

1969

Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 04

David Fetters

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/fetters>

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Fetters, David, "Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 04" (1969). *Dave Fetters Audiotape Transcriptions*. Paper 4.
<http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/fetters/4>
January 1, 1969.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collections at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dave Fetters Audiotape Transcriptions by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Dave Fetters' Audio Letters - 1969

Tape #4 16 April 1969 continued:

...shell craters, so we're not sure exactly what got them, whether it was a B-52 strike or a number of smaller strikes or artillery or what. But all over the place, there were bodies that were just barely covered with dirt. Apparently they were hit real hard and normally the VC or the NVA pick up all their dead and carry them deeper in the jungle and give them a good burial. There must have been so many people killed and so few people to take care of the dead that all they could do is just throw a little dirt on the bodies and drat, I didn't have my camera, but there were really some gory sights out there. A lot of graves were uncovered and there were skulls and hands and arms and chest cavities and legs and everything all over the place. Feet, most of them still had clothes attached to the bodies and some of them still had meat on the bones.

I came across one skull. The mouth was wide open and of course it was a perfect skull. You know, big hollow eye sockets and nose sockets. The mouth was wide open. It still had a North Vietnamese Army helmet on the skull. It was buried a little bit. I started to dig it up but then the skull fell apart and I decided not to keep it. The helmet was kind of ratty so I just left it, kind of grubby looking and everything. I did get a couple of souvenirs. Do you remember my telling you that Dale Vanderplow had one of those North Vietnamese belts with the silver buckle and the star on it? Well I found one of those. I also got what is called a Ho Chi Minh Sandal. It's a sandal made out of discarded vehicle tire with inner tube forming the straps that hold on to the feet. It's a real neat little gadget. I meant to get a pair but I was too busy stepping over bodies and looking at whatever anybody else found. I didn't collect everything that I wanted to, but I do have the belt and the sandal. I had a real good skull, a real perfect skull that I was going to take back, but too many other people had skulls and stuff and it was getting real crowded on our APC so I just left it. Not only did we find about a hundred bodies, we also found such things as rucksacks and discarded ammunition and containers of all sorts. Most of the stuff was pretty well moth eaten and rotten so we didn't get too many real good souvenirs.

There were some souvenirs that I wish I could have had and those were the hand grenades that I saw laying around. There must have been about twenty of them. They've got neat little wooden handles on them with a chunk of metal on the end. Whoops, there goes the tape. Okay, here's another little goodie. Oh yes, I was telling you about those hand grenades. They're real neat little things to have. I've seen a lot of people with them as paper weights on their desk all chromed up. They make real nice souvenirs but we didn't have any men out there who were experts at taking enemy demolitions apart to disarm them so we just let them lay. We also found some RPG rounds, rocket propelled grenade rounds out there and some B-40 rockets. So we put those in a big pile, well I didn't touch them, but the engineers that went along with us put them all

in a big pile and blew them all up. It was quite a sight to see, that field just full of bodies and parts and pieces and uniforms and all that kind of stuff, skulls and hands. Oh boy, I sure wish I had my camera. I meant to take it but this morning at 6 o'clock when I got up I was kind of groggy, so I left without it.

Riding those APC's through the jungle is quite an experience, of course we're all sitting on top of those things and you have to hang on to whatever you can find to hang on to and there's not that much to hang on to, especially when you have ten people up there on top with you. It's real crowded and whenever we hit a bumpy area or a terrain feature like a log or something that we have to go over, it jerks and jolts and throws everybody around. We had a couple people fall off. Nobody got hurt. We went to one area that was a logging area or something, or had been logged before. They left all the stumps in the ground and termites had gotten into the stumps and made great big mounds out of them. In fact, they were so big that we hung up a couple of PCs, in other words, the bottom of the PC hung up on a stump, and the tracks couldn't get any traction. So we had to tow them off. The APC that I was riding on threw a track so we spent an hour sitting there while the mechanics put the track back on the vehicle. Quite an operation. Meanwhile we had two jets and a helicopter gun ship flying over the area to protect us in case the VC wanted to sneak up on us and lob in some mortars or grenades or anything. But nothing happened, luckily, so we continued on our way.

An advantage of riding on APC's is that it can crash through the jungle and clear a nice path without too much trouble. A disadvantage is that the jungle is still so thick that if you're not careful it will sweep you right off the top of the thing. Not only that, but all the thorns and vines will entangle your weapon and web gear and things like that, and pull you off. Another thing which is worse is occasionally you'll hit a tree full of red ants and they'll just come dropping out of the tree and land all over you. As soon as they land on you they bite and it's just like a bee sting. Boy oh boy, sometimes just everybody just started slapping and swatting and knocking those things off. They really hurt. They get on the back of your neck and crawl up your pant legs and arms, face, they bite you anywhere. I had one bite me right on the end of the finger and I didn't even feel it because it was a calloused finger, you know where I play the guitar? I don't know how long he was there but I just happened to see him awhile later and knocked him off.

Coming back this afternoon, we came across a 500 pound bomb that was unexploded and laying in the jungle. So we, the engineers, put a demolition charge on it and we moved a good thousand meters away and the thing went off. Quite an earth shaking device. Oh yeah, another thing about riding on those APC's this time of year is that it's so hot that everybody sweats profusely and it's so dry that the APC's kick up dust that you wouldn't believe. By the time I got back here, I was so dirty I looked just like a Negro. Just as black as can be. Face and arms, everything that was exposed. It was a real funny sight. I should have taken a picture of myself

but I was too tired and dirty to take the time. When we did get back we found out that our pump had broken down and we didn't have any water to take a shower with. So I had to go over to one of the Vietnamese companies and dip water out of a well until I had a big bucket full and then pour it over my head in order to take my shower. It didn't matter, any way that water got over me was fine with me. I sure was dirty. When I came in about 5 o'clock, took my shower, ate, came right over here to check my mail, and got your nice letter and everything. That was a nice way to end the day. Tonight we got the movie, "For a Few Dollars More" in, so we saw that. In fact I just finished seeing it. We also had the movie, "Battle Beneath the Earth," "The Scalp Hunters," and a couple more. I can't quite remember the names of them right now but a pretty good lot of movies.

Let's see, there was something else that I wanted to tell you. Let me think. Oh yes, I got back this morning and found a couple of CRP [Combat Recon Platoon] bunkers in smoking ruins, so I asked what happened. Apparently the cheap wiring or whatever they have in their bunkers started on fire. This was about midday today. It started a couple bunkers on fire and nobody could get too close to put the fire out because the CRP's had hand grenades and ammunition inside their bunkers and all that stuff was blowing up. Finally they got a big engineer payloader, you know, one of those great big front shovel scoop jobs that came up and dumped a big load of dirt on the bunkers and smothered the fire out. It was kind of funny though.

I also had a sore fanny after riding on that APC all day because I was sitting on just plain, hard metal. I haven't got much padding back there to begin with. Boy that bouncing up and down all day long sure knocked the crap out of me. It feels good to sit on a nice soft bed for awhile, well, if you could call it soft. The mattress is only about two inches thick, but it's better than nothing.

Tomorrow I'll see if I can take a few pictures of planes coming in and helicopters coming in so you can get the idea of how dry and dusty it is. The runway is nothing but dirt right now and when a plane comes in it makes an awful cloud of dust. That noise that you might have just heard is the mortar outside my room here firing flares up in the air. It gets light around here about 6:15 or 6:30 in the morning and it gets dark about 7:15 or 7:30 at night. The temperature in the daytime must be 100 or 110 between noon and 2 o'clock and slowly tapers off. Tonight, or at this time of night, 9:30 or so, 9:15, it's about 80 or 85 out. It feels cool compared to the heat of the day. Inside my little room here it's about the same temperature but the air is so still that it seems quite hot. Well, it doesn't seem, it is. While I'm laying here making this recording, the sweat is still popping out all over my chest, shoulders, arms, and face.

I've got a funny letter here. It's written by a guy or a friend of a guy who's getting real short and is getting ready to come home and it's addressed to this guy's family telling them what

to expect and what to overlook when the guy finally gets home. It's quite a riot, and it covers one full page, so I'm going to retype it and send you a copy. There's also another one kicking around that's called, "How to Tell a Man by How He Uses the Urinal," or some crazy thing like that. It's got a list of about 15 different men and what they do and don't do at a urinal. It's real funny. I saw it about a month ago and I meant to grab it up then and make a copy of it but never got around to it. Now I'm not sure where it is so I'll have to look for it. Soon as I find it though I'll type up a couple of copies and send them to you. They're quite a riot. They're something like "The Green Beret As Seen by such and such."

Last night we showed the movie, "The Green Berets," to a bunch of the CIDG outdoors, and they got a good laugh out of it, especially the part where that little hamchuck kid trips that sergeant, Sergeant Peterson, and the guy goes sprawling. A couple of other places where after the North Vietnamese had captured the camp, the American planes came over and shot them all up you know. Everybody was yelling "VC #10" and that kind of stuff. "Chicom VC" those are about the only words the CIDG know.

I read in the Stars and Stripes magazine where at Fort Benning, Georgia, an APC with two people on it who were demonstrating how an APC can float and get across a river, in this case the Chattahoochee, down there by the airport, you know where that little road led off and it went down to an area with bleachers and things like that. Well anyway, the APC was maneuvering out in the river before a couple hundred people when all of a sudden the nose just dipped under and the thing sank in 30 feet of water and drowned the two people that were on board. I don't know if you've ever seen one in the water or not, but they do float, but with only with about two inches of the entire contraption out above water. At times that Chattahoochee River really had some current in it. This must have been one of the times that the current was just a little too much to handle for an APC. It's really too bad but I don't know why it doesn't happen more often because those things, as far as I'm concerned, aren't made to cross streams and rivers and lakes and such. This only had two people in it. What would it be like with a squad, which is what it's built to hold with all their equipment and everything, which would be about ten people or twelve people with all their equipment? It adds up to a lot of weight. That thing would really be low in the water.

I'm having a little trouble talking tonight for some reason. I guess it's because I swallowed so much dust today. Every couple of minutes I've got to cough and choke and gag so I have to shut the machine off. Not only that but it gives me time to think of what I'm going to tell you next. I might get around to sending you a couple of indigenous poncho liners they're called. They're all green, O.D. in color, and built like an American poncho liner but about two-thirds the size. It'd be handy to have a couple of them. We could use them as car blankets or take them to the beach or give them to friends or whatever we want to do with them. Also I've

got a few of those nylon hammocks. When I send them to you what I suggest you do, I think they're six feet long, what you should do is take one and cut it up and sew about an additional three feet or four feet on to a couple of them so they'd be big enough to hold me or maybe even you. I don't know if one of those six foot hammocks would be long enough for you, but if you want to try one out, you can either just put rope through the ends, and you know, some strong nylon rope, or put a stick through the end and tie the rope on it. When you stretch it out between two trees, stretch it quite tight, I mean real tight, otherwise you'll be sitting in a U-shape and it's quite uncomfortable for any amount of time. Well, I have to spend the whole night in one so I stretch it out just as tight as it will go. Then when I lay in it, it's relatively flat. It's kind of hard to sleep on your side and definitely hard to sleep on your stomach, if not impossible. But, I have found a way to sleep on my side, either side, and on my back. Sometimes I sleep with my legs straddling the thing.

Holy mackerel, somebody's been spraying bug spray all over the place and it's drifting into my room and about choking me to death. I was sitting here trying to think of what I was going to say next when all of a sudden I heard a crump, crump, crump, crump. So I got up and ran outside, and sure enough we just took four rounds of incoming. Hard to tell where it was. As I was saying, I ran up on the roof to check out what it was and nothing else came in. Apparently it was four VC mortar rounds or something hit outside our perimeter, way out in the sticks some place. Their aim was off tonight luckily. I imagine any minute now I'll hear the 81 mortars or the 105 howitzers start firing in the general direction from which the mortars came. The interpreter just stopped in to ask me if I knew what was going on. I said I did. Nothing I have to do now. I just came back inside and told the radio man that we just took four rounds of incoming, but since it was so far outside our perimeter and so close to the engineers, they'll probably take care of it.

I see the tape's about ready to run out. I'm going to listen to this and I hope it recorded okay. I think I'll get ready for bed and just lay here and listen to the tape that you sent me today. Maybe tomorrow I'll get started on that one to my folks. Tell them I'm sorry I haven't returned it yet, but I'm just busy. In the meantime you can let them listen to the ones that you got, just fill them in up to now, or up to whenever I get around to sending them a tape.

I meant to say that the pillow you picked out was exactly the one I would have picked out. It was a good choice. It sure ought to be neat. I enjoyed reading the letter how you say I'm so interesting to live with because all the funny things I do or the natural things I do that seem funny to you, et cetera. Well, the same thing goes for me, hon. You're a perfect wife, and I wouldn't change you for any reason in the world, not even your figure. I may tease you by telling you you have a fat tummy or fat buns or something but you know I don't mean it. It's all in fun. I love you just the way you are. So don't change. I'll see you in Hong Kong. Love you so much.

6 May 1969

Tuesday

Hi hon. Tonight is the 6th of May and it's about 6:15 in the evening. I'm sitting up on the teamhouse roof again in my usual position. Presently we're having an alert where all the CIDG man their fighting positions and all the mortar crews fire some white phosphorous rounds out in the woodline just to start fires and to practice, things like that. It's quite a sight to see, all those Willy Peter rounds as we call them, going off in the woodline and great big clouds of billowing white smoke just settling all over the entire area. It starts a fire and all the dead grass and trees out there start burning. That white phosphorous is really some nasty stuff. If a person ever got that stuff on him, it would just burn right down into the muscle of his arms or wherever it landed, and just keep right on burning. The stuff burns in contact with the air. If you get it on you, it sticks and just burns in. You can't just knock it off. It's really some fierce stuff.

I had a little excitement again last night. I had radio watch from midnight to 2 a.m., so I went to bed about 10:30. I was real tired after working hard all day, manual type labor again around the teamhouse and the area, getting ready for the monsoons. We're throwing more sandbags on the roof and trying to cover the whole area with cement before it starts raining real hard. There's still a couple of places that leak there in the club area, the roof over the club. We're trying to get enough sandbags up there so that we can cement the whole thing and get it waterproofed before the monsoons really get here to stay because once it starts raining every day we won't be able to fool around with cement. Anyway, after an hour and a half sleep I was awakened and went on duty and I started writing you a letter. I was kind of groggy at the time after just waking up. I just started rambling on about how I like my camera, although I haven't taken any pictures yet. Well, last night I hadn't. I did manage to take some this morning. I'll tell you about that later.

Anyway, I started telling about how nice the camera is and its capabilities and how I was just studying it and learning all the controls and dials and everything. Just looking at it and playing with it. I got a real nice soft black leather case with it and shoulder strap, and of course the lens cover. It's really a beautiful piece of equipment.

Do you hear the noise in the background there? That's one of the star points opening up with their M-16s and machine guns. You can see tracers whipping out into the woodline and you can hear the, oh there goes another star point over in back of me now. You can hear mortar rounds exploding out in the woodline. It's really something to hear. Okay, they quit. There's a couple of mortar rounds still going off. I don't know how good this is going to turn out on tape but I did pick a good time to start making a tape letter to you tonight. Shut up! Shut up! That was Lieutenant Valez. He just walked out of the shower down below me here and he saw me

using the tape recorder so he piped up, "Hello Lieutenant Fetters! Hello to your wife!" things like that.

Anyway, as I was saying, last night at 12:15 I was the only one awake listening to the radio and writing you a letter. We started to take incoming mortar rounds from the VC so I ran around getting everybody up. In the span of the next 20 minutes, we took 70 mortar rounds. However we were fortunate in that none of them landed inside the camp. Apparently the VC were shooting from the southwest because we could hear the mortar rounds leaving the tube and a minute later they'd start landing. Of course we spent most of our time inside the teamhouse waiting for it to let up but we did come out long enough to determine the direction from which they were coming so we could tell the artillery and they could start firing and our mortar crews could start returning the fire. Anyway, the rounds started landing south of us out on the runway and just worked their way right up the runway from the south to the north up to the turn around point. Not too many of them landed right on the runway itself which is lucky because the thing has just been completed and we're still waiting for our first plane to come in. We did take about four or six rounds on the runway and the turn around point. They of course make small craters which will have to be repaired later. But the rest of them landed off to either side of the runway. They were staggered all the way from the south up to the north. I think the VC were aiming at the camp, and they must have had their tubes just a little bit off. They had a good spread. If they had been east about 300 meters, they would have walked those mortar rounds right up through the middle of camp. I'm sure they would have done quite a bit of damage. As it was, nobody got hit and very minor damage.

While the rounds were coming in I was down in the radio room so I called the B-Team and asked them if they had any aircraft up in our area and they did. Katum was also taking some mortar rounds and they had what's called a shadow aircraft over in their area. It's a converted 119 with three miniguns which are the super fast, six-barreled revolving machine guns putting out six thousand rounds a minute. So with three of them firing, that's eighteen thousand rounds of ammunition a minute. Well he came over. It only took him about five minutes to get here and he circled the camp. We sent a flare up over camp so he could take a bearing off of the flare. We told him 220 degrees was the azimuth at about anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 meters out from camp was where we thought the VC were firing from. By the time he got over the camp, they had quit firing but he flew over there and dropped a parachute flare out of the plane and started circling the area and started opening up with the miniguns. Boy, is that ever a fantastic sight to see and also to hear. When that thing fires, all three miniguns open up at the same time and I told you before what it sounded like. It's just hard to describe the noise. If there hadn't been so much going on I probably would have gotten the tape recorder and brought it up but I was manning a radio and of course when the VC are shooting at you, you don't have time to just

stop and think about well, should I grab the tape recorder and my camera and come up here and see what I can find?

Oh, here we go again. Everybody's opening up again. I'll have to play this tape back and see how it turns out. It's kind of neat seeing all those tracers flying out into the woodline. I'm sure if I took a picture I couldn't get a real good shot of it. The tracers are so small.

I'm not quite sure where the tape ended on the other side. It just all of a sudden was flipping around the take up reel. I think I was just letting you listen in on all the firing and everything and all of a sudden the thing ran out of tape. I was talking about that shadow aircraft that was flying around shooting at the VC last night. He had 25,000 rounds to shoot up and he'd open up with short bursts of anywhere from two or three seconds up to maybe ten or fifteen seconds at the most. When it was pitch black, the tracers, which is about every fifth bullet, came out so fast it was just a solid stream of red light from the plane halfway to the ground to where the tracers burned out. It was really neat. It kept flying around and shooting from all different angles, mostly in the same general area and dropping these real powerful flares. They must have been a million or a million and a half candle power because 81 millimeter flares that we use are 500,000 candle power. They're real bright. Anyway, he flew around for about thirty minutes or so until he shot up all of his ammunition. The noise that that makes is really fantastic. It sounds like a real powerful piston aircraft engine just going full blast, just racing. It's a real noisy racket. I can't really think of what else it would compare to around there. One of these days I'll be lucky enough to have the tape recorder handy when one of those things flies over and see if I can get a tape for you but it's really something to listen to. It's even neater to see. I don't know if a time exposure would turn out, possibly. Even if I did get a time exposure it probably would have just been a couple of red lines from the clouds to the ground.

They're still firing their 60 mortars over here to the right of me. Some of the rounds are landing rather close. They need a little practice there. You can hear all of the noise in the background. That's only one star point firing. Can you imagine with all five star points firing? What a racket that makes. I don't know how this is going to turn out on tape. Probably nothing like what it sounds like here because a tape recorder of this size doesn't really pick up the sounds as it is, as they are. I imagine it comes out real high pitched and squeaky and crackly whereas around here it's real throaty and whew, quite scary. I don't know how the VC ever get up enough nerve to attack a camp in the face of that kind of fire power. Gee. It's enough to make a guy shudder. Holy mackerel. Everybody's just standing around up here laughing and talking and just, they're amazed at the amount of fire power they can put out. They're all making jokes at me; I'm sitting up here telling war stories on the tape and they're all laughing at me. They're all down at the other end of the house so I try to get away from people when I'm making tapes. I'm getting to the point now where it doesn't bother me at all to make a tape and listen to myself talk as I'm

making it and listen to myself again when I rerun the tape but I hate to make a tape with other people standing around and sitting around listening in and making comments on the side, things like that.

Today we were getting sandbags for the top of the teamhouse over in the area where the 25th Division and the engineers stayed when they were here. When they left they plowed down all of their berms and bunkers and everything. Now it's just a big dusty sandy area. It gets real hot in the daytime. We went out there about 3 o'clock this afternoon and it was terribly hot. We were picking up sandbags and loading them on the truck when Sergeant Moss, the team sergeant yelled and jumped back and we all looked down and here's this great big scorpion. It's the first live scorpion I've ever seen. It was pitch black and it looked just like a crawdad, what do you call them, crayfish, only it's got this tail that just curves up in back just like a regular scorpion. It was about four inches long, a great big monster. We all kind of stood there and looked at it and poked at it. I wanted to try to catch it and try out what my dad told me that he did in India, and that was to take gasoline and make a circle around the scorpion and then light it and watch him sting himself to death. Well, the other guys told me I was crazy for wanting to catch it and keep it, so they started throwing rocks at it and poking it with sticks. Finally they killed the thing. Boy, it was quite a scary looking animal. I've heard the guys saying before that they've seen scorpions around here, but this is the first one I've seen since I've been here.

Oh, there goes another star point opening up with a couple of their rifles and machine guns. We do this about once every two weeks or so, just to make sure everybody knows his fighting position and make sure all the machine guns are laid in properly and everyone knows how to handle their weapons and man their battle stations. I'm just kind of looking around now, surveying what's going on. They brought one man in a couple of minutes ago who had a piece of shrapnel in his leg. Apparently somebody shot either an M-79 grenade launcher or a LAW or blew up a Claymore mine or something too close into the berm and a piece of shrapnel flew back and hit the guy. He wasn't hurt too bad. There goes another, oh that's artillery shooting now.

Oh, the tape's about ready to run out. I think this is a short tape. I'm quite sure it is because it doesn't seem like I've told you a whole lot. I'm getting to be as bad as you are. The tape ran out while I was talking. I'm just going to say goodbye and hope you enjoy all the noise on the tape. I'm going to listen to it and see what it sounds like. It ought to be pretty good. So maybe next time I'll have a longer tape and more to say. In fact I know I will because I will have just come in off operation and have the operation to tell you about.

9 May 1969

Friday

Good morning, hon. This morning is Friday about the 8th or so. I'm in one of my another fantastically good moods. I just got in off operation. I had a heck of a time when we were out there. I just now found out, just before I came up here on the roof, that my two radio operators stole our two extra batteries that we had out there on operation. We always take two extra radio batteries in case the ones in the radio poop out or get wet or something. Now I just find out that the batteries are missing. Who knows how long they've been missing. These were two Cambodians whom we can usually trust. Boy that makes me mad. I'm going to get those two guys and I'm going to make sure they know how displeased I am.

One of the guys is a friend of a lot of the team members and he comes over here to the teamhouse a lot and just walks in and thinks he owns the joint. He speaks fairly good English. The next time he comes over I'm going to bodily throw him out the front door and tell him to stay away from us. I'm tired of these stupid, idiotic people.

Well, I left Wednesday morning, on the operation. We went south toward the bridge. We got to the bridge about five o'clock in the evening and we sat in the woodline until it was almost dark and moved out toward the bridge. We were setting up ambushes that night, south of the bridge. You'll see a road coming in from the east meeting the highway that runs up to camp. We were going to set an ambush on that road and also the road, the north-south road, going across the bridge. When we got up fairly close to the bridge, we saw three VC on the other side of the bridge on bicycles just leaving the river. They must have been fishing or I don't know what. So, instead of calling in artillery on them which I could have done easily, but didn't because of the fact that the first round is always an air burst and it would have just scared them off before they had time to get the high explosive rounds in on the ground on them. So what I did instead was told the VNSF to send out the CRP which is the Combat Recon Platoon of 20 men and ambush the three characters. There are only three of them and we had 20 people in the CRP. He said, "Yeah, fine, you know, we'll send them out and they'll sneak up on them and shoot them." So we sent them out and we waited and waited and all this time it was getting dark. Pretty soon it was so dark we couldn't see the VC anymore because they were about 500 meters away, which is quite a ways. We waited and waited and waited, and finally it was so dark and nothing happened. Pretty soon here comes the CRP back. And we said, "What happened? What's the matter? Why didn't you get them?" They said, "Oh, we couldn't get across the bridge without the VC seeing us." So they argued back and forth and around and around.

As I found out later, what they did, they went up to the bridge and they sat there and waited until the VC left so that they wouldn't have to shoot them and then just came back and

reported that the VC got away, they couldn't get to them without being seen. Boy oh boy, talk about being mad. I let that stupid VNSF know exactly how I felt. Boy I was so mad, I was just steaming. Of course, when I get mad like that and tell the VNSF what I think, I can't be sure that the interpreter is interpreting me literally. I think he fudges on the interpretation so the VNSF doesn't get all embarrassed and lose face in front of his people.

Anyway, he got the idea that I was mad that these stupid CRP's were afraid to go out and go after three lousy VC when they had 20 people with them, M-16's, grenade launchers, and a machine gun. That shows you exactly what these people are like. They're just completely afraid to do anything. They don't want to fight for their country. All they're looking out for is themselves. As long as they get a place to sleep and food to eat, they could care less whether or not they chase VC. They think this war is great, boy. They get all this free food and free money and all the ammunition they can shoot up.

Anyway, that night was a complete waste. I'm sure the three VC's that got away knew that we were thereabouts and kept all their people off the roads. The next morning we headed back up this way and we got about a klick and a half south of the camp and set up ambushes again. We had three ambushes out this time. It started raining and thundering and storming that night, or last night. It would have been an ideal time to catch the VC because on rainy nights they like to come out and move around and junk. Sure enough, this morning when I got up there was all kinds of yakking and yakking so I got the interpreter to find out what was going on. I come to find out that the ambush that we had on the north-south road going to camp about 200 meters south of where we slept, they saw some VC crossing the road with flashlights, and they were only 100 meters away which is about the length of a football field. Those chickens didn't even open fire. They saw the VC crossing the road, they had flashlights, they were silhouetted and everything, and they were afraid to shoot.

Man, I don't know. I was so discouraged when I came in this morning I just told the VNSF he ran a #10 operation and it was the worst one I had ever seen. I'm going to write a report on him and send it in. I don't think it will do any good but I'm going to do it anyway. It's just pathetic. We could have gotten the three down by the bridge the night before last, and then last night we could have gotten another half a dozen more except for the fact that they're so afraid to shoot at the VC. They're afraid that they'll be outnumbered and the VC will come charging back. And of course as soon as they get shot at, they turn and run. Boy, how discouraging.

Every time we go out on operation we have two Cambodians as personal bodyguards for the Americans that are out, because if anything goes wrong the Vietnamese will look out for themselves. They don't care who they're shooting at. They turn and run away from the VC and if they find that the Americans are standing in their way, they'll just run right over them or shoot them down on their way. We've got two Cambodian body guards and they hang with us all over

the place and sleep with us and everything to make sure, well, they're supposed to watch out to make sure that the radio batteries aren't missing in the middle of the night and people don't swipe knives off of us, off of our webbing that we wear and swipe our canteens and steal our water and our food and our C-4 that we use for heating up our chow. Those are the breaks of the game.

I got back in camp and found out they had a little more problems. I got back at camp and found out that they've had more problems with the Vietnamese again so we've initiated what we call an honor guard furnished by a Cambodian company. They furnish the squad every night for us, the same people, seven people. They constantly guard and patrol all around our teamhouse from 7 o'clock on until 7 o'clock in the morning. That is so the Vietnamese don't sneak in at night and steal whatever they can get their hands on, breaking into the mess hall, stealing food and ice, stealing our water, light fixtures, just anything they can grab, wires, screen, cement bags. You name it, they'll steal it. So we've got these guards around here and anytime after 11 o'clock if somebody approaches the chain link fence that we have around the teamhouse and tries to get in, they're challenged. If they don't stop, they're shot. No questions asked, they're just shot.

We've got two, you know that little red flare I shot up over the lake one night last January? We've got a couple of those here in the commo room. If we ever get into trouble where say the Vietnamese surround the teamhouse or point weapons at us or aim LAWS at us or anything like that, we just pop one of those red star flares and all three Cambodian companies will come into the inner berm, surround the teamhouse, and squelch any possible riot that the Vietnamese could try. I wish the whole camp were Cambodians because those people are good fighters and everything. They know what they're doing and they like the Americans. They hate the VC, whereas the doggone Vietnamese, they could care less. The VC don't bother them, they don't bother the VC. They just soon let them run around in their country. They don't care.

Also, whenever we have an alert, each Cambodian company sends a squad to the ends of their company areas that border on the Vietnamese company areas. Their job is to do nothing but to guard the Vietnamese from turning and firing on their own people. It's been known to happen in a lot of camps that when the VC attack, the Vietnamese inside the camp instead of returning fire on the Vietcong, they will turn right around and shoot at people inside the camp. In other words, the Cambodians. They'll even shoot at their own people on the inner berm, that's the way these people are. Then when the VC break over their star point, they just join the VC and fight against us. So, anytime we have a ground attack or anything like that and the Cambodians see that the Vietnamese are leaving their fighting positions, they'll just gun them down. Also at Katum, which is the camp next to ours, when they had their ground attack last December or so, a lot of it started right inside the camp. The Vietnamese knew that it was coming so they just started firing on the Americans. The Americans in turn just opened up with their 105's point blank range right into the Vietnamese companies. Just wiped out bunker after bunker of those

stupid people.

You know on an operation when the Vietnamese get hit, they won't even haul out their own wounded and dead. They'll just leave them sit. They'll just turn and run. They could care less about their buddies. If they get wounded, they think, "Shoot. I'm looking out for number one. I could care about my best friend. I don't care if he's wounded or hurt or can't walk or anything. I'll just let the VC have him. I'm just going to get out of here." That's the way they feel. Cambodians, even if they're out numbered and being overrun and everything, if their people get wounded or shot and killed, they will police up all the bodies and equipment and everything and bring them back into camp. They take care of their own.

Also when I got back in today I found out that over at Katum there was an M-79 round laying out on the runway and an artillery lieutenant and an enlisted man saw it there. They got out of their jeep and went over to it and they looked at it and they couldn't tell whether or not it was a dud round or just one that somebody had dropped or I guess it didn't enter their minds that it was a booby trap. So they went to pick the thing up and it killed the enlisted man and wounded the officer. He's in satisfactory condition right now. At night, sometime during the night, the Vietcong snuck up to the runway and laid the booby trap right in the middle of it. You might think it's funny that the VC can come up so close to camp. It's not at all rare to find that when you go outside your camp in the morning you'll see signs on your barbed wire fences: "The VC were here," and "We kill all Hoa-Ky", which is Vietnamese for Americans. "We capture all Americans," things like that, right out on the front gate. The VC are experts at sneaking up on camps and putting signs out like that but a lot of it is due to the fact that the people who are supposed to be on guard at night are actually sleeping in their positions or if they do see the VC, they won't fire on them for fear that the VC will fire back and score a couple of hits. It's really a pathetic situation over here. I'm getting real fed up. I hope that after my six months out here in the field they'll take me in on the B-Team or the C-Team where I can just sit behind a desk and do paperwork and not have to fool around with these stupid people. You get so discouraged, you know.

Well, you know how I feel. I keep griping about them and griping about them but things aren't going to change, at least not for a long, long time. They're going to be just as lousy and as cheap and stupid and idiotic as ever. I see no end to the war if these people keep acting the way they do. If the Americans ever pulled out this country would go to you know where so fast. Then all our past eight years here would have been a complete waste because these people just won't fight for their country.

You may hear that firing in the background. Those are supposedly our guards called LPs out on the runway. They're supposed to be Listening Posts, somewhat camouflaged, set out into the woodline so that in case the VC sneak up they can give us early warning. Those jerks sit out

there and fire their rifles all day and eat, sleep, and make all kinds of noise. They actually aren't doing us much good. A little, but not much.

Oh, the captain is going to be leaving this coming Sunday for his two weeks, or his one week R&R. He'll probably be gone for two weeks so during that time I'll be camp commander. Also we're having a battery of 155 howitzers moving in. They will be part of the 1st Cav. people, "legs" in other words. [a derogatory term for non-airborne troops] They'll be moving in three big 155 howitzers. They'll be parked right out here behind our teamhouse. When those things fire over the teamhouse they make such a noise, that your whole bed inside the teamhouse will jump. I was in the C-Team one time, I guess it was the last time I was in on my scrounging operation, and about three blocks away they were firing 155's. Man oh man, what a racket! I couldn't believe the noise it made. It almost threw me out of bed it was so loud, right in the middle of night. Boy, you think a bomb went off right next to the bunker. Well these things are going to be in camp for now. It's great to have the extra fire power and everything but boy when they start firing over the teamhouse at about charge seven or nine which is about their max charge, you know they're firing. The whole place just shudders. It's a wonder it doesn't fall apart, all the cement and everything up here on the roof because of the noise it makes. It's just fantastic. Well, they'll be moving in and like I say it'll be nice to having the extra firepower because we sure need it.

One of the spotter aircraft found some VC's to the northwest yesterday, or northeast rather. We put about 205 rounds of artillery in on them. I was out in the field and I monitored all of that on the radio. I wasn't here in camp when they were firing but almost all night last night they were firing. Apparently they found some VC out there running around through the bushes. It's kind of hard to tell if we got any or not though, those rounds landing in the jungle and only the aircraft up there to determine whether or not any kills were made. What we usually do is send out an operation to sweep the area but the VC are like the Cambodians. They haul off all their dead so that we can't get a good count of how many we actually kill or wound or how much damage we actually do.

Okay, here I am on the other side. I've got three of your letters and a tape down there waiting for me. I just got in this morning at 8, got cleaned up and read a letter from Pete and one from Sue and Ken. They didn't have a whole lot to say. They bought a little camping tent. It's seven feet in diameter and only four and a half feet high. It's built like an igloo and supported with fiberglass poles. Next I guess they're going to get sleeping bags and Coleman lanterns and a stove, getting ready for their big trip in August. When they get their tax return back they're going to fly down to Tulsa for their best man's wedding and stay with his parents while they're down there. I don't know where they're getting all their money to spend. It seems to me that when we were first married we didn't have money like that to just go flying around the cities half way

across the nation just for weddings and start splurging on a lot of camping equipment and stuff like that. But of course they're both working. When we were first married you were still in school so I guess that accounts for where most of our money went.

I think after I make the tape to you or maybe I'll quit now and go down and read your letters and find out what you have to say and answer some of your questions and stuff. I wanted to get this tape out of the way so it can go out this morning on the work chopper. Oh, and I forgot to tell you that A-Company commander stopped in here while I was gone yesterday. He looked around at the inside of our teamhouse and we're kind of proud of it because we've been working hard to get the thing as homey as possible. We've got the entire inside painted now and each man's CONEX is all cleaned up and painted. We take a little pride in where we live since we have to spend most of our time in the teamhouse, at least most of us, doing paperwork and things like that, and sleeping in it. Oh, excuse me (I sneezed). We like to have it as homey as possible and as comfortable as possible. So we've got the whole inside painted and the entire club has those big four by eight plywood sheets on the walls and they're all varnished. We have new fluorescent light fixtures that we've hung up and a nice homemade bar made out of big timbers. The carpenters did a pretty good job. They fastened them all together with wooden dowel pins instead of nailing it all together. It looks real rustic, kind of neat. We have some pictures of movie actresses hanging up on the wall with their signatures on it. They have bikinis on by the way, they aren't nude. And a couple Playboy foldouts hanging up, and magazines and newspapers that are months and months old, but still, it's something to read anyway.

Anyway, he came in and he was real pleased to see that we had done so much work. As soon as he goes back to A-Company, he's going to tell the III Corps commander, which is General Richardson, pretty good friend of ours up here, that we've been working on our teamhouse, that it's about the best one that he's ever seen and most of us are willing to bet that it's one of the best ones in Vietnam because a lot of guys on the team have been around many A-camps. Not necessarily assigned to them, but just to visit, and have found that most of them are not near as nice as ours. The ones that are getting close to ours do all the work on the inside and let the outside go to pot. Around here we've been doing work on both. I'll have to take some pictures of the outside of the teamhouse. You can get a better idea of what we've been doing.

Basically the teamhouse is built around CONEXs which are the individual men's rooms, the hallway down the middle of it, and the club which is mostly made out of big six by six timbers is a kind of a square area in the back of the teamhouse. The whole thing is lined with big timbers, sandbags, PSP [perforated steel plate, used for runways], more sandbags, more PSP, more sandbags, ammo boxes full of dirt, just stacked layer upon layer upon layer upon layer. Of course all of the walls are about eight to ten sandbags thick on the side as well as on top. The whole thing is capped with cement, mostly for waterproofing, but also to afford some protection

against shrapnel and things like that. The whole teamhouse area, mess hall, water tower, commo bunker, and shower room is surrounded by chain link fence. Presently we're building an interpreter's bunker on the inside of the fence here onto the back of the teamhouse so that those people can be handy at all times so if we ever get hit or anything they can just run inside the teamhouse. Then we've got interpreters.

I'll take some pictures and, I don't know, maybe give you a little narrative to go along with the film that I send home. I think the first roll of 35mm that I shoot with my new camera I'm going to send it away and then have the film developed and sent back to me so I can see how the pictures turn out to make sure I'm doing everything properly with the camera. From then on I'll just send you the rolls of film home and you can develop them. As long as I have 35mm here I'm not going to have too much trouble getting film because that's about all they sell over here is 35mm. As soon as I get my telephoto lenses I'll be able to take some real fantastic shots of helicopters in the air and things on the ground from the air when I fly in. That'll be a lot of fun. I just hope I get some time.

Starting now and during the next three or four weeks the team is going to be down to about half strength because a lot of guys are on R&R so let's see, we'll have about six people here and that's all. Two people will be out on operations at all times so that leaves four Americans in camp. That means radio watch every night because it takes four watches per night on radio watch. That means also you'll have about six days in camp before you have to go out for your operation when usually it's about fifteen. So as you can see we're going to be pretty busy for the next couple weeks. Besides that I'll be acting commander and I'll have Lieutenant Valez, which is the Civic Action / Psychological Operations officer as my XO. Between the two of us we'll have our hands full with all kinds of lousy paperwork, and I think we're due for an inspection team sometime soon. Like I said, the new artillery battery is moving in. We'll have to get them all squared away and issue them sandbags and all that kind of baloney, and help them out as much as we can. This is going to leave very little time for free time but some things are just going to have to slide, that's all there is to it.

We'll see how it goes. It can't be all that bad. I'm not sweating it, but you know the way I am. When I see things that have to be done I like to get out there and do them just to accomplish them but around here there's always so much to be done that I, myself, just can't make sure that all the jobs that I'd like to see done get accomplished and if they are accomplished properly. I like to oversee everything, get my fingers in everything and make sure it's done right. If anything I hate is to tell somebody to do something and then to come out a couple days later and find out it's been done but so poorly it's got to be done over again. These civilians that we have working for us we have to keep on them all the time to make sure they do things correctly and don't cut corners. From about 10:30 to 11:30 you have to watch them like an eagle, otherwise they'll

sneak off on you and take an early lunch, take their poc time, and shoot, they only end up working from 8 am to 10:30 if they can get away with it, and then from 3 to 4:30, six days a week. Then they expect to get paid for a full 48 hour week or a 45 hour week, whatever they're supposed to be working. They're just like everybody else. They're out to get whatever they can for as little in return as possible. But, those are the breaks of the game.

I think after another couple more months here I'm going to say "phooey." That's the way the attitude is on the team. Most of these guys, they say, "Shoot. I've been here long enough. I'm tired of fighting these people. Just let them get away with whatever they can. I'm tired of fighting them." It's a losing battle. No matter how hard you work, you don't seem to be able to accomplish anything, in that direction anyway. When you get most of the guys on the team with an attitude like that it's hard to get anything done around here. Even after a couple more months of this stuff I can't see myself getting that kind of attitude but I probably will slack up a little bit, not work quite as hard, spend a little more free time catching up on some reading that I've been trying to do since I've been here. I think I've only read about two books since I've been here. I haven't even started that one by Bob Shaver yet, from Bob. Oh I almost sneezed. You know how it is when you almost start to sneeze and then you just get ready for it and all of a sudden it doesn't come. That's just what happened there.

I haven't got a whole lot to tell you this time. I had a pretty good night's sleep out in the jungle last night in spite of the rain. I had my hammock set up and then my poncho over top of that about a foot and a half above me. I remained high and dry and slept soundly in spite of the lightning and the thunder and the rain coming down on the poncho and all the artillery going over head. I don't know who was shooting what last night but there was some mighty big rounds going over our head; made a terrific crack when they went over head. It must have been 155's or 8 inch or 175's which is about the biggest gun we have over here. Instead of just the normal whistling sound, like a 105 makes, this thing made a clap just like a thunderclap when it went over. When the round hit the ground it just shook the whole area. Just rattled trees and everything.

Oh, I forgot to say, yesterday when we were coming back from the bridge we were walking off the side of the road through the moderately thick stuff and we were walking through an area that had been heavily bombarded with artillery and most of the trees were dead, they're just great big tall dead snags I guess they're called. All of a sudden about 4 in the afternoon, a real stiff breeze came up for no apparent reason and these snags or stags, whatever they call them, started waving in the breeze and every now and then one would fall over nearby, come down with a big, horrendous crash. Everybody would jump a foot. Some of them fell pretty close. If one had ever landed on anybody it would have been xin loi. He would have been squashed flat. So we took it kind of easy going through that area. We picked the clearest areas we could find for fear that those trees would eventually fall on some of us but none of them did.

I think about a dozen of them fell all total inside of about 30 minutes. Boy it's kind of scary when you're 30 or 40 yards from one of those great big monsters when they fall. They bring vines and branches and everything down with them, a couple of lesser trees around them. Just a terrific crash. The trees around here don't grow like the trees over there where they have branches from about the bottom half throughout the entire upper half. The trees over here have great big long tall trunks. Way at the top they've got, what foliage they do have, I think because of the fact that no sunlight can filter down through a lot of that thick stuff that only the branches at the top get enough sunlight to sprout leaves and younger branches, things like that. It's kind of neat. It's kind of weird. If I get my telephoto lens I'll be able to take some pictures of the tree line around here and you can see what they look like.

I was going to take my camera out on this operation but shoot, all that, just any little extra weight is rough. I try to take a minimum amount of weight as possible. Like this time I only took four canteens because I knew I could get a refill halfway through the operation down on the river. Usually I have to take about six canteens and of course all your food. And ammo. You're loaded down with ammo and that stuff weighs a ton. I take survival kits and signal flares and mirrors and bayonet. I don't use the bayonet for my rifle; it's just for hacking vines and weeds and junk like that. And a hammock and poncho. All that stuff adds up. It gets pretty heavy. Man, when you're hacking through that thick stuff and sweating like a fiend, any little extra weight really begins to tell and since I don't have a little tiny Instamatic I just soon not even take a camera. Maybe one of these one-day short operations I'll be able to take my camera along and get some shots of the undergrowth and stuff. We'll see.

Well, I've done pretty good so far. I don't think I've even shut the tape off once to stop and think of what I'm going to say next. I think I might have to now. I'm getting low on ideas. I'm just looking around camp here trying to see if there is anything changed that I can tell you about. Not a whole lot. Tell Pete that I sure enjoy his letters and I'm surprised that he writes as often as he does. I'm real happy to get his letters. Oh, I got another one of those little kits that USOs send over and stuff like that. This one's got some stainless steel blades, toothbrush, toothpaste, plastic bags, writing paper, pen, medicated powder, a couple packages of gum and Lifesavers, some of those towelettes. They're nice little kits to get. If I keep getting them like that I won't have to buy any toothpaste and razor blades and shaving cream. They pretty well keep me furnished with them. I also got another little pocketknife.

Hey, while I can think of it, if you can find that nice Jacob Herder pocket knife that Chuck gave me, you know that real flat one that he chromed up, all metal? If you can find that, send it over. I'd kind of like to have that. It's a nice knife. I always carry a pocketknife around with me and it sure comes in handy. I've got that little penny stainless steel knife. I usually carry that around too, but I'd rather have that other one. It fits flatter in my pocket.

We finally started to get some planes in on the runway. Now I can get some pictures with my new 35mm camera and you can see what it looks like. I see the tape's about ready to run out. It's a good thing I haven't got a whole lot more to say. After I read your letters and listen to your tape, I'll be able to tell you some more and fill you in on some more information. I haven't had much luck scrounging a fan yet, but I better get one before too long before I get heat rash. If I get a chance to go to Bien Hoa I'm sure I can scrounge one someplace. Last month we sent a couple of other guys in. The same guy doesn't get to go all the time and it's kind of a treat to go into Bien Hoa so that's why we change people, oh goodbye hon, see you later.

10 May 1969

Saturday

Hi hon. Here's a news flash from Camp A-323 Thien Ngon, way up in the northwestern portion of III Corps. It's 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Saturday the 10th. The reason why you'll probably get two tapes, you should get these tapes at the same time, is because Friday, the work chopper broke down and we never received any mail, nor did the mail we have go out. Today it will all go in on the chow chopper when that comes in. Since we had a little action here last night, I thought I'd make another tape to you and describe it all and let you know what happened.

I'm sitting up here on the teamhouse roof. If what I say doesn't sound very coherent, please forgive me but I've been up since 2 am this morning. I haven't had a bit of sleep and I've been doing a lot of work today. In fact, we all have. We've got a mess to clean up. Let me get around to the beginning of the story. First of all, last evening we were all out in back of the teamhouse here looking around, deciding where to build a bunker for our interpreters because they live in scattered areas around the inner berm here. It's kind of tough to get a hold of them when we really need them. So we were out back laying timbers down and discussing where to build them a bunker and where the walls should go and how large it should be, et cetera and a big storm blew up. In fact it's becoming a regular thing now, every night we're getting rain and storm and thunder and lightning. Not too much thunder but lots and lots of lightning. I've got some pretty good time exposures of lightning, snake lightning, that kind of stuff. We'll see how they turn out. Anyway, last night our usual storm blew up at about 7 o'clock and it was getting real dark and cloudy. We all kind of chuckled and said, "Yeah, tonight would be a real good night for Charley to whip some stuff in on us." And we all kind of agreed and shook our heads yes, went into the teamhouse and watched a movie. We saw "Madigan." It was in the same line as "Bullet." One of those cop type things, this was in New York City. It was a pretty good movie. We also have "The Shaggy Dog," and "The Comedians," with Richard Burton and a couple of other ones that I haven't seen, and I may not get time to see before we have to turn them back in. Anyway, I watched the movie. In fact we saw two movies last night. I'm too tired to think of

what the other one was right now.

Anyway, after the two movies were over with it was 11 o'clock and I still hadn't listened to the tape that I got from you Wednesday. No wait a minute, yeah, it came in Wednesday but I didn't get back off operation until Friday morning. So Friday night, which is last night, I went to bed at 11, laid in bed for a half-hour and listened to your nice tape. At 11:30 I went to sleep fully realizing that I had to get up at 2 o'clock in the morning to go on radio watch. I thought, well, okay, I'll take my radio watch from 2 am to 4 am and then sleep from 4 to 7 and I'll have let's see, it would have been 2-3-4-5-6-7, oh anyway 5 hours sleep, 5 and a half hours sleep. That would have been enough for me. As it worked out, I got up at 2 o'clock to go on radio watch. Things were real quiet. I checked our Cambodian guards out around the teamhouse and everything was fine. The other guys went to bed so I just settled down in the commo room and listened to the radio and started to read Life magazine and Time magazine. Artillery was firing most of the time I was on watch, from at least from 2 to 3. At 3 o'clock everything was quite quiet. Artillery stopped firing and it was raining a little bit, not too much.

And then, all of a sudden, the same as last time I was on radio watch, I started hearing these explosions. I'm getting to the point now where as soon as one of those things goes off I can tell it's an incoming. It's a little tough when you're not used to it but I'm an old seasoned veteran now. I can sit in the commo bunker where we're relatively safe and things are quite quiet and we're well protected and hear a crump outside somewhere and realize that it's incoming. So I jumped up and ran around and woke everybody up and stepped back into the commo bunker. Just about at that time, one landed ten feet outside the commo bunker. Man, oh man, what a noise! Whew! Just a smashing, jarring, thudding jolt. We have one air vent that the air conditioner sits in. The wall's about five feet thick there but the air vent goes straight through. It landed ten feet away from the wall on the air vent side so a lot of the noise, dust, and everything, dirt, came flying in that air vent and got blown through the air conditioner fan and everything. The commo room filled up with dust and smoke. I went out choking and gagging. I wasn't really scared because I knew I was protected in that thing. I mean, no shrapnel can get in, but it was the first time since I've been here that rounds landed inside the perimeter. It not only landed inside the perimeter, Charley walked them from one side of the inner perimeter to the other.

On the way he knocked off two CRP bunkers, I've got a picture of one of them, he put two rounds right smack-dab through the top of our mess hall, and boy you should see the mess. I've got some beautiful 35mm shots of the mess hall. Two great big holes in the roof that blew off most of the roof. The entire inside was just completely ripped to shreds. Everything in there was just blasted to pieces. We had all kinds of food like #10 tins of blueberries and blackberries and cherries and all that kind of good stuff. Man, that doggone food was just plastered all over the walls and dripping from the ceilings. Floors just blown to pieces, tables and chairs all over

the place, and every dish and glass that we had was broken. All of our plastic spoons and silverware were shredded bits of plastic on the floor. Pieces of tin from the roof were blown into the walls. And of course shrapnel had blown a lot of the boards off the, well the concussion had blown a lot of the boards off the side of the mess hall and put holes through it. Shrapnel went through the wooden walls. It went right through double thicknesses of two by fours and then out through the chain link fence and it just tore a big gap in that. We found big chunks of shrapnel laying all over the place. We were hit by about thirty rounds of 82mm mortar and about three 107mm rockets.

Oh, listen to this. One round landed right smack-dab on the top of the teamhouse, right on the roof here which we just finished cementing in. In fact I'm sitting right next to it. I took a picture of that. Of all the area that we have exposed here on top of the teamhouse, all this flat area, you know where it landed? Right smack-dab on "my spot," the spot that I had carefully marked as "my spot" and put "First Lieutenant Dave Fetters 18 April '69." The thing landed right there and just wiped out my spot. It was really comical. Everybody was really kidding me about that this morning. It's too bad I never got a good picture of it before it blew up. I took a picture of after it was hit. When you see the picture you might think, "Shoot, those things don't do very much damage," but the concrete here is about four inches thick, and it went into the dirt and sandbags and ammo boxes underneath. You can't tell too much here, but when you see what the two rounds that hit the mess hall did, then you know what these things can do. Boy, I still look at that mess hall and shake my head. They completely ruined our freezer. We have a big three door refrigerator that was just perforated with shrapnel. Just completely obliterated the three front doors. Just blew them all in, and shrapnel all over the place. It's really crazy what that stuff can do. Oh, we had a big thirty inch...

Okay, here I am on the other side. I just kept right on talking until the tape ran out without even noticing what was going on. This is about the second day the runway's open; we've had planes coming and going all day long. We've been making many, many, many trips out to the runway to pick up garbage. You can probably hear in the background a C-123 taking off. That's the second one of those that we've had. We've had two Caribou's and this is our third C-130. It's sitting in the turn around point right now unloading. It's the first time we've ever had C-130's in here. Wow, I'll have to get the movie camera and take a picture of these things taking off. They do combat takeoffs I guess they're called, or something like that, or tactical takeoffs. They turn on full power at the end of the runway. Shoot, they only go less than halfway down the runway and they're going fast enough to pull up. When they pull up they go so steep it's a wonder they don't stall and crash. It's really funny.

I was talking about the mess hall, I'll come back to that. This morning, as luck would have it, we got a load of timber and we got an old refrigerator that we had turned in for repair.

Both of those things came in this morning just in the nick of time because all of our refrigerators and freezers were “het roi, fini het roi.” That means shot to pieces, no good, demolished. Anyway, I was driving down the runway with this refrigerator and the plane that I had taken it off of was still down at the end of the runway at the turn around point. Well he went out on the runway and revved up his engines and started coming at me. Shoot, I was less than halfway down the runway. He called me on the phone and said, "Ah, don't worry, I'll be up before I even reach you." I said okay. I just kept putting down the runway. Sure enough here he comes. It must have been only seemed like 30 feet above me when he went over. He went right smack-dab over me. Boy, what a neat thing, a great horrendous plane taking off and just barely over your head. Here I am humping down the runway in the three-quarter with a refrigerator on the back and Tony Alexander on the back holding the refrigerator down and this big old plane comes flying over us. But I couldn't drive and take pictures and everything all at the same time. As soon as I get my movie camera I'll have some fantastic movies. Boy, gee whiz, these will be movies to beat all movies. It's really something, all the stuff that goes on around here.

Anyway I was talking about the mess hall. I went in the inside of it this morning and just looked around at all the shredded bits and pieces. I was going to say it's real funny what some of the shrapnel can do. Right in the middle of a whole bunch of cans, there was one can of maple syrup just completely turned inside out. Just completely exploded. None of the cans around it were even touched. They were full of honey of course, I mean syrup. But I mean no dents or scars or holes or anything. For the amount of damage it did to the inside of the mess hall, I mean it completely wiped out our tables and chairs and all our shelves and fifty percent of the food we had in there and cans of food and everything, demolished our stove, our big refrigerator, our freezer and a big pedestal electric fan and most of the beams and rafters in the ceiling where the rounds came through were all shredded to bits. But the funny thing is there were a couple of light bulbs in the ceiling that weren't even touched. Even the concussion didn't even faze them. That's really crazy. Of course there were some dead rats in there laying around the floor, and garbage like that.

It was pretty spooky last night. Let me tell you, those rounds were coming in. We were all inside the teamhouse and usually we send a man out. We can tell when they're inside and outside the perimeter. We knew they were inside last night so we didn't send a man out to see where they were coming from. We just waited until they quit which was only about ten minutes after it started. Of course we ran out then and old bac-si was busy. Our cook caught a piece of shrapnel right through his wrist. It might have broken a couple bones and he was in bad shape. Another man out here in back of us, whose bunker I took a picture of, he got a few pieces of shrapnel in the head and he's in real bad shape. They medevaced those people out of here real early this morning, and there were three other people injured, not quite as severely. They'll

remain in camp here. Of course we were firing our mortars and flares and everything like crazy and we called in a Spooky, which is a C-119 with miniguns on it. Since it was such a low cloud cover and it was raining so hard and thunder storming, he couldn't make it. He got half way up here and ran into such thick stuff he couldn't go below it or above it and didn't dare go through it. So he couldn't make it. So we thought, "Oh boy, now if we ever got a ground attack we would be in trouble." We couldn't get any air support, here we are way out here by ourselves. But apparently nothing happened.

Well, let me go back a little bit. After the first 30 rounds, we had our flack jackets on and we were prepared for the worst. Everybody was getting ready to go man his position and everything and all of a sudden they quit. It was real quiet; nothing happened after that. We waited and waited and waited. Nothing happened. We took care of all the wounded and surveyed the damage and thought, "Okay. That's it for the night." Went back to bed and this was about 10 after 4, so I got off watch and the next man came on. No sooner laid down in bed than boom, boom, here come seven more rounds. These seven, we determined later, didn't do any damage at all but at the same time I think Charley was in the woodline. He started shooting at us with his AK-47s, small arms and apparently nobody was injured but a couple of our star points opened up with their machine guns and everything and started shooting back and flares, the whole works. Then we really thought we were getting a ground attack so we sent everybody out to their positions. Mine's in the commo room again. I had my flack jacket on and my radio and my harness and web belt with all my ammo and my rifle and canteens of water everything, all set to go.

After about fifteen or twenty minutes of shooting, everybody quieted down and that was it for the rest of the night, but by this time it was 5 o'clock in the morning and we were busy getting the medevac called in and landing him on the pad in the dark and getting the wounded out there to the helicopter. By the time everything quieted down and we got settled, it was light so instead of going to bed we just stayed up went into the mess hall and just shook our heads, almost cried, and just started cleaning it up. It's all we could do. We got our two mama-sans and a couple of the yardmen and carpenters that work for us and everybody pitched in and we got most of the mess cleaned up. There's still a lot to go. We ripped off a lot of the roofing that was blown up and destroyed. As soon as we get some time and some lumber and everything, and we'll patch that up. It's crazy.

Oh, we took another round right through a roof overhang that was just nothing but tin and two by fours. Just blew a big hole in that and sent shrapnel into the side of the building, but it was the building where we stored the rice and PIRs which is the Vietnamese LRP rations for patrols and stuff, but didn't do any damage there. I think if I get around to it, I'll take a picture of it. I've just been so busy, I haven't really had time to do much. I had to submit emergency

requisitions for freezers and refrigerators and all that kind of stuff, food that was destroyed. Write up reports of survey and a whole bunch of junk like that. Tomorrow the artillery is moving in, the captain leaves, and I've got to go to Tay Ninh for a commander's conference. On and on and on. It seems like it never quits.

I'm in my poc time right now, which lasts from about 11:30 to 2:30 where you eat and you go lay down for a couple hours for sleep. I didn't get around to eating until 12:30 and then I came over here and I thought I'd better get this tape out before the chow chopper comes this afternoon because I'd like you to know what's going on. It's exciting information to know even if it is kind of dangerous and that kind of stuff, but I'm sure you'd be disappointed if I didn't tell you as soon as I could and describe everything to you so I'll hurry up and send this tape out. This is a tape that somebody else had used and never mailed to his wife so I listened to the first couple minutes of it and oh, the tape is going. He didn't have much to say.

No Date Given

Hi hon. I'm presently lying down on my bed in my darkened room, tape recorder beside me. I've got a fan blowing on me. It's the captain's fan. I borrowed it out of his room while he's gone. I'm just going to lie here and talk quietly. I haven't really got a whole lot to say to you tonight because I just finished writing you a, let's see about five both sides of five pages on that professional type stationary. I told you about everything that's been going on.

I got your tape today and also the tube with the picture of the motorcycle in it. When I first pulled it out and saw all of the tearing and rips along the top of the poster I couldn't figure out what had happened, you know. I didn't remember that the dog had chewed it up. I started blaming the postman and Army Spec-4s that haul the mail around, and everything. I kept looking down in the tube to see if I could see the shredded paper or figure out how it got shredded and everything. Then after a couple of minutes it finally dawned on me that our little puppy dog got it. It's too bad, that was kind of a neat poster. I think I'll hang it up in the bigger room that I'm going to be moving into pretty soon. I think I'll take all the plastic mats down off this wall. They were up in here when I moved in but they're so neat I think I'll just take them down.

The room that I'm moving into is so barren. It's kind of divided into half. When you walk in the door, directly ahead is a table under which are two safes. Off to the left is a filing cabinet. Off to the right is a bunch of shelves with paper and pencils, you know, all that bookkeeping type junk, forms and junk, and a metal wall locker. But then after you get in to the room, the long axis well, as you step into the door, the room goes down to your left. So past the filing cabinet to the left, start a row of shelves around the wall, two sides, about three feet high,

with one shelf underneath. It doesn't really afford me much space. So what I'm going to do is also take my foot locker, my little cabinet thing that my Dopp kit sits on and my larger type shelf arrangement into that room with me plus all my pictures and everything and fix up the walls and hang my guns up. I think this new shelf that I cut in the back of the CONEX here above my head, I think I'll take that in. I'll take my fluorescent light out of here and see if I can hook it up in my room. That throws a much brighter, softer light with a lot less heat than a plain, old light bulb. Then I'll have to fix it up so that I can turn everything on as I go into the room and also turn it off as I lay in bed just like this room is. It'll take me a little while to fix it up. Also, I want to get some kind of a partition between my living section and my working section, maybe take some of this plastic junk and hang it up in there. I don't know what exactly I'll do yet but I definitely want some kind of partition because I hate to run in my room and sit down to read letters or listen to your tape or go to bed and have to look across the room and see all my doggone paperwork and desk materials and typewriter and stapler and all that crap sitting over there.

Oh, I don't know how it's going to be in civilian life if I ever get a desk job. I'd have to put in eight hours sitting behind a stupid desk, I'd go crazy. I'm going to have to get some kind of job where I can get out and do stuff. Well I'm sure there are a lot of them around and I'll find one, especially if we're going to be living up near Ludington or anywhere up the coast there.

That reminds me, sometime when we get the chance, probably during school, you know the breaks between terms, just take a cruise up there and go real slow and see everything there is to see in and around Ludington, Manistee, and a couple of those other little places up there. Really examine them closely to see if we can, well, to see what it's like and see how we would like it if we lived there, to see what kind of facilities they have and schools, the whole works. Just look around the countryside, see what we like and don't like. Who knows, maybe we'll find a neat little house someplace set back in the dunes. It sure would be neat.

Well, the colonel stopped in today with his counterpart from the B-Team. They looked around the camp and spent about 30 minutes here and I briefed him on all the latest activity and the rocket fire and all that garbage. He told me I was doing a fine job as acting CO. He calls me Dave instead of Lieutenant Fetters or anything. He's a real nice guy. He's in command of the largest and most active B-Team in Vietnam. Our B-Team has six A-Teams and we have out-shot and out-killed all the other B-Teams in Vietnam. This past month was exceptional; we got an exceptional high VC kill. We got all kinds of letters of commendation and all that junk, but it doesn't mean too much to me. We just do our jobs and get it over with.

There has been a lot of activity around here lately. Some of the stuff we receive from agents that we have, you know our secret agents spy type people. I can't pass on a lot of things that I know because it's still classified. However today we had quite a bit of excitement. About

4:30 this afternoon one of the super-duper spy planes that we have flying around, the kind with the infrared photography equipment and side looking radar and people sniffer device and heat seeking radar and all that garbage in one little old plane, spotted an enemy tank due west of here about sixteen klicks. Actually it was one klick in from the border. He flew over, noted its position, called back to this camp, told us it was out there. However neither the 105's or the 155's here in camp could reach it, and he was also running out of gas; he only had 20 minutes of flying time left so he had to go back to Tay Ninh. So he went back there and the doggone guy never came back. He said he was going to take on fuel and come right back and then direct in the big 175 artillery pieces on the tank but he never came back. I don't know what the reason was.