Training Day


U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Graham/Released
Highlights

4 4th Annual Fit Vet Challenge
5 Thrift Store Closing
5 Local Veterans Art Show
6 Awards Nominations
7 Your Chapter Website
7 Future BTL Publication Changes
8 Finding Ralph, Part 2

From the President
Ken Moore, President • Vietnam 1966-67 • US Army Cavalry

Over the past few months I have become slack in providing reports monthly in the newsletter. I will provide reports for the remainder of my term, but I will ask the other officers and committee chairs to start sending in their reports also. The BTL is the only way we as officers and committee chairs communicate with our entire membership. We need to inform our members about the activities and meetings that are planned. These reports need to be done in a timely manner now that we are going to be sending out the BTL every other month, and these dates have to be months in advance.

The time is quickly approaching for our Annual Election of Officers of Chapter 20 for the next two years. The positions that will be open for elections this year are President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. I will not be running again for President. I feel it’s time for me to step down and let someone new with other ideas step up as your President. Serving you over the years has truly been a labor of love, and I know I’ll miss it all and miss seeing you all the time. You are truly a special bunch.

I encourage all of you to consider running for office. The pay and benefits are great (kidding, of course!). If anyone is considering running, do not hesitate to ask me about the positions and what is expected of you.

We are moving forward in the closing of our Thrift Store. I want to thank Rich and the LLC for all the hard work in making this go as smoothly as possible. It’s been nearly 30 years that we have enjoyed the benefits of the income we made from this business. Money will be a little tighter, but I can assure you we will still support the important issues of Veterans and the membership of Chapter 20.
With reports from Washington DC, it is official that all military operations and American forces have now been withdrawn from Iraq. In last month’s BTL, I reported that there are two members of our armed forces who are still missing from the Gulf Wars. They are Sgt. Bowe R. Bergdahl, who was captured in Afghanistan, and SSgt. Ahmed Al-Taie, who was captured in Iraq. After our troops have withdrawn and our presence is no longer needed in Iraq, let us all pray that SSgt Al-Taie will not be forever lost or forgotten. Our Government must and will continue the search for both of these men. We owe that to them and their families.

News reports from the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) and Joint Prisoners of War/Missing in Action (JPAC) this month indicate that another MIA from the Vietnam War has been recovered and identified, bringing the total of missing Americans from the Vietnam War to 1,677.

**1st LT. Robert Elwood Bennett III,** (No photo available) US Air Force from Springfield, NJ was the pilot of the 2nd F4C aircraft in a team of two that were assigned to a close air support mission in Tra Vinh Province, South Vietnam on December 13, 1967. After the two aircraft had delivered their ordnance, the crewmembers were instructed to drop their canisters in a nearby river. They acknowledged the transmission and proceeded to the destination. Immediately thereafter, Lt. Bennett and his co-pilot were seen ejecting with good parachutes from their aircraft. Lt. Bennett and his Co-pilot landed in the Song Co Chien River, which separates Vinh Binh and Kien Hoa Provinces on the southern coast of Vietnam. One crewman was rescued uninjured, but Lt. Bennett and his parachute sank before rescue personnel could reach him. He was officially listed as a KIA/BNR. The remains of Lt. Robert Elwood Bennett III were recovered from Vietnam on April 13, 2010 and he was identified on November 15, 2011. Further information about his return and interment are not available at this time. After 44 long years, we all welcome Lt. Bennett home to his family and country.

There are also reports of the recovery and identification of the following:

- **Sgt. Joseph A. Bowen,** US Army was reported missing on November 30, 1950 during the battle at the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains were identified on November 7, 2011.
- **SFC. Charles A. Roy,** US Army was reported missing on November 5, 1950 when he was captured by Chinese forces. He died in a POW camp in North Korea in 1951. His remains were identified on November 7, 2011.
- **Pfc. George A. Porter,** US Army was reported missing on February 13, 1951 in the Hoengsong Massacre and died in a POW camp in North Korea. His remains were identified on November 15, 2011.

**Nominating Committee**

Chuck Macaluso, Chair

The Annual Meeting & Elections will be held April 12, 2012 at 6:00 pm.

**Location:** Italian American Sports Club - 1250 Buffalo Road

**Driving Directions:** The Club is located on Buffalo Road close to the intersection of Howard Road, directly across from the stone quarry, next to the Eagles Club and the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

**From the East:** Heading westbound on 490, exit Mount Read Blvd and turn left; southbound on Mt. Read to Buffalo Road circle, turn right; westbound on Buffalo Road, 1.4 miles; the Italian-American Sports Club is on the right side.

**From the West:** Heading eastbound on 490, exit 33 eastbound, Buffalo Road (Gates Center); head eastbound on Buffalo Road; continue past Howard Road; the Italian-American Sports Club will be on the left side in about .5 mile.

**Positions for nominations:**

- Four Executive (4) – President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer
- Three Board (3) – Directors

The “new” Nominating Committee will also be elected by the membership that evening. A “to date” slate of candidates will be finalized by February 15 and published in the March issue of the BTL.

In order to vote in the Annual Election, voters must be a member for at least 30 days.

Only paid members with a DD214 on file by 28 February of previous fiscal year are eligible to vote. (For example – 28 February 2012 to vote April 2012).

A quorum is defined as 10% of VVA 20 members.

**ELECTIONS cont’d on page 7**
Attention Chapter 20 members: We have now entered into our 4th year of good natured kidding with each other. All the 2012 New Year resolutions about becoming more health conscious can be obtained and are well within our reach. So along with all the good intentions, well wishes and “sure thing” attitudes that we convey to each other, it is time to get serious and invest time in ourselves, now and all through the remainder of 2012.

How are you going to do that, you ask? Well, for the most part if you can build on the small steps that you are already taking, the results will be seen and felt in no time. Here’s what I mean.

Begin with the idea that you will do a few things each day. You don’t need bold proclamations about swearing off this or that food item, or bad habit (smoking as an example) or running the New York City Marathon, but keep it simple. Think about eating less, moving more for example. Things that may have a huge impact on your overall well-being can be accomplished by small simple easy to remember steps or actions.

Look at packages to see what ingredients they contain, how many servings are in the package and how many calories each serving will have. So for example, my favorite Wegman’s cookies are the famous chocolate chip mini cookies. Disregard the ingredients for the moment, but there are 16 servings per container, 2 cookies per serving, at 120 calories per serving (50 of those are FAT) and I love them. There’s no way I’m going to eat just two cookies. So I overdose on the cookies and blow my calorie intake by a country mile, and BINGO, after a long winter of inactivity, I’ve gained pounds. NOT GOOD, EH! So what’s a person to do?

Of course, I could force myself to eat fruit instead. I’ll try, but perhaps the best way to combat this dilemma is to psych myself out. How, you ask? Well for me, I’ve learned to take the damned two cookies out of the package, put them on the plate, and savor the taste. Sure it’s not fun, but I like that better than ten more minutes on the treadmill. Again, not preaching (we have a chaplain for that), but I try to reduce 100 calories a day from my eating, and move a 100 or more steps per day to increase my activity, especially in the cold weather months.

Do something! Try mall walking, or perhaps your school district will have a similar program. Think about portion size, in the case of adding extra unwanted calories, size does count!

Try and cut back gradually. This is a long-term process, and the daily little things or small steps really do count over the long haul. Just do it!

We all have it within our control to take the steps to be more fit and healthy. The New Year is always a great time to set the stage and begin the process. We can all encourage each other to give support and assistance, but ultimately it is our own individual choices that count.

Some people use food diaries, if you think that writing something down will help you, but all means do it.

The point here is that we all have it within our control to take the steps to be more fit and healthy. The New Year is always a great time to set the stage and begin the process. We can all encourage each other to give support and assistance, but ultimately it is our own individual choices that count.

Since the first two years of our friendly competition was won by our brothers in the Marine Corps, and last year the Navy beat the rest of us, there is a lot of pressure on the Air Force and Army to step up on the scales and weigh less at the finish line this year.

Let’s bring it on - make the efforts, stick to your program, eat less, move more, see a new you at the end of the 4th Annual Fit Vet Challenge!

FIT VET UPDATE

At the kick-off, 58 people stepped on the scales, representing all branches except the Coast Guard. To help you see where you are in relation to your comrades, here are the average weights by branch:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Average Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>26.0 220.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>12.0 224.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>8.0 217.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>USMC</td>
<td>12.0 198.7</td>
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Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 20 Thrift Store, LLC announces the closing of the thrift store located at 1199 E. Main Street. The decision was made due to increased local competition and the reluctance to invest capital improvements to compete in the current marketplace versus using our resources to promote our causes. The thrift store has existed for over 25 years, and has been the major source of revenue for Chapter 20.

Profits from the thrift store have made it possible for the organization to fund numerous projects, some of which include the veterans walk, helping to endow the memorial at Highland Park, endowment of reference material on Vietnam at the Central Library and funding the Oral History Project in conjunction with the Central Library. These projects support veterans’ issues, educational material and outreach, community projects and many other worthwhile local charities. These endowments and gifts are part of the legacy of Chapter 20 members.

The LLC will continue to accept car donations; information about this may be obtained by calling 585-224-8484 or at the chapter website www.VVA20.org. Chapter 20 will also receive additional financial support from the household goods donation program now being conducted in the Rochester Metro area by our national organization.

Local Veterans Art Show

Artwork by Veterans will be on display to the public at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center on Wednesday, March 7, 2012 from 10 am to 1 pm. It is estimated that over 40 pieces of art from among 15 different categories will be exhibited. Categories consist of fine art such as painting, drawing, sculpture and photography; applied art that includes ceramics, woodcarving, needlework and leatherwork; and craft kits such as string art, fabric art and wood building. Local artists will judge the artwork to determine first, second and third place in each category. The first place winning pieces will advance on to the national level where they will compete with entries submitted by Veterans from other VA facilities around the country. Veterans are encouraged to enter art work by February 24, 2012.

The competition is an annual event that provides Veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities the opportunity to participate in creative self-expression in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music as part of their therapy, and to gain recognition for these artistic accomplishments. First place winners from the national competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, hosted this year by the VA Boston Healthcare System in Boston, Massachusetts the week of October 8-15 with the art exhibit and stage show performance on Sunday, October 14.

If you wish to enter artwork into the competition or have any questions please contact Hank Riegal Recreation Therapy Supervisor Canandaigua VA Recreation Therapy Department at (585) 393-7371.
With our Annual Dinner coming up in April, it is time to think about those who serve the Chapter as well as all veterans. There are several awards given each year – and we are fortunate to have many in both our Chapter and our community who work diligently to serve veterans. Consider those around you and nominate them for one or more of the following awards:

**Awards**

**COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**
The Community Service Award recognizes a group, organization or individual who has demonstrated a strong sense of community service and who favorably recognizes and relates to Vietnam Veterans’ issues.

My nomination for this award is ____________________________________ because ______________________________________

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**VETERANS’ SERVICE AWARD**
The Veterans’ Service Award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated outstanding dedication in improving the condition of Vietnam Veterans and/or the community. (There may be up to 3 Veterans’ Service Awards presented annually.)

My nomination for this award is ____________________________________ because ______________________________________

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**THE ROGER ROBACH AWARD**
The Roger Robach Award is given to an individual who has spent a minimum of ten years working for the betterment of all veterans in New York State.

My nomination for this award is ____________________________________ because ______________________________________

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**DON AND RORI MURRELL HUMANITARIAN AWARD**
The Don and Rori Murrell Humanitarian Award is given to an individual who has accomplished an extraordinary effort on behalf of active duty military personnel and/or veterans and their families. (All individuals are to be considered for this reward regardless of Chapter or veteran affiliation.)

My nomination for this award is ____________________________________ because ______________________________________

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______________________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Please consider nominating those who you feel are deserving of these awards and submit your nominations to the Secretary, Joe Peck at jpeck2@rochester.rr.com. You can also email Kathy Gleason at kathy14470@msn.com for an electronic version of these nomination forms. Deadline for all nominations is March 15.
Future BTL Publication Changes

It was decided by the Board of Directors to reduce publication of the Between the Lines to every other month, starting with the April 2012 issue. This was primarily in response to the closing of the Thrift Store and anticipated reduction in revenue for the Chapter. The BTL has always been a source of pride for our membership and we have national recognition – John Rowan himself suggested the Chapter Newsletter of the Year award (presently at every Convention) be nicknamed the Chapter 20 Newsletter award! You will see some changes in layout. We will no longer be selling ads, for example, deciding instead to make that space available for essential news and events. Please bear with us as we find ways to work smarter with the BTL in trying to reduce our expenses as much as possible without sacrificing the objectives of the publication itself. For more details, a list of deadlines, etc. feel free to email Kathy at kathy14470@msn.com.

Do you know a veteran who is homeless?

The VA’s National Homeless Veterans Hotline

The Hotline is staffed at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center in conjunction with the National Suicide Prevention services. Studies show a huge correlation with needs required by one or the other services provided at the time of the call.

1-877-424-3838
24/7 365 days/per year

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24/7 365 days/per year
It was Friday and I woke up at six am as usual. It was Friday, so it meant I would be going to the gym as I do every Friday, Monday and Wednesday. This has been my routine for many years while I was working and I continued to go even after I retired. I needed some anchor to my working past in my daily retirement routine. It was mid-March and still a little cold outside. Driving to the gym I began to think about boot camp, my shipmates, and Pearl and it continued that morning as I returned from the gym and said goodbye to my wife as she drove off to work. After clearing the breakfast dishes I went upstairs to our home office. It was about nine-thirty when I sat at the iMac and keyed in USS Maury in the Google box. I was surprised to see a site pop up. It was the official site of the USS Maury AGS 16 complete with a picture of the Maury in the header and links to pictures of reunions; pictures that shipmates had sent in of their tours. I was amazed to see some of my old friends in the pictures and sailors from years before my tour in 1967-68. These young smiling faces, feeling the sun on their faces as the camera sealed their youth forever in a snap shot. These faces were old now, a lot different, more lines and less hair on their heads, more wrinkles and less smiles on their faces, or maybe not. Some were probably gone recently or long gone to their Maker leaving just these pictures behind for us to remember them by. Damn that feeling of getting old, it was back again. "Quit griping and get on with it," I said out loud and continued to view the pictures and other sections of the site.

I clicked on the message board on the home page and found a familiar name, Tonie Morris. Looks like Tonie was asking if anyone heard from Danny Blanks, another familiar name. There wasn’t any reply to Tonie’s inquiry, so it looked like he hadn’t found Danny yet. I looked at all the previous reunions and was surprised to see that the first reunion was held in 2003 was in Buffalo, NY not more than 75 miles from where I lived in Rochester. Damn, why did it take me so long to do this? I pulled up all the pictures of each reunion and found a few guys that I had known. I didn’t see Mike, Danny or Ralph, but I did see Tonie Morris, Dennis Mack and Terry Gann.

Once again my thoughts flashed back to 1967, but this time I was already assigned to work in Supply and Dennis, or Mack as he wanted to be called, was my 2nd class Petty Officer. He was the man in charge of all items that left the Supply area. Mack was a good guy even though he had this crazy love for Country Western music, or shit kicking music as it was so affectionately known by all the non-country western music fans. I had to listen to that twangy shit for hours every day when he was on duty. It was Johnny Cash, Conway Twitty, Hank Williams and Roy Acuff over and over again. It drove me freaking insane initially, but I soon learned how to block it out. Funny how years later I learned to appreciate Country, but by then the twanging was out. Now it’s the new Country Music. Mack was from Buffalo, NY, a town several hundred miles northwest from New York City. He had an accent, but of course he said that he had an accent and was constantly exaggerating the NYC accent whenever he was around Mike and me. We ignored him. Mack was also much older than me. He was twenty-four and I was nineteen, he was also married and I wasn’t. For the most part we got along fine, except for the shit kicking music. Life in Supply wasn’t bad - we had air conditioning.

Searching the website, I noticed that Terry Gann was the Webmaster and remembered that Terry was on the Maury when I was on, so I sent him an email asking if he had any information on Mike, Danny, Ralph, Tonie or Mack. Terry wrote back the next day and gave me the addresses and telephones for Mack and Tonie. He didn’t have any information on Mike, Danny or Ralph. In the meantime I had been searching on the web and found several possibilities for Mike and Danny. I found a possible daughter for Mike in a small town north of New York City and remembered that Mike had lived upstate in Nyack and thought this could be a possibility. I called the number and after the introductions she said that her Dad’s name was Michael and he was in the Navy. I gave her my phone number and asked her to call him to see if he was interested in talking about old times.

I called Mack next and he answered the phone on the second ring. It was the same voice I remembered down in the supply room with the shit kicking music in the back ground.

"Hey, you old salt, how have you been?" I said.

"Who’s this?" Mack said his voice a little gravelly.

"Well, I didn’t expect you to remember my voice, but I did recognize yours, it’s Vito we were shipmates on the Maury together back in 1967. How are you?"

It was quiet for a second or two then it must have kicked in and Mack’s voice lit up. “Son of the bitch, I do remember you. How are you? Where, er, how did you find me? Why did you find me? Not that I’m complaining or anything, but it’s been, what thirty, forty years?” Mack said.

“IT’s been 43 years and it’s a long story, but first, are you busy, did I catch you at a bad time?"

“NO. Phyllis and I were just having a cup of coffee when you called.”

“Well, it all started yesterday morning. I had this strange feeling that I should find out what happened to my old shipmates from the Maury. I didn’t say anything to my wife Geri because she would just say, ‘Un-huh, good,’ and go to work. Anyway, after Geri went to work I signed onto the iMac, found the USS Maury Website. I recognized Terry’s name, he was listed as the Webmaster on the Maury site. I took out the sixty-eight cruise book and found his picture. He put on some weight, but it was Terry. I sent Terry an email asking if he had any information on you and some of my other buddies. Terry sent me your email address and said you lived in Hamburg. You know, this is freaking incredible, I lived in Buffalo, well Amherst and Snyder for three and a half years from seventy-four to seventy-seven. I also had a good friend from work who lived in Hamburg, we visited with him and his family many times. We were probably within miles of each other and we never knew it. Shit, that’s something else.”

“Well, Phyllis and I have been here since seventy-three. Raised our daughters here,” Mack said. “You know, I always wondered what some of my shipmates were doing, but I never knew how to get in touch. I have talked with Brandt, but he’s a funny guy and doesn’t talk much and he never calls me back so I just gave up. But I have thought about you guys.”

“Yeah, I know the feeling. Mike Gorglione and I even met a year after we got out since we lived close by, I think it was in seventy-one or two. My wife and I tried fixing Mike up with a friend of ours, but that didn’t pan out. He lived up in Nyack at the time and my wife and I lived in the Bronx so we didn’t live that close, but there was always the phone. Then we just lost contact when we moved to Buffalo in
October seventy-four. I don’t know, we just had our own lives to live and just went on. I’m now retired and have a lot of time on my hands so the urge to find you guys is stronger than before.”

We were quiet for a few seconds, both of us not knowing what to say next, then, “So guess what?” I said. “I’m scheduled for an MRI at the Buffalo Veteran’s Administration Hospital and thought we could get together for lunch afterwards, my treat. My appointment is in the morning. I think it should be out by eleven or so, I could meet you somewhere in Buffalo, or I could drive down to Hamburg and we could have lunch in town. Bring your wife, of course. My appointment is on Friday, April second. Say, I was watching the Food Channel and they highlighted two places to eat in Buffalo that were outstanding. Actually, one is in Amherst. The one in Buffalo is noted for their baloney and onion sandwiches on homemade bread, the one in Amherst is supposed to have the best hamburgers in town. Take your pick, my treat. We could continue our reminiscing at lunch.”

“That’s fine. Oh wait, that’s Good Friday, can’t eat meat, Catholic,” Mack said.

“Damn! Me too. I forgot. OK, it’s a fish fry then. Any ideas?”

“Well, there’s a place down here that Phyllis and I like and it’s right on the lake,” Mack said.

“OK, I’ll drive down after the MRI and pick you and Phyllis up. I have a GPS and your address so I’ll call you when I get out of the hospital.”

“Sounds good. See you on April second. Take care,” Mack said.

“You too,” I said, and just like that I began the rebuilding and reacquainting process with my past.

I was a little nervous about seeing Mack again, a little excited too. I had no idea what to expect. When I last saw Mack we both forty-three years younger. I was nineteen and he must have been in his twenties, probably around twenty-four or five. He was married and lived off base, but I never met his wife Phyllis.

Why was I doing this? Why now, after all these years? I looked at the pictures of Mike and I, Danny and I, and Ralph and I on my desk. Who was I looking for, my shipmates or my youth? I know I could find my shipmates if they were still alive, but I could never find my youth, only the memories, and they were fading. There was that feeling again, but now it was a feeling of hopefulness. I knew there was little hope in capturing the same feelings that the nineteen year old guy in the fading pictures was experiencing, but I still wanted to see what would become of this.

The next day Mike called before noon and after the first five minutes it felt like there wasn’t a forty year gap in our lives. We had so much in common. I had four daughters, Mike had two daughters and one son. I have four grandchildren, Mike has one. I was married for thirty-nine years, Mike was divorced after fourteen years, but at least he was married like I was. All right, so there weren’t that many things in common. Anyway, we talked for almost an hour, and either my hearing was going or because I was away from the New York accent so long, but I kept hearing myself say, “Huh? What? Ehh?” whenever Mike spoke. I think it was a combination of both, but by the time we ended the call we were promising to call each other before the next forty years passes. “Yeah, yeah, I’ll call ya. Hey, I gotta go and get ready for work. Some of us still have to work for a living ya know,” Mike said.

“Right. All right, how about once a month then?” I said.

“OK, once a month. I’ll call you,” Mike said and we hung up.

I had a feeling that we would keep in touch. It felt good talking to someone who I knew when I was nineteen years old, single, looking for adventure outside of New York City and in the Navy. I kept thinking of the times we had in boot camp and then on the Maury. Great times. Or was it that anything that was so attached to a time when we were young would seem great even if they weren’t so? I don’t know. I just know that it felt good talking with Mike. We were nineteen again. But even though we were in boot camp and on the Maury together for a year, Mike and I weren’t as close as Ralph and I were. What would it be like talking to Ralph? Would it go as smoothly as it did with Mike and Dennis? Would we have anything in common? Was he married? How many children or grandchildren does he have? What did he do for a living? Forty-three years is a lot of time since we said goodbye in Subic Bay, I had to find Ralph and find out.

I was back on the PC trying to find a relative or someone that might know where Ralph was living. There were many McKibbons. I looked at the clock, it was twelve-thirty-five. I knew that Foley, Alabama was an hour behind us so it should be a good time to get some listings for McKibbon. I thought about Ralph being medi-vac’d from the ship at Subic, the seriousness of it all and thought maybe I should call the local funeral home to see if they had any records for Ralph. I hesitated for a second thinking how morbid that thought was, but said what the hell, I wouldn’t have to go further if the searching ended there. So I called. The woman answering the call at the funeral home was very friendly. I explained my situation and hoped she would help. She said she could look at their earlier records for me, but it would take some time and that I would have to call her back on Tuesday. Then she offered to look up any McKibbons in the local phone book. She found six names and gave me the numbers. I thanked her and said I’d call back on Tuesday to see what she found. I called five numbers for McKibbon, but none of them knew Ralph and at the sixth number no one was home. I’d have to get back to that one later.
So far I was making good progress. I spoke with Mike and Mack. I was about to try the number that I had for Danny, when the phone rang. It was Tonie Morris’s wife Georgina.

Georgina said that she got my number from Terry Gann and hoped that I wouldn’t mind her calling. “No, it’s not a problem. I was going to call Tonie after I tried this number I found for Danny. I think it may be him, but it’s a Florida number,” I said.

“That’s Danny, he lives in Milton, Florida. Tonie just got off the phone with him. They must have talked for an hour.” She said, “Here let me put Tonie on.”

Tonie and I talked for a while. We caught up on the family, working and miscellaneous stuff. I could see why he and Danny spoke for an hour, Tonie was a slow talker and so was Danny. After exchanging telephone numbers and addresses we said we’d keep in touch and ended the call. I wondered what made Tonie begin his search for his shipmates. Why was he trying to locate Danny now at the same time I was trying to locate my shipmates? “What was the trigger?” I said out loud as I looked down at a picture of Tonie, Ralph, Danny and I taken forty-four years ago. I should have asked him, and made a mental note to do so at the next call.

I dialed Danny’s number and waited as the ring tone beat out its call.

“Hello,” he said quietly and there was no mistaking it. That was Danny’s voice, a little more gravelly, but it was him. I could feel my heart pounding as I notched up one more contact on my mental call list.

“I’m great. I was just talking with Georgina and Tonie Morris. He said that he spoke with you and gave me your number. This was the same phone number I found, but wasn’t sure it was you because of the Florida address. Werent you from Birmingham, Alabama?”

“No, I’m from Alexander City. I moved here when I was transferred to Whiting Naval Air Base. When I retired from the Navy I got a job with the Santa Rosa School District and we decided to make Milton our home.”

“So what’s been going on since I last saw you forty-three years ago?” I asked.

“Damn, it’s been that long? Hey, a heck of a lot. You know, I’ve spoken to Mike Gorglione and Dennis Mack. Remember them?” I then repeated the story of how this whole search began.

Danny said, “You know I was never as close to my shipmates as I was to the guys on the Maury. I guess because it was my first tour of duty, especially you, Ralph and Mike cause we were in boot camp and all, but after the Maury it wasn’t as much fun. I guess it became a job and not an adventure. I wasn’t a kid anymore looking for fun.”

“You know, I think you’re right,” I said. “In the beginning it was an adventure, it was the first time away from home, for me anyway, it was exciting. As we get older the excitement dies down and it becomes everyday life, I guess.”

We spoke about Danny’s other ships and ports for a while. We got to a point where we had talked ourselves out and just stopped.

“OK, I will talk to Angie and let you know, but I would really like you to contact me and the rest. This was great. I wish we could get together one of these days,” Danny said.

“Well, there’s going to be another Maury Reunion in two-thousand-eleven,” I said. “It’s going to be in Norfolk, Virginia. I’m going with Geri, why don’t you and Angie come too? I’ll see if Mike will come. I’m sure that Mack will since he went to several before.”

“Of course. Call whenever you feel like it. We’re both retired and what the hell, nothing else to do. Let’s call at least every month,” I said.

“Well, can do, but I have a better idea. Why don’t you and Geri take a ride down here? The beaches are really beautiful down here and the weather is hot. You guys can stay with us, we have two empty rooms, I know Angie won’t mind. Think about it. Next month Tonie and Georgina are going to a wedding somewhere in Florida and they are going to stop by and stay with us for a couple of days before they go,” Danny said.

“All right I’ll see what Geri says. She hates to impose on people, especially if we just met them,” I said and we ended the call.

I thought about it. Would be nice to take a ride down there. I’d like to see Danny and meet Angie. We could ride down to Foley, it’s not far from Danny’s, and see if we could find Ralph. That would be cool. Don’t think Geri would go for it though, we’ll see.
Bereavement Focus Group

Second Wednesday of Every Month
6:30 - 7:30 pm
Army Strong Community Center
2035 Goodman St. North, Suite 103
Rochester, NY 14609

RSVP and for more info contact:
Marianne Sernoffsky at 585-339-3308
marianne.w.sernoffsky.cfr@us.army.mil
or
Christina Griffith at 585-338-7400, x2225
christina.m.griffith@us.army.mil

Help Base Greater Rochester

(www.hbrochester.org) is an online resource for veterans, service members, and their families in Monroe, Livingston, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates Counties. The mission of Help Base Greater Rochester is to enhance services by coordinating, mobilizing and educating the community-at-large about the issues facing veterans, service members, and their families and advocating for the necessary services to ensure that these community members can regain and maintain their physical, emotional, and economic well-being.

Vietnam Veterans of America

Car Donations 8:30am-5:00pm
Truck Pick-up 9am-4:30pm
(weather permitting)

DAVID J. KAUFFMAN POST #41
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SUPPORTS THE VIETNAM VETS
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Greece Memorial Post 206
The Newest Post in Monroe County

Meeting the 3rd Thursday of the month 6:30 - 7:45 pm
Army Strong Community Center
2035 Goodman St. North, Suite 103
Rochester, NY 14609
RSVP and for more info contact:
Marianne Sernoffsky at 585-339-3308
marianne.w.sernoffsky.cfr@us.army.mil
or
Christina Griffith at 585-338-7400, x2225
christina.m.griffith@us.army.mil

Mary Anne Vitticore
Women Veterans Program Manager
VA Health Care
Upstate New York
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400 Fort Hill Ave.
Canandaigua, NY 14424
p:(585) 393-7621
c:(585) 490-9370
www.visn2.va.gov
maryanne.vitticore@va.gov
The days flew by and Friday, April second came quickly. I drove over to the Buffalo VA Hospital and had the MRI done on my shoulder. I was out at ten forty-five and called Mack to see if we were still on for lunch. We were still on, so I keyed Mack’s address into my GPS and I was off.

It only took me twenty minutes from downtown Buffalo to get to Hamburg. Mack and Phyllis’s house backs up to the NYS Thruway, just one more “funny” thing. Funny because I passed their house many times when I was working for Citibank. I would travel down to the Silver Creek branch to audit our branch operations several times a year. Of course, I never knew that Mack and Phyllis were probably inside, with a cup of coffee in their hands, just talking about things. Weird.

It was still early for lunch, so Phyllis offered me a cup of coffee. Mack pulled out his Maury Cruise books and we talked about our lives as I turned the pages back forty-three years. It was amazing. The smells from his cruise books were the same as mine and for a second or two I crashed back in time and thought I heard shit-kicking music. No, not really, but the smell of his cruise books were the same. Must have been the plastic book cover.

After a while I could hear my stomach growling so we closed the books and went to lunch, had a great fish fry, talked for another hour then drove back to Mack’s house. On the way back we passed a familiar street on the lake side that I drove on many times when I visited with my old buddy Bill and his family. Again, another “funny” thing, I could have passed Mack and Phyllis as I drove to Bill’s house and never knew it. Just weird. Ships passing in the night and never knowing it.

Mack and I talked for another hour before I finally said I had to go. Mack and Phyllis walked me out to the car, we said goodbye and promised to keep in touch. As I drove away I cursed “Shit! I forgot to take a picture of Mack, Phyllis and myself. Well, next time.”

During the hour long drive home from Mack’s I thought about what I managed to do in the past two weeks. What was I doing and why? Where would this re-acquaintance lead to and what’s the point? I answered myself as I drove home. “The point is, you guys were friends on board a ship during a time in your life when your eyes were wide open, just waiting for something to happen and it did. It was an exciting time, near the end of the Sixties. So much shit happening in the world around you. You went on a cruise to a war zone, to exotic foreign shores where people were way different from you. People were protesting the war at home, there was rioting in the streets of Harlem, Detroit and other cities across the country. You were away from your family and friends and you survived. You made friends outside of your comfort zone. Friendships that just needed kick-starting to be rejuvenated. If they didn’t want to be friends again then they would have said so, but instead they were open for another go around.”

I didn’t expect to visit with Mack, but it seemed that I was destined to do so because of the hospital appointment I had with the Buffalo VA for my MRI. A week after I made that first call, I was sitting down with Mack having a cup of coffee and talking about the good old days, how crazy is that? How and why did that dove tail together? And Tonie, why was he trying to contact Danny at the same time I was and would he have found me if I didn’t wake up that Friday and search for the Maury site on the web?

Why are they so important to me? Talking or thinking about Mike, Ralph, Danny, Mack or Tonie has a very different feeling. I don’t know, I can’t explain it, but it’s a lot different from when I visit with friends that I haven’t seen for a while. I have friends that I’ve known since I was twelve or thirteen years old and we now live three hundred and fifty miles apart, and I sometimes don’t see them for at least one or two years, but when we do get together, we hug, we kiss and it’s like it was just yesterday since the last time we spoke, but it’s still not the same. Yeah we call occasionally, but the feeling is not the same as when I talk with Danny or Mike. It’s weird, I can’t explain it. My connection to the guys from the Navy is so closely tied to a special time in my life that I must love and want to be back there again that just by talking to them I am mentally transported back in time. Those guys are my time machine. That’s crazy, but I just don’t get that feeling when I’m with my childhood friends, and I’ve known them longer and they’re more like family.

I reached out and found four out of the five shipmates. Would I find Ralph? Where the hell was he?

I think it was mid-April when Danny called. Wanted to see how I was doing and how things went with my MRI and lunch with Mack. I brought him up to date on both and we started talking about how warm it was already down there in Florida, over one hundred degrees and it wasn’t even summer yet! I’ve been to Florida many times, but was never in the Florida panhandle.

“Say, did you talk with Geri about coming down for a while and staying with us? I told you Tonie and Georgina are coming down in May and are staying with us. The weather is already hot down here. You and Geri can stay with us, we have plenty of room,” Danny said, I could hear the excitement in his voice and hated to disappoint him.

“Hey, I’d love to, but it would be tough for Geri to take time off of work now and besides she’s not in the mood for a long drive. I’ll talk it over with her again and let you know.”

After a while longer we hung up. I thought about the drive down. I always loved our driving vacations to Florida with the family. Geri and I drove many times with the kids and twice by ourselves when the kids were on their own. It could be fun. I mentioned it again to Geri that night and she gave it the “Can’t do it now, too busy at work, why don’t you go. Fly down.”

That night I checked out the cost of a ticket to and from and it was outrageously expensive. By the time I add on the car rental and hotel it would be over a thousand dollars. Hey, I like Danny, but not that much. So I bagged that idea....but it would be good to see Danny again and spend hours talking about the old times and his twenty-two years in the Navy. I knew that if I kept on thinking about it I would talk myself into a long ride south.

That idea kept banging around in my head and a couple of weeks later I called Mike to see how he was doing.

“How’s it going?” I said.

“Not bad, just getting ready for work. You know some of us have to work for a living.”
“Yeah, yeah, so what, that’s what you get for being younger than the rest of us. Hey I called Danny last week or the week before I think, he’s doing OK. He said he spoke with Tonie, and Tonie and his wife Georgina are going down to Florida for a wedding, I think next week. They were going to stop by Danny’s for a few days and visit with them. He wanted to know if Geri and I wanted to come down sometime and stay with them. I would love to, but Geri can’t take off from work, busy time of the year for her, so she said I should go. I checked the flights down to Pensacola and shit, they are expensive from Rochester. What are you doing next month? Want to take a ride down?”

Mike was quiet for several seconds then said. “Yeah, that sounds good. I have a lot of vacation time and could take a few days off. When were you thinking of going?”

“How about first or second week in June? We could leave mid-week and stay for the weekend. Wait, I’m looking at a calendar now. Let’s go down on June tenth and come back on the fourteenth or fifteenth.”

“OK, that gives me enough time to give my place a heads up.” Mike said.

“I’ll call Danny and see if that’s OK with him. I’m pretty sure that Tonie and Georgina will be gone by then, although I would like to see Tonie and meet Georgina. I’ll look up some motels in the area. We can bunk together.”

“All right, let me know. How are we going down?

“I can swing down and pick you up and we’ll go down together. Split the cost of the gas, food and motel.”

“I can drive too. I have a Nissan truck. Great ride. What are you driving?”

“A Honda Accord. It might be more comfortable in my car. What do you think?”

“Either way, I’m OK.”

“All right, I’ll call Danny and get back to you probably tomorrow. Same time,” I said and we ended the call. I called Danny, but he wasn’t home. Called later that day and he was very excited about the idea of Mike and I coming down. Wanted to know if Geri was coming also, but I explained why she couldn’t.

“Well, I know Angie will be disappointed that Geri won’t be able to make it, but happy to finally see you and Mike.” I called Mike the next day and told him we were on for June tenth. “Road Trip!” Mike said. “We’ll have a blast. The weather should be great this time of year. Clear sailing all the way down.”

It took a couple of days, but I waited for the right moment to let Geri know what the plan was.

“So you don’t mind?”

“Why would I mind? You’re over sixty, you can do what you want.” Seemed to me like there was frost in the air.

“Well, I wanted you to come. You can still come with us.”

“Can’t. We’re really busy at the office. I told you three people have left the office and we are at a peak time for sales. Besides, why are you doing this now?”

“I don’t know, it’s just a feeling, I can’t explain it, just something I have to do. It would be easier for us to find Ralph. I haven’t been able to locate him online and...”

“I just don’t understand the urgency of this trip, why now? What’s so important about finding Ralph? You haven’t thought about these guys in over forty years. Why now? Is this your mid-life crisis thing? Instead of a red car are you looking to get back to your youth through this trip, meeting with the guys you were what, nineteen with? I don’t understand. Are you really going to find Ralph or are you finding you?”

“What? What do you mean ‘finding me?’ I don’t have to find me, I know who I am,” I said back to her, just a little too quickly.

Geri took a deep breath. “Look, I’m sorry, I don’t have to understand. You want to go, then go. Really, I’m OK with it. Really.”

I was looking at Geri as she was talking and hearing what she was saying felt like the truth. Was I really looking for Ralph or was I finding me? Not today’s sixty-two me, but the nineteen year old me. And was I looking at an almost sixty year old Geri or a sixteen year old Geri, in her pink dress, smiling, standing by the drapes in her Grandmother’s house in Florida? God. The feeling was so strong. Yes, maybe this trip was my mid-life crisis, my mini-escape from reality, but I was also on a mission to find Ralph. I had found all my other shipmates. Ralph was MIA. Where the hell was Ralph?

To be continued...
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION  VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, CHAPTER 20

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AND INFORMATION

Greater Rochester Vietnam
Veterans Memorial ................................. 585-753-7275
(enter 9; enter 2 to leave a message)
Ira Jacobson American Legion
Post #474 ............................................. 663-7030
VA Clinic - Westfall Road .......................... 463-2600
Vet Center ............................................. 232-5040
Veterans Administration .......................... 800-827-1000
Monroe County Veterans Service Agency ... 753-6040
e-mail: serviceofficer@yahoo.com
Veterans Benefits Hotline ....................... 800-827-1000
Veterans Bill of Rights .............................. 800-342-3358
VA Medical Center in Batavia ................... 585-297-1000
VA Hospital in Gallup ............................... 716-834-9200
VA Medical Center in Canandaigua ............ 394-2000
VA Medical Center in Bath ........................ 607-664-4000
V.V. of America in Washington ................. 800-VVA-1316
V.V. Memorial Fund “The Wall” .................. 202-393-0090
Nat’l Lge. of Fam. MIA/POW
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Richards House ...................................... 506-9060
The Resource Center ............................... 546-4250
Stars & Stripes ....................................... 546-3524
Persian Gulf Vets, Inc. .............................. 385-4097
Operation Welcome Home ....................... 234-4694
National Caregivers Support Line 1-855-260-3274
Homeless Hotline ................................. 877-424-3838
Suicide Hotline ..................................... 800-273-8255

WEB SITES/E-MAIL ADDRESSES

Veterans Widows International Network:
members@aol.com/vetwindows
NYS Department Health: www.health.state.ny.us/nyvets
Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Highland Park:
www.rochestervietnammemorial.org/The_Memorial.html
Operation Welcome Home:
www.operationwelcomehome.org
VVA New York State Council:
www.nyvietnamvets.org
Veterans Affairs:
www.VeteransAffairs.gov

MISCELLANEOUS

VVA Vehicle Donations ....................... 224-8484
VVA Chapter 20 ...................... info@vva20.org · 482-7396
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24/7 365 days/per year

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FEBRUARY 2012

2 THU  • Groundhog Day
6 MON  • Board of Directors, 7:00 pm
9 THU  • General Membership Meeting, 6:30pm (Italian American Sports Club, 1250 Buffalo Road)
12–18  • National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans* is recognized the week of February 14th each year
14 TUE  • Happy Valentine’s Day!
19 SUN  • U.S. Marines landed on Iwo Jima, 1945
20 MON  • Presidents’ Day
22 WED  • Ash Wednesday
23 THU  • Iwo Jima Day - U. S. Marines raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi (Battle of Iwo Jima) 1945
24 FRI  • Operation Desert Storm Ground Campaign began, 1991
28 TUE  • M*A*S*H TV Series final episode airs February 28, 1983
29 WED  • Leap Day!

The week of February 14 each year is your opportunity to say thank you to a special group of men and women, more than 98,000 Veterans of the U.S. armed services who are cared for every day in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, outpatient clinics, domiciliaries, and nursing homes. During the National Salute, VA invites individuals, Veterans groups, military personnel, civic organizations, businesses, schools, local media, celebrities and sports stars to participate in a variety of activities at the VA medical centers. The activities and events include special ward visits and valentine distributions; photo opportunities; school essay contests; special recreation activities and Veteran recognition programs.

MEETINGS

BOD
2012: February 6, March 5, April 2, May 7, June 4, July 2, August 6, September 10, October 1, November 5, December 3

NYSC Meetings Owego, NY
February 4, March 24, June 16, September 29

Membership
Now starting at 6:30 pm!
February 9, March 8, April 12, May 10, June 14, July 12, August 9, September 13, October 11, November 8, December 13