



THE VIETNAM WAR: MAIL CALL



Vietnam was a part of the French Colony of Indochina. A nationalist revolution led by the Vietnamese Communist Party drove out the French in 1954. The United States intervened in Vietnam to maintain governments in southeastern Asia that would be sympathetic to the West. By 1969, more than 543,000 American soldiers were fighting in Vietnam. They used state-of-the-art helicopters, pilotless aircraft, chemical defoliants, and other advanced technologies. Despite the superior military technology, the war was long and difficult. American soldiers faced a strongly motivated enemy.

This was the first war in American history to be televised daily. The American home front was already in the throes of social upheaval as the Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum. Vocal antiwar groups formed, dividing opinion on the war effort. Mail played a vital role in communicating the struggles both on the battlefield and the home front.



THE VIETNAM WAR: LETTER 1

Photo on right: Pvt. Price with his sister in Virginia.

Tuy Hoa
7 Feb 66

Dear Mom,

I knew you must be worried to death from not hearing from me but at least it was unavoidable this time. We moved out about a week ago from our base camp at Tuy Hoa and replaced a unit of ROK marines. I was right in the middle of a letter when we got the word to move and I had to pack it away. These ROK's we replaced were dug in defensively in the middle of a rice paddy. They had been hit by two battalions of VC a few nights before suffering 48 casualties and killing over 100 VC. They hadn't been sending out any patrols or recon so when they dropped us out here we had no idea what the situation was.

Since we've been here we've suffered pretty heavy casualties. Yesterday the count stood at two dead and fifteen wounded, but last night B and C company got into it with a Battalion of VC and at last count there were 6 dead and many wounded. By the time you get this I imagine you will have heard about the 101 on news. We've killed a lot of VC and captured a lot of weapons and that's what counts.

I got into it pretty heavy a few days ago and it was a miracle that I'm alive. I can give you the date and time and see if there was any indication of extreme danger at that time on my chart. It happened on the 4th of Feb. ~~we~~ there was about 12 of us with the Lieutenant out on a routine patrol about 1/2 mile from the hill the rest of the company was on. We were searching through an abandoned village looking mainly for chickens, eggs and milk to sleep on. We were ~~crossing~~ crossing a dike between two houses when we were opened up on by about 10 VC with automatic weapons. I was carrying the radio which made me a prime target that's not my usual job but on this particular day

I ended up with it. We started returning ² fire and my weapon jammed on me on three different occasions. This whole fight was being observed by our men on the hill. We received instructions to try and maneuver and push the VC which we ~~was~~ were able to do fairly successful and were told that help was on the way. The guys on the hill said they could observe about a platoon of VC moving away from us. Any way they entered a tree line as we were coming out of a another tree line with about a three hundred yd open rice paddy between us. ~~we were about~~ half way across when they opened up from the tree line again. We were laying in about 6 inches of water and a foot of mud. We held back for an air strike and artillery. These helped some but they didn't follow through. We were told to begin pushing again. When we stood up they wounded two men and when the Lieut. ran over to one of them they killed him. This put us without a leader because the platoon Sgt. was way around to the left trying to ~~was~~ flank them. About this time the company was coming up behind us and they didn't know where we were exactly. The fire from the VC was going over us and into them and the company was firing back at us. ~~the VC were firing~~ So we were receiving murderous fire from both sides. They were so close that when one of us would try and stand up and tell our guys they were firing at us we could hear them yelling "There's one! Get him! Get him!" we ended up with one seriously wounded by our own fire and the other one well not sure who got him. It was about 2:30 pm when they first fired on us and about 4:30 pm when we finally met up with the company and pushed the VC to the river. When you check your chart be sure to allow for the time difference. You probably can't tell too much from what I'm writing but I'm mainly interested in getting this letter off to ease your worry. As you can see I'm writing this on the back of one of Shawne's letters. I carry all your letters in the top of my helmet and I was able to scrounge up an envelope. I'll close this now and I'll go out on the resupply chopper. Don't worry and I'll write but I can't tell yet.
Love Johnnie

LETTER 1: TRANSCRIPT

Tuy Hoa

7 Feb 66

Dear Mom,

I know you must be worried from not hearing from me, but at least it was unavoidable this time. We moved out about a week ago from our base camp at Tuy Hoa and replaced a unit of ROK [Republic of Korea] marines. I was right in the middle of a letter when we got the word to move, and had to pack it away. These ROK's we replaced were dug in defensively in the middle of a rice paddy. They had been hit by two Battalions of VC [Viet Cong, the enemy] a few nights before, suffering 48 casualties and killing over 100 VC. They hadn't been sending out patrols or recon, so when they dropped us out here we had no idea what the situation was.

Since we've been here we've suffered pretty heavy casualties. Yesterday the count stood at 2 dead and 15 wounded. But last night B and C Company got into it with a battalion of VC, and at last count there were 6 dead and many wounded. By the time you get this I imagine you will have heard about the 101[st] on [the] news. We've killed a lot of VC and captured a lot of weapons, and that's what counts.

I got into it pretty heavy a few days ago, and it was a miracle that I'm alive. I can give you the date and time and see if there was any indication of extreme danger at that time on my chart. It happened on the 4th of February. There was about 12 of us with the Lieutenant out on a routine patrol and a half mile from the hill the rest of the company was on. We were searching through an abandoned village looking mainly for chickens and eggs and mats to sleep on. We were crossing a dike between two houses when we were opened upon by about 10 VC with automatic weapons. I was carrying the radio, which made me a prime target. That's not my usual job. On this particular day I ended up with it.

We started returning fire, and my weapon jammed on me on three different occasions. This whole fight was being observed by our men on the hill. We received instructions to try and maneuver and push the VC which we were able to do fairly successful, and were told that help was on the way. The guys on the hill said they could observe about a platoon of VC moving away from us. Anyway, they entered a tree line as we were coming out of a another tree line with about a 300-yard open rice paddy between us. We were about halfway across when they opened up from the tree line again. We were laying in about six inches of water and a foot of mud. We held back for an air strike and artillery. These helped some, but they didn't follow through.



Private First Class John R. Price from Norfolk, Virginia, arrived in Vietnam in December 1965. He served with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, based at An Hoa. Pvt. Price was mortally wounded while leading a medic to wounded members of his platoon. He saved the lives of five injured men and for this act of courage was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Heroism. He died on February 9, 1966, before this letter to his mother was mailed. The letter was found in his helmet. He was 21 years old.

LETTER 1: TRANSCRIPT [continued]

We were told to begin pushing again. When we stood up, they wounded two men, and when the Lieut. ran over to one of them, they killed him. This put us without a leader because the platoon sergeant was way around to the left trying to flank them. About this time the company was coming up behind us and they didn't know where we were exactly. The fire from the VC was going over us and into them and the company was firing back at us. So we were receiving murderous fire from both side[s]. They were so close that when one of us would try and stand up and tell our guys they were firing at us we could hear them yelling, "There's one! Get him! Get him!" We ended up with one seriously wounded by our own fire, and the other one not sure who got him. It was about 2:30 p.m. when they first fired on us and about 4:30 p.m. when we finally met up with the company and pushed the VC to the river. When you check your chart, be sure to allow for the time difference. You probably can't tell too much from what I'm writing, but I'm mainly interested in getting this letter off to ease your worry. As you can see I'm writing this on the back of one of Shawn's letters. I carry all your letters in the top of my helmet, and I was able to scrounge up an envelope. I'll close this now and [it] will go out on the resupply chopper. Don't worry, and I'll write first chance I'll get.

Love, Johnny

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- 1 After reading the letter, what assumptions can you make about the living conditions of Pvt. Price and his fellow soldiers?
- 2 How important were letters to Pvt. Price? How can you tell?
- 3 Price talks about being a target by carrying the radio. Do you think that would be a problem for soldiers today? Why?
- 4 How do you think Pvt. Price's mother received this letter, if he was killed before sending it?

