

T-321 Nov. 7th 1966 {in this letter is a 5-piaster bill worth less than four cents} **Rice KIA**

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, this is the first chance in two weeks that I had a chance to get to base camp to get writing paper and film. We spent the night at base camp and are now out on a guard mission for two weeks? This is like an R and R compared to the hell most of the guys finished with Saturday and it was hell Friday for the 4th for 2nd squad.

I got my package with the pictures yesterday. I also picked up the camera package yesterday. We finally showered and got rid of our rotten clothes. If they don't get a clothing exchange set up soon, we won't have anything to wear in the next few months. We can DX boots for new ones.

We moved from our village camp and set up another one. We made our own road so that turned out to be mud. It is not raining much anymore. North gets the rain. Temp 90. the next day Saturday we moved to a camp, took a shower. Then set up our own camp a few miles away. Sunday we took our tracks to make a mounted sweep of a brushy area. This land is all flat so we hit mud that is like wet cement. Got most of the tracks buried in mud. The road we came back on is dry and dusty except for mud holes. So we barreled down till we hit the mud. The tracks barely can make it. The driver has to put it in low and down to the floor. The mud pulls so hard we almost stall out.

For the next couple of days we are camped at the edge of a rubber plantation. Monday and Tuesday I stayed with the tracks as 50 gunner. The rest of the company swept an area 3000 yards long. Because of the heavy brush it takes them all day, night, and next day. They are gyped out of two meals. They found several tunnels and some stored rice also a small VC camp that was hastily abandoned as A Co. came.

One of the other companies goofed up and it was costly. A patrol got way off course and hit the base camp trip flares at night of another camp. Result, four guys got shot up by friendly forces. That makes six killed by our own men in 3rd. Brigades so far.

Wednesday. We moved at noon to a different position. We camped at a plantation overnight. When one track overheated and cracked a block. The next day we camped in our last place of moving and had a small clear operation in hilly country. I went on that one. We scared out one sniper who was killed by 10th Cav. acting as blocking force. We found many tunnels and destroyed some with grenades. This all happened Thursday. All digging in this area was rather newly done. The patrol ended in the swamp lowland. We cross two creeks and muddy grassland. The creek had a foot of water but we waded in it up to our belt because of the soft mud in it. Here it was extremely hot and muggy. Instead of brush there were palm brush and plenty of red ants that bite like mad. Our tracks took us back through a village in the area we went, the kids here did not come up to the tracks like they do elsewhere. There was no hand waving by civilians here. *A sure sign of VC activity.*

So Black Friday came. Loaded with explosives the rest of our company in platoon groups went into an area next to the one we went Thursday, looking for suspected VC tunnels. By radio listening we found out they located many new and old tunnels and destroyed them by explosives.

At noon 2nd platoon found an anti tank trench loaded with booby traps. The whole company started to experience some sniper firing. In the afternoon 3rd platoon {ours} ran into three bunkers

and tunnels on a hill. They were occupied and caught 3rd squad by surprise. Heavy sniping started up here. Also, a squad of 2nd platoon got pinned down by a sniper. **Rice** got killed by one bunker when he stuck his head up too high in an attempt to toss a grenade in it. He is the first KIA in the 2-22. He was killed instantly by the sniper there. The squad leader had his helmet hit by a bullet. He was unhurt. This happened at 4 p.m.. We had just come down the village to take the company back to camp. We never did that day. We got sniped at in the village. Supply track got that sniper. They would not let us take the APC to the hill in order to shoot up the bunkers with 50's. We went back to camp.

2 others in 2nd platoon got wounded by snipers. A squad leader there has burns on his arm from sniper bullets that missed him. The company stayed there all night. No action all night. They did call in artillery on that hill. We don't know how many VC were killed. We know some were badly injured by our bullets and grenades. There were so many tunnels that they evidently got away and took any dead with them.

We could not get Rice or the two wounded out till morning because of the location and snipers. The next hill was hit by air strikes and swept Saturday. All tunnels were destroyed. The only action that day was against snipers. B company swept the village which was abandoned that morning. They found bobby traps, tunnels, weapons, and a huge store of VC rice. Much more than a village should have.

It's a good thing most of the snipers were lousy shots. We could have lost half a platoon because of them. The guys did a very good job against the VC.

I don't blame you for worrying. Now we should be away for all of that for quite a while. At least a month. After Christmas we move north to set up a base camp. We will not be hunting for Charlie like we did last week. Last week's mission was quite successful through for the whole brigade and artillery.

A lot of VC sampans were destroyed by supporting elements. All this took place 20 miles SE of Saigon and 10 miles from Bear Cat, our base camp area.

Saturday night the 5th, I attended a special class out in the field on a new instrument. I then used our company only one, all night. This is a new Starlight scope, a type of sniper scope or spotter scope that amplifies available light so that it looks day in the night through it. It can be mounted on a rifle and weights 5lbs. Of course its working part is classified in its material and construction and the whole thing cost \$3,500. It must have a phosphorus material that intensifies incoming light because it will continue to work for a few minutes after it is shuts off. It is amazing to see as plain as day guys walking around in the black of night and they can't see you. Unlike infrared it cannot be detected yet it will pick up infrared light. Instead of being limited by a light source you can see thousands of stars through the 4x lense that you cannot see with my telescope at 135x. and of course to look at the moon with this like looking at the sun with a normal telescope. A safety switch cuts power when this happens to avoid burning out the intensifying element. Charlie has already picked up four of them. The classified part is destroyed by putting two bullet holes in it. The air will quickly destroy the working material. You might find the article about this new night scope in one of Ken's popular science. Here's how it works.

However, the safety switch is a little slow. Too much light with power on all at once and good by \$3,500, and an eye ball. It should be a very wicked snipers scope at night. Best of all the guy sniping cannot be seen even by an infrared scope. Mt. Palmar is using one on a telescope as they can see a lot more fainter stars with it. The sky had stars as thick as a snow storm larger star were as bright as flares.

Sunday we went back to base camp. Spent the rest of the day getting ready for today's trip Nesbit got a package from the church today. It contained lots of goodies and a congratulation on his marriage card.

Well we should have it easy for the next week or two. Charlie should not bother us here. The camp has flares up all night.

4th division had finished a big campaign up north with a large number of VC killed. In the other operation over 1500 VC are now counted for as dead. So Charlie is getting a hard time there. In the delta near here 600 have been killed by helicopter patrol boats and 3-22 also artillery in their sampans during the past week.

It is now Spec. 4 Ronald F. Picardi. I made that while out in the field. I'll probably be that for the rest of the year here, then perhaps make Spec 5 or E 5 a few months before my hitch ends. Anyway it means \$40 extra dollars.

I also hear of a heavy snow. This is sure unusual.

Oh yes it is 95 here.

Well will close.

Ron

PS, All's well and in good health. everyone hopes there are no more KIA's

*The KIA is Larry Rice of Michigan, Saginaw County.*

Dear Mom and Dad, T-317 Nov. 10th

Well Gun ho A Company couldn't stay in a restful place for long. We are back in the boonies again. We are acting as a blocking force this time. They still want us on night patrols. That one got goofed up last night. My compass bearing was off. We ran up on a fence. As there are usually mines around, such an area we tried to go around but ran into another. We started back. Darkness caught us. So we spent a hectic hour feeling our way through dense brush listening to our track to get our way back. How wonderful we hit a nest of wild hornets. We had a spray can to keep them away.

Tuesday I got a package from the church. It had things I need, writing paper, envelopes, etc. Also, lots of goodies.

The air mail letter arrived first. For some strange reason there is no post mark on it. As far as receiving mail from me don't worry if unexpectedly you don't get letters for a long period of time.

It is because our company is trying to wear us out on some mission one after another. No one has had a full eight hours sleep for weeks. If he gets six, he is lucky or is sleeping all day. In order to keep awake on guard, guys are starting to play the radio at a low level to keep their mind occupied. Otherwise, they can easily fall asleep. If they don't get their throat cut by Charlie, they will lose a stripe by the C.O. or Papa Lima will take the strips.

Well at least I can dry out my blanket and clothes. Last week everyone ruined a set of fatigues to dry rot. We moved all day and got wet at night. So ever thing got wet since it was tossed in a wad inside a bag till dark. The clothes just spoiled. It even hid the BO from no shower in two weeks. Oh yes Beetle hair is coming in style. We are not in base camp long enough to get it cut. I'm stuck with \$170 in money I can't send home. When the post office is open, I'm miles from it. I can't even mail the money. It is no good in the states.

Here is something else that they lied to us in the states. You heard about beer and cigarette ration? Well we though that was a free deal. Not hardly! It is a limit on how much beer, cigarettes, booze, even cameras, projectors, radios, tape recorders, watches, typewriters, fans etc. that we can buy at the PX.

Bad news. We just came in. I'm getting a money order now. We are leaving tonight for the Cambodian border where Big Red 1 is, that is all I know.

Ron

Nov. 11 T-316

Dear Mom and Dad.

I am at a huge base camp. I don't know where we are going next but the entire brigade came.

We left at 11 p.m. last night. It was convoy style so the lights were on. I was able to look out the hatch all the way. The road became a 4-lane highway, beautiful buildings where important officials live. The place had guard posts and barb wire fence all around. The main bridges have permanent outposts. Beyond we took a narrow road through flooded land.

We got to base camp at 5 a.m.. All I know is it is 20 miles west of Saigon or more, the land is flat yet high. Enough here not to have rice at this area. There is jungle to our west.

We are in camp Cu Chi. This is the camp of the 25th Div. We will join the 25th and go Charlie hunting again. This camp has a very nice PX. There are 19" TV portable for \$119. Also, good cameras and radios. There are canned goods and many other things in an air-conditioned building and does that feel good in this hot place.

This PX here had a great variety of goods.

Well, I am staying here tonight. Tomorrow we might have a mission. So long for now.

Ron

Got today off to rest.

Dear Mom and Dad T-315 Saturday

Here is a roll of base camp and Vietnam pictures. Send the Vietnam ones in one letter and keep the base camp pictures. I'll send them back right away.

The koolade letter arrived here Thursday evening. That is good stuff. I bought some cans of concentrate juice. That is good and well as fizzies. We can get Tang and ice tea mix. But no koolade.

Today we took a long trip down the main road westward then north.

There were many villages along the way. Also, lots of North Vietnamese Regulars in the area. We didn't see any, but heard lots of firing.

Yesterday the 1st and 25th plus so their units killed 900 VC. Got 19,000 yes 19,000 grenades and tear gas made in Red China. Casualties ratio is 100 VC to 1 American. They also destroyed a huge claymore bomb factory and found 5000 claymores.

This is some place where we camped for the night. There are kids all over. We are near an outpost in a big flat field. Right now there is a light rain. It has been hot today. But not as bad as other days.

Lots of carts go by as well as people loaded with baskets of fresh-cut grain. As usual the kids peddle fruit and coke at high prices.

Well I guess if I want to get this out today I'd better close now.

Ron

Ps. I can buy prepaid processing film here for slides. It cost \$2.80 total. So may try some of that. It cost \$4.80 at Fort Lewis for 20 color compared to \$3.80 at home. Only film paper is thinner. Slides are cheaper and nice, only paper backing at home instead of plastic at Ft. Lewis.

Dear Mom and Dad, Nov. 16, T-311

Here are the slides.

I got a letter with envelopes in it today. Go ahead and send a package of koolaid. It makes the water taste better. If you send envelopes in the large letter, it will have to have 10 cents postage. It was marked insufficient by five cents but came anyway.

I don't know when I can write again. They have been working our butts off. We have had short water, missed meals and lost sleep. Today we washed in a ditch full of water to get rid of our billy goat smell. We washed out the junky clothes and shaved off a week of beard. But tomorrow we have 15 gallons of water starting now for 10 men for three or more days. That comes to 2 qts per day. That is not enough as one drinks twice that if it is hot. If it does not rain tonight. It has so far every night and we get soaked, I have a hole dug full of clear water. I will fill extra canteens and purify. We have 2-5 gal can to do the same too if we need the water.

I got my magazine and read it while in the APC. Boy, am I fed up with this outfit, yet there is nothing I can do about it. But see that tomorrow is one day shorter in this place. We have no weekends. Little if any time off and do the stupidest things. Like digging foxholes to sleep in just before it pours rain. We are camped in a marsh. We dug foxholes here too. They are full of water.

We have ran the APC's so hard some are burning out engines. One had burned out valves. Some have generators trouble. One track is getting a new engine put in here. It threw a rod yesterday. Just about everyday half the APC's get stuck. If not, they have to be run full throttle in low to keep from bogging down. They have large enough radiators, they don't overheat unless stopped. However, high rpm heavy pulling work has taken its toll.

Well, will close. I was able to get Christmas cards so when I get time I will send everyone a card that I can.

Ron

Dear Mom and Dad Nov. 21 T-306

I finally got a letter that said about what was said in the paper about Rice.

Saturday and Sunday was a search and clear. We were doing a straight leg enemy and got pinned down by grenades in front, 50 ca. in back and small arms from the flank. Worst of all we couldn't see where it was coming from. We then pulled back. Our platoon had no one hurt, yet three were injured in the company. 15 injured and one killed in Charlie company.

They finally did it right and went in by APC with troops behind. Charlie took off so fast he left his wounded and equipment behind. 3rd plt shot the only two VC's of the day. We also found a fortified position and four huts which we burned down. Also, found lots of clothes and other gear. I kept a VC shelter half a piece of plastic 4x8'. the rest of the stuff was burned. They wear black and green cowboy type shirts and shorts of thin cotton. There is also a bag of salt in which are rotten fish spice. So in all it was a safe day. We also got accidentally hit by artillery while in the APC's Don't think that didn't scare anybody.

As usual we fought mud that buries tracks. Our base camp is all plowed up from constant driving of APC's all over in this swamp. There is a nice ditch of running water, which we can wash up in. We also washed our stinking rotten clothes and shaved off our beards. I have no idea where we are going or what we are doing next.

To answer the question I got in the letter with two orange drinks. There are two companies of VC north of Martin Cox. Of course they are long gone now. Here there is a battalion of them 3 miles from here. They have air strike them with B52's every day so far, when the 2 dozen 500 lb. bombs go off the tents move 5 inches from each explosion.

Will close for now. I'll have another roll of slides coming soon. Are you getting the film by letters? There are two so far plus the slides you sent back. All safe and well.

Ron



Dear Mom and Dad Friday 25th T-302

Well, this finishes a nice safe week. Only two killed, six injured and two tracks damaged. So here is the story on this.

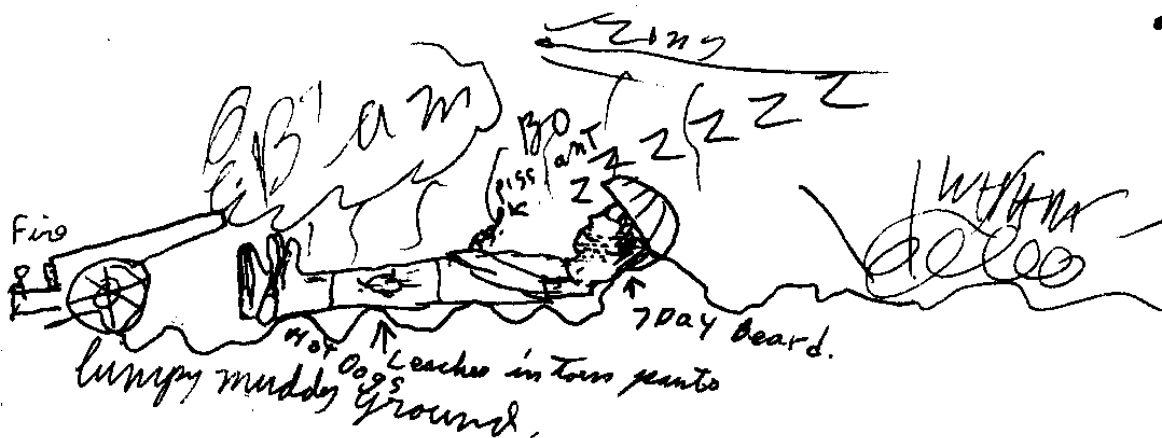
Tuesday after coming off a night patrol the 3rd platoon went on separate missions into the boonies on foot. We traveled 6 miles through woods and bamboo brush. In some place there we were on hands and knees. We didn't get back till dark. Everyone staggered back from exhaustion and lack of water. It was very hot and we were soaked from sweating. Charlie trailed us back. Our rear security saw him and we stopped and laid down. I was in the rear with a machine gun crew. We surprised three of the jokers. Ed Shell got one with his first shot. The others were injured with a grenade launcher. They tossed a grenade at us. It was way short. All this is not confirmed as we were in a hurry to get back before dark and did not want to take time to check it out. No one got hurt.

1st platoon did not find anything. They didn't walk as far as the 2nd platoon {pardon the language} got their ass kicked by Charlie. They were stupid enough to take a path a short ways. They were also bunched up. Charlie was waiting with two home made claymores. Results, one killed instantly, the 2nd died on the chopper. He was all tore apart from the blast as he was on top of the claymore. 4 others were injured enough to require dust off. *medical evacuation by chopper.*

Wednesday we went back as a company into the same area. We had no contact and came back late tired as usual and bitten by leaches.

I have slide film of this mission and the one described in the last letter. The film was pictures of APCs stuck in the mud and pictures of dense jungle. I took some of us crawling in bamboo. There are some of burning of two VC huts. One may have the collection of gear we found. I don't think any bodies showed up in that one they would be too gory if they did. There is one of our bathtub complete with the nudist colony *nothing showing* the last one is the big blast of 300 lbs. of explosive inside an APC.

The roll of ex 126-20 had first two pictures of Vietnamese kids and they are camera bugs. 3-5 water buffalo one close up of one. 6-10 villages along the way. As one gets closer to a landmark a big hill out of the flat land, one show air strikes on the hill. Last few show the mud and swamp we travel in. Also, our muddy base camp.



A GI can sleep anywhere in any dirty condition. There are also lizards, snakes, etc. Bats.

Lots of times the field mice sleep with us. Night crawlers are so big the perch would choke on them, over a foot long and as big as a pencil.

Nov. 24th.

Well, our trip back had a long delay. 2nd platoon APC hit a 105 shell set by Charlie as a land mine. It blew off the track and broke four road wheels. The driver and TC were flung out. They had a broken arm and broken leg. The rest in the PC were unharmed except for sore ears. A few minutes later recon track pass us and hit a mine. We though we hit it for a minute. Dirt flew into the track.

They tried to tow the track but kept getting stuck as the damaged vehicles were dragging bottom. So we stopped in a clearing. They stripped one track of everything salvageable. The good track and wheels were taken off and put on the damaged recon track. They tipped the track to do this. 300 lbs. of explosives were put on the stripped track which was upside down. The explosives blew the track into small pieces of aluminum. They blew as high as 200 ft.

We didn't make it to base camp as we had one delay after another from mud. We did get a nice turkey dinner last night and lots of seconds too. Also, ice cream.

Today is Thanksgiving. We are fighting mud again. Do you know a track travels 1 mile an hour? It does in this country. I write a little on the letter each time we stop.

Well will close to mail. We got to a base camp we were suppose to reach yesterday. We will go to our new one tomorrow.

Ron

PS I got two sets of fatigues also one extra on top of this, out in the field on issue.