnamese counterparts during two tours.

and they put their air brakes out which slowed them down tremendously and to keep them in the air, they went out to afterburner. We didn't have a single person shoot at us. It scared them all out of the way. Never been so happy to see an F-4.

I was seeing things from the eyes of the natives. I would expect everybody who's educated to do that. It's very easy not to do when you're in a place where you're uncomfortable, you don't know what's going on and you're afraid of losing your life. People do crazy things.

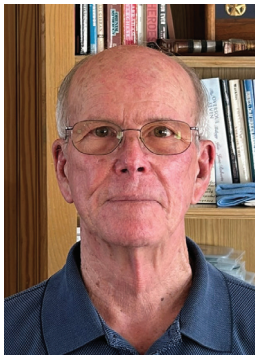
Nobody told me what I had to do, they just put me on the boat and I was an advisor. I had to use my common sense. I had to be their friend and help them when possible.

One day, we came up on a town which had PBRs. I saw a U.S. soldier jumping on the chest of a dead Vietnamese man with a bunch of kids standing around. I quickly went ashore and found the CO and asked what was going on. He said, 'we're showing the village kids what happens to VC, so they won't become VC.'

I said, 'you're making VC. You will probably be overrun tonight because you're showing them you don't respect the tradition of the Vietnamese, that once you're dead, you're sacred. It doesn't matter if you're a good guy or bad guy, you're sacred. By disrespecting the dead man, you're showing you don't understand the Vietnamese people.' ⚓

HEALING WARRIORS

VIETNAM VETERAN URGES COMBAT VETERANS TO ADDRESS BATTLEFIELD TRAUMA



CAPT Tom Murphy '66, USN (Ret.), wrote *Beyond the Trident* to highlight the impact of trauma through the lens of his time as a Navy SEAL. The book offers focuses on the need to heal the body, mind and spirit.

Captain Tom Murphy '66, USN (Ret.), learned a lot during his 25-year Navy SEAL career. One major lesson was missing from all his years of training, however.

He was never taught how to cope with trauma.

"The word SEAL should be synonymous with trauma," Murphy said. "We go looking for trauma and we create trauma. Trauma is created against us, too."

SEALs are trained to be the aggressor. Their operations are designed to eliminate the enemy. Still, Murphy said the wounded rate among SEALs during the Vietnam War was high. Coping mechanisms for dealing with the aftermath of taking a life, losing a teammate or being wounded were not part of their instruction, Murphy said.

"That part of SEAL operations was not emphasized in terms of training," said Murphy, who led the Fifth Platoon, SEAL Team Detachment ALFA in Vietnam. "We had lots of training for operations but none to cope with the psychological effects of taking human lives in that particular way.

"When you really get involved with taking a human life in a direct and dramatic fashion, our psyche suffers some consequences which leads to what we now know is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)."

Murphy said most combatants return from battle with some trauma. In his book, *Beyond the Trident*, Murphy outlines the traumas impacting warriors along with civilians and encourages all to seek assistance for mental health battles. A network of support services is available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and nonprofit organizations.

Sometimes, veterans don't know they need help or how to access care if they do. Some feel there is a stigma attached to asking for help.

Murphy wrote his book to help combat veterans identify the signs of PTSD and to understand seeking help is OK. He emphasizes the value of leaning on professional services, friends and family. He uses a three-legged stool analogy to stress that the mind, body and spirit all need to be addressed to heal.

"For combat veterans, they need to get over the feeling that it's shameful to go get help," Murphy said. "Using the lens of my life, I try to help people transit their trauma and move into the direction of reestablishing the strength and viability of all three legs.

"We need all three of those legs. We need them to be balanced and strong."

Some signs of PTSD include sleeplessness, overreaction to simple events, nightmares, out of context aggression to events and addictions, Murphy said. Some veterans turn to drugs or drinking to cope.

Healing requires mindful commitment to tending to an individual's mind, body and spirit, Murphy said.

"During my time in the Navy, overdrinking was the drug of choice," he said. "It relieved the stress in a very short period. All that did was mute the symptoms. You have to look for a purpose that gives life a meaning again.

"If you're sitting there in the fog of trauma, don't just sit there, pick a direction and go one way or the other. If you're walking the wrong way, you can turn around. As Winston Churchill said, 'if you're going through hell, keep going.' That's exactly what I think people should do." ⚓

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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is better understood today compared to when Vietnam veterans were coming home. There are a variety of support services available for warriors returning from combat.

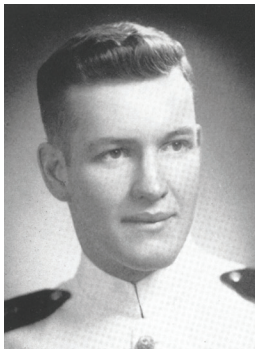
They include:

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: www.mentalhealth.va.gov
- Mental health and substance abuse help for Veterans: www.usa.gov/veterans-mental-health
- Lifeline for Vet: www.nvf.org

Editor's Note: As part of the Legacy of Valor series, Shipmate *is highlighting alumni who received the Navy Cross for their service in Vietnam.*

NAVY CROSS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL WILLIAM LEFTWICH '53, USMC



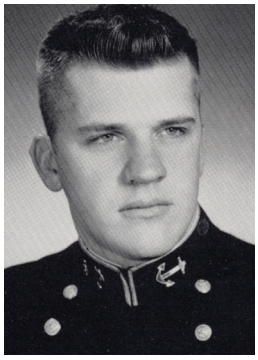
Then-Major Leftwich received the Navy Cross for his actions on 9 March 1965. He was killed in action on 18 November 1970 when his helicopter crashed during a Marine reconnaissance team extraction. The Armel-Leftwich Visitor Center at the Naval Academy is named for Leftwich and his classmate Lyle O. Armel II. Leftwich's Navy Cross citation reads, in part:

On 9 March 1965, Leftwich played a major part in all phases of the successful relief of the village of Hoi An, which was under heavy enemy attack by two Viet Cong battalions. Prior to the actual operation, he worked out a plan with the 22d Division Air Liaison Officer for supporting aircraft to deliver their ordnance in extra-close proximity to the front lines, and then to continue simulated attacks while the Vietnamese marines assaulted the enemy positions.

He participated in the planning of the approach march which, by using last-minute intelligence, avoided a massive ambush planned by the Viet Cong. As lead elements of the task force contacted the Viet Cong from an unexpected direction, he sensed the ideal opportunity to use the prearranged air support plan, and taking the radio, he moved under heavy fire to the forward-most elements of the task force. By his own personal example of shooting point-blank and shouting, he led the attack, which overran the immediate Viet Cong positions and carried the assault to within 40 meters of the crest of a hill overlooking Hoi An.

Despite injuries by enemy machine-gun bullets in the back, cheek and nose, he went to the aid of a mortally wounded comrade, and although bleeding profusely, he refused assistance and delayed his own evacuation until he could call for additional air strikes and brief the task force commander of the situation.

COMMANDER CHARLES J. COX '60, USN (RET.)



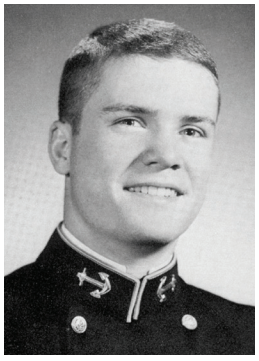
As commander of River Assault Division 111, River Squadron 5, Task Force 117 (TF-117), then-Lieutenant Cox was leading a column of assault craft down the Ben Tre River in Kien Hoa Province when the column was ambushed by a Viet Cong unit on 15 September 1968. His Navy Cross citation reads, in part:

After ordering return fire from all weapons, Cox exposed himself to fierce enemy fire while evaluating the tactical situation and marking beach sites for his boats. Although painfully wounded at the outset by exploding rocket fragments, he continued to issue orders and maintain tight control over his division, landing embarked troops on both enemy flanks.

To ensure the safe arrival of the medical aid boat to attend to his numerous casualties, he ordered a monitor at the aid boat's location to provide fire support, and then directed his boat and another monitor back through the ambush. As the front and rear units met in a hail of enemy fire, Cox ordered his two monitors to reverse course and, while running the ambush for the third time, led all four boats to a position of relative safety.

He then supervised the treatment or evacuation of his wounded before submitting to much-needed attention for his own injuries. Because of his rare tactical brilliance, the infantry units were landed at optimal positions to assault the enemy from both flanks and inflict serious damage while sustaining little themselves.

THE HONORABLE JIM WEBB '68



Then-First Lieutenant James H. Webb Jr., USMC, demonstrated extraordinary heroism while serving as a platoon commander with Company D, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, on 10 July 1969. His Navy Cross citation reads, in part:

While participating in a company-sized search and destroy operation deep in hostile territory, Webb's platoon discovered a well-camouflaged bunker complex, which appeared to be unoccupied. Deploying his men into defensive positions, Webb was advancing to the first bunker when three enemy soldiers armed with hand grenades jumped out. Reacting instantly, he grabbed the closest man and, brandishing his .45 caliber pistol at the others, apprehended all three of the soldiers. Accompanied by one of his men, he then approached the second bunker and called for the enemy to surrender.

When the hostile soldiers failed to answer him and threw a grenade which detonated dangerously close to him, Webb detonated a claymore mine in the bunker aperture, accounting for two enemy casualties and disclosing the entrance to a tunnel. Despite the smoke and debris from the explosion and the possibility of enemy soldiers hiding in the tunnel, he then conducted a thorough search, which yielded several items of equipment and numerous documents containing valuable intelligence data. Continuing the assault, he approached a third bunker and was preparing to fire into it when the enemy threw another grenade. Observing the grenade land dangerously close to his companion, Webb simultaneously fired his weapon at the enemy, pushed the Marine away from the grenade and shielded him from the explosion with his own body. Although sustaining painful fragmentation wounds from the explosion, he managed to throw a grenade into the aperture and completely destroy the remaining bunker. ⚓

'IT HELPS KNOWING YOU'RE NOT ALONE'

CLASS OF '65 PARKINSON'S GROUP IS MODEL FOR ALUMNI SUPPORT

The neurologist couldn't tell Mark Muhsam '65 why his hands and feet were going numb.

The Vietnam War veteran found comfort with his U.S. Naval Academy classmates. Each week, members of the Class of 1965 connect over a Zoom virtual meeting call. Part of their "check-in" call is dedicated to current ailments and efforts to navigate a complicated medical system.

Equally important, the classmates have a chance to reconnect socially, trade sea stories and push some of their troubles to the back burner for a bit. These alumni hope other classes will follow their blueprint when it comes to sidestepping common obstacles with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and complex insurance processes. They are also paving a path to strengthen the ties that bind in their golden years.

"It's been a great experience with this group of guys," said Muhsam, a former navigator in C-130s in Vietnam who has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and is a 100 percent disabled veteran. "You hear everybody's collective aches and pains, all of a sudden you don't feel so bad for yourself because somebody else has something wrong, too.

"It's the togetherness, we feel for each other. It's like when we were all back in school. For many guys, it's the highlight of the week."

Tuesday afternoons are the designated Zoom times for the Class of 1965. Mitch Henderson '65 spearheaded the weekly gatherings which have attracted about two dozen classmates, spouses and friends. More than half those participants have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Through research, connecting with experts, and peer-to-peer communications, they learned about the link between Agent Orange and Parkinson's and other diseases.

In addition to helping each other, the Class of 1965 hopes to create an archive of resources and best practices and to connect with other classes to ensure knowledge spreads throughout the alumni community. They aim to eliminate some of the uncertainty and help avoid common health care pitfalls.

As one former '65 Navy pilot with Parkinson's put it, he appreciates the weekly Zoom meetings where classmates share advice, ideas and camaraderie. "This group has kept me going," he said.

Frequent communication is crucial, said Skip Orr '65, who has also been diagnosed with Parkinson's. The former P-3 pilot and Vietnam veteran said consistent meetings allows the participants to get the latest information and to give and receive classmate support. "We can understand each other because we talk once a week," he said. That bond is everything for Rear Admiral Jim Taylor '65, USN (Ret.). "I get a sense of

PARKINSON'S TOOL KIT

Members of the Class of 1965 created a Parkinson's tool kit to assist alumni leaders create and manage a Parkinson's support group. The tool kit can be found at www.usna.com/parkinsons-toolkit. it provides guides for forming a support group, suggestions for the meetings, sharing of resources and experiences.

Parkinson's Tool Kit for Class and Support Group Leaders

PHOTO COURTESY OF MITCH HENDERSON '65

Members of the Classes of 1964, 1965, 1968 and 1973 are working to create support groups for alumni, and their families, who are battling Parkinson's disease.

mutual support," Taylor said. "I'm very grateful. **It helps knowing you're not alone.**"

AGENT ORANGE

Henderson was motivated to rally his classmates after seeing his buddy Brian Donohue '64 and his family in their long journey through Parkinson's disease. Donohue was a dual Bronze Star Vietnam veteran exposed to Agent Orange numerous times. He felt isolated and alone. This made Henderson wonder if there were '65 classmates that felt the same way. Bob Wahlfeld '65, who had been assigned to two vessels doing gunfire support, was the first to raise his hand and the Zoom group started right up.

Agent Orange was a toxic chemical herbicide used to defoliate the jungles of Vietnam and eliminate cover for the Viet Cong. It was used for a decade in Vietnam with the U.S. spraying nearly 20 million gallons and exposing as many as 2.8 million Vietnam War veterans to Agent Orange. As of 2022, at least 328,000 Vietnam veterans had died of Agent Orange-related illnesses and 571,000 affected were still living.

The VA recognizes a connection between Agent Orange exposure and Parkinson's and 18 other diseases. Obtaining VA care and documenting service time in Vietnam can be a daunting experience. The tool kit and support of the alumni community can alleviate some related stress, Henderson said.

VA experts have joined the Class of '65's Zoom calls and shared information regarding Parkinson's disease organizations and available resources.

Henderson's goal is helping alumni and class leaders to start and manage their own health care support groups for members stricken with any number of diseases. Henderson said the Zoom group is a chance to tap into a reliable support system. He said that the caregivers whose journeys are often harder than their ailing husbands have started up Zoom groups too.

"The guys don't complain at all," Henderson said. "They just try to help each other. Alumni need to help alumni and their caregivers and families with health and related issues."