

Letters to GIs Travel a Hard, Long Route

By MGY. SGT. J.T. FRYE
S&S Staff Correspondent

SAIGON — The mail must get through, and it does more often than not, but the problems faced by the U.S. military postal system in Vietnam are awesome.

The system serves a transient population with short stays in any one place. Conditions are not the most pleasant and the mail must travel at least 7,500 miles.

Here's how the system works:

Back in good old Homestead, U.S.A., mom or sweetheart posts a letter, card or tape to our hero. It is processed locally and moved to a larger city's postal activity. If air mail, it may go by one of the smaller feeder airlines.

From, say St. Louis or Buffalo, then, all Far East APO or FPO mail is sent by air, rail, or truck to the Postal Concentration Center (PCC) at Seattle or San Francisco.

Seattle gets the flow from the so called northern tier of states and San Francisco from the southern tier. The line runs east across the map from the California-Nevada-Utah northern boundaries, up the west, north, and east sides of Wyoming,

across the north edges of Nebraska and Iowa, down the Mississippi to the north boundary of Tennessee, on across North Carolina to the East Coast.

At the two PCCs, mail is sorted and bagged according to the ultimate APO or FPO destination and is on its way according to priority: number 1, registered, airmail, and air parcel post; 2, military ordinary mail (MOM); 3, 1st Class; 4, space available (SAM) and parcel airlift (PAL); and 5, parcel post.

The first three priorities are routed overseas by air, and when airlift space is available, the fourth. However, SAM and PAL parcels can be downgraded. In January a 150-ton backlog necessitated moving SAM and PAL by ship. Parcel post is routed via surface transportation.

In three to six hours the mail is sorted, bagged and loaded in "igloos," plastic containers shaped to the aircraft. Each igloo carries 3,000-6,000 pounds and a Pan American 707 can carry 13 igloos — or 78,000 pounds.

At least one Pan Am flight per day leaves from San Francisco direct to Saigon, Cam Ranh and Da Nang.

Seattle's outflow goes to Tokyo by Northwest, and here there can be a delay in transhipping via Pan Am to the Air Force facilities at Saigon, Cam Ranh and Da Nang.

SAM and PAL parcels come out of San Francisco via Pan American direct to Da Nang, Cam Ranh Bay and Saigon. However, when the volume of such parcels exceed Pan American airlift capability, the parcels come into Vietnam on military airlift command contract flights.

All surface or sealift mail leaves from San Francisco and enters Vietnam through Army's 38th Base Post Office, Saigon, or 39th in Cam Ranh or III Marine Amphibious Force Postal Concentration Center at Da Nang. During the period January thru April 1968, 6,473 tons of mail were transported via surface means to Vietnam as compared to 12,936 tons via airlift.

From airlift and sealift processing centers, mail bags are put onto pallets and moved to some 100 military post offices located throughout the country; from Da Nang to I Corps; from Cam

Ranh to II Corps; and Saigon distributes for III and IV Corps. Mail travels in-country by the fastest possible conveyance — land, air or water. Only combat essentials have higher priority.

An average of 6,000 tons of mail come into the post offices every month. The high was 13% tons during last December Christmas rush. About 2,000 tons go out each month.

Overall staff coordination on postal matters is handled by Air Force Lt. Col. John R. Mancus, chief, Staff Postal Div., Office of the Adjutant General, Headquarters, MACV, Tan Son Nhut.

Not including unit mail clerks, 1,840 postal personnel work the mail, sell about \$700,000 worth of stamps a month, and transact as much as \$34 million a month in money order business.

Now, if you still think your mail is slow, you might advise your correspondents that 6-cent, plain envelope mail may not move across the U.S. by air. You could also check your locator card at your local unit mail room, serving military post office, and serving postal directory for inaccuracies.

Clear Reds Can't Win War: Thieu

SAIGON (UPI) — President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam said it is now "absolutely clear the Communists can never win" the Vietnam war.

"The aggressors have been seriously weakened by our response to their attacks," Thieu told diplomats at a presidential palace reception.

Thieu said a "new and very encouraging development" in the war was that an increasing number of Viet Cong were defecting to the government side — some of them coming over as whole units. Among them were high ranking officers, he said.

The South Vietnamese president said this could "be symptomatic of a new turn in the war, provided we maintain our pressure against the enemy."

The South Vietnamese president spoke on the occasion of "International Aid Day" in honor of the countries providing aid and assistance to South Vietnam.

Thieu said the Viet Cong have "suffered a serious shortage of manpower both in repairing military installations destroyed by our air power and in replacing the heavy casualties their troops suffered in aggression against South Vietnam."

"More important, an increas-

ing number of their cadre and troops realize the futility of their aggression," he said.

He added, however, "Even a weakened enemy can do great harm if he decides to direct all his military efforts toward political and psychological gains."

"Thus, during the Tet holiday, the Communists callously violated the truce they had proposed to launch reckless attacks against Saigon and other population centers.

"They suffered in these attacks staggering casualties which are not easy for them to replace. But at the same time, they have caused widespread destruction and casualties among the population, and made hundreds of thousands of people homeless."

Speaking at the same reception, Foreign Minister Tran

possessed

receiving.

U.S. Copter 'Saves' NVA

CHU LAI, Vietnam (Special)

A Huey helicopter pilot supporting American Div.'s 196th Inf. Brigade went after what was reported to be a downed American jet pilot, but came back with a North Vietnamese Army soldier instead.

WO Kenneth W. Johnson of Webster City, Iowa, was flying a resupply and medevac mission for a battalion of the 196th which was under fire five miles north of Dong Ha.

An ARVN outpost in the area of where an F4 jet went down reported spotting the pilot wandering in a rice paddy.

"I picked up the message and went down to take a look," said the 174th Aviation Co. pilot. "I spotted him and also thought he was the pilot."

"We were about 100 yards from him when he suddenly threw up both hands and I realized he was an NVA." The Huey picked up the NVA and took him to the 3rd Bn., 21st Inf. command post.

The pilot was later picked up by another aircraft.

Trouble Is He Will Grow, and Grow

We thought all those "put a tiger" gags had died out, but Sgt. 1.C. Jack R. Steere, of Fayetteville, N.C., apparently has one more. Clyde, the tiger, one of three cubs found during a combat op-

eration, has been adopted by the Special Forces detachment at Dong Bu Thin, near Cam Ranh Bay. (USA)

Hutchin Cites War Gains

HONOLULU (AP) — Lt. Gen. Claire E. Hutchin Jr., chief of staff of the Pacific Command, took issue with those who maintain the Vietnam war has come to a stalemate.

"South Vietnam is making progress on all fronts — military, political and economic," Hutchin said. "We are winning slowly and steadily. Our national interests require that we continue to do so."

His remarks were in a speech to the Western Conference of Independent Telephone Associations.

If the Southeast Asian mainland were to fall to the Communists, Hutchin said, "an increasingly powerful and confident Communist China would be able to exert mounting pressure on Indonesia, the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and Japan."

System Will Spare AF Pilots 2nd Southeast Asia Tours

S&S Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has announced a new long-range program, called Palace Cobra, to centralize the systematic withdrawal of pilots from U.S. commands for Southeast Asia duty. This is being done by the Air Force said, to delay involuntary second Southeast Asia tours as long as possible.

Second tours for some tactical fighter and helicopter pilots would be required by the end of the year without Palace Cobra but now, the Air Force, says they are not anticipated before 1970 if at all.

Each Stateside command has been told to identify a specific number of pilots eligible, based

on qualifications and the command's portion of the total eligible for Southeast Asia assignment under the new Palace Cobra system. Those identified will equal the known withdrawals expected in each U.S. command during a one-year period.

An estimated 3,000 are to receive the Palace Cobra identification, and then go into a freeze status, according to their eligibility order for Southeast Asia duty.

When a Palace Cobra pilot leaves for Vietnam or Thailand or becomes ineligible for assignment for one reason or another, he will be immediately replaced in a freeze status by another pilot eligible to go.

Each U.S. command has re-

ceived its monthly and annual programmed withdrawal schedule and the identification process is now under way. First Palace Cobra pilots should receive word some time next month.

After the identification process is completed each month, U.S. commands will select a specific number of pilots to fill Palace Cobra requirements. This will take place about four to seven months before the month they are required. Pilots at the same time will be advised they have been reported to the Air Force for assignment and therefore have as much as 18 months notice of pending combat duty. They now have a lead time of about six months.