

30 Jan '68

Dear Sue,

I'm still in a state of half-shock. PBR 153, my old lead boat in 533, was hit with two B-40 rockets and a round of 57-mm recoilless. The whole crew was wounded, and the VN cop was killed. . . . I tell you, I'm just numb inside. 153 was the boat I was on when we took that rifle grenade.

I was really after I heard about it. Last night—Tet, the Vietnamese New Year—I had my chance, but because of the cease-fire I couldn't do a thing. The VC had come into this village near the river and strung VC flags everywhere. There must've been 50 of them. One flag was about 30 feet from the perimeter of the outpost there. I saw about 10 to 15 of the ranging in age from 13 to 18, standing in front of one hooch, smoking and drinking beer, like a gang of hoods on a street corner in the States. They were in civilian clothes. I called in a helo fire team to look over the area and try to draw fire, and with them covering, I moved in close to see. That's when I saw them—two at first, just like the pictures in *Life* and *Look*—black pajamas, bandoliers strung across their chests, hand grenades on their belts, carrying carbines or M-1s. And they just looked at us. The helos swept down and a couple more ducked into a hut. I had them dead to rights, but I couldn't do a thing. Not until they fired the first shot—and they didn't.

God, I wanted to shoot them! We stayed in the area all night, but they didn't do anything.

Early this morning, however, the VC attacked Da Nang and that broke the cease-fire. This morning the helos from Vinh Long went out and greased 95 of the moving down a canal in sampans. That tally, along with the 78 (body count—26 additional graves were found) the Navy helos (Seawolves) caught in the open last week and killed, washes away a little of the taste for revenge.

I guess it isn't *nice* to say, but if I had any compunctions about killing them before, I don't now. Give me another chance like last night and I'll drill a round into one of those yellow heads.

Geez, I hate Vietnam.

Love,
Dick

Lt. J.G. Richard Strandberg, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, served with River Patrol Sections 533 and 522 from May 1967 to May 1968. This letter was written to his wife. The curator of "The Vietnam Experience"

art exhibits in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1980 and in New York City in 1981, he is now an artist living and working in Mesa, Arizona.