



[REDACTED]
O'Fallon, Illinois 62269
25 July 1996

Dick,

Here's a copy of something I thought you'd like to read. Also, I bet it's about a place you'd like to see. I know I'd like to go back there. After all, if we got to Cu Chi it wouldn't be that much harder to get to Dau Tieng. And really, I'd like to see both of those places again, but I will say that Dau Tieng is by far more scenic.

When I was at Cu Chi, there were rumors of those tunnels going right under our base camp, but nothing was ever done about it. Now we know that there really were those tunnels there.

In 1968 we had General Williamson take command of the 25th Division. Back in 1966, when he commanded the 173rd Airborne Brigade and when he was at Cu Chi once, he made a disparaging remark about the 25th. He said: "What kind of outfit is this that can't even secure its own headquarters?" Ironically, when he commanded the 25th himself, the worst disaster at Cu Chi ever occurred.

In February of 1969, DC (and I mean DC -not VC. DC were Dac Cong, and were Viet Cong special forces) sneaked through the perimeter at Cu Chi. I think they also cut the throats of guys sleeping on bunker guard, if I remember right. They sneaked in and blew up nine Chinooks with satchel charges. They also killed 39 Americans while losing [REDACTED] 13 of their own people. I had just left Cu Chi when that happened. A buddy of mine in the Little Bears wrote to me about it. Did you ever know about that happening?

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Over the weekend I was pulling security work and I met a former Mule-skinner. He was a flight engineer with the 242nd Aviation Company. He was not in Vietnam long then, for he got shot down and wounded. By the way, I don't think you would have been too crazy about having a job on a Chinook. It would be alright as a gunner, but crewing one is a lot more work and with nothing to gain. Furthermore, the mission work is of practically no or very little variety. But I'll say this about it: IT'S BETTER THAN INFANTRY!! It's better than "humping the boonies!" I bet you'll agree with that! Am I right?

In this article I've attached, it says that B-52 carpet bombings destroyed most of the tunnels. It did, and I knew that. And when that happened, the Viet Cong were conceding defeat. That tunnel complex was their only means of survival; it was their only "trump card" over us. Once that was knocked out, they had nothing over us -no advantage whatsoever! However, by the time it came to that, we had decided to quit in Vietnam. The other side then knew that all they had to do was stay around and survive. Once we were out of there, the country would be theirs, and that's exactly what happened. But it all comes down to one thing: It didn't have to happen as it did; we could have won. There is no doubt about that.

Well, I'd better get this letter off. I'll write again soon. Take care now.

Clear right,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Frank".

Underground in Asia

Cu Chi Tunnels provide a look at life during Vietnam War

By Jeanne Conte
Special to the Times

A trip to the Cu Chi Tunnels northwest of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam is both a sobering and fascinating experience. Visitors can descend into and crawl along a 165-foot stretch of the underground tunnels today as was done so often during the Vietnam conflict. But there is much to see, learn and experience without actually entering the tunnels.

A model of an underground surgical center is on display (partially above ground) under the new forest of eucalyptus trees. Nearby, demonstrations are given of how smoke from the tunnel kitchens was exhausted at surprising distances, diffused and camouflaged through layers of leaves.

This was only one of the many ingenious ways those in the tunnels managed to wage a decade of war from beneath the ground. The Tet Offensive attacks on Saigon emanated from the Cu Chi Tunnels.

Visitors can sit at a table in a reconstructed tunnel kitchen and taste the food used then — a white vegetable called a "potato" by our interpreter yet not like our own.

Secret tunnels were begun in Cu Chi as early as the 1940s, during the French occupation. By 1960, the Viet Cong realized the strategic importance of the tunnels and enlarged them to startling proportions and sophistication. As they were being constructed, dirt was dumped inconspicuously into recent bomb craters.

At one time, the tunnels spread over 210 miles, extending from Saigon to Cambodia. Some were of multiple levels, several stories high and as much as 23 feet below ground. They held weapons factories, command centers, storage facilities, field hospitals and living quarters. Numerous trap doors protected against poisonous gases, fires and bomb attacks.

Because of guerrilla warfare emanating from the tunnels, both U.S. and Australian forces sustained appalling casualties. At one time, the U.S. 25th Infantry Division ("Tropic Lightning") located their headquarters directly over the tunnels.

"Tunnel Rats," volunteers from U.S. forces who were of especially small build and high courage, entered the tunnels; many were trapped there in firefights. Military dogs, German shepherds who were encouraged to locate tunnel entrances, were deterred by the Viet Cong's use of pepper and stolen American clothing to confuse their scent.

During "Operation Sunrise," villagers were armed and relocated to 180 new villages; then an intense effort to find the enemy and clear the area of guerrilla warfare began. B-52 carpet bombing in the late 1960s destroyed most of the tunnels. Of the Viet Cong cadres who fought within them it is said that only about 6,000 of the 16,000 survived.

Maps at the Cu Chi Museum show the complex maze of underground labyrinths. Beyond this, visitors to the tunnels can see the re-created traps and rooms built to



Photo by Jeanne Conte

Although the tunnel entrances appear too small for a person to fit through, a Vietnamese guide demonstrates how easily they could be entered. *I don't think so!*

show underground life during the years of bitter conflict.

Within this newly planted forest of eucalyptus trees are Australian gum trees, grown where Australians fought alongside Americans over the Cu Chi Tunnels.

The Cu Chi Tunnels and Museum are in

Cu Chi, a city of 200,000 people, in the northwest metropolitan area of Ho Chi Minh City. For more information about visiting Vietnam, contact Absolute Asia, 180 Varick St., New York, NY 10014; (800) 736-8187 or Bolder Adventures Inc. Asia Transpacific Journeys, P.O. Box 1279, Boulder, CO 80306; (800) 642-2742.