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19 October 67

Mom and Dad—

Your oldest son is now a captain in the United States Marine Corps. I was promoted yesterday. Of all the men selected for captain, 1,640 men, only about 50 men have been promoted to date. I was one of the 50, to my surprise and pleasure. My effective date of rank is 1 July 1967, which means I have technically been a captain for 3½ months. I am thus due back pay for 3½ months. With this promotion, my annual income is \$9,000.00 a year. I'm single, 24 years old, college-educated, a captain in the Marine Corps, and I have \$11,000.00 worth of securities. That is not a bad start in life, is it?

As I understand, Dad, you were married about this point in life. There was a war going on then too. I really know very little about those years in my parents' lives. Sometime you will have to tell me about them—what you were doing, what you were thinking, what you were planning, what you were hoping.

Mom, I appreciate all your letters. I appreciate your concern that some of the things you write about are trivial, but they aren't trivial to me. I'm eager to read anything about what you are doing or the family is doing. You can't understand the importance these

“trivial” events take on out here. It helps keep me civilized. For a while, as I read your letters, I am a normal person. I’m not killing people, or worried about being killed. While I read your letters, I’m not carrying guns and grenades. Instead I am going ice skating with David or walking through a department store to exchange a lamp shade. It is great to know your family’s safe, living in a secure country; a country made secure by thousands upon thousands of men who have died for that country.

In the Philippines I took a bus ride along the infamous route of the death march in Bataan. I passed graveyards that were marked with row after row after row of plain white crosses. Thousands upon thousands. These were American graves—American graves in the Philippines. And I thought about the American graves in Okinawa, Korea, France, England, North Africa—around the world. And I was proud to be an American, proud to be a Marine, proud to be fighting in Asia. I have a commitment to the men who have gone before me, American men who made the sacrifices that were required to make the world safe for ice skating, department stores and lamp shades.

No, Mom, these things aren’t trivial to me. They are vitally important to me. Those are the truly important things, not what I’m doing. I hope you will continue to write about those “trivial” things because that is what I enjoy learning about the most.

Your son,
Rod

In September 1968, Capt. Rodney R. Chastant, from Mobile, Alabama, extended his 13-month tour of duty in Vietnam with Marine Air Group 13, 1st Marine Air Wing, Da Nang. He was killed on 22 October. He was 25 years old. David is his brother.