

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.

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7 Dec 67

Hi Honey,

I received your letter today saying you got my ring. I figured it was too small, but you can get it made to fit your ring finger. I'm glad you like it. I was hoping you would. It's the nicest personal present I've ever given you, I believe.

I wish you weren't sick, honey. I know how you must feel, and I hate to be sick. With those two small tornadoes around the house I would imagine your nerves are shot.

I lost two of my men today to a booby trap. As usual, my luck stuck with me and I didn't get hurt. We had been checking through this village by the ocean and we had found quite a bit of explosives and rifle ammo. I had my platoon in rifle teams abreast with squads in column. I walked in between my two point men so there were three of us walking in front.

We were crossing a corn field with a thick hedgerow around it. There was one place that looked like we could get through, so I told my point man to go through there. I turned and headed for it. Just as my point man went through, he heard a click and jumped. I was five meters from him, and one of my squad leaders stepped in front of me to go through next. Just as he did, the point man jumped and the squad leader started to turn to me. There was a tremendous explosion, and I was knocked down by the force of the blast. My ears were ringing like hell, and my squad leader staggered to me. I jumped up and yelled for Bell, who was the point man. He was halfway through his jump when the explosion went off and threw him into the next corn field. My squad leader, Hunter, had caught the full blast of the explosion and shrapnel. His face, body, and legs were completely cut to pieces by the shrapnel. His clothes were blown to rags, and he was bleeding like hell. One of the pieces of shrapnel had penetrated his can of shaving cream, and it was splewing shaving cream about five feet in the air over both of us.

My RTO, who was also knocked down by the blast, and I yelled for the medic, who rushed up and probably saved the man's life by his fast action. Meanwhile, I crawled through the blasted area and ran over to Bell, who was lying on his stomach with his pack blown over his shoulders.

"HUMPING THE BOONIES"

I got him out of his pack and turned him over. He took shrapnel in the left arm and hand plus his left leg, but he wasn't too bad off.

Captain Sells, who has been with my platoon, ran up to me right after the explosion, but I was too dazed to remember exactly what happened. He took over for about five minutes until I regained my senses.

It was a pretty exciting day. Someone up there knows I have a beautiful wife and two wonderful children to go home to.

I love you very much, Dearest.

With Much Love,
Fred

2Lt. Fred Downs, platoon commander, Co. D, 1/14th Inf., 4th Inf. Div., Pleiku province, 1967-1968, WIA 11 January 1968.