



## My life in the United States Marine Corps

As told by Joe De Bilio

For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be a Marine. There was something about the Corps that resonated with me: the proud history, “the First to Fight” mantra, the uniforms. I can’t pinpoint it, but I wanted to be a Marine.

. After graduation from Boston University, I reported to Quantico, Virginia to undergo 6 months of Marine Corps Officer Basic School. The curriculum teaches the skills necessary for an officer to lead Marines. The courses include Military history and tradition, all weapons, small unit tactics, map reading, land navigation, logistics, communications, how to employ supporting arms, drill command and ceremonies and leadership. Every Marine is a rifleman and every officer is trained to lead a platoon. I had been accepted into the flight program and, upon graduation from Basic School, I would be transferred to Pensacola, Florida to begin flight training.

### **The highlight of my Military Career happened at Basic School.**

As a final field exercise before graduation, we were all to participate in a “5 Day War.” This was to be a practical demonstration of applying what we had learned over the past 6 months.

We were given a very short briefing on how to get in the plane, a propeller-driven high powered T-28. Our mission was to fly simulated strafing runs over the final graduation objective while the others in my class attacked. That T-28 was fast and very powerful and, before I knew it, we were in a power dive with the ground

coming up very fast. Then the plane started to fall apart! Something smashed into the cockpit shattering the canopy. There was a big gash in the wing and the tail was also damaged. My pilot leveled the plane and tried to assess what had happened and if the plane could still fly. He declared an emergency and headed back to the airport. On final approach the plane stalled and we crashed into the Potomac River.



We were very lucky and both of us walked away from the crash. It appears that our crew chief had failed to properly secure the cowling and it came off in the power dive, crashing into the canopy.

My classmates ribbed me for the rest of the time that we were together, saying that “4 more planes and I would be North Vietnam’s first Ace!”.

After my crash, I lost my enthusiasm for flying....in fact I hated it!! The Marine Corps decided that, if I couldn’t fly, they would put me in tanks. I spent the next 2 years of my life in Fort Knox, Camp Lejeune, and Cuba before heading off to Camp Pendleton, California, leading a platoon of Tanks while having the most fun that you could have with your clothes on! The tank that the Marine Corps used in the early 60’s was the M48A3 Patton Medium Tank. My Platoon consisted of 5 Gun Tanks and on occasion 3 flame tanks. The gun tanks were 52 tons of hell death and destruction. These bad boys could travel at 30 mph, boasted a 90 Millimeter Gun and 2 machine guns. Leading a tank platoon was a fantastic experience. As a young 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, I was responsible for millions of dollars of equipment and the lives of over 30 men. Best job I ever had.



I was sent to Viet Nam as an anti-tank platoon leader in Da-Nang and special operations with a Battalion Landing Team up and down the coast of Nam. I was promoted out of my job as platoon leader and made company operations officer (staff guy in the rear with the gear). I guess my only achievement in Nam was that I never lost a man. Politics really started to get in the way of fighting a war.



It was truly the highest honor and privilege to have served in the Marine Corps and to have led Marines. The lessons that I learned as a Marine have served me very well in life and I'm a much better man as a result of my time in the Corps.

There is an expression that says, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Well, it's true. Each time I meet a fellow Marine it is a special event because he and I know that we share something unique, - a bond, a brotherhood that makes strangers into friends for life.

Semper Fi

