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VBCMagazine

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SUMMER 2022

RESCUED FROM THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN

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GROUND WAR IN UKRAINE

THE WORLD'S MOST
DANGEROUS HIGHWAY

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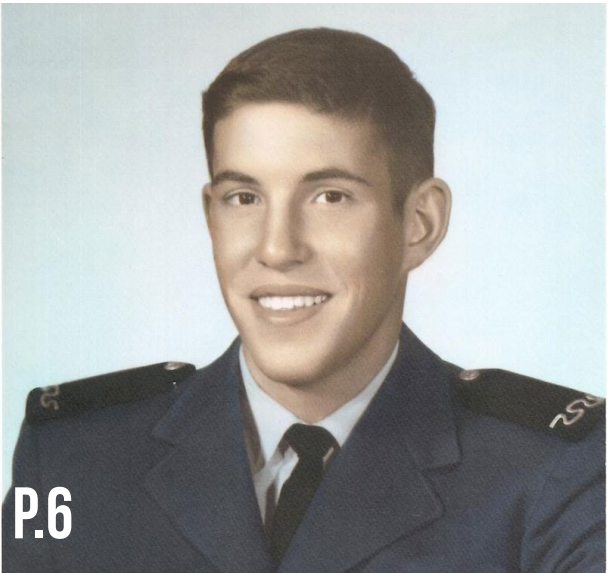
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Cover: Michael Blassie with T-38 Talon trainer, ca. 1970
(Courtesy Blassie family), Tomb of the Unknown
(Wikimedia Commons)

VBC Magazine is published quarterly by The Veterans Breakfast Club, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that harnesses the power of storytelling in order to connect, educate, heal, and inspire.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Along with word-of-mouth referrals from VBC participants, this magazine is the best advertising we have for our mission of sharing veterans' stories from all eras, backgrounds, and branches of service. In *VBC Magazine*, we try to deliver in print the kind of educational and inspirational programming we do in-person and online. So, if you like what you see in these pages and know of others who would also, please let us know, and we'd be happy to send you as many copies as you'd like to pass along. We count our circulation at 15,000 per issue, half mailed directly to households and half hand-distributed by volunteers who leave copies at libraries, schools, Legions, VFWs, doctors' offices, and anywhere else veterans and those interested in their stories might pick them up. Contact me if you'd like additional copies, whether 5 or 500. And if you're interested in advertising in *VBC Magazine*, you can check out our ad rates at veteransbreakfastclub.org/sponsor. We welcome your support and any response you might have to what you read here. Enjoy!



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UPCOMING EVENTS IN-PERSON, FACE-TO-FACE

All in-person events begin at 8:30am unless otherwise noted and include breakfast for \$15pp. RSVP to betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org or 412-623-9029.

FRIDAY, July 8: Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Penn Hills, PA 15235)

TUESDAY, July 26: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)

WEDNESDAY, August 3: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)



WEDNESDAY, August 31: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

FRIDAY, September 9: Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Penn Hills, PA 15235)

TUESDAY, September 29: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)

WEDNESDAY, October 5: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)

TUESDAY, October 11, 9:00AM: McKeesport Regional History and Heritage Center (1832 Arboretum Dr, McKeesport, PA 15132)



TUESDAY, October 25: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)

FRIDAY, November 18: Comfort Inn & Conference Center (699 Rodi Rd, Penn Hills, PA 15235)

WEDNESDAY, November 30: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

WEDNESDAY, December 7: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)

SATURDAY, December 17: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park 15102)

Events will be added.
Go to veteransbreakfastclub.org for schedule updates.



ONLINE, VIRTUAL, ZOOM & SOCIAL MEDIA

Every Monday, 3rd Tuesday, 2nd Thursday at 7:00pm ET
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Mondays @ 7pm ET

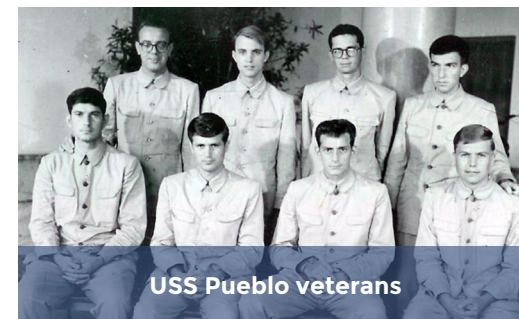


3rd Tuesday @ 7pm ET

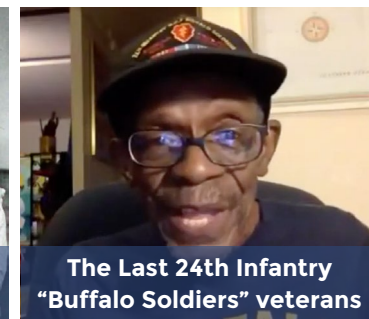


2nd Thursdays @ 7pm ET

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS



USS Pueblo veterans



The Last 24th Infantry
"Buffalo Soldiers" veterans



OIF with Gen. Doug
Satterfield



Historian
Ian Toll



The Pretty Kittens'
tumultuous 1967 Vietnam tour

THE SCUTTLEBUTT

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Shakespeare
and Veterans



Kids Rank Edition



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FEATURE

RESCUED FROM THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN

The Saga of Vietnam KIA Lt. Michael Blassie

by Pete Mecca

The saga of the Vietnam crypt of the Tomb of the Unknown is perhaps the darkest chapter of the US Department of Defense's long-running effort to account for POW/MIAs. Though discovered in South Vietnam at the crash site, along with personal effects and survival gear, the remains of US Air Force pilot 1st Lt. Michael Blassie got labeled "Unknown." It took the hard work of an eccentric Vietnam veteran activist, an investigative reporter, and the Blassie family to cut through years of bureaucratic bungling, official stonewalling, and government deceit to rescue Blassie from the Tomb and bring him home.

St. Louis native Michael Blassie was the picture of an ideal young Air Force officer: tall, handsome, with a hospitable grin and approachable demeanor. A 1970 graduate of the Air Force Academy, Mike qualified on the A-37B Dragonfly ("Super Tweet") Cessna attack aircraft. Then, in January 1972, he joined the 8th Special Operations Squadron of the 377th Air Base Wing at Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon.

Michael flew as an Air Commando, probably running covert missions into Laos and Cambodia, in addition to his official duties as forward air controller and counterinsurgency operations pilot in South Vietnam.

On March 30, 1972, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) launched a massive surprise attack on the South. The Easter Offensive was the largest and most conventional ground invasion of the Vietnam War. Over 130,000 NVA with their tanks and artillery swept into South Vietnam along three separate fronts, from the DMZ to Saigon. By taking towns and cities in the South, the North Vietnamese sought to gain territory and improve their bargaining position at the Paris Peace talks underway.

Two weeks after the offensive began, combined NVA and Viet Cong forces laid siege to the provincial capital of An Lộc, located 100km north of Saigon. Over the next month, enemy forces cinched the noose, pounding the city with artillery and attempting to starve out the population. Western reporters called it a "mini-Stalingrad," the ugliest kind of siege warfare.

On May 11, Communist forces unleashed an all-out assault to take An Lộc. The US Air Force responded with aerial counterattacks. Michael Blassie's C-37 Dragonfly was part of that defense flying support for allied South Vietnamese ground units. It was his 138th combat mission.

Blassie dropped in low for a bombing run on attacking forces when enemy anti-aircraft fire boomed from the ground. A fellow airman saw tracer rounds directed toward Mike's A-37. The accompanying shells found their mark.

Major James Connally, Blassie's flight commander, described the tragic incident in a letter to Michael's parents:

Mike's plane was hit and began streaming fuel. He must have been killed instantly since he did not transmit a distress call of any kind. The aircraft flew a short distance on its own and then slowly rolled over, exploding on impact in enemy-held territory.

Out of the fog of war comes another version of the incident, one in which Michael's Dragonfly inverts upside down, and Michael ejects from the stricken aircraft. Flying at a low altitude to drop napalm, he would have been propelled into the ground.

Whatever the case, other aircraft were dispatched to the area to provide cover for an Army chopper rescue team, all for naught. The enemy threw up what was described as a "murderous hail of fire" which prevented any rescue or recovery attempt.

Michael Blassie had become a cold statistic of war.

The Air Force told the Blassie family in St. Louis all they knew: their son had been killed in action, but his remains could not be recovered since he went down in enemy-held territory.

That simple, tragic explanation would be the only one that Blassie's parents ever heard for 26 years. They never got updates on recovery efforts. And they never learned the truth: that their son Michael's remains were discovered some five months after his death.

It was a South Vietnamese Army patrol that scoured the crash site and came back with six bone fragments, a Beacon radio, two compasses, an American flag, a parachute, remnants of a pistol holder, a one-man life raft, fragments of a flight suit, a wallet with family pictures, and an ID that read: "1st Lt. Blassie, Michael Joseph."

The discovery of personal effects at the crash site should have converted Michael Blassie from a Vietnam MIA to a KIA, closing his case.

But instead of giving closure, the remains endured one of the most baffling episodes of misidentification in military history.

The chain of custody began with Captain William C. Parnell, an operations officer at An Lộc. Parnell wrapped the remains with the effects and held them overnight. The next morning, he handed the package to a helicopter crew, which delivered it to the Saigon Mortuary.

and held them overnight. The next morning, he handed the package to a helicopter crew, which delivered it to the Saigon Mortuary.

There, Captain Richard S. Hess of Mortuary Affairs inventoried the package and added a skeletal chart showing the bones' locations on the body (right humerus, right pelvis, and four rib bones). He also added the critical notation: "BTB [Believed to Be] Lt. Blassie, Michael Joseph."

From there, the remains and effects went to Camp Sammae San, Thailand, where the US ran a search and recovery center. In 1976, they were shipped to Hawaii to be analyzed by the Army's Central Identification Laboratory (CIL-HI).



The Blassie siblings, 1961. Patricia is on Michael's right (Blassie Family)



OA-37B Dragonfly (TSgt Ken Hammon/USAF)

By the time the package arrived in Hawaii, the wallet and ID were missing, presumed stolen during storage or transit.

The Army lab in Hawaii removed the “BTB” designation and, through a later discredited technique called “morphological approximation,” declared Michael Blassie’s remains as belonging to “Unknown.”

Morphological approximation presumed that one could determine personal characteristics like age and height by careful examination of bone fragments. Scientists at CIL-HI estimated the deceased’s age to be between 26-33 years and height between 65.2-71.5 inches.

Michael was 24 years old and 72 inches tall when he died. That is, he fell outside the approximated ranges on both counts. In addition, a single strand of hair found in the flight suit yielded an estimated blood type O negative. Blassie’s was A positive. To Army scientists, these findings superseded any other evidence, such as documents or personal effects. Michael Blassie was therefore ruled out as a possible match.

DNA testing was in its infancy in 1972. Remains identification bordered on guesswork. The pressures of war put a premium on closing cases and moving on, getting the job done even if that meant rushing lab reports. Morphological approximation, worthless though it was, provided quick answers and a veneer of scientific validation.

No one knows how many remains from Vietnam and elsewhere were buried in the wrong graves because of these flawed identification procedures.

The Blassie family in St. Louis didn’t know Michael had been misidentified because they were never told there’d been remains and effects recovered in the first place. The Pentagon had kept them in the dark, probably with

the good intention of not getting the family’s hopes up until Michael’s identity could be confirmed. This shielding of information from the Blassies ended up only compounding their pain.

As an “Unknown,” Michael Blassie’s bone fragments were put in storage at the Hawaii laboratory. There they would rest for eight years in a file labeled X-26 until their date with destiny arrived.

That destiny was already in motion. The year after Michael Blassie’s death, Congress directed the Department of Defense to select the remains of an Unknown Vietnam servicemember to be interred in Arlington National Cemetery’s Tomb of the Unknown. Those who fell in the Vietnam War would thereby be honored alongside the three other Unknowns from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War.

Arlington got to work building a special new crypt for the Tomb, one designed to hold the Vietnam War remains. That crypt would remain empty for over a decade. It turns out that, unlike previous wars, the Vietnam War didn’t produce many Unknowns. Improvements in evacuation, recordkeeping, and forensic science meant that almost all US remains recovered from combat zones were identified. The six fragments in file X-26 were the exception.

In 1983, Congress and the Reagan administration, under pressure from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, agreed to move the remains of X-26 into the Tomb of the Unknown as a healing gesture for a country still traumatized by the Vietnam War. The goal was to schedule the ceremony before Election Day 1984, which is why Memorial Day, rather than Veterans Day, was selected.

Major Johnnie Webb was the officer in charge of the Army’s Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. In order for the X-26 remains to be interred in the Tomb of the Unknown, Webb had to sign a statement confirming that they would never be identified.

Webb refused. He knew morphological approximation was a flawed identification technique, and he suspected that someday, X-26 might be identified, especially given the personal effects and documents associated with the bone fragments.

Signaling its determination to have its Vietnam Unknown, the Pentagon gave Webb six months to make a positive ID of X-26. If he couldn’t do it, Webb would be ordered to sign off on the burial. On March 21, 1984, Webb reluctantly signed.

Then, according to Webb, the Pentagon issued a second order: destroy any evidence linking file X-26 to Michael Blassie, including the personal artifacts from the crash site.

Webb would later call his grappling with that order “the struggle of my life.” On the one hand, he’d risk court-martial by not destroying the evidence. On the other, if he destroyed Blassie’s personal effects, he might condemn Blassie’s remains to permanent oblivion.

Webb devised an ingenious solution: hide the crash-site artifacts where no one would ever find them, in the casket with the remains of X-26.

* * *

On May 28, 1984, a Third Army Old Guard horse-drawn caisson moved slowly along Constitution Avenue. Over a quarter million people lined the route to Arlington National Cemetery. An Army band played mournfully while 21-gun salutes cracked in the distance. Trailing the procession were Vietnam veterans, comparatively disheveled with beards, long hair, and jungle fatigues.

Serving as next-of-kin, President Ronald Reagan received the folded flag and made brief remarks. “Today,” said the President, “we pause to embrace him and all who served so well in a war whose end offered no parades, no flags, and so little thanks. Placing a Medal of Honor on X-26’s flag-draped casket, Reagan concluded, “Thank you, dear son, and may God cradle you in his loving arms.”

The Blassie family wasn’t in attendance. They had no way of knowing the remains so caringly committed to the Tomb were that of their son and brother.

* * *

Michael’s younger sister, Patricia Blassie, was seven years old when her big brother with the gentle smile left for the Air Force Academy in 1966. “We were all so proud of him. It was so exciting,” she says.

Patricia was proud also when he headed off to Vietnam six years later.

“The last day we took him to the airport, Michael looked back at us and waved. I never dreamed I’d never see Michael again.”

Patricia was 13 years old when the Air Force chaplain

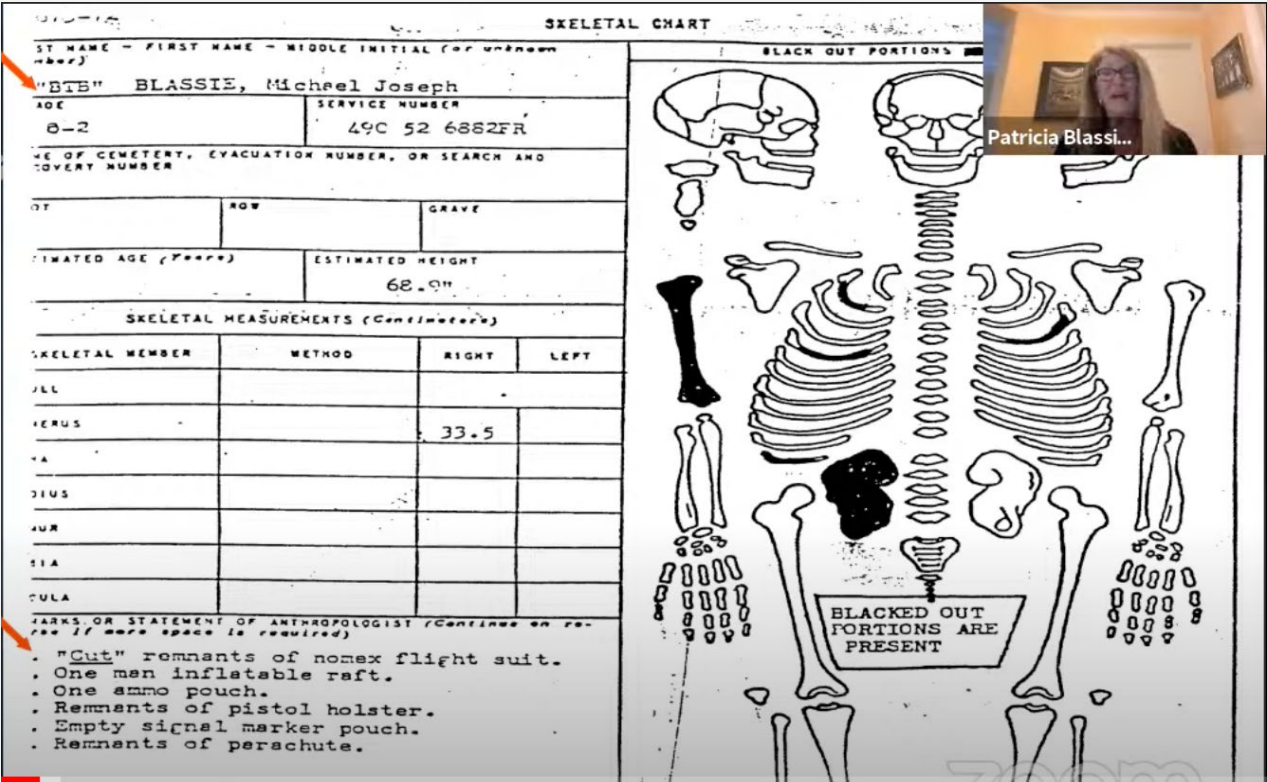
knocked on their door to deliver the news of Michael’s death.

“That day changed the Blassie family forever,” she says.

“I’d left school early that day, and I looked out the window when I heard a car door slam. I thought, ‘What is that?’ I went into the backyard and waited, I mean, everything seemed so strange. A neighbor came over to get me, saying, ‘Pat, you need to go inside.’ So I did and knew something was horribly wrong. They said Michael had been killed. They had a letter from his flight leader, James Connally, who recapped what had happened.”



TOP: Air Force equipment found with Michael Blassie: dog tag chain fragment, signal marker pouch, match holder, parachute survival guide, and ammunition pouch (Blassie family). BOTTOM: Air Force flight suit fragments and holster fragment found with Michael Blassie (Blassie family)



Michael Blassie’s skeletal chart, VBC Happy Hour screenshot, 2021

Still, without remains, there was a terrible sense of open-ended grief. “We wanted to know the rest of the story. We wanted the entire truth, but they couldn’t tell us that.”

The official designation was KIABNR—“Killed in Action, Body not Recovered.”

“My father served in Normandy during World War II and he never got over losing Michael,” Patricia recalls. “He and Michael were very close. Dad set up a little memorial in the basement and would go down there all the time and just sit.”

“When something like this happens in a family, [it] can bring a family together or tear it apart. My parent’s marriage did not survive. You grow apart sometimes during this kind of tragedy. My father went to his grave in 1991 not knowing the rest of his son’s story.”

Meanwhile, Patricia herself joined the Air Force. “I didn’t have any direction, and the family was lower-middle income. I didn’t even know how to go about college. Mike

always knew what he wanted, I didn’t. The recruiters said if I joined the Air Force, I’d travel, get excellent training, and an education. I signed up the next day. In my 17-year-old mind, that sounded like a good deal.”

By 1994, Patricia had risen from Airman Basic to Captain and was working in the Pentagon in Public Affairs. (She would retire in 2018 as a full-bird Colonel).

That’s when a Vietnam veteran and former Green Beret named Ted Sampley called Patricia’s mother out of the blue.

“Mrs. Blassie,” said Ted, “I believe your son is in the Tomb of the Unknown.”

The Blassies didn’t know Sampley. If they had, they might have hung up on him. Ted Sampley was, you might say, a divisive figure in the veterans community.

No one doubted his commitment to the cause of POW/MIAs. He was constantly researching, protesting, and pressuring the Pentagon to resolve open cases. But his tactics were confrontational and often involved outrageous claims and conspiracy theories. He believed, for example, that Senator John McCain had been brainwashed at the Hanoi Hilton and was sent back to the US to orchestrate official coverups of living POWs in Southeast Asia.

When it came to tracking MIAs, Sampley was shrewd and tireless. He made his case for Blassie as the Unknown Vietnam in a self-published newsletter, the *U.S. Veteran Dispatch*. He connected the dots for the Blassies over the phone.

Sampley told them that remains had been discovered near Michael’s crash site, along with items belonging to an Air Force pilot. No other MIA or KIA even remotely near the An Lộc location would have possessed a life raft, parachute, and pistol holster. A simple process of elimination made clear that the remains had to be a small fixed-wing pilot like Michael.

Sampley’s words landed like a percussion grenade in the Blassie household. Even the thought that remains had been discovered near the crash site seemed preposterous. That Michael might be in the Tomb of the Unknown . . . well, that was simply too much to believe.

Just to eliminate doubt, Patricia traveled to the Air Force Casualty Office at Randolph AFB in San Antonio to ask if there might be any truth to Sampley’s claims.

“By no means,” the office reported back, “is there anything to substantiate that your brother is in the Tomb of the Unknown.”

That was enough for Captain Patricia Blassie. As far as she was concerned, the case was closed.

And so it would have remained if a rookie CBS reporter named Vince Gonzalez hadn’t run across Sampley’s article about Blassie on the Internet. A hunch told him there might be something to Sampley’s claims, and he began his own investigation.

In 1997, Gonzalez contacted Patricia. “I know about Ted Sampley’s past,” he told her, “but I believe it’s true.”

“Well, my mom can’t get these kinds of phone calls,” responded Patricia. They’re too upsetting. Michael, after all, was her first born.

But Mrs. Blassie also had a hunch. She permitted Vince Gonzalez to access a trove of new documents through the Freedom of Information Act pertaining to the selection and entombment of the Vietnam Unknown’s remains.

These sources reinforced the probability that Michael Blassie’s remains were in the Tomb. More disturbingly, they also suggested a concerted effort to conceal any links between Blassie and the remains.

CBS Evening News went public with the explosive story in a broadcast on January 19, 1998.

“A seven-month CBS News investigation has revealed,” reported correspondent Eric Engberg, “that the identity of the unknown serviceman is almost certainly known, and that some military officials, for whatever reason, knew it all along and tried to hide it.”

The report triggered a speedy response from the Department of Defense which, after its own investigation, ordered the Tomb to be opened and the Vietnam Unknown’s remains to undergo DNA testing at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

Blood samples were collected from Patricia’s mother and older sister.

Institute staff later reported their surprise when they opened the casket to retrieve the DNA and saw the crash-site artifacts Major Johnie Webb had enclosed with the remains back in 1984.

The DNA testing resulted in a perfect match with the Blassies. Michael was no longer Unknown.

* * *

On July 11, 1998, U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Blassie finally came home to St. Louis.

Instead of moving Michael’s remains to the burial ground at Arlington, the family decided to have Michael re-interred at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery along the Mississippi River just south of the city. Secretary of Defense William Cohen was on hand for the somber burial. So were dozens of Michael’s old friends, classmates, and comrades in arms, along with thousands of others, including Vietnam veterans, who came to commemorate the return of a lost brother. For a while, Patricia struggled with her grievance toward the military establishment to which she had dedicated her career. She grew bitter and even considered quitting the service.

“I thought, ‘Wait just a minute here, a South Vietnamese scout team with American advisors discovered the remains, found an ID and artifacts, put them on a chopper and considered their job done. I don’t care what happened, but the documents showed that patrol went into Michael’s crash site to find him, and they did. But for whatever reason, the first bad decision was not telling the family. The government does not have the right to keep such information from the family.”

“When I looked into all the documents and from my personal research, it was obvious that improper decisions were being made, and all of sudden Michael is the Unknown representing the missing from the Vietnam War. So they finally took him off the shelf, file X-26, and

for that I’m thankful. At least he went into a place of honor.”

Hurtful also were the objections she and her family received from Vietnam veterans, who resented the Blassies for taking away their Unknown. They saw the identification of Michael’s remains as a loss for them.

“To many Vietnam veterans, “ Patricia explains, “it was pretty upsetting to have the Vietnam Unknown disinterred. I talked with many of them and they would say, ‘But this is the one honor we received, and the Blassie family is disrupting that honor.’ I would reply, ‘All the Vietnam Unknowns should be accounted for by the government.’ I would remind them of that, and I’d tell them our family story. I’d also remind them that Michael was never an Unknown Soldier. He was made one.”

Whenever Patricia’s mother received criticism for requesting Michael’s removal from the Tomb of the Unknown, she would simply shrug and say, “He’s not your son.”

* * *

Given the advance of DNA technology, there may never be another US Unknown. Every recovered American service member killed in action since the Vietnam War has been identified and buried.

In 1992, the Defense Department started collecting and holding blood samples from all inductees for possible future DNA comparisons. Those vacuum-sealed samples now number some 8 million, sitting ready for a “self-reference” analysis in case of battlefield death.

According to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, as of this writing, there are still 1,584 US service members unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. Of those, 470 are considered “non-recoverable.” That is, death has been determined, but no remains can be recovered.

The Vietnam crypt of the Tomb of the Unknown, the one that contained Michael Blassie’s remains, has been empty since the exhumation on May 14, 1998. Vacant, it will likely remain.

Pete Mecca is a speaker, author, and Vietnam Air Force veteran who runs VeteransArticle.com and hosts VBC’s A Veteran’s Story every second Thursday online. You can watch his conversation with Colonel Patricia Blassie on A Veteran’s Story on the VBC’s YouTube channel, youtube.com/veteransbreakfastclub.



Jean Blassie and her son George Blassie, brother of Michael Blassie, gather at his stand at his gravesite in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (USAF)

Pete will personalize the inscription for you. Just let him know!

VBC Host Pete Mecca has written two wonderful books we highly recommend: *Veterans: Stories from America's Best* and *Fights Like a Girl: Women Warriors, Past to Present*. You can order signed copies for \$25 each at veteransarticle.com/books.html or by mailing payment to:

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IMAGE: 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Wikimedia

by Galen Peterson

Galen Peterson is a foremost expert on modern tank combat, having learned the subject first-hand as a tank platoon leader and company commander in Iraq. Galen is author of the memoir Strike Hard and Expect No Mercy and has lectured at his alma mater, West Point, on battle command and officer-ship. A guest on VBC Happy Hour back in February, Galen recently wrote this analysis of the operational situation in Ukraine, explaining how the Russian Army, a supposed armored juggernaut, bogged down so quickly in a losing war. Read more about Galen at koehlerbooks.com/writer/galen-peterson.



Galen Peterson in Iraq, 2008

JAVELIN ANTI-TANK MISSILES

Much attention has focused on the success of Javelin anti-tank guided missiles. The Javelin is a US-made fire-and-forget missile with an effective range of 2000 meters (just over a mile and a quarter). The missile comes in a disposable tube, which the Command Launch Unit (CLU) snaps onto for use. The CLU, an oversized Styrofoam-camera-looking thing attached to an upward angling missile tube, is your clue that you are looking at a Javelin. The gunner locks the missile onto a thermal image and after launch, the missile arcs up into the air before plummeting down from the top, where the vehicle armor is thinnest. The missile can also be programmed to fly a direct path and strike the side of the target.

While most modern tanks have frontal armor rated from 500 to over 1,000 millimeters of rolled homogeneous steel (the benchmark measuring unit of armor), the top armor of most tanks is around 25 millimeters. The massive difference in armor thickness is the reason behind the development of top-attack weapons. There is no top armor on the planet, including our own, thick enough to withstand a strike from a Javelin.



US soldiers fire the Javelin anti-tank weapon at the Pohakuloa Training Area, Hawaii (Photo by SPC Patrick Kirby)



Bofors NLAW (Wikimedia)

NEXT GENERATION LIGHT ANTI-TANK WEAPONS (NLAW)

While the Javelin gets the publicity, most published photos are actually of a different weapon that's roughly the same size. The Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons (NLAW) is a Swedish and British jointly-developed missile with the small sight already attached and a range of only 800 meters.

The NLAW's flight profile is flat and programed to fly over the top of the target. The top-down strike is achieved with a downward-angled warhead that penetrates top armor. Portable and simple to use, the NLAW is as potent as a vindictive mother-in-law.

METIS AND KONKURS MISSILES

A third type of anti-tank guided missile is also seeing success in Ukraine. The Ukrainians, as former Soviet citizens, have large quantities of Cold War-era *Metis* and *Konkurs* missiles. These missiles are wire-guided, requiring the gunner to keep the sights aligned on the target all the way to impact.

To aid the gunner, these missile systems come with a tripod because the flight time might be as much as twenty seconds for a Konkurs maximum range shot. Unlike the Javelin and NLAW, the *Metis* and *Konkurs* only impact directly at the point of aim instead of a top-down attack. The *Metis* has a range a tad longer than the Javelin, but the *Konkurs* has double that.

These two missiles are the primary means Ukrainians are using to destroy the more than 1,000-1,500 Russian armored vehicles lost so far.

There are more weapons for short-range urban fights, like the RPG and other western-made equivalents. These RPGs are *not* the ones seen in Vietnam or even, for the most part, in Iraq or Afghanistan. They are newer and more effective. I can attest personally to their ability in stopping even an M1A2 Abrams tank.



Belarusian soldier with a 9M113 Konkurs missile (Mil.ru)

TANK AND ANTI-TANK TACTICS

The effectiveness of these anti-tank weapons is partially due to the tactics employed. Launching a missile requires exposing the soldier long enough to acquire the target and then shoot. To increase the survival rate of missile gunners, infantry will plan for ambushes or place missile teams on opposite ends of the line so if one team gets targeted by retaliation fire, another is still free to launch.

On the other side of the fight, the tanker needs to use technology or good tactics to avoid being hit by a missile. While there are systems designed to counter the missiles at point of impact, they don't always work as designed.



Russian tanks with “Cope Cages,” 2021
(Anonymous posted to Russian social media)

The most visible and widely ridiculed system employed by Russia are the roof “Cope Cages” over tank turrets. These slats of metal, in theory, cause the missile to detonate farther out and the airspace below dissipates the molten jet caused by the warhead before it reaches the tank’s armor.

In practice, the cages fail for two reasons: the missile doesn’t strike the cage on its flight path and/or the molten copper jet still retains enough power to cut through the armor.



A Georgian T-72 tank layered with Explosive Reactive Armor bricks (1st Lt. Justin Colvin, Marine Forces Europe)

The Spanish-tile-like brickwork you see on tanks is Explosive Reactive Armor. When a shell or molten jet strikes the armor, the tile explodes outward, and the explosion disrupts the incoming weapon. Explosive armor really does work – as long as it’s replaced regularly. Most explosives have a short shelf-life measured in the time it takes for the composite chemicals to disintegrate. The Russians have been terrible at maintenance, so it follows their reactive armor tiles are likely too old to function correctly.

A third method of defeating missiles is to block or

intercept them. The Russians have a passive defense system called *Shtora* – Russian for “curtain”–to counter wire-guided missiles such as *Metis* and *Konkurs*, or the American TOW missile. *Shtora* has a hot red heat lamp on the front corners of the turret. When turned on, these hot spots work to confuse the computer that tracks and aims the missile. If the computer makes flight corrections off the wrong heat source, the missile misses.

Shtora can jam *Metis* and *Konkurs* missiles, but not Javelin or NLAW. I haven’t seen any footage of Russian tanks in Ukraine using *Shtora*.

Top-shelf Russian tanks also have an active defense system called *Arena*. This system detects incoming missiles and shoots them down at close range, much like a shotgun against a clay-skeet pigeon. Of course, this is highly dangerous to any friendly infantry nearby. As with *Shtora*, I’ve seen no reports of *Arena* being used in Ukraine.

The most successful method of countering missiles is to prevent infantry from ever firing the missiles in the first place. This is accomplished through tactics. A good commander will strive to identify likely positions of missile teams and employ firepower to suppress them or kill them before they can launch a missile. A massed attack, with a base of fire and an aggressive assault, will overwhelm light infantry anti-tank missile gunners.

The traditional Russian antidote to missile teams is heavy volumes of artillery fire. Massed artillery suppresses the infantry, keeping them from rising up and risking the exposure required for firing a missile. As tanks and mechanized infantry close in, cannon and machine gun fire take over until the assault reaches the defending missile teams’ positions. We’ve not seen this tactic employed in Ukraine.

The downside of proliferate use of firepower is the quantity of ammunition required. A strong logistical system is necessary to maintain this style of warfare. Ammunition is bulky and heavy. Rockets especially so. This gets us to another major Russian liability: logistics.

LOGISTICS AND MAINTENANCE

Mechanized warfare already has high logistical demands, especially in fuel. Combat conditions drastically reduce vehicle cruising ranges. Driving off-road slashes mileage and burns fuel at a much faster rate. For tanks, the need for quick turret hydraulics requires higher RPMs. The constant starting, stopping, and backing involved in fighting guzzle fuel.

Supplying a large mechanized force involves thousands of trucks. The longer the supply line is, the more trucks are needed. A key piece of this puzzle is the staging of supplies in depots for distribution. When supplies can’t get off the highway because of mud, the result is a massive traffic jam and starving units at the front.

The vast distances involved in the Ukrainian invasion are logistically daunting. It is more than 150 miles from the Russian border to Kyiv. Large pockets of Ukrainian-held territory dot the rear of the advance. The Russian left flank of that advance is 250 miles long, and the supply lines are vulnerable along that stretch.

The Russian Army is not well organized for large offensive operations. Railroads are a vital piece of Russia’s logistics system, and once the Army departs its home rail network, the system unravels. Russian trucks are not designed for efficient loading and unloading.

Maintenance is another critical liability. Armored vehicles require a lot of attention. Vibrations of tracked movement alone can cause wires and bolts to come loose. Cold temperatures (Kyiv is the same latitude as Calgary) make metal and rubber brittle and easy to break. Frozen mud globs can rip wires and air lines. And if one vehicle in a convoy stops moving, it can have a cascading effect upstream.

It’s clear from videos of broken-down equipment that the Russians had not been keeping up with maintenance prior to the war. Flat tires, of all things, lead the list of critical problems. State of the art equipment is no good if it can’t get it where you need it.

The maintenance operational readiness rate expresses the difference between paper and ready inventories. While the Russians have 15,000 tanks on paper, fewer than 3,000 have seen a wrench recently. Russia has already lost upwards of 400 tanks in the war, about a third of their total tank force on the ground in Ukraine. Russian tank crews rarely survive the destruction of their tank, so each of those losses equates to almost three men killed. Tank crews are harder to replace than the tanks themselves.

Weather gives the Ukrainians a massive advantage. “General Mud,” or *Rasputitsa*, is the seasonal early spring in Eastern Europe. The ground thawing mixes with the snow and rain to create deep gooeey mud. Gravel and dirt roads, which are many, become impassible.

“General Mud” helped to save Russia in 1812 and 1941, but now it’s working against them. Bad roads prevent Russian forces from leaving highways with any expectation they’ll be able to return. The constrained maneuver prevents armored forces from exploiting mobility to flank defenders and bottles up logistics. How the Russian General Staff failed to account for this factor, given its decisive role in Russian history from Napoleon through Hitler, is a mystery.



Wehrmacht soldiers pulling an automobile through mud, November 1941 (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1981-149-34A / CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Distance and mud makes Ukrainian ambushes and sabotage operations easier, shrinking territories under Russian control. The Russian offensive has stalled out, and now Ukrainians are launching counterattacks and raiding the logistical areas of the Russian forces.

Ukrainians are even able to challenge the airspace over the Russian-held territory. Russia has not been able to unleash their air force at will in northern Ukraine. And Ukrainian unmanned aerial systems–drones–are having spectacular success dropping missiles and spotting for artillery.

The effectiveness of Ukraine’s air defense is most evident in the patterns of Russian air strikes. Only the areas near the Sea of Azov are seeing extensive Russian fighter-bomber activity. While Russians have hit the far west areas, they have done so only by cruise missiles. This indicates that Russians are not comfortable flying over Ukraine. As it is, they have lost well over a 100 airplanes and helicopters, perhaps over 200.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, experts predicted the armored juggernaut would be in Kyiv within three days. This failed to happen. Poor tactics and operational art have hampered Russian soldiers’ ability to counter the modern weapons making headlines.

If there is a lesson at the tactical and operational level, it is to stay on top of maintenance and to train with skill.

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MEET THE VBC BOARD



The Veterans Breakfast Club owes much of the success of its mission to the vision, expertise, and support of its eleven Directors who sit on its governing Board. Working behind the scenes and out of the spotlight, the VBC's Board Members steer our organization toward the future by setting high-level strategy and policy, overseeing performance, and making sure we have the resources we need to thrive. These Board Members aren't paid. But they do earn the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts, counsel, and talents are furthering the VBC's storytelling and community-building mission.

We asked our Board members to share a little about themselves and why they devote so much time and care to the Veterans Breakfast Club. Here's what they had to say.



Mike Cherock, VBC Board President
Founder and CEO of AE Works, Ltd.
US Navy, 1989-1996

"I started out in the Navy as a nuclear-trained power plant operator aboard fast-attack submarines. That service provided examples of leadership and the value of acting with integrity. It shaped my belief system that everything in the world, including business, is about people. When I founded AE Works, I wanted it to be the kind of business whose purpose is beyond profit, a certified B Corporation focused on creating a world where everyone is relevant."

"The magic of VBC is the people. Everyone at a VBC event has the opportunity to participate and to connect, learn, heal and inspire. It's a community for veterans, but also for all citizens looking to celebrate and honor stories of service."



Mak Kelly, VBC Board Vice President
Property & Casualty Consultant,
Henderson Brothers, Inc.
United States Naval Academy (2010)
US Marine Corps, 2010-2018

"I was adopted and raised by a single mother in California and, later, a Vietnam Marine Corps veteran father. They instilled grit and a desire to serve. In the Marines, I served as an Aviation Maintenance Officer and Aerial Gunner for heavy lift helicopter squadrons, including an eight-month deployment in Africa. I concluded my career as a Captain with Marine Corps Recruiting Station Pittsburgh. So much of who I am I owe to the Academy and the Marine Corps."

"When I got out of the military, I began mentoring prospective Midshipmen and transitioning veterans. Then I heard about the VBC and fell in love with the mission after attending several programs. I'm devoted to capturing more of our nation's history through the unique lens of individual perspectives shared through VBC storytelling events."



Bill Boswell
William P. Boswell, LLC
US Air Force, 1964-1998

"My years as a JAG in the Air Force sent me all over the US and Europe and exposed me to people and situations I never would have encountered on my own - all starting at a young age with lots of responsibility and expectations to match. It made me a better attorney and, I hope, a better human being and left me with terrific memories of the people I served with. The people you meet are friends forever in a way not like other friendships."

"I see the Veterans Breakfast Club as providing an important service to history by encouraging all veterans, no matter where or when they served or what they did, to share their stories. The stories we hear at the VBC aren't necessarily the ones that make it into the history books, but they have their own significance."



Amber Spells, VBC Board Treasurer
Corporate Tax Associate, Tyler Collier Associates, LLC
PA National Guard, 1996-2005

"My military service opened me up to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world. I'm forever grateful for the friendships created, the survival skills I learned, the travel, and the discipline. I still roll my t-shirts. My service on non-profit boards and work as a travel advisor and accountant, are all inspired by my service."

"The Veterans Breakfast Club brings to light stories of service and sacrifice that might otherwise remain hidden from view. Many of us veterans travel through life without anyone asking or even knowing about our service. The VBC gives us the opportunity to share and even inspire."



Glenn Flickinger
Founder, The Alternative Board
President, Flickinger & Consultants, LLC

"I come from a family of military service, which has instilled in me a passion for history and for serving the veterans' community. I've worked my way through hundreds—if not thousands—of books about our nation's various wars and to meet and talk with those who were there on the front lines of history is a thrill for me. Interviewing the remaining World War Two vets has been a tremendous experience for me and an honor to keep their stories alive. The VBC brings these stories of service to life."

"My passion for history stems from my great grandmother, a Titanic survivor. Sha'nini George was on the second to last lifeboat to exit the Titanic—the last on the starboard side. If she would not have made it, I would not exist. Just as I honor my great-grandmother in sharing her story, the VBC provides the opportunity to all veterans and their families to share, record and preserve their stories for generations to come."

Sharon George
President,
The Sha'nini
George Foundation



Laura Goossen
Director of Product Management,
Westinghouse Electric Company
US Military Academy (2001)
US Army, 2005-2007

"Growing up, I had many role models who led by example and showed me how to live a life of service and faith. I'm not sure what gave me the drive to challenge myself in a crazy way by going to West Point, when only 15% of cadets were female. It was such an honor and an amazing opportunity to serve our country at such a young age right after 9/11. My job was collecting intelligence so that we could do what we needed to protect the country."

"The VBC is all about the people! And I'm proud to serve and maintain such an important platform for our nation's heroes to tell their stories in a unique way."

"The Veterans Breakfast Club provides a vital link between the military community and the larger society. With so few serving in the Armed Forces, we need to make sure that all Americans remain connected to and supportive of those who serve and have served. The VBC's mission is to make sure those connections remain alive and vital."

John Pippy, CEO of ADACEN
Brig. Gen., Pennsylvania Joint Force,
Pennsylvania National Guard
US Military Academy, 1988-1992
US Army, 1992-present



"As a combat Army veteran of OEF and OIF, I transitioned to the civilian world with a commitment to public service and, specifically, serving our veterans. The VBC is one of the non-profit initiatives I support and serve because it provides a platform for our community of Veterans to express themselves and engage others. More importantly it is a place where everyone's service is valued and honored."



Hughes Turner
Philanthropist & Venture Capitalist
Retired, US Department of Veterans Affairs
US Army, 1975-2004



"My service to the Veterans Breakfast Club stems from my many years as a Marine Corps infantry officer from the Vietnam Era through the launch of OEF and OIF. VBC programs bring history to life in a powerful and entertaining way. In so doing, the VBC serves veterans by connecting them to the community and helping them to heal from trauma of war."

Brad Washabaugh
VP of RTI International, retired
US Marine Corps, 1976-2005



Henry Lamont Gourdine
Managing Director, Victory Strategies
US Naval Academy, 1991-1995
US Navy, 1995-2019

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FEATURE

“THERE WILL BE STORMS”

A Messenger for the Dutch Resistance Remembers the War

by George Zwaagstra

George Zwaagstra was born in Tjerkwerd, Friesland, the Netherlands in 1933 and emigrated to Canada in 1951. He joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and became a Canadian citizen in 1956. He lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and has shared his remarkable story with us on VBC Happy Hour earlier this year.

I grew up in a tiny village in rural Friesland, northern Netherlands, where there's almost as much water as land. Eleven lakes and countless canals form a crazy-quilt patchwork of waterways that can be traveled by boat in warm weather and by ice skates in cold. It's hard to get around if you don't know the routes. And it's easy to hide if you do. During World War II, many young men simply disappeared from view.

War came to our village on May 11, 1940. German soldiers banged on the door of our family's grocery store wanting food. They had literally just arrived in our country the day before as part of a massive Blitzkrieg attack on the Netherlands. That it took only one day for Wehrmacht soldiers to find our tiny village suggests the sheer number of enemy soldiers swarming our country.

I'll never forget the frightening sight of those soldiers in their field-grey uniforms, marching boots, and steel helmets. And I'll always remember the not-too-distant sounds of bombs dropping, shells exploding, small arms firing those first days. Life as we knew it was over.

On the surface, however, life appeared almost normal for a while. The occupier's hand wasn't too heavy at first. Hitler planned to incorporate the Netherlands into the

German state and was eager to win the population over to Nationalism Socialism. The Dutch largely treated the German occupiers with cold disregard. We simply ignored them in public.

In private, we fought back. The Resistance began almost immediately and grew into a massive underground network of cells by 1942. Our family's grocery store served as a key node in Friesland, and our village sheltered Jewish families, hunger evacuees from Amsterdam, and guerilla fighters.

Of course, I knew almost nothing about these activities until much, much later. We lived by a code of silence that persisted long after the war. My father told me early on, "George, the less you know the better. Don't ask questions. And don't answer any either." Anyone who talked too much or inquired too deeply was assumed to be a German collaborator and informant.



George Zwaagstra,
Royal Canadian Air Force, 1954



Netherlands Map, Friesland circled
(Scipius, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons)

So, when the young man who worked as our store's delivery boy disappeared in 1943, I was never told why, and I never asked where he'd gone. I was simply told that I would now start delivering groceries by bicycle. At age ten, I guess I was old enough to work for the Resistance, though I didn't really understand my role. I didn't ask questions.

But I did come to learn I was delivering more than groceries. I had many customers, including six I visited on a regular basis. Two were my uncles and aunts, who were hiding evacuees from Amsterdam. Another farm about 11 kilometers from our store sheltered a family from our village. The oldest son was a guerilla fighter hunted by the Germans. I delivered messages to and from them regularly.

The process was simple. I would make a delivery of grocery items. The woman of the house would receive them. Then, she would say, "I didn't order this package. Please give it back to your father." That's how messages got returned.

In early 1945, two high profile members of the Dutch Resistance came to us seeking refuge. Captain Philip Willem Pander was from a prominent Dutch manufacturing family in The Hague. The Pander company had a major contract to supply the Luftwaffe with ski-plane undercarriages for Hitler's impending winter war against the Soviet Union. Captain Pander's uncle and Pander company head was a fanatical Dutch Nazi, but the nephew was on our side.

Pander's adjutant was Folkert Wierda, a career Dutch Army officer whose son, Sytze, was two year older than me. Together, Pander and Wierda commanded 2,500

armed Resistance members and were among the most wanted men in the Netherlands.

Somehow, a weapons drop organized by Pander landed on the wrong farm, whose owner went to our local policeman. The local policeman then told his superiors, who tipped off the Germans, who determined that Pander and Wierda were hiding in our village.

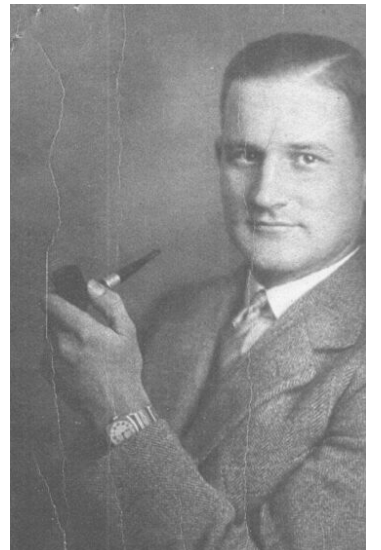
Our community came under intense surveillance and many sweeping searches. But the Germans didn't find anything until one perceptive soldier heard the incongruous sound of a typewriter coming from the back of the blacksmith's house. A nighttime raid uncovered not only Pander and Wierda but a whole archive of records detailing past and future operations, weapons cache locations, and names and addresses of Resistance members. It was a devastating loss.

On April 10, 1945, after weeks of interrogation at a nearby jail, Pander and Wierda were packed with other prisoners on a train for nearby Westerbork Transit Camp. From there, they were to be transported to Auschwitz and Sobibor Concentration Camps in Poland.

Just before entering the city of Zwolle, the train stopped at the only river crossing. German guards selected nine prisoners from a boxcar, including Pander and Wierda, and ordered the others to watch. The men were lined up along the river bank and shot by a firing squad.

One of the nine, J.J. Lamarche, jumped into the river as the shooting started and managed to play dead while floating downstream with the other bodies. Lamarche would be the only surviving witness to the atrocity committed on April 10. He told my father the story.

Six days later, the Canadian Army officially liberated our village. I recall low heavy clouds yielding to bright sunshine in early afternoon, just as an enormous vehicle appeared down the road rumbling toward us. The tank stopped at a canal bridge, and a few Canadians hopped off and crossed over by foot.



Captain Philip Willem Pander
(Tsjerkwert.nl)



Adjutant Folkert Wierda
(Tsjerkwert.nl)

One of those soldiers was Dutch-born from a nearby village and had emigrated to Canada years earlier. "The war is over," he said. "You are free."

People emerged from their homes singing, crying, cheering. It seemed like the street was filled with twice the number of people I'd seen during the war. The same thing happened in the neighboring villages. It was like awakening from a long nightmare.



George Zwaagstra,
Royal Canadian Air Force, 1954

One of those who emerged was Sytze, whose father, Adjutant Wierda, had been executed on the riverbank days before. Sytze and I got to know each other as we prepared for school to start up again.

In August, I took a train to Zwolle with Sytze and my father, who was involved in wrapping up the business end of the Resistance. Before he went to his meeting, my father brought Sytze and me to the exact spot on the riverbank where the eight men, including Sytze's father, had been shot.

Sytze and I stood there in silence staring into the flowing river. I'm sure he imagined, like I did, the scene in April. The shots fired, the blood spilled, the bodies carried downstream. We didn't speak. There were no words to capture the bitterness and sorrow that welled up in us both.

On the way back, Sytze and I stopped in Sneek, a small town next to the province's largest lake, named Sneekermeer. The plan was to retrieve our bicycles and ride the rest of the way home. But given the nice summer day, we decided to rent a sailboat—which you could do for pennies—and enjoy some time on the water.

Sneekermeer had a reputation for unpredictable weather, so we shouldn't have been surprised when, suddenly, a fierce storm kicked up just as we reached the middle of the lake. Our boat whipped around and started taking on water. Huge waves crashed over the sides, threatening

to swamp us. Sytze fought to control the rigging, while I bailed frantically to keep us from going under. It was touch-and-go, but after about thirty minutes we reached the shore, soaked and utterly exhausted.

After we caught our breath, we looked out at the ferocious whitecaps we'd barely escaped.

Sytze put his hand on my shoulder and turned to me.

"You know, George, there will always be storms in our lives. And there will always be wars in our lives."

School started back up a couple weeks later. Being a student in peacetime was an entirely novel experience for me. Sytze, being two years older, attended a different school. I never saw him again.

But I've carried with me ever since the truth he spoke on the lakeshore.



Memorial at Kaderveer-Zwolle at spot where eight were shot on April 10, 1945 (Lammertshattem, wikimedia commons)



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FEATURE

ROUTE IRISH

The Most Dangerous Highway in the World

Brigadier General Doug Satterfield served three combat tours in Iraq as an Engineer Officer. Recognized as one of the leading experts on military engineering in desert warfare, General Satterfield was one of the most popular guests we've ever had on VBC Happy Hour. He started his 40 years of Army service as an Infantry private and therefore possesses a unique perspective on the military. The following is adapted from his book *Our Longest Year in Iraq* (2021), a must-read for those interested in the Iraq War. You can read more from Doug at theleadermaker.com.

It took a little more than a month after the ground war began in Iraq on March 20, 2003 for Coalition Forces to occupy the country. Then, the Nation Building phase started. The new Iraqi government set itself up in the heavily fortified "Green Zone" in center of Baghdad where Saddam Hussein's Republican Palace stood. Our military headquarters, Victory Base Camp, lay 7.5 miles away from the Green Zone near the Baghdad International Airport.

High-level civilian and military officials shuttled back and forth between these two locations daily along the one road connecting them, the Qādisiyyah Expressway. The military designation was "Main Supply Route Irish" or "Route Irish," for short.



Lieutenant Colonel Doug Satterfield, 1st Cavalry Division Engineers, 2004 (Doug Satterfield)

For the next two years, Route Irish would be one of the most important roads in the world and probably the most dangerous. Its nicknames among US service members were well earned: "the road of death," "IED alley," and as one 1st Cavalry Division senior officer called it, "a shooting gallery on steroids."

Route Irish was a four-

lane divided highway running alongside dense Sunni residential areas. Some of the most notorious Iraqi insurgents and international terrorists plied their trade in these neighborhoods. Starting in May 2003, roadside bombers, suicide bombers, snipers, drive-by shooters, and other dealers in death unleashed violence on Route Irish almost every day. Burned-out hulks of armored and civilian vehicles began littering the sides of the road. Over time, they mixed with runoff from broken water and sewage lines, mounds of trash, and discarded junk. Together, these created a distinct smell of war, which assaulted our noses.



Route Irish Map

If you served near Baghdad, you knew about Route Irish and did what you could to avoid it. But this usually wasn't possible. There was no viable "back way" between Victory and the Green Zone. VIPs might zip overhead on military gunships or even hire an armored-car taxi service at the per person, one-way cost of \$2,390. The rest of us, however, white-knuckled it back and forth.

Anyone and everyone could be hit, but the enemy usually focused on Iraqi civilians associated with the Coalition and, to a lesser extent, on military units traveling between the Green Zone and Victory Base. Civilians were the easier targets.

The enemy was creative and highly skilled. They hid explosives behind highway guide rails, in the asphalt along the side of the road, and in cars and donkey carts. They threw grenades off bridges and overpasses on the convoys below. They knew how to trigger an explosion with

Route Irish, 2004 (Doug Satterfield)



Convoy briefing before traveling on Route Irish, 2005 (Doug Satterfield)

a cell phone or garage door opener at just the right time for maximum effect. Insurgents would then create confusion by adding small arms fire into the mix.

Combat units patrolling the route had a near impossible job. We all appreciated what they did to mitigate the threat. But we also knew we were always a hair's breadth away from death.

There was no place to hide and little cover if attacked. We fought from around our vehicles surrounded by enemies firing bullets and RPG rounds.

I lost count of the attacks on Route Irish. Fortunately, the US Army Engineers in my unit had an Angel on their shoulders. We didn't lose anyone, though we came close. We all have hair-raising stories. We all have our near-misses.

One bright sunny morning in early April, a small convoy of our 1st Cavalry Division was traveling to the Green Zone along Route Irish. It quickly came under a canopy of small arms fire, RPG rockets, and mortars. Unknown to us, this attack was the beginning of a major uprising sparked by Iraqi Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr. The tactics then for smaller support elements called for driving through an ambush. It didn't work this time. Two of our vehicles got hit and disabled. They had wounded who needed help. My Engineer unit came upon the ambush and starting fighting back. That, along with the 1/227 Aviation Apache attack helicopters on the scene, forced the insurgents to withdraw. Fortunately, we suffered only four seriously wounded and no deaths.

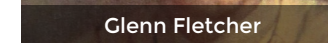
Others weren't so lucky. I saw many die there, and the sights and smells of Route Irish remain with me to this day.

FINAL SALUTE

TO THOSE WHO RECENTLY PASSED, WE SALUTE YOU.



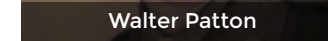
Richard Bielicki, WWII Army



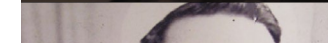
J.P. Conner, Korea Marines



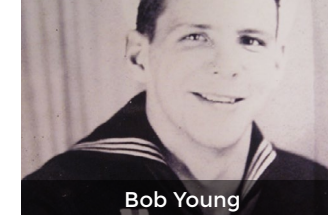
George Cummins, Cold War Navy/Army



Glenn Fletcher, WWII Army



Jerry Parisi, WWII Army



Walter Patton, WWII Air Corps



Bob Ryan, Vietnam Navy



Bob Young, WWII Navy

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Bill Dempsey, Dick Hayes and Paul Schaughency are just a few of the many veterans who live at a Baptist Senior Family community. We thank them for their service.

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AN ARMY SALUTE TO THE NAVY PEACOCK: A STORY FROM THE KOREAN WAR

by Dave Lozier

Sailors with the USS Mason (DE-529) in Boston on a cold day in March 1944. The Mason was the first US Navy ship manned by a predominantly African-American crew. (National Archives)

Last year, in our fall 2021 issue of VBC Magazine, we ran a story on the Navy's phase-out of the venerable peacoat in favor of the "Black Cold Weather Parka." We received many responses, including this moving story from Army veteran Dave Lozier.

I graduated from a Virginia Junior College in the summer of 1977 and was trying to figure out how to pay for two more years of school. I figured Army ROTC was my best option, me being an Army Brat and comfortable with that life style.

So, in early June 1977, I boarded my first airplane to fly from Richmond to Louisville for ROTC Basic training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky. I was hoping to earn a two-year ROTC scholarship.

My seatmate on the old Piedmont Airlines DC-8 was a salesman from Kentucky. When I told him I was off to Officer Basic he shared his story.

He was in Army ROTC when he graduated from college in 1950. In those years, ROTC graduates went to a short Officer Candidate School after graduating from college and then received their commissions. The new officers would then transfer to their officer specialty school and enter the Army National Guard or Army Reserves.

Twenty-seven Junes previous to our meeting, in June 1950, my new friend had reported to ROTC Summer Camp. There were about 100 in his training company. On June 25th North Korea invaded the South. Just days before, every one of the 100 soon-to-be Lieutenants in his training company had been looking forward to returning to their home-town Armories as transportation, or engineer or supply officers. Suddenly, they were all facing the certainty of being assigned to the Infantry and going to war.

Upon commissioning, they were shipped off to Infantry Officer Basic at Ft. Benning and soon boarded ships to Korea as 2nd Lt. Infantry replacements. That winter, with the Army and Marine Corps in full retreat before the Chinese Red Army, my seatmate found himself standing on the rail of a WWII vintage Liberty Ship off Inchon, pelted by snow and sleet and a Siberian wind that only Korean War veterans can appreciate.

A duffle bag was slung over his shoulder. He and his classmates steeled themselves to climb down a cargo net rope ladder into a landing craft. To call his shivering foreboding "fear" would be an understatement. To make matters worse, the Army had not issued any winter equipment to these new Infantry officers.

The Navy crewmen took off their peacoats and offered them to the Army 2nd Lieutenants out of sympathy. I can't imagine a more moving gesture of comradeship.

My friend wore his Navy peacoat for the duration. He told me he was one of only two in his class of over 100 platoon leader replacements who survived that winter.

I stepped off the plane with a new-found appreciation for the sacrifice asked of those who volunteer to serve. I earned my scholarship and chose Infantry as my branch. During my own military career, all too often I saw the Army fail to provide proper equipment to its men in a timely manner. However, I also came to appreciate the cost that was likely paid by those sailors who surrendered their peacoats to fellow servicemen going into harm's way.

Those sailors stood watch in the cold and wet without their own peacoats and may have had to pay for new ones. They freely made that sacrifice.

Regardless of branch, we all serve.



Dave Lozier

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Questions? Email betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org or head to veteransbreakfastclub.org/membership.



VBC JEOPARDY

Test your knowledge of all things military, past and present on VBC Jeopardy! One of our most popular events is our bimonthly VBC Jeopardy Game, played on Zoom. Here are some clues from recent rounds. Answers on the following page.


AFTER 1947, THE US DEFENDED THIS "GAP," THE SOUTHERN CORRIDOR THROUGH WEST GERMANY'S RUGGED CENTRAL UPLANDS EAST OF FRANKFURT.

THIS BADGE WITH A BAYONET AND OAK WREATH WAS CREATED IN 2005 TO RECOGNIZE NON-INFANTRY COMBAT.



THIS COUNTRY IS THE UNITED STATES' OLDEST ALLY, THOUGH THE RELATIONSHIP HASN'T ALWAYS BEEN GREAT.


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IN 1948, PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN DEFIED THE PENTAGON AND SIGNED AN EXECUTIVE ORDER COMPELLING THE MILITARY TO DO THIS.

AS AN ENLISTED SERVICE MEMBER, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS SALUTE OFFICERS, EXCEPT WHEN YOU'RE PASSING THEM INDOORS, YOUR HANDS ARE FULL, YOU'RE IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES, OR YOU'RE HERE.

THIS HOLLYWOOD STAR JOINED THE MARINE CORPS AFTER 9/11 AND EARNED THE NICKNAME "EARS TWO."



SAILORS AND MARINES CALL IT A SEABAG. ARMY SOLDIERS REFER TO IT BY THE NAME OF THIS TOWN IN BELGIUM KNOWN FOR ITS WOOL INDUSTRY.





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VBC JEOPARDY ANSWERS

What is the “Fulda Gap”?

What is the Combat Action Badge?

What is France?

What is the brig?

What is desegregate?

What is a combat zone?

Who is Adam Driver?

What is Duffel?



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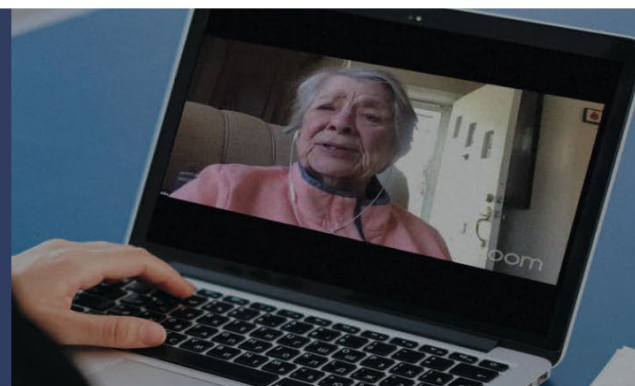
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