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Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 01

David Fetters

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Dave Fetters' Audio Letters - 1969

Tape #1

14 March 1969

Friday

Hello Trudy and everybody else back home. This is my first attempt at making a recorded letter. I'm presently sitting in my room, if you can call it a room. What it is, is a metal CONEX (CONTinental EXchange) container, or shipping container, that's six feet high, six feet wide, and seven feet deep. That's my room. It's metal on all sides except one open face. That faces inward toward a hallway, and all the other team members have theirs also facing in the hallway. What we live in is called a teamhouse, about 14 rooms, and presently 13 members on this team. Connected to that is the medical bunker, a commo bunker, and our clubhouse where we have a movie projector and screen and a little bar. Then out the backdoor's our latrine.

The camp itself is real fascinating. When I flew over it, I took about three pictures from the helicopter. It was a Chinook by the way, one of those big twin rotor jobs. I took it on black and white film, super fast film, and I think it will turn out alright. But the shape is just like a five pointed star. The entire, well, let me start from the far outside area and work inward. First of all we're surrounded by jungle and real thick bamboo forests, if you can call it that. That, at the nearest point, is about 800 meters from our outer perimeter. From the woodline to the outer perimeter there's nothing but burned off area. Right now we have grass that's growing to be about six feet tall out there. We requested another defoliating mission [Agent Orange] flown by the Air Force to kill all that stuff; otherwise we burn it off ourselves. Starting about three or four hundred meters out from camp we have mine fields, all kinds of layers of barbed wire working all the way back in to the outer berm, or the outer perimeter. It's real thick stuff, it's got all kinds of mines, booby-traps, barbed wire, tanglefoot, all that kind of junk.

Then we get to the outer berm, outer perimeter, which is about a six foot high dirt embankment, and every square foot along that is covered by a bunker of some sort or another. Every man has a specific bunker to go to in case of an attack. These bunkers are built of wood and heavily sandbagged. Most of them have three or four foot thick walls, but even that is little protection against what some of the weapons the VC have.

But behind the bunkers on each star point is a company of CIDG forces, which means Civilian Irregular Defense Group. We have two companies that are Vietnamese and three companies that are Cambodians. Each star point, as I said, has a company of about a hundred men. They live in the star point. They man the bunkers; they pull their own watch of their

portion of the perimeter. They live there with their families, and everything they own. They build their own homes, usually right on the back of the bunker that they have to man. They own very few things, just a few eating utensils, the clothes that they have, and a couple of items of furniture, all of it handmade of course, as are their houses. They're made out of ammo boxes, pieces of tin, anything they can scrounge, sand bags. The areas themselves, from a distance, look real clean and fairly neat, despite the fact that they are bunkers that they live in. When you get up close, you can see the filth. It's hard to explain but each bunker is supposed to have a drainage ditch around it because of the monsoon season. It rains quite steadily here and water covers the whole area, so they try to drain it off. But they can't very well and as a result, all kinds of dirt and crap and everything collect. When it starts raining it will help get rid of some of this dirt, but until then, for the next couple of months, we'll just have to put up with it.

Rats run all over the place around here. We have dogs that try to help control the rat population but they can only kill so many. We have poison rat boxes set out all over the place but for some reason or another they just aren't doing the job and there's no such thing as a rat trap. We just can't get them. The Vietnamese build their own rat traps and they work to an extent, but the rats are so rampant around here you just can't keep up with them. We have some in our teamhouse but I haven't seen any yet.

I got here last Wednesday. Oh, I forgot to tell you what day it is. Today is the, I think it's the 13th, Friday. I don't know, I kind of lose track of time out here, you don't pay too much attention to it. Anyway, it's in the evening. Tomorrow morning the work chopper goes out. That's why I'm trying to get this tape out to you tonight.

Well, let's see, where was I? Oh yes, I was talking about the outer perimeter and the star points. Well, just behind each company, there's a road that circles the entire star and connects all the companies. Each company is segregated from the other company by barbed wire and bunkers, things like that. The companies themselves get along fairly well together, although the Cambodians get along with each other better than they do with the Vietnamese, and vice versa. But all of them get along fairly well with the Americans here in camp.

While I'm on that subject, we have a Special Forces A-Team here in the camp. I'm pretty sure you know what that is, otherwise Trudy can tell you about it. We're here not to command, but only to advise the Vietnamese Special Forces A-Team. They are in this camp and they are supposedly in command of this camp. Our job is only to advise them, and they command the five companies. However, it doesn't work that way. We end up doing most of the work, doing all the planning, coordination, everything. In fact it's even our money that's paying these troops out here. But, we still have to act as advisors, not really as commanders. It seems that if things

go wrong out here, it all reflects back on the Americans rather than the Vietnamese. But that's the way it is.

Okay, now back to the construction of the camp. Between that road and what we call the inner perimeter, there's a ditch. It's about six feet deep and about six feet wide. During the monsoon season it fills right up with water, but presently it's just full of junk, empty cans and empty ammo boxes, and ammo containers, canisters, all that kind of stuff and barbed wire. There's only one way to cross that, and that's a wooden bridge that leads into the inner perimeter where we have the United States Special Forces team and the VNSF, Vietnamese Special Forces. Also inside the inner perimeter we have a contingent of 105 howitzer artillery men. We have about 42 of them here, three tubes of 105mm guns, and we're pretty friendly with them. We get along real well with them, although they have their own little area that they live in, their own little bunkers and everything else. They rely on us for electricity and water. Of course, we rely on them for fire support. The Vietnamese Special Forces have their own teamhouse, their own club, their own supply room, their own medical room, as we have our own, although we do get together at times.

We don't socialize a lot together. It's just kind of frowned upon. They do their own socializing. Of course they all speak Vietnamese and we all speak English, but the Vietnamese are pretty good about picking up the English language. I can't say that about the Americans. It's kind of tough picking up their language. I know that I'm a Trung-uy, that's first lieutenant and Dai-uy is the captain. By the way, my commander is a captain. I'm, well, I'll get back to that later. There's so much I want to say I just keep skipping around.

Inside the inner perimeter we have all kinds of mortars, two big 4.2 inch mortars and two 81mm mortars. Each star point has two or three 60 millimeter mortars for themselves plus LAWS (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) and rocket launchers. We have a couple of 57mm recoilless rifles and one 106mm recoilless rifle. (I'm just blowing bugs off my arm.) Also we have our vehicles in here. We have a couple of three quarter-ton trucks and a deuce-and-a-half (2 1/2 ton truck). All of them are real decrepit, full of bullet holes and shrapnel holes and running on flat tires, all the window glass broken out of them and everything else, but they run. That's what counts. We use them for getting outside the perimeter to get to the airfield or the helicopter pad. Tomorrow I plan to take quite a few more pictures of the camp, and from the pictures you'll be able to see what the camp looks like. I know I can tell you what I see, but you'll visualize something entirely different so when you get the pictures you'll be able to see what they're like.

The place won't look as dirty on the pictures as it actually is. All over the place there's, in these drainage ditches, there's filth, just mucky, smelly water, and oil, all kinds of trash. What

the Vietnamese people don't want they just throw outside their doors into the drainage ditches and when the rains come in, it just moves it all away into the bigger ditch. But the camp, as far as sanitary facilities and everything, is pretty good. Our medic is in charge of that, and we have fairly clean latrines and shower. He takes care of the water problem and everything. We have wells that go down that go, oh maybe 30 feet or so, and we get fresh water which is lucky because in our area of operations it's real dry this time of year. Starting in about two months, we'll have the monsoons and it will get very wet. But while it's dry, one factor in our favor is that it's so dry that the Vietcong don't even come into this area very much. Because it's so dry, they can't get water to supply their troops so they just kind of stay out of our area. However, the area right next to ours is full of water, and that's where they're having most of the action right now. When the monsoons come I expect they'll be back in here, shooting up the place.

But anyway, I mentioned the airfield outside the camp. If you look on your map, Trudy, you'll see a highway running from, I think it goes all of the way from Bien Hoa to Tay Ninh. I think it's Highway 2, or 22, that runs right up to the Cambodian border. Well, our camp is right on that road. The airfield is part of that road. It's a widened section of the road. It's real rough and full of holes and everything but C-123's can make it in and out okay. Of course all of the helicopters, they don't have any trouble. We have a turn around point at one end of the runway for the airplanes, the fixed wing airplanes that come in. That serves also as the helicopter pad for the Chinooks, but we have a smaller pad for the Hueys which is right outside our camp gate. That's in case we get hit, or something, and we need some people evacuated. They can land there or right inside the inner perimeter if it's absolutely necessary. But there are so many aerals and stuff sticking up around here that it would be a little tough for a helicopter to get in and out. Like I say, if it was really necessary he could do it.

Let's see. Our area of operation must be about ten miles north and south and about eight miles east and west and running from northeast to southwest, it borders Cambodia. Of course that's where the Vietnamese, I mean the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese Army, have their camps and all their strategic launching sites for their rockets and mortars and anything like that. They are within range to hit our camp. The camp next to us (Katum), like I said, has been having trouble the last few months. In fact, every night they get about ten or fifteen mortar rounds or rocket rounds, and it gets a little discouraging after awhile, trying to sleep in that stuff and also waking up the next morning to find out what has to be repaired. Their camp is built almost exactly like ours, star shaped and everything, but because of the fact that they've been hit so much, it looks like a complete junkyard. Everything is just shattered to bits. They're living almost underground, but, like I said, they get hit every night and they just can't keep up with it all. This guy, Dale Vanderplow, was XO out there for awhile. While he was there, they were hit

with 250 rounds in one night, followed by a ground attack. They ended up killing about 190 of them or so but it was pretty rough for awhile. One star point completely gave way to the enemy. They made it inside the outer perimeter, just in that star point, until finally tactical aircraft and Huey gun ships arrived, and what they call Spooky, which is a C-47 mounted with miniguns that shoot something like 6,000 rounds a minute. It's a super-duper Gatling gun. The combined air power forced them out.

Oh, the tape is almost done, so I'll let it run out and then turn it over and continue on the other side. Like I said before, I'm the XO for this camp. My CO is a captain in rank. My duties, besides being an alternate commander is that of S-1, personnel officer and S-4, the supply officer, which keeps me pretty busy and also, funds officer. I'm the guy that's in charge of paying all the CIDG personnel in the camp. We also have a contingent of civilians working for us that act as our mechanics and cooks and house girls and that kind of stuff. Don't get all excited, they're not very good looking.

Anyway, I get about 2 to 3 million piasters a month to pay these people. One dollar equals 118 piasters. Getting everything straight, paying the people without cheating them, I should say without their cheating me, and returning the money is a real complicated job at the end of the month. It starts about the 25th of the month and ends about the 5th the following month. They fly out here with the money and the payroll, and I have to pay each person as he comes to the window, or first of all, I have to recognize the character. I have to be able to recognize his name and pronounce it and distinguish whether or not this guy really is the person he says he is. The way we've got this worked out now is they have to bring the weapon that's assigned to them to the window, and I check the weapon's serial numbers. However, when these people want to go on leave, or they get sick and go to the hospital, or they just run out of camp, they just leave their weapons behind, see. Any one of their buddies can pick up the weapon, plus his weapon, and bring it one at a time up to the window and get paid twice. I have a real tough time, or I will have a tough time distinguishing or trying to catch somebody doing this. All these people to me look almost alike, but I'll have the help of an interpreter and a couple other guys who know these people better than I do. If we spot one, of course, we tell them to get out of here. We can't punish the characters because we're not authorized to. Only the Vietnamese Special Forces are allowed to.

Another thing. These people think nothing wrong of stealing. They'll steal anything and absolutely everything they can get their hands on. They figure that the Americans are big and rich and powerful and have lots of money and everything, and can afford to lose some things. But when you get 500 people trying to steal you blind, it gets to be a real problem. These people will think of absolutely any trick they can to get something from you for nothing. Like today, I

was in the supply room and one guy came running in with a legitimate pair of fatigue pants that were torn and ragged and he wanted a new pair. So we took in his old pair and gave him a new pair and he walked outside. I happened to watch him. He walked to his house, and picked up another pair of fatigue pants that were fairly good, nothing wrong with them, and he punched a hole right through the seat and quickly came running over to cash it in for another new pair. That's the way these people will do it.

I mentioned we had a 106 recoilless rifle. I think Trudy knows what this thing sounds like, don't you hon? Anyway, when this thing fires, it makes a terrific explosion. There's about a ten man team that operates this gun. In Katum, which is the other camp that gets hit occasionally, during their ground attack, believe it or not, the team fired one round and because it made so much noise and scared them, they purposely disabled the gun so that they wouldn't have to fire again, then they all took off. That's the way these people are.

When we go out on operations, two Americans go with half a dozen Vietnamese Special Forces and about 100 or 150 of the indigenous, or the CIDG people. When we get out on an operation, this is what I've heard from the rest of the team, I haven't been out yet. When they make contact with the VC and start firing at them, these people will fire back, unless they think that the VC outnumber them, or the VC have superior fire power, or something like that. Whether or not they do is no concern to them. If they think that they're losing, every one of them will immediately get up, turn around, and run and leave you sitting there. Even the Vietnamese Special Forces will do that. They'll just get up and run. They don't care what you say, they don't follow your advice or anything. That's the problem it puts us in. We're supposed to get out there and make contact, find out what size force it is, take them under fire if we can, route them, kill them, capture them, anything we can do. If it's a superior force, we call in artillery and air strikes on them. But as soon as the Vietnamese or the Cambodians or anybody find out, or they think they're going to be on the losing side, they'll just get up and run. But, like I said, it's just the way they are.

Now, the Vietnamese Special Forces are supposed to be in command of this camp, but they aren't really. We are, although we can't come right out and say we are. At other times, when we go out on operations, we try to work our way north as far as we can up along the Cambodian border, but we only get about at the most 4,000 meters north of the camp and everybody will just quit. They'll stop right there. They won't go any farther. Although the border could be six or eight or ten thousand meters away, they don't dare get up close to the border. You can go up there alone, they'll let you go. But if you try to take one of them with you, you just can't do it. They'll chicken out. When we plan an operation, we can plan on going, say northwest 600, I mean 6,000, meters. But when we get out on the ground and actually start going in that direction,

the Vietnamese who are working the compass will work in a big circle and we'll end up right back in camp if you don't watch them.

Oh, here's a little incident. When I left Tay Ninh, which is the B-detachment area, we had a load of food that was due out at our camp. A CH-47, a Chinook, came down to pick us up and the food, and there were about 40 Vietnamese that wanted to go out to this camp too. They were a relation of the troops that were out here, or troops returning from leave, or any number of things, people coming back from the hospital, civilians, all that kind of junk. Anyway, about 40 of them wanted to get on the helicopter with about 5 Americans, plus the big satchel of food that hangs below the helicopter while we're flying. Well, the man in charge out there, who happens to be a friend of mine, another first lieutenant the S-4 (Supply) officer, told them that only 25 were allowed in the helicopter because of the weight problem. So he counted out 25, and as soon as the helicopter landed, we got on. He said okay, these 25 people go. They started going toward the helicopter, and the other 20 or 25 people picked up everything they owned and made a mad dash for the back door. So we had about 45 people with everything they owned, live chickens and pigs under their arms, baskets of food and fruit and weapons and all kinds of trash, trying to race on to the back of the helicopter. So we quickly raised the door and the helicopter took off so none of these people could get on. That's the only way we could do it. There's just no way of counting out 25 people and trying to get them on the helicopter and explaining to the rest of them that they can't go because it would cause too much weight. So, instead of taking any, we just told them that we couldn't take any. When the helicopter flew over the bundle of food so that we could get it hooked up and take the food with us, the Vietnamese wouldn't let us. Because of the fact that none of them were allowed on the helicopter, they wouldn't let us pick up the food. So we had a little trouble there. We set the helicopter back down, loaded our rifles, stepped outside and formed a little cordon around the food. We got the bundle put back together that they had torn down and got it all set to go again. So we all ran back on the helicopter, it took off, flew over the bundle and then the S-4 officer was going to hook it up. The doggone Vietnamese started shooting at him with live ammunition. So he ducked for cover and the helicopter landed again. We all went charging back out with our loaded rifles to try to find who was shooting at us, but of course they all scattered. They ducked behind boxes and trucks and any other thing out there, and you can't tell what's going on. So we had to wait there for reinforcements to arrive from the B-Team and we had about five guys with M-16s, loaded and ready to take a potshot at anybody who tried to shoot at us. We finally got off the ground with the food, but that's the way these people are. We're breaking our necks for them, but they could care less.

During the day, after lunch, everybody quits probably because of the heat or because they get full or something. It's just like an afternoon siesta. It's called poc time, p-o-c. Everybody

just goes to their own little hooches and bunkers and just sacks out for anywhere up to four hours. So all afternoon, you can't get a thing done around here. The Americans can break their necks building things, but they'll be doing it all by themselves. They can't get a Vietnamese or a Cambodian to give them a hand at all.

They're basically lazy. They won't keep their houses in very good shape unless we're after them all the time. We give them things like volleyballs and volleyball nets to play with but they don't appreciate it. They play with them for a few days and then the volleyball will be used as a target or something of that nature, or they'll let the dogs chew it up, pull the net down and make hammocks out of it, anything like that. Our Claymore mines have what's called C-4, that plastic explosive, in the back of it with little pellets in the front. The Vietnamese will sneak out at night and take the back off the mines, take all the C-4 out of it because it makes a good heating tablet. They put that in their stoves and heat their food up with it. It burns real nicely, a real hot fire that burns for a long time. They use that rather than diesel fuel in their stoves. Of course that leaves us with mines out there without any explosive charge in them. It doesn't bother them a bit. That's just the way they are.

I've got a roll of color slides all set to go home, plus the roll of black and white that's presently in the camera, so as soon as I get about four rolls I'll send it all to you. I've got a roll of Super Eight movie film. I'm hoping that somebody around here's got a camera I can use. When I was at the B-Team being in-processed, Dale (Vanderplow) had a Super Eight movie camera, and I was going to use his and take shots of the area, but I never got around to it. I was a little too busy. Everybody can start sending me letters as soon as they want to. Just address it to A-Company. I've only gotten one letter since I've been here and I'm getting mighty anxious to hear from somebody back home, let me tell you. Everybody else is getting letters and hearing from home. I haven't been getting too much yet, so as soon as anybody wants to write, I'll be willing to read, let me tell you.

The work chopper comes in here on Mondays, no, Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. That's the only time I'll be getting mail and that's the only time that mail will be going out of here. So you may get, hon especially you, may get two or three letters at one time. When you open them, read the date at the top and then try to read them in order. Everybody else, you won't have to worry about that because I'll probably only get one letter off to you every two weeks or so. Soon as you send me Dan's and Sue's addresses I'll write to them too.

There's not much I can do out here as far as going to the PX or anything like that, but when you get that PACEX [PACific EXchange] catalog you can look in there, and if there's anything you want, let me know, and I'll order it. What I have to do is send them a money order,

so what you should do is send me the money and then as soon as I get the money, whether it be a money order or check, whatever, then I'll cash it and make a money order in my name to pay for the item and then I'll have it shipped home. As far as I can tell, there will be duty on some of this stuff so when you get it you may have to pay duty. I think the back of the catalog explains how much duty it is, but even with the duty and the freight and shipping charges and all that stuff, you'll save about fifty percent on what you buy. Now cameras and stuff, you'll save about sixty-five or seventy percent, cameras and stereo equipment. I think I'll try to make as much use of that as I can.

I was interrupted for a minute there. When you write me, go ahead and ask as many questions as you want because I don't know exactly what you're interested in and it's a little hard for me to just ramble on and on about a whole bunch of stuff and not go into detail about anything in particular. I run around here during the day in shoes and pants only. I don't even wear a watch because it's so hot it just sticks to my arm. I see the tape's just about ready to run out, so I'll say hi to everybody and Trudy, pass the tape around. Let everybody listen to it. I'll try to send you more. I've got one other tape here that I can send you, and as soon as you start sending me some I'll listen to it a few times, erase it, and send it back to you full of stuff. Don't forget to send me Dan's and Sue's address and I'll try to write them as soon as I can or get a tape off to them or something. And ask Dan if he wants a watch because I can get him a real nice Seiko watch and mail it right to him right at his address. I'll pay for it and you can give Trudy the money, or whatever you want. I sure miss everybody and it's going to be a long year, I can see that. I haven't been sick or anything yet. I don't plan on getting sick. I'll try to take care of myself. Goodbye.

26 March 1969
Wednesday

I don't know if you can hear me or not, let me turn the volume up a little bit. Greetings from the camp in Vietnam. Sure was good to get your tape today. I sure enjoyed it. I'm getting a whole bunch of letters and stuff so feel at ease now; I'm getting lots of good news from home. I got one from Pete today and a couple of them from Mom and Dad. And a couple from you, besides your tape. It makes me feel real good to hear from home.

I don't know what to begin with. First of all you heard the little noise in the background. That was the mortar right over on the other side of the clear area, shooting over in the woodline. We had a little action today. I'm a little out of breath because I just climbed to the top of the

teamhouse. I'm sitting up here in the cool breeze, if you can call it that. It's coming from the south at about 10 miles an hour but it's still about 80 out, 85, something like that. But it's considerably cooler than the 110 we get in the daytime. Anyway, the mortars are just shooting out in the woodline just to kind of harass the enemy if they're out there watching us.

This morning I got in at about 8:30 from my first operation. Well, after we got into camp we ate and relaxed, I shaved. I had a good growth. I took a picture of myself and I've got one more to go on this roll and then I can put another roll in. I don't know, I've got about three or four rolls for you, so as soon as I get a few more rolls shot up I'll send you half a dozen and then you can blow some money and get them all developed and have fun looking at them all. Anyway, we got back in this morning at about 8:30. I had about 104 people with me. About three hours later we had a helicopter land with some brass from the engineering group that's coming up here to resurface our runway. At that time we were all sitting down in the club, in the teamhouse, having a meeting. All of a sudden we heard this bam, bam, bam, so we all come charging out and we took eight enemy mortar rounds. They were shooting at the helicopter while it was on the pad. The thing stops just long enough to let passengers off and then takes off again. Well, it had just settled on the ground when the first rounds landed and they missed the thing by only about 25 feet, I mean 25 yards. But still, that's enough to throw shrapnel all over the place and really give those guys quite a scare. The guy they dropped off was a lieutenant, he came charging up the road with his flack jacket on and his weapon in his hand; he dropped his hat and all kinds of stuff. Papers flying. The ol' helicopter took off out of here and he got out in time before another six rounds came in. All total, we had eight rounds land near the chopper pad. The first two rounds were close. The other six were a little bit farther away. But it was a little excitement for awhile. Then our own artillery and mortars opened up, and it's too bad I didn't have the tape ready because it sure was a lot of racket around here. We had three 105's firing into the woodline and four mortars firing to the northwest right into the area where I had come from that morning. It's crazy because in the three days I was out, we didn't see one VC, although we did see a lot of recent tracks and camouflage and paper and cans and the rice and stuff they had been eating that they left in their bunkers. But we didn't see one Charley. Not four hours after we had gone through the same area, he had come in and set up his mortars and just waited for a chopper to come in. He must know the range to the exact foot and he must have markers up by way of trees or something in the woods, with prepositioned mortar locations, so all they have to do is set up their mortar, drop a quick eight rounds down the tube, and then they move out even before the rounds start landing, so that our fire back on them is minimally effective to say the least.

If Charley was anywhere out there where those rounds landed I feel sorry for him because

we were shooting white phosphorus. When that stuff explodes it shoots that white phosphorous all over the place in about a 25 square yard area, just billows of that burning white stuff. You get that on you and it burns, and it continues to burn, and continues to burn. It just burns right down into the muscles of the body. Anyway, all three 105's were shooting into the woodline to the northwest, and the whole area was just covered with white phosphorous smoke. The mortars kept lobbing shells farther back into the woods. That's the way Charley operates. Not four hours after you go through his area, he can come in, set up, shoot at you, and turn and run again. Later on in the day we had another couple planes and helicopters come in, but no further rounds. This was the first time in about three weeks that we've been hit. Nobody got hurt or anything. I don't think the helicopter was even nicked by a piece of shrapnel. Right after they landed I went out with a bunch of other guys and we dug around where they had landed and I got my first souvenir of the war. It's a fin assembly of a Chinese Communist 82mm mortar.

I sent you a small note written on scratch paper that I wrote while I was out on the operation. I mailed that out this morning, but I want to repeat a few things and elaborate on a few more. The operation as a whole wasn't too bad. The Vietnamese run the whole thing and the Americans are along just to give them guidance, to make sure they know what they're doing, and to make sure they know how to read a map. Of course we're there to call in artillery and air strikes if need be. The Vietnamese (Special Forces) that I went out with happened to be their "Top" or first sergeant. He knew his stuff pretty well, and he had good control of the troops. We had about 50 Cambodians and 50 Vietnamese. I feel sorry for the Cambodians. They (VNSF) make them do all the hard work like lugging the radios around, but those guys are quite aggressive and are good fighters. They like the Americans, but the Cambodians and the Vietnamese don't get along. So the whole time, the Cambodians had all the rotten details like front and rear and flank security, whereas the Vietnamese could kind of lope along in the center and be relatively secure. Anyway, I made pretty good friends with a couple Cambodians and we talk by way of sign language. We get along pretty good.

Every time we stop out there in the boonies, everybody sets up. We set up a perimeter and everything. We have scouts out, listening posts, that kind of thing. All the Vietnamese quickly whip out their canteens of water and their canteen cups and start hauling out bags of rice and picking flowers and buds and leaves and everything off trees and stalks and pulling up roots. Fifty percent of their meal comes out of the jungle and the other fifty percent is the rice and dried shrimp and mackerel and Chinese noodles and all kinds of garbage. They throw it all in one big pot and make enough for about six people. They have about four canteen cups full of goulash, and each man has two or three or four bags of rice and they take a spoonful of goulash and throw it into the rice and munch on it. Every time they set up they offer us Americans some,

but we know better because that stuff will give you diarrhea. They're used to it, but we're not. As much as they eat, those people are the skinniest things you've ever seen in your life. They're all terribly skinny. But, they live on it. Apparently it's enough to keep them fairly well nourished.

They carry their share of the burden. Most of them come loaded down with steel pots, flack jackets and reams of hand grenades stuck all over them just in case they run into something. Not that they ever use them. They'd probably turn and run before they'd ever use it but they have it out there. When you get my black and white picture of what I wear out on the operation, you'll see that all I have on is a tiger suit with a tiger hat. We don't wear steel pots or flack jackets or any of that kind of garbage. It would be nice to have and I would like to take it out, but under the circumstances it just can't be done.

That jungle is so thick in places that a man of my size has to get down on hands and knees and crawl through the stuff, whereas the Vietnamese can just get by stooping or getting down on their knees alone. But boy, you just can't imagine how thick that junk is. You hear plenty of tales about jungle canopies being three layers thick and all that garbage. Well, believe me, it's true. I have to keep my shirt on all the time and the sleeves rolled down and my pants rolled down otherwise I get scratched to smithereens. Of course, carrying my weapon, which is a shortened version of the M-16, it's called a CAR-15, I don't know what they call it that for, but anyway, it's a good foot shorter than the regular M-16 and quite a bit lighter and a lot easier to handle in the jungle, but it puts out the exact same firepower and everything. I carry about 250 rounds of ammunition, a couple of emergency packets that have morphine, pills and you name it, all kinds of stuff in there, signaling mirrors, flares, et cetera, et cetera, bullion cubes and about 6 canteens, about 4 freeze dried meals, a hammock, a poncho, of course my map, grease pencil. That's about it. I travel as light as possible, but still it gets pretty heavy when you start out. Coming back in it's not too bad because you've eaten most of your food and finished off most of your water. But that jungle is real thick, and with all my gear on and my pants down, sleeves down, I sweat like a fiend. It's real tough trying to monitor your water to last as long as you have to make it last this time of year. To the northwest where I went there is no water whatsoever, so we filled up at camp, went as far north as we could, and then came charging back down to get water before coming in. We had a couple of ambushes set up but didn't gain anything. We figure that in every A-camp in Vietnam there's about five to ten percent Vietcong inside. Without anybody knowing about it, they have all the distances stepped off, they know where all the mortar pits are, all the guns are, all the ammo bunkers, communications bunker, everything. They have it all plotted, stepped off, so anytime the Vietcong want to they can just quickly set up a mortar, put those settings on it, can hit or come very close to whatever they're shooting at. Just

like today when they shot at the helicopter coming in.

Anyway, we also figure that the Vietnamese tell the Vietcong that we're coming, or the Vietcong in the camp let the Vietcong outside the camp know where our operation is going, how long we're going to be out, what area we're going to cover, what we're going to do, all of that kind of good stuff. That's one reason why we haven't made very much contact around here recently. The other day we did get a couple unconfirmed kills but, like I said, it was unconfirmed. We were out there, I wasn't, but one of the other guys was out with a group, and they claimed they saw two VC so they called in artillery on them because they were too far away to shoot at and the VC started running toward them. But the stupid Vietnamese started shooting at them while they were still a thousand yards off. They claim they shot the two VC, but they're too scared to go out there and check to see if the bodies are there. It's crazy. They had a hundred people out there and only two VC. Everybody opened up and shot their M-16s for a solid five minutes on automatic. You can imagine what that was like. If anything had been out there, it would certainly have been killed or at least wounded quite badly. One of the Americans ventured out alone, which is taboo, and saw a lot of blood and everything but he didn't stay out there long enough to look for the bodies because he didn't trust his own Vietnamese, let alone the Vietcong shooting back at him. So as it was, it was an unconfirmed two. We sent the report in, but it doesn't go to our credit because it was unconfirmed.

Okay, here I am back on the rooftop again. I just went down stairs to check with my chief interpreter, and look over the money that came in today. I've got about 2,800,000 piasters sitting down in my office safe, waiting to pay these people when the pay day rolls around. That's about a five or six day job for me and I'll be spending about 16 hours a day working on this. I've got to count all the money to begin with to make sure it's all there. Then I have to make separate envelopes for about 500 people. I'll count out each man's payroll and put it in the envelope, recount it all to make sure every piaster is accounted for. Then I have to pay each company. Then comes the rough part of trying to catch people who are going through two and three times. I just grit my teeth every time I think about these people and how they cheat and lie and steal and try everything they can to get something from the Americans. I think, well, not think, I know, our biggest job here is fighting the Vietnamese Special Forces Team and the Vietnamese companies. The Cambodians are pretty good as a whole and they seem to be very honest and I'm glad we have three companies. They try to do their best with the Americans because we treat them right and they treat us right. But the dumb Vietnamese, they'll steal you blind in a minute.

Anyway, we have our sources here in camp, and they have shown us, wait a minute, the tape's about ready to run out, I've got automatic reverse on this thing so all I've got to do is hit a button and start over again. I'll try it. Okay, here we go, now I'm recording on the other side. By

just hitting the button I reverse the tape automatically without having to turn the reel over. Anyway, we have sources in the Cambodian companies who kind of fill us in on what's going on behind the scenes, kind of like a super spook, in each company. While I was out on the operation, the captain went around and talked to some of these fellows, you know, trade them a little bit of C-rations or C-4 plastic explosive, for some information. They told us that when they first got here, the Vietnamese Special Forces Team came around and told them to pad their strength figures by at least four or five people. They also said that they would furnish these companies extra weapons so that people in their companies could take these extra weapons, with different serial numbers, and go through the pay line two or three times, to get that extra pay. In turn they would be given maybe the equivalent of five or ten dollars for doing it, and the rest, which would be about a hundred bucks or so, would be going to the Vietnamese Special Forces. Well, over the past few months, the XO before me has caught quite a few people coming through and we're to the point now where only about twenty sneak by. These people look so much alike, and have names so screwed up, that it's hard to catch them. The Cambodians will help us as much as possible to get around this, even though they're ordered to send men through two or three times. I think this pay day they're not going to do it. We'll see.

It's so complicated it's hard to explain, but the Vietnamese Special Forces have actually ordered our combat recon platoons, who live right inside the inner perimeter with us, to steal out of our supply room. In turn, they would keep maybe five percent of the stuff. The rest of it would go to Vietnamese Special Forces, who in turn would turn around and sell those items that were stolen to the companies in the outer perimeter for say five hundred piasters for a uniform, which is very roughly five dollars. You can see where the Vietnamese Special Forces are really making good on this deal. For the life of us, we can't quite pin them down. No matter what we do to secure the supply room, they'll find a way in, even if they have to blow part of our wall down. In the past it has been known to happen that the camp commander and one other U.S. man have walked up to the door of the supply room, and have it be locked, but hear somebody inside, but by the time they can get the chain off the door and get inside the man would be gone and for the life of them they can't figure out where he goes or how he gets in and out. Since I've been here, they've only broken in once and they swiped four weapons, 35 blankets, and a couple hundred uniforms and a whole bunch of C-Rations. You can see what we're up against. We spend 90 percent of our time fighting these people, trying to keep them honest and everything, but it's really hard to do.

The captain on our team has signed for 512 weapons. So far this month, we've counted weapons about three times, and have only been able to come up with 480 at most. So you can see that the rest of the weapons that are out in the camp some place are well hidden, and the way

it looks, the Vietnamese Special Forces have these weapons hidden someplace. On pay day, they will pad their strength figures, well, they do it all month, but they will issue weapons to the people who they want to go through the pay line twice under different names, with different weapons and serial numbers, to get paid. The trouble we have is, for instance, one of our companies has 107 people or so. Not one person can write. Not one person can read. About four people, well, I'd say about three different groups of four people have the same name, the exact name, and the whole company, every single man, has the same first name: Chau. Their last name's are Chau-Lan, Chau-Son, Chau-Bei, Chau-Liu, Chau-Con, Chau-San, everything. Every first name is Chau. People are so illiterate that some of them don't even know their own names, other than Chau. So we just assign them a name and when they get paid all they do is give us a thumb print where the signature should be. The noise you heard in the background was our 105, or a 105 shooting on the horizon.

Let's see. It's dark here. The moon is out, half a moon. Cloudy, a little bit cool, well, for around here it's cool. During the day it gets easily up to about 110. I'm getting a real good tan. Mostly on the upper half. I haven't been wearing shorts too much because the higher-ups frown on wearing shorts, but everyday a work chopper doesn't come then I put my shorts on and run around. It's the only way to stay partially comfortable. I've taken two showers today trying to keep cool, but you're just fighting a losing battle. I got my basketball back board set up okay and can shoot baskets for about a half hour but then I'm so tired and hot I just have to quit. It makes for a real professional, though, because the hoop is smaller than usual and the basketball is the size of a soccer ball. You have to be a real deadeye to get that ball through the hoop. But it's fun.

There goes another shot. It's crazy, when they shoot that gun you can hear the shell whistling through the air. When they shoot mortars, if you're standing right near by it, you can actually see the shell leave the tube. Right now they're shooting white phosphorous again. Come here, puppy. I have a dog up here on the roof with me. This dog's name is Dammit. Pardon the language, but that's what we call him. Anyway, they're shooting white phosphorous and they just had an air burst over on the horizon, about a 300 meter air burst. In other words, 300 meters up in the air, oh must be about 1,000 or 1,500 meters to the north of us. It's really neat. They fire here and you can hear it whistling through the air and all of a sudden, way out there in the distance, it goes pop, and you see a big fireball in the air, a big puff of smoke. It's really neat.

This tape that I'm sending you now is the second tape that I bought, so I'm not going try to answer any questions or anything on the tape. In fact, I'll probably reserve the tapes just for general ramblings and comments and things like that and answer questions in my letters because then I have more time to look it over and think about it and write down what I want, although it

is a little bit slower. I'm on radio watch tonight again from four in the morning until whoever relieves me at seven, the regular radio man, so I'll have time to answer Pete's letter, Mom and Dad's letter and everything.

Let's see, what was I going to say? Oh, this is for Dad. Tell him that in the PACEX catalog that you should be getting fairly soon, there's a pretty good selection of cameras. From what I've been able to read, the one I recommend is the Canon FTQL for about \$144 here in the PX or \$139 or something through the catalog. There goes another air burst. It looks just like fire works. There, can you hear that? I'll play back the tape and listen. Anyway, as I was saying, that Canon FTQL is a real good camera. It costs about three hundred and twenty or thirty or forty dollars in the States. It's got a F1.2, 50 millimeter lens I believe. "F" stops from 1.2 to 16, and shutter speed from all the way open for as long as you want down to 1,000th of a second, something like that, plus all the synchronizations you need for flash bulbs, electronic flashes, and all that stuff. It's got a quick loading cartridge system. It's got all the latest features. I guess you can read about it or get some information about it and find out it's a real good camera. In fact, I might even get another one just for myself, besides the one I originally planned to buy. But, we'll see.

I had to shut the tape off just for a second to think of what I was going to say next. Listen...Can't hear anything--shells are exploding way out there...Every time a chow chopper comes in, it's a big Chinook, we get out there on the turn-around point of the runway, off in the gravel, and when that baby comes in we have to get nice and close to keep the Vietnamese people from swarming onto the chopper when it lands. When that thing hovers over the landing area it kicks up all kinds of dirt and gravel. It just pelts you something fierce. It really burns. That stuff stings when it hits. Not only that but all that dust settles on your body which is completely soaked in sweat. By the time you come in you've got trickles of sweat running down through the mud that's stuck on you, and it really looks funny. Your face, back, arms, chest, stomach, legs, are just all coated with mud. That's what it looks like, actual mud. The chopper comes in and drops off a big load of food for the Vietnamese people, and of course they swarm all over the bundle. What we have to do, one of us, is jump up on the top of the bundle (another round going out) and they have a big horseshoe ring on there with a bolt going through it. Listen. Another air burst. Must be quite a ways away because it takes time for the sound to get to the mic. Anyway, we have to take that horseshoe snap ring off of there and the bolt and nut, otherwise the dumb Vietnamese swipe the nut, for some reason. We haven't been able to figure out why. They'll swipe the nut and leave everything else. Of course it's useless to us if we don't have the nut. So we have to jump up there and grab the nut. Meanwhile, the helicopter moved over and settled down and opened up its back tailgate. All the Vietnamese who are coming pile on, and we have

to jump ahead of whoever tries to get on because at the present time we are not allowing any Vietnamese or Cambodians to leave the camp until we get the weapons back that were lost. They will fight, kick, scratch, bite, push, crawl between your legs, any crack and cranny that you can find, to try to get on that chopper, whether they have a pass or not and everyone who does go on the chopper should have a pass. It's up to us, it takes a good four of us to stand on that tailgate and just push people off, except for the people that we want to get on, seeing if they have special business or something, or a pregnant woman has to get out of camp to have her baby or something like that, but it sure is a struggle.

Of course, you don't go anywhere outside of camp without strapping on a pistol or something. In my room I've got a loaded M-16, a loaded automatic carbine, plus my .45 pistol with about forty or fifty rounds around the belt, plus an extra magazine on the holster, besides the one that's in the gun. We all go charging out in the jeep, looks just like Rat Patrol. Four or five guys, or even two of us sitting on the jeep without anything on but our shorts and boots and our old flop hats to keep the sun out of our eyes, pistols strapped on our waists, and the old beat up trucks that we ride around in are full of shrapnel holes. It's a wonder that those crazy things run at all. I took a picture of one. I don't know how it will turn out, but I'm sure the picture will not do the truck justice for looking as bad as it does. It's really something to see. But they do run. It's a wonder.

The 105's are just kind of generally harassing the enemy tonight. Every now and then they'll just shoot a round up north. That's mostly where they are. It's called H&I fire, harassment and interdiction. Oh, I got back from the operation this morning and I had a real good growth of a beard and I was going to shave off just the beard and keep the mustache because the old doc downstairs, bac-si we call him, which is Vietnamese for doctor, just grew one which looks like an Errol Flynn type mustache. Everybody thought it was neat and he got me to try it out just so I could have my picture taken and sent to you. But because of the fact that we had some visiting dignitaries due in today, I shaved it off. I think I'll grow one to see what it's like, and take a few pictures and send it to you and then shave it off again. It's really too hot to have any type of growth around here. Of course you're not allowed to have beards anyway, but almost everybody grows a moustache at one time or another.

Well I see the tape is just about running out. I miss you terribly much. About all I think about is meeting you in Hong Kong and what fun we're going to have there. It will really be something. I'll submit my paperwork and oops, that's the end.

29 March 1969

Saturday

Again I'm in my favorite spot up on the teamhouse roof. Today is the 29th, Saturday night. Man, am I ever beat. It's been a long, hard couple of days getting the payroll ready and I spent all day today paying just half the camp. And believe me it took all day! You just can't imagine the problems we run into. Last pay day, before I came here, they took a picture of everyone in the camp on pay day when they came through the line to get paid, and they took all the weapon serial numbers and also wrote them down. So this pay day, when the people were coming through, we had the company commanders pick out the pictures for us and we had to compare the weapon serial numbers that the man had to the one on his card. And would you believe that two out of three didn't match? These dumb people don't keep track of their own weapons. They grab each others. They don't care, as long as they have one in their hands they think they're going to get paid. It took us four hours to pay just one company of one hundred people. That's the company with everybody's first name being Chau. We would call out one man's name and four people would come walking in to get paid. Naturally not one weapon's number matched. We had a real tough problem with that company.

It's funny though, these people, well in this particular company, they're Cambodians, they're all from the same village, they're all brothers and nephews and cousins and uncles and everything else. That's why all their first names are Chau. The company commander was the village chief and his platoon leaders were the section chiefs or whatever they are from the village. It was almost comical, but it sure was a problem. Then we have to have the man sign his payroll sheet; we have to staple his picture to the pay cards; we have to correct his weapons number. If he's got the wrong weapon we have to find the man who's got his and trade. Also, to help alleviate the problem, we've painted numbers on the stock in bold white letters, or numbers rather, so that they have fewer numbers to memorize and it would be easier for us to control the weapons.

We have definite proof that the LLDB, I mean the VNSF (Vietnamese Special Forces), is purposely padding the payroll vouchers, the daily strength report, et cetera et cetera. They do this so they can have us pay extra people. There are so many people that look alike that they can talk people into coming through two or three times. They have a stock of extra weapons from people who are sick, or on leave, or in the hospital. They try to sneak these people through. The past week and a half, well, two weeks, we've really been cracking down on people with wrong weapons, status reports, accountability ledgers, strength reports, weapons counts, and muster formations that we have, trying to get the number of weapons to match the number of people, and the right weapons to be with the right people at the right time, et cetera, et cetera. Any time

anyone goes on leave, what they had been doing up, until I took over, was just leaving the weapon in the company area. They'd get on the plane and take off. Of course we have to sign their leaves and everything. It was really getting to be a problem. We have 512 weapons signed out and we can only account for about 480 of them. I started working on accountability, and every person that goes on leave now has to turn in his weapon to me. I take down the serial number compare it to the payroll register to make sure the serial numbers match, so on and so forth, sign the receipts and everything. It's a lot of extra paperwork but it's necessary to keep these people honest.

Oh, the reason I'm sending you this tape is because last night on radio watch, I wrote letters to Pete and Paul, well, to the Fetters family in general, but mainly to Pete and Paul, and I was going to start one to Dr. VanDyken (minister) but I got involved in radio messages and stuff and didn't have time. I've been so busy these last couple of days I just haven't had the time to write a letter. So I'm sending you a tape.

Today we had quite a bit of action. I was acting CO because the captain went to the B-Team to straighten out some paperwork on this thievery we had a couple weeks ago. About ten o'clock, the operation that we had out in the field was about a thousand meters from a bombing run by the Air Force. They were set up in their perimeter. They had 104 or 105 people out. Right after the bombing run, or right during the bombing run, a company of VC ran right into them. Things were really hectic for about 20 minutes. Immediately they called in and let us know that they were being hit, and how hard, by what size, what direction and where they're located and everything and we called in artillery for them. It was quite exciting. It was my first real chance to coordinate fire support, and all that kind of stuff, for the people in the field. Let's see, it lasted for 20 minutes. They were attacked by about 50 VC that came charging right into them. They repelled the attack, well, let me start over. They had their perimeter set up and they had half of a Cambodian company, in other words 50 Cambodians and 50 Vietnamese. Well it happened that the Vietcong hit the Cambodian side of the perimeter, and the Cambodians are pretty good fighters, and they're pretty fierce. They started firing away at the VC. Meanwhile of course the VC were firing back and also dropping in 60mm mortar rounds on the perimeter. Well, the Cambodians were fighting diligently and the Americans were calling in artillery. We had a FAC which is a Forward Air Controller, that's an ex-fighter pilot up in a little spotter plane, he also coordinates the artillery, and spots the enemy and makes any corrections or adjustments in the artillery for us. Being on the ground in the jungle it's real hard to see where the artillery is landing or whether it's effective or not. So anyway, right after the VC hit, the Cambodians were fighting them off and the Americans were calling in the artillery. One of the Americans turned around to see what the Vietnamese were doing and there wasn't one there. Not a one. All 50 of

them, as soon as the shooting started, got up and turned and ran, full blast. They just picked up everything and took off in the opposite direction including the Vietnamese Special Forces man who is in charge of the entire operation. They just picked up and ran. So, as soon as they noticed that, the Americans called the Cambodians back in and said "come on, we can't stay here", so they had to turn and run too.

Ok, it's just about time to switch over so I'll switch reels and start over on the other side. Our man radioed in to say "It's impossible to control these people; the Vietnamese turned and ran like chickens. There's nothing I can do except tag along. We have four people wounded and one person killed." Well, anyway, it took a couple of hours for the Americans to stop the running Vietnamese and get them halted and take stock of the situation. The Vietnamese commander at that time told the Americans that he received orders from the camp commander here to return to base. The Americans called me to ask me if I had also received the same orders. I said, "No, I hadn't" and I walked over to the Vietnamese commander and asked him what orders he gave to his Operation Leader out in the field. He said he had given orders to remain out there, regroup, and go back and assess the damage, the artillery damage, and find out how many dead VC they could police up for weapons or anything. So I called back to the American and told him what the camp commander said, and I guess the two of them out there had a pretty good go around about who was telling the truth. Although I didn't argue the point at the time with the camp commander here, I felt that he was giving me some bum information. See, their radios are on different frequencies than ours. They get their side of the story from their man in the field, and of course we get ours from our man in the field. They know darn well that when an American calls in, he's telling the truth about what he's doing. We're wondering whether or not it was the Vietnamese camp commander here who lied about what he actually told his man in the field or whether it was the man in the field who lied about the orders he received from his company commander. But we'll determine that when they finally get back in and find out what's going on.

I know on another operation that one of the other lieutenants here was out on, they ran into a couple of VC, and immediately the Vietnamese commander, after breaking contact, the Vietnamese commander said that he had received a call from his major at the B-Team level telling them to break contact and move directly back to camp. Well, when we got here we found out that no such order had been given by the major at the B-Team, and the Vietnamese Special Forces man who was out on the operation at that time was told, that he told a bold faced lie to the American out there about receiving that order. We sent that to the B-Team and they promptly relieved the man. We'll have to follow through on this action today and find out who was lying and who was telling the truth and whoever screwed up, get him relieved or reprimanded, or

whatever they do.

The other day, I don't know if I've told you or not, but we caught, or we were informed by one of our little sneaky petes around the outer perimeter here in one of the companies, who stole the weapons and C-rations and everything out of our supply room. We policed up six people, took their names and weapons and everything and reported them to B-Team. They said okay, the next time the chow chopper comes in, send an LLDB, that's Vietnamese for Vietnamese Special Forces, it's Luc Luong Dac Biet, and anyway, their S-2 said that he would gladly take the six prisoners to the B-Team and have them put in jail or recruited in the ARVN army or whatever they do with them. So we got them on the helicopter all right. We told the S-2 at the B-Team to meet them on the pad and police up these six people. Well, as usual, when the helicopter lands on the pad, there's such a mass confusion of stupid people rushing to the helicopter trying to get on and the Americans trying to fight them off that the six people completely slipped away. We haven't the faintest idea where they went or how they got away, or anything. There was a captain there waiting for them, and he hasn't the faintest idea what happened. So we nailed the S-2 about it, the Vietnamese S-2. He said oh, the six people slipped out of the helicopter before he could keep track of them. That's all that happens and the people are free. That's usually the way it happens. We know ourselves, although we can't prove it, that the Vietnamese Special Forces S-2 just let them go, because they're buddy-buddy and all that stuff. In fact, we feel that the Vietnamese Special Forces actually told these people to break in our supply room and steal stuff and that's pretty typical.

Our trouble is that we just can't prove most of this stuff. What we have been able to prove has been embarrassing to the Vietnamese, and their higher headquarters will immediately talk to their American counterparts and explain that surely there has been some mistake down at the A-Team level and your people must be making some mistake, blaming the Vietnamese Special Forces for being conniving idiots and all that stuff. Then of course we receive a message from higher up saying, "Look you people, we know there's thievery going on and everything, but just cool it a little bit. If you do catch people, don't make a big splash about it." That's the way this whole war is. It's so stupid. It's ridiculous. It makes me mad. I get so mad; I don't know what to say. Well, I could just sit here shaking my head, that's all there is to it. I feel that the President doesn't really understand what's going on over here. Starting with my level down here on the A-Team, we are commanded by the B-Team, run by a lieutenant colonel, to pad our figures about the size of our operations out in the field by at least 50 percent. When we send out a count of actually 100 people, we say we're sending out about 150 or 170 people, because supposedly we have to have 50 percent of the camp force out on operation which you see is pretty close to 200 people. Now when B-Team gets these figures, they pad it a little bit more and

send it to A-Company. A-Company pads it a little bit more and sends it to 5th Special Forces, they're headquartered in Nha Trang (Special Forces Headquarters for all Vietnam). I'm sure they pad their figures and send it to MACV Headquarters. And he pads his figures and sends them to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and they have to pad their figures and put it on a silver platter for the President. As I understand it, nobody knows exactly what's going on over here. Man, I can tell you, things aren't right. They're really rotten. Well, the tape's about ready to run out Hon, so I'll say goodbye this time. Seemed like an awfully short tape for some reason.

5 April 1969
Saturday

Here I am with a new tape. It's good to get talking to you again after about a four day break. The reason why you haven't gotten any letters recently is because I spent from Wednesday to today, which is Saturday the fifth, in Bien Hoa and Tay Ninh taking care of my funds report, turning that in, making sure everything was okay and taking care of a bunch of other paperwork for the team. And also on a scrounge mission to get food for the next month for the team. I've got a lot to tell you about, but first I want to say I hope that the last tape that I sent turned out all right because I was in a hurry to get it out in time for the mail and I didn't even have time to check it over to see if everything recorded okay. But this time I'll listen to it after I tape it, and if things didn't turn out then I'll re-tape it.

First of all, Wednesday morning I got on a work chopper, landed here about 8:30, 9 o'clock in the morning, had my camera all loaded and everything. I was determined to get some good color slides from the chopper. So after I left here I started snapping pictures, and by the time I got to Tay Ninh, which is only about a 30 minute ride away, I had shot up a whole roll of film. It should turn out all right, but I'm not sure. I've got four completed rolls now to send you, so I'll wrap them up and send them to you pretty soon. The chopper ride was quite exciting. We stopped at Katum which is a camp next to ours; it's a few miles away. They're the ones that always get hit all the time. Well, flying into the camp it was really a shock to see the place. It was built just like ours is, although it's a little older, it should be in about the same condition. But because of the fact they get hit 20 out of the 30 days of the month, their camp looks just like a junkyard. All the bunkers and everything are caved in, and the people are living like moles. It's really a pity but that's the way things are. Everything's blown to bits, and craters all over the place. You can't imagine what a junkyard the place looks like.

I can't remember whether I got a shot of that camp or not. I don't believe I did because we

came in right at tree height which is about 100 feet off the ground. We were just barely nicking the tops of the trees. I took a couple of shots out of the chopper of trees that were just as high as we were. It was real funny to look straight out and see trees whizzing by you, and look down and ten feet below you see all the jungle and everything flying by. We landed and picked up a couple of VC suspects and the XO from that camp, and then flew to Tay Ninh. On the way in we passed over a couple other camps that I took pictures of. Lots of jungle and fields and crater holes. We passed Nui Ba Den Mountain, although it was quite hazy, I took a couple of shots of that too. I don't know how they'll turn out.

After I got to Tay Ninh on Wednesday morning, I turned in my funds report and took care of all the paperwork I had to take care of. Then Wednesday afternoon I flew out for Bien Hoa with one of the sergeants from the team that went with me. Now, our main reason for going to Bien Hoa was to buy beer, and cokes, and to scrounge food for the team. Now we had to buy a whole lot of beer because we have the engineers coming in to repair the runway along with a couple of infantry companies and we like to keep them well supplied with whatever they want to drink. Besides, we make 100 percent profit on whatever we sell. So I went about my best scrounging methods and believe me, after a day and a half down there I think I accomplished more than anybody's ever accomplished from this team.

First of all, bright and early Thursday morning, I procured a "semi-tractor-trailer-truck," a big flatbed job, you know, the biggest the Army's got. I scrounged a Vietnamese driver and he and I and the sergeant I was with took a 15 minute ride to where they store all the beer and stuff. We proceeded to buy, now listen to this, 480 cases of beer and pop. That's five pallets of beer and one pallet of Pepsi. Man, that filled up the back of that truck. That was about \$1,160 worth, and we carried all that cash on us to pay for it. That's the only way to do it. We paid, I don't know what it figures out to per case or per can, but for 80 cases, which is one pallet load, of premium beer we pay \$200, which is a pretty good price. Then we make about \$450 off of it. So we make a little over 100 percent profit. The business is real good because if the Americans don't buy it, then all the CIDG around here will. Well, after I scrounged the truck and we went over there and picked up all the booze and stuff, we brought it back and I made arrangements down there with some people to get it loaded on a plane and airlifted out of here as soon as possible. I also bought a case of cigarettes, a case of cartons, which are 60 cartons of cigarettes. We also make 100 percent profit on those. By the end of this month, we should have about \$3,000 in our team fund, profit, because all the beer and everything is paid for.

That took care of most of my morning, Thursday morning. When I did have a little free time, I was out bumming a jeep off of somebody so that I could go around and bum food off the mess sergeants. It takes a little gall, I guess, to just walk up to any old mess sergeant and say,

"Hey sergeant, I'm out scrounging food for my team. Got anything you'd like to give away?" And usually you sit down and chew the rag with the guy for awhile, with a pitcher of iced tea in front of you, you know, you have to B.S. a little bit and tell him stories about how you're starving and everything. Well, it was true during this past week. Aside from eating C-rations and LRP-rations (Long Range Patrol), we had bacon, tomato, and onion sandwiches for breakfast because that's all the food we had. So after giving him the sob story, the guys would go to their stock room and dig out a number of cases of odds and ends that I could throw in the jeep and bring back with me. Well, at the end of an afternoon, I had three complete jeep loads of food. I didn't get very much meat but I got a lot of everything else. I was surprised that I got so much, and so was everybody on the team when I called that evening and said that I have a big pallet of food coming in. I was a little disappointed that I couldn't get any meat. Well, anyway, I decided I wasn't going to give up, I was going to keep trying and see what I could come up with.

So after spending all day Thursday getting the beer and the food, Thursday night I went about scrounging up some sports equipment for the team. One of the guys in particular requested some weights so that we could lift weights. So, after scouting around, I spied a weight lifting room that had two bars and about three sets of weights, and pads, and all that kind of stuff laying around, and a nice regulation size basketball hoop. So when nobody was looking I took a big box and moved in and about 2 minutes flat I had about 125 pounds of weight in the box, plus the basketball hoop. With that much in that box I had to walk through the company area and stow it in the warehouse area, or the flight line area, where we stack everything that is coming out to the camp. I had to be nonchalant about it so I wouldn't attract any attention to myself. Man, if you try carrying 125 pounds in a cardboard box through a company area without attracting attention, it's hard to do. I had a real sore shoulder after accomplishing the feat, but I managed to do it.

I hid the weights in the cab of a truck overnight until I could get time to wrap it with steel bands and strap it to a pallet and put it on our flight line with A-323 marked all over it. But I managed, not only that, and the basketball hoop, I got a basketball, a football, a softball, some gloves, a badminton set, bunch of tennis shoes. I got a nice pair of size 9 white basketball shoes for myself to wear now. Let's see, I guess that's about all in the sports equipment that I got. I think I'll take a picture of this homemade hoop that we have in camp right now, just to see what we used before I put up the new hoop. You can get some idea of how we scrounged up materials for a basketball hoop, at least temporary. Maybe tomorrow or the next day I'll put the regulation size hoop up and use the basketball that I got. It was kind of fun scrounging all that stuff.

Oh also, Thursday during the noon break, everybody knocks off from 11:30 to 12:30 and the entire warehouse area and storage area back there was all empty. Everybody went to eat and they locked everything up. So I decided to skip lunch that day and wandered back there to see if

I could find anything the team might be able to use. You know, pick it up and wrap it in some kind of container and kind of camouflage it and stick it on our flight line so that it would get out to the camp eventually. We were hurting for sandbags, so the first thing I spotted was a pallet with 5,000 sandbags on it. So I wrapped it up with that steel band, that steel tape, and clamped it and latched it to a pallet, and I found a Vietnamese who was sacking out in the shade, so I woke him up and told him to get in the Hi-Lo and pick that up for me and put it on my flight line. At the end of the hour, I had sandbags, I found an air conditioner sitting out in the yard there I thought the team might think that would come in handy, so I lashed that on to a pallet and stuck it in there. Also, I got the set of weights out of the cab truck and let's see, that was Friday. But between the two days, I got everything I could possibly scrounge, swipe, hid, lashed down, marked for A323 and got it stowed on the flight line. What they do, the man in charge of the flight line isn't really in charge of what comes on it. He's just in charge of making sure that everything gets out and tallying up the weight so they can make maximum loads out to the camp. Well it ended up that we had about five full planeloads of junk, after I got my six pallets of beer and everything else that I scrounged, on the flight line. Things were stacked so high and so deep that I had to take some great big canvas tarps and cover everything so that nobody else would see it and swipe it. I left the sergeant I was with, with the food. He stayed there an extra day to guard it with his life. He packed that on a pallet and got on the plane with it to make sure everything got out here okay.

In the meantime, while he stayed at Bien Hoa from Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon, I went back to Tay Ninh, scrounged another jeep, and went around from mess hall to mess hall trying to get some meat. In a matter of an hour or so I got about 30 packages of frozen hot dogs, about ten pounds of hamburger, and a big roll of Canadian bacon. So it wasn't too bad. I went back to the club that evening to get a Coke and there was this sergeant sitting up at the bar, so I sat down next to him and we started talking. He casually mentioned that he was out looking for some chicken wire. So my brain started clicking again and I realized that we had a lot of chicken wire out here and we had plenty we could spare. So I said, "Hey Sarge, I know where you can get some chicken wire." Right away he was interested and everything, so I told him that I could get him six rolls of chicken wire if he could get me some meat for the team. So we shook hands on the deal and he took off and I took off. I phoned a radio message back here and told the team to have six big rolls of chicken wire out on the chopper to backload when I came in the following day and in turn I'd have some more meat for them. So the sergeant came back that night with a truckload, or a jeepload, of meat, and I told him that the chicken wire would be coming in on the Chinook, back loaded from our team the following Saturday afternoon. So when I left this afternoon from Tay Ninh on the chow chopper, I made sure that the chicken wire got back on the chopper and went back to Tay Ninh for the sergeant. Now we're

all set for food for the next month.

I had a steam bath, let's see, Thursday night. I'll tell you about that a little bit later. The next thing I want to tell you about is a record player that I bought. It's not a record player as such. It's called a turntable. It's an automatic turntable called a Synclab95 made by Garrard of Great Britain. The price in the States is about \$130 for just the turntable alone. It doesn't put out any noise or anything. All it does is turn the record and of course picks up the sound off the record and transmits it to the amplifier. This is the best turntable made. I got it for \$76, got it all wrapped and insured and it went out yesterday and it will be going by surface mail so I don't know how long it will take to get there. So when you get it you can unpack it and look at it, but whatever you do, don't try plugging it in to see if it works or try to put it together, or anything. What I would like to have you do is just take it out and look at it, ooh and aah over it, or say, "Gee, what a waste of money" or whatever you're going to say, and then just put it back in the box and wrap it up and keep it in the den or something for me until I get home. Oh, and I also sent you another little box with a little surprise in it, but I'm not going to tell you what that is. I sent that by airmail so it shouldn't take more than a week, or a week and a half, to get to you. I bought two Seiko watches. One is all stainless steel with a black face, and one is a gold one like mine with a better band, one that won't lose its gold plating like mine does in all this heat and sweat over here. They're two beautiful watches and I didn't have time to send them yet. I've got them all wrapped up here back at the teamhouse with me, so next time I go in, or somebody else goes in, I'll have them send it out. Course it may be a month, but at least I'll have them.

I ordered one of those funny looking Vietnamese dress things for you. I don't know what they're called. It's called an Arial or Arias, or Aria, I don't know, some crazy thing like that. It's going to have black pants and a purple little flap thing, you know, blouse and flap, whatever you call it. I told the lady all your measurements and everything, and paid for it. It only cost like eight dollars or so. They're already paid for. Next time I go to Bien Hoa, I'll have to pick it up or get somebody else to pick it up for me, and then I'll send it to you, so it will take at least a month yet. I see the tape's about ready to run out so I'm going to reverse it.