

WILLIAM MICHAEL HEMLEPP SR

Graduated from Ashland Senior High School in Ashland, Kentucky in 1953 and attended the Citadel and University of Kentucky during the years of 1953-1954.

Dropped out of college and went to work in Armco Steel Mill in Ashland to support my mother, two younger brothers and a sister. After my Mother took charge of the family, I joined the Marine Corps on September 15, 1955.

I arrived at Parris Island at 0245 on the 17th of September 1955 and commenced training. I graduated as outstanding member of my platoon and was promoted to PFC in December 1955. After ITR, I received orders to attend Sea School in Portsmouth, Va. Upon completing Sea School, I was ordered to the staff of ComPhibTraLant (Commander Amphibious Training Atlantic) as an orderly for Rear Admiral Lower Half (wears two stars but equivalent to a Brigadier General one star) H. A. Yeager. I was assigned as The Admiral's stand by driver in addition to my orderly duties. After The Admiral's assigned driver was relieved, I was assigned as his permanent driver. After 19 months as a PFC, I was promoted by the Admiral to two stripe Corporal E-3. (There were no Lance Corporals or E-8 or E-9's at this time).

In January 1958, the Admiral was transferred to ComPhibGruFour (Commander Amphibious Group Four) and had orders issued to me to transfer to that Command also. During that month, The Admiral promoted me to (three stripes-no crossed rifles) Acting Sergeant E-4.

Shortly after Admiral Yeager took command, the staff was ordered to Quantico, Va to assemble plans for an amphibious landing in Beirut, Lebanon. This landing, ordered by The President, Eisenhower, took place in July 1958 with 2nd Bn / 2nd Mar landing unopposed and took control of the city and airport. Admiral Yeager was in full command of the landing until the Marines established a command center ashore. His command, including your truly, was aboard the USS Pocono at the Beirut port. We departed Beirut back to the world in October 1958.

In early 1959, Admiral Yeager was transferred to Washington, DC. He asked me where I wanted to go and I told him I needed to return back in the Marine Corps because I have been gone too long.

In 1959 I received orders to Camp Lejeune and was assigned to India Company, 3rd Bn, 2nd Mar where I served for 18 months as a Rifle Squad Leader, Platoon Guide and Platoon Sergeant. In April, 1961, India Company was selected to relieve another rifle company in Gitmo Bay, Cuba for security duty on Leeward Point.

Our company maintained a defensive posture for approximately 3 months. After that exercise, we were ordered back to Camp Lejeune to continue our training.

After 3/2, I applied for Drill Instructor's school and was selected to attend DI school at Parris Island. I graduated 1st in my Drill Instructors class and was meritoriously promoted to Sergeant E-5. First time in my career I wore crossed rifles. I spent 28 months as a Drill Instructor and trained 7 ½ platoons. In April of 1963 I was selected as Drill Instructor of the quarter and meritoriously promoted to Staff Sergeant E-6.

After my duty at Parris Island, I was transferred to Force Troops, Camp Lejeune, NC. I volunteered for 2nd Force Recon Company and was set up for an interview the following day. After the interview, I was selected to serve and immediately sent to Fort Bragg, NC for Airborne School. After Airborne School, I was assigned as training SNCO of the training platoon. After several training missions with 2nd Force, I learned I had been selected for The Warrant Officer program and transferred to Quantico, VA for the Warrant Officer Screening Course (OCS). Upon completing the screening course, I was promoted from candidate to WO-1 in February 1964.

Along with the promotion, my MOS was changed from 0369/8511 to a new MOS of 3102. Traffic Management Officer. This was a whole new world for me. The Marine Corps immediately sent me to several freight transportation, passenger transportation and the movement of government household goods schools in order to make me a full fledged office puke. I was initially stationed at The Marine Corps Supply Base at Albany, GA in the Traffic Branch. My boss was Mustang Major "Red" Wilkerson, a member of the Bataan death march during WW2. Great Marine and taught me a lot about the transportation field. During this tour of duty, I asked for and received permission from Hq Marine Corps to travel to Fort Benning, Ga to maintain my proficiency in Airborne operations. I traveled once a month to Benning and jumped with the Airborne students. I was able to participate in several experiential jumps with the Marine Corps representative. The Marine Corps representative at Fort Benning was LtCol Paul Xavier "PX" Kelley, a future Commandant of the Marine Corps. (July 1983-June 1987)

In March of 1965, elements of the 3rd MarDiv were ordered into the Republic of Viet Nam. I had about one year at Albany and volunteered for Viet Nam. Because of the Corps needing young officers, the Commandant issued an order to promote eligible Warrant Officers to 2nd LT. I was promoted to 2nd LT and did not get ordered to Viet Nam until October 1967 and had been promoted to 1st LT.

Arriving in Viet Nam in December 1967, I was assigned to the staff of BGen H. C. Olson, Commanding General of Force Logistics Command. I briefed the General each morning on the tactical situation of Marine Corps elements in I Corps and the results of the logistics support. Because of the tactical information I reported, I had to travel to forward locations to obtain first hand information for the briefings. My assistance was an outstanding Staff Sergeant by the name of Tossi. He briefed in my absence. Because I missed several briefings and SSgt Tossi did such a outstanding job as a briefer, I sent a request for a meritorious promotion to Gysgt. He was promoted which provided me with more time to travel. I was able to work with and train members of the South Korean Marines in airborne operations from Danang and worked with them down south.

My travels in Viet Nam took me from LZ stud, / Dong Ha/ Quantri to Saigon. This travel gave me a combination of tactical and logistics work. It was very interesting duty with lots of chances to see and witness the operation of the Marine Corps in a hostile environment. I was very proud of our young Marines.

At the end of my tour in Viet Nam, all the temporary officers were given the chance to apply for a regular commission, reserve commission or an LDO. If we were not selected for one of those commissions, you would be reverted to your permanent rank. I applied for a regular commission; but, was selected as an LDO. This allowed me to remain an officer and not get reverted.

I received orders from Viet Nam in February 1969 as a Captain and transferred to an Army Logistics staff in Northern Virginia. The Military Traffic Management & Terminal Service, as it was known in those days, was commanded by an Army Major General with a Navy Rear Admiral as his assistance and an Air Force BGen as his Deputy Commander. As a Marine Corps Captain, I was the senior Marine on the staff. Many exciting stories were connected to that duty. I was stationed there from March 1979 to August 1973.

I had applied for and accepted for the Degree Competition Program and reported to The University of Southern Mississippi for 21 months. I graduated in June of 1975 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. This was another great tour of duty. I enjoyed the campus life so much I requested an additional year to get a Graduate degree. The Program requirement was for each year you spent on campus, your pay back was two years for each year of fraction of. My pay back was 4 years after graduation.

Someone at Headquarters Marine Corps sensed a happy Marine and answered my request with an unaccompanied tour of duty with the 1st Marine Air Wing at Iwakuni Japan. I arrived at Iwakuni in 1975. In my 20 years in The Corps, this was my 1st tour with the wing. I have jumped from several Marine Corps helicopters, Air Force cargo planes, Navy fixed wings and Army cargo air craft, but never had anything to do with the people that operated those machines. This was an eye opening experience.

After Iwakuni, I received orders to the Marine Corps Logistics Support Base in Barstow, Ca. This time I was the Mustang Major in charge of the Transportation Department. It was a great tour of duty which added on to my logistics knowledge and a great golf base.

In 1979, I called my monitor to check on my next duty station after Barstow. He informed me that I was coming in the zone for LtCol next year and if I made it, I was coming to Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington. Rather than go back to the Washington DC area, I chose to retire and seek employment in the civilian world.

I obtained a position with Amerida Hess Corporation located in Woodbridge, NJ in the logistics department. With 3 years left toward retirement from Hess, I was requested (in 1999) to transfer to the Hess oil refinery in St Croix, USVI to train the local employees on transporting Chemicals and dangerous material by ocean and air. I actually stayed 6 ½ years and retired.

Shortly after I arrived in St Croix, I met and attended several unofficial Marine Corps League gatherings. On 14 November 1999, our Marine Corps group had a Birthday celebration and the Commandant of the Marine Corps attended. General Jim Jones was in St Croix visiting a former Marine who he served with in Viet Nam. What a surprised for all the 30 some Marines living in St Croix.

In 2005 I retired from Hess/Hovensa and moved to York, SC.