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# Beller's Fellars

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Vietnam 1966-67

"Fly-Away Team Alpha"

Letters Sent Home By Spec. 4 Vern Greunke

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*"We are Beller's Fellars true,  
There ain't nothing we won't do,  
We may drink, and we may smoke,  
But we'll never touch a Coke!"*

*(Sung to the tune of "The Green Berets" accompanied  
on the guitar by Orville "Butch" Browning)*

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"Sp/4 James T. Davis, the first American killed in actual ground combat in Vietnam, was a member of the secretive Army Security Agency (ASA). More specifically, he belonged to the 3rd Radio Research Unit (RRU) which later was designated the 509th Operations Group in 1966. A portion of Saigon air base was named after him. (Davis Station).

"ASA first arrived in Vietnam May 23, 1961. Originally called the 400th Operations Unit (Provisional), RRU designations were used as secret cover designations."

"Sp/4 Davis ... was accompanying an ARVN unit when his truck was blown up by a land mine planted 10 miles from Saigon. Davis was shot in the ensuing firefight - the first American killed in ground combat in Vietnam - on Dec. 22, 1961."

-- VFW Magazine, History of Vietnam

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*The following letters are the exploits of an  
Air-Mobile "Fly-Away" PRD-1 team.  
Portable Radio Direction Finder Model No. 1 -  
a jeep-mounted radio we used to locate enemy  
transmitters in the area of the "IRON TRIANGLE",  
an enemy staging area just north of Saigon.*

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**Aug. 22, 1966 - PLEIKU - "WE'RE HERE!"**

Dear Folks,

Well, here I am, this is our third day here at Pleiku. We arrived at Qui Nhon Sat. morning. We flew here in a cargo plane, standing up with our duffel bags etc. After lugging it from bus, to truck to plane etc., it seemed to get heavier every time I picked it up.

We pitched tents here and started digging in. We're on top of a hill in some highland region, so it's quite cool, especially during the night. It's kind of hard to sleep with the mortar shells going over our heads. The artillery is behind us as they fire over our tents. We're on a perimeter manned by 50 cal. machine guns so we're well protected. I'll probably be transferred within the next month and I'll be on the move. The Fly Away Teams are being separated from the company and we'll be traveling up and down the country probably with an infantry unit. Our equipment isn't here yet, but we'll be gone as soon as it is here. We hope to be able to practice with it a week or two we hope.

It rains here every day so we're quite dirty and muddy. Maybe I'll get to a shower tomorrow and get to clean up.

We have C rations for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Some hot, some cold, but just the same, it's food! We hope to get cots, as we're now using our air mattresses and a blanket. My flak vest makes sort of a pillow.

Each day brings improvement to the area and things should get better. It can't get much worse. Don't worry about me, I'm fine and feeling okay, a little tired right now.

How's everything at home? I'll be waiting to hear from you. My mail will be late but it will get to me sooner or later. Oh yes, my APO number is 96355 not 96295 as they first told us. It'll probably change again when I move.

We watched jets bomb some mountains yesterday, very interesting, but we really didn't know what was going on. It was up north of us, but not near the border. Cambodia is about 35 miles away and North Vietnam is about 300.

Well that's all for now, I'll write when I can. Only 345 days left here.

- Vern

[Enclosed with my letter were these General Orders:]

**330th RADIO RESEARCH COMPANY**  
**APO San Francisco 96295**  
**18 August 1966**  
**To: All Personnel**  
**330 RRC**

1. Disembarking instructions for 330th RRC personnel:

**UNIFORM:**

- a. Fatigues with Boots Bloused
- b. Wear soft Cap
- c. Steel Pot [helmet] will be suspended securely from Pistol Belt.
- c. Pistol Belt with filled canteen, 2 Ammo Pouches, 4 Magazines w/ball Ammunition, 1st Aid Pouch; Bayonet on left hip.
- e. The Flak Vest will be last item packed in Duffel Bag
- f. Next to last item will be Cargo Pack with Mess Gear.

**WEAPONS:**

- a. Weapons will not have magazines put in until further notice.
- b. Ammo will probably be issued immediately prior to disembarkation.
- c. Personnel are cautioned that misfiring a weapon is a Court Martial offense.
2. Weapons should be constantly in locked position and safety precautions are of prime consideration  
— CONSERVE AMMO YOU MAY NEED IT —
3. Mail may now be mailed without postage by printing the word **FREE** in the upper right hand corner where the stamp used to be.

Signed - PRESTON C. McKILLIP  
First Sergeant  
330th RRC

[We disembarked the ship in LST type landing craft, just like the Marines! Upon hitting shore we stepped off onto the sandy beach, trudged up the beach to waiting blue buses. They transported us to an airstrip made of PSP "Perforated Steel Plating". We all climbed into the empty cargo plane, standing up with our duffelbag in front of us. As the plane took off we all fell over, like dominos, each onto the duffelbag of the guy behind us. We landed at an airstrip near the city of Pleiku. We rode in the back of army trucks known as "deuce and a halves". Dark haired kids greeted us along the road on our trip to our new "home". Some waved, some greeted us by waving their middle finger. That about summed up our welcome! Arriving on the hillside we were on the perimeter of the camp and found only a couple of tents set up, the tents of the "Advance Party" who had left from Ft. Wolters a few weeks before us. We set up more tents, and slept with our boots on, and our rifles at our side. We were "over there" in the midst of the war.]

**Aug. 26, 1966 - NHA TRANG**

Dear Folks,

Well, here I am at Nha Trang, a city next to the coastline. We were filling sandbags yesterday morning at Pleiku when they called us together and asked us how long it would take us to pack. Later on we were on a plane for here and have stayed one night here. Things are still in a mix up and now we're on orders to Saigon I guess. We hope to leave tomorrow. It's much hotter here, and very sandy. There are better facilities here, like the tents have floors, no "C" rations etc. Even electricity in the tents. We haven't done much today but sit around here, trying to get our records straightened out. I haven't gotten any mail yet because it hasn't caught up to me. Now it'll be delayed even more since we don't know for sure just where we're going. Our team is still together and I guess our jeeps and equipment are waiting for us. It sounds like we won't be attached to any one unit, but with anyone who wants us at any time. We'll have plenty of protection plus we'll be able to call in help if we ever need it.

Things aren't too bad over here so far, and I can truthfully say I like it so far. I don't mind it, but I suppose things could get worse yet. It's 100 degrees in this tent right now and I seem to be sweating all over the paper. I did like the atmosphere better at Pleiku even though it rained at least 3 times a day.

Right now I'm sipping on a can of root beer at a table just taking it easy. If things stay like this I might extend my time over here. Sooner or later I'd like to get paid and then I'll send my extra money home. I want to get a camera and some other stuff too, but it can wait. I'm not bad off with supplies and stuff and it isn't too hard to get. There's still artillery and mortar fire at night here but I'm getting used to it and slept real good last night.

Maybe when my mail catches up I'll hear some news from home. Sooner or later I'll probably get a big stack of letters all at once. Well that's all for now, I'm fine and doing okay.

P.S. My APO number is 96355 but will probably change again. - Vern

**Aug. 27, 1966 - NHA TRANG**

Dear Folks,

Just a short note tonight, as I'm packing my stuff again, awaiting our trip to Saigon. We're still here in Nha Trang. We went swimming again today in the ocean. It's a beautiful beach and it's hard to believe there's a war going on as we relaxed in the sun to cool off as there wasn't much else to do. As close as we watched our stuff, someone managed to steal my watch which I had sitting in my shoe next to my towel. It's the watch you gave me for graduation from H.S. and has faithfully kept time ever since. I sure miss it but I'm sure I'll find a replacement for it after payday when and if we get to Saigon. Things are still a mix-up for us 10 guys but it looks like we'll be PCS, permanent change of Station. That means we won't be associated with the 330th but with a new unit. We don't like that but maybe it's for the better.

I have a new address, but I won't send it until I'm sure we really get stationed there. We're still looking forward to our new assignment and want to be able to settle down somewhere and "plush" ourselves in. A little ingenuity goes a long ways here, and there's always new ways to ease life here. Maybe I can send some pictures to explain this better. Here at Nha Trang they have an NCO club, an open air movie theatre, wooden floors in the tents, and cheap Viet Nameese labor, (sand bag filling, etc.)

I wouldn't hesitate to volunteer for here if I know what it's really like over here. Of course each person over here regards life here different, but unless you're an infantryman it isn't a bad tour. The combat pay \$65 a month comes in handy even though we may never hear a VC shot, and we're always well guarded. Agency personnel especially are not known for taking any unnecessary risks.

Things are all okay here and I'll write more later on. Let's see, 340 days to go? See you next year, and hope some mail comes sometime.

- Love, Vern

### ***Sept. 1, 1966 - SAIGON (DAVIS STATION)***

Dear Folks,

Here I am, next to the "big city". We haven't gotten a chance to get into it, and probably won't, because of the election trouble here. We arrived here the other night and did a little training today with our new equipment. We'll probably leave here next Monday to the 303rd RRU, from there we'll probably be transferred to the infantry unit. That means moving our stuff again, new address, etc. I like this place, its real plush, wooden framed barracks with corrugated steel siding, cement floors, and a mama-san to look after our stuff. This morning I got up and ate breakfast then left to go to Finance. When we got back our housekeeper had taken down my mosquito net, made my bunk, emptied the wastebaskets, swept the floors, etc. They also pull K.P., the yardwork, etc.

After spending 4 days at Nha Trang, swimming and taking it easy, we got stuck on a detail the last day we were there. I now have a good experience at cement pouring and mixing! I've got the blisters to prove it!

I suppose you can send mail to this address, and I hope it all gets forwarded otherwise it might get returned to sender. I did get 3 letters from you by a courier from Pleiku, but haven't gotten anything since. I suppose it'll all catch up to us soon.

I played tennis tonight and beat one of my buddies on our team. There's a basketball court too, and pool table, ping pong table in the day room. It's going to be bad leaving here and going back to living in tents on the ground, eating "C" rations. I'm anxious to get to work on our mission though.

Thanks for the letters JoAnn & Susie, I really enjoyed them. Please write more often. The longer we're here the more guys we run into we knew from (Ft.) Devens. I met a Sgt. today who was an instructor there too.

I guess I'll close for now, I'm fine, hope everyone else is.

- Love, Vern

### ***Sept. 6, 1966 - BEIN HOA***

Dear Folks,

We arrived here yesterday afternoon, to hear the same story. "Gee, we didn't know you were coming". I wonder where we've heard that before! We're waiting word to what's going to happen to us from here. We've heard some rumors we may be supporting the Australian troops here. We hope so, as they have a good reputation, they don't quit until they fulfill a mission.

We set up a tent here and just as we finished there was an alert. We grabbed our gear and headed for the assembly area. It was probably only a practice as the all clear signal was given a few minutes later. Some of the guys were caught unprepared, dressed in t-shirts and Bermudas, with their pistol belts and helmets on. This company also left from Ft. Wolters a few months before us. They have a lot of company spirit too, as opposed to Nha Trang where we were met with grumbles and such low moral among them. We had it bad at Pleiku, but everyone still had fun and joked around while we worked when we were there.

Susie's letter caught up with me the other day along with one from H&L. Thanks for the Kool-Aid. I haven't found a need to use it yet as all the water we've had hasn't been bad. I might need it in the future. They too have an NCO club tent with pop and beer readily available. We joke about that, "Remember, this is a hardship tour!"

Yes, we landed with the 1st Cav. at Qui Nhon, but didn't go with them to An Khe. I'll try to answer all your questions later and have some other letter writing to do yet. So I'll close for now. - Vern

New Address! 303rd RR Bn APO San Fran. 96266

### ***Sept. 6, 1966 - BEIN HOA***

Dear Susie,

Thanks for the letter I received the other day at Tan Son Nhut, near Saigon. I'm looking forward to more mail now that I've got a semi-permanent address at least. Our team split up this morning, myself going with our team leader and two other buddies. Our team leader is Sgt. Beller so naturally we call ourselves "Beller's Fellars", and our adopted motto - "We snoop, you shoot". How's that one? We're undergoing two weeks of special training and are now located with the 173rd Airborne, paratroopers, you know. After that we'll regroup and probably use the 303rd RR Bn. as a base station for our operations.

Let's see, it's Tuesday here, so it's Monday where you are, Labor Day, but no holiday for us, we were moving.

We have electric lights and even a TV!, really rough isn't it? Ha! Every night from 8 to 11, planes circle Saigon receiving TV signals and relaying them to further away places. I was reading an old Post today and was wondering if you still get them from Cronks. If you can find the July 16th issue or can get it somewhere I'm sure you'd enjoy the article on Viet Nam in it. It was very interesting for me as I've experienced so much of what the writer wrote. It was much better put than I could ever describe of the whole feeling of this country. It centered around the An Khe area where the guys from the 1st Cav. on our ship went. It also spoke of Pleiku and the regions thereabouts.

Now I'm wondering what's going to happen to my mustache, the 173rd aren't allowed to grow them. You see, I've been growing one since we left on the boat, although it's still very faint. Maybe I can get a picture of it for you.

Last night they had generator trouble at the 303rd. Since we were the only ones with gas lanterns you know which tent had light in it!

Every night from 6:30 to 8:30, the Armed Forces Radio Service in Saigon plays good old rock 'n roll for us, baseball games during the day and news broadcasts too.

I'm wondering if you or Norm has heard the song "Di Dit" or "Dit - Dit". We heard it on the ship coming in to Okinawa. We couldn't believe it, there is Morse Code on the record and the chorus is made up of singing code that spells out "I Love You". If you heard of it or can get it, I'd appreciate it if you'd get a copy and save it for me.

Since we're staying here two weeks I hope to get my big pile of laundry done. We haven't been in one place long enough to turn it in and get it back. There's surely some Viet Nameese women around here that are willing to do it for us. At the 303rd they have house girls to keep the tents tidy and the kitchen help too. They'll work all day for a couple dollars so it doesn't cost us much.

Well it's about time to hit the sack, we have steel army bunks with springs and mattresses, no pillow or sheets, but remember "this is a hardship tour!" So "Choa'Ong, until I write again.

Your Brother - Vern

### ***Sept. 7, 1966 - BEIN HOA***

Dear Folks,

Please put the enclosed money order in my savings account. I still have plenty left but I'm going to wait a month to get an idea of how much I'll need while I'm here. I wrote a letter to Susie last night which should get there with this one. It's now Wed. noon just about time for chow. The weather is cool now which is nice and I slept real good until some jets took off next to us.

I can't think of much right now so will close.  
- Vern

### ***Sept. 16, 1966 - BEIN HOA***

Dear JoAnn,

It's about time to write you, you and Susie both wrote such nice letters which I was glad to get. Mom's letter of the 9th came yesterday which was the first I got since we left Saigon.

How is your new school? Do you like it better there? I'll bet you don't have any trouble with balls going over a fence during recess, do you?

We had a very distinguished visitor here today, a 3 star general. Brigadier General Denholm Commanding General U.S.A.S.A., how about that?

I worked about 6 hours today and am finally turning out some good work. I really think I've accomplished something here. At first it looked like I'd never catch on, listening to the chirp, chirping of V.C. transmitters. They don't have good clear tones, and sound more like birds or crickets. After listening to it all day I go back to my tent and lay down on my bunk to rest. The real crickets start chirping and it almost sounds like they're chirping code to each other! Our job is to locate enemy

transmitters to save infantry men from having to search useless ground looking behind every tree. By giving them a more definite idea it saves them valuable time and work. Even when we do locate them they're still hard to find. You could probably walk over them without knowing it. They don't stay out in the open, but rather hide in tunnels or foxholes with only a single wire above ground or hidden in a tree. Every transmitter destroyed means loss of communication with other units which leaves them with no support.

We went into town the other night and as we passed the corner, down the road from us the usually empty barbed wire compound had about 25 captured V.C. in it. I was a little shaky after that when we heard they caught them setting up mortars and were going to shell us if we hadn't caught them first. They were just down the road a couple of miles from us.

The chow down here continues to be really good here. Today for dinner I had ground up steak patties, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas, a banana, and a large piece of spice cake. They've all been like that and I've been getting a real balanced meal.

I finally got some laundry back the other day, it's really nice to have clean clothes, and starched! I don't know who paid for it but the laundry ticket had 82 piasters for the job. Why that's about 75 cents, not bad for 3 sets of fatigues, a couple sets of underwear, and a towel. I guess I should have sent my Kaikis too!

Tomorrow is Sat., that means a half day of work and free pop and beer Sat. afternoon and all day Sunday! I guess they use up the profits made during the week since the clubs have to operate on a non-profit basis. Monday means inspection day, our weapons and personal appearance. Last week a captain said I needed a haircut, a shave, name tags and rank insignia sewn on my uniform, but I still passed the inspection and didn't get put on any extra duty. Ha! A First Lieutenant inspected my rifle which I cleaned thoroughly the night before. He couldn't say it was perfect, so he pointed at some invisible dirt and said it needed a little work on it but otherwise it looked real good. All I do was agree with him and say, "Yes Sir" as he handed it back to me. All the officers and senior NCO's are real nice guys here and join in with all the fun we have. You can even poke fun at them like during a volleyball game or playing catch.

We've got a couple mascots here, a dog, and two ducks. Sound familiar? The dog's name is "Rat"! Now what kind of name for a dog is that?

He's not as good looking as Lucky, but he's one of the best looking dogs I've seen over here, and friendly too. Most dogs are diseased here and you're afraid to even touch them.

The ducks we have are black and quack very little. They just waddle around but don't get in our way. We saw the First Sgt. walk into his tent today with a large mouse trap and asked him if he expected to catch anything. He said "Well, maybe a few mice or a duck with a broken neck!"

It's now evening, the sun is just setting, when you look out you see a beautiful countryside and it's hard to image somewhere out there we've fighting a war. We'll be reminded of it as it gets darker. Some flares will light the sky and the artillery will start to shell the nearby hills hoping to destroy enemy hideouts.

I wrote a letter to the boys at Pleiku last week and am awaiting a reply. I'll bet things have really changed since we left. Dick Lowther is on the other "Fly Away

Team” and is supposed to be operating in that area too. We should both be home at the same time next year so maybe I’ll see him then.

I’ve got about 4 rolls of undeveloped film yet which I’d like to get developed before I send them home. That way I’ll remember better of what the pictures are of and you’ll have a better idea too.

I just killed a mosquito bothering me, that’s 2 that won’t give me malaria! I’ve got a can of insect repellent too, but they can’t read so they don’t pay attention to it. At least they aren’t as thick as at Saigon.

I remember laying in my bunk running my hand up my arm and all I could feel was mosquito bites all the way up it.

Well, that’s all for now, write again soon, okay?  
- Your brother, Vern

### ***Sept. 18, 1966 - BEIN HOA***

Dear Norm,

It’s now Sunday afternoon, we worked this morning but are now free. The guys went over to Bn. Hq. to play softball. A Signal Co. challenged us to a volleyball game tonight. After that we’re going to a hamburger cookout. That’s better than the franks we’ve been having for chow. Franks for dinner & supper. Almost everyday. They also alternate them once in a while with meatballs. I think the cook must have a book “101 ways to prepare Franks! Ha! Can’t complain too much though, they sure beat C rations!

How’s the furniture business? Are you still working there? How’s the combo doing?

We’re leaving Tuesday, going back to Hq. 303rd, which is nearer Long Bein or however you spell it. Since we’re right next to an airstrip we had occasion to witness a near tragic accident. A jet and a prop plane both unaware of each other attempted to land on the same airstrip at the same time. Someone saw it soon enough and they were both waved off.

My radio mysteriously regained its lost volume yesterday, probably a short in it somewhere. Now I can really turn up the music and play it over the noises of the jet engine static tests. Well, that’s all for now, - your brother, Vern

*[The cook who came over with us on the boat came to the 303rd and suddenly there was a line for chow. He later came to Cu Chi, hence the need for a larger belt.]*

### ***Sept. 25, 1966 - LONG BINH***

Dear Folks,

Just a few lines to let you know I’m all right and some of our plans coming up. We’ve been getting our equipment and gear ready all week and last night Sgt. Beller received orders for us to be ready the 26th for an alert. So we worked today, checking and rechecking our supplies and stuff. Military Assistance Command 5 send down the order to the 509th to have all mobile and air mobile units ready by tomorrow morning. Gee, somebody knew we were here after all!! Ha! Some of our radio stuff won’t be in until 9 tomorrow morning so we can’t leave until it’s tested and proven reliable for us. We could be leaving in the p.m. though. Our team has been issued an M-60 cal. machine gun and an M-79 grenade launcher, so

guess who has responsibility for the machine gun, yeah me! I’ll be in the last jeep if we go in any convoys with the gun. Me a machine gunner?? I guess I can forget all the “non-combat” stuff about the A.S.A., huh?? That’s the way it goes.

Me and another guy went sight-seeing yesterday and picked up some cheaply made trunks to store our stuff in while we are out on a mission. It was the first time I’d been behind a wheel since I left home. It was fun putting the jeep through the gears and its maneuverability is fantastic. Then today we heard of a Capt. who drove over a mine near here and was killed, so I don’t feel too much like driving today.

I’m on a new team now at least a different partner, the one I had before I really didn’t want to go out with and he hit it off better with another guy on our team so when I heard of the switch I was more than happy about it. ????

We’ll probably be near a Special Forces camp too so we’ll have plenty of protection. Oh yes, as it looks we’re still going to the DMZ after all. “Change number 3,496” as the joke among us goes, nothing new to us and I guess we’ll be with the Marines and “Aussies”.

We’ve got 2 cases of C rations for 2 of us but I don’t think they’ll last more than a week. We’re going to try to squeeze in a case of pop or beer in our trailer since we don’t know if we’ll be near drinkable water. We’ve got 15 gallons of clean water with us and 15 gallons of gas. (Oh yeah, a case of ammo too) along with cots, a tent, commo wire, other stuff, extra this and extra that, etc. We’ve prepared for any unexpected events.

My teammate is bringing his guitar along “even if he has to strap it to the top of the jeep”, so we’ve got something to do if we have any spare time. We’ve got a small stove and some pots and pans to cook our “C’s” in too, and other necessities we’ll need.

We found out we’re still attached to the 330th at Pleiku! All of our administrative stuff still comes through them, promotions, etc. So we’re a part of it, but on temporary duty at the 303rd, spending temporary duty for them in the field, makes a lot of sense doesn’t it! We won’t know if we’re coming or going! All for now. -

Love, Vern

### ***Sept. 27, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Well, I’ve got a lot of news for you, some good, some not so good. I’ll probably leave half of it out anyway.

I’ll start with this morning, at 11:30 we received our alert, “Be Ready To Go At 2:00.” Well, we scurried about finishing little things and finally left at about 2:30. We convoyed our 4 jeeps to Saigon and then joined a large convoy coming this way. Most of it was through small villages where people waved at us and cheered us on. It was like a parade as we constantly waved back to the well wishers, the little kids wanting us to throw them candy or cigarettes. We had lots of protection, many tanks, etc., alongside the roads with their barrels pointed into the woods, and we wore our helmets and flak vests as an extra protection since we traveled through “insecure” areas. We found out this morning that two little towns we’ve passed through frequently were VC controlled, gee, we never had our weapons with us when we went through. Now they tell us!

Cu Chi is also off limits to us as it is insecure too. We're near the 303rd yet and our orders were changed from the DMZ again. We were told this morning to expect Majors and Colonels to drop in on us. Oh yes, during the briefing this morning the Major said "If you want anything - just ask for it!" How about that?! Our three man team will be located with an ARVN Vietnamese army camp. Tonight we're staying with the 372nd until we leave for our predetermined location. It seems they've been watching us and were turning in individual progress reports on us even when we were with the 173rd.

We are located with the 25th Infantry Div. and an artillery group who fire large mortars all day long. Boom! Boom! all day long, and loud too. Some are only 100 yards away, so we feel the shock wave from them. They told us just before we arrived there was an air strike just past the perimeter near here, I wish I'd seen it.

The length of the mission will be determined by how long it takes us to find our target. Then if we're successful we can sit back and watch when the infantry goes to work, sit back and take pictures of the bombing if we're successful. A lot is riding on the effectiveness of our team and if we goof up, we're really going to goof up, but if we do a good job, we've got it made.

They have a well here so they have plenty of water for the shower so I took a badly needed one tonight and really feel good now. It's been hot and rainy lately and we've gotten pretty dirty. I turned in some laundry for the Vietnamese to do, but it won't be done for 5 days so I couldn't pick it up before we left today. I've got 3 sets of fatigues with me yet so hope I'll make out okay. I turned in some film (6 rolls) yesterday that was supposed to be done tomorrow. Now I can't get them until I get back to Long Binh.

If you get Krenzer's map maybe you can find Cu Chi on it, it's west of Saigon, maybe halfway to the Cambodian border, I think. I think we're better off here than with the Marines at the DMZ too. We still might get up there someday as we'll always be sent out on new missions during the next 10 months.

We've been having some night singing sessions lately with my buddies guitar and a little beer too. Oh yes, one guy has a \$300 "Gretch" like Dave B. has, only it's solid back and has a twang bar on it too. It sounds really nice, especially compared to the "zip" guitars a lot of the guys bought here.

- All For Now, Vern

### ***Sept. 29th, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

We repacked our trailer and put on more C rations and other canned goods. Would you believe 3 of us are taking 9 cases of C rations, 2 cases of Vienna Sausages, a case of pineapple juice (large cans) some cans of popcorn, and 2 large cans of pre-cooked ham. Also some other vegetables and stuff. We've got 8 - 5 gallon water cans and 10 cases of pop, and 5 cases of beer. This isn't all ours though - we are going to share it with 6 others there, a US advisory team stationed with the ARVN. They have a lot of trouble getting supplies there. Even our Sgt said "Don't expect me to check up on you there, I'm not going near there." He went the day before to look things over. We're going in a Chinook helicopter, the very large ones with 2 rotors. We'll fly high over the area, past it a couple of miles, and then drop to treetop level, and go in as fast as it

will go. Our site will be on the edge of the heliport there, but we've got to fill sandbags to make a bunker for mortar attacks and a small bunker for our machine gun. With 3 of us on duty 17 hours a day we will take turns with the radio equipment and machine gun. I hope this doesn't sound too bad, please don't worry about me, we're still well protected and we're top on the evacuation list if we ever had trouble.

I think I'll be getting an extra \$125 a month COLA (cost of living allowance) since we're going where there aren't any U.S. Army facilities such as barracks, or mess halls. I've still got plenty of money for the month and don't expect to use it all, I hope.

- All for now - Vern

### ***Sept. 30th, 1966 - PHU HOA DONG***

Dear Folks,

I'll start this tonight, now that we are here, after a hairy helicopter ride at noon. I have met the six American advisors here, and everything is okay. There is a 1st Lieutenant, a couple of Sergeants, a Specialist and a PFC.

Well, I didn't get much done last night so I'll continue now. We have much more light tonight in our castle or fortress in which we're staying. Last night the electricity only kept the light bulbs dim. We're staying in an old French mansion, solidly built of cement and tiled floors. It's really nice and cool in here during the day too and it isn't bad at night. We have a patio on the second floor here with sandbag protection and a lookout tower on top. We had a nice meal last night, they took our 11 lb. ham we brought and sliced it lengthways and heated it, boy did they gobble it down! I only took a half slice, with some corn and VN bread rolls. We had "C's" for breakfast, hot cocoa, and chicken. At noon I ate the bread and blackberry jam. It feels funny walking down the village street with a loaded weapon down to a small house where they cook the hot evening meal but every once in a while the VC have taken a few pot shots down the long narrow street. The mortar and gun fire today gave us a feeling we're surrounded by enemies, we were right. I took a couple pictures of an air assault we observed near here today. We finished our bunker today next to where we set up our equipment everyday. We can't leave it there overnight so we take it all in at night. We got out there today at 7:00 but tomorrow we start at 8:30. We quit at 4:30 today so our work days will vary, but shouldn't be as long as previously expected. I can say we accomplished something today but I can't tell you about it.

Hmmm, a mine or grenade just went off behind our house, but the other guys don't seem to be disturbed about it, so I won't be either. You can't start worrying about everything or you'll be a nervous wreck in no time, especially here.

It's raining now and the lights are flickering so I hope I can see to continue this. It's very dim in here now. There's water on the floor since there's no door from the porch, just a very large doorway. It's calming down now and the wind isn't blowing it in anymore. One of the guys is taking a shower. They have a garden hose hooked on to the drain gutter. Then just stand under it and you've got plenty of water!

We played a game of volleyball after supper, against the VN's. We each won 1 game, they're pretty good too. While we played I could catch a lot of what they were saying, since it was mostly numbers (the score) like

“Nam - Hai” (5-2) I think I could almost count to 20 in their language now. Let’s see ... Mot, Hai, Ba, Bon, Name, etc. when you get to 10 its Meui, then Meui Mot, Meui Hai, etc. simple huh?

I got a slight burn today and should have a real good tan when we finish here. It sure gets hot during the day but it’s nice and cool in the bunker so we take turns staying in there. We’ve got quite an arsenal, 1 machine gun, 3 M-14 rifles, a box of fragment grenades, smoke grenades for marking our position in case of air evacuation, and incendiary grenades, guaranteed to melt our equipment if we ever needed to destroy it quick.

Things aren’t too bad here really, they talked of rotating us each week, but we want to stay the entire mission here even if it’s the worst spot. - I just sprayed myself with bug repellent, they were biting tonight, that’s unusual because they haven’t bothered me lately here.

We were scouting around our site today, an area of open land, about an acre, when we noticed something like a large can lid. As we gently brushed away some sand on it we saw the markings 105MM Howitzer, yeah, an artillery shell casing buried in the ground. Since it’s buried we can’t tell if its been fired or not but we’re sure not going to dig it up to check!

I bet I sleep good tonight, I’m pretty tired from all that sandbag carrying and filling. I slept good last night on my cot, but woke up early by the communications radio about 10 feet away. It’s kept on all night by one of the advisors who shares my “room”. He’s quite a guy. He showed me a letter he received from Robert Kennedy the other day. He wrote Kennedy (who he somehow has connections with, but doesn’t know personally) and asked him to send a single red rose to a girl he’s been writing but has never met her. Well R.F.K. sent back a letter saying it would be done along with returning the 100 pia, which he said the guy should keep as a souvenir of his tour here. The guy got a letter from the girl along with a newspaper clipping with a picture of the city editor delivering the rose. The guy also knows the Gov. of N.Y. and Buffalo. Some friends!

I was interrupted again, had to mop the floor to get the excess water off. Usually 2 helicopters a day land here, but this is expected to increase as visitors come in to check up on us. It looks like everything will go okay mission-wise anyway. I sure hope our team gets good results. We had a very serious briefing with the Capt. yesterday before leaving Cu Chi. He stresses the importance that we do a good job, well we’ll sure try anyway.

Some unavoidable things can decrease the accuracy of our reports. Large metal objects, fences and other conductors can cause errors in our equipment. Today we felt like calling up our team chief and asking if water buffalo cause any errors. Ha! They’re on the other side of the perimeter fence. On another side is a very old graveyard.

I don’t recall a “Gene Schultz”, from that clipping you sent *[I wound up working with Gene for eighteen years at the Tribune before he was laid-off]* but I do know about the 196th Light Inf. You see there were stationed at Devens and were preparing to ship out when we left for Ft. Wolters. We heard when they landed here and I believe they’re about 40 miles from us.

Right now I’m listening to the Grand Ole Opry on AFRS, I was all set to hear the rock ‘n roll show at 7 but it came on instead. Then I remembered - it’s Saturday.

There’s no TV here so I’ll have to be content watching the show 3 lizards are putting on crawling on the

wall catching moths and other insects. Quite interesting, and no reruns!

I tried to wire my shaver onto the wires suspended from the ceiling, touching only one wire at a time, I thought I would be safe enough. But after the first tingle I think I’ll wait until tomorrow and hook it up BEFORE the electricity comes on.

We don’t have mama-sans to look after us here, but an occasional houseboy will sweep the floor and one put up the poles for my mosquito net yesterday. Our room is 15x15 feet, the upstairs has 3 large rooms and a couple small ones where the advisors sleep too. A captain came today, real nice guy, like the 1st Lt. here. Just one of the guys, that’s all. We do say “Sir” though occasionally, otherwise it’s just a first name basis.

*[Was introduced to a new way to go to the bathroom here. The “outhouse” was out back. Upon exploration I found it and prepared to do my duty. I opened the “outhouse” door and discovered no toilet, seat, or any other fixtures - just a round depressed area in the floor, a 4 inch hole in the middle of that and two foot pads. Just SQUAT and do your job. I didn’t need to go as badly as I thought, but did get the hang of it out of necessity later anyway.]*

I don’t know if you can find Phu Hoa Dong on the map, it’s up and to the right from Cu Chi. The coordinates are 7150 over and 1889 up, if that is any help. Bye for now.

- Vern

## **Oct. 3rd, 1966 - PHU HOA DONG**

Dear Folks,

Well, I haven’t heard from you in quite a while, mainly because I haven’t gotten any mail delivered here. I guess it’s all being held at the 303rd. Today was a very slow day, we didn’t do much mission-wise, so we just sat around watching frequent nearby air strikes. Very interesting of what we could see. We monitored the advisors radio freq. for a while and listened to the progress of their ambush mission and could hear their rifle fire as they weren’t far away. Those guys are playing for real! We could hear the messages like “We’re under fire right now, apparently our position has been compromised.” and things like that all day long.

A chopper came in today with gas & water for us, along with 25 steaks, and a case each of apples & oranges. If you could have seen the looks on the faces of the advisors, boy they couldn’t believe it! They remarked that this was the only bunch of oranges they’d seen over here, and wanted to know where we had connections. Well .....

They really downed the steaks too and told us when they moved they wanted us to come with them. They never had it so good!

I’ve got my shaver plug wired on to some loose wires suspended from the ceiling in my room, so no problem keeping clean shaven. We’re expecting a Major to stay overnight here tomorrow, I hope he’s as easy-going as the 1st Lt. and Capt. here. They’re real nice guys, especially the Lt. He’s always wearing a green camouflaged cowboy hat, with the floppy brim pulled down all around. He really looks like a character in the movies.

It’s raining now so maybe if it holds out I can take a shower. The hose to the roof gutter comes in to our terrace which gives us rather clean water with only a little tar mixed in.

Our team leader Sgt. Beller came today with the supplies, and remarked our team was turning in the best results, which made us feel good. I hope our team as a whole is accomplishing something of value.

Say, could I make a request for an early Christmas present? I'd like much to have a small fold-up travel alarm clock. It would really come in handy when we're out on these missions and would still be easy to carry around. Also how about a few more packages of Kool Aid in the next few letters.?

We couldn't get in a much more insecure area than this, but if we ever do, I'll never tell you! I think we'll be okay though and things couldn't get too much worse. We were a little weak on security today as the bulk of the RVN's were out on patrol today. We were one of the few left behind. Nothing to worry about as we've still got helicopter support here, keeping an eye out for any trouble for us.

Things were so slow today we had time to mess around on Butch's guitar, listen to the baseball game, and soak up some more sunshine. A lot of the kids around here always gather on the other side of the fence hoping that we might give them something. As much as we'd like to give them our extra food and scraps we can't or we would be constantly bothered by the begging for something. At one time I counted 27 little faces watching us curiously. Everyday when we close down and leave the kids assemble along the fence and as soon as they see we're gone they run through the fence entanglement and go through our trash pit seeing if we left anything behind for them.

The other day we shouted to them as we held up our fingers. We said the Viet Nameese numbers while they said them same in English. Let's see, Mot, Hai, Ba, Bon, Nam, Sau, Bay, Lam, Chin, Mui, Mui-Mot, Mui-Hi, etc. *[And I've never forgotten ...]*

I'm sure I could count to 999 but I don't know the word for thousand yet. I'm picking up a little each day but still not much. Maybe now I can barter in their own language when I want to buy something in their shops.

Well, I'd better close for now and get my dirty clothes sorted out for the houseboy to take to the laundry tomorrow. So will close for now - I'm fine, hope you are too.

- Vern

### **Oct. 8, 1965 - PHU HOA DONG**

Dear JoAnn,

Well, how's everything with you? Everything's "a-ok" here. I had the afternoon off today and wrote some letters. We take turns "resting" during the day, actually it's only enough to keep one man halfway busy so the 3 of us don't really strain ourselves that much. We've got time to listen to the radio, strum the guitar or take it easy swinging from one of our hammocks we bought and have strung between the jeep and trailer. We're getting good results I might say although that's about all I can tell you at this time. Ask me later on about "Uncle" *[I had an uncle OTTO, one of our targets' code names]* and maybe I can tell you then, okay?

One bad thing about getting an afternoon off here, there's just no place to go! Any other place and I'd really appreciate the time off, but here we just sit around the jeep anyway on our off time. I have yet to spend one American cent this month, (no place to) but I did buy a hand sewn hammock made of nylon taffeta, at 450 pia, some nylon

rope 48 pia, a flashlight with batteries 95 pia, my laundry was 135 pia, and I paid for the ice one day 60 pia. I've still got about \$40 worth of piasters.

Did I tell you we heard we're due to rotate back to the states on July 4th - 269 to go! That's a month less than we figured, I hope it's true, but then again I still might extend here too.

Tonight for chow we had franks, cream style corn and VN bread which is good. I passed up the cole slaw, no thank you I still don't have a taste for it.

We asked our Sgt. to come out again, but he replied "Are you kidding?, not with those mortars going off around you!" You see we had a little action today here, some skybursts and we couldn't tell which way they were coming from. We radioed this to him and he just said "Sorry about that!" We called him the other day and told him some bullets were going "zing", "zing" over us, and he called back with "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff". Made us feel real nice didn't he? Ha! There really is nothing to worry about, and don't let it scare you. Everything will be okay for us.

As bad as this place is I'll sure hate leaving our "palace" here, this is even better than a barracks. So much room! We've even got a houseboy who takes our clothes to the laundry, gets the ice for our pop cooler (a real honest to goodness ice box) sweeps the floors and straightens up my blankets and stuff around my cot. He's a Chinese who speaks fairly good English, says he learned it all working in a tailor shop in Saigon.

Will close for now, write when you can. Your brother, Vern  
*[Also enclosed in letter was a meal card from Ft. Wolters, and a Domain of the Golden Dragon card for Davy Jones Locker which all got on the ship when we crossed over the international date line, the 180th Meridian on Aug. 8th, 1966.]*

### **Oct. 13, 1966 - CU CHI**

Dear Folks,

Greetings from the low rent district. (interrupted here, mail call, received first letter addressed to 372nd). Yes, that's what the guys here kid us about. You see the company has tent kits, wooden framed and tent coverings, were getting crowded, so they set up a tent for all TDY personnel here. The first night it rained and we got soaked, with a river under my cot to boot. We've now got a wooden floor which helps a little.

You asked where Cu Chi is. Well it's about 20 miles Southwest of Saigon, not too far from Tay Ninh where all the action is taking place. That's Operation Attleborough or however you spell it. Tay Ninh was mortared back by the V.C. a few nights ago and we're on our toes here too. We had a special formation last night, going over alert procedures again.

I don't know if I told you, but we're watching with great interest for the next operation following the present one at Tay Ninh. I just might know something about it. I can't say much more than that though for now.

The word is Gen. McChristian is pleased with our work so far, so we feel pretty good too.

It's now Sunday afternoon. Would you believe it's the first afternoon I've had off since Sept. 27. Also tomorrow morning it's my turn to sleep in. "Uncle Russ" said "Why don't you take the afternoon off, and see you tomorrow about 9 or so. No sooner said than done!"



I bought an electronic flash adapter for my camera. Something like 30 flashes on a charge. Now I can get the indoor shots I've wanted.

I just heard N.U. beat Okla. State today, well, rather yesterday for you, that should make it 8 straight wins this year. *[Bob Devaney had just taken over at NU and the football program - has been on top ever since!]*

Now that I have the afternoon off it would be a very nice day to spend at the lakes or just driving around. Here there's no place to go, except the PX., but I've got about everything I need or could get there.

I'd say it's about 100 degrees out right now, sunny, but partly cloudy. Typical Aug. afternoon back home.

Got a few more letters to answer.- Vern

### ***Oct. 14, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Yes, here I am back at Cu Chi. I flew in on a "Huey", a small helicopter, the one most used over here in VN. I was given 4 hours to be packed and ready to go. They're rotating the teams around and now I'm at net control. I started at control yesterday, boy what a job! After a few hours I was ready to throw my hands up in despair and say "I Quit!" I caught on to it later on and made only one major mistake in the afternoon. Today went much better. I really don't want the job and have been bugging Sgt. Beller about it. He said he'd try to send me to Trung Lap next week if he could. I sure hope so. I'd rather be out roughing it in the field then here with 6:00 reveille, police call, shining boots and everything else. I wouldn't mind Control if it was located in the field, but not here. All you've got to do is keep track of 3 stations, keep in communications, send messages, keep 3 separate writing pads, plus the other stuff we use, monitor code on another receiver, and try to help the guys out when they have trouble. If anyone wants to know what I'm doing over here, just tell them I'm on an Airmobile Radio Research Team, that's about all you can say, I guess. You could add I like it over here, really!

I got a 35 piaster haircut today, not bad with a back massage to boot!

Everyday we meet more and more instructors and students from Devens and it's sort of been like old home week for them. Seems like they cleared out the school houses and sent them all over here. Sorry about that. It means one thing, there's going to be a lot of openings there, for possible reassignment. Hmmm - I don't know about that. All for now

- Vern

### ***Oct. 16, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

It's now Sunday afternoon, another day's work finished, and today we feel we've really accomplished something. Instead of Sgt. Beller just shaking his head in disgust today he and the officers in charge were running around with their heads cut off. Now if we can just continue the good work. You asked about the children getting into the garbage and what kind of perimeter we had. Actually it wasn't much of a perimeter to speak of. We were enclosed in a fenced in field or heliport, surrounded by woods. In these woods was a small ARVN

security squad. That was it. The rest of the territory was anybody's land. Today the guys there called up to say they were closing down because of a firefight going on near them. What "scardy cats", when that happened to us we just crouched near the ground and kept in contact with control. That happened the other day too during the supply run. The Capt. on the advisory team fired some shots into the air hoping to get the attention of the pilot so he could talk to him, instead what it did was hasten the exit of the helicopter.

Thanks for the alarm clock, it will sure come in handy in the field where we have to get up in the morning at a preset time to make a communications check into the radio net. Also we can use it to set it on Greenwich Mean Time during the day and still have our watches set on VN time as our reports use G.M.T.

Your Tribune of Aug. 27 came yesterday, presumably by boat? I've sent some slide film in to be processed in U.S. and sent to you. Upon receipt it should hasten your purchase of a slide projector. I found out they forward our mail from the 303rd to the 372nd only once a week.

I do know the name of the operation we're supporting but — it's classified, sorry about that. We are supporting the 25th Inf. Div. but it's a large outfit so it's possible they have more than one operation in effect and you couldn't tell by the news. I'll be able to tell you more next near when I'm home. When I get back to Long Binh (303rd) I should have about 6 rolls of film developed and waiting for me so I'll send them home with an explanation on the back and you'll get a better idea of things. I hear Congress is kicking around some ideas for servicemen here, like giving them 30 days non-accountable leave if they extend and return for duty here for 6 months. That would sound very good and I'll give it a thought.

I'm not looking forward to the next 2 or 3 weeks here, but that's what it looks like it might be for us here yet, boy do I want to get out into the field again.

Well, that's all for now, I'll keep you posted. Everything's okay here.

- Vern

### ***Oct. 21, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Your two letters came yesterday afternoon, greatly appreciated both. I was laying on my bunk Sat. evening when I heard someone say "Who knows anybody in Nebraska?" Naturally I sat up quickly and after a short discussion found out a guy just transferred here from Phu Bai, living in our transit tent is from Lexington, near Kearney. One of his friends who came down too is from Colorado, worked on railroad at Elkhorn, Valley and had been to Fremont a couple of times. I ate breakfast with them this morning and we had lots to talk about. Said at Phu Bai his NCO in charge was from Cozad, and really didn't want to see him go. I gave the newspaper clippings to him and he was surprised when I told him I could get a letter from home in 4 days. He usually waited 2 weeks, because of poor in-country service.

You wrote about that Holtz boy. I remember after Christmas last year seeing him name as returning to Devens. Since his vacation didn't coincide with the school's I kind of figured he was with the 196th. He was a Spec. 4 and since there was a scarcity of these in our schools I figured I might see him, but never did. Our guys

were lucky at Tay Ninh, they set up their equipment each day at the same spot. One day they went to set up and found 3 mortars had blasted holes 20 meters from where they always set up.

Oh, yes, that "Coolie" hat I was wearing, no it's not part of our uniform, I found it caught in some barbed wire that day and was wearing it as a joke, it's cool too!

I don't know what to tell you as to my address. One day we get a message saying "a job well done, be ready to leave", the next day one said "stick around a while" or something like that. The last message said "be ready to leave" congratulations (pat, pat) and said they would recommend a 7-day leave for us. So we don't know how long we'll be here. Maybe, just maybe we can jaunt off to a nearby country for rest and recuperation, if not maybe a couple days in Saigon, so I guess I won't send any money until we find out if we'll be here a while longer. After Thanksgiving I may be sent to Thoi Hoa. If I don't forget, I'm enclosing a Psychological Warfare paper, dropped from planes with a message to Viet Cong to give up, end the war, and lead a better life for themselves. Part of the "Open Arms" program.

Oh yes, our higher ups have told us where they say they can put us to use. It's still classified but I can tell you where I'm at when I get there.

They've started putting up decorations in Mess Hall, Turkey and all the trimmings are set for us. Yesterday we had a barbecue "cook it yourself", hamburger, hot dogs, chicken or steak. That's all for now

- Vern

### ***OCT. 25, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

It's now Tues. night, just a week from payday. I hope to have enough money left this month to send about \$200 dollars home (I hope). I should send Art some too to cover the cost of some needed articles he's going to try and send me. Thanks for the Kool-Aid, I think I'll have enough for a while since I don't know when I'll be going out into the field again. Things are going okay now, but our teams had a little excitement in some small skirmishes last week. No sweat, we're all okay, nothing to worry about.

We're taking turns now sleeping in, it only takes 2 guys to get things going in the morning so 2 get to sleep in every other day. It sure feels nice to be able to sleep till 7:30 or 8 instead of waking up tired at 5:30 every morning.

I noticed 2 names of guys here in VN in the V.F.W. list who are in the 196th Inf. near here. I'll probably never get over that way but the way we travel around, who knows? I think I might remember the Schultz kid in the clipping you sent a while back. He and I might have detasseled corn together a few years ago. *[We didn't]* Say, I didn't see my name on that list, but saw Dick Lowther's. His address is listed as 330th RRC and that's the address I used to write him. He is on the other Fly Away team so he is away from Pleiku too. Sounds like the 330th has lost track of both our teams and isn't real sure where we are.

Well, I'll try to write more later on. - Vern

### ***Oct. 26, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Well, another day passed, looking forward to tomorrow, and hope for more results like today's. We received word 1st Lt. Cocharine was ambushed the other day. The jeep detonated a claymore mine and at the same time sniper fire opened up on them - they didn't have a chance. It seems like only yesterday, he was explaining to us how we were expected to operate our new gear. This was at Bn. Hq. last Sept. 26, only a month ago. That's 2 officers in the RR Group who have been killed, and as one remarked, "why do they always have to get the good officers"? I guess I told you we had a little excitement too last week, I won't go into the details, but we all came out real lucky.

Boy, if I keep stuffing myself like I have I'll have to get new fatigues. I don't know if I'm gaining weight, but I don't see any reason why I shouldn't be. What meals! A real balanced diet too.

Well, another 2 mail calls today, nothing, as usual. After a week or so of watching the others open their mail in front of you it gets on you. Sure I've gotten a couple each week mostly all on one day then I wait another week for a few more. I guess I could have given my address here to you but I really didn't know how long it will be.

Jim wrote he hopes to get Pam down there *[Panama]* in Nov. now, I hope everything works out okay for them. The rent on a small apartment with hot water, sounded sky high but I guess it's worth it for them.

Well, I haven't got much to say for now and haven't really felt like writing lately. Guess I'll wait patiently for more mail so I'll have some replies to send.

Oh, yes, one more thing, thanks for the picture of me in my car, without going through too much of my stuff, would you see if you can find the colored picture of my car with me standing by it and also Jim's wedding picture I left behind. I've got a plastic folder to keep stuff like that in now. - Vern

### ***Nov. 2, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Well, I'd better get this written while I've got the chance. I'm getting used to it here now, it isn't too bad. Butch and I turned down the opportunity to spend some time at Trung Lap where Alpha team is. We decided to stay here. We had another mortar alert last night. I was down to my underwear ready to take a shower, when the alert siren went off. I slipped on my pants and boots, flak jacket and helmet and headed for the bunker outside of our tent. I was already full and I sat in the doorway. I'm sure they'd have found more room for me if any rounds came our way but a half hour later of tense waiting the all clear signal was given. We know they're not kidding when these alerts go off, they don't do it for practice.

It's now Nov. 2, I started this yesterday morning but was interrupted when Butch came in and said "Get your hat, "you're going out to the Delta Site, on the helipad", so off I went.

Let's see, you asked if I saw McNamara, well I would have if I'd been here earlier the day I flew in from Phu Hoa Dong. He rode down the road next to our tent here the morning of the day I came back so I missed him.

Things are going okay I guess, can't complain. I do need a new Army belt the one I've got is getting smaller!!! or something like that.

One more thing, it looks more and more like we'll be staying here longer than expected, so use the address. 372nd RRC A.P.O. San. Fran. 96535, with name and serial number. All for now. - Vern

### ***Nov. 8, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Wow, did I get a pack of mail yesterday, seems like they have been holding it at the 303rd for a while. Now I've got so much catching up to do. Thanks for the pictures, I've got a plastic folder to put them in that I bought at Phu Hoa Dong.

Butch and I went into Cu Chi today, we had to get a permit from the C.O. and had to take our weapons and helmets. We got the jeep washed and while we were waiting we had some little boys shine our shoes, cost 20 pia a boot, about 35 cents in all. I'll pay that everyday if I could!

You said a box of slides came, that's the only one I've sent and was wondering how the exposure was on them. Most of it was guess work, but Art sent a light meter to me so I'll get better contrast and light levels from now on.

Those "pretty clouds" etc, I'll bet if you look close you'll see a small cloud of smoke and some little black specks, jets, pulling off an airstrike. I've just about got another roll finished now and will send it home soon.

I read in "Stars and Stripes" about a cold spell the midwest was having, well, it's still 85-90 most of the time here. Some nights it sure seems cold, clear down to 70, I'll bet!

Dick Lowther wrote a short letter telling a little about their "Fly Away Team". Said they too eat 2 meals of "C's" a day in the field. They are in support of the 25th Inf. Div. as we are.

You asked about the record I wanted. We heard them call it Dit, Dit, or Didit, as it would be in true Morse Code, by somebody and the "Brambles", but we didn't hear the first name of the singers.

I've got to finish this for now and write a few more while I'm in the mood. - Vern

P.S. Still haven't got that money order I'm going to send, still too long of a line at the P.O.

### ***Nov. 25, 1966 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Here it is the day after Thanksgiving. I worked as usual yesterday but was relieved at noon to enjoy the good turkey dinner. Nice slices of white meat, potatoes, hot buttered rolls, fruits, vegetables, etc. Actually I was expecting a little better, you see we have meals like that every day! Yeah, I'm not complaining, we've just been spoiled all along. I had to go out to the perimeter today and ride herd on some P.F.C.'s again trying to help them learn on the equipment. If you could see me bossing around, I bet you'd laugh! I sit around while they do all the work. Nice time to pull a little rank too. Ha!

Art wrote a short letter I got yesterday, also got one from Mrs. H.H. Tillman, a Christmas card, she saw my name in paper as being over here.

Say, I told you we would still be here for an indefinite time. That still goes, but continue to send mail here at 372nd.

The First Sergeant assured St. Beller our mail would be sent to 303rd promptly as soon as we get orders to go back.

Well, more later I still have people I haven't written that I owe letters to from quite a while back.  
- Vern

### ***Dec. 1, 1966 - BEN CAT***

Dear Folks,

Well, here I am at Ben Cat. We rotated a few of the personnel on our team on the supply run and pay run. I'm now here after a chopper ride of about 45 minutes. We stopped off at Boa Tang or however you spell it and our second stop was here.

It's really great here. I took my first hot shower since leaving the boat. We've got hot and cold running water, bunks and mattresses, white sheets, cement floors, a mess hall where you sit down and the house girl brings it to you. Last night we had roast beef and gravy bread, mashed potatoes and gravy, and a big helping of peas. There are about 15 American advisors here with a battalion of R.V.N.s.

I got the package from V.F.W. two days ago, postmarked Nov. 9, but the cookies still tasted okay. Didn't get Mrs. Krenzer's package yet but when it comes it could be awhile before they get it on a supply chopper up here. My address is still 372nd, and please don't send any Christmas goodies as the food is plentiful.

Only 18 more shopping days till Christmas and it's 95 in the shade. Not too hot, and the nights are cool. In fact we have circulating fans overhead in our billets and it's downright cold without a blanket. We've got a houseboy to make our bunks etc, and he takes our laundry out everyday. I need a haircut now so I'm going into the village where it costs a whole 20 piasters. About 18 cents! The village is safe too, you don't need to carry a weapon with you either.

I've got a few shots left in my camera and will send it home soon. I hope the shots from the helicopter came out okay. It's really something, a couple thousand feet up at about 80 knots an hour and you're sitting a foot or less from an open door. And when the pilot decides to go down he does it in a hurry. Straight down! Or he banks it until you feel you'd slide right out that door and the earth is at ridiculous angles. It's fun though more exciting than any carnival ride.

Well, that's all for now, back to work. - Vern

### ***Dec. 20, 1966 - BEN CAT***

Dear Folks,

Well, about time I get a letter off to you. It's been a while since I wrote anyone. We've been quite busy lately. As you can see I'm back at Ben Cat, my address is 372nd again. We spent about 8 days resting and pulling maintenance on our equipment. We didn't get the in-country R&R because MAC V Commander Gen McChristian wanted us back in the field as soon as possible. Somehow I lucked out and got sent here.

We started operation Sunday morning and a typical day goes something like this. Wake up 7-7:30, dress, eat breakfast, fried eggs and toast, drive out to our

site and set up. We start at 8 or 8:30 depending on certain things. We finish work at 5:30 or 6 and go in and eat chow. Sunday night we barbecued our own steaks. Then at 7 we watched a movie. I changed into civies before it just to get a little more comfortable. After the movie I took a hot shower and shaved. Then watched a little T.V. and finally hit the sack around 10:30 and a couple cold beers. I guess you can see why I don't mind it here at all. So I hope I can spend as much time at Ben Cat as I can. As you can see we keep a pretty busy day and I haven't taken the time to write as often as I should.

I put another roll of slides in the mail for you the day I got here so you should be getting it soon. Some were taken in Bein Hoa and then when we left by Chinook to here. We've got a Christmas tree up in our dining hall complete with decorations and bulbs. I watched the Perry Como Christmas special last night, maybe you saw it back home too. Well, better close for now. - Vern

### **CHRISTMAS DAY, 1966 - BEN CAT**

Dear Folks,

Here it is Christmas afternoon. I'm sitting in our jeep at our site. Yes, we're working today as usual. We had a supply chopper come in at about 11:30, (moui-hai-yeah, ba moui fut) local time. They brought our mail and a sack of goodies to us.

I don't think we really missed Christmas that much, we've really had a happy one here. Yesterday afternoon about 5:00 (they let us close down early) a helicopter was slowly circling the area. I looked up and said to Ron, "It's Santa Claus", Yeah, big red suit, beard, and all. When he landed I noticed who it was, one of the advisors here who was wearing the suit. I took a bunch of pictures which won't be in the mail yet. They had a nativity scene in front of the VN officers club, a table of gifts for the kids, and a speech was presented by the Camp Commanding Officer. A little later the advisory team sang some carols and then the gifts were distributed. No, I don't think I missed any part of Christmas, even if I wasn't at home as I would have liked. This morning we had breakfast as usual, fried eggs, and toast, with orange juice. We headed out to the site about 8:20 and set up our equipment. About 10 we received word a chopper would be heading our way in one hour. Finally the call came "Little Bear 617" wanted a smoke grenade marker so we threw a yellow one. He acknowledged and came down. Sgt. Beller and a newly promoted captain greeted us with well wishes and asked how things were. Then just before leaving handed us each a gift, a sack of assorted articles, a soap dish, fingernail clippers, this writing paper, a pen, etc. After the helicopter had left his third stop we heard him call our radio net using our call signs and wishing us a Merry Christmas from Little Bear 617. In turn we wished him the same and went back to our work. Along came 2:30 and over the air came control saying "Close Down until 8:30 local time".

The team at Thoi Hoa then called us and said they planned to drive down to see us. The team at Lai Khe said likewise. Thoi Hoa is about 5 kilometers, but through VC territory. True the truce was on but they took no chances. About 10 minutes later their jeep pulled up in our compound, Tom and Harry, decked out in helmets and flak vests arrived. They said they missed a convoy but rode alone not stopping for anything.

*[A note here ... we set this meeting up by having a pre-arranged frequency to contact each other on. It was not allocated to us, and our team leader, Sgt. Beller was none the wiser. Guess he knows now!]*

We all enjoyed a fine dinner, turkey, potatoes, etc. Later we toured the village together and took some pictures to some girls we'd promised earlier one day on our sandbag filling venture.

The guys from Lai Khe never did come down, probably couldn't push themselves away from the table. Ha! Later the guys drove back to Thoi Hoa, keeping radio contact with us until their safe arrival.

It's now 7:15 p.m. the White House ceremony is being presented on T.V. Later tonight we've been invited to a party at the VN officers club.

Earlier this morning Ed Tune, at control received a message saying his father or step father had died. He wasn't sure which one, as it hadn't been made clear to him. The rest of us decided to pitch in for a memorial gift. We got the address and are wiring flowers by telegraph with the help of the Red Cross. Within an hour a helicopter was waiting to take Ed to the 303rd to board a homeward plane. *[Another footnote - I replaced Ed Tune at Ben Cat because Ed had hit a little girl with the jeep. Broke her arm or something, not too serious I think. Her father was not too thrilled about it though and was reportedly making some threats if he saw Ed Tune again. So, I replaced Ed and really hoped all Americans didn't look the same, as the Vietnamese did to us.! Also another side look here. When I arrived I met one of the US Advisors, a captain, upon learning why I was replacing Ed, he laughed it off and proceeded to tell me about the time he and a bunch of guys were sitting in a sidewalk cafe and somehow he managed to shoot and kill an innocent bystander, an old lady, by accident. He just laughed it off, their lives were cheap to him. No big deal! This is in direct contrast to another Captain. We lived with him at Phu Hoa Dong. Later, when we were at another site in the field, we were monitoring the advisor's radio frequency. That's where the "action" was. We recognized his voice as he talked to his superiors at headquarters. Seems a man had been killed in a village by some misguided artillery fire. He was supposed to give the widow a certain amount of money as compensation. You could almost hear the tears in his eyes as his voice broke as he questioned them. "You mean these few dollars are supposed to replace her husband?!" he asked. You could tell he was very disgusted and sorry about the mishap, but I'm sure he realized this happens in a war situation more than he would want to admit.]*

It's an 18 hour flight (18 days by boat) so Ed will be home for New Year's even if it's under such sorrowful conditions. He bid us goodbye and should be returning to our team early next year.

Jim wrote that Susie had written him you've eagerly been watching the TV newscasts to see me. Well, maybe by now they've shown it so I hope you saw it. *[A local TV reporter from Omaha somehow found me by accident at Ben Cat, took my picture and a little voice recording just before Christmas].* Sounds like Pam hasn't made it to Panama yet either, maybe she's down there by now.

Incidentally, although we didn't have snow by Christmas Eve, it did rain, if that's any cause for consola-

tion. Also Lai Khe had a few enemy mortars fired into the camp and US killed 4 V.C. How's that for a truce?

About 7:30 this morning the advisory team was bustling around, you see they had to hurry to get ready as a chopper was on its way to pick them up. The occasion? The Bob Hope show, of course! It was announced only 8 hours prior to performance, for security reasons. They were going to it at Camp Zeon, The First Inf. Div. headquarters (The Big Red One) near Phu Loi.

The show was also presented at Cu Chi, 25th Inf. Div. Hqs. (Tropic Lightning Div.) so maybe our team members got to see it. I don't know who they were really going to see, Bob Hope, or the pretty girls accompanying him. Ha!

Your letter came today with a few others, sounds like R. Greffe would be somewhere near Pleiku, reasoning from his 4th Div. address.

Also, you said the slide tray is getting full, you'd better plan on buying a few more as I'm sure I'll have many slides coming in the rest of the year, and we've got plenty more places to go and see. Would you believe 220 days left in VN? Yeah, give or take a day or two. I had to stop and figure it out a couple days ago, since I quit counting a long time ago. I think it goes faster that way.

Just re-read your letter, hope I've answered any questions you've had. I'm still so far behind in writing. Well, I'd better finish this and get it in the mail so bye for now. Have a Happy New Year and God be with You.

- Vern

### **Jan. 1, 1967 - BEN CAT**

Dear Folks,

Happy New Year! We're not out at the site, it's about quarter to 12. It's almost noon here so it should be around midnight for you. I guess you're still waiting for the New Year as it hasn't gotten to you yet.

I received 3 letters and the Christmas pamphlet from you yesterday along with some other Christmas cards from other people too. Also your package, thanks, and the shampoo will sure come in handy as I just used the last of mine last night. Guess I forgot to tell Krenzlers I did get their package too, I remembered after I sealed the envelope of their Christmas card. Well, I'm wondering if they ever had me on TV or not? Maybe by now they've shown it. Guess you got my slides of it before they showed it on TV. I might have another roll on the way but I don't remember for sure. I've got about 3 pictures left on a roll of 36 that I took in the Chinook and of the Christmas celebration for the kids here. Also I took some the night before last when Thoi Hoa got attacked. I hope some of them turn out. There were two flare ships (planes) dropping flares and choppers firing tracer rounds at the enemy on the ground.

When we heard Thoi Hoa was under attack the other night we were quite interested - you see one of our teams is there. We went outside and monitored our radio in the jeep listening to the goings on. It lasted for about an hour and a half, about 6 ARVN's were killed, 10 wounded, our guys were okay after guarding a gate and manning their bunker which doubles as living quarters.

I don't have your letters with me right now, so I don't remember what all you asked. I don't know about that orphanage here, there is a refugee center on the road to Lai Khe, but haven't seen or heard of any Missionary around here. A Lt. here has a good hand in the building of the center but that's about all I know about it.

Thanks for forwarding the letter to Jean, I don't quite see how it got to our house, except by the return address or something. Oh yes, 372nd is still my address until further notice.

It's now 6 p.m., we were monitoring the radio when at about 2:30 St. Beller's voice came over the air. "Close down until 8:30 tomorrow, do you acknowledge?" "A" team did, then it was my turn, we were so surprised I said "You Kidding Me?, Roger!, Out!! So we closed down. We decided to drive up to Lai Khe and see our buddies. *[Another clandestine rendezvous arranged by prior plans]*. It's about a 15 minute drive on "Thunder Road" as they call it. We met them and decided to go see the boys at Thoi Hoa. Were advised against it but went anyway. Pedal to the floor and a rifle out each side of the jeep. *[I was scared, really!]* We got there in record time not slowing down for anything. I got some pictures of the bunker they live in, also, me, standing by a V.C. suspect woman who was squatting on the ground. I finished that roll and will be in mail tomorrow. The guys pointed out the place where the mortars etc. were landing the other night in the compound, boy, I'm sure glad I wasn't there! We, Tom, myself, and a V.N. Lt. went over to the village. Tom was measured for a pair of black V.C. type pajamas. The Lt. helped Tom from getting skinned, price-wise. Then the Lt. insisted we have a beer, on him. Baum-de-Ba (33 Brand) as it's pronounced. We were drinking that when the Lt. who speaks fairly good English asked if I'd ever tried these, a food product hanging from a rack. I said no, so of course he insisted I try one. It was a small object about 2 inches square. I took off the fiber winding around it, while watching Tom & Lt. do the same. Then I unpeeled the leaves one by one. Then I came to a second string type fastening. Then smaller leaves. Finally I saw Tom take out something and pop it into his mouth. I opened the final covering and saw it. Kind of a pinkish meat chunk, I asked what it was. "Pork", was the answer. With a little difficulty I chewed it and swallowed it. I still wonder if it was cooked or raw?! If you get sick over here and you tell the medics you've been eating R.V.N. food, it really shakes them up, but I had no ill effects.

About 5 o'clock we headed back to Ben Cat, as Willy and Curly still had to get back to Lai Khe.

It was kind of a dumb thing we did taking the chances we did. The radio op learned we'd be driving from Lai Khe and told us we were nuts. We were all set to go back until an R.V.N. soldier came up to us. He wanted us to go tomorrow morning with a convoy when it would be safe. He wanted us to stay overnight, but we assured him we'd be okay, and left. Well, I'm still here, so everything's okay. I think it'll be a while before we pull a stunt like that again, and if Sgt. Beller ever found out - -

We've received good word that the impending operation we have been working on would be starting very soon. Now our results are getting pretty serious work, no more guessing or goofing around.

I'm still taking it easy at Ben Cat, hope I stay awhile yet, sure like the extra \$2.47 a day, I'm drawing for separate rations. I don't know when I'll get the chance to send some more money home. I've got plenty but no place to convert it to a M.O.

All for now, more later.

- Vern

## ***Jan. 10, 1967 - BEN CAT***

Dear Folks,

Guess I'd better get a few lines off to you while I have the time. I'm sitting in the jeep, as usual, trying to pass the time. It's been dull lately. You see a funny thing happened the other day. On the 5th to the 7th high flying B-52 bombers hit an area "Northeast of Saigon" as the radio announcer put it. Well, ever since then it's been real quiet. I wonder why they decided to bomb that place?.

Hmm ....

A big operation is now in progress [*Cedar Falls*] in this area. Actually I knew about it long ago, but the advisors here didn't know about it until just a few days ago. It's really been something to watch. The roads are filled with tanks, armored personnel carriers (A.P.C.'s) jeeps, etc. At one time yesterday I saw 60 helicopters in the air above us. Also jets and plenty of air strikes. Yesterday some helicopters started firing machine guns and rockets into an area just a few hundred meters away. Boy, I hope they didn't see anybody there! Artillery goes off all day and night sounding something like the final display at the July 4th fireworks display.

They tell me I've got some letters waiting at Cu Chi, but it'll be a week before I get them. Oh, well, by then I'll have more to send up to me.

I guess you should be getting those slides of Christmas and of the attack on Thoi Hoa, would you let me know if those night pictures of the plane firing tracers came out?

The other day a chopper landed with a bunch of CBS and NBC reporters. No, they didn't take a picture of me, they were headed up the hill to the 173rd Airborne Brig. They are from Bein Hoa, but are now about a kilometer from Ben Cat taking part in this operation.

Did I ever get shown on TV? As I said before, don't worry about security on that, it's okay to let anybody know I'm over here it just wasn't supposed to be let out when the company in Texas was supposed to leave. That Meyers boy clipping you sent had Agency all over it and said he was coming over here, that's not the best thing to do, but it's been done plenty of times before. About the only thing really classified is exactly what our mission is over here. Everybody knows we're Radio Research, but exactly what we do is something else.

With all these people around the area's getting quite crowded. We had 7 bunks up in the day room last night, and the dining room was quite crowded for breakfast this morning.

We hear on the radio of the operation going on in the Delta, but as of yet have not heard of the operation here. They just refer to it as "northeast of Saigon," about 35-40 miles. They're trying to clean the V.C. out of the "Iron Triangle", a jungle area, stronghold of the enemy for quite a long while.

They've tried it before but were met with a good sized force. Sure hope they get them this time.  
*[As I recall this was the first venture where the ARVN were not told of the operation in advance, to help stop any security leaks of the operation to the enemy, and hoping for a larger element of surprise.]*

Well, that's about all for now. More later.

- Vern

## ***Jan. 13, 1967 - BEN CAT***

Dear Folks,

Friday the 13th, that's what it is here, not that I'm superstitious, it's a hot afternoon here, about 95 degrees I'd guess. It's been getting quite chilly lately at night. Must be the winter weather, ha! I wasn't too cold last night, I've got a pair of pajamas, (black V.C. type) naturally! It took about a week to get them made in town, I got measured for them so they're custom made just for me. I think I'll have an extra set made because they're real nice for lounging around in, after work.

We may be working late tonight. They want us up on the air from 8:30 to 5:30 and then from 7 to 11 in the evening. Sort of a long day, but they consider it important enough to the operation going on. I'm sure you've heard by now of Operation Cedar Falls, and the "Iron Triangle", well, that's what we've been working on for so long. Every night at 7:30 we listen to the newscast on TV and hear how it's going, VC's captured, rice confiscated, etc. The other night it was on, and Ron turned to me and said "Look what we started". We've done most of our part in it, now it's the combat troop's job to take over.

Today marks 200 days left over here, not too long from now Easter will be here, the July 4th, and then I can start counting the days on my fingers.

In the next few days we should be getting our mail, being held for us at the 372nd, they said I've got a few letters, so I'm waiting to see who from.

It's now Saturday morning, we're going to take turns having the morning and afternoon off now that we're working nights. We worked 7 to 10:30 last night, it was kind of scary in the dark out there, and they kept firing flares up behind us. Once or twice a machine gun with tracer round opened up to our right. I don't know if they saw something moving or what, as it was very foggy last night.

There really isn't much new here going on, besides the operation, it's about the same as usual for us, although we're watching it all with a special interest, seeing what kind of radio equipment and documents the infantry units are capturing.

I'm fine, hope everyone is back home.

- Vern

## ***Jan. 15, 1967 - BEN CAT***

Dear Folks,

Your three letters came this morning the last one postmarked the 11th. Also got 2 from Jim's sister, and one from Internal Revenue with W-2 forms, etc.

Not much new going on here, still listening to newscasts on reports of Operation Cedar Falls. That one in the Delta is a separate operation, ours is concerned with the Iron Triangle.

I guess the film of me wasn't much to look at, but at least I was on anyway. You've been sending all these names of guys but I doubt if I'd recognize any or remember their names.

I've got the afternoon off, I hope to get to Lai Khe Tuesday afternoon if I can catch a ride. "Curly" Kollstedt invited me down, it's his day off too, and we could spend the afternoon together. He said to bring my camera as they have quite a cache of weapons etc. taken from the VC during this operation. They've sure found a lot of rice stockpiles, they've tried to distribute it to the V.N.'s and any they can't, they burn.

No, I haven't eaten any foreign food lately, except for village bought bread. We've got good food here, and I'm trying to find a new Army type belt. The one I've got is too small. I've put 2 inches on my waist since I joined the Army, I can still squeeze into my original issue fatigues, but some new larger ones feel much more comfortable.

Boy, those snow scenes don't look inviting, I'd rather be over here than pushing my way through that stuff!

We're continuing to work at night now, getting used to sitting out there in the dark too. I don't mind it too much since we get part of the day off now. We've got our two M-14 rifles, and an M-79 grenade launcher, sort of an oversized shotgun that fires hand grenade type shells. We're secure here though, in fact, with the 173rd near us we're more secure than ever before. The road to Thoi Hoa is secure almost 24 hours a day now.

I can't quite do as you suggested, sending \$5 in the mail each letter, remember we use "funny money" over here, our \$1 bills are pink, \$5 blue, \$10 sort of a peach colored, as it would be of no use to you to try to cash it.

One of these days I'll put some black & white negatives in with a letter and have you get them printed and mounted in an album.

I've got some other little odds and ends I want to save too. All for now.

- Vern

### **Jan. 23, 1967 - BEN CAT**

Dear Folks,

Just a short note to accompany the M.O.'s. It rained quite a bit the last 2 days. We only worked one hour last night as there was no let up in the weather.

I hitchhiked to Lai Khe this afternoon, and spent the day with "Curly", one of my classmates at Devens. Got back at 5:30 found the two guys from Thoi Hoa had driven down after work and are staying overnight, in real beds, for once!

Things still very slow lately, as the operation continues. Been reading about it in Army paper. Would you clip any news about "Cedar Falls" out of the paper and save them for me?

Had an Army movie tonight, now watching George Gobel on the Dean Martin show.

Hope mail gets out to me, maybe in the next week or so.

Oh, yes, watched Univ. of Nebraska play Alabama in Sugar Bowl on T.V. yesterday, [23 days late, on film] - couldn't really boast about their playing after that big loss.

Well, not much else new going on around here, so will close for now.

- Vern

### **Jan. 29, 1967 - THOI HOA (Toy-Wah)**

Dear Susie,

Yes, here I am, Thoi Hoa, an RVN Army camp, very small in the middle of nowhere. It's a triangle shaped fortress, with sandbag gun emplacements and not much else. There's about 4 U.S. advisors here, and us, Bill Chron and myself. Harry King and I swapped places, so he's now at Ben Cat. I took my last hot shower last night and ate a hearty meal of turkey, mashed potatoes, and beans. Now I'm on a steady diet of C rations, living in a 2 man tent, and all the benefits?, of outdoor living [and outdoor plumbing!! an orange crate with a hole in it, surrounded with a waist-high curtain made of burlap for privacy!]

Ed Tune got back from his emergency leave to the States yesterday so our team is back to full strength.

Sgt. Beller got a message yesterday and a helicopter came to pick him up and take him to Saigon. For the next couple days he's going to be briefing Gen. McChristian, AND Gen. Westmoreland [?? like to hear more about that Uncle Russ!], about our mission here. We're hoping our work is about through here so we can return to Cu Chi and then go on some in-country R&R. (Rest and Recuperation), maybe at Vung Toa, a seaside resort area.

I've just about finished another roll of film, the first pictures are the beginnings of Operation Cedar Falls, and the last ones are here at Thoi Hoa. All for now.

- Vern

### **Feb. 5, 1967 - THOI HOA**

Dear Folks,

I received three letters from you yesterday on the long awaited supply run. I guess I'll try to get them answered this afternoon. Would you believe I came down with the flu? In such a warm climate! It got cold a couple nights ago, I guess I must have gotten it from that. I'm feeling a lot better now.

Still living in our bunker type house, sure comes in handy too. We saw a little action here the other day the closest rounds were 200 meters away from the compound so we were safe.

The V.C. were awful brave, right out in broad daylight they mortared a bridge, trying to stop a big supply convoy. I was out at the site at the time watching it all go on, ready to jump for our hole in the ground just in case. At one time I saw about a squad of men racing across a rice paddy, I wasn't sure if they were V.C. until the R.V.N. soldiers opened up on them. They were quite a distance away so I didn't have a chance to fire at them. You know, I still haven't fired my weapon over here! That would mean I'd have to clean it!. Ha!

I wish a few of those protesting draft card burners would have been here that day so they could see for themselves the little innocent 6 year old girl hit by a V.C. fire and ripped her stomach open. Also a few old people got hurt. Hasn't been much else going on - it should be quiet over the V.N. New Year.

I've taken some pictures of our surroundings here, also a couple in our "hooch".

Me and Chron both got stuck with the cooking chore. Bill fried some frozen shrimp and the next night I fried some sort of lunch meat. Of course the Capt. and Lt.

praised our cooking, said we should do it more often. No thanks! There are 6 U.S. personnel here so I guess I'll have to cook about once a week.

Cedar Falls may be over, but we've still got our ears on the "Triangle", still wondering when we'll get pulled back for some rest.

I'm getting quite a stubble on my face, it's been a few days since I shaved. We forgot to bring the water out today so can't shave till tomorrow. Oh yes, I'm back to using a razor, since there is limited electricity here (7-9 p.m.) and no wall sockets.

I took a picture of Bill scrambling some eggs over our little stove under our shelter at the site. That panfull was all mine, and he ate the next panfull. *[When we got fresh eggs, we ate eggs, while they were fresh, 5 to 6 at a time. So who knew anything about cholesterol?]* Well, must close for now, and take my turn at work.

- Vern

## **Feb. 9, 1967 - THOI HOA**

Dear Folks,

Happy Vietnamese New Year, yes, today and the next few days, is their big holiday over here. It's really been something to watch, and take part in.

The advisors and us here got into the festivities too, not quite by our own choice, but with a little twisting of our arm. Last night about 7:30, we were "invited" to a dinner with the Vietnamese officers. We tried to wiggle out of it, but they insisted we join them as was the traditional custom. So we went along with the bit. We all sat down at a long table, furnished with chopsticks, bowls, and two strange bowls of liquid, boiling over a little charcoal fire. Each member at the table was introduced to the guest of honor, an old man, the oldest man in the neighborhood here. *[He gave us his blessing that the Americans were welcome for another year, (as though he had anything to say in the matter)].*

Then it was time to eat. First we started by taking a fiber leave, I think it was called rice paper, placed it over the top of a small bowl in front of us. Then, with the chopsticks you picked up a piece of small meat, (I don't know what it was) and dipped it into the pot of boiling vinegar, then placed it in the center of the leaf on the bowl. Then you picked some small sliced vegetables and some other stuff and put in on the leaf. After that you wrap it up into a little bundle, and then dip the end into a bowl of gravy type sauce. Then, of course you bite off a chunk, and wow!, was it hot! After trying hard not to gag on it and keep a pleasant expression on your face as you chewed it and trying to swallow it. Then you sit there with the inside of your mouth, slowly turning into an inferno. Those spices and stuff made my whole mouth tingle, even spread to my lips and a burning sensation on tender skin. I slowly ate the rest of it, hoping everyone else would eat the rest of the food before I was finished.

When everyone was done, they brought out the glasses and the whiskey, some Australian stuff, and very potent. By then I had hoped the meal was over, that is, until they walked in with the big bowls of rice. *[I DON'T eat rice anymore!!]* So I ate a bowl of rice, mixed with potato chunks, meat, etc.

Then the VN captain, the post commander invited us to watch the entertainment on the stage outside.

We had front row seats reserved for us so we felt honored. Then he dropped the bomb on us, another old custom - an old tradition that all visitors and officers at the dinner each get up on the stage and sing one song. So as the show progressed finally the officers were up there singing. Three of us got up and went through a very badly done verse of "I've Been Working on the Railroad", the only song we could think of that we all knew the words to. About 10:30, the band finished and everyone waited til 12 midnight for the lighting of the bonfire. Finally the time came, as tired as we were we went out to watch. The time had come, the fire lit, the band back on the stage strumming out a fast tune on their electric guitars and then, bang, bang, bang, the whole place opened up with every machine gun, rifle and pistol, firing tracer bullets. I never realized the firepower of this place, and a lot of the guys were gone on pass. The shooting, flares, etc. lasted a good ten minutes of constant firing and then it quieted down. We decided to try to get some sleep, even though the band played on, and on, in fact til 2 in the morning.

Now Bill and I are trying to figure out a way of getting out of another supper tonight. Maybe if we drive down to Ben Cat after work, "on business", and spend the night there. Hmmm .... We could even take a shower there, the first one in over a week.

We've been having a lot of trouble with our jeep, batteries, and fuel. The other day we dumped in a 5 gallon can of diesel fuel, which was supposed to be gasoline. That didn't help the engine any, and our batteries aren't any good either. So I've had my chance to get my hands greasy once again, and a few knuckles bruised too. Yes, I get to drive a bit, it sure is fun to get behind the wheel of our jeep and putter around going through the gears.

Let's see Dad, you asked about the price of beer etc. over here, well, VN beer is about 20-25 cents a bottle in a small joint, but in Saigon, the classy bars etc. it's much higher. American beer at our clubs runs 15 to 20 cents a can, and pop about 10-15 cents. There is a Coke plant in Saigon and the VN sell it for 25 cents a bottle, as the deposit on them is 50 cents. Glass bottles are hard to get, so the deposit costs more than the pop. The village cafe here lets us take a case with us to our site each day, trusting us with a deposit, we broke a bottle one day and got socked for it but otherwise they're pretty pleasant about the arrangement.

I believe Susie mentioned in her letter Mom was looking for a clothes dryer. Well, I would have liked to have gotten everyone a present at Christmas time, but I couldn't do it at the time. I think that would make a nice present for the whole family to enjoy, so please take the money out of my bank account and buy you one. I hope I still have enough funds for that. Also I sent in my income tax return, since I didn't make over \$900 until Aug. I get my money paid in refunded. You should be getting a check for about \$40 from them. *[Do I recall we didn't have to pay Fed. Tax while we were over there, gee what a deal!!]* Also I've got some of this month's paycheck socked away which I want to get home at the first opportunity. When we finish this operation I'll turn in all my ration and allowance papers so I'll get a big extra chunk of pay sometime later on in the next few months.

Well, it's about time to take my turn at the radio gear so will close for now.

- Vern



## Feb. 17, 1967 - THOI HOA

Dear Folks,

It's now Friday morning, we're sitting here with jeep problems, a mechanic went to Lai Khe for parts, so we're just sitting here passing the time. I received a letter from you on the 15th, on the supply run. Not much new going on here, just letting the days pass as we get just a little shorter on the tour here.

You were asking the whereabouts of this place. If you get a hold of Krenzer's map, it's about 5 kilometers below and a little to the east of Ben Cat. It's probably not on the map anyway, but it is along Route 13.

The last roll of film I just sent in has a lot of pictures of this place, the compound, rebuilding the bunker/house, and also some shots of our site, jeep, radio gear, etc.

Susie asked about the VN money I sent, I believe they were 1 Dong notes, in other words, worth about 1 cent each. They also have 1 dong and 10 dong coins which are round, plus a multi-cornered 5 dong piece.

Last night we had fried chicken, which the company at Cu Chi had sent out a few days before, so you see, we do get a little more than C rations to eat here.

I finally got a haircut today, after many weeks passed since the last one, it was getting to the point that it looked like it did before I joined the Army. *[I still remember that haircut, the Vietnamese barber cut my hair, and gave me a shave, and insisted he needed to shave my eyelids too, with a straight razor! and I let him!!! trusting soul, or a real fool, I'm not sure which!]* Also the sun has bleached it to a light brown. I've got a good tan from the waist up, after all these sunny days we've had. I really don't miss that snow you've been having, and the weather here is still bearable, although I hear we're in for some hot weather during the summer months.

I too am wondering where Art *[my Marine brother]* is going to wind up. At least they can't send him over here until August. Maybe he will wind up with stateside duty, *[he did!!!]* which I would call more of a hardship tour then being over here. I don't think there will be any operations in the near future which will concern us, ours is over now, although we're still continuing our original operation.

Aside from the faithful letters I've received very little correspondence over the last month, in fact since Christmas I've heard very little from anyone. Maybe if I get ambitious I'll drop everybody a line and then I'll hear something from them. It could be too, that the mail going to the 303rd is getting forwarded to the wrong place and then returned, as I know has happened. Things feel a little dreary over here when you wait and wait for the next supply run to bring mail, then when it finally comes, it's a let down. I hope I don't sound bitter, it's just that I'm getting fatigued and tired of this place. It's lost its luster of when we first got here, it was something new, different, now it's getting to be old stuff, what once may have fascinated me, is looking more like the junk and dirt that maybe it really is. Maybe soon we'll get a rest, be refreshed and we can start all over again. I'm sure I won't put in for an extended tour here, I'd like to get back to civilization with a little more comfortable surroundings.

We've had a lot of "excitement" here this month, but I'll tell you about it when I see you again. Nothing to worry about, and everything calm now. All for now

- Vern

## Feb. 24, 1967 - THOI HOA

Dear Folks,

Well, quite a bit has happened since I wrote last. Last Sunday a Chinook helicopter came out to bring our sick jeep in for repairs. I spent 5 days at Cu Chi, and now we're back here in operation again. It sure felt good to get those few days of rest, sleeping late etc. Every night we took roll call in the club, and got feeling pretty good on beer. We didn't get drunk, but we felt pretty good, and had a good time.

The company's sure changed. All the tent kits were modified so they have screened in sides and metal roofs. Only 6 men to a tent kit and each one has a TV, donated courtesy of the club profits. *[As I recall the company commanders at Cu Chi had a monthly meeting of sorts, and once presented our C.O. with an Alka Seltzer tablet mounted on a ribbon. An award of sorts to our company for consuming the most alcohol per capita of the Cu Chi base.]*

I got a letter from you, Krenzers, and one from Mildred. I bought a new radio at Cu Chi to replace the one stolen at Ben Cat, I hope nobody makes off with this one.

Sgt. Beller had sort of planned to send us to Lai Khe, I talked him into going back here, even if it isn't the greatest place to be *[the sun must have been getting to me!!]* and he's sending another team to Lai Khe instead.

Guess who was here at Thoi Hoa yesterday? Film star and singer, Robert Mitchum! We heard he was stopping at Ben Cat for lunch. A little later a chopper landed here. I didn't realize it was him or I could have went into the compound to see him. A little while later the chopper took off and flew directly over us. A guy sitting next to the open doorway, *[Mitchum]* pointed his finger at us like he has holding a pistol, then he smiled and waved. We waved back not realizing who it was. When we went in at 5 o'clock we found it was him. *[Robert Mitchum starred in a film called "Thunder Road", about motorcycle riders, I think, and Hiway 13, if you could call it a highway, (really a narrow gravel road) was nick named Thunder Road.]*

Not too much else going on lately, Sgt. Beller said if we stay here a while longer, he may have our team swap places with the team at Ben Cat. I sure have no objections to that! *[A shower at Thoi Hoa consisted of a 50 gallon barrel of water mounted on a stand with a shower head on a pipe. You dribbled enough water on you to get wet, soaped down, dribbled just enough water to rinse, then tried to dry yourself off even though you were probably already sweating anyway. Also you had to be sure you didn't use the last drop of water because the Vietnamese Commander of the camp took his shower late, and there had better be water for him!]*

Last night we had grilled hamburgers, we've got a pretty good supply of food for a while now. Still got plenty of "C's" to fall back on.

*[I remember making fresh French Fries. We cut up potatoes into fries, and used a new can of cooking oil each time we made a batch. The oil came in those neat green cans, remember?. They didn't taste like McDonald's fries, ours were much better!]*

Well will close for now, hope everyone at home is okay.

- Vern

## March 4, 1967 - THOI HOA

Dear Folks,

It's a nice afternoon here, cloudy and not too hot, which is a relief from yesterday. Right now it's Mike's turn to man the radio so I've got some free time. We have a little shelter up to keep the sun off us and I've got my radio turned on listening to a VN station playing American and French songs.

Not much new going on here, drove down to Ben Cat yesterday, picked up Browning and drove to Lai Khe about 10 kilometers from here. We got gas, went to the P.X. and Browning tired to get M.O. to send to the finance company who's trying to repossess his 65 Chevy. Somehow his allotment hasn't gotten to them since he's been over here. Now his credit status is doubtful, and it wasn't his fault.

The other day I read in a mimeographed newspaper, the advisors at Phu Hoa Dong had thrown a big celebration for Tet, the VN new year. It had the names of the advisors on hand. Well, the guys who we knew when we were there are gone, but who was there didn't fair too good about a week ago. Seems that the place was hit and overrun, a total of 26 U.S. killed and another 29 wounded. There was a group of Infantry there besides the few advisors. They did manage to kill something like 124 V.C., but I feel sorry for those GI's who gave their life to do it. And to think we were there in October.

I've heard the V.C. casualties are up 50 percent over last year, as is the Cheiu Hoa (returnees) program which has double the amount V.C. who have voluntarily given themselves up. From captured documents, diaries, etc, the morale of the men seems to be getting lower, they realize they are losing their grip on the people, lack of food, and continued harassment of air strikes, patrols, ambushes etc. Maybe soon the trouble over here will be over, and Hanoi will be willing to talk peace at the conference table. I'm afraid even if a cease fire does come, it'll be years before there will be true peace and security for the people here. The pacification programs seem to be taking effect too. Thoi Hoa is sort of a semi-secure village during the day, but at night it's known that it's infiltrated with V.C. and sympathizers. *[One night just before we left the ARVN army surrounded the village just before daylight. They searched every home and checked everyone's I.D. When we got up they had a whole lot of people corralled in a holding pen. VC or VC sympathizers I guess. Oops, guess it wasn't as "friendly" a village as we thought!!]*

A few weeks ago a group of V.C. were spotted in the area, the report was not turned in by a soldier, but a villager, so you know they're starting to put faith in the U.S. and V.N. government as it is now. There is still a lot of area considered V.C. controlled, but, one by one, they're being forced out, such as Cedar Falls, Junction City, and Deckhouse 6, in the Mekong Delta.

Ourselves, well, we're still out at our site every day, and it's almost getting dull. At least we can't complain about being overworked! The days sure seem long with nothing to do. We do put in about 8 hours at the site, but it only requires one guy at a time. Then we've got from 5 till 8:30 or 10 to eat supper and just sit around, listen to the radio, read, write a letter. Then we hit the sack and sleep till 8, get up, drive the jeep to the site about 8:30, and another day ahead.

*[I went into the village one day to purchase a reading lamp. It was a small oil lantern with a reflector behind the glass globe with a picture on it. The Vietnamese who saw it thought it was funny I had it. Guess it had some religious significance!]*

I hope they've got a supply and mail run coming up in the next week or so, that's about the only thing to look forward to. All for now.

- Vern

## March 18, 1967 - THOI HOA

Dear Folks,

It's now Saturday afternoon, another week finished, looking forward to finishing more weeks yet to come. I haven't written since I got your last two letters a week ago, so I guess it's been a while since you've heard from me. The last three days I haven't felt very good, but today I think it's all finally out of my system. I almost caught a chopper into Phu Loi last night after work but they were only taking emergency calls and I didn't feel too bad anyway, I just didn't want it to get worse. *[I think it was dysentery, I had the constant runs, fever, chills, etc. Remember making many quick trips over the berm, to the exposed wooden crate of a toilet, sitting in the moonlight, totally exposed to the enemy, and hoping either side, friendly or foe didn't take a pot shot at the silent intruder, then back to my cot to cover up with a wool army blanket or two, even though everyone else was sweating in the hot weather]*

A lot has happened these past 2 weeks, but I'd rather not say anything about it now, maybe I'll tell you about it sometime later. *[The "Road To Thoi Hoa" story follows these letters]*

I've seen an awful lot of stuff going on over here, I know I probably said something before about not extending over here. Well, we've all thought about it a lot, weighed the advantages, and disadvantages, and all have our own reasons, for 7 of our 10 man team have put in for a 6 month extension over here. It hasn't been approved yet so I really didn't want to say anything, just wanted you to be aware of the possibility. We put a number of stipulations in the request, they have a choice, approve or reject it, they can't take half our request without the other. We've asked to remain on a team as we are now, a 30 day, non-accountable leave starting on or about Aug. 1. As we see it we see no reason why they shouldn't approve it, but if they don't they'll assign us somewhere else, U.S. or overseas, with a slight possibility of an involuntary 1-year extension here, because of our critical M.O.S.

All we can do now is sit back and wait for the results.

You've mentioned about the MARS calls home, yes, I'm fully aware of them, but I see no practical way of ever getting to one. Even then, there's still always a long line, and only a few calls placed. Of course, out here, we've got next to nothing, but a shelter over our heads, a little food, and anything we can scrounge to make living easier. We make do with what we have and seem to be doing all right.

Last week we cemented the floor in our bunker, and put a small sidewalk at the front door. The advisors scratched their names in it along with the date, as a reminder to anyone coming by in the next few years, showing they were here.

You wrote about a C.M.A. orphanage at Ben Cat, I thought I'd told you before, I've never seen or heard of any in the area, and if there was an American missionary around I'm sure I'd have run into him at one time or another. Ben Cat is a small compact village, but it is surprising how many people live there. Also there is a refugee center just outside of Ben Cat on the way to Lai Khe. *[One night the VC invaded the camp and took all the refugees' ID cards from them as I recall during my stay at Ben Cat.]*

Oh, yes, thanks for the last package of Kool-Aid, only, please, send only PRE-Sweetened. Sugar around here is hard to come by, and do you know how many small C ration packets it takes to fill a cup? Yeah! We'll find some sugar I suppose, and we have enough Kool-Aid for awhile, it really doesn't taste real good mixed with water that has purification tablets in it.

Art [my brother] wrote a letter informing me he is now a Corporal, looks like he has caught up with me, guess it's time to get another promotion, don't you think? Can't let the USMC show up the US Army, can I. Ha! *[He went through basic in California, electronics school AIT, stayed on as an instructor and was out in 2 years, having never even left the states. It ain't fair!!]*

Oh well, he's the same rank now, but I've still got 6 months seniority, time in grade!

I've got a lot of other letters to get answered so I'd better finish this for now. Happy Easter! - Vern

### **March 27, 1967 - THOI HOA**

Dear Folks,

Got your two last letters the other day, after a mix-up in routing our mail. I got a package from Mildred and a number of letters. We had the traditional Easter ham yesterday, which we've been keeping on ice for the occasion. I now know what you had to put up with before the refrigerator was invented. We get a block of ice off the ice truck everyday to put in our ice box.

As much as I want to stay out in the field, I do wish I could get into Long Binh to our finance clerk. I really don't seem to be saving as much money as I'd like too. If I could get an allotment started and they kept part of my pay I couldn't spend it if I didn't have it. *[Probably shortly after losing a pile at poker, never was good at it anyway]*

Actually I'm not spending that much, but I've got some loaned out, Butch needed money to get his car payments straightened out because the Finance section wasn't getting the money sent to the right place. I lent him \$200 which he'll pay back on the 31st. Also Mike who's with me now, hasn't been paid in 3 months because of a mix-up in his records when he was transferred to our team, so I've been supporting him till he gets paid. Then too I've got that non-availability pay coming, an extra \$2.50 a day, which I'll get in one chunk when I turn in the certificates I have. That's close to another \$250.00 there, so I guess even if I haven't sent any home lately, it's still about as good as being in the bank.

The time went very fast when we first got over here, I'm afraid these last 4 months will pass a lot slower. At least now we have the fun of rubbing it in to the new guys, how little time we have left over here, we heard plenty of that ourselves when we first got here. Even with a 6 month extension I'll still get back for the second time before some of these guys just getting here now!

The weather still hot and dry, the nights are

getting worse now that "Spring" is here. All you can do is lie there and sweat, making it even harder to sleep. It hasn't rained here now for a good 3 months, but I'm not looking forward to the upcoming rainy season, especially when we sit outside all day. It sure makes things miserable.

Tell Norman thanks for the letter, and the picture of his guitar, sounds like his combo isn't going too badly. I'll bet it would be as interesting to him as it is to me if he heard some of the latest rock 'n roll hits sung in French. Occasionally, the VN radio station plays French and American hit songs, but that oriental music is sure hard to listen to.

Well all for now, - Vern

### **March 30, 1967 - THOI HOA**

Dear Folks,

Just got your latest letter this morning on supply chopper. I think I've gotten all the letters you've sent, and they haven't been getting lost as some others have. I heard that Mrs. Mayer and Janet had both sent Christmas Cards, but were returned to them. One letter I got today was forwarded 4 times because the 303rd forwarded it to the wrong place, and it finally found its way to Cu Chi.

You should see all the food we got today. Wow! All sorts of canned goods, vegetables, cases of sterilized milk, in gallon cans, and a full case of eggs. *[One night me and Mike downed a lot of cold milk, making the white mustache on our lips, and enjoyed every minute of it. The other guys there thought we were a little nuts, we were supposed to be men and drink beer I guess.]* We eat all the fresh stuff first, like tonight we'll have fried chicken. Ever since Sgt. Beller brought out the mess Sgt. from Cu Chi to take a look at our living conditions, and get some pictures, he's really been treating us grand, with all this food.

Since my boots are getting a little ragged I asked for a new pair to be sent out. "Curly" assured me he'd personally made sure they were in with the stuff on the supply run. Well, I never got them and inquired about them. I don't know if they were putting me on, but, King said they accidentally kicked them out of the chopper over the Iron Triangle. I still don't know if they were kidding and forgot to drop them off. If it's true, I hope the VC who finds them appreciates the airlifted "gift"!

Not much new going on, "Charlie" blew another hole in the road the other night, and held up the convoys til the hole was filled at noon.

They had an air strike about a mile from here at noon, I just pulled up my chair and watched the "show" being put on.

I heard the press conference with Dean Rusk, sure sounds like the US is bending over backward, trying to get any indication of peace talks with Hanoi. Whenever peace talks do come, our team will be out of a job. Guess they'll put our gear in mothballs and save it for future use. *[When the peace talks did start, a coalition of VC and North Vietnamese stayed in Saigon, at the former Davis Station, I believe. Maybe they slept in my old bunk!]*

Still looking forward to see outcome of Cassius Clay's draft order. Will he take the draft or go to jail as he says? It's true he's proved he's a good fighter, and now he's standing to lose a lot of money if they draft him, but it wasn't exactly my idea to willfully join the "New Action Army", either!

Lucy wrote, so I know the new address, also heard Herm *[my oldest brother, in Nat. Guard or Army Reserve]* made Spec. 5, but is due to turn in his uniform shortly. I

think I have a good chance at Spec. 5 myself, if my extension over here goes through, and I really don't see any reason why it shouldn't. I don't really mind it so much over here, as long as I'm as far from the "Flagpole" as I can get! In other words, away from garrison or company life. What would they say if they knew we were out here everyday clad only in shorts and tennis shoes. Ha! Real combat troopers, huh?

I'm getting a sneaky suspicion it's about time I get pulled in to Cu Chi, but I sure hope not! It may not be great out here, but I don't mind putting up with it.

The other day one of the advisors S.F.C. Rodrigues, went in to Phu Loi for a meeting of NCO's there. After two days he came back, and we all had a good chuckle as he sat down on his bunk and remarked "Sure feels great to be HOME"!

Lately we've been setting rat traps out and rat poison, Easter morning we didn't catch the Easter bunny, but we did "capture" one rat who we'd observed carrying off a potato one night.

Well, better close for now, more later. - Vern

### ***April 6, 1967 - THOI HOA***

Dear Folks,

I had a letter written and ready to mail to you a few days ago, but since then I had to change what was in it. You see March 31st we got paid in the afternoon. That night my billfold was stolen out of my pants hanging on a pole in our bunker. I really didn't think I'd see it again, so I wrote a letter asking you to try to get me a duplicate driver's license, etc. Well, I managed to get it spread around the compound, that the money wasn't as important to me as my billfold with the I.D. cards, ration cards, etc. Sure enough, it showed up one day, minus the money, of course. *[About \$300 as I hadn't spent much, then got another month's pay on top of what I already had]*

They still haven't recovered the money, so some V.N. soldier is still in possession of about a year's wages of a VN private. *[A new days later there was a lot of liquor flowing among the Vietnamese soldiers, and some drunk ones, fighting among themselves, shooting their weapons in the air, etc. I always had the feeling yours truly probably financed their "party".]*

Mike finally got his 4 months back pay and he paid his debts to me, so I'm okay financially. I got an Easter basket from Mildred yesterday along with a couple letters.

It looks like the hot, dry, season is just about over, so now we're getting set for the hot, wet, monsoon season. We got our first rain since the first of the year two days ago. *[Once during a thunderstorm, there was a loud boom, then some mines going off which surrounded our compound. We donned our helmets, flak vests, got our rifles, and were ready for an impending attack. I tried to remember all that stuff from basic ... squeeze the trigger, line up your sights, etc. Checking things out in the quiet spell after the explosions, they realized lightning had struck one of the commo antennas mounted on a bamboo pole, which then set off the mines ... whew!!!!]*

We've been out of fresh meat for awhile now, so we've been eating dehydrated meats, and fish, like had-dock, shrimp, etc. and served with fruits, like pears, applesauce, pineapples. We still buy a few things in the market, like the French bread, which is pretty good.

I guess all I can say is I'm still here, feeling fine, nothing much new to report. - Vern

### ***April 12, 1967 - THOI HOA***

Dear Folks,

Yes, I'm still here, guess I haven't gotten around to writing lately. Not really much new going on, the days still slowly going by (110 to go).

Don't be surprised if my extension doesn't go through, looks like I might be spending the last 2 years somewhere else instead of here.

I don't know if I ever got around to telling you about what happened to the one guy on our team. Trung Lap was mortared a few weeks ago and while they were evacuating the wounded the one guy on our team *[Steve Masica]* was hit by mortar scapnel. Although wounded quite seriously he's now doing fine and is at a US hospital at Vung Tau.

We're supposed to be getting a replacement for him soon. *[PFC George Thomas]*

I'm enclosing an article about it. It mentions the wounded advisors, but one of those wasn't an advisor, it was Steve Masica of our Research Team. *[Will enclose the article from Stars and Stripes in one of these correspondences]*

Cu Chi was hit the other night and a few rounds landed in the 372nd company area. As far as I know, no one was hurt from the company. Curly was all upset about it, it ruined his drinking for that night, as he had to stay in a bunker for about 3 hours!

Getting incoming helicopters has been slow, so I'm not sure when this will get out. Will close for now. I'm fine, hope you're all the same.

- Vern

### ***April 20, 1967 - THOI HOA***

Dear Folks,

I received your last letter the other day on the supply run out here, in fact it was the only letter I got. Sgt. Beller confirmed the rumor I will be going back to Cu Chi on the next run, probably about the 25th I guess.

About that letter addressed to Mr. & Mrs. Vernon Greunke, well, you could tell councilman Purkey I was unable to get to the polls myself, but I'm sure the "Mrs." voted for him. Ha!!

You asked if I needed anything in particular, toothpaste, shampoo, etc. well, no, since we keep pretty well supplied by the PX chopper every Sunday, *[you could get a fifth of Vodka for \$1.25 and trade that up at Lai Khe (a dry county) for about a truckload of goodies, really!!]* - also we get things sent from Cu Chi. There's nothing I really need, that I can't get, or that the Army hasn't issued, also I do have a poncho and raincoat, so there's no need for anything else, such as that plastic you mentioned.

It's not really that much longer I'll be over here anyway, let's see - 103 to go?

Once I get back to Cu Chi I'm going to sort through my stuff and probably send a box or two of clothes etc. that I don't need and lighten my load on the trip home. I've sure accumulated so much stuff, I just can't believe how much more stuff I've got since I got over here. The boxes will probably go by boat, so they won't get there for a month or more after I send them.

We had a Sgt. Major and a Capt. come out the other day to inspect our site and take a look at our living quarters. I don't know just what they thought of the place, I never really heard any reports on it afterward.

Not really much else going on, although our work may take on a new interest in a few days. Can't say much more than that, sorry.

I'm fine, hope everybody back home is the same.  
- Vern

P.S. Enclosed are 3 slides. 1- Robert Mitchum, "and friends" [I took a photo of the advisors photo they took when Mitchum was here] 2 & 3 nearby air strikes, March 13.

### ***April 27, 1967 - THOI HOA***

Dear Folks,

It's now Thursday morning, I've been getting ready to move to Cu Chi on Sunday. Not much new going on, it's been very quiet around here lately, "Charlie" has left us alone, so there hasn't been much excitement here.

Our interest in our work increased as of last Friday. There's an operation on (Manhattan), I don't know if you've heard of it or seen anything in the paper about it. Please save any clippings out of the paper if they do mention it. It's a small operation, but concerns us very much, as did Cedar Falls.

It's been raining here quite regularly, in fact every afternoon as the monsoon season is now upon us. I guess it's better I do go to Cu Chi, where it's a little more "high and dryer", than having to sit out in the rain out here.

All the buildings at the 372nd now have sheet metal roofs, so no more leaky canvas tent roofs.

"Curly" said I've got a package waiting for me at Cu Chi, hope there's a stack of mail too, I didn't fair too well last time, only the one letter from you. Sunday is payday too so I'll be well set financially and should get money I had loaned to Butch back too, so hope to get a money order home soon.

I'll also be turning in my M-14 rifle, for the new lightweight M-16 which looks more like a Matty Mattel burp gun than it does an Army issue item. Now I'm trying to get the rust off my rifle so I can turn it in!

We've got a lot of action due east of here about a mile or so. So far they've hit the area with 2 air strikes, strafed the area with machine guns, and have really been dumping the artillery into the area. Looks like airstrike number 3 coming up. Maybe they spotted some fortifications in the area. We've heard a VC battalion was in the area, but they haven't caused any trouble yet. Yep, they're dropping napalm now, this has been going on now for about 2 hours, interesting, anyway!

Well must close for now and get back to work.  
More later.

- Vern

### ***May 3, 1967 - THOI HOA***

Dear Folks,

Yes, still here, didn't have to go to Cu Chi last supply run, should be going in, in two weeks. I also received a stack of mail Monday, some letters dated back in late March!

Sgt. Beller, our team chief is now at Ben Cat. He's going to visit each site for a few days. He should be down here next. It sounds like he's enjoying his "vacation" so far although I doubt he will want to stay here long.

Your package arrived intact also, oh yes, we can too make Jell-O here. We've got a kerosene stove and an ice box. We haven't got much fresh food though. We've eaten a lot of rice lately, with canned sauces and gravys on it. Had some French Onion Soup (that's what they called it) sort of a potpourri of stuff. Those dehydrated potatoes don't taste too bad either. We had hamburger steaks a couple of times until the meat spoiled, getting sort of tired of eggs too. [When we got eggs, we got a case at a time and you ate eggs until they were gone].

No, I haven't gotten anything from Army & Navy Lutheran Service, although the New Testament came from the Bible Society. Haven't gotten to see the chaplain here either. The big bases have chapels but of course nothing around Thoi Hoa. We work 7 days a week too and since we're such a small team it's difficult to even get a day off. I doubt any of us will get the out of country R & R, (rest and recuperation) which most everyone else gets at least once over here.

Dad asked if I got to drive over here. Yes, in fact it's a '65 Ford - Jeep that is! I'm signed for the \$3700 Jeep, plus trailer and all the radio gear. Actually we only put about 3 tenths of a mile on it, just driving it to the site outside our compound here. Never even get it out of second gear, (4 speeds too!) We use about a gallon of gas a day, for idling the engine to supply power for radios we use.

You asked if I could describe the team members, so you could identify them in the pictures. Well, here goes.

**Staff Sargent Beller** - our team chief, don't think I've sent any pictures with him in them, anyway, he's got Sgt. stripes, wears glasses, maybe there is a picture of him somewhere. He's a pretty fair Sgt. been very fair to all of us, given us many breaks when we didn't deserve them, pretty easy going guy, isn't the "mean old Sgt." type. You can't pull anything over on him though, he's done the same things himself when he was a lower ranking soldier. His wife lives in Iowa somewhere, not sure but think it's Keeokuk, something like that.

**Spec. 5 Browning** - He's a tall guy about 24 I guess. He re-upped once, but think he's pretty fed up with Army life, doesn't get out till about May of '69 just before me. I was at Phu Hoa Dong with him, also Ben Cat.

**Spec. 5 King** - Tall dark-haired guy from Ohio. Has about 2 years left probably less. Him and Curly Kollstedt hit it off pretty good, both were at Trung Lap together from Sept. to Dec.

**Spec. 4 "Curly" Kollstedt** - One of my classmates from Devens, then to Wolters, and still together. He's the one who looks like me, has mustache, same color hair, was usually a little under the influence even at the classes at Devens. He's from Ohio too, he's who'll replace me here at Thoi Hoa.

**Spec. 4 Thomas** - Also a classmate at Devens. He brags about as much as Cassius Clay, and we kid him a lot. He's from Baton Rouge, so we nicknamed him "Cajun". He was the one with Steve Masica at Trung Lap when it was mortared, Tom's been put in for the Bronze Star medal because of that. Trung Lap has been mortared frequently since then, as has Cu Chi.

**Spec. 4 Ed Tune** - Was in a few classes before me at Devens. About as tall as me, short hair, dark hair, and always sort of a sad look on his face. He's the one who spent 30 days in the States after Christmas, after the death of his father or step-father. Also got engaged while he was home.

**Spec. 4 Chron** - Sort of looks a little like Dale K. Tall, blonde curly hair, with freckles, and glasses. He's sort of Sgt. Beller's pet, or pet peeve I should say. "Can't you ever do anything right?"

**Spec. 4 Donahue** - New to the team since Jan. He's been here at T.H. since Feb. Tall dark haired, acts a lot and reminds me of Norman, *[my kid brother]*. Really, I sort of get impatient with him sometimes, was a little slow catching on, like a little brother who isn't learning to do something as fast as I'd like.

**Spec. 4 Masica** - Sorry no picture of him I'm sure. He came down with Donahue in Jan. was the one wounded at Trung Lap, is now back in the U.S. at a hospital there. Will get the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. Knew him from Ft. Wolters, he was the First Sergeant's pet, as he was always looking for yelling M-A-S-I-C-A in a very loud voice. More or less picked on him, but mostly in good humor. *[Also at our 1st annual? reunion]*

Well, that's the 9 members plus me, although two have been replaced who we started with.

**Spec. 5's Roland "Butch" Williamson, and Ronald Seyboldt.** They are now back at 330th at Pleiku. All in all, we've got a pretty good group, all work together very well, but still give Sgt. Beller a bad time once in a while.

The one thing you don't want to do is get us all together at one time, such as at a club, cause "Beller's Fellars have struck again"! I'm sure we'll have one more wing ding of a party before we leave. They better think twice before assigning any of us to the same place next too. We all get along good together but we also tease, fight, and cut down each other at the first opportunity and sometimes the radios could burn up after the insults, etc., thrown at each other during a friendly discussion.

All for now.

- Vern

*[Also enclosed was an article from the Stars and Stripes newspaper as follows: Headline - "VC Attack in Boi Loi Woods" - CU CHI, Vietnam- "It was so thick in there we could hardly tell where the bullets were coming from," said a young rifleman whose company was attacked Monday in the Boi Loi woods 15 miles northwest of here.*

*It was the first significant contact in two days of OPERATION MANHATTAN, a multi-divisional sweep toward the Saigon River. The Communists waited until the 25th Inf. Div. company was setting up camp in a clearing.*

*First snipers, then a hail of rifle grenades and small arms fire hit B Co., 2nd Bn, 14th Inf. Two American soldiers were killed and 10 wounded in the 45-minute fight.*

*"We cut back in the woods to see if we could find them," said Pfc. David Nevius, a 19 year old infantryman from B Co. He said maneuvering in the thick undergrowth was made even tougher because of booby traps.*

*Two other companies also withstood sporadic attacks throughout the night. Tuesday they went back into the woods and again B Co. was hit. Four more infantrymen were wounded. - Pacific Stars and Stripes, Thursday, April 27, 1967]*

## **May 10, 1967 - THOI HOA**

Dear Folks,

Well, the sweating is over, by this I mean our visitors have left. We had the Battalion Commander (303rd) a Lt. Col. come out to see us this morning. I don't know what kind of an impression we made as I haven't heard any reports yet, but he sure asked a lot of questions which I tried to answer as best I could!

Well, Art and JoAnn's birthdays passed, sorry I couldn't get even a card off to you Jo, now I'm trying to remember how old you are. Let's see - about 13?

Me and Buddah will celebrate our birthdays together, complete with a cease fire to honor the occasion, can you beat that? Ha!!

I don't know where I'll be for that occasion. Things are buzzing again, yes - it looks like we're in for a move, to would you believe Pleiku? We've still got our hand in some things down here also something upcoming shortly which involves us.

If we do go up to Pleiku it will mean spending time at Cu Chi with maintenance and probably a little while at Long Binh (Bein Hoa) then to Pleiku. By then we'll just have time to train replacements for the team and prepare to be homeward bound!

We'll have to wait and see what happens now, but it looks like the move is very imminent.

Still far behind in most of my letter writing, hope to get caught up soon though.

I'm sort of glad we'll be going up to Pleiku, nice and close to 330th so we can get out of the country faster. Also there had been a rumor we were to have been moved way north, clear up to the DMZ. That didn't sound so good, we're too short to be going up there where the action is!

I never did recover the loss of my money from last month, but was paid May 1. Also got my \$200 back from Butch. I sure hope to get money order sent when I get to Cu Chi.

The days are as hot and rainy as ever, quite miserable at times. Hear it is cool up at Pleiku, guess I'll have to dig out my winter clothes! Ha!

In a few minutes I'll have to go out to the site and check the progress for today. Had to lay the law down on Mike today, got the point across and straightened him out. Mean ol Vern! Ha! All for now. - Vern

*[Well, quick thinking Mike got me out of a jam once. I was going to heat up something, don't know what, as we usually did. Took a large vegetable can, put some rocks in bottom of it, then poured some gasoline in it being careful to place 5 gallon of gas a distance away before I lit the "stove". Well .... the fire jumped out of the "stove" connected the dots of dripped gasoline together across the ground, traveled up the side of the gas can and presto the 5 gal. can of gasoline was on fire!!! Luckily it was a completely full gasoline can, so it was just burning near the top. I knew I couldn't put the fire out with water, and I yelled to Mike. Hey, we've got a problem! or something to that effect!! Mike grabbed a plastic-coated*

*poncho, doubled it up into a ball, and used it to smother the flames coming out of the opening in the gas can. Had it not been completely full it could have easily exploded, killing us or permanently disfiguring us with bad burns over our bodies. Had Mike not thought of smothering it my next plan of action was to jump in the jeep, get away from the fire and let it burn and wait for the impending explosion. Good thinking, huh?! We could have been listed as casualties of the "war" and it would have only been my own fool doings.]*

## **May 24, 1967 - THOI HOA**

Dear Folks,

Received your last 2 letters on the 22nd along with a couple other letters and cards. Spent a quiet birthday here, sort of celebrated the night before. It was a party in honor of Lt. Priest's promotion to Capt. We had barbecued chicken also hot dogs, and of course some booze. We were all a little hung-over yesterday but we had to stay sober that night, because they air dropped an important message that night, concerning the truce for Buddah's birthday. I didn't get a cake last night but did have a good meal of barbecued veal and chicken, along with french fries. Sgt. Garcia says he's going to fatten me up. Ha! *[Mike and I tried to make gravy with the drippings off some meat once, well, we put in more flour, more water and had some dandy wallpaper paste, but it was really too thick to spread!]*

Right now Tom and I are working on a large sign to be erected on the helipad. The Capt. gave us the instructions for what he wanted on it. Soon to be put up will be a sign, a large piece of 4'x8' plywood, bright red with white lettering which will read:

**WELCOME TO THOI HOA INTERNATIONAL  
ELEV. 23 METERS  
LONG. - - - DEGREES LAT. - - - DEGREES  
VISIT THE THOI HOA HILTON  
INTERNATIONAL CUSINE  
VC ON CALL  
1ST BN 8TH REG. - CO VAN  
"THE ROAD RUNNERS"**

Should be quite an eye catcher, huh? We'll get some pictures of it when it's done. Also the T.H. Hilton which is bigger and better than ever. As you can tell we've been eating good lately too.

Haven't heard any definite word yet about our proposed move to Pleiku, I sure hope so!

Got word this morning we'll have visitors this afternoon. Some big Colonel from our higher headquarters in the States. I had to call Tom out here so I could shave off about 3 days of beard and exchange my tennis shoes for my jungle boots.

That's the third set of visitors in the last month and I'm getting a little tired of it!

Yes, the jelly you sent and candy, came in fine shape.

I'm enclosing some propaganda leaflets which I want you to save for me, maybe I can explain them to you later.

I'm on the job right now, and the interruptions to answer the radio are making it difficult to write. So will close for now. More later. - Vern

## **May 30, 1967 WOULD YOU BELIEVE ... CU CHI**

Hi!

Just a short note to accompany M.O.'s Yes, back here, and I'm ready to leave, but no such luck.

Sure will make the days seem longer! I'd trade this place for T.H. any day!

Well, must close for now, try to write more tomorrow. - Vern

*[Mom's note on bottom, - One \$100 and one \$70 M.O. ... My attitude seemed to have changed here, possibly by the fact we were getting "short"?]*

## **May 31, 1967 - CU CHI**

Dear Folks,

Got about an hour off right now, so will try to get a little writing done. Yes, I'm here at Cu Chi finally, time is going slow again, even slower being here. Hope I don't get put on the duty roster, K.P., perimeter guard, etc. Still hoping to get pulled back to Pleiku early, but I doubt it, they always manage to forget about us till the last minute.

With 61 days left, the time is moving show, probably even slower next month! It's hard to believe the first 3 or 4 months went by so fast, I guess it helped to be constantly moving around.

Haven't heard too much from anyone lately, but haven't had much of a chance to write, myself.

The village of Cu Chi is now "on limits" for U.S. personnel for a 3 hour pass, must be relatively secure now, don't even have to take weapon with you.

*[To go into the village you had to get a "pass" from the Company Commander's office. The Army always does things in triplicate, so ... when you get to the guard shack at the edge of the base you give them your pass. He writes the time of day on it, and you have 3 hours to be back by the time noted on it. But, ... since we didn't really need all 3 copies of the pass ... we could go into the village to our favorite roadside open-air lounge, and stay as long as we liked!. Then we took one of the layers of the pass, and wrote on it the "new" time we left the base, then went back to the base under the allotted time limit and gave the pass back to the office.]*

The annual maintenance due on my jeep is scheduled for Friday, looks like I'll be getting a little greasy. Lots of work to be done on it too. I guess it's worth it though, nice to be able to get behind the wheel. Even nicer to have around for trips to P.X. etc, instead of walking.

Hope you get the Money Orders I sent yesterday, got paid today and have a lot of excess cash again but will probably be end of month before the line gets short at P.O. again.

Turned in a great big bag of laundry today, but still haven't gotten my duffel bag and foot locker completely cleaned out yet. Sure have accumulated a lot of stuff this past year.

Nice to get back to the overhead shower, and 3 meals a day, but actually we ate better at Thoi Hoa!

Well, can't think of much more right now.

- Vern

## **June 4, 1967 - CU CHI**

Dear Folks,

Just a short note today along with some more M.O.'s Not really much going on today.

Got my first day off "officially", since really had a lot of days "off" at Thoi Hoa!

Art wrote the other day, sounds like he's looking for an extra stripe soon (Sgt.) Boy I can't let that happen can I? Ha! Actually I've been put in for Sp. 5 (Sgt.) twice myself already, but it's the old problem of only a few slots open, especially the ones with a little more time in the Army. Since I got to the 330th just before coming over here I'm about at the bottom of the ladder as far as time in grade as a Sp. 4 goes. Would sure be nice to get it over here, but all I can do is wait and see.

Will be getting a pay raise in Aug. anyway, for going over 2 years in the Army, also the congressional bill was passed and entire army will get a raise in Oct. Those two will just about offset the loss of combat and overseas pay when I leave here.

Just about finished the annual maintenance due of "my" jeep, oiled, greased, spot painted, cleaned, etc. It looks like a new jeep, and I've got a pair of greasy fatigues to prove it!

I hear the Primitives have disbanded? and Norm is with the Epics? Is that correct?, and just who are the Epics?

The days are still slowly passing, one by one. Starting to sort through my stuff now, trying to figure out just how much is field gear to turn in, and how much is army issue which I'll have to drag home. I want to go as light as possible if I can help it. Also have to consider new issue of clothes I'll receive in "Sunny California". It was a foggy 50 degrees, very chilly after leaving Ft. Worth at 3 in the morning and a warm 80 degrees!

Last year I saw Golden Gate bridge, as we slowly floated underneath it, this time it will be a much better view as we FLY over it!

It took us about 18 days via water, should be able to cut the time to about 18 hours by air, quite a difference!

Well, will close for now.

Vern

## **June 7, 1967 - TRUNG LAP**

Dear Folks,

Yes, here I am at Trung Lap, another "hardship" area. You wouldn't believe how rough it is, it's even better than Ben Cat! Nice to be able to take hot showers again, a nice mess hall and good food, and a semi-private room. Ed Tune and I share a room about 15'x15' and you should see my bed! The mattress must be over 4 ft. wide. Electricity, overhead fan, fluorescent lights, dressers and lockers, the works!

I guess you're wondering how I got here. Well, King and "Curly" are going on R & R to Taiwan tomorrow so I'm his replacement for the next week or so. Had a very wild helicopter ride out here. It isn't very far from Cu Chi, about 7 kilometers. *[I drew a little graphic to show them the relationship of Trung Lap to Cu Chi, up and to the left a bit.]* but the pilot put the chopper in some very sharp dips, rolls, etc. We tilted over almost 45 degrees and the ground beneath us was swinging and swaying.

You get the sensation you will fall out, but of course the centrifugal force holds you in. Then some treetop level flying, more dips and rolls, and then he sat down. Quite exciting to say the least!

Something new has come up, actually I should say, came out. Yesterday morning I woke up with a very good sized swelling in my right cheek. Guess I looked like "Henry" in the funny papers with toothache and a diaper-sized bandage around his head. Well, I trotted on down to the dispensary to get it fixed up. Well, from one chair to the next, x-rayed, etc. and in a half hour it was extracted. I must say, it was the most painless tooth I've ever had pulled, but 2 hours later when the novocaine wore off I sure didn't feel too hot. I had a fever and the area was infected so I was confined to quarters, Ha!, 24 hours bed rest. I was feeling much better by noon today so Sgt. Beller okayed my trip to the site here. The doc said the swelling would go down in 2 to 3 days. Well, before I left I made sure that this would only be a week and a half stay and I definitely will be returned to Cu Chi when King gets back. That way I can stop back and have this looked at.

Gus Thomas will go to Taiwan around the 19th and when he gets back we should be getting quite "short".

Well, must close this for now and get this on tomorrows flight to Saigon (by Otter) similar to a small Piper Cub, since they have a small grass air strip here. Well, 55 to go and counting, see you soon.

- Vern

## **June 14, 1967 - TRUNG LAP**

Dear Folks,

This will be short, since it's about time for dinner, but I've got a few important things to say. First of all, it's best you stop writing after you get this letter. Very soon we should be moving about the country, and the forwarding of mail over here, leaves something to be desired. Secondly, I should be back at Cu Chi in a couple of days, and hope to get a couple of packages in the mail, with my stuff and also a couple of gifts in there. Please don't open these packages, but put them aside till I get home.

Thirdly, and most important to me anyway, is my new assignment. Following my leave, starting about Aug. 1, I'll be heading back in this direction. My next duty station is Taiwan, also known as Formosa, or Nat. China. Anyway that's where I'm going.

That means I'll be leaving from San Fran. after my leave, about Sept. 1 for either 18 or 24 months. I'll only have 23 months left in Army so that's the most it will be.

Oh yes, Gus Thomas is going there too! Yah, we're good friends, but just can't work together very efficiently! Ha!

*[After we got to Taiwan we also got to go on a side trip to Korea for a month after they took the "Pueblo" spy ship captive. One night while sharing a room there we had sort of a contest of stubbornness to see who would turn off the light. We laid there for quite a long time before I finally gave in, got up and turned off the light, else we would have probably left it on all night!]*

Well, that's all for now, be seeing you in August. Take care.

- Vern



## ***June 18, 1967 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Sorry about the color of ink, [red] seems I've misplaced my blue pen. Got your latest letter at the evening mail call. Glad to hear my money orders arrived safely. Got some orders down the other day for payment of rations due me from my field duty.

Worked yesterday morning, and had afternoon off, slept in this morning and worked in the p.m. Have to put in an honest 8 hour day tomorrow out at the perimeter. Mike should get back from R & R at Tokyo in a couple days, and Tom is due back from Taipei about the 24th.

Been sorting through my stuff today. I've got one very full duffelbag of field gear and equipment, 1 duffel bag of army issue clothing and one AWOL bag. Still trying to get the weight and bulk cut down as much as possible.

Let's see you asked before how to pronounce Pleiku, will how about Play - Co that's how it sounds. I'm sure it's been mentioned on news frequently.

Do you remember me writing about two guys I met, one from Nebr. and guy from Colorado who had traveled in Nebr. knew he'd been to Valley and Fremont, I think. I heard he was sent to Panama some time ago, and has same job as Jim M. Wrote Jim about it, as they're sure to run into each other. I don't remember for sure but I think these two guys were in our radio net for a week or two. Since the Agency is a relatively small part of the Army we're both liable to run into some old acquaintances during the rest of our tours. I've already met a lot of instructors from Devens over here, also old friends from "H" company. Found out a fellow classmate Leon Hart is also going to Taiwan, so that's 3 of us out of our class of 18 who graduated from Devens together, now spending almost the rest of our service time together. [Four actually, Barry Anderson from our class went there too.]

Still wondering where Jim will be assigned next, probably be a few months before he finds out though. [Vietnam - Phu Bai as it turned out - we graduated from H.S. together, joined Army and Agency together too.]

Well, 42 days to go, be seeing you soon. Take care and God bless you all.

- Vern

## ***June 22, 1967 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

Just a few lines while I have the chance. Not really too much new going on - yet. Have good reason to believe we may move soon, don't know just when yet. Under the 40 mark, 39 to go. Just got my travel orders the other day, haven't figured out everything it says, so many abbreviations etc. but I know what most of it says.

Haven't got a definite date of departure yet, but from what I can tell, after leave, when I report back, I'll probably leave the states from McCord Air Force base in Washington, instead of leaving from Calif.

Yesterday it rained until about 8 p.m. just in time to show the outdoor movie. I shivered through 2 reels of it, and decided it wasn't worth it. It really was cool, everybody wearing jackets, if they had them. It sure felt cold, but I heard it was only down to around 75! Must have been the cool damp air that made it feel so cold.

Got in a real good night's sleep anyway, til about 6:30 that is. Got woke up by somebody looking for a guy in the tent. About an hour later I was woken up with "It's

time to get up, it's time to get up in the morning!" Boy, some clowns singing this to the guy next to me! It was my morning off so I did get to sack out til about 10, then it gets too hot in our tent. I get tomorrow off, well, the afternoon off anyway. Going to be hard getting used to a regular 8 hour work day! Ha!

Looking forward to the tour in Taiwan, always heard so many favorable reports about it. Sgt. Beller spent a few years there himself and gave me an idea of what it's like. Gus Thomas should be back from R&R tomorrow, after checking out the place for himself. I've had offer to "trade" tours with other guys so it can't be too bad can it? Well must go for now

- Vern

## ***June 28, 1967 - CU CHI***

Dear Folks,

I've got the afternoon off today, so will try to get a few lines down to you. Not a whole lot going on, just passing the time day by day. Am preparing my hold baggage, to be crated up and sent directly to Taiwan from here. Saves carrying it all home and them back again.

Don't know exactly yet when we will be leaving here. Could be another 15 days or so, then again, maybe not. Not real sure just when I'll be getting to the states either, for all I know I might have to go directly to Taiwan and them catch a ride to the states for my leave. All I know now is that I will report to the 509th RR Group in Saigon, then find out just what will happen.

It was a sad occasion here a couple of days ago. There was a guy, Mike Krefting, who I met over here in Oct., was in 2 classes behind me at school and does same work we're doing. In late Oct. and Nov. he and I trained a number of guys just out of school, how to run and operate the equipment we've been using. We've met numerous times back here at Cu Chi after getting back from the field. Just last week he got back. He was counting the days too, down to 75 I think. He'd saved quite a bit of money while on field duty at Dau Tieng, Friday afternoon he asked if I wanted to go up there on a chopper and stay overnight. Seems they have a self-built swimming pool there. Luckily, I declined the invitation. He'd planned to pick up his money he had in a safe up there, return to Cu Chi and then on R&R to some other country around here. Well, Saturday afternoon I saw him leave, Sun. morning I heard Dau Tieng had been mortared that night. He was injured and evacuated to Tay Ninh. Last I heard he's here at Cu Chi in hospital. Guess I'll try to get over to see him on my day off. He had already gotten his orders too, - Ft. Devens. I remember just a couple of days ago how I'd kidded him how he would be as an instructor at school. Now he'll be laid up for a while. I'm just glad I didn't put in that 6 month extension after all! Be more than happy to put my time in at Taiwan.

Lately we've gotten stuck on after hours details. Every night from 5:30 to 7:30 the whole company is out filling sandbags, mixing cement, and in general just fixing up the company area. My muscles were sure sore the first few nights, about the first hard labor the team has had since we've been in country. We're still exempt from K.P. and guard duty, latrine detail [whew!!] etc., so we haven't got it too bad. Well close for now, more later.

- Vern      P.S. 33 DAYS!!

### **July 3, 1967 - CU CHI**

Dear Folks,

Just a few lines accompanying the enclosed M.O. also sending 2 other letters with M.O.'s Please check to see that you received the full \$350 and put in my savings account.

Yes, we're still here at C C could be til the 20th, then again, maybe not. This last 28 days will sure be going slow, unless we start moving around.

As far as I can tell, I still should be home around the first week in Aug. Not much else new to report, I'm fine, hope you're all same.

I'll try to write more when I get the time.

- Vern

### **July 15, 1967 - CU CHI**

Dear Folks,

Yes, still at Cu Chi, looks like we might be here till the 23rd, that's what the latest word is. I did get your letter you wrote about the 3rd, along with the clipping of Tom Sawyer's address. *[H.S. classmate, knew him since Cub Scouts]* Maybe, just maybe, I can find him when I get to Saigon again when we leave country. A number of things have happened since I wrote last. Number one is that the guy who was hit at Dau Tieng wasn't as bad off as the reports we had heard. About last Tuesday he showed back up in the company, has had most of the stitches removed, but still hasn't regained use of three fingers on his right hand. He's got about 50 days left in country but with his hand out of commission there isn't much he can do. He's hoping on getting an early drop in his tour so he could get back to the states. All he does now is sit around in the company and goes down to hospital for therapy on his hand. He still isn't in very good spirits, probably because he doesn't have any idea just what is going to happen next. *[Mike K had small piece of scrapnel hit very near one eye too. He didn't tell his folks about this either, wrote with his left hand and told them he hurt it playing basketball, so as not to worry his folks!. He had the tail fins of the mortar round as a souvenir too. They were imbedded in the wood of the pallet that his cot was resting on, just about where MY cot would have been if I'd gone along with him!!]*

A few days ago Spec. 4 Chron got a message from Red Cross informing him his father was in the hospital and wasn't expected to live. Sgt. Higgings drove him to Saigon to catch a plane home, and I rode along as "shotgun". That afternoon the Sgt. and I rode back to Cu Chi, all the way back in a pouring rain. It was a 3/4 ton truck with NO TOP, that's what made it so miserable! *[I always thought Chron's dad had died, so you can see how I felt when I contacted William Chron on the telephone and was told "No, that's my son!"]*

I don't know if you heard about it or not, but on the night of the 13th the base camp here received about 15 mortar rounds wounding about 15 people. It was raining at the time, and being crouched down in a muddy floored bunker, with water dripping from the ceiling, sure didn't feel good either. We were watching a movie when the alert sounded then about a half hour later the all clear signal was given. Then 10 minutes later the siren went off again, and back into the bunkers we went. Another 1/2 hour later we were out again. No rounds came near our company area but I still didn't like the thought of "Charlie" messing with us now, especially so close to leaving this place.

I guess I told you about Butch making Staff Sergeant, so now it's "Sgt. Browning" although I don't think he's really gotten used to the idea himself.

Not really much else new going on here. The time is going as slow as ever. I managed to get two days off in a row, yesterday and today.

Just about got all my things in order now and hope to get it all in one bag to take home.

Well, that's all for now.

- Vern

### **July 26, 1967 - PLEIKU**

Dear Folks,

Yes, we finally made it back up here to our old company. Got in yesterday evening. I'm starting to process out of the company. I hope to get out of the country by the 1st, but don't be surprised if it's a bit later than that. I might get held up in Saigon, since I have to fly "standby".

Anyway, look for me sometime after the first, but it might be a week later than expected. Hope to leave for Nha Trang on the 27th, then down to Saigon the next day.

Only met two guys from my old class at Devens up here, most are spread out around the country, and most of them extended for 6 months. I believe Dick Lowther is at home right now.

Guess who I met at the airport at Saigon? Tom Sawyer!, who was also waiting to catch a plane. We had all our baggage stacked up outside the terminal and I stayed outside for about 5 hours. Happened to meet him inside, as I was in line with my baggage getting ready to board the plane. So we talked about 10 minutes, when we probably could have talked a couple of hours.

Met another guy who had been in Jim's class at Devens and had gone to Panama too and now over here.

Well that's about it for now, see you soon.

Love, Vern

**"Give Me a Ticket For An Aero-Plane ...  
Ain't Got Time For A Fast Plane ...."**

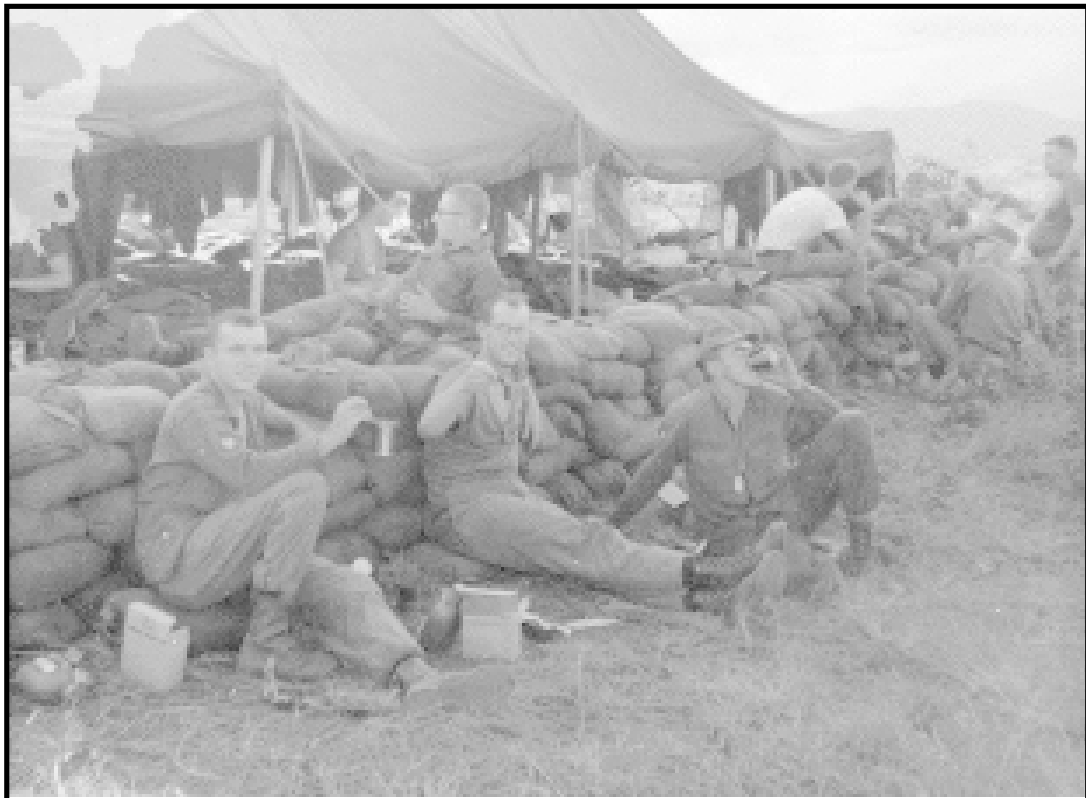
— *The BoxTops*

*[My efforts to leave the country turned out to be more difficult than I thought it would be. We went to Cam Rahn Bay to leave. We had to fly standby since they wouldn't fly us home, only to Taiwan. We had to stay at the air terminal and if they called our names, we had something like fifteen minutes to board the plane. No snack bar, no place but wooden benches to sleep or nap on. About twenty of us all trying to catch a plane. First they thought we all wanted to go together! No way! just get us on a plane. Two and a half days later, with little food, sleeping in our Class A uniforms on those hard benches we caught a flight on a Medivac Plane headed for Dulles Airport, Washington D.C. We went through Anchorage, Alaska then to Dulles.*

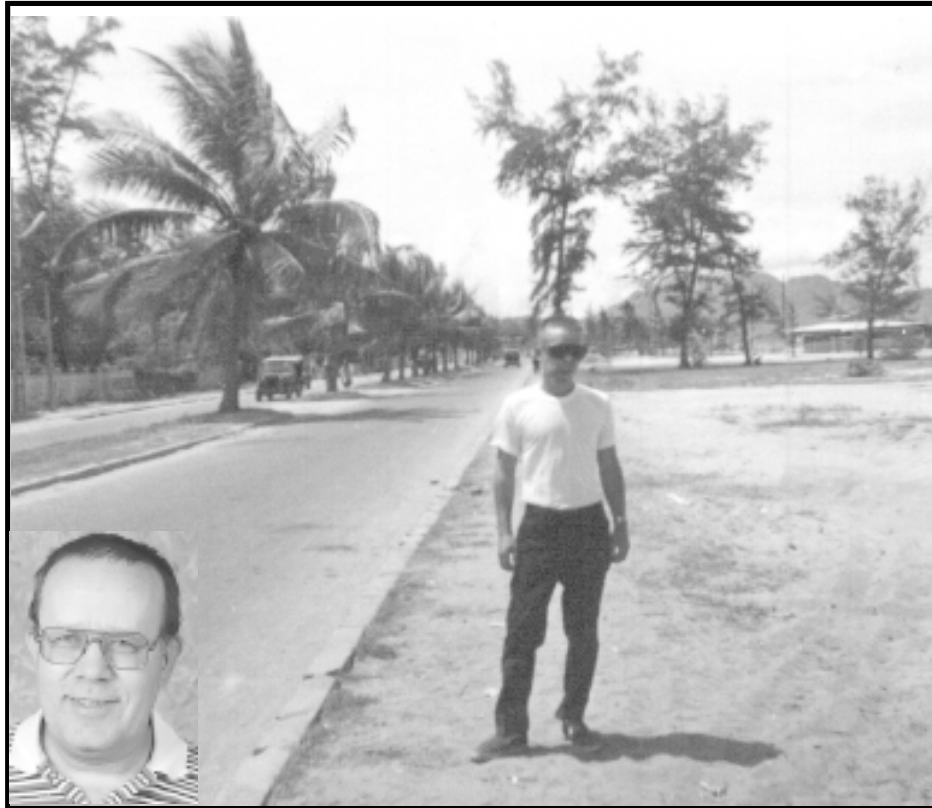
*The plane was loaded with wounded soldiers laying on racks or litters hanging from the ceiling, with nurses and doctors attending to them. We sat facing backwards the whole way too. There wasn't any cheering or hooting & hollering when we landed, we were just thankful to have finished the year's tour alive and well. ... We were HOME!]*



***Pleiku the First Day.*** Filling sandbags left to right: Wayne Miasaki, Maurice (Curly) Kollstedt and Dick Lowther, my classmates at Ft. Devens, MA.



***Pleiku.*** First days, filling sandbags and eating "C" rations. Pictured left to right, Barry Anderson, Leon Hart, Charles Horner. Reclining on bags is Dick Lowther.



***Nha Trang.*** Along the ocean drive. A former French resort area. Hard to tell a war was going on except for the Red Crosses on the underside of the helicopters flying over us.



***Davis Station, Saigon - 509th RR Group.*** Located on Tan Son Nhut airbase. The North Vietnamese stayed in this area as peace talks progressed later in the war.



**Pho Hoa Dong.** Directional Radio Receiver on tripod. Jeep had transmitter for communication back to base or net control. Sandbag covered foxhole, a place to hide during sniper attacks. Whenever we landed at a new spot the first thing we did was dig a hole and fill sandbags with the dirt so we had at least a minimum amount of protection against enemy fire. This site was located on a corner of the helipad and our living quarters were in the large house just visible in the background.



**Phu Hoa Dong.** Living quarters were in old French mansion. Americans occupied upstairs level. Some of the walls had gapping holes where shells had gone through. Later in my tour this area was overrun by Viet Cong. Thankfully none of our team members were there at the time. This was my first "site" as we began working on our mission to locate the enemy.



***The Second Story Shower*** at Phu Hoa Dong. A garden hose affixed to the roof gutter. "*When It Rained, It Showered*". All the conveniences of modern plumbing! This worked fairly well during the rainy season, but I don't know what they did during the dry months.

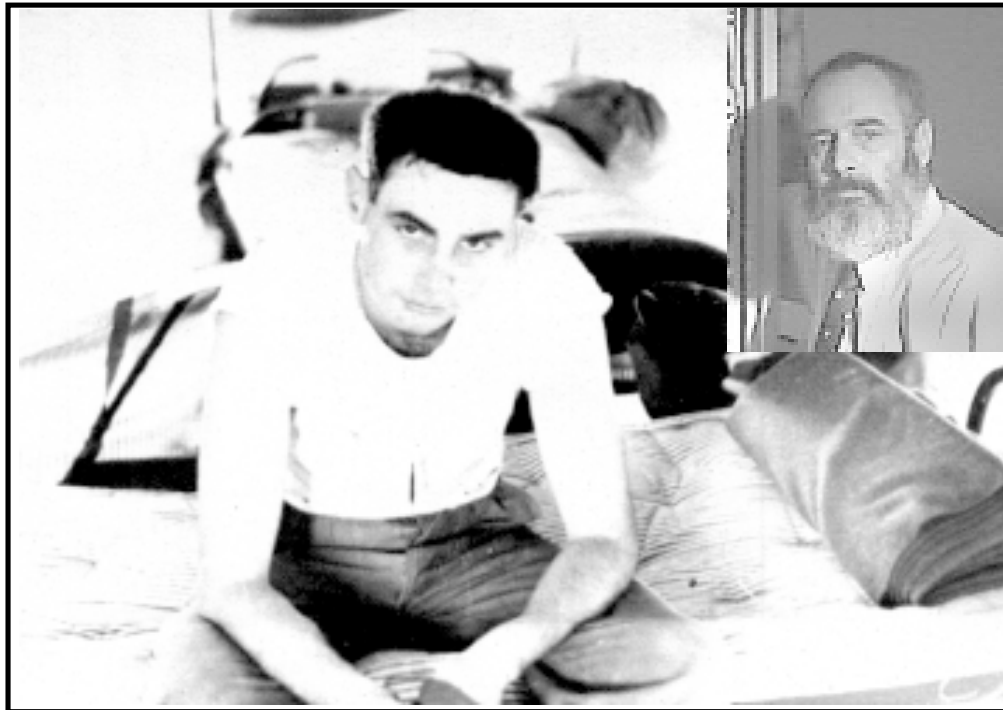


***Butch Browning*** practicing his guitar and passing the time at Phu Hoa Dong. We transported that guitar from plane to plane and helicopter to jeep without as much as a scratch.





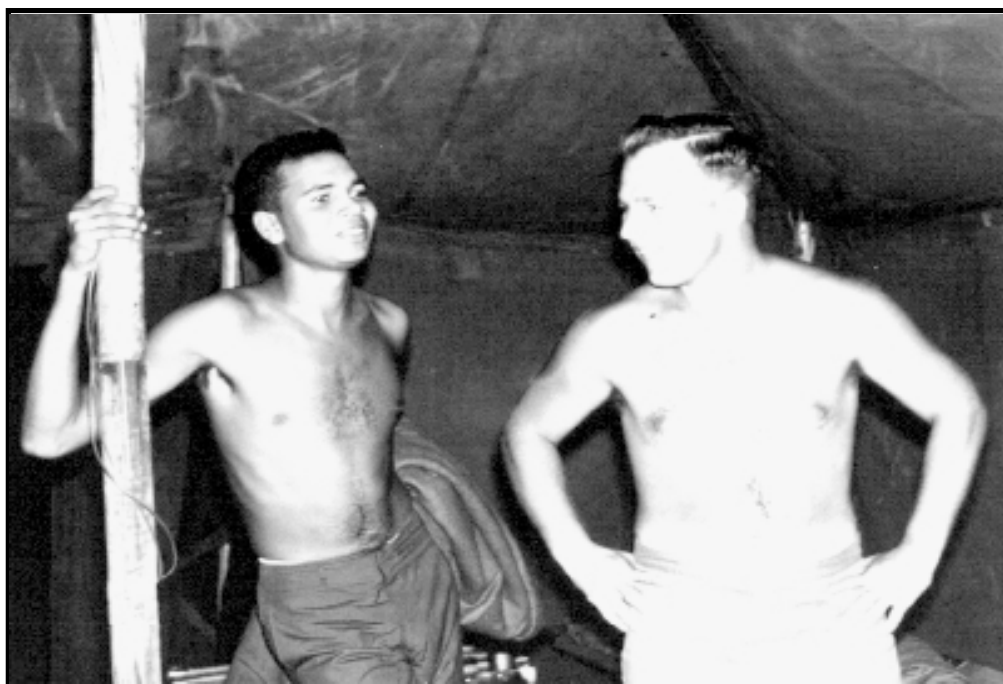
**Maurice "Curly" Kollstedt** and **Harry M. King** all decked out in their gear awaiting a Chinook helicopter to take them to their first mission site at Trung Lap. Both were from Ohio and seemed to hit it off good together. They were two of the four of us who got together for "Beller's Fellars 1st Annual? Reunion".



**Edward D. Tune.** Picture taken at Trung Lap while I was there. We were filling in for Harry and Curly who were taking their R&R in Taiwan. I once described Ed as the one who always had a sad expression. You can see by the example here. I have now located Ed (in Germany) and he explained due to family matters that he had good reason to be a bit sad. I concurred.



***Gussie Thomas*** reading his usual literary material, comic books! Actually comics were quite popular, when you could find them. Picture taken in our "transient tent" at our base of operations and network control Cu Chi. The tent was usually in a state of squalor as we were somehow exempt from company inspection. We spent the whole year TDY (temporary duty) so escaped many of the usual routine details such as K.P., guard duty, and latrine duty. Whew, you really don't want to know!



***The Two Thomases.*** Spec. 4 Gussie J. Thomas and Pfc. George Thomas. George replaced team member Steve Masica who was seriously wounded at Trung Lap during a mortar attack. Gussie lives in Baton Rouge, but unable to locate George Thomas.





***Orville (Butch) Browning*** putting together the diamond shaped antenna for our direction finding radio. The antenna was rotated as we listened in headphones for the direction of the enemy signal.



***Vern Greunke and Gussie Thomas*** preparing a fine meal of "C" rations. My favorite was the cooked ham warmed on the exhaust manifold of the jeep. The hot chocolate wasn't too bad either. Gussie retired from the army as a First Sergeant. Photo by Butch Browning.

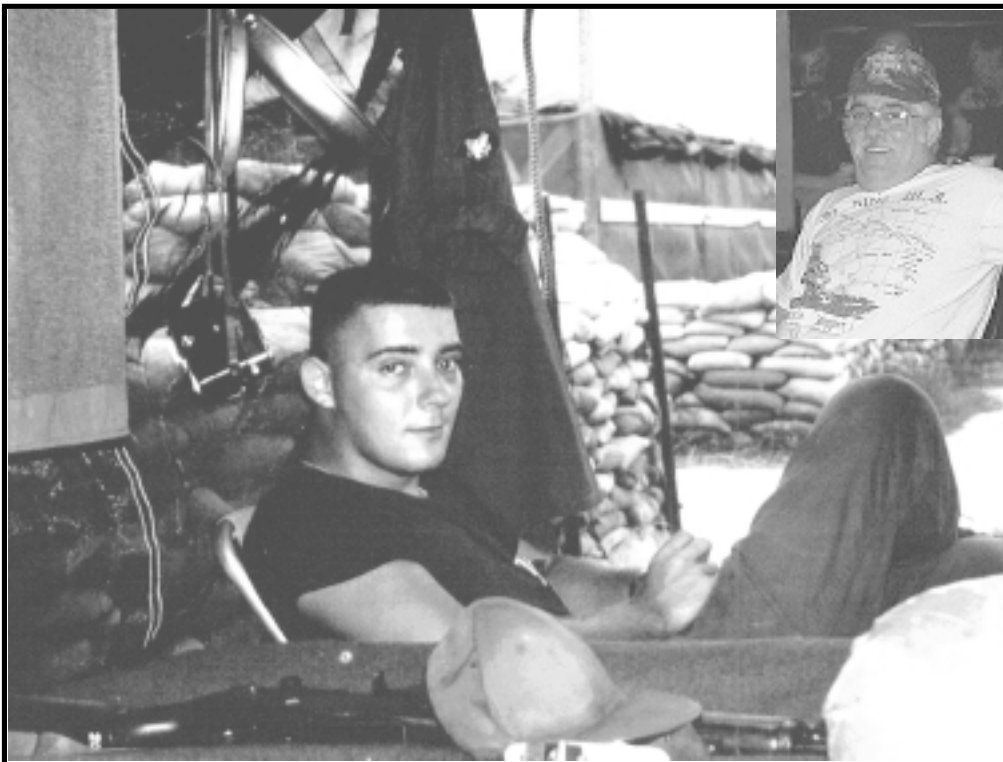


**Michael Krefting** holding the tail fins of the mortar which exploded next to his cot while on a "vacation" trip to Dau Tieng. He had invited me along on the trip. They had fashioned a swimming pool on the second floor of an old French mansion, complete with diving board made from a helicopter blade, and Mike thought it would be great fun to go there on our day off. He was not a member of our team but did the same job at the 372nd RRC at Cu Chi. I recently located him (spring '97).

Since his writing hand was injured he wrote letters home with his left hand and told his parents he hurt it playing basketball so as not to worry them.

He also had a few fragments lodge near his one eye.

Had I gone along with him that day it's possible I could have set up my cot just about where the mortar landed that wounded Mike. Whew!!

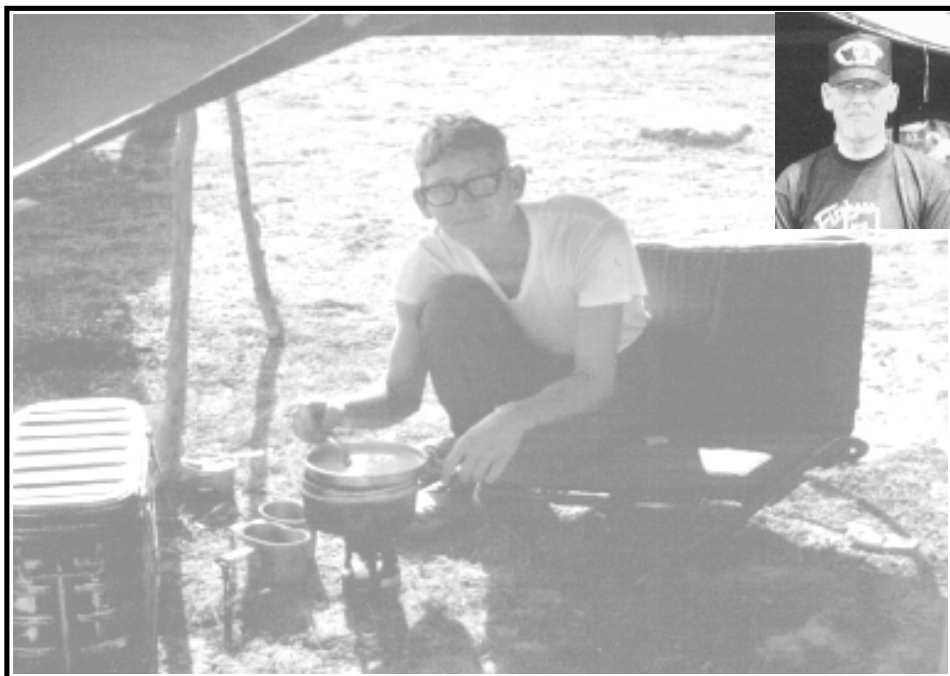


**Ronald Seyboldt.** We were together at Ben Cat. Introduced me to the game of "Battleship" which we played on paper to pass the time waiting for "flashes", instructions from our net control. Ron lives in Erie, Pennsylvania.

**Maurice "Curly" Kollstedt** going bar hopping on one of our infrequent in-country R&R's. Here we were at Bein Hoa when a downpour erupted. Not to dampen our spirits, only our shoes and socks. We had lunch at one of these fine establishments, and I made sure everyone know about my lack of enthusiasm for eating vegetables! "I didn't order a garden" or something to that effect. Being a bit "under the influence" and feeling no pain, I did let one of the bar girls talk me into taking a bite of a long skinny sandwich she had. With some prodding and rough translation we finally figured out I had taken a bite of an EEL sandwich. UGH!



**"Whey and Dau"**. Little girls at Ben Cat who spoke fairly good English. They taught us some Vietnamese and were helpful in running errands for us too. One of their friends stole Ron Seyboldt's watch. When we weren't looking she slipped it up around her leg and hid it under her shorts and then quietly left the group of kids hanging around us and went home. Some of the kids knew other members of our team and we let them talk to them over our scrambled and secure radios. They became quite good at mimicing our call signs which were designed to supposedly be hard for the local people to pronounce. Once or twice we employed the kids to fill sandbags for us and we also sent them to the village to bring back some pop. One child carried the bottle, one brought the ice, and another the glass. Each of them expected a "tip". Soon the entourage of kids going on an errand grew into a small platoon. We paid them each a nickle or so, big money to them. I was later thanked by one of their mothers for the money as she was using it to pay for their schooling. My pocket change!



**William R. Chron III** at Thoi Hoa site. Bill was scrambling eggs, five at a time. We would eat a dozen together while they were fresh. We cooked them over a very small camp stove using gasoline. Also in the picture is the shelter made from two tent halves, and the seat from our jeep. Airstrikes were frequent here and sometimes we sat in our lawn chairs watching the war while listening to rock 'n roll music on the Armed Forces Radio station at Saigon. A bit unreal at times. (*Bill died of heart attack Jan. 7, 1998*)

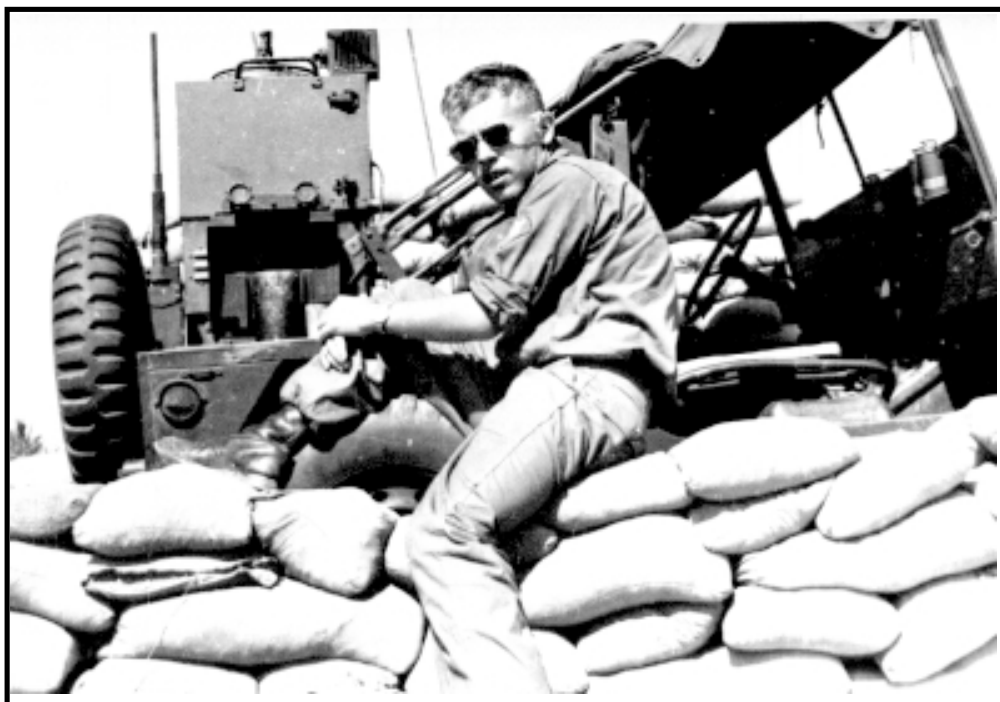


**Houseboy and Bill Chron** proudly showing off a plate of fried chicken or breaded shrimp. Picture taken inside our bunker in the living room-dayroom-bedroom-kitchen area.





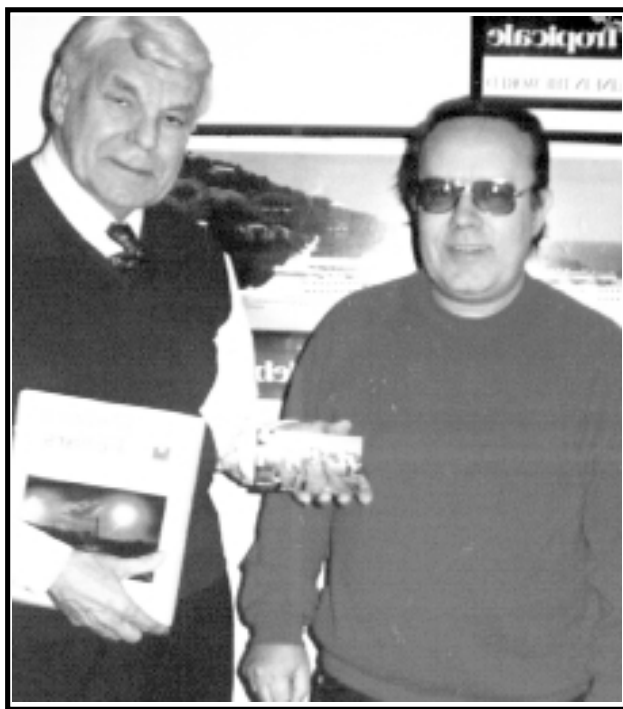
*Thoi Hoa Site* taken from Chinook helicopter. Highway 13 "Thunder Road" passed in front of compound. Ben Cat was down the road, as was Lai Khe. This dirt-bermed compound was "Home Sweet Home" for the author for a number of months. I even volunteered to live here to avoid going back to base camp as I wanted to stay "as far away from the flagpole" as I could get.



*Vern Greunke* (the author) taking it easy sitting on the sandbag wall around our jeep at Thoi Hoa. My "uniform of the day" consisted of fatigue pants with rolled cuffs, and shower sandals. We could go a few days without shaving too. If we got a call on the radio that someone was coming out to see us we had to scurry around finding the "proper" attire of boots, fatigue shirt, and cap or helmet. It was usually hot so we just dressed accordingly.



**December 1966.** KMTV Channel 3 - Omaha reporter John Hlavacek found me at Ben Cat sitting at a roadside cafe waiting for a helicopter to take us back to base camp for some in-country "R and R". A jeep pulled up alongside our table and a guy asked if there was "anyone from Omaha?" among us. I said I was from Fremont and he replied "Close Enough". He just accidently found me. He took a movie of me tying down the tarp on our trailer. He also made a tape recording of me wishing my family back home a Merry Christmas. The movie didn't turn out but they did show a still picture of me on the TV while playing the tape recording.



**December 1995.** Twenty-nine years later I found John in Omaha, working at his travel agency. He took me aside and showed me piles of manila folders labeled by year. "Letters I sent home during World War II", he said. "My Mom saved them!". He has since started typing them up for "the grandkids". I later compiled a book of memoirs as gifts for his grandchildren.

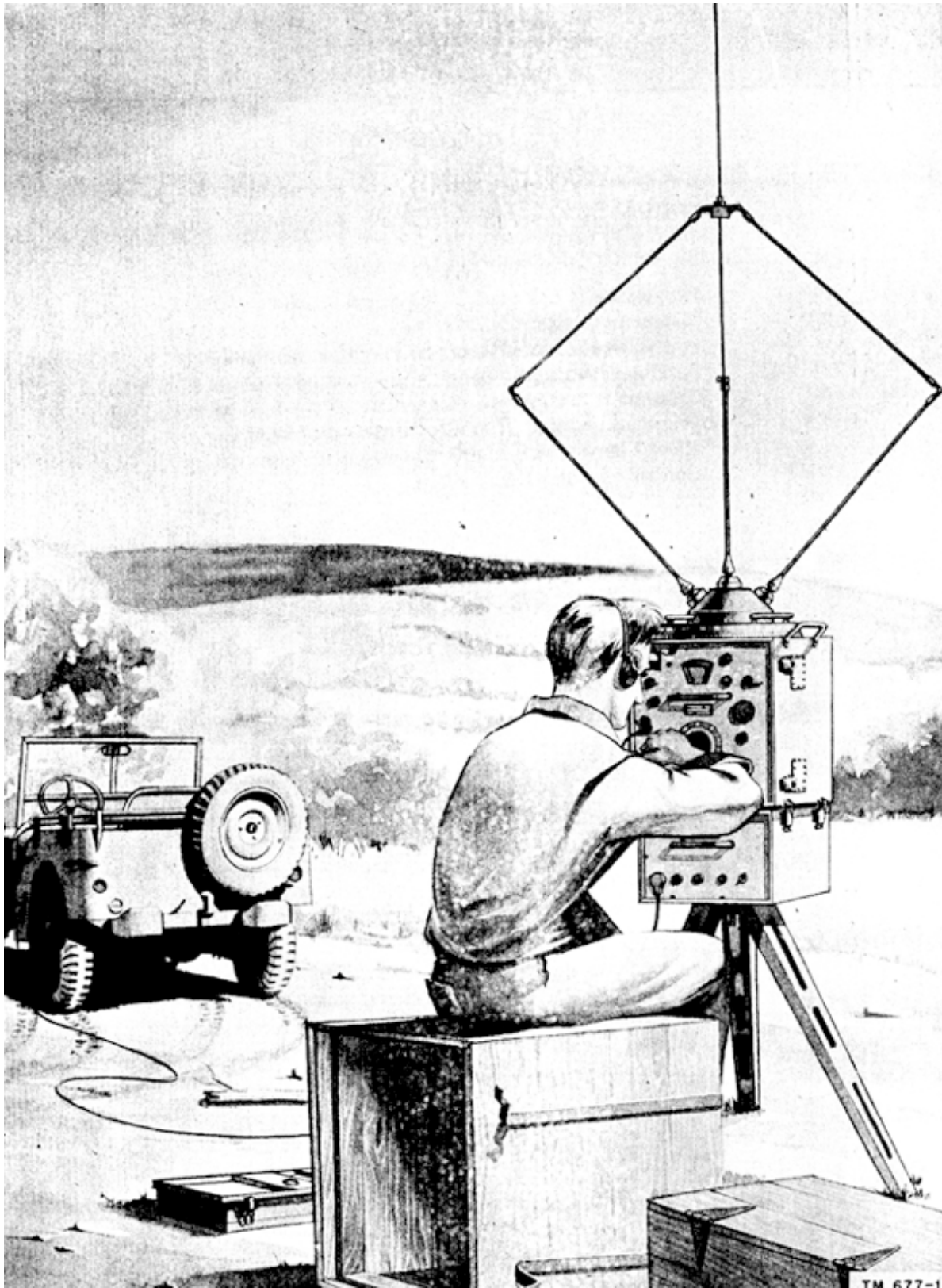


Figure 1. Direction Finder Set AN/PRD-1  
From **INSTRUCTION BOOK FOR DIRECTION FINDER SET AN/PRD1**  
**INSTALLATION AND OPERATION** Manual Order No. 141800-Phila-51

**Not the “Road to Damascus” but  
“The Road to Thoi Hoa” (Toy Wah)  
or  
“Is That All There Is ... ? “**

One Sunday during Adult Bible Class our Pastor’s brother-in-law remarked he felt that his faith was the result of a slow learning process rather than a sudden “Road to Damascus” type conversion. His statement reminded me of a time I was on a road and was stopped unexpectedly halfway between two villages. While this was not a “conversion” on my part, it was an experience that I have always believed included some “Divine Intervention”, on a road, “The Road to Thoi Hoa”. This particular event in my life has been written many times over and over in my head and I will now finally try to put it all together on paper.

I was stationed in Vietnam in the years 1966-1967, and lived most of the time away from the large base camps. We were on a special radio team, 9 enlisted men and a Staff Sergeant who was in charge of us. I preferred to live out in “the boonies”, on a two man crew living with a few American MACV advisors. The rest of the people around us were Vietnamese soldiers and their families. One particular place was called Thoi Hoa, pronounced Toy Wah, not to be confused with the large seaport city of Tuy Wah (pronounced “Two e Wah”).

Thoi Hoa was a small contingent of Vietnamese soldiers located on Hiway 13, that had earned the nickname “Thunder Road”. The outpost was a triangular shaped affair, surrounded with a dirt berm and a mine field for protection. The American advisory staff was very small and many times there were only four or five Americans there, counting us. The members of my team had all enlisted in a unit which had been described as “Non-Combatant”. So much for that. No, we didn’t go out looking for trouble, but it did manage to find us, a number of times. In fact one of our team members sustained wounds which required about a year of hospitalization.

The accommodations at Thoi Hoa were very crude. We lived in a two room bunker made of sandbags. The “living room” doubled as a kitchen, bedroom, dayroom, and “basement” in the event of an enemy attack. The sanitation facilities consisted of nothing more than an orange crate type box with a waist-high privacy screen made of burlap bags. The shower facility was an old oil drum painted black, raised in the air to gain any solar heat available and had a shower head attached to it. This was the Vietnamese officers’ shower, and we were their guests, so we were careful not to use the last drop of water, especially since the Vietnamese commander was usually the last to shower. We used the minimal water possible, a canteen cup full, maybe two. Drip enough water on you to be able to lather up with soap, then rinse off with just enough, but not too much water. Toweling off was the hard part, to get dry that is. It was so hot and humid that you would be sweating and as you toweled off, and you never got really dry, just refreshed.

Our hot meals were cooked on a small camp stove, and sometimes we barbecued meat on a charcoal grill made from an old oil drum cut in half. Many times we feasted on “C” rations and also ate a lot of rice from the local market. If we were fortunate to get something like fresh eggs, we ate eggs, five at a time till they were gone. The same went for potatoes, we made lots and lots of french fries. Who knew about cholesterol? An ice man delivered ice every few days, just like “in the old days”

back home. These conditions led us to venture out on a questionably unsecure/secure road to Ben Cat, the next camp up the road.

The first time I traveled the road was during the Christmas truce of 1966. Four of us had gathered at Ben Cat, a larger Vietnamese training camp and village. We decided to run the road to see our buddies at Thoi Hoa. Thoi Hoa and Ben Cat were located along one side of the “Iron Triangle”, a Viet Cong stronghold, just above Saigon. Since there was a truce on, this should have been a “no sweat” trip. The enemy was not supposed to shoot at us, and we hoped we didn’t run over any land mines which might have been previously planted.

We left, flying down the road with our flack jackets and helmets on. Our rifles and machine gun were loaded and pointed at the sides of the road. I was scared, I’ll admit, but in our group the peer pressure was such that you didn’t let on. We were a fairly tight group, having traveled together on the ship, and by plane and helicopter, stopping at numerous camps for a few days until we got working at our ultimate mission locations. The peer pressure affected us in a number of ways. When we drank, we drank to have fun, not to get drunk. Getting drunk would have been a sign of weakness, unable to “hold your liquor”, ... not cool. Drink till you get sick ... cool! A number of times we came under attack, experiencing sniper fire, mortar fire, etc., but remember, don’t flinch, don’t show any signs of fear, a weakness, ... not cool!

We did make it to Thoi Hoa that day without incident and had a good time with our friends. They gave us a tour of the compound and an area near there which had come under heavy attack a few nights before. A forward outpost had been flattened and numerous Vietnamese and Viet Cong killed. They told us of the events of that night and how they had guarded the front gate, the only entrance to this compound. We had listened to the events that night, monitoring our radio for any word on what was happening. I even took some time exposures of the fireworks in the sky, flares, and gunships covering the area with thousands of rounds of bullets.

As evening approached, we were loading our gear in the jeep for our return to Ben Cat. A Vietnamese officer noticed this and urged us not to travel the road anymore that day. “Stay the night - it will be safer traveling tomorrow morning!” Did he know something we didn’t know? Well, we macho guys, fearing nothing, decided to go anyway, regardless of the warnings. We made it okay, but I was scared, ... again.

Weeks later I was rotated to duty at Thoi Hoa. As time dragged on, we were tired, dirty, and with not the greatest menu of food to look forward to, started to venture out onto the road in the evening, and then beat it back the next morning unbeknownst to our team sergeant. Ben Cat offered hot and cold running water, hot showers, real toilets, meals served by Vietnamese women on real plates, beds with real springs and mattresses, movies in the evening, and even TV!

One particular morning my partner Mike Donahue and I got an early start on the road leaving from Ben Cat. There was a bit of fog laying in the low places, and we traveled at the highest speed possible. Going as fast as we dared, in the belief that we were a harder moving target for any enemy who might have us in his sights. Also if by chance you ran over a land mine, presumably with your back wheel, you would clear the blast area a little quicker and possibly escape injury. Guess we didn’t take into account what happened if you hit one with a front wheel!



Anyway, I was driving on this narrow gravel path, not much more of a road than would be classified as a "minimum maintenance" country gravel road back in the states. Just as we "flew" over one rise and then another, I suddenly had to jam on the brakes. In the little bit of fog just ahead we saw a huge tank, an M-60 type, I believe. It was as wide as the road. Behind it was a column of Army vehicles, tanks, armored personnel carriers, trucks, jeeps, you name it. And just in front of this huge tank were two foot soldiers. They were wearing headsets and slowly sweeping the road with metal detectors searching for any recently planted mines. The entire convoy was traveling at the walking pace of these two men. Mike and I looked at each other in astonishment and with a big grin and a wave of our hand pointing behind us, said, "Well, It's All Clear Behind Us!" We had just "tested" the road for them. The men in the lead vehicles of the convoy looked at us too, with a look of "where in the world did these stupid G.I.'s come from?" We laughed and proceeded on our way. We had to be on the air on our radio net very shortly.

One morning, after repeating these "hot shower" runs, on a more frequent basis ("familiarity breeds contempt"), we were "flying low" though this enemy territory when the jeep's engine started acting up. The engine started to surge and sputter. I pumped the gas pedal, and the surging smoothed out. Then it surged again, I pumped again, and so it went. The engine seemed to run smoothly as long as I pumped the gas pedal, but if I held the pedal steady, it started to sputter and surge. Fuel line? Fuel pump? Carburetor? I couldn't tell, but just kept pumping the gas. We had just passed alongside a VC village. Village is too strong a description. It was a group of bamboo roofed shacks on one side of the road, which had not come under the "Pacification Program" other villages had. It was the classic VC Village. Don't stop, just get through the area as fast as you can. They had been known to take pot shots at travelers, so "keep it moving buddy". Well, the jeep started to sputter again. Sputter, sputter, cough, cough, it surged, it slowed. I pumped the gas, I held the gas pedal steady, it didn't seem to matter now, as we slowed to a stop. And silence.

Stranded in VC country! Terrific! I tried the starter. Nothing, no grind, no noise, ... not even a click! The jeep we had was equipped with special radio gear, and on the dash was a voltmeter, rather than an ampmeter. The gauge showed the amount of charge or voltage available in the battery. I turned the ignition switch to "on" and the needle didn't even move! Flat Dead!

We tried the two-way radio too, to no avail of course, no power - no radio. It really didn't matter much though. We only communicated on a special radio net among ourselves and it was too early for any members of our ten man team to be monitoring the radios anyway. We may have raised some help if we could have found the right frequency to place a distress call, then of course we would have had to convince them who we were, where we were, why we were there, that we were friendly, and were not setting someone up for an ambush. The point was moot. The jeep, and the radio, were dead.

"Keep your cool" I thought inside, "Think man, think!" I was the ranking member of our two man team, I was in charge, I was responsible for us ... the highly sensitive, highly classified material and equipment we were carrying with us. We weren't even supposed to be out here, unprotected, and with our whereabouts unknown to our superiors.

We waited a minute, still no go with the battery. I then asked Mike if he wanted to try to walk to the next post, Thoi Hoa, through enemy country, alone. Not a good idea to say the least. It probably would have been suicide. We weren't trained for something like that. Sure, we went through basic training, but we were no combat veterans, and they were using real bullets here! "No, not really" was his reply, "yeah, me either". "Do you want to stay with the jeep, alone, unprotected while I walk to the next post, or back to where we came from?" "No? I understand." Going off on foot together, or just sitting there together would have not been any better. We were in a real fix. The advisory post from which we just left had no way of knowing that we did not make our destination and our counterparts at Ben Cat would only realize something was amiss when they tried to contact us when our radio net opened up, in maybe a half to three quarters of an hour. A lot could happen in that time.

Like, fear ... sweat ... panic ... death! What am I going to do? How much danger are we really in? Has anyone spotted us from the village, from the bushes or tree line? Do they realize we're in trouble, an easy target, a quick kill or capture to be led away as POW's? My mind and my heart were going faster and faster. "Think, what are our options, what is going on here, are we going to die? Die? Now? "Hey!", wait a minute! I'm not ready to die yet! It's not fair, I haven't lived a whole lifetime yet!"

They say when a person is about to die, their life passes before their eyes. I understand. Probably the panic which was starting to set in caused a self examination of my own life. I needed an answer. "Is this it? Am I going to die here on the roadside? Is this why I was born, to die here in Vietnam? Was I about to be shipped home in a body bag? For what purpose was my life?" Many early childhood experiences came to mind, like the cold Nebraska winters I had endured, walking to school, or the store, taking a chance with frostbite, (we had no car till I was 16). I remembered the hardships of delivering my paper route in the winter on my bicycle more than a mile from home. School days, and the struggles I had in studying, and other visions came quickly to mind. "Hey, wait a minute, I still haven't experienced love, marriage, kids, grandkids" ... "Is this it?"

In the 60's there was a hit song entitled "Is That All There Is?" It was a song with questions about life, with a haunting refrain, "Is That All There Is?". That summed up my feelings at the time perfectly. "Is That All There Is?" Was this IT? Was that all there was to my life? Was this my time to die? At the tender age of 21?

I started to shake, not visibly I hoped, but my legs were getting very weak. They felt like they were turning to rubber. I tried not to show it to Mike, who also shared our predicament. Panic, Panic, "Don't panic, oh, what to do?". This wasn't a bad dream, it was real, and it was happening to ME!

I don't remember all the events that happened, but I do know this was a great time to pray! I don't remember exactly what my prayer was, it wouldn't have been very long though. I'm sure it didn't start with a proper salutation as I had been taught in eight years of parochial school. It may not have ended "In Jesus' name", It might not have ended with "Amen." It might not have been worded as a request if "He willed it." It might have been as short as one word. "Help!"

HELP! ... Is that a prayer? ... I think so, if the Person it was directed to understood it as such, and He would have. It was not directed to the local god, Buddha, it was not directed to St. Christopher the patron saint of travel, it was directed to my God, my Father in Heaven. "HELP!" ... Addressee ... understood!, if You will it ... understood! and Amen ... understood!

Trying to keep my wits about me the only logical solution I could think of at that time was "Let's try to push it to get it started". Now that didn't really make much sense if you think about it. The jeep had been rolling at a much faster pace than we could ever push it, and it had stopped. What I knew of auto electrical systems led me to believe pushing really wasn't an option if the battery had absolutely no power, no spark, and maybe even a short in the wiring or something.

Just as we were about to try to push it, and believe me my legs were still shaking, and feeling very weak, (more panic I guess) some small children from the "VC Village" came running out to see what was going on. None of them appeared to speak any English, but we convinced them to help push the vehicle. The more the better!

We managed to get it rolling somewhat, and with one hand pushing on the windshield frame, and the other hand on the steering wheel, Mike, the kids and I pushed it as fast as we could, I jumped in and "popped the clutch". Sputter, sputter, it fired!! Gently giving it a just a bit of gas I managed to keep it running! It was running! Mike jumped in then and I slipped it in gear. We were rolling! Some of the kids thought this was great sport and jumped on the fenders. They wanted a ride! "No, no, you can't go! Get off! Thanks, but get out of the way we've got to get going!" Of course our knowledge of the local language wasn't that great, but they got off and we were on our way!

We rolled along the road rather smoothly, until almost a quarter mile or so from our destination. Then, sputter, sputter, surge, surge, it was doing it again! It stopped, again. This time Mike volunteered to walk in and get a Vietnamese with a jeep to give us a push. I stayed behind, feeling rather secure as we were almost within yelling distance and the safety of our camp.

Mike returned with a jeep driven by a Corporal from the Vietnamese motor pool. We pushed the jeep down the road ... fast, but it wouldn't start. We tried again, and again, pushing it with the other jeep. It wouldn't start! No way, no how! Finally we gave up and pushed it into the compound and used the U.S. advisors' radio to call in our predicament. "The jeep is dead! ... and we are out of service", severely putting a cramp on the mission of our whole team. We needed at least three sites in operation to develop any useful intelligence.

We were safe, we were saved! I don't know what thoughts Mike ever had or what he recollects, or if it affected him in any way. He was an easy going type guy, maybe it never fazed him, or maybe he never realized the gravity of our situation and the possible outcomes that could have happened.

Later a mechanic was flown out by helicopter from Cu Chi, our base camp, with parts to fix our jeep. I don't really remember what all was wrong, but it was a lot! It seemed to be a fuel problem by the way it responded to my pumping the gas, but when it quit it was all electrical! As I recall it turned out to be a combination of both.

A few weeks passed after that incident on the road. It was near dusk and the gate to our compound had already been pulled shut. The war was over for the day. A jeep with two Americans passed by our compound headed for Ben Cat or perhaps the big artillery base at Lai Khe. Not long after they passed there was a commotion among the Vietnamese soldiers. They were standing on top of the berm looking down the road. We joined them and using binoculars we could see the jeep had stopped in the middle of the road. Stopped at just about the spot where our jeep had quit running for the second time on that previous occasion. In the zone of safety, we thought, just beyond the village of Thoi Hoa which was across the road from our compound.

A squad of Vietnamese soldiers went out to investigate. They approached the jeep and found the two Americans, dead. They had been shot with their own weapons. The Viet Cong had jumped out in front of them, stopped them and shot them. Then when the local village people came out for a "look-see" the VC just melted into the crowd and got away. A medi-vac helicopter was called in to remove the two soldiers.

That was it! No more "road runs" for me! If they wanted me to go anywhere from now on they could come and get me, just like in the original plan. "Bring a big helicopter, a Chinook, if you want me out of here!"

Years later at my wedding, our Pastor used Psalm 23 for the scripture reading. Part of it reads like this. "Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me ... surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Appropriate indeed! I thought we were alone that day, but no, I'm convinced now that we were never actually alone!. If I were an artist and could draw, I would draw a picture of a jeep and a dashed or invisible hand, gently clutching the back of the jeep, coming from above, perhaps through the children that gave us that extra boost to get us going again! Luck? Chance? Divine Intervention? I can't prove it, but I do know in my heart there was someone greater than me that helped us that day and answered my question, "Is That All There Is?",

"NO!", "There will be more ...", And there was, ... much more!

Signed,

Specialist 4, Vern Greunke  
Short Range Radio Direction Finding  
Fly Away Team - Alpha  
330th RRC - Pleiku, Vietnam

Now living at: 209 West Oak  
P.O. Box 124, Cedar Bluffs, NE 68015  
Ph. (402) 628-2820

# **THE REUNION**

## **BELLER'S FELLARS 1ST ANNUAL? REUNION Indianapolis, IN June 9, 10, 11, 1995**

Well, It finally happened. After months of waiting, Firebase Indy took place, and the 330th RRC had a second reunion. This was also the time and place of the *"Beller's Fellars 1st Annual? Reunion."* Four members were in attendance. Vern Greunke, Steve Masica, Maurice (Curly) Kollstedt, and Harry King were reunited after almost 29 years.

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*This is the text of a Reunion Newsletter sent out after our 1st Annual? Reunion.*

Arriving at Indy almost an hour late, I disembarked the airplane. I was wearing my special 330th RRC T-Shirt and had glued an old ASA patch on a dark blue baseball hat, hoping to be more easily identified by any other former RRU'ers. Standing against the wall at my gate was a fellow with a big grin on his face. I can't say I really recognized him, but he too was wearing a dark blue baseball cap with an ASA patch on it, along with some extra pins which read "Iron Triangle", "Cu Chi", etc. something like that. It was Steve! He said he recognized me. I guess I'll have to take his word on that. We rounded up a yellow limo and off to the Holiday Inn we went. The taxi cab fare was about 30 bucks, so I was glad Steve waited for me and we could split the fare! We checked in to the motel and headed straight for the bar, naturally. I started downing my drink for the weekend ... Diet Coke. I was on medication for a bad back that I had wrenched a week before and besides I pretty much have given up drinking. It's not that I wouldn't drink, I just choose not to drink anymore.

A few hours went by, and a few other vets for Firebase Indy came in. We also started sporting ASA types. Guess I shouldn't say that - as the buzz word for the banquet the following night was "Remember! There was NO ASA in Vietnam!!!! Ha, Ha, Ha!! A little past 5 p.m. I slipped out to the lobby and two guys who looked vaguely familiar were just checking in, Curly and Harry. They immediately headed for the bar also & weren't too interested in Diet Coke. After a while, I convinced them I was hungry and so "Beller's Fellars" were on the move. We walked across a very dangerous intersection in a big city!, and managed to make it to an Arby's about a block away. It was a little unreal. Sure we'd talked to each other on the phone, but here we were, old buddies from Viet Nam., together again, what a trip!

We threaded our way through the dreaded traffic again, not a bit scared of course, we were combat vet'rans. Back at the motel we started running into other 330th types, most of whom we didn't know, and who were at Pleiku maybe a year after us. We did run into a couple who were on the boat with us, but didn't really recall them. Likewise they said also. We also talked to one who was with the advanced party that got there even before we did. We went up to our rooms, shared some pictures and slides in Curly's hand-held slide viewer. One picture in particular struck me extremely funny. It was an early picture of the site at Ben Cat I believe, the jeep parked on the helipad with a hand fashioned cardboard sign which read **"RESTRICTED AREA"** in English and Vietnamese!. What a hoot!!



**THE FOUR** - Vern Greunke, Maurice (Curly) Kollstedt, Steve Masica, & Harry King at Firebase Indy and 330th RRC Reunion. This was also the First Annual? Beller's Fellars Reunion.

Later in the night we got word the group was assembling in the room of the reunion organizer, Sam Hamilton. We met more ASA types, OOPS!, anyway the room was packed with people, and being a non-smoker now (23 years ago I quit) the atmosphere was thick with smoke. Some pictures were passed around, more stories, introductions, and such. One guy, was sitting on the floor in the hall. Too much noise, smoke, I don't know what. We thought he looked familiar, but we really didn't know him, or he us. Turns out the next night at the banquet a handbill was placed at each place setting. It was a campaign flyer for this guy. His name is George Duggins, and he is running for Vice President of the National Viet Nam Veterans's Association.

Back to our respective rooms and called it a night. Saturday morning we ventured over to a Bob Evans restaurant for a high priced breakfast. We rode over in Harry King's pickup, so as to avoid that nasty intersection again.! After breakfast we looked for and found a German souvenir shop that Maurice (Curly) was interested in. Looking for some replacement mugs or steins or something. No luck. We then got directions and headed for THE FAIR-GROUNDS, where the official Vets reunion was to take place.

We headed into the heart of the city through busy streets, and construction. Something didn't look right. The sign said State Fairground with an arrow. Then it clicked. No, not the State Fairgrounds, the Marion County Fairgrounds! Okay, so who knew there were 2 fairgrounds near Indy?? Anyway from there I got to navigate, and sit up front on the soft seat (my back, you know). We did manage to make it almost to the opening ceremonies for Saturday. There was a big tent of vendors selling T-shirts, patches, medals, pins, etc., etc., etc. If you're interested in that stuff contact Steve Masica, I have a funny suspicion he could fix you up in that area.

Also set up were some smaller tents, some helicopters, a few big guns, some "Hummers" and also "The Moving Wall" the smaller scale replica of THE WALL in D.C. We toured the grounds, got a few things to take home too. Curly bought me a patch. It is a replica of a 33 Ba Muoi Ba Beer label, only in cloth. I haven't sewn it onto anything yet, but will find a place of honor for it. You see the story behind that goes like this. When we went back to the 303rd at Bein Hoa, we were going to the NCO club one evening. Civies Only! was the rule. As I had already packed and sent my civies in my hold baggage Curly lent me a white shirt to wear to the club. That night I carefully peeled a label off a "33" beer bottle and put it in the pocket of "My" shirt for safe keeping. Unfortunately "My Shirt" went to Ohio and not Nebraska so I lost one last valuable souvenir. Curly made it up to me at Indy!

About 12:30 a line was forming at one tent, so we got in line ... old habits die hard! Seems they were presenting medals to all in attendance who wanted one. It seemed a little silly at the time, but after I thought about it a little more, it really was a

nice gesture. We were presented a medal from the Indiana Vets Assn. or something like that. Mine was presented by a Colonial, and there were three generals presenting them too! Even though I was in civies and "retired" from the service for over 25 years I instinctively whipped up a snappy salute when confronted by the Colonial. He returned it of course. My only regret is that I should have gotten in line with one of the Generals. I've never shaken the hand of a General. Since the other medals were never formally presented, just a notation in your 201 file, and my Bronze Star came in the mail, it did seem really neat to get presented a medal, not a bad idea after all!. I have a picture of Steve and Harry getting theirs. Steve looked like he was ready to bust out laughing, but maybe he just always looks like that!!!.

At 2:30 or something like that all RRC personnel assembled at the RRC tent for a group picture. About half an hour later we finally got some sort of picture taken. I ordered one but have yet to receive one as of this date. Curly had someone take a snapshot with his camera of the bunch, and doubted we would recognize anyone on the picture anyway. We'll see. I did run into one guy from Devens that day. Andy Henry, he was either in 20A or 18A DittyBopper class. Didn't remember me, at least not in my present physique.

We toured the grounds some more and took each others pictures and got someone to take a picture on each of our cameras of "The Four Horsemen". My wife said we should have taken more profile shots, as gravity has taken over! Well not for Harry, he must have a better metabolism or something. I got a picture of Harry and Curly posed in from of a "HumVee". Close as I could get of a jeep. Now I have a "Now and Then" or "Before and After" picture and hope to enclose them with this letter or at least will at a later date.



**Maurice "Curly" Kollstedt and Harry King** pose in front of a "HumVee" at Firebase Indy reunion in June of 1995. See similar picture taken in 1966 in the picture section of this book.

Back to the motel for a banquet. It was a bit expensive and we had originally doubted on attending it but we did, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Well, not every minute .. I don't travel very good anymore, lose my appetite, etc. But had a good time anyway. After we had eaten, thanks were given to the organizers and then we each got up and introduced who we were and told a little bit about ourselves, what we did, or what we pulled off somewhere in our tour of duty. A few M.P.'s who were with us listened to our stories, shook their heads, laughed along with us and assured us that the statute of limitations should have expired on the stuff, illegal, immoral, or whatever. It was a casual affair, but one gentleman arrived in his dress blues!, ribbons, stripes, and bow tie! Said he would be buried in that suit, and since we probably wouldn't be in attendance, could see what he would look like at his funeral. The guys who were stationed there after us enjoyed hearing about the early days, and comments from the "Boat People". They said it helped tie everything all together. I think it would be interesting to hear from someone who was there when they "Pulled the Plug" as it were.

Later, some slides were shown from around the Pleiku area. Seems football was popular there as it was at Cu Chi. Also seems that the unit at Nha Trang thought they had a pretty good team too. So what else? challenge them to a game.! They flew up to Pleiku I think and duked it out! Then it dawned on me ... this was years before the original "M.A.S.H. the Movie came out!.. Also slides from the surrounding area of Pleiku were shown. Then I showed them my slides. They seemed impressed. They were a bit in awe at the living conditions we put up with and I ribbed them about them working in air conditioned trailers. "Not ALL were air conditioned!", they responded.

We broke up into a few small groups, and talked a bit longer. It was getting late. Very late. Back to bed for Sunday morning and our eventual departure.

We may not have known many when we got there, but we made many new friends since we all had so much in common. Ft. Devens, Pleiku, and remember "THERE WAS NO ASA IN VIET NAM!". This came about somewhat because as one was checking on getting out the word on the reunion as I understand it, he contacted what would be HQ now at Vint Hill Farms, and was basically told "There Was NO ASA ..." maybe it was all just a bad dream?

Sunday AM, slept in. Had breakfast with "The Guys" or at least what I could try to force down. Still not really hungry. Needed sugar, or chocolate, or something.! A junk food junky. Many of the guys from 330th were also having breakfast at the motel restaurant. Shook hands again, and thanked them for a good time.

Rounded up our gear, and headed out for the airport. I navigated again, naturally!! Ha!

Said our goodbyes. No tears, not on the outside anyway. It had been a real trip. Could hardly believe it was all over ... already. Well just wait till next year ... or whenever ... and bring the wives ... maybe. Maybe, just maybe we can do it again, with more of us a little more planning on a convenient date, and a lot of luck on having the same weekend available, and the funds available too. Hope so. Uncle Russ already volunteered his house. It is in a nice central location ... Massachusetts (he said to bring warm clothes as it's cold up there!!) Not too far from Devens! Guess we could sneak in on AWOL trail from Ayer, and commandeer an old barracks! ... Nah!

Hope this gives you a little insight on our trip and incentive to try and get the group together again. Also I have merged the list of all 330th personnel the guys from Ohio had found addresses and phone numbers on, with the original manifest of the boat people. I have done a little searching with my computer, locating some more of them. It's getting to be quite a long list. Will mail it out also in the near future. Could I just put in on a computer disk and let you load it and print it yourself?? Tell Me.

I would also really like to get a biography on each one of us of what happened after "NAM". Haven't started mine yet either but would really like to share any info you volunteer with the rest of the group. Send it to me and I will be more than happy to act as NET CONTROL and distribute it out to the bunch.

Pictures will follow, news will follow, hang on ... it ain't over yet!! Going Lima Hotel ...

Ditty Di Dah Di Dah  
VA SK or whatever,

**Vern** (ASA - ALL THE WAY)

## ***After 'Nam to 30 Years Later- Who Went Where ... the Rest of the Story***

**Russell W. Beller** - Left Vietnam and went to Ft. Devens from there he went to Bangkok, Thailand with the Royal Thia. Security Forces. Later he went to El Paso, Texas to a language school to study Vietnamese and was on orders to go to Viet Nam for a second time but peace broke out and the war was over. He was then stationed at Ft. Devens again and then went to Udorn (sp) Thailand to close that station. He then retired from the Army. in October of 1978, with 22 years in the military service. He later returned to service as a civilian and retired, again, in April of 1994 with 37 years of federal service.

"Uncle Russ's" birthday happens to be May 8th, and this year he turns the big "60!" We wouldn't want to let such an important event as that pass by too quietly would we??? Hint, Hint!! Russ was married to his wife Katherine in 1962. Katherine died of ovarian cancer in September of 1990. Russ has three boys and 3 and 1/2 grand kids as the fourth is due in February. A note about his service before Viet Nam. If I understand my messy notes, I believe he said he joined the army in 1956, was schooled and served in Taiwan. Got out of Army, got back in and went to Germany, then to Taiwan again, and then to Ft. Wolters making E-6 shortly before shipping out to VN with us. Somewhere along the way and I'm not sure just when, but some of us found out we were selected for these PRD-1 teams. Originally I was supposed to be on Team "B" and I think the Sgt. in charge had red hair, but don't know his name. Then plans changed and I wound up on Beller's Fellars. I don't know what life would have been like on the other team but I feel fortunate serving with the leader and team members that I did eventually end up with.

**Orville "Butch" Browning, Jr.** - A letter from his widow will be found elsewhere in this newsletter. His widow Janet now resides in Lima, OH and an invitation to attend the 2nd Annual? Reunion of Beller's Fellars will be extended to her. I know I would like to meet her and she has expressed a likewise feeling.

**Roland "Butch" Williamson** - Butch was with us about 1/2 the tour returning to Pleiku around the end of January 1967. After Vietnam Butch went to Hakada, Japan and then back to Viet Nam. I believe he was with the 330th when it moved the bulk of the company to Nha Trang and left a site at Pleiku. This was around May of 1970. If I decipher my notes correctly he then went to Vint Hill Farms, VA and then to Okinawa where he was acting NCOIC for a time. While in Okinawa he had a CO named Chron, William R. Chron III!! I think there was some kind of disagreement concerning a speeding ticket, Article 15 too, but you'll have to ask them all about that!

After Okinawa Butch went to Thailand, and then to Fargo, ND as an ASA Field Rep. or recruiter, not sure which. He got married there and later went to Korea, at Camp Humpries ? near the village of Pyong Tech. (sp). After that he went to Ft. Devens.

Somewhere along in here he was in Japan, and monitored the capture of the Pueblo. Well, Gussie Thomas and I had the fortune(?) of being sent to Korea about three days after the incident, 5 guys from Taiwan, 5 from Okinawa. I believe the E-7's name who accompanied us was Sgt. Strawn. We ran into our instructor from Ft. Devens's Sgt. Trbuza and also an O5D classmate Charles Horner who as I remember had managed to attain E-6! by that short time. We stayed a month, and that was too long!! (I have since talked on the phone to both Sgt. Trbuza and Charles Horner.)

Back to Butch, he said he graduated from Moorhead State University, MN after getting out of army. He is originally from Wisconsin but now lives with his wife and two dachshunds (sp) in Wyoming. He was recently the State Adjunct Treasurer of the D.A.V. and is active in local Viet Nam affairs. He went to Washington D.C. for school as a Service Representative for Viet Nam vets in 1989. (Just before we ended our phone conversation a familiar phrase came out. "This, That, and Everything Else"!! Seems like I heard that one before. Ha!!) Just a familiar saying we all heard once or twice from Butch while he was with us.

**Maurice "Curly" Kollstedt** - One of my classmates at Ft. Devens. Curly was assigned to Germany after his tour in Vietnam. He managed to get himself stationed in Italy where he met his wife Rosanita. After completing his tour in Aug. of 1969 he stayed on in Germany to get some more education. He said he studied German but doesn't remember much of it now. Curly was married September 23, 1969 and his birthday is March 6, 1945. He has two children Marizio who is 25 years old, (Marizio is the Italian equivalent of Maurice) and a daughter Dolores, 18 years old that will be graduating this May. Curly works at Champion International a big paper manufacturing company in the Electrical, Instruments, and Refrigeration areas. The last time I talked to him the company was sending him to college for more school at Miami, of Ohio for an associates degree in electronics, I think.

Curly says his hobbies include woodworking, and bee keeping. He has a hive(s) in his backyard but the neighbors could be none the wiser. Yes, he has gotten stung! He is also a member of AMVets? or one of those types of veterans organizations.



**Ronald G. Seyboldt** - Ron left us at the same time Williamson did in Jan. of 1967. He returned to the 330th at Pleiku and after finishing his tour there he also got out of the Army in August of 1967. He now lives in Erie, PA working for the phone company, GTE doing installation and repair for something like 29 years now and got married in 1968. They have 3 kids, 2 boys and 1 girl, 23 (boy), 24 (girl), 25 (boy) who are all college grads now but think he said they are still living at home. Ron is a Ham, an amateur radio enthusiast, and said his call letters are WB3DOM (Dirty Old Man), but claims the numbers are issued at random. A likely story! He has won numerous state contests with his radio skills including a QRP contest 5 watts or under and worked 50 countries and made contacts with around 160 other stations. When I talked to him last year he was preparing to go on a radio locating contest searching out a hidden transmitter somewhere. Imagine that!! Ron spent some time in Miami, at Homestead Air Base. I think I remember this from our conversations at Ben Cat. (I put in for Homestead, hoping for duty on some exotic tropical island, out of Viet Nam as one of my selections based on his description of the duty but wound up in Taiwan instead, and am not sorry).

Ron also spent some time at dear Camp Humphrey (sp) in Korea also. While in Korea he and another guy managed to flip a deuce and a half truck off a bridge onto its top. No one was injured but they had somehow changed seating places during the accident.

Ron is drawing some disability from Vietnam. From filling sandbags! Something about a bad disk or such. He said sandbag filling had come to an abrupt halt at one time after a mysterious fire, an empty sandbag fire!! Hmm!! Later they did sandbag in earnest after a shelling of the Pleiku company area. An MP tent was hit just after one of them had stepped out during the night to "relieve himself". The MP had just gotten back into bed when the entire tent was destroyed just down to the level of the sandbags!! No one was hurt but you can believe the sandbag filling was a new daily routine!

**Harry M. King, Jr.** - Harry went to Germany with Curly Kollstedt and got out of the army in 1968. He went to Akron University for a time and got married in 1973 and has been married for 23 years. They have a son Jeff. Maurice "Curly" was best man at Harry's wedding and Harry is the godfather of Curly's son Marizio.

Harry is also a "Ham" his call letters being KA8NKM and the cute meaning for the letters I guess I didn't write down. Ask him! The last I know Harry was working for Goodyear in Akron, was released somehow and then hired back by an independent employment agency, company or something to return to the same job. I don't understand it all myself.

His hobbies include woodworking and fishing. He and Curly went fishing after our brief reunion last year and caught 60 Crappie, ... he says! He also likes to fish on South Pass Island in Lake Erie, where the walleye fishing is good.

**William R. Chron III** - Bill extended his tour in Viet Nam for 6 months, like we were going to do, but didn't! He was on the Fly-Away Team located out of Pleiku. He was at Pleiku during the Tet offensive of 1968. He told me some stories about that last year when I made initial contact with him and would like to hear more about that. Something about the 173rd airborne getting creamed near Dak To. Bill managed to get malaria and was in the hospital at Saigon for a while. (*Trivia Question*): "What Day of the Week was Malaria Pill Day?" (Wednesday) From Viet Nam Bill went to Vint Hill Farms, VA and helped move the 370 unit to Ft. Bragg in July of 1968.

Bill went to OCS in January of 1970 through June and managed to see Sgt. Beller, Butch Browning, and Gussie Thomas back at Ft. Devens. On to Ft. Hood, TX as a Platoon Leader and was Operations Officer with Tri-Cap. In 1971 he supported the 1st Cav and in 1972 was Company Commander of an EW company, a follow up of ARDF. He later served as XO there when a Captain came I think and then he went to Okinawa in Sept. of 1972 as Company Commander there. He stayed in Okinawa til 1974 and was "Riffed Out" of the Army in Sept. of 1975. He went back on active duty in the reserves in Nov. of 1977 and was active in recruiting I think 'til 1981 where he went to St. Louis Reserve Center for one year as Regional Coordinator for Nat. Guard and Army Reserves for West Coast. Later he went to Arlington Hall, VA in 1983 and out of the Army in 1987 as a Major.

He then worked for a Dept. of Defense contractor till 1994. He worked for the DEA from 90-94 in support of anti-drug law enforcement network, or something like that. Bill has done consulting work and works as an electronics senior systems engineer. He is presently single and has two boys, Damon, 19 and Nicholas who is 15. Bill says he is active in the Amer. Legion and his hobbies include bowling, playing golf, hunting and fishing. Bill joined us at our 3rd reunion in 1997. **I received an email from his wife on Jan. 8th, 1998 stating that he had suffered a massive heart-attack and efforts to revive him failed. Bill passed away Jan. 7th, 1998.**

**Gussie J. Thomas** - Gus and I went to Taiwan after leaving Viet Nam. We were both stationed at headquarters company at Shu Lin Kou on the mountain side above Taipei, the capital city. In Feb. of 1968 we got a month TDY in Korea no thanks to the "Reds". They had just captured the Pueblo. Gus and I drew the unlucky numbers for a free trip to that frozen land up north. They wanted to PCS us there too, but we came up with enough

excuses and protests to get back to Taiwan. Two Spec. 5's went too, they worked in the office. I wonder if PFC Michael Mouse still has a clearance to visit the operations there? Along with Specialist 4 - Don. P. Duck? Gussie used to tell the girl bartenders how he saved my life in Vietnam and sometimes it was my turn to have "saved his". He may have really saved mine once in Taiwan though. We had been out ALL NIGHT drinking, and it was early in the morning. With my eyes squinting in the bright morning sunlight I stepped off a curb of a busy intersection, right in the path of a Chinese bus turning the corner. Gus pulled me back just in time, but that's about all I remember of that night/day.

Gussie re-upped just as I was leaving Taiwan in March of 1969. He did the American thing and bought a new car with his re-enlistment bonus. You could make good money by selling the car to the local people if you could somehow exchange the NT, the local money, back into US greenbacks. He says he left Taiwan and went to Ft. Bragg, Ft. Devens, and then to Vint Hill Farms, VA. Then he went back to Taiwan to close it up, then proceeded to Vietnam to close down the station there too. He then went to Ft. Haachuca(sp), and into the Military Intelligence branch and was promoted to E-6. Five years later he made E-7 and was home on leave from IRAN when that mean old Khomeini(?) guy took the hostages. He was later in Administration at Ft. Polk, LA in the Adjunct General division of the Army and also made 1st Sgt!!!! (I have in my possession a letter from him where he was looking forward to be a Proud Civilian again, while still an E-5!.) Later he also went on to Panama in the Inspector General division, and retired from the army in Jan. '87. He worked in the Postal Service for about a year after that I think, but said the paper dust bothered him too much. "Tom" as I used to call him, (had one of my children been a boy his name would have been "Thomas") is a single parent and has a daughter, Gloria who is 21. She will be graduating late this fall from Southern University, at Baton Rouge. She is in the pharmaceutical field I understand, and has done some internship in Michigan during the summers. I believe she plans on graduate school also towards a Masters Degree. Gus said he helps out one of his brothers in construction, and does some of his own remodeling on his home. His other hobby is fishing too.

**Steven J. Masica** - Steve found an easy way out off our team, by getting wounded! He, more than any of us knows what war is really about! He was in-country for a while in a hospital and understand he did the rest of his recuperating at Ft. Reilly, Kansas. In Oct. of '67 Steve went to Vint Hill Farms, VA, and then back to Ft. Devens for 05D30 school as an analyst - then back to Vint Hill Farms and then to NSA at Ft. Meade, then to Vint Hill until he got out as a transportation clerk.

Back to Minnesota from whence he came in June

of 1969. He has worked for the phone company also, US West, for 27 1/2 years. He plans to retire from that in 2 1/2 years and pursue his other interest - VET'S SUPPLY LINE, a sole proprietorship which he and his wife of 23 years Marilyn and their dog run from their home. His ad runs in national Vet's magazines. He is a war profiteer, he sells military junk, insignias, patches, hat pins, and some really cool hats with the ASA patch on them! Made in USA too, no foreign stuff! In his spare time he is also the Post Commander of VFW 3915, Brooklyn Park, MN though he says "only 5 and a half months left" with a bit of glee in his voice. Said it sure takes a lot of time and work.

**Edward D. Tune** - Still no luck locating him. I called at least half the Tune's in the US and no one knew or was related to him. All I know is that he went to Germany also after Vietnam, got married there, to a US or German girl I'm not sure. I understand he returned to Viet Nam for another stint there and that's about all I know. He could be residing in Germany.

**PFC George E. Thomas** - the guy who replaced Steve Masica. No luck finding him yet either but with a common name like that I'll really need some help. Hopefully I could get an official orders or something with his serial number (i now have his middle initial which will eliminate many other George Thomases. Anyone remember - was he from the south?

**Michael J. Donahue** - another one hard to locate. Too common a name. I now have his middle initial. I printed out a list of all the Michael J. Donahue's in US - a long list. If his phone is unlisted, well you figure it out. Mike was with me at Thoi Hoa, he replaced Butch Williamson or Ron Seyboldt. Don't think he had seen a PRD-1 before either. He also accompanied me on our infamous jeep runs to Ben Cat and was with me the day the jeep died - FOUND! in Wisconsin. Met twice now.

**Vern Greunke** - that's me. I get the longest bio because it's MY newsletter! I left Vietnam in Aug. of 1967. I took the full 30 days leave due me even though it took over 2 1/2 days to get out of Viet Nam on stand by. When I got to Seattle I was told I could not fly on a military plane stand-by to Taiwan because I was officially AWOL!!!! I wound up paying half the civilian fare on a commercial jet to get to my next duty station. Gussie Thomas joined me in Taiwan as did Leon Hart and Barry Anderson, our former classmates at Devens and "boat people" from the 330th. They both went "down island" to other sites. I was content at mission control, but preferred to be a "site rat" working the site about a mile from the Air Station where we lived.

Work, go to Taipei and drink, go back to base and sleep. That about summed up Taiwan!



On our trip to Korea while we were there a number of unlucky things happened. Like a couple of the guys from Okinawa rolled a 3/4 ton truck down a mountain-side. They were thrown out I understand, but one did receive a broken arm. On the plane ride back to Taiwan the remaining five of us joked repeatedly, "Sure hope the plane doesn't crash!" Ha! Ha! We descended to Taipei airport over a mountain range very near our base in thick clouds. A white-out. The landing was uneventful and we proceeded up the mountain to our company area. Just before we reached the base we were in awe as we saw the wreckage of a China Airlines jet strewn across both sides of the road. It had happened just a few days before our return and guys from our company had been called out there to help quench the fires, and retrieve bodies and search for any survivors.

I worked the Taiwan site with a guy from Lincoln, NE who was also quite a drinker, even more than me. He brought it with him to work at the site. We took the water bottle off the water cooler and cooled our beer cans in the water after replacing the bottle. No own was the wiser. He also brought those airline "mini's" stuffed in his shirt too, and spiked our pop. One person could work both positions there so the other one could sleep on the desk/ safe combination and use a pile of burn bags for a pillow. That way we slept during our working hours and had more time to go drinking! Many times when it was Dan's turn to work he fell asleep during his "watch" on the midnight shift, and I wound up having to jump off the desk to answer a "Flash" or the intercom. Gussie wrote a few months after we were both gone that some other guys actually got caught with alcohol at the site!! and got court martialled or something and the site chief got busted too. All I know is I got my Good Conduct Medal and you can't prove anything now!!

I got an early out from Taiwan by extending my tour so I would be returning to the States with less than 5 months of my ETS. I got out in March instead of August which was fine with me! I went back to my old job at the Fremont Tribune doing the advertising make-up still using the old lead type and Linotypes. I enrolled at the Univ. of Nebr. at Omaha in electronics in the fall of 1969, and soon started dropping the study load until I was down to about 4 hours credit. I took a night course in drafting the second semester but my heart wasn't in it and there were too many worldly distractions to my study habits. I dropped out of that but my instructor called my mom once, offering to help me get through the class else I would end up in the Army in VIETNAM! Ha!, been there, done that!

I went on a date on Father's Day June 21, 1970, was engaged on Sept. 4th, and got married to Linda, my wife of 25 years on Nov. 8, 1970. Who said short courtships don't work? We have two daughters, Lareesa Lynn who is now a High School English teacher. She was valedictorian of her High School class. Guess she got it from me??!! Our younger daughter is Tammy Lynn a attending Midland College, Fremont, NE. She plans on going into the sports information field.

I did continue my education a bit by taking a correspondence course in electronics from United Technical Institute, a division of Career Academy. My Alma Mater of Milwaukee, WI which is now defunct. It went belly up. They also had motel operator school, flight attendant and something else too. The course I took was entirely on records with big picture books. Listen to a chapter and take a test. A great way to learn, but not so great when you wanted to use it for a reference.

My picture once ran in the editor's column of Radio-Electronics magazine, I was named a Hugh J. Gernsback scholarship winner of \$100 towards my tuition at U.T.I. - You probably missed it!

Electronics, and later on computers entered the printing field, so I was well prepared to adapt. I still do the ad make-up now but on a Power Mac! I am also the system's manager of the editorial computer. I wrote the Accounts Receivable package they are currently using on the business side for the classified ads so have pretty good job security until they decide to junk the pre-XT dated computer main frame we are using. It runs under CMP but luckily the advertising modules are written in a very BASIC like language. That's why I was able to "program" the bills stuff. They think I'm really smart!! Ha!

I have a Pentium at home for leisure work, newsletters, old army buddy finding, and have now assembled a large database of ASA veterans. I have a web page on the internet where I collect their information about themselves then give them the password to the places on the "net" where I have the database displayed so they can look up their "old" ASA friends too.

I have after much searching found **Michael J. Donahue** my "jeep ride" partner, living in Wisconsin. I was looking in Minnesota! We met at Grundy Center, Iowa in the middle of June 1998 over 30 years later and re-enacted the jeep pushing incident with my rental car.

I also have located **Edward D. Tune** .... living in Germany. I got a stateside address of Nevada for him but he has been living in Panama and recently moved to Germany. He is employed with Lucent Technologies and does support work.

**Still looking for George E. Thomas.** Have at least found the middle initial on him, but have called a lot of George E's with no luck. Well, maybe someday he'll turn up yet!

**An edited letter from Janet Browning detailing the life of Butch Browning after leaving Vietnam**

8 September 1995

Dear Vern & Curly,

I met Butch at ASA, in Ft. Meade, Maryland, in August of 1967; he had just returned from Viet Nam and I had just started working at NSA, as a civilian in July of 1967. We dated once on November 3, 1967 and then he had his first surgery for cancer, although he did not know it was cancer at that time. This was later in November of 1967. After he left the hospital and recovered, we started dating seriously in December of 1967. Then the latter part of December 1967, he got a call from Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in D.C., and they informed him that they had found cancer, from the tumor, that Ft. Meade had removed in November of that year. He was sent to Walter Reed to undergo additional surgery and radiation therapy. I still saw him there and after the radiation was finished, we were married the 20th of April 1968. We had no children of our own.

Butch spent until November of 1972 at Ft. Meade, MD. He attended school in Ft. Devens, Mass, while he was stationed at Ft. Meade, MD. Then, in November of 1972, he was sent to Korea (Camp Humphreys). He called me in March of 1973 and asked me to join him. I quit my job and I arrived on Easter Sunday of 1973. We adopted a Korean baby girl, when she was first born, on 6 June 1973. Then the latter part of January 1974, Carrie Lynn died; she was 8 months old and we had already adopted her and were waiting on the visa when she passed away. She died at the military hospital in Seoul, Korea and is buried in Incheon, Korea. Butch was reclassified into 71L (admin) and sent to Ft. Lee, VA in February of 1974.

He seemed to really enjoy his new job in Virginia and excelled at it, being promoted to E-7 SFC, while he was there. He was again reclassified. 71L was overstrengthed too and Armor MOS's were understrengthed. He was caught up in the involuntary reclassification program and was sent to Ft. Carson, Colorado. He attended Armor school there and sometime in Spring of 1977, I believe, he was reassigned to Wiesbaden, Germany.

I later joined him in Germany, as it was a command sponsored tour there. He stayed in Wiesbaden until the latter part of 1978; then he was reassigned to Vilseck, Germany, as an instructor, in the Armor MOS he held at that time. He was up for a promotion in the Spring of 1980 and even got a sequence number, but it was never to be. He started having problems swallowing and was plagued with a

sore throat. Finally, Vilseck sent him to Neurnburg, Germany, to one of the larger hospitals and they discovered a tumor in his throat again. We were air-evacuated out of Germany for the States. We landed in Maryland about the 2nd or 3rd of September 1980. They took us back to Walter Reed again and there he underwent a total laryngectomy sometime later that same month. By the way, his mother passed away in May or June of 1980.

In April of 1981, they medically boarded him out of the Army, giving him credit for 20 years with 100% disability. He wanted to move to Kentucky; he was following some old army buddies, that had also retired and moved to Kentucky. We rented for a bit and then bought our first house, in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. We lived there until about 1983 or 1984 and then we bought a small farm, in Grayson County, Kentucky. It was about 7 miles from the Nolin Lake, between Millerstown and Wax. He had really gotten into woodworking, after he retired and he set up a small woodworking shop out in our garage. It was for our own personal use, but he did make a few wood baskets and sold them. He was having trouble swallowing for about the last 3 years that he was alive. They kept telling us it was a benign stricture in his throat. Butch used an electro larynx to speak with (held under his chin) and he really mastered the art of it all. He taught a great many laryngectomys to speak with it as well. Anyway, finally in 1993, they decided to try and put him to sleep and try to dilate him. The surgical procedure failed (the opening was just too narrow and they were afraid of tearing tissue). While they were doing the procedure, they noticed several questionable places in the back of his mouth and throat; and biopsied those. They then scheduled him for a permanent G-tube placement later; I believe it was March of 1993. They did the G-tube placement, but they also did a chest X-ray. When he returned to the clinic, they informed him that they had found a spot on his lung and that they were fairly certain that it was cancer. They did Cat Scan of his lung and confirmed that it was indeed cancer. They operated on him in April of 1993, right after they found it, and removed 1/2 his right lung. Just before he was released on the 20th of April 1993 (our 25th wedding Anniversary), they informed him that he also had throat cancer again. It turned out to be inoperable. He returned to the Clinic about a week later and they informed him that they took biopsies of the lymph nodes, when they removed his lung and they also turned out to be cancerous. It was at this time, that they informed us that he was terminal and had about 2 years to live.

At first he was on liquid Tylenol 3, through his G-tube and he also took all his liquid food this way too, as he could not swallow anything but water or coffee in the beginning. The Osmolite was just too thick for him to swallow. Little by little, the opening in his throat grew smaller and smaller, until he could no longer even swallow water or coffee. By October of 1993, the Tylenol 3 was not taking care of all the pain and they put him on liquid morphine, through the G-tube, as well. He was also on a nerve medication because he would get crying spells, where he was actually sobbing. February of 1994, the VA finally ordered Hospice for us and they sent a nurse out once a week. They taught me how to take total care of him and they just took vitals, when they came. A doctor from Ft. Knox, finally put an arterial line in his left groin, in April of 1993, so he could get the morphine compacts. The liquid morphine that we had been putting through the G-tube was no longer covering his pain very well and he needed another method. They tried a needle button in his stomach, but he developed cellulitis, so the arterial line was the only choice he had. In May of 1994, I started having difficulty flushing that line. Butch also suffered from bowel obstructions and was on almost daily enemas. I finally took things into my own hands. Butch was on withdrawal from the morphine; later we were to discover that he had a very major blood clot in the artery in his stomach, from the arterial line. He told me, he did not care what I had to do, just get him help, so I did. The ambulance came and took us to Grayson County Hospital and there the ER doctor had a fit. He immediately informed us that he did indeed have a blood clot somewhere in that artery and sent us on to the VA hospital, by ambulance. The doctors told me that they were not sure he would even make it through the night. This was the 19th of August of 1994. He stayed on 5 North, there for about a week and then transferred to 5B Hospice, where he stayed until he passed away on the 3rd of December 1994. He just had too many health problems that I could not care for; he had staphylococcus, the blood clot, he was severely diabetic, he had problems with bowel obstructions. He wound up having seizures 4 or 5 weeks before he passed away and then about 3 weeks before he passed away, he went into a coma. I was so devastated by the coma, but I guess it was God's way of letting him go a little easier. He could not give up and I did not know how to let him go; I said often, it was almost as if an umbilical cord was between us. I guess if I could best describe his approach to life, he would say,

"take the cards you're dealt, make the best hand possible and never, never, never fold!"

It was ironic; all those months, of me telling him that it was OK for him to go on, that it was going to be OK, even though I never meant one word of it. The morning that he passed way, I had not slept all night; really; had not slept very much those last few days and nights, but was holding his hand and told him that it wasn't really OK if he died and that I probably wasn't going to be all right. I looked up at the clock after I talked to him, holding his hand and it was about 3:15 AM. Sometime after, I fell off to sleep that way; at 4 AM, they awoke me and told me he was gone. I think he just wanted to hear me say that it all wasn't OK

He's buried in the new section of the New Lone Oak Cemetery (we gave them about an acre and 1/4 of our land to make the cemetery bigger). We buried him on the 5th of December 1994. He is home now though; I just hope and pray that he knows it.

He has 5 brothers and a father still living. His father lives in Melbourne, Arkansas, used to live in Dolph, Arkansas. He also has a brother living in Melbourne. He has another brother living in Alabama and a brother living in Texas and 2 half-brothers living in Texas. One of his half-brothers died in 1986, I believe.

One day soon, I am thinking of putting a large headstone up between his grave and the one next to it, where I will be buried. My parents live about 8 or 10 miles from the cemetery, so they change the flowers for me too.

Butch was 51, when he passed away; he would have been 52 the 18th of February of 1995 I will be 47 on the 11th of December of 1995. He was very good to me and I did love him very much; I believe he was very happy too. I know that he would have gladly given his arm or leg to have gotten Vern's call a little bit sooner, but hind sight 20/20!! He talked of you all often during our life together and I recognized both of your names, when I heard them.

I am enclosing a couple of photos, just in case you would like to see how young he stayed! I also can tell you, he was a confirmed victim of Agent Orange. When they finally admitted to Agent Orange causing cancer, his type of throat cancer was the first one on the list. Knowledge is a wonderful thing, if only you can have it before you make such a costly mistake and lose even one life!! I leave you all with his love and best wishes.

- Janet

# *A Christmas Story*

The following story was written by myself and selected by the editors to run in a *Memorable Christmas Stories* section of the Fremont Tribune

## **Christmas in Vietnam - 1966**

This being the first time I was away from home, family, and in a War Zone to boot, it didn't look to be a very Merry Christmas, in that hot, dry time of the year. Two incidents in particular will stay in my memory for a long time to come.

The first was while we waited for helicopter transportation to Cu Chi for our jeep and trailer, as ground travel was much too risky without the aid of a convoy. We sat in what you would call a one-table, open-air roadside cafe on Highway 13 which was nicknamed Thunder Road, that went through the village of Ben Cat located alongside the Iron Triangle, just north of Saigon. As we monitored our jeep's radio, another jeep came down the road and stopped next to ours. One green-clad man jumped out and said he was looking for someone from Omaha. "I'm from Fremont," I said, "Close enough," he replied, as he got out his camera and tape recorder. He took a couple of snapshots of me and I got to make an audio taped message to my folks back home, which was played a few weeks later on KMTV. The thing I never figured out was how he ever found me, or was it just plain luck, as only a couple of people knew my location, and they say they were never questioned about my whereabouts.

The other incident happened on Christmas Eve day. Weeks prior to this as we set up our special radio equipment on the edge of a helipad each day, curious children from the village would come out to see us. They were always looking for a handout, or to steal something when our backs were turned. I lost a watch and radio for sure. As they gathered around us each day we made friends with them and with

hand motions and conversation (they could speak a lot more English than we Vietnamese), we got to know them quite well.

Soon we put them to work filling sandbags for us or sending them down to the village (about a half-mile) for refreshments. Each would carry an item, a bottle of Coke, a tall glass tumbler with the ever-present blotch of green pain on the bottom (superstition, I think), and some ice covered with rice husks -- insulation, of course.

For their trouble we would give them a few coins, and soon the errand squad grew to a small crowd. They each expected a tip of course, just for going along I guess.

Now it was Christmas Eve, so the American military advisers assigned to this camp held a little celebration for the soldiers and village people. One of the more portly corporals donned a Santa suit (where they got it I have no idea!). He boarded a small bubble type helicopter and threw candy out to the kids over the compound. Later he entered on foot and greeted the kids with some small presents.

As they gathered around the paper mache creche, some of the kids we knew brought a little old lady to see me. Acting as interpreters for her, they explained that she wanted to personally thank me.

"Thank me for what?" I asked. "For giving the kids the money," they said and then went on to explain that she had been sending her children to the village school with the money we had been giving them. Imagine that! Some of these kids had been receiving an education from my POCKET CHANGE!! Christmas Spirit?

**Yes, it was Christmas, indeed!**

## **BACKGROUNDS**

### ***Starting at the Beginning. -***

Upon graduation from High School in 1963 I set out on reaching my only goal at the time - to "Get a Job".

While in high school I had only heard "Viet Nam" mentioned a few times, probably in geography or history class. One classmate had a friend who dropped out of school and had wound up in "Viet Nam!" - wherever that was? It was no real concern, just some far away military action that would probably be over and another one would take its place.

I did get my "job", and the interviewer asked one question in particular. "How do you stand on the draft?" "I don't know, probably about the same as anyone else my age (18)." It seemed highly unlikely I would ever be drafted.

Two years passed, it was early of 1965, friends were getting draft notices, physical notices, etc. We could see the progression by birthdates, and it was closing in on me.

Jim Mayer, a classmate and close friend, Vince "Jim" Toelle, a co-worker and I, could see the handwriting on the wall. We went to the draft board to volunteer for the draft. The person there talked us out of it, wanting us to get any some sort of guaranteed education out of it by enlisting instead. We talked to the recruiter, took pre-enlistment exams, and of course the Army pre-induction physical.

Jim Tolle was going into some a signal school. I was going to try to get some advanced printing schooling to complement my work at the Fremont Tribune. Jim Mayer was going to get some schooling too, but don't recall just what it was.

The three of us left on a bus from Fremont to the recruitment center in Omaha. Jim Mayer and I had scored high enough on the tests to qualify for the Army Security Agency (ASA). We really didn't know what it was all about but one line on the brochure sounded rather comforting. - "NON-COMBATANT". Now I was ready to serve my country in some way - it just didn't need to be as a foot soldier in the infantry! The only hitch was we would have to enlist for 4 years, not the normal 3, or the 2 year draft.

We decided to apply to the ASA recruiter when we hit Omaha. We really didn't understand much about it or the MOS's listed. - "Morse Intercept", "Traffic Analysis", etc. We took the bait and went off to Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri.

We three "Buddies" each landed in a different platoon, seperate buildings, etc. Now I didn't expect to get to bunk with my "buddy", but thought we'd be able to see each other more than we did!

About three or four days into basic training we were just starting our close order marching drills on a parade field, each platoon on it's own. Once our platoon came close to Jim Mayer's platoon, marching past each other. I had an urge to shout out "Hey, guys, there goes my buddy!" in a sarcastic vein, but of course held back do to the discipline I would have incurred & was too timid to do it anyway!

Once, we, the ASA enlisties, reported to the local ASA detachment on the base. They welcomed us and treated us with respect, and gave us the word about what to expect of life in the Agency. Hey, they were alright! Not like the drill instructors trying to make life as miserable as they could. It sounded like we had made the right decision after all.

Leaving Ft. Leonard Wood for Ft. Devens, Jim Mayer and I took a bus from Nebraska to Massachussets - about three days in the back of the bus, listening to the motor rev up and all the other noises. We thought we were saving money, but we really didn't understand "flying standby" nor had either of us ever flown in an airplane before.

At Ft. Devens Jim and I wound up assigned to the same company, same class in school and even the same platoon. Yes, we did bunk together, 1000 miles from home. I don't recall if anyone ever noticed that our serial numbers were only one digit apart! I do remember that once we did get seperated. They had us form a line and they split us into two groups, just between Jim and myself!

My group went off to TTC (Tactical Trainging Course) a simulation of conditions in Viet Nam. I had to don black pajamas and pretend I was a Viet Cong soldier. We hid in a wooded area and captured soldiers trying to negotiate this training area.

Jim and I started Morse Code classes together, and we also had to retrain ourselves how to type using just a book. We were on our own. We picked it up rather quickly and were on our way. I managed to get "Ahead of the Game" once too often and so they advanced me to a class two weeks ahead of the one I had been in. So long Jim!

Getting advanced may have been my downfall. I did okay until it was time to pass 18 words per

minute of morse code. I had hit a road block! Others had too. One night they called us together and informed us we were being "diverted" into something called "Radio Direction Finding". What a bummer! More school! As it turned out, it was really one happy day. I was glad to get the different training and it suited me JUST FINE!!

I stayed at Devens in a different barracks and some of us wound us as squad leaders for our platoon. We finished our DF classes with a fun outing of using this antiquated piece of radio equipment that we would "never see in the field". "It was obsolete". We went on a "hare and hound" chase one day to locate a hidden transmitter. A lot of fun as far as classtime goes, but of course "we would never see it again."

I managed to stay near the top of my class (number 2) till almost graduation. Numbers one and two would get special recognition and a notice in their hometown newspaper. This would be a proud moment for me considering my performance in high school. Won't they be surprised!!

I slipped to number 3 but was still very proud of myself and realized I was a lot smarter than I ever gave myself credit for in high school.

Shortly before graduating we were given a "dream sheet" to fill out, stating where we would like to be stationed if it was our choice. Little did we know, but I did discover it many years later, the choice had already been made for us, our orders had been cut even before the date we were given this "dream sheet". It was appropriately named!

Since most of us were going "stateside" to Ft. Wolter's, Texas we weren't required to go through the week of gruel training on the TTC course. We knew better of course, as the word was out. We would be shipping out to Viet Nam! So much for being a non-combatant.

We left from Boston and it was my first airplane ride. I remember one fellow teasing Gussie Thomas my teammate-to-be - "Look there's the Statue of Liberty". "Gee, have we gone that far already?" was Gussie's reply. NO!, we were just over Boston Harbor!!

Just previous to this we had a class party. We had steaks, etc. I really had never gone out for steaks, as my main source of food consisted burgers and fries. I didn't even like salad, and had no clue what kind of salad dressing to use. "Thousand Island" was the choice as someone clued me in it was something like Mayonaise. And for drinks? Sure I'd tipped back a few beers before this but never any real hard stuff.

"Try a Singapore Sling - it is a mixture of alcohols, and sweet too". "Bet you can't drink seven of them in a row and still stand up." I did and I could!! Didn't really feel so good trying to keep my bunk from spinning that night though!

On to Texas, with the "dry heat". It was hot!, Hot! We spent much time at the bowling alley (air conditioned). Our barracks had only a window unit on each floor, and I was on the wrong end. - (new-comers got last choice)

We got our green underwear and tried to dye our white stuff green too. We didn't figure how many yellow to how many blue boxes of dye it took since the green stuff was already gone. A lot of blue underwear hung from the clothes lines and finally the brass said enough was enough. No more dying clothes.

We were sent home for leave just prior to shipping out. There was an airline strike on and anyone on orders to Vietnam was supposed to get priority for stand-by flights. Our company in its need for security, conveniently put rows and rows of asterisks where our destination, port of call, etc was supposed to be. Try showing that to an airline clerk, who was not impressed!

I got a ride from Dallas to Omaha in a plane that landed about five times on the way. Or was that five times before we got to Oklahoma City! I forget.

One guy was able to get to Ft. Worth and somehow managed to get a ride along with Vice President Hubert Humphry to Minnesota, HH's home state. The national press picked up the story and upon his return to Fort Wolter's was admonished in front of the company formation. "We didn't need that kind of publicity!", as it said he was in the 330th ASA Co. "which was headed for Vietnam!" Big Secret!!

We left Texas around midnight in a big propeller driven airplane in 95-100 degree heat. We flew quite low to the ground and I could feel the plane hitting bumpy air, losing altitude. Of course I never felt the gradual rise again either, I just knew we were going to hit the ground.

Arriving in "sunny" California which I had heard so much about in the Beach Boys's surfing songs - we froze! It was only 50 degrees, cold, damp, overcast, and we, in our short sleeve class A uniforms.

We later boarded our ride for the next 18 days. The U.S. General Hugh J. Gaffey, troop transport. We "shipped out" on Aug. 2nd, and arrived in Vietnam on August 20th, 1966.

# Old Letters Lead to Veterans' Reunion

By Tammy Real-McKeighan

*Tribune Staff*

It began with a shoe box full of letters.

Vern Greunke was sorting through his mother's belongings after the local woman went to live in a nursing home two years ago. In the process, he found the shoe box. Inside were all the letters he'd written from Vietnam to his parents in Nebraska. The Cedar Bluffs man didn't know the letters would start him on a computer search for his fellow veterans and lead to a reunion.

But the letters brought on a wave of nostalgia. Years ago, Greunke enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was 21 when he went to Vietnam in 1966. His job involved finding the location of Viet Cong shortwave radio transmitters in a thick jungle area called the Iron Triangle. The area, just north of Saigon, was an enemy stronghold, he said.

Greunke spent a year moving from place to place. He often worked out of fox holes protected by sandbags. Eating off a plate was a rarity, and he was "in country" for three months before he got a hot shower.

At first, Greunke was excited about his assignment and planned to re-enlist. But as the months wore on, boredom, fatigue, a near-death experience and a case of dysentery took their toll. Soon, he was counting the days until this tour of duty ended.

In the meantime, Greunke made friends with the men in his unit. His letters home were filled with stories about buddies and daily experiences. He thanked his parents for packages of Kool-Aid that made the water more bearable to drink, and even wrote about buddies who had been wounded.

After finding the letters Greunke knew he wanted to locate his friends. He remembered his uncle talking about World War II ship reunions and showing photographs of his buddies.

"I thought that it was too bad that we couldn't do that," Greunke said.

Greunke began by purchasing a CD ROM [drive] for his computer and a CD that contained 70 million telephone numbers. In January, he started inserting his buddies' names and last-known hometowns into the computer.

Before long, the computer was providing some much-needed information. His first find was a friend named Maurice "Curly" Kollstedt.

"He was just estatic," Greunke said.

Kollstedt said he had contemplated placing newspaper ads in hopes of finding his fellow soldiers when Greunke called.

Greunke kept contacting other veterans, locating nine out of the 13 men in his unit. Only one call didn't go



as planned. Greunke was trying to contact Orville "Butch" Browning. He reached the man's widow instead.

"He died six weeks ago," the woman said, explaining that her husband had suffered from throat cancer.

"I didn't know what to say," Greunke said. "If we could have just found him a little sooner ... He was a real good guy."

Greunke's other buddies were sad, too. Two lived only a few hours from Browning and would have visited him in the hospital and shared memories with their friend before his death.

That never happened, but Greunke wanted to reach as many other veterans as possible.

The men eventually decided to meet during a Vietnam veterans reunion in June in Indianapolis. The 330th Company of which they were a part was "piggy-backing" its reunion onto that statewide event.

Only four of the nine men attended. But after 28 years, their reunion was a happy one.

"We kind of stood there in disbelief that it was really happening ... it was emotional," Greunke said.

For the next three days, the men talked. One man, Harry King, told about firing into the darkness at enemy "shadows" that appeared to be crawling over a fence. Two American gunships (airplanes) were firing on the area, so the man doesn't know if his gunfire killed anyone. But the next morning, he saw that the ground was littered with the bodies of Viet Cong soldiers, women and children. It was a bad memory he harbored for years. Now, at least, he could share it with people who really understood.

During the reunion, Greunke also distributed copies of a book he made from his letters. The veterans hope to have more reunions and perhaps even bring their families.

One night after the reunion, Kollstedt telephoned Greunke.

"I want to thank you one more time for getting us all together," he said.

Greunke knew all the work was worth it.

"I felt so good," he said.

**Reprinted from the Fremont (NE) Tribune**

**I wrote the following story which  
appeared in  
the Fremont (NE) Tribune  
as a tribute to my friend,  
Jack Plahn,**

**"The Hometown Boy Who Didn't Come Home"**

**“THE WALL”**

Mention that to a Vietnam veteran and they'll know what you are referring to. "The Wall That Heals" is on display this weekend at the Dodge County Fair in Scribner. I hope you plan to visit it as I plan to, and take time to remember our fallen, especially those from our area.

Although there are others, one name will stand out to me:

**Jack Charles Plahn - 09FEB68**

In 1961, at Fremont High a discussion in American History class turned to current events and the first time I recall hearing about some faraway place called Vietnam, .... wherever THAT was? It seemed to have had no bearing on my present life, and was no cause for concern.

June 1963 I was intent on accomplishing my immediate goals, graduate and get a job. Entering the job market meant applications, interviews, and searching the Classifieds for some sort of employment. I needed a job, any job!

Finally the phone did ring, "Get to the Guide and Tribune, there is a job opening in the back shop", so said one friend, "cleaning Linotypes and sweeping the floors". (I'm still here, the Linotypes are long gone, replaced by newer and faster typesetters and computers)

One question I still remember being asked was: "How do you stand in the Draft?" I was registered, and all I could answer was "I guess the same as every other young man my age". And so I was employed, with cash to spend on the most urgent need ... wheels!

Besides providing transportation to work, a car offered mobility, something to fix, alter, and see how fast and how much noise we could make.

Having a car also meant checking out the fast-food drive-ins and a new aspect in my life .... car hops, girls, and .... dates!

We didn't have the "Square" back then. The Fremont Mall area was mostly corn fields. Implement dealers and truck stops were not the most appealing to the teen-agers of that time.

We hung out mostly at Phil's Drive-Inn and experienced the life portrayed in the popular 70's movie, American Graffiti. We cruised Main Street, and went out to east Military Avenue for impromptu drag races to see who really had the faster car.

That's where I met Jack Plahn. Jack, along with John Busche and George Pascoe hung around with Garth Porter. Garth was a bit older than them, a skinny kid with a slight hunch back and a funny name. Garth ... whoever heard of anyone named "Garth"?!

After two years working at the Tribune, and talking with Jim Toelle, a coworker who was also my age, we realized something was about to change. Jim and I were concerned how our slightly older friends who were getting physicals and then draft notices! With the build up of forces in Vietnam, we could see it coming, and if it was indeed inevitable, Jim, myself and my other close friend, Jim Mayer decided to volunteer for the draft and get it (two years of army service) over with.

The lady at the Selective Service talked us out of that. The Army recruiter told us by enlisting, we could get our choice of schooling.

Even though Jim Mayer and I enlisted for four years in the Army Security Agency, a non-combatant unit, my first tour of duty send me straight to Vietnam.

One of the last times I remember seeing Jack was at Garth's funeral. He died of a heart attack just weeks before my enlistment. Jack, George, John, Jim Mayer, Dale Krenzer, and I were pallbearers.



After my discharge I mentioned something to mom about looking up Jack. There was a strange look on her face as she said "Didn't you hear?", "Didn't we send something in a letter?" She went off to her files of old papers and brought me the clipping of Jack's death - February 1968, the month of the infamous "TET" attacks.

Jack as an infantryman had only been in-country about three weeks before being killed. It's possible I didn't get the message as I was on temporary duty to Korea just after the Pueblo capture ... but that's another story!

In 1991 I took a trip to Washington D.C. Although the government buildings, monuments and fountains were impressive, the area of most interest to me was "THE WALL". I was intent on finding Jack's name. I made several rubbings of his name and viewed the names of the other 58,000 memorialized there.

Memories from that time in my life overwhelmed me then, and still do. Just seeing pictures of the wall can bring out emotions that are hard to hide considering the price paid by so many, so young, for something they might not have even believed in, but answered the call - "Greetings from your friends and neighbors" (the salutation on the standard draft notice). Just like Jack got.

In recent years on Memorial Day, I have placed a flag on Jack's grave. This year I noticed a man tending to flowers there. I introduced myself, and found it was Jack's dad. We reminicesed a bit about Jack. I told him how I came to know Jack and he told me what little he knew about what really happened in the war. Mr. Plahn also told me that after a year at Midland College, Jack said the draft board might as well come and get him ... and they did.

At the time I was very much convinced we were right in drawing the line at Vietnam and save the entire region from the advance of Communism. Of course, now knowing the outcome of the war and the present political climate in that area makes our second guessing much easier.

Were we right? Were the war protesters right? I don't know.

Now I, as a parent and having closely watched the youngsters of this area excel in sports, academics, and themselves graduate, think I have a better understanding of some of the protestors. I find it so hard to imagine that with all the expectations that life affords them that had they lived in times only 20 years earlier could in just a few short months, be dead on a battlefield. And maybe, just maybe, I might be seen carrying one of those protest signs myself?

As each of us went off to war we wondered about our own fate. These youth whose lives were shortened so are now the ones we honor by our presence at the wall. And Jack, I'm sorry, but we just didn't get the chance to really know you. Jack Charles Plahn - the hometown boy who didn't come home.



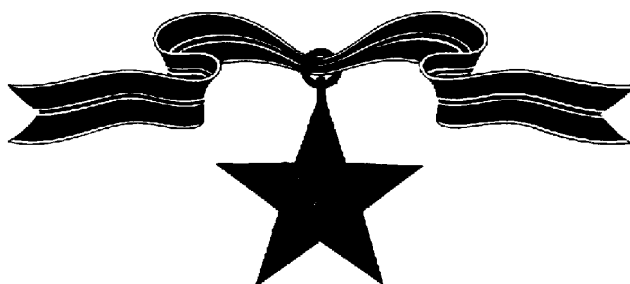
The President of the United States of America, authorized by Executive Order, August 24, 1962, has awarded the Bronze Star Medal to

**SPECIALIST FIVE VERNON W. GREUNKE  
UNITED STATES ARMY**

for meritorious service in ground operations against hostile forces:

Specialist Five Vernon W. Greunke, distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service during the period August 1966 to August 1967 while assigned as a Specialist Four, Special Identification Techniques Operator, with the Short Range Direction Finding Team No. 1 of the 372d Radio Research Group engaged in operations against hostile forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Through diligent effort he was instrumental in providing the supported commander with invaluable intelligence information. All activity in connection with this effort was conducted on the outer perimeters of Army Republic of Vietnam or Popular Forces outposts. These areas were wired, in no set format, with enemy mines and booby traps fashioned of unorthodox materials that blended in with the terrain. As daily operational procedures required that the equipment be set up in exactly the same locale, it was imperative that extreme caution and judgment be used in clearing these areas and the routes that led to them. Specialist Greunke demonstrated outstanding courage, military professionalism, and sound judgment by consistently rendering this hazardous duty on a daily basis. During his tour of duty, Specialist Greunke came under mortar fire and enemy sniper attacks on several occasions. In all instances, Specialist Greunke displayed his military prowess, competence, and inimitable fortitude. Specialist Greunke's technical proficiency, devotion to duty, and numerous contributions to the mission of the Short Range Direction Finding Team No. 1 reflect great credit on him, the United States Army Security Agency, and the United States Army.





# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 24 AUGUST 1962  
HAS AWARDED

## THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

SPECIALIST FIVE VERNON W. GREUNKE, UNITED STATES ARMY

FOR  
MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT  
IN GROUND OPERATIONS AGAINST HOSTILE FORCES

IN VIETNAM FROM AUGUST 1966 TO AUGUST 1967

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON

THIS 8TH DAY OF APRIL 19 71

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Verne L. Bowers".

VERNE L. BOWERS  
Major General, USA  
The Adjutant General



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stanley R. Rees".

SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

Recently Declassified Report From The 509th RR Group Detailing The Attack  
At Trung Lap Where Steve Masica Was Wounded

670371A

REF

LA 1372

14 June 1967

SUBJECT: [REDACTED]

INDEX D

CASUALTY STATUS:

1. Airmobile Team sustained one (1) casualty during operation Rendevous. SP4 Steven J. Masica, RA 17 721 296, received shrapnel wounds of the right elbow, left hand, lower back, both legs and feet during mortar attack on TRUNG LAP Ranger Center. On 15 March 1967, TRUNG LAP Ranger Center received two mortar attacks. The first attack occurred at 1945H hours when 30 82mm mortar rounds were received [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The second attack came at 2045H hours and approximately 15 82mm mortar rounds were received [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SP4 Masica was wounded during the second attack and was initially evacuated to the 12th Evacuation Hospital at CU CHI. SP4 Masica is recovering at the MHD 249th General Hospital APO 96267. SP4 Masica is recovering from his wounds and indications are he will sustain no permanent physical disability.

2. Additional mortar attacks on TRUNG LAP Ranger Center, THOI HOA and CU CHI resulted in no further casualties of Airmobile personnel.

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Bottom part of an apparently previously classified citation issued for our efforts "obvious effort the members of the Airmobile team exerted in support of (blacked out) reflects credit on your organization, US Forces engaged in counter-insurgency and the US Army."

Signed - Brigadier General, J.A. McChristian

2. (U) The professionalism, zeal and obvious effort the members of the Airmobile team exerted in support of [REDACTED] reflects credit on your organization, US Forces engaged in counter-insurgency and the US Army.

  
J. A. McCHRISTIAN  
Brigadier General, US Army  
ACofS, J2



**Grundy Center Reunion 1999 - Back: Michael Donahue, Russell Beller, Harry King  
Front: Vern Greunke and Maurice "Curly" Kollstedt**



**330th RADIO RESEARCH COMPANY  
PRD-1 FLY-AWAY TEAM ALPHA  
AIR MOBILE  
VIETNAM 1966-1967**

**This book is dedicated to our fallen team members,**

***Orville "Butch" Browning, Jr. & William R. Chron III***

**Our "Big Brother" - "Butch" died of throat cancer & other complications Dec. 3, 1994.**

**I regret that I missed contacting him by only six weeks!**

**Our "Little Brother" - "Bill" suffered a massive heart attack Jan. 7, 1998**

**Some of us were reunited with Bill at our 3rd Annual? reunion  
at Firebase Indy in June of 1998**