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Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam

By Richard Dewhurst

Hey, it's 104 degrees,
(40C)
and if that doesn't wipe you out,
a jammed weapon will.
Remember, guys, keep it clean
and keep your head low.
"Hi, Mom. Well,
I'm fine today.
And I hope that you're
in good shape also.
Today I am swimming,
washing and taking in the sun.
The beach is great.
The sand is white
and the sky is clear.
Boy, I wish every day
was like this,
then I wouldn't have
any problems while I'm here."
American casualties
in Vietnam,
killed and wounded
now exceed 300,000.
More than 39,000 killed
and more than 258,000 wounded.
"Dear folks, this is your
on-the-spot correspondent
in the Big 'Nam reporting.'
"Hi, honey, I had
a hell of a day yesterday."
"Dear Sue, thank you
for the wingtips.
Only one question:
Where do I wear them in Vietnam?"
"Darling, I am sitting down
to write of my love for you
and the horrors of war."
"Actually, I'm writing because I have
to, or go out of my mind.
Things happen over here
you just can't..."
"Mom, I appreciate
all of your letters.
For a while as I read your letters,

I'm a normal person.
I'm not killing people
or worried about being killed."
"Darling, believe me, I try not
to skip a day in writing you.
Whether or not I get a letter determines
if it's a good day or not."
This is London...
Switzerland calling...
...South America...
And here is the news.
Three Communist P.T. boats
attacked an American destroyer
off the coast of Vietnam
yesterday.
And today, President Johnson's
response was hard and tough.
He has ordered the U.S. Navy
to continue patrolling there,
and if they are attacked
to destroy their attackers.
To any armed attack
upon our forces
we shall reply.
To any in Southeast Asia
who ask our help
in defending their freedom,
we shall give it.
You can't win in Asia.
So I am not going to go along
with this kind of a program
in South Vietnam,
at least with my vote,
that in my judgment is going
to kill needlessly
untold numbers of American boys,
and for nothing.
"Dear Dad, well, here it is.
We've been told that our whole company
will be shipping out to Vietnam
after advanced infantry
training.
Our company commander and our
battalion and brigade commanders

told us there's no sense in trying
to fool ourselves, we're going for sure.
The only thing
that makes me mad
is how do they expect you
to tell your parents."

"I don't mind going, but there are some
guys here who just won't make it.
And I don't think
they'll make it out alive.

Your son, Bob.

P.S., tell Mom not to worry.
It's nothing I can't handle."
All right, settle down,
settle down.

"Dear Uncle and Aunt,
some people wonder why
Americans are in Vietnam.
The way I see the situation,
I would rather fight and stop
Communists in South Vietnam
than in Kincaid, Humboldt,
Blue Mound or Kansas City.
And that's just about
what it would end up being.
The price for victory is high
when life cannot be replaced.
But I think it is far better
to fight and die for freedom,
than to live under
oppression and fear.

Your nephew, Jack."

- What state are you from?

- Charlotte, North Carolina, sir.

North Carolina?

Charlotte, yeah,

- I know it well. Good luck to you, lad.

- Thank you, sir.

"Dear John, well,
in 360 days I'll be home.

Try not to worry
too much about me.

I know that will be
difficult,

but it doesn't do anyone
any good.

Love, Bobby."

"Chris, I finally got
to my unit yesterday.
Our mission is to find V.C.
and kill them.

I should be operating like this
for the next two months
before I get a chance
to take a shower and sleep in a bed.
What a life.

There are absolutely
no comforts in our job.
I carry nothing but a razor
and a bar of soap for comfort.
We wear the only clothes
we have
and wash them in rivers
and streams as we cross them.

You were right.

I managed to get myself
right in the middle of it all."

"Dear Tom, hi, how are you?
I hope all is well at home.
Everything's okay here.

My whole squad is
all a bunch of screwballs.
Eddie's running around
with an insect bomb
cursing the bugs.

The mosquitoes that come out
at night are man-eaters,
but the insect repellent
keeps them off.

It's safe in the daytime. We stand out
in the open or work on the bunker.

We can run up and down
the hill with no worries.

But at night we've got to stay
in the bunkers, as snipers sneak in.

Dennis."

"P.S., send some Kool-Aid.
The water here

tastes like shit."

I think I got
a booby trap here.

Roger Whiskey,
I have a booby trap...
trip wire tied
onto a branch,
grenade on the end of the trip wire.
Spoon is out.

"Dear Mom and Dad, the way
we move without contact
I begin to wonder
if the V.C. are even out there.
All the time
you know they are.
The great frustration is
that they don't come out and fight."

Be careful now!
Watch yourself.

"Dear Red, anyone
over here who walks
more than 50 feet
through elephant grass
should automatically
get a Purple Heart.
Try to imagine grass
possessing razor-sharp edges
eight to 15' high, so thick
as to cut visibility to one yard.
Then try to imagine
walking through it
while all around you are men possessing
the latest automatic weapons
who desperately want
to kill you.

You'd be amazed at how much
a man can age on one patrol."

"We're all scared.
One can easily see this emotion
in the eyes of each individual.
One might hide it
with his mouth,
while another might hide it
with his actions.

But there is no way
around it.
We are all scared."
Look up in the tree!
Look up in the tree!
Aw, shit!
He's over there!
I'll get you,
son of a bitch!
Go!
"My dearest Bev,
for the last week we've been waiting
for an attack,
and finally it came
in full force.
Honey, I was never so scared
in my whole life.
We got hit by 12 mortars
and rockets.
A mortar landed
about 30' from me.
And I was lucky enough
to have my head down.
But the sergeant
next to me didn't,
and I think
he lost an eye."
I've been hit!
Ahhh, I've been hit!
"This was my first
real look at war.
And it sure was
an ugly sight.
I helped carry
some of the wounded away.
And, boy, I sure hope
I don't have to do that again.
It was an experience you can never
explain in a million words."
I've got a lot of pain
in that left ankle.
That's a good sign.
It's that sharp pain you get
when you've got nerves, you know?

It's that sharp nerve pain,
burning, burning.
They're gonna do
all they can to save that leg.
I know.
I know there's not much left
because I was carrying
that damn thing in my hands
all the way back.
I was afraid the whole thing
was gonna come off.
I said, "Hell, they can't be
right around in here."
So, I didn't call bombs
and nap in on these people.
- Mm-hmm.
- But that's where they were.
I'm sure now that
that's where they were.
God damn it, I...
I hate to put nap...
and...
and on these women
and children.
I just didn't do it.
I just said, "They can't be there."
"Dear Vern,
I talked to Danny,
the man who lost his leg
this morning.
He's a mean bastard.
I've never seen such
bravery and guts before,
and I'm stunned by it.
You should have seen
my men fight.
They were going after wounded men
no one else'd go after.
You should have seen
my brave men.
It'd give you
goose-pimples."
This is Cam Ranh Bay
on the South China Sea.

It is said to be one of the finest
natural harbors in the world.

It will in time be
the chief port of entry
for American men
and materiel in Vietnam.

It is taking on
a look of permanence.
And the activity going on
all around

suggests that
we have recognized
there is not going to be
an easy, painless
or quick way
out of this struggle.

And so, during the past year
our military forces
have grown from 25,000
to nearly 200,000 men.

The possibility of 300,000 men
here by spring
is now considered likely.

"Dear folks, car, bird,
house, et cetera,
new jungle fatigues,
boots, cooling fans,
typewriters, napkins,
silverware,
grass seeds,
all trickle into supply
and are dispersed
as needed.

Jeez, you know,
this is an 'in' war,
one of the hippest things
in this whole world.

I've read where officers
were quoted as saying,
'This is the only war
we've got.

Don't knock it.'

This war is not going to end
by any one single battle

or combination of battles.
It could be a situation
that could drag out for some time.
Certainly, as the war gets
more intense...
and I feel that it will
in coming the months...
we will suffer
more American casualties.
"Dearest Bev,
last night we had the V.C.
all around us.
Bev, don't ever tell
Mother this,
but at times I feel
I will never come home.
The V.C. are getting
much stronger.
So I think this war is going to get
worse before it gets better.
The days
are fairly peaceful.
But the nights
are pure hell.
I look up at the stars
and it's so hard to believe
that the same stars shine over you
in such a different world
as you live in.
All my love, Al."
"Hello, dear folks.
It's going to be hard
for me to write this,
but maybe it will make me
feel better.
Yesterday
my company was hit
while looking for V.C.
They told me that they needed
someone to identify a boy
they'd just brought in.
It was very bad they said.
So I went into the tent
and there on the table

was the boy.
His face was all cut up
and blood all over it.
His mouth was open.
His eyes were both open.
It was a mess.
I couldn't really
identify him.
So I went outside
while they went through
his stuff.
They found his I.D. card
and dog tags.
I went in and they told me
his name...
Rankin."
"I cried, 'No, God,
it can't be.'
But sure enough,
after looking
at his bloody face again,
I could see it was him.
It really hit me hard
because he was one
of the nicest guys around.
He was
one of my good friends.
No other K.I.A. or W.I.A.
hit me like that.
I knew most of them,
but this was the first body
I ever saw.
And being my friend,
it was too much.
After I left the place
I sat down and cried.
I couldn't stop it.
I didn't think I ever cried
so much in my life.
I can still see
his face now.
I'll never forget it.
Today the heavens
cried for him.

It started raining
at noon today
and has now
finally just stopped
after 10 hours of the hardest rain
I've ever seen.
Love, Richard."
What we've just seen,
men fighting for their lives
in the jungles
of South Vietnam,
is what has aroused
such apprehension and debate
throughout the world.
War is brutal,
and the reaction to it is strong.
This week hundreds of people
demonstrated against it.
Others have voiced
their concern by question and dissent.
Public opinion polls
indicate
that the dissenters are
in the minority,
but their number
is growing,
and they are starting
to take more positive actions.
On Saturday,
a march to show solidarity
with American servicemen
in Vietnam was held in New York City.
The marchers carried
American flags.
Flags were hung
from apartment house windows.
Against this background
the battle continues,
and in it this week,
274 Americans were killed,
1,748 wounded,
18 listed as missing.
There's no end to the war
in sight.

"Dear Ma,
Vietnam has my feelings
on a seesaw.
This country is
so beautiful.
When the sun is shining
on the mountains,
farmers in their rice paddies
with their water buffalo,
and palm trees,
monkeys, birds,
and even
the strange insects,
for a fleeting moment
I'm not in a war zone at all,
just on vacation.
But still missing you
and the family.
There are a few kids
who hang around,
some with no parents.
I feel so sorry
for them.
I do things to make them laugh,
and they call me 'dinky dau.'
That means crazy."
- Okay!
- Okay!
"I hope that's one reason
why we're here,
to secure
a future for them.
Your son, George."
"Dear Mom and Dad,
you know that joke about
how hard it is to tell
the good guys
from the bad guys over here?
Well, it's funny in Bronxville
or Dorset, but it isn't over here.
The enemy in our area
of operation
is a farmer by day
and V.C. by night.

Every man we pick up says,
'Me Vietnamese number one.
V.C. number 10.'
So we have to let him go.
By the way,
number one means real good,
and number 10
means real bad.
Other handy phrases are:
'titi,' very little;;
'boo koo,'
which means very much;
'didi mow,'
get out of here.
What more do you need
to know?"
Didi mow.
Go, go.
"Love always, Mike."
Roger.
1st Battalion's coming in.
All right!
Come on, get out of here.
Come on, get up!
"Dear Red,
the frightening thing
about it all
is that it's so very easy
to kill in war.
There's no remorse,
no theatrical washing of the hands
to get rid of non-existent blood,
not even any regrets.
Get killed because
that little son of a bitch
is doing his best
to kill you?
When it happens you're more afraid
than you've ever been in your life.
And you desperately
want to live
to go home,
to get drunk,
or walk down the street

on a date again."
"Dear Mom and Dad,
1st Cavalry moved in here
a few weeks ago,
and what a rowdy bunch.
These guys have been out
in the mud in the boonies for months.
They just wandered around
staring at everything,
trying out all
the chairs,
flushing the toilets.
It was funny to watch."
"But I guess when you've had
to do without clean clothes,
good food and shelter
for as long as they have
you might believe
your eyes either.
Oh, God, it must be awful
for them out there.
Love always, me."
"Dear Mom and Dad,
and everyone...
oh, I had my first baptizing
with Saigon tea."
"This is the usual approach
of a bar hog.
You walk in and sit down
at the bar.
Before you get to order a drink,
a girl will be sitting next to you
and she'll begin with...
'Hello, what is your name?
Would you like a drink?'
You order one.
Then she'll say,
'I've not see you here before.
You're very handsome.
You look young.
How old are you?'
They usually like you to be 21 and 23,
but I tell them 19.
Then they say,

'You baby-san!'
Which means, 'Have you ever been
to bed with a woman?''
"A baby-san's a virgin.
Ha, come on!"
I wish I could report to you
that the conflict is
almost over.
This I cannot do.
We face more costs,
more loss,
and more agony,
for the end is not yet.
I cannot promise you
that it will come this year...
or come next year.
Our adversary still believes,
I think, tonight
that he can go on fighting
longer than we can,
and longer than we
and our allies
will be prepared to stand up
and resist.
Roger. If they come up
to where you are,
I'll be going at them
in the same direction.
I want to try
to flank them.
That's why I'm asking
what direction you're firing in.
It sounds to me like
you're firing east. Over.
This is Elmo, did not copy.
Repeat, over.
What direction
are you firing in?
- Come in on the other flank. Over.
- That's affirmative.
You can fire that way.
Negative! Don't fire any way.
We're surrounded by friendlies.
Return incoming fire

from there!

- Returning fire, sir!

- What did he say?

Escort platoon, they're trying
to overrun these woods.

"Dear Madeline,
it's good to have someone
to tell your troubles to.
I can't tell them to my parents
or Darlene 'cause they worry too much,
but I tell you truthfully
I doubt if I'll come out of this alive.
In my original squad
I'm the only one left unharmed."

"In my platoon there's
only 13 of us.

It seems every day another young guy,
18 or 19 years old
like myself,
is killed in action.

Please, help me, Mad.

I don't know if I should stop
writing my parents and Darlene or what."

Come on!

"Oh, and one more favor,
I'd like the truth now.

Has Darlene been
faithful to me?

I know she's dating
other guys,
but does she still
love me best?

See if it's God's will.

I have to make it out
of Vietnam though,
because I'm lucky.

I hope.

Ha ha.

Love, Ray."

Okay, watch out.

Okay, up!

I've got it.

"Dear Doug,
we were cut off

from our base
and requested a helicopter
evacuation with a priority.
We were
all in sad shape now.
I know that at one point,
my feet about to crack open,
my stomach knotted by hunger
and diarrhea,
my back feeling like a mirror made
of nerves shattered in a million pieces
by my flack jacket pack, and extra
mortars and machine-gun ammo...
my hands a mass of hamburger
from thorn cuts,
and my face a mass of welts
from mosquitoes,
I desired greatly
to throw down everything and sob.
I remember a captain,
an aviator, who observing
a group of grunts
toasting the infantry
in a bar said,
'You damned infantry think
you're the only people who exist.'
You're damned right
we do."
- How many men did you have?
- Ten, sir.
- How many came out of the battle?
- Four, sir.
- Four. Rest of them killed or wounded?
- One killed.
One killed, rest wounded. Some of the
wounded will be back for duty, I assume?
Yes, sir. We got them all out.
All of them came back.
- Uh-huh. All your weapons too?
- Yes, sir.
What were
you doing, lad?
Sir, I was a medic
on a point.

- Mm-hmm. Think you saved some lives?

- Yes, sir.

"September 1967.

David, morale's very high
in spite of the fact that most men think
the war's being run incorrectly.

One of the staggering facts
is that most men here believe
we will not win the war,
and yet they stick
their necks out every day,
and carry on as if
they were fighting
for the continental security
of the United States."

Were you men in the battle? I know you
were, weren't you, Fitzgerald?

- Yes, sir.

- What did you do?

What did I do? I ran around and shot
just like everybody else.

What did you shoot?

What type of weapon?

- I'm on an M-60, sir.

- An M-60.

"We were taking
a fierce beating over here.
They don't have
enough men.

We must have more men.

At least twice as many,
or we are gonna get
the piss kicked out of us this winter
when the rains come."

Ever since Hill 80-81 and 86-20
you feel something
in the air...

uh, about the build-up.

I don't know. You can almost feel them
working around you at night.

"Dear Ellen,
we really have been preparing
for this all-out offensive by the gooks.
I guess you might have read

about it in the papers.
There's supposed
to be a truce in Vietnam
during the Chinese
Tet New Year.
Khe Sanh is the only area
not observing it
because of the build-up.
I'll try to write again soon.
Love, Jim."
Incoming!
"Dear Mom and Dad,
I guess by now you're
worried sick over my safety.
Khe Sanh village
was overrun,
but not the combat base.
The base was hit and hit hard
by artillery, mortars and rockets.
All my gear and the rest
of the company's gear was destroyed.
I am unhurt
and have not been touched.
But with all the death
and destruction I've seen
in the past week
I've aged greatly.
I feel like an old man now.
I've seen enough of war
and its destruction.
I'm scared by it,
but not scared enough to quit.
I'm a Marine and I hope someday
to be a good one.
Please pray for us all
here at Khe Sanh.
Your son and Marine,
Kevin."
It's Tet,
the Oriental New Year,
and it's a new war.
The Vietcong
simultaneously attacked
just about every major city

and town in South Vietnam.
In one day, they'd increased
the scope of the war dramatically.
Howard Tuckner was there.
The war came to Saigon
early in the morning
of January 31st.
The first target was the symbol
of the American presence in Vietnam,
the United States embassy.
About 20 Vietcong had
invaded the embassy compound
and were now battling American
Marines and military police.
There are two men
over in that direction.
The Vietcong had
penetrated to the center
of what was supposed to be
the most secure city in Vietnam.
What's the hardest part of it?
Trying to know where they are,
that's the worst.
Riding around, they run in the sewers,
in the gutters, anywhere.
They can be anywhere. Just hope you
can stay alive from day to day.
Everybody just wants
to go back home and go to school.
- That's about it.
- Have you lost any friends?
Quite a few.
We lost one the other day.
The whole thing just stinks,
really.
Awful of sick it.
I'll be so glad to go home.
I don't know.
This is the worst area we've been in
since I've been
in Vietnam.
Do you think
it's worth it?
Yeah...

I don't know.
They say we're fighting
for something. I don't know.
General, there's a lot
speculation on the Hill
that ultimately we may have to use
nuclear weapons.
What can you say
on that subject?
I do not think that nuclear weapons
will be required
to defend Khe Sanh.
Incoming!
Marines just sitting here
taking it like dopes.
Yeah,
that's what gets me.
That's not they way
we're supposed to...
We're supposed to be
hard chargers.
We're supposed to
go out and get them.
If they pulled a good search
and destroy, we could clear them away.
I don't know.
You get out there 50',
you're lost already
in the jungle.
It looks pretty clear
from here, but...
It's just a constant siege
here.
And you don't know exactly
when the incoming's coming.
And you don't know how much
it's gonna be from day to day.
And...
How would you compare it to other places
that you've served in Vietnam?
Well, this is the worst
I've been at.
Most of the time
you can't get anything done

because there's
too much incoming.
You can't get out
much at all.
It's just too dangerous
to get out.
And, um...
it just gets on your nerves,
that's all.
Either that, or just have the B-52s
go up one side, back.
The only thing they hit
is the ground.
"Dear Dad and Mom,
well, they haven't
gotten me yet.
I'm sitting here
in my new bunker underground
with many sandbags and metal skids
between me and the surface.
But the men and I will be
all right no matter what comes.
We are all well
and morale is high.
You know I've never really
regretted coming over here,
even yesterday
when my favorite turd got it,
the little guy with
my platoon sergeant's radiomen.
I really loved the kid.
He was the hardest
little worker,
and never complained.
Do anything for you.
After they had
taken him away,
it almost kicked my ass,
as the saying goes.
I almost cracked."
Ready? Fire!
"But there are 75 others
to worry about
and I snapped myself out of my cheap

civilian bull and got back to work."
"You learn every day
the mistakes you're making
and the biggest one is to get too
attached to any one person.
Over here, at least.
Things happen so quickly. One minute
he's fine and the next he's not.
But old Don is pretty lucky.
Knock on wood.
And home I'll come,
I'm sure.
Maybe after we wipe
them up here
they'll go to the bargaining tables
and we can come home...
all of us.
Love, Don."
"Dear Aunt Fanny,
this morning one of my men
turned to me
and pointed a hand
filled with cuts and scratches
at a plant
with soft red flowers,
and said,
'That's the first plant I've seen today
that didn't have thorns
on it.'
The plant was also
representative of Vietnam.
It is a country
of thorns and cuts,
of guns and marauding,
of little hope and of great faith.
Yet in the midst of it all,
a beautiful thought,
a gesture and even person
can arise among it
waving bravely at the debt
that pulls down upon it.
Someday this place will be
burned by napalm,
and the red flower will crackle up

and die among the thorns.
Yet that flower
will always live
in the memory of a tired
wet Marine.
With American sons
in the field far away,
I shall not seek...
and I will not accept
the nomination of my party
for another term
as your president.
What happened
to you?
Oh, I got kind of
messed up.
My unit was dropping...
caught some, uh...
well, I don't...
exactly, I don't know
if it was a fire base.
They was always shooting.
And then I was out
pulling guard.
And some hot rounds
got too hot.
And they started
getting close.
The next thing I know,
I couldn't hear out of this ear.
They kind of blowed it out. Next thing
I know, I was catching shrap metal.
And then that was it.
Then they started evacuating me out.
This is my fifth hospital
they put me in.
I don't know if they're
gonna send me home or what.
I sure hope they do 'cause I've had it.
I don't want no more Vietnam.
"Dear Mom and Dad,
Peach and Fuzzy,
as I suppose you can see
by my new stationery

this is not
my normal letter.
While walking
down the road one day
in the merry, merry month
of September
my squad got into a hell of a fray
and lost one member.
Mm-hmm. Me.
I'm all right.
I am all right, I'm all right!
Carbine round hit me
where it would do the most good,
right in the butt.
It hit no bone,
blood vessels, nerves
or anything else of importance.
Except my pride.
It was, however,
a little bit closer to my pecker
than was comfortable,
but that's as good as ever.
Although, it's now going through
a year's hibernation."
"So I'm lying in bed here
and it comes time for
that most thrilling event
when the general gives out
the Purple Hearts.
All in all, it was a dreadful
performance by everyone.
But in a way,
a classic stereotype,
one of the large number
of stereotyped characters
and situations I have watched
acted out, much to my growing concern.
They finally left me
sicker than I was before,
and with a medal
I never wanted anyway.
Love, Sandy."
"Dear Mom, it's official.
Would you believe

a Silver Star?
But I'm no hero.
Heroes are for the late show.
I was just trying to help a couple
of guys who needed help.
That's all.
The heroes over here
are the guys trying to do their job
and get home
from this useless war.
Love, Phil."
"Dear Dad,
I've been listening to the Vietnam
radio's news report special
on the assassination
of Martin Luther King in Memphis."
"But now I have
a story to tell.
On Friday March 29
in our A.O. just south of Hue,
we received small arms fire
from a village."
"My platoon leader Gary Scott
and one other man were killed.
I was very close
to Lieutenant Scott.
I was his radio operator.
He was a fine man,
a good leader.
Yet he could not
understand
the whys of this conflict
which killed him."
Ready!
Aim!
Fire!
"They will say he died
for his country,
keeping it free."
"Negative."
"This country has no gain
that I can see, Dad.
We're fighting, dying for a people
who resent our being over here.

Oh, I'll probably get
a Bronze Star
for the firefight.
Lieutenant Scott will get
a Silver Star.
That will help me get
a job someday,
and it is supposed to suffice
for Lieutenant Scott's life.
I guess
I'm bitter now, Dad.
This war is all wrong.
Your loving son, Phil."
"Debbie, my dear honeycake,
my health
is much better now.
The more I dream of the love
we have shared,
the more I love you.
These dreams make feel
as if I'm still with you.
Please keep a full and complete diary
so we can reminisce.
Debbie, I'll surely have
much love and lots of joy
with you in our future.
I'll remember your youthful
and lovely face always.
Please pray for me,
Debbie.
Alan."
"Merry Christmas,
my darling.
Indeed for me
a very Merry Christmas this year.
My values have changed
over these many long years.
I've searched
very carefully
for lasting happiness,
for what life
really means to me,
and I found it.
I found it in a family

in a home,
the dream home we'll soon
build together.
I found it in the beautiful New England
that I love so well,
that I miss so much.
But most of all, Debbie,
I found it in you."

"Dear Mom,
well, I'm spending
Christmas Eve
in good old bunker 110.
I've got
guard duty again.
I always wondered what it
must be like to be at war
and far away from home
on Christmas.

Now I know.

I can imagine how Pop felt
during World War 11.

Love and kisses,
Ray."

Vietnam, this is where it's at.
It's what's happening,
or to put it another way,
who needs it?

"Dear Mom and Dad,
on Christmas
the whole company was loaded
onto a two and a half ton truck
and carted off to Bien Hoa
to see Bob Hope.

Imagine! I've looked
at Bob Hope for years
entertaining the troops,
and never once thought
that he'd someday
be entertaining me!"

This is Miss World,
from India.

- He missed his cue.

- This is Miss World from India.

How.

"Dear family,
Christmas out there
was really something.
At midnight
on Christmas Eve,
the mortars
and tracks and tanks
and all of the
1st Cavalry Artillery
sent up an absolutely
thunderous barrage
of high-altitude
flares.
It was quite a show.
I believe few people
have seen fireworks like these.
Then, when all had
quieted down
and the flares
had gone out,
the whole area calmed and hushed
and we could just hear
one of the fire bases
start singing
'Silent Night.'
Then it was picked up
by the other positions
around us and by everyone.
It echoed through
the valley for a long time
and died out slowly.
I'm positive
it has seldom been sung
with more gut-feeling
and pure homesick emotion...
a strange
and beautiful thing
in this terribly
death-ridden land.
It is something
I will always remember.
Love, Peter."
For the average frontline
infantry soldier in Vietnam,

war is a bore,
interrupted only
by moments of sheer terror
when men die.
Contact with the enemy
seems to be more infrequent
than ever before.
The soldiers like that.
They sense,
rightly or not,
that the war
is almost over.
I'd rather go out myself
and not find anything...
come back in
empty-handed.
Why is that?
The object of the war
is usually to find
people and kill 'em.
Yeah, but that's not my...
I just don't care
too much about that.
"Dear Tom,
about morale?
Americans do have
many things to be proud of.
Among these is the ability to create
a means of survival
in an absurd situation.
Because the tour here
is one year long,
you're able to count
the days until 'DEROS'...
'Date Eligible
to Return from Overseas.'
You're able to say
'This time next year,
I will be home.'
After careful consideration
with my senior civilian
and military advisors,
and in full consultation
with the government of Vietnam,

I have decided to reduce
the authorized troop
ceiling in Vietnam
to 484,000 by December 15.
Defense Secretary
Melvin Laird
said the U.S.
3rd Marine Division
will be one of the units involved
in President Nixon's
most recent
redeployment order.
This afternoon,
the U.S. Command announced
departing units

will include:

supporting elements
of the 1st Marine Airwing
plus the 3rd Brigade
of the 82nd Airborne.
"Dear civilians, friends,
draft-dodgers, et cetera,
in the very near future,
the undersigned will
once more be in your midst,
dehydrated and demoralized
to take his place again
as a human being
with the well-known forms
of freedom and justice for all,
engage in life, liberty,
and the somewhat delayed
pursuit of happiness.
In making your
joyous preparations
to welcome him back
into organized society,
you might take
certain steps
to make allowances
for the past 12 months.
Abstain from saying anything
about powdered eggs,

dehydrated potatoes,
fried rice, fresh milk
or ice cream.
Do not be alarmed if he should jump up
from the dinner table
and rush to the garbage can
to wash his dish with a toilet brush.
Also, if it should
start raining,
pay no attention to him
if he pulls off his clothes,
grabs a bar of soap and a towel,
and runs outside for a shower.
Pretend not to notice if,
at a restaurant, he calls the waitress
'number one girl,'
and uses his hat
as an ashtray.
Be watchful if he is
in the presence of women,
especially
a beautiful woman.
Last, but not least,
send no more mail
to the A.P.O.,
fill the icebox with beer,
get the civvies out of the mothballs,
fill that car with gas
and get the women and children
off the street, baby,
because the kid
is coming home!"
Come to see me 'cause I will
be looking out for you.
- Yeah.
- I'll be lookin' for you.
- No sweat, man. Take it easy.
- Take care.
I feel that the 9th Marine...
they have been
doing a good job
for quite a while now.
It is about time
for them to go home,

but I would also like for
the rest of the men in Vietnam
to go home just as much
as the 9th Marines.
I would like to see
all this end.
My friend,
he would've, uh,
been pulled out
of the bush here
two days
after his death.
And it just seems
kind of a shame
that he died needlessly.
Get down, come on.
"Hey, brother,
this place is sort of
getting to me.
I've been seeing
too many guys getting messed up
and I still can't
understand it.
It's not that I can't
understand this war.
It's just that I can't
understand war, period."
"You just sort of sit back
and ask yourself
'Why?
What the hell is this
going to prove?'
And, man, I'm still looking
for the answer."
"It's a real bitch."
"I just can't believe
half of the shit I've seen
here so far."
- How many bodies...
- How many did you see killed?
Myself, I saw
approximately 100 bodies... dead bodies.
That's a conservative
estimate now.

I know one group
specifically,
they had rounded up
about 20, maybe 30 people
and most of 'em were
women and children.
There might have been
a few old men in the group.
But they'd rounded them up
right over a ditch bank
and shot 'em all
with a machine-gun
and left 'em in the ditch.
"Dear John,
the physical and human damage
done over the last few years
is much greater
than I realized,
not just the dead,
but the G.I.s who can't talk
in coherent sentences
anymore.
Bomb and artillery craters,
the ruined villages,
these things you can understand
as the byproduct of war.
But I can't accept the fact
of the human damage.
I feel like I'm at the bottom
of a great sewer."
"Dear Mrs. Perko,
what can I say to fill
the void?
I know flowers and letters
are appropriate,
but it's hardly enough.
I'm Johnny Boy.
And I'm sick both physically
and mentally.
I smoke too much.
I'm constantly coughing, never eat,
always sit around
in a daze.
All of us are

in this general condition.
We're all afraid to die,
and all we do is count
the days till we go home.
When we go to Saigon we spend
all our money on women and beer.
We're all in desperate need
of love."
"Some nights I don't sleep.
I can't stand being alone at night.
The guns don't bother me.
I can't hear them anymore.
I want to hold my head
between my hands,
run screaming away
from here."
"I'm hollow, Mrs. Perko.
I'm a shell.
When I'm scared I rattle.
I'm no one to tell you about your son.
I can't, I'm sorry.
Johnny Boy."
Come, say it.
"Hi all,
Christmas came and went...
marked only by tragedy.
Christmas morning
I got off duty
and opened
all my packages alone.
I missed you all so much.
I cried myself to sleep.
It's ridiculous.
I seem to be crying
all the time lately.
I hate this place.
This is now
the seventh month
of death, destruction
and misery.
I'm tired of going
to sleep and listening
to outgoing and incoming
rockets,

mortars, artillery.

I'm sick

of facing every day

a new bunch of children

ripped to pieces.

They're just kids.

18, 19.

Their whole lives

ahead of them cut off.

I'm sick to death of it.

I've got to get

out of here.

Peace, Linda."

Kent State University

in Ohio has had campus violence

for three nights,

causing the National Guard

to be called in.

And today the guardsmen opened fire

on the students, killing four of them,

two young men

and two young women.

The National Guard was called in over

the weekend by Governor James Rhodes.

Today when 1500 students

started an antiwar rally

on the commons,

the guardsmen

surrounded them.

Then when some students

started throwing rocks,

the guard moved in

with tear-gas.

"Dear Editor...

This letter is

from the men

who daily risk their lives

in Vietnam.

In regards to the recent killings

at Kent State University,

we are... we are sorrowful

and mourn the dead.

But it grieves us no end

and shoots pain into our hearts

is that the, quote,
biggest upset is over
the kids who got killed
at Kent State, unquote!
So why don't your hearts
cry out and shed a tear
for the 40-plus thousand
red-blooded Americans
and brave, fearless,
loyal men
who have
given their lives?
During my past 18 months
in hell,
I've held my friends during
their last gasping seconds
before they succumbed
to death.
Do not judge us wrongly.
We are not pleading
for your praise.
All we ask is
for our great nation to support us,
to help us end the war.
Damn it!
Save our lives."
At Clark Air Force Base
in the Philippines
there were no speeches,
no bands, no bunting.
Homecoming was gentle.
The first man off was
Captain Jeremiah Denton,
a man who had been
in prison so long
his own teenage son
had grown up,
gone to Vietnam himself,
served and gone home again.
And only now was his father
coming home
after eight years.
We are honored
to have had

the opportunity
to serve our country
under difficult
circumstances.

We are profoundly grateful
to our Commander-in-Chief
and to our nation
for this day.

- God bless America.

- God bless America.

"Dear Bill,

I came to this
black wall again
to see
and touch your name:

William R. Stocks.

And as I do,

I wonder if anyone ever
stops to realize

that next to your name
on this black wall
is your mother's heart...

a heart broken

15 years ago today

when you lost your life
in Vietnam.

And as I look

at your name,

I think of how many, many times

I used to wonder

how scared and homesick

you must have been

in that strange country

called Vietnam.

And if and how

it might have changed you,

for you were the most

happy-go-lucky kid in the world,

hardly ever sad

or unhappy.

And until the day I die,

I will see you

as you laughed at me

even when I was

very mad at you,
and the next thing I knew
we were laughing together.
But on this past
New Year's Day,
I talked by phone to a friend of yours
from Michigan
who spent
your last Christmas
and the last four months
of your life with you.
Jim told me how you died,
for he was there
and saw
the helicopter crash.
He told me how your jobs
were like sitting ducks.
They would send you men out
to draw the enemy into the open
and then they would send in
the big guns
and planes to take over.
He told me how after a while
over there
instead of a yellow streak,
the men got a mean streak
down their backs.
Each day
the streak got bigger
and the men became meaner.
Everyone but you, Bill.
He said you how stayed the same
happy-go-lucky guy
that you were
when you arrived in Vietnam.
And he said how
you of all people
should have never been
the one to die.
How lucky you were
to have him for a friend.
And how lucky he was
to have had you.
They tell me the letters I write to you

and leave here at this memorial
are waking others up
to the fact
that there is still
much pain left
from the Vietnam War.
But this I know,
I would rather to have had
you for 21 years
and all the pain
that goes with losing you
then never to have had you
at all.
Mom. "

Sync, fix: