

# The Battalion Runner

2018 – Number 4 – Christmas 2018

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines



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Please note the official email address for the 2/9 Network is now [twoninencoic@aol.com](mailto:twoninencoic@aol.com) or [ditson35@verizon.net](mailto:ditson35@verizon.net). The former gmail address was not sufficient for sending large mass mailings and is no longer in use.

***MERRY CHRISTMAS  
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL!!!***



# 2/9 Reunion 2018

## The Official USMC Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Marine Corps War Memorial



**Our reunion, held 8-12 November, in Arlington, VA, was a huge success. We had more than 170 Marines, family, and friends in attendance. Despite repeated SNAFUs caused exclusively by outside parties, we got everything done as well as any reasonable person could expect. Last minute changes were the rule, rather than the exception. Our first official event was the USMC Wreath Laying ceremony at the Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima Memorial). We thought that was going to be on The Birthday, as has been the custom for the 19 years I have been attending our reunions (other than last year when the renovations impacted the ceremony and it was moved to the WWII Memorial). Just a few days before the reunion we found out otherwise. Due to the possibility of the Presidential Parade for veterans impacting the ceremony on the 10<sup>th</sup> the Marine Corps moved it to the 9<sup>th</sup>. The problem was few people knew that and we could not find it on**

**the HQMC nor Marine Barracks website. Time was also changed to 1200 hours, something we also did not know. As a result the Wreath Laying Ceremony fell on the same day at the same time as our 2/9 Memorial Plaque Dedication ceremony (see the following story for that report), at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico. After a great deal of scuffling we were finally able to move the dedication ceremony to 1500 hours but had to change our bus schedule to get people there. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to the Memorial Plaque Dedication Committee, the museum's Liaison Office (especially Sharon), Debbie Crist, and Henry Ostaszewski, all from different parts of the U.S., for putting together an amazing effort to overcome the obstacles we faced. When we got to the Iwo Jima Memorial for the Wreath Laying ceremony at first we thought no one was there. Than someone noticed there was a crowd gathering on the backside of the memorial. The Wreath Laying was to be conducted there, not out front where it has always been held. My best guess is that 2/9 represented somewhere around 90% of the people present. We are always a strong presence at the ceremony but this year we were nearly the only ones there. I suspect that is primarily because the Marine Corps failed to communicate the changes in date and time to anyone, anywhere. There was light rain for the entire ceremony and my best guess is that is why the ceremony was held on the back side of the Memorial. The ceremony itself lasted 17 minutes. No President's Own, no Commandant's own, no Marine Barracks marching in review or performing close order drill. Just small segments of each of them. There was no sound system. When General Neller spoke he literally was shouting. When the guest speaker, the Secretary of the Navy, spoke, no one could hear a thing he said. All bad.**



**The worst part however, was what happened prior to the start of the ceremony. One of our 2/9 Marines immediately noticed the flag flying from the Iwo Jima Memorial was tattered. He informed one of the enlisted Marines present from Marine Barracks but got no action. He proceeded to corral the nearest officer in Dress Blues and pointed out the flag. That prompted a mad scramble up the memorial by ladder to install a new flag before the Commandant arrived. One of the civilians assisting in the replacement of the flag nearly fell off the memorial. It was disgraceful.**



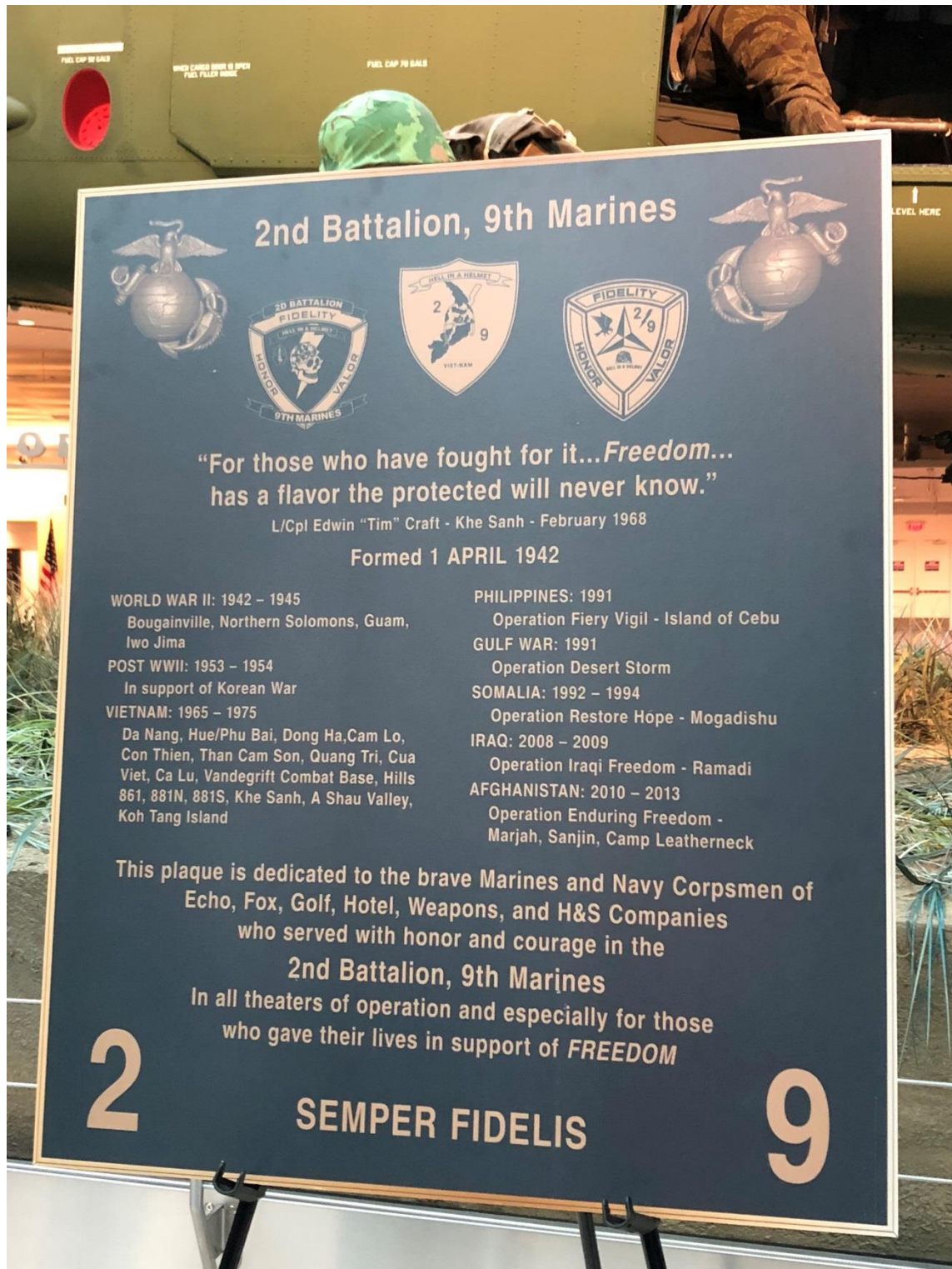
**The entire affair was deeply disappointing and, to me personally, an affront to those who have gone before. Bad weather with some rain, yes. Difficult conditions as a result, yes. But in my personal opinion and those of every**

single person I spoke to that was present it gave the perception that the Marine Corps was conducting a vastly reduced ceremony just to “get it done”. Those that served and made the ultimate sacrifice in the horrible conditions in the Pacific, at the Chosin Reservoir, in the jungles of Viet Nam and the deserts of Iran and Afghanistan deserve better. The Birthday, to me, is one of the most hallowed days of the year for the United States Marine Corps, and the official Wreath Laying Ceremony on that day is sacred to many of us. It is a day to remember, to honor, and to thank those Marines for their service. Last year’s Wreath Laying Ceremony, was 15 minutes long in cold weather at the WWII Memorial. Not a very good trend. Next year The Birthday falls on Sunday so it is a near certainty the Wreath Laying Ceremony will be on Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup>. That has been the custom. I just hope the Marine Corps tells someone about it. Maybe, just maybe, next year the men who have gone before will be remembered in the manner they deserve.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines Memorial Plaque Dedication Ceremony**



The first thing I need to do here is thank the four Marines from 2/9 who got this done. Jim Tiner, John Klemm, Keith Fay, and Dick Kinney first proposed doing this more than four years ago. Their efforts came to fruition at this reunion. Here is a photo of the actual sized reproduction of the plaque:



**The ceremony was originally scheduled at Noon on the 9<sup>th</sup> to be held at the actual location of the plaque. First, the Marine Corps screwing up the Wreath Laying Ceremony caused a mad scramble to get the time of the dedication changed to 1500 hours and second it had to be moved indoors due to the rain, now heavy. To make matters worse the bus scheduled to take around 50 of our members to the museum didn't show up on time and a second bus was sent out to pick up our folks. This was a Friday afternoon of a holiday weekend in the Washington, D.C. area. Thanks to the efforts of those identified previously all this got done. The ceremony was outstanding and the Museum Staff present were surprised there were more than 120 people present given the weather, SNAFUs resolved only at the last minute, and historic experiences with similar dedications. They said almost all previous ceremonies were attended by not more the 2-3 dozen people. Jim Tiner was our Master of Ceremonies and we had the honor of LtGen. Brian Beaudreault, Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies and Operations, serve as our keynote speaker. General Beaudreault could not have been more patient and accommodating. He served in 2/9 as the Golf Company Commander during the Somalia operation in the early 90s.**



**After General Beaudreault's presentation Jim introduced Red Hill's daughter and grand-daughter who unveiled the plaque. It was a nice gesture by the plaque committee to have them do that in Red's honor.**



**Some side notes concerning the ceremony and other tidbits involving the dedication ceremony.**

- 1. General Beaudreault asked if he could have the wreath you see in the photo above commemorating those who lost their lives while serving with 2/9 so he could place it on the grave on his commanding officer in 2/9, Colonel Tom O'Leary, who passed at an age far too young. The general placed the wreath on Colonel O'Leary's grave in Arlington National Cemetery.**



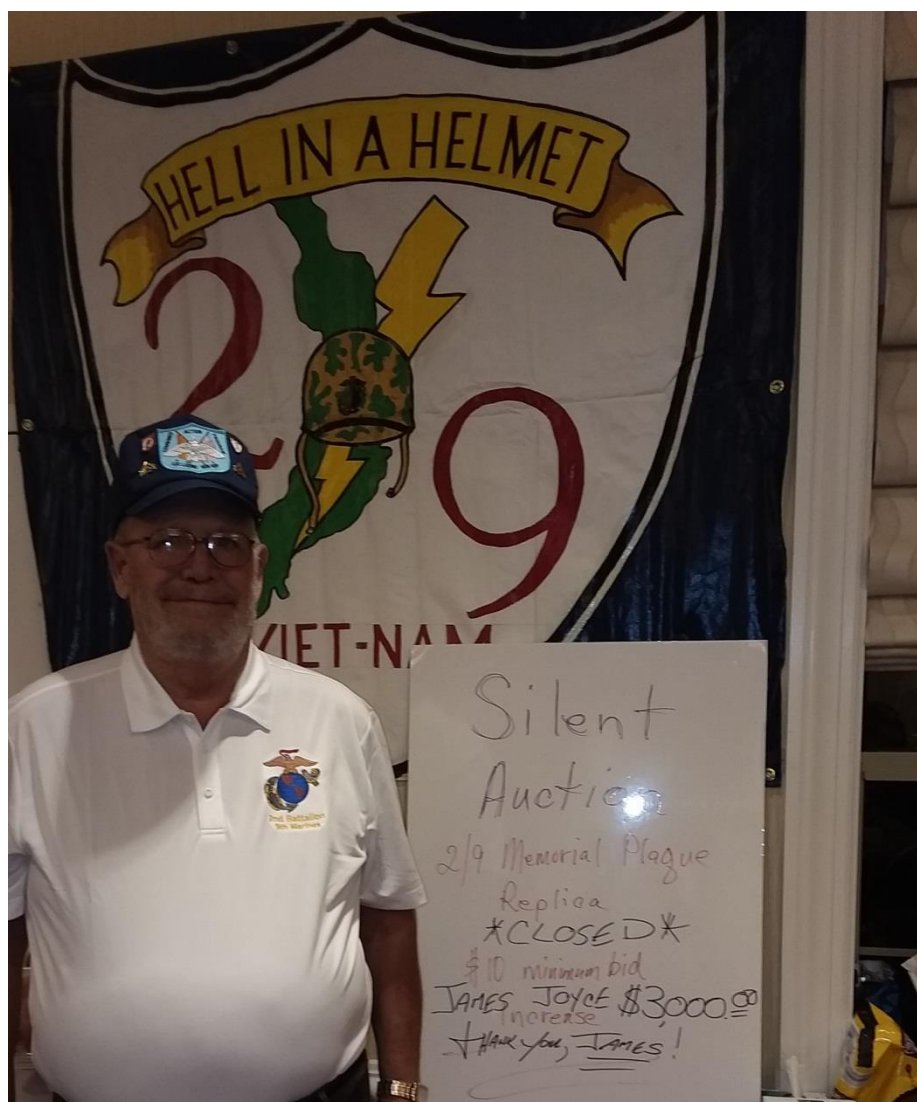
2. I got to meet John Frank, the post-Vietnam Marine who is the administrator of the most heavily used of the three 2/9 Facebook pages I know of. John and a few other post-Vietnam Marines attended the dedication ceremony but I only got to meet him. He vowed to attempt to convince more post-Vietnam Marines to attend our next reunion. That is something I have been trying to do for years. Let's hope that he is successful and we get to host more of our fellow 2/9 warriors at our reunion next year.



3. As some Marines quickly pointed out after I posted a photo of the plaque on the 2/9 Facebook pages there is a spelling error on the plaque. Sangin is misspelled as Sanjin. The museum plans on fixing that by replacing the entire plaque with a new one containing the correct spelling. The committee missed it, I missed it (I checked the plaque more than once), the museum missed it and the Marine Corps Historical Division at HQMC missed it. I wish it hadn't, but any Marine knows – shit happens.
4. As a thank you to all those who donated to the memorial plaque the committee purchased 2/9 challenge coins and presented them to all those present at the reunion who donated. They are mailing them to those not present. We also had them on sale at the reunion for \$25. John Klemm has some left if you want to purchase one. The price is \$25. The back side of the coin is the official USMC logo for 2/9 during their time with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. You can reach John by emailing him at [jklemm65@gmail.com](mailto:jklemm65@gmail.com).



5. As part of their thank you to the 2/9 Network the committee donated an actual size replica of the plaque for us to put up for silent auction at the reunion. The cost for that was \$150. We decided to conduct the silent auction and announce the winner at the Birthday Dinner the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup>. As of 1600 hours the bidding was at \$400 so we decided to wait to see if anyone else would be a bit more. When we got to the reunion, Judy Ostaszewski was manning the check-in desk. She noticed a new bid. Jim Joyce, a frequent attendee at our reunions and close friends with Red Hill, had bid \$3,000! Judy double checked with Jim on the bid and was overcome with emotion when he insisted the bid amount was correct. Henry O., myself, and a couple others also checked with him. That was his bid. We closed the bidding. Jim's only hope was that we would use the money to somehow remember Red, something we all hoped to do. The 2/9 Network will be donating up to \$2,000 to create a final memorial to Red, giving us \$5,000 to accomplish that. We are seriously considering an individual plaque for Red in Semper Fidelis Park at the National Museum of the Marine Corps but have not made a final decision. Thank you Jim for such a huge gesture of generosity and honoring Red in such a way!



## 6. Thank you to the 2/9 Memorial Plaque Committee!!!



L-R: Keith Fay, John Klemm, Lieutenant General Brian Beaudreault, Dick Kinney, Jim Tiner

**This was an extraordinary effort resulting in an extraordinary result. The 2/9 Network membership responded to this with such generosity that the committee was able to upgrade the planned plaque to the largest such plaque allowed at Semper Fidelis Memorial Park. It will be there as long as the park exists honoring the memory of all those who served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines. Combat Marines, peacetime Marines, Corpsmen (I consider them Marines), and especially those members of 2/9 who made the ultimate sacrifice, should or would be proud. It is meant to remember all. Thank you men!**

# The Birthday Dinner



**One thing, thankfully, that was NOT impacted by all the SNAFUs we experienced during this reunion was our Marine Corps Birthday Dinner at the Marriott Key Bridge Hotel in Arlington. We had over 150 people attending. The photo above is about half the crowd. While those of us responsible for making this dinner memorable strive for that every year, it is going to be damned near impossible to match this year's evening. From the service provided by the Key Bridge staff, to the great dinner, to the speakers, to the very end of the evening it was a night that few will forget. That isn't just me speaking either. Just about everyone I spoke to thought it was a truly great night. We were once again in the Capitol View Ballroom, by itself a venue few can match in the Washington, D.C. area. Debbie Crist deserves kudos here as she almost single handedly arranged the entire dinner. Thanks Debbie. There were several key events during the evening.**

- 1. We honored two special people by naming them honorary members of the 2/9 Network. Marcy Rodriguez and Yvonne Martinez have been responsible for almost all the photos and/or videos you have seen after annual reunions for several years now, with few exceptions. Besides that work they have been tireless volunteers doing virtually everything asked of them. I don't think there has ever been a time when I asked if they could do something that they hesitated for a second. They are**

**sisters and the daughters of 2/9 Marine Xavier Rodriquez. Marcy and Yvonne now join are other honorary members, Chaplain Dean Crist and his wife Debbie as our newest honorary Marines. Welcome aboard and Semper Fidelis!**



- 2. Our first speaker of the evening was Larry Kirby. Larry, 94, is the sole surviving member of Echo – Easy in those days – Company from the battle for Iwo Jima. Larry delivered a speech that few of us, if any, will ever forget. His self-deprecating humor was a key portion of his speech but only led to the words that touched the heart of all of us in the room with him. He talked about World War II and how it was, basically, a war fought by boys between the ages of 17-20.**



He spoke about how those young men did not fight for their country, their Corps, or their God. He said they fought for each other and the love they had for each other and how they would, and did, many times give up their own lives to save the lives of their buddies. That hit home but only continued to captivate us as he reached the point where his mastery of words became obvious. He described young men who have passed and how there were differences between young men lost too soon. He described how one young man might leave home to go somewhere in the morning and become involved in a car accident that might end his life. Tragic indeed but completely unexpected. The other was a United States Marine around 18 years old who climbed down the ropes on the side of a troop carrier into a landing craft at Iwo Jima and KNEW he might, and probably would, die that day, but did it anyway. He talked about what those young men lost in World War II and other wars missed during what might have been their lifetimes. Holding their new-born baby in their arms, marrying the woman they loved, etc., and how they willingly gave that up. I do not pretend to be presenting the context of his words correctly in the description above. I could not possibly do that. Somehow, some way, Larry Kirby has a gift of expressing out loud the feelings many of us have, but doing it in such a manner that the message is clear. I believe he brought out hidden memories in many of us – memories that were not tragic but those not fully understood in our own minds, until he spoke the words that brought them to the forefront of our minds. As he spoke I was off to the side of the podium and could see the entire audience. The impact of his words was clearly evident. Just about every lady in the room, and most of the big bad Marines, were shedding tears as he finished his speech. They were tears of sadness, yes, but they were also tears of understanding. The understanding of one's own thoughts, not always fully understood, does not happen until a Larry Kirby speaks and brings that sense of understanding to men and women, and the corresponding emotions that carries with them. I specifically remember a retired Lieutenant Colonel of Echo approaching Larry and telling him how he had witnessed large numbers of speeches throughout his lifetime but thought Larry's was the best he ever heard. I would have to agree, and literally dozens expressed similar feelings in the couple of days following.



**In 1995 Larry's children finally convinced him to write a book about his experiences in life and primarily the Marine Corps. The book is titled "Stories from the Pacific – the Island War 1942-1945". It is available on both Amazon and Barnes & Noble. I can personally vouch for the fact the Larry writes as well as he speaks. Around 2005 a second publisher purchased the rights to Larry's book. They called him and asked what he wanted in the form of royalty payments before they proceeded with a second printing. He told them he wanted nothing but asked that they keep the price lower so more people might read it instead of them paying him. I can also tell you that after his speech his book sales soared. One of our guys told me he ordered three copies of the book before the dinner ended. Enough said! Part of Larry's speech is posted on you tube. Take the following steps if you want to see that portion:**

- a. Open YouTube. b. Search Theodore Kirby. c. Click on T symbol in a brown circle. d. Click on Larry at the Reunion.**
- 3. Our second speaker was Kathy Upchurch. Kathy spoke about her relationship with Red Hill and how she helped him early on in his search for men he had served with. Kathy's husband, 2ndLt Jim Upchurch, was KIA in Vietnam in 1969. From those early days when Red started the 2/9 Network we have grown to more than 2,700 strong. Sadly 3-400 hundred of our original members are now guarding the gates of Heaven. Kathy also presented pins to the two members of our audience that evening who were widows of Vietnam Veterans, Darnelle Hill and Barbara Stander.**
- 4. Our final speaker, Henry Ostaszewski, delivered a testimonial to the memory of our 2/9 Network Founder and Inspiration, Richard "Red" Hill, who passed unexpectedly in March of this year. Henry is one of only three who have been to every reunion held since Red gathered about 30 Marines in the first reunion. He was also a close friend and neighbor to Red.**

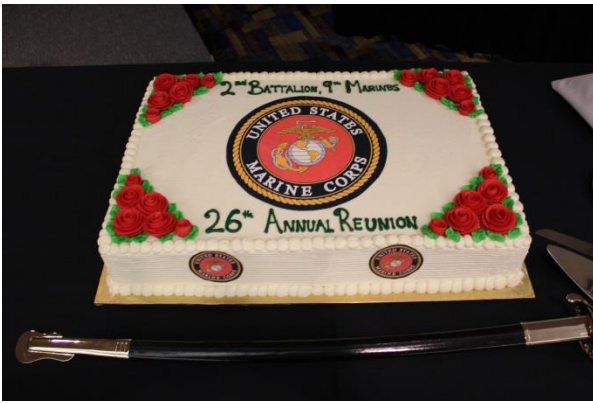


**Henry is not one prone to hyperbole but got straight to the point. He discussed how Red began his quest to look for his Vietnam buddies in the 1980s. How he had a banner painted and went to Washington, D.C., and stood all by himself with the banner. Men came “out of the woodwork”, and identified themselves. That’s how it all began. That banner is still our signature identifier at all our reunions.**

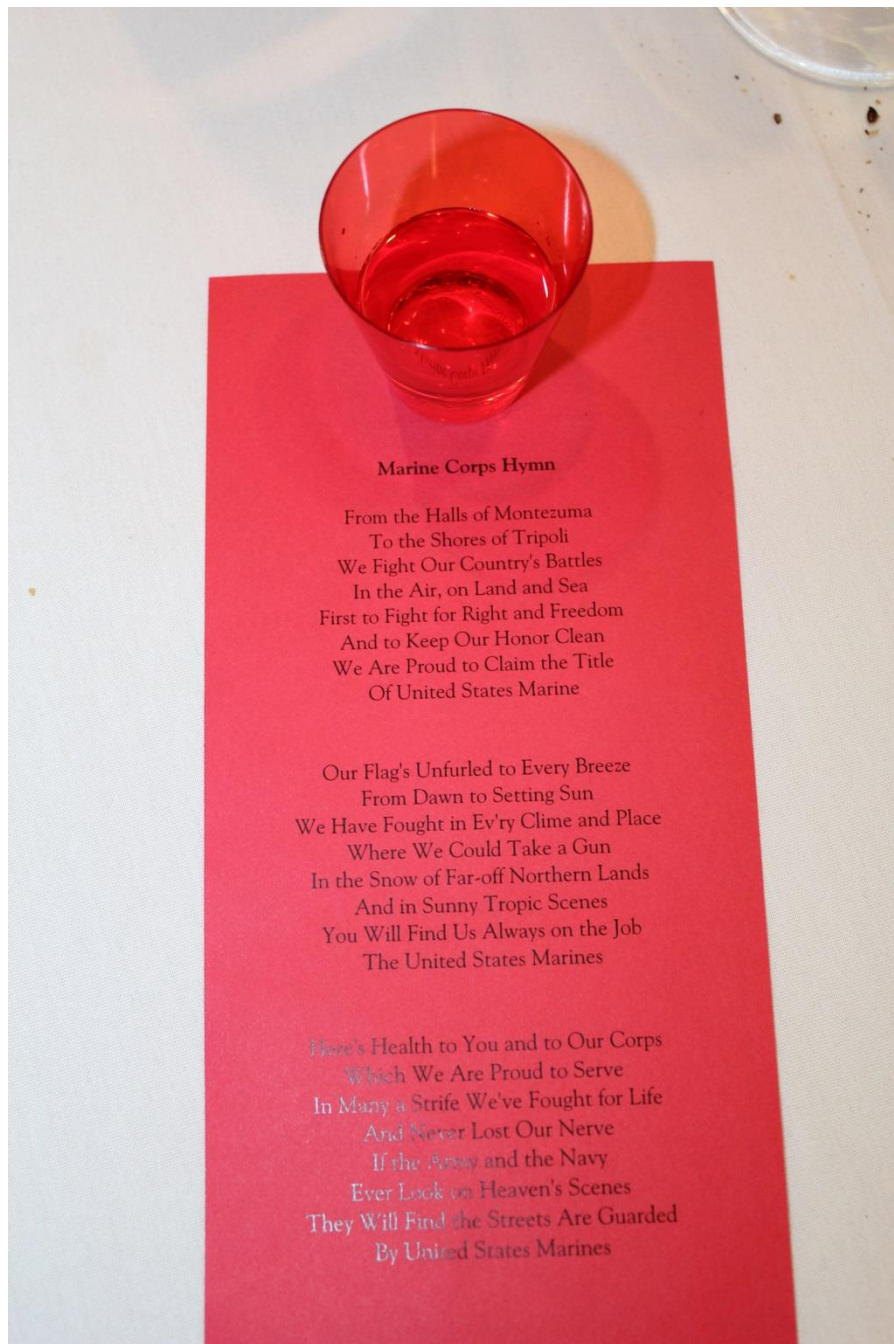


**Henry asked all to look around the room and answer a question. Would you know the people you were with, or looking at, if it were not for Red? Few could say yes as an answer. Many of the people that come to reunions never met Red and some probably wonder ‘what’s the big deal?’ Well, Henry made sure they knew what the big deal was. I took over the Reunion, along with Henry, when Steve Clemons passed away several years ago. I took over the 2/9 Network when Gabe Coronado retired from that post in 2014. I have always tried to conduct myself with a major thought in mind – “what would Red do?”. I will continue that in the future. Henry introduced Red’s wife, Darnelle, and presented her with a full sized replica of the 2/9 Memorial Plaque. He spoke about his special relationship with Red and how they would see each other in the neighborhood all the time while Henry was walking his dogs. The entire speech was emotional and to the point. Red may be gone but his memory will live on and he will remain our inspiration and leader. Our entire weekend was devoted to Red’s memory, and Henry’s speech didn’t mean we were yet done with Red.**

- 5. Next up was our Birthday Cake Cutting ceremony. Our youngest Marine, Cpl Dauwan Brackens, joined us from Quantico, and our oldest Marine was Larry Kirby. Dave Garner presided over the ceremony and read General Lejeune’s Birthday message and General Neller’s message from this year. Major Blake Peltz, son-in-law of 2/9 Vietnam Vet Tim DeWolf, served as our official cake cutter. Major Peltz made sure he cut a deserving portion of the cake for the two to share!**



6. The last event of the evening prior to announcing the winners of our raffle and 50/50 raffle was our tradition of having a "Hot Damn" toast, begun by our special guest every year, Barbara Stander, in honor of her husband Stan, lost to Agent Orange exposure several years ago. This has evolved into a special part of the evening at our Birthday dinners over the years. The act itself is simple. A shot of Hot Damn Liqueur with two drops of Tabasco sauce. A toast is made and the shot follows. After drinking the shot the glass is to be firmly placed back on the table followed by a loud exclamation of "Hot Damn". Few forget the taste of the shot and that is as it should be. We provide non-alcoholic shots for youngsters or those who do not partake. The change that has been made since we began this tradition is now we sing the Marines Hymn before the toast is made.



**This year, in addition to toasting Barb's husband Stan, our other toast was to Red Hill.**



**After the dinner and our return to the Marriott Residence Inn, our reunion hotel, about 50 of us proceeded to pile into personal vehicles or our rental vans and made our annual trip to The Wall to visit and say hello to our brothers. This is always an emotional experience and this year was no exception. Semper Fidelis men!**

## **2/9 Network Notes**

- 1. I had some concerns that with the donations made to the 2/9 Memorial Plaque Committee (independent of the 2/9 Network), our annual donations would suffer. That appeared to be the case when I sent out Battalion Runner 18-3. Boy, was I wrong. Donations soared in the two months leading to the reunion and we had a very decent balance in the bank. We could have paid for our Birthday Dinner but it was far too late to do that. I began looking for something else that would benefit everyone and ultimately got a great deal on golf shirts containing a hand stitched Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines stitched under it.**



**Every Marine at the reunion was presented with their choice of a Red or White shirt. We then sold additional shirts for \$20. There are still quite a few left. I have a couple dozen large and extra large shirts and a few 3X, 2X, Medium and Small. There are red and white available in both large and extra large but almost exclusively white in the other sizes. You can get one for \$30 by sending a check to me at 21 Moseley Street, Billerica, MA 01821. Make the check out to Danny Schuster. That \$30 includes shipping costs.**

**If you send a donation of \$100 I'll send you a shirt for nothing! Just be sure in both cases to include a color and size. I cannot guarantee you will get the color you want depending on the supply I have left when I get an order. So if you want red and I don't have any you may get a white shirt in the mail.**

- 2. Thanks to 2/9 Network member Ken Rooker I have nearly 100 2/9 decals designed by his son-in-law Brian Maguire, who is a professional graphic artist. Brian did this at no cost. If you make a donation to the 2/9 Network or buy one of the golf shirts discussed above I'll send you one for no charge. If you just want to buy one or more they are 5 bucks apiece. Send me a check to the same address listed above. The photo of the decal below really does not do it justice. It is a beautiful decal. Apologies to our post-Vietnam Marines. These were developed by and for Vietnam Veterans from 2/9.**



**I have asked Ken if Brian might consider a 2/9 bumper sticker with both Vietnam and post-Vietnam logos on it. Let's see how that goes.**

**3. Photos and Videos.** I have over 630 pictures and videos of the Plaque Dedication ceremony, Wreath Laying ceremony, Birthday Dinner, and many from our hospitality room at the hotel. I had hoped to have them all sorted and posted to Photobucket and VIMEO so I could provide links to them in this newsletter. That didn't happen. I've got a very old computer here, soon to be replaced, and it simply does not want to do the proper work to upload everything. I still have to sort through them all and eliminate some that are not so flattering for the people in them or are near duplicates of others. My plan now is to post links to the photos on Photobucket and videos on VIMEO during the month of January on all 3 2/9 Facebook pages and on our website at [www.2ndbattlion9thmarines.org](http://www.2ndbattlion9thmarines.org) in January.

**4. From the mailbox:**

- a. I received an email from Gary Gedese on 9 December. Gary is looking for anyone that knows his father, Robert Van Nason, who served with Hotel in 66-67. Gary's request was labeled "Time Sensitive", so if anyone knows Robert please contact Gary ASAP at [gedese0321@hotmail.com](mailto:gedese0321@hotmail.com), or phone 760-583-1694. Let us hope it is not too late.
- b. I received a second email from Jim Coan, who served in Vietnam in 67-68. Jim knows 2/9 Network member Jack Hartzel well and has written a book about Con Thien titled "Time in the Barrel, a Marine's Account of the Battle of Con Thien". Jim explained in his email that his book includes several accounts of incidents 2/9 was fully engaged in at Con Thien. I have a lengthy blurb from Jim's publisher. If anyone wants a copy of it email me at [twoninencoic@aol.com](mailto:twoninencoic@aol.com) and I'll forward his email to you. Jim also wrote another book earlier titled "Con Thien, Hill of Angels" that is a historical memoir. Jim can be reached at [zzjimco@aol.com](mailto:zzjimco@aol.com).

**5. Donations.** No begging in this newsletter but if you want to send some money to support the Network my address is listed above in the section about the golf shirts. I do want to send my deepest appreciation not just for those who made last year such a financial success, but in responding in such an outstanding manner to the request from the 2/9 Memorial Plaque Committee. I have recently had reason to peruse the 1/9 online database. They charge their members something like \$25 every year and their biannual reunions have significant costs associated with their events. I've seen similar things in other Marine outfit websites. We do just about everything for free, just because of the generosity of our members. No one does better than you guys!

As always, anyone is invited to contact me with any questions or concerns via one of two email addresses – [ditson35@verizon.net](mailto:ditson35@verizon.net) or [twoninencoic@aol.com](mailto:twoninencoic@aol.com). Or, you can call me at 978-667-4762. One final note. One juvenile has been flooding my email account with bogus 2/9 Network New Membership requests. I actually think I know who it is but have not been able to prove it. I am working with our internet service provider to identify the IP address of the individual doing it and hope to be able to put an end to it. I'm also considering a change to how people have to go about requesting membership but hope that isn't necessary in the end. If anyone reading this knows someone with the mind of a 12 year old please let me know. If not, I can tell the idiot one thing. It's a pain in the ass, but it only takes me about 2 seconds to get rid of your junk that probably takes you a couple of minutes every time you do it. That must take time away from your Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse cartoons.

**SEMPER FIDELIS AND MAY YOU ALL HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

**Danny Schuster**

**2/9 Network Administrator and Reunion Coordinator**



**I just HAD to put one picture of myself in here!!!!**