

**4 Stories**  
by Gerald F. Merna,  
1st Lt., USMC (Ret)  
A Vietnam Remembrance

# Third Marine Division

## **TWO SCORE AND THIRTEEN**

### Association History



**U. S. Marine Corps**

1 LT. GERALD F. MERNA-USMC

# Introduction

Throughout its storied history, the 3d Marine Division has earned a stellar reputation for its dedication to the highest values and principles of the United State Marine Corps; for its extraordinary bravery on the battlefields of Bougainville, the Northern Solomon Islands, Guam, and Iwo Jima in World War II and in the jungles of Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War; for its loyalty and sacrifice to country; and for the esprit de corps for which the Marine Corps is renowned.

Division veterans of the Pacific battles of World War II formed the Third Marine Division Association in 1949. Fifty-three years later, the ranks of the Association number more than 5,000 Division veterans of three wars as well as Marines and Navy personnel who have served with the Division "between wars." Through the Third Marine Division Association, friendships forged on far-flung battlefields or in places far from the comforts of home and family are maintained. With its many programs, the Association honors the Division Marines of the past, supports the Division Marines of the present, and provides continuity to the Division Marines of the future.

The roll call of Marines who have served with the 3d Division includes 42 men who were awarded the Medal of Honor for exceptional heroism – 10 from World War II and 32 from the Vietnam War. The Division itself has also been the recipient of numerous honors, including two Presidential Unit Citation Streamers with Bronze Star, the first in World War II for the battle at Iwo Jima and the second for the Vietnam War; the Navy Unit Commendation Streamer for Iwo Jima; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Streamer with four Bronze Stars; the World War II Victory Streamer; the National Defense Service Streamer with one Bronze Star; the Korean Service Streamer; the Vietnam Service Streamer; the Korean Service Streamer; the Vietnam Service Streamer with two Silver Stars and one Bronze Star; and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry Streamer with Palm.

The 3d Marine Division's primary mission is the execution of amphibious assault operations, as well as other operations as directed. The 3d Marine Division is the Marine Corps "Forces In Readiness" in the Pacific. The Division's elements include the Headquarters Battalion, based at Camp Courtney, Okinawa; the Twelfth Marine Regiment and the Combat Engineering Company, both based at Camp Hansen, Okinawa. The Fourth Marine Regiment, the Combat Assault Battalion, and the Force Recon Battalion, all based at Camp Schwab, Okinawa; and the Third Marine Regiment, based at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. The Division also includes elements reporting for rotational training cycles from the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California, and the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, under the Unit Deployment Program.

# Dedication

*"Dedicated to all Marines and Navy personnel who have served with the 3d Marine Division since it was activated on 16 September 1942."*

In 1966 I was the Marine Corps escort officer for Roy and Dale when they made a "handshake visit" to the 3d Marine Division in Vietnam.

What a thrill for me! I'd grown up watching their movies, as well as Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson and Hopalong Cassidy. And, here I had Roy and Dale in person! The only thing that could have improved on that would have been to see Trigger trailing along.

It was a cold, rainy night when they arrived but it didn't seem to faze them one bit. They were decked out in their finest Western garb, six-shooters and all. (Maybe we could have used their help on a few patrols. At the very least, they would have shot the guns out of some of the VC's hands like they always did in their movies.)

I took them around to individual "hutches" to meet the two, three or four Marines that might be huddled in them. Roy and Dale would shake the hand of every Marine they met. Then they'd sit down and tell us all about their adopted children – how and why they adopted them, and how much they loved and missed them. They also made it clear they were thrilled to be visiting with us.

I took a lot of other "stars" around during my tour in 1966 to 1967. They included Robert Stack, Robert Mitchum, Henry Fonda, Wendell Corey and Floyd Patterson. Though all of them were very nice, Roy and Dale stood head and shoulders above all of them in the impression they made on us. As cold as it was, they *exhaled* warmth, friendliness and love. They literally mesmerized us with their presence and their genuine concern and feelings for their fellow man.

I had the pleasure and privilege to hear many of their stories as we went from hut to hut, since they knew they had to shorten their time in some of them in order to make as many visits to Marines as they could.

World War II and Korea had their big USO shows (I was also in Korea) but Vietnam ushered in a whole new era of handshake visits by stars such as Roy and Dale. I will never forget that cold, wet night – seeing two magnificent people ignoring their own discomfort and needs to try and cheer up and brighten the day (night) of a bunch of Marines they were meeting for the first time, and would probably never see again.

I know Roy is "riding into the sunset," as the famous song reminds us. But Roy and Dale will always ride into the memory of the United States Marines they so generously shared their time with, during some very tough times.



*Phu Bai, Vietnam: August 1967: L to R: First Lieutenant Gerald F. Merna and Wendell Corey, Actor boarding helicopter to visit troops. Photo courtesy of Gerald F. Merna*



*July 1967: Center: Floyd Patterson, World Heavyweight Champion 1956-1959 and 1960-1962, visits the 3rd Marine Division. Photo courtesy of Gerald F. Merna*



*Phu Bai, Vietnam: August 1967: Actor Wendell Corey with members of Third Marine Division Reconnaissance Patrol. Photo courtesy of Gerald F. Merna*

## A Potentially Deadly "Night Dancing Party"

In the Old Testament, Noah was chosen by God to build an ark to save his family and a pair of every animal from the Flood. While there was no Noah or flood, God was certainly protecting other "pairs" of 3d Marine Division Marines in a similar way on January 7, 1967, in Vietnam.

Major General Wood B. Kyle, the Division's Commander, received some rather unusual invitations from Colonel Ngo Quang Truong, Commander of the 1st Infantry Division, 11th Tactical Region, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The Colonel was inviting pairs of Marine Corps officers of the 3d Marine Division to attend a "Night Dancing Party."

The party would be at what was, prior to the war, a pretty nice hotel in the historic Vietnamese City of Hue, regarded as Vietnam's most beautiful city and once the imperial capital of Vietnam. (Ironically, one year later, January 1968, the Tet Offensive took place. The fierce fighting during that battle seriously destroyed much of that city, including its imperial palace).

Individual written invitations were provided for at least two officers of each rank, i.e., two Lieutenants, two Captains, two Majors, two Lieutenant Colonels and two Colonels. I say "at least" two, since while that adds up to 10 officers, I recall a slightly larger group of maybe 15 in all. Perhaps the Division padded it with a few "extras" for their own reasons. Perhaps because I was on the General's staff at that

time, I was one of the Lieutenants selected. (Shown below is the actual invitation I received, written in Vietnamese, which has been in my files all these years.)

Needless to say, there was no Marine then serving in Phu Bai, Vietnam, only miles from Dong Ha and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Vietnam, that had any neckties; the only "jackets" we had were flak jackets (armored vests). I did not RSVP to this invitation either, though presumably someone did when they were initially proffered. The invitations were rank generic, and not name specific, e.g., LIEUTENANT, CAPTAIN, MAJOR, LIEUTENANT COLONEL and COLONEL, almost like Noah's general designation for two animals of each description.

I can't recall the names of others in this group selected to attend this party. And we were all rather puzzled what it was all about, until someone said it was a "goodwill" visit of Americans with Vietnamese counterparts.

We put on our best utilities, and each of us wore our sidearm. Together with a small security force the division provided who were appropriately armed, we boarded our "buses," which consisted of several motor pool trucks. We arrived in the City of Hue around 1730 and located the Huong-Giang Hotel that overlooked the River of Perfumes (shortened to Perfume River) that divided the City. From the outside the hotel appeared to be an attractive building, though showing some of the neglect caused by the war that had been raging for many


years. Entering the hotel, we were greeted by a Vietnamese officer and assigned individual rooms. Here's where any semblance of a normal hotel quickly evaporated and reminded us where we were.

While there was running water, it was all cold water. There was no heat in the entire building, and the room was damp and cold. And this was January! Even though we would spend very little time in it, there was a fairly comfortable bed, much better than our sleeping bags in our hootches back at Phu Bai. Overall, it was an unexpected and pleasant change from the mud and rain and other uncomfortable conditions we temporarily left behind.

We had a chance to relax and clean up a little, and at the appointed hour of 2100, still wearing our sidearm, walked into a large ballroom on the third floor. Upon entering the room it was obvious the party was already underway. We saw a fairly large group of Vietnamese men and women; the Officers smartly dressed in uniforms we were not accustomed to seeing them in. Their ladies were also nicely dressed, a few in "western" clothing but most of them in ao dais, a dress Vietnamese women traditionally wore that consisted of a long tunic split on the sides and worn over loose trousers.

We were affably welcomed, and invited to help ourselves to the wine and buffet that had been set up. We didn't need to be told twice, and while I can't remember exactly what food was available (even today I pay little heed to buffets) I remember being thrilled upon seeing the dessert table. It was full of French pastries and other delicacies. I never expected to see such treats again until I got home. Any one who knows me also knows the priority I place on good bread, and almost any kind of pastry or other desserts, with meat and potatoes coming in a poor second! So I picked at whatever real food was there, but satisfied my appetite on the bread and dessert. My fellow officers seemed to enjoy the entire buffet.

It was from this point on that things seemed to take a turn for the worse. There was very little mingling – they were on one side of the room and we were on the other, like bashful boys and girls at a prom. Music was playing both Vietnamese and American music, and several Vietnamese couples were dancing. Two or three of our men, attempting to "break the ice," walked across the room to ask some of the ladies who appeared to be by themselves if they

	<b>Đại-Tá NGÔ - QUANG - TRƯỜNG</b> TU-LỆNH SƯ ĐOÀN 1 BỘ-BÌNH KIỂM TU-LỆNH KHU XI CHIẾN-YHUẬT
<i>Hân hạnh kính mời</i> Trung Úy _____	
đến dự Buổi dạ vũ _____	
ngày 07/01/67 lúc 21 giờ _____	
tại Lầu 3 khách sạn Huong Giang (đạp dạ cũ) _____	
Y. PHỤC: - Veston, complet cavat	XIN TRẢ LỜI: Số-Tây số 5

Translated: Colonel Ngo-Quang-Truong Invites Lieutenant to attend a night dancing party that will be held at 07 January 1967 at 2100 at Huong-Giang Hotel (on 3rd floor)

would like to dance. Almost rudely and even discourteously, they were snubbed, ignored or otherwise turned down. It quickly became apparent that we were invited for food and drink, but not to socialize with their ladies. The men only wanted to *dance* with them, not marry them, and were only trying to be friendly in the first place! I remember wondering why in the world they even invited us?

It didn't take long for our senior officer to let us know it was time to "say goodnight, Gracie" (the line George Burns always used on TV to Gracie Allen when he wanted her to break off her renowned yakking and leave with him.) None of us were upset with this decision.

We returned to our rooms, and it seemed like I had just got into the sack when there was a knock on my door and one of our group quietly told me to saddle up, and that we would be leaving in 10 minutes. Not really undressed since I still had my pants and socks on, all I had to do was add my utility top put on my boots, strap on my .45 pistol and proceed to the lobby. Then we got back in our trucks, and left the hotel and Hue between 1:00 and 1:30 a.m. to return to Phu Bai.

The decision to leave very early literally turned out to be a life-saver. The Viet Cong either knew that 3d Marine Division and ARVN officers were staying at this hotel on this night, or, they coincidentally planned an attack on this hotel. Either way, an attack was about to be made on the hotel.

Sometime before dawn and not long after we left, several Viet Cong "sappers" (VC or NVA commandos particularly trained in infiltration and demolition), swam up the Perfume River toward our hotel. Almost naked except for explosives strapped to their bodies, they succeeded in placing their deadly explosives around the hotel. Shortly after accomplishing this, violent explosives wrecked havoc on the hotel. I do not know how many, if any, ARVN officers or their guests, or possibly others staying in the hotel, were wounded or killed. I do know there were no 3d Marine Division Officers injured. It was reported that at least one of the sappers was captured.

So the next time I'm invited to any "night dancing parties," I will consider it "hazardous duty," keep my clothes on after the party, expect anything, and leave early like George Burns always wanted his beloved Gracie to do!

### **The Trials and Travails of a Mustang Lieutenant**

The term "90-day wonder" came into vogue during World War II when a service member completed some fast-paced Officer Candidate School (OCS) and became a commissioned officer after about 90 days in the service. (The Corps takes longer than that for boot camp!). Well I must have been an especially slow learner, because I was an 18-year wonder.

In 1966 the Corps selected over a thousand senior staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) for the officer corps. Vietnam was raging, and cannon fodder was sorely needed. Most of us headed for Vietnam within a month or less of the date we were commissioned. I was part of a brief ceremony with several other now former SNCOs at Headquarters Marine Corps in Arlington, VA. The brief ceremony consisted of taking the oath of office while my wife and a two-star General each pinned a gold bar on my shirt collars. I missed the stripes I wore on my sleeves for so many years. I could see them, but not those tiny little bars. But this was quite a thrill nonetheless, and pretty heady stuff after 18 years of enlisted service. Several of my buddies were lined up outside waiting to give the traditional "first salute" so they could get the traditional dollar. While I did pass out a few of those, my wife got the first one, and it was a two dollar bill that she still carries in her wallet today!

Nor were any of us sent to OCS, Basic School, or any other so-called "charm school" to learn the finer points of being a

Marine Corps Officer. While it was fun, and very interesting, it was also pure trial and error. I think it took me forever to learn the proper position for wearing the new insignia, and more than once was told I had them on wrong. To begin with, this "promotion" from Master Sergeant E-8 (I was later promoted to Master Gunnery Sergeant E-9 while an officer) to a mere Second Lieutenant was seriously questioned by a lot of my colleagues at the time. "Why," they asked, "would you do such a thing?" My reply was always, "The last time I checked, you have to make Second Lieutenant before you make Colonel!" I wish now that I could foresee then for those doubters how many doors that special opportunity opened for me, even as a mere lieutenant after I retired. As Marines know, when you become an officer and a gentleman by coming up through the enlisted ranks, you are referred to as a Mustang.

In 1952 I volunteered for service in Korea while a Staff Sergeant on recruiting duty in New York/New Jersey. The Officer-in-Charge then was Lt. Col. Lou Wilson, a Medal of Honor winner and future Marine Commandant. Several times my request was refused, being told the Corps had a long waiting list of volunteers. Learning my younger brother, Jim, had his orders for Korea, I earnestly appealed to Col. Wilson to help me get there too. Though he probably thought I was nuts, he came through for me, and in two weeks I had my orders! (A third Marine brother, Richard, would serve there after Jim and I left). In Korea (1952-1953) I made Technical Sergeant (E-



*Lt. Col. Leo Donahue, USMC, Division Adjutant, 3d Marine Division, Vietnam, August 1966. Photo courtesy of Gerald F. Merna*

6) while serving as a Section Leader of an ATA Platoon of Weapons-1-5, 1st Marine Division. Almost eight months later I was a platoon sergeant with E-2-5.

Thirteen years later, on August 24, 1966, less than 60 days after being commissioned, I found myself with the 3d Marine Division in Vietnam as a brand new, 36-year old 2nd Lieutenant. Stepping off an airplane in Da Nang, Vietnam, I was completely surprised to be greeted by two field grade officers. One was Lt. Col. Leo Donahue, whom I worked with at Headquarters Marine Corps (when he was a Major) just before I was commissioned; he was Adjutant of the 3d Marine Division. With him was Major Wayne Massey, the Assistant Division Adjutant. In addition to being surprised, I was impressed that they had come to personally welcome a modest Second Lieutenant, until I learned why.

I mentioned to both officers that I *expected* to be assigned to the 1st Bn, 4th Marines to work for another officer I also served with at HQMC. He had requested and was expecting me to be assigned to his unit. Imagine my chagrin when Col. Donahue informed me that he was going home soon, that Major Massey would replace him as Adjutant, and I was to be the Asst. Division Adjutant. Though pleased with the confidence they were placing in me, I must have also telegraphed my disappointment. If I had any doubt I was losing ground for my preference, all doubt was removed midway through my second attempt asking to go to the 4th, Marines, Col. Donahue abruptly ended the dialogue. With a half smile, he said, "Nothing has changed, *Lieutenant Merna*. I'll still call you *Jerry* and you can call me *Colonel*. We've been *expecting you* and you are *going* to be the Assistant Adjutant!"

With a salute and a hasty "aye, aye, Sir," I became the Asst. Division Adjutant. Several months later, I became the Division Awards Officer. So much for the 4th Marines! Who knows, perhaps they saved my life that year! Upon reflection, that year in Vietnam, while far from enjoyable, turned out to be a very interesting and memorable one.

Upon returning to the U S in September 1967, I spent the following year as Adjutant and Casualty Notification Officer at the Marine Air Reserve Training Detachment (MARTD), Andrews Air Force Base. I was blessed with yet another fine commanding officer, Lt. Col. Ed Ruty, a former

Blue Angel pilot, now deceased. Despite the strong possibility of making Captain in less than six months (my peers all did), the unpleasantness of the casualty notification duty, and the even stronger possibility of another Vietnam tour as a Captain, I acceded to my family's desires and retired. I never looked back and never regretted the decision. I loved my 22 years as a United States Marine, and it was time to devote myself to the family I also loved.

Postscript: A few years after Lt. Col. Donahue and I were both retired, I was able to achieve some small and equally satisfying measure of retribution for that day we first met in Danang. I was the Executive Assistant to the Postmaster General and Donahue was the Executive Director of a DC-based trade association. I don't know how he found me, but he did, and called one day out of nowhere. He said he was very pleased to learn of the position I then held, and volunteered that his association was having serious mailing problems. He wondered if I could "send someone over to help him out." My response came quickly as if I had talked to him the day before. With tongue-in cheek I answered: "Nothing has changed, *Mr. Executive Director*. I will still call you *Leo*, and you can call me *Mr. Merna*!" He instantly understood and remembered that day, and we both had a good and long laugh. I of course helped him out But the moment was delightful!

Semper Fidelis.

### **A Great Marine Corps General Died In Vietnam Major General Bruno A. Hochmuth, 1911-1967**

As a new Mustang 2nd Lieutenant in Vietnam, I had the privilege and unusual opportunity to work closely with two Commanding Generals of the 3d Marine Division. These were Major General Wood B. Kyle from my arrival on 24 August 1966, until he was relieved in a change-of-command ceremony I witnessed on 18 March 1967 by the then Commanding General of III MAF Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt. On that day General Walt installed Major General Bruno A. Hochmuth as the new Division Commander. I worked for him until my tour ended on 1 September 1967. By the nature of my assignment as the Division's Assistant Adjutant, and even more so as the Division Awards Officer, I was required to meet often with these Division Commanders and Chief of Staff,

Colonel A.D. Cereghino. While I also have positive memories of working for General Kyle and admired his leadership style, I developed an even closer working relationship with General Hochmuth, to whom I dedicate this writing.

In 1966-1967 the 3d Marine Division's Headquarters was based at Phu Bai, about 4-5 miles south of Hue, 35 miles north of Dong Ha, and about 50 miles north of the buffer zone, called both the demarcation line and demilitarized zone (DMZ), which divided North and South Vietnam. In Phu Bai, I especially remember the heavy, sticky mud that made it very difficult not only for vehicles, but also for walking. Vietnam is typically tropical with two main seasons: hot and dry, and hot and wet. The wet season generally begins in mid-April and lasts until mid-October. The rain begins in September and lasts through January.

Marines were entrenched along this DMZ to engage the enemy, stop their infiltration by clearing out guerrilla forces' basic facilities, services and supplies, such as water, rice, and sometimes ammunition, in the villages and hamlets stretching the length of the coastline. Eliminating their long-established infrastructure within each village and hamlet was as important as defeating them in the field. Unlike most other wars, there were really no front lines in Vietnam and no rear areas. The jungles and swamps belonged to whoever occupied them at any given time. I was regularly assigned to nightly patrols as a platoon leader of a Provisional Platoon around our CP perimeter with a force that was responsible for assuring the command's security. I also went on counter-intelligence patrols to nearby hamlets to inspect for enemy infiltration efforts, and to search for their hidden supplies or other provisions.

But my primary duties were assisting the Division's chief administrator, the Adjutant, with the myriad duties involved in supporting a Marine Division in a combat environment. Some of these included casualty reporting, graves registration, troop replacements, discharge boards, and the ultra morale booster, mail services. Ultimately, as the result of the division's increased combat activities that resulted in a very heavy load of award recommendations, I became fully involved with establishing an all-important award processing program for the division. It was here that I became much more involved with not only the Chief of Staff, but also General Hochmuth. I was an advisor to them, and a

voting member of the Division Awards Board. I spent a lot of time on choppers visiting forward area units to find and interview witnesses for the highest level awards, and to assist unit personnel in preparing appropriate award recommendations.

General Hochmuth, who was very easy to work with, was an *extraordinary* human being and Marine. This tall Texan was then 56 years old (20 years older than me), was a graduate of Texas A&M, and had already been a Marine for some 30+ years. He had extensive combat experience in World War II where he won two Silver Star Medals. He was quietly religious and well respected by those who knew him. He didn't curse, smoke or drink, and did not have a lot of tolerance for anyone who did, *especially* if done to extremes. But he was also very understanding of the war situation and the times, and was therefore not overzealous about anything, except the well being of his Marines. He would often invite a small group of officers of various ranks to dine with him in his quarters, such as they were in those rainy mud flats, it was his personal way to get to know his officers better, away from their responsibilities. He also used these opportunities to let us know where he stood on a lot of matters, hoping we would in turn pass that information down the chain of command. He not only inquired as to how we were doing, but also wanted to know about our families. He would even ask if we were writing to our wives, children, parents, and others.

One of the more interesting additional assignments Gen. Hochmuth tasked me with was to be the escort officer for celebrities or dignitaries visiting the Division. These visits were informal, one-on-one, non-staged visits by stars that wanted to go out among the troops to meet them. This was unlike some of the more formal USO-type visits of stars where there were either large clubs or stages erected for stars such as Bob Hope, Anita Bryant, Marilyn Monroe and others. Since we were so close to the DMZ there weren't any large enough clubs or stages in the areas occupied by the 3d Marine Division. Clubs were available much further south at primarily Army or Air Force bases in Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang and Chu Lai.

Some of the famous Hollywood stars I had the privilege of escorting around the Division for "handshake" visits to troops in the field, in their huts and tents: Henry Fonda, Robert Mitchum, Robert Stack, Roy

Rogers and Dale Evans, and Wendell Corey. Also a very popular sports figure of that era was Floyd Patterson, the 1952 Olympics middleweight boxing gold medallist who later held the world heavyweight title from 1956 to 1959, and again from 1960 to 1962. Although Patterson was by far the favorite of the troops, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were my favorite, while Wendell Corey was General Hochmuth's favorite. Perhaps this was because Corey was another tall Texan, and about the same age as Hochmuth. He mentioned that Corey had been a television star "hero" of his for a long time, especially for his *Harbor Command* TV series in which he played a Coast Guard Captain. Some of Corey's other many movies and the roles he played were *Rear Window* (a policeman), *Alias Jesse James* (Jesse James), *Cyborg* (a sheriff), and *Waco*, (a preacher). He also starred on the *Westinghouse Playhouse* in the early 1960's with Nanette Fabray.

Corey's visit came in August 1967, just a couple of weeks before I would be going home. I thought I was pretty safe at that point, until Corey told General Hochmuth he wanted to go out with a recon (reconnaissance) patrol! I said to myself, "You've got to be kidding!" and felt sure the General would veto that request. But Corey wasn't and General Hochmuth didn't! He "suggested" I take him out in the bush and let him visit with a recon patrol. I found a patrol just returning from their mission, and took some extraordinary pictures of Corey with this patrol. Corey himself carried a miniature camera pinned to a collar on his utilities. I know he got some great pictures as well. (On other occasions I also accommodated Actors Robert Stack who wanted to ride in an Amtrac (Amphibious Tractor), and Robert Mitchum, who wanted to "go out and see the guys.") General Hochmuth thoroughly enjoyed Wendell Corey's visit, and for a change, his morale was definitely uplifted after Corey's visit to his 3d Marine Division.

Sadly, there is no happy ending to this story. Once a week I would climb aboard a helicopter with General Hochmuth to fly to the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Division Headquarters. We would meet with our counterparts on subjects of mutual interest and coordinate matters related to Vietnamese awards presented to Marine Corps personnel. On 14 November 1967, a little over two months after I left Vietnam, General Hochmuth's helicopter crashed on one of those very same trips

I regularly made with him. It was reported that it was an operational crash. Perhaps it was, but I would not have been surprised to hear it was shot down, because we flew over hostile areas on those trips. General Hochmuth became the only Marine Corps General to become a casualty of the Vietnam War. For sure, The Corps lost a wonderful man, and an outstanding leader!

**GERALD F. "JERRY" MERNA**, born April 1, 1930, in New York City. Raised in his youth by Dominican nuns. Successfully completed three careers in past 53 years, receiving two degrees from George Washington University by attending night school. Raised two children, Linda and Gerald, and has been happily married to high school sweetheart Dorothy (Sedlak) from Piermont, New York, for over 49 years. They have two grandsons.

First career as a Marine, enlisting on 17th birthday, April 1947. Attained rank of 1st Lieutenant after coming up through enlisted ranks



**Gerald F. Merna**    **Richard G. Merna**

to Master Gunnery Sergeant throughout 22-plus years of service. In Korean, 1952-1953, same time as brother, Sergeant Jim Merna, later joined by brother, Corporal Richard Merna. ATA Leader, Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Platoon Sergeant with Easy Company, 2nd Battalion. 5th Marines.

In 1966, commissioned as Mustang 2nd Lieutenant, serving 13 months with 3d Marine Division in Vietnam.

After the Marine Corps, Jerry began his second career in 1968, 18 years with the U.S. Postal Service. Rose steadily to higher management positions, ultimately directing the efforts of over 4,000 Northern Virginia employees, responsible for 150 post offices. Was also the Executive Assistant to the Postmaster General, an SES appointment and one of only 30 officers within the 850,000 strong USPS.

Jerry's third career, that of advertising director, and later VP, for two large defense associations in the Washington, DC, area. Directed worldwide advertising activities for AFCEA's journal, *Signal* magazine. Then became VP for PR & Marketing for NDIA's national *Defense* magazine.

Currently serving as Publications Consultant to NDIA, residing in Potomac Falls, Virginia, with his wife Dorothy.