

Hamilton AFB, Calif.

26 Oct 1965

My Darling

I made through the course here and now we're just waiting 'till 1300 to board a bus for Travis.

We had a nice quiet flight from Dallas. While getting my baggage in San Francisco, I started talking to this SSgt, also a communicator, and he's from Cumberland but used to live in Pawtucket. Since it was some 15 miles to town, some of us shared a cab to the Greyhound terminal. There we found that Uncle Sugar had a contract with them to furnish transportation to Hamilton for people coming for M-16 training. We had lunch there since the next bus wasn't leaving until 2:30.

Talking to everyone here, it seems that about 90% of us in this shipment are in comm¹. There are 180 people in this class, and a new class starts every even numbered day. The instructors said they have to work 7 days a week except when there are 31 days in a month – then there are two odd days in a row – the 31st and the 1st – so they get the 1st off.

About half of us are NCOs². I understand they're establishing a relay center there and that's why there are so many of us at once. As one of the ranking men, I have a room which I share with a CMSgt³ from personnel. Most of the people are in open bays.

The next morning (Sunday) we got up at five for chow, with a formation at six. It was pitch black and freezing. Though it was only 48 degrees, it was so damp it cut right through you. They formed us in

¹ communications

² Non Commissioned Officer

³ Chief Master Sergeant

relays of 50 people and I was assistant to a SMSgt ⁴for our group. Busses then picked us up and took us to the range, across the runway and about 5 miles away. The sun finally gets up around 7:30 due to the mountains surrounding us. The first day the thermometer climbed to 92 degrees.

The training with the M-16 is not the regular target shooting that we do with the carbine. The course is quite interesting, but they've got to cram too much in too short a time.

We started off with learning the weapon itself, taking it apart and putting it back together. By the time we finished that part, the field kitchen was set up and the coffee boiling, so we took a break. Black coffee was all they had, but it tasted good by then. We had been issued field equipment, helmets and rifles, so we just dunked our canteen cups into the kettle to get our coffee. After that, one group went to the line to fire, another in back-up to fire next, another in the pits, putting up and scoring targets and the fourth in a class on weapon handling. We were second to fire, so that gave us a bit more break period. They've got a big range they're still working on. Fifty people can fire at once. I qualified as "Expert", getting 57 hit in 60 shots.

By then it was about 2:30 and we went to the class on weapon handling. In that class, the instructor asked for a track man and some A2C⁵ got up. (I'm getting too old to be raising my hand to that anymore!) Next he asked for a MSgt⁶ – so I got up. There were two of us, but obviously since he intended to use that airman for speed, I couldn't resist

⁴ Senior Master Sergeant

⁵ Airman 2nd Class

⁶ Master Sergeant

the challenge. Then he said here was an airman's chance to legally punch a MSgt. Of course, that set pretty good with the others – not me. Anyhow, he set us about 30 feet apart. The airman had no helmet, field equipment or rifle to slow him up, while I was all decked out. Then he gave us separate instructions, so neither one of us knew what the other was going to do. Whatever it was, we were both to act when he hollered, "Go".

As it was, this guy was to race at me and touch me before I could shoot him. In my case, I was supposed to have an empty rifle so that when he said "Go", I had to release the empty magazine, insert a new one and fire. Luckily, I didn't fumble and shot 3 times before he got to me. He wanted to emphasize the need for doing this rapidly and without looking at your weapon. Just another second would have made the difference. When that was over, we did our turn to work the pits and then quit at almost five o'clock. For typical Sunday evening fare, we had cold cuts in the mess hall. For lunch, we had eaten C rations. Also, they had about a 15-20 minute non-denominational church service on the range in the morning since we were unable to go to regular services.

By night time, I was just about pooped, so I didn't do much of anything but stretch out in the sack.

The next morning, it was up at five again and formation at six. This time, they left us off some distance from the training area and we had to march in. When we arrived in the area (it was still real dark), they greeted us with flares, explosions and gunfire, so that everyone had to hit the deck. Fine way to start a day! We had a couple sessions covering night fighting and different types of grenades and mortars. From that, our group had a coffee break and this time I foxed them. I had saved my powdered milk and sugar from the previous day's "C" rations, so I had a decent cup of coffee! Then we did some firing from the hip with the weapon on automatic (so it fires like a machine gun – about 600 rounds

per minute). We then went to the launch area where we launched grenades with the M-16. By using a special cartridge and attaching the grenades to the end of the barrel, they can be fired about 400 yards. But boy, the kick-back on that weapon will knock you on your fanny if it's not held right. I've an injury on the knuckle of my thumb to prove it. On one of the shots, you have to fire with the thumb and when it kicked, my hand wasn't just right.

Next, we went to grenade throwing, where we had to toss from different positions. Throughout the day also there was some instructor throwing practice grenades in the middle of people so that people would learn to holler "grenade", pick it up and toss it away. From there, we went to assault, where we had to attack bunkers, houses, etc., shooting live ammunition and throwing grenades. Then, right-handers had to fire left-handed, etc.

That was the end of it except for cleaning our weapons and turning in our equipment. It was around 4:00 when we got back. I wasn't feeling quite so tired this time, so I took in the movie. "Von Ryan's Express", with Frank Sinatra, was playing. Real exciting! Afterwards, I stopped to pick up a couple hamburgers and some coffee.

This morning, they could keep their 5 o'clock reveille. I stayed in bed for almost all morning, not getting up until almost 8 o'clock! By then, it was too late for the mess hall, so I took a walk to the cafeteria. It's about 11 a.m., now, and I'm due to move out at 1300 for Travis. Hamilton is pretty but seems real old. I'll bet there's not much more than 1000 troops on the base. It sure seems that there's not much of anything going on. Crossing the flight line to the range, you have to look real hard to detect any activity. It's an Air Defense Command base.

I hope you're not having too many problems with the kids. If the girls especially can learn to just do what they know they must do without being told over and over again, it would help.

I miss you so terribly much, my love. It has always gotten me so discouraged looking ahead to a year away, though when it's past it isn't quite so bad. Even once the half-way point is reached, things get a bit easier, at least psychologically, if not in fact.

I love you and our children with all my heart. Be sweet, my love, and write real soon.

Your Leo

Introduction

An introduction normally takes the head position at the beginning of a work. Here, though, the letters themselves take the lead. Like a canoe in a swift and sure current, these letters and little else will propel you through this year-long tour of duty. Only occasionally will I dip the paddle in, on one side or the other, to guide you or recount a memory.

Leo was 37 when he left for Vietnam. At home, his wife, Don Leta, had charge of the five children, Karen, Stephanie, Lanis, Paul and me. And she was pregnant with the sixth.

Early in their marriage, war had sent him away, to Korea. Now, fifteen years later, war separates them again. This time he is not a young airman and newlywed, but a father and an experienced NCO.



Leo Dubois in 1965, just prior to Vietnam

See how comfortably he directs and mentors the young men under his supervision, how ably he runs his shop – communications maintenance at Da Nang, at the time, the busiest airport in the world. Picture his observations of daily life on a growing airbase.

Leo's thoughts do not get far, though, before they are drawn back to home. He receives a letter. He shares a package of homebaked goods. Or he lays in the sack at the end of the day. He turns his mind towards his wife and children. Unable to touch, speak and kiss from so far, he writes himself into these letters and sends them off. Don Leta reads each and responds, then lovingly stores them away in a box.

Forty years later, we are going to open the lid of that box and glimpse a war and a reflection of home, 1965. Thank you for joining us.

- Bryan Dubois,
Editor

Da Nang, RVN

18 Nov 65

My Dearest,

I know I won't get this finished now as I'm on my lunch break, but I just received another letter from you and when I do I want so much to talk to you and see you that I immediately do the next best thing, which is writing.

Haven't heard from Bob as of yet so I don't know how much luck Marie has had in getting him to put that letter in an envelope like she said she would. Even so, they probably have my old address so it would take longer to get here. My mail now comes direct to Da Nang, so service is a bit better. Likewise, outgoing mail used to go to Tan Son Nhut first but now it goes from here to Okinawa and then to the states. The letter I got today took 4 days. 4-5 days seems about average.

You say Marie mentioned Commendation Medals. Actually, what happened was that Schooley prepared his and Bob's in draft form before he left. I then got them fixed up and on their way after they had departed. I then took care of Hancock when he left. The last one I did was on Lewis. If I hadn't taken care of the last two, no one else would have. Just before my leaving, as a matter of fact, the day I got the word, Dorrough had moved down to the Chief of Maintenance with me. When I checked out he said he would write one up on me and see that it got out. Haven't heard anything yet, but it usually takes some time.

I think when I do get the chance (and enough money), I'll buy a good movie camera. That would be better here, especially in viewing the terrain and the people. Then I could send the film off for development

with your return address.

Likewise, it would be nice if you get an instamatic. I enjoyed the girls' school pictures and I know there'll be many changes in them all before I get back. When you do send some, don't forget yourself (and keep your eyes open!). The only ones I have of you now date back to Korea and Holy Cross!

I wrote to Mom again yesterday and also dropped a few words to the people back at Ellsworth. Haven't heard from Mom, other than the letter you forwarded.

Back to taking pictures again, I don't know when I'll get back to Saigon. It may be on business. I would like to get some pictures there however, since no place can be quite like it. I haven't seen the city of Da Nang yet, so I can't compare. Da Nang is the second largest city in the RVN. I might get into town some day.

After we've been here 4 months, we can put in for R&R. We can either go in country, the Philippines, Okinawa, Bangkok, or Hong Kong. If I could afford it, I'd like to get to Hong Kong, or as second choice, Bangkok. I could probably get some good clothes cheap in HK.

Time to go back to the pits. It's a hot walk. We work out of tents and Quonset type buildings. See you later.

Made it through the rest of the day without much excitement. As a matter of fact, I didn't get much done at all this afternoon. There was



Don Leta around the time of Korea

quite a bit of artillery being fired up into the hills shortly after supper. As long as it's "outgoing mail" they can keep it up as long as they wish.

Of late here, it's been pouring late at night and then on and off in the morning. It has cleared by noon but then you can imagine how hot and sultry it gets. I hope to get up to Marble Mountain tomorrow to visit the transmitter sites we have up there. They say you can see quite a bit when it's clear and then you realize how many rivers and waterways crisscross this terrain.

I don't know if I mentioned it before, but make sure that if you have to get a hold of me in an emergency to contact the Red Cross first thing. That's the quickest way to get word here. You might get their number for quick reference and also let your folks know about it.

Good night, my love. Miss you terribly and think of you always,

Your Leo

Da Nang, RVN

28 Nov 65

My darling,

I have two letters from you to answer today. The one you wrote 18 Nov didn't get here until yesterday. It was the one with Karen's letter enclosed. It got mis-sent to Guam. I also heard from Bob Bishop. His letter had my old address and it took 5 days to get to Tan Son Nhut, and another 7 days to get to Da Nang! Real good service out of those warriors.

There wasn't time to write last night. Friday night the troops on Monkey Mountain shot up the place. They called in the strike team from the base of the mountain and a Lt. Col. went up there with about 20 men. They sprayed the whole jungle with every weapon they had. The top of the mountain has the Da Nang Tropo site, a big relay with huge antennas through which all our circuits go. Everybody working there lives in a containment area at the base of the mountain. Both these areas are fenced and guarded. About half way up the mountain is where all this trouble has been. There we're installing a radio relay connecting us with Thailand. A couple giant parabolic antennas have been set up. There are a couple army vans with relay equipment and some AF vans with the new gear. Civilian contractors are doing the installation, but the equipment is manned by the Army and AF. The Army stuff is only there until our gear is complete. There's no sweat in the daytime, but at night there's only 2 Army troops in their van and one airman in the AF vans. Since I told you before we couldn't get guards, our own radio relay people have to do the guard work.

The old man was quite perturbed when he heard of all the shooting going on, and no one has hit anything yet. I'm sure the boys are so shook up that they're firing at shadows. We've heard stories from them about seeing people up there, monkeys with orange faces (probably baboons), apes up to 200 lbs and mountain lions. I expected elephants, too! Anyhow, Saturday night Grenier and I went up and sent all but the operators down to base camp. We had some field phones connected to the vans where we could get word to the operators. We settled down in the sandbagged bunker with our M-16's and everybody's ammo, looking like a couple of Mauldin's G.I. Joe characters. It was a raw rainy night as usual and we were wearing field jackets. Over that Grenier had a poncho and I had foul weather pants and top. With our hoods up and steel helmets on we had to laugh at each other as we settled down to wait.

It was about 6 PM by then and getting dark rapidly. We had spotted the trails through the jungles but in no time they were gone and we only had a general direction. The rest of it is so thick, no one could possibly come through it. Throughout the night as flares were fired at Da Nang East or near the base of the mountain we'd catch some of the light and be able to scan the area quickly. Periodically, the Marines were firing mortars somewhere on the mountain. After it got real dark, Grenier and I took turns moving about the area so we could see what a body looked like. I swear it was so dark and the clouds hung so low that we couldn't make out a body more than 15-20 yards. We had told the operators not to come out of their vans unless we told them to evacuate 'cause anything moving out there was fair game. It seems that every time a mortar went off or flares lit the area this colored boy in the Army van would call us and want to know what was going on. He was still thinking of the previous night's shooting. We sat there all night and didn't see a thing. Oh, if we wanted to, we could of imagined all sorts of

things. Foliage on trees moving in the wind, jungle noises, the tricks your eyes can play on you at night—all can make one jittery.

We had to show these kids that they were their own greatest enemy. In the week they had been there, they've fired over 4,000 rounds and have never been fired upon in return. We were either not going to shoot wild or get something for our efforts. Though we didn't see anything, they have previously picked up suspected VC in that area. I think this may have settled them down somewhat.

We were picked up at daybreak and came back to base. It was 9:30 by the time we breakfasted and showered. After being up 26 hours or so I was ready for the sack. I woke up in time to make Mass at 1700.

I'm glad to see the girls did so well in 6-week tests. Karen amazed me with the 92 in math, even though I must say I was surprised at her low English grade. I should say Lanis & Steph are doing well, with one of them narrating the class play and the other president of her class. That's pretty good for new kids in school. I don't know, maybe so much homework hurts rather than helps Karen. I'm a strong believer that you can get saturated by too much to the point where really you're only spinning your wheels and not learning anymore.

I was happy to hear that you like the doctor who checked you. Perhaps he's right and we should strongly consider an hysterectomy. Definitely something will have to be done about your legs also. Gee, how I wish I could be with you during these next few months my sweet. I know there's no good time for us to be separated, but it seems with everything happening that this is one of the worst times. It all the more convinces me that I must take steps to see that we're not apart like this again. When this is over with I feel we'll have done our duty and others can help carry the load.

Rain again yesterday and today, though not downpours like last week. I think the sun has been out only 3-4 hours in the past ten days.

It sure makes things dreary. It's past 10 o'clock now and I've got to get ready for the sack. Good night, my love. I'll lie down again and think about you—about us—and the things we've done together. Though a poor substitute, thinking of having you in my arms again at least helps a little to soothe the pain of being parted. I love you so very, very much,
Don Leta.

Your Leo

13 Dec 65
Danang, RVN

My dearest Don Leta,

The hardest part of this assignment to a combat zone is the feeling that in some way you could take a greater part but are in some way prevented. Still, every now and then someone sneaks off on a mission, mostly as a machine-gunner on one of the helicopters. In a way it's ridiculous, since unqualified people manning these weapons put everyone else in jeopardy, plus which, if anything happened it would be "not in the line of duty" since it's forbidden. I think in many cases we have to close one eye to these happenings, however, especially after a day like today when 6 planes loaded with bodies of Marines left Da Nang. This was a result of the melee which is mentioned in the enclosed clipping, and which is still going on. The "light" or "moderate" casualties we read about don't always tell the full story.

Not much new workwise except that, shades of stateside, we're expecting a Pacific Command (Hawaii) inspection next month. That really shakes the heck out of me! But of course we have to go thru all sorts of ridiculous and silly routines to try to satisfy them. That's like trying to get the pig pen spotless 'cause the Secretary of Agriculture is coming for lunch.

I did want to write tonight, my darling, even though you can already see there's not much to enlighten your day. As times go on, I am more and more sorry and feel so helpless than I'm not with you – to help you with all the little things that have to be done day in and day out. Maybe my saying I want to help you is just an excuse and what I really mean is that I want to be near you – but regardless, I would help you if I

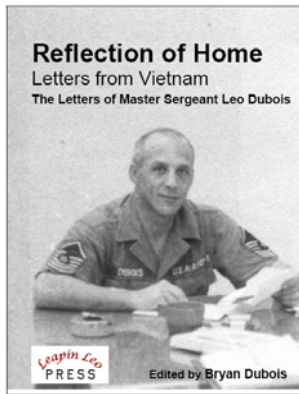
were near, so that's all that matters. Don Leta, I love you so very much. Can you possibly understand? Do you think it possible in any way that there could be any doubt in your mind? My love, you and you alone mean more to me than anything, and I mean anything, in this world. I want so much to be able to speak these words to you. I hope, my sweet, that you don't think old dad is depressed and discouraged. Far from it. Rather, it's more that I'm happier for the opportunity to stop and meditate on what really counts to me in this world. Yes, I get discouraged and a bit disgusted at times. All of us do. But more often are the times, for me, when I rejoice at what has been given me – wonderful children and a mother for which I can truly find no equal – an understanding mate, an exemplary mother, and a loving girl.

You're just going to turn around now and say I'm being silly, or I'm exaggerating, or I'm getting battle-weary. That's not the case, Don Leta, believe me. It's just that I've been so long ...these many (yet few), years when I should have told you this. Let it stand for now that I love you – God how I love you – and I hope and pray that I can come back to tell you and show you, over and over and over again, how very much you mean to me.

Yours, now & forever,

Leo

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Read the letters two ways: as a complete volume available for download at once and, at your option, as a unique email service.

The email service sends a letter every one, two or three days for a year approximating the pace of their original delivery. Some people are surprised how they have enjoyed the “every few days” aspect of the email experience. Readers pause to appreciate Leo’s words, then anticipate the next letter.

DA NANG, RVN

25 Dec 1965

My Beloved,

This is one of the happiest days of the year for mankind, heralding the birth of the Prince of Peace. Yet, it is probably one of the saddest days I have ever known. I've put off this letter all day, though hardly a minute passed without my thoughts being with you. It was like I couldn't bring myself to sitting down to write, because that would make me concentrate on this thought all the more, and I felt too weak to cope with it.

Christmas here has generally been false time for celebration – with the majority of the people drinking and carrying on, trying to convince themselves that they were having a ball. We were scheduled to work right through Christmas day, but when word of the 30- hour cease fire was passed, we converted to skeleton crews. Starting early yesterday, just about everyone started “celebrating,” it going on into the early morning hours. I'll bet there wasn't more than 7 or 8 sober people, including Grenier, Carter and me. Perhaps we would have been better off joining them!

On Christmas day things were pretty quiet, what with all the hangovers. Also, it turned into quite a somber day – a few minutes of sunshine in the morning and heavy rains in the afternoon. Even though I was up well past midnight (2 A.M.), I couldn't sleep and I didn't go to midnight mass. I waited until 1300 so that I could attend a Christmas Mass celebrated at the base of Hill 327 by Cardinal Spellman. It was quite a sight. A couple Air Force busses ran us out there, an area

occupied by Marines. It was quite gloomy, and the ground wet and soggy. It was a sight not soon to be forgotten, lines of people receiving holy communion with slung rifles and hanging bayonets. Cardinal Spellman arrived by helicopter, and as I watched him make his way to the improvised altar, I venture to say this will be the last Christmas Mass he'll be able to say among his troops. He walked feebly, held on either side and you couldn't help but wonder if he'd make it. What made the celebration particularly touching was a Vietnamese chorus - men, women and children. They would each sing hymns in Latin, like one responding to the other. It was especially beautiful when the girls and women came in. In typical Oriental voice, high pitched and clear as a bell, you were tempted to close your eyes and try to see the angels singing.

The sun shone briefly over the silent field as the Cardinal moved ever so slowly through the ceremony, never leaving his one position at the center of the altar. Throughout it all, MP's kept scanning the hills for any sign of unnatural movement. After Mass, Cardinal Spellman removed his vestments and stepped forward to address his soldiers. You could hear a pin drop as he said how honored he was that the Lord had allowed him to come here once more, and that he knew that this could well be his last. This old man's voice fell on all sorts of people, clean and dirty, combed and unshaven, and yet not a murmur. The second he finished and turned, the skies opened and rain fell by the bucketfull.

Free Christmas dinners at the club today and I didn't eat until I got back from Mass - about 3 P.M. The rest of the afternoon was quite uneventful until 5 o'clock when I received a wonderful letter from the sweetest girl in the world.

Sugar bun, I'm sorry if in some of my writings I give the impression that I may doubt that you love me as I do you. This is not it at all. What I am trying to do, in my own clumsy way, is trying, through the

inadequacy of words, to make you feel how strongly and deeply my love is for you. I'm deeply flattered and honored to know that you feel you couldn't re-marry if we were no longer together, and let's face it, every man likes to hear this since it feeds his ego. However, I know it means more than that to us. It goes much deeper and is really a way of saying we could never replace each other. The thing is, and you probably feel the same way, that I know I love you so much and it's so much inside of me and growing, like a child, that it's impossible to believe anyone else could feel the same. This is what's making this year's separation so hard – to not be with you while my love continues to grow. I don't want to sound like I'm sorry for myself; rather, I'm saddened by this increasing feeling of two persons becoming more and more like one and being unable to be together, physically, to enjoy it. We are together, my happiness, in all other ways and that is what must sustain us through these days. Oh, my Don Leta, I love you so very much.

Things sure seem unnatural today – too quiet. No jets flying or guns booming. A few choppers and light observation planes have gone aloft, as well as an occasional transport, but that's all. This morning one of the observation planes kept circling the Marine & Air Force areas and the city of Da Nang. It was one of those rigged out for propaganda flights – P.A. system with large amplifiers – and it was playing Christmas carols. You couldn't hear the plane hardly and yet this music was coming out of the sky quite clearly.

Tomorrow is Sunday, so this will be the first 2-day weekend we've had. Also, restriction comes off tomorrow, so many people will make themselves scarce hereabouts. This morning, the First Shirt came in with orders for people going back home - 7 or 8 of them – and woke them all up with a “ho, ho, ho” and gave them their orders as a Christmas present. We've got a fine F/Sgt (MSgt Hodgson), and he's retiring when he goes back around August.

That's about it for now, my sweet. It must be the thought of it being Christmas that he made this day so sad for me. But the time is passing by, however slowly, and the day will be with us in the near future when we can live again. Good night, my angel, and take extra good care of yourself for me.

Your devoted Leo

DANANG, RVN

Friday, 21 JAN 66

My Beloved Wife,

There are time that even before I sit to write to you, nothing of news is on my mind, but only the teasing feeling of loneliness and longing for you. After having spent those six weeks apart while I went to the NCO Academy, I had no idea whatsoever that these past 3 months could be so long. At least, on that last trip I knew it would all be over in a short time, while now what has already passed must be endured another 3 times before 12 months are completed.

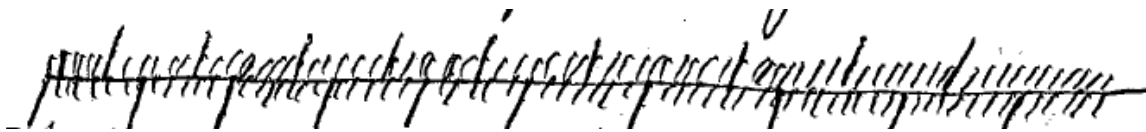
I've read and re-read your last two letters, those I received yesterday and today, and I've taken out the pictures I have over and over again. I've come to Vietnam with but one thought in mind—to do the best I could for what is a good cause. Towards this end I have had but one prayer, that I have the strength to serve with honor. My guiding words are, and remain, That... "greater love than this hath no man, than he who lays down his life for his friend." Through all this, little did I initially realize that the greatest suffering I would be asked to endure would be the separation from my loved ones. Don Leta, I know we will make it through this one, but I could not stand even the thought of having to do it again. I pray that some type of solution or ending is found, for escalation would probably mean extension of duty. If this must be, then so be it, but I can never miss you more than I do now.

It's strange how at certain times I get to feeling so melancholy. This usually gets when I spend too much time thinking, instead of finding some way to keep busy. I did have ways to get out of that and

keep busy today as we ran into a multitude of problems with our power. A scheduled change from base power to emergency power didn't come out too good and we were kept hopping a good part of the day getting facilities and circuits back on the air.

Those pictures of Paul are real cute. He sure looks like he has dark eyes. I feel like I could just hug him. He does look like he could be a handful and a half when turned loose. I got the letter with Paul's pictures today and the one with Mom's pictures yesterday, though the first letter was written 2 days after the other. Quite the mail service!

Boy, last night was something else. I lay on the sack somewhere around 6:30 and woke up at 9:30. By then the Vietnamese were starting their celebration of Tet with fireworks. It was sporadic until midnight, and then everything broke loose, and it kept on till morning. They have no elaborate fireworks like roman candles or aerial displays; it's almost all firecrackers. The part that shocked me is that most, or at least a great part of it is done indoors! The object of it all supposedly is that they're chasing the evil spirit out of the house so they can start the year with a clean slate, so to speak. They have strings of firecrackers that won't quit, either. Some are 3 deep on each side, 12 feet long, like this:



They're each 2 inch salutes, interspersed with 4 or 5 inch ones. Let me tell you it's a long blasting string. If you remember what the finale is like at fireworks displays in the states, try to imagine it 2 or 3 times as bad, and lasting from midnight to 6 A.M.! It must have been 1:30 or so by the time I went to sleep, and I woke up in the morning to the sound of more fireworks.

I think I may already have mentioned it, but you ask in one of your letters about buying a table and chairs. Of course do so. As far as that goes, get anything else we might need while you can. In case there's any loot left over, here's a couple of clues for any package you might send in the future:

2 pairs black shoelaces—24”

40 banana breads/apple cakes

Canned beans/brown bread

No more chocolate—this climate is murder on it.

One old spoon and fork.

As much of you as possible.

Made it to the movies tonight, the first in over a week. They just haven't had much of anything on. This was “A Shot in the Dark”, a comedy with Peter Sellers, and I haven't laughed so much in ages. I even had tears from laughing so much. Of course it was silly, but a welcome break in the routine.

I've got to get with it and take a shower and hit the sack again. Here it is time for lights out already—as a matter of fact, they just went out, but I still have a lamp.

As you've mentioned previously, my darling, I sort of hate also to get to this part of the letter because I feel so inadequate when trying to say how much I love you and miss you. More often than not I will have to stop here, close my eyes and try to picture the times past when we were together—How very wonderful were those times, and how little did I realize it then. Perhaps it will be like that again, but I can't imagine it anything but finer, if possible, since I can so much more appreciate it now. To see you; to talk to you, hold you, kiss you—oh my love, I want you so very much. It's really strange how a thought can be both wonderful and sad at the same time—like thinking of having held you close and being unable to do it now. And the many times I've laid down

and found myself reaching into emptiness, looking for you—hoping to touch you and to have you hold me –only to find it wasn't to be.

Don Leta, my love, I miss you in so many different ways.

Take real good care of yourself for me my love, until I return. After that I will take care of you forever

*- this I promise.
Your loving
Leo*



Other Highlights of the First Quarter

- Letter 7 A Master Sergeant's Pay
- Letter 8 "I've only been at it 2 days, but it looks like I'll be getting some backing."
- Letter 13 Leo's self-portrait and drawings of the bad guys
- Letter 14 A drawing of the compound
- Letter 23 Airman L__ Cracks Up
- Letter 23 Leo's longing for Don Leta compared to the Korea; A Long Devotional
- Letter 38 New Year's Eve Plans
- Letter 39 A Vow: No More Children
- Letter 44 Rats, Bats & Mosquitoes
- Letter 45 "I'm just going to have to go ahead with something, even if there's a good chance of failure."

- Letter 46 A B-57 Blows Up

DA NANG, RVN

3 April 66

Sunday

My Happiness,

It was such a nice day today, and I spent it all just lazying around. All, that is, but about an hour or so when I had to get some people together about a problem. It was warm but there was a light breeze. Sitting outside for a while it seemed impossible that people in other parts of this land were plodding through rice paddies, up in the mountains or in the jungle, intent on doing battle. Here's a bright sunny day, and off snarls a jet, bombs prominently hanging on its underside. From the other side comes a helicopter, doors open and the machine guns plainly seen pointing out – and then another, and another. You watch and wonder where they'll set down. If it's the flight line, you don't pay too much attention, but if they drop straight down the road you know there are casualties and you automatically count the number of them coming in. Big battles you don't hear about for a couple days later are foretold by counting these arrivals. It makes some of us wonder, sometimes, why we should be so fortunate as to remain here within our little circle of relative comfort, where for others to come here a day or two is a great period of rest and relaxation.

Things don't seem to be quieting any in Da Nang. It was reiterated that anyone leaving the base for any reason would automatically be given Article 15 or Courts Martial'd. Most Vietnamese are back at work on base, but there's considerable political activity in town – nothing threatening this base, however. They just want to make sure it stays that way by no one getting involved. It's going on a month that town has been off limits now, and all the shack rats are really hurting! Poor souls!!

No mail in a couple days – understandably. I know you’ll really have your hands full now with that houseful, so don’t worry, I’ll be expecting nowhere near as many letters hereafter. Realistically, I’ll be glad to get one letter a week from my honeybunch. Only wish I was back with you so letters wouldn’t be needed at all. Gosh how I miss you, Don Leta. It still seems so awfully long to go yet – over six months. I know it wouldn’t be half so bad if I just didn’t miss you and love you so much – but I wouldn’t change that in any way. I know I’ll probably be just about speechless when we see each other again, even though there’s so much to say – so much I want you to know.

Green and I never did get to throw our promotion party. As a matter of fact, we both ended up working well past quitting time Saturday. We plan on having it next weekend – and this time we’ll have help. Sgt Telthorster (never heard that name before) came to the outfit about 3 weeks ago. He’s in operations. Yesterday a message came in that he made CMSgt¹. Since promotions were effective the 1st, he was really caught by surprise.

There’s not much to report, sweetheart. Things just keep going their slow, plodding way. I’m getting to believe that Sundays are not so hot here when you’re off duty. At least, not for guys like me. It drags too much, and gives me too much time to think. Like now, I’ve figured there’s 205 days to 26 October – maybe around 190 before I leave here. This whole day, which seems to have lasted 110 hours, only chopped one measly day off the total. Oh well, maybe tomorrow will fly by and I’ll feel better because it passes without my having had much time to count it.

You make sure to watch yourself and take extra good care for me. I love you so very much, my dearest.

Your Leo

kk-A

¹ CMSgt Chief Master Sergeant (E-9), the highest enlisted rank.

DA NANG, RVN
5 May 66, Thurs.

Hi Honeybunch,

Another day gone by and I'm back at the shop now. It's about 9:15 PM and I was going to go to see Jack Lemmon in "How to Murder Your Wife" but there was too much of a line for me. It's still on tomorrow so I'll probably make it then.

After chow tonight I stretched out on the sack and conked out. Didn't make it up until 8:30. Went to the club and had a couple of cups of real potent coffee so I'm wide awake now. I'll probably play heck trying to get to sleep tonight. Oh, I was talking about the movies before, so I thought of sending you an excerpt from the daily bulletin. Every day there's some comment about the theatre and the movie that's playing. The guy who writes it must be a frustrated comic. Some of his descriptions are cute though, especially when he's describing some ridiculous movie of the type like "Monster from Outer Space" or one of those "A La Go-Go" things.

We had about a one hour respite in my office just before quitting time. This construction man from RMK, the civilian construction company working here for the government, was in putting a hole in our ceiling to duct the air conditioning. We were gabbing while his 4 Vietnamese workers were cutting the hole and he asked if any of us spoke French. Currier and I both do, so he told us to ask this one Vietnamese if the thing looked OK to him and how much of a job it was going to be. That's all we needed. We ended up talking with him for an hour, and he wouldn't much quit. One of the other Vietnamese also talked French and by then Grenier came in so we really had a session.

He had been in the French army for 10 years, was 44 years old and had 7 kids. He'd been to France, Italy and Germany. I showed him the pictures on my desk and the set of them in my drawer. Just like these people too, they go ape over that stuff. The two who didn't speak French kept asking the other two who was this one and who was that one. They said I had a "jolie" (handsome/pretty) family and that I must be "malheureux" (sad) to be separated from them. They thought my wife was "tres jolie" – very pretty. They all started jabbering and pointing when they saw Bryan's picture near the sign of Da Nang. They thought there was a Da Nang in the U.S. and I had to explain what it was. You asked again if I had received those pictures. As you can see I did, but thought I had mentioned it before.

There was another letter from my girl (you!) today. Actually, I haven't been expecting as many letters as you've written, figuring you'd be pretty well tied up with all you have to keep up with now. You mention having received but two letters last week – I know there was a stretch where I skipped quite a few days, like when I went up to Dang Ha. I've written every day the past week or so, however.

I enjoyed your relating Bryan's comments on what he was going to be when he grows up and forgetting Lorenda's name. I guess I'll let him be a doctor since that's where the money is, but if things keep up the way they're going he'll probably be another G.I. in Southeast Asia.



Bryan with helmet and rifle, 1966, in "Da Nang, Texas". This picture was taken beside US-281 about three miles south of Perrin, TX. See the story below.

Nothing more news today. Everything was pretty routine, as a matter of fact I got quite a bit done since not too many problems popped up. My biggest accomplishment was getting rid of another day, leaving me with 171 days and a wake up. Today we had our first commercial freight flight direct to and out of Da Nang. On one June they're supposed to start passenger service directly out of here to the states. Right now we have to go to Saigon to catch our flights. So I guess when I'm ready, I'll get right on here, go to Japan and then on to Texas.

Good night, my sweet. I love you loads and miss you tremendously. You're my own sweet honeybunch.

Your Leo

ps-C

Re-Discovering Da Nang, Texas

I remember a trip from Jacksboro to the hospital at Fort Wolters in Mineral Wells. Mom stopped and took this picture of me standing by a sign, wearing a plastic helmet and holding a toy rifle. I was tickled to discover my father's reference:

"They all started jabbering and pointing when they saw Bryan's picture near the sign of Da Nang. They thought there was a Da Nang in the U.S. and I had to explain what it was."

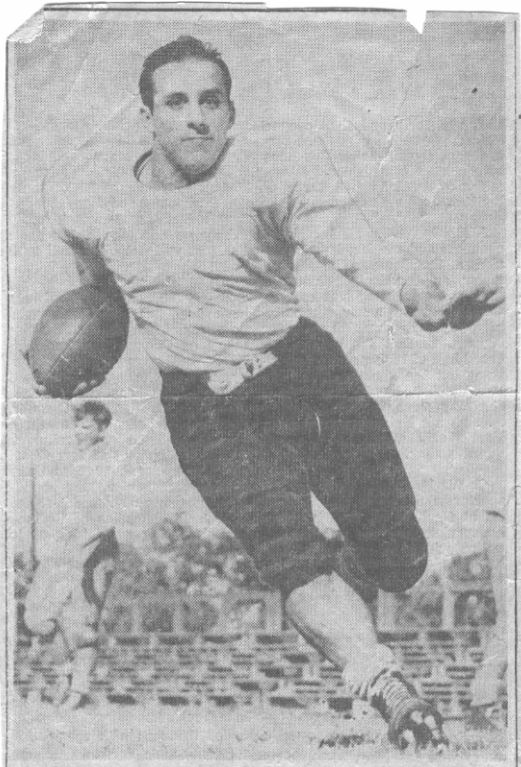


What was "Da Nang" doing in the middle of Texas? I had a notion, but I needed to find out the whole story. I did some research on the internet and found out that Fort Wolters was an Army helicopter school during the war. The fort has been closed for years, but at the time there were about 1,500 helicopters in use there. (The property is now a business park with some of the facilities put to commercial use. Many abandoned buildings remain, including the hospital

where Lynn was born. It makes an interesting auto tour. The Wolters Industrial Park is on the eastern end of Mineral Wells.)

Fort Wolters, proper, had several large landing fields. To give the pilots cross-country flight practice, about 25 small landing strips were constructed in the surrounding counties. The landing strips were given names of Vietnamese towns and geographic points and were laid out on compass bearings approximating the actual points in Vietnam.

Research in the Gladys Johnson Library in Jacksboro turned up a 1966 Jacksboro Gazette-News article about the helicopter school. *“Jacksboro is along two of the cross-country flight routes and one of the staging areas. Da Nang is about three miles south of Perrin”* With this clue, I turned to Google maps and aerial photos. To see the remnant of the landing site from the air, go to Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) and enter “Perrin, TX”. Follow US-281 south for about 2 miles. The landing strips can be seen in the Google “satellite” imagery. Look for three, parallel features running north-to-south, located southwest of the intersection of US-281 and Rambling Road. They can be viewed from the ground, though with some difficulty, by driving slowly along Rambling Road and gazing across the field while the landing strips come into north-south alignment.



Other Highlights of the Second Quarter

- Letter 64 Whisky and Women
- Letter 70 Troop Trouble - How the NCO Earns His Pay
- Letter 72 Letters from Stephanie's class; "Stephanie has a boyfriend"
- Letter 79 Little Chance of Promotion This Year
- Letter 84 Promotion
- Letter 88 Teletype Message - Baby Lynn Marie is born
- Letter 91 A Lesson in Price Control . . . on Beer
- Letter 93 Devotional to Don Leta - "to hold your hand in front of people"

DaNang, RVN

13 June 1966

My sweetgirl,

I've just been sitting here spooning a bit again while thinking of you. I miss you so much and 134 days still seems like such a long time to go yet. With three billion people on earth, how come I miss one woman so? I'm just in such a hurry for all this to be over with and for me to be going back home that now it just seems to be dragging all the more. Well, this month is just about half over, so I guess time is still moving on after all.

Yesterday was miserable here. It must have been the hottest day yet. It was hot again today, but not nearly as uncomfortable as yesterday. I was going to go to Monkey Mountain but put it off 'cause I dreaded the hot, dusty drive.

There was a letter for me from my honeybunch today. Sweet, that's another reason I want to be back – to help with the kids. You mentioned Karen again, and her tantrums and going into a rage. I hope the doctor can tell you something when you take her tomorrow, even though none of them have seemed too encouraging so far. She surely hasn't been getting any better. Was she quite that bad before the last time they changed her medicine? I'm surprised the teacher hadn't reported her conduct as being rebellious or anything, even though I remember you mentioned she said Karen had seemed depressed. Do you suppose she just does her fussing and feuding at home? I can't help but worry about it, knowing you have five others to keep up with, and here I am unable to help at all. Make sure you get the word to the Red Cross if anything goes wrong, and keep me advised of what develops. Don't just skip it over 'cause you don't want me to worry. That will just make me worry all the more. A little mortar fire around here

doesn't bother me nearly as much as the uncertainty of wondering how you're going to take care of everything back home all by yourself.

About 6-7 more guys got their assignments this weekend – some happy, some not so happy. One guy wanted California and got Lackland. Another wanted the southeast and got Kansas. One guy wanted overseas and ended up in the Midwest. The others all got their first or second choices.

There's just nothing new here. We're still restricted to the base, the movies are too crowded, the BX still doesn't have too much to offer, the NCO Club is too hot, and the bowling alleys, golf course, race track and swimming pool haven't been built yet! It's just the routine of up around 6:30 and back to the barracks somewhere in the vicinity of midnight. I'm afraid that routine will be pretty much the same for another 130 days or so.

So, good night for now, sweet girl. You've just been so wonderful to me and for me all these years. I'll be thinking of you again well into the night, and how my heart and all of me can feel the longing pains of wanting you. I love you so.

Your Leo



Karen, 13, was the oldest in our family. I remember her as artistic and witty, always creative. I smiled earlier when I read my father's mention of the letters she wrote him. On this day, though, Leo worries about her moodiness and depression.

From half a world away, does he have the power to help? We fear that even if he were miraculously transported home, he would bring not a cure, only companionship. We fear the unspoken in his instruction, "Get the word to the Red Cross if anything goes wrong".



Other Highlights of the Third Quarter

- Letter 154 "I'm now resolved all that is past and gone. . ."
- Letter 157 Ridiculous! - The Absurdities of Military Life
- Letter 161 Hunt for the Last Modem
- Letter 164 Leo Wavers on R & R; Why Does He Avoiding It ?
- Letter 165 Operators and String Pullers
- Letter 168 Paperwork and Stateside Regulations
- Letter 172 Selecting the Airman of the Month – Leo Poses a Question
- Letter 179 Leo Starts a Rumor

DA NANG, RVN

24 AUG 66

Happy Birthday, My Love,

I've just been talking to our MARS¹ operator, hoping to get a phone patch through to you. We had the states but there was too much interference so they're going to keep trying and call back. I didn't figure they'd get through until around 9 P.M., our time, so I went to chow. When I got back they told me MARS had called ten minutes earlier. They said they had a good clear shot at that time.

There was no mail today for the fourth day and I was wondering if anything was wrong. That wasn't my primary reason for trying to get this call though since I had been planning it originally for our anniversary. However, at that time the station was down. It's supposed to be better in a week or so, once we replaced the antenna. The one that's on now had toppled and got badly bent, but usable.

It's 8:40 P.M. now and I just got a call from Sgt Buenavitas at MARS saying they were just now getting up with the states and he would call me first as soon as they got through. I've been holding off writing any more until I see if I get to talk to you. Oh, I miss you so much, my sweet, that I even feel wobbly sitting here thinking that I may get to hear your voice in a few minutes.

We've reached the 11 P.M. mark now and still no contact. Lt Nelson was just in the shop and we've been talking business for the past hour. I'll be waiting up as long as MARS is still trying to make contact. They've been making contact with Sacramento and San Diego but can't seem to hold a steady receive signal at this end.

¹ MARS Military Amateur Radio System; now Military Affiliate Radio System, a network of licensed amateur radio operators.

Well! Finally got through around 12:30 A.M. our time and it's too bad we had such a bad phone patch. Most of the time I could make out your voice but couldn't tell what you were saying because of the static. I understand I was coming through to you fairly well. Isn't it funny though; I had so many things running through my head while waiting—things to ask, sweet words, etc.—but come time to talk they had all deserted me. Then of course there's always that psychological barrier when knowing there are people at both ends monitoring the call. A couple of your replies were picked up by the operator and relayed to me.

I don't guess I'll be going to Hong Kong unless Maj Linkenfelter gets me a hop when he goes. He said he'd be flying either there or Bangkok before very long. If so I'll go with him if he has room. Otherwise, I'll skip it entirely. I've ordered a couple of things through the BX already and I'm getting short enough over here now that staying these next couple months won't bother me.

I had also asked about Karen—how she was doing. Last letter I had from you said you were going for the appointment at Carswell. I was glad to hear she seemed to be doing well. Green just told me that he talked to the mail clerk tonight and he said the mail must be pigeonholed somewhere since he's gotten very little air mail delivery the past 3 days.

Buck, Green and Grenier were all here when MARS called me. We were all eating some of your preserves - - - on graham crackers - - - with coffee. When the phone rang, they all got on the extension right quick, just to tease me. But then they hung up and left the room.

Even though it was a poor quality circuit, it was so nice hearing the sound of your voice. I don't know why I should have expected it to sound any differently, but it's just been so long since I heard it. Gosh but I miss you, sweetheart. It's 61 days until DEROS, so it should be less than 60 before I leave here, and believe me that can't move fast

enough. Just thinking of hearing your voice again now almost makes me shake. Oh, if only I could be holding you close this minute. Then, on top of that, looking at the latest pictures of you right now only makes the ache in my heart and in my body more intense. Golly, how could I ever miss anyone so much and have these strong feelings continuously increasing. I keep telling myself to calm down now, that I'll just have to be patient and pretty soon it'll come to an end. Then right afterwards it starts all over again. I love you, my dearest Don Leta, from the very depths of my heart. Be sweet, my happiness, and take extra good care of yourself for me. When I return I'll grasp you and never let you go! Then there'll be no part of you that will not know my kisses—and as soon as I'm finished, I intend to start all over again. Right now I'd be happy just to hold your hand, and press it gently, knowing that you were near me. Good night, my beloved.

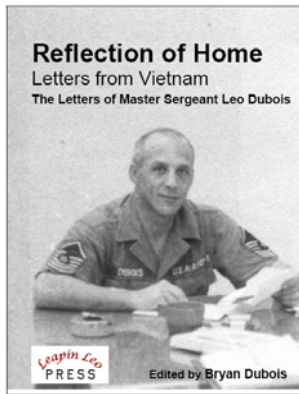
Your Leo

As I folded this letter, I looked
at the heading and remembered:
The first thing I had planned on
saying to you was “happy birthday”,
See what you do to me—even
from 10,000 miles?



Other Highlights of the Fourth Quarter

- Letter 182 Contraception, Children and God's Will
- Letter 188 Big John – A Typical Wire Man
- Letter 189 Leo and Don Leta's Anniversary
- Letter 196 An Exclusive Gift – The Love of Husband and Wife
- Letter 210 Leo won't leave again "unless it was a question of national survival"
- Letter 213 "Bring the kids along to pick me up"
- Letter 225 Cooped Up, The Troops Only Drink and Fight
- Letter 231 Leo's Contribution to the Cost Reduction Program
- Letter 242 A Woman Has Come Between Two Close Comrades
- Epilogue



Reflection of Home: Letters from Vietnam – The Letters of Master Sergeant Leo Dubois Available for download from www.leapinleo.com. (Format: .pdf, 587 pages, \$9.95)

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