

was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in the Marine Corps the day I graduated from college in 1965, having gone through Princeton on a NROTC scholarship. New Marine officers are sent directly to the Basic School in Quantico, Virginia for 6 months of training.

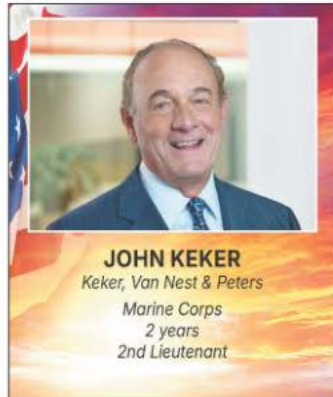
After graduating first of 400 other new lieutenants from Basic School, I could have asked for any assignment.

ment, but the Marine training (or brainwashing) is so good that all I wanted to be was an infantry platoon leader in a war zone. And I was. Arriving in Vietnam in early 1966, leader of 60 Marines, (3 rifle squads and two weapons squads), I lasted less than 8 months before I was wounded, operated on in Phu Bai, DaNang, and eventually Bethesda Naval Hospital, and later retired for disability. I had lost half my Marines, killed or wounded, by the time I left Vietnam.

What did I learn that has served me well in starting our litigation firm, now Kecker, Van Nest & Peters LLP, and seeing the firm thrive since 1978? I learned some characteristics of sustainable high-

er performing cultures, as explicated in a wonderful book entitled "Lessons from the Hanoi Hilton" by Peter Fretwell and Taylor Baldwin Kilend, including:

1. A sustainable high performance culture is mission-centric, not leader centric. Leaders and followers may change, but the mission doesn't.
2. Leaders protect followers by creating an environment of inclusion, honesty and second chances. Leaders care for the needs of others while still challenging them to grow and learn.
3. Individuals and small teams are entrusted with personal responsibility and authority in most daily decisions.
4. Members of a sustainable high performing culture are



**JOHN KECKER**

*Kecker, Van Nest & Peters*

*Marine Corps*

*2 years*

*2nd Lieutenant*

willing to face their fears and take risks. They use failure as a learning mechanism, part of the high price of success, in their relentless pursuit of the mission.

**Veteran profiles continue inside**