

To all my Koh Tang Brothers, Families and Friends,

This letter has been longer in coming than I desired.

This past year three of our fallen brothers have come home and were laid to rest. Rest well brothers PFC Richard Rivenburgh, PFC James Maxwell, PFC Class James Jacques, we pray this gives comfort and closure to the families and friends of these forever young United States Marines. Also, in February additional remains of US Navy Corpsman Ronald Manning were returned to his family. To see the news release from the Defense Prisoner of War-Missing Personnel Office, on each of these warriors go to www.dtic.mil/dpmo and search their names.

A group burial will be taking place in the near future at Arlington National Cemetery for the warriors US Marines PFC Daniel A. Benedett, PFC Lynn Blessing, PFC Walter Boyd, L/Cpl Gregory Copenhaver, PFC James Jacques, L/Cpl Andres Garcia, Bernard Gause, PFC James Maxwell, PFC Richard Rivenburgh, PFC Antonio Sandoval, PFC Kelton Turner, US Navy Corpsman Ronald Manning and US Air Force 2nd Lt Richard Van De Geer all from Knife-31. Remains yet to be recovered are US Marines PFC Gary Hall, L/Cpl Joseph Hargrove, L/Cpl Aston Loney, PVT Danny Marshall and US Air Force S/Sgt Elwood Rumbaugh. May God give peace to all that are forever impacted by this mission. A mass email will be sent to all in the contact list as soon as we are aware of the date.

Thanks, to all who attended our reunion this past May, over seventy attended. Here's a **HOO-RAH** to each one of you... Rick & Corina Ackerman, Randy & Eunice Austin, Nancy Backlund & Don Backlund, Tina Bailey©, Larry & Sharon Barnett, Scott Baron, Steve & Debbie Berger, Bob & Ruth Blough, Pat Brown, Paul Bussiere, John & Margo Daughtry, Mark Dick, Melton Dunscombe, Pat Flannigan & Alyson Porter, Richard Francis, Jerry Gettelfinger his son Keith, James Gregory, JD Harston, John Hendricks, Al Heryford, Dan & Betty Hoffman, Jeff & Ann Kern, Scott Kresin, Al & Debbie Mahan, Francis & Ann McGowin, Ed & Julia Mills, Fritz & May Mixdorf, Fred & Ellen Morris, Tom & Shelba Noble, Carl Odom, Iona Oswalt & Kim Tennyson, Steve Poore & Anita Kraus, Edd Prothro, Don Raatz, Henry Rausch Jr. & Jennifer Rausch, Marion Riley, Gale & Debbie Rogers, Vic Salinas & Debbie Lively and her two lovely grandchildren, Lee Saunders, Steve Simoni, Roger Skinner, John Steiert, and Fofu & Patricia Tuitele, it was great seeing and meeting you all.

A big Thank You to COL Randy Austin for speaking at the banquet dinner and ending it with a boot-on-the-chair toast: to the past, the present, and the future. We must get a copy of the toast and repeat it at each reunion.

On the same note we want to give Al Mahan a Thank You for establishing the web site www.mayaguezfalleenheroes.com which pays tribute to our fallen brothers and for doing a superb job as our store keeper.

It was an honor for us to meet and hear John Daughtry's testimony. As the pilot of Spectre 11, he helped save many lives of those on Koh Tang. Another honor was to meet the father and sister of Don Backlund (Pilot-JG11), who on 15 May 1975 put in his normally detailed daily log book only these words: "longest day of my life." These simple words speak volumes about that day.

Henry Rausch (Coral Sea) traveled the farthest, from Washington State to Branson by his now over-mileage-de-commissioned jeep. Those who have come to know Henry over our last four reunions know that he loves to travel and be with his Brothers. It warmed my heart to see a banquet room full of members from all over the country, each of whom has a personal testimony from this mission. Again, thank you for attending; I can't wait to see you at the next reunion.

Speaking of the next reunion, please mark your calendars to join everyone in Solomans Island, Maryland, 12-21 June 2013. The activities will include a tour of the PAX River Naval Air Station, a fundraising golf tournament, a crab feast, a chartered fishing trip, a special trip to downtown Washington, DC and Virginia, plus much more. Accommodation camping, cabins, apartments, hoteling, etc. at the Naval Recreation Center, with amenities are private fishing/crabbing pier, 3 huge swimming pools, private beaches, mini-golf, driving range, acres of fun and a central area for our group meals and nightly campfires.

Now, onto more serious issues. For some time, a number of issues have been affecting our organization. To put down in words the way I feel and to give some direction as to where to take the organization is not an easy task and took some major soul-searching. For the past five months I have been bombarded with telephone calls and e-mails about a variety of issues that are causing tensions within our organization. I will address these to hopefully put them to rest. Realizing that it is impossible to satisfy everyone, I will address these issues as honest and straight-forward as I possibly can.

Issue #1 Suggested Changes to By-Laws: Our by-laws continue to be a work in progress. In an attempt to ensure the long-term survival of this organization, I am proposing to the BODs and the membership to change the by-laws to read something along the lines: Anyone involved in any way with the Koh Tang /*Mayaguez* rescue operation, including descendants of the vets, may hold any office (including the President) if voted in by the majority of the membership. I am also considering proposing changes to include the ability for officers to be re-elected to the same office, but not for concurrent terms. As well, we should think of membership dues in the future. These proposals have some merits and some drawbacks. Let's face it guys, we are not getting any younger. If we want our organization to be here long after we are gone, we have to think outside our small box.

Issue #2 Are the veterans who participated in the *Mayaguez* recovery / the battle of Koh Tang, Vietnam Veterans? Let us look at all the facts. We all know the last 41 men named on the Vietnam Wall did not die in Vietnam. We also know that

officially (according to some records) the Vietnam War ended with the evacuation of Saigon on 30 April 1975. We know that if you ask the curator of the Iwo Jima Memorial why Koh Tang was not listed as a Marine engagement on their memorial, you will be told that Koh Tang is part of the Vietnam War. Further, many men who died in Laos, Cambodia and other places prior to 30 April 1975 are listed as Vietnam Veterans even though they never set foot in Vietnam. On the other side, the VFW does not list us as Vietnam Veterans because of the date of our engagement. To put it simply, the answer depends on who is defining "Vietnam Veteran." I feel that it is a dilemma that will probably never be answered to everyone's satisfaction. That being said, I ask only that we be respected for what each of us did during our operation as we respect those who served their time in Vietnam. We must remember that we are all veterans, just like our many Brothers who served before us. In the end, it doesn't really matter if our names are attached to a specific war.

Issue #3 Why were only certain people selected to participate in the History Channel documentary "Heroes Under Fire" or various books that have been written about the operation? Let me tell you that when I first saw the documentary, I was a bit miffed myself and asked the same question. The answer is this: The people who appeared in the documentary and the people who were quoted in the books were contacted directly by the producers of the documentary or the authors of the books. Our organization was never contacted or asked who should be in a particular book or TV show. If your story did not get told, please do not blame any member of the organization because they were in a book and you were not. It was entirely out of their hands, and had nothing to do with organization. The only exception to this was Scott Baron's book "The 14 Hour War." Scott put an announcement on the Koh Tang website's Guest Book page requesting that any member of our organization who wanted to contribute to his book was free to write his story and send it to him. Therefore, if you did not write your story, you have only yourself to blame. If you sent Scott your story and it did not get in the book, take it up with him, because no one in our organization had anything to do with it. While we are on the subject of Scott's book, I want every member of this organization to know that the recollections published in Scott's book were those of the individual contributor; in no way was the organization involved in the editing. Again, if you have issues with things that were said or not said in this book, take it up with the contributor or Scott Baron.

Paul Bussiere is sending a package to all in the near future. He is writing a book, to include any ones story who wants to tell it, from the guys left behind in Okinawa, to the cooks on the Coral Sea, to the airmen at Utapao. Putting ones experiences in words and down on paper is a tough thing to do, give-it-a-shot. The KTMV's Organization thanks you Paul for taking on such a large and wonderful project.

Issue #4 Dan Hoffman's American Legion address in Indianapolis. One of the mission statements of our

organization is this: * "Keep the *Mayaguez* Recovery and the battle of Koh Tang in the memory of the American public".

I have received complaints about the fact that Dan spoke at the American Legion convention. I want to take the time to explain to all of you how this came about. When Dan was President of our organization (May 2010-12), he was asked by the American Legion to tell *his* story and experiences. This invitation came about because Dan's younger brother, David (of Oaken Barrel Brewing, Indiana), told an American Legion board member and friend about the battle and his brother's dedication to keeping the memory alive. Dan contacted all members of the Board of Directors (BOD) and told them what he had been asked to do. He then stated to the BOD and to the Legion "That he wanted the presentation to be about the entire operation and not just his story." The Legion stated that they had many guest speakers and would prefer that he just speak about his experience only. Dan stood his ground and the Legion conceded, allowing him more time. He spoke of the entire operation, his experience and his best friends' experiences of Koh Tang, and his life of today. Dan also was requested to include subjects such as PTSD, the VA, and the American Legion itself. For the next seven months Dan had to write his speech, submit it to the Legion for approval, then re-write it several times to satisfy the Legion. Then he had to practice giving his speech over and over to make sure he got it within the time limits. The BOD was kept informed throughout.

Since Dan's speech, the KTMV's organization has received a large amount of recognition from many different sources, mainly because the Legion transmitted the video worldwide on the web. As a result, many more of our Brothers have been located. In addition, the American Legion publication that goes to all Legion members everywhere will aide in finding additional Brothers at a later date. Dan's address has done as much in accomplishing the preceding *mission statement as any other event.

The mistake that was made in all of this was not explaining these facts to the entire membership. We should have explained before now that the Legion asked Dan personally to give his story and presentation; they *did not* ask the KTMV's. For those of you who choose not to agree with what I just said, I ask you two questions: What would you have done differently faced with the same circumstances? Would you have chosen not to participate and let this opportunity for recognition for our organization slip by? I am going to assume that those of you who complained about this were just misinformed and you will look at the big picture and realize what it did for our organization. I invite you to take a look at the speech and think about it from that view. (www.legion.org/convention/211852/mayaguez-veterans-honored-legion)

Dan Hoffman, this organization wants to recognize your devotion and dedication as the first officially elected President and our former spokesperson. I know it was not an easy thing

to do. We thank you for your steady commitment to this ever growing organization.

Issue #5 Clique or Core Group. I want everyone in this organization to understand that no member is more or less important than anyone else. There are people that have been here since the beginning and have made major contributions to our organization, volunteering of personal time, financial and otherwise. With that said, they are no more important than our newest member. I can understand how this perception may have occurred. People have a tendency to migrate toward what they know. At the startup of our organization, we only had a few people to turn to, and therefore many of us may have contacted those people about an item rather than calling a newer member. This will be corrected, with any luck implementing Issue #6.

Issue #6 Communications: This, everyone, is the root of all of our problems. We must do better to ensure that all members know that they are invited to participate, in all events conducted by the KTMV's Organization. I am asking each board member to call at least five different members each month. I encourage all members to contact another member each month just to see how the other is doing. If you are sitting out there and have not heard from anyone from the organization, contact someone yourself. Call a board member to find out what is going on.

We need to expend every effort to expand our organization. One way would be to form some small committees, such as a reunion committee, a website committee, a committee to help contact all that were anyway involved with this mission. To name just a few, the families of our fallen brothers, the 4th Marines, USS Wilson, USS Coral Sea and USS Holt, Knives, Jolly's, Nails, Spectres, Crickets, all the communication centers, you get my drift??

Our Participation List can be located on the web site under Contact Us, (no telephone numbers/privacy issues). If you see a name you recognize, call one of the board members and get the number or give us needed info to locate them. On this list are 550 names involved with this organization. Happy to report we have point of contact with 209, leaving 341 whom we have no contact information on, mostly consisting of US Marines that landed on the island and the *SS Mayaguez*.

To throw some more figures at you, of the 209 contacts, 157 have email address, 52 do not. I encourage those with no email address to get one, if not have a family member or friend be a point of contact for you. Several email communications have been sent this past year of importance via email and not by postal service due to time frame constriction and related costs. Those with email address' only, I encourage you to call one of us from time to time.

The above issues have been brought out by a very few members of this organization. If you're not helping, please don't sit back and do nothing but complain, about the ones that are trying their best, whether it is for personal recognition or that of the organization. This group we have formed in such a

short number of years is one we all should be proud to be associated with. It is unfortunate that I had to spend so much time on issues that cause problems for this organization. I hope that we can now put these issues behind and spend our time growing our organization. Today many of our members whom served together back in 1975-76 have re-united, thanks due to this organization growing and being put in front of the American eye.

I know that I have hit you with a lot in this first letter. I want each of you to think about ways to improve our organization and to let us know your ideas. Volunteer your time; suggest a location for our gatherings; help spread the word. I also want each of you to understand that I will represent the majority of our organization and will not implement changes that will benefit only a few individuals.

The next message will include subjects like these: 1. Why we have KTMV's Fund Raisers and how the funds are used. 2. The problems and its progress to correct and update our web site www.kohtang.com. 3. Suggested ways for the KTMV's to help all veterans. 4. Up-date on the progress of the Winter Newsletter. And, of course, I will be encouraging all to join us in Maryland, right on the Chesapeake Bay and Patuxent River, which is, simply put, **breath taking**. Tina and I will do our best to hold an off-the-chain event for all those who attend. Again, the dates for the 2013 Reunion are June 12-21.

Semper Fidelis your friend,
Al Bailey
KTMV's Organization President May 2012-2014

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Together We Stand Divided We Fall



*Be Happy In Whatever You Do In Life.
Happiness Makes You Feel Good And Those Around You.*



2012 Branson Reunion

Koh Tang *Mayaguez* Veterans Organization

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