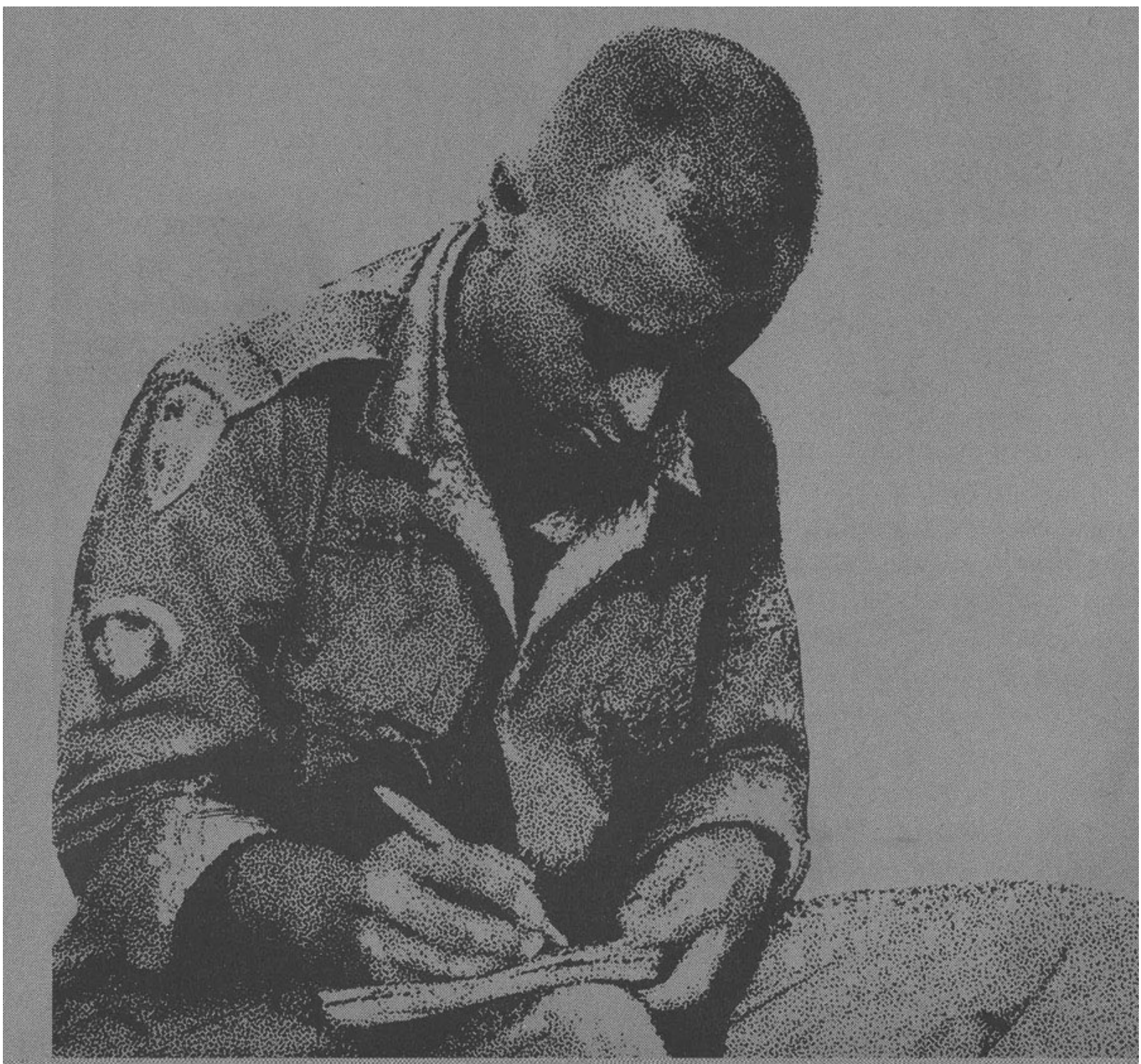

LETTERS FROM GI'S IN VIETNAM

In March of 1965, Captain Ned N. Loscuito, Jr., was transferred, at his own request, from a post in Augsburg, Germany, to combat duty in Vietnam. At the time, his mother was recovering from a serious operation. Because he feared that the news of his transfer might delay her recovery, and because he did not want his parents to worry about him, Captain Loscuito decided not to tell them the whole truth. He told them he had been transferred to South Korea. However, by July the conflict had become so much larger and more perilous that he could no longer keep his secret. The letter in which he finally told of his true situation is printed below. On August 20, 1965, while traveling on a road near Long-Cong on a search-and-destroy mission, Captain Ned Loscuito was shot and killed by a sniper.

Dear Mom and Dad,

This letter is not meant to be a shock. However, I think it's time that I righted my white lie. Now, I don't want either of you foaming at the mouth, getting hysterical, or worrying yourself sick at the news.

You both think I am in Korea. This is not the case. I am in Vietnam and stationed about eighty miles southeast of Saigon in the Mekong River Delta region. I am assigned as Senior Advisor to the 41st Ranger Battalion.

I knew about this before I left Germany. It is the reason in fact why I left Germany a year early. . . . Arlene and Edith both know where I am, as does my cousin Sal. I told them before I came over so if something did happen it wouldn't be such a terrific shock.

As you know, battalions form regiments, regiments form divisions, and two or three divisions form a corps. My battalion is attached to the 10th Regiment of the 7th Division of IV Corps (4th Corps). So if you should read about any of those names in the newspapers you'll know something is happening nearby me.

Now, why didn't I tell you before? I knew, Mom, that you were very sick when I was home. I was afraid you would get sicker if I told you.

Things are not bad over here for the Americans. My day usually begins about 0830 and I work with the battalion about three hours. At 1200 we eat and, since the Vietnamese take a siesta, we do also. So I'm free until about 3:30. I have a real fine tan. In the afternoon I go back to the battalion for about an hour. Every other night I sleep in bivouac with the battalion. The other nights I stay with the Americans (about thirty where I am) and watch a movie or write letters.

We go out on operations with the battalion about seven times a month for the maximum of ten days. We don't have contact with the Viet Cong more than two or three times.

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LETTERS HOME

As far as danger is concerned, there is danger. However, I have two Vietnamese bodyguards who go everywhere with me, cook for me, make my bed, everything. Additionally I have one American officer and one NCO and we look out for one another. Chances of me getting hurt are pretty slim. Since 1961, five hundred Americans have been killed and two thousand wounded, but since that time over one hundred thousand Americans have served here. That means the odds are one out of two hundred killed and one out of fifty wounded. I am careful and don't take unnecessary chances. Besides, the majority of the fighting is farther north now than we are and that's where most of the casualties are. So the odds are even better.

I hope you both realize that over half of the men I knew at West Point have been or are here. I could never again face my buddies unless I came here. Call that pride. . . . And there is something else, call it patriotism, and leave it at that.

Please hold your heads up and be proud of me. I am doing what I think best and don't worry, I am happy and well.

Enclosed is Ranger Shoulder Patch 6.

Lieutenant (JG) Pinneker, a Navy pilot in Attack Squadron 144, was killed on a mission in March, 1966. The following letter was written by Captain Nguyen-Van-Tien to his widow.

Hoa-Dong, on 30th March 1966

Dear Mrs. Pinneker,

I am a Vietnamese Army Captain, District Chief of Hoa-Dong, Gocong Province and my name is Nguyen-Van-Tien.

Lieutenant Pinneker was killed in the coconut grove two miles southwest of my district town while piloting his plane in a strike against a Viet Cong Company.

Writing on behalf of the entire Vietnamese community in Hoa-Dong, I would like to express our most sincere condolences to all those mourning the death of your brave husband.

We did not know your husband by sight, but the name Pinneker will always be present in our minds. He died according to God's will, but his memory continues to live sharply with us.

As the people of Hoa-Dong watched, he intrepidly carried out his mission over our area. We will always remember the way he made the supreme sacrifice in the manner of a true hero. We grieve deeply at the loss of one comrade in arms who fought so valiantly to preserve the freedom of the Vietnamese people.

To us, the death of Lieutenant Pinneker is highly significant. It brings to mind the daily sacrifice of the American youth in one country and is a brilliant example of self-abnegation that can only be found in those who still believe in a human brotherhood based on a common belief in Freedom, Democracy, and human Dignity.

In his memory, the people of Hoa-Dong held religious memorial services in the Pagoda and the Catholic Church. These services were attended by hundreds of people who wanted to show in some way their appreciation for your husband's sacrifice.

Once again, united with you in mourning, we ardently pray that God rest his soul and that you please accept our sentiments of deepest regret and sincere gratitude.

A combat soldier's needs and feelings are exemplified by this letter from Corporal Neil W. McCaffrey, USMC, to his father, who is the mayor of Allenhurst, New Jersey.

Dear Dad,

. . . I have been meaning to answer Mom's question about my dog. I named her Sweetpea. I had her for three months. She followed me everywhere, including on patrols.

I use the past tense because she is dead. Sweetpea got shot while on patrol with me and I had to destroy her. I can't remember when I have ever loved a dog so much. She was more than a dog to me. It's hard to describe. But when you are in a combat zone for a long time and all your loved ones are home, you have to show some affection, and receive some affection, or you go crazy. You can't be tough all the time.

So a dog fits in perfectly. Do you understand what I mean? Well, anyway, she's gone and I'll miss her.

Yesterday I went down to the air base and guess what? I found out that 1/9 (First Battalion, Ninth Marines) had made it there. It was real good to see all those guys. While I was there, I found out that a couple of my

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friends had been killed and wounded after I left the outfit. So I went over to the hospital to see them.

I not only saw them but about ten other guys there that I knew, including one pal in a special ward where they keep the seriously wounded Marines. He was the only one who was in a bad way. The rest would be back to duty in a few weeks. Anyway, I have known him since I joined the Marine Corps. He made corporal the same time I did. Knew his wife, too. He had gotten married a few months before coming over here. He tripped a land mine and was full of sharp metal from his feet to his head.

The doctors had removed part of his brain. I talked to them and they said he had a fifty-fifty chance of living and, if he did, he wouldn't be more than a vegetable. It made me sick and mad at the same time. He did not move; just stared into space. I tried to talk to him, but the doctors said he couldn't hear me.

I know what I'm going to say may sound crazy, but I hope he dies. He couldn't bear to have his wife or parents see him that way, I'm certain of it.

The reason I said seeing him made me feel mad was because suddenly I thought of all the punks back home who are protesting what we are doing over here, while guys like my buddy are getting blown up.

I promised myself I would never write an angry letter like this while I was over here because I didn't want you to worry any more than you already have. Seeing him touched this off, I guess. It made me even more aware than I was before of how proud I am of being an American and living in such a beautiful and wonderful country. I guess it takes something like this to open your eyes to the fact of how lucky you are.

I wish this war could end tomorrow, but I'm afraid it's going to drag on for quite a time. The V.C. are not going to quit, that's for sure. They might be lousy fighters, but they have guts and determination. Too bad the punks back home don't have the same. If they had, the war should be over fast.

CS1 James C. Kline, USN, of Anaheim, California, tries to explain to his child, age seven, the burdens and responsibilities of a soldier and a father.

March 14 1966
Da-Nang, Vietnam

A letter to my son,

Ricky, my son, this will not be an easy letter for me to write because I may use some of the wrong words or I may not be able to make you understand the meaning of this letter.

You are still a young man yet and the world looks awfully big and mysterious to you, and a lot of things happen to you that you don't understand, but someday you will have a son of your own and you will have these feelings as I have tonight. At least I hope you do.

You probably can't understand why I must be away from you, over here, missing all the good times we've had together and seeing you grow up as the days go by, but I feel that my duty and responsibility to you starts with making the world a little safer, I hope and pray, for you and your son (you may have someday) to grow up in. You also have a responsibility, and that is for you to take advantage of these opportunities that are made available to you. These are some of the rules that I have used to help me and you might want to use them, too. First of all: Believe in God and follow his commandments; be loyal, trustworthy, morally clean, and spiritually right. Never lie no matter what, honor and love and respect your mother and father. Respect the rights and property of others. Do not covet what belongs to others, do not steal, and do not use the word and the name of God in vain.

Jesus had a cross to bear and all of us over here have our cross to bear.

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LETTERS HOME

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Jesus had a cross to bear and all of us over here have our cross to bear. We may falter but must carry the load ourselves as Jesus did, but we can call on him any time the load gets too heavy or we need help. There are a lot of fathers here that are making their sacrifice so that their sons and you may have a free country to grow up in—to have the right to worship as you choose and to make of yourself as you see fit. These are only simple things to you and me. But there are very few people in this world who have this right. Cherish it! You have a good home, wonderful mother, and many good friends and, above all else, you have God.

I miss you and your mother so very, very much and I look forward anxiously to the day when we can all be together again and enjoy one another.

The battle of the Ia-Drang Valley, which took place in mid-November of 1965, was one of the hardest fought and most bloody of the entire war. The letter which follows is Sp-4 Kenneth W. Bagby's personal account of the action, to his parents in Winchester, Virginia.

Plei-Ku, Vietnam
Nov. 17, 1965

Dear Folks,

I met a boy on the ship coming over to Vietnam. He was a good guy from the state of Missouri. He was my best friend. His name was Dan Davis.

On Monday morning, the fifteenth of November, he died in my arms of two bullet wounds in the chest. He said, "Ken, I can't breathe." There was nothing I could do.

To the right of me another friend, whose last name was Balango, died of a wound in the throat. Up front Sergeant Brown, my squad leader, was hit in the chest and leg. To my left Sp-4 A. Learn was hit in the ankle.

We were crossing a field and were pinned down by automatic weapons fire from the enemy for about forty-five minutes before the rest of the platoon could get to us, and save the rest of us.

In another line of attack my platoon leader Lieutenant Marm was shot in the neck right beside me, about ten feet to my right. Me and Cp-4 Ahewan took him back through the lines to the aid station.

Another situation, me, Daily, and Sergeant Riley captured two V.C. and were bringing them back through the lines when we were pinned down again, as one of them spotted a buddy and tried to signal him. I was going to kill both of them but Sergeant Riley stopped me.

Out battalion, the First BN Seventh Cavalry, is competely inactive due to the killed and wounded of its men. My squad which consists of nine men, three came out.

Folks, by all rights I should be dead. The good Lord evidently saw fit to spare me, for some reason. I prayed, and prayed and prayed some more, the three days we were in battle.

The many men that died, I will never forget. The odor of blood and decayed bodies. I will never forget. I am all right. I will never be the same though, never, never, never. If I have to go into battle again, if I am not killed, I will come out insane. I cannot see and go through it again. I know I can't. The friends I lost and the many bodies I carried back to the helicopters to be lifted out, I will never forget.

The pen that I am writing this letter with belongs to Stash Arrows,

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the boy that rode up to Winchester with me, on my emergency leave. Pop, remember him. He was hit three times in the back. I don't know if he is still alive or not. I hope and pray he is. God, I hope.

Folks, don't let these men die in vain. Appreciate what they are doing over here in Vietnam. They died protecting you all, and all the people in the United States. We just cannot have the enemy get to the folks back home. We have got to stop them here, before that happens. If it is God's will, we will do it. Tell the people back home to pray for us, as we need their prayers. . . .

We raised the American flag on the grounds. We are fighting on Tuesday, the sixteenth of November. It waved proudly for the Armed Forces and the people of America, as it did in so many battles won in World War II and Korea. I sat beside a tree and looked at it, and hoped I would never see the day it would be torn down and destroyed. . . .

A typical day in the life of a nurse in South Vietnam is described by five Red Cross "clubmobile" workers: Joyce Brady of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Mary Cherney of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Midge Patty of Maryville, Tennessee; Liz Miller of Atlanta, Georgia, and Sandy Montgomery of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

March 30, 1966

A day in Vietnam is awaking at 6:00 in the morning to quiet, cool winds . . . walking from our tent to our powder-pink shower house . . . brushing our teeth out of a canteen . . . eating breakfast of soft powdered eggs and "C" rations . . . being greeted by the men . . . walking to our working tent which serves as our Recreation Center . . . serving refreshments to the men . . . playing a game of ping-pong with an eighteen-year-old man . . . serving food in a chow line . . . talking to the men . . . laughing with the men. . . .

Getting in a helicopter and flying to the forward brigades . . . meeting with the Commanders of these brigades . . . touring the area in an open jeep . . . riding in a tank . . . waving to the men . . . taking pictures so we can send them home . . . viewing an area where Charlie had been hit the night before . . . shaking our heads in disbelief . . . talking to the men . . . smiling . . . returning to the First Infantry Division headquarters by helicopter . . . watching the gunner in the helicopter scanning the jungles for any sign of Charlie . . . getting in a three-quarter-ton truck to pick up supplies . . . unpacking supplies and putting them in the proper place . . . drawing and making props for our next program . . . hearing the favorite saying in Vietnam, "Sorry about that" . . . walking back to our No. 1 Doll House (the name the men gave our tent) . . . showering off the red dust which had accumulated on us during the course of the day . . . dressing in civilian clothes . . . eating supper in a different mess hall . . . roast beef, powdered mashed potatoes, corn, pudding, bread and butter, Kool-aid . . . talking to the men . . . walking to the "outdoor movie" and admiring the cauldron of color in the evening sunset . . . walking down the dusty path armed with our flashlight . . . walking past the barbed wire . . . walking past our bunker hoping we'd never have to use it . . . walking to our patio that the men built for us as a surprise . . . talking with the girls . . . discussing the events of the day . . . watching in silence the flares shot off in the distance . . . hearing the artillery firing . . . being thankful that it is outgoing fire instead of incoming . . . feeling secure because we are being protected by the finest group of men in the world . . . washing out our uniforms . . . laughing at our hardships . . . rolling our hair. . . .

Walking to our "outdoor facility" . . . one last time . . . spraying disinfectant all around our tent . . . checking our bed for snakes, scorpions, roaches, or any other nice things . . . hearing the artillery firing in the distance but not listening to it . . . writing a letter home to the family . . . turning off our flashlights and placing them under our pillows . . . turning over . . . being alone . . . alone to say our prayers . . . alone to think . . . dreaming of the day when we will not be needed in Vietnam . . . dreaming of peace.

WO-1 Richard Elliott (First Cavalry Division) of Clearwater, Florida, to his father, back home in the American South.

April, 1966

. . . Nothing much has been happening. It is pretty dull now. Our job is done. We found the Cong, now the division has to kill them off. Yesterday we caught a hundred or so in the open. We bombed them, then our gunships went in and cut them down. I had to sit back here with the lift section and listen to all the fun. I didn't get to kill one. . . .

We took a Special Forces team out the other day. . . . They ran into

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some trouble, and we had to pick them up early. When we got them, one mountain tribesman came running up to the ship with a Viet Cong head in his hand. . . .

We are moving further north tomorrow. Start trying to find Charlie again. Maybe this time I'll get to kill some.

Edited by Bill Adler

Coronet
August, 1967: p. 56

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