

8-31-1969

## Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 14

David Fetters

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### Recommended Citation

**Repository citation:** Fetters, David, "Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 14" (1969). *Dave Fetters Audiotape Transcriptions*. Paper 14.  
<http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/fetters/14>  
August 31, 1969.

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Tape #14 31 August Continued

...He goes overboard, he acts like a little baby, trying to get everything just right, got to please the general. Boy, you've never seen such a bunch of, what a farce. What a waste. Can you imagine that? I'd be so ashamed to have a job like that if I made the Army a career. I'd say, "Shove it." I couldn't put up with that kind of crap. That's the way this stupid place is around here.

So I sit in on his briefing until 5:30 and then I go home again and stay in the TOC until the night crew comes on at 6:30 and then I eat from 6:30 to 7. I get all of from 7 to whenever I feel like going to bed to myself but since I have to get up at 5:30 I'm usually in bed by 10. So if I'm lucky I get three hours to myself. It takes me a half an hour after I get back from dinner to take a shower and get cleaned up, take all the crap out of the pockets of my uniform from that day and put it in the uniform for the following day. Of course I also am supposed to wear spit-shined boots and pressed and clean uniform and all that junk. Since I get it done for nothing it's no great pain to change every night.

Then from 7:30 to 10 I either sit in my room and read and listen to the radio, or write letters and listen to the radio, or I go to bed early, or I go down to the Officer's Club downstairs and watch a movie. Usually I watch the movie because during the dull parts of my job during the day got math books I can study. I got pocketbooks, magazines, newspapers, that I read just trying to keep from getting so bored. Although the S-3 and everybody else, the stupid XO and the Deputy Commanding Officer and the Commanding Officer, you know, when they come in you have to act busy and look busy and all that stuff. Typical Army, you know. If you don't have a thing to do in the world, at least you have to pretend you're busy. You have to act busy. That's one of the toughest jobs there is going. Everybody admits it around here. They say if you don't have a thing to do, just look busy. Just act busy, you know, pretend. That's how idiotic the Army is getting these days. I don't know how it was back in the old days but this is downright stupid. They don't do anything. Especially back in the States.

Boy, that was terrible back there, that job I had at Bragg. You know, just trying to stay busy. Of course all the NCOs in the office too, they were the same way. Had to stay busy, had to do something. Then they have the gall to say, "Well shoot, we're not getting paid enough. When are we going to get a pay raise?" and all that junk. For what little they get, I mean for what little they do, they sure get a lot, PX privileges, free hospital, medical, dental, eye care, free housing, all that stuff, free education. I don't know. Then these people just have the gall to stand there and say that we aren't keeping up with the rest of the civilian population in pay raises and stuff like that. Heck, look at how much money I'm sending home right now. Even back at Bragg, look

at how much money we were making. I wasn't doing anything really. I spent seven or eight months at Bragg just sitting around the S-2 shop, doing nothing. Oh boy, anyway, that's the way it goes.

At least I'm glad I'm in the Green Berets instead of an American unit. 'Cause we're allowed to drive our own jeeps. No officer is allowed to drive any vehicle in any of the other units. You got to have a Spec4 drive you wherever you've got to go. No one is allowed off their base after dark at night. Like for example last night, one of the guys in the S-3 shop, a captain, is leaving. He's going home. So we decided to have a little get together and there's a Chinese restaurant at Long Bien which is about a 10 minute drive away. So we all jump in the jeep and went over there and had a nice Chinese dinner, you know, kind of a little going away thing. This was 8 o'clock at night. Coming back we were about the only vehicle on the road. Nobody else out. I don't know, I just like having more freedom than most other people. I enjoy it. So, that's my job. That is daily, seven days a week, month in and month out. It wouldn't be so bad if they had two officers as liaison officers and then we could take turns, you know. Even if they require both of us to be there all day, at least one of us could take an afternoon off occasionally and go to the PX or bookstore, library, hobby shop, any place like that.

But I know what you're thinking, you and everybody else that listens to the tape, you're thinking "Well, at least you've got a nice safe job. You've got better food, better facilities." I agree, but boy I have never been so bored in my life. It's terrible. It's great being here and knowing that you're not going to get shot at and you're relatively safe. But boy the next three months are just going to drag and drag and drag and drag and drag.

Maybe by now, hon, you know that I've got that letter from Michigan State, and by the time you get this tape it should be in Nha Trang. I've got to thank your mother for making copies. That was a very smart thing to do, because the Army is notorious for losing things as you well know. But submit this paperwork and if they happen to lose the letter then I've got a couple of other ones I can fall back on. I hate giving them the original copy but I think I will.

Okay, here I am on the other side. As you know, I was scheduled to be what's called the S-3 Air, but we got a couple new captains in and one of them bumped me of my job so I ended up being TOC Duty Officer and he's S-3 Air. But I did get down to the runway and had our GLO, which is the Ground Liaison Officer for the Army working with the Air Force. I had that man show me around. We saw some F-100 fighters. They were loading bombs on them and stuff. Got to see what a 500 and 750 pound bomb looked like, napalm, rockets, cluster bomb units, like little hand grenades, miniguns, 20mm cannons. I got to sit in the cockpit of an F-100 and an A-37 jet. We watched them land and take off and pre-flight checks and all that stuff.

We saw all the different other kind of aircraft they had down there, three or four different

FAC planes. They had a 01-Birdog, and U-10s. They had OV-10s and a Piper-02 it's called, and Spooky gun ships which are C-47s or DC-3s to you, and C-119s. They carry miniguns, usually three each. They have F-100s, F-5s that the ARVNs use. Not the ARVNs, but the Vietnamese Air Force, A1Es which are propeller driven, also flown by the Vietnamese Air Force.

They had a U-2 plane. Boy is that a weird looking thing. Man, it looks so sneaky and just a typical spy plane. It's painted flat black and what few letters and numbers are painted on it, are painted red. It just looks like a sneaky thing. It reminds you of a black spider or something. It's got real long, tapered, skinny wings, like a sail plane, real long skinny body. It's only got one set of wheels right under the canopy and it lands on that one set of wheels. When it lands it has a little truck that runs out under the wings, one of the wings, and it catches the wing tip. That's how they keep the plane from flopping over. It's a crazy way of doing things but that's the way they do it. So they had that sitting in the hangar. I'd seen it land about three days earlier and sure enough, there it was. And... not to mention all the C130s, Caribous, 123s that are sitting around and what's called Freedom jets, those big DC-8s and all that bring new troops in and take people who have been here a year back home. They had a couple of those sitting around, you know, Pan-American or Flying Tiger Line or I don't know, American Airlines. So, they look nice. I envy anyone getting on a plane like that. When we were there they were just loading one. All these guys, you could just see how happy and relieved they were and excited to get out of there. So even if you didn't know the guy next to you, boy you just struck up a conversation, just start talking to each other about how nice it is to get out of the country and get on the Freedom Bird and go back home. You can see them just looking around, just smiling at everybody.

But very shortly it will happen to me. It makes me feel bad right now because the officer whose place I'm taking leaves in 27 days. The captain we had the Chinese dinner for is leaving today, also out of the same office, and the S-3 who is also a captain got his orders yesterday with a 40 day drop. The captain is going back to Benning to get into that nine-month career officer's course. They gave him a 40 day drop so that he could get into class early rather than waiting until January when the next class starts. Boy, he was just sitting there in his office and somebody brought his orders in and said, "Hey, you got your orders." He looked at him and said, "Oh, yeah." He thought he was getting out at the end of October, you see. But his orders said 14 September. I was there when he read his orders. He said, "Oh. Getting out 14th of September. That's about right." I said, "September or October?" He looked again and it was September and he thought it was October, you know. He read September but it didn't register. He was fully expecting it to say October, so September didn't register. Then when he realized, boy he jumped up out of his chair and started running around telling everybody. He's got less than two weeks before he leaves country now. He's all excited.

Scully will be coming in tonight to take over in the S-3 shop. He'll be assistant S-3 actually because he's a young captain. He doesn't have enough experience yet to take full command of all Special Forces operations in Vietnam. So they'll probably have a senior captain or a major come in as S-3. Let's see. What else?

All the time around here you hear these jets taking off, their afterburners and everything blazing away. I've got one of these old fans sticking out of the middle of my ceiling, you know one of those big things you see in old restaurants? So that helps keep my room cool. If it gets much hotter around here, which I'm sure it will before too long, I'm going to roast without a fan or an air conditioner or something. But this is winter right now, and the temperature hovers at about 90 degrees or so. Of course the humidity is way up there because it rains daily. But around, probably October, it will quit raining and turn back into summer. Then the temperature will soar to 100, 110 degrees. Man, it's going to be rough, I know it.

We have stupid 155 howitzers right in back of the barracks here and every now and then occasionally in the middle of the night they'll start firing. You can't imagine the concussion that thing makes. It shoots right up over the top of our barracks here, the officer's barracks, billets. The first night I was here, the fluorescent light above my bed fell out, bounced off the bed, landed on the floor and broke into a million pieces. Five of those perforated tiles they use for soundproofing in ceilings, five of those things fell out of the ceiling. Two of them landed on the bed while I was lying there and three of them landed in other places. But boy, every time those stupid guns fire I get stuff falling off my shelf, pictures falling over and ceiling caving in. Needless to say it wakes you up in the middle of the night.

So far I've seen, let's see, any good movies? I saw "Rosemary's Baby." That was weird. "The Bible," was scheduled to be shown, is scheduled to be shown shortly. "The Bible," and "Anzio." I don't know. The movies don't mean too much to me because I can see a movie one night and then the next night forget what I'd seen the night before. It's just some place to just sit down and relax quietly, lounge. I usually kind of doze in the chair while I'm watching the movie. That finishes about quarter to 10, 10 o'clock and I just come up and get in bed, go to sleep. That's my day, really.

Today, however, Scott Peterson, he works down in S-1, he's a second lieutenant. He and I are going to hit all the bookstores, the libraries, the hobby shops and stuff around here to find something to do, you know. To find things to keep us busy, we're going to get, well I'm going to get books on logarithms, trig, algebra, calculus, you know everything in math that I can find and just start pouring over all those books again. Get five or six of those books. That'll keep me busy for a long time. Plus I've got paperbacks here to read. I've got three High Fidelity magazines that I've gotten in the mail for free. They're complimentary copies. Of course, they send you these little notifications after each magazine "Now that you've received a copy of our

magazine how would you like to sign up for a year” and that kind of stuff. So I got three of those to look at. It's interesting. It's about, well, high fidelity things, stereo equipment. So I read those thoroughly from cover to cover. I do have access to Dune Buggy magazines now, so there's no need for you to send any.

21 Sept. [about]

Today out at Thien Ngon they had another doggone incident out there that kind of shook me up. You remember Holck, my good buddy, the demo sergeant? He's the one I probably have in some of my motion pictures, maybe not. I know I've got pictures of him. You've heard me talk about him a lot. Spec5 Holck. I call him Wes. He and I were excellent friends out there at Thien Ngon. Today, he went out to meet an aircraft on the turn around point like we've done hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of times, the same way we've always done it. He'd gone out in the truck, you know, with maybe a civilian or two or a couple of other people and helped unload the plane or anything else that was necessary. Right after he left the plane, was walking away from it, an enemy squad started shooting small arms, automatic weapons, B-40 rockets and mortars at him. A doggone B-40 rocket landed right next to him and just, just critically injured him.

He was medevaced out of there. According to Sergeant Ingram who was up on the mountain and who was monitoring the whole thing he said he's in critical shape in the hospital. He's alive and they expect he'll live but he's just perforated with shrapnel. He's in real bad shape. One civilian was killed. That's about all the information I have on it right now. Ingram's keeping me posted.

As I was saying, Ingram who works up on the mountain now and I correspond daily. Of course I work in the TOC and I have direct communications with him. Holck, Ingram and I used to be a real close threesome out there at Thien Ngon. We were best of buddies and we always did things together, we goofed off together and worked hard together. So we're both deeply concerned with what's going on. Boy, when that report first came in, immediately, when the report first came in they said a US was critically injured, critically wounded. Immediately I got on the horn and called out there and tried to find out who it was, and when I found out it was Holck it was such a, I don't know, a kind of a blow, you know? I mean it really shook me up because this guy was a real good friend of mine, and not only that, but shoot, it was something I had done daily for the six months I was out there and that same thing could have happened to me so easily. It just didn't. I'm lucky, grateful, thankful that it never did but also I'm quite upset about hearing that it happened to him. He's already been wounded once and spent a month and a half in the hospital in Okinawa. I feel sorry for the poor guy.

I got word from the hospital that although he is seriously wounded he'll be, he'll pull

through okay. Well, that's about all I got. They said he'll live, but he must be in awful shape. Let me tell you those B-40 rockets are terrible things. They are just terrible. Ed Scully's got one, a rocket that was dismantled, taken apart, all the explosive and everything taken out of it, and he said he'd give it to me as a souvenir. So I'm going to try and bring it home to show you what it's like. It's a pretty good size outfit. Well, let's put it this way. If one of those B-40 rockets hits an APC, it will wipe it out. So now you know approximately what those things will do. Those are the things that they shot at me when I was out there in contact. We had about 20, 25 of them shot at us. They are just one h of a nasty weapon. Boy, they make just a horrendous explosion when they go off nearby and they throw shrapnel all over the place. That's what got him. Apparently one landed real close to him. Man, I just can't keep from thinking about it. He was a real dedicated character, a real hard worker. Oh man.

Anyway, it upset me quite a bit. I'm going to try to keep track of where he's going, what hospital he's going to end up in. I'm quite sure he'll be medevaced back to the United States. If he spends some time at Fort Lewis. Like, in a serious case they send you to Japan and operate, take all the shrapnel out, everything like that, sew him back up. If he's still quite bad, they'll send him to the hospital at Fort Lewis, Washington, which is one of the best Army hospitals in the world. They keep him there until he's recovered enough to start therapy and everything else, and then they'll put him in a hospital of his choice. You know, if he wants to go back to Fort Bragg or you know, maybe near his home. He's from San Francisco so he might just elect to stay right there at Fort Lewis, Washington. In a way I hope he does, because then when I process out of the Army in December I'll be able to stop in and see him. By then he should be in fairly good shape. Oh boy.

What a rotten deal, man, that's really sickening. He's already suffered enough. He got a piece of shrapnel in his wrist before. Went right through his wrist and the palm of his hand. He's lost all his nerves in his little finger on his right hand, part of them in his ring finger of his right hand. He has a little trouble manipulating those and he's got scars and stitches on that arm already. Now this happens. He's already got one Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for heroism and here he gets another Purple Heart, more scars and suffering and everything. Oh well.

Doggone lousy war anyway. Man. I'm just happy I'm not out there anymore. Only another 87 days and I'll be able to get out of this place. Boy, what a waste, too. All these troops being killed, all the Americans. See, I have to listen to the briefing every night. I'll get to that in a minute about what my job is, but part of it is listening to the briefing, the general's briefing every night. III Corps commander, he's a three star general. Daily they give the American losses, the wounded and killed in action, and then they give a weekly summary every week. Then they compare these to the Vietnamese figures. They show them every possible chart and combination of figures that they can possibly come up with, which is good. At a glance it tells you everything

rather than just have some guy stand up there and drone on about figures and everything. But, doggone it, looking at that chart of friendly wounded and KIA, I mean US wounded and KIA compared to Vietnamese wounded and KIA, it's just absolutely disgusting and sickening. In every category, the US figures double, at least double those of the Vietnamese! I couldn't believe it when I first saw it, but there are twice as many Americans being killed and wounded than there are Vietnamese. These people are so doggone sorry. I just grit my teeth when I think about it.

They've got a great big III Corps map up on the wall and the Vietnamese units are all clustered around large cities and stuff. Nowhere do you find a Vietnamese unit out in the boondocks where Charley is. Heck no. Only American units are out there. There's not one Vietnamese unit anywhere near the Cambodian border, of course not. The Americans are up there. I'm speaking strictly of American units. I'm not talking about CIDG now. American units are operating up around the border but no ARVN Army units, no Vietnamese Army units are up there. We've got people like I say, like CIDG, but the only reason why they're out there is because they don't want to go out into the ARVN Army. That's a sad state of affairs. Well, I can't go into detail about that. A lot of it's classified so I'll just end here.

Boy oh boy, this war cannot end too soon to suit me and of course millions of other people. It's really a rotten situation. Well, let's get down to my job. I don't know what all I've told everybody or how much information has been disseminated but I'll give you my schedule first. Daily, seven days a week, day in, day out, I get up at quarter to six. I'm in the mess hall by ten after six. I'm at work by 6:30. From 6:30 to 7, I have the sit rep (situation report), the ground commander sit rep, the operations report and briefing notes that I have to break down and categorize and get ready for dissemination when I go over to Second Field Force Headquarters, plus all kinds of other intelligence summaries and anything that S-1 or S-4 might have. In other words, anything at all, any kind of correspondence between our headquarters and our higher headquarters which is Second Field Force Headquarters, I organize, put into my little briefcase, grab my TOC pass, hop in my jeep and buzz over there about 7 o'clock in the morning. It takes me about an hour in the morning. I have to go to the Distribution Center, pick up stuff, drop stuff off. I go down into the TOC, I go to the Liaison Officer's office and I disseminate a whole bunch of stuff there, pick up stuff for Special Forces. I go see G-2 Targets, I see G-3 Air, I see AAE, which is in charge of all the helicopter assets in III Corps, I see FSCE which is in charge of trail dust missions, defoliation missions. I see the G-3 operations officer, which is a colonel.

In fact, the only people I deal with are majors and colonels over there, a couple of clerks and jerks and flunky captains who are runners. That's about what it is, a miniature Pentagon down there. Man, I've never seen so much brass conglomerated in one spot at one time in my life. I go see G-2 Operations. That's about it for the TOC. I leave the TOC and I go to G-2 Distribution both pick up and delivery. I go to G-3 Plans. I go to R&E, which is Research and

Evaluation, and then I go to MACV Headquarters which is Military Assistance Command Vietnam. MACV is an overall command of everything that goes on in Vietnam. Under MACV in III Corps is Second Field Force, commanded by a three star general. General Abrams, who's the commander of all Forces in Vietnam, is the MACV commander.

I go to MACV, pick up some more stuff, drop some more stuff off. I buzz over to the motor-pool and pull what's called "motor stables" on my jeep every morning. In other words I got to check the oil and the water and the lights and the battery level and all that garbage, the gas. Then from there I go back and disseminate all the garbage that I picked up from Second Field Force. Then I go up to the TOC and I spend from 8 o'clock in the morning to 4 o'clock in the afternoon in the TOC.

The TOC is the Tactical Operations Center. That's the hub of all the activity for all of Special Forces and all of III Corps. We monitor everything that goes on as far as Special Forces operations. Everything that takes place in almost everybody's field, we deal with everybody, mostly S-3, naturally. A lot of S-4, a lot of air operations, training, all that kind of stuff. Everything that comes and goes almost invariably comes and goes through the TOC. So I have a pretty good command of what's going on in all of III Corps at any one time, in any camp, in any location, anything that has to do with Special Forces. It is my duty, along with the two NCO's that work in there with me, to make sure that the appropriate staff is notified of what's going on, to disseminate all the information that comes in through the TOC, and we are the agent by which all the other staffs disseminate their information to the various teams and things.

We are not actually a commo center. We have a signal in commo center that does all the regular traffic and stuff but if, but in the TOC we also have commo facilities. We have three different radios that we monitor all the time. We have four regular telephones. We have three field telephones and a switchboard of about a dozen other outlets to various sections, various headquarters, all over the place. At any one time, when there's something going on, it's not at all unlikely to see one man with a telephone in each hand and all three of us in that particular, what's the word I want, state, I guess. But when things happen like when a camp is being hit at night or during the day when a Mike Force is in contact, they call in and ask for air support. It goes through us, we notify the S-3 section, of course the S-3 is a major, monitors what's going on, he makes the decisions but we are the ones that make his decisions work. We notify the appropriate peoples, we ask for appropriate air support, give them coordinates, location, times, situation, everything.

When things are going, that place is really hot. Usually all three of us and sometimes four of us are in on the act of monitoring phone calls, making phone calls and like I said, it's easily possible to have four men in there and two of us with a telephone in each hand, and the other two guys engrossed in conversations over the radio or telephones with other headquarters.

We get everybody involved. We've got an Air Liaison Officer, who's an Air Force major working up there with us. Of course we have the S-3, the assistant S-3, the S-3 sergeant, me, a couple of clerks who are busy running messages down to the com center, bringing messages up, contact reports, spot reports, admin reports, sit reps, everything else. That thing, that TOC, is a beehive of activity when there's things going on.

When there's nothing going on, you'd be surprised at how dead it gets. It really gets boring. In fact, we sit in there, we have a radio. We have magazines and newspapers that we read, you know, just to keep us from going crazy. See, we have our high and low spots. I'm not sure if you've paid much attention to any articles that may have mentioned high spots and low spots, you know, and enemy activity picks up and drops off.

Last week we were in a high spot. The enemy was initiating many contacts. The friendlies were also initiating many contacts. But then about twice a month you get a high spot and also twice a month you get a valley, a low spot. Last week was a high spot and all week long we were busy, real active. The days just flew by, well, not flew by, but they were busy enough so that they seemed shorter than they actually are. We were quite busy and then this week, things have slacked off. The Mobile Strike Force has come in for a month long stand-down. They've come in out of the field. They are no longer in any type of operational position, they're being refitted, retrained, regrouped, everything else. When they are out of the field, the only people we really have to contend with are the camps. Normally the camps are relatively quiet. It's not as if every operation that goes out from every camp makes contact. That's not the case.

Today the only thing of any significance that happened was the fact that Thien Ngon had that little action up there, that was the only thing. Actually there wasn't anything we could do. They got their own medevacs from Tay Ninh. They didn't have to come through us. They didn't request any air assets or anything. They took the enemy under fire with their own organic weapons in camp, artillery and mortars. And that was that. We get routine medevacs called in through the TOC daily. It only takes a minute or two's work.

When I first got in the TOC I was overwhelmed at the amount of things that I had to learn, but boy after two weeks on the job I knew about everything there was to know about the job because, they said, "Okay sir, the quickest way to learn is to sit down behind the desk and handle everything that comes in." That's exactly what I did. The other two just sat there and if I needed their assistance, I asked for it, otherwise I did everything. I learned fast. We handle all the B-52 strikes, well, we monitor all B-52 strikes in all of III Corps to make sure that none of them are too close to our camps or too close to troops or anything like that. There's a myriad of things that have to be done. Just, it goes on and on, all the little details and the plotting of operations. Every night all the operations have to phone in their Remain Overnight Positions. We plot them on the maps, and combat sky spots which are radar controlled night bombings of

intelligence targets and pre-planned air strikes, and of course B-52 strikes. All kinds of stuff. That lasts until 4 o'clock at which time I, again, make a trip to Second Field Force, hit all the same things I hit in the morning, and at 5 o'clock I go to the general's briefing. Well, I get there about quarter to 5.

The major, who's the S-3 briefer, is the man that I brief. I brief him on the day's activities and all that kind of stuff. Then he turns right around and in 15 minutes time digests everything that I tell him and briefs on everything that goes on in all of III Corps plus what I had just given him. He does that without a mistake. I'm telling you, that guy is something to listen to. There are two majors, actually. One deals with strictly ARVN elements, one deals strictly with US elements. That guy's spiel is about 20 minutes long and he whips through that stuff without making one faltering sentence or line or mistake or anything, of course he does it twice a day. He's got all the American units memorized, where their locations are and boy he just whips through that stuff. You've never hear a guy talk so fast, so fluently. Boy he just spits out those unit designations and everything and flies through it all. It's interesting to listen to for a couple of times, after that it gets a little boring. That lasts anywhere from 40 to 60 minutes or so. I sit through that briefing.

Every day they go through the S-2 portion of the weather, the S-3 portion where all the units are operating, what they're doing, how many people, how many elements they have out, all the contacts that took place during the day, the equipment lost, the people wounded, killed. Then they have a portion on, well, everyday of the week they have something different. Like, Friday is when I brief the general on Special Forces operations. Thursday the S-4 has a portion, I don't know, the S-5 takes a portion. MACV has a portion on revolutionary development and hoi chanh [NVA who defected to US side] and all kinds of stuff. It's somewhat interesting.

Boy, that place is something else too. They've got, oh let's see, five generals, about fifteen full bird colonels, about 20 lieutenant colonels, about ten, twelve majors, two or three captains, and then there's me. I'm the youngest, or the lowest ranking man in that place. I get a lot of good natured ribbing by everybody, and I'm making a lot of friends higher up, not that they'll do me any good later on. It makes me feel good to have lieutenant colonels say, "Hi, Dave, how are you doing this morning," or "There's my friend, the Green Beret," you know, carry on like that. It's kind of unique. I end up there about 6 o'clock every night, come back here to the TOC, check in, drop off my little suitcase, my little pile of papers and junk that I pick up. Then we take turns. The NCOs stay there one night until 6:30 and then I stay there every other night from the time I get back until 6:30.

Meal time is from 6 to 7, so, what they do, they drive the jeep to the mess hall and eat at 6. Then at 6:30 the replacements drive the jeep back and then I get relieved at 6:30. Or like tonight, I get to leave at 6, take the jeep over. We just take turns, getting off early at night.

Otherwise it's a pretty long day. That's basically what my job is.

When I first got down here they told me I was going to be S-3 Air, which would have been more exciting and more interesting. Well, I don't know if it's more exciting but I would have enjoyed it more, dealing with airplanes and helicopters and stuff. I always did get a kick out of stuff like that. But, a captain has since bumped me of that position. It is a captain's slot, and they didn't have any captains at the time to fill it so they thought, "Well, okay. We'll take an intelligent, good-looking, handsome, astounding, brilliant, First Lieutenant named Fetters and put him in the slot. I'm sure he can handle it." And I convinced them I could because I wanted the job. I worked at it for one week and I was bumped out and put in the TOC.

It's probably a more demanding job than the TOC and really significant. Actually, the fact that I'm Liaison Officer is of more importance than being TOC officer. The slot that I hold is a major's slot. It's up to me to know exactly what's going on in all of III Corps and all of Special Forces activities daily so that I can brief the people who brief the general. Of course I have to be available for any questions the general might have on Friday nights. I've got my own little spiel and charts, and the whole works. It's something getting up there in front of a three star general, two star general, three one star generals and a whole bunch of other brass, giving my little spiel. I feel like a mouse in front of a lion but phooey, always he's only an old man. He smokes a lot and drinks his coffee every night. Oh well, that's the way it goes.

I seem to be doing all right. I haven't been criticized or spoken to or anything like that. Nobody's made any major corrections in the way I've done my job so I guess I'm doing all right, and I'll coast in until December, well, until the end of November when they'll get a replacement in for me. I hope that I'll have a couple weeks here just to kind of loaf in and get a sun tan before I come home. The rainy season will be ending shortly, about the middle of next month. It's raining outside right now by the way. I hope to get a good tan before I come home and do my last minute shopping, packing, mailing of packages, relaxing, getting rest, clearing, maybe taping some tapes over at the hobby center.

Boy, I've rattled on and on and on for the past hour and haven't even stopped to take a breath, hardly. Let's see, the tape is getting close to running out now. I think I've covered everything quite well, quite thoroughly.

Oh by the way, Bien Hoa Airport here is the busiest in the world at this time for the number of aircraft coming and going, daily, monthly, weekly, yearly, what have you. Boy oh boy, I've never seen so much activity in one place at one time. There were hundreds of planes in the air, all the time. Boy, there were three or four of them landing at the same time, I mean, one right after another and they've got two parallel runways, where they have traffic coming and going at all hours of the day and night. It's really something to see. I also hope I can take some

movies before I leave. They kind of frown on taking movies of the airport, but I'll get off over the approach to the runway, if I can, and take pictures of all of the different planes that come and go and the fighters and all that stuff, the FACs, the transports, the cargo planes, all that junk. It'll be interesting.

(Early October 1969)

I haven't really got too much to report. Just these stupid gooks over here. I get to dislike them more and more every single day. As I drive to and from Second Field Force Headquarters where I make my daily morning and evening runs, I go right through the, well, not the village of Bien Hoa but the outskirts of the village, right through a little shopping area, a somewhat of a densely populated area. These stupid people, they walk down the middle of the streets. When they feel like making a U-Turn, they just make a U-Turn. They don't bother to look behind them to see if there's a car or anything. People are getting hit by vehicles all the time. The Vietnamese themselves are such crazy drivers. These stupid little slant eyed people driving these big deuce and a halves and they go tearing down the street. They just lay on their horn. That's all they do, they absolutely lay on their horn for stretches of half a minute at a time, just a solid horn. Everybody better get out of the way or they'll get run down, that's all there is to it.

I've seen these people carrying these things across their shoulders, you know, with a weight on each end, you know those shoulder harness things where they carry all their weight, get clipped by a truck and just spun the old bat around. She ended up on the ground and all her pots and pans and food and everything else she was carrying was splattered all over the place. And they just keep right on going, just blaze right on through. They like to play chicken with Americans, especially if they've got the bigger vehicle. They come driving right smack at you, and you'd better move, that's all there is to it. It's disgusting. It makes me mad but there's nothing I can do about it.

All these soldiers, these stupid army soldiers, Vietnamese Army soldiers all over the place and all they do is just hang around the little cafes and stuff all day long and do nothing, just walk up and down the street and they're always smoking cigarettes and, you know, walking around in bunches of five or six out in the middle of the street. Cars have to stop and go around them and all that junk. They're just loud and boisterous and think they're really big stuff. They're filthy people. I mean, right in the middle of the downtown area, if you can call it that, where all the stupid, dirty, rundown, beat up, old, smelly shacks are where they do their business, these soldiers will just walk to the edge of the road, and right in the gutter they'll take a leak. It's not a gutter, it's just the area between the edge of the road and the little patio of the shop, if you can call it that. People walking by in front of him, behind him around him, everybody. Nobody

seems to care. He just stops when it's convenient, pulls it out, and takes a whiz right in the street. Boy, I found that hard to believe but they do it.

I've seen grown ups, they drive around these little three wheeled carts that carry people and stuff. I've seen a cart driver, empty cart driver just pull over to the edge of the road and get out, walk over to the edge of the road, take his pants down and take a crap right there on the edge of the road, traffic going by and everything. I was so amazed that I just watched, I just sat there and watched. This is gross but, you know how they do their little Vietnamese squat, well, that's what he did right on the shoulder of the road. What they do, oh man, as he crapped, he'd reach around and catch it in his hand and throw it out into the field. Then when he was all done he just stood up, wiped his hand in the grass and wiped it on his pants, and got back in and drove away. That's all there was to it. And this is common. This is really common. I've seen kids helping each other take a crap and wiping each other's butts and stuff like that. It happens all the time, I mean all the time. Every day I see it. I don't think much of it any more but it would shock you seeing it the first time, anybody else. In fact it probably shocks you just hearing about it.

Oh crap, I just realized that the doggone volume was turned way down.

27 October 1969

Monday

Monday night, the 27th, and it's 25 minutes after 10, believe it or not. Twenty-five minutes after ten o'clock, ten, ten, one-zero. That means it's late at night and I got to get up at 20 minutes to 6 tomorrow. You ask yourself, "Why is that dumb dud up so late?" I will tell you: because Ronald Ingram is here. Tonight is his last night at A-Company, 5th Special Forces Group, Bien Hoa, Vietnam. He's going to sign out tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock, hop on a truck, drive down to the CLD and fly up to Nha Trang to Out-Process and go back home. Home home home. So he thought it'd be nice if he and I got together over at the club and just sit at a nice little quiet booth some place and talk about old times and just generally kind of have a private going away party. So we did. So here I am. He just now walked out of the room. I tried to get him to stay and say "hello" to you but he's too bashful, so he walked out and said, "Hey, I'll see you tomorrow." So. Here I is.

I didn't think I'd make a tape tonight but I thought, well, I'm not really that tired. I mean, I'm tired, I know I am, but I've had a few drinks tonight. I'm a little bit lightheaded so I thought, what the heck, I'll stay up a few minutes and at least start a tape to you because I didn't send anything to you yesterday, the day before I sent a letter, and tomorrow I won't send anything to you but I will start this hour tape.

Well, let me tell you about Ron Ingram. Did I tell you I got a letter from Wes? I don't

know if I did or not. I don't think I did, but I got a letter from Wes Holck. He's back in California. He was moved to a hospital at Fort Ord, California. His neck, his shoulder, his neck and his shoulder are about the two worst things that were wounded, the two worst wounds that he had. From an earlier injury, his little finger and ring finger on his right hand were a little bit screwed up. The nerves did not go back together, were not connected or something and as a result he couldn't control those two fingers as much as a normal person would be able to. So, he was moved back to Fort Ord, California. They operated on him there. His stomach wounds are fine. His neck wound is fine. However, his shoulder wound, he got hit all over from head to foot, but his worst wounds were in the shoulder, stomach, and neck. His stomach and neck wounds have healed pretty well, but his shoulder wound has severed a couple nerves and as a result, unless it's fixed, his right shoulder will deteriorate slowly but surely.

So he's going to a hospital in San Francisco where they specialize in fixing broken nerves, disconnected nerves or whatever you call it. So, they're going to operate on his shoulder again and connect the nerves, get it fixed up, so it will be back to normal, and also they're going to re-operate on his hand from that earlier wound that he had and see if they can't repair the nerves in that and get them almost back, 100 percent normal. However, he's been told that he probably will get a medical discharge and he will get 30 to 40 percent permanent disability checks from the government for the rest of his life which will total about \$150, \$160 a month for the rest of his life for the injuries.

He said he received your card. He was very, kind of reading between the lines, he was real happy to get it, I'm sure. I know it meant a lot to him because he never did get too much mail, an occasional letter from his parents and that's about the only people who would write to him. He was always real happy to get mail out at Thien Ngon because he never did get very much. So he mentioned the fact that between you and I we sent him more mail than he got at Thien Ngon, which is not the entire truth but I know he really appreciated hearing from both of us. So what I'll do, I'll send that letter to you, his letter, and let you read it. You can tell by reading the letter that he was pleased at hearing from you. It also includes his home address, so I'll probably write him another letter or so, you know, just say, "Well, I'll be getting out of the Army at such and such time and I'm sorry I won't be able to get down to see you, but Ron Ingram's getting out at such and such time."

Ron and Wes only live a few miles apart believe it or not. They discovered that when they first met each other and you know, talked to each other about where they were from and everything. They only live about five miles apart. So between the two of them, they'll get together, and Ron'll pass on all the good word about me and say how sorry he was and how we both thought a lot of him. We both consider him a real good friend and how we felt real bad about when he got wounded and everything like that. Ron'll probably tell him how it is with me,

that as much as I would love to come down to San Francisco and see them both, have them show me around the town and you know, spend a couple of days with them, Ron realizes that I just won't because I'll be so anxious to get home and see you. And I won't want to spend the money, you know, little odds and ends like that. They realize the circumstances. Ron's hoping that since I won't be able to stop down and see him, that maybe someday soon he'll be able to come up to Michigan and see me.

It's funny, hon, but both Ron Ingram and Bob Shaver have told me a number of times how much they would love to meet you. For some reason they feel that by knowing me they can almost picture how you would be. I'd drop an occasional hint. I'd say, "Yeah, Trudy and I like to go out to the sand dunes and do this and do that. You know, we like to take our dog out and do this and we like swimming." Occasionally I mention what we like to do and I'll bring you into the conversation once in awhile. Just tonight, Ron told me how much he would love to meet you because he can almost picture how you would be. He keeps telling me how much of a good friend I am and how unique I am in that we both have the same interests and we're both basically the same, kind of quiet. We have the same likes and dislikes. He feels that he knows you even before he's met you and as a result he wants to meet you because he feels, I don't know, it's hard to explain. But both Bob Shaver in his letters and Ron when he's talking to me, have said that they can almost picture what you're like just by the way I am and how I talk about you and how we both do this and do that together. It'd be nice someday if Ron would show up because I would like to introduce you to him. He's quite a guy. He's a real good friend.

I'm glad I had somebody like that over here, he and Wes both. Without them, my stay at Thien Ngon would have been just fair, fair to mediocre. Whereas with Ron out there and Wes out there, it really helped my morale a lot because both of them were real good friends and to me, just because they were EM (enlisted men), doesn't mean a cotton picking thing. We just became real good friends. You know how the Army frowns on enlisted man-officer relationships and all that baloney. I never did go for that. So, Ron and I became real excellent friends, and Wes and I became real good friends in the short time that I knew him. Shoot, it was only three or four months, but I don't know, just knowing those guys made me feel much better out at Thien Ngon.

We had a lot of fun together, did a lot of stuff. Even when we were working on our cotton picking, foolish rear ends off, just working like crazy fiends, we still enjoyed a good laugh together, and enjoyed working together. That's what made it so easy, or bearable, you know? Because you had somebody like that to work with. If you had to do it by yourself it wouldn't have been near as much fun, in fact it would have been a strain. In fact I probably would have grumbled a lot if I had to do all that stuff by myself. But with Ron and with Wes, it made things a lot easier. We'd trade a lot of ideas, thoughts, jokes, hardships, everything. We'd hash it out,

get a good laugh out of it and keep on working. So between those two guys it really made my stay over here much more bearable than it would have been otherwise. I wasn't really that close to anybody else out at Thien Ngon. Of course I knew everybody else. We got along quite well, but not near as close as Wes and Ron were. It just made it so much more bearable. I can't really say fun because it wasn't really fun. It was a lot of hard work, a lot of dangerous work, getting mortared and shot at and all that stuff. That's definitely bad but still, having somebody else there to talk to, to share things with, makes a heck of a difference. Whereas if I didn't have Ron and Wes I would have just kept those thoughts to myself.