

COMMENTS ON JOSEPH R. "BULL" FISHER  
KANEHOE BAY MARINE CORPS OFFICER'S REUNION  
21 APRIL 2006  
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

THANK YOU FOR THAT KIND INTRODUCTION.

I WANT TO SINCERELY **THANK OUR HOSTS**, FOR THEIR GENEROSITY IN SPONSORING OUR REUNION.

IT HAS BEEN A REAL TREAT **SEEING SOME OLD FRIENDS** AND FELLOW MARINES SOME OF WHOM I HAVE NOT SEEN SINCE THE BRIGADE LEFT HAWAII FOR OKINAWA AND THEN ON TO VIETNAM – WE HAVE ALSO WARMLY REMEMBERED SOME OF THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE WITH US TONIGHT AND SADLY WE REMEMBERED SOME OF THOSE WE LOST IN COMBAT IN VIETNAM. MAY GOD BLESS THEM ALL AND WE ARE ETERNALLY THANKFUL TO THEM FOR THEIR SACRIFICE.

SO WHY AM I STANDING BEFORE YOU TONIGHT? PETE PAFFRATH ASKED ME SEVERAL WEEKS AGO IF I WOULD TALK FIVE TO EIGHT MINUTES ABOUT COLONEL **JOSEPH R. "BULL" FISHER**. COLONEL FISHER WAS 2/4's COMMANDING OFFICER IN HAWAII NINE MONTHS BEFORE WE LEFT FOR VIETNAM AND THEN HAD THE BATTALION FOR SIX MONTHS IN COUNTRY.

WHEN HE ASKED ME TO DO THIS, I ALMOST DECLINED BECAUSE I FELT INADEQUATE TO APPROPRIATELY HONOR A **MARINE CORPS LEGEND SUCH AS BULL FISHER**.

SO, THEN, WHO IS THIS LEGEND? LET ME TELL YOU SMALL BIT OF WHAT I KNOW:

HE **ENLISTED IN THE MARINE CORPS IN 1942** AND SAW ACTION THROUGHOUT THE PACIFIC ISLAND-HOPPING CAMPAIGN WHERE HE ROSE TO THE RANK OF STAFF SERGEANT FOR HIS "NOTEWORTHY LEADERSHIP SKILLS, HIS COURAGE, EXPERTISE IN MAP READING AND HIS PROFICIENCY IN USING THE BAYONET."

AS A PLATOON SERGEANT HE WAS AWARDED A **SILVER STAR** ON IWO JIMA FOR PERSONALLY DESTROYING AN ENEMY MACHINE GUN BUNKER WITH HAND GRENADES. BECAUSE OF THE DIRE SITUATION, HE DID NOT ASK A PRIVATE TO DO IT, HE DID IT HIMSELF. IN THE PROCESS OF RUNNING TO THE BUNKER HE WAS WOUNDED BY RIFLE FIRE TWICE - ONCE IN THE CHEST AND ONCE IN THE SHOULDER. HE WAS STILL ABLE TO REACH THE BUNKER, RISE TO HIS KNEES AND THROW TWO GRENADES INTO IT SILENCING THE MACHINE GUN. BECAUSE OF THE EXTENT OF HIS WOUNDS THE DOCTORS AND NURSES WERE AMAZED THAT HE LIVED.

WHEN THE WAR ENDED COLONEL FISHER RECEIVED A **FIELD PROMOTION TO SECOND LIEUTENANT** AND PARTICIPATED IN THE OCCUPATION OF JAPAN.

BETWEEN THE WARS HE GAINED THE NICKNAME THAT WOULD STAY WITH HIM THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, "**BULL.**" THE NAME WAS GIVEN REPORTEDLY BECAUSE OF HIS STATURE. HE STOOD AT SIX-FOOT-TWO, WAS BROAD-CHESTED AND WEIGHED APPROXIMATELY 220 POUNDS. I SUSPECT, HOWEVER, THAT IT HAD JUST AS MUCH TO DO WITH THE AGGRESSIVE MANNER IN WHICH HE PERFORMED HIS DUTIES.

FIVE YEARS LATER, FIRST LIEUTENANT BULL FISHER FOUND HIMSELF IN HIS SECOND CONFLICT, THE KOREAN WAR. AT THIS TIME HE COMMANDED, AS A FIRST LIEUTENANT, **COMPANY I, 3D BATTALION, FIRST MARINES** UNDER COLONEL LEWIS B. "CHESTY" PULLER.

AFTER SEEING INTENSE ACTION IN THE BATTLE FOR SEOUL HE MOVED ON WITH THE FIRST MARINES TO THE CHOSIN RESERVOIR.

HE WAS AWARDED A **NAVY CROSS** AT HAGARU-RI ON 28 – 29 NOVEMBER 1950. ACCORDING TO THE CITATION, HIS COMPANY REPULSED WAVE AFTER WAVE OF ASSAULTS FROM AN ESTIMATED ENEMY REGIMENT. THE ACTION WAS FOUGHT AT NIGHT IN SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES OVER A PERIOD OF EIGHT HOURS. HE INSPIRED MEN TO HEROIC EFFORTS THUS INSURING THE DEFENSE OF A LARGE SEGMENT OF A PERIMETER VITAL TO THE WELFARE OF THE ENTIRE CORPS

HIS GREAT MENTOR WAS **GENERAL CHESTY PULLER** -. WHEN A JOURNALIST IN KOREA ASKED COLONEL PULLER WHY HE PLACED A LIEUTENANT IN COMMAND OF A COMPANY INSTEAD OF A CAPTAIN, PULLER BELLOWED: "LIEUTENANT JOE FISHER IS ONE OF THE BEST DAMNED COMPANY COMMANDERS WHO EVER LIVED. HE'S EQUAL TO THE TOUGHEST ASSIGNMENT. AS LONG AS I'M AROUND, HE'LL LEAD ITEM COMPANY."

COL CHESTY PULLER EVALUATED FISHER ON HIS FITNESS REPORT AS **THE "BEST COMPANY GRADE TACTICIAN," IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS.**

WHEN GENERAL PULLER RETIRED, HE SAID THAT THERE WERE **ONLY TWO REAL MARINES LEFT** IN THE CORPS, ME AND BULL FISHER. THIS WAS VERIFIED BY HIS WIFE, JEAN, WHO ATTENDED THE CEREMONY.

COLONEL FISHER WAS ASSIGNED AS THE **CO OF 2/4 IN JUNE 1964.** FOR WEEKS BEFORE BULL TOOK OVER, WE WERE WARNED THAT THE MARINE'S MARINE WAS TAKING OVER AS CO AND THAT WE HAD BETTER BE READY.

THE BULL CERTAINLY **DID GET OUR ATTENTION**. HE HAD COME TO US FROM FMFPAC AND KNEW THAT WE WERE GOING TO WAR IN VIETNAM. HE WAS DETERMINED TO GET US READY.

HE CONCENTRATED ON **INFANTRY BASICS** LIKE WE HAD NOT SEEN SINCE BASIC SCHOOL. WE WERE IN THE FIELD CONSTANTLY UNDER HIS WATCHFUL EYE ENSURING THAT OUR TRAINING WAS REALISTIC AND EMPHASIZED THE BASICS:

HE WAS OBSESSED WITH **SMALL UNIT LEADERSHIP**, TRAINING AND ENSURING EVERY MARINE IN THE BATTALION WAS TACTICALLY AND TECHNICALLY PROFICIENT. SO MUCH SO THAT SOME OF US LIEUTENANTS THOUGHT HE WAS TO - PUT IT KINDLY - A BIT **ECCENTRIC**. BUT AS I LOOK BACK ON THAT TIME IN HAWAII WITH HIM – EVERYTHING HE DID WAS TO FOCUS US ON GETTING READY FOR COMBAT.

YOU ALL KNOW THE STORY OF OUR DEPARTURE IN MARCH 1965 SUPPOSEDLY FOR OPERATION “SILVER LANCE.” WE WERE ACTUALLY **HEADING FOR VIETNAM** WITH AN IN ROUTE STOP IN OKINAWA FOR A MONTH OF INTENSIVE TRAINING.

WE LANDED AT **CHU LAI ON 7 MAY 1965** WITHOUT INCIDENT. THE SECOND NIGHT WE MOVED FROM THE BEACH BEYOND HIGHWAY 1 TO HILL 43. WE HAD A SEVERAL MONTHS OF LOW INTENSITY COMBAT WITH MOSTLY LOCAL VCs IN THE CHU LAI AREA. HOWEVER, I MUST SAY THAT ON THE SQUAD AND PLATOON LEVEL WE DID NOT ALWAYS CONSIDER IT LOW INTENSITY.

IN AUGUST THAT CHANGED WHEN WE PARTICIPATED IN **OPERATION STARLIGHT**, THE FIRST MAJOR US COMBAT OPERATION OF THE VIETNAM WAR. I WAS HIS 81 PLATOON COMMANDER AND IN HIS JUMP CP. BEFORE WE LEFT FOR THE VAN TUONG PENINSULA, HE TOLD ME TO NEVER BE MORE THAN TEN FEET FROM HIS ELBOW.

WE LANDED IN **LZ WHITE** WITH ECHO COMPANY AND IMMEDIATELY CAME UNDER FIRE. I HEARD BULL SHOUT: “OK MARINES, THIS IS NOT HOTEL STREET AND THOSE THINGS WHIZZING OVERHEAD ARE NOT PIN BALLS THEY ARE THROWING AT YOU. LET ME SEE SOME RETURN FIRE”

THE ENEMY FIRE WAS COMING FROM A HILL ADJACENT TO THE LZ AND WE WERE TAKING CASUALTIES. ECHO HAD NOT GOTTEN ORGANIZED YET. BULL JUST GRABBED THE NEAREST PLATOON COMMANDER AND TOLD HIM TO **ATTACK THE HILL**. WE HAD ONE MORTAR SET UP AND HE TOLD ME TO START FIRING BEHIND THE HILL. THE PLATOON TOOK THE HILL WITH SOME DIFFICULTY BUT THE ENEMY FIRING ONTO THE LZ CEASED.

I OBSERVED HIM FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE OPERATION AND RECEIVED A BULL FISHER LESSON FROM THE MASTER TEACHER ON **HOW TO RUN A BATTALION IN COMBAT**

**HE CONTINUED LEAD 2/4 UNTIL OCTOBER 1965** WHEN HE WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE III MAF STAFF AND WORKED FOR GENERAL WALT FOR THE REMAINDER OF HIS TOUR.

I AM CONVINCED THAT HIS LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING IN HAWAII AND OKINAWA **SAVED MANY 2/4 LIVES** DURING OUR FIRST SIX MONTHS IN COUNTRY.

**THE BULL RETIRED IN 1968** TO WHISPERING PINES NORTH CAROLINA. I ASKED JEAN LAST WEEK WHY, AND SHE RELATED THE FOLLOWING:

“JOE HATED STAFF AND PAPER WORK. HE WAS AT HQMC AND WANTED TO GET BACK TO THE THING HE LOVED – **BEING IN THE DIRT WITH HIS MARINES**. THE COMMANDANT TOLD HIM THAT IF HE WANTED TO MAKE GENERAL, HE HAD TO GO TO THE **ARMY WAR COLLEGE** AND WAS ISSUED ORDERS THERE. WE WENT TO CARLYLE BARRACKS AND CHECKED OUT THE SCHOOL AND AREA. THE WORST SIX MONTHS OF HIS LIFE WAS AT THE ARMED FORCES STAFF COLLEGE AND HE DID NOT WANT A REPEAT OF THAT FOR NINE MONTHS AT CARLYLE. HE ALSO KNEW THAT HE WOULD BE A **PAPER PUSHER** THE REST OF HIS CAREER AND DID NOT WANT THAT. HE DECIDED THAT IT WAS TIME FOR HIM TO RETIRE. SHE SAID HE LOVED RETIREMENT AND PLAYING GOLF AND RAISING FLOWERS – THE PEONY WAS HIS FAVORITE. FOR THAT, HIS FRIENDS IN RETIREMENT CALLED HIM **FERDINAND**.”

COLONEL FISHER **DIED OF A HEART ATTACK IN 1981**. ACCORDING TO JEAN, HE WAS ON THE WHISPERING PINES GOLF COURSE HOLDING THE FLAG AT THE FIRST HOLE – PLAYING THE GAME THAT HE LOVED SO MUCH.

**HIS MARINES LOVED HIM** BECAUSE HE RESPECTED EVERY MARINE NO MATTER WHAT HIS RANK. HE COULD COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH ANY MARINE FROM PRIVATE TO GENERAL. HE WAS A LEGENDARY LEADER. HE WAS TOUGH BUT FAIR. HE INSTILLED IN HIS MARINES A PRIDE AND BROTHERHOOD THAT SPANNED HIS THREE WARS. HIS LEGACY CONTINUES TO INSPIRE ANY MARINE WHO SERVES IN 2/4 TODAY OR WHO HAS EVER SERVED IN THE 2D BATTALION, FOURTH MARINE REGIMENT.

**GOD BLESS BULL AND CHESTY AND MOST OF ALL, GOD BLESS OUR MARINES WHO ARE IN HARMS WAY AROUND THE WORLD TODAY.**

THANK YOU AND SEMPER FIDELIS.