



A photo in a Mekong Delta waterway

## **A Navy / Marine 'Combat' Dentist in Vietnam**

**Some of us who served  
just did our jobs and  
wrote letters home**

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'Combat Dentist'**



This is meant as a history of my time in the military as a dentist right after graduation from dental school. I thought that my grandchildren might get a kick out of reading it some day. My memories including 8 mm home movies are approaching historical, as they are now over 50 years old. I did a presentation one evening at a volunteer meeting at the Museum of Flight in Seattle. They videotaped the presentation and placed it on youtube.com the video is of marginal quality. The narration is clear. It can be seen at;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghrQOpbBiX8&index=10&list=PL05BDN7vYdtrM7ih5SZcTvvzuMfPXpC3r&t=0s>

The Vietnam War was a time in America that can best be described as chaotic. We had a draft that you could avoid if you stayed in college; found a Dr. who would diagnose you as having heel spurs; you joined the Texas Air National Guard; or you went off to Oxford to study. Toward the end of the war, we had a draft lottery. Yearly, numbers were drawn that correlated to the days of a year. If your birthdate was selected early, you were drafted.

We had close to 60,000 casualties in Vietnam. The Vietnamese military and civilian populations probably had over 2 million casualties. There is evidence that African-Americans had a disproportionate risk of dying in combat. At one time close to 20% of combat casualties were African-American while 10% were white. Some changes were made and those exposed to combat more closely reflected the general population percentages. I have the greatest respect for the men and women who were daily combat, were wounded or died and their families. Three battalions of Marines kept me alive by providing security for our beachhead. I will for the rest of my life be thankful for their skill and courage.

As a dentist I was in about the safest possible situation I could be in considering I was in Vietnam. Nonetheless, there were some risks and my parents worried about me. To help them understand that I was relatively safe, I wrote home often to explain about what I was doing and what was happening where I was. Mom kept all these letters and battalion newsletters that I also sent home. I found them a few years ago in her effects that had been packed away along with photos and family records. The letters helped me put a date on some of the events I described. Unfortunately, I did not date many of the letters.

I have been critical of some of the Battalion's procedures and officers. One has to realize that with the exception of the Commanding Officer, Executive Officer and Operations Officer we were all brand new at this being officers. None had ever served in a war zone. Most had a 3-month Officer Candidate School. I had 30 days of charm school of how to wear a Naval uniform, who to salute, how to have a hail and farewell party. We dentists were either smarter than the others or they decided we were un-trainable. So, they did not waste a lot of time on us. My criticisms come from that of an almost civilian / very untrained Naval officer. Hopefully you will see some of our adventures as somewhat humorous. As you will discover, I am not a great writer.

I will forever be beholding to the Marines. I spent a 7 or 8 months with them at Camp Pendleton and they provided security for us at Chu Lai and when we would go out into the villages to do dentistry. Of my 24 months on active duty I spend more time with the Marines than the Navy. This has given me an identity crisis. Was I a Marine or Naval Officer? I joined the Navy but spent the majority of my time with Marines. I stand for the Marine hymn and recognize the "Anchors away."

This is an account of one person's perspective and adventures as a young man who found himself in Vietnam. All young men need adventures and this was mine.



Advance 50 years. All of a sudden there has been a movement to welcome home Vietnam Veterans. The Museum of Flight in Seattle is developing a park dedicated to welcoming home Vietnam Vets. There is a B-52 that has been restored as a centerpiece for the park. It will be free. No admission will be necessary to visit. They are developing a walkway with plaques in memory of those who were there. I did write letters to the Museum Board and management of the museum that maybe there should be some icons for those who served in the Army, Marines, Navy and yes maybe the Seabees. In addition, I suggested anyone who was awarded a medal of honor should have a plaque at no cost to him or her or their family.

They did have a wonderful dinner ceremony where those us who had served were honored. Mariana and I were guests of another docent. It was a very expensive evening and not many of the ground troops were there.

It has started to be a custom on Veteran's day for school celebrations to have some vets come talk to the school children. Once in a while at other meetings, Vets may be asked to stand. I take all these with a rather mixed feelings. For 50 years we were first vilified for serving in Vietnam. Many of us were advised it would be better not to mention we had been there. Eventually, we were just ignored. I got use to that. Now it is mildly uncomfortable to be asked to stand and be recognized, or to have someone come up and thank me for serving.

This attitude is at least partially because I came home with no disabling physical or mental injuries. The folks who should be thanked are those who came home with disabilities or the families of those who did not come home. Any of those who served in combat, going through the jungles and rice paddies deserve recognition and thanks. They did a very difficult and dangerous job, a job that was asked of them by their country.

It has been said that a Veteran is an individual who once wrote a blank check to the United States of America for every of value up to and including their life.

The ones that came home and found they were 4 years behind their high school peers in their chosen careers, deserve a thank you and some points toward government jobs where they are in competition with those who did not spend time in the military.

The City of Seattle has taken this advantage away from vets who apply for jobs, particularly those who served in combat. As was stated by several Seattle Council members, "They are trained killers we do not want them employed by the city."

I sponsored a plaque for the Seabee Stat Team 1106 Medal of Honor honoree CM3 Marvin G. Shields. I can think of no one more deserving. He grew up in Gardner and Port Townsend WA, where he is buried. I stopped by his memorial, a tombstone with the Medal of Honor engraved along side of the Seabee emblem. There were a number of empty beer bottles at the base of the monument. Obviously some of his high school classmates come by to lift one in his honor. I could not stand there without snapping a salute to honor to this very brave man and fellow Seabee.

I am kind of sentimental toward those who served in Vietnam.



The name of this discussion nearly was, The Wishbone War. This came from a naval 2<sup>nd</sup> class corpsman, Ronald Coleman, one of our medics. There was a scar on the mountains to the West of our Camp in the shape of a wishbone. Much of what I write is somewhat humorous. Time has a tendency to blunt the bad memories. We lost three men, one to malaria, one to meningitis and another to drowning. We had several men wounded. This is in no way meant to make light of what happened to these fine Seabees. There were several hundred Marines lost protecting us. I have nothing but the greatest respect and admiration for the Seabees I served with and the Marines who were there to keep us safe so we could build the airfield.

I did not put in 12-hour days 7 days a week other than the fact that I was the dentist and was on call 24 hours a day. It was a fine bunch of men I served with. They all went beyond what could have been expected of them and preformed beyond even their own expectations. They went ashore as "Boys" some just out of high school and came home "men" knowing they could complete any job they took on.

The chronology of my story is approximate. My memory was of incidents I had been involved in or knew about. I could not put a date on most of them. I wrote home often, sometimes a couple of times a week. I wanted my parents to know I was OK.

I discovered my mother had kept all the letters and battalion newsletters along with some newspaper clippings. Some of the letters were dated. I combined my memories and the letters along with the newsletters. So the dates and events are approximate except for some events that were important enough to make Wikipedia. When I know a date it will be part of the letter. All letters were "Dear Mom and Dad," sometimes Pearl and Ken, my sister and brother-in-law. All letters were signed, "Love Fred." I did leave out a lot of personal stuff that was in the letters. What would you like me to bring home, sizes, colors etc.? ***The letters will be in bold italics.***



About a month before going off to Okinawa with my father at SeaTac Airport.

I had gone ashore at Chu Lai Vietnam in May 7 of 1965. I was a dentist with a battalion of Seabees, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion - 10, NMCB-10 or for short MCB-10. Seabees or CBs are interchangeable. Up until we went to Okinawa in March of 1965, MCB-10 tended to be the screw-up battalion. If there was an average or lower officer or enlisted person they tended to be put in 10. MCB-10 was then given jobs that were not too easy to screw-up. The pacific overseas Seabee missions were rotated through the various west coast battalions.

In 1965 it was the men of 10's turn to be the deployed as a ready battalion. The plan was to do public work jobs on Okinawa, building, paving, wiring and plumbing jobs. As luck would have it, Vietnam began to heat up. MCB-10 went to Okinawa and two months later to Vietnam. The men worked 7-days a week, 12-hour days. I was told 50 years later that for their accomplishments, the battalion was awarded a "E" for excellence for the job they did in landing, getting an airfield built in record time, building fuel farms, helicopter pads and helping with numerous other camps. We did qualify for several medals but somehow my medals never caught up with me.



How did I end up in Vietnam? I joined the Naval Reserve while in dental school. I had a dental school classmate that convinced me that the Naval uniform was the best looking uniform and would be a chick magnet. In addition, we might get duty on a ship. I liked the Naval uniform, felt I probably should serve my country, and it would give me a job the day I graduated. There was even a chance I might be assigned to a ship and get to do some traveling. Korea had ended and there really were no war clouds on any horizon that I was aware of in 1960.



The Eagle Globe and Anchor of the Marines. I will always love these guys. They kept me safe.

I came as a shock when I received orders to serve as a dentist with the Marines at Camp Pendleton. I was in a Naval Dental clinic on Camp Pendleton attached to the Fleet Marine Force, FMF. The FMF was the first to go if the balloon went up. At the time, Camp Pendleton was where Marines came for advanced infantry training.

After about 3 weeks as a dentist at Camp Pendleton a Marine came in for some fillings.

He said, "Sir, I do not want to be numbed."

I responded, "This is going to hurt like heck. The decay is pretty deep."

He responded, "I don't care. I do not want to be numbed."

It was his choice, so I filled his tooth with no anesthesia. He was rigid in the chair, tears ran down his cheeks and saliva flowed out of the corners of his mouth. I stopped and asked several times if he did not want to be numbed. He shook his head, and said, "no."

The next patient did the same, as did the third patient. I went into the cubical next to mine and asked the dentist who had been in the Navy a month longer than me. What was up?

He said, "Did you see the Gunnery Sargent out in the hall? He telling his men real Marines do not use local anesthesia. He is out there laughing as they suffer. He thinks he is making them into men."

On my way back to the next patient, as I passed a Gunnery Sargent, I said, "Gunny, I saw you last week. You have a wisdom tooth that should come out. Go get your chart. I am finishing early because your men do not want to be numbed. We can get your tooth out today. Because Marines do not use local I will be done early and can have time for coffee."

He said, "I don't think I want it out. Sir."

"Of course you do, go get your chart."

"I really do not want it out. Sir."

"Gunny that was not a suggestion. That was an order. We do not want you to get deployed overseas and end up with an infected wisdom tooth. Besides, I will not have to wait for you to get numb so I have plenty of time."

"Sir, I really do not want it out."

"Tell you what gunny. You quit telling your troops that real Marines do not use local anesthesia and I will let the extraction slide."

The rest of the day went as planned. All got numb and gunny left with his wisdom teeth. In school, all our appointments were two and one-half hours long. Suddenly, I was getting fillings and extractions done in under an hour, even if they were numbed. This Navy gig was going to be good for my skills and speed. I truly was "practicing dentistry."



I lived in a small house in San Clemente about 15 minutes from the base's North gate and another 15 minutes to the clinic at Camp Las Pulgas, the fleas. It was an area used by the Marines for tank training. I drove to the base every morning and was back by 5 PM to eat my TV dinner. It was a





pretty boring life. One of the other dentists had been married right after graduating. He got orders to a mobile construction Battalion, MCB-10. MCB-10 was going to Okinawa to be the ready battalion in the Pacific. He would have to leave his new wife of two months who would have to go home and live with her parents while he went to Okinawa for a year. He was most distressed. Crushed might be a better description.

There was no war in Vietnam. MCB-10 would be doing public works jobs, building warehouses, do sewer work, running wires doing nothing that this "misfit battalion could screw up."



One tough Seabee, note the pistol and knife on L and R hip.

I suggested we might be able to swap orders. He would stay in Camp Pendleton with his wife and the Marines and I would go to Okinawa with MCB-10. The Navy made the swap. I turned in my Marine green field uniform and boots and went to Port Hueneme and checked into MCB-10. I had been a Marine for 7 months. Now, I was back in the Navy.

The CBs gave me CB greens and combat boots and the next month I was back at Camp Pendleton. I was now in the field with my battalion, read that as sagebrush, rattlesnakes and tarantulas. I learned about and fired machine guns, threw hand grenades and fired a bazooka. I dug fighting holes, foxholes, set off dynamite charges and did a lot of long marches. I did turn to a Gunnery sergeant and say, "Gunny, I am dental / medical, a noncombatant. I do not think I should be firing heavy weapons." He responded, "Sir all Marines, officers, even pilots, are riflemen first, sir. Shut up and run sir."

All freshmen and sophomores at the University of Washington had to be in Air Force, Navy or Army ROTC.

Navy ROTC paid tuition and a small stipend for books and was a four-year program leading to a commission in the Navy. For those who did not want to go into the Navy on graduation or could not qualify, were assigned to the Army ROTC. Army ROTC paid nothing unless you went on for a third and fourth year. In addition, I wanted to go to dental school. At a minimum pre-dental and dental school took 6 years.



Firing a machine gun.

I am very near sighted so I did not qualify for the Navy ROTC program. As a dental student, I would not qualify for a 4 year and commission program. I was required to be in the Army ROTC program my first two years at the University of Washington. This was a two-year program that could lead to a commission if

you did not go to dental school so my military career came to an end, or so I thought.



Setting up a fighting position.

The Army ROTC had included some training on how to clean various pistols and rifles. I had camped a lot as a kid around the state of Washington and as a Boy Scout. The rest of the MCB-10 officers were engineers mostly from the East Coast. They had never held a rifle or pistol. The closest most had come to camping





Firing a bazooka.

practical experience. I just never got the lapel insignia, but then I never got the medals I qualified for either.

The next 4 months were in a Naval Dental Clinic on the Base at Port Hueneme. I was a battalion dentist. My boss was the MCB-10 Commanding Officer, an engineer, Commander Bannister. We referred to him as Captain because he was in command of our battalion. Much as the commander of a ship is referred to as Captain even though his rank may be a Chief Petty Officer, Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander or Commander. My CO, boss, was the MCB-10 Captain; but I worked in a clinic commanded by a Dental Captain, a four Striper.

I wanted to go to the American Dental Association national meeting that was in San Francisco. It was unheard of for a new dentist to get such a trip. My Captain asked, "How do you compare to the other dentists in the clinic? Get me numbers. How many fillings and extractions do you average a week vs. what the clinic does?" This was easy. I was really getting into dentistry. My speed had picked up and I enjoyed doing dentistry for "my troops."

The rest of the clinic dentists had been at Port Hueneme Clinic for some time. Do one filling an hour and spend the rest of the time drinking coffee. My numbers were double those of the clinic. So I went to the convention. This being a CB dentist was OK. It did irritate the other dentists in the clinic.

About four months later, we left for Okinawa. To get there, we got on a Military Air Transport Service, MATS, Boeing 707. We were to leave from Point Mugu Naval Air Station. We all arrived at 6 AM to depart. The married CBs kissed their wives and children and boarded the 707. One of the engines would not start. So we all got off the plane and went home or to the enlisted barracks or Bachelor Officer Quarters, BOQ, for the single men and officers.



An Air Force MATS, Boeing 707 C-135

I played poker all day with the Air Force pilots and crew and won enough to take the whole flight to the Enlisted Man's club for a beer. I figured it was better for all to go for two beers and know how much everyone drank than to have them do it on their own and come to the flight with a gigantic hangover the next morning for the long flight. It was a bit of an honor to be invited to the EM, Enlisted Men's, club. But if I was buying, I had to be invited. It worked. We were all ready to take off the next morning at 6 AM. The flight was again delayed. The needed part had not arrived.

It was arranged for every one to be back at 11 AM for a take off. This was the third time the men hugged their kids and kissed their wives. No one really thought we would leave. The engines all started and we were off.



Our first stop was Hawaii to refuel. From Hawaii, we went to Wake Island getting there after midnight. Our troops had a snack at Hawaii, but had not had a real meal since Breakfast about 20 hours earlier. Because I was a Lieutenant, I was the senior officer present. This was in spite of the fact I had been in the military less than a year. I knew enough to know I needed my Chief Petty Officer as he had been in the Navy over 12 years. I explained, "If my rank could be of any value, let me know or I will stay out of your way." He came to me and explained the men needed food. The mess hall was closed for the night. He could use my shiny silver LT bars, railroad tracks. We went together to the mess hall. The sailor in charge of the mess hall met us and said, "We are closed."

I said, "We have 100 men who are hungry. They have not eaten in 20 hours."

He said, "We are closed for the night, sir."

The Chief had clued me in, "Sailor please get the officer of the day down here."

He responded, "LTJG Jones went to bed about 3 hours ago. He is going to be very upset if I wake him up. For those of you who have not been in the navy, my Lieutenant's double bars out ranked a LTJG 'Lieutenant Junior' grade's single bar

I responded, "Tell him you have a Lieutenant here with a bunch of men. The LT is getting upset. He wants them fed. Tell him I want him here in 15 minutes. That is an order."

The poor sailor said, "What if I put out a bunch of sandwich makings, bread, cheese, cold cuts, ice cream, coffee milk and some hot soup?"

I said, "That would be great. I guess we do not need to bother the officer of the day."

We ate our sandwiches and we took fixings on the plane for another meal, and were off 2 hours later for a 6-hour flight to Okinawa. I learned a lot about being an officer that night. First rule, feed your men before you eat. Follow the lead of your Chief. I was beginning to sound like a Marine.

Okinawa was wonderful. The weather was great. Our camp was comprised of WWII Quonset huts. Each aluminum hut had 4 officers in private rooms each with a shower, washbasin and toilet. They also had geckos. These were lizards about 5 inches long that ran up the walls and across the ceiling. They did keep the insect population down. Each hut had a local woman hired to clean, do our laundry, and organized our shelves. They took care of our rooms. This cost us \$10 a month. If you left a shirt or pair of pants on a chair they were washed, starched and ironed when you got back to your room that night. I was bad about leaving my clothes on a chair. This is a habit I still have, ask Mariana, my wife. I nearly wore out some shirts because they got washed, starched and ironed every day. My clothes were arranged all folded in my chest of drawers. My bed was made. My room was spotless. I could really get use to this sort of life.

**Dear Mom and Dad,**

**Camp Kinsar is a long way from plush but it is comfortable. The weather is about 80 degrees. Several dentists I know are also stationed in Okinawa. Our club sells mixed drinks for 25 cents, and beer for 15 cents, 10 cents during happy hour. The Okinawa barmaid is trying to teach us Japanese. My meals cost \$60 a month. We get steak or prime rib every other night. We do exercise every morning and have forced recreation on Saturday mornings. I am thinking about buying a camera \$420 in the states \$185 here. I may go broke saving money. FQ**

I had my own dental clinic and a great dental assistant, a Filipino fellow, Pacifico Guiang DT 2<sup>nd</sup> class. He had been in the navy about 10 years. If the truth were known, he probably knew more dentistry than I did. He had worked under several oral surgeons in Bremerton Naval Station. My life was good.



You could get a haircut and shave for about \$1 including a good tip. In addition, you got a massage of your scalp and shoulders. I nearly ran out of hair. I was visiting the barber two times a week. After a shave, your cheeks leaked the shave was so close. You could follow this up with a "hotsy bath." First, you sat in a steam box with only your head exposed to the room air. Next, you went to a table for a massage. The massage was complete when the young woman walked up and down your back. At the finish you were so relaxed you could have been poured into a bottle.

I was also introduced to sake. Several of us went out for a Japanese dinner of sushi and sashimi. They gave us a warm drink in very small cups. It tasted harmless, a bit like warm lemon-aid minus the lemon. After a number of small cups and dinner, I tried to stand up. It was a good thing I was not driving. That was one potent drink that had snuck up on me.

Things began to heat up in Vietnam and suddenly we were having evening meetings. We were going to Vietnam to build an airfield for the Marines. The airfield concept had yet to be tested. This SATS field, Short Airfield for Tactical Support, was constructed from aluminum panels that were about 2 inches thick 18 inches wide and 10 feet long and weighed about 120 pound each. This would be the first usage in a combat situation.

One night, the plan was to take 1/2 of the battalion to Vietnam. Two nights later the whole battalion would go. The next night, we might not be going. There were graders, dump trucks, dozers, earthmovers, shovels, shops, kitchens even a portable dental clinic in a trailer. We were to have 4 LSTs.

The next day we could only get 2 LSTs, so only essential equipment necessary to the airfield construction would go. Next we heard to expect 20% wounded crossing the beach. I decided to not take the dental trailer. I did not want anyone to die because I wanted an air-conditioned dental trailer/clinic. I would use the mount out dental equipment that came in two large metal suitcases. Several months later, I realized how wrong that decision was. I would have killed for an air-conditioned clinic.

The evening meetings were beyond belief. A major discussion for two nights was on the question; can the men take a can of shave cream in their packs, 782 gear? It would make a big mess, if one of our men took a round, a bullet, in the pressurized shave cream can. I sat there thinking, that is the least of their problems if they have a bullet that hits their pack.

Next, the whole battalion would need gamma globulin inoculations to protect us from hepatitis. Hepatitis was a problem in Vietnam. Gamma globulin gives some protection from hepatitis but its effect is fairly short-lived, maybe a month or two. The Medical officer said he could inoculate the whole battalion in less than a day. The Chaplain argued it should be done now, so we are ready to leave at a moments notice.

The next topic was, No one should wear white T-shirts. The white would serve as a target against our Seabee green field uniform. Everyone had to dye their T-shirts. Overnight, all the green dye was bought up on the whole island of Okinawa. So we went to shoe dye. Our T-shirts looked like they had been used to clean up an oil spill but they were not white. In the meantime, the Chaplain kept arguing against the Medical officer on the gamma globulin issue.

These meetings were held after dinner in a Quonset hut about 30' by 20'. It had a large table with a green felt covering. There were pictures of the President and Secretary of the Navy on the walls. All the windows had to be closed. The "Secret" sign was placed on the door and the door was locked from the inside. The landing plans and airfield plans were Secret. The room had to be secure to look at secret documents. There was no air conditioning. The room got as hot as some of the tempers. To add to the discomfort the smoking light was lit, we could smoke. It truly was a smoke-filled room. I had no reason to be in these meeting. I could be ready to go in the next hour, pack my pack, grab the dental gear and I was ready. I had nothing to add to the other discussions. But the CO wanted all his



officers present. There were several with pipes and most of us bought cigars. I slid a very fine orthodontic wire down my cigar. The wire would support an ash that was 2-3 inches long. Ashtrays were passed to me. I would respond something about the long ash heated the air going to the cigar improving its flavor. One night the middle inch of the ash fell off leaving 1-inch of ash, a gap and then the cigar. I dared not smoke any more cigars. The Commanding officer did not find this funny.

We lived through 5 weeks of meetings. The Chaplain convinced the CO that the gamma globulin should be administered in two days. The MD medical officer left the meeting and said it would be done, but medically it was a bad decision. It should be given immediately before we went and to only those who were going. It was not sure when we would go or if the whole battalion would go.

You have to understand about gamma globulin. It is about as thick as Karo syrup. The dose of



Our ship LST-1166, the Washtenaw County, being loaded.

gamma globulin is related to your weight. They must use a large bore needle to give it because it is so thick. My turn came and I bent over a table. It was injected in your buttox, as Forest Gump would say. Half of the dose would be given in each cheek. To say it "hurt like hell" is a gross understatement. I did not scream, at least not out loud. Finally, the left injection was done. I told the corpsman, "I need a minute before he gave me the second dose. That hurt like hell." He responded, "Oh sir, you cheeks are pretty big. I just gave the full 10 ccs in your left one." I had done a couple of fillings for him a week earlier. I think this was a little revenge. I did not sit comfortably for 2 weeks.

Three days later the decision was made to take the whole battalion including all our equipment. That included 4 LSTs, landing ship tanks, an LSD, landing ship dock, and a couple of freighters. We were loaded up in 4 days. Our task force had a number of other ships to bring the 3 battalions of Marines and their equipment. The Marines would precede us across the beach. They would provide security so the CBs could build an airfield.

I was very impressed that 2500 men and all their equipment could be loaded that quickly and be on our way in so short a time. I do remember we all managed to make our t-shirts some shade of green black brown but at least they were not white. I cannot remember if the men were allowed to carry a can of shaving cream.

**Dear Mom and Dad,**

*Enclosed is a copy of things in two footlockers being sent to Port Hueneme. I am also sending Pearl a catalogue of china. Would this be a suitable wedding present? I doubt if it will get to her on time. I am quite sure I will not be home for the wedding. They will not give me leave much less fly me back to the US. I am very sorry, but when your country calls. You know. Would you like a set of china?*

*We are changing bases so there is liable to be a delay in my mail. It may take as long as a month before you hear from me. I will let you know as soon as it is permissible. You will probably read about it the papers long before we are given the go-ahead to write about it. I am receiving your*



To the left and LST, Landing Ship Tank, a Cargo Ship and to the right an LSD, Landing Ship Dock. Our task force included 7 LSTs, several AKA transports and 2 LSDs. We also picked up the Iwo Jima, a helicopter aircraft carrier.

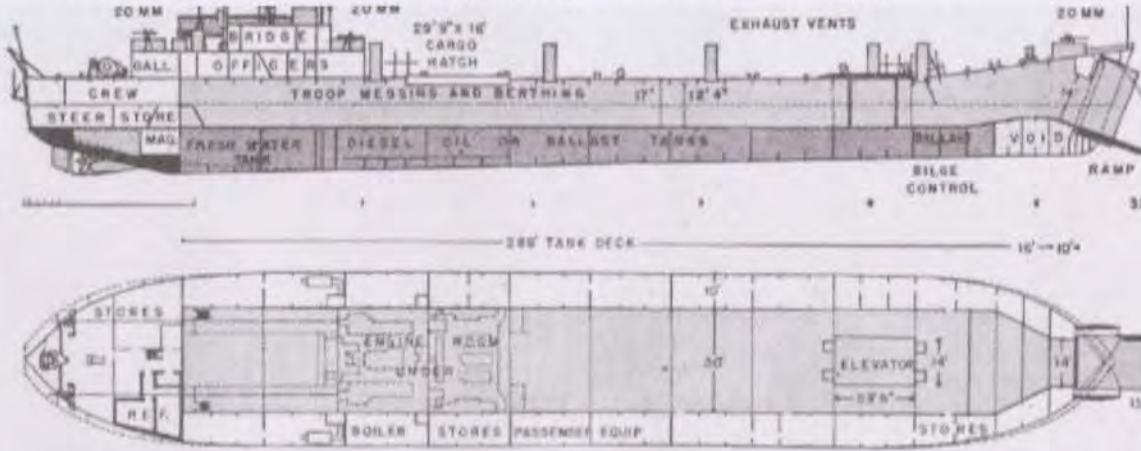
*letters and appreciate them a lot.*

*As this is the last letter I will write before I*



*go. Happy mother's day, Happy Birthday to Pearl. You will have to wait for presents. Oh yes. I will be careful. FQ*

Within a day of leaving Okinawa, we sailed through the tail of a typhoon. Seas ran 10' to 15' high. An LST is a flat-bottomed ship. It has no keel as it is built to be run onto the beach. Its forward ramp is dropped onto the beach so the equipment can drive off the ship. With no keel, there is very little resistance to prevent the ship from rolling side to side. The center of the ship holds the equipment. The sides of the ship are for the passengers, troops, who come with the equipment.



You can see the berthing area, passenger, troop, areas are on the side of the ship so when the ship rolls in rough seas these areas amplify the motion.



May 1

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*Well, I finally got on a ship. I have been on an LST, landing ship tank, for 1 day. We are on a nearly calm sea and it hard time staying in my bunk that is about 5 feet above the deck. These ships roll a lot.*

*There are 5 Battalion officers in a room 8' x 10' plus 8 suitcases and 6 full packs. We should get to where we are going in about 4 days. I am sure it will be in the paper before you get this letter. Our ship is not loaded with tanks. We have trucks, graders, bulldozers, and earthmovers. These are the heavy equipment the Seabees will use. This is the first time Seabees have done*

*anything like this since probably WWII. As you might guess there is much speculation among the troops as to what to expect. I will fill them in on this tomorrow. I am anxious to know if we will encounter what we have been told to expect. We have seen this move coming for about a month. It is hard to believe it is now happening.*

*We are enjoying ourselves on the ship's good food, movies in the wardroom and not much to do. Tomorrow I will examine the teeth of the ship's crew, about 140 men. Sunday I am to give a first-aid class and personal hygiene class to our folks. Our MD is on a different ship. I have no training to do this other than a Boy Scout first-aid merit badge. It does not look like I will be doing much dentistry for a while. I am sort of an assistant medical officer for the time being.*



*I saw flying fish for the first time today. They are small 6-8 inches long. They swim fast and spread their fins like wings still pushing with their tails and then jump and glide. They can glide 30 to 40 feet and get a couple of feet in the air.*

*Next day -We joined up with the convoy today. 7 LSTs an AKA and an LSD. Eventually, we were*



The Iwo Jima Helicopter aircraft carrier.

*joined by a helicopter aircraft carrier, the Iwo Jima. Today, we told the troops where we are going and what we will be doing. Most of them had a pretty good idea. It is hard to keep a move this large a secret. The seas are getting rougher. Every time we go over a swell the prop comes partially out of the water and vibrates like the devil. It is kind of funny the ship's*

*crew did not know where we are going. They had a code name, but that name is not on their charts. Once they knew, they got more serious about the whole thing.*

*Sunday Our room is air-conditioned that is good for sleeping. We are somewhere off the coast of China. We had two movies last night because it was Saturday. FQ*

I found myself as the senior officer present of the Seabees onboard. As such, everyday one of the Chiefs and I walked through the berthing areas. Many of the CBs became CBs because, in their early training on ships, they found they were prone to motion sickness. As a Seabee, they became equipment operators, electricians, welders, drivers, etc. but were not posted to a ship.

Within hours of leaving the harbor, 1/3 of the troops were seasick. Once the first one lost a meal, the smell was overpowering and even if you were not prone to motion sickness the smell would take care of opening your stomach's sphincters. By the third day more than half of "my men" were sick. There was not much that could be done. The sides of the ship went up and down close to 10' with each heave of the ship. We had crossed through the remnants of a storm. Seas were about 10' to 15'. The ship rolled 30 degrees each way. My quarters were higher, near the bridge. I woke up the first night. My leg was caught in the bar the surrounded my bunk. The rest of me had flipped off the bunk only my leg kept me from hitting the steel deck. Since I was in the top bunk, I would have had bruises.

There was not much I could do when taking my walk through the decks. I could only offer encouragement. We only had 5 days to go before we hit the beach. Many of our men did not eat during the whole trip.

We also had a contingent of Amphibious Seabees, ACBs, on our ship. They were all fun and games. They would set up the causeways that would be used to unload our ships. Because the beach was so shallow we could not get far enough up the beach for our bow ramp to let us drive off the ship onto the beach. The ACBs were called to a briefing on one of the other ships. They came back much more serious. They had been told to expect heavy casualties crossing the beach. I do not know where this intelligence came from but I guess it is better to be prepared. The ship's company became more serious. They took the covers of their 3" guns and practiced loading and firing them.

We started some classes for our men. I was chosen to teach a brief first-aid class because I was the dentist. I knew all about teeth but really was not trained in general first-aid, other than the first-aid merit badge I earned as a Boy Scout. But, I did my best. We also had reviews on cleaning the men's weapons, and the importance of personal hygiene. It was going to be hot and dirty. We would be



The other end extended out into the bay. That morning, two LSTs pulled up to the end of the causeway and unloaded. Their trucks, dozers, jeeps, graders, and earthmovers just drove off the ramp onto the causeway.



During the landing the Marines provided us protection. This tank had 6 105 mm. recoilless rifles.

Our turn came in the afternoon and we ran aground about 20' short of the causeway. We were either heavier or the tide had gone out. There we sat until the next morning. The morning tide was just enough for us to get to the causeway. To say we were a sitting duck that night was an understatement. Fortunately, the enemy did not have any large guns. I did begin to wonder a bit about the planning of this event.

50 years later I was at an Alaska Airlines Aviation Day at SeaTac airport in Seattle. There was an A-4 for our students to see. I had a video on my phone of A-4s taking off and landing from our strip. I showed it to one of the pilots with the plane. He said, "I was there. I flew top cover for the assault. We did some bombing but there really was almost no opposition for the Marines." What are the odds of running into one of our cover pilots 50 years later?



Two men having lunch in their fighting hole.

Our physician had gone ashore on the first day. He was a short heavy fellow who was about 40 years of age. As he walked through the sand, he got tired and sat down and declared this our campsite. The tents started going up. They were 100' from the water. Our equipment went further inland behind a sand dune that stretched north and south about 600' from the water for several miles. This served as our Eastern border and fighting positions were dug in and concertina wire was strung in front of the holes.

May 14, 65

**Dear Mom Dad and Pearl (my sister)**

**Happy Mothers day and birthday for Pearl. Presents will have to wait until I get out of this place. I got out to the airfield site yesterday. The runway is made of aluminum matting laid on a dirt base over the sand. The panels are about 12' long 18" wide and two inches thick. Each sheet links to its adjoining sheets. So the runway inches forward 18" at a time. I enjoyed the newspaper clippings. You really know how to hurt a guy. The pictures of all the beer that was destroyed in the earthquake hurt. (Seattle had a major earthquake on April 29, 1965) I would give half a months pay for a couple of beers. It is dry here. They do tell us we will eventually have a beer supply. FQ**



camping on the beach. Of course, I emphasized the need of tooth brushing to avoid trench mouth, not a real problem.

"Trench mouth" came from the trenches of WWI. After being in the trenches for a couple of weeks, whole battalions came down with advanced periodontal disease. At the time, it was assumed to be a very virulent bacteria or virus because such a high-percentages suffered from this periodontal disease. We now know it had to do with severe stress, poor nutrition, and lack of oral hygiene.

I was also chosen to explain why we were going to Vietnam. I fed the men the same story I had been given to share. If South Vietnam went communist, so would all of S.E. Asia, and we would be fighting the Communists on the beaches of Australia. I have never really forgiven my country for having me pass on this myth, the domino theory. Vietnam fell, became Communist and has taken Capitalism to an art form. The US had many chances to become an ally of Vietnam. We were allies in WWII against the Japanese. Had we encouraged France to give up their hold on this little country, there never would have been a war.

One of the major decisions that had to be made. Were the men to have bullets for their guns when they went ashore? How can you do an amphibious, across the beach, assault without bullets for their weapons? On the other hand, these guys had not had a rifle for 3 months and only then for 2 weeks of military training. They were great construction people; but Marines they were not. This issue was yes one day and no the next. In the end they could have bullets but they had to be in the pouches on their webbed belts. No rounds could be in the rifle without a direct order to arm them.

**Dear Mom and Dad**

***Monday We joined up with more convoy today including a helicopter carrier, the Iwo Jima. We are due to get some destroyers and another attack carrier. We should be off the beach sometime tonight and go ashore tomorrow. The shower I took this afternoon may be the last one for sometime.***

***Although we do not expect anything to happen, I want you to know I appreciate very much everything you have done for me. The more I see of people, the more appreciative I become of you two.***

***That is all for now, I have to get this to ships mail. Love FQ***



The causeway unloading our trucks and graders.

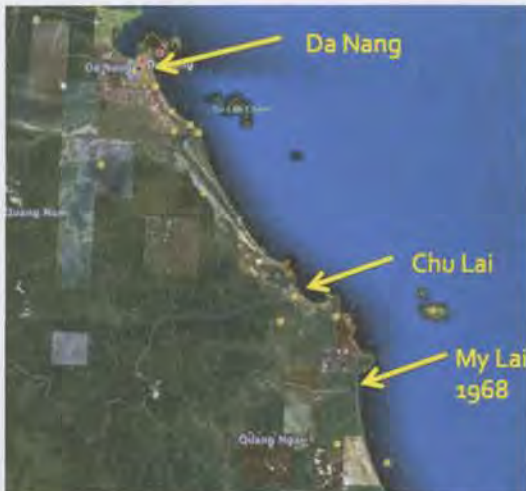
We arrived off the beach at Chu Lai early on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The Marines offloaded into small landing craft and amphibious personal carriers. They hit the beach and moved inland. There was no opposition. I have seen photos of Vietnamese giving these troops flower leis; although, I did not see these. Our task force had picked up more ships as we traveled. We had a helicopter carrier, several troop carriers, at least 6 LSTs, an LSD, and several cargo ships.

The LSTs had causeway sections attached to both sides of these ships. These were basically steel cubes about 6' feet on a side lined up two cubes abreast and 10 cubes long. These sections of 20 were dropped off the sides of the ships and connected end to end. This became a floating dock

about 1,000 feet long. One section had a gigantic outboard motor the size of a truck. The motor pushed one end up to the beach where one of our bulldozers pulled it further and built a sand ramp.



Our water came in wheeled tanks called water buffalos. They were filled from the ships. While the ship was there unloading, we could go onboard and shower and clean up. After a couple of days the ship left. An hour later a large helicopter landed between the tents and the beach showering everyone with sand. You could get clean by bathing in the Pacific Ocean but you could not stay clean. I became obvious this was not going to be fun.



*Dear Mom and Dad, May 10, 1965*

*Well, I have been here for 3 days. Our 4-day trip on the ship took 10 days. We are about 60 miles south of Da Nang on the beach. The sand is very fine, it gets into everything. There are no rocks and very few shells. The beach is about 10 miles long with rocky headlands at the North and south ends. We can get to the headlands at the North. To the South is no man's land. We do not go there. Our camp is about 100 16' x 32' tents. I think they are surplus from Korea, they are rotten. This would be an ideal vacation camping spot for a couple of weeks; 10 months will get a little tedious. We are due to leave next February. FQ*

We bathed in the Pacific Ocean for several weeks.

Soap up, rinse off quickly with seawater, quickly dry before the salt water dried and started to itch. It was the biggest bathtub in the world, the Pacific Ocean. By the time you had your clothes on you were already covered by sand.



*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*I don't know what stories you have been getting back there, but I think they have been exaggerated. You must remember that distances here are greatly exaggerated. 20-miles would be a healthy day's travel. To go 5 miles and return can easily take over two to three hours. I have not been out of the beach area.*

*We are fighting a very primitive army. (Boy was I naïve!) Their weapons are for the most part captured. 5-miles is more than enough of a buffer. Some of the Seabees have been*

*sniped at but most of this happened right after the landing and at night when working under high-intensity lights putting down runway mats. One truck driver has a small piece of shrapnel lodge in his arm.*

*We have lost Marines on patrols through the rice paddies and small villages. This was a wake-up call when I saw the pictures our photographers took of boots, rifles standing vertical on*

*bayonets driven into the sand with helmets sitting on the top. This was a ceremony for the men who had died.*



*By the way, mom's friend will be glad to know the fuzzes (officers) and the snuffies (enlisted men) have all been living and eating the same chow and working the same hours. We all are living in a tent, sleeping on cots. Our floor is the sand of the beach. We*

Two Vietnam ladies watching me extract teeth in the village notice their black teeth. This is due to chewing betel nut.



*sleep in our clothes wearing our pistol and K-bar knife. It does hurt when you roll over on your pistol.*



Small round boats the woman took to fish and collect seaweed. We would see them a mile offshore.

*We have had our first case of malaria. We all take a pill a day and a second pill once a week to protect us. The problem is there is a rumor the pills cause impotence, so only about 1/3 of the men take their pills daily. FQ*

May, 28, 1965

Dear Dad and Mom,

Little is new here. The field is slowly progressing. We should have fighter-bombers here in three days. These should be able to land with arresting gear like on an aircraft carrier. I did the first dentistry I had done in a couple of weeks. three patients. It was kind of fun.



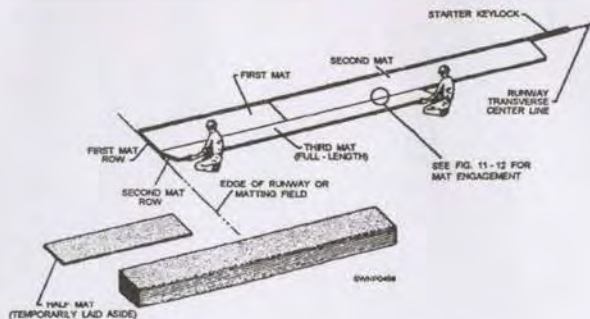
These boats are about 20 ft long and have a bottom of woven palm fonds. .

There is a fishing village a couple of miles north of camp. They have two types of boats. One is a sailboat about 20' long. It has a bottom made of palm leaves that have been woven together and painted with something that looks like pitch. There are no cabins. They sleep on the deck. The sails are junk rigged typical of Asian boats. They go out into the ocean for several days at a time fishing. The other "boat" is a perfectly round basket about 4 feet in diameter also woven out of palm fonds. The women take these out in the bay a mile or so to fish and collect seaweed. They have one paddle and somehow make them go in a straight line. The women work very hard right alongside of the men.



The Vietnamese chew betel nut. When they smile, their teeth are jet black. It is a tar like covering from the nuts they chew. It caused a lot of irritation to their gums and lips that are fiery red. They consider this beautiful. The betel nut gives them a high somewhat like nicotine. FQ.

While all this was happening the battalions was laying down an airfield. The surface was an aluminum mat that was about 12' long 2' wide and 1 1/2" thick. Each mat weighed 144 lbs. The sand was smoothed and leveled by large earthmovers. A layer of soil was place on the level sand about 1' deep. This was to have been iron ore but turned out to be clay. The mats







fighter-bomber landed on our runway with the use of arresting gear like used on aircraft carriers. They took off using 2 Jet Assist Take Off (JATO) rockets to get them to flying speed on the 3,000' runway. It always seemed to me these should be RATOs for rocket assist takeoff, but no one had asked me.

were interlocking and laid down to make a runway about 90' wide. Our men worked around the clock in 2-12 hour shifts. The day crew manned fighting positions at night, 3 or 4 men to a site. They were to get 4 to 6 hour of sleep switching off so someone was always looking out to be sure our camp was not attacked.

3 weeks and 3 days after we landed an A-4



The A-4s could carry up to 8,000 lbs. of bombs. They would take off raise their landing gear, fly out over the ocean, drop the spent JATO rocket casings and go into an immediate bomb run. Many of the pilots would fly 3-4 missions a day. The bad guys were pretty close.

We had landed to make a backup airfield to a conventional airport at Da Nang. There was a concern for the defense of the Da Nang airfield. Da Nang was surrounded by large hills, small mountains, and was vulnerable to attack. The geography was not that different from Dien

Bein Phu where the French had surrendered 11 years earlier.

The A-4s would take off while our Seabees were working on the runway, smoothing sand and laying matting just yards from the end of the runway. I was at the airfield with the medical officer one day. An A-4 started its run, fired its JATO. They would do this after reaching about 60 mph. One bomb shook off the wing and went skipping down the runway. One of our guys was on a grader leveling and smoothing the sand so more matting could be placed. The bomb skipped over the grader. It did not explode. There is a safety wire attached to each bomb. A small propeller spins once the safety wire is pulled free when the bomb is dropped of the wing of the A-4. The propeller has to spin a certain number of times from the air it is passing through the propeller blades as the bomb falls before it is armed and will explode when it hits something.



The airfield a few days after the first A-4s landed using arresting gear to stop and JATO rockets to aid take off.

The medical officer walked over to the man driving and wrote him a prescription. It was for 4 beers. He said, "Here go back to camp and drink these. I think you need them. Change your pants while you are there and take the rest of the afternoon off." We did pull the men back after that event when flight operations were taking place.

One of our trucks was parked alongside the runway. When the arresting wire broke. The wire was a cable almost 2 inches thick. The severed wire whipped around. Fortunately, no one was in the truck because the wire whipped around and took the top off the truck making it a convertible.

The base material under the matting was to be



laterite an iron-rich rocky soil. Our operations officer had come ashore by helicopter when we were still in Okinawa to look over the area and found a source of "laterite" to serve as a base for the runway. Unfortunately, it had a high clay content.

When the rains came, the clay soaked up the water. The clay became a gumbo. The planes would touch down on the same spot near the end of the runway. This red gumbo would come through the joints in the matting and the plane would disappear in a cloud of spray. In time, so much of the base was lost, they had to take up the matting and replace with more soil only to have the same thing happen again. The matting could only be laid in one direction, because of the nature of the interlocking pieces.

Once they started to repair the landing end or the runway, the whole 8,000' had to be relayed. The planes would only have part of the field to take off and land on while it was relayed. They were back to using JATO and arresting gear. One of our Chiefs decided there must be a better way when it became necessary to relay the matting for the third time. He found the matting could be pulled out the side of the runway and if you were very careful you could slide those sections back into place after the repair. The panels were locked parallel with the length of the runway but not with the width. This really simplified repairs.



You can see the causeway sticking out into the bay. Our camp of tents are in the middle of the picture. The Marines' air wing's camp and tents are to left. Circled by a brown road. The runway is partially in view at the bottom.

and our battalion flag on two flagpoles, one on either side of the Commanding Officer's tent. A couple of days later I was in the tent of Headquarters Company, This Company included medical, dental, the chaplain, clerk typists – administrative types.

A couple of Chief's were chatting. One said, to the other, "Lets start a rumor." He raised his voice so the rest of the tent could hear. There were 10 or 12 Seabee yeomen, clerk typists, in the tent. "I heard Hanoi Hanna on the radio today. She said, that the Seabee's flagpoles at Chu Lai will be taken out by the VCs by the end of the week."



Hanoi Hanna was an English-speaking radio commentator who we could get on our radios. If conditions were good, we could sometimes get Australia radio stations, particularly at night. Hanoi Hanna was easy to tune in and had good music. She did keep a steady stream of propaganda about how bad we were, the names of people who had died, where ships were going, and what units were where.

Two days later the flagpoles were moved out into the middle of the area where trucks and heavy equipment was parked. Of course, it pays to be cautious particularly if you are the Commanding Officer and the flagpoles are just outside your tent.



While the work progressed on the field, our camp slowly improved. The tents were placed on a platform off the sand and were hard backed with 2 by 4s. Basically, a skeleton of 2x4s was erected on a plywood floor that was about 2 feet off the sand. We still had the canvas tent but the canvas was now stretched over a skeleton of 2 by 4s. The floor was plywood so we finally were out of the sand. There were two steps leading up to the floor. This was high living. The canvas tents were Korean War surplus and rotten, but it was great to get out of the sand. When the rains came in November, the canvas leaked like a sieve. The areas between the 2 by 4 rafters would hammock and collect a



couple of gallons of water. At its best, the canvas leaked. When the weight of the water exceeded the strength of the rotten canvas it would split dropping several gallons of water on you and your cot. Before going to bed you would turn your cot over and dump out the water, wring out your blanket and lay down to sleep. It was impossible to get and stay dry. We drilled holes in the plywood floors so the water would drain from the floor. Fortunately, it was warm. My leather hatband and shoes suffered and developed a blue covering of mold.

Since we were living in "government provided quarters," we lost our quarters allowance that was \$110 a month back in Port Hueneme. We had a BOQ in Port Hueneme, but the roof leaked when it rained and it was declared substandard. We were allowed to move out and rent an apartment. Three of us rented an apartment and each chipped in \$30 a month for rent. It was in a nice apartment complex. Lots of single schoolteachers also lived there. The other \$80 went into our pockets, such a deal.

In Vietnam, we lost our quarters allowance because the government gave us a leaky tent that 10 of us lived in. That saved the government almost \$1,000 a month. That is pretty good rent for a leaky tent. Remember this was 1965 when a thousand dollars was a thousand dollars. About 1/3 the cost of a nice car. But all was not bad news, we were given \$55 a month combat pay since we were in a war zone. This was a net loss of \$55, such a deal. We did get a \$200 dollar a month deduction for our income tax and we could send mail to the states without a stamp by writing free in the stamp's place.

**June 13**

**Dear Mom and Dad,**

**Well, I am back in Chu Lai after 7 days in Saigon. It was a nice change, but it is good to get back. Saigon is a city of about 2 million people but the downtown shopping area is about the size of**



Local women carrying heavy loads of wood.

**Yakima. I had a rather low regard of the Vietnamese as the ones around Chu Lai are in black clothes, "black pajamas," and are farmers. They are very hard working people. We see women caring loads of up to 100 lbs. on a yolk across their shoulders. They have no facilities to do laundry. They are small people many less than 5' tall.**

**Women in Chu Lai seem to be good looking when young, under 30 y.o. and suddenly look very old.**





A Saigon lady in her Ao Dai



TuDo street had a definite French influence.



The C-123 I flew in flew in formation with another most of the way back to Chu Lai.



The unmarked Caribou DHC-4

*This is probably due to hard work in the sun.*

*In Saigon, there are many beautiful Vietnamese. The women all wear long silk pants that are white. They wear a blouse made of colored silk that has a panel of material a foot wide that extends from the waste to their ankles in front and back an Ao Dai. When they walk or ride a bike these colored panels fly out behind them.*

*Saigon has great French restaurants. Tu Do Street showed a French influence and had great restaurants. We had a filet mignon, a salad, potatoes, a bottle of wine and crepe suzettes. This cost three dollars for each of us. It was great to get some fresh food. Although I paid for it with two days of diarrhea. Getting meals like this, sleeping on a bed with a mattress and sheets, and being able to stay clean for more than a few minutes, made my stay very enjoyable.*

*Money exchange is rather interesting. The official rate is 75 piasters for one dollar. However, no one uses the official exchanges. On the black market, hotels, stores, laundries and moneychangers on the street will give you*

*between 130 and 140 piasters per dollar. However you must deal in at least five-dollar bills. This ratio changed constantly.*

*A few days after getting back I flew to Da Nang in a helicopter. We boarded a C-123 and flew to Quang Nhi to visit and get photos of our STAT team that was building a school. We stopped in Quin Nhon, Nha Trang and Saigon. On the way home we stopped in Plekui. While there, we saw many Caribou, DHC-4, a short takeoff and landing aircraft built by the de Havilland a Canadian company. They were painted OD with no markings as to what country they belonged to. (I found out a few years ago that these were probably CIA, Air America planes.) We also saw a battalion of Vietnamese Arvin load up in one helicopter after another heading to a mountain battle. We could see the smoke of the battle from the airfield.*

*When we got back to Chu Lai, they had the BOQ (bachelor officer quarter) tents up and we now have a plywood deck under my cot. The dental clinic tent also had a floor.*





An A-4 taking off with JATO rockets giving them a boost. When the rocket fired there was a loud boom. The plane would rapidly accelerate. The rockets burned out about the time it left the runway.

*We have 8 A-4 fighter-bombers on the airstrip to protect us. The strip is not much longer than when I left. The planes use JATO, rockets to take off and arresting gear to land. Our guys are working off the end of the runway extending it as they takeoff and land.*

*We have our movie theater set up and have a supply of movies. The theater is a 55-gallon oil drum to set the projector on, a screen made of two sheets of plywood and a large area of sand for all of us to sit.*

*Yesterday they dropped ship's anchors for our causeway. They were too heavy for helicopters. The C-130 flew low over the*

*beach. Parachutes were opened pulling the anchors out of the back of the plane and they hit the sand. The chutes did not lower them.*

*I was appointed to be airdrop officer. I take a truck and a few men out and set up the drop zone. A red cloth sheet marked the target on the sand and a smoke grenade was set off to show the wind. We pick up the supplies and chutes. The chutes go back to Da Nang so they can be used again. This is quite a ways from dentistry, but it gives me something to do. FQ*



We needed a well for water. The water table was quite high. You only had to dig down 6' to hit good water; at least water that could be processed. The pit was dug in the sand, a pump was placed sending water to a small processing unit that filtered and made the water drinkable. This was a quantum leap. We had running water. We had sinks to wash in. We had showers.

The edges of the well were sand and collapsed in filling the water hole with sand. It was dug again and it collapsed again. The Seabees were often called on in the US to help with flood control. The

battalion carried burlap bags to use for sand bags for flood control. A crew was put to work sandbagging our "well," the hole in the sand. This kept the sand from filling in our "well." Everything was wonderful. We had a reliable water source.

At least we had it for a couple of days. Suddenly almost the whole camp, all 600 men, came down with gastroenteritis, diarrhea, the Ho Chi Mien quick step, Montezuma's revenge, traveler's diarrhea, the trots what ever you want to call it. We had outdoor "outhouses, 'crappers.'"

We, of course, did not have sanicans or honey buckets. There were no women in the area so modesty was not much of a problem. Scattered around the perimeter of our camp were their substitutes. Lovingly known a "crappers." They were 4-55 gal oil drums set down in the sand. A box was placed over these with 4 strategically placed holes, a "true four holer." Once a week the box would be tipped up on one side and a quart of diesel fuel was placed in each 55 gal drum receptacle, and set on fire. This kept down the smell and the flies. There were also large funnels attached to 3" pipes place around the camp to use as urinals. This yellow waste ran down the funnel and pipe into the sand, so this did not smell. It was not a sophisticated system, but it worked very well. While sitting doing your business, you had a beautiful view of the beach and the Pacific Ocean and any ships that might



be anchored. The perpetual onshore winds dispersed any smell and kept the flies away. It really was a good system. By the third day of this disease you would get off the throne and get back in a rather long line hoping you could hold your bowels long enough to work your way back through the line before you exploded.

The MD was up to his ears in fecal matter. He quickly decided this was not an infection. It had to be chemical. The only thing new was the well. The burlap bags were preserved with creosote. Creosote is a very potent laxative/poison. We were back to water from the ships and water buffalos, a trailer with a large tank on it. We all quickly recovered.

During this crisis, I headed for the outhouse. I came around the corner of a tent and discovered that that throne had just been set on fire. The next one was about 300' down the beach. I had tears in my eyes as I shuffled as fast as I could to cover that distance looking a bit like a penguin. I made it, but it was close. The water pump ran nonstop for a week flushing out the well as well as our water system. By week's end the water was safe to drink. No one died but many thought they might.

Some Washington DC official visited Chu Lai and noticed this setup and was shocked. How can the men relieve themselves in front of everyone. Immediately buildings were built around all of these facilities with plywood sides obscuring anyone doing their business. We lost our view of the beach and ocean. In addition, because it was now enclosed with the exception of a few vents we now had smells and flies. Leave it up to a politician to screw up a perfectly good system.

**Dear Dad and Mom,**

**Yesterday was a red-letter day. We had our first movie and a barbecue. One of the ships brought the film and hamburgers. There was enough for them and all of us to have two. They came ashore so they could all enjoy a beer. You cannot drink on a Navy ship. It even rained a bit just enough to dampen the dust.**



Our well drilling team went out to the village to help get a well. They had a small pond about a foot deep, filled with moss and a couple of water buffalo standing in one side of it. The villagers would push the moss out of the way and dip water in a bucket. Our men dug a deeper hole and blasted the sides to crack the hard pan. This produced much more water. It is muddy but much better than what they had. Given time, the water will clear. The village plans on rocking in the sides to keep it from caving in. This will also keep the water buffalo out of

the well. They have a unique custom. They put fish in the pond to keep out the devils. It also shows them if the VC has poisoned the water. Just remember never drink water out of a well that has dead fish.

I was there when they were digging. I had a good time playing with the kids. They speak no English and I speak no Vietnamese. They did teach me how to count to 10. I taught them that we were Seabees not Marines. FQ

We did occasionally have Senators and Representatives visit. These trips gave them good press, photo opportunities, visiting the troops in a war zone. What a good politician they were to run the risk of going into a combat area to visit their Seabees and Marines from their district. They would



spend most of their time with the Commanding officer visiting our work sites and getting their photos taken with aircraft taking off in the background.

We would hear they were coming and that they would like to meet any of our battalion members from their state. We did not always have anyone from Nebraska or Kansas so we invented one. I would get one of the new enlisted men and explain they were now from E. Bend In The River, Nebraska. I would pick a small town being sure to check the senator's data to be sure he was from a different part of the state. I would then prime our person about the area. How he loved his state and missed his parents and brothers and sisters. How his parents had a small farm, but he had always wanted to serve his country and was very proud of doing his part. It worked, the Senators got their photos and we were never caught in our little subterfuge. Everyone won.

**Dear Dad and Mom,**

*I got Pearls wedding photos. I feel really bad about not being there, but they just do not give you leave when you are in Vietnam. I have a friend in Okinawa who will send a present. We now have 1000' of the 7000' runway in place. We have the Marine guns going off most nights, but I can sleep through that. They are across the road from our camp. They had 155 mm. howitzers. You can read by the muzzle flash. They fire into the mountains to keep the VC awake. They also tend to keep us awake also. I am acclimating to the 99-degree heat. You just sit and sweat. If cleanliness is next to godliness, I am afraid I am in trouble. I get clean every night by taking a*



*swim and bathe in the ocean. You have to dry very quickly to get the salt water off. If it dries you itch. By the time I am back to the tent I am dirty again. We do not have laundry facilities so we wash our clothes in the ocean. Civilization will be wonderful with sheets mattresses, clean clothes, running water and sidewalks. The sand is really a pain to walk in. You take one step forward and your other foot slides back half a step. It is a little like walking on ice except it is hot as hell. Just walking is exercise. From the fit of my pants, I am losing weight probably*

*equally due to walking in the sand and eating C-rations. FQ*

I had not given much thought as to what I would be eating as we were mounting out to come here. The government took care of that for our first 3 months. They were called C-rations. Each of us was authorized 3 boxes of the C's per day. Here the memory tends to fail me a bit. I remember each box had 4 cans painted olive drab with black printing giving a hint as to what gastronomic delight awaited you.



As I remember, the main dishes were scrambled eggs and ham, salmon, tuna, chicken, turkey, beef and lima beans and ham. The beans and ham had a half-inch of congealed fat on the top of the beans and ham. If you closed your eyes, you could not tell if you were eating salmon, tuna, chicken, turkey or beef. They were all very salty and tasted the same. There was a belief in the 1940's that our troops would sweat a lot and it was important to replace the salt that was lost. In fact, it was important to replace the water they sweated out. The food would take care of the lost salt.



The next delight in our box meal were crackers. These were two crackers that were 3" in diameter. One of cans was about an inch and a half thick, the other about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick. One held 4 or 5 3" crackers. However, it was rare to get a can that did not have the crackers broken into  $\frac{1}{4}$ " crumbs. The smaller can held peanut butter. This had sat long enough to separate into peanut solids the consistency of rock with a layer of oil on top. You could break up the solids with your K-bar, Marine fighting knife, and stir in the oil to make chunky peanut butter. If you poured this into the can of crumbled cracker you could make a mush that you could eat with the included plastic spoon. It was rumored that the peanut butter industry stopped selling the military peanut butter because those who ate C-rations never again would eat peanut butter. I know it cured me of eating peanut butter.

A forth can was fruit cocktail. It was pretty good, very good if you consider how long ago it had been canned. I was told there were some cans with fruitcake, pears, and applesauce. I cannot remember those. The C-rations we were eating had been packaged in 1943-45. They were stored and were used to feed advanced troops in Korea and for the first few years of Vietnam. As I remember there was salt, pepper, instant coffee and non-dairy creamer and 5 cigarettes along with some toilet paper in each box. There was a heat tab that could be used to heat your meal. I cannot remember ever doing this. I suspect I tried it and found the stuff was no better warm than it was cold. Each meal weighed a little over 1.5 lbs., 5 pounds per man per day. Our 600-man battalion would go through 3,000 pounds of C-rations a day. I never saw it being unloaded, but it would be a pickup truck of food a day for the battalion.



A stove made of a C-ration can and a can opener.

In theory, we could make a small stove out of one of yesterday's cans that you poked holes in the side of and put a heat tab in the bottom. Each c-ration box came with waterproof matches. You could put the meat can on top of the improvised stove. Of course, you had to take the top off the can you were heating

or it would explode. The other option was to take the metal cup that your canteen fit in. This was kept in our canteen case attached to our belt along with our pistol, ammo pouch and K-bar knife. Put the meat in the cup and heat it. Of course you would not have the cup for your instant coffee. I guess these rations were better than no food.

We did have beer. Our supply folks in Okinawa managed to ship beer to us on a regular basis. We also got local Vietnamese beer "33" "ba muoi ba". It was very yeasty. You could not see through the beer it was so cloudy. Everyone could have two beers a day when we had beer. Beer made life a little more civilized. At about 12-weeks we had a supply ship sent an officer to our camp to see if they could bring beer ashore for their crew. We said, "If you bring steaks to share with us." We had not seen fresh meat or vegetables in over 3 months. They had lots of both. It was a momentous night.

At about 3 months we started eating in the officer's mess hall. This was a tent with netting to keep the bugs out. The mess tent would seat about 20 of us at picnic tables. The cooks were now opening large 3 to 5 pound cans of meat and heating it. If there was a difference from the small cans we had been eating, I could not tell the difference.



We dipped our mess kit in a can of boiling water and soap and then another of boiling water to rinse before going down the line to get our B rations.

The drill was; you took your mess kit, knife, fork spoon and your metal cup they all fit together hanging from the handle of your plate. You would walk down the line past three metal garbage cans with a diesel heater in each can. The first can had hot soapy water. You



held onto the handle of your plate. The spoon fork knife cup and plate top slid onto the handle of the plate. You vigorously pumped up and down in the soapy boiling water. From there you



went to a second can that had more disinfectant also boiling. A third can was boiling water to rinse off the soaps. You then held out your metal plate and the cooks would plop some meat in one division and potatoes or canned vegetables in one of the other sections.

Once you were done eating, you went through another line with more garbage cans to clean your plate, fork, spoon, knife, and cup again. You were ready for your next meal.

**Late May, 65**

*I still do not do much dentistry but may do a couple of fillings this afternoon. I have been made R&R officer (rest and recuperation). It will be my job to organize trips to different areas of SE Asia to get men out of here every so often. If all goes well, we will get them to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Japan, and the Philippines and maybe Saigon. Of course, I will have to look over all these places (I can dream. It did not happen.) for good food and rest.*

*We have 2,000' of the runway laid, Planes can land and takeoff once we have 3,000 feet. The staff is getting a little jumpy; they promised it would be in for planes in 21 days after landing. The site was changed to an area that needed more cutting and filling, so that has delayed becoming active a few days. There has been a lot of equipment breakdown. The trucks are old and worn and the men have not had a lot of practice running the equipment.*

*Officially, it has not been released as to what battalion is here. The folks back home know MCB-10 is in Vietnam but not where. We cannot release any news articles because our location is still classified. So I guess this letter is classified CONFIDENTIAL. Radio Hanoi's Hanoi Hanna (Red North Vietnam) announced that the VC would be eating in MCB-10's mess hall on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May. I guess they heard about our food and decided against it, as we have not seen them. I was surprised by how people lived in Okinawa but there is no comparison to how they live here as you will tell in my pictures. Their homes are thatched from palm fronds. There is no plumbing, running water or electricity. FQ*

The Commanding Officer held weekly staff meetings. All officers must attend. I arrived shortly after most of the other officers at one meeting.

The C.O. said, "Mr. Quarnstrom you are 5 minutes late."

I looked at my Acutron watch, a graduation present from my parents, that was accurate to 2 seconds a month. It was one of the first electronic watches. I said, "Sir, My watch is accurate to 2 seconds a month and it says I am 5 minutes early."

The CO said, "I am looking at the Commanding Officer's watch and it says you are 5 minutes late."

I said, "Yes, Sir. I will reset my watch." This was one of the many hints that I probably was not cut out to have a career in the military.



*Early June 65 the arrival of the bear.*

*To answer some questions you asked. I carry my pistol whenever I leave Camp. For the first few weeks in May, I slept in my clothes with my pistol and K-bar knife. I rolled over one night and about broke a rib. I started putting the belt with pistol and knife on a box next to my cot. It still is there every night. So far no Seabees have seen any VC to shoot at.*

*My pistol is loaded against regulations. The regulations say our weapons may not have a clip with bullets in them. As I told our security officer, I am not here to impress anyone. I just plan on coming home alive. He said he would go to the skipper. I said to go ahead. He did not. If I need my pistol, it is a little late to put a clip of bullets in it.*

*You asked about the round shipping crates in the village. They are the round boats. They use a single paddle and go a mile or so offshore. The size of the Vietnamese amazes me. They are about the size of a skinny jr. high school student. They refer to us as the long-nosed big bellies.*

*We had a C-130 drop about 30 bundles of spare parts yesterday. The last pass they dropped a baby bear. She was in a bad mood. She had ridden in a truck; then put in a plane, C-130, and then thrown out of the plane in a box attached to a parachute. She must not have cared for the parachute jumping. I doubt if you could get her into another airplane. She is very cute. She has no baby teeth yet. God only knows what we will do with her when she gets big. FQ*



The blast to break up hardpan for a well in the village.

*June 13, 65*

*Not much is new. I have a screened in tent for the dental office, but there is no door so the flies still get in. We now have cold beer. Life is getting better. The airdrops have stopped. The C-130's can land on the strip. Much of the wing hangs over the edge of the runway.*

*After we eat, our dishes, mess kit are dunked in 3 different garbage cans of boiling soapy water and rinsed in plain boiling water. Before we use them for the next meal, these are dipped again in a can of boiling water.*

*The blast I showed in the movie was to break up the ground where we were digging a well for a local village. The train tracks you see are for a train that runs from here to Da Nang the tracks have been blown up in about 7 places so there are no trains.*

12 NOVEMBER 1965

## Villagers Call MCB-10 'Number One' Battalion

When a Vietnamese points to something or someone and says "Number Ten!" he is paying no compliment. To be "number ten" is to be ugly, distasteful, and in general undesirable.

Consequently, there was much concern and confusion among the Vietnamese villagers of Chu Lai recently when they found out that MCB-10 was going to help them in improving their village living conditions. The people wondered what kind of a deal they were going to get with a "number ten" outfit doing the work for them. It didn't sound too good.

When the men of MCB-10 arrived with the MCB's diamond "ten" on their hard hats, the villagers were certain they were getting a "number ten" deal. They were in for a surprise. The Seabees of MCB-10 assisted the local people in digging wells and drainage ditches. The battalion's medical and dental department pitched in to help care for the people. The climax came when the people found out that the Seabees were going to build a slide for the new school's playground.

One of the village's learned men, after pondering over the problem for some time, approached MCB-10's dentist, LT Fred Quarstrom as he was preparing a villager for a tooth extraction and, with the help of an interpreter said:

"I understand now. You are the tenth battalion, not number ten battalion. You are number one battalion!"

*We have no wildlife here except a few lizards and an occasional snake. So far, none of the snakes I have seen are poisonous. There are tigers in the mountains but there is also VC so there is no hunting. By the end of the week, we will have 60 aircraft here. They are flying 4-6 strikes a day. This will increase with more planes. They takeoff, retract their landing gear, fly out over the bay, drop their spent JATO rockets and go into a bomb run. We watched them dive bomb an area about 10 miles from here. They really make quite a mess of a target.*

*Please sent clipping about the fighting here. Your letters are enough to scare a guy. I held sick call at 8 AM and will visit some of the work*

In several Asian countries calling someone number 10 is an extreme insult. The villagers did not understand why America would send there number ten battalion.



sites today and open the clinic again once the sun goes down. I am enclosing a military life insurance bill. Please pay it from my bank account. The rumor is, if you buy military life insurance, they do not send you to dangerous places. I really doubt if this is true. FQ.

*Late in June 23 the last piece of matting is placed for field*

*Today was both a red-letter day and a sour one. Last night at 3:20 AM the last piece of runway matting was laid. The runway is 8040' long. I managed to scrounge 2 bottles of wine so the photographers and I braved the VC and went out to the strip and got photos of the last piece being laid and toasted. We christened the event (We drank the wine and filled the bottle with water for the christening.) We shared the wine between the 14 of us who were there. I think the crew that put down the last piece of mat feels a lot better about the 9 previous hours they spend putting down matting to get to the last piece.*

*The day is sour. As of today, no one can wear short pants in camp. If you want to write your congressman, this is a good reason. We have men with heat rash and crotch rot so bad they are in pain. This can be blamed on many things. It is a fact that we sweat like mad just being in the sun, but when you put a man on a tractor or dump truck where the engine puts out more heat, it gets very hot. When you put on long pants the temp jumps 20 degrees. The pants hold in the humidity and their skin breaks down. I am not sure who is responsible for us going to long pants. Our word came down from an admiral in Hawaii, Commander of the Pacific Construction Battalions, sitting in an air-conditioned office in Pearl Harbor. They work these guys 12 hours a day, 7 days a week and pull crap like that. They wonder why our reenlistment rate is about 2%.*

*Idiots run our Navy. I am not as bitter as I sound. Besides that, I have a plan. The air-conditioned idiot who instituted this ruling will be out here next week. If I can find a good actor, we will have a case of heat exhaustion right in front of him. See one of his men fold up in the sand at his feet might get him to open his eyes. Of course, I will be there with the photographers, so he will have immediate first-aid to cool him and documentation of the problem. We will rush him away before he has a chance to do much talking. All I need is a good actor. My next letter may be addressed from Portsmouth Naval Penitentiary; but only if I get caught. FQ*



The bear with LTJG Davis

*June 25, 65*

*The last of the matting went down 2 days ago. Everyone is quite happy and the workload will start slowing down. Our 60 aircraft have flown over 1000 missions and so far there have been no losses. Now to your questions:*

*The flyers live in tents like the rest of us.*

*If the bear gets as big as I expect, she will be about 5' when standing. She was tearing at the tends and was rather angry. She also had some facial swelling. The Captain called me in and*



Here is the bear just after he went to sleep with the ether.

*asked me what was wrong with the bear. I told him I thought she had some abscessed teeth. He asked me why I did not take them out. I explained she would bite me. He said, "Why don't you put her to sleep." I explained I had never done general anesthesia and she might not wake up. He said, "That would be OK." He really does not like the bear. If she died in dental surgery it would not be his fault. I tried sodium Pentothal. I could not find a vein with the needle, so I gave up. She did claw me while I was trying. I got a couple of scratches.*



*Yesterday I used ether and got her to sleep after a lot of fighting. I had a man on each leg and her head with leather gloves. I held a big ball of gauze over her face and poured ether into the gauze. She struggled for about 3 minutes and went out. I opened her mouth and saw a gigantic tongue. I grabbed it with a towel clip and hung it down into her crotch. I probably saved her life by doing this as it opened her airway. They use the tongue to get grubs from under logs and lap up honey when they find a bee's nest. She recovered quickly once I was done and seems to be as smart as when she went to sleep. She seems to be quite healthy.*

*The perimeter of the base here is about 10 miles long north to south and a mile or so from the shore toward the mountains. If you put a fighting hole every 30,' you would have 1430 foxholes and would require 5,000 men to have 3 men per hole. That is why the Marines go on patrols. They just do not have enough men to expand the perimeter.*

*We have three battalions of about 700 - 900 men each. One is north of us; one to the West past highway 1. One is to the south. (This ended up being fairly close to My Lai, about 5 years later.)*



This is the opening to a tunnel system. It was too small for any of our people to get down into. We thought it was a "spider hole." It probably was part of a whole tunnel system.

*We get infiltrators that come through the unoccupied areas. The Marines go on search and clearing operations. They hope to discourage the VC from being in the area. It is impossible to tell VC from ordinary Vietnamese. They are all in black pajamas.*

*We hear stories that they come in at night and dig "spider holes" They sit in these eating their cold rice with brush pulled over their heads and holes. They hide in these in the daytime. They can pop up and take a shot and hide again. Our folks working on the runway at night under high intensity lights do occasionally get shot at. So far none have been hit. FQ*

**June 22, 65**

*Well there is one fewer Quarnstrom (my sister got married). I got the wedding cake it was very good. My dental tech Guiang says, "Thank you, also." It has been a long time since either of us have had cake. I also got some "Q" rations today. I love those cookies. My mail comes with a New York FOB stamp. The battalion has a stamp with our number. The Military Post Office headquarters are in NY so that is what the stamp reads. There was an article in one of the newspapers about our Chaplin. He is the public information officer who wrote it. I think the articles that are submitted should be about our men. They are working 12-hour days 7 days a week.*

*My pistol is loaded. As for the machine gun you see in the pictures I sent. They are too heavy to carry around. We are slowly getting trenches outside our tents sandbagged in case we should be attacked. Fortunately we have not needed them. FQ*



The smoke is from the bombing and shelling of the point about 8 miles south of us. I believe this was operation Starlight.

**June 24, 65**

*I have received 2 packages now. They are really appreciated. My job is not all that exciting. They assigned me the job of supervising the photographers. They are to record the work being done for operations reports. It is strange to me that we are expected to have a crew writing weekly operation reports with photographs when they could be helping build the field.*



*I have the photographers working for a change. In the past they had no boss. They now have me.*

*We had a point south of us attacked last night it was about 8 miles away. Some of the big guns fired and sunk the sampans and our planes really plastered the area with 500 lb. bombs. We could sit on the beach or in the O' club tent and watch this take place across the bay. (This is close to My Lai.)*

*We had one of the men get psychotic last night. The workload is starting to get to the men. He had received a "Dear John" letter from his girlfriend and decided to swim home.*

*The photos I sent from Saigon were mortar trenches. They are in many open places and parks. They offer protection in case of an attack. By being zigzag, if a mortar round hits in the trench the explosion only affects about 10' of the trench.*



The A-4s, Skyhawks, could carry up to 8,000 lbs. of bombs. They would take off, raise their landing gear, fly over the bay and drop their JATO rocket cases. Often they would go into and immediate bomb run. The VC were not that far away. For several months they would land by catching an arresting cable with the hook that is hanging down.

*The basket boats and the bigger offshore boats have woven bottoms of matting from palm fronds and are painted with tar or sap to make them waterproof.*

*The pictures were of the women carrying wood on yokes across their shoulders. I guess it is for cooking fires. They weight close to 100 lbs. We had small trees all over the area. I think they are some form of pine. There is a lot of farming, peanuts, rice and eggplant that I recognize.*

*Now that the runway is about complete it looks like our next job will be to put in*

*a pier so we do not have to rely on that easily damaged causeway. We had a storm that pulled up the anchors keeping the causeways perpendicular to the beach.*

*I got my pilots license in the mail. Of course I cannot use it here. I will have to take about half the instruction over to feel safe in a small plane. Please do not write any more congressmen. I haven't been standing perimeter watches. That was a cartoon drawn by one of the battalion newsletter "artists." FQ*

*July 6, 65.*

*We got a ship in yesterday loaded with beer (yes) and lumber both of which we needed badly. The captain also suggested we start R & R trips. We hope to have people out of here in a week. I am happy today, probably by the way I woke up. We have an new LTJG.. He is a mustang (he worked his way up through the ranks). The first thing I heard this morning was a booming voice saying, "Hasn't this battalion heard that there are only to be 6 officers per tent." I rolled over and told him, "We did not have tents enough to give the officers 3 tents."*

*He then said, "Will the battalion had \$55,000 why don't they use it." If we did I doubt that we could get them shipped. He then ranted that some of the officers have an acre and others, namely him only had enough room to roll over. I rolled over and said, "The tent next door has 4 empty cots."*

*He next asked, "Who are you?"*

*I said, "They call me lieutenant, I am the dentist."*



*I rolled over and went back to sleep. It had been a successful exchange. I am glad I have 2 bars on my collar or I would have come out second best.*

*We got a number of new people in the last few days. They seem to think they were picked on because they were sent to Vietnam. I know 600 other guys who have been here a couple of months; so I do not have much sympathy for them. All in all, today started out good and I am going snorkeling at 1 PM so it should be a real good day. FQ*

I could get turn around mail from home in about 8 days. I would send a letter requesting some information or describing what I had been doing and get a response 8 days later. To me that was pretty amazing. I had written to my parents describing just how bad C-rations were. A few days later I got a letter from my mother telling me she had sent a 2 lb. coffee can full of chocolate chip cookies. To this day this is one of my favorite foods.

I wrote back and thanked her and told her I was really looking forward to the cookies. In my next letter she told me she would send a can a week. Would I tell her when they arrived? I was in heaven. Several weeks later I got another letter asking me if they had arrived? I immediately sent a letter, "No but I was looking forward to them." Two months later and after many letters, the first can arrived.

I opened the can and discovered not only did she send cookies but had included a can of Right Guard deodorant. The cookies were tainted with the taste of Right Guard. The only thing worse was no cookies. That same day, Rich Davis, a LTJG officer in charge of our mail, arrived in the dental tent. "Fred I have some questions about your mothers cookies." I thought news really travels fast out here. I had just opened the can. I told Rich, "I am going to eat the first can all by myself, but I have a can coming every week, I will share the next can. Besides these are tainted by Right Guard."

Rich responded, "No, we got this message about your mother's cookies." There was an official Navy message that had come out across the Pacific dit, dot, dit via Morse code. To: the commanding officer all troops Pacific, commanding officer all Seabees Pacific, commanding officer all troops Vietnam, commanding officer Marines Vietnam, commanding officer Seabees Vietnam. I suspect almost every 1 star admiral or general in the area.



FM CNO (Commander of Naval Operations)  
 TO CO MCB MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION TEN  
 INFO TO COMCBPAC (commander CBs of the Pacific)  
 COMNAVPAC (commander Navy Phillipines)  
 FPO SANFRAN  
 UNCLAS (unclassified – it is not a secret)  
 MAIL COMPLAINT  
 A. US NAVY POSTAL INSTRUCTIONS OPNAVINST P2700.14  
 1. CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY RECEIVED CONCERNING MAIL SERVICES BETWEEN  
 LIEUTENANT FRED QUARNSTROM AND HIS MOTHER ALLEGES THAT ALL  
 ELEVEN PACKAGES MAILED TO LIEUTENANT QUARNSTROM DURING MAY AND  
 JUNE. NONE HAD BEEN RECEIVED AS OF 17 JUNE. FOLLOWING INFORMATION  
 REQUESTED ON WHICH TO BASE REPLY.  
 A. DATES ON WHICH CONUS PARCEL POST RECEIVED PERIOD 1 MAY TO  
 CURRENT DATE.  
 B. AVERAGE TRANSIT TIME FROM CONUS FOR ALL CLASSES OF MAIL  
 C. NUMBER OF PACKAGES LIEUTENANT QUARNSTROM HAS RECEIVED  
 FROM MOTHER DURING THE ABOVE PERIOD AND DAYS RECEIVED.  
 D. STATEMENT ON QUALITY OF MAIL SERVICE TO MOBILE  
 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION TEN AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
 IMPROVEMENT IF ANY.  
 2. RECOMMEND THAT ALL PERSONAL BE ADVISED OF MAIL SERVICE WHEN CAN  
 BE EXPECTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARAGRAPH 2016.1 OD REFERENCE (this  
 referred to problems of mail delivery when in a forward area.)  
 There were letters from Asst. vice chief of naval operations to Senator Magnuson  
 and a letter from Senator Magnuson to my mother.

The message about my mom's cookies.

Subject: Lt Quarnstrom Cookies. Had Lt  
 Quarnstrom received any cookies? What condition  
 were the cookies in? How were the cookies

packed? It went on with two pages of questions. It ended, has Lt Quarnstrom been counseled that  
 when he was in a forward combat area that his mail might be delayed depending on the tactical  
 situation and the availability of transportation.

I suspect a copy of the message hung in every radio shack in the Pacific. Poor Lt. Quarnstrom. I  
 wrote my mom sending her a copy of the message. I thanked her. I was really enjoying the cookies.  
 What was with the Right Guard? Please do not send any more deodorant with the cookies it makes  
 them taste funny. By the way, who did you contact? All these people this was addressed to are very  
 important and very busy. They have a lot of things to worry about other than Lt Quarnstrom's cookies.

She wrote back. I did not want you to smell bad, so I sent the deodorant. You were not getting your  
 cookies so I wrote our Senators, Henry Jackson, and Warren Magnuson. I knew they would take care  
 of the problem. I thanked her profusely for the cookies, but please do not send more deodorant.  
 Everyone smells bad. Why should I be different? The VC could probably smell the Right Guard so it  
 is better I not use it.



I had no x-ray machine, no suction, and no compressed air. I had a patient I could not get a tooth root tip out of. I needed an x-ray. There was an AKA, cargo ship, off shore that had a dental clinic. The patient and I got in a Mike Boat, LCM, and a small landing craft – the man and I rode out to the ship. There was no way to get on board via a stairs so we climbed a cargo net. It was about 15' from the LCM to the deck of the ship. Up we went like a couple of monkeys. I found the Dental Officer and he let me use the clinic. I got an x-ray and got the tooth root out. It was wonderful to have air-conditioning. We had to climb back down the cargo net to get back to camp. I seem to have an adventure a day.

**July 7 65**

**Dear Mom and Dad,**

*I got another package yesterday, #3. Thanks again. The cookies were great and the popcorn was appreciated. I am enclosing a message the battalion received about my packages. (see previous page) This came by radio – dit, dot, dot dit across the pacific from CNO, Chief of Naval Operations, Washington D.C. He is a very busy man as are all the Marine commanders and Seabee commanders the message was addressed to. All is not as bad as it might sound in the message. We are having a bad time with regular mail being irregular. This did give the command a chance to say a few words about that. FQ*

The cookies kept coming, a can a week. I did share them with everyone who came to the dental tent. Mom fessed up many years later not only had she written Senators Jackson and Magnuson, she had enlisted the aid of every lady she knew in Sunnyside to write Magnuson and Jackson. We had messages going back and forth for two months. Official Senate inquiries were taken very seriously.

**Dear Mom and Dad,**

*The reason I sent you the keys to the cruse boxes was this. When we left Okinawa we had been told to expect 20% casualties on our landing. This did not happen. If it had and I had been one of the unlucky ones, they would have shipped the cruise boxes to you. As it is they will stay in a warehouse in Port Hueneme until we get back.*

*Well not much else is new. We have been here 8 week it seems like years. We expect to be here a year. That is unimaginable. I sent \$400 to pay for camera film you send, the duty on Pearl's china set, the wedding present. I had sent by a friend in Okinawa. I get about \$400 a month pay plus combat pay of \$55.*

**July 24 65**

**Dear Mom and Dad,**



This is the fireball of the crash.

*We had a plane crash yesterday. It was an F-104 Air Force from Da Nang. It was loosing hydraulic pressure and the pilot tried an emergency landing here. He got to the runway but could not get his wheels down. I thought for a minute we were under attack as I heard a jet come over that did not sound like one of ours. I stepped out of the tent in time to see a fire ball rise from the airfield area. It was about then I realized there had been a crash. There wasn't much left. Part of the tail and engine were the biggest pieces. The rest of the plane was spread for about 1,000 feet.*

*Where do you keep getting the idea that we have been under attack? The area to the north and south has been, but there are a lot of Marines between here and there.*



*I got another package today. They really hit the spot. Please tell me anything you hear about the GI Bill that was just passed.*

*It seems that every time the MD leaves someone gets really sick. The last time a guy came down with malaria and encephalitis. (He passed away.) Yesterday it was spinal meningitis. Luckily it is probably not the bacterial type that is so infective; but we are sort of holding our breath. FQ*

*Dear Dad and Mon,*

*Things have picked up a bit. I am now seeing 6 patients a day, or I should say a night. It is too hot for patients to tolerate dentistry during the day.*

*For crying out loud do not write any more congressmen. Packages come by ship via San Francisco, Okinawa and Saigon. They have to be sorted at each place including Saigon. Every time they have a coup in Saigon, everything shuts down. The packages are really appreciated.*



I now had a drill powered by a small electric motor. The lack of hair makes it much easier to keep it clean.

*Yes, we are now getting beer. We have a good supply. Every man can have 2 cans a day. We officers can have as much as we want. Yes I know that is not fair. I probably have 2 a week. The Marines have offered us \$20 for a case. They do not have a supply. If we sold any, we would have to sell to everyone and then we would not have any.*

*One of the Marine battalions had an ice cream machine they could not get the freezing element to work so they brought it to us. Our guys had if fixed in a couple of hours and we had ice cream for a week until the Marines heard and came back for their machine. The*

*mechanics had told them it would take a month to get parts. It sure was good, while it was ours. FQ*

We now also had electricity via generators. When we arrived, I had a foot peddle power my dental drill. That was a joke. You could not pump fast enough to do a filling. With electricity, I added a small electric motor and the bur now was a blur. But not fast enough to do a filling. I could open into teeth to do root canals. I did not have an x-ray so I could not determine how long the roots were. I got very good, at tactically, by feel, determining an appropriate measurement. The patient had nothing to loose. If the root canal worked, we saved the tooth. If it did not, I had to extract the tooth, which was the other option.

You must remember I was now less than a year out of dental school. I had extracted maybe 10 teeth when I was in school. I did more extractions in my first week at Camp Pendleton than I had in school. There was no oral surgeon here to refer difficult extractions to. In fact, for several months I think I was the only dentist on the beach. If I could not extract your infected wisdom tooth, 3rd molar, I had to get you to the Philippines and a naval dental clinic's oral surgeon. That typically took a couple of weeks. You could be dead by then. Often I would have the surgery book open on the counter behind the patient, so I could determine what the next step should be. I was either better than I thought or very lucky. I never had a problem.

It was so hot during the day; I held evening office hours once the sun went down. It was a bit more comfortable. While extracting a tooth, you need suction to remove saliva and blood. The area must be kept clean, so I could see what I was doing. We used a large rubber ear syringe as suction. We had



a second syringe to fill with water to rinse the area, and a third to use for compressed air. It all worked out and I became a pretty good surgeon.

One major problem of evening hours was that our diesel fuel for the generator often was contaminated with water. When the water gets to the generator motor, it would quit. Half way through an extraction, the lights would go out. My dental light was not great. A 110 volt 50 watt bulb did not put out a lot of light. It was better than nothing, until the generator would quit. That seemed to happen at least once a week. We did have flashlights. I would finish the extraction I had started, but then stop for the night. Talk about working under unusual conditions.

If you have a long multi rooted tooth with roots going different directions, it is common to separate the roots with a high-speed bur. Each root would come out more easily. Of course, I did not have a high-speed handpiece. In the book I had, it described a technique of splitting teeth with a chisel. I had no choice but to learn this technique. My dental gear had a chisel that was about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch wide. I would place it in an appropriate groove to cause the tooth to split between the roots. We had a small metal mallet. I started by giving it a tap. Nothing happened other than scaring the heck out of the patient. My assistant Pacifico Guiang had served with some fine dental surgeons in Bremerton Naval base.

He said, "Here let me show you. You hold the chisel in the groove and I will hit it with the mallet." Whack, the shock wave went from the mouth down the patient's body to his feet and back to the mouth. But the tooth was split and I could bring out the two roots one at a time. I learned a lot from Pacifico. I was the dentist, but I was not too proud to learn.

**Dear Dad and Mom,**

**I have got about 6 cans of cookies. They are really good. That is the stuff we really miss. Things have slowed down since the runway was completed. The men are down to 10-hour days, 6 days a week. They made me R and R (rest and relaxation) officer. We had a lottery to decide when men would be able to get out of here for a week. Most will go to the Philippines or Thailand. I got the first group out yesterday. The C. O. wants to get as many men out as quickly as possible. They certainly have earned it.**

**I got a letter from one of my classmates who is on an air-conditioned aircraft carrier with fresh food fruit and deserts. They have been at sea for 2 months and are going to Australia for a month in port. I have been on this beach for 4 months and have gone nowhere and we are still eating C - rations. I broke a root tip off in a patient last week. I could not find it without an x-ray, which we do not have. I did get to take him to Da Nang and the dental clinic for an x-ray. I found it and removed it. It was great to get out of here for a day.**

**We had a storm last night that blew the causeway out of position. We have 3 LSTs waiting to unload and no way to get the supplies ashore. FQ**

As time passed, some of our folks finished their enlistments and most decided to leave the military. Other's tours with the Seabees were up and went home to a new duty station. We were getting in 50 new troops some weeks. They came from bases in the states with real dental clinics. On the average they needed a couple of extractions and 4 or 5 fillings. I simply did not have the equipment to do that volume of work.

I explained the situation to the commanding officer. He told me to put it in a letter with specifics. I am not the greatest writer. It took about 20 rewrites before I had a letter he would sign. It went from our battalion to the commander of Seabees of the Pacific Command. From there it went to the Commander of Seabees in the US, to the base commander at Port Hueneme and finally to the commander of the dental clinic where I had worked prior to going to Okinawa. It made him look pretty bad, but the condition of our replacements got better. Unfortunately when I left the battalion, I was given to the Port Hueneme dental clinic commander as a staff dentist. The same person I had



complained against. A smart Lieutenant does not critique a Navy Captain particularly if the Captain will be his commander as this man was for my last 6 months on active duty.

That fitness report pretty much took care of me making the Navy a career. I got an excellent in expresses himself well in writing and for social activities and average for everything else. Had he made the "averages" "poors" I would have had the right to challenge that score. You could not challenge average score. An average grade was a career buster for an officer.

**Dear Dad and Mom,**

*We had some excitement yesterday three Air Force F-105 fighters landed here. They had been bombing in N. Vietnam and when they got back to Da Nang there was a thunderstorm. They diverted here to land. 2-planes landed with minutes of fuel remaining. 1- had its engine quit on the runway, out of fuel. One ran out of fuel and the pilot ejected over the bay. He was picked up within 15 minutes by one of the helicopters. The plane crashed in the ocean. Our little field saved you taxpayers a bunch of money by saving the three planes.*



I am examining the teeth of a villager. I could not do anything except extractions. I probably saved some lives because these teeth were very badly infected.

*I still have not had a chance to shoot any VC. I guess I am not destined to be a hero, to bad. The more I see of this country and its people the happier I am to be here rather than some comfortable training center clinic in the states. As I visit villages to do dentistry and see the planes coming and going from the field MCB-10 built. I get a feeling of accomplishment for the small part I had in helping that happen. FQ*

**First week in August 2nd or 4th**

*I have moved into my dental clinic a tent with  $\frac{3}{4}$  being medical  $\frac{1}{4}$  dental. I hold sick call at 8 AM and 6 PM every day. I tend to do dentistry in the evening because it is a bit cooler. Daytime is for*

*swimming, letter writing, watching over the photographers, visiting work sites, what ever they want me to do. I am not overworked.*

*I found a couple seashells when swimming yesterday. They are smelling up the dental tent. I will bury them in the sand until the insects clean them. One was a conch shell the other was a cowry.*



The Saigon River from our hotel.

*We had two marines killed. They had a grenade go off in a truck about 2 miles from here.*

*Two of us were sent to Saigon on a short trip. We stayed in the Majestic hotel. We were able to get a steak, salad and desserts. That is heaven. Add to that sleep in a bed with sheets. We sat on our balcony and watched a fire fight take place across the river from the hotel while sitting in relative safety enjoying a beer. The money exchange is crazy. The bank rate dollar to piaster is about 70 to one. On the street you can get 150 to one. But, you need to count very fast because you give them a \$5 bill and the hand you a wad of piasters. By the time you count and find they only gave you 130, they are long gone.*





*We were able to do a little sightseeing and got around town a bit. Most traffic is by bicycle. Cabs are, take you life in your hands. They drive crazy passing bikes on the right, trucks on the*

*left all at about 50 mph down very narrow streets.*

*The photos from Saigon show a 3-legged monument this is a monument to the Trung sisters who supposedly liberated the country from the Chinese in 33 BC. Madam Ngo Deen Dem, the wife of the president who was over thrown several years ago, had the statue monument put up. The statues that were on top*

*look very much like madam Dem. When her husband was removed, the mob took the statue down and destroyed it. The first photo shows the statue coming down.*

Many years later I learned our CIA had suggested that it would be OK for the Arvin (South Vietnam) troops to have a coup and remove him. He was discriminating against the Buddhists who were burning themselves in protest. The president and his brother were placed in an armored personal carrier and somehow guns went off and they died.



*I have been serving as the medical officer for the last few weeks. I just sign paperwork. Dr. Dwyer finished his tour and went home. He was great. If he had two Band-Aids and a bottle of disinfectant he could save your life. He had been in private practice for about 10 years in a small town. He got divorced and decided to join the Navy as an officer. He had been in Korea as a Marine door gunner on helicopters.*



*The new MD arrived today. He seems to be a bit bitter about being sent here. He was stationed in Washington DC. for a couple of months before being sent out here.*



*When I got back from Saigon, I had a bullet hole in the footlocker under my cot. It went in one side glanced off a medical emergency in the dental office book and went out the other side of the footlocker. The executive officer was cleaning his pistol. You take out the clip. Pull back the slide let it go forward. Aim at the dirt and pull the trigger just in case there is a round in the chamber. He just aimed it out of his tent. Our tent was next to his. It went under my cot nowhere near the ground. Fortunately I was in Saigon. That would have scared the hell out of me had I been sleeping when he fired.*

*It is getting really hot. I think it is time to go swimming. We have 1 mile of runway and about half that much taxiway. The rest of the runway is leveled and graded. We have about 30 jets, A-4*



*single engine bombers. These are remarkable planes they can carry up to 8,000 lbs. of bombs. I am now an assistant to the assistant public information officer. The executive officer and I just completed and article about MCB-10 at Chu Lai.*

*We got a pay raise today. We are now paid in script, MPCs, military pay certificates or funny money, your choice. It looks a lot like monopoly money. We can now mail our letters without a stamp. We only have to write free where the stamp would be. FQ*

One of the jobs I had was "money order auditor." As I remember, we got paid about once a month. The supply officer would take a guard with him and go to Saigon and pick up the payroll for the battalion. This would be about \$200,000. We were not paid in American money for fear it would end up in the black market. Vietnamese money was often not worth much more than the paper it was printed on. 1 US dollar was equal to about 100 Vietnam dong. If I remember right. If you exchanged money on the street in Saigon you might get a ratio of 1 to 150. However you had better be able to count very fast. Your \$10 bill would disappear before you had figured out you only got 900 dong. The moneychanger had disappeared into the crowd. The ratio if you went to a bank was about 1/3 would you would get from the moneychangers on the street.

Our supply officer would come home from Saigon with \$200,000 MPC, Military Pay Certificates. These could only be exchanged for dollars by going to the supply office before you came home. This really did not slow down the moneychangers. They soon would accept MPCs but at a slightly lower rate.

The MPCs were freshly printed. They were about the size and shape and looked not unlike Monopoly money. Being freshly printed they tended to stick together. The largest denomination was \$20. On payday you arrived at the paymasters table. He checked your record and counted out your pay. Many of the men took their pay in cash. They would then go to the post office and buy money orders and send them home to their wives and families.

The Postman was responsible for any errors he made taking in and counting the MPCs and preparing money orders the men could send home. At the end of the day he might have \$120,000 in MPCs. That is where I come in. He would bring the money to me with a receipt. I would count the money and sign his receipt. It takes quite a while to count out 60,000 MPCs particularly since they tended to stick together. As I remember I would count out stacks of 10,000 MPC. If the count came out right, it was great. If not, I would recount one of 10,000 MPC stacks hoping the find the error in the first stack.

Once the count was correct, I put the MPC in a small 40 lb. safe that spent the night under my cot; as if no one could carry off a 40 lb. safe with \$120,000 in MPCs. The next day, I would take it to the Marine Supply Company. Their supply officer would count it and give me a receipt. I got really good counting money. How I was assigned this job will be made clear later.

#### *August 10?*

*A photographer and myself went to Nha Trang. It is about half way to Saigon. MCB-10 has a STAT team there. The officer in charge just made LTJG so we needed photos of that and of the job they are doing. Nha Trang was a resort town it has about population of 100,000 or so. It is also where the Vietnamese Air Force academy is. It is much cleaner than where we are. Last week a B-57 Canberra jet ran into trouble in this area. The pilot ejected after pointing it toward the Ocean. It instead of diving into the ocean, it started to circle. Another B-57 tried to shoot it down with no success. It crashed in the center of town killing 50 Vietnamese.*

*The STAT team has it pretty good. They live in a French Villa right in town and work on the airbase for the Army Special Forces. All in all, they lived much better than I live. I will be here another day and then back to the sand and wilderness.*



***Nah Trang is on the South China Sea. It is in the mouth of a valley with mountains on the North and South with a very beautiful beach. There are many French style buildings.***

***I am back in Chu Lai. It was good to get out of here for a couple of days. A couple of my articles have been printed in several California papers. I guess I should have been a journalist. If only I could spell. FQ***

While in Nah Trang, I was in a Navy version of a pick up truck. There were three of us in the cab. We had stopped. We were waiting to turn onto a busy highway. There was a young Vietnamese standing along side the road. I assumed he was a teenager by his size. All of a sudden he pulled a pistol out of his pants and pointed it at my face. A couple of "kids" had pitched a grenade into a Marine shower a couple of weeks earlier, killing two Marines. I tried to draw my pistol but it was on my right hip that was tight against the door of the truck. I could not get my 45 cal. pistol from its holster or duck below the level of the window because we three were jammed in the front seat of the pickup.

That is when the water of the toy gun hit my face. I really lucked out. It was not a real gun. I had not been able to draw my gun. Had there been two of us in the truck I would probably have killed the young man. It took quite a while to get my pulse rate back to normal. I would have been fully justified to have fired before he did. I would have had to live with that the rest of my life. Even today when I think about the event ,my blood pressure rises. It would be hard to accept that I had shot a kid with a toy gun.

I went out the next week and purchased a shoulder holster. I was not going to come home in a body bag because someone pulled a gun on me and I was unable to draw my gun to defend myself. Fortunately, I never found myself in that situation again. I can close my eyes and relive looking down the barrel of that pistol.



We are about back to our jeep. You can see the railroad bridge.



We walked along the rice paddies to the village.

***August 14, 65  
Dear Dad and Mom,  
I am sure you will  
hear of the battle here.  
Two Marine  
battalions moved  
from here and  
attacked several miles  
to the South.  
(This was in the  
My Lai area)***



***They landed from helicopters in the middle of a VC Regiment and had about 100 wounded and 15 killed. We are still pretty safe.***



Are these VC or friendly? There is no way to know.

***We went out to  
a village to the  
West of here  
and did some  
people to  
people  
dentistry.  
What a mess***



***most  
were.***

The village, the little girl was very bashful. This was a fish sauce factory.

***of the mouths  
We picked up a***

***squad of Marines, 7 men, drove 4 or 5 miles to the West past where***

The schools opened for the first time in many years after we arrived.



*the Marine camp is and parked the jeeps and mechanical mules. We then hiked 3 or 4 miles along rice paddies or rivers on foot trails to the village. Fortunately we never ran into any VC. I must have seen 40 patients. All I could do was extractions. I wiped the forceps off between patients with an alcohol swab. If I did that in the US, I would be out of practice. But it was all I could do. It is very basic dentistry. I may well have saved some lives because many had very serious oral infections. Draining puss was the norm. After an hour the Marines came to me and said we have to go. I said I still have 15 people in line. He said, "We have been here long enough for the VC to know we are here. It has been too long. We are leaving in 5 minutes. We will leave you a jeep. I am not a dumb as I look, I was ready to go when they left.*

*We got a water ski boat and skis last week. Boy, am I stiff. I have not been skiing in a long time.*

*Two of the guys I was with at Camp Pendleton are here now with the Marines. They expect the dentist I traded orders with to arrive here within a few days. He is going to be upset because he will be here for a whole year.*

*I got 2 more langouste, Pacific lobsters with no claws, yesterday. Their tails are about 9" long. That is the only part with meat in it. We boil them for 40 minutes and eat with butter or Pacifico will chop them up for fried rice.*

*I understand that all officers have been extended until January. I hope to get out of the Navy in July. FQ*



A M274 Marine Mechanical mule, a ½ ton 4 wheel drive cart that could carry a driver and 5 troops if we crowded together.

*August 17 65*

*Dear Dad and Mom,*

*We had a USO show come to Chu Lai yesterday. All the Marines and those Seabees who could get away were at the show. We really appreciate these shows. We had George Jessel and some girl singer. She struck me as being ugly, so she must have been really bad. It has been a long time since I saw a round-eyed girl. Our journalist invited the show back to camp after the show. He forgot to tell anyone. So they just arrived. We managed to get some cold water and a place to sit. They were here for 3 hours.*



*We watched the B-52s bomb the mountains to the West of here the other day. This is kind of silly because we have 8" guns that can reach that far and do most every day. I guess it gives the Air Force practice.*

*Since I have been here I have lost 25 pounds C-rations will do that along with walking in soft sand everyplace you go. I also have a great tan. Swimming on my lunch hour helped that. Today is our 100<sup>th</sup> day here. Only 200 to go. FQ*

*August 18 65.*

*Dear Dad and Mom,*

*We have a new skipper. He is a real wildcat. He has the men working 12-hour days 7 days a week again and has canceled the R and R program. That certainly gave everyone a moral boost. My carbine is coming in a few days. It has been quiet around here.*

*The marines are getting ready for another big sweep. If they are as successful as the last one, I may be making more flights. Their corpsman came to us for extra supplies. They can predict*



*with amazing accuracy how many wounded they will get and what types of wounds they will have. I keep thinking if we know that maybe we should not go there.*

*I got three packages yesterday #16, 17 and 20. I am sure 18 and 19 are still coming. FQ*

Being the battalion postmaster was a high stress job. Being responsible for that much money. Particularly since any errors would come out of his pay was a big stressor. As I remember his pay was close to \$400 a month. He could make an error that would wipe out his income for a year if he was not careful. In addition, every man in the battalion blamed him when they did not get a letter from home, their wife, or girl friend.

Consequently, he developed an ulcer. The medical officer suggested we should visit him at the Marine Hospital. Before you get visions of windows, brick buildings, grass and trees, let me set the scene. The Marine hospital was several large tents put side-by-side and end-to-end. If you wanted to see surgery done you could walk up to the fly netting outside the surgery tent and watch. You were outside the tent the operating room was inside with a second tent and a cloth floor and fly netting enclosing the floor and roof.

Our only wheels were the battalion ambulance, a 4 wheel drive enclosed truck. When we pulled up to the hospital, a corpsman came to us and explained that there had been a big battle and they were overrun with casualties. Would we mind taking four of the wounded to the airport to a waiting C-130 that would take them to Da Nang and the B-med hospital on Monkey Mountain, a 2000' mountain seven miles East of the Da Nang airfield.

There was a report of a large VC army preparing to attack Chu Lai and at the same time a second group was to attack Da Nang. The Battle took place on August 18, 1965 about 10 miles south of Chu Lai. It was named Operation Starlite. It was to have been called operation Satellite but a clerk working by candle light due to a blackout miss typed and it became Starlite. It was the first major regimental size action conducted by purely US military units. Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt devised a plan to launch a pre-emptive strike against the Viet Cong regiment to nullify the threat on the vital airfield and Base Area



It involved 5,500 Marines from 4 battalions. They were supported by Naval gunfire. The total VC strength was around 1,500 men. The marines landed from the water in several areas and others came in by helicopter. One company landed in the middle of a VC battalion and was immediately surrounded. 45 Marines were killed 203 were wounded that day.

We were asked to transfer patients to the airfield. Of course, we were more than willing to transfer the wounded to the waiting aircraft. We got to the airport loaded our 4 stretchers in the waiting aircraft. The litters were stacked 5 high in 2 rows. There were poles that went from the floor to the ceiling of the aircraft. There were attachment points to attach the litters to. This made for a secure attachment so the litters would stay in place. The litters were stacked head to toe. In total there were about 40 casualties in the aircraft.

Once our 4 were safely on board, we started to leave. The crew chief came to us and asked where we were going?

I answered, "Back to camp."



He said, "You cannot leave me with all these casualties. I do not know how to care for them."

Dr. Dwyer being a good doctor said, "Fred, come on, lets fly to Da Nang with them. We will be of more help here than going back to camp for the evening."

The next thing I know I was taxing for a take off to start the trip to Da Nang. It was dark by the time we were in the air. It was rather turbulent. The Dr. asked me to start an IV one of the Marines he felt was dehydrated. This was common because it was so hot and humid. Those in combat often did not get enough water to drink and routinely were dehydrated.

I explained to John that I had never started an IV. He said, "I am busy with a fellow with a lung wound, you know the anatomy. This fellow needs fluids via an IV. Tonight is the night you start your first IV."

I wounded the poor guy about as bad as the Viet Cong had. It took me several tries and a couple of veins to get a needle into one of his veins. I started down the isle and one of the wounded who was on the top of the 5-litter stack said, "Sir, I am getting airsick."

If he vomited it would trickle down his stack and with in a short time half the injured would join him plying the BUICK song. I looked for a basin, a wastebasket or anything he could vomit in. Being an aircraft they do not have things sitting around that could fly around if it got turbulent. There was nothing and the patient was getting greener by the minute.

I said, "Here use my hat."

He said, "I can't barf in your hat."

I said, "You have always wanted to barf on an officer, this is probably the closest you will get to that goal."

So, he filled my cloth hat. Because we were in camp we had not taken our steel helmet. Fortunately there was a toilet in the back of the plane. I



washed out my hat in the toilet. As a Marine you were to wear your hat at all times when outside. We arrived in Da Nang and John asked me to ride with the patient who had the lung wound to the hospital. He needed surgery immediately. John had placed a chest tube and there already was a couple of cups of blood in the suction bottle.

The lung patient was immediately moved to a H-34 helicopter, a Choctaw. This was before the Huey HU-1 turbine helicopters came to Vietnam, at least to our area of Vietnam. The H-34 looked like a bumblebee. It had a large bulbous nose

that housed a very large radial engine. The pilots sat above the engine. The cargo passenger area was below and behind the engine.

As I remember there were two litters, a couple of corpsmen and me in the cargo area for the short trip to Monkey Mountain, about 7 miles away. The helicopters would climb quickly over an airfield to about 5,000' and then fly to their destination. Their landing could best be described as a controlled crash. Come down as quickly as possible over the landing zone, flare to stop your descent at the last possible moment. They were most vulnerable to small arms fire while taking off and landing. The less time in the lower altitude the better.



On the way to the Hospital, I looked out the window and saw a sting of tracers coming up toward us and then fall back to earth. We were high enough to be out of range. Within a few minutes we descended (a controlled crash) at the helicopter pad. I jumped out as the corpsmen maneuvered the litter out of the helicopter. I had the suction bottle that was now about half full of blood.

The triage officer, a Commander in the navy or Lt Col. In the Marines met us. I said, "This guy needs surgery immediately."

His response after noticing my dental insignia, "How would you know?"

I think he was having a bad night. They too had many casualties that night. I held up the bottle, "Is this proof enough, you SOB." I was not having a particularly good night myself.

He responded to one of his corpsmen. "Take him to surgery now."

So here I am on top of Monkey Mountain in the middle of the night in Vietnam. I have no tent, cot, or place to sleep. I have no helmet. I did not bring my rifle. So I sat on the steps leading up to one of the tents and watched a firefight that was taking place about a mile away, explosions and tracers going off until dawn.

The sun came up and the attack stopped. The VC would melt back into the jungle until there was a

## Battle keeps Seabee medics busy on visit

CHU LAI, South Viet Nam — started as a routine trip to visit MCB-10's sick at the Chu Lai field hospital.

The battalion's physician, Dr. Starr; dentist, Dr. Quarnstrom; and training officer, Ens. Neier, climbed into a battalion ambulance for the short ride to B Medical Company's hospital.

Little did they realize what the night held in store for them. The battle had been raging south of the Chu Lai area all day and the wounded were keeping the medics' personnel very busy.

Upon arriving at B Med the doctor was asked to carry a load of wounded Marines to the airfield where a medical evacuation plane waited to take them to Da Nang. Since there were no doctors available to supervise handling patients, Starr assisted himself, seeing to their needs while Quarnstrom and Neier helped load patients up

and get them settled for the flight to Da Nang.

The plane departed Chu Lai with Dr. Starr and Dr. Quarnstrom tending to the needs of the patients. It was not what could be classed as a happy trip as is usually the case when one leaves Chu Lai but the men were more cheerful than could be expected considering the day's events.

MCB-10's physician and dentist rode to Da Nang where the patients were transferred to helicopters for the ride to the field hospital of C Med Battalion.

Dr. Quarnstrom continued on in a helicopter with one of the more critically wounded, while Dr. Starr rode back to Chu Lai to prepare more patients for the trip to Da Nang.

The next morning the two doctors answered reveille by going to bed instead of getting up.

better time. I heard a helicopter starting up. I ran over and hopped onboard. A few minutes later I was back at the Da Nang airfield where I caught a flight back to Chu Lai. I was home about 10 am. As I waked back to camp, I passed the CO. Gave him a salute, and said, "Good morning Sir." He replied, "You have a busy morning?" "Yes, Sir." Little did he know.

The Marines involved in Starlight all received a Navy Unit Commendation. I qualified because of my involvement in evacuation of wounded to Da Nang. However it never caught up to me.

You did what you had to. It did not matter that I had no training to do much of what I did that night. In fact I had no military training in handling casualties or wounds. Dental school taught us about teeth and minor jaw injuries. Most of my emergency training came from earning a first aid merit badge when in Boy Scouts. It did give you a good feeling thinking you might have made a difference to a couple of Marines. I will always wonder if the fellow who filled my hat remembers that night.

August 19 65

I suspect this clipping came from my hometown newspaper. It may have been written by me. The battalion did tend to write and send such information to the men's hometown newspapers.



*I cannot start this letter with – nothing new happened. I had an exciting evening last night. The marines had an operation with quite a few casualties. Last evening we drove up to the field hospital, a big tent, to see one of our folks with an ulcer. I was with our physician. As we were leaving they asked us if we would mind driving some casualties down to the airstrip. We loaded them into the ambulance and left for the plane. One had been shot in the lung and the others had multiple wounds to their arms and legs. We got to the plane at about 8 PM and loaded them into the plane. The aircraft crew expected about 8 more casualties and asked that we fly with them as they did not know how to care for wounded. By 10 PM we had a load of 42 casualties. On the way Da Nang the MD asked me to start an IV. I had never started an IV. He said, "You know the anatomy, Tonight is the night." I wounded the fellow about as bad as the VC but did get the IV started. Another wounded told me he was getting airsick. We were bouncing around a lot. I could not find a wastebasket, bucket or anything else; so I gave him my hat. He said, "I cannot barf in your hat." I told him you have always wanted to barf on an officer. This is as close as you are likely to get." So he filled my hat. There was a toilet on the plane so I washed out my hat.*

*We arrived at Da Nang and loaded the wounded on choppers to take them to B Med the field hospital on top of Monkey Mountain. Our physician went back to Chu Lai to help with another flight. On the way to B Med the helicopters climbed over the field to about 5,000' we could see tracers come up at the helicopter. We were too high to be hit.*

*The marine I was with had a lung wound and a chest tube draining blood into a bottle. When I got off the chopper, two corpsman grabbed his stretcher. The triage officer met us. I told him this man needs surgery right away. He saw my dental insignia and asked, "How the hell would I would know." He was having a bad night and I did not want to be any part of delaying this Marine's treatment.*

*I held up the bottle of draining blood and said, "Is this reason enough you S.O. B." "Take him to surgery now." That was what I wanted to know. I watched a firefight about 2 miles away with tracers and explosions for a couple of hours. As it got light the VC disappeared into the jungle.*

*At 1 AM the choppers were back with another 30 wounded. I caught a ride back to Da Nang at about 6 AM. I caught a ride back to Chu Lai. I was a very tired boy. We lost 58 Marines and 250 casualties in the first 2 days but they seem to have a regiment of VC trapped. Indication is they had about 700 casualties. This was operation Starlight.*

*I though you might like to know what we know about what happened. All of this took place about 10 miles south of our camp. FQ*

*After about 4 months, we started getting fresh meat and vegetables. Our first steak dinner was changed to a steak lunch. We had an admiral visiting from Honolulu. The senior officers would visit for a day each month. In doing so, they see what was being built, would get combat pay for the month and could receive the medals we earned. Since he was not spending the night, our CO decided we would have our steak for lunch. The men working on the runway would have to settle for C-rations. This was announced in our weekly staff meeting. Not being very smart, I suggested we should feed the admiral C-rations. "Maybe he would notice and make fresh meat and vegetables a priority for us."*

*The commanding officer stated, "That is a very naive idea, Mr. Quarnstrom. We will have steak for lunch with the admiral."*



**Dear Mom and Dad,**

**Please let me know if you hear anything about extending officer's times on active duty in the Navy. We keep getting rumors that this will happen; but not much in the way of facts. I really am ready to get on with my life.**

**I am still snorkeling . I saw 5 langoustes yesterday but they were too fast for me. I cannot think of anything that would taste better than fresh "lobster." FQ**

**Aug 20 65**

**Dear Dad and Mom,**

**Things have settled down a bit. We have an intelligence briefing about once a week. One of our officers goes to the briefing by the Marines. He brings back the info to our staff meeting. The numbers he brought to us were close to 1000 VC were killed and 100 captured. They basically wiped out a whole regiment that was poised to attach Chu Lai. We will sleep a little better.**

With McNamara as secretary of Defense body counts were very important. They actually went over the battlefield counting bodies are parts of bodies. No one believed the counts were very accurate but it kept Robert M. happy. If a plane took off with one bomb, it was counted as a sortie. If it has 8 bombs it was one sortie. When the supply of bombs got low, 8 planes were sent out with one bomb each. This counted as 8 sorties and also risked 8 men rather than one man with 8 bombs that only counted as 1 sortie. Statistics became very important on the battlefield.

**Happy Birthday to dad. As is the usual you will have to wait until I get home for a present. We had an interesting time yesterday. I think I told you about going out to a local village to do dentistry. The ARVN advisors to the city invited us to lunch at the best restaurant in the province. It has a corrugated aluminum roof, thatched walls and a dirt floor. The food was much like Chinese, but much more spicy. Lots of rice, spiced shrimp, sweet and sour pork, crab rolls, beef and a different chicken soup. It had whole pieces of chicken in it. Mine had a drumstick with claws. The fellow next to me got a neck with head beak, and eyes. It was a successful meal and now we will invite them to our camp for dinner. I did pay for it with the Ho Chi Min quick step. It took a few days to get my digestive system back to normal. The new skipper sends us expendable officers to these meals. He is making major changes. We will see. Not much is new. I have embarked on a career in writing or I should say I almost did. The thought of correcting the spelling punctuation and awkward grammar is an insurmountable task. So one bidding author will probably be lost to the world. I thought you might get a kick out of my first attempt. The sad part about it is most of the events occurred. FQ**

This is a story I wrote about a fictitious attack. No attack happened as I described. If you added all the crazy things that had happened into one incident, it could have been true. It shows proper procedures getting in the way of immediate response. Sometimes doing it by the book was not the best technique.

We had one LTJG who would sneak up on his men in their foxholes at night. He was trying to catch one sleeping. If he had caught one, he would have gone to a Captain's Mast, lost stripes, had a pay cut, and could have been sent back to Okinawa to the brig, jail. Of course, that would mean he had a bed to sleep in, three meal meals a day and would not be working 12 hours a day and standing watch all night. The brig was a building that was air-conditioned. It was more punishment to be kept in Chu Lai.

One of the men asked me to talk to the LTJG. He said, "Tell him to not go sneaking around in the dark. The only reason he has not been shot is the men in the holes did not know who was sneaking up on them. They really dislike him. If you go sneaking up on a foxhole in the night, figure you might just get shot at.

One of the interesting facts is our security force carried revolvers right out of the old west with 18" barrels, the original "hog's leg" from the old west and the days of Wyatt Earp. They held 6 round of ammo but you could not have a round under the hammer so you only had 5 rounds to use. To reload you had to open the revolver eject the spent ammunition insert new bullets and close the revolver all while dodging the rounds from the enemy. To fire you had to cock the hammer and fire, and cock the hammer to shoot the next round. You could shoot 5 rounds in about 15 seconds.

The rest of us carried 1911 colt semiautomatic pistols that had clips with 7 rounds. You could fire all seven in about 4 seconds. You could not aim that fast and it kicked like a mule. But you could scare the heck out of the enemy. When empty you pushed a button ejecting the clip and inserted a new clip of 7. This took about 3 seconds.



In an attempt to preserve my sanity I decided to write a story (fiction) about one night when we were attacked. This was written while I was at Chu Lai. The Commanding Officer said, "I hear you are writing a book." I could answer truthfully "no." I did not mention it was just a story of one night. This was that attempt.

#### The night of our attack

One can't be too critical of the security force at Camp Shields. After all we were never overrun. In fact, there is little evidence to support the fact that the enemy was ever in camp. That is except for the Vietnamese who were hired to work here and they were closely supervised.

This discussion of the security at Chu Lai is not meant to be particularly critical of any one person or even the security force as a whole. It is of course, fiction. However many of the incidents that were included did happen in a slightly altered form. If all the wacky occurrences of a week had ever occurred all at once they could have precipitated an incident that closely paralleled this story.

As little Te Se Hyung silently sneaked up on Camp Shields he was thinking to himself how refreshing it was to be out of his spider hole and in the fresh night air. In his hand was a carbine that had been provided by the US CIA to help fight the French during WWII. On his belt were some grenades that had been procured the same way. Hanging around his neck was a camera he had traded one of the Seabees for a VC flag. It got in his way, but he knew if he had not brought it one of the other VC would have taken it while he was gone from the tunnel city under the camp. They had been so busy building footlockers for the American troops they had not built any for themselves.

He crept forward full of confidence he could reach his objective, the Seabee slop chute, beer hall tent. How better could he destroy moral of those working on the airfield. He knew the camp like the back of his hand he had worked there for 3 weeks picking up rubbish. He had practiced his intended path many times while picking up trash.

As Te entered the barbed wire he was careful to place each foot so as to not get caught or entangled in the devilish barbs. Then it happened. His camera caught a barb throwing him off balance and he became hopelessly trapped; or so he thought. He had not planned on the ingenuity of the Seabee security.

Thud was the first thing Milton Samathrase heard. Milton had been resting his eyes for the last few minutes. Milton knew if the boatswain's mate saw him like this. The charges would state he had been asleep, he would be put on report, taken to Captain's mast and broken from seaman apprentice to seamen recruit. That was how he had slipped from Seaman to Seaman apprentice. So softly but loud enough to be heard he said, "A men."

It was OK to pray on watch but they did not understand about resting ones eyes. He opened his eyes expecting to see the boatswain. There 30 feet in front of him was a VC tangled in the wire. Without hesitating he picked up the phone and said, "I've got a VC in the wire!"

The man on duty in the security tent replied, "Who just shouted into the phone?"

"I did," shouted Milton, "I've got a V C in the wire."

"Who is I?" came the reply.

"Samathrase."

"Samathrase, don't you know how to report a suspicious activity?"

"Suspicious hell! He is tangled up in the wire."

"Samathrase, stop shouting into the phone and report in the proper manner."

"But he is in the wire." Came a meek reply.

"Samathrase, let's go over the reporting procedures. What do you tell me first?"

"I do not know. He is in the wire?"

"Samathrase, your are to tell me what fighting hole you are in."

"I am in the hole right in front of where this guy is in the wire."



"Samathrase, forget about the guy in the wire for a minute. Don't you know the number of your hole or the sector you are in?"

"No sir, but he is still here."

"Now according to my record you are in hole 4 of sector 1."

"Yes sir."

"Now what do you tell me next."

"Suspicious activity."

"Very good. Now where is that activity?"

"In the wire."

"Samathrase!"

"To my front sir."

"How far?"

"30 meters."

"Very good Samathrase, Now, what is the suspicious activity?"

"I can't tell you sir."

"Why not?"

"You said you would put me on report."

"You idiot, it is OK to tell me now. We have come to the place on the form I have to fill out."

"Oh, OK, I have an enemy sighted in the wire."

"How do you know he is an enemy?"

"Because he threw a grenade at me."

"Did it go off? I have not heard an explosion."

"No he forgot to pull the pin. They must sleep through their classes too, huh?"

"Sir?"

"Yes."

"May I put a round in my chamber?"

"Do you have a clip in your weapon?"

"No. Sir."

"Then obviously you cannot put a round in your chamber."

"May I put a clip in my weapon?"

"Of course not. You know the order about putting a clip in your weapon."

"But the guy in the wire."

"I do not care about the guy in the wire. You know the only one who can give you that order is Mr. Lint. I am going to call and ask him what to do. You report anything suspicious."

"How suspicious can one man get? He is tangled up in the wire throwing grenades at me."

"Samathrase, has he fired at you?"

"No, he dropped his weapon when he got tangled and cannot reach it."

"Let me know if he starts shooting at you."

As this point the Boatswain picked up the inter-camp phone and said, "Operator give me BOQ 2 this is a priority 1 call."

"What is a priority 1 call?" asked the operator.

"This is a priority 1 call."

"I have never received a priority 1 call request. What do I do?"

"Consider yourself on report for not reading battalion notices. You handle them before any other calls."

"That is easy. It is 1 o'clock in the morning. No one is on the phones."

"A sleepy voice answered the phone, "LTJG grade Bill E. Lint speaking sir."

"Mr. Lint, Boatswain's mate Target calling sir. Hole 4 sector 1 reports a suspicious activity sir. A VC is entangled in the wire. Samathrase is manning that hole sir. The time is 01:32 and 15 seconds, sir."

"Very good Target. Has he complied with force order 1236.12A?"

"Sir, I don't recognize that number. What is it about?"

"It's about putting clips in his weapon. He hasn't has he?"

"No Sir."



"Good make sure he doesn't until I can get to the war room and direct this battle."

Within a few minutes a big figure was heading for the security tent. It was a big man, because he was chubby but also was covered with equipment. On his left calf a bayonet was strapped. Next there was his pistol belt. On it hung a pistol, holster, two canteens full of water, a first-aid pouch an entrenching tool in its case, a magazine case for his pistol clips, another magazine case for his rifle ammunition. That case also had a K-bar knife attached. Next came a map case, and pouches for grenades. If only the commander had let him have live grenades. Next came his revolver with the mother of pearl grips. It was not official, but it sure looked good. Over his shoulder was his field marching pack. This included a poncho, blanket, shelter half tent stakes and a pole, two pairs of socks, an extra set of trousers, an official blouse and a change of skivvies, shaving gear, soap, tooth paste and tooth brush. As he entered the security tent he thought, I am really ready to go.

When target saw him come into the tent. It is good he is fat or he would never get all that stuff on his belt. He got here so fast, it was as if he slept in all that stuff.

"Mr. Lint don't you think you should sit down you are breathing very hard."

"Target, are you trying to tell me I am fat? Well stow it these are deep breathing exercises. Good for chest expansion you know."

Lint was proud of his use of stow. He had only been in the Navy 2 years and already many nautical terms colored his speech. "Target get the maps of our defenses and bring them into my office, err the war room. Be sure to put of the Do Not Enter Top Secret Briefing sign up. Target get our maps of our defenses"

"Sir, we loaned them to medical to decide where the heads were to be placed."

"You loaned out our Top secret map? I made them Top Secret. If there are VC in the area we cannot take the chance they might know where the heads are being placed."

"But sir, you are not authorized to declare things Top Secret. In addition, we do not have a safe capable of holding Top Secret documents."

"Target, don't tell me what I can and cannot do. This is War. Medals go to those who take command in emergencies and make decisions. We will have to do without them. We cannot risk letting the VC know where our positions are."

"But Sir, The Vietnamese we have working in camp helped build the positions."

"We will have to give them all Top Secret clearances then."

"What if one of them is a VC?"

"We can do that under the concept of 'need to know.' Certainly if they helped build the holes he needed to know where to build them."

The conversation was interrupted by the phone. "Target this is Samathrase. You said I could not put a clip in my weapon. Can I throw one of these grenades back at him?"

"I said, NO!"

"But he threw it at me."

"Mr. Lint will give you an order, if he wants you to attack."

"Who said anything about attacking? I just want to defend myself."

"Samathrase, do you want to be put on report? Just inform us if something new occurs."

"Like if he remembers to pull the pin on one of his grenades?"

"Samathrase, get back on watch."

"Target, you handled him very well. Why don't you go out the hole and take a look. Report back to me what you find." Said Lint.

Target was gone in a flash. As he climbed the sand dune behind the fighting hole He called to Samathrase. "I am coming up behind you. Do not get jumpy. "A men" said target as he opened his eyes. "Boy am I glad to see you."

"Now where is your VC?" asked Target.



"Oh, he got loose quite a while ago. You can still see where he was. His camera case is still caught in the fence. He took the camera."

"Well stay on your toes. They might try to get through again tonight."

"Oh, yes Sir, Target. You know me they call me Alex alert."

"Very good Samathrase. I am going now."

Target has hardly disappeared from sight when Samathrase was again leaning on the front parapet of the foxhole. His rifle was pointing out into the blackness of the night. He lowered his chin on the stalk of his rifle, to rest his neck muscles and then just because it was more comfortable he lowered his eyelids just a little bit. Soon he was comfortably snoring.

The report of the night's activities read, at 01:30 a VC squad attempted to mount our defenses. When the lead man became entangled in defensive wire the attack was broken off. One grenade was thrown but did not explode. While the man occupying hole 4 sector 1 was taking evasive measures of the grenade the man in the wire abandoned his entangled equipment and fled leaving his equipment in the wire. Contact was broken off at 01:35. It was on the skipper's desk by sunup.

Very good thought the skipper I will have to have letters of commendation put in the jackets of all the men involved. And so within a few days a letter of commendation was in the service jackets of all the participants. The essences of the letter is as follows:

"When the security force at about 01:30 of July 23 1965 came under attack, of a reinforced squad of VC, the above mentioned men successfully beat back the attack. This included driving back one of the more determined enemy who made a suicidal attempt at thwarting the barbed wire defenses. They performed in the highest Naval tradition and showed again that Seabees protect what they build. They added to the honored credo of "Seabees can do."

The letter of commendation didn't mean much. No extra beer ration, no time off, no special chow privileges. Milton still worked a 10-hour day and still stood watch, on for three hours. Off for three hours, all night. But he now had a war story and war stories were hard to come by in Seabee land. He could not go home and tell people he had worked 12 hours a day seven days a week for 8 months without a day off. Only nuts would do something like that. But now he had met the enemy. In fact, he had been attacked by the enemy and came through unscathed. He could imagine the girls now, all-agog by the tails of his bravery.

**Aug 25 65 Hong Kong.**

***I am back from Hong Kong. It is a really fabulous city. It is beautiful, dynamic, and full of beautiful friendly people. I about went broke saving money. They say the average person on R & R spends \$7 an hour awake or asleep. I came pretty close.***

***You cannot appreciate how nice it is to sleep in a bed with sheets. Have a steak, salad and desert and a glass of wine while looking over the Hong Kong harbor. It is wonderful to not have to worry about the people you are around. No one wants to shoot you.***

***I ate in a floating restaurant in Aberdeen Harbor, great Chinese food. The Golden Pheasant in Sunnyside has a long way to go to be this good. (The Golden Pheasant was Sunnyside's Chinese restaurant. It was considered very exotic when it opened in 1955 and still exists 60 years later.)***

***I was walking down the street and heard this loud clatter. I walked into what I thought was a bar. It was a Mahjong parlor. The noise was from 50 tables of people moving mahjong pieces around while laughing and talking. An elderly gent came up to me and said, "We will teach you the game of Mahjong." My answer was "I bet you will." I got out of there before my wallet was emptied.***



***When I got back to Chu Lai I got really great news. WE WILL BE HOME BY CHRISTMAS. FQ***

My mouth often worked faster than common sense and my brain. I had to attend the staffs meeting each week. Nothing was discussed that remotely affected me. Nor did anything dental that I did effect the battalion on a weekly basis. After the CO had presented his plan for the week, he would go around the tent asking for input, "Do you have anything to add Mr. Jones, Mr. Smith, Mr. Zander, Mr. Buckelhide, Mr. Quarnstrom, Dr. Dwyer (our MD), etc?"

After you have lived in a leaky tent, on a beachhead, eating C-rations in a war zone, you get a little squirrely. It really bugged me that I was not doctored. Finally, I had it. I wrote an official letter to The Commanding officer MCB-10 from The Dental Officer MCB-10. Reference: salutation of a dental officer. I went on to quote from Navy Regulations the appropriate sections addressing the salutation of dental officers. A dentist shall be referred to as Doctor until such time as they make Commander at which time Doctor or Commander is the proper title. Once a Captain they should be referred to as Captain.



The best restaurant in the province. You can tell by motorcycle out front. They are very rare here.



The beer was warm and served with ice cubes of questionable water. The flies swarmed around your glass of beer.



The kitchen was a cloud of smoke from several small fires. There was no refrigeration. Pork, beef, chickens and duck hung from a clothesline out side.

Since the CO was a commander, I had just told him I was equal to him in the eyes of the Navy. This was a very, very, very big mistake. He did refer to me as Doctor for that day forward often with an emphasis on the second syllable. He also put me in charge of examining the latrines, out houses, crappers, and the garbage dump. I was also assigned to eat in the villages as a representative of the battalion.

We would host the Vietnamese officers in our office's mess for dinner. In turn, they would

invite us to have dinner with them in the "best restaurant" in the province. It may have been the only restaurant in the province. It had a dirt floor, thatched walls and a corrugated aluminum roof. This was a sign of great opulence in this area. Most homes and shops had thatched roofs. These roofs might be a couple of feet thick and housed mice, rats, birds, bats, and bugs. Eating at the restaurant was taking your life in your hands. The village was 5 miles outside our lines. It was several miles outside the Marine camps. Several times it was touch and go getting back to our base.

We had been to a dinner there and it was dark by the time we headed back to camp in one of the Arvin (Vietnamese Army) trucks. On the way back to the base conclave, all hell broke out ahead of us off the road. Our translator said, "No worry. I send men." At least I think that is what he said. He had a strong accent. But his English was much better than my Vietnamese. The pickup truck ahead of us unloaded 6 Vietnamese troops who disappeared into the dark.



I did take out my pistol just in case; but felt rather naked sitting in the back of a pickup with canvas sides in the dark on a road 3 miles outside our lines. I considered getting out of the truck and down in the ditch by the side of the road. The ditch could have been home to any number of bad animals including poisonous snakes. I was also worried that they might drive off and leave me there. His men took care of the problem and we were on our way 10 minutes later. That 10 minutes felt like a couple of hours.

The "restaurant" was a cloud of flies. Your beer was warm but had some ice cubes made from questionable water to cool the beer. The water source was usually a large puddle full of moss, bugs and sometimes a water buffalo. The flies were heavy beer drinkers. You had to keep one hand busy brushing flies off your glass. They liked to swim around in your beer. I did this while using chopsticks with the other hand to eat dinner.

The food was tasty. If you ignored that your soup had a chicken neck with the head beak and eyes still attached or a chicken leg with the foot still intact. The CO never accepted invitations from his counterpart in the Vietnamese Army. He sent his Dentist and other Jr. officers.

The restaurant had no refrigeration. The meat we ate was hung outside in the sun on a laundry line. Flies covered the beef, chickens and ducks. They cooked our meals on a table covered with two inches of dirt on which they built little fires. They cooked over the fires by placing a pot on a three-legged stand over the fire. Every trip to the "best restaurant in the province" ended up with a bout of the Ho Chi Minh's quickstep. The GI upset was as violent as the water issue had been, but only lasted 4 or 5 days. The more frequently we were sent to the restaurant, the more immune we became to the food. After the fifth time of being so honored, my stomach was only upset for a day. I often wonder how many parasites I collected.



I was also put in charge of collecting parachutes that were used to drop us critical supplies. From all of this, I learned you cannot demand a title; you must earn it every day. To this day, my name is Fred, Dr. Q if you must title me. Fred was good enough for my mother it is still appropriate.

When we had a supply drop, I had a truck with driver and 5 or 6 men. We would go to the area where the drop was to take place. A C-130 would fly over. We would set off a smoke grenade to show the pilot the wind direction and strength and to serve as a target for the drop. On the second pass a bunch of bundles would be

dropped with individual chutes. Once they hit the ground, the truck went to the supplies. The supplies were placed in the truck and the chutes were collected.

Everyone wanted a chute to place over his tents to keep out the rain. It usually took 4 or 5 passes to complete the drop. This gave individual Marines a chance to come to the area. On one drop as I walked toward the drop zone my foot caught a trip wire and I tripped it. I hit the dirt thinking it was part of a booby trap. I just knew an anti personal mine was about to go off. The Marines laughed at me. It was a flare trip wire placed so if there were infiltrators at night they would trip the flare illuminating the area.

It only took my heart about 20 minutes to get back to a normal rate. On one drop, the plane came over





one last time and a single package with a single chute was dropped. The men were busy collecting cargo and chutes. One of the men came to me and said, "That last drop was a bear."

I responded, "Bear, smear, get those chutes. Here come the Marines. If we do not get the chutes, we will not get our drop next week."

"Honest, there is a bear, come see."

I walked over being careful of any more trip wires. There was a Malaysian honey bear. It was about 15 pounds and was a bit upset. It had been in a truck to the airport, then a plane, and then it was pitched out of the plane with a parachute. It had been a bad day for the bear.

We had no idea of where he had come from. The CO did not want a bear, but did not dare turn it out in case some Admiral had sent it. We named the bear Boo Boo, eventually that was changed to Chu Lai. I don't think she noticed the change. We took her back to our camp. She liked cookies and candy and there always was a Seabee to run with her and feed her what she liked vs. what a bear should be eating. She ran pigeon toed, would trip, role and come up running.

The military newspaper, Stars and Stripes, wrote a story about the Seabee's mascot, Booboo the bear. Now the CO would not dare turn her out. In time she got to the size of a small collie dog.

Her face started swelling and he would get a little mean. The CO called me in and asked what is wrong with the Boo Boo.



A cartoon about the bear surgery from our base newsletter, yes, I had a shaved head.

I answered, "I think she has some infected teeth. See did not brush and likes candy."

He said, "Why don't you take them out."

"She will bite me."

"Why don't you put her to sleep?"

"I have never done general anesthesia before, she probably will not wake up."

"That would be OK".

He did not like the bear. If it died in dental surgery it would not be his fault.

I tried IV Pentothal. The trick was, I had to give it intravenously. I could not find a vein in the Bear's arm. It never dawned on me to shave the hair; so I might see her veins. This attempt was a failure.

I tried injecting Pentothal into a muscle. I saw no effect; so I let the bear have the rest of the day off. She did not like getting stuck with a needle and her claws tried to take the back off my hand. The scars went away after 15 years.

The next day, I was better prepared. I had 4 Seabees holding her legs. They all had heavy leather gloves. My dental assistant had a can of ether. I had read up on doing anesthesia with open drop ether. I had heavy leather gloves. I was the head holder.



In one hand I held her head, in the other I had a big wad of gauze. The assistant poured ether in the gauze and I held it over her nose and mouth. For a little animal, she was very strong and fought like mad. But, she was no match for a dentist and 4 Seabees and a can of ether. The more she struggled, the more she breathed.



After a few minutes she went limp. I assumed she was alive, as she was breathing. I had no way to monitor her blood pressure or pulse rate. After all I had never done a case of general anesthesia, much less on a bear. I had seen one case of general anesthesia while in dental school. They had used IV Pentothal.

I opened Boo Boo's mouth that was limp. Out came a big tongue. It was in my way so I grabbed it with a towel clip and pulled it out and down onto her crotch. She had one very big tongue. They use it to get grubs from under logs. I could now see her teeth and went to extracting 4 teeth that were badly decayed. They had magnificently long roots when compared to a human. This all took about 15 minutes. I did not have to give her more ether.

I stopped and just held her. I clearly did not know what I was doing. I should have made sure her airway was open, but I did not know that was important much less how to do it on a bear.

In another 15 minutes, she started moving around. By the half hour, Boo Boo was walking around a little drunk. The next day she had totally recovered and seemed to be as smart as when I put her to sleep. It is kind of hard to judge the IQ of a Bear. She did not like me for a few days. Her face did not swell again and she seemed to be in a better frame of mind. I had a photo of the executive looking over the bear surgery with a pipe in his mouth. Had a little ether vapor been caught by a puff of air and gone to his mouth, we would have had one heck of an explosion leaving parts of Boo Boo and me all over the beach. Ether fumes are very flammable/explosive.

I had done my first case of general anesthesia. When I entered my anesthesia residency two years later, the director of the program asked me if I had ever done any general anesthesia.

I proudly answered, "I had done a Bear."

He responded, "I was interested in successful cases."

I explained the bear was alive and seemed to be happy in the San Diego Zoo.

It seems there was some anesthesia research done with bears because they had the same physiology as humans for what ever they were studying. The bears had died. They were not working in the bear's mouth and the giant tongue had blocked the bear's airway. It proves if you are lucky, you do not have to be smart.

We had some friends visit the San Diego Zoo about 20 years later. They took the tram that drove you around the zoo. When they got to the Malaysian honey bear grotto, the driver told them to see if they could find the bear with missing teeth. They had no idea of how it had lost them. Jay raised his hand and said he knew the dentist who had removed them. They did not believe him.

As it turned out it was good she was just a cub. When these bears get big, they are very dangerous.

**Dear Mom and Dad,**

***I was made Photograph Officer, putting me in charge of our two photographers. Up to now they had not done much. They did not have to answer to anyone. Yesterday they put in a 12-hour day***



*developing and printing photographs. They spent 4 hours telling me how they could not do it and 8 hours putting things together and printing a bunch of photos.*

*Tomorrow they have to develop and print 92 prints for an operations report of how the field and other jobs are coming along. I find it a little hard to believe that a report with glossy photos is required every month while in a forward area. I told them they could take the rest of the day off once the photos are ready. I bet they will be done by 3 PM. FQ*



One of my odd jobs was photographic officer. I was in charge of the photographers. I also was in charge of the photo tent. This was a dream job. The tent was air-conditioned. In fact, it was the only air-conditioned space in the camp. Because we developed our own photos and prints of photos, we had to have a cool space, if the photos would develop properly.

It was a dream to go there to see what the photographers had been doing, a chance to get cool. Daily temperatures outside were close to 100 degrees and 100% humidity.

In addition to keeping tabs on the photographers, I had to go with them on photo shoots to be sure they got the photographs that were necessary for our monthly ops reports that were sent off to Seabees Pacific headquarters in Honolulu. After reviewing the photographs that were taken, the CO would tell us what he really wanted. I would go up with the photographers in one of the H-34 Marine helicopters to be sure they got the photos he wanted.

Because of the large radial engine, these helicopters shook like a clothes washer out of balance. They shook so badly I really thought it would come apart. Once a month, or so, we would hear about a lubrication line coming loose or getting clogged and the rotor freezing. If this happened the rotor



stopped. The helicopter then had the glide ratio of a rock. The engine was 1525 horsepower. It did not feel like the chopper wanted to fly. It would veer left, right, up and down sometimes all at once. From this I came to the conclusion that helicopters cannot fly. They are just so ugly the earth repulses them. As a crew chief told me. If you do a preflight and you do not find something missing or broken, do the exam again you missed something. If something is not leaking it needs oil.

When you climbed on board the crew chief/door gunner would tell you to put your helmet on the floor under your seat. The first time I heard this I said, "I would rather keep it on my head, I do not worry much about being shot in the butt."



His response was, "Sir, we are flying above the VC, if they shoot you in the butt the bullet will probably lodge in your head. Better the helmet stops the bullet before it gets to your butt." Now that was logic. I did not learn that in dental school.

The photographers had a special "seat belt" it was a harness that went around their waist. It was attached to long straps to the inside of the chopper. This allowed them to lean out the open door to get the best photos. I was sure glad I was not a photographer. The door gunner has his chair half out of the door along with the mounted machine gun. He was always hanging out there.

To get photos of the whole airfield, the chopper would go to 9,000'. This was nice because it was nice and cool at that altitude. It seemed like it took a half an hour to get there. Chu Lai was really a very beautiful country, the sea, mountains, jungles and rivers. It would have been great if I had any confidence in the helicopter that was intent on shaking itself apart and would not go in just one direction. The fact there were people down there who wanted to shoot you did not help my confidence. I have not lost anything in helicopters and have found no reason to get in one since I left Vietnam.

Back to the photographers, I went to the photo lab one afternoon to check and see how the latest batch of photos was coming. I walked into the dark room and one of the biggest craps games I had ever seen. This was very against all regulations. I probably should have reported them and the other 6 players. Instead, I said, "I have not seen anything. I am leaving and will be back in 10 minutes I do not want to see this when I come back." I went out the front door and started to the dental tent. I passed the CO who was going toward the photo tent to check the photos he had requested. He too liked to cool off.

My heart stopped for a minute. If the game was still going on, I too would have been in trouble for not reporting the gambling. As he went up the stairs and through the front "door" of the tent, 6 people went out the flap that was the back door. Saved again. A couple of hours later I went back to pickup the dried prints of our morning flight. They looked great. In fact they were so good I decided to take them directly to the CO. I knocked once. By this time the more important tents had doors of wood with fly netting. Fly netting the whole way around giving the tents some air circulation. I heard, "Enter."

I walked in with the photos and saw Marine officer with a star on his collar. My first thought was he was a line officer. Naval line officers had stars on their sleeves of the dress blue coat. We support officers had insignias indicating our job, dental, medical, supply, civil engineering. But the stars were not on their collars. I am a bit slow; but, it dawned on me I was face to face with the Marine General, the Commanding Officer of the whole area. I excused myself and started to leave. He said, "No, stay, I want to see the photos." He too liked what he saw. It was my first and only exposure to a General or Admiral. And he liked what he saw. I was out of trouble for a little while.

About this time, we had the airfield well under way and started going into the villages to do public works jobs. This started by digging some wells for the new villages. All the villagers had been moved out to Route 1, to get them out of the airport area. Route 1 is the main "highway" from Da Nang to Saigon. This highway would be akin to a mountain dirt road with a few spots of asphalt and mud puddles big enough to swim in. I once drove a jeep into such a puddle and the hood went under water. Fortunately they were 4-wheel drive so I was able to back out.

The Vietnamese homes were bamboo with thatched walls and roof. A large house might have two rooms. Most were single rooms about 10' by 10'. The homes were moved within a few days from the area where the field would be built. Within a week the homes were rebuilt and functioning. Route 1 was a two-lane road that in some places was hard surface but most of it was packed dirt. None of the villages had a "good" water source.





We would see a large depression maybe a 70 feet across filled a foot deep with water choked by weeds and pond scum.

Villagers would dip water out of these while a water buffalo or two were standing on the other side of the pond. Our folks dug deep holes and cracked the soil with explosives to let water flow into the new well. Within a few days there were fish in the pond/well. We asked why they did this. Their response was if the fish are swimming the VC has not poisoned it. Remember to always check to see there are live fish in your well.



I am treating a woman in the village who has an infected tooth. Pacifico is handing me my instrument. There was so much need we started letting him extract teeth also. His line was always longer than mine, he was Asian and fit better.

We also started doing people to people dentistry and medicine. The Chaplain arranged for a squad of Marines, 7 men with rifles, to meet up with the battalion doctor and I. We would take a couple of corpsman and my dental tech. We all carried a 45 cal. colt model 1911 pistol. It held 7 rounds and kicked like a mule when fired. I had been to the range at Camp Pendleton. At 50' I could put 7 of 10 rounds in a bulls eye that was about 8" in diameter. I came close to firing expert. The clip held 7 rounds. For the test, we had two clips of 5 rounds. You had about 10 seconds to fire 10 rounds. That included shooting one clip ejecting it inserting the second clip and fire those 5 rounds. I got 6 of 10 because when the first clip emptied I tried to fire it without replacing with the new clip. By the time I put the new clip in, I only got off one shot.

A couple of jeeps or mules would carry our bunch across Route 1, past the Marine camps another 4 or 5 miles out into VC country. From there it was a hike for a couple of miles through the rice paddies to a small village. The medical folks would show the villagers how important it was to clean their kids. Basically they would give each child a bath in the river. When we came back a couple of weeks later all the sores on their legs and arms had healed.

My dental assistant and I would extract hopeless teeth that were infected. The Chaplain would arrange the trips, but he never came along. I would think he should have been as interested in saving souls as I was saving mouths. At the first village we went to, a line quickly formed with people who had major tooth problems. I went down the line injecting local anesthesia for the first 10 extractions. I had brought local anesthesia, syringes and forceps. By the time I had finished the ten injections the first patient was numb. I started extracting teeth. The translator came to me and asked what I had done. The people say their mouth feels like it is wood.

I told him, "This keeps them from having pain and they will return to normal in a couple of hours."

He said, "Do not do that. It scares them. They do not want it. Just take out the bad teeth."

I said, "It is going to hurt bad."



He said, "Just do it."

I finished those I had numb and started on the next group. They had not been given local anesthesia, numbed up. They did not make a sound. They did not flinch. The teeth were very loose due to the infections. They came out easily and often would have infection drain from the tooth sockets. I may have saved some lives. I was bowled over that they did not want local anesthesia and could do the extractions with nothing.

The lines grew longer. It was one tooth in the forceps, one in the air and one hitting the bucket all at the same time. We would wipe off the forceps with alcohol between patients. I had no way to do a proper job of sterilizing while in the villages. If I practiced like this today I would lose my license. However, every one of these patients had severe life threatening infections. You did what you had to do. After an hour and probably 100 extractions, the Marine squad leader came to me and said, "We need to leave. We have been here an hour."

I told him, "Look at the line, I can't leave these folks."

He said, "We are leaving in 5 minutes. We have been here long enough that the VC know we are here. We will leave one of the jeeps for you. But we are out of here in 10 minutes, no more."

I am not as dumb as I look, I left with squad as did, Dr. Dwyer and the corpsmen. We did this every couple weeks going to a different village. It was satisfying. Looking back, we really did not solve any problems long term. I should have been teaching someone in the village to do what I was doing.

After a couple of trips the crowds grew. I could not keep up. My dental assistant Pacifico started extracting teeth alongside of me. He was Filipino. Being Asian, the villagers preferred him. His line was always longer than mine.

This was probably one of the dumbest most dangerous things I did, but it really felt like I was doing something worthwhile. We never ran into any bad guys while walking to the villages. We were either very lucky or had someone looking over us. In fact some of my patients were probably VC. There was no way to tell everyone wore black pajamas and a conical hat made of palm fronds.

#### **Sept 1**

*Where do you keep getting the idea that there is fighting in our camp. There has not been any. I did get a carbine, a rifle officers carried in WWII. It fired fully automatic, a machine gun. It had banana clips of about 20 rounds. Two clips were taped together so I could get of 40 rounds in less than a minute. One of our officers was in charge of a 10-man team the worked in a Vietnamese town building schools. He was on his way home. The rifle had been captured from the VC and was given to him. I will feel a bit safer as we hike through the rice paddies going to small villages to do dentistry. Because it was not an issued weapon, he could not turn it in. It will be my souvenir for serving here.*

We supplied weapons and training to the Viet Minh during WWII. They were our allies against the Japanese who occupied Vietnam and much of China. In fact they rescued a number of our fliers who were shot down flying against the Japanese in the Vietnam area.

*The R and R program is going well I got 100 of our guys out for a week last month. Commander Bannister said to get as many out as fast as is possible they earned a week of rest after completing the field. I think I will be going to Hong Kong in a couple of weeks.*





Our outdoor movie theater. The projection room is on the left. The ocean is behind the

*I guess I should shoot a few holes in this letter so it looks like I was fighting off the VC as I wrote it. Ha Ha. FQ*

For entertainment we had movies that were projected on a large plywood screen. It was about 10' by 7' mounted horizontally on the beach. We would sit in the sand under

the moon looking out at the South China Sea watching the movie. The moon would set the mood while we watched Bikini Beach movies with whatever teenage stars were in

vogue. We would watch our movie wishing we were back on that beach in California with all those beautiful women and not out here with 600 smelly Seabees. We would trade our movies with the Marines or any ships that were in port. The movies were very popular but you always felt letdown as you walked back to your tent after watching how people lived and frolicked on the beaches in the US.

**Sept. 7, 65**

*The money system is really screwed up. To buy anything in the village you need piasters, "P"s. They have changed our pay to MPCs, military pay certificates, or funny money. My billfold looks like a monopoly game, with red, green, blue purple and brown bills. The Vietnamese bills are 1, 5, and 20 P. They are worth  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cent, 4 cents and 15 cents. This rate changed by the hour and could be almost any ratio.*

*The Marines are about ready for another attack. They expect to meet stiff resistance. I went swimming yesterday and got two langousta. Pacifico made langousta fried rice. He is a very good cook. I got a can of fudge in the mail yesterday. It made a great desert. FQ*



clothes in a metal chair sitting in a pool of water.

**Sept 18, 65**

*It has really been raining here for the last few days. It rained hard for three days straight. The dental tent leaks like a sieve. I had to quit treating patients. The chair is metal. The electric motor drives the handpiece and bur. Water was dripping into the motor. The chair was sitting in a puddle. I could not get the patient numb. Every time I touched the bur to the tooth; he had pain. I had a strange tingle in my fingers. All of a sudden we both got a jolt. The motor's electricity was shorting out through the bur into the patient sitting in wet*



*Our BOQ is a bit better. The tent leaks but not as much except over my cot.*

*I should get use to the rain there is much more in our future.*

*Next day- It is 9 AM and I have been doing dentistry since 6:30. Our new skipper is full of fancy ideas. The whole battalion starts at 6:30 and works until noon. We then work from 6 to 8 in the evening.*

*It rained again last night. We are lucky to live on the sand at least the water drains away so*



*we do not have puddles. The Marines that live on the hill north of here are up to their belts in mud. One camp was under 6" of water. Their foxholes were up to the brim in water. FQ*

**Early Oct 65**

**To Pearl and Ken**

*I am sitting listening to music from an Australian radio station on a small short wave radio. Keep your eyes open for cute teachers. I will eventually be home and I have been out of the dating game for a year or two. Would you please call the U of W and find out how I get a transcript of my records. I am in the process of applying to an oral surgery residency and must have transcripts. If I do not get my tour extended and if the GI bill passes I should be able to enjoy school without 3 extra jobs to pay expenses. This was how I had gone through dental school. (I had worked as a dental lab man, an apartment night manager boiler operator and insulation installer in the summer to pay my way through dental school. In fact, I took a cut in pay when I joined the Navy.)*

*I have been surfing every lunch hour either on an air mattress or just swimming. It is good to cool off and get some exercise. The surf was a little high today. I went end for end about three times in one wave. So here I sit all bruised and bleeding just waiting for a chance to do it again tomorrow. FQ*

We had a 155 mm howitzer company 200 yards down the beach. They would fire interdiction rounds into the mountains to the West. This would go off and on every few hours all night. They did not know where the enemy was in the hills, but would fire at known trails and random areas. The thought it would keep the enemy awake all night. Of course, it kept us awake also. When the guns went off, you could read by the muzzle flash. After a while we would hardly notice when they were firing.

One night someone opened up with a machine gun down the beach. This did wake me, as it was a new noise. I rolled out of my cot hit the floor and piled a couple of boxes in front of me for protection. The rest of the tent was laughing at me when I fully woke up. They did point out that the cardboard did not offer much protection.



The flares lit up the sky for several hours until it was figure out we were not under attack.

One night they were firing over our camp into the hills. Suddenly the sky lit up over camp with explosions. All we knew was something was exploding over our camp. Nothing was hitting the ground or the camp; but, we could clearly see air bursts overhead. The Marines started firing off flares thinking we were under attack. This went on for a 30 minutes. General quarters were sounded, a siren. We all went to our fighting positions. In my case this was the medical tent to help with casualties. There were no casualties, but the explosions continued over our camp. It was finally determined that the howitzer company was firing

rounds with proximity fuses that were meant to explode feet over the jungle in the mountains. There was a temperature inversion over the camp that faked out the proximity fuses of the shells to think they were over the jungle and they exploded. They were going fast enough away from our camp that any shrapnel flew well beyond the camp.

They eventually stopped firing, general quarters were secured and I went off to my tent to go to sleep. This is when I saw one of the Jr. officers crawl out from under an inflatable raft that was stored



outside our tent. We did tease him for a while. The rubber raft would not offer much protection had we been under fire. The explosions did gain our attention for a few hours. All is well that ends well.

Oct 27, 1965

This time the field came under attack. The explosions were out at the airfield. At the time there were more than 30 A-4 fighter-bombers parked wing to wing along the taxiway. A group of VC managed to get past the Marines and walked down the line putting explosives in many of the aircraft. When the explosions started, the planes were destroyed and it was too late to stop others that were already loaded with explosives one plane would set off the next plane, if that plane did not have an explosive charge. It was a wake up call that there was more danger here than we had admitted. We lost about



Ensign Pat Donnelly, a former football player for the Naval Academy examines the damage done to the matting after the attack.

30 aircraft that night. The planes were quickly replaced but not before revetments were constructed with 55 gal. steel drums full of sand stacked three high so that if one plane blew, it did not take the planes on either side of where it was parked.

**Mom and Dad,**

*I am writing to let you know I am OK. We had a suicide squad of 6 VC get to the flight line and put explosives in the tail pipes of a number of our A-4 fighters. Once the first one blew up; it set off neighboring planes. We are far enough away that we did not hear the explosions but the sky was lit up with flairs for several hours and we were all on alert the rest of the night. Of the*

*6 VC three got there wish and met their maker. The other VC 3 got away.*



This is what is left of one of our A-4s after the attack.

*Da Nang also came under attack. There was much more damage at Da Nang. This including some of the cargo planes that deliver us supplies. MCB-9 had some casualties. Their injuries are reported to be minor. However you have to fill out all the paperwork if you are to be awarded a purple heart. They earned it; they should get it.*

*The best news I have had is we are leaving here on December 10. I will believe it; when the plane takes off. FQ*

We had hired local Vietnamese to help clean around camp and the airfield. They were local villagers, we thought. The joke was they did not have a security clearance; but if they were to work in the camp, they "had the need to know." In theory they qualified for a confidential level clearance. This may be how the attack on the field's planes was planned.

To advance in rank, the Navy gave quarterly tests in all rating. To advance, you needed good scores and good recommendations. The tests were classified as Confidential. Classifications went from confidential, to secret, to top secret. Confidential's only security requirement was that it be kept in a locked box. This was the lowest level of security. The tests were classified so a record was kept of all the tests. The navy did not want them to get out to the troops so they could "cram" for that test.

The Chaplain was in charge of the tests. The chaplain was not the most organized individual. His desk was often a foot deep in paperwork. His mate (secretary) took it upon himself to clean the



chaplain's desk. In the process he threw away several tests that should have been locked up. When it came time to send the tests back, some were missing.

Immediately, the chaplain's mate was sent to the dump to find them. No luck. The loss was reported to the CO. Suddenly this siren sounded. I had no idea of what the siren meant much less what it was for; but obviously, it must be important. One of the chiefs came to the headquarters area and explained to the officers that we were to go to the Officer's club/tent and the enlisted men were to go to their tents. When I arrived at the club, I was assigned a Chief. All search parties were given 6 tents to search. Each tent housed 12 men. The tents at that point were still in the sand. We were to search each tent for the missing tests. This was in spite of the fact the chaplain's mate has fessed up that he had sent them to the dump.

I left with the chief I was assigned to. Both of us were shuffling our feet in the sand. I did not know him, nor did he know me. I decided I should speak up. I said, "Chief if we spend more than a minute a tent we are being excessively thorough. We both know what happened and if the tests were in one of the tents all the men would have to do is rake a couple of inches of sand over the tests and we would never find them."

He responded, "Thank you. I do not know you very well and I was having similar thoughts but did not know how to present it. This is one of the dumber things I have had to do in my 18 years in the Navy."

We walked in one end and out the other end of our 6 tents. The chief turned to me and said, "Let me buy you a beer at the Chief's club." It is an honor to be invited to the chief's club even though it is much like the officer's club just a big tent 16' x 24' with a few chairs sitting in the sand. The Chiefs had bought some decorations in the village. They had over stuffed furniture. Their bar really looked like a bar as opposed to the officer's club with one cooler to keep our beer cold. By the time we got to the club, there were 3 other search parties enjoying their beer. We had been too thorough. We then all left for dinner.

We actually had an officer's mess tent by this time. We were then eating B rations. B rations were basically 2 lb. cans of the same stuff we had in C-rations. However the cooks and mess crew opened the cans and heated it.

Someone had brought a book, the Caine Mutiny, and we had all passed it around reading it. There was a section where Capt. Queeg went a little crazy when he asked for a second serving of strawberries before turning in for the night. The mess men told him the strawberries had been eaten. He took out a measuring cup, a bowl and sugar and measured out the size servings that had been given out proving there should still be some strawberries left. Clearly the mess men had helped themselves to the leftover strawberries. He had the USS Caine, a small cargo ship, searched. The crew was searching for a key that would open the cooler where the lost strawberries had been. This was even though the mess men told him they had eaten the berries.



The local fisherman had use the river for their port. This clearly made more sense that putting the causeway out into the open ocean for our supply ships. This area became our port.

After our search, I was sitting eating with the junior officers in our mess tent. I simply had to open my mouth and ask if anyone had found the strawberries. This happened at the moment the CO walked into the tent. He heard me and asked, "Are we having strawberries tonight?" We had not had any fresh fruit up to this point. When my foot is in my mouth, I think pretty quickly. "No sir, but I sure wish we had some strawberries. They are one of my favorites." I do not think he had read the book.

As time passed, special services sprung into action. First they brought in snorkels, fins, and diving masks. The first



swim, I went off the beach. It was rather boring just sand, sand and more sand, very few if any fish and no coral. There was a rock outcropping about a mile north of our part of the beach. It was where the headlands of a small hill ended in the ocean.

We needed a better port for the ships that brought supplies. The first plan was to fill in rock to make a dock that went out to a small island off this point of land. This was to serve as a place for ships to unload. One issue was, it was open to the ocean. First we needed to determine how deep the water was in the 100 yds. from the point of land to the small island. I was chosen to help take a look.



The water in the river was deep enough for the smaller LSTs. The port was developed here. It was well protected from storms.

The XO, executive officer (second in command), came along. The CBs had already starting blasting a road down to this potential dock site. They could use the fill rock to make the dock to the island. Our swim showed that it could work.

In the end, it was abandoned because it was open to the ocean and storms. The storms would make it impossible to use and difficult to maintain. It was decided to build the port in the river North of the rock headlands.

This swim convinced me I wanted to come back to take a look. I checked out a snorkel, which I had never used, fins and a mask. I put my fins and mask on and I swam out to a very large coral head. It rose 15 feet off the bottom and was close to 10' in diameter of perfect brain coral. It came within 4' of the surface. I stood on the top of the coral head and adjusted my snorkel. It is a bad to stand on coral. I did not know at the time how damaging this can be for the coral. I put the snorkel in my mouth and stepped off the coral. I did not realize you always exhale, before breathing. This clears the water out of the snorkel. I took in a breath of seawater and started coughing. I was not sure that I would not drown. It would be really bad to come to war and drown while swimming. I learned quickly to exhale to blow the water out of the snorkel before inhaling.

The coral got its revenge. A few weeks later I grabbed some fire coral. My fingers stung. By the next day my fingers were so sore I could not hold my dental instruments without pain. It took a couple of weeks to get back to normal.

Now that I knew how to breathe, I started looking around at the coral. It was spectacular. There were multiple coral heads of many colors, fan coral and small rod-like coral. Many layers of rock that looked like it must have been lava flows. There were layers with caves a few inches in diameter and a foot or two deep. I noticed antenna sticking out of the holes. I carefully worked my hand into the hole. This worked. Out popped a spiny lobster without claws. We were told these were langouste. I held on like a vice and took it back to camp.

I learned later that there were sea snakes here that also liked the holes. They were very poisonous having poison similar to that of a cobra. Fortunately, I never ran into one, but I did see some swimming near the causeway. I was told they have very small mouths so if you get bit it probably will be a toe or finger, maybe an earlobe or nose.

My dental assistant was ecstatic about the langouste. He said he was cooking dinner tonight. No C-rations. He was back shortly with rice, vegetables and a langousta with no shell. It was the South Pacific's version of a lobster. Dinner was fantastic, fried rice with langousta. My dental assistant presented me with a homemade spear gun. I do not know where he got the shafts for the arrows or the inner tubes to make the elastic cords to fire it. He said, "You bring back more and I will get rice from the cooks. But do not stick your hand into holes. We have sea snakes here that have the venom



of a cobra. They like to live in those holes." Now he tells me. These snakes are also common in the Philippines.

The spear gun worked very well. The next day I got a langousta walking across some sea grass. Dinner was again in the bag. I did start exploring the area more. On day I swam around a coral head and ran right into a grouper. The mask causes some magnification, but this fish had to weigh a couple of hundred pounds. I felt if it had opened its mouth it could have swallowed me whole. It was as surprised as I was. In a flash, it disappeared. It took me a few minutes to get my heart rate back to normal. I could not do dentistry during the day because of the heat, but I managed to snorkel a couple times a week on my lunch hour.

It did help the monotony of C-rations. My dental assistant was very happy to cook when I could bring back to camp a langousta. In fact he found a 50-pound bag of rice that "fell" off a truck. I did not question him further, as I did not want to know. It really got me hooked on snorkeling.



*Sept - October*

*Dear Dad and Mom,*

*The pictures of houses I sent may be the village, if they have corrugated aluminum roof, or camp if they are tents. The Vietnamese use fish sauce to cook with. Small fish are cooked and then sealed in large vats and allowed to ferment in a salt sauce for 4 months to a year. I have no idea for how long, but you can smell the town long before you get there, Nuoc ham (nuc mom) smells very bad.*

*The villagers built a market place with columns and a covered area for selling produce and crafts. It came out quite nice.*

*You had a question about me being on the staff. Myself, the physician, supply officer, chaplain and all the other officers who are not in command of a company are part of the Commanding Officer's staff, 16 of us.*

*The sweep I mentioned was pretty much a flop. They killed 150 VC. There was a whole regiment of VC there. It was decided to take Vietnamese army forces with our forces. It seems every time this is done the VC hear of our coming and get out of the area.*

*We have had torrential rain. But it has stopped and it has warmed up again. There is no happy medium. FQ*

They actually count bodies. McNamara came from Ford to become Secretary of Defense. He decided we needed statistics. After each battle, they counted bodies then body parts. Count the arms and legs and divide by 4. When a plane took off it was one sortie. If it had 1 bomb or 10 bombs. They would send 5 planes with one bomb each and it counted as 5 sorties but risked 5 pilots' lives. I find it strange to have accepted the death of 150 people as just a number. They were the VC, the enemy; but still humans. You get desensitized when you have been there for a while.

*October 20, 65*

*I got half a sack of mail yesterday. Evidently there is a bottleneck somewhere as I also got 4 cans of cookies and 30 newspapers all in one day. I got the birthday can. I feel bad I have not been able to get you all any presents. We do not have much here to buy.*



*I think we have started our monsoon season. It has rained every day for 12 days. We got some sun yesterday and some today. With those exceptions, it has rained nonstop. It not only rains, it comes down in sheets. Our roads are large mud puddles except where they are pure mud. Our high temps are in the mid 70s. After 5 months of 90s and 100s we are freezing.*

*In the book Cain Mutiny, there is a very funny incident about searching a whole ship for a key to a refrigerator where can of strawberries were stored. We had a similar search here. Someone by mistake put a Navy advancement test in a trashcan and it probably went to the garbage dump. Our C.O. would not take this explanation and so after a secret meeting in the afternoon, we were all paired up with a Chief. We held a surprise search of the camp. I am proud to say the Chief and I searched the men, their belongings in 6 tents and had a beer in the Chief's club in 15 minutes. We did not find anything. It is embarrassing to be associated with stunts like this. Needless to say the test was not found. The command staff are supposedly intelligent men. I sometimes wonder.*

*I found a quote that fits very well. "The Navy is a master plan designed by geniuses for execution by idiots. If you are not an idiot, but find yourself in the Navy, You can operate well by pretending to be one. Constantly ask yourself how would I do this if I were a fool? That way you will never go wrong." FQ*

Because of my fine writing ability, I was named assistant public information officer, PIO. It did help that I had most of my day free. I did write an occasional piece about what we were doing. They were put out to the media and mostly would be published in the Port Hueneme newspaper after heavy editing. My writing skills were about 9<sup>th</sup> grade level if you could ignore my spelling was closer to 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

The pinnacle of my writing was a story about taking the teeth out of Boo Boo our sun bear that was picked up by a Las Angeles newspaper. My career as a journalist was very short.

One day I was asked to review a nomination document for a Seabee from one of the other battalions for the Navy Cross. He was part of a team that was working in a small 11 man STAT Team building a headquarters in a Vietnamese village. They were attacked by a large VC group 1500 to 2000. The VC force outnumbered this STAT team and a 10-man special services Army group. The fighting was fierce and it looked like the whole team might be lost. One of the Seabees, Marvin Shields, volunteered to go outside with the 2<sup>nd</sup> LT in charge of the team and load a bazooka so the LT could fire at a machine gun nest and mortar group. To do this they went to a fence outside the main building. They killed many of the enemy but were both wounded. Shields stayed with the gun while the LT was taken back into the building for treatment. Shields was then treated and went back out to the gun position even though he was wounded. He had a broken jaw. He was wounded several more times but drove the attackers back. He carried ammunition out to the troops manning the defensive positions the rest of the afternoon. Late in the day he carried a badly wounded man back to the building and was shot several more times. His wounds were so bad, he did not survive. He was killed by the VC. One of my pet peeves is the phrase, "He gave the ultimate sacrifice." The sugar coats what happens in combat. Tell it the way it is. Maybe we will stay out of the next war and fine young men like Marvin Shields will not be killed in the prime of their life.

For his actions Marvin Shields was nominated for a Navy Cross. I wrote my comments after reading the commendation letter describing what he did. He went back to the gun position after being wounded several times. He went back to his gun position while under heavy fire. He continued carrying ammunition to the troops and carried a badly wounded man back to safety. I felt he qualified for a Medal of Honor. This truly went beyond the call of duty. I am sure my comments did not cause the nomination to change, but just maybe it caused those in charge of such awards to think a little harder about what this remarkable man had done. His wife received his Medal of Honor from President Johnson.



Shields was from Gardner a small town near Port Townsend Washington. I drove past a memorial that had been erected along the highway from Port Townsend to Port Angeles a year ago. I have to admit it left a lump in my throat seeing this monument to this remarkable young man. I went back this year to see the grave stone memorial. I had on a baseball hat with a Seabee logo. It might sound melodramatic, as I got ready to leave I saluted this fine sailor. It just felt like the thing to do. I felt better for having done it.

Hygiene was an issue. We walked in the sand. The wind blew the sand and salt spray. The roads and trails were mud. You could not stay clean. When we first arrived the only way to get clean was to bathe in the ocean. Once we had a well, the CBs installed outdoor showers. There were no women; so there really was not much reason the put a tent over the showers. The water was warm the air was hot so the shower was refreshing. This was the one time when you could get dry. Shower, towel down and put on your clean dry clothes. You were clean and dry for an hour or so before you were soaked in sweat. In October to December you would be soaked in rain. The shower was a major improvement.

It was impossible to keep your hair clean so I gave up and just cut all my hair off. I was bald before my time and long before shaving your head was fashionable. We had been told we would be coming back to the states in January or February. I figured I would start letting my hair grow the end of December and I would have hair before I got home. My dental tech thought I looked weird with no hair. I expect most of the men in the battalion felt the same. It was not a fashion statement that caught on. All of a sudden toward the end of November we were told we were going home the second week in December. I stopped shaving my head, but still looked a bit like a cue ball when I got home.

**October 15,**

*Well I got out of Chu Lai for a while. I took a bath last night, the first one in 6 months. I am quite surprised at Hong Kong. It is very clean and very industrious. Everywhere you look they are putting up large apartments. I will be here until the 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is a place you could spend a fortune saving money.*

*Happy Birthday Mom. You will have to wait until I get home. An Air Force officer told me I was going shopping with him this morning. He said there are things you need to buy for your family and for when you are married. Once you have done that, you can go shopping for what you want with what money you have left.*

**October 17**

*I am saving money like a dizzy bachelor. That is about twice as fast as a drunken sailor. This is a spectacular city. I am taking a tour out to see the boarder with Red China. We will go through areas where they settle refugees. I am taking lots of pictures. FQ*

**October 30 65**

*I think I have got all your mail. I have been getting all sorts of applications for oral surgery school residencies. I guess I should get on the ball and decide positively, if I am going to apply and get them filled out. Some of them pay up to \$400/ month for going to school. I could take that without any gripes. Now if only I can get accepted.*

*We have another new physician. Boy I wish I could get out of here. I am the only one of all the Dentists and Physicians who came ashore the first day to still be here.*



*You must have put on quite a campaign to get me birthday cards I have got about 8 or 9.*



*November - After the village market ceremony*

*Dear Mon and Dad*

*The village ceremony did not serve drinks. They served us a lunch, most of which I was afraid to eat, fried chicken and mayonnaise salad dressing. There was a good chance of food poisoning had I eaten it. There was some bread that was OK. You asked about a friend whose son might be here. You said he was an Army Engineer. He is probably south of Saigon. There are not many Army troops here. You were right about the girl in the slides I sent home being in pajamas. That is about all they wear here, black pajamas. For the opening of the market Women were wearing their white Ao Dai. These are very striking. Do not send any more packages. We are being told we will be home by Christmas.*

*Nov 17, 65*

*Dear Mom and Dad*

*We should be leaving here starting the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. This means very little however, government transportation is at best unscheduled. We are reasonably confident that we will be in Pt. Hueneme by the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>. I will have to spend a few days there to get my uniforms cleaned and get ready to come home. I hope to take leave starting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December. Depending on flights I should be home on the 24<sup>th</sup>. If I got on a plane in my blues after 8 months in the sand out here they would probably throw me off the plane.*

*Things are still quiet here. No more attack or alerts. I have applied to 5 schools or hospitals for an Oral Surgery residency. We will just have to wait and see if I get accepted at any of them. They typically take those who graduate 1 or 2 in their class. I graduated in the top ¼ of my class but not 1 or 2. Maybe they will give me credit for serving here.*

*(I clearly did not understand reality. When I got home I was told to not tell people I had served in Vietnam. As opposed to being a positive, serving my country was considered to be bad.)*

*I do not know much about any of the programs. They were just the addresses I could find. With all the applications, my typing has improved. Even if I do not get accepted, it is not a complete loss. Some of the programs pay quite well \$400 a month. I could live like that. Do not send any more packages or magazines by regular mail. All surface mail will be going to Pt. Hueneme as of about two weeks ago. In fact our airmail has been pretty fouled up. For a while we were receiving mail from the states in about 4 days.*

*I haven't had a hair cut in about 2 months. I started growing hair when I found we were coming home in December. I had shaved my head since last May. It sure takes a long time to grow out a "pig shave." I have picked up a pretty good tan. Swimming every lunch hour did that. I am getting pretty good at surfing on an air mattress. I guess that will come in handy later in life. I wrote today asking for a new set of orders when we get back to the states. The battalion will come back to Vietnam in June. I will get out of active duty in July. It makes no sense to bring me back for one month. I hope to get duty in the San Francisco area, Seattle or Whidbey Island. (lots of luck) I doubt if they will let me out of Pt. Hueneme but it does not hurt to ask. The fact I have spent 8 months out of the States should help.*



A C-130 taking off from Chu Lai. We are on the way home.

*By the way you do not have to add USNR 655530 to my address. I have to use it to get free mail. The numbers make me feel like a computer card. FQ*

*Nov 20*

*I think I have arranged a trip to Okinawa before we leave for home. I hope so. I need to pick up the dental porcelain oven I left with a classmate when we mounted out. I explained*



*to the CO that I will not be able to use it when we get to Pt. Hueneme if it is left in Okinawa. It took some convincing but he agreed.*

*We think we will be coming home in C-130s. These are a propeller driven plane. The thought of going 9,000 miles at 300 mph is nothing to get excited about. However, I think I will take the trip. We were originally to go home in C-141s that is a larger jet transport that could make it in about half the time. We should get some time in the Philippines and Hawaii in the C-130.*

*We just got a radio station here. It is really nice to hear music. I bought a shortwave radio and could some times get Australia. Most of what I got was in some Asian language. They do not have much of an ear for music. At least my ear is not trained to enjoy their music. I am anxious to see your color TV.*

**Nov 30**

*Do not be too set on the Dec. 10 date. The Battalion will probably leave in 9 planes that will leave 12 hours apart. The earliest will go on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Each will make 2 or 3 stops for 10 to 12 hours. I am quite sure that I will not be on #1. In fact, the plan now is that I will be on the last one. The 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> is about the earliest I will be in the states.*

*It is kind of funny. "Number 10" is a swear word in Vietnamese. #1 is super. #2 through #9 are not so good. You tell someone they are number 10 and you had better be ready to fight. The local Vietnamese could not figure out why America would send their number 10 battalion to Chu Lai. It was considered an insult. I explained that we were not the number 10 battalion we were the 10<sup>th</sup> battalion. One of the Vietnamese officers I met finally figured this out.*

*I should be leaving for Okinawa tomorrow or the next day for 3 days. Not much more time is left here.*

*Dec 3. I am back in Okinawa. I had managed to get a hop to Okinawa to pick up some dental equipment I had left. When we went to Vietnam. It is always good for a little break. I saw Dean Pope, a classmate of mine, did some shopping and attended the Ryukyu Island Dental meeting. On the way here the plane stopped at Hong Kong and Tainan Formosa. I saw another classmate Dick Raisler. He came out to the plane as it refueled.*

*Little had changed here, but it seldom does; so I was not surprised. We have started to pack up to come home. This is a little early but I would hate to be left because I wasn't ready. Not much time left and I can't say I am not glad. FQ*

*On the appointed day of departure, a new battalion started arriving in C-130s and we were to be packed and ready to hop on the planes to go to Okinawa. I never met my replacement dentist. I have always felt a little bad about that. I might have passed on some of the wisdom I had collected living in a tent on the beach in a war zone. Do not volunteer. Do not go into the villages to do dentistry. Do not eat in the villages. Do swim and snorkel a lot. Have your office hours in the evening.*

*I was chosen to be on the first flight. We were out at the field ahead of time to be sure we were not left. As things go, they could change their mind in a moment. I wanted to be in the air on the way to Okinawa when they decided we were going to stay a couple more months. I could find any variety of reasons I should not go back, but first I had to be in Okinawa. I was happy to be on the first flight. Dah!*

*The crew chief gave the aircraft a preflight check and found a bullet hole in one of the wing flaps. The plane was grounded. I was asked where the BOQ was so the crew would have a place to stay while a new flap was brought in or a means to repair that flap was found. I was crushed.*



I gathered up the crew and took them to tent city, now named Camp Shields, named after a Seabee who received a Medal of Honor. The crew looked at the tents, open showers and open-air latrines and said, "Lets go back to the plane and think about this?"

The crew chief found a role of super strong very adhesive aluminum tape and the holes were covered. If they spent the night, they would get combat pay, but it was not worth sleeping in a tent. The wing flap was fixed. The plane taxied and turned on to the next taxiway leading to the runway

During the time we had been in camp a second C-130 had arrived. It was parked on the taxiway leading to the runway. Our plane taxied up behind it. Shut off the engines and dropped the ramp so we could get onboard. It was then determined that the plane in front of us would not be leaving for several hours. The runway was busy with A-4s taking off on bombing missions; so they could not just pull it on to the runway to let us pass. The only solution was to back up our plane. C-130s can back up by reversing the props but the pilot has almost no control to turn much less stay on a taxiway that was about 10 feet wider than the landing gear. This is to say nothing of the amount of sand that would be blown into the plane in front of us. It would also be dangerous to have Seabees standing around as this was happening. Propellers can really mess you up if you walk into one that is turning.

It was decided all 50 of us would simply push the plane back to the N-S taxiway. We could go down to the next joining taxiway and get on the runway and head for home. This nearly was a good idea. The problem was the engines were not running and because of this the pilot had no brakes. We got it going back and it was about to roll across the NS taxiway out into the soft sand. The crew chief started yelling and 50 men went from pushing on the front of the plane to the back of the plane and got it stopped before it got stuck in the soft sand. We loaded quickly. The engines were started and away we went heading for CONUS (continental US) the land of the Big PX (military base version of present day COSTCO) and the home of the brave.

## Boo Boo the Bear Takes a Nip Too Many

POINT HUENEME, Calif., Dec. 14. — (UPI) — It's the end of military life for Boo Boo the Vietnamese bear.

She tried to bite the pants off one too many Seabee commanders.

The last time was when Boo Boo playfully nipped Unit 10's Cmdr. C. T. Williams on the posterior recently. This was when the unit's mascot arrived with the unit at the Seabee base here from the Far East.

Now, the unit which has had the Vietnamese black sun bear for the past seven months is going to offer the growing pet to the San Diego Zoo.

"THERE'S NO place to keep Boo Boo at the Point Hueneme Seabee center," is the official reason.

She was accepted as a gift from Vietnamese natives as a 2-week-old cub by a Navy chief petty officer in Saigon. When the chief found Boo Boo was getting too

tough to handle he shipped the bear in a box to be dropped by parachute to Seabee Unit No. 10 at Chu Lai. The parachute failed to open, but the bear was not injured in the drop to the ground from a helicopter.

THE SEABEES kept their gift in a 10-foot cage, but Boo Boo often managed to climb out—and into barracks and offices and beds.

The first officer Boo Boo bit was then unit Cmdr. J. M. Bannister last August.

Despite officer-nipping incidents, the Seabees claim Boo Boo lives on a diet of mashed potatoes and gravy and oatmeal with syrup, but abhors meat.

## Singer's Wife Dies

NEW YORK, Dec. 14. — (U.P.I.) — Mrs. Paul Robinson, wife of the singer and actor, died here Sunday after an illness of several months. She was 68.

One must understand about the seating on the C-130. There are 4 rows of seats stretching the length of the cabin. One row on each side facing back to the bulkhead (side of the plane) and two center rows, back to back. That makes two isles, but the passenger's feet with the back to the side of the plane point toward the middle rows. Those in the middle rows point their feet toward the side. You are not toe-to-toe more like thigh-to-thigh so one person's feet fit between the feet of the two passengers they are facing. The seats are basically hammocks. Canvas attaches to a bar at the base of your butt. The canvas stretches out to a second bar that fits right about mid thigh. There is a bar keeping these two bars apart that your tailbone sits on. There is a backrest made of 2-inch wide straps these go from the butt bar to above your head. There are windows every 6' feet or so. You can take a peek out of the windows unless the canvas back piece covers them.

You loose feeling to your feet rather quickly because the bar your thighs are resting on shuts off circulation. The bar that runs from the thigh bar to the butt bar crushes the nerves leading to your legs from your spine. About half of your body becomes numb, but you know what, no one complained. It seated about 90 troops. In the back is a ramp that

A clipping from the Port Hueneme paper about the bear. I do not remember him biting the CO.



drops down for loading, we had placed our packs here so you could go back and lie down, if all the spots were not taken. There was a toilet that was rather busy. However, we were heading home.

I know we stopped in Okinawa to refuel. I think we spent the night. I cannot remember how we got from Okinawa to San Francisco. All I know is, it took forever. We landed at a military facility and went through customs about as fast as we could walk. We worried about Boo Boo the bear. The medical officer had written a letter stating that he was not a veterinarian, but from everything he could check, the bear was absolutely healthy. Had Boo Boo been a dog it would have been in quarantine for 6 months. There were no rules for bears. Boo Boo's next home was Port Hueneme but she was getting big, bear size, 5 feet tall standing on her hind legs and about 4 feet on all 4 feet. She got too big to be controlled by two Seabees. Each with a rope on her collar. With one Seabee on either side of her she could be prevented from biting anyone. She really could not be blamed she was hoping someone had a cookie. Eventually she went to the San Diego Zoo where she lived another 25 years with other Malaysian bears.

I finished my 6 months of active duty at Port Hueneme. I had lots of work to do because My CBs had not had much dentistry for the previous year. The clinic was only open Monday through Thursday. I told them I would be seeing patients Monday through Friday. The commanding officer of the clinic already did not like me. I told him, if I could not see patients in the clinic, I would have to see them in my dental tent that we would place in the parking lot. The base newspaper picked up on the fact that the battalion dentist was seeing patients 5 days a week. The article in the newspaper included a photo of the CO of the dental clinic on the base golf course one Friday. Soon the whole clinic was working 5 days a week getting new CBs ready to go to Vietnam. This did not make me a winner of any popularity prizes from the clinic staff.

I had a bunch of folks who needed partial dentures. I was not allowed to do these. They had to be done by a base dentist. The problem was the battalion would be going back in about 6 months. The troops all had 30 days of leave coming to get reacquainted with the wife and kids. They had Seabee schools to go to, and Military training weeks at Camp Pendleton. I would get them an appointment to get started on their denture. They would miss the next appointment because of training. That would put them back at the starting point. There was no way they could make an appointment a week for 4 weeks without missing an appointment. They were not going to get their denture before leaving for Vietnam in May of 1966. I went to my commanding officer with the problem. He said, "I have lots of money in special services. Take them downtown to a dentist and get them fixed."

I went back to the clinic and told the Chief in charge of the clinic that my CO had told me to take my folks downtown to a dentist to get their dentures. "I do not think I can do that, Chief. Is there some regulation I can show my C.O."

The chief levitated out of his chair. Ran into the Dental Clinic's commander's office. The commander was in my cubicle in about 2 minutes. "What is this about taking your men to a civilian dentist for dentures?"

I responded, "They cannot get them here and they need them. The Battalion has the money." I had 11 Seabees in line that afternoon to start their dentures.

It was common for each Naval dentist to have one dental assistant. I explained to my CO that I could get a lot more work done if I had a couple of extra folks. He said, "I have a mechanic who does not like to get his hands dirty and a carpenter who does not like to work outside. You can have them if you can keep them busy and out of trouble."

The next day I met with the young men. It goes like this. I give you a week to be able to assist me. You will work in the clinic. You cannot stand watch because you do not have formal Navy training as a dental assistant. You will not have to stand watch with the battalion, as you are now working for me. Screw up and you will be back at your old job and will be on watch every other weekend."



By the end of the week they were doing a better job then most of the clinic's assistants. They had real incentive to do a good job. My regular assistant, Pacifico, was able to do more administrative duties and take time off to be with his family. He had earned it because he had kept me out of trouble, and had taught me a lot of practical dentistry. He helped train the mechanic and carpenter and got to see his wife and kids more often. The rest of the clinic dentists were not happy. They only had one assistant each; but they only did one filling an hour. They were not being overworked.

When the battalion got ready to go back to Vietnam I got orders not to San Francisco, not to Seattle, and not to Oak Harbor Whidbey Island. I got orders to Port Hueneme's dental clinic working under the commanding officer who I had written the letter about sending 100 replacement troops who needed 100 extractions and a couple of hundred fillings. He was the man who only had an open clinic 4 days a week until I started working 5 days a week. It was the same naval Captain, the kind with 4 gold stripes on their sleeve as opposed to my two gold stripes, who I had told I was going to take my folks down town to get dentures because I could not get his clinic to do what the men needed in the way of dentures. By now it should be fairly obvious why I did not make the military a career. The fitness report he wrote about me pretty much assured if I stayed in the Navy I would never advance beyond Lt. But I did have a big life adventure. All young men need adventures. I certainly had mine.

My time in the clinic was about two months. When I was in Washington D. C., I checked my fitness report. I got an excellent in "Expresses himself well in writing." I also got an excellent "Social Activities." All other categories were average. Had they been poor I would have been given a chance to challenge them. Anything less than good was career ending. Even a good would delay advancement.

I qualified for 6 ribbons and 3 medals

a Navy Unit Commendation ribbon



a Combat Action ribbon



a Vietnam Presidential Unit citation ribbon



a Vietnam service ribbon and medal



Republic of Vietnam campaign ribbon and medal





a National Defense service ribbon and medal

All were for my time in the Navy and Vietnam. I just was there and did my job. The ribbons and medals never caught up to me. These are *IWT (I Was There)* ribbons they were not for heroics. They went to all who had served with MCB-10 in Vietnam. There may have been an additional Marine ribbon for my night of working in the medical evacuation of wounded from operation Starlight. In addition, I took all the training and served in as combat area as is required for a Seabee Combat Warfare Specialist Officer insignia. However this award was created for those who served after 1992.

None-the-less, none of these ribbons or devices were received by me. My DD214 forms certify that I had earned them. 45 years after I left the service I decided I wanted the ribbons. I can never wear them, but maybe the grandkids will get a kick out of them. I wrote the Navy and was told that all my records had been destroyed in a fire in St Louis records facility. Fortunately, when I left the Navy I was given a copy of my records. Copies of these records did not impress the Navy. I earned the ribbons and wanted them. I wrote our Senator Patty Murray and sent a copy of my DD214 form. To her credit, they arrived by mail about a month later along with the Seabee Combat Warfare Specialist insignia.

This is kind of silly. After coming home I found I should be apologetic for having served in Vietnam. There were major protests taking place all over the country. Do not wear your uniform off the base. Certainly never let anyone know you were there. It was suggested, once I opened a dental office, that it would be best to not let patients know I had served.

I now feel kind of embarrassed to have requested my ribbons. While *I Was There* and the ribbons were for participation; not getting my ribbons in no way compares to the three men who died in MCB-10 or others who were injured; nor, does it compare to the couple of hundred Marines who died or were injured in Operation Starlight and the other various fire fights they were involved in while protecting us as we built the airfield. The PTSD they came home with from being involved in combat, trumps my *IWT* participation.

The war was expanding. They were drafting MDs and DDSs. There is a phrase in all of documents, "Dependent on the needs of the service." i.e., we need you in Vietnam." To go to dental school we had to take an education deferment. Once we graduated our names went into a Doctor Draft pool. When I graduated no Doctors were being drafted. Within two years many were being drafted.

At the time, if you were in college making progress toward a degree you could get a deferment. Your life could actually depend on getting good grades.

We did have many in our classes both pre-dental and dental school that were attending college on the GI Bill. Having served in the military prior to 1960, they had benefits that require a certain number of credit hours each quarter and certain grades. Between those who wanted to keep their deferments and those on the GI Bill the competition for grades was fierce.





My draft card of many years ago.

All young men 18 to 25 had a have a draft card. When you turned 18 you had to go and register for the draft and were mailed a card that you had to carry at all times. It was assumed if you were the son of the mayor, or a judge, other elected official, even a prominent local citizen you probably would not be drafted.

Many young men simply moved to Canada. By the time I came home, there were protests in most major cities in the US. Young men would burn their draft cards in protest. This did not protect them from being drafted. Others got medical deferments. My vision qualified me to be 4F, (not eligible to be drafted) Without glasses I was very near sighted, 20:400. With glasses or contacts I had 20:20 vision. However, if you are awakened in the middle of the night from a deep sleep it may take a few minutes to find your glasses or put in your contacts. I had to have a special exam and sign a waiver to be eligible to join the Navy.

There were major protests against the war. It was suggested we should not wear our uniform off the base. Those returning home would often be protested against at the airport of entry. I will always feel freedom of speech allows this, but the protest should be against the government, those officials who took us to war and kept us there. Do not protest against the individuals who were sent to the war.

In December 1967, there were drawings once a year to see who would be drafted first. They drew the days of the year out of a pool of 366 days and the sequence that they were drawn in decided if you were drafted.

Prior to this time those arrested for minor crimes might be given an option, go to jail or enlist in the Marines or Army. Because of a variety of social issues more African-Americans were given this option. Consequently the number of African-Americans in combat and who were killed and injured was greater than the percentage of African-Americans in the population of America. With the advent of the lottery draft and the birthday lottery, this changed.

As my time on active duty came to a close, the base yeoman (a navy secretary), called me in. he had prepared papers for me to sign to stay in the Navy another 4 years. He advised me that, "After the 4 years, they will send you to post graduate school. You could become a periodontist or oral surgeon."

I answered, "Yes, but you will send be back to Vietnam."

He said, "There is very little chance of that."

I responded, "It not only is possible, it is probable, close to assured. I have been there. I really did not like it. I have done my time on active duty."

"Sir we have to recruit 14 enlisted men to equal the points we get for one officer."

"Well then you had better get started, because I am not signing up for another 4 years. I have been accepted in a medical anesthesiology residency. I do not want to miss that opportunity."



I went home for a month before leaving for Washington DC and my anesthesia residency. This was a unique opportunity for a dentist. I was accepted into a medical anesthesiology residency at the Washington Hospital Center in Washington DC. This was a 1,000 bed hospital in the inner city of Washington DC. The residency program was about 15 MD residents, one dentist and about 15 MD anesthesiologists. I was trained to give general anesthesia for patients having surgery, from simple procedures to heart and brain surgery. I was on call every third night and stayed in the hospital and would be awake most of the night doing emergency cases and giving anesthesia for births. Seeing a baby born will always be a miracle for me. I never felt bad being awakened out of a deep sleep to attend to a delivery. I was wheeling a soon to be mom into the delivery room one night and before I could get there, the baby was born. What a thrill.

The Washington Hospital Center was a very busy place. When on call we went to all the cardiac arrests. It was a big hospital full of very old and very sick patients. They did not all live. I always took it personally when someone could not be revived. From this year, I realized being a dentist had some definite advantages as a way to make a living. Unless I really screwed up everyone would live in my dental office. After 54 years that record is still intact.

The day I left for Washington DC. I received a letter accepted into an oral surgery residency in Oklahoma. However, it was too late to change plans. After 54 years of general dentistry and teaching sedation anesthesia courses in 8 dental schools publishing over 55 research papers, teaching in 38 states and 15 countries, reviews for insurance companies and being an expert in malpractice cases, I am glad I made the decision I made.

While in Washington DC I stayed in the Naval Reserves. I needed the money. My residency paid \$350 per month. I think I got another \$150 for my reserve time. My single room apartment cost \$300. I drilled one weekend a month. I actually just sat in the dental clinic in case someone on the base had a toothache. I finished my residency and came home to Seattle. The reserve unit in DC got called up and went to Vietnam 4 months after I left.

My timing was perfect. I did have 6 months left in my reserve commitment. When I got to Seattle. I joined the Air Wing at San Point Naval Air Station. My reserve time was up and I was again offered another 4 years in the reserves. That Air Wing was called up and went to Vietnam 3 months after I left the reserves. Considering the 2 years I had in Army ROTC, my 4 years in Naval Reserves while in dental school, 2 year of active duty, and 2 years in the reserves, I was half way to retirement after 10 years in reserves and active duty.

I wonder how many times, I would have been sent back to Vietnam had I gone for 20 years and retirement. Combat qualified dentists are a rare group in the Navy. I think my timing of leaving after 10 years of service was exquisite. I am glad I served and am proud of what I did, *I Was There*. I just did what I was asked to do to the best of my ability. Some of my commanding officers might question that last statement. I really did not fit the Naval officer role very well. I do have to admit I had quite an adventure and all young men need an adventure.

I should mention that while in the residency at the Washington Hospital Center in Washington DC. I met a nurse, Mariana, who lived in the same apartment complex and worked in the Emergency Room at the Washington Hospital Center where I was doing my residency in Anesthesiology. The lady at the switchboard of our apartment introduced us. We dated a bit.

As the year anesthesia residency finished, I purchased a single engine Piper Colt, a small single engine 2-seat plane. When the time came, I said goodbye. Maybe we will meet again some day. I flew off into a hole in the overcast clouds and headed west. I had faith I would find another hole to descent through when it came time to refuel. I probably had a little too much trust in my skill. My pilot's license still had wet ink. However, 5 days later I was home in Sunnyside. I moved to Seattle and started working as an associate dentist. Seattle was a very lonely place. The dental school gang had spread to the four corners of a compass.



Six months later, I got a call that Mariana was coming to Seattle to visit one of her friends she had grown up with in Bolivia SA. She asked if she could stay with me. "Absolutely." Was my reply. She came to Seattle. We took Marcella to dinner at Ivar's fish bar on Broadway. The fish bar was a little fancier than the average Denny's. Mariana and Marcella were talking mostly in Spanish, but I caught bits and pieces of riding on the Military academy grounds, driving military jeeps, bodyguards, etc. Ivar's fish bar was the best I could afford; I had been in practice about 6 months. On the way back to my apartment I asked her who that was.

She said, "That was Marcella."

I said, "Yes, I got that but what is the body guard thing."

She responded, "Well, her father is the President of Bolivia." Had I known, I could have borrowed a little money so we could go to Ivar's on the Waterfront. Before Mariana went back to Washington DC, I proposed. It took her a while to make up her mind but eventually she said, "yes." That was 51 years ago. I guess it was meant to be, as we just celebrated our 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary in May of 2019. It is strange how things work out. It has been a very good 50 years, with three children and 4 grandchildren.



While I have made fun of some of those I worked for and with, it is done in the interest of finding some humor in a very serious endeavor, fighting a war. The years help blunt the bad times. The humor of the years remains. My letters home helped put a date with some of the events. These letters also helped remind me of some of the events I had erased from my memory.

It truly was an honor to have served with the Men of 10, NMCB-10 Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Ten and with the Marines at Camp Pendleton and Vietnam. I will always be grateful to the Marines I trained with and provided dental care to and who protected us.

One of the Marine Battalion's camp had a welcoming sign that pretty much summed it up and is not a bad motto to live by.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment**



**The Magnificent Bastards**  
**THE HARDER WE WORKED THE LUCKIER WE GOT**



**THE HARDER WE WORKED THE LUCKIER WE GOT**