

Black Jack Westerman

Dick Culver

Now here's a name that brings back memories – lots of 'em! He was a Marine's Marine, and was held in at least awe by virtually all those with whom he came in contact. Many senior officers were not impressed (primarily I think because they weren't in his league), but certainly they didn't have the chutzpa to mention it in his presence. He was a legend in the Corps, and no matter what your personal opinion of his talents, he was all Marine. Black Jack was also alternatively called "Evil Black Jack" or perhaps a few more unmentionable sobriquets, but whatever else he was, Black Jack was a man to ride the river with.

There are many stories that followed him around the Corps, all of them designed to get your attention and hold it. He had been commissioned from the ranks in 1949 and had headed to Korea in time to make Pusan Perimeter, and the Inchon Landing. He and another of my favorite Commanding Officers, John Counselman, had traded command of the same Platoon, one commanding it while the other was in the hospital on several occasions. Both had been awarded the Navy Cross while commanding the same unit. It was probably a truly salty platoon that emerged from the first year of the Korean unpleasantness. The story went that Jack had made the Pusan Perimeter when the Brigade was thrown in from Hawaii, and he had been one of those who had stemmed the tide of the North Korean Army when their less prepared sister service units had been badly used up, primarily due to a lack of training, and perhaps at least partially due to a lack of suitable equipment. The Marines, always being short of equipment, felt right at home, and as the old Houseman poem went:

*"...Their shoulders held the sky. suspended;
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;
What God abandoned, these defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay."*

The Marine Brigade saved the Pusan Perimeter and were then pulled out and embarked on shipping for Inchon. Jack had a humongous scar on his left arm that went from his wrist to his elbow and had obviously once been a gaping wound. At a party held at his quarters I once asked him about it, and his comments were short but to the point. He explained that they had been on the lines so long (this was during the Pusan evolution) that the entire platoon was essentially asleep on their feet. Jack positioned the platoon and spent several hours checking the lines to make sure everyone was awake. After his third pass, and finding everyone in a semi-catatonic state, he decided to get a couple of hours of sleep himself. Pulling his poncho over his head, and using several large rocks to anchor it against the wind, he quickly dozed off only to become aware of some activity outside his makeshift digs. A glance from under the poncho showed a pair of tennis shoes, and since the Marines wore no such footwear, Jack assumed that it must be the Zips. He felt around for his Carbine, making sure he didn't disturb his poncho in such a manner as to attract undo attention. Unfortunately his weapon wasn't conveniently within his grasp without alerting the North Korean. Suddenly the tennis shoe clad Zip bayoneted Jack in the left arm. Now Jack was a BIG man and not easily subdued by one lone Korean. Jack grasped one of the rocks he was using to hold his



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poncho down, and grabbed the hapless assailant, and beat the guy to death with the rock. He bound his wound as best he could in the dark and then rolled over and finished his nap before seeking medical attention.

Jack was eventually medivaced from Korea with a serious back injury (I never got the exact particulars on that malady) and sent to the Naval Hospital in Bremerton, Washington. Once he was out of danger, he was encased in a sizeable body cast that went from his waist to his shoulders, allowing only minimal arm movement. His wife, understanding soul that she was, smuggled a very large Hawaiian Sport Shirt into his hospital room. A pair of scissors and some judiciously hidden safety pins readied Jack for his first night on liberty since the Pusan Perimeter action. He was apparently able to hoist a brew even with his "pinioned arms" and was well into his second glass of suds when some loud-mouthed civilian at the bar for reasons unknown, started bad mouthing the Marines. The story goes that Jack listened to several of these diatribes before telling the individual to shut the #\$%& up or he (Jack) was gonna' kick his fanny up between his shoulder blades. His antagonist, now well fortified with "the grape" himself, took one look at the wounded, but sizeable, Marine and laughed, thinking he was safe! He apparently did not see the look in the eyes of a gentleman who had once beaten his antagonist to death with a rock! Seeing only a guy in a body cast, he continued haranguing Jack and the Marine Corps. BAD MISTAKE! The story goes that Jack came after him, pinned him to the bar with his cast and bit his nose off! There are several other versions of course, one of which has Jack biting his ear off, but the outcome was the same! Lesson? Don't mess with or underestimate Jack Westerman!

Years passed, and I had yet to meet Black Jack Westerman. While I had about 12-years time in the Corps by 1965, I had just left 3-years stationed in New Orleans at the 8th Marine Corps District Headquarters, a job I cordially hated. Until my exile in New Orleans, I had been alternatively an Artilleryman, an Infantry Type and had spent a tour in the old First Force Reconnaissance Company. Needless to say, I viewed any sort of administrative assignment with an extremely jaundiced eye. I would have been tickled to have been assigned to an I&I Staff *training* Reservists, but these headquarters clowns had me signing discharges. Hell, if I'd have wanted to be a clerk, I'd have gone to work at Woolworth's! I had great respect for the reserves themselves (they had done yeoman service in Korea and were our backup in the event of a major dust-up), but being a SLJO in the District Headquarters shuffling papers was beyond the pale!

Service with the Reserve District Headquarters was not one of my career highlights, but at last I had finished my tour, gotten out of purgatory and been reassigned to the 2nd Marine Division. My original orders had been to report to the Division during the last half of May of '65, but in order to escape my lingering damnation, I volunteered to shoot the Eastern Division Rifle Matches, which sprung me a couple of months early from the District Headquarters. Since the Matches were located in the same geographical area as my new assignment, I thought I had beaten the system by a bit.

"*Odin*" has a strange sense of humor and by the grace of the almighty I managed to place in the Division Matches and was selected to fire both in the Marine Corps Matches and subsequently to shoot with the Rifle and Pistol Team that summer. While I enjoyed demonstrating my erstwhile skill with my assigned enemy-repelling ordnance, I had never been a range rat, but rather tried to time my shooting sessions between FMF assignments. Well, it worked, but rather than simply allowing me to return to Lejeune following my Summer of shooting, I got orders to report back to New Orleans and spend still another month away

from my beloved Corps. My original orders had me assigned to the 2nd Marine Regiment, but when I finally reported in to the Division in October, my original billet in the 2nd Marines had been filled. The Division Headquarters personnel folks however were thrilled to see that I had some Reconnaissance experience since the 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion was short of officers. By pure chance, I had become a welcome billet filler.

By mid 1965, the 2nd Marine Division was approaching the status of a “casual organization”, and was essentially being used as a manpower replacement pool for the units assigned to the Republic of Vietnam. Being a soldier by trade, I was literally chomping at the bit to “kill a Commie for Mommy” as the saying used to go! I was NOT amused at becoming a billet filler in a replacement pool.

The personnel officer at the 2nd Marine Division asked me if I had ever heard of a Lieutenant Colonel named Jack Westerman? I politely answered “no”, with a quizzical look on my face. He chuckled and said something to the effect, that I would probably welcome a set of orders to Wes Pac once I had served my time with the 2nd Recon Battalion. I left scratching my head, wondering what he meant! I was soon to find out.

Upon getting past the Battalion Adjutant at 2nd Recon and being ushered into the Commanding Officer’s Office, I was greatly impressed by one of the most imposing gents I had ever seen. He was seated, but even then, the fact that he had one elbow on each corner of his desk without stretching, bore witness to his size. His face was inscrutable, but bespoke of much service. He was deeply tanned and one cheek was adorned with what appeared to be a full set of tiger claw marks, Hummm... I was literally speechless, something unusual for me. He looked up and I imagine expected me to be somewhat taken aback, his expression while not exactly menacing, was anything but friendly.

Since I was wearing my greens with what few dangles I had garnered, I felt somewhat undressed while viewing Jack Westerman’s multiple rows of ribbons topped off with a Navy Cross. To say I was impressed would have been an understatement. I wasn’t sure what was coming next, but I guarantee that my fanny was appropriately puckered.

He made the obligatory welcoming remarks, and finished off saying “so you’re one of those damned “dingers”, eh?” Now being known as a “dinger” or a “range rat” was anything but a compliment as it bespoke of individuals who were suspected of avoiding field duty by ensconcing themselves on one of the Rifle Teams. While I have always disliked the term “dinger” except when used in a joking manner, I decided to attack!

“Well sir, no I’m not a range rat, and I have always considered myself a Marine who knew how to shoot, not a shooter who only came to the FMF when dragged off the range! I’ve always looked at shooting as practicing my skill at arms, and I never see a bullseye when I look through the sights, I always see some dink’s head sitting on my front sight blade!”

Black Jack stood up with what “could have” passed for an evil smile, and said, “welcome to my battalion captain!” Apparently I had chosen the only words that would have favorably “tweaked his trigger” (sorry for the pun), and we initially became friendly adversaries... He was playing wait and see, but it was a decent start.

I made sure that everything he asked, I did with 110% effort and he would occasionally call me in the office and ask how things were going. Most of the rest of the Battalion Officers

made an overt effort to stay in “hull defilade” when the Colonel was out and about, but I began to enjoy trading friendly barbs with him, and often he would smile back, but always seemingly awaiting some inadvertent screw-up. I was determined not to give him one.

Time passed and my company (A Company) was selected to take a full compliment of troops (some extra bodies were pirated from the other companies including some 6-month reservists) down to the Army’s Jungle School in Panama. Now I was blessed with an outstanding Officer and some fine NCOs. Since we were almost operating in a cadre status, I had only one other officer, my XO, a second Lieutenant named Skip Hartnett, and Sergeant Francis A. McGowin (of *McGowin and the Buckets* fame) as my acting Company Gunnery Sergeant.

Hartnett had been commissioned from the ranks as a corporal, **out** of A Company, 2nd Recon Battalion some months before, the very self-same outfit to which he had been reassigned upon reporting back to the FMF (an unheard of procedure at the time, but then we were in a shooting war, and the ranks were thinning out). He was not without some previous military experience as he had put in some time at the Citadel, and was a Scuba School graduate. When Skip decided to quit the Citadel and try his hand at real soldiering, he told his grandmother, a very proper lady of the Charleston, South Carolina society, what he had done. She reportedly looked at him in horror, and said, you didn’t use your **real name** did you? Skip’s Grandmother was from a different and perhaps more genteel era!

When Skip reported back into the Recon Battalion, Westerman asked if he’d like to be assigned to a different outfit since he had just been commissioned out of A Company, some months before. The feeling was that it might be a bit awkward to work with his former enlisted friends as a newly commissioned officer.

“Nope,” says Skip, “the troops all knew I was a SOB when I left, and I ain’t changed a bit!”

McGowin of course needs no introduction, but by now was sporting a handlebar moustache (again unheard of at the time) and had it waxed to perfection reportedly lubricated with “Cramer’s Firm Grip”. It was becoming obvious that Skip, Mac and I were all renegades, and that suited Black Jack right down to the ground! The other senior NCO heading to Panama with us was First Sergeant Martin, probably the only true gentleman in the group. As the old observation of the Artillerymen goes, Martin lent dignity to what otherwise would have been a vulgar brawl!

One afternoon I got a call from the Battalion Headquarters to get up to see the Colonel immediately. Scratching my head, I grabbed my cover and beat-feet for the Colonel’s office. Colonel Westerman wanted to know how my plans were progressing for the deployment to Central America.

“Fine,” I told him, “we’re all set!”

“Oh yeah,” sez the old man, manifesting a thinly disguised sneer, “what sort of briefing are you going to give the General before you shove off?” thinking he had caught me in some sort of lapse of preparation.

“Again not a problem,” sez I, “I’ve already got the briefing ready to go! (lying in my teeth).”

“Oh yeah?, let’s hear it... Now!”

“Uppsssss...”

Now anyone who knows me very well, knows that if I have *anything* going for me is the ability to think on my feet, and verbal tap-dances to cover the appropriate situation tend to flow naturally. I was gonna’ need this dubious talent in spades this time. I covered what **I** would have wanted to hear if I were the CG, and gave Black Jack what I considered to be a decent briefing. The Colonel looked up at me somewhat amazed, and said, “What sort of vehicle are you going to take to Panama?” I told him a PC (Personnel Carrier), and Westerman said, “ya’ see! I knew you were gonna’ forget something!” But he was slightly smiling when I left his inner-sanctum. Once again, I had ducked the poison dart, and the Colonel loved it. One thing he truly admired was someone who could make his brags and then produce – in many ways, Black Jack and I were two of a kind! Whew...

FADE TO PANAMA AND RETURN

After a month long adventure that has many McGowin and Hartnett stories that will be told separately, we were waiting on the jungle airstrip for our C-130 to show up. While we were cooling our heels, one of my Corpsmen came over to me with a sand bag that was suspiciously squirming. *Squirming?* Hummm...

“Skipper,” says the Doc, “what should I do with these?”

“These? These *WHAT?*”

“Why our Boa Constrictors,” he says with an innocent look on his face.

“Boa Constrictors? *What* Boa Constrictors? What in the hell are you gonna’ do with Boa Constrictors and where in the hell did you get ‘em?”

“Sir we traded the “*San Blas*” Indians out of ‘em! We’re gonna’ take ‘em back to the *Field Medical Research Lab*” he said proudly!

“Geesch! Well, I never wanna’ stand in the way of science, tie the bag up with some parachute cord and stash it under the seat of the PC!”

“Skipper,” came a voice in a stage whisper, “the Colonel’s gonna’ be pissed!”

“Really?” I said, “why?”

“Well, I heard rumors that the Colonel says that the next outfit that comes back with snakes from Panama is gonna’ get their @\$ \$ handed to ‘em!”

“Uh Oh...”

Well, the only way to handle this is to keep my mouth shut and feign ignorance and stupidity – in this case, he’ll believe both! We are soon winging our way back to Cherry Point. When we arrive it’s about 2100 on a Saturday Night, and the kids haven’t been on liberty for a month. To say that they were anxious to get off for a little time in the ville, and back to their

families is an understatement. We had only one fly in the ointment! One duty-struck, and mightily “urinated-off” customs agent who had been extricated from his night in front of the TV to shake down a Marine Recon Company returning from the jungles of Central America. He went out of his way to express his displeasure by being what can only politely be described as overzealous!

This clown had every personal bag and pack field-stripped on the tarmac, and even deflated the spare tire on the PC to make sure we weren’t smuggling some unnamed contraband back from the Canal Zone. After about an hour and a half, he had discovered a grand total of nothing, and was figuring what he could do next to make sure we didn’t remember this as a pleasurable experience!

He finally gets into the cab of the truck. Being thorough, he goes through the glove box and finally sticks his hand under the seat of the truck. He is grinning from ear to ear, just knowing his efforts have been successful. He pulls the sandbag out and starts to undo the parachute cord tying the mouth together.

“And just what do we have here?” he says with smug satisfaction.

The boas’ have become lulled into a stupor due to the heat in the aircraft and the droning of the engines, and are not making their presence known... Yet! I had a diminutive and funny Black Marine as a driver who began to see the potential of the situation. At this point the Customs Officer sticks his arm into the bag up to his elbow!

“Suh, dem’s *Fur de’ Lances*,” he says with a thinly suppressed hint of humor surfacing! The officious idiot’s hand had just contacted the coiled bodies of the snoozing serpents!

“Oh \$hit,” he says with some small concern evidenced in his voice (some would use the term “*panic-stricken*!”).

Now I don’t to this day know if it is (or was) legal to import snakes into the country, but urban legend says that cold-blooded varmints are exempt from vet checks or animal control! Whatever the reason, the Federal “animal control officer” decided enough was enough, tied the bag (tightly) back together and stuck it back under the seat. With a dismissive wave of his hand he indicated that his inspection was over! I could have kissed my driver, and sorely wished I had a camera handy when the “duty-struck” customs type felt the snakes in the bag!

Black Jack never found out about our “snake importing” enterprise, or if he did he didn’t mention it. For several months thereafter however, there was a ceremonial “snake feeding” session at the BAS (Battalion Aid Station) on Friday afternoons when the “chancre-mechanics” fed white mice to the newly welcomed battalion members (the boas) from the jungle expanses of Panama. To the best of my knowledge, the Boas never made it to the Navy’s Field Medical Research Lab, but since Black Jack never mentioned the incident, I decided to keep my mouth shut.

Several other stories about the snakes floated about including when they escaped in Skip’s quarters after he poured them out on the deck the night we got back, sending the girls onto the couch. The confused Boas then crawled down into the heat ducts for warmth – it was late January, and such asylum was perfectly natural for a jungle raised snake. The following Monday the base maintenance folks fled for their lives telling Miss Kay (Skips

Memsahib) that they'd be back when "serpent control" had finished extricating her pets (we figured that tactical self preservation dictated not leaving the snakes in the Battalion Area until Monday morning when we were there to supervise their integration into battalion's daily routine).

BACK TO BLACK JACK

Winter oozed into Spring and Skip departed on his first Med Deployment as a platoon commander, and I was left with my faithful First Sergeant and McGowin to hold down the fort, when I was again summoned into the Black Jack's inner-sanctum. By now we had displaced from our old base at Montford Point, and relocated to Onslow Beach. The serpent incident had subsided somewhat, so I wasn't expecting any undue flack.

"Culver," says Black Jack, "I've got a question for you! As you know, we have garnered 2nd place in every event we've entered including football, bowling, and other activities, and we've only got one more to go to decide our final standing in the Commanding General's Cup!"

As a note, if you place high enough in each category, you can win the coveted CG's Cup even if you never win a single event, since the entire thing is based on an aggregate score. We were a VERY under-strength Battalion even in peacetime circumstances. ...And we had to compete against every regiment in the Division (a regiment at that time being at about 5000 bodies when fully fleshed out)! The Recon Battalion only went about 600 men during fully manned peacetime strength. It wasn't the quality of the individuals that made the difference under normal circumstances, but rather that you were more likely to find qualified individuals in any line of endeavor from a group of 5000 than one of 600! Black Jack WANTED that cup if for no other reason than to break it off in the fanny of all those who thought he was an unwashed and uncouth (although brave and highly decorated) clod!

I asked what event was left open for us to compete in for the finals?

"Why the Intramural Rifle and Pistol Competition," he says with an innocent look on his face! "Can you take a team out there and get me 2nd place?"

"No Colonel, I'm afraid you have the wrong man!" I tell him.

"**What?**" he says with an extremely disappointed and definitely hostile tone in his voice, "I thought you were an ace rifle shooter?"

"I see what you're driving at Colonel, but if you want 2nd Place, get yourself another boy! Now if you want to WIN the thing, then I can probably help you out!"

"You're a smart @\$@ little SOB," sez Jack, "Are you telling me we can win the match?"

"Colonel, I don't go into anything to lose, but if you wanna' win, I'll do my best! Never forget there's no second place winner in a gunfight!"

Now Jack knows that so far I have made good on my brags, and is beginning to see the humor in the situation.

“Ok smart @\$\$, how many men do you need to do the job?”

“Four.” sez I “that’s all we’ll need to win the thing! The Intramural Rifle Teams consist of four men.”

“Gawd Damnit,” he says, “why don’t you take everyone you’ll need? The 6th Marines have a 30-man team and the 8th Marines have a 40-man contingent. I’m not sure how many the 2nd Marines have, but they have fielded a sizeable team also!”

“The Rifle Team Match is a four man evolution,” I said, “and there’s no need to take a passel of folks out there, they’ll just get in the way!”

“At least take an extra man incase someone gets sick!”

Seeing his logic, I agree to take six including the Corpsman plus a four man pistol team.

“If you screw this up, it’s gonna’ be your fanny!” sez the Colonel! “Who ya’ gonna’ take?”

“Well, I intend to take myself, Sergeant McGowin who’s a hell of a rifle shot, Corporal Foley who’s shot the Division Rifle Matches before, and I’ll take a look at volunteers and pick one who’s a motivated high expert.”

The die was cast and we began to plot our triumphant overthrow of the major Regiments to enshrine Black Jack into the athletic and military skills hall of fame of the 2nd Marine Division. The resultant competition has many individual stories (perhaps better told separately), but McGowin, Foley, I and a young kid named Metze (a high expert, but with no match experience) departed for the range with blood in our eye and gently humming the Marine Corps Hymn.

The entire match was a one week evolution, with what is called “Preliminary Day” fired on Wednesday, Individual Match Day on Thursday, and Team Match Day on Friday. Every day following the firing schedule I was admonished to call the Colonel and give him a report of our progress and some hint of how our eventual standings were stacking up against the Infantry Regiments and all the other Separate Battalions (Tank Battalion, Engineer Battalion, etc.). Having McGowin was a definite plus as he kept the other shooters motivated, and Foley was an old time rifle shooter. Only Metze was an unknown quantity, but he was coming along well. Not only was Mac an outstanding rifle shot, but he was an excellent coach. I made a mental note not to allow him to bury Metze in the sand with a bucket over his head to improve his concentration.

Each day I’d give Black Jack a status report, and acted much like the “*Rothschild Dispatch Riders*” dutifully reporting to Rothschild at the British stock exchange during the Napoleonic Wars. Rothschild would hang his head in apparent sorrow indicating that his riders were bringing news of England’s impending defeat at the hands of Napoleon at Waterloo. Of course nothing could have been further from the truth, and Rothschild publicly sold his shares in the Bank of England as if they were worthless, while his minions on the floor bought them back for pennies on the dollar. By late in the day, Rothschild “owned” England! The scenario was much like this with Black Jack I suspect. He made his bets and hoped I wasn’t whistling Dixie out my posterior.

At a scheduled luncheon on Preliminary Day, I called Jack to report our progress and he asked if we had won the match.

“Well, we did well individually, Mac was high individual, I came in second, Foley third but Metze only came in 10th!”

“I knew it,” bemoaned the Colonel, “we’re gonna’ lose!”

“Nope, I have high hopes for the individual match and the team match!” You could almost hear the Colonel’s dashed hopes on the telephone!

I called the Colonel the following day after the Individual Match.

“Well,” he said with a resigned tone in his voice, “how did you do?”

“Different than yesterday,” I replied, “in the individual match, I came in 1st, McGowin 2nd, Foley 3rd and Metze came in 7th!” Not too bad for a bobtailed Separate Battalion with only 4 shooters, eh what?”

Not knowing how to handle the news he came back with, “yeah, but you’ll probably screw it up in the team match!” but the apprehension in his voice was considerably soothed.

Everything would have gone smoothly in the team match until a very nervous Metze fired his first off hand shot on the wrong target! Now we were sucking wind. We held hard across the rest of the course, but by the time we hit the 500-yard line we were the last team still on the firing line. It was rumored that the 6th Marine Regiment was convinced that they had us beaten, and were already preparing to divide the loot. I was coaching our last two shooters, Mac and Foley, and we were down to the last two shots in the match. Rumors of scores spread like wildfire, and our competitors couldn’t wait to get down to tell us that in order to win, each of our last two shooters had to shoot a 5! Hummm... About this time, the Division Commanding General, Major General Orin Simpson, stopped behind our firing point (logical since we were the last team left on the line). General Simpson had stopped by to observe our actions in Panama during our stint in the Jungle School noting that we were acquitting ourselves well, and of course I had briefed him prior to our departure for Central America. We were not an unknown quantity.

“Well,” said General Simpson, “how are you guys doing?”

“Winning the Rifle Match General,” was my reply.

“Really? You’d better tell the 6th Marines! They think they’ve already won it!”

“General, if you’d be so kind, you’d better tell them to quit dividing the loot, all we need to do to win this thing is shoot one more 5,” I said, just as the final target came up with a white spotter in the center!

The General shook our hands and congratulated the team, and I noted with some pleasure that our old curmudgeon, Black Jack, was waiting behind the lines to see the final outcome. I have never figured out if he knew I had called it right, or if he was planning a firing squad behind the Flag Pole! I’ve never seen that big a grin on the old “knuckle-dragger”

before or since! I think he was more proud of us than I was, and that would have to have been going some! As I said, Westerman was a Marine who admired a man or a team that made good on their “brags” and I truly had a horseshoe shoved up my fanny that Spring Day at Lejeune.

I have many more Westerman stories, but this could easily become a book instead of a sea story, and I’ll save some of them for later.

I suppose our relationship went well, as later in Vietnam, he asked for me by name when he was the CO of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines. I’ve always wondered if in some sort of strange way we were two of a kind as I noted before?

I have many fond memories of that fine (if somewhat eccentric) old gentleman. After we had retired, Skip Hartnett was up in North Idaho visiting in the early 1980s, and as usual on the 10th of November (the Marine Corps Birthday for those of you not acquainted with USMC Legend and traditions), we had acquired a Marine Corps Birthday Cake, and laid in some Cognac and



General Simpson, CG 2nd Marine Division presenting the winning trophies to the team members of the 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion, Spring 1966. General Simpson handing Cpl. Foley his trophy. 2nd Recon Battalion members are Lt. Col. Black Jack Westerman, Capt. Dick Culver, Corporal Foley, Sergeant Francis A. McGowin, and Corporal Metze. Other teams placing in the competition are in the background awaiting their trophy presentations.

(2nd Marine Division Photo)

Champaign to make “French 75s”. After reading the traditional Birthday Message (to ourselves – Marines are a strange bunch), and cutting the cake with a 16” ’03 Springfield bayonet, we decided to see if we couldn’t run my phone bill up to an unmanageable figure searching for old friends and comrades. Several French 75s into the exercise, we both got to wondering what had happened to the infamous Black Jack Westerman. I recalled hearing that he had retired in Bremerton, Washington (the location where he had bitten the guy’s nose off over 30-years before). We did a directory search and sure enough they did have a Westerman in the phone book so we took a chance.

The gentleman answering the telephone turned out to be Black Jack’s son whom I had known as a wee rug rat in the mid 1960s. He regretfully told me that both his mom and dad had passed away some years before, but we reminisced with some of the old stories. I hung

up considerably saddened, I had somehow thought of him as being indestructible. If not truly indestructible, I had pictured him personally subduing an entire enemy Regiment, or throwing himself on a Nuclear Bomb to save those entrusted to his care! I can only imagine the conversation he and St. Peter must have had when he reported to his last muster.

A final thought comes to mind, like the legendary Captain Jimmy Bones of WWI fame and poem, Jack may return from tending the gates of Hell to subdue the latest version of the Hun, it wouldn't surprise me in the least!

More stories later...

Semper Fi,

Dick