UCF Veterans Legacy Program

Source Packet Overview

vlp.cah.ucf.edu

John Holladay

Colonel, USMC

Short Biography of Veteran

John Holladay was born on October 19, 1945 in Clearwater, FL. He moved to Orlando, FL during his childhood and remained there through high school. Holladay joined the Marine Corps in 1966, serving until 1995. During his time in the military, Holladay rose to the rank of Colonel, serving two tours in Vietnam and in the 1991 Gulf War.

John Holladay passed away in 2025 and is buried in Cape Canaveral National Cemetery in Cape Canaveral, FL.

For more about John Holladay, listen to the to oral history recorded with his wife Cassandra Holladay.



Key Historical Themes & Events

- USMC History
- The Vietnam War
- Marine Corps in Global Conflicts – World War II to Present Times
- Khe Sahn
- Military service, a family affair

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Source Packet Document List

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John Holladay

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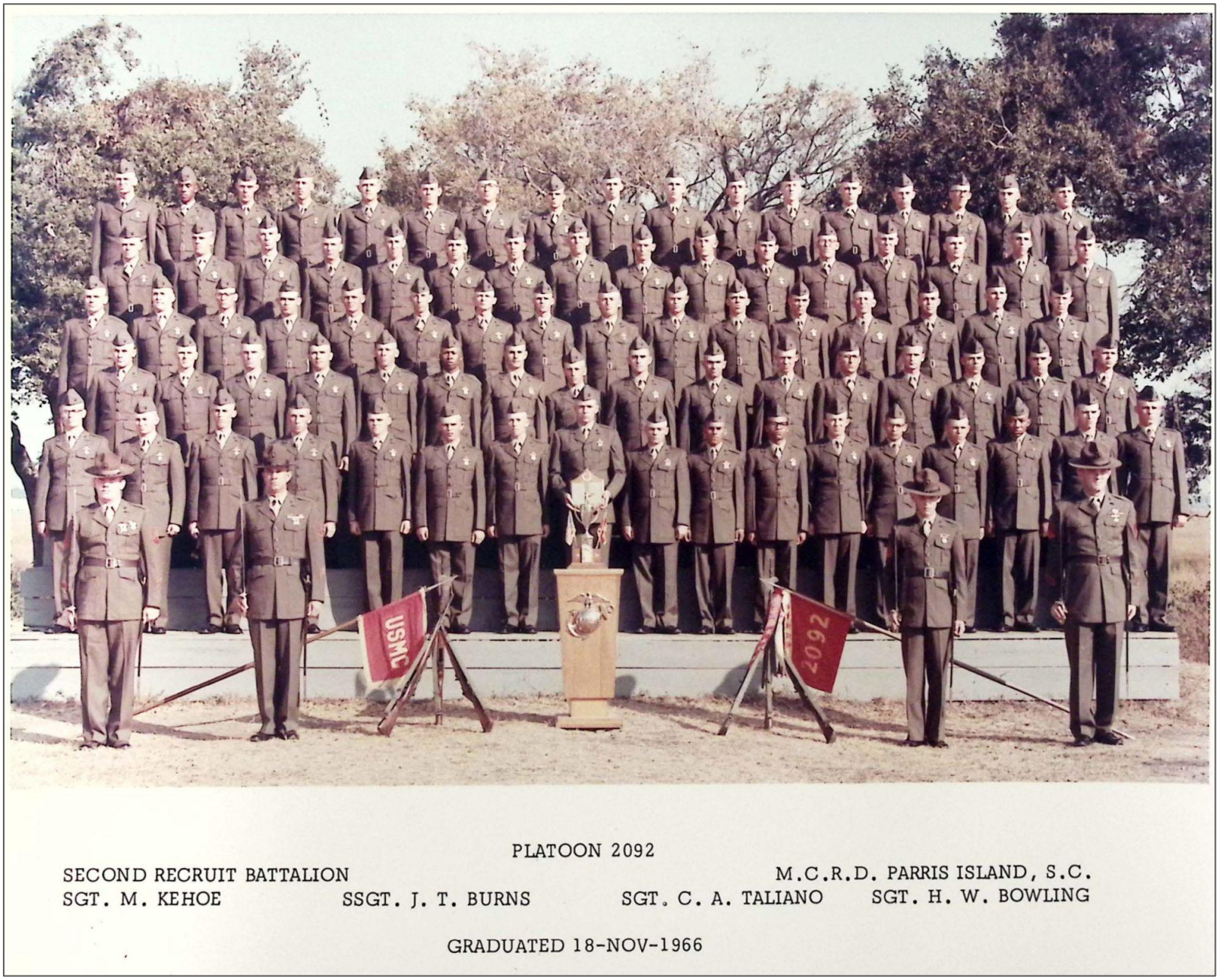
Recruit Battalion Platoon Photo 1966



The November 18, 1966 graduation photo for Platoon 2092 of the Second Recruit Battalion, in which Holladay trained at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD), Parris Island, SC.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (1 of 11)



Holladay in Vietnam, 1967-68. This photo of Holladay outside a temporary barracks is part of his personal photo album.

NB Subsequent pages in this packet include multiple photos and Holladay's handwriting, giving details about his service between December 26, 1967 and March 26, 1968.. The excerpts from this album provide a personal record of his time in Vietnam.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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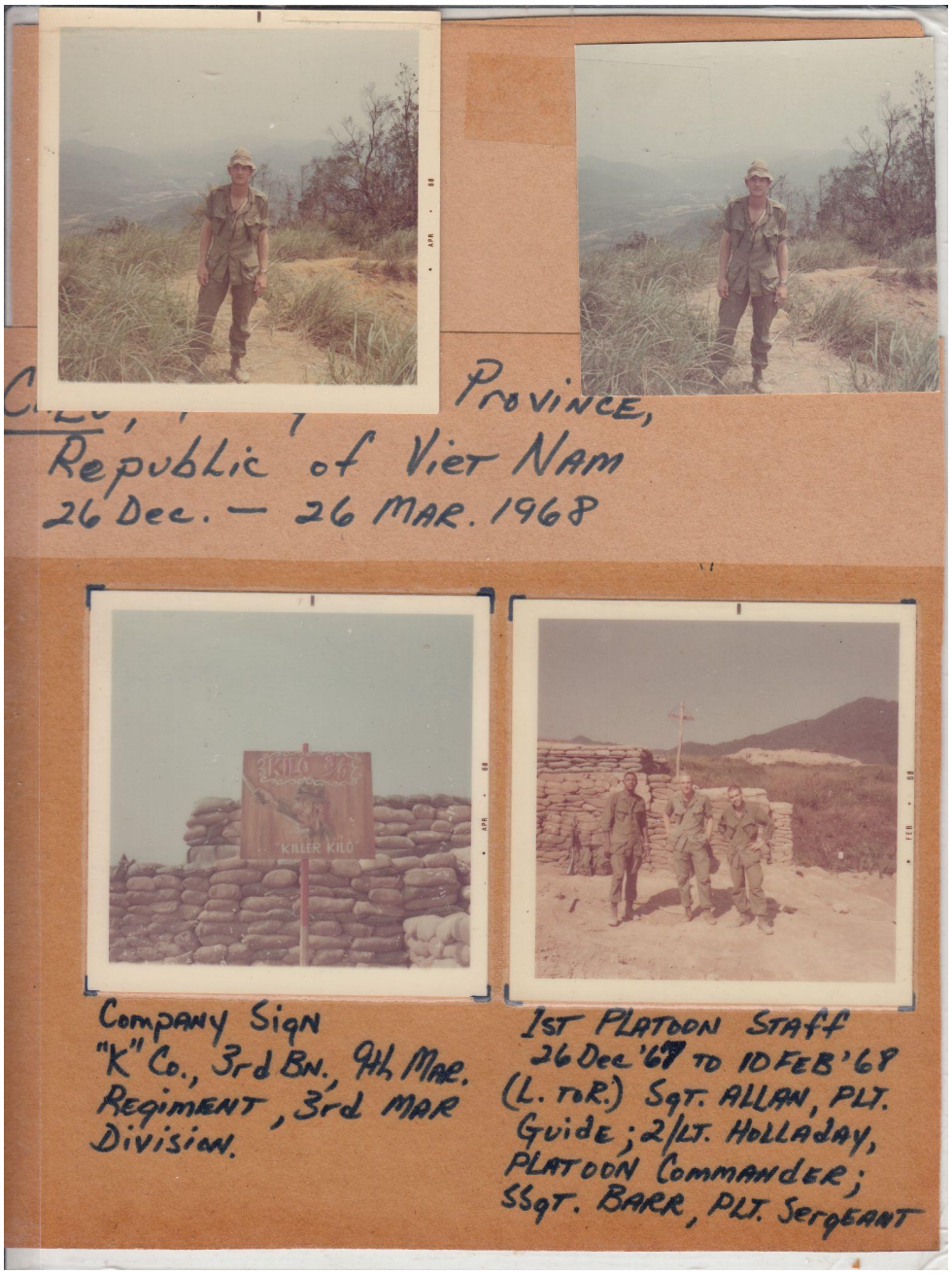
Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (2 of 11)



4 photographs included in Holladay's personal photo album, taken in Vietnam in 1967-1968. The photographs include the K Company, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment sign and the 1st Platoon staff, with Holladay serving as Platoon Commander.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (3 of 11)



This page of Holladay's Vietnam photo album includes pictures of an approaching storm, a resupply by a CH-34 helicopter, the construction of a sandbag bunker, and the completed bunker that housed a squad and the Platoon Staff.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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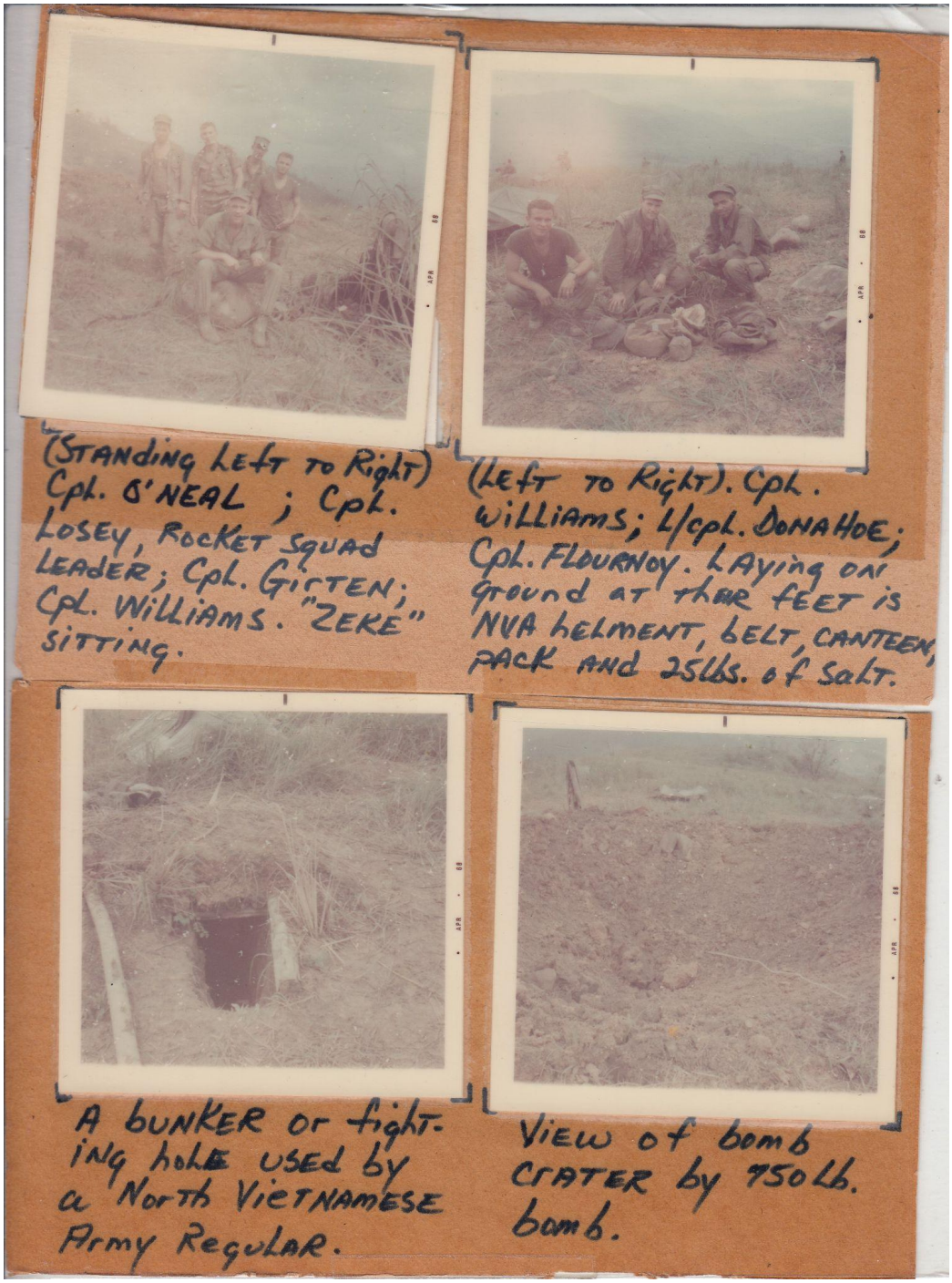
Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (4 of 11)



This page of Holladay's Vietnam photo album shows men from K Company, a bunker used by a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier, and a bomb crater.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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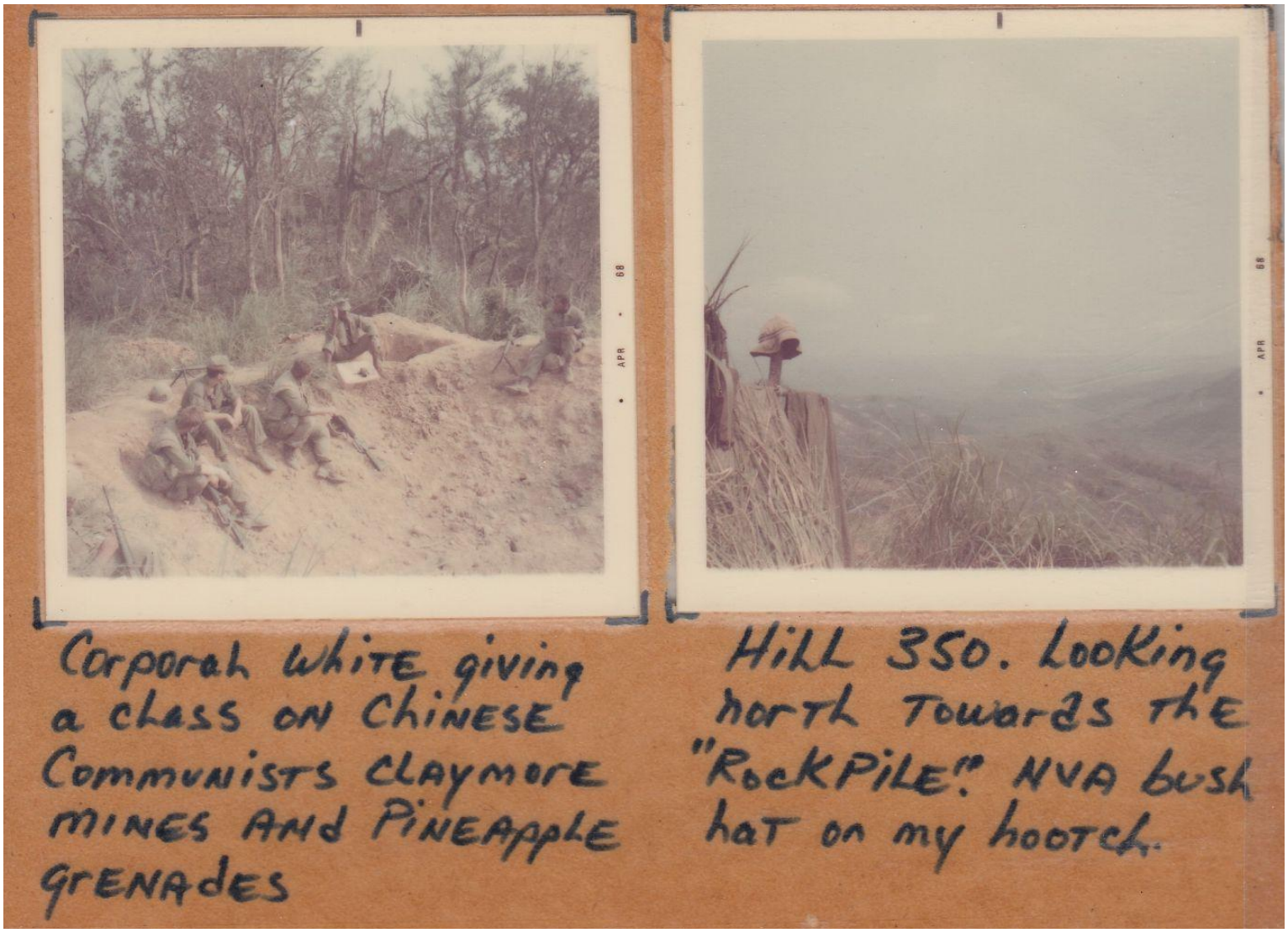
Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (5 of 11)



The photographs on this page of Holladay's album depict a Corporal teaching a class on Chinese mines and grenades and a view of Holladay's tent (hootch) in the foreground, with a hill known as the "Rockpile" in the background.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (6 of 11)



More photos from Holladay's Vietnam photo album show a resupply by a CH-53 Helicopter, Marines zeroing M60 light machine guns, K Company staff, and Platoon Sergeant Clifford Williams.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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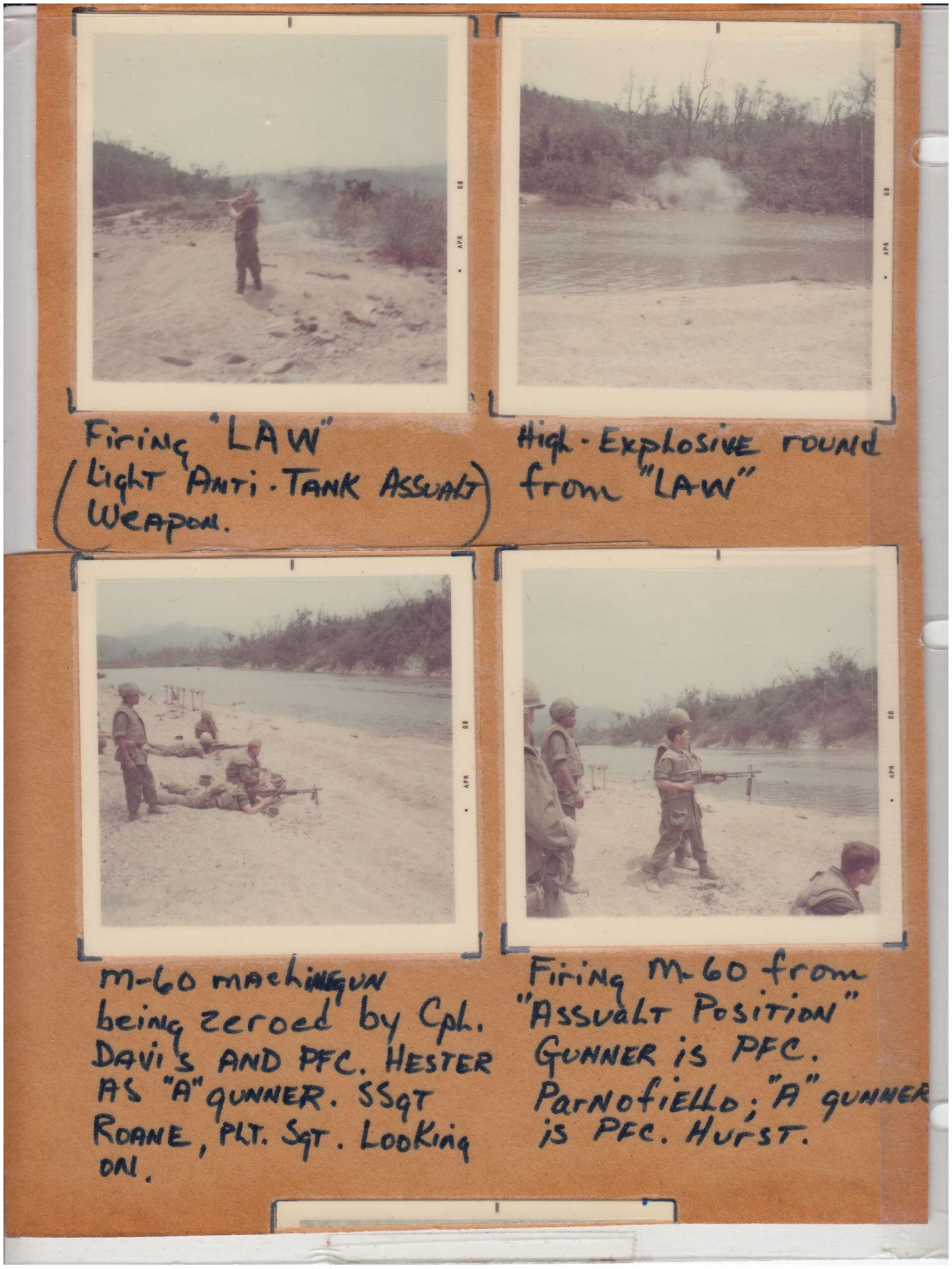
Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (7 of 11)



These photos show Marines firing a M72 light anti-tank weapon (LAW) and M60 machine guns.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (8 of 11)



Photographs show Marines from Holladay's platoon walking through fields of tall grass, including two squad leaders and the platoon's corpsman.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Vietnam Photos (9 of 11)



The photograph at the top shows Vietnamese children from a local mountain village, while the two at the bottom show a shelter tent and members of Holladay's unit preparing a canned meal, or C-rations (C-Rats).

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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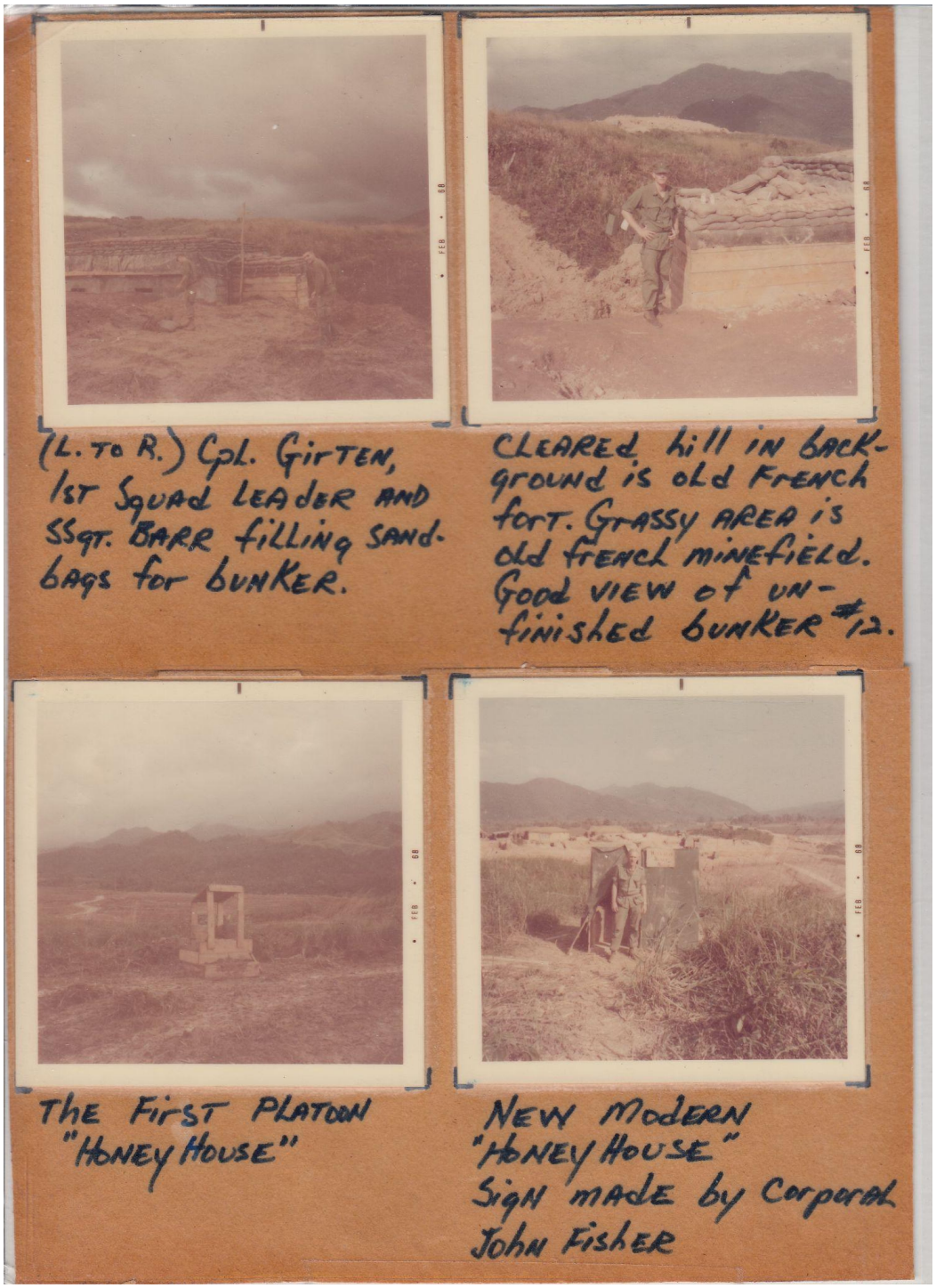
Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (10 of 11)



This set of pictures includes Marines building a sandbag bunker, Holladay posing in front of an old French fort and minefield, and photos of the old and new toilets (Honey House).

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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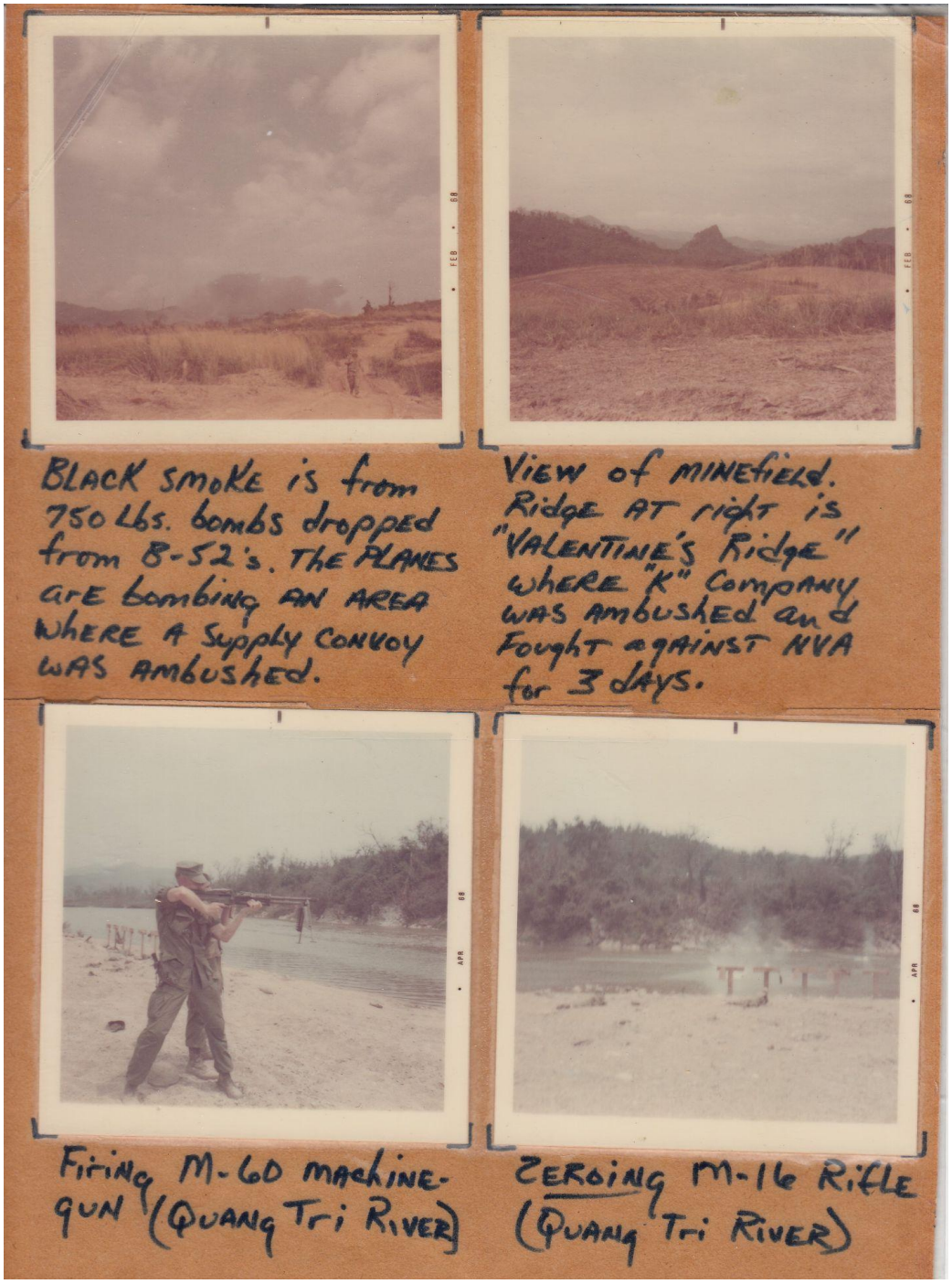
Vietnam Photos,1967-1968 (11 of 11)



More photos from Vietnam show smoke from 750-pound bombs dropped by B-52 bombers over an area where the NVA ambushed a supply convoy, a minefield with Valentine's Ridge on the right, and Marines firing an M60 machine gun and an M16 rifle along the Quang Tri River.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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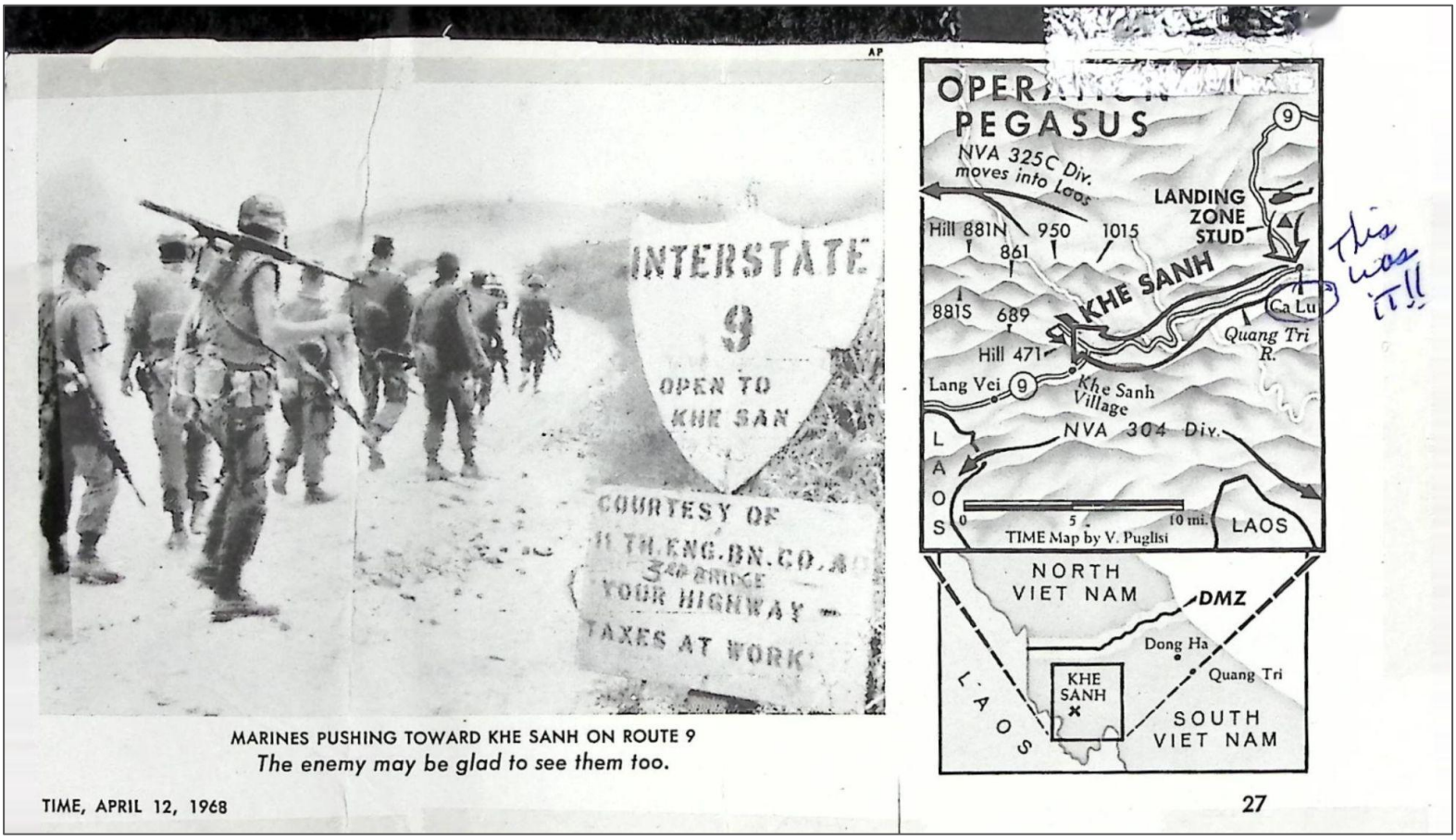
Newspaper clipping about Route 9 to Khe Sanh



Magazine clipping about Operation Pegasus, which took place between April 1 to April 15, 1968, to break the 77-day North Vietnamese siege on the US Marine base at Khe Sanh. The document includes a map on the right showing the movements of US Marine along route 9 as well as the movements of North Vietnamese forces. Holladay annotated the map to indicate his location during the operation.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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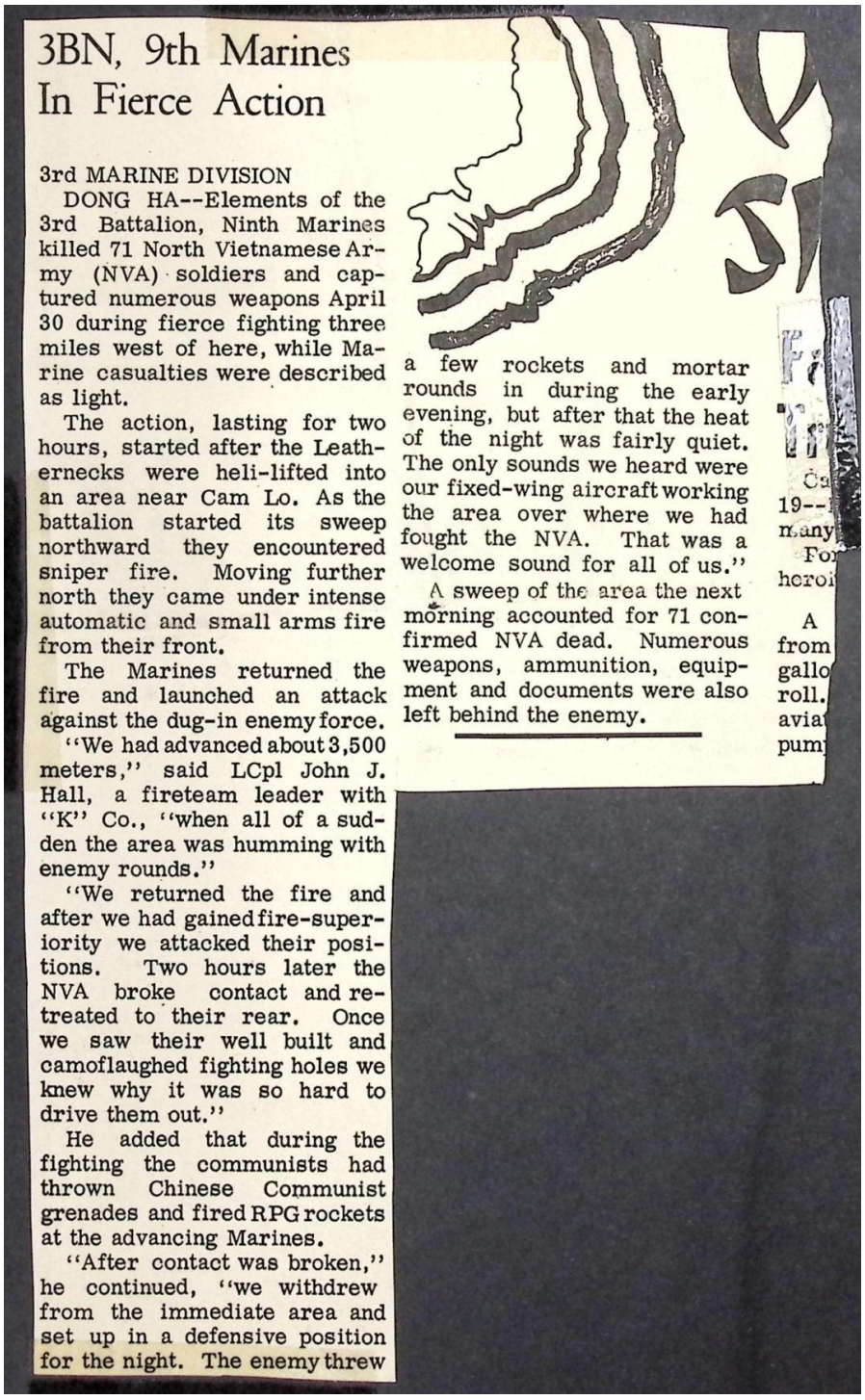
Newspaper Clipping



3BN, 9th Marines In Fierce Action

3rd MARINE DIVISION

DONG HA--Elements of the 3rd Battalion, Ninth Marines killed 71 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers and captured numerous weapons April 30 during fierce fighting three miles west of here, while Marine casualties were described as light.

The action, lasting for two hours, started after the Leathernecks were heli-lifted into an area near Cam Lo. As the battalion started its sweep northward they encountered sniper fire. Moving further north they came under intense automatic and small arms fire from their front.

The Marines returned the fire and launched an attack against the dug-in enemy force.

"We had advanced about 3,500 meters," said LCpl John J. Hall, a fireteam leader with "K" Co., "when all of a sudden the area was humming with enemy rounds."

"We returned the fire and after we had gained fire-superiority we attacked their positions. Two hours later the NVA broke contact and retreated to their rear. Once we saw their well built and camoflaughed fighting holes we knew why it was so hard to drive them out."

He added that during the fighting the communists had thrown Chinese Communist grenades and fired RPG rockets at the advancing Marines.

"After contact was broken," he continued, "we withdrew from the immediate area and set up in a defensive position for the night. The enemy threw a few rockets and mortar rounds in during the early evening, but after that the heat of the night was fairly quiet. The only sounds we heard were our fixed-wing aircraft working the area over where we had fought the NVA. That was a welcome sound for all of us."

A sweep of the area the next morning accounted for 71 confirmed NVA dead. Numerous weapons, ammunition, equipment and documents were also left behind the enemy.

This newspaper clipping describes combat involving the 9th Marines North of Cam Lo, Vietnam and features quotes from Lance Corporal John J. Hall.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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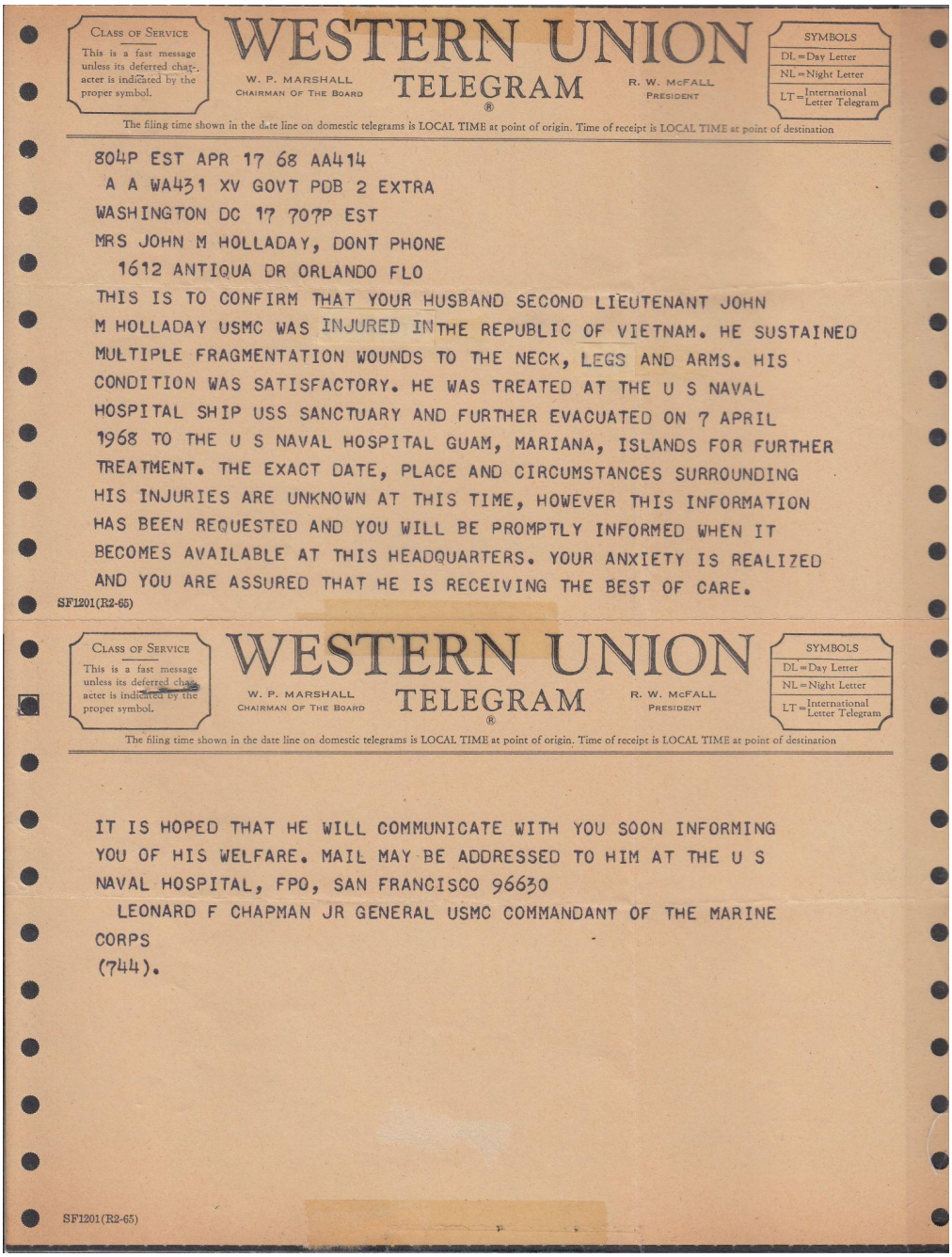
Telegram on Holladay's Recovery (April 17)



CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a fast message unless its deferred character is indicated by the proper symbol.

WESTERN UNION

W. P. MARSHALL
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

TELEGRAM

R. W. McFALL
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LT = International Letter Telegram

The filing time shown in the date line on domestic telegrams is LOCAL TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is LOCAL TIME at point of destination

804P EST APR 17 68 AA414
A A WA431 XV GOVT PDB 2 EXTRA
WASHINGTON DC 17 707P EST
MRS JOHN M HOLLADAY, DONT PHONE
1612 ANTIQUA DR ORLANDO FLO
THIS IS TO CONFIRM THAT YOUR HUSBAND SECOND LIEUTENANT JOHN M HOLLADAY USMC WAS INJURED IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. HE SUSTAINED MULTIPLE FRAGMENTATION WOUNDS TO THE NECK, LEGS AND ARMS. HIS CONDITION WAS SATISFACTORY. HE WAS TREATED AT THE U S NAVAL HOSPITAL SHIP USS SANCTUARY AND FURTHER EVACUATED ON 7 APRIL 1968 TO THE U S NAVAL HOSPITAL GUAM, MARIANA, ISLANDS FOR FURTHER TREATMENT. THE EXACT DATE, PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING HIS INJURIES ARE UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME, HOWEVER THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN REQUESTED AND YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY INFORMED WHEN IT BECOMES AVAILABLE AT THIS HEADQUARTERS. YOUR ANXIETY IS REALIZED AND YOU ARE ASSURED THAT HE IS RECEIVING THE BEST OF CARE.

SF1201(R2-65)

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WESTERN UNION

W. P. MARSHALL
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

TELEGRAM

R. W. McFALL
PRESIDENT

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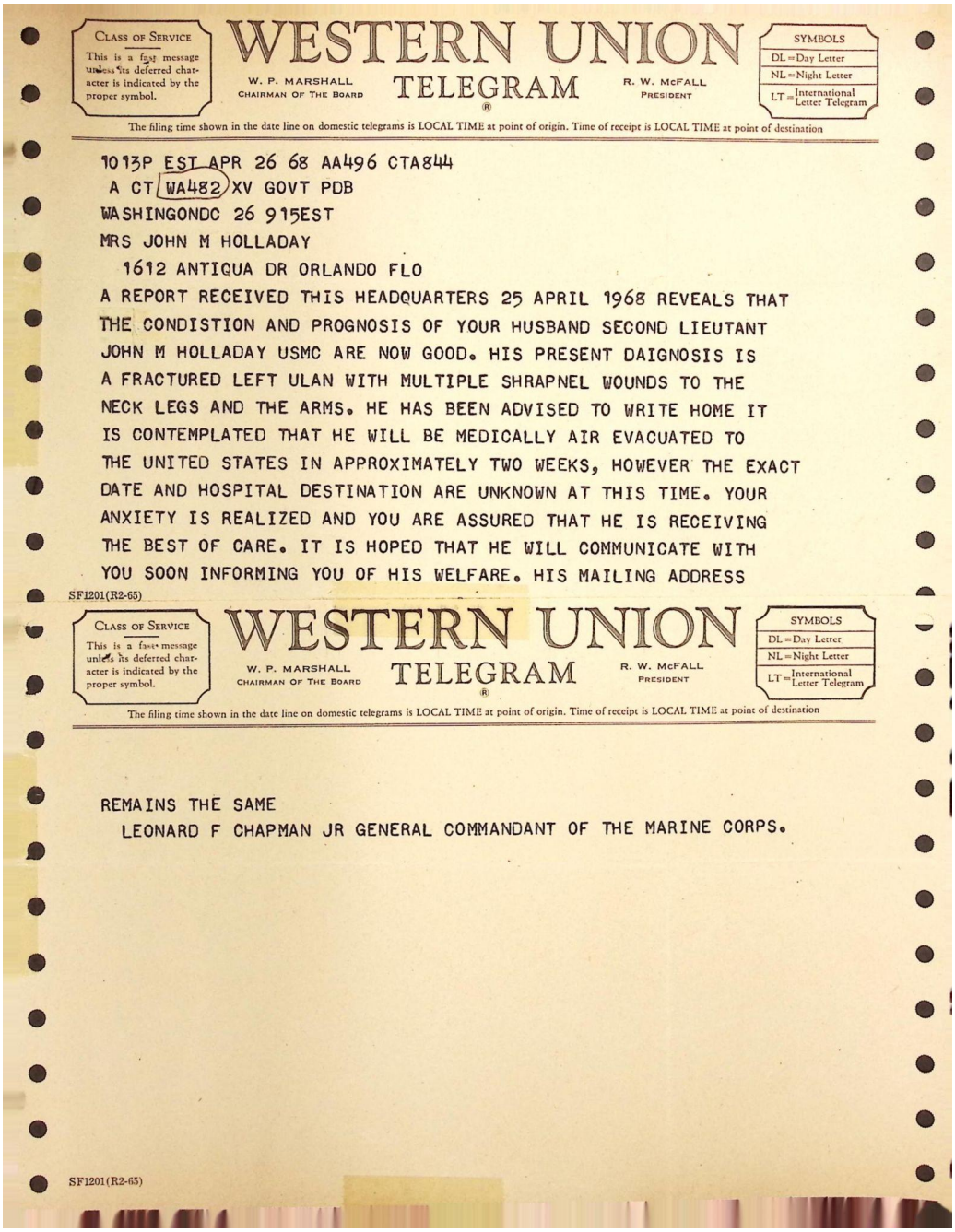
IT IS HOPED THAT HE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH YOU SOON INFORMING YOU OF HIS WELFARE. MAIL MAY BE ADDRESSED TO HIM AT THE U S NAVAL HOSPITAL, FPO, SAN FRANCISCO 96630
LEONARD F CHAPMAN JR GENERAL USMC COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
(744).

SF1201(R2-65)

On April 17, 1968, the US Marine Corps Commandant sent a telegram notifying John's wife, Cassandra Holladay, that her husband had sustained fragmentation wounds to his neck, legs, and arms in Vietnam. Holladay received treatment aboard the hospital ship USS *Sanctuary* before his evacuation to the US Naval Hospital in Guam. The telegram stated that the circumstances surrounding his injuries remained unknown but assured Cassandra that John was receiving the best possible care.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

Telegram on Holladay's Recovery (April 26)



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WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

W. P. MARSHALL
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

R. W. McFALL
PRESIDENT

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1013P EST APR 26 68 AA496 CTA844
A CT WA482 XV GOVT PDB
WASHINGONDC 26 915EST
MRS JOHN M HOLLADAY
1612 ANTIQUA DR ORLANDO FLO
A REPORT RECEIVED THIS HEADQUARTERS 25 APRIL 1968 REVEALS THAT
THE CONDISTION AND PROGNOSIS OF YOUR HUSBAND SECOND LIEUTANT
JOHN M HOLLADAY USMC ARE NOW GOOD. HIS PRESENT DAIGNOSIS IS
A FRACTURED LEFT ULAN WITH MULTIPLE SHRAPNEL WOUNDS TO THE
NECK LEGS AND THE ARMS. HE HAS BEEN ADVISED TO WRITE HOME IT
IS CONTEMPLATED THAT HE WILL BE MEDICALLY AIR EVACUATED TO
THE UNITED STATES IN APPROXIMATELY TWO WEEKS, HOWEVER THE EXACT
DATE AND HOSPITAL DESTINATION ARE UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME. YOUR
ANXIETY IS REALIZED AND YOU ARE ASSURED THAT HE IS RECEIVING
THE BEST OF CARE. IT IS HOPED THAT HE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH
YOU SOON INFORMING YOU OF HIS WELFARE. HIS MAILING ADDRESS

SF1201(R2-65)

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WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

W. P. MARSHALL
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

R. W. McFALL
PRESIDENT

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REMAINS THE SAME
LEONARD F CHAPMAN JR GENERAL COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS.

SF1201(R2-65)

On April 26, 1968, the US Marine Corps Commandant sent another telegram to Cassandra informing her that her husband was in good condition. The message clarified details on John's injuries and stated that the military was considering medically evacuating Holladay to the US within 2 weeks.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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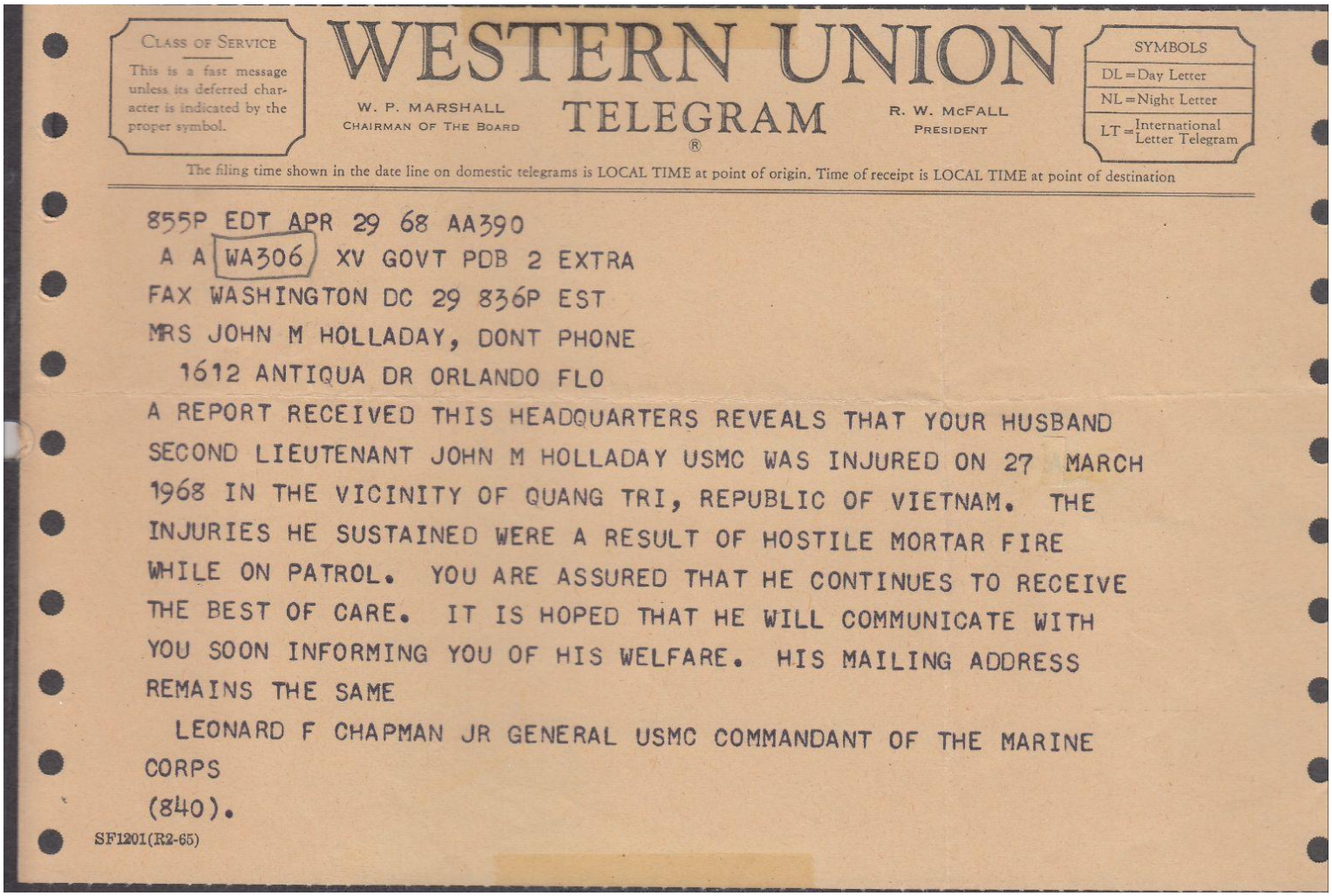
Telegram on Holladay's Recovery (April 29)



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W. P. MARSHALL
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

R. W. McFALL
PRESIDENT

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855P EDT APR 29 68 AA390
A A WA306 XV GOVT PDB 2 EXTRA
FAX WASHINGTON DC 29 836P EST
MRS JOHN M HOLLADAY, DONT PHONE
1612 ANTIQUA DR ORLANDO FLO
A REPORT RECEIVED THIS HEADQUARTERS REVEALS THAT YOUR HUSBAND SECOND LIEUTENANT JOHN M HOLLADAY USMC WAS INJURED ON 27 MARCH 1968 IN THE VICINITY OF QUANG TRI, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. THE INJURIES HE SUSTAINED WERE A RESULT OF HOSTILE MORTAR FIRE WHILE ON PATROL. YOU ARE ASSURED THAT HE CONTINUES TO RECEIVE THE BEST OF CARE. IT IS HOPED THAT HE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH YOU SOON INFORMING YOU OF HIS WELFARE. HIS MAILING ADDRESS REMAINS THE SAME
LEONARD F CHAPMAN JR GENERAL USMC COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
(840).

SF1201(R2-65)

On April 29, 1968, the US Marine Corps Commandant sent another telegram to Cassandra, informing her that John had sustained injuries from hostile mortar fire while on patrol in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam, on March 27, 1968.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Hospital Photo (Front)



Holladay and 3 other wounded Marines at the Guam Naval Hospital in 1968. Holladay appears in the upper left.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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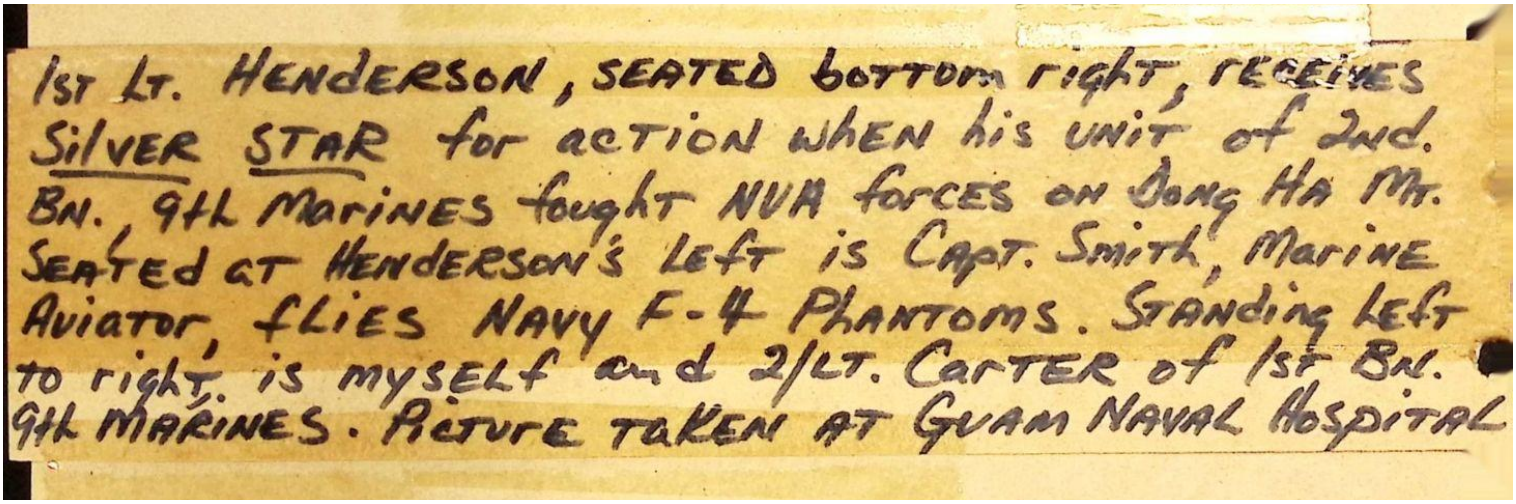
Hospital Photo (reverse)



On the back of the hospital photo, Holladay identified each of the wounded Marines pictured with him, including their rank and unit.

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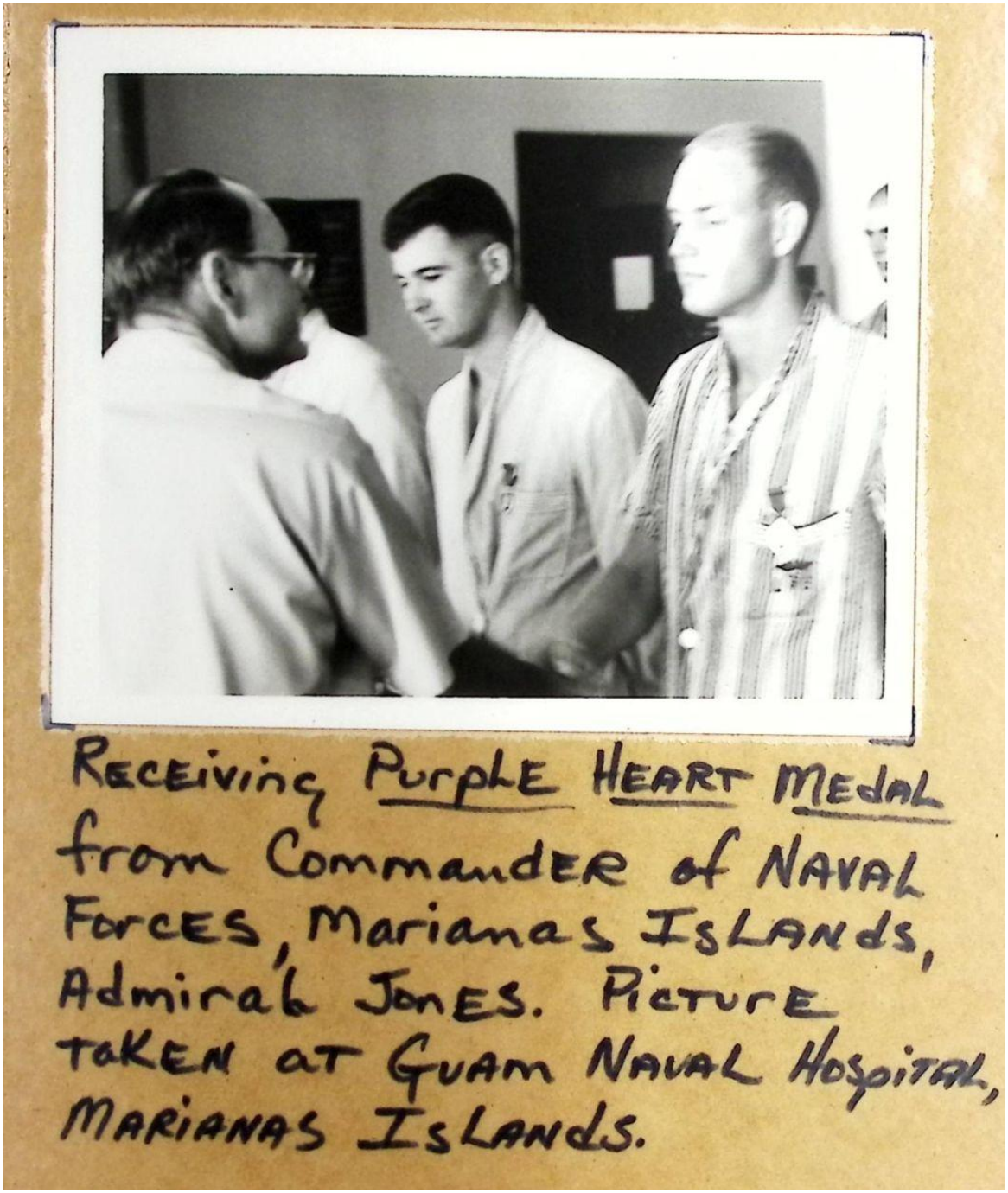
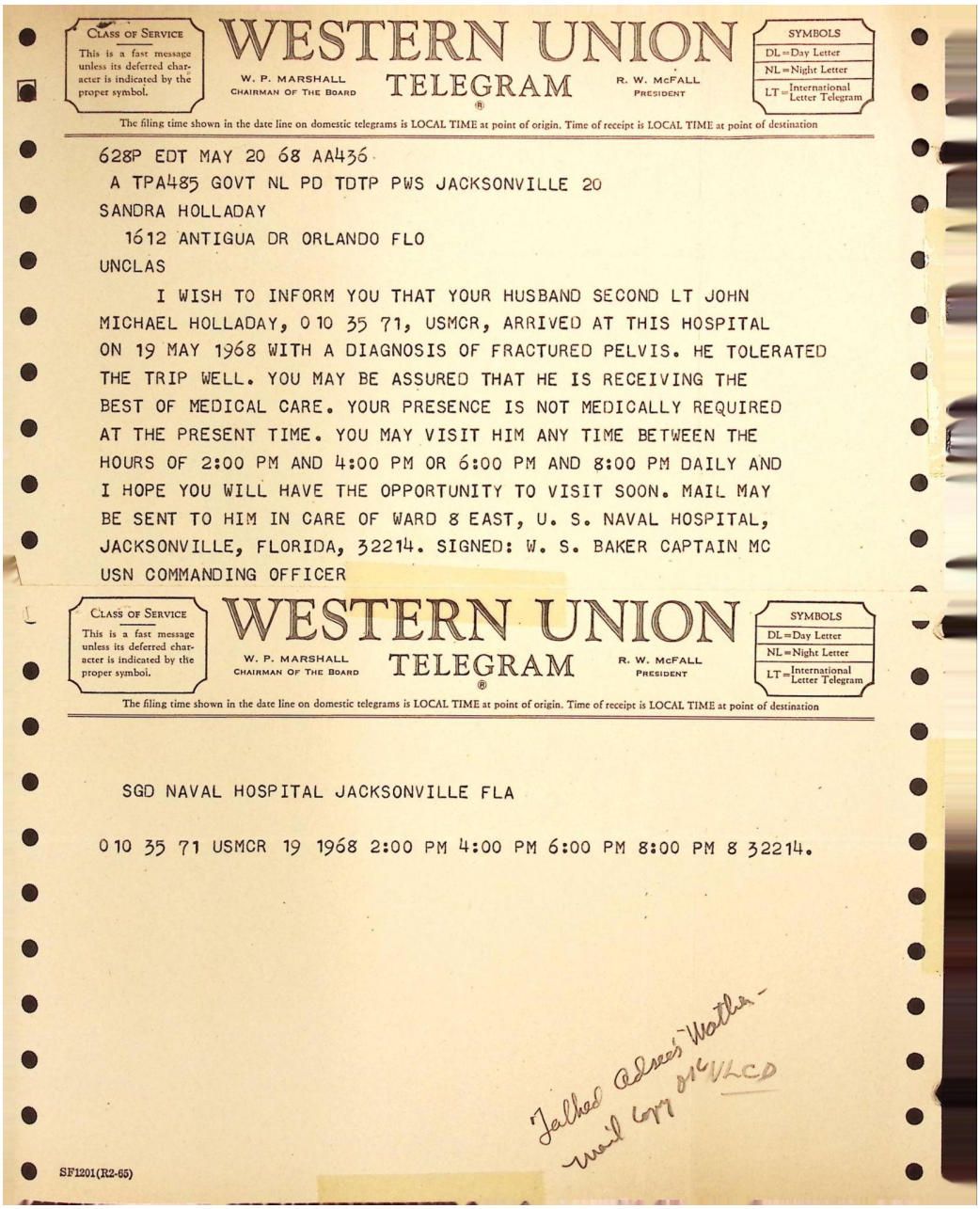
Holladay receiving the Purple Heart



A photo of John Holladay receiving the Purple Heart Medal at the US Naval Hospital in Guam in 1968. Admiral Jones, the Commander of Naval Forces in the Mariana Islands, presented Holladay with the medal.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

Telegram on Holladay's Recovery (May 20)



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WESTERN UNION
W. P. MARSHALL, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
TELEGRAM
R. W. McFALL, PRESIDENT

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628P EDT MAY 20 68 AA436
A TPA485 GOVT NL PD TDTP PWS JACKSONVILLE 20
SANDRA HOLLADAY
1612 ANTIGUA DR ORLANDO FLO
UNCLAS
I WISH TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND SECOND LT JOHN MICHAEL HOLLADAY, 0 10 35 71, USMCR, ARRIVED AT THIS HOSPITAL ON 19 MAY 1968 WITH A DIAGNOSIS OF FRACTURED PELVIS. HE TOLERATED THE TRIP WELL. YOU MAY BE ASSURED THAT HE IS RECEIVING THE BEST OF MEDICAL CARE. YOUR PRESENCE IS NOT MEDICALLY REQUIRED AT THE PRESENT TIME. YOU MAY VISIT HIM ANY TIME BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 2:00 PM AND 4:00 PM OR 6:00 PM AND 8:00 PM DAILY AND I HOPE YOU WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT SOON. MAIL MAY BE SENT TO HIM IN CARE OF WARD 8 EAST, U. S. NAVAL HOSPITAL, JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA, 32214. SIGNED: W. S. BAKER CAPTAIN MC USN COMMANDING OFFICER

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WESTERN UNION
W. P. MARSHALL, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
TELEGRAM
R. W. McFALL, PRESIDENT

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SGD NAVAL HOSPITAL JACKSONVILLE FLA

0 10 35 71 USMCR 19 1968 2:00 PM 4:00 PM 6:00 PM 8:00 PM 8 32214.

"Jalbad Alsee's Wallet - mail copy 016/VLCD

SF1201(R2-65)

On May 20, 1968, the US Naval Hospital in Jacksonville, FL notified Cassandra that her husband John had arrived at the hospital the previous day. The telegram noted that John had a "fractured pelvis," but reassured her that he had "tolerated the trip well," was receiving excellent care, and could received visitors.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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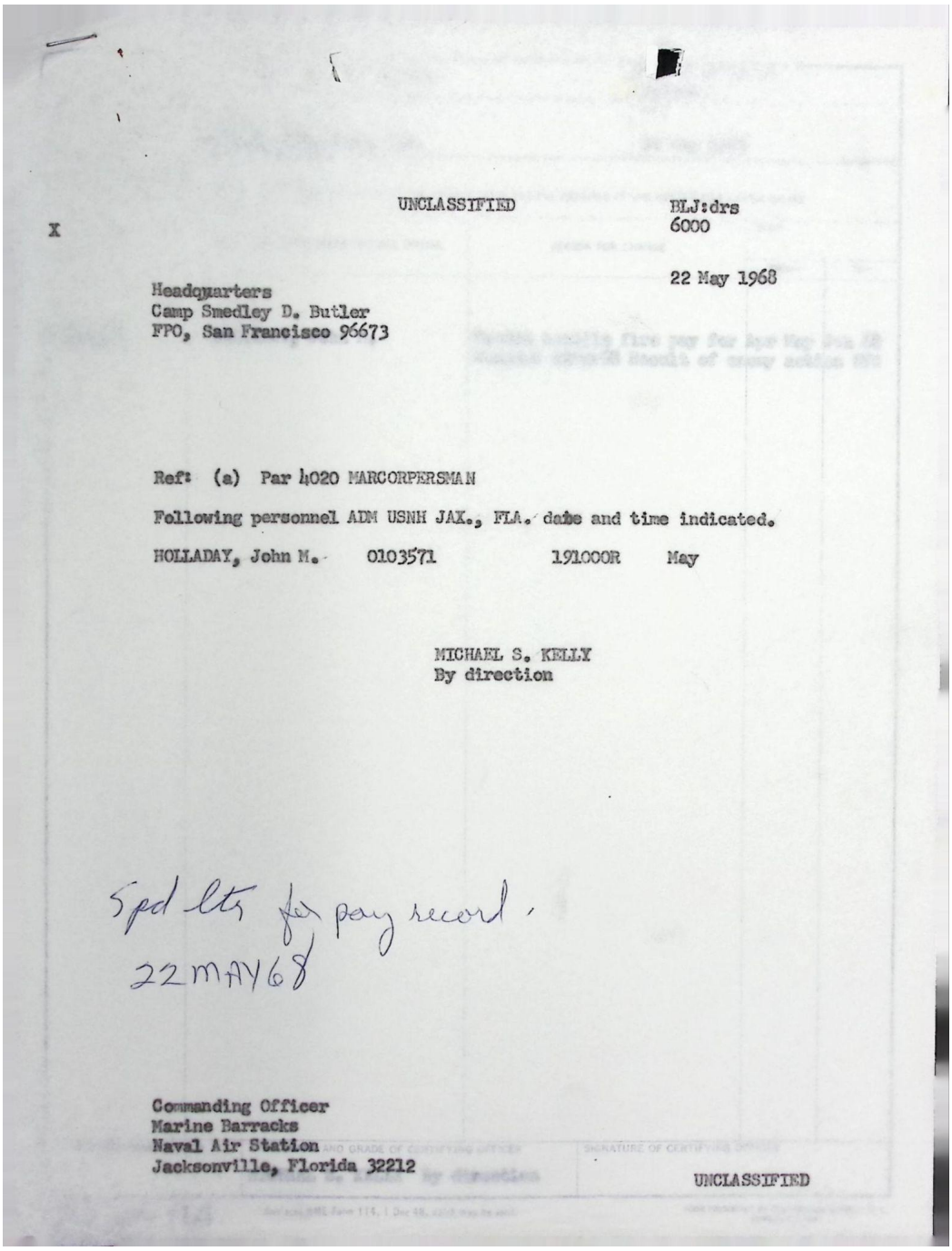
Pay Record (1 of 2)



UNCLASSIFIED

BLJ:drs
6000

X

22 May 1968

Headquarters
Camp Smedley D. Butler
FPO, San Francisco 96673

Ref: (a) Par 4020 MARCORPERSMAN

Following personnel ADM USNH JAX., FLA. date and time indicated.

HOLLADAY, John M. 0103571 191000R May

MICHAEL S. KELLY
By direction

Spd ltr for pay record.
22MAY68

Commanding Officer
Marine Barracks
Naval Air Station
Jacksonville, Florida 32212

UNCLASSIFIED

The first page of a Military Pay Order documenting Holladay's military pay following his injuries in Vietnam.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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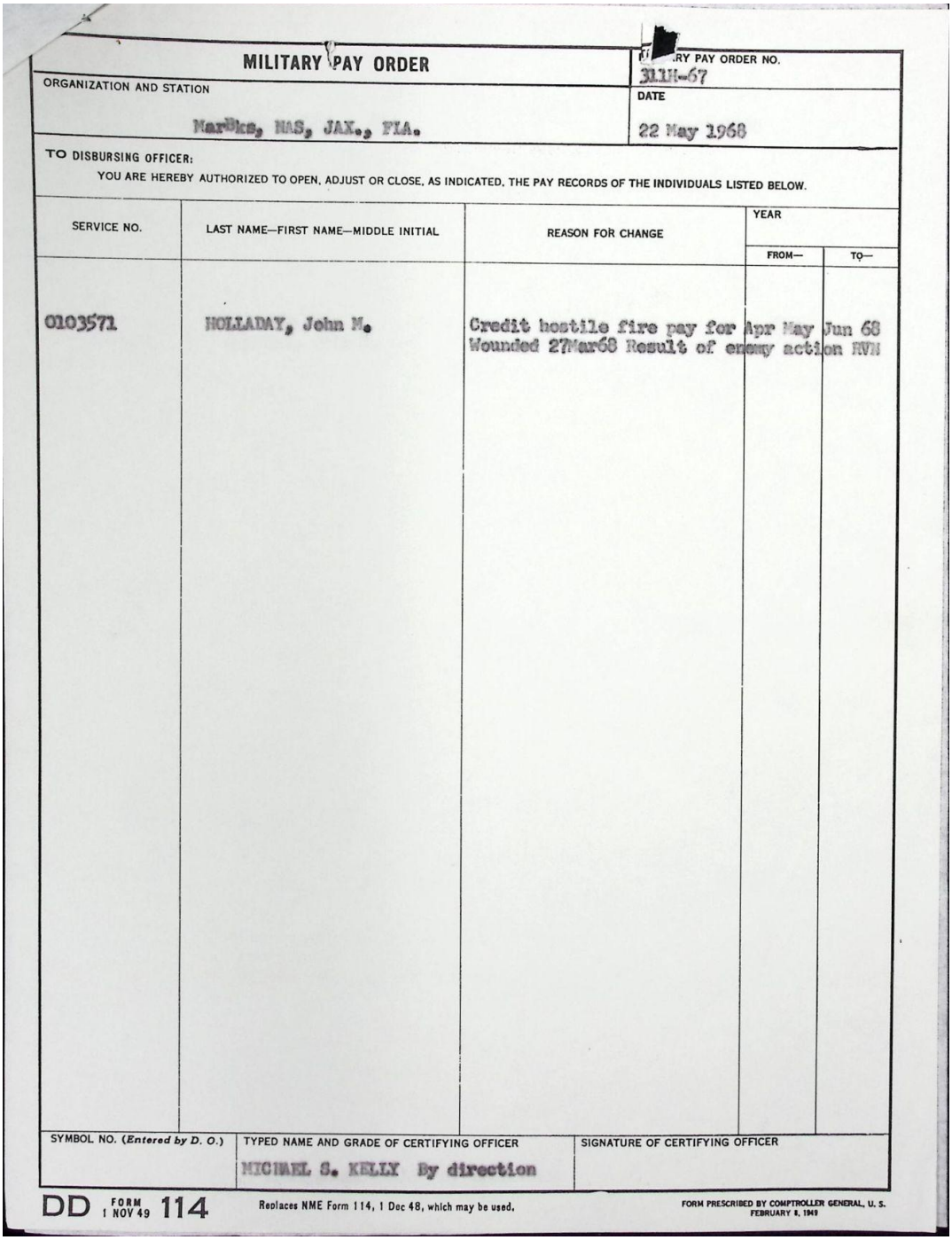
Pay Record (2 of 2)



MILITARY PAY ORDER

ORGANIZATION AND STATION: Marks, NAS, JAX., FLA.

MILITARY PAY ORDER NO.: 311H-67

DATE: 22 May 1968

TO DISBURSING OFFICER:
YOU ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED TO OPEN, ADJUST OR CLOSE, AS INDICATED, THE PAY RECORDS OF THE INDIVIDUALS LISTED BELOW.

SERVICE NO.	LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE INITIAL	REASON FOR CHANGE	YEAR FROM—	YEAR TO—
0103571	HOLLADAY, John M.	Credit hostile fire pay for Apr May Jun 68 Wounded 27Mar68 Result of enemy action RVN		

SYMBOL NO. (Entered by D. O.)	TYPED NAME AND GRADE OF CERTIFYING OFFICER	SIGNATURE OF CERTIFYING OFFICER
	MICHAEL S. KELLY By direction	

DD FORM 1 NOV 49 114 Replaces NME Form 114, 1 Dec 48, which may be used. FORM PRESCRIBED BY COMPTROLLER GENERAL, U. S. FEBRUARY 8, 1949

Page 2 of Holladay's Military Pay Order stated that he received hostile fire pay for April, May, and June 1968 after being wounded by enemy action on March 27 in Vietnam.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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"Aide's Aide" Newspaper Clipping



THE AIDE'S AIDE - Cass Holladay, "Aide de Camp" and wife of Captain J. M. Holladay, Aide de Camp for the Depot, appears to be all smiles as Major General Carl W. Hoffman, commanding general of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island presents the captain with the Navy Commendation Medal. Capt. Holladay was presented his medal for outstanding performance of duty. (USMC Photo)

Undated news clipping showing when John received the Navy Commendation Medal at the USMC Recruit Depot in Parris Island, SC. Pictured next to Holladay was his wife, Cassandra "Cass," whom he described as his "Aide-de-Camp."

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

Second Vietnam Tour Photos, 1972-1973 (1 of 2)



Photos from when Holladay went back to Vietnam in 1972-1973 for a second tour.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Second Vietnam Tour Photos, 1972-1973 (2 of 2)



Holladay and his men in an near their tents during his second tour in Vietnam, in April 1973.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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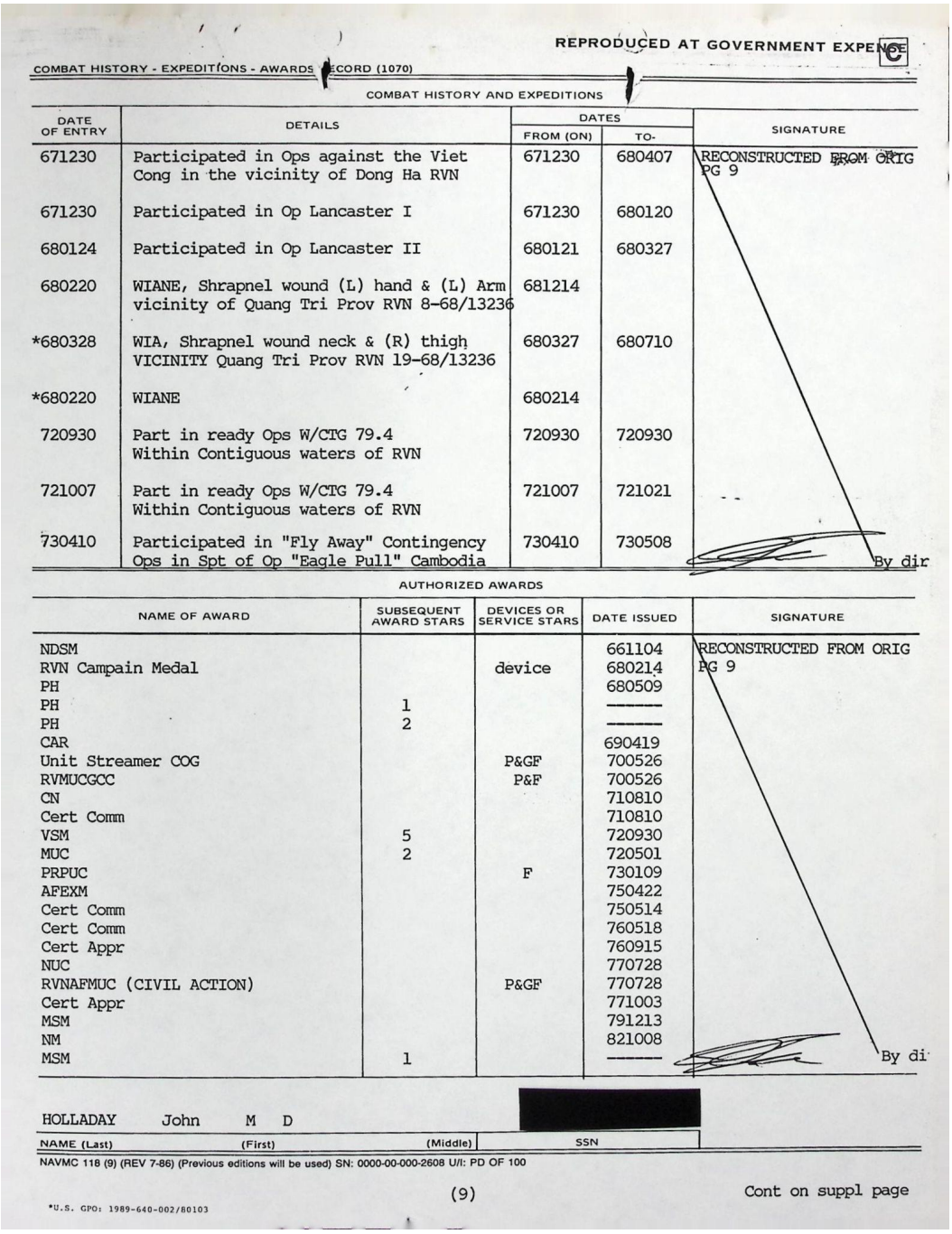
Combat Record



REPRODUCED AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE

COMBAT HISTORY - EXPEDITIONS - AWARDS RECORD (1070)

COMBAT HISTORY AND EXPEDITIONS

DATE OF ENTRY	DETAILS	DATES FROM (ON)	DATES TO-	SIGNATURE
671230	Participated in Ops against the Viet Cong in the vicinity of Dong Ha RVN	671230	680407	RECONSTRUCTED FROM ORIG PG 9
671230	Participated in Op Lancaster I	671230	680120	
680124	Participated in Op Lancaster II	680121	680327	
680220	WIANE, Shrapnel wound (L) hand & (L) Arm vicinity of Quang Tri Prov RVN 8-68/13236	681214		
*680328	WIA, Shrapnel wound neck & (R) thigh VICINITY Quang Tri Prov RVN 19-68/13236	680327	680710	
*680220	WIANE	680214		
720930	Part in ready Ops W/CTG 79.4 Within Contiguous waters of RVN	720930	720930	
721007	Part in ready Ops W/CTG 79.4 Within Contiguous waters of RVN	721007	721021	
730410	Participated in "Fly Away" Contingency Ops in Spt of Op "Eagle Pull" Cambodia	730410	730508	By dir

AUTHORIZED AWARDS

NAME OF AWARD	SUBSEQUENT AWARD STARS	DEVICES OR SERVICE STARS	DATE ISSUED	SIGNATURE
NDSM			661104	RECONSTRUCTED FROM ORIG PG 9
RVN Campain Medal		device	680214	
PH			680509	
PH	1		------	
PH	2		------	
CAR			690419	
Unit Streamer COG		P&GF	700526	
RVMUCGCC		P&F	700526	
CN			710810	
Cert Comm			710810	
VSM	5		720930	
MUC	2		720501	
PRPUC		F	730109	
AFEXM			750422	
Cert Comm			750514	
Cert Comm			760518	
Cert Appr			760915	
NUC			770728	
RVNAFMUC (CIVIL ACTION)		P&GF	770728	
Cert Appr			771003	
MSM			791213	
NM			821008	
MSM	1		------	By di

HOLLADAY John M D [redacted]

NAME (Last) (First) (Middle) SSN

NAVMC 118 (9) (REV 7-86) (Previous editions will be used) SN: 0000-00-000-2608 U/I: PD OF 100

(9)

Cont on suppl page

*U.S. GPO: 1989-640-002/80103

John Holladay's record of combat operations from December 30, 1967 to May 8, 1973, lists his participation in 5 combat operations in Vietnam and 1 in Cambodia. The record also notes that he was wounded in action on 3 separate occasions and lists military awards he earned.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Photo with First Lady Nancy Reagan



A signed photo of Holladay with First Lady Nancy Reagan at a garden party at the Marine Commandant's residence in 1984.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

NHSC Award Photo



Mr. Robert Parma (left), Chairman of NHSC's Awards and Recognition Committee, presents Lt. Col. J.M.D. Holladay (right), Deputy Director of the Marine Corps Institute, with the NHSC Distinguished Service Award.

The fall 1985 *National Home Studies Council (NHSC) News* showed Holladay receiving the NHSC Distinguished Service Award. He received the award for his many contributions to the NHSC, including visiting schools, speaking at NHSC conferences, and serving as chairman of the NHSC Public Relations Committee.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

Photo with General Colin Powell



Holladay with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, during Powell's 1991 visit to the USMC Recruit Depot in San Diego, CA, where Holladay served as Commanding Officer of the Recruit Training Regiment.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Hallowed Ground Article

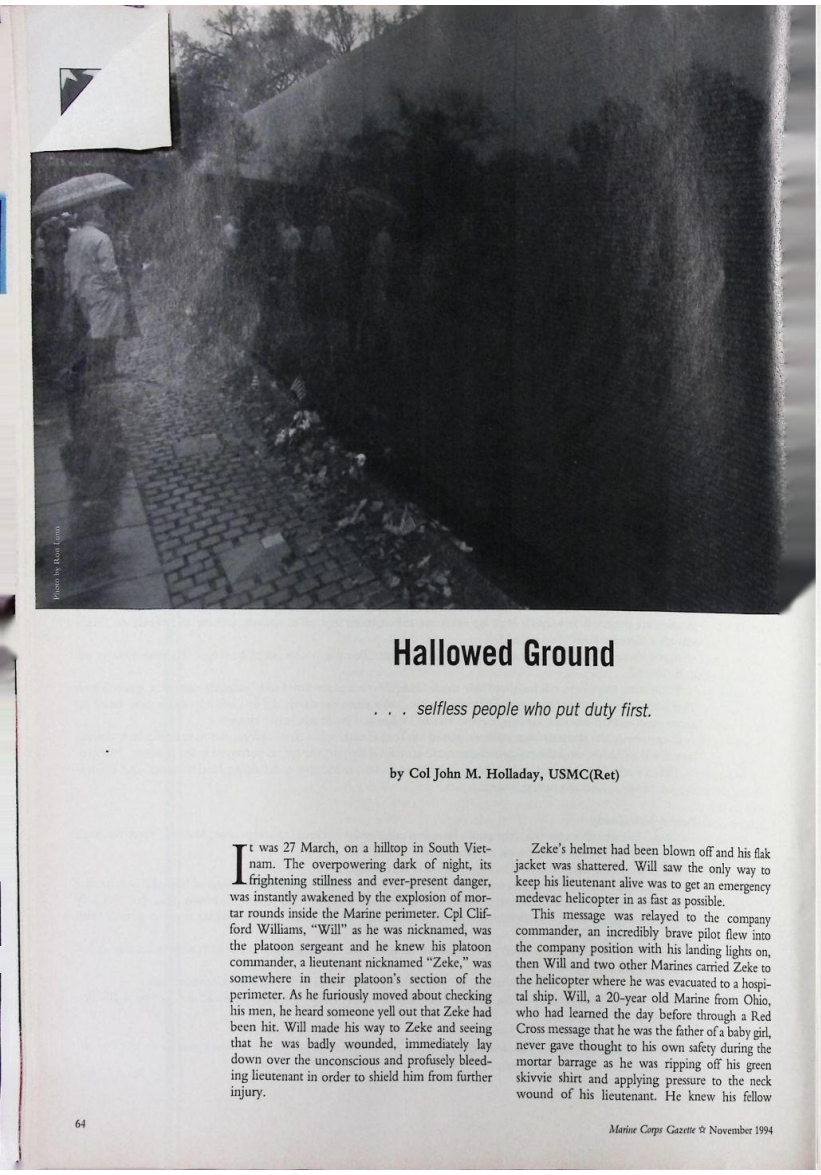

Photo by Ron Lyon

Hallowed Ground

. . . selfless people who put duty first.

by Col John M. Holladay, USMC(Ret)

It was 27 March, on a hilltop in South Vietnam. The overpowering dark of night, its frightening stillness and ever-present danger, was instantly awakened by the explosion of mortar rounds inside the Marine perimeter. Cpl Clifford Williams, "Will" as he was nicknamed, was the platoon sergeant and he knew his platoon commander, a lieutenant nicknamed "Zeke," was somewhere in their platoon's section of the perimeter. As he furiously moved about checking his men, he heard someone yell out that Zeke had been hit. Will made his way to Zeke and seeing that he was badly wounded, immediately lay down over the unconscious and profusely bleeding lieutenant in order to shield him from further injury.

Zeke's helmet had been blown off and his flak jacket was shattered. Will saw the only way to keep his lieutenant alive was to get an emergency medevac helicopter in as fast as possible.

This message was relayed to the company commander, an incredibly brave pilot flew into the company position with his landing lights on, then Will and two other Marines carried Zeke to the helicopter where he was evacuated to a hospital ship. Will, a 20-year old Marine from Ohio, who had learned the day before through a Red Cross message that he was the father of a baby girl, never gave thought to his own safety during the mortar barrage as he was ripping off his green skivvie shirt and applying pressure to the neck wound of his lieutenant. He knew his fellow

Marines would repulse any attack while he tried to save the lieutenant's life. A hero? Will would say no—just doing his job.



In my time as a Marine, I've had the opportunity to visit some of the hallowed ground throughout the world where heroes gave so gallantly of themselves. In Belleau Wood in France, I remember when I walked the ground how peaceful and serene I found the wheatfield and the wood itself. You could feel the presence of a long-ago battle, you could see it in the still gnarled trees, and you could faintly see the depression of shallow pits or foxholes as they were named by the heroes who fought there. On just one day during that battle, in June of 1918, 1,087 Marines died on that hallowed ground.

Then there was the island of Guam, in the Marianas chain of the Pacific, where I walked the landing beach and looked up at the incredibly formidable mountains and jungle inland from the sea, and could understand how 1,156 Marines lost their lives in July and August of 1944 during World War II.

Later I had the occasion to walk another landing beach of World War II where it is said you could always recognize a veteran because his face was forever scarred from constantly burying it in the hot volcanic sand. I crawled through the sulphur-smelling, smothering hot tunnels and climbed the heights of Mount Suribachi on this tiny island known as Iwo Jima. The Marine Corps alone lost 4,554 men during February and March of 1945.

Will was doing the same thing he had always done—singlehandedly trying to take care of his Marines.

Today the entire island is declared a sacred burial ground to the Japanese. The island of Okinawa cost 2,846 Marines their lives in April, May, and June of 1945. I have spent 4 years of my life on that island, 65 miles long by 13 miles wide. Hallowed ground to two nations—and to this day Marines will find reminders in the training areas of that epic battle so long ago. One is not able to forget when you look into the eyes of the old Okinawans.

There are many others I have visited in my travels, such as the landing beaches and battlegrounds of the Normandy invasion in Europe, and the American cemetery at Omaha Beach, like the cemetery at Belleau Wood, filled with the white crosses of our fallen heroes.

And in these United States, when one visits places like the Arizona Memorial in Hawaii, the national cemeteries in Arlington, VA, Beaufort, SC, the black hills of South Dakota, and Fort Rosecrans in San Diego, one cannot help but be taken aback by the rows upon rows of headstones—the magnitude of the sheer numbers—1,163,000 men and women who fought bravely and died in all of America's wars.

There is another place—not a battlefield or a burial ground—but because of its meaning and message is in fact hallowed ground. It is a special place to me. It is a final resting place of sorts, for the names of more than 58,000 Americans. That place is the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC. There are a lot of names on that wall—12,926 are Marines—and some of those Marines I knew. One name, in particular, is very special to me because we were close friends. You remember the lieutenant and the corporal I was telling you about earlier; no, it's not the lieutenant's name on the wall, he survived his wounds. The name that is on the wall is that of Cpl Clifford Williams. Will was killed in action a month after he saved the life of his lieutenant. Will was doing the same thing he had always done—singlehandedly trying to take care of his Marines. His platoon was pinned down and making no headway in the attack on a village. Contact had to be established with the platoon on the right to coordinate the advance. Cpl Will took off through the small arms fire to find the other platoon. He did not come back. Nightfall set in and Will still did not come back. The next morning the platoon found the body of their fallen hero, his life had ended with a single rifle shot.

Cpl Will never had the chance to see his wife and one-month old little girl. Will never had the chance to make an impact on that little girl's life like all daddies want to do. Will's life was not in vain, however, because the good Lord saw to that; Will made the difference of life and death to his lieutenant; and the lieutenant, now a retired colonel of Marines, pays tribute to his friend, Will.

USMC

>Col Holladay is currently attending Stetson University in Deland, FL, where he is studying for a masters degree in education. He also resides in Deland. This article appeared originally in Chevron, *the base newspaper for Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.*

In November 1994, Holladay wrote an article in the *Marines Corps Gazette* in which he recalled an incident in Vietnam when a corporal saved the life of his platoon commander. Holladay also reflected on his visits to hallowed Marine Corps battlefields such as Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Source Packet Documents

vlp.cah.ucf.edu

Valentine's Ridge Personal Account (1 of 3)

Valentine's Ridge 13-15 Feb 1968

By Col. John Holladay

(Col. John Holladay was the 1st Plt Cdr. of Kilo Co during this action. Then Captain Bill Conger, India's CO who was serving as the S-3A when this fight occurred, was rope dropped by helicopter during the night to assume command of the beleaguered Kilo Co. The editor has taken the liberty of "tacking on" to Col. Holladay's narrative a summary of Captain Conger's involvement and that of the India Co. reactionary force. I have also borrowed from 1st Plt Corpsman Ray Felle's "memory" to form a composite picture of the events of that day. Col. Holladay's narrative was unselfishly written in a "we", meaning 1st Plt, format. I took the additional liberty of changing the "we" to "I" where I felt it was appropriate.)

At approximately 2200 hours on 13 Feb 1968, 1st Plt Kilo 3/9 departed CaLu en route to a point several clicks west of the COB to set up a platoon observation post. One purpose of the mission planned by the S-3 was to locate the source of harassing 82mm mortar fire, which seemed to hit the COB every afternoon between 1700-1730 hours. It was felt the main mission of the NVA unit was to keep us guessing and possibly tie up our troops so we couldn't "easily" help out at Khe Sahn. Arriving 2 hours later on a hilltop that offered reasonable visibility in the moonlight to a ridgeline to the west, later to be called **"Valentine's Ridge" (VR)**, 1st Plt set in a defensive perimeter and called in artillery fires on predetermined targets. 1st Plt had an Artillery Forward Observer attached as well as an S-2 Scout.

At approximately 0530 hours on the 14th (Valentine's Day) the remainder of Kilo Co 3/9 made their way around to the southeast, coming off Rte 9 from CaLu. It had been prearranged that 1st Plt would link up with the Company and fall in at the rear of the column as the Company passed. Linkup was made and 1st Plt remained in trace providing rear security until mid-morning then shifted to the lead for the Company. Approximately 1500 hours on the 14th the Company halted on a ridgeline to the northeast of **VR**, which looked down into a valley with a small stream. Terrain was rugged with elephant grass and steep slopes down into the valley and up the other side. While the Company halted, the S-2 Scout was observing **VR** and noticed rectangular openings (3 total) in the treetops on the eastern slope. The Company Commander, Captain Al Ward, was at the Company forward position for observation of the valley and he was shown the openings in the treetops. Careful screening of the area with field glasses showed no enemy movement.

All Platoon Commanders and Capt. Ward believed that contact with the enemy was imminent. Two courses of action were quickly discussed: (1) proceed to the west and south down to the stream and come up **VR** on the long axis; and (2) continue the present route, go cross compartment (directly down one slope and up the next) to ascend to the top of **VR**. Because it would soon be dark Capt. Ward went for the 2nd option. The Platoon Commanders wanted arty prep fires for any option but Capt. Ward chose "to proceed with caution", in his own words, with no arty prep fire on what had to be suspected enemy positions. To this day there is controversy surrounding that decision. It was tactically unsound then and now, and it resulted in needless loss of life. **VR** should have had the hell slammed out of it with Kilo moving in immediately after the prep fires ...as they had always been taught. The only rationale anyone could ever offer was that Capt. Ward must have thought that some surprise was to be gained against the enemy by not using supporting fires. Prep fires had been used most of the night and the Company had moved all day within easy observation of VR...there was no way surprise could have been critical. Kilo was going to attack, no matter what.

The tactical formation for movement decided upon by Capt. Ward was basically Company on line, Platoons in column; 3rd Plt on the left flank, 1st Plt in the middle and 2nd Plt on the right flank. The Company CP group would travel at the rear of the 1st Plt column. Approximately 1530 hours on the 14th the Company moved down the slope of the hill to the streambed. Recent sandal tracks and C-Ration cans tied to strings from the trees that overhung the streambed for the enemy to drink from were found and it was observed by all that the other slope was cleared of underbrush on the opposite side to facilitate the enemy's movement up and down the hill. It was clearly obvious that the enemy was up ahead.

Moving up the hill required swinging the formation to the left slightly and in doing so 1st Plt encountered a draw directly to the front. The terrain was extremely steep and for a second the draw would have made the climb up less of a problem, but Sgt. Clifford Williams and I quickly decided that's probably what the enemy wanted us to do... take the easy way up. 1st Plt pulled to the right of the draw as fast as they could and found the slope so steep that they had to drive E-tools in the ground for the M-60 machine gunners to move up the hill. Approximately 5 minutes after 1st Plt started to move away from the draw; a 12.7mm machine gun opened fire from the top down through the draw. 1st Plt moved rapidly up the hill around to the right and halted in a column close to the top while the firing was continuing, which now included mortars and small arms fire.

Moving behind the 1st Sqd, I was called to the head of the column, where immediately to our front I could see a large boulder that restricted our view of the top of the hill. Together with 3 other Marines, including a radio operator, I was crawling forward towards the crest when all of a sudden the large boulder exploded. One Marine had the cheek of his ass blown off and the other three took hits from the rock fragments and exploding RPG that hit it. Fortunately, the angle of fire was so steep for the enemy that he would have never hit us without overexposing himself. At this point I sent Sgt. Williams back to the first squad to gather up more grenades. When he returned, we laid on our backs and threw grenades towards the top for a few minutes until they killed or badly wounded the lone NVA (body was never found, just a lot of blood and the RPG's in the fighting hole).

Holladay's account of the fighting at Valentine's Ridge in February 1968. During the engagement Holladay served as Platoon Commander of 1st Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

Valentine's Ridge Personal Account (2 of 3)

After the position was secured the Platoon moved up, on line, on the crest of the hill now bending towards the left where the majority of the firing was going down the hill. 1stPlt immediately started laying down fire and that's when it was discovered that a squad and a machinegun team were missing. All this was happening in about 15 minutes or so. Sgt. Williams took off back down the hill to find the other squad and was back very quickly with the missing men. At this point, I was told that Capt. Ward and his CP group had broken off and stayed at the base of the hill; they were in the direct line of the 12.7mm fire and the mortar fire.

Making contact with Capt. Ward on the radio, I told him that 1stPlt was at the military crest of the hill and that he should bring the CP group up behind us; the route was clear. I yelled over the radio to Capt. Ward again that 1stPlt was almost at the top, and he had to come up behind us, it was clear. I never got an acknowledgement, never heard another word from Capt. Ward, and learned later that the CP group had huddled making decisions and was hit with mortar fire. That's why I also couldn't raise the XO, Lt. Reese, because he had been mortally wounded. While all of this was going on the word came across that fixed wing was going to drop napalm.

While 1st Plt was firing in the direction of the draw one of the machineguns continued to feed so we had to break the belt to keep from running out of gun ammo. When I couldn't raise anyone in the CP group or the other Platoons, I decided that we would make our way to Rt. 9 and hold up to see what was happening. Since we had little ammo and most importantly no idea of the size of the enemy force and/or their position, the main objective was to stay together, make it to Rt. 9 and look for help from the rear. Additionally, the Marine with the torn up ass needed medical attention badly.

1st Plt moved slowly along the crest of the hill to find a way to Rt. 9 on the other side. We found a draw whereby Sgt. Williams and a couple of others went down on a quick recon and found it full of unoccupied fighting holes. We then made our way to the bottom of the hill and ended up at a blown culvert. We held up and that's when I got the call from Maj. Oliver, the Bn. XO, to hold 1stPlt in place until he contacted 2nd and 3rd Platoons. We stayed at the culvert for a long while, and the whole time red and green tracers were constantly going overhead. We were at maximum range for our 81mm mortars, so they wouldn't fire. It was a couple of hours before I was contacted by Maj. Oliver, who told me that Capt. Ward and others had been badly hit and 2ndPlt was lost...split to pieces to the northwest and no one had seen their Platoon Commander. Likewise, 3rdPlt was also split up and hit badly. I was then directed to coordinate the firing of illumination rounds over some prominent terrain feature so Marines of the other Platoons could make their way to Rt. 9 and be picked up by 1stPlt.

There was a hill called the "Little Rockpile" off to the southwest from CaLu that was used as the terrain feature, the illum rounds started coming in and Marines who had gotten together with radios started calling in. One Marine stated that he was in a hole with enemy running all around him; he didn't crawl out for about another hour. At approximately 0100 hours on the 15th (we had been out since 2200 hours on the 13th and made first contact about 1600 hours on the 14th), we got the word to start making our way cautiously along Rt. 9 towards CaLu. Picking up stragglers as they emerged along the way, we started moving down the road towards the COB. The Marine with the shot up ass was really in bad shape but Ray Felle, the Platoon Corpsman, cautioned against anymore morphine. Platoon members switched off carrying him on their backs with legs dangling to lessen the severe pain...he was really hurting. We made it to the first blown culvert outside CaLu when we were met by Maj. Oliver and a security team from India Co., who assisted in getting our wounded into the perimeter and to the Battalion Aid Station.

****

Upon learning that the CP Group and 3rdPlt of Kilo Co. were unable to move because of heavy casualties, the decision was made to helicopter insert the Bn. S-3A, Capt. Bill Conger, to take over command of the battered remnants of the Company. At approximately 0100 hours on the 15th, Capt. Conger and Bn. RTO Cpl. Vernon Downs Jr. dropped by rope through the floor hatch of a CH-46 and plowed through the triple canopy to the ground. Drawing the 27 surviving Marines of Kilo and Cpl. Downs into a defensive position around him, Capt. Conger commenced calling fire mission after fire mission throughout the night, often at "danger close", to put a wall of steel between the NVA and his Marines. As Capt. Conger called in the arty, Cpl. Downs continuously moved among the Marine positions, recovering and redistributing ammunition and grenades.

As morning broke, Capt. Conger assembled the survivors, shifted the artillery fire, and assaulted the NVA positions where the KIA's of Kilo of the previous day lay. During the assault, Capt. Conger and 25 of the 28 Marines with him were wounded, but they managed to push the NVA off the ridgeline and down the west slope but only to a point 100 feet below them. Medevac choppers were called in to remove the wounded and two H-34's arrived on station but were driven off by heavy small arms and mortar fire, as well as a 12.7mm heavy machinegun supporting the NVA from the next ridgeline. Contact was constant as Lt. Pete Walsh's 3rdPlt of India was sent from CaLu to assist with the extraction of the Kilo survivors. A second attempt at evacuating the wounded and resupplying ammo by helicopter was thwarted by withering ground fire as the two H-34's received numerous hits. One of the 34's managed to limp to the CaLu LZ, where it crash-landed near the minefield. All three crewmembers on board had been hit during the rescue attempt and had to be medevac'd.

At approximately 1500 hours an AO on station began coordinating fixed wing strikes on the ridgelines in support of the withdrawing Marines as Walsh's 3rd Plt India linked up with Conger's group. Due to the intense contact the KIA's had to be

The continuation of Holladay's account of the fighting at Valentine's Ridge.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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Valentine's Ridge Personal Account (3 of 3)

left on the ridgeline and only the WIA's removed. The remainder of India Company was dispatched from CaLu to assist with the extraction of wounded as light faded and airstrikes were called off. Supporting fire from the "Rockpile" and CaLu picked up where the fixed wings left off. Unfortunately, a "short round" from a 4.2" mortar fell among the Marines and a previously wounded Marine being carried by Cpl.Tim Cunningham of India Co. was killed. At approximately 1900 hours the Kilo/India force reached Rt. 9 and started moving towards CaLu, but not before being subjected to heavy incoming enemy artillery fire. The Battalion Commander proceeded down Rt. 9 with security from Lima 3/4 and additional corpsmen to assist and all units were inside the perimeter at CaLu by 2400 hours.

EPILOGUE

It would be three weeks before the KIA Marines left on Valentine's Ridge could be removed. Teams Hindrance and Delmar of Alpha Company 3rd Recon were inserted to locate the remains but were unable to remove them. The task of recovering the bodies was ultimately given to then Lt. Holladay's 1st Plt Kilo to perform. The remains were subsequently removed from the ridgeline and brought back to CaLu, where the sad task of identification was made by Battalion Surgeon Jerry Behrens and Chaplain Richard Black. There were at least 100 WIA's on Valentine's Ridge in addition to the following KIA's:

Captain Alexander Ward
2dLt. William Reese
HM2 Larry Goss
Pfc. Fredrick Bungartz
Cpl. Lowell Combs
Cpl. Dennis Flemming
LCpl. Mark James
Pfc. Melvin Jones
Pfc. Barry Rigsby
LCpl. Jeffrey Wentzell
Cpl. David Schneider

There were many heroic deeds performed on February 14th and 15th, 1968. Several were recognized but probably many more went unnoticed or the participant and/or witnesses perished during the battle. Capt. Conger would receive the Silver Star for, as Col. Holladay would say, "*his heroic example and inspirational leadership, by taking the "Grim Reaper" head on, saving many Marines from sure death and righting a sure disaster.*" He would balk at accepting the award until his recommendation for a similar award for his RTO, Cpl. Vernon Downs, was approved. Downs would receive his Silver Star but sadly be killed in action one month after Valentine's Ridge. Holladay himself would be critically wounded on March 27, 1968, with command of his Platoon falling to Sgt. Clifford Williams, his trusted Plt.Sgt. from the **VR** action. For his heroic actions on March 27th, Holladay would put Williams in for a Silver Star, but as fate would have it the paperwork would be lost. One month later, on April 30, 1968, in a firefight that would cost the lives of 35 Marines and 2 Corpsmen, Sgt. Williams would be killed in action. It would be 30 years before Col. Holladay found out that Sgt. Williams never received the award for which he was nominated. Col. Holladay resubmitted the nomination to Headquarters Marine Corps and on July 13, 2001 presented the Silver Star to Sgt. Williams' son Wayne at a graveside ceremony in Newberry, Michigan.

Col. Holladay stresses that his narrative of the events on Valentine's Ridge are one man's recollections, perspective, and opinion. "Hindsight" always has been and will continue to be 20/20. With that in mind, he questions why certain tactics, some of which were unsound and directly contributed to the deaths of Marines and a Corpsman, were used that day. For example, why didn't Kilo, after confirming enemy presence on **VR,** hold up for the night on the ridgeline to the east and pound the hell out of **VR** with supporting arms; then go after them at daylight. Lots of lessons clearly identified those days had already been learned the hard way in earlier fights. As fighting continued on **VR** on the morning of February 15th, then Lt. Holladay was called to the COC and met with Lt.Col. Gorton Cook, the Battalion Commander. Col. Cook was devastated at the loss of his Marines and could not understand how Kilo had been hit so hard that it split the Company up. He asked Holladay if they knew the enemy was close and was told that they were sure contact was imminent. Holladay was then asked why the area wasn't prep'd. He told Col. Cook about the discussion between Capt. Ward and the Platoon Commanders and the decision of Capt. Ward to forego the prep fire. Col. Cook couldn't understand the logic in it and years later in a conversation with Col. Hollady remained perplexed by the decision.

"Someone once said that every man that served in Vietnam was a hero. I can't necessarily say I agree with that but I do know that every man who served in the 3rd Battalion 9th Marine Regiment can claim that title." Ed.

Final part of Holladay's account of the fighting at Valentine's Ridge and his epilogue.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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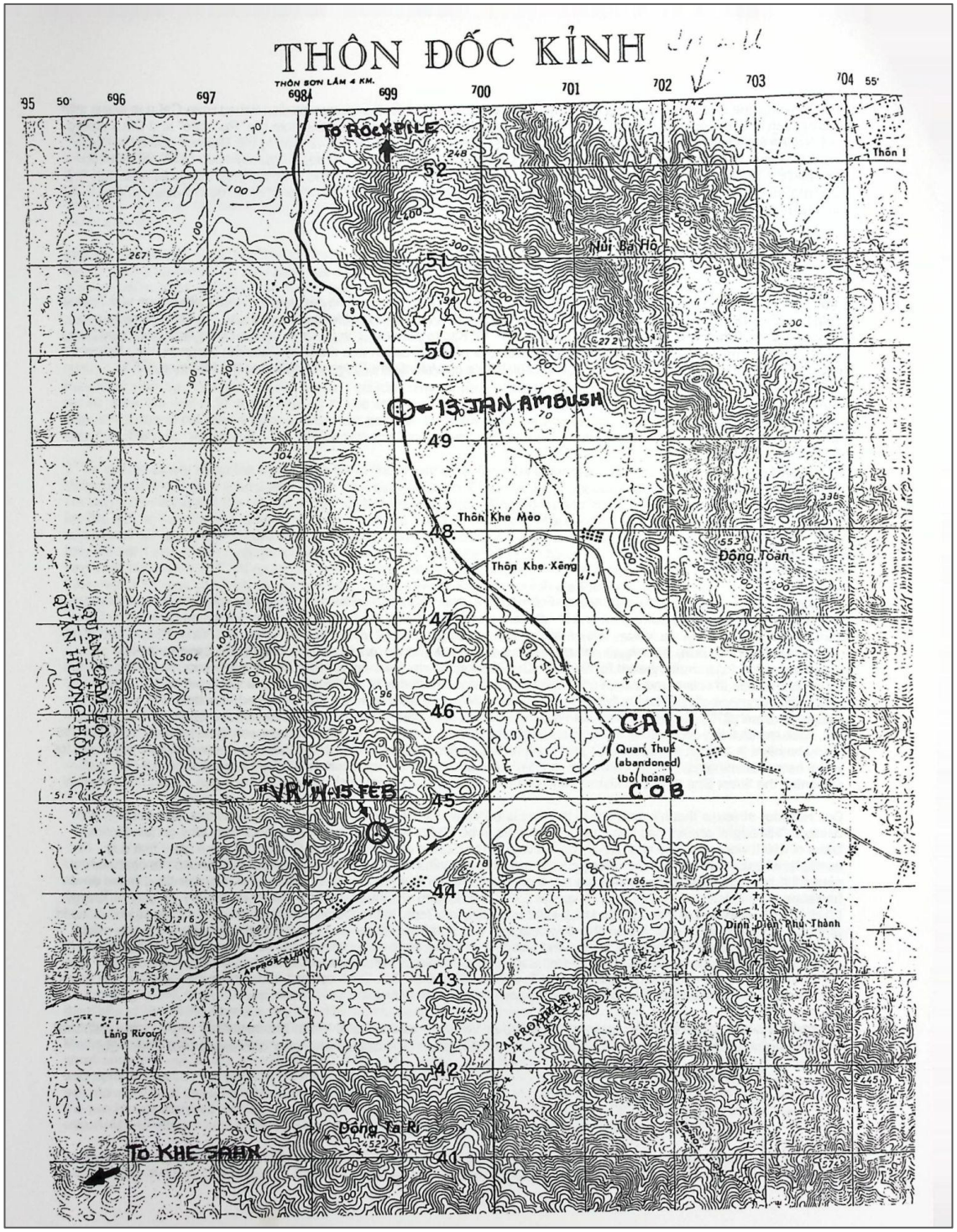
Valentine's Ridge Annotated Map



An annotated map showing the locations Holladay discussed in his account of Valentine's Ridge.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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1999 Documentary Transcript

Felle: The last time I saw Colonel Holladay, we were in a hot zone taking incoming.

Holladay: And then, out of the blue on the computer, that miraculous thing, and there's an e-mail from Raymond Felle.

Narrator: Now, for the first time since Vietnam, the commander and the man who saved his life are reunited.

Holladay: Hello, my friend! How are you doing?!

Felle: Wow, I don't believe it!

Holladay: You look, you look exactly like you did then! A little hair on your face!

Holladay: Your steadfastness to just be there, you were always there. Everybody talks about, well, I thought you had more Corpsman than one. And I remember you and I were talking about that one time, I never knew you were supposed to have more than one, we always had just one. And we all think Dr. Felly wouldn't let another Corpsman in that platoon to take care of em.

Holladay: This is just like being back together, I mean he's just like he was 32 years ago!

Felle: That's the voice, that's the voice I remember now, that's the voice!

Holladay: We used to joke and do all kinds of stuff!

Holladay: Well I've guess we've done alright haven't we. We've kept it together.

Felle: Life, that's life.

Holladay: That's right.

Holladay: I owe you a great deal.

Felle: Well, I owe you too, I mean you [cuts off]...

The transcript of a 1999 documentary clip which featured the moment Holladay met with Raymond Felle, the Navy Corpsman who saved his life in Vietnam. They met and talked about it over thirty years later.

Hoggard Films, "Real M.A.S.H.: The World of Combat Medicine," 1999.

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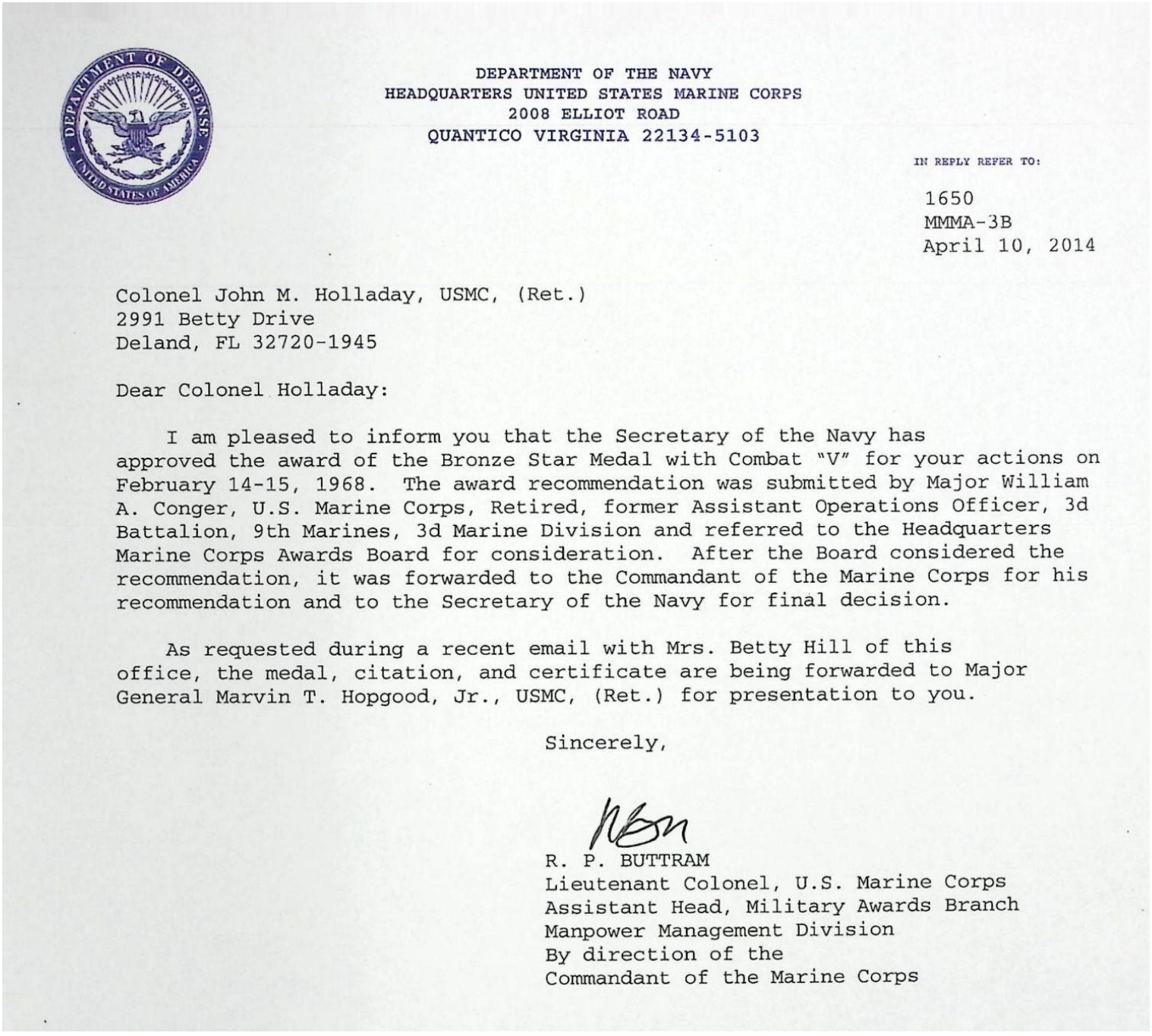
Bronze Star with Valor Letter, 2014



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
2008 ELLIOT ROAD
QUANTICO VIRGINIA 22134-5103

IN REPLY REFER TO:
1650
MMMA-3B
April 10, 2014

Colonel John M. Holladay, USMC, (Ret.)
2991 Betty Drive
Deland, FL 32720-1945

Dear Colonel Holladay:

I am pleased to inform you that the Secretary of the Navy has approved the award of the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" for your actions on February 14-15, 1968. The award recommendation was submitted by Major William A. Conger, U.S. Marine Corps, Retired, former Assistant Operations Officer, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, 3d Marine Division and referred to the Headquarters Marine Corps Awards Board for consideration. After the Board considered the recommendation, it was forwarded to the Commandant of the Marine Corps for his recommendation and to the Secretary of the Navy for final decision.

As requested during a recent email with Mrs. Betty Hill of this office, the medal, citation, and certificate are being forwarded to Major General Marvin T. Hopgood, Jr., USMC, (Ret.) for presentation to you.

Sincerely,

R. P. BUTTRAM
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Assistant Head, Military Awards Branch
Manpower Management Division
By direction of the
Commandant of the Marine Corps

A 2014 letter from the Marine Corps Headquarters in Quantico, VA informed Holladay that he had been approved to receive the Bronze Star Medal with Valor for his actions in February 1968 at Valentine's Ridge during the Vietnam War.

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

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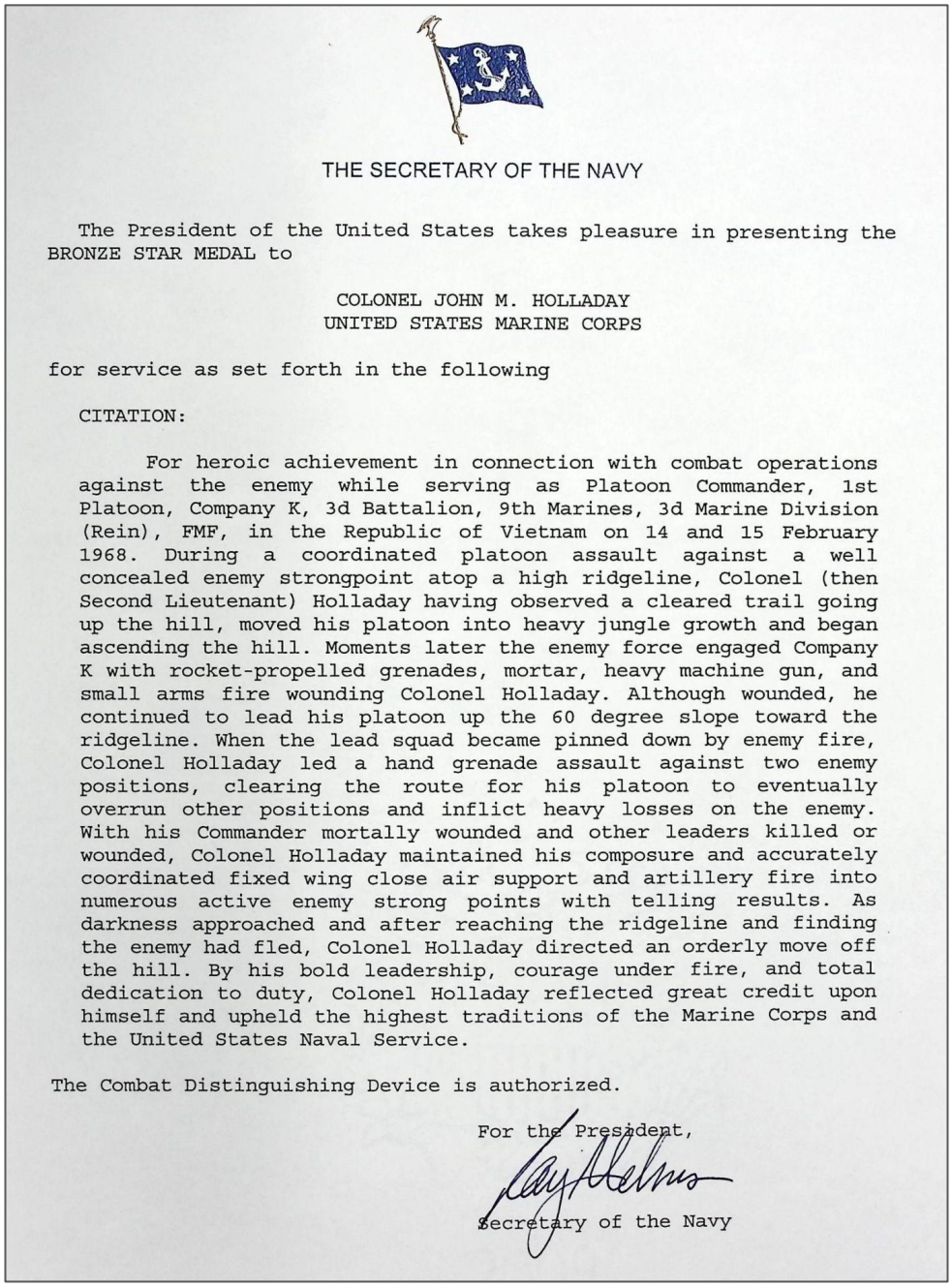
Holladay's Bronze Star Citation, 2014



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the BRONZE STAR MEDAL to

COLONEL JOHN M. HOLLADAY
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For heroic achievement in connection with combat operations against the enemy while serving as Platoon Commander, 1st Platoon, Company K, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, 3d Marine Division (Rein), FMF, in the Republic of Vietnam on 14 and 15 February 1968. During a coordinated platoon assault against a well concealed enemy strongpoint atop a high ridgeline, Colonel (then Second Lieutenant) Holladay having observed a cleared trail going up the hill, moved his platoon into heavy jungle growth and began ascending the hill. Moments later the enemy force engaged Company K with rocket-propelled grenades, mortar, heavy machine gun, and small arms fire wounding Colonel Holladay. Although wounded, he continued to lead his platoon up the 60 degree slope toward the ridgeline. When the lead squad became pinned down by enemy fire, Colonel Holladay led a hand grenade assault against two enemy positions, clearing the route for his platoon to eventually overrun other positions and inflict heavy losses on the enemy. With his Commander mortally wounded and other leaders killed or wounded, Colonel Holladay maintained his composure and accurately coordinated fixed wing close air support and artillery fire into numerous active enemy strong points with telling results. As darkness approached and after reaching the ridgeline and finding the enemy had fled, Colonel Holladay directed an orderly move off the hill. By his bold leadership, courage under fire, and total dedication to duty, Colonel Holladay reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

The Combat Distinguishing Device is authorized.

For the President,

Secretary of the Navy

Holladay's Bronze Star with Valor citation described his actions at Valentine Hill on February 14–15, 1968, as showing "bold leadership, courage under fire, and total dedication to duty." The citation commended Holladay for maintaining his composure and effectively leading his Marines after being wounded, while facing heavy enemy fire and having to coordinate the fight when other leaders were "killed or wounded."

Holladay family Archives. We wish to thank the Holladay family for their participation in the UCF VLP program in memory of their loved one John M. Holladay.

Headstone



Holladay's headstone located section 6 site 1684 at Cape Canaveral National Cemetery, FL.

UCF VLP Archives.

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