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Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 12

David Fetters

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Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Fetters, David, "Dave Fetters' Audio Transcription - 1969 - Tape 12" (1969). *Dave Fetters Audiotape Transcriptions*. Paper 12.

<http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/fetters/12>

July 13, 1969.

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Dave Fetters' Audio Letters - 1969

Tape #12

Sunday 13 July Continued.

...poke around and as soon as somebody spies him and throws something at him or tries to kick him he'll of course run and hide again. We have rat traps set up around the place, but for some reason they're wise to the traps and they just stay away from them.

(Vietnamese radio)

That was some Vietnamese yakking on the radio. I tried to get some music but there's no music on. Let me play this back and see what it sounds like. It was kind of poor quality but it gives you some idea of what they sound like over here. One of these days when the radio comes in with real good reception I'll see if I can tape some music. There's quite a difference between Vietnamese and Cambodian so I'd like to get a sample of both at the same time or rather on the same tape, one after the other, so you can tell the difference between them. The Cambodians have a real funny inflection when they talk. When they ask a question it starts out guttural and they put a real high inflection on it like (demonstration). That's the way they talk. They roll their r's. A lot of stuff like that. A lot of real sharp words that end in c's and k's. It's hard to explain but it's kind of interesting, neat.

Our power tonight is sure screwed up. It keeps coming on strong and fading out and the lights grow dim and brighten up and the fans go fast and slow. I don't know what the deal is but it sure isn't steady. I think I better take a run out there and check the generator. I'll finish this up later on.

(Vietnamese Radio)

I'm going to see if I can find a Vietnamese station here. I've got to find someway to fill up this tape and get it in the mail to you today. I don't know, it's already gone out today but I've got to have it in the mail for Wednesday because I'm not going have time after my heliborne operation to come rushing back quickly to make a tape to you. That's why I'm making it early. Shoot, I just spent an hour talking to you last night, I really haven't got much to say today. So I'm going to look around for a station here, if I can find one. I'd like to find some music.

We're having generator troubles again. The doggone LLDB are taking way too much electricity. The output register on the ammeter registers about 45 and as soon as we shut the LLDB off it drops way down to 15, and we've got more stuff than anybody else in camp running off the generator so you can see how much they use.

(Vietnamese Radio)

This is some rather decent Vietnamese music believe it or not. You ought to hear the bad stuff. Okay. So much for that. Something to kind of fill up the tape.

There's not a whole lot to say except that I miss you, miss everybody. I got another nice little letter from Floss. I get a chuckle out of her letters. I guess she listened to the tape where I was talking about the bar girl having a big set of knockers. She comes back and says that she isn't quite so well endowed with a set of knockers. She whipped out another poem for me. I think I'll type it like the rest of hers and put it up here on the wall with the rest of them. I added a big 8 1/2 by 10 color motorcycle picture out of my motorcycle magazine, the picture of the sailboat that you sent me. I've got quite a cluttered wall full of stuff here.

I put your batteries in the movie camera and it works fine. The trouble I told you about before, apparently it's got a little built in device so that when the batteries run down it won't shoot. You know, rather than shooting at a slower speed, it just locks itself and you can't shoot it which is nice. As soon as I put the batteries in the thing shoots like a million bucks so today I took a movie shot of Ron Ingram and I took a movie of Co La and Minnie Mouse. I'm sure when you see it you'll be able to tell them apart. Minnie Mouse is the short little girl with the long hair and I think she had a blue blouse on at the time. Co La must be about Flossie's size, maybe just a little bit shorter. Minnie Mouse, you can see how much shorter she is than Co La, so you know how small she is. She's really a little pipsqueak and boy they sure can put out some good chow.

We had apple pie again tonight. Let's see, we had steaks, let's see, not fried really. Broiled, yeah, I guess that's what it was, broiled steaks, and carrots, and string beans, and French fried potatoes, nice steak. The only thing that we don't have for the steak is that A-1 steak sauce which I really enjoy. Oh no! I had the volume turned way down. Let me see. There, I turned it back up to the level it should be. Let me play it back and see how much tape I ruined.

Well, it isn't too bad. I think the quality of the tape turns out better when I have the volume down lower and the microphone a little bit farther away from my mouth than I have it now. As soon as I crank way up to 8 again it comes through a little bit fuzzy, I guess, when the needle jumps off the end, but at least I can be sure that you can hear me okay at the other end. That little section there where I forgot to turn the volume back up, it was set on about 2. To play it back at a normal listening level, I had to turn it up to about 7 but it came through real clear, a little bit clearer than it does at this volume level, however you have such a small machine there to listen to them with then I'll just leave it at 8. When I put the mic real close to my mouth, hon, it gets all spppfff... So I'll hold it a little bit away like this.

Let me see, let me see, let me see. Don't know what to tell you, I'm all out of news. The same old stuff around here day after day. I shouldn't say that because there is enough different things happening in a day to be different, I mean, to keep me from being bored. So I can't

complain. Heck, if I were on the B-Team I'd really be bored. I'd spend almost every night and most of my evenings all evening either reading or writing letters or a combination of both. The only entertainment I would have would be my radio, my books and magazines, and that's about all. What I'm waiting for is that catalog that you sent for from Roth Studios, you know, in California, those crazy weirdo pictures.

Well as soon as I get that I'm going to, when I get bored, I'm going to sit down and crank out a couple of pictures and start hanging them up around my walls and stuff. Maybe I'll draw a caricature of every member on the team. When it comes time for them to leave or when I leave I'll pass them out to the guys, you know, a little something for them to remember me by. Maybe I'll just draw a caricature of the team members and take a picture of each man holding his caricature and take it back and keep it. I don't know. I've got one speedball pen and point, and got all different kinds of speedball inks except black and I've got a Lindy ballpoint pen and felt tip black pens, so that's enough for that. I don't have any color pictures, or pencils. I don't really need them. I'll just use the different colors of inks I think and use regular typing paper to draw on which isn't the best but it will do. And get back into shape, drawing a little bit. Kind of lost my touch after being away from it for so long.

D.B. just made some popcorn tonight so I think I'll go back into the club, have a little bit of popcorn, maybe a can of pop and hit the sack early. It's 8:20 right now, I'll go to bed about 9 o'clock, sleep until 7 tomorrow morning and then get ready to go. We're leaving out of here about 9 or so on helicopters. If there is somebody standing around with little to do maybe I'll give him my movie camera and show him how to work it and then he can take movies of the helicopters coming in and take a movie picture of me in my get up with my rucksack and pistol belt, canteens, ammo, rifle, and the whole schmeer. The tape is finally running out. To my pleasure, to your displeasure, but I can't help it, hon. I see it fluttering, there it goes--good bye.

15 July,
Tuesday

Hi. This evening is the 15th of July. It's Tuesday night, and since I have a lot to say I put on an hour tape. I only have 25 minutes from now until 9 o'clock to say what I want to start with, and then at 9 o'clock I'm going to watch Star Trek until 10, then hit the sack at 10, get up at 12, go on radio watch from 12 to 2 and I shall finish this tape from 12 to 2. But, like I said, I have a lot to say. I made a tape to you Sunday night before I left on the heliborne and I haven't got any mail to refer to so I won't be answering any questions, I won't be referring to any notes. I'm just going to discuss what happened on the heliborne.

First of all it was scheduled to leave at 9 o'clock, Monday morning. So of course Sunday

night I made that tape to you, got everything packed and ready to go, got my tiger suit out, made sure I had all the water I could carry, plenty of food, plenty of ammunition, got my map straight and put the different codes and call signs on my map. Pardon me, I just had a Coke. And coordinated everything I had to, got everything all set. I hit the sack early about 8:30 Sunday night so I could get a good night's rest and I slept from 8:30 to 7 o'clock in the morning. Got up at 7, put my tigers on, ran over and got breakfast. At 8 o'clock we loaded all our junk on the truck and started moving out toward the runway because we had to get all 200 CIDG broken down into three groups of nine lifts, no, I should say nine groups of three lifts, because we have nine helicopters and they were going to make three trips in.

Well, 9 o'clock rolled around and we got a call from the B-Team saying that, first of all, the FAC, Forward Air Controller who's usually an Air Force captain or major who flies around in a little light plane, called in to say that the ceiling over the landing zone was too low for our heliborne operation at that time so he said he's going to ask for a one hour weather delay. So we informed the B-Team of that and they said "okay." We came back in, sat around the dining room table drinking coffee and just generally feeling nervous about the whole thing. The way we had it planned was that Spec 4 McCrea and myself were to go in on the first lift with 357 Cambodian Company, which is the best fighting group we have. If we got into trouble as soon as we got on the ground then two more Americans would come in on the third lift with the rest of the troops. Of course there was a second lift that would come in too. But if we got on the ground, the first and second lifts got on the ground all right without any trouble, then the two other Americans who were scheduled to go would not go because there isn't actually a need for more than two Americans out in the field because actually one man does all the work, the man in charge, it's either the captain or myself and anybody else out in the field just kind of tags along and helps monitor the radio and that's about it.

Well anyway, 10 o'clock rolled around and the FAC called in to say that the clouds were lifting a little bit. People keep ducking into my room so I shut it [the tape] off. Oh yeah, the FAC, at 9 o'clock the ceiling was down to 400 feet which is way too low. At 10 o'clock it was up to 800 feet so he said okay, he's going to go ahead and put the airstrike in on the landing zone which they always do prior to an insertion. From where we were way down at camp, we could see the jets zooming over the area. By the way, the landing zone is in the 0990 block. You can see it's a big clearing with a dried up lake in the middle. It's called Beng Kas Andeth. That's where the landing zone was going to be. It's only about two clicks away from the Cambodian border. It's way up north, too, let me tell you.

So anyway, he put the airstrike in and then from that time until the time we actually got on the ground, which was about 11 o'clock, we had artillery pounding the area. They put 300 rounds all around the woodline surrounding the area, mostly on the western, southern, and

eastern edge because to the northeast the clearing extends up in that direction and then around to the northwest right up to the border. There's no sense in putting artillery right in the middle of a clearing when there aren't any troops there. So at about, I don't know, 10 or 10:30, about 10:30 I guess, the nine helicopters showed up and landed on the runway. I ended up being on the fifth helicopter of nine. I had the interpreter, McCrea and myself, our two radio men, and one or two other CIDG, just regular riflemen.

I got to say that the radio man that I had, we call him Number Ten as a joke, he's a Cambode, kind of a youngster, maybe about 18, 19, but he's real dedicated to us Americans. He really takes it upon himself to watch out for us and he's an excellent man to have as a radioman because he sticks with us like glue. He can hump through the jungle, through the thickest stuff, just all day long carrying that big old heavy radio, and he'll never complain at all. Anyway, I had Number Ten as my radioman. We took off, I don't know, we climbed to about 2000 feet or so, got into formation, which is kind of a V formation, and flew up to the area. At this time we had what's called a C & C ship [Command & Control helicopter] with the B-Team commander in it and his X-Ray, which is his counterpart. Also, Captain Sutton, the team CO, was up in that ship. They coordinate everything. We had Allan 08, he was the FAC. We had 2 Huey Cobra gun ships, which I was told later, contained as much firepower as a World War II Destroyer. I sometimes have my doubts but later on I'll tell you how we put them to good use and I don't have any doubts anymore.

Anyway, we had two of those and we also had one other ship which acted as the, well, we call it the Smoke Ship. It dives into the LZ before the other ships come down and drops two smoke grenades letting the pilots know which direction the smoke is, the wind, is blowing and then it gets upwind from where we're going to land and lays down a heavy smoke screen so that when we get out we can run into the woodline covered by a heavy smoke screen without being seen by the enemy, supposedly. Well, when we got near the landing zone, the two helicopter gun ships opened up on either side of us with their rockets and automatic 40mm grenade launchers which shoots out little grenades about the size of a walnut or so and they kill anything within a 5 meter bursting area, so an area about 30 feet in diameter in other words. They were putting those things in with 2.75 inch high explosive rockets on both sides of the LZ as we were landing. Not only that, but all the door gunners opened up with their machine guns and just sprayed the woodline. As soon as we hit the ground of course everybody jumped out and ran into the woodline. Boy, that gives you an awful, naked feeling to jump out of that helicopter and go charging into the woodline not knowing whether or not Charley was sitting right in the woodline waiting to shoot at you or not.

We had to run across maybe 250 feet of open ground to get to the woodline and the VC could have been sitting right in the woodline waiting for us and just waited until we got right on

top of them and opened up, but fortunately there were no VC there and we made it into the woodline all right. The second and third lifts arrived without any trouble. We got together at that time, all 200 people, and started moving out in our usual formation of a center column, which is composed mostly of the headquarters section right in the middle, which is the LLDB, their radiomen, the Americans, our radiomen. To our front and rear we have about a platoon of CIDG to act as our more or less bodyguards. And then right up in front, about 75 meters out to our front of the middle column is a 20 man combat re-con platoon which kind of clears the way for us. Then on either side of us we have about 75 or so CIDG which form a column on either side of us, maybe 50 or 60 feet out from us depending on the thickness of the jungle.

From where we landed, we moved over to the eastern side of the landing zone, which was at 098905, that little notch of woods that sticks up into the LZ there. By the way, I hope you have a map to refer to. When my folks listen to this I would appreciate it if you'd take that map over so they can get some idea of where we went and where all the action took place and everything that I'll tell you about later.

Anyway, we started moving southwest from that location, through very thick jungle. There were many, many vines. The vines were anywhere from quarter of an inch up to maybe an inch and a half in diameter, two inches in diameter. They just curled and twisted and wrapped all around the trees and the ground and up in the air and everything. It was very difficult moving, but we moved from about 12 o'clock when we finally got started, down to the 89 line. We got onto the 090 line, which is the north south line. We stayed right on that almost the whole way down. But we were at 090 on that 09 line and the horizontal line was the 89 line. Right about there we came across some trails that contained commo wire running up and down the length of the trail. Usually that's an indication of one of two things. Either a Claymore mine booby trap wire, or just a regular communications wire. Of course that made everybody nervous so we cut a big chunk out of the wire and took it with us. I couldn't get the Tieu-uy, as I'll refer to him, who was the LLDB XO and my counterpart on this operation, I couldn't get him to stop long enough to send people down to each end of the wire to determine what was there, so the only thing I could do is chop a chunk out of the wire and continue on the way.

Anyway, right about there, right at the 89 line, where the 89 line crosses the vertical 09 line, is where we came across about three of those wires. I was disappointed that I couldn't stop the troops and get them to search the ends of the wires because who knows, maybe we would have found some VC commo equipment or a couple of mines or any number of things. At least I did get them to chop a chunk out of the wire, maybe a ten or fifteen foot section so that it would be worthless for them, without a little bit of hardship to splice them back together. Anyway, this was about, oh, maybe 2 o'clock or so.

All this time we were reporting to a FAC which was all the time flying overhead

constantly monitoring our position relaying everything to camp because the radios we have don't reach all the way back to camp from a distance that far out. So we'd relay everything to him and he'd relay it back to camp and vice versa, the camp, through him, to us.

Anyway, we moved on down, of course we were moving very carefully at a good, not a fast pace, but a very steady pace, because everybody's kind of anxious to get out of that area because we knew darn well there were a lot of VC around some place but we didn't know where at that time. So where we started moving south on the 09 line again and we got to about the 883 line, in other words about one third of the distance, well, one third of a klick north of the 88 line on the 09 line, we came across a trenchline. It's called a communications trench because it runs from bunker to bunker. What they had done, they dug this trench, it's about four feet deep and just wide enough for a narrow, skinny man like a VC to move up through it and every so often along the trench they had little holes dug into the side of the bank so that anyone could crawl into it, you know, if they started getting incoming rounds of any kind. But it didn't look like it had been used too recently so we thought, "well, okay, no sweat."

We continued on moving south. We got down to 090877. I want you to find that spot on the map at this time if you will. I hope you know how to read the map according to the figures I gave you. The first three numbers, the 090 you read, you find the north south line which reads 09 and the third number gives you an indication of how far between the 09 and the 10 line it is. Okay, when I say 090 I mean that I'm right on the 09 line. Okay, 877 means that where the 87 line crosses the 09 line, you move .7, in other words seven tenths of a klick north of the 87 line, so it's 87.7. At that point you will see there was a clearing on our west side although we were too far away from it to see it, I mean the jungle's too thick. We didn't see that trail right there, we weren't near enough to that. But anyway, right there 090877 we stopped to take about a half hour break to get some chow. This was about 10 after 4 in the afternoon. Okay, it was real thick and of course when we stop we set up our perimeter and everything, and this is where all the fun started. We were sitting there from about 10 after 4 to 4:30.

At 4:30 all hell broke loose because right at that time we discovered that there was a company of VC right behind us, following us all the way down. Apparently they didn't know that we had stopped and as a result, they walked right into us. They didn't see us first, we saw them first and our rear element opened up on them right away. You're sitting there quietly munching chow or resting, getting a drink of water when all of a sudden about 40 M-16s open up on full automatic and immediately, of course, the VC returned fire. Man, that was, what happens in the next hour is unbelievable. I'll try to explain it like it was but you just can't imagine what it was like. I'll try to explain it as close as I can but you'll just have to bear with me when I jump around a little bit. I'll do it the best I can but first let me check to make sure this tape is recording okay.

16 July 1969

Wednesday

Okay, let me get back to the activities. This is Wednesday morning. I didn't continue on radio watch last night because somebody else took my watch and let me sleep which was nice of him. So here it is early Wednesday morning and I want to finish this up before the work chopper goes out.

Anyway, as I said, about 4:30 the VC hit us, hit the rear of our column, the rear of our perimeter and just let us have it with everything they had. They were shooting mostly AK-47s, which is an automatic rifle that shoots a 30 round clip and most of them pour 30 rounds out of that thing just as fast as they can get them out on full automatic, and I was lying down flat on the ground and the only protection around was a tree maybe a foot in diameter so I got my head up as close to that as I could and grabbed the radio, pulled my map out, and started talking to the FAC which was right overhead and told him we were in contact with the VC and to start calling in artillery. All the time the shooting was going on, I was lying there just trying to keep my eyes on what was happening and adjusting artillery that was landing behind the enemy. I was working it toward us.

See, the trouble is with thick jungle like that, when the enemy hits us, they get so close that we can't call in artillery. It's so thick that our people could see the VC and you couldn't see more than maybe 20 or 25 feet at the most because the stuff was so thick so you know how close they were to us. Let's see, the VC were probably, I'll say, 20 to 30 feet from our people and the people that were doing all the firing were probably 20 to 30 feet away from me, so I was pretty close to all the action. After the first, I would say about five or six minutes of heavy firing, the VC broke contact and everything was quiet for about three minutes and I could hear some people moaning and groaning so I knew we had some injuries. And I was still calling in artillery. I told the FAC upstairs what was going on so he could relay it to the teamhouse here. They immediately requested some helicopter gun ships from Tay Ninh to come up and give us support.

Well, we had a lull for about two or three minutes and all of a sudden the VC counterattacked again and they shoot not only small arms but what's called B-40 rockets. They are launched out of a type of rocket launcher. It's not a rocket that fits inside a tube like our bazooka, so called bazooka, but rather it's a rocket that slips over a tube, just on the end of it and is fired from that position. Well, fortunately for us the jungle was so thick that the rockets couldn't penetrate very deep into our perimeter. As a result they exploded out near the outer edge of the perimeter. None of them got too close to me although some of them were too cotton picking close to suit me because I could see them going off in the trees up in front of me, maybe

20 to 30 feet away, about anywhere from 10 to 20 feet above the ground they were going off in the air.

Boy, they blow branches and vines and leaves and sticks all over the place. There's nothing worse than hearing the sound of those bullets going over your head and those rounds exploding, because in the jungle it's normally very quiet all the time. But boy, when there's all this shooting and these B-40 rockets going off, there's just a tremendous din, just a terrible racket. It's enough to scare anybody.

Well, there's a definite difference in firing between M-16s firing away from you and the VC weapons firing towards you. When a rifle is aimed at you and fired it's got a definite crack. I don't know whether it's the crack of the bullet going by or what, but anyway, I could hear this terrific cracking from all these automatic weapons pointed in our direction. I wasn't looking straight up above me but there were branches and sticks and leaves falling down on us all that were laying there. We could hear bullets going over head and believe it or not they, some of them actually go "zip." That's what it sounds like, just a high pitched little "ziiip," and you hear some of them ricochet. You hear them hitting branches, some of them snap, and crack, but of course there are hundreds and hundreds of them going over head all at once. Just a tremendous volley of what sounds like machine gun fire, but actually it's just like I said, a number of automatic weapons. And of course these doggone B-40 rockets. They fired, in all, between 20 and 30. Nobody got an actual count.

Anyway, they attacked a second time and broke contact and all this time I was working the artillery closer and closer. I was dropping them 50 meters at a time getting them close to where I thought they were getting a little too close for comfort because I could hear the shrapnel going through the trees. Boy those 105s, they make a doggone hellish explosion. No kidding. They're terrible.

Anyway, we had another lull for another three or four minutes and then all of a sudden the VC attacked for a third time. When they attacked the third time, all the other troops behind me and on either side of me got up and started to run away from them. The only people who didn't run were, well, the other American, myself, our two radio operators, the interpreter, and about 30 or 40 people who were doing the actual fighting back there, and their company leaders from the Cambodian companies that were out there with us. So actually, when the third attack hit, I wasn't watching behind me and I didn't know the people had picked up and started running because I just couldn't monitor everything that was going on. I had my hands full with my map in one hand and the radio handset in the other hand trying to coordinate all the fire support because the helicopter gun ships were arriving overhead at that time. I was trying to tell the FAC exactly where I was located so that he could put the gun ships in on the enemy who at this time were still too close, and of course I kept glancing around behind the tree to make sure the VC

weren't getting too close for comfort, so I didn't really know that these guys, our own CIDG troops, were turning and running on us.

Anyway, all the actual fighting took place in a 20 minute time span. When they finally broke off on the third time, I thought, well, they're getting ready for another counterattack so let's get up and get back with our troops at this time. So just as I jumped up, told the American to get up, and our radio operators and interpreter to get up and let's turn around and make it, get out of there, get back with our troops who were supposed to be surrounding us, protecting us. At that same time, the 30 or 40 people who were in the front line firing picked up their wounded and their weapons and everything and turned and ran back toward us also. So I thought "uh-oh, maybe the VC are counterattacking real hard this time and they're going to overrun us." So everybody turned and ran.

It is very difficult to run through thick jungle like that with my weapon in one hand, my map in one hand, and the radio handset in one hand. Eyes in front of my head and in back of my head and twenty sets of ears and talking to everybody at once and still trying to coordinate everything and get a hold of my counterpart and give him some help and suggestions and everything, it's just, oh man, you just cannot imagine how it was. During the actual firing I realized that I wasn't scared. I was too busy to be scared. I just realized what a tremendous racket it was, I couldn't get over the noise, just terrific, especially when those rocket rounds went off.

Anyway, we turned around and ran maybe thirty or forty meters and then we started to run into the rear element of our people. They were also still running, and I ran into my counterpart, the Tieu-uy, and told him to get these people stopped and get a perimeter set up so we can take care of our wounded, get ready for another counterattack, call in artillery and gun ships, you know, just give everybody a chance to settle down and get their wits about them again, and reload all our weapons. Well, he ran off trying to get everybody to stop running. We had 200 troops out there and when you can only see 30 or 40 at one time it's rather hard to control everybody. But he was doing the best he could. We halted temporarily and the people who were doing the shooting came up toward us with the wounded, started carrying the wounded by us. See, we were heading in a southern, southerly direction at this time and they carried the wounded by us and again, the two Americans, radio operators, interpreter, and about four CIDG were the last people.

As I was saying, the small amount of people that I was with ended up being, unwillingly, the rear security. Not because we wanted to but just because that's the way the situation turned out. Everybody else got up and ran and just left us, that's all. There's no other word for it. They just chickened out. They just got up and ran. They didn't even care about the wounded. What few people remained behind to take care of the wounded were mostly the company commanders

and the interpreter and the other American and his radio operator. Of course my radio operator just stuck with me to make sure that I had the radio at all times. He doesn't understand a word of English but he knows that when the action takes place, if I don't have the radio then everybody's in a strain because I'm the only one that can call in support.

Okay, at this time I started getting a little upset because I realized that if the VC were to hit again, there was nothing I could do but drop the map and the radio and fire back to save my own skin. I wouldn't have time to call in any support or anything. So I was just hoping that the VC wouldn't hit us again and luckily they didn't. So anyway, after we accounted for everybody in the rear section we picked up all our stuff and started running again in the same direction that all the troops had taken off running until we finally caught them. After another, an additional ten minutes of running we finally, well, I'll tell you what happened.

While we were running through the jungle I was still calling in artillery, trying to look at my map, where I was going, talking to the FAC, and adjusting artillery all at the same time. It's very difficult when you're running pell-mell through the jungle and just, I had a wrist compass on, just glancing at that very briefly and only on occasion to get a general direction of where we were running and then to try to pin point myself on the map so I can call in artillery on the enemy position without getting the artillery too close to our own position and injuring or killing our own troops. Anyway, you can see the trouble I had. So I thought, "Well, I've got to stop these people so I can settle down, find out where I am, and call the gun ships in on the enemy position." So I thought, "Well, there's no way I myself can stop them" so I hit upon the idea to shift the artillery from behind us, although they were hitting in the general vicinity of where the enemy was, I had to stop these people.

So I told the FAC to tell artillery to put about six rounds three or four hundred meters in front of us, which they did immediately. Boy, that brought everybody to a standstill. As soon as they heard those rounds landing in front of them, they stopped abruptly. Of course they all came flying back to me and asked me what was going on. So I just told the Tieu-uy "the people are stopped, get them set up in a perimeter, tell them to settle down, load their weapons and just watch for Charley."

So okay, I had them stopped. So then I shifted the artillery again back to where I thought the enemy was and I adjusted the helicopter gun ships in on the enemy position. I couldn't see them. It was so thick I couldn't see the gun ships, but I popped a smoke grenade so the FAC could see where I was and he put the gun ships in a hundred meters behind us. Boy, those rockets and miniguns, they're called, those are the machine guns that shoot 6,000 rounds a minute and their 40mm grenade launchers, automatic grenade launchers, really put out the firepower. I wouldn't want to be anywhere near where those things landed. So anyway, they expended two gun ships on about three passes each, really saturated the jungle back there. At

about that time the air strike, or, the jet planes “came over station” it's called. They were orbiting overhead burning off some fuel and when they got the word from the FAC, they also came in, dropped 500 pound bombs. At that time they were probably 300 meters away from us.

Boy, a 500 pound bomb going off that close is something to behold, although it's not a very pleasant experience. It literally picked us up off the ground and slammed us back down, the concussion was so great but I felt it did some good. O.K., after finally breaking contact for the last time and getting everybody settled down into a good perimeter, weapons loaded and everything, I immediately asked around, you know, I asked all the commanders, platoon leaders, company commanders and everything for an estimate of the situation and what their status was for ammo and wounded and things like that and I found out we had eight people wounded and one man who was killed.

It upset the Cambodian Company Commander because it was a Cambodian who was killed and those people are very, well, not religious, but devout to their own kind. They're very concerned about each other's welfare. Of course they look out for each other terrifically. They were all upset because they left that body behind so I inquired about that. He said he couldn't go back at the time because he realized there were only about ten of us there who were the rear security, and of course the two Americans, the radio operators and stuff and there was no way he could have gone back in there to where the VC were to police up that one body. He also told me that we would have had to have a bag or something to put him in because the man was hit with a rocket round, almost a direct hit, and it just blew him apart. So we had to leave that one body out there. He was the only man that was killed though.

We had four people who were wounded quite seriously with big chunks of shrapnel. One guy took a piece right through his shoulder, went in the back and came out the front and left a great big gaping hole. Another guy, his arm was dangling by the elbow, he took a big chunk right there. Another guy, (clears throat) excuse me, hit hard in the leg and another one in the upper arm. Then we had four other ones who were just slightly wounded, you know, hit with small pieces of shrapnel that just lodged in their arms and legs and stuff and bled a little bit, swelled up, but that's about all. So, let's see. From where we were hit, we moved south about 1,000 meters to that big clearing. It's shaped something like a bowling pin with a squashed out bottom to the southeast, to that jutting finger type thing sticking out to the northwest. It has a trail running right through it. That's at the 090866. Well, in that little tiny clearing right there is where I called in a medevac helicopter and two more gun ships escorted the helicopter up at that time.

So I got the, well, by the time I got down there it was about quarter to seven. The helicopter got there about quarter after seven. We got the eight wounded people on board and right after the, well, the cobra gun ships would circle the area and in case anybody started firing

or anything I could use them as fire support but apparently the VC evacuated back up north some place. They didn't bother us. I had my troops deployed all the way around that little clearing there as security. After the medevac departed the gun ships remained with us for about fifteen or twenty minutes until it started getting dark. Then I told the FAC, who was still overhead, to use the gun ships and expend them from that clearing due south about to the 86 line. There's about a 500 meter stretch of woodline there. That's the direction we were going to be moving. So they expended everything they had in that 500 meter stretch of jungle.

From where I was right on the edge of that clearing it looked like the doggone Cobra gun ships were coming in right on us. Actually they were, they zoomed right overhead about three or four hundred feet in the air, which is about as low as they can get because some of those trees are three hundred feet high. They just belched out everything they had, rockets, grenades, miniguns. Oh, also, the jet fighters after they put in their bombs, they also sprayed the area with 20mm cannons, they're called. It's also a super fast machine gun that shoots a 20mm bullet that explodes on contact. Boy, that's some wicked stuff to hear.

You know how that "spooky" aircraft sounded on that one tape I sent? Well that's the way these fighters sound when they fire. What you hear first is the rounds hitting the jungle. It's just a series of millions of tiny explosions and then you hear the actual sound of the machine gun from the plane. So it takes awhile for the sound from the plane to reach you, but in the meantime the sound of the bullets hitting reaches first. So it's kind of funny, you hear all these millions of little explosions and then a second later you hear the brrr. It's even faster than that. It's just a hum. Just a bsssst, like that of the machine guns from the airplane. O.K., they shot up the woods too, so quarter after seven we moved out of there and moved down south about another six hundred meters and set up our RON for the night. RON stands for "remain overnight position."

This is the first time in my experience over here that I have seen the CIDG actually be absolutely quiet. I was interrupted again. Anyway, I was saying, that was the first time in my experience over here that I have seen the CIDG actually remain perfectly quiet in a Remain Overnight Position. They were still scared, of course, that Charley was still following us. I was quite certain at this time that they weren't. But I wasn't absolutely sure. Anyway, they moved into position, set up their perimeter, put out Claymore mines, set up their machine guns and everything and it was also the first time that they didn't eat. They didn't set up their hammocks and ponchos and everything else, all they did was put their stuff down and everybody that night slept right on the ground. They left everything packed and ready to go. All the weapons of course were right next to us. I slept on just plain old dirt ground. I rested my head on my rucksack, and I had my weapon laying right next to me and I had the speaker from the radio right up near my head. The volume was turned down but I could still hear everything that was going on. You know, all the air traffic that I needed.

At this time I could reach camp with my long antenna so I told them where we were and what the situation was. Just about that time, well, it doesn't actually get dark until about 8 o'clock here. That's when the sun actually goes down. But when you're in thick jungle like that it starts getting pretty dark about 7:15, 7:30. This was about 7:30, quarter to 8 and it was pitch black. So everybody just kind of half slept all night. I'm sure it was the best security we ever had in an RON position.

Early the next morning we were given orders to go back up there to the contact area and search the area thoroughly for VC bodies, weapons, anything like that and give the Air Force what's called a BDA, it's a Bomb Damage Assessment. However, nothing I said or could do or the Vietnamese leader, nothing he said or he could do could get any of the CIDG to turn around and go back up there. Which is a kind of a sorry situation because everybody's kind of interested to know, you know, when you expend that much ammunition, bombs and everything in a location, what good it did. They get a little upset if you can't give them some sort of an idea of whether or not it did any good. Not that they won't be, not that they would be reluctant next time to send the same support, but they like to stick a feather in their cap if they did some good too. So anyway, we struggled and argued and did everything we could to try to get them back up there but they just would not go, so the only thing we could do is come back down south.

We came on down and came in camp. We got in camp about 12 o'clock noon yesterday morning. Everybody was pretty well beat, worn out. I was more tired from the mental strain than I was the physical strain. Just real happy to get back into camp. Of course everybody was, they waited for us in the truck at the end of the runway to pick us up, the Americans and the radio operators. They drove us in and of course immediately everybody pounced on me with questions about what happened you know, and everybody was real interested in knowing how it went and what all happened and everything. So, I explained the whole situation.

Oh, I forgot to tell you, we did kill four VC and wounded about five others. That was what we saw. I'm sure we killed quite a few more but like I said, we couldn't go back to the area and sweep it and find out. Shoot, even by the following morning I'm sure we wouldn't have found anything because the VC are notorious for coming back in and dragging off all their dead. But we did kill four for sure and wounded at least five. You might think it's a small toll on both sides, after fighting for 20 minutes, but like I say, the undergrowth was so thick that that really helped. I mean, it hindered us from getting them, but it did the same for them. It hindered them from getting us, it protected us to a great extent. Those B-40 rockets are definitely killers, if they're anywhere around.

Well, in fact, there was a platoon leader near me on the third counterattack and there were only about 30 people firing and everybody else had taken off. He came up to me and he knelt down right at the base of the tree where I was and told the interpreter who was lying down next

to me that he only had about 20 or 30 men there and they alone were holding off the enemy. Just then a B-40 rocket went off maybe, I don't know, it's kind of hard to say, but I could see the flash and of course the concussion was fierce. The sticks and everything and dirt and everything blew down on us. It went off real close to us, but it was on the other side of the tree from me, I don't know how far away, but anyway, this guy that was kneeling down talking to us caught a piece of shrapnel in the shoulder at that time. So things were definitely too close for comfort.

I hope I didn't scare you overly, hon, or anything like that. I can explain how it was, but the way you imagine it is probably entirely different. That's always the way it is. Even somebody who's been out in contact before in the same type situation, they're always different, always something different. And as much detail as I can give, you just can't get a true idea unless you're really out there. It sounds like it was, I don't know whether it sounds to you like it was nothing but pure hell for twenty minutes or whether it was, well, it sounds bad but it actually wasn't as bad as it sounds. Well, I don't know what to say. This is my first really big contact, so I can't judge but for 20 minutes there it was really bad. But again, it surprised everybody that not more people got hurt. Of course I'm not one to complain about that. I'm just happy that I got out of there in one piece, without even a scratch. Of course everybody commended me on a fine job and the FACs and everybody and the B-Team commander called down and said I did an outstanding job and everything, so everything turned out all right anyway.

Yesterday after I got back into camp I was mentally exhausted so I just took a shower and shaved and ate a good meal and drank lots of cold liquid and flopped into bed for a few hours rest. Then yesterday afternoon, late afternoon, I finished, well, I had to fill out a debriefing form, of course draw map overlays and everything of the contact and intel report and send that forward. Then I had a meeting with all the company commanders, platoon leaders, and VNSF who were out there with me. Believe it or not, some of the Vietnamese who turned and ran came back and told the camp commander that I had left them, I had turned and run from them. I had the other American, both radio operators, a couple of company commanders, platoon leaders, and my interpreter all stand up for me and say, "No, you people ran from us. We were the ones that stayed and fought. We were the ones that coordinated all the artillery and everything." Boy, that shut those people up in a hurry. I can't believe that. Boy, I was shocked when I heard that. That guy actually tried to accuse me of running when actually he was the one that turned and ran. These people are so pathetically sorry, it's upsetting. It just makes you wonder why should we be risking our necks with people as sorry as these. Man, oh man. Anyway.

I finished filling out the reports yesterday afternoon and last evening I had to turn in some more crap, like my weekly PSYOPS report that's due in today. I had to fill that out. Weekly rice report, some paperwork on one of our interpreters who's quitting. All kinds of garbage like that. So I finished that up at about 8 o'clock. From 8 to 8:30 or so I was talking to Ron in here and

then from 8:30 to 9 I started making this tape. From 9 to 10 I watched Star Trek and went to bed at 10 o'clock, fully expecting to get up at 12 for radio watch until 2, but one of the sergeants here, well, he said he came in and usually what they do for me is call my name once or twice and I'll wake up immediately and jump right out of bed and take over. He said he stuck his head in and called my name six or seven times and I didn't respond so he said, "Well, must be too beat." He just took my two hours too, in addition to what he had. So I was quick to thank him this morning.

Today is work chopper day and doggone it, the only thing I dislike about going into Bien Hoa today is the fact that I have to leave on the work chopper so I won't be here long enough to get my mail that's coming in today and I probably won't see any mail from, well, I haven't gotten any since Sunday, so that's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, I probably won't get back here until Friday or Saturday. That will be about six days without mail. I mean, it's my own fault for going to Bien Hoa, but I have to go. I have to stop by the S-4 down there and get our property book squared away. A property book is a means of keeping track of non expendable or accountable items on the team like all the big appliances, generators, vehicles, furnishings, things like that that are non expendable. So I have to take care of that and then go over to the PX and see what kind of camera equipment came in that I ordered. Like I said I got a note from one of the women that works in the PX who told me that the camera equipment that I ordered had arrived. So I've got to go down, pick that up, and pay for it.

Let's see, I'll probably be able to take care of all that next Thursday. I've also got two packages here to mail to you. One's got some film in it and a bunch of other stuff. As soon as I get back this weekend, I'll start working up another package for you because I've got a good set, a good pair of real Ho Chi Minh sandals made out of real tires and inner-tube. They're kind of neat. We probably won't want to save them for the rest of our lives as souvenirs but at least you can see what they're like and show them around. Just hang on to them until we decide we want to throw them away. I'm going to take my movie camera with me on the helicopter this morning and see if I can't get some good movies of flying around. I'll probably take one, I've got about half a roll left in the camera now so I'll finish that up between Thien Ngon and...