

The Letters of

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant David Lyndon Wheeler USAR

Viet Nam September 1968 - August 1969

3 <sup>rd</sup> Platoon/Company B	1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion/8 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry
2 <sup>nd</sup> Platoon/Company B	1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion/8 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry
Exec. Off./Company B	1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion/8 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry
Cmdg. Off./Company B	1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion/8 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry
PBO Hq. & Hq. Company	1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion/8 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry

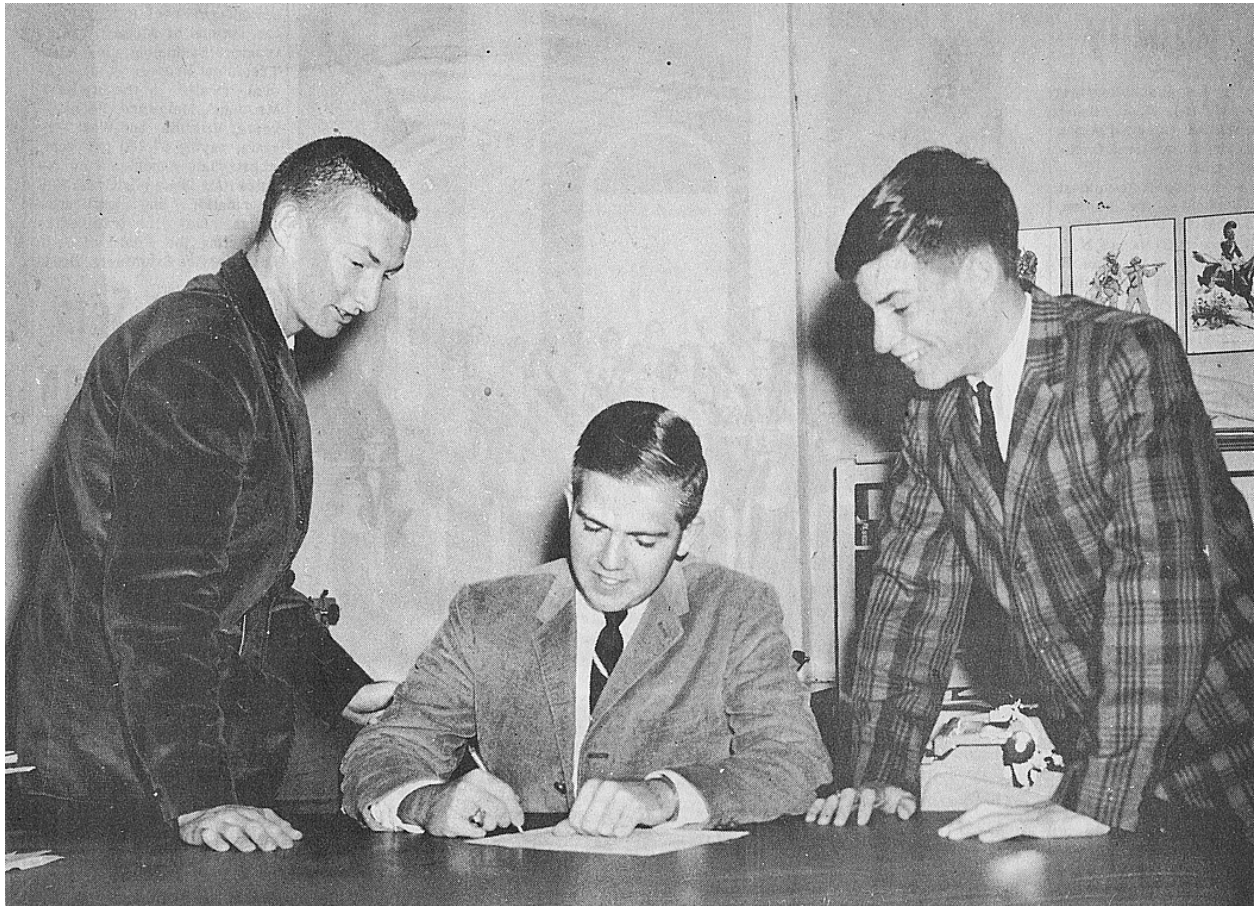
1<sup>st</sup> Brigade/1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Airmobile)  
(DMZ, and Cambodian Border near Tay Ninh)

Oct. 2 1969 - Captain USAR -	Commanding Company "C" 2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion/11 <sup>th</sup> Infantry 2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade/5 <sup>th</sup> Div. (Mechanized) Fort Carson, Colorado
January 1971 - Captain USA -	Fort Knox, Kentucky

Previous military assignments:

2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. USAR -	Fort Benning, Georgia - September 1967 5 <sup>th</sup> Mechanized - Fort Carson Jungle Training - Canal Zone
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## R.O.T.C. Scholarship Winners



R.O.T.C. scholarship winners at the University of Delaware are from left, Steve B. Rash, a freshman from Woodside, Del.; David L. Wheeler, a junior from Arlington, Va.; and John M. Collins, a freshman from Haddenfield, N.J. Three freshman (Richard Work of Newburgh, N.Y., not pictured) won four-year scholarships and Wheeler received a two-year grant from the Department of the Army.

**David L. Wheeler**  
BOX 112, RUSSELL E  
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
NEWARK, DELAWARE

May 19, 1965

Dear Dad,

As you know, I've been planning to go advanced course R. O. T. C. It has come to the point of signing on the dotted line and after great consideration I've decided to go through with it. It's not for the money, although it will help, but because I really want to and feel the opportunity great. I know you and mom feel rather hesitant about it, but I feel it's really the thing for me.

Enclosed are the forms involved, in triplicate, of course. Under where it says "consent of Parent or Guardian," all you (mom does not have to sign, only one signature is wanted or required) have to do is sign your name and the date on all three forms. Please do not mark anywhere else on the forms. These forms are required to be in by May 28<sup>th</sup> so please return them to me, not the R. O. T. C. department, as soon as possible. If you have any questions just call me or have a message for me to call home.

I'm feeling a little better now that I've had some rest and have finished all my papers. Finals don't bother me at all now.

I hope you are all well. Give my love to everyone.

With love,  
David



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS  
5TH INFANTRY DIVISION (MECHANIZED) AND FORT CARSON  
Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G1  
FORT CARSON, COLORADO 80913

ALCGA-PMD

4 December 1967

Lieutenant David Wheeler  
5614 33rd Street North  
Arlington, Virginia 22207

Dear Lieutenant Wheeler,

Your assignment to Fort Carson has been noted with pleasure, and I wish to extend a sincere welcome to you. You are tentatively scheduled for assignment to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry. An officer of that unit will be appointed as your sponsor to assist you in getting settled. He will contact you in the immediate future.

Your request for 10 days additional leave has been approved by this headquarters, and Fort Benning school authorities were requested by telephone to amend your orders accordingly.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mechanized), has added many and varied accomplishments to a long history of distinguished service since its reactivation in 1962. You can be justly proud of the opportunity to contribute to the success of such a fine organization. I am confident that you will understand the sense of urgency which we ascribe to all of our activity in this division.

Fort Carson is located in scenic surroundings at an altitude of about 6,000 feet, approximately five miles south of Colorado Springs. Colorado Springs is a friendly community, particularly with respect to military personnel. These facts, combined with the generally pleasant year-round Rocky Mountain climate, should insure that your tour at Fort Carson will be extremely enjoyable.

Bachelor Officers' Quarters are available on post.

Upon your arrival at Fort Carson, report initially to the Fort Carson Community Center, Building 6140. This facility is equipped to render a complete service, 24 hours a day. Trained representatives will advise you of your processing itinerary.-

I trust that the foregoing information will be of assistance to you. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or your sponsor:

I know that your forthcoming assignment to the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (mechanized) will be, both enjoyable and professionally rewarding. We are looking forward to having you with us in the near future. Meanwhile, best wishes for a safe and pleasant trip to Fort Carson.

Sincerely,  
B. C. OWENS                      LTC, GS              G1

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "B C Owens".



UNITED STATES ARMY

November 2, 1967

Thurs. Night

Dear Brother,

- (1) Ft. Benning, Ga., above and beyond any other place or situation in the world, blows it out the ass sideways.
- (2) Camp Roosevelt had more experienced and capable leaders and instructors.
- (3) Riding in open cattle trucks, w/o seats (except the floor), in 35° weather when it is raining profusely, for 30 miles, is, to put it mildly - a pain in the ass.

Nevertheless, I'm managing to get high grades, make good friends, and attempting to become an officer with a professional attitude. Some things however, are detrimental to my high morale. First, my chances of attending the wedding are decreasing daily. Second, my health is slowly getting worse. Third, most of the women are of rather poor quality and dubious morals and character.

Let me elaborate. Training here is nearly 100 hours a week - including Saturdays until noon (usually) or later (sometimes). No leaves or passes are granted for periods of longer than 4 hours, and then only for special reasons and to persons with good class attendance. As of now we don't know our training schedule for the week including Nov. 18 and won't know it until Nov 10 or 11. If training is all Saturday I won't be able to come. If it is a half day there's a slim chance. Why?, 'cause last week on the escape and evasion course (you travel 5 miles at night through dense terrain, evading aggressors, to reach a safe point) I injured my left eye (cut the pupil with a thorn) and have missed two days of training because of it.

Because I have missed this training, they may not grant me a 4 hour pass on Sat. morning. (If I get off Sat. morning I could leave Fri. night and be in St. Louis around 10:00 p.m.) Even though my eye doesn't hurt anymore and has healed, I still can't see very well - only a blur, so I'll probably have to miss more training time to get that straightened out. (By the way, don't mention the eye business to Mom or Dad - they don't know all the details and shouldn't.)

It pisses me off, but that's the way things stand now. My suggestion is that you definitely plan to have Doug or whomever you want as best man and count me out. It really doesn't look at all probably that I'll be able to come. Perhaps, I'll see you all Thanksgiving (I get 4 days off) or Christmas for sure. At any rate, make sure someone consumes my share of champagne and grosses out at least ½ of Amy's friends and family as I would have. As for you, if you have any trouble the first night, just give me a call and I'll try to work something out for you. Otherwise just remember the cardinal rule: Once you can smell it, you've got it licked.

You wouldn't believe some of the shit they're teaching us down here how to use demolitions on all sorts of stuff (TNT, comp. C-4, detonating cord - great to wrap around people and set off it blows them into 50 different pieces). All sorts of hand to gland training, (I got my expert on the M-60 machine gun), survival, booby traps, airmobile operations, counterinsurgency techniques, -Christ, you name it, we get it - including being shit upon daily. We're supposed to be 2nd LTS., but we're treated more like cub scouts. I agree, about half of these cats deserve it, but the rest of us deserve a little better - maybe 1<sup>st</sup> Class Boy Scouts.

The quarters are real nice - icebox; private shower and bath; bar w/in 20 steps, package store w/in 100 steps; no drinking regs.; virtually complete freedom. Only one problem - there's no time to do anything except write a letter or two and sleep. 95% of us have serious colds but aren't encouraged to go on sick call. What ends up is you either get well somehow or get sick enough to get to the hospital. Two guys now have strep throats, five have pneumonia, and a couple mono. Your guess is as good as mine why.

Listen, I have to cut. Try to understand my predicament here. I really want to come - it would really be great. but I don't think they'll let me because of missing the training Sat. morning regardless of what I've missed before. Explain to A. and give her my regrets. I'll try to write again before the Day.

Hang loose Poncho,  
Dave

P.S.

I met John Wayne two weeks ago in the Ft. Benning Officer's Club Stag Bar. He looks as old as the hills and is a boisterous ass, but we all laughed and ate him up like a bunch of girl scouts - mainly because he was buying the drinks. Secondly because he was accompanied by high ranking officers who were also laughing. Quite an experience though. He sure is BIG.

DLW



1 October 1968

Hi there fun lovers, (Dick and Amy)

Welcome from the vacation land of the S.E. Things are swinging here at the An Khe Hilton in Greater II Corps, Vietnam. Wish you were here to enjoy the festivities. There's a party here every night with fireworks and surprise parties. Such a ball. At the costume parties I'm always disguised as a big tree strung with loads of guns and grenades. It just broke one party right up and had everyone rolling on the ground with laughter (I think). Wish I could write more, but I'm running out of light. News is that I've been switched from the 4th Div. to the First CAV but have no assignment within the Division yet. We're just pulling perimeter security patrols until we receive orders. Lots of laughs. Don't write until you receive a more definitive address from me - which will be soon.

Things are fine and spirits high. I'm now a big "First John" - weeee.

Love,  
David



*Company "B"*  
*1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry*  
*1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)*  
*APO San Francisco 96490*



October 6, 1968

Sunday

Dear Folks,

I'm now at LZ (Landing Zone) Sharon at HQ, 1st BN, 8th Inf. of the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry. LZ Sharon is slightly south of Quang Tri City or about eight miles south of the DMZ. It's a real small place with a not too secure perimeter. Shortly I'll be assigned my company and platoon. Everyone is so darn carefree and have give-a-damn attitudes. It's a wonder we've gotten this far. One minute you're in the field, the next you're on a chopper heading down the ranks towards assignment. Let's hope someone knows what they're doing. However, the reception here was warm and friendly and we were sipping a beer shortly after our arrival. By the way, Jim Jourdonnais and I got assigned to the same battalion. Good to have a friend in the same unit. I'd describe how this cavalry unit is organized but its not kosher with the intelligence group.

It's not quite the same size as my Battalion at Carson - actually same size but not divided up the same. The XO of the BN is somewhat of a Doo-Doo but can be tolerated. We haven't met the CO yet.

If you write you can reach me at:

1Lt. David L. Wheeler, 05245922  
3rd Platoon, Bravo Company  
1st BN/ 8th Cav, 1st Brigade, 1stAIRCAV  
APO San Francisco, California 96490

We'll be going to the field in the morning. No big sweat. I can't wait to get rid of some of my luggage though. I traded for a good ruck sack and that helped but today we had to carry everything from the LZ (or air strip) to the S-1 shop (about 1½ miles). The ruck sack plus the duffle bag nearly proved fatal. As you can guess, transportation is a hit and miss proposition.



October 8, 1968

Tuesday

I had finished four pages of this letter when a chopper came in and blew the last three pages away. Frustrating. I don't know if I have the strength to write it all over again, but I'll try.

Sunday night I got my own platoon. (3rd Platoon, Bravo Company) and went into the field to join them Monday morning. They've been in the field, away from civilization for 52 consecutive days. They're the raunchiest looking crew you've ever seen and the greatest I've ever known. The problem is not only Charlies, but disease. Everyone of them (31) has a bad case of either jungle rot, ringworm, parasites, or dysentery plus all have to contend with the heat (100-120 during hot hours 11-4) and the leeches. Leeches crawl and stick on legs during the day and on the face and chest at night. They don't hurt, only sting a little. But the idea of them is revolting.

Yesterday we walked (humped is the military word for walking hard and fast) about five miles through the mountains. Most of the men carry packs with from 50-60 lbs. of equipment in them. That's a lot. I was only carrying about 30 lbs. - pack with rifle, pistol and four frags. Around noon we were climbing a hill and I passed out. The platoon sergeant (SFC Simms) came back down for me, took my pack and carried it up to the top of the hill. Two privates helped me up the hill after that. There were no snickers, or wise cracks or funny looks. They were just helping someone. I felt like an ass. I've obviously got a lot of things to live up to here. I don't know how they do what they do and still keep their sense of humor.

By the way, please relay that address to all concerned parties as I don't know how often I'll find the time to write.

My Platoon Sergeant, SFC Simms is one of the finest men I've ever met. He not only knows his stuff but is a gentleman to boot. Without him things would be impossible to tolerate.

There are so many thoughts running through my mind that it's hard to concentrate. Most of all I pray nightly that I'll have the strength to see me through these times.

From where I'm sitting now I can see the DMZ. These hills I'm in are very pretty, sort of like the beauty of the ocean - very pretty but it can kill you in a second.

Humor here is slightly perverted (maybe I should say strange or dark) here it would be a

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strain to say what a person might laugh at. I should suffice to say that surprisingly enough, morale is very high and complaints are made in a good natured manner.

My love to you all and I'll try to write soon.

David

3rd Platoon, Company "B"  
1st BN, 8th CAV, 1st Brigade, 1st AIR CAV  
APO San Francisco, Cal. 96490

October 20, 1968

Sunday Night

Dearest Aunt and Uncle,

To start a description of the forsaken place I am located would be horrendous. I'm in the mountains just south of the DMZ. It's cold when you're inactive, rains 5-20 inches a day (monsoon season), has murderously high hills, is infested with leeches and ants, and is prohibitive to good radio communication. Main problems consist of: (1) medical - immersion foot (continually wet) which everyone has, (2) jungle rot, (3) colds, (4) heat exhaustion (from climbing tall hills), (5) dysentery (spelling?), (6) hepatitis (frequently), and malaria. Add to this a 50-70 lb. pack, 5 grenades, 1 smoke grenade, 1 trip flare, 300 rounds of ammo, and food. Frankly, the Viet Cong and NVA regulars are the least of my problems.

I know that sounds awfully grim and it is. However, morale is very high and I've never met a finer group of men. I've only been in action with my platoon for two weeks, yet I feel a deep comradeship with my men. My platoon Sgt., SFC Sims, is a rather coarse southern gentleman of the finest character. Without him these first few weeks my job would have been unbearable and killing (literally). The first day with the platoon I passed out climbing a hill (rather embarrassing). I woke up at the top of the hill. Being somewhat embarrassed I asked no questions. Later I found out that SFC Sims had carried myself and my equipment plus his own equipment singlehandedly up the hill. I guess that makes him hero of the day, but I was impressed. His humor is definitely basic but funny and the way he maneuvers people around to his viewpoint is phenomenal. Naturally he is very tactful with his suggestions but has never steered me wrong. So you see, all is not smelly in Vietnam.

I should like to relate to my somewhat doubting uncle that my success at cards is blossoming out into greener pastures. My funds are definitely well padded by my exploits. There's only one poor aspect however - here in the mountains there's nothing to spend the profits on.

Tonight we've set up perimeter on a hillside overlooking a long valley. Unfortunately there's high ground surrounding us about 340° around and is not too safe. But I doubt if Charles will mess with us. My platoon knocked out a chopper pad here this afternoon and I had a lot of fun blowing down trees and blowing out stumps with TNT. Over here, sometimes (like today) a big boom is very comforting. Sort of gives you a feeling of power. Luckily we were able to get

a chopper in. The weather has been so bad lately that no choppers have been able to get in and as a result we've had no hot chow or beer for three days. Water is no problem since the streams are too plentiful and ponchos can be spread out to collect the bountiful rain. Heaven to us is a dry place to sleep where we can take our boots off and dry our feet out.

I think of you both quite often and of the fine times I spent with you. Over here there are no people that I can have a decent, intelligent conversation with I really miss it. Actually there's one man in my platoon named "preacher" - a hard core infantry type with two years of seminary - but military tactics and religion are our only topics. What I miss are the warm evening chats with you both filled with humor. I suppose face value acceptance as a rational human being counts a lot.

It's raining very hard now and the fog is rolling in. the men are putting out their trip flares and claymores as it is getting dark. Ambush patrols are leaving the perimeter and the remainder of the people are writing letters, reading, and generally fooling around. It's quite and peaceful. But there's still the ominous sound of people digging in and preparing for the worst. The first night here I was awakened by incoming mortar rounds and was confused until SFC Sims grabbed my foot from the slit trench next to my tent. I said "what the \_\_\_ are you doing?" He said "making love - get in here dumbhead". About two minutes later it ended. Muddy and wet I emerged from my hole somewhat shaken. The tent was riddled with holes from shrapnel. That's the kind of humor that keeps you going over here. Afterward the Sergeant apologized for calling me dumbhead. I just laughed and told him "anytime."

It's getting too dark to write now and I's sure I've made a hundred mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation. It's unavoidable though when I write quickly.

I hope you are both well and happy. I think of you often.

Much love,  
David

3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Company "B"  
1<sup>st</sup> BN, 8<sup>th</sup> CAV, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> AIRCAV  
APO San Francisco, Cal. 96490


October 21, 1968  
Monday Afternoon

Treasured humans (Dick and Amy),

I've had my own platoon for about two weeks now and it's been real. To describe the problems I have here would be a grandiose job but I'll list a few:

- (1) Rain - it's monsoon season; 5-15 inches a day, (rain, that is)
- (2) Leeches - aggravating, but not harmful
- (3) Malaria - runs about 5%
- (4) Jungle Rot - everyone and now I'll got it good
- (5) Hepatitis - every once and a while
- (6) Heat exhaustion (spelling?) - we're in the mountains and climbing with a 50-70 lb. pack is a strain.
- (7) Immersion foot - everyone gets it if extreme care isn't taken. It is rarely taken. (care that is)

With the monsoon season comes rain and fog that prevents aerial or overland resupply of any type. As a result, until yesterday we had to rely on local streams for water and had to ration ourselves to one meal (cold) a day. Being wet continually has its drawbacks also. Clean clothes were sent out a week ago and that's a treat. Otherwise you smell like a toilet that hasn't been flushed since Christmas - fragrant.

Even with these problems morale is high. This is the finest group of men I've ever met - or probably ever will. Nothing gets them down. The saving grace of it all is SFC (Sergeant First Class  ) Sims - a ranger, airborne, pathfinder, demolitions qualified veteran of the Korean War. He's a rather coarse grained southern gentleman of the best tradition (Memphis, Tenn.). His humor is original, if a little vulgar. His help has made this hell hole bearable. He's already saved my young ass several times. What do you say to a man who saves your life? Thanks? He just laughs it off and says "go \_\_\_ yourself!" He's always extremely tactful in convincing me that I'm slightly in error (usually 180° wrong).

Who we're fighting up here (about 8 miles south of the DMZ) is NVA regular troops. Actually, the terrain, weather, and medical problems are less of a problem than the enemy. Every time they mess with us they get their ass wiped royally. We met a few on the trail yesterday. I was walking three men behind point. Just as I was lowering my rifle Plt. Sgt Sims pushed me aside on the ground, put his M-16 on spray and cleaned a gook up standing about three feet from me behind a tree. I could have got him but this Sgt Sims is a real go-getter. Sometimes I think he likes killing gooks better than anything else. He's already said he'll give the point man two cases of beer if he'll let him have a gook in the open. What a crazy war!

What I wouldn't give to be sleeping between clean sheets (dry sheets) in a nice warm bedroom. Ecstasy!

Right now we're alongside a small stream shaving, washing, and writing letters. very peaceful.... We can hear a bunch of firing and explosions in the background. N one really notices it though, it's just like trucks passing by back home. My mind is slowly passing into oblivious so I had better say adieu. I'll try to write soon. I hope you're both well.

With love,  
Dave

22 October 1968

Tuesday Morning

Dear Folks,

I got my first mail yesterday - one from mom (#5) and one from Dad (with newsletter clipping depicting Dad as Pres. of ATC). Thank you. In reference to the money I send home - I owed you both more than \$100. As I remember it, you told me you deposited some money in my checking account which I doubt you took out to repay yourself. I think I owed you more like \$200. Better check that out.

In around twenty minutes will be extracted by helicopter from this hilltop to go in on a combat assault of a suspected NVA fortified bunker system. It's always exciting and lots of fun to ride the helicopters after doing so much walking all the time.

To settle your mind Dad, my pack is now around 60 lbs. and I can keep up with the best of them. It just took a couple of days to get in shape. I can assure you I still don't like being a pack mule, but if you wish to live with any comfort at all you've got to carry the weight: bedroll w/air mattress, chow, writing paper etc., heat tablets (to heat up chow), flashlight w/extra batteries, and etc. and etc. It all adds up the with ammo and etc.

A few more things to add to my "want" list - popcorn (preferably in a self contained cooking ("Jiffypop") package); small paper address book, pens and pencils, grease pencils, socks (again). Someday I'll be asking for a good waterproof, military type flashlight with self contained light filters (white and red).



23 Oct 1968

(continued)

Wednesday morning

The CA (combat assault) was fun, but was about as dangerous as attacking Lubber Run Park at night. All we turned up were leeches and bugs. But it's good experience. Today we stay with the company CP as pad security. It's about time too. The benefits are great: less humping (walking) and coffee and donuts come in on the morning log bird. By the way, a log bird is a

helicopter which brings in our logistical (supply) support.

We had a chaplain in the field yesterday afternoon to give service - Protestants. I'm sending the program. The poor chaplain could hardly say two words without a tree stump being blown out 20 feet away or a chopper coming in or some other disturbance. I'm sure it will be good training for him. I just wrote a few of the comments (on the program) people were screaming right next to him as explosions were about to take place or chopper was coming in.

The weather has broken for a few days and it is sunny this morning. But naturally, with the sun comes the heat again - it's only 8:30 a.m. and it must be 95° already.

Sgt. Sims is finally settling back and accepting me as the leader. I'm sure it's a headache off his shoulders to pass the ultimate responsibility. I'm obviously making correct decisions now because he offers fewer and fewer suggestions. He now merely nods, says, "yes, sir", and moves out. When I question him about the merit of a certain order he now agrees - I should hope so, he taught me! Chopper's inbound and have to rush. Much love to all and thanks for the mail (got 5 more letters yesterday).

With love, Dave



26 October 1968

Saturday Morning

Dear Folks,

The last few days have been exciting and tragic with a little humor to boot. First let me thank you for the bountiful mail I have received. Out here the "sugar reports" (mail) are the balm of civilized existence. You should see the eager faces when my men know that the mail is in - packages are like Christmas morning. I'm certainly no exception. We may be two miles away from the night perimeter when we get the word the mail is in, but no matter how rugged the terrain is, we move that distance in record time. I've seen men get 25 lb. packages and hump the contents for 5 miles- amazing, and no complaints.

The last three days we've had enemy contact every day. Wednesday afternoon we were cloverleafing (around the perimeter) and my point man (I usually walk fourth man behind the point) walked up on an NVA soldier defecating in the middle of the trail. He'd be alive today (the NVA) if he hadn't reached for his weapon (M-1 carbine). My point man was carrying a 12-gauge shotgun with 00 buckshot. As we policed up the M-1 weapon we found it was unloaded and non-functioning. Thursday we got ambushed by two NVA snipers and immediately got two casualties (neither serious), my point man and my RTO. However, I found my M-16 worked quite well to quell the disturbance. The two NVA snipers were carrying burp guns manufactured in the U.S.S.R. They also had English, Russian, and Chicom medicine on them. Yesterday we served as a blocking force for another of our companies' platoons. Two gooks ran right into us and received permanent profiles from us. Unfortunately one was an NVA nurse and the other a small boy (14) guiding her. The action did us all a lot of good and has morale riding high. I don't feel bad about the boy though because he was carrying a complete attack plan for a nearby fortified hamlet.

Besides scout dog teams we have a Kit Carson scout working with our platoon periodically. A Kit Carson scout is a former NVA soldier who "Chieu Hoi'd" and was retrained by us to be a point man. The problem is he's only 16 years old. Just a scared kid: no education, no brains, no guts. Thursday, this Kit Carson was second man when we got ambushed. Last night he refused to pull guard. Naturally we took him directly to the company commander. The CO gave him a direct order at which time he tried to shoot the CO with his M-16. SFC Sims was standing behind the Kit Carson scout. SFC Sims is quick-lightning fast, is the word. I don't think the Kit Carson will be able to hold a rifle anymore with broken arms. However, he's still walking point. The kid's age is what bothers me, he's only a child. Yet he's getting paid by the U.S. govt 100 times more than the average V.N. soldier and gets preferential treatment and good

equipment. If we sent this kid back to the Kit Carson scout center he'd be shot by his own people - so what do you do?

Yesterday, after zapping the two gooks we went down to a nearby stream to bathe, shave, and turkey down. Well, SFC Sims saw a 5-ton rock he didn't like so we spent about 2½ hours trying to push the rock into the stream. You've never seen anything like it. Three squad leaders, the Platoon SGT. and the platoon leader (me) all discussing quite seriously how we were going to get the rock into the water - a real tactical problem. When we got it in the water, with a magnificent "splash", there was real pride as if we had really accomplished something - what a ball we had!

Today we're pad platoon all except for SFC Sims and a squad out on perimeter security. Everyone is getting haircuts and life continues merrily along. The background noises of war proceed, however, and the tense feeling is still in the air.

I have a NVA issue rice bowl with red star, and etc. on it that I'm going to try to send home for Craig. I don't know how I'm going to pack and wrap it but I'll try. Make sure you wash it well before fooling with it. What I need is 10¢ airmail stamps to send it. Try and send me a book of 10¢ stamps.

Time to get to work. Take care.

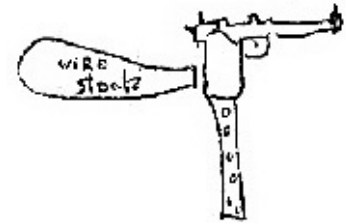
With love, Dave

26 October 1968

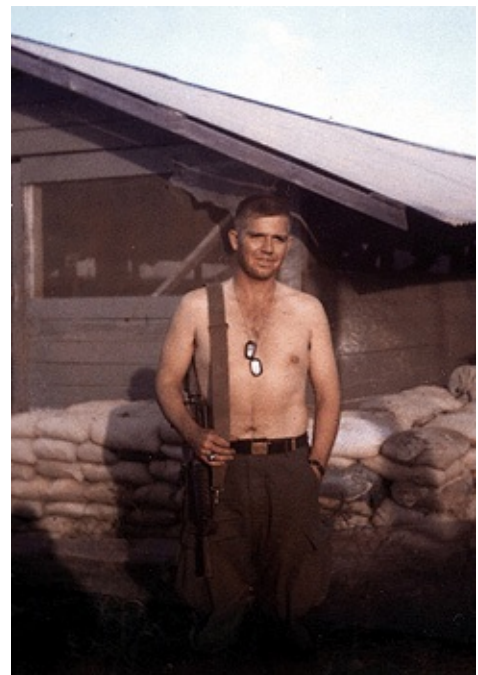
Saturday Evening DMZ

Dear Folks,

Big Day Today. Our company found a large arms cache' used by the NVA. Loads of stuff. Unfortunately, we didn't just find it. Seems there were some NVA troopers guarding it, but they decided, reluctantly, to give it up. No casualties on our side, 100% more cavities on their side. Apparently, all the action we've been receiving in this area has been because that arms cache was here. So, where there's smoke, there's fire, and I expect we'll be searching this area extensively the next week or so. One of the weapons I'm carrying now is from that cache - a converted Walther 38 (P38) pistol with 30 round magazine (9mm) which can fire fully auto. I don't know who it scares more - the NVA or me. But on single shot it's fairly accurate (fairly accurate means I probably could hit my foot if I aimed at it.) I also have my RTO carrying the Chinese submachine we found yesterday.



I'm afraid they're going to send SFC Sims back to Brigade S-2 tomorrow morning. I know how I can manage things in excellent order by myself, but the strain will increase. Losing Sims is like cutting off my right arm: I can still shoot left handed but it will take time to adjust. My platoon Sgt. now will be a 20 year old E-5 from Boston with 17 months in the Army. E-5's usually (stateside) are only Team leaders in a squad (11 men) under the supervision of a squad leader E-6. But the kid has guts and has learned the hard way. I just hope he has a little common sense.



I've had a head cold ever since I've been here and am just now getting over it. The problem is that now that I can smell better I can smell the stink of this country better, and this country does stink. Maybe I better get my cold back. Well, I've got to go check the perimeter, it's getting dark. Hope it doesn't rain tonight - my roof's got a hole in it.

I find it interesting that Becky Stanard is using me for 'our man in Vietnam". However,

David's Viet Nam Letters 20

I'm afraid if I wrote the class a letter of what it's really like over here I'd be court-marshaled on the spot. And the kids - well, all their idealism would be lost before they had any.

My love to all - I'm well and active and in better shape than ever.

With Love, David

28 October 1968

Monday afternoon

Dear Folks,

I have a new platoon Sgt. now - SFC Hensley. Only around 10 years in the Army and a tanker, to boot. He's been "in country" about seven days and is "cherry" (no combat yet). Things could be worse, but I don't know how. I guess he'll be as hard to break in as I was. Good news: mail is coming in abundantly and many thanks. Found another cache of arms and ammo yesterday. Only problem was the stuff was so old and rusted you couldn't have sold it for junk. The only reason we saw it was we stumbled on it on the trail - doesn't say much for us but it's still a find. Bad news - the whole Division is moving to the Mekong Delta near Tay Ninh in a few days. Starting tonight we will neither be able to send or receive any mail for about 10 or 15 days. So don't be surprised if you don't hear from me for awhile. The way things go - every time we (the 1st Cav) move into an area, the VC and NVA move out - as a result, up where we are it's pretty safe (?). So, they're sending us down near Saigon "where the action is". Don't worry. I've got a superb unit of trained "killer cowards". We don't intend to let anyone mess with us. I hope this letter gets out.

We've got a scout dog with us today and he's worthless. About the only thing he's good for is littering the trail.

I've got my old RTO (radio telephone operator) today (one that was wounded). He's a jewel, plus has brains. While I've been writing it just occurred to me that Sam (my RTO) is a negro. Never even came across my mind before. We sleep in the same tent, eat from the same dish and drink from the same canteens (I have to carry the water since his load is so heavy). I guess that's what I like about the Army - color means nothing - it's the person that counts. A lot of people say that the Negroes and Jews in the service are cowards. Well I've got all kinds of men in my platoon and they're all heroes as far as I'm concerned. As a matter of fact, the only two duds I have are both whites from Wisconsin. One has an I.Q. of around 80 and the other wants to go home to mama. Anyway, I'm proud to serve with them. Much love to all - I'll write as soon as possible.

David

November 2, 1968

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Wheeler

Coming home from a long, hard day of school to find your letter in our mailbox was about the nicest thing that could have happened to me. Dick and I were so pleased with your letter and pictures.

I guess I'd better begin at the beginning and tell you about our involvement with David. About 3 weeks ago we received our weekly magazine, Young Citizen, which contained a 3 page write up on the war in Viet Nam. The children became extremely interested in the article so one day I took our Social Studies time to discuss it. In the meantime we have received a letter from David telling us about some of the situations there and on the front of the envelope was a small map of Viet Nam with a dot where he was stationed. To spice up our discussion I brought the letter and envelope to class and read portions of it to the children. I guess that's where it really began. The next day they wanted to know if they could write letters to "Lt. Wheeler." Since we were finished with a unit in English I thought that this would be the perfect time to teach a unit in writing friendly letters - so we set out to write 37 letters to David. We wrote and re-wrote but it wasn't work to them - they enjoyed it so much. Finally we had them finished and ready to mail when they asked if they could make a Christmas box for him. I was all for it, so that evening Dick and I sat down and made out a list of 44 different small items each child could bring in. I typed up a form letter to all the parents explaining that we were writing a Lt. in Viet Nam and that each child that wanted to could bring in a gift for our Xmas box. I wish you could have seen the response - children wanted to bring in 4 and 5 items and some did. I met one of my students mothers in the Commissary th day after the letter to the parents went home and she wanted to know if she could bake little cakes to put in the box! It was absolutely unbelievable. So for one week we took our afternoon time to wrap packages and make cards for "Lt. Wheeler." We have one of those large banana boxes filled to the brim with gifts; pencils, shoelaces, boot polish, toothpaste, razor blades, grease pencils, mouth wash, aspirin, shaving cream, after shave, - you name it and it's in there. I mailed the package this morning for a small fortune but it was well worth it. You'd be surprised the interest the children are taking in the war now. Not a day passes that they don't say something about what's happening. When they heard about the bombing halt they said, "Maybe Lt. Wheeler will come home now and come to visit us so we can meet him." The minds of children are wonderful. Anyway, that's the situation now and we are patiently awaiting David's reply. I know he's just going to love it. Oh, another thing I must tell you is that the children have done some tall bragging. You should hear them - "We are the only one in the whole school writing to a soldier in Viet Nam" - and it went on and on. Each day they question me as to whether I've heard from Lt. Wheeler. They will be uncontrollable when we do!

I love teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade! I never thought I'd love it this much but I have 36 of the cutest kids you've ever seen. The only thing I really feel inadequate at is Reading. I really have to work at that subject more than any other. But the constant reward is what's so wonderful. I've worked so hard with my class (I have the low group) and to see them progress is the most

wonderful feeling - it's kind of hard to describe but I'm sure you know what I mean.

Unfortunately I have 41 in my Reading class and that is far too many - it should be half that many for 1 teacher - but you do the best you can under the circumstances.

I've rambled along long enough and must let you go. I'll let you know the outcome of it all when we hear from David.

We will be up for Thanksgiving and hopefully will see you both then. Until that time, take best of care and don't worry about your son. God is always with him and I say a prayer each night for he'll watch care over him.

Lovingly, Becky

8 November 1968  
Friday Afternoon  
(Tay Ninh West)

Dearest Folks,

Just a short note to tell you I am A-OK, a little dehydrated, but OK. We couldn't write letters until we had completed our 200 or more mile journey. We're now on the Cambodian border west of Tay Ninh and Saigon. Tactics, terrain, and action is totally different. Land is flat, swampy, and treacherous with underbrush. Triple canopy jungle abounds which makes medivac difficult. Took us two hours today to get a man out but that was because we were using a stupid 25th Div. chopper - which are worthless.



Our CAO ships will be with us soon with their jungle penetrators to get wounded out. Only a ten minute operation then. The weather is blistering hot and water is about nonexistent. What we usually drink is water we find in shell craters and then purify. Not too hot but drinkable. The gooks are all over the place and we're having a blast - literally. They don't know what to think of the CAV with its mobility, fire power, gun ships and instant resupply. It must scare the hell out of them.

I wish I could write more but I'm dead tired and we still have some more to move tonight. Just know that I am in excellent health (now - few hangovers a few days ago, thank goodness) and spirits, and will stay that way.

Love to all - I'll write ASAP.



David

Couple of men of mine just found a beautiful bunker complex with lanterns and mahogany walls and beaucoup overhead cover. The inhabitants are deceased, compliments of Third Platoon. Apparently, one of my men was just trying to be alone when he defecated and ran into the bunkers. It certainly relieved my constipation when I heard them open fire about 20 meters from me: 5 hits, no runs, no errors. Hope the gooks have some water.

DHW

9 November 1968  
Saturday Morning  
(Tay Ninh area)

Dearest Folks,

First light and life somehow seems teeming with vigor. Our first log bird is just setting down with a precious cargo of water! The chopper pilot, a cool type, broke us up over the radio when he came in. Usually, over the radio, everything is serious and businesslike - and brief. But when this guy came in he passed over us and when informed of such he replied - "oops, sorry bout that". When we popped smoke for him he said -"aha! Goofy grape (violet smoke)."

Hi,

10 Nov 68 Sunday

Great day. We found a literal gook city of bunkers and hooches, well, kitchens, and etc. I've never seen such an elaborate and sophisticated network of gook bunkers. Unfortunately the bunkers (around 17 of them, 10x10x8 underground) were occupied, but we soon corrected that with little loss to us except some sweat. The gooks suffered a little and had to be deposited in underground hospitals - about six feet deep.

The equipment we found was fascinating - 500 lbs. of rice, a rice mill, diaries, money, telephones, medical supplies (most medicines we find are "made in Great Britain!), and various personal gear. I accounted for a Red Chinese officer (1LT) myself. Luckily he's still alive and in a prison camp now, I guess. That guy is human too and before we medivac'd him I saw some pictures of his wife and family and home in Manchuria. Fascinating. Sort of makes you think about the value of human life when its in your hands. I could just have easily dispatched him quickly, but hesitated since I saw his officer insignia. I am now glad he's alive. He'll probably have some good information.

I'm sending some money I got off him and a razor blade he had in the razor kit he had. Please keep them for me. The guy's name was Thonc Van Kee. The money is North Vietnamese (NVA).

Last night I spent in a swamp, but tonight I'll be dry - we're in a dry field. Makes life more pleasant. I'm getting your letters fast and furious and love them all. I've gotten up to Mom's #17 and around six or seven from Dad. I got Mom's package and loved it - keep it up. The Kool-aid and iced tea mix (especially) is the greatest and most valuable when drinking swamp water to kill the taste of the iodine tablets. It's getting dark and I must check my part of the perimeter. I'm in good health and excellent shape - don't worry. Things are fine and I'm in fine spirits.

My love to all.

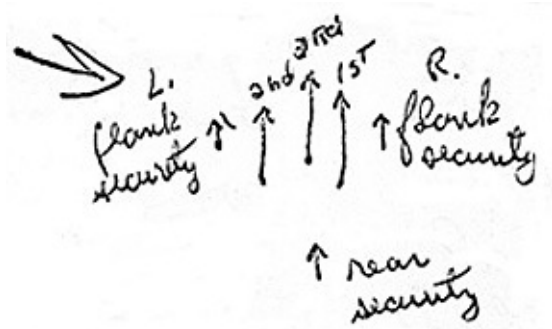
David

November 17, 1968

Sunday Noon

Dear Folks,

Another day, just like all others - hot and dangerous. I had to ask someone for the date and day to put on this letter - time really escapes you out here. As it stands now, I'm the oldest officer in the company (both in age and in time in the company). Our company commander left yesterday and his replacement is a 22 year old "cherry" (never been under fire). With him arrived another 2nd Lt. to take over the 2nd Platoon (Lt. Jenkins, former 2nd Platoon leader had an accident - he zipped when he should have zagged and got a million dollar wound and is probably home now). The mortar platoon leader left last week and hasn't been replaced. The 1st Platoon leader is new as of three weeks ago. The XO is in the rear base area and has never been to the field so he doesn't count. So now I'm the "experience honcho". That's news to me though - I don't feel it. It's hard to be diplomatic to a captain who has obviously screwed up like he did this morning. When we broke camp he had us marching in a single file ( for a company that means it stretches over 600 meters or more depending on the terrain). At any rate, it's a good formation if you don't mind getting half your men killed. So I informed him of such in no uncertain way and got us going right.



Luckily enough he took the advice and saved us a lot of grief -mainly because an ambush had been set up for us and the wide frontal formation flushed the NVA before they had a chance to execute the ambush. Result: 6 dead NVA and no wounded for us.

Dad, you asked about my reaction to the bombing halt. As I told uncle Dick in a recent letter: Johnson must be an insane, inept, and totally foolhardy dunce. Try to have Uncle Dick send you the letter I sent him because I went into it pretty thoroughly and don't have time right now. The main point I made was that when we were bombing the DMZ and NVA the NVA had no refuge to rest and recuperate. This demoralized them, kept them ill-supplied and kept them on the move. As a result of the "bombing halt" the NVA have stepped up operations all along the DMZ and right down to us on the Cambodian border. Our spotter planes can see the difference in the supply roads and the NVA are now driving truck convoys all around the clock even to the point of using their lights at night. If Johnson is foolish enough to think that giving in to Uncle Ho will end the war he's an ass. It's the same old story that resulted in our WW2 with our appeasement of Hitler. What's wrong with our government? Don't they know that every time they piecemeal our forces and stop bombing and the such that more of our troops die as a result.

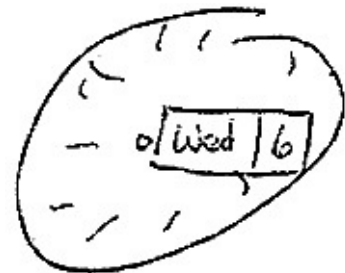
This nonsense about Nixon being elected is equally as bizarre. How could the American public elect a man who hasn't the courage or personal integrity to commit himself on the greatest political issue of our day - Vietnam. Maybe people think that if they look the other way the war will stop. Well damn, damn them. Nixon's platform as far as I can figure is: 1) Let's make Dirty Dick no. 1, 2) Let's do whatever we can to appease everybody - not the right thing mind you, just the nice thing, and 3) Let's keep the Republicans in the White House at any cost - even if it takes another 30,000 deaths to make it honorable. Well, Dick Nixon, fooy on you and I hope you get drafted.

Enough lecturing, because, as you see, I've developed a few deep convictions - first, to stand up for I believe is moral and correct, and second, to make those thoughts known. Naturally, in the military, that is impossible. But I can at least keep my family and friends informed.

Everyone's adjusted to the heat and lack of water by now, but no one likes it. To add insult, we've had to carry more plastic explosive than before (from 1 lb. per man to 3 lb. per man). That means my platoon alone now carries over 100 lbs. of C-4 (plastic explosive). We must blow up every bunker we find and we had to blow six already today. Naturally, with all the practice I've gotten pretty good with demolitions and am relied on heavily to use my knowledge. Luckily I've had some real fine instructors and have learned well. It's lucky too, since we've lost (by assignment or otherwise) every officer or non-com who knew anything about explosives. So again, now I'm the old hand who knows the answers. It scares me to think what shape the company would be in if some of my cohorts at Ft. Benning were in my shoes. I guess that sounds sort of conceited but confidence and professionalism is the name of the game over here - without it you're just another snuffy (private).

I think I've already thanked you but just in case, Mom, I thank you again for the second package I received. The socks were an unbelievable luxury. I hadn't had a new change for two weeks and they were rotting off my feet. Everything in the box as of great value and immediately put to use. However, let me add some hints. Toothpaste, foot powder, gum and lifesavers all come in our Sundry Packs - ration supplement- which are in good supply. They came in

handy this time but are not as valuable as food. Second, I think the anchovies are too much down here in this climate. Send instead stuff like garlic salt, onion salt, allspice, and the like. One can of potato sticks, or chili, or raisins, or plain spaghetti, or tamales, or "Just Fried Chicken", or canned Fritos and potato chips or ready to drink bottles of Welch's grape juice, or anything that is good that can be eaten from the can like tuna fish, or smoked oysters - mmmmm. The slim jims you sent were out of this world, keep them coming. I wouldn't send any more beef jerky - for 39c a package you're getting robbed. Please send more rubber bands - they are



priceless. Also - pork and beans, brick oven baked beans with brown sugar sauce, a shaving brush, a nail scrub brush. Also, start looking around for a watch of excellent quality under \$150 that is heavy, heavy duty, self-winding, second hand, shows the date and day, is shockproof, waterproof and all that other good stuff. A \$30 Timex won't make it. Either will a medium grade \$60 watch. It has to be an outstanding quality, reliable watch that can take it. Otherwise it will be a waste because the kind of treatment it will get out here will destroy anything but the best. It must have that date and day group on it. Extra stuff like a built in stop watch and alarm is nice but of little value unless unavoidable. Make sure you use my money I have in the bank for it - okay? The necessity for a good watch is no joke out here and may save someone's life - no lie.

I got the letters from Becky's class and they were not only touching, but funny as the devil - what 9 year old's can write. I'll try to get a letter off soon - have already sent a few CAV newspapers to them. Oh, another thing I'd like - a nice leather cowboy type belt made of good leather with a large, plain brass buckle. The belt should be thick and about 2½" to 3" inches wide - about size 36. I know I must sound awful asking for this junk to send me but out in the jungle you can get nothing on your own. If it isn't send from home, you don't get it. PX's, which I haven't seen for a couple of weeks, have nothing but cigarettes and toothpaste and nothing else.

18 Nov 68  
Mon. Morn

Moving out. Got your package last night Mom - thank you so much. I also got some cookies from Mrs. Wildman. Please thank her for me - they were delicious. I don't have her address, it was destroyed.

Love to all  
David

November 24, 1968

Dear Folks,

Sunday Morning

We're on "LZ Mustang" for a day or so pulling perimeter and bunker guard. It's no easier job, but it's a change. This base is a Battalion Fire Base ( ) which serves as a forward supply link with the companies of the (1st Battalion, 8th CAV) patrolling around it. It's not much more than an advanced Boy Scout camp but it's trying. As a matter of fact, Camp Roosevelt is like the Marriott motor hotel in comparison, but you can sleep better at night. Every other company (A, C, and D) has been in heavy contact for the past few days except for Pigiron ("Bravo"). I think the main reason is the difference in tactics we use. Whereas we travel off the trails and roads and avoid any open area, the other units don't. Naturally, if you march your troops out in the open all day and travel along the trails with little or no security out you're going to get in trouble as the other companies do. Not old Pigiron ("B"). Especially my platoon. It may take us twice as long to get somewhere and we may be so tired that we bitch and moan a lot but I haven't taken any casualties for a long time - no accidents either! - and I'm the only platoon leader in the Battalion that can say that! My men sort of sense this too and it sort of makes us a more cohesive team because of it. You can see it in their faces back here on the LZ when the medivac choppers bring wounded in - they sure feel sorry for the unfortunate guys, but they're happy right where they are. I even had two men from another platoon ask to be put in the "Third Balloon". Luckily I was permitted to oblige and trade off two of my "duds". Time marches on...

I think as a result of avoiding the trails and open areas we find more caches and bunkers too. In the last week we've destroyed over 2,000 lbs. of rice and captured beaucoup ammo and etc. Whenever we've made contact we've always had the element of surprise because the NVA always expect the G.I.'s to take the easy way out. My C.O. is beginning to realize this also, so life for me is not too unpleasant and privileges for my men come forth more readily.

I'm receiving mail in about seven days and packages in about fourteen days. Mom, I've received many packages from you already and truly appreciate them. There's nothing like mail or packages with goodies to raise the spirits. Every package is just like Christmas.

Everyone is receiving Christmas packages early and we're forced to open them early - there is no place to store them. No problem though. If I receive some early I'll wait until Christmas to make a thank-you reply so no one will know the better. At any rate all mail and packages are really heavenly over here - for morale, there's nothing that can beat it - nothing.

I've received a couple of letters from Nancy - it's so nice she can find the time to scribble a note to me with her busy schedule. She even had the gall to warn me to take it easy with the women over here. HA! what a joke. The fact is, where we are there are no women, no nurses,

no - no one for that matter except for G.I.'s and gooks. The only woman I've seen since I've been in the field was the NVA nurse which the 2nd platoon shot because she threw a grenade at them. And that silly girl Nancy worries about me messing with women over here. When will some kids grow up.

It just started to rain here for the first time since we've been in Tay Ninh province - it's a pleasant change because it keeps the dust down a little.



I'm sending a picture of Sam Wright, my RTO (radio-telephone operator) - he carries my PRC-25 radio for me when we're in the boonies. It's a backbreaking job, but very important. He has a Polaroid camera and I swiped it to catch him shooting at rats. Right after he shot (and missed), the rat ran right at him and chased him on top of the bunker screaming at the top of his lungs. What a sight!

My well diggers have been at work for about 10 hours now and have finally struck water about 15 feet down. If we can get a portable water pump we'll be set for showers tonight. That'll be my first for three weeks except for an impromptu dip I took when Sam pushed me into a bomb crater full of water. Even if the NVA can't hear us coming they can smell us a mile away.

Be advised I'm in great health and shape, good humor, and quite spirited. Don't worry about anything. Give my love to all,

David

25 November 1968  
Monday Afternoon

Dear Folks,

All is fine here. I've received all kinds of mail and packages lately and it is sheer ecstasy. Thank you all so much. I'm sending you some pictures I had one of my men take with his Polaroid camera. The guy on the left in the picture with Sam and I is a real cool customer. He's the best point man I have and doesn't miss a trick. The point man walks way out in front of everyone else and is more of a guinea pig than anything else. The point man in most instances doesn't last long



unless he's good - other wise he gets blown away or gets too scared. This guy has ridden point since I've been here without a scratch. The trick is to never make a mistake - he has to avoid and detect all booby traps, watch the trail for any signs of recent enemy movement, break trail in difficult terrain, be able to keep a fairly good sense of direction w/out a compass, detect any enemy in the route of march before they see us, watch the trees for snipers, keep us in line with other flanking units moving with us, and be prepared to engage (and lay down a base of fire) anything that moves in front of him. He won't take any other job or walk anywhere else but point. He says he doesn't trust anyone else but himself. Sometimes he reacts too fast but its always for the good. His record so far : 11 NVA killed, 1 water buffalo, 2 monkeys, 1 orangutan, over 10 chickens ( I have my doubts about his need to shoot these, but they were good eating), and 1 rather large lizard. When we engage something he always waits for me to come up and then stays with me for protection. The M79 he carries takes several different cartridges (40mm): HE, shotgun (50-00 Buck), WP, flare (parachute), smoke, and CS gas. When walking point he usually chambers a shotgun round. When he's not walking point he stays with me as a bodyguard - not because I make it that way, but he has some weird sense of responsibility. When we're on perimeter guard, like here at Mustang, I stay in the command bunker in the background. It's quite safe - three layers of sandbags all around and on top. It's ten feet under the ground and dry. The roof you can see is covered with 3 layers of sandbags and supported by a liner of ½ in. sheet steel. I don't know where they got it. I suspect they took it from the artillery who were supposed to use it for thin base plates, but obviously, no questions were asked by me. "Geno" sleeps on the roof over me in the open and is like a puppy when I roam around the perimeter, but



I never have to worry about protection.

Two days ago I was setting up booby traps (Foo gas - thickened gasoline) on the barbed wire outside the perimeter and a sniper opened up from about 400 meters away. There was no danger because the bullets were hitting over 50 feet from me and I had a mound of dirt to hide behind. Earlier Geno had said he was going to play cards and I didn't see him around. But as the rounds went off this huge hulk of a man comes out of nowhere, jumps on top of me (and nearly crushes me) and starts firing my Walther like mad. I don't know where he left his weapon but he ran out of the perimeter without it. He must of fired 300 rounds before I could get my face out of the dirt to tell him he couldn't hit anything over 100 feet with the Walther. By then one of my .50 cal. had opened up and the sniper was long gone. He had sort of a sheepish look on his face when w got up and must have apologized for 1½ hours afterward. Sometimes this place makes you do funny thing. At any rate, I'm down to one 30 round magazine for the machine pistol now and the supply people don't issue 9 mm ammo! So now Geno runs out and checks every chopper that comes ion for captured weapons and ammo. Crazy man!

Oh, another good example of us have some fun. About 2½ weeks ago when we had just gotten here we were making a routine sweep of our night perimeter before we came in for the day. This usually only takes about an hour and is accomplished by leaving one side of the perimeter and entering on the other:



But after we got about 50 meters our course started to vary ever so slightly until our trail went something like this:

I didn't say anything at first because Geno has a good sense of direction and sometimes goes off course purposely to avoid obstacles like tall hills, streams, bamboo thickets, and suspicious openings. My pucker factor went to about .0001 when I finally heard Geno open up with his M79 with HE round. After the shells hit I heard a ferocious "roar" and could just barely see a rather large tiger running off into the horizon. I chewed Geno out rather abruptly but for missing the tiger, not going off on a wild-goose chase. Hope the CO never finds out.



Well, its chow time and I must put my creative talents, the allspice, dry peppers, and chili peppers to good use.

Much love,  
David

P.S. Showers in the background are compliments of third platoon - they work beautifully, we think. I hope we get some water one of these days to try them out.

29 November 1968  
Friday Afternoon

Dear Dick and Amy

Life here lately have been rather miserable with only two bright spots. Our battalion has been in constant enemy contact for the last twelve days. Two of our companies (not ours, thank God) have had close to 40% casualties (only around 10 deaths, though). As yet, these actions haven't been on our terms. The NVA aren't afraid of us down here and have been mostly ambushing and stay around to have pitched battles. Two days ago (or was it one?) our "Charlie" company was caught in a U shape ambush and nearly encircled. One of their lieutenants, a good friend of mine from Ft. Benning, was the first platoon leader. His platoon was on point and caught the worst of the ambush. His point man was way ahead of their column and got shot right off. My friend, Dave deCantree, went out to pull him back to the medic, who had also been wounded, but was still helping his buddies. When the lieutenant started to pull his point man back he received a direct hit from a B40 rocket (our 80 mm anti-tank weapon). It took both their lives. At that point the highest ranking man left in the first platoon of Charlie company was an E-5 Sergeant. An E-5 is usually only in charge of about five or six men in a squad of 11 men. Needless to say, he didn't know what to do and the action raged on. At the time my platoon was around 8 kilometers away pulling perimeter security around LZ Mustang (a battalion logistics and fire base).

We were immediately called in and shipped out on helicopters to make a combat assault from helicopters to help them break contact and withdraw their wounded. I was on the first bird and am not ashamed to admit I was scared s---less. Bullets were flying all over and damaged every bird although none crashed. We had to crawl once we were on the ground to avoid the grazing fire for about 250 meters. the company pulled back as we set down a base of fire for their cover. the E-5 Sgt. of 1st platoon walked past me and told me they still have about five men still left out there in front of us. It was getting dark and no one likes to move in darkness so I didn't think we could get to them. but a few men volunteered and got them back, all dead. that night, last night I guess, we ate Thanksgiving dinner and it was delicious, although not much conversation or frivolity took place. Late in the night jet bombers were brought in to bomb the area, ARA (Aerial Rocket Artillery - helicopters with rockets) worked out, the 105 mm's put in around 150 rounds, and our mortars shelled sporadically. To retrieve the last bodies we went back in the morning (this morning early) after the artillery saturated the area with CS gas (tear and choking gas). to our amazement as we approached the area of recent contact we saw at a distance a man crawling towards us on the trail. He was still very much alive, although badly wounded, and could barely talk he was so pissed off at us. He said he could understand everything but the gas. Apparently his gas mask was shot up and didn't work. We found the other man.

We were airlifted back in around 9:00 A.M. this morning back to LZ Mustang. since our platoon was only acting as a quick reaction force, and operating separately from the company, we were pulled back to join the rest of the unit. As e came in we were greeted by two rather attractive "donut dollies". The wounded men (a couple of my guys got nicked also) were taken to the aid station for treatment. The donut dollies followed. When the medivac choppers came in the guys at the aid station weren't about to leave since the girls were the first they had seen in around two months and were really putting on a show of affection and etc. It's surprising how some guys can act out the injured bit and really get the babes crawling all over them. the battalion surgeon (Doctor Cross, no less) was about as distracted as all the others. Earlier, when the girls had first arrived (around 7:00 A.M.) quite a commotion had taken place. Obviously, since we're so far from anything approaching civilization, their had been no reason to construct any screens or barriers around the showers or latrines. First, modesty is no attribute in the field infantry. And second, this area isn't at all secure yet and it's best to keep your eyes open at all times. Well, as you know, the morning is the best time to shave, sh--, and shower so everyone was proceeding as normal. As the small (LOH-6A) scout helicopter brought the girls in on the pad there was a mad rush for cover and concealment. I wish I had been there.

I've gotten several letters from you both and really appreciate it. Mail is the single most morale factor here - along with the fact that it keeps us abreast of life in the "World" (USA). Thank you very much. Sorry about that car accident. Happens to the best of us, I guess. Have you every considered hiring a deaf and dumb chauffeur? He couldn't yell profanities at other drivers and wouldn't be able to listen to bad directions! I trust that all is well in your household. Have a few yards of beer for me and live it up.

With love,  
David

P.S. I'd refrain from passing on to Mom and Dad all but a small portion of this letter. I'm afraid they know too much of what's going on over here already and don't want them to worry. DHW

1 December 1968  
Sunday Afternoon

Dear Folks,

Boy is it hot! We set up early today in an area adjacent to an open field. The vegetation is just like a mountain forest except that it's flat and has a little bamboo. After we got log this morning (in another open area) we pulled back into the wood line to wait for any gooks who might come and scrounge our night perimeter for equipment we left behind (by accident). No gooks came but after an hour of waiting we heard some automatic fire about a kilometer away and soon heard a helicopter sputtering overhead. As the chopper's engine quit it started autorotating down into the open field in front of us. The bird obviously wasn't meant for us because we had already receive our log and the birds radio wasn't on our net (frequency). To the quite obvious amazement and happiness of the bird's crew we romped out of the wood line to their aide. We immediately threw up a cordon all around the chopper and put out security in the wood line around us. Then we got the crew to some covered safety. The pilot, who had prior to crashing called for help (and received no answer) was all smiles and thanks. We all acted real nonchalant and professional as if we had done it every day. All this was fine until one of the door gunners told us his cargo: cold beer and sodas! Hallelujah! Since my platoon Sgt was closest he ran and secured three cases immediately and went back for more before the company commander stepped in and insisted on inspecting the cargo to make sure it wasn't poisoned. He and the 1st Sgt. inspected for about a ½ hour and assured us everything was in order and we could drive on.

Naturally, it turned into too much of a good thing. The bird had about 40 cases of drinks on it. We did our best (with 129 men present) and finished nearly all of it by 3:00 p.m. We got a flying crane in and it airlifted the downed chopper out with it somewhat inebriated crew in tow. Quite a change in operations from the rather constant contact we've been in.

2 December 1968  
Monday Evening

Another hot, hot day. A few bad heat casualties have started to come and we've had to medivac them. Water, again being the main problem. In the morning and evening we have plenty of water brought in. Then we fill our canteens (I carry four 1 qt. canteens, some carry more) for the patrols during the day. Oddly enough, when it's real hot, you need 2 or 3 gallons (8-12 canteens to stay happily wet).

Poor Sam just got a bamboo stick in his eye and is miserable. So as we march I've been leading Sam around by his shoulder straps. As Sgt. Hensley puts it: "The blind leading the blind." Quite a funny fellow that Sgt Hensley is!

Everything is fine though and 3rd platoon remains the luckiest and the best. Never felt better in my life physically. Only thing that gets to you is the food. Please send some canned goods: spaghetti, ravioli, baked beans, pork and beans, tamales, potatoes sticks, chili, popcorn ("Jiffy Pop"), anything canned that is good to eat by itself and can be cooked in the can (pre-cooked, of course). A big package of stuff like this is easy to handle because it's worth humping. We carry "C" rations anyways and I'll simply add the food you send and delete the "C" rations. You can't ever send too much of this type food. Cancel all gum, candy, toothpaste, spice, anchovies, and beef jerky. They are always liked and definitely used but food and snacks are much more valuable to me. The idea about small packages is over now. When you hump 50 lbs. every day, another 10 lbs. doesn't make any difference and the contents is much valued.

Got to get the letter out - choppers inbound.

Lots of love, Dave

7 December 1968  
Saturday Afternoon

Dear Folks,

Things on this end are rather tense. The gooks are really messing with us - our bodies, as well as our minds. My platoon, once at a strength of 44, is now down to 30. Illness, accidents and the NVA have left us with very little - and not necessarily in that order. After a fire-fight the other day we backed off and set up for the night. The NVA had obviously expended all their munitions during the day and since they don't have any means of rapid resupply, like us, they were forced to break contact and retreat. But as we set up and dark fell we heard movement all around us. But the gooks were out of ammo so they climbed up in trees and threw rocks and sticks at us all night to keep us awake -which they did. Really quite disturbing.

Then yesterday, the man walking one person ahead of me on patrol apparently had the pin on one of his grenades pulled out by a branch (we don't know really what happened, we can only guess) and it went off. The poor guy only had a few days left in the field before he was to take over a job in the rear. That kind of unnecessary accident is what infuriates me about this war. Why should this man have died if we're just going to leave this country?

Don't worry about the kid though, I'm fine and healthy. When anything ever happens I manage to fit about all except my feet into my steel pot.

Perhaps, maybe, possibly, if I'm lucky, really lucky and fate shines upon me and I have Marcus Cole on my side, I'll be able to get a job in the rear area one of these weeks (maybe a month). The Bn. XO (Maj. McNearny) came out to investigate the accident (yesterday) this morning and I got wind of a job as Bn. Motor Officer which will be opening up in January. Naturally, being a leg infantry officer I told him I wasn't too interested. Somehow though, I managed to drop the fact that I had been a Bn. Motor Officer for a Mech. Bn. at Fort Carson and had gone to PLL school, Motor Officer's Maintenance course, and a course on Preventive Maintenance. I don't know how that slipped out but he looked quite interested. I'm keeping my finger, toes, and ears crossed.

Oddly enough, I'm now the officer who has been second longest in the field of all the officers in the Battalion. Looks good.

I do like working in the field and love the life of the infantry but you've got to be crazy to like being shot at. Division base camp is plenty close enough to the action for the kid.

I'm sorry I haven't written more often and will try harder. It's just been too hard and busy to do much of anything but sleep though - so I sleep instead of write. The more the men get hurt,

the more I try to prevent it by checking, double checking and even triple checking all plans, tactics, routes, equipment, and safety procedures. I don't ever consider it a risk to be as cautious as possible. The man yesterday came off of R&R about a month ago. When in the rear he found himself a job at Bn. S-4 (supply). But the Bn. Sgt. Major said he first had to receive a release from me. Since I was short on men I refused. Then he threatened to go AWOL if I didn't and I gave him notice. So he came to the field reluctantly. He turned out to be such a fine soldier I looked into the job for him again and had lined it up for him going in on the 12th. I feel rather guilty about the whole matter. It is certainly no fun to play god or counselor.

Christmas here seems a big nonentity. There's nothing to make you think of its' approach and with no sense of date or time (for the norm). You don't feel as if time is moving at all. It's strange. However, you're letters and packages make life a whole lot more bearable. They mean so much out here. You move all day for a long distance, and heat is so hot you melt - then at night the log birds bring mail in and for a few minutes you're back in the world in your thoughts. It's great.

Well, it's getting dark and I've got to unroll my bedroll, blow up my air mattress, and pull about 2 hours of radio watch. My love to all. I'll try to write soon.

With love,  
David

11 December 1968  
Wednesday Afternoon

Dear Folks,

Life, tactically speaking, is much easier now. We haven't had any enemy contact for a few days since our last CA (combat assault by helicopters) into a new area. The terrain, up until yesterday, was terrible though. It was the worst conglomeration of sticker thickets, bamboo tangles, some elephant grass that I've seen yet. Two nights ago we had traveled all day until around five o'clock and still hadn't found anywhere open enough to even blow a pad for log. Usually, we would just forget log and have them throw water out of helicopters to us in some special 3 gal. shock and burst proof containers. But they were out of the containers and the bamboo and jungle canopy was so thick we'd have had to climb trees to get them. Plus we had some heat casualties we had to be out, so, they called in jet fighters and they dropped three 500 lb. bombs which created an 'instant pad'. I shudder to think how much our instant pad "cost", but I'm sure it was well over what I'll earn in the next twenty years.

But yesterday we broke into some beautiful forest-clear area terrain with 1000 lb. craters filled with clean, clear water. What a relief. For the next few days we'll be operating "undercover" from a central base camp. They brought all the provisions we'd need yesterday to operate unassisted for three days. From now until then they'll keep all friendlies and aircraft from coming close to us in hope of catching a large NVA force supposedly moving in our direction. We'll keep maximum noise and light discipline - sleep at day and roam at night with beaucoup ambushes set up all the time on any suspicious or recently traveled trails. I'm sure the end result of this operation will be some mightily tired soldiers and a few dead squirrels and monkeys and panthers! No doubt some fat colonel sitting in a plush chair back in Tay Ninh City thought this up. I'd like to run him on point for a few days to show him what it's like.

All in all things are comparatively calm, hot, and bearable. I hope things are remarkably more bearable and comfortable for you all at home. I know that for me Christmas time was (1) quite time consuming, (2) somewhat tiresome, (3) a whole lot of fun and festivities, and (4) a time when we could all get together and have a good time.

It doesn't look as if I'll be able to be with you physically this year but I'll be there in spirit. Somehow out here we'll manage to have a pretty good time. Everyone has a little booze stuck away somewhere and it will be produced. My wacky platoon Sgt, myself, Sam (3rd squad leader, no longer my RTO, 'cause I got him promoted to Sgt E-5), and one of the machine gunners, Ralph Coppin (NYC) have made up our own renditions of several once popular songs which we will perform for our company. One goes: (to the tune of "see the USA in your chev..")  
"see the DMZ, in you APC..."



(Armored Personnel Carrier)

Another:("Jingle Bells")

"Jingle Bells, Mortar Shells, VC in the grass,..."

I'd like to repeat some of the others (lines and songs) but I'm afraid you would find them the least bit sacrilegious and vulgar. Maybe we'll get to the rear for Christmas, maybe not. I'm not all that concerned and sometimes its safer in the field, who knows. At any rate I want all of you to make up for what we lack in spirit and facilities by having a great time. It would seem rather an insult to us if our friends and loved ones didn't have the best Christmas yet. Giving you the opportunity to enjoy yourselves in peace gives us our satisfaction.

My love and thoughts are with you all at this time of year. I'll try to write soon.

Much love,  
Dave

17 December 1968  
Tuesday Morning

Dear Folks,

Sorry 'bout using your paper. Had a little accident yesterday and fell completely submerged in a canal while trying to cross the "easy way". As a result, everything I owned got wet - including all writing paper and etc. Don't send any paper or envelopes - we'll get "sundries" (cigs, gum, paper, envelopes, etc.) today - I just don't have any now and have time to write - soo.

Please record in my check book a check #117 on December 17, 1968 for \$230.24 to the "Army and AF Regional Exchange Service" for me - thank you.

News - I'm safe and sound (if a little wet) and in good spirits. Last Friday (the 13th, naturally) my platoon was sent out on ambush patrol. Luckily, we didn't realize it was Friday the 13th or we might have been spooked otherwise as it was we pulled off one of the most successful ambushes in our battalion for the last few months. Although we were close, too close for some, we caught an NVA heavily armed scout platoon completely by surprise on a main trail. We got a body count of 13 NVA and saw the blood trails of six others. The six wounded left all their equipment too. As a result, the booty we cleaned up was beautiful - all types of automatics and gear. I got a beautiful pair of 8x30 tinted, adjustable binoculars off the officer (1 LT, I think) and policed up beaucoup 9 mm ammo for my Walther (over 500 rounds - more than enough). I'm carrying the binoculars now and they're great for recon. Of my 34 men (now) I received no casualties. The RTO for the artillery forward observer I had along got a slight scratch from a shell fragment but a bandaid covered that. Needless to say, praise was fast and furious and the whole company was extracted from the area to a secure LZ for a supposed one week rest(!) by the Brigade Commander. I thought my company commander was going to kiss me he was so happy! All sugar turned to salt after six hours on the LZ as our Battalion got orders to move in 2 hours to a blocking position about 20 km northwest of Saigon. So our rest was less than 12 hours and we are operating in the boonies again.

This area is entirely different from any others. It's totally flat with few trees - mostly rice paddies, dikes, and canals which provide little or no cover and concealment for either us or the enemy. Who we're fighting is VC, not NVA. The whole idea of fighting them is different from the regular NVA soldiers. I'm sure my preference is for fighting NVA. Also, we are working in populated areas (villages, hamlets, farms, etc). The rules of engagement are different also - you can't fire unless fired upon! That is, except for night time when anything that moves is fair game. The first night cost us a little money - two water buffalos were claymored. Rather embarrassing and hard to explain to a farmer whose whole livelihood depends on these beasts of burden. So, although we enjoy the change - pretty countryside, easy traveling and fast,

interesting people to talk and trade with, good fields of fire, easy places to set up at night - there are many drawbacks - hot with no shade, rice paddies smell, crossing canals with no bridges gets you wet and makes you smell even worse, and the VC are dirty fighters.

I've sent some small gifts to you for Christmas which will probably get to you in a month or two at the earliest (ordered them from a stateside firm). If anything is harmed make sure you make a claim as everything is insured and guaranteed completely.

All my love to all,  
David

P.S. Enclosed is map of where we are now.

19 December 1968  
Thursday Morning

Honorable Uncle, Beloved Aunt:

As you view the contents of this letter there are probably many questions forming in your mind - none of which, Uncle Dick, are valid. Therefore, let me explain. the check is part of a small gift which I have in the mail being sent to Uncle Dick. the gift is only a token of my appreciation for many lessons learned in humility and my deep respect. Since you can't pay customs duty at this end, you'll have to pay it at your end. The money, therefore, is to pay this customs duty. The money is not meant as an insult - on the contrary, it is meant as an expression of trust, knowing that if you received a notice of a package from me with money still due on it you would take one of several actions: (1) wait until you played gin rummy with me again and win the customs due from me; (2) Have the package x rayed and sent by explosion proof car to the FBI for examination, (3) forget about it, or (4) send me a nasty letter about it. Thus, trying to prevent any rash or unnecessary actions I acted accordingly.

Aunt Marge, there are many things here that I would like to send, however, not knowing your preferences, I would like your opinion: jade, silk, sculpture, china, or what: The variety is great and expense no mind. My question lies in your preference. Do you collect any certain type of oriental do-dads? Uncle Dick, also be advised that your package may be long in coming since parcels sent from here take rather devious routes. The cartoon is just one which one of my men fools around with. Just something different.

At this time we are located SE of Tay Ninh (30 km. SE) and about 35 km. West of Saigon. the region is one of vast open areas filed with wet rice paddies, swamps, villages, and is very, very flat. Down here they have is called the "Tiger Leech". Not as mobile as the little leeches we had in the mountains near the DMZ, but vastly larger (5"-6") and the devil to get off.

Although there are only a few NVA units moving in the area, the VC locals are all over sniping and booby trapping the devil out of us. There is little or no shade and therefore the sun hits us pretty hard. Even so, this area has its high points: (1) the walking is much easier - no bamboo or stickers to cut through, (2) there are people around to trade with and children to give candy to, (3) and visibility makes recon. much easier - therefore safety is easier to obtain.

My platoon has recently (last 2-3 weeks) been highly praised for its actions against the enemy - one ambush was beautiful - and lucky. We had a good gook body count and received no casualties whatsoever. While cordoning and searching a village we flushed two NVA rice collectors and found a large weapons cache' - no casualties again. Yesterday my point man observed a VC setting up a booby trap on the trail we were following, waited for him to finish,

then fired at him forcing him to run right into his own booby trap ruining that VC's whole afternoon.

Every other company in our battalion seems to catch a lot of grief every time they move - but not Bravo. Maybe we're lucky, maybe we're just pros - of course I'm a little prejudiced.

With all this going on the Christmas spirit is nonexistent. There's nothing to relate us to the season - no decorations, no music, no sense of time. It's summer here and everything is green and brown. There's little or no time for merry making, only concern for one's own self: security, health, hunger, and natural needs. Perhaps another year there'll be a time and place - and I guarantee I'll raise hell.

My best wishes and hopes for you all this Christmas. I'll try to write soon.

Love,

David



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December 22, 1968  
Sunday Evening

Dear Folks,

Life progresses. We got on the LZ again for less than five hours a few days ago (LZ Tracy). We were supposed to be there for five days this time. But some of the Navy Swift boats (armored speed boats) got ambushed so they sent us out on Navy troop carriers to search the area. This is real joke to us since we are known as "airmobile". Although we had no real contact we have picked up numerous V.C. in our search and clear operations. They're booby trapping everywhere but up 'till now we've drawn only one casualty. "Geno" is king in this type area - his eyes are worth their weight in diamonds. He sees things no one else can. Within three days he detected over 20 mines set up to get us. The other platoons seem to hit every one they put in their path - and they use mine detectors! Geno doesn't believe in them (mine detectors) and I can't get him to carry one. It's too heavy and prevents him from keeping his weapon ready to fire. Results over here prove what is right or wrong, so I'm not about to override his preferences. However, I still have the squad behind me carry and use it as an added precaution. The one casualty we did have was a man in the rear of my column. Everyone up front is real cautious where they walk, but the guys in the rear figure that if there was anything up there, we would have set it off. Not true! One hundred cautious people could avoid an off-the-trail mine, but one man might decide to sit down off the trail on a break and set it off - as was the case of our casualty. I hear he's alive but won't walk again.

I've received beaucoup packages and will try to reply individually to them all. Dad's "bottle" arrived a few weeks ago and was consumed a week ago after a particularly successful ambush we pulled off. It tasted like liquid gold. I got several packages from Mom over the last few weeks and they are great. The food choice was outstanding. Keep it up!!! Popcorn makes a wonderful change and the food supplements C-Rations beautifully. By the way, I weighted myself on the LZ the other day and found my weight to be 158! When I left the world I weighed about 186 or 187. The weight loss is great too. I've never felt so fit or looked so thin and trim. As soon as I get a rear job I'll probably gain it all back, but out here all excess weight is unneeded.

The gooks in this area are very friendly. But this is very deceiving. I never permit any of my men to talk to, barter with, or in any way associate with any gook, that's alive. It prevents accidents of all sorts and puts them above suspicion. I'm sure they view this rather dimly but I know it's best. Four days ago, as if to prove my point, a bunch of troops at LZ Tracy (our Bn. fire base now) were buying cokes from the gook "coke girls". There were six G.I.'s, two gook girls, and one ten year old gook boy. The boy waited until the girls had drawn a big crowd and then calmly laid a hand grenade on the ground and walked away scot free. Fortunately, one of

the G.I.'s saw it and threw a coke girl on it, thus saving the G.I.'s from all but minor wounds. When my men heard of this a few gave me some "knowing" looks thus showing their approval of my orders previously given. Some men will never learn and have to be locked up as soon as we hit civilization for their own protection.

This brings to mind a favorite topic of mine. I can see two different wars being fought here by two different types of troops. One war, the "fighting war" is fought by "field grunts". The other, the "funny war" is fought by rear echelon troops. There is no mistaking the difference in appearance and attitudes. The difference itself makes me determined to stay in the field with the "men" of the Army. A field grunt is easily spotted - as easily as you could detect a farmer straight from the fields in the State Department corridors. He needs a shave, is badly sunburned, hasn't changed his clothes in two weeks, his boots are a shambles, his language consists of series of four and five letter words of extremely profane nature, he's heavily armed and hugs his weapon for dear life, he lies down in the dirt and sleeps when he's tired, his bearing is one of insolent confidence and goes about his business with deference to no one save his field buddy. He's just plain rough and tough - moves through crowds like a duck through water. All rear echelon types avoid him like the plague - they're afraid and awed. On the other hand, the rear echelon troops wear starched fatigues - clean and crisp, have spit-shined boots, mellow tans, a beefy, well-fed look, and carry their weapons (if they carry one at all) as you might carry a 15 lb. sledge hammer. It is obvious that it isn't the extra appendage that we grunts realize it is to us. For the rear types it's just a useless piece of equipment that they are forced to put up with.

The field grunt carries everything he own in his pockets or in his pack and only takes it off when he rests - and then the pack is usually his pillow's and rifle his bed-mate.

When you put a field grunt in a PX or clean mess hall or nice living quarters he's awed and confused. He's not used to it and hardly remembers how to us his silverware. It isn't the first time I've seen my men prefer the hard ground to a nice cot. Please don't think I'm joking as I'm dead serious - there's no exaggeration in what I say, underestimation if anything.

The field grunt's war is one of constant fear for his own life - from bugs, proper nutrition, lack of groundwater, and lastly the gooks. He leads a barely tolerable life only made bearable by his friends therewith him and his letters from home. His battles are basic ones for the necessities of life.

The rear echelon type is totally different.; His whole existence is one of the "candy ass" life. A little hard work during the day, hot chow three times a day, clean clothes are there for the asking, new boots when he cuts his old ones, all the beer and booze he can drink. In the rear are all the service clubs, USO clubs, red cross centers, and snack bars.

The grunts never see the "Bob Hope" shows or tape recorders, or TV's or anything else. Only the rear types see that. It's funny as the devil, but that's life I guess. No sweat, we've got our own kick and like it that way. Sort of an inner confidence I guess. Well, ambush tonight - have to get ready. My love and best to all. The packages and letters are great!! I can't thank you enough.

All my love,  
David



24 December 1968  
Christmas Eve  
Early Afternoon

Dear Family,

You wouldn't believe where I am right now! A rather fantastic and interesting turn of events has brought me to be at this time on a couch in Andy Antipas's villa right smack in the middle of Saigon! Let me backtrack a little and explain. Up until yesterday morning I was in the field at LZ Tracy where we had arrived that morning. From the constant daily long marches and heavy strain I seem to have developed a bad case of hemorrhoids which was touched off by a minor shock wave received one evening (no sweat, only minor) So, even though I could live with it I decided to try to pick up a little "ghost" time and went to see our Battalion Surgeon. He said I could forget it or go get an operation to correct it. Not being too enthusiastic about the idea of an operation, but liking the idea of getting a rest for awhile, I agreed to the minor operation. So Doc Grose, our Battalion Doctor, wrote up orders for me to go to the 3rd Field Hospital. Naturally, I was overjoyed to find out it is located in Saigon! So, I took a C123 (two prop transport) to Saigon arriving in the early afternoon yesterday. I went to the 1st Cav liaison office, picked up their phone and called Andy at the new embassy. It was 2:30, but his secretary announced that "Mr. Antipas" is at lunch. Upon explaining my identity and situation, and joking a little, I discovered that lunch time at the embassy is from 12:30 - 2:30! Well I called again at 3:00 and spoke with Andy who told me to come on down to the new embassy. Somehow I managed to get there on MACV busses and marched into the embassy \_ I must have looked like G.I. Joe Hardcore too. My clothes and boots were the same one's I'd had on for weeks and I was still carrying my combat pack and gear. You've got to visualize the whole thing: a front line trooper in battlegear walking into the ultra-modern new embassy with marine guards in class "A" uniforms. Andy met me at the desk in his suit and nearly fell down with surprise - I guess he didn't know I was fresh from the field. At any rate he had some work to do so he sent me via embassy limousine to his villa in Cholon. What class! My biggest surprise is the fact that Saigon doesn't look like a war is going on - just a busy looking city. My weapons had been confiscated at the Tan Son Nhut airport (a shotgun and submachine pistol were apparently a little too much for downtown Saigon - plus neither is a legal military weapon, sorry 'bout that). Andy's villa is a palatial estate within walls, with cook and houseboy. When I arrived I was led up to a beautiful room with bath and proceeded to throw my gear off. Mr. Land, Andy's co-renter (who is a Labor man in the State Dept.) then arrived and was somewhat aghast to see a grubby looking lieutenant standing in the middle of the bedroom in duty fatigues with my helmet still on! Must have been a laugh. He soon understood and had a drink together. One hot shower later Andy arrived and I had a delicious dinner with wine, cognac, cigars - the whole bit. Really too much for a simple field trooper like myself. The bit seems unreal to me, I can assure you. Well, we traded war stories all night and I got a little tight on the Hennessy Cognac. This morning Andy was going out to some rubber plantation for an inspection tour but will return by tonight and is

going to take me to some embassy party - I'm going to have to borrow his clothes since the only clothes I own are on my back.

So here I am writing a letter in simple luxury in his villa. There is a full time security guard right outside the door and the cook and houseboy are waiting hand and foot taking care of my every need. I still have on my fatigue shirt, am wearing Andy's trousers, my combat boots and have one of Andy's Browning 9 mm automatics strapped to my side for comfort (I suspect that Andy feels this a bit of unneeded protection, but as far as I'm concerned, I'm still in Vietnam and anything can happen). He said he'd leave his car for me to drive around but I'll be darned if I'll step outside the house alone. The traffic here is completely uncontrolled, ten times worse than N.Y. City during rush hour and there must be millions of motor bikes hustling all over the place with no apparent destination. I'll go over to the 3rd Field Hospital tomorrow



to check in. I guess I'm really not authorized this little day and a half vacation but what the devil, it only happens once in a lifetime. There'll be no trouble - I got to Saigon in amazing time without a hitch. That in it self is amazing. It usually takes at least a day or two of waiting in airports to get anywhere so I'll not be missed. I'm just going to relax and take it all in - what a life!

Andy has been a wonderful host and made me feel like a king - there's nothing here that isn't for the asking. This whole situation is so completely different from anything I've been doing I can still hardly believe I'm here. Andy's hospitality makes me feel like I'm at home - except for the pistol I'm carrying. This may not be a normal Christmas, but it is interesting as the devil and I've got civilized people to talk with.

I'm sending a list of the checks I've written. I understand I have enough money in the bank to cover them. At any rate, in a month I'll be sending more money home to deposit.

I've sent home a few gifts which I've ordered through the PX. I hope the price tags are

not on them although I suspect they will be - please look the other way. I don't know how long they will take to arrive but I doubt you'll see them for a month or two. Uncle Dick is also receiving a gift as is Nancy.

My most loving wishes for a wonderful holiday for you all. I'm well and strong and will probably be kicking up my heels soon.

With love, David



1st AIR CAVALRY DIVISION  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96490



26 December 1968

Dear Folks,

Well, Christmas passed yesterday in a somewhat interesting, if lonely, manner. Christmas Eve was spent with Andy at a beautiful bash given by his boss in the political section of the Embassy. Having eased into a set of Andy's duds for the affair (Andy's clothes fit loosely so you can imagine I've lost a little weight) he proceeded to drive us over to the party at his boss's villa. After having spent a little time on the Saigon streets myself with Vietnamese drivers I expected a smoother voyage. HA! These streets turn anyone into maniacs behind the wheel. I guess the "Southern 500" would seem like a letdown compared to the ride I got, but we did arrive safely, somehow.

The affair was splendid with plenty of good liquor and outstanding food (turkey and the whole bit). The people were friendly and kept me entertained. Even though they knew I was a CAV trooper - platoon leader right from the boonies, I don't believe many of them understood the dirty part of the war. Words like "boonies", "body count", and "gooks" are only descriptive terms for them without any emotion. Maybe it's better that way - Andy understood though, and knew what I was telling them about the baseness of the fighting war. Andy turns out to be a very fine, knowledgeable, and possibly heroic man. From what I understand from his understatement and his cohorts' comments, he travels and visits places that no one in his right mind would dare venture. When I compared notes it turns out he flies weekly over sections of the Cambodian border where the CAV daily gets birds shot down. He apparently makes inspection tours of rubber plantations which every time we get close to we get heavy contact. He's doing the State Department a great and needed job. While others sit back in Saigon and accept feeder reports from underlings of doubtful veracity, Andy goes out and finds out the story for himself. I'll tell you, he does things out here far more dangerous than I would ever consider doing with a whole Cav rifle company, no lie!

Well, I had Christmas breakfast at his Villa and met him down at the Embassy (he'd had duty officer Christmas Eve and Day). And guess who shared the elevator with me? None other than Mr. Bunker himself! He wished me Merry Christmas. I think I mumbled something magnificent back like "Duh". Andy then took me over to the 3rd Field Hospital where I've been for a day and ½ now. I trust that someday I'll have the opportunity to thank Andy for hospitality

and friendship he showed me for my short stay. The change made Christmas for me and served as more than expected R&R. I doubt if he'll know how much it meant. For a guy straight from the field without a hot shower or clean bed or civilized conversation for three months it was unreal.

The hospital is very nice and my doctor a pro, but I've got to get out of here. Col. Harrington (the Doc) understands this and I think he'll let me get back to my unit tomorrow. It's a "grunts" dream here with nothing to do but eat, sleep, and stay clean. But I'm bored stiff and feel like I'm loafing. So I'm going back on line where I belong.

I suppose what I miss most is that feeling I always had at Christmas at home. They try hard here but it's not the same. My thoughts are with you and hopes for a wonderful holiday time. Give my love to all and tell me how Ned enjoyed his presents. I'm sure it must have been a panic.

With love, David

1 January 1969  
Wednesday

Happy New Year!

I trust you all celebrated properly to welcome in a year that will hopefully bring peace to us. I got out of the hospital the day after Christmas and was in the field with my men the next day. Again we're up against a new and more fearsome terrain. It rains more often, most of this area is waist deep swamp, there are no people around, booby traps are found anywhere you look, and the



mosquitos are unreal. They issued us mosquito netting and insect bombs to make sleeping easier and they work pretty well. Water (good water, that is) is short again, but not severely so. I'm now the 2nd platoon leader. Maybe I should explain what happened from the beginning. What gave me a literal "pain in the ass" which sent me to the hospital was a booby trap myself and my RTO (radio-telephone operator) tripped. Luckily it was only a concussion grenade so it shook us up a little. So I went in and SFC Hensley took over the platoon for awhile. When I returned he had things well in hand. So when the second platoon leader, Lt Shannon, hit a booby trap yesterday (nothing too serious, but I think he'll be sent to the USA) the C.O. Capt. Schwartz, figured my Plt. Sgt. could handle the 3rd, and sent me to the second. They're in bad shape with only a SGT E-5 (buck Sgt.) as platoon Sgt., two E-5's as squad leaders and one E-4 squad leader. To beat that, 70% of the guys are cherries (new) and have little experience. I'm sure it will prove to be a challenge and that interests me. My rear job may or may not show up, I don't know at this point. I'm just happy here, working hard.

You asked about a tape recorder, well sometimes I may be able to find a recorder to play it on, but I can't guarantee the tape will still be in one piece. It's hard to keep anything in one piece. Plus there's only one way to get to the rear here and that's to get shot, soo. The watch you purchased sounds real fine, I'll probably receive it shortly.

After getting stocked up well on alcohol which everyone so graciously sent we had a small celebration in my hut last night. I'm not sure which we celebrated more, the booze or the New Year, but it made little difference. We all went to bed around 9 p.m. The mortar platoon celebrated by shooting a flare up at midnight but it was raining and no one bothered to get out of

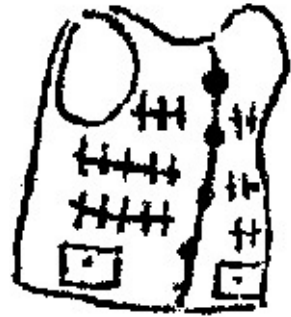
their hooches to look. Rather grim.

Dad, you asked me several important questions which I know you want answers to, but I can't remember the questions now. After I read my mail I usually burn it to prevent any capture of the letters. I kept your letters with the questions in them to answer when I got a chance. However, before I got a chance I took a dive into the swamps when I slipped once and everything got wet - soo.

The pictures you send once in awhile are great! I wish you'd send more - especially of Christmas and New Year - they mean a lot to me.

You asked if I write the parents of men who got wounded. No, I don't. First, I don't have their addresses and it's too hard to get them out here. Second, I barely have time to write you all, and third, I'm not sure I'd say the right thing. If Mrs. Rosado said she saw me on TV she probably did. About a month or so ago a TV crew came out to LZ Mustang and shot us at work and during an assault we made. We've also had several UPI and other newspaper photographers with us so I suppose you might see us in the papers sometime too.

Question? See if you can get me a lightweight, sleeveless, O.D. shotgun vest that will hold many 12 gauge shotgun shells. I'm carrying a 12 gauge Stevens (Savage) shotgun now and need a convenient way to easily carry 20 or 30 shells so I can get at them quickly. Maybe I can draw one: I sure would appreciate it.



I'm fine and healthy and in good spirits. Nothing to worry about. We're moving out shortly so I'll write again soon.

With my love, David



1st AIR CAVALRY DIVISION  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96490



January 1968  
Sunday Morning

Dear Folks,

Well, "The Kid" lucks out again. My luck over here has proved to be somewhat fantastic, to say the least. I wrote before of two of our platoon leaders hitting booby traps (1st and 2nd platoons). I was changed therefore to the 2nd to fill up the leadership gap because my platoon Sgt., Sgt. Hensely, was good enough to handle the 3rd alone. After that the 2nd platoon hit no more booby traps, although everyone else did. But the night after I made the switch to the second we got mortared by the gooks. We had stayed in the same place too long (3 days) and got zeroed in. Naturally I had warned the C.O. (I must seem a thorn in his side sometimes, but it's my life as well as his) but he figured we could get away with it. So the gooks dropped in about 40 rounds of 60 mm ammo. The second platoon had dug in well and although the rounds had come close to us, were of no consequence. However, SFC Hensely, my old RTO (Sam), our medic, and another RTO were all hit seriously by a round that landed two feet from their hooch (above ground). That is where I would have been if I hadn't been switched to the second platoon. So the third platoon is now led by a Sgt. E-5 (a good man, but no experience other than as a squad leader). To boot, my old company commander, Cpt. Elrod, and his former artillery forward observer, Lt. White (who both worked on Battalion staff), were both killed when their light observation helicopter was shot down on a routine flight yesterday. So out of all the officers I've served with since I've been here (not including our new C.O., Art. F.O., and new platoon leader) I'm the only one remaining alive and unscathed. Rather a frightening thought although I see no trend. I figure it is all bad luck of which I have not been a party. They all made their own mistakes and I don't intend to put myself in a position to make a mistake. In all cases it seems as though these officers were in some manner either not doing what they were supposed to be doing, not where they were supposed to be, or just plain not thinking. With a little planning and foresight it can all be prevented and that's exactly what I intend to do.

Much to our relief we were extracted out of that heavily booby trapped area yesterday and are now in a similar area of less danger. Maybe we'll have a lull for awhile.

I've gotten the pictures of you both and am glad to have them. I look forward to the pictures of Christmas and home. I received all kinds of packages at Christmas and hope to get a break one of these days so I can answer them properly.



Just finished my C-ration lunch - delicious - ham and lima beans with a little cheese spread mixed in. Tastes just like dog food. My big wish when I get home is for a turkey dinner with lots of bread dressing, candied sweet potatoes, olives, nuts, wine, deviled eggs, rice, pecan pie, scalloped potatoes - oh well, my imagination gets carried away sometimes as I would probably have to be if I ever ate all that stuff. Just a good macaroni and beef casserole would be heaven now.

Don't worry about me as I am in excellent health, trim shape, and good humor, if not a little ornery!

All my love, David

LT David L. Wheeler 05245922  
2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Company "B"  
1<sup>st</sup> BN, 8<sup>th</sup> CAD, 1<sup>st</sup> AIRCAO Div  
APO San Francisco, Cal. 96490

Free  
AIR MAIL

MR. & MRS. Richard S. Wheeler  
5614- 33<sup>rd</sup> Street North  
Arlington, Virginia 22207  
U.S.A.



1st AIR CAVALRY DIVISION  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96490



Treasured Relatives,

5 January 1969  
Sunday Afternoon

The miscarriage of war progresses. It's been awhile since I've written and I have many things to thank you for; namely your letters and package. The letters are always a welcome break in the monotony of daily headaches this place brings. I thank you, for your wit and warmth do much to raise my spirits. The package was wonderful. Perhaps most I liked the little Santa Claus. Wearing it on my helmet added a little color to things, especially with the light at night. You can imagine some of the comments I received. But for all, I thank you gain, it was much appreciated.

The war is getting a little dull and tedious. Danger is always exciting in its own way but you even get numbed to this. What is particularly distasteful to me is the casualness with which everyone takes our casualties. Recently, from booby traps and mortar attacks we've received numerous wounded. Although unavoidable, the wear and tear of seeing friend after friend hurt

is hard. There must be a better way of obtaining a goal.

I'm afraid I must forgo the pleasure of getting my licks in on Uncle Dick as I have no time now. But I did want to thank you for your thoughtfulness. The best of the New Year for you both.

With love, David

21 February 1970

Dear Folks,

I don't know where time goes, but it's almost March already. Time has flown for me. What with the number of inspections and the various "hot" projects that have been passed down to me, I've spent nearly all my time working with my troops. The results have been rather fine but it's cost me my social life. Other than a few battalion parties it's been all I could do to get enough sleep at night so I could have a clear head in the morning. With troops like the Army has today you definitely have to be on your toes all the time. No wonder most career types request reassignment to Vietnam after a short stay here.

Most of the officers I have working for me now are really fine. It takes a load off of my shoulders. It's the new soldiers that are putting the hurt on us. If they don't go AWOL, they're smoking pot. If they're not complaining about how hard things are, they are going on sick call. As soon as the guard schedule is posted about 10% go down to the dispensary to get excused from guard because of their feet or something. And yet you see them walking half way across post to go to the enlisted club. NO personal pride or initiative. And when you get a man who really tries and has great potential it's all you can do to keep him from getting disgusted with the whole bit. What a life.

I'm almost tempted to re-up for Vietnam myself. However, when I get that feeling I just show my slides to myself again and that thought passes quickly. The weather is great out here. About one week out of the month is usually lousy with a lot of snow. but the rest of the time it gets up to 60 degrees in the daytime and makes life in the Motor Pool pleasant. Of course, it's cold as the devil at night, but that's to be expected.

The billets I'm occupying now with my troops are really nice. They're three story brick affairs with a good layout that were built in about 1966. Since I got here I've spent most of my truly creative effort (Do I have any?) trying to improve on what we have and make the buildings a little more like home for my people. We've just about finished them as much as possible so that they are truly liveable. So what happens? Naturally, we're going to move across the street to alleviate a space problem. We occupy these billets with two other companies (about 200 people per company) and they are getting to be a little crowded. We did so well improving these buildings, and have done so well on our inspections that I guess they (my boss) figure we will be hurt less by the move than anyone else. The only problem is that the buildings we're moving into are the old wooden structures that were built around 1943 and still are heated by pot belly stoves. To say the least, I've seen better housing in Vietnam. And so life progresses with new and exciting things.

I'm glad Dick is getting into a new deal. A little change in environment improves

everyone. somehow I think that Dick has possibly been shielded from some of life's finer and cruder aspects by being at Hopkins all this time. I don't know though, maybe I'm talking through my hat. I got a letter from Dick Stanard the other day. They sound happy, if not a little busy. Of course, Becky could keep anyone busy for nothing at all just by talking, but that's not too nice to say. I hope you both are well. I've been a very negligent son by not writing at all. I'll try and correct that in the future. Every time you've called me I've been waiting until later to call you and gotten beaten to the punch. Well, love to all.

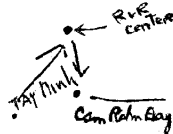
David

KT David L. Wheeler DS245922  
2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Company "B"  
1<sup>st</sup> BA 7<sup>th</sup> CAU, 1<sup>st</sup> AIR CAU DIV  
APO San Francisco, Calif. 96490

MARCH 2, 1969

Free  
AIR MAIL

MR. + MRS. Richard S. Wheeler  
5614-33<sup>rd</sup> Street North  
Arlington, Virginia 22207  
U.S.A.



AIR MAIL

2 March 1969  
Sunday Morning

Dear Folks,

Well, I'm safe for awhile. I'm in An Khe, the Cav's rear, rear area where they keep all the records, process R&R personnel, and process DEROS (rotating back to the World) personnel. I can hardly believe it. As I said yesterday, when I called you all, I'm taking an R&R to Bangkok.

Up until 27FEB69 I was in the field West of Tay Ninh. For the six days previous to that we have been in contact with NVA main force elements every day. Although our casualties were very light, the strain was heavy. Every time we turned around we ran into a platoon or larger force of NVA moving towards Saigon for the "Big Offensive" we've been expecting for so long. Luckily we had our affairs in order and repulsed them and blocked their movements effectively. But it kept us in a constant state of excitement and fear. At this time we were operating in an area which is normally controlled by another division and after those six days the other division decided to kick us out and try and handle the situation themselves. Naturally, we were very happy and even happier when we found out we were going to come back to take care of base defense on LZ Tracy, for awhile. So, trying to make good, better I put the screws to Cpt. Burson about letting me go on R&R. Needless to say, he was not too pleased about the notion. He was very tactful though and said: "Hell, no. What do you think I am, crazy!?" Well, it took Jourdonnais and his beer and whiskey to prepare the Captain properly. But old Jourdonnais used his charm and ingenuity properly and after about four hours of hard drinking we got him to sign the release papers. I then had to have the Bn C.O.'s approval. He wasn't too willing but had to admit I needed a break (since I've been in the field longer than any other lieutenant or captain has) and said O.K. Not wanting to wait until morning when Cpt. Burson might have sobered up,

Jourdonnais got me on an emergency log bird (which fly at night only in emergencies when units are in contact and need resupply) which was flown by a friend of his and flew me back to Tay Ninh. One day there and I was on my way. So here I am and lie looks mighty rosy. My R&R isn't a normal one since I wasn't permitted before to take one of the normal allocations which come down monthly for the next month. What I'm taking is a "standby R&R" which means I'll go in any vacant seat left by someone who has missed his flight. Although I wanted to go to Hawaii, the personnel here inform me that vacant seats to Hawaii are impossible to obtain. However, Bangkok, my second choice, is considerably easier to get to - thus that's where I'm trying to go.

An Khe is a dream compared to Tay Ninh, Cu Chi, LZ Tracy or the field. I'm sleeping between clean, white sheets, get to sleep all I want to, the chow is good (including a snack bar with steaks and hamburgers), the officer's club is beautiful (bar, slot machines, periodic shows, and movies every night). So, all in all, my complaints are few and life is very easy. While my orders are being cut I'll be here until 5March. Then I'll leave for Cam Rahn Bay. I'll stay there a day and then try to get to Bangkok. Once in Bangkok I'll have 5 days, then take the back route to Tay Ninh again. I'm told there's a new lieutenant in the millwork and he might be coming to take over my job. That will give me the X.O.'s job for Bravo Company back in Tay Ninh. Wonders never cease. I just hope everything works out o.k. I'll try to write while I'm in V.N., but don't expect any letters while I'm in Bangkok. I don't imagine I'll have the inclination then. But I'll keep you informed. the biggest thing though is getting out of the country for the Tet offensive. I couldn't be happier.

I got the blank checks you sent me and promptly cashed two of them:

#119 27Feb69 to V.N. Regional Exchange	\$50.00
#126 1Mar69 to V.N. Regional Exchange	<u>\$50.00</u>
	\$100.00

that should leave me around \$25.00 left in my account. Don't put any more money in the account, I don't need it. I've plenty of money - over \$700.00 for my R&R and more where that came from and that's without touching any of my savings. I'm not hard up for cash. I just used the checks for gifts and they are easier than cash in some instances. When I need to use checks again I'll simply send home more money. O.K.?

The shotgun belt, shells, brush, cloth, and etc., along with the food and goodies were magnificent. I thank you. It's exactly what I wanted. The new equipment gives me the versatility I need - plus it is of heavy, rugged construction. I picked up a few tricks from one of the local gook policemen which might come in handy. But I'll need a shot-splitter and about 100 ft. of heavy duty nylon fishing line (although it must be heavy duty, it must also be very flexible, so use your own judgement.) In case you can't already imagine, I'll use the shot splitter (a pliers

type mechanism which cuts through the buck shot - used as fishing line weights) to cut into the buck shot in the standard army issue shotgun shells, then string the pellets together with fishing line, recrimp the shot, and reload the shotgun shells. When fired it gives a chain like effect which may prove interesting.

I'm glad you liked the pictures. I can't wait to see them myself. I've got plenty (too much probably) of film and plan to take a picture or two any time I can. So keep a little record of how much all the processing costs (as I'm sure it's running up quite a bill) so I can reimburse you at least monetarily for all the trouble you're going to. I won't attempt to try and repay you for everything you've sent, the time and trouble you've taken to please me, or the effort (superb, at that) you've made to write to me. I feel the most fortunate young man around to have such loving parents who show that love in so many ways. All I can say is thank you. I hope there will be a time when I can be given the chance to reciprocate in some small way for all the love and attention you have given me. Here, especially, knowing that someone cares means so much. I can assure you that very few people get as much mail or as many packages as I do. You can see the jealousy written all over their faces as I retreat into the "corner" to read my letters. The effect on me is great as it builds my morale, lifts my spirits, and keeps my sense of humor.

By the way, you mentioned a guy with a moustache in one of my pictures filling sand bags. That is Jim Jourdonnais. The picture was taken while we were building LZ White. The amount of work to be done and time allotted was so great that everyone was forced to work no matter what the rank. Jourdonnais and I weren't any exceptions. So as it turned out, he supplied the beer and we helped him build his bunker. It was a beautiful bunker too, with more overhead cover (3 layers of sandbags) than even the Bn C.O. had. His address is:

1LT James L. Jourdonnais 05241430, S-4  
HHC 1st BN, 8th CAV  
1st AIR CAV DIV  
APO San Francisco, CAL 96490

I'm sorry I haven't acknowledged Doug's letters to me. I have received several and thank him for writing. I hope he understands why I haven't written to him personally, although I've tried. Tell him I really appreciate his and Cathy's thoughtfulness. The problem about mentioning that he wrote is that I usually forget. Unless there is some specific question in a letter I burn them after I read them. This prevents me from either losing them or getting them captured. If the NVA find an address on a letter they've been known to write letters to relatives, etc. There's so much happening that I usually forget to thank someone for a letter, written since I've already burned the letter. A vicious circle as you can see.

I'll try to write again when I hit Cam Rahn Bay. I'll probably be buying some stuff in



Bangkok when I get there and will try and send it home from there. I doubt is I can insure it so if it arrives broken all I can do is cry. If the gift is for you it will be addressed to you. If it's something I've purchased for myself Ill address it to myself. You can open everything to see if it needs some special storage. But, if it addressed to you I intend it to be opened as I mean it as a gift. If I buy any shirts or blouses for you I'll make sure they're sewn together!

Well, back to the O'Club for a little imbibing. Love to all and be award that the kid is on vacation.

With love, David

4 March 1969  
Tuesday Afternoon

Dear Folks,

Just a short note to tell you I'm having a great time here in An Khe doing nothing. The pictures and propaganda leaflet are just some things I turned up in my wallet and want to send home for safe keeping. The pictures were policed up off a sniper killed in an attack on our company night location. I'd like to take credit for the kill but artillery actually got him. I was only adjusting the artillery on him. The rifle is the standard NVA issue, Russian and Chinese made AK-47 - semi and full automatic, approx. .30 caliber, 30 round magazine - extremely accurate and deadly. It's a matter of discussion as to what is more effective: the AK47 or our M-16. There are the typical people we're fighting in their normal uniforms. Take a look at some pictures of South Vietnamese farmers and try to tell the difference between the two. It gets to be a rather interesting challenge.



One other bit of news I gained from my old platoon Sgt., SFC Simms (who is now working for Brigade S-2-intelligence) who is going on R&R also and whom I just saw last night. He says that LZ Trace, with Bravo Company there on base defense, was hit by a heavy mortar and ground attack two nights ago. Results: five killed, twenty-five wounded. I shudder when I think of how close



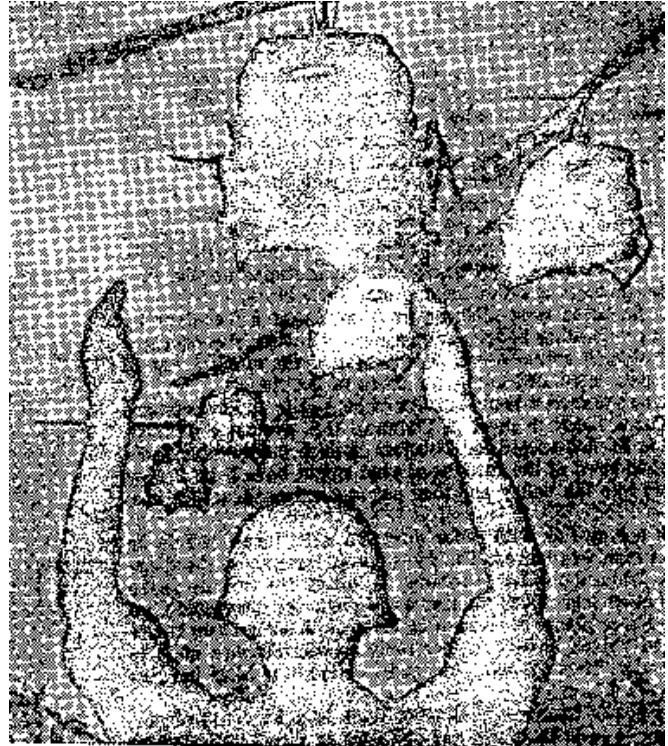
I came to being there with them. You wonder sometimes about your mind. When I left Tracy, all I knew was that I had to get out of there for awhile - any way I could. So I did - and look what could have happened if I had stayed. Damn! Someone up there is looking out for me. You don't stay as lucky as I have been for as long as I have been without something going for you!

Well, I'm off for Cam Ranh Bay tomorrow and Bangkok the next day. Love to all, David

Washington Star, March 9, 1969

# Copter Warfare: How It Evolved

By JOHN T. WHEELER  
Associated Press Staff Writer



SAIGON--As the intensity of the Vietnam war swirled higher and higher, more than one U.S. infantry commander predicted more powerful enemy firepower would push the glamorous but frail helicopter into a minor military role.

The theory was that the extremely vulnerable choppers could never stand up to enemy units equipped with massed heavy machine guns and flak cannons aimed by radar.

But the helicopter proved itself more than capable of serving in the third or conventional stage of the insurgency here. Textbooks on tactics, U.S. senior officers say, must be rewritten to give the helicopter increasing importance in warfare.

Much to the surprise of many military planners, only minor tinkering with tactics was necessary to adapt the mass use of helicopters in Vietnam from the shotgun and home-made pistol days of low-level guerrilla warfare in the early 1960s to today's battles that sometimes involve heavily armed divisions on both sides.

The U.S. Command estimates that the 2,500 helicopters now in Vietnam have given allied infantrymen such mobility that if they were withdrawn it would require one million added trigger-pullers in Vietnam to do the same job.

U.S. Command sources say an allied war machine without helicopters at present would be on the defensive rather than the offensive and that casualties would be far higher. Because American troops are doing the heaviest fighting, their casualties over-all would be proportionately far higher if the helicopter hadn't been able to make the transition from low-level to large scale war.

A major reason our negotiators in Paris have a strong hand in bargaining for peace with the Communists is because of the helicopter," a senior officer of the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division says. This division, with 449 choppers ranging from miniscouts to giant flying cranes,

has more helicopter muscle than any other in Vietnam. It uses them with a precision and a backing of massive firepower that, in the opinion of several officers who have served here during both the "little war" and "big war" days, it is safer to be in helicopter units now than almost any time in the past five years of war.

### **Experimental Unit**

The Air Cavalry was an experimental unit based around the helicopter and sent to Vietnam to prove experimental tactics. It often has been said that if the Spanish civil war was the proving ground of modern air power and armor, Vietnam has provided the crucible for the helicopter.

A major watershed for helicopter warfare came during last spring when the 1st cavalry assaulted into the A Shau Valley, an enemy stronghold in northeast Vietnam that still includes a truck road off the Ho Chi Minh Trail and is protected by 37mm antiaircraft guns directed by radar.

The cavalry and the 10th Airborne Division, which operated in the mountains east of the valley, lost 130 choppers shot down or grounded due to battle damage during the month-long operation. The cavalry pilots during the first days of the assault heard over their radios for the first time the beep, beep, beep of radar locking onto their ships.

But the flak batteries were silenced in a matter of a few days by *U.S.* jets and rocket-shooting helicopter gunships. Although the 130-chopper toll seemed high, it actually was seven short of the number lost in one month in a little-noted 1967 campaign south of Da Nang.

The chopper had proved it could survive in as hostile environment as any it now seems likely to meet in Vietnam. *U.S.* ground commanders, who knew the French record for disasters in such inaccessible spots as the A Shau, shuddered at the thought of what might have been if they had to march into the valley and then out again through major enemy ambushes.

Dealing with enemy flak with radar direction units turned out to be less of a problem than was feared. The beeps come through on the choppers FM radios. While the radar is locking on, pilots can execute sharp diving turns and other high speed maneuvers to elude the electronic aiming systems. Air Force planes have been called upon in some areas to use their sophisticated "black boxes" or electronic countermeasure units to jam the enemy radar. Then jet bombers can be called in to blast the suspected sites.

Dealing with the heavy machine guns sometimes is a harder problem. These can be dug in and carefully camouflaged to direct fire that is deadly up to 5,000 feet or more. But use of continuous bomb, shell and rocket fire on landing zones effectively silences most such weapons during assaults.

For the entire year 1968, the 1st Cavalry counted 1,004 helicopters hit by enemy ground fire. Of these, 774 flew on and completed their mission or at least got home safely, 128 were shot down and recovered, and 102 were destroyed.

## Over 2,000 Destroyed

Since the war began, more than 2,365 helicopters have been destroyed from all causes in Vietnam, but only a few more than 1,000 were shot down and destroyed. Many of the rest involved mechanical failure and the type of crashes and collisions that could have happened anywhere in the world where choppers are ordered to fly in marginal weather into small landing zones.

The how of the helicopter's survival in increasingly hostile battlefield situation stems mostly from an emphasis on precision timing and flying and the massive use of firepower. Another major factor was the introduction of ever faster and more heavily armed helicopters.

In the cavalry, where techniques have been most finely honed, a battalion-size heliborne assault into War Zone D northeast of Saigon worked like this:

A helicopter landing zone was picked near a suspected enemy concentration. The zone was carefully studied by aerial reconnaissance including small scout helicopters that often flew below tree-top level and at speeds ranging down to 10 miles an hour to look for traps.

The entire assault was timed to coincide with the touchdown of the first infantry-bearing helicopter. Air strikes of up to 20 minutes started hammering the area to "sanitize" the landing zone. The artillery took over as the helicopters maneuvered into position off to the side of the zone.

Finally, the artillery lifted and Aerial Rocket Artillery helicopters carrying up to 76 rockets each swung into their firing runs. When armed with 17-pound warheads, each rocket has the punch of a 105 mm artillery shell. They can be delivered with a precision and rapidity no artillery battery could match.

With the "slicks" helicopters having no heavy armament and filled with troops—only 30 seconds from touchdown, gunships took over suppression of the landing zone, lifting their fire the moment the first infantrymen raced out of their choppers to secure the landing zone.

Such precision was unheard of years ago. Then the helicopters quite often were late in picking up the troops and since the artillery and air-power were not given new orders, troops often hit landing zones anywhere up to a half hour or more after the "prep" fire ended.

Since the air and artillery strikes pinpointed the intended landing zone, communist units could and sometimes did move into position to blast the ground troops as they hit the ground.

However, as much as muscle operations involving one or more battalions have revolutionized counterinsurgency warfare, it is the air cavalry that has given U.S. commanders their most potent weapon-intelligence against the enemy.



*Company "B"  
1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry  
1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)  
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Friday Afternoon  
21 March 1969

Dear Folks,

I'm sorry I haven't written recently. I've meant to, but several matters have been pressing heavily on my mind which I wanted to solve. Primarily, trying to get a rear job, which I have - although I don't know how long it will last. I'm now the Bravo company executive officer (same address). I work in the Bn rear area in Tay Ninh. It's a plush, easy, comfortable job with all the mean pleasures of life in Vietnam. The job however, was not easily obtained. Although, at the time I got the job, I was the senior ranking lieutenant with the most time in the field of any lieutenant in the battalion, my company commander, Cpt. Burson, had the idea he was going to keep me in the field! Naturally, he evolved this idea while I was gone on R&R. The way things stood when I got back from Bangkok was that I was returning to the field and Lt. xxx was taking XO. Lt xxx has been in the field two months less than I have, has been a rifle platoon leader only two of these months (the other two months he spent as the mortar platoon leader, a somewhat needless position because it carries no responsibility) and has distinguished himself as a cowardly bastard with no initiative and even less intelligence. Needless to say, the C.O. wanted to get him out of the field to keep him from screwing up any more (He's personally accounted for around five men's deaths and numerous wounded through his own sheer bumbling ineptness). So I can understand why Capt. Burson wanted me to stay in the field. However, I thought: If I don't look out after "the Kid", no one else will. So I went on the warpath to get the job. I played it with all the "cools" and finesse I had. Luckily I had an ace in the hole which was irrefutable or I'd be in the field today. The ace was two profiles I've picked up from fun and games in the field. A "profile" is a medical disability which limits one's effectiveness or ability to function in the field. I'd never mentioned them to the C.O. because I wanted to stay in the field until he was "squared away". But as the situation changed I saw I was forced to bring them up to the C.O. The profiles are only minor by the way - they read good on paper but are only aggravating - not disabling. One is a loss of hearing in one ear from a nearby explosion (it's coming back, no sweat). The other is from a small frag I got in my calf which damaged a muscle, but it's nearly healed now. But it's still on paper and upheld my argument. Really nothing, but the C.O. didn't know the difference and here I am. However, things may change unexpectedly and I may be forced to hit the boonies again. At least I'm getting a nice rest no matter how long it lasts. This place isn't so safe anyway - there's no fear really about gooks getting in the perimeter, but we get mortared or rocketed every few nights. It's just enough to keep us on our toes. Tay Ninh Base Camp is so large that the targets the gooks shoot at are 600

or 700 meters away - thus presents little danger to us, only a little scare as the rounds scream over our buildings at night.

That's the good news. The bad news is a real tragedy to me. Three nights ago I planned to go out to LZ White (we moved again, this time from LZ Trace back to White) to take Jim Jourdonnais some goodies I purchased for him. I called before I left on a bird, to ask him if I had forgotten anything. He told me not to come, he was too busy. So I planned to go out the next night. Well, that night LZ White got a fierce rocket and mortar barrage along with a sapper (gook suicide squads carrying demolitions - satchel charges) attack on the ground. While we were gone off LZ White the last time, the gooks had obviously paced off the perimeter and bunkers and had everything zeroed in. The result: nearly every bunker on the LZ got a direct hit, the sappers got inside the perimeter and destroyed numerous command bunkers. Jim was in one of the command bunkers. the bunker he was in first got a direct hit from a 107 mm rocket which broke both Jim's legs and gave him numerous frag wounds. His supply sergeant, Sgt. Monotti (one of my old squad leaders in the third platoon who Jim got a job on the LZ) found him, dragged him out from under the debris and gave him first aid. As this was happening a gook threw a satchel charge in the same bunker giving Jim more wounds. Sgt. Monotti drug him to another bunker to safety. Then that bunker received a direct hit injuring him further. Sgt. Monotti returned to find him buried again and dug him out again. After patching him up he drug him to another bunker which believe it or not got hit too. Jim then asked to be propped up against the HQ bunker (outside) with an M-16 until the attack was over. The attack lasted until around 6:30 in the morning at which time he got medivaced. I hear he has already been sent to Japan and will be in the States soon. All I know definitely is that he is alive, but seriously injured. A damn shame!

If Jim hadn't told me to stay here I'm afraid to imagine what would have happened. My luck is holding true to form.

Thanks for all the letters and packages., as far as I can determine from all your letters I've received all the packages sent. And I'm the best supplied kid around too - you people sure do take care of me! Unless I hit the boonies again the only things I'd like to have here are good and plenty's, pop corn, and snacks such as cheese waffles and potato sticks.

By the way, some of the film I sent home is designed for color prints, not color slides. I didn't realize it until now. I hope slides can be made from them. I may also be sending home some 126 cartridges for developing. I was given some film someone didn't want and have a little Kodak I've borrowed to take some pictures. I'm sure there're a lot of other questions you wish answered and I'll try to do that later. I just wanted to give you my situation and tell you I'm o.k. I'll write soon.

Love to all,  
David



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26 March 1969  
Wednesday Afternoon

Dear Folks,

Took some Polaroids today and thought I'd send them home for you to see. There are four pictures enclosed here and five in an accompanying letter. Those five with form enclosed I would like to have made into color slides (can be done using enclosed mailing envelope). I can't mail that type of envelope with enclosures from here for some reason.

Life is fairly busy and hectic back here, but it makes time go easier. I've gotten some of my men out of the field to help me. It might be hard to understand, but the working relationship with these men is fantastic. Naturally, in the field a mutual respect and devotion emerges of itself. Add to this the fact that I've gotten them out of the field permanently in a rear job (something like giving a man with cancer a reprieve on life, a million dollars, and a clean sheet) and you've got the most loyal, hardworking, and conscientious workers in the world. Sometimes I've really got to watch what I say when I mention that we need something for the barracks or the field troops. I've trained them in subversion, night fighting, and undercover ops and they're good - real good. So a comment from me often results in them raiding a supply dump, lumber yard, or helipad. They don't care how they get things. All they have to have is a fair resemblance to a "need" and they're on the way: armed guards, dogs, and all. I said two days ago that I'd like to have a refrigerator for the field troop day room. Yesterday morning I found a 10'x4' refrig. in the day room (the type that the Bn. mess hall uses). Lord knows how they got it through a 3' door but they did. It must weigh a ton - they had to have used a fork lift to get it here. That presents another problem: our motor pool doesn't own a fork lift and vehicles like that aren't operated or released at night. The whole thing was rather amusing at first. I then chuckled and pointed out that the electricity we have in the buildings was not sufficient to run a refrigerator of that size. I then understood when I heard the 10kW they had lifted, started out back. All in one night! Now someone is bound to miss the stuff so I figured we better trade this stuff off. So I had a big problem until I found out where they got it all. Apparently they bribed a chinook pilot to land the stuff on our pad in trade for a pallet of beer (80 cases) which didn't cost a cent since we had traded a gook machine gun for it. Rather complicated, huh? About this time, Maj Hardegree, our Bn X.O. walked in the door and saw "the loot". I thought my career in Vietnam had ended and my work in Leavenworth had just begun. But Sam (same one) slid the refrig. around so the



back panel showed a neatly stenciled sign: "property of U.S. Marine Corps". Not a word was said except when the major left he said: "Someone stenciled that wrong, you'd better correct it!" Maybe I'd better chain my people at night.

I picked up a new pistol too. It's a Chicom (Chinese communist) 9 mm (short) automatic pistol. A beautiful one. My Mauser had gotten screwed up by a mortar round but still had face value, so I traded it for something that would work.

I got two packages yesterday - great! Thank you, just what I wanted. I've already loaded up five shells and tried them out. It chopped an 8" banana tree right in half. I think it'll be perfect. Thanks again.

Back to work. My love to all.

David

April 1, 1989

(Transcribed from tape.)

Well Hi,

Using this new method here with a genuine super number one tape recorder scrounged up here from a buddy. Just in case you're wondering, this is on a 7½ speed. I hope this works out all right, I don't know if you can get a tape recorder or not, but I sure would hope you could.

Let's start out with a few of the general things. Your packages, you've been asking about them. They're packed beautifully and what they've got packed in them is just more than a man can expect over here. All the food, and popcorn, and booze, and shotgun shells, shotgun belt, and the cleaning rod. Good lord, I just can't think of all the things, you've been wonderful. Can't imagine how much I appreciate it, and I do thank you, very, very much.

As for future needs, I really don't have any, except maybe the popcorn and the Good and Plenties. That's about all I need. I don't need any more shells. I've already got a few shells, a few of that split-shot, I've already purchased. Go ahead and send them along, I can always use them, but I've got a full basic load right now, and I won't need any for awhile. But the popcorn I can use.

I've gotten all of your pictures. They're great. Some of my pictures you've returned, I really appreciate your getting prints made of those. I got all of the stamps and I thank you for the stamps. Tell Doug I've received all his letters. I just got two recently. I certainly appreciate them. Got a couple of pictures and got Mister Rembler's bottles. Certainly have got his bottles and yours too Dad. Makes things very pleasant, very pleasant, especially out in the field where it's something else. It gives you a little sock every night.

Gee, you've been asking about the pictures, whether I had a light meter or not. No, I don't have a light meter; it's an electric light meter built into the camera. It's a Yuskika 35, a pretty good camera. It's got everything figured out. It takes great pictures.

Start talking about these gems I bought in Bangkok. I don't know if I'm going to send them home or not because they're sort of expensive. I'd hate to lose them. I don't think I'll have any trouble getting them into the country. I don't think it's illegal or anything like that. I doubt if I'll have to pay any customs.

You asked about the location of the CAV. You couldn't figure out where it is. Well, the CAV, as such, is all around Saigon. It's public information and it's no news to the Gooks. It's in a circle around Saigon, a semi-circle, a half circle I should say from West around to East. And our units, at the Northwest about fifty clicks, fifty klicks, a klick is a kilometer. So it's about thirty-five miles, something like that. To figure it out multiply times eight, divide by five

and you get miles.

Couple things I'd like you to send me. First of all, there's Doug's address, Doug's new address. That brings up another topic, about his job. Boy that sounds fabulous. If he goes back with Pat Hayes, I don't know if he is or not, but, sounds like he'd sure get a lot of money. Making three times as much as I'll ever make. It's really, really something. Sort of makes you wonder whether you want to stay in this racket.

The fighting around here is getting pretty bad. The Gooks are, where are unit is, is just packed with Gooks. Seen about three regiments around here. We're getting the hell beat out of us. Of course, we're beating the hell out of them. Since I'm XO now I've got just a mass of paperwork, which I work from dawn to dusk on, resupply, and everything else. It's a hell of a job. It's good, I'm not humping. And humping, humping's the term. What that means is you're just walking all day, with a heavy pack. It's a connotation rather than a definition.

I'm sorry I messed you up. I sent you some of this Kodachrome X film, which is for high-speed prints, not slides. I didn't realize when I bought it. I didn't look closely enough. I wasn't widely enough awake; therefore, you're probably sending them in and asking them to give slides. Well, they're charging you thirty cents per slide. Well at thirty cents times twenty pictures is six bucks; that's a lot. I'd do the same thing myself to get the slides, because I don't want the prints. But please keep a list of all this stuff. I hope you've been keeping a list all along of all the development costs because it's quite a bit, because I intend to pay you back. Give me a quotation of the prices and I'll send you some money.

Some of the pictures you send me that I've taken of some of the other men, you've asked me to send some of the addresses of some of the guys. I don't know if you want to do that or not because the majority of guys in those pictures, as a matter of fact every guy I've been looking at has with been wounded or killed, except for two of them have dero'ed. Deroed means going back to the world, you're rotating. So it won't do much good.

I've been looking through these pictures. One of them Dick sent me of Doug and Cathy over Christmas. Doug's sideburns are too much. You've got to be kidding me. I've got my picture up on the wall, talk about my hippie brother.

I've got a picture you sent back taken in Bangkok. It's of that temple, that white one with all the gold on it. That was really wild because I told you about these two students. The deal I had with these students was "you show me the real Bangkok, introduce me to a nice young lady, and I'll teach you slang and table manners." We're going down this canal one day in this power motor boat, I saw this procession going by, a funeral procession, and they were going to cremate the body. They got – I don't know if these pictures came out or not because I opened my camera and the film didn't come out, or even with the films that arrive, pictures of the

funeral pyre. It was really tremendous. All sorts of good shots.

Of course, I got your pictures of the snow scenes outside the house. That's, ...you don't believe what snow means to us over here. Picture of Dad at your desk. There's a big grin on your face. I really like that. I'm going to send you another picture of Pigiron; it's a little better picture. We had him drunk one day. She gets drunk every day. We give her eight or nine beers. She wasn't feeling too well yesterday because we had given her a shot in the beer and she was sick from it. Picture of Mom out in front of the house. I like that. I keep these pictures. Picture of Mom, Dick, and Amy. I guess this was over Christmas. Really brings you back to home.

Weather her is terrible now.

We're running out of tape here; just turn the tape on the other side when it runs out. All you do is just pick it up as is, turn the tape over, put it on the other reel and start going again. It will play on the other side. So I'll probably be switching about now.

The weather here, it's getting unbearable. It's really hard to get out in the field. We've been getting temperatures here from 100 to 110 in the field. Lot of heat casualties. Doesn't help the guys working either. Sort of bad all the way around. Course what we're fighting is something else. If you're wondering where I am, I'm in my hooch right now. It's really a tough life compared to the field. You know what the field's like, I've told you about it. A picture worth a thousand words. You really can't imagine what the experience is to hump there, fight, and everything else. It's a god-awful thing. But right now I'm in the back of the hooch. They've split one of the buildings up into small screened buildings. There are just screens holding it together. It's been broken up into quarters. I've got one room here. I'm sharing it with one of the other XO's. There are rugs on the floor, bamboo rugs, sleeping mats, bamboo around us. Mahogany plywood on the wall. We have a nice bunk with that civilian air mattress. You probably remember me sitting on the floor blowing up that air mattress and trying out at home, Mom, before I left in September. Boy I tell you, it was worth every cent. I've had offers for 40 or 50 dollars here because it's so good. The mosquito netting. I've got a radio going, footlocker, and the great thing I guess is we've got three fans going here. That's a big thing. Fans are in. It's a hundred times better than an air-conditioner over here. Because an air-conditioner going, it tears you up as soon as you walk out, you're walking from a sixty-degree temperature to a hundred and ten. It almost knocks you down. You keep the fans.

And of course, I've got my cooler. I'm getting an icebox in a few days, getting a TV in a few days. There's only one station on TV. Plus, I've got this tape recorder. It isn't mine, it's borrowed. I'll be sending tapes now, as much as I can now. Please tell me, the first chance you get, whether these tapes are coming out all right, whether you can find something to play. I can get tons of tapes. You don't have to send them to me; I can buy them at the PX. We have a PX here.

Lining the walls we have pictures of home. One of the other XO's here has pictures of his girl. Got my shotgun, the Gook pistol I captured, a 45 actually. I policed up a 45-caliber burp gun. It's a small submachine gun, very short barrel. Two big thirty round magazines taped together. I'm just ready to go. We have sandbags piled up around the building, so it's fairly safe here during a mortar attack. And we do get mortared every night. Usually they don't come too close, just scares the hell out of you when you hear them whistle over your head. It's something else. I've used this tape before. I'm recording over this time because it didn't come out too good. We got mortared a little earlier and I had to make a rather mad dash and tore the tape. The tape recorder got knocked over. Wild.

I've got this little while-your-out slip. This little pink slit you've asked some question on, Dad, and I'll answer a few of those for you.

You asked if I know where Jim Jourdonnais is located. I don't know. He was in Okinawa the last time. He really got shot up bad. One of the best friends I've had. What happened, his LZ got overrun. Sapper squads got in the perimeter. Before they got in they got mortared. One of the first mortar rounds to land landed just outside Jim's hooch and tore up his legs pretty good. His supply sergeant, who used to be one of my squad leaders, was inside with him, started to give him first aid. Sappers heard what was going on, sappers are a special Gook squad, it's a suicide squad that walks around the perimeter throwing satchel charges. A satchel charge is just what it sounds like, an attaché case packed with explosive. They threw one in the hooch he was in. That hurt them both pretty good. And Menoti took Jim over to another hooch, another bunker. That bunker got a direct hit. So Sergeant Menoti dug him out. Menotti had gone for a medic. When he came back to the bunker, he dug Jim out, took him to another bunker. Jim was so ticked off at this time; he started yelling at Menotti. Of course, he was out of his head; he had holes all through him. He started yelling at Menotti to just leave him be. You know, everywhere he was going he was just getting hit. One of the sappers had an AK-47, which is one of their automatic rifles and stuck it in the window till he heard the guys screaming. Started shooting people. Jim got a couple slugs from that. Finally Jim, he's real super, he was shot to hell, he told Menotti to give him a rifle and lean him up against the COC, this is the Combat Operations Center, on a fire base. Lean him up against the COC with an M-16, he'd take care of himself. I don't know. He's all right. He's alive. I don't think he has anything too serious, couple of bones broken. But when the doc shipped him out, we have a great battalion surgeon, when he shipped him out he said he'd make it.

Do I have any word on Dick Flynn? Hell, I don't even know if Dick Flynn made it to the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. So I didn't make it. They shipped me off to the CAV. So I don't know if Dick made it or not.

Did I receive the package with the ramrod in it? Yes I did and thank you very much.

Whether Jim received his package of Jack Daniels? I doubt it. Because after I got your letter, that letter was dated after he had already been medivaced. So it's probably floating around. It'll probably make it back to him in a hospital somewhere.

If you got a couple shells, go ahead and send them, but don't buy any more, same with the split-shot.

The question you asked, do I take salt tablets? Well, I quit taking salt tablets the first two weeks I was here. You take them every once in a while when it gets real hot. The guys are really getting hot out there now, but I'm not with them.

Next food package. Popcorn, potato sticks, yea, Good and Plenties, maybe some licorice string, something like that. Fritos, yea, but don't send anything, don't send any snacks that are in a bag or in a box or something like that. They have to be in a can, because the heat and moisture get through them right through the foil.

This, this was over here is something else. I don't know if you can hear the guns going off in the background. Tay Nin's a rather large base camp. It encompasses about a square mile and there're a lot of people on it, a lot of big guns. One of the worst things about getting mortared here, or rocketed, whichever they're planning on doing, whatever night. There's a perimeter around us and we don't man the perimeter. That's taken care of by the 25<sup>th</sup> division. There's nothing for us to do except hide, get in a bunker. You don't know what to do when the damn shells come screaming in and explode all over the place. You know you've running around like your heads cut off. It's really wild to see what happens, the reaction of some people who haven't been out in the field versus people who've, those guys who've been out in the field. Hell, we run for the bunkers, sure, but that's about it. Then as we hear the shells stop, go out and look for wounded guys and pick them up.

Look, this tape is getting real short. I'm going to be signing off. I'm going to put on another tape right now and I'll send it at the same time I send this.

4-8-69

(transcription from tape)

Here again with the next tape. Date 8 April 1969, exactly three minutes after twelve at night. We just got out of the bunker, just got mortared again. That's all over. My roommate just came in. He's another XO with one of the other companies, just announced he had a baby boy. Only one problem, he's not married. He's in sort of tight shape there, apparently the girl didn't tell him she was pregnant. Oh well. Things going as usual. Glad they didn't tell him about it until he got out of the field. That'd be a hell of a thing to happen in the field. Life goes on as usual. Things are really shitty back here. We just had about six medivacs come in, guys pretty well shot up.

Tell you a little bit more about where I am. It's Tay Nin base camp. Facilities are real nice here. We got an EM club and a movie out there, a movie every night. We have an officers club with a bar, dining room orderly to bring you your chow. TV. Everything like that. Guess I'm going to get a TV pretty soon here. Got an icebox. Go along with my three fans. I could probably get a hundred and fifty dollars for all three of them right now. Sort of hard to come by.

Wish I could tell you a little bit more about this place, but security denies me from letting it go. Hope you're all well. I would like to know how many pictures I've got back there now. I know I sent a lot of rolls. Send me an idea. Tell me about it. Give me a little idea about how many rolls of film I've got, how many pictures, whether you've kept them separate, or whatever the case may be. I'm going to keep taking picture as much as I can. Record what's going on over here. Nothing too good going on over here. I'm getting quite fed up with this war. We've not accomplishing very much. This last offensive is just wreaking havoc. Our companies are getting contact every day. Getting a lot of guys hurt. Number of replacements we've got. To give you an idea, only four guys of my original platoon are left. Now several of those have Deroed, but most of them have been wounded, gotten out of the field. It's only a matter of time before I go back out in the field, I guess. The company commander's already been wounded twice, although they've been small wounds. He's gone back to duty, but it sort of looks as if he's going to get blown away eventually. Of course, I'll go out and take the company, get me a little company-commander command time, and that's good. But I don't particularly relish going back out there. The heat is abysmal. The temperature's anywhere from a hundred to a hundred and ten during the day. You get enough water, but everyone's humping five and six canteens just to get along. Damn woods, they're blowing pads out there again. That takes a lot of work. They're only getting a log every two or three days because the Gooks, they just expect when they get a helicopter in there the Gooks are going to contact the perimeter at night, so they only get log every two or three days. Then it really builds up, when they get a log in. The go out and haul the stuff in so they can fight off the surprise attack. I've seen a lot of my friends get hurt.

Your letters and packages have been something fantastic to me. Can't appreciate it

enough. It's your support, that's the biggest thing. I tell you there're a lot of times when I've been out in the field, and back here its just the same. Everybody else doesn't get much mail, but yours come to me. You can hear them saying "goddamn that Wheeler, he's getting all those letters." You know when I get five, six a day. That was sad. That's great, I really appreciate it.

I should have written more. I've been bogged down with a lot of paperwork I'm doing. I just haven't had the time to sit down. Every time I sit down I want to lay down. It's not like that out in the field; of course, you took the nights off in the field. Back here you can't do it so great. Course you have lights on. You don't have lights in the field. So you can work at night here. That's what we do. I had another problem just arise. We had a kid come in from Cam Ran Bay, been AWOL for the last six months. Classic deserter. Now we have charge of him. We have him under armed guard. Don't 'know what we're going to do with this kid.

Seeing about that guy, it's a real shame. I wish Nixon would do something, do something about this darned war. Stop it or increase it, or something, but we're getting the hell kicked out of us right now.

Far as my need, I really don't need anything too much. I'm in good shape. Believe it or not I'm actually getting skinny back here. I have no intention of getting skinny again, not that way, if I can help it. I did six months out in the field and it's all hell.

I don't know if I told you, but I understand that you got those packages, those six packages from Bangkok, including that one with the mess. No point in opening them. They're all sealed, and everything. You'll end up with about half of those anyway; I'm going to give them to you. Nice presents, but if there are any breakages I can make claims on it. Another big things is, Nancy's going to return all the packages that I've sent her. She doesn't feel right in accepting the presents, until possibly my commitment to her is a little greater. I think it's crazy since I gave them as gifts, and gifts alone. The problem is going to be for you, because there are going to be quite a number of packages, like ten or twelve packages coming to you. It will be something.

It looks like I'm going to run out of tape real quick, so just pick up this reel and turn it on the other side.

I'm sitting here listening to the radio, first time I've had in awhile. I was talking about those packages. You're probably going to slit my throat when I come back; it's going to take up so much space. I hope not.

Talking about Doug's job. That sounds really something.

Hope you're getting some more pictures. There's one in the mail now. It's Kodak 126



slide, I guess. I like color prints. I don't know if you got them made into slides or not. I just happened to have a camera and an extra roll of film. Somebody else's camera. Couple of good ones of choppers. I don't know if I'll ever be able to sort all those slides out. As much as possible keep them and mark on the back the dates they came in or something like that. You forget pretty quick what you see. Very quick.

Wish I could record some of the sights and sounds you see around here. The perimeter at night is scary. Rather dangerous place to walk around at night. Everybody's just a little bit jumpy, because sappers, suicide squads, are around here. Sometimes they get in the perimeter. Not here for a quite a long time, but you never know. It's quiet except for the booms, the big guns going off, maybe an incoming rocket or two. Perimeter's lit up. They have big searchlights going out in front of us. You see guys sitting with their rifles on their laps, sitting on top of their bunkers, sitting very quietly. In the background you can hear a few radios going. Communications shack right across from us. You can hear them talking to the forward firebases. Helicopters moving around overhead. Still at night. Going out on recon or firefly missions where they have huge spotlights on it and shine down on the river ways to see if there is any movement on the riverway. Once in a while you see a flare goes up in the sky. You see it lit up once in a while from machineguns going off or grenade launchers going off.

That reminds me. I don't know if I've talked about Andy over Christmas. He was fabulous over Christmas. It was one of the most fantastic experiences I've ever had. First time out of the field, coming down, I was supposed to go to a hospital, but I didn't. I called Andy. He said, oh, I can't come for you, but I'll send a car from the embassy. Sent an embassy car for me, took me home and fed me and clothed me, gave me a pistol to clip on my side. Took me to a Christmas party. Really made my Christmas. Quite lonely for me, wish I'd stayed with my unit, but Andy sure made up for it. Took care of me like a real pro. Got me stoned. Talked about war stories. He had a couple of good war stories going for him. Hope to go see him again. He wanted a grenade launcher if I found one on the field. I found one. I got one for him. It looks like a huge shotgun with a barrel about four times bigger, not longer, but bigger in circumference. I can take him one of those with the ammunition. He can use it from his villa, although he got armed guards on his villa. From upstairs, if he ever got attacked there he could use the grenade launcher out of his window. And he'd use it well. That guy is a sharpie. He's got more guts than a lot of guys I've seen. Some of the things he does, like flying over Cambodia with the NVA set up over there.

I probably won't go on leave for awhile. I don't know what my chances are of seeing you in Hawaii but I'd just love to see you in Hawaii. It's not too easy. When you go on leave you're the lowest priority. There're two priorities over you, regular R&R, standby R&R, and then comes leave. It's not too easy to get to Hawaii unless I can pick up somebody else's allocation. Maybe I can, maybe I can't, I don't know. But we can see what happens. That wouldn't be until June or July, probably more like July. Let's see, April, May, June, yes, that's

three or four months.

I hope Dick and Amy are all right along with Doug and Cathy and Ned and the rest of the folks. Got that note from Trany. I'm glad you've given her a gift for me. I wish I'd been able to send something from here. I wish I could send everybody something more. I keep getting letters from Uncle Dick. He's just unbelievable. I really like that man, he's always got some wit and charm in his letter. And of course, Aunt Marge writes me. Sure makes me feel good. I sent him a chess set. I hope he likes it. It's one of those nice little ivory jobbies that I'd like myself, but I don't have the time to play. But I know he plays and I like to send him something like that. Things are so relaxed here. I can't quite believe I'm not out in the field. There's just no comparison between the two. This is a farce back here. You get rockets, mortars coming in, but that doesn't mean anything. Ten, twenty minutes and then it's over. It's not like out in the field where you're so intimate with stuff.

I don't know how long this tape is going to hold out. This is the second tape. I hope they get to you about the same time so you can get them. I'll keep sending them. Of course with these tapes I can just lay back on my bed, dream, and talk my heart away. I wish you'd send tapes back to me. I have a recorder here. Tape looks like it is going to run out. My love to you all. I trust that you are all well. Know that I am well and in good condition. Hope to see you soon.

April 18, 1969

(transcription from tape)

Well, about not writing or sending any more letters. This will be explained in due course. But believe me, I've been, well, I haven't been back to this tape recorder for a good week and a half. I've been working.

I just got your letter with the pictures in it Dad. Thank you for the pictures. You didn't have to develop the slides. I just sent them back because I can't do much with them over here. But I thank you very much for having those things developed.

The prints that you got back. You asked what the prints were of. Most of them are of Tay Ninh base camp. What you can see in there is our log pad, where I stay, there should be a narrowed view and a general view of the airstrip, some other choppers, and stuff like that. And there's some pictures of the mountain. This is Nui Ba Dinh mountain. This is the Black Virgin Mountain. It's got quite a history. The mountain itself, the special force have Como LZ on top of the mountain and there are several LZ's at the bottom of the mountain. But the Gooks inhabit in between the top and the bottom. They've got caves in there and we can't get them out. It's not really worth it to get them out. It's quite a fortress and quite an interesting place. I'll tell you more about it when I get home.

It sounded kind of cute when you said Cathy and Ned came in and Cathy left around Noon. It sounded like the old man is putting the kid to sleep. Sounds like the little boy has a great favorite and vice versa. I find this quite amusing and quite pleasing. I couldn't think of anything nicer.

I'm just going to have to watch it because when I have kids it becomes quite obvious that the first born of the family is going to be the old man's favorite. I hope my kids turn out to be as charming and as cute as little Ned is.

I got that form letter that you sent. Yea, sure I'll write those letters, but I don't think I will actually.

This letter writing business... I'm just so swamped with stuff. I've been changing over the property books. We've had a million people wounded. I've got to go traveling around to see the wounded, take care of their needs. We've had wounded every day, every day for the last month. I'm just hopping all the time, going everywhere, doing everything.

Our CO got killed. The last time I sent you a tape I was saying this guy did too much, got in the way too much, and I was right. He paid for it. He paid for it with his life. When his body came back here I escorted it to Saigon and dropped it off at Graves Registration in Saigon. Naturally, since I was in Saigon I went to see Andy. As usual, Andy sent a car for me. I went

down to the embassy and went back to his house. He gave me some civilian clothes. This time I had my own weapon. First think we had lunch, had a few drinks and shot the bull for a while. Then he took me over to his bosses house. This is the Chief Counsel I guess, the #2 man in the embassy or #3 man in the embassy. Well, we had drinks and played water polo at this house. Nearly got wiped out. Then we went over to some promotion party for a lieutenant colonel. Had a real wild time there. Of course I was still in civilian clothes, I hadn't had time to change. It was really wild seeing all these majors and colonels cutting up. Finally, when they found out I was a lieutenant they cut up even more, trying to impress me I guess.

There's a vast difference when you have a bunch of rear echelon colonels and majors. You get a second lieutenant who has a CIB, that's your Combat Infantryman's Badge, to how you're a comb at trooper. They sit back and listen to what you have to say. A vast difference from a colonel or major back here. Oh well, some of them are pretty good. Well, I enjoyed myself. Andy put me on the plane in the morning.

(unfinished)

7 May 69

Dear Mr. Wheeler

I received your letter today, and am pleased to hear that all is well with Dave. the news of his new C.O. brought extra joy. Some people you just can't tell anything. I also received the package about a week ago and I'm happy to say that there is plenty of ice around. I have an open wound on my leg and have found it's good for infection also.

The Doctors' estimates now will put me out of the hospital sometime in late Aug. or early Sept. So perhaps I will be here when Dave's "Freedom Bird" comes in. I am at Madigan General Hospital (Ward 9A), Tacoma, Wash. which is very near McCord AFB - from where Dave and I left for RVN.

The actual final healing of some of the damage done will take perhaps a year, but it is the kind of damage which being in the hospital won't help, i.e. a broken eardrum and some nerve damage in my left arm. The possibility exists that the nerve may never heal completely but I will have, at a minimum, 80%% - 90% use of the arm and hand.

But being home is just a thing in itself to be thankful for; and that I have both arms and both legs is even more so a blessing.

Again, thanks for both the package and the letter.

Sincerely,  
Jim Jourdonnais



*Company "B"*  
*1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry*  
*1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)*  
*APO San Francisco 96490*



13 June 1969

Friday Night 2330 hrs.

Dear Folks,

Well, it's your negligent son again. I'm sorry I haven't written recently. Life has been one big smear of activity in the past weeks. Physically, I'm fine now. I have yet to really learn what I caught, but it was a beaut. High fevers every afternoon and night, a nice heat-type rash, and cramps. At first I thought I was pregnant but the nurses assured me I wasn't old enough yet. That's all over now and I've been back to work for about three weeks I guess. Time has sort of floated by without control.

I'm still PBO with no less than about 100 extra duties. The main portion of the Bn. is working out of Bien Hoa and LZ Rock (named after Sgt. Rock - SFC Musial). I'm the only officer left back here in Tay Ninh with about 100 men - cooks, S-4 people, motor pool, and wounded. Naturally, since I'm the ranking man, I'm in charge. Damn! My own duties could keep me going 25 hours a day but now I'm saddled with being:

OIC (officer in charge)  
Personnel, OIC  
Intelligence, OIC  
Operations Officer  
Duty Officer on Guard  
Indigenous Laborer Control Officer  
Bunker Line Inspector Officer  
Mess Officer  
Club Manager  
Narcotics Control Officer  
CBR Officer  
Clerk-typist  
Jerk  
General Catch-all

In other words, I've got my fingers in everything I don't want to get involved with. As a result I spend the majority of the day working as OIC and the night doing my own job. Plus we just got inspected by Division and have a horrendous amount of work to do correcting the deficiencies. Plus three companies have been in heavy contact and require extensive combat loss statements (my job). Plus the gooks are mortaring and rocketing the devil out of Tay Ninh day and night. One particular enemy mortar crew has our battalion zeroed in and over 50 shells have landed within 50 meters (which is the killing radius of a 82 mm) of me. Luckily everything has missed me but it doesn't foster good working techniques to have to hit the floor every few hours. I now work, interview, and sleep in an S-4 produced command shelter recently constructed under knowing guidance (me). It's really quite impregnable to anything but a 122 mm rocket. If it weren't for eating and drinking I'd never have to leave if it weren't for my extra duties. As it is I've got it set up with two radios and three phones and have instant contact with all my vehicles, all the forward areas and anyone else in Vietnam (I've got a special phone with an amplifier that makes long distance calls to places like Saigon possible). Although I've only done it once, I can now call Andy with ease.

Three buildings have been destroyed by fire resulting from direct mortar hits. This all adds to the daily confusion. So I've had little time to myself and practically a 20 hour work day. The field was so much less complex. It was live right or die. Now I'm still subject to enemy attacks with the added administrative burden. Sometimes you can't win. But I'm satisfied. The demands are challenging, the respect gratifying, and the work hard. At least the time goes fast.

So, other than working for a living, the status quo has not changed. Work hard - party hard. I'm just wondering when the "partying" part will begin. I guess in about 84 days.

Nancy has stopped writing. I guess she's decided it's not worth it - probably no percentage in it for her.

Well, I'll try to write again soon. I received Moms and Aunt Marge's packages - and all your letters and tapes. I enjoyed them all and thank you deeply.

My love to all,  
David

22 July 1969  
Tuesday evening

Dear Folks,

I've gotten all your letters from Canada and am real glad you're both having a good time - sounds ideal. I don't know when I wrote last. Time is just flying by - but not without a lot of work. Today we had our AGI (Annual General Inspection),. We were all worried since we had just recently completed our move from Tay Ninh. but my S-4, Cpt. Guidry, and I worked our crews hard and came out on top. It's hard enough that supplies are short here (Quan Loi, pronounced Kwan Loy), logging is a 24 hour a day operation, new equipment is scarce, and it rains all the time. But no, they have to have a big inspection. For being a novice at my job I got a pretty good rating - superior. Of course it took everything I had in me to get motivated, plus I doubt if anyone gives a damn - just personal satisfaction of a good job I guess.

This Cpt. Guidry is a fine, fine man. The Colonel couldn't have picked a better S-4, the guy's got a lot of moxie and tact which goes far in the supply business. Plus he's funny as the devil. Makes a lot of difference to have a personality instead of a meathook to work with.

When I first arrived here I hadn't had any sleep in three days but managed to pull all the Bn's equipment through without damage or loss. The next morning he brought me breakfast in bed (a cpt., no less) and had the Bn. barber come in and give me a shave and a haircut. Really a fine man. Of course, for the inspection, he helped immensely and double checked all my work for me. So all in all - quite a good team.



Quan Loi by the way is not east of Saigon as I thought. It's 10 km. off the (6 miles) Cambodian border (about 60 km N.W. of (37½ miles) Tay Ninh. It's in the highlands and in the middle of a large rubber plantation. The indigenous people are Montanyards: a very proud and strong breed of Vietnamese. Most of the women walk around bare chested and the fighting is mild. I'm glad to hear you say that Washington says that the war is slowing down. I just wish they would tell the NVA that. Somehow they're still interested in killing us. funny..



I haven't had time to take any pictures, but will make a point this week to get some to you.

On my drivers license - send it in about two or three weeks so I'll get it just before I hit the states - thus I'll be able to rent a car if I wish.

Well, I'm mighty tired and want to get to sleep. I'll try to write a little sooner and get some pictures. Give my love to all.

David



Company "B"  
1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry  
1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)  
APO San Francisco 96490



25 July 1969  
Friday Night

Dear Folks,

Things should have been quiet and peaceful except I'm in Vietnam and the gooks seem to have a grudge against "round eyes". A few rockets tonight, nothing big. Got a read-out on one former area in Tay Ninh. Seems that the chaplain's hooch (30 feet from my old hooch) received a direct hit from a 107 mm rocket last night. Blew off both of his legs and wounded 30 others. Glad we moved, heh, heh. Things are looking up here. Cpt. Guidry and I have made a real fine hooch for ourselves. Bunkers are not abundant, but are adequate. Naturally there's a magnificent one 2 feet from our door-- surprising! How'd that happen?

It just so happens that we have the only hot shower in town. We scrounged an "immersion" heater ( a gas burning affair that clamps onto 55 gallon drums and submerges a heating element into the water) from one of the "mech" outfits and are proceeding to live like kings again. Our hooch is in a concrete floored building with a tin roof, screens, fans, ice box, radio, tape recorder, personal and overhead lights, wall lockers, and etc. Not too hard to live with. But you should have seen it when we got here - damn. I've seen NVA who lived better. But with hard work, a lot of initiative, and a few fast fingers we've got a good thing going. As a sideline we operate probably the most productive, efficient, and well supplied S-4 shops in the "CAV". There's almost nothing we can't and don't supply our troops. All it takes is a little thinking, planning, and plain hard work. We thrive on hard work and naturally swim in the good graces of all levels of the command channels. Oh well, a little pride never hurt anyone. If it weren't that I know things will change and we'll move again, I'd "extend". But the rockets mellow that feeling rapidly.

I'm happy to hear that Doug and Cathy and Ned are visiting you now. I know you all enjoy having family at home. I received a well thought of letter from Uncle Dick. Enjoyed it no end as I have all your letters. I'm glad to hear you both got away for a while to Canada. It sounded ideal for you both. Although I'm sure Dad would have more enthused if a 'BUNNY'

club had been incorporated in the resort! At any rate, I'm going to try and make a tape soon and take some good pictures to send on. I'm well and happy as can be expected. My third purple heart came through today for the nick I got in the convoy the first of the month. Quite a joke considering the minor things that have happened. Shows how screwed up awards can be. Will write soon.

With love, David

26 July 1969  
Saturday Night  
("at the movies")

Dear Folks,

Things are running smooth. Got my commo rig set up today. My supply Sgt., SFC Anderson, built a console for me so that I have my radio (local), remote set (hooked up to a powerful radio w/100 ft antenna - range 100 miles), and two telephones (one local and one with amplifier), and intercom (to the warehouse) all rigged in front of me sunken into my desk. Real fancy and convenient. It locks up at night and all I have to do is lift out my remote radio set and walk to my hooch and reconnect another line. This commo is great. It all



means that anyone in any company anywhere in the battalion can contact me anytime. Since I represent the "source" of all supplies it facilitates resupply and cuts out the middleman. I can have my fingers on all the needs of the Battalion. Naturally, being forced to monitor a radio all day keeps me somewhat tied down to a desk and cuts into my admin time. But I learned long ago that "late hours" can make up for the daytime. The benefits are enormous and saving in time and money significant. Plus since I've been able to "produce", people sit up and listen to my needs. The result: my own helicopter (to use) once a week. I take it down to Division Supply in Bien Hoa ("Ben-Wa", or as we call it "Benny HO") and get to talk personally with my source. It means I can get ten times what any other battalion gets since people naturally take care of friends. the trade is easy - I give them captured enemy weapons to take home (since Bien Hoa is not the field, they can't get souvenirs like weapons) and they give me anything I want in the supply system. So, all in all, things are going great. The picture enclosed was just taken ten minutes ago. The camera got wet so the color is poor but I guess it'll suffice temporarily. If my stomach seems to be protruding again it's because I contracted DUNLOP's disease which is probably attributed to several overdoses of Budweiser preparation X. My love to all - I'll write real soon. I should have a roll of film finished tomorrow.

With love  
David



H.H.C.  
 Company "B"  
 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry  
 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)  
 APO San Francisco 96490



30 July 1969

Wednesday Night

Dear Dick

One of my "only" letters, I'm sure. Life here is going at a fast pace during the day but grinds to an all too ominous halt at night. Everyone just waits... The silence is deafening. The trouble lies in the fact that a trained ear (as everyone here has) can hear the rockets and mortars being launched. When you hear it, you just wait for the crash. Luckily they haven't been too close lately. But, the sirens begin and vehicles traveling way too fast can be heard rushing towards disaster. A screwy place. I'll be glad to leave.

Dick, I wish I could relate the experience to you. Fear is a thing that can only be felt. Fear from the jeopardy of civilized justice is a minor thing- fear for existence is another. I've seen a lot: the boonies, the "high" life (with Andy Antippas in Saigon), the LZ life, the Base Camp. Filth, disease, wounds - the whole gambit. I have yet to determine what it really means. As a "military man" (face it, I like it), I have yet to see any justification. If the Reds attack San Francisco, I'll be there with weapon in one hand and flags in the other - but this shit over here has got to stop. Too many of America's elite are getting slaughtered over here. It is pathetic to see first hand. To see a young man with his legs blown off is a sickening sight. What can you say? Awards over here glorify heroism, but a cause is quickly denounced as invalid. It's quite obvious, I



guess, that a kid like me - searching for an experience of glory and enlightenment has suddenly come to the conclusion that war is hell. But Vietnam is worse yet. It is a war without logic or purpose. Thus death is without purpose here. Nixon came here today. Lucky he didn't come here to where the war is - I'd have probably blown his head off. He is a sorry bastard who doesn't know what a good fist fight is!

Four days ago I received my third purple heart. It was awarded for a "frag" wound (pin-hole size) I got in a convoy coming from Tay Ninh to Quan Loi. Naturally I didn't refuse it but I'm ashamed of it. Two other men (another with 11th Armored Cav) got killed during the same ambush - they probably got the same award. Why? I hope America wises up - it took me long enough.

I'll be home soon - 30 days. I hope I have the balls to speak up. I don't know. Civilization may lull me into solitude. Here, war is common talk only because everyone is involved. At home, no one is involved. What the hell. At any rate we should be able to have some good drunks. Maybe I can forget this place and become again the little bastard I was.

I hope you and Amy have a great time this summer up in Nantucket and elsewhere. It won't be long until we see each other again soon.

Hang Loose, Dave

P.S. Sorry to forward this home but I've lost all addresses again. Moving a lot helps. DHW



H.H.C.  
~~Company "B"~~  
1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry  
1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)  
APO San Francisco 96490



1 August 1969  
Friday Night

Dear Folks,

Things are quiet here. A steady rain is falling. Not like any rain you are used to at home. It's an extremely hard rain, but constant. If your building isn't raised, it gets flooded. But the drainage is fairly good and we stay quite dry. I've tried to call Andy several times tonight. With avail however, but I'll make it eventually. I called last week but only to find out he was in Bangkok for the week with Judy. I'm going to try and take a three day pass next week and pay a visit to Saigon. Should be as exciting as usual.

No luck getting Andy, I guess he's party-hopping.

Listened to your tape last night. Thank you - I enjoyed listening to Ned's antics. Must be a typical Wheeler.

Went "downtown" to the big city of An Loc today. It was like stepping 200 years back into history. Primitive isn't the word for it. They're still walking around in loin cloths - well close, anyway.

We added a sign over our door today - "Authorized Personnel keep out." The only one who caught it was our X.O., Major Blake. Just shows how observant people are.

Lots of Love, David

P.S. I got the word about Jim Lunson going to the "one 'o' worst". (our neighbor, 101st Airborne) I'm sure all his parents can visualize is Jim storming another "Hamburger Hill". However, I doubt if he ever gets as far as "LZ" (forward fire base). If he's operating a teletype he's probably in a Brigade or in Division headquarters - which is as safe as you can get over here. I'd trade places any day! Tell his parents not to be overly concerned - he's okay - I wouldn't doubt if he has a stateside bed and running water.

David

12 Aug 69

Dear Dad,



These pictures are of some pretty bad scenes. Please don't show them around. We got a ground attack here last night - sappers. They got into the perimeter and raised hell. My head office clerk was badly wounded while manning a perimeter bunker. Blew one leg off. But he'll live and be fine I hope. I just got back from three wonderful days in Saigon w/Andy. He gave me a wonderful vacation. A separate roll of film is on the way from my trip to Saigon - should prove interesting. No sooner than I got back than we got hit here - the same day no less. The kid's fine and getting shorter - my "turtle" is even here ("Turtle" is a code name for replacement - since he's "so slow in getting here"). He's a CW3 and quite good, I hope.

Lots of love, David



12 Aug 69

Dear Folks,

Here are some pictures of my trip to Saigon. Great time and plenty of bird watching. Rather busy night last night as I explained. Tentative body count is around 40 gooks KIA and a few friendly WIA. A little scary though at night. I received mom's package and enjoy it immensely. thank you. Plus I received my driver's license okay.

Love  
David

The Washington Post, August 13, 1969

## Red Offensive Ebbs; Foe's Toll Put at 500

It is probably the start of their fall campaign but there is no indication how long they will be able to sustain it," said a spokesman for Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, U.S. commander in Vietnam. Abrams was quoted as saying "excellent intelligence" had warned the allies of the impending attacks, reinforcements were sent into threatened areas, and B-52 Stratofortresses bombed enemy positions.

[At the summer White House in San Clemente, Calif., President Nixon's press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said when asked about the enemy outbreak, "We are watching very carefully. There is no question, I think, that they represent the initiation of what some have expected in the way of an enemy summer offensive.]

All major contact was broken off at daybreak Tuesday although scattered clashes continued until after dark, when a U.S. Army brigade base camp at Quanloi was hit by a rocket and mortar barrage. Quanloi, 65 miles north of Saigon, was the scene of the largest enemy ground assaults earlier in the day.

Several other towns and bases in the same general area as Quanloi were also targets for heavy infantry and commando attacks early Tuesday.

They were Anloc, a provincial capital 60 miles north of Saigon; the provincial capital of Tayninh, 65 miles northwest of the capital and Lochninh, 70 miles north.

Some North Vietnamese succeeded in fighting their way into Quanloi, Lochninh and Anloc, but were driven out. The U.S. Command had set up a task force headquarters at Quanloi in anticipation of the attacks.

One of the largest battles broke out south of Anloc where members of the U.S. 11<sup>th</sup> Armored



Shaded areas show regions where enemy ground action was heaviest in conjunction with yesterday's shelling.

Cavalry Regiment, using tanks and armored personnel carriers, killed a reported 45 North Vietnamese and captured two. One American was killed and two wounded.

A second battle erupted when the enemy attacked a U.S. artillery base guarding an infiltration route to Tayninh with 400 rounds of rockets, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades.

In a one-hour battle, 54 North Vietnamese and 9 Americans were killed, U.S. spokesman said, and 39 Americans were wounded.

Enemy forces were reported falling back toward the Cambodian border in some areas north of Saigon under attack by U.S. fighter-bombers.



**EMBASSY  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

August 13th  
Saigon

Dear Dick and Dora.

A short note to tell you that Dave came down from Quan Loi to spend the week-end with me. We had a good time I think. He has put on some weight since he got his executive position in Battalion Hqs. I guess he's like you Dick - a banker at heart! Anyway he fitted into my clothes well and we made it to a party. French restaurant., the swimming club - as well as took the opportunity to wander around and take a few pictures. I'll send them along as soon as they are ready.

How is everything with you-all? Dave showed me some snap shots of you both and you both seem fit as fiddles. For us, Judy and Mark are fine. Mark now gets around like a little crab. He can pull himself upright and absolutely refuses to stay in his crib when he can be downstairs with the people. He is a real joy to us. For his first birthday party, Judy organized a little do including the children of some of the other Saigon wives - I expect these slides momentarily also - Mark handled himself well - he was, for a little while afraid of strangers and a group would make him very nervous - I think he will be a very gregarious young man. Judy's sister spent a month with them in Bangkok - it was a good change for Judy. I spent most of my stay ill with the flue. I plan to try to talk my way up to Quan Loi this week-end to see Dave - I spoke to him last night by phone and he said he may leave Vietnam by August 27.

More later, cheers  
Andy



**EMBASSY  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

August 20th

Dear Dick and Dora.

A quick note to pass on the slides I took of Dave the last time he was here. I have since talked on the phone to him at Quan Loi and he is doing fine. He expects to process out this week-end and the plan now calls for him to spend the week-end at my place with his boss the Bn. S-4. We will give your young man a proper send-off from "Nam".

For me - only 6+ more months. I am already growing a little restive and thinking about new places and new faces.

Cheers,  
Andy

24 Aug 1969

Dear Folks

Just a short note to say I'm okay. I'm in Saigon with Andy now and living it up. This time I brought Capt. Guidry along and given his rather liberal manner we're really raising the devil.

Quan Loi quieted down for awhile and I thought it best to leave while the getting was good. Needless to say I'm short!

The boy in our office, Lee Shaw, who got wounded when Quan Loi was attacked, died shortly later. Really a shame. He was a good, clean-cut man—never complained, just worked hard.

I'm not quite sure when I'll hit the states. My orders are sort of fouled up, so I'll probably have to spend a few days in Oakland to get thing straight.

At any rate, I'll call as soon as I hit the old U.S. of A.

Love, David

August 29th  
Saigon

Dear Dick and Dora.

A short note to say hello - send a few more slides as well as to ask Dick to deposit the enclosed check in Mark's account. Sorry to bother you but we don't seem to have deposit splits and the like. Well, David and his boss, the Battalion S-4 Maj Guidry spent last week-end at my place. We had a nice relaxed time of it with David becoming slightly sunburned while we lolled around the pool.

I then took Dave and Mac up to the base camp at Bin Ho where Dave had to begin processing out.

He is a good young man and knowing that he is typical of the US fighting men makes me feel a lot better about things when one reads about dissent and disillusionment in the "younger" generation. I'm happy he got through this campaign with no trouble to speak of.

Best regards to all and  
much affection from us.  
Cheers,  
Andy

P.S. What's the score on Orson Trueworthy?