Notes Between Two Worlds:  
The Diary of Roger Lansbury  
2nd Battalion, Fifth Marines

The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography printed no article on World War I in 1968, the fiftieth anniversary of the armistice; nothing has been printed on World War II in the last four years. Until recently, no one had submitted any manuscripts dealing with the twentieth-century wars. Yet a unique feature of our century, as compared with the years from 1783 until 1914, is the percentage of American males and females serving in the armed services in major conflicts. I was delighted to receive Philadelphian Roger Lansbury’s diary of his service in Vietnam which is printed here as a valuable historical record of that war. Our hope is that our readers who are veterans will send the Historical Society letters and diaries illustrating their service. Whether or not your war correspondence survives, take the time to write your memoirs of the war and reflect upon what service in the military meant in later life. We hope on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, fortieth of the truce in Korea, and the twentieth year after the fall of Saigon to create a special issue using diaries, letters, and memoirs of those with first hand knowledge of America’s wars.

W. Roger Lansbury was born in Philadelphia in 1944 and attended public school there until the ninth grade when he entered a private Quaker high school. He attended a small Lutheran College in Virginia for two years before dropping out in November 1965. Hoping to avoid the draft and service in Vietnam, he enlisted in the Navy in November 1965. The Navy gave him his fourth choice of jobs, a
Hospital Corpsman. While in training he learned that the Marines had no medics of their own and used Hospital Corpsman in the field. After working in a ward in Balboa Naval Hospital for six months, Lansbury received four weeks of Fleet Marine Force training and in April 1967 was assigned to a combat line company (2nd Platoon, “E” Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines) in Vietnam. He served in Vietnam until April 1968. Lansbury kept a diary of his sojourn in Vietnam which he enclosed in letters home. Except for omitting salutations, the diary is presented as originally written.

J.W.F.

Fri. April 28, 1967

It is now night. I have spent my first day in An Hoa after two days in Da Nang.

We are surrounded by mountains which arise quite abruptly. The mountains to the South are in the process of being defoliated. By chemical or fire I know not which, although they appear blackened.

I still don’t really believe that I am in Vietnam. I only remember that I am in a war when the artillery fires. Especially so, I might add, when it passes directly overhead. Then the whole building shudders under the impact of the shock waves. I’m not used to it. I jump as they fire. They fired quite frequently all morning. I had the opportunity to watch some of the artillery hit a few miles from here. Being new here, I found it hard to believe that those puffs of smoke I saw were aimed at people. I am told that I will soon believe it.

In the distance now I hear a sound. I must remember I am in a war. It is the sound of a “fire fight”. I can hear machine guns and mortars.

I have also been told that this place is worse than the DMZ. There is supposed to be more action here now than anywhere else. I suppose everyone says that of the place where they are stationed. The place that I will be going in a few days is also supposed to be the most booby trapped place around.

War. Will I realize it only when I am under live fire? The doctor

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1 DMZ was the alleged Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam.
had me start an IV\textsuperscript{2} today for the practice. Though shaking violently, I did well. I started it on a Vietnamese boy whom I guessed to be about 12. He had schrapnel wounds of the arm and side and a hole, possibly made by a bullet, through his foot. He came from a village known to be infested with VC. He was apparently lying to his questioners. The marine, with interpreter, slapped (gently) and threatened him until he was petrified. Even so he did not flinch. He was evacuated by helicopter to a hospital.

The artillary has started again. It is 9:00 at night. The VC have been more daring recently and have been probing the camp quite often. Two were caught inside the lines several nights ago.

The few women I’ve seen here so far I found attractive. The children, as all children, are cute. They also appear quite independant and able to care for themselves.

In a few days I will be going into the field and experience; to quote another corpsman when asked what it was like down in An Hoa; “Hell.” We shall see what we shall see.

\[2130\text{ April 29, 1967}\]

Last night was quiet and rather cool. Nothing much happened today. The artillary fire amounted to very little. It has been more active in the last hour than it was all day.

Today we had a Vietnamese come in with a high fever. The immediate diagnosis was heat stroke, for which he was treated. It later turned out to be malaria. His temperature was 105.2 one of the two times that I took it. The 2nd class Corpsman that I was with didn’t really seem to care how we treated this man. To him he was just another “Gook”. Everyone that has been around here seems to feel the same way. Apparently a lot of Vietnamese try to fake malaria in order to get med-evacked to Da Nang for a vacation.

A little girl came in to get a shot. She was quite adorable and went around offering to shake everyone’s hand. She had one brown eye and one blue eye.

\textsuperscript{2} IV is an intravenous infusion.
Still quiet. Everyone figures that we will get mortored on May 1st as it is a communist holiday. We shall see.

2150 April 30, 1967

Sunday. Very quiet day. Very little artillery fire today. We let the malaria case go. The Vietnamese that come here don’t seem to want to leave. They are treated and then hang around trying to prolong their stay.

There has been a little mortor fire in the distance in the 1st hour. Several of the BAS corpsman are going on a operation tomorrow. There is still fear that we will be “hit” tomorrow because of the holiday. Orientation starts tomorrow.

We did receive what seemed to be one sniper round while playing horseshoes this afternoon. It did not come too near but we heard that shot and rickosche. The temp today was 105.

1530 May 2

Everything was quiet yesterday and last night. All rumors of attack because of May day were unfounded.

We finished our orientation classes of yesterday and today. We are waiting to go to our companies and join in “operation union”. We learned that this is a rather strategic area. We defend the only coal

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3 BAS is Battalion Aid Station, a small hospital with a ward where minor injuries and illness were diagnosed and treated. The regular hospital with full surgery & medical facilities was in Da Nang.

mine in S. Vietnam. We are also situated near one of the routes taken by those coming from the Ho Chi Min trail.

There is a thing here called "CAC." This is where a Corpsman lives with the people of a village and becomes, in affect, the village doctor. Training for this includes 30 days of Vietnamese language school. This interests me as you have an opportunity to learn the ways of the people.

It is hot, of course, and more windy than usual. The compound seems more quiet than usual because of all the companies that have already started Operation Union.

We got issued our medical gear and found it quite inadequate. But then everyone is short of supplies around here.

1930 May 2, 1967

If I were only able to be descriptive. This room; the room in which I spend my last night, and in which I have spent the last week; it has a beauty of its own.

It is apparently french, and it reminds one of the type rooms depicted in the old French Foreign Legion movies. The floor is of rough cement; cracked and pitted and discolored from age and heat and mud. The walls are of a plaster like material and are also of a rough texture similar to that of the floor.

There are two relatively large french windows on the opposite wall and on either side of the doorway. They begin about a foot from the floor and end about a foot from the ceiling. One still has the four

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5 An Hoa, site of South Vietnam's only coal mine, is located about 25 miles inland from Da Nang. In addition to coal its other major industries included fertilizer plants and an industrial complex begun in 1963 by the French and Germans. This mineral and industrial development made An Hoa a prime target for Viet-Cong (V.C.) attack. Jim G. Lucas, Dateline: Vietnam (New York, 1966), 331-332.

6 A clandestine supply route.

7 CAC were the initials for "Combined Action Companies." These companies consisted of marines and navy Corpmen who were attached to Vietnamese Popular Forces or P.F.'s. The marines were given intensive training in counter-insurgency techniques, Vietnamese language, history and customs. In addition to providing civic-action programs, they trained the popular forces in weaponry, tactics and communications. Marines in Vietnam, 49-50.
paned windows intact, while the other has only empty hinges. Through the patched screens and above the piled sandbags which take up almost a quarter of each window, one can see the smoke rising from the village fires. The village is beyond the bunkers and barbed wire.

The room is lighted by two fly specked single neon lights which are secured with masking tape. A fan on one side of the room runs constantly, or as constantly as the electricity runs. Ammunition box piled atop one another makes for excellent storage space of smaller personal items.

The walls are adorned with the usual nudes from “girlie” magazines. Some are attractive; others aren’t.

There are ten cots in this particular room. They are olive drab in color as are the blankets. Under one cot lies a black trunk. It too has been around. It looks as though it was meant to stay with this room.

The fan and the flies buzz on and tomorrow I finally enter “hell.”

1700 May 3, 1967

I joined my company today. I will spend the night here in An Hoa and then I will join the rest of the company in “Antenna Valley”.

Things were quiet all day. One 12 yr. old child was brought into the BAS by the German “Peace Corps” workers that live in the village. She had a fever of unknown origin. She also had an infection on the right side of her face. A local Vietnamese doctor had treated it with what appeared to be human feces. Fecal material is apparently often used by the local people, but is usually of an animal variety. The girl was sent to the hospital in Da Nang by helicopter. Her mother is a beetle nut chewer, as are most. Her teeth were blackened from chewing beetle nut.

Antenna Valley was a hotly contested battleground for the marines and the V.C. Between November 6 and November 17, the marines conducted operation Essex in the valley. V.C. dead totaled 72 while the marines lost 37 and 122 wounded. Two other operations launched in November 1967, Foster and Badger Hunt resulted in 125 enemy killed. Twenty one marines were killed and 137 wounded. Marines in Vietnam, 85-86.
Yesterday a Vietnamese walked into the prop of a small place. He lost an arm and injured his head.

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1530 May 14

Mothers Day in the States. Malaria pill day here.

I’ve been back here at An Hoa for 3 days. I finally joined my company in Antenna Valley on May 5th. As the helicopter landed, the snipers started firing. Sniper fire was my welcome to the field.

My first night was spent in a self dug ditch in between the rows of a farmers tobacco field. We stayed close to the farmers’ house. His house, as do the majority of the homes here, consisted of several large bamboo poles supporting a grass thatched “A” shaped roof. One usually finds livestock within the house. One corner usually has a pig pen and chicken coop. If they are wealthy enough to own a water buffaloe, its’ pen is nearby.

This country and these people must be used to war. The majority of homes also include a built in bomb shelter. At other times this shelter is used for storage.

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May 15th

We were standing by to move out to our objective. Hill 90. The younger people had already been evacuated from the farmers’ house whose land we dug in on. All that was left were two old men, a boy, one small pig, several chickens and some ducks. From several surrounding farms came some more refugees; several men and 3 or 4 women burdened with 8 or 10 children. With them were their worldly possessions; chickens, ducks, unhusked rice, and of course tobacco and beetle nut. The women’s teeth were black from chewing beetle nut. The old men and the women looked twice their age. The women age quickly. They shrivel up and remind one of the old hard working farmer at home whose face is wrinkled and weathered from sun and wind. And these people sat around waiting to be escorted by South Vietnamese troops to safety in An Hoa. They sat, as is the custom, with their feet about 8 inches apart and flat on the ground, resting
their buttocks on their heels. I’ve tried to duplicate this position, but find myself unable to do it. The adults talked while the children remained subdued. Most smoke their own rolled cigars. The children start smoking as soon as they are old enough to walk and talk.

As we were leaving, one women bared a filthy breast to nurse a child.

I was told the next day that the Vietnamese soldiers were afraid to come into this VC area and that the refugees had probably been slaughtered shortly after we left.

The rest of my week field trip was spent doing a lot of walking. We caught sniper rounds every day, but there was no serious fighting. It rained one day. It rained so hard that you couldn’t see further than 20 yards in front of you. Apparently the rains get heavier during the monsoon.

We had a Vietnamese Police Chief who was a former Viet Cong with us. He knew the valley and the people well. He was able to spot boobey traps and hiding places without difficulty. In each village through which we passed he would show us VC huts which were immediately burned. The marines get a kick from burning “hootches” and I fear that all the homes burned were not V.C.

We passed through one village which the V.C. had terrorized. They had shot three young children through the head. One girl of about 10 was still alive and we called a helicopter to take her to Da Nang.

We left the valley on May 10th. It took us 12 hours to walk approximately 18 miles. We took one casualty. A sniper shot a man in the right side and the bullet came out the left. At last word he was allright.

We spent one night at the Coal Mines on the Song Thu Bon river before returning to An Hoa.

May 15th

We just arrived from An Hoa at a place called Hoi An. Former V.C. who assisted the marines were known as “Kit Carson’s”. Miswritten in original; the correct place was Hoi An.
not far south from Da Nang and is near the China Sea. Tomorrow we move to a position about 500 meters from the China Sea.

1730 May 16

We moved to Ha Quang III today. It is a small hill about 500 meters from the China Sea.

It is beautiful here. From here to the sea is a small wood of scrawny trees resembling pine trees. The sand is quite clean and almost white.

As evening nears one can sit on a bunker listening to the birds chattering from tree to tree. In the distance the China Sea gleams and a white sail from a small craft skids across the water.

Across the sea a relatively large mountainous island rises abruptly. The mountains are a hazy blue, slightly darker than the sea. As dusk descends, they start deepening to a purple hue.

One sits; admiring the sights and sounds and suddenly all is marred, as usual, by the sound of a 30 caliber machine gun in the distance. The firing stops and you can hear the children in the nearby village resume their games. What games do they play? What do all children play. They are playing war.

May 21

We only spent one night at Ha Quang (near Hoi An) and then came back to An Hoa. We spent several days at an outpost at An Hoa (doing nothing) and now we are in our third day at a small camp in Hoa Nam. We are holding this position while the company that usually mans it is out on an operation. We have been running day patrols and night ambushes. I spent last night on an amtrack running up and down the road in front of the camp trying to draw fire. We were totally unsuccessful at drawing fire.

Yesterday from 1400 to 1800 I went on a patrol. We covered approximately 8 miles and saw two enemy which were briefly engaged. Our lead man thought that he had wounded one. This area is full of villages which were all destroyed and are now overgrown. While
passing through weed covered rubel, I started noticing art work that I hadn’t noticed in villages before. I was impressed by some of the intricate wood carving on some of the beams and gabels. I have also been noticing the pottery. It consists largely of baked clay and has no design. The thing that interested me most however are the gigantic clay containers used to store rice. They are shaped like vases and stand about four feet high. I am curious as to how and where they are made. One sees kilns now and again but I doubt that they are all made at the kilns and transported to the villages.

Also interesting are the cemeteries. The farmers just bury their dead and mark the grave with a round earth mound surrounded by a trench. What I would assume to be the more wealthy add tombstones and occasionally monuments. I saw a monument yesterday with a stone rooster on top. I could not get close, but it appeared as though the rooster was made of different colored stones inbedded in clay or something I suppose.

I had the opportunity to observe the fearfully awesome sight and sound of a B 52 bombing raid. The planes bombed a hill several miles from here at about 4 a.m. One could hear the low roar of the planes as they approached. It sounded like the hum of a bee hive only much lower. The planes must have dropped several hundred bombs and the flashes from those behind the hill looked like lightening. All one could see was a miriad of such flashes, interspersed with flashes of flame from those bombs hitting this side of the hill. After a few moments the sound of the bombs came; first with a few distant muted booms and then turning into a sound like distant rolling thunder. I imagined that such must have been the sights and sounds in England, France, and Germany in World War II, and pictured, with horror, the same sights and sounds occuring at home today as they do in Hanoi today. I pray that this never happens.

May 21

Another installment. I wonder if I am making interesting reading with these commentaries on whatever one might wish to call them.

Lansbury chose an unusual metaphor to describe the bombing; operation “Rolling Thunder” was the code name for the U.S. bombing of targets in North Vietnam.
This place, Hoa Nam, is sort of nice. This position is set in a shaded area and some of the bunkers are really fixed nicely. I am staying in a Lieutenants bunker while he is on an operation. It has a low ceiling (3/4 of it is of course underground and the roof is sandbagged. This leaves about 2 feet from the roof to the ground which is open and screened). It is about 20 feet long and 12 feet wide. There are planks on the floor and straw mats on the walls. It houses 2 cots, a desk and chair, and an ammunition box chair and matching table. My cot is even equipped with a mosquitoe net. Also included are several shelves and several assorted nails for hanging things. It is returned to An Hoa from Hoi Nam 3 days ago. We have done nothing much here except run the usual day patrols and night ambushes.

Two days ago we had a day patrol which ended on the top of a large nearby hill. The view was magnificent. One could see from here to the China Sea which must be 20 or 30 miles from here. From the mountain one could see that An Hoa is enclosed in a massive valley. Again I am impressed by the abruptness of the rising mountains. This whole valley seems almost bordered by walls. An Hoa sits at the far end and the China Sea meets the other end.

Also throughout the area weaves the Song Thu Bon river and its tributaries. These zig-zag back and forth across the rice paddied area like giant serpents. Right above An Hoa is a relatively large, man made lake from which this complex gets its water. To view it from the top of the hill with the breeze wrinkling its surface and the suns reflection making the wrinkles burst into thousands of brightly glowing jewels, is a marvelous experience.

Yesterday the whole company was sent out to a nearby village to set up security for an inspection tour of the American Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam. I was told that this village was a recently completed sample of Americas aid to the Vietnamese. The cost was put to me as 4 million dollars. The village is apparently Vietnamese built under American supervision. The homes are of course typically Vietnamese. That is that they consist largely of a frame with thatched roof and sides. The fields were well layed out and a good irrigation system is in use. I also noticed that not only did the village and homes appear much cleaner, but so did the people. The people's clothing seemed cleaner and neater, and I only saw one sickly looking child. In many other villages many of the children have healing or
festerings sores and cases of scabies and other vitamin deficiency
diseases. I still haven't figured out what sanitation devices, if any,
these people use. Even in this village I saw an old woman walk out
of her door and squat next to the house.

As usual, the children in this village are numerous. While waiting
for the Ambassador we accepted the hospitality of a man and stayed
in the shade of his home. He had 10 children and his wife was
conspicuously harboring the 11th within herself. We asked the chil-
dren to fill our canteens. They filled them from their own bucket
(or large stone bowl) in which most families keep their days' water
supply. Unfortunately the water tasted conspicuously like rice paddy
water.

We will shortly be honored with the visit of Senator Tate (D)
from Texas (he is due in here any moment.)

By the way, the Ambassador's visit was cancelled.

1300 May 30, 1967

We sit in our raised, screened, and galvanized tin roofed quarters
writing letters, playing cards, arguing, and sleeping. We are waiting.
Waiting for war. Most of our time seems to be spent sitting around
here or some place else. Right now we are on a two hour standby.
This means that some company somewhere nearby has run into a
sizeable number of VC or other enemy. We may be needed if they
get in trouble.

Yesterday we acted as a blocking force for some PF's and RF's
(Popular Forces and Regional Forces) who were holding an operation.
The Marines here don't trust the PF's or RF's or, for that matter,
the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam.) These Vietnamese
forces are apparently known for running instead of fighting.

The relationship between the men, especially in the field, appears
quite close. The negro-white relationship is especially interesting.

The whites and negros here get along better than I've ever seen
anywhere else. There seems to be very little prejudice on either side.
Personal possessions here are usually shared by all (of course, each
has his own taboo on very personal items). Packages received are
shared by all. A man with no money can always buy a beer or get
cigarettes. Cigaretts, utensils, swigs of water, etc. are shared by negro and white. The word for negro in the Marines is "Splib." For whites it is "Chuck". I have not as yet heard the word "nigger" used here. To address or refer to a negro as a "splib" is perfectly acceptable.

1830 June 5th, 1967

We got back yesterday after 3 days in the field. I don't feel very well and haven't for 4 or 5 days. I've lost my appetite and my thirst is unquenchable at times. It is probably due to the dysentary I think I have.

We were on a two hour standby all last week, and got called out Friday June 2nd at 1300. At 1300 we got the word that Fox trot company had made contact with a sizable enemy force (probably a Battallion). Contact was made in the Chiem Son area which is part of Tam Ky and about 2500 meters from the Song Ly Ly River. It is North of Chu Lai and South of An Hoa.

As we were boarding helicopters at about 1345, we learned that Fox (2/5) and Delta (1/7) had gotten into a full scale battle. We were originally going to help Fox & Delta block off the enemy but it turned out that the enemy had ambushed Fox and Delta.

We finally arrived at the area at about 1415 but could not land because air strikes were being used against the enemy. The helicopters circled the area as we watched the smoke from the bombs. We finally had to land at Tam Ky to refuel. Our chopper got several hundred feet off the ground after refueling but was forced into an emergency relanding at Tam Ky when an engine failed. We waited for another chopper while the other five made the first landing in Foxtrots' area. The first wave landed, I was told later, without incident. They then secured the area for further landings.

We waited for another chopper at Tam Ky for about 45 minutes. During that time we watched the casualties from Fox and Delta flow

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12 The fighting began when two companies of the 5th Marines, about 400 men, located an NVA force estimated at 2900 men. Two battalions of the marine regiment joined the fight which raged all day and night. The marines reportedly killed 117 of the enemy. New York Times, June 3, 1967.
in. Our chopper arrived and we joined the rest of the company at about 1600.

We stayed at the original landing zone until dark while more troops from different battalions came in. Our position was reinforced by Delta Company 1/5. It was later learned that the reason for our not immediately going to the aid of Fox Company was that no one knew their exact whereabouts.

While waiting for the word to move, I had a chance to observe the air strikes which were rather impressive. There were 8 UH 2 (Huey) helicopters and 4 phantom jets in use. Hueys are equipped with 2 M60 machine guns (made by Mattel) and two 20 millimeter cannons. The jets carry rockets and bombs, including napalm. The Hueys and jets were continuously hitting an area to our rear.

At dusk, our company and Delta 1/5 started up a road and around a hill to flank Foxtrot. As we slowly moved in single file we started hearing the rumors that Fox company was completely annihilated. It was said that someone from Fox had come over the radio and was jabbering hysterically. He was apparently insane and it was thought that he might be a sole survivor.

As we crepted along the dark road toward our objective we could still observe the tracer rounds from the Hueys. We also noticed that the enemy had the nerve to continue automatic weapons fire at the swooping jets and helicopters even though the tracer rounds gave away their positions. All enemy ground to air fire soon ceased however with the arrival of a plane known to the troops as "Puff". Puff contains a gattling type gun with 6 barrels that fire at a speed of 6,000 rounds a minute (100 rounds a second). It can apparently fire bursts for several minutes. When Puff fires its gun, all one can see is an almost solid red line of fire. Considering that only every 5th round is a tracer makes Puffs' fire power an impressive sight.

As we moved near our objective we suddenly received sniper fire from a machine gun. Two men were wounded. The time was around midnight.

The fire forced us to take a position in an open area of dried rice paddies in front of a tree line. We called in a helicopter to Med-evac the two casualties, which was apparently what the enemy was waiting for. The helicopter arrived at about 0100 and its landing clearly marked our position. The helicopter was just taking off and Delta 1/5 was just moving into position on our right flank when the
enemy opened up on us with mortars. As the mortars fell all one could hear were explosions followed by agonizing screams and the cry of “Corpsman”.

A mortar attack is horrible. One is helpless. No one knows from where the rounds are coming. This plus the wounded plus everyone looking for non-existent shelter makes for mass confusion and possible panic.

Fortunately, the mortaring was not heavy. The enemy apparently did not have much ammunition. We probably received only 20 or 30 rounds in about an hour and a half. It is blood chilling to hear the “pop” of a mortar being dropped into its tube; of the sound of someone yelling, “incoming”, and the faint whistling sound of the missile itself. One hugs the ground trying to become part of its wondering where this round will land.

One lone, last mortar fell harmlessly at about 0230. By that time most people were dug in and I was busy with the casualties. I had two people die while trying to save them. I felt utterly helpless.

Our casualties: 2 platoons of my company;—Echo (1 platoon was not yet in position and could only watch us get mortared), 20 wounded and 1 dead. Eight had to be med-evaced immediately. The others waited until morning. Delta Company 1/5; 18 wounded and 3 dead.

At 3 a.m. I fell into an exhausted sleep.

We moved out at 0630. We moved through a tree line and over a small hill into a gigantic rice paddied area. The point platoon found Fox companies position. What was left was on a small wooded hill. The rice paddies around them were full of Marine bodies. Out of approximately 150 men, Fox Company had 46 dead and 40 wounded. I do not know the casualties of Delta 1/7. Fox lost all of its officers except for one. The captain (company commander) apparently lost his life while assaulting a machine gun nest. He was apparently wounded and then overrun by the enemy. At the last he was forced to use his pistol at point blank range.

We spent the next night and left the following morning without incident. Our arrival probably did save the rest of Foxtrot. The enemy apparently left in a hurry when our helicopters landed, leaving behind a small group to keep us from pursuit. This was surmised from the number of enemy dead and weapons we recovered. The enemy will never leave anything behind if they can help it. They will even go as far as covering traces of cooking fires so that we can get no idea
of their numbers. From the number of cooking fires and fox holes found alone, it was estimated that there might have been a regiment of enemy. The dead we found proved the enemy to be of the North Vietnamese Army.

One of the Corpsman with whom I came to Vietnam was killed. This was the first action he had seen. He was part of those who were overrun. The VC stripped him of his clothing because he was small in stature. All of the wounded which were overrun were shot in the head. This Corpsman apparently was killed outright. For this at least I am glad.

June 13, 1967

We got back yesterday from 3 days of rest and relaxation at China Beach in Da Nang.

Da Nang is a huge complex of different military installments. Different areas represent different services. There are Marine, Navy, Airforce . . . areas. Each has its own PX and its own club where beer and liquor are plentiful.

The Vietnamese city of Da Nang itself is located in the center of the different complexes, and by each complex entrance, small "shanty towns" have sprung up. From what I saw, the main business endeavors of the Vietnamese in Da Nang are prostitution and the selling of such trinkets as marijuana and dirty pictures. For the price of five dollars one can obtain the dubious pleasures of a quick roll in the hay or several hundred prerolled marijuana cigarettes. Of course, the houses of prostitution (called here "skivie" houses) are off limits, but very few Marines or other personnel seem to get caught.

I was not totally surprised at the amount of marijuana being used by the Marines here. It is easy to get, can be relatively cheap; and makes for a pleasant "trip" after a days war. Beer and liquor are limited to everyone other than those in a large complex such as Da Nang or Saigon. In An Hoa, we have a beer call every day where you pay 30 for your two-can-per-man beer ration. Other than this and the occasional bottle in the mail, there is nothing other than marijuana to turn to. I hesitate to estimate, but I would guess that 25% of the people in my company use marijuana. Out of that, 5% are probably heavy users.
I tried earlier to explain the race relations. I think that "Time" magazine expressed this relationship very well in a recent article "The Negro in Vietnam". Time simply suggested that Negro-White relationships among service men in Vietnam are years ahead of race relationships in the United States.

We go on a 5 day operation near here tonight at 2100. I must admit I am not joyous about the idea. It is rumored that there is a Battalion of NVA in the vicinity of our planned operation. I think that I am more nervous now than I was before last weeks' mortar barrage. I occasionally wake up at night thinking that our own artillery fire is incoming mortars. Every time I think of that attack I find myself shuddering.

Today I went on a convoy. This consisted of riding tanks to a river about 5 miles from here and escorting 7 trucks back to An Hoa. I must admit I rather enjoyed the tank ride. We were probably going no faster than 30 miles an hour, but with the noise and dust of a tank ride, it seems as though one is going 100 mph.

The beer hall opens soon, at which time we will all politely push and shove into a line to get our 2 cans of beer. I hope that it is cold tonight.

June 20, 1967

We returned from Operation Arizona two days ago and tomorrow we will go to Nang Sang (The coal Mines) where we will stay for several weeks.

Operation Arizona, from my point of view; the point of view of the unknowing, unthinking pawn, was a totally unsuccessful and unorganized mass of confusion. I am convinced that each step of

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13 The Time article is in the May 26, 1967 issue.
14 This location is actually Nongsun. Lansbury also refers to it as Nong Song, Nang Song, and Nag Song.
15 Operations Arizona, which commenced on June 14 and concluded on June 22, centered in the Dai Loa and Duc Duc districts of Quang Nam Province. The 7th marines were also involved. Lansbury's comment that the operation was "totally unsuccessful," while despondent, was probably not incorrect. Contact with enemy was described as "moderate" while only 80 confirmed kills were made. Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. History and Museums Division, A Brief History of the 7th Marines (Washington, D.C., 1980), 60.
the operation was planned on the spot. Any pre-planning was dis-
regarded. Because of this apparent lack of planning, the moral [sic] of the troops was lower than I have ever seen it so far. There was much quarrelling and tempers flared with little provocation. This occurred especially after long fast marches, at which time the troops were dragging with fatigue. The mental and physical strain put on everyone in those 5 days was exhausting. To make matters worse, there was no enemy contact other than finding three VC in caves in a village in which we spent the night. Enemy contact usually brings the troops together in that they think as one large fighting force. In a fight, each individual is dependent on the other individuals. The whole unit makes for a decisive victory although each individual has the responsibility of doing his own assigned task and doing it well. As a corpsman, I would probably do more damage than good if, in a fire fight, I were to pick up a weapon and start playing Marine. If the time came for me to pick up a weapon or use my 45 pistol, then that time, as the Marines say, would be the time to “hang it up.” Such a time would indicate that we were about to be overrun.

June 24, 1967

We are now at Nang Sang (the Coal Mines) on the Song Thu Bon River. We are sitting on the uppermost level of a large hill. In the day time I sit and live, as do the others, in a hole dug in the bare earth, surrounded by piles of sand bags and covered by a tin roof which in turn is covered by sand bags.

So I sit fighting a war. Three days and two nights on a hot hill; living in a hole, eating my choice of one of the same twelve meals out of green cans. One night trudging over hills through thick brush to sit in ambush for an unseen enemy, fighting miriads of blood thirsty mosquitoes, to return again for three days and two nights sitting in a hole. So it will be for several weeks.

Sitting here, I again find it hard to believe there is a war going on. I believed it once, three weeks ago when mortars were exploding around me, and voices were calling “Corpsman” from every direction. I believed it three weeks ago when I heard a fellow Corpsman scream in agony and stood by watching helplessly (we had done all we could)
as he slowly died pleading, "Please help me, somebody, help me." I believed in the existence of war three weeks ago as I tried to melt into the ground to avoid the mortars. I remember thinking to myself, "Oh my god its for real. It's not a game, it isn't any fun anymore, they are trying to kill me," and I almost cried. But that was three weeks ago and now I sit in a hole on a hill overlooking a beautiful view and I find it hard to believe that a war is going on.

I wonder if I am the only one who feels this way. Are flying bullets and exploding projectiles and torn bodies the only way for me to remember that I am involved in a war in a country half way around the world from my home? Or maybe I find it hard to believe because the only enemy I've seen, other than a few dead, are the three VC that we captured in a village on Operation Arizona. Funny though, those three VC (two men and a woman) looked just like any other villager. I sit and watch fires glowing on the surrounding hills; fires started by exploding artillery, and I find them pretty. Or I watch a jet swoop down and drop napalm which explodes in red and orange flames and billowing black smoke and I forget that the jet is dropping that bomb trying to kill people, just as they are trying to kill me.

And yet this is all silly. I know there is a war going on. It says so in the papers and tonight we go into a mosquito infested area and lie quietly in wait for someone to walk unsuspectingly into our killing zone.

Now I wonder if our being here is right or wrong, good or bad. This I can't answer. I see good in a village built with American aid near An Hoa. The homes are of the same material as other homes; bamboo with thatched roofs and sides; but they are cleaner. The people look cleaner and you don't find any scab infested children running around or any open running sores covered with flies and water bull dung. The irrigation system is good and the crops are rich and plentiful. I see bad when a marine, for no apparent reason, shoots and kills a water buffaloe securely tied to a fence. He kills it and then unties it so that he can tell everyone how it charged him. And I wonder about the owners of the bull who now have no way to plow their fields.

But good or bad or right or wrong is of no importance to me right now. That is a matter for reflection over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine after a good meal at home. It does not matter now because
good or bad or right or wrong, I am here and, even though I find it hard to believe, involved. Some say, "War is horrible. Become a conscientious objector and don't go to war. Fight against war, even if it means prison." I say, "Fine, war is horrible, but maybe one can't really fully appreciate its horror until one has been involved in a war."

June 26, 1967

The weather is breezy and consequently cooler than usual today. I think that there is rain in the air.

Here at Nang Sang things remain quiet. Reconnaissance spotted two companies of NVA (North Vietnamese Army) going into nearby Antenna Valley. It is thought that Antenna Valley is one of the routes used by enemy coming from the Ho Chi Minh trail.

A Vietnamese chemist came to our bunker this morning and brought us some ice. Apparently he just wanted to make friends. At any rate we gave him C-rations in trade for the ice. He is of the educated class and is apparently anxious to speak English. Unfortunately he has much to learn before he will be understood in English.

His name, I don't remember. He came with the ice at about 1000 and left at about 1100 inviting me and one other person to join him in his home for lunch at 1200.

The village of Nang Sang was made off limits to us when we got here. I imagine they don't want us buying liquor. Any any rate, myself and the marine snuk to the village where I was anticipating my first Vietnamese meal.

His house is located in what we might call a tract of row houses. I don't know if they are French, American, or Vietnamese built, but they are single rooms (each "apartment") of plastered brick. The furniture consisted of several wooden table chairs, one bed, a table, and a bureau. The floor is of cement and the cream colored walls were decorated by one photograph and a French Vietnamese calendar. His family consists of a very attractive and very well built wife, (bust lines here are not a strong Vietnamese feature) and two girls; one 3 years old and the other 4 months old. He had another chemist guest with wife. The other chemist speaks English very well. The two wives
stayed in the thatched lean-to in back of the house that served as the kitchen.

The meal, though it was not a full course meal, consisted of a glass of lime ade and dried squid. The squid was warmed over an open flame and pounded to soften it. I found it quite good. It tasted very much like lobster. Dessert consisted of a seed covered and peanut filled candy. All in all, it was an enjoyable meal although conversation was difficult and often forced. Tomorrow he brings more ice.

June 27, 1967

We never reached our intended ambush site last night. We stopped in the near by CAC unit across the river and were about to leave for the ambush site when we got a radio report to spend the night with the CAC unit. Intelligence reported spotting six companies of NVA nearby. It was also learned that they killed two water buffaloe yesterday. Apparently they kill water buffaloe as a sort of sacrifice before going to battle. This hill is only defended now by one company minus one platoon which is in China Beach on in-country R & R. Everyone is expecting to be attacked any moment. We assume that they are planning to overrun Nang Sang. We are all sort of hoping that they plan their assault for the 4th of July as the platoon on R & R will be back here by then.

The enemy is supported to be equipped with mortars, rockets, 50 caliber machine guns, and the rest, automatic rifles.

Needless to say I'm not pleased with our present situation. Nang Sang was overrun once before last October. The mens' spirits are high, however. Maybe they are just covering their nervousness. I do notice however, that everyone is a little more friendly and everyone seems to stay in groups chewing the fat. We have nothing else to do but sit around and wait. Jokes are being told and there is much talk of old times and home. We are all even joking about the possibility of being overrun. Jokes are being made of writing letters home saying, "Dear Folks, Everything is fine and there is nothing exciting happening. P.S. This may be my last letter home."

Yesterday evening while I was on ambush one of our men suddenly went crazy. He has been acting strangely—very withdrawn—for the
last few days. I had been keeping an eye on him because he just got out of the hospital with a diagnosis of possible malaria. He was med-evaced to Da Nang immediately.

Mail just came in and we are expecting ice and ice cream shortly. Spirits remain high while we wait.

July 8, 1967

Our fears for July 4th were justified. There are three levels on the hill at Nong Song. At approximately 2340 on July 3rd the upper level was attached. By midnight, (or shortly after) July 4th, the top level was overrun. Fox Company who recently lost a platoon on Union II,16 lost the platoon on top of the hill. There were 15 killed and somewhere between 15 and 20 wounded. The hill was overrun by a “Sapper” squad (suicide squad) of VC. They did not use many weapons. They came up the hill in bare feet and shorts carrying hand grenades and satchel charges. They ran from one end of the position to the other blowing up the bunkers. Most of the men were apparently caught in their bunkers. It is thought that they were either sleeping or stayed in their bunkers thinking that they were under mortar attack.

My platoon had been on top of the hill until July 1st. On July 1st we went into the mouth of nearby “Antenna”. Valley for 5 days of patrolling and Fox Company took over our positions on the hill. When Fox company was hit, we were called out of the valley to help. We came down the middle of the valley to the road and followed the road to Nong Song. We covered the 5 mile distance in 1 hour and 10 minutes. This is excellent time, especially with a company

16 Union II began on May 26 and ended on June 5. It was fought in the village of Nui Loc Sun, the same sight as Union I. The village was in the center of a major V.C. controlled region along the northern central plain. The 100,000 inhabitants supplied the V.C. with rice and recruits for I corps. In the intervening 10 days between the Union operations, marine companies continued to patrol the area, reporting daily contacts with enemy forces, an indication of the importance that the V.C. attached to the area. Enemy losses totaled 540 killed as against 73 marines killed and 139 wounded. For their participation in both Union I and II, the 5th Marine Regiment (reinforced) won the Presidential Unit Citation. New York Times, May 28, 1967; Marines in Vietnam, 76.
size move. We learned later that a two company size ambush had been set for us on the road. We were fortunate to get on the road a thousand meters below the ambush site.

Intelligence sources later revealed that the attack had been done with the help of Chinese advisors.

The attack on Nong Song consisted with a mortar attack on An Hoa. Mortar damage was light and there were no serious injuries in An Hoa.

August 22, 1967

July 8th now seems eons in the past. A lot has happened between then and now but I have been partially too busy and partially too lazy to keep up to date on these writings.

We returned to An Hoa from Nong Song on July 8th. The whole area was buzzing with reports of NVA battalions in the area. An Hoa was in imminent danger of attack. It seems that it takes threats of annihilation for the Marine Corps to decide to take defensive action. When we returned to An Hoa we were put on a crash program of strengthening fortifications on the lines. We put up new barbed wire and built above ground bunkers, trenches, and fighting holes.

We were doing this for several days when intelligence reports came in that a nearby CAC village was to be hit by a company of NVA. Our platoon was immediately sent there where we spent 5 days

17 Lansbury’s complaint is a common criticism against the corps. See, for example, Robert Pisor’s *The End of the Line* which criticized the marines for not digging in better at Khe Sanh. More recently, Patrick Townsend, U.S.M.C. (Ret) attempted to explain the lack of defensive preparations at Beirut, which claimed 241 lives, as due to the marines’ “brand of chivalry” which assumed that the other side would “fight fair”. See Townsend’s “My Turn” column, “The Marines’ Weak Spot,” *Newsweek*, January 30, 1984. Such a view, however, is romantic. The failure of the corps to construct more adequate defensive positions is due to its ingrained attack mentality, its reluctance to sit on its “ditty boxes.” Comparing American marines to Australian soldiers, correspondent Martin Russ, himself a former marine, noted the former’s proclivity for carrying more ammunition and grenades to its lightly equipped Australian counterparts. This difference seemed to indicate a willingness by the marines both to accept more casualties and to engage in attack situations. See Martin Russ, *Happy Hunting Ground* (New York, 1968), 200-201.

18 Combined Action Companies.
strengthening the barbed wire perimeter. Neither An Hoa nor the CAC ville have been hit yet.

Our next base of operations was 8 miles North of An Hoa on 2 hills called Phu Loc 6 and My Loc 2.

Phu Loc and My Loc had been in our TAOR (Tactical Area of Responsibility) until April. Because our TAOR was exceptionally large for one Battalion to control, Phu Loc and My Loc were given to 1/26 and one week later to 1/7 when 1/26 went to the DMZ. The area of Phu Loc and My Loc was commonly called “booby trap alley”. We had been taking almost daily casualties from booby traps, and mines on Liberty Road (running from An Hoa, past Phu Lock and on to Da Nang) were taking their toll of vehicles.

Our first job was to rebuild the fortifications on My Loc. Echo Company had built My Loc in December of 1966 (the hills are several thousand meters apart). At that time, one company was on each hill. My Loc was deserted and bunkers torn down in May or June. Echo Co. took over Phu Loc & My Loc from 1/7 around July 20th. 2nd Platoon had the job of living on and rebuilding My Loc. First and third platoons stayed on Phu Loc and acted as security for Liberty Road and a wooden bridge being built for Liberty Road across the Song Thu Bon River.

The job of 2nd platoon was hard. Rolls of barbed wire were brought in and thousands of sand bags. We had 15 perimeter bunkers to build plus a command post and ammunition bunker. Much of the barbed wire of the perimeter remained intact. Our immediate concern was the building of shelter on the barren hill.

We spent 11 days on My Loc. The troops were exhausted. No one could work from 11 until 1 because of the heat. After a hard days work, we still had to man the lines at night and run the usual activities—listening posts, outposts, ambushes etc. The strain showed

19 The 26th Marines (Col. David Lownds) was the marine regiment that later defended Khe Sanh.
on the short handed and undersized platoon and morale was low. Water was scarce; our only source being a 250 gallon container (called a water buffaloe). Showers were simply out of the question. I had one sponge bath in 11 days.

The time I spent on My Loc was a depressing time for me. My morale was at an all time low. I was tired of an apparent senseless and futile war. I was tired of sleeping in the dirt and eating C-rations. We were living like animals and smelled worse. I was tired of seeing the fear of us on the faces of the women, men and children of the surrounding villages. Every time we entered a village on a routine patrol, children would cry and men and women would visibly shake. The VC of the area have a very effective propaganda system. The people think we come to rape, savage, and destroy. The reason for the successful propaganda is that these things happen more than is necessary. Rape is not common, but destruction of property and rough handling are. An unthinking Marine, while searching a house, will often throw things around and overturn furniture. There is disregard for the scant possessions of the Vietnamese. A family of 8 has 8 sets of chopsticks (though rarely 8 plates). An unthinking Marine might take some as a souvenir, or he might break dishes. The Marine asks questions to which the standard reply is "Come bieck." (I do not understand) (the usual question might be "where is papason?" or "VC adow?" (VC over there?—which the Vietnamese understand). The angered Marine, tired of hearing "Come bieck" (even if the Vietnamese answered, the average Marine wouldn’t understand) might give the individual a hard shove or slap and leave disgusted.

The thing that also depressed me on My Loc was the civilians that I treated which were inadvertently wounded by our fire. We had a VC sniper in the area that became a bit of a joke. He would snipe at us at approximately the same time every day. We would try and picture him finishing his meal hurriedly so he wouldn’t be late for his sniping duties. He would snipe at us and we would reply with machine guns, mortars, and occasionally artillery. For 4 or 5 days, after such incidents, the civilians would bring to us a casualty from our fire. One day it was a baby with a nasty shrapnel wound of the elbow. Another day it was a young mother who, if she lived, would never bear children again. Still another day it was an older women with a broken femur. One day it was a complaint of a dead water buffaloe—the farm machinery of the Vietnamese.
On August 1st, before the bunkers we were building were completely finished and before we could enjoy the dubious pleasure of living in our own completed works of art, 2nd platoon moved to Phu Loc and 1st platoon took our place.

The routine at Phu Loc was a strenuous one. We were concerned with the security of a 5 mile stretch of Liberty road from Phu Loc toward An Hoa. This stretch of road was the most feared by the daily convoy drivers from Da Nang to An Hoa. 1/7 had daily been losing men and vehicles to mines planted on the road. Our luck had not been much better. Our casualties were low but we (I should say the convoys) lost an average of one vehicle every two or three days. Phu Loc had about 5 tanks at its disposal. At one point, we had no tanks in operating condition. It is amazing that there were not more serious casualties. One day I was riding as convoy security returning from An Hoa. I was on a lead tank. The second tank was the the rear of the 20 vehicle convoy. About 4 miles from Phu Loc, the rear tank hit a small mine. There were no injuries but the tank had to be towed. Our tank went back and hooked up and started towing the second tank. About a mile from Phu Loc, the tank we were towing hit a second mine (apparently a "command detonated" mine or our tank would have tripped it). I was momentarily dazed by the concussion but quickly came to my senses and jumped off the tank to check for casualties. There were three injuries, one of which required evacuation. The tank was almost beyond repair.

Our routine at Phu Loc consisted of daily squad size mine sweeps, 4 four men day and night outposts on the road, and night ambushes and platoon size search and destroy missions.

On August 3rd, the mine sweep from An Hoa (which sweeps from An Hoa halfway to Phu Loc) was ambushed. The mine sweep was made up of several engineers, a squad for security, and one or two people coming to Phu Loc. Among these was Lt. __________, our platoon commander, who was bringing the pay for Echo Co. The Corpsman was stationed with me in the States and we had come over together.

The ambush took place near the old bridge, about 1500 meters from an ARVN outpost, and about a mile and 1/2 from An Hoa. The ambush was a complete success. There was only one survivor and he was so badly wounded that the VC thought him dead. Those others that were not killed but wounded, were all shot several times in the head. The money was not found as Lt. __________ had hidden
it in the bushes before he too was shot in the head. One sad thing is that the whole massacre was witnessed by a squad on an OP (outpost) several thousand meters away. Supporting arms were not called in on time due to confusion of call signs (Each different activity is given a radio call sign such as Alpha 2 bravo, or Cassandra, etc.). From that day on all road sweeps were conducted on a platoon size level.

Aug. 10th. The same routine for 2nd platoon. Day and night outposts along the road and a daytime roving patrol. Tonight was turn to go with one of the 4 man OP's. We usually sent out 4, 4 man OPs at night. A corpsman went with OP2 so that he could be in the middle in case one of the other OPs needed a corpsman. OP 1 was situated by the road about 500 meters from Phu Loc. OP 2 was approx. 1000 meters from Phu Loc, OP 3 about 1500 meters, OP 4, 2000 to 2500 meters. Before leaving for the OP sites after dark, the squad leaders in charge of Op 1 & OP 2 got together and decided that 8 men per position were stronger than 4. OP 2 was in position by about 1900. We set up on the side of the road around a small bush and about 15 meters from a foot trail that ran perpendicular to, and crossed the road. At about 2000, OP 1 joined us—a procedure that was highly illegal. This gave OP 2 8 men and one Corpsman. We had no cover and little concealment. Two men stayed awake to watch and the rest settled down to sleep.

I couldn't get to sleep. I was used to the constant buzzing of the mosquitoes. It was just restlessness on my part. At about 2200, as I was just about to get up and urinate, one of the men on watch started waking everyone up quietly and in a barely audible whisper, told us not make a sound or move a muscle. We all froze in our positions. I was lying on my back in a shallow gully. It was just deep enough so that I couldn't see the road without lifting up and turning my head slightly. I didn't try to look.

The man on watch had seen one man come up onto the road from the path on the other side and carefully scan the road. It was a dark night with no moon and we were in the open, yet he had not seen us. He had dissappeared back down the trail and suddenly reappeared with about 10 other men. They walked casually, got in a bunch in the center of the road (about 20 meters from us) and started talking in normal, though excited, voices. They then split up, half going up the road, and half going down. It looked as though they were setting
up flank security for a larger force. Our squad leader decided to wait and see. Again, in a barely audible whisper, he told us not to move or make any sound.

About an hour passed. Then, at about 2300, a column of men, all armed, well spaced and well disciplined and dressed in NVA uniforms, started quietly across the road. They were following a foot path that crossed the road and entered a gully about 15 feet from our position. I could not see from my position, but I could hear the sounds of boots on dirt and pebbles mixed with the occasional ring of metal or clank of a belt of machine gun ammunition. As they watched, some of the men started counting the passing figures. One man stopped at 80. Another man counted 150. Still another counted close to 200. How none of them saw us I do not know.

At about midnight, the last man of the column passed us and four men stayed on the road scanning the area. They were apparently waiting for another element (possibly the rear of the column) to start across the road. At about this time a flare went off in the vicinity of An Hoa slightly illuminating our position. At the same moment, one of our men apparently made a slight movement, rustling his poncho. The squad leader, sitting several feet to my left (I was lying parallel to the road) saw one of the four figures suddenly crouch at the noise and start to advance toward our position. We had finally been spotted. The squad leader immediately threw two had grenades and yelled for everyone to open up as he started firing his M-16 on full automatic over my head. Everyone then threw hand grenades and started shooting. Two of the four figures on the road fell immediately and the other two dove for cover on the far side of the road. We took no answering fire save for one hand grenade and three carbine rounds. The carbine hit no one and the hand grenade, which was off target gave minor schrapnel wounds to three of us. We had caught them completely by surprise (a very unusual occurrence as we usually end up being ambushed). Apparently, the reason that they simply did not get up and assault us is that they did not realize how small of a group we were. For all they knew, we could have been company size. To open up on us would give away their positions.

After throwing the hand grenades and shooting several magazines, we decided that it was time to withdraw. This we did; at a dead run. It took us only about 1/2 hour to return to Phu Loc. My main concern was running into the flank security that the enemy had put
out earlier. I don’t know how, unless they withdrew upon hearing
the firing, but we missed them.
A check of the area the next day found two blood trails (where
bodies had been dragged) and our gear, which had been left behind
in haste (ponchos, hats, etc.) gone. We were accredited with averting
a possible attack on Phu Loc. We told the Company Commander
that we (OP 2) had had a pre-arranged signal via radio with OP 1
and that when we spotted the first VC at 2200, we signaled them.
We went on to relate that OP 1 then joined us at about 2230, and
we set in together.

Forgive the grubby paper although everything around here is
grubby, including me. I haven’t written anyone in about a month
due to low morale. I’m afraid that I am just plain fed up with what
seems to me to be useless blood shed.
We are now on a hill called Phu Loc, about 5 miles from our
home base, An Hoa. Our job is to keep this section of “Liberty Road”
(which runs from An Hoa to Da Nang) open. Unfortunately VC
activity in the area has stepped up markedly. On the average of once
every 2 days a vehicle hits a mine (I was blown off a tank 2 days
ago when we hit a mine) even though there is a mine sweep every
day and there are marines at strategic points on the road. (We lost
our platoon commander and a Corpsman I came over with when the
mine sweep was ambushed several days ago. They were completely
overrun. (15 killed: you probably won’t read about it.) I’m also tired
of treating innocent civilians whom we accidently shot or bombed (I
make it sound more horrible than it really is, so don’t quote me.)

Dec 12, 1967

I sit in a room of sand bags. It is not really a room in the common
sense. A room has a distinct personality. The personality of the people
in it or of the memories it envoke. It is the memory of previous
comforts. Is is familiar. It radiates a sense of security. This sandbagged
room is not really a room. It is an enclosed portion of the outside.
Inside and outside meet and clash at tarped windows and doors. The earth on the floor is the same as the earth of the walls and of the ground outside. A candle flickers and water drips somewhere—it could be inside, it could be outside. A rat scurries amongst sleeping men; not to harass, for they, as we, desire only to feed an empty stomach. Man is careless and rats feed from his carelessness. After all, where would man be without his faithful companion the rat. The rat has lived mans wretchedness and suffering, has shared the burden. He has seen the rise and fall of Rome, the birth of Christ. He accompanied Columbus. I wonder if he remembers these events? He has known war. He has known famine and disease. This to him is just another war. It will end and he will continue in his wanderings. Some die, some suffer. The rat has seen it all before, and will see it all again. Another war in another time, in another place. He will see more death and suffering. He will scurry among exhausted boys. Boys tired of fighting; tired of living in fear; tired of not knowing why; tired of unaccustomed dirt and unaccustomed hate. And the rat will continue his everyday existance. An existance of searching, sniffing, scrounging, and fighting until death robs him of life. And so man continues his everyday existance. An existance unknowing, unthinking, and uncaring until death robs him of life.

The sandbags here will crumple. Where will they be next?

One gets tired of sleeping with one’s boots on, just in case. Tired of expecting the unexpected and wondering what horrors he might have to face tonight. Wondering if he will see the sun again or die under illuminations with his flesh torn and ragged from burning steel and lead. Are the rats tired also?

Dec. 22, 1967

I left the platoon today to start my tour in the BAS. I was supposed to get out of the field in 6 months but today makes it almost 8. I shouldn’t have to go into the bush again except on a few Battallion size operations. I don’t really think I’ll like the BAS, but it is better than being shot at. I have talked with the BAS chief several times and he has all but promised to put me in the pharmacy. I don’t really want to work sick call because the marines from my platoon
will be in looking for favors of light duty etc., and I hate to refuse them although I must. (Fortunately, I think that they know it.) Unfortunately, I know our chief well enough to realize that I can’t depend on his promises.

I must admit I am glad to be missing the upcoming operation (Operation Auburn) of which “E” Co. is taking part. They are going to a place near Phu Loc known as “Christmas Ville.” 2/5 was involved in heavy fighting there last Christmas and took a fairly good beating.

Dec 23, 1968

I have finally rotated from the field into the Battallion Aid Station (BAS) in An Hoa after 8 months in the field. I am totally exhausted, physically and mentally. I have had my fill of Vietnam. I was to leave today for 5 days of rest in Da Nang on in country R & R but was not allowed to leave today because An Hoa is supposed to be mortared tonight. They have promised that I can leave tomorrow.

We have been told of a Christmas truce, but all here know that such a truce is a farce in this area. The VC like to use our holidays for strategic strikes. Using our holidays (overrurng of Nong Song July 4th) for larger scale actions is a good morale deflator.

I fear that if the VC try and come into the perimeter tonight, they will come at the weakest point in the lines—through the BAS.

2/5 has lost a lot of ground here I think. I can’t really say that it is the fault of 2/5 but it is a fact that our TAOR is not nearly as secure as it used to be when I was first here. Squad size patrols and ambushes are rare now. It takes platoons to go where squads used to go. The CAC villes (now CAP20 as, I’m told, it was discovered that CAC, pronounced KAK, is a dirty word in Vietnamese) are probed by V.C. snipers quite often now. Booby traps between here and Phu Loc are worse in that there are fewer gernade traps and more 81,105, & 155 milimeter traps. Stepping on a booby trap now is almost a guarantee of the loss of a leg or two. On a three day sweep of the nearby Phu Nong area my platoon lost one man the first and second

day out to booby traps. The first day, one of my men on our flank stepped on a booby trap while we had been out of the perimeter of Phu Loc. for only 2 hours. His right leg was so badly damaged that it was amputated at the groin when he reached Da Nang. He also lost 4 fingers of his right hand. The next day another man stepped across a trench onto a booby trap. His left leg was gone to the shin and his right foot was hanging to the shin by a small bit of flesh and muscle. We cut the remainder of his foot off. He also lost a finger and possibly one or both testicles. I never found out from the hospital. Both legs were amputated at the knee. It seems that anytime a company goes out in that area, a marine loses a leg or two, or a life. The reward for a lost limb? A bronze star and purple heart.

Dec. 24

I am going to China Beach in Da Nang for 5 days of in country R & R. An Hoa is supposed to get hit tonight or tomorrow night. They caught a VA Sapper inside the lines yesterday afternoon but could not get any information from him. I watched the questioning for awhile and was told to keep mum as some of the procedures used in his questioning are considered unlawful. The suspect's nose and mouth were covered with a cloth which was kept moistened with soapy water.

It seems that the battalion will definitely by moving north to Phu Bai (north of Da Nang, 36 miles south of the DMZ) early in January.

Jan 1, 1968

I just came back from Da Nang and leave for Da Nang again tomorrow for 10 days of on the job training at 1st Medical Battallion.
I will be working at A & S\textsuperscript{21} which receives all the casualties from the I Corps area.

\begin{center}
Jan. 19, 1968
\end{center}

The Battallion has moved from An Hoa north to Phu Bai. Phu Bai is approximately 35 miles from the DMZ. It is a large place, and will probably be as large as Da Nang in the near future. It is a relatively secure area (no weapons are needed when one moves from place to place).

Intelligence reports just received indicate that the NVA (of which there are many between here and the DMZ) plan to hit here and a place called Phu Loc (15 miles south of here). The plan is for the NVA to overrun and hold Phu Loc for 5 days. They then will be ready to go to the table with a stunning victory to their credit.

The 1st Bn 5th Marines just moved to Phu Loc and have been taking a constant beating. Since the news of the intelligence reports, it has been decided that 2/5 will go to Phu Loc for an undetermined length of time to reinforce 1/5. It looks as though my tour in the BAS is not going to be quite as quiet as I thought.

\begin{center}
Jan 21, 1968
\end{center}

I have been sent with 10 men from 106's\textsuperscript{22} to take over an outpost near here while the Marines on the outpost go on an operation near Phu Loc. Rumors still fly and no one seems to really know the fate of 2/5. The operation is supposed to last 30 days and I am supposed to remain at the outpost (known as hill 230—about 6,000 meters from Phu Bai) for 2 weeks. Apparently, the 30 day operation is to take place half way between here and Phu Loc, at the mouth of Ash

\textsuperscript{21} A & S Administration and Supply.
\textsuperscript{22} 106 MM recoiless rifle.
Hoi (sp?) Valley, where 2/5 will make its new home, building from scratch.

Jan. 22, 1968

I arrived at hill 230 to find that the 10 men (most of whom have never been under fire) and myself replace a reinforced squad of grunts from “G” Co. The hill can be reached only by helicopter and I am told it is impregnable due to its steep sides.

The total strength of the hill, with us as replacements, is 10 106 (MM) men, 3 radio relay men from 1st Recon, (the hill is used as a relay station for the Reconnaissance teams that work in the area) and 4 Vietnamese Marines who also run their own radio relay. We have with us one M-60 machine gun to replace the 2 M-60s and one 81 millimeter mortar tube that were here. Our total man strength is 17. The hill is supposed to be supported by a total of 28 men. Consequently, we are force to diminish our perimeter by not allowing men on the bunkers around the Helicopter Landing Zone. This leaves 4 two man positions for our perimeter. Our supply of hand gernades is limited, and our only illumination is a few hand illumination gernades, which are not very good. Any needed illumination will have to come from artillery. However, this hill has not had any enemy activity since February of last year. I must admit that I can not rest easily though because enemy activity in the area has increased immensely in the last month and everyone fears an enemy build up for some sort of big move such as the take over of Phu Loc. Everyone seems to feel that if anything happens, it will happen during the upcoming Vietnamese holiday known as Tet.

Jan. 25, 1968

At approximately 1030 last night, we were probed by the enemy. They apparently got inside the wire and threw about six hand gre-  

nades. We also received about 20 rounds of small arms fire. One enemy at least was on the LZ as he tripped a flare set up there. We received no casualties and found signs of the enemy this morning.
We found several sets of enemy foot prints and several trip flare wires cut. Today was spent placing claymore mines and trip flares around the perimeter. We asked for resupplies but received none.

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Jan. 26, 1968

We were hit again last night at about 0230. We received about 5 incoming hand grenades and got 2 casualties. The casualties were minor shrapnel wounds, not serious, but serious enough for evacuation. That leaves us with 8 men to stand lines. We called again for ammunition and reinforcements and were again refused. I don't plan on much more sleep.

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Jan. 27, 1968

We received about 3 hand grenades and several rounds of small arms fire at about 2300 last night. We have no casualties but our machine gun broke down. A check of the wire around the perimeter showed foot prints and cut trip flare wires again. Everyone is quite nervous to say the least.

An emergency resupply of ammunition (including a grenade launcher) came in. The Recon. Radio Relay team got it for us through their commanding officer. Our battalion again refused our requests.

1530

Much to our surprise, helicopters suddenly appeared with a squad (13 men) of "grunt" reinforcements. They brought with them a machine gun and an M79 grenade launcher. It seems that our battalion sent them when intelligence reports indicated that hill 230 was supposed to have been overrun last night. They brought with them pressure release trip flares (flares that go off if the trip wire is tripped or cut,) which have been set out. We still have the same perimeter, but will put an LP (listening post) on the finger of the LZ.

Everyone feels much relieved that we have grunt reinforcements, but they are to stay here only until the 29th (the beginning of Tet)
when they are supposed to return to Phu Bai to prepare for the start of a 30 day operation in the direction of Phu Loc.

Jan. 28, 1968

Last night we received no enemy contact but the LP came in after hearing movement off of the finger. At least I got some sleep.

Jan 29, 1968

Things relatively quiet last night. One trip flare was set off and a “bush” was see rolling away from the trip flare. The “bush” was fired upon but no traces of enemy or blood were found this morning.

We just received word that this being the start of Tet, a 2 hours truce is to go into affect at 1800 this evening.

Jan. 30, 1968

The truce was called off last night. At approximately 1830 last night, a 10 man recon. team set, in approx. 8000 meters west of our position, spotted an estimated battalion sized force of heavily camouflaged NVA headed in a southeasterly direction. Checking the map indicated that a continued southeasterly direction of travel would bring the NVA in the vicinity of the Imperial city of Hué (about 12 miles North of Phu Bai).

By 1845 the Recon team was completely surrounded by the NVA and the NVA was approx. 100 meters from the Recon’s position and advancing on line; 3 abreast and 3 deep. I was able to follow the action by listening in on the radio as the Radio Relay Team on our hill had to relay messages for the surrounded team.

Artillery finally arrived on target at about 1900. The enemy was approx. 50 meters from the team. TWO UH2 (Huey) helicopter gun ships, a flare ship, and “spookey” (or “Puff” the magic dragon)
were called in. "Spookey"$^{23}$ is a fixed wing aircraft carrying flares and two mini guns which fire 6,000 rounds of 7.62 mm. rounds per minute, per gun.

With the aid of the gun ships, the Recon, team was able to hold off the enemy (who, at one point, were within hand grenade throwing distance) until they were extracted by helicopter at 2230. All the man had minor schrapnel wounds. One man was seriously burned by WP (white phosphorous) and another died later of a gunshot wound of the chest. At 1130 we received word by radio that we were to return to Phu Bai.

Feb. 1, 1968

I returned to Phu Bai to find the BAS (except for a 4 man rear element) and all the letter companies gone. Their battalion had moved to an area around the mouth of Ash Hoi Valley located on Highway 1 approximately half way between Phu Bai and Phu Loc.

I joined the BAS on Jan 31 and found them situated in an old railroad tunnel. The tunnel is all right, but our security is little.

We have just received the news that Hué is in control of the enemy and that Saignon and Da Nang have fighting in the streets. This must be the offensive we have been waiting for.

I can’t say that I am surprised that Hué was a prime target although we expected an attempted takeover of Phu Loc or Phu Bai. Due to Hué’s age and contents (a college, the old Imperial Palace, etc.) it is unlikely that we will be allowed the use of artillary or air support as these would destroy$^{24}$ buildings. Any fighting will have to be hand to hand and house to house.$^{25}$

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$^{23}$ "Spookey" fired 6,000 rounds a minute and carried enough flares to floodlight a mile radius.

$^{24}$ On the matter of destroying the city, Lt. Colonel Myron Harrington, U.S.M.C., made this observation, "There was a reluctance initially, of course, to use our heavy armament to destroy the city in order to save it." This reluctance was later overcome because the NVA, in Harrington’s words, was an “extremely tenacious fighter. He did not flee and run when the marines came in—he held his ground." When several thousand NVA entrenched themselves in the Citadel, a fortress that was once the imperial Palace, the U.S. used bombs to avoid prohibitive casualties. Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War, Vietnam: 1945-1975* (New York, 1981), 211; *Marines in Vietnam*, 100.

$^{25}$ House-to-house was with, in the words of one historian, "all odds against the attacker." To minimize damage and civilian casualties, however, fire support was largely limited to rocket launches, recoilless rifles and tank guns. *Marines in Vietnam*, 100.
Feb. 10, 1968

I am in Phu Bai and have been trying to get to Hué for six days. The ceiling is too low for helicopters and a bridge on the road from here to Hué is enemy occupied and blown up. I might leave by convoy today if the bridge is secured. They have been trying for several days trying to sweep to the bridge from Hué, and part of 2/5 is trying to reach it from here.

Things for the last week appear to be nothing but mass confusion. Hospitals in the area are full and there is a troop shortage. Office workers who have never been in the field are being used for convoys, lines, and reactionary forces.

We have a forward BAS and 1 doctor and 4 Corpsman with the Battallion CP in Hué. They arrived there around Feb. 3rd. Myself and 4 other men left the Rock Crusher (a mile or so above the railroad tunnel and supposedly the new home of 2/5) six days ago and have been trying ever since to join the forward BAS in Hué. We now have a 2 man BAS at the Rock Crusher (with little security), a 4 man BAS in Phu Bai, and a 4 man BAS in Hué.

We finally managed to get some reinforcements of several hundred men from Da Nang to replace casualties in 2/5. The companies have lost 4 corpsmen killed and wounded. We just received 7 Corpsmen to replace those lost but can’t get them to their companies in Hué. G, H, & F companies of 2/5 are in Hué. G supposedly has 70 men left and H is just as badly off.

Phu Bai was under rocket and mortar attack off and on for 5 or six days. The sirens go off and everyone jumps in a ditch. The attacks have done little damage.

The fighting in Hué has supposedly died down, but as the NVA are surrounded and can not withdraw as they attempted to after holding Hué for 5 days, fighting continues.

Maybe I will make it there today. I don’t relish the idea of going by convoy as I am sure we will be ambushed. I only hope the ceiling lifts for choppers (even though one was shot down several days again and there is supposedly no really secure LZ in Hué.)
Feb. 19, 1968

... I am in Phu Bai after spending a week in Huế. They have a forward BAS there and I tried for a week to get there, but, due to bad weather, we didn’t get out until the 10th. I got there only to find that due to a shortage of field corpsmen, I had to return to a company until replacements could make it up from Da Nang. I was with Golf (“G”) Co. 2/5 for 4 days and 3 nights. (The president mentioned G Co. on radio and television I am told.). If television and radio there say that Huế is secure, don’t believe them.

I’m afraid that I had one too many close calls while with G in Huế and must admit that I am very tired of the war. I fear that I am so tired that I hardly care anymore. I’m sorry to worry you but there really is no safe place in Vietnam. (There never really was a secure place but even then the most secure, ie Da Nang & Saigon; are now dangerous). I can only go from day to day, not counting the days.

I leave this month (the 25th) for 7 days R & R in Australia. It should be interesting visiting the “land way down under.”

I am enclosing some more Vietnamese paper money that I picked up in Huế as well as some VC propaganda pamphlets that I picked up around An Hoa quite awhile ago. Also enclosed is a card saying the equivalent to Happy New Year. It was given to me by some civilians of Huế who considered me their liberator when we moved into an area and I entered their house in search of VC (door kicked down, pistol drawn, etc. real Hollywood stuff.). When I entered the house, they came streaming from some bomb shelter hidden in the read of their house. It reminded me of the circus clowns piling out of a small car.

Huế must have been a beautiful city, but now it is a shambles. I don’t believe that I saw one building without some sort of battle scar on it.²⁶

²⁶ The civilian dead in Huế exceeded 5800 which was ten times the combined American—ARVN troop looses. In Harrington’s words, Huế had been “devastated.” Maclear, The Ten Thousand Day War, 211.
On the outskirts of the “secured” portion of Hué, civilian corpses (men, women, & children) still lay in the streets and houses. No one knows how they died, but there are only two ways—by the hand of the VC or by our own artillery and mortars. Those civilians in the less secured areas (where snipers and squad sized VC patrols operate) are in danger from both sides. I do not know if there are civilians in the strongly held VC and NVA positions, but I am sure there must be. I had an old woman with schrapnel imbedded under her eye (after travelling through her cheek) tell me in poor french, that her husband and son had been kidnapped by the VC.

We were set in for the day by a bridge crossing a canal. A middle aged Vietnamese man came to us with a note in English asking permission to cross the bridge to search for the bodies of his family. I found that he spoke fluent french and thus communicated with him. He told me that he had been in Da Nang on business when Hué fell. Upon his return to Hué, neighbors told him that the VC had killed his wife and three children. He had had a first wife who had also been slain by the VC.

There is no good drinking water in Hué so the troops drink beer, soda, and whiskey as they find it in their house searching. Looting is widespread. The ARVN’s wait until the marines secure an area and then move in to loot. The Marines do well for themselves also. They seem to enjoy this type of fighting and would prefer this kind of warfare over rice paddy and jungle fighting. This is probably because one knows where the enemy is and can often see the enemy that he is fighting. A lot of the marines come to the BAS and try and refuse to be medivaced or admitted. They want only to go back to the fighting.

I guess I got carried away, but there you have a brief sketch of the present day Hué. It is by far much more quiet than in the first few days, but daily fighting continues.

27 This opinion is starkly at odds with Harrington who noted, “initially we did not have any real concept of how we were supposed to fight.” Marines in Vietnam had had little experience in fighting in built-up areas, their combat being confined to jungles and the paddies. But he later added, “one of the beautiful things about the marines is that they adapt quickly.” Maclear, The Ten Thousand Day War, 211; Stanley Karnow, Vietnam, A History (New York, 1983), 532.
Enough for now. Could you give this letter to John? He might like to add it to my memoirs.

Love,
Roger

W. Roger Lansbury
Daniel F. Ring, editor