



James Boyd Reay papers

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(1) This reflection on my experience of 6/22/69 was written about 2001

RE: June 22, 1969.

Although being wounded on my first patrol with my unit is what I consider to be my "Traumatic event," I realize that most of my months in combat were an ongoing traumatic event.

The rice paddy was thankfully dry — in between plantings? Darkness added another layer of fear the the fire fight.

I was angry, and remain upset that a bunch of LIFER Officers are willing to sacrifice the Grunts for their benefit to promote their military careers.

The Flashes of the guns and explosives and their sounds — were the scariest parts. When the Shrapnel went in my back, the pain was minimal compared to the fear that built within me.

I didn't think I was dying, but I wasn't sure. Nevertheless, I was strangely relieved (and proud?) that I was wounded so I could catch the dust-off back to the security of the base camp. Civilization! Electricity and no gooks.

I'm not cut out for this. Comraderie is great, but I never have and never will get a Kick out of firing guns. I'm not afraid of guns. I just don't like the fact that they're

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purpose is to harm - to kill. People that shoot guns are what allows people to kill people.

The medic was comforting when he reassured me that I wasn't bleeding much. I was relieved to have someone bandaging my wound and seeming calm himself. That was a comfort.

The artillery flares lit up the sky like a Friday night football game. Surreal. Interesting shadows cast by the descending parachuted-flares. But will the light give away our positions even more. The light overriding the darkness is still a positive thing.

I've not been exposed to helicopters for very long. Now I hear them overhead.

Gratefully, All air traffic is friendly.

What must the gooks think of our far superior war equipment?

H'mm, I hearing from our radio guy that one of the airborne copters is carrying a Colonel - and the Colonel is here for WHAT? To direct this combat mission gone awry? He's not so brave, or he would be down here with us.

Old men send young men to die. Lifers will do many things to gain rank. Wartime is THE TIME to make rank.

Now I remember - during all my training, 8 weeks Basic, 8 weeks Light Weight Infantry 11B40,

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and 5 days in-country, we've often been told to hate and distrust The Enemy, but we've never been convinced WHY this enemy is so Terrible.

Somebody reassures me that the med-evac copter is on its way. I wonder, how can it land? How will it hover long enough to load me and many other wounded troops?

I've not been in the field - for God's Sake - this is my FIRST NIGHT with my unit! My first patrol. Is this what it's going to be like? Ambush patrols every night, until finally I get the hit that does me in?

The whopping blades are a mixed blessing. It's my link to safety, but is this just the next chapter of an Army effort gone awry? These poor guys that HAVE NOT been wounded. These are my comrades. We should become friends. They have to stay here and suffer the consequences.

I'm on the med-evac. I was able to climb onboard unassisted. Do I have my M-16 with me? Does it matter? The copter is full of wounded - some on stretchers. These guys - I just met them this very afternoon. We've only been together a few hours and now, THIS. I feel guilty somehow, because I don't even know

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these guys names. Or maybe I'm relieved that I don't know these guys names. Oh, the power of anonymity.

What time is it? I don't care, where are we being flown? I don't care. What are these other guys thinking? I don't care. I think survival is a very selfish mindset.

Now I'm back at the firefight. What just happened? Did we fuck up? How are the rest of the guys going to get out of it? Is it worth putting so many guys at risk in such precarious conditions?

I never thought of this before, but I must have smelled some things that night. The sweet early night essence of tropical grasses. Maybe a wisp of the clean jungle fatigues I put on this morning. Certainly, the smell of hot rifle barrels, especially after lotioning their hot rods with milky white oil. Or was it just the plastic squeeze bottle that was milky white?

I was not brave. I was "in the wrong place at the wrong time." How did I get myself into this situation? How did I allow myself to be in such a situation? I don't HATE these strangers that I'm firing on. It's just, well, every man for himself. I hate violence I abhor war. What am I doing here? Will I survive it? Do I want to survive it?

Time Will Tell.

Jim Reay

Thursday, 2/9/95

Dear Kim,

I'm so happy that you are interested in reading my "old mail," and I'm grateful that your interest has kindled a desire in me to read them all.

This "installment" is what I read over the weekend. Would you believe this is only about a third of them? So unless you scream, "NO MORE!!," I'll probably be stuffing your mailbox again.

It's nice to be able to boast a bit about oneself -- I am glad that I wrote in such detail. It reminds me of my Viet Nam experiences far more than pictures or memories can.

Mother deserves an award for having the foresight to save them all. Now I wish I had saved all the mail I received while I was in the Army!

Love,
James

Saturday 2/11/95

Hi!

I can't help it. I am enamored with all these memories. Not just my letters in themselves, but references to family, relatives, neighbors, etc.

Thanks for getting me to read them!

Love,
James

written @ 2002

Five Things I Wish Americans Would Remember About Vietnam

1. **The Vietnam War was unjust.**
The U.S. government was dishonest with the populace.
There was an inequitable conscription policy.
A lottery was introduced in latter years of the war.
2. **The United States did not learn from its Vietnam mistake.**
The U.S. supported Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines.
The U.S. propped up The Shah of Iran.
The U.S. enabled the rise of Osama Bin Laden.
3. **Collateral damage continues for generations.**
I wish that political and military decisions were more focused on their long-term effects. The consequence of war is fractured families and alienated allies. Land mines are a long-lasting menace. Reconstructing societies is prohibitively costly. Our government has expended a fortune resettling thousands of Vietnamese citizens in the U.S.
4. **Our Vietnam incursion produced a negative effect.**
Altruistic principles dissolved into selfish interests.
U.S. involvement caused death & destruction with no perceptible benefits to the Vietnamese.
5. **Killing is rarely justified.**
Ask Vietnamese citizens how they feel about alien countries fighting on their soil. Who does "God Bless" in such a situation?
Who bears authority to proclaim God's favor?

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Jim Reay
Military Service Bio/Chronology

1966 Graduated from Minnetonka High School
Excelsior, Minnesota

1966/1967 Freshman year at Bemidji State University
Bemidji, Minnesota

1968 Baptist Missionary

Prior to the unbiased lottery system, physically fit US males were drafted into military service if not married and not fulltime students. Although I had not resumed my college education, I received a one-year deferment while traveling as a Baptist Missionary.

1969 Upon completing my year of missionary service, my draft status immediately reverted to 1A, "Available For Active Duty." I was drafted and inducted into the Army on January 13, 1969.

1969 January–March Eight weeks of "Boot Camp"
Basic Training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

1969 March–May Eight weeks of Advanced Infantry Training
at Fort Polk, Louisiana, where I was assigned the position of
11B40—Light Weapons Infantry Soldier.

Three weeks leave before flying to Viet Nam

1969 June–September Combat Duty with the 25th Infantry
Division northwest of Saigon, near Cu Chi, South Viet Nam

1969 September–December Company Clerk at Battalion
Headquarters near Cu Chi while awaiting reassignment.

1969 December through 1970 August Security Guard with
the Military Police at Cam Ranh Bay, South Viet Nam, the largest
military installation in Viet Nam and the most important air and naval
supply location for the entire war effort.

During World War II, following the tragedy of several Sullivan brothers perishing together aboard an attacked ship, the US Congress enacted a law stating that in future wartime situations involving siblings, neither brother would be required to be in a combat position.

While serving in Viet Nam, I learned that my younger brother, an Army Airborne Mechanic Enlistee, had volunteered to accept assignment in Viet Nam. On the day that my brother arrived in Viet Nam, I was released from combat duty. I could have requested a transfer out of Viet Nam but I elected to stay "in country" where I was reassigned to the relative safety of a large support base.

Each soldier serving in Viet Nam was required to spend an entire year overseas. Because I had been drafted for a 2-year military obligation, I chose to extend my year in Viet Nam the necessary number of days beyond one year, so that 5 months of my 24-month obligation was cancelled. As a result, I served only 19 months in the military—4 months in training and 15 months in Viet Nam. I was discharged from active duty the day that I returned to the United States.

James Boyd Reay