



1968

Michael A. Tuscano

Vietnam War
U.S. Marines

3rd Marine Division
Alpha Battery
1st Battalion, 13th Marines

Lance Corporal

Michael A. Tuscano

Veterans
History
Project
Transcript

Interview conducted
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Veterans History Project Transcript

So, Mr. Tuscano, do you recall when you entered the service?

Yes, do you want to know the-

Sure, sure, if it comes to mind.

I remember more about the military then I do about anything else. In 1965 I graduated. Later on, they had the buddy system. You went, like Neil, you and I went down and signed up for the buddy system. I am not going to give his last name, but George was his name. He and I signed up for August 20, I think it was August 22nd, I can't remember. When I went in, it was '66

Yes, 22nd of August 1966

See, I remembered that

Very good. So, may I ask what high school you attended?

Niles West

Niles West, you were a local man all the way

I was in Niles, right

And, at that time you didn't have a draft number. They didn't have numbers at that time.

No, I probably would not have gone in.

As I said I went on the buddy program and my buddy didn't show up

So, were there a lot of your friends that enlisted?

Yes, I had, that I went to high school with, I want to say four of them never made it back, that I graduated with.

So, you graduated in 1965 and then a year later you decided?

Well I just thought, you know I was only 17, and yes, I'll join the Marine Corps. And George talked me into it but he didn't show up! And I just said, "Oh, well."

Was there a tradition of military service in your family?

My dad was Army Air Corps in World War II.

How did he feel, Okinawa, did you say?

Yes

How did he feel about you joining up?

He didn't really, you know

Were you an only child?

Yes, so was my dad

Wow. So, after you graduated from high school were you working or considering going into a line of work?

I was working off and on. I just got out of high school and I wasn't sure I wanted to do this and that.

There wasn't ROTC in high school or anything like that?

No.

So, you enlisted, you choose the Marines

Yes, well you know I was 17 and I thought the Army, nah, the Navy, nah. I don't know why, I can't remember why George and I-

Yes, I remember when I was younger, hearing exciting, inspiring stories of World War II and a lot of times they were Marines. And I thought the Marine Corps Hymn sounded so good.

I really can't remember why, you know it wasn't like the movies that brought me in. I just thought, and plus it was only two years. See everybody else they were trying the Army and all of them trying to talk you into four years. And I go, "No." The one guy goes, "four years" and I go "No, I won't go to the Army." And then one guy says, "We have a two-year program," so I went in for two years.

And then you were inducted-

down on, I think down on LaSalle.

And then did they send you?

to San Diego

You went straight to San Diego?

Straight to San Diego

Was that by train or plane or?

It was plane. It was a plane. I think it was Continental

Was that your first time away from home for any length of time?

Yes. It was.

A great adventure

It was not what I thought it would be, and it was-

So, was basic training-

That was at San Diego

Was it that difficult as they sometimes say?

Yes it was, when you're 17 and you're away from home. These guys they didn't let, because Vietnam was going on, they didn't let any slack. And it was pretty nasty.

Were you in pretty good shape when you went in?

Yes. Oh yes. I was in real good shape, I was in even better shape when you know.

How was the were there any famous drill instructors or?

No, they were just nasty. They were bad. Well you're going to, you were probably getting shipped to Vietnam. At that time, you wouldn't know.

But you probably had an idea you might be going to Vietnam?

No, you had to go through all the tests. You know, like-

So that lasts for about 6 weeks?

I think it was. It was probably in there, probably in that one piece. The second sheet you have, the other one. That's the one I think.

Oh, this one

Yes, it'll tell you right there at the top. I think it was-

Oh, San Diego, yes you went out there on the 23rd of August and it says on the 22nd of October you're transferred.

Well see you had to go to ITR (Infantry Regiment Training). When you got your MOS-

That was your mode of specialty?

Your, MOS was, your- I was artillery

So, did they, when did you get assigned to artillery?

You got that when you left boot camp. After boot camp you went to Camp Pendleton. Well, I was fire directional control and I'm going, you know it's like looking like a grid map like that map and you had to do algebra and calculus. And I don't know how I passed everything. I was a good C+ student in Algebra. So, we ended up getting on the guns and that's how we got trained on artillery. They gave you like there's mortars and 105s and 55s and there's 55 self-propelleds. And that October, that October date is probably right as it was 6 weeks. And I forgot it was short, if you were infantry you stayed there longer.

So, the basic training and the infantry and the artillery training that all took place at-

Camp Pendleton

Camp Pendleton

We did some infantry. They had a VC village. They had, you know, a jungle set up and all that, where you had to crawl through the barbed wire. They would let off real-they were like

sandbags, and I would say from you to here, from me to you, they would blow it up to make it realistic. It was real dynamite and that is what they used to shoot over you, until a guy stood up once.

Yes. So, you, did everybody make it through basic training?

Not really, especially when you went to, you had to get your M-14. You get your certification. One guy, it was like- I forgot the distance, it was like a tunnel that went to the targets, all of the sudden we heard a bam. The guy put a- because he didn't qualify. And a couple of guys, you know-

Was he injured?

He was killed

He killed himself?

Yes, he put a gun to his head.

Oh, he did it to himself. Because he didn't make it?

Yes, there was some guys that wanted to get out. And they were taking pills. You know, not a lot.

When you said the M-14?

That's the one right there, you could see it in there I think

That picture right here that's the M-14?

No that's the AK

And this one that in training

Let's see. Yes, that's a 14 that they got right there.

So, did you, when you complete your Camp Pendleton experience did you go anywhere else for additional training?

When I went to Camp Lejeune from Camp Pendleton, my dad and Arlen got married on November 26, 1966 so I stopped at home because she would not get married unless I was there.

On the other side of the country?

Yes. That's where we got trained some more. And that's where they would send you. When you left Camp Pendleton, your next duty station was Camp Lejeune. From there they decided, "Well you're going here; you're going there."

When you went to Camp Lejeune, did you fly there?

Yes

And when you get to Camp Lejeune how long did you stay at Camp Lejeune? A long time?

Well, they took me there, I can't remember-

Did you get more training at Camp Lejeune?

Yes, right.

I think it's the 2nd Marine Division

Right, I think its 3 or 4 months. It probably would say I left there in May.

Yes

It should say, do you see It in there? I know sometimes its-

That abbreviation- Yes there is an 18th of May '67

Yes that's when I left, I think.

Yes

See, when I got there, you got your next duty station or they said I was going go to Cuba

Oh, okay

Now me, I was only 17 years old and I, and everybody says, "No, don't go to Cuba. First, you gotta go by ship. The second thing is it's spit shine." I'm in artillery so 10 to 1 you're going to be doing guard duty and you're not going to be doing anything except-

So, if you could go Guantanamo-

Yes Gitmo. And at that time, you probably just clean the gun, clean this. You don't do anything. And the guys talked me out of it and I go, "What else you got?" And they say Vietnam and I say, "Ok." I was 17, you know, that's in May, that's got to be the May date I left for Vietnam. I know it's May, the 18th

So, was that when you become part of Battery C?

I was in Charlie Battery, right. When I got to Vietnam, yes.

So, for the purposes of the interview we'll have to identify the unit with which you spent most of your time. And that would've been Charlie?

No

That's coming up?

I was in- When I got to Vietnam, I was with Charlie battery. I think I was in Phu Bai for about a month. I don't know if it's in that one there or there. This one might be there at the top of my operations.

Yes, participated in the Defense of Huế, in Phu Bai. Yes.

Ok then, we went to Khe Sanh I think in June. I think. Is that in-

Participated in Operation Crockett, 14th of June.

That's probably when I went to Khe Sanh, June 14th. Then ok, when I got to Khe Sanh, you probably see it in there somewhere, they transferred me to Alpha Battery. That's on- here I'll show you. Ok, I remember it. This is where Charlie, this is where the ammo dump was. They put me down here we have one 105 mm and I was in 05 battery. I can't remember if it was a week or two weeks but they transferred me to Alpha battery.

So Alpha Battery is where would've been your main unit?

Yes, that was my- from June to April to the day I left. I can't remember the date that I left.

So that was Alpha Battery, 1st Platoon?

Right

3rd Marine Division. So Alpha Battery-

113

113?

Right, Alpha Battery 113

Alpha Battery 113, and that's 3rd Marine Division? 1st Battalion?

Right

3rd Marine division?

Right

So, when you're at Camp Lejeune, were there any difficult or demanding officers there?

No, it was pretty nice. Even in Camp Pendleton it wasn't that bad. You know we were being trained. And then we went there and that was like nothing and Camp Lejeune - we had a movie theatre out there and I think we even had a, something like a health club.

Yes, yes. So, you went in the service then in August, 1966 and then your next year you're in February, March and May in at Camp Lejeune. You're starting to wonder where am I going, what's happening, and you don't want to go to Guantanamo, you want to go to Vietnam

Then I got off the plane-

Yes what was that first day in Vietnam like?

The airplane took a couple rounds and then they opened the door because you know, on the C-130 they put that down, and it was hotter than hell. You just stood there and would sweat because it was so hot.

Far worse than any of the jungle climates that they expose you to in the United States?

It was really, you just stood still and just be-

And you landed at?

Da Nang. You went from, it was from California, I think it was Travis Air Force Base in California if I remember. And then you went to Hawaii, and then you went from there to Okinawa, and then you got your jungle fatigues and your dress clothes, put it in a c-bag and then left there in Okinawa what you didn't need. And they just gave you socks and jungle fatigues and then they sent you off going to so-and-so Charlie battery from there.

So, to get to Da Nang from Khe Sanh-

No. that was Phu Bai

Phu Bai first?

Yes, it was Phu Bai first. It wasn't that long. Might've been a couple weeks, might've been a month it wasn't that long.

Was that by truck or helicopter or?

It was by truck. And from Phu Bai to Khe Sanh was by truck. I think it was Highway 1. I can't really-

So, at this time you were holding up pretty well. The climate's tough but you're young and you're a Marine-

And you were in artillery so you didn't really have to do a lot of guard duty. In Phu Bai, it was very little, off and on doing something. We had to do a couple of patrols but in Khe Sanh it was ARVNs, Marines, infantry out there that were around the home base.

So, being in artillery, you had to be able to operate a certain number of guns or types of guns?

It was a 105 mm howitzer and we had one 55 gun, artillery piece. It was a 155 mm. We had one of those that we had. This one shows there's a battery but there was no battery, we only had one 55 mm. It's like an 8 inch, it's almost the size of an 8-inch gun on a ship.

So, life on Khe Sanh Base, was that, did that take some getting used to?

It wasn't that bad at the beginning when we got up there in June. Like I said, you know. We were called Pardee's Pirates.

Pardee's Pirates, who was Pardee?

He was our captain.

Was he a good guy?

He was a little weird. We'd always get, you know it's like you ever watch M.A.S.H? the original M.A.S.H., you would always have one guy to get you something?

Oh yes, yes.

And we built a club out of ammo boxes and airstrip matting. And I go where did you get this from? The SeeBees or whatever the guy did, or you know and we got this and we got that. And that was like June, July, August, September and I think that was October, 1967 that I met Robert Stack. And all of the sudden we had a big party.

Yes, that's one of the questions, is did you, were there any USO shows or famous entertainers.

No, that was the one. All of the sudden, like I said, we were called Pardee's Pirates and our first sergeant, he was a heck of a nice guy, or captain was da-da-da and I still think I remember we had a big party. Because somebody took a cake, that was supposed to go up because we were on a plateau and it was a radio station, and it wasn't us but somebody stole the cake. And the first sergeant goes "You'd steal Jesus Christ off the cross," and I can't say the word "and you would come back for the nails!" And I go, we're all sitting there saying, We didn't do it, and we turn around and there was Robert Stack all of sudden. I think it was like October, because we didn't start getting hit, because there was nothing going on at that time, until I think it was like November or December and they started. In Laos, they had 152 mms, like the Japanese they would bury themselves in the hill. We had a 155, but even with a 155 gun we couldn't get the right trajectory to hit them. They could hit us, but we couldn't hit them because we couldn't get the right-

So, you would have to call in airstrikes?

They would call 'em in, but even then. Somebody would, it wasn't up to us. I don't know somebody would.

So, you started getting shelled on?

Somewhere, I want to say, I'm trying to remember-

So how many miles were you from the Laotian border here do you think?

Not far

Not far

Because I know that one paperwork I got there, the other one, that one. It's missing one. It's missing an operation I did. All I have left is two pictures, I have two slides of the Chinook helicopter and our 05.

Over the border

I think Cambodia or Laos, I can't really remember, they dumped us there for about a month with one 05 in the middle of the jungle. I don't even know. It's not in there. I think it was, there was a sniper - Carlos Hathcock, I think that was his name. He was a big sniper back then and he went after a general or somebody, a bigshot. And all the time he was around, we were - and something happened I read in one of the books, that he went out and shot this general or some big name.

I wonder if he survived the war, Mr. Hathcock?

He did, but he had complications after that.

So even though you're kinda on the perimeter-

We were about, I want to say, we were about 10 miles from the DMZ.

So even though you're in Khe Sanh in charge of these kind of permanent guns, but they still send you out on missions?

That was the only one

That was it?

That was the only one that they sent, don't ask me why you would send one gun into the middle of the jungle.

And were you able to get it set up and operational out there?

Oh yes, they already had it dug out and everything else. So I-

And did you know what you were firing at?

No, they didn't tell us anything, just said "Here."

Coordinates and fire at this target?

They just stuck us in-

Did you fire it while you were out there?

No, no. And then ok we can go on.

Oh yes. So, the food is still good? Haven't lost any weight, gained any weight?

Well after- The food wasn't bad.

Yes

It wasn't great.

Did you get any R & R?

I'll have get up to that point. The food was ok..

Then 1968 you would see the Tet Offensive. Khe Sanh was, sugar-coating it, was the longest battle in Vietnam. It was a 77-day siege, we were surrounded by four divisions.

Was it a surprise?

No, that Tet was all coordinated between the NVA and the Viet Cong and all that, all over. That's why Tet, I forget the day, I know it was '68.

Yes, was it January '68?

I'm trying to remember, January 21, 1968 because we had all these, we had like a board and the guys would go out. The FOs, the forward observers, and he would give you coordinates. And when we got hit, the gun was going around and around and around.

Yes, the Tet Offensive -

We had rockets coming this way, there were mortars coming this way and then 152s were coming this way. I'm surprised I never even got hit. We had a lot of guys that got killed. Because the ammo dump, the ammo dump that was down here was Charlie battery and they hit the ammo dump. I don't know if you've ever seen that picture, I should've brought it.

I've seen pictures

The picture of that guy running on *Newsweek*?

Yes

Where they were running, that was Charlie that was the battery I was in. Lucky I wasn't there, but a lot of those guys got killed because the ammo dump blew up and started throwing-

But they moved you from Charlie battery to Alpha?

When I first got there, so somebody must've been - so, then you can see on there - no, on this one there. Right there? See where I got hit? (pointing to service record sheet) I think it was January 21st.

"Right face from an enemy mortar" in Khe Sanh on the 26th of January

Was it the 26th?

Yes

I couldn't remember, I thought it was the 21st.

Yes

That's the whole story. Ok, you said R & R right?

I get there, back because of the Tet Offensive they were bombing us and the flames, and they were shooting the planes and they would, you did manifest. You just got there. I was going to Taipei and we got there blah, blah, blah and the planes just came, they came in, like this turn, turn, turn and went and took off and this Air Force guy goes "Get the shrap metal" I was looking at him like I couldn't say that "You're friggin' nuts," I ain't going there to get shrap metal off the tarmac right in front. So, as Blacks would say it. I go diddy bopping. So I, they took my flak jacket, they took some of it. And if it had been an inch more over it would've probably went through the back of my head. But it just caught me, it's almost gone. It was pretty deep, it was right here, if it had been an inch over more it could've went-

And that was because you were trying to take the scrap metal off the tarmac?

No, I just I walked away-I diddy bopped and the mortar went off and got me. So they put this black kid picked me up and his eyes looked like- you know because when you get cut in the face you bleed a lot. I had all this blood. I was taken to the doctor and they dragged me to the doctor and he says, "Do you want stitches?" And I go "No. just put the thing on; I want R & R." Two of us chased the plane down, the plane came in and dropped all of the ammo and that, we were chasing the plane down the tarmac. Sergeant and I got on the plane, the plane turned and took off. We didn't manifest; we didn't even know where the plane was going. Guess what? Bing bing bing bing, they had a guy they called him Luke the Gook," back when the French were in Nam Phan Phu, they had all their tunnels already dug and this guy would come out at the end and start shooting at the planes. He got our plane, we had no landing gear and one engine was on fire and we had to do a belly landing in Da Nang. And I was all, and Da Nang was like going to downtown Chicago, they had air-conditioned theatres, they had good food. We were eating C-Rations. My dad's World War II C Rations I was still eating.

Wow

When we got hit, we couldn't, they had to bring every man. Either the plane was coming in and they a chute and it would pull the pallet out. Well they couldn't do that anymore so they bring it in, let me see, over here I think it says it, I didn't bring my glasses. Oh yeah, right here, drop zone. See right there?

Yeah.

C-130s would come in, they'd put the gate down and they would just pull it out, we got our ammo and supplies but we never got that much food.

Yes it was too hot to-

They, the planes were getting hit, one of the Marine Corps, C-130s were all camouflaged, but the Marine Corps ones were silver. And one came in and direct hit, it had fuel on it, and just blew up. I still got something, I think I still got slides somewhere. But, go on,

So, you were planning on R & R and then you get hit-

My face-

And then you end up in Da Nang?

And then we fly there to-

Taipei?

To Taipei.

And did you get more medical treatment?

All I had was a patch, I didn't want stitches, I don't want them, no stitches

Yes. So how was Taipei? Was it-

It was our joint

Good beer?

I had to go to a show, and I had to go to a scalper, because you had these girls and you have this, I think it, well I wanted to see *Casino Royale*, so I said, "let's go see it. And she says we got to get a scalper because back then it was a big thing, going to the show.

Did you get in to see James Bond? No?

Well, oh yes, we got in.

So that R & R was?

Three days, because I was only a Lance Corporal.

So, when did you get your promotion?

I forgot.

Would that have taken place overseas?

It was in Khe Sanh.

If you had been higher ranked, say a Sargent, would you have gotten a longer leave?

Maybe.

Maybe?

Usually.

So, when you come back from Taipei in Taiwan do you, are you back in the hot place?

Well then, I came back on Da Nang, had to get a chopper to fly me into Khe Sanh, which-

Took fire too?

No, one black kid's on there, I said were in this- it's called a jolly green giant, it's a big huge helicopter. It only has one blade and a rotor in the back. It's a big chopper, and they got a thing down the center with all your mail, and it's like, it's on rollers. And I told the kid, "When you get off, be like Jesse Owens, run!" Because we were catching fire, and then the thing jammed and I started throwing stuff all over the place and lucky somebody, like I said somebody must have been watching for me because they knocked down a lot of helicopters.

So, you mentioned the siege of Khe Sanh to 70 something days?

It was a 77-day siege at Khe Sanh. If you just go on your phone and say Khe Sanh and you'll see "It says it was the longest battle in Vietnam."

So-

Then I came and the Corporal, which I know, says "Well I heard you got hit." I got there I said, "no biggie" blah, blah, blah. He says, "oh you're going home for a week." You can see it in the papers, somewhere in there it shows, I went home for about a week. My grandmother was sick, and you don't come home for grandparents. But my family doctor was military, and he knew me very well. So, I don't know who he knew, but he got me home. And then I had to go back again and-

But by that time Khe Sanh was-

It was still going.

And you made a good recovery with the patch on your cheek?

Yes, it was deep but not, it you know, like I said it could've been-

So, it's like your third time coming to Khe Sanh?

Yes, basically.

And you're still taking fire?

Yes, we're still taking fire, I can't remember what date or time I got back. When did I leave? February? I think it was February. It should be right in there somewhere, no it should be right there, it says-

Yes, the emergency leave was 6th of February '68

Ok, so, I was back in a week.

Yes, and then you, so then the siege of Khe Sanh lifts and then you're able to-

No, I should've brought the picture, the guy gave me the picture. I think it was April 7th, somewhere. The Army supposedly saved us, uh, uh. It was (really the Air Force that, that bombed all the, you know. I mean I got pictures, I still got movies of when I got there and when I left. And when I got there it was all jungle. The other pictures, it looks like this table, it was nothing, with the Agent Orange that they sprayed, that cleared out a lot you know. I mean you could see for miles.

So, the Agent Orange, was dropped to try to relieve the pressure on Khe Sanh, maybe?

Well, they were just doing it, you know there was nothing left. There was all, we could watch the NVA coming up by us. I mean I got movies of the jets coming in, the Phantom jets coming on, I'm sitting on my bunker taking movies!

So, did you, was there a friendly rivalry between the Marines and the Army?

Well, no. The Army wasn't, there was only a couple. It was more Seebees, it was more of a Marine Corps base. The Army, they set up in April. That was the end of the siege. That's, I even talked to a couple of guys that were Army and they were going, "No, they just wanted the glory

you know." Saying we saved you." But they didn't; it was almost all over. It was the B-52s carpeting, you know they carpet the area and they just-

And were the Viet-, were the regular Vietnamese Army, they were on the base with you too?

The ARVNs.

The ARVNs. Were they there? Were they pretty good fighters?

Yes, they were up front and then you had your Marines and then you had the airstrip and everything. But some were not too bright, this one time we did a fire mission and they called it right on top of themselves.

So, Mr. Tuscano-

Yes?

You're back in Khe Sanh, this period-

It was pretty nasty, like I said. By the time I left they started giving us new C-Rations, but the other stuff was, was World War II. But the Marine Corps always got the low end-

Did the shooting take place all of the time?

Oh yes.

So, did that effect your ability to sleep or anything?

Well we had to dig, I want to say from there down to here. We had tents and that, but when the siege started, we started getting ammo boxes and we started digging everything out by hand. Everything was underground. And you know with the airstrip matting and sandbags, we'd put down airstrip matting and lay the sandbags on top.

Airstrip matting, what's that like?

It's like perforated, it looks like cheese and you hook them together like this. The ones they didn't need, you know they got some different ones. Some are flat like this and some had holes. Most of the ones we got had the holes in it because they didn't need it, they got new stuff.

In addition to getting hit and the cut right cheek, did you, did you get malaria or anything like that?

I'm getting there. You must've been reading my mind. Ok, I came home I think it says June. Around June 1st somewhere. It should be on this one here

Yes maybe this one, yes June '68.

That was probably around June 1st I think

Yes.

Wasn't it? June-

Transferred, TR

I know-

This is after the siege is lifted then?

Yes, we were, we went from Khe Sanh down to outside of Da Nang. I don't know we were near some beach they called it Wonder Beach, I know, a couple miles away. But we were just there until we were set to go home. But we all, it wasn't like a whole group that left. It was like, "OK Neil, Jim and Bob." We all left at different times. So when I left I got to Da Nang. Da Nang wasn't that far away so I took a jeep, and I missed the flight. I don't know why, they said be here at this time and I go, "Ok, now what do I do?" The guy goes, "Well there's one of this, and it's an Air Force plane. It opens up front, I don't know what the number is. It opened up in the front. He says: "That one's going to whatever, Okinawa, and then you can catch something here there or whatever." I said, "Whatever." I run out. "I want to get out of here." And you know what it was? A body plane.

Oh.

So, I had to fly in this plane, it was a prop plane, it wasn't a jet. I was the only one there so he gave me a blanket, and I slept on a casket all the way to Okinawa, I think it was a couple of hours - three or four hours, I don't remember. That part I don't- then I got to Okinawa, they couldn't find my bag. So, all I had was my jungle fatigues and then they took everything else away from me. I had some stuff, a Vietnamese NVA uniform, like that. That's where I got the gun, the AK from. I shot the guy. They took my stuff. I didn't care, I just wanted to get out of there. And I was all by myself when I got home so I didn't have to worry about protesters. Nobody really paid any attention to a single Marine. You know I had jungle fatigues on, you know that's all I had. Blah, blah, blah so I get there, that's when I came home. In August I was going to get out. My next duty station was going to back Camp Lejeune. Then I was sitting, I was only 20, I was sitting with a buddy of mine at a bar. I think you had to be 21 but the guy didn't care, it was on Milwaukee Ave. And I was sweating. I was going what the hell, and they had the air conditioning on. So, I go to my grandfather and I say "Gramps, I don't feel good." I got chills, I got a headache, and I got a 101 temperature. I can still show you. I still got all of the paperwork from my SRV like I said, he had get your things like this it has everything. So, I go to Great Lakes, they hand me a couple of pills and the nurse or guy nurse or whatever he was he goes "Man why are they sending you home?" I went home with my mother and my stepfather who lived in Morton Grove, and my grandparents and my dad lived right here in Niles. All of the sudden the next thing I remember is I'm laying in Lutheran General and I'm looking up. And I remember the doctor, Doctor Obsick. He was my family doctor, he was military.

He was the man that helped you for your grandmother's illness?

Yes. Thank God it was him. How many hospitals would you go in Niles or Park Ridge that you had malaria, trying to figure it out. Because I had 106 temperature when I hit. And all I remember is him talking, I barely couldn't see him, I could hear him. He says well you got 1 or 4. I think 3 or 4 I can't remember, 3 or 4 types of malaria and I had the worst one. He said, "If

you would've been in the field. So, I spent almost a month in Lutheran General Hospital, and then they transferred me to Great Lakes; they wanted me to do guard duty. And they almost killed me. You know I stayed in the yard, I got better, but I went to the first sergeant I haven't even had enough liberty, I just got back. He said, "Don't worry about it." He took care of it. But if it wasn't for my family doctor, I probably would've been dead. By the time they would've figured it out that I had malaria. He knew right away.

So, you were at Lutheran General, weak and in and out of everything?

Oh yes, I lost, I was pretty well in shape. I went from like 165- I lost like 26 pounds in 6 days. You could see the thing going like this, with the medication they were giving me. You could just see your temperature went up, went down, went up, went down and finally it leveled off. He says, "I'll be here three times a day. They're going to have to pay me!"

You were under siege again, of a different kind.

Yes, of another kind. I was in Great Lakes for, see that's the only thing, I can't find that paperwork. I got from June to August. It was like, last week, what's my muster out date August 20 something? 20-

August 21st is it?

Yes, August 21st. I have a week between there and there I can't - the records are somewhere. I don't know where they're at. They could be with the Navy or whatever. And guess what they did? For that one week, they sent me to Camp Lejeune!. For one week. They could've mustered me out here. Maybe they thought I was going to re-enlist or something. I went, "Enh-Enh (no)."

That is the question we always have. Did you give any thought at that time into re-enlisting?

No, they tried. Not after what I went through in Khe Sanh and all that. You know and then doing this and-

So, in Khe Sanh you were fired upon-

Oh, daily

Many times, and-

Oh yes that was daily

And then you were firing-

Back

With Artillery. But also with your M-14?

No, no we didn't.

Rifles and-

We weren't really, we were in the middle. Like I said we were, we were right here. All we had, they gave us M-16, I kept my own 14. I just put the M-16 away because I didn't like it.

You thought the M-14 was a better weapon than the M-16?

Yes, it was a better weapon at that time.

And how did the M guns compare to an AK-47?

You didn't even have to clean it.

It was a better weapon?

It was a better weapon. Oh yes, you didn't have to clean it at all.

And then how did you come by the AK-47 in the picture?

Well, the guy, we were on a patrol and I shot the guy coming through the wire.

With the?

The M-14.

With the M-14. But when you were out in the field, were you allowed to use an AK-47 if there was one nearby?

Oh yes. I had it for awhile.

And then how would you get more bullets for the AK-47?

Oh, I had a, this guy had a ton. It was a 7.62 short because the M14 has this one, but the AK had a, it's called 7.62 short because it's shorter and they guy had, he had loads of, you know. You know, you couldn't go in the jungle with it, because an M16 cracks.

Cracks?

Sorry, it bangs. When you shoot an AR-15 it goes *shooting noises*, when you shoot an AK you hear a *crack* it's a different sound, and you don't want to go into the jungle with that and somebody hears you shoot at somebody. They might shoot you. But you know we didn't do too much. Near the end we were kinda put off to the side.

Yes, but you- it does say you participated in Operation Scotland II and Operation Rice and then Mameluke and Thrust. Those were when you were at other places after Khe Sanh, right?

No, that was in Khe Sanh

That was still part of Khe Sanh?

I think, do they have the dates on there?

Yes 15th of April, 27th 19th of May

That one was probably when we were leaving in April. The last one, what did you say it was?

24th of May participated in Operation Mameluke-

No, which one in April?

Participated in Operation Scotland II

That was probably when we left. That's when we left. I think.

You went off from Khe Sanh?

That's when we-

Left?

Deuce and a half truck with the gun in the back and our whole battery left and they brought in another battery. And we went down I think it was Highway 1. You know, I'm just going by all that, I don't know dates, I can't remember, you know.

So, in this, I don't remember this, how many men are in a battery?

We had, I'm trying to remember, I think it like was about 8.

Yes.

I think it was 8. I'm just trying to remember everybody that was there-

Did anyone else in it, in Alpha Battery suffer any injuries?

No, we were, I was the only one. See I was, you know. There was a couple of guys killed, but they were on other guns.

At Khe Sanh?

You know, and we were I think it was a half-moon. Because they had different-

And they were probably being killed by shells-

One guy was killed by a RPG, the guy who got through the line

Then you received a Purple Heart?

Right, and we got two Presidential Unit Citations.

National Defense Service Medal-

Go on the other one, the other page there. Yes, that one, I think that one there. That shows it a little bit better.

Yes, it shows a Service Medal with two clusters is it? A Vietnam Service Medal with 2-

It says "Presidential Unit PUC?"

Yes

That's president- That's the one that with 2 or 1 star. So, we got one with that and one star, two Presidential Unit Citations.

And then you earned a Rifle Marksman Badge?

Yes.

That was with an M-14?

Yes. That was it. See, the red one, we used to call it the fire watch ribbon, because when you went into boot camp, when you got out of boot camp you got a red ribbon, they call it National Defense but we call it the fire watch. At Camp Pendleton and that, you had to do fire watch.

And what's fire watch?

Just, it's like you walk around the barracks and make sure everyone's sleeping and nobody's doing anything. And you know.

Did they have MPs at Khe Sanh?

Yes but it was more – I really don't really remember because like I said we were strictly by the base.

Yes. And this terrific color picture here, yes, this is Khe Sanh-

And I'm just saying-

And that's with the AK, the AK-47?

Yes and that's the helmet I got, where I, the round one there was out the back of his head.

And then all of this equipment, or anything you would like to bring back? You came back on that air-

They took the uniform; they took whatever I had. And the gun I gave it to somebody. You couldn't bring it home.

Wow.

Somebody was watching over me, I don't know what, but-

There's a question here. Do you recall any particularly humorous events?

Well, yes. We smoked a lot of pot. And this one black kid, he was on duty, because we had you sit back and we had headphones and a speaker. So, when you had a fire mission they would call in and uh I had a coolie hat and I came up on him on watch he was sitting in his chair like this and I tapped him on the shoulder, I thought he was going to turn white - he laughed so hard. And you know we had nothing else to do, you smoke a little weed.

He thought you were the enemy?

Yes. He wasn't pissed but he was like laughing.

So, did he, did the officer, they didn't mind people smoking weed?

They stayed away from us. Because all you had to do is take a grenade and they hid. The only ones that came out were like the first sergeant and the gunnies and they were all cool.

Captain Pardee wasn't out there?

No, he wasn't. He was hidden somewhere. and the lieutenant he was good but this first sergeant and the other I think it was a master sergeant, they were all lifers but they had, when they were going to get out, they had all their jobs you know

Smoking the pot then, was that only at Khe Sanh?

No that was mostly all the time

And-

Not all-

Did it affect anyone's ability to function or sleep or anything else?

Nope, we never had a problem.

How did it get on the base, the pot?

The Montagnards? I don't know, I still don't remember. Somebody would find it. Somewhere, somebody had it. It was all they had as Montagnards by us, it was nothing else. Don't ask me about who got what, got this. I don't, I really don't remember.

But it was always plenty. Was it expensive weed?

No, it was not. You know, we could go on any base and somebody had something. Lucky, I didn't go in - I know some guys that came back that were junkies and heroin. I said, "Wow. I had a good friend of mine, it took him years, finally he-

Was able to-

kick it, you know.

Yes so, they kinda dragged out your separation from the Marines. They sent you back to Camp Lejeune for one week.

Yes, one week

Did it kind of end on a high note?

What was good is, the company clerk. I had, he was really nice, he was really good. We were pretty close guys and my mother goes, oh you got a package. And I go what the hell is this? Instead of sending it to Camp Lejeune, he sent it to my house, my Purple Heart. So, he says, he put a note in there if I remember, "I didn't want to send it there because they'll make a big deal out of it." So, when I got there it's like I'm there they're looking at me like what are you doing here. They sent me there for one week.

So that company clerk he was in Vietnam?

Yes, he was our company clerk. Don't ask me how he got to send it to my house or what

So, was it difficult readjusting to life after being through all of this?

I was glad to be home, after all of that. Nah, I just, you know. There was a little, you know. I want to get married, have a kid right away, and do this and do that, and that was a big mistake but you know. I knew there was problems along the way because, it took me, I was telling, was it Judy, the librarian?

Yes.

Almost seven years. I mean I filed and put in the registry for Agent Orange. But they did the same thing, I go up to Hines, they took something out of here and here and never heard from them again. They checked my prostate that time and nothing. They just said, "OK, you're done."

When did you think, did you know they were using Agent Orange when you were in there?

Oh yes, but I just, you know, like a lot of vets, I got discouraged. I finally got a good job, I was unemployed. I didn't have a couple months drinking and no drugs or nothing. I was just having, I didn't realize it at the time, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - wasn't back there in the 60s

And in the 70s there was nothing. Well, I got divorced and blah, blah, blah, like you said I was a little on a binge.

Yes, you didn't – was there a GI bill then or anything like that?

Yes, and I did a couple of things, but maybe that's why I couldn't concentrate on anything. I tried something, I tried this and that and it just didn't-

You were under such a pressure cooker at Khe Sanh-

And then with the malaria and this and you know. And I got divorced after a couple of years, I had a kid and all that. Yet one day I was standing in an unemployment line in Evanston and a guy like you walked up, I still remember. Some things you know, with the military, and some things they stick in my mind and some things I can't remember. And his name was Silverman and he goes, "Come here," he says "You see that lady in that office there? Go and see her". I said ok. "You want a job?" I go, "Yes." And she says go to the Warren Township administration building in Skokie, District 2. It was the Circuit Court of Cook County. And I ended up being there 24 years, thanks to this guy. And it kind of turned me around. I mean I did some things, but it was the same thing all over again.

So then, you were working for the courthouse there?

Yes, it was the Circuit Court 2 for Cook County. There used to be the one here in the police station, but that was District 3. I was in District 2, that was down in Skokie. Really it was right down by the Skokie Police Station down there-

Did you stay in contact with any of your war time buddies after the service?

No, well you see-

You all left?

We all left at different times. Only one guy I saw him when I was in Great Lakes, James McFarland. And I tried everything, I cannot locate him. We even had a, see we'd get this magazine, it's called *Red Clay*, because in Khe Sanh the clay was red. I mean I can still, I got a book that I had and you can still smell it because it was just that distinct.

So, this Red Clay

That's a magazine I get about every 3 months. It's just for guys that spent time in Khe Sanh. These are all, they give you a directory and everything. So-

So, then it was different and difficult for the Vietnam veterans. So, you didn't join a veteran's organization or anything?

No, they had groups like that-

So, there weren't any reunions then, were there?

No, not really, no. I just I don't know why after that, like I said. I never. I scuba dived a lot when I was younger. And I had years, and when somebody tried to get me in I went, "nah." I'm just like that, I have no idea why, I just don't like being with a group of people. I don't want to be dictated to or I mean I even ride a Harley, you got all these groups, I went to one meeting and I went, "enh, enh no."

When did you, did you ride a Harley motorcycle before you went in the service?

I had a Triumph.

A Triumph.

I had a Triumph before I went in. Then years later I got a Norton and then I've been riding Harleys ever since.

So, the fact that you don't care for these big groups then, you don't do those Marines Ride for Tots?

No, no. Well I do the Toys for Tots

Oh, you do?

Yes, I do that every year. I don't go in the parade like I used to back in the old days when it was one parade, now it's all, it's just run terrible. And I just do it for the kids, for the toys. Because my wife works for Walgreens and she gets toys that are on sale or they gotta send back or whatever. So, I just get a bunch of toys, because it's for the kids. I did it for a lot of years, Toys for Tots. I don't do the other thing because I don't want to be riled, because I was once at a parade with the circuit court and somebody said something about the Marine Corps or something and I about went - they had to hold me back to go after the guy. You know, so-

So, I sense we're coming to the end of the interview. This is a tough question. How did you think your military service and experiences affected your life?

I don't think it, well, like I said now thanks to a buddy of mine I went to high school with when I had this cancer, he was trying to get me to go and that was 2010. And I filed then, he finally got me to go see a doctor, a psychiatrist and he said, "Go do this, go do this and this and this. And like I said, it took me seven years to get to 70%. So, I finally got that.

When you say 70%, is that 70% disability?

Yes

Based on Vietnam service and the Agent Orange?

No, Post Traumatic Stress.

Post-Traumatic Stress.

I get 70% which, not bad. I mean I'd rather have the, but I knew there were problems. And since I saw the doctor, the woman at the Department of Veteran Services or blah blah blah said, "Why didn't you get anything?" I'm going to refile this." And I went from 0 to 70, I don't have to pay real estate tax, because I'm at 70%, medications I don't have a lot but they take care of that, they pay for that. And now I got the prostate, which put me at 100% but they don't give you 170, they do under certain circumstances if you file the right things. That's with the government, they deny you and then you gotta, like I said, it took me 7 years. And I get a check, I get a nice check from them and I get a pension check. I got no bills. I mean yes, the military, to this point the Post Traumatic Stress and the prostate I'd rather have, I mean I probably if I had gone to Gitmo, I probably wouldn't have had these problems.

Yes, exactly. And then how did you think your military experience influenced your thinking about war or about the military in general?

I went into the military, I volunteered. I mean you know, like any guy now, you know. I was just doing it to, I mean right now these guys, I had it bad, but these guys nowadays that are going to Afghanistan. Man, it's brutal, it's brutal you know. And I met a couple guys that you know.

Pardon me for, did you mention cancer. You had cancer in your face?

In my jaw

In your jaw. Was that the result of Agent Orange?

They said no, that wasn't on their criteria. When, like I said to Judy, "All you gotta do is go in and there's a certain criteria." If it had been in my throat than yeah, but my dental assistant, my dentist, she found it in the back of my molar. So, they had to replace all of this, they had to take a bone out. And then I had an infection and they had to take a vein out of here and put it in there. Oh, and I missed the one thing, Camp Lejeune. The water's been contaminated for the last 60 years. So, I have to file another claim because I think I got neuropathy or something. And I was there for 3 months and a week, drinking the water. All you have to do is go and google it, "Camp

Lejeune water contamination". The last 60 years the water's been contaminated. Now they only got a little, like I said the government only puts so many things down at a time, this and this and this. So that's what I told her. I should've done it sooner. You know, I tried back then in the 80s and I still got the same thing, sort of the run around. It was bad, now it's a lot better. I go and I see, I won't see the VA doctor. I got my own doctors, every doctor that I have is at Lutheran General, and I got a PA, a physician assistant, she's better than the VA, she's better than any doctor. And she's the one that found my PSA level was up and she said you better go see. I got a doctor over here at Golf Rd at 12, she says "Go see Dr. Lee." I didn't say nothing to her so I must of, I don't know, something that people know I didn't have to say one word to her there that I didn't want a VA doctor and it came right out of her mouth saying "Go see Dr. Lee" and-

So, she's another kind of an Angel like that Mr. Silverman or whatever?

Yeah, she's, I just happened to get her. Don't ask me, I didn't get I doctor I got a physician's assistant and she told me, "Don't even go get a physical by your doctor. I'll take care of you no problem. I'll give you all the tests that you need". My doctor wouldn't have found it. It might've been too late by the time he found it. Anything else?

Is there anything that you would like to add that we didn't cover in the interview?

Oh, I think you covered pretty much everything. I don't know what else, like I said. I retired at 55 with the circuit court, 24 years in. So, I think that helped me when I saw Mr. Silverman and I got that job. And I say I had a good and I thought this is- and things got better. And like I said, I was staying there and I think that's what helped.

Yes, helped to steady things. But, look back on everything you've been through in the 77 days, in Khe Sanh and-

Well, you know. The whole thing is like I said-

Yes, the Tet offensive was really something.

But Khe Sanh was, all you gotta do is google Khe Sanh and it will show somewhere the 77 days. And I think it was Khe Sanh, I don't know if I'm right, I think there were more bombs were dropped on Khe Sanh then all of World War II. So that's another thing, I'm positive I know that. Remember it was something like they had a couple things, one said you saw the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, whatever the times was in the TNT. I saw a couple of, if you just google it, I don't remember where I read it, I know they did it because the B-52s were going my whole time there, dropping the equivalent of 5 Hiroshima atom bombs on Khe Sanh..

Well, Mr. Tuscano, thank you for-

Well thank you.

Thank you for that very enlightening-

It was a little bit more than the normal guys you were getting in here. If you need anything else just tell me, I mean I could, you know I don't think I got anything else that you would-

Yes. If I have any follow-up questions and I'm missing something I certainly will contact you. It's going to take me awhile to transcribe this. It might take a while, but then you'll read it and correct it and we'll get there. And if you want to add something to it that's ok too. We had some vets, and "I was telling my daughter about it she said, "Dad did you tell them the time about that" so we went back and put it it.

I think I got it pretty well. Like I said, I remember more about that over there, I mean there were more-

You were at such an impressionable age and you're-

17. Well, you know you're in the Marine Corps. You're a jarhead, you know it's like you know, "Ok I'm a Marine, I didn't-

And then you still feel that, once a Marine always a Marine?

Yes, like I said we meet all the guys on Tuesday. It's like I said, it's very enlightening that. You know, now I got my buddy from high school, the same one that got me into this with this again, these guys at the Dunkin Donuts and I ended up with two more guys. One guy loaded the truck for my dad in 1961 for Illinois Bell right down on Waukegan Rd, that used to be there, the supply division, Roger. You met Roger.

Oh yes, he used to be my next-door neighbor, well one yard down my neighbor.

Well, he loaded the truck in 1961, my dad was a driver. And then in Evanston where I started my first day on the job in '79, they were going to bomb the building - the FLAN. Well, the commander now he lives, he wasn't commander, he lived down the street from me, ten houses and I never even know it. And then another guy, another Evanston police officer I met. There's two Chicago cops that I know. I mean it's kinda weird going into this thinking you're not going to know anybody and you ended up all of a sudden, oh yes, this guy, I know this guy.

Yes, so its Mr. McGilll that told you about it.

Yes, and Carlos; he's a retired Chicago Police Officer.

Well Mr. Tuscano, thank you for your service and thank you for being here and we'll see what we can do.

Reader's Note: The following eight pages of scanned photographs and documents illustrate Mr. Tuscano's remarks and his service to his country as a United States Marine.



Scan of postcard shared by Mr. Tuscano, illustrating “boot camp” training as Marine recruits go over the top of an 8-foot fire and maneuver obstacle during one of the many Physical Readiness Tests they undergo at the San Diego Marine Corps Recruit Depot.



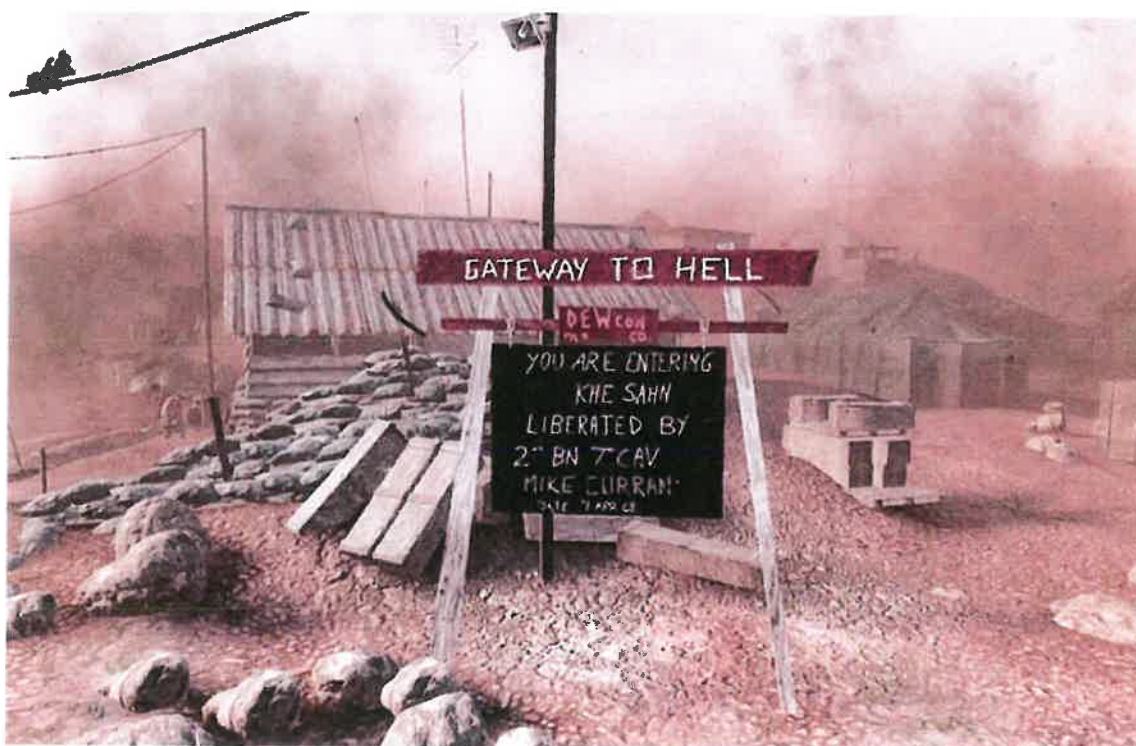
Mr. Tuscano with AK-47



“Men of US 3rd Marine Division preparing to load a round into their M101 105mm howitzer Vietnam 1 June 1968. “Pasted to Pinterest by Thomas Montie.”

Mr. Tuscano had left in April, 1968.

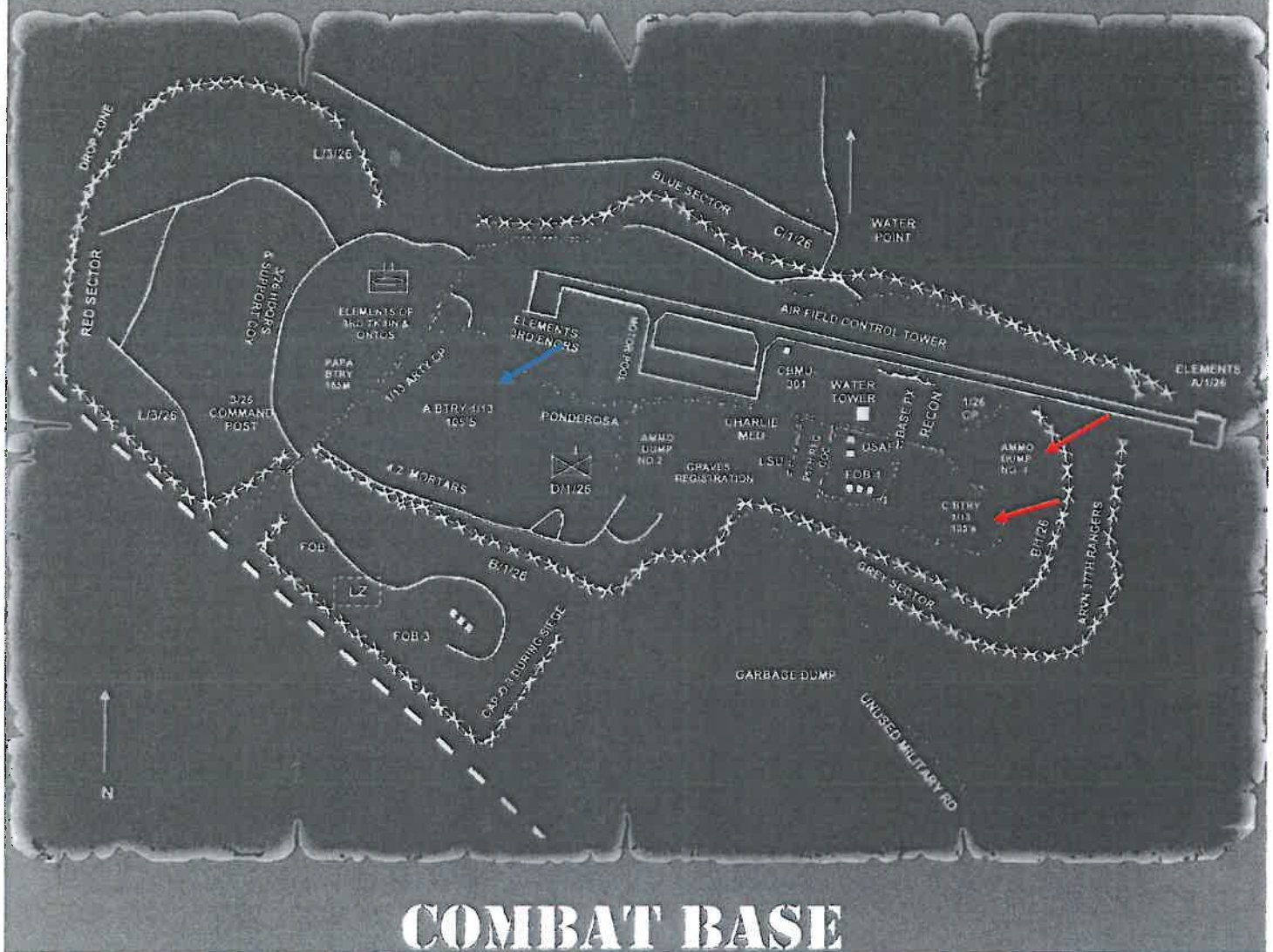
Khe Sanh photographs provided by Mr. Tuscano.



RED CLAY



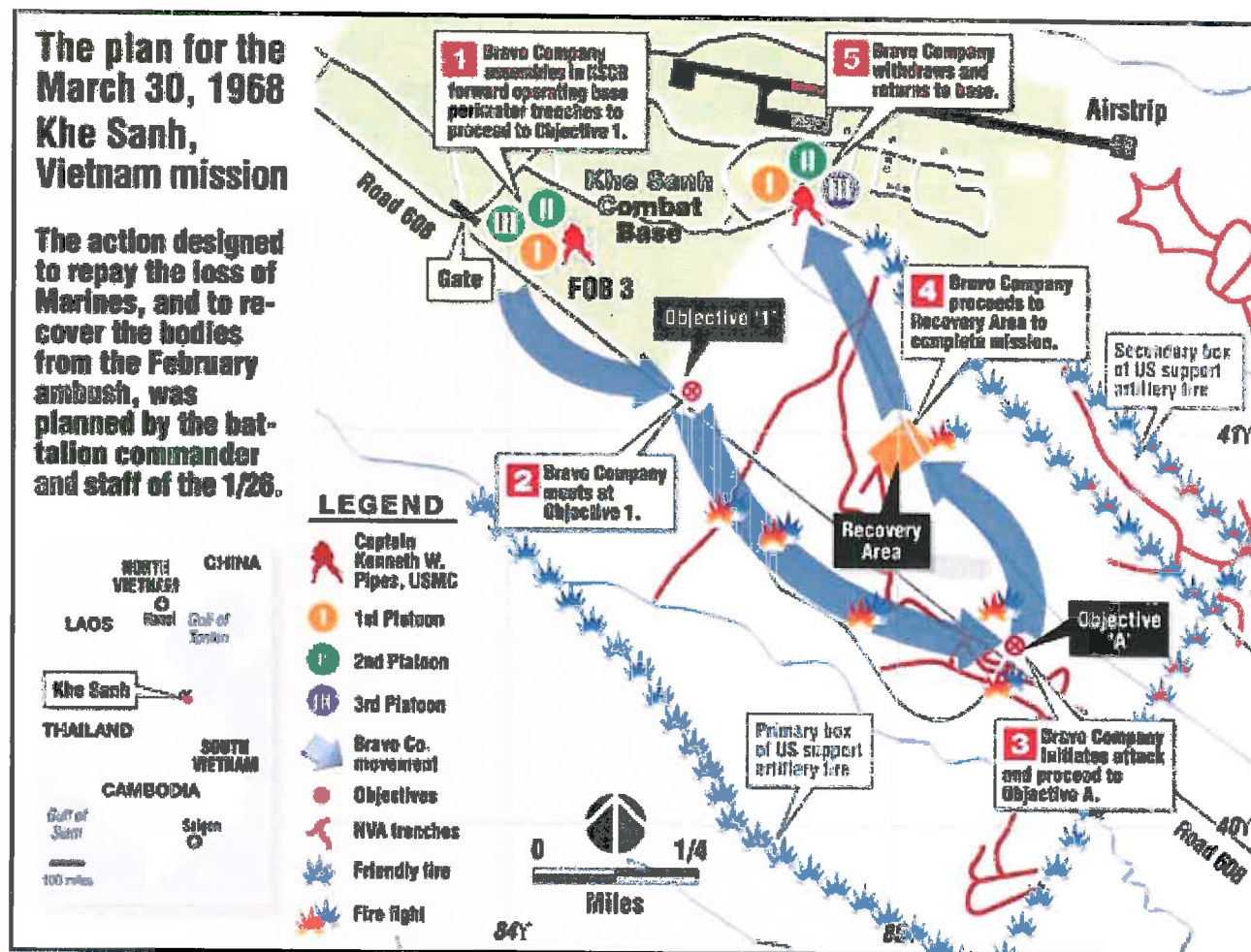
KHE SANH



Helpful scan of front cover of issue of Khe Sanh Veterans newsletter *Red Clay* with map. Shortly after his arrival in Vietnam, Mr. Tusciano was switched from **Charlie Battery** to **Alpha Battery**. The “C” battery suffered casualties when the nearby Ammo Dump was later hit by enemy fire. Mr. Tusciano estimated the base to be about 1 mile by one-half mile in size

The plan for the March 30, 1968 Khe Sanh, Vietnam mission

The action designed to repay the loss of Marines, and to recover the bodies from the February ambush, was planned by the battalion commander and staff of the 1/26.





Before he grew his moustache, Mr. Tuscano shakes hands with visiting celebrity, Robert Stack of film and "The Untouchables" Series fame.



Mr. Tuscano is standing on the right

Mr. Tuscano's USMC service record documents his June, 1967- April, 1968 service at Khe Sanh during its famous 77-day siege and his combat injury suffered on January 27, 1968.

COMBAT HISTORY - EXPEDITIONS - AWARDS RECORD

COMBAT HISTORY - EXPEDITIONS

DATE OF ENTRY	DETAILS	DATE		SIGNATURE
		FROM (ON)-	TO-	
19May67	Participated in defense of Bua/Phu Bai, RVN	18May67	12Jun67	<i>[Signature]</i>
24Jun67	Participated in Operation CROCKETT	14Jun67	16Jul67	<i>[Signature]</i> Bvd
28Jul67	Participated in Operation Sidra against North Vietnamese Regulars in Quang Tri Province RVN	16Jul67		
			31Aug67	<i>[Signature]</i>
11Nov67	Participated in operation Scotland in Quang Tri Province RVN	01Nov67		
			31 March	<i>[Signature]</i>
27Jan68	WANE - Right face from enemy mortar at Khe Sanh in Quang Tri Province, RVN. PARTICIPATED IN OPERATION PEGASUS	26Jan68		<i>[Signature]</i> CO
6Apr68	... TRI PROVINCE RVN	1Apr68	14Apr68	<i>[Signature]</i> CO
18Apr68	Participated in Operation Scotland II in Quang Tri Province, RVN.	15Apr68		
			25Apr68	
24May68	Participated in Operation RICE in Quang Tri Province, RVN	27Apr68	17May68	
24May68	Participated in Operation MANULIKE THRUST in Quang Tri Province, RVN	19May68	7June68	<i>[Signature]</i> CO

AWARDS

DESCRIPTION	STARS, DEVICES	DATE APPROVED	APPROVED BY	DATE MEDAL ISSUED	SIGNATURE
NatDefServMdt		5May66	SECNAV NOTE 1650 of 5 May 66		<i>[Signature]</i> Bvd
VNEM	1*	18May67	80 May 67-4/13		<i>[Signature]</i> CO
VNEM	1*	8Jul65	Exec Order 11251		<i>[Signature]</i>
VOM	(1960-)	28Nov67	CO A-1-13		<i>[Signature]</i>
PUC		29Dec67	PRES., USA		<i>[Signature]</i> CO
VSM	w/2*	10May68	SecNav ltr Apr68		<i>[Signature]</i> CO
PUC	w/1*	May68	ADMAR 21 May68		<i>[Signature]</i> CO
Purple Heart Medal		15May68	CG SecNavDiv(Rein) 21 May68	7Aug68	<i>[Signature]</i>

EMBOSSED PLATE IMPRESSION

TUSCANO, MICHAEL A.

NAME (Last, First, Middle)

SERVICE NO.

NAME 118(8)-PD (REV. 8-65)

Supersedes 1-63 edition which will be used

9-61000

RECORD OF SERVICE

EXPRESSED PLATE IMPRESSION

TUGANO, MICHAEL A.