



POST SOLANT AMITY

And the Members of "G" Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment



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March 2004

Twas said, "They had the *climb* of their Lives."

Someone at 2ndMarDiv concluded that "Cold Weather and Mountain Familiarization Practices" would make for an interesting thing for east coast Marines to learn. Thus, Echo Company, 2nd Battalion of the 6th Marines was chosen to move, with sea bags by six-by, to the Asheville region of North Carolina in January 1960. The objective being the preparation of all hands for a march to the highest mountain peak on the east coast: Mt. Mitchell at 6,684 feet.

The troops, including Ron Smith...still recuperating from broken ribs and worse sustained in a car accident only a month before, Frank Schmidt and myself slept in four-man kerosene heated...and occasionally destroyed by fire...tents. With tidiness being next to Marine Corps Godliness, the small hill adjacent to "tent-city" was cleared of brush. When next it rained, the company street became mudville. Supply had to provide pallets as a walkway atop the mud.

Daily, the troops with their 782 gear, weapons, cold weather parkers, sleeping bags and wearing heavy rubber boots humped uphill and along a two lane, rural public roadway and then, far more quickly because it was all downhill, returned to the camp.

The night's were bitter. Sometimes as low as sixteen degrees. But, ensuring that the rocks and trees remained safe, sentries were posted from dusk till dawn. Taking a shower was a gamble. If the heating unit broke down while you were still lathered up, you rinsed with REALLY COLD water or just wiped the soap off and returned to your tent.

In the field, every meal was hot "soapy-soak-then-rinse" water field mess or C-rations. When not hiking, fire and maneuver or ambush exercises were practiced endlessly.



Echo-2-6 before the disastrous sixteen hour ascent to Mount Mitchell, in the sub-freezing weather of Smokey Mountains, circa February 1960.

There was but one weekend of liberty where most everyone got a chance to fight the Asheville lumberjacks, in THEIR local watering holes, and the never to be forgotten ride over hill and dale in the backend of a vomit filled six-by.

But, there were lighter moments. For example, a military funeral with a mock seven gun salute for the utility cover of one Private Nick Conda from Connecticut, who owned not one single garment bearing his name...despite regulations to the contrary...but, instead, hand-me-downs and throw-a-ways from anyone he might have served with in the 6th or 8th Marines. The platoon sergeant, weary of telling him to replace the utility cover, formed the platoon, had him remove and bury it, accompanied by appropriate commands and the clicking of empty weapons pointed skyward.

At the near end of this month-long frolic in the woods came the final exam; simply, **hike and climb to the peak of Mount Mitchell**. The day started normal enough: fallout, line up and route march up the same road traversed every day since we'd arrived. Around 0800, the company reached an area situated at the base of the mountain, in a state park facility. Then, everything began to go very, very badly.

The scheduled path was to zigzag its way up the mountain face and the next day, as we hiked *down* the trail, took little more than an hour and a half. But unable to find the trail, the Captain chose for us to proceed up a firebreak located on the other side of a stream adjacent to where the company had been standing-by. His decision would result in a dangerous, mind-numbing sixteen hour climb, a number of bone-breaking injuries and the Captain losing his command.

At 0930, we crossed over the stream via a fallen tree trunk, except for myself who managed to, stupidly, *step* into it. I stopped just long enough to wring out my socks, re-don the rubber boots and joined the platoon.

The first impression had by all was that we would walk across the plateau on the mountain side of the stream, then up a slope of perhaps 50 degrees to a hill crest and be finished. But, with each crest we found another plateau and slope. Again and again we would hear, "Your almost there. Just a little farther." But they LIED. No one had any idea of where we were or how far we had yet to go.

Sometime after dark The temperature tumbled (Continued, page 2)

What's Been Happening

Since our last newsletter, a young man in the mid-west, looking for something to tease a father-in-law with, searched the I-net for anything listed under the father-in-law's name. Directed to our website, he found the limited biography of someone not his father-in-law but of interest. So, he ran an address check for all bearing that same name in Ohio and sent the list to me. Hence was Delwin "Bill" Bailey found.

Bill's biography has been dressed up and he's been helpful in providing still more information about the identities of other company members, now posted on our website. More recently, he sent me some records he'd carried in 1960-62, about each member of his 3rd platoon squad!!! Thanks Bill and keep those mementos coming in.

He'd also mentioned that he, annually, meets with what is left of his PI graduating Post Honor Platoon 121 of 1953. He pointed out just how short life is and that, since only last May's re-union, six of his remaining eighteen comrades have passed-away and then asked about the prospects of G-2-6 getting together. What do you think?

George Bitsoli, our west coast gate-keeper, met with Ed Hart recently. George explained that "Ed, Ed's son and I met at a local Italian food and pizza restaurant that both he and I are familiar with. Between mouthfuls of food, we spoke about the old days and the Corps. Because of time constraints, we couldn't meet again before he headed east but he promised to reach out when next he returns to California."

Well, read on George, he's heading your way.

Trevor Davies and his wife, Ruth, have had about enough of the snow and bitter weather of the northeast. It has been especially bad, this year, in the Boston region.

Trevor has been looking forward to hanging up his sheet-metal workers toolbox and relaxing. To that end, he's been square-rooting his quiet departure from (continued, page 2)

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See the whole story at:
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The First Marines in Monrovia

What's Been Happening (Continued from page 1)

the north American workforce and, if all goes well, he's scheduled to do so this July. Then it's loafer and loafing time.

Ed Hart (1st Platoon) has had something of a different winter than planned. He'd thought he would be in Florida, around Jacksonville, much before year end '03. No such luck. With his ketch in need of repairs in Maryland, Ed drove to California to visit his son around Christmas time and returned to find his boat ice-bound with no "early release" in sight.

It wasn't until mid-march that Ed pulled from the dock and began his trek south. He'd gone about 1/3 of the way to Norfolk when, given very poor visibility, the late hour and weather, he dropped anchor with 120' of scope at 2100. At 0200, he awoke and going topside found his fantail no

more than twenty feet from a threatening array of pylons and the wind...from the same front that flipped that water taxi and killed so many in Baltimore...whipping about frantically with gusts to 50 knots!

Ed explained that he had intentions of heading toward Ireland in May but not anymore. He's decided, instead, to continue further south than originally planned. His new course is to the Panama canal, up the west coast of South America and Mexico to California, regroup and head out to the warmer climate of Hawaii and one more trip around the world. "I've had enough cold stuff for a while," he said. "Perhaps, for a lifetime."

George, get out there on your widow's walk and keep an eye out for the man. He'll be in California any month now.

"...the climb of their lives." (cont. from page 1)

to well below freezing. Still again and again we heard, "Your almost there. Just a little farther, Marine." By mid-night we were breaking footholds in the ice face of the slope with our rifle butts and continued to climb.

An office poge broke his forearm and reports of still more injuries started filtering through the ranks. At 0145 of the following morning, after nearly 16 hours, we came upon what was our last bit of flatland, a road frozen over with ice. As we climbed single file off the slope onto the road, a light colonel appeared and congratulated us on our ascent. A moment later, I paused and asked my squad leader, a Sgt. Strong, for permission to put my parker on. Before Strong could answer, the Colonel approached and in a com-

forting, supportive tone quietly repeated the expression already heard for hours and a SERIOUS source of agitation for all, "Your almost there. Just a little farther, Marine."

I lost it. Ripping my BAR from my shoulder, I grabbed it by the muzzle and flung it across the ice covered roadbed. Then, I jumped up and threw my legs up at a angle of 90 degrees from my torso and flopped on my ass, shouting that I was not moving "another f***ing inch." About me, faces cringed. Strong nearly turned white. The Colonel? Well, he looked down at me, walked across the ice, retrieved the BAR, walked back to me and said, "Marine, the camp for the night is about 200 yards from here" as he returned the rifle to me, by this time standing, ass.

At my urging, Ed spoke freely of his own reunion experiences with recon, then added that three of his former buddies had died in the last month alone!

He asks that anyone remembering the Captain's home state let me know. I'll pass it on to Ed, and he'll use his tried and true resources to find Capt. Ken Skipper.

Dick McGibbeny, his wife and link to the internet, may head further south. Diana explained that Dick may retire by July '04 and "We plan a move to Lehigh Acres, a Florida community some 7 miles from downtown Fort

"I've had enough cold stuff for a while. Perhaps for a lifetime." Ed Hart

Frank Schmidt remains quite content spending his railroad pension living not far from the beaches of southern Long Island. There are no scheduled passenger liner trips this year but he expects to make a short trip to Florida in the fall.

He and I reminisced recently about the Pisgah climb (see article on page 1) and the fact that it was he and I that shared a puppet atop Mount Pisgah, at the completion of the sixteen hour "trip." He remembered that there was no reveille and they woke us after 0800 on the morning after!

No one ever said another word about that incident. But it remains indelibly etched in my mind as one of only two reasonable decisions of the kind I saw a leader make in the Corps. Realizing the 16 hour jaunt had maxed-out my willingness to be further manipulated by platitudes or the powers of "chain-of-command," the Colonel saw a better way and did the right thing. He made a compromise with the absurd practices we were all too familiar with.

The next day, after nearly reaching base camp of "Tent City," I was diagnosed with 2nd degree trench foot by the corpsman but otherwise, like Frank Schmidt and Ron Smith., I survived the adventure.

A life shaping experience, the climb tested our mettle more than anything endured on Parris Island and I'm ever-glad that I made it.

An USMC record, I'm sure.

Ron Smith, Baltimore's WBAL radio talk show host from 1500-1800 daily, is still telling the world how best to run things. If driving the B-more area, "give a listen, why don't cha?" at 1090 on your AM dial.

Joe Teklits and his wife, Marge, are taking a trip to visit family in the J-Ville, Florida area at the end of April. He and I have made tentative plans to get together and spoken of trying to get an even greater number of the flock together, with so many living in the Florida region. And, Ed Hart might even be sliding past us on the intracoastal at the time., on his way to Panama and beyond. We'll see what happens and let you know about the outcome.

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About the next issue of PSA

Each time the newsletter's publication date rolls around, I grow anxious about having to conjure up ideas to fill all of the blank space.

In recent months, I've received a number of emails from men taking exception to what appears as an almost public policy of minimizing non-wartime service, and the convenient and perhaps inappropriate labeling of them as "Cold War Warriors," implying "no risk there, baby," for service as far back as 1946! Indeed, over the many years since we last served, I've heard some fools profess, "WWII was the last of America's 'real man' wars." IT was a "just war, man, with real purpose."

Dismissed has been the sacrifices made during the Korean "Conflict," the Vietnam "Era," and every "two-bit piece of over-dramatized *nothing* since the big WWII."

And, more troubling still, some see veteran's organization sharing those opinions.

I will write of these omissions, next time, in the Post Solant Amity.

Mailed as a black on white copy, a fully colorized version can be found at our website, where on page one you'll find a link to a downloadable version.

I hope you've enjoyed this latest effort. Send in your stories by e-or-snail mail to make for an even better next issue.

Semper Fi; Ed Shea