A Year In Vietnam
With the 101st Airborne

April 1969-March 1970

by
Harry G. Enoch
Introduction

My life was pretty normal until Vietnam. Along with most everyone else my age in the sixties, I was opposed to the war. I got married right after graduation from the University of Kentucky. I didn’t know what I wanted to do but was sure I didn’t want to go to Vietnam, so I enrolled in graduate school. One year later, I got drafted and sent to basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and advanced infantry training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. After a brief furlough, I was sent to Vietnam, where I spent a year in the 101st Airborne Division.

Like some other Vietnam veterans, I received a hostile reception when I came home. This was especially so at the University of Kentucky, where I returned to school. Students were the most insulting. At a party once, a girl asked me how many babies I killed in Vietnam. I was stunned. From that moment on, I didn’t talk about the war with anybody except other veterans.

A few years later I decided to write down my experiences in Vietnam and share them with my dad who served in World War II. I called it my Journal. Sadly, my dad died before it was completed. Finally, after the Journal had been in my closet for nearly 30 years, I decided to add some photographs and "finish" it.

What follows is my account of the year I spent in Vietnam. I served in the 2d platoon, Delta Company, of the 3rd Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. We were the Currahees, the "Stand Alone Battalion." I expect my tour of duty was similar to many other grunts in Vietnam, long hours of boredom and drudge punctuated by brief encounters with the enemy. I didn't jazz up the Journal by focusing most of my attention on combat. I spend more time describing food and friends than firefights.

Dated entries in my Journal are taken from the letters I wrote home. There are two exceptions. The entry for October 28, 1969 is taken from a letter I wrote from Song Mao but never sent. I have also included the diary I kept from January 18 to March 3, 1970, while we were on a campaign in the An Lao Valley and on Hill 474.

Though he never got to read it, this work is dedicated to my dad.

Harry G. Enoch
Winchester, Kentucky
June 2009
I’m Going To Vietnam!

April 7, 1969
Monday
Fort Lewis, Washington

I arrived in Seattle Sunday and spent the day sick in my motel room. Tonsillitis. Also lonely, depressed, and full of dread thinking about what the next year would bring. Why in the world do they want to send me to Vietnam? Lying in bed I wondered how all this happened. I got married, started to graduate school and finished one year. Then Congress said goodbye to graduate school deferments. I’m sure the day that law passed Edith Cline, our local draft board administrator, put my name at the head of the list to call up. On October 8, a date I’ll never forget, the Army swore me in for two years, then sent me to basic training at Fort Bragg. From there I went to AIT (advanced infantry training) at Fort Polk, aka “Tiger Land.” There was a huge sign at the entrance claiming to be the “Birthplace of Combat Infantrymen for Vietnam.” It gave me cold chills. Surely they’re not going to send me to Vietnam!

I slept most of the day yesterday. This morning at the motel I met Prigge, a friend from Fort Polk, where we were in AIT together a month ago. We took a taxi together to Fort Lewis. Snow covered Mt. Rainier looked awfully pretty. It’s springtime here in Washington State. Spent all day today standing in lines and filling out forms. Got outfitted with the latest Vietnam fashions--jungle fatigues and boots. Baggy as hell, but very comfortable. I really like the boots. And I like not having to tuck your shirt in.

Long day. Still feeling like crap.

April 8
Tuesday

Vivion Holder somehow found his way here from Mt. Sterling. He was a sight for sore eyes. I don’t think I’ve ever known a more good natured person. Nothing seems to bother him. He helped me get through basic training. He has the right personality for the Army. He even thinks the food is good. Howard and Kidd, both Kentucky boys, are here too. They said Wells went to NCO school. We were all at Fort Bragg together.

Holder and I were assigned to “plunger detail” this morning, so we were in and out of latrines all day. Got a break tonight to go for a beer. Not nearly long enough though--tomorrow we leave for Vietnam.

April 12
Saturday
Cam Ranh Bay, Republic of Vietnam

We landed in Cam Ranh Bay Thursday afternoon. Flew all the way from Seattle with only one stop, at Osaka, Japan. I have never been on a plane so big, a huge Boeing 707. It was like an ordinary commercial flight, except this one was full of soldiers headed for Vietnam. The airline was World Airways, which I never heard of before. There were stewardesses and regular food and otherwise normal stuff, except all the passengers were dressed in jungle fatigues.

Welcome to Vietnam. The heat was a huge shock. It took my breath when I got off the plane. Cam Ranh Bay from the air was endless sand and lots of wooden barracks around a huge airstrip at the ocean’s edge. It looks the same from the ground, but no ocean for us, only sand. Spent the first day standing around waiting. Just like at Fort Lewis, there were guys going home getting processed right by us guys just going in. Two lines literally going in opposite directions. Envy ran deep in our line.

We have been treated better so far. Not hassled as much as during training. After processing in at the 22d Replacement Center, we spent most of three days loafing around, doing piddling details, and watching the assignment board for our names to find out where we’ll be going. There is even a decent USO Club complete with “doughnut dollies.” We have nights free for the EM Club, a place where enlisted men can drink beer away from officers and NCOs. Or we can go to the movies. The theater is like a drive-in theater with no cars. There is a twenty foot high outdoor screen and seating is in the sand. I saw a new Clint Eastwood film but didn’t catch the title. It’s a little bit cooler at night, at least outdoors.

Bought a new watch at the PX and put away the Bulova dad gave me, ’cause it looks like I’m headed for the boonies. I fly to Bien Hoa tonight some time after midnight. No problem, I’m wide awake now. I’ve been assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. For crying out loud, I’m going to be a paratrooper!

April 13
Sunday
Bien Hoa

We left Cam Ranh Bay in an odd looking two engine plane, a C-123 Provider. It took the pilot four tries to make it off the runway. Even a few of the lifers looked like they were going to be sick. Nobody ever bothered to explain what was going on.
I’m finally over the bug or whatever I’ve had since Seattle. They “forgot” to send us to church today. Instead we had a shitty detail. We hauled the cans out from under all the latrines, loaded them on a truck, took them to the dump, poured diesel fuel in them and set them on fire. Rough day. Thank God for Holder.

This place is a huge Air Force base and an Army base camp. It is the rear headquarters for our unit--3d Brigade of the 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division--and many others. We are about twenty miles northeast of Saigon. There is a huge place named Bien Hoa City near the base somewhere. People say this is right now the second busiest airport in the world. Tan Son Nhut in Saigon is the busiest. The jet fighters are awesome. They take off and land in pairs and the noise is tremendous. Whatever is going on just comes to a halt for about twenty to thirty seconds, because no one can be heard. The most common jets are F-4 Phantoms and F-105 Thunderchiefs. Also common are “Freedom Birds,” the commercial airliners taking people home--or “back to the World” as they say.

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**LZ Betty**

April 21
Monday
Phan Thiet

The stay in Bien Hoa was for training and indoctrination by the 101st. They call it P-Training. It was mostly review--one helping of basic training and one helping of advanced infantry training with a side dish that might be called “how to stay alive in Vietnam.” It seemed a lot more relevant now than it did in North Carolina or Louisiana. We were all very attentive.

We walked miles and miles with our rucksacks (backpacks) and steel pots (helmets). I got an awful sunburn on my arms. We pulled real honest to goodness guard duty watching for honest to goodness VC, with our weapons at the ready. The base perimeter is ringed with bunkers that are manned every night. We were told that the base was overrun in the ’68 Tet Offensive. Many of the bunkers were blown up by sappers. If the bases are that unsafe, what are the chances of surviving out in the field? They say when you leave the bases, you are essentially behind the lines everywhere in Vietnam, because the enemy is everywhere in Vietnam. Also the enemy looks just like and dresses just like the friendlies. Hmm, not a comforting thought. Fortunately, except for the scary talk, our nights on the bunkers were quiet.

We had breakfast and usually supper in the mess hall. It wasn’t bad. Lunch was wherever we happened to be at the time and the food is C-rations. Not too great. It’s hard to imagine eating this stuff every day for a whole year. There
are six different meals, two and a half of which are totally inedible. There are no nights off. If we had no guard duty, there’s more training, like setting night ambushes or some other fun stuff.

Holder is gone! Shipped up north yesterday to I Corps, called “eye corps.” He’s in the 101st too, 2d Brigade of the 327th Infantry. I miss him already. I arrived at LZ Betty today. It is presently the “forward” home of our unit. It is a combat base and Landing Zone, near the city of Phan Thiet on the South China Sea.

I flew into Betty on a two engine plane called a Caribou. Like the C-123, it’s made for short takeoffs and landings. One other new guy was with me, Denny Fyffe from Cleveland, Ohio. We’ll probably be together for a long time, we have the same DEROS (Date of Estimated Return from Overseas): April 8, 1970. DEROS is now our reason for living.

Fyffe and I went together to meet our battalion commander. Black Hawk he calls himself. His real name was Lt. Col. Manual A. Alves. He didn’t seem too interested in us. It was mutual. He told us to get a haircut. Every time your hair gets long enough to pinch between two fingers, somebody tells you to get it cut. Next we went down to the Delta Company area and met the supply sergeant. We got our field gear at his supply room, some of it new equipment and some old. We went to the 2d platoon tent to pack our rucksacks.

My promotion to PFC caught up with me. Status at last. And I finally have a mailing address: APO San Francisco 96383. Seems like it’s been a long time without mail and will be longer still till a letter gets home and back.

“Airborne” in Vietnam has been transformed into “airmobile.” The 101st doesn't do parachute jumps over here, thank God. They travel by helicopter, thus, airmobile. It sure sounds better than walking. The 1st Cavalry Division was the first airmobile division formed, and the 101st was second. There are plenty of helicopters at LZ Betty. There’s hardly ever a time when you can’t hear a chopper coming or going.

Our company is presently out in the field. Fyffe and I are to join them when the choppers go out on the next resupply day. We’re packing a four days’ supply of food and water, a ton of ammo of all kinds, extra clothes, toilet articles, a bedroll, and whatever else we need for personal stuff. Two old timers are here waiting to go out and are giving us an education. Showing us what we need to take and what to leave behind. Sager said we should carry ten to fifteen canteens of water. I thought he was pulling my leg until he showed us his ruck--fifteen canteens. And he’s a little guy. When I finished packing my ruck I could hardly
lift it off the ground. And I didn’t even have any water in the canteens. This sucker is gonna be murder to carry. Something has got to give. Hope it’s not me.

Sager is a friendly, down to earth guy. He told us that the 101st has the lowest casualty rate of any division. I hope it’s true. Sager says time passes faster in the field. That’s good, I only have 354 days to go! (That sounds so much better than 365.)

April 22
Tuesday

It was especially hot today. (I think the same thing every day.) It seems like all we do is fill sandbags. The sun is hottest between noon and 3 o’clock, and we’re always out in it. Our base runs right up to the edge of a cliff overlooking the South China Sea. The sea is a beautiful sight, visible from most places on the base but seems hopelessly far away.

I don’t have the foggiest idea what the war situation is. Very little information filters down to us on Vietnam or the war. Are we accomplishing anything? I guess they would tell us if we were losing. Or would they? The papers we get--like the Stars and Stripes--mostly carry news from back in the world. That’s kind of strange too, seeing things back there so unchanged and people so apparently unaware of what’s going on over here. Come to think of it, that’s just the way I was before I got my draft notice. We do have radio. Somebody usually has a transistor going nearby. There’s no news there either, just music from Armed Forces Radio or Hanoi Hannah. The music helps keep us going. Blood Sweat and Tears, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Rolling Stones, Dylan, The Doors. I was surprised to find people smoking pot in the rear. I’m almost afraid to have a beer right now, much less get stoned. I feel like I need to keep my rifle at the ready on the way to the mess hall.

I heard that our 2d platoon shot down the battalion commander’s chopper in the field, but Black Hawk apparently was not hurt. This doesn’t sound good. I also heard that our company has had only one KIA since the first of March. That is supposed to be good. All communication appears to be strictly by rumor. Lord knows if any of it is true.

April 23
Wednesday

I’m in what is called a line company for obvious reasons. My MOS, or military occupational specialty, is 11 Bravo, infantry rifleman. We are not a support unit for the rear but rather stay out on the “lines,” wherever that may be.
They say that in this division the line companies spend about a month at a time in the field and then come back to base camp to “stand down” for about a week before going back to the field.

We had a USO show tonight. A Korean trio played and three Korean girls sang and danced. It was no Bob Hope Show. Being too embarrassed to leave right off, I stayed for half an hour. I came back here to the tent and hope to get some extra sleep. I want to make the most of my last night on a cot. I go to the field tomorrow.

**First Time In The Field**

April 27
Sunday

I didn’t get to go to the field Thursday, so I had one more “last night” in the rear. Fyffe and I spent the day filling sandbags. We are using them to make walls around the wood frame buildings and tents to stop mortar shrapnel. My sunburn is beginning to turn into a real tan.

Friday morning we were on the “Can Do” pad at 8 a.m. waiting on choppers to fly us out to join 2d platoon. We finally left at 11:30. Waiting truly appears to be a way of life in the Army. We rode out on the resupply chopper. It was the first time I ever flew in a helicopter. Flying along at a thousand feet or so, a hundred miles an hour, no seat belt, sitting on the floor with your feet hanging out the open door and the wind in your face--quite a thrill. It was wondrously cool while we were in the air. We landed sort of on the run. The engines and props slowed only slightly, dust and purple spotting smoke swirled wildly around the chopper. The crew chief pointed a thumb at us and then toward the ground. Fyffe and I hopped off with M-16s in hand, then drug our rucksacks off. Others from the company came rushing up to unload hot chow and resupply boxes and sacks. It all took only seconds. Soon the chopper was only a faint sound fading in the distance. I’m in the field!

They tell us we are supposed to get resupplied every four days. We carry four days of water, because you can’t count on finding any during the dry season, which is what we are in now in this part of Vietnam. The countryside is very brown. We must carry enough C-ration cans to make eleven meals. The twelfth one is a hot meal brought out by the chopper on resupply day. It was, in fact, cold, but delicious nonetheless.

Resupply includes food, water, ammo, clothes, mail!, a so-called cold pack-one warm beer and one warm Coke apiece--and something called a sundry pack.
This is a big plastic sack filled with soap, toothbrushes, shaving stuff, paper and pens, candy, insect spray, magazines, comic books, paperbacks, *Army Times* and *Stars and Stripes*, cigarettes, chewing tobacco, cigars and more. The good stuff, mostly the cigarettes and candy, is doled out by squad leaders. The rest is anybody’s that wants it. Much of it gets sent back in.

The company was all together and did not move on Friday. I went along on a few cloverleaf patrols. These go out about a kilometer--they call it a “klick”--from the perimeter and then loop back in. When we stop in the field we always arrange the unit in a circle, whether it’s the squad, platoon or company. Someone is always on guard around the perimeter of the circle. Our platoon has three squads, each squad has two fire teams, and each fire team has three to four people. One position on the perimeter is usually manned by a fire team, so a platoon size perimeter would have six positions, or holes. The CP (command post) is a fancy term for wherever the platoon leader--usually called LT for lieutenant--happens to be. It’s always somewhere in the center of the perimeter. Each squad is run by a squad leader, usually a sergeant. Mine is Sergeant Joe Carter.

I was nervous, of course, the first time I went out on a patrol, but the first really scary thing was being out on OP (observation post)--alone. Even though it was broad daylight, there were so many things that I could imagine might happen. . . . Nothing did, however, and after fifteen minutes or so, mild terror gave way to mind numbing boredom, a very common reaction sequence over here.

Saturday we walked, or humped, about 2 kilometers to another mountaintop. Humping means going from one place to another with all your gear including your pack, or ruck. It is continuous, grueling physical exertion. It is vicious and relentless. In the beginning I could not even stand up without help from two people. Then after a dozen steps I thought I was dying. Everything I had hurt, sweat was blinding me, my energy reserves were down to zero, but there was no stopping. I was wondering, “Will I live through the next hour? Do I want to?” Amazingly, I stumbled through it like everyone else. A lot of the veterans were bitching but nobody dropped out. Just another adjustment.

We couldn’t dig in at our new position--not enough dirt. So we made our “foxhole” by piling rocks about two feet high. I had beef with potatoes and gravy (ugh) and pineapple (delicious) for supper and was asleep by 8 p.m. Sleep comes in bits, because we have to pull about three hours of guard duty every night, usually in two hitches.

On Sunday we went through the morning ritual of bringing in the trip wire, flares and claymore mines, which is the opposite of the evening ritual. Then we went down the mountain and hacked an LZ out of the jungle. By 10 a.m. we were
in the choppers and on our way back to Betty, back to civilization. I scored it a successful trip to the field. Didn’t get killed, didn’t get shot at, didn’t see any VC, didn’t have to my shoot rifle. Therefore, I am still what they call a “cherry.” Doesn’t bother me. I hope I’m a cherry when I go home. I don’t need the thrill.

I’ve gotten to know a couple of the guys in my squad, Troendle and Bouchard. They have made things a lot easier for me. They kidded me for my good luck. The platoon had been in the field for two months, and I was there for only the last two days before they came in. Luck continues tonight. We are on our way to showers, clean clothes, a company cookout with steaks and beer, and the night off, meaning no guard duty. Ah, the good life. This is more like it.

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**Life In the Rear**

April 29
Tuesday

Finally got mail! Three letters from Marilyn arrived today, the first in over three weeks. I have not mentioned my thoughts of her, since this journal is a record of what’s happening in Vietnam, what makes each day different from another. Missing Marilyn is a constant and doesn’t change from Sunday to Sunday. I record my thoughts of her in the letters I write home every day.

We spent most of the morning and all afternoon stringing concertina wire--a triple coiled spiral of barbed wire--around the LZ Betty perimeter. There are now five concentric circles of wire, with three coils in each row. Two coils on the bottom and one stacked on top. After work and before guard duty, Fyffe and Troendle and I managed to grab a couple of beers at the 192d Club. It’s the club for the 192d Assault Helicopter Company. They’re the helicopter guys who fly us everywhere. Rumor has it that our stand down will last until May 10 or 11. Great! We were only expecting three days.
After the barbecue Sunday afternoon, we had a big football game on the beach. Tackle, not touch. It felt kinda good to lay a shoulder into the company commander. Our chief, Captain Harry Rothman, was really very sporting about it, and being a big stud himself he was dishing it out pretty good too. Everybody had had so much beer we weren’t capable of inflicting much damage--or feeling any pain.
Monday I was on guard duty at the base PX with Burks, my fire team leader. We just laid around in the shade all day reading and talking, then stayed on pulling guard duty there through the night. We got back to the company at 7:30 this morning.

The food in the mess hall is pretty good. Beats C-rations anyway. Something about the milk and eggs tastes funny. Not sure what it is. (Dried?) They have started giving us three freeze dried meals at resupply called “Lurps.” They were developed for the LRP (long range patrols), who need lightweight supplies. LRP is three or four man recon teams that are sent out to the field for a couple of weeks at a time. LRP are crazy, but Lurps are pretty tasty. I think I’ve lost more weight. I probably weigh about 145 to 150, but what I have is on pretty tight.

April 30
Wednesday
We filled sandbags all day for walling up hooches. That’s what they call the new wooden barracks that are replacing the old tents. Although very crowded inside, it is nice to sleep in an almost bed (cot), even though I only got to once so far. It is very hot in the sun, over a hundred I’m sure. It’s against regulations, of course, but we can’t work with a shirt on. I am getting tanned like a farmhand, from the waist up. I went and asked for some clean shorts at the supply room and they just laughed. Nobody wears them. Nobody. Too hot. I’m always the last to know.

I am slowly catching on to the vocabulary. Much of our conversation is made up of just a few simple words: *boocoo* (too much), *tee tee* (too little), *sin loy* (too bad), *dinky dow* (crazy), *deedee mow* (hurry), *no bic* (I don’t understand), *chop chop* (food), *boom boom* (fuck) and *fuck* cover just about everything. For those few remaining instances we have “It don’t mean nothing” and “Wha’ they gonna do, send me to Vee-et-nam?”

Met another fellow newbie today--Terry Wellman from Middlesboro, Kentucky. He’s a nice guy and is the CO’s radioman, or RTO. Seems like everything has an acronym. I read in *Stars and Stripes* that Holder’s outfit got sent to the A Shau Valley. I read about that place before I came over here. It’s a very bad news place. I must be living right. I hope Holder makes it through. [Vivion
Holder survived A Shau Valley, the 101st Airborne and his year in Vietnam. Not long after he got home, Vivion died in Winchester, KY when the car in which he was riding was hit by a train.

We went to a funeral service today for a 1st platoon boy. He got shot in the leg, not bad they said, but he went into shock and died before the Medivac could get to him. There was a short sermon, they played *The Star Spangled Banner*, then *Taps* while we all saluted. Everyone was very choked up. [On April 19, Spec 4 Carl Phillip Morrison, 1st platoon, Delta Company, of Bonita, Louisiana, was killed by sniper fire while on a reconnaissance-in-force operation.]

May 1
Thursday

Last night I had guard duty at one of the “headhunter towers.” These are thirty foot tall, wooden lookout towers that line the perimeter. They are sandbagged at the top, but still seem awfully vulnerable to me. The tower we were on was at the edge of the cliff facing the sea. There was a pleasant breeze that made for comfortable sleeping. I was on watch when the sun came up over the South China Sea. Beautiful. I was inspired to poetry, but when I finally found my pen, alas, I could not find the words.

This was probably the most interesting day I’ve spent in Vietnam. We had convoy security, which meant we rode with a convoy of engineers, their trucks and equipment out to a quarry north of Phan Thiet and back. We pulled security for the trip, but not at the quarry, so we had a lot of time on our own. The 45 minute trip each way went through Phan Thiet. That was a real experience. Unfortunately, I can hardly begin to describe it. The town has maybe 50,000 people and every building looked like our worst big city slums. But while it was poor, it had a lot of character, if not charm. The houses were wood or mud with thatched roofs and dirt floors. There was no grass to be seen, it was crowded beyond belief, and in most places the smell was very bad. In the town center there were a few concrete shops with living spaces on the second floor. The shops were better looking than the houses, but none looked too prosperous. The whole city seemed like one big market, especially out on the street. People were squatting everywhere, buying and selling.

At the quarry there were about forty little kids, two to ten years old, and a mama-san with her teenage daughter that hung around all day. Not surprisingly, the kids are cute as can be. They bummed food and cigarettes from us until the guys ran them off late in the afternoon. The mama-san was selling Cokes,
Vietnamese beer and her daughter--fifty cents, one dollar and five dollars. The lieutenant finally ran them off about 3 o’clock. The guys said only the Cokes were worth the money.

The kids were really enjoyable though. They made me feel almost human again for awhile. They were little hustlers, for sure. All of them can cuss in English and give the finger quite well. A little one, maybe four or five years old, followed me around like a shadow all day. He was dirty and skinny but awfully smart. He saw me cleaning my M-16 with rolled up cigarette filters, so he went off and found himself some and started imitating me. He probably could have cleaned my rifle better than me. He untied my boot laces and tied them back. It wasn’t a bow knot, but it looked just like one. He never asked me for anything. I miss him already.

Coming back, Phan Thiet was just as interesting and incomprehensible as before. And me without a camera to record my thoughts. We did see one incredible and memorable sight--a lambretta beside the road that had been flattened until it wasn’t over an inch high. A lambretta is a little three wheeled vehicle not much bigger than a motor scooter. We have seen them carrying a dozen or more people down the road. The engineers said it had been run over by a tank a few days before. I don’t think there were any people in it.

May 2
Friday

We had guard duty on the same tower last night. I was supposed to have the watch at sunrise again, but somebody fell asleep on guard and didn’t wake me up. That seems to be pretty common. It’s scary as hell and punishable with a court martial, but it is almost impossible to stay awake sometimes. It hasn’t happened to me yet, but I suppose it’s just a matter of time until it does. Anyway, it was the first eight hours sleep I’ve had since I got to Vietnam.

Today we are back out stringing concertina wire around the perimeter. I lucked out and drew security. Wellman and I spent the whole day in a big cemetery that wraps around two sides of the base. There are cemeteries everywhere you turn around. We hung our shirts on bushes for shade and spent a dull seven hours “securing.”

Remembered today that the Derby runs Saturday. I’m betting an imaginary $10 across the board on Arts & Letters. What the heck, make it $100 on the nose.

May 8
Thursday
Filled sandbags all day; back on the bunkers tonight. Life in the rear is becoming seriously boring. Many wish for the field. I’m not that bored yet.

May 9
Friday

Went out on a recon patrol today into the Southern Free Strike Zone. It’s a big scrubby forested area west and south of LZ Betty. The name “Free Strike” means that the military has declared the area off limits to the Vietnamese. If any are found trespassing, they may be shot, no questions asked, i.e. free strike. We walked out and back, about six miles in all, or ten klicks. Very hot. My notepad got soaked, and the letter I wrote last night is now illegible. We were looking for weapons caches and listening for mortar rounds. I think. The VC have been lobbing a few mortars toward Betty the last few nights, though none have landed in the perimeter. Our patrol turned up nothing.

May 10
Saturday

What a day. Got a Care package from home with all kinds of good stuff. Food, candy, kool-aid, a comb, a glasses strap, and a bunch of plastic bags. We have to keep personals, food, etc. in plastic bags or it gets wet, molded and ruined. They never actually got around to telling us we had the day off, though in fact we did. Then Burks gave me and McClain the night off from guard duty.
Tonight we watched half a lousy movie that we left in the middle. Our movies appear to be quite new but have their titles snipped out for some reason, so we never know the name of what we’re watching. We went by the EM Club for beer, but it was closed. It’s brand new, the only brick building on the base, but it closes too damned early. When it opened last week, they immediately made the one we liked best—the 192d Club—off limits to us. We went back to the hooch (barracks) and nibbled on our goodies. Rumor is we get to go swimming tomorrow.

May 11
Sunday

The rumor proved to be accurate for once, but not for me. The platoon is at the beach, and I’m stuck on a tower with McClain. He’s just back from R & R and is telling me about all the girls he had in Bangkok. I could kill Burks for doing me such a big favor last night.
McClain told me not to leave any food out because the rats are pretty bad in the towers. People have been bitten while they sleep. Funny I didn’t hear anything about them last time I was up here. Due to visions of having my eyeballs chewed out, it took me forever to fall asleep.

May 15
Thursday

It’s been a busy week. Tuesday we had the day off, more or less. In the morning we got resupplied, packed our rucks and cleaned our weapons. In the afternoon there was a really bad USO show--Mary Margaret and the Martels. Wonder where they get these people. Then we were off to the bunkers.

We usually get to our bunker by 6 p.m. Between 6 and 8, people test fire their weapons, check their claymores and trip flares, then sit on top their bunker talking and waiting for dark. Starting at 8 our mortar and artillery units start firing H & I (harassment and interdiction) rounds. Very noisy. These rounds land anywhere from 500 to 3,000 meters out from the LZ. After dark there is almost always a flare visible in the sky. We often hear firefights in the distance. We never know if it’s one of our ambushes or coming from the ARVN. ARVN is the name for the Vietnamese army and their soldiers. They are the regular troops of the Republic of Vietnam, or RVN. Their base camp is about 4 kilometers north of us, near Phan Thiet City. It’s hard to believe that all the shooting we hear could be associated with VC activity. Later on during the night, a sergeant of the guard comes around in a jeep checking to make sure the guard on each bunker is awake. Article 15s for sleeping on guard duty are pretty common.

We left on a mission first thing Wednesday. The VC have been mortaring Betty the last four nights, so they sent us out to look for the tube. I didn’t like the sound of this one. The deal was, we were to go about 3 or 4 kilometers west of the LZ and set up some ambushes. Not that they really expected the VC to come walking by. It was more like a place to set up for the night to listen for the tube and spot the mortar. We heard it--it was between our two positions! So we couldn’t call in artillery. Thank God they didn’t send us off looking for it in the dark.

May 17
Saturday

It was a moody day for me. I wasn’t lonely or tired, at least no more than usual. But I felt far from home, like on another planet. The lifers have been working us hard, but it’s still a lot easier than humping. We don’t have any time to
ourselves. We rush to and from details and to and from every meal. Sometimes the trucks don’t pick us up in time and we miss lunch or supper. Everyone feels royally shafted then, but there’s not a thing you can do about it, except bitch. Bouchard and I almost always get away for our beer before guard, even if it’s at the expense of supper.

The thing that’s bugging me right now is this: I’ve about had all I can stand of loafers, duds and idiots that don’t pull their load. Some people spend all their time trying to get over, and what happens is some other slob has to do their job. Every day when we are out in the sun stringing wire or filling sandbags, some of our guys manage to end up back at the hooch sleeping or at the EM Club shooting pool.

I really admire guys like Big Tom. I’ve gotten to know Tom real well and like him a lot. He is a giant of a fellow from Georgia, super good natured, and he never tries to get out of anything. In fact, he always does the work of two—at least. In the field he helps other people carry their gear. He carries twenty canteens just in case someone else runs out. In the rear he actually volunteers for jobs that others cheat their way out of. On guard duty the other night he and I did the “Word Power” quiz in the Reader’s Digest. Then we played a game where we asked each other questions using trivial information, like the former name of JFK airport in New York, Hitler’s mistress, Napoleon’s wife, Marilyn Monroe’s real name, and so on. Tom doesn’t smoke or drink and takes a Bible and a dictionary everywhere he goes. I wish I was more like him.
I bought a little flashlight today to use writing letters and maybe reading after dark. Also bought a leather wrist strap for my watch but can’t get it tight enough on me. One would think all this work would give me more impressive muscles, but I’m skinnier than ever. Finished a good book, *A Night in Lisbon* by Erich Maria Remarque, but it was sad and made me sad. Right now I’d rather be mad.

I tried to write a poem today, started maybe a dozen times. I could see the images and feel them, but couldn’t write it down, so I gave up. My vocabulary is shrinking and I may be going brain dead. It is getting hard even to describe everyday happenings, so I look for easier tasks. For example, I’m tempted to write about what’s in my pockets right now. We have pockets everywhere:

- left shirt--pen, pack of Winstons in a plastic case
- right shirt--comb, glasses strap, toothbrush for cleaning rifle, a pack of Kents (bad sundry bag this week)
- lower left shirt--sunglasses, matches, rosary
- lower right shirt--note pad, church key, P-38 (C-ration can opener)
- lower left pants--*Best American Short Stories of 1965*, handkerchief
- lower right pants--shaving brush for cleaning rifle, plastic bag with letters, paper, envelops
left pants--45 cents in piasters, boot blouses, rubber bands
right pants--nothing!
It takes awhile to change my shirt and pants.

May 18
Sunday
    We had the day off. I actually went to church this morning, then took a
    shower, wrote letters, cleaned my rifle, and ate.

May 19
Monday
    It rained all night and we slept under a tin roof. It was glorious. There’ll
    be a minimum of sandbag filling today. We have to pack our rucks to travel--we
    are going back to the field. Twenty-one days in the rear was pretty good. We are
    supposed to be working in or near villages in what is called the Pacification
    Program. Winning hearts and minds of the people!
    The *Stars and Stripes* is carrying news about a step up in VC activity,
    especially around Saigon, some of the bigger bases, and a few other provinces.
    They say it’s for Ho Chi Minh’s birthday. It is surprisingly quiet in our province
    (which I still don’t know the name of--nobody does!). Even the mortars that were
    fired at us every few nights were badly aimed and none have hit the base.
    I have a new job, assistant machine gunner. I get to carry ammo for the
    gun and stay close to the new gunner, Fyffe. He and I hang out together anyway.
    I’m glad he got the M-60 and not me. He’s a big guy and seems to handle the
    heavy gun with ease. When the gun position is set up, my job is to keep it fed. I
    carry 300 rounds for the gun. Everyone else in the squad is supposed to carry 200
    and I’m sure they all do. Yeah, right, uh huh.
    We got in a good hard hour of volleyball before dark. It felt good to get
    that kind of tired again.

Working the Villages
May 22
Thursday
“The Field,” somewhere northwest of Betty

We left for the field Tuesday morning by chopper. We haven’t been moving much, yesterday not at all. There is a spring near where we have settled in, so there is plenty of water for a change. You can see Phan Thiet from the high ground, about 6 or 8 kilometers to the southeast. It seems the rainy season is trying
to start. We have had three or four showers this week. We are supposed to be out for three weeks, but who knows what that means.

With days filled patrolling and pulling OP and nights with guard duty, eating has become our chief diversion and major pleasure. Actually, I would say food is everyone’s number one preoccupation. I’m tired of C-rations already, but the Lurps are pretty good. Just add hot water to the freeze dried mush and you have a pretty good meal. It comes in chicken and rice, pork and scalloped potatoes, chili, spaghetti, hash, and beef stew. We all get Care packages from home now and then, so everyone is lugging around heavy cans of goodies like fruit cocktail, vanilla pudding, and baked beans. What I wouldn’t give right now for a hot fudge sundae from Berryman’s Tastee Freeze.

Last night we went to a nearby village to set an ambush. One of the Vietnamese told someone that VC would be coming through tonight. I think we had a failure to communicate. None of us speak Vietnamese and none of them speak English, so conversation is a little uncertain. The village only has two families, but the place is like an oasis in the desert. Outside is all sand but inside is lush and green due to a small spring. We drank coconut juice and slept under huge palm trees on soft grass. No VC.

We are moving out this afternoon. Working with some Vietnamese troops called Popular Forces. They are the district’s reaction forces, which I think are like a local militia, more or less. These guys are something else. They make all kinds of noise, come and go at random, never carry enough water or ammo, and eat rice, wild onions and rotten smelling fish three times a day. They will buy, trade or steal anything you have. We have a hard time understanding each other, but we’ve been getting along pretty well so far.

May 25
Sunday

Yesterday we finally got resupply. Some idiot let us go to the field with a three day ruck, when we’re on a four day resupply. That kind of crap happens every time you turn around. By Friday everyone was out of food. But Saturday they made up for it with a delicious hot meal--roast beef and potatoes, lima beans, biscuits--stuff I wouldn’t have touched back at the mess hall. It tasted great. Best of all though were the six letters from home. When you come right down to it, it’s letters more than food that keeps us going.

We moved to a new NDP (night defensive perimeter). I don’t know why the lieutenant picks the hottest part of the day to move. He is new though; this is
his first trip to the field. It’s taking some time to get used to staying dirty and sweaty again and no way to really get clean. We all look like ragamuffins.

Now that my ruck is no longer breaking my back, I can write about it without gritting my teeth. It is hard to estimate what it weighs, but here are my guesses.

- 300 rounds of M-60 machine gun ammo--25 lbs
- 28 magazines for my M-16--15 lbs
- 12 quarts of water, canteens and covers--30 lbs
- 4 day supply of food--20 lbs
- entrenching tool--3 lbs
- 3 grenades, 2 flares, claymore, trip flare, bedroll, pack, frame, extra clothes, toiletry items, books and magazines, and an ammo can full of assorted personal junk--10 lbs

That’s in the neighborhood of 100 pounds if my estimates are anywhere close. I’m amazed I can pick it up, much less walk with it on my back. It gets tricky trying to balance while crossing a stream on a downed tree or climbing up a rocky hillside on your hands and knees.
Our rucks caused a near disaster when an artillery shell landed nearby and sent shrapnel tearing through the trees. We all hit the ground fast. This was followed by loud moaning from a few of us. Nobody got hit. We just had the breath knocked out of us and our ribs nearly crushed by the weight of our rucksacks. Mine dug into my neck and sent my steel pot rolling off down the hill. Lucky it didn’t snap my spinal cord.

The field is definitely different from the rear, and so far it is not too bad. There is much less hassle out here. The first sergeant is still at Betty. Guess he’s finding other slobs to do his crummy details. We haven’t had to move at night. We go to bed about 8 and get up by 6:30, pulling two and a half hours of guard. That works out to a lot more sleep than we got on the bunkers. Noise discipline is always in force out here; never any loud talking or singing and, at night, not a sound. Smoking after dark is also verboten. The smell carries a long way and the
flare from a lighter, even covered, can be seen from a distance. Of course, every rule was made to be broken.

May 27
Tuesday

We didn’t move from our position yesterday. Our squad went on ambush last night but all was quiet. Today we moved about 4 kilometers to another oasis-like village. We traveled early before the heat got too awful. This place has coconut trees everywhere and a public well. I took a bath and washed my shirt and towel. The green terry cloth towel is a versatile performer. We use it to pad our shoulders when carrying our rucks. We also use it to keep the sun off our necks and to mop up perspiration when we’re humping. We lay it out on the ground to make a clean place for food or tiny rifle parts. Morning and night it serves as an all purpose washcloth/bath towel. Finally, at night we use it for a pillow.

We sampled the local fruit today. Drank coconut juice and ate pineapples. They weren’t quite ripe but were still good. Saw bananas and watermelons too. Neither were ready to eat. The bananas are very small, only about four inches long. They should start growing good soon, as the rainy season is supposed to begin any day now. It’s only rained twice since we’ve been out--once when we were on the chopper pad waiting for our ride and then that night on ambush at the oasis.

Today while we were on patrol, I was thinking, if I was ten years old this would be a dream come true. I wanted to live rough and tough, and if there was anyone I envied more than pioneers or Indians, it was Marines. I hated cleaning the kitchen, making my bed, and taking a bath. This would have been a treat back then, sleeping under the stars at night, living and eating outdoors, and nobody to make you wash or clean your room. This would have been an adventure even at seventeen or eighteen. But at twenty-four it seems an exercise of mind-numbing physical endurance. Compulsory patriotism. Could it be penance for past sins? Was I that bad? Maybe should “offer it up,” as the nuns at the Catholic school used to say.

After reading about Lady Bird Johnson’s America Beautification project, I thought she should come follow a platoon of GIs around Vietnam for one day. She would see littering raised to an art form. A lot of concentrated effort and teamwork goes into it. I’m not sure we are entirely to blame. Everything they give us comes ridiculously over wrapped, and there are no garbage cans in the boonies. You never saw the like of stuff we throw away. After we leave an NDP it’s knee deep in empty tin cans, cardboard, paper, cellophane, old clothes, magazines, and a
multitude of other assorted junk. After the war, they may make us come back over here and clean up our mess.

I remember Nixon saying that he plans to have all U.S. forces basically out of the fighting by the end of the year. We would be withdrawn to fire bases and base camps. The Vietnamese--the ARVN and Popular Forces--would take over the fighting and we would support them, instead of doing the fighting for them. Right now, in our province at least, only our troops are in the field doing the fighting. All the ARVN appear to be either in base camps or “guarding” villages.

Our battalion commander is a lieutenant colonel who calls himself Black Hawk. He flew out to the field yesterday in his chopper to give our platoon leader his promotion from first lieutenant to captain. He couldn’t stay long--had to get back to town. I don’t blame him a bit. After he left there was a rumor floating around of a new “policy.” Supposedly our company is to keep two platoons in the field and one back at Betty. They would rotate each week. That would mean fourteen days out and seven days in the rear. The other rumor is that our platoon is going in on June 5.

We’ve really been getting over today. Just laying around since we got to our position at 10 o’clock. It’s such a good spot with open views in all directions, we don’t even have OPs out. I’ve been playing cards most of the time with Bouchard, Troendle, Hahn and Burks, who is my fire team leader. They’ve been easy to get to know and very friendly. A village boy came around awhile ago selling Cokes in bottles. I paid fifty cents for one. It was very hot. You cannot imagine how delicious it was.

May 29
Thursday

We are still in the coconut grove and may stay another night. I hope. We went on patrol yesterday through a village about 500 meters away, just across the rice paddies. Don’t know the name, but it was pretty good size. It might have had a thousand people. It smelled awful. Most of the villages do. I guess you’d expect that when so many people live so close together with no sewage system. These people didn’t seem poor by local standards, or hungry. They looked healthy and well clothed. They were living in mud huts--many of them white washed--with thatched roofs. We stopped only long enough to drink an orange soda and attracted about fifty kids in maybe two minutes.

This morning the CO and the pay officer drove out from LZ Betty in a jeep! We have been that close to the base all along and didn’t even know it. It might as well be a million miles. We got our monthly pay. Some people get all
their pay in cash--military currency, that is. I got $35. We went back to the village after lunch. It doesn’t seem like there is a war going on where we are. No fighting, no shooting. After almost two months in country, I hardly even think about getting shot at anymore. Well, at least I don’t think about it every waking moment any more. The worst part is missing home. And being bored out of my skull.

We were eating supper about 6 o’clock--canned pork, cheese and crackers, and warm Pepsi--when the latest rumor came around. We are supposed to start “Pacification” on Monday, whatever that means. Here is what we were told. We will be going to villages and checking them out for VC, weapons, or anything suspicious. If we don’t find anything, the villagers will be classified as “friendly.” Propaganda teams will then come in and try to get the people to work for us. We will give away food, and medics will take care of their sick. Sounds like it would be good for the Vietnamese and us too. It would be wonderful to do something nice for these people. And we would like to stay around the villages and the people and water. Hopefully less humping too. Of course, there is no telling what Pacification is really all about.

May 30
Friday

The sun is just coming up, peeping through the clouds over the mountains. The camp is beginning to show signs of life. The people on last guard--4:30 to 6--
are sitting in their holes wrapped in their ponchos, smoking and making coffee. Others are stirring, peeking out from under their bedrolls with sleepy eyes. The mornings are beautiful. Whatever is blooming nearby always smells best in the morning. It’s pleasantly cool before the day’s heat sets in. Everything is colored in shades of blue, the sky, the clouds, and the mountains in the distant haze. The mountains are beautiful but seem threatening and menacing too.

We’ve had all kinds of choppers out today, bringing the CO, the chaplain, the paymaster again, and resupply. We got six days of food this time. We’re supposed to go in on the sixth. I don’t have any idea what the chaplain came out for; he didn’t do a thing.

We finally left the oasis about 4 o’clock this afternoon. Moved only a kilometer. We were on hard dirt for a change instead of sand. Could only go down about a foot for our foxholes. Our company commander has joined us and he says we definitely will be working the villages. Maybe. He also told us we are in the middle of a twenty-four hour cease fire for something or other.

May 31
Saturday

It was a dreadfully slow day. Then about 5 o’clock these two girls walked brazenly into camp looking for some action. They had been set up about 200 meters from camp all afternoon. Things must have gotten slow, and they thought it might improve business to show off the merchandise. Rothman was sputtering mad. He had them run off and even fired a few shots over their heads. It was the thrill of the day! Too late to save it though.

The only other excitement is the dysentery “running” through camp.

June 2
Monday

Yesterday we moved about 3 kilometers to a new position, from 1½ kilometers north of the village to 1½ kilometers south of it. I don’t know why. Then we got resupplied, again. I picked up a couple of good books—Tales of Joseph Conrad and Man and the Web of Life. I scarfed them from the ditty bag before the lieutenant got his usual first choice of everything. He doesn’t mind sharing with the men, as long as he gets his share before anyone else. He and his parasites rip off all the good magazines, candy, and the cartons of Marlboro and Winston. The rest of us are usually left with the Army Times, Lucky Strikes and Camels.
This morning they woke us all up at 3 a.m. I thought I must have fallen asleep on guard duty. But no, it was a surprise mission. We moved out with the rest of the company to cordon off the village. We were in position and had it surrounded before daylight. There we sat with all our gear on, stomachs growling, slapping mosquitoes, and nothing happened. What was supposed to have happened no one ever said. Is this a numb nuts operation or what? [According to the battalion operational report, filed July 31, 1969, and now declassified, the village was Hoa Thanh. The report declared the three day cordon a success.]

It’s almost bedtime now. We sat around all day wherever we could find shade, making sure nobody came in or out of the village. The kids never got the hang of the Army’s orders though. They were coming and going all day long. They can’t stay away from GIs.

I’m sitting on a dike with rice paddies on three sides of me. They say we’ll stay at this village for four days. I refuse to believe it. I’m getting so sick of “they say.”

Whiskey Mountain (also called Titty Mountain for obvious reasons) where our radio relay station is located. During pacification, we worked the area to the left off the picture, which is the village in the picture below.
This is the village we cordoned and searched. Highway 1 runs through the village—you can see the houses lining both sides of the road.

June 4
Wednesday

Black Hawk just left. He strutted into the village about an hour ago in his jeep. Yeah, the little guy can strut in a jeep. He had everybody hopping mad in no time. I guess he thought we looked sloppy or lazy or something. So he had the whole platoon pick up everything and move 200 meters to a different spot.

My squad spent yesterday and most of today in one of the village hooches. It had one dark room and smelled very strange. There were no chairs and only a hard wooden platform for a bed. They had an altar in one corner of the room. The family insisted we use their home, but they stayed mostly outside. They would come in ever so often and sit in a corner and just watch us. They didn’t seem nervous or concerned, just curious. Unfortunately, we could only communicate with our hands. I won twelve bucks playing blackjack.
A little while ago a company truck came out with our mail. They also brought our sick guys back. They wouldn’t have done that if we were going in tomorrow. That’s not so bad really, as long as we stay near the village. All Betty has is cold beer, hot meals, and cots to sleep on if you’re ever lucky enough not to have to pull guard duty. We get much more rest out here--and sleep too. At Betty they keep you on work details all day. You never get a break, except for meals. And you have to pull guard with only three people on each bunker. Out here we usually have five or six guys in each hole for guard.

Village kids are driving their cattle and water buffalo in from the fields. The procession is strung from one end of the main street to the other. Looks like it’s clouding up to rain but feels cool and nice right now. I need a bath anyway. We played football for about an hour this afternoon. Two on two; used a plastic canteen for the ball. Fyffe and I were a team. We smeared ’em.

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**Our Hosts, The People of Vietnam**

June 6
Friday

The choppers came and went today--without us. Without the big red mailbag too. We will stay out for a few more days. We are supposed to be teaching the ARVN how to use their new M-16s. They joined us yesterday. We are going to be working closely with them--even setting ambushes together at night.

Meals, while not anything to brag about, have become a tolerable if not enjoyable ritual. For breakfast I always have a canned cake (pound cake, fruit cake, or pecan cake roll), a can of fruit (peaches, pears, or fruit cocktail), and a cup of hot cocoa. For dinner it’s canned ham, turkey, or pork (hot or cold depending on how much time we have), cheese spread or peanut butter and crackers, and a warm Coke or Pepsi. We usually get four sodas apiece in our “cold pack” on resupply day. I guess once upon a time, or maybe just once, they sent the sodas out cold. For supper the main course is a LRP (pronounced “lurp”), a freeze dried meal in a bag. My favorite flavors are chicken and rice, beef stew, and chili. You just pour a canteen of boiling water in the bag and let it absorb for five minutes. It’s not bad and pretty filling. After that another can of fruit, then when things settle down and the bedroll is spread out, a couple of cups of cocoa or coffee. We try to save our candy to eat on guard duty to help us stay awake. The ARVN like to trade for our C-rations, so sometimes we get fresh fruit, fish, and real rice. Since we’ve been working in the villages we have had plenty of water, which means we don’t have to hump so much of it.
Today we sat around most of the time. I taught the guys in our squad to play Hearts and Oh Hell, no betting. Yet. We’ve been lolling in the shade of the coconut grove at the edge of the village. There was a nice breeze. It was quiet, almost idyllic.

There are kids everywhere. They’re like ants—you can’t turn around without stepping on one. We finally have to run them off because they never stop begging for something. If we gave each one of them “seegardettes” and a can of “number one chop chop,” there wouldn’t be any left. They don’t appear to be needy or hungry. I think this must be kind of a game with them. It drives me crazy that I can’t understand or speak their language. Although I am trying, I don’t seem to be learning very fast. You’d think the Army would try to teach us, since they insist on keeping us busy doing something all the time, even if it’s the most trifling tasks. Could be there is no one around to teach us. I have not personally run into one person who can speak Vietnamese.

These villagers are the jabberingest people I’ve ever seen. The older men are relatively quiet, but the women and children talk nonstop. When there are four or five women together I swear it sounds like a bunch of chickens cackling. We’ve gotten to look into many of their homes in the village. They are all very plain—one room, usually partitioned to make more, and often an added on lean-to not more than four feet high used for a kitchen. There is little furniture, one or two pieces like a bureau and a table of sorts.
Cooking is done over smoky wood fires with very crude looking utensils. All the food I’ve seen is either boiled or eaten raw. Meat must be hard to come by—they rarely seem to have any. In addition to the tiny fish they trap in streams, I’ve seen them eating lizards, frogs, snakes, and a strange looking little crab that lives in the rice paddies. They will eat any animal they are fortunate enough to catch—birds, rabbits, deer, rats, etc. In their small yards they raise ducks, chickens, cows, and pigs, but I have never seen any of them being eaten. They may be grown for market or only eaten on holidays or special occasions. Cows are used in the fields along with the water buffalo. It is weird to see a cow pulling a cart or a plow.

They don’t clean the way we do. No washing or scrubbing the house. They just sweep off the dirt floor as needed. They do dust a lot. And it is necessary, as the villages are very dusty. The streets and yards are all dry dirt, and the homes are very open with no glass in the windows. There is a sizable space between the top of the wall and the ceiling, probably to let the horrible smoke out. It is also hard to understand why they let us take over their homes. In the mornings they invite us in and they all leave for the fields for the day. I cannot imagine going off to work and leaving a bunch of sloppy, careless, foreign devils in your house. Even less, to leave your wife and children home, as they sometimes do. Of course, they usually get something in return. I never heard of any homes being vandalized, but there was very little in them to steal.

The kids make the strongest impression on all of us. They swarm out from the village and follow us everywhere we go. Even when you go to the bathroom you can count on an audience. Anything we throw away they pounce on and save. They are as lovable as kids anywhere. We get attached to them and miss them when, for some reason, they don’t come around.
Clothes do not make the man over here. They are a necessity, not a decoration. Vietnamese men don’t use any underwear. The women do wear bras, but they aren’t bashful about taking them off in public to nurse a baby or take a half bath in the yard. A farmer’s entire wardrobe seems to consist of two pairs of pajamas--black or blue--one set with long pants, one set with short pants. They really look like pajamas to me but are worn as everyday clothes. Must be nice to get up in the morning and not have to get dressed. What am I talking about? We don’t get dressed in the morning either. We even sleep with our boots on.

One thing I have not seen yet is any display of affection between a man and a woman, or boy and girl. It is very common to see two women going down the street holding hands. And it is just as common for men. It’s a little strange to us to see two men in uniform, with M-16s slung over their shoulders, walking along holding hands. We don’t see much affection shown to children either, except for very young ones. It is really incredible the way the children take care of each other. A little one can always hitch a ride with somebody. Children only four or five years old carry a baby around piggyback or on their hip. All the children are very pretty.

There aren’t many young men in the villages, for obvious reasons, but there aren’t many young women either. Same reason? Married age Vietnamese are not so handsome, especially the women. One reason being that many of them chew the betel nut. It stains their mouth and teeth an unsightly red. [Betel nut (Areca catechu) chewing is a widely practiced form of recreational drug use,
common in South East Asia. Chewing betel nut releases a number of psychoactive alkaloids, in particular arecoline, a mild central nervous system stimulant.

The means of transportation are diverse--oxcarts, horse and buggies (little bitty horses), bicycles, Hondas, lambrettas, ancient trucks and buses, cars (rare), and trains. All are unbelievably overcrowded. I’ve seen five people on a Honda. Buses always have people standing up, hanging out and even riding on top. Everyone seems to travel fully loaded. Children, animals, baggage, furniture, and so on--basically, anything that can be carried is likely to go along for the ride. The ride is seldom smooth. Although the main roads like Highway 1 are paved with asphalt, they have potholes large enough to hide a small tank.

My impression of the people in these villages is that they are very warm and outgoing. Seeing what we are doing to their country, it would make sense if they were openly hostile, but they’re not. They seem trusting, caring and friendly to strangers.

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**Making Friends and Losing My Cherry**

June 7
Saturday

Today was slow. Got washed up at the well this morning and re-read all my letters from home. Then read a little of Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night*, which made me sleepy, so I tried to nap. I wasn’t sleepy enough though. We are pulling so little guard duty--only an hour and a half last night--that I’ve lost the ability to fall asleep instantly anytime day or night. For the last four days we have not done any patrolling either. We have to go out on ambush every night. We leave about 6 p.m. with one squad, usually about ten people. That’s why we’re getting so much sleep. We come back in about 7 the following morning and head for a hooch or the shade of the coconut grove.

From our position we can see people all around us working in the rice paddies, plowing with their water buffalo and wooden plows, and setting out the rice sprouts. Today the “Coke girl” was back for a visit. Someone gave her a can of shaving cream. She squirted it out and started eating it with a stick. She was
having a real picnic. I guess she would have finished off the whole can if Sergeant Hicks hadn’t taken it away from her.

Fifty-seven days in country. So far I’ve not seen a VC (that I know of) or had a shot fired at me. We often hear gunfire and artillery in the distance but not close. I’ve not yet had any of the common tropical diseases, such as the fungal skin infection they call “jungle rot.” Nor any of the social diseases. In fact, I haven’t even felt bad since I’ve been in country, except for one itty bitty hangover after the cookout back at Betty. The big excitement of the day: We got a new platoon leader, Lieutenant Fletcher. He has not made it around to our squad to meet us yet.

My closest buddy right now is Bouchard from Wausau, Wisconsin. He pronounces it “wah-sah.” A real character. He has the gleam in his eye of a born devil. He’s the platoon prankster. He’s witty, easy going, quick to laugh, a natural born coward like me ("careful"), 21 (old for this group), Catholic, and very irreverent. He likes his beer as much as I do. On resupply day we go around trying to collect all the beer from the non-drinkers. Bouchard was ribbing Big Tom the other day for carrying a dictionary in his ruck, and then when writing home Bouchard asked me how to spell “scene” and “clothes.”

Most of the squad, including Bouchard, will be leaving in August. There will only be three left besides me: Denny Fyffe, Terry Wellman, who is from eastern Kentucky and came over right after me, and Steve Hicks, who is from Cincinnati and just arrived. Hicks was at the University of Cincinnati on a baseball scholarship and dropped out for some reason. His girlfriend works for Cincinnati Gas & Electric at the building that has the fabulous model train layout every Christmas. Hicks is a sergeant, an “instant NCO”—he went to NCO school before coming to Vietnam.

Myself, I passed up NCO school after AIT. I haven’t volunteered for anything since my first day in basic training. Our company was all seated in the bleachers late on that day. It was cold and wet, and the ground was muddy. The company commander asked all the college graduates to raise their hands, and three of us did. He called us down and ordered us to belly crawl around in the mud for several minutes for the benefit of the other recruits. The lesson he wanted to teach was that no one was better than anyone else. It worked for me. Of course I learned another lesson too and vowed that that was the last time I would ever volunteer for anything as long as I was in the Army. I should have gone to NCO school though. Rank is everything in the military. The higher you are, the less you do. The saying “rank has its privileges” must have originated in the Army.
June 8
Sunday

We had a shower after lunch break. Rained pretty hard for about an hour. It felt nice and cool. Our whole squad squished into a little hooch too small to stand up in. We played cards until the sun came back out. Things were soon back to normal--steamy and hot. That night we moved back into the village to pull security for the company commander, Captain Rothman, and his staff at the CP (command post).

June 9
Monday

As they say in Vietnam, I got my cherry busted last night. That’s the term for coming under hostile fire the first time and earning your CIB, or combat infantry badge. Some VC slipped into town just after dark and opened up on the CP with AK-47s. When the shooting started I set a new record in the low crawl--twenty feet in one-tenth of a second. We found several blood trails this morning but no bodies. We didn’t hit anyone from our hole. Bouchard, Troendle, and I were fighting to see who could get the lowest. It was scary but over quickly. For the next several hours we got to listen to artillery missions called in to Betty. So much for guarding the CP. We want back on ambush.

Today is resupply. They brought breakfast out and it was a feast. I had a huge plate of bacon and eggs, bread and butter, coffee, two boxes of cereal, two cartons of milk, coffee cake, and half a grapefruit. I’ve been dreaming about that kind of breakfast for a long time.

I shaved and put on fresh socks while waiting for the supply chopper and the mail. It was pretty noisy around the CP. Everyone was agitated after last night. Apparently, Black Hawk was too. We’ve been on patrol all afternoon. After spending so many days in the shade, the heat was murder.

June 10
Tuesday

The Army is a pisser for sure. We spent all day on recon looking for those VC from the other night who could be in Cambodia by now. About 5 o’clock we settled into what was supposed to be our NDP, and everyone started fixing supper. I had just gotten my chicken and rice cooked when the order came to saddle up, we were moving out. They said we were going to a firebase east of the village to pull security for a few days. Sounds great. Something must be wrong with it.
After we threw away our suppers, packed up all our gear, and filled in our foxholes, they said we weren’t going to the firebase after all. Now we’ve got to re-dig the holes, unpack our rucks, and cook another supper before it gets dark. It seems we are merely puppets under the control of a perverse idiot master who gets his kicks from jerking our strings. Things can’t get must worse.

Wrong again. Looks like it’s going to rain.

Back To Work At Betty

My sketch of LZ Betty

June 13
Friday
LZ Betty
On Wednesday trucks showed up and took us back to LZ Betty. Got to see Phan Thiet again. Have been on details continually since. I wish we were back in the field. It seems we always want to be the opposite of where we are. I had three Care packages waiting for me when I got back. We had a feast on the bunker that night. We had nine guys for guard, a luxury unheard of in the rear. I didn’t even get waked up for my turn. That was only about the third full night of sleep I’ve had since I’ve been in Vietnam.

Thursday after dinner I went up to the little PX and bought a camera, a Kodak Instamatic. We spent the day cutting brush with machetes out beyond the perimeter wire. I got rid of my job as assistant machine gunner, or ammo bearer. Fyffe is still machine gunner. Bouchard gave up his M-79 and I got it. So now I am a grenade launcher. That night we were out on OP. It is a little creepy being outside the perimeter. Our position was near the dusters (tanks). They started working out just after dark, and we watched them put on an impressive and noisy show.

Duster

More brush cutting today. Tonight we are the reaction platoon. That means we actually get to sleep in the barracks and won’t have to get up, except in the unlikely event that the base comes under attack. In that case they will rush us to whatever spot is under attack. After dark, we got to try out the new lights in the barracks, an addition since our last time in. The bugs got so bad we headed for the EM Club. Played cards, shot pool, and guzzled beer for a couple of hours. Had a great time with the guys in my fire team--Hahn, Bouchard, Troendle, and Burks.
Going to be rough when they all leave. Also got to try out the new camera. My first picture was of the inside of my shirt pocket.

(Clockwise from the left) Hahn, Bouchard, me, Troendle and Burks

June 14
Saturday

Today we had convoy security again. We didn’t go to the quarry this time and didn’t go through Phan Thiet either. We went west of Betty where the engineers were working. They were repairing a blown up bridge. We got back too late to eat in the mess hall but also too late to go on guard, so we got the night off. That seemed like a fair trade. We spent Saturday night out on the town, at the EM Club playing poker and drinking beer.

June 15
Sunday

We spent the day tearing down old hooches near Betty that the Vietnamese had abandoned. In a garbage can at one of the hooches we found two Polaroid cameras. Fyffe and I each kept one. They were in pretty good shape, though an inexpensive variety. Have the VC been taking pictures of Betty? Scary thought.

We worked in the sun all day without shirts. I have never had a tan like this in my life. Can’t believe the color of my skin. Of course it’s only on my top half. The legs are their usual paper white.

(From the left) Troendle, Wellman, Hahn, Bouchard and Burks

Vietnamese vendors bring out their Cokes, beer, ice, and girls from Phan Thiet every day. We’re not supposed to eat the ice, since they think a bunch of
people have gotten sick from it. Captain Rothman said if anybody else gets sick while we are in the rear, we will go back to the field to stay. Today we had several Cokes apiece--with lots of ice.

The Vietnamese will take piasters for their merchandise, but they prefer MPC, the military currency. This is worth more, but riskier for them. Every so often the military collects all the MPC and issues a new series in trade for the old. The Vietnamese obviously cannot trade in any they have, since they are not even supposed to have it. So they have to turn it over quickly, i.e., use it to buy some American stuff that they can, in turn, sell back to the GIs.

I really hate the way some of the guys in our platoon treat the Vietnamese. They call them gooks and insult them constantly. Some of our officers are as bad or worse. I don’t know if it’s because we blame the Vietnamese for our being here, or if it's just because they're different from us.

June 16
Monday

We filled sandbags all day long. The sun was hot and there was no place to hide. We are putting sandbags around the barracks to help in case of mortar attack. Sounds like a good idea, but we aren’t likely to be there. We don’t spend much time in the barracks. Word came that we are to go to the field tomorrow. So they had a big cookout for us--hamburgers on the grill, coolers full of beer, and a volleyball game--then gave us the night off again. Best of all, just before we went to bed they decided we weren’t going to the field after all. Aw shucks.
June 17
Tuesday

We are waiting on our ride to the bunkers. Filled sandbags again all day. The barracks wall is now sandbagged half way up to the roof. Just got back from my fifth trip to the john today. That big orange Monday morning pill for malaria is murder. It guarantees diarrhea once a week. As a rule, the fastest anybody ever moves is on Monday. [The big orange pill (chloroquine) was taken once a week and the little white pill (dapsone) was taken daily--both are to prevent malaria.]

Hoa Thanh in Monsoon Season

June 19
Thursday
Near Hoa Thanh

So much for getting used to cots and mess hall food. We convoyed out to the field today. Back to the same village, the same spot we left eight days ago. I found out the name of the village is Hoa Thanh. Today I read some old letters and a play by Sophocles. It looks like rain. Maybe it will cool us off. The heat is still
gruesome. We moved about 3 klicks in the sun this afternoon. My ruck felt like it was full of bricks. After not humping for awhile, I had almost forgotten how miserable it is. I’ve had the GIs since Monday. I don’t feel sick, but this is getting mighty tiresome.

The platoon is back to sitting around during the day and setting ambushes at night. We are staying about 2 kilometers outside the village this time and, thus, are missing our Vietnamese friends. This morning we went on a cloverleaf patrol for the sole purpose of trying to find the “Coke girl.” Seems she hasn’t discovered that Delta Company is back in the field.

Lopez, our company first sergeant, brought us some good news for a change: Black Hawk is leaving around the first of July. That will add a nice touch to Independence Day. Everyone hates him. Not because he is a bad commander, but because he does so many things to hack people off. He has taken away a lot of little freedoms that help make this place bearable, like wearing “boonie hats” and mustaches that are allowed in most other units. I don’t like him because he put Phan Thiet off limits. I would give anything to see the city.

Did we get a rain this afternoon. It took about fifteen minutes to blow in and then we got totally drenched. That is the most it's rained since I’ve been here and the first time we've gotten completely soaked. It lasted about twenty minutes and was really cold for awhile. We keep wondering if the monsoon season has started yet. Maybe this is it.

June 23
Monday

I was sick all day. Guess the thing that started last week was more than the Monday morning pill. I’ve been staying sick to my stomach and weak, limp as a noodle. Luckily we haven't been moving much. I had two adventures that under other circumstances would have been memorable and exciting. Both involved snakes. I had only seen a couple of dead ones before today. This afternoon I was lying down reading on my side. For some reason I looked up and behind me, over my shoulder. There was a snake with his head up in the air sniffing his tongue around, about six inches from my rear end. I froze and just stared at him until he lost interest and slithered away. He was light green and about four feet long. No one else even saw him. I went back to reading, too tired to go tell anyone.

Everybody saw the next snake. Our squad was going out on patrol, mercifully without me. They wanted to take my grenade launcher, so I went over to my ruck to get out my ammo pouch. When I picked up the ruck a big yellow and black striped snake crawled out. The whole squad went chasing after it into
the bushes. A few shots were fired, and they returned triumphantly with the dead snake to show the whole platoon. They were sure it was the most poisonous variety in all Asia. It was lost on me. About that time, I had to grab the toilet paper and make my own run to the bushes.

June 25
Wednesday

The sun is shining for me again. After trying all kinds of medicine, Doc gave me a shot of penicillin yesterday that finally got me back on my feet in about twelve hours. I’ve been ravenously hungry ever since. I have barely eaten for a week. I gave all my C-rations away except for the fruit. Fortunately, they sent out hot chow this morning.

Got in from ambush at 6:30 this morning, and we stayed in the coconut grove all day. I started a great book, *Men Who Made A New Physics* by Barbara Lovett Cline. It amazes me to find books like that in our goody bag. It was probably amazing to everyone else too, and that’s why it was still in the bag after so many people had picked over the stuff before me.

Almost overnight the countryside has turned from brown to green. Grass is beginning to grow everywhere. There are rice paddies in every direction and for as far as you can see. They are separated by dikes and ditches, which make it a pain when we are humping and have to scramble up over them every fifty to a hundred feet. Most of the paddies are already planted. A few farmers are still plowing them with their water buffalo. After being so dry for so long, the country seemed like a wasteland. Now it seems lush, green and fecund. If I haven’t said it before, I should say now that this is a beautiful country.

June 27
Friday

Our days are still dull but easy, with a minimum of humping and always before breakfast or after supper when it’s cool. Ambush every night, though I wonder why we bother. We have not had contact on one yet. There are five of us to pull guard, so that’s only two hours a night.

Just finished eating ham, crackers, peaches, and a coconut bar. While C-rations aren’t great, whatever food we have is important to us. We live from meal to meal. You feast with whatever is in hand, however modest the menu or meager the portion. I’ll bet everyone who leaves here goes home a fruit lover. It is the one thing most of us eat three times a day, if we can get it.
We’re getting soaked every day now. We were able to stay out of it today by huddling together under a creek bank. They brought out jungle sweaters the other day because it is so cold after the rain. It’s one of the few things I’ve seen of the Army’s that I might use at home. The sweaters are made of nylon, some kind of knit, lined underneath like a sweatshirt, and are really warm.

We just counted up, of the thirty-two guys in our platoon, thirteen are leaving in August, most of them from our squad--Burks, Troendle, Hahn, McClain, and Bouchard. Big Tom leaves in December. McClain was the last one in the squad that I met. When I came he was on R & R in Bangkok. After he got back he had to get treated for the clap before he could return to the field. He wasn’t back long before he had to go in to get cured again. Rothman threatened him with an Article 15 if he gets any more venereal diseases on his tour.

The guys talk about a legendary social disease called “Black Syphilis.” Supposedly, it is incurable and if you get it, the Army will send you to an island for quarantine, indefinitely. They write home that you are missing in action. Sounds like a bunch of bull to me. Of course, if McClain doesn’t return from one of his cures, I might have to revise my theory.

If I go to Hawaii on R & R in October, it looks like it will be as a PFC. They say Sergeant Thomas doesn’t let anybody make rank. Since he’s been here only two people have made specialist fourth class (Spec 4) and one sergeant. In other units I’m told, making Spec 4 is usually automatic after about five months and there should be one sergeant for each squad. He’s not due to leave till October, so it will be close.

July 1
Tuesday
LZ Betty

Night before last my squad went out on ambush and didn’t get into position until after dark. It was pouring rain, so we just flopped down in the nearest mud hole and went to sleep without digging in. Certainly not by the book. Last night we had a platoon size NDP for a change, but we had to set up in the rain again. Our fire team lucked out and got to stay in an abandoned hooch. The roof wasn’t much, but we spread hay about three inches deep on the floor and made really comfortable beds. I sank down in the hay and went right to sleep in the coziest bed I’ve had in a long time. It felt good to get out of my cold, wet shirt and put on a dry jungle sweater.

Today we rode back to LZ Betty. Of course, we first had to wait in the rain for three hours for the trucks to get there. I’m sitting in the EM Club drinking a
Coke. It’s raining dogs and cats outside. Hope it stops before guard duty. We are on OP tonight.

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**New Battalion Commander**

July 8
Tuesday

Black Hawk is gone and we have a new battalion commander, Lt. Col. James Bowers. This one is Rattlesnake. [Black Hawk, Lt. Col. Manuel Alves, served from December 1968 till July 1969. Rattlesnake served from July till November 1969.] Where do they get these names?

Thought we were finished with perimeter improvements, but we spent the last two days stringing concertina wire. Guess Rattlesnake has different ideas about how much barbed wire is enough. We got rained on good both days. It felt nice to get into dry things after supper. There are clothes hung up drying in every available space in the barracks. It is especially good to get out of my boots for awhile at night after supper. I doubt if I’ve averaged more than thirty minutes a day with my boots off since I’ve been in country. We always sleep with them on since we never know what situation may greet us in the middle of the night.

I’m sitting on my cot now with a little puppy, our new mascot. He loves C-rations. His stomach doesn’t seem to though. He’s been throwing up all over the barracks. We are on reaction tonight. We get to stay in the barracks and be ready to go out if the base is attacked.

We had an inspection earlier tonight outside in full gear, so the first sergeant could check us out. My ruck was loaded, and I had so much stuff in my pockets my pants were almost falling down. They are dangerously close most of the time. I’m always reaching back and patting my hip to see if my billfold is still there and panic when I don’t feel the familiar lump. The reason is that my back pocket is usually hanging down under my rear end instead of on it. The pants are very baggy to begin with and not wearing a belt makes them harder to hold up. A belt chafes your waist too much in the humid atmosphere. I often have this mental picture of having to charge a VC position with my pants falling down around my ankles. Not wearing underwear has it problems too. I often sit down and pop right back up with a sharp, burning pain, swearing I’ll be more careful where I sit the next time.

Some of Rattlesnake’s new rules include no food, drinks, cigarettes, radios, or books on the bunkers. Does not sound like the mark of a good commander. Let’s make a bunch of dumb rules that everybody hates, nobody obeys, and are
impossible to enforce. I know all five were broken on our bunker last night. An
even dumber rule is that we are supposed to pull two-thirds guard from now on.
That means of the three people on the bunker, two have to stay awake at all times.
We have to pull nine hours of guard. Before we had three hours of guard and six
hours of sleep. Now we are supposed to pull six hours of guard and get three hours
of sleep. Fat chance. That really takes the cake. Every time the jeep came around
to check last night we woke another person up. He had to remain upright just long
enough for the jeep to get out of sight. It would not be unreasonable if they would
let us catch up on sleep the next day, but they don’t.

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Guard Duty Gets Exciting

Nobody really minds pulling guard. It’s part of our life. It is challenging to
stay awake sometimes though. It is amazing to me that we do as well as we do.
Even knowing you could get a court martial or skewered by a Viet Cong sapper
doesn’t help keep you awake on a bad night. The radio helps. Somebody usually
has a transistor radio so we can listen to music. Then there is the field radio or
Prick 25 (PRC-25) we use to call and talk to others over the network. There is a
constant chatter on the radio, much of it serving only to keep people from dozing
off. It’s not party line gossip, but rather marginally guard duty related talk carried
out in what I guess is supposed to be Army lingo. Such as:

“Betty Mike, Betty Mike this is bunker 23. Commo check. Over.”
“Bunker 23, this is Betty Mike, I got you Lima Charley, loud and clear.
How you me? Over.”
“I got you same-same. Thank you much. Out.”

When I pulled guard for the first time in the field, I thought I heard people
on the radio asking “What is your cigarette?” which seemed like a weird but not
impossible thing to be asking. I figured maybe they wanted to know your brand.
Then I asked somebody what it meant. It’s supposed to be “What is your sit-rep?”
which is short for “What is your situation report?” That made sense, except for
one thing. I found out that everybody really was saying “What is your cigarette?”

About a week ago I had decided that my new watch must need cleaning
already. It was gaining about an hour a day, every day. But yesterday it didn’t.
The only thing that was different was that we used Troendle’s watch on guard duty
instead of mine. That pretty much explained the mystery. Someone in our hole
has been setting the watch up. Both Troendle and Bouchard denied it. Since
Bouchard has seemed pretty tired lately, I suspect Troendle has been getting an
extra hour of sleep every night. Those extra hours catch up with whomever has last guard, and that’s usually Bouchard. Hard to believe he didn’t realize he was sitting in the hole for two and a half hours instead of an hour and a half on last guard. Then again, he may have been napping himself and didn’t notice the difference.

Daytime guard is not as bad, mainly just boring. We have to keep an OP (observation post) out whenever we are in the field, or even just outside the perimeter at Betty. We pass the time on OP by writing letters or reading. Sounds crazy, but you get awfully casual about any danger after only a short time. Boredom quickly becomes the main thing you have to deal with. I’ve taken to studying stereo catalogs and dreaming about the kind of system I want to buy when I get home. Right now I have my eye on an AM-FM receiver with a built in cassette tape recorder made by H. H. Scott, $287 from the overseas PX. I don’t have any idea where I’ll ever get that kind of money.

Tonight Troendle volunteered to share his popcorn if I would go get us some Cokes from the EM Club. While at the club, I heard that Firebase Sandy, five miles north of Betty, got mortared about 5 o’clock and again just after dark. We have been hearing a lot of chopper activity over at the 192d. Could be a long night for them. Lordy, I guess it could be for us too.

July 11
Friday

We did not have to go out Tuesday night. Apparently there has been an increase in the of level of enemy activity all around us. Wednesday night on guard we were ordered on 100 percent alert. That means everybody on the bunker is supposed to stay awake all night. We sneaked in a little sleep but not much. They gave us Thursday morning off to catch up.

Last night we were on ambush on the beach just south of Betty. We were sleeping to the sound of the surf when the VC started firing a mortar nearby. They had a tube set up on the side of a hill about five hundred meters from our position, and they dropped about five or six rounds in on Betty. Within minutes a team of Cobra gunships responded to our call and were on the scene. What a sight to behold! They lit up the sky with a fabulous display of rockets and tracers rounds from their miniguns. It was a breathtaking light show. Must have been terrible on the VC end. After the ships left, all was quiet. The tube did not fire again.
July 13
Sunday

We had another exciting night last night. Our platoon was on reaction when the perimeter was hit. Fortunately, it turned out to be only a probe and not a full scale assault. How big a probe we don’t know. Two VC were spotted after they set off a trip flare. Well, that was enough to turn on an awesome display of firepower. I believe every gun on the perimeter, as well as all the artillery and mortars, must have opened up for the next five minutes. Something is clearly going on around here, but nobody is telling us what. All this work on the perimeter, the step up in enemy activity around Phan Thiet, and then today a fifty truck convoy arrived at LZ Betty. Half of the trucks were carrying artillery ammo. Intelligence must have picked up something, but I guess they figure we aren’t intelligent enough to share it with.

We were still partying in the barracks when the fracas started at about 9:30 p.m. We could hear the artillery over the blare of the music. At that time we couldn’t tell if the shells were incoming rounds or friendly fire. We did know that we were headed for the action. Three deuce-and-a-halfs were outside the door in no time, and in less than a minute from the first sounds we were speeding around the perimeter road toward the main shooting. As we got closer the firing got louder and louder. The sky was full of flares that lit the bunkers with a bright but eerie reddish light. We were trying to lay flat in the back and were literally bouncing up and down in the bed of the truck as it sped over the bumpy perimeter road. The air was full of swirling dust and smoke. We were looking out to see if
there were any incoming tracers and wondering if the VC had gotten through the wire yet. The trucks stopped where the noise was loudest. We got into position behind a berm and began adding to the hullabaloo ourselves. I fired off about thirty grenades before they called a cease fire to let the Cobras work out. The gunships gave us a phenomenal twenty minute light show, and then a “Shadow” came on the scene from Bien Hoa and gave us another show. Shadow is the name for C-119s, the old Flying Boxcar from World War II, fitted out with four Gatling type miniguns that fire 300 rounds per second. It is a shocking and breathtaking thing to watch. As the Shadow circles slowly overhead, these thin red columns of tracers appear and seem to connect the invisible plane to the ground. By 12:30 the show was over and we went back to try to get some sleep. We were all sort of stunned by the incredible display of power we had seen. I’m sure everyone was wondering as I was what kind of an enemy could stand up against such a firestorm and keep on fighting. What kind indeed.

Above: Three-view of original C-119G Flying Boxcar cargo model.

Shadow

Slow Times

July 14
Monday

We are in a rut. The days in the rear go by in a dull blur. In the mornings the trucks bring us in from the bunkers about 7. We eat breakfast, shave, wash up, hit the john, and mail letters till 7:30. From 7:30 to 8 we clean the barracks and
police the company area. Formation is at 8, then we move out on detail, usually stringing wire. The trucks come to get us for lunch at 11:45, unless we have C-rations with us. It takes about twenty minutes to get in on the trucks. We gulp down dinner, maybe grab a Coke, and make it to formation at 12:45. We are back on detail by 1 o’clock. The trucks come again around 4 to bring us in for supper. From 4:30 to 5 we eat, then grab some essentials at the PX, pick up laundry—we have to pay to get our uniforms washed in the rear—and make it to guard briefing and equipment check at 5:30. At 6 p.m. the trucks take us back to the bunkers. We have a couple of slow hours before dark to talk, smoke, eat some more, read and write letters. That’s pretty much what I’d call a rut.

July 15
Tuesday

Today I experimented with sending a tape home. It was horrible. I couldn’t make myself talk to the microphone. Will have to settle for letters and pictures. A friend from Kentucky, Bill Taylor, has promised to sell me his rangefinder camera, a Yashica, when he goes home. I received some information today on graduate schools, including Harvard and Cornell. Harvard’s list of biochemistry faculty reads like a Who’s Who in Science. Three are Nobel Prize winners in the department. It seems strangely out of place to be studying college catalogs with an M-16 across my knees.

I have been feeling awfully depressed lately. It seems like we are killing ourselves for nothing. We should just give this whole continent to the Russians or Chinese or whoever wants it. Who cares? What difference does it make to us? I don’t know that the Vietnamese want “democracy,” even if we could give it to them, and we are trying to ram it down their throats. Except for a few loose screws, I don’t think anybody is over here because he wants to be. They made us. Who is they, I wonder? The Army, the government, the people of America. Do “the people of America” really knew what’s going on in Vietnam? If they knew, I don’t think they would want us doing what we're doing to these people.

Some few among us are truly twisted. You’ve got to be a little sick to enjoy it here. Those that do seem to fit into two categories: born killers and those too messed up to make it in a saner world. Just your typical slice of humanity I guess. I want out, but I am trapped and sinking. Will I be changed forever? I am absorbed by the fear Dante described in The Divine Comedy during his descent into hell. I am afraid I have sunk so far I will never be able to return to normal.

July 17
Thursday

Yesterday was a bummer. While we were out on our usual wire detail, we picked up some kids who were setting off a bunch of our trip flares. There were ten little boys and three girls, maybe six to ten years old, and two old men. These same people are out here every day grazing their cattle. I imagine the cattle could stampede if they tripped one by accident, so the kids may have been trying to get them out of the way. Or they may have been setting them off for kicks. Who knows? It was probably stupid to put trip flares out this far from the perimeter anyway. Nevertheless, the fearless Lieutenant Fletcher rounded them up and took off their shirts and made them into blindfolds. Then he made them get in the back of the truck and lie down. All this so they wouldn’t know where they were going! What an idiot. He did this all in a rough and dehumanizing way and seemed enjoy the whole thing. Sergeant Lopez came over and said something to Fletcher I didn’t hear, to which the Lieutenant replied, “You trying to tell me how to do my job, Lopez?” Lopez got in his jeep and drove off. I had to ride in the back of the truck with the kids. They were all terrified, and the little girls were crying. I tried to comfort them, but it was hopeless. We took them to the POW center and never heard another word about them. It was the first time I felt ashamed to be in this uniform.

I just got three letters from home. Feeling a little better tonight. We got the whole day off. Bouchard and I spent the afternoon circumnavigating the perimeter, exploring and taking pictures. We stopped in to have a beer with the friendly guys from the recon platoon at the 17th Cav. They have it made. They go to the field in small, three or four man teams and monitor enemy movements. It sounds scary and dangerous, but they say it’s not. The best part is they don’t have to put up with a bunch of officers and lifers. And they say they are treated great in the rear instead of being hassled all the time like we are.

Bouchard and I also checked out the 192d pad, getting an up close look at the choppers. We ride on Hueys or “slicks.” The same ship with a red cross on it is a Medivac or a “dustoff.” Fitted with rocket launchers and miniguns, it’s called a gunship. Another type of gunship is the Cobra, which has a striking and characteristic look. While small and only about three feet wide, they are, nevertheless, armed to the teeth with rockets, grenades and miniguns. Looking almost toy-like is an observation chopper called a “Loach.” It would be fun to have one of these back in the world.

When we returned at 5, a company cookout was in full swing. The fun was short lived though. We were back on the bunkers by 6.
July 18
Friday

I'm on barracks guard today. Tough job. Clearly, the monsoon season is upon us. The rain has settled into a regular daily pattern. The days still start out sunny and hot as hell. Then about 3 o’clock menacing dark clouds begin to form in the distance, usually out over the South China Sea. The rain then blows in as a squall with pretty strong winds, often with lightning and thunder. It lasts from five minutes to an hour, and then quits. Afterward it stays cloudy and is much cooler. At night the rain starts again for thirty minutes to as long as three hours. We are all adjusting.

Hard to believe astronauts are soon to walk on the moon. Talk about being far from home. I don’t know though. In some ways the moon is not as far away as Vietnam.

I am reading a book by Art Buchwald, Have I Ever Lied to You? I have been trying to explain to the guys in the squad why it’s funny, with little success. I finally got them to laugh a little with the chapter on graffiti, with morsels like these:

“Goodnight David.” “Goodnight Goliath.”
Do the Chinese look in the White Pages?
Pall Mall can’t spall.
The Army has the answer! What was the question?
They liked the last one best. Guess I’ll read the rest of the book to myself.

Ten in the platoon are on seven day leave or are going soon. This is in addition to their R & R. Actually it is a lot like a second R & R, and the same places are available—Bangkok, Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore, and Sydney. So many getting to go must be related to things being really slow. Their descriptions of R & R and leave were unbelievable at first, but they have all come back with the same story. One of the guys described his experience as typical. His first night in Bangkok he bought a bargirl for the week. Picked her out of a crowd of competitors and agreed upon a price with her “boss.” She did everything for him for the whole week: changed his money, bargained for him in the shops, took him sightseeing, went to eat with him, went dancing and partying and drinking, and anything else he wanted. Of course, she spent the nights with him too. Very friendly town if you have $500 or so to get in the game.

July 21
Monday

There was no time off for church Sunday. We worked all day again on the perimeter. We are busting our tails off to get it finished. Lieutenant said intelligence expects us to be hit soon. That’s worrisome; however, given the quality of “intelligence” over here, it's probably wrong. I would worry just as much if they said they were not expecting us to get hit soon.

Sergeant Thomas came up to me today and asked if I would like go to the Combat Leadership Course down in Bien Hoa starting Sunday. A few in our company have been to it. They said it was easy, fun, you learn a lot, and that you are in line to make E-5 (sergeant) in short order afterward. I weighed all the alternatives. It was against my vow to ever volunteer for anything again in the Army, but it sounded good, and we are supposed to go back to the field Monday. My next squad leader could be a jerk. I would feel safer giving orders to an imbecile instead of taking orders from an imbecile. Also, sergeants get over like crazy, so I decided to go for it.

July 22
Tuesday

The bastards won’t cut us any slack. Formation after lunch is supposed to be at 1 o’clock. We all gulp down our dinner in ten minutes and run down to the barracks to try to get about fifteen minutes to rest and read letters. So today, seeing us all back, that creep Fletcher called formation at quarter till one. If I was as popular as he is right now, I’d not turn my back on any of these guys.
Our squad did luck out on this afternoon’s detail. We built a sandbag wall for Task Force South. That’s where the tank company is based on the west side of the LZ. We got several breaks—one at their NCO Club—and got off at 4.

After almost four months in country, I finally found out where we are. From the Currahee newspaper I learned that Phan Thiet is in Binh Thuan (pronounced “ben twon”) province. Now, where the hell is Binh Thuan province?

We had LARC duty last night. That’s an amphibious patrol boat that operates every night sort of like the Coast Guard, looking for suspicious activity. LARC stands for Lighter, Amphibious Resupply Cargo, whatever that means. It went out at 11 p.m. and got back about 2 a.m. We got to spend the rest of the night sleeping in the barracks. LARC is really good duty. We just cruised up and down the beach, a few miles each way. The only action was running off an occasional sampan that had accidentally strayed into the off limits area.

Earlier that night the usual gang—Fyffe, Wellman, Bouchard, Troendle, Burks, and I—had gone to the EM Club to party and shoot pool. After it closed, we went to the NCO Club for more beer. I was feeling pretty good by 11. As soon as we got on the boat, I curled up over the engine compartment where it was warm and went to sleep. The roll and pitch of the boat made it feel like I was sleeping in a cradle.

Today Burks and I shared PX guard. We were on from noon to 2, 6 to 8, and have three more hours tonight. He and I talked a long time about things I haven’t discussed with anyone in months. Politics, religion, history, world affairs. Few others care to go beyond the big three—girls, cars, and the stinking Army. It was even fun to disagree about something different for a change. He was in favor of the ABM project and believed it was only for defensive purposes. I was against it, thinking that defensive weapons can easily become offensive. Burks is from Woodbury, Tennessee, and spent two years at Tennessee Tech. He went before the E-5 board yesterday and came out a sergeant, the rank he deserved long ago. He only has a month left in country. He is funny, but kind of hard to get to know. Like a lot of people I’ve met in Vietnam, Burks has a sad story. He was engaged to a girl when he got drafted. Four months after he went to ’Nam, she married his best friend back home. He said he hasn’t told many people, and he laughed it off when he told me. But I could tell he’s still carrying the scars. It’s a sad thing. Not a week goes by it seems without someone in the platoon getting a Dear John letter from a wife or girl friend.

from the Currahee, August 22, 1969
SGT John C. Meacham looks up from a well deserved moment of refreshment at the LZ Betty LSA open mess and receives word that a Cobra gunship is down on the beach in the Southern Strike Zone. In five minutes he has his team (and the word is used advisedly) of Lighter, Amphibious Resupply Cargo (LARC) operators on the way down the beach toward the fallen bird. The LARC team is accustomed to reacting to momentary alerts. They were ready.

The amphibious vessel operators stationed at LZ Betty are exemplary of the men in the rear who push themselves to the limit to kept the men in the field supplied. SGT. Meacham, LARC NCOIC, tells the story of a similar, though much larger, detachment he was assigned to in Thailand. They worked 24 hours straight and slept only while they waited, cozied up to the ship, for their turn to unload. The men here keep similar hours.

The six men of the Phan Thiet detachment of the 97th Trans Co. (Heavy Boat) based in Cam Ranh Bay work a 24 hour day with little time off for sleep. Governed by the changing times of the tide, they tend the mooring of supply ships and haul hoses ashore for the tankers. When their ships are free during the day, the operators pull necessary maintenance on the LARCs, under the guidance of marine mechanic SP4 Gleason A. Eubank. This is their job, and they do it well. Their extracurricular activities, however, are almost as varied and time consuming as their duties. SP4 Ken Walter says, “We’re here to do a job. We do the extra work because it has to be done.”

The LARCs are indispensable to our perimeter defense. For two hours nightly, they take out a six man infantry squad to patrol the waters off Betty and the nearby Southern Free Strike Zone. They chase sampans which, by accident or design, stray inside the 1000 meter off limits zone and investigate reported enemy activity. “I get a kick out of the infantry guys,” says SP4 Robert Marinello. “They groove on being out at sea, and we sure appreciate them when we hit the action.” When alerts occur at times when the infantry are not available, they gather a few volunteers and are off.

These men do their work well, and without fanfare. They will kid SP4 Michael Russo about being in Vietnam long enough to become a citizen or challenge SP4 David Garroute to a “drag” race; but their own protests aside, they are a serious hard working bunch who make a welcome addition to the LZ Betty support forces. We’re happy to have them aboard!
July 24
Thursday

We spent the day rebuilding a bunker. Betty was mortared last night, and bunker 13 took a direct hit. The barrage lasted for less than a minute, maybe a dozen rounds fell inside the perimeter. We were on bunker 20 and didn’t know until an hour later that one got hit. Three guys got airlifted to Tan Son Nhut. Heard this morning that one of them died. We didn’t know any of them.

We were back on bunker 20 for guard duty tonight. Watched an incredibly beautiful sunset. The sky is always a treat.
July 26
Saturday

We got a new platoon leader yesterday. That makes the fourth since April. These guys don’t seem to pull much time on line. It’s a general consensus that Fletcher was the worst of the lot. Walter Gibson is a little bitty second lieutenant from Atlanta, Georgia. He knows how to make a good first impression; he let us off for dinner at 11. Maybe he won’t be the slave driver Fletcher was.

Went on ambush last night. At least that’s what Sergeant Thomas called it. We were inside the wire.

Had today off to get ready for CLC. I had to get a haircut first. There is only one kind of GI haircut--very short. It’s called a white wall. They gave me three new uniforms to take, but no new boots. I really need some boots. My friend England from Tennessee is the company mail clerk. He helped out and kept me company. England was wounded in February during Tet. He came back from the hospital and got a job in the rear about the time I came in country. He used to be Troendle’s best buddy and is a real nice guy.
Tonight I’m relaxing in the EM Club. I really feel for the rest of the platoon--it has been raining like mad for the last two hours. I feel for me too. Before I came to the club, I went over to the NCO hooch to ask someone to wake me in the morning to catch my plane. They offered me a beer and invited me to join their poker game. Between Sergeant Higgins and Hicks, I lost a quick $20. Lucky I got out with my shirt. This means I won’t be getting into any trouble in Bien Hoa.

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**Combat Leadership School**

July 28  
Monday  
Bien Hoa

This place is great so far. A fellow I know in Bravo Company, Richard Burgess from Minnesota, is going to the class too. We came down together from LZ Betty. He and I got to Bien Hoa around mid morning yesterday and roamed around all over the base, as we didn’t have to check in at Camp Ray until 6 p.m. Then we had orientation, watched a movie, had a beer at their NCO Club and went to bed.

Training started at 5:30 this morning with a lesson on how to lead an exercise class (PT or physical training), followed by sessions on leadership, air support, intelligence and communications. This afternoon we went out to the First Air Cavalry’s jump tower for some more practical training. We got a quick course in rappelling and within an hour we had walked down the side of a forty foot tower. It was a blast. Next we made a “slack jump.” It sounded impossible, but it worked. Holding twenty feet of slack rope, you jump off the platform, and stop falling when you reach the limit of the slack, which you are holding behind your back. The friction of the rope wrapped halfway around your waist stops you. You descend by squeezing and unsqueezing the rope held behind your back. That’s not very clear. Anyway, the twenty feet of free fall was a major thrill/scare.

The food is great. They have my favorite cereal, Frosted Flakes, which I haven’t seen since home. I ate three bowls after my bacon and eggs. The accommodations are also first class. Our bunks have mattresses! and mosquito netting! There is a day room with a pool table, shelves of books, and a nice stereo. We haven’t had any harassment--what a switch. We are being treated like NCOs. I think I’m going to like being an NCO.
August 2
Saturday

The week has been spent mostly in the classroom. We learned how to call in artillery, Medivacs, gunships, and Phantoms. We also learned about 90-mm recoil-less rifles, demolitions, map reading, scout dogs, and emergency tracheotomies. They taught us how to cross a stream by making a raft out of ponchos to float our weapons, rucksacks, and all our gear. We tried it and it worked. Swimming felt great too. Next we made a rope bridge and crossed a stream (i.e., the swimming pool) going hand over hand.

The last two days have been devoted to patrols and ambush. Our biggest assignment involved writing a patrol order and presenting it to the class. I met a fellow named Colwell the first day. He and I got to be good friends at the school, and we ended up competing for top student. Whoever did the best job on the patrol
order was to be named honor graduate, which carried with it an automatic promotion to E-5. I worked my tail off and gave an hour and a half presentation that I thought was good. Unfortunately, Colwell gave a two and a half hour presentation right before me and his was better. He got the promotion I wanted, but he deserved to win.

Just to add a dramatic touch, while I was giving my talk the base siren went off, the one that warns of incoming mortars and rockets and such. We had been warned, so when we heard the wail everybody rolled out of their seats and under the desks, including me. I literally dived off the stage with the microphone still around my neck. Great reaction time! It was a false alarm of course.

For our graduation celebration they threw us a big cookout. I had a huge T-bone steak, a chocolate sundae, and too many beers.

August 4
Monday

Burgess and I managed to miss the flight back to Phan Thiet two days running. Have been haunting the gift shops and the EM Club. We went to a steam bath, the first time for both of us. They are very popular. I got steamed, showered and massaged. It was very refreshing. They offered many more options, but I only got the basics.

The food at the 101st Airborne mess hall is pretty bad, so I have been shelling out a lot of money for food. I spent the afternoon in the EM Club drinking cool boys with Troendle. He is passing through on his way to seven day leave in Singapore. Many in our company have gotten one because things have been so slow.

August 5
Tuesday

It's Tuesday and I'm still in Bien Hoa waiting on the 2:30 p.m. flight. We're so tired of sitting around that we almost wish we were back at Phan Thiet. This morning I started reading Washington, D.C. by Gore Vidal, but after about an hour my mind kept drifting away to a pearl pin I saw at the gift shop yesterday. I went and got it and mailed it home. After lunch the trucks hauled us and our gear from Camp Ray over to the terminal again. The rain has started and is now coming down hard. It is blowing sideways, coming in the open sides of the terminal.

The plane finally came, a graceful little Caribou. Out on the runway, we had to wait for several Phantoms and Thunderchiefs to take off. They brag about this being the second busiest airport in the world. Right before us a Braniff flight
took off for home, back to the world. That’s a strange expression, but one you hear fifty times a day. It is the way everyone refers to home. “When I get back to the world. . . . ”

I remember the first time I left this airport on my way to the 101st. I was apprehensive and pretty emotional. On the whole I have been lucky, considering that I am in the Army, in Vietnam, in a combat infantry division, in a line company, and airborne to boot. The thought is not quite as intimidating today as it was when I first saw the big billboard at the entrance to Fort Polk: “Birthplace of Combat Infantrymen for Vietnam.” That sign gave me cold chills. At the moment I feel no particular dread about going back to the boonies tomorrow.

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**Our Kit Carson Scout**

August 7  
Thursday  
LZ Betty, Phan Thiet

The platoon is in the field. I have tonight off—no guard duty. Last night wasn’t bad; we had six guys out on bunker 30. I was on detail today in the supply room. It was easy work—and nice to be out of the heat. Sergeant Thomas came up to me after lunch and said they were thinking of sending me back to Bien Hoa to escort a Chieu Hoi scout through P-Training. Chieu Hoi is an open arms program for surrendering Viet Cong. The military drops leaflets all over Vietnam offering amnesty to those who surrender. There is another program for teaching them to be scouts for U.S. units. The ARVN don’t like to have anything to do with them. In the 101st they send the Chieu Hoi through P-Training and they come out as Kit Carson Scouts. The first sergeant said we need to have somebody work with our scout from the start and establish some kind of communication with him, so we can work together in the field. I tried to tell him nonchalantly that I was interested, without actually getting on my knees and begging. That would give me another three or four weeks in the rear!
August 8
Friday
I’m sitting on bunker 30 looking out at the ocean and dreaming of home. The view is marvelous. We are about two hundred feet up and about three hundred feet from the water. A steep cliff drops down to sea level, then there are about fifty feet of beach to the ocean. Right in front of the bunker is a deep, wide gorge. It’s lighted up at night so we can see anything that might be moving.

No mail today. I worked in the supply room again all day. Easy! When I wasn’t busy, I was able to read about the Kennedy scandal in the latest two editions of *Newsweek*. The whole Chappaquidick affair has an unpleasant odor to it. The supply sergeant told me to come back tomorrow to help him work on his inventory. This sounds like my kind of job. Beats digging and lifting all day, or that other thing we do in the field.

August 9
Saturday
Today we worked at the motor pool sanding on a deuce-and-a-half. I must confess I loafed a considerable part of the time. This afternoon we went to a USO show. Jug of Punch was the name of the group, three guys and a girl, who sang folk songs, mostly Irish tunes. It was fair to middlin’.

No mail or packages for three days. Don’t expect to get any now before I leave. I will probably be going to Bien Hoa tomorrow with the scout if I can get all my stuff together in time. Should be about a two week break.
It will be pretty boring going through the same P-Training again. But it could be a lot worse. I could be in the field. At the 101st CLC the guys from up north told us about spending months at a time in the jungle and mountains and places like the A Shau Valley. When they cleaned their weapons at night, they were scraping out burnt powder, not rust like we do. All of them had lost buddies. They said they got about two days in the rear a month. I’ve now been in country 123 days and only 32 of them have been in the field. Our company hasn’t even had a casualty yet from unfriendly fire.

The lights in the bunkhouse went off at 7:30 tonight, so we headed off to the EM Club. About that time it started to rain. We stayed at the club splurging on food and beer, while it poured outside. I knew I was going to have to borrow money in the morning to get my clothes out of the laundry.

Word came at 9:30 that I had a package down at the hooch, so we all hurried back. Marilyn had packed it full of goodies. We sat down and feasted for about an hour. I ate Rice Krispie treat candy until I had a stomach ache. Packed my rucksack with cupcakes, popcorn, canned fruit, and candy. Troendle begged me for the cheese and crackers. The cheese had turned a kind of odd color and I was afraid to eat it. If it doesn’t make him sick, maybe I’ll try it next time.

Got invited to a late night party at the E-5 hooch. Had two beers and left when the poker game started. They must have been dreaming about my easy money again, but I didn’t have any left. I was wet when I crawled under the covers. It reminded me of Fort Bragg, when we would come in some nights cold and wet. We would take a hot shower, then run and get in the bunk to try to warm up. It seems like years since Fort Bragg.

August 11
Monday
Bien Hoa

Yesterday I adopted my scout. His name is Kieu Van Ngoi (pronounced “coo-ee van noo-ee”). He began following me everywhere I go. That is supposed to last till we get back to Betty. Then he will go to the field with us and be a scout for our company. I borrowed some money to get my clothes out of the laundry, then Ngoi and I took a shower and went to church. I don’t know what he thought of it; he doesn’t speak any English. None, nada. Well, he can say, “number one GI” and “number ten GI.” I read some, while Ngoi napped in the shade. After dinner we loafed in the motor pool. I didn’t get picked for guard duty, but before we could slip off, the first shirt sent us to the supply room to work. Ngoi and I got back to hooch about 11 p.m. and got into the cupcakes before going to bed.
This morning we almost missed the plane to Bien Hoa. Ngoi had to go to the bathroom and when we got to the airstrip, our plane--a Caribou--was already there with the engines running.

I am back in Bien Hoa now, at the same place I started four months ago. Except this time I’m the old guy with fifty new guys. They are all just in country and have a million questions, all along the same lines. “What’s it like. . . . ?” They are loud and rowdy, trying to hide their fear and confusion. I remember. I will never forget the 22d Replacement Center in Cam Ranh Bay when my orders came down for the 101st Airborne Division. I figured they could just go ahead and put me in a body bag. My heart was pounding so hard, it was a real possibility.

Aside from the Marines, the 101st was the only unit I ever heard about before, i.e. in WWII: North Africa, Italy, Normandy. Fighting on the beaches of France, the forests of Belgium. Parachuting from gliders behind enemy lines at night! Oh lord, pinch me. What would a bunch of gung-ho paratroopers want with somebody like me? Like us--they got Holder too. The Army would have been a lot harder to take without Holder. We went to P-Training together at Bien Hoa, then got split up. I went east to Phan Thiet with the 506th, he went up north with the 327th. The lucky dog ended up in the A Shau Valley; he might just as well have been in the Marines. I think about him all the time.

Ngoi and I spent the day sitting around waiting or waiting in lines. I read about 250 pages in my book, Vanished by Fletcher Knoebel--most of it while standing in stupid lines. I reserve the right to complain about the work, the food, the rain, and the boredom--even though I know I could have a lot worse to complain about.

August 12
Tuesday

Last night we got to sleep on beds with mattresses again. About 2 o’clock in the morning the warning siren went off. My ear was pre-tuned to that frequency from CLC, so I was the first one on the floor. I pulled the mattress down over me, then the others came tumbling to the floor. Well, we never heard any incoming. After a few minutes I didn’t hear anything at all. The next morning I woke up stiff as a board, still on the floor with my mattress over me. Everybody thought it was pretty funny but me. It was the first time I saw Ngoi laugh, or even look like he was enjoying himself. He seemed a little looser after that.

We made the trip out to the training area twice today. Two times out and two times back, three miles each way in the broiling sun. We had to come back in at midday to change out our MPC, something they do regularly to try to keep the
military currency off the black market. From what I see, the process doesn’t work very well. I’ve got blisters on my feet for the first time in Vietnam.

The classes were a review of a review for me--grenades, claymores, M-16s, machine guns, etc. I was bored to death or, more accurately, bored to sleep. Luckily, we got out of guard duty tonight. The first sergeant remembered me and let me off.

Ngoi did okay today. Hard to tell what is really getting through to him. We sat in classes all day and listened to people lecturing in English and, of course, Ngoi doesn’t understand a word they are saying. He listened anyway and seemed interested. He likes having a weapon. With a steel pot and an M-16, he looks like a ten year old playing army. He is about a foot shorter than me. Because of our language barrier, it is a little hard to get to know him. I communicate by hand and arm movements and facial expressions, plus a few words, usually “No, no!” I don’t know where he’s from or how old he is. I’d guess he is somewhere between eighteen and thirty-five years old. He is friendly, independent, unafraid, broke and, I am afraid, not exceptionally bright. The thing he enjoys most, besides eating, is fooling with equipment. Anything from taking a machine gun apart to using his P-38 can opener. He shows despairingly little interest in learning English, and I have been unable to remember more than five Vietnamese words at a time. The last four days we are supposed to have an interpreter with us. That will be nice. I look for it to work out, one way or another.

Tomorrow promises to be a tiring, muddy day. We have to crawl the assault course and it looks like it’s going to rain all night.

August 16
Saturday

It has been a very busy week. I just graduated from P-Training for the second time. My scout graduated too, but I don’t think he knows it. Ngoi sat quietly, though a bit restlessly, through every single class this week without understanding a word. It was kind of a farce without an interpreter. I’ve worked really hard with him, but it is difficult to tell if anything has sunk in. I know the English lessons haven’t. The only word he knows is “airboy” (airborne). Every time we see an officer, he salutes and says, “Airboy” then smiles at me like he’s a regular trooper.

Last night we had to go on a simulated ambush patrol in the rain and went for a long spell laying in the mud. I lost my Instamatic camera, which made me pretty mad. This morning, after I put on my last pair of clean fatigues, we had thirty minutes of PT, then went on a one mile run. I was pretty grungy by the time
we got to breakfast.  About mid morning we went to the barber shop.  After my shearing, I reached in my shirt pocket for my shaving mirror, to check out if I had any hair left, and the mirror was gone.  My hand came out with ink all over it; my ballpoint pen had leaked all over my pocket.  Amazingly, I’m still in pretty good spirits.

August 17
Sunday
  Ngoi and I are guarding the baggage.  Everybody else is at church.  There was a big beer and steak party last night, and today we all leave.  Ngoi and I are going back because there isn’t a Kit Carson Scout class starting any time soon.  My travel orders are good till the 24th, but I’m so bored I couldn’t stand another week here, and I want my mail.  Just hope the company is still in the rear.

August 18
Monday
  We didn’t get to leave yesterday after all.  In the afternoon, I ran into a couple of guys from the platoon who are here to DEROS.  It’s surprising how many times you hear this made up word.  It figures into about half our conversations.  “What’s your DEROS?” “When I DEROS. . . .” etc.  Most of the “old guys” in the platoon are leaving this month.  It’s going to be hard with them gone.

  We had some beers and I learned from McClain that the platoon was back in the field.  Resupply day is the 19th.  So if we go back late on the 19th, we won’t have to go out till the next resupply, on the 24th.  Maybe they’ll be back in by then.

  Saw a good film last night about Catherine the Great, with Peter O’Toole and Jeanne Moreau, but of course have no idea what the name of the movie was.  [Great Catherine]  Lord knows what Ngoi thought of it.

August 19
Tuesday
LZ Betty
  Got back to Betty yesterday, and we had ambush last night.  We were off this morning, so I read more on the Civil War--this book is really great.  I got to take a shower--finally--and put on clean clothes and went to Gino’s, the little Vietnamese shop up the hill.  I bought two Bic pens, a battery for my penlight, and a photograph album.  I put all my pictures in the album and mailed it home.  This
afternoon we strung wire again and it rained on my fresh, starched fatigues. Am sitting on bunker 12 listening to the day sounds dying out and night sounds coming to life.

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**Prettting Up For The IG**

August 20

Wednesday

This was a red “letter” day of sorts--I got ten letters from home! What a treat. Have not had time to read them all yet. Our new work schedule doesn’t have many holes. We are out from 7:30 till noon, 1 to 5, then from 6 till dark. The whole battalion is getting ready for a big IG inspection. That looks pretty silly in translation: Inspector General inspection. This morning Ngoi and I got our rucks ready to go to the field. Resupply day is Saturday. At 2 this afternoon he left on a three day pass to Phan Thiet to visit his family. I filled sandbags until 4:15, ate supper from my Care package, and got ready for guard duty. We were late getting out to bunker 14. I will try to read a few of the letters in the fading light.

August 22

Friday

Yesterday we filled sandbags from 7:30 in the morning until almost dark. Then I had to work another two and a half hours in the supply room getting resupply ready to send out tomorrow. I won’t be going out with them, since I have to be here when Ngoi returns. I’m ready for the field though; they’re killing me back here.

We sandbagged this morning but had it a little easier in the afternoon. Sergeant Higgins, who has been my squad leader for the last two months and who has also been in the rear for the last two months, knows a thing or two about avoiding work. He split us up into small details so it will be harder for the first sergeant to check up on us. He put me in charge of my own crew building blast walls. These are walls in front of the doorways to the hooches to keep shrapnel out if a mortar round lands nearby. There were three of us, two new guys and myself. You are a lot more forgiving when you are working for yourself. When we broke for lunch, we were too hot to eat. This IG business is madness.

They gave us the night off to rest and then said we could rest on the bunkers instead. Right now, until it gets dark, we're resting at the Echo Company Club. This big inspection is supposed to be on August 26. I hope I’m not around here much longer.
Sitting here with the new guys makes me feel old. I am actually the oldest guy in the platoon now. Fyffe and I have the most time in country. Troendle, Bouchard, McClain, Hahn and Burks have all left. Taylor left awhile before. His wife was sick back in Kentucky. Since he only had about six more months to go, he probably won’t be back. Frank Martin left too--$40 poorer. I felt like a jerk talking him out of his cash in exchange for my check, but he was so happy to be going I don’t believe he gave it a thought. He put in for a six month extension, then wondered what in the hell he had done it for. He caught a lucky break when they turned him down. Those were all my best friends and I hated to see them go. There are plenty of new guys to make friends with--six have gone out to the platoon this week and six more got here yesterday.

Delta Company has been in the field since August 3. About two weeks ago, Big Tom got hit by a sniper--a clean wound in his side. They said everybody was goofing off, not pulling security. He got back this afternoon from the hospital at Nha Trang and won’t be going back to the field for awhile. He is getting the job of mail clerk and jeep driver that England had. England went home while I was at CLC; he looked me up in Bien Hoa to say goodbye.

On August 17 the company came in from the mountains for one day and the next day left on another mission. They are now providing security for a team of engineers in Le Hong Phong Forest. I have not been to this area but it is supposed to be a dry, desolate brushwood forest, very thick and hard to operate in. The engineers are in the process of clearing it. Guess that means they are leveling the forest. Sounds like easy work for the company though. I have been in country 136 days and have only been in the field 35 days. Pretty soon guys will be rubbing me for good luck.

It’s getting dark. I better get back to the bunker.

August 23
Saturday
Another day gone. This one spent painting. All the barracks are getting a coat of gray paint for the IG. I worked one of those roller brushes all day and probably will again tomorrow. The first sergeant is sending us to the field bright and early Monday to make sure we are out of the way when the inspection begins. No one is reluctant to go. It’s getting to be a real pain in the rear.

We did get off tonight. Didn’t quit working until dark though. We went to the club and played pool until it closed. I was so tired I didn’t make a good shot all night.
August 24
Sunday

The first sergeant had us up at 6:30 this morning and gave us only a half an hour to get to work. We painted until 4:30. Then back to bunker 14, my home away from home.

From Currahee, August 22, 1969

Perimeter Strength Emphasized

In the weeks since LTC James Bowers assumed command of the 3/506th Inf., one of the obvious improvements is the strengthening of the LZ Betty perimeter defenses. After some unfortunate experiences at 101st fire bases up north, all installations should take a closer look at their defensive arrangements. With this in mind LTC Bowers, and members of his staff, directed an exhaustive inspection of existing defenses and studied plans for future improvements. The result of these efforts has been an extensive revamping of the original defenses, construction of new
positions, and changes in the command and reaction systems, all geared for increased security and efficiency.

The physical change has been effected through the efforts of virtually all units on the LZ; although the brunt of the job has fallen to the rifle companies of the 3/506 (notably Delta and Alpha Companies) and even the Engineers. Even though the job of perimeter defense is never done, there has been excellent progress made so far. The Currahees are especially grateful for the help received from Bravo Company, 116th Engineers, who have been landscaping the beach.

The perimeter reconstruction program has meant long hours of hard work for many people, but the reward is our own security.

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**In The Forest With The Rome Plows**

August 26
Tuesday
Le Hong Phong Forest

Finally made it back to the field yesterday. It was great to see everybody again--those still here anyway. We are in with an engineering company and a tank platoon--three tanks and seven armored personnel carriers, or APCs. The engineers are clearing out wide paths in the forest leaving pie shaped wedges of trees. They are making a giant wagon wheel on the ground. The point of it is to take the area away from the VC. The clearing removes some of their cover, makes them come into the open to cross the area, and makes it easier for our troops to operate in the forest. The uncleared area is almost impenetrable for us, although it barely seems to slow down the VC. Of course, they don’t carry a house trailer on their back like we do.
(From the left) Hustad, 1st Sergeant Decker, Angelo, Hicks and me
The company has not had any contact on this mission, which would be an easy one if not for our gung-ho CO. Four new guys, Ngoi and I came out with resupply at 10 o’clock. It took until 2 to get everything unloaded, distributed and packed into rucks. About that time someone spotted a herd of cattle and a bunch of Vietnamese to our front. The 3d platoon was securing the firebase, so our platoon was sent to check it out. We got a ride on two APCs. What a way to go! Sure beats walking. The mission, however, was screwed up from the start. By the time we got out there, all we could find was an old man and a little girl. We got orders to tie them up and blindfold them. A chopper soon came to pick them up. Meanwhile all their cows wandered off. We spent the rest of the afternoon looking for the other Vietnamese but never found any.

Today we moved the firebase about 7 kilometers. Riding the APCs made it painless. The engineers have twelve bulldozers--they call them “Rome plows”--to do the clearing. The path they are clearing now will be 400 meters wide and 64 kilometer long. They are carving us out a new firebase right now. It will be in a triangle, about 200 meters to the side, with one berm all the way around, and a second parallel berm on the inside. When we form our NDP there will be a tank at
Each APC has a 50-calibre machine gun, and this afternoon two 105-mm artillery pieces are coming out. We may be safer out here at night than we were at Betty.
One of our tanks

These engineers really have it made. (It seems like everybody in Vietnam has it made but us.) Of course, they don’t know what humping is, since they ride everywhere. They get all kinds of extra goodies, like ice, beer, Cokes, all the water they need for showers, etc. They do need showers. When these guys come in from “plowing” all day, they really need a bath. They have their own mess hall on wheels that follows them. Their cook fixes two meals a day--breakfast and supper--and the food is delicious. Last night for supper we had corned beef, mashed potatoes, green beans, fruit cocktail, and iced tea. This morning for breakfast we had bacon, scrambled eggs, pancakes, milk, and coffee. Unbelievable. So far I like hanging around with the engineers.

Today, two platoons were assigned to recon patrols. 2d platoon got to stay back to secure the firebase, except for one squad that went out with the tanks and APCs to secure the engineers. I was glad to stay at the firebase. Finally got back to my squad. I got a warm welcome from the few guys left who know me. Hard to believe that Fyffe, Wellman and I are now “old timers.” 1st Sgt. Thomas actually treated me like a person or, hopefully, like a soon to be noncom. He has put me in for promotion to Spec 4 and will put me in charge of a squad when one of the current squad leaders leave.

Ngoi is adjusting pretty fast. He loves the food, though I think he will eat just about anything. He sucks down C-rations like a vacuum cleaner. He is a little shy around the guys, but I probably couldn’t do as well if I were thrown in with a bunch of Vietnamese strangers. He still doesn’t speak a word of English.
We have the ARVN with us again on this mission. I’m told that they usually don’t do a damned thing, unless you count begging and stealing food. They hang around the firebase all day, never go out on patrol, and don’t pull guard or ambush at night. It’s hard to figure what their purpose is. Delta Company puts two platoons out on ambush every night, while one platoon secures the firebase perimeter. We’re on the perimeter tonight. It had been a long time since I had put out my claymore and trip flare. Now I’m on first guard, about 8:30, and writing by the light of a full moon.

August 28
Thursday

Our platoon is set up in a perimeter in the middle of the jungle. It is really thick and overgrown. The past two days we have been on a sort of combined recon and security mission for the dozers. Tomorrow we should be securing the firebase again. Although I’m looking forward to it, they will probably dream up some piddling details to ruin our day. It hasn’t been so hard in the jungle, but we move a lot and don’t have any free time. Guess I was getting used to free time. Yesterday we got up at 6:00 and had a hot breakfast before riding APCs out to where the dozers were to start clearing. The platoon moved back into the woods about 200 meters, then sent out a cloverleaf patrol. After the patrol came back in, we waited
until the dozers cleared off a long section, then we came out and got back on the tracks and moved to a new site. This cycle, which took from 30 minutes to 2 hours, went on all day. Each time, they cleared an area about 1,000 meters long and about 400 meters wide. A couple of times the dozers came crashing through the trees toward our position, and we had to make a run for it to get out of their way.

All in all not a bad day. We got to ride to work, and the walking we did was minus rucksacks--we left them at the firebase. I carried a pistol belt with three canteens and my dinner, 100 rounds of machine gun ammo, my M-79 and a bag of shells, and a towel. The real load was in my pants pockets. They are stuffed with cigarettes, candy, writing paper, paperback books, camera, and more. Yesterday we knocked off at 2:30, since it was resupply day. I’m so spoiled by the engineers’ food that I could hardly eat my C’s. Just took a few bites at dinner and threw the rest away. It was too hot today to eat much anyway.
Tonight we're on ambush. We left before supper and we won't be back in until after breakfast, so we'll miss two hot meals. We stopped at a pre-ambush site and ate supper. Stayed there until dusk, then went on for about another 20 minutes to the ambush site. We put our claymores and flares out in the dark and then dug our holes. Pulling platoon size ambush is pretty nice. There were five in each hole. We only had to do two hours of guard duty. Our perimeter is so big, I don’t see how they call this an ambush. It’s just like our regular NDP.

The new second lieutenant is not getting rave reviews in the field. He is such a nice guy, but he doesn’t seem to know how to operate in the bush and is not catching on too fast. He is really friendly and wants to be helpful, but no one is taking any advice from him yet. While I was gone, the company was operating in the mountains. Lieutenant Gibson passed out twice while humping up a hill. To lighten his load, he threw out his C-rations and emptied his canteens. He kept plenty of chocolate bars though.

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**Recon With The LRP**

**August 30**
**Saturday**

With a recon team on a mountain

Yesterday I got a new temporary assignment. At first I thought I would have a heart attack, but now I think I’ve gone to heaven. Lieutenant Gibson came over to see me when we got in from ambush. He said he wanted to put me in charge of a “killer team” in the mountains nearby and told me to go see the CO. Captain Rothman said I am to take two men and an RTO by chopper over to a mountain where an eight man recon team was setting up. The team will stay on the hill during the day, and at dusk they go down to the plains below to ambush a well that the VC were thought to be using at night. My team will stay on the hill and act as a radio relay, since on the low ground their radios cannot transmit over the mountain. The CO built it up like it was a real important mission and I would have a lot of responsibility. He let me pick who to take, so I asked for Angelo and Woods plus Hustad on the radio. Three old guys with one new one, Glen Woods. Woods is from a little town in central California. He is a great guy, very friendly, and tries hard to do whatever is asked of him. It didn’t take long to figure out I liked him. Of course, I already liked Angelo (funny) and Hustad (easy going). We loaded our rucks, then got together some extra ammo, claymores, flares, sandbags, and a starlight scope for night viewing. I was praying we wouldn’t have to carry all that stuff very far.
A chopper took us to the mountain, about 8 kilometers from the firebase. The recon team met us at the LZ and helped us up to their place on the hill. They picked a site with great security—a rocky shelf surrounded by boulders and thick vegetation, mostly bamboo, that would prevent being surprised by the VC. We would hear them coming a mile off unless they took our trail, where we had an M-60 and the rest of our guns guarding the approach. If they probed us, we could call in pre-registered artillery or gunships.

These recon guys are not the gung-ho killers I had pictured in my mind. They were out of Echo Company from LZ Betty. Their club was the place we frequented when we could get away from the bunkers for a few minutes before guard. Their company has three platoons, two mortar platoons stationed at Betty and one recon platoon that usually stayed in the field. The recon platoon is broken into three 8 to 10 man teams. The team we are with is big on laying around their hooches playing cards all day. On our first night up here, they left before dark to go on ambush. They had been set up for about 10 minutes when it started to sprinkle and they called to say they were coming in. No VC would be coming to the well in the rain. Right, and we won’t get wet if we are back in our hooches.

Our platoon got to go back to Betty yesterday, and we missed that. But I have finally learned that going back to Betty ain’t all it’s cracked up to be. It’s like when you’re in the field, you can’t wait to get back to the rear. Then as soon as you get to the rear, you can’t wait to get back to the field. Yesterday we spent the whole day playing rummy, reading, writing letters, eating, and answering the radio. Now that’s getting over. This afternoon 2d platoon went back to the field. They’re humping, we’re taking it easy. The CO said we would be here from 2 days to 2 weeks, however long the recon team stays out of radio contact behind this hill.

The latest rumor is weather related. Supposedly, every fifth year the monsoon season is short and not too wet. We have still only had a few sprinkling rains, and they say that by this time last year, it was coming in torrents every afternoon from about 3 till 4 p.m. and again from about 7 p.m. till 1 or 2 a.m.

August 31
Sunday

Still in the field, still taking it easy, and getting grubby as hell. I wash my face and hands and brush my teeth in the morning, and air my feet in the afternoon—a rare treat. Others have given up on trying to stay clean. They’re playing poker right now. I should be in the game; they aren’t very good. We’re monitoring one radio and listening to music on another. Baseball comes on at 1 o’clock. There is
a game broadcast every Sunday and Monday afternoons. Hope it’s the Redlegs. It is a challenge to follow them. I’m trying to get caught up on letter writing. Have written to Vivion Holder (101st Airborne in I Corps), Jeff Gatewood (in the Army in Germany), Peter Sinclair (in grad school at UK), Mom and Dad, and Marilyn.

Besides monitoring the PRC-25, our only chore is to make sure no VC stumble into our position. My hooch faces down the trail, so I’m looking out most of the day. We have tripwire set up in several places along the trail. It’s unlikely they would come up here anyhow; it’s not on the way to anywhere. Nothing seems to be going on at the well either, so our days here are probably numbered.

(From the left) Hustad, Angelo, me, Woods

September 2
Tuesday

These recon guys are certainly not the fanatics we expected. They take a relaxed almost serene approach to their mission. They’ve only gone on ambush twice since we’ve been with them. The first time they came in when it started to sprinkle. The other time, last night, they came in about 8 p.m. They heard on the radio that resupply was to be at 8 this morning and that we would have to hump 2 kilometers and cut an LZ before that time. We did get up at 7 a.m. as planned, but lollled around eating breakfast and drinking coffee too long. When the chopper came on the radio telling us to pop smoke, we all took off flying down the trail. As soon as we came out of the brush onto the plain and threw a smoke grenade, the chopper landed and we took resupply there. The pilots didn’t seem to mind we weren’t in the spot we were supposed to be.

The “arrow” (resupply) was a big one. Got new socks and towels, four Cokes, cigarettes, candy, extra C-rations, plus a big steak for our “hot meal.” While it wasn’t hot, or even warm, it was delicious. We also got paid and got to donate a urine sample. They have taken to monitoring us to make sure we aren’t skipping our malaria pills, or so they say. I had an argument with the pay officer over how much leave I was charged for before coming to Vietnam. I will probably lose.

After resupply we moved to a new position lower down. I think the recon guys didn’t want to pack all the new stuff up the hill. The poker game is in its third day, and I’m still holding out. Even though the recon guys are now friends, I’m not sure I trust them not to hustle us. Only Angelo has played with them, and he lost.

We’re dusty and dirty and getting grubbier by the hour. But hey, we’re not complaining. I was afraid the recon team would be called back to Betty. Now it looks like we’ll be here at least another four days. It started to rain about 5:30, coming down in a steady drizzle. I lowered the sides on my hooch, and it's right cozy inside. If this keeps up, I guess recon will skip ambush again tonight.

September 3
Wednesday

Rain is now the order of the day. It rained on and off all last night, then this morning from 8 till 12, and started again about 4 p.m. Always just a drizzle so far. After it stopped around noon, we moved back up the hill to our old position. When we first got back, I was shocked to see that we had been living in such a dump, but we soon got used to it again. Everybody even put their hooch back up in the same spot.
One reason we came back is because this position only requires one hole to secure it, since there is only one approach. At the other position it took two holes. In all we have 13 men to pull guard from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. That’s only 45 minutes a night. Unbelievable. The guys in our platoon have a term for it: “getting over to the max.” They are out in the field now and pulling guard in 2½ hour stretches if they’re lucky.

Just finished supper. Spaghetti Lurp, crackers, three fruitcake bars, and a can of peaches. I have hot chocolate warming in a canteen cup.

Time seems somewhat confused lately. Each day drags on like it will never end, but August flew by. In some ways it seems like I’ve already been in Vietnam for a lifetime, but in another way it’s hard to believe it’s already been 5 months. The other 7 months of my sentence, I’d rather not think about.

September 4
Thursday

We’ve been on the hill all day, sitting on our butts. The poker game is in the fifth day, and Angelo, now seasoned, is $65 ahead. His current plan, if his winnings hold up, is to buy us a slide projector for the barracks back at Betty and throw the platoon a big drunk with the rest. I have read three books since we’ve been up here-- *Long Remember*, a Civil War love story, sad; *Mickey Mantle*, autobiography; and *The Supreme Court in American History*, better than it sounds. Have started two others. Spent the rest of the time working crossword puzzles, teaching Glen to play rummy, cleaning my gear, drying out my stuff, eating, and listening to the radio.

Heard today on AFVN that Ho Chi Minh died. Seems like that ought to signal the end of something, like the war maybe?

For some reason, I have been a lot hungrier than usual, and since food is more plentiful, I have been doing a lot of eating. My sweet tooth has taken charge and I’ve stuffed myself with caramels, coconut bars, fruitcake bars, cocoa, and anything else I can get my hands on. Have also been experimenting with “recipes.” I took most of the meat out of a chicken and rice Lurp, added twice the called for water and made “chicken and rice soup.” Delicious. Variety of any kind is welcome. When I first tried Lurps I liked them all, but some of them now I can’t force myself to take a bite--pork and scalloped potatoes, for example.

It’s been mostly sunny today but not too hot. Rained about 30 minutes this afternoon. Recon thinks they will be going in tomorrow or the next day. I’m ready. It is true what they say about mail being the biggest morale booster for men oversees. I can feel mine ebbing away. No letters since we came to the hill. Our
morale is now resting in a little red plastic bag about 4 miles from here. For some reason that only the Army knows, they are holding our mail at the firebase.

September 7
Sunday

Our prayers have been answered. Well, one of them anyway. We got mail! It finally came out with resupply--nine days’ worth. I got an armload of letters and a Care package from Carolyn and Jim, mostly food. I’ve already eaten three chocolate cupcakes, a package of peanut butter Nabs, three rolls of mints, Jiffy Pop popcorn, a can of potato sticks, a can of peaches, and a can of pears. I gave half of it away and still have cans of applesauce and pineapple left.
My rucksack was so stuffed I almost couldn’t lift it. We moved to a new position after resupply, luckily only about 300 meters. Because I have time on my hands and paper to waste, I decided to “inventory” my ruck:

**Inside the rucksack:** 6 cans of fruit, plus the 2 cans from the Care package, 2 cans of Coke, 6 cans of crackers and cheese, 1 can of peanut butter, 1 pecan cake roll, 1 pound cake (the latter four items are C-rations), 3 empty Lurp bags refilled with candy (mints, fruitcake bars, and 8 or 9 chocolate bars), several packs of Marlboro, packages of sugar, salt, pepper, cocoa, matches, plastic spoons, and several packages of all purpose tissue paper.

**Hanging from the rucksack:** 8 one quart canteens of water, bayonet knife and sheath, 2 smoke grenades, 4 Lurps, and an entrenching tool.

**Tied to the rucksack:** 2 accessory bags which hold compass, razor and blades, insect repellent, bottle of malaria pills, mirror, 1 pair of clean socks, lighter fluid, steel comb, equipment for cleaning my M-79 (rags, brushes, oil, etc.), heat tabs for cooking, can of foot powder, sunglasses, and an Instamatic camera.

**Strapped to the frame under the rucksack:** bedroll (consisting of poncho, poncho liner, jungle sweater, and assorted cords for making hooches--mostly old shoelaces), claymore bag (with claymore mine, 100 feet of wire and blasting cap, firing device, and 2 trip flares with wire), 2 parachute flares and 4 railroad flares wrapped up in plastic bags, and my waterproof ammo can (holding 3 packs of Winstons, a picture album, 2 flashcubes, extra film, bottle of Merthiolate, tube of bacitracin-neomycin, roll of scotch tape, package of envelops, address stickers,
Strapped on top of the rucksack: gas mask and case, baseball cap, pistol belt with 4 canteen covers (holding 1 canteen cup, 2 more canteens of water, 3 grenades, 6 shotgun rounds for my M-79), and a cloth bag with 25 rounds of M-79 ammo.

It’s obvious I’ve changed a lot of the old rules I had for carrying things. Having gotten stronger and more nimble with the pack, I now find more “necessities” must be included, especially in the food line. Hustad, our RTO (radio man), got some chocolate shake-a-pudding today and let me taste it. I suspect it will be a necessity in the near future.

Contents aside, the ruck itself is light. It is made of tubular aluminum with padded nylon straps. To keep the aluminum frame from crushing our spines, we take the cardboard from a box of C-rations, double it over, and wedge it around the curved frame. While cardboard may not sound very comfortable either, it is better than having a metal bar digging into your back.

When we're humping I use a towel to cushion the shoulder straps of the ruck. I top off my ensemble with an M-79, matching shoulder bag with 25 more rounds of ammo, and a camouflaged steel pot.

Our laying around may not last much longer. One recon team is supposed to go in tomorrow and these guys think they’ll be extracted the next day. I’m still hoping they won’t, but I know this is too good to last. I can count the times I’ve been out of the hooch today. Once to pass out the malaria pills and twice to go to the bathroom. We are close enough together we can talk and hear the radio without moving, so we don’t. We are really getting indolent. I’m surprised my self winding watch hasn’t stopped.

I haven’t seen Ngoi for a long time. I sorta doubt he’s learned much English yet or even tried. And I’m fast forgetting the Vietnamese I knew.
September 9

Tuesday

The recon team is going in tomorrow for sure--maybe. Don’t know what they will do with us. We are scheduled for resupply and hoping we will go in with the team to pick ours up. I hope the CO doesn’t tell us to hump back over to the firebase and take resupply with them. They moved the firebase again and it’s only about 2 kilometers from us. What we really hope doesn’t happen is getting resupplied here and having to hump over there with a full ruck. Surely they wouldn’t do that.

We’re getting lazier all the time. I have trouble going to sleep at night because I’ve been getting too much during the day. When I wake up in the morning at 6:00, I open my eyes and look around, then roll over and sleep on till about 7:30. We’re still pulling 45 minutes of guard a night. The recon team has totally given up on the ambushes. The Army hasn’t been like this since I’ve been in. When we had a night off back at Betty, we still had to get up early the next morning. And even back in the States we had to do an hour on fire guard. I haven’t slept until 7:30 since I was drafted. We can sleep till noon if we feel like it--some do.

For dinner I had chicken noodle soup, crackers, fruit cocktail, and a roll of lifesavers. Pretty good. I’ve been eating good, just not getting much variety. We
heard yesterday that Senator Dirksen died. My dad was a contributor of his. When I was drafted, he wrote Dirksen to see if he could get me an assignment where I could use my chemistry degree. Dirksen wrote back saying that the Army needed all the college men they could get in the infantry.

I called the CO and told him we were going in to Betty tomorrow to pick up our arrow (resupply). He just said, “Roger that.” Hope my R & R orders will be waiting. Must have worked a hundred crossword puzzles. I’m beginning to see checkered blocks in my field of vision. Today I wrote Carolyn and Jim, Mom and Dad, and my cousin Robbie--am about written out.

Dug into my ammo can for a snack and tried a Space Stick. The first bite tastes a little like a Tootsie Roll; after that it’s not so hot. I’m dreaming of some stuff that would be really good: brownies, Rice Krispie treats, Cheez-Its, chocolate pudding, Hostess cupcakes, macaroons. . . . Oooh, gotta stop that.

Ended the evening with a late supper. Spaghetti, crackers, applesauce, hot cocoa. Was good but I am getting kinda tired of chicken soup and spaghetti. Am reading Roots of Heaven. It was beginning to look like rain, so I adjusted my hooch and put all my stuff inside.

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**Rejoining The Company**

September 12

Friday

Le Hong Phong firebase

I have been too busy to write the last few days. Wednesday morning at 7:20 on the dot there were four helicopters circling overhead. Two gunships kept buzzing over for about five minutes checking the area out, then the two slicks came in and we hopped on for the trip back. As always, it was a beautiful ride. I do like to fly on these choppers.

The minute we got back to the company we headed for showers, clean clothes and haircuts. The latter was not by choice. After getting resupply and packing our rucks, the first sergeant said we would go out on Friday. Then he changed his mind to Wednesday afternoon, then Thursday morning, etc. We spent the afternoon on detail, filling ammo boxes with sand. It was hot and we shed our shirts. The guys in the rear have some good tans but mine is almost gone from sitting on my duff in the mountains. We got off about 4 o’clock when it started raining. I ate like a pig at the mess hall and it actually tasted good--been away from it so long, I guess.

We didn’t have guard duty Wednesday night or Thursday night. I spent much of my free time studying the stereo magazines Arthur Ellis loaned me.
Arthur is a good friend of mine in the platoon. He's a really bright guy but has flunked out of two colleges. Wasn't interested in what they were teaching. He reads constantly, all kinds of subjects, so we talk a lot about books and music. He joined Delta Company in December and finally made Spec 4 in September. Why others consider him a different bird you could tell from his R & R plans. He is in Sidney, Australia now. He planned to go to a museum of aborigine art and to their library. He doesn’t have a girl and won’t in Sidney. Booze and women are as far as most guys ever get with their R & R planning. Arthur is a serious stereophile and is saving for a system in the $2,000 range. I’m considering something in the $300 range myself. He usually keeps to himself, but I like him and enjoy talking to him. Not really close to him though; he doesn’t get too close to anybody.

Thursday we worked on the sand boxes again and quit when the rains came at 3:30. Went to a movie last night with Sophia Loren and Omar Sharif--don’t know the name of it, of course. [More Than A Miracle] The film kept breaking and they would fix it and start it again. The longest uninterrupted sequence we saw was maybe five minutes. We stayed 45 minutes, which was way too long. Went back to my stereo magazines and catalogs.

This morning we were out on the chopper pad by 8 o’clock and back at the firebase by 10:30. The platoon is out with the dozers. We are sitting around the company area listening to the radio and waiting for them to get back. I popped one of those little pans of popcorn over some C-4 and drank the Ale8 I’ve been saving. Ahhhhh.

1st Sgt. Lopez is out with us today. Everywhere he goes it’s the same story--do this, do that, bitch, bitch, bitch. I try to avoid being around him. Hope he goes in tomorrow.

At noon today we all gathered around the radio for the baseball scores. There is a fellow Reds fan here. Steve Hicks is from Cincinnati. He went to “instant NCO” school--used to be my squad leader and is now our platoon sergeant. Sergeant Thomas is gone, DEROS’d while I was away. The Reds won yesterday and are in first place. Looks like it will be a close race for the pennant. There is somebody for just about every team. Everybody is talking up the start of football season.

After dinner I went over and talked to the 105-mm artillery crew for about an hour. Most of the 105’s I’ve seen are field pieces, but this one is track mounted and looks like a tank with an oversized gun barrel. The guys are real friendly; they took me inside and gave me a tour. They explained about all the different types of rounds, charges and fuses they use and how they adjust (aim) the gun.
It's raining now and I'm trying to stay dry under a big piece of plastic I scavenged yesterday and brought out with me. The platoon should be back any time now. I get to go out on ambush tonight.

September 13
Saturday

It was good to see everybody when 2d platoon came in yesterday afternoon. They gave me a good razzing about getting over. Don’t think they will let me forget it for awhile. We have a lot of new guys with us. Ortega, Martin, Wright, Joe Sakowitz, Durden, Ross, Effelburg, Smith, Hall, and Preza.

We left on ambush about 6:15, set up our NDP, built a low hooch and pulled about two hours of guard. All was quiet. We got back in time this morning for leftovers. The company sent out a “hot breakfast” consisting of cold pancakes, cold eggs and warm milk. It still beats C-rations.

The mission is the same--providing security for the engineers who are turning Le Hong Phong Forest into the Le Hong Phong Desert. The engineers and their Rome plows came over from Phan Rang on the coast, just north of Phan Thiet. There is an APC company that came all the way from Pleiku, up near the Cambodian border. They have four troops, a troop being the equivalent of our platoon. D troop is at Betty securing the 1st Cav; C troop works out of Phan Thiet providing road security; A and B troops are stationed in Phan Rang and take turns coming over to support us. So the APCs secure the plows and the infantry secures the APCs by patrolling in the woods and hills where they can’t go. Our daytime operations require us to carry only weapon, ammo, food and water. The APCs give us a ride whenever they can. Naturally, we have no idea how much longer we will be out, but we are guessing two or three more weeks. They are promising two days off at Betty when we go in, with an all day party down on the beach.

Sergeant Decker, our new first sergeant, asked me today if I still wanted to go on R & R in October. Good God yes, man! He said I’m writing every time he sees me. I’m on a bunker now--OP duty--waiting for it to get dark and cool off.

I started a book called Flowers for Algernon; it’s one that was made into the movie called Charley. Very good so far. I was appointed team leader today and went back to 2d squad. No one in the squad now was here before August. Wellman moved over to 1st squad. And Fyffe is in Nha Trang with malaria. I haven’t seen him for two and a half months!

Sergeant Hicks assigned me to the 2d squad towork with Sergeant Knoy, their new squad leader. He's an instant NCO like Hicks. Mel Knoy is a little different from the usual GI, meaning he doesn’t talk girls, cars and sports all day,
thank goodness. He has a nice camera, and I’ve been asking him a lot of questions about photography, which he is really into.

It’s 5:00 p.m. now and starting to rain. Getting pretty regular.

September 14
Sunday

It’s almost 6 o’clock and we haven’t had supper yet; it’s getting dark now around 7. We moved the firebase today and it was an all day job. Not hard work, just long. We had to tear down the old bunkers and clean up the area. The ride to this place took four hours at about 2 mph. Then we built new bunkers. I’ll be out on the berm tonight.

Last night I had to take three men out 200 meters for an LP (listening post). We listened real good too. The water dripping off the leaves made it sound like there was movement around us all night. Scary.

September 15
Monday

We were on recon and security today--walking and sitting. This seems like a hell of an occupation for a twenty-four year old married man with a college education and an extreme dislike of violence. I’ve told myself a million times, “somebody has to do it, might as well be me.” If I wasn’t over here, some other poor schmuck would be.

Today is very hot. We stopped around noon and set up our perimeter in the shade. That would be, uh, security. Rumor is we go in tomorrow for two days of fun. The CO says we’ll party all day; we will have all the beer we can drink along with lobster or some other treat. I’ll believe it when I see it.

We’re back at the firebase now, waiting on a hot meal. There are some good things about being around these engineers and APCs. They definitely live better than infantry, but then who doesn’t? Our squad has ambush tonight. It doesn’t look like rain. I wouldn’t bet on it though.

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**Southern Free Strike**

September 18
Thursday
LZ Betty

We are moving out tomorrow. We aren’t going back to what is left of our great hardwood forest, Le Hong Phong, but rather to the Southern Free Strike, a
dry, brushy forest south of LZ Betty. “Free strike” means that the area has been declared off limits to Vietnamese and anyone found there is a military target.

We’ve been going like crazy since 5:30 trying to get ready. We were all packed to go to the mountains until they changed our mission. Had to pack more meals, canteens, ammo, etc.

We are in the barracks and it's nearly midnight. I managed to find two hours to fill out forms for graduate school and apply for a fellowship. Now they are ready to turn out the lights.

September 19
Friday

Got word this morning that I finally made Spec 4. Now at 10:30, we are all standing and sitting around the orderly room waiting for the trucks to take us and our gear to the pad.

We heard about Nixon’s speech last night. The only part that we cared about was that all twelve month tours are being cut to eleven months. That means my 200 days left in country just dropped to 170. That will mean a March 8 DEROS for me, if the Army doesn’t find a way to screw me out of it.

September 21
Sunday
Southern Free Strike

This is the first chance I’ve had to write for awhile. We’ve had two days of rain. Started on the chopper ride coming out and finally quit yesterday around noon. I learned something new. I have always hated to get my head wet in the rain, even when the rest of my clothes are wet. Well I found the cure. Get your feet good and soaked and squishy and you don’t give a damn about your head anymore. We got off the chopper in a rice paddy, knee deep in water, and our feet haven’t dried out yet.

I will be glad when this operation is over. It’s scary out here. It feels like Charlie is around this time. We are on a search and destroy mission. That usually means search-and-avoid if we are given a choice, but this time the CO is along with us. Captain Rothman reminds me a lot of my uncle, Jerry O’Daniel. Rothman is about to get off line and must want to get some body count really bad before he goes. He is so cocksure of himself it bothers you. He likes me and always speaks to me, calls me “Enochs.” Shared a snort of his Old Fitzgerald with me last night. He’s pretty human for a West Pointer, Airborne Ranger and lifer—but he’s way too gung-ho.
We came out with a five day ruck and are supposed to be extracted Wednesday morning. The “Free Strike” has changed a little since the last time we were here; it was the dry season then. It’s not dry any more. In fact it is lush. The trees have filled out, the undergrowth has come up, and the “overgrowth” has grown down. It's a jungle.

September 22
Monday
It is a pretty morning. The sky is clear and the birds are singing all over the woods. I felt safe last night. The rain wasn’t dripping and worrying us to death every ten seconds, and we had a good position in the event Charlie came our way. We are still in our holes and probably won’t get fed and packed up until around 8 o’clock.

September 23
Tuesday
For a change we are sitting still. Haven’t moved out of our ambush site yet. We got word we’re not going in tomorrow, staying out another day and a half-until they change their mind again. Only going to get food and water on resupply. No cold pack, books, cigarettes, candy or clean clothes. Worst of all, no mail.

One of our new guys, Swonger, is needing resupply. Yesterday while we were humping, a limb snagged on a trip flare hanging out of his ruck. The limb pulled the lever and the flare went off, setting his ruck on fire. We put it out before it got to his ammo, but now he’s got a useless ruck, and we are carrying most of his stuff.

Our fire team got lost while we were out on a cloverleaf patrol. I was beginning to think we were never going to find the platoon. We were worn out when we finally got in. The experience fueled one of my biggest fears—getting separated from my unit and being left out here alone.

September 24
Wednesday
Last night I ate supper in the dark in the rain, then after I pulled guard from 7:30 till 9:15, I climbed into my bedroll, which was soaking wet and covered with sand. Sounds like a scene from hell. But my supper tasted good and I slept well. Think I could sleep on needles now, in fact, I think I have. I woke up this morning
still soaked but feeling great. There are a couple of hundred thousand other guys going through the same routine. I probably have it a lot better than many of them.

We are still waiting on resupply. The sun is shining and everything is dry again--bedroll, clothes, towel, shoes and socks. We are supposed to go in Friday morning. So they say.

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**Timeout: Hawaii**

September 26
Friday
LZ Betty

Yesterday was my birthday, and our operation in the Southern Free Strike came to an end. We are back at Betty getting resupplied before going back to the mountains. My birthday present of sorts came through: orders for R & R. I leave on October 6. This afternoon I talked to Marilyn on the MARS phone. [Military Affiliated Radio Station, operated by the 43d Signal Battalion in Kontum] I got confused trying to listen and use radio protocol to talk and then got tongue tied, but it was still great. Hey, I’m going to Hawaii!

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September 26, 2d platoon went back to the mountains east of Le Hong Phong forest. September 30, I returned to Betty to prepare for R & R. October 4, flew to Bien Hoa, bus to Tan Son Nhut AFB. October 6, left for Hawaii to meet Marilyn. October 12, left Hawaii for Tan Son Nhut. October 14, bus to Bien Hoa.

October 15
Wednesday
Bien Hoa

I’m laying out at the swimming pool, alternating between reading and cooling off in the water. Supposed to go back to Betty tomorrow. Our plane
landed back at Tan Son Nhut about 3 p.m. Monday. I had supper, a couple of beers at the EM Club and went to bed.

Yesterday a bus took us to Bien Hoa. We had a fascinating ride through the outskirts of Saigon and Bien Hoa City. Got here about mid afternoon. I saw a movie with Darrin McGavin and Nick Adams--on Mars! [Mission Mars] Not too good.

I started reading Isaac Bashevis Singer’s *The Magician of Lublin*, which I bought at Fort deRussy. The book is very good, but it has been hard to concentrate. My mind keeps drifting back to Honolulu.

October 16
Thursday
This morning while I sat in the barracks waiting on the bus to the airfield, I was thinking about and worrying if I will ever finish my degree in biochemistry. I had doubts while in graduate school, but after a two year leave it will take a heck of a comeback. Given my poor grasp of Vietnamese, it's hard to imagine me passing a competency exam in German and French. Seems very unfriendly--not to mention useless--for them to insist on two foreign languages for a Ph.D. Plus, I think I’ve already forgotten all the chemistry, physics and math I knew, not to mention literature, art, economics, etc. It is strictly lowest common denominator in the infantry, and there are precious few opportunities to discuss anything besides cars, sports and how much we hate the Army.

I was at the airport this afternoon waiting for the plane to Phan Thiet. It landed about 4:00 p.m. and they pulled it in for maintenance, so I won’t make it back today. Breaks my heart.

Came back to the barracks on the bus, ate supper, then went to the EM Club and had three beers while reading *LBJ, A View by a Foreign Observer*, which was supposed to have been a bestseller in 1967.

When I got back to the barracks there were a couple of black guys terrorizing everyone, pushing people around, cursing and demanding money. I just picked up my bag and went next door. All the blacks I have met in Vietnam have been very friendly. Don’t know what was the matter with these two.

October 17
Friday
The Phan Thiet bound crew is back at the airport waiting. The *Stars and Stripes* carried a story about the third and fourth games of the World Series, and we got to listen to highlights of game five on the radio. Those Amazing Mets did
it. Surprised everybody in the country, well, at least everybody in our group. I read about the “War Moratorium.” Thank goodness it was peaceful. Probably won’t have any positive impact on Mr. Nixon. I imagine getting Hanoi’s warm approval kinda put the kiss of death on the whole thing.

I ate dinner in the Air Force mess. It was nice, clean, quiet, uncrowded and had great food--more like a restaurant than a military mess hall. Everything the Air Force does seems to be higher class than the Army. Of course, we have it all over the Marines. If I get drafted again, I’m going to ask for the Air Force.

I read the other day that the Army is going to stop serving beef stew next year--too expensive--and more hamburger. The beef stew is one foul concoction I won’t miss, but it’s hard to imagine how they could serve more hamburger.

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**Bad Times In Song Mao**

October 19
Sunday
Mountains north of Phan Thiet

Well I’m back in the field. Friday we flew to Betty, got there about 4 p.m. After supper I starting working on my ruck. It was a challenge to find a place to put all my stuff, with only my overpacked ruck and overflowing foot locker to choose from.

Saturday was resupply day. We had police call at 7:30 that morning and then they left us alone. I started reading *The Way to Inner Peace* by Bishop Fulton Sheen. At 10:00 I took my clothes to the laundry, got a Coke, had my watch put back on the old watch band, then went “window shopping” with the PACEX catalog. The neatest thing I saw was a set of Thailand bronzeware, 29 pieces in a teakwood chest for $19. It was really different looking and comes with or without a fancy (Erewan) design on the handle.

I went to the pad after dinner and the chopper came at 2 o’clock. We flew around for a long time looking for 2d platoon. The navigator’s dead reckoning must have died. Finally I saw yellow smoke out in the middle of the forest with mountains all around. I said to myself, “We ain’t goin’ down there,” but we did. The LZ they had chopped was so lousy we had to hover about 20 to 25 feet above the ground. The ground was covered with stumps and limbs about two feet deep. The door gunner started throwing the resupply out of the chopper, and I helped him while wondering, *What are they going to do with me? Guess they’ll have to take me back in. Great!* After the supplies were off, the crew chief motioned for me to throw my rucksack out. Over the roar of the chopper, I hollered, “What!?” Nooooo.” He picked it up and threw it out, then pointed to me and then to the
ground. I told him he must be crazy, I couldn’t jump into that mess. The pilot looked at me and gave me a thumb down, so I figured they really meant it. I climbed down and stood on the skid, lowered myself until I hung from it by my hands and then dropped the last ten feet onto a nasty pile of branches. I was very shaky when I stood up but not hurt. It was good to see everybody again, especially Lieutenant Gibson and they guys in my squad. They all gave me a hard time about getting over.

We are in a place they call “the bowl,” so named for the mountains that enclose it on all sides. [This area northwest of Phan Thiet was also called the “Toilet Bowl” and thought to be the headquarters for Viet Cong activity in Binh Thuan Province.] These are some really steep mountains, the sides of the hills look slick as glass. But they tell me they haven’t been climbing much, mostly traveling through valleys and over saddles. The operation has been an easy one so far. They haven't had any contact.

That afternoon we moved about 100 meters to our NDP. We had a five man position; I pulled one hour guard twice. We got up at 6:30, moved out at 8:00 and humped till 11:00. Not bad so far.

The first thing you do when you get to the field is start talking about when you might be going back to the rear. We are supposed to go in in eight days--maybe. The platoon only had two days in the rear while I was gone, so we are still due for a stand down.

The afternoon was pretty easy and we got to our new NDP by 6. I had some goodies from home for supper--tomato soup and Tootsie Rolls. A funny thing about the food though. I realize I have come to like C-rations--except for one or two--and actually look forward to meals. It certainly is a surprise to me. Most of them nearly gagged me the first time I tried them. Ham and lima beans still do.

October 22
Wednesday

Last night was the first night it rained on us--from about 3 to 5 a.m. Didn’t get too wet though. I went out on OP after breakfast. Read Dr. Spock’s *Baby and Child Care* when I could get a few minutes.

At resupply I got the new pack I ordered. My old one was falling apart. It is a pack board and has a cushion pad so that your back never touches metal. Is really comfortable and better balanced. Makes humping a lot easier.

Not much going on today. Just had to go out on a couple of cloverleaf patrols.
October 23
Thursday

Tuesday morning we went down the hill from our NDP to clear an LZ for resupply. While we were cutting, Rattlesnake came on the radio and said we were getting CA’d to a new location in less than an hour. We started working like crazy to finish the LZ in time, then when we finished, word came that we wouldn’t get CA’d until Wednesday after resupply. So we spent the night at the same NDP. On Wednesday after resupply, they delayed our mission until today, so we got to spend a third night at the NDP. That saved a lot of work.

Today we humped fifteen minutes to the LZ, and the choppers flew us about 10 kilometers to a place called Song Mao. We got here about 10 o’clock and humped to a nearby hilltop to set up a perimeter. We are supposed to guard this hill for a few days. They sent half of the platoon off somewhere else, we don’t know where they are. In spare moments I read Your Food and Your Health ("startling scientific discoveries about diet, digestion, and nutrition, and how you can benefit from them") by Richard Carter and Stewart Wolf. This day marks one year in the Army for me.

October 24
Friday

We went out on a cloverleaf for about one and a half hours. Got the football scores and the unfortunate news of a tie game between Notre Dame and Southern Cal. It is a chore keeping up with national news back home. Stars and Stripes is blatantly censored by what they choose to include and omit. We do get Time and a few other magazines though.

I found a pretty nice radio for Daddy in my battered PACEX catalog. I hope to get it for him for Christmas. It is an AC-DC transistor in a black leather case with FM and two short wave bands. It’s made by National Panasonic and sells for $30. Will order one as soon as I get that much in hand.

This afternoon we moved off the hill and went down to a nice, cool, shady bamboo grove beside a creek. I went to fill my canteen and found some striking little fishes. Reminded me of some of the tropical fish I used to keep in my aquarium, but not quite the same. They were about one to two inches long with bright rosy fins and tail and a blue stripe starting about the midsection and running to the end of the tail. Amazingly pretty considering the dirty little stream they were in. I remember that bettas, or Siamese fighting fish, are supposed to be native to the rice paddies of southeast Asia.
I don’t know how we always manage to finish working on our position about thirty seconds before it gets dark. We follow the same routine every night: dig our hole, fill a few sandbags, put out claymores, trip flares and wires. Then when you finally get to lie down to enjoy the cool dusk, bam! it’s pitch black and there is nothing to do but get in your bedroll.

**October 26**

**Sunday**

We are sitting on an LZ waiting for resupply. Heard Kentucky lost to Georgia last night, 30 to 0. It’s overcast today, hope it lasts.

* * *

*The entry for October 28 is taken from a letter I wrote but never sent.*

**October 28**

**Tuesday**

Song Mao is about 40 kilometers northeast of Phan Thiet. We are working about 5 to 10 kilometers west of The Bowl. Last night we set up our NDP across a trail on the side of a hill. This morning my squad took the first cloverleaf to the top of the hill, with Sgt. Mel Knoy in charge. We found four recently used and well built hooches and one bunker. We checked them out and returned to the NDP.

Lt. Walter Gibson then brought the platoon up and we made the hilltop our patrol base. Spec 4 Roger Leonnig from Oregon, took the 3d squad on a cloverleaf and Sergeant “Big Tom” Thompson, our acting platoon sergeant, went along. They set up a perimeter about 1 kilometer out from our PB.

PFC Wright of 3d squad spotted a VC and opened up with his M-60, but only got off two rounds before his gun jammed. They chased him a little ways and returned without finding anything. Wright thought he had hit him. They called Canyon 26, the call sign for Lieutenant Gibson. He took the 1st squad, with Spec 4 Bill Hustad in charge, down to help out 3d squad.

About the time they joined up, Rattlesnake--Lt. Col. James Bowers--came overhead in his chopper. He ordered Lieutenant Gibson to chase the VC. My squad was still at the PB providing security. I was out about 50 meters on OP--alone. Williams, our M-60 gunner, came out and told me to keep my eyes open, that the platoon had just had three wounded. After my 45 minute pull on OP was over, I returned to the patrol base. Sergeant Knoy called me in to the CP. Spec 4 Angelo Camelliri was on the radio.
Sergeant Knoy then told me that the patrol had been trailing the VC and Rattlesnake was pushing them on. They walked into an ambush set up across the trail in front of them. The enemy opened up with a light machine gun and automatic weapons. Before anyone could react, they had three wounded. Leonnig was walking point and got hit once in the side. Hustad was walking slack and got hit once in the arm, in the side and above the knee cap. Lieutenant Gibson, who was walking fifth in formation, got hit at least once in the belly. The exit wound was extremely large and much of his lower organs were blown away. He lived for about ten minutes. Hustad and Leonnig are doing okay, but Hustad is still in very critical condition.
It was almost two hours before Medivac could get Hustad and Leonnig out using the jungle extractor. Medivac couldn’t take Lieutenant Gibson. Big Tom had to bring him about 1½ kilometers back to the PB. They used ponchos and bamboo poles to carry him, and it took them nearly two hours to get him in. Meanwhile, we took the personal items and ammo out of the three rucks and burned the rest.

Rattlesnake found an LZ and an aerial recon chopper to extract Lieutenant Gibson’s body. Parts of 2d and 3d squad made up the patrol to move him there. It was hard going and slow moving. When we got there we had to cut down enough trees to make a place for the chopper to land. Minutes after we finished the chopper came in and picked up the body--and Canyon 26 took his last ride back to Betty.

We returned to the PB and got on the horn to Captain Rothman. Big Tom was told to take over as acting platoon leader. Knoy to be acting platoon sergeant, Terry Wellman to take over 1st squad and I was put in charge of 2d squad. We were to rendezvous with the CO and the 1st platoon back at the LZ where we had CA’d in five days ago. It was a crude LZ made by an air strike.

We moved the 3 kilometers in about one and a half hours and married up with 1st platoon about 5 p.m. They moved us into the perimeter and we set up for the night. Captain Rothman called a meeting with Big Tom, Knoy, Wellman and me. The CO emphasized the importance of killing the VC the first time, so you wouldn’t have to go after them and risk getting ambushed. He told us that tomorrow we will have a stand down in the field.

October 29
Wednesday

We got resupply today, a day early. They sent out extra C-rations, so I got to stock up on fruit. We got paid too. With my dependent allotment, my Spec 4 pay comes to just over $400 a month. I get $15, they send the rest home. I’m in the dough now, eh?

The CO is calling this a stand down in the field. They didn’t have enough choppers to get us all back to Betty. We went swimming in a bomb crater. It was about twenty feet across and eight feet deep and not too dirty. The water was cold but felt great.

Yesterday Captain Rothman made me squad leader for 2d squad. He also sent my name in for promotion to E-5. Sergeant Knoy went to 3d squad. I will miss talking to him all the time; he really is funny.
The weather is improving. It only rains about twice a week now and not hard. Some of the streams are already dry. They say this is an untypical monsoon. We’ve only had a couple of really bad electrical storms, probably fewer than at home.

I read that Nixon has changed our policy in Vietnam from “maximum pressure” to “protective reaction.” Who are we kidding?

We are supposed to get CA’d in the morning at 11:00. Word is we will be on an easier mission—-in flatland. I hope so. Walking is murder in these mountains, and even sitting is a challenge not to slide down the hill. Lord, I’ve seen enough of these mountains of Song Mao.

Had to quit writing before dark as about 500 mosquitoes were buzzing around my head. I lathered on the insect repellent and retreated under my bedroll.

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**Last Mission in Binh Thuan Province**

October 30
Thursday

We finally got CA’d this afternoon, about 10 kilometers north. According to Captain Rothman, this is an area where the rangers discovered many bunkers and hooches and killed 36 NVA. They also hit numerous hot LZs and found several booby traps, including one 500-pound bomb. They lost a slick and a Cobra in the operation. I find I like getting first hand information from the CO. Just don’t like what I hear.

November 1
Saturday

The CO is with our platoon and while this operation is not a hard one right now, it would be a lot better without him. Just like in the Southern Free Strike, we don’t start digging in until about dark and have to feel our way through fixing supper and getting our bed laid out. At least we’re not doing it in the rain this time.

We’ve been sitting most of this morning. Our squad is securing the rucks while the CO is out with 1st and 3d squad on a long cloverleaf.

Today must be All Saints Day. I’ve almost forgotten what it’s like to be in a church and hear Mass. The last time was in July, I think. We did have Mass in the field the day before I came in to go on R & R.

We were supposed to go in last resupply day. I heard they had our company party set up and everything ready. The CO said he couldn’t get any choppers for us. I’ll give 100 to 1 he volunteered us to stay out longer. He must
be bucking for major. We should be going in when he gets off line, which should be less than two weeks. And Rattlesnakes goes home this month!

Peter Sinclair wrote me that he will be in Sidney on January 7. In hopes that I can join him there, I plan to put in for seven day leave. Every once in awhile somebody lucks out and gets approved for leave after they’ve already had their R & R.

I started rereading *Men Who Made A New Physics*, teaching myself about the theory of light, relativity and quantum mechanics for the umpteenth time--trying to keep my brain from slowly turning to mush. I have forgotten much but find I understand it better than before.

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**The Battalion Moves North: FB Chukuk**

November 5
Wednesday
Firebase Chukuk, east of Ban Me Thuot

A lot has happened in the last few days. On November 1, the cloverleaf stayed out all day; they didn’t get back until around 4:30. We ate supper, went down to a creek to fill our canteens, then moved to an NDP. Sunday morning we humped some but sat all afternoon. About 5 p.m. word came we were getting CA’d back to Betty. Everybody was going wild thinking our stand down was here at last. I didn’t let it get to me; I didn’t think they would CA us at night just to get back to the rear. We went out and chopped an LZ until dark and sure enough the choppers called saying they weren’t coming until morning. We moved back into the wood line and set up for the night.

On Monday we were out stomping through the wet grass before breakfast and the choppers soon came to pick us up. As always they looked great. It was my 18th chopper ride--supposedly, I need seven more flights for an Air Medal. Turns out what they were in such a hurry about was getting us resupplied and back out on another operation. We were packed by 10 o’clock and away by 4. The whole 3-506th battalion is on the move.

By Tuesday Delta Company was setting up at a firebase called Chukuk. We are about 30 kilometers east of Ban Me Thuot, near a major road that leads over the mountains to the coast. [Highway 21 goes from Ban Me Thuot to Nha Trang. Ban Me Thuot is in Darlac Province, about 200 kilometers due north of Phan Thiet and about 50 kilometers from the Cambodian border.] The rest of the battalion is in the area nearby. We are in the central highlands and most of the people living around us are Montagnards, who are very poor even by Vietnamese standards.
This operation should be fantastic duty. Always suspecting the worst, I can’t believe it will last long. All think we will be here a month or longer, even the CO. I’d gladly stay here till I DEROS. American troops have spent the last few years in the swamps and jungles while the ARVN troops for the most part guard the villages and firebases. Well, they say that the ARVN were kicked off this firebase and sent out to the boonies, and we are taking their place.

Tuesday morning we listened to Nixon’s speech. Everybody was mad he didn’t declare a pull out or at least a cease fire. He did talk about Vietnamization of the war—the idea that the Vietnamese should fight the war themselves and that we should support them, rather than the other way around like it has been so far. Amazing that this new policy affected us the same day it was announced.

We are far north of Phan Thiet. This place is nothing but a chopped off hill with a bunch of 105’s on it. We spent yesterday improving our positions on the perimeter. We have a hooch, about 10 feet by 12 feet that the ARVN left, for sleeping and right in front of it we dug a fighting position. The ARVN didn’t have one. The hooch is no mansion but better than anything a boonie rat ever dreamed of. It’s got a dirt floor and we policed up a lot of wood and boxes to make beds, shelves, make-shift chairs and tables, etc. We will ask supply for air mattresses, lanterns and possibly showers—dare to dream. We are even hoping for a trip to the nearby village once a week to swim, go to the PX, bring back food, and more. All this is tentative of course.
The Hootch
2d squad is near full strength. Sergeant Knoy is our squad leader; Angelo Camelliri and I are team leaders. Others in the squad are Fyffe, Swonger, Epps, Woods, Moore, Williams and Kepner. We only have two holes to pull guard, so we are getting plenty of sleep.

The wind blows a lot up on this hill, and it is cool at night. It rains a mist on and off all the time. Today we worked again on improving and cleaning up our positions. Nobody has bugged us, so we haven’t been hurting ourselves with overwork. Whenever the rain starts, we dash inside and dig out a magazine and some candy, or make a cup of cocoa and talk until it passes.

I talk to Knoy every night. He has a good camera and is teaching me about photography. I had no idea it was so complicated. Am looking forward to getting a camera that will take me past the Instamatic phase. We also talk chemistry, which he is interested in, so I’m teaching him too.

We got Marlboro in the flip-top box at resupply. The first time I’ve seen them in ’Nam. That’s what I always smoked back in the world. Funny how much that little box reminds me of home.
November 6
Thursday

We haven’t done much all day, mostly worked on the hooch patching up leaks and making the place comfortable. I put up a wide shelf for various junk, such as my shaving gear, M-16 cleaning equipment, malaria pills, canteen cup, etc. Then drove nails in the logs for my rifle, steel pot, and ammo pouch and to hang things up to dry. My bed is made out of four 81-mm mortar ammo boxes. It’s about 3 feet by 7 feet and 6 inches high, with lots of empty sandbags for padding and a sheet of plastic tacked down over them to hold all in place. Our fighting position is so close out front, we pull guard from just inside the door of the hooch.

The weather has been crazy. The wind blows constantly, maybe 15 mph, and gusts to at least twice that. And it’s even worse when the Chinooks land. They came today with our resupply. There was no mail, but I did see a pile of blankets. We stood in line for a couple of scoops of vanilla ice cream, ½ pint of milk and a banana. I chopped up a “lifer bar” and made chocolate chip ice cream, then had bananas and cream (sliced bananas, milk and sugar), and finished off the milk in a cup of cocoa to get warm. Quite a treat.

November 11, Veteran’s Day
Tuesday

It has been very slow. Although there is little work to be done, they want you to stay busy every minute of the day. So we try to take four or five hours to do a twenty minute job. There is plenty of time for listening to the radio, working on the hooch and shooting the bull.

November 12
Wednesday

The initial euphoria over this place is beginning to wear off. Many of the promised improvements--air mattresses, lanterns, hot meals, etc.--have not materialized. There is a little mess hall but it is only for the brass. They have suspended our cold pack for awhile, and they still owe us a sundry pack. The company had a truck going into town and we sent money to buy our own soft drinks. We are building a shower though. They gave out the blankets, and we get milk and fruit every few days. My room mates--Kepner, Moore, Epps and Woods--are gifted with light fingers and go on the prowl at night. So far they have scrounged a case of oranges, two cases of C-rations, gallons of milk, a big water
jug with a handy spigot, and a lantern with a supply of kerosene. Their best find so far was a case of cold beer, which we shared with the whole squad.

All in all this is the best duty we’ve had since pacification in the villages and coconut groves north of Phan Thiet. My only complaint is the busy work. I wish they would assign us a certain amount to do and let us go when it’s done. As it is, we have been on detail somewhere all the time and we loaf and goof around until we get off, then rush back to wash up, eat, clean the hooch, read, work on squad business, and so on.

This afternoon we had to line up at the “barbershop.” They sent the Vietnamese barbers out from Phan Thiet for a day to give us haircuts. They were charging us 50 cents apiece. I made a crack to the CO about being forced to pay for a haircut I didn’t want, and he said he’d cut mine for free. I said okay, but after putting me off three or four times he just gave me the 50 cents.
November 13
Thursday

I got stuck on trash detail this morning, providing security for the garbage truck that takes all the trash from the firebase to a nearby dump. It was a mess. By the time we got to the bottom of the hill, there were dozens of Montagnard kids waiting for us. They swarmed over the truck and tore through the trash like they were looking for buried treasure. It was an amazing sight.
We have five guys to pull guard at night. I get up twice for an hour or hour and fifteen minutes. I put on my flack jacket, put the blanket around me, and sit in the doorway of the hooch on the box seat I made. To stay awake, I listen to the radio, smoke, and eat candy or fruit. At 6 a.m. we have a stand-to and everyone stays in the hole until about 6:20 in order to prevent a pre-dawn attack. When that’s over, we go in the hooch and start breakfast. I usually have a cup of cocoa, a pecan cake roll and a can of fruit. We have till 8 o’clock to get cleaned up, shaved and whatever else--mail letters, straighten up the hooch, throw out the trash, police call, etc. Our work day goes from 8 to 11:30 and 12:30 to 4:30. During the dinner hour we eat, clean up and talk. At supper we do the same. Free time goes by fast, and there is always too much we want to do. We have another stand-to from 6 to 6:20 p.m., after which we come in and fire up the candles. They only make enough light to see to move about, not enough to read by. I usually write during the dinner hour, then eat by candlelight.

November 14
Friday
They threw us into a tizzy this morning. We got orders to prepare our rucks with three days of food; we were to be sent on a mission to the jungle to search for some kind of valuable stuff a Chinook dropped in the mountains. We about went nuts trying to get all packed, as we have accumulated quite a bit of junk. Anyway, we did not get CA’d after all but are supposed to tomorrow.

After all the excitement died down, I took a two hour nap right in the middle of the day. Haven’t done that since we were out with the recon team in August. We got hot chow for dinner, some kind of hamburger tomato goulash with biscuits and fruit cocktail. Not bad. We waited for the choppers all afternoon, so it was like a day off. Knoy and I talked chemistry for hours. It set off a painful process: trying to remember what I used to know.

November 16

Sunday

Yesterday we went on our mission and got back the same day, at about 7:30 p.m. The CO took 2d platoon in search of the lost gear, supposedly a half million dollars worth of cryptographic equipment, which if found could have compromised military operations all over Vietnam. The place was in the mountains near Da Lat, 75 kilometers from here, so we spent most of the day riding choppers. We left about 10 a.m. on a Chinook and went to an airstrip, where we transferred to slicks that took us out close to where the gear fell. We found it on the side of a mountain. It had fallen from about 1,500 feet and was badly mangled. Since nothing could be salvaged, we blew it in place with a 30-pound case of high explosives, then returned the way we came.

The rain has stopped almost completely, and the wind is not nearly as bad. The Chinooks are a terror though. Every time one comes into the firebase, it blows something off the hooch. Today it took one of the walls down and, for good measure, also blew down the supply tent--C-rations were blowing everywhere. Sadly, the unfinished shower went too.

November 20

Thursday

Kids here ride on the water buffalo. Whenever GIs get close to these animals, they become enraged. Yesterday we watched an elephant walking around about 1,000 meters out. It was huge and had kind of a brownish hide, darker than tan and definitely not gray, as I expected. One of the guys on guard the other day swore he saw a flock of parrots. It is surely a country of the unexpected.
This morning my fire team went on a water run for the base. We rode in the bed of a deuce-and-a-half and made a trip of about 25 kilometers to pick up a water trailer. After we loaded up, the driver took us a few miles farther to a village, where we stopped at the local car wash—a beer hall/brothel. I have no idea where the term “car wash” comes from. I amazed myself by passing up a cold Blue Ribbon. Wasn’t too hard, actually, since they wanted 70 cents a can. The ladies looked like they had just gotten up, but a few were ready for business. They didn’t get any from us.

We made another water run in the afternoon and ended up back at the car wash. This time I broke down and bought a beer. It was a most interesting adventure, but by the end of the day we were pretty tired of riding in the back of the bumpy truck.

We brought mail back for the camp. I had a letter from Bouchard. He says he has it made at Fort Riley, Kansas, getting drunk every night. Fyffe went in today for his R & R. Last night he lifted two cases of C-rations—24 meals—and two bottles of chili sauce. He’s a sneaky devil. That Knoy got his sixth and seventh packages since we’ve been on this hill. Everybody is green with envy—me included. Last night while I was on guard duty we talked till after 9 o’clock. After my shift was up, I turned it over to him and went to bed.

November 21
Friday
I wrote tonight by the light of a full moon while on guard duty. Nothing much happened today but did get to go to Mass. We heard that tomorrow we replace Bravo Company on bridge security and they are coming here.

**Bridge Duty**

November 24

Monday

The Bridge on Highway 21

Saturday Delta Company got trucked to a new location. We are providing security for a bridge over a small river on Highway 21. The VC or NVA blew up the old concrete bridge, and the Corps of Engineers built a new steel bridge about 100 meters south of the old one. Our squad is positioned at the end of what’s left of the old bridge. Bravo Company had things set up pretty good, with bunkers and fighting positions and dry (with the aid of a poncho) places to sleep; it is small but cozy and comfortable.

It has been completely overcast for three days and rained all night Saturday. This morning the radio said it was 40 degrees. That feels really cold when you can’t go in the house to warm up. I wear an undershirt, jungle sweater, fatigue shirt, flack jacket and wrap up in a blanket to keep warm, then peel off layers as the day progresses.
We got here Saturday afternoon, put out our claymores and trip flares and got our perimeter organized. Yesterday we filled sandbags, improved the positions and tailored the tiny hooches to our needs. They are bringing us a hot meal every day around noon and giving us an hour or two to eat. Saturday we had chocolate ice cream and milk, and I made a milk shake. Yesterday we had bananas (I got four) and more milk. They are native bananas, tiny--maybe five inches long. It has been too gloomy to take pictures, but I did get one Saturday morning at the firebase of a sunrise with a thick, low fog laying all over the ground below. It reminded me of snow.

Yesterday was slow and I read a whole book, *Ghost At Noon* by Alberto Moravia. It was about a marriage that went bad, all over a misunderstanding. He could not figure out what he had done, and she wouldn’t tell him. Very depressing to read.

Today my squad went to 3d platoon area to provide security while they went on a day long mission. They waited on the LZ until 3 p.m. but the choppers never showed up. When 3d platoon came back, we shared a hot meal with them--I had four pieces of chicken and biscuits--then returned to the bridge. I had a Care package waiting; it took twenty-four days to get here. Everything in it was in good
shape and tasted good, except the apples which couldn’t wait. The whole squad converged on my can of sugar cookies, which won many compliments. For supper I had a can of Campbell’s tomato soup and Ritz crackers--they never tasted any better.

November 25
Tuesday

We were out on patrol all day. Still very chilly and gloomy.

November 26
Wednesday

Right after breakfast I looked up and saw an elephant walking down the road with three little boys riding him. He moved like he was drunk, weaving from one side of the road to the other. He came all the way up to the bridge, went down the hill and crossed the river. I was flabbergasted.
This morning our squad went out on a patrol. We walked several hours along a road that was flanked on either side by a huge coffee plantation. Hundreds of acres with thousands of trees in regular rows. Very handsome.

Time seems to be going by very fast now. I didn’t think October would ever get here, and after Hawaii I didn’t think it would ever end. Now November has streaked by. Rattlesnake and Captain Rothman have both left, been gone for a couple of weeks. Rattlesnake (James Bowers) was replaced by Lt. Col. Joseph N. Jaggers Jr. who goes by “Wildcat.”

Spaghetti from home is on cooking for supper to eat with the Ritz crackers. Had Kraft macaroni and cheese last night and got pretty far into a package of sharp cheddar cheese today. I’m eating high on the hog these days.

November 27
Thanksgiving

Was a pretty fine day other than being cold and cloudy as usual, and having to get haircuts. We got a turkey dinner with mashed potatoes, dressing and gravy, cranberries and bread. Plus a few extra treats like milk, bananas, fruitcake and even shrimp cocktail. This afternoon they had Protestant services with a full bird colonel for a chaplain. There was a USO girl (about forty years old, more of a
“USO woman”) serving chocolate ice cream with marshmallow cream. And donuts. It was all delicious. Clean clothes came with resupply but haven’t been given out yet. We didn’t even have to go on patrol. It was a fine day. If we had only gotten mail, it would have been perfect.

We get paid tomorrow and Sergeant Stone (new platoon sergeant) is going to send me into town to the PX to do some shopping for the platoon. I plan to do some for myself as well. Hope to buy Dad’s radio and mail it and David’s belt home in time for Christmas. One of the convoy drivers kept promising to pick up the radio for me but never did, so he finally gave me my money back.

The new bridge we are securing

November 29
Saturday

Sergeant Stone sent Big Tom and me in to the PX. After we bought everything on the list, I went looking for my stuff. I got Dad’s radio and mailed it-$29 plus $1.90 for postage and insurance. Then I got a camera--a Fujica rangefinder for $47.50. I showed them my Kodak Instamatic that had quit working and they gave me a full refund for it, $16.50, even though I had been using it since August. I also mailed Mom a wooden tray and ordered a birthday present for Marilyn.
There may not be much chance of getting to Sidney on seven day leave but I’m going to try. I put down January 7 as the date, with Hong Kong and Tokyo as alternates.

November 30
Sunday

It was freezing cold this morning. I stayed in my hooch wrapped up in a blanket until about 7 a.m. On the whole the weather wasn’t too bad. Instead of gloomy overcast, it was on and off cloudy and sunny.

This morning our squad went on patrol, in a manner that has become our daily routine. One squad goes out in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one stays back on security. We are checking out our sectors, the four quarters surrounding us, for activity. We are supposed to be out for three hours, but the loop out and back only takes about a half an hour. So we walk out the road about 300 meters, then go back into the bush about the same distance and find a place to sit for two and a half hours. We were back on the coffee plantation today. Knoy, Moore, Woods and I played hearts for a couple of hours for a penny a point.

(From the left) Woods, Knoy, Moore
I am sitting here drinking a Black Label beer. This afternoon around suppertime the Vietnamese barber, who hangs around with us all the time, showed up with six beers he was trying to sell. I traded him out of three of them--for two packs of Camels, three cans of chicken and noodles and six cans of crackers. My rucksack is stuffed full of choice C-rations, plus a box that is almost full. We're not hurting for food right now.

December 1
Monday

The company has been out constantly since August 3, with only a two day stand down--our beach party at Betty. I’ve been luckier--at Bien Hoa most of August and R & R in October. This operation is much better than the jungle or the mountains. We see people from our other 3-506th companies every day, plus other units, and lots of Vietnamese. There is quite a bit of traffic on the road, though most of the Vietnamese travel on foot or by cart. Working the bridge is much better than looking for VC all day and hiding from them all night.

December 2
Tuesday

Spent most of yesterday reading--letters, old newspapers, and Christmas cards from people I’ve never heard of. It was pretty warm, so we went down to the river, right below the ruins of the old bridge. (I believe every bridge in Vietnam must have been blown up at least once). I took a bath in the river, although the water was too cold to go all the way in. Washed out my dirty old clothes and dried them in the sun. As soon as they were dry, we got resupply and a load of clean clothes. Never fails. Yesterday by 11:30 I was starving and couldn’t wait for the hot meal chopper any longer. I wolfed down a can of soup, chicken, crackers and peaches. Just as I lay back to begin digesting, the hot chow came--steak, baked potatoes, corn, biscuits, and chocolate cake. Naturally I was forced to eat again. Thus, I was not hungry for supper and went to bed without eating. But by 8:30 p.m. I was starving and had to rummage around in the dark to find a can of fruit.

We essentially had today off. We pulled security while 1st and 3d squad went on patrols. There are ten of us in the squad now, and will be eleven when Fyffe gets back from R & R. They have not sent us a replacement for Lieutenant Gibson. 1st Sergeant. Stone has been acting platoon leader since he came out and is doing a fine job.
From where we are, we can hear the 105’s up at the firebase. They have regular fire missions every night. The 105-mm shell is almost two feet long and will go 10 to 15 kilometers. It doesn’t fire “automatically”--has to be reloaded after every shot. A battery of five guns can put out about fifteen rounds in as many seconds.

I heard that Gerald Ingram is in D Troop back at LZ Betty. Gerald and I used to play baseball together in Mt. Sterling, a long time ago. Our company worked with B and C Troops in Le Hong Phong forest. D Troop took over where the Cav unit was at Betty--where we used to get beer before guard duty on the bunkers.

I learned that the chemical name for the heat tabs we cook is trioxane. Now if I can only find out what trioxane is.

December 4
Thursday

I spent the whole day in 3d squad’s guard hole while they were on cloverleaf. It has been very cool. I’m wearing two pairs of pants and have been walking around wrapped in a blanket. The Montagnards come down to the river every day to take a bath. I watched a woman washing her baby, who couldn’t have been two years old. He was buck naked and screaming to high heavens. I can’t blame him. It’s so cold today, I wouldn’t even wash my hands. The women aren’t a bit bashful. After washing up the kids, they whip off their tops and wash themselves. A fair amount of ogling goes on at that time.
The squad is sitting around in a big circle cooking and eating. For supper I took the chicken out of a chicken and rice Lurps, put in a can of chicken and noodle soup and some little green onions I found growing nearby and some pepper, and it was so goooood. Also had pineapple and crackers. Am still hungry and have my eye on a pan of popcorn from my Care package.

December 6
Saturday

We are getting up at 6 a.m. instead of the usual 6:45. We pull 50 percent stand-to in the mornings now. At 6:30 we start the daily guard schedule. I had the first hour this morning and made breakfast in the guard hole. Heated up some water with C-4 for cocoa to have with a pecan cake roll and some oatmeal cookies that Carolyn sent me. Also had a few bananas. You only get about two bites off each one, but they are delicious. During that hour we had police call and brought the claymores in. At 7:30 I straightened up my hooch and washed. At 8:30 we went out on cloverleaf, about ¼ mile up the road, then about 100 meters back into the coffee trees, where we sat playing hearts until 11:30. Saw some beautiful red and purple flowers that resemble bougainvillea vine. We got back to the bridge just before dinner time. Had steak, rice, green beans, bread and apples. I took seconds of everything. Also got two grapefruits that I’m saving for breakfast.
We got a new platoon leader today, Lieutenant Smith. I haven’t seen him yet, but he sent word for us to work on the fighting positions some more. So after dinner we spent a half an hour making the sandbag walls a little higher. Most of the guys crashed for a few hours. I can’t sleep in the daytime, so I went down to the river to take a bath and wash my clothes. It's warmer today and the water was decent. I woke up the guys, and we went back to the river where we spent a couple of hours swimming in fatigues and galoshes and riding air mattresses. The water was cold but it was fun.

December 7
Sunday
Last night after dark, I talked to Woods for a long time. It’s funny how you can live around people for so long and really know so little about them. He had it pretty rough back in the world. Lives in California, in the central valley, and his family moved around working on the farms. He has two brothers who served in Vietnam before him. Woods came in August, and in September his girlfriend got married to someone else.

December 8
Monday
The weather still refuses to be reasonable. The rain has quit, but today is cold again after three hot, clear days in a row. When I came out on guard at 10:30 this morning, it had only warmed up a little. A few sandbags fell off my hooch wall the other night leaving me a cute little window but it turned the inside into a wind tunnel. Needs some work.

December 9
Tuesday
I made it in to the Ban Me Thuot PX yesterday. Left at 1:30 and got back at 5:30. Hitchhiked both ways, seven different rides altogether. The longest wait was about a half an hour. It was a scary feeling being dropped off all alone by the side of the road out in the middle of nowhere. I kept a nervous eye out for movement in all directions. Even though we have security at various points along the way, it was easy to imagine the VC avoiding our locations and setting up near the road. I mailed a stack of Christmas cards--they may be New Year’s cards by the time they arrive--and brought back four cases of soft drinks and two big bags of goodies for the platoon.

December 10
Wednesday
One of the guys in our platoon writes to six or seven girlfriends--he writes one letter and sends the same letter to them all. If they ever get together he’s dead meat. Spent the afternoon reading a *Popular Photography* magazine I bought at the PX the other day. Learning about taking pictures and what camera I might need to buy.

December 11
Thursday
Yesterday we got orders to put overhead cover on our sleeping positions. Everybody went to the woods to chop branches for the beams, then we filled sandbags to lay over the top. Took about two hours in all. I had thought about doing it before--for warmth mainly. After we were all finished, Sergeant Stone came around saying not to worry about it, we would be moving out in two days. I was just beginning to like this place.

We are supposed to be going to a better duty. Charlie Company is coming here and we are to take their place providing security for an airfield in town. “They say” we will have barracks to sleep in, mess hall to eat in, showers, EM Club, movies, PX, clean clothes, etc. Being the skeptic’s skeptic, I haven’t yet
swallowed this particular hook, line and sinker. I believe we will move out, maybe. I’ll wait and see on the rest. Ban Me Thuot would be a good place to spend Christmas though.

Hope it is as “safe” as here. I haven’t been personally shot at since June, the night I got my CIB. When the CO left, he made a little speech about how those of us that were with him would never forget May 25th. I didn’t tell him I’ve forgotten that one already.

It’s hard to keep the new guys on their toes. Most came in August and September and have not seen any action yet. Knoy lets me pretty much run the squad which I like. Sergeant Stone tells me I’m still first on the E-5 list and should get my sergeant stripes any day. I’m not counting on it. The extra money would be nice though.

We got two more new guys this week--McKennie and Fescoe. McKennie is a quiet guy but nice. Fescoe went through NCO school, got promoted, showed up two weeks late at Oakland and was busted back to corporal. We have eleven in my squad now. It’s great only having to wake up once to pull guard at night. Another advantage to being where we are is that the CO and his CP are with the 1st squad, and the platoon leader and his CP are with the 3d squad.

We had a meeting with the platoon sergeant early this morning. He gave us a little pep talk, telling us we were getting lax. What happened, I think, was the CO complained to the platoon sergeant that he was getting lax.

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**Ban Me Thuot**

December 14
Sunday
Ban Me Thuot

About 1 o’clock Friday afternoon we got on the trucks with all our gear. Of course, after hurrying to get aboard, we didn’t go anywhere. We played cards to kill time. My lucky streak continued--I’m about $20 to $25 ahead. Around 3:30 we left for Ban Me Thuot. It was an hour’s ride to get here. We are at a military compound that has a lot of helicopters and a small landing strip together with the PX, which I had been to, and some other facilities. We are providing a small part of the perimeter security. The first night our whole platoon was on guard. I pulled four hours, from 6 to 10 p.m. We had a good breakfast at the mess hall. Our little area of the compound has big tents for sleeping, showers and a place to wash up. About a mile up the road is a mess hall, PX and EM Club. They play movies regularly, one inside in the EM Club and one outside. They also have a chapel, a barbershop (ugh!) and a basketball court.
Yesterday the whole platoon had the day off. Never heard of such a thing! We had a formation at 8 o’clock, a police call, then we were free. I stayed in the tent for an hour or so to enjoy a huge Care package from home. Some weeks ago back at the firebase, I got rid of my M-60 ammo can (about 3” x 6” x 10”) and switched to a can that artillery fuses come in that is twice as big (about 5” x 7” x 12”).

I had to go get a haircut, then sat in the EM Club drinking Pepsi till the PX opened. They didn’t have anything, so I took Woods and Moore and we headed for the MACV PX downtown. Moore is in my fire team and is one of our card playing team. He’s from New York and is a good guy. I helped Woods buy a watch to send his brother and some china for his sister. We went to the MACV club and had a cold beer and a tasty hamburger. Then set out for town to explore and take pictures of Ban Me Thuot. I shot a whole roll of film. When I was getting ready to take the roll out this morning, I opened the back of the camera before rewinding the film. I was so mad I didn’t speak to myself the rest of the morning. Sent the roll off to develop anyway.

We had a good time going into the shops. Each one is unique. The food markets are really something. Just a whiff of the odor is enough to quell any temptation to eat. Apparently, they don’t believe in throwing away old meat. Just gets better as it ripens, I suppose. We saw dried squid and other nameless fish and innards of who knows what. They had something that looked a bit like liver but was a wild, brilliant red.
Ngoi and Moore
I mostly enjoyed taking pictures of the people. For a few Hershey Kisses the kids would do their thing for the camera. The old women would give a big grin and show their red stained teeth--from chewing the betel leaves. None of the younger girls or women (from about 6 to 46) would let you take their picture. They would turn away every time. Got back to our compound about 5 p.m.
I got sidetracked on the way to supper. Went by the basketball court and some of the platoon were playing, so I joined in. Just shooting, we couldn’t get enough for a game. Then we went to the Club, had a beer and saw a movie—“Coogan’s Bluff.” It was good but mighty rough. Clint Eastwood is a mean dude. Had a drink of Old Granddad, cost me 25 cents. The whole day’s entertainment cost $1 plus the roll of film. Slept like a dream last night.

Made it to breakfast again this morning. Got a ride down and back. It’s nice to have bacon and eggs again. Back at the tent, I shaved, washed, rolled up my bed, straightened up my area, then went to formation. We were the reaction platoon today, so it was really like another day off. No details, no guard. We were supposed to stay in the compound, but they let us go play basketball. We had to enough to get up several good games. I was really beat afterwards.

Our new CO, Captain Minogue, played one game. He was 3d platoon leader, then our platoon leader for awhile at the firebase. He took over the company after Rothman left. It's safe to say he's not well liked by the men. He goes on R & R in two days and should get off line after that. Anyway, he has played some ball before and thought he was really going to show us his stuff, but Fyffe, Big Tom and I took care of him. He finally got disgusted and quit. Nobody minded.
At noon we made a PX run, came back and took a chilly shower, and enjoyed a clean towel, pants and socks. Got a lot of dirt off. Had a can of ginger ale and Jiffy Pop popcorn from my Care package for supper. Tonight we'll still be on reaction and have to stay in the tent, but it has lights so we can read and play cards or chess.

December 16
Tuesday

Yesterday we had off again but didn't do anything exciting, except for taking the squad to a whore house! Sergeant Stone came to me in the morning and asked me to escort the squad to the local establishment. He told me to make sure they didn’t get into any trouble and to bring them all back with me. The girls there would come over to our table one or two at a time. They would pick out a guy, get
him all excited and then the pair would go upstairs to take care of business. Some of the guys took care of business several times. I watched over the flock while I nursed my beer all day.

Was slow today. We had to attend some silly classes on radio procedure, map reading, and other such things. Very boring but did not last long. Spent the afternoon reading a not very good novel. Still enjoying the mess hall for breakfast, a little less for dinner and have given up going back for supper. It is a one mile hike each way and uses up too much free time.

December 17
Wednesday

Last night my team had to pull guard at the MACV compound downtown. Four of us “borrowed” a truck and drove up to the EM Club. We had hamburgers and four rounds of beer before the Christmas music drove us out. I had a sore throat yesterday and woke up this morning with a cold. It has mostly gone now.

I got a stack of mail from home today, including letters from Bouchard in Wisconsin and Dr. Fred Bollum, Peter Sinclair, and Victor Rizza at UK. And a bunch more of those send-a-serviceman-a-Christmas-card cards.

Went to Mass this afternoon and fell asleep three times, dropping my book one time. It still seems funny to go to Mass outside with the altar on a stack of C-ration boxes and vestments made out of camouflage cloth.

December 20
Saturday

It has been an action packed three days and our “getting over” operation is over today. We are headed for another firebase.

Thursday morning we made a fantastic discovery--the Air Force Club. What a place. They start serving beer at 10 a.m. and we were there by 11:00. That’s where we made our first mistake. Kepner, Knoy, Moore and I got a game of hearts going and played until 5:30. About mid afternoon I got a call through to Marilyn from the MARS station, three exciting, confusing minutes. It was an absolutely beautiful day. The doors of the club were open and a warm breeze was blowing in. It smelled just like spring. We had a great time. Then we went to the Air Force mess hall, another great discovery. Had a delicious steak for dinner; forget what we had for supper. Too much beer by then.

We were told that morning that we had the night off, so I was truly surprised when we got back to our compound to find out that I would be on guard with Kepner, Moore and Woods. Three of us were in pretty bad shape. We sent
Woods up to the EM Club for more beer. That was our second mistake. Around 1 a.m. Lieutenant Smith was making the rounds and saw two beer cans in the window of our bunker. When he came up to check on us, he found one of the guys had fallen asleep during his watch, so no one was on guard. We caught hell for it this morning. They docked our pay $40 and blustered about Article 15s. Although drinking on the bunkers goes on every night, no one is foolish enough to get caught like we did. Got to meet the new CO, Captain Ohl, the hard way. William “Bill” C. Ohl is from Bainbridge, New York. After our chewing out, we got latrine cleaning duty for the morning.

Guess we were lucky to get off so easy. I had a good talk with Sergeant Stone, and he told me not to worry about anything. He said he was going to try just as hard to get my sergeant stripes. I talked to Lieutenant Smith too, and he approved me for seven day leave to Hawaii. My new crazy plan is to try to meet Marilyn there the first of February.

Today we packed up for another battalion move. It was distressing to have to leave some of our food, magazines and other treasures behind. We are now sitting on our steel pots at the airstrip waiting on the planes.

Christmas at LZ Uplift

December 24, Christmas Eve
Wednesday
LZ Uplift

The last few days have been very busy. Saturday we waited at the airstrip until after supper, then finally got off in C-130s for LZ English. From English we took a convoy to LZ Uplift. Along the way we passed through endless rice paddies and several small villages.
Uplift is the base camp of the 173d Airborne Division and is our new temporary rear. They are a small division and had troops in our AO before. We worked with the 173d at Phan Thiet. They were famous for getting their asses kicked and for their wild parties on the beach. Now our 3-506th is attached to them. They are on an operation called “Washington Green” and their mission is supposed to be pacification. I know now that that can mean any number of things, some of which are very “un-pacific.”
We got to Uplift late Saturday and they rolled out the red carpet for us. Had a big sign welcoming us and put on a party for us that night--snacks for our whole company, showers, a good meal, a movie, then a barracks to crash in. The film was “No Way To Treat A Lady” with Rod Stieger and Lee Remick--pretty good. After the movie, they treated us to Korean strip show that was better, albeit more shocking than sexy.

Sunday morning we left by Chinook for Firebase Abbey. We came in as the 173d was leaving. The firebase has been occupied for awhile but there is much work still to be done to make it suitable for the 101st. We strung concertina wire and chopped down the high grass from our fields of fire.
On Monday Sergeant Stone moved our position about 100 meters, so we had to start all over digging, filling sandbags and building a bunker. Fortunately for us, they used explosives to blow the holes for the bunkers, and we didn’t have to dig them out. I’ve never seen so many choppers in two days. There was never a moment that you could look up and not see at least one, and quite often it was Chinooks two or three at a time.

About 4 p.m. Monday I was whacking away at the elephant grass with my machete and got too close to my hand. Actually cut into the bone in my thumb. Our medic patched me up, then sent me to the rear to get some stitches. I got a chopper back to Uplift and saw the doctor, but he didn’t sew it up. He said they don’t do sutures unless absolutely necessary, because infection is such a problem. He pulled the skin together with tape, put a splint on it and told me to come see him everyday for the next four or five days. What luck! I’ll be in the rear for Christmas. The only bad thing is they were going to pass out the mail after supper Monday, so I missed that. Then thinking I would be out the next day, I told them not to send my mail back in. The supply sergeant said there was a ton of letters for me--said there was a whole bag for me and two other guys--plus two Care packages and four packages of pictures.

That night after getting bandaged up, I went down to the EM Club and had fried chicken and French fries. Came back to the barracks and sacked out in a nice warm sleeping bag.
Yesterday I read all day, went to the club and had two ham sandwiches, two Seven-Ups, and a beer for supper. I took a shower with a bag over my left hand and found some brand new clothes to wear.

The doctor changed my bandage today and it is already healing. It poured rain all afternoon and I have lain on this cot all the while reading. Nobody has asked me to turn a finger for two days. They play Christmas music all the time, and it is making me feel pretty lonely. Hope to go to Midnight Mass tonight.

December 25, Christmas
Thursday

Last night I went to the club and had a hamburger, beans and Coke while trying to stay awake until midnight. They closed at 10 and I went back to the hooch and listened to carols and finally got all Christmasy feeling. I walked around in the dark for awhile, then went to Mass, which was really nice. Every time they sang carols, I could feel my heart rush to my throat and tears come to my eyes. I was too choked up to sing. It was a moving experience and helped me feel close to those I love who are so far away.

This morning I was up at 7 and after breakfast helped take the company’s resupply down to the chopper pad. Along with the usual stuff, they got Christmas dinner, gifts from the Red Cross with all kinds of goodies inside, and a cold pack. I rode out with the chopper to the firebase to get my mail. When I got there Knoy said they sent it back to Uplift. Then when I got to Uplift nobody had seen it.

Back at Uplift, we had a great feast of a dinner, which was terrific, and a USO show that I passed up.
Firebase Abbey

December 26
Friday
Firebase Abbey

I came back to the firebase today. My thumb is healing really well. I went right to work filling sandbags. They have made much progress here. It looks completely different from when the 173d left. Today was sunny and hot, and I had my shirt off for the first time, I think, since R & R. I took some pictures of an air strike on a hill a little over 1 kilometer away. The jets were dropping 500-pound bombs on who knows what. Was an impressive sight. I would hate to be the VC under those things.
December 27
Saturday

Rain this afternoon drove us all under cover. I don’t know if we are supposed to work in the rain or not, but somebody will have to drag us out. They probably will too. The lost mail showed up with tons of letters, plus a package from Marilyn and one from Uncle Junie. I signed my papers for seven day leave, so it looks like I will get to Hawaii again.

January 1, New Year’s Day
Thursday
The boonies

Well, all good things come to an end. We got CA’d off the firebase Tuesday. Are supposed to be out two weeks, then return to the firebase. Doesn’t look like we’ll get back to LZ Betty any time soon. Not that anybody misses that place. Knoy lucked out. They have sent him off to some school, and he will be gone for about a month.

I was a little out of shape, but by the second day, humping seemed to be just a normal way of walking again. Even these mountains aren’t a killer yet. And we are all loaded down pretty heavily with things better left in the rear. I am carrying an assortment of unmilitary type food--Ritz crackers, Old English cheese spread that Aunt Reta sent, several cans of orange and grapefruit juice, and much more.

Monday we got huge surprise, when Joe B. Carter just walked up, said “hey” and rejoined the platoon. He was my squad leader when I first came out to
Delta Company. He DEROS’d and went home in March and is the last person on earth I ever expected to see again. He enlisted for three years and has six more months to serve. He got in a little jam back stateside and gets to do his last six months in Vietnam. He is back in the same division, battalion, company, platoon and squad that he left in March. He will be our squad leader while Knoy is gone. Unbelievable.

(From the left) Epps, Carter, Fyffe, Moore

Today we learned there is a New Year’s cease fire in place. I’d like to see it last three more months.

January 12
Monday

We are sitting at a crude LZ that we cut for the resupply choppers. They are late--two days late. All that extra food has disappeared. Our last full meal was noon Saturday. We were supposed to be resupplied that afternoon. Yesterday we were spreading around the last bits of candy and crackers, trying to stretch them out. Everybody was really generous sharing what they had.

This has been one very screwed up operation. Let’s just review how this all started. The 101st detached us to support the 173d. We moved our rear up to their
base camp, LZ Uplift. Uplift is west of Qui Nhon, near Phu Cat. On December 21, our company was assigned the job of securing Firebase Abbey. When we got there it wasn’t much of a firebase--basically, just a perimeter of fighting holes protecting five 105-mm howitzers. It took us over a week to build substantial bunkers, string up several rows of concertina and chop out fields of fire.
On December 28 we got word that some rangers had received fire from a village of about seventy hooches. That was when we first learned that we were on reaction for their company. News to everybody. They gave us ten minutes to pack a three day ruck and be ready to move. They said there was a good chance we would be back the same night, but we haven’t seen the place since. Last I heard, the 173d was back at the firebase. Those sons of bitches let us do all the work for them.

We try our best to keep a sense of humor, but there is nothing funny about a tour in Vietnam. We’ve lived with the heat, cold, rain and mud, mosquitoes, leeches and flies, the filth, exhaustion, pain, thirst and hunger. We’ve seen death, ours and theirs. And it’s not over yet. I’ve a notion our misery is beginning to come into full bloom. This is the worst place so far.

We never saw any seventy hooches, but we saw plenty of other things. The day we CA’d into the mountains we killed a VC and got a weapon. Two days later we got another VC and two more weapons. Then came the New Year’s cease fire. We had a Medivac land to take a sick man in, and the chopper drew sniper fire. We were fired on by snipers the next day, and everybody has been pretty much on edge since. So much for the cease fire.

And it's monsoon season here. I don’t know when it started or when it ends, but the rain has poured. The terrain is mountainous and rugged. We spend
most of the time climbing up hills or sliding down them and wading through streams in between them. It's tough to move in this jungle. The hills are steep and covered with thick vegetation--trees, bushes, vines, and undergrowth. You slash away at the foliage with a machete for four or five minutes and find you have gone only a few inches. Then when you try to go forward, the vines move in to strangle you or trip you or snag your ruck. The hundred pounds on you back doesn't make it any easier. You need two hands to hold on and keep your balance, one hand to hold your weapon, and one hand to work the machete. We ain't got enough hands. So you slip and slide and fall, you get dirty--but you were already dirty--and you get wetter, if there is such a thing. When were you dry? Try to remember. It rains during the day and at night. You haven’t seen the sun since . . . well who can remember. You go to bed in a wet poncho and wake up wet. Then you roll it up and pack it in your ruck, knowing it'll be wet when you unroll it tonight.

The company has lost twelve guys on this operation, to malaria, hepatitis, a slipped disk, a kidney infection, and a broken leg, just to name a few. We’ve got replacements in the rear but they aren’t sending them out. We are getting kinda tired, what with all the humping in the day and the freezing rain at night. Well, that’s just normal stuff we are expected to put up with and usually we can. The way we cope is by looking forward to a little pick me up, which is usually the next resupply--food and water and a bag full of mail.

Most of us have not had a bite to eat since yesterday morning and the humping has been relentless. Some of the guys are worn out. The mail is weeks late and we may or may not get any today. We know there won’t be a hot meal or cold pack or clean, dry clothes. Some of these fellows haven’t had clean clothes on in over a month and their last hot meal was Christmas day. Everybody is waiting for this to break, but we don’t know when or if it will. I’m not bitching for myself. I'm handling this better than most of the company (perhaps because I had a break in the rear at Christmas with access to showers and some good food). Still, it's starting to get to me. The lack of mail mostly, I think. This is a lousy way to live. Beats being dead though.

It's getting dark and we are beginning to set up for the night. There won’t be any food today.

January 16
Friday
LZ Uplift
Thursday was a heck of a day. After twenty-one days in the boonies, we got CA’d back to the rear. Mail at last. Angelo and I got our promotions to E-5. Sergeant Stone is going to try to get it back dated to December, since he said my name was supposed to be on the list for last month but some clerk screwed it up. I had already taken over as squad leader on the last operation.

The last two days in the field were awful. We were totally out of food and they couldn’t--or wouldn’t--get the resupply out to us. They finally came late on Tuesday, January 13. Then again on Wednesday. And again on Thursday. We stuffed like pigs.

We landed here about 11 a.m. yesterday. Got showers and clean clothes as the first order of business. It took till 10 p.m. to read all my mail, while taking time out frequently for eating and for a few cold beers. Popped some corn from my Care package, and it went fast, as did the sugar cookies. Got special compliments on them from Kepner, Knoy and Lieutenant Smith.

We spent today getting trucked around all over the place, including to several firebases. Nobody seemed to know where we were supposed to go. So the 173d is putting us up for another night. We get to enjoy their fine food, a show tonight, and cots in out of the rain later on.

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**An Lao Valley and Hill 474**

January 17
Saturday
Firebase Lucky

Today a Chinook brought our platoon out to Firebase Lucky, a deserted rat hole on the top of a mountain. Firebase "Lucky" indeed. Don’t know if we will stay. Or where this place is. But the view is great.
[According to several unit reports, we were in an area known as the Crow's Foot, west of Bon Song in Binh Dinh Province.]

* * *

From January 18 through March 3, I kept a diary of our experiences in the An Lao Valley and on Hill 474.

* * *

January 18  
Sunday  
An Lao Valley or Combat Alley

Yesterday our battalion CA’d into Combat Alley. I had just taken over 1st squad of the 2d platoon. We had point this afternoon and I was pretty nervous. This place doesn’t look any different from the other mountains we have been in, but the name is certainly ominous. What in the heck is Combat Alley?
I have a good bunch of guys in my squad. Wellman, my Kentucky buddy who has been here for a long time, is one fire team leader. Steve Williams is the other. He is a cut up and pretty new still, but he's a sharp cookie and I can count on him. Maki carries the M-60, Sewell is the assistant gunner, and Magelitz has the M-79. Rounding out the team are Sturdivant, Ortega, Sullivan, and Shultz.
Monday  
Right after lunch about 1 or 2 kilometers north and over a hill, we heard somebody get into a terrific fire fight. That was our first contact with the 22d NVA Regiment. Alpha Company fired it out with them and took three casualties. Their KIA could not be recovered. We moved to a hill east of there. 3d platoon was following us, and the NVA opened up on them with AK-47 fire. Nobody was hurt. So we had contact to our front and our rear. We called in gunships, which worked out from about 4 p.m. until dark. In the face of all that rocket and minigun fire, the NVA kept up a steady fire at the gunships. That told us they must really be dug in good. And that they intended to stay and fight.

January 20  
Tuesday  
I found out that Fescoe came into the Army on the same day as I did. He went off to NCO school after AIT, and he leaves here October 22, the same day he gets out of the Army. I’m still glad I passed it up.

I won’t be going on seven day leave. The CO said he can’t afford to have anybody gone right now.

We have moved around so much that I don’t have any idea where we’ve been. We made brief stops at a couple of small firebases--Lucky and Christmas.

This afternoon Delta Company moved into position on the south side of Hill 474 as a blocking force. The other companies were CA’d to the north side of the hill to drive the NVA our way. Alpha Company took one KIA while trying to retrieve the body from yesterday. He fell into a chasm and they had to leave him. Nobody came our way.

January 21  
Wednesday  
Delta Company took Hill 474 today. Our platoon was in the lead and my squad was on point. It was really hairy. Hard going but we made it before dinner. We spotted two NVA on a rise about 200 meters from us and fired on them. My squad gave chase but they got away.

January 24  
Saturday  
We’ve been playing army, a lot of humping and not much free time. It doesn’t bother me anymore, except for the monotony. Humping has gotten to be a
challenge, a contest with myself. The country is beautiful, and I try to find opportunities to notice.

No contact now for three days. Got resupplied on flat land north of Hill 474. Took a bath in the creek, felt great. Set up our NDP on the side of the hill.

January 25
Sunday

One hell of a day. We humped from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.--all up and down hill. About 2 p.m. 1st platoon made contact about 1 kilometer ahead of us. They took one KIA and two wounded. Two Medivacs were unable to get them out. The first one got shot up; wounded the pilot and medic. The second was driven off by heavy fire. In the process 1st platoon took three more KIAs. We made it to the top of Hill 474 after dark. Called in gunships and a Shadow worked till around 10 p.m.

When 1st platoon got fired up, they were away from their rucksacks and the NVA got them--eighteen rucks, including all their grenades, claymores, four M-16s, an M-79, ammo and, worst of all, two of our radios. Tonight we heard the NVA trying to talk on the radios.

January 26
Monday

We watched air strikes all morning--F-4 Phantoms and F-105 Thunderchiefs dropping napalm. We moved in this afternoon and patrolled the area. After my squad returned from our RIF, we got pinned down by sniper fire for five hours. They were about 100 to 200 meters out. We had to NDP there. Called in gunships, artillery and Shadow.

January 27
Tuesday

Still spending most of our time humping. What little time is left over, I find squad leader duties take up. The platoon went back to the top of Hill 474 and watched air strikes from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.--500-pound bombs, napalm and more gunships. We moved back down to the same place we were last night and took sniper fire again. 1st platoon had a man shot in the back of the head from a bunker tunnel. Alpha Company lost one too; he bled to death before Medivac could get in. We NDP’d there again. Still had to have heavy support--gunships and Shadow till about 11 p.m.
January 28
Wednesday

We moved down hill after a morning air strike with a good idea where the NVA were. I don’t know how many times my squad can come this close. We RIF’d to the suspect draw and checked out the upper half. We could find nothing in thick brush there. I reported to Lieutenant Smith that the lower half looked dangerous and suspect NVA to be dug in there. We returned to the company. Half an hour later Charlie Company swept the lower half of the draw and took four KIAs and five wounded. [Battallion operation reports of the 3-506th say it was Bravo not Charlie Company that got fired up in the draw. There are several other instances where my journal does not precisely agree with the official reports.]

The sun was blazing; we were nearly cooked. Called in gunships at close range, less than 100 meters. We had three damn companies surrounding the draw and couldn’t get the NVA out of there. They fired back at the gunships. Unbelievable. All that fire power doesn’t seem to faze the NVA. Nobody doubts the fortitude and bravery of our enemy.

We moved back to the top of Hill 474. Charlie Company had to use flame throwers and CS to help get their patrol out of the draw.

[CS (ortho-chlorobenzalmalononitrile) is a white crystalline solid that has been used for many years as an anti-riot agent. CS can be disseminated in grenades, projectiles, aerosols, or as a powder. CS is a lacrimator, a substance that produces profuse tearing. In very minute quantities, CS has a peppy odor. At higher concentrations, the eyes will involuntarily close and have a burning sensation with profuse tearing. The nose will run, and moist skin will have a stinging sensation. CS will cause severe coughing with a tightness in the chest and throat. All of the above effects are produced 20 to 60 seconds after exposure and will last from 10 to 30 minutes after being removed from the gas. CS has a very high level of toxicity and may also cause severe blistering of the skin and permanent blindness.

Source: U. S. Army Center for Health Promotion & Preventive Medicine, Office to the Deputy for Technical Services, Deputy for Technical Services’ Publications, Fact Sheet: Tear Agent O-Chlorobenzylidene Malononitrile (CS).]

We called in an air strike in the afternoon, then the gunships and Shadow worked till late. Artillery and illumination rounds kept up all night. My squad had to secure an adjacent knoll, away from the platoon, but we had no activity.

January 29
Thursday
We moved down the ridge line west of Hill 474, while the hill was blasted with heavy air strikes all day and artillery all night. At least one of the runs was an Arc Light mission: B-52s dropping 750 and 1,000 pound bombs. They fly too high for the enemy to see or hear. The first they know of the strike is when the bombs start going off. We could hear the muffled booms in the far distance.

It has turned hot, and I mean hot. I’ve gone from carrying two canteens of water to eight. Thank goodness we are on three day resupply instead of four or five. Rumored we will be moving to a hilltop to spend a week. Got a letter today from David Drake and from Ted Deeken’s wife Paula.

January 31
Saturday
Yesterday was resupply. My ruck weighs a ton. We got a hot meal, mail, clean clothes and a cold pack that was actually cold. Got paid too--E-5 pay. Am up to $458 a month. I got stuck with a “free book” yesterday. I ordered it from Time Life from an ad that said free, no obligation and all that. It came with a note: “If you don’t like it, return in ten days.” Fat chance. I’m sure I will enjoy Wines and Spirits for $5.63. Paychecks and book orders seem out of place out here.

February 2
Monday

It's resupply day and finally have a chance to write. Have been reading Stars and Stripes, Holiday, Sport, Playboy and The Virginian by Owen Wister. And eating a lot--can’t seem to get full. I sent off for a set of Thai bronzeware from the PACEX catalog--only $19.

February 3
Tuesday

The last five days have been all alike. Move down and out on the ridge during the day, while they pound the north side of Hill 474 with artillery and air strikes. Then back up to secure Hill 474 at night. They have gotten up to 3,000-pound bombs now.

The word from intelligence is that the 22d NVA called their 8th Division for reinforcements, reporting that they were trapped and taking heavy casualties. Reportedly, the 8th Division is getting their ass kicked by the Americal Division and will not be able to help. We have gotten numerous Chieu Hoi, twelve so far. The ones I saw looked like they were in a daze.

After they lift the air strikes today, we are going to start down the hill to begin a mop up operation. The first objective is the draw where Charlie Company got fired up.

February 4
Wednesday

We started a sweep down this big mountain looking for weapons caches and other stuff. Supposed to take a week. Then we are due a four or five day stand down. Looks like the rain has quit and the days are steadily getting hotter.

We started down the hill yesterday about 12:30. The brass must have been expecting some big finale. We had four Army photographers with us taking pictures and movies. We’ve never seen a photographer before. We had Loaches
flying low over us, swooping down into the draw checking out the area ahead of us. There were Cobras circling high overhead, waiting.

As luck would have it, my squad got point again. This time we didn't receive one round of fire. We started the long, slow process of checking out the numerous caves. It has been fruitful so far. Our platoon has found B-40 rockets, AK-47 ammo, food, clothes, medical supplies, lots of documents, one of our M-16s and one dead NVA.

Today 1st platoon found Charlie Company’s four bodies, now eight days old. In the afternoon, my squad found more B-40 rockets and three launchers. I stepped on one--loaded. Nearly messed my pants. 3d squad found a big cave with maps showing our positions. 3d platoon killed an NVA running away wearing one of our rucksacks. About 2:30 we took sniper fire. It sounded like two AK-47s. We never found where it came from.

February 7
Saturday

We are sitting today for a change. We’ve all had our fill of humping up and down these mountains. I am probably in the best physical condition I’ve ever been in. I’ve not been sick since the stomach bug in late May or early June and a mild sore throat in December. Just two more months to go.

Squad leader is a pretty good position. I feel better running the squad myself than having somebody in charge who doesn’t know what they're doing. It is more responsibility and takes up much of my free time, but it gets me out of some work details, and usually squad leaders don’t walk point.

We have a really great CO now, Captain Bill Ohl. I thought Rothman was good but Captain Ohl is flawless--and human too. He really takes care of us. Rothman wouldn’t ask us to do anything he wouldn’t do, but damn, there wasn’t anything he wouldn’t do. I think Rothman could stay on his feet for a week without food, water or sleep. Captain Ohl is always raising hell with somebody in the rear to get this or that our here for his men. He got the mail straightened out, got our cold pack coming again, and gets us clean clothes regularly. He did all this from the field. He is quick to praise and slow to anger. He doesn’t give a damn for lifers either. He has been letting the guys wear their “boonie hats” and grow mustaches in the field, against Wildcat’s orders. Captain Ohl is first rate in my book.

Lieutenant Smith is another story altogether. His ego knows no limits. Practically speaking, Sergeant Stone runs the platoon. Lieutenant Smith is like the
relay between the CO and us. Carter gives him hell all the time—and has been beating him at checkers all day today.

Our sweep has been pretty productive so far. We found almost all the equipment 1st platoon lost, plus a bunch of other goodies. Lots of B-40 rounds, Chicom grenades, etc. My squad found an AK-47 yesterday in a cave, along with all of our lost claymores and C-4. We fired on two NVA with AK-47s early in the morning. One died in the Medivac on the way in; the other one got away. We found two more NVA bodies.

The NVA have an unbelievable cave network here. We’ve checked a lot of it, but it would take months to do it all. Engineers are out today, I suppose trying to find a way to blow the whole thing up.

February 8
Sunday

All is quiet. We are observing the Tet cease fire. It started day before yesterday and is supposed to last five or six days. I’m having trouble getting used to my new name, “Sarge.” Doesn’t sound like me.

February 10
Tuesday

The last few days have been quiet. We have been going down in the caves every day, spending most of our time in them. Our squad has had the honor of working underground, since we have become most familiar with the caves. Day before yesterday Steve Williams found a BAR in good shape with nine full magazines, plus a whole pile of documents. Yesterday I found a typewriter we suspected they had been using there.

Bravo Company had contact yesterday. They pinned some NVA down in a rice paddy and called in gunships. They did not get a body count yet.

This morning we were down in the flat and took AK-47 fire from the top of Hill 474. Afterwards, we went back into the caves. This was our last day searching here. Tomorrow we are to set off powdered CS in the cave system to make the place uninhabitable for six months.

February 13
Friday

Our stand down was supposed to come off tomorrow, but they gave it to another company. We should get our turn soon. We are dreaming about an all day cookout on the beach.
February 14
Saturday

It is a pretty day. We're on a big hill overlooking rice paddies and a village and we can see the ocean. It doesn’t look like any place for a war, until we turn and look at the forbidding mountains behind us. I don’t know what’s up there, but those mountains look mean and angry.

We got resupply this morning, and it is going to be a busy day. We are supposed to move down the hill. We’ve been searching for caves and caches and haven’t done too bad. After we find them, the engineers blow up powdered CS inside to make them uninhabitable. It is really foul stuff. We've gotten a nose full several times when the powder drifted our way. It's much like tear gas.

Yesterday we had a treat. Wellman got a package with a homemade pound cake and a big can of Betty Crocker vanilla pudding. It believe it was the most delicious thing I ever put in my mouth.

I had hoped to be through with this operation by now and on the beach resting, but... Day before yesterday we were ready to start a sweep down off the plateau to the rice paddies. We got about 200 meters down, and it got real thick. 2d squad went down another 200 meters and found a whole new complex of caves. We couldn’t go past them without checking them out, so we left 3d squad on ambush and we came up to our old spot.

Yesterday morning about 11 a.m. Charlie Company got in contact lower down the hill. They had one man wounded. NVA shot down the Medivac chopper trying to get him out. He got out on the next Medivac. Gunships came in and pinned down some of the NVA. Chinooks were sent out to do “flame drops.” They carried about ten 55-gallon drums of fougasse in a net below the belly. Fougasse is a form of jellied gasoline similar to napalm. The barrels were released and a flare dropped with them. When the barrels burst on the ground, the fougasse was ignited by the flare which resulted in a huge fireball. Flame drops are more accurate than dropping napalm from a jet.
Later our platoon took NVA artillery fire from a nearby mountain. The shrapnel was coming way up the hill toward us. 3d squad took some AK-47 rounds really close, and we heard them twinging by over our heads. We pulled back to another hill and called in flame drops and artillery. Some of the artillery rounds were CS, and we got gassed a couple of times.

Today we started back down the hill. This time we covered 3d platoon, while they checked out the area. They found three burned NVA, three AK-47s, a load of ammo, a B-40 launcher and five rockets. It is 5 p.m. on resupply day and we haven’t had anything to eat yet. And I’m hungry.

February 15
Sunday
We finished the sweep down the hill to the valley. Found a few more NVA with serious burns. Got CA’d around to the south side of Hill 474. A POW supposedly reported that we would find more NVA positions in this location. He led us to a cave that had parts from a Loach that had been shot down.

February 16
Monday
We rendezvoused with 3d platoon and started down the draws on this side of the hill. Lieutenant Smith took my squad down to a cave and rock area. I told him we shouldn’t go in, that we should call for flame drops instead. We got five
drops at close range. It was quite a sight. Afterwards, it was too late to check out, so we NDP’d about 300 meters down the hill.

February 17
Tuesday

Resupply day. Got a great Valentine’s package. But when we started down the hill, it felt like my ruck weighed 10,000 pounds. Carter took a cloverleaf out and he shot an NVA, who then went into a cave. Carter went in after him and shot him with his .45. He got an AK-47 and some other booty.

Last night 1st platoon fired on two NVA from an ambush. They got two weapons but couldn’t find the NVA. This afternoon the gunships came out to work the area over. We all had smoke marking our positions because they were firing very close to us, less than 50 meters. The gunners got careless and dropped several rockets very close to our platoon. The concussion knocked several of us down and two were hit. Sturdivant took shrapnel in the groin and Carter in the back. I was right behind Sturdivant but didn’t get a scratch. We got them both out by Medivac.

Proto went in for R & R today, and Fescoe went in to have a cyst cut out. Knoy and Angelo are on R & R. Now with Carter gone, I am the only NCO in the field, so I will be acting platoon sergeant until one of them gets back.
February 18, 49 days left

Wednesday

Got a Care package yesterday. Tried a little bit of everything--popcorn, deviled ham, cheese, box of candy. There was a new car book that disappeared as soon as I took it out of the wrapper. It's till going around the platoon and will probably be worn out when it comes back. The language of cars is one that everybody speaks. Let’s see--cars, food, girls and sports. That’s about it.

Carter and Fescoe both came out today. 2d squad went back into the caves this morning, and my squad went in this afternoon. We didn’t have any luck for a while, then I found two rucksacks full of clothes, ammo, one 60-mm mortar round and a lot of junk. 3d platoon was in the area. Cunningham was right below me in the cave. He said they chased an NVA in there and while looking for him they found three AK-47s and an RPD machine gun.

I figured it was time to split, so I took my team out and we duffed it back to our platoon, about 25 meters up the hill from 3d platoon. Lieutenant Smith called and said to go down past them and check out some more caves. We took our time going down, and on the way we heard a burst of gunfire from inside a cave. It must have come from the NVA Cunningham told me about, and he opened up on
some of the 3d platoon guys looking for him but didn’t hit anybody. They threw seven or eight grenades in to blow him out. Then Burgess went down to take a look. Lieutenant Faulkner told him not to go, but Burgess wanted to get a rucksack out. The NVA was still alive and put a burst of rounds in Burgess’s chest. DeLonga went in to get him and got shot in the foot. Walker finally pulled Burgess out, but he was dead when they put him on the chopper about a hour and forty-five minutes later. Burgess dropped his .45 in the cave. We NDP’d with 3d platoon that night and all was quiet.

Burgess was a good friend of mine. We had gotten close in Leadership School at Bien Hoa back in August. I didn’t get to spend much time with him because we almost always operate in platoon size units in the field. But we got together to visit whenever we could. I feel really bad knowing he is gone.

February 19
Thursday

We should be at the beach in three days. Just 48 days left in Vietnam. And I get out of the field twenty days early to begin processing. So that’s twenty-eight days on line. I will have to go to Phan Thiet, Bien Hoa, and Phu Bai and will probably leave for the World from Cam Ranh Bay.

My squad had the first cloverleaf today. We checked out our right flank and front. I told Lieutenant Smith it was too thick to get into the rocks, that we should get a flame drop. We pulled up the hill and Chinooks worked out below. The NVA shot at both Chinooks. They are gutty and persistent.

February 20
Friday

We wait on resupply. 3d platoon is supposed to go to the beach today. Who knows if they will.

February 22
Sunday

I got a telegram from Carolyn and Jim on February 20. They had their baby--named her Mary Ellen.

Everything is quiet today. We are expecting some new guys out. Supposed to go to the beach in three days. One of our guys in 3d squad, Boubede, went home on emergency leave yesterday. He's been here six months and his wife just got pregnant. Damn.
February 25
Wednesday

At last! We are waiting on an LZ for the choppers to take us to the beach. 1st platoon went in yesterday. They were ready at 10 a.m., left at 5 p.m. I finished *The Virginian* this morning. It was good but wasn’t quite what I expected. Was a love story.

We got two more NVA and one POW on Sunday and Monday. Carter led the way. We got all the caves blown with CS and made it down to the flats.

February 27
Friday

We had a great time on the beach, our first stand down in five months. They took us in at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, and we came back out 3 p.m. yesterday. The water was great. We had air mattresses and used them to ride the surf in to the beach. We had no bathing suits, of course. Some swam in fatigues, others in the buff. Thank goodness I kept my pants on, as there are some sore sunburned rear ends today. Somebody busted the football before we could play a game, but we did play softball. In the afternoon there was lots of beer. Mail too, then about 4 o’clock a chopper came in and blew it away. Much of it could not be found. Afterwards it was nice just laying around doing nothing. I sat on the beach after the moon came up and watched the breakers for a long time. Slept like a log to the sound of the surf.

I woke up Thursday to a beautiful sunrise over the South China Sea. We got resupply and haircuts, then had one last go at the water before we CA’d back to the mountains.

We are back in the rice paddies ambushing every night. I hope we can close the book soon on Hill 47 and "Washington Green," which is what they are calling this operation. There is a lot I have not included about the other companies. They have had many more KIAs and gotten more NVA, but it is impossible to keep up with them all.

February 28
Saturday

A couple of weeks ago Sergeant Stone left us. He got a job in the rear, as a re-enlistment NCO. Carter made E-6 and took over as platoon sergeant.

We had a piss test last week. Isn’t that wild? They are testing our urine to make sure we’re taking our malaria pills. Lieutenant Smith was the only one who flunked. The CO gave him hell, then three days later he came down with malaria.
Lucky for him it wasn’t the vivax variety (100% preventable by the pill) or the CO would have skinned him alive. Nobody is anxious for Lieutenant Smith to get back--except Captain Ohl, who wants to chew him out some more.

Carter is acting platoon leader while the lieutenant is gone. He’s doing a good job, and they have even offered him a direct commission. I got to be platoon sergeant for a day while Fescoe went to the rear to have a cyst cut out.

We are sitting around in the day and going out on ambush at night. We’re out of the mountains and in the flat lands, finally. I got a new guy in my squad, an “instant NCO,” so I don’t have to go out on ambush every night. Knoy is back from R & R and didn’t say much about it. He got my camera fixed. It was so minor they did it for free.

A helicopter took two dead NVA up and from about 300 meters dropped the bodies on top of Hill 474.

March 3
Tuesday

We have been paying $5 a month for our cold pack. Now we are going to have to start paying for cigarettes. The sons of bitches in the rear say they have run out of sundry packs, and we no longer get candy, cigarettes, and toilet articles at resupply.

I have been saving my money and expect to have about $370 to bring home. That should be enough to buy a stereo (Scott Casseiver), Marilyn’s sewing machine, and still have about $50 left over.

Less than a month and I’ll be home. I don’t expect anybody is going to thank us for what we’ve done or be able to appreciate what we’ve been through. We'll know though. I've about done my time but I still don’t believe in this war. I remember arguing with Uncle Joe one time until about 3 o’clock in the morning. He thought the peace demonstrators should either all be drafted or deported. He was sure I would see the light after being over here. I'm afraid he was wrong.

My squad had ambush. We got one NVA and another got away. I think Shultz hit him first. We heard him groaning and threw grenades in that direction to finish him off. Somebody threw a grenade that didn't go off. We figured he forgot to pull the pin. We hunkered down expecting the NVA to find the grenade and throw it back at us. But all was quiet the rest of the night.

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**Quiet Time In The Flats**

March 5
Thursday
I’ve been saving good paperbacks to bring home in my ammo can, which is chock full. I keep getting better ones and have to throw out one of the old ones. Yesterday, I latched onto this gigantic, $3.95 volume called Encyclopedia of Mathematics. It won’t fit in the can and I’m brooding about what to do with it. If I ever catch up with my foot locker in Phan Thiet, I have about three boxes of books to send home. Our battalion is supposed to be sending all our personal stuff from LZ Betty to Phu Bai, our brigade headquarters. Our rear is no longer at Betty—is now at LZ English.

We heard one of these good-bad rumors yesterday. That we may be getting a six day drop, meaning they may move our DEROS up six days. That would put me home on April 2. Too much to hope for. Too awful to count on if it doesn’t happen.

There are a few little junk items I hope to bring home after carrying them everywhere for a year—a metal comb with a few teeth missing, a shaving mirror bought in the Vietnamese shop at Betty, a pair of jungle fatigues for Lonnie, and a pair of jungle boots for me.

Knoy talks a lot about his wife. She sends Mel a lot of pictures of herself in a bikini. She seems to have him under pretty tight control—doesn’t let him smoke, drink or gamble. She goes to school part time at Arizona State, majoring in Spanish or something like that, and works part time in a motel.

March 6
Friday

We are loafing today. Just had one patrol and will have ambush tonight. Have been sleeping pretty good at night. I have this weird thing that happens a lot: I wake up thinking I’ve fallen asleep on guard. The other night I even got up and went over to the hole. Somebody was already there of course, Steve Williams, and he thought I was crazy. I felt like it.

We are able to bathe regularly now, as we have been staying close to a little creek. We are even managing to wash some of our clothes. There are little fish in the stream that look just like red rasboras, from above anyway. I haven’t been fast enough to catch one. I wonder if rasboras come from Vietnam. They look just like the ones I used to raise in an aquarium.

My squad has been enjoying the contents of my latest Care package—Cheez-Its, pretzels and marshmallows. The Hostess Twinkies got smashed almost flat but was still awfully tasty.

I did something very out of character this afternoon. I got into a high stakes poker game. Well, high stakes for me—$1 ante and $2 limit. I put up $10
and a half hour later I was up $41. Somebody else wanted to take my place, so I quit while ahead. Should be enough to buy a good turntable.

March 8
Sunday

Have been studying new car prices and trying to decide between buying a new or used one. It looks like we will have to pay $2,400-2,800 for a new one or $1,000-1,500 for a decent used one. I really liked the Ford Torino station wagon, but they cost about $400 more than a sedan.

Day before yesterday we had the Catholic chaplain out and I went to Mass and Communion for the first time since Christmas. We are still set up beside a nice stream and have plenty of cool shade. I finished an interesting book on Vietnam called The Gooney Bird by William Anderson. It was hilarious and informative. Glad I wasn’t here in 1965, when the North Vietnamese were mounting “human wave attacks.”

March 10
Tuesday

Fyffe and I go home together and we are planning on being out of the field, forever, on March 15. We are counting the days.

We have been staying pretty close to a village and haven’t had any action. Every day our patrols go out and have been regularly finding rock piles full of caves. We don’t go in them any more. We return to our patrol base and call in a chopper to bring us a few barrels of powdered CS. We take the CS to the rocks and blow it. I guess we’ll stay as long as we keep finding more rocks.

I’ve got two guys, my team leaders Terry Wellman and Steve Williams, who can both run the squad, and they are taking turns running the ambushes at night. Since I’m short, Carter took me off going on ambush, so at night I talk to him at the CP.

We are waiting on resupply now and there is not much to write about. Lieutenant Smith is still gone. He must really be nursing that malaria. Carter is doing a great job with the platoon. He asked the CO to send me in to go in front of the E-6 board before I go home. I’m pretty sure they are not going to let me out of the field for that, especially since I’m so short.

March 12
Thursday
We have been sitting around a lot the last few days. I’ve got the new sergeant running the squad. I like teaching better than doing.

I’m beginning to think about being home and where I might have to spend my last five months in the Army, assuming they give me an early out to go back to school. I’ll have to spend the summer cramming to relearn all the biochemistry I have forgotten over the last year and a half. Don’t know how I am ever going to pass the German test, and after I do, I still have to take French. I have this strange urge to build something, a bookcase or some model ships or planes. I am thinking of ordering a Heathkit short wave radio to build for Dad.

March 18
Wednesday

Got orders today for my new post back in the world. It’s the worst possible. Fort Polk, or Fort Puke as we called it in AIT. Don’t know what the assignment is. The orders say NCO Academy. The lieutenant thinks it means I’ll be going to a school, and Carter says it’s a job as instructor there. [As it turned out, I served as a clerk in a headquarters company until my discharge in August 1970.]

C-rations have gotten to be right sickening after eleven months. I am probably losing a little weight. Because it’s so hot at noon, I only eat peanut butter and crackers and fruit for dinner. I’m healthy though and surely in the best physical condition I’ve ever been in my life.

March 20
Friday

Finally got orders for my new DEROS date--March 30. I can hardly believe it. Eleven more days and I’ll be home.

On Saturday, Fyffe and I took a chopper back to LZ English. From there we went to Phu Bai, 101st headquarters, to process out of the division. (We got there by way of flights to Pleiku and Da Nang.) From Phu Bai, we flew to Cam Ranh Bay, and then took a Freedom Bird back to the World (McChord Air Force Base, Washington).
My last view of Vietnam, March 27, 1970

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The Following Constitutes A Statement By the Carrier Which Is Hereby Delivered To the Passenger At the Carrier’s Request
Postscript

After Vietnam, I returned to graduate school. In the 1970s and 80s I read everything about Vietnam I could get my hands on. The reading made a lot of things more clear, but I still can't say I understand the Vietnam War. I know I don’t subscribe to the idea that we would have won if it hadn’t been for political interference and war protesters. I am proud to have served my country but--in my personal opinion--I don’t think America should ever have been at war with Vietnam.

In 1985, Ron Logan, Bill List, Don Bratton and I formed a non-profit corporation to construct a Vietnam Memorial in Lexington, KY to honor the fifty men killed or reported missing from Fayette County. Two years later, the monument in Phoenix Park, at the corner of Main and Limestone, was dedicated. The ceremony included our mayor, senator and congressman, and the dedication address was given by Gen. William C. Westmoreland. Don moved out of state soon after, and Bill died of cancer in 1998. I see Ron occasionally, but it’s been several years now.

I've been retired to my place in the country since 2004. I am blessed to be in good health and have a wonderful family. I still don’t talk much about the war in Vietnam.
Left to right, Bill List, Ron Logan, Don Bratton and me.

Articles and clippings about
Operation WASHINGTON GREEN

Moans of Wounded Enemy Echo at Night...
By SPEC. 4 BILL TOLIVER
S&S Staff Correspondent

THE ROCK, Vietnam — There is an unreported battle being waged on this granite fist of a rock, 123 miles southeast of Da Nang.

On this craggy, boulder-strewn mound, Hill 474 on Army Maps, GIs have been fighting ugly little fights with the 8th North Vietnamese Battalion.

The fight has been going on since late January and one high ranking U.S. officer estimates that 300 to 400 enemy have died here although they have been able to count only 75 bodies.

Fourteen Americans have died, he says.

Recently, one platoon was searching a little draw on the south side of the hill. The rocks had taken a terrible beating. Air strikes had stripped the cover from the granite.

The brown congealed residue of napalm is everywhere and at night the hill echoes with the moans of wounded North Vietnamese hiding in the thousands of intertwining crevices.

It is not a pretty hill.

You walk carefully here. The rocks are black and slippery. And you don’t know who is behind the next one.

The enemy below the rocks had taken a terrible beating and there were many bodies.

An 8th NVA Bn. roster with 170 names had been taken off one of the bodies in a cave. Some people thought, therefore, that the cave complex was where part of the battalion had moved after being driven from their former headquarters on the north side last month.

“It was a lucky strike,” said the platoon leader. “They said they’d bomb this one draw in case anything was there. And the next day we came down and found all this stuff, first knapsacks, 50 pounds of rice right under that rock. It was still good. Most of the dead were found with Chicom grenades, four full magazines and AK47’s.”

“One thing you can say about the NVA, they’re plucky little bastards,” said one battle-hardened veteran of The Rock.

There was a lot of searching to be done here in the four and five-leveled caves. The tunnels were small, Vietnamese-size.

The soldiers were blowing up cans of tear gas powder in the searched caves — powder that would make the caves uninhabitable for six months.
Dustoff Braves Fire To Save G.I. Lives

LZ ENGLISH -- The price was high, four helicopters and two wounded aviators, but to the 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) this is a cheap price to pay for the lives of two infantrymen.

A company of the 101st Abn Div's. 3rd Bn., 506th Inf. located a large cache of enemy weapons and ammunition on Hill 474 nine miles northwest of the 173d's base camp here. After cataloging the captured equipment, the company took a break to eat chow.

Suddenly, from well concealed caves in the boulder strewn mountain side, snipers opened up on the company with automatic weapons. The platoon furthest down the hill was pinned down immediately and suffered several casualties.

Gunships at LZ (Landing Zone) English immediately scrambled, and a dustoff (medical evacuation helicopter) started for the area. While the gunships pounded the hillside, WO Stephen L. Tomooth, El Monte, Calif., maneuvered the dustoff into the area.

"They had an LZ on a ledge," recalled Tomooth. "When we came in and tried to hover, the NVA started firing."

The ship rocked under the impact of the gunfire, which seriously wounded the crew enemy riddled it with automatic weapons fire. Miraculously, none of the crew was injured, but damage to the engine and flight controls made the helicopter almost unflyable. It managed to leave the LZ, but was forced down less than two miles away, near an American fire base.

A third dustoff ship was already on its way to the casualties, crewed by the same men who had taken in the first MEDEVAC ship. The enemy fired on the chopper as it approached and shattered part of the windshield, spraying WO Max Owens, Ft. Knox, Ky., the pilot, with plexiglass.

Owens fell back and Tomooth, the aircraft commander, grabbed the controls just in time to keep the helicopter from smashing into the hill.

"Right then, the pick-up looked just about impossible," Tomooth said. "But we weren't giving up."

A short time later the infantry medic sent word that he had finally been successful in stopping the wounded men's serious bleeding, and that they could wait until the snipers were silenced to be evacuated.

The next morning, however, the situation was virtually unchanged as CWO Michael
NO PRICE TOO HIGH -- That's the feeling of this dust-off pilot as he brings his ship in under fire during an action in northern Binh Dinh Province.

(US ARMY PHOTO by SP/4 Bob Parkhill)
173d’s ‘5th Bn.’ Knocks Out NVA

By PFC Nicholas G. Kube, Jr.

3/506th 10 – In a hard hitting series of clashes, the 8th Bn., 22nd Regt., North Vietnamese Army (NVA), has been routed by the “Screaming Eagles” of the 101st Airborne Div., northwest of Bong Son in Binh Dinh Province.

The deeply entrenched NVA Battalion, concealed in the caves and crannies of Hill 474, initiated a series of fire fights with heavy AK-47, B-40 rocket, RPG rocket, and RPD light machine gun fire against elements of the 3rd Bn. 506th Inf. As the conflict progressed, series of F-4 Fighter-Bombers were brought to bear on the enemy positions. In coordinated heliborne combat assaults, Lt. Col. Joseph N. Juggers Jr., battalion commander, began an encirclement of the NVA. Further air strikes and artillery bombardment prevented the NVA battalions from fleeing their base camp.

With the NVA surrounded by the “Currahees”, the air and artillery bombardment was intensified with the airborne infantrymen directing this massed fire power on observable targets. Further combat assaults were then made by the airborne battalion placing them in command of the enemy routes of escape.

The NVA, under the continuous punishment of small arms, air, and artillery fire, attempted to exfiltrate Hill 474. Despite the enemy’s advantage of terrain, Juggers, utilizing mobility tactics, continually shifted his forces which caused the NVA to become disorganized. The systematic destruction of the adversary in the clashes that followed, the hardened veterans of the 506th never lost the initiative, driving the NVA into smaller and smaller elements. The final phase resulted in the battalion’s defeat in detail.

The NVA lost 90 dead as the result of small arms, F4C air, and artillery fire. The Currahees captured 20 AK-47 assault rifles, 6,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, three RPD light machine guns, four B-40 rocket launchers, 45 B-40 rockets, 25 C4I grenades, 3,000 pounds of rice, a typography, and substantial quantities of medical supplies, engraving tools, clothing, and documents.

Information from NVA POW’s and Ho Chi Minh revealed that a third or more of the battalion had been lost on Hill 474 and the majority of those who survived the battle would Chieu Hoi if allowed to do so by their leaders.

See related story—“Bright Idea”—on page four of this issue.
In a prolonged and fierce battle initiated in the mountains north-west of Dong Son village by Company "L", 3rd battalion, soon joined by the remainder of the battalion and an element from the 173rd, Airborne troops have been showing the NVA just how devastating it can be to test the combat effectiveness of these elite U.S. soldiers.

The combined support ordinance of numerous air strikes, helicopter gunship and Cobra sorties have pounded Hill 174 for six days, while ground forces fire into the heart of what is thought to be a major staging area for a Tet offensive by elements from the 22nd NVA Regiment, aimed at disrupting the pacification program in Binh Dinh Province.

The NVA are dug into caves on the boulder covered face of the mountain and every effort by the GI's to unearth them has been met with stiff resistance. In this operation forward progress will be measured from boulder to boulder, as each hard-won new position reveals its network.
NVA BASE

(Continued from page 1)

of caves and tunnel complexes.

Bravo, Charlie and Delta Companies have all been probing and harasse-
ing the surrounded enemy
day and night all last week and it seems to be a
matter of time before the
enemy, unable to escape
or obtain supplies, will
fall to the superior Cur-
rahee force.

In spite of the NVA's
terrain advantage, the
men of the 3/506th have
been making significant
progress; and, though it
is too early for accurate
figures on NVA losses,
indications are that they
have suffered heavy cas-
ualties.

The important thing is
that the enemy, usually
an elusive, hit-and-run
force, has been trapped,
and the Currahees are now
calling the shots.

ALPHA FIRST

On a narrow, rocky
trail flanked by a steep
drop on one side and a
cliff on the other, the
men of the third platoon,
Alpha Company were the
first Currahees to make
contact with the enemy in
the recent series of
fierce fire fights in the
new 3/506th AO.

Although they were at
a serious disadvantage
because of the terrain,
the men of Airborne Alpha
fought courageously to
ward off the repeated
probes and attacks made
by the enemy; and they
were successful in stay-
ing the offensive thrusts

of an enemy well armed
with AK's, machine guns,
and Chinese grenades. In-
formation gained from the
contact has been instru-
mental in the success of
the joint battalion op-
eration presently under-
way in the same general
area.

Although thick vege-
tation and rocky terrain
prevented an exact de-
termination of enemy los-
ses, it is certain that
the effectively applied
firepower of "A" Co. and
support forces caused in-
reparable damage to the
NVA force.

*******
ALPHA FOILS
NVA AMBUSH

WITH THE CLOSING OF DARKNESS A SMALL GROUP OF MEN FROM ALPHA COMPANY MOVE ALONG A BERM SEPARATING TWO OF THE TERRACED RICE PADDIES OF "COMBAT ALLEY". THEIR CAU-
TIOUS MOVEMENT CONTINUES AS THEY APPROACH THE SUOI PHU
MY RIVER JUST ABOVE MY DINH VILLAGE. SUDDENLY, A BOLT
goes forward and the enemy's position is be-
trayed. Just ahead, per-
haps only 50 meters in a
tree line is the enemy!

PFC Joseph Holmes,
Augusta, Georgia delivers
a fiery volley from his
M-16 and falls into the
prone position behind
some short stubs of vege-
tation. The fire of
AK's crack through the
air; while PFC Wesley
Williams, Manhattan, N.Y.
the slack man, rushes
forward covering Holmes
from a small rise in the
ground. The AK fire be-
comes more intense as
Sergeant Roy L. Graham,
Rivir Beach, Fla. deploys
his squad. The radio
operator (RTO) SP4 Paul
Beavers, Hillside, Md.

help to the platoon leader,
1st Lt. Phillip R.
Peters, Seattle, Wash.

Soon the 3d Platoon,
Alpha Company are on the
move to support their
fellow veterans in the
first squad.

In a few minutes
time the well placed fire
of twelve AK's has pin-
ned down the men of the
1st squad. Out-numbered
they continued to pour
out a heavy volume of
fire despite the tactical
advantages of terrain
and numbers held by the
enemy.

With the light faded,
the fire fight went on. The arrival of 1Lt
Peters and the rest of
the Third Platoon soon
reversed the situation.

(Continued on back page.)
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
The VC found themselves caught in the cross fire of a counter-attack! The
beams of thenice paddies gave the reinforcing 2nd and 3rd squads a natural
forward position flanking the enemy.
"Darkness, like a closing curtain," made
further advance by the
3d Platoon unnecessarily
 Risky. Lt. Peters summoned
the devastating presence of heavy guns
shells. Rockets and mini-
guns tore into the con-
cal V.C. positions.
Their were a few final
bursts of AK fire---then
silence. Darkness closed
and the VC fled into the
haunting shadows.
Quick reaction, al-
ertness, and unselfish
service denied the enemy
a single casualty among
the 3d Platoon. Though
every casualty are
unknown it remains cer-
tain that the work of the
"Screaming Eagles" has
been branded into the
thoughts of the V.C. am-
bushers. *****

N.V.A. ROUTED
ON 474
In a hard hitting series of clashes the 6th Battalion, 22nd NVA regiment has been routed by the "Screaming Eagles" of the 111st Airborne Division (Airmobile), northwest of Bong Son in Binh Dinh Province.

The deeply entrenched NVA force concealed in the caves and crevices of Hill 474 initiated a series of fire fights with heavy AK-47, B-40 rocket, RPG rocket, and RPD light machine gun fire against elements of the 3D Battalion (Airmobile), 506th Infantry. As the conflict progressed sorties of F-4 fighter bombers were brought to bear on the enemy positions. In coordinated helicopter borne combat assaults Lt. Col. Joseph N. Jaggers Jr., Commander of the 3D/506th Infantry began an encirclement of the NVA. Further air strikes and artillery bombardment prevented the NVA battalion from fleeing their base camp.

With the NVA surrounded by the Currahees (Continued on back page.)
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of the 36/506th the air and artillery bombardment was intensified with the "Currah sleek" directing this raised fire power on observable targets. Further combat assault were then made by the mobile 3d Battalion placing them in command of the enemy route of escape.

The NVA under the continuous punishment of small arms, air, and artillery fire attempted to exfiltrate Hill 474. Despite the enemy's advantage of terrain and maneuverability, the 506th Infantry never lost the initiative driving the NVA into smaller and even smaller elements. The final phase resulted in the 8th Bn, 22nd NVA Regiment's defeat in detail.

The NVA lost seventy-five dead as the result of small arms, TAC air and artillery fire. The "Currah sleek" captured 20 AK-47 assault rifles, 6,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, three RPD light machine guns, four B-40 rocket launchers, thirty-five 3-40 rockets, eight RPG rockets, twenty-five chicom grenades, 3,000 lbs of rice, a typewriter, and substantial quantities of medical supplies, entrenching tools, clothing, and documents.

Information from NVA POW's and Hoa Chan's revealed that a third or more of the 8th Battalion, 22nd NVA Regiment had been lost on Hill 474 and that the majority of those who survived the onslaught would Chieu Hoi if allowed to do so by their leaders.

RESULTS BY COMPANY:

ALPHA
4 enemy KIA, 4 AK-47's, 5 60mm mortar rounds, 3 B-40 rockets, 1 82 mm mortar sighting device, 200 AK-47 rounds, 1 chicom, 40 lbs of rice.

BRAVO
7 enemy KIA, 1 RPD light machine gun, 5 82mm mortar rounds, 2 60mm mortar rounds, 1 chicom grenade, 100 AK-47 rounds.

CHARLIE
6 enemy KIA, 1 Chieu Hoi.

DELTA
14 enemy KIA, 1 Chieu Hoi, 1 POW, 4 B-40 rocket launchers, 2 RPD light machine guns, 17 AK-47's, 32 B-40 rockets, 5 anti-tank grenades, 25 chicom grenades, 6,000 AK-47 rounds, 1 82mm mortar round, 3 60 mm mortar rounds, 37 B-40 detonators, and 3,000 lbs of rice.
The 3d Battalion (Airmobile), 506th Infantry, arrived in the Republic of Vietnam in 1967. Since that time it has served as a mobile Task Force for the whole of II Corps. Stationed out of Phan Thiet in the southern tip of II Corps the Battalion undertook the bloody battle of Phan Thiet during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The Battalion accounted for over 500 enemy casualties during the battle and maintained pressure on the VC from the Southern Free Strike to the Le Hong Fong Forest to the north. The Bat-
mortars, four B-40 rocket launchers, and two 57mm recoilless rifles.

With the end of the battle of Hill 474 the “Currahees” remembered their comrades fallen here and are continuing their mission in barraging the NVA from the populated low lands of Binh Dinh Province.

(Story by PFC Nicholas Kobe)


E 3/506 provides fire support.

The 3/506 is separated from the 101st by 200 miles on a mission with the 173d Abn Bde, but “we wear our Screaming Eagle patch with pride.” They are proud of their Bn Commander, LTC Joseph N. Jaggers, Jr., who is a story in himself and known as “Wildcat.” The Bn Soldier of the Month was SP4 RONALD D. GOOCH of Co B who received a “Screaming Eagle” all plaque, 3-day pass, wrist watch, letter of commendation to himself and his parents or wife. Also promotion to SERGEANT. The winner for March was SP4 STEPHEN R. WILLIAMS of Co D, who will receive the same. The local subchapter is “STAND ALONE” and within the last two months has enrolled more than 233 members under Maj. Marvin L. Larson, Pres.; 1SG Theofil Macias, Vice Pres.; SFC Edgar Bellar, Sec’y, and hard working CSM Robert L. Steele, Treasurer. These “Currahees” are proud for upsetting the plans of the VC/NVA for an attack on Tam Quan District by the battle of Hill 474 and their subchapter.

☆ ☆ ☆
It was hot and dusty when the C-130 transport touched down at Landing Zone Betty. The engines suddenly reversed to bring the lumbering monster to a stop at the end of the runway. It slowly turned, heading towards the loading area with its single tin-roofed shack. The men who lined the runway struggled to their feet. They were leaving Betty, they had no idea for how long or what lay ahead. So it was, that Task Force 3/506 composed of: 3rd Bn. (Ambl.), 506th Infantry; Delta Battery, 2nd Bn. (Ambl.) 320th Arty; and a detachment of HHC, 326 Engr. Bn. (Ambl.) left Landing Zone Betty. The C-130 had been airborne for nearly two hours when it made its landing approach. It dipped through the clouds and felt for the runway, touched down and reversed engines. It was Ban Me Thout, and little could be said for the conditions which these men had to deal with. The weather was foul; the rain and constant mist made life miserable, but there could be no dampening the pride in these men, who, separated from the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) since 1967, had lived the Currahee motto, “Stand Alone.”

The Task Force, under Operational Control (OPCON) to Task Force South, had fought the fierce battle of Phan Thiet during Tet of 1968. The Viet Cong threw everything they had into the battle, gambling on complete victory and the political and military gains which the capture of Phan Thiet would bring. The Viet Cong left 500 dead in the wake of what became utter disaster for their aspirations in Binh Thuan Province.

It was November, 1969 when, at Ban Me Thout, the Task, Force was OPCON’ed to the 23rd ARVN Div. and shortly thereafter, to the 1st Bde., 4th Inf. Div. Contact was light as the Currahees pursued an aggressive search and clear operation until their departure. In late December, the C-130s were loaded again, and a different destination awaited the Task Force. The C-130s were to land at Phu Cat and Landing Zone English, the advance guard moved by Chinook to Landing Zone Uplift while the main element moved by truck. The Task Force was now under the Operational Control of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The mission of the Task Force was to find the 2nd NVA Regt. and prevent it from disrupting the Pacification Program on the Bong Son Plain; a combined project of the 173rd and the South Vietnamese Government.
The possibility of an NVA thrust existed in Binh Hoai Province and not a moment could be wasted. The Currahees were immediately transferred from the “hooks” to waiting UH-1H “slicks” and combat assaulted into the Crowsfoot Mountains. Meanwhile, the engineers began turning a barren hill into Fire Base Abby and constructing a Tactical Operations Center (TOC) in the valley below—which bore the ironic name “Happy Valley.” Contact in the Crowsfoot Mountains proved light, as the NVA fled the approaching Airmobile Forces. In mid-January, the companies—freshly shaven, showered and clothed shuttled to Landing Zone North English by truck.

Tet 1970 was approaching and thoughts drifted back to the 1968 Tet Offensive. The 22nd NVA Regt. was expected to make a drive into the lowlands of Binh Dinh Province. The pacification program had hurt the VC and NVA, denying them rice and replacements from the villages of the province. The NVA were expected to make a show of force and the Currahees were to face this test. The forward TOC was moved from Fire Base Abby to Fire Base Tape in the An Lao Valley. The stage was being set.

The companies of Task Force 3/506 were deployed, both in the An Lao Valley and the surrounding “Combat Alley.” The search for the enemy was intensive as time seemed to be running out. It was on the afternoon of January 25 that Delta Company was moving up the slope of one of the hills enclosing “Combat Alley” when they began to receive intense small arms and heavy weapons fire. This was the beginning of the battle for Hill 474. By late afternoon, Delta, Charlie, Bravo and Alpha Companies were locked in a series of fire-fights, with the 8th Bn., 22nd NVA Regt. The NVA had massed in the shelter of a vast natural cave complex. With the terrain in their favor, the NVA withstood several assaults by the veteran Currahee battalion. For nine days, an intense air and artillery bombardment blasted at the granite caverns. But in the end, it was the individual soldier who had to dig the NVA out of the cave complexes.

Many acts of heroism occurred in the days that followed as the men fought their way through the darkened citadel with pistols and, above all, raw courage. Tet was short for the NVA—they never left their staging areas as they were again met and defeated by the Currahees. Task Force 3/506, its resources and strength, are built upon determination seasoned with experience and tradition. The faces change as well as the names of the men who have carried the burden. So long as there is a need, this task force—Task Force 3/506, remains prepared to “Stand Alone.”