

Pháo Binh –

A Marine Artillery Officer's Letters from Vietnam - 1966-67

by Mark Wakeman Howe

Dedication

To the grunts.

I hope grunts realize how deeply and sincerely an artilleryman wants to support his grunts. When you are bottled up in your FDC or behind your guns or humping ammo, all of your being is with them. You want so badly to be of help to your grunts. If the grunts are happy you're happy. When the grunts get into trouble you feel it deep in your soul. And when you are prevented from helping your grunts through some command or bureaucratic problem, your sense of frustration is great.

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The War in Vietnam? *[Written sometime during the summer of 1966]*

This isn't a war where one side is right and the other side is wrong.

It is a war where two very dissimilar races are going through the painful process of learning to live together in a world that is getting frighteningly smaller every day.

A couple of nights ago an artillery battalion a few hundred meters away from here was attacked by a sizable VC force. The following morning the bodies were still stacked up around the perimeter wire where they had been dropped by the deadly fire of a highly industrialized and sophisticated society. Many of the VC were so young their naked bodies showed only the first indications of puberty. When they were looked over by the intelligence section, it was determined that many of them were local people from the surrounding villages. These are the people we deal with daily and who should know what we are here for if anyone should. Why then would they make a suicidal assault on those who have left homes far across the sea for no other reason than to protect them against terrorism and violence? There is obviously a very unfortunate lack of understanding somewhere. It is too much for me to fathom what goes on in the minds of these people who seem so friendly during the daylight.

It is clear that the lives of the villagers are improved by the presence of Americans. When I arrived here last May the highway north of Chu Lai ran through relatively uncultivated land. Now the countryside in the vicinity of the occupied areas is all paddies and gardens. New houses built when we moved into the area are now surrounded with banana trees and shrubs. This is very important to a Vietnamese. As soon as his house is built and his floor of sand and clay is packed firm, he starts his landscape gardening. In less than a year the only indication of a dwelling is a clump of trees with a little thatch roof showing through. Thus it is protected from the wind and rain in winter and the hot sun in summer. The straggling line of hootches along highway #1 is becoming a rural and agricultural area.

Some verbal doodling: *[Probably written during a long boring night watch]*

As the great solar ball of fire slumps its weary form into the reaching arms of the Annamite Mountains.

The night is black, there is a pale yellow glow far down in the valley where somewhere a kerosene lamp burns in a grass roofed bamboo frame house. There is worry on the face of the mother as she hears the ripping crash of a shell landing not far away. But this has been for so long, she forgets. The baby sucks at her breast. The child has infected sores on his legs. During the day the flies keep these clean. Another shell lands farther away. A rice bowl shifts position in its basket with a soft tink. And outside the village, along a sandy bottomed draw, a small group of Marines lie in ambush for any VC that should happen to pass this way tonight.

And on the other side of the village two boys, alert and careful, leave the house of their parents and swiftly melt away into the night. They fight Marines; they are VC and they have risked the hazards of the night to visit their home for a little while-for a bite of food, the warmth of family love. Then away again to the mountains. And around the nearby fortified hilltop, ARVN soldiers sit in their bunkers behind multiple rings of barbed wire. They believe the VC won't come tonight, but if the Sergeant catches them asleep, they'll spend some time in the barbed wire cage in the sun. Outside the wire several forms move slowly toward the bunker. The night is black and they move slowly but steadily uphill. The mother pulls the baby from her breast. She puts him in his small crib and blows out the kerosene light. There is a faint crackle, like the popping of corn, far in the distance. Small red glowing tracers ricochet gracefully and arc away into the sky.

Prologue

In war, a lot of what happens between the combatants and the indigenous population is of a missionary nature. In Vietnam the most important part of our job was a mission to win the hearts and minds of the people. We were very much like missionaries. Our success in this may have been far greater than we realized at the time.

When the Marines went into Vietnam in 1965 there was instantly a relationship that developed between Marines and Vietnamese. In the boondocks, the "boonies" as Marines say, it was the rural and agrarian peasant. In the cities and towns it was the military leaders, merchants and other urban dwellers. When I arrived in country in 1966 these relationships had formed somewhat but were still developing.

The Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine, which had been evolving for many years, involved coming together with the people and helping them defeat the VC aggressors from within the local village organization. The Army methodology as put forward by General Westmoreland was to strike against VC forces from secure bases and return to those bases after the battle. They called it search and destroy. From the Army point of view the end result would be the same; the VC would be defeated and the villagers would be able to return to their normal lives. But without the close personal contact, Vietnamese could be convinced by the VC that America was an invading power like the French and the cause of their misery.

The Marine commander, General Walt, did what he could with the limited resources available to him to get his Marines out into close contact with the villages in the territories he was responsible for securing. This was called the Tactical Area of Responsibility or TAOR. Where his thin resources were adequate, the numbers of friendly villages increased, but in more remote areas he had problems. I was able to see and be involved in this effort, and my letters show how the American military force as a mission to the people can be a powerful tool in an occupied country where everything is perception.

I have no doubt, I got a lot of the missionary spirit from my mother. Dorothea Kingsley Wakeman was a China Hand. Raised and schooled in Southern California, she received a degree in English literature at UCLA. She then followed a family calling and went to Hankow, China in 1933, as an English teacher for the American Episcopal Church. She got out of China, just ahead of the Imperial Japanese invasion, in 1937.

My father Robert's army artillery battery went from training in the California desert for the North African campaign to landing with the 7th Division on Eniwetok, Kwajalein, Kiska in the Aleutians and eventually the Philippines and Okinawa. I suppose that would have been the Big SLF (Special Landing Force) the Division Landing Team. I can recall many times making comparisons to Vietnam, thinking we could hardly call Vietnam a war by comparison.

The Marine's role historically was aboard a Navy ship. The concept of "send in the Marines" was always from an American ship in harbor -- the Boxer Rebellion and the Dey of Tripoli come to mind. During the evolution of modern warfare this amphibious role became very important. So important apparently that the Army 7th division became amphibious, usurping the Marine Corps role. My father would disparage the Marine Corps -- "The Marines would go charging through and take the top of the hill, take all the glory, and leave the Army to do all the dirty work cleaning up the mess they left behind." They called that mopping up.

I enrolled in the Stanford University NROTC program in 1960. I had always been an ocean type person; that was how I got the idea of Navy instead of Army. (I had actually applied to both Annapolis and West Point). We were a generation too late to have been called for Korea, but we knew many who were. We were faced with an uncertain future as the cold war Western world prepared for blocking reactions against the great Communist threat to our existence. We studied seapower in our classes with the idea that control of the oceans would be the key to our survival. But on land we could see the great landmass nations of Russia and China and the many smaller neighboring nations appear to fall under the Communist dogma one by one. This was known as the "domino effect", and this domino theory pervaded all our military political thinking for a generation to come.

At the end of my father's war we had "the bomb" all to ourselves. Soon the Russians had it. My grandparents feared the Bolsheviks; now the Bolsheviks were the Commies and they were spreading like a disease over the globe and they had the bomb. We even had Russian Commies in Cuba. Communist influence was expanding in Southeast Asia. There was no doubt the US had to react to Korea and in Vietnam. And by now even China had the bomb as well.

In college, we naturally discussed this lots. Most students took the conventional view that we draw the line in Vietnam and elsewhere and say "do not cross". But Ho Chi Minh was a visionary and would not rest until Vietnam was united, free from foreign occupation, and he also happened to be a Communist. He could very likely have been something else given half a chance, and it is even possible that in our zeal to preserve South Vietnam, we drove him to it. But when it was clear he would not cease his efforts to reunify (takeover) the South we went to war in South Vietnam. We began slowly, first as advisers, then little by little escalating into a dominant role as the South Vietnamese proved their inability to do it themselves.

Did we have a choice? Probably not, but my position in our debates was as follows. Since Vietnam had historically been overrun by China so many times, there was a lot of antagonism between them. I argued a strong Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam would be an excellent buffer against any expansionist ideas Mao might have had for the future. I looked for a defensible line and picked the Khyber Pass. I said, worst case, what if China took all of Southeast Asia, and was pushing up through all those Nepalese and Indian states toward the oil-rich middle east, they would have a pretty tight baggage train if they got past the Khyber Pass. There is a lot of Western tradition with the Khyber Pass, Kipling and all, but little did anyone realize how big a role it would play 45 years later. Also, I had been an admirer of the way the British enforced their Pax Britannica for so many centuries. They simply played countries and powers off against each other rather than trying to be the big policeman. We were being dumb, I thought.

I recall the week the end of my sophomore year I decided to take the Marine Corps option. As a Navy midshipman, there is an option for accepting a Marine Corps commission upon graduation. I loved the ocean, and I loved the idea of going to sea, but at some point I realized that in the Navy you rarely see the beach. And of course in our seapower studies, all the amphibious warfare examples stood out in my mind from my memories of the Victory at Sea TV shows our family had followed lots of blow-by-blow commentary from my dad. But Robert despised Marines.

I came home after signing up for the Marine Corps, dreading telling him, no idea how to approach the subject. But finally, bluntly, I told just like we always did in our family. A simple statement followed by a long stern stare. After a long silence the corners of his mouth began to twitch and with a twinkle in his eyes, shortly we were talking amphibious tactics in the Pacific. Very much like the day I slunk home with the forbidden motorcycle -- next thing I knew he was learning to ride it around the driveway.

While at Stanford I played trumpet in the infamous Stanford Band and majored in biology. These biological studies took me back to the beach as well. I applied for a new program in marine biology at Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove near Monterey California. It was necessary to pull strings, both with the Navy ROTC as well as with the biology department on campus. My Marine Corps Major was supportive and the director of the program, Don Abbott, had been in World War II and had a soft spot in his heart for military guys so I was accommodated. After graduation I was pretty sure I wanted to be a marine biologist but in the mean time I had a commitment to the Marine Corps.

In June of 1964, I graduated from Stanford University with a degree in biology and a commission in United States Marine Corps. I recall perfectly an event during the NROTC graduation parade. We were assembled in formation, and along the sidelines at the far end of the field was a group of strange looking folk, lined up watching. They were hippies. We had never seen hippies before, and we didn't know what they were at the time. They were demonstrating against our graduation. That summer Carol Doda went topless on Broadway in San Francisco and the world changed. Nightclubs that had hosted some of the great names in jazz became sleazy go-go joints because that was where the money was. But I missed all that, I was gone.

The Basic School at Quantico Virginia, called TBS, is where all young Marine Corps lieutenants go to get trained. I packed up the '49 Ford, advertised and got some passengers to go along and help out with the driving, and launched across the country in the fall of 1964. Through the fall and winter months at Quantico we got our basic training. In the spring, as an artillery officer selectee, I attended artillery school at Quantico. And then back across the country in the '49 Ford to my first duty assignment with an artillery battery at Camp Pendleton in California. This was now late spring of 1965, during a period when our leaders were wrestling with major problems in Vietnam.

At Pendleton all was calm before the storm. I reported in to the 2nd Battalion 11th Marines (2/11) and had several jobs before being finally assigned to the howtar battery; literally a cross between a howitzer and a mortar. For some reason howtar batteries are designated as Whiskey battery

The CO, Capt. Dyer, came to the howtar battery from the Navy. He was enthusiastic, loved the troops, and loved artillery, but his background was not artillery and there was a lot he just had to take on faith from us. He wasn't always real comfortable doing that. He'd get a funny little look on his face and say "Okay, but let's just try this and see if it works" and then it wouldn't but he wasn't completely convinced.

Then there were the lieutenants: me, Joe and Curt. We thought we had everything pretty well figured out. Joe Wright was a real solid, thoughtful, type -- I am sure from the Midwest, perhaps Indiana. Curt, more the wiry animated type with an old man's face. Curt had grown up in the tobacco business and claimed to be able to walk down the middle of a tobacco storage barn and by the time he reached the end, have a running total of the amount and value of the tobacco stored there. Or something like that. At least being able to work with numbers so effortlessly in his head was a big advantage in such a mathematical branch of arms as artillery.

A howtar is literally a 4.2 inch [107mm] mortar mounted on a 75 mm pack howitzer carriage. A mortar has no wheels. The artillery "tube" is simply set in a heavy base plate on the ground and leaned in whatever direction you want to shoot. By putting the mortar on a carriage with wheels, a lot changes. Moving is quick; you just hook up to a mighty mite jeep and take off. Most artillery is too heavy for a mighty mite to pull around. Also both howtar and mighty mite can be fairly easily helilifted in and out of LZs (landing zones) while operating with the grunts. Changing direction of fire requires a bit more though; the trails must be lifted and the entire carriage wheeled around to the new direction of fire. All mostly depends on how consistently you are firing in the same general direction.

In Vietnam we could find ourselves firing missions in very different directions at times. So during this experimental period for the howtar in the Marine Corps we found ourselves doing a lot of evaluating and later on going back to base plates. Seeing a "four deuce" (nickname for 4.2 inch) mortar in action was very interesting for us lieutenants. We had never seen the things before, but many of our cannoneers had used them a lot prior to the invention of the howtar.

The howtar was developed with the concept of vertical envelopment in mind. Idea was, you could lift a battery of howtars in with an infantry battalion operation and they would have their own artillery at their beck and call. Of course this assumed that the infantry battalion commander understood how to use artillery effectively.

Early one morning in February 1966 we mounted out the battery, onto the freeway north from Pendleton, destination Long Beach to board ship for the West. My job was to herd the convoy through Long Beach with the idea of getting through early enough to avoid traffic. I drove a pretty well known bright red TR 3 at the time. I put a flashing red light on the roof and this, together with a prick six (big clumsy handheld) radio, was my command vehicle.

My recollection is there was some screwup where I had them taking off on 7th St, and it should have been route 7, but in any event, there we were heading down 7th St. in downtown Long Beach,, just as rush-hour began. I had one tall black sergeant in charge of leapfrogging ahead by mighty mite jeep and stopping traffic at the intersections as we passed through. Eventually, I think we attracted enough attention we got a motorcycle escort, but we put on quite a show. I recall being a bit embarrassed by the way it turned out; supposed to have been low profile at dawn, and ended up screaming mighty mites

flying through town, brakes screeching, Marines jumping to parade rest at intersections and then flying ahead to the next intersection to do the same. But we arrived at our ships, the LPH (Landing Platform Helicopter) Princeton and the LSD (Landing Ship Dock) the Alamo.

During most of 1965 the US had been struggling to figure out what to do in Vietnam. On the one hand, there were the vast pressures put on us by the domino theory and the conviction that we must not fail to hold South Vietnam free against the North Vietnamese Commies. On the other were the ineptitudes and petty bickerings among the South Vietnamese generals and the growing knowledge that South Vietnam would never be able to protect themselves from being overrun by North Vietnam without massive help from us. By March of '65 the bombing of the North had begun, nicknamed "Rolling Thunder".

In April, the Marines had expanded their role of guarding the airbases to engaging in combat. They had been restrained from doing that priorly. At about the same time, the North Vietnamese reacted to our offers for negotiation. Sure there could be two Vietnams, they said, but the people should decide for themselves how they would run their lives and government. All foreign troops must depart and settlement of all differences would be done under the program of the Viet Cong. Most of it sounded pretty good, but that last condition was pretty impossible for us to swallow at that time. If there could have been more flexibility on that Viet Cong provision, we could have left in mid 1965 and the end result might not have been much different.

I wonder about what would have resulted if we had walked out. At that point it could have been justified. Generals Thieu and Ky usurped power during a typically irresponsible coup in May, exhibiting incredible ineptitude. There were almost comic examples of civil warfare among the generals. Soon after that the NVA began to move south in greater force. In hindsight, we could have bailed at that point. A transfer of power could have been negotiated as we pulled out. Such a departure might fall under the "cut and run" category of failing to honor our commitments, but it could have been justified and would have saved the U.S. from what was to come.

If we had "cut and run", would the Vietnamese people have the bond with America that we do today? Probably not. Would the Commies have done a better job running the country? Probably not. We can never know how it could have been different; our decision was to stay the course, which meant escalating as the Communists escalated and increasing troop strength accordingly. After a long bombing pause from Christmas to Tet 1965/66, a one last chance for peace so to speak, the buildup began. I happened to be a part of that buildup.

The organization of the Marine Corps in the Pacific at the beginning of the Vietnam war was complex. The 3rd Marine division was based in Okinawa to be prepared for any eventuality in the Western Pacific (WestPac). The 1st Division at Camp Pendleton had an exchange program going with the 3rd Division referred to as "trans-placement". Units would form up and train at Pendleton and transplace to Okinawa on a rotational exchange basis. There were a number of advantages to this plan, but when the 3rd Division left Okinawa and went "in country" in Vietnam during '65, those of us at Pendleton didn't expect to be there long.

An SLF (Special Landing Force) is integral to Marine Corps tactics and has all of the elements necessary for assault. It is organized aboard ship in such a way that when the decision is made to deploy the SLF, it simply deploys. Guns and trucks are aboard ships with the capability to land them on the beach. Troops are aboard ships with helicopters capable of landing a large force into an LZ (landing zone) quickly and efficiently. Some artillery, such as howtars, can go into an LZ with the troops and provide even closer fire support. A typical SLF is a BLT (Battalion Landing Team). This is an infantry battalion, at least one artillery battery, plus all of the ancillary weapons and equipment necessary to perform in a combat/assault mission.

The Marine Corps Division is organized by infantry regiments, those in the Pacific consisting of mostly odd numbers. One artillery regiment will support several infantry regiments in the division, and the 11th Marine Regiment was the 1st Division's artillery Regiment. My battalion was 2/11, second Battalion, 11th Marines. We had DEF, batteries of 105 mm howitzers (we called them Delta, Echo and

Foxtrot) and Whiskey battery of howtars. (1/11 would have ABC and 3/11 would have GHI) 2/11 was supporting the 5th Marines at this point and Delta and Whiskey batteries were assigned to BLT 1/5 (1st Battalion of the 5th Marine Infantry Regiment).

In a very short time during the build up in 1966, the 5th and 7th Marines would be joining the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 9th Marines that were already there. This meant that units were moving in all directions to try to block the Communist invasion and stay out of each other's way and this meant mostly north. In general, the 3rd Division went north from DaNang to Hue and the DMZ, and the 1st Division controlled the Chu Lai tactical area north almost to DaNang. A unit's Tactical Area of Responsibility was called its TAOR.

In the following letters you will note what appears to be a lot of uncertainty about where we were going and when. In reading accounts of the uncertainty in Washington at that time; between the President and his cabinet and among the Joint Chiefs of the Armed Forces, the reasons become apparent. There is much in this that can be viewed from the perspective of future wars of this kind, very much like our wars in the Middle East today. There are no easy answers and decisive military decisions may have to yield to more subtle political decisions, as you will discern. In any event, the troops on the ground will always have very definite ideas about how things are going and these views may be quite different from those of the folks back home, the politicians, and the media. It is this positive perspective which I hope my letters convey, and it is the positive things we accomplished in Vietnam which I hope can be studied for future geopolitical dealings in the world.

First day at sea. 17 February 66

Only a slight swell, but enough to give a couple of us a slightly queasy sensation. The wind is blowing like a son of a gun up on deck. My cabin is far forward on the port side, and I can hear the water just outside the far bulkhead. Curt and I figure we must be just about water line or a little above it by the swish the waves make each time the bow plunges down.

Yesterday's leave taking was the most amazing mill drill I have ever seen in the service. All the sailors had their families and/or girlfriends aboard and the mess cooks had set up a long table with coffee and doughnuts for them. The coffee was probably one of the best ideas since about every other sailor was to a greater or lesser extent pickled. The hangar deck was cluttered with girls, sailors, Marines and paper coffee cups. The high point of the departure was when a crooked sailor fell overboard while waving goodbye. He splashed his way over to one of the logs they always have floating alongside the pilings of Navy piers and meanwhile the squawk box was saying, "This is not a drill. Man overboard."

All the brass then present on the quarter deck went streaming down the gangplank in traditional busy dignified naval fashion and began the activities of issuing instructions and consulting that signifies to the military man that all is under control. I wonder how it must appear though when it takes all the brass on the brow, including the ship's executive officer, to retrieve one drunk from the drink in port. Many a more serious matter will have to be handled by a very junior lieutenant.

Dear Folks, 23 February 66 [very a.m.]

Just had a fairly splendiferous couple of days in Hawaii culminating today with one glorious ride on the waves at Makaha. As soon as we got to Waikiki we four (Joe, Curt, Chuck the dispersing officer, and I), rented a Jeep. This was on Monday afternoon.

Monday was fairly disorganized as we each had separate duties to perform and were split up, but by late afternoon we had gotten rooms at Fort DeRussy, and had localized at Prince Kuhio Beach on Waikiki. That night was spent carousing until the wee small hours with some rather interesting times in the Hotel Street area where the troops go. This I will elaborate on later as I have to get the light off so Curt can go to sleep (as well as me).

This morning we drove out to Koko Head and then over the Pali and finally with little time to spare made it out to Makaha to do some surfing. Unfortunately, we found they don't rent boards there and it was pretty crowded anyhow so we briefly took our lives in our hands and mixed it up with the surfers to try a little body surfing. Am now back aboard and we sail at eight tomorrow.

love, Mark

Dear Folks, 12 March 66.

Here comes another fast letter in lieu of one of the epistles I am in the middle of writing. I didn't really have anything to write about during the sail over and the inspiration never hit me to write about Hawaii as I promised, however since being in Olongapo I have had infinite inspiration and in one brief sitting have already written four pages and have only scratched the surface. This one will be illustrated too, eventually, depending on whether or not we get back to Subic next weekend.

By the way - I received my first mail this morning. We got to Subic on the 5th of March and the most recent letter I got was dated 6 March, which was very gratifying; knowing the letter I received was that current. The oldest letter was 14 February. I think they must save it up and then send it in one big slug.

Enclosed is the signed pink slip. The list of car conditions are all okay except for brakes, which may be due pretty soon. The PX wouldn't handle them. Everybody told me about Roger's Serenade and Dave blowing out the candles with a fire extinguisher. :-).

Much more soon to come.

Love, Mark.

The BLT on SLF 1/5

UNITED STATES NAVAL BASE SUBIC BAY, P.I. March 1966

First foreign port - - U.S. Naval Base, Subic Bay, Philippine Islands, and the adjacent town outside the base called Olongapo. Subic has a fairly good sized piece of protected water but it has limited pier space so most of the ships have to anchor out in the bay. This is much less convenient and means that everyone spends a lot of time waiting for liberty boats to take them from or to the beach. The fleet landing is where all the troops and sailors ashore wait to go back to their ship. And so around midnight, just before liberty is secured, it gets pretty crowded and has a tendency to get a little out of hand. Periodically there will be a fight resulting in a stabbing or a beating or clubbing and this is the way it is. There was a sailor stabbed the first night we were in.

The town of Olongapo is without question a "troop's town" just like San Diego or Oceanside or Long Beach and as such comes to life when the big warships are in Subic. While we were in port there were three big carriers and several troop ships full of Marines so needless to say, Olongapo was really rocking.

My first impression of the town itself came as the ship was pulling into the bay early one morning. The naval base sits on the beach at the far end of the bay and up the valley behind the base was a pall of rising smoke. Captain Dyer pointed toward the smoke and said, "See where that smoke is rising? That's Olongapo." I found out later that they are constantly burning off the mahogany forests so they can plant harvestable orchards of mangos and bananas. The cheapest wood you can get here is mahogany.

The second impression I had of the town was looking across the river from the base through the link and barbed wire fence. The only parts of the town that are not "off limits" are those adjacent to the two main roads which run through town. I was looking across the river at the off limits area and it has the made-out-of-sticks-and-rattan look that one associates with the orient.

Naturally the first things we all did were, (a) go to the PX, (b) go to the laundry, and (c) go to the officers' club, - in that order. One Navy base is just like another except for the change of scenery and so too were the PX, laundry, and O Club, with the following exceptions. The PX had such tight security we had to give a thorough accounting of ourselves and list every purchase we made before we could come in or go out. This apparently was because of a thriving black market. It takes a ration card to get cigarettes and you have to sign in a log book when you buy single packs in a club. They sell for fifteen cents a pack on base but the equivalent of fifty cents (2 pesos) in town. The laundry is amazingly cheap of course, and the O Club has San Miguel beer for fifteen cents a bottle.

The first night, the Captain, Joe, and I had dinner at the club and then the Captain decided to take us into town for our first taste of the Orient. This first introduction was some sort of a mixture of bright lights and milling Filipinos, Marines, and Sailors. Because of the combination of a tropical thirst and 15 cent beer, I was in no condition to gather any more than an impression by this time.

As we strode across the river bridge outside the Main Gate, it was like crossing into another world. The water underneath the bridge was filled with little dugout outrigger canoes from which small boys' faces peered up out of the darkness asking for coins to be thrown. The din and lights of the town were only about a hundred feet away but on the bridge it still seemed dark and peaceful and there was the gentle aroma of human waste and sewage in the damp, warm breeze.

On the other side of the bridge came the impact of lights and people. In place of busses and trolleys, along the streets, they have what they call a "jeepney." It is probably an old World War II Army jeep but there is usually very little left in the present vehicle to remind one of its origin. They are modified to carry about eight passengers behind the driver and are all brightly painted and decorated with streamers. The owner of an empty one will try to talk you into letting him take you somewhere "special", which costs one peso and means he won't stop for anybody else before he takes you to where you want to go. However if you are smart you will just climb into one that already has people in it and you will make the same trip for ten centavos (2 ½ cents). At night the jeepneys turn off their headlights every time they

slow down or stop because they do not have any generators (or weak batteries or something) and since they are honking their horns and shouting and flashing their lights at the same time, Magsaysay Street is only slightly more organized and colorful and chaotic than a bump-a-car concession at a carnival.

The Captain started going in the doors of various bars until finally we decided on one called "The Willows" fairly well up toward the center of town. There is very little difference between the night clubs in Olongapo but this particular one is where I met Angie.

The girls, as we discovered at the PX at closing time, are all rather like little giggling, jabbering children. We saw all the little salesgirls come pouring out of the PX to the buses like so many grammar school kids after the bell to go home. But when they are trying to attract the men they take on an air of sexiness and end up about as real as a mechanical doll.

I had just managed to shake one of them off in the Willows. They all order gin and orange or something like that, which costs the man 4 pesos and then of course all she is served is a glass of orange soda. She gets 2 pesos from the take. If the guy feels he is getting cheated and makes a fuss, the waiter brings a small glass of vodka for him to mollify himself with - or to embarrass the hostess with, because a lot of the girls do not drink at all and most do not when they are working for obvious reasons. Well I put up a real fuss, like deciding to only pay two pesos, and soon - very soon in fact - found myself without the girl which was not bothering me at all. But Curt decided I looked lonely so he had one of the other hostesses invite the only tall girl he could see, over to our table. She had been sitting unobtrusively off to the side with some other girls. Unlike most of the girls, she had long legs, broad shoulders, and altogether a very good figure. At the time, she looked beautiful to me as I peered out through my alcoholic fog, and many more times during our acquaintance I thought she was beautiful, although actually I do not think she was really. She made very good conversation; impressively so for the native girls we had seen, and claimed she had been to college in Manila and had majored in English. I thought I would find out if she was a phony but when I asked her to give me three verbs, she asked me if I wanted active, transitive, or intransitive. Grammar was never one of my strong points so naturally I was snowed right there. I was also gratefully happy to learn that she was not a prostitute which was highly unusual. In fact nobody but me believed it. And it still took all the next day with her at the beach to completely convince me that she really was on the level.

Angie is a strange mixture of intelligence and lazy irresponsibility. Eventually I discovered she had had four years of college with another year towards her masters degree which would give her all the qualifications necessary to get a good job teaching or working in Manila or somewhere, but she is much more interested in having a good time than that. To Angie, the present is all important. She gives of herself freely enough I guess but takes advantage of what others have to give her even more freely. If she gives you a gift you may well find that you are paying for it, and as far as gifts for herself, to say the least she is very demanding.

My impression of her education was that it had really only touched the surface. Angie can drop enough vocabulary in any given field to make you think you are talking to a scholar, but I never did see any real thought or understanding of academic matters. She did not sound as though she appreciated the education too much either - - she thought it was too much work. Even so Angie was certainly of the leadership level in the social structure and this was obvious in her dealings with other natives.

She carried herself with a proud, almost haughty bearing and allowed familiarity from few people but at the same time was talkative and friendly. So picture if you can a proud, haughty, friendly, volatility and you can perhaps see Angie. Whether the result of family heritage or brought about by the certain degree of economic independence which she enjoyed through her brother-in-law is hard to say but I believe now it is probably both.

Angie is 24 and is rather old to be unmarried. She is second youngest of eleven children and out of four brothers, two are professors and one is a doctor in Manila. She and her ancient father live with her sister and her sister's husband who is a Navy diver. Her sister, Josie, is also attractive and intelligent but unlike Angie is an efficient and responsible worker. They live very well and have three maids -- girls of about 15 -- to take care of all the menial chores except that Josie does the cooking. Krause, Josie's

husband, has the misfortune to be caught between regulations and circumstances and although the area where they live is one of the nicest I have seen, because there is no electricity or plumbing it does not conform to Western standards and cannot be approved [*as military housing*]. So his family life means coming home at five o'clock in the evening and going back to the base at midnight. On weekends he can have overnight liberty, however, so he is able to have his weekends at home.

Josie built the bungalow during a time when Krause was in the states for a period. When Krause returned he found he had a home. The place is called Forestry, just outside of Olongapo, and is named for a government reforestation project in the area. One gets to Forestry by taking a jeepney from the gate, going through town past most of the bars, and stopping at the Market. The Market is one block square and is the first indication that one is getting clear of "troop town" as one travels away from the base. The jeepney has cost 10 centavos so far. From here you get a tricycle to Forestry for about 50 centavos depending on how well you bargain and how many tricycles are sitting around. The tricycle is a magnificently dangerous piece of machinery -- specifically a small Honda (50 or 90 CC) with a sidecar. It is a modern replacement to the rickshaw apparently; relics of the latter may still be seen, not in use.

I was a little nervous at first about going to Forestry because it is clearly defined, "out of bounds." But as long as you look like you know what you're doing and have somewhere to go, you don't seem to get bothered. At least I never did. The Krause's bungalow is the best one I saw there; new, of mahogany plywood and concrete slab. It is at the top of the bank of a small river where water buffalo graze and women do their laundry. Also used for bathing.

The first day after I met Angie, we went to the beach on base. [*We sailed a special services boat to an island and walked past the Aircraft Carrier Enterprise [Big E] with all the sailors lined up and whistling as we walked by with Angie in her bathing suit. She was mortified.*] That night was the first time I visited Forestry. I invited her to the O Club for dinner so we had to go out to Forestry for her to change clothes. The Filipinos seem to have a very communal attitude toward property, and I was dressed up in Krause's only suit at the insistence of both sisters. The possibility that Krause might mind (he was on duty that night) actually incensed the girls. I gathered from more than a few instances that a person is expected to share whatever he has without qualms, and a visitor may stay as long as he should feel like. The only obligation is that he enter into family activities. They felt I did this splendidly.

After Angie and I had gotten all dressed up, we flagged down a logging truck for a ride to town. There were three steps on the front fender of the cab just to climb up to the seat which was a good 6 feet off the ground. Angie was able to squeeze onto the seat beside the loggers and I stood on the top step and hung onto the side of the cab; there was no door. All of the vehicles I saw were ancient and this truck was certainly no exception. They seem to keep them all running somehow though. We must have made quite a picture; Angie in evening dress and me in suit and tie riding to town on the logging truck.

The second evening I went out there, I got caught up in the local sandlot game. I never did learn the name of it, but the children marked off a rectangle on the road by pouring cans of water in the dirt to make lines. The rectangle is the width of the road, about 10 feet, and maybe twice that long. It is further divided into quadrants. When I played we were divided into two teams of 4, 1 team being designated as guards. The guards have to run along the lines and try to tag the other team members as they try to go from one end of the court to the other and back again. If the running team succeeds in getting one person home free, they have won and get to run again. But if the guards tag somebody or force somebody out of bounds (the side of the road) then the runners have lost and must change sides and become guards for the next game.

After the game we all went down and bathed in the river since the slightest exertion always results in a profusion of sweat. The little river valley was very beautiful. The moon couldn't have been more perfectly round and the water was only slightly cool and there was the babble and laughter of the maids and other children who had been playing the game. It is somehow different hearing the sound of people speaking an oriental language when there is darkness. It is somehow more mysterious when you can't see the mouths that make the sound.

That was the same day Angie and I had our accident and I'll mention it in passing, because it happened. It wasn't much but accidents always sound spectacular. I caught Angie as she was on her way into town on the motorcycle, and hopped on behind her. I had gotten ashore early so she wasn't expecting me and was riding in on some errand or other but probably mainly just for the ride. Just as we were entering the traffic area, a jeepney turned left right in front of us. She hit the rear brake and tried to go behind it, but the wheel skidded and we bounced off the rear fender of the jeepney. The motorcycle creamed over like they always do into a heap, and I jumped off without any problem except that the wheel caught the handles of my bag and pretty well demolished it. Angie was a little shaken now and bloody in places so we decided to call it quits and go home.

The next morning was the first time I went to work in the market truck (called a trap). Each morning Angie's nephew, Nording, was assigned the task of getting me back to the base on time since he and a friend went in every morning early to a job at the BOQ. The first morning we ended up walking in because we tried to depend on the tricycle/jeepney system and couldn't find one. Angie said the boys didn't like that because my legs were too long and I walked too fast. After that we would climb onto a market trap, which was owned by a neighbor in Forestry. It always left at 5:55 and I could count on being on the Officer's pier waiting for the liberty boat by 6:15 and generally I was back aboard ship before any of the other officers were awake. We would jump off the truck just before it went through the gate and walk through (they were afraid it would be embarrassing for me to go through the gate on the truck).

As battery "Project Officer" it has been my lot to do a good many unlikely jobs during my time in the outfit, but the one I pulled in Olongapo really took the proverbial cake. We scheduled a beach party and to make sure everybody really appreciated it we scheduled it to follow a hike. Dates were encouraged and since all the troops would be hiking, some officer had to be assigned to bring the girls to the party. I knew the troops had a lot of imagination, but they must really have put in a lot of effort to come up with the group I was assigned to pick up. I doubt if any were older than 18 and all acted about five years less than that. To top it off the 1st Sgt. and Gunnery Sgt. of the battery were assigned as my task force.

Picture if you can the young lieutenant explaining to the guard at the gate that he is taking eight assorted club girls on base to a party; two very senior sergeants (Angie called them the two buffaloes) saying "come on ladies, right this way ladies, into the bus now ladies." And from the girls, all less than 5 feet tall, comes a babble of giggles and Tagalog. The real test of my sanity came at the party when one of the tiniest of the girls passed out and I knew that I had to escort all eight back out.

The party was a success of sorts. There was water skiing from a float off shore, lots of beer and food, and one hell of a lot of drunk mortarmen. I began to get a little exasperated after I got thrown in the water for the fifth time. It seems several of the troops had their eyes on Angie and kept putting people up to getting rid of the lieutenant. I felt the party was getting out of hand and decided to clear out with my charges, but I found out that after we left, the party really did get rough and the Captain made the battery march all the way back to the ship. I hope we learned a lesson and judging by the cowed looks on the troops' faces as they fell out for two hours of disciplinary drill the next morning, the point was well made, and taken.

The girl that had passed out earlier had recovered by the time we went back to the gate, fortunately for me, and was all smiles and giggles saying "had a nice time -- fun party -- had a nice time -- I passed out, didn't I? .." she sure did. "... who cares!"

Angie, true to form, amazed everybody by whomping a baseball out into left field during the baseball game at the party. Captain Dyer called her in to hit for the gunny and I am probably the only one who knew she'd probably do it. It was particularly mortifying for me though since I had just struck out. I imagine she did pretty well in the volleyball game too since she says she had a volleyball athletic scholarship to college. I didn't see her play much though, because I went water skiing about that time. Curt mentioned one time after we left Subic that he thought Angie could probably do just about anything she set her mind to and from what she's shown me so far I think he may be right. It appears that waterskiing might be a good test though, because she never got up in four tries.

On my last day in Olongapo, I got off work early and went out to the Krause's by the now well accustomed series of bus, jeepney and tricycle. Both Josie and Angie were on errands in town so I started looking around to see what the place looked like in broad daylight. I had finally decided to take some pictures so had brought my camera. The fatal mistake, I discovered was not bringing several rolls of film. It seems that everybody in the vicinity wanted their picture taken. So that I wouldn't waste too much film I would just walk around looking for different picturesque views, and point my finger in that direction and wait until the foreground was filled with little boys and girls. Pretty soon Josie came back from town and was delighted, particularly since I had "technicolor". I now started taking portraits of her two boys. By the time Angie finally got back, there were all too few pictures left, -- two I think. So I have two pictures of Angie on a motorcycle with me in one, and a small herd of water buffaloes in the other. I had also planned to go off with Angie into the countryside and take some pictures but that will have to wait until some other time.

With all the film gone, we got around to taking a jaunt we had been talking about for so long -- a motorcycle ride to see some country and hopefully without accident. We took off back to town with Angie driving and then to avoid the traffic of milling throngs and jeepneys, we took the back roads off the highway that goes around the edge of the bay, away from the base to the right. The road winds around the first finger of the hills fairly high up giving a beautiful view of the rivers, the shipyards and town of Olongapo below to the left of the road. Angie said "See, just like San Francisco, only we don't have a bridge." And at that moment, I really couldn't say it wasn't, somehow.

A vessel which is characteristic of the area and could be seen on all the waterways in the town as we looked down from the hill is the banka, or maybe bonka. Bonka means boat in Tagalog, but Americans speak of these boats as bonka boats. They are outriggers, but are usually outriggered on both sides making a sort of trimaran. The outriggers themselves are nothing more than bamboo poles, canted slightly higher forward than aft, and attached to outrigger arms of curved bamboo which are lashed athwart the canoe fore and aft. The canoe in the middle may be finished with plywood and planking or merely "dugout" of a log by the boys. They are all very long and narrow. They may be paddled but the more progressive folk use a simple inboard drive system. There is so little friction with the water that they are able to get the boats up to considerable speeds. It seems a shame they don't beef up the system a little bit and try to rig a sail on it.

As we rode around the point we could see the bankas and the Navy ships and the fantastic extremes of the modern and primitive in the houses, transportation, and atmosphere generally. After slaloming around a few rapid curves in the road we came to a beach where Angie says the people like to go. We left the motorcycle and walked along the beach for a while. This was where I got a good look at a good bonka boat and I think I will draw up a set of plans because some of the ideas look pretty good. Bamboo begins to appear to me as God's gift to mankind. Also on this beach were some small, white, spindly legged crabs about the size of a quarter which would move so fast you could hardly believe they were in contact with the ground.

This time it was my turn to drive the motorcycle so off we went at a speed consistent with the dual mission of showing off and caution, back towards Forestry for dinner. And oh what a splendid dinner!!! Josie said that if I wanted Filipino food that's what I would get so lo, there appeared a veritable feast of rice, pork tongue, and other assorted little goodies and sauces. They gave me a fork, but soon I was using my hand (always the right) and learning what is and what isn't a faux pas at the Filipino dinner party. The children and servants were gathered all around alternately laughing and looking on with anticipation as I learned that it's proper to serve yourself from the serving bowl with a greasy hand, you shove the food off your fingers into your mouth with your thumb, and you don't usually lick your fingers afterwards when you are the dinner guest. Yes, I fo-pahed and everybody got a kick out of it.

After dinner I wanted to go into town to meet Joe and Curt. I didn't realize I was letting myself in for another startling exhibition of Angie's many talents. We once more borrowed the motorcycle and drove in to "The Taurus" club, on the Market side of town, which is much the nicer being farther from the base. We left the motorcycle outside with some trepidation and then went in and found Joe and the

Captain and a girl named Carmen with the Captain. A precedent had apparently been established by this time because then and ever after, whenever one of the girls would be seated at the table or leave the table, all men present would rise as one and sort of bow slightly.

Pretty soon Angie began to nudge me and in her usual very outspoken, careless self-consciousness which gives the appearance of reckless abandon, made it clear that she would like to have me arrange with the combo for her to sing the next song. It took me a while to determine whether or not she was kidding, but she was insistent so I did and we were all very pleasantly surprised. She was really good. Her body always looks a little bit at loose ends, as if she wasn't quite sure what her limbs might do next and this might be a problem professionally I think, but as far as her singing, it was real cool; contralto I guess you'd call it. Deep, throaty and sexy as hell. She said she just wanted me to hear her sing so I would know she could. I sure know now she can. I'm glad we were never able to find a trumpet. I probably couldn't.

Shortly after we went into the Taurus Angie started worrying about the motorcycle. Being currently sensitive on the subject [I had recently had my Honda 250 Scrambler stolen in Dana Point] I went down to check and found a small very black little boy deeply interested in what I was doing as I locked the fork. I gave him 10 centavos and told him to watch it for me. When we came back out about an hour later he was standing with his chin on his arms, which just barely came over the top of the seat, facing three even smaller kids sitting on the curb. He had the same kind of look that our little Pomeranian, Sparky gets when he rests his chin on a ball or sock between games of catch. I gave him another 25 centavos and each of the little ones 5 centavos and they were probably grossly overpaid, but I couldn't help it.

Time was now growing short, so we went to the market to get some little tidbits for me to take aboard ship and some grapes for Angie; they are imported and a real delicacy here. I bought mangoes, some fruit like a green persimmon but not as sweet, and a box of mosquito killing incense. I also tried a boiled banana for five centavos, but I didn't like. We carted the spoils back to Forestry, got me all packed up and Angie got dressed up in the most beautiful outfit I ever saw. She wore capris and a white sweater from Hong Kong that had many colored flowers beautifully embroidered on it. With the sleeves pushed up, the white sweater against her dark skin and sitting tall on the motorcycle after she left me at the gate -- I wish like anything I had had some "technicolor" (I even had some flashbulbs but no film. Captain and lieutenants must have come through the gate right behind me, because they saw her riding back across the bridge. And that was the last of Angie; proud, reckless perhaps, girl on a motorcycle.

Dear Cathy,. (At Sea -- enroute to Opn. Jackstay in the Mekong Delta) 22 March 66

I hope you received my epistle okay and now have a pretty good idea of what kind of a life I am leading. I imagine it will be something of a shock to Mom and Dad to get so many words from me. We spent a week rehearsing our amphibious plans and then went back to Subic for another weekend. Curt, Joe and I decided to take a special services car and go up to the mountain resort of Baguio where those wood carved water buffalo are from. The total party finally also included Angie, Josie, and Krause (his first name I finally discovered was Chuck). It was lots of fun, aside from the fact they have a water shortage and only turn on the water for three hours twice a day. It wouldn't be so bad except you can't flush toilets and the bathroom smelled pretty bad.

We took many pictures, so I'll send some home. Like one of me sitting on a water buffalo in the tobacco fields.

(Later) I have just been up on deck and discover we are right off the coast of Vietnam. The first inkling I had was the water suddenly became dotted with little sailboats.

[Sketch of Vietnamese sailboat, 20 feet long, two masts, gaff rigged.]

The people who have radios are getting the most terrible music out of them; sounds like the Chinese Theater in Chinatown except no banging. We are due to make our first landing on Saturday so by the time you get this I will be dodging bullets and computing fire missions. We'll be fighting for a couple of weeks, so I won't get any mail for that time, but to make up for no mail, the chaplain gave us a stack of letters to pass out to the troops after we've been ashore for a while. They're from girls (college I guess) all over the country and addressed to "a Marine in Vietnam, to a soldier in Vietnam, to an American servicemen, etc..

Time to get back to work. Love & Mabuhay, (Long live in Filipino) Mark

Dear Folks, (Aboard USS Princeton.) 23 March 1966

In a few days from now, I will be a veteran. A while ago today, we began to notice sampans on the water, and now we are steaming down the coast of Vietnam. We are making our first landing this weekend on a piece of wet land in the Mekong Delta just outside of Saigon. We made one practice landing on Mindoro last week, but that was mainly to test the loading plan. So this will be the first chance we'll get to practice an entirely new method of employment. It is this new 6400 mil idea and the way it looks now, we will have our guns pointed:

[diagram of a 6400 mil idea]

This operation is supposed to last two weeks and then we'll be back in Subic. Right now more liberty in Subic just makes us groan but I imagine it will seem different by then. I would like to get up to Japan and see Lynnae, if I can get leave.

By now, you should have gotten the story I wrote. Well, we went back to Subic again last weekend, and since we had the whole weekend I engineered a trip to Baguio for Curt, Joe, and me and it ended up we took Angie, Josie and Krause (his name is Chuck I discovered) along too. It turned out to be a very interesting weekend with water buffalo rides, sailing, Honda-ing and seeing some very pretty country. Baguio is a winter resort up in the mountains (Mountain province) and reminded me of California mountains during the summer. There were pinecones and the pine needle carpet and the smell of the mountains. It seemed like they should have a ski lift somewhere, but they say it never snows. It was great to be cool again for a change though.

I inquired about Sagada [Province] but nobody knew exactly where it was. Our driver claimed it was eight hours from Baguio, but that doesn't seem right. If I spend the two weeks back in Subic, I'll see about getting up to see Hazel Goslin. The driver said the rice terraces up there are one of the wonders of the world of some sort, and it's fantastically beautiful.

Love,

Mark.

PS mail time should be six days each way. I am mailing this now [evening], but I don't know when it will go.

OPERATION JACKSTAY 26 March - ~5 April 1966

"War is hell." Many times we laughed and repeated that old phrase as Sergeant Hahn cooked up a stew, or chicken and mashed potatoes, or a breakfast of hot cakes and bacon. Many times I felt fortunate as I lay on the beach in the sun or took a dip in the muddy salty waters of the Mekong Delta waterways. We really did have it good compared to the "grunts" (Marine infantry) who were sloshing their way through miles of swamp and steaming jungle in search of the elusive Viet Cong. One Platoon leader told me that there was one day his platoon was waist deep in swamp water for 14 hours straight.

Our worst days were the first two. We were dropped into the landing zone and could not believe how crowded it was already. Massed within an area of about 200 by 500 meters was the battalion command group, an infantry company, our howtar battery, and an 81 mm. mortar platoon. The next day they even piled a 105 howitzer battery into the same position. I hate to think what would have happened if the VC had decided to use their mortars on us. The weather was sunny, clear, and very warm so we stripped off our jackets and went to work emplacing the battery.

Normally I would have put my Fire Direction Center [FDC] somewhere concealed from view at a distance from the guns but we were right in the middle of a rice paddy clearing with our perimeter of defense just around the edge of it. So the Captain directed us to make our home in the muddy bottom of a shell crater. It wasn't too bad by the time we fixed it up a little though. We built a solid bottom over the mud with branches and dry clay. The result was spongy but tolerably solid.

At this point I should describe the land conditions we had to work with. Both battery positions which we occupied were unplanted rice paddies and as such were level even though very rough in a freshly plowed sort of way. This is the way the ground dries I think - the surface cracks or rather shatters into a field of large clods of claylike consistency. This dry clay we discovered is actually only a crust sitting on the surface. We had had an idea that this was so from digging around in our FDC crater but it became clear that anywhere you dig down more than about two feet, you will be in sticky clay. You can even get a feeling of this lack of solidity when a gun goes off and the ground almost seems to tremble like the crust on a baked custard. "Digging in" is more like "carving in" after you're through the crust. You carve off a piece of the clay with your shovel but now the clay is stuck fast to your shovel so you have to bang it on the ground or scrape it off on another shovel to get it clean again.

While we were busy preparing for war, the "Ugly Angels" were doing their best to bring in our guns and gear. The "Ugly Angels" is a squadron of H-34 helicopters [*UH-34D*] that was assigned to the Princeton in support of our BLT. [*HMM 362*] The bird itself, we became convinced, is not quite big enough for the job, and most of the ones in the "Ugly Angels" should probably be about due for retirement. They have been used heavily over here and are really worn out. In light of our experiences of the next few hours of combat we forgot all about the VC and hit the deck in terror every time one of our own birds came in.

We had been getting a little nervous at the way the birds would just get off the ground and then go plunging off barely clearing the trees at the edge of the clearing, trying to get air speed and altitude. It's not the simple situation of a helicopter going straight up and down; as soon as they lose their air speed, they can just barely hold themselves up and as we learned, sometimes they can't even do that. The same way landing; as soon as they hover over one spot ready to land and lose their horizontal speed, they may not be able to hold themselves up and flop down suddenly like an overweight duck.

The most unnerving accident occurred when one was bringing in one of our howtars. The guns are carried external with the H-34 and are slung below the chopper on long nylon straps. We were watching one gun coming in over the jungle, and as usual the pilot looked like he was planning to deliver it to the infantry company mess tent on the other side of the area. Suddenly we all heard his engine cough and sputter and several seconds later some smoke started trailing out from the engine compartment. He hung onto the howtar though - - (we learned later involuntarily because he couldn't get it to release) - - and after he had gotten well past us, banked around to circle back. By this time he was putting out a good bit of smoke and we expected him to explode at any moment. Finally as he was approaching the landing zone

about 300 meters away he dropped the gun and in a cloud of smoke landed in our rice paddy. I don't think he could have made it if he had had any further to go.

Meanwhile people were scrambling for cover in all directions. All except Curt who was busy snapping pictures one right after the other with his lens cover on. It was a very shaken but thankful pilot who climbed unhurt out of his aircraft.

In the end we had to consider the howtar pretty much a total loss. The tube was cracked, the axle bent, a wheel broken off. Three of the other guns came in in unorthodox orientations and one was set down very neatly upside down. The tube of that particular one was bent so that later when we tried to fire it the rounds would get stuck part way down. This happened twice and each time we cleared the malfunction by first tilting the gun forward with the trails in the air and the barrel pointing downward. Then with a bore brush some brave soul would push on the round until it was past the irregularity and free to fall the rest of the way. One of the cannoneers would then hold the trails up in the air while everybody else took cover and then he would slam the trails to the ground and hit the deck himself. As the trails came down, the barrel came up and the round would then slide down and fire. It really looked impressive.

As evening came on, I had my FDC people construct a sort of tent for us by piecing shelter halves (half a pup tent) together. This is a necessity for blackout at night. The troops not actually on watch in FDC were spread out and dug in and we all went to our respective shelters. This first night most of the troops on the perimeter were pretty jumpy and those that weren't were feeling trigger happy, so when anything would make a noise in the surrounding jungle, there would be a snowballing avalanche of firing, starting in the immediate vicinity of the real or imagined enemy and spreading sometimes to the entire perimeter.

The next morning, stories varied from telling of the automatic rifleman who expended three magazines (60 rounds) on one sniper muzzle flash to the story of "Pedro", one of our gung ho communicators who threw three grenades because he thought it was fun. It is very difficult to reconstruct the situation out there that night because there was so much of the confusion of the first night of combat, but the story stands with some pretty convincing evidence that there was probably a small number of VC probing our lines that night, for what reason I can't figure. They were within grenade range apparently because we found several grenade craters the next morning within our perimeter. We caught one group of three in the light of an illumination grenade and those troops on that sector are convinced they got 'em. We found no bodies however for all our efforts - although of course this is not unusual in this war.

Early the next morning it began to rain. Although our makeshift tent leaked in many places, it did manage to keep our hole from turning into the bathtub we later discovered it could become. The following day we had lots of slack time and started working to improve our respective foxholes, craters etc. Joe made a beautiful hole which would perfectly accommodate his air mattress in the bottom. When we remodeled the FDC crater the tent would no longer quite reach the edge of the hole so we rigged the shelter so that it would just cover the chart table etc. in the middle of the hole.

That night, when it started raining, the water ran right off the shelter and right back into the hole again. Sometime during the night I remember my air mattress became a little swimming pool and I splashed around in it to be funny. By morning I must have been floating or close to it. Joe said he just rose with the tide and he was afloat by morning. The Exec Pit [a command area where the battery Executive Officer is located] was the most amazing though. Somebody lost a package of a concentrated drink mix called Injun Orange, into the water and being highly concentrated, it colored the entire pool bright orange - It was very pretty.

By this time the end of the peninsula assigned as the first objective had been secured and it was time to pack up and move on to the next phase of the operation. To briefly explain the tactical objective of the first phase, the BLT was assigned the task of neutralizing what is known as the Rung Sat Special Zone. This area is a strategic waterway and mangrove swamp complex at the mouth of the Mekong River. The swamp had long been known as a refuge for the VC and a possible supply center but until they had recently started harassing shipping into the port of Saigon, no one had seen fit to disturb them. But now

that they had become a threat, the Marine Special Landing Force on station at the time [that's us] was called to sweep the area, and perform the search and kill operation so common in this war.

The objective of the first phase was the tip of a peninsula flanking the chief waterway. This tip was actually an island separated from the peninsula by another river. The plan was to land in the middle of the island and sweep outward in both directions toward blocking forces which would have been simultaneously landed at either end. The VC would be split and caught in two separate claws. At the same time the Cong would be isolated by maintaining surveillance of the network of waterways which they would have to cross in an escape attempt. The BLT CP end of our battery position was in the center of the narrow island and the two sweeping forces landed in the center and moved outward towards the ends of the island.

At the end of the second day the first phase was complete. The island had been swept with very few Cong found and the BLT was ready to displace on up the river to the second objective area where there were suspected support facilities.

The following morning (Monday) our choppers arrived and this time they gave us some of the new H-46's. These are the ones we had practiced with at Pendleton and the ones built to carry a load. They have two big rotors and can carry both a howtar and a jeep to pull it, in the belly of the plane. They carried our guns external [in this case] and at the same time filled the chopper itself with troops. It's a good aircraft and most of them are pretty new.

We set down in a rice paddy again, right next to a heavily damaged Vietnamese church maybe ten miles up the river from the first position. The church was about 200 meters from the river which looked very inviting, particularly since we were all very muddy and sweaty. The Captain assigned the church to FDC and I set out carefully to investigate. It appeared that my biggest problem was going to be our souvenir crazy corpsman - "Doc" Vail. There were just enough enticing looking artifacts in the church to make me feel suspicious of booby traps and I must have looked pretty funny looking carefully at the ground every time before I put my foot down. I finally decided on a safe path from the landing area to the corner of the church where I wanted to put FDC and had my troops start carrying the gear into the building. Meanwhile the rest of the battery had begun to feel more confident and people were soon all over the inside. Doc Vail had started tying wire to various objects one by one, clearing everybody away each time and then pulling on the wire from a safe distance. It was becoming clear that the place was not mined, but I was not completely easy about it until we had been there quite a while.

As soon as we had the guns set in, communications and FDC set up and oriented and had satisfied ourselves that nothing much was happening, the Captain told us to start rotating our people down to the river to clean up. I'm sure many of us had visions of leaches, snakes and maybe even piranhas in the muddy water but gradually people began to look less like mud pies and more like Marines again. We found that this river was actually just tidal waters of the Mekong Delta and was salty as well as muddy which unfortunately precluded the use of soap but it did serve the purpose of removing mud and sweat and there weren't any harmful creatures. As we lay back on the sandy beach waiting for our clothes to dry and listening to the pounding of bombs and rockets in the jungle beyond the range of our guns, we began to wonder if this was really a war or just another "field firing Exercise" (FFEX) back at Pendleton. Here we were occasionally firing H & I concentrations, (harassing and interdiction) practicing procedures and ironing out problems just as though no war were going on.

However, as the afternoon progressed I began to get a little nervous about the night. It seemed very peaceful but realizing that it was usually the unexpected that costs lives, I began to think about what would happen if we got hit by the VC and the walls of the church began to look very thin indeed. Also I thought of how close to the guns we were and how every Cong in the Mekong delta would probably have the church plotted on their maps. It would be hard for them to resist pelting the church grounds with mortars; at least it would be for me if I were a Cong. (Of course I wouldn't have passed up the opportunity to pound our first crowded position either.) So we gathered up some shovels, went about 100 meters away to the junction of some paddy dikes and dug a new home for the FDC on the side of the dike away from the gun position. S/Sgt. Meader, the Comm. Chief, was delighted to have so much extra room in the

church, particularly the dry spot we had occupied under a small area of intact roof. We dug down until we started getting into mud, about 4 feet this time, and constructed a very good tent over the hole using all our experience from the earlier position. This one would be dry I said. I was almost right.

That night the rains came again in deluge after deluge and any low spot in the roof immediately filled up with water. Our tent did very well for a while but eventually leaks began to develop and the night was not comfortably spent. On the other hand, it did not fill up with water; in fact we never had any standing water on the floor. The biggest problem was the mud and this we took care of the next day by spreading palm fronds over the entire floor and stamping on them until all the red ants had drowned. All foliage was full of them.

The church itself turned out to be the center of activity. Sgt. Holm, the mess cook, had started setting up at the end away from the altar equivalent to the Narthex and toward the river. The roof was non-existent on that end and his cook fire smoke went right up one wall leaving a long black streak. Every morning there would be coffee freshly brewed and hotcakes cooked one by one in a single mess kit frying pan. He never managed to improvise a griddle. As the number of empty ammo boxes grew the kitchen got more sophisticated with a serving counter and a pantry for unopened "C" ration cans. One meal in particular most troops don't like is ham and lima beans and the pantry became well stocked with these. As the week went by we began to receive various items of chow from our other mess cook who remained aboard the ship. These were sent out by the ever willing chopper pilots addressed LZ Bluejay. Soon we were supplementing the "C" rations with stew or maybe chicken and mashed potatoes, soups every now and then, and on one of our last nights we even had sliced ham, mashed potatoes, and carrots, all eaten out of a canteen cup one on top of another.

Fresh water was the only re-supply item we had any problem with. It was all carried in in 5 gallon cans and was drunk at a fantastic rate in the form of Goofy Grape, or Injun Orange, courtesy of Sgt. Holm. For the first few days I had a tremendous desire to be able to take a fresh water bath with soap but with a premium on fresh water we weren't even allowed to shave. Eventually we got so used to being sweaty and dirty that we cared less and the river sufficed, but at first it was bad.

One afternoon after we had been in the second position for a couple of days the storm clouds started coming up fast and we could all taste the feeling of a shower coming in on the breeze. I started running around collecting my shaving gear, soap, toothbrush etc. and laying out my air mattress to collect the water. Curt and I were the first to strip down when the shower hit but soon others followed suit. In no time I had showered, shaved and brushed my teeth and the water was still coming down. By the time it finally blew over I had managed to collect a full helmet of fresh water for doing laundry.

That was the only time during the entire operation any of us had the opportunity feel at all clean. That was the only time it rained during the daytime and several days later when the moon passed the full, it never rained again at all. I don't have any idea what the moon has to do with it but that's what the natives predicted and that's what happened, precisely.

After two miserable muddy nights in the FDC hole we returned sheepishly to the church convinced all was safe. About the same time we did this the rains stopped and it was never muddy again.

The problem of most concern to me during this operation was the double one of mosquitoes and unhealed sores. In the first place the heat and humidity are such that your skin is seldom dry. The only times I felt dry were for the brief instant just after a swim when the water had dried off and the sweat had not quite started to flow. (My uniform was probably the best adapted of any for this type of climate. I wore Daddy's fatigue jacket from W.W. II [called an Eisenhower jacket] with the sleeves cut off. It is short and fits loosely so I had good circulation of air.) At night I would wear the nylon jungle shirts we are issued as I thought for protection against mosquitoes, but unfortunately they bite right thru the cloth.

The problem would start with a mosquito bite or dozen. These would itch but when scratched, the damp skin would easily come off too leaving a raw place which refused to heal. Apparently I kept a good enough watch to prevent any of them from infecting badly but they would not heal in the dampness. They would just stay raw and red. As soon as I returned to the ship and could spend enough time in the air conditioned wardroom, they healed up almost as I watched. I had the feeling that over a long period of

time in the country the number of raw places would keep increasing and sooner or later I would be skinless. Eventually I found that the best treatment is to make sure they don't get started by a liberal use of mosquito repellent. This, incidentally, is a highly valued item by the Vietnamese people.

Almost from the first day we were there we started having occasional visitors from the nearby Vietnamese village down on the river. At first it was just soldiers that came but soon some civilians came casually wandering into the area to look around and talk. The talking wasn't easy though because the Vietnamese spoke no English and Capt. Dyer was the only one of us who spoke Vietnamese. This proved to be only a minor obstacle though for soon we were all bobbing and nodding together like old friends.

One young buck came ambling in with a S&W .38 revolver on his hip. He turned out to be the village sheriff. Since I was also carrying a revolver which looked very much like his, being a S&W .45, he immediately came over and signified that he would be very pleased if I could furnish him with some ammunition. I pulled out my pistol and showed him the size of my bullets and that settled that. We then traded pistols for inspection purposes and I found that his was pretty rusty and dirty so I went through motions of cleaning with a questioning look at him and he beamed and nodded. I got my tools, oil, and cleaning rod and we went to work. Fortunately his pistol was put together the same as mine so I had no trouble getting it apart for him. When he was satisfied it was clean, he started putting it back together by himself. He amazed me by figuring it out with very little trouble at all. He would keep trying parts and orientations and experimenting until he was satisfied all was as it should be and then look up at me for approval. If I nodded he was delighted and so were his friends who had by this time gathered around to watch. Pretty soon he had it all back together again.

Another sport came in to better himself by trading with us. One big item of trade throughout the rural areas of the countries over here, seems to be "C" rations. He claimed that he could bring us a bottle of beer for every box of "C" rats we would give him. He apparently was more interested in bartering than trading though because he never did go get any beer to trade. However I took advantage of his disposition and my boredom by this time to try to learn a little something of the language. We had a "tourist phrases" type language book put out by the defense department and went through giving phrases back and forth. I was disappointed though when he finally realized that it was much easier to point to the phrase in the book rather than to speak it, so that is how we conducted most of our conversation. I was able to get a start on the language though for which I was happy.

Early Palm Sunday morning we notified the BLT that we wanted a Chaplain for our Palm Sunday service. We received a "roger" on our request and so a few of the troops set about Christianizing our church. They took two pieces of mahogany that had once been part of the rafters and lashed them into the form of a Cross. Then to symbolize the body of Christ someone twisted a piece of barbed wire into the shape of a wreath and placed it over the cross. The three altars that were already built into the church were not suitable for the purposes of Christian Communion since they were built out from the wall, so another table like altar was constructed out of the ever handy empty ammo boxes and a blanket was spread over the top. For most of that day we were sending our fire commands and receiving battle messages in this church but no chaplain had come.

Finally that afternoon the Chaplain was dropped into landing zone, "Bluejay", and we were able to conduct our service. He stood behind the altar of boxes in his jungle utilities and with a black sash of cloth hanging from his shoulders as his only vestment. The troops sat about the Church on their helmets, on ammo boxes, and on the broken pieces of the church and prayed. The service was short but it brought a touch of something comfortable and familiar into our lives, "and we were refreshed."

After the service the problem became how to get the Chaplain back out of the position again. He stood wistfully watching helicopters go buzzing by high overhead but none dropped down to pick him up. We finally radioed out "Chaplain spending the night this position. He is in good hands." Indeed he was. That night Sgt. Hahn made his famous pot of stew. The following morning the Chaplain went on his unshaven way back up into the sky as we waved farewell.

Again and again in this war the great importance of supporting arms is felt. President Johnson has declared that although he will keep pressing the Viet Cong as long as they persist in their belligerence he

will do so with as little loss of American life as possible. With this aim in mind and also in keeping with the unconventional warfare necessity to sweep and kill because holding real estate is too costly, supporting arms such as air and artillery have proved ideal. These two have also made a terrible impression of awe and wonder on the Vietnamese people.

One of the most impressive of these machines for keeping the peace over large areas is what we call the armed Huey helicopter. The first time I saw a Huey in action was during Phase I soon after we landed. A very small but vicious looking helicopter came into our clearing flying just above the tree tops. He came skimming in low at a pretty good clip, swung his belly forward to stop and settled to the ground firmly like he meant business. It was an Army chopper and almost looked foreign to me after seeing nothing but Marines and Marine equipment; even the four men in Army uniforms looked strange - - the lieutenant had his bars embroidered on his collar.

The machine itself was fairly bristling. Not least impressive by far was the crossed sabers insignia in white of the airmobile, 1st Cavalry, which was painted on the side. The muzzles of twin machine guns, probably 50 caliber, projected from the bubble nose. Two soldiers were seated just aft of the pilots compartment, one on each side. The aircraft was completely open on the sides where they sat and these soldiers each had a swivel mounted light machine gun trained downward and to their flank. While in our position they relaxed somewhat but never let go their weapon and stayed on the alert. Rocket pods were mounted on either side of the body and we were soon to learn what damage they could do.

It seemed this bird was part of the river patrol (RAG Patrol ?) and had not been told where our people were going to be operating. Needless to say they were a little disturbed by all the sudden activity in the area and decided it might help to know what frequency we were using so they could coordinate with us.

They left after getting the information, just as quickly as they had come; a roar of blades and they were away, barely clearing the trees at the edge of the rice paddies. We noticed many of these birds after this, patrolling back and forth over the jungle at high speed and low altitude. Once in a while a Huey patrol passing over our position would dip down and make a sudden zig zag, throwing his belly first to one side and then the other, which is apparently the closest a Chopper can come to dipping a wing in greeting.

Observing a Huey in action was quite awesome. He would be cruising along as usual and suddenly his belly would swing forward as he stopped and turned. He would then swoop down and you would see the straight thin trails of smoke being traced downward from the rocket pods and then the concussion as they impacted on the ground. By the time the smoke came drifting up above the jungle into sight the bird would have maneuvered into a new position for better observation and would be ready to fire again.

One afternoon during the later stages of the second phase sweep some spectacular reports started coming over the tactical net which we monitored at all times. The companies up forward had started finding things. As the reports came back our radio operator would relay them to us as we stood around. One platoon had uncovered an arms and munitions factory, another had found stockpiles of weapons and supplies. In one mine factory they found storage caves full of mines so far underground that they had no idea how far it went, even after they blew it up.

The thing that meant the most to us was when they found cooked rice and personal effects; packs, blankets, and gear abandoned by a surprised unit of a fairly good number of troops. Since we never knew how many VC we were up against and we were beginning to wonder if there really were any at all, this discovery was spooky. But we never did find all those people who left their packs and food. I even wondered if it was planted to make us think they had a much larger force than they actually had; perhaps for diversion of our forces away from somewhere else, or for some other reason. But then perhaps it was a large unit which in typical fashion when surprised managed to disappear into the ground. It seemed strange though that they waited so long because they would have been able to escape without the loss of so much of their precious supplies had they done so earlier. It is not often that VC are surprised and

particularly after the length of time we had been in the area. They couldn't have helped knowing we were there. It sounds fishy to me.

The evening before we left to return to the ship, Joe, Curt and I decided that we had better pay our respects to the local village if we were going to at all. There were quite a few cases of "C" rations that were going to be sent back to the ship so we decided to make use of them in a people to people visit to the local tavern. We filed by the stack and each of us hefted a case of 12 to his shoulder and continued on to the village. Unfortunately none of us had any idea of what we were going to do with our bargaining power and as a result we blew the whole thing but this is what happened.

We were met along the way by a local man who immediately made it known that he wanted the rations. He was obviously something of a business man because he had some money and he wanted to buy but we refused. Then he offered Joe 4 beers for his case and Joe immediately accepted since he knew he didn't want to drink any more than that. The same offer was made to Curt and me but we hedged. The going rate was much higher than this but we really had much more buying power than we could use.

When we reached the village we were surrounded by people looking for handouts, feeling our pockets, and milling about. The easiest thing at the moment seemed to go ahead and take the man's offer and get rid of the rations which we did. Twelve bottles of beer appeared along with some ice and we began to pass the cup. (I had the only canteen cup.) There was lots to see in the village and Curt and Joe wanted to take pictures so by the time we were ready to leave, 10 of the 12 bottles were still full. So we carried them back to the battery area for the troops.

After it was too late and our "bargain" had been concluded I came up with what would have been the ideal solution. We should have opened up two cases and given the contents out to the people as a good will token and then used the third case to bargain for the beer. As it was the shrewd business man got all the food and made a good profit and we gained nothing in good will or material. Wiser next time.

The village itself was an armed, fortified hamlet. All the people lived within the compound itself which was surrounded by barbed wire and fortifications and guarded by lookouts in lookout towers. There were many animals - - the most prominent were the water buffalo - - and pens were set aside in the compound for these. The houses were typically grass and sticks and very crowded considering the amount of land they had available. The feeling was very much like what it must have been with the castles and warring lords of feudal Europe, all crowded behind fortifications for protection. I never could figure out how they made their livelihood though since none of the surrounding ricepaddies were under cultivation. Perhaps we missed rice season. I don't know. The compound faced on a piece of the river which it included and many colorful boats were drawn up on the beach. It is very frustrating having to figure everything out about the people by guessing and inferring but without knowing the language that is about all I could do.

It appeared that at one time this was a much happier place to live than it is now. We saw ruins constantly of what must have once been nice residences. The raised plateau like areas where the houses had once stood were generally large enough to have contained a house with a large lawn, and the lawns were generally still growing. Surrounding the ruins were the rice paddies extending outward in all directions - - almost like what we would call a plantation. It makes the present watchful and afraid way of living seem even more sad, thinking how much better it was once and could be. At least for the period we were there the people could feel free from danger and from the fear of a sudden VC raid.

When we asked them where were the VC, they would give a grim smile and point at all the jungle to the north in one broad sweep. When we had finished there were certainly a few less VC in that jungle and it had certainly become a less hospitable place for them.

Dear Folks, Tuesday, 5 April

We just got back to the ship a few hours ago and we are all still alive. Our battery lost no casualties even though we might have been hit fairly hard the first night. It was hard to tell because our troops were excited anyway and filled the air with lead every time they saw a single muzzle flash. I will elaborate on the fighting later.

After two wet days in the first position we moved up to another position where we spent the remainder of our 10 day mission. We were only about 500m from a village (Hamlet actually) which made for some interesting situations. We did a lot of firing and treated the whole operation as a long needed training exercise.

I was almost sorry to leave except that we had begun to get so dirty. I will write up the operation and fill you in on the details. If you read anything in the papers about Marines protecting the shipping to Saigon, we have decided this must be the interpretation of our operation. As far as we were concerned it was a search and kill sweep of suspected hideouts in the Mekong Delta area. The question mark on the date above is because I'm not sure if it's the 4th or not. It is Tuesday however because yesterday was malaria pill day (not Atabrine by the way.).

Had a letter from Cathy waiting when I came aboard. She says she's been calling and you haven't been home much. What's been going on?

We probably won't get the rest of our mail until we get to Subic this weekend. We should spend a couple of weeks there between expeditions. Going to sleep now -- looking forward to "ye olde bed."

Wednesday, 6 April

Got at least 12 hours sleep last night and feel much better. I just about went to sleep finishing off what I wrote yesterday. Hopefully I'll get a chance today to start work on writing up our "combat."

Please let me know if you receive any letters postage due that had "free" written on them. I found out later that I have to have my service number on the return address.

Love, Mark

Dear Cathy 6 April 1966

I am now a combat veteran! The first night ashore was the worst since we must have had all of about 5 VC sniping at our position, but likely I think they were scared off by the noise when about every one of our trigger-happy Marines made a practice of shooting about 20 rounds every time the snipers made a move. The air must've been so full of lead that the Cong figured it was unhealthy sticking around.

I was curled up in the bottom of the FDC (Fire Direction Center) Pit (which turned into the FDC swimming hole the next night) and wasn't particularly bothered by it. You know me when I'm sleepy. The whole operation seemed so easy it was hard to believe we weren't just out in the Zulu impact area at Pendleton out on a problem. We did have a few people killed in the BLT though which brings home the fact we are fighting a war. Memorial services are scheduled for tomorrow.

I am planning to write up the operation in another "article" but just to fill you in in the meantime we were assigned a search and kill mission in the Mekong Delta area because the Cong have been using the swampy area as a hideout between their hit and run attacks. The most worrisome lately have been against shipping into the port of Saigon. We uncovered a hospital, an arms factory, and fantastic numbers of arms and explosives. We didn't find any VC but then that is the way it usually goes. At one hideout the company that uncovered it found 150 pounds of freshly cooked rice which could probably have meant any one of a dozen things but I, personally, think it was a fake.

In our second position we set up around a ruined church of some sort and my FDC was set up right in front of one of the three altars. There was a village nearby, actually one of the fortified hamlets, and we had lots of visitors. They were happy to see us as they had been hit by the Cong only the week before and were happy to be able to rest easy for the time we were there. It was very interesting seeing their reaction to us. These people were not at all afraid, and much more interested in getting our "C" rations than anything else.

I just happened to remember forgetting to comment on "The Invisible Man" you mentioned a while back. We read that for a class I took on "The Novel" which was taught primarily from the existentialist viewpoint. I thought it was very good although terribly frustrating. I couldn't really get the feeling of discrimination axe-grinding though; mostly the psychological mess of the Invisible Man. Also

a vivid if not necessarily valid feeling for the atmosphere of a Negro community. I can't remember too much now though.

Love, Mark

PS. You remember I mentioned the letters the girls from some colleges wrote to the troops? Well the men really went wild. They are writing back about how many battles they've been through, how many times they've been wounded, and how many VC they have killed and there should soon be some very impressed college girls around the country. You girls should see about doing that. It should prove highly entertaining and certainly gives the troops a lift

Folks 17 April 66

Present position is at the Bay View Hotel in Manila. We are right across the street from the US Embassy but our window is just at tree top level above the ground so we can see neither the embassy nor the bay. We bought some facemasks at the PX before we left in case we have a chance to do any skin diving in the bay? ?

Earlier this week Capt. Dyer decided to have another battery party. We all went out to Grande Island in an LCU on Wednesday and spent the afternoon drinking beer, skin diving, sleeping on the beach and eating a plethora of tenderloin steaks which our cooks had managed to purloin from the ship's stores. The barbecue fire burned all day and the water was clear, deep and beautiful, and it was a good day. They had a float off the beach a ways and in about 15 feet of water so Joe and I did some skin diving conditioning by going up and down getting our ears used to the pressure. We were very sorry the whole time that we didn't have any gear at all such as masks, fins, snorkel etc. That's the reason we bought masks this morning. Diving down among the sand and coral formations we were aware of beautifully colored blue and green blurs moving about but without masks that's all they were was blurs. Next time we hope to be able to determine that they are fish.

Wednesday night got a little hectic as you might imagine with that many inebriated troops running around but we made it through the night without getting anyone killed and I was thankful. Thursday morning we were all supposed to return to the ship but the staff and officers who did not have any particularly demanding duties were given permission to stay over on the island. The first thing I did after looking around and laughing disgustedly at the sick and hung over people we had strewn about, was to chow down four steaks fried in beer! Then Joe, Curt and I took a hike around to the far side of the island to see the scenery and to try to get Curt's intestines recovered from overindulgence. He never drank a drop until we left the states and he can't handle himself yet. I think he's learning his lesson though. Anyhow I picked up several varieties of snails on the seaward side of the island and will mail you the shells. Then we went up the jungle trail on the side of the island to the old gun emplacements on the top.

The main emplacements were a huge concrete complex with two tremendous 10" guns on top, maybe 50 feet long. There was a tower there for observation I imagine (we called it OP #1) which Joe and I climbed up to view the surrounding bay. There were divers on the seaward side diving for shells which we had met earlier (officers) and we could see them diving down through the clear blue water among the rocks of the reef. Then looking toward Subic we could see all the ships in the bay. It was very pretty.

After taking some pictures we went on back to the beach area and had a few more steaks at the cottage, and then spent the rest of the day doing some more diving and lying in the sun before returning to the ship.

Friday we were able to talk the Colonel into letting me take one gun out to the field to shoot. It gave me a chance to run a precision registration successfully for the first time. Also there were some pretty steep mountains in the impact area which gave us some experience with site. *[A complicated procedure for firing artillery where there is uneven ground such as steep slopes and ravines.]*

The indigenous Filipinos in the area apparently make their livelihood by supplying field Marines with Coke, beer, and chow. We had plenty to drink all day and traded our "C" rats in to the natives for a

large bowl of fried rice with assorted chopped meats, egg and I don't know what else in it. Very good and much better than the "C"s.

It looks like we may leave Subic for the last time soon. We leave on another very secret operation this Tuesday; and this should be our last with the BLT. We are then scheduled to return to our Battalion 2/11 which is in Chu Lai now. We have also heard rumors about going to Okinawa which would be fine with us because Chu Lai is supposed to be a place where you earn your combat pay the hard way. But it all remains to be seen.

I am ready to start asking for you to send me stuff now. At the moment the two things I need most are my diving mask (I bought a cheap one) and a tube of A-fil. [*a kind of sun block*] Also if my white knit shirt will fit in the same box I could use that. I have bought some clothes here but the workmanship and quality control is nonexistent. The clothes are cheap but it's not worth the bother of having them sewed up all the time when the stitching pulls out. Also if you should see a pair of dacron perma-press type sun tan trousers I could sure use them. The trousers here aren't worth buying. I am trying to hold my shape constant at 31-32 (assuming no shrinkage.)

The popular camera among shutterbugs here seems to be the Petri. Curt's cost \$28 (f/2.8) and the better model F1.8 is \$31; 45 mm lens I think. One of the section chiefs has a complete set of about \$250 worth of the gear, Japan prices, and is selling for \$150 if you're interested. It includes filters, lenses, telephoto/zoom, tripod I think, etc. But I noticed the Petri was not on your list. Otherwise I will wait until Okinawa because I understand the selection and prices are a lot better. Also I am planning to buy an Akai tape recorder. It is sold in America under the name "Roberts". The two models I am interested in are the M-8 which has tubes and the 355X which is solid-state -- transistorized. It looks like a Roberts 5000X I saw advertised in a hi-fi magazine.

There is much more to write but I will send this now. Next chance I get I'll answer all questions in the last sheaf of correspondence. Enclosed is pink slip. I did not forget to sign line 1, as I am not selling and I am not releasing ownership. I have signed in pencil so please erase if at all possible. Also he will have to pay tax on the "purchase price" which is a figure determined in Sacramento, not on what he pays for the car. Am sending Dave a check for \$75 which the insurance company paid for repairs to the Malibu. I estimated damages at \$100 and that's what they sent me less \$25 deductible; no investigation or anything. I don't get it but I'm not complaining. [*USAA insurance company paid for damages to a serviceman's property almost without question. Begun as an association of Army Air Corps Officers after WWI, they have supported the services loyally ever since.*]

Dear Folks, 20 April, 1966

Once again I am able to get a much needed vacation after a strenuous "liberty" in Subic Bay. Playing is undoubtedly the hardest thing we do. The problem is, no matter how tired you are or how many letters you just have to write, it is almost impossible to decide to stay aboard ship and not go "on the beach" with the people who aren't tired and have just as many letters to write and don't care.

This same sort of pressure has had another effect on me and I am speaking of the pressure to drink and drink and drink "with the boys." I've never had any problem with drinking because it was easy for me to drink what I wanted and stop when I had had enough. No longer so. Drinking here removes initiative from the hands of the individual and places it in the hands of the group and more often than not in the hands of the heaviest drinker of the group. All drinking goes by the rounds, with some one person picking up the tab for the group each time around. Not only does it get very expensive, but you find yourself drinking much more than you would otherwise let yourself.

Even this wouldn't be so bad except that it begins to become a habit so that every night on the beach ends up the same way. It is very frustrating but then you can't always be going off by yourself to have fun. Fortunately Joe and Curt like to get out and see the sights during the day and it's only at night that we get bogged down.

The whole situation finally hit me with a tremendous wave of disgust the first night we spent in Manila. The only idea anybody had for the evening's entertainment was to go to night clubs. That may

actually be about all you can do in a strange city if you don't have much imagination but I doubt it. Anyhow, that week in Subic we got drunk at the "O" Club on Monday, got high on Tuesday, got smashed on Wednesday night on Grande Island, drank again Thursday most of the day, got caught in another drinking ring on Friday night with Joe, some respite on Sat. night but here again Sun night we were going out drinking again in Manila. The first bar we went in all there was was juke box and people just sitting and drinking; not even talking to each other.

I ordered a ginger ale and stayed sober. I don't understand what desire there is in a person that can be satisfied by sitting at a bar in a dark room and drinking. It makes me shudder. I think half the battle is just establishing a reputation gently, of being a non-drinker and then just keep dragging your feet whenever possible. Enough of that.

Monday in Manila we went sight seeing around the city and ended up at the Army-Navy Club for a swim. This was the first old British style club I had seen and I was impressed. There were people there from many different countries, many probably from the embassies nearby. They had tennis, swimming and the beautifully big "sitting" rooms with massive furnishings that I have always envisioned as "British Club". The rooms upstairs had large wooden doors made of slats for ventilation and the bathroom was labeled the "W.C." I ordered a scotch and soda on the terrace and felt "veddy, veddy posh". It was an interesting, almost nostalgic feeling.

I have been doing a very poor job of answering questions in letters you have sent and I now am sitting at a very large table in the wardroom with your letters spread before me and will try to satisfy them one by one.

Yes, -- Billy Howe can go into Marine Air without graduating. As a matter of fact two years of college plus passing a test is minimum requirements for some programs. [*Cousin - ended up serving as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam.*]

Please hang onto the Scientific Americans. I would enjoy reading them but would probably lose them over here, so it's best that you keep them there. If you happen to come across one you think I would particularly enjoy [oceanographic etc.] you might forward it. I could keep track of a few I think.

I have been enjoying Daddy's word sketches very much. [eg. "I am sitting on the lanai and the sun is just dropping behind the trees over toward the Club."] The way he describes these little situations I can feel them myself, like a very vivid snapshot of another life I used to be part of.

No, I have no restrictions on what I write or dates mentioned etc. I didn't include them in the Olongapo article because I hate to be tied down to chronology. The PS. at the end was an anecdote I forgot to mention and may be plugged in in any appropriate spot.

The problem you mentioned about fraternization with the troops is a great one indeed. Captain Dyer thinks in terms of camaraderie and believes drinking with the troops is necessary for a closely knit outfit. I am sick of it and avoid it as much as possible but I am sure the Captain does not understand the problem. However the number of unpleasant incidents resulting from some of our battery parties have alerted at least the junior officers and some of the NCOs [*non commissioned officers*] to the situation and with this much backing I think we can curtail the parties somewhat. We are learning the hard way why there are O Clubs, NCO clubs and EM [*enlisted men*] clubs. This problem is very similar to the one I started this letter by describing and can only be solved by a concerted effort which I believe we can now make. The Captain is senior enough so that he has no problems and doesn't see the problems that the junior officers and NCOs are having.

I have had no problems with my bronchitis and if anything it is improved. I just had a short bout with a cold and have been having some congestion but much less than a similar cold I had at Pendleton. Do what you like with my bronchial letter. I am sure I am ok now.

I certainly appreciate the clipping you sent of our operation. It is very interesting to see what people back in the States are being told. It is certainly a much more optimistic view than we get. I will give more on this soon. The operation was "Jackstay" and we moved once. The initial landing was at the end of the peninsula and we then displaced up the river towards Saigon. We were just out of range of the arms factories and other goodies they found and were primarily a blocking force to prevent escapes to the

river. I imagine the river we were on was the Saigon River in the newspaper but it had another name on our map.

Have had no word to date from any "China Hands."

You should have the TR-3 pink slip. I'm pretty sure I left it in my jewelry box. [red Triumph sports car I left in the keeping of sister Cathy in Berkeley]

I have gotten all letters through 15 and you didn't forget to number at least the letter or the envelope if not both. [Mother numbered all her letters so I would know if any were missing]

I will certainly be interested to hear any news from Dana Point. I never got an answer to the one I sent them. [Had real estate dealings in Dana Point prior to leaving Pendleton]

Thank you for the Easter card. I got a do-it-yourself palm cross from Pat Tomter as well as the one from Daddy. [Tomter was the curate at St. Mark's Church in Altadena; also a sailing partner on a Malibu Outrigger at Balboa.]

My address has not really changed as much as it appears. 107mm and 4.2" are the same thing. Why they say 107mm Mortar instead of Howtar I don't know. It doesn't make any difference though, it's all the same unit. BLT 1-5 or 1/5 makes no difference. The SF. post office changed the zip code of Marines to 96602 to separate it from Navy mail. Actually the address was supposed to have the BLT 1-5 underlined but it has been overlooked so much I suppose it doesn't matter now.

I have had letters from Hazel Longyear [family friend], Ed JouJon-Roche [family friend], the Shattucks [family friend], Margie [Bowlus, cousin], Pat Tomter, and Donna [girlfriend but not serious] who was very surprised to discover me gone for some reason. All these came at about the same time so I decided they must be having a "Write to a Serviceman" campaign in California. Hazel even sent \$5 which was very nice. Yes, uhuh, that is about 19 pesos -- mmmmm.

We left Subic early Tuesday morning -- in fact Joe, Curt and I had just barely got into bed after a last fling in Olongapo Monday night [yes, that's the same Monday we were in Manila -- heh, full day!] and the anchor came clanking up with its terrible noise. But this time we have no idea where we are going. Rumors are starting to get ridiculous now such as going to Australia, and Japan, and Okinawa -- ie. just about anywhere at all. In fact I think I'll go pump some "squids" [Navy] tonight. The BLT Commander doesn't think too much of Howtars in particular and artillery in general so there is some talk we may remain aboard on the next landing. We may get back to 2/11 sooner than we thought. However 2/11 is presently in Chu Lai which, as I mentioned before, is a hot spot.

My write up of "Jackstay" is coming very slowly and I may have to send you a very rough draft and let you clean it up. I don't know where the time goes but it sure does.
love, Mark

Dear Pat; [*The curate of the St. Marks Episcopal church in Altadena*]

20 April

I appreciated your letter and to answer your question: "What's up with me?" Nothing much right now but who knows what the morrow may bring. The BLT was the unit used in operation Jackstay which got some publicity, to judge from the clippings I've seen. We landed on a peninsula somewhere south of Saigon and did a little search and kill operation involving much searching and very little killing. Since then we have been bumming around Subic Bay and if you've read the epistle I wrote my folks on that subject you know what that means. However if you haven't, it means a small Filipino town just outside the main gate at Subic called Olongapo which incorporates all the best and worst features of the Mexican border towns, San Diego, Long Beach and Manila if you can believe it..

We had a very nice Palm Sunday service in a Vietnamese Monastery on the banks of the Saigon River during Jackstay. Our battery position was located in a rice paddy adjacent to a rice paddy and we had utilized the bullet torn abandoned building as a communications center and fire direction center in spite of the fact it was an awfully good target. There were three altars and various artifacts which had been knocked about during some previous shelling. We sent word that morning for the Protestant Chaplain but it was late afternoon before he could be dropped in by helicopter. Meanwhile some of the troops had made a cross from some pieces of the building and placed it above the center altar. They

wrapped some barbed wire around it to signify a crown of thorns which apparently is symbolic of something necessary for the Catholics. The communion rail and table for the sacraments was built out of ammo boxes and all the troops attending sat on ammo boxes and pieces of the broken building. There was a touch of the worldly down in the Comm area between two of the altars. Someone had put up a pin-up of a Playmate and forgotten to take it down. My room-mate Curt took a picture of it and I will get a print made up and send it home because it was a very impressive scene. The Chaplain spent the rest of the afternoon waiting for a chopper to pull him out but none came and he ended up spending the night with us. So that's the price of fame and glory.

You wondered about how we spend "leisure" time. In port you can probably imagine. At sea it is a real fight with self discipline to keep yourself from vegetating. I try to read, write, and do correspondence courses when I can make myself. Conflicting desires are the evening movie, shooting the breeze, eating ice cream from the fountain, and sleeping. We also try to maintain a battery training effort which takes some supervision.

At the moment we are heading West and that indicates back into the war zone. Our specific destination we know not. There are some wild rumors flying around about Hong Kong. Ha! Chou Ong (an "Aloha" type word for all greetings in Vietnamese)
Mark

Hazel and Dick Longyear were family friends. Dick was at Stanford with my dad.

Dear Hazel and Dick, 20 Apr.

Thank you very much for the letter and gift. I immediately converted it into pesos [19] and invested this in the economy of Olongapo, P.I.

So far our combat effort has been fairly uneventful. We had a little excitement on Operation Jackstay which you no doubt read about in the newspaper but it was a pretty easy bit of work. After Jackstay we had some time off in Subic Bay - Naval Station in the Philippines which is adjacent to the town of Olongapo. We are now back aboard ship steaming off toward something but we have not been told what yet.

No, I did not recognize the name of the Medic near Saigon. There are many of them that are doing a tremendous job with government supplies but this is the first instance I have heard of sending additional supplies in privately. While we were on Jackstay we had our corpsmen and doctors busy in the nearby village treating the people for whatever they could. These people will travel miles for an antibiotic since the value has become very well known.. We also had RVN soldiers passing through periodically and we treated them as best we could for infected insect bites etc. Another valuable "preventive medicine" which is extremely highly valued by the people is insect repellent. One major cause of infection seems to be scratching mosquito bites.

Hope your health is improving Hazel. My bout with pneumonia last summer makes me particularly sympathetic.

Thanks again, Mark

Nibs and Sondra Shattuck were family friends. Nibs was at Stanford with my dad. Daughter Tana was attending UCI while I was in Vietnam but maybe didn't start until later that year.

Dear Shattucks,

Thank you for your letters and Easter card. I am always happy to hear news from the college scene and the Balboa/Newport area in particular. I'll bet it really was jumping and I wish I had been there too.

We are now on our way again, somewhere west and that probably means another operation. I trust you know about our last one - Jackstay. I was surprised at what a write up it got in your papers as it seemed so insignificant to us since we never had any significant contact with VC. It really was impressive though when they started uncovering the supply complex. We were monitoring the tactical radio net at the time and listened to the traffic as the companies would report their findings. Very exciting.

After a week of strenuous playing in Subic [Olongapo actually] it is a great rest to be back at sea with nothing to do but sleep at night. [or write letters]. We've heard some rumors of possibly going to Hong Kong but I'll believe it when I see it.

I hope you have been sharing the letters I have been sending my folks as I know they enjoy your company up that way.

Chou Ong [Greetings, good-bye, etc.]

Mark

Dear Cathy; 20-24 April

I decided I am going to have to start answering some letters instead of just writing letters so here I will try to catch up on your letters. I appreciate your telling me Daisy Abad's address but unfortunately I had already been and left Baguio by the time I got it. I have put her address in my little red book though just in case I get back.

Daisy was a pen pal I corresponded with during elementary school. She lived in the mountain town of Baguio, which was known for its coolness in the heat of summer. I began corresponding with her through one of Mother's missionary friends and I think Cathy carried on some later.

Speaking of Baguio and since you mention ice cream in just about every letter you have written - when we were in Baguio, I won a bet I had made with Curt earlier. He bet me one gallon of ice cream that I couldn't eat ½ gallon of ice cream at one sitting. So that evening we went to a restaurant and everybody ordered dinner and I ordered a half gallon of ice cream and naturally, being a very proficient and accomplished eater of ice cream, won the bet. In fact I had finished the ice cream before the rest of the gang's dinner arrived and so I helped them eat theirs.

I can't remember if I told you about the trip to Baguio but at any rate we went up with Angie, and her sister and Kraus.

Angie was my Olongapo girlfriend and she lived with her sister's family in the suburbs of Olongapo. Kraus was her sister's husband who was a Navy diver at Subic. His name was Chuck but everybody called him Kraus.

The car wasn't big enough [we hired a car and driver from the base] so Kraus came along on his motorcycle and I traded off with him driving. When we arrived we couldn't find any place to stay until finally one of us [I don't remember who] found a tremendous apartment-like suite with three rooms for 55 pesos so we took it. All was well except there was no running water except for a few hours each day and I think I remember writing this to somebody already so I'll stop.

Since we got back from Jackstay - I suppose you know all about that by now from the newspapers - I have managed to get considerably fatter and am now having trouble getting into the uniforms I had tailored when we first arrived in Subic. I do manage to do quite a bit of walking around the ship and we get up and PT with the troops every morning at 0600 but even so I managed to skip both breakfast and lunch today without any severe pain. I know you didn't appreciate that kind of approach but I really appreciated dinner and had a cup of ice cream tonight with a clear conscience.

Since we seem to get back to ice cream every other paragraph I'll tell you about our ice cream man. The three of us consume great quantities of ice cream and the way it goes is always "I'll buy if you fly" or "I'm flyin' if you're buyin'." Anyhow, the person who flies generally ends up buying about four cups of ice cream from the fountain down on the mess decks. Consequently the sailor who acts as ice cream man knows us pretty well and doesn't even bother to ask how many but just starts filling cups until

we let him know where to stop. The ice cream isn't very good because it is made from reconstituted milk - we don't have any fresh milk over here at all. When I get back to the States I'm going to go on a milk diet until I'm sick of it!!

The letter I am reading of yours ends telling of your staying with Cathy K. for the next few days. They must have been exciting days because you never signed the letter. Your grades sound great!! I am delighted to announce that I am still holding my A average in Geology I. *[by correspondence course thru UC Berkeley]*

I'm now on a new letter [24 April] and I am happy to hear you enjoyed my "book" as Mother called it. I have since had a falling out with Angie. She started getting very demanding and started making such a fuss about us getting married that I thought it best to call the whole thing to a quick and desperate close. This is a problem that Americans have here - Filipino girls very much desire American husbands, and some just won't take no for an answer. Anyhow I think we have probably left Subic for good so it doesn't matter so much. I have many pictures which I will send when I get them developed. This probably spoils the story but then that's life.

I well remember "Edy's infamous sundaes". We had an Edy's at Stanford too.

Regarding mail service - if you get the right address on mail it should reach me in 6 days. However any mistake confuses the post office and then it may take 6 weeks. The zip code is now 96602 for all Marines to separate it from Navy mail. Otherwise your addressing is fine and all mail has been coming thru on time except for when we were in combat and had no mail service. They were afraid of having it captured and used by the Cong nefariously.

I just glanced up at the bulletin board here in the wardroom and judging by the air operations for tomorrow we will be within helicopter distance of DaNang. This is the most we have had since we left Subic. What ever is coming up must either be very secret or not important enough to bother mentioning to us. The latest rumor is "liberty in Hong Kong ???" We've learned not to put much stock in rumors but this one sure sounds nice.

If you can, please share this letter with Mom and Dad because I missed some stuff in the letter I just wrote them and the DaNang bit I just found out about.

Much love and thanks for the letters, Mark

PS. I am a Trung wee [1st Lt.] and you can trade one "C" ration "thit biff tek" [beefsteak] for one "bia" [need I translate] in the local village. Maybe I should take out an extension course in Vietnamese.

Operation Osage - 27-29 April 1966

Dear Folks, 25 April 1966 [Mon]

This is the second and last installment of the article on Operation Jackstay. I would appreciate a copy if you are able to get it done up. I'm sorry it took so long -- it's kind of old now -- but perhaps it will be interesting. Feel free to edit because it needs it. I hope you can figure out my notations and all.

We have another operation coming up starting this Wednesday morning. The pilots think it is just to protect the rice harvest or something and probably won't have any enemy contact. We have the word our battery probably won't even be taken ashore but we're standing by. This one is supposed to be about 4 or 5 days long at the most and probably three. Then there are rumors of another operation before we head for Okinawa, sometime around the 2nd of May. That's about all there is for the old SLF.

I was very happy to get the clipping you sent about the formation of the 9th MAB on Okinawa. Since then we have heard more about it by bits and pieces. 2/11, our battalion, is in support of the 5th Marines but we have word from our squadron that 2/11 is now in Chu Lai. If the 9th MAB does form up on Okie that is probably where we will all end up.

[The Marine Expeditionary Force was renamed Marine Amphibious Force because the term "expeditionary" had bad connotations from the days of the French in Vietnam. The new term was used in other ways, such as MAB; Marine Amphibious Brigade, which was an infantry regiment augmented with supporting forces for flexibility.]

Another bit of news is that the SLF will be furnished by the 9th MAB which will mean a rotation of one BLT out of four for sea duty every month or so. This could be an ideal way to spend the war except that the combat pay will only be a quarter of what it would be if we were in Vietnam. Also I imagine we will be able to hit a lot of different ports along the way. All is rumor now so will keep you posted.

Love, Mark

PS. Love those clippings; also "Peanuts." :-)

29 April 1966

Dear Folks,

Just returned to the ship from a small operation just north of DaNang and south of Hue. We considered it another easy one and until about an hour ago no one had any idea we would lose anybody. The name of this one is Osage and the events of this afternoon will probably put it in the news.

You remember I mentioned earlier this week that Howtars might be going in on an operation the BLT was assigned starting Wednesday morning. We were finally given a "definite maybe" Tuesday afternoon and told to remain on 30 minute standby after H+2 [h-hour was set for 0630] Along about noon on D-day, Wednesday, we received our call and by 1400 we were on the beach. It was a beautiful beach with white sand, shallow water and so clear that as we came in low we could see Manta rays swimming along the bottom and sharks out in the deeper water. As we flew over White Beach we could see a couple hundred Marines swimming or lying on their air mattresses on the water. The beach was packed, as usual. There were amtracks parked in the treeline at intervals along the beach with several Ontos scattered in among them. Delta battery [105's] had already set in and we set in next to them. Once again we discovered that the Col. and his CP were in the same area and we were not happy.

LtCol. Harold L. Coffman was the grunt CO of 1/5 and not real popular with us artillery types as you will learn in subsequent letters. The Ontos was a very unique tanklike piece of armament with 6 recoilless rifles mounted on it. It will also be described in a later letter.

I recall the humid heat and mosquitoes during the night; trying to sleep using a sheet as protection from the bites but being too hot to be covered in even a sheet.

I have mentioned the utility jacket I wore on Jackstay. It was my Dad's in WWII, cut shorter than the regular jacket so therefore cooler to wear, a herringbone weave so I thought it made me look "old corps" which was cool in both senses of the word. Capt. Dyer didn't like it and told me so as we were

preparing to launch out on this operation. He said something to the effect of how do you think that makes you look to the troops, which made me feel uncomfortable. I also felt that my relations with the Capt. had become strained over time for various reasons and when he decided to put Joe in charge of the FDC and switch me to working for Curt in the Exec Pit, I felt like I had been fired. None of this appeared in the letters.

For the next two days nothing happened. We heard reports that the grunt companies had been taking heat casualties but no contact with enemy yet. Thursday afternoon we had swim call and for a brief hour enjoyed the blissful coolness of the sea before returning to the hot, humid land. I have never sweat so much in my life. On Jackstay I mentioned that our skin was always wet, but this time it would pour off in rivers just standing still.

Last night we received word we would be going back to the ship today at about 1300 so we fired up our ammunition in another FFEX type shoot [*field firing exercise; a Camp Pendleton training thing*] and staged our gear on the beach waiting for our choppers. The first wave landed about 1330 and took troops back to the ship. I was on the second trip out and went back, dropped my gear in my cabin, and went up to start checking our ordinance gear as it came aboard. As I was standing by the medical receiving station which Curt and I were using as a check point, the word came over the IMC [shipboard public address system] that six “med evacs” were coming in. Naturally, not having heard anything of the preceding 20 minutes of action we expected to see the typical heat casualties, but that’s not the kind they were at all.

It seems that just after the last howtar was lifted from the beach, a tremendous explosion was heard from the direction of the peninsula which extended out to the right of White Beach facing the ocean. We pieced the bits together and learned that “C” Company had been sweeping across the neck of a peninsula and had been caught in an observed mine type ambush. The sweeping elements had already passed over and the XO, 1st Sgt., and Corpsman in charge were caught by it and killed.

One story we got was that they were moving with a group down to a water hole and suddenly a semi circle in front of them burst into fire and shrapnel. It was either very good planning or an awfully lucky detonation that got who they got. There were only a few more besides those. They now figure they’ve got a good bunch of VC out on the peninsula and I’m waiting for morning to see if they will have shelled it down to sea level. I think I have now had a glimpse of the horror of war that you can only get by experiencing it. I only hope it doesn’t strike much closer to home than this. I knew the XO pretty well but I hate to think how much worse it would be if they were close friends or troops in the battery. And this may well come sooner or later.

My most vivid memory of this was the body bags with twigs sticking out as they were choppered back to the ship and laid out on deck. It was the twigs sticking out that got me; indicating how these guys had been scraped up to put in the bag.

Dear Folks, Saturday, 30 April 1966

The battle is still raging ashore and howtars are still aboard ship. Sure enough, the peninsula was still there this morning. They have been uncovering caves, caches, and other assorted signs of VC occupancy but so far no VC as such. Several sniper rounds have been received and some have found their mark. Casualties however are now very light. The operation has now been extended one more day.

As far as the next destination goes the latest information calls for about 10 days at sea in reserve for an Army operation in the DaNang - ChuLai area and then “in-country” at ChuLai for an indefinite period of time. This is in contradiction to previous word regarding assignment to Okinawa as per the newspaper article. We were even given reason to believe we might be sent to Mt. Fuji, Japan for firing. That is the artillery range for FMF [*Fleet Marine Force*] artillery in WestPac [*western Pacific*]. This would probably have come to pass sometime in May and Lynnae would have been about 4 hours by train from there. Word from people who have been there is that Tokyo is the liberty town almost every weekend. We should find out pretty soon what’s going on - I hope ?? Not only is assignment of the BLT uncertain but we don’t know yet whether or not we will continue to support the BLT.

I understand that small parcels may be mailed to me from the States air mail for 4th class rates. It would certainly be worth looking into. Something that would be very handy would be little plastic bags; like what shirts sometimes come in or smaller ones that are so very common. Anything that needs to be kept dry has to be in one. You can't just put something in your pocket because perspiration and or rain will soon have it sopping. Another possible and welcome present would be fizzies! Also drink mixes like Wyler's Cool-aid. If you know anyone who wants to send something to a service man these are the appreciated items; not cookies and cakes etc. which arrive in something less than delicious condition sometimes. One father sent his son [one of our cannoneers] a bottle of whisky. The postal inspector sent a letter in lieu of the parcel stating that "the bottle had been discovered in a damaged condition and emitting an offensive odor" [we chortled] and that "the contents of the mail sack were in a dampened condition and also emitting the same odor." That would be an interesting puzzle for the recipient of an odorous letter to try to figure out.

Answer to question about censorship: No mail is censored. Casualty reports are classified so I omit numbers.

In Country Friday, 6 of May ('66)

Dear World;

This at last is the final almighty word and the word is augh!! Last night about 1930 we received notice that by the following morning at 0600 we would be packed up bag and baggage and prepared to land at Chu Lai. This morning, after an amazing melee of packing, we loaded our gear aboard our motor transport and it is now in Chu Lai. Troops are still aboard ship but we should follow to the beach this afternoon or more likely tomorrow. I don't believe it.

For the past month the various reports as to what was to be done with Howtars were a wonder to try to keep up with. When we left Pendleton, we understood that when we were finished as SLF we would go "in country" for the remainder of our tour but since then so many conflicting possibilities were announced we have really had no idea that original plan held any water. Recently of course there was word passed that the entire BLT would go to Okinawa as part of the 9th MAB. Since 2/11 is supporting the 5th Marines (or was ??) we expected we would go there anyway. But then we heard that elements of 2/11 were already in Chu Lai as well as Okinawa as well as Japan and so it began to get confused. Then we heard from the supply people that our gear was being signed over to the new SLF, 3/5 so we began to wonder if maybe we would stay on as government SLF personnel. Then the word was passed this week that the BLT was definitely going to Chu Lai and get off. Naturally, we assumed Howtars would be going with the BLT. Then about Wednesday they said Howtars were staying aboard; probably, going back to Okinawa, and perhaps, no one knew for sure but the chances seemed good -- continuing on with the new SLF. Then last night, - we had heard nothing to the contrary so had assumed we were staying aboard -- we got the word to jump. Now, believe it or not, there is rumor that a bird colonel says we may come back aboard ship in a week or so after the new SLF gets aboard. All the rumors I have enumerated here were passed on a battalion or higher level. These are nothing, as you may well imagine, compared to rumors passed by lower echelons all the way down to the most boot troopie.

Now, the real gem stone, one of my friends who is an FO [*artillery forward observer*] for D Battery 105's (by the way, this is the same D that I first reported to at Pendleton) bought an Akai X355 in the Philippines and decided that it would be too much to try to carry it "in country" with him. We bartered around awhile and finally, last night I decided to buy it. (This was before the word was passed about going ashore.) The conditions were that he would pay all shipping expenses and insurance to get it back to the states in the event something unexpected came up such as I have mentioned. So, Curt, Joe and I had just settled back to enjoy the music and think about how bad everyone else was having it, having to pack ashore and our bombshell went off.

Everybody admits that there is no place for us in Chu Lai but here we go. I sent my Akai tape recorder ashore this morning with footlockers, seabags etc. in the back of a P.C. (grim disbelieving face) and to think I worried about carrying a typewriter!! Well anyway, I understand they have shipping facilities in Chu Lai so stand by to receive one insured tape recorder. Only one thing, if it looks like conditions are possible for a tape recorder, I might keep it for awhile to qualify for some sort of duty waivers which take some time "in country" to get. I don't understand them yet but I understand that the duty runs about \$100 or more! Curt just said he thinks it runs about 50%. If I can possibly store it in Chu Lai with any degree of safety and wait until next December, I can ship it on my orders. I have heard they are building up Chu Lai on a permanent basis so I may be asking you to send me some tapes on a loan basis soon. At any rate, though I think I made a mistake, at least I gave the other guy a break. He was really up tight, having to carry it ashore with an operating infantry company. Oh well, we'll have the jazziest battery position in the Far East. I wonder how many radio batteries it will take to run it ???

You probably realize by now we have nothing to do with "Hot Springs." [*an operation*] We have heard of an operation which fits your description and we think the BLT may be an on-call reserve for it but we're not sure. The clippings you send are about the most news we get. Many thanks from all of us.

I caught a slight cold about a week ago and so my lung troubles are right back where they were when we left the States. No worse however. I don't think I will have any trouble with the climate.

The .22 magnum [Colt revolver] I brought has some mechanical problems. The lever that rotates the cylinder jams slightly periodically and after taking it apart and comparing it with the Smith .45 I have come to the conclusion that Colt makes an inferior product. Several of the troops want to buy it and I think I could probably get about \$35 for it. Should I sell it or not? You remember also the barrel was blown. If you would rather keep it it would be no problem in my footlocker, but I'm not impressed with it mechanically or metallurgically.

Thank you for the color prints. You should have the ones I sent by now. I hope you won't be scandalized by some but please remember this is not the States.

We have had no shortage of anything really yet, especially ammo, since we haven't really had to put any strain on the supply system with the amount of firing we've done. We brought much more than enough from Pendleton with us, just from what was allotted for "training" which we never got. I know that last will burn you up but it does me too. Joe and Curt say they fired for training even less on the East coast [Camp Lejeune] because they were always sweating inspections.

I was happy to hear the rundown on cameras from Consumer Reports. In light of that I think I will hold out for the ones you listed and hope we eventually get somewhere where I can buy them. I still can't believe they would keep us in ChuLai straight without a break for 10 months. The camera the Sgt. was selling has been sold. It was a more expensive model apparently.

So long for now. ChuLai in the morning and I'm not looking forward to it. The place sounds grim - like a desert.

Love, Mark

First Day "In Country" - Budda Mtn. 8-12 May, 1966

This account was written on the back of an elevation map labeled Song [river] Tra Khuc, which is the name of the river cutting across an area labeled Trung Phan [name of the village?], Tinh Quang Ngai [province]. It was amazing my folks were able to decipher it; sometimes I was barely able to see what I was writing, like at the end. But it was the only paper I had.

The Song TraKhuc eventually flows to the City QuangNgai, a city of great strategic importance to I Corps.

As noted in a subsequent letter, the name of the mountain I was on was Nui Tranh; Budda Mtn. was where the colonels were headed to command the operation. But the Budda Mtn. name kinda stuck. Colonel Peter H. Hahn was the 11th Marines CO.

I feel like "big brother" as I sit here on top of my mountain and look down for miles in all directions and "watch" every detail of the lives of many, many Vietnamese people. I am acting as FO [forward observer] on a mountain top in the middle of a rice paddy plain just south and west of ChuLai. Originally there was a team from Force Recon [Marine] up here purely as a spot team for any activity. But the observation was so good and targets so plentiful that they decided to put an FO in to call some artillery missions. The first I knew of the operation was 20 minutes before I left to go on it; the afternoon of the first day that I had been "in country." I was immediately helilifted in to the top of Budda Mountain and told to make liaison with the Recon spot team. I flew in with a pair of bird colonels in a Huey, one a Marine Air Col. and the other the CO of the 11th Marines. My radio operator and I got out at Budda Mtn; the Colonels were just along for the ride.

Budda Mountain sticks up out of the middle of the plain like a cone shaped skyscraper and perched on its peak is a small village of Montagnard tribesmen with a Trung-uy [wee] [first lieutenant] in charge. It holds a very strategic position with its steep sides and excellent visibility in all directions. All the houses are dug down into the peak itself - some thatched, others sandbagged into bunkers. Barbed wire and trench lines run around all parts of the village so that wherever you go your are either jumping across a trench, climbing from one trench to the next one higher, or walking along a parapet. The houses face on the trenches as on a street. The very tip-top peak is a man-made bunker, sandbagged thoroughly

with a pillbox at one end [and the highest point]. It is from here and from on top of "here" with a BC scope that I have been firing my missions.

This is the late afternoon of my second day here and the 8th day for the recon team and as far as I'm concerned I would just as soon spend the rest of the war right here. I want to describe the scene. There are mountains on the far side of the plain to the east, south and west, but on the north and northeast the plain extends to the sea. There are several other peaks sticking up out of the plain but none so high as Budda.

As the sun gets low over the western mountains and the cool evening breeze starts up after terrific heat of the day, everything seems to come to life. Farmers down on the plain who have moved across their fields slowly all day or stayed in the shade of patches of trees between the rice paddies, now move out to collect their cattle, carry their produce home, or do any repair work necessary on the dikes and paddies.

These farmers wear mostly the black pajamas of the area but many wear blue, white or tan shirts or trousers now. They all wear coolie hats which are straw but look white in the sun in the distance, especially against the black of the pajamas. As we search the plains for signs of suspicious activity, the white hats always stand out as signifying a person.

The cooking fires up here on Budda Mountain have been going since about 4 o'clock and by now most people have eaten and are sitting on top of their sandbagged roofs or in front of their thatched roofs. All that is visible of a house is the roof since the rest is underground.

I had dinner with the Dai-uy [Captain] who is apparently either a higher unit commander or else a visiting officer since the Trung-uy [1st Lt.] is actually in charge of the troops. We ate in his "tent" which his troops built in about an hour from a bamboo pole framework, split bamboo rafters, and dried grass thatch. The dinner consisted of rice, naturally, and a sauce similar to the Philippine mole, made from bits of the worst parts of a chicken, hot peppers, and a Vietnamese soy sauce made from pressed [rotten] fish-essence of fish I guess you'd call it. [called nuc mam] Not having chop sticks I ate it out of a "C" ration can with a spoon but they all ate out of blue and white china rice bowls with chopsticks.

The countryside is ever changing with the different positions of the sun. As the sun hits the water in the rice paddies from various directions, the dikes may stand out in relief, the plain may look flat and uniformly green, or the paddies may reflect like so many mirrors in varying degrees and color, like a mosaic. That is the way it is now. Another beautiful effect is the illumination shells at night, and more grimly, the reflection of the explosive and white phosphorous shells as they burst in an unfriendly village or in the paddies. The tracers also reflect, looking like two converging paths of orange-red fire.

Winding through and often merging with the rice paddies are the wide, shallow meandering rivers, some of which I think have actually ceased to flow and have been dammed up into paddies. The high ground where the villages are is only a few feet higher than the paddies, but here there are trees and open grassy areas usually starting abruptly at the edge of the paddy with a stand of trees. Not to be misleading I should add that rice paddies also produce corn, watermelons, and squash.

The war has surprisingly little effect on these people or at least the effect is not what one would expect. Last night about this time, I called artillery in on a village that had been showing signs of VC activity. I finally ended up with two batteries of 105's and 2 batteries of 155's in effect. The show was pretty spectacular. The people stood outside, much as they are watching the sunset tonight, nursing their babies and cheering and oh-ing and ah-ing like we do on the Fourth of July. Night before last, the Hueys came in on several villages with rockets and tracers. They loved that show too. But the most amazing is the reaction of the people whose village gets hit. After one heavy concentration of napalm hit one village yesterday, our next surveillance was that the villagers were out collecting the metal from the pods and stacking it. When FDCC sent back - did I want to call a concentration in on them? - I couldn't think of any reason why I should so I didn't. People who have had tremendous quantities of explosive dropped on their village, go out the next morning to farm as if nothing had happened. Farmers working in a paddy next to one being hit by artillery hardly look up as the rounds fall. Unbelievable!

Another village we hit with air strikes was thoroughly plastered. As soon as the strike was over, two VC came out, one carrying a machine gun, walking. He ran a little when a helicopter flew by but except for that they seemed very nonchalant. We watched them go into a trench in the next village along a road the marines would be advancing over. I called in a concentration on them which hit practically on top of them. There were a total of six in there with the machine gun and four ran away unhurt. I don't understand why the rounds did so little damage but I am sure they knew they had been hit. I recommended use of fuse V.T. next time since the Q. had so little effect. So far I have not been able to observe the effect of V.T.

When a fire mission is called in, it is up to the forward observer or FO to recommend what type of round and what type fuse to use. HE is high explosive and the most common. Fuse quick or Q detonates instantly on impact. VT or variable time can be set to detonate just before impact, which can be more effective as an air burst where troops are in trenches or holes.

At first fire is adjusted onto the target by one gun. As soon as that gun hits close enough to assure success, the rest of the guns "fire for effect" using the same data as the adjusting gun. There are many variations for how fire will be patterned, but all will be as planned unless a gun "fires out", which can be a deadly mistake.

This is now, the morning of the third day and friendly units are advancing toward Buddha Mtn. from all directions. We have been going crazy craning our necks in all directions. Yesterday morning a large Marine force made an amphibious landing across a river to the SE. First indication was tremendous concentrations of artillery on several villages along the river and then many villagers streaming out along the roads away from the villages. I am sure it was a small percentage of the population escaping but it was the only instance so far of anyone caring enough to run away. Then nothing happened for quite a while except for leaflet drops (they drop billions of "free conduct passes" for anyone who wants free conduct into a RVN controlled area) and loudspeaker planes broadcasting in Vietnamese. Then while we were looking the other direction there was a crackle of rifles and we turned to see the amphibious force crossing in rubber rafts covered by Marines strung out along the far bank. Meanwhile another force had been advancing up the plain from the N. - I believe this is 1/5 - and these were the troops the light machine gun and people in the trenches were waiting for. We watched them [*the Marines*] off and on all day and they looked very bored as they sauntered across the paddies feeling as safe as anyone in the world. Apparently the concentration I called in had scared the V. C. out if it had not killed them because there was no resistance.

Slightly later another force came down the valley from the West along a road, skirmishers out on both sides searching the villages as they came. They eventually moved into an old ruined French Fort and made camp about 1600. This morning they moved out to sweep the villages and now the fort is thick with people looking for good stuff in their trash.

One of our main jobs is spotting and reporting suspicious activity. The leader of the Recon spot team is SSgt. Fowler, a very capable and young, hard-charging Marine. Yesterday afternoon he picked out a house where some man had brought a brief case. Also he saw a woman bury something and cover the place with straw. That was enough for him; he reported it and started watching the house like a hawk. It did look suspicious when people kept coming and going; mostly coming until we had about ten men inside. Another man climbed a tree outside.

By this time the Marines were within 300 meters of the house, but nobody went to check it out. Sgt. Fowler was sure only a Viet Cong officer would be running around with a brief case so when the man came back outside and another man lounging against a tree sprang to his feet, Sgt. Fowler was convinced. He said, "Yep! 'Heels together, feet at a 45 degree angle, thumbs along the seams of his trousers.' That man must be at least a major."

This morning we noticed Marines all around the house but nobody bothered to search out Sgt. Fowler's suspicious activity. Boy was he disgusted.

We had another couple of suspicious characters spotted, one in a green shirt which Sgt. Fowler considers a sure sign of a VC. They were walking along talking to everybody and carrying a hoe and a bundle apiece but they certainly weren't doing any work with their hoes.

I stopped watching them after a while as I scanned the countryside, but I could hear Sgt. Fowler mumbling, "They're in step, they're swinging their arms - 6 to the front, 3 to the rear." My radio operator asked, "Forty inches, back to chest?"

"Yes! Now one of them is counting cadence: 'Hup two three for' [only in Vietnamese] . Those are North Vietnamese, hard corps regulars sure enough!"

Other Marines are now walking among the farmers and sweeping through the rice paddies in close to our mountain and approaching the village where we laid in the artillery two days ago. They are apparently in it by now as there are several fires going in there. The plain out beyond the village is dotted with Marines.

This is now the evening of our forth and last day out here. We will be "extracted" tomorrow morning. Very little action today. Friendly forces have passed by our mountain and have departed going in all directions. If nothing else, this operation must have really confused the VC. First we chased them in one direction and then the other. Today we spotted some agent running around with rifles; one woman had a pole across her shoulders with a rifle hanging from either end, besides her baskets. I started adjusting on a group of about 15 at 2,000 meters and finally after they had split up one by one I cornered one very tired joker in a dirt or sand hut and fired for effect at it. I'm sure it did not hurt anybody but I sure gave him a run for his money. Must have chased him for almost 2,000 more meters.

Little by little, I have picked up the situation of the people here. The Montagnard or Mountain People have been somewhat squeezed out of their homeland by the wars which have been fought over their land. The people here on this mountain were brought here to colonize this peak for the sole purpose of holding it for its military value. They are paid as soldiers and their supplies are issued by one of their own people who acts as quartermaster.

They do their shopping in the village market in the nearest village which is only about 200 meters away but almost straight down. The vertical interval is about 100 meters.

In the morning the women go down the trail with empty baskets and water cans and during the rest of the forenoon and early afternoon they come puffing back up the trail with their heavy loads on their heads and their bare torsos glistening with perspiration. The women and girls uniformly wear a black wrap-around sarong made of a light shiny cloth which comes to just below the knee. Then they may wear a long blouse with a drawn-in waist of black, white, or other colorful material or, during the heat of the day, no top at all. Their black hair may be left long, or tied in a bun behind their head. Afternoons are spent socializing, suckling their babies - they all seem to have one, even girls that appear to be no more than 12 or 13 - or just lounging about. I noticed they all seem to have a "tan line" across the back from a bra which they wear under the blouse; but it is strange because they never wear the bra when the blouse is not worn.

The men wear a green utility uniform of cotton material with flat pockets but they rapidly change to various colors of swimming trunks and T-shirts in the afternoon and evening. The work day is about four hours long during the morning when they maintain their trenches and parapets. The rest of the day is leisure except, of course, for watches which they stand at night. They have intermittent fire fights with the bushes during the night, as though to keep themselves awake, and ding away at birds during the day for practice and sport.

The men are very friendly and try constantly to socialize and be around when things are going on. They stay out of the way very well though when things are busy.

The children are around a lot and sometimes get underfoot. They are well behaved though and amazingly intelligent. They scavenge through our trash and love to play with matches and smoke cigarette butts or whole cigarettes if they are lucky enough to find or beg one. They know several very catchy folk tunes too which they run around singing in groups of four or five.

These people have a good life and are certainly not being hurt by the war. They have no love for lowland Vietnamese who consider them inferior and that probably accounts for the glee with which they observe our bombardment of their neighbors. Our stay with these people has been very enjoyable and it is so dark now I cannot see where to put the dots or cross the t's.

HILL "54" - 2/11 Reunites

26 - 30 May, 1966

At long last we have arrived at a place we can call home. Since we came ashore in Chu Lai we have packed up and moved, bag and baggage, to three different positions, each of which we were assured we would be staying in for a "long time." These positions were considered "permanent" as opposed to tactical or operational, and each time we were psychologically prepared to settle down and set up housekeeping. However, as usual, "the word" was just as changing as ever and changed as fast as we could move.

The first position was in ChuLai where we were attached to the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines [Regiment] 1/11. This artillery battalion was at Pendleton when I first reported last June and moved overseas while I was in the hospital with pneumonia. In fact, if I had not been in the hospital I would have been transferred and sent over with them at that time. Needless to say we felt right at home, at last seeing so many familiar faces again, many of whom were transferees from 2/11. We moved into the sand dunes about 5 miles from the beach and set up our camp of huge GP tents [*general purpose tents are barracks size rooms*].

We got there on a Sunday evening (8th of May) and the following Monday afternoon I was on my way to the top of a mountain peak held by Montagnards, - as an FO (forward observer) for Operation Montgomery [*as described previously as Budda Mtn.*]. I was informed I had 20 minutes to get ready and they meant business; things happen like that here. It was on the top of this mountain of Nui Tranh that I spent most of the battery's stay in Chu Lai. It was not Budda Mtn. where the village [*and Recon outpost*] was - it was Nui Tranh. I made a mistake. Budda was where the operation CP (command post) was set up. I got my first ride in a Huey going out there and it is just as thrilling riding in one as it looks like it would be, to see them skimming over the trees. I mentioned I went out with the 11th Marine [Regimental] CO, Col. Hahn.

As soon as our first elements got ashore we began to hear rumors that the battalion would be moving inland shortly. Since the Anti-Communist forces started pushing the perimeters inland away from the coastline as they built up strength, it was necessary for the artillery support to move out into positions where they could cover the maximum amount of territory with fire support. It is not a matter of having friendly and enemy lines which keep moving forward on the ground. It is more like being a police force in the bad part of a city. Trouble can break out anywhere and it must be countered quickly and as adequately as possible because if it is not, people get hurt. Artillery provides one of the best means of quick action because of its flexibility; ie. a 105 battery can support two areas 20 miles apart, one right after the other, if it is in the middle between them. By placing artillery units about strategically, a lot of ground can be covered. So this is why a week after we landed we left Chu Lai.

For the brief few days I was in Chu Lai after I returned from Nui Tranh, I learned a great many things about this funny war we are fighting. The Chu Lai area is about as "hot" as any, as far as combat and VC activity goes but this has not affected regulations and safety procedures which are at least as strict as those encountered in garrison. [*Probably new units coming in still acting like garrison units with all the usual regulations.*]

Upon landing in Chu Lai we were stunned into obeying unlikely clothing and activity regulations set up by 1/11. Examples: utility jackets must be worn in spite of the heat except when actually working and even then only strip to T-shirt; sleeves must be rolled above the elbow; no showering in the rain; etc. ad nauseum. Safety regulations are strict too, primarily because any slip up resulting in casualties to friendlies nearly always means somebody gets relieved of his command. Often a battalion commander will refuse to relieve a battery commander if he feels it is wrong, and then the battalion commander is relieved as well. It is not difficult to get into trouble either because an incorrect elevation or charge, or a 100 mil error in deflection can put a round in a friendly village instead of an unfriendly one, - or on a friendly outpost or patrol.

One night in our second position somebody put a round on an ARVN guard station by a bridge by mistake, wounding a guard. Captain Dyer really looked panicked and checked everything we had fired to

make sure we could not possibly have fired it, and then went running up to the FSCC [*fire support coordination center*] with all his evidence. It was almost funny seeing everybody getting all kinds of paper work together to cover themselves. This is a policy which is very necessary and done at all levels, ie. having paperwork available to protect yourself in any contingency. It is called CYAw/P [*very well known principle - cover your ass with paper*].

Inspections are another thing to contend with and I have to worry about a motor transport inspection which FMF Pac [*Fleet Marine Force Pacific*] is making throughout the theater soon. I have to start CYAw/P'ing with requisition duplicates and work request duplicates etc. and I should be all right. It does not matter whether the vehicle runs or not but you had better be able to prove that the parts have been put on order or the work request for 2nd and 3rd echelon work has been made.

On the brighter side of Chu Lai, were things like showers, good chow, movies, and a club which had managed to master the art of cold beer by freezing it in a freezer during the day while the generator was running. As the beer froze it was pulled out of the small portable freezer and put into ice chests where it was kept cold until evening. I am pretty well used to warm beer now though.

When we left Chu Lai, we went to support good old 1/5 [*Infantry battalion*] again at a place called "Hill 54" almost 20 miles from Chu Lai. This was our second position. 1/5 ceased to be a BLT as soon as it came ashore and so lost all its reinforcing elements. This was quite a blow for the CO, Lt. Col. Coffman. He had gotten used to considering us as part of his command and did not like having to go thru the 1/11 [*Artillery battalion*] CO for our support. Col. Gasser (gas-sair) [*1/11*] and Col. Coffman fought back and forth over H & I fires, supporting missions, etc.

The most tender spot for the "grunts" though was in motor transport. They soon realized they had to come begging to Howtars if they wanted any of their gear transported or water to drink. They got two water trailers from Service Battalion but needed our 6x's and our water trailer too in order to tow the trailers and have enough water. They almost cried when we left them. I don't know what they are doing now.

When we arrived on Hill 54 there was nothing there but a hill. They said that within two weeks it would be built into a permanent camp with roads, tents with floors, showers, electricity, etc. We were told to expect to be there for at least three months. It was a very pretty place with rice paddies and small villages around it and many trees and grass. We set up the battery partly in a graveyard and partly in rice paddies and proceeded to defend our new home.

First we wore ruts into the rice paddies and dug up the graveyard with our trail pits [*trails are the part of a cannon used to pull it, like a trailer. Pits are dug for the trails to drop into when the cannon is set up for firing and also prevent recoiling backwards*] (troops are instructed never to desecrate a grave - we always stay clear of the individual grave mounds and never walk on them - on purpose anyway.) The final blow to the pretty countryside was when the engineers came in with bulldozers. It was no longer pretty when we left.

Since this area was heavily infiltrated with VC, we had lots of fire missions and lots of snipers shooting at us. There were several convoys a day going between Hill 54 and Chu Lai and these were often sniped at along the way. One convoy was even ambushed by about a squad and the grunts had a good time chasing them around the countryside. Col. Coffman had his own private war with the indigenous personnel in the area. This war was however, a price war.

There is always quite an economic problem in an area when American troops move in. They have quite a bit of money and cannot spend very much of it so it tends to lose its value to them. Consequently they will cheerfully pay 2 to 3 times the going price for vended items like beer and soft drinks. Not only is the economy inflated but the social system is upset as well. Street vendors find themselves making more money than anybody else and "everybody else" gets unhappy and curses the American capitalists. So the Colonel ordered a boycott and held out for 30 piastres for coke and orange soda and 40 P's for Bia Lorne, (Saigon beer). When we left Hill 54 five days later the boycott was still on and the vendors had dwindled in number but stuck to their price of 50 P's for orange and I do not know what they wanted for beer. I wondered how many of the snipers were angry vendors.

Our third and final position was one third of the way back toward Chu Lai on Route 1 from Hill 54. The way we got the story of our transfer away from 1/5 was that Col. Coffman's reputation for the employment of artillery had gotten around and so the Regiment wanted us pulled out. I was on the Recon party when Col. Gasser laid out our new area which would be set up for 2/11 when it eventually found itself completely in Vietnam. We drove off highway 1 into white sand dunes, out through a small village at the edge of a flat sandy plain covered with a sparse growth of tough grass. The following morning the scattered batteries of 2/11 in Vietnam began to converge and by evening the guns of Delta, Echo, and Howtar batteries and a few tents were in, still under the official wing of 1/11. We had word that the headquarters group was on the way from Okinawa. Foxtrot battery is still afloat with the SLF (Special Landing Force) that relieved us.

The first day we laid in the guns and dug out defensive positions to hold off the VC until more sophisticated bunkers could be built. We dug and filled sandbags until well after dark and when the VC probed that night they did not do any damage. The fortification procedure used over here is to start from ground level and build up. Holes are only dug for temporary fighting shelters because they fill up with water right away. So we filled sandbags as fast as we could. As the day drew towards evening Curt, Joe and I began to get a little spooked and decided we would sand bag in our end of the GP tent assigned for battery C.P. and Exec Pit. So we got out with everybody else and filled about 150 sandbags of our own. We made a wall about cot-plus-two-feet high and across the front and sides of the Exec Pit end of the tent where we would be working and sleeping. I was standing XO watch when the first probe hit and was sure happy to slide down behind a wall of sandbags. They threw in three rifle grenades and several hand grenades but they did not really know where we were, obviously, and did no damage. The following day we got most of the rest of the tents up and most of the rest of our gear from Hill 54 and Chu Lai. We also laid out and filled sandbags for our main ammunition bunker which will be a formidable structure when it is finished. Curt said "If we get hit again I'm gettin' in the ammo bunker."

Unfortunately we neglected the bunkers on the perimeter because that night we got hit again and some damage was done. One of our cannoneers was killed [*Hamilton*]. We had one KIA and nobody else was even scratched. Apparently the man had been outside of the bunker behind it sitting on his air mattress when a grenade came over and landed behind him. He was a very quiet man, had one of the highest GCT intelligence scores of anybody at Camp Pendleton when we were there, and always seemed to be in a kind of dream world. He should never have been out where he was, so in keeping with the safety idea we now have staff NCO's standing perimeter duty to ensure it not happening again. Several bunker walls were damaged so it was apparent they would have to be rebuilt stronger. Of course after what happened the men needed no encouragement in rebuilding strong bunkers.

Finally on the third night the perimeter guard was organized to the extent that all [*defensive*] posts were well coordinated by wire and all battery's Exec Pits were tied into the loop. Our battery, known as Whisky - all mortar batteries are "Whisky" - was selected to fire illumination. We had two guns, each pointing to opposite sides of the position, and a man standing by beside it with a round [*of illumination ready*]. At the first sound of firing or at a moment's notice, he would drop the round into the tube. It worked so well it was almost as if the sentries could turn the lights on like a flashlight. There was some firing, even had a 50 caliber weapon fire some rounds at us but as soon as one of our tanks started moving his turret around toward it, the 50 kept quiet from then on. It seems to be an unwritten rule here involving escalation. You do not fire a tank unless they are using a pretty big weapon themselves and a 50 cal. bordered on escalation. It was that night that I first started writing this letter. Last night and the night before that, we were not bothered and I believe it is the instantaneous illumination set-up that did it.

There has been very little time for writing this week. Today is the 26th, Thursday I think. Hamilton was killed last Sunday night. We moved into this position last Saturday. We have been busy just about every minute. I have been able to write most of this on XO watch. (I am now Asst. XO and Joe is FDO) which we have to share, half the night apiece. I realize you will not have heard anything from me for quite a while when you get this (and the letter on the map) but the conditions have not been conducive to writing letters until now since we were never settled enough to unpack very much. I now have a cozy

little CP tent which I share with Joe although I spend most of my time in Curt's tent in the Exec Pit. I have even made a desk out of ammo boxes.

Tuesday, LtCol. Stribling, CO of 2/11, came in the advance party from HQ group to check out the area. It was really a big lift seeing him again and the rest of the people from Pendleton. It seems like all the CO's we have come in contact with so far have been such pig headed egotists. Col. Stribling is a real fine man and I think is appreciated a lot more now than he was before.

You asked about what kind of missions we fire. On Jackstay we fired primarily H&I fires and very few observed missions during the day. Now that we are "in country" we are firing a lot more actual missions but the bulk of the firing for everybody is still H&I type. Last night we fired H&I's steadily all night, changing off using one gun at a time and were behind most of the time. *[Harassment and interdiction fires are fired on an hourly schedule set up by infantry units so that they know when to stay clear of an area.]* We are not as badly off as the other two batteries though because they have to have safety officers check each piece before it is fired. They have already had the chance to fire a few errors and that is the result. I imagine it is just a matter of time before we will be in the same boat but I hope not. They say that their watch schedule in the Exec Pit is "12 hours on and 12 on."

There are two officers per battery available for watch since the FDO has his own watch in FDC. Therefore they trade off - one is safety officer while the other is XO. They can sleep between missions during the day because there are not many, but they do not sleep much at night. Actually, though, nobody is getting much sleep and I think it is stupid. Sooner or later the lack of sleep is going to start resulting in errors.

Dearest Cathy; 29 May, 1966

I hope my lack of communication for so long has not been worrisome to you all, stateside. As you will read in the epistle I wrote "the parents", I have been moving about the rural Vietnamese countryside with my helmet and body armor looking for a place to call home and to defend etc. That's the kind of war this is. When there are no lines - enemy or friendly - you have to decide to sit on a piece of ground and call it home before you have anything to fight about. The rest of the time you have very little chance of seeing a VC except a sniper or something.

We had some excitement today. Our position here has become fairly well built up in the past week and so we were surprised to hear firing today. You very seldom hear any action during daylight. Apparently we had a survey team working outside our wire (barbed) and they started drawing some fire from the nearby village. Of course when our perimeter sentries open up from their sandbagged bunkers, they get excited and feel they are putting on a 4th of July display so a sudden, tremendous volume of fire issued forth in the direction of the village. The surveyors were scrambling one direction under the wire and the villagers were scrambling the other way for cover and that is about the way it was left. ??

We now have all kinds of weapons in here with us. Besides the two 105 batteries we came in with, there has been a 155 battery, a 155 howitzer battery self propelled (artillery mounted on a tank-like vehicle), and a beautiful thing - or two beautiful things - called "Guns". It is a 155 mm Gun, also self propelled. It is called a gun instead of a howitzer because its barrel is about twice as long and so is its range. When they fired a few rounds last night they had to notify everybody in the immediate area to hold their ears and hang onto their britches. They are apparently supporting a recon. team on the Cambodian border, way over on the other side of the country. Or maybe it is the Laotian border that is over there - I forget.

Dave sent me a copy of the "Peliboy" *[this was a Cal Berkeley student publication that parodied Playboy magazine]* which I enjoyed very much and now so is the rest of the battery. It is hard to tear people away so we can conduct a decent fire mission. Things like that - common ordinary commentaries on a normal U.S. type environment, even if a little exaggerated and caricatured, are very gratifying. I feel more in touch. As soon as I get my tape recorder operating, I am going to ask somebody just to tape an afternoon of radio, like KFWB or KRLA, and send it to me - complete with commercials, news, publicity games and all. Also just a tape of an evening at home or a barbeque party with Norman at it - but it would

be hard to get it candid if anyone knew they were being taped. I also would appreciate any and all pictures you would not mind passing through my hands from time to time. I am not really homesick; it is too fascinating an experience over here to actually be that, but I feel like the world may be getting a little ahead of me and I will be behind when I get back.

We have been working pretty hard around here since we arrived. In fact we keep going right around the clock, firing H & I fires at night, and building during the day. I will say I am at the moment extremely sick of the barest thought of the long night exec watches for H & I fires. Most nights so far we have had missions one right after the other, as fast as we could fire, almost all night.

I will be due for R&R (rest & recreation) this summer starting in July but being due and actually getting it are two different things. The only really hopeful possibility is if we go back afloat on SLF, which we probably will some time. If there is any possibility of your coming over here when I can meet you I will let you know but don't count on it. My die is presently cast in Vietnam.

May 30

Today, among other things, we built Curt a floor. High on the priority list of things to do to improve the position area is decking all tents. The large GP tents have prefab decks that come out from Chu Lai in pieces and are laid down and the tent put up over them. For the CP tents, however, we have to build our own decking from scratch which takes a while. What you have to do first is get some ammo boxes by salvaging the boards and nails and build a framework with a platform about 4 1/2 inches above the ground - the width of a board. I thought of Uncle Bob as we threw away hundreds of hinges and hasps and screws which we took off the boxes. As soon as they decide where to put Joe's and my tent (we call it the BOQ) we can start in on our floor too. Then I can start thinking about setting up the tape recorder. Hopefully we will soon have some electricity. - I have been thinking seriously about piping the music around for the troops to listen to while they work. I know I work better and feel the burden less when there is music and I am sure they do too. - - -

Just sitting here in the cool of the afternoon (cool meaning the perspiration has ceased to drip spontaneously) on my cot in my tent thinking about the music I can almost imagine sitting on the lanai with the hi-fi going in the background and the sun getting very low behind the Country Club and a delicious sort of sultry summer feeling in the air. I am not homesick as I told Cathy, because there is so much new and exciting going on here but I have very delicious thoughts of summertime in California. I believe this will be the first summer I have been away entirely.

1 June, 1966

This morning we had reveille guns fire for us at 0600. It was the peck-and-boom sound of the Ontos up on the 5th Marines' hill and its sound is so different from any of the artillery booms we are used to that everybody woke up and came out to see what was happening. Lying in the tent, it seemed as though the whole thing shook every time the Ontos fired and I figured they must be almost in our own battery position. I was surprised to find them up on the hill we call "Little Roundtop" about 1000 meters away. (The 5th Regimental C.P. is on Big Roundtop - Hill 54 - right next to it and a little closer.)

When Ontos fires it spots in its rounds with a .50 caliber spotting rifle that fires a tracer for better observation. It has some sort of phosphorous-filled projectile which flashes when it hits. So when it fires at a target it has a sound something like "peck - ... peck- ... peck-boom thump." It fires six recoilless rifles and the back blast is tremendous. From here it looked like a great orange tongue of fire lashing out at the rear. We still do not know what the target is specifically but right after that we start getting fire-missions for the same area. It is only about 4000 meters away to our front. We have had quite a few targets like that, that come down as "lots of VC" and only a few miles or less away. It is a little unnerving but so far nothing has come of it.

One night a few days ago we had a target described as "300 VC moving toward our position" at which we then fired the battalion. Our battery fired 24 volleys, broken up into 4 six-volley missions. We were firing shell, mixed so each gun fired, 3 High Explosive and, 3 White Phosphorous on each mission.

It was a beautiful sight when the rounds started landing! The 155 howitzers could just barely hit the short range and since the target was in defilade to us (slightly behind a hill) some of the rounds would not quite make it over the top without hitting. There would be brilliant flashes from behind the hill and then a flash on top with a fountain spray of platinum sparks of white phosphorus. This target was apparently not observed because we never got a surveillance but since we stopped shooting, somebody must have been satisfied.

This is now later in the morning and we are sitting in the Executive's Pit tent watching the show to our front. Apparently they found a pretty good sized force out there where the Ontos was firing this morning because there is now a full scale operation going. About an hour ago, (1000) they had air strikes coming in all over the area; jets would come swooping down over the zone and cut loose with rockets, napalm and heavy machine guns. It is incredible the number of rounds they can fire in one second on a strafing run. Curt says the rate of fire is 5000 rounds per minute which boils down to almost 100 rounds in a second. Tanks have moved up on a hill to our immediate front and have been covering an assembly area and LZ (landing zone) for choppers. The choppers have now commenced dropping troops into the combat zone as they pick them up from the LZ to our front.

As each wave of H-34's goes in with a load of troops, an armed Huey escort chopper gets up high on the formation and then dives down like a hawk on any areas that look like potential or actual danger areas or enemy weapons. He then cuts loose with his rocket pods and/or machine guns - - both mounted heavy machine guns and swivel mounted light M-60's.

They are really softening up the LZ right now with rockets - - there went some white phosphorus. So far we cannot hear any small arms fire but then the wind is blowing the wrong direction. Just got a report that it is a VC platoon and they are trying to cut them off. That is what the chopper is for - - vertical envelopment

. . . . We just got called into the show with a fire mission but promptly were called out again when some choppers started flying around the area. They do not trust us to be able to miss a plane apparently; we were firing almost between planes in formation on Jackstay without any trouble!

I just received letter #24 and I am sure you must have wondered what happened to me over here. No, the civil war has not affected us at all. Actually I think the only people really bothered are the ones close enough to the cities to feel the deprivation of not being able to go into "the Ville" (all towns are "The Ville" over here - - even Olongapo.) - which constitutes the only liberty. As far as any plot behind all this civil war, I do not think so. I talked quite a lot with the ARVN Dai-wee (Capt.) when I was up on Nui Tranh and his attitude was that you come to expect civil war almost as regularly as you predict the seasons of the year. After one government has been in power for a certain time you can start seeing the signs of a change brewing and then pretty soon, sure enough, there is a coup and the government changes. He feels that this is the Vietnamese equivalent to elections and parliamentary procedure.

My bronchitis sequel to the cold I had has gone. However I spent yesterday morning in Chu Lai taking a complete examination by the pulmonary specialist for division as requested by the division surgeon. Your letter to Wally Greene really started the ball rolling. (Mother's note: we had a personally signed answer from General Wallace Greene, jr. in response immediately when we wrote him.) The division surgeon went all the way down through the chain of command and by the time it got to me there was a stack of letters putting their "two-bits" in. It was great going in to the hospital because after the examination was over I had to wait for two hours with nothing to do but go out on the hospital beach and swim and lounge in the sun. It was not for long but it was the first beach call anybody has had so far I think. And I was visualizing being on the beach every afternoon.

No, the monsoon season does not start here until fall and is at its worst during the early winter months. You are evidently referring to the monsoon that hits Saigon and the southern end of Vietnam. That one misses us and the winter monsoon misses them. We will be lucky though being on sand where the mud is no problem.

As I mentioned in some letter to someone, the entire tactical area here is expanding like mad. In fact someone heard that the territory occupied around Chu Lai has tripled in area since January. And this is just with the First Marine Division. This is our sector.

No, again, (another contradiction) I do not think the Chinese influence is too strong - at least not attitude-wise. I have been meaning to read something about the history and culture but have not yet done so. I do understand, though, that China is the national villain of Vietnam. Apparently China has invaded and tried to subjugate the Vietnamese several times in history but has been unsuccessful eventually each time. Also, it seems, China has never been a benevolent conqueror and has given the Vietnamese a deep hate for the Chinese. However, if the writing and speech seem Chinese it may be that Chinese occupation has left its mark on those aspects of the culture.

Apparently the war has stopped for lunch. All is once again quiet to our front. The heat is fantastic so if the VC feel it as much as we do that may be the reason for the break. A siesta here is called "Pock time" (that is the way it is pronounced) and extends from about 11 to 3 when nobody moves.

You wrote asking me to write about children and I remembered I had included a bit about the Montagnard children on Nui Tranh. I really feel at a loss when it comes to writing creatively. I'll gird up my loins and give it a try though; maybe a story about the impact of the war on those Montagnard boys would flow. The life in the village was certainly unique. What do you think?

All for now. Love, Mark

Vietnam, inland from Chu Lai, South of DaNang 2 June, 1966

Just got a letter from Russ Reddick. (Marine combat engineer friend from Pendleton) I had heard he was with the 1st Engineers in Chu Lai but had not gotten around to checking it out. His note was short and to the point:

"Dear Mark,

Where in the hell are you.

Russ. "

It took two weeks to go the 15 miles between us.

Today was a good day. We heard that they got 8 VC by body count yesterday and found some fresh graves besides. (Yesterday was the operation we watched from our "front porch" with the air strikes and chopper assaults etc.) Today the 155 howitzers fired quite a lot which was spectacular. Even in the early dusk their muzzle flashes lit up the entire area with orange light. We also got electricity in today which makes shaving easier as well as writing this letter. A flashlight just does not hack it!

.... I lost track of my blue pen in the scramble just now. All hell broke loose suddenly down toward post #2 on the perimeter. I was really scared for a moment when I heard one of the section chiefs say, "Oh God! I thought that area was supposed to be secure." I was picturing gooks pouring through the wire and into the position.

Actually none of our posts were involved - - some of the grunts had gone out on ambush patrols and apparently found something. We sat out on our "front porch" again and watched the tracers ricocheting up into the sky. Then suddenly there was a flash from the top of the hill where I mentioned the tanks set up the other day and then a bang of a mortar. This precipitated a rapid exchange of tracers between the top of the hill and the bottom of the hill, I noticed, as I came creeping back out of my foxhole and peered over the top of the sandbags. We then heard post #2 over the local security net say, "The grunts on the top of the hill are shooting at the grunts at the bottom of the hill." Then the 81 mortars [*81mm mortars are carried by infantry and controlled by them directly. The infantry's own artillery, so to speak.*] started firing illumination but about every third round was a short one and we could see the magnesium flares burning up a storm over in the tankers camp. There has been some degree of levity among us as we watched the intramural war progress but "the Chief", our Navy senior corpsman sobered us somewhat when he said, "Well, I suppose it's better to be able to laugh at something like this, but I sure

hope nobody gets hurt. “ To us it had all been a show; like watching a flick, but the corpsman knew what the result could be better than any of us and we were reminded.

Mark

3 June 1966

Hey Dave, The Peliboy Magazine you sent was extremely enthusiastically received by the battery. I took it to the Exec Pit to read on watch between fire missions and it was all I could do to find it each time. Invariably the first comment would be "That's a pretty thin Playboy isn't it?" Some people would puzzle over it for quite a while before they realized what it really was. A good counterfeit! Is the Pelimate really a student? Thanks for the intellectual reading experience. Great!!

We just got word we are going on an operation next week so I better get hopping and packed and anything else it takes to ensure that I come back a warm body - etc. -

The mail wasn't necessarily censored. Gummed envelopes have to be opened twice over here; once so you can put the letter in and once again when you take the letter out.

Dear Folks, 6 June 1966

We are now on call for an operation somewhere near here which we do not know the name of. It is only a small one though; only one battalion involved. Two days ago we received six 4.2" mortars in addition to our howtars and have spent all our time since then practicing. We are a little skeptical about going right out on an operation with a different weapon but that is what we are going to do. Some of the troops used to be in 4.2 [pronounced four deuce] batteries so it seems to be working out.

The battery has changed face quite a bit lately and I think the change has been in most respects for the best. Captain Dyer has been replaced as CO by Lt. Sweeney who was one of the firing battery instructors at AOOC [Artillery Officers Orientation Course] at Quantico when I was there. Capt. Dyer was a very well liked leader; he was almost like one of the troops in enthusiasm and spirit and his transfer to "C" Battery, 1/11 was met with not a little bitterness by the battery. Capt. Dyer did not know a lot about artillery, however, and this made him very difficult to work for because he was always suspicious of anything that looked a little different or struck his fancy as wrong.

Lt. Sweeney is just about as much the opposite as a man can be. He is aloof and demanding of the privilege of rank but he knows the gun very well. He has made many things a lot clearer for me and every day is almost like a gunnery class at AOOC. Unfortunately he takes a very dogmatic attitude toward battery procedures and his inflexibility in this respect tends to make the NCOs mad. Also the XO very extremely mad. My attitude is -- sure he is hard to work with but at least you know, and you know he knows, where you stand as far as proficiency goes. I feel sure he will loosen up some when he gets the feel for the gun a little more.

I received the enclosed letter from Margie [A cousin; wrote a tribute to fighting in Vietnam] and I was so impressed I thought I would pass it on to you.

I just received my account of Nui Tranh (Buddha Mountain) and have decided it should be rewritten which I may or may not do. At any rate, the parts where Sgt. Fowler imposes military characteristics on suspicious people are intended humorously. I could not tell if you understood this or not. Like the two farmers "marching" across the field or the man standing at attention. Sgt. Fowler had a fertile imagination and a sense of humor as well. There are probably innumerable explanations for the "suspicious" activities we noticed but I think counter-intelligence is much too sophisticated an explanation to be a possibility in this war. It is hard enough to distinguish between VC and Vietnamese as it is without having to coordinate Vietnamese pretending to be VC. My own guesses would run along lines of wealthier farmers preparing for the impending "rape, pillage, and plunder," of the approaching Marines. We did feel our observations were not getting properly coordinated with the grunts in the area however, but as my Negro ammo Sgt. would say, "They ain't wrapped too tight!" and shake his head from side to side.

We also have a new battery gunnery sergeant and he is working out beautifully. The gun sections are tending to work more as a team now with a strong force working from the top.

I am writing this letter on XO watch between missions and I assure you there is nothing to watch out for. There is nothing to be seen. Have not yet received the package with bread and spices. I have read both Scientific Americans from cover to cover however and am thoroughly delighted. In one of them, in the article on lungs, it mentions that silicate (sand) in the lungs can cause serious respiratory problems. I'm sure mine are far from serious but that doesn't follow with what all the doctors said at the time. *[This refers to the pneumonia that I contracted from being munched by a wave while surfing just before we left Camp Pendleton. The force of the wave drove sand into my lungs and the doctors considered that the pneumonia was the result of germs that had been forced in with the sand.]*

Mark

Operations, Operations

Notes:

During this period we had numerous references to a large concentration of VC forces along the Cambodian border. This was the "Do Xa region", 30 miles to the west southwest of Chu Lai, and was reputed to contain the headquarters of the enemy's Region V Forces in the Area. This much postponed operation was generally referred to as Operation Washington. Eventually General Fields decided there was nothing very big in there, but apparently he was wrong. They were just very well hidden.

At the same time an NVA division with three regiments had entered the Que Son Valley, to the northwest of us. This area had a population of 60,000 and included rich farmland and salt deposits. General Thi, the Vietnamese commander and friend of Gen Walt, said it was "The key to the struggle for I Corps", primarily because of the importance of the rice harvest to the VC.

Gen. Thi was deposed by Ky during the upheaval of the So. Vietnamese generals during this period. Thi was a Buddhist sympathizer and the Buddhists in the DaNang/ Hue area were in revolt. On May 14 Gen. Ky attacked and Gen. Walt lofted US fighter jets to referee the clash. By early June the insurrection had crumbled, but there was some resentment in the I Corps area against the Saigon government's high handed action against the Buddhists. All of this serious political turmoil was going on at the same time as we Marines were going about our duties without any knowledge of them.

On 13 June another operation, designated Operation Kansas was initiated in the Que Son Valley area. This operation was mostly to be fought by Recon units in force and observed artillery fire which the Recon units would call in. Our good friends Delta 2/11 were lifted into the strategic Tien Phuoc Special Forces camp in support of the Recon units. Central to this operation was a Recon unit on Nui Vu, a peak with excellent observation capabilities. This was where SSgt Jimmy Howard was located with 18 Recon Marines when they were nearly overrun by the VC. When LtCol. Coffman's 1/5 troops went in to the rescue at the base of the mountain, they made headlines back in the states; Charlie Company's Capt. Buck Darling answered Gen. Green's question about what they did with "General, we killed them". In addition to the 85 enemy killed, there were also 40 elephants and 10 water buffalo.

The Chu Lai TAOR was 205 mi.² of the beginning of 1966. By the end of June and it had expanded to 340 mi.² 1/5 on Hill 54 was 10 miles north of the Chu Lai airfield and 6 miles south of a town called TamKy. TamKy was the capital of the Quang Tin Province and roughly at the bottom of the Que Son Valley. The strategic plan was for the DaNang and Chu Lai TAORs to meet at TamKy by the end of the year, a point roughly midway between the two big cities. This of course never happened.

Operation Apache 9 June 1966

We are preparing to be helilifted out on another operation, "Apache." We will be supporting 2/5 somewhere nearby to the north of here. At the completion of this operation, in about 5 days, we will have one day to get ready again and then are scheduled for a big operation with the 1st Cavalry over near the Cambodian border. This second operation should just be kicking off about the time you receive this so watch for it. 15 days is what they have told us to plan for; no name yet that I have heard. We are going in with 6 mortars (4.2") on Apache and with 4 mortars on the Cambodian one. Apparently the howtars are being relegated to garrison firing.

I finally set up the tape recorder yesterday afternoon and am glad I have it. It sounded great. Just about then a wind storm came up so I put it away. The sand blows around a lot.

We have a new battery gunnery sergeant and he is working out beautifully. The gun sections are tending to work more as a team now with a strong force working from the top.

I am writing this letter on XO watch, also between missions and I assure you there is nothing to watch out for. There is nothing to be seen.

Have not yet received the package with bread and spices. I have read both Scientific Americans from cover to cover however and am thoroughly delighted.

June 13

Got back from Operation Apache last night and are standing by for the word to move out on Operation Washington which is the name of the big one we are scheduled for with the 1st Cavalry Division (airmobile). Apache was really great.

We went into position with Delta battery in the rice paddies alongside a village. There was plenty of well water in the village and a shady peripheral path where anybody not actually on gun crews sat to watch the show. The show was pretty good too.

We were really working out with our new mortars about like greased lightning. The two guns we were adjusting with, were taking about 30 seconds to fire from the time they received the fire commands until the adjusting rounds were on the way. Whereas the clumsy mortar has to be jockeyed back and forth around its recoil pit and trail pit every time it changes deflection (direction of fire), the mortar only has to be "leaned" toward whichever direction it wants to shoot and it is ready to go. We were so good and so fast that we were fired on just about every mission that was fired and "Delta", very sheepishly started working on speed. They are one of the batteries that has been having to have a safety officer check each gun before they can fire. This definitely cuts the initiative to have speed. I do not believe they were required to have safety officers on this operation, though. FDC was the weakest link and I was sure happy I had got out of there when I did. I figure I got all the experience without the headache of having a Major breathing down my neck.

When we first arrived there were very few people in the village. They had cleared out in a hurry when we started landing. Gradually they started filtering back though. This was a typical village, populated entirely by old people and children since all the others are involved in the war - - probably with the Viet Cong.

Right away the few people there started begging for our "C" rations and they were making a tremendous haul too. As far as I can see, "C" rations should be issued twice a day instead of three times because of all the waste. Anyhow on the second day all troops were ordered to stop giving anything to the "gooks" because the ARVN (pronounced Arvin) dai-uy (Capt.) said that the people were storing up the goodies to give to the Cong. I then realized that I never saw anyone eating anything we gave them unless it was already open.

One little boy was given a cracker with cheese on it and he really looked distressed. He looked at it for a minute, put it in his mouth part way, and then looked around to see who was watching. Of course we all were, so he started nonchalantly sauntering away with the cracker neither out of his mouth nor bitten into, looking back toward us each time he passed a garbage pit. He still had it in the same uncommitted position when, either he went out of sight or our attention was taken, I don't know which. The one item the people all would accept for immediate consumption was cigarettes. Even the smallest children wanted to learn to smoke and the funniest sight was a little boy, too young to wear clothes even, puffing away on a cigarette.

There were several very good targets for us out there. One was thirty Viet Cong in an open field. The surveillance that came back was that the rounds fell all over among them. Also we leveled a village pretty well by fire following reports of VC moving into it. Apparently the VC went into holes because a lot survived unhurt, so an air strike was called in, which plastered them with napalm.

There were a lot of VCS (suspects) prisoners taken from among the various villagers. One of the "advisors" [*U.S. advisor to the Vietnamese*] in the area said that when we moved in, the propaganda planes told the people not to be afraid and not to run away from the Marines. A lot of them paid heed and returned, but were immediately snapped up as VCS. The adviser was not very happy about that turn of events since it is his business to win the trust and confidence of the people.

Today has been a very interesting day indeed. As I mentioned we are on standby for a big operation but apparently something has either gone wrong or changed or both. There are rumors of a highly secret operation which would be the largest ever attempted in the war if it comes off. Apparently there has been some leak somewhere so it may be canceled but at any rate my pack is still packed. By the time you get this it will have happened if it is going to, I'm sure. I also know it is no rumor.

No one here believes what we have been doing all afternoon and evening. When we got back from the operation, I had one of the wiremen run an electrical cable into the end of Curt's and my tent. We then got busy and set up the Akai tape recorder and started playing our only two tapes. One was Wagner which does not seem to go over well with very many people, and the other was the demonstration tape which came with it. Not bad but nothing great. Pretty soon one of the cannoneers produced a prerecorded tape of "South of the Border" by the Tijuana Brass and then we really started rocking. Last night Joe came along with three albums of show tunes that he bought from the same guy from whom I bought the recorder, so we had a little more variety. I stuck the "talk" button down on the Execs' phone with masking tape and set it beside the speakers. This sent the music out over the "gun loop" so that the phone watches in all the gun pits could listen. They did not appreciate Joe's music too terribly much though. One Corporal said, when I asked how it was coming over, "Beautiful sir - - uh yes sir, beautiful - - do you, uh, have anything else, sir?"

"Why? You don't like this kind of music?" I asked.

"Well sir, actually I think it's kind of 'groady'" was the response.

As soon as Joe went to bed, the T.J. Brass came back on and everybody was happy again. On the other hand, several communicators and FDC men came down to the Exec Pit and - tired and short of sleep as they must have been, stayed up until almost midnight listening to "Sound of Music" and "My Fair Lady" completely in ecstasies of emotions of nostalgia and memories. It really did sound fantastic; just like Julie Andrews was right in the Command Post tent singing. My watch is just about over now so I will stop writing and wake up Curt.

14 June

We are on two hour standby for either one of two separate operations but it looks like we will be going on the big one. One is called Op. Washington but I am not sure if that is the big one or not. It is in the vicinity of Pleimei or Pleiku. It will last for a couple of weeks so don't expect to hear from me for a while.

Please send tapes of anything that sounds good. Before I leave here just about everything I have will be ready to be thrown away - - ie. underwear, utilities, toilet articles, etc. so I can just fill up my footlocker with the tapes and ship them back. Also I have been trying to keep a list of things I need sent. I need a small, cheap paint brush for brushing sand and dirt off my pistol after a helicopter ride. Also if you could find a .45 caliber bottle brush, it would be very handy. Curt has a battery powered razor which I would like to contribute batteries to for the field - penlite type - about four. I am about out of Lefty Lemon and his pals - the sugar-free is easiest because it is compact and does not draw ants. However I would very much like to have some of the Wyler's packets.

Now! - to start going hog wild, how about some Ovaltine and malted milk (plain) to go with the powdered milk (which has not yet arrived). Curt read my list and decided to write home for the same things. The French bread with condiments combination you sent must have been a sad story one way or another. It never got here and if it does after this operation it probably will not be in very good condition. The condiments will be very much appreciated though. They are in great demand for flavoring "C" rations. In fact, I would like to put in an order for garlic powder right now while I'm thinking about it.

Right now I am listening to the "Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla" with the earphones & feel about as much like I'm in Vietnam as on the moon. It's fantastic! My ear doesn't interfere with the enjoyment as long as I don't think about it. *[Lost high frequency hearing in my left ear on the pistol range at Quantico. Standard pistol was the 45 auto and since I only fired revolver when competing on the pistol*

team, it took me longer to get ready to fire and sometimes had trouble getting my ear protection in place.] I will write as soon as I can.

love, Mark

Period 12-25 June

The week following our return from Operation Apache was one of tense waiting and proved to be the lull before something of a storm. As soon as we were withdrawn from the operational area of Apache we were immediately put in standby status for impending operations in several areas. The word was getting around about a definite buildup of VC forces in strength to the north and west. Whenever enemy troops can be located in numbers we will always try to take advantage of this concentration and hit them as hard and as soon as possible. It was not hard to judge the probable size of the VC forces by the size and organization of the countering reaction forces we were standing by to support. In fact one possible operation, had it been carried out, would probably have been the largest single engagement of troops so far in the war.

We returned from Apache on Sunday evening (12 June) suddenly and on urgent orders delivered personally by Col. Hahn, CO of the 11th Marines. Apache was promptly brought to a close. We didn't have any idea whether we would have time for a shower before we got the call to move out again, but we worked until late Sunday night getting the guns cleaned up and all our gear ready for a quick deployment. But it wasn't until Wednesday afternoon about 5 o'clock that we got the word to "move out".

One half hour after we got the word, we were loaded into vehicles, staged on the road and ready to go. This was the first time we had used a tactical convoy of vehicles to deploy the battery since Camp Pendleton. By 6 o'clock we were once more with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines up on Hill 54, waiting to be helilifted out on an impromptu operation to the north the following morning.

By this time we were able to piece together enough information to learn what the situation was. There were four companies of VC in a valley about 30 miles to the north which had been spotted by a recon team of 20 men. The recon team had been spotted by the VC as well, though, and before they could help themselves they found themselves pinned down and extremely hard pressed. Air strikes, artillery, and armed Hueys gave what support they could through the night and the infantry started moving out by helicopter early the next morning. It soon became clear to us, though, that once again under control of Col. Coffman, CO of 1/5, we would be made witness to the gross misuse of artillery support. His first gem was when he told our battery commander, Lt. Sweeney that we would be committed, if we were committed, with only 40 rounds of HE [*high explosive-the normal shell used for cannon fire*] ammo which would come to 10 rounds per each of our 4.2" mortar tubes. (Our tactical employment weapon is now the mortar and not the howtar and for the special reaction artillery support mission we would only use 4 guns) This would only barely be enough ammo for two very short missions and would not even justify the gas expended to take us out. This gave us the realization that they didn't intend to use us at all except possibly in a "provisional rifles" capacity [*provisional rifles is a designation where you give non-infantry troops, including cooks and bakers, rifles and use them as infantry*] and we felt right at home again with 1/5.

Sure enough, the following day, while the Marines, recon and VC were shooting it out in the rice paddies, we spent one of the most restful days since arriving in country sleeping, reading, and talking but mostly sleeping. Joe, Curt and I refer to that day as the day we spent under a P.C. [personnel carrier, 3/4 ton truck]. The greatest effort expended that day was in moving from one side of the P. C. to the other little by little to stay in the shade of its shadow.

The final results of the action with the VC were grim and left us with a sober feeling for the possibilities of the coming weeks and operations. By the time the rescuing troops arrived, the recon people had suffered a heavy toll of dead and wounded. The GySgt [*apparently actually a Staff Sgt.*] in charge of the recon unit was wounded himself and unable to stand up so he just sat there and shook hands with the infantry troops as they came in to relieve his position. We talked with the troops from 1/5 coming out with captured weapons and effects taken off the bodies of the VC that assaulted the recon position.

The battle must have been desperate indeed. There were some 30 VC bodies strewn about the immediate area and after fresh graves and other indications had been investigated, it was estimated that recon had killed about 100. One killed Marine had four VC bodies in his foxhole with him--at least one had been dispatched with an entrenching tool. There is no question but what recon is at least as tough as they say they are.

Mother's note: "In the American newspapers, there appeared accounts of Staff Sgt. Howard's heroic stand guarding an observation post of the 1st Marine Division, and how he and his men hurled rocks at the VC as mock grenades to fool the enemy as their ammunition dwindled. When rescued, only seven men were able to pull a trigger and five of those were wounded."

We spent one more mosquito bitten night at Hill 54 and the following morning early, returned to home base for breakfast. Once again we were on standby without knowing exactly for what operation or when. It began to be apparent that the only reason nobody was being sent in to engage the VC was that there were just too many of the gooks and not enough of us. The recon unit had reported the presence of the equivalent of two Communist divisions in the vicinity of where we had heard there were four companies. This would be about 9,000 VC troops of the hard corps, regular type. The position was determined to be approximately 30 miles north of us between the coast and the Laotian border.

About 10 miles north of here and about 20 miles north of Chu Lai is a town called Tam Ky where the Marine air wing has strategically placed an airstrip along highway 1. This installation is almost midway between Chu Lai and Da Nang and so has great importance as a link between the two larger bases and as a supporting base for operations in the area. When word came of the presence of the large VC forces, great clouds of dust started rising from the highway, filling the sky, and descending in a thin red film over everything for miles around as the supply convoys started moving to Tam Ky day and night. The first convoys of five ton trucks started rolling up the road the night we moved to Hill 54 and didn't stop for about three days. They were loaded down with all kinds of ordnance and supplies, - primarily 155 ammo on the trucks we saw. Several batteries of heavy artillery had already been sent up north at the first crack and it looked like they were either doing or expected to be doing a lot of shooting.

By Friday when I went into ChuLai to pick up the pay roll the highway didn't even look familiar. Any surfacing that the primary Vietnamese highway had had before had been completely torn to dust and rubble by the heavy 5 ton trucks and cargo. The dust raised by normal vehicle traffic was now unbelievable and choking.

That same Friday afternoon was the planned commencement of operation Kansas which we had been invited to participate in. This Marine sweep had been a planned operation as opposed to a sudden decision but late in the planning alternations had been made to include cutting off and destroying the four companies of VC reported in the area. When the four companies turned into two divisions, plans were apparently changed accordingly and the operation was postponed for three days. This would indicate moving out the following Monday afternoon.

It was with this plan in mind that Joe, Curt and I decided to build ourselves a BOQ so that when we returned from the operation our belongings would still be in some semblance of order. Consequently, on Sunday, while the rest of the battery tried to get caught up on sleep lost during a tense week of watchful waiting, we put two CP tents together side by side and made a very habitable home for ourselves. Next we took about 150 4.2" ammo boxes, tore them apart, and with the pieces built a deck for the tent. And so with a tired but satisfied feeling we set up the exec watch schedule for the night and set up for firing the nightly H and I (harassing and interdiction) fires.

VC Attack in the Night 19 June 1966

H & I's are normally fired by one gun at a time thru the night so that only one section is up at a time. The remaining guns have a one man phone watch and during this period of danger we posted a second man to sleep in the gun pit in case he was needed. Such was the situation on that Sunday night. My watch in the exec Pit was first and went up until I had fired the 12 to 1 H&I's which only took about the first 15 or 20 minutes of the hour. Curt had the following watch but before I woke him I went out by the guns to brush my teeth. I then returned to the exec Pit which adjoins the BOQ to leave a message for the oncoming recorder watch. As I was writing it down there was the crack of a rifle and a round went whining just over the BOQ. I looked up at our Negro switchboard operator and he looked back at me and rolled his eyes and we simultaneously dove for the same piece of deck in the cramped confines of the exec Pit. I realized that the electric bulb in the top of the tent was still burning so I tried not to think of the target I was making in the doorway as I stood up and reached to unscrew it.

About this time a succession of concussions were going off in the near vicinity of the tent-- specifically right in the gun position. I scrambled for the bedroom of our new home and scrambled into my flak gear (body armor) and helmet while keeping all parts of my anatomy as close to the ground as possible. *[I'm sure I recall waking Curt at the same time.]* I shouted at Joe that we were taking incoming mortars or something as he raised his head from his cot and looked dazedly around. Joe has a problem waking up under any circumstances and this night was no exception. He lay there with his head raised a couple of inches and moved it from side to side trying to break thru to the conscious world. I grabbed my revolver and in a very low but fast crawl moved to a position behind a wall of sandbags just outside the exec Pit. By this time I could hear Curt on the exec phones trying to find out what was happening and wondering if the illumination guns had their illumination in the air yet.

Just as I reached the wall of sandbags there was a blinding flash which seemed to go off right by my head which sent me stumbling head first to cover. When I picked myself up and looked over the top of the bags I could see two men that appeared to be in steel helmets and looked like Marines walking by gun 4's ammo bunker. They were almost casually walking along and it wasn't until one of them threw a grenade on top of the bunker that I felt safe to fire at them. I'm sure I missed and for the next few minutes I was too busy looking behind me and trying to see if the illumination was going up to notice what happened to the VC. About this time of all things the illumination went out and I started hollering at gun #5, one of two position illumination guns, to fire his illumination. He told me he was out of order and then I noticed that his gun didn't look exactly the way it should. It had no barrel!! We later decided that the blast I thought was by my head was actually the demolitions detonating which had blown the howtar apart. *[I previously indicated we had switched to mortars and done away with the howtars; perhaps we were using howtars for illumination. I don't recall.]* The two VC I saw had probably dropped an explosive charge down the tube after the first round of illumination had been fired, while the section chief was reaching for the next one. He claimed the blast knocked him right out of the gun pit. Now gun #6 started putting up illumination again. He was told "continuous illumination" so he promptly started putting up one right after the other. Before we knew it he had about four flares up in the air right together. Continuous illum is [supposed to be] fired one round every 30 seconds so that one flare pops just as the preceding one goes out.

Since our troops were now moving out of the tents and the enemy had moved out of the position the battle was essentially over for us. We moved out to the gun pits in force and fired at the retreating VC. Delta Battery had been hit even harder than we had and we could see the enemy fleeing from their position toward the wire. The entire action only lasted for about three minutes before the camp was alert and the infiltrators on the run.

Just as soon as it became apparent that this was for real, the 50 cal. machine gunner from one of the 155 Guns was up in the turret blazing away in beautiful fashion all along the wire perimeter and out into the blackness beyond, where we could see orange muzzle flashes from various points. It is very doubtful that any of the VC that managed to infiltrate the position ever made it back outside the wire again alive. Delta was able to kill several in among their guns and several more were killed on the wire

trying to escape. With the illumination which we were putting up in good fashion by now, it was not unlike a shooting gallery as the troops lined up and dinged away at the bodies along the perimeter. The 50 covered beautifully by blasting several enemy automatic weapons out of operation.

The following morning we counted 14 bodies in the vicinity of our perimeter and in Delta's position. Three more were found by the Grunts up on the hill where the 5th Regt. CP is located. All in all, when the various patrols had reported back the number of fresh graves, blood trails, and bodies farther out, 2/11 was credited with 34 kills which is a decent number for the type of action we were involved in. Delta took a fairly large number of casualties but the over all kill ratio was 10 to 1. We had only one man slightly wounded when he was hit by grenade fragments. He was on bunker watch in #4 bunker when one of the gooks I fired at tossed a grenade in over the top. We were lucky. During the remainder of the night we fired a total of just over 500 rounds of illumination.

For the rest of the week nobody did much sleeping at night. Both Division and MAF Commanders, Gen. Fields and Gen. Walt respectively, paid Col. Stribling a visit the following morning and in spite of how well we felt we had done, they made the Col. almost feel it was his fault we had been hit. So, in the fine tradition of closing the barn door, we commenced stringing a couple of additional perimeters of barbed wire and keeping between 75% and 100% of all hands awake and alert all night. This condition of readiness was to last until the moon began to fill to about the quarter. After a few days of this a more realistic 50% with 75% during the "bewitching hours" between 11 and 3 went into effect. But needless to say, the attitude of the camp changed overnight from that of a garrison situation with possible threat of probes and mortar rounds to a very alert combat base awaiting the assault of 9,000 hard corps VC regulars. Prior to that Sunday night we worried about all those VC but the reality of being hit was still only hearsay.

There is much I recall about that night that I apparently never wrote about. I recall having an intestinal disorder that night and after the shooting was over, spending some time on the latrine as the troops ranged over the area checking for hiding VC. I recall our tall black Battery 1st Sgt. running past the latrine with his posse and almost shooting me, but then yelling "You shook, Lt.?" and I groaned back "No, sick".

I recall Battalion Staff insisting that the battle raged for a half hour before we drove them to the wire. Also that Delta was hit first and had had a firefight going for a while before we got hit. Also that there was no way the VC could have looked like one of us.

My unwavering recall was that they looked like Marines with helmets, and that the time from the first shot til I was behind the sandbags was only long enough to get my flak gear, make sure Joe and Curt were awake, and get back, and that was just the other end of the same tent. It is possible that the concussion of the blast could have put me out for a while and I lost track of that time, but I never thought so. Also, our illum was instantaneous always, and if Delta was hit first, the VC were on us moments later.

About a week later battalion did one of the most sensible things they could have done to prevent another surprise occurrence of the same sort. Ever since we arrived in the Hill 54 position, the two nearby Vietnamese villages had been a real problem in diplomacy. Whenever we were hit, either by sniper fire or by physical assault, one or both of the villages was invariably involved. At first we told the villagers that if they allowed VC to use their village again we would be forced to level it. But we still continued to take fire from it at night. A great feeling of animosity grew among everybody against the villagers in general, although we never followed thru with our threat [*to level the villages*]. Now it was apparent something would have to be done since most of the fire we received during the attack was unquestionably from the village to our front.

The [*artillery*] batteries pooled together a team of troops with more or less companionable feelings toward "gooks" and sent them with a squad of grunts from the Hill into the village as a "pacification" force. The return from this move was almost instantaneous. Within a few days many villagers who had fled returned to their homes with a new feeling of security. One of these refugees had been the village chief who was a marked man by the Cong and had had his brother, who had been a

chieftain of a nearby village, assassinated by them. With the support spiritually which our presence gave them, the Vietnamese began to do everything in their power to assist in our cause and defense.

Shortly two VC squad leaders which had participated in the attack [or at least claimed to have] surrendered themselves to the grunt Lt. in charge of the team and offered to give any assistance and information within their power. From them we learned the location of local caches of VC arms and supplies as well as a vague idea of the battle plan and supporting mortar position for the Sunday night assault. The final assessment of the intelligence obtained was that the assault was intended for three companies of VC but that two of the three never arrived or at least they never joined in the assault. Apparently we really cut their company to pieces because one of the squad leader defectors who had been held in reserve claimed that the reserves "fled in fear" from the action.

One very unlikely problem resulting from the battle was what to do with the bodies the next day. It is hard to believe that some disposal procedure was not clearly spelled out by the command but one of our troops on sentry duty at the camp entrance discovered he was able to eavesdrop directly on the S-1 line and came up with some very interesting scuttlebutt. After calling for advice first to regiment and then to division, the story goes that the bodies were finally collected by a truck from Army Special Services which carried them down to highway 1 and dumped them out alongside the road. When I passed by in the afternoon of the same day the bodies were still there but had been covered with native mats. Various natives and Popular Forces [PFs] were investigating curiously. The most spectacular body was one huge, muscular fellow. Most of them were considerably larger than the average Vietnamese we had seen locally. They could well have been the VC equivalent of our Force Recon units which I described earlier. But this one joker was really tremendous.

Dear Cathy; 24 June 1966

First part of this letter is describing people and stories about fun times with the Pasadena Boys Club Jazz Band called the Ambassadors in Swing. I describe a funny story about getting my '49 Ford convertible smeared with floor wax and then describe a battle a few days before where we killed a bunch of VC inside our wire. Contrasts like this never seemed unusual at the time; but I was young.

Thank you for your latest letter. I sure do wish I was just arriving in Southern California for summer vacation. Yes, I sure do remember Danny Miller and Don Fry. When I knew Don he was a rather plump type trombone player who kept everybody in stitches with his sense of humor. Danny was a real friendly type with a big smile.

Do you remember Linda Cropsey? She was a singer for the Ambassadors and a friend of Don's and Danny's I think. I would be interested to know what became of her. I think I remember that she had rather interesting ambitions such as becoming a lawyer or something. I don't remember for sure.

One hilarious night after rehearsal or after a job or something we all drove out to Gwinn's as we often did and I had been experimenting with various waxes on my car. As it happened there was a can of floor wax in the Ford. There were two cars; mine and Danny Miller's, I believe both convertibles, and we pulled up side by side in the car service area of Gwinn's. About halfway through our hamburgers, we suddenly noticed that Don was busy with the can of floor wax polishing spots here and there on the somewhat less than clean and shiny surface of Danny's car, reaching out from the back seat of my car. When he noticed we were noticing he began humming and polishing at a desperate pace while Danny gave an unhappy moan and moved out to defend his car. Before the wax battle ended both our cars were liberally smeared with Johnson's floor wax and we had all pretty much got into the act.

Things are getting pretty exciting over here. Check the papers for news of "Artillery battalion hit by VC about 9 miles north of ChuLai". Yes, that sure was us. The lucky thing is they don't seem to be trying to kill people at all. All they tried to do was destroy our guns and ammo. Before we knew it they had blown up one howtar and were throwing grenades in all directions toward ammo bunkers and gun pits.

It all started just after midnight last Sunday night/Monday morning. (19th/20th June) I had just come off exec watch and since I had all the H&I fires completed for the following hour, I didn't wake up

Curt right away, but went out with my canteen cup of water to brush my teeth. All was perfectly quiet. I went around to the exec pit end of the tent to leave some parting instructions to the switchboard operator and while I was talking a small arms round went zinging over the top of the tent. The colored switchboard watch rolled his eyes and we both hit the deck before I realized the light was on and our blackout discipline had become lax. I reached up and unscrewed the light and then started getting my flak gear on (body armor vest and helmet) and grabbed my pistol. By this time the grenades were bursting all over inside our area and it was getting a little smoky. I got behind a row of sandbags and watched men who I would have sworn were our own troops walking right in front of me as if they owned the place, tossing grenades. I got to fire one shot at them before the illumination went out and after that I was too busy getting the illumination back up to notice what happened to them. I was also pretty anxiously checking my rear for suspicious missiles. By this time people were coming out of the tents and getting out to the guns and the VC had moved out. The entire perimeter had been hit by now and everybody was at their posts and ready to fight. The VC that had infiltrated into the battalion perimeter were few in number and whether intended or not, a suicide unit. I'm sure very few made it back out through the wire alive and we counted 14 bodies the next day. The 155 Guns have 50 caliber machine guns mounted on top of their turrets and one of these opened up right across our front and sprayed lead, sand, and tracer phosphorus around making the vicinity of the wire a very dangerous place.

The result of this encounter is that 2/11 has quite a reputation for "in fighting". Artillery normally doesn't have to fight this way and since we did and came out on top, people can't do enough for us. Nobody was killed in our battery; only one man was even wounded, and not seriously. I couldn't really enjoy it though, because just toward the end of my watch I began to feel sick and to feel a bad case of diarrhea coming on. Throughout the short battle I spent most of the time doubled over and waiting for a break to go to the head. Then while the troops combed the area looking for hiding gooks, I was a very suspicious looking figure in the head; very sick and very still. It was apparently only a case of the flu and two days later I was fine.

Last night we heard word of possibly two to four companies of VC in the area and were up most of the night waiting. At one point we had intelligence they were within 300 m of our position, but they never came in any closer. Tonight, there are indications of a possible attack so we are standing ready again. In fact, when the moon goes down in about 20 minutes I'm going to climb into my flak gear. You'd never believe it but this is supposed to be a secure permanent position, almost synonymous with garrison duty.

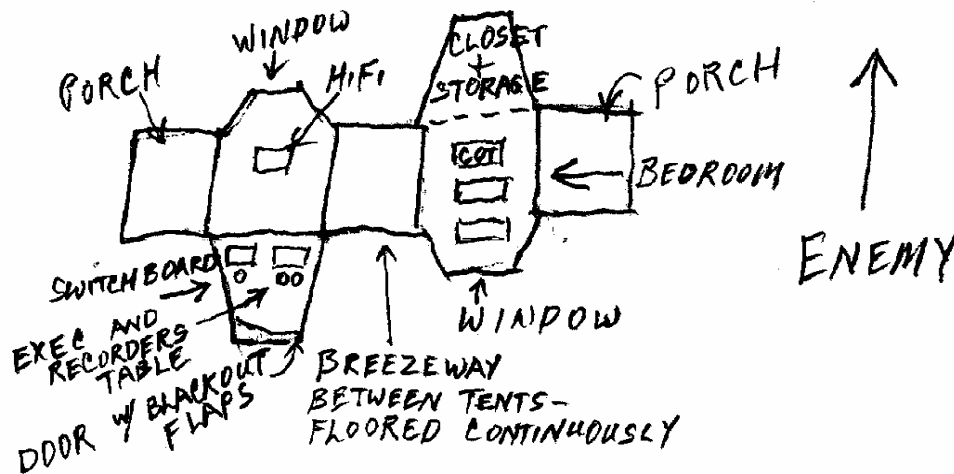
Hey, guess what we had for dinner. Ice cream!! I had decided to skip dinner and eat a canned beefsteak I have saved from "C" rations but when Curt and Joe came back and told me what they had I couldn't stay away. It was probably not very good tasting stuff, but it sure was delicious as far as I was concerned. Like Mother said, the ice cream here is a lot like Frosty but it has a slightly canned milk or powdered milk flavor. Tonight's was vanilla so imperfections were slightly more apparent. They have also had chocolate, which is good and maple nut, which is great. They use so many nuts that each spoonful is almost like grabbing a handful of nuts.

* * *

It is now almost dawn and I slept through the time of most excitement, which is between about 12 and three in the morning. Nothing happened tonight though. We fired a special set of H&I's tonight, which put an almost continuous light sprinkling of rounds all around our position area. We're the only guns that have the short range capability to do this shooting in close. This is so that if a surprise attack were forming beyond our perimeter, the best places to form from would not be particularly safe -- those are the places we planned our concentrations.

The BOQ I am living in now is a veritable palace. The day before we got hit we rebuilt our separate two tents into one large house with an ammo box deck. I am now sitting in the den just off the living room which we have been using for an exec pit and as I look through the door into the living room I see the twin eyes of the reels of my tape recorder sitting up very neat and civilized on the cabinet I built for it out of ammo boxes.

Here is our floor plan:



It really looks classy -- in fact just about the classiest looking tent I have seen. We generally use the sides of the breezeway for doors since it's easier than fighting with the blackout flaps in the regular door to the tent. The camp is laid out so that we are between the troop tents and the guns, which really puts us at

the center of things. In fact, people saw some of the VC right up between the BOQ and gun #2 -- only about 30 feet from where Joe and Curt were sleeping in the bedroom.

The sad part is I will be leaving the battery next week. We get a new 2nd Lieutenant today. Since this war is set up so that people always go home after 13 months but their units do not, the personnel have to be mixed up within a particular unit so that the RTD (Rotation Tour Dates) do not come at the same time. Rumor has it that I may be sent to 155 Guns; that would really be an experience! If so, I would probably go to Twenty-nine Palms when I got back to the States. At any rate, going to Guns might mean moving right next door here. I could leave the hi-fi where it is and visit often. I'll find out next week I guess.

All for now, Much love, Mark

PS. Had a letter from Roger -- he sounds sad but hopeful about the two of you.

PPS. Talk about uncomfortable ways and places to sleep! I figure I will spend my nights for most of the new moon days of every month sleeping on the floor in flak jacket, helmet and pistol. I started out last night in the sand outside the B.O.Q. but the bugs started biting. I moved inside and propped my head against the side of the hi-fi cabinet. This was about midnight. The next I knew it was 5 o'clock when I was due to take over and started writing this.

PPPS. Received cookies which were delicious. I set them out handily, night before last when we were up all night worrying about the "two or three VC companies" somewhere near. We had coffee urns from the mess hall and everybody really enjoyed the cookies. Especially nice to munch on during nervous moments when a crackle of small arms fire would break out on the perimeter as the outposts opened up on a cow, pig, or platoon of walking bushes. They say it is amazing the way the trees start walking around from about midnight on.

I am looking very forward much to any and all tapes anyone would care to send. (Particularly all the Kenton records.).

More love, Mark

Transfer to 3rd 155mm Guns

June 30

The last night I spent with Mortar Battery 2/11 was the night of 25 June. That afternoon I received the word from the battery office that the following day I would be transferred to 3rd 155 Guns. The two 155 Guns we had in our position there at Hill 54 was the third platoon of 3rd Guns. The other two platoons were back in the hills above Chu Lai. It was to this rear area that I was to go.

When a unit comes over in one bunch from the States, most of them will be due to rotate back again 13 months later. In order that a unit won't be decimated when this happens, arrival in Vietnam is usually accompanied by a mass of transfers of personnel to mix up the rotation tour dates. (RTD's) So I wasn't surprised at the transfer. I was relieved though because there had been some consideration at battalion of making me the Bn. S-1 [*administration officer*] and that is one job I would just as soon do without.

I am not entirely happy with the switch; it will certainly be interesting and probably a lot safer but I will never again have the opportunity of jumping out on operations by helicopter with the grunts. We are very much in general, general support and do not move around too much.

On the other hand I have a refrigerator in the tent, electricity, and a mess hall only a couple of doors away. The tent I share with my room mate Tom McDermant is not as nice as the BOQ we built out at 2/11 and a lot more cramped. It is a single CP for two, as opposed to a double CP with breezeway for three like the BOQ. There was something very artistic and comfortable about the way we built the BOQ.

At any rate, on this last night with 2/11, I went to bed early because I had volunteered for the 3-6 watch in the morning. Along about 11:30 that night I was awakened by the sound of machine gun fire to our front out about 1,000 meters. At first it was sporadic and then increased to an almost steady rate. This all came from the far side of "Red Hill", a small hill on the other side of the village to our front. We understood that the grunts had an outpost out there and this sort of continuous fire would indicate a last desperate attempt to hold a superior force from overrunning their position. Then suddenly, almost simultaneously, our perimeter opened up and we incredulously watched as bright little orange flashes of fire went right past our tent about "man level"; we were receiving automatic weapons fire from the near side of the base of "Red Hill". Almost immediately the gunner on top of the 155 Gun opened up again with his 50 and we could hear the bullets bouncing off his hull for a few seconds as the hostile machine gun tried in vain to put him out of action. In no time it was all over and Lt. Sweeney was on the phone trying to explain to battalion that we had actually been fired upon and that we were not just jumpy.

The next morning in the staff and officers mess, the discussion was going hot and heavy as to whether or not there had been any enemy fire or not. There had apparently been some grunts on the near side of the base of the hill and the incoming tracers certainly did look like ours. One S/Sgt. claimed that they were ricochets that had gone way over our heads. Of course we knew better than that. The sight unit for the 155 Gun that had engaged with its 50 had been smashed by one of the incoming rounds. (The sight costs about \$17,000.) It began to appear that we had been engaged in another intramural battle like the one we had observed among the grunts that other night. Of course this sounds bad but I am inclined to go along with the explanation of the Gunny. "They like to split your fire. A few of the gooks sneak in between two units and then fire a few rounds in each direction. After that each unit is just firing at the other's muzzle flashes."

My official job here with "Guns" is liaison officer but my duties are to assist the FDC and Exec alternately. The direct result of my presence is to provide the possibility for each of the three of us in this position to have a day off to go to the beach every third day. The schedule will not get started until we get me "snapped in" on the workings of a 155 Gun Battery. Consequently I would like to know if you ever mailed my diving mask. I should have written before this but I remembered you asking if I still wanted it sent and I never answered. Anyhow I didn't get it. I did however get the Scientific Americans and I think I remember mentioning in some letter that I had read them both from cover to cover. Well I did. I never enjoyed them that much at home, or never had time.

About the shells and sand [*mailed home*] - the white sand and white shells are from White Beach somewhere near Phu Bai (just south of it I think) between Da Nang and Chu Lai. [*Wrong; Phu Bai is north of DaNang*]. The dark "odoriferous" shells with the animals still in them are from Grande Island, P.I. and the grayish dirty sand is from the plain where 2/11 is located at the base of Hill 54. This is the sand I have been living on and in for almost two months. I added it for packing.

I did receive the address of the Rev. Baker (Hong Kong). I will have only one chance at R & R (rest and recreation) and I have been convinced that the place to go is to Bangkok. This will mean making a sad decision against seeing Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and Saigon. We were just lucky to have the opportunity of seeing as many places as we did on S.L.F. (Special Landing Force).

The package you sent with the bread and condiments is the only one I know of that I have not received. If the face mask isn't already lost in the mail don't send it. Special Services for 155 Guns is amazing. There are five of those same face masks outside the tent right now. Tom is Special Services officer and as such has the Sp. Svc. Sony 500 tape hi-fi set up in here. I am playing mine through his speakers now. I am waiting with bated breath for the Challenge milk, milkshake mixings (we have a very good freezer), tapes, flashlight 6 V type and light plastic one if you find it but no big thing if you don't. The big one I want though. Also Tom has some delicious looking assorted Wyler's and Salada lemonades, limeades and iced teas that look awfully nice if you have a little extra room in some bundle. Other things I have mentioned I would still like to have sent but these have an immediate and urgent appeal. They may well have been sent already -- I remember one letter said the milk was going the next morning and you were getting tapes ready quite a while ago in another letter. I am feeling particularly desperate right now for all the Kenton albums all together, one right after another on a tape at 3 1/2 ipm. Also Pink Panther, Charade, and Wild Side; Slaughter on 10th Ave, whatever's on the back, Mutiny on the Bounty, To Kill a Mockingbird would be nice too. Then Mancini, Brubeck and Ventures; I can't remember specific titles. Yes I am music starved. The little I have available just whets the appetite.

While I was busy rescuing things from the rain which just started, guess what got wet. (*The ink is blurred by raindrops in places.*) Anyhow it's waterproof ink I think so no sweat. Thank you Cathy for your package. I actually received it quite a while ago but I was just admiring Roy the Froy sitting on top of the hi-fi cabinet and thought to mention it. Also I am almost out of lefty lemon again. :-). Now that I have such cold water and ice it really tastes great. Also received another loaf of sourdough bread, bouillon cubes and candied lemon rind. Once again the bread came through in fine shape.

Finally got a letter from Edwardo. He is back in the hospital having the pin removed from his hip. Apparently he isn't getting along with Pat any better than he was but said Pat had been on leave for awhile and that was great.

This is certainly a rambling sort of letter but I'm trying to jot down all the things I can think of that I should have answered or told you. Also have a letter and pictures from the McCaffrey's. I will send the pictures along with this if I can find where I packed them.

I really do appreciate the clippings you send. Many of the last went right along with what I had been saying in my article. By now you have received my account of the recon team affair. I was surprised the newspapers printed the casualties - I thought they weren't supposed to. I guess I won't have to be so careful. It is the same incident though and was certainly an heroic stand.

What is Cathy Koenig's address now? Is she back on the Great Plains somewhere or in California? I thought it about time for me to start sending some Vietnamese souvenirs to people and Cathy K. wrote so many nice letters to me, I thought I'd send something to her. I guess all for now. Tom just put some tapes on he recorded before he left. All right. Jazz!!

Love, Mark

PS Also I am still in need of a couple towels and a sheet dyed green. The ones I have (one each) are getting awfully dirty.

Dear Folks, July 7, 1966

Guess what arrived in the mail yesterday, looking as fresh and new as anything on the outside? That's right. One mouldy loaf of sour dough bread, assorted condiments, my Cressi face mask and a delicious date nut coffee cake. (this package was mailed April 27th) When it arrived I was just mixing myself a canteen cup of ice coffee so what time could have been more appropriate! The very center of the coffee cake was all that was spoiled by the mold and the mold itself was almost a tasteless variety. So after picking out the center I wrapped the rest up in a plastic bag and popped the package into ye olde "fridge" . (Tom is from R.I. and that is what he calls the refrigerator.) After munching a bit of it, that is!

The cookies were still crisp and a few weren't broken. The package was addressed to BLT 1-5 and that has been a real problem getting mail forwarded from them. My passbook from 1st Federal took over a month to get here from the time it was mailed because they forgot to change the address.

Things are not particularly inspiring around a 155 Gun battery. We are "in the rear with the gear" so to speak. I am going out "forward" (that is where the platoon at 2/11 is called) this afternoon to deliver a class to our troops in the forward platoon on American-Vietnamese relations. They have to be reminded periodically not to be "ugly Americans."

Night before last I spent with Russ Reddick (combat engineer friend from Camp Pendleton) over on the S.W. side of the Chu Lai perimeter, at the 1st Engineers position, next to the 7th Marines. I am switching off duty with the X.O. on a night on, night off basis, so since that night was "off", Russ came over and picked me up. All their facilities are outstanding over there as you might expect of an Engineer Bn. The tents have so much wood in them that they are essentially homes with canvas roofs and awnings all round. The O-Club they have is hard to believe. It is huge with a thatched roof, colored lamps hanging from the roof made from 106 mm casings, a bar, bar stools made from cushions fixed to upended bomb racks, rattan easy chairs and couches and cocktail tables from the Okinawa clubs. It was a good feeling sitting in a soft chair, drinking cold beer out of a glass, with colored lights and watching a movie. Then to go back to a lighted tent where people sat at desks and had closets in which to put their clothes. Of course it was crude and all made from materials at hand obviously but that sure didn't make it any less nice.

Russ gave me the address of the sister of his fiancé, Faye, whom you may remember from the times they visited at Balboa. He says she wants a Marine to write to her. She is tall, dark, and part Polynesian-Tonkanese. (I don't know why Faye is so light.) She goes to U.C. Riverside.

Had a very nice letter from Debby Wakeman which was much appreciated. She mentioned that one morning when Caroline came to breakfast with her hair all up in rollers, Jim countered by arriving at the table wearing my motorcycle helmet, and stated that he had had his hair up too.

Had a wonderful, uneventful, 4th of July, with barbequed steak and more ice cream than anybody except me could eat. I trotted as much of the leftovers as I could, back to our ice box. How was yours?
Love, Mark

Dear Folks, 17 July , 1966

I am now sitting down to my typewriter in a fit of exasperation with my desk covered with microphones, tapes, headphones and other assorted recording gear. I have been trying since mail call this afternoon to get the blankety-blank tape recorder to record a few well chosen words "from the desk of 1st Lt. Mark Howe, deep in the heart of VC territory in the outskirts of Chu Lai, Vietnam." No luck!! And it plays the tapes you sent so beautifully too. Tonight we got an even more powerful, new generator to replace the one we "expended" last week which means tonight is the first night we have had cold beer in several days. It is a real hardship for us Marines "in the rear with the gear" having to drink warm beer. I am feeling particularly loquacious this evening, having the double delight of cold beer and discovering myself in print. [*the Budda Mtn. article was printed in the Pasadena Star News*] I may even miss movie call if it doesn't get to sounding too jolly up there.

With regard to the Star News - - as far as printing letter excerpts, don't try to collect pay for them. The only things to be careful of "militarily" are not to give names of units, numbers of casualties any

more specific than "light, medium, or heavy" as I have been doing, and mentioning anything that has not happened yet. Otherwise I think you are ok in anything they print. Needless to say I am delighted.

In the area where 3rd Guns is camped the Vietnamese villagers are pretty well used to the presence of American troops. Before I got here I understand the village market place was across the street from our mess hall. Capt. Davison, the new CO, decided that it wasn't so cool to have the people so thick in the camp so he made them move to the outskirts. There are still many of them around though and twice a day about 50 head of water buffalo are herded past my front door, driven by the men and boys. The women follow along with their flexible shoulder poles with pots of rice, tea, and whatever else they need for their day of work in the rice paddy dangling from the ends. While the buffalo graze in the fallow paddies, the people spend their day bent almost double working up and down the rows of rice in the adjacent paddy. Our camp is set up on one of the spots of high ground in the middle of the rice paddies and any time during the day I can look out and see groups of two or three white, conical hats working to and fro across the green of them.

This battery has developed a particular friendship with one Vietnamese family. The man and his wife are known only as Papa-san and Mama-san, a carryover of the Japanese influence on the Marine Corps, strongly developed from the long years spent on Okinawa and in Japan itself. This family has a son named Charlie who has learned English and acts as interpreter on the rare occasions where verbal communication is necessary. How many of the other children belong to Mama-san and Papa-san, we do not know.

Mama-san does the laundry for the Marines in the area which she carries in fantastic quantities in baskets hung from the ends of her shoulder pole. Collecting and delivering the clothes, she moves with the graceful, swaying shuffle, barefoot through the fine, thick dust of the road. The Vietnamese women are able, with this gait, to transport as much as 200 pounds on their shoulder poles. These poles are tough but flexible, like an archers bow, and flat for comfort across the shoulders. During the cool times of day, in the morning and evening, the roads are lined with women carrying firewood, herbs, lumps of crude sugar, and various items of merchandise in this fashion. When the men carry things, they usually manage to get the use of a cart of some sort. It is interesting to note that these carts are predominately wheeled with Jeep or truck tires.

One of my first assignments in the battery was to take charge of the motor transport and get it "squared away." S/Sgt. Bergeron, my Motor-Transport Chief, was discouraged because the water used for washing away the sand and mud had to be hauled from water points many miles away. This was important because it clogs wheels, brakes, breather ports, engines, and drivers alike. So Sgt Bergeron with his French accent went to Papa-San and had a pow-wow using young Charlie-San for an interpreter. The result was that for twenty-five dollars PapaSan would dig a well guaranteed to produce water, which was no spectacular guarantee considering that rice paddy land is wet like a sponge anywhere once you get below the surface.

Two days later we had our well. It had seven feet of water and water level was only about three feet down. When I went out to inspect the results I decided that I would no longer have to worry about the trucks coming back to the motor pool dirty.

The village girls had found our well an excellent place to set up shop for selling candies, Ho Chi Minh sandals, and various other Vietnamese curios. The vehicles looked like a set from Wagon Train drawn up in a circle around the well while the drivers pretended to wash their trucks as they bantered with the girls and played with the children. Playing with the children of an occupied land has always been a favorite pastime of the American trooper. Seeing such happy, friendly playfulness makes one incredulous that the father or brother of one of those youngsters might well be one with the dreaded Viet Cong, which we are trying so hard to kill, and which cause the villagers so much sorrow.

I was dismayed to learn of all the packages that I haven't received. I have, however, received all five of the most recent and have marveled to see how many packages each mail call would bring. I can at long last sleep under a clean sheet and dry my face with a clean towel. The towel, particularly, got kind of dirty on Jackstay. I discovered that the cookies were better eaten together - - ie. white crunched cookies

together with oatmeal which were not so crunched. I volunteered one bunch of crunched cookies to a party in the Sgt's Club last night and another bunch to the late night FDC watch which I thought was looking bored and hungry.

Tana's cookies arrived last night and are delicious. Her packing job pretty well prevented any of them from getting broken but then, nobody I know had anything bad to say about "crunched cookies." Makes chewing easier and white are premixed with oatmeal.

Also had a letter from Bill W. and from the Shattucks; a letter and card from Cathy which I will answer from my next loquacious state since I have many questions about "things" in Las Vegas.

I envy Dave but I am getting lots of reading done. (Dave Bowlus has been doing research at the Berkeley Marine Lab at Bodega Bay the way Mark did at Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove one quarter in 1963 - dwh)

Dear Cathy, 18 July, 1966

I changed my mind about the things I was going to ask you about Las Vegas - - I'll wait until I can go myself. I was very interested to hear about your trip though, since I did not know anything about you going. Apparently it was a Chi Omega convention or something, huh? Why can't I meet topless dancers when I go traveling abroad. (Of course you know what you were don't you - - a broad traveling. Heard that in the mess hall the other day and thought I'd throw it in.)

I can't believe what I am doing right now. I have set up an "outdoor office" on the dike right in back of my tent with an old wash stand built out of "ammo" boxes for a desk. The dike goes all around the outside of all the rice paddies and has trees planted on it at intervals. My office is under one of these clumps of trees and my picture-window-view takes in about 200 acres of rice paddies. I have set up the Sony speakers from our Special Services Sony 500 facing out the back of the tent and plugged them into the Cleopatra/Mutiny on the Bounty tape playing on the Akai. The Akai incidentally sounds a lot better than the Sony I think. I wasn't sure before.

In order to visualize the rice paddy topography here, you have to imagine hilly countryside filled with lakes and irregularly shaped islands. The lakes are rice paddies at this time of year and they extend many elongated arms up between the hills and the higher island-like ground. During monsoon season the water often gets so deep that sampans are able to navigate on the paddy area. A long reach of paddy extends along the length of one side of our camp and the "island" on the other side is occupied by 2/7, an infantry battalion. Another dike crosses this reach about 100 feet from where I am sitting and every morning the Vietnamese bring their cattle up the road, through our position and across the dike to the other side to the pastureland. In the late afternoon they come plodding back across the dike and back through our camp to their village.

Up the dike a ways, two women are taking advantage of the cool of the morning to scoop water from the deep irrigation canal which runs around the perimeter of the paddy and splash it up into the terrace of the paddy itself. They have an ingenious system for doing this. A large stiff leather bucket is suspended between the two scoopers on a double rope harness. Each person has a rope attached to the top and a rope attached to the bottom of the bucket, and the wooden handle of each rope in each hand. Then with an amazingly dexterous bit of teamwork, the bucket is swung down into the water and then up into the paddy, alternately filling and dumping in response to the amount of tension applied to either rope. Like the swaying rhythm of the women with their carrying poles, the water scoopers get a swinging rhythm going, which they must maintain to keep the "pump" working.

I just drank a quart of chocolate milk, for which I received the makings the other day. With the ice cold water from our ice box I could not have told the difference between the powdered milk and fresh milk from the States I am sure. The Longyears sent me \$5 to enjoy and since I can not spend it over here I am enclosing it to buy more powdered milk, IB (Instant Breakfast, remember?) Ovaltine, malt powder, etc, etc, and the postage stamps to send it. I think I will start trying to make ice cream.

Time for about three hours of Marine Biology, now.

Dear Folks, 24 July, 1966

I just sat down to have a couple of bites of ice cream and before I knew it I had polished off the better part of a one pound coffee can of it. A Negro Staff Sgt. and I have a certain infamy in the battery with our ice cream consumption but although I don't think anybody realizes it, I still put away a lot more than he does. HEH! After everybody, including the messmen, have eaten all they can, one of the cooks, whom I have trained, brings all the leftover ice cream to my tent and I put it up in canteen cups, coffee cans, etc. The two coffee cans Tana sent her cookies in were perfect but my roommate, Tom McDermant put a knife through one of them. He puts a knife through just about everything he can get ahold of and what could be a more perfect target than the plastic top on an empty coffee can. It went all the way through the top and the bottom.

I guess I have received all the packages now; I have my sea-light, two more tapes which I have been playing ever since they arrived. Still none of those electrical things except the cord and plug in the light package. The Mutiny on the Bounty tape was messed up somehow - - I must have had the mono button pushed when I taped it because it is not in stereo. I will probably return that one to you. I would also like to send you a program for taping records we have at home. It should be possible to get three full albums on one side of a tape at 5 5/4" pm speed. Would there be anyone around that would have the time or inclination to do this?

I had very nice letters from Dr. Lyons, Jim Ellingwood, Sally Kincaid, J.J.(and some Kool-aid), Cathy Koenig, Pat Howe, Sondra Shattuck, and Stewart Warner. I am trying to answer them little by little but if you see those people you might mention that I appreciated hearing from them.

I have completed the first half of my Cal Geology I course with an A average. I have more time to work on it now in Guns and have also finished two of the Marine Biology texts I brought over. Also part way through a couple more. I may be writing for more books before too long, if you happen to come across any Marine Biology texts dealing with the South China Sea I would appreciate getting one. Last week I went diving with Tom McD, at the Chu Lai beach and the amount of fauna is fantastic. It is, as Tom said, just like swimming in somebody's tropical fish tank. But I don't know what I am seeing or what to look for. I collected some more shells - - less odoriferous

The Air Mail and surface mail cookies arrived within a day of each other. No olive oil so far. The San Francisco sourdough was delicious, w/ spaghetti seasoning etc. Also have what Sally calls "greenery."

I am keeping the picture of Sparky in the garden under the elm if that's ok J.J. By the way where is Bodega Bay? Dave should have taken a Malibu with him. The beach in the picture looks perfect.

Gun Platoon Commander

30, July

As a result of a new change in disposition of 155 Guns and many contributing circumstances, I am now the commanding officer of a 155 Gun platoon of two guns on Hill 54, back with my old buddy, Col. Coffman. However since we are in general support of the division there is no problem of the Col. trying to run anything but our lives. Our mission is over his head.

How I got this auspicious post is a long story. It all began when we found we would have to send a platoon down south of Chu Lai. Up until now we have had the two guns north and four guns in Chu Lai. The platoon that was next to us at 2/11 was moved [*north a short distance*] to Hill 54 about a week ago. I was to be sent south to take over the new south platoon when Tom McDermant went home next month so for training they sent me north to this [*Hill 54*] platoon.

The platoon commander here was sick when I arrived and a couple of days later they decided he had malaria and evacuated him. So the Battery Cdr., Capt. McNamara (who just took over from Capt. Davidson) gave me the platoon. Eventually the plan is still to send me down south to the new position but I understand that before the move of guns is made, the position will have been completely prepared - - even some board, screened houses built . On the other hand there's VC' s down there.

My house here on "54" is almost on the top of the hill. Do I ever have a view from 54 meters up!! It is not quite like the top of Nui Tranh but it is still interesting and pretty, - seeing the pastoral activities going on over the green countryside. Most of the crops are well up now.

The packages you have been sending are really hitting the spot. The Jewish Rye, or whatever it was, is delicious. The piece with butter and seasoning came through tasting so much like "barbecue on the Lanai" that I could imagine the whole rest of it. The new-green-sheet arrived and I laughed thinking about your fixing me up a sheet all nice with a hole in the middle. I thought at the time that it looked like a lot of work had been put in on it but I chalked it up to your economy mindedness. Seems like there was another package over which I wanted to express delight but I can't think what it was.

We have been doing a lot of shooting out here - - in fact since I have taken over the platoon they have probably shot as many rounds as they had in the preceding two months. (I have been here five days.) This morning we fired a platoon, ten volleys zone fire, and were able to get him 50 of the 60 rounds fired within the 15 minute period. That is fast shooting!! The second gun only got 20 away because they were having to ram by hand. We have been getting our missions primarily from various recon teams out deep where only we can reach them. The one this morning was to prepare a landing zone though. The other targets get kind of discouraging except that it is better to be shooting than not. Yesterday a mission was called in on a sniper! Other missions are usually around "four VC" in size. We had a mission two days ago on 40 to 50, though. That is an unusual target.

31 July, 1966

I just reread your last mail and decided some comments were in order. If by sleeping bag liner you mean of sheet material, that would be perfect. The problem is how to keep the mosquitoes out at night and a sheet works great except for when a knee or a toe pokes out. The brass are really getting worried about mosquitoes since so many units are losing appreciable numbers to Malaria. It seems there is one variety the pills do not help and that variety is going around like wildfire. It hit 2/11 just after I left and it is going strong out here now. Although not at all pleasant, it is however about the only way to get a rest.

___ I am so glad Sparky's problems are over. Your intentions were in vain because everybody else told me about him. [*Family pet Pomeranian; had surgery for fiber glass he had swallowed and the folks tried to keep me from hearing.*]

We have good food here - - melons are grown locally for anyone who wants to pay the inflated prices. Here on Hill 54 we have to hike all the way to the bottom of the far side of the hill to eat though, so we go hungry more often than not. I have gone back to only one or two meals a day. The trek should keep us spry tho. [*I recall a battery clerk making coffee for us early in the morning and calling "caw-*

hee” out across the morning stillness at the top of our hill. Few were awake for it. I’ll bet there were a few villagers wondered what it meant though.]

Cathy Koenig wrote about the Stanford ASB President. We tried the same thing when I was there but the guy turned out to be outstanding. He too ran as a joke - - a graduate law student - - and was surprised when he was elected. But he did the best job of any we ever had. Now who was that a joke on? People over here still laugh remembering the contest invented by Cal Tech, a timed race to see who could put a piano through a 9" hole in the least time. Instruments of destruction and teams were clearly delineated.

I got a letter from a Mrs. Langstaff on Casa Grande in Pasadena together with some Rootin' Tootin' Strawberry and many clippings.

The weather turned wet again today. It has been rainy and cold all day and so has limited just about all work. Vehicles are practically immobilized in this stuff. Of course it is only a preview of what is to come.

I have been permanently assigned as platoon commander for these two guns. In fact, although I got another Lt. to act as my X.O., he will be sent down to take over the South platoon any day now. We are very short of officers - we are supposed to require two with each platoon but there are not enough to go around - what with malaria and going home, etc.

Another letter from Dr. and Mrs. Lyons. They sent the last of my "articles" from the Star News.

3 August, 1966

Operation Hastings has only affected us slightly. Our range from here, on Hill 54, cuts into only the southernmost area of Hastings and all we have been able to support have been the recon teams keeping track of VC movement into and out of the battle area. We do not move around very much since we are so bulky and have so much range. I don't know if Curt and Joe got up there or not. 2/11 supports the 5th Marines so probably some of them are up there. I am waiting to see some of them and find out what happened. Unfortunately I am stranded here with the responsibility of a platoon and cannot travel around like I used to.

Yes, I sure have had a chance to shoot my platoon. The second day I was here we fired 60 rounds at everything from "VC sniper" to "50 VC at burning ammo dump." Mechanical difficulties are getting us down though. In fact, Gun #1 is currently out of action. No power. These guns have been over here for almost a year now and are beginning to get pretty tired. Same with the motor transport as I mentioned before.

They do use a lot of artillery in tight situations like Hastings but air strikes seem to make better publicity. They certainly are spectacular. Also the napalm can get down into bunkers and caves where artillery has trouble. What we have is the speed and flexibility in getting fire onto a target. Then of course, we are also cheaper.

*(We had asked in our letters to Mark if they were using the artillery in Operation Hastings because all we read about is the air strikes. dwh)

I cannot remember telling you about the enforced conditioning program we have here. We have to hike up and down all 54 meters each time we go to chow. I have picked out the steepest face to go up and down. It takes about half as long but it is quite a pull. The chow here is great.

I finally had my revolver taken away. The new Captain (McNamara) obeys the letter of the law sent down from regiment and so pulled all personal weapons in. However, he felt sorry so he sent me an M-14 rifle, a grease gun, and a .45 pistol. Now I have to decide what to carry every time I go anywhere. I would still trade them all for the revolver though. These "automatic" weapons make me nervous since I have seen so many of them jam. I think the grease gun is probably the least likely to malfunction, though, since it is so simple.

People are starting to break out wetsuits now in anticipation of the monsoon season. If you were to send mine now by slow freight it would probably get here about in time. Monsoons start about October - November.

Had a note from Tana S. in which she promised to send some more cookies. mmmm. They were almost like chocolate candy they were so full of drops.

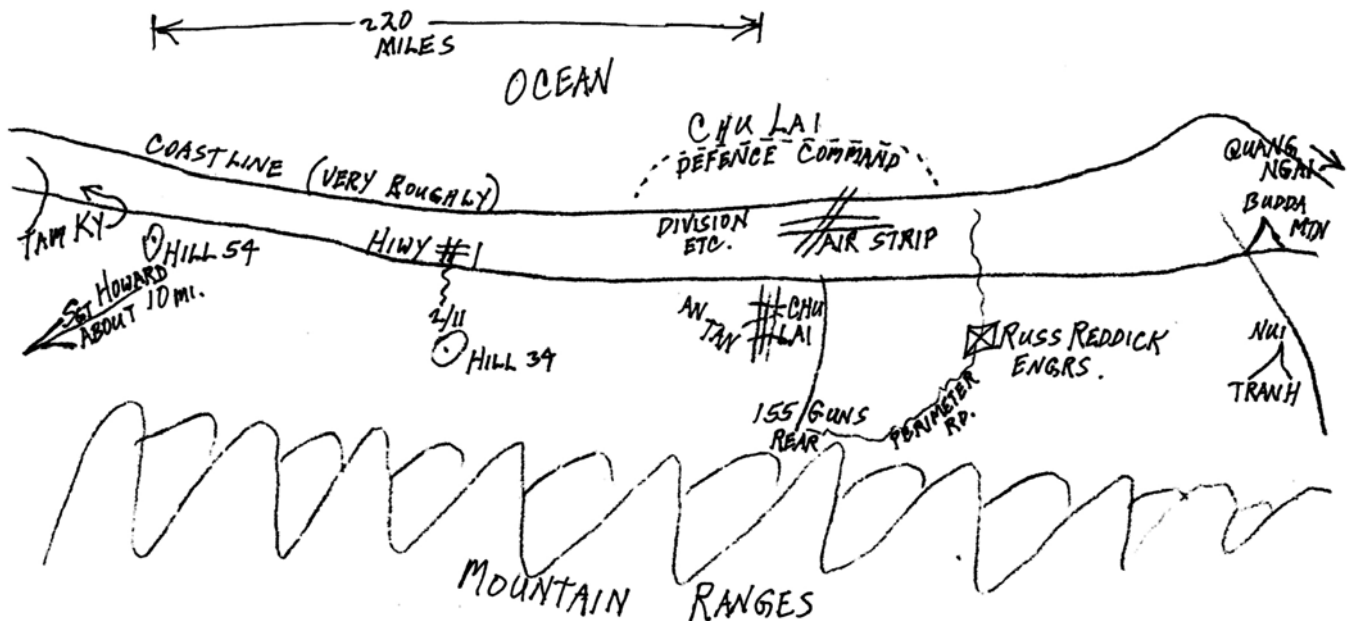
That sounds like old times, eating in the trailer. I remember the time we had breakfast on the cliff at Dana Point. It was so beautiful. Your trailer trip should be a lot of fun. When I get home, I will probably have to camp out for a while until I get used to being civilized again. I can imagine that being indoors is going to feel stuffy. Right now it would sure be nice to try out though. I find myself constantly thinking of overstuffed, easy chairs, floors with carpets, cars, and other items of civilization. Best of all would be a kitchen with a refrigerator, sink, and stove. I'm raving.

Somebody should get Andy started on some USAFI courses (U.S. Armed Forces Institute). He can take a test which will qualify him for a H.S. diploma and take any H.S. courses he needs for college entrance. Once he has passed the H.S. GED, he can take college courses at government expense as well. Just a thought. I am Education Officer.

Dad;

4 August, 1966

Enclosed is a rough sketch which gives a general idea of the locations you mentioned. I am not too sure where the Chu Lai perimeter is but it follows roughly a continuation of the circle of Perimeter Road. An Tan is the commercial village just inside the perimeter. Chu Lai village itself is an American built relocation of the original one. My platoon is now at Hill 54. Sgt. Howard was somewhere north and inland from Hill 54.



"Guns" are used in general support of the division. We are a part of force troops and as such are attached to the division - - one battery of 155 Guns and one battery of 8" Howitzers, (both self propelled) per division. There are three batteries of each in the Marine Corps for each of the three divisions. We have been firing in support of recon teams such as Sgt. Howard's since we are the only weapons which can reach them. We have the longest range but the 8" is bigger. Same carriage however.

A 106 is a recoilless rifle - anti tank weapon. The Ontos, you may remember, mounts six of them - three on a side. (The Ontos is a rocket firing full track vehicle.)

So far in this position we have had no time for anything except building the position. The first few days we had so many fire missions that we could not even do that. We have been getting a little more slack now so we fill sandbags, string barbed wire, and build bunkers all day long. Today we received decking for a G.P. tent which we set up. That is good. At least twelve men are off the ground now.

The newspaper picture does not look inconsistent to me. (We clipped one and sent it to Mark showing Marines under fire running, and wearing only fatigue hats while others had helmets. We asked if it was a fake. dwh) I can visualize everyone running for their flak gear and helmets.

Hastings sure did turn up a lot didn't it. You can stand by for another one even bigger to follow, called Colorado. We do not know if my platoon will be moved for it or not but we sure will be supporting it.

The mail has been a little erratic lately. For a while it was coming thru in record time. Perhaps because of the air strikes or perhaps the military activity.

5 August 1966

Dear Folks,

It seems hard to believe that one year ago today I was in the hospital at Camp Pendleton asking permission to get out for Dean's birthday party. It seems so long ago but yet it almost seems as if time has stood still for so much of the time since. There has been so much to do and never quite enough time for it all -- such a great responsibility, perhaps self-imposed, somehow to live up to an image that was a shared thing between two brothers.

Since that time it has seemed to me that I have been able to "find myself" more clearly -- a purpose and dedication; perhaps an identity which he saw and I never quite realized myself. "O wad the powr o' giftie gie us ..." [an old quotation that ends to the effect, "to see ourselves as others see us"]. I feel that the spirit between us was so kindred that by emulating the most enviable qualities in him I may make of myself what I want most.

* * *

This was written while listening to the sounds of Mancini and contemplating the natural beauty of the Vietnamese countryside from my tent at the top of Hill 54. I have the most beautiful view -- not as high as Nui Tranh but the land is less cultivated, less populous and has a great natural beauty with the mountains in the sharply ascending background.

My brother Dean died of cancer when he was 14 years old. On his birthday in August of 1965 he had been sick for three years. I was in the hospital with pneumonia at the time and if it hadn't been for that I would have left for Vietnam before his death. As it was, he died soon after, and before I left in February of 1966. This was of course all very tragic for my family and probably accounts for how much I wrote home from Vietnam.

OPERATION COLORADO 6-15 August, 1966

Written on Operation Colorado

Dear Folks, 14 August, 1966

This note is to let you know what is happening. Much more to follow. On the afternoon of the 5th, we got word to prepare to move, and at 0500 on the morning of the 6th we were on highway # 1 waiting for the convoy to take us north of Tam Ky on Operation Colorado. We planned for a 5 day operation but we are still here and show no signs of leaving. In fact we have set up a small galley and are putting decks in some of the troops' tents. It must remain for you all to let me know how much over-all damage this operation is doing via the news publicity.

I received a well battered but insured package just now containing some tapes I have long awaited and - - - although the package looked smashed (it was addressed to 107 mortars) and has probably been in the mail for ages, the contents survived ok so I guess I won't try to collect damages. I am in a bad position for playing tapes, however, since my recorder is still on Hill 54.

Dear Bowli and Sally,

Thank you all much for your correspondence and goodies.

We are currently just south of Da Nang on Operation Colorado with a fantastic array of artillery. We have four 155 Guns & two 8" Howitzers in my battery plus 2/11, plus a 155 howitzer battery. In other words, a few of every weapon the Marine Corps owns.

I am working in FDC again and have posted Dave's "Do Not Disturb: Plants & Animals in this area are under scientific study" [from his marine biology research lab at Bodega Bay] on the computers' table. We really needed the "Do not Disturb" part since people are inclined to make this a social spot. I notice a very faint pink panther paw print has been super imposed on the sign. :-)

Sally, you wondered why the green sheet. Well, for one thing it doesn't show dirt so much. Then too, green is a pretty color. I thought dirty white was fine on Apache because I was so visible. I was the only person that did not get stepped on or stumbled over (or worse) in the dark. However, in the mornings when I'd fold my sheet, people from the far sides of the positions and way out on outposts would say "Oh, you're the one with the white sheet. We wondered what you were last night." So I figured I might as well shift to the more conventional green. Another benefit of the green sheets is that on particularly warm nights the perspiration runs the dye and I wake up camouflaged. The towels are even better for this.

It is now almost 0400 and the chances of an attack are much less so am breathing easier. We call the hours from 11 until 3am. the bewitching hours. If "Charlie" attacks then, he has a reasonably good chance of getting into the position and escaping without being seen and "greased."

Dear Cathy, 15 August

We may be packing up and going "home" tomorrow morning. Just as we were beginning to make ourselves at home out here. It would surprise no one if they told us we were going to the moon, and we take all the word we get just about that seriously, but anyway this is the latest.

It sure has been fun commanding that platoon of guns. There is a captain there [*Capt. Johnson, Lima Battery on Hill 54*] with a battery of 155 howitzers (SP- stands for self propelled) and he tries to harass us. It gives me pleasure to be able to politely tell him we have more important things to do than to get haircuts once a week and shave every morning. Haircuts are a problem though. I haven't had one for a month and most everybody is pretty shaggy. Once in a while we have to ration water and I maintain that drinking is more important than shaving. We stay pretty squared away though and have accomplished a tremendous amount of work for 30 people. The Captain periodically threatens that he is going to talk to his buddy the Colonel and have my platoon attached to his battery. My CO says not to worry, that he can't do it - - I sure hope not. Relations were much improved by the time we left to go on Colorado and he is learning what I will and will not take from him.

I really do want to go camping when I get home. It will be such a novel experience to camp with people who feel like they are roughing it. Of course we do not have to worry about being cold which makes a big difference - - even when it is wet. In fact rain in the afternoon is a welcome respite from the heat of the day for showering, laundry etc. So let's go camping.

We are all making an I.C.R. (*Ice Cream Run*) this afternoon. 2/11 is up on the hill with us and has invited us up for a celebration with steak and ice cream. [We don't really know what they are celebrating unless they got advance word on the end of the operation] Can hardly wait.

Hey, little sister, I'm still out of milk. It's awful with all this I.B. [*Instant Breakfast*] and milkshake mix sitting around to be out of milk,

Much love, Mark

OPERATION COLORADO - the Story 6-15 August, 1966

First word came from Capt. McNamara on Friday afternoon, 5 August, to be prepared to move out Saturday morning at dawn. Although constant moving from place to place gets awfully tiresome, at least when we get the word to move out in a hurry, everybody has had lots of practice packing. So we packed.

Along about 5 o'clock the wind started blowing, the sky turned gray and cold, and the distant crackle of thunder sputtered over the mountains. I heard the howitzers passing the word to cover sights and put on muzzle covers and began to wonder how the rain would affect the operation. The big lumbering, top heavy, tracked vehicles we call a '55 Gun are not at all graceful in the slippery Vietnamese mud. Just about then I got a call from Capt. Mac with orders to move out as soon as it started raining and get off Hill 54 and down to the highway. It could be disastrous maneuvering the gun off the hill on the slippery mud of the road.

This was all the encouragement I needed. There was no question in anybody's mind - the rain was coming. So without waiting for the wet slippery proof, I passed the word "CSMO." That is the command that sets the artilleryman's blood to racing; the command that means grab your pack, hitch up your gun and move out. Hitching up the gun for a self-propelled means firing up the engine, pulling forward off the recoil spade, and driving away which we did in short order. [*CSMO is actually Close Station March Order but the literal meaning is lost in the reality of the exciting moment.*]

Ted Mahoney, my assistant platoon commander, climbed aboard the lead gun and started the platoon out of the gun position just as the first drops started to fall. The road out goes all the way around Hill 54 to the highway which is on the other side of the hill. I stayed in the position to supervise loading the rest of the gear and then went over the hill to see how the guns were doing. When I got over to the infantry area I could see one gun sitting peacefully and hugely at the bottom of the hill, dwarfing the infantry vehicles and equipment around it.

Sitting precariously on a narrow section of road on the side of the hill sat the other gun. The road in front of it tilted to the side steeply and below it sat the thatched infantry battalion chapel. Ted looked a little worried and said that the first gun got through o.k. but every time the second one started across, it started slipping off down the slope to the right - a rather precipitous slope - right into the chapel in fact. I watched them try once more but the road was so slick that the huge wide tracks would not grab into the surface and propelled the gun in a sort of oblique forward and sideways motion toward the chapel. The driver slammed into reverse and ground back out of danger. I decided the only thing to do was cut the road back into the hill and level it off since it would be foolish to try to run the gun through with the rain coming down steadily.

I went to phone the Lima battery exec and ask for the loan of their TD15 tractor. It had been all cleaned up for an engineer equipment inspection and they weren't very happy about it but the CO was at chow so I got it. When we got back, Capt Tanner, the Gun Battery Exec and the battery Gunny had arrived to see if we had gotten out and the Gunny was trying to drive the gun through with no better luck. In fact the Gunny, noted for a certain disregard of consequences (which eventually nearly cost him his life) was jockeying it around in such a manner that the infantrymen in chow line nearby were gaping in

horror as I came by with the tractor. In no time at all the road was cut through and the gun came lumbering down off the side of the hill slipping and sliding a little but the chapel remained unharmed.

With the guns off the hill and parked ready to move out in the morning, we all prepared to get what sleep we could for the night. The move was scheduled for 0600 so I set reveille for 0500. Everything was packed except for our racks and blankets so we turned in.

At 5 o'clock we prepared to move. Cots went into the P.C. trailer along with the artillery motor transport packs - - water proof bags full of anything that fits. At 0600 the central platoon was still at the bridge south of us waiting for the ferry to be fixed since the guns are too heavy for most bridges. Finally at about 0800, Capt. McNamara decided to lead off with the two northern guns, with the other two following soon from the ferry. I was to wait for the third section of the convoy which was the FDC section.

Well, what happened was the third section merged with the guns in the second section and went right by. After waiting about an hour for the third section and sweltering in flak gear and helmet, I hitched a ride with a logistics follow up convoy going to Tam Ky. We breezed along through the countryside for a while and then were brought up short by a massive traffic jam at the river bridge just south of Tam Ky. *[Chang River]* The engineers had a ferry built and there upon it sat a 155 Gun looking like a huge self satisfied toad being ferried across. Shortly I was back with the battery again. This was not the first traffic jam we had caused and it was not the last.

We lumbered on through Tam Ky which was the first civilization most of us had seen for awhile. There were paved streets and two gas stations. It began to seem like we must be going to Da Nang when finally we turned off to the left and went into our position. The guns roared up the reverse slope of a small hill and backed down on their spades. In no time they were laid and bulldozers had scooped up parapets around them.

As assistant FDO I set up the FDC tent and charts for the FDO who was then Lt. and now Capt. John Ressimyer. He is now the XO. So began our week long camping trip. We sat back and shot missions, lay in the sun, and drank beer with the infantry companies who were sent back to our area for R&R between battles. One day the rains came down so hard that anything that was not fastened down was washed away but mostly the weather was nice.

One evening 1/5 got helilifted into an ambush. Through some foul up, artillery never got in to support them. We were mad because we weren't called and they were mad because we didn't shoot but Col. Coffman and his bloodthirsty troops charged right into the VC positions and ripped them to shreds. Hill 54 resounded with their stories for weeks. I suspect they didn't want artillery to take any of the glory - but then I knew Col. Coffman.

Finally one morning a week later things were calm so they decided to end the operation and they did, so we packed up and left. We have supported many operations from our permanent positions but that is the only operation we have deployed to support since I have been in the battery.

The first pages of this article were written on Colorado. I found this tablet floating around the FDC during one of the rains and started writing. I found it again floating around my footlocker yesterday when I started sorting out my letters etc. So here at last is Operation Colorado which I promised so long ago. I have tried to include my feeling of awe at the size of the guns. I still have the feeling sometimes when I see one of them driving by or even just standing beside one. But just after working with howtars and 105's they were particularly awesome to me.

Imagine how I felt the day the gun almost ran away, with me riding on the side. It would certainly have leveled my hootch down south.

[This was the long promised writeup for Colorado. It wasn't actually finished until December, as evidenced by the runaway gun incident which happened at the South Platoon position in December.]

Dear Folks 17 Aug.

Just received a package containing olive oil, Tang, rum cakes, Eagle brand, etc, etc. - all in beautiful condition but much delayed ! ?? They were sent on June 10th to Howtars 2/11. So far all I have

heard is the Washington Square and Slaughter on 10th Ave tape in the other package but am looking forward to the rest.

Sure enough, as I wrote to Cathy the other day, we were pulled out of our position north of Tam Ky and are once more at Hill 54. I received the package of tapes in the field and so could not play them until now. "Roy the Froy" is still sitting on top of my tape recorder.

We have returned to some of the hottest weather I have seen since we have been here. I suppose it is typical August weather. While on the operation we had rain every afternoon which dropped the temperature considerably.

I saw Joe Wright on the operation and he mentioned that he had received some prints of slides he took which I had admired. I will drop down to 2/11 as soon as possible and get them to send on to you. I also completed another roll of pictures which I will develop and send on to you.

I am now listening to the Stan Kenton tape and it is fantastic!! While I was on Opn. Colorado, the Lt. from Lima Battery next door (155 Howitzers S.P.) took care of the recorder and he is so enthused he spends most of his time in our tent. This is ok because he brings beer.

Hey!! I tried using olive oil, spaghetti seasoning - just a smidgen - and garlic powder on the "C" ration white bread and the result was delicious. My room mate now, (also X.O.) Bill Rhoads, who says he normally can't stand the stuff said it was great. Yum. Keep those pkgs of sour dough coming. Also may I put in another pitch for the Challenge milk powder. The Foremost is better but right now quantity is better than quality and I can save the Foremost for drinking plain.

Love, Mark

18 Aug.

Hi, I am listening to your tape (*one we taped of the family talking here at home, dwh.*) and I might as well be sitting right in the living room with you all. At least your voices come through perfectly well even if you are having technical difficulties of some sort. I was very disappointed with the recording on my set. It picked practically nothing up and was badly distorted. Playback is fantastic, however. In the meantime, I would be delighted to have tapes from you of anything at all. The reason for the KRLA/KFWB tapes was merely "atmosphere from the states." Sort of a means of keeping in touch with commercials, hit songs, news, trends, etc. Slow speed is adequate for anything you want to tape. I can't hear any significant difference in fidelity. (*Answers to our tape to Mark, dwh.*)

No, we missed Nathan Hale (operation) but a lot of people I know were in it. Yes, it is funny to hear Mother yawn. You sure must be tired. I am delighted to be hearing about my Malibu. Heck, if there are a few indentations in the fiberglass, that looks ethnic. Yes, that is a Lido that Angie and I went out in. (Philippines, dwh.) There are several homemade innovations which may have disguised it - such as mahogany spars which break. There is a regular deal where we can go into Chu Lai to call home via "hams." However this does not apply to CO's. We are the victims of circumstance of being in command. Very interesting to hear about Jim somebody's wedding and the dilemma of invitations, wedding gifts, etc. This is very exciting. I am tickled pink listening to the sounds of a Wakeman, Bowlus, Howe dinner party, BBQ type, on the lanai. All the way down to the last detail of everybody talking at once. This is so much fun. My room mate here will be very surprised when I join right into the conversation. (I have the earphones only.) The "grunts" are most undependable providers. They just shut off the juice so the rest of the tape must wait.

I have a new roomie - - Bill Rhoads. He was in my class at artillery school but has only just come "in-country" from Okinawa. He was working in the baggage facility at Okinawa, processing outgoing shipment from here. What a job!

My platoon is all back on Hill 54. We will be supporting the next operation Jefferson - from here. Ah, the juice came back on so I will continue with the BBQ - - - -

That was really great hearing all of that "home." How would it be to send a tape of radio maybe once every two weeks. There is no need to use 7 1/2 ips speed since it sounds "awful" either way, but just put it on KRLA steadily for a full long tape at 3 3/4.

I am now sitting out on my "verandah" in a Vietnamese folding chair which is probably an extremely colorful lightweight version of the officers' chair (aluminum tubing and plastic weave reclining seat like a lawn lounge chair). From here I can see the ocean out to the east and a panorama of tidal plains to the north and mountains to the west. The sun has just set over the mountains and the beautiful green countryside is fading into the dusky pinkish gray of the twilight. This will be another dark night which is very worrisome.

Love, Mark

PS. Have received no big box with malted milk. Missing letters 39, 41 and 42??

PPS. Notes on the arty to Daddy --

Yes, our guns are SP (self-propelled). The 155 How (howitzer), M109, which is used to an increasing extent is also SP. They have a few towed How for rough or inaccessible terrain. The Army has a 105 How SP but the Corps didn't buy it. The carriage for the '55 Gun is the same as for the 8 inch How, also a force troops weapon. Normally the 8 inch and Gun batteries are divided into the 1st 2nd and 3rd FAG (field arty group). The 3rd supports the 1st Division, the 1st FAG the 3rd Division, etc. I imagine they'll form a 5th FAG or something for the 5th Division. There are universally six weapons in a battery. *[LtCol. Stribling took command of the 1st FAG in Nov. I don't show a 3rd FAG in country.]*

Heard some talk of phasing in the 175 mm Gun, which the Army has, and phasing out the '55 gun. The '55 guns are so obsolete that when we break parts for the gun (not carriage) they have to be made from scratch. All tables are in yards and must be converted, and metro (meteorological) data is given in effects rather than corrections which are now used. TO is about 150 *[personnel]*. The thing weighs 60 tons almost, and roads are a problem, especially over here with so much water to be crossed. The engineers have to work overtime to beef up or bypass bridges for us.

Just before I came into the battery one of the guns went through a bridge near Tam Ky and the driver drowned. Regiment loused that one up. They assured us we could make it in spite of both ours and the engineers' protestations. Sometimes we wonder about Regiment. Incidentally, we work as an attachment to Regiment, rather than as an FAG in general support of the Division over here. We still support the Division but Regiment controls us. As an FAG we would have our own Colonel (bird type). As you will read in my account of Colorado, the weapon is a clumsy beast and needs good, dry, roads. I cannot believe how little traction the tracks have. Max range is 23,500 meters, projectile weight 94 pounds, same as the How. They can fire our ammo but we can't fire theirs, I don't remember why.

Mark

And more -- (I am reading back through the various letters and will comment. :-))

I have been learning all about glacial moraines from my geology course. I'll have to go up and appreciate terrain some time. You're camping trip really sounded like fun. Ours was too. :-)

I remember Mother's fear of getting into too hot country such as you mentioned going into the Mother Lode. I also remember her enjoying it as much as anybody once we did it. The heat no longer bothers me anymore here -- it's just the discomfort of having sweat constantly soaking clothing and running off the skin. As long as the breeze keeps blowing it's not too bad. The thought of returning to a climate with cold weather begins to scare me though. Maybe I'll have to go live in the Mother Lode country. :-)

You mentioned trying to get me a Marine Bio book for Asian waters -- did I mention the fantastic offer I found in the Stars and Stripes overseas newspaper? They were selling books of all kinds for less than one third of the regular price. I sent a check for \$27 and I will be receiving about \$80 worth of outstanding scientific reference works.

24 August 1966

Dear Folks,

My write up of Operation Colorado is seriously delayed. I have been writing regulations, guard orders, schedules, etc. for my platoon and have not felt inclined to do any other writing. Actually I think this is the first time rules have been written down at all with anything in mind other than CYAW/P and when the troops first heard wind that paperwork was forthcoming there were some grumblings. Fortunately my Sgt. in charge is good and he put everything into effect without any trouble and the troops realize now that all paperwork does not read like spit and polish regulations.

The first paperwork was a "training schedule" of sorts. This was because I was tired of the disorganization of working from hour to hour. I figured out a daily schedule that would accomplish everything that should be accomplished in a day and published it. Then I began to realize how much slack the people had been used to. For the first few days I had to periodically go down and check to see who was hiding in their tents and who was still in the rack when work started in the afternoon. It's working well now and I only check to see it's being followed often enough to keep the Sgt.'s a little nervous.

My second work was uniform regulations. Most regulations read one way but certain things are ignored by commanders according to whim. I tried to give the troops a workable set of rules to follow so that they would know when they could relax and when not. They are liberal but they will be enforced. The big problem as far as uniform goes is we are not quite at war and not quite in garrison. Brass are always around and lesser brass are playing politics trying to get to be greater brass.

Finally my guard orders were much needed and the enforcement very necessary. Nobody really knew for certain what he was doing and the result was slightly chaotic. So now you know what I have been doing for the war effort.

The moon is filling out now and it is light until after midnight so I am relaxing a little at night. During the dark phase I was really jumpy. As a matter of fact the rear area at ChuLai where I felt so safe was hit by a few VC just after we got back from Colorado. They did no damage though.

Last night we almost froze to death. I had a blanket over me and I was still a little chilly. The days are still very warm but it is good to have cool nights. The rains are getting closer too. Yesterday it came down hard for about an hour just before dark.

I have the June Scientific American. Lima battery has a subscription.

Anything you hear about the big shark at 6000 feet I would enjoy hearing about; clippings etc. I got a partial picture of it in a clipping from the "widow" I met at Balboa.

We had a discussion on problems of the world last night here in my tent which has turned into the local "O" club. I am convinced the best thing Cathy could do with her Negro children is to instill in them a desire for knowledge and respectability. I don't know if this is possible but if it is, that would be the age to do it at. I think what they need more than better housing, better schools etc is a better sense of values.

Love, Mark

25 August 1966

Dearest Cathy,

I just received a "writing portfolio" from Arnie Swenson, the XO of Lima battery next door. He said he wanted to have Lima have a share in contributing to "those extraordinary letters of Lt. Mark Howe". So I decided to put it to immediate use and write an "extraordinary letter". :-)

I just received your last in which you mentioned your expedition to the Watts area. Lots of luck. I hope this letter finds you still in good health. With all the rioting going on all over the US it's a good feeling to be over here in Vietnam where it's safe. People over here are beginning to wonder if the battlefield would be more appropriately placed in urban USA. Incidentally, what we hear over here about dissension among our countrymen over whether or not we are fighting on the right side is not terribly disconcerting. The more we see of the regular PAVN [communist] forces as compared with our allies, the more we wonder, too, if the country would be better off with Ho Chi Minh in control. But what really is discouraging is when we hear about all the racial violence and rioting by hoodlums who are probably

rioting because it's something to do. They should send them all over here to help us build roads and fill sandbags. Am I ruining your day? :-)

I received two packages today, one full of gingerbread men and the other with powdered milk and iced tea. The gingerbread men are beautiful and very interesting because although they have a slightly old looking appearance, they smell and taste like they just came out of the oven. The miraculous age of baggies!! None broke either. The milk package was squashed almost flat but no damage to contents. Yesterday a package came with bubbles, malt, candy, soap, etc. and a package of iced tea had given everything a coating of tannic acid and sugar when it broke. :-) I have been rationing the last of a package of powdered milk so the package today was just in the nick of time.

No, I don't need a bee hat. I have a camouflaged mosquito net that goes over my helmet if need be but they aren't that bad. Where I live now I'm not even bothered -- up on top of Hill 54. I am lonely though. My last roommate was just called back to the battery area to take over as FDO because another officer just left for embark school. I am getting more geology done now in my loneliness and you all will probably get more letters.

My platoon is getting so much accomplished I don't doubt but what we may be the best one in the battery. Yesterday morning I was holding a CPX (FDC fire drill) and suddenly a real fire mission came in. We just continued on the way we had been as if it were just another drill and the commands pop right out like clockwork. The guns were johnny on the spot and the first rounds landed within 100 m of the target and the second volley was fired for effect. Apparently the target moved out of our target area because the next shift we couldn't hit so they shifted over to the second platoon of guns which is now between us and Hill 34. When the observer finally ended the mission it was because the second platoon wasn't even shooting in the right grid square. So goes the war.

I just got a letter from Russ Reddick's girlfriend's sister today. He wanted me to write to her which I did. I think I mentioned it before. She says "I am 5'4" and weigh 115 lbs. I have blue eyes with dark brown hair that reaches almost to my waist."

Love Mark

PS. I thought Barbara Viallant got married. How does she happen to be working for her parents or do you know?

Dear Folks, 6 September 1966.

Mail has started coming through, like clockwork once again. It is funny how it can be so erratic for periods of time, and yet so regular others.

I just made some inroads (further inroads) into the latest sourdough bread. This is actually the first I've gotten since the olive oil arrived and that makes all the difference in the world!! Yum. I spread the oil on thickly, salt it, garlic powder, a light coat of spaghetti seasoning and then let it steep in the plastic bag for a while -- usually not long because I get impatient and start munching (choff,choff). By the way I did receive the malted milk package, which I believe I mentioned -- also another one with Carnation milk and iced tea (smack). Had a yummy box of cookies from Tana (with umlaut) and an "assorted" package from Margie and Roy, which I will dwell on for a moment. There were three entire articles photostated from magazines dealing with communications/ electronics in Vietnam. They are so good and so pertinent that I discover I now have a rotating library. Also a couple of tubes of "plastic rubber" guaranteed to caulk and insulate just about anything permanently. One gun was badly in need of insulative paint around a battery terminal so there was the first use almost immediately. Also a few goodie items and some plastic baggies. Thanks to the Stehles.

To start answering letters with the most recent, Daddy's, I am sorry to hear you're having trouble with the Ampex. On the last tape you sent I could hear that something was dreadfully wrong with the motor. Towards the end of the tape the motor could barely keep it going. So far I've had good luck with mine for the most part except for recording, which doesn't work right at all I don't think. At least if that's the way it sounds on an Akai, I don't want it. The gadgets are beginning to give some trouble too, just as I knew they would. The reverse tends to want to play the same tracks through backward instead of

changing heads. Pretty at times, but most unrecognizable. Also, the machine is extremely powerful and although it will fast forward so fast it sets up a draft in the tent, if you aren't careful, you can snap a tape or draw it into a thread of its former self by heat and tension. You said Andy had an "M-B" -- did you mean, M-8? I was thinking of getting that one originally, but I remembered all the trouble we had with tubes. I wish they had a solid-state model like mine, but without so many gadgets. I think it could not give any better sound though. I am most impressed. Also how well it has held up under the trying conditions of combat.

(By the by -- a package just arrived by the flying jeep express and it was from Donna. Contained therein were caviar, smoke clams, anchovies, mixed nuts, and a large 20 quart size box of Carnation milk powder. I simply had to stop and make myself my last milkshake with those little milkshake powders.).

To continue -- the reason the "long tom" [*long tom is an old WWII Army term for the Guns.*] is SP (self-propelled) is apparently because of its tremendous size -- they figured it would be more maneuverable, which it is. On the other hand, you are exactly right -- in mud we are useless. Employment of Guns has to be made by someone who understands their weaknesses, and capabilities, which is the main reason we do not think the Marine Corps should have them at all. The Marine Corps unfortunately, I am discovering, just doesn't know how to effectively employ artillery -- at least anything bigger than a 105 howitzer. We are mobile, and we can move fast, but we've got to have good roads and solid positions.

Where my platoon is right now, we will be helpless until the monsoons are over and the ground dries out. There are periods when the ground is dry enough, but as soon as mud starts forming, it is all we can do even to relay on a new azimuth of fire, let alone displace. I have been having my people bring in sand every day from a nearby sandpit in hopes of beefing up the gun pits, but unless the engineers get a decent road between us and highway # 1 (we are about 1000m away on the far side of Hill 54) we will not be able to leave.

I remember saying Bill Rhodes was my XO, but that is all I can guess at what you interpreted as SO and he is no longer even that -- I think I mentioned he was sent back as battery FDO. Our T.O. (table of organization) for officers, I believe, is 6 --: CO, XO, assistant XO, FDO, assistant FDO, and Liaison Officer. We are not intended and hence have no TO for deployment in platoons. 8" has that capability, but it is only our "sniper artillery" role and the general nature of the war itself that has split us up. We have a long range, but we still only have a 155mm shell.

Platoon commander is more or less an additional duty so-to-speak, but I'm not sure what my official position is now. It's confused. The rear platoon [*the one that was out behind Chu Lai*] has moved north of 2/11 now and is about 2/3 of the way north, between Hill 34 (2/11) and Hill 54. The South platoon is still south of ChuLai, which makes us pretty spread out. Battery HQ is always with the "rear" platoon, wherever it is and Captain McNamara is essentially the "platoon commander". TO battery commander is a major but Capt. McNamara is fairly senior. I said [*previously*] that an FAG [*Field Artillery Group*] commander should be a colonel, but that includes a battery of Guns and a battery of 8 inch.

Today seems to be "letter-day" -- just got Mother's letter with all the clippings. It is sad to think that Dana Point will never be its wild, deserted, nice self again. But it will be a wonderful time to remember -- camping in the trailer on the cliff, sailing out through the reef, coming crashing in through the surf at night after a long sail down from Balboa. I really wanted to buy a place there, but it would never be the same. I would probably make a mint, but then, who wants to be rich.

I appreciated Mother's description of the supper on the lanai with the hummingbirds. The cooler weather we're having here actually approximates California summer days. It is cool at night and gets cold towards morning, which lasts until almost noon when the cool breezes start getting warmer or stop. Then it will be very hot, but about 1 or 2 in the afternoon the breezes pick up and keep the afternoon bright but comfortable until sunset -- about 7:30. The evening breezes are balmy, -- and looking out over the level plains of Tam Ky in the ghostly light of the full moon with the wind blowing quietly but steadily through the tent is very exciting. All is dark and quiet because of blackout, and we have cleared the hill off so

thoroughly that the only noise the wind makes is the soft flapping of occasionally loose pieces of tent canvas. The grunt reaction force is positioned around our area to be ready to "react" in case we are hit, and occasionally there is a flash as someone lights a cigarette or the red glow of one being smoked by another waiting Marine -- waiting for the dawn, waiting for action, waiting. Maybe there is a low murmur as two or three talk together quietly; and then maybe there will be the soft sound of an Akai X355 tape recorder and the suggestive muffled "psssh" of a beer can being opened as several young officers gather to discuss the day's activities or the war or just philosophize to pass the time.

Another exciting time is early in the morning. I generally get up a little before 0600 because I have my radio watch ring me on the phone at 0545 every morning. Sometimes I walk down to the mess hall for breakfast and as I walk east across the top of the hill I can see the rosy glow of dawn amid the line of billowy clouds far out over the South China Sea. I can hear the birds waking up, -- birds which we never see though, because our hill is bare, -- and the roosters crowing down in the local village -- (a brand-new village which was built to get our payroll). Then I go down the hill, almost straight down the side of it, to the mess hall and there is scarcely anyone about yet. Then after breakfast back up the side of the hill to a wide awake and functioning camp. The cool morning breeze is blowing gently and troops are out in front of their tents shaving, brushing teeth, etc. And some straggle off toward breakfast. They take the longer easier way around the side of the hill. Now I can sit and look out over the tents and the woods just outside the perimeter, which are now catching the first sunlight, and the hazy blue color of the "Central Highlands" rising sharply from the plain to the West.

Last week was study week -- I did five lessons for geology. This weekend, I relaxed and read "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold" and finished up some short stories of Southeast Asia by Somerset Maugham. The East he describes is so different from what we experience. Europeans in his stories are so lonely since there are so few of them. With us, it is almost like being in the States since our entire society is made up of Americans. I have often said that if this country had a more modern civilization, I would enjoy living here. I am enjoying it anyway, but it would be nice to have a car and be able to live in a house and have friends with cars and houses.

I did a thorough "tent cleaning" yesterday and found many items I had misplaced during any number of moves. I found the pictures of Cathy's "coronation" by her sorority. I have been ignoring your inquiries in the hopes they would turn up. Package to Cathy has Vietnamese curios and Philippine pesos. Package to Daddy has all kinds of stuff. Akai demo tape has some slightly discernible talking to indicate how poorly I was able to record; Philippine shirt and jeans are excess baggage and padding; other tapes, etc., "artillery trends." Film should show tents on sand at 2/11 (Hill 34); Vietnamese driving cattle through the position at 3rd Guns' old rear position in the hills above ChuLai; and a couple of shots off the top of Hill 54. Artillery in pictures on 54 are 155 howitzer (M109 in "artillery trends") and 155 Guns at the bottom of the hill.

"Spy Who Came in from the Cold" is an outstanding mystery story. Also a bit of philosophy.

Enclosed is my programming recommendations for tapes at 3 3/4 speed, about three records per side. Hold up on them though until I ascertain whether or not certain aberrations in my tape recorder are power inadequacies or gadget failures. I suspect the latter.

I imagine by the time this reaches you, everybody will be getting ready to go back to school. Seems like the summer just started. I will feel lonely for you; it makes me feel loneliness just to know I am writing to only a part of the family rather than all of it.

Love again, Mark

Dear Cathy, 9 September 1966.

Note the naive discussion on drugs and taking a "trip". During my leave with Cathy in Berkeley I tried marijuana and decided I didn't like it. Never LSD. But it is easy to see how the new fad got started, particularly in Vietnam where marijuana was apparently plentiful.

Just a note to say "happy birthday" if this should reach you on that day. It probably won't get there till the day after though. I'm sure the whatchamacallit won't fit you, because the people here are all

about the size of eight-year-olds, but it was pretty so I got it. You can maybe hang it on the wall or something. :-) The rest of the stuff in the box is for whoever wants it. I realize this is a hell of a way to send a present, but I hated to waste space. :-(I had a bunch of ChuLai shells for Mother too, but they got lost during the last move apparently. I'll get more later. The one solitary one came from the top of hill 54, about four to 5 miles from the ocean, indicating that this was once a beach??!!

You mentioned hearing about the normal well adjusted boys at Harvard using LSD. I guess LSD and other non-narcotic hallucinatory drugs are just one of those things, like motorcycles, that will only lose their bad connotations with time. Anyhow, I am dying to take a voyage. It sounds fantastic. The way I want to go is listening to the hi-fi -- I don't particularly want to remember my embryonic stages. :-).

I guess I better say, "a very merry unbirthday" and mail this before I have to add a PS and say Merry Christmas.

Love Mark

PS. Merry Christmas. No! Not really; I thought of a couple more things I have time to write before the mail goes.

Firstly, I just planted a garden. That's right, around my tent. We were out laying barbed wire yesterday afternoon and I saw some very pretty flowers growing -- kind of like African daisies, but with almost strawberry like foliage. Also some plants that looked like lilies, but no flowers. So I filled up the back of the PC with them and drove up to my tent. Capt. Johnson (Lima Battery) says I get the tent beautiful award for hill 54.

We have been grounded to the immediate area for the duration of the election period. It seems the VC have been making some nasty threats as to what they are going to do to the Marines on election day. It's obviously just an attempt to intimidate the Vietnamese as we are their protection, but for other than military reasons we don't go anywhere. This means no laundry, no ice, and no liberty in "the ville".

Much more love Mark

Dear Folks, 10 September 1966.

Note to Mother: win a few, lose a few. If the bread had been in the Ovaltine can and vice versa all would have been well and good. But unfortunately the can which got smashed had Ovaltine and lemonade and the resulting mixture when combined with milk is oddly interesting at first taste -- hmmm, lemon chocolate you say -- and then you realize it is subtly but revoltingly nauseating. I couldn't believe it could be that bad at first, and I tasted several times, but for the next three hours I had to be very careful not to think about it because even now two days later, I can still smell it in my mind's nose.

Two days ago I got # 19, # 20, and # 21 and this morning I got # 16, # 17, and # 18. [*letters and packages were all numbered*] The French bread is terrific; the unprepared loaf had two spots of mold which I immediately cut off and ate for the penicillin (you can't be too careful around here), but the prepared loaf was in perfect shape. Penicillium must not like seasoning. I am greatly enjoying the drink mixes you are sending and the regularity with which you send them. Please do not send any more cool-aid and don't increase the flow of Wyler stuff. It's not that the quantities you have sent haven't been perfectly appropriate and sensible, but it's just when you multiply it by about 10 people.... The French bread is outstanding, however, and even though I've gotten milk from a couple of other sources, I drink a lot of it. I knocked over a few things in my delight over the Challenge milk. You had thoroughly discouraged me. I can use the Carnation mixed with things and save the Challenge for drinking straight (or on the rocks). Had a bowl of corn flakes and strawberries for breakfast while I was opening the other package. Malt jar came through fine. Will sleep in liner tonight and wake up with unbitten feet. Water bag works great. I collect rainwater for drinking because it doesn't taste like chlorine or iodine. It might not be a bad idea to get some more of those bags from West Co. [*West Co. was predecessor of West*

Marine, which became Port Supply.] (like the Bowluses gave me) for items which come in weak jars. (Ovaltine -- malt (2) came through ok). They are without a doubt one of the great inventions of our time. Baggies get little holes in them -- snag too easily -- not so bad to use and throw away though I guess but not good for storage.

Today's project for me was to build myself an office. The CP tent I live in now is open on all sides and since blackout is strictly enforced, I have been forced to go to bed with the sun. A CP tent does have an "entry hall" of sorts, however.

Since the prevailing winds and hence rain come directly toward my front door, I have sealed it off and refer to my entry hall by whatever name fits it at the moment -- pantry, garage, attic, kitchen, etc. You would think I was living in a house to listen to me giving directions to a person going out to get a case of beer from the "Pantry". "You go through the entry hall, past the library till you get to the pantry. Face left and the beer is on the floor of the service porch".

But now I have to add the "office" or "den" to the navigation aids. This is the only area I can blackout so today a brand-new desk went into it. I made the desk out of two by fours and plywood that 81 mortars were throwing away and I even lacquered the tabletop with the same lacquer I had to keep my brass shiny with. Using my Sea-light for light propped up on the bookcase, I have a real cozy place to spend the monsoons in. I bought about \$80 worth of textbooks through "Stars and Stripes" newspaper for about \$25. I figured they just wanted to keep the troops doing something constructive. They finally arrived about a week ago and what they are is Japanese printings of regular texts.

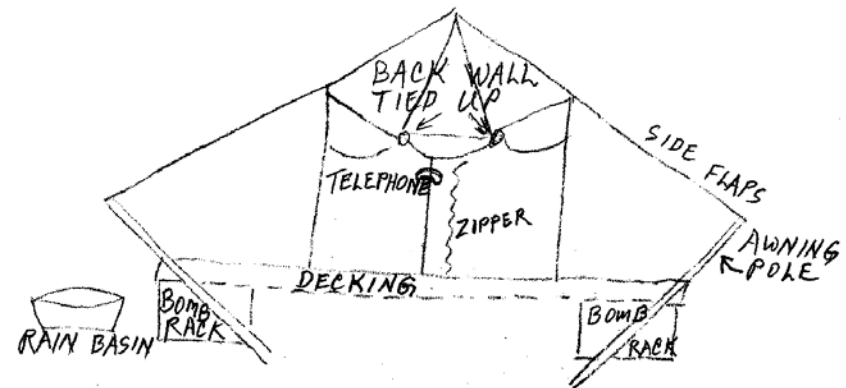
I got:

The Oceans

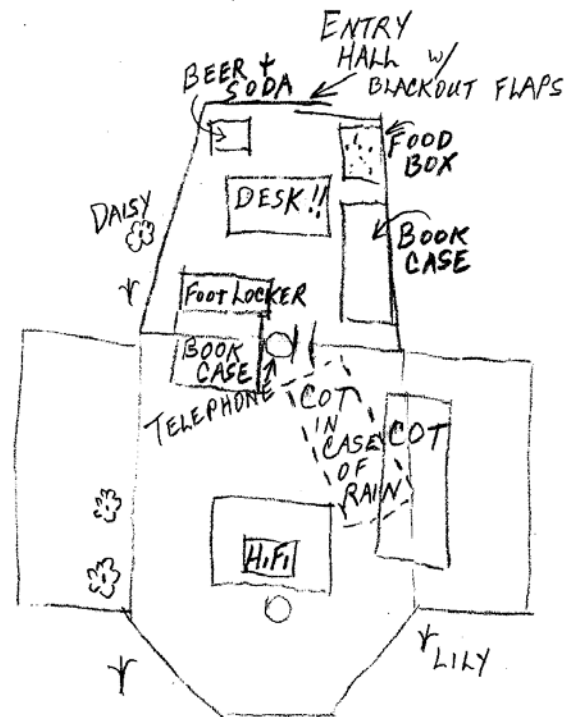
General Biochem

Microbiology

E. Asia the Great Tradition



Hill 54 Tent; back view and floor plan.
Entry Hall and Desk overlook the plain
and guns below



-- Sverdrup et al \$25.

-- Fruton, Simmonds \$18.

-- Frobishe \$6.50.

-- Reishauer, Fairbank \$12.50

E. Asia the Modern Transformation -- Fairbank, Reishauer, Craig. \$14.50

They are well bound, as good paper or just about anyway, as I would imagine the regular printing would be. I have plenty to do at my office this winter.

Love, Mark

Dear Folks; 14 September 66.

Happy Birthday to Cathy where ever she is. I just listened to your latest tape and was tickled pink listening to all of the homey conversation. I was hoping Andy wouldn't talk you into recording on 1 7/8 inch because he is misinformed -- I don't have that speed. All I can hear is high pitch chipmunks and it's completely unintelligible. I will have sold this recorder before I return and will have bought all new stuff in Okinawa, I hope. I have to keep fighting people off over here -- everybody wants to buy it. I feel guilty taking a profit, but I think I could easily make anywhere from \$50 to \$100 over what I paid. That is, even after I explain that one of the channels has gone dead!! Money means nothing here because there is nowhere to spend it and paychecks are so large.

The problem now is whether to buy another X355 or the M-8 like Andy's (which has plenty of class regardless of what he says) or get a tape deck, amplifiers, etc. like we have at home. Are you disillusioned at all with the Ampex? I have always considered it to be pretty near perfection, but as far as tone goes I have heard nothing sound any better than my Akai. Exasperation results from stupid things like tape sliding off the track, difficulties in threading etc.. I have a feeling the humidity may have caused a lot of friction in the system increasing the tape tension, but I don't know.

This is more fun listening to KFWB here. Too bad the tape isn't a full length. This works best having the talking on one track both sides and the music on the other track both sides. This way I can set it on automatic and listen for hours. I almost know the Beatles' "All the Lonely People" by heart now. :-).

I hope Mother doesn't think I have to get out and fill sandbags and string barb wire -- I just sit up here in my tent at my desk (I have it out on my porch so I can see everything that happens -- Big Brother, you know) and watch. Periodically I go down and encourage, criticize, and compliment -- preferably all three in that order. It is a problem to know how much to meddle but I use the philosophy of a very minimum of strategic harassment. Once in a rare while it will backfire when the platoon sergeant makes a mistake and an hour or two of work has to be undone, but that's the price you pay for the system -- and the platoon sergeant learns. Then I have to make sure he doesn't lose too much face, but still get it corrected. But this is rare -- very little can get past my eagle eye view here on the top of the hill.

We had a change of command yesterday. 11th Marines has a new CO -- Col. Norris replaced Lt. Col. Sullivan, who was something of a nuisance. The new colonel was out to look things over at Hill 54 the other day and chuckled about the heavy artillery not only being forward of the light artillery, but even in front of the infantry. 1/5 is on the reverse slope of Hill 54 and we are on the forward slope. Excellent direct fire capabilities however.

This morning I had the platoon get out and do some shooting with their pistols, rifles, grease guns, and one M-60 machine gun [also 7.62 mm.] My policy is to let them shoot a couple of magazines (40 rounds) at least every two weeks, which does a lot more good than a lot at once. It's also good constructive recreation and insures that we have always got new ammo. I was "asked" to turn my revolver in to the armory for safekeeping by Capt. McNamara and was issued a "grease gun" and .45 auto. The .45 was worthless, as usual, and the word on the grease guns is that they sound unusual and draw friendly fire, so I am now a rifleman. I have an M-14. Since I started carrying mine I have noticed a lot of staff and several officers have rifles to. We wear our pistols to show and around during the day of course, but at night, everybody is a rifleman.

I moved one gun up to a better position -- drier and higher -- and with my one small PC I am slowly getting bunkers moved and built. We have been doing no shooting at all, other than a high burst registration. [A "Where the hell am I?" type of calibration to figure out where the gun is shooting.] We are even giving the [VC] snipers a rest.

I am just about ready to take my exam for Geology -- I can soon claim to be studying for finals -- what a thought. :-).

I got a flower in my garden yesterday.

I'd be interested to see anything in your papers on the Vietnam elections.

Love Mark.

PS. Enclosed are some examples of our Monopoly money; you can see how the value of money is not real. Please return -- it's not supposed to leave the country. [*Called MPC- Military Provisional Currency*]

PPS. I am just about out of WD-40. Do they sell it in liquid form, i.e. not aerosol? It seems kind of wasteful, the spray is so voluminous.

You didn't mention my request for wetsuit but all I need I think, is the short-sleeved old one (jacket only). Don't worry if it doesn't look like it will hold together -- I have plenty of "plastic rubber" from Margie and Roy. It looks like the perfect outfit in the rain here.

As noted previously, I had been having a constant battle with Capt. Johnson, the CO of Lima battery, over command of my Gun platoon. Since he was the senior artillery commander in the position, his thinking was he should command me. My CO, Capt. McNamara didn't like that idea, but eventually it happened, and probably made the most sense.

I remember the chagrin I felt when Capt. Johnson finally got control. But afterwards we had a very good and perhaps better relationship.

Dear Folks, 23 September 66.

I am no longer the CO of 155 Guns "A" Platoon. We were attached to "L" Battery yesterday, which is the 155 How battery in our area up here. I am presently filling a dual role as the platoon commander of my platoon and as the S-3 of the composite battery. This amounts to being the FDO but of two battery types. Actually though, since I will be standing the Exec watch as well, you might consider that I am filling three jobs. When you come right down to it I could be pretty busy from now on. Last night I went down to the Guns with Arnie Swenson, the XO of Lima battery and showed him the things he should know when firing them, and then he took me down to a howitzer and showed me the same. Our old Guns really do look ancient compared to the brand-new howitzers. The howitzer does just about everything automatically accept pull the lanyard (they are all the SP variety and have no trouble navigating in the mud to speak of -- also have 6400 mil traverse). There has been a lot of talk of moving the Guns out of this position for that very reason (mud) because of the impending monsoons, but the division engineer was out yesterday and says they will make all the roads and positions trafficable before the rains come. I was tempted to say "I'll bet!" But restrained myself.

I have once again done some refurbishing of my house. I have moved into my back room entirely and am storing all my gear in what used to be my living room. Now when it rains and the cold wind blows I have nothing to worry about. Also until I sell my tape recorder, it is out of all danger.

I have finally gotten the word on my R&R. Capt. McNamara asked me about it the other day and he is going to send me out on a quota next month. Is there anything I can get you in Bangkok? That will be an ideal place to go Christmas shopping.

Yes, I received two manila envelopes -- 1 with the mimeographed letters and Magic Slate, which arrived when I was in Howtars and the other with Argosy's and Harvard's parody of Time where Vietnam sinks into the ocean and foreign policy tries to ignore the fact. I sent some back in the package, which I mentioned a while ago. You should've received it by now and I hope the present to Cathy finally got to her. Or maybe you can give it to her as a Big Game present.

The tapes are great, especially with nothing erased. The only problem is when I play something recorded at a speed I can't reproduce. No problem about privacy -- I live alone.

Did you have a chance to go to Dana Point as you mentioned in your letter you might do? I keep wondering if Pat has been promoted to captain yet, and how he will treat Ed if and when he does. He is the type that might press it in a moment of uncertainty.

In case you missed it in the letter, but mainly because you asked about it in your last: it is the short-sleeved wetsuit that I want now. It will take up very little space, and it's about ready for the junk anyhow. If it doesn't last, I can always save the zipper.

It was a very nice thought thinking of my Malibu all nicely fixed and lying in state in the lush summer verdure of the backyard. I can hardly wait to see it again. (Both actually; boats and yard).

The kinds of IB I always bought were chocolate and chocolate malt, however the others you have sent were very good with one exception and that was the eggnog, which was terrible -- well not really that bad, but not so good. One of these days, I am going to have to go on a crash diet so that I can fit into the clothes I have to go on R&R. I am sure everyone would be greatly amused to see the effect war has had on me. I am saving the IB for use as Metrical when the day of reckoning comes. I have been trying to get some film for my camera so I can show you your corpulent son. It was definitely a shock when one day I happened to see myself in the mirror and it looked like my face was puffed up. It apparently all came about in the month after I transferred to Gun battery -- too much beer I guess.

All for now... love Mark

Notes:

IB is Instant Breakfast; I loved it for mixing with milk powder.

The Malibu was a 20ft. sailing outrigger I left in Altadena. It actually never moved again from the back yard. Years later I tore its disintegrated remains into pieces and put them in the trash week by week.

The Magic Slate was just a typical child's toy; wax board with plastic film to write on. I think I used it for notes in the rain.

Argosy magazine [Feb. '65] had a picture of a girl I dated at Balboa during the Character Boat Parade. I was partially in the picture.

Pat was another Marine officer; I knew him at Stanford, but he was several officer groups ahead of me and my roommate Ed. When I left the Horizon House Apts. in Dana Point, Pat moved in. I was thinking Pat might pull rank on Ed.

29 September 1966.

Dearest Cathy,

Never was I ever so envious and tickled and proud of my little sister as when I got your postcard from Sur. [*Big Sur*] In fact as soon as I get back to the States I want to follow your very route. You couldn't have picked one that could make me any more delighted. All I could do was just sit and feel my scalp tingle as I read the caption and looked at the ocean crashing on the rocks. There is something so infinitely and inexorably mighty about the sea and particularly that part which crashes on the Pacific coast. To plan a trip like that and then follow through and really enjoy it as much as you did is very commendable for three girls (no offense intended).

I am going to Bangkok on R&R in a few weeks!! Actually I haven't seen anyone coming off R&R yet that wasn't completely exhausted. They generally have to take about a week of combat to rest up. The monsoons aren't any wetter than they were when I last wrote.

Russ and Faye got married a few weeks ago. The only way I found out was that I am writing to Faye's sister named Terry and she told me. In fact, I wasn't even sure Russ had gone home yet. Russ told me that Terry wanted someone in Vietnam to write to, so he asked me to do the honors.

The sun has now gone down and this paragraph and the last one are being typed completely in the dark. It will be interesting to see how it turns out. I have to be careful not to stop in the middle of a sentence though, because I'll never pick up the continuity again.

All for now, very much love, Mark

Dear Folks. 1 October 1966.

A note to let you know that Christmas has arrived for me over here. Each day my troops bring up armloads of packages and look envious thinking they must all be cookies. Little do they realize it's wheat germ and Tiger shake and olive oil, soap, dry milk, French bread and a wetsuit top. The tiger shake is just the perfect thing for my dieting. I tried on my uniforms today and I still have a good inch or so to go. The biggest problem is going to be those tan slacks I had you buy me when I was leading the lean and mean life of a mortarman. I also repacked all my uniforms and clothes in the valpak using the plastic bags that Tana Shattuck uses to pack her delicious cookies. I can't remember if I mentioned them or not from a week or so ago. They always come through fresh and not the least bit crumbled even. But no wonder because the package is about 60% packing and padding. :-).

When I get back from Bangkok, I can start getting fat again until it comes time to go home. I am leaving for Bangkok on the 10th of October, which means I will probably be there for my birthday unless transportation gets held up. I was hard put to decide between Hong Kong, Bangkok, Malaysia, Tokyo, Taipei, and Singapore. I understand that for every three months extra I volunteer to stay here for I get one additional R&R. What a decision -- to get safely home or see exotic ports. However, if I did extend for three months I would be sure of having my leave fall during the summer. Maybe I could meet you in Taipei or Hong Kong.

3 October 1966.

Excerpt from a letter to Margie and Roy this date. Confidences of course apply but barring news media, I trust your discretion in dissemination. [*Apparently the doubt in this letter was regarding how the Vietnam elections came out and how the American media reported it.*]

In answer to doubt expressed on the subject -- "About the elections, when we heard the news over here we were a little doubtful too but after all, could you expect them to announce a failure? (Or at least what might appear to be a failure). I do think it was poor judgment for them to pad the figures as much as they did. An article in a clipping recently showed population distribution of South Vietnam and something like 20% of the population is in VC controlled territory. An 80% turnout would be possible if everybody in both government controlled territory and doubtful territory (we call it yellow zone -- Green is friendly and red is VC) voted, which is unlikely. I do, however, believe the elections were a roaring success by the fact of confirmed reports from various areas. "The powers that be" no doubt felt that the overall statistics would sound discouraging, which could be disastrous to the effort among the people. The hoax couldn't be perpetrated over here of course without perpetrating it on the world. So that's the way it goes.

That the newsmen have realized this and gone along with it is an inspiration and a refreshing new insight into the character of the press. So I hope nobody rocks the boat. I am sure most people will realize this -- the article with the damning population distribution never even hinted at doubt of the results of the election but only lauded the spirit of the Vietnamese people. But there it was. We could look at a 30% or 40% turnout and realize what a success it was for democracy, but there are too many people in the world and in Vietnam, who could not or would not. Needless to say my views, obvious as they are, I send confidentially." End of excerpt.

Got three more A's on my geology, and I was impressed with the reader who put much thought and effort into answering some questions I had asked on the assignments. It would be so easy for a correspondence course reader to put forth a minimal effort. I'll mention his name to Cathy -- it's Art Horton -- and maybe she may have heard of him. More likely Dave might be involved in science. Time is running out and my trousers still don't fit. I guess I'll have to stop eating altogether.

Love Mark

A Glimpse of Paradise -- R&R Bangkok 10-16 October, 1966

I started preparing for R&R about two weeks prior to going. I stopped eating. The chow and beer in Vietnam together with the enervating heat is apparently pretty fattening because I discovered that it was going to be impossible to wear my uniforms and civvies in the shape I found myself. After about two weeks of starvation I was at last down to size and drove in to the battery on the 8th for my orders and to disbursing to get my money. This amounted to about \$350 which I thought would be plenty. This was on Saturday and I spent that night in the "BOQ" at the battery area. The next morning early I got into my khakis for the first time in many moons and took a jeep to the Chu Lai airstrip to catch a hop up to DaNang. I found Sgt Hogrefe there who had been my FDC Op Chief on Operation Jackstay when I was in 2/11. It happened we were both on our way to Bangkok.

It was pouring rain in DaNang, the transient quarters were canvas cots in a tent, chow was poor and insufficient, and the PX was closed. They also ran out of coffee. But we got out on time Monday morning and had a banquet aboard the plane at noon -- steak, ice cream, pastries, and fresh milk. It was interesting to see the land change below as we passed across S.E.A. The narrow Vietnam piedmont merged into the mountains immediately and it was almost all highland until we were close to Bangkok. Then suddenly the land flattened out again with beautifully symmetrical rectangular rice fields. This is very different from the sweeping curves of the Vietnamese paddies which follow the contours of river flood plains and around the numerous hills. Another interesting thing was the lack of roads. Long straight canals with houses along their dikes and in many cases actually built out over the canal itself serve for highways.

It was sunny and warm at Bangkok airport -- the R&R center had a meeting all set up and as we trooped in to take our seats, Thai people were waiting to give us Cokes and cold scented wash cloths. At the meeting we were given various items of information such as hotels available, tours, ethnic customs, etc. R&R hotels only cost \$30 for 5 days but we learned why they are cheaper when we tried one. Tommie's Tours, a Bangkok tourist agent, has been endorsed by the R&R people and consequently provides many services, among which are transportation from and to the airport and the cokes and washcloths. Of course, on the way from the airport we had the opportunity to sign up and pay for all kinds of tours. Sgt Hogrefe and I played it cagey and only signed up for the shopping tour for \$1. The jewel and bronze industry seems to be the mainstay of the Bangkok economy and 50% of the buildings in town are jewelry shops. More about the shopping tour later.

The R&R hotels had reservations available right at the airport. We had heard that the best hotel for the money was the Hotel Nana but we found that it was not indicated as an R&R hotel which meant we had to go check on our own. The Nana was full so we ended up at the Petchbury, an R&R hotel. I had barely got my bags down when a fat bell boy started trying to sell me a cab. I had heard that getting a driver is a good investment so after considerable haggling we met Mr. Pok, the delight of our stay. The fat boy was the go-between but when we talked to Mr. Pok we arrived at the price of \$30 for the 5 days. His "pitch" was not that he "would drive for you" for 5 days but that he "would take care of you" for 5 days. That is exactly what he did and then some! Sgt. Hogrefe was in stitches almost the entire time we were in the car.

The extent of conversation at first was comparing the value of everything; - bars, cars, drivers, girls, etc.: "C.C. Bar, number One; Toyota, Japanese, number ten;- Japanese car, number ten - ten - ten; .- .- American car, number one." There was one R&R jewelry store he was particularly against and that was "Chinese Communist number ten" which seemed to be the strongest thing he could find to say about a bad thing, so when Sgt. Hogrefe and I wanted to be especially disparaging about something to each other we would point and say "Chinese Communist number ten."

Mr. Pok was particularly impressed by what the U.S. is doing in Vietnam. He would often launch into a tirade about North Vietnam and the VC, during which he would act out the part of a VC slinking about in a crouch and then squat very low with his hands up like binoculars. Then he would act out the

Thai and American soldier - "number one" - walking upright and shooting, "bam-ba-ba-ba-bam" and then again the VC expiring magnificently and dramatically.

Another thing Mr. Pok was violent about was the "Chinese Communist # 10 drivers (also # 10,000)" who got in his way or did not drive predictably. There is no question in my mind but what Mr. Pok would have a ticket within ten minutes of driving in the States but since there are no traffic laws apparently, in the competitive traffic of Bangkok, he did great. He drove matter-of-factly at about 80 kph through traffic, zigging, zagging, passing and cutting in with only inches to spare and calculating how fast another driver would be able to get out of his way with precise accuracy. And on top of it all he never abused his car at all - in fact he took better care of his car than he did himself. I noticed the same skill with the drivers in the Philippines (even Vietnam, although there is not so much traffic there). They are not reckless, - they are good. You never see a bad wreck but you have close calls all the time. Perhaps all our traffic laws in the States lull us into a false sense of security. The Asian drivers are always alert because they have to be and react instantly and instinctively to anything from any direction.

The first stop after we got settled was the New Bangkok steam bath. This is a famous specialty of Japan and places of Japanese influence. I had never had one and decided to try it out. It was a little disappointing. I had the feeling that my masseuse probably had some specialty but that whatever it was, it certainly was not body massage.

After the massage and steam bath we went to a bar for a beer which cost twenty baht or \$1. The bottle must have held almost a quart though. We were both pretty tired and the more we thought about sleeping on a mattress in an air conditioned room, the more we looked forward to it. So we decided to have dinner and cut the night short. Lee had been reading the R&R literature and discovered a place which served Mexican food and of course, being a Southern Californian I was in favor, so we went. Lee had a Mexican dinner but I changed my mind at the last minute and tried some Thai food. For my first try it was disappointing. All it was was a dry rice and a watery, tasteless soup with several very hot pieces of chili pepper. Thai food is generally a lot different I found. Lee said that his Mexican dinner was good but nothing like Mexican food back home. Soon we went back to the Petchburi and climbed between clean sheets in an air conditioned room.

** By a sort of tacit agreement, as soon as we had gotten away from military influence and were in civilian clothes, we went on a first name basis. At 2/11 everyone had always called him Al so I was surprised when he said his name was Leon; He preferred his middle name.*

The next morning - Tuesday, my birthday in fact - neither of us were very impressed with the Petchburi. The rooms were almost bare; they wanted \$5 extra for a radio. Already clean sheets were not enough, we wanted an atmosphere with some class. The entire atmosphere was drab. We had breakfast in the hotel coffee shop and even that was drab. So we decided we would have to move. Having gotten an early start, it was before 8 o'clock when we left the Petchburi and went to the New Nana again to secure reservations. They were unnecessary - they had two rooms available. I suspect that Tommie's Tours, the R&R agency which had taken us there the previous afternoon from the airport, had had something to do with the "no vacancy" which we found there. Tommie's has everything pretty well planned through the R&R people. They have hotel reservations all set up at the airport, - the shopping tour pretty well cornered most of the buying done by R&R people and the commissions on jewelry are not small. The sightseeing tours we went on were very good, however, and not too expensive so by buying on our own, staying clear of R&R hotels and taking the tours we think we made out very well.

After we had moved into the Nana we went to the Air Force PX to get some clothes. After living in dungarees and boots for so long I was all ready to buy a suit but finally we each settled for an extra pair of slacks, a couple of short sleeved white shirts, black loafers, and a tie. We almost looked like twins. I tried to buy an FX Canon camera but they put a \$25 ceiling on R&R people buying in the PX. They say it is because of the black market but it seems unfair to the fighting men really.

We went back to the Nana with our purchases, got dressed up, and went down to the Nana dining room for lunch. The Nana Hotel definitely had some class. It is not flashy or ornate and is not really expensive (\$8 per night) but it has a solid, modern elegance. Even Mr. Pok, after he had investigated it

and came up to our room said, "Nana # 1, Petchbury #2." After a while we got him to admit that Petchbury was # 10. The convincing factor was the elevator. As we were leaving the room, Pok started for the stairs and then realized we were going the other direction. Then his face lighted up as he turned and he said "Ah - - lift, # 1, Petchbury no lift, # 10." But the lift went the wrong way and pretty soon the door opened again once more on our 2nd floor. Lee pushed the 1st floor button again but before we realized what he was doing Mr. Pok made a dash through just as the doors started to close again and cleared them by inches. We just stood there and laughed all the way down to the first floor where Mr. Pok was already waiting. He was always a little jumpy about the elevator doors after that.

Lee and I had lunch in the Nana cocktail lounge because of its dimly lit and elegantly informal atmosphere. He had a Kobe steak and I had lobster, and we sat there in white shirt and tie beaming at each other and felt like kings, scarcely able to believe our senses. The lounge was even actually cold and the food was superb.

Tuesday night we went on Tommie's Night Tour which, for \$9.50, included dinner and Classical Dance and one drink at a night club. The first stop was a restaurant with a traditionally ornate Thai atmosphere. We had a fantastic Thai dinner of about ten different things to put on rice, all very exotic and delicious. Fruits and Thai confections were served for dessert and the Classical Dance was performed very beautifully by very beautiful girls in ornate gold costumes.

Another dance was done by two girls in black and less ornate dress and was said to be Lao. The girls in black danced within inches of each other, following the other's motions precisely. The music was little more than a whisper with muffled drums and tinkling bells. It was so soft and graceful and the music so hauntingly beautiful, I could not keep my mind from it for the rest of the evening. Dinner music was played on a lute-like traditional instrument and the sound of it will forever mean Thailand to me. Very simple and not too melodic - metallic and a bit twangy. When sung, Thai music sounds very much like children singing.

After the dance we went on to two night clubs. The first had a Korean floor show during which the female vocalist also did a beautiful job of dancing at one point and of playing drums in accompaniment to still another act. In spite of the previous night's sleep, we were pretty sleepy by the time we got back to the hotel.

The following morning, not quite so early, we were up and had breakfast at the coffee shop and were picked up to go on the shopping tour. Tommie's shopping tour is known as the #1 Drunk. As you go from shop to shop each one keeps offering drinks in hopes your sense of economy may be dulled. The first place we went was Chinese (Mr. Pok snorted when he heard) and the second place was terrible and expensive so we went home - refreshed without having spent any money, but with a little more knowledge of star sapphires.

Earlier the manager of the Nana travel desk had invited us out for lunch. It seems he too had a jewelry shop conveniently located right across the street from the Nana. We had a delicious Thai lunch which started out with a huge bowl of steamed mussels in dark green shells. Then too there was the assortment of soups and things to go on rice. After lunch we went back to his shop, called Tiffany Jewelry and were favorably impressed, at least compared to what we had seen on the tour. The shop was small, run by the man and his wife, but very nice. I was disappointed that he had no necklaces or earrings but his bronze was beautiful and much more reasonable than the other places, It was not until the next to the last day that I thought to mention the possibility of his making me a necklace and earring set. It was only barely completed in time.

T. James Jewelry, the shop with which Mr. Pok had affiliations, made me mad right away. They were a high pressure outfit to start with and the following day I discovered that the American who had been "helping" me to a "good deal" and giving me hints on what to look for and what to disregard, was in fact a plant. He worked for them!! I found all this out when I went back after comparing prices at Tiffany Jewelry and the American was still there big as life.

On Thursday morning we had Mr. Pok take us to the floating market. We went down to the river and out onto a sort of landing, all cluttered with vendors, marketers and boatmen. When Mr. Pok realized

we had not had breakfast, which was not hard to tell because of our hungry looks, he bought us some delicious toasted bread - split bun actually - which had been toasted and slathered with melted butter and sugar. As we munched, Mr. Pok made liaison with some boatmen and soon we were aboard and heading out into the river traffic.

The boats in Thailand are distinctive. In fact I have found boat design to be unique for every people with which I have been acquainted in the Orient. The Philippines had the banka with its narrow hull and bamboo outriggers. The Vietnamese have clumsy looking two-masted sailing craft with high prow and stern. Bangkok boats may be of two designs. The kind we took was a typical passenger boat with fringed awning and seats around the inside but the truly distinctive design is a long narrow boat with a special kind of outboard engine. The engine is tipped forward and balanced over the transom with a long screw extending into the water about six feet aft. It functions like a sweep oar for steering only the propeller is on the end of it. And they do go like the wind. It is startling to see one careening down a narrow, congested canal at a good 15-20 knots.

At one point a sight-seeing boat like ours backed out of a slip awkwardly wallowing and blocking almost the whole channel. Just then a fast boat came skimming past us heading for a diminishing gap between the passenger boat and the bank. At the last minute he realized he would not make it and we were amazed and relieved to discover that they can stop almost on a dime.

We followed the main river for a short while before turning off into the network of canals. On the far bank of the river was the Thai Pearl Harbor with a couple of impressive looking destroyers. Perched slightly higher rose the beautiful "Temple of Dawn."

The canals are laid out and used just like streets with houses along the banks, most with platforms out over the water. We turned down a beautiful but fairly deserted side canal and Mr. Pok got excited. He was forever suddenly being inspired with just the thing to make our trip complete and on this occasion he wanted us to try some "coffee." We pulled alongside a coffee vendor who was lazily paddling his vending canoe along the bank. After a brief torrent of verbiage from Mr. Pok the vendor began to make our coffee. Although there were several of us, he brewed the drinks one at a time, pouring the boiling water through a cloth bag filled with grounds and then mixing with milk and sugar and pouring over crushed ice in a glass. The ice was a separate ritual in which he reached behind him into a section of the boat filled with rice husks for insulation and extracted a piece of ice. This he washed in the canal, rinsed with clean water from a can in his boat and then cracked it in a bag by giving it several whacks with a mallet. The coffee was delicious.

Soon we came to another well traveled canal, turned into it and when we passed the American Bar and Restaurant we knew we were not off the beaten track. We would pass boats full of what I would guess were retired couples, some speaking English but mostly a variety of other European languages. The boatman wanted to stop at a place dealing in jewelry and silk where there were many Europeans. The women were bustling about as if they were in a grocery store, the men aloof or talking together, and the Thai boatmen looked on with patient amusement and amiability, thinking, no doubt of their commissions for the money being spent. Mr. Pok said, "Number ten, number ten - too much! Coca Cola 5 baht, - I show - no too much - Coca Cola 1 baht." Mr. Pok would never admit to a single commission! He would point out other drivers as "Chinese" who worked commissions on the side.

His big gripe was the police. "Ah, you hab money? you #1 - you good! You no hab? -you #10. You come with me. Police #10! Commission." We would tease him sometimes when he seemed particularly anxious to take us somewhere expensive. We would say, "How much you get?" He would stop as if completely taken aback, then screw up his face, shake his head, pound on the steering wheel with the palm of his hand and exclaim, "No-o commission!" After awhile he could sense our jibes coming and after suggesting a thing he would pause, look at us, and then say "NOOOOOO commission! " Commission or no, our boat ride was worth the \$10 it cost and lasted for most of the morning.

One place that Lee had wanted to see was the snake farm in Bangkok. Mr. Pok was very quiet whenever we mentioned it and it became apparent that Mr. Pok thought snakes were #10 billion. The morning we decided to go, Mr. Pok decided that we should go to the zoo. (pronounced szoo) "Szoo # 1,

snake farm # 10." We thought we had made ourselves clear until we pulled up and parked at a gate. We asked, "What is this?" Mr. Pok looked very earnest and a little bit worried when he replied emphatically, "Szo, sir, # 1" We could not help but laugh but made him take us to the snake farm anyway. He came in with us but went around with a look of distaste, making faces now and then and muttering things ending in #10"

Friday morning was supposed to be our last day in Bangkok. One trip we had been planning for all along was out to the River Kwai to see the old Jap prison camp and famous bridge. But all along Mr. Pok had been trying to talk us out of it. It was a three hour trip each way and apparently gas is pretty expensive. Whenever we brought up the subject Mr. Pok had many other suggestions. So Friday was either the day or never. You can imagine we were beginning to get a little worn out by now so it was not entirely by accident that we overslept that Friday morning. But when we went down to meet Mr. Pok, he shook his head and said some things about Japanese cars being #10 and informed us that his car would not start that morning. I suspect that the projected trip to the River Kwai might have had something to do with the engine failure but I could not be sure. Anyway he offered to pay for our taxies and before noon he had his car back again. We never made it to the River Kwai.

That morning I thought to ask at Tiffany's about a necklace and earrings. I picked out seven beautiful stones for the set which they said they could have made up for me but it would take two full days. They looked at another necklace I had bought which had not nearly so nice star sapphires and the wife tried to console me by telling me how beautiful it was. I had thought about staying over an extra day and these sapphires convinced me. First I paid a visit to the R&R center, next to the Nana hotel across the street, and made sure I would not be stranded if I missed my flight. I also learned that they would have to run me AWOL to my unit but they said if my unit did not care there would be no problem - - the unit could just tear up the papers. I could not see how the battery could grudge me one day so I took a taxi to the jewelry factory to make sure the set would be done in time. While I was there they had me sketch out just exactly what I wanted. Not being an artist myself, I hoped they would not take my drawing too literally.

After this Lee and I met back at the hotel, got cleaned up, and went down to the dining room for a last expensive meal - at least for me anyway - I was now getting down to my last penny. I tried the Kobe steak this time and it certainly justified all of Lee's raving. We had both bought some bronze ware and Lee got a few other things at Tiffany's so the next stop after lunch was the APO to get rid of the stuff.

It was now well into the afternoon and we were hot and tired. Lee decided he wanted to go to a movie. Mr. Pok had talked about going water skiing and that sounded perfect to me right then, so we dropped Lee off at the theater and then headed "up country" to a place called Nantaburg where there is a ski club. I was immediately glad I had decided against the movie. As soon as we got outside the city Mr. Pok opened her up and we went flying along through the countryside on a good four lane highway. Soon we turned off onto a country road which was flanked on one side by a continuous water lily pond, some pink or salmon - others white. At Nantaburg we got a water taxi of the long outboard type and went skimming across the river to the ski club. I paid for half an hour (\$2.50) and tried to get my money's worth but when I finally quit my arms and legs were about ready to drop off. It gave me a strange feeling as I would ski over next to the bank and smile at Thai families cooking their dinners over hibachi pots on platforms extending out over the water, and then swoop out across the wake and go by house boats and produce barges poling up or drifting down the river.

After skiing Mr. Pok wanted to show me the places "up country" where you can get Coca-Cola for 1 baht, (5cts) so we went to a place near his home on the way back. The restaurant was only an open front frame building alongside a rural road and did not smell any too fresh. I drank a beer for 12 baht (this is cheap) while Mr. Pok went home to get me some coconuts. In spite of the rural atmosphere of the place the people were well dressed and intelligent appearing. It seemed like the Thai counterpart of a rural country store in the States and a young man and his very young wife were sort of lounging about while a few younger children played in front - it was late afternoon. The boy began to make polite talk and I was amazed. His English was broken but it was very well educated and his ideas were those of a person who

is really aware and who cares about what goes on in the world about him. And this was almost in the middle of nowhere. He was happy I enjoyed Bangkok and hoped the war would soon be over.

All the Thai I met were "interested." Even Mr. Pok, who was certainly not a very educated man, had definite ideas about the world around him. I have often had the feeling over here that the people do not really care about anything except their next meal. But I found the Thai I met to be a very proud people with high ideals. They perhaps took life a little too seriously but compared with overly slack or passive attitudes of the Vietnamese and Filipinos I cannot hold that against them. They have a somewhat uncertain feeling about their place in the world. One time when Mr. Pok and I had gotten to talking in a serious vein he said, "I titi. (titi means little) My country, Thailand, titi. You bigk, America bigk. I "sir" you. You understand?" I realized as his questioning eyes scrutinized my expression that his statement was much more a question to him and he wanted my reaction. I half pretended not to understand because there was such a big concept to get across with such limited language. I told him "You #-1, - I #1, - you #10, - I, #10. We same!" I wished I could make him understand how little size of country and stature count in the worth of a man or a nation. It is easy for me to say, being a "bigk" American but how hard to convince another when the sensitivity is aroused.

The word is that a dishonest Thai is rare. You might be cheated by the Chinese, Japanese, or other "foreigners" but not often by the Thai. I knew of a Marine who left his wallet in a taxi. The driver tracked him down the following day to return it with the large sum it contained. I began to be almost embarrassed to count my change because honesty seemed so much a matter of faith. But in Vietnam you have to watch your gear like a hawk all the time because even the children will steal you blind.

On Saturday I had Mr. Pok take me to the zoo. He was delighted. He went ahead and let me know whether an animal was #1 or #10 and I would agree or disagree. When I disagreed he would look interested as if he had learned a new thing about life. Then we drove around the palace grounds of the King of Thailand and I tried to imagine what the king must feel like and what it would be like to be ruled by a king.

Breakfast that morning (Mr. Pok took me) was at a regular Thai restaurant. Thai coffee, eggs and sausage which was chunks of hot dogs, and then tea at the end of the meal. It cost titi money. I turned Mr. Pok loose for a few hours and spent the early afternoon by the pool at the Nana where I started writing this epistle and took a short nap. Mr. Pok picked me up about 3:00 and we took a trip out to the country again for a Thai dinner. We wandered around aimlessly for a while until he thought of a place. This restaurant was also open front but bigger and not quite so rural.

We sat by a window away from the road. Outside children were swimming in a pond surrounded by palms. The food was great and although not exactly titi money it was about 1/3 what the same would have cost in the city. Then we went back to a movie, "The Lost Command" - American with Thai subtitles, It was fun watching a movie with a Thai audience - you feel kind of self conscious when you think western countries are looking bad and you feel so happy when you think peace and good will are being brought out. At the end of the movie the audience rises, a picture of the king is shown on the screen, and the childlike music and voices of the Thai national anthem are played. The thought will always give me a warm feeling in my heart for the titi king and his proud titi kingdom.

We went back to Tiffany's but my jewelry still was not ready so Mr. Pok and I opened up a closed Thai coffee shop nearby since he could see the people inside, and had Thai 7-Up. I thought it was homemade because of its strange consistency but I discovered that they mix a regular bottle of 7-Up with one whole raw egg. Different but good. Just as we were leaving I recognized some cans for sale as being sweetened condensed milk. They mix it about one part to three in their strong Thai coffee, so I bought four cans to take back with me, along with my coconuts.

Before he left me Mr. Pok gave me a Buddha medal, which, with a very dramatic pantomime, he indicated would cause me to survive and the VC to expire should I ever do battle with them. He rationalized this easily: "Thai Buddha #1, Vietnam Buddha #10.

It was midnight before I got my jewelry and the following morning I was flying back to Vietnam. From DaNang airport I went right up to the Marine copter base - hitched a ride on a chopper going to

ChuLai. They dropped me off on the top of Hill 54 about 200 yards from my tent and I was back in action with Bangkok only a happy memory.

Dear Cathy, 14 October in Bangkok

I have been sitting here in the lobby of the Nana Hotel for about 15 minutes trying to think of people to write postcards to, but have come to the sad realization that I don't know any addresses. So I will write to you and you will have to say hi to everybody in your neck of the woods for me from Bangkok.

I have been running around here fast and furiously for about four days now and last night I decided to go to bed instead. Feel much better today and have done a better job of bargaining -- the national pastime I think. Mom and Dad can expect some big packages soon.

I met an old mortar battery friend in the Chu Lai airport so we have been traveling together. He is Sgt. Hogrefe who was my operations chief aboard the Princeton and on SLF (Jackstay etc.)

Bangkok is #1, -- Thailand #1 and the thought of having to go back to Vietnam is #10. The speed with which money goes is #10,000. Thus, in the local jargon, an entire spectrum of goodness and badness may be expressed. Bargains galore in bronze ware, star sapphires and silk. I don't like the silk so well but the bronze is #1 -- sapphires also #1, and the settings are maybe #2 :-) -- -- later --

This afternoon, after doing some shopping, I went with our driver, Mr. Pok, out to the country (upcountry they call it) to go waterskiing in a river. It was #1! Sgt. Hogrefe met a beautiful girl a couple of days ago and thought he would go to a movie. (#10) On the way back Mr. Pok (taxi driver guide) stopped by his own neighborhood and we had a beer at the "corner drugstore". Very ethnic!

I'm getting sick of the night life as usual so am going to bed again. Also running out of money. Will have to write this up later. Thailand #1.

Tomorrow I will go AWOL by missing my return flight. It's not as bad as it sounds but Sgt. Hogrefe is spooked about doing it too.

Love Mark

Dear Folks, October 20

I am sitting in my tent house open on two sides and enjoying the beauty of South East Asia. Since my return from Bangkok I feel a greatly increased attachment to the east. Before, I was an American among Americans in a foreign land but now suddenly I am an American among Asians. And what a fantastic new feeling it is.

Some people dread the monsoons, and from a military standpoint they are depressing. But from the aesthetic view, the weather here is not depressing at all. It may be exciting, frightening, frustrating, and uncomfortable at times but depressing it is not. The past few nights there have been times when the rain was so heavy and the wind so strong that I just lay on my cot waiting for my tent to be blown to pieces. The rain came down so hard that it was driven right through the waterproof fabric as if under pressure. Perhaps it is my sailor's delight showing through but I love it. Of course sometimes we spend many hours getting a vehicle unstuck but then, that is war.

From where I sit at my "desk" right now, I can see sharply rising hills and mountains to the west with their higher slopes disappearing into the clouds and mists of the low, stormy cloud cover. To the east is the South China Sea and the various inland waterways with fishing boats and villages. And all around is the as yet relatively wild and uncultivated scrub plain of the coastal lowlands, misty and wet, with occasional cattle and Vietnamese wood cutters. Of course the land along highway #1 is settled and cultivated but I would love to be able to roam off into the wild inland areas without having to take a platoon of infantry along for protection. Perhaps someday peace will come to this country which has so rarely known peace, and then it will be possible.

Just now as I was writing here, there was a sudden sound like small pebbles falling on my roof and then a great swish and a roar as the rains came sweeping in. I can no longer see the South China Sea and only barely the misty outlines of the nearest bank of hills. Paddies are a bluish gray as they flood outward against the light green of grass and dark green of scrub and trees. It is almost like echoes as you hear intermittent deluges swish into the trees, first in one direction and then in another. This is great.

Love Mark

26 October

Dear Folks,

I had a very happy return of the day, thank you, with some of the most wonderful and appropriate presents. Tana Shattuck sent cookies -- as usual not broken and packed in the handiest baggies. The bags from the Bowli were welcome -- their most recently discovered attribute is they are mouse proof. I have been getting a little nocturnal visitor lately and very few packages discourage him. If all else fails, he munches my book bindings. A few mousetraps would be handy by the way. About 3# size. (If you think that is big, you should see the rats.)

Thanks to the Wakemans for the book with particular delight to Jim for one of the better pictures of the Gladiator I've seen. (Also the only one I've seen that I am in but that is beside the point.) Cathy sent chamomile tea which I have taken to brewing by steeping in a canteen cup sitting on a Coleman lantern. That is a trick (about the only one though) that was not in the housekeeping hints book she also sent. Also a deck of cards from one of the Bents at the New York and Allen Texaco (Flying A?) station. I got tapes from the Shattucks, Stehles, folks, etc. But Regiment took away our generator -- apparently their air conditioners and refrigerators were overloading the circuit -- so we are juiceless. It is so unfair -- just when I get some tapes to play, I can't play them.

A couple of nights ago we played Monopoly (that is the "in" game -- or "camp" I guess is the "in" term) until about midnight and when we got done we had the Recorder [*I think I remember this as the fire mission recorder; writes stuff down as it comes in over the radio*] bring in the cake with candles for me to blow out. The ice cream was sorely missed however. The next night, since I had no light, I read for a while by lighting one candle after another. Coleman lantern works better though. :-)

One entire box of Jackstay slides were spoilt like that. The prints look much better than the slides. I imagine it wasn't cheap getting the prints made but I couldn't press him to take money. If you felt like sending him a "care" package he is a real chow hound, although he won't admit it. He is Lt. Joe Wright, HQ battery 2/11 etc. Has same taste I do. I have been having trouble getting 127, color, but don't send more than two roles -- I hope to talk somebody into buying a camera for me soon.

Air and surface mail same-same as near as I can tell.

I have neglected to answer your questions about chow. We eat as well if not a little better than in the states. Steaks maybe once or twice a week, roast beef every other night, vegetables, fresh baked bread and pastries, salad not real often but not to be missed, no milk, ice cream same-same steak, fresh eggs for breakfast most of the time, powdered aren't very popular, ham, bacon. Preserved foods are kept so well now days, nobody even thinks about not having fresh stuff.

The Chipman's Columbia impresses me no end. I've seen pictures of them and it seems to me they are supposed to be about the fastest thing on the water. [*Friends of the family; had a 50' Columbia sailboat named Cygnus.*]

I am careful about snipers as are we all. We worry most about friendly Vietnamese who (some do) think it is a great joke to snipe at Americans and see them jump. That has only happened twice though around here. Did I mention that I had my revolver incarcerated? The Captain (not Lima) is scared to death of Colonels so I tried the .45 automatic and didn't like it, a grease gun was next to worthless I thought, and am very happy now with an M -14 rifle. I have a switch I can flick to automatic or semi automatic. About once a week I take my platoon out on the side of the Hill to shoot.

Been getting some very nice letters from the Lyons.

I feel so happy to hear about things like Charlene's divorce. It makes me feel that maybe I haven't missed the boat but maybe just the first cruise. It may also just be spiteful malice toward the stay at homes. (This paragraph had probably best be scratched.) [*My mother deleted this paragraph as requested; another indication that I did have misgivings about those who stayed out of the war but didn't want to publish it.*]

The monsoon rains are certainly thrilling. My last letter was written during one. We are up on the hill so the sound effects are only those of rain on tent and mud, but I can imagine the hiss of the rain in the jungle. We can hear the sound from the plain.

Love Mark

PS. Radishes have sprouted.

5 November 66

It has been awhile since I have written about the war, primarily because up until now it has all been very hushed up. But since I am now reading about it in the papers, I guess I can comment.

Just before I left for Bangkok, several days or so, I was taken aside by Capt. Johnson and informed that the division was displacing and that maybe Lima and possibly our south platoon, plus various personnel would be involved. That was all that was known -- the division was going north. My thoughts wandered to things like amphibious invasion of North Vietnam etc. But apparently it was either DaNang or the DMZ -- not Hanoi.

A day or so later, the division was gone and we still had no more word. A few days after that, I went to Bangkok mildly curious whether or not I would find anybody around when I got back. But nothing changed while I was gone. Our own move depended upon whether or not the Army brought in a battery of their 175mm guns (SP), which they did. You may have seen some pictures of them in the paper. They can shoot about 5 miles farther than we can. (32,000m). We are still hoping to get our guns replaced with the new 175's.

The weather was sunny and dry and warm for the week after my return from Bangkok and then it rained hard for the next week. It has now been dry for more than a week, but with a few drizzly afternoons, but sun most of the time. So you can see that the picture of the monsoons painted by the newspapers is not entirely true.

A few nights ago we went into condition "gray". Nobody really knows what it means except "watch out." We started standing at least 50% alert at night with most everybody else "with their boots on." According to the latest reports, there is a uniformed Communist battalion operating in our immediate vicinity and according to a reliable source, one of its objectives is to link up with local forces and hit Hill 54. I would be very surprised if they do, but we are on the alert anyway. We have about three perimeters of concertina barbed wire in front of our position plus a few other wire obstacles. The area between the inner and outer wire is wired with trip flares. The infantry has had to retract its reaction platoon. So "L" scrapes together a squad for reaction each night. We are not too worried.

Love, Mark

PS. The package addressed to Cathy had one dress; the other ones had none. I had a corporal mail stuff so I don't know what he put on the customs tickets. If you've got both packages you've got everything unless one happened to bust open enroute.

PPS. Due to the recent enactment of a bill which authorizes the payment of 10% interest on all pay and allowances put into government savings, I am putting all of my pay into government savings. *[This was to slow the drain of currency referred to as the gold flow problem.]* This will of course leave me with no ready pay day in case I have the opportunity to buy something. Therefore I need some readily negotiable instruments. I am going to find out if things like a bank draft can be cashed over here but in the meantime could you please send me the government tax rebate check. I'm pretty sure disbursing will cash it.

Dear Folks, 18 November.

I didn't know when you would be leaving San Francisco so I sent a batch of slides to Cathy. I figured you all would be getting together soon though what with big game and Thanksgiving so it shouldn't be long.

I have been wondering what all the commotion was about missing dresses. I imagine the corporal I sent to the post office got mixed up and put the wrong stickers on -- I don't know. But the dress and flag in the package for Cathy was all I sent. You said you got both packages so where did you think the other dresses were -- in a third package or that the post office opened one and took them out? :-)

I didn't send an explanatory letter because I was sure that as soon as the second (Cathy's) package arrived all would be clear.

You mentioned something about the Wiancos writing -- I have not received anything so far. A few people are still addressing letters to BLT 1/5. I got \$5 from Hazel the other day addressed that way. Hadn't slowed it up though. I wonder where the Wiancos sent theirs.

I am now living in a regular "house" at the battery area. I am battery FDO, which now entails standing watch every fourth day in the 4/11 FDC. We process missions now for K battery (155's) 3rd Guns, (we have one gun this position) and two platoons of 8 inch howitzers. Yes, they are all plotted on the same charts with various color deflection indices for the different weapons. I have my people drill with multiple missions, which gets pretty interesting as you can imagine.

The position here is only about a quarter mile from 2/11 -- just up the road. It is not nearly as safe feeling as Hill 54, but I guess war is war. Still, I guess we are a lot safer than we will be when we get to the DMZ.

I don't think I will extend my tour after all. I've fallen in love with Russ Reddick's sister-in-law.

CHU LAI'S An Tan 27 November 1966

As you travel north through the Chu Lai area on Highway 1, the airfield and most of the division facilities are to the east. Just on the west side of the road and parallel to it runs the old French railroad tracks. They have long since fallen to the ravages of war but are still in evidence. A few support units such as engineers and artillery have their compounds on the west side of the tracks. At the northern edge of the military compounds, a strange looking village compound is seen on the far side of the tracks. It does not look Vietnamese but neither does it look American. There is an interesting combination of thatching, matting, and corrugated aluminum, and an organization of buildings very un-Vietnamese in its uniformity and compactness. This is Chu Lai village.

As you proceed further about a thousand meters, you pass a Marine sentry and you are in the thriving liberty town of An Tan. The shops are solid along both sides of the highway with silks, dresses, pots, stoves and lamps displayed across the open front of each stall. About the equivalent of 5 blocks later you reach the bridge over the Song An Tan (An Tan River) heavily defended with troops, barbed wire and amtracks and then you are out in the country again.

An Tan is the present "business district" for Chu Lai Village. When the Marines landed they displaced the old Chu Lai lock, stock, and barrel as they built the base. In return they built a brand new village compound for the people outside the base area on the far side of the highway and this residential compound became the new Chu Lai. Naturally it was not long before the people realized the boon which the Marine pay check brought and so the adjacent village of An Tan along the highway became a flourishing shopping and liberty Ville.

Last Sunday was another muddy, rainy day but we decided to send a liberty run into An Tan anyway. There was not as much going on around the battery as there usually is and since I had a lot of shopping to do (for Christmas) I decided to go along. This would be the first time I had been in a "Ville" on liberty since Joe, Curt and I went to the fishing village in the Delta on Jackstay. I had been through An Tan so many times on runs to Division, I practically knew it by heart.

When the liberty party was all aboard the truck there was only one trooper among them. The rest were all sergeants and staff and not many at that. We went bumping off down the road wet and miserable wondering how we had happened to pick such an unlikely day to go. When we got to An Tan the truck dropped us off at the north end of town before going through to the other end to park. It was immediately apparent that the weather had one big compensation - - very few people were in on liberty! It was more relaxing moving about and the shopkeepers were more anxious to make a sale.

My first stop was with a barber. Now the fair price for haircuts is about 30 dong (30¢) and I made it clear before I sat down in the chair that that was all I intended to pay. Well, I ended up paying 50 dong after he tried to coerce me into paying 100 dong. Yes, they are businessmen! While I was in the chair a girl came around selling Christmas cards. She sold me 5 for 100 dong and soon I was surrounded by card vendors. When I kept holding out, the price of cards rapidly dropped to 6 and then 7 for 100 dong. I was beginning to get the feel of the economic situation. In the end I got 8 for 100 dong from a shopkeeper.

Next I asked if they had any clothes to sell which was what I had really come for. I had long been attracted by the beautiful silk they had laid out in the shops. Almost immediately each of the little girls had a dress or a jacket to sell. It was all the barber could do to cut my hair with everybody pressed around my chair. Finally he told me I would have to ignore them if he was to finish. When I leaned back in the chair they all buried my chest with the pile of silk finery. When the barber was finished and it was obvious that I intended to walk away, they finally came down to my price and I bought the stuff.

At this point I started "window" shopping (they have no windows) carrying my purchases in one of the plastic bags from the Bowluses, with the self sealing plastic handle. One of the girls from the barber shop started tagging along trying to carry my bag for me. I wouldn't let her but she came along anyway. I bought a few more things in another store and when I went to leave the little girl already had my bag. I gave up and figured a small tip would probably be in order.

I stopped at a few more shops and bought at least one costume in each. The traditional dress for women is a very long blouse split up to the waist, worn with white or black trousers. The blouse for dress occasions is of beautiful colored silk. For school girls the cut is the same but the blouse is pure white, as are the trousers. The cut is perhaps the most distinctive thing about the costume. The torso of the blouse is form fitting as are the shorter working blouses. In fact the working women's black pajama blouses button down the front but always look as if they were in danger of popping all the buttons. The waist of the blouse tapers in to the natural waist of the girl which is slightly higher than the belted waist of western girls I think. The skirt of the long blouse reaches to well below the knees but as I say, is split up both sides to the waist leaving a small triangle of midriff exposed on each side. The short black pajama blouse extends to the curve of the hips, has no split at the side but separates below the last button at the waist leaving a small triangle of midriff in front. The universal coolie hat is worn on the head and slightly elevated heeled sandals are worn on the feet. Of course, they normally go bare foot in the country. The silk material is the most beautiful I have yet seen in the orient. Judging by everything else over here I can't believe its good for anything besides looking at and I would hate to think what cleaning would do to it but it is certainly pretty to look at.

It was getting close to the time for the truck to come back and pick us up so I stopped by one of the restaurants for a beer. There are orders against drinking anything in the villes because ground glass and acid have been found in some bottles, or so they say but I don't let it bother me. I'm careful. The little girl was beginning to hint about money now, I suppose not knowing but what I might suddenly leave. I stopped long enough to get a couple pair of Ho Chi Minh boots (sandals made out of a tire) and then sauntered down to a shop next to where our truck had pulled up. I started to take my bag from the little girl but she backed off belligerently and demanded \$2.00. I had the feeling she was about ready to run off with everything so I grabbed the bag and pulled it and her to the truck. When it became apparent that she intended to be nasty I threatened to put her into the truck with the bag. She let go and I got my stuff aboard. Then I tried to give her 20 dong which I had thought would be rather generous, but she would not take it - still demanding \$2. She had started crying by this time and even went so far as to pick up a big stone. At this point one of the shopkeepers turned fierce and I thought he was going to flail her on the spot.

By this time the rest of my liberty party had begun to gather and were joking and pretending to be worried, offering suggestions etc. My Comm sergeant offered to throw her into the Song An Tan. I was rather in favor of that idea but remembering the customs which Mother had described in China I thought of the old Chinese peacemakers and wished heartily that one would show up. Since of course none did, I picked out the most distinguished looking man I could find in the crowd who happened to be the shopkeeper who had told her to drop the stone, and approached him as arbitrator. He said the girl was crazy and that 50¢ would be generous.

She was now scraping up a mud ball with a malevolent look in her tearful eyes. Thoroughly disgusted I tried to give her 50¢ but she screamed "no" and looked even more distraught than before. At this point I gave the money to another older girl who had been offering advice and asked her to give the money to the girl. Then I climbed into the truck and we left, - not quite before I could crank the window up though The little beggar threw a small rock in the window.

When I make it into the Ville the next time, besides doing my own carrying I would like to talk to the shopkeeper and ask what he would have done in a similar situation. The Vietnamese do not fool with the Koreans because the Koreans will not stand for it. If a Korean thinks he is being given the run around, he will just walk out without paying. If anybody gives him any trouble about it he'll just slap them down and set to with a tremendous volume of verbiage. I would have taken great pleasure in giving that little girl a good spanking but I would like to know if I could have gotten away with it. Actually her actions seemed to me most unoriental. My understanding was always that oriental children, especially girls, were very respectful, well behaved and quiet. At any rate I ended my first liberty in An Tan by being stoned out of town. How could I help but have better luck next time?

Dear Folks, 1 December 1966

I have been busy pretty nearly steadily since I got back to the battery. Not a lot of pressure but just something going on constantly what with all the material to maintain and watches to stand. Right now I am in DaNang as a courier for the exchange of the battery crypto publications. I got here yesterday morning intending to return last night but never got out. It's beginning to look like today maybe another wait.

Several things of importance to tell you. First, and worst news, I got my orders last week, assigning me to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in March. Since I consider this a fate worse than being sent to Siberia, I have decided to extend (or try to extend) my tour of duty overseas in the hopes that when I get reassigned it will be to the West Coast. If I should be granted my extension of six months I would have one month of free leave anywhere in the world with transportation furnished round-trip. This being a fantastic opportunity while at the same time a necessity, I have thought about going to Tahiti for a month. Don't laugh; I'm serious. The only other place that sounded interesting was Scandinavia. Also if you could find reservations for next summer somewhere in the Far East, I could pretty well pick the date I took R&R as well as the place. If you were here for a month I could guarantee seeing you for at least a week. Send your ideas.

You will be receiving some packages and they require some explanation. The one for Cathy is only partly a present. The earrings are the present but match the necklace for mother with the idea that you can get together on them?? :-) The necklace with the earrings is for me in case I want something nice for a present some day but it would be a shame for it to sit in a footlocker so I am sending it on loan. :-) The big package to mother has assorted gifts as follows: blue dress for Tana Shattuck, red for Margie (I assume she will be down sometime), ties and knife as appropriate on your judgment. I have a shopkeeper working on something for Wizabuffies and will send it along as soon as possible. (ASAP) Also will forward more "assorted" gifts which may be stored or given as you see fit. Shopping is loads of fun over here. It's got it all over Nash's and the Broadway. :-)

I hope to have a chance to write more but an air terminal lacks inspirational qualities.

Love, Mark

South Platoon

2 December 1966

Probably letter to Terry but I don't know. Carbon copy of letter written on same day as the move to South Platoon.

It seems like a while since I wrote last but then I guess I haven't had any letters from you since then so we're even. I received your nut bread earlier this week and not only was it fresh when it arrived but it is still just as fresh as I munch on it this evening since I missed dinner. I have been telling everybody you made it -- that is what you said isn't it? Delicious!! What else do you cook? I also received a package which said "do not open until Christmas" on it and people have been trying to talk me into opening it anyway. I smelled on an open corner and decided it's not food and that made most of them lose interest. Otherwise I think I would have been forced to open it before Christmas.

While on the subject of presents, you should be receiving one, one of these days too and I didn't calculate mental torture by putting any restrictions on the outside. You may open as you see fit. Customs requires it to be itemized on the outside anyway. Not knowing your size and there not being time to ask and be answered, I went on the data that I got from the battery's former supply officer, a warrant officer named Don Raub. Don was visiting one day and saw your picture over my desk. He told me to get a pen and paper and read off the following data from your picture. He said a supply man is never wrong. I've seen quite a few that were but Don's pretty good. I'd be interested to know how close he came.

At any rate I would love to have a picture of you in it if it fits, if you wouldn't mind.

When I first started writing to you I was at our North platoon position. About three weeks ago I came back to the central position where the battery HQ is located and today I moved south to take over that platoon since the platoon commander was being transferred to division. So once again I am commanding an independent platoon. Only this time I've got the shooting platoon. Ever since the big move out from the ChuLai perimeter the South position has been doing all of the shooting. It would seem that this area down here is crawling with VC. They haven't given the artillery too much trouble recently but when the guns first arrived there were a couple of bloody battles fought in the gun pits. It is good to be back in the shooting artillery again though. We have a battery of 155 howitzers and a platoon of 8 inch howitzers besides my platoon of Guns. The rounds have been going off all evening as they fire harassing fires at the VC.

I moved in this afternoon into the hooch vacated by the Captain I am relieving. The house is furnished; I have a real metal frame bed with springs, and native type kerosene lamp and stove with tea kettle. So far I haven't discovered any bad leaks in the roof but one of the boards holding up the canvas roof is suspiciously wet. The floor space is only about 6' x 8' -- not exactly roomy but good enough if the bed is as soft as it looks. In fact I guess I'll try it out. :-)

love, Mark

3 December 1966

Dear Folks,

I am now on FDC watch at the Southern platoon and will try to catch you up on what's going on. I have moved twice in the past month: once been to the battery area and once again down here yesterday. Consequently I have lost some of your letters which I haven't had a chance to answer. Please bear with me. Being with an independent platoon relieves one of a lot of busy work with administration and logistics -- inventorying equipment etc. -- which is necessary for officers in the headquarters area.

To give you some idea of where I fit into the picture now:
(diagram)

At the South position we have a company of infantry [*7th Marines?? What company?*] and one howitzer battery "M", 8" platoon, and us. There is an infantry battalion just over the first line of hills on the muddy road but that is our nearest help. [*7th Marines probably.*] We really feel like we are out in the middle of nowhere. And I guess we are. It's a good position though tactically. Good visibility in all

directions (almost) and they have learned their lesson and have cocooned themselves in with a jungle of barbed wire.

As you go south from ChuLai the foothills of the Central Highlands spread out over the plain until they reach all the way to the highway at the south end of the base. In an earlier letter I mentioned a desire to roam off into the hills and mountains -- well here I am now. And it is just as beautiful as I expected. The vegetation is lush but not dense jungle like you hear about farther into the mountains. It would be beautiful country to go riding out over in the morning. And I still haven't seen it in the sunshine yet.

I am starting a new system of letter writing for the peace of mind of mother. She has so often been afraid I have neglected to write something, thinking I already had, when in fact I had written it to someone else. I even got a letter from Donna saying that mother requested that she forward my letters on after reading them. I didn't go for that idea too well but I'll tell you what I will do; I'll make carbon copies of all my letters and include them.

I came up with another idea on my extension etc. I decided to try for a three month extension which would put me in California in June and July. Then if my orders were changed I wouldn't feel so bad about going east. Also, I hear that a person, particularly artillery, doesn't spend much time in Lejeune. They have cruises and shoots going out constantly and I would be going to Vieques for a month or so to shoot and on a cruise either to the Caribbean or the Mediterranean. It's not really a bargain in trade for California but it is some compensation and I am told the skin diving is fantastic. *[Not what happened - went for 6 month extension with 30 day leave instead.]*

I have your last letter here which I shall answer. Don't send rat traps -- supply has finally come through with some. Besides I think they must all be drowning. I can't believe that anything less than a foot tall could survive the monsoons.

I had a nice Thanksgiving dinner too. I was on FDC watch and took a break to run across to the mess tent after all the troops on my watch had been. They were out of turkey, the roast beef was full of gristle, and the baked ham was getting cold, but I made a meal out of some great, juicy, big fresh shrimp they had as a salad/cocktail item. About the best flavor I've ever tasted. Then they had pumpkin pie and cherry vanilla ice cream. I ignored the mince pie, mixed nuts, sliced fresh fruit, and mint candies and happily sat and slurped melted cherry ice cream until the mess men began to look impatient. Then I wrapped a couple of pieces of pumpkin pie in a napkin and waddled back to the FDC. I felt the same as on steak nights when they have both steak and ice cream. It's just too exciting.

I would be delighted with a seascape in the dining room. If the desert scene needs replacing it will have to be replaced I guess and really just about any artistic nature scene would be good.

No, I don't commute to Hill 54 to get my mail. :-) Military mail follows an entirely different concept than civilian mail. Yours goes by geographical location -- military goes by organizational chain of command. If you can understand this you will be able to understand what happens sometimes when something goes wrong. Right now you would do better to leave the 11th Marines off since regiment has moved to DaNang. Most people change my address as I change the return address. I suppose you haven't because you know it so well you don't need to look. Anyhow I will always use the best current address on the envelope. Now then, the letters all go to the battery headquarters and they keep track of where I am and send it out to me, whether Hill 54, Quang Ngai, or whatever.

I didn't write much to anybody about the battery position *[Hill 34]* so you didn't miss out. The "house" was what we call a hootch, made of two by fours and tent canvas, mosquito screening, and whatever lumber, hinges, plastic tarps etc. that can be scrounged together. The BOQ was one of the larger nicer ones. It didn't leak, was well lit, and was very much like a one room homemade beach cottage. Only with much more makeshift remnants of salvaged canvas. We had electricity for the first couple of days I was there but the generator froze up. We should get our big one back from Barstow soon where it was sent for major repairs. Should be here in about a week. I didn't even bother to bring the tape recorder down this time; I left it in the BOQ where it will stay dry and safe.

Apparently we won't get to the DMZ after all. The people who went north stayed in DaNang to relieve those who were going up to Dong Ha. We'll probably stay put for a while though.

I can't agree with your panacea of bombing Hanoi to end the war.
Love, Mark

Dear Folks, 6 December 66

It is sunny today for the first time in many days. Weather changed suddenly to warm last night too. Instead of getting cooler as the sun went down it stayed about the same all night. Today is beautiful weather. I took a roll of film yesterday and mailed it in but today would have been an ideal day for pictures. I think I might feel funny though spending two days wandering around the position taking pictures. Also, a new PX opened up in ChuLai so if I can get some time, I'll maybe be able to buy a good camera.

I am gradually finding your letters so I will answer them as I come across them. I received your package with french bread and bouillon cubes. We don't have enough cold weather for me to keep up with the bouillon so please hold off for a while. The french bread was delicious. Also received the checks. For the life of me I can't remember what I planned to do with the \$100 check from Daddy so am tearing it up. If you have my letter handy you might let me know what it was I wanted it for. :-)
smiley face with haircut.

You mentioned your day lilies in China; that's probably exactly what these are. They bloom in the morning and as the sun gets low in the sky they start to close up. They are all red or pinkish, shaped: (flower) some pictures I took of my garden didn't come out. I think the film was some that had been sitting in the PX warehouse since the Marines landed. Hill 54 is the only place I've seen them so far. The lily like plants didn't bloom so I don't know what they are.

Except for mosquitoes we don't see very much insect and animal life. We have dragonflies, moths, centipedes and flies but in no great number (except for the flies around the mess hall) and lizards and mice. There are snakes too but we clear [*bulldoze*] so much when we move in that there's no percentage in the wildlife staying.

I don't need any more sheets and towels, but I have managed to get a pillow and could use one pillowcase. Green shows dirt less but other than that white is fine. It doesn't look like I'll be worrying about camouflage anymore. I will wait until March when I can pick it up myself or any other stuff. I'm pretty well equipped now.

I'll be home for Easter!! Whether I come back here or go to the East Coast after that I don't know but I'll be in California for 30 days. I think I'll rent a beach house and pretend it's summer. This is all the letters I can find right now.

Love Mark

PS. Cut Donna off your mailing list please. I have gotten slightly embarrassing repercussions from things she has picked up from them. Article type letters okay but family type no.

Logistics in Vietnam

9 December 66

Dear Daddy,

Found your letter of 20 Nov and although I think I have answered most of the questions already this should tie up the loose ends. I received another tape/letter from you the other day which I imagine is the one with the Stanford Band you mentioned. However since we are still without electricity I have no opportunity to hear it. The battery should be getting their big generator back from Barstow (depot maint.) any day now but that won't help me.

I read the write up in CR on the small tape recorders and that Craig 212 sound like the ideal set to me. I would have no trouble fitting it into my footlocker. There is a new PX which just opened the end of last month in ChuLai. As soon as I have a chance to check it out I'll have a better idea of whether or not to have you send me one of the Craigs.

I have been trying for a week now to break away. Transportation is a problem too as over 50% of our vehicles are broken down at all times and those that are running are precious. You said that you went overseas with all new equipment. (World War II, Army Artillery) Well, the economically minded Marine Corps starts out with ancient equipment and then tries to stay ahead of the game by patching. It really burns us up to see the Koreans, Arvin, and U.S. Army running around in their brand new vehicles while we know that 10 years from now those will be the vehicles we'll be using.

Another series of complaints involves the gold flow and the big noise the administration makes over it. They encourage us to spend more money in the PX and less in the villages, yet perhaps the biggest flow of money is put out for ice. The ice from the villes is expensive; about \$2 for a block of maybe 25# and dirty and no doubt unsanitary. It takes about 10 blocks a night for a battery sized unit which is \$20 gold flow right there. With enough generators and for much less money we could be using the reefers which we all have but can't use for lack of electricity. Then they spend money to get people TV sets, (the battery has two) tape recorders (1) and we even got a great big behind-the-bar type reefer from "division clubs." They probably congratulate themselves on the comforts of the troopers by pointing out all the TV sets but they overlook how worthless it is without electricity.

Another major expenditure is laundry. In the entire Chu Lai area there is one very small overworked laundry platoon in the headquarters area. Essentially all it does is the general's sheets. It doesn't even begin to support any more than the headquarters establishment. I would estimate our battery puts out in the, vicinity of \$100 per week to civilian laundries for inferior service. My last laundry came back with scorch marks from drying it over a stove apparently. Quite often you get somebody else's clothes or even with half your clothes missing. I lost a good jungle utility (fatigue) jacket that way. I hope the VC that got it gets caught with "Lt. M. W. Howe" written across the pocket in big letters. The VC don't have to get clothes from Hanoi - - they can just take all they need from the village laundries.

In every unit I have been involved with, I have tried to stimulate interest in utilizing the Marine laundry platoon, small as it is. It is so overworked that sometimes a driver who goes to division with it early in the morning comes back late in the afternoon without having gotten it washed. Many times it will have broken down, perhaps with generator trouble, making an even bigger crowd the next day. The troops get discouraged and after a while start using the civilian laundries again.

Another needless expenditure once again depending on generators, is haircuts. People end up in desperation plugging into a BA279 (radio battery) which probably costs the government over \$5. I have seen various other appliances donated by agencies in the States to the fighting man but the fighting man never gets to use them. He has no electricity.

Another sore point is "Division Clubs." Each case of beer sold to the troops accrues \$1.20 to the unit account at "division clubs." Over a period of time our account had built to an amount in the thousands of dollars. Since we are in a forward position we can't use the money on a club so it just sat. That's what we used for one of our T.V. sets and our behind-the-bar reefer, but that is only a small dent. Recently they started letting us use it for "free beer" for the troops and we have at last started using it up but this is just one more example of a system designed solely for headquarters people in the rear and

imposed on everybody. I'm a little bitter at the Corps right now for trying to send me to the east coast so I am a little less inhibited in my criticism. Consequently, since it would not be from me directly, if you happen to mention anything to any of your politician friends it would be ok by me.

Of course you probably can't conceive of a war where people complain because they don't have cold beer and washing machines to say nothing of T V sets and bar reefers and you have a point. However, since it is set up that way I think the effort is grossly misdirected. Now if they really were interested in effectiveness they would bring in less TV sets, bar furniture and beer and more scotch tape and chewing gum to keep our equipment running.

When a part breaks, no matter how critical, it may take two months before we get another. The two guns in my platoon would be lucky to make it back to the highway from this position if we had to move out. Our supply officer, Bruce Ellis, who is smart and a very good officer, says the problem is that people just don't know how to let the system work. But I tell him there is no sense in having a system that is so delicately balanced that it gets bogged down if somebody does not know how to use it. I don't know what kind of a system you had [*WWII Army Artillery*] but the way ours is set up, supply won't even stock an item that does not get used every 30 days. Then when the item is needed it is put on order, and orders take upwards of a month to be filled. So if the item is a part needed to keep a truck or a tractor running, the fastest solution is to run down to Sea Bees and "scrounge" the part. Now, when supply sees the part is no longer needed they cancel the order.

Division supply has the same "usage data" system so after the order is canceled their records show no usage and therefore they don't stock the part either and so it goes. Bruce's point is that if people would let the system work - let the truck stay deadlined for two months awaiting parts - eventually usage data would be built up to where supply would have everything all ready for you when you needed it. But what do we do in the meantime and what do we do every once in a while when a bad supply man gets in the chain and we have to start all over.

I contend that the military should take a look at the civilian system, which works, and centralize to a greater extent. I say what is wrong with having a big "department store" down on the beach with enough of everything to keep the equipment running. Then nobody would have to scrounge - - if a fan belt broke it would not take two months to get another through supply - - you could just go down and pick one up. Then there would be no reason for hoarding parts, and rules against stockpiling could be enforced. As it is now commanders have to condone a certain amount of it in order to keep running. It could be, however, that the shortage stems from the fact that the Marine Corps just does not have the money to keep an adequate inventory of supplies. That, however, is purely in the realm of politics.

To continue with your letter, sounds like I'll be coming home to a practically new house. No, this doesn't make me feel badly one bit. I've gotten to be a real bug on improvement -- get something done every day better than the day before. Therefore I am pleased. :-)

We never did see any VC in uniform. Nobody ever saw them. [*Opn. Colorado?*] We teamed up with the grunts a few days later and made a sweep of the area between us and the mountains. The artillery supplied the blocking force along the highway and around to the sides somewhat while the infantry (I Company, 3/5 which took so many casualties on Hastings) swept from the mountains down to the blocking force. Only a few VCS (suspects).

You asked if officers and men dress any different. No except that officers are required to wear rank insignia on their collars and cover. Most of the time I just wear a T -shirt but there is still the bright silver bar in the middle of my forehead. On SLF we drew our bars on our collars in black ink but now we are doing everything but spit shining our boots and that may be coming next.

Snipers seldom show during the day except on sweeps and operations. I haven't been on one of those since Colorado. I think I mentioned that I have a rifle. That is not to look like a trooper - - it is just because it's a better weapon than the pistol. I understand that a sniper tried his luck on the south platoon once when they first got here. We have a parapet around the position (called a berm) but there are several hills with a field of fire. As soon as the sniper's position was determined, 8" swung around and put a round right on top of him. Haven't had a sniper since.

The road from Chu Lai to DaNang is not considered secure. Periodically they have what they call a "Rough Rider Convoy" which drives up and comes back but that is just to show that we can use the road if we want to. We generally lay one gun on an azimuth which covers the road when they do and they go up loaded for bear.

You mentioned taking a jeep and driving to DaNang. I can't even take a jeep and drive to Med. Battalion for my annual physical. Vehicles are very strictly controlled. We are lucky if we can keep two jeeps out of our five, running. One of the two is always the CO's and the other is the XO's. They are pigs about them. Out of the other three they try to keep one running for mail and admin runs but that is all. Out of 5 PC's one is the only vehicle in the north position - - no they have a 2 1/2T [*deuce and a half*] also - - and one is used by supply. The rest are consistently down. We have six 2 1/2T 6x's [*called deuce and a half for two and a half ton truck or six-by's for 6x6 wheel drive*] - - they have one north, one for the galley, one for trash and water, and the rest are down. Of six 5T, we have one here in the south position. It just came out of the shop and since we got it, it has sprung a leak in the master cylinder and one battery has fallen apart with age. The wrecker has been down for some part or other ever since I got into the battery. One of two refuelers gave up the ghost completely and I think was evacuated after we stripped it of any usable parts.

Time for lunch.

Love Mark

Notes on MotorT [Motor Transport]:

PC = Personnel carrier; cute little 3/4 ton truck.

2 1/2T = Known as the six-by or deuce-and-a-half; the work horse of the military. 6WD, dualies on the back.

5T = similar to the 6x but beefed up; only in units with big equipment, like 155's up.

Wrecker and refuelers; only because of our big guns; use a lot of fuel [if we move] and need massive assistance if we get stuck.

11 December 1966

[Written to Donna; may be duplicated but don't send a copy to Donna for heavens sake!]

Nothing much has happened lately. I'll give you a little run down on life in the South platoon.

The Mike Battery complex is composed of "M" Battery, a platoon of Guns and a platoon of 8 " howitzers. We have grunt companies here and there around our position but we have our own perimeter and our own security. As I told you before, this is the shooting platoon; generally fires more rounds than all the other platoons combined. So far it has been running true to form. If we had had as much VC activity around us on Hill 54 as we have here we would have really been worried. But down here it is taken for granted. We are on a hill, which is an advantage, but there are many other higher hills all around. Once a sniper got up on a hillside directly in front of us and tried to pick off a few Marines but one of the 8" howitzers swung around on him and blew him clean off the mountain. Since that time there has been no trouble with snipers.

I have a very small hootch made from 2 x 4s and torn up tent canvas and plastic sheeting. When my guns fire, the report shakes everything around inside and after each mission I have to pick up the pieces. I have toilet articles all over the floor, my tea kettle and stove are rolling around on the floor, my rifle falls off the wall, etc. etc. War is hell. My latest addition to my comfort is a 6 V battery powered hanging lamp which I made out of an old Vietnamese light socket and switch, a piece of aluminum foil for reflector, and a tail light lamp from my '49 Ford. It hangs over my desk from a piece of canvas repair thread.

When I took over the platoon I was a little worried about the troops. They were not unlike a tribe of wild Indians. A couple of days after I got here I went out and broke up a dirt clod fight in the gun pit. It amazed me that the NCOs would stand for such a thing. It all started out with an archery set we had in

our special services gear. One of my first projects was rebuilding the Guns parapet and when it was finished it was a rather impressive towering wall of dirt around the gun pit. Also an ideal archery target. Well, somehow the archery turned into a pitched cowboy 'n Indians battle complete with knives, hatchets and dirt clods and the parapet in between.

One of the first indications I had that I was in the war zone was the first night I was in the position. Just before dark all hell broke loose on the perimeter -- rifles and pistols and machine guns including the 50 Cal (it's a big one). When I wondered what was happening they said "Just test firing the weapons Sir. We do that every night." Well they don't anymore!

Another little trait they have is throwing grenades at night for the fun of it. Mike calls it "H & I grenades" to keep the VC from sneaking up on the wire. The idea sounds okay but the attitude of the troops was that of the 4th of July. Particularly one crazy character who likes to take grenades apart and make homemade bombs. He was in the brig at Pendleton when I was there and I think the loony bin would be a better place for him. He loves to throw grenades. He is a perfect man on security bunker watch, stays awake all night with no trouble. He just keeps throwing grenades. Right off I held a shakedown of all the troop's gear, counted the grenades, and made threats about any grenades turning up missing. Today one gun was short three. I passed the word "Everybody by their racks!" and suddenly one of the troops came up with 5 from the glove box of our truck !!

I passed the word that from now on there will be a shakedown every time any ordinance comes up missing. For a shakedown they have to empty everything they own out on their rack and have it gone through. Amazing some of the things you find on a shakedown. :-) Oh -- the reason for the shakedown today was that last night a grenade got thrown inside the wire and Mike security thought it came from one of our gun pits. I'm not at all convinced that didn't. Like I say -- wild Indians. The average age is pretty young for the troops. Most are about 18 to 20. But I have been all over the sergeants to get this stuff squared away.

The security watches are the biggest headache. We have a total of 24 people or about 20 watch standers. We have posts in 2 bunkers, 2 gun pits and then the regular Comm/FDC watches. There were 2 men in each bunker standing watch all night when I got here. One was supposed to sleep on a cot in the back of the bunker while the other was awake. As it was neither got any good sleep. I shook everybody up with my first decision, to have 3 people, 3 watches, and one man would go back to the tent to sleep each watch while the other 2 stayed on post. Getting the third man per post was like pulling teeth because each gun has to keep two men on all night and after they furnish 2 men for outpost they only have 4 left. The only alternative was to take people from the Comm & FDC watches during their time off. They were standing 6 on, 12 off, so they could afford to give a little bunker time -- they average 8 on and 16 off in a 24 hour period -- so every third day they have security sandwiched in between their other watches. One man was talking this morning about it. He got off FDC watch at 1800 last night and went on bunker watch at 1830; he was relieved at 2300, went in and slept for 3 ½ hours and was called to the bunker again at 0230. He was secured from the bunker at 0630 and was a half hour late to his next FDC watch. He got off at noon today and has off until midnight tonight but he couldn't be too tired because he has been lying in the sun all afternoon reading a book. War is hell!

My watch schedule? Every other night I spent in the FDC, the other night I have off. In the mornings I supervise, harass and direct and read and write in between. In the afternoon I read, write and talk with the lieutenant who stands FDO in the daytime. Right now I am sitting in the sun writing while the "big eye" bronzes me.

Love ya, Mark

14 December 1966

Dear Folks,

Santa Claus came prancing in in his mail truck this morning and my hootch now really smells like Christmas. Your first package of decorations went up in the BOQ at the battery when I was there. Since then I have received the four little metallic balls and have hung them over my front door here. Now I have redwood boughs both inside and out... inside mainly just for the smell. Also got a tape of Christmas music from Margie and Roy which I can't play. The titles all made me a little nostalgic though. Sure wish I could play it. Also your can of Christmas cookies didn't help. Up until now it didn't feel like Christmas so I didn't miss it. But now it smells, looks and even tastes like Christmas and I do. The evergreens have a wonderful smell. Also got a card from Hazel Goslin and a game came through wet from Susie and Vic so I opened it. It was from Oshkosh, Wis.!!? Is that where they are now? Did I mention the dried fruit pack I got from the Jou Jon Roches? It came a few days ago. I noticed the basket it came on was from Hong Kong. It's a well-traveled basket... almost made it back home again. Hmmm... some new kinds of cookies in here. "Munch, munch". One tastes like coconut with sweetened condensed milk. Mmmmmmm....

I have spent the morning working on a letter to be sent to the ONR (Office of Naval Research) and anybody else I can think of. I'll enclose a copy for you to proofread. Your article on oceanography from C&EN (whatever magazine that is) has given me a whole raft of agencies to write to. Also a lot of encouragement to see that the national interest has been aroused in oceanography.

By the way -- I received the book from the Australian embassy in Saigon *The Marine and Freshwater Fishes of Ceylon; Munro*. Unfortunately I haven't had a chance to go under-sea exploring though recently. It will have to wait until next summer I guess.

Love, Mark

Copies of letters to girls for Mother so she won't miss anything. :-)

Letter to Terry, Russ Reddick's sister in law.

My correspondence slid to a shameful extent. Since last you heard from me I have been transferred from Hill 54 to the battery central position where I found myself heavily committed to all kinds of administrative jobs. Then when a Captain we had commanding our South platoon got orders to division on Thursday, I got the job. I am now in command of the South platoon, down in the VC country near Quang Ngai, South of Chu Lai. This position has been doing more shooting than the rest of all the heavy artillery in the division combined. Should be fun.

I am on FDC watch and it is pretty late. I think I'll sneak off and hit the rack for a while when I finish this so you'll understand if my handwriting trails off in a few places.

Not too much action today -- in fact I haven't heard my guns fire yet at all. Most of the day I spent sorting through papers and orders and playing house with all the little gadgets I inherited with my hootch. I also found a cache of cans of beer, cans of orange juice and cans of club soda. I can take care of the first two items fine but there's only one use for the club soda that I can think of and not being a drinking man...? I wonder if soda's good straight.

I have a vague feeling that perhaps this is a partying bunch down here although so far the evenings have been quiet. The CO of the howitzer battery is in charge and he has that sort of look in his eyes. Not that I don't enjoy a good party you must understand, but I prefer the casual private sort rather than the unitized kind where everybody will come because the CO wants them to enjoy themselves. Well that's okay -- I'll go with my soda water on the rocks. You're probably wondering if you haven't been misled as to what combat is really like but quite frankly except for living conditions and people getting killed, this is very little different than duty in the States. When you consider that it's the same people no matter where they are it's not too surprising.

Let me tell you, Terry, it's cold here, or at least it feels cold compared with what we are used to. Last night I was very glad for my blanket on my spring bed and from now on I'm going to use two. The funny thing is, though, that the thermometer shows it only goes down to maybe 65° at the lowest. Of

course the dampness and wind make it seem worse but I still catch myself looking up toward the mountains to see if there's any snow.

Love, Mark

16 December 1966

Dearest Cathy Howe,

I can't believe one of my guns just about ran over my hootch. Fortunately the driver ran up on a bank alongside the road when it started to run away with him. Unfortunately I was riding on the gun and fell off into the mud and would you believe I put my last pair of clean trousers on this morning? I was worried the gun would flip over on top of me.

I tried to do some studying today but I got distracted. First Ken Boudreaux dropped in for a chat. He was out "trooping the line" and we got to talking about the world. He was an English/Philosophy major and is thinking of joining the FBI or CIA when he gets out. He was in my class at Quantico and is now acting local security etc. officer -- mostly etc.

I gave him a supply of Lifesavers... in fact I have all my troops walking around with Lifesavers now. I got a very small but heavy package from the Warners the other day with four boxes of Lifesavers. I passed some out to the troops today. I'm going to send some up to the north platoon too because Bill Rhodes, the platoon commander who relieved me, loves them. He'll be tickled pink.

We have been reading about Cal's student strikes over here. [*The Free Speech Movement or FSM demonstrations led by a student Mario Savio. Cathy was there and interested but not involved.*] In spite of the ridicule which Ron Reagan has been the object of, everybody said a few hurrahs at his university stand. It's just getting so tiresome. It's obvious that the demonstrations are not accomplishing their goals... just like the Negro uprisings. They just build up feeling against their cause. Why doesn't Savio go out and start his own school? I like to think that that is the benefit of living in a free country. If you don't like what's going on you have the freedom to show the world (or rather state) that your way is better. His approach is so entirely negative it amazes me he hasn't gravitated to one of the magnetic poles long ago and built an igloo.

I don't however understand this distribution of contraceptive pills. Do you mean for sale or for free? At Stanford we had a socialized medicine type set up but all medicine was paid for. None was just handed out. As far as your middle-class values go, I don't believe there is any such thing. Each person has his own attitude and that may well change many times, depending on how much he learns or cuts himself off from learning about the world. Frankly I hadn't realized there was much resistance to "the pill"; I knew the idea of abortion was being fought by the Catholics and a few other religious groups, but they were using "the pill" when I was home and nobody thought anything about it.??!!

What with the styles the way they are they are going to need some effective birth control measures. :-) I can hardly wait to see what girls aren't wearing these days... miniskirts for instance. Do you realize I have never seen a miniskirt? Or a topless waitress? Or a see-through dress? Probably, as usual, the papers build it up more than it is, but there was no denial that Jayne Mansfield has been waltzing around in sideless dresses!! Good grief!!

I'm getting fat again this week so I'll starve again next week. I haven't had a chance though with all the Christmas goodies coming in. I finished my Geology final and am now enrolling in Sociology [so I can speak your language], and Historical Geology. I looked for a statistics course oriented toward life science but could find none. They did have calculus for life science though but I found it too late. Check is already in. Knowin' somebody at Cal will probably hijack it because I'm fighting in Vietnam. Hope the reader isn't a demonstrator.

I've been reading the science fiction book I got from the Wakemans. It's great. It's not really what you think of as science fiction at all but along the literary lines of Huxley and Orwell... only better I think. I am enclosing Lynnae's last letter wondering if I have lost touch with the intellectual world or what. She talks about disliking the stultification [sp?] of intellectualism. The impression her letter left on me was exactly the stilted "well-chosen" language she was bewailing. Obviously she is unaware of it... am I oversensitive? You're writing always seems very warm and human and so do others so I don't think it's

my imagination but I wonder what kind of friends Lynnae has. How do my letters sound? Maybe it's just the use of big words.

Time to blackout my tent.

Much love, Mark

PS. Maybe I wrote Lynnae an intellectual sounding letter thinking of her as such a student, and she is retaliating.

Another letter to Terry, Russ Reddick's sister in law.

21 December 1966

I got your letter several days ago but things have been kind of jumpy around here and I haven't had a chance to write. But things are relatively well organized now so I'll start trying to relax. Night before last it appears that a VC came through our wire and paid a visit to one of my gun pits. The two sentries on duty suddenly saw him standing beside the gun but before they could get him he ducked around the gun and was out of the pit. They paid no attention to him and made a quick and frantic search of the guns and ammo bunkers looking for satchel charges and other explosives that he might have left. This made sense to me. Then they checked out the area and the barb wire and found a gap in the top strand of wire about 3 feet wide. Also a couple of footprints. Needless to say, it shook us up a little -- which is good. Too bad they don't do things like that more often to keep us on our toes.

I went back to the battery area the next day and was delighted at the response I got. The CO was appalled and when I returned last night I had all kinds of hard to get supplies and even harder to get reinforcements. We got a whole case of trip flares, barb wire, stakes, and five troopers. That may not sound like many to you but as shorthanded as we were it was like a godsend. What it actually amounted to was a capability to put listening posts and combat outposts out in front of our wire. Today I have been running around getting wire repaired, our first LP organized, and amazingly enough, trying to set up a club for the troops.

It all ties in with security because I'm going to enforce lights out in the troop tents at about eight o'clock every night from now on... If they want to write letters, read, etc. they'll have to go to the club tent. The troop tents will be for sleeping. They get little enough sleep at night around here without having lights to bother them and other assorted commotion.

So anyway, how was your Christmas? Thank you so much for the stocking presents. I opened the package about a week ago because some strange syrupy looking substance was oozing out -- kind of pinkish. You'd never think it but the air over here is so wet that it was dissolving the candy canes!! So I had to eat them of course. :-) It certainly added to the "flavour" of Christmas. Your stockings are hanging from my rafters under some pine boughs and cones I got from my family. I wondered if you had knit them yourself. I have never before seen a "lace-able" stocking.

You have no idea what the effect was on me when you started naming off the south sea islands. I was still curious though... is your mama Tapuan or was she just born there? I recently received a book through the Australian embassy written by one of their marine biologists concerning the fish of Ceylon. It was the closest I could get to the Southeast Asian area. I have been thinking of seeing if they could use a marine biologist when I leave the Corps. (There is little question in my mind about leaving the Marines.) I don't enjoy the thought of settling down but as an oceanographer maybe I wouldn't have to. I could work for the Australians for a while and then use that as a recommendation for working for the French with a lab in Papeete. Then, when things settle down in S.E.A. I could work for the Thai fisheries, and then I'd be about a good ripe middle age (about 30) and take a position on the faculty of some school or other and write and teach. See what an effect your mention of Tonga Tapu caused.

It is debatable how much of a promotion being a general's aide is. It is certainly something of a plum, but when three of us were picked to interview General Stiles when he was commanding the First Marine Division Rear at Pendleton, all three of us told him we'd just as soon not if it was all the same to him. Russ probably won't have much time to himself... anywhere the General goes, the aide goes, and generals keep moving.

Much love, Mark

PS I have been trying to figure out what you meant by the initiative I showed. From your letter it sounded like it was because I sent two letters in a row. Whatever it is I'm glad you like it -- please let me know so I can do it some more. :-)

The following notes were taken from a tape from some time in December or January.

All kinds of interesting things have been happening involving our home life here. We got word a couple of weeks ago Captain McNamara is being transferred to regiment and a new CO is coming over to us from 8 inch. He's the XO over there now. He has quite a reputation as a harasser of troops and officers. In fact he is supposed to be so bad that the officers will leave an area when he comes into it. It remains to be seen. *[This XO was Sid Adkins, soon to be very well known to us all.]*

Along with this change, an order came down from FAG. That's the unit that's taken over for regiment down here in the Chu Lai area. Anyhow, this order came down from FAG saying all batteries would have the capability of assuming FDC control at all times and that an officer would be on duty in the Exec Pit. First it looked as though I were nominated but today Ted Mahoney got the word to move. Apparently the skipper realized that I would be spending so much time across the street. *[at the composite battery HQ]*

21 January 1967

Dear Folks;

I am perfectly all right but short of sleep and extremely harassed. We are trying to run this battery like a Battalion and don't begin to have enough people to do it. I will make a tape soon.

Did you receive: "letter to Congressman"?

Pictures/negatives? Did the pictures come out any better for you?

PS enclosed are more negatives. Fedco's turned out pretty good so it's not the camera. (Brownie Hawkeye)

Not sure what was going on during this period. Probably a lot of correspondence was done by taped letters. Both Tet and Capt. McNamara's replacement as battery commander by Sid Adkins took place in February. 8 Feb was Capt. Mac's going away party. Prior to that I was working at the center position in Battery HQ getting the classified materials straightened out. This was an extra job I had picked up and the files were in terrible shape. Capt. Mac was somewhat terrified of leaving anything that Adkins could nail him with so we worked long and hard. In fact I had a L/Corporal Stepneski in charge of the files who not only helped tirelessly squaring away the secret message files, but also filling me in on what went on during War Call later on. As a result, I knew more about the situation before the 10 March incident than any other officer in the position and probably even more than the investigators. All of this alludes to a major assassination attempt to be described in a subsequent essay.

I was probably suspected by Adkins of being part of the conspiracy, but I knew nothing until after the incident had occurred.

At the same time, we were heavily involved with adhering to the FAG directive regarding watchstanding. Our composite battery probably consisted of HQ 4/11, Kilo battery 155's, 8", and us. The S-3 Major in charge of the FDC was probably from 4/11. I recall that at first, when he caught me studying Sociology during my watches in the FDC, he had a number of very uncomplimentary things to say about me. Probably took me for a California liberal kook. Later, he surprised me by trying to talk me into accepting a position as his assistant S-3. But by then a number of things were beginning to spin out of our control, and I never did take that job. The part I played in the investigations and Board of Inquiry [preliminary to a Court Martial] of L/Cpl. Hurley was much more interesting.

9 February 67

Letter to Terry

Right now I don't know what address to send this to but I'll just save it until I hear from you. Thank you for both your letter and picture and for the Arizona highways. Believe me if I got orders to Arizona I would take them but I shuddered at the thought of going to the East Coast again. There is

something about the West that is great -- rugged, beautiful, open. Coming back from Quantico I drove my '49 Ford across the country -- when I came across Texas and into the Southwest deserts I just felt good. It was a feeling like going from a stuffy room into the great outside. But then I'm a Westerner. My family has gone to or through Arizona many times on vacations and we have all grown to love the Southwest.

I appreciated you sending your father's picture of you as a Maori. I certainly understand your wanting it back and will return it as soon as I can find an envelope the right size. You should have addressed it in pencil. I wonder if you have heard of Moral Rearmament (MRA)? Some very good friends of my mother's are active in it and had a Maori staying in LA for one of their plays. His part was a war dance in full costume. Apparently housing got scarce and he stayed at our house for about a week. He performed for us a few times and I well remember his finale in the middle of our living room with a leap and grimace and growl at the end of the dance. All of your paraphernalia reminded me of his costume. So in an attempt to keep up with your ethnic picture I enclose a picture of my ethnic outrigger. Regarding our exchange of pictures, I have been passing on a large onslaught of photography. Don't feel you have to keep them because it won't hurt my feelings at all to have them returned. Just keep what you want. By the same token I would be very happy to see any snapshots you have on the same basis. You certainly needn't feel reticent about asking for them back.

Yesterday was the first day of the Tet stand down. Today is a holiday in deference to the Vietnamese since the day is so important to them. This worked out very well for us since we had a going away party for Capt. McNamara last night. He has been the CO of the battery for about six months now but is going to Regiment. Somebody managed to find a supply of booze and we all got "schnockered". (sp??) In fact the platoon commander from the South platoon got so sick I had to move my rack outside for the night. It was kind of fun for a change but I'm glad booze is hard to get just the same. The Vietnamese had celebrations all around also so we were right at home you might say. In fact this Tet celebration seems to be like Christmas, 4th of July, and New Year's all rolled into one. They light off firecrackers, shoot their weapons in the air and have a gay time of it.

26 February 67

Dear Cathy,

Thank you very much for several letters, a tape, and the pictures. I am returning some and sending you some too. I mentioned in a tape to Mom and Dad that it came out a little fuzzy. How did it sound on the Craig? [*The Craig: a little tape recorder for sending taped letters.*]

I have a stack of your letters too and now that I have learned to tape letters home in such short order I can concentrate on more appreciative answers to yours. (Only superfluous answers can be made on tape I think). You wrote after seeing "A Man and a Woman" that you were so happy with the warm, human feeling of it. I don't know anything about the movie but I know that is the feeling I have often had reading Steinbeck's books. You said it wasn't too psychological which is unusual for a European flick. I don't like psychological flicks but I was startled to read the other day that Conrad, whom I idolize, was the innovator of the psychological novel. He is certainly nothing like psychological flicks though.

Your schedule (classes) sounded great but I imagine you're about ready for finals by now. You're on the quarter system now aren't you? When? Maybe I can swipe some of your American Novels.

It is a very funny feeling for me thinking about returning to the "real world". I read your accounts of New Year's parties and wondered what it would feel like to go to a party where people wear civilian clothes, don't bring guns and helmets, and bring girls (round eye type). The other day a couple of Red Cross girls showed up at the FDC bunker while I was on watch. Just for a moment I almost panicked. I couldn't think what you say to round eye girls. I looked around and saw the troops going through the same momentary shock. Up until now I never thought there would be any problem reentering civilization. Another thing I keep thinking about is driving. I long to get behind the wheel and step on it. Those highways are going to seem so smooth and anything above 35 mph is going to feel like flying.

The only thing that won't be an experience is going to be food. We eat better over here, I think, than the troops do in the States (in the barracks).

The course I'm taking is Sociology I. It's called XBI to indicate it's equivalent to the Berkeley (B) course. I'm bogged down after only two lessons (out of 15).

I'm looking forward to seeing you at Cal, having dinner at "I House" [*International House where both Cathy and Lynnae were living at the time*] and the whole bit. In fact I may well land in San Francisco first. So if you get a call some night to come pick me up why ...!? I think I can see why Lynnae went to "I House". No, I'm probably reading in my own problems but it seems like it would be easier to... never mind; I think I'm getting stage fright about reentering the sophisticated peacetime America. I should arrive sometime around the first of April. Of course plans could change and I'd like to hold out for a little later date. What's your schedule?

I'm up to your 8 Feb. letter now. I don't know how the Southern accent slipped in. There are a lot of Southerners in the Corps and of course I converse with them daily. Maybe something rubbed off. I never played the tape through to listen to it; I probably wouldn't have sent it. I'm doing a little better now though. In fact it's so easy I fear I'll lose the motivation to write. But I don't think you can do justice to ideas on tape at all. Unless, of course you have a discussion going.

I have much sympathy with your problem with the sorority. I had the same problem but there were enough of us who felt the same way about the foolishness that we were able to effectively counterbalance. I also think a Cal student would be mistaken not to travel around a bit between campi. La Jolla is beautiful.

Your camping trip sounds intriguing. Where do you go?

I had a very fine letter from Kathy Gant which I will save. She sent it when it appeared you would not return to Cal.

Give my love to Kathy Koenig. Her addresses are about as hard to keep up with as mine must have been. She is still at Cal, nicht wahr?

Could you tape "Snoopy and the Red Baron" for me? I have tried to get Mom and Dad to tape me some radio but to no avail. I'll have to appeal to Margie and Roy again. Our favorite during the monsoons was the "Yellow Submarine". On some of the wetter days Bruce, Ted and I would hole up in our hootch, burn our kerosene stove, and sing or play "We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine, etc..." :-)) while the floods poured down.

I just got shanghai'd into a football game and it is now dark outside but it won't get very dark because there is still plenty of moon left. They've been shooting a lot this afternoon. When we shoot (general support artillery) we usually all shoot... 155 How's, Guns, and 8". How's and 8" are shooting now, no telling what at. Sure would hate to be on the receiving end though.

Enclosed are many things... please forgive my long silence but I'll be seeing you very soon. Rather than take spring quarter off why not just "matriculate"?? down to La Jolla or Santa Barbara. If you choose to stay at Berkeley we'll just have to take a few trips up the beautiful California coast. You won't have to be somewhere with the palms of your feet together no matter what.
Much, much love, Mark

The Fragging Incident 10 March 1967

This is the story of the fragging of the 155 Guns XO, Capt. Williams. A fragging is when one trooper attempts to shoot or grenade another disliked superior in his own unit. It typically occurs during combat where it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove. Only those involved know. I recall one of my classmates at Quantico was rumored to have been fragged as soon as he took his platoon into combat in Vietnam. Having known his disposition and personality we found the rumor to be believable.

According to one book, the fragging of Capt. Williams was the first fragging incident investigated by the Naval Investigation Service [NIS] during the Vietnam War. For reference, the investigating officer was Bob Clark.

I do not recall or was not privy to much of the NIS investigation; however I was one of three officers on the board of inquiry [2 Lts. and a Major] and did a certain amount of investigating myself during the proceedings. The perpetrator was Bruce Ellis' supply clerk, L/Cpl Hurley, and it was a very interesting case. The word we got was after the conviction he was sentenced to 7 years.

The following story emphasizes what we thought was the most important thing at the time: the culture fabric of the battery. It also illustrates Vietnam era combat attitudes in general.

At shortly after six o'clock in the morning, the first rays of dawn started lighting a new day from behind the South China Sea. The base camp of the 3rd Gun battery was several miles north of Chu Lai in the Republic of Vietnam. The tents were scattered about over the white sand with the two long barreled self-propelled Guns nestled among the sand dunes at the far end of the camp. One or two troopers could be seen outside the troop tents near the guns with their tin Vietnamese wash basins.

On the opposite side of the camp was the headquarters area near the highway #1 which connects Saigon with Hanoi and links the cities and villages of the eastern coastline the length of Vietnam. As the sun rose the Marines from the outpost bunkers on the perimeter started collecting their ammunition and machine guns and trudging in off post. One man walked toward the mailbox in front of the battery office and about 25 yards away two sentries from the guns walked past the CO's tent carrying a machine gun to the armory. It was now almost 7 and there were signs of life from the staff NCOs quarters as they began to roll out of their racks. There were still very few troops up and about -- somebody had forgotten to hold reveille. It was the morning of 10 March.

The cool morning stillness was suddenly shattered by the dread sound of an explosion. The man in the security tower saw smoke rising from the headquarters area and thinking it was a VC mortar he immediately hit the warning siren. The men in the tent area saw a cloud of smoke rise from the CO's tent where the CO, Capt. Adkins and the exec, Capt. Williams lived. The man at the battery office mailbox was just turning around when it went off and he saw Capt. Williams crumple onto the front porch of his tent and the door slam shut behind him.

I was in my tent about 50 feet away and was awakened by the explosion. Lt. Bruce Ellis, the battery supply officer and my tent mate, was getting into his flak gear so I followed suit. Then we heard the gunny calling for a corpsman and the agonized voice of Capt. Williams asking somebody to stop the bleeding. Within a few minutes there were three corpsman, the battery gunny, and several others gathered around in horror. Bruce went outside and I started to follow him, but before I could get to the door he was back. His ashen face told the story as well as his words, "His foot is just about blown off." I went out and watched the corpsmen do what they could and then lift him onto a stretcher and into the ambulance. The flesh of his right leg above the ankle had been completely blown out with nothing holding the foot to the leg but a few strands of flesh.

After he had been taken away the full impact of what had happened hit us all. The front door of his and Capt. Adkins tent had been booby-trapped with a grenade and a tripwire tied to a stick. We could see how it had been done. The wire went from the hole in the porch where the grenade had been, across the front of the door, to a stick on the other side so that when the door was opened outward it would hit the wire and detonate the grenade. Capt. Williams had been heard to say "I saw it but I couldn't believe it.

It was a grenade taped to a stake." The Marines present that morning all realized that it could have been done by the VC and in a combat area one would expect that to be the natural conclusion. But it was significant that the feeling was such in the battery that nobody doubted for a minute that the booby-trap had been set by a Marine.

It is a sad thing when men find it necessary to kill and maim each other in the name of war, but how much more terrible it is when they turn hatred among themselves to the extent that they attack their own countrymen. It seems so hard to believe, and truly until one has seen and known the circumstances of such a thing it would seem impossible. But I saw it all from beginning to terrible end and I now understand that such a thing could happen. Considering the thought and hatred that went into a booby-trap such as the one set for Capt. Williams, how much easier it must be to merely pull a trigger in battle at a hated person.

Circumstances of stress cause men to do strange things and war carries a considerable amount of stress. There are few leaders that can combine the virtues of accomplishing the missions of war while maintaining the psychological well-being of the men who fight for them. Capt. Adkins knew to the letter what must be done to please his superiors and prosecute the war but either he didn't care or more generously, didn't know how to control the minds of his men. Not that he didn't try; he explained his goals and showed what he was working toward and this certainly held back the tide for a while. But as the men went out every night, moving sand dunes into berms, building bunkers, stringing barb wire and this, night and day with no break they finally began to approach the point of doing something about it.

The specific situation in the 3rd 155 Gun battery must be understood to fully realize what happened. There were many situations and different groups had different reasons for discontent. The battery had had a long and colorful career in Vietnam. Before I came to the battery almost a year ago there had been a battery commander named Capt. Moore who had apparently done much to shape the personality of the unit. In those early days it was the mission of an artillery battery to shoot. The other necessary things, such as maintaining equipment and building massive impregnable barbed wire perimeters were only accomplished to the extent of keeping the guns shooting. The rest of their time they spent drinking and playing and socializing with the local villagers who were allowed to freely circulate in the camp.

At the time I arrived in Vietnam a considerable number of headquarters echelons arrived too, and with these people came the regulations and supervision imposed in a garrison situation. Of course the new units were more susceptible to the new regime than the older ones like the 3rd Guns who were able to retain some of the old flavor.

Capt. Davidson took over the battery shortly before I joined it. He was quiet and steady and while the drinking and playing was curtailed to a healthy extent, the battery continued to function effectively in a relaxed fashion. Although the Majors and Colonels from the headquarters echelons began to pester, the biggest cause of pressure brought to bear on the battery was the equipment. The vehicles, guns and equipment which had been in combat for nearly a year started to show the effects of wear. This put an immediate and severe strain on the battery supply and maintenance capabilities and of course on the manpower.

The supply functions had been ignored and parts which are hard enough to get when supply functions properly were now nonexistent. To alleviate this problem the battery was given a warrant officer in supply to get the account straightened out. His name was John Raub. Starting very nearly from scratch, it did seem that he worked miracles. Supply was no longer the "corner grocery" though and it took long hours of work and many new rules which were met with considerable resentment.

When Capt. McNamara took command of the battery from Capt. Davidson at the end of July he made it clear in his change of command speech exactly what you would expect. He said, "The mission of an artillery battery is to keep shooting, moving and communicating. All I ask and expect of you is that you keep me shooting, keep me moving, and keep me communicating." These were the first words of command we heard from our new commander. Through the remainder of the summer operations, the fall preparation for the monsoons, and through the winter monsoon rains themselves, there was always the

short stocky figure of Capt. McNamara with a word of advice, a chewing out for a blunder, but always ready to go "straight to the Colonel" if he thought the battery or anyone in it wasn't getting a fair shake.

Not much more than a week or so after Capt. McNamara joined the battery I was sent to the north platoon on Hill 54 for "a few days" to learn how a platoon is run. The following day the platoon commander came down with malaria and I had the platoon myself. My contact with the rest of the battery from then on was mostly by telephone but I tried to keep track of what was going on through conversations with troops and other officers. In August one platoon was sent south of Chu Lai and became known as the South platoon. The remaining two guns and the battery headquarters was moved to the white sands north of Chu Lai but south of Hill 54. They were still moving when their two guns were ordered to link up with my platoon and move out with four Guns on Operation Colorado. A week later I returned to Hill 54 and the center platoon returned to a new general support artillery complex being built in the white sands next to the 2nd Battalion 11th Marines [2/11], a direct support battalion. *[General support artillery supports an entire division and is used wherever needed throughout the division TAOR. Direct support artillery are used to support specific regiments of infantry within the regimental TAOR.. Division artillery is referred to as Force Artillery.]*

From here on nobody did very much shooting. The headquarters platoon had a tremendous task building the position in the sand. They worked hard and finally they had it under control. Toward the middle of September they were hit on their north flank by a small force of VC which they managed to stop effectively. Except for this they prepared to sit out the monsoons as productively as possible, working on the guns, trucks and radios. There was always time for some volleyball in the evening and for a trip to the beach or to "the Ville" on the weekend. People worked nights when there was work to be done and so the routine went. Orders came down from the generals and colonels and Capt. McNamara would simply crank the new programs in with the old and the battery would slowly assimilate those that were assimilable. We changed with the times, did our job and did it well. The troops weren't badly off. They had tents reinforced with used lumber, their shower was primitively built but washed their bodies, their bunkers weren't made with new sandbags, the perimeter wire was rusty and laundry was hung from tent ropes rather than from new shiny clothes line poles. The officers lived in hootches made from used lumber and canvas rather than new wood strongback tents with tight canvas and plywood walls. But we did our job and we were having as enjoyable a time as possible under the circumstances.

Capt. Sid Adkins was the executive officer of the 3rd 8" howitzer battery next-door. Guns and 8" are traditional brothers in Marine artillery since they are both employed as Force Artillery in support of the division. It was only natural that we set up side-by-side and share a mess hall. But 8" had an entirely different attitude towards fighting a war. Their camp was beautiful. Their troops worked day and night building and moving and tearing down and building again. Our troops often teased them about working on their position at night with floodlights. Then we got the word that Capt. Adkins was to take over the Guns. 8" was overjoyed and our troops couldn't believe it. His reputation as a petty perfectionist was well-known and officers and men alike were unhappy about it.

Before Capt. McNamara left he called all the senior enlisted men and officers together and told us that regardless of our personal feelings, it would only encourage the troops to get into trouble if we let our feelings be known. So we did our best.

Capt. Adkins came to the battery with the idea that the organization was all fouled up and that he personally was going to straighten it out. Two things became apparent. There wasn't a person in the Gun battery that he trusted and he intended to make the battery over in the image of 8". Major Hancock, the 8" commander, would come over daily and he and Capt. Adkins would walk around the area deciding what to do next to square away Guns.

Soon after Capt. Adkins came over, our Exec since Operation Colorado, Capt. Ressimyer, was transferred to Chu Lai. This was the opportunity Adkins had been waiting for. He let it be known that he would hold the position open and Exec the battery himself. He could not have made a more definite show of distrust of the Gun battery officers. Meanwhile another officer, Capt. Williams, had moved up to the exec slot in 8" battery. In a short month he had earned the reputation of Little Caesar for his manner of

totalitarian command in the 8" battery. When 8" received their new infusion of officers toward the end of February, Capt. Williams was outranked and so was sent over to us to be the Guns exec.

In order to make up for all the time which he felt had been lost due to inactivity, Capt. Adkins started working the troops seven days and five or six nights a week. Formations were held three times a day, no more than 45 minutes break for each meal and sections were watched closely to ensure that nobody escaped working parties. Capt. Adkins couldn't stand to see any project unstarted and so nearly drove the gunny crazy keeping work going on many different projects all at once. For a while the troops took it and then took to grumbling.

The discontent was originally centered on the CO and the gunny who made them work. When Capt. Williams stepped in he showed such a personal interest in the work that he had some things torn down and rebuilt. This was the last straw for the troops in the frame of mind they were in. In the investigation after the incident it became known that grumbling started to take the form of speculating on booby-traps, grenades etc, either dummy or armed, to scare the commander or his exec into giving some relief. It came out that there was one offer jokingly made to collect \$10 from 10 people and pay a man to do violence of some sort to the commanders.

All of this culminated finally in the incident which happened on the morning of 10 March. It could just as easily have been a murder. The culprit was caught and is not significant. He was only irrational enough to put into action what was in the minds of all. How wide is the gap between the thought and the act? Perhaps the gap seems small except that out of probably 100 men only one acted. He did not particularly care which Captain he got; in his eyes the purpose would be accomplished by either.

The results of the incident were awesome. It pointed up thoroughly to Capt. Adkins that the entire battery was untrustworthy. He moved into the hootch with Bruce and me and tried in vain to rig a lock for the doors. He was convinced it had been a plot by a group of people in the battery and he was reasonably sure we would find out they were marijuana smoking niggers who talked jazz and threw grenades for the fun of it at night. This brought to a head all that Capt. Adkins despised about Gun battery.

Marijuana has been a problem of a minor nature for nearly every unit in Vietnam. It is easy to get from the Vietnamese, is not habit forming, and if not over done does not incapacitate the user. In order to keep it to a minimum, Capt. McNamara would direct that we have periodic shakedowns in the troop areas to try to find it and to keep pressure on the users to keep it at a minimum. Capt. Adkins looked on the very idea with abject horror and thought to try to trap the users by asking questions and snooping about. However he did not conduct a single search. This was another thing which convinced him that the battery was rotten to the core.

Another sore point, which was only hinted at at first but which came into the open later, was his prejudice. Capt. Adkins' home is in Carolina and the Gun battery had no small percentage of Negro NCOs. He did not understand their talk and apparently linked the "jazz" they talked with corruption. I will say that our Negro section chiefs have had some of the sharpest sections in the battery. All I have known have been as conscientious as they come. After the incident it became known that a massive transfer of personnel was to take place out of the battery and that replacements to be sent by other units must be Caucasian. The S-1 at group headquarters said he had never heard of such a stipulation before in his 20 some years in the Corps. From my personal surmises as to who was and was not smoking pot, I am sure it was in vogue among some of the white troopers but not the Negroes.

The final incrimination was the throwing of grenades for "kicks". There has been a term among the troops called "war call" and it is used by some to indicate VC action which puts everybody manning the perimeter. To others it means throwing a few grenades in front of the bunker to simulate incoming and then seeing how long it takes for everybody to get out on the berm.

After the incident, investigators from ONI (Office of Naval Intelligence) were able to determine that "war call" had gotten rather out of hand. At first it had merely been grenades pitched into the perimeter wire but that apparently began to get old. So in order to increase the realism and the bravado of

it some would throw grenades back into well-chosen places within the position. Then they discovered that the supplementary charges from rounds fired with VT fuses (called "supp-charges") could be taped to the grenade and would make a bigger bang. In fact one night three of them were detonated near the guns and the explosions were so loud that they were reported as incoming mortars.

The craters were analyzed the next morning and it was decided they had been grenades but the true origin was not suspected until several days later when a startling discovery was made. The gunny was walking by one of the guns and he noticed something green with black paint protruding from the sand near the track. It was a fragmentation grenade with two "supp-charges" taped to it with black electrical tape. Its discovery was kept secret and Navy CID (Criminal Investigation Department) was called in to investigate.

After a very brief investigation it was dropped and I have no idea what decision was made but the following Sunday the troops had the day off and athletics were encouraged. Maybe Capt. Adkins thought it was about time the troops had some recreation. Anyway it didn't last. It was after this that Capt. Williams came to the battery. Staff NCOs were assigned to check posts all night long and grenades were closely counted. Although it happened occasionally, "war call" became rare.

After Capt. William's injury the battery went under a cloud of investigation and restriction. At first nobody was allowed in or out of the compound. Then all leaves or rotation dates back to the States were canceled. All personnel were put on legal hold. This lasted until about the 28th of March at which time people started getting transferred right and left. Most of the Negro NCOs left; anyone that had had any shady part in any of the investigations, and anyone that was not liked by Capt. Adkins. It became a joke among the officers; anyone that was transferred was in Capt. Adkins words, a "No good, low down, no account scoundrel." We had to laugh at some of the people that received that epithet. We shook our heads and I made the comment, "After Capt. Adkins has purged his battery of all Negroes, pot smokers and grenade throwers he will have to learn that the world is peopled primarily with imperfect men. The sooner he learns to work with imperfection instead of purging it or pretending it doesn't exist, the better off he and all around him will be."

In Country Again - DaNang

According to the terms of my agreement with my career monitor at HQMC in Washington, I would go on 30 day leave in CONUS and return to RVN for a 6 month extension. Then, after that I would take another 20 days of "circuitous travel enroute" to my next duty station which would be Treasure Island, San Francisco. My circuitous travel would include Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand, a plan originated and successfully tested by my good friend from Quantico days, Jerry Henderson.

At some point my mother came up with a scheme for me to do something nice for a Vietnamese girl who was an AFS Exchange student at Polytechnic High School in Pasadena. Mother had attended the school herself many years before, and had stayed in touch and found out about Huang Mai. The plan developed that I would carry Mai's picture back to her family in Hoi An, near DaNang, when I returned from leave.

At first I had a problem with her name. With Oriental names, the family name is given first. So in English her name was written Mai Huang and her father was Trung Huang.

After this presentation proved such a success, another plan developed to get the assistance of Marine Corps Air to fly her books home. Eventually all of this fit in well with my new duties in Civil Affairs and Intelligence.

22 May 67

Dear Folks;

I am in Vietnam once again. After arriving in DaNang I went straight to G-5 to find out how I could go about delivering the picture for Mai. I talked to a Major in the office and he went right over to ISO [*Information Services*] with an idea for making a formal presentation to her parents in Hoi An. So today I am supposed to go on down with the local Marine liaison officer and reporters and photographers to do it. I also happen to think that if the Marines were that enthusiastic about that idea, maybe they would be willing to take on getting Mai's books back here. So we will arrange for her to have them shipped from El Toro over here for delivery to her parents' home. I need some more information for the news story. I need the full name and address of Poly and the girl's name and address of her American parents. I assumed her name was Mai Trung, but that's not the name on her letter. Her father's name is Hoang Trung, but she wrote hers Mai Hoang. ??!! Please send info posthaste and also her reaction to the book shipping idea. Also, when she is returning to RVN and when she wants her books shipped.

It is hotter than you know what here. It hit 100° at eight this morning and is now about 115° at 1300. Hard to believe. I am going to report in to the 3rd Guns this afternoon I guess but will not be staying. I am slated for 3/11 right now. The 11th Marines are staying in the DaNang area and 3rd Guns is right next to Hoi An where Mai lives. 3/11 supports the 7th Marines, so you can keep track of me. Love, Mark

My cousin Dave Bowlus also followed a specialty in Marine Biology and attended Scripps Institute of Oceanography after graduation from Berkeley. I frequently sent back notes and specimens for him to see. Littorina is a tiny snail that lives high in the intertidal zone; Tegula is larger and grazes further down. The niche they fill that is alluded to here is as grazers of algae. Nowadays the idea of bringing in an exotic creature and turning it loose is viewed with horror. Back in the 60s it had not yet gotten to that point.

Vietnam's answer to Littorina (for Dave). The clam like snails fill the niche of Tegula here, I think. The niche is further filled by an amazing looking fish with a wide jaw and antler like appendages on his head. He chomps down algae like a lawnmower. While at the tidepools yesterday at one point I saw a Moray eel come partway out of his lair to check on some limpets I was feeding to the fish. No hermit crabs though that I saw.

These snails will probably still be alive when you get them but not much later. If you happen to be at the beach, you can bring them to life in salt water.

[Drawing] front on view of algae chomper. It's a blenny of some sort. Looks like the "olive blenny" in my Ceylon book.

11 June 67

Dear Folks,

I got your tape and several letters last night. There has been some mistake in your interpretation of my congressional problem. I don't think it had anything to do with my being transferred--I don't see how it could. *[My congressional problem was the result of my earlier analysis of the Marine Corps problems in supply and logistics. The rule in the military was always not to have congressional influence; that was frowned upon. When I agreed that it would be a good thing for my analyses to be passed on to Congress it was with the idea that improvements could be made.]*

As for the S-2 job, I am expanding it into something pretty interesting. I have even acquired an interpreter, Sergeant Hung, and have met the village and hamlet chiefs from two of the local villages. I was not given the battery primarily because I had not been selected for Captain. The reason for that, no one knows. At any rate, I am having a good time doing what I am doing and I get lots of studying done on FDC watch. I am finally putting my foot down about sleep though, and the other day I went to sleep in the afternoon and slept right through until almost time for a 10 o'clock watch. As long as I can use the time constructively, I couldn't be more pleased.

My dysentery performed very strangely. I had it for the last time on Okinawa. As soon as I got to Vietnam I was perfectly okay.?? Maybe it has something to do with getting used to the water or something all over again. Neither of my doctor friends seemed very concerned. They said I could take "worming pills" when I got back to the states. But also they said that worms are very unusual, even among the grunts.

That was so funny about the robins thinking the mole was a big worm.

I really enjoyed mother's readings on the tape. When you listen to something like that you don't even think about how somebody is "clipping" their words. I can't remember that you sounded anything but normal. The rest of us went through the trials of learning to talk on tape so Mother, you'll just have to give in. :-).

That guy at Turner's real estate is named "Andy" Anderson. He's not really so much of a sourpuss. He has put on that attitude, I think. He was real nice when I first put the Malibu in there. He's not too smart, so I'll bet it really was funny hearing the argument over the refund. The guy at the other place seemed like the kind of person to have a multi-hull boat lot. The more I think about it the more amazed I am at the condition of all the boat pieces. I didn't think much about it at the time because everything looked just the way I left it but then I realized that more than a year had gone by. You must have really watched over them with loving care. Thank you.

Yes, I remember Darryl Sutherland. I would have sworn he was a short (relative to the others; you know basketball teams) blond, lithe, forward.

Do you think the white dress would fit Wisabuffies? I promised to get her one last Christmas, but never did. If you could find out, and call it a late Christmas present. What I had in mind originally was an Ao Dai from here.

I'll see if I can get up to "Wing" tomorrow and see if I can get a specific contact for you at El Toro. It would be easier that way.

I took pictures of Hoi An and sent you the roll. The city didn't look very suffering, but there would be little point for the VC to do anything to harm the city. They said some mortar rounds had dropped just outside the MACV *[Military Assistance Command Vietnam]* compound about a week before. There is boku VC activity all over the area.

I think I'll stop and make a tape.

Love, Mark

14 June 1967

Dear Folks;

I talked with the 1st Marine Air Wing Civil Affairs Officer this morning and he was very helpful. His name is Major Jim Stewart and he has a friend at El Toro named Lt. Col. Samuel Coffey, who is the MCAS El Toro Supply Officer. (Or at least he is in the supply office). At any rate, if Mai can get her stuff to him in boxes, Major Stewart thinks they will crate it at El Toro.

The address to use here is: (to me)

c/o Civil Affairs Officer.

HQ, 1st Marine Air Wing.

FPO 96602

Major Stuart thinks she is probably more interested in sending cameras, radios, clothes and other manufactured items than she is in books. Apparently there is a large Vietnamese duty, as much as 80% to pay on all items like that. He smiled and said it was okay with him, but flyers are that way. I think it would be a much better thing if she did utilize the opportunity to send books and items of a more lasting value. I suppose a radio is though, so see what you think.

It might be good for you to sound out Colonel Coffey yourself since I'm sure you understand military methods and "thinking" better than Mai and her parents. I'm sure it won't be like going to the post office, although flyers are generally pretty easy going.

Love, Mark.

Let me know what happens

18 June 1967

Dear Folks;

I didn't realize I hadn't been writing. I do so much writing; I guess I don't realize who I am writing to. I got a letter today which indicated I could expect another tape. And those were two outstanding Peanuts cartoons.

I can't remember if I mentioned it--I don't think so,-- but the new CO of Gun Battery, Major Barker, was known as the Red Baron when I got back off leave. When they arrived at the Hoi An position they apparently sat for ages trying to get a registration but in vain. Finally the Major took off in his jeep one day and told the battery to stand by for a registration. Somehow he managed to talk somebody out of an aircraft and pretty soon the call came in over the "conduct of fire" net, Carnival Time, this is Carnival Time Red Baron, over." The 155 Gun flag now has an embroidered picture of Snoopy with scarf and flyers' cap.

There is nothing I want except for iced tea mix. Maybe the plain instant tea would be more economical since there is no problem getting sugar, and I think I could get lemons okay. You probably won't approve of this request but could you please send me a box of NoDoz. Most watch officers do a sort of hypnotized, half doze and awake which is neither restful nor constructive. It is an excellent chance for study and letters if I can manage to take advantage of it. Hence the NoDoz.

I got a new desert water bag from Terry yesterday. Haven't tried it out yet though. The best one I've gotten (or seen), so far is the one Daddy sent. The stitching and reinforcement was much better than the desert bags. They mold out fast here.

If you happen to feel like taping more radio programs it would be a lot of fun to hear them. The guys next door have the only tape recorder, but they play it loud enough for everybody to hear.

My interpreter can hardly wait for Mai to get back here. I think he thinks he is going to play Cupid or something. He says he has heard her sing with a group in DaNang. She doesn't look the type to me, but I suppose I really didn't see her long enough to form an opinion.

I am halfway through the geology course and deep into Ordovician and Silurian periods. It would be easier if I could stay awake though.

An idea came to me the other day when I was reading comments by people who think we should wipe out North Vietnam. I still think the problem is we shouldn't be here in the first place, but as long as we have taken on the idealistic burden of saving the world, we can't accomplish that by just destroying everybody who doesn't understand us. It seems to me this is a little like trying to raise a couple of children into a better life. Of course, they don't know any better, would probably rather go out and play in the street than go to school, and have a very naïve idea of right and wrong. One may be cooperative and the other uncooperative. We could take the bad one and smash his teeth down his throat and he would be done with in a day. But why not guide him by keeping him in good health, while punishing his bad actions. He should learn provided the thought eventually gets through that somebody cares about him. Of course then there are the political aspects, but under the circumstances I don't see how we could be doing better. Barring, of course, a bloodless coup against Hanoi and withdraw before China could regroup her helter-skelter people. I really think the problem is we are dealing with a massive ethnological inferiority complex. Along with this is an underlying wish to be able to do it themselves.

There are a few of us that think the best thing to do would be to kill all the little zipper heads and go home. Most agree with General Walt -- we must and are winning the hearts and minds of the people. Now, I think I know because for the first time I have the opportunity to work with them. I think General Walt was a fine man and a person with the insight into the political and humanitarian problems that few military men have. I hope we get another like him in General Cushman. Of course, General Westmoreland is the same stamp in that he was restricted by the civilian efforts. This is where I think the Marine Corps got a big jump ahead of the game though.

Love, Mark.

Note: At this period during the Vietnam War our leaders were going through a painful process deciding how to prosecute the war. In my view this might well have been a tipping point. If we had kept up the momentum of pacification begun by the Marines under Gen. Walt we might well have achieved success in Vietnam and been able to come home within the following year or two. At the time I was writing these letters I could not have known that Westmoreland's concept of winning was attacking from armed American enclaves while Walt wanted to use a more real estate oriented methodology where Marine Corps units occupied the countryside and worked against the VC side by side with the people in the villages. Walt's concept required more troops and took more time but, as noted earlier in my letters brought more favorable results. As the two concepts were discussed amongst the politicians in Washington, the Army method won out because it appeared more efficient. As a result the southern VC came to welcome North Vietnamese communists as their allies. We may have actually pushed the VC into the arms of the NVA. As was later shown, the more easy-going Southerners, VC included, had much more in common with Americans than they did with the very dogmatic North Vietnamese communists.

PS. When you order through me [*merchandise ordering through the PX*] the easiest thing would be to mail the money to my checking account with a notation on the check to that effect. It is:

First National Bank of Quantico.

Quantico, Virginia.

Just let me know how much to add to my stubs. That way I can assume the money is there by the time I get your order. Otherwise I would have to wait a couple of weeks to be sure it had had time to get through. Okay?

Mai Huang's Books

The following letters are regarding the planning and delivery of Mai's picture and books. My reply to Mai's letter was apparently never sent. I have no idea what happened.

Dear Mrs. Howe, 11 June 1967

I was so happy when I learned the news that Mark has given my picture to my parents and I've got a letter from home too. These are all wonderful news. After a wonderful year, full of experience, I have been informed that I will be leaving on 25th of June. I hope I would be able to see Mark and DaNang! And I wonder if there is anything you would like me to give him as a surprise! I would be very happy to do so. All I want to say is. That. Thank you very much. It was all your idea that I was able to send my parents something.

Veillez,accepter,Madame,l'assurance de tous mes sentiments respectueuse.

Hoang E. R. Mai

PS. I would like to send a thank you note to Mark. Would you, please, give me his mail address? Thank you very much.

1 July 1967

Dear Folks;

I was glad to hear you got my advice concerning Mai's books. You didn't mention what kind of reaction you had gotten from the people at El Toro, but I hope it was satisfactory. If all Mai has are books I am happy. People always seem so cynical about the motives of Vietnamese -- it is too bad. I suppose there are enough of them who have tried to get away with things so that the cynicism might be warranted though. I'm thinking of the black-market activities, graft in government, etc..

I doubt if there was any picture of Mai's mother. I had a hard time getting her father to pose for the picture when he found out Mai might see it in the newspaper. He said that his wife was in the hospital and that Mai would be worried if she didn't see her mother. Yes -- she was having a baby.

I don't think my interpreter is mistaken about Mai. He mentions her often (joking to me) and knows her uncle and cousin well. I will talk to Sergeant Hung again and see if I can find out more about what kind of singing she did.

That was cute of Cathy playing Stravinsky. It must've been quite a day with a steady cacophony such as that. Did she think to carry placards ahead of time advertising Stravinsky's birthday?

I had an interesting discussion this evening. I am disciplining my interpreter. He took off without telling anyone Wednesday night and a woman in labor arrived at our gate Thursday morning. We were rather disturbed needless to say. His lieutenant at Regiment says. "Okay, it's his first time, no sweat." But the Colonel doesn't see things that way, and neither does the XO. So I am making him stay aboard tonight, which is Saturday night. To him, this seems to be a terrible punishment. I tried to show him that this was a very important thing to Marines and that if he didn't square away the CO would simply get rid of him. I think he is learning. I would like to see him stay actually -- he is a little deeper than most... quiet and rather expressive at times. If he'll just stay out of trouble.

love, Mark

The Baker family were hosts to Mai during her stay in the US.

July 10, 1967 (Avalon, Catalina Island)

Dear Dorothea,

This note should have been written several days ago, but after the whirl of the month of June I just came over here and collapsed. July 1st, we took Mai's books to El Toro (or rather Lt. Col. Coffey's home). We had called the day before to check on the time. He and his wife were wonderful people. They were most interested in Mai and what your son was doing for her. On Monday, July 3, he was going to take the books to the base and have crates put around them. I told him we would keep them posted on Mai and her books too!

It was interesting to see that our suspicions about Mai's mother were correct. I am not going to tell her but will let her family surprise her when she returns home.

Avalon has beautiful fireworks over the bay.... USC is putting in a branch campus at Fisherman's Cove by the Isthmus. I will do some checking around to see what I can find out about the need for marine biologists. Once again, please write Mark and thank him for all he has done. We look forward to meeting him in the fall.

Sincerely, Joanna Baker

August 7, 1967

Dear Mark,

It was very nice to come home and see all my things already there waiting to be opened. It was very kind of you to help sending my books and things home. I know it is not easy for you to go from DaNang to Hoi An. You know, I am told that you and your friends "frightened" my family and this small sleeping town just a little bit! But it was very nice of you to do this. I want to say. "Thank you, very very much" to you and your friends, who had helped you.

I wonder what you are doing every day here. I hope that your work is not too hard for you. I hesitate to ask if you are homesick, I know it is not nice to ask so and I just wondered. It is nice to miss home sometimes. You'll appreciate it more.

I arrived in Saigon, the 25th of July after a wonderful, just wonderful bus trip from California to the Southern States, to New York and Washington. I had to stay in Saigon for a few days for orientations. I flew to DaNang the 5th of this month and was kept there for two days before proceeding home this morning. A bridge on the DaNang Hoi An road was just blown up!

I am home, real home. It is a strange feeling being home again. My parents look older, to me. I know the reason why. It is not easy to raise up 8 children during this difficult time. Oh, Mark it is really scary tonight. The guns are roaring already. I am scared.

Some of my dear friends told me they were afraid that it would be hard for me to readjust to my home again. I thought it would be, too. But it hasn't been difficult at all. I am Mai as I was one year ago, and home to me is the nicest and sweetest place wherever and whatever and however it is. Don't you agree?

But I will be leaving home as school starts, too. I probably will be in Hue or Saigon to study in the university.

I am writing this long, because my mind is full now of ideas and thoughts, excitements of being home again. While I was in California, I just loved to read letters, but they always seemed too short to me. I read and reread. And I think it would be kind of nice for you to have a letter to read "if you ever have time!"

It is really strange, I am thinking, that tomorrow this letter will go from Hoi An, across the ocean to San Francisco and will be returned from there to you in DaNang. It will take many days and DaNang is only 15 miles away from Hoi An. I hope it will get you anyway.

To end this letter, I want to say thank you to you again. May God protect you and I hope you'll be returning to your home again very soon. I was really homesick when I was away from home and scared too. I know you are not, because you are much older than I am. If I have an older brother at your age, I know he wouldn't be homesick and scared at all being away from home and in a strange country. Bye-bye for now, and best of luck and wishes to go with you every day.

Than ai, Mai

26 August 1967

Dear Mai,

I received your letter on the 18th of August as I was leaving for Hong Kong on R&R. That was only 11 days for your letter to go 15 miles from Hoi An to me here. You can't tell whether a letter will go all the way to San Francisco or not. Sometimes a mail sorter will catch it and realize it is a local letter but 11 days is about right for a round trip to San Francisco.

I left my address with your father when I "frightened" everybody. It is the same as the return address on the envelope. It doesn't seem like much of an address, but the way I have written it works the best of any.

I can hear the chatter of machine guns off in your direction tonight and hope that all is well with you and your family. I don't think there is much chance of danger to your house though. Nobody likes to do damage to towns, fortunately in this war. I remember at the time you wrote your letter to me we had some guns down near you shooting. The roaring you heard was what we happily refer to as "outgoing" as opposed to the "incoming" which everybody dreads. And what you heard was loud but safe.

I was very impressed and happy to read your letter. You have such a wonderful and mature attitude towards your life. I know what you mean about being away from home. When I was sent to the East Coast of the US I longed to return to California and the Pacific Ocean. And as I drove back across the country to the west I appreciated it so much more than I ever had before. It is much different for me now though. I will be happy to return home, of course, but the real feeling of "homesickness" I feel right now is for Vietnam and the "Far East". I will leave here soon -- sometime in September -- and it is a very sad thing for me to think that I may never come back again. I don't know if you have ever spent any time in the countryside, but I think of the roar of the monsoon rains as I used to hear them coming roaring across the plain toward me from the mountains, or the beautiful sunrises over the South China Sea as I looked from the top of a hill where I lived south of Tam Ky.. I used to write and write about all these things and I wonder if you ever had a chance to read them. My mother usually showed them to everybody. :-) (Forgive the artwork -- it is a family custom.) But Mai, I have enjoyed your country very much. It is very unfortunate that a war was necessary to bring me here but this much good it has brought. My own feeling is that the world is going to have to get acquainted with itself. My "western" people are learning to live and work with your "eastern" people as partners. There are immediate goals, certainly, and events along the way are very often difficult and sometimes very tragic, but looking toward the future I feel it will all have been worthwhile. As you are now certainly aware, one's knowledge of a foreign land and people is much different after living and working with them than when one has only read in books or visited one city briefly.

You have still been more fortunate than I and my friends. You have actually learned to live with Americans, speak their language, and learn their customs. We cannot do this for military reasons except in the cases of our advisors and combined military units. And these are limited to only military circumstances. But it is a step in the right direction.

Since I returned to Vietnam from my leave, I have had a new job in which I was for the first time brought directly in contact with the people of your country. I had the job of talking with them, helping them with their problems many of which we created, and generally trying to establish understanding between us. Mai, there are differences in thinking that I was confronted with that completely baffled me. But time is so short and there is so much else to do that it won't be possible, I think, for me to ever understand. I think my biggest failing is not knowing the language. Expression loses a considerable amount through an interpreter. I now wish I had an opportunity to sit down with you and talk for many hours. This is the opportunity which AFS has given to the many people you have known in America. But there is so much that I wish I knew that only comes with knowing people very well.

I hope this letter hasn't been too "intense" for you. Your letter filled my heart with a great many thoughts, and I wanted to tell them to you. [*This section crossed off*]. I can't help but feel I am leaving an unfinished task to go home and this is a frustrating feeling. But maybe it will be finished in our lifetime and if not, in our children's, because the world will not be a big enough place for independent races much longer. [*End of crossed off section*]

If you feel you would care to write to me I will always be very happy to hear from you.
 [*This letter was apparently never sent.*]

Civil Affairs and Intelligence with the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines

20 June 1967

Dear Folks;

It is 6 o'clock, and I am sitting in my office dripping with sweat. I don't see how the heat could be any more oppressive. There is not a breath of wind, and I just walked back from the mess hall (roast beef). I tore off today's page of the calendar to rest my hand on so it wouldn't soak the paper, but the puddle is beginning to soak through.

I got a letter today from Mother still worried about my happiness. I am positively delighted with my job and am starting to build an empire out of jobs nobody else wants. The latest one is for civil affairs/ civic action department which we call the S-5. The battalion S-5 is a Navy officer and is going home in a few weeks (1 July in fact). I got busy looking interested and controlling some of the activities through my interpreter, -- I'm the only one with the hot line to the local Vietnamese speaking officials so to speak. Of course the old S-5 couldn't have cared less, so it looks like I'm in. When somebody asked the XO the other day, he just shrugged as if it must be obvious -- Lt. Howe.

This morning I got the photographers out again. It seems that the old battalion to occupy this CP was 2/12, who did a lot of civic activities. One project was to raise money for a new leg for a 14-year-old boy who stepped on a VC booby-trap. But the leg was not available or something at the time so the money was never used. Now apparently a bed was found in Saigon for the boy and so I took him to the hospital in DaNang enroute to Saigon. He will fly south on Friday. But I got to thinking that there really should be news coverage of such an act so I phoned ISO on the way and they had a writer and photographer ready to go with us to the hospital. So once again I may have my picture in the paper. I'll feel a little guilty though. I made it very clear to the reporter that it was 2/12 that had raised the money and made the arrangements and that all we had done was to drive the boy up to DaNang.

Friendships became very strained in Gun battery due to the pressures of personality conflicts. 3/11 is probably the most "no sweat" battalion I've seen and it's a welcome change. Nobody tries to impress anybody with his superiority and the result is a very friendly atmosphere. So I'm happy already. I even have a marine zoologist naval gunfire officer who is getting out of the [*service*] to go to work for Scripps as a Marine Technologist, because his grades weren't good enough to get into the school. Starting pay is \$685 for a non-diver or \$735 for a diver qualified person.

love, Mark

27 June 1967

Dear Folks;

This is now the morning (early) watch in the FDC and it's about 0430. I haven't written the enclosed yet. I plan to look at my orders and then when I'm sure of what they say, carbon off the answer and pass the word. At this point, I understand I'll be reporting to TI [*Treasure Island, San Francisco Bay*] for duty, but I heard from the Colonel that the orders read "For further assignment". Apparently somebody read them wrong, but it looks like a West Coast assignment anyway. If it's San Francisco, it'll be just like old times. Too bad Dave won't still be there. Of course, I would still rather have gotten a Southern California assignment, but I'm certainly not complaining. Next, I think I'll have to get a fast good mileage car for driving down the coast for weekends. :-).

My real estate agent has managed to get the owner of the two lots down next to the highway to come down to \$8,500, which doesn't sound out of line at all. High, yes, but not out of line. The lot will be a stone's throw away from the marina entrance, also, in case I want to open up a boat shop. :-) The terms are \$2250 down and the rest in five years. The only thing I'd like to know, though, is if everything is about the same as before. Like did the marina wash away or is there an impending depression in Orange County etc.

I sent off one order day before yesterday to PACEX after filling up one order form. I'll get the other one off shortly. But don't expect anything for as much as two months.

Love, Mark.

PS Any bites on the Malibu?*[Malibu outrigger sailboat I was trying to sell.]*

The following letter was written, pending me actually seeing my orders, to be sent out as soon as I knew for sure.

Last night I heard that my orders were in and that I had orders for September to Marine Barracks, Treasure Island in San Francisco. I heard later that they were not to TI after all, but just to report there "for further assignment". So I had to wait until this morning to find out for sure where I was going and then catch the outgoing morning mail at eight o'clock. Hence this rather impersonal form letter. As soon as the personnel office opens, I will be able to find out, stuff this in an envelope and mail it. If it turns out to be "for further assignment" though it should still mean West Coast. The September date is a month early. They added six months to my rotation date and then neglected to add on the extra month I took leave in the States. So far it hasn't been corrected. I am still going to try to get "circuitous travel orders" home and come back by way of the South Seas. All I'll be allowed is 20 days, though, under the new manpower economy program so that should put me in Conus towards the middle of October. If they catch the mistake, then add one month.

Just saw 'em and I am going to San Francisco for duty!!!

28 June 1967

My very dear Folks,

I hope you didn't mind my carbon letter about my orders. I just barely got the letters into the mail before it left. I went so fast, I forgot to put the Stehle's address on theirs so it went a day late. One copy was to Aunt Grace -- also Lynnae, Cathy and unhappily, to Jerry H.*[Henderson, Marine officer friend from Quantico and Camp Pendleton days]* :-) I have been so happy it wasn't to Camp Lejeune that I haven't really had a chance to feel badly that it wasn't Camp Pendleton, or El Toro. Of course the orders could change.

I got such a happy letter from Mother just now I feel happy all over.

That was a very good question about whether listed VC sympathizers were really such or not. But any we capture are screened thoroughly by highly trained interrogation teams, and even then, if they show any signs of innocence they are sent to secure areas to begin a "new life" as a loyal S. Vietnamese. One of the big selling points of the Chiau Hoi (open arms) program is that a former VC can have a complete pardon and start a new life with no stigma attached if he so desires. Of course, some may not be sincere, but amazingly enough, most are. We have them working with Marines all the time with terrific impact propaganda wise.

One of these days I'm going to look up Mr. Johnson at OCO. Maybe he might have some ideas for my area down here. *[No recollection what this was.]*

The Snoopy flags, I imagine, were locally made. I don't think there is any Red Baron insignia. He is never seen -- only his bullet holes.

My biggest problem as far as letters go is keeping track of when I write. About the only thing to do is 1) when in doubt, write and 2) write every time I receive a letter. I'm trying anyway.

I'm afraid I can't agree with your position on the Israel question. I don't blame them for not taking abuse lying down, but the most admirable thing would have been to pull right back and say "we'll do it again next time." It would probably set the record for an unselfish war and would give the rest of the world something to think about. Until people stop using war to add territory (national gain) there will always be war. War of aggrandizement should be branded as illegal universally or not at all. If Israel can be rationalized, what are we doing in Vietnam? It is easy to imagine that anybody who disagrees with us must have a gun in the back of its citizens, but I'm not so sure anymore. Propaganda is a much more powerful weapon. That way the people really believe they are the really really right ones. Maybe later they find out different.

Yes, you sure can still be mad at Conoble. *[The letter I wrote about problems in logistics was sent to a congressman friend of the family. The story went that a secretary in his office forwarded it on to the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the next thing I knew my Colonel had me in his office writing that*

things were much better now.] If he was as disinterested as that he should have thrown the letter in a wastebasket. However, on the other hand, it probably did some good. I couldn't help but feel a little tickled at how well the letter covered the situation. I just wish I had had a chance to tailor out a few things. :-).

love, Mark

30 June 1967

Dear Folks;

I kind of miss writing on my green paper. I got a package today with the tape recorder jack and a little tin of Start. It tastes very much like Tang -- is it cheaper?

It seems strange that after having such a good time with Cathy and friends in Berkeley that I should get orders to a place within sight of her flat. How strangely fate works. I felt that my monitor wouldn't have the heart to send me to the East after the letter I wrote.

The NoDoz won't be a steady diet; just a crutch for use at odd watch times. I don't plan to lose any sleep over a long period -- it will just sustain me between times.

We have a new Colonel who promises to be something along the lines of an Adkins from what I can gather. Of course probably nowhere near that bad, but along those lines. The Colonel who left was a real easy-going gentleman and a pleasure to work for.

Time to "bag it".

Much love, Mark

4 July 1967

Dear Folks;

This is a very embarrassed letter to say happy 4th of July and a belated "happy birthday". I was going to make a tape to send last night, but I never quite got around to it. We had some activity. I was making a tape for Tana's friend Chris and listening to what I assumed was going to be a routine TOT [*Time on Target -- this is where a designated group of artillery units fire so that all rounds land on the target at the same time. It requires quite a bit of timing, because each unit has different firing characteristics and varying distances to the target*]. But just as I was chuckling over how loud the bangs were and how excited everyone must be nailing somebody who wasn't expecting it, the Major came tearing down the stairs in his underwear and told us that about seven rounds had landed about 200 m to the east of the perimeter. Since the TOT was supposed to be 2000 m to the west we knew something had gone wrong. If you happen to be able to get the tape you can hear the whole thing up to the point where the Major comes down the stairs swearing. :-) In the next few minutes we saw a lot of lights start moving around in the tree line and figured we had probably hurt somebody. In the FDC I took the reports from the tower as he reported the group of lights coming around the side of our wire to the main gate where our doctor and corpsman met them. When all was known, we had a woman with a head wound and two ARVN to Medevac. This morning we learned we also killed a water buffalo. But even more drastic, we had a long wait for the Medevac choppers because they were busy down in the southwest part of the TAOR. 2/5 had gotten hit with mortars and among other things, our mortar platoon (4.2 inch) down there had been overrun. Out of 24 people in the platoon there had apparently been 24 WIA but only a few seriously. However out of the entire area there were about 30 serious cases for Medevacs. The reports are getting thick again suddenly about activity in the area.

Well anyway a very happy few days after your birthday, Mother. I sent a present which should arrive in time for Christmas I hope. :-) Maybe Daddy can wrap it.

You recorded your last tape on channel 1 without erasing channel 2 so it was a little hard to hear. I will send a response tape soon.

love, Mark

PS I am also taping AFRS radio telling about 4th of July activities etc. Will send.

7 July 1967

Dear Folks;

I received your package of tea this evening and it was interesting to find the instant tea in the can in a solid block. I have been chipping off pieces to mix up.

No new news really. I got stuck with the 0230-0700 watch last night after coming back from "G" company, but the 3A [*3 alpha; that's the assistant 3, which means the assistant operations officer, who is in charge of the FDC watches*] felt sorry about it and told me I could have the morning off. Unfortunately the morning was not his to give me off so I took the afternoon off instead and slept right through to supertime.

8 July 1967

I wrote the above last night on watch. Today I have to take a deposition in connection with one of my courts-martial. The new Colonel sent everybody found sleeping on post directly to a court. It had been being handled by the battery commander at office hours. So I have about four defendants right now.

The wind has been blowing something fierce. It's calmed down some now but when I got back from "G" company there was a thick layer of dust all over everything.

It is good to write on green paper again.

love, Mark

9 July 1967

Dear Folks;

I just got a letter from both you and Cathy telling about your 4th of July weekend. It sounded like much fun, and I sure wish I was there. Did you ever figure out why the beach wasn't crowded? Are real estate prices falling? I am offering \$8,300 currently on the lot nearest the corner of the highway. I sent the offer before I got my orders, however, and I'm a little less enthusiastic now. No, not really I guess, but if I had gotten Pendleton I would have gone ahead and bought the old house anyway. Let me know if anything is wrong with the new marina.

Got a card and pictures from Chris Stewart. She says you sent her some of me.

I took my first 10 feet of movie film yesterday. It'll probably be a while before I get good though. I'll be on the road tomorrow (Monday) so should have boku (beaucoup?) for you to start looking at.

After being so tickled about going to TI the sadness over not going to Dana Point is beginning to seep through. But I am certainly looking forward to a wild, if expensive, time in San Francisco.

Much love, Mark

10 July 1967

Dear Folks, (carbon to Cathy :-)).

Today was one of the more ridiculous farces as far as a workday goes. This morning I went out with Lt. (Jg) Wells, (the marine biologist) to relieve the OP -- meaning we exchange two people on the observation post so that two can come back for a rest. Actually, the rest is out there, away from battalion. A few miles up the road, our driver managed to drive the truck off the shoulder of the road -- a drop off of about 3 feet. The truck slid off without turning over somehow, but it was close. I haven't seen such an uncoordinated driver since I've been here and I've seen some real winners.

When we got back just before noon, I noticed the white pajamas and white pith hats of the elders of the neighboring hamlet standing around our front gate. So I got out and through the interpreter found that there had been a water buffalo killed this morning and they were trying to pin it on us. So I went out with Sergeant Hung to check it out. I felt a little nervous being out in front of our barb wire with no one but Vietnamese, but I didn't let on how I felt. I looked for all the handy depressions nearby for a handy run and jump. The buffalo was perfectly intact except for two very tiny holes, one on either side of him just above his shoulders. It didn't look like an M-14 wound to me and I told him so. The "wound" hadn't even bled. I suspect, they made the holes with a pick to get us to pay for a dead animal. After the problem last week with the erratic rounds the people have gotten the idea we'll pay for dead livestock. We got several claims out of that -- the only valid one for a water buffalo killed by shrapnel. But I don't buy this one today.

So after I got back from the buffalo I had enough time for a glass of milk and, of course, ice cream!! And had to get another vehicle and driver to go out to "H" battery to serve charges on two of my "clients" in an upcoming court-martial. Actually, Jim Wells is the trial counsel and served the charges. I am the Perry Mason. We got ahold of a jeep and driver and started out when it became obvious that the vehicle wasn't too healthy. We were several miles north of DaNang when it finally stopped running. We worked on it for a while, but it was hot and dusty so I finally called ahead to "Hotel" and asked the CO to send help. Some time later a truck arrived with a couple of mechanics with tools, but after working for a while they gave up too. But they sent us on ahead in their truck, so we could get our charges served.

Along about then the sky started darkening and we had the feeling that the day would close before we were wet as well as our other misfortunes. We got our charge is served, I talked to my clients for a while, and we borrowed a 2 ½ ton (open) truck from hotel for the return trip. There were boku things and errands I had planned to do but by this time we were going to be late getting back anyhow (they close the gate at about 1800) so I said. "Let's go home". And about that time, the sky opened and the rain really came down. Within minutes we were soaked to the skin. When we got back I went straight to dinner soaked and then to the office soaked where I read 2 letters from Mother and one from the Bowlie. I still don't understand how they managed to swing the deal with the boat though. Did I miss a letter.

love, Mark

15 July 1967

Dear Folks; (original went to Terry, :-) but you can pretend.)

This place is full of excitement this morning. DaNang was rocketed just after midnight. It's all over now, but the shouting, but it was spectacular for a while. Unfortunately, I slept through the show. I came on watch at 0330 and wondered why I hadn't been waked up at 0230 as I should have been. Then I found out. We are still making out reports and time schedules on what happened. We are very proud of ourselves though, because we (this battalion) had the rocket sites spotted and were prepared to fire at them within six minutes of the first rounds the VC fired. Unfortunately the VC set up right next to district headquarters so it was a chore getting clearance to start shooting. People who saw it say it was really beautiful to watch. Great fireballs went off into the sky from the airfield. Apparently the damage was pretty great up there and there were a fairly good number of well aimed rockets. Our counter fire stopped them and we hope we prevented them from getting all their rockets shot.

It was quite a well-planned attack. Numerous units all over the TAOR have reported being hit by small arms and mortars. Got some more reports to go in.

Mark

16 July 1967

Hello again,

It is now 0200 and I am once again on watch. If I had had this watch last night I would have gotten to fire the counter rocket barrage. That would have been an experience. What a thing it would have been to get on tape.

I have been working on my geology, but started getting so I couldn't hold my eyes open so started writing this and now have revived somewhat. I drank a lot of tea and took a NoDoz earlier, but it's not doing its job. The purpose is not to lose sleep by using the pills. It's just to channel my sleep into more convenient times. This way I should be sleepy tomorrow afternoon when I lie down to try to take a nap.

Most of the information is now in on the rocketings but by the time you get this the newspapers will probably have really played it up big back home. They really tore up some stuff there on the airstrip, but the indications are we tore up a lot of VC at the rocket sites. There were a lot of blood trails and rocket tubes left behind. This is the second rocket attack for us this week. Last Thursday night they dropped a few rockets in on the Hill where I made the tapes on the Fourth of July. They also put some in the direction of the Esso petrol plant north of DaNang but apparently overshot and they went in the South China Sea. Two observers got azimuths to the flashes, however, and they had counter battery fires actually on the way within six minutes of the firings. That is damn good, really. The northern area up

there is what we fondly refer to as "Indian Country". This is the second time "H" has fired at rockets since I have been here. If they fired last night that makes a third. They are sure getting plenty of practice.

I took out another combined patrol on Friday afternoon. This time we went out a little farther from the CP area and it felt a little more like "combat". There was a particular hamlet I have been wanting to contact which is located in back of and to the south of our battalion position. It is off the highway a ways and is hidden by trees, but we see the inhabitants from time to time. It seemed rather mysterious before and seems even more so now. I was planning for us to visit it on the last leg of the patrol coming back out. But as we approached the ARVN Lt. balked. He said there were many mines and guerrillas in the woods there and that an ARVN patrol had been ambushed there with the loss of a Lt. so he didn't want any part of it. Since we weren't really prepared for shooting it out with a guerrilla band (after all, we are cannon cockers) I went along with the ARVN figuring it would be better to make a special trip in if we planned to reconnoiter the hamlet. It isn't a comforting thought, though knowing an "unfriendly" hamlet is that near.

I took my camera along and should have some good flicks arriving home soon. I'll have to think of some hair-raising stories to go along with them.

Very much love, Mark

17 July 1967

Dear Folks;

The tape at 1 7/8 is nothing but Armed Forces radio. I hope you didn't get your hopes up. As far as a serial continuation of an earlier tape, I don't know what happened. It shouldn't have been. I have always used both sides of the tapes so if you should get one with a blank side, it's a mistake. Sometimes I don't bother to play it back and so could conceivably let one like that out.

The new Colonel is interested in canvassing home areas for items for the Vietnamese. He says he has five "curtain climbers" at home going to five different schools and projects that we should soon be receiving massive shipments of soap and clothing from them. That seems to be the popular two items.

The ARVN advisors near us say that unfortunately it is hard to get the people to use the soap on themselves -- they use it up on their laundry. (??) If anyone would like to make such contributions, a mixture of the Dial type soaps with laundry soaps in bar form would probably be best I think. Children's clothing (dresses, shirts and trousers) would be of most universal use but other clothes can always be "repaired" into something usable. I would be interested to see what the "repaired" stuff would come out like though. Please let me know what kind of items are on Mrs. Distill's list. It might give us some other ideas. If you can get Mai's opinion, that might help too.

Thanks for the article on movie cameras. Mine is a super 8 (I think) as that is the film I shoot in it. It has about everything mentioned in the article except back winding and fade control. I found out the telephoto lens costs \$33, which was discouraging. But I think worth it. I just wonder about what an underwater camera would cost, or maybe I can get an underwater case. I haven't checked yet.

We are getting set for Operation Boulder so by the time you get this it should be underway. It's not a big one though; just going into an area about as unlikely as any we've been in. It's up in the high valley on this side of the mountains I have often mentioned. They say the valley floor has elephant grass 12 feet high with multiple canopy jungle on the slopes. I am not going though; I am a watch stander in the rear. The headquarters group is only going about 2 miles away and set up at the 7th Marines CP. It would be fascinating to get up there though -- with a camera.

love, Mark

18 July 1967

Dear Folks;

I am glad you enjoyed the tape from "Golf" Company hill. *[I was taping one evening during a skirmish outside the wire in our position. The tape was able to pick up the sound of the distant gunfire and the sounds of the grunt reaction force as they jogged down the hill in their body armor. As my family and friends the Shattuck's were listening, suddenly Sondra Shattuck said, with a horrified expression on her face. "This is real, isn't it."]* They got rocketed up there last week; in fact it was only a night or so

before DaNang got rocketed. The VC must've been practicing. I'm pleased that you got the feeling for the grunt reaction force coming down the hill. It was a real thrill watching them deploy when they reached the area where the wounded were too. They fanned out on all sides in groups of four. The lowest organized group is the four-man fire team with one automatic weapon.

I only have the Craig 212 so cannot use 2 channel recordings. It is good having your tapes off the Ampex though, because of the much greater sensitivity. The birds at the end of this last tape were great. It sounded like the bird section of the San Diego Zoo. I have received your large tape of radio sounds. I gave it to the guys next door to play on their recorder and so I have been hearing it even though I do not know exactly when. They keep us all well supplied with music. I have my radio and tape recorder constantly connected up with the jacks you sent so that any time a song comes on that I particularly want, I just flip the button and I have it. The reproduction on the Craig is fantastic for such a small machine. It actually sounds better than the original on the radio. The only problem I have noticed is the apparently tremendous draw on the battery pack. Batteries are 10 cents apiece in the PX (Eveready). The batteries don't last very long -- about a week -- and I probably average about three hours a day. That would be about 20 hours, so maybe they last a little longer than that. I have to rotate them after about an hour on a set or else rest them because the sound begins to get uneven. (Wow -- a "technical" term).

I would be surprised if the recorder had picked up any small arms fire in the distance. If it was very loud I would say it must have been wind rattling in the mike. However, there is often small arms in the distance and if you can just barely hear it you have good ears and that's probably what it is.

I will call Major Stewart today and inquire about Mai's books. I guess she will be soon or has already left California.

Something I thought of for the school is watercolors. I think we have coloring books and crayons already, but I'll check. It certainly would be fun to discover a budding Vietnamese artist in our little school. One of these days I'm going to get a movie of the children trooping to school lined up along the trail from the village. The zoom is particularly good because I can get them without their knowing it. I suppose resolution is not so good though.

After seeing the pictures of the Malibu I felt twinges about selling it. I haven't changed my mind though. Maybe \$1075 would be a better price tag though -- do you think?

The enemy doesn't shoot around here day or night except on rare occasions such as the rocket attacks on the airstrip. We have an effective OP system so that all sites are covered by observation. The plan is set up so that as soon as flashes are detected, the azimuths from the various OP's are sent to the regimental/ battalion FDC's and counter rocket (battery) fires initiated. On this last occasion, two of my 3/11 OP's had an intersection and we were ready to counter fire within six minutes of the first enemy firings. The problem was, there were a lot of friendly units in the area which had to be located first, so that delayed the counter fires a few more minutes. By the time we did start shooting in earnest, no more than 15 minutes later, more like 12 I think, we still did quite a lot of damage. In all there were over 1000 rounds fired over the area. Otherwise, AO's [*aerial observer's -- they fly around in cute little planes and watch for targets*] call missions on troop concentrations, suspected or otherwise, and other observers do the same. Those are normally our only targets. Typical would be: "4 VC on trail w/ weapons", (common); "30 VC in open", (not common). "10 VC w/ automatic weapons firing", (rare except on operations) or for an AO "VC firing at aircraft." :-)

I am sure our "how 6's" are the same as yours. They are mounted in an LVTH and have a short tube and were originally armed with a 75 mm weapon. We use them for their direct fire capability as an assault/ defensive weapon and only indirectly as artillery.

Please excuse the weird way I have used the paper. I ran out here on watch.

love, Mark

19 July 0100 FDC

Dear Folks;

This will be a fast one and there is already another letter going out in this same mail. Yesterday afternoon (18th) I went to Le Dong school to visit and see what they might need. I also took the package

of balloons you sent and my movie camera. You should be getting the results soon. I hope the heat hasn't damaged the film. Anyway, among other things, some of the most important items are notebooks and/or pads of writing paper, eg. the writing tablets used in grade school. All the children are probably about 10 or younger. I don't remember if I mentioned watercolors and with that perhaps shelf paper for painting on. Fingerprinting might be an interesting experiment, but better wait. Also one box of colored chalk and if you could figure a way to get a blackboard over here that would be great. The one they have is on its last legs. Is there a small child's size rubber ball that you know of? A little larger than grapefruit size. About three would be great if such exist. Otherwise, additionally any ball or other game suitable for small children on a dirt playground. You can use your imagination as far as other classroom items go. They have a very tattered map of the US on the wall and a small globe. World awareness seems to be a popular theme in the school.

I have only seen about 50 in the classroom at once, but the teacher says there are 70. I imagine they are not always all there. The school wouldn't hold 70 anyway.

I won't say more -- I remember Mother's mind is particularly fertile when it comes to schoolrooms.

love, Mark

23 July 1967

Dear Folks;

In case I don't have a chance to elaborate more later here's a note. I am going to Hong Kong with the Navy Lt. (jg) who's the marine biologist. We got quotas together for five days starting the 19th of August. I just finished two letters -- one to Mrs. Baker and one to Mrs. Lo. I am hoping I will get a letter back from the Lo's before I leave since the only address I have is a P.O. Box. We are hoping the riots don't interfere too greatly. Also, in particular that they don't cause the trip to be canceled.

Lots of film should be on the way to you. Let me know if I should buy a projector.

Since the Operation started (the name was changed from Boulder to Pecos.) I have taken over the S-3 (operations) section in addition to my other duties. There is not a lot to it but I am responsible that the FDC doesn't screw up anything. The first night when I came on watch the 2nd Lt. before me had five mistakes on his H&I's. We caught them because one of the battalions found the 10,000 m error by just looking at it and so I had the rest read back and rechecked. From then on all H&I's are being sent by one person and read back by a second person. So far so good.

Last Friday we were told to send Sergeant Hung to Division G-1 for disciplinary action. Of course we had had him go UA a couple of times, but there hadn't been any action taken by any higher headquarters. He called his Lt. at Regiment and found out he was going to jail for 30 days. He wouldn't let on that he knew why and said he thought it was a mistake. I believe, though, that in fact, his confusion was due to a number of offenses, any one of which he could be going to jail for. So on Friday Sergeant Hung left.

On Saturday regiment called to find out why we hadn't sent Sergeant Hung up to them. We said we had, but they hadn't seen them. We smiled to ourselves. But by Friday night he had turned himself in so I breathed a sigh of relief for his sake. But yesterday he was back by here looking for me, and today he found me. The story he told goes that he lost a pistol at the last battalion he was with and that is why he was going to jail. But he told them he would pay for it so they let him go. However, they were going to send him to the 2nd Arvin Division and he hates Arvin. So he wanted me to write a letter for him telling the adviser at I Corps to use his influence to get him sent back to 3/11. Since Sergeant Hung would not have been replaced and I certainly would be lost without an interpreter I wrote the best letter I could. I imagine Hung's desire to stay in the battalion has something to do with his periodic AWOL trips for which he might be shot in an Arvin outfit. But we should know tomorrow. He says he has to keep in touch with a girl and I gather he is something of a lover.

My Civil Affairs NCO is good. He has a knack for getting along with Vietnamese and was invited to dinner at the home of our laundry lady and her brother. I had to get permission from the Colonel for him to do it but then we found out that the laundry jeep had broken down and that I was also invited to

help them eat the food at the laundry near our main gate. That was at about 0930 this morning. In fact Sgt. Kennedy had to wake me up to invite me. The meal consisted entirely of crabs and coke. The laundry lady, called Mme. Thanh-Van, and another lady, did all the cracking and even some of the feeding.

Yesterday I took a jeep ride down to India battery to interview a couple of my latest clients for a court-martial. This was the first time I had been down there, but I was particularly interested in going because everybody always looks nervous and puts on their flak jackets and helmets before they leave. I took my movie camera and got a lot of good flicks along the way. I hope I am learning and that the movies are coming out, but I don't know. The trip was uneventful from the VC standpoint, but about half way there we met a 155 Gun coming toward us. I had my driver stop and I took its picture, as it rumbled past. After I finished I noticed that Major Barker, the new CO was riding on the front. I was happy to have gotten such a good picture of him.

I feel the kind of tired where my brain isn't all there and my writing has no point. I'll stop now, but at least you know what has been happening. I'll write again when I have had enough sleep to write with some purpose.

Much love, Mark

PS to Folks: Another letter to Terry. I apologize for the content but my brain isn't functioning too well. It's about 0200 now but I get off in a half hour. I'll sleep tomorrow afternoon. I am tickled pink over the pictures of Terry, the Cutlass, and the Malibu. Wish there were more though. I was awfully sad I didn't take any the whole time she was here.

August 1967

Civic Action in the Thanh Trung Village area, South of DaNang

We have a new battalion surgeon who just reported in from the States. His name is Lou Angialletti and his enthusiasm for the great effort of the free world forces in Vietnam toward the betterment of the Vietnamese population has been an inspiration to me. I had begun to get tired of listening to tired Marines talking about the Vietnamese in tired and impatient terms. But with this new encouragement I have become aware of interest inspired in many of the troops I have called upon to help out.

From our first planning session came the rough plan of action. It was obvious that he was prepared to work overtime in bringing medical aid to the people and wanted to do everything possible toward raising their standard of living. However, taking one step at a time, we must first meet with the local officials and discuss our plans to find out just what would or would not be acceptable to the people.

At about this time I got a call from Major Stewart to tell me that Mai's books had arrived. So I decided one day to just take off and run all the errands that had been piling up. I got a driver and jeep from the survey section. (This is a sore point with me not having my own vehicle). There is a trooper in the FDC section, who has been to 12 weeks of Vietnamese language school at Monterey. I got him and another guy; both of them were happy to spend their off time between watches doing something adventurous. With the driver, the four of us headed south across a bridge that none of us had been across before, and headed down into Indian Country with our helmets low over our eyes and rifles at the ready to the sides of the road. We turned east on a road called Henderson Trail to cut across to highway #1 which goes through Hoi An on the way to Saigon.

I had been told by some ARVN advisor friends that Henderson Trail was swept every morning, but that it was a good idea to go fast because of the snipers in the trees. We soon found Marines with Amtrak's on either side of the road clearing away trees. Since it is almost impossible to prevent snipers, we have found that the next best thing is to eliminate the trees. This they were doing with axes, dozers, shovels, and flamethrowers on a magnificent scale back to a good 100 to 200 m on either side of the road. They had helmets and flak jackets and didn't look very relaxed, so we didn't either and kept moving fast. Pretty soon we were back in secure territory again on highway #1 and felt better.

I had forgotten how far it was to Hoi An. It seemed like forever that we went and I was beginning to worry that we had gotten the wrong road and might be deep in Indian country again when I noticed a bridge which stood out in my memory from my first day back after 30 days leave.

[flashback to end of leave, return in country 22 May 67]

Since I have brought it up I will tell you about it. As you remember, I was carrying Mai's graduation picture when I arrived back in Vietnam. Division G-5 section was very interested and immediately put me in contact with a Captain Wilson, who is the Marine liaison officer at the Hoi An military compound. Captain Wilson was planning a visit to the DaNang area the following day. So after checking with Regiment, it was agreed I would travel back to Hoi An with him when he returned and make my presentation. By the next day, however, two things had become apparent. First, more time was needed to prepare for the presentation because they had been unable to contact Mai's parents and second I had learned the 3rd Guns CP was located right down next to Hoi An. So without any sweat, I went ahead and caught my ride with Captain Wilson to go as far as 3rd Guns.

So as we were driving south down the road well south of DaNang we heard a loud report and saw a spurt of dust down the road about a mile ahead of us. These things are not unusual so we didn't really think much about it. There are always grenades being thrown or engineers blowing up one thing or another. But as we drew closer, it was apparent that something was wrong. Alongside the road was a Vietnamese lady with several large lacerations on her face and some PFs motioning us to stop. This we did and put her in the back of the jeep with me. My humanitarian instincts were dulled by two things. Firstly, she was far from being a pretty sight, and secondly, as we went speeding down the road the wind and motion caused distribution of a certain amount of the gore over my baggage and my khaki uniform.

A short ways down the road was another lady being carried in a basket and apparently from the same incident. I was afraid we were going to have to crowd her into the back of the jeep with me too but another vehicle came up behind us with more room. When we finally arrived at the bridge, which I mentioned earlier, I would have thought the lady next to me was about ready to die. The bridge was narrow and built in stair step fashion with ramps going up and over. We came down the other side and turned into a combined action compound where there was a corpsman. Here the corpsman washed and dressed the wounds while waiting for a Medevac chopper to come in. He let us know the wounds were not as serious as they looked so we climbed back in our bloody jeep and continued on down the road.
[end of flashback]

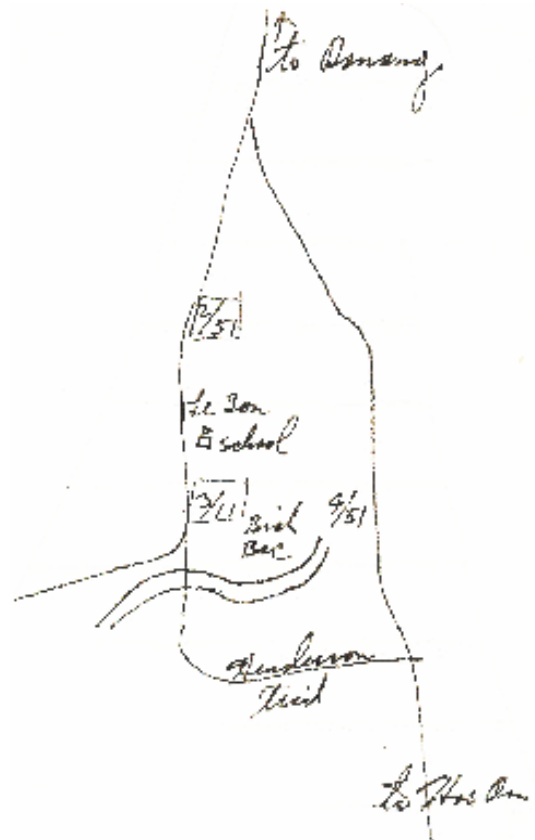
This then had been my welcome back to Vietnam after 30 days leave in the States, and these were the bridge and CAP compound I remembered as we were driving towards Hoi An several months later with Mai's books. After recognizing that we were on the right road and not far from friendly forces, I could relax some, but I was still a little nervous at every turn off we passed wondering each time if we made the right choice of roads.

As we got closer to Hoi An the countryside became markedly more beautiful. I hadn't remembered it from before, but I wish very much that I had remembered my camera. At a place where the road turns east toward the sea to follow the river to Hoi An, there is an old French fort, which is now the Dien Ban district headquarters. It is built as a square inside a square of parapets surrounded by a square moat. But the moat blends with the surrounding vegetation and is covered with pink water lilies. Down the road farther, outside the 3rd Guns area, is a part of the river with deep water access to the sea. Here may be seen larger and deeper draft boats moored or hauled up on the beach like huge resting hulks. Here too are water lilies growing in the still water along the banks. In the outer part of the city are beautiful colored shrines which you should have some pictures of from the first time I went to Hoi An.

I stopped at the military compound to try to borrow an interpreter and found out they are in short supply all over. I met an Army lieutenant who said he would come along and help out. He said he didn't know much but he did amazingly well. We waited a while. I arrived there at about 1330 but all good Vietnamese sleep from noon to 1430 so we killed some time and then went on over. About 1420 people were just waking up inside, but Mr. Truong, put on his shirt and invited us in. During the course of a very limited conversation, we learned that Mai was in Saigon but would be coming home any day. How they knew, I don't know -- telephones don't exist as near as I can tell. Anyway, perhaps I'll get an invite to a meal out of it which would be fun. I am very glad you thought of doing this little project. It has been a lot of fun and got me into many very interesting situations.

After leaving Hoi An we drove back up the road, past Henderson Trail about a mile and drove into the 51st ARVN compound. I wanted to talk with the *[51st ARVN Regimental]* C.O. about conducting our civic action in his area. He was not at home, but I met the American adviser and he assured me there was no problem. We did discover in our conversation, however that the HQ area of 3/11 *[Marine artillery battalion]* is in the 4/51 *[ARVN infantry battalion]* area rather than the 2/51 area, with which we had been working up to this point. This shifted our entire scope of operations away from the Le Son area where our school is and put the emphasis to the south and east in an area of very little previous contact with civic action.

To explain our situation, we are *[at the ARVN 51st Regimental HQ compound]* on the east side of a road which



runs roughly north and south. About one quarter mile to the north is the school and about a half mile north is Le Son village, both alongside the road. To the east and south of this compound are groups of Vietnamese houses, away from any road and loosely organized into the hamlet of BichBac. It is in this latter area I want to get started with our civic action. So we need to get from the 51st Regiment to the 4/51st [battalion].

The location of 4/51 was clear enough, but the directions were a little complicated. We were to head back down the highway again, but before we got to Henderson Trail, we were to turn west at a yellow school bus and follow a trail just wide enough for a jeep. If we stayed to the left at all turns, when we got to the end of the trail we would be at 4/51st -- and sure enough we were.

I knew the MACV adviser there, Captain Martinez, since he had been over to visit us several times when he was with the 2/51st. We discussed the whole program, talked it over with the Dai Uy, 4/51st CO, and it was agreed that we would hold a village chiefs meeting on that Friday (this was on a Wednesday), and everybody concerned would attend.

The Record of the Civil Affairs Planning Meeting for the Dien Ban District, Village of Thanh Trung, on 4 August 1967

At 1450 on 4 August a meeting was held at this CP for the purpose of planning the civil affairs program of the battalion [3/11]. The CAAOR [*Civil Affairs Area of Responsibility*] of this unit lies within the 4th Battalion, 51st ARVN TAOR and is maintained in cooperation with the CO 51st ARVN Regiment. For this reason, the commanding officer, 4th Battalion, and MACV adviser to that unit were both asked to attend. The meeting included the following Vietnamese officials: the village chief and chief of police of Thanh Trung village, Dien Ban district centered around grid square AT 9963 and various hamlet officials including the chiefs of BichBac (AT 990655) and Ha Dong (AT 998643) hamlets. Also present were the Commanding Officer, Civil Affairs Officer, Civil Affairs NCO, and Battalion Surgeon of the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines.

The specific purposes of the meeting were:

- a) to explain the Medcap program and how the battalion surgeon intends to conduct it, to include the utilization of Vietnamese medical trainees for assistance.
- b) to determine what major projects are desired by the people and how much of the work that the people will be willing to perform themselves.
- c) to determine what items, if any, are particularly desired by the people and which civic action materials available through G-5 are not appropriate in this area. [*an important criteria as learned from prior mistakes*]
- d) to determine the specific cultural characteristics of the village.

The results of the meeting were as follows:

- a) The Medcaps will continue to be held three times a week (M, W, F) at the main gate of the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines CP. Every two weeks, a Medcap team will go out into specific areas of the CAAOR to conduct sick call. This team will be accompanied by a combined platoon consisting of 1 squad ARVN from 4/51 and 1 Marine squad from 3/11.

The requirement for a Vietnamese worker to assist at Medcap was met with resistance by the chiefs. The [*Village*] chief said that he could not spare an individual on any kind of a continuing basis because the family of the person would not be able to afford it. Marines present could not understand this but had to accept it. The solution proposed was that after a dispensary has been built, it will be possible to request a worker from Dien Ban District headquarters.

b) Projects desired by the people were, in order of preference:

1. a dispensary
2. a school and
3. a marketplace.

Labor would be performed by members of the village assisted by ARVN soldiers from the 4th Battalion and Marines from 3/11. The CO 4/51st said he would provide teachers for the school from among his soldiers.

c) It was found that donated clothing was not desired by the people. Reasons enumerated were that clothes were not simple enough, they were often worn out beyond repair, and that they identified the wearer as a recipient of FWMAF aid. Items desired include soap, toys, and picture books. Toolkits were not wanted because they were "American tools" and Vietnamese tools are different. It was agreed that a sewing machine would be a fine thing, but it could not be agreed what individual would receive it. This will require further study.

d) It was determined that the population of Thanh Trung village is around 3000 but that only about 600 live within the CAAOR. The remainder live south of the river (AT990642) in the hamlets of Ha Tuy, Bich Nam, and Quang Dong. These hamlets are under VC influence and are outside the 51st ARVN TAOR. Above the river are the hamlets of BichBac and Ha Dong, the latter being occupied by an ARVN company. There is less VC influence in these hamlets. The religions consist of an animistic ancestor cult resembling the Buddhists. People are rural peasant farmers, growing rice, peanuts, and tea. The income level is low, making them a poor people.

The politics of the Village of Thanh Trung

The hamlet chiefs were the most amazing group of little old gentleman. They were all old -- only the Village Chief and Chief of Police were young. Most carried parasols, had sparse goatees and mustaches in the traditional Oriental manner, and smiled much. They seem terribly tickled with the whole shindig and all tried to get their two cents in; sometimes all at once. The Dai Uy had beautiful command of the situation throughout the proceedings however, translating the various problems to the chiefs and coming back to me with the information I needed precisely and in a way that I might know thoroughly just what thoughts and emotions had gone into the answer. My admiration for this officer is boundless. The village chief was a younger man named Pham Phu De. He was dressed in khaki shirt and trousers, a fairly tight lipped man, with a good deal of poise.

The Chief of Police stuck to the village chief like glue, and I had the feeling that he might well double as a bodyguard. He had a clean uniform -- blue trousers, white shirt, and black beret, and a six shooter -- probably a .38 -- on his hip. He looked even younger than the chief but unlike any Vietnamese I have seen so far, his manner was grim and watchful. I was careful to match his attitude with no mirth whenever I looked at him or talked to him and he seemed to appreciate it. He is a new chief of police and may be either trying to prove himself or stay alive or both. He came over and smiled when he shook my hand goodbye.

Nguyen Qua is our most well-known chief. He is chief of what we call BichBac hamlet which surrounds our compound on two sides. His people are most of the ones at our Medcaps, his hamlet is the one we hit when one of the other batteries fired out, and his houses are the beautifully Vietnamese ones we see when we look out across the back wall of the compound. He is a very old man. Le, the barber who works in the laundry concession at our gate calls him the "old man". Le thought he was a good man at first but when we gave him some old clothes a few weeks ago, the old man said he didn't want them. This got Le's goat as an ungrateful act so Le hasn't had anything good to say about him since.

Medcap Team Patrol -- 11 August 1967.

Planning for the first "roving Medcap" was accomplished for the most part during our big meeting with the various village officials. We agreed to give the people 12 hours notice, but no more because of the possibility of a VC ambush. The VC take a long time to plan their activities and spur of the moment action is not encouraged or desirable to them.

The only real coordination required was with the 4/51st ARVN. Since we have no wire communication with them, I have to take a ride over to their camp whenever I need to talk to them. I don't mind this though because it is a very interesting trip always. So, on Wednesday afternoon I got a jeep and drove across Henderson Trail over to their camp.

The advisers at 4/51st have been building their quarters for the past few weeks and they had finally gotten the place looking pretty good by this time. The living quarters are a thatched house with a wooden floor and the "office" next door is built with boards, with a tin roof and a concrete floor. It really looks comfortable. Captain Martinez as usual had his shirt off working, and being short and brown, naturally I didn't recognize him. I asked his Sergeant where he was and was surprised when a nearby brown worker turned around with a big grin on his face and asked what I wanted.

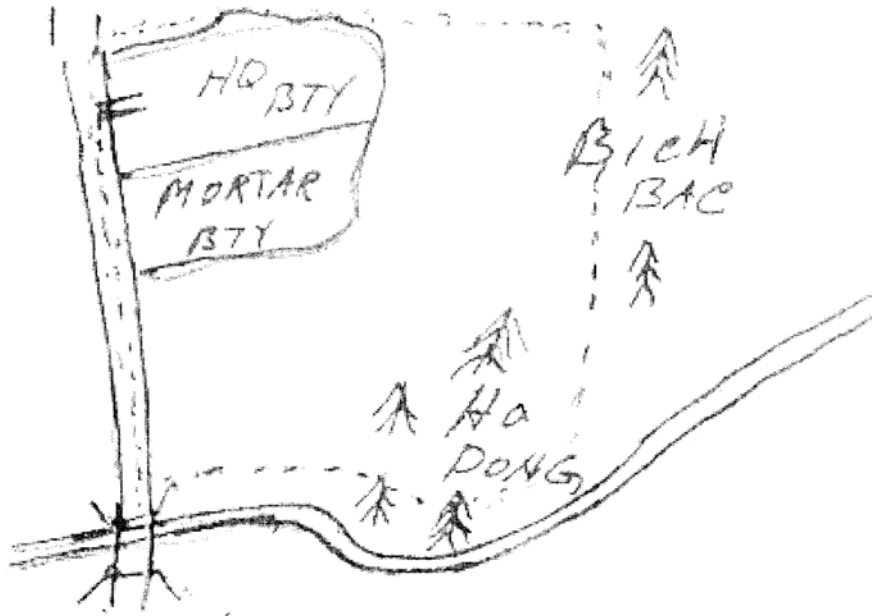
I told him we wanted to make the patrol on Friday (11 August) and wanted to meet his squad of ARVN at the bridge down the road from our CP. We called the Dai Uy over and explained it all to him and thought that all was ready. I thought I had explained the dual nature of our patrols to him. We try to combine our missions on these patrols and because we are so short of personnel anyway, the civic action is done in conjunction with a military reconnaissance patrol. I outlined the entire patrol route and indicated where I thought we would hold the Medcap.

On Friday morning, the first indication that all would not be according to plan was when it became apparent there were no ARVN at the bridge. About halfway to the bridge we were accosted by three ARVN and told to follow them. I wanted to find out what was going on, particularly

when they started heading off across the fields, not at all in the direction we intended to go. After a rather vocal exchange between myself and the ARVN 2nd Lt. Company Commander, it began to appear that the signals had gotten crossed somewhere along the line.

The original plan was to make a large loop. I wanted to see where the ARVN company was, down in the trees around Ha Dong, so I planned our route to follow the river from the bridge and include a stop in there. From there we would swing to the left so we would follow the river from the bridge, east along the river to the big bend where the hamlet of Ha Dong was supposed to be, and then a swing back up to the north and along the tree line across the rear of the battalion compound. Somewhere along the tree-line we would stop and hold our Medcap before continuing on and skirting back around the north side of the compound and returning.

The ARVN plans did not include a visit to their company area. They had set in a security force around the BichBac Hamlet for the Medcap and that was where they wanted to take us now. They had the Medcap on their mind and couldn't think of any other reason for our being out there. Apparently all the people had moved out of Ha Dong and up into the BichBac area. So there seemed no point in our going to Ha Dong. Of course, I wondered if maybe there was some reason they didn't want us in their CP



area and the more I thought about this the more interested I was in going there. But once again, they told us there were many ARVN mines and booby traps there and that their orders were to take us to our Medcap.

After trying to get straightened out by radio I gave up and decided against pressing it. As it turned out it was lucky I did. We arrived at BichBac and immediately set up our Medcap at about 0915. We still had crowds of people around at 1130 when we decided to call it quits and leave.

Lou Angialleti and his corpsman set to work scrubbing infections with PhisoHex soap and dressing them with bacitracin ointments, giving injections, and examining people with less apparent ills. It soon became obvious that there was too much for two men to do so Sergeant Kennedy, my civil affairs NCO, and myself set to work helping out. We washed babies, administered eye drops, applied salves, gave out pills, and the doctor gave instruction to us on giving injections. I told the doctor we should be prepared to treat about 20 people, but we ended up with well over 50 and for reporting purposes have estimated about 75.

Lou had an interesting medical experience when a small girl turned up sick with a congenital heart disease. He says that unless she receives heart surgery she cannot live very long. He had us all look and put our hands on her chest to feel the lump which was her heart. He had the corpsman put the stethoscope on her to listen to the strange palpitation. Now we will see what we can do to help her. I had to caution Lou not to make any statements which might commit us to curing her. I just don't know what there is can be done and it would be too bad to give rise to false hopes. Also, we call it "losing points" when we promise something we can't follow through with.

At about 1100 we started trying to taper the Medcap off. Lou brought out some cough drops and told us to watch the kids start coughing. It was funny. As soon as they saw the cough drops the undertone of children's voices began to melt into a rumble of panting, wheezing and other symptoms of upper respiratory problems. When I started handing out the Cepacol drops, though, I was mobbed. This is a characteristic of these children that really bothers me. Individually, the children seem shy and well behaved, but whenever anybody steps out into their midst with something to give away, the dog eat dog instinct must come to the surface and they trample all over one another to get to the source of the goodies.

As we were about to leave, Nguyen Qua the Hamlet chief who had been "hosting" the Medcap, led me over to his house for a glass of tea. As we walked up the path through his front yard, which consisted of an uncultivated garden, he pointed deprecatingly toward a couple of cardboard boxes covered with straw sitting in the middle of the yard. We drank the tea (I wondered if I would be sorry but I never had any bad effects) and he jabbered along to me on a subject I was used to. He pointed to his straw walls and shook his head, his wife pointed to them and imitated a very badly chilled person, which was very incongruous in the hundred plus degree heat. Then they pointed to their one cardboard wall, made from cardboard boxes and smiled and nodded. They rapped on their wooden table and smiled some more and said. "You gib?" I knew they wanted wood and cardboard. It seems too bad that these materials from Western culture are so much better materially than the aesthetically pleasing bamboo and thatch. They would much rather have a house built from corrugated "tin", uncut sheets of "beer can metal", and old cardboard boxes. The poor people and those remote from the advancement of Western culture live in the beautiful villages of thatch houses surrounded by trees and bushes for protection against the winds.

Jim Wells was the funniest at the Medcap. He didn't particularly want to get in and wash babies or give injections so he stood by and supervised in English, German and Spanish. He would command "Achtung" to the patients as they came forward. "Wie gehts", "Hasta la vista" and then proceed in mock medical dignity to give pronouncements such as "We'll have more soap later; come back next year, at 4:30." Or "Give me one chow." He finally decided it was time to go home and took off alone back to the battalion. I think he's gotten a little crazy. He has seen more of the real combat of this war than any of us "cannon cockers" I think. As naval gunfire spotter he has been in all of the most active areas, has gotten mortared, grenaded by ARVN, and watched infantry units get wiped out and now has no respect for danger. He has nothing but good spirits, though, and doesn't let anything bother him too much.

It was about noon by now. So, tired and hot but happy we returned to the CP for lunch.

The Laundry at the Gate

As Civil Affairs Officer (S-5) I have inherited the Vietnamese laundry at the main gate to the compound. The Lieutenant who was Headquarters Commandant when I got here made most of the arrangements so all that was left to me was to act as a go-between on matters of state.

The laundry is run by a Vietnamese lady of apparently genteel upbringing. She is about 35, dresses well, and carries herself with a good deal of poise. Her name is Madame Thanh-Van. Her brother is Le-Phi-Yen, about 20 years old, and is the camp barber. There is also another boy of about the same age and a younger girl who act as clerks and helpers.

Le or "Lee" as he is called by the Marines, is the only one out there who has an adequate knowledge of the English language. He is so good, and so intelligent, however, that we have used him for an interpreter on many occasions. He is an easy going, friendly type, with a very straightforward manner which could only have resulted from a fairly affluent upbringing. He talks intelligently and has such a genuine interest in the programs we have to help the people that he has proved invaluable in my civil action work. It is reassuring to work through him because he is completely impartial. The only problem is, he is so susceptible to personality conflict. At first, his only gripe was with the chiefs of Le Son village on our north side. These hamlets consist of some "new life" compounds and some of the native style buildings along the road. "Lee" said that the chiefs were # 10 because they took money or confiscated the better part of any transactions that took place. He told me about this in particular because of my civil affairs "give away" programs. It was "Lee" who persuaded me to give the donation of clothes to the "old man" from BichBac instead of to Le Son. He told me the old man was a good man and wanted to help his people. So we arranged to have the old man Nguyen Qua come to pick up the clothes.

The donations we had were an odd assortment of items left over from some earlier civil action activity. There were several large bags of buttons, some old clothes, shoes and children's toys, books, and games. Apparently the toys, books, and games were accepted alright, but he came back to let "Lee" know that the clothes and buttons were not wanted. I never was told outright, but he certainly lost a friend in Lee as a result. Now Lee says he doesn't like anybody down here. He says the only good people are in DaNang. He says with a smile that the "old man" is a VC. Sergeant Hung used to say the same thing about people he didn't particularly like so I wonder how many loyal but disagreeable Vietnamese are incriminated this way.

One situation, I went through with Lee was the issue of a security check for persons working inside the gate. Apparently Lee's sister, Madame Thanh-Van, had been having some trouble with the ARVN security people, because she didn't have any clearance papers. Lee explained the problem to me so one day we went up to DaNang to see what we could find out. Finally we had the address and routing necessary for the security check, and I had been thinking about the practical aspects of having a security check on Lee as well. We went ahead and processed the papers on Madame Thanh-Van and I then gave Lee the same papers to fill out on himself. There is no question in my mind about Lee's integrity, but I sensed that he was a little bit reluctant to submit to a security check. There was nothing he could say of course, and he went ahead, but I wondered at his initial reticence. He has also been passing himself off as being only 18. He looks older than that and Vietnamese usually look younger than they actually are. So, I have been suspicious on that count too. So after his funny reaction to the security check, I came up with a possible explanation. It is unusual for a young man to be a civilian. Most are in an army -- either the VC or the ARVN. Lee has probably been a "draft dodger" of sorts and is probably afraid that a security investigation will stir up some questions about his military service. He has talked about joining the ARVN next year when he tells people he's 18. He is good-natured about it and always looks a little bit guilty when he talks about it so I don't feel suspicious of his motives. I imagine he pulls in a couple of hundred dollars from his barber operation, if not even more. So the ARVN pay of \$25-\$50 a month probably looks pretty bleak to him. But he knows he's got it coming.

12 August 1967

Dear Folks;

I have been as bad recently about writing as I was overdoing it a while ago. However, you will soon be swamped with the results of my silence. I have started writing again and although I have been writing fast to get everything down, I think I can pick it up later for reconstruction purposes. Because of the way I have been rushing it, I haven't had the chance to really get right down to filling it with the feelings and atmosphere that I had the time to do when I had less pressure on me.

One problem now, and it has hurt my studies as well, is the fact that the watch schedule in the FDC has eased off some. You may find that hard to understand. When we got a bunch of new officers in the Battalion and I could have maybe two nights off in between, the nights I do stand watch -- maybe two to three nights a week -- I am really sleepy. Before, I could sleep during the day before a night watch with no trouble and I got used to it. With a no-doz or two I could actually enjoy it. But it is nothing but a chore now. I can't stay alert enough to write letters or study.

I have made a very nice discovery. The water here is pretty bad for showering. I think they take it out of the rivers and then soak it down good with chlorine. After taking a shower, I always feel like I'm covered with a scum -- kind of sticky and greasy at the same time and itchy. For a while, I stopped using the shower and took a bath out of a bucket of our drinking water, which is supposed to be cleaner. But it wasn't. So yesterday it rained hard and I thought about back in the Delta when we looked forward to the rain for our showers and I took all the buckets and cans I could find and collected enough to fill a 5 gallon can. I told my roommates to leave it alone and now I can really look forward to taking a bath. I think it is even better than I imagined. Of course it's not as convenient as being able to stand under a shower head, but then, I took a good many baths back in the beginning out of a steel helmet. That was a trick, having it come out right so that there was just the right amount of water left in the helmet for the final rinse. I remember a few times, like on Apache, when we got our water by tying comm wire to the helmet straps and lowering it down the Vietnamese villagers well. Those were the good old days. :-)

That was the time, before I got your dyed green sheets, that I took a white sheet I had "borrowed" from the USS Princeton for protection against the mosquitoes. After we were all sprawled around on our air mattresses for the night, I was the only one who never got stepped on. People used my white sheet for a landmark in finding their way around the camp.

I wrote to Cathy and asked her to buy me a new rapidograph pen. You may remember I left my old one in Baguio City in the Philippines. Well I couldn't believe how fast she got it back to me. Complete with the greatest unbreakable bottle of black ink that can be used on glass, cloth -- just about anything I guess. Now writing is once again a pleasure. In fact, I think writing with a rapidograph is the only way of writing that is as fast as typing -- and like you, I can think better writing than typing.

This is now Saturday night. The movie tonight was Batman, so I have had a nice comfortable evening "At home" chatting with Ken the chaplain, writing, and enjoying the clean feeling of the rain water bath. Also enjoying ice tea. :-).

I couldn't see the point of ordering a set of fine china -- maybe I am wrong -- but I did think we should have an example of the stuff. Hence the gift of the snack set.

Ken [*Battalion Chaplain*] is taking over my lecture on Religions, Law & Customs; I will save my notes and make a tape of both for you. I do not rehearse lectures. That is something I have never been able to do. All I can do is make notes, know what I'm talking about, and then just get up and talk about it. My biggest problem before was in "stage presence" -- I would be so nervous I couldn't think clearly about what I was saying. But now that taping letters has taught me the forensic arts, I have almost no trouble at all. It amazes me beyond all comprehension and my self-confidence in words exists where it did not before.

Mother, you never sounded like Gracie Allen!! You did sound tense; sometimes worried about wasting tape :-), but never the least bit undignified or unpoised. However, since your recitation in Haicu on tape, you have seemed perfectly relaxed -- as if you were just carrying on a conversation in the same room. So "sweat not".

Dear Folks,

13 August 1967.

Another short note to fill in a few ideas I forgot last night. I got a letter from Betty Lo a few days ago. She says that she will be happy to see me and that she doesn't think the turmoil there will interfere with the trip. She says... "Just a few bombs now and then." Her address came back as an Education Agency instead of the Sunlight Trading Company. We figured maybe they have to keep changing names over there like we do for security reasons.

I got the letter from Margaret [*my father's sister, Aunt Margaret McCaffery had the congressman friend*] about the "Congressional thing.". I like to think that maybe my letter had something to do with the improvements around here. They have even given up on military generators and are bringing in new civilian ones. The ice situation changed radically. They started furnishing block ice at the central galley supply point and now we even have ice machines in our mess Hall.??!! The laundry is still unsolved, but I have our laundry service here at the gate pretty squared away and they do a real good job for not too much money, including pressing. We still have our TV sets, but at least now they work.

The Division Clubs system must be making a mint. They upped the price of drinks again and they were making a lot before. We sure do wonder what happens to the money. Someday the division headquarters will probably have a fantastic new club built down on the beach somewhere, and the combat troops that paid for it can enjoy it on the way in and on the way out Vietnam.

A new Captain's list is out and this time I checked personally to make sure my name was on it. And this time it was. I don't know how long it will take this time, but it shouldn't be too long for me since I am about the most senior 1st Lt. in the Marine Corps right now. It is amazing -- some guys who have only been 1st Lts. for a few months are on the list. Jim Wells is a (jg) same as a 1st Lt., and he has really been bent out of shape by this acceleration of Marine Corps promotions. He would have been in the year group (mine) that got promoted last March, if he were a Marine officer.

The only benefit of having any more muddling around done at HQMC would just be for curiosity as to what happened to my first promotion. I only feel uncomfortable now when I meet captains who are "boot" to me and that will soon be changed. It was not something that was of any great importance to me other than wondering why. They just look in a book and if there is a black mark by your name it goes in one pile and if there's not it goes in another. As far as sending more of my letters to Washington goes -- -- -- horrors!! They could care less.

I haven't been up to III MAF since I learned of Gary Reese's job. Maybe this week. Time is running short now and I feel rushed. Only 43 days now.

I love hearing about your sailing trips. Wish I were there in SoCal too. But I think I am going to miss this place.

Love, Mark.

PS enclosed -- uncanceled letters

Medcap at the gate**14 August 1967**

This morning I went out to the gate to observe the Medcap and to give away some toys to the children. My motives are several. First, the supply of toys is too limited for mass distribution either in the school (Le Dong) or in the villages. However, by giving them out at Medcap, I can perhaps cause a greater turnout of people. It was something of a surprise to see only 5 people at the gate -- 3 children, an old man and an old woman, after seeing so many people wanting to be treated on our visit to the hamlet. The people need the medical aid -- we know that -- it's just that they aren't bothering to come to the gate.

The doctor was delighted over the improvement in one of the children who had a bad infection last Friday. The little girl was badly inflamed all over her chin, neck and chest with an infected rash. This morning it was almost completely gone. I have made my reputation as an eye doctor now and the old woman had come for some eye drops and also wanted some for her little girl. So I administered the drops.

The delight of the morning was when I pulled out the toys. I gave the little girl with the rash the little kicking donkey and that really tickled everybody. The hamlet chief, Nguyen Qua, had come along to see if we had any wood or cardboard for him and watched the Medcap with a benevolent smile until I brought out the bucking mule. Then his eyes lit up with delight and he wanted to try it himself. It didn't work too well in the sand, but nobody minded. He asked Lee to ask me if I could get another one for his grandson. I told Lee to tell him that it was sent to me by my family in the US and that I would have to write to them and have them send me another one. Then I pulled out the bubbles and a few packets of "funny face". There was a wind blowing, so all I had to do to demonstrate bubbles was to pull the bubble blower out of the bottle and hold it up in the wind. Of course the stream of bubbles that issued forth was a delight to the children. Now it remains to be seen what kind of turnout we have on Wednesday, but it was a happy three kids and one hamlet chief that left this morning.

Tomorrow afternoon, I am going to Dien Ban District headquarters to talk to the American adviser to the District Chief. We are going to talk about building a dispensary and both Ken, the Chaplain and Lou the doctor are going along. I am including them on all my dealings since this will be their show when I leave. Wednesday, the doctor is going to take the girl with congenital heart disease up to DaNang for further examination.

16 August 1967

Dear Folks;

This weekend I go to Hong Kong. I had a letter from Betty Lo as I mentioned but not from the Bakers. We are going over on Saturday afternoon but the orders direct us to the airport on Friday afternoon. I am trying to see about getting out of wasting all that time. Jim thinks he would just as soon waste it there as here. I am getting more time conscious as my tour grows to a close. Especially when tomorrow we have classes all day for staff and officers. They are mostly ridiculous ones on subjects we either know well or don't need at all. I am giving one on direct fire procedures. This sounds okay, but the only application of the procedures is against tanks. VC tanks haven't been invented yet. Direct fire against personnel could be covered in about five minutes of advice, and I have to fill 50 minutes with antitank tactics.

We had an old Vietnamese gentleman arrive at our gate last evening with a bad infection. When I arrived the corpsman was arguing with him in sign language trying to get him to take two aspirin and three shots of penicillin. It soon became apparent that the gentleman had very definite reasons for not taking the medicine but we couldn't figure out what they were. So I called up the civil affairs people at 1st Marines, whom we work with very closely, and had them call an interpreter to the phone. Then by holding the phone to the ear of the wife of the man, the interpreter could ask her the questions and find out what the trouble was. Of course I had to push the "push to talk" button on the phone and signal the interpreter when to start talking, -- but it worked out okay.

The problem was that the man had taken Vietnamese medicine that morning and it was thought to be very dangerous for him to take any of our medicine the same day. Of course, we wondered why he

had come to our gate at all -- but all we could do was tell him to soak his infection twice for 20 minutes in warm salt water and to come back in the morning to go to the hospital. He went away and this morning he did not come back. We are still wondering if our instructions got balled up in the translations.

Love, Mark

19 August 1967

Dear Folks;

To answer a few of your most recent questions, about the TR-3: I think the car needs more than a valve grind, but I can't remember what tests indicated this. At any rate, don't do anything until I return. I will probably have the engine rebuilt, but it will be weighing the cost of bodywork etc. (also paint). I will be "loaded" as Dave says, but I don't see any reason for blowing it on something as silly as a new car. As for the business of veterans coming back rich, this is only partially true. People with no dependents have no way to spend their money and hence have to save it or drink it up or gamble it away. Dave could get just as rich if he stopped spending money. (Provided of course he was working.)

As for the G.I. education bill, my recollection was \$150 a month, but it may have gone up. I can't see that talking about it is subversive, though. Anybody is eligible. No, I guess, not everybody, but at least anybody qualified and that's just like any other job. I notice the Berkeleyites aren't falling all over themselves to cash in on the "gravy". And I'm also sure it's not because they feel guilty about taking advantage of old Uncle Sam. More likely it's because they would much rather stay home where it's safe and comfortable and where they can start getting in line for the vice presidency of their father's defense industry plant. I realize I exaggerate, but I mean, a bachelor can get rich over here. So can a civilian Berkeley grad. But a man supporting a family in the states cannot.

I have received the following packages:

1. Clothes etc. from Shattuck's.
2. Paints, chalk etc.
3. Paints, balls etc.
4. Paints, ball, tea, and dial soap.

Don't need anymore NoDoz, thanks. Please have the prints made at Fedco as indicated. A photography bug in the FDC here says the films are good but printing is bad. What does the Fedco mailer cost? If it's in the vicinity of \$2 without film or \$3 with film please sign me up. "(I have no film for the brownie.).

Love, Mark

26 August 1967

Dear Folks,

I have a lot of correspondence to answer so this will be quick. Then I want to write up in detail the fantastically wonderful experience of going to Hong Kong. I might even decide to go back. You asked if I could extend again over here. That was so very considerate of you to show that you wouldn't mind. I will probably regret my decision, but right now I just can't resist the thought of going to San Francisco.

I have received several packages of Civil Action materials, among which were your most recent package from the Longyears. They have just put out a message from III MAF, begging people to donate money for soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste during a critical period through August and September. I don't know what the sudden urgency is, but it's the first time I've ever heard the Marine Corps admit they needed any assistance so it must be important. Donations should go to Project Handclasp in San Diego marked for shipment "To CG III MAF."

There is a good chance I may leave here sooner than planned. If my circuitous plans are approved, I will not have to wait until the 25th of September because I won't need a flight date to CONUS. In other words, I can take off as soon after the 1st as I hear about my circuitous travel.

Just to fill the suspense, Jim and I were given a wonderful time by the Lo's. They are truly wonderful people!! They were enthusiastic about Maudie [*Maudie Prickett, a family friend and actress*

in Hollywood whose family started the Pasadena Playhouse] who apparently showed Pat a good time in Hollywood.

In case unexpected expenses come up on my "world tour" I might have to phone for money. In that case, the most I could possibly need would be about \$500, but it would be important and soon. Would that be all right? It costs about \$8 for the first three minutes, so I'll just let you know the address and how much I need and then we can talk the rest of the time. But like I say, I will probably have enough.

I think I told you what I remembered about the TR-3. I was planning -- in fact, I tried -- to have the engine rebuilt before I came back from leave. But there wasn't any time I could afford to be without a car. If the valve job fixes it, that's great, but usually it is more economical to have the entire engine done at once when there is that many miles on it, depending of course on the rest of the car. As long as Henry and Dave did it themselves, they must have decided that was all that was needed. Many thanks to them both and I have to change my attitude towards hippies. I know it will make it run better immediately, but I'm afraid the heads will just have to come off again for cylinders, rings, bearings, or any number of other things which can be expected. \$29, however, makes the present job a veritable gift.

I will commence working on my Hong Kong paper now.

Much love, Mark.

PS.

The Bakers were not at home. Mr. Lo thought they were on leave in London. That was a disappointment.

I am sending Dave a copy of a book I have found outstanding. It is worth \$20-\$25 in the US I think. He can consider it a graduation present.

Took one roll of movies on the Hong Kong harbor tour, arranged by Mrs. Lo.

Two more shipments from the Japanese importer, plus, several (3) packages from Hong Kong should be arriving shortly (two insured).

Please feel free to correct grammar etc. on my yellow sheets. [*Notes on the Civil Action Program written up for the first half of August*] I didn't even have time to reread.

No more iced tea, please. Chris has just sent me more than enough to get me through the end of the month. :-)

Had a note from Sondra which came while I was in Hong Kong. Just found it in my drawer. They are vacationing -- spent a day at Santa Monica. Heard from them and Chris that Tana is getting a Hollywood pad. Sounds great.

29 August 1967

Dear Folks;

When you receive this letter you had better stop all correspondence to me. I will probably be on my way to New Zealand. My permission for circuitous travel came through yesterday and I will be leaving here sometime between the 1st and 10th of September. I am presently contemplating going straight to Okinawa, buying all the Japanese things I want -- eg. tape recorders, telephotos, projectors etc. I will probably have a couple of days to do this before my processing is complete and then I can fly down to Taiwan for a few days. From there I will go from Okinawa to DaNang or Saigon, Singapore or other country in that direction (Malaysia) and then to Australia and to New Zealand. The commercial fare on BOAC from Singapore to Auckland is about \$360 so I think that is the most this trip could cost, transportation wise. I should arrive in LA on the 25th, give or take about five days. But I will have to immediately report in at Treasure Island to try to get an additional 10 days leave. That's the way they're working it now.

All for now.

Love, Mark

30 August 1967

Dearest Cathy Howe (and friends), .

Don't write me after you receive this. In fact, if you write after I write this it will be too late. I am moving out of here within the next few days. I will go first to Okinawa for processing and from there take a few days to hop down to Taipei. That shouldn't cost very much. After that I will just bum along to the south until I get to New Zealand. Possible vias will be Saigon, Malaysia (Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, etc.) and Australia. According to my latest calculations, which vary somewhat from my calculations (more hasty) of yesterday, which I believe I sent to Mom and Dad, I should arrive in LA along about 3 October. After including my time in Okinawa, plus a few extra bonuses of admin time I will actually have about 28 days en route. I should see you before most anybody because I have to ask permission for my extra 10 days of leave.

So see you soon!!

Much love, Mark

[The following letter was written by Ken, the regimental chaplain, about a week or so after I left Vietnam. By this time I was on my way from Malaysia to New Zealand before flying out to Hawaii and then San Francisco.]

Dear Mark September 16, 1967

Greetings to you from "Hairy" Hill 55. As you can see by the package, I picked up your "VC suit". I hope it's what you wanted from Lee.

Mr. Curly and Mr. Elliott returned from Okinawa yesterday, so we are back at full strength in the hootch. So far we only have one new "tent peg" in the hootch, Lt. Rougharton. Mr. Elliott is the new 2 slash 5. However, he goes home in December.

Actually, S-5 work is at a standstill, mostly because of this area. We were all pretty upset yesterday because Capt. Russell was shot on his way back to the Hill. It happened right at the turn there by Anderson [*probably Henderson*] Trail. It was about 1700 and dark and rainy. Doc Lou gave him care at our aid station and then he was medevaced to 1st Med. We heard this morning that he was going to make it. He got hit three times in the stomach.

I finally had an inspection by the assistant division chaplain. I fixed up my bunker and he thought everything was "FINE".

Nights have been the usual thing with a lot of intelligence about "55". So, we are pretty jumpy at night. You will be happy to hear this now that you are gone, I'm sure.

Well must close, take care. Going to miss our drives over Superhighway #1. We did get some good pictures.

God keep you, Ken

The following letter was written to my sister Cathy while she was on an aid mission to a small village in Mexico. She had been sick, and was becoming disillusioned with the program. Our family would shortly join her down there and subsequently observe a certain amount of insurrection in Mexico City where armored police vehicles would confront masses of students and workers in the streets. It would be the 1968 Olympics and the demonstrations would end at the Zokolo, the central plaza in Mexico City, which was right in front of our hotel. These were turbulent times.

23 July, 1968

Dear Cathy,

I just finished reading a carbon copy of your letter to Mom and Dad where you talk about running out of money on the project and wondering what good you are doing. You sounded (in fact you mentioned the fact) as if you wouldn't mind if they called the whole thing off early.

I am writing this post haste because I have tried to encourage many people who had the same feeling of "what's the use" in Vietnam. We spent great quantities of money, exerted tremendous effort in man hours and talking and in the end in many cases felt that the people were neither better off nor changed in any significant way as a result of it all. They might have had a school to go to for a while before it was blown up by the VC or medical aid and sanitation for a while while we were there to do it for them but there was no apparent lasting effect.

Well, I never believed it. There were certain ones of us who had done some small thing like eating a native meal that no other American would touch, or learned the language, or - - I think perhaps and refuse to be disillusioned by the fact that my watch was stolen -- help the fishermen pull their boats up on the beach and string their nets to dry. *[My GI watch was stolen right off my arm by children while I was helping fishermen pull their boats up on the beach. This was at China Beach early one morning while I was awaiting processing out on leave and had \$1400 cash in my pocket. Scary moment; they were so clever I never felt it happen. If they hadn't been so intent on the watch it would have probably been the cash.]* These things I think made a lasting personal impression of human equality on a few.

I am afraid that many more and more terrible wars are to come as the world gets more and more crowded. I will always remember my Mr. Pok* who said to me, "I titi -- you bik. My country titi, USA bik." or words to that effect. How easy it is to go to war against a foe who is not known, not understood, and feared as likely to take over the world with terrible might. In Vietnam there is no great lasting benefit to be derived from spending a lot of money or building great works. I think even life saving acts involving our interventions are looked upon with suspicion. It is the simple human contact--being one with them; perhaps shocking to them, perhaps even teaching them of our customs although perhaps shocking to them, such as holding hands and wearing mini-skirts. It is admittedly poor to flagrantly abuse customs, but when they are ready they should learn of the differences in customs so that they may see visiting Americans in the proper perspective.

You can do this --- be the bridge across the gap. If you accomplish nothing through teaching sanitation, health, etc. don't think you have been there in vain. You will have become a part of the lives of many people-- a part of their own lives on an equal plane doing the same things they do and they will know Americans are not all "businessmen" or "tourists." And in the same way you will have had an experience which cannot be bought at any travel agency.

Hoping to see you down there,

Much love, Mark

* Mr. Pok was our taxi driver/guide while on R&R in Bangkok

Postlogue

I returned from Vietnam by way of a number of countries along the way like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. It was called "circuitous travel en route" from one duty station to the next. My next duty station was Marine Barracks Treasure Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. So I ended up pretty close to my alma mater.

By the time I had finished hitchhiking on military aircraft from place to place my leave was close to used up. Fortunately I caught a hop from New Zealand to Hawaii which was the longest and potentially most expensive leg of the trip. The flight was a Continental government charter that had just completed a resupply run to the Antarctic Operation Deep-Freeze. There were five stewardesses and one passenger -- me. Since all any of us wanted to do was sleep it should have worked out fine but each time a stewardess woke up for any reason she stopped to see if the passenger needed anything. Life can be hell.

My first duty at Treasure Island was acting as Marine Liaison Officer to the Marines at the Oakland Naval Hospital. Oak Knoll, as it was called, was where Bay area Marines would be shipped from being wounded on the battlefields of Vietnam. There were tragic cases, heroic cases, hilarious cases and every now and then a terminal case would die.

I was at Oak Knoll during the massive Tet offensive during February of 1968. This brought a large number of Marine casualties into my command. This Tet offensive was very different from previous offenses but we were not to learn of its significance until long after the war.

During the time I was "in country" the VC were uncertain of their objectives. They were not necessarily Communists but they were opposed to the series of inept South Vietnamese governments that the Americans were supporting. As I noted in many letters, people that were friendly to us during the day might have family members that were VC and support assaults on our positions at night. These were Southerners who had a very different attitude than the hard-line Communist armies from the north.

Before the Tet Offensive of 1968 there was a massive buildup of forces from the north to augment the VC guerrilla forces of the South. These northern forces had generally been welcomed by the VC as helpers in their cause. I was probably a witness to the beginnings of this build up as I was leaving the country in the fall of 1967.

When the Tet assault began it was very well orchestrated to show the populace of South Vietnam that simultaneous attacks across the country were possible, could succeed, and if the people rose up in support, that the Americans would be demoralized and leave and the South Vietnamese government would crumble of its own ineptitude.

The problem from the Communist standpoint was that although the attacks were generally successful at first, the American and ARVN forces absorbed them and pushed them back again in the days following. At the same time the populace did not rise up as anticipated and adopted a wait-and-see attitude which we always found so frustrating. While there was a tremendous loss of life on both sides, the Communists in the South became more dependent on Hanoi and Hanoi in turn became more hard line toward the south. There were places, such as in the ancient capital city of Hue, where Communist forces got so far out of control that they slaughtered southern residents of the city at times indiscriminately. At this point there were some VC sympathizers that began to wonder about what they were fighting for. But at the same time many Americans were wondering the same thing and to the Communists it looked like a tipping point in their favor.

North Vietnamese generals and South Vietnamese VC have written extensively on this subject and all agree that after the failure of the 1968 Tet offensive they were pretty well defeated. It was the antiwar activities in America that gave them the incentive to push forward. In fact it was primarily that incentive that kept them doggedly fighting, with tremendous loss of life, all the way through and up to the negotiations in Paris.

I got out of the Marine Corps in the summer of 1968, after having put in the four years required by my NROTC contract with the Navy. At that point Vietnam was beginning to boil as America poured

more and more into it and civil unrest was more and more vocal against it.

My sister Cathy graduated from Berkeley and became an elementary school teacher. Many of her students were Hispanic.

I went back to school in Marine Biology at Cal State Fullerton and took up residence in Dana Point where I had lived before I left for Vietnam. I was busy with my graduate studies and did my master's thesis on four tidepools at the end of the point itself. I paid little attention to Vietnam after that. I was aware of the news stories about antiwar rioting, the various political maneuvers to end the war, and the pullout of American troops and the fall of Saigon in 1973 and 1975 respectively. It wasn't until I began reading Robert McNamara's book about the war that my interest was rekindled. I went back through boxes of stuff my mother had saved and found all my letters and photos and even the negatives for the photos which established the chronology.

Reading my letters for the first time after 40 years was an experience for me. It was like I was reading a story for the first time except I began to visualize background for the verbal pictures. Having the photos helped a lot too. The gaps in the story began to appear in 1967 when more communication was done with tape recorded voice. I am sure the tapes are carefully tucked away in the boxes too but may never be available in written transcription.

With the perspective of my personal involvement in Vietnam and the subsequent cultural and political upheaval which resulted, I naturally have some opinions on the present-day situation with America and the Middle East. I did not think that America's involvement in Southeast Asia was necessarily a mistake. I only felt that it might have been possible for a better outcome had we backed Ho Chi Minh rather than the South. A unified Vietnam under other circumstances might have saved a lot of agony that later resulted. In such a situation we might have been able to successfully press for a federalized, unified country with two states. If we had not been so hung up on the fact that Uncle Ho called himself a Communist, we might have had a valuable ally in the area. But anyone who lived through that period knows how impossible that would have been.

As it turned out, we Americans had much in common with the VC. Most were more nationalistic Vietnamese than communist. They had recently experienced a French presence which acted very much as a colonial government rather than its professed advisory capacity. After throwing out the French, the presence of American advisers seemed too much like another occupation to some.

As Marines, we were trained to respect the cultural mores of the Vietnamese people. My classes for my troops included things like not considering a couple of Arvin troops holding hands to mean that they were queer (I don't believe gay was a term in use yet). Because of the tremendous cultural differences between us, that was very difficult for a few of our troopers. They considered Vietnamese troops to be effeminate and unreliable. If we were to be able to build trust and confidence with the people we were trying to help, this would require a lot of education on our part. We had cultural classes to try to impress on our men the importance of this to our combat efforts. If the people in the Villes thought of us as friends and helpful they would be less inclined to help the VC. They might have even convinced the VC that we weren't so bad.

There have been a number of accounts of situations where Marine units remained involved with a village over a period of time with very positive results. The people came to trust the Marines, the Marines trusted the Arvin or PF Vietnamese troops they worked with, and the VC lost their control of the village. As noted in my letters, our policy was to involve the people in our neighboring villages in their own self help with our assistance. You may recall my insistence that we never promise anything we couldn't deliver. This dependability and trust was definitely winning the hearts and minds in our own enclave and could have resulted in a much better outcome I believe.

This is how I think we could have won the war:

1. Wholeheartedly implemented General Walt's program of pacification in the Villes.
2. It is now pretty universally accepted that the political unrest over the war in the United States encouraged the North Vietnamese to keep fighting. In early 1968, if we could have maintained a united front with regard to Vietnam but at the same time opened negotiations with the VC in the South, a

satisfactory bargain might have been brokered. Remember this was perhaps two to three years prior to Kissinger and the Paris peace talks. Then there could have been alliance of VC and non-VC nationalists hammering out an accord with their North Vietnamese brothers in Hanoi with the US government merely looking on.

3. On a national level we needed to be more evenhanded and less meddling in the government of South Vietnam. Note the comment by my friend the Dai Uy that the elections in Vietnam were different. We misjudged the VC and they misjudged us. Had we accepted the VC as a constituent in the South, the North Vietnamese would not have had the excuse to invade with their forces and we might have been out of there earlier and with much less pain. As it was, we fought VC until they were losing; the NVA came down from the north to aid their Commie brothers, and in the end crushed the true VC nationalists under their heel.

Unfortunately all of this is hindsight. We were totally unable as a country to accept anything with a Communist label no matter how flimsy. Our president was paranoid he would go down in history as being the first president to lose a war. We were unable to consider that concessions to Communists were any different than concessions to Hitler during the tragic appeasement era before World War II.

The greatest fault and the most egregious one lies with the Viet Minh. Their inability to see the threat to their entire way of life from the dogmatic and ideological communist North was their great downfall. Northerners had become used to a much more austere lifestyle and were indoctrinated with and adhered to mindless dogma. When they finally crushed the South in 1975 this austerity was imposed on the southern VC nearly as intensely as the non-VC. Had the VC made an effort to negotiate a peace with the southern government early in the war before the massive invasion of NVA, they probably would have done well. The perfect time would have been early 1968 when they still had some control. But the antiwar demonstrations in the US kept them thinking they could have the whole enchilada so they kept going and with tragic consequences.

Another scenario might have been a negotiation directly with America for withdrawal of forces. This might have forced the hand of the squabbling southern generals and allowed a "coalition" of both parties to rule in some fashion. This would be much like we see in Iraq today.

In Iraq there has only briefly been a confrontation between military or even quasi military forces. Totally unlike Vietnam, the terrorist enemy has no positive goal. In fact there appears not to be any one enemy. Each terrorist faction wants to terrorize certain other groups or factions. The only goal would appear to be anarchy.

There are certain groups or countries that have a very great interest in the resultant unrest. The Kurds in the north would very much like autonomy and the Turks across the border very much dread such an event across the border from Turkey's Kurdistan. They know that the next thing would be their own Kurds demanding autonomy.

Likewise in the Southeast, Iran might like to annex those portions of Iraq along their border. Or at least control them. It would be interesting to see how that would turn out since the Iranian Shia are Persian and the Iraqi Shia are Arab.

It appears to me we have the kind of government in Iraq that we wished we had in Vietnam. They are not strong as we might wish them to be but they have all groups represented relatively fairly. Unfortunately the first step is for so many of the squabbling children to get killed or disabled that the populace as a whole becomes sick enough of the carnage that they decide to give up their differences and get along in some fashion.

This part of the world will probably never be peaceful. Those who talk and write about the mess in Iraq just aren't paying attention to the rest of that part of Asia. Stability is an illusion created by a ruler powerful enough to maintain order. We in the West just need to be sure that ruling entity doesn't start playing games with the oil supply.

Years ago there was the slogan, "no blood for oil". Anyone naïve enough to believe that needs to review history. Oil is the lifeblood of modern civilization and any country's ruler who finds himself in a position to choke off any significant portion of that supply can hold the world hostage. There is no way

we would have any interest in Iraq if it wasn't right smack in the middle of oil production for Southwest Asia. The rest of the world needs to be certain that whoever or what ever governs those oil-producing countries is not interested in, or at least capable of, blackmail. Any significant blackmail of oil consumers in the rest of the world might well trigger a world war. Resources triggered the first two world wars and oil is now once again the most powerful of those resources.

On the other hand, I would more realistically foresee that if the world supply of oil were seriously threatened, the countries most dependent on it would step in with terrible power and get it flowing again. This would most likely be done with a coalition of forces and international agreements as to how the subjugated territories would be governed. This might in the long run be the best thing for the peoples of the Middle East. But we would be witness to some inhumanities we presently shriek with horror at the very mention of.

Why Iraq?

Ever since India and Pakistan each got nuclear weapons capability it has become a major global goal to ensure nuclear proliferation is "nipped in the bud" in that region. Many seem to misunderstand what it means to nip in the bud. If you wait until you have a disease and then cure it, you run the risk that it will get you before you get it. If you take steps to ensure it never gets started in the first place you are nipping in the bud. That we react to the possibility of weapons of mass destruction and then discover they don't exist should be considered a good thing. If through our actions, whether they be diplomatic or military, we ensure that W's MD cannot be produced, we are doing our job.

Of course, if it weren't for the oil, Southwest Asia would not be so important. But because of the oil it is imperative that extraordinary steps be taken in such a volatile region. This must include strong preemptive measures because the stakes are so high. The threat is not simply political supremacy, national self-determination, humanitarian relief or any of the other standard phrases used to justify actions in the region. The threat is to Western civilization as we know it and perhaps to some of Eastern civilization as well. Much of Asia either sits on its own oil supply or has limited need for oil, but then there is China. The sleeping Dragon is now awake but strangely very quiet on the subject of Southwest Asia. Only a moron could assume this means she is not extremely interested in how this oil field balancing act turns out.

The coalition invasion of Iraq was strategically astute for a number of reasons but the reason that seems to escape everyone is its position at the very center of the entire problem area. Since the US has unequivocally ended up with the role of the world's policeman, whether we like it or not, we need a precinct station on the beat. Could we depend on Arabia? Obviously not, more so now than ever before, but could we invade Arabia? Even more obviously not. Would it make some sense to invade Iran? No; they generally have been pretty sensible in the long term and sensitive to pressure from the rest of the world. But from the central location of Iraq we have the perfect position to keep tabs on the region and have the means of force in place for timely and effective control if necessary.

The risks are many and most involve a highly effective level of intelligence and diplomacy. Just as in Vietnam we were perpetually afraid of an unexpected reaction from China, now in Southwest Asia it is imperative that the dragon not feel unduly threatened.

The free-market economy of the modern world has done wonders for national security. If your trading partners are treating you fairly and you are making a good living, you would be crazy to entertain the notion of clobbering them. China is making a good living off of the rest of us. If they can remain convinced that we have no intention of interfering with their oil supply and in fact are working to ensure it continues to flow, they should be content.

I will sound very optimistic when I propose that we seem to have learned our lessons from Vietnam well and are in Asia with the dragons blessing. I would also propose that we and our world would be in a much worse position had we remained uninvolved.