

March 2018

Marine Corps League



**Marine Corps
League #790
Detachment
Newsletter**

**Next Meeting:
April 2, 2018 19:00 hours in
the Coffee Shop
Happy Hour 20:00 to 22:00
hours at the Firehouse**

Commandants Message

Greetings.

My message this month is a simple one....

Bring someone with you to the next meeting.

Bring a prospect. Bring another member that just does not come out. Bring the Marine you met in the Home Depot. Bring your own sorry butt if you haven't been to a meeting in a while.

Bring someone to the next meeting.

The only way to grow is for every member to get involved.

We will have two guest speakers for the meeting.

See you there.

Semper Fi!

Glenn Meyers
(217) 506-2490
2017 Commandant
Gem City Detachment #790
Marine Corps League
Quincy, Illinois

MARCH 29TH
VIETNAM VETERANS DAY



www.march29vietvetday.org

WEEK OF January 18, 1968: Defense of Khe Sanh



Marine shooting his M-14 at an enemy forward observer at Khe Sanh, February 24, 1968. (U.S. Marine Corps)



A Marine M50 Ontos, a light anti-tank vehicle, part of the defenses of the Khe Sanh combat base, October 23, 1967. (U.S. Marine Corps)



This pile of empty artillery shell casings at Khe Sanh, one of several just like it by March 1968, helps illustrate the scale of the Marines' defense of the combat base during the siege. (U.S. Marine Corps)

On January 20, 1968, North Vietnamese Army units attacked a U.S. Marine Corps company on patrol near the Khe Sanh Combat Base. This firefight soon exploded into one of the most significant engagements of the Vietnam War, when between 15,000 and 30,000 North Vietnamese troops, having carefully surrounded Khe Sanh, assaulted a garrison of approximately 6,000 U.S. Marines. The siege at Khe Sanh lasted for nearly 3 months, during which time the massive Communist Tet Offensive erupted throughout South Vietnam.

While the firefight that happened on January 20 directly led to the beginning of heavy fighting, the buildup to the battle at Khe Sanh actually began weeks earlier, when on January 2 a Marine patrol spotted a small group of North Vietnamese Army officers on a reconnaissance mission near the Khe Sanh Combat Base and opened fire on them. Khe Sanh already had been the scene of numerous engagements, especially in 1967, because it overlooked one of the most crucial supply routes into South Vietnam from Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By the end of 1967, American intelligence officials knew that Hanoi was planning a large offensive for the upcoming year. The North Vietnamese patrol that the Marines spotted on January 2 confirmed, in General William C. Westmoreland's mind, what the MACV commander had long suspected: that the imminent offensive would be a massive invasion across the Demilitarized Zone, and that the destruction of the Marine Corps garrison at Khe Sanh was to be the opening salvo. Westmoreland's assumption about the shape of the upcoming Communist offensive turned out to be wrong, but the attack on Khe Sanh was indeed a crucial part of that offensive.

By January 1968, at least 15,000 (with some estimates of up to 30,000) Communist forces had converged on the area around Khe Sanh, including multiple armored and heavy artillery regiments. The combat base itself was a relatively modest facility, with a small airfield for resupply and a garrison of roughly 3,000 Marines. Another 3,000 Marines occupied and defended the surrounding hills. As intelligence of the North Vietnamese buildup in the region trickled in, MACV sent supplies and reinforcements to Khe Sanh by air. On January 20, a Marine company engaged enemy forces while on a patrol, and the following morning North Vietnamese Army forces launched their main attack on multiple American defensive positions using mortars, rockets, bangalore torpedoes, and automatic weapons fire.

Early on the first day, North Vietnamese artillery struck Khe Sanh's main ammunition depot, destroying the majority of the base's reserves. Six C-130s managed to arrive with more, but the garrison's short runway was heavily damaged as well. The Marines were quickly supported by a massive air support campaign (everything from devastating B-52 Arc Light strikes on enemy troop concentrations to fighter/bomber close air support) along with artillery and resupply missions (mostly via air drop after the damage to the runway). Khe Sanh's defenders dug in to outlast a siege.

General Westmoreland and President Lyndon B. Johnson both assumed the attack on Khe Sanh was the opening move in a large invasion across the Demilitarized Zone. They may have been partially correct. Historians still disagree over whether the North Vietnamese attack on Khe Sanh was truly intended to be diversionary (as Hanoi would retroactively claim) or if overrunning the combat base was an integral part of the plan for the Tet Offensive.

Continued on page 4.

Coming Events

NOTE: NO dance in March – First dance is April 28th

March 29th—Vietnam Veterans Day—Welcome Home and Thank You!

April 2nd – Detachment Meeting—Coffee Shop at the Veteran’s home 19:00 Hours.

April 21— St. Louis Cardinals game—Pregame ceremony honoring Illinois Marines 12:30 Hours.

April 28th – Dance at the Veteran’s home. Starts 1800 hours. Setup 1730.

May 5th— Dogwood Parade

May 7th – Detachment Meeting—Coffee Shop at the Veteran’s home 19:00 Hours.

May 26th – Dance at the Veteran’s home.

May 28th - Memorial Day.

June 4th – Detachment Meeting—Coffee Shop at the Veteran’s home 19:00 Hours.

June 13-17 – Department of Illinois Convention will be held at the Crystal Lake Holiday Inn. More to come as received.

Upcoming events TBD: Veteran’s Day Parade, Fishing for Freedom, State Fair security detail.

NOTE: Membership annual dues are \$35.00. (Membership sign up cards have not been updated yet.)

2018 Officers		Phone
Commandant	MEYERS, GLENN	(217) 506-2490
Sr. Vice Commandant	GRIEP, WAYNE	(217) 224-4886
Jr. Vice Commandant	JANSEN, JEFFERY	(217) 316-0219
Adjutant	DOELLMAN, LUKE	(217) 617-3152
Paymaster	DOELLMAN, LUKE	(217) 617-3152
Judge Advocate	DELGADO, JESUS	(217) 740-1207
Sergeant-At-Arms	CRABTREE, STEVEN	(217) 242-8715
Chaplin	SPIKER, DAN L.	(217) 228-3262
Trustee 2018	CANE, STEPHEN	(217) 224-6360
Trustee 2017	HAMANN, STEVEN L.	(217) 577-1507
Jr. Past Commandant	HAMANN, STEVEN L.	(217) 577-1507
Quartermaster	GEISE, THOMAS	(217) 223-5894

Marine Corps League #790-Oohrah!

Continued from page 2: Either way, U.S. forces defeated both Tet and the Khe Sanh attacks on the battlefield, despite the political losses and decline in morale that ultimately resulted. The attack on Khe Sanh did indeed draw significant American reinforcements and resources northward and out of the South's urban areas that were targets of the nationwide offensive that began on January 30.

After weeks of near continuous artillery barrages, bombings, rocket attacks, artillery strikes, and firefights, the Marines defending Khe Sanh managed to hold out and North Vietnamese units began to withdraw on March 6. By April, only a few rear-guard North Vietnamese units remained, and the United States had begun Operation PEGASUS to reopen the only road to Khe Sanh and to relieve its defenders by land route, which they finally did on April 8, when elements of the U.S. Army 7th Cavalry linked up with the Marines. As one historian notes, April 9 was the first day since January 20 that no North Vietnamese shells fell on Khe Sanh. A total of 205 Americans died in defense of the base, and over 1,600 were wounded. Additionally, hundreds of South Vietnamese soldiers were also killed, as well as at least 1,000 Montagnard militia fighters.¹

¹Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1968-1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2006), 34-35, 37-41, 73-81, 84; Jack Shulimson, Leonard A. Blasiol, Charles R. Smith, and David A. Dawson, *The Defining Year, 1968*, U.S. Marines in Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997), 58, 61-65, 70-27, 255-258, 260, 269, 277, 282, 289-290; George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, (4th edition; New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 227-228, 247; Spencer C. Tucker, ed. *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, (2nd edition; Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 579-583.



Panoramic photo of a portion of the Khe Sanh Combat Base, February 22, 1968. (U.S. Marine Corps)



Members of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment bow their heads during a memorial service for the Americans and South Vietnamese who died in defense of Khe Sanh, circa mid-1968. (U.S. Marine Corps)



EARNING THE TITLE

"FOR THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND, NO EXPLANATION IS NECESSARY; FOR THOSE WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND, NO EXPLANATION IS POSSIBLE."

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www.gemcity790.org

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www.marinecorpstimes.com

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