

Letters Home (Dec 69 to Jul 70)

- 4 Dec 69 - Wed - Dad - Sorry that it's been so long between letters. I got a package from you today and another one the day before yesterday. Everything was great but I gave away the pea soup. Not for me. Thanks for the ID bracelet. The nuts were great and I especially liked the peanuts. The Reeses Peanut Butter Cups didn't last long. I tried to hoard them but I didn't stand a chance. These guys are like vultures when a care package arrives. I went to the rear for my door gunner job last week and gave most of my stuff away. Now I am back in the boonies and have no goodies. Everybody loves the shoe string potatoes. They make great munchies while we are playing cards. I broke the stem of my watch today and gave to a local who said he could fix it for \$1.50. Not bad.
- 5 Dec 69 - Thu - Dad - My new platoon leader and I just haven't been getting along together. The truth is, no one likes him. I was talking to a couple of guys last night and they were talking about writing their congressmen about this a-hole. The other day we went out to the Red Ball to meet the supply truck. The LT was waiting for something that wasn't on the supply truck and he blew up. He put his M-16 on the sill of the truck, clicked it off safety and told the driver that whatever he was waiting for had better be on tomorrow's truck. The resupply sergeant is an E5 with less than 30 days left in country. We told him to report the incident to the CO in Duc Pho but he didn't want to take the chance of having his departure date delayed. The new LT is a real back stabber. Always bad mouthing someone behind their back (crap, he just walked by and looked over my shoulder to see what I was writing) - what a jerk. I did something to my foot the other day and plan to go to the rear to have it checked out. It's swollen and really painful. Got my 1st Playboy today, so things aren't all bad. The guys got hold of it which means I'll have to wait my turn like everyone else. They are good guys.
- 8 Dec 69 - Mon - Dad - I'm writing this with just candle light. One of our platoons is receiving incoming. They are in the ville next to us and we are on alert. I received a package from you yesterday and a big one from Kenny & Joyce. And then 2 more big one's from Judy's girl scouts. I have a hand frag box filled with goodies and everyone else in the platoon is smiling. If you are worried about sending the booze, don't worry, I can do without it. But I've never heard of anyone getting in trouble for sending it through the mail... If you can send me any newspaper articles about the "massacre", I'd appreciate it. We are not informed about anything like that... Some of the locals are useless but there are a lot of them that are kind and helpful. They seem to enjoy being around us. We left yesterday morning on a large patrol. Two squads from my platoon and 2 squads from the 2nd platoon with some ARVN's. A total of about 60 men. We had traveled about 2 clicks when the M-60 man behind me spotted movement. It was a free fire zone and he opened fire. A couple of ARVN's were wounded and the assistant machine gunner got some shrapnel in the jaw but isn't hurt bad. We called in gun ships and I had my camera and tried to get some pictures but I wasn't about to stick my head up for a picture. We got 1 NVA and 2 cows... Some ARVN didn't think the dead NVA had enough holes in him so he emptied a whole

clip from his M-16 into the dead guys skull. It was sickening. We blew up a bunch of bunkers and I got to lob a bunch of M-79 rounds into the confusion (I don't think I was responsible for either of the cows). We got back about 3 in the afternoon. We moved out again around 7 that night. A reinforced platoon, about 40 of us, went about 7 clicks through a bunch of rice paddies and returned to the ville at 5AM. Not a shot fired but we were wet and exhausted. Our illustrious winged warrior, Colonel Johnson, had come up with another outstanding plan. We were told to expect significant contact and thank goodness, nothing happened.

- 10 Dec 69 - Wed (TGIW) - Keith and Judy - Wow, you have to thank your family and the girl scouts for those fabulous packages. I'm passing out their names to the rest of the guys in the platoon and they plan to write thank you notes. 228 days! That a sorry number, isn't it? I'll send you a picture of me with a black arm band on VM day. Give my love to my cute little bunny, Colleen.
- 11 Dec 69 - Thu - Dad - Things around here are going along on a day to day basis. I never know what the next day will bring. And just 227 left. My platoon leader continues to show that he is a real a-hole. Each day he finds another way to demonstrate his incompetence. He has favorites in the platoon and I guess I screwed it up for my squad because we are on his black list. He's not the brightest guy in the world so it's a waste of time to explain things to him. Let me tell you about another fool - Lt Col Johnson. Johnson tells us that when we go on patrol we should conserve ammo, "Don't forget that ammo cost the taxpayers money." Then he turns around and tells us that we are under performing and need to get more kills. He complained about the contact we had the other day, telling us that we shouldn't have called in gunships for 1 NVA, we should have taken care of him ourselves. I guess he thought we were afraid of the cows. But it's not like I have a choice. I'll make sure I'm in a better mood for my next letter.
- 15 Dec 69 - Mon - Keith & Judy - I've got a black arm band and all the other guys are wearing them too. I just got another box from the girl scouts. Better tell the girl scouts that we will be too fat to go on patrol soon. We are definitely the fattest platoon in Nam. Grab any of my Tarzan books if you want to read them or anything else for that matter. Dad knows it's OK. Glad to hear you lucked out on the draft. I don't wish this crap on my worst enemy. I was on guard and my times up so I'll finish later. It's time for guard duty again, 20 hours later. 223 days left.
- 15 Dec 69 - Mon - Dad - I have a couple of stupid incidents to tell you about. Part of it is, I just have to let off steam. The day before yesterday we were on patrol with a group of ARVN's as advisors. They captured a boy about 14 years old, a young girl around 12 and an older man, all suspected VC. We established a perimeter and the ARVN's began torturing them all. They tied the boy's hands behind his back and worked on him. They were giving the boy the Chinese water torture test, that's what we call it. The ARVN in charge of the patrol asks my Platoon Leader for his knife and then proceeds to cut the boy's ears off while he is asking him questions. The boy kicked and struggled and 6 of them couldn't

hold him down. The ARVN in charge picked the boy up and began smiling as he walked the boy out to the edge of our perimeter. My friend Tom, who is our Platoon Leader's RTO told our Platoon Leader that they were going to kill the boy. Our Platoon Leader commented that this was their patrol and we weren't responsible. The ARVN pushed the kid to the perimeter with his hands still tied behind his back. When they reached the perimeter the ARVN emptied an M-60 Magazine into the boy. The ARVN asked for our Platoon Leader's knife again to cut the boy's ears off but several of us made such a stink that he relented. The other two would have also been doomed but when we called in the contact, HQ was not happy that one of our captives was killed while trying to escape. So our LT had to stop the crazy ARVN, protect the prisoners and put together a report explaining how he screwed up. I can't do anything about the incident because it's not safe to report something like that. This afternoon, I was sitting in the local store with my platoon leader and company 1st sergeant, Top. LT Ray had asked me to carry the radio up to the store. Since my girlfriend runs the store, I didn't complain. My Platoon Leader tells Top that he is having trouble with a man in the platoon. The problem is Big E, my good friend. E has 10 months in the field, a silver star and a bronze star for bravery. Top suggests that next time we have incoming, make sure that Big E is a casualty and I'm sure he was serious. You know from my letter that I have had a lot of good leaders over here so the good news is that these jerks are not the norm. I'm not sure what I'm going to do about it but I'm definitely not going to forget it. I'm sorry to write all of these depressing letters but a lot of bad stuff has been happening lately. P.S. If you are uncomfortable getting these kinds of letters, tell me and I won't send anymore like this again.

- 15 Dec 69 - Mon - Dad - I'm in a better mood tonight. Here's my resupply list - another nail trimmer because the other one was permanently borrowed. Some more pens and more razor blades. Also, film, batteries and flash cubes. We have a Christmas tree up and I tried to take some pictures of it but my last flash cube was bad. I'm temporary RTO again so you will probably be getting more letters. I have a good chance to write them while I'm on radio watch.
- 17 Dec 69 - Wed - Dad - I'm on radio watch and it's been raining for 4 days and 4 nights. If I'm lucky, I just might float home. The iced tea is great hot and the hot soup warms me up. Merry Christmas.
- 19 Dec 69 - Fri - Dad - Sorry that I didn't tell you about the door gunner job. For some reason it got shot down but I'm glad that it did. Too dangerous just for a shower and clean sheets. That Liquore Galliano was great. Regarding Doc's note, we are good friends and Doc is from Alexandria Virginia. Doc came in country about a week after me and we plan to get together when we get home. I'll try to take more pictures of myself but I never think about that. Please send me a picture of our mascot, Yum the dog. Say hi to the IRS for me and it's nice to see you made money for me with some stock. Thanks. I'm happy to hear that you received the cane I sent you.
- 23 Dec 69 - Tue - Dad - I got 3 packages from you today and have enough booze to

open up a bar out here. Sounds like a plan. Only one bottle broke and of course it was my favorite, the Galliano. Thank Lorraine for the CC, really enjoyed it. Thanks for the buttered beans, I love them.

- 24 Dec 69 - Wed - Keith and Judy - Not sure what day it is but that shouldn't matter. I'm hoping to include some J's in the letter. I just finished listening to the Vikings-Falcons game so that means it must be Monday, not Wednesday. I have about 5 more minutes of guard duty and then I have to crash but I wanted to thank you and Judy for the card. (23 Dec 69) I'm on guard duty again with one hour until Christmas eve and they just finished playing Magic Carpet Ride and I really felt like I was back home for a while. I go on patrol tomorrow morning so I'll finish this letter tomorrow. (30 Dec 69) I've been allergic to paper and pen all week, sorry. Not much to write but I did finish the letter.
- 3 Jan 70 - Sat - Dad - You get my 1st letter in 1970. This letter entitles you to the Batman "Good Guy of the Year Award" for coming through when most needed. Thanks! We had big parties on Christmas and New Years and everyone enjoyed themselves. In your last package you wrapped a bottle in a sock and the bottle broke. Only the 2nd broken bottle in all of those care packages. Yesterday I was walking around and felt a pain in my foot. I didn't get all of the glass out - boy am I dumb. Everything you sent was great and it was moral booster for everyone. Could you send me some spray paint? No I'm not crazy but I want to paint the inside of my hooch. Please send me 2 pairs of pants (one bell bottom and a pair of Levis) and 2 shirts. I'm preparing for R&R, thanks.
- 13 Jan 70 - Tue - Dad - Haven't felt like writing lately so sorry about the gap. Don't worry about income tax. If I'm lucky, they'll come and get me. You make the decisions on the stock, OK tycoon? I'll be going on stand down in 5 days so expect another batch of pictures. 162 days left
- 22 Jan 70 - Thu - Dad - 1970 does not seem to be the year of the letter. I'm temporary squad leader now and everything is rushed. Mail's been real slow lately and I haven't gotten a letter in a week and a half. I have a helluva cold and sore throat but not sick enough to avoid patrol. Day before yesterday it only got up to 70 degrees and we were all freezing. I'm supposed to go to the rear about the 1st of Feb for a college test. I also still have my tooth.
- 27 Jan 70 - Tue - Dad - Received 3 letters from you yesterday. Our mail is messed up. Yesterday we went out on an all day operation. We were a blocking force for A & E companies, who were sweep toward us with a platoon of APCs. We set up about 8:30. We sat around for a couple of hours and a couple of us decided to shoot down some coconuts. One of the guys noticed what looked like a can in the hedgerow and we went over with some ARVN's to check it out. We thought that it might be a booby trap. It took us about 3 hours but we recovered three 105mm Howitzer shells, a couple of hundred feet of communications wire, a generator, 3 NVA uniforms, 2 US Army shirts, two 55 gallon drums of rice, two PRC25 batteries, and I found 72 D cell batteries, so I won't be needing any batteries for

a while. The rest of the sweep got 5 VC KIA, a couple of M-16s, an M-14, an M-1, 1 SKS, an AK-44, and 2 AK-47s. Today's operation was ludicrous. We were to go to a cemetery, dig up grave and report back how the people died. They wanted to verify artillery statistics. I'll take an Article 15 before I do this and the locals will hate us if we do it. Last time one of our companies dug up graves, in 3 days last June, they had 15 killed and 70% of the company wounded. It was only a squad size patrol so we hid and reported back that we didn't find anything. Sounds like it's cold at home. I feel sorry for you. The sun has been out the last couple of days and I've been working on my tan. The black arm bands in the picture were worn by the 1st & 2nd platoon to protest the war on VM day. I opened a checking account with American Express in Chu Lai. My paycheck is deposited into the account and that way I'll have money for R&R. I forgot to mention, Big E got out of the field 2 days after the incident with Top and our LT. I just hope that Top gets what he deserves. P.S. Doc says Hi.

- 30 Jan 70 - Fri - Dad - Things are fairly slow here, not too much happening. I just get up in the morning and do whatever I've got to do and then take it easy. Get some sun, read (thanks for the book in the last package) or go up the road, sit and talk to the girls and have a coke. My hooch is really progressing - I have a door with a latch now, and a new table. When Tom builds his own, I'll have plenty of room. Please tell Miss Coggins that I'll probably write tomorrow. I really don't need anything except for clothes for R&R and some paint for my hooch. Keep the food packages coming. Everyone likes the pass around cans of potato sticks and send me some more Jiffy Pop.
- 30 Jan 70 - Friday - Keith & Judy - Just a short note to see how you guys are. Keith, did you get the letter Rudy sent you? I'm laying on the cot, in my nice warm hooch and it's almost dark. I had the local kids make me a door for the hooch today and I also added a latch. I have incense burning, an aerial for my radio - sitting fat and happy. I'm going down hill now - 160 days left. I'm sending a picture with this letter. I'm really not as hard core as I look, the sun was in my eyes. Going on R&R the beginning of March so don't be surprised if I give you a MARS call.

NOTE: I would send letters to various friends under the pseudonym Rudy Begonia. These letters would contain either a package of 10 joints or OJs (opium joints).

- 31 Jan 70 - Saturday - Dad - Things here are OK but probably not for long. Yesterday, the ARVN's linked to the 4th Platoon got word to pick up 2 Chu Hoi's (VC or NVA who surrendered). The ARVN's sent out 2 men to pick up the Chu Hoi's. The 2 Chu Hoi's were standing in the middle of a rice paddy when the ARVN's walked up. Before the ARVN's had a chance to do anything they were ambushed and both were killed. About an hour later someone opened up on our CO as he rode in a jeep down the Red Ball. Too bad they weren't better shots - he's a real prick. Last night, the 2nd Platoon, about 100 meters from us on the other side of the ville, got hit by mortars and then had VC in the wire on 3 sides of their perimeter. Second Platoon killed 7 and the ARVN's got 2. No GIs were hurt but 2 ARVN were killed. They were really lucky. They killed a couple of VC with satchel charges just as they got inside the perimeter. If the VC could have taken out the M-60's, they could

have been overrun. We got some incoming last night, but just small arms fire. We've been real lucky since being here. (2 Feb 70 - Monday) - I'm laying out here in the sun and thought that I would finish the letter. Yesterday, my platoon got hit out on an operation, but everyone is OK. Got a new knife the other day - a Bowie knife. More like a short sword and just about as useful as a machete. I'm no longer RTO, I'm carrying an M-79 now which should make you happy because it keeps me off point - usually!

- 4 Feb 70 - Wednesday - Keith & Judy - Congratulations! Only 160 more days of peace and quiet until I get home. Sounds like it's cold. Don't you wish you could be in this tropical paradise? Most of it's not too bad. It's just when we go out on patrol and folks like to take pot shots at us - that bugs me. Mortars are the worst. It's all luck with mortars and they have been pushing my luck lately. You weigh 210 lbs Keith? What have you been eating? Seems like Carol is dumping me since she hasn't written in 3 months.
- 8 Feb 70 - Sunday - Dad - Could you contact a couple of insurance companies for me and tell them my situation and see if I can get car insurance when I get home? If I have to, I can a license in DC or Virginia. (12 Feb 70 - Thursday) Sorry about the big gap, but we've had a lot of work to do lately. Got the paint Monday and my hooch really looks great. Big E has about 20 days left and I can't believe how short that is. I think that I'll get a motorcycle when I get home. It should be affordable and insurance shouldn't be bad. My R&R is March 15th through the 21st in Sydney. That drop that I was hoping for, 5 days for each month you serve, has been pulled. So don't expect me home before July 26th. We have a big operation this morning (I'm writing this at 5AM), so I won't be able to send this letter until I get back.
- 14 Feb 70 - Saturday - Keith & Judy - Happy Valentines day Mr. & Mrs. America! Hope that you got Rudy's last letter. Irving is sitting here, keeping me company. He's looking over my shoulder and just staring at the letter with big eyes. Irving's a big frog. About the size of my hand. He's been living in here for the last couple of weeks and just started coming out to keep me company. Irving gets along well with John, the mouse. We also have a platoon mascot - Colonel Roach. He's a puppy. Really cute with stripes that make him look like a tiger and he thinks he's a tough guy. From my hooch, in greater downtown My Trang, happy Valentine's day.
- 16 Feb 70 - Monday - Dad - Here I am, out on an operation, dropping you a line. I'm going to get some pics today. I just missed some good shots of arty prepping the area. This is a big operation - our company, a couple of battalions of ARVN along with a couple of other units of GI. Keep sending me the paperbacks and Mad magazines. Anytime you can include Hot Rod, or Car Craft, or Mad magazines, please do. (17 Feb 70) I just got off guard duty and I'm so mad I can't see straight. Yesterday, a little while after I stopped writing, we were sitting on the old French railroad tracks, Tom and I. The sweep was coming our way and we were just waiting for something to happen. Tom spotted a guy moving in front of us and told the 2 ARVN sergeants who were with us. The guy was walking parallel to the tracks, moving northerly. Sergeant Heus put an M-16 round in front of the man and

waved him over to us. The guy started running and Sergeants Heus and Kiem asked me to drop a couple of M-79 rounds in his path. After 6 rounds the guy surrendered. He was taken in as a VC suspect. About 2 hours later I spotted a couple of guys moving in front of us. They didn't appear to be armed but when we called for them to come over to our position, they took off. We couldn't fire at anyone unarmed but I kept dropping M-79 rounds right into their path until they suddenly took off into a Vietnamese hooch. They were getting out of range and I had to run into the village in front of us to keep them in range. The ARVN's were right behind me and we started running toward the hooch while I lobbed a round onto the roof every 5 or 10 seconds. We got in front of the hooch and I fired an M-79 round into the hooch entrance just before the ARVN's ran in. The ARVN's pulled the 2 suspects out of a camouflaged bunker in the hooch. They were taken away as VC to Duc Pho. Tom told the guys in the platoon and made me out to be a hero. Roger, my squad leader, went up to Jack Frost (Sgt Jackson, platoon sergeant) and our new platoon leader, I don't know his name yet but we call him Flash, and suggested I get put in for a bronze star. About an hour later, Jack Frost and Flash pull me aside. Jack Frost reprimands me for using 29 rounds of M-79 HE to capture 2 VC. The whole operation captured 4 VC (1 VC besides the 3 we captured). I laughed at them and walked out. I'm tempted to go to the CO but that would be a waste of time.

- 27 Feb 70 - Dad - It's about 8:30 at night and I'm sitting here in my bunker with the prettiest girl in Viet Nam. Her name is Nurse and she's a snow white puppy with 2 big black eyes and a little black nose. I've had her for 2 days and managed to spoil her. She thinks she's a little princess.
- 8 March 70 - Dad - We've been working real hard lately. I've gotten 2 letters and 2 packages from you but have just been too busy to write. The clothes you sent were great but I don't have any use for underwear.
- 12 March 70 - Thursday - Keith & Judy - I'll be leaving for Duc Pho in about an hour and from the Chu Lai, then Da Nang, and then Sydney. When I get back from R&R I'll have about 110 days left. I'm sorry that I'm making you nervous Judy, I'll refrain from sending so much film.
- 12 March 70 - Thursday - Dad - In 3 days I'll be in Sydney, want to join me? This is one of the few advantages of being in the position that I'm in. I could use some money but by the time it got here I'd be back in the field.
- 30 March 70 - Monday - Dad - I've finished all my college tests and I am supposed to get my tooth pulled today. Thanks for all the package and be sure to thank the bible class. I have a 7 day leave coming up in the middle of May or June and I hope to return to Australia. It was fantastic down there and almost worth being here for a year. I bounced a couple of checks, so please send \$200 to American Express International Banking Corp., Military Banking Office, Chu Lai, Republic of Viet Nam, Check Account # 4614142