

Swifty Spotlight

The World-Famous
Purple Foxes



Issue #1
Fall 2019

Memorial Plaque Updated

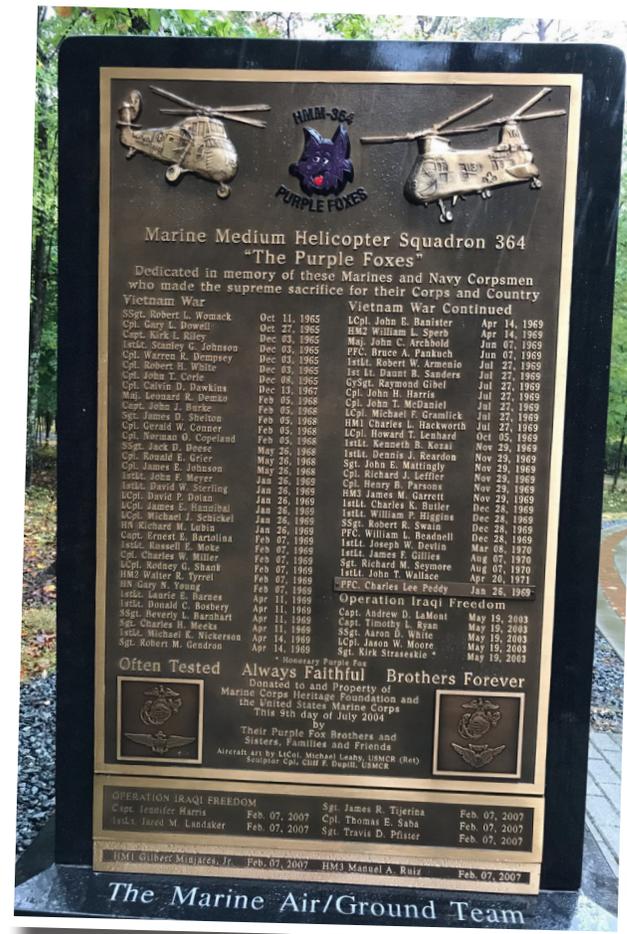
In 2003, the Vietnam Purple Foxes began a memorial project to honor those Marines and Navy Corpsmen who served HMM-364 and made the supreme sacrifice. Initially the bronze plaque was to show only those who were killed in Vietnam. Unfortunately, the squadron's losses continued as Operation Iraqi Freedom kicked off and the names from those KIA on May 19, 2003 were added.

Just before the plaque was to be installed in the Semper Fidelis Memorial Park at the Museum of the Marine Corps near Quantico, Morphine 1-2 was shot down in Iraq on February 7, 2007.

An addition to the plaque was quickly made. Unfortunately, there was a miscommunication and the two Navy Corpsmen who were on board were accidentally left off.

We are pleased to announce that this oversight has FINALLY been corrected and the addition of **Gilbert Minjares (HM1 07)** and **Manual Ruiz (HM3 06-07)** is now complete!

For the past 2 years, Shannon Dittlinger (HMC 07) and Larry Britton (1stLt 68-69) spent countless hours raising money and working with a foundry to rectify this error. (I helped a little.) A special thanks and must be given to Larry, who took many, many trips to the monument



and coordinated with the museum to make sure we got it just right.

For more on the original story of the plaque, [click here](#).

Pop A Smoke 2020 reunion is 8-12 July 2020.
See Page 2 for full details.

From the Editor

Welcome to the debut issue of *Swiftly Spotlight*! My name is Stephanie Hanson Caisse and my father was a Corpsman who was KIA in Vietnam while flying with the Purple Foxes. 20 years ago, I went searching for answers as to what happened to my father, and was welcomed with open arms to the Fox family. In addition, I ended up marrying SgtMaj Rick Caisse, who deployed with the Foxes to Iraq in 2008.

I helped Frank "Uncle Frank" Gulledge (Maj 69-70) for many years creating the Fox website, as well as worked with the Foxy Ladies group during the deployments in Iraq. More recently, I came up with the idea of creating an online newsletter to pass along news, and share stories from Foxes from ALL the years this amazing unit has been around.

But... this newsletter won't succeed without your help. Currently, I hope to do a quarterly newsletter. If we get enough interest, we might be able to do more. So, please send stories, pictures, ideas, comments, whatever you would like to see our way! My email is corpsmankid@hotmail.com.

Semper Fi,
Stephanie

Upcoming Events



Pop A Smoke 2020 Reunion
8-12 July 2020
Nugget Hotel & Casino
Sparks, NV

For those that do not know, Pop A Smoke holds a reunion every 2 years for all units of combat helicopter and tiltrotor Marines.

The Purple Foxes will have their own hospitality hootch within the hotel where you can catch up with fellow squadmates and meet new Foxes. Come join us for a weekend of great fun!

Hotel rooms can be reserved now. Reserve yours today if you are even thinking of coming, as there is a limited number of rooms available at the discounted rate.

Click here to reserve your room today!

Full details for Pop A Smoke registration and Purple Fox details will be coming soon!

Swiftly Sightings



Steve Shupp (Cpl 67-68) celebrated a Kentucky Christmas in 2011 with a gift from his daughter, Tara.

Swiftly now adorns the spare tire cover for his camper on all of their road trips.

Have you seen Swiftly around?

If so, let us know about it at corpsmankid@hotmail.com.

Smoke Signals

Did you know that the USMC/Combat Helicopter & Tiltrotor Association has established scholarship programs for children/grandchildren of current POPASMOKE members and for spouses of active duty who are paid members?

Two of these current active scholarships endowments are in the name of Purple Foxes:

Ernesto "Gooie" Gomez

Lance Corporal Ernesto "Gooie" Gomez, while serving with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262, Republic of Vietnam was awarded the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism against enemy forces.



On 25 Jan 1968, LCpl Gomez was the Crew Chief aboard a CH-46 transport helicopter assigned an emergency medical

evacuation mission on Hill 881 near the Khe Sanh Combat Base. While in the zone he observed two Marines leading a casualty, whose head and eyes were covered with bandages, toward the helicopter.

The entire landing zone was subjected to intense enemy fire and at that time LCpl Gomez left the aircraft to assist the wounded Marine reach the aircraft. Shielding the injured Marine with his own body, LCpl Gomez was able to get him aboard.



Morphine 1-2



On February 7, 2007, a CH-46 helicopter flying with HMM-364, the Purple Foxes, was on their last casualty evacuation (casevac) mission of the day in Iraq when they were shot down by insurgents.

The helicopter crashed and seven American heroes lost their lives – Capt Jennifer Harris, 1stLt Jared Landaker, Sgt Travis Pfister, Sgt James Tijerina, Cpl Thomas Saba, HM1 Gilbert Minjares, HM3 Manuel Ruiz.

In a twist of fate, this Morphine 1-2 crew in Iraq was flying a memorial flag for the Purple Fox crew of YK15 who were shot down on February 7, 1969 in Vietnam.

For complete scholarship details, click here.

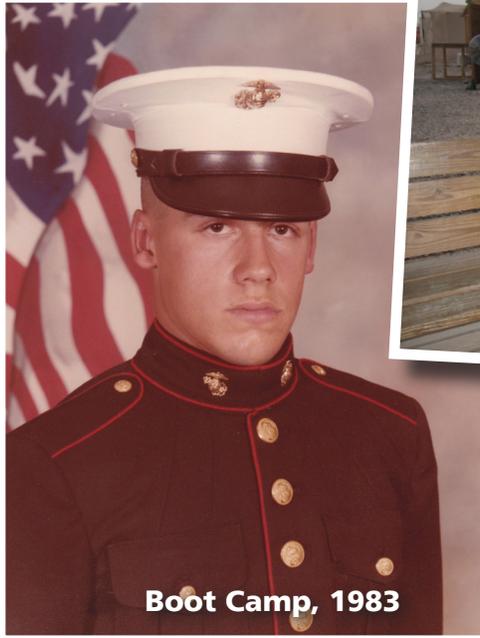
Now & Then...

Rick Caisse enlisted in the Marine Corps in January 1983 and attended basic training at MCRD Parris Island, SC. In May of 1983 he reported to Field Radio Operator School in MCAGCC 29 Palms, CA.

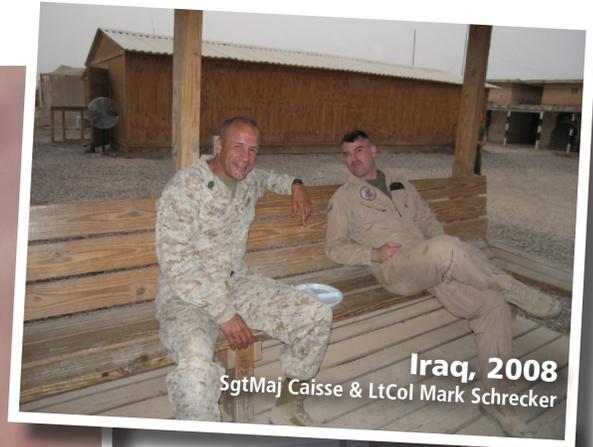
Over the next 25 years, Rick served in numerous duty stations, such as I&I Duty in Lynchburg, VA; and time with 1st Bn 6th Marines and VMGR-252 among others. He deployed three times to Iraq and once to Afghanistan.

Selected to his present rank, SgtMaj Caisse received orders to HMM-364 where he served a tour in Al Tequedum, Iraq with the priority mission being casualty evacuation.

“When I first received orders to The Purple Foxes I was floored because I had trained for six months to deploy with my current command and did not want to leave. I looked up the Foxes and their history though, and found a unit that had a history rivaling our most decorated ground units. The bravery of the pilots and crew are amazing – so glad I am a Fox!”



Boot Camp, 1983



Iraq, 2008
SgtMaj Caisse & LtCol Mark Schrecker



MCJROTC, 2017
SgtMaj Caisse, Cadet & LtCol Dave Harrill

After retiring from the Marine Corps in 2013, Rick became an instructor for the MCJROTC program at Germantown High school in Madison, Mississippi. Headed by retired LtCol JD Harrill (the former commanding officer of 2/8 in Marja, Afghanistan and the operations officer of 2/4 in Ramadi, Iraq) this program began in August of 2011 when the high school first opened its doors. Since then it has grown immensely, going from a small classroom to a dedicated building and range facility.

The company has become a force in all competitive events throughout the state of Mississippi and MCJROTC Region 5 which consists of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Never fear, Marines. Our country is in good hands...

TAPS

Roger Combs, 1stLt 69-70 (passed Aug 22, 2018)

We will post any new notifications we receive since the last newsletter issue. If you have a name to add, let us know at corpsmankid@hotmail.com.

Foxes in the News



The Golden Eagles®

Congratulations to Rich Bianchino (Capt 69) who is now the 6th Purple Fox to be chosen as a member of the Golden Eagles!

The Golden Eagles was established in 1956 as a living memorial to Naval Aviation, and is the most prestigious group of Naval Aviators. Its membership includes admirals, generals, astronauts, aces, innovators, inventors and leaders, who during their service were pioneers in the development of new concepts, received special recognition for outstanding performance, or who otherwise warrant special consideration for meeting select criteria. Their careers are defined by continuously exhibiting performance as the best of the best.

The other members from HMM-364 that are Golden Eagles are Gene Brady (LtCol 69), Ernie Cunningham (Maj 68-69), Pat Donovan (1stLt 68-69), Dave Legas (1stLt 69-70) and John Harris (1stLt 69-70).

Membership is limited to only 200 active members.



John Harris, Pat Donovan and Rich Bianchino

“ We all should be exceedingly proud that the Golden Eagles, a very selective and extraordinary group of noted Naval Aviators, has repeatedly chosen new members from the ranks of HMM-364. It is a remarkable accomplishment to be chosen and I feel very comfortable in saying that no other rotary wing Marine squadron is as represented as is HMM-364. -Alan T. Robillard”

What Else?

- 1 This is a newsletter about Foxes and for Foxes. What else would you like to see included? Send me your stories, ideas or more, at corpsmankid@hotmail.com.
- 2 If you received this newsletter from someone else, and would like to be on our email list, please send your name, email address and rank/years as a Purple Fox or your affiliation with the Foxes to corpsmankid@hotmail.com.