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Dave Fetters' Audio Letters - 1969

Tape #13 16 July Continues

...Tay Ninh, and then when I fly from Tay Ninh to Bien Hoa I'll probably put another roll in, take another whole roll of movies flying around in the air, so I'll have two more movies to mail to you from Bien Hoa. While I'm in Bien Hoa I can probably get down near the airport if I have time, I mean the runway, and take pictures of some of the planes that come and go. I saw a U2 there one time, one of those old spy planes, you know? Of course jet fighters come and go all the time, 123s and 130s, Caribous, C-7As and C-47s, the old gooney bird, the old DC-3. Of course all kinds of light planes, for FACs and things like that. It's a real busy airport. I read one time where the paper said it was the busiest in the world. I can believe it because there's always planes coming and going. I mean, even faster than Los Angeles Airport, which I've been to.

Well, I'm glad that's all over with. Let's see, next month another heliborne is scheduled, however I will be on R&R. I mean, I will be on leave at that time, and it will be the captain's turn to take that one out. So maybe next September I'll have another one, I don't know. I hope not. Maybe I'll have a new job by then. Let's see. Today is the 16th. We got less than a month to go. And when you get this tape it will be about three weeks before you will be winging yourself away.

Hey, if I were you, I would keep my camera handy at all times, you know, maybe you want to take a picture of the plane that you're getting on, or of O'Hare Airport, or San Francisco Airport. If you land in Anchorage and you get a chance, I'd appreciate it if you'd get off the plane and at least take a picture of something saying Anchorage International Airport or you know, just something to show people that you've been in Anchorage, Alaska and Tokyo. At least get out and snap a few pictures of Tokyo, you know, surrounding people and if you see a Geisha Girl, snap a picture, stuff like that.

Also, I wouldn't get all rattled and worried about the plane ride and everything. About the only one that might be a little, no, it won't even be upsetting at all, is the flight from Grand Rapids to Chicago. That's nothing. If you get on a nice little jet or something it's a real nice little ride. I really get a kick out of airplane rides. If you don't sit there and worry about it all the time, it's very enjoyable. And actually there's nothing to worry about. Look at it this way, if anything happens, there's nothing you can do about it anyway. So just relax and enjoy the ride and always try to get a window seat because you can see so much more. Either sit in front of the wing or behind the wing on the small jet, and if you get on a big jet I know for sure you'll be sitting in the after part of the plane so try to get a seat way in the back behind the wing. It's interesting to watch all the flaps and things on the wing as the plane lands and takes off and you get a better

view when you look straight down. There's a lot to see if you fly, oh, you'll be flying at night at least for a portion of the time, but when you're flying during the day it's always neat to look down and look at the cloud formations and mountains and things like that. So just make the most of it.

When you get on a big plane, probably from San Francisco around to Hong Kong, you'll find that they show movies and serve excellent meals and they've got little headphone things you can plug in. They've got John Doremus and about eight different selections of radio programs you can listen to. Some of them are comedy like Bill Cosby, you know his funny albums. They got mood music and jazz and rock and roll and all different kinds of neat stuff. They have magazines and stuff for you to read and you can buy drinks if you want, you know, booze. You probably wouldn't want it, in fact I'm sure you won't, but I just thought if you want to try it, because they give you these neat little tiny whiskey bottles. They serve you free pop and stuff like that. I think you'll find it quite enjoyable. It's quite relaxing. The seats fold back and you should be able to sleep. I don't know, when I flew most of the time I didn't sleep because there was so much other stuff to do and so many things to watch out of the plane. I'm always that way, even when I have a chance to sleep on a plane I don't because I hate to miss anything, you know like a neat mountain or something down below or the Grand Canyon or Pike's Peak or whatever we fly over. I just hate to miss all that stuff. So I usually stay awake and just look out the window. Here goes the tape, hon.

31 August 1969,

Sent to LT Feters' Parents

It's 10:30 in the morning, sitting in my grubby little room. I just got up. I'm back in the rut again, after spending a terrific time in Hong Kong. I just can't get over how much fun I had there, we had. I might as well start from the beginning.

I can't remember when the last time was that I wrote to you or sent you a tape or anything but, let's see. I left Thien Ngon about the 11th or 12th of August. I got down here just in time to be assigned a room and a job and get my stuff moved in and get relaxed.[New assignment at Bien Hoa, C-Team] Then it was time to go on leave. So I went to Saigon. We have what's called a Command Liaison Detachment there. We call it CLD, composed of about 20 or 30 people. I have an easy life down there, really. They don't do anything, they just kind of monitor who comes and goes out of Tan Son Nhut Airbase, which is right in Saigon. They have a plush club and a nice mess hall, each man's got an individual room, most of them have air conditioners. Of course, they spend a lot of their time in civilian clothes just messing around, not doing much of anything.

Anyway, I got down there the 13th, I believe. I was scheduled to leave the morning of the

15th. Also, a guy by the name of Ed Scully who was with me at Bragg and also out at B-32 with me was down there on the exact same two days that I was so together the two of us hit some PXs around the area. We didn't actually get into downtown Saigon because it's such a mess trying to fight the traffic and everything, and boy there's a lot of traffic too. Ninety-five percent is motorbikes, motorcycles, motor-carts, and bicycles. The rest are small cars, mostly taxis. Boy, these people drive like maniacs. We took a ride in a little three wheeled motorcycle type cart that had two seats up front instead of a three wheeled motorcycle with the two wheels in the back, it had it up front. You sit looking right into the traffic with nothing out in front of you and boy this guy weaves in and out and darts across intersections and gives you quite a thrill. If I ever get a chance to go down there again I think I'll take my movie camera, take a ride in one of those things and shoot a movie so you can see what it's like.

So I spent two days there, well, actually, a day and a half getting ready to go. Since I was going on leave instead of R&R, I flew standby on a regularly scheduled R&R aircraft flight and I was a little surprised at the number of people who happened to choose that day to go to Hong Kong. See, they have a flight every other day to Hong Kong. Of course everybody on R&R automatically is manifested for the flight. Anybody on leave going to Hong Kong gets the seats that are leftover. You aren't guaranteed a seat, but luckily, because of my rank I guess, I don't know what all went into deciding who gets a seat, I did get mine. This took place about one o'clock in the afternoon on the 15th.

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut Airbase at about 9 in the morning and they give you a little sheet to fill out that tells you where to go, what time to be at such and such a building for your briefing and customs inspection and money change over and all that stuff, so that didn't start until one o'clock. From 1 until about 2:30 it took us to get through all that garbage. So they had 80 people on R&R, they had about 60 people on leave who made the flight and there were about 15 people who didn't make it, so they'd spend another two days there waiting for the next flight out and try to make it on that one.

We went through all the rigmarole, and everything, in the heat. I had my khakis on. Real uncomfortable. Finally they loaded us all on buses at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, drove us right up to a big jet that was waiting for us there. I think it was a Pan-American, and we loaded on. I sat way, way up front, in fact the second seat from the front, and I got a window seat. It was the first time I had ever been that far up front in a jet. It was quite a nice sensation. The pilots left the doors of the cockpit open so everybody, one at a time, could go take a peak in there and see what was going on.

The flight itself took an hour and thirty minutes. Took off over Saigon, flew over part of Vietnam, out over the South China Sea, and remained over the South China Sea until we got just about in Hong Kong. Let's see, it was 6:30 I believe, their time, when we finally arrived. It was

real neat flying in because the coastline is just dotted with just millions of islands. They aren't little flat islands; they're cones of mountains that stick up out of the water. Then right on the coastline you'll see little villages, fishing villages with all the junks and everything there. This time of the evening was when all the fishing junks were coming in and boy what a neat view that was, seeing all those junks. Those things are so neat looking. I don't know if the kids know what they look like, I'm quite sure they do, but just the way they're built, and their sails, the way they're fitted out. It just looks so typically Oriental and I really enjoyed looking out the window and seeing them all down there. Also, there's a ferry run from Hong Kong to Macau which is a Portuguese island noted for its gambling casinos and things. Anyway, the ferry itself is one of those big new hydrofoil boats and I saw one of those zipping through the waves at about 50 miles an hour while we were coming in.

It's weird when you land because the mountains come right down to the shoreline where Hong Kong and Kowloon are and you wonder where the airport is. You come in and you circle over Kowloon and then you swing past the island. You start dropping and dropping until you're only what looks like maybe a few hundred feet above all these enormous buildings and things and you just hope the pilot knows what he's doing because there's no sign of an airport any place. But then all of a sudden, jutting out into the bay you see this big, long narrow strip and that's the runway. It's all man made, they just dug away a part of a mountain side, carried it out into the bay and dumped it and built the air strip right on that.

So we landed and I was all excited because I didn't know if Trudy would be at the airport or just where she'd be. I kept looking around for her, you know, being excited and happy and everything else. My stomach kind of knotted up with anticipation. I kept looking around, and looking around, and I didn't see her. I went in to Customs and they were real nice. They opened most of the enlisted men's bags and checked them out thoroughly, but the officers they said, "Well, do you have any firearms or anything that you shouldn't have?" We just say "no," put a little marker on our bags, and away we'd go. We went out.

It's very streamlined. They've got things down real nice. I'm surprised. For the Army, everything is really streamlined. It only took us about 10 minutes to get off the plane, get driven into the terminal, pick up our bags, go through customs. Go through the terminal and they inspect your ID card, shot record, and things like that. In the main part of the terminal they have a little booth there. You walk up and they give you a choice of about six or seven hotels. You tell them which hotel you'd like to stay at and they give you a little slip and say, "Okay, take your bag and put it on that truck and get on the bus." As soon as the bus is filled up they take you to a briefing hall where they give you about a 30 minute briefing on what things to do, what not to do, what to be careful of, what to look out for, what to expect. You know, just general things like that that will help you out. They give you a map of Hong Kong. They change over a hundred

dollars for you into Hong Kong money. I was in the first bus load there and after not seeing Trudy at the airport I thought, "okay, I'll see her at the President Hotel" because we had arranged ahead of time to meet at the President, or I knew she would be there. So I got in the briefing hall. It was nicely air conditioned. They had free beer and Coke for those who wanted it. So I took a Coke and went in and sat down at a table and started thumbing through my little R&R Serviceman's guide, a little tiny book they give you showing you different stores and best buys and things like that. Some guy walked in and started talking to us through the intercom system. He stopped and said, "Will Lieutenant Fetters please report to the rear of the auditorium." So I thought, "uh-oh, now what?" Then immediately I thought, "Well, hey, I wonder if Trudy's here?" Sure enough I got to the back there and there she was.

So, we spent about thirty minutes there just talking and smooching and hugging and everything, just waiting for everybody else to come, to arrive from the terminal. Boy I had a lot of jealous looks, I'll tell you, when those guys walked in and saw me sitting there with such a good looking woman. I don't know whether they realized it was my wife or not, but they didn't care. They probably thought well man, that lucky guy, look at the girl he's got. Trudy was all tanned and had her sandals on, and a real nice little print shift and her hair done up nicely. She really looked sharp. They wouldn't let her into the briefing so she had to remain there for the 30 minutes that I was in there.

Afterwards they had buses going to all the different hotels, whichever one you chose, so we got on the bus to the President. It took us right to the door. We went in, checked our bags, they gave us a room. We had a real nice room with a harbor view on the 14th Floor, which is almost at the very top of the hotel. Let's see, that was about 9:30, 10 o'clock that night. We got up to our room and commenced to say hello and just, I don't know. I'm sure you know what we did. We just hugged and kissed, and relaxed and lounged and just talked and had a grand old time.

I can't recall exactly what we did and the order of the things that we did it but I'm just going to start talking about some of the things we did. It was, it is a real exciting city, full of exciting things to see and action. I don't know, it's so dynamic. It's funny, at night it's all lit up beautifully. There isn't one sign that flashes on and off. They're all either on or off. All fluorescent neon signs on buildings and things are just on. They don't blink or flash or do anything like that. It's different but it's so pretty. You look out your window and you see all the lights on the Hong Kong side reflecting off the water, real calm harbor. At any one time you could count anywhere from 30 to 50 boats out in the harbor, big ships. Not boats, there's millions of boats, but I mean these are big ships. I only counted them once and I counted 46. That was just from my hotel room and I could only see maybe 75 percent of the harbor. I know there were many more ships around the backside that I couldn't see, but such a beautiful view.

We almost left our curtains open the whole time, you know, morning, noon, and night. Well, we weren't in the room too much during the day but at night when we would get in from tearing around the city, looking at everything, we just opened the blinds and the curtains and just turned the lights down low and just look out. It was so beautiful, just a fantastic view.

Boy, the hotel itself was quite nice. They have a lot of bellboys and everything. I don't know how Trudy felt about seeing all the Orientals around, of course they didn't bother me after being over here six months. But the Chinese are so much different than the Vietnamese. There's just absolutely no comparison at all. Just none whatsoever. Chinese are so energetic and hardworking and industrious, whereas the Vietnamese are just the opposite. I couldn't get over how modern the city was, and clean. For such a large city, the place was really clean. Even the little tiny back streets and things, they were messy and cluttered, but they weren't dirty. It was all relatively clean. Let's see, we, normally I would have only had Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, those four days complete, and five nights before I would have had to return. I would have had to return Wednesday morning at 5 am, so instead I made reservations on a flight back for Thursday afternoon which left at 5 o'clock. Although I had to pay my own way, I felt it was really worth it to stay an extra two days.

I'll get to that later, but anyway, we spent most of the first five days, in fact almost totally all of the first five days from maybe 8 o'clock in the morning to anywhere from 9 to midnight at night just out doing things and seeing things. As part of the R&R program I could buy a little tour packet which would give us three tours each for \$7.50. You get three coupons in your packet and each coupon had a choice of maybe three different tours you could take. So, we took a harbor cruise which lasted about three hours. We took a sunset cruise which included a big Chinese dinner. That lasted about four and half hours. We took the Hong Kong Island tour which included a snack, little hors d'oeuvres and something to drink at a real nice hotel on the sea. That lasted four and a half hours. All of that just for \$7.50 for each of us. You can't beat that. It was fantastic. I bought a couple of those little books, one for each of us, and took advantage of their tours.

When we left the hotel, well, when we got up in the morning, the first thing we would do is go downstairs and eat breakfast. They have about anything that you could find any place in the States, you know, scrambled eggs, anything you wanted. In fact almost every place you eat, except if you go to a little tiny Chinese restaurant, you can get either American food or of course Chinese food. I very, very rarely ate any American food. I ate all the Chinese food I could because boy, that stuff is really good. I really enjoy that stuff, especially fried prawns in sweet and sour sauce. I don't know why, but that's out of the sea too, and normally I don't eat sea food but boy, these things are delicious.

Of course I ate with chopsticks when I can. I'm getting pretty good with those things. At

least I can keep up with anybody else who knows how to use them, and I certainly don't starve. It's funny watching some Americans trying to use chopsticks, though. Boy, they just cannot get it, that's all there is to it. It looks easy when someone who knows how to use them are using them. But for some people they just can't get it. Okay, here I am again. I was talking about chopsticks. I'm going to try to get some and bring them home and let all the kids try them out. They'll get a kick out of trying to use them.

Anyway, after breakfast we'd go out and hop in a taxi and take a ride down to the Star Ferry. It was only about five blocks from the hotel. We could walk it but shoot, in the heat, you know, and with the entire day of walking ahead of us we thought well, we'll save ourselves a little bit and splurge and spend Kong dollar to take a taxi. That's equivalent to 16 cents, so it didn't really hurt us. Normally I wouldn't have even thought about taking a taxi anyway, especially not in the States, or even over here in Vietnam because shoot, it's an American dollar for the first quarter mile, you know. But heck, in Hong Kong you can ride almost any place in Kowloon for a Hong Kong dollar which is only 16 cents.

We get to the Star Ferry which carries the equivalent of Holland's population, four times over, daily. The Star Ferry line operates about 8 ferries which has an upper deck, which is first class, and a lower deck, which is second class. For the upper deck you pay a Hong Kong quarter, which is four cents. Four cents, that's first class. Second class is two cents American money. I think it's a Hong Kong dime, yeah, something like that. So you get on this nice little ferry and they take you across. You get on the Hong Kong side and we step out. Depending on where we want to go or if we want to go to the say the Peak Tram, or to the China Fleet Club which is a big PX for the Navy, you just hop in a taxi and take a ride over there. That costs a whole dollar and a quarter in Hong Kong money. That's a jump up to about 20 cents. It really broke us.

But it's so neat, there's all these people, all these Chinese people just bustling all over the place. Hard working, they always walk with a purpose. They always seem like they know exactly where they're going, they have to get there. It almost reminds me something of New York during the lunch hour rush or something. People don't move that fast or they aren't that crazy as they are in New York, but everybody walks with a purpose and there are so many people around on the streets and everything. They don't stare at you as if you're a foreigner or a tourist or anything. They just go about their business.

Of course you can't help but stare at some of the people. The men are typically, no, I can't say typically. The men seem to take much more pride in what they wear than Americans do. Almost everybody, no matter what kind of job they have, dresses up. They wear a white shirt and tie, sport coat. I don't know, they just seem to take pride in what they look like. Even the young school boys and stuff dress up. The women, too. They're always wearing high heels. Trudy couldn't get over the number of people that wore high heels all the time, high heels and

dressess, usually a form fitting sack dress type thing. They all don't have those big slits up the side either, but I did see some that did. But it's so neat walking around, you would think that a place like that, well, I don't know, I did, I expected it to be not nearly as up to date as it was. Their buildings are as modern as can be, just really sharp, well built, sturdy, air conditioned, fancy.

What really surprised me was the fact that when they're building these buildings, almost all the cement is mixed by hand, a lot of the work done by women. It's carried up scaffolding made out of bamboo. They can build a building thirty stories high, forty, fifty stories high, they don't have them that big but they could build them that high, and they use nothing but bamboo scaffolding. Is that ever weird to see. Nothing but bamboo scaffolding. I've got some real good pictures and movies of the bamboo scaffolding that you'll see.

They have double-decker buses and double-decker streetcars that buzz all over the place and the taxis. There seem to be no speed limits at all in the city, anywhere. It's quite a thrill riding with those taxi drivers. Unlike America, though, everybody, well nobody is so arrogant as to be a complete road-hog. Especially among the taxi drivers, there's no competition like there is in America. Like at the Star Ferry when we get off the Ferry, the taxis don't all go rushing up to the people and try to get a fare, they get in line, one big long line and they drive up to where the people are, one at a time, and get loaded up and just move on. When they're empty they go to the back of the line.

At one time I thought, well shoot, rather than standing in line here waiting for a taxi let's move on down the line and see if we can grab one. So I went down there and I started to get in one and the guy says no, no, you've got to stand in line, you know, play fair and all that stuff. I thought, shoot, that's fantastic, I've never heard of people doing this before. The drivers are actually courteous to one another even though they drive like maniacs; they're still courteous to one another. Nobody lays on the horn at the other guy. Nobody cusses them out or throws their fist at them or anything like that. They don't even give each other dirty looks. They're courteous to each other, even different taxi lines and things.

Man the tape is going too fast, I know I'm not going to be able to tell you everything, but it's just such a fantastic...(gap in the tape) all the Chinese food, and the people. The women there are really something. They're really good looking women. I told Trudy that a lot and she agrees with me, the women are good looking for being Oriental. Almost all of them, you very rarely see a fat Chinese. Very, very, very rarely. In fact I can't even remember off hand spotting one, but they're all nice and slender. The women wear all these sack dresses but they are tailored right to their curves and everything and they really look neat.

But gee, every day we took that Star Ferry at least a couple times over to the Hong Kong

side and then we'd come back to the Kowloon side and eat at the hotel or something or take an arm load of things that we bought back up to the room and then go back out. We toured all around Kowloon and all around Hong Kong. We spent one day doing hardly anything but taking pictures. We went up all these little tiny back streets and back alleys where they have the ladder streets they're called. They're actually large steps and all these little street vendors and Chinese signs and things. Terrifically interesting. I could have spent a month there and never got tired. Of course with all my camera equipment I just had a hay-day taking pictures. Boy, I put my wide angled lens on and get a great big wide street scene. I put my telephoto lens on and zoom right in on somebody eating or cleaning snakes or chopping fish or all kinds of stuff like that.

Our harbor tour in a little Chinese junk was really outstanding. It took us all over the place, showed us a bunch of neat different boats and we went to these typhoon shelters. One of them was Yau Ma Tei. That's where they have all these thousands of people living on junks and sampans. The difference between a junk and a sampan, a sampan is a little smaller than a junk and it's usually motor driven whereas a junk is quite a large boat, large family type vessel. Although it may have a motor in it, it's usually moved by its sails. We cruised slowly through there and these little kids came out, they scull out in these little tiny boats. They of course yell for money. We threw a dollar overboard and they dive in and get it. They have their grocery stores, their gasoline stations, their schools, their churches, their dry docks. Everything, water boats, is all right there on the water. They're almost completely self-sufficient in their little boats there. If they want something they just go over to the ice boat and get some ice or go over to the fuel boat and get some fuel, or supermarket boat. I don't know what they call it, chow boat, I don't know. But it's so neat. We took a lot of pictures of those people living in those boats also.

We went to a floating restaurant one night and had a terrific Cantonese meal. That was part of the sunset tour. We sat at a table with about ten other people, great big circular table and they'd bring just a mammoth platter of all different kinds of food. They'd serve it for you and everything. That's the best way to do it rather than just two people going out because usually when you eat you get a ten course meal and they don't normally make an amount so small that two people can eat it. In other words, when you have a large Chinese meal, or a Chinese meal, you get ten or twelve or fifteen different courses and you take as much as you want off these big platters rather than get individual servings of these ten or fifteen courses. So we really enjoyed our meal there.

Trudy did a real fine job with her chopsticks, in fact she was, well maybe third or fourth best at the table. There were only one or two people better than myself. One was a wife of a serviceman who was Chinese, of course she was good and he was good. But everybody else you know, they were brand new, first time they ever used chopsticks. Those poor people almost starved to death. It was fun. We howled you know, just laughing until our stomachs hurt at

some of these people. They just couldn't get them to work. It was so funny.

We went up to the peak both in the daylight and at night, and what a beautiful view it is at night. Just terrific. It's funny, we went up the peak tram, that thing rides probably a 30 degree angle, I don't know how steep it is but it's really steep. The conductor, when he's walking up the aisle, looks so funny because the seats are normal seats. When the train is sitting level, you're sitting straight up in your seat but when it's going up the hill of course, you're leaning way back and you're still perpendicular to the floor, whereas the conductor is leaning on about a 30 degree angle. It looks so funny. Everybody who had been on the tram that night for the first time just couldn't help but laugh at him, and he's used to being laughed at so he just grinned.

We couldn't get over the short, short, mini-mini skirts that the women wear. Mostly it's not the indigenous people but visitors, people from France and all over Europe and all different countries. You could tell by the way they talked, you know, where they were from. You could pick up German and French and Dutch, all that. Most of those people, you know, they look like the snobbish rich, and they wore these fantastically flower printed psychedelic dresses and things, super short. It's real weird, great big sunglasses and all kinds of crazy stuff.

Another thing that struck me as funny was well, first of all, almost everyone can speak American, or English, as well as Chinese. It's almost a necessity because that's kind of a melting pot over there. And secondly, when they do speak English, they speak with an English accent, a British accent. So it's funny to hear a Chinaman speaking English with a British accent. They'd talk about flats for apartments and lorries for trucks and petrol instead of gas or fuel. We had a few chuckles about that too, especially our guides. They were young girls, maybe 18 or so, and they talked just like a young American would, they used the typically, I don't know what it's called, hippie slang or young generation type talk. They're in on all the cliches and phrases and everything.

I've got lots of film. I don't know how many rolls of film we had developed. I think I had about three or four rolls developed while we were there. I've got another three rolls here that I sent out a few days ago, and what else? About, I don't know, maybe six movies, just of Hong Kong alone. No, I don't think it was six. Maybe about three or four, but boy we're going to have some nice pictures. It was a real exciting trip, just terrific.

The last day and a half we spent mostly right around the hotel. We'd go out and just poke around in all these tiny little stores, one store right after another, and there would be stores that are honestly, this is the honest truth, no larger than the bathroom in your house there. They will have, these are usually camera stores, cameras and radios, and they will have three clerks in there waiting to pounce on you when you walk in. That's one thing we never could complain about, to walk in a store and there were forty people around waiting to help you. But there were cubby

hole stores like that just store after store after store after store. You go right out of one camera shop, go next door you go into another camera shop. There may be three or four or five camera shops right in a row, you know? And nobody seems to be hurting for business because they're all in business. I know the competition is probably kind of fierce. Maybe that's one reason why the prices are so neat, so good, but oh well.

We just relaxed in the room, lounged. Right across the street was a place called the San Francisco Steakhouse. I got a great big T-bone and she got prime rib one night with all the trimmings, and it was at least as good as Schuler's. I'm still debating whether or not it was better, because boy that prime rib that Trudy got was just absolutely fantastic. It just melted in your mouth; it was so good, so tender. It was almost raw, it looked like, but boy, you could cut it with your fork. That whole meal only cost us \$13, that was American. But boy, what plush interior and everything. It was completely American owned and operated and American beef. But boy, the food was just fantastic, just great. Then we went to an Italian restaurant our last night there and got pepperoni, mushroom, and sausage pizza. We really had a great time, some good meals. We had room service. We'd get in, we'd eat maybe around 7 o'clock in the evening, and then at midnight when we get ready to go to sleep I'll call room service and tell them to bring up some Coke and some chocolate ice cream or something, piece of cake or some sweet rolls, something like that. Boy, we sure couldn't complain.

It was just a terrific time. I don't know, I just can't tell you. I can't describe how great it was, how much fun it was, and it was so worth it. Boy, after six months in this hole, something like that is just what a guy needs. Especially to go to a place like that and meet his wife. It wouldn't have been near as good without having Trudy there to share it with me. To just go there by myself I would have been busy, I would have done things. I just wouldn't have enjoyed it as much as having Trudy there. I'm sure glad that we had the opportunity to meet in a place like that. Boy, it was really something. Shoot, I didn't get a chance at all to tell you about my new job or anything. In fact, there it goes. Goodbye.

About mid-September

(Gap in the tape, now at Bien Hoa Air Base, C-Team)

I'm going to keep the set [of jungle fatigues]. They look neat with the silver bar, crossed rifles, Vietnamese jump wings, name tag, US Army tag, American jump wings, CIB, Vietnamese patch and Vietnamese rank, all of course colored. You see, Special Forces are the only people over here that wear colored insignias; everybody else has subdued black, green and black. So when we walk into a PX or something everybody stares at us, not only because our insignias are bright but because we've got so much junk on. Nobody else wears Vietnamese jump wings or patches

like that or Vietnamese rank. It makes me feel pretty good to walk into a PX or a post office or a bank or some place like that and see everybody turn to stare at me. I can see them doing it without really looking at them. I can be looking at something else and I can see them kind of looking at me. They look up and down and watch me walk by. There aren't that many Green Berets around really, especially in a place as big as Bien Hoa and Long Bien.

It's real funny, the past couple weeks reading all these articles about the Green Berets and about Colonel Rheault and how he's being tried for murder and all that stuff. They're really blowing this thing out of proportion. I just read an article tonight and it was in the Fayetteville paper and sent over here by some guy's wife how Colonel Lemberes, or whatever that jerk's name is, who the papers say is the present group commander. Let me tell you something about this guy. He has never been in Green Berets before and he was a "leg" when they appointed him our commander. When he was going through Jump School on his second jump he broke his leg. But every paper that I've read or every magazine article that I've read said that he's nursing a "sprained ankle on a practice jump," implying that he was airborne (qualified), but he wasn't. See, they don't come out and say well, they put a "leg" in where an airborne leader is supposed to be.

Also they quoted that crazy colonel as stating that Special Forces are nothing but school teachers and instructors and advisors and all that baloney when everybody knows that we do a lot more than that. In fact the reporter who wrote that story turned right around and asked a top NCO whether or not we really ran secret missions into Cambodia and Laos and North Vietnam and spy missions and sabotage missions and all that stuff. The sergeant said with a great big grin, "That's classified," implying that we do. But he's right, it is classified. Since that time though, that "leg" colonel has been replaced by Colonel Healy who I've met already. He's a full bird colonel, Airborne, Special Forces for nine years so he's pretty good. He knows what he's doing.

I went and turned the radio down a little bit. The past two weeks or so, well, week and a half, the Mobile Strike Force which I've told you about earlier have really been in thick contact. Twice they've been completely surrounded. That's a whole battalion, completely surrounded. The total figures now is something like 32 missing, 154 wounded and they say only 19 killed. I have my doubts as to whether that's correct or not. But what they're doing, they finally got everybody out of the contact area. There's a gigantic NVA force in there. They think it's a regiment, possibly a division but they're not really sure. They know it's much larger than what we've got. For some strange reason, none of the American units will come in and reinforce us with troops. They give us all the fire support, air support, gun support and every other kind of support except troops. So, Colonel Healy, the new Group CO came down and personally was directing operations for awhile because it was such a big contact. It was one of the biggest

Special Forces has ever gotten into. He got a little disappointed that we couldn't get better help from American units for at least blocking forces and things like that. Everybody got discouraged so he decided to pull everybody out.

What they're going to do is put B-52 strikes in that area, really demolish it. Just wipe it out. One B-52 strike covers three entire grid squares, three kilometers long and one kilometer wide. That's one strike. So they're going to put in a couple of strikes, cover about six square kilometers where all the fighting has been taking place and after that they're going to go in and sweep the area and see what they can come up with. It will be real interesting to see what the final count is on both sides because up until now we've only got an enemy body count of six, which is ridiculous for the amount of contact that's been going on out there, for the amount of fire power that's been used.

Some of the wounded have come here to the CIDG hospital and from here a lot of them have been medevaced to the, I guess it's the Long Bien Hospital because of serious wounds, I mean, more serious than our doctors here can handle. It's really a nauseating scene to look in the gym right across the road here. It's a full size gym, well it's a big old empty building but it's got a big basketball court and the floor from one end to the other, from wall to wall is just covered with stretchers full of wounded. It's really a disgusting sight, pathetic. I don't think I've ever seen that much gore in one place at one time. I feel sorry for those Cambodians. That's who they are. The entire Mobile Strike Force is composed of Cambodians. These guys, they're so much different than the stupid Vietnamese. These guys are really anxious to fight. They do a good job. They don't run like the Vietnamese do. It's a shame to see so many of them in there wounded and torn up and dying for a country that's not even theirs although they hope to get a portion of it back someday. All I can do is just shake my head. Dumb Vietnamese, they are so pathetically rotten. I shouldn't be talking like that but they are. I just can't help it. Got to tell the truth. They just continually burn me up. Right across the hall from our S-3 is their S-3, and they never do anything on their own. They always come over, take all our reports, all our messages and everything, translate them and use them as their own. They've got the same radio equipment, everything else, all the way up and down the line as we do, yet they're too lazy to do their own work. They come over and look at our maps, take our messages, take our reports, our summaries, our briefing notes, everything else, verbatim, translate it into Vietnamese and use them.

Just a little thing like at night, this past night the toilet was out of order and yet some stupid Vietnamese went in there, just filled up the doggone toilet with shit and just left it, just you know, he wiped himself and just put stacks and stacks and stacks of toilet paper in the commode. Okay, here I am back on the other side. As I was saying, that completely made me PO'd. The Vietnamese that work in that S-3 shop can all read English thoroughly, and

understand it, speak it. Yet they'll go down there and walk into the bathroom, although it's got a big sign on the door that says 'Out of Order.' They can see that the toilet's broken because the back of it is off and there's no water in it, yet they'll still use it. Boy that stunk up the whole building tonight.

That little radio you sent me I told you I hooked up on to of those big square dry celled batteries...

31 August 1969

Sunday

Hello sweet honey, how are you? Have a nice trip? I bet you're happy to be back home with the little doggie and cat, family and nice little house and little Mustang. I was going to say something else but it's not very polite.

Remember how you told me that you wanted to have a tape waiting for you when you got back so this is the tape. I also got, well I'm anticipating getting the next hundred dollars but you should have about three hundred dollars in money orders waiting for you plus possibly a check from the government for \$575 for the month of August, so you can't complain too badly. Shoot, that almost pays for 75 percent of your trip.

Well, here I am sitting in my grubby little room. This is Sunday the 31st. I just finished making a tape to my parents explaining all about Hong Kong. I was going to tell them all about the job here and everything but the tape ran out. In fact I haven't really explained to anyone exactly what I do. I've written to you in letters saying how I sit around and do nothing, get bored, work long hours daily. The reason why I have today off is because I worked yesterday and I'm switching to nights. So I get today off in anticipation of working tonight. I'll work one night, I mean one week of nights, get a day off and go back on days again. This is a sorry job, really. Phooey. Well, I won't go into that right now.

I wonder if that radio's too loud. Let me shut this off once and see. I guess it's okay. You get a little music in the background, but that's all right. Oh, let me see, I wrote you a letter yesterday and brought you up to date on what was going on. I never did get to see Costello, at least not yet. My daily routine just doesn't lend itself to taking a little while off and looking around for somebody.

I'll tell you what I actually do. I am what's called the TOC Duty Officer and Liaison Officer for A-Company. I get up in the morning about 5:30, by 6:30 I'm on the job. My place of work is in the back of the S-3 shop where Scully will be working starting tomorrow. We got a little room back there that's got maps of all III Corps, all the different camps and everything else,

plus it's got two different radios. One is FM which we normally use and one is single side band. We've got all the (sneeze), excuse me, we've got all the message log books. We monitor everything that goes on in all of III Corps for all Special Forces. So if any camp wants anything, has anything happen to them, gets into contact, needs fighters, helicopters, gun ships, resupply of ammo, anything, anything at all, it all comes through where I work. My job is to, well, I've got a couple of NCOs working in there with me. Between the three of us we take all the incoming calls, log them in, inform people, relay messages, pass them on, keep people informed.

It's the type of job where if there's nothing going on, it's completely dead. It's absolutely, totally dead and boring. But when there's something going on, things are coming in so fast it takes all three of us. Usually one guy on each of the two radios and one guy rushing around logging things in, passing messages, making people aware of what's going on, posting the map, posting charts, all that garbage. So you have your peaks and your low spots. Well anyway, I get on the job at 6:30. From 6:30 to 7, I sort briefing notes, ground commanders' situation reports, operational status reports, things like that. I break them all down because at 7 o'clock I hop in my little jeep and carry my little briefcase and run over to what's called Second Field Force. That is where the three star general [Julian Ewell] who controls everything in III Corps operates. He's got a big underground Tactical Operations Center. So we go down about two stories underground and they got this great big cement bunker that's air conditioned, and the whole works. They've got all radios and crap down there too. That's where all these big wheels are that, in fact, that's it for III Corps. They control everything that's going on in III Corps right down there. Of course, you have to have a secret pass and all that stuff to get in. So I go down there with my briefcase and pass out all my papers to different field elements, liaison offices, G-3, G-2, G-3 Air, G-2 Targets, all that kind of junk. I have to go around and see all these different people, you know and they give me what crap they have and give them what crap I've got.

The people working down there, everybody from PFCs on up to full bird colonels, but boy, you've never seen so much brass in one place at one time. Usually there's a full bird colonel who's in charge of each of the G-3, the G-2, the G-3 Plans, the G-3 Operations, Chief of TOC, G-3 Targets, I mean G-2 Targets, G-2 Plans, G-2 Operations, all those guys, all those different titles, all have a full bird colonel in charge. Of course they have two or three flunky lieutenant colonels and majors and of course a bunch of captains. No lieutenants down there. I don't recall seeing one lieutenant down there. They're all captain or above. So I run down there and I poke around, mess around until about 7:30. It only takes about a half an hour to breeze through. Drive back over to MACV headquarters which is Military Assistance Command Vietnam. They are the chief advisors to all the ARVN units in Vietnam. I go to their headquarters and give them what junk I've got and they give me what junk they've got and I go back and of all the stupid things I got to pull what's called "motor-stables" on my dumb jeep. In other words I got to check the oil

and the water and the battery water level and the tires and lights, every single day.

Then I go back to where I work. This is about quarter to 8. I stay there from quarter to 8 until noon, from noon to 12:30 I get lunch, and from 12:30 to 4 I sit in that stupid little back room. At 4 o'clock I make another run over to Second Field Force Headquarters. Again I go down in the TOC. Then from 5 to 5:30 I sit in on the general's briefing. He has professional briefers, that's their sole job is to just brief him. Of course they have to, well I won't say "of course," but they do have to wear a brand new, spanking clean, pressed, starched uniform for every briefing, spit shined boots. It's a bunch of horse shit. That's no fooling. What a waste. They have that kind of garbage going on in a cotton picking war zone. You'd think they'd just be able to walk in and get their work done and get the heck out, you know, get back to work. But no, no no, they got to fool around.

Believe it or not they've got a lieutenant colonel whose sole job is to see if the general's table is set before the briefing. He's got to have hot coffee, cream, sugar, cups, spoons, a little folder, his pens have to be just so, the seats have to be just so. The table's got green felt on it. It's got to be completely spotless of lint and dust and dirt. He's got to make sure that the room is clean, that all the briefers have clean uniforms. That's a lieutenant colonel doing that! And that guy jumps around as if he's the general's chief PFC flunky. You ought to see the way he has to hop around and, oh man, he's a complete you-know-what.