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March 2 [1969]

Darling,

I love you so very, very much. Finally it's over for a while and I can write. I don't know where to begin or what to say or how. I guess I'll just try to tell you how I feel, which is mostly proud, sad, tired and relieved. After all these endless days and nights, they gave me and the platoon 36 hours off. I spent today going to memorial services for my people, doing wash, catching up on work in my office and writing up people for medals.

Oh, Darling, it's been so unreal. I'm not going to go into detail—it would only scare, depress or worry you. Just be convinced I'm fine, it's over and all I have to complain of now is a bad cold and a lot of fatigue. These last days were just so filled with fighting, marching, thinking, all the time thinking, "Am I doing it right? Is this what they said at Quantico?¹ How can I be sure I haven't led us into a trap and the NVA are waiting?" etc., etc., until I became so exhausted just by worrying. I'm just so grateful (to whom?). I "only" lost six men (I know how awful that sounds)! I had a seventh guy fall off a cliff and get a bad cut and concussion, but he'll be OK.

I'm so confused. At the services today they were talking about God protecting people and eternal life and

¹ Quantico—military training camp.

I felt so **desolate**,² so despairing. I know there is no reward waiting for them or any hope. I began crying I felt so awful and hopeless, but somehow held it back and it just looked like I was sniffing from my cold. (See! How awful my ego and pride that I couldn't even let myself weep for those poor, poor kids!) All I can say is that considering how awful it was, I'm so lucky I didn't lose more.

I said I was proud. Mostly of them. I'm putting 10 of them in for decorations. Enclosed are some of the rough drafts of citations. Don't read them if you don't want to. Just save them for me. I guess I should be honest. I've been nominated, I hear, for the Silver Star, the third highest medal. Please don't get upset. I didn't try to win it—I was just trying to keep my people alive and doing the best I could. I may not even get it, 'cause the reviewing board might knock it down to a Bronze Star. You know me so well, you know I'm lying if I say I'm not pleased. I am, I'm proud, but only the worst part of me. My better part is just so sad and unhappy this whole business started.

Again, though it may be foolish, I'll keep my word and be honest. The post-Tet offensive³ isn't over. All intelligence points to a return bout. However, my platoon is 1,000% better than it was, we have so much support now—like a family, really. We'll all watch out for each other. Also, we don't believe they'll hit again near here, so whatever happens, I'll be OK. That's the truth too, honey. I have fantastic good luck, as strange as that may sound, and what's US is too good and too strong for any badness.

Love,
Brian

² **desolate**—bereft of friends or hope; sad and forlorn.

³ Tet offensive—see pages 228–236.

Brian Sullivan, a lieutenant assigned to the 4th Battalion, 11th Regiment, 1st Marine Division, was a field artillery officer and infantry platoon commander in the area around Da Nang from June 1968 to June 1969. He is now an associate professor of history at Yale University and lives in New York City. This letter was written to his then-wife Tobie.

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