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Live Every Moment



We Honor Veterans Newsletter

April 2026 Edition

Vietnam Combat Artist and Marine Corps Veteran Jim Butcher

James “Jim” Butcher was born in Jarrettsville, Maryland and grew up in Hagerstown, Maryland. He graduated from North Hagerstown High School in 1962 and then studied art at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Upon graduation, Butcher enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and was trained as a jet engine mechanic. He was assigned to VMCJ-1 photo reconnaissance squadron stationed at Da Nang Air Base in Vietnam in March of 1967. Soon after being assigned to the air wing in Vietnam, Butcher was invited by Col. Raymond Henry, Special Assistant to the Commandant, to join the Combat Art Team. Responsible for creating a permanent record of the conflict in Vietnam with a medium other than motion picture or still photography, Butcher contributed 150 pieces of art, which are now in the Marine Corps collection at the Marine Corps Museum in Quantico, Virginia.

Upon his return from Vietnam, Butcher was assigned to duties as ambassador for the USMC’s combat art collection in Washington, D.C., working in public relations with civilian, government, and military organizations.

After Butcher was honorably discharged from the USMC in 1969, he returned to civilian life as an employee at Major & Keesey, a commercial art studio in Baltimore. In 1970, he embarked on a freelance career producing work for advertising agencies, book and magazine publishers, and art departments of various colleges and government agencies.

Over his distinguished career, he was commissioned by national and international clients such as NBC Television, Time-Life, Inc., and General Motors, and his illustrations

appeared in National Geographic, Newsweek, Reader's Digest, and other publications. Jim also created the cover artwork for the Axis and Allies game series.

Locally, he created many of the judges' portraits displayed in the Harford County Courthouse and numerous portraits exhibited throughout the University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health campuses. He served on the faculties of The Maryland Institute College of Art and Harford Community College and received many honors recognizing his artistic excellence and dedication to the arts.

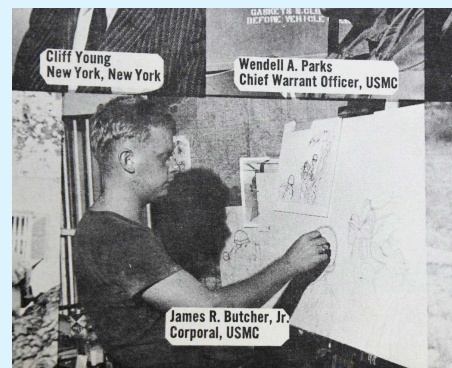
Jim married Jeanne Drescher after returning from Vietnam. When asked how they met, Jeanne smiles and shares that she and Jim were friends in high school and that when he was in Vietnam, she wrote him a letter. That letter eventually led to their marriage. Jim and Jeanne had two daughters: Amy and Susan.

Jim Butcher was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by a team of Gilchrist military veteran volunteers. The tribute included an opening prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Jim was presented with a We Honor Veterans pin and a Vietnam Veteran pin from the Veterans Administration, a certificate from Gilchrist, a patriotic blanket made by a Gilchrist volunteer, and a thank-you card made by a school student. Jeanne Butcher was presented with a Proud Wife of a Veteran pin and a patriotic scarf. When the veteran team presented Jim an honor salute, Jim proudly returned the salute. The tribute concluded with a prayer.

Semper Fi Jim Butcher.



Jim Butcher with the Gilchrist team

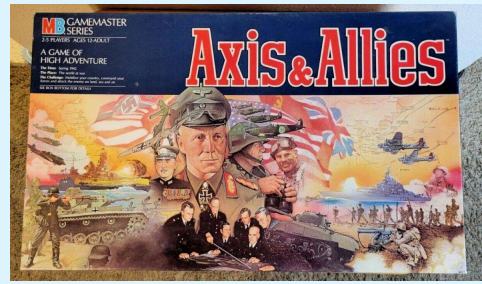


Vietnam Combat Art book that includes artwork by Jim Butcher



Vietnam Combat Art by Jim Butcher

Corporal Jim Butcher at work in Vietnam



Axis & Allies Game Cover by Jim Butcher

Air Force and Army Veteran Tom Connelly

Edward "Tom" Connelly was born five minutes after his twin sister Connie in 1956. Tom grew up in a large family with seven brothers and sisters. Tom graduated from Mount Saint Joseph High School in Baltimore in 1976. Tom's father had served in the United States Army Air Forces.

The USAAF was established in 1941 as a key component of the U.S. Army, playing a crucial role in WWII and eventually evolving into the independent United States Air Force in 1947. Following in dad's footsteps, Tom enlisted in the Air Force after high school graduation.

After completing boot camp, Tom was trained as a Medical Service Specialist. After four years of service in the Air Force, Tom was discharged and then joined the Maryland Army National Guard where he worked as a medic. At the same time, Tom worked with the former Baltimore Association for Retarded Citizens (now known as The ARC Baltimore) as a group home manager for three men — Bill, Paul, and Reggie — who had spent much of their lives in residential placements. He cared deeply for them, offering dignity, stability, and patience.

Tom's unit was activated and they served with the 2nd Battalion 175th Infantry Regiment during Operation Desert Storm. Tom served in the National Guard until about 1991.

After the military, Tom worked as a nurse at Johns Hopkins Bayview. During the majority of his nursing career, he worked on the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit. Before he retired, he also worked as a nurse in the ER.

Tom met Elena Villegas in 1992 at Johns Hopkins Bayview while working as nurses on different units. Elena also came from a family with eight children, which is why both Tom and Elena always felt that family was so very important. They married in September of 1993 and have one son Glen Villegas.

When asked what people should know about his dad, Glen said that Tom and Elena enjoyed traveling. They would do road trips to other states, camping, traveling abroad, and going on cruises. Tom's last trip abroad was to Italy so he could see the 4 Holy Doors at St. Peter's Basilica, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, and St. Paul Outside the Walls.

He often donated blood to the Red Cross. Glen continued saying family is very important to his dad and thinks that is why Christmas is his favorite time of year. He loved seeing everyone, especially the kids, during the holiday season. He would dress up as Santa, even though the kids knew it was him. Tom loves dogs and every single dog he would spot, he would often say, "Oh look at that pup."

Tom Connelly was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by a team of Gilchrist military veteran volunteers. The tribute opened with a prayer, the singing of the National Anthem (music provided by a retired Air Force Colonel), and the Pledge of Allegiance. Tom was presented with a certificate from Gilchrist, a We Honor Veterans Pin from the Veterans Administration, a patriotic blanket made by a Gilchrist volunteer, and a thank-you card made by a school student. Elena was presented with a Proud Wife of a Veteran pin and a patriotic scarf. Family and friends then sang several patriotic songs, including the Air Force and Army songs. The tribute concluded with a prayer. When the veterans presented Tom with an honor salute, he returned a salute that would make the Air Force and Army proud.



Tom Connelly at a staging site in Saudi Arabi prior to Desert Storm



Tom Connelly with the Gilchrist Team



Tom Connelly returning an Honor Salute

Army CSM Hugh “Smitty” Smith

Hugh “Smitty” Smith was born in January of 1933 in Washington Court House, Ohio. He graduated from Washington Court House High School in 1951, immediately entering the Army where he was trained as an infantryman.

Smitty was with Army Special Forces out of Fort Bragg and was sent to Korea after the war to train the Republic of Korea Armed Forces in hand-to-hand combat and guerilla warfare tactics.

Smitty did two tours with the infantry in Vietnam, with the first being 1967-68. He earned a Silver Star at Landing Zone White. Landing Zone White (also known as Firebase

Kate, LZ Kate or Firebase White) is a former U.S. Army base northwest of Quang Duc Province in southern Vietnam near the Cambodian border. His second tour was from 1971-72.

Smitty served for 26 years and rose to the rank of Command Sergeant Major, retiring in 1978. During his years of service, Smitty was awarded a number of medals and commendations including the Legion of Merit, Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Purple Heart.

After leaving the Army, Smitty worked as a math teacher and then for 20 years as a receiving/purchasing agent for Martin Gillett, Inc., a condiment factory.

Smitty and Linda were married in 1985. Children included Juanita, Dawn, Patrick and Theresa.

According to his son, Smitty was an avid sports enthusiast, including baseball, football, basketball (played all three in high school), racquetball, boxing, weightlifting, running, biking, softball and bowling (and he hated losing). He also was a hunter, enjoyed working on cars, and in his younger days enjoyed being on the farm. Smitty also liked to play cards with his brothers and sisters.

Smitty also enjoyed volunteering at his church, including serving as an usher, counting the offerings every week, and reading his Bible every morning.

Command Sergeant Major Hugh Smith was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by a team of Gilchrist military veteran volunteers. The tribute opened with a prayer, singing of the National Anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Smitty was presented with a certificate from Gilchrist, a We Honor Veterans pin and a Vietnam Veteran pin from the Veterans Administration, a card made by a school student, and a patriotic blanket made by a Gilchrist volunteer. Everyone then sang several patriotic songs, including the Army song. The veteran team then presented Smitty with an honor salute – which he proudly returned. The tribute concluded with a prayer.



Hugh "Smitty" Smith



A few of Smitty's Medals (L-R Legion of Merit, Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Purple Heart)



Smitty with the Gilchrist Team

James V. “Jim” Benvenuto COL(R) U.S. Army

James Vincent Benvenuto was born in 1938 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Jim graduated from Bellevue High School in 1956 and then attended the University of Pittsburgh. Jim majored in accounting in the School of Business Administration. Since Jim played trombone in high school, he joined the PITT Marching Band which meant traveling with the football team. Jim also enrolled in the ROTC program and upon graduation in 1960 he entered the Army working in military intelligence.

Jim’s 26-year military career in the Army started in 1960 when he attended the Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Jim then attended the Army Intelligence School at Fort Holabird in Maryland. Upon completion of his training, Jim was assigned to the 902nd Military Intelligence Group in Washington, DC.

Jim was then stationed in Europe with the 513th Military Intelligence Group. While in Germany, Jim met Christiane Sellert. According to Jim, it was love at first sight and they were married in May of 1962. They would have two children – Suzanne and James.

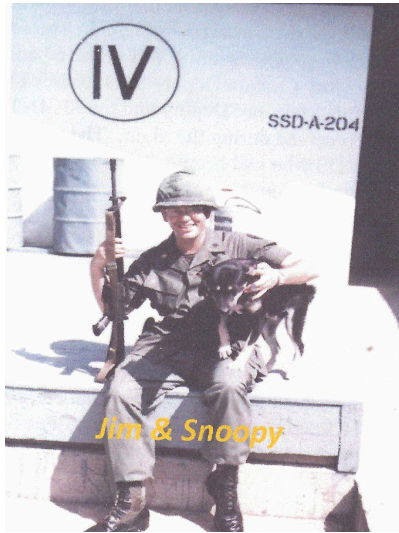
Jim spent his entire career working with military intelligence. He spent a tour in Thailand and two tours in Vietnam. In between and after overseas tours, Jim had numerous assignments including with the Defense Intelligence University, the Army Special Warfare Center, Fort Leavenworth, Washington, and back to Germany for several years.

In 1974, Jim applied for and was accepted to the Army Comptroller Program. He was then sent to Syracuse University where he completed a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

Jim’s final assignment was as Director of Strategic Planning and Resource Management for the Chief of Army Intelligence. Jim retired from the Army in June of 1986.

Upon retirement, Jim became a consultant focusing on military budgeting and planning. In 1988, he founded JB&A, Inc. (James Benvenuto and Associates). Initially, there was one other employee. Over the 23-year history of the business, there were over 200 employees with an additional 65 subcontractors.

Jim Benvenuto was recently honored with a Salute to Service Tribute conducted by Gilchrist staff and veteran volunteers. The tribute began with an opening prayer, a Gilchrist music therapist leading everyone in the National Anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Jim was presented with a We Honor Veterans pin, a certificate from Gilchrist, a thank-you card made by a school student, and a patriotic blanket made by the mother of the music therapist. The music therapist sang several patriotic songs including the Army song. The veterans in uniform then presented Jim with an honor salute. The tribute concluded with a prayer.



Jim Benvenuto and his dog Snoopy in Vietnam



The Benvenuto Family



Jim Benvenuto and family at the Salute to Service Tribute

New “Ask VA” Portal

Do you want to find more information on VA benefits and services? Do you have a question, concern, recommendation, or compliment for VA? Then use the new [“Ask VA”](#) portal!

What is [Ask VA](#)?

The [Ask VA online question portal](#), launched on October 18, 2021, was created to provide the Veteran community with an easier, faster and more convenient way to get their questions answered. It replaces VA’s outdated Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) and the GI Bill Help Portal.

Anyone can access Ask VA to submit a question at any time. Veterans, their families, caregivers, beneficiaries, dependents, or the general public can use Ask VA for specific or broad information on VA benefits and services. Veterans do not have to be enrolled in VA to submit a question. In fact, Ask VA can provide helpful information for Veterans to enroll and begin their VA journey!

For more information, go to: [New "Ask VA" portal allows anyone to contact VA securely - VA News](#)

Uniform Smiles

An Air Force tech was troubleshooting a radio when a young airman asked, "Should I unplug it first?"

The tech replied, "Son, if you can unplug a jet's radio mid-flight, we've got bigger problems."

Please Share

If you enjoyed reading this edition, please forward a copy to other veterans that you know so that they can also enjoy the newsletter. If you are reading a shared copy and would like to receive your own copy of future editions, please send an email with your request to kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.

Looking For a Few Good Volunteers

Would you like to be a Gilchrist volunteer? We are always looking for volunteers – especially those who have military experience. Our military veteran volunteers are involved in Salute to Service Tributes for veterans under hospice care, visiting public schools to talk about military service, meeting with veterans to talk about their military service, supporting our annual Welcome Home event for Vietnam Veterans, and many other activities.

If you would like to learn how to become a volunteer, contact Gilchrist at kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.

Gilchrist Cares

You may know Gilchrist best for the care we provide people near the end of life. But we offer so much more than hospice. Today's Gilchrist extends services to individuals with serious illness who need our care and support well in advance of hospice care. We also provide counseling and support before and after the loss of a loved one. Please visit the Gilchrist website to learn more.

[Gilchrist providing care at every stage of serious illness.\(gilchristcares.org\)](#)

We Want Your Input

If you have suggestions for content you would like to see in future issues of the Gilchrist We Honor Veterans Newsletter, please contact us at kmcdonnell@gilchristcares.org.



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