



FROM THE MAJOR *to the Missus*

Letters from the War in Vietnam, October 1966–October 1967

written by Major Ray B. Stice to Elizabeth "Gig" Stice
transcribed and edited by Robin Stice Maroney with John M. Curatola



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to the Missus



A U.S. Marine Corps Grumman TF-9J Cougar of Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron 13 (H&MS-13) at Chu Lai, Vietnam, ca. 1967

Source: official U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation photo 1996.253.7404.005.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

In 2022, the staff at the History Division Archives suggested that a collection contributor contact Marine Corps University Press (MCUP) about publishing the war letters between their parents while the father was deployed as a Marine Corps aviator in Vietnam between October 1966 and October 1967. The collection represented just one of the voluminous works held by the Stice family, representing decades of correspondence between family members at home and on the war front.

To date, not much, scholarly or otherwise, has been published on this topic with the intent of illustrating in startlingly honest detail both sides of a military deployment—the servicemember and the spouse. We have seen our share of historical nonfiction and trade fiction on American warfighters’ experiences when put in harm’s way, though none quite captured the impact of their military service on those left behind—spouses, parents, children, communities—attempting to come to grips with the fact that a hole is now present in their daily lives.

The pages that follow offer the love letters of a husband and wife—Major Ray B. Stice and Elizabeth “Gig” Stice—at their best and sometimes their worst as a couple and as individuals struggling to make a difficult situation work. This printing represents as closely as possible the original transcribed letters, with minor alterations to the text based on current standards for style, grammar, punctuation, and spelling, but also to accommodate space constraints of the publishing process. Due to the pass-

ing of time and the challenges of transcription, some information may not be complete or the names/terms left as per the original because verification simply was not possible. In some instances, we have retained the original spelling of specific places and things as they represent the accepted spelling for the historical period. Further, editorial text, informational footnotes, and citations have been inserted to provide additional context, to educate the reader on social and historical terms from the period, and to allow for additional research later.

At times, the couple's letters venture into sensitive areas, including the sociocultural and political issues of the day, the tension caused by distance in a marriage, at times using terms that some readers may find offensive. We include these blemishes, not with the intention of drawing attention to or supporting what would be considered by many as derogatory but to celebrate the highs and lows of military service and the families who give our troops the strength and support they need to deploy bearing America's flag.

Angela J. Anderson

Director

Marine Corps University Press

FOREWORD

Much has been written about the Vietnam War. We know the history of the war, battles, individual heroics, and the stories of prisoners of war (POWs). Unfortunately, we do not have a clear picture of Vietnam's impact on the families of those who fought in the war. The collection of letters in *From the Major to the Missus* tells about one family's Vietnam experience.

During Marine Corps major Ray B. Stice's tour in Vietnam between 1966 and 1967, he and his wife Elizabeth "Gig" Stice exchanged letters on a daily basis. Their children also sent letters to their father. Thankfully, Ray and his family kept those letters for the many decades and moves that passed. Those letters portray the love and dedication of a military family despite being separated by more than 9,000 miles. While Ray faced the dangers of combat as a fighter pilot, Gig raised their four children in a rental home in Austin, Texas.

Military spouses rarely get enough credit. Not only did Gig worry about her husband's service in a war zone, but she handled all of the household demands of a large family. The couple's letters cover daily activities in their lives. As a combat veteran myself, I knew the importance of mail call. Mail on the home front was equally important.

As a Marine who served in numerous deployments without my family, I can relate to the Stice family. My wife Dena and I had seven children. Although Gig and Dena never met, they understood the demands of the

Corps and what it means to be a Marine. Both ladies worried that there might be a knock on the door with news no family ever wanted to hear. Military wives are to be treasured. In many ways, Gig Stice represents military wives throughout history. Those special women, including Gig Stice, neither receive proper recognition nor medals for serving our nation.

As you read this book, you will learn about a Marine officer who balanced his military duties with his responsibilities as a husband and father. Some of his letters spoke directly to his children in an effort to maintain that connection while so far away. Major Stice's letters demonstrate both humor and candor, just as Gig Stice's letters show her strength and growing independence.

I first met Ray Stice after I succeeded Lieutenant Colonel Kenny C. Palmer as commander of Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13). I knew Kenny Palmer well and he spoke highly of Ray Stice. Ray and I shared a common bond. We were both mustangs—enlisted men who became Marine officers and then aviators. I saw firsthand the impact Major Stice had on MABS-13. During his time with the squadron, Stice served as the executive officer (XO). As XO, Major Stice made sure that his fellow Marines had housing, workspace, and drinking water. Major Stice was also a decorated fighter pilot who earned 12 Air Medals. His work as the XO earned Stice the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with the Silver Star “for meritorious service in connection with operations against insurgent communist forces.” Stice also earned the Navy Commendation Medal. In the citation for Stice's commendation, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific commanding general, Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, wrote:

Displaying exceptional initiative and resourcefulness, he [Stice] worked tirelessly to maintain the squadron's operational effectiveness during a period of increasing combat missions and numerous personnel rotations. Despite extremely adverse weather conditions and the constant threat of enemy fire, he accomplished all of tasks efficiently and expeditiously. His steadfast determination and seemingly unlimited resourcefulness earned the respect and admiration of all with whom he served and contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission.

As I meet fellow Vietnam veterans, I urge them to share their stories with their families. Thousands of Americans served in Vietnam between

1962 and 1975, and history demands that we know the individual stories of those who served and sacrificed in Vietnam. Children and grandchildren need to hear those stories to better understand their family's connection with Vietnam and the United States' role in the war. Fortunately, Ray and Gig Stice saved their precious letters. As you read *From the Major to the Missus*, you will get a new perspective on Vietnam. You already know the impact of war on the battlefield. This book helps readers understand the human side of war and the effect it has on individual families of servicemembers.

At the height of the war, more than a half a million Americans served in Vietnam. Nearly 60,000 names of servicemembers who never came home are etched on a memorial wall in Washington, DC. Only recently, our nation finally recognized and honored those who served in Vietnam.

I want to thank Ray and Gig's daughter, Robin Stice Maroney, for transcribing, editing, and sharing her family's letters. Robin and her sisters'—Karen Stice Ratliff and Kathy Stice Blanchard—efforts further show the love her parents had for each other. *From the Major to the Missus* shares private thoughts and life's challenges in combat and at home, offering a rare look into the lives of a special Marine Corps family.

*Lieutenant General Richard E. Carey
United States Marine Corps (Ret)*

PREFACE

By Robin Stice Maroney

Background

My father, Major Ray B. Stice, was 38 years old when he served as a U.S. Marine Corps fighter pilot in Chu Lai, South Vietnam (officially the Republic of Vietnam). He and Elizabeth (he lovingly called her “Gig”) Kirkpatrick Stice had been married for 12 years prior to him leaving for Vietnam. The Stices had four children together—Karen, Robin, Kirk, and Kathy—and they lived in Austin, Texas. Ray Stice flew 163 combat missions during the war and was awarded 12 Air Medals, including a Bronze Star, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Bronze Star for heroic action for his “tireless Devotion to Duty, Professional Skill and Exemplary Leadership upholding the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”¹ Ray graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, the University of Illinois, and attended the University of Omaha in Nebraska.

Gig was 36 years old when Ray left to serve his tour of duty in Vietnam. She was a U.S. Army officer’s daughter, who traveled the world with her family the first 25 years of her life to different Army posts. Gig attended Austin High School and graduated from the University of Texas with a bachelor’s degree in English, where she was also a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma. After graduation, she married Ray and became a

¹ Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry citation, Maj Ray B. Stice, 24 July 1967, in family collection.

Figure 1. The Stice children playing in Cherry Point, NC, ca. 1958



Source: Stice family collection.

Marine officer's wife. The family moved around frequently for another 15 years within the United States to different Marine Corps air stations until Ray retired in 1970. The final move was back to Austin so Gig could be close to her mother, Priscilla Kirkpatrick. Gig often said she spent so many years of her life moving or in a car due to the military (40 years) that when she finally settled down, she never wanted to travel again, although she never said no to a fun expedition or adventure.

When Ray left to fight in the Vietnam War in September 1966, Karen (age 11), Robin (age 9), and Kirk (age 7) were in elementary school and Kathy was a toddler (age 2). They lived only a block away from their school in Austin.

For the most part, Ray and Gig's letters were transcribed in their entirety without revisions except for words of intimate nature when Ray

would write “privately” to Gig. We have attempted to edit errors of punctuation and (on occasion) spelling for ease of reading. Some sentence fragments or use of popular terms of the day, such as *sez*, *wif*, and *dozo*, are included as originally written to better show Ray’s wonderful sense of humor. We hope not to offend any reader, family or otherwise, by including uncensored swear words and language from the time.

Transcribing the Letters

It has been an incredible privilege transcribing my parent’s letters to each other from October 1966 to October 1967 during dad’s 13-month tour of duty in the Vietnam War while stationed at Chu Lai. We discovered most of their original letters in an old suitcase left in the garage after our mother passed away. It had always been her intent to transcribe the letters, but that never came to be. I felt it was not just an honor but my duty to fulfill my mother’s wish to transcribe the letters in their entirety. Our father wrote 173 letters home to our family while he served in Vietnam, and mother wrote 248 letters to him from Austin. Reading their unfiltered thoughts, dreams, and love for each other and their four children has been a great joy.

I still have vivid memories as a child of sitting under a weeping willow tree on the corner of the street writing letters to my dad, and when finished, I would run into our house, open my mother’s purse for her red lipstick, and seal my letter with a red-lipped kiss. While transcribing the letters for this book, I came across one of the letters that Dad had kept, complete with lipstick kiss and “my real lips” written above it.

Right before Dad left for Vietnam, I remember being afraid about him leaving us to go fight in a war. I remember expressing my fear about him possibly being hurt or shot. I will never forget his response to me,

Robin, don’t you DARE get scared or worry about me. If you are scared, then I will worry about YOU, and I don’t have time for that, and THAT’S AN ORDER!

I said, “Yes sir! I won’t get scared!” I knew an order was an order—I was the daughter of a U.S. Marine. His wise, strong words stuck with me that year, and I never worried once.

My biggest appreciation for my parents came while transcribing their letters, as the clarity and depth of love between them was so obvious. These letters—written by my dad during an active military conflict, and

my mom as an officer's wife raising four children alone—are as real, raw, and true as they can be. The two of them maintained a sense of normalcy, no matter what was going on in their lives, because of their constant communication through daily letter writing. For example, there was a sudden break in one of dad's letters dated 18 October 1966, when a bomb landed outside his hooch, and he had to dive behind a bunker of sandbags until he received the all clear. When he returns hours later, he is soaking wet, freezing cold, and simply relieved the bombing is over.² However, he does not hint that he feels any fear as he tries to pick up where he last left off to finish the letter. He manages to still be a “parent” after he has essentially had his ass handed to him and continues to handwrite his wife some advice in response to a concern she has about my brother and school. It is evident that he is striving to be a caring husband and father in the midst of war. He writes,

*Try to use a lot of restraint and patience with them—monsters
as they may appear, they are beautiful children.*

To many, writing a letter during wartime is the epitome of living in the physical and mental moment. Our dad wrote like he was talking to us in person. In fact, he and my mother wrote so often during the Vietnam War that this collection of letters reveals a two-way conversation between a husband and his wife, lovingly saved, preserved, and kept pristine in their original envelopes for more than 50 years. Altogether, 459 letters were written, including those by their children, during his 13-month tour of duty in Chu Lai. This book includes most of the transcribed letters written from October 1966 to October 1967, though some trimming was required due to space constraints.

Military Brats

Our father was a United States Marine Corps jet fighter pilot, and we children became what is affectionately termed *military brats* raised on Marine air bases all over the country. We were like any other ordinary military family who hopped to with military readiness when given orders to hit the road. Our father always drove like he was on a mission, with the pedal to

² For more on Marine Corps activities in this area at the time, see Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982).

the metal. My mother remarked that, once they were married, she began a life of chasing after our father wherever he was stationed. The “Stice troops” were steadfast as our family convoy moved across the country in a station wagon 9 times in 14 years and transferred schools 13 times. We did not have car seats or air conditioning. Dad drove with the windows down, cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. The wind would often carry the hot, chalky ashes back into our faces. When we were babies, Dad built a wooden playpen box, lined it with blankets, and put it in the back of the station wagon so we could sleep, crawl, and play nonstop during those long hauls. We all still laugh about the time when Kathy was a baby and had a dirty diaper during a very long drive, and Dad absolutely refused to stop. Even though Mom begged, he simply threw the cloth diaper out the window, where it got caught on the car’s antenna and flapped all the way to our next destination like a family flag! It was the same trip our station wagon was sprayed by a skunk while the windows were down, and when we stopped for the night at a motel, the front desk clerk refused to let us have a room because we all smelled so bad. We eventually found another motel who took pity on us.

We got used to bugging out at a moment’s notice, packing up, and leaving cherished friends behind. Driving away with arms waving out the window, shouting “I’ll miss you!” and promises to “Write every day!” Letter writing was our sacred form of maintaining forever friendship bonds, and we could not wait to get to our next duty station to check the mailbox and pick up where we last left off.

Our childhood routines were typical of a military family; we shopped at the commissary, exchange, and PX. Many of our doctor’s visits were on base. We all had military IDs. Guards at the gate to the military base would stand at attention and salute us as we drove through because we had an officer’s decal on our car. We learned to salute at the dinner table and repeat with proper, deep inflection, “Sir, yes sir!” We loved to dress up in our dad’s helmet and old flight jacket and pretend we were pilots.

Each time we moved, Dad would build us wooden sandboxes, homemade go-karts, and tree forts for us to play in wherever we lived. We earned our turtle, duck, fish, and whale swim badges at public pools; wrestled and boxed each other with our dad’s old boxing gloves in the backyard; rode minibikes; and watched in the sky as Dad flew over our house, tipping his wing and blinking his lights. The Fourth of July was always a special holiday when Dad would light sparklers for us, and our

parents watched as we drew figure eights and wrote our names against the black sky. Sometimes we all loaded up in the station wagon and watched above in awe as the Blue Angels showed off their daring dives with incredible teamwork and precision at the air shows. While loaded in the back of the station wagon at drive-in movies, we would peek above the seats to see the forbidden scenes that only our parents were allowed to watch.³ We were taught that the U.S. flag must never touch the ground, and we knew to respect it.⁴ We looked up at our dad with wonder as he dressed in his immaculately crisp uniform, with a perfectly starched crease down his pants, spit-shined black shoes, and gold oak-leaf emblem on his cap. White glove inspections and chores were to be strictly adhered to. We felt like we were all in the Marine Corps, we just had different duties. Dad always joked, “I can get 20 men to run 20 miles, but I can’t get one kid to take the trash out!”

Coffee and cigarettes went hand-in-hand and were consumed religiously by our parents all day long. Food bought from the commissary was not a choice—it was a necessity (e.g., Spam and frozen fish sticks). Meals were not exciting or fancy, but we always set the table and sat together as a family (the whole year he was in Vietnam, we set a place for Dad). We diligently collected enough green stamps to paste in the booklets and order our mother a new hair dryer for her birthday.⁵ We played kick-the-can in the front yard and used trashcan lids as our bases for baseball. Dancing in the den and playing ping-pong was our nightly entertainment. Sibling rivalry was normal, and we often challenged each other, which led to laughter and mutiny until spankings were sometimes the only solution

³ A great deal of change took place in the movie industry during the 1960s, including a significant one that would overturn what many deemed outdated and unnecessarily restrictive. By 1968, movie ratings that are similar to modern conventions were instituted. G = general audiences or suitable for all ages; M = suggested for mature audiences and subsequently was soon changed to GP and then PG for parental guidance suggested; R = restricted audiences or no one under age 16 admitted without an accompanying adult; and X = for those 16 years and older or not suitable for children.

⁴ Public Law 94-344, known as the Federal Flag Code, contains rules for handling and displaying the U.S. flag.

⁵ S&H Green Stamps were trading stamps popular in the United States from the 1930s until the late 1980s. They were distributed as part of a rewards program operated by the Sperry & Hutchinson company. In 1964, the S&H Green Stamp catalog became the largest single publication distributed in the United States. “Trading Stamp,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 March 2018.

to cool down the chaos. We certainly knew the meaning of: “Do you want a spanking?”

Our military roots grounded us in the same way our parents, Ray and Gig, were raised, as both were U.S. Army brats growing up. It was natural to be patriotic Americans, and I am thankful to be the daughter of a Marine and for the childhood we had. Our father died way too young, which is such a shame, but on reflection, being able to honor them with this book is the gift we can give back to our parents and our family.⁶

Generational Family History of Military Roots

Our family’s military roots run deep. Both of my parents were Army brats with fathers who were soldiers and fought during two wars. Dad grew up with fierce patriotism and dreamed of being a Marine officer and fighter pilot, even as a young boy in the Boy Scouts in Illinois. He was raised the son of an Army colonel, Kenneth Seymour Stice (1894–1956), who graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1918. Our mother, Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Stice, was also the proud daughter of an Army colonel, Frank Smith Kirkpatrick (1889–1948), who graduated from West Point in 1924. Gig and Ray met as children and even played together in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, when my grandfathers taught at the University of Illinois. My mother often told of how she remembered seeing model airplanes attached to the ceiling in my father’s bedroom when she played with his sister, Lucile. Both of my grandfathers served in World War II (WWII) in the European theater, and my maternal grandfather continued to serve in the Pacific theater during WWII before my parents married.

I recently found a letter dated 7 June 1945 that describes how my grandfather, Kirk Kirkpatrick, wrote home to his wife Priscilla, expressing his joy and surprise about seeing his old Army buddy, Ken Stice, walking down the street in Paris, France. They had drinks together and reminisced about old times from Illinois.

Who knew that 11 years later their children would be married! After doing research on each of my grandfathers and father’s military service, I am in awe of how extraordinarily dangerous their jobs were, especially

⁶ Ray Stice died on 6 September 1978 in Travis, TX, at the age of 50, and was buried in Austin Memorial Park. Elizabeth Stice passed on 13 March 2014 and was buried near her husband.

Figure 2. Family military service: Col Kenneth S. Stice (left) and Col Frank S. Kirkpatrick (right)



Source: Stice family collection.

during wartime. They, like so many others, were heroes who volunteered to sacrifice their lives every day for their country with humble dignity and honor.

I also have immense respect for my mother and grandmothers' sacrifices for our country. I consider them heroes in the same category as my grandfathers. The responsibility of being military wives turned them into resilient warriors. I cannot begin to imagine how stressful it was for them to pack up and move as often as they had to and then navigate the job of finding new homes, schools, commissaries, doctors, and friends. With husbands gone for the duration of the war, the women were left to raise children alone, and at the same time put on a brave face for everyone else. While tucking their children into bed at night, I imagine they often did not know if their love and life partner would make it through that same night. These strong women learned to thrive and survive, despite the mental and physical toll on them. I am sure each of the women in our family frequently cried into their pillows at night, quietly, of course, so the children would not hear their sobs, only to wake the next morning and face the responsibilities that could not be escaped. They were part of the "waiting wives" club, and they used every 1,440 minutes of the day to be

good wives and mothers, to be useful to others, and to make the world a better place.⁷ While waiting for the postman, they continued to write daily letters of love and encouragement to their spouses, and I firmly believe it was the women who kept the men alive and healthy, at least mentally. I see proof of it in the hundreds of expressions of love in these letters, where they each carefully shared their concerns with their husbands in measured words so as not to say anything distressing. I also read in my dad and grandfathers' letters the same careful use of words to keep their wives and children from worrying. My grandfathers could never reveal their location during World War II, as their letters were censored. The women in my family also kept their marital relationships alive through expressions of deep passion in their letters. Their spouses did the same in return.

How Ray and Gig Met:

Childbearing Years and Moves Around the Country

My grandmothers—Mildred “Milly” Bickmore Stice (1901–82) and Priscilla “Pris” Marshall Austin Kirkpatrick (1905–70)—were lifelong friends. By coincidence, or what I like to call a “God incident,” Milly came to Austin during March 1955 and showed Gig a picture of her son, Ray. She said to Milly, “Tell him to look me up if he ever comes to Austin.” My grandmothers quickly connected the dots, and Ray drove up from Kingsville, where he was in flight school, and called Gig. She answered the phone, and heard a deep male voice who said, “Hello, this is Ray.” She laughed jokingly and said, “Ray, who?” That was their first contact. He said he and a friend had flipped a coin as to whether to go to Mexico or Austin. As fate would have it, the coin pointed to Austin.

They had not seen each other since they were children, so it was if they were meeting for the first time. My mother told us stories about her first impression of seeing Ray that day. He came to the house wearing a jacket with the collar flipped up. His shirt sleeves were rolled up with cigarettes tucked underneath. She said he was very “cool” for 1955. She described being attracted to this young, dark, tall aviator (tall being relative since she was only 5 feet tall and he was 5'9”) as he walked into my grandmother Priscilla's living room. Ray would drive up every weekend all the way from Kingsville to see Gig.

⁷ For more on waiting wives, see Kathleen P. O'Beirne, “Waiting Wives,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 102, no. 9 (September 1976).

Figure 3. Ray and Gig cruising in his Ford, ca. March 1955



Source: Stice family collection.

They quickly fell in love. He said he had a surprise for her, stating, “I’m going to marry you, but I don’t know what to do with you in the meantime.”

Mom claims that he never asked, he just told her. He said, “I’m either going to buy an airplane or get married.” We found in mom’s later writings where she admitted,

I didn’t like the thought of him leaving. All the boys were always leaving, and they didn’t come back. I was by then age 25, and tired of fighting off the boys. I was waiting for a guy who would put me in the kitchen and make me stay there.

Gig and Ray married three months later on 18 June 1955, in a small chapel at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The same chapel where my grandmother Priscilla married her sweetheart, Frank Kirkpatrick, on 23 July 1927, and my sister, Karen, married her husband, Bill Ratliff, on 10 December 1977. That sacred chapel was also the site of our mother’s beautiful memorial service in March 2014, almost 60 years after

Figure 4. Wedding of Ray Stice and Elizabeth Kirkpatrick



Source: Stice family collection.

walking under a full military procession with white gloves, swords aloft, and satin sash-filled aisle to marry her pilot, then-First Lieutenant Ray Bickmore Stice.

Shortly after their marriage, Dad received his naval aviator wings, and Mom was present to pin on his wings. They then moved to Marine Air Base Camp Lejeune in Cherry Point, North Carolina, after a quick honeymoon in New Orleans along the drive. Gig learned quickly what it was like to be married to a fighter pilot with orders to deploy for military training exercises. Only a few months later, in 1957, Gig was six-months pregnant and on her own, while Ray was sent on a three-month tour for a Marine Corps-Navy amphibious exercise with 8,000 Marines on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico.⁸

⁸ Regimental Landing Team 8, supported by Marine Aircraft Groups 26 and 31, on 17 May 1957 took part in TRAEX 1-57 at Vieques, Puerto Rico. Ralph W. Donnelly, Gabrielle N. Neufeld, and Carolyn A. Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1947-1964*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1971), 34.

Figure 5. Capt Ray Stice in Panama during his deployment to Puerto Rico



Source: Stice family collection.

Babies, Babies, Babies, Babies, 1956–1964

My oldest sister, Karen, was born two months after Dad’s return from the Caribbean exercise in Cherry Point on 7 July 1956. Ray was home a short while after Karen’s birth before he was sent back to the Caribbean for another Marine amphibious training exercise in March 1957.⁹

When Dad was deployed this time, Mom was two months pregnant with me. I was born in Cherry Point on 24 October 1957. At some point before my birth, Dad was deployed on an aircraft carrier off the coast

⁹ Donnelly, Neufeld, and Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1947–1964*, vol. 3.

Figure 6. Gig with her mother, Priscilla Kirkpatrick, during Ray’s deployment to Japan, ca. 1960



Source: Stice family collection.

Figure 7. Karen, Kirk, and Robin Stice in Omaha, NE, ca. 1962



Source: Stice family collection.

of Italy, and at the time of my birth Mom was alone.¹⁰ She did not have a name picked out for me when I was born. Mom was watching a soap opera in the hospital, and she heard the name “Robin” and immediately liked it; thus, the unremarkable story of my name.

In October 1958, we moved to Jacksonville, North Carolina. In December 1958, Mom was pregnant again but caught the flu and miscarried on the move to Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, California. We lived in a Quonset hut until we finally received our living quarters on base. Soon after, Mom was pregnant again with our brother, Kirk, who was born on 9 October 1959 in El Toro.

A few months after Kirk’s birth, Dad was deployed on a one-year tour to Japan.¹¹ In December 1960, Mom was alone with three young children under the age of four, so we moved back to Austin to be near her mother, who lived a few blocks away for help that year.

In late December 1962—right after the Cuban Missile Crisis—we moved to Nebraska, while Dad went to back to school at the University

¹⁰ Donnelly, Neufeld, and Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1947–1964*, vol. 3, 35.

¹¹ Donnelly, Neufeld, and Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1947–1964*, vol. 3, 47–48.

Figure 8. Gig with Karen, Robin, and Kirk in Beeville, TX, ca. 1964



Source: Stice family collection.

of Omaha. When we arrived in Nebraska, the temperature was below 0 degrees.

We moved again six months later to Beeville, Texas. Dad was a flight instructor for three years at Naval Air Station Beeville, and during this time, my youngest sister, Kathy, was born on 16 November 1964. Ten days after Kathy's birth, we moved to Quantico, Virginia, and spent 1965 there while Dad worked on his clearance and training in preparation for the Vietnam War. We lived at the bottom of a very steep hill and school was at the top.¹²

¹² On MCB Quantico, the schools and family housing are located on Purvis Road, which is known for its hilly terrain. Ashurst Elementary was likely the school attended by the Stice children, though it closed in 2015 after serving Marine families for more than 50 years.

Figure 9. Karen, Robin, Kirk, and Kathy in Quantico, VA, ca. 1966



Source: Stice family collection.

By 1966, we were back in Austin while Dad served in Vietnam and Mom was alone again for a year, but this time with four young children. Their letters to each other during this period culminated in this book.

Exactly three weeks after arriving at Chu Lai, Vietnam, Dad became the executive officer of Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13). It was the largest outfit in the group. Dad was responsible for coordinating the construction of an entirely new military air base with all its associated facilities, and he did it all during active combat. The job had to be incredibly challenging, especially since he was also flying daily combat missions directly into and along the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

When not flying and building an air base, he oversaw hundreds of personnel, including all disciplinary actions, along with preparing awards and citations for those who earned them. Dad did a fantastic job describing his new job duties in Vietnam in a detailed letter to mom dated 20 October 1966:

I hope you can grasp the scope of the problems—runways—taxi-

*ways—ramps—Tacom—GCA—approach control—nav[igation]
aids of all sorts—aerology—the tower & crew & comm. gear—
crash crew & gear—hangers—ready rooms—shelters—ammo
dumps—supply warehousing—quarters of all types—roads—elec-
tricity—sanitation, garbage—food—water—mess halls—officer
spaces—hospitals—disbursing—motor transport—passive and
active defense—military police—those are just a few of the
things I can think of, plus the clubs & PX’s etc. Tell Kirk I’m
going to build a fire station—tell Karen I’m going to build a
library—tell Robin I’m going to build a restaurant and tell the
damned bugs to leave me alone, so I can tell you God damn
I miss you!*¹³

Dad had only been home from the war for less than two weeks before we packed up and moved to Beaufort, South Carolina, in December 1967. Dad was the executive officer of VMFA-333 at the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort until his retirement in 1970. I will always remember the powerful saying shown at the entrance of the base, “The Noise you Hear is the Sound of Freedom.” The air base was the jumping-off point for the 250,000 Vietnam War veterans who got their start at tiny Parris Island.

Our last move was back to Austin on 31 March 1970. Seven days after Dad retired, Mom’s mother died on 7 April 1970 at the age of 64. It took Mom an entire year to recover from her mother’s passing. The Stice family has called Austin home since.

We Salute You

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for leaving us the gift of your handwritten letters that “help us remember old times.” This book is our family’s tribute to both of you. We have all enjoyed your unique wisdom, insight, wit, and “sort of reminisce.”

As Dad said in his letter on 21 February 1967,

*[It] takes a war to make people realize there are such things
in life as love and families, and a reason for things—many*

¹³ TACOM refers to U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command; GCA refers to ground-controlled approach or a service provided by air-traffic controllers to guide aircraft to a safe landing, including in adverse weather conditions, based on primary radar images; and aerology refers to the study of the atmosphere from ground level.

Figure 10. The Stice family in Beaufort, following Ray's retirement, 1970



Source: Stice family collection.

reasons. And I'm never too old to learn a few things about life—I've learned a few new things over here that's for sure. Like how extremely fortunate we are to have each other's love—I guess that's the most important thing—and our children will find their loves when the time is ready and right—I'm certain of that.

It is my hope that future descendants will someday open the pages of this book, read these beautifully handwritten letters of love, written during war, and be taken back to a time in history that might otherwise be forgotten.

Reading our parents' letters has allowed us to rediscover new, wonderful, and poignant things about both of them. Our father passed away in 1978 at the young age of 50, and we have missed not having him around for most of our adult lives. Experiencing his wry, clever personality and hearing his voice in these letters has brought him back to us once again as if time never stopped. One of my favorite lines in all of Dad's letters

Figure 10. Ray and Elizabeth Stice wed in Austin, TX, 18 June 1955



Source: Stice family collection.

was written on 17 August 1967, when he only had two months left on his tour of duty in Vietnam. He was obviously contemplating what retirement would look like after he returned to the states to finish his military career. He said, "Someday when someone asks, 'What do you do, sir?' I'll stop

and back up a pace and answer, ‘I was a Marine for a while, but I’m a father now’.”

It is with humble gratitude that we say thank you for coming back into our lives through these letters and being a father and mother to us once again. We are proud to be “Marine brats,” and we are proud to say our father, Major Ray Bickmore Stice, was a jet fighter pilot in the United States Marine Corps who fought for America and gave it his all.

We are proud to say our mother, Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Stice, was an aviator’s wife, who loved us deeply and sacrificed everything for us. In the words of our parents—the major and the missus—“sending lots of love and kisses.”

*Semper Fi,
Karen, Robin, Kathy, and Kirk (deceased)
2023*

SELECT TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS, AND ACRONYMS

A/C	aircraft (Ray); air conditioner (Gig)
ALO	air liaison officer
APO	Army Post Office
arrest	use of mechanized gear to rapidly decelerate a plane on landing
arty	artillery
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
AWOL	absent without leave
BDA	battle damage assessment
cank	mission/flight canceled
CO	commanding officer
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
DMZ	demilitarized zone
dozo	From the Japanese, it has several meanings depending on the situation: here you go, go ahead, help yourself, or you first.
early early	early morning report time
EOD	explosive ordnance disposal
FAC	forward air controller
FMFPAC	Fleet Marine Force, Pacific
Gs	measure of acceleration equivalent to gravity
GCA	ground-controlled approach

GI	government issue
H&HS	Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron
H&MS	Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron
hooch	Korean and Vietnam War slang for a thatched hut or improvised living space (e.g., inside a sand-bagged bunker or improved foxhole)
hop	mission-based flight
KBA	killed by air
KIA	killed in action
LST	landing ship, tank
MABS	Marine Air Base Squadron
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group
MAW	Marine Aircraft Wing
MCAS	Marine Corps Air Station
MIA	missing in action
MOS	military occupational specialty
natch	naturally
NBC	nuclear/biomedical/chemical
NCO	noncommissioned officer
PX	post exchange or commissary
rack	bed
RIO	radar intercept officer
ROK	Republic of Korea
R&R	rest and relaxation
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SAM	surface-to-air missile
secondary	alternate mission
SNCO	senior noncommissioned officer
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TACA	tactical air coordinator (airborne)
TACAN	tactical air navigation system
TACOM	tactical command
TACON	tactical control
TAD	temporary active duty
UN	United Nations

utilities	military camouflage uniform of loose button-up, long sleeve shirt and baggy trousers
VMFA	Marine Fighter Attack Squadron
VR	visual reconnaissance
WX	weather
XO	kisses and hugs; also a military term for executive officer

FROM THE MAJOR
to the Missus

INTRODUCTION

By John M. Curatola, PhD

The Vietnam War had many inflection points and transitions with the very nature of the conflict morphing over time. The way it was fought, the tactics used, and even the larger strategic imperatives all changed as the war unfolded. For the United States, the war was an element of the Cold War and grew from an insurgency that slowly built in intensity, morphing into a conventional fight. As much as the conflict changed, so too did American society. Social movements called into question not only the war and its conduct, but the existing status quo and social hierarchies. The 1960s were unlike any era in American history, as the decade stood witness to the limits of American military power, and the Vietnam War served as a lightning rod for other issues related to American social and cultural values.

Chronicling the mid-60s were Major Ray Stice and his wife Elizabeth, or “Gig,” as he referred to her. A Marine aviator in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967, Stice observed the expansion of the war in Southeast Asia. Simultaneously, stateside Elizabeth was witness to the changing nature of American society. During his 13-month tour, the couple collectively wrote 459 letters. Forgotten with the excitement of his return from Vietnam, they were fortunately found by their daughter Robin years later when cleaning out the garage. This collection serves as a kind of time capsule recording both the war and the turmoil at home during a period of great change. In their correspondence, it is evident that both Ray and Elizabeth were

caught up in these events and tried to come to terms with an emerging American society and an increasingly unpopular conflict.

The United States inherited the conflict in Southeast Asia after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Following the French collapse and victory of the Viet Minh, the Geneva Accords of 1954 split Vietnam into two countries with a Communist north and a democratic south. To settle the existing division, the Geneva Accords included planned elections in 1956. However, South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem canceled the election, leaving the country split. Regardless, Communist leader Ho Chi Minh remained fully committed to removing Western colonial influences and sought to join the nation as a unified state. While Communist forces infiltrated the south and attacked villages, killing thousands of civilians, the South Vietnamese government was hardly a representative democracy and was widely considered a corrupt and ineffective regime. Despite the South Vietnamese government's many shortfalls, its anti-Communist stance easily aligned with larger American strategic objectives. The north's aggressive infiltrations continued into the next decade, resulting in a growing need for U.S. military presence.¹

The 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident provided the *casus belli* for the significant increase in American military participation.² Airpower was quickly seen as an expedient way to deter Communist offensive actions and defeat its military effectiveness. Striking targets in North Vietnam served as a kind of diplomatic response to Viet Cong incursions. Simultaneously, close air support (CAS) for ground forces engaged in the south was a force multiplier, providing a distinct tactical advantage for American forces and their Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) allies. As the number of targets in North Vietnam increased, so too did America's commitment. The U.S. footprint in South Vietnam grew significantly from

¹ Adm U. S. Grant Sharpe, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato, CA; Presidio Press, 1978), 10-23; John A. Farrell, *Richard Nixon: A Life* (New York; Vintage Books, 2017), 226, 314-15; David L. Anderson, ed., *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (New York; Columbia University Press, 210), 30-31; and Robert F. Turner, *Vietnamese Communism: Its Origins and Development* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1975), 30-31, 94.

² Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Public Law 88-408, 88th Cong., 2d Sess. (7 August 1964), General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives. This resolution gave President Lyndon B. Johnson the authority to increase American involvement in the conflict and served as the basis for the administrations military policies in Vietnam.

1965 to 1967, as tens of thousands of troops arrived “in country.” These increases were symbiotic; as more Americans became engaged in ground combat, they required significantly more CAS.

The increase in American combat operations also required new bases and stations. Da Nang originally served as a major hub for Air Force and Marine aircraft during the opening years of the war.³ However, it was clear that additional fields were required. As a part of this growing effort, the Marines proposed establishing an expeditionary airfield at Chu Lai in the Quang Nam Province. As more Marines deployed to Vietnam, the idea of building an expeditionary base quickly gained traction. A site approximately 64 kilometers southeast of Da Nang was chosen by the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPAC) commander Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak.⁴

Approved by President Lyndon B. Johnson in April 1965, the base was to be operational by 28 May. After removing 400 local Vietnamese, Marine engineers and Navy Seabees went to work preparing the site. True to their expeditionary nature, the Marines planned an airfield using the Short Airfield for Tactical Support (SATS) system. Instead of pouring concrete and building permanent structures, the SATS system used fixed metal planks secured on leveled ground for use as runways and taxi strips. Leveling the red dirt took longer than expected, with the first piece of runway laid on 16 May. While the initial target date was missed, a 4,000-foot runway was in place by the end of the month. Eventually an 8,000-foot runway was built with accompanying taxiways and parking ramps. Although building runways and taxi ways was a start, to service the aircraft and support operations the airfield needed fuel farms, bomb dumps, repair facilities, billeting spaces, chow halls, heads, administrative building, along with other supporting infrastructure.⁵

On 1 June, four Douglas A-4 Skyhawks from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 225 (VMA-225) arrived, followed hours later by four other Skyhawks from VMA-311. That same day Chu Lai-based aircraft performed

³ Capt Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era, 1954–1964* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1977).

⁴ Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1978).

⁵ Shulimson and Johnson, *The Landing and the Buildup, 1965*, 30–31.

Figure 12. Helicopters at Chu Lai, ca. 1966



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

their first combat missions launching from this new location.⁶ By fall the air base also included a nearby landing field to the north that housed rotary-wing assets from Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG-16). Once finally established, the Chu Lai location was central to Marine operations in the I Corps area as it served as a staging base for combat operations with accompanying fires support and logistical functions.⁷

In October 1966, Ray Stice arrived at Chu Lai and served as the executive officer for Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13). Sent to Vietnam on individual orders, meaning he did not deploy with a unit, Stice was assigned as the second-in-command of MABS-13, overseeing the further development and daily operation of the Chu Lai facility. A fixed-wing aviator with time in both Marine Fighter Squadron 312 (VMF-312) and VMF-314, he had already logged hours in single-engine fighters such as the North American FJ2 Fury and the Douglas F4D Skyray. However,

⁶ Shulimson and Johnson, *The Landing and the Buildup*, 1965, 41–42.

⁷ Shulimson and Johnson, *The Landing and the Buildup*, 1965, 65.

Figure 13. A Marine TF-9 Cougar of Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron 13 (H&MS-13) in Chu Lai in 1967



This aircraft might have been on flown by Maj Ray Stice during his time in Vietnam.

Source: official U.S. Navy, National Museum of Naval Aviation, photo no. 1996.253.7404.005.

his new assignment was more ground-centric. An airfield operates like a small town. MABS-13 had the responsibility to not only ensure the airfield could support combat operations, but also had the more mundane tasks of feeding, housing, cleaning, and caring for the thousands of Marines living at the facility. While providing showers, billeting, and food, MABS-13 was also responsible for various airfield services such as weather and radar support, explosive ordnance removal (EOD), and crash fire and rescue services. In addition to ensuring base functions, Stice also had to concern himself with airfield security, as it was often surrounded by enemy positions and within range of Viet Cong mortar and rocket attacks.⁸

However, while saddled with these responsibilities, Major Stice carved out time from his regular duties to fly combat missions. Among the regular squadrons of A-4s and helicopters, the facility had a few older Grumman TF-9J Cougar aircraft that were of Korean War vintage. While not the “hottest” or newest aircraft in the inventory, the TF-9s were still

⁸ Shulimson and Johnson, *The Landing and the Buildup*, 1965, 30-31.

useful for spotting artillery, providing CAS, or as a forward air controllers (FACs) directing other aircraft in support missions. During his 13-month tour, Stice amassed 163 combat missions and earned 12 Air Medals. From 1966 to 1967, he observed firsthand the changing nature and increasing violence of the fight in Vietnam.⁹

Through the couple's correspondence, we gain insight into the changing nature of the conflict overseas, but we are also provided a greater awareness of social and political forces at work back in the United States. The 1960s were a time of great social change in America as civil rights advocates, antiwar protesters, feminists, and counterculture movements represented a general questioning of authority. A sentiment clearly opposite of the 1950s, when conformity was the order of the day, government authority was inherently accepted, and the Christian nuclear family served as the bulwark to godless Communism. The 1960s bucked such paradigms and called into questioned conventional constructs. The children who watched *Howdy Doody* and *The Mickey Mouse Club* in the 50s became the radicals of the 60s.¹⁰

In their letters to each other, Ray and Elizabeth exchange their views on these new social movements and the emerging military effort in Southeast Asia. While intimate in discussion, the collection of letters chronicles the expansion of the conflict in Vietnam along with the changing nature of America society. The American public owes a debt to the Stices and their children for not only preserving this history but allowing us to peer into their private lives. Their correspondence provides an insight into what one Marine family experienced, is indicative of the issues reflecting the nation at large, and chronicles this turbulent time in American history.

⁹ Maj Ray B. Stice, "Chronological Record of Duty Assignments," 19 June 1946–31 March 1970, Stice Family Records.

¹⁰ *Howdy Doody* premiered in 1947 on NBC in black and white and was the first nationally televised American children's program. The western-themed show featured Buffalo Bob Smith and his wooden marionette Howdy Doody. The later years saw color programming until the final episode on 24 September 1960. *The Mickey Mouse Club* first aired on ABC in 1955, hosted by Jimmy Dodd and the Mousketeers. The American variety show was produced by Walt Disney but canceled after its fourth season due to contractual issues with ABC. It was revived several times: *The New Mickey Mouse Club* (1977–79); *The All-New Mickey Mouse Club* (1989–94); and *Club Mickey Mouse* (2017–18).

Airplanes flown by Major Ray B. Stice during his Marine Corps career:



TU-1

U.S. military designation for the De Havilland DHC-3 Otter light transport aircraft
Source: official U.S. Army photo.



FJ-2, 3, 4 FURY

North American's series of swept-wing carrier-capable fighter/bombers
Source: official U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation photo 1996.253.7229.003.



F9F PANTHER

A U.S. Navy Grumman F9F-2 Panther of Fighter Squadron 112 (VF-112)
Source: official U.S. Navy photo.



F9F-8 COUGAR

A U.S. Marine Corps Grumman TF-9J Cougar of Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 13 at Chu Lai
Source: official U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation photo 1996.253.7404.005.

Airplanes flown by Major Ray B. Stice (*continued*):

GRUMMAN F4D-1 SKYRAY

This aircraft is a carrier-based fighter/interceptor

Source: *official U.S. Marine Corps photo.*



GRUMMAN F8F BEARCAT

Marine Fighter Squadron 321 flying over Washington DC, ca. 1950

Source: *official U.S. Marine Corps photo.*



DOUGLAS A-4 SKYHAWK

The Skyhawk is a single-seat subsonic carrier-capable light attack aircraft, ca. July 1975

Source: *official U.S. Marine Corps photo.*



F4B BOEING PHANTOM

A McDonnell F-4B Phantom II of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 over Vietnam on 25 December 1969

Source: *official U.S. Marine Corps photo.*



Airplanes flown by Major Ray B. Stice (*continued*):



NORTH AMERICAN SNJ-4

A training aircraft used to test viability of aircraft carrier use by Naval Air Transport Command, ca. April 1946
Source: courtesy of Bill Larkins.



NORTH AMERICAN T-28 TROJAN

Designed to transition pilots to jet aircraft, ca. 1973
Source: official U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation photo 1996.488.162.128.



LOCKHEED C-140 JETSTAR

This version of the JetStar was also used by the U.S. Air Force for transport, ca. 1979
Source: courtesy of Lockheed, photo 1443803.



CESSNA 310

A twin-engine aircraft used throughout the Vietnam theater, some aircraft continued in military service into the mid-1970s
Source: official U.S. Army photo.

Airplanes flown by Major Ray B. Stice (*continued*):

**BEECHCRAFT
C-45 EXPEDITOR**

The C-45 was the World War II military version of the popular Beechcraft Model 18 commercial light transport

Source: official U.S. Air Force photo.



**FAIRCHILD C-119
FLYING BOXCAR**

U.S. Marine Corps Fairchild R4Q-1 Flying Boxcar of a Marine transport squadron in 1950, which was identical to the USAF C-119C

Source: official U.S. Navy Naval Aviation News, August 1950.



**LOCKHEED C-180
SKYWAGON**

Cpl Trevor Winterton (left), and Sgt John Ellis load a Cessna aircraft with 2.75-inch white phosphorous rockets on 3 August 1966

Source: Australian War Memorial.



1

OCTOBER 1966

Friday night

9 October 1966

Hello there or something like that. Sitting here on pins and needles—tape and no GDT in recorder—insured mail notice and post office closed!¹ Beer cans rusting out (no ice box) and just finished an ADMAT [administrative material] inspection . . . remember them? Ugh . . . How about sending me a needle and thread kit: black, white, green, and khaki threads?

Last night, as I almost finished with your letter, I got a phone call (that’s another story, our phones) from Colonel Owen L. Owens saying, “Come to my hut!”² So I slogged—that’s a slow jog down the street (sand)—and “reported as ordered.” He wanted to show me how “great

¹ GDT refers to gas discharge tube. Unlike microprocessor-based electronic equipment, the GDT acts as a less vulnerable high energy handler that, unlike AC power, does not leak current.

² According to official Marine Corps records, Stice deployed on 15 October 1966 as part of Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13), Marine Aircraft Group 13 (MAG-13), 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW), Fleet Marine Force (FMF). Ray B. Stice, “Chronological Record of Duty Assignments,” 19 June 1946 to 31 March 1970, Stice family collection. According to the official history, LtCol Owen L. Owens was the commanding officer of MABS-13 from 9 September to 31 December 1966. Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982), 347.

his TV antenna worked.” He “Could tell the girls from the boys”—most important for some reason I’m still not sure of—and, “Just wasn’t that the greatest picture bar none.” “Yes,” (fortunately) “it was just great.” [He says,] “Would I mind inviting the big boss [B-B] over?” “Of course!” (You bastard, the mess hall just closed and I haven’t eaten since like 0530 this morning at Okinawa, Japan.) I outs (British accent there) miself his door, took a fearless step in the black toward the B-B’s hut, ran afoul the blooming barbed wire, projectiled miself into his ruddy septic tank hole (empty I must say), crawled battered and beaten back to the bastard bloody boss saying, “Does your colonelship have a flashlight, sir?”

Needless to say, “There’d been some changes made” in the couple of days I was gone. And needless to say, I don’t have any.

Da Nang muddy? Wif, you ought to see our own homegrown type. Today is the first time I’ve seen the sun in weeks! My Sears plastic raincoat is all torn up, and I got another one in Kadena [Japan] fortunately—the GI [government issue] raincoat leaks like a chamois. The sand (blowing) was between the heavy showers—sometimes the wind gets up to 35 knots (almost 40 mph) and I guarantee you the sand will blow.

You know what I’m going to do? Voluntarily observe an Elvis Presley movie AND EYEBALL ALL THOSE PERTY GALS! Ray D. Pendergraft and I are going to take turns closing our eyes when you know who is on and signaling when it’s time to watch.³

When I appointed you balancer of the exchequer, I did not expect your books to be 20 cents off at the end of the month—20 kisses for you!

...

Just for pure spite . . . hey, all you sweet children—Karen, Robin, Kirk, Kathy—listen. The one who yells the loudest gets a kiss! How’s them apples?

Well, flick time. It’s always something time isn’t it—don’t know about that—but I do know I love and miss ALL of YOU!

Ray



³ Given the date, the Elvis Presley movie could have been one of the year’s releases—*Paradise Hawaiian Style*, directed by Michael D. Moore (Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 1966); or *Frankie and Johnny*, directed by Fred de Cordova (Beverly Hills, CA: United Artists, 1966).

Monday
10 October 1966

Dear Sweetheart,

I have this feeling you're at Okinawa today and that the long first lap is over. I'm still at the part of hardly being able to think about you without getting weepy, but it is encouraging to think that once you get the trip behind you, we can start writing. Somehow you always manage to make me feel you'd really rather stay—last time it was telling Milly [Stice] in Dallas that you sure hated to leave us, and this time it was learning that you were trying to jump out of the plane while it was out there on the runway.

Golly, Honey, I can just imagine that bunch of confused emotions going on, tearing yourself away and then having a real need to come back! You could practically have a short circuit at that point. I feel grateful to that stewardess for calming you down. It's a wonder they didn't have to strap you in. Mom and I tried to figure how the bag should get to you and suppose it must have gone up on a mail plane. I feel sure you got it and or you would have turned around for it. I was all ready to leap in the car and carry it to you myself. Yes, you were right. It slipped my mind completely, but I remember saying, "Won't it be a load off your back to get rid of us." And you gave me a funny look and really didn't want to get that coffee.

I'm only sorry I didn't get a chance to give you an extra big kiss here at home. As it was, I had my worst moment when I saw your shoes in the bedroom before you left, so I put them away so the homecoming wouldn't be so bad. It was rough but we did it and I'm proud of both of us. Your phone call helped the kids a whole lot and they have been fine ever since.

...

Sweet Kathy ran in the house saying "Dad" and acting like nothing was different, so she took it the best. Wish I was her.

...

I ran out of cigarettes, but other than that you left me a couple of days of being all "fixed" and a chance to see if my head was screwed on before charging into the old world. My head is okay, I think—I'm just missing a heart and you. Please adjust those, Darling. I'm sort of wobbly without them!

Now just get an APO [Army Post Office package] off to me soon and I'll be really happy.⁴

I love you angel,
Gig



Thursday night
12 October 1966

Hi Sweetheart,

Golly, this first week seems awfully long without you. I'll be really glad when it's over. Right now, I'm bushed from being "brave" at two affairs where people badgered me about Vietnam. Everybody's got a relative over there, so I've had to listen to all their stories, take names, etc. That was mostly at the gaggle of geese party for old Army wives, where I again ran into Mrs. McGee and was corrected one more time that her husband was a full general in the Marine Corps. When someone asked if I was "Air Force," she piped up and said, "Yup, Marine Air Force," and winked at me and said, "That oughta get 'em!" It appears that I am the only Marine wife here, though I've met two mothers with Marine officer sons.

But the big deal today was the Kappa coffee, where there was a panel discussion—with map—on Vietnam by five Army men who were just back and two sergeants, a lieutenant colonel surgeon, two majors—all in uniform and they really had some good stories. One said he learned fast to dig a really deep foxhole, and they also learned to blast out holes, which were hidden caves. I asked one question, "What to send—or what did you appreciate most?" and got razor blades, soap, pictures of kids in plastic scrapbooks, and presweetened Kool-Aid for an answer. So you are now the Kool-Aid kid!

I came home and gave a lecture to the kids on our Vietnam map.

Still no letter from you yet, and Milly warned it might be three weeks, so I'm not expecting one yet. It sure will be good to hear from you, and I do hope you find these at Okinawa. I'll bet they latch on to you mighty quickly though and put you to work with barely a breather. You just re-

⁴ Postal service for U.S. servicemembers goes back as far as World War I in the form of numbered Army (APO), Fleet (FPO), and Diplomatic Post Offices (DPO) to ensure that communications continued during a conflict or deployment.

member wars [that] aren't won in a day and take a breather if only by going to bed early, whenever and wherever.

...

I do hope this one-sided conversation ends soon and I can feel like I'm talking to you once more.

Thanks for the \$40 cash—it's been a boon this week when I ran out of checks.

I love you—or did you guess?

Gig



Thursday

13 October 1966

Hi Honey,

The past five days have really been jam-packed! To start with leaving my hanging clothes and orders and records in Austin really got me off on the right foot . . . ugh. It did arrive on the next flight, but I didn't know it. Some unknown person had carried it over to my Delta jet and given it to the flight engineer and no one at Dallas, Texas, knew where it was! I was going crazy trying to find out where it was and suddenly it materialized out of the darkness as I was reluctantly getting on the Delta flight. Never again!

Got to San Francisco in good time and the rest of my luggage appeared out of a hole in the floor on a big rotating platform. Oh—sat the Delta flight out between a Negro and a Frisco go-go dancer—what's the world coming to! Caught a midnight bus to Travis Air Force Base—got BBQ and slept until 1100 Sunday morning. Got suited up, called a cab, went to the overseas flight office, weighed in, got another cholera shot, and ate a huge brunch.⁵ Called Aunt Myrtle about 1300 and we left Travis right at 1600 in a big Boeing 707 World Airways jet. Took about five hours to [get to] Hawaii. Stopped for fuel and 150 head calls and Karen's

⁵ The U.S. military's immunization program during the period was extensive. For more, see John D. Grabenstein et al., "Immunization to Protect the US Armed Forces: Heritage, Current Practice, and Prospects," *Epidemiologic Reviews* 28, no. 1 (August 2006): 3–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxj003>.

card and back aboard for the longest 10-hour night flight I've ever taken to Kadena.⁶ We were flying west into the sun, so the hours actually almost stopped.

Most of the passengers were Marines and about one-third Air Force and about 20 Army dependents. We arrived about midnight Monday, and it took about another three hours to get our luggage and catch buses out here to Camp Hansen way up north on Okinawa.⁷ Weary, bleary, and saddle sore, I slept until noon Tuesday. Some of the enlisted people had orders here, but most of us are going on "down south" or "in-country" as they say.

I still had the problem of what to leave, buy, and take all over again. I've been going to clothing cash sales and the PX twice a day now, still squaring things away. Basically, I needed wash khaki uniforms (cap, shirt, and trousers) plus complete utilities.

No greens [service uniform]—no blouses—no coats—no tropical worsted [summer uniform]—no civvies.

Everyone here added, "Take a fan because they're still sleeping in tents at Da Nang" and other goodies so I got a good eight-inch Japanese fan and six more sets of underwear, a wind-up clock, etc.

The business of thinking I would be assigned a unit within the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW) was a joke—all they know is send everyone south and let them do it there.⁸ Seems as though there's an airplane load each midnight, and the manifests are published each afternoon for the following day's flight. Doesn't seem to be any particular pattern as to when your name is on the manifest.

Got gamma globulin and flu shots, which is something akin to trying to lift yourself with your own boot straps.

I'll admit that the story about extending naval aviators in the Repub-

⁶ *Head call* refers to the military term for restroom break. Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa, Japan, is a major air hub for U.S. forces in the Far East. With two large runways, it often serves as an air port of debarkation and embarkation for deploying forces.

⁷ Camp Hansen is a Marine Corp installation on the northern end of Okinawa that houses permanently assigned ground force units and other organizations on a rotational basis.

⁸ MABS-13, Command Chronology (ComdC), December 1966, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077119, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

lic of Vietnam (RVN) for an additional year rattled my cage.⁹ It was Navy aviators primarily. We felt their shortage in Beeville three years ago.¹⁰ It is not a new problem.¹¹ The Senate gave Lyndon B. Johnson authority to call any and all reserves yesterday, that will help some.¹² I'm sure they're not extending Marine aviators.

Talked to a major from Da Nang yesterday and he said the chow lacked fresh tidbits but was "good chow" and definitely not C-rations.¹³

...

Got a big bug bomb like you recommended plus towel and wash cloths. Cigarettes are only 15 cents here.

Some things are cheap here, some much more expensive. Okinawa is like a little Japan—less developed and becoming almost as overgrown.

...

I had forgotten how oppressive the humidity feels but temperature wise it's only about 80 today, which isn't bad.

I won't be able to get my pay squared away here, so you just keep on the same way. But your bank account should not go down more than \$200 each monthly statement or your spending is too great.

...

⁹ The Republic of Vietnam is the official name of South Vietnam. These terms may be used interchangeably throughout this volume.

¹⁰ Beeville, TX, was the home of Naval Air Station Chase Field that served as a fixed-wing training base for fledgling naval aviators. It was named for LtCdr Nathan B. Chase, who died during a 1925 training mission in the Pacific. It was upgraded to a full naval air station in 1968 and produced more than one-fourth of the Navy's pilots during the Vietnam War. Chase Field was closed in 1993 by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC).

¹¹ For more on personnel shortages, see Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966*, 262; and Jack Shulimson et al., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 570.

¹² "1966: Senate Passes Defense Bill," *New York Herald Tribune*, European Edition, 19 August 1966.

¹³ One of the challenges of feeding troops during the Vietnam War was the absence of a permanently established fighting front. A C-ration dinner might include hard bread, a canned main course, crackers, chocolate or hard candy, cigarettes, chewing gum, and coffee. C-ration entrées were simple—canned spaghetti and meatballs, beef stew, or franks and beans—but cigarettes were still included, despite the 1964 surgeon general's report showing their harm. See Chrissie Reilly, "History Highlights: Military Food Research and Development," Defense Logistics Agency, 20 April 2016.

Well, that's about it for now, Darling. Sure is lonesome without you. I really do love you, in case you're curious.

Kiss my sweet children starting with Kirk, Robin, Karen, and Kathy.

Love,
Ray



Monday
16 October 1966

Darling,

The first week is over! Only 51 more to go. Hope they all aren't so action-filled. The last one got to Friday without too many mishaps other than those described, but then Mom called and told about her accident in the car, which didn't hurt her except to make her very sore, but smashed the car door and window. She called me later in the evening and said she wanted me to come over to help the next day with all the Tellepsen crew that was arriving and had been invited to stay for dinner and night, and she was still a bit shaky, so I got a sitter and went over, of course. . . .¹⁴

...

So this week is starting out cool. Kathy and I went to the bank the other day and, while we waited for the car at the bank, she turned around and saw the car and got very excited and said "Dad"! I thought that was pretty cute.

...

Karen tried to paste four quarters on her letter, but I took them off. But the thought was sweet.

All my love, sweetheart,
Gig



¹⁴ Karen Tellepsen married Ed Kirkpatrick in Houston right before Ray Stice left for the war in 1966. Ed Kirkpatrick was Gig's younger brother. Don Kirkpatrick was her older brother.

16 October 1966

Hi Darling,

Yep, Chu Lai of all places. Friday, we bused to Kadena and caught a jet to Da Nang, stayed at the transient facility overnight and the next morning checked in with the wing G-1 (personnel).¹⁵ He asked me what I wanted and I told him my sad story. He told me that Chu Lai was going to have all the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II's although he did not have much hope of my getting checked out in-country.

Da Nang was the dirtiest most fouled up junk pile I've ever seen. One filthy mess. The flight down here only took about 30 minutes—after a 4 hour wait—but it took another 3 hours to get wheels across the field here at MABS-13, so yesterday was mostly shot waiting.

Everyone says, “What are you current in?” Naturally, it's a bit disheartening to say the least. Cloyd H. “Rick” Klingensmith is a major here; Joseph B. Wuertz tomorrow pins his on; Clyde Simon, Jack Acey (El Toro with the pretty Asian wife next door), and a whole sling of captains and majors I know or knew (like Lawrence A. Whipple), even one I hadn't seen since we were in flight school together. Only saw one familiar face in Da Nang. To top off the gripe department, six of the seven captains who were sent down to Beaufort from the Air Warning Squadron (AWS) to get checked out in the F-4 are in the squadrons here. Well, now that they've started sending single people instead of entire squadrons, they'll have to add in the training somewhere. One slim ray of hope as far as flying goes: they have four of the old Grumman TF-9J Cougars that I flew in Beeville for three years in Marine Aircraft Group 13 (MAG-13). They've put the guns back in and all fixed up with rocket and bomb fixtures. I'll bet the Viet Cong think that the long-nose refueling probe is a 75mm cannon!¹⁶

Today is Sunday, but you'd never know it for all the activity. We're living in small wooden frame shacks of five to six officers each. Tell Kirk I'm sleeping on an old cot like the one he wanted to put up outside with

¹⁵ The G-1 is a staff position responsible for personnel at the division and corps level.

¹⁶ The term *Viet Cong* is a colloquialism meaning “Vietnamese Communist” that originated in the 1920s to differentiate the group from Chinese Communists. While some have assigned pejorative value to the term, it is used here purely as a descriptive identifier. The organization is also known as the Liberation Army of South Vietnam and the People's Liberation Armed Forces. See Brett Reilly, “The True Origin of the Term ‘Viet Cong’,” *Diplomat*, 31 January 2018.

a blanket for a pillow and a wobbly air mattress. I had to borrow a saw, hammer, and nails to make a small table to write on and a bench to sit on. The doors have screening but the sides are wide open. It's a problem of who can stick it out longer—me or the mosquitoes and bugs! But the 8-inch fan just barely runs on the 50 or 60 volts, and I have to stop every once and awhile when the lamp gets too dim to see the paper. No hot water anywhere, but they manage to pump enough cold water so that each three or four shacks here have a water spigot. We “procured”—that means stole—some pipe and bent it like so . . . and voilà pronto chango—a shower. There's a round pipe out front for you know what, and a three-holer [latrine] across the sands. Not bad, since you don't have to worry about invasion of privacy when there ain't none.

All the squadron people seem to have known precisely where they were going for months given the abundance of battery-powered stereo tape decks, handmade (Japanese) steamer-type chests that have desks, chairs, mattresses, lights and huge mosquito nets (room size), large built-in drawers, and panels that fold all over the place. Jack Acey just came in two hours ago and it looks like he's been here 10 years! He was nice enough to offer me a cold beer from his 1.5 cubic foot Japanese icebox on top of which his 20-inch fan swings gaily back and forth.

Somewhere, I have to get some more goodies. I had no idea it was so primitive here. Right now, I don't even have any boxes to unpack into, no laundry soap, not even a wash brush. All the other bases use local help for all that or they have laundries. The chow is entirely edible, although no tea for some reason. I haven't caught any bugs yet (internally only).

Chu Lai is just down from the South China Sea, so naturally it's all one texture—ankle-deep fine sand. Completely exposed, no trees, just wildly scattered little clumps of some odd bushes. They say the area is relatively secure—whatever that means—and there are two runways Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12) has one and their Douglas A-4 Skyhawks, and we have the other one for the F-4s and Grumman F-9 Cougars. Our side is brand new and just barely operational with a squadron, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314), one-half now and one and a half more next week. Got to do something about screens ASAP—the bugs just won.

I love you,
Ray



October 1966

Tuesday night
18 October 1966

Hello Darling,

My, it was good to get your first letter yesterday. You and [President Lyndon B.] Johnson just were a week apart in your trips, though I think yours was shorter as it took him 10 hours to get to Hawaii! I groaned for you on your 10 hours to Kadena, Okinawa, but I was glad you had a fancy jet at least to Hawaii.

I can well imagine your all-over sick feeling from all those shots and do hope they have worn off by now. What a way to start a war! So glad you got a couple of good sleeps in and a chance to get your wardrobe changed to tropical gear. And, of course, that you found your bag in Dallas.

You still sounded like you were about to take off at any moment, which evidently you did, and I'm sure you are there "in-country" by now. Just in time for the monsoons, I hear.¹⁷ I told you to take an umbrella! But I know you know how to take care of yourself, and the wet won't bother you once you're used to it . . . much. But I'll bet you will be glad just to stay in one place if only to give me a handy APO. Right?

Can you believe I drove to the commissary today thinking of you all the way? The gate military policeman (MP) said my Quantico sticker was fine—no sweat. . . . Tomorrow I'm supposed to turn around and go back to the "Waiting Wives" tea, but my heart isn't in it. Too long a drive for these lazy bones. I'd rather iron.

. . .

Now, the newspaper clipping looks a wee grim if taken at worst: six months back before going back for another year. If so, I can envision a two-and-a-half-year tour here for me! I don't think a six-month tour would encourage you to want to pack us up. But as I said, that's if taken at worst and who wants to do that? Who the heck knows anyway, so let's not sweat it. As far as I want to see it's 13 months and that's far enough.

. . .

I found myself wondering if people will put responsibilities on you in the same way just because you're a new "rookie." I'm sure you are ex-

¹⁷ The monsoons are seen in summer and winter, with the winter monsoon season lasting from October to April. Winter monsoons are typically not as rainy as the summer season, which lasts from April to September.

pecting this, but as I told the kids tonight grimly, “Learn to say NO!” A famous word I can’t ever seem to say now that you’re gone! Anyway, I’m crossing my fingers for you that you can divide and conquer all your jobs and I know you can.

Darling, don’t sweat writing. (I don’t mean that literally but wish it were true.) Just get me an APO, which is hopefully better than Okinawa if there is one, and I’ll carry most of the letter-writing ball. I’m trying to make one every other day. Post office says they can come for 5 cents if you want. Try one and I’ll time it. This letter from you mailed on the 14th got here the 17th. It’s midnight here—good morning, Love!

XXXs,
Gig



18 October 1966
Chu Lai

Hi Honey,

I cannot help wondering when I’ll get my first letter—due to my moving all over the place, you probably got the first one. The electricity has been off all day, so I’m trying to hurry up before the sun goes down—I mean before it gets too dark—it’s been raining all day.

When I was in Austin, all I could think was all the things I could get and send home. Now, all I can think of is what I need! One of my old Training Squadron 25 (VT-25) buddies is flying a transport to Japan tomorrow [Major Richard T. Douglas].¹⁸ I gave him a big green bill and a long list of possible goodies, starting with a voltage control to boost the wavering 50–80 volts we get up to 110 again, a big room-size mosquito net, soap powder, brush, wash basin, big steamer trunk, clothesline and pins, another fan, straw rugs, etc.

. . . As far as a job goes, I’m still unemployed. There are rumbles about my being the MABS executive officer, but we’ll have to wait until next week to see. VMFA-314 is due in Friday and then the S-1 (personnel) is going to “present his personnel picture” to the MAG commanding offi-

¹⁸ The VT-25 Cougars was one of the training squadrons based at NAS Chase Field.

Figure 15. Four U.S. Navy Grumman TF-9J Cougar of Training Squadron 25 (VT-25) flying in formation



Note that two aircraft are fitted with inflight refueling probes, ca. 1960s
Source: U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation, photo no. 1996.253.7410.015.

cer.¹⁹ They want to get all the various strengths and rotation tour dates all spread out neatly.

Remember—[Lieutenant Colonel John T. Murphy and Major Louis F. Gagnon are] flying helicopters and really have some interesting tales to tell. They're getting hit quite a lot. We lost two men last night in a stupid accident. They were visiting MAG-12's enlisted men's club across the field and decided to take a short cut back here across their runway. An A-4 landing hit them.²⁰

We put in planking in front of our group of shacks, built a small wash rack around the shower spigot, and things are looking up slightly. We planted some trees and bushes outside the hut, brought some Korean

¹⁹ An S-1 is a staff position that is responsible for personnel at the battalion or brigade level.

²⁰ MAG-13, Command Chronology, October 1966, Box ___, Folder 098, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, III-1.

beer from the Republic of Korea Marines [ROK Marines] here and had a monsoon party. Be a good time for Charlie to raise hell.²¹ I think tomorrow we'd better dig and sandbag a bunker.

...

I went into the S-2 (intelligence) shop this morning and saw Clyde Simon and told him to brief me. Well, he went on for 45 minutes without stopping!

There's an awful lot of flares going off tonight. Someone is nervous.

I sure hope Karen is doing better in her math. I think you should go to class with her! Make sure you keep that practice of them making up their beds and cleaning their teeth in the morning. Tell Kirk I'm still using a hammer and a saw—today, I made a small shelf for my clock, flashlight, and pocket knife. Try to use a lot of restraint and patience with them—monsters as they may appear, they are beautiful children. I'll be glad to start flying and working so I can get my mind off of you all. It's a bit hard being in the same hut with all these squadron people—you know all their spirit and camaraderie.

It is really hot and muggy here. I'm glad I came now in the fall so I can get acclimatized with the seasons.

Got to "shower" and hit the air mattress—wish it was you!

I love you, Gig,

Ray

Kiss my kids for me, Dozo, starting with Robin this time.



Thursday night

20 October 1966

Hello again sweetheart,

And a real hello this time as we are in touch again at last a short four days apart! Your letter from Chu Lai left there on the morning of the 17th and got here the 20th at noon. Marvelous! I keep blessing the dear pilots who fly our letters back and forth!

I was shocked of course to hear how bad Chu Lai is, but I'm glad

²¹ Collectively, the United States often called them the Viet Cong, which was commonly shortened to VC, which in military alphabet code was spoken as Victor Charlie. It was further shortened to just Charlie.

you gave it to me straight as I can really picture it now and even more so, as Mom said Frank Shallene was there (building those runways) and the temperature gets to 135 degrees in the summer! So description wise, I've got the picture but I couldn't find it on the map! Gotta get a better map—or better eyes.

...

Yesterday was the Bergstrom Waiting Wives coffee and I met Mrs. Haight, who got here in May from Quantico; her husband is at Da Nang in public relations work at a French villa. Tough! Also two wives (Kapacz), I think whose husbands were sergeants and made lieutenants this summer. Kapacz was on the plane with you as he left Travis on Sunday too. Anyway, there are four of us in Austin. Kapacz was a sergeant for 13 years.²²

...

Eat a lot and don't be like this man in the article. I can't see you losing 40 pounds—Frank Shallene didn't—besides you don't have it to lose. I do! Oh, what a pet I am.

...

It's not easy to think of you under these conditions, so let me do something and I'll feel better. Just tell me what.

I love you too, Sweet Man,
Gig



20 October 1966

Hi Honey,
I should have brought my water wings [floaties]. I think the monsoons have started. It's been raining for three days now. Every once and awhile it will slow down, and if you stick your head out, someone pours a bucket on you—it's that heavy.

We could hear some small arms fire this morning, there were a lot of flares last night, and tonight nothing big. Our bunker is about half done—that's a lot of work—you have to make your own sand bags, of course.

²² The term *waiting wives* refers to the women left on base while their husbands were deployed. See Ralph Blumenthal, "To Waiting Wives' of Officers the War Is One More Job," *New York Times*, 4 October 1971.

The Seabees are almost through with the shower next door—cold water, but it’s out of the breeze.²³ And the new mess hall across the “street” is getting the roof on today. That sure will be nice to get finished. Our current “mess hall” is a tent about a half a muddy kilometer from down the “road.” They don’t use concrete except for very necessary spots; they use a local clay called laterite to make the sand cohesive. Actually, the only time you need it is when the sand is dry and everything bogs down. In the rain, the sand gives almost as good traction and a lot cleaner.

Did you notice the change of address? MABS-13 in place of Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron 13 (H&MS-13). Tomorrow, I am the executive officer of the MABS.²⁴ It’s the largest outfit in the group. It’s going to be one hell of a challenge. In the states, the air stations are already built and it would still be a big job. Here, we’re building a completely new base and all the associated facilities in combat.

I hope you can grasp the scope of the problems: runways, taxiways, ramps, TACOM, GCA, approach control, navigation aids of all sorts, aerology, the tower and crew and communication gear, crash crew and gear, hangars, ready rooms, shelters, ammo dumps, supply warehousing, quarters of all types, road, electricity, sanitation, garbage, food, water, mess halls, officer spaces, hospitals, disbursing, motor transport, passive and active defense, military police.²⁵ Those are just a few of the things I can think of. Plus, the clubs and post exchanges, etc.

The old executive officer is leaving and I’ll only have tomorrow to slosh around, starting with the coffee with the colonel at 0630 and then going to all the various areas and meeting all the officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

I don’t know how in the world I can ever get much flying in. I’d better get prequalified in the F-9 fast, while I’m still numb.

²³ The Seabees played an integral role in the creation and maintenance of U.S. bases in Vietnam. See “Seabee History: Southeast Asia,” Naval History and Heritage Command, 16 April 2015.

²⁴ Stice, “Chronological Record of Duty Assignments,” 2.

²⁵ There are two terms that Stice may have been referencing—TACOM and TACON—for tactical action. TACOM, or tactical command, refers to a commander with the authority to assign forces to accomplish a mission from a higher authority; TACON, or tactical control, refers to only control of movements and maneuvers necessary to accomplish a previously assigned mission or limit the authority to direct combat forces. GCA refers to ground control approach. It is a landing methodology where a controller on the ground with radar can guide a pilot to the runway using voice commands over the radio.

The colonel (MABS commanding officer) was in Omaha with us, but you never met him, and I barely met him.

Tell Kirk I'm going to build a fire station; tell Karen I'm going to build a library; tell Robin I'm going to build a restaurant; and tell the damned bugs to leave me alone, so I can tell you how God damn much I miss you!

Love you,

Ray

P.S. I think I'll have a piece of chain installed in each one of the four-holders [latrines] with a little placard: "LEST WE FORGET."



Saturday night at 2230

22 October 1966

Hi Sweetheart,

Today—rather tonight—was just like Christmas. Three of your first letters—your wonderful letters—and my buddy came back from Japan with a few goodies for me. Hog heaven! We've had a couple of rough days. Yesterday, the commanding officer of VMFA-314 crashed on landing, and this afternoon my roomie Joe Byrum pranged in the rain.²⁶ They all got out okay, but we've torn up more air control and ground gear in the last three or four days than the Viet Cong could in a month. We've done pretty good routing out Charlie too. Our dogs caught a couple of them buried in the sand Wednesday. And the rain—whew—we're just soaking wet every time you stick your head outside for some reason. Zap, you're soaked.

Work wise, I'm completely snowed—appears like we're operating on a mighty thin shoestring all around. This is a huge outfit and getting larger all the time—more than 400 now going to 600, I guess.

...

I'm in much better shape now gear wise. I'm sure I'll be able to pay

²⁶ According to the command chronology, LtCol Darrel E. Bjorklund was the commanding officer of VMFA-314 at this time. MAG-13, Command Chronology, October 1966, I-1. The term *pranged* is British slang for a minor accident or crash involving a vehicle or aircraft.

the house rent. There just isn't too much you can buy here other than soap, razor blades, and believe it or not KOOL-AID!

You send me some chocolate brownies in an air-proof tin and I'd be your slave forever—as if I wasn't—well forever and a day! It's late as hell and our all officers' meetings go at 0700 sharp at MABS, and this morning the only thing that woke me up was the rain splashing in through the walls and roof. I was almost late for my first solo executive officer day.

I'm almost falling asleep—damn it, I love you so much.

Thank you for those sweet letters!

Ray

XO to everyone!



Sunday night

23 October 1966

Darling,

I was just resting in the living room after a long Sunday with the kids, sorting the weekend out in my mind and I thought, "What the hell, as I am lying here thinking, when I could be writing you?" I am really tired tonight and feel sort of all in from carrying the load all by myself. Sundays are really the worst. I've practically memorized your first two letters, and I'm really anxious for the next. I haven't written for three days because I lost \$5 worth of stamps and am really mad at myself.²⁷ But maybe my presents will make up the lost day.

...

About that time, it was time to take Karen, so I dashed to the Civic Theater with her and then home to feed Liz and the crew. Took all the gang to the store later in the afternoon (minus Liz and after Kathy's nap) to buy goodies for Robin's birthday party. Then home and Don came over for supper as Mom went off for the weekend to Dallas to see the theater with Trude, Flossie, and Alberta.

Don is a dear and very sweet to the kids, so he is relaxing to be with and always appreciates my cooking—rice and hamburgers.

²⁷ By today's standards, \$5 may not seem like a great sum; however, the 1967 to 2023 purchasing power equivalent puts \$5 then at approximately \$45 today.

I stayed up late watching a Marine movie—look at the habits you got me into—and ironing and folding clothes.²⁸

...

On the news just now, they say it is midday Monday. A spring morning in Australia. What season is it there?

I hope you haven't had to pay extra stamps for my Kool-Aid in the letters. I will quit that unless you tell me you like it. Sorry it can't be beer. Your beer is still in the icebox. And right now, I think I'll have one! And if that doesn't show you something, I'll eat my hat. It's even kind of good. Glug, glug.

We still have a rather large fan in the garage, Honey, which I could freight to you if you want. But I'm sure you can get one there easier.

I know you are going to be extremely busy getting checked out in the F-9 perhaps and so you mustn't write more than a one-page letter. None of this losing your eyesight trying to do it at night. I can rattle on about things here at home for an hour and love every minute of it, but you mustn't try to answer in kind. Remember, I understand more than you know, and I can read between the lines all sorts of things, so don't try to keep me happy in your letters, but reassuring me about— Oh hell, who am I trying to kid now? I love you, Sweetheart, and that just says it all.

Goodnight my love,
Gig



Monday night
24 October 1966

Hi Honey,
Tonight, it dawns on me—Robin's birthday—such a good deal. You tell her I'm sure sorry I couldn't send her anything. There's nothing to buy if you don't like soap and razorblades!

²⁸ There were many films on the U.S. Marine Corps released in the decades prior to 1966 that could have been on television at this time, including *6th Marine Division on Okinawa* (1945); *All the Young Men* (1960); *Battle Cry* (1955); *The D.I.* (1957); *Flying Leathernecks* (1951); *Halls of Montezuma* (1951); *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957); *Here Come the Marines* (1952); *Marines, Let's Go* (1961); *The Outsider* (1961); *Retreat, Hell!* (1952); *Tarawa Beachhead* (1958); *To the Shores of Hell* (1966); *What Price Glory?* (1952); and *A Yank in Viet-Nam* (1964).

The last letter I got from you was written 10 days ago. I guess those first three letters upset the applectart.

Would you believe that I'm eating popcorn! Not much, but its real! Someone brought an electric popper and the voltage happens to be high enough to do the trick. You could send me a half dozen cans of unpopped popcorn for your first packaging attempt.

Would you believe that I'm drinking cold beer! Someone scrounged up an old rusty icebox and managed to get it working.

Would you believe we're watching *Twelve O'clock High*?²⁹ No . . . well that would be too much, but it's true! Joe Byrum got in a small Japanese TV somewhere—probably the only one in Chu Lai, I'm sure. We rigged up an antenna of sorts, fiddled, and diddled, and presto channelize—Da Nang TV!

. . .

Charlie isn't quitting, that's for sure. There was all kinds of activity all last night—mostly artillery and mortars—several of them sounded like they were right next to the hut, but of course they weren't. I would have sworn they were though. Looks like Dean Martin now—kind of hard to say with only 85 volts and no real antenna or lead in wire.

Looks like the 4th of July with all the flares out there.

. . .

I've only been executive officer of MABS for two days and I'm right up to my ears—the skipper, Lieutenant Colonel Owens is going to try to catch a Lockheed C-130 Hercules to Da Nang and get some flight time. I guess he trusts me—I don't know. We have 500 people all over the place, running and building a whole air station at the moment. Sure wish we had 200-300 more. Everyone is stretched so thin they're working 12-16-18 hours a day. . . . It finally quit raining for a while this afternoon after almost a week of drenching downpours. I have to make a hot locker for my gear. I scrounged an old metal wall locker so I'll have to drill some holes in it and get an electric light inside to keep my clothes from mildewing. Those plastic clothes hangers didn't work out too well—not enough space, too windy, and too much moisture anyway.

²⁹ *Twelve O'clock High* highlighted the strategic bombing campaign over Germany during World War II. It specifically addressed the stressful nature of the air war and the toll it took on Army Air Corps aviators. *Twelve O'clock High*, directed by Henry King, starring Gregory Peck (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Studios, 1949).

. . .

Met a major from the battalion that's guarding to the north. All he wanted was our empty beer bottles. He said Charlie really hates to crawl over broken glass around their positions, but all their beer was in cans. They've even had signs written in Vietnamese saying "mines" and planted old can's and ammo boxes in the ground with claymores [antipersonnel mines] on them. Lots of room for ingenuity.

Got to take a bath you know . . . cold shower, I mean. Want to join me outside in front of the entire MAG? That ought to stop 'em. Well, too late, I just took my shower without you. See, wouldn't it be nicer if I had all those nice showers we didn't take together to remember?

The 20 piasters and MPC is for Robin because that's all there is, with borrowing privileges reserved for Karen and Kirk, of course.³⁰

I love you, Darling—letters, Dozo.

Your Ray



Tuesday night

25 October 1966

Darling Sweet,

I just got your third letter today, the one written last Tuesday when you said you hadn't gotten any letters yet, and I really groaned because I know how much your letters have meant to me these first long weeks and I know what a long wait even two weeks can be. But I feel sure you have finally started getting them and they will snow you for a little while, then we will practically be talking in our letters when they catch up with you.

. . .

Well, it is the day after Robin's birthday and it was a huge success all around. I ended the day looking at her cards and found yours saying, "I wish I could be there, Robbie" and I really felt you were, except for the movie camera. I chickened out and couldn't remember if you had indoor or outdoor film, so I didn't take a movie. . . .

Then your letter came today saying give Robin a kiss first and it was

³⁰ Piastres are a monetary subunit of the pound. In 1966, the foreign currency exchange rate for the Vietnamese piastre was 72.77 piastres to \$1. MPC refers to military payment certificates. The military was paid in MPCs for buying things at the post exchange.

very appropriate coming as it did so near her birthday. They are all very interested in your letters and Kirk got worried that you didn't have his little spade to dig your bunker. I assured him you had a spade there. And I do hope you dug a good deep one! We both got a bit weepy, and he said he didn't like to think of your being gone and that was why he didn't want to see you off at the airport. I said I knew that was why. Karen just says don't get the sniffles, Mom, and I assure her I don't have them. Much.

Kirk ran to get his flare gun after reading about the flares you were seeing and said his was still a live one. Hmm?

...

Tomorrow is the commissary and the Coleman's for dinner.³¹ I seem to not get enough sleep on the nights I write you because I always listen to the news in the middle of the letter. But it sounds encouraging tonight. Something about a troop pullout in six months if the Communists do too. Now, I guess we wait for their reaction. It is too much to believe this early.³²

I was so glad to hear Clyde Simon is there. Give him my love and tell him I am thinking of Ruby and her little ones. They have four or five now, I think.

And your "home" away from home sounds like it is getting a bit better with the planking and trees. I'm so curious to hear if the screening helps.

Every night that I watch TV, I think of how we used to watch it together and wonder what it would be like when you would be over there where the news was being made. Now you are there, but I'm still here sitting on the couch! I keep thinking I ought to leap up and go over there with you. I keep thinking if only I were a nurse or something useful. I guess I just wish I could share your hardships. At least we'd be together. But as you say, that's the "iffy" side of life.

P.S. My outfit for bed consists of a sweater, pants, P.J. bottoms, a blanket, and a quilt and none of it keeps me warm like you do. But the thought of you puts me to sleep, so on that nice warm thought, I'll go to bed.

³¹ Sharon and Bill Coleman were family friends. Sharon was a bridesmaid in Gig's wedding.

³² Lyndon B. Johnson, "Manila Summit Conference Documents," American Presidency Project, accessed 23 February 2023.

XXXs and a little bit more,
Gig



Thursday night
27 October 1966

Hi Darling,

. . . Every night it's something. Tuesday someone crashed out off the runway and Wednesday (last night) I had to wash clothes and move to another hut. Tonight, right after I got my clothes washed and hung out, all the electricity is out—generator blew up—I'm writing next to a cumshawed Coleman lantern now.³³

Finally got in the air yesterday and today! I don't think I've ever worn so damn many things around my neck and hung things all over the place with so much gear—weighs about 60 pounds! And today it was 92 degrees, so I was sweating freely to say the least. It's okay except when you're pulling a lot of Gs and then you remember it's there.³⁴

Today, I was making an armed reconnaissance hop down near Cam Ranh Bay where President Johnson and all of the big wheels were, then inland in the mountains, back up near Laos (I think), and then back here.³⁵ My first impressions were: "This is too beautiful a country to have a war." Beautiful coastlines, islands, and beaches; rich rice fields; striking mountains where the trees are as advertised at over 100 feet tall, green, lush, and sometimes covered with a lower secondary alive like canopy. The rivers are full and fast and every hill has thousands of waterfalls. And you can go for miles without seeing anything man-made. I won't go into the rules of engaging targets and what you can and can't do, but I'd say

³³ The term *cumshaw* refers to something that was obtained by irregular or unofficial means, such as bribery, debts, cutting corners, etc. British Navy personnel likely first picked up the word in Chinese ports, during the First Opium War of 1839, which means "grateful thanks" in the dialect of Xiamen, a port in southeast China.

³⁴ Depending on the job and aircraft of the personnel, a pilot would like wear standard issue boots, flight suit or uniform, belt, protective vest, flight helmet, various emergency gear, and communications headset or radio. Gs refer to G-force or gravity.

³⁵ Johnson, "Manila Summit Conference Documents."

Figure 16. Maj Ray Stice (kneeling, right front row) at the Marine Aircraft Group 13 recovery unit



Source: Stice family collection.

there's no doubt about one thing: they sure are careful.³⁶ Besides, unless you got hit or just happened to see some tracers, you'll never know whether you had even been shot at to start with. I wish all the Viet Cong would all wear orange hats or something, then you could be a lot more effective.

I think I have another hop tomorrow, but you never know because the schedule isn't out until after midnight.³⁷ Yesterday, we flew out west into the mountains, then up north, back to the coast over Phu Bai (Hue), back over Da Nang, and on down here to Chu Lai. So, I'll get a good

³⁶ For more on the rules of engagement during the period, see Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982); and Maj Ricky J. Drake, "The Rules of Defeat: The Impact of Aerial Rules of Engagements on USAF Operations in North Vietnam, 1965-1968" (thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, 1992).

³⁷ The term *hop* refers to a combat flight. See Edward Fraser and John Gibbons, *Soldier and Sailor Words and Phrases* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1925).

view of this part of the country anyway. I just can't get over how pretty it is from the air, and how primitive and dirty it is from the ground—really a perplexing place.

...

Don't worry about my eating. I can get some soup and sandwiches at the mess hall after flying if I miss a meal. You forgot that they work for me? My real and embarrassing problem is getting too large of servings from them going through the line. They serve you sort of cafeteria style.

...

You look on that map along the coastline until you see Chu Lai. It's about 80 kilometers below Da Nang and then mark it. The kids will help you.

Tomorrow night—I wasn't on the day schedule—I asked the operations officer if I could go along on a night flare drop, so I better turn in and get some sleep. My regular job hours don't change.

Goodnight Sweetheart.
I miss you and I love you,
Ray



Saturday night
29 October 1966

Hello Husband Mia,
Would you believe I've just had a drink—a “with dinner” drink and an “after dinner” drink? And in the midst of 17 people, 8 of whom were children? Yup, you guessed it, I have just come home from Sharon and Bill's and my big Saturday evening.

...

First though, don't you dare say I'm not writing you, because I know I am and it isn't my fault you are behind in getting them. I simply refuse to fly them over to you personally. You would just stick me in front of the world in your cold shower and I wouldn't mind the audience, but I just can't hack those cold showers.

...

I got your sixth letter yesterday, telling about the rains stopping and your popcorn, beer, TV evening with guns and flares going off. Not quite like mine, heh? Still, I am so glad you are all being inventive and getting

things like iceboxes, TV, and popcorn popped. Yes, I'll send the popcorn, brownies, etc., if you thank me for my last bundle, which surely has reached you by now—the not needed Kool-Aid, air mattress, and screening!

Trude Shallene says the base there was named for General Victor H. Krulak, and that is “Chu Lai” in Vietnamese. She says he came over and had an air-conditioned place built for him when the Marines were still lying wounded on the sand. . . . I really will bend Frank Shallene's ears back when he comes down here next time to find out more about Chu Lai.³⁸ He sent some dolls from Thailand, which she says were very good.

...

Wrote Milly. And all in all, I am being a good girl. One who should have more imagination however. Though, I think sometimes imagination takes money.

...

Texas lost a football game again today in the last few minutes with the other side kicking a field goal from the 51-yard line. And they had been winning up until then.³⁹

Funny that the letters take longer to get from “my side” to “your side” than vice versa. There's a full moon here tonight. Do you see it on your side? If so, there's a kiss on it for you. Marked R. B. Stice 062183 USMC (NOT TRANSFERABLE?). SPECIAL DELIVERY VIA MOON SATELLITE.

Goodnight or good morning, whichever it is for you, Sweetiepie. Always hate to close a letter, but I'm sure you have work to do. Me, I just think I do!

XXXs,

Gig

P.S. This letter is in answer to yours written on 24 October, mailed on

³⁸ Though this cannot be substantiated, several publications, including the Marine Corps' official history, reference Krulak and Chu Lai. See Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1978); Otto J. Lehrack, *No Shining Armor: The Marines at War in Vietnam an Oral History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992); and Frank A. Blazich Jr., “Surmounting the Sands of Chu Lai: MCB 10 and the Marine Expeditionary Airfield of 1965,” Seabee Museum, 4 May 2022.

³⁹ “SMU vs Texas (Oct 29, 1966),” Stats.Texasports, accessed 23 February 2023. The final score was Southern Methodist University 13, University of Texas 12.

the morning of 25 October, so that only makes us five days off. Do you suppose we'll ever get on the same frequency? Over.



Friday morning at 0900
28 October 1966

Good morning Darling,

For once, I am wide awake while writing you. And feeling great because I folded up at 2200 last night, too tired even to hear the news. The reason was because I went to see the *Blue Max* with Uncle Sam, Mom, and Liz Wednesday night, came home to read another two hours, and had a busy day that day going to the commissary. . . .⁴⁰

Of course, Wednesday was a red-letter day mostly because two letters came from you with all that exciting news about your new job. I was really hoping you would get the job, but afraid to say so in case you didn't. But it sounds terrific. Overwhelming, I'll admit, but terribly challenging and a wonderful way to keep so busy that the year will fly by.

I was so glad to hear my letters were beginning to get there and that you had gotten some things from Japan to make the place bearable. I looked at a box of Cold Power [laundry detergent] here to send you but it was so big that it would take a box of its own to mail it. So, I was glad to hear you could get it there. Gee, that's a shame they don't have a laundry there, maybe you'd better build that instead of a library! The kids got a big kick out of all the things you are going to "build."

I read your letters to everyone at least three or four times and so I really memorize each one.

...

The Blue Max was as terrific as you said it would be and a really good story too. . . .

I got a sticker at Bergstrom [Air Force Base]—no sweat—and they were very nice to me, especially when they heard where you were.

...

Of course, I was sorry to hear about the torn-up aircraft and the accident with the men on the runway, but still it was not as bad as the fire

⁴⁰ *The Blue Max*, directed by John Guillermin, starring George Peppard (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Studios, 1966).

on the USS *Oriskany* (CVA 34). That was really so terrible it's still hard to believe.⁴¹

I can hardly picture the rain when it is definitely Indian summer here. Wonder how long it lasts and how one gets dry. The whole picture sounds pretty foreign! (That's called an understatement.) I'm a bit rattled as the little girls have now found me in the kitchen.

Glad to hear you have the dogs over there to find the Viet Cong and that they really work. That must help a lot.

...

It is a bit weird not to have an "escort" to things. I noticed it particularly at the movies when I bought a Coke and thought they were 10 cents and they were 25 cents. Haven't paid for myself in some time! And I felt sort of self-conscious in a crowd of men, like I wanted to find you and couldn't.

...

I seem to have to explain a lot to Mom that I am okay, our marriage is okay, the kids are okay, and so forth. . . . She may still be recuperating from her accident, but she is cross, weepy, and all sort of run down from the marriage. I am rough on her at times, but I think once she relaxes, she will be okay. She is just not strong enough to discipline the kids without upsetting herself, and I told her she'd better let me handle them, but she forgets and tries to do it anyway. Don may be able to help her a bit once he gets out of *Oliver!*⁴² He has many irons in the fire and seems terribly happy for the first time in ages.

Guess that's about all for the moment, "Herr Major: It sounds like we both have our jobs cut out for us.

...

I love you, Angel,

Gig



⁴¹ On 26 October 1966, a flare was accidentally fired, setting off the contents of a magazine locker while the USS *Oriskany* lay off the Vietnamese coast. The resulting fire killed 44 men. "Blast Rips *Oriskany*; 43, Killed, 16 Injured," *Evening Tribune* (San Diego, CA), 26 October 1966.

⁴² *Oliver!* was a Broadway-style adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. It first premiered in London in 1960 and was brought to the United States as early as 1963.

Saturday noon
29 October 1966
Chu Lai

Why Not,

And how are you sweet things today? I don't know why I feel so good, I've got a roaring headache and a stiff back from those damned Martin-Baker seats in the F-9.⁴³ Two Bufferin and six salt tablets should do the trick. The night flare drop fell through—no one wanted any apparently. Today we went down south and out west again trying to watch for the Viet Cong and dodge the mountain tops in the clouds. Had to pop up on top three times. I'll be damned if I'm going to run into one of those things. Saw a couple of Air Force planes giving someone hell, but they didn't need any help apparently. We're really quite limited with the F-9 and lucky to have them in the first place for people like me aren't in something else, but still no bombs or rockets yet just the guns for the time being. Today is a pretty day if you're just looking or sitting still. I'm not sure if you've ever lived on the beach—well, that's what we're doing here, living in a beach shack. Remember how sticky and sandy everything gets from the salt spray? That's us.

...

This noon we had to wait and keep going around while a big jet transport used the runway that had the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] aboard, pretty big wheel you know—next to Mac himself.⁴⁴ Tomorrow General Krulak is coming down—he'll be all over the damn place I've heard—so standby for the “Brute,” he's commanding general of all the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.⁴⁵

Would you believe 4 Bufferin, 12 salt tablets, and a visit to the state-

⁴³ The Martin-Baker was a British-made ejection seat that saw its share of success and failure. Some pilots offered several slogans regarding its performance, such as “Meet Your Maker in a Martin-Baker” and “Martin-Baker Back Breaker.” Issues persist to this day. See Diana Stancy Correll, “Navy and Marine Corps Replacing Faulty Aircraft Ejection Seat Components,” *Navy Times*, 27 July 2022.

⁴⁴ Given the period and prior reference, “Mac” is likely Robert S. McNamara, secretary of defense from 1961 to 1968. Robert S. McNamara, “Remarks at a Press Briefing Following the Return from Vietnam of Secretary McNamara and Under Secretary Katzenbach” (remarks, Washington, DC, 14 October 1966).

⁴⁵ LtGen Victor H. Krulak, Oral History Transcript, Benis M. Frank interviewer, Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 1973.

ly 4-hole [latrine]? First headache I've had since I left you—hmm, I wonder—I'll stop writing for a couple of days and see if that helps! Got to get to work, because it's a long walk. If we had blocks, it would be about seven or eight blocks, but here in the sand it's like walking uphill all the time.

I love you sweetheart. I'm sorry, it's me that's sweating. Sweet baby—

Yours,
Ray



Sunday night
30 October 1966

Hello again sweetie,

We all went to the Coleman's ranch today—all except Kathy that is—and saw the “shack” that Bill is insulating with the help of several men. I really thought about how much you would have enjoyed being with us today. Guess the “shack” reminded me of your “shack” over there!

...

Just had to write you about the ranch afternoon, because it was the kind we would have loved together and at least you can picture it a little this way.

Oh yes, I saw the Marine silent drill team on Ed Sullivan tonight.⁴⁶ So good! It's almost Marine Corps Birthday time! An early happy birthday to you, Sir!⁴⁷

From your “Lady” friend,
Gig
(Robin asked me what I was smiling about. Guess I like Marines.)

⁴⁶ “U.S. Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon,” *Ed Sullivan Show*, season 19, episode 8, CBS, aired 31 October 1966.

⁴⁷ Marines have not always celebrated their founding on 10 November. Formal commemoration of the birthday of the Marine Corps began on 10 November 1921, because it was on that day the Second Continental Congress resolved in 1775 to raise two battalions of Continental Marines. “Marine Corps Birthday Celebration,” Brief Histories, Marine Corps History Division, accessed 24 February 2023.

2.

NOVEMBER 1966

Tuesday night

1 November 1966

Hi Sweet,

I guess you didn't call Mom. She sent me my fourth mosquito net and a whole slew of spare light bulbs! So, I'm in pretty good shape for bugs for the time being. Only two big items needed: an extremely noisy wind-up alarm clock and a movie camera. Oh, by the way, your movie camera has outdoor film in it. Go ahead and use it. It's half-finished now and could be sent out (I think). Let's not have another year of no home movies just because I'm not there—read the book and DO IT!

Robin's birthday sounded great

Don't you believe any garbage about troop pullout. This one is going to take a while.

Ask Don if he thinks a Vietnam War song would sell. A couple of my shack mates play git fiddles and have some real soft nice songs just for relaxation.¹ The main thing that is missing is a primary identification theme like the Green Berets versus Army. We'll make up a tape or some-

¹ The term *git* has multiple meanings, though most references seem to come from British slang for the word *get*, which was shortened from *beget*. Depending on the context, *git* could refer to something silly or done in a rough manner, such as playing guitar.

thing one of these days. They don't think they have anything saleable. Who knows.

. . .

No TV or popcorn over here and I'll be damned if I'll go over to the old hut (actually it was only on about an hour long and very poor).

I can think of better things to share than hardships! . . .

The moon just popped up fat and orange. I still think the Viet Cong will be there sometime. Anyway, if Charlie was going to get restless, I'd pick the Marine Corps Birthday night (10 November). Have to keep the guard sober for that one.

Enclosed please find one check—yours and the kids' travel plus our dislocation allowance. That ought to pay rent for a couple of months!²

Well, it's November—bring on the monsoons . . . we've already had a few good practice sessions with 15 inches of rain one day. That one is still standing around.

No more Kool-Aid, Dozo. Work on a little self-packaging and I might be interested.

I'm tired—3 shootings, 10 marijuana cigarettes, one 16-year-old Vietnamese girl hit by a truck, 2 AWOLs, 6 lost rifles, 2 found pistols, 1 nut, 1 queer, 5 TAD, 10,000 messages, 13 letters, 2 awards, 1 bust [arrest], 476 stupid hard-working Marines, and the colonels go flying all day long.³ My turn tomorrow!

Good night, Honey.

I do love YOU,
Ray



² See Public Law 89-501, Monthly Basic Pay and Allowances (1 July 1966). Allowances were based on rank, time in service, married/dependents, and additional allowances for aviation and submarine duty. Stice would have had almost 20 years in service at this point. As an O-4 aviator with 20 years of service plus more than two dependents, Stice's monthly allowance would have been approximately \$1,300 in 1966 dollars.

³ AWOL refers to absent without leave; TAD refers to temporary active duty or orders to displace to another location. Until the early 1940s, there were no laws that barred homosexuals from serving in the military. For more on the topic during the Vietnam War era, see Steve Estes, "Vietnam," in *Ask & Tell: Gay and Lesbian Veterans Speak Out* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Scholarship Online, 2007), https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807889855_estes.7.

Tuesday night
1 November 1966

Hello darling,

Well, you certainly are having a time getting settled, aren't you? But I was glad you didn't get stuck with Major Joseph B. Wuertz, so maybe it was for the best that you had to move. Hope by now the dust has settled a bit, though.

It was just grand to get your letter about the scenery, which sounds magnificent from the air. I really felt like I'd had a bird's-eye view right out of the cockpit. Of course, I was thrilled and scared again to hear you were "up," but you sounded pleased to be back in the saddle and back to your usual gripes about the Gs, the gear, and the heat, which I hadn't heard in a while. Ah Beeville! Ah Chu Lai!

I got a tremendous bang out of the newspaper. It was great to read the fresh poop, and I pulled out my map and looked up several provinces on it. Which province are you in? Every day I am more and more glad you aren't near Saigon or Da Nang or the [demilitarized zone] DMZ. It tickles me that the Marine Corps calls Chu Lai permanent, like El Toro and Cherry Point.⁴ Permanent until activated, deactivated, or re-activated.

In other words, lots of activity going on there all the time. Next thing, if they aren't careful, they'll have those really permanent dependents around!

. . .

Kirk seems to have the most moments of being inconsolable and getting angry with me over nothing. . . . Liz sort of hangs so loose, they figure I'm loose too. So I had a "chat" and tried to explain why he has to be extra good when she's around. . . . I got some satisfaction when she insisted you probably wouldn't fly much, and I showed her the picture of your [commanding officer] CO and the other lieutenant colonels in their flight suits. . . . They find it hard to believe you really are a jet pilot, I think.

Oh Angel, I'd better stop. You can't spend all day reading my letter. I'm glad you are able to get good service and food and that they love you

⁴ "Chronology of Key Marine Corp Events in the Vietnam War, 1962-1975," Marine Corps History Division, accessed 28 February 2023.

(Ha ha!). But that 0530 wake up sounds wicked and you must get to bed very early to keep healthy. I need a healthy husband who writes me lovely letters, when he has the time only. Did you know the Japanese don't write their wives at all? I do love you, you know.

Gig



2200 Thursday night

3 November 1966

Chu Lai

All day I've been saying . . . I will write Gig . . . I will write Gig . . . Think Gig . . .

Hi Honey,

This is going to be short. It's late and I'm tired again and need a shower badly.

I was just finishing up an armed road reconnaissance this noon and headed back here and someone comes up on guard saying Chu Lai was closed for the next 45 minutes, so I headed up to Da Nang. When we shut down, there was a big hydraulic leak in the nose gear, so these idiots tried to fix it. To make another long story short, it took damn near nine hours just to get it out of the barn, refueled, and lift off again! Seems the group [executive officer] XO had a 37 mm [round] come up through his nose up north and our Chu Lai crash gear took hours to get his aircraft off the runway. Heard a few rumbles about "low pull-outs," "multiple runs," etc. I guess that's the way to waste \$3 million.⁵

This red warning tag came from a bomb that Don Lundberg dropped up north this evening.

If [General Victor H.] Krulak built anything air conditioned around here, I'll eat it.

This afternoon, someone had two entire Viet Cong companies caught in the open and no air [support] at the time. Some days, you should stay in bed.

⁵ For more on aviation issues during the period, see Cdr Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret), "The Marine Aviation Experience in Vietnam," *Naval History Magazine* 30, no. 3 (June 2016).

It's 2300 already. Goodnight, Darling, I'm filthy dirty, but I love you in spite of it.

Ray



Thursday night
3 November 1966

Hello Sweet Pie,

...

You are being so good it hurts! Two letters in two days—and under such conditions too! I was sure surprised to go to Mom's this afternoon and there was your letter written at Da Nang, practically while airborne. When you write A/C, Mom reads it as Air Corps and “noon chow” was completely misread. I have to decipher for her! . . .

I've just come home from seeing *Doctor Zhivago* at the movies and I am feeling good despite the hour—midnight! (Don babysat). It was a beautiful poetic picture with breathtaking views of Russia and, oh, it makes me mad you can't see these with me.⁶ All these months of Elvis Presley and now I finally am seeing truly great movies—alone.

...

Your statement that your pay might be \$884 makes me think of the joke I heard on TV—oversexed, overpaid, and over there—surely that was a mistake!⁷

...

I wander around trying to find goodies to send you and the clerks wonder what I'm looking for! . . .

Wakarimasu [English: I understand] living by the sea, but what do I send a salty Marine? Salty popcorn, that's what. They say it gets cold over there, but you haven't mentioned that yet. Let me know if you want gloves, hand warmers, or something. I keep looking for a dehumidifier. Is there such an animal?

...

⁶ *Doctor Zhivago*, directed by David Lean, starring Julie Christie and Omar Sharif (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1965).

⁷ This reference was also made in Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *The Vietnam War: An Intimate History* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2017), 203.

I'm getting in the mood to take pictures. I think I'll attempt one this weekend. I'm scared stiff of cameras for some reason.

Don says he'll work up a tape too, and that will be fun to do. I'm sort of getting bleary eyed now, so I best go to sleep.

I love you,
Gig



Saturday night yet
5 November 1966

Hi Honey,
How is it—I mean how are you—there? You know these Saturday nights. I'm sure it's Saturday because I had to look at a calendar, although I have developed a general principle of “to hell with what day it is.” Only the numbers on the correspondence seem to mean anything!

Your last weekend sounded great! Of course, I would have really enjoyed that. I'll bet it's real pretty there now. You know, even here you can surmise it must be winter somewhere. Last night, when we finished a flare drop mission (at bleary midnight), the wind was too chilly to take a shower, so I'm doubly stinky tonight after another hop.⁸

That's why I couldn't write you last night. I wasn't scheduled for our Grumman F-9 Cougar hop during the day, so I begged [my way] on to the Douglas C-117 Skytrain (old C-47 transport, a.k.a. Gooney Bird) for a night flare drop and some possible night time with Major Louis F. Gagnon as copilot. We still need our night and instrument time even here. So, we took off and dropped flares around Da Nang and Monkey [Son Tra] Mountain for five hours. I helped—hell, worked!—in the back for 4 hours, and finally got to log 1.1 hours as copilot. Sort of a rough way to get night [flying] time after a normal 12-hour day to start with. Frankly, I'd like to fly once a day . . . although this [Marine Air Base Squadron] MABS job is really a full-time affair and then some. For instance, we don't have a food

⁸ Flare drops were used for a variety of reasons, particularly to distract enemy troops or to highlight a target. See Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982), 166; and Maj Gary L. Telfer, USMC, LtCol Lane Rogers, USMC, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984), 122.

services officer—no sergeant major—a lot of big holes like that and you end up with big sections that aren't being honchoed by an officer.⁹ That's another reason why I need my own wheels; we are spread out all over the base and then some. I thought I had a jeep today, but it fell through. . . .

. . .

Thank you for the happy birthday—on the 11th. Why don't you tiptoe out to the icebox, open up a cool Bud, and have a silent toast with me? You'll have to do it right at 1800 in the evening of the 11th for our 2000 on the 10th here—got it?

Almost got a secondary [mission] today, but I just didn't have enough fuel to carry it out after we finished the required hop. Only been three shooting secondary missions for the F-9s so far here.

Yes, I do love you,
Ray



Saturday night
5 November 1966

Hello Darling,
I've had two really fun days with the kids. They had a day off yesterday (teachers conference) and I took them shopping. . . .

Tonight, we all had baths and they put on their new clothes to go to Mom's for dinner. They looked very nice with clean everything. The girls are really getting very pretty but they don't know it yet. . . . Don played a recording of his "Sound Spectacular," and I do hope he has some luck with it. . . . Kirk and Kathy really enjoy his company and Kathy shows she misses you. She still thinks you are up in the airplane and points to the sky! We've really seen very little of him since you left, but Kirk admired a wild yellow shirt he was wearing—"Gah, I really like that shirt, Uncle Don." He went off for the last shows of *Oliver!* and the kids settled down to a great game of Parcheesi with Mom. If you'd been here, we could practically have "snuck" off to the movies. As it was, I just read *Time* magazine—all about the booby traps they are using over there. Just a bit shakes

⁹ The military occupational specialty (MOS) for a food service officer is 3302. Food service officers plan, organize, manage, analyze, supervise, budget, execute, and coordinate the food service and subsistence programs on base and during deployments.

me up. Don't go to Saigon or Da Nang. In fact, just stay in your airplane or shack!¹⁰

You were right about the pay raises. But you knew about it before I read it in the paper here tonight. How come you knew it first?

I mailed the popcorn and loose beer openers, so it was a noisy package—15 pounds! The postman asked what it was. Also alarm clock and tidbits but no brownies. Hope it gets to you before too long.

...

Must close before this letter gets too fat. I really do miss you, Honey, but know you are with the good guys—the dodge boys! (Dodge these traps, that is.) It's Marine Corps Birthday time, and I think I'll go next year and have a ball. Right now, I'm not presentable in my old blue robe with all the buttons popped.

Tomorrow is ranch time again. You've been gone four weeks today. I can hardly believe it, as it seems much longer!

I love you—"That's affirm!"

Gig

P.S. I have gotten a letter from you every day and feel we're finally beginning to communicate on the same frequency . . . it makes the load lighter to hear a masculine remark in every letter.



Monday night
7 November 1966

Hi Honey,

You asked which province are we in—the very bottom of Quang Tin and only about 8 kilometers north of Quang Ngai.

...

Better hurry up with that clock—extra loud, Dozo—throw in a dozen cans of popcorn and a couple of large tubes of Crest toothpaste. If I had my druthers, I'd like a 12-month subscription of *Playboy* and some lighter flints (Ronson's are best) and a couple of jars of OFF bug spray. Now, how's that for a shopping list.

Your Halloween sounded great—much more interesting than mine.

¹⁰ Possible reference to "South Viet Nam: The Tunnel Rats," *Time Magazine*, 4 March 1966.

Last night, I borrowed the colonel's jeep and went to the (my first) movie over at Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12) on the beach—Tony Randall and Anita Ekberg in the ABC murders or something.¹¹ Had one hell of a time laughing . . . maybe I should go more often.

. . .

You tell Liz that I flew 10 hops the first 12 days here (1 day in 4 different types of planes). Too much actually—the colonel had a few comments along those lines today.

Got another one of those weirdos for a group commanding officer. Sort of lies to himself, orders others to cover, and won't hear any side to any story—period. He's got his staff jumping like grasshoppers in a skillet and, of course, it all rattles downhill quite a ways. I never could understand how these kooks can fool people so successfully for such a long period of time then they end up in a very responsible position where they do more harm than good!

. . .

So far, I've been really lucky about skin problems, rashes, malaria, etc. We take all our pills and try to wash every day.¹² The only thing I have are some tiny white bumps on my fingers that I've always had before. I think it comes from JP-4 (jet fuel) more than anything.¹³

It's 2100 and I'm going to take full advantage of it and go to bed like now.

Goodnight, Darling,

Ray

P.S. Lou Gagnon just snapped a Polaroid shot. I was just folding up this letter when he said, "Hey, Ray," and I turned and all I saw was a flash.

On the left is my G-suit, torso harness, and my homemade table and

¹¹ Stice is referring to the Agatha Christie movie, *The Alphabet Murders*, directed by Frank Tashlin (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1965).

¹² For more on general health concerns and medical issues during the period, see Jan K. Herman, *Navy Medicine in Vietnam: Passage to Freedom to the Fall of Saigon* (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, Department of the Navy, 2010).

¹³ JP-4 (jet propellant-4) is used by the U.S. military for aircraft fuel. JP-4 is a colorless to straw-colored liquid that smells like gasoline and/or kerosene. For more on the use and health impacts, see "Public Health Statement for Jet Fuels JP-4 and JP-7," Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Centers for Disease Control, June 1995.

bench (covered with my blanket).¹⁴ You can see my red lamp and a can of peanuts I finagled in Da Nang one night. My ashtray is on the top, behind that is my voltage control clock and radio. All your letters sit next to the lamp and my knee board and maps are just in front of the canteen. Behind me is a yellow towel and my Sears raincoat on top of my flight suit and next to that is that old locker one of my buddies scrounged up for me somewhere.

You can even see the imprint of my shoulder holster under my left arm and where the strap goes across up over the right shoulder.

So, caught in the act of writing my wife—I'm guilty—I'm guilty! That's my "home" away from home. Oh well, it still beats a fox hole in the jungle, and there sure are a lot of them.

I love you,
Ray



1500
9 November 1966

Hello Darling,
Well, I'm feeling much better about the world this afternoon than I was last night. I tore up a letter to you this morning that was all about worries about school problems, and it's a good thing I did as they all brought nice report cards home today. Ungraded ones fortunately with Ss for satisfactory and a few "Needs to Improve," which states the case mildly. They've gone off now to get a Wednesday afternoon "icee" as a treat, and Kirk has a date. Both sisters are chaperoning him though!

I feel extra good as I've gotten a letter from you every day this week, and I really feel we're finally beginning to communicate on the same frequency! In fact, I feel almost spoiled, but that's just what I needed. It sure makes the load lighter to hear a masculine remark in every letter and,

¹⁴ The G-suit refers to the flight suit worn by aviators and astronauts who are subjected to high levels of acceleration (gravity) force.

heavens to Betsy, you are masculine!¹⁵ Raunchy is the word! If I could find you, I'd . . . well, I'd try anyway, to trounce on you with all 105 pounds of me!

Had the teacher conference yesterday, which unnerved me, and then voted after that. Much ado as the Republicans did very well in all respects considering.¹⁶

. . .

Kirk was impressed with the bomb tag. You seem to be getting things done and having a better feel for the whole picture now, so you must be getting adjusted now. You are flying, settled, and working—three things that always make you feel better if not cleaner! And the dirt just proves you've been working. Sounds like your morale is much better now. You did have a few bad days there, or at least frustrating ones.

I typed four of your last few letters for Milly and they took up four of these pages. Whew! But I'm sure she'll be pleased to get the word. I am pretty good decoder but get a little frustrated when you do {} at the end of a page, usually some technical word too! Like why is a "secondary mission" after "we finished the perimeter." Glug, glug.

Kids are home, so here are their dictated letters to you . . .

Kirk says . . .

Dear Daddy, Love Kirk,

On 9 November 1966, I got my report card! . . . Dear Daddy, we went out to the ranch. Daddy, we went deer hunting. Daddy, Miss Mink has been saying "Kirk, you are reading a little more better these days and she likes me." Daddy, I want to tell you about this little girl that is in my class. She has a broken arm on both arms. . . . her dog scared her and she climbed a fence and her dog jumped up and she fell down. Daddy, Kathy has been good. She hasn't been crying when Mother leaves her at Gramma's house. She has been the goodest girl I have ever seen. Love, Kirk. And Dear Daddy, Robin has been saying "poo poo," "meanie," "stupid," and "I hate

¹⁵ The primarily American expression "heavens to Betsy" has been seen in print as early as 1857, but the origin of the term for shock or surprise cannot be determined or who Betsy was, though some posit that it might point to either Betsy Ross or Davy Crockett's rifle, Old Betsy.

¹⁶ She is referencing the 8 November 1966 midterm congressional elections that took place midway through Lyndon B. Johnson's second term as president.

you” to me, and she is saying “Kirk, you are stupid” and now I have been mad at her and I have really been really mad. Daddy, I do not like Robin because she is awful mean. I hope she gets a spanking from you! I like the little red pin that you gave me. . . . Daddy, I wish you were here because I would like you to be here. I really want to shoot my BB gun.

Love, Kirk

Robin says . . .

Dear Daddy,

Kirk has been saying “stupid” and all that junk first, not me! So, I have to say it back to him. So, I haven’t been doing that stupid stuff. I have been trying to help Mama. Brenda, Tommy, and I have the best report cards in our class. My teacher said who had the best cards—who got As in conduct—and we were the only ones who got straight As and I was real thrilled with that. I wish you were here.

Robin (I’m not as mean as Kirk is.)

P.S. Gig here. . . . You have a date—1800—on the 11th. Cheers! And will you dance with me this time? Don’t forget to toast the president first. I’m sure he would be “thrilled” if you did!



2200

9 November 1966

Hi Honey,

Well, tomorrow is the you know what day. I think we’ve been able to scrounge enough beer for the troops, so they can get a little smashed. The moon is gone and all the bets are on Charlie raising hell. The group guard gets theirs on 11 November.

Well, I guess Ronald Reagan and Charles Percy won according to the radio.¹⁷

Robbin, I want to thank you for that real nice letter! . . . I’m saving

¹⁷ During the midterm elections for November 1966, Governor Ronald W. Reagan (R-CA) won, as did Charles H. Percy (R-IL). See “1966 Midterm Elections,” United Press International, November 1966.

all the letters, so if I don't get one like today then I just read them all over again!

Yesterday was quite a day—first an early morning shooting, then all our fuel was contaminated, and last night one of our nuttier guards went the rest of the way and tried to cut people up. . . .

My roomy says you better send us some cans of popping corn quick. Our Japanese supply is all but gone. He'll send a case (unpopped), so it will last for a while.

Cold—for taking cold water showers at night—yes, it's cold. I'd like to see you try it! Ha! So would the kids! All the kids here at Chu Lai that is. Gum—put it with the Kool-Aid, Dozo. I can't chew gum. You're forgetting my position as executive officer—a little respect PLEASE.

I knew transport pilots were good for something. Over here, they're worth their weight in goodies. Lou Gagnon just arrived from Da Nang with 12 cases of beer and 4 cases of Cokes, all for Hotel 1 (our hut).

. . .

My hops have slowed down a bit. I milked that “ham” bit to a bloody end, so I have to think up something else new. Today was good—*way* up next to the DMZ with Clyde Simon. That's where all the real action is—a little too much at one point—our own artillery was impacting right next to where we were working. I thought, “Let's get out of here!”

Speaking of getting, I've got to go to bed. I am flat tuckered out. Keep up those wonderful letters. You're doing just great.

I love you, Sweetsan,¹⁸
Ray



Friday night
11 November 1966

Hello Darling!
I think I'm behind one letter as I still have clippings from yesterday's paper to send you. The news—or is it life?—seems to go too fast if you don't keep up. It's really quite remarkable that I can get such really fresh news

¹⁸ In Japanese, the suffix “-san” is a term of respect. It can be used with both male and female names and with either surnames or given names. It can also be attached to the name of occupations and titles.

of what is going on there in the newspaper. Really much better coverage than TV. I'll bet if I cut them out each night, it would be interesting for you when you get back. I suppose it's old news when I mail it to you, but I keep thinking maybe it gives you the overall picture. Let me know if you want me to send the war coverage stories or just other assorted ones.¹⁹ So many stories are sad ones though, and we both can do without those at this time. I'm not the world's bravest girl, you know! I just think I am, ha ha. As a matter of actual fact, Ferdinand the bull and I had lots in common—except sex!²⁰

Had a little lecture with Robin and Kirk tonight that they must try not to be mean to each other, even if I allow them to write you their “sometimes” feelings. They understand and really get along quite well. They are just so close in age that they keep bumping into each other's feelings. It's kind of crowded being the two middle kids!

I've been missing you a lot. Is that news? Sure wish I were half as busy as you are to keep my mind “off us,” but I really kind of like having time to daydream about you because I like to think about you. How about that!

Went to a Kappa meeting yesterday and saw some of the other “actives”—the young college girls of today. They sure are pretty and, yup, made me feel old! It's lovely to come home to the kids who never think I'm too old to be sat on, climbed on and enjoy my kisses, except the shredded wheat ones, or I might add the early morning ones!

...

The stars are big and bright tonight. I really do think we saw the same moon! Did you get my message? I still can't believe Vietnam is as pretty as you say it is from the air.

Best I close and let you get to one of your many jobs. How many there are too! I sure hope you are getting enough sleep—that night flare drop to Da Nang sounded very exciting and arduous after a long day at Chu Lai.

¹⁹ Given the timing, much of the news reported in the *Austin-American Statesman* would have focused on the midterm elections, the war in Vietnam, and college football. Much has been written about government attempts to filter the news and how the media revealed the stark truth of the conflict and shifted public opinion about the war. *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations on News Policies in Vietnam*, U.S. Senate, 89th Cong., 2d Sess. (2 and 31 August 1966).

²⁰ *Ferdinand the Bull* remains a children's classic, as it focuses on a bull that would rather smell flowers than fight in the ring. Munro Leaf, *The Story of Ferdinand* (New York: Viking Books, 1936).

Not the most tranquil thing to do before bed. Maybe dull letters will put you to sleep. Though, knowing you, sleep is no problem—it's just getting to bed that's the problem. Just write me one-page letters every other day if that will help.

By the way, thanks for that smashing kiss. That's my favorite kind you know. And you ration them like hen's teeth. I wonder why? (I'm in the closet.)

XXXs,
Gig (No! Not Mrs. Gig)



Friday night
11 November 1966

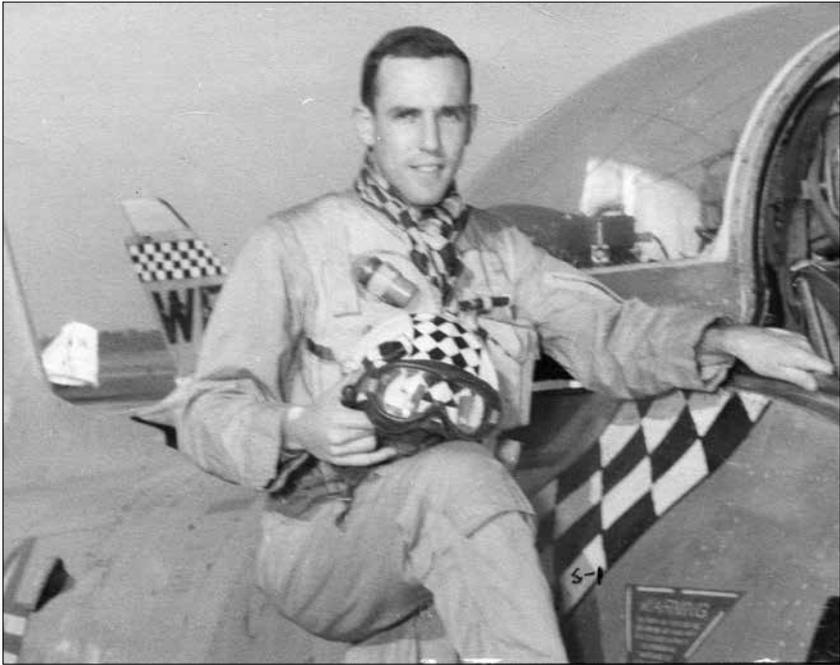
Hi Sweetheart,

And how is yours today? Mine is dragging a little. I got to fly for three days straight, and I'll be grounded for five or six days. Lieutenant Colonel Owen L. Owens (boss) is going to Okinawa tomorrow and get his shopping done. I asked him, "What do you think about my going to Bangkok for a couple of days on the 21st?" and he said forget it. When he comes back, I'll hit him up again for 10 December. It's two hours later now. This is going to be a short one unfortunately. Had to go out on the runway—all our lights are screwed up and the mirrors are the same (raining too).

Lost a third hour trying to go on a night flare drop. They got the word to launch and we all ran out in the rain, lit off, and got canceled (canked). . . . I did have a good hop this morning way up north (two planes). Clyde Simon and my roomy Berny [Major Bernard H. Thomas] in one and me and the group executive officer in another. You'll never believe what we saw up there in the same plane yesterday—a pack (Viet Cong) train of eight elephants!²¹ (Must be "red" elephants.) And none of the damn guns would fire! Oh man, what a laugh that caused. We all figured it was just as well. What in the *hell* could you say to your kids? "Oh yeah, Daddy's been out elephant hunting with his jet" or "How *mean* could you get?" Besides, what would they do, paint little elephants on the side of your cockpit? Too

²¹ L. P. Holliday and R. M. Gurfield, *Viet Cong Logistics* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, prepared for Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/International Security Affairs and the Advanced Research Projects Agency, 1968).

Figure 17. Maj Ray Stice poses on the wing of his aircraft, Chu Lai



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

much. However, at that same spot, they lost two Air Force F-4s and a SAR [search and rescue] helicopter this morning and hit a third helicopter.

They even put a sign up in the Liver Shack for Armed Reconnaissance Flight Purpose Code: 1-T-2 Elephant Hunt, 1-S-2 Elephant Kill, 1-Z-2 Elephant Scare.²²

Got to get about 200 feet of nylon line. I read about one guy who

²² Flight purpose codes included three characters—numbers and characters. Depending on the date, the first number referred to the type of operation; the alpha character referred to the general purpose of the operation; and the third number referred to specific purpose of the flight. 1-T-2 = training/targets of opportunity or armed reconnaissance; 1-S-2 = training/targets assigned after takeoff; and 1-Z-2 = training/escort of vessels not in own force. See *OPNAV Instruction 3710.7U, NATOPS General Flight and Operating Instructions* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Department of the Navy, 1 March 2004), appendix D. Though these instructions date 2004, the concepts are likely similar to operating instructions in Vietnam.

came down on the top of a 150-foot tree and broke his leg falling out of his harness. Heard that another one punched out at nighttime, stayed in a tree in his harness all night long, and the next morning when the sun came up he realized his feet were only three feet from the ground! Ugh . . . some days you should just stay in bed.

Last night, would you believe we had charcoal broiled steaks? Flown from Lord knows where, an eight-piece band from Da Nang, real live mixed drinks, and no Viet Cong! He really missed a good chance—raining—everyone in the mess hall (minus the guard) and no moon. Sorry Charlie.

Got to get out in the cold rain and take a shower. I'm grumpy.²³

Tell Kirk to write me a letter and then Karen next time. Robbie's was really cute.

Kiss my sweet children. They are sweet children, aren't they? Well, kiss them anyway.

I love you,
Ray



Sunday night
13 November 1966

Hi Honey,
Another weekend over, and all is well. Stayed home Friday night, played cards with Mom, Helen, Liz, and Sam Saturday night her at the house and fixed them all drinks with that liquor you bought. . . .

Don was out at the ranch with Bill and the other men for a poker and deer hunt. And guess what, he actually got a deer! Bill had him “fix it” or whatever they say, and he got a big kick out of Don's first hunt. Don gave him the deer and is keeping the horns.

Sharon drove us out this afternoon—a car full of kids and food—to eat the *cabrito* (English: goat) Bill's dad cooked. Don and the men had gone, but another couple was there with their two boys (nine kids in all), and I

²³ According to World Bank Group data, the mean temperature in Vietnam for 1966 was 76.38 F. In November 1966, the minimum temperatures record was approximately 66 F, with more than 6 inches of rain for the month. “Country: Vietnam,” Climate Change Knowledge Portal, World Bank, accessed 3 March 2023.

had Kathy along. What an afternoon! Kathy is not ranch ready yet, but in between tears had a lovely time. (No nap, falling down, etc.) The father of the boys went out and got a deer, while Bill went out the other direction, so he came back and hung the deer up alone, with an audience of three women plus nine kids!

...

Anyway, they like doing things with tons of people around, always have and probably always will. I really like getting back to the peace of our big old house, and the kids do too.

They said they were trying to help me with Kirk—get him to play with boys etc.—and I said I knew they were and that I appreciated it. And he really does get a big kick out of it all. They are all (relatives and friends) trying to be helpful, and my tongue is hanging out as a consequence!

Glad another new week is here. Your letters seem to get here on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. So that's a nice way to start a week. The kids bicycle your letters up to the post office for me and love to do it. They have found the shortcut to school, so they don't mind walking it now! Oh yes, I read the movie camera instructions—now for the nerve to use it. I love you but not machines! They are more trouble than people?

Sweet XXXs,
Gig



2200 Saturday night
13 November 1966

Hi Honey,

I'm going to start now and finish tomorrow. The first day without the colonel was really a bear. I managed to sidestep the group executive officer, get chewed out at 0700 by the S-3 (operations) and finally found a sympathetic ear tonight in the S-4 (logistics), so now I know where some of the troops lie. Spent fully 75 percent of the 15.5-hour day (all the water pumps out for 6 hours) explaining why or how orally and on paper (mostly) 5 percent chewing out wayward gunnery sergeants, staff sergeants, corporals, and privates. I stand up and make them look me in the eye when I'm performing. Without a sergeant major to keep them in line, things are going to pot. A master gunnery sergeant who runs our mess hall came up and read my mind today. He asked if he could take over the duties of

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sergeant major. He was so worried about the way some of the people are going to pot. Colonel here or not, I grabbed him quick. Someone that concerned is hard to come by so I'll see the group S-1 (personnel) about it tomorrow.

You asked where are we working—I Corps, Baby—563 kilometers north of Saigon roughly. We've got about 322 kilometers north and south and from 161–241 kilometers across from the South China Sea to Laos all the way to and including along the DMZ. There's one hell of a big battle on the Laos (west) side of the DMZ that's been going on for months—Operation Irving or Hastings—the names aren't important as they change them all the time for the benefit of the press corps but the fighting's the same.²⁴ Forget about me and Cambodia—the DMZ is where all the action starts for us—although [Major Robert T.] Bob Roche got some today just 14.5 kilometers west of here.

Karen, I'm so proud of you I could bust! I think with the brains that your mother and I donated to you that you are doing just great. Keep up the wonderful work.

Kirk, you are forgiven. The fossils are very old, and you should try really hard not to break them. Maybe Mom could fix up a box with cotton in it, and you could take one to school.

Mom, put them in a box, Dozo.

Kathy, Where's Daddy, Kathy? Just tell her I'll be back and show her on the globe.

Robin, you tell Kirk I'd much rather kiss Mom, not kick her.

I thought all the school pictures were really nice, thank you.

Don't knock our four-holer please. It will probably take me a year to remember to pull the chain!

Late, late, late, just time for a quick shower. Goodnight, Baby.

Love, Ray



²⁴ Operation Hastings was the plan for Marine reconnaissance into Quang Tri in July. Operation Irving was a search and destroy mission that took place in October. Shulimson, *An Expanding War*, 1966, 159–76.

Monday night
14 November 1966

Hello darling,

Oh, it was so nice to get your picture today. You look so good to me I could eat you up! So now I know you really are there. Don't have to shout at you anymore, I can see you at your desk. Gosh, I'll have to take one of me at my desk—the kitchen table!

It even looks like my screening at the window. Is it? Did you ever get it? Also, package #2 with clock and popcorn should be there, but it went by regular mail. I sure hope they're there by now. I think I have you spotted on this map. There's an island called Cu Lao Re off the coast, right? I put a marker on the Quang Ninh/Quang Ngai border as being Chu Lai. So glad to find you aren't in Tay Ninh Province!²⁵ Ugh, ugh.

Man, you did give me a grocery list. So, good, I'll get on it. However, I spent a rather large amount today with hardly a batted eye. Bought the 20-volume *World Book Encyclopedia*, plus atlas (\$25) and dictionary (\$25) for \$251.²⁶ We really were ready for one believe it or not, and the bank account was full, so I thought, "Why Not?" I really wasn't that casual about it. Karen had asked for one, Robin and Kirk also were needing one, and we had brought Mom's old *Compton's* over, but it was outdated.²⁷ Then this week's *Time* had an article on them, so when the lady came—I had mentioned our need to the teacher and I guess she sent the saleslady over—I was "ripe" and decided it was not a thrilling way to spend that much money; but with four kids in school, it was almost a MUST and the time had COME!²⁸ It's a Field Enterprises one—the same company that made *Childcraft*—but this one should take them through college, except for very technical material.²⁹ We'll get it in a couple of days. No bookcase—I'll just take the *Compton's* and *Childcraft* out of the bookcase in the den. I compared the dictionary with your old college one and it is three times better.

²⁵ She may have been referencing media coverage from Operation Attleboro from approximately September to November 1966 that was intended to test a new search and destroy concept by the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, with the objective to discover the location of People's Army of Vietnam and Viet Cong base areas and force them to fight.

²⁶ *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 23 vols. (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational, 1966).

²⁷ *Compton's Picture Encyclopedia and Fact Index* (Chicago: Compton, 1966).

²⁸ "Learning: Encyclopedias for Kids," *Time Magazine* 88, no. 20, 11 November 1966.

²⁹ *Childcraft: The How and Why Library* (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational, 1966).

And now, I'll really have a good map too for looking up Vietnam. . . .

Saw pictures of propaganda leaflets being dropped from a propeller plane that took off from Da Nang on TV tonight—got a glimpse of the sandy beach runway up there. . . .

I'd trade places with you if I could get out of Christmas shopping. Man, you do leave at the darnedest times. Just when I have to be the one to wrap packages. Let's just X out Xmas. I'm for that!

On that crunchy thought, I leave you . . . for the bedroom.

Gig a Wig



Monday night

14 November 1966

Hi Darling,

You've been so good about writing that I can't believe it. One thing I've done this time that I didn't do in Japan is keep a calendar by the month. You are on my table for three entries only: "money due," "flight time," and "wrote Gig"—NOT necessarily in that particular order. If I can't write you every other night, it's sure beyond my control, but I'll try.

. . .

You wouldn't think I had a feel for things if you could have seen me today. I was so afraid I would not hear my alarm clock (set for 0430) that I kept waking up all night long. Finally, it rang, and I got up, shaved, drove (colonel's jeep) over to the S-2 to brief, ran back to visit you know where, grabbed a couple of fried eggs, and out to the plane. Lit off, taxi, take off etc.—TACA [tactical air coordinator (airborne)]. We controlled a flight of F-4s over one nice target and then went over to another and controlled a flight of Douglas A-4 Skyhawks (mostly all bombs) headed for home with little fuel, climbed up in the scud like an eagle, caught Da Nang's tactical control (TACON) for a fix down on a heading, broke out over Chu Lai straight in, and back to the chocks.³⁰ Downed the aircraft because the big smoke rockets we were supposed to mark the targets with didn't fire. Off

³⁰ The term *scud* refers to small, ragged, low cloud fragments that are unattached to a larger cloud base and often seen with and behind cold fronts and thunderstorm gust fronts. They are generally associated with cool moist air, such as thunderstorm outflow. See NOAA National Weather Service Glossary.

with the gear, debrief back to work (slightly sweating), look out the window—KABOOM! Mortars incoming? No. Outgoing rockets? Sure as hell, there went two of our aircraft. As I told the skipper tonight, one of our most aggravating comments on the aircraft yellow sheets to the pilots was “ground checks okay” to our gripes, but in this case it was appropriate.³¹ Well, it wasn’t too funny. They almost hit six people working on two of VMFA-314’s aircraft right in front of it. It does happen. Matter of fact, two hours later a Lockheed C-130 Hercules transport ran into one of those same VMFA-314 aircraft, but of course all of that was prior to 0830 this morning. Does this pace resemble “normal” day here? Sure does. And that was just during the “working” hours, got 10 more to go usually. Some good, some bad, but with one guarantee—all fast and furious. “Secondary” means another mission over the one you just completed, your primary—you know—fuel permitting. Why not? Usually, you only have a few minutes available after most missions and if there’s weather . . . well, there’s always tomorrow—takes time to be a hero, especially when the malaria pills are THAT big.

I started out to tell you how busy I’ve been today and, to hell with it, there just isn’t time.

. . .

Listened to radio Hanoi last night; almost as bad as radio Havana, only a little worse. Trying to be the big, understanding brother to the poor misguided South Vietnamese.³²

Well, I almost did it again. It’s past my bedtime. When my eyes won’t open, it’s time to stop. Don’t sweat the lousy penmanship. I’m obviously not taking time to be careful or I wouldn’t even get started. I just bang on through and work on the context. . . .

Would you believe . . . I’m so tired I’d believe anything, even that I still love you for some reason.

Goodnight Honey,
Ray

³¹ The term *yellow sheets* refers to the Naval Aircraft Flight Record (OPNAV Form 3710/4) that is then used to produce flying hour summary reports. See *Flying Hours: Overview of Navy and Marine Corps Flight Operations* (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, 1991).

³² *Radio Hanoi* refers to a propaganda station, with such personalities as Hanoi Hannah, that was run by the North Vietnamese Army to undermine American morale.

P.S. Did you ever get halfway through a haircut and lose all the *denki* for the rest of the day?³³



Tuesday night

15 November 1966

Hi Honey,

Can you believe that date? Only two years ago, on a Monday night, Kathy was born—16 November 1964. That was the week that was, wasn't it? The weather turned cold while I was in the hospital, remember? How wonderful it all was after she was born. I'll never forget a minute of it. You really pampered me, and I ate it all up. And we had a whole week together—a blessed week it was. . . .

Guess what! I think I know Lou Gagnon. His wife Gay was in my car-pool for Kirk, and we talked on the phone many times. We met at several parties too. A tall blonde, and he was a tall brunette. Right? They had four children, I believe. Tell him I said to say hello to her. They left in January, and she is still in Virginia, I think. Have you seen Larson or Major Earl D. Litzenberger? I suppose not, being "ground pounders."³⁴ Gagnon was promoted to major while there at Quantico. Well, anyway, it sounds like he is doing a fine job bringing beer and cokes from Japan to you. Great!

I'm bewildered about that popcorn. Surely, it's there by now. Bought the Crest, gasoline, and OFF today; flints and *Playboy* still to come. Fine thing. The work boy wants *Playboy*. Robin was a bit shocked. She read *Playboy* once at the barber shop! . . .

I'm so glad you like my letters. That really pleases me a lot. I was afraid maybe you wouldn't have the time to read them. I am just so amazed and pleased when I get 2 in a row from you; 13 in all so far. And each one like a gold nugget.

Well praise may turn your head, so I'll just add that you've kept me humping to keep up. I thought it would be the other way around. You conditioned me to think so at least! Typical Stice stunt.

. . .

All for now, my love. I really do feel close to you in these letters. Send me another undershirt for Christmas. I'm serious!

³³ The literal translation from Japanese for *denki* is electricity.

³⁴ The term *ground pounder* refers to U.S. Army or ground-based military units.

KRKK and (da Mother), XXXs

Gig



Wednesday night

16 November 1966

Hi Baby,

...

Your last letter was written on the 11th—that's not too bad at all.

Major J. B. "Jack" Acey (next door) came in this afternoon with no shirt on and we were teasing him about his hairy chest. He's put on just a little weight and I told him if he'd shave that hairy chest, I'd take a picture of it and mail it to *Playboy*! Chuckles come hard sometimes.

Colonel Owens came back this afternoon, so I guess I can start flying again. He thought I'd done really well; the group executive officer was calling me by my first name. The doctor, base operations, base security, motor transport, and communications officer were all working together and going through MABS instead of going to the group directly and then interfering with the MABS later. He claimed he'd been too busy to even try to regain control. I really think that is more an excuse than a reason, but I sure hauled them in tight. I was getting pot shots from all over the place the minute he left. The first day was chaos, second day murder, third day utter confusion and still very murderous, fourth day grim but passable, and the fifth day no lighter but a whole lot clearer and smoother. If we hadn't had a couple of accidents, today would have been really productive. One of the big problems is that almost all of our people also work for the group in a dual capacity. I felt hamstrung, bypassed, uninformed, and then shot at by the new directly informed group staff. That's the way he left things. Well, it's been rough, but I gave him the control, coordination, and cooperation to go along with the responsibility he's always had and no disciplinary problems after really chopping down a few wise ones. Of course, the workload won't really decrease very much now he's back, but it's been kind of like hitting your head against the wall because it feels so good when you quit.

I never got completely in the clear, but I got the feeling there was a clearing somewhere. The damn squadron is getting bigger all the time and it won't be too long before it's really beyond the span of control. Coupled with no sergeant major on the bottom and being short two major's in the

November 1966

middle. Talk about learning from your mistakes. I even made a real old one with the executive officer. He asked me how much fluid was in one of our arresting gear engines and I tried to “estimate.”³⁵ He said, “You aren’t going to give me that old crappy MABS bullshit, are you? Do you know?” What could I say? “No, Sir, I don’t know. I’ll find out.” One of our biggest problems is trying to run an entire air station complex on stateside, peacetime men and equipment. We are our own public works, maintenance, sanitation, mess halls, clubs, PX, post office, crash crew, guard, weather station, bomb dump, multi-radar, motor transport, phone system, head [latrine] builder, and maker of electricity, churches, and hospitals. We only have two explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) people, for instance. They are the ones who have to get under these smoldering hulks—more times than not, dig in the sand—that used to be planes and remove the fuses from the hot foam-sprayed, slimy wet bombs and rockets before they either blow up or certainly before the aircraft can be moved off the runway and get the damn field open again before someone flames out for lack of fuel. So, one of our biggest jobs is writing letters pleading for more gear, more men, and doing it properly and thoroughly enough so that the wing and back home believe it enough to cut loose and help out. And they are slow but sure. Some things we’ll never get I’m sure—some types of people we may never get—but I’m generally optimistic, though 10 years from now who knows.

What a lousy letter, huh? I feel like I’ve done my job and I’m ready to go home! Ha! How about them apples! Ready for a frolic Ferdinand? . . .

I love you, Darling,
Ray



16 November 1966

Hi Darling,
Wow was I snowed when those four “letters” arrived today. Couldn’t imagine what they were! . . .

Oh, what a wild thing to spot in the twentieth century—elephants

³⁵ The term *arresting gear engine* refers to a mechanical system used to rapidly decelerate an aircraft as it lands either on a runway or deck.

from a jet! And the elephants kept plodding while the guns jammed. That really is a good story. Talk about rubbing your eyes.

I try not to talk about your flying much because I might say the wrong thing. But I do of course note all you say, and I don't mind reading about it. Just can't talk about it. So, rave on and I'll be your devoted listener (who tries not to chew her nails.)

...

Kirk misses you a lot and I got out *Life Magazine* to show him a story about the Marines in the DMZ. . . . My copy just now getting here. It was grim, but he took it well.³⁶ He was in a lonesome mood, I guess. I had told him to polish his shoes and he was feeling a bit unfathered. He really does seem to need you the most, especially when we talk about the things men do. . . . Maybe it's hard to be grownup, good, and brave all the time when you are only seven years old. Must go to bed. It's much too late. I love you, Honey.

Gig



Thursday night
17 November 1966

Hi Darling,

Wow, another letter today! That's four days in a row, and it sure has been nice. I can hardly believe my eyes when I see one in the mailbox. Have I been doing that well with you? Mine sometimes miss the morning mail though, as the mailman doesn't come until afternoon, so I take them up to the post office every day that I have my clothes on!

Sorry you had to get chewed out at 0700 on your first day without the colonel. That's like getting it with both barrels. It's bad enough just to have your eyes open at that hour! Oh well, maybe he had optirectalis.³⁷ It sounds like you got things straightened out later in the day though. At least, I hope so for both our sakes. I'm sure things will be better once you

³⁶ Maynard Parker, "Marines Blunt DMZ Invasion: The Crucial Battle to Block North Vietnam's Infiltration Route Through the 'Demilitarized' Zone," *Life Magazine*, 28 October 1966.

³⁷ Though the reference is unclear, the term *optirectalis* may be slang for someone with negative outlook on life.

get those personnel holes filled. It sounds like good experience in leadership at any rate! As a matter of fact, I'll bet your "performance" was pretty hot too—if it was eyeball to eyeball! Thank goodness, my eyeballs aren't on a level with yours . . .

. . .

I'm really quite happy here in our house and always so glad to get home from people. But I keep having the feeling that something is missing and that something is you.

A real estate man called today about whether I needed a house—said he was a Reserve Marine and if I ever needed him to call Major Louis B. Robertshaw at the recruiting place. Wondered why Major Robertshaw hadn't met you. Marines are so scarce here in Austin; they really are interested in you. I said thanks, it was nice to know I had a friend.

. . .

Karen was so pleased you were proud of her. And Kirk was relieved that he was forgiven for the fossil breakage. Kathy has not forgotten you at all and when I say where's Daddy, she points to the sky and says "Daddy, bye bye." She listens for airplanes a lot.

Your third package is ready for mailing with flints, Crest, Vaseline, and OFF. Did you ever get the other two?

. . .

Happy Thanksgiving, Love. Hope the chow is extra good that day. The Marine Corps Birthday meal sounded great.

All for now, Darling,
Gig



Friday night late
18 November 1966

Hi Sweetheart,
Today's been something else—started out with a bad case of running back and forth to the out-castle, flew up north this noon, went back to work, grabbed a quick late chow first (no breakfast to starve an intestinal cold?), and then back out again tonight. I missed chow again—right now, a beer and peanuts tastes really good.

Honey, you send me anything you desire, except Mom's letters to you

as they just make me mad. I can take the ones she writes me because she tries not to be antagonistic. Well, don't bother with that.

Did you ever get that snapshot of me Lou Gagnon took? He took another one outside yesterday, but it was a 35 mm, not a Polaroid. If you're not going to take movies . . . I'll take some out here. Oh, something else, ask Don to check the furnace filters. They are used just as much with the heater as the air conditioner. Is it getting cool there now?

I did make a stupid mistake before I left. I told you Vietnam was below the equator—of course it's not—just enough to cover the hills with jungle. I can still look out every night and see Cassiopeia clear as a bell and Orion and the Dipper (although low).

. . .

I'm sorry I'm too tired to write tonight. I'm just sitting here half-dozing. I've got to shower and get to bed.

Goodnight, Honey. I've got a 0630 brief tomorrow morning.

I love you,

Ray



Saturday night
19 November 1966

Hello Precious Lamb,

I just came home from a sexy French movie—*A Man and a Woman*—and it was poignant.³⁸ Meaning it definitely made me think of you. It was about a sports car driver who drove in the Le Mans to Monte Carlo and lead scenes you would have eaten up. It was also, of course, a love story about a widow and widower who each have one child and sleep together, but not quite as they had past experiences that kept them preoccupied during the love scenes. So, it was sort of like four people in bed. . . . The race drivers had something in them very like you—a preoccupation with a technical machine, very intense, sophisticated, and at the same time simple, unsophisticated, unspoiled love of life itself. And since I live and love just that sort of complicated, simple type of person, it wasn't unusual

³⁸ *A Man and a Woman*, directed by Claude Lelouch (Beverly Hills, CA: United Artists, 1966).

that I should see you in the picture. For instance, the fellow won the grueling Le Mans and drove back the same night just because the girl wired, "Bravo, I love you!"³⁹ How many times have you come back from ever so many days and nights of tortuous work and only asked for me to be there. I ached, for instance, when he couldn't find her after this long drive. And she couldn't possibly have known what he went through to get back to her. Life is so very lopsided that way. It's a wonder men and women ever get together.

Oh Angel, you are so cheerful, even tired and bleary and numb. You have the most marvelous way of taking whatever comes. But not like a martyr at all, which makes life so unbearable for real martyrs like me! A cheerful martyr, that's what you are. Ghastly! No, not ghastly at all just perfect and that's all you get for tonight. You really will be unbearable when you come back. Spoiled rotten just because I get mushy in letters.

...

...

No, I never got halfway through a haircut and lost all the *denki* for the rest of the day because I don't know what a *denki* is. Heaven help me if you start speaking Vietnamese. You haven't even mastered English yet! Point: SAIGON not SIAGON. AGGRAVATING not AGGRIVATING.

...

This is extra-long because you were extra-good this week. Five letters. Sometimes I really think I could love you . . . especially on Saturday night . . . a certain MAN and a WOMAN.

XXXs,
Gig



Saturday night
19 November 1966

Hi Darling,
. . . If I had my druthers, I probably would have picked the *New Book of Knowledge*. I'll never forget reading the old one as a child. It really left a

³⁹ The Le Mans is not a fixed distance race, but the winner is determined by whoever travels the greatest distance in 24 hours.

lasting impression and a strong nostalgia. I hope your new *World Book* has lots of projects for the kids. . . . Some night, you should take the top three over to the University of Texas planetarium, if they have one. They would really enjoy it.⁴⁰

. . .

Kirk, I'll take you deer hunting when I come home. Ask your mom if you can practice a little once and awhile on your BB gun so you can learn how to sight and squeeze the trigger. Remember what the sights should be?

Robin, how's your math coming along? I was really surprised when you told me about that!

Karen, you'll have to write me again too, all of your letters were so nice. It made me wish I could be there, but of course I can't. It takes an awful lot of people to fight this war, and everyone is working all day long every day. We all feel we're right in helping these people and they certainly are grateful. For instance, tomorrow morning one of our doctors is going to operate on an eight-year-old boy's leg that has been bent up for a long time. He had polio when he was three and the doctor is going to straighten it out and fix him all up so he can run and play like the other kids. You should have seen his mother; she was so happy she cried and went off jabbering in Vietnamese all over the village about it. They don't understand our language, but they sure understand kindness. You don't have to speak that!

. . . You don't have to send me news accounts, Honey. We get Radio Saigon at noon and 2200, and it's about the same thing you all hear. The best news, of course, comes in daily summaries we all read.

Well, with two hops yesterday (last one at night) and the damn early morning, if I go to sleep right now, I'll be in good shape for tomorrow. So, with that thought, sack time!

I love you, Baby. I really love you,
Ray



⁴⁰ The University of Texas has several planetariums, though they do not reside in the Austin area. The McDonald Observatory is in West Texas and the Arlington campus hosts a planetarium.

Monday

21 November 1966

Hello Darling,

It's Monday morning and I haven't mailed Saturday's letter yet. So, I might as well send two. Yesterday was sort of emotional all around. It was 20 November, which was the day Dad died, and so Mom wanted us to go to church with her as she had flowers in his memory. I woke up late (after my lovely binge letter to you) when she called, and she asked why I was late getting up, so she got blasted off the hook right then and there.

...

Well, that just sort of climaxed the whole day with Melba giving me solid gold earrings in typical Melba fashion—"All I want is your love and your kids." Melba has bought love with jewelry for years. I don't even wince anymore.

Golly, there are so many kooks in the world it's hardly worth getting enraged. I just thank God for a sane husband and sane children. I keep wishing you were around to help me laugh or take me away or something! Just the memory of you helps me stick to my convictions, however. Also, some choice Marine swear words that go rolling around in my head that people never hear. Good old Marine swear words. I love 'em all!

Gosh, I feel better already. Will go mail this now.

I love you, Darling,
Gig



Monday night

21 November 1966

Hi Darling,

And how are you tonight? Have you forgiven me for forgetting Kathy's birthday? Being sorry doesn't mean much, but no, I will never forget the night she was born. You needed some help, the doctor needed help, and I couldn't help. Now that is a difficult position. I really thought I was going to lose you. I sure prayed that night. I love all my children dearly, but no more of that for you. I was just one of the architects, while you were the contractor and builder.

You're right about Lou Gagnon, this is his second wife. He married her a couple of years ago after his first wife died, leaving him with three kids.

...

Just came back from seeing old Martha Raye. She gave us an outstanding half-hour show—popping all over the place—a real honest professional. She ended up saying the jerk demonstrators back home weren't fit to clean the mud off their (our) boots. They ate that up. Sorry, kids, no autograph.⁴¹

Don't worry about my not having time to read your letters. That's sort of like breathing you know—always find time for that. I have them all clipped together and opened out so I can read them like a book. And what a wonderful chapter you always seem to add.

We've been getting ready for the big blow. Typhoon Nancy is kicking up her heels between Manila and here.⁴² About midnight, the sand started blowing; three hours later, everything is covered with sand—us too—we're here too. Woke up with the damndest taste in my mouth—sand. . . . I'm not sure if we can fly much more than tomorrow. It's supposed to arrive Wednesday around noon.

Some weather up north on the early early. I only got to see the ground for a few seconds and I had the wrong damn river to boot! Good thing we don't shoot first and ask questions later, we'll have some unfriendly friendlies.

Got 120 feet of rappelling line for the tall timber. So far, I've flown about 20 missions these first four weeks. That's not bad considering the boss was gone almost one week. I got the "dawn patrol" again tomorrow. Goodnight, Sweetheart, I need that old rack time.

I love you,
Ray



⁴¹ Martha Raye was an actress, comedian, and singer. Frank Blazich, " 'Maggie of the Boondocks': Martha Raye and a Lifetime of Service to the U.S. Armed Forces," National Museum of American History, 9 November 2021.

⁴² Meteorologists began tracking the storm on 17 November and it reached tropical storm strength on 19 November before emerging over the South China Sea on 21 November.

Tuesday night
22 November 1966

Hello Darling,

It's always so good when the day is over and I can sit down and write you. I really wait all day for it, and tonight seemed extra-long as I weakened and let the children watch a Danny Kaye fairy story movie until 2200 on a school night.⁴³ But tomorrow, they get out at 1400 and have a four-day holiday, so it's an easy week for them.

I really didn't think I'd get lonesome for you on Thanksgiving, never having made too much fuss over that holiday, but today I bought a turkey and cranberries and have an awful yen for oyster dressing. And to my surprise find I do have some memories of Thanksgivings with you. . . .

Well, guess what I see and hear all the time now—McDonnell Douglas F-4C Phantom IIs! Bergstrom got its first F-4Cs from St. Louis, Missouri, five months early. They are changing from Strategic Air Command (SAC) to Tactical Air Command (TAC) and made a to-do on TV about getting 15 the other day.⁴⁴ Kathy really thinks she is going to see you now when we go there. She and I drove out today. She always sleeps coming home, of course. . . .

I was so proud of your accomplishments while the colonel was away. It sounds like you moved quite a few mountains while he was gone! It sounds like they also discovered Ray Stice; the whirlwind Ray Stice that I live with that is. Like Colonel Joiner said to me, "He tries . . . he more than tries! He gets the job done!" Well, anyway, I can tell you did try to get things going smoother even if the job isn't the kind that is going to be finished overnight. And I'm sure several people appreciate the fact. I know I always do when you fix things up for me. They don't know how lucky they are to have you.

⁴³ *The Daydreamer*, directed by Jules Bass (Los Angeles, CA: Embassy Pictures, 1966).

⁴⁴ Strategic Air Command was part of the U.S. Air Force that dealt with long-range strategic bombardment. Largely recognized as two-thirds of America's nuclear triad, it also conducted bombing during the Vietnam War from bases in Guam and Thailand. Tactical Air Command was another element of the Air Force that was largely comprised of fighter and attack aviation somewhat akin to Marine air in mission sets. On 1 July 1966 Bergstrom Air Force Base was transferred to a TAC, becoming home to the Twelfth Air Force and the 75th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. See *NORAD/CONAD Historical Summary, January–December 1966* (Colorado Springs, CO: Command History Division, Secretary Joint Staff, Headquarters NORAD/CONAD, 1967).

...

On TV tonight, they corrected a statement that wives could go on reduced rates to Hawaii to meet husbands on leave—no such luck. It's a nice thought though, and maybe we should think about it. I don't think I could let you go again though!

...

The news has been about the battle in War Zone C and the 7,000 infiltrating from the north, on a year's basis that is.⁴⁵

That's about it in the tidbit department. Have you gotten my packages?

I am still in a deep state of shock from Mrs. Gig the Pig, and the children (Karen) think you ought to change that to Mrs. Stice and her mice. More dignified, you know. You must remember MY passion, pizazz? Oh, just find me. I'm the one with red eyes from staying up writing YOU THANG. (Oh, Daddy got that from Gomer Pyle!)⁴⁶ Can't get away with a THANG, can you!

XXXs, G.



Tuesday night

22 November 1966

Hi Honey,

Do my letters smell as bad as yours smells good? What do you do, keep the paper in your dresser near some perfume? I keep mine on top of my moldy clothes for "arc de parsparin."

Enclosed is today's schedule just so you believe me and my 0530 revelries and the need for a stiff alarm clock. Lord only knows where your package is and Mom's too. Why don't you reimburse Mom the \$60 bucks to help settle her account?

⁴⁵ *War Zone C* refers to the area in South Vietnam centered around the abandoned town of Katum near the Cambodian border, where a strong concentration of People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and Viet Cong activity took place. "War Zone C," in *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199891580.001.0001>.

⁴⁶ *Gomer Pyle, USMC*, was a television show that aired on CBS from 1964 to 1969 and starred Jim Neighbors as the somewhat dimwitted Marine from Mayberry, NC, stationed at Camp Henderson, CA.

Would you believe I'm out of cigarettes, and this isn't exactly the time I want to quit at this exact instant.

P.S. Can we talk privately? . . .

Hell, I love you so much I can't stand thinking about it, and I can't stop either! I've tried to reason it away, but it's still there. You know what I mean? I do have a notion that might help if we can manage it—sort of a selfish thing, but it might work—if we cut the kids off with a razor about 2100 and thought only about ourselves for a few hours and did this often enough with locked doors. Maybe that would be a step in the right direction. Can we stop being a mom and dad after 2100? I think it would work.

. . .

Goodnight, Honey,
Ray



Wednesday night
23 November 1966

To: Major Wing-a-Ding-Ding

Hello Honey,
Robin handed me this letter for you tonight and added to me privately "I didn't know the letters he needed me to work on, just the hard ones I decided." She got busy on it after I told her she'd better get after you about your spelling. And you know Robin. She always rises to a challenge. So, your daughter is going to get you straightened out. I wish her luck! If you ever quit "comming" places and just say you are coming, it would be a start.

. . .

I've got to make this short as tomorrow I'm cooking an 11-pound turkey for the Ks, As, and Ss.⁴⁷ I got out the good silver and polished until my back ached. It sure needed it. Actually, I thought it would be good for the kids if I made a party out of it. Don is going to bring the tape recorder

⁴⁷ The Ks were the Kirkpatrick family. Don and Ed Kirkpatrick were Gig's brothers. The As were the Austin family. Sam Austin was Gig's uncle and her mother Pris's brother. Bill Austin was Sam's son. Bill and Nan Austin had 11 children, so there were many cousins. The Ss were the Stice family.

over, and we'll take snapshots too. He says he wants to try my voice for his commercials, and if the clients like it, I might make \$10! Imagine me making money. . . .⁴⁸

I can't imagine where the popcorn and clock are. It got sent, that's all I know. Regular mail though, so I hope it's not on the Saigon docks!

Kirk was happy to hear about the BB gun decision. Thanks, Dad. And the battery decision. Whose side are you on, anyway? He had a hard day today—couldn't find his shoes, forgot his money, got about 10 spankings, and got consoled by his grandmother. (While his hard-hearted Mother sneered. Boy, did she get a dirty look!) Let's face it, there are times when mothers are no damn good. I think I'll be a nice soft father for a while. Maybe that's the trouble, I have to be a father instead of a mother sometimes! I'll tell you one thing, when it comes to BB guns, batteries, and deer hunting, you can have him!

Speaking of stamps, they say I can mail letters for 5 cents and they will get there as fast as 8 cents.⁴⁹ Tried it once, did it get there? . . . Read about the 25 Viet Cong near Chu Lai. Sounds like they got them all by ground, air, and sea.⁵⁰

I was glad you wrote about the "good" side of the war, like helping the Vietnamese boy. I'm sure they are glad you are all there when they can finally see the truth, like in the story I mailed yesterday.

. . . Take good care of yourself. Repeat after me: "On my honor, I will try to write shorter letters and EAT MORE, SLEEP MORE, and SMOKE LESS."

. . .

XXXs,

G



⁴⁸ According to the Department of Labor, approximately 22 million women were in the American workforce in 1960, a 35 percent increase from 1950. Working wives accounted for 12.4 million of those workers. Median annual income at the time for women in the labor market—typically clerical, service, or professional (office) positions—was \$2,230. *Women Workers in 1960: Geographical Differences*, Women's Bureau Bulletin 284 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962).

⁴⁹ "Postal History: Rates for Stamped Cards and Postcards," USPS, March 2023.

⁵⁰ Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966*.

Thursday night, Thanksgiving

24 November 1966

Hi Honey,

Would you believe tonight is Thanksgiving—well, here anyway? What a meal: ham, turkey, sweet patooties, “punkin” pie—the whole bit. My eyes were a bit larger than my stomach as usual, and I left some for the Gods. I will say my thoughts were drawn to you all very strongly. I could even feel you saying a prayer, and I said one for you, silently of course. You wouldn’t think it was a holiday at the 0530 brief. I suspect the purpose of these flights is to roar around making so much noise to wake the Viet Cong up bright and early to make them mad enough to shoot at us and then we could clobber ’em. We almost got a secondary, but the idiot wouldn’t come up on the frequency we were given.

Typhoon Nancy has degenerated to an extra tropical blob now, and I think we’ll only get the drags starting tomorrow, with heavy rain and a lot of gusty winds (20–40 knots) until Saturday morning.

We got our first local United Nations (UN) laborers today—an interpreter, Mr. Tu—says he has a brother in Da Nang in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) (a captain), probably both staunch Viet Cong, and 3 females and 11 men (from 18th ARVN Division).⁵¹ Get seven more tomorrow. Mr. Tu wants a UN typist and an UN typewriter. I don’t know about that.

Just strolled down to our temporary club that is about one-half again as large as your “den” there, all handmade out of bamboo, thatching, and woven palm leaves—really not bad for \$350 and 18 bags of cement (\$2 an officer). We’re building a permanent one 180’ x 90’ for \$3,600 (\$20 an officer).

They almost transferred a guy into MABS that was a couple numbers senior to me, but that’s suspended now. I’m sure he couldn’t be executive officer because it’s a command billet and he’s not an aviator. We’re having a lot of trouble getting the guard all in the same chain of command and it’s a bit screwed up.

...

⁵¹ The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was the ground component for the South Vietnamese government. It developed a rather dubious reputation for corruption and ineffectiveness in the field when compared to American forces.

Way past my bedtime. My bed's pretty big so come on!

I love you,
Ray



Friday night
25 November 1966

Hi Honey,

Yes, and how are you, mother of my four children? Today was bonanza day out in Chu Lai West. I got four letters: a real sweet letter from Pris, one from Mom, and two ever-loving letters from guess who—my girlfriend, that's who—old friend of mine that I used to shack up with or whoever the hell you are.

. . . Did Kirk deliver my kiss for me? Robin could even add a good hard love, they are all so good.

Yes, the Republicans did very well. You know, all the years I've been around Marines that I've only met a few Democrats and some scattered agnostics—90 percent must be Republican.⁵²

Looks grim on the F-4 checkout. January is my only chance and Colonel Owens only wants me to fly every other day, let alone go to Japan for six weeks to get checked out when VMFA-115 goes back to Japan.

I hate to disillusion my dear sweet mom-in-law, but no *Time* magazines please. I get enough of that (like say 12 months) of back issues. *Playboys* might be received . . . possibly. After reading 1,000,000,000 messages, letters, orders, rivetous [fascinating] requests, regulations, I'm bleary eyed. Only a good bosom will perk up the old eyeballs! Please don't blast her, regardless of how it may appear, she really has only your best thoughts in mind. I learned to live with mine; you have a little patience with yours. Okay?

. . . I always did say you had to be a nut to walk off and leave your wife. I sure am a NUT, yes ma'am. . . . Kathy give Karen a LOVE, that way you'll learn to be as sweet as your mom.

⁵² Though not specific to the period, a 2009 Gallup poll showed that most veterans of all ages were Republican; however, a 2020 Bloomberg article discussed how the military's preference for the Republican party may have shifted. For a more detailed look at both, see Everett Bledsoe, "What Percentage of the US Military Is Conservative—4 Sources," Soldiers Project, 1 March 2023.

...

I hate to tell you but *denki* is electricity. No, I don't know any Vietnamese yet. I have to see Mr. Tu about that. Maybe he'll teach me some good Viet Cong I could use.

Gomen (English: I'm sorry), Honey. Rack time—it's late even here, you know. Know what? I sure do love you.

Ray

P.S. Kirk—shine your shoes! Karen—clean your teeth! Robin—keep up the good work! Kathy—kiss Mama.



Saturday

27 November 1966

Hello Sweetie,

Three days down and one to go of the kid's holiday. They are struggling over letters to you right at this moment, mostly so I can have a moments peace to write. Should have written last night, but I must confess that I read *McCall's* magazine all evening. Really sort of pooped. We spent a busy Thursday cleaning house—the girls mopped—stuffing turkey, setting the table, and cutting berries for it. We finished around 1500. . . . Kathy went around all day saying num num and licking her chops! The turkey cooked 5 hours and got looked at 500 times. The cranberries never jelled! Mom came over and played ping pong with the kids after her company left for the game and Don came over with Uncle Sam's recorder (his is broken) around 1700.⁵³ He had cleaned out his tapes and found the one we made in Beeville, Texas, for him in New York, so he played it for us during the cocktail hour. . . .

It filled the day and we did get a tape made for you, though it is pretty wild. Don left the recorder for me to use the other side, but I decided not to as you'd probably have to play the thing in public and I'd rather write my coos on paper! So, it has some old songs of Don's on one side, which he said you can erase if you want to send it back.

...

⁵³ The University of Texas played football against Texas A&M University in Austin, winning 22-14.

Figure 18. Karen, Kathy, Robin, and Kirk ready for the holidays



Source: Stice family collection.

Whew! Kids finished letters and are off to the store. Baby asleep early, as Don is taking us to the caverns this afternoon somewhere in the hills.⁵⁴

Regarding your 22 November letter, I was so glad you got to see Martha Raye. She is indeed a pro, and they are the most fun to see. I was surprised to hear about the typhoon. No mention of it in the papers here. As a matter of fact, just yesterday, Chu Lai made the news. That's like hearing two versions: the official one and your side. And your side is a bit more vivid!

Well, here's sand in your eye! (That's a joke, choke, Dad?) The weather is still balmy here; no furnace in the last two weeks at least. But yes, I will remember to clean it out. I'm really pretty good at house maintenance now. It just takes me until midnight to lock up, that's all. By the way, you are being much more sensible about your bedtime. . . . Maybe I will be too.

⁵⁴ There are a number of caverns in the hill country around Austin she could be referring to, including Inner Space Caverns in Georgetown, those around Barton Creek, or Longhorn Caverns State Park.

XXXs and then some,
Gig



Sunday night, 2245
27 November 1966

Well, Sweetie (or is it sweaty?),
I'm a bit fuzzy at this point. Just "read" a book in one hour and it almost put me to sleep. So, hang on while the water boils for coffee. Missed the news. Somehow those kids kept me talking until 2130 about you and presidents and heaven knows what else. Best part of the day, however, so I didn't mind. It was a long day today and hard to fill. The last of the holidays, and all the kids were home with no playmates, weather is cold, and nothing to do. Don filled yesterday with the trip to the [Inner Space] caverns near Georgetown. Made us all think of you and the Luray Caverns [Virginia]. We were such old pros that the guide had to work to keep our interest. It was a small group and Kirk literally played in the cavern. He (the guide) showed us total darkness and, man, that really is black down there! Then they had a record saying, "And God said let there be light." And guess what? They turned the lights back on. Right?! Oh, you're so smart. We were also supposed to listen to the drips. It was hard, as Kirk had a pack of gum in his mouth.

...

Say now, "your" *Playboy* issue (December 1966) costs \$1.25 and so somebody is going to make a Christmas present out of it! Karen tried to take a peek and I wouldn't buy it while she was around.

So glad tomorrow is Monday, and I will perk up with a letter from you. Sure can't hack a Sunday without you. Wish you could see Kathy play monster in the nude or put both feet in a hole in a pair of pants, with the other hole in the back.

...

Gigabeth



Monday
28 November 1966

Hi Darling,
How about this for schoolbook paper. Would you believe it's: 1) raining;

2) very late; 3) approaching an 18-hour day; and 4) lonesome without you, Baby? Do you believe all that?

Would you also believe no evening meal, forced to drink 4–5 beers on an empty stomach while Colonel Owens proofreads the roughs?

And how about I just plain love you! That shouldn't be too difficult to believe. I'm sorry I haven't been able to keep up the daily letters—even missed every other day this time. Please don't let your morale slip. You've been doing so great in that department. I'd hate to think your morale depended completely on my letters, although I will say I do rely heavily on yours for the proper spirit.

I guess I really should go to church, but Sundays are just like all the rest. Sometimes my attitude needs to be expanded on maybe four sides instead of three.

One of our corporals is being rotated tomorrow, and he's been working as long as I have today—voluntarily—that's the sort of people that really make everything worth it here.

And we have the other type; the mama's boys who are so insecure and undisciplined they aren't worth the trouble they create. But all in all, everyone really works hard.

I shouldn't write to you under these conditions, but I'm afraid it's been too long as it is . . .

Would you believe still no packages—*nyet* [no] popcorn, *nyet* clock—and I'm still missing breakfasts. That's not your doing, I know, but Uncle Sam is screwing up somewhere.

Would you believe I'm mildewed—completely raunchy—stinking up a storm. There's something about this permanent damp—hell—wetness that just isn't sociable. Doing fairly well on the dry (wet?) rot, and only have two known types of fungus on my hands and feet. But I still have all my fingernails, which is more than a few people can say (root rot they say).⁵⁵

We only have one guitar player left in the hut; Carl Bott went over to MAG-12 to fly A-4s. That only leaves Tennessee Major Bernard H. "Bernie" Thomas (one of the elephant hunters) and a new . . . major to kick a few.

You think all is wine and roses, eh? Well, let me tell you how rough

⁵⁵ For more on these health issues, see "Diseases," in *Annual Report of the Surgeon General United States Army, Fiscal Year 1961* (Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1961), chap. 6.

it is in combat. I just tore a hole in my Sears plastic raincoat and ran out of Coffee Mate. Now, isn't that one hell of a way to fight a war? And I don't recall you sending any *Playboys* yet. . . . Things are bad all over. I did see a recommendation for an Air Medal go through the colonel's papers, maybe things are looking up a little.⁵⁶

I will admit that not being able to buy anything for Santa Claus still bugs me. I just don't see an out. Maybe we could cheat a little—you send me some tags and I'll sign them for the, you know, children. . . .

Damn Navy game—lost 20 to 7—we heard.⁵⁷ Would you believe we deciphered it through the static? Garbled portions of the game came in about 0200 in the morning yesterday. I suppose Mom had a big deal in DC for it; she always used to.

. . . Kisses to Karen, Robin, Kirk, Kathy, Pris, and perhaps one to Liz if she's been good!

I love you, Honey,
Ray



Tuesday afternoon
29 November 1966

Hi Honey,
Fresh paper for me too. We are really going through it, aren't we? Your letter yesterday told how good mine smells, which surprised me. No, I'm not putting anything on it and only keep it in your old dresser drawer there in the living room. But I like the thought anyway.

I'm afraid that letter got opened at Mom's house, as I was on my way out when it came, so I'm glad you wrote "Psst, don't read out loud," as I was just doing so when I hit that part! Regarding what you said, yes, I'm sure we will be able to have time to ourselves when you come home. The children are growing up, you know, and we are approaching the time

⁵⁶ Established in 1942, the Air Medal is awarded for meritorious achievement in aerial operations, for heroic acts in aerial operations against an armed enemy, or for merit in operational activities. During the Vietnam War, a single award of the Air Medal denoted participation by ground troops in a requisite number of combat air assaults.

⁵⁷ The annual Army vs. Navy football game took place on 26 November 1966 at the John F. Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia. The Army Cadets lost only two games that season to Notre Dame and Tennessee.

when our parental responsibilities will definitely be less and less. Less physical, that is, and more supervisory. Already I am able to trust the children to get up, feed themselves and Kathy, and wake me at 0755. I really think you taught them that when they used to get up with you. At any rate, it is certainly nice, and I am proud of them.

...

If I can just discipline myself to going to bed earlier, I will feel better, I think. But without you home, really, bed is pretty dull and cold to boot! So, I piddle around until midnight, and feel sort of rundown as a result. It will sure be nice to have you around to go to bed with, among other things.

...

I find it really helps me if I “let you go” in my mind and think it’s right for you to be there, helping the guys on the ground to keep from getting hurt. I just figure if I were getting shot at, I sure would be grateful to see a jet with you in it fly over. And if I were an enlisted Marine, I’d be grateful for a sane officer over me. . . . In fact, it’s so right for you to be there, it would be wrong not to! If an 18-year-old boy can be a professional with one year’s training, we can do it together with 16–17 years training.

Yes, I know that’s corny and uncharacteristic of me to spout the professional line, but this is one of those times when we both need to remember every bit of patriotism we ever learned and forget our personal selves. I guess that’s what freedom is. In order to have the right to talk against something, you have to be able to fight for something. And in my way, I’m trying to fight too. As a matter of fact, you don’t know how frustrating it is to me to have to stay home.⁵⁸ If I made home sound good, it’s only because I’m trying to kid myself. I’d much rather be with you—bugs, lizards, and all. . . .

At any rate, what I’m saying is I’m an adult—you are an adult—we can hack it better than the average couple, so don’t weaken, love. When you weaken, I turn to mush. And there is nothing worse than a mushy female. That mush I know.

END OF SERMON. Must send you an issue of *Life* magazine I read

⁵⁸ Jyoti Prakash, R. D. Bavdekar, and S. B. Joshi, “The Woes of Waiting Wives: Psychosocial Battle at Homefront,” *Medical Journal Armed Forces India* 67, no. (January 2011): 58–63, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-1237\(11\)80016-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-1237(11)80016-X).

last night about the North American Aviation XB-70 Valkyrie. Wow, what a story. My hair was standing on end.⁵⁹

Kathy says, “ugh a boo boo, Daddy.” Thank you for the nice letter! . . .
Love from all the local yokels—the vocal, local, yokels that is.

Wifesan



Wednesday night
30 November 1966

Hello Honey,
You sure raise some wise children. Robin’s letter really put me in my place. What can I say?

Guess who just moved in the hut—Major Ray D. Pendergraft. He’s F-4 qualified naturally. He’s off with Major Joseph B. “Joe” Wuertz.⁶⁰

Would you believe I get one of your packages with three popcorns, three cans of OFF, flints, three light bulbs, and toothpaste but no clock. Well now, I do thank you. I do believe you sent a clock, right?

. . .

You’d better be taking some movies, Gig, that’s an order! Kirk, you help Karen help Mom. I don’t want another blank year like we had last time. You can read the book, can’t you?

I may have one small crack at some Christmas shopping next week on the sixth. I’ve put in to go to Okinawa for a recheck in the Low-Pressure Chamber and Ejection Seat and Disorientation Training Series we’re supposed to have every two years.⁶¹ I hope to grab a couple of mad hours in the Kadena PX somehow, get them wrapped, and mailed. I can see that the colonel isn’t going to give me the time off, so this is the only way.

⁵⁹ The XB-70 Valkyrie was futuristic-looking six-engine strategic bomber capable of Mach 3. Its high-altitude mission appeared obsolete in the face of modern air defenses, and the aircraft was incredibly expensive to maintain and operate. The program was formally canceled in 1969. Keith Wheeler, “How the XB-70 Starfighter [sic] Met Its End: The Second-by-Second Story of the Mid-Air Crash that Destroyed the Triple-Sonic Airplane,” *Life*, 11 November 1966, 126–43.

⁶⁰ Maj Ray D. Pendergraft from VMFA-542, MAG-13, 1st MAW, III MAF, was killed on 2 July 1967 when his aircraft was hit by ground fire in the DMZ near Kinh Mon.

⁶¹ For a modern example, see Navy SBIR 2008.2, Mixed Gas Hypoxia Training in Low Pressure Chambers, Topic N08-139; and the NSTI Course Catalog from Navy Medicine Operational Training Command.

He's worried about one thing: my flying and anything connected with it. Only last night did he finally say, "Have a good hop" or something like that. I can ask him all about his Korea flying, but he won't discuss mine, not even talk. He doesn't even like to see me in flight gear! I guess he's jealous. Hell, he could fly the Grumman F-9 Cougar if he wanted to, but he won't. Guess he's getting too old.⁶²

...

I hate to cut you short, Honey. I want to go to bed early and catch up, feeling sort of run down tonight. When I catch myself yawning all day, I'm tired!

Goodnight, Sweetheart. I love you,
Ray



Wednesday night
30 November 1966

Darling,
My what a sobering sight I saw on TV tonight. The rain and mud at Da Nang. Somehow, I hadn't quite pictured the weather as being that bad. That must be the remains of the typhoon or the monsoon. You last mentioned the sand blowing but didn't talk about the rain. I never saw such mud in my life, except maybe at Omaha. They showed Major General Lewis W. Walt and mentioned I Corps. I do hope it's not quite that bad at Chu Lai. It still hasn't rained here since you left. Did you take it with you? Really much too dry but bright cold and clear, warming in the afternoon.

We had one of our best days today, mostly because I went to bed at 2200 last night and felt so much better.

Kathy and I mailed you an issue of *Life*—because it had the interesting airplane story—the tape, and a letter this morning. The tape cost 10 cents to mail!

...

A nice day in all, though no letter from you, so it doesn't rate as perfect!

⁶² An aviation officer candidate in the Navy or Marine Corps must be at least 19 years old and no older than 27 years at commissioning. Waiver requests for those up to 29 years old are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Myrtle writes, “The good sports like you make a heavy contribution towards the success of men like Ray who carry the more obvious burden.” Really very sweet of her to write that. I can see I’m going to get the full sympathy bit from friends and relatives this Christmas. That may be more of a burden than having you gone. I feel like a relay station. The price of being married to an officer. I still don’t have my major’s wife image on right. I keep thinking someone is going to drag me away for impersonating an officer’s wife. And I can’t go around with a sign around my neck saying, “Caution, this one really doesn’t know what she is.”

When you are only 5’ tall, no one takes you seriously anyway. That’s why I love you. You always take me seriously. You’ll never know how much that has meant to me. And that’s about as serious as I’m going to get in this letter. For heaven’s sake, next thing you know I’ll change into a proper girl, and you’d never be able to stand me then.

Honey lamb, you know I really do kind of like you. Don’t get mad at me in your dreams anymore. . . .

I love you,
Gig

·3·

DECEMBER 1966

1 December 1966

Hello Dearest,

Two nice letters from you today sounding pretty darn cheerful, I guess from that Thanksgiving dinner and a stroll to the club. All small members of the family enjoyed their tidbits, especially Robin tonight, who had her halo slightly eschew. I decided tonight that she was going to have to get along with Kirk because she is the oldest, regardless of whose fault it is—or answer to me. This seems to have been the magic word, for Kirk—now having me on his side—is now her equal and ended the evening hiding under her bed during nightly chats and asking to sleep with her on Saturday. Such new-found friendship!

...

I'm written out tonight. Wrote a Christmas letter today to be mimeographed and the literary effort took two hours to condense to one page.¹ I could have used your talent in that line. Also, spent the whole morning cleaning the filters and when I clean filters, I clean filters!

¹ *Mimeograph* refers to a duplicating machine used to make copies by pressing ink through the holes of a stencil and onto sheets of paper. Originally patented by Thomas Jefferson in 1876, this advanced technology for the time would eventually be replaced in the 1960s and 1970s by photocopying.

I wasn't too happy to hear that you got other packages but not mine. Golly bum. But Mom was most pleased.

Glad you didn't lose your job to someone else. It sounds challenging even if the flight time is every other day. You need a day to recoup from a 0530 hop as it is.

...

Kirk told Don he wants a "poocher" for Christmas. That's a plain old pooch (dog) in our language. He is still without a doubt the funniest little boy, with a marvelous sense of humor. He told Don he wants a new uncle for Christmas. And added quickly "That's a joke, Uncle Don." . . .

Are we really 17,220 kilometers away from each other? Hardly seems possible. I get more pure Ray Stice—the sweet one that is—at this distance than I do at five feet. Won't it be ghastly when we're face to face again! Unless, of course, you change; I'm perfect. I was pleased to read about the NUT who leaves his wife. Now, that's the kind of change I like. . . .

Bonsoir, mon ami,
Gig



Saturday night at 2100
3 December 1966

Hi Darling,
You sure didn't get a letter last night, did you? I hate to skip two days like that, but you never know how things are going turn out until it's all over and then it's too late to worry about it.

Out of the Wuertz K. Smith atmosphere, old Ray Pendergraft is one hell of a nice guy. He's just getting settled in our hut.

Screening, yes, it came last week or 10 days ago all by itself. But the alarm clock, no.

...

Well, it sounds like you just about did yourself in on Thanksgiving and with little or no help. Did you get some pictures?

...

The movie camera is really simple. All you have to compute is the linear opening. Maybe f/8 for average day, f/11 for a bright day, maybe

f/5.6 in light shade, f/4 in heavy shade.² Only buy outdoor color film and keep it simple. . . . Only one thing on the film—buy STANDARD 8 mm, never super 8.

Please do take movies. I'll only shoot you if you don't!

Would you believe it's been raining for a week! And last night, I nearly froze in only a sheet. Tonight, I'm going to use a blanket! I have a good cold coming on—got the blearies and the bloozies.

. . .

Still looks like I'll go to Kadena this Tuesday (6 December). It could take several days to get back though. It is harder than hell sometimes if we end up hitchhiking. But I got some green today, and I'll hit that PX first chance I get.

Goodnight, Sweetheart. Getting sort of lonesome, you know.

I love you, Honey,
Ray



Saturday night
4 December 1966

Hello Darling Sweet,

Oh, it's so good to write you. I've been waiting three whole days for a moment alone with you in thought. The weekend just slurped me up like a tornado. Saturday was sort of slow for me but busy for the kids. Mother took the girls to Sears to shop for—I suspect—a housecoat for me and a sweater for Kathy. While Don took Kirk to Kiddie City!

. . .

Sunday morning found us all being pleasantly lazy reading the paper late and loafing over a long nostalgic article about "The Middle-Aged Lions"—stories about vets of World War II.³ The kids had friends over too.

² These two apertures—f/8 and f/11—are essentially the Goldilocks of aperture values: not too hot, not too cold, but just right. They provide a middle option to balance a reasonably wide depth of field with a reasonable shutter speed.

³ This may refer to Saul Pett and Jules Loh, "The Middle-Aged Lions: More War . . . then Peace," Associated Press, 6 December 1966.

...

I didn't mean to write all of this news at the last, but it of course just happened tonight, and I don't think it's really sunk in yet. Milly just hasn't been writing me for a month and I didn't realize how Lucile's condition had changed. I told Milly that you had been recommended for an Air Medal, and this will be something nice for her to tell Lucile. . . .⁴

Well, darling, I'm like a bottled-up dam spilling over tonight. No, you don't have to write me every day for my morale, but I think I have to write you! That's what irks me about December. It will be so busy that it may cut my letter writing down, and that makes me more frustrated than anything. Too much to tell each other. Speaking of you, yes, I was shocked mildly (grin) by your dinner of 4-5 beers, after an 18-hour day. That's playing or working it pretty close, meaning the beers might have shown and that wouldn't be too good, now would it? Especially when I'm not there to drive you home. Seriously, Honey, that's not good pilot care and you've got five—count them—good reasons for good pilot care. Besides, if I can be a saint you can be a saint or it isn't fair. And just because you're out of Coffee Mate is no reason.

Enough, enough, I'm satisfied. Gee, I'll be glad when January comes. I love you, root rot and all. . . .

Gig



Monday night
5 December 1966

Hi Dear,

After yesterday's long letter, there's not much left for today except an amusing story about Kirk at the dime store.

...

Home again. Dinner, baths, Karen's homework drags until 2030 and Robin gets in fights with Kirk. Kathy cries. And, guess what? Every single one gets a spanking. Karen's first in six months. Robin's first for the day.

⁴Stice was awarded his first Air Medal in December 1966. MABS-13, Command Chronology (ComdC) December 1966, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077119, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

. . . All go to bed happy deciding, bad as it was, one swat from you would have been worse. . . .

Mother finally says she will babysit for me tomorrow while I go Christmas shopping—all day if necessary! So, I'll fold up shop tonight and quietly go to bed. Weather is 60–80 degrees again. It'll be great to have a day off. First one in 11 years. I feel so strange when I'm all alone shopping. Do wish you were here. We could go to *Marie Antoinette* again!⁵ That's a joke, Dad.

I just glanced at our old year, and it was a rough one, you know? Urinary tract infections, flu, ear aches, tonsillitis, measles, colds, heart attacks, dental appointments, plus moving, traveling, and leave taking. It's been positively peaceful for two months now with no sickness at all. Oh, I do hope it lasts. Their [the children's] health really seems to have taken a turn for the better. They are all thriving. So much for us, Pa. Oh yes, first volume of *The World Book Encyclopedia* came—the atlas. Very big. It even has star charts and both sides of the world, or something. How about that? Want to test me? Chu Lai is not on the map though. Must be new.

P.S. O'Malley—Marine corporal gets Medal of Honor here in Austin tomorrow for action “near Chu Lai.”⁶

XXXs,
Gig



7 December 1966

Hi Darling,
Well, it looks like we shopped on the same day. Perhaps that was why I was disoriented too! I shopped for frequent cups of coffee, hauled out lists, went off and left packages, and my feet hurt. What did you do?

. . .

I was glad to see a letter for me today too, though amazed to hear about the package. It honestly sounds like the clock got stolen, as I think it was in that package. Can you complain to someone? . . .

⁵ She may have been referencing *Marie Antoinette*, directed by W. S. Van Dyke and Julien Duvivier (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1938).

⁶ “Vietnam War—U.S. Marine Corps: Robert Emmett O'Malley,” Congressional Medal of Honor Society, accessed 28 March 2023.

...

Yes, it does sound like the commanding officer is a bit jealous of your flying, but that's not serious either. You know what you have to do. Perhaps he just needs a ground assistant when you're airborne.

...

The girls were very good yesterday. I guess the spankings paid off. Robin cleared the table last night and Karen helped get out some Christmas ornaments. I found an old pair of your galoshes—boot type—do you want them? Kathy loves to look at your clothes incidentally. They really seem to remind her of Dad! Christmas just sneaked in the back door. The kids made sure of that. Kirk woke me up this morning saying he needs a beard for a costume. He has one line to say and will wear his suit, as he is a customer talking to the elves. Must get going.

Sweet thoughts and kisses to you. I look at my map of Vietnam every night and think of you. That's a big world over there.

Gig



8 December 1966

Hi Sweetheart,

Gosh almighty, I had to mail my last letter to you in with all the Christmas cards at the post office as they've closed the ordinary drop in the windows and, now, I wonder if you'll be delayed getting them because of the crush. I hope not.

...

Kirks pictures of you got developed and it sure was nice to see them. He doesn't want to give up the originals (shades of you), but I think I'll mail them anyway. . . .

Just got word that I have to help at the school Christmas party (third, fourth, and fifth) grades as Luci Johnson Nugent has been invited and may come!⁷ And the Waiting Wives meet Monday at the USO, plus the Armed Forces Wives on Wednesday, and I think I may just stay in bed.

...

Ah women! We must need some MEN around, especially ONE MAN.

⁷ Gig is referring to President Lyndon B. Johnson's daughter who married a national guardsman, Patrick L. Nugent, in August 1966.

Must go get the pictures now and maybe I can include them in this. Mom's pictures, despite her fancy camera, were lousy. So, hang on.

XXXs,
Gig



Late, more like 0100, 10 December
9 December 1966

Hello Angel,

I'm writing this one in bed under the old purple quilt, all sweet and clean, as you used to say and it's a nice way to write you.

I'm feeling more "friendly" toward you tonight than last night, because last night, while looking for old Christmas cards I found instead old pictures of old girlfriends and got such a case of jealousy that I couldn't write you or do Christmas cards. Oh, oh, oh!

But, a letter came today, the second for the week, and other than the fact that I got miffed again over the screening that you didn't even rave about and got 10 days ago before you remembered to mention it, well you made zero points this week, Sir, and I may not invite you to bed with me. I might even throw a shoe at you.

But, you redeemed yourself by saying you were lonesome—getting sort of, that is—so I melted a little on the edges and you may stick a toe over, but that's about all. Make that a leg with hair on it. And on top of that, you have to say I LOVE YOU and mean it. I'm not at all easy to convince tonight.

However, since you didn't get in the doghouse on purpose—only by chance—I'll let you out briefly. It's a bit difficult to leave a rip-roaring scene on paper.

...

The pictures must have gotten exposed when the camera was fixed. But wasn't the one adorable? . . . Thanks for all the long-distance advice, Darling. You really do try. Oh, the man, after setting it, said your guide pasted on back was a good one. I said, yes, my husband did that. Just don't hold your breath for any of my pictures!

...

At least there are some nice things in December—people. The very things that bother the most sometimes please the most.

December 1966

Oh, Honey Bunch, this hasn't been a very good letter, has it? (I'll take two legs with hair now.) . . . I hope the rain has stopped. Now, there's a serious matter. And now, I'm ready to turn the light out and forgive you. (I've got ways, you know.) Ways and ways and ways, starting here with XXXXXXXs and ending with XXXXXXXs.

Gig



Sunday night

11 December 1966

Hello Darling,

Forgive the grease spots. I've got Vaseline on my hands due to the cold weather now. My crazy brothers were after your address today at the same time. It was quite funny. Don had called to see if I wanted him to take the kids to see *Bambi* and I said no—it's too cold and they have colds.⁸ So he decided he'd write Christmas cards and asked for your address. Just as I was giving it, the operator said, "I have to interrupt for an emergency call from Houston." It was Sandy and the emergency was the post office deadline for packages overseas was today and he needed your address. . . . In my surprise, I think I said MAG-13, so I hope it reaches you!

Everyone is sending you things . . . now so you'd better get a secretary to answer your mail. They really don't expect answers, Sweet, so don't sweat it really. Everyone really does miss you though, and I know how they feel!

. . .

Otherwise, all is fine. I sure hope you got a little breather at Okinawa. Glad there is a spot you can go to once in a while like that. It does seem strange that you still need all those yearly checkouts, even over there. But I'm glad if it gives you a moment to shop just for the fun of it.

I'm not sending you a wrapped Christmas present per se, as every month is Christmas for you, meaning I hope I can send you at least one a month and I'll let the others take this month! Is that, okay? It's really not Christmas for me without you anyway, but by darn, I've got to make a prefabricated one for the kids in the next two weeks. And if I'm going to make the *Waiting Wives* scene at the Red Cross tomorrow, I'd best go to

⁸ *Bambi*, directed by David Hand (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1942).

bed. Wonder what a good waiting wife is supposed to look like? Grimm's the word. *Grimm's Fairy Tales* that's me.⁹ All stockings have runs, and the dear old hair dryer gave out sparks the other day. I closed my eyes and threw it away. There goes my hair. In January, I'll splurge on a good one. Okay, Pa?

Goodnight, Love Dove, all the children liked your notes. I read them at dinner, and they really feel very secure that you care. No sweat there. Take care of that cold coming on. Must be the time of year. Oh yes, Don was very impressed by our new atlas. I really think it was a good buy. That's our family Christmas present!

I love you dearly.

Gig



Monday evening

12 December 1966

Hi Darling,

The Christmas mail load really has fouled us up. I haven't had a letter in five days, although I did get Mom's Christmas package mailed 21 November. Still missing her first one and your first big one with the clock. The trouble with the electric clock is obvious. They lose power several times during the day and night. My travel clock isn't loud or long enough, and usually it goes off just as some aircraft is taking off and just can't be heard.

Just looked across to the main road and I couldn't believe my eyes. Some civilian car (1960 Chevy two-door) just cruising down the road.¹⁰ Must be the only one in captivity.

Oh boy, I wish I had the drink that should go with this hangover I've had for the last two days. It must be a cold or flu virus: rundown, lightheaded, coughing, and dripping. The doctor gave me some pills etc., but it's sure slow coming around. I'm going right to bed after this letter –1930 or bust!

Right beside an air station in combat is no damn place for a rock

⁹ Francis Jenkins Olcott, ed., *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn Publishing, 1927).

¹⁰ Chevrolet had several 1960 models out that year that Stice could have seen: Corvair Monza, Corvette Roadster, Bel Air, Biscayne, El Camino, Impala, or Suburban.

quarry and we have three!¹¹ It sounds like incoming. We're right between two runways—banging and banging—after burners banging. The McDonnell-Douglas F-4 Phantom II has two you know. Sometimes in the middle of the night, it damn near throws you out of bed! In the daytime, all eyeballs automatically pop to the source of the bang spot! Like a 360-degree ping pong game! And recently, we added a new touch to the continuous noise injector (CNI) aboard ship—the aircraft launch catapults are powered by steam, so our SATS CATS, you guessed it, with two big jet engines going full blast—well, just try and get away from that Charlie!¹²

How about a JATO cocktail at 0330.¹³ Those are big rockets, though I guess you've never heard a real rocket. It's like artillery that just continues and never stops until the bottle is shot and blown—not merely released, it has to be blown off. All the Douglas A-4 Skyhawks use JATO at night. In Okinawa, I stuck cigarette filters in my ears, but that wasn't satisfactory. My administrative officer walks around all day with Mickey Mouse ears on (aircraft carrier deck noise suppressor ear covers), so I had to make him move his desk in from the outer office so I could catch his attention visually. I should be really good at charades after this! The pilots revert to finger talk, lip reading, and ear grabbing, but the ground officers and the troops just shut up.

...

We've darn near reached the back side of the Christmas curve. . . . I can imagine the snow of Nebraska and the pure solace of Texas, I can

¹¹ For more on quarries in the country, see LtGen Carroll H. Dunn, *Base Development in South Vietnam, 1965–1970*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991).

¹² Stice was being sarcastic about the continuous noise that interrupted his sleep, which he called CNI. His bunk sat between two runways, so it must have been difficult to sleep. For example, according to the MABS-13, ComdC May 1967, there were 24,566 takeoffs or landings from both the east and west runways of Chu Lai. SATS refers to short airfield for tactical support, which was an expeditionary airfield field system that could be laid on flat terrain and create runways and taxiway suitable for jet aircraft. CATS likely refers to a ground-based catapult system similar to that used on an aircraft carrier as part of the SATS system.

¹³ JATO refers to jet-assisted take-off. It is a misnomer as it really means a rocket-assisted take-off with a disposable or reusable canister affixed to an aircraft fuselage. It provided additional thrust for heavy aircraft operating on short runways. These rockets were no longer manufactured for military use after the Vietnam War. For more on Marine Corps use, see Donald J. Mrozek, *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam: Ideas and Actions* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1988), 148.

Figure 19. Aerial view of the U.S. Marine Corps Short Airfield for Tactical Support (SATS) Chu Lai, South Vietnam



Several Douglas A-4 Skyhawk aircraft from Marine Air Group 12 are visible in the foreground.

Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo A701478.

darn near imagine the soft Christmas carols, and this year, you all can walk to the nativity scene. I hope one of the kids will put out a cup of coffee, a clean cigarette, and a brownie for old Santa Claus before he comes around and inspects all the trees and gifts.

Good night, Gig.

Love you,

Ray



Monday night

12 December 1966

Hi Sweetheart,

You're on a trip. I can feel it in my empty mailbox. I'll sure be glad when you get back! Pretty dull without you.

I was sure a lady of leisure today. Kathy's cold was still drippy, so I decided not to go to the Waiting Wives coffee and spent the morning

December 1966

with her instead. Then met Mother for lunch with her friend and daughter while Kathy napped with Molly, the sitter here. Got all that? Lousy sentence. . . .

Home again, I found the dictionary had arrived and Robin was overjoyed. She sat right down and did her homework with it. Books are collecting now and 20 more to come. No bookshelf! We'll have books coming out of our ears. Help! I'll be able to give you the annual rainfall in Vietnam maybe, who knows. But it sounds like you've already got it!

Read *Life* magazine—see, I really was lazy today, . . . And the story of the USS *Oriskany* fire made me give the kids a fire lecture tonight by Christmas candlelight.¹⁴ They loved the latter. My, what a story. I cried, of course. There just seem to be so many brave war stories. Another one in the paper tonight out of *Approach* about the A-4 pilot who landed his airplane with his left hand after his right arm got blown off, elbow on down. He ejected too. I guess you'll be getting that if *Approach* is over there.¹⁵

I know you have so much to read, poor Darling, that's probably why you long for *Playboy*. Have no fear, the Christmas issue is on its way to you.

. . .

I'll feel like back to normal again when this month is over. Good-night, darling, sweet, angel, hairy man. Gosh, I found myself wishing you could call me from Okinawa. I can still hear the sound of your voice from Dallas saying, "That's affirm!"

XXXs,
Gig



Tuesday night
13 December 1966

Hi again,
I'm talking to myself this week. I can see it now. There will be five letters from me all stacked up for you on your return. That's Gig in a gulp. Speaking of "Gig"—the name that is—my sweet son says he'll name his child after me. Gulp. We were talking about names at dinner because Mom

¹⁴ "Carrier's Agony, Hell Afloat: *Oriskany* Fire," *Life Magazine*, 25 November 1966.

¹⁵ Gig is likely referring to the December 1966 issue of the Naval and Marine Aviation Safety magazine, *Approach*.

got a family history of the Austin's in the mail from her cousin and I am descended from a Tory named Austin, who fought on the Tory side in the Revolutionary War and fled to Canada afterward. He married a Scottish girl named Catherine Sinclair. So, we really should change Kathy's name to Cathy Sinclair. At least I feel better about her name now. They had two sons, one of whom came to Texas and may have been a grandfather to Stephen F. Austin—a Moses Austin.¹⁶ Interesting? We must get the Stice history again too. Karen was thrilled as she is studying the Revolutionary War now.

...

Weather is nice and chilly and a good excuse to have the oven on. We also “made” a candle tonight. Not too great, but the kids are so complimentary of all my creative attempts. So far, we've tried sequins, candles, Christmas letters, and tomorrow Christmas cookies. I still haven't gotten the kids their toys yet. The prices at Kiddie City turned me pale.¹⁷ We'll try Shopper's World first!¹⁸

This will have to do as a letter, which was obviously written in the dark waiting for your return from Okinawa. I keep wondering which one of my letters will hit nearest to your Christmas. Probably one written on 17 December, so let's make a very merry toast to each other on the 17th. This is your very married wife saying, “Over.”

XXXs,

Gig



Wednesday night
14 December 1966

Hi Darling,

Your stories about the kids are really cute. This is a heck of an age to be missing. I sure hope you can run them outside and catch some movies once and awhile so I can catch up on this year. You know what happened the last time—nothing to show for it (movie wise).

¹⁶ Moses Austin was an American pioneer and businessman born in Connecticut on 4 October 1793. He and his wife Mary Brown had four children, including Stephen F. Austin.

¹⁷ Lionel Kiddie City was an American toy store founded in 1960 and defunct by 1982.

¹⁸ Shopper's World was a discount department store founded in Chicago in 1962, with 14 chain locations across the country.

FINALLY got airborne again this afternoon. Damn near 10 days now with Okinawa, that darn virus, and one no-radio bum start yesterday. My cold is getting better now slowly, and I slept long and deep the last couple of nights. So that helped.

Raining again and I had to shoot a TACAN/GCA (tactical air navigation/ground-controlled approach) when the hook wouldn't come down, so go around and do it again—okay.¹⁹

The commanding general of 1st MAW says, “Thou shall have a sumptuous and bountiful Christmas dinner.” Menus that came out by message—clear for Charlie, or encrypted, I'm not sure—look great, even better than my birthday and Thanksgiving.

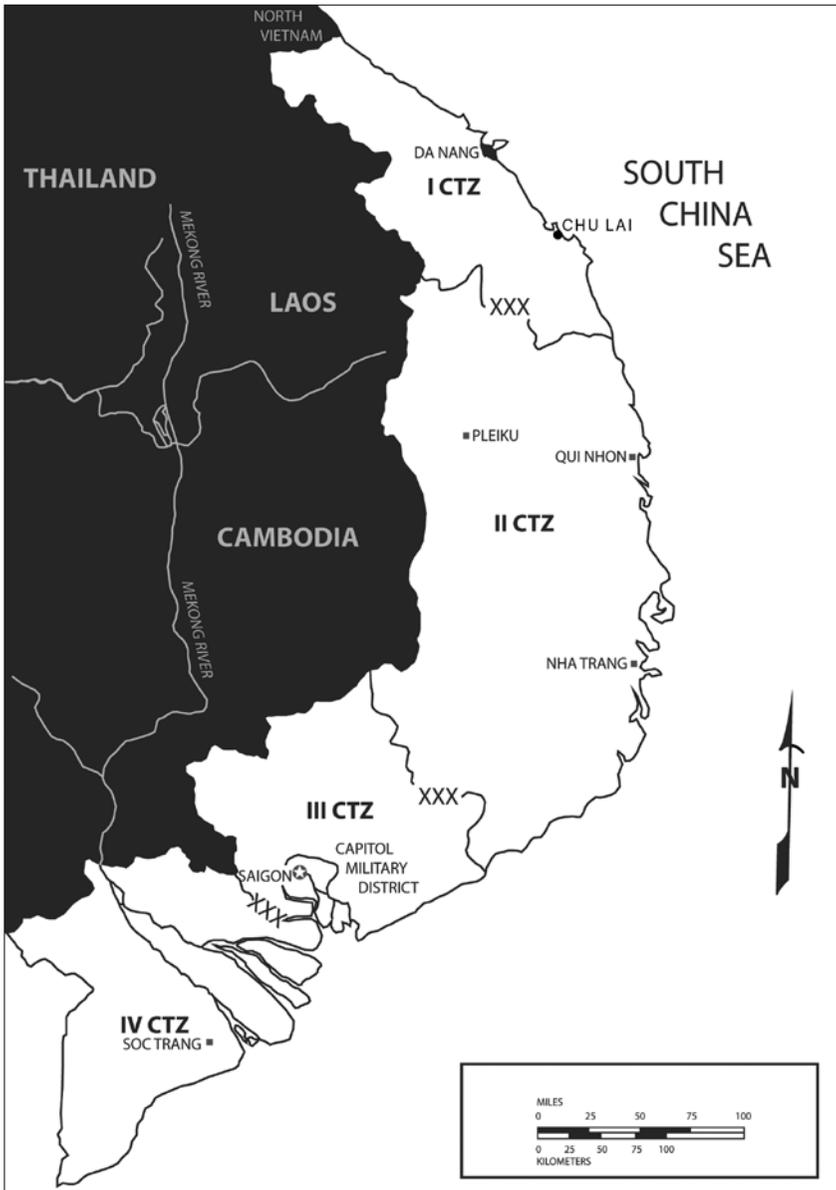
Yesterday, I was in the group S-3's office and asked Lieutenant Colonel Richard L. Robinson about the possibility of going to Japan with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 (VMFA-115) in January or February for the F-4 check out and he said, “Why not, want one.” I went in to see “Friendly Freddy” and the MAG executive officer came out and offered, “Make it VMFA-323 in May.” I almost had a heart attack. I couldn't believe it. . . . After all this time and that bum's rush at Quantico from the Commandant of the Marine Corps, I finally learned how to toot my own horn. He asked me how Colonel Owens felt about it. I had to be honest there. He was sympathetic originally with the notion of eventual F-4 checkout, but he sure hadn't said yea or nay and probably never would. He understood. So, I hit the S-1 Lieutenant Colonel Harry D. Stott with it, so the idea would be implanted. Now I'll just wait it out. Really now, it will be just perfect to spend about six months as the executive officer of MABS, then two months in Japan, and then five months in an F-4 squadron. Isn't that just beautiful? Seeing is believing, but it sure is nice to think about.

. . .

Regarding maps: you should know that I CORPS, Chu Lai, Da Nang, Hue, Phu Bai, Dung Ha, the DMZ, that's our stomping grounds for the next four and a half months, at least since I got here—up, down, and all around.

¹⁹ TACAN refers to a system of navigation using high-frequency signals to determine the distance and bearing of an aircraft from a transmitting station; GCA refers to when a ground-based observer monitors the descent angle and course of an aircraft using radar, which allows pilots to land during adverse weather.

Figure 20. Military areas of responsibility during the war



Source: Marine Corps University Press.

Time to, yeah, eat and sleep, getting dark in the dank.

Regarding my last letter: the wing came out today with a noise-level damage investigation message today.²⁰ See, it's not *all me!*

Except that part that loves you!

Ray



Wednesday night
14 December 1966

Hello Santa Claus,

Your reindeer drove up today with a huge package for us and even the postman smiled when the kids said, "It's from Daddy!" We were all stunned and have been sniffing around it all afternoon, but we haven't opened it in case something is loose (unwrapped). What I discovered though, and called all the kids to see, was the \$1 stamps on the outside—all 14 of them. Good grief, Charlie Brown, I never saw a \$1 stamp before in my life, much less 14 of them. Oh, you noble soul. And from the man who times three-minute phone calls with a timer! Sweetheart, what am I going to do with you? You are a nut, but I hope you had a good time. That's the main thing.

It really was a big surprise to get it so soon and made me feel better that you had gotten there and managed to have a few minutes off, because I haven't heard a word all week. But the package said five days' worth almost! "*It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas.*" Here, I agonize over little things, and you manage to do 20 at once—like fight a war, run a squadron, fly miles to shop, pack, take tests, shop, mail, wrap, and spoil four kids and me. I won't say you are too much, but you are! . . .

It's getting toward midnight again here and I've got to go see Kirk in the *Shoemaker and the Elves* tomorrow.²¹ . . . It's, ugh, wintertime, ugh. Robin had her play today (Scrooge etc.), but I missed that one. Made cookies

²⁰ Stice may be referring to a military study on the impact of extreme noise on hearing within the military community. For more on the topic, see "Noise and Noise-Induced Hearing Loss in the Military," in *Noise and Military Service: Implications for Hearing Loss and Tinnitus* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2006), chap. 3.

²¹ Gig is likely referring to a school adaptation of "The Elves and the Shoemaker" in M. Edwardes and E. Taylor, trans., *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (New York: Maynard, Merrill, 1905).

all day and accomplished nothing else. The first batch turned into molasses cakes. They didn't look like cookies at all. Oh well, hell. Tomorrow, I'll bake another batch.

So, goodnight, Love. Thank you for the big box. How can I stand it to wait until Christmas?

XXXs, Gig in bed

...

Gig



Friday night

16 December 1966

Hi Sweetheart,

Yes, your letters have been delayed by all the Christmas load, but don't worry about it, just keep up that wonderful writing!

This so-called picture was taken this afternoon. Is that current enough? That's the front of our palace-hut, that is—still half boarded up from the monsoons and typhoons. Those sandbags are our bunker from mortars. They were supposed to hit us last night, but they never did. Anyway, everyone is armed all the time, of course, that's a .38 revolver here, and on the right are two trash cans. . . Thought it was a good picture at first, now it just looks scroungy. As I was saying, notice that good looking Marine standing there? . . .

Honey, I'm too tired to finish. We were up most of last night. I set up Mom's Christmas tree this afternoon and it looks really pretty.

Goodnight, Darling.

I really love you, Honey. . .

Ray



Saturday morning

17 December 1966

Hi Darling,

I'm sitting outside watching Kathy swing. The weather is so beautiful it hurts—a blue sky without a cloud in it, sunshine, and just a tiny bit crisp and cool. The kids have gone to get air in their bike tires. Kathy wanted

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to go—she rides behind Robin now—but she’s happy swinging now. Everyone is well or just about. . . .

I feel unusually good as I collapsed on the couch after taking an aspirin at 2100 last night and slept until 0200! Got up, did the dishes, and went to bed until 0900 this morning. *Great!*

. . .

I got your nice long letter yesterday describing your hectic trip and the funny incident at the colonel’s hut. It at least made a cute story to tell in a Christmas letter to Myrtle and one to Milly, adding of course that the septic tank was empty fortunately! I could hear you swearing way over here—oh shit—and then having to regain your composure to go back in and ask for a flashlight. Life is full of pit falls—ah, prat falls that is. Of course, I hope you didn’t get banged up (dunged up?) too much.

The planes are flying over a lot today, but peaceful like, that is. The droning Sunday sound. Bergstrom is expanding—your type of aircraft—and I find myself vaguely wishing you were Air Force.

. . .

So glad to hear you got a camera. That will be grand when you come home to show us. “When you come home” are lovely words, aren’t they? Sweetie, you really are so lucky. There was a story in the paper today about a Green Beret orphan soldier, answering a Christmas card for a buddy who got killed, to a nurse here in Austin. I felt like adopting him myself! Would you like to be a “father” to a young soldier or is being a father to a runny-nosed redhead enough for you?

Well, Darling, it really is time to say Merry Christmas to you. I promised to do so on the 17th. But I’d rather say Happy New Year. That one I *really* like. I have a date with you in 1967 to finish a cup of coffee at the Austin airport. And a half-completed kiss to finish with no one around to watch. But in the meantime, back to the Christmas tree. Karen said this morning, “Mother, it really is time to do something about Christmas!” Father, help! That’s *your* department. The kids are already saying, “See, Mom, we can open Dad’s present box now cause he said they are wrapped.”

Looks like I have some jobs to do, so off with me head.

Bye for now, Darling.

I love you,

Gig

Saturday night
17 December 1966

Hello Mrs. Sex Pot,

I think I'll outline that one in red and mark it "Special Handling Required" and "Need to Know Only." . . . that helps the old morale better than a thousand Christmas presents and a popcorn popper—well, almost. (I'm really a popaholic in disguise!) One of you (you or Mom, not both) ought to make the year bearable and send me a simple electric popcorn popper. Ours is being transferred to Da Nang shortly. Plus, a *big can* of popcorn.

Today, I had one of the best hops ever. We were scheduled to recon the DMZ with two aircraft and only one was up. So, Dick Douglas—the one that got all my goodies in Japan—and I headed out anyway and, of course, asked for a secondary (alternate mission). So, we contorted Joe Blow on chartreuse, and they said, "Negs, go back TAN for an emergency strike."²²

After many channel changes we finally got our forward air controller (FAC). One of our companies was pinned down outside this Viet Cong village and catching hell from real intense fire of all sorts, so a little assistance was in order. They were throwing everything but the sink up at the Cessna O-1 Bird Dog and he didn't like that either. So, we pumped everything we had right when he wanted it until we had "Neg Austin's"—thought you'd like that.²³ Made a few more passes to keep them down until we got relieved by two Vought F-8 Crusaders, two Douglas A-4 Skyhawks, and two McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom IIs finally. Ye old Bird Dog has fairly husky big brothers. Total time to clocks 1.0, and that included snooping around another "possible" area to boot.²⁴ We don't get these real honest close-air support hops in the Grumman F-9 Cougar—only rarely—but it sure feels good after all these years of eating, drinking,

²² Chartreuse is a French herbal liqueur known for its unusual yellow-green color that was so distinctive the color and the drink's name are now synonymous. TAN refers to tactical air network, which was a network of frequencies for radio communications.

²³ Austin is likely Stice's call sign.

²⁴ Stice is likely referencing *Hobbs time*, which refers to the time from when the aircraft engine starts to when the engine stops and it is measured in hours and tenths of hours; for example, 1.0 refers to one hour.

and sleeping this stuff. I should get a lot more of it if I get in VMFA-323 in May. A good hop. Steak tonight so that's appropriate I'd say.

And what did the poor overworked mailman bring today? Two letters from you and a big box from Kirkpatrick's of Houston, a card from Hazel (DC), and a card from Shrewd Trude (That's not a very flattering identifier is it? Pris can use that one). . . .

I hate to think of you all nice and clean in that big soft bed all by your lonesome! This is why Marines are so good at prior planning, looking ahead. Hell, we're all forced into it. How about all the hairy legs at ONCE? Hey, you want to be shocked? Right next to where I grabbed my camera, they had . . . "Baby Dolls" with all the lace in the right places, I guess. I'm sorry, I'll get you some next time! I promise!

Yes, I love you,

Ray



Monday

19 December 1966

Dear Heart,

So nice to get your "noisy" letter today. It's a good thing I can "talk" to you on paper, I guess. It sounds quite unbearable there, and I found myself wondering how YOU can stand it without Mickey Mouse ears or filter tip plugs. What are you putting in *your* ears? Now I'm shouting on paper!

Well, close your eyes and imagine a house so quiet you can hear your thoughts, with only the soft sound of cars crunching buy. . . . My, I'm impressed that you remembered where we went to see the manger scene. Yes, you're right. We *could* almost walk there this year. But probably won't!

. . .

I bought you another clock today at the dime store. Same clerk and she remembered I bought the other one two months ago. I thought you'd get one in Okinawa, but since you didn't, I'll get this one off to you air mail tomorrow, I hope!

Tomorrow is going to be put up tree day, so it may be hectic. We're also in the throes of wrapping—or is it the WOES?

. . .

The German *Luftwaffe* was on TV tonight. They fly Lockheed F-104 Starfighters and have lost 37 pilots due to not knowing how to fly or

maintain them.²⁵ I thought that might interest you as you talked about that once. They summed it up as “too much too soon” (i.e., trying to jump into the jet age without the knowledge). Well, it is sad they didn’t know how hard it is to fly them before they lost so many men. They have some technical representatives (Americans) to help them now and are still “deeply committed to all weather flying.”²⁶ That’s sort of a jumbled account of what I heard on TV, but you know the story, I’m sure. Stories like that, however, verify to me that you know what *you’re* talking about.

Where was I? Hiding from the job of wrapping presents, that’s where I am. Oh yes, and mad that you are so behind on getting my letters. . . . You’ve been gone four months: September, October, November, and December. . . . Kirk says, “How many years has Daddy been gone now, Mom?” Oh, that’s one for you. His idea of time and numbers is so confused that it’s really funny. While buying his presents (he picked them), he said, “That’s okay, Mom, I’ll forget by next week.” True, true.

. . .

Robin and Kirk went over to help put up lights at Mom’s house. Don tried to nail them to the *door*, but Mom said, “We have to open it you know.” He got them up, but sent Robin inside to do woman’s work. She retaliated by *stomping* on his foot. Don is learning all sorts of things! Crunch. Karen and Robin made apricot cakes for their teachers. They really have been busy as little beavers. All are well from their colds. I hope you are over yours. Take your medicine. Glad you had the good sense to go to the doctor. That’s a *good* boy, man, husband, lover, etc.

Golly bum, I’ve got to do it. Face Christmas week starting NOW. Why is it that my conscience niggles me when I wrap one upside down? . . .

Gig



20 December 1966

Hi Sweetheart,

. . . I took my movie camera out yesterday and shot some F-4s and A-4s on

²⁵ See Steven Esser and Hans-Joachim K. Ruff-Stahl, “An HFACS Analysis of German F-104 Starfighter Accidents,” *Journal of Aviation Technology and Engineering* 9, no. 2 (2020): 19–34, <https://doi.org/10.7771/2159-6670.1218>.

²⁶ Marshall Michel, “F-104: Germany’s ‘Widow Maker,’” Spangdahlem Air Base, 30 July 2015.

a strike mission. I hope it works. I took another one today on a helicopter escort up at Hue/Phu Bai, but the air was sort of rough. They may not work. I'll have to mail them to Hanoi for processing.

This afternoon, I planted trees. Colonel Owens had a bug about getting some tall pine trees for the group adjutant building compound post. So yesterday, we went out looking. We found two matching coconut palms that would be fit for a king, but they were full size—big. He still wanted them regardless. Today, he's off flying the Lockheed C-130 Hercules, and when he comes back tomorrow noon, he'll really have a surprise. We snaked them both out through the jungle, swamp, broken chains, truck brakes, and ropes, but there they are. They are really beautiful and quite rare here at Chu Lai. Wish to hell we could have put them outside our own hut. There's one more I found—taller and more crooked—but maybe we can get it tomorrow (to keep).

...

Heard some more good news about VMFA-323 this summer. The group S-3 (operations) was writing a letter to the wing asking that myself and one of the group captains be transferred to VMFA-323 just prior to their departure to Iwakuni, Japan.

I guess I didn't ask too soon—five and a half months away yet. The irony of the situation? The hut I was living in and got kicked out of by their skipper? Yep, VMFA-323's Lieutenant Colonel Aubrey W. Talbert—37 years old—boy wonder—clown of renown and Joe Wuertz, all in one package.

...

I don't dare talk about your Christmas presents as I'm not sure you got them yet! Tomorrow's letter, okay?

Goodnight, Darling, a very, very Merry Christmas. I sure wish I could be there.

I love you, Gig.

Ray

Hey, children of mine! MERRY CHRISTMAS, Karen and Robin and Kirk and Kathy! And a HO, HO, HO TO YOU TOO, MOM. I know you'll like your presents. Everybody give everybody else a big hug and a kiss. I sure hope Santa Claus got everything to you in time. It's a long way from Vietnam to Austin, but if he refueled over the North Pole, I'll

bet he got there with my presents. If he's a couple of days late, don't be disappointed. He'll get there soon enough!

All you sweet kids give your mother a special big love for me, will you?
And she'll give you a love for me!

Merry Christmas everyone—Merry Christmas!

Love, Dad

P.S. Daddy Claus



Wednesday night

21 December 1966

Darling,

My thoughts are full of you tonight. I've been reading a doctor's report on civilian medical care in Vietnam—Project Hope—and besides being factual, it was very graphic.²⁷ I long to be over there helping somebody somewhere. And yet, I feel so untrained, useless, and of course needed here. A strange dilemma.

...

I got your good letter yesterday regarding Japan “maybe” (one curled nose, here). I'm glad you're glad. I am not so glad. But no comment. You're the boss. I like you where you are though. Is that possible?

Well, Old Tearjerker, you made me cry with your package. I opened it to get Sandy and Karen's present out for the Austin's to take to Houston, and that *wild* purple paper made me laugh and cry at the same time. The baby paper tore me up a bit too. And so many packages and so well wrapped. It was YOU all over the place, and I had a good weep. I put a pretty white ribbon on the purple package and wrote a note about what you said for them to do: “sit on it and antique it yourself.” I know it will please them so much.

We put the tree up yesterday, no sweat. Kirk commandeered the tree holder, saying “That's the way Daddy did it last year,” and we girls fluttered around, saying “You're right, Kirk.” Mom helped and Milly was chief decorator, of course!

Kathy got very excited about *your* stocking. She *still* remembers you

²⁷ Ben Stanley, “Soft Power Through Medicine: The Complicated History of Project Hope,” *Rotation*, 26 August 2020.

and even played an imaginary “show off for Dad game” like you were about to come in. I know that’s hard to believe, but the little thing really does talk about you too. She goes to your closet, looks at your picture, points to the sky, and it is *quite* amazing.

...

Tomorrow, Don takes us to see the Yule log at Zilker Park. A new custom just started. My Christmas fever comes and goes. I tend to start thinking about you and Vietnam and forget all about it. I do wish you could have seen Red Skelton’s TV Christmas show though.²⁸ He had some Seabees singing the U.S. Naval Academy song (*For those in peril* etc.), and I wept, of course.²⁹ Have you ever tried to cry without letting your kids see you? It’s like landing with no hook. Choke.

Goodnight, Sweetie Pie. Take care.

Gig



Thursday night

22 December 1966

Hi Darling,

Well, I sure hope you all had a very merry Christmas—of course, I haven’t had mine at this exact minute. Your letter today finally gave me the news that you actually have my presents. I was worried about the time of shipment, so that’s why I air mailed them. Your letters take eight days from your Wednesday night desk to mine (Thursday night). How long do mine take?

Boy, you’re the gutless wonder of the world, making your brother send me my *Playboy*. No guts, I guess. But thank him anyway. I will say that he played it really cool and put his letter in with Miss *Playboy* of the month where I’d be sure to find it—took a while to uncross my eyes—where it was hidden!³⁰ Tell him I damn near missed it!

...

²⁸ *The Red Skelton Hour*, season 16, episode 14, “Christmas Spirit,” directed by Bill Hobin, aired 20 December 1966, on CBS.

²⁹ Gig is likely referring to a British hymn, “Eternal Father, Strong to Save,” long associated with and adopted by the maritime armed forces.

³⁰ The *Playboy* playmate of the month for December 1966 was Sue Bernard, who was believed to be the first Jewish playmate.

We all got CANKED [canceled] today because of the monsoon rains. It will probably be this way—with only two more flying days before Christmas—through the 25th.

Tomorrow morning, the colonel is going to present my Air Medal. That'll be a nice Christmas present. I'll send you the photo he usually has taken (probably next week). One of our photographers is going to be court-martialed—liked cameras too much. Like you for not sending me a CASE (not pack, not can, a CASE) of popcorn and a popcorn POPPER.

Got 66 people coming in the next five days and only room for 30 at the most! And that's 12 and 14 to a hut like ours. Have to break out the tents, I guess.³¹

We got a “well done” from the group the other day for making double wooden bunks to give them 10 times more floor space. Colonel Douglas D. Petty said, “They should go look at MABS barracks.”

Oh, those palm trees. Man, they really did go over big. The group commanding officer came in about 1700 after they were all done and was just pleased as punch.

Hope those young studs sloshing around in the mud on the perimeter are alert. It's too rainy to launch the flare ship tonight.

You know, I've only flown six missions this month! Man, that's slow. Maybe tomorrow.

We're out of beer for the next three weeks, so have a drink for me, Dozo.

Goodnight, Honey. I'm too tired to go on tonight. I love you and miss you. It isn't much of a Christmas without my family.

Ray



Friday night

23 December 1966

Darling Sweet,

Thank you for your wonderful, good letters this week. With everybody asking about you, I've been so proud to be able to tell them about your

³¹ MABS-13, ComdC December 1966, Box ___, Folder 077, 1201077119, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

Figure 21. Christmas with Grandma Milly Stice (Ray’s mother as Santa), Karen, Robin, and Kirk



Source: Stice family collection.

first battle mission with eight airplanes coming to your rescue after an hour of flying it alone. Loved that comment about “ye old birddog has some fairly husky big brothers.” I know you were thrilled to be there when you were needed the most—Austin?! Was that your call sign? Well, it was quite a hop indeed, and I’m awfully glad you got back safe and sound. Scares me to pieces to think of flak coming at you though. That’s never happened before. Do you suppose I’ll get battle hardened? I honestly don’t think I ever will, but I can talk about it matter-of-factly by repeating your calm cool words. Anyway, it was *very* good to get those letters this week and the simply *great* picture! I loved it. You even look like you’ve gained some weight, even Karen noticed that. This picture is much more vivid than the other and a better likeness too as it shows the hut and area. Karen said it looked like Virginia, and it’s even a cute one of you. I mean you really do look kind of gung ho handsome. I thought the sling was a camera until I read your letter. You look fine and that’s the main thing.

...

Tomorrow, Mary Jane McNeil Hurlbert brings her kids over and, in the evening, Don and Mom will come for dinner and to unwrap presents. Sunday, we all go to Mom's for dinner. The house looks pretty with the tree up. Kirk's flash bulbs didn't go off and he's *very* mad. Plus, my eyesight! I cranked to four with him yelling and screaming until I discovered he was right. Poor little lamb. His first roll of film too. He is so like you sometimes it is funny! "Up a little, UP a little, UP A LITTLE!"

I said, "Oh, we forgot to rub the carbon off the flash bulb, Kirk." So, I rubbed it on my red coat, and he just muttered, "Look at your coat, Mom." Sure enough, black all over it. He decided I was hopeless. He bought the flash bulbs with *his* money too, and now said he's going to take them *all back*. Whoee!

Karen said, "Santa" is going up in his price—coffee, cigarettes, and brownies too! Last year, it was only milk and cookies. I'll say your price has gone up too. Scarborough's doesn't carry popcorn poppers for corny people. Darling, you'll have to wait till *after* Christmas or find that last *case* I sent you two months ago! Check at the post office again.

Glad you liked my sexy letter. Better than the kitchen ones, I guess. I'm no *Playgirl* remember, but what's there is warm and soft and made for you if you convince me that it's me you want. That sounds more selfish than I mean it to be. This one is being written in the kitchen. Midnight too. So, off to the scene of the crime.

Take care, dear, and we'll discuss this in depth some time. You really are my perfect angel, and I haven't even opened your Christmas present yet. Must be LOVE.

Gig



Christmas Eve

24 December 1966

Merry Christmas, Darling,

Sure glad I only have to say that one time, from Vietnam anyway! It's a dreary bleary night. Santa's filed instrument flight rules (IFR) for sure!³²

³² *Instrument flight rules* refers to rules that allow properly equipped aircraft to be flown under instrument meteorological conditions.

I sure give him credit though, he found that package of yours mailed the fourth of November *somewhere* and with a radar hand off to a GCA and a mirror to a MOREST landing and delivered the irascible packages! How's that for timing? You had no idea you were mailing your Christmas presents so early, did you? Ah you are so smart, man, that's planning to a T! I'll chew the hell out of that gun and brow beat the mess sergeant out of *something* to pop that corn! Maybe I can get a small personal gas cook-stove—like Sterno only more gas—and a pot.³³ We've already got the corn, thank heavens (and you), and the salt and some kind of oil that should do the trick. We finally borrowed a tiny Japanese icebox (one-foot square) and a few beers, and I'm sure to be scratched [for flight] because of the weather—enclosed is a schedule so you could believe it; the times slide, of course, up to three hours before you actually CANK. No TV, but who needs a boob tube when there is a wife to write and beer to sip! Sweet wife who mails early.

...

Just heard the great white father Lyndon B. Johnson on the radio in Johnson City, Texas.³⁴ I guess I should have stolen away on his aircraft. I could have gotten my flight time and seen you at the same time. How about that? And when he goes to San Antonio tomorrow, I could see Uncle Sam. Did you know he sent me a copy of the "The Middle-Aged Lions" that you made two months ago?

...

You know what I'm going to do tomorrow morning for the first time since I left you in Austin? SLEEP IN! Ah, luxury. Ah, laziness, where hast thou been? Cometh and we shall meet on the morrow! If I'm not interrupted by the pitter patter of incoming mortars, it promises to be a really nice Christmas!

Enclosed with the schedule for today, which really started late for the first hops, are a couple of samples of hundreds of Christmas cards we got from all over the country. It really gets you to read them. We passed them out to all the sections with the Red Cross packages for all the troops.³⁵ Before we secured, we drove around the base, just checking, and one of

³³ *Sterno* refers to a canned fuel used to heat food.

³⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Christmas Message to the Men and Women of the Armed Forces," Armed Forces Radio, 24 December 1966.

³⁵ *Vietnam War and the American Red Cross* (Washington, DC: American Red Cross, n.d.).

the guys from the crash crew was setting out flare pots in the driving rain on the runway. He was covered from head to foot with black tar from the pots and a pocket full of the cards we received. He couldn't salute—his hands were full—but he was smiling from ear to ear, saying “Muddy Merry Christmas, Sir!” Well, I saluted him anyway. They've been getting their share of business, of course, and really are pros. Not so with the guard, because as we get more and more, the dregs increase too. Three were caught sleeping on post last night and two were drunk on post, if you can imagine that out here, especially with all the flares, mortars, artillery, and flying going on let alone Charlie. Oh well, life does roll on and the sun still comes up in the East each day regardless of what we do.

Thank you, Darling, for your love.

Ray

P.S. At chow tonight, would you believe Dick Douglas came over to the table? Well, would you believe champagne at Chu Lai?

. . .

What's the name of the newspaper you're taking, the *Austin-American Statesman*? When you get ready to put in the bit about the Air Medal, I should know which paper to send it to. The next time you talk to Mom, ask her what paper she reads. *Washington Post* probably for the same reason.

Hate to pass Christmas without singing a couple of carols. The radio finally came through with some carols tonight.

Chris Gondek wrote to Major Lawrence A. “Larry” Whipple that Lieutenant Commander Timothy J. Linehan was killed in Hawaii.³⁶ That really is sad. Car, plane, no one knows here. . . .

Tonight, for once, Hanoi Hannah is quiet. Yesterday, she said “The new Marine chow hall at Phu Bai would celebrate Christmas to a Viet Cong Mass” or something fouled up like that. Yesterday, we killed more than 100 Viet Cong near Phu Bai. Maybe that's what she meant.

Some truce. We're advertising to the world a 48-hour truce. They're doing the same and, on the side, telling their local supporters the truce is only for 24 hours. So, standby for a blast tomorrow, I guess.

³⁶ Linehan was one of the pilots of the Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star jet trainer. He was flying in the two-seat plane with Maj Ralph Yakushi. “Navy Abandons Search for Pilot,” *Honolulu (HI) Advertiser*, 21 November 1966.

. . .

I guess Bob Hope, Billy Graham, and Cardinal Spellman are all too good to come to Chu Lai. They're all working Da Nang.³⁷ Too bad about that \$200,000 coliseum built by the division forces here for the Bob Hope show. What they don't know won't hurt them.

Do you know it's 2330 and I don't care? I really do, I'm just feeling my oats. . . .

Good night!

Merry Christmas to you all,
Ray



Sunday night
25 December 1966

Oh Darling,
Such a full and beautiful Christmas. I was just sitting here on the couch reminiscing to myself when I thought, for heaven's sake, why don't I tell Ray all about it. But it's so much that I hardly know where to begin. I honestly didn't realize how much the family has grown, meaning having more near this year would make the present load triple in size for the children. We almost had two Christmases.

It all started peacefully Saturday morning. Mary Jane McNeil Hulbert ran over and left a child for me to sit with and we had a good visit until she left to get her hair done.

That afternoon, I decided I'd better get some more candles as presents for her and Carolyn Patrick. . . . So, I took all kids and went to shop. Kirk and Karen discovered an old organ in the shop amidst the candles and started pumping it. They knocked over so many candles in the process that we left in hasty retreat! Home again and the kids decided we had to put lights up *outside*, so we started nailing like mad and almost broke a window with the hammer. . . . *Finally*, it was time for Charlie Brown's Christmas on TV—kids all bathed, shining and clean. . . .³⁸

³⁷ "Billy Graham Opens His Tour of Vietnam," *New York Times*, 21 December 1966. Bob Hope's 1966 Christmas USO Tour included stops in Vietnam, Thailand, and Guam.

³⁸ A *Charlie Brown Christmas* first aired on 9 December 1965 on CBS and would win an Emmy in 1966.

Finally, Mom and Don arrived, loaded with presents and food. Mom had cooked all day—turkey and creamed ham on pastry shells for Christmas Eve dinner. Then the fun began. . . . Of course, I sat down and played Christmas carols right away. Robin saw some men on TV earlier who had to sing impromptu carols and remembered your voice. Then we all sat in the kitchen on the expanded table (one chair is broken) and ate the ham croquettes and apple pie. And *then* we started to open presents. . . .

And at last, it was my turn and, *Honey*, what can I say? That ring is *gorgeous*. Everyone says it is the latest rage to have large rings and it is huge! . . . I was afraid it looked too big on my hand and, of course, it has to be cut down as it fits my thumb right now. But it really is my first piece of valuable jewelry, and I shall always love it. I “hinted” to you, and you expanded beyond my wildest dreams too! You and Mom should be spanked. Also, the stunning evening blouse that is half of next year’s Marine Corps Ball dress. Marvelous! Now that’s no worry.

. . .

Then, wonder of wonders, Don left on a mysterious mission, returned, opened the door, and into the melee of ribbons and packages came a black puppy dog, chain, bed, ball, and all! A five-month-old German shepherd-collie mixture named Midnight straight from the pound. Midnight brought the house down! I can’t describe him, but he eats everything on the floor, has a lovely disposition, and the children adore him. *But* after much debate, I had to say no thank you to that present and Midnight went home with Don. . . .

All was very peaceful this morning, though I woke up at 0600 for some reason. Mental telepathy? Had a cigarette and went back to sleep. Robin woke me with Kathy in a dirty diaper. And she’s *trained* but just a bit confused at Christmas. Everyone loafed and enjoyed their presents, showed them to friends, etc.

Then at 1600, we donned our finery—Karen in one of your new dresses, plus watch—and went to Mom’s house for an elegant Christmas dinner. All was soon bedlam again there, opening presents from Karen and Ed, the Austin’s, and Pinky Preston. Thirteen of us in all plus three dogs. Fire burning and the house glowing with lights and candles. Weather beautifully Christmassy.

. . .

So, it went. A whirlwind lovely, beautiful Christmassy Christmas and

you were so much a part of it, it wasn't like you were gone at all. Merely playing Santa Claus half a world away!

Now back to normal. The kids still have a week at home. I would love to finish this day and crawl in bed with you. I'm practically in one of my jittery states, where only your warm body calms me down. But a cup of coffee will have to do. It's cold, but there are many warm and loving thoughts to keep me warm. And that's my Charlie Brown Christmas recorded just for *you*.

Goodnight, Love,

Gig

P.S. Darling, just for the record, I LOVE YOU.



Tuesday, noon

27 December 1966

Hi Honey,

After that super-long letter Christmas Eve, I figure you could reread it for a month, and I can do my laundry, write Mom, and catch up on some sleep. I can't sleep in in the morning, so the only suitable answer is to start early. Don't worry about what I'll do with the extra clock. It's a good one and it will be nice to have a spare. They inevitably get broken. How about a small electric popcorn popper as that gas stove didn't work too well. It spilled and we darn near burned the hut up—no more of that.

. . .

You're right about the *Luftwaffe*. The F-104 was too much too soon. The more sophisticated the aircraft, the more everyone needs identical training.

Too bad the Marine Corps doesn't buy your system of counting. I'd only have an 11-month tour! Dear Sweet Heart, I left the West Coast on 9 October so to 9 November is one month; to 9 December is two months; and to 9 January is three months etc. Would you believe two and a half months?

We've been screaming for electricity so they sent a couple of generators. We've been screaming for huts (more material to build them) and people with about the same urgency. Which would you believe we got first? Hut material. . . . With 14 men to a hut and four tents, I may squeak

by. We got 60 more people today. I hope there aren't any more for a couple of weeks.³⁹

Just met Lou Gagnon's second brother. He's an artillery sergeant—the first one was a teenage helicopter machine gunner here (all Marine's) at Chu Lai—and still a brother-in-law at Da Nang. The younger brother naturally is having a ball on the choppers and wants to extend six months. They're not so sure about that.

...

As far as your money goes, go ahead a "dip a bit," just as long as the rate doesn't exceed \$200 a month of dunking. I'll hang on to mine—it's six of one and half-dozen of the other.

The Japan bit with VMFA-323 in May is very short, just ground school and aircraft familiarization, then *mostly* to Okinawa for guns, rockets, bombs, napalm, etc. That's still a long way off, so uncurl your left nostril a bit. That's better. Now SMILE! No, not swear—SMILE. . .

...

Happy New Year, Karen and Robin. Yuck, yuck, you all.

And a Happy New Year to you, Wifsan. It really will be eventually.

Love you,
Ray



Tuesday night
27 December 1966

Hi Sweet Pie,
Your 20 December letter came today. The one where you moved palm trees, and you sounded positively gleeful. Probably chortling because you got out from under the Christmas debris. I'm so snowed, I still sort of wander in a daze. . . . I just now got the popcorn popper off to you and the clock and two remaining popcorns out of the cupboard and thread. It

³⁹ For more on issues with manpower and materials, see Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1978); and Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982).

took me all afternoon to wrap them. Mom took the kids to movie. I had Midnight the dog and Kathy for company.

Didn't get much done yesterday either. . . .

I just wish I could get rid of the load of people I need to write and get back to just our conversations.

That Australian bush hat was a hit. Kathy and Kirk both wear it. I am still so crazy about my ring even if it doesn't fit. I carry it in my purse and show it to everyone. Tried it on Josephine today just for laughs and sure enough it fit her. She la de da'd in it and said, "Now I know what a real ring feels like." Or words to that effect. I wish I had a really pretty hand to wear it on, but I'm secretly pleased that it's mine, regardless of my hands! Just the fact that you cared enough to get it for me sort of overwhelms me. I like it, I like it!

Now, I'm being silly again. It's sort of late, like midnight, and I might admit to being a little lonesome. My eyes are beginning to glaze over from staring at the kitchen table too. Not really lonesome exactly, because I feel very close to you in our letters. No sweat there at all. Everybody has told me for a week now though that, "I'll bet you miss Ray and worry about him." And now I'm beginning to believe them! Thanks, a rot. As a matter of fact, I think all I need is to move a rubber tree plant or maybe a palm tree. Sounds like awfully good therapy. Good night, Love Dove.

Happy New Year?!

Gig



Wednesday

28 December 1966

Hi Darling,

Would you believe four trash cans full and no pick up until Friday? I'm overflowing. Also stuffed from eating Lammes chocolate nuts all by myself, without you to be cruel and take them away.⁴⁰ Wish you were here. It's really no fun to be a glutton alone.

Court-martialed! I really never came so close, did I? As a matter of fact, of course, I *planned* that Christmas Eve delivery to the popcorn glut-

⁴⁰ Lammes Candies is an Austin, TX, company established in 1885 that specializes in pecan pralines and other chocolate, caramel, and nut candies.

ton of the world, and it was nice to hear they delivered for me despite the rain. My *reindeers* were pretty good this year. Ho, ho, ho! Caught you being a nonbeliever, didn't I! I hope your face is covered with salt, you butter finger!

Speaking of butter fingers, I guess my chocolate fingers were caused by slightly celebrating your Air Medal. Would you like a chocolate-fingered kiss? Hmm, delicious! A bit salty, though. Say cheese, and send it to me quick.

Your Christmas letter was outrageously good, and I got it today. Four days—I'll bet it's because those pilots heading West are eager to get their rest. But I really won't knock my reindeers. Following *my* instructions to go left, ah right, ah left, ah that-a-way.

...

Midnight is still running gaily through the house. He's a very gay dog really, doing jobs and staying clean at Mom's house. That's okay. Kathy *always* bingos at *her* house.

That was kind of sweet that you read "The Middle-Aged Lions" from Uncle Sam. It was a classic and I'm glad he sent it to you. Marvelous that *Playgirl* got there. You, you cross-eyed baboon. Glad *you're* happy. I told Don your funny male joke. . . . And, as a matter of fact, I bought it at a downtown pornographic book stall, and he paid me for it. But I'll slink no more for you. Had to hide it under my arm. And the 7-11 man raised his eyebrows when I asked for it there. Best you hand it to an enlisted man and tell him Happy New Year—if you dare! You have a wife to look in the eye if you ever get them uncrossed. In the meantime, enjoy yourself. Be my guest.

I'm going to have a serious discussion with a major just back from Vietnam and his wife about Vietnam over cocktails tomorrow night. Mom and I have a colonel escort. I shall do my best to look the part of a major's wife—wash my hair, take off my zippered pea-green house dress, wear shoes, and get a babysitter. Gosh, that'll take me *all day*!

Good night, Love Dove. Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant. All that popcorn and no beer. Tsk, tsk. Would you believe that I talk this way and don't drink anything but coffee? More seriously tomorrow. Promise!

Und All Dat Schmaltz,⁴¹

Gigsan

P.S. Give me an A for *decoding* your letter. What's TAN?



Thursday night

29 December 1966

Hi Darling,

This is write-to-wifesan night! Notice that I haven't learned one word of Vietnamese yet. It's also go-to-flick night if possible, and more than likely an average Happy New Year too! (Early here, late there.)

Finally got my "name" in the paper—almost. The intelligence summary said, "At 1330, 2 F-9Js from H&MS-13 [Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron 13] attacked and destroyed 5 buildings at BS'236399 while receiving intense automatic weapons fire" or words to that effect. That was yesterday anyway. No names, just facts ma'am.

Today, we escorted helicopter recon inserts, checked Special Forces camps, and meter metassed yesterday's strike areas.

...

Tell Kirk that a few days ago I saw a flick *Old Yeller* that really was great with a couple of backwoods boys and their dog.⁴² Really something to see.

Just to see how far down the news had traveled, I sat at the same table tonight with the boy wonder, Lieutenant Colonel Talbert (VMFA-323 commanding officer) and he was well aware of my joining his squadron in May. No apparent sweat on the surface anyway.

Hey, you know what, Gig? All this crap aside, I do love you. Why it takes an enforced separation to prove the point, I'll never know. Just take something away and you sure find out quick enough how badly you want it or not. And if I wanted you anymore, I couldn't breathe! Enough, enough, I'm convinced. All those horrible fights we used to have at Beeville—lord!—and a couple at Quantico. I'd like to see how many thousands of a second a fight would last now! And the children, I could really get fouled up if I worried about how much they mean to me. You'll really have to watch me when I get home. I'll probably spoil the daylights out of them!

⁴¹ *Und All Dat Schmaltz* is a rough German translation for "and all that sappiness."

⁴² *Old Yeller*, directed by Robert Stevenson (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1957).

Should have the pictures taken in the office back tomorrow then you'll see I'm still me.

Do you mind a short cutoff? I'm tired and I really should get to bed and sleep, sleep, sleep. A few of these hops are quite tiring—all Gs and very little let up.

Good night, Darling. I'm not so sure you'd like my hard bed, but you're welcome to try. It's only a little matter of 16,094 kilometers and four bunkmates barring you. Other than that—COME ON!

Ray



Friday

30 December 1966

Well now,

Happy New Year maybe? You'll probably get this in 1967, and here I am way back in 1966 talking to you. I predict you get this letter 4 January 1967. Tell me how good my prediction is.

It is actually drizzly damp here today, and all the kids are home. I've only broken up about 10 fights by yelling *louder* than they could—Robin and Kirk, my feisty ones—and even saw stars in front of my eyes once. Do you suppose I had apoxia [altitude sickness]? Or maybe apoplexy? With attendant red face probably. That I couldn't see. It really hasn't been quite that bad. We listened to music and danced a bit this morning. Me in my warm pink bathrobe and the kids built houses out of couch pillows. One of *those* days.

I did go to the party last night with Mom and the colonel, who turned out to be charming, and Mom should latch on to him. He escorted us in his Ford Mustang but was a *terrible* driver. Too many *jeep drivers* probably.

Kathy just wandered in looking adorable in her dark green sweater and told me about her loaded pants—a little late. She agrees that *she was a bad girl!*

I met another Air Force waiting wife at the party and an Army major who had been a sergeant in Japan in 1948 and his wife, who was a school-mate of mine. So there was much to talk about. Most were retired Army couples though. I showed my ring, which all women love to see, and the waiting wife could read the box label saying Thailand, which I couldn't read, and so now that piece of the puzzle fits. She was very impressed as

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she had gotten a mined star sapphire, which she wasn't so wild about. She thought mine was much prettier, and I do agree. Everyone says it is beautiful.

I've had much fun telling everyone how I lucked out with your Christmas package. The hostess told me about her daughter-in-law mailing calling cards and a silk *robe* to her husband in a *tent*!

Your popcorn popper should get there soon and you can go into business. Charge a nickel a bag. The hostess also got a thank you letter from a sergeant over there, which showed how much the troops liked the things strangers sent, and she said she would answer it and say, "You'll never know how much joy you brought two old folks by answering." She's going to have it put in the paper too—the sergeant's letter that is. *Und All Dat Schmaltz* again.

...

No plans for New Year's, which shocks our Karen. That one is *always* ready for a party.

Mailman just came—hold the phone! Nothing but a \$9 doctor's bill for cough prescription medicine, urinalysis, and three look-sees! Guess I really should go to Bergstrom. It's hard with kids in school though.

Think I'll cut Robin's hair now. How are you doing with yours? Oh yes, I think your double bunk idea was great. Hope you could get the new ones squeezed in too. Sounds like a *real* load to find room for. I don't comment too much on it, but I know you are doing a great job, Honey. They are lucky to have you.

Bye for now, and a kiss for every day of the New Year!
Gig



Saturday night
New Year's Eve
31 December 1966

Hello Honey,
Well, tomorrow I can start using Mom's calendar—Happy New Year! Maybe I'll get "happy" tonight.

Whew, some weather today! Pouring down rain by the sheets. Bernie Thomas (roomie) and I ran a VR (visual recon) of a couple of targets and

WX reconned the entire area, while the whole wing stood down waiting. Only found an inverted hole, and you had to crawl in there on your hands and knees (2–300 feet). Oh well, we shot an actual TACAN/GCA and arrested landing plus the targets they wanted and a couple more we found. Not too bad, but no dice on ordinance delivery. You need a little elbow room for that, so everyone CANKED and found out I was really quite rusty on my actual instrument proficiency. Nice to find out the easy way and do something about it.

If you're a good girl, I'll send you the picture taken in the office last week, although it's a bit overexposed, and a copy of the citation. Whether you put it in the paper that's up to you. I don't know what paper you're taking to start with. Mom might want to—you know her!

Okay, okay, you've been holding your breath for me to say it's cold out here. Today, it's about 75 degrees and everyone's freezing! I'd have grabbed a blanket if it wasn't too cold to move. That hasn't stopped the mosquitoes that's for sure. Nor the rats—rats bigger than cats and dogs, all rabid. Even the few that were brought down from Japan have to go. Four of the men from VMFA-314 are taking shots daily; their dog died. They kept him inside, fed him from their canteen cups, etc. Not too good a deal. We put out four traps last night to catch the rats under our hut. They're big-normous!

Small electric popcorn popper, Dozo, and two cheap Japanese lighters. My matches are running out.

...

Tit for tat (shouldn't be the former, I guess), I'll send you a picture you send me a tit picture! You sure are married to a kind, gentle, thoughtful bastard. I'll bet you're the only wife getting written to tonight—parties galore—10 majors wetting down in the rain. What else yet?

THE GRAND OPENING—I did it again (I can think of a grander opening. Can you?)—of the officer's club. One concrete deck (poured yesterday), a thatched roof (completed? today), a 44-piece band from Da Nang, and 200 drunk officers just getting started. And don't forget the RAIN thrashing in through the not-so-completed walls.

Just this minute, I was brought your beautiful Christmas letter. It's almost overwhelming. I'm pleased beyond words everything was so nice. Really got to me several times and I had to stop and look out at the rain for a while and then read on—just beautiful, Gig. I just can't believe how

lucky I am to have such a marvelous, wonderful family. How did you have the heart to turn down the dog? Tried to read it again—not quite up to that twice in a row. I'll try it again tomorrow.

Goodnight, My Love,
Ray

4

JANUARY 1967

Midnight

1 January 1967

Happy New Year, Darling,

The bells are ringing, horns blowing, sirens going and lots of pops and I'm in the middle of an old Bing Crosby movie!¹ The bells sound like they are saying, New Year, New Year, New Year! I went outside and it's cold out, but there's a moon and it feels like New Years. Miss not hearing *Auld Lang Syne*, but I bet you sing it with your friends tonight.² I told Sharon and Bill this afternoon that it's not my favorite celebration and, "Ray says it's because I don't drink enough!" I really think you're right. HOW ABOUT THAT!

I was in a new cleanup mood all day today though, and I washed the tub, washed the dog (who innocently watched me), and washed the tub again. Midnight was a gentleman though and never moved a muscle, even laid down. Then he frisked around and I started vacuuming and

¹ Given the actor's long career and the season, Gig may be referring to one of Crosby's holiday movies or his more popular titles, such as *Holiday Inn* (1942), *White Christmas* (1954), *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945), or *Going My Way* (1944).

² *Auld Lang Syne* is a Scottish song with words attributed to the national poet of Scotland, Robert Burns, which were said to have been written in 1788 but not seen in print until after his death in 1796.

discovered a job in a corner. So, he got spanked. Ah joy, it's very short lived, heh?

He gave me a scare last night. I put him out and forgot he was out. Then while reading the newspaper on the couch I looked up and saw the door handle move like someone was coming in! Trembling, I said, "Who is it?" And then locked all doors again and peeked out. There sat Midnight. Thud!

I'm short of paper tonight. Karen went shopping and came home with onion skin. So, what else is new? Lance Coleman's mother made him bring back the medal he took from Kirk. I couldn't find any of yours and this was one left here by the other owner I think, but he sure wanted it. I gave him a decal, but he snuck home the medal too. I've promised him you'll send him one if he can wait a month. Do you think you could rake up one or a patch? I've never seen a boy so crazy to have a Marine medal. Kirk won't part with his, as you can tell from his letter! Wasn't it cute. I loved the bouncy bounce part. He sure is crazy about his dog. And it really is one smart dog; he goes to his bed when I point! Wish someone would point me to bed like that. Any volunteers!

I'll be glad when your New Year's letter comes. I do hope you had a bit of a truce, though there was something on TV about a big battle in the central highlands.³ Well, best I not talk about that. I'd like to think my letters give you a breath of dear old normalcy or is that lunacy?

...

But it's a New Year! And I *promise* to be good. So, postpone all court-martial proceedings until I get a proper defense stance. Now, I'm *not* going to draw you a picture of *that*. Think *Playgirl*. How generous can you get?

Time to put the New Year to bed.

Goodnight love,
Gig

³ The North Vietnamese *1st Division* attacks allied outposts around Dak To in the Central Highlands, an area that has been the scene of heavy fighting since the summer. The enemy is largely destroyed or forced to withdraw by 23 November, after weeks of fighting. The Battle of Dak To is the largest and costliest engagement in the Central Highlands since 1965. For more on activities in the Central Highlands at this time, see Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982).



Monday night
2 January 1967

Hi Baby,

Slight interruption as my voltage adjuster was starting to burn up for some reason, probably needs a new transformer.

Got the package with the popcorn, clock, and thread, but there wasn't anything resembling a popper in there. Thank you! *Domo*⁴

Midnight sounds great. How big is he going to grow? I thought you'd get a small kind, like a beagle.

That hat of Kirk's isn't Australian. It's a Vietnamese camouflaged jungle rain hat.

I'm sure relieved that you like your ring! And the first half of your birthday ball dress, well, I was really sweating them out. I fussed over that ring something fierce. I spent hours on it; I worried, fussed, looked and looked, but I kept coming back to that same one all the time. I figured, to heck with the size just get the right damned ring! Take it to the jeweler to get it cut down and also take the girls' watch chain and have them solder it shut. Kirk's watch band too to cut down.

When I got your Christmas letter, whew, it was almost too much all at once. I'm just overwhelmed at how marvelously well everything turned out. I'd been sitting on pins and needles ever since I mailed my packages from Okinawa. Well, I guess for a couple of months before that when I saw how limited everything here was. Your wonderful letter made the whole schmeer so well worth it.

...

We had a norther ourselves this morning. Tropical Storm Pamela is hitting the coast down near Cam Ranh Bay and we're getting all the cold air from China blown down over our sopping wet necks.⁵ The temperature plunged down to 65 degrees, and I shivered all damn day! No winter clothes, of course, just that Sears plastic raincoat and flight suit—flights got canceled that's for sure.

⁴ In Japanese, *domo* (literally "very") is often used to stress the speaker's feelings, but it can also be used in this instance to mean thank you very much.

⁵ Typhoon Pamela originated as a tropical depression on 24 December 1966 east of Palau. It caused significant damage and loss of life in the Philippines before weakening and dissipating west of South Vietnam by 31 December.

After looking at a map, I've worked every place listed in the I Corps area from above the demilitarized zone (DMZ) down to Bong Son, Binh Dinh Province, and a lot of places that aren't there, of course, but there is only Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, for jets so we really have one eye on the fuel and one eye on the weather. It's 357 kilometers to Ubon Ratchathani if either Da Nang or Chu Lai are closed for more than a few minutes. Just Friday morning, for example, a Douglas A-4 Skyhawk landing in front of me blew its tires and closed the runway right as my low fuel light popped on (1,200 pounds). Nothing to figure really; power up, climb, divert to Da Nang, Mach climb to 18,000 feet, back to idle, descend, request a "low state-no delay," straight in approach, turned off the runway with 550 pounds, and close to "pucker" fuel (500 pounds) but okay. I called Chu Lai and the runway was still closed one-and-a-half hours later. That was the third time for me. A couple of weeks ago, we put out an order for emergency use of the taxiway for low state aircraft (low fuel). We couldn't possibly go to Ubon Ratchathani and Da Nang was also closed. It's a bit involved but should be worth it someday.

Both Major Joe Wuertz and Captain J. P. Faulkner have had their aircraft hit with small arms fire. That's probably what we're up against. Seems like someone gets hit every day. The poor choppers are the ones that get it the most; they draw three to five hits a day.⁶

Um, you wouldn't like me today. I'm filthy. For four days, I've said I was going to take a shower the next afternoon when it's bound to be warmer? Ha! It gets colder and I get scroungier. I mean how far can you go on a 16th of a pint of Mennen's!⁷ My face is clean as the driving rain, but my feet . . . well . . .

Goodnight, Darling. I sure love you.

Without you, I'm nothing—zilch.

Ray



⁶ For more on the Marine Corps' use of aviation elements in Vietnam, particularly helicopters, see Adam Givens, *The Mobility War: Marine Corps Helicopters in Vietnam, 1962–1975* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2023).

⁷ Mennen is a brand of men's toiletry products, such as Mennen Speed Stick, soaps, and aftershave.

Monday afternoon

2 January 1967

Hi Sweet,

The mailman hasn't picked my letter today, but here goes anyway. You wouldn't believe the change in the house two days later. My, have I been working! And so have the kids. Much credit to them. Everything is packed away once again, and we feel nice and clean. Tomorrow, they go back to school, but today the weather has turned to spring—as only whimsical Texas weather can do—and the kids are outside. Kirk is building a soap-box car, *he thinks*. At any rate, they are having fun tearing orange “craters” apart, after *several* laborious trips to the back of the grocery store.

...

The paper says there is quite a lot of action around Hue and I know you may be extra busy, if that's the word for it, so I'll stay busy too and see if that helps!⁸ No truly, it's just that my ears really perk up now when there is any mention of Marines, especially “calling in air support.” And Hue looks awfully close to Da Nang. U.S. Army general William C. Westmoreland called it a direct threat, and I would call it that too!⁹

I think I'll give up on Mr. Mailman and go mail these two letters. Maybe it's a federal holiday—it just dawned on me that it probably is. Kids watched the Rose Festival on TV this morning, but this Texas sunshine beats the hell out of California sunshine.¹⁰ I've even been casting glances at the *boat*. Imagine that! I could just picture you *wasting* the whole day climbing around on it, and I would be so *mad* at you! And you would do it anyway!

Hate to break up the Katzenjammer hammer kids in the backyard,

⁸ American newspapers at the time were covering stories about the end of the truce. See, for example, “Viet Truce Ends; U.S. Bombs Reds,” *San Diego (CA) Union*, 2 January 1967. For more on action around Hue at the time, see Col Richard D. Camp Jr., USMC (Ret), *Death in the Imperial City: U.S. Marines in the Battle for Hue, 31 January to 2 March 1968* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2018).

⁹ Jack Shulimson, “The Marine War: III MAF in Vietnam, 1965–1971” (presentation, Second Triennial Symposium, After the Cold War: Reassessing Vietnam, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, 18–20 April 1996).

¹⁰ Gig is referring to the 78th Annual Rose Parade, which takes place in Pasadena, CA, every year. See “Pasadena Ready to Greet World with 78th Annual Rose Parade,” *Desert Sun*, 21 December 1966.

but here goes.¹¹ Off to get dog food and cigarettes—both important! I'm ready for you to place *your* next order, Sir. Only hit me light. I'm feeling sort of *poorly*

All my love, of course,
Gig



Tuesday night
3 January 1967

Hello Dearest,
Your Thursday letter (29 December) came today . . . and I've been waiting eagerly to get going on us again. Now I know what you were doing that night. These holidays just frustrate me with no mail deliveries. So, I was darn glad to see a letter.

The kids went back to school today, good as gold, and Kathy and I missed them, though we were kept busy cleaning up after Midnight once again. . . . I began to wonder about him this afternoon when he was acting much too sleepy. Decided a vaccination shot was in order before all else and called Mom to come along and babysit in the car while I took him to the veterinarian. We all trooped in the vet's office—minus Mom and Kathy—and the doctor took one look, a temperature, and of course diagnosed distemper.

He advised us to take him back to the pound and get another dog as it was a 50-50 chance he'd recover even *with* treatment.¹² Long drive over to the pound and we left him, hopefully to be returned if he gets well. Kirk was a pretty sad little boy tonight, but he took it like a man. I was concerned about the way Midnight had suddenly growled a bit—just a bit—at Kathy and Kirk, so I knew I couldn't try to care for him at home for their sakes. Too risky, but I sure wish I could have. The vet wouldn't keep him

¹¹ *The Katzenjammer Kids* is an American comic strip by Rudolph Dirks that debuted on 12 December 1897 in the *American Humorist*, the Sunday supplement of the *New York Journal*. It would later be redrawn by Joseph Musial beginning in 1956, who continued the strip until 1976. See "Camera-ready Comic Art Drawing for *The Katzenjammer Kids*," National Museum of American History, Smithsonian, accessed 3 April 2023.

¹² Canine distemper is a viral disease that affects the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and central nervous system and was once the leading cause of death in puppies until a vaccine was developed in 1960.

at all, so I had no choice. Don will probably be pretty upset when he gets back from Houston, as it was sort of his dog too.

...

Goodness sakes, I'm glad Kirk didn't see *Old Yeller*. That's a real tear-jerker, isn't it? But I'm glad you could see a movie that was better than Elvis! Bet it was good and I'd like to see it—maybe not tonight though!

Darling, don't sweat our fights. I loved every cotton-picking minute of them. It would be awfully dull if we cooed to each other *all* the time. It's an awful female trick to get an awful male reaction, that's all. I'm so damn female. I really can't guarantee no further fireworks because there are still my "periods" to contend with, but I may be a bit milder hopefully. And you will deserve a rest after Vietnam, which will bring out all my nicer instincts, I feel sure. So, no more dramatics—maybe! Fortunately, it's ALL MY FAULT! However, any man, who teases his children by misspelling their names, will have WISE WIFES and CHILDRENS to contend with!

I could practically *feel* you going ZZZ in your letter; you really did sound ready for bed. I wish I could give you some of my spare time. I have too much.

I'm proud of your five-buildings strike. Sounds like you were on target, and thanks for my own personal intelligence report! Better than TV. I'm so hooked on news that I had to laugh at myself when I jumped up tonight from reading at 2150 for the news like a bell went off. And I get up at 0800 promptly, not to see the kids off but to get the first five minutes of news when they give the Vietnam news. Won't we be a mess when we get together? Two automatic robots saying, "Oh yeah, sorry about that." My reflex just went off. It will take us a year to get uninked. At least we both will understand because of these wonderful letters that keep us close. Bye for now, love. Send me a shopping list. I'm ready to go to work.

XXXs,

Gig



Wednesday night

4 January 1967

Hello Sweetsan,

Yes, I'd believe four full GI cans full. Would you believe five days with no showers and tonight is no night to change my luck!

January 1967

Ho, ho, ho—would you believe 10 tins and 2 bags of popcorn and no popper? Sears, Dozo, \$6.20 for the 2.5-quart model.

Hi Karen, and a Happy New Year to you too, well three days ago! “The new dog, Midnight sounds like a dream.” Yuk, yuk, yuk. I’m sure happy you liked your dress and watch.

Hi Robin, who ever saw a kiss like that before! Yes, thank you for the popcorn, but tell your mother I need a Kenmore Sears Roebuck Electric Popcorn Popper. It doesn’t taste as good without being popped!

Dear Kirk, that is a real Vietnamese jungle hat, not Australian. I’m sure happy you liked everything. Ask your mom to get your watch shortened for you or else buy another band to fit your arm. . . .

Well, your prediction was absolutely correct. I got your 30th letter today on the 4th, so usually it takes eight days. How about that. Yes, those star sapphires just don’t hold a candle to your ring. I thought you knew it was from Thailand, just bought in Okinawa. . . .

Next, I can worry about oversleeping again. I trusted the electric clock one time too many and the power had been cut for three hours! The colonel is outside in his jeep raring to go and I’m out like a light. What can you say? I thought he couldn’t see me because I’d covered my bed with a camouflage jungle foxhole cover to keep out the blowing sand—didn’t work—and was caught in the act. When I finally got to work at 0730, I said, “Good evening, Colonel. I’ll forfeit the first round.” Everyone in the hut had threatened to throw me in the swamp with my nice loud windup! Hell, I just barely hear that over the aircraft. No, my hearing is as good as the sleeping.

One of the new hut mates just got circumcised, followed by lots of jokes like screwing around with the electric can opener.¹³ You know, all those sweet sympathetic thoughts. I’m sure as hell not going to oversleep tomorrow. Would you believe four alarm clocks? Best I try them out. It’s been a long day.

¹³ Early history shows that male circumcision in the United States was quite uncommon, but by the 1950s, approximately 90 percent of newborn boys were circumcised. For more, see Brian J. Morris, Stefan A. Bailis, and Thomas E. Wiswell, “Circumcision Rates in the United States: Rising or Falling? What Effect Might the New Affirmative Pediatric Policy Statement Have?,” *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 89, no. 5 (May 2014): 677–86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2014.01.001>.

Goodnight, Darling. I love you.

Ray



Wednesday night

4 January 1967

Darling,

Tonight, you're getting a short snort. I really must write Al a thank you for the box of goodies he sent the kids. . . .

Mom and I went to a jeweler (and pawn shop owner) today and got an appraisal of the ring for kicks—it's worth \$185!

Kathy for once was speechless when I picked her up at nursery. She tried to say, "Hi, Mom!" and the lady shushed her as it was nap time for other kids. She froze in midair with mouth open, wanting to cry and not daring. She solemnly handed me her Matchbox car, which she had clutched for three hours.

Mom called the pound and we got news that Midnight was not doing well and would be put to sleep. I could hardly sleep myself last night thinking of him and how I should have put aspirin in his water.¹⁴

My gosh there was a scene on TV tonight of the 480-kilometer *Bluebird* K7 boat that blew up with David Campbell, the sportsman. It didn't really blow up, but it took off from the water like a jet, did two flips, and then hit. I think he just got into the lift speed range.¹⁵ Also, on TV, I saw Colonel Robin Olds, the World War II Air Force ace whose wife was actress Ella Raines.¹⁶ Remember her? Blue, blue eyes, dark hair. They interviewed him about the MiG successes. . . .¹⁷

¹⁴ There is no known cure for distemper, so Gig could have been referring to what some at the time may have considered a home remedy or simply the anti-inflammatory and pain-reducing properties an aspirin could have offered.

¹⁵ "Don Campbell Perishes: Speed King Dies in Crash," *Spokesman Review*, 5 January 1967.

¹⁶ Operation Bolo was conducted by the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, commanded by Col Robin Olds. Olds had his F-4 Phantom II fighters use attack aircraft call signs and altitudes to trick the North Vietnamese fighters into thinking the F-4s were bomb-laden Republic F-105 Thunderchiefs. When the North Vietnamese fighters attacked, they found the F-4s ready for a fight. In a matter of minutes, they shot down seven MiG-21 fighters. For more on this event, see "The War: Off at the Elbow," *Time Magazine*, 13 January 1967.

¹⁷ The term MiG refers to the Soviet Mikoyan-Gurevich aircraft being used by the North Vietnamese during the war, though several models were available. See John T. Correll, "Against the MiGs in Vietnam," *Air & Space Magazine*, 1 October 2019.

Got a letter from you, hoorah, hoorah, back dated to Tuesday, 27 December. I already had your 29 December one, but I didn't mind going back. Glad you don't mind getting the second clock. It will come with popcorn popper.

...

You sound *awfully* crowded with people. I do hope you can smooth it out. Aren't you glad you got there first?

Kathy doesn't need a map for you. She just digs into old boxes of photographs and brings me your picture. Really knocks me out. She also missed your *stocking* after I took it off the door. How about that! She even recognizes your *letters* now. BELIEVE IT OR NOT.

...

Oh yes, I take Karen to a movie next week at school *It's Fun to Be a Girl*. Boys go to the gym with their fathers and see *Boy to Man* to "prepare for changes to come."¹⁸ Gulp. Kirk was very curious and got the whole bit tonight too. . . . Father, help! He always says he's going to be a bachelor after a sex discussion. "What if I have all girls?" Well, you might have all boys, Kirk.

...

ENOUGH! Why are you so writeable?

Your puny wife and stupid heart,

Gig

P.S. Roger okay to dip \$200? Thanks!



Friday, cold

6 January 1967

Dearest Sweetheart,

I have a new bright red rooster calendar to look at now in the kitchen. How's *that* for news! Absolutely nothing interesting happened yesterday, so I didn't write. Today was better. I went to the commissary with Mom and Kathy and enjoyed bringing goodies home, like a new pillow for Karen, new underpants for Kirk, and new toothbrushes.

¹⁸ For more on public school sexual education at the time, see Beatrice M. Gudridge, *Sex Education in Schools: EDUCATION U.S.A.*, Special Report, 9th ed. (Washington, DC: National School Public Relations Association, distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse, 1969).

...

I'm finally getting *Life* magazine. Would you like me to mail them to you too? What magazines are over there? Ready for another *Playboy*? Sorry about that! Beg me.

How's the popcorn concessionaire these days? In business yet? That was a popcorn nightmare you gave me for two-and-a-half months. It's almost three months now, isn't it? Just 10 months more to go. What's a month here or there?

I've got dishes and a half hour of Johnny Carson yet to go. That's all I can get on the kitchen boob tube, and I am *very* tired of him, but he's better than dishes, period.¹⁹

Goodnight, Dearest Man. Be a good man and get plenty of sleep, and plenty of eats, and take good care and thank you for calling me Princess. Gray hair, what gray hair? Just Princess.

Gig



Friday night

6 January 1967

Hello There,

Well now, yes, you did send me a popper and it POPS like a popper should pop. . . .

I got to work on time yesterday, but had to change the group working hours—not an easy task—from 0700 to 0730 and even made breakfast for a change.

Winds are blowing and sands flowing. The rain has finally let up. It's been about two weeks now. I only have three sets of skivvy's left. Now, if it'll just warm up a skosh, it's washing time for me and my clothes.

Some nut is still in the movie distribution—*Pinocchio in Outer Space* and *Billy the Kid versus Dracula*. Whew, the only good one was *Agent for H.A.R.M.*—nice bikini shots.²⁰

¹⁹ Johnny Carson hosted the late-night entertainment program, *The Tonight Show*, on NBC from 1962 until its final episode on 22 May 1992.

²⁰ *Pinocchio in Outer Space*, directed by Ray Goossens (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 1965); *Billy the Kid versus Dracula*, directed by William Beaudine (Los Angeles, CA: Embassy Pictures, 1966); and *Agent for H.A.R.M.*, directed by Gerd Oswald (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 1966).

TAN is a radio frequency. We use colors for frequencies. Haven't used AUSTIN for a long time because it used to be big rockets.

Today's hop wasn't too bad—a helicopter escort. It could have been Lieutenant Colonel Ken D. Vanek. He's here somewhere. He got recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) last month, only the wing turned it down and he ended up with a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal.²¹ I'm still plugging along. I got recommended for a gold star in lieu of a second Air Medal today.

Colonel Owens is slowly going along with the program. He even drove down today and met me at the aircraft. I was so surprised that I forgot to salute him. One of my old friends in Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12) got hit and shot down this morning just below Da Nang (A-4 pilot). We just called their club, and he's having quite a happy hour. I understand. Why not!

If you get two letters today, the other one is the III Marine Amphibious Force's (III MAF) paper *Sea Tiger*.²² Not too bad a rag. And a joke for Pris about Lyndon B. Johnson, the hero of Cam Ranh Bay.²³

Heard the Beatles were down to seventh place. How shocking. How is our Penn Square stock doing? Above 17 yet? Did we see that British farce about the school of hard knocks? One-upmanship? I swear we did. I'm keeping close track of just who is one up on me here. The damn colonel is about 10 up on me, and he claims he never heard of the game—a natural.

Guess you'd better dye your hair blonde or else send me another picture to look at. At the moment, and for the past three months, you've been a BLONDE. Hell, take your pick. You could be blonde, brunette, or red. With our kids, who could razz you about that. My color is fairly well set—GRAY—and getting grayer by the week. Cutting it off doesn't seem to

²¹ The Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal is awarded to servicemembers who distinguish themselves by heroism, outstanding achievement or meritorious service (but not of sufficient nature to warrant a higher decoration, such as a Distinguished Flying Cross).

²² III MAF published and distributed *Sea Tiger* throughout South Vietnam from 10 November 1965 to 18 July 1968.

²³ Stice is likely referencing Johnson's presence in South Vietnam, where he awarded Gen William C. Westmoreland with the Distinguished Service Medal. See Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks to Members of the Armed Forces at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam" (speech, Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, 26 October 1966).

Figure 22. Maj Ray Stice awarded the Air Medal



Source: Stice family collection.

work as that used to be an easy switch. Chop it off—presto—brown. I'll bet you even have a couple of grays. Kirk, you look! And if Kirk finds any, he can pull them out and mail them to me. Okay, Kirk?

Yes, goodnight, Honey. Damn, I miss you. Every time I think how great it is to sleep in my own bed alone . . . it's a lousy joke. Hell, we really fit together perfectly.

January 1967

Goodnight Darling,
Ray



Sunday afternoon
8 January 1967

Hello Baby,

Isn't this the most original paper you've ever seen? Still at work naturally. Had the early early this morning and got CANKED due to poor weather up north. Some truce we had for New Year's Eve. Hell, more than 1,000 Viet Cong moved up on Hue/Phu Bai in broad daylight. They dug in and did everything but assault. It took about four hours to get permission to break that up. They were starting their assault and we clobbered them from here and Da Nang at the same time.²⁴

I won't get technical, but there are huge numbers of Viet Cong all around our encampments. Our problem is to keep them from having an opportunity to mass forces. Very simple plan, per se, as long as they can't mass, our big areas are relatively safe except for small groups of attackers. Our work is cutout for us that's for sure.

...

I guess I really should conduct an investigation on you for something. You have been rather insubordinate lately. Ready? Assume the position! Um, one of these days.

Colonel Talbert says the only way to hack these cold outdoor showers is to chug down a couple of fast belts first. Then he said it didn't work. All you had was a wet cold drunk!

Awful lot of activity this evening. Commandant General Wallace M. Greene is arriving shortly.²⁵ Only commanding officers allowed at the hanger, so screw them. I'll observe from my window. It's right across the fuel pits. Lots of the usual precautions: choppers in the hills, extra cameras and microphones. Too much of some things. At the moment, there are four transports blocking the way. I'll bet Colonel Douglas D. Petty

²⁴ For more on these actions, see Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966*; and Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984).

²⁵ Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*, 75-77.

(MAG-13 commanding officer) is going into orbit. More choppers and trucks full of troops. He'd better *hyaccu* [hurry up] before the rain starts up again. He's going to watch an A-4 take-off with JATO bottles and make an arrested landing. I hope the idiot doesn't cock his nose wheel and close the runway like they did last week for some other VIP. Oops, too late, rains started up again. Sorry about that. It certainly is NOT representative of Chu Lai. Ho, ho.

Did you know we have the most obnoxious flies in the world? They just look at you and say, "Get your damn meat hooks off my coffee!"

Midnight sounds like a riot. How do you like him, Kirk? You'd better learn how to clean up after him and help your Mother. I had my first and most impressionable dog when I was Kirk's age and I never forgot him. Maybe we can keep this one.

...

Yes, your letters do add a trace of my kind of normalcy, thank heavens! Couldn't do without them that's for damned sure!

...

Would you believe no Commandant? Lord, they're hard pushing a big four-engine Lockheed C-130 Hercules out from in front of the hanger. Mustn't blow sand in the commanding officers' eyes. Looks like a lot of people heading for the hills, so it must have been a bust. If he snuck in, I'm sure I missed it. Oh well, the colonel got three letters, so he'll be happy. It's either "his little redhead" or that "god damned red head" depending on the mailman. I won't offer my endearments to you during like situations. That's a violation of Article 31.b Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ); Fifth Amendment of the Constitution; and paragraph 3, section XI Bylaws for Black Muslims.²⁶ Like the private first class (PFC) who answers the phone, "It's your nickel. Go ahead, man." The voice on the other end says, "Do you know who this is?" "No," answers the PFC. "By God, this is General Grogg." Whereupon the PFC says, "Do you know who this is?" General says, "No!" PFC says, "Whew. Goodbye!"

...

²⁶ Article 31 of Uniform Code of Military Justice (10 U.S.C. § 831) protects servicemembers against compulsory self-incrimination and requires that they be informed of the alleged offense before being questioned; the Fifth Amendment guarantees the right to a grand jury, forbids "double jeopardy," and protects against self-incrimination.

Womp, womp. Good thing Greene left. It sounds like a pretty fierce duel just out of here, shaking the walls.

Well now, last night's leftover popcorn tastes good. I'm back at the hut now. Not too bad, or not all that bad as they say here.

Did you get me a subscription to *Playboy*, *Playgirl*? If you fouled up, you'll have to go to the local sin center. Aw, come on now, it is NOT pornographic. I'm waiting patiently for January's issue!

Dark now, so goodnight, Sweetheart.

I love you!

Ray

P.S. General Greene did show. I just missed him somehow.



Monday

9 January 1967

Darling,

My spirits absolutely soar when a letter from you arrives. You are the dearest, sweetest, smelliest man I ever knew! I'm referring to your 3 January letter that just came. I put the map up right away on the kitchen closet door and it's great.

Glad I waited until this morning to write. I was weathered in with the curse last night and feel much more human this morning. Joe, the yardman, showed up before coffee, needing \$5 as his "customers" are all out of town. He looked like a winter bird that needed to be fed, and I didn't even consider saying no. But I gave him \$10 and made him go get change, and then I lectured him to go to the employment bureau and handed him the other \$5!²⁷

. . .

Speaking of money, yes, I'll send the tax forms when I get them. Guess I go to the post office for them. I'll find out. . . . The popcorn popper was not air mailed, but they said it was light and would probably be anyway. Hope it comes soon. It left with the clock package. . . .

²⁷ In the 1960s, unemployment was relatively high in the United States, at approximately 4.9 percent between 1960 and 1973. "Unemployment in the G7 countries: 1960-2000—TED: The Economics Daily," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5 September 2002. For more on social programs at the time, see "History: Era of the New Frontier and the Great Society, 1961-1969," U.S. Department of Labor, accessed 4 April 2023.

The flash bulbs still didn't flash on Kirk's camera. I'm ready to weep! Or go buy an Instamatic.²⁸ They are *really* the ticket. Back to the shop with my bag of cameras. Plunk.

...

I flooded the car when I was getting Kirk. It floods awfully easily and I have to be *terribly* patient. I'm not as cool as you are when you divert to Da Nang. That really is Puckersville. Or should I say I *was* on that hop. I practically breathed a sigh of relief with you. I got the picture all right—clear as a thousand bells. They'd better—you'd better?—build *another* runway at Chu Lai.

Didn't know the small arms fire was that heavy in those parts. I'm biting my nails now and have five gray hairs when I really let myself think about it, which I don't. I just plain old miss you and that's bad enough. I even reread some letters yesterday and it calmed me down. The Marine's down in the Mekong Delta made me at least glad you weren't down there.²⁹ Small comfort.

My gosh, I'm talking war talk. And you don't need *that* from me! Kathy thinks I'm dull company and she's through playing with your toolbox. Nothin' says lovin' like heat from the oven, and we both send our kitchen best love to you—oven on.

P.S. You're right about bedtime without you—zero-zilch-nudding—I'm tired of clutching myself trying to find you in bed. Where you is? Gee, it will be good to clutch you again.

Gig



Tuesday

10 January 1967

Darling,

After going to the post office yesterday, I happened to call Betty Wattinger, whose husband Major Fred Sidney Wattinger is an Air Force officer

²⁸ The Instamatic was a line of inexpensive and easy-to-load cameras made by Kodak in 1963 for 126 or 110 cartridge film.

²⁹ Operations in the Mekong Delta area during this period did not produce the results the military hoped for, yielding few enemy casualties, but resulting in seven Marine deaths. Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese*, 1967, 151.

flying O-1E Cessna Bird Dogs somewhere near Phu Bai and (Tam Duc?) is with a Special Forces camp. He was a classmate of Don's and I remember him slightly too. . . . I called to tell her about my map from you and happened to mention getting the 1040 tax forms. She said she had called the tax office and been told that you all do not have to file returns until 120 days after returning from Vietnam.³⁰ But I am mailing them anyway, plus extras. The funding information will probably come in mail soon, as it said so on their last form. At any rate, no sweat for a while!

Sidney left about the same date as you and had quite a record before that for long-term alerts with Air Force—some sort of record. He's gone four out of five years! You probably fly over his camp. She said it was secret stuff he's doing for the Marines, probably looking for enemy. He's officially stationed at Da Nang, but not there really.

. . .

I saw this beagle picture in the paper the same day your letter came suggesting a beagle! But I really can't seem to get much enthusiasm for another dog yet. Kirk and Don talk about getting one Saturday though, so. . . . If those two blokes work on me, I'm a goner.

Glad you told me the hat was Vietnamese. It is so cute on both Kathy and Kirk. *When* I get a picture of them in it, I'll send it.

The sun just came out and it feels like a light got turned on. Texas weather *is* crazy. It snowed in McAllen and Laredo yesterday, but not here in Austin.³¹ We only saw a bit of sleet. Now, it will warm up in a hurry. We have all seasons here *every* day.

I am taking Karen to the movie about adolescents at school tonight and to the *dentist* tomorrow. Her little teeth are still on top of each other. May get one pulled.

The mailman is pokey today, but I'll close in case he comes. Sort of felt good that I got a January letter yesterday and we're rolling in the same year now. We can see the end just around the bend! You *do* make the longest trips! When can I say, "Where do we go from here, dear?"

Bye for now.

³⁰ Executive Order 11216-Designation of Vietnam and waters adjacent thereto as a combat zone for the purposes of section 112 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, 30 FR 5817, 3 CFR, 24 April 1965.

³¹ The Rio Grande Valley is not known for winter weather conditions. For more on historic snow events in the area, including January 1967, see "RGV Receives Widespread Snow," National Weather Service, 8 December 2017.

Mucho love and kisses,
Gig



Tuesday night
10 January 1967

Hi Darling,

Got your 3-4 January letters today. I'm sure sorry to hear about Midnight. I'd forgotten about distemper and all the shots they need. I was proud of the way the kids took the news. That's pretty rough. You did the right thing taking him back to the pound.

...

I have to turn on the radio for the news too! Of course, we know all about our part up here in the north, but only as far as we fly. Pat Faulkner picked up another hit yesterday. We get quite a few when the weather is low, and the run-in altitudes have to be low.

There's a lot of talk about Colonel Owens going on R&R on 25 January and then getting transferred to Okinawa to fly C-130s. That will be a hell of a chore for me. I've got to rough up all the officers' fitness reports for him and then break in a new commanding officer when I hardly know what's going on to start with. Going to be quite a struggle that's for sure.

Excuse me—I had to stop and mix a rum and coke. No beer again. Gee, one of these days the damn beer man will find us HERE—Chu Lai run. . . .

Get your pen and tablet ready to order:

1. A can of you know what;
2. A case (12/24, who cares) of popcorn;
3. Sunbeam Model 555 II Shaver head (with five little blades not three). Mine's beginning to cut and scratch;
4. Some color shots of you or the movies you should have been taking all this time. I just found out special services has an 8-mm projector I can check out for two days at a time. Now I can see if my camera works if and when I ever get my movies back from Hawaii that I mailed on the 20th and 23d;
5. February and January issues of *Playboy*.

...

I just made a fruitless trip. I heard that they had passed the word

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about the Korean Marines getting hit really hard and they needed blood fast.³² By the time I got down to sickbay, the last truck had gone and they said they had 250 donors already and that was enough for the time being. They never did come down to the officers' area—99 percent pilots—we'd have to be grounded for a couple of days. Hell, I can afford that. I wondered why the chopper traffic had been extra heavy tonight. They're all stationed about 6 kilometers south. As a matter of fact, one of my first flight students is their forward air controller, but he's home on emergency leave right now. I'll just keep it in my own bank for the time being.

Well, well, well, Mrs. Minx, a \$185 ring from your boyfriend overseas. Um, that's not too bad! I wish I had a girlfriend that sweet—look out!

...

I just heard something about a big snow in Texas. Was that up in the panhandle? Our weather here has been horrible—raining for three weeks now—and I've only flown one time this month and down to my last set of skivvies. I finally washed my clothes, but that was three days ago and they're still wet. I guess I just have to go out in that damn cold rain and take a shower . . . br. I'll be cold for a WEEK! But you can leap over here and warm me up! That could be a bit hazardous as I'm not sure I could behave more than a few milliseconds, possibly a couple of microseconds, then POW. One of my single friends going on R&R said he'd dedicate the sixth stroke to me when he came back. Oh well, our turn will come. PATIENCE—that's the key word—right? Right! You sure answer fast, don't you?

Tired, tired, tired . . . going to bed now.

I love you, Gig.

Ray



Wednesday night

11 January 1967

Hello Darling,

³² The Republic of Korea deployed its Marine Corps force to Vietnam during the conflict. They had a reputation for strict discipline; however, the results of their combat effectiveness often varied. Jack Shulimson, LtCol Leonard A. Blasiol, Charles R. Smith, and Capt David A. Dawson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 143.

What a bonanza day from you! It is my turn to be overwhelmed again. You sure are hard to top—as if I haven’t known that for years—in one-upmanship. Yes, we *did* see that movie. I ran my poor *little old* legs off over here, 16,000 kilometers away, being your errand girl and just when I get you happy, you’re off again. Yeah, I know I *asked* for it. I really have to laugh when one of your *screams* of “Popcorn!” or “Popper!” gets strangled with a “Gee whiz, it’s here.” It’s a wonder you don’t choke on that popcorn in embarrassment at being caught screaming. I know the noise is bad there, but I *can* read, and I *do* react—believe it or not! I’m really closer than you think. POW!

. . . . I saw a *flashing* picture of you today. I say flashing because it was just about the biggest smile I’ve ever seen you have in a picture. Darling, now I will be very serious. It was *dandy* and I plucked up my courage for the honor of MABS-13 and all the good men there and decided to put it in the paper. I called the paper, and they said to mail it in with brief description (no story) and they would be “happy” to put it in. I hauled out the trusty typewriter and wrote in my nicest typing the bare minimum but threw in one line about “Major Stice has also been recommended for the gold star in lieu of a second Air Medal,” and only had to cross out the capital I made by mistake in second! Then I tore up to the dime store for brown manila folders . . . and mailed them off with a typed one for Milly too. I just wish I’d done that when you made major too. I could start a clipping file on my husband! Hope it is dark enough to show in paper.

And if you get interviewed when you come home, I’ll go get my hair done. A real concession to fame! By divine, you’re going to turn me into a major’s wife yet!

. . .

What is “a Command Chronology for December. . . .” Slow down there, Major, I can’t read your writing! I practically curl up inside your letters trying to read them now. Good thing I asked about “TAN.” I thought that meant tangent, like take a left at the next intersection. . . .

Anyway, I’m glad to hear the colonel cares enough to let you fly and it does sound like you are doing fine in that department. How, with all that rain I don’t see how, except for comments like “we recon’d while the whole *wing* stood down waiting.” Here, I read in the paper, “Bad weather—no flying—and *relax*.” Why don’t you do same? . . .

I could comment on the *rats*, *rain*, wind and sand, cold, and dirty conditions you are working under, around, and with, but I’ll simply mutter

that sounds *terrible* and guess that covers it all! The whole *bit* makes me shudder. It's so nice when you tell me to *smile* and come up for air. Your movies sound *choice* too, but I haven't gone to any in a month, so at least you're one up there! Sweetpie, I miss you. Life *can* be good. Hold the good thoughts. We love you and you look *fine* in your picture, so you've got me fooled.

Many kisses,

Gig

P.S. Stock market up today. The most trading since 1962.³³



Friday night

13 January 1967

Hi Sweetie,

This I shouldn't do. Leave baths and a letter to you until midnight. The reason? No reason except it was a rainy wet Friday and I ached all day long missing you. Friday used to be such a good day too! I had my Friday at the movies yesterday on Thursday. . . . At any rate, that left Friday empty, and I kept thinking if Ray were here we'd go to a drive-in, rain and all. Or maybe if I were *there*, we'd go to a *walk-in*, rain and all!

. . .

Speaking of North Carolina, I sent in the pic of you in Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312 (VMFA-312) in black-and-white checked ascot for the paper. It was the only official "passport size" one I had. The big one *was* overexposed and the paper said it would have come out blank. . . .

I got my ring back from the jeweler—just lovely—and picked up film, which is enclosed. Kirk's camera needs repair, so I'm not getting it fixed since keeping the old one going is enough! I got a battery for it and now can take indoor pics.

Mostly this is an I-miss-you letter. I didn't think you'd mind if I told you. I know I'm supposed to keep the old chin up, but right now it feels good to let it sag. Jeepers, I can't be chipper all the time. That's about as

³³ In late 1966, the Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 saw a 22 percent dip that bottomed out in October as the Vietnam War escalated and the country dealt with divisive social and infrastructure issues along with midterm elections. The fourth quarter brought slim growth and stocks soared to 24 percent by the beginning of 1967. See S&P 500 Price Index from 31 December 1955–31 December 1967.

close to a wail as I'm going to get. I just wondered if you had those funny moments where a wave of longing and "wow, it hurts" comes over you. Worse than labor pains! Phyllis Diller says war is DUMB. *D U M B*.³⁴ But that's the light side again and I don't feel light. Just black. *B L A C K*. The worst part is that I know you have these moments too. . . . I like the way you say it, "Forget all this CRAP" "I really do love you, you know?" Yes, I know. Yes, yes, yes.

. . .
I MISS YOU,
Gig



Saturday night
14 January 1967

Hello Baby Doll,
Nice you have a friend in Betty Wattinger; I never met Sidney. If he's got secrets with the people at Phu Bai, it's news to me. I have been over both Tam Duc and Hue many times. We purposely fly over all the Special Forces camps every day; it keeps their morale up and gets us familiar with the areas in case they need help, it keeps Charlie aware too.

I got a good secondary this morning. After our route reconnaissance, we still had some juice and got sent out in the hills to cover for an emergency helicopter evacuation of some casualties. The helicopters were unable to land because of the heavy fire from a ridge line overlooking the landing zone, so we strafed the hillside, and they were able to get in and get the guy out and get him to the hospital. Worked really well, although the weather was terrible—really low clouds and damn little room to maneuver around the hills—and almost didn't get joined up with the choppers because the visibility was so poor, and no one got hit.³⁵ Sometimes things work out despite the odds. Been lucky so far and never had a helicopter I've escorted get hit yet.

Remember the beagle puppy at Quantico? That's the kind I'd get—short haired and friendly as can be.

³⁴ Phyllis Diller was a stand-up comedian who toured with Bob Hope during the conflict. She had just performed a show for American troops in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, on 6 January 1967.

³⁵ For more on air support operations, see Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese*, 1967, chap. 13.

Send me a picture or 15 more better—of YOU—I have a real nice set of the kids and everyone except YOU . . .

. . .

If Kirk's camera won't flash, take it to the camera shop. They'll fix it.

Maybe I will get more time in Japan than I thought. The word has changed slightly, and they are planning on two to three months out-of-country for each squadron during the year. *Mox nix* [it doesn't matter] in-country or out, it's all the same war and it all counts on the overseas return date and that's the main thing.

I'll bet you a beer that I have the early early tomorrow morning. I haven't missed that one yet—Sunday. Whew, I slept under two blankets last night and can't see any change for tonight. Cold and rainy as usual, but at least when it's raining the sand can't blow, that's a mess.

I got my second roll of movie film back yesterday—a helicopter escort and digging up one of the palm trees. Not too bad. Good enough to go ahead and shoot, and I bought three reels and film cans at the division PX. I haven't seen another elephant, although some of the water buffaloes are so big you have to look twice to be sure. There's one really beautiful waterfall I want to get if the sun ever comes out again. About 97 kilometers southwest, out in the wilderness, and not a village for miles around.

Think I'll go to the flick and go to bed early. I'm sort of tired. Good-night, Darling, I sure miss you.

Love,
Ray



Sunday night
16 January 1967

Hi Sweet Pie,

My that was an interesting letter you wrote from the window of your office near the fuel pits! I mean that seriously. I almost felt like I was there because it was so expressive. Your mind would flicker like an eye from the desk to the window to the noise outside and it was like *reading* a movie. You ought to be a *director*. Very good writing and exciting reading. I felt like I was back at the hanger office in Beeville—a part of your world, yet very much not a part and fearful I would interrupt you in the middle

of something important. I stand in awe of you at work. Strange, isn't it? Don't choke.

When you write that there are Viet Cong all around you, I practically climb up in my chair and shout, "Where? Where?" Good Lord, maybe you'd better not be *that* descriptive! Just joking, of course, but I do find myself wondering if those transports got them and if General Greene got away in time. I know he did. I heard that he said it's [the war] going to go on a long time, or words like that effect at Da Nang.

...

Yes, I guess I'll get you a *Playboy* after I get license plates and lighters for you. . . . Car still needs oil leak fixed too and the week holds a Vietnam wives' meeting and a dental appointment for Karen. I pulled her large back tooth out myself and saved \$4! Seems I'm a pretty good tooth puller outer.

. . . . The bankroll reads \$2,980 and it's the middle of the month yet! I'll never get back to \$3,000 again. I am hopelessly under the mark now. My fat cushion is gone. It's still cushy but not fat. No, I'm not asking for money. It's safer with you than here. But if anyone is going to buy a new car when you get back, it will have to be you. I can't seem to save here like in Virginia.

...

Time to close up this book and read my lovely anthology by Thomas B. Costain.³⁶ I tried some of Mom's dirty books but find I really prefer nice clean literature. Not like some people I know! What would you do without a wife to make nice dirty digs? Heh? That's what keeps you being the *good* boy you are, that's what! Me. I'm perfect. Thank goodness, I've never been corrupted by bad men. . . .

Gig



Monday night
16 January 1967

Hi Honey,
Glad you liked the first picture. It was too light, that's why I sent the other

³⁶ Gig is referring to Thomas B. Costain, ed., *Read with Me: A Personal Anthology of Memorable Reading* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1965).

one last week. It was a lot better, except it shows our unstarched half-dirty utility uniforms.

...

I don't think I ever sent you the command chronology for December. It got lost somewhere.

At the last count, the colonel was severely up on me. The latest is his getting relieved Monday, 23 January. We'll have to set up a change of command ceremony, cake, coffee, imbibes, and everything for that day, let alone all the awards I have to finish up and fitness reports of all the other officers we haven't done yet. I have a headache already, and here I was just getting him broke in properly. He'll be a lot happier flying C-130s again in and out from Okinawa. The new commanding officer will be a Lieutenant Colonel Gordon H. Keller. I've known him somewhere, but I sure don't know where, probably Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina.

Major Berny Thomas and Major Dick Douglass finally got orders to VMFA-115 today—that's the first non-F-4 Phantom II pilot switch into a squadron rotating to Japan (mid-February). Major William W. "Bill" Mackey and I are next and we're all relieved to see it start! They'll be back here about the time Bill and I should join VMFA-323 (mid-May). So, four months more here at Chu Lai, then three months in Japan, three more months back at Chu Lai, and home sweet home. That's not too bad, is it? Something to look forward to that's for sure.

I'm glad you're having good Texas weather. We're sure having the same cold monsoon dregs with driving rain day for more than a month. I got CANKED four days in a row now.

...

Been real hard on A-4s, helicopters, and transports the past couple of weeks. The Grumman F-9 Cougars best and the McDonnell Douglass F-4 Phantom IIs next best skill in the first place and two engines in the second place makes happy hops and aged aviators. It's not really that cut and dried, unfortunately, as the weather really is the predominant factor.

...

Better close, I'm trying to snivel in the night flare dregs. They're on 15-minute standby now. Goodnight, Baby. I love you, popcorn and all. (Even your cotton-picking kids.)

Love, Ray



17 January 1967

Hi Dear,

Just a note this. It's cold outside and Kathy doesn't leave me alone a second when she's up. Drinks my coffee too!

Newspaper picture forwarded "with pleasure." . . .

Two letters from you yesterday plus paper. Looks like Chu Lai needs a PR man in truth! Hang Da Nang!

. . .

I saw some gray hairs today, and after a good night's sleep too! They're still there. Your bosom-less wife also does *not* appreciate *Playboy's* emphasis on bosoms. It will ruin you for reality, but that's *your* problem, not mine! What a *drag* those bosoms would be!

Gotta go.

XXXs and stuff,

Gig



Wednesday night

18 January 1967

Hi Baby,

Sorry, this is going to be short. It's late. We've been putting up a wooden TV pole for our Japanese antenna for our American (borrowed from special services) TV. I took the lead-in wire from my neighbor's extra slack—the one I bought in Okinawa and sold to them. So, now we have our own TV bloob tube—the only station is Da Nang.

Sunday afternoon, I was wet, cold, and dirty. In sheer desperation, I went down to the unit Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron (H&HS) metal shop and got 13 feet of three-quarter-inch stainless steel tubing. I bent the hell out of it into a crude coil. I found a rusty 30-gallon paint can, took it down to the welding shop, and cut holes all over it. Then I went to motor transport and got a five-gallon can of diesel fuel, borrowed some of Lou's Bangkok water hose fittings, then back to the welding shop to solder the fittings to the ends of the coil, down to the paraloft for some canvas, and back to the carpenter shop for some more plywood and

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nails.³⁷ I checked in the office, because the colonel had gone home about 1730. Back at the hut, I put it all together . . . and mm, my first hot shower since Okinawa! . . . The word sort of sneaked out and more strange noses snooping around than I ever saw before. I finally decided the price would be . . . a beer for a shower—a HOT shower!

Last night, Colonel Owens and Lieutenant Colonel Walter E. Domina (H&MS-13 commanding officer) came down obviously dressed for nothing BUT a shower, and soon four construction people from RMK-RBJ showed up.³⁸ Three hot showers later—one civilian stripped down and used his undershirt as a towel—and many borrowed beers and a slightly used bottle of Chivas Regal Scotch later, I gave up the ghost and crawled in bed about 0100. Bernie and Lou “entertained” until they left about 0300. . . . Lord, the things you have to do to produce something is unbelievable.

Still cold—still raining—still CANKED—still pushing paper, rather wet paper that you more slosh it than push it. And, we’re reduced to Korean beer again.

Sweet Honey, I miss YOU!

Goodnight, Babysan,
Ray



Wednesday night
18 January 1967

Hi Dear,

Guess what I just watched? Bob Hope on TV in Vietnam? *Right*. I snuggled right up and saw the rain in Da Dang. And it *did* look wet there. Hilly too, like mountains. Millions of men. I never saw so many. He really did try to make the rounds and tried hard. Pleiku and Qui Nhon were on

³⁷ The term *paraloft* refers to Navy and Marine Corps parachute maintenance facilities that clean, dry, and pack parachute systems for expeditionary warfare and special operations units.

³⁸ RMK-RBJ was a consortium created by the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War for American construction support. The so-called “Vietnam Builders” included Raymond International, Morrison-Knudsen International, Brown & Root, and J. A. Construction.

too and a lovely shot of jets flying over Vietnam. I was jealous of the few nurses I saw.³⁹

But last night on TV was “something else.” They had a Marine Lieutenant Colonel Kunts refresher flying at Yuma, Arizona, with his wooden leg for the first time. That made me cry. What a guy! Bald too at only 26 years in. Some things *are* really TOO MUCH!

...

Gotta go to bed. I wrapped a package of yummy longhorn chocolate candy for you tonight and the *Playboy* and I’m exhausted!⁴⁰ I hope the candy doesn’t start a riot. It may put your teeth out of commission like it nearly did mine!

Bye for now, love. Shave heads—will call Sears about them tomorrow.

...

Candy kisses,
Gig



Monday night
19 January 1967

Hello Baby,

How it is? Been a beautiful hot day today with a tremendous blue sky, full white clouds, and just a hair below headache level work to do. You know the kind where your brains are going 93 different directions at the same time and your mouth can’t quite keep up with the thoughts. No flying, dammit. The F-9s are still sick, although they’re coming along slowly.

I have made some sweeping recommendations to the colonel that he bought on the spot. I have to be careful there as he trusts me. He mentioned the other day that he would go on the record that, if I couldn’t get in an F-4 squadron then they should let me have MABS when he gets a squadron commanding officer’s billet. That would be fantastic—me being the commanding officer of damn near the air station when you consider all our varied functions—but you really need a lieutenant colonel’s horsepower to seal your arguments effectively. Even Major David W. Morrill,

³⁹ *Bob Hope Christmas Special*, starring Bob Hope, featuring Phyllis Diller, aired on 18 January 1967, on NBC.

⁴⁰ Lammes Candies was famous for their Longhorns, which were Texas-size pecan turtles.

as much as they respected him, lost several points for horsepower, and everyone knew he would in fact BE a lieutenant colonel by June and I could have the group S-1 job too. It's up for grabs. I'd rather stay in MABS where there's so darn many different things going on, even after nearly nine months of it.

...

Hey Sportsan, do you still love me after 12 years or are you ready to trade me in? I'm rigged and ready to run for another 12 or whatever the hell you want even if parts of the last 12 months have been more risky than risqué. Anyhoo, I love you regardless, and I refuse to think anything else.

Love Baby,
Ray



Thursday night
19 January 1967

Hello Darling,
Everything seems more orderly tonight. I've been home most of the day, so I mopped and swept up a storm. It helped to take my mind off of Karen. (And you I started to say!) Karen's fever was 101 degrees this morning, so took her to the town doctor at 0945 with Kathy too, who's had a cough for a month. Karen had no other symptoms, so the doctor took urinalysis and culture again. Urinalysis was normal. Culture results tomorrow.

...

He took a throat culture of Kathy too. I'm glad, as it was quite thick mucus she had. Meanwhile nose drops. She's as chipper as a bird and so funny these days. If you thought Kirk was a character, you should see Kathy! In the last few days, she has smeared Crisco in her hair, potato in her hair, and loves to play jokes on us, like sitting on both toilets until we come find the one she did something in or scolding Kirk. My can she scold him! . . .

...

The news said there was a mortar attack on an airfield "near Hue"

tonight.⁴¹ Wonder if that's Dong Hoi, where Major Wattinger is? Glad it wasn't Chu Lai. But I suppose you fly around similar places, maybe there. Best I not think about that.

...

I'm interested to hear if the colonel did get transferred. If so, you *will* be snowed and I'll understand if mail goes down. Had two letters Monday but none since, so I'm ready for news again!

...

Candy and *Playboy* airmailed today. Hooray, hooray! Sears got called too. They said the catalog didn't specify five extra little blades, but it probably comes with the head. They'll send them to you direct. So, the list is getting whittled down to just a picture of me. That's just waiting for copies and is Mom's department at the moment. Can you—pant, pant—wait?

All for now, Love Dove.

I love you!

Gig



Friday evening
20 January 1967

Hi Honey,

I'm still at work and got a few minutes, so hi! Thanks for those cute color shots of the kids. Keep it up and take about five or six of YOU—just YOU—next time.

...

Really, Gig, I do have a lot of fine pictures of the kids. Please spend a whole roll of you just for me? Snap shots—that's all.

I hope you sent me that razor head. Mine has starting to go rapidly and there aren't any spares growing in the jungle.

What would you think of a wife who mails her husband the address of some old friends in Hawaii and then writes, "I hope you have fun in Hawaii," after he pleaded with her to meet him after he already had his R&R orders and everything set up? That's the answer Colonel Owens

⁴¹ Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese*, 1967, 9.

got from his wife. She sort of shot him down—no real obstacles—she just “isn’t interested in Hawaii.” It sounds to me like she isn’t interested in her husband. Crummy deal.

. . . It’s just wet and cool again today. Reconned the coast all the way up and back and never got above 300 feet because the clouds were so low—that’s almost precision approach radar minimums (200 feet).⁴² All the fishing boats turned over on the sand, hooches [huts] all closed up, and there was damn little to see. Maybe next month the damn rain will stop. Yesterday, I thought I had enough fuel to get an alternate mission, and it turned out to be another one of these helicopter medical evacuations. But, hell, it was more than 96 kilometers away and I just couldn’t do it, especially with all the weather being like it’s been around here and the fuel I had.

It’s nighttime now. The group S-1 called and said they were canceling our change of command ceremony on Monday and we have absolutely no idea why. Colonel Owens won’t go ask the group commanding officer why not, but I sure as hell would.

. . .

Goodnight, Babysan. . . .

See you later, Sweet Wife.

Love You!

Ray



Saturday afternoon

21 January 1967

Hi Darling,

Would you believe two strep throats and three with 24-hour flu? Yup, it’s been fast and furious for two days, but all is calm now. Yesterday morning, I woke up to the sounds of Robin throwing up. I took Karen’s temp (101 degrees) and noted Kirk’s tummy ache. I thought I had two cases of “I want to stay home with sister.” But, as Robin picked up her books for school, she threw up again. “So, okay, you stay home.” I paced floor until 0900 and called the doctor. He got culture results on Kathy—strep—and

⁴² Precision approach radar is used by ground controllers to provide guidance to pilots during final approach via radios.

ordered penicillin for both Ks as Karen was complaining of sore throat too. Kirk threw up after I was through talking with the doctor, but suppositories were ordered for Robin, so I could use them for him.⁴³

...

It is now 1545 and no one is throwing up. No one has a fever and I only have 10 days of penicillin to give K and K. Whew! All the clothes are washed, floors mopped, and guess what? We're all bored! . . .

Your two letters written Saturday and Monday were the only bright spot all day Friday! I was thrilled with your story about helicopter support. Such a good hop! I'm *proud* of you. And three months in Japan sounds *marvelous*. It was great to get all that news the same week it happened practically. As you say, sometimes things work out when the odds are high. We are both brilliant hard workers! And on top of that, we love you—don't throw up.

Seriously, love, all is fine here now. I wished for your strong arms, but it seems mine worked okay. Four sick at once is a bit much though.

Must play Monopoly now.

Hard life, huh?

XXXs,

Gig



Sunday night

22 January 1967

Hi Honey,

It's been raining for 30 days and 30 nights today, well, it is something earth shaking when it happens to you! Bad news on my razor. It's almost beyond use. Did you get another head quick like? I can't take no for an answer on this one. It has to be a five-blade head (a three-blade head will not fit). Mine has a big hole in it and it cuts like hell.

After our beach run this morning, I managed to find the field below the clouds, and I called the tower about "three miles out for a straight-in." They said, "Negative, the field's IFR."⁴⁴ "But I have the field in sight (bare-

⁴³ Prochlorperazine suppositories are used to control severe nausea and vomiting.

⁴⁴ IFR refers to instrument flight rules, or the weather conditions are degraded and instrument support is required for pilot navigation.

ly) and I'm below the clouds" (barely). "Do you have the two A-4s in front of you?" (To me) "Two A-4s?" "Negative-one." I'm just about ready to give up the ghost and the "other" A-4 says, "I'm rolling out" [on the runway]. Finally, the tower says, "Wait, we'll get a special VFR clearance for you."⁴⁵ About that time, I had just chopped the throttle to idle and dropped gear flaps speed brakes and trying to convert from 350 knots clear to 150 dirty. I said, "Forget it. I'll go out and get a GCA."⁴⁶ Then the tower says "You're cleared to land on number two behind the A-4." What a mess, but I got down okay. There was a half-hour holding pattern at Da Nang. One of the C-130s that brought us some fuel this morning wanted it [the fuel] back so he could get back to Da Nang!

Some parts of these hops are really something else. You're doing about 16 things at the same time—one eye on your instruments (bad rain and haze outside); one eye on the hills or the water or other aircraft (and believe me they are there frequently); one eye on your DME (mileage out); one eye on your radial (bearing from the station) because of the naval gunfire and artillery is all over the place where you don't want to meet at the same time; one eye on each hooch hole, hill trench foxhole, drainage ditch, and cave tunnel hole because, God, they all wear black PJs and a white straw hat. I'm pulling rolling hard turns and diving at them. If they don't scatter, they're civilians; if they run, they're Viet Cong. I popped the zipper on my G-suit yesterday and, with every hard turn, the damn thing would blow up and unzip some more. I felt like I was being undressed turn after turn. By the time we got back, I was all but out of it and felt I'd been stripped! Got back for the debriefing and the guy says, "Anything else significant happen during the flight?" I started to tell him about the damn G-suit and figured "forget it." He pleaded with me, saying "If it has any possible value, we'll get it into the wing immediately!" I think he thought I was holding something out on him.

The hops are really short; they only average 1 hour and 10 minutes usually, because we're always "on the deck" and burn a lot of fuel and higher power settings to keep the hard turns and airspeed up so Charlie won't have time to "line them up and squeeze them off." Things go so fast usually that when you're back, you're not sure if you saw a particular thing or just thought of it from some other flight.

⁴⁵ VFR refers to visual flight rules as opposed to instrument-supported navigation.

⁴⁶ GCA refers to a ground-controlled approach supported by air-traffic controllers.

Boy, the next week is going to really be something. Colonel Owens is going on R&R. The minute he leaves, I start getting chewed out by the executive officer and the S-3. Sure is hard to tell a bird colonel he's all fucked up. I wanted to finish 60 missions before the end of the month, but I don't think I'll make it. They don't like me flying when the colonels gone, although they sure do it all the time.

...

Well, it's time to study the inside of my eyelids. I'm getting tired. Goodnight, Darling. Kiss my sweet children and (kick my bad ones) (as if I had any).

Ray



Monday night
23 January 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

My it feels good to be writing you a nice quiet evening letter. You must have thought my last one was sort of a ding dong. Well, things are indeed better. I took the girls one to the doctor today . . . and the blood count showed Karen had a "virus" that "sort of peters out by itself" and penicillin doesn't help it. But she's getting some penicillin pills anyway to keep her from getting Kathy's strep. Her fever was 100 degrees at noon and going down. Probably be all well by Wednesday and able to have her two teeth pulled Friday. . . .

...

I saw an article about I Corps in the paper about an O-1 Bird Dog "riding herd" the paper said on 40 Viet Cong until they called in Air Force North American F-100 Super Sabres and got them.⁴⁷ . . .

I really enjoyed the female Turkish jet jockey story; but, gosh, she doesn't sound human!⁴⁸ I think the *Sea Tiger* is a better paper too, than *Stars and Stripes*. . . .

⁴⁷ For more on Air Force support of ground troops during the period, see John Schlight, *The United State Air Force in Southeast Asia: The War in South Vietnam—The Years of the Offensive, 1965–1968* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1999).

⁴⁸ Gig may be referring to a news story about Sabiha Gökçen, a Turkish aviator who is recognized as the first female combat pilot. See "An Historical Heroine: A Row over the Ethnicity of a Turkish Icon," *Economist*, 25 March 2004.

The weather here turned unexpectedly *balmy* today. It felt so good and even Karen said it was “romantic” weather that made her think of the past and “one night cooking outdoors eating marshmallows and popsicles.” That’s her version of romance! She was awfully glad to hear you’re getting “five months” away from Chu Lai. She counts like I do.

...

Have to close a letter to you. I’d rather keep writing, but hang up I must.

Kisses and *things*,
Gig



Tuesday
24 January 1967

Dear Heart,

Rather than sit down and stew by myself, I decided to write you that the car needs \$75 worth of work. There, it’s said! Sort of a low blow I just got. And I said yes, go ahead. It needs major work because of the oil leak, the engine needs to be pulled, etc.

...

The main reason I thought you should know about the work and all is because you must save *your* money while I am unable to! I looked ahead and figured some of the expenses I’ll be facing by next month:

\$2,814.84	Bank balance
- <u>\$275.00</u>	Car and house payment
\$2,539.84	
- <u>\$50.00</u>	Karen’s teeth (approximate)
\$2,489.84	
- <u>\$25.00</u>	Doctor’s bill (approximate)
\$2,464.84	

Not to mention new car license plus dental bills for Robin and Kirk if I start them (and should). Sooner or later, we’ll need spring and summer clothes, and there’s always the chance that something else might break down.

So, my point is, just because you can’t spend your loot there, be *thankful* and save it and that will make me feel better on this end.

...

Now, in comparison, don't your troubles look small? I really got a big charge out of your Tuesday night at the shower party. How typical of you to try so hard to fix a hot shower that you actually succeed and end up making money, beer, and friends in the process!

I *knew* they were lucky to have Ray Stice over there! Don't let them wear out MY MAN though. He belongs to me, or so the marriage license says. Strictly on loan to the Marine Corps for one year.

Sweet Kirk is home. My healthy one! And *you* stay healthy too. We'll ship the wealthy and make the wise. Okay? *That's affirm*. This one is merely signed.

WIFE



Wednesday night
25 January 1967

Hi Darling,

I missed writing last night because I had to get ready for this morning's change of command ceremony. Colonel Owens got relieved by a Major Morrill and left for seven days R&R in Bangkok. His wife never did want to meet him in Hawaii and both the R&R and his transfer came up at the same time. The new commanding officer is a lieutenant colonel selectee who will probably put the silver leaves on in May or June. Really nice guy and quite sharp—F4 qualified.⁴⁹ It will be nice to work for a fighter pilot for a change. We couldn't shut down the whole operation, so we only had 200 (of 700) people for the ceremony, but it went off okay. The group commanding officer even said a few words, which is unusual for him.

...

The Texas candy and *Playboy* arrived in rapid shape (beautifully edible too). Thank you all. . . . The hole in my razor is getting bigger. Did you order from Sears? They have them at all big drug stores.

Had the stupidest picture taken today. Colonel Petty, the group com-

⁴⁹ According to the command chronology, Maj Morrill relieved Owens on 25 January. See MABS-13 Command Chronology, 1-31 January 1967, Marine Corps Archives, History Division, Quantico, VA; and Capt John C. Chapin, USMCR, *A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1988).



Figure 23. Maj Ray Stice seated at his desk, Chu Lai
Source: Stice family collection.

manding officer, wants office/desk shots of all his officers—rather serious—like for your ID card only sitting at your desks.

...

Tet comes soon.⁵⁰ Good for some (them), probably not so good for us. I don't really trust their Lunar New Year. It would be a good time to make us look stupid like they tried at Phu Bai on our New Year.

You sure that wasn't one of my high school pictures you sent to the paper? I don't recognize that young feller. Now, there's a gray-headed so-and-so I know over here and people will think war is really rough. Whew, look how he's aged when you see this next picture.

...

⁵⁰ Stice is referring to *Tet Nguyen Dan*, or the festival of the Lunar New Year, which is the most important holiday for the Vietnamese. It begins with the first new moon of the lunar calendar and ends 15 days later on the first full moon, usually sometime between 21 January and 20 February on Western calendars.

Would you object strenuously if I just Zzz and went to bed? I'm tired, Baby. My eyeballs are winning the fight . . .

Goodnight, Honey, it's been a long day for some reason. See you, gator-later.

Love,
Ray



Thursday night
26 January 1967

Hello, Darling *Wet Sweet*,
You might as well face it, the monsoons will last six weeks they say. So, heat up that hotsu bath-Japanese style, if necessary.

First, just so you can commiserate with me, I have been sick. Yeah, the damn bug got *me* last night after a nice fried chicken dinner. . . . I told Robin to stay home and take care of the baby, as Karen wasn't strong enough. She *relished* the idea and the girls ended up cleaning kitchen closets, fixing coffee and lunch. They urged Jell-O on me like I urged it on them. Now I know! No Jell-O! By noon, I was human again and ate three helpings of spaghetti for dinner brought over by Mom. I defy bugs!

The car came back. It was \$84 instead of \$75. . . .

But enough about cars and bugs. Guess what I saw on the Huntley-Brinkley [show] tonight? Chu Lai! Mostly the inside of the sandbagged radar hut as they were showing him [the reporter] how "pilots can drop bombs they can't see." Radar men can direct planes they can't see and it's rather frightening. They interviewed a Lieutenant Michado.⁵¹

They didn't show the base itself, just the outside of the hut, the radar screen, instruments in the hut, and the voice of a pilot. Not your voice! The children saw it too. Oh yes, there was a shot of the planes taking off and one landing. . . .

There was another story about a cave that had to be blown up despite

⁵¹ Gig is referring to *The Huntley-Brinkley Report*, an evening news program anchored by Chet Huntley in New York City and David Brinkley in Washington, DC. It aired on NBC from 29 October 1956 until 31 July 1970.

women and children hostages somewhere in your area, maybe south.⁵² Well, enough about that. Just stay alert.

...

You never mentioned getting or using the screening or air mattress I sent way back in September. What, you no like?

Kirk and I wonder if we should mail a box of clothes to you—his size and maybe girls’ stuff too for an orphan. Could you handle that and should we do it? Seems to me we ought to do something for the children over there, and it might start the ball rolling for others in their classes.

...

Gotta go to bed. Lots of thoughts, but none to put on paper. So, I’ll put them to bed and think about you. Last night, I kept thinking he wouldn’t go for me tonight, and I was *so* cold, and well yes full of bugs, but darling they were such nice clean bugs.

Your pictures were mailed to Milly, and Robin wrote her that she loved her MUUMUU dress and “I *where* it all the time.” Best you and Robin go to spelling class together. Oh yes, report cards in and all fine. Both girls got check pluses in *art*. A few “needs to improve” in spelling and arithmetic for all.

And a round of kisses for you.

Gig



Friday night

27 January 1967

Hi Baby,

Sit down first. . . . Seated!

Happy new crisis year to your strep throats. I’m not sure I could have waited as long as you did. “HELP” was definitely in order. . . . I guess that’s one of the benefits of being overseas. Your loving wife gets to clean up all the messes solo. Brother, what a battle with kids all going at the same. . . .

⁵² Gig may be referring to incidents eventually revealed in an October 2003 report by the *Toledo Blade*, “Rogue G.I.’s Unleashed Wave of Terror in Central Highlands.” See John Kifner, “Report on Brutal Vietnam Campaign Stirs Memories,” *New York Times*, 28 December 2003.

I wouldn't even try to say who had the roughest deal, but yours isn't a bed of roses and I damn sure know that.

We're plodding along here. Our new commanding officer is a whiz and going to be just great. He's just tearing at the bit to get airborne. I told him that we all liked to try to fly once a day, and he just shook his head like he never heard of anything else. He knew Colonel Paul K. German somewhere and Major Clifton C. Williams.⁵³ He, the boss, flew for the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center at Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was damn near an astronaut.

Sitting? Things are picking up around here quite a bit. I'm not sure how much we'll be in the papers, just remember where we are and which province.

Are you seated yet? We're talking about Quang Ngai. Should be some good hops coming up—more scratchy.

Did you send me the Texas candy and the brownies? Man, they are really good and quite in demand. I had to invoke “mine not yours” on the rest of the hut. Can't say I didn't warn you that one of these days I might ask you what you think of Honolulu too, but the time would be rather short at only seven days total with one day for travel to, one day for travel from, and five days in Hawaii. Hell, I'm ready for R&R, aren't you too? I just have to convince two key personnel of the fact: the new commanding officer and Pris. She's had it up to here with kids from rear echelon troops. Like how much should a retired lady be subjected to? Cost is something else, probably about \$500 to get you there and back home air coach. And one HELL of a ride for me from Da Nang to Pearl Harbor. You ask your boss, and I'll ask mine for 23 February (both fly to Honolulu), 24th through 28th (you know what), and 1 March (both fly home).

Taksan [I'll pay] trouble. Are you game? At a \$100 per day to just get there, you sure wouldn't want the curse, would you? Anyway, do some basic arithmetic and if the dates are good—Pris is willing and my boss agrees—why NOT!

⁵³ Marine Corps Maj Williams was a naval aviator and test pilot who was training as part of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) cohort of astronauts for the Gemini and Apollo missions. Williams was killed on 5 October 1967 when his Northrup T-38 Talon jet trainer malfunctioned between Cape Canaveral, FL, and Houston, TX. He was forced to eject, but he was traveling too low and too fast to survive the landing.

Goodnight, Hilo Hattie!⁵⁴ Well, just a bit of explanation is in order I'm sure. The R&R quotas for February came out today and I thought, hmm, the skipper will have been here about a month and have his feet pretty well on the ground. I'll have been here for more than four months. Why not? . . . They give us just about one quota a week to Hawaii and the 23d just happened to be the last one in February. That's the only real reason I thought about that particular date. . . . The only thing is, the quotas don't come out for March until about the last few days in February like this one.

The end of February is not a particularly good season in Hawaii, nor will I be able to pick up my clothes in Okinawa. One shirt, one trouser, that's all I have. You need shots too probably.⁵⁵ HEY, SOMEONE HELP GIG OFF THE FLOOR. . . .

. . .

Snooze time, Honey.

I LOVE YOU!

Still, yet, even regardless!

Ray



Sunday night

29 January 1967

Hello Dear,

I feel like I haven't heard from you in days and days just because it's the weekend, I guess. I got your 22 January Noah's ark letter—30 days and 30 nights of rain. Noah's was 40, I think, and the hairy landing story about two airplanes ahead you and you only seeing one. That sounds like me. Awfully glad you got down in one sentence, "I got down okay." That's really putting it *mildly* for a man who just got dezipped too!

. . .

I called Sears about your razor head. They said the order went to Dallas and maybe to the West Coast and couldn't say when I'd get confir-

⁵⁴ Hilo Hattie, born Clarissa Haili, was a comedian, actress, singer, and dancer. Her name is now synonymous with a large chain of retail stores offering Hawaiian-themed goods.

⁵⁵ The International Certificate of Inoculation and Vaccination was established in 1933 to protect people traveling and to prevent the importation and dissemination of infectious diseases across borders.

mation (maybe a month). So, here's hoping it's the right one and that you get it. If not, get one flown in from Okinawa. Surely someone could get one to you. But one is on the way.

...

I hope things are okay for you there. I know there's been some fighting going on from the news and I'm trying hard not to worry. MAN, that's a full-time job. As if that wouldn't curl my hair, but it doesn't, and I need a permanent badly. My next project then is ME.

Goodnight, Sweet.

Or good morning, XXXs,
Gig



Sunday night
29 January 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

Well, you've had a couple of days to think about it. What do you say, "Hawaii or bust?" Are you with it? Or against it? Think positively, Dozo. This afternoon while we were waiting for two F-4s to finish their emergencies, I hit him—gently of course—with "sort of interested in R&R after he'd had a chance to get squared away, maybe a 'month' or so." I'll hit him tomorrow with the actual date, 23 February. Boy, you'd better be right biologically. You really need a quick check along those lines.

You would want air coach to Honolulu to arrive early in the afternoon of 22 February. I'll get reservations at the Ilikai Hotel for you \$15 per day and have them send you a duplicate receipt so you can walk in and be all taken care of. The R&R center run by the U.S. Army is only a block away, and I'll arrive anytime that evening or night.⁵⁶ I'll give you the R&R phone number. We'll rent a car and have a real, honest honeymoon for the first belated time in our lives. No in-laws, no children, just the two of us. Now that's a challenge—a bit late—but why NOT.

As far as your reservation back, let's play that by ear for now. It will either be the 1st or 2d of March.

Now, how's them apples? Put your money where your mouth is . . .

⁵⁶ Stice may be referring to the Piliilau Army Recreation Center, which was part of the Armed Forces Recreation Centers system to support military personnel around the world.

put up or shut up . . . shine on oh jealous eyes. You know, what the hell, let's do it! I hate to think all this depends on your marks on the calendar! Oh well, I'm broad-minded—I married one. I'm patient, well to a point, and I love my wife. What better chance do or will I have to show you that.

. . .

[Stice provided lyrics intended to be sung to the tune of “Rye Whiskey” by Tex Ritter]

1. Throw up and diapers and medicine too—to hell with them all—all I can think of is you oo, oo, oo! 2. (continue) From Vietnam to Texas is a long, long way. We'll meet in Hawaii, with hooray - Who ray . . . 3. Standby for a monster from out of the trees; his soul purpose in life is you to please. 4. He loves you to pieces from hand to toe; you say the word and we'll go, go, go. 5. From Chu Lai to Austin, this plea is sung; you give me your answer and we'll have fun. 6. A honeymoon a honeymoon we've never had . . . swaying palms and luaus can't be all that bad.⁵⁷

Enough? Okay?

Love,
Ray



Tuesday
31 January 1967

Dear Husband,
Mama Mia! You *do* like to shake the dice, don't you? I was sitting down when I read your letter, but I still had one part of my brain on Kirk's 104-degree strep throat.

. . .

Offhand, I'd say March would be *easier* for me to make a Hawaii trip financially and physically. Finances are \$2,483.95 with all bills paid at the moment (except for the doctor). With \$363 deposited on 1 February,

⁵⁷ Stice provided these lyrics, which were intended to be sung to the tune of “Rye Whiskey,” recorded by Tex Ritter, released on 15 March 1933.

that's \$2,846.95. I always pay the rent on the last day of the month, so really it would be \$2,646.95 left for February. I figure I'll need some new clothes before I could make the trip. That's right, Daddy-o, new clothes. You don't want an old hag for a drag, do you? Plus, I need a permanent.

...

Everyone else says, "Great, go," including the kids who are quite romantic at the idea. Oh man! And I even like the idea until it scares me to pieces. Who's going to lead me around if I get lost? I've never been *any* place *alone* in my life except Dallas, New York, Mexico, and Japan a *long* time ago! Sometimes I wish you were a bank clerk. How do you put a girl from 1955 into 1967 minus her four kids?

...

But back to us. Let me see how the curse goes or comes and you tell me about *your* finances. Yeah, it's your turn! And if March would be better or worse—and I can do it either way—but after this hellish January, I'm too pooped to make a quick decision. Meanwhile, I'll call the travel agency . . . and get an estimate, places to stay, etc.

Yes, you got in the news tonight—Quang Ngai—was that you?⁵⁸ You, meaning you and/or Chu Lai. So glad you've got a good boss, and you're sounding quite cheerful. It must be the Texas candy. I knew that might cause a riot and tried to warn you. But, hmm, a nice riot. More for your next good deed. No, seriously, I'll keep sending it if you want some more. But, I don't want to be responsible for any cavities!

Must go to bed now. Your letters help a lot, do you know that? I miss you, Dear. Enough maybe even to go to Hawaii.

XXXs,
Gig



Tuesday night
31 January 1967

Hi Darling,
I'm not sure where January went, but zoom it's done gone! . . .

⁵⁸ Gig may be referring to news reports stemming from small unit actions taking place in southern I Corps during the period. See Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*, 51–52.

Is 23 February a good date? I need orders, hotel reservations, money, and all kinds of things here, so write soon! I'm using the 23d for planning purposes anyway. Is it a noncurse week? That's the million-dollar question!

I've been flying every day since the boss took over, and he started yesterday. I fly in the mornings, and he flies in the afternoon. For as close to being an astronaut as he was, he is a real nice boss and just as demanding as I am. We'll get some of the squadron moving good, that's been a bit slow. The trouble of people and parts is still our biggest problem. We keep ordering and never seem to get much in, except the beans and bullets.

...

Our briefs have been something else. Yesterday, we were woken up at 0430—hell, it was still nighttime when we got to our area—and this morning we got awakened at 0500 for a 0505 brief. Talk about scrambling about madly in the dark. I took my own damn flashlight this time, since the plane captains didn't have any.

I guess for the next three weeks I won't be able to think of anything except R&R and YOU in Honolulu. This way, we both get R&R. You've never had any before either, have you? R&R—that means release from responsibilities. Is Pris up to it? So much depends on so many things, and I have to wait two weeks just to find out. I'll go nutty waiting. Why don't you send me a telegram with YES, YES, YES on it? That would cut off a week of the anxiety.

I'm so tired, I have to stop and get some sleep as I'm just as likely to have to get up at 0430 again as not. I got my first Vietnamese haircut today. I told him "a little off the top." He thought I said "a little on the top," and that's what he did . . . no more curls—sorry about that. You never told me I had hairy arms. Part of it must be the dark lighting. Hey, bug Sears, Dozo. I really do need the razor head—now! Like two weeks ago! The damn nob is almost all the way across now and really sharp.

Goodnight, Sweetheart Baby Doll—Hawaii!

Say HI DOZO.

More better,
Anxiously,
Ray

·5·

FEBRUARY 1967

Wednesday night

1 February 1967

Hello Darling,

...

Life is definitely rosier. Sweet Kirk's temperature is down, though he's lost his voice temporarily.

...

Kathy is bubbling with laughter and cuteness again; Karen's cheeks are pink and bright; and Robin is stowing food away minus vegetables as usual.

Mom brought Kirk a plastic airplane kit to assemble—the really easy kind—and he did it *all* alone and was quite proud of himself. It's a bit crooked on the stand, which he insists is the way it was made not his error! Obviously, I can't criticize his *first* model airplane.

I watched a TV documentary called *To Save a Soldier* tonight showing the helicopter and medical evacuation airlifts, and it was very moving.¹ It

¹ *To Save a Soldier*, directed by Walker Stuart, narrated by Henry Fonda, aired on 24 October 1966 and late January 1967, on ABC. This documentary depicts the rescue of a wounded American soldier in Vietnam, his helicopter transport to a combat medical center, and finally to a hospital in the United States.

was especially interesting to me after you have written about sometimes helping those to land. Everyone seems so *capable*, energetic, and brave.

...

Will close now, this being a pretty darn good report after that lousy month of January! I am much encouraged.

My love to you and all the troops over there! How about *that*? I'm proud you are with them.

XXXs and hugs,
Gig



Tuesday night
2 February 1967

Hello there,

Got your buggy letter today, and I'm glad the kids took good care of you. Don't you dare bring any to Hawaii! I'm as pure as the driven sand, and we have the driven sand to prove it. . . .

So, I'll commiserate a little bit but not too much. We have some pretty potent bugs out here too. Several of the officers and enlisted both are down with some tough one.

I must say your Fridays are always interesting—way up or way down—while mine are all so simple it hurts. You either get to fly or not usually; although, I've been doing fairly well there. Today was number 58. We didn't get to shoot like a couple of days ago. I had a really good close, and I do mean close, air support of troops on the ground and lots of fire.

Nice gal you are, sending me the bill for the car just when I'm thinking in terms of hundreds of dollars, and you send me that paltry \$85 bill—not a pimple on a pumpkin. Good timing, Old Miss.

One of these days, the enlisted magazine *Leatherneck* will run an article on Marine close air support here at Chu Lai.² I almost took the photographer up myself, but the skipper said no. One is enough, and I'd already flown that day.

Your screening and air mattress I'm saving. I don't need the air mat

² *Leatherneck* published an article in May 1968 about close air support, one year after Ray made this prediction, and republished it in June 2022. Maj Harvey D. Bradshaw, "Tigers in the Sky," *Leatherneck*, June 2022, 49-53.

because I have a 3.5-inch foam rubber mattress over a 5/8-inch plywood board now and it's okay. And a GI net works fine, I may need them sometime. There are a hell of a lot of moves coming up starting in May, you know.

I'll ask the civil affairs officer about the children's clothes. They wear mostly straw hats and black P.J.s like their Viet Cong cousins.

Colonel Owens got back from Bangkok—not too impressed—and took his small Japanese icebox I had borrowed temporarily. But my aerologist just came back from Japan today with a starting relay switch that I needed for one of the broken-down American boxes. We have 19 we can't fix.

Don't run off to bed and not put your thoughts down. What am I, a mind reader? I'd take you hot or cold—bugs, um—well, leave the bugs . . . in Texas, and when we see each other in Honolulu, it will be well worth it.

I'm worried about the clothes I'll not have to wear in Hawaii. All my damn clothes are locked up in Okinawa, and we sure won't be stopping there. I'll be riding a contract jet—Pan Am, probably—to Hawaii. How about YOU? That's the QUESTION OF THE MONTH. How about YOU? Hm? . . .

Whew, it's getting really cold outside, Baby. I hope they don't choose tonight. That damn bunker would be for the rats, not for me. Actually, the night before Tet—Wednesday, 8 February—is the most likely night for their purposes. Clobber someone and then have about a week's "truce" to pray about it.³ We've been working the hell out of them around here. They want in here, they gotta pay the price of admission and it isn't cheap.

Honey Baby, where in hell is my razor head, the five-bladed Sunbeam? This monster is eating me alive (Model 555 II). There must be a million shops there in Austin. Hell, they had them in that tiny place in Quantico.

. . .

Honolulu or BUST! Yeah, that's the code word. . . .

See you later, Honey.

(Has more meaning doesn't it?)

Love,
Ray

³ Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984), 10.



3 February 1967

Dear Daddy-o,

This is your wife talking to you now. I just got unfairly accused of putting Kirk's racing track in the garage, which I did because the damn thing was in the WAY! And if the track fell off, well, it was half off anyway. Just be thankful it wasn't THROWN AWAY.

Kirk says he is going to beat me up if I throw it away.

It is Friday, and the curse is right on time. I always wonder why my body just won't move on mornings like this and then I find out. I have the old motor running now, but the bed looks good. Kirk did get another shot yesterday and will probably be all well by Monday, but he still has a low fever. He feels much better and is wild to get another model to build.

...

Not much else new. I am waiting for your letter. I checked to see if I could get a shaver head for you at the drug store, but even they said they would have to order one. So, if the Sears one is wrong or doesn't get there, best you just get a new shaver or let me send you one. Tell me what you think.

Must close now.

All my love,

Gig



Sunday night

5 February 1967

Hi Honey,

The mailman must have the flu. He sure isn't putting out. No razor head, not a letter in four days . . .

I didn't write last night because I got smashed, clobbered, whatever you call it . . . the last thing I remember was looking at the clock. Thank the Lord, it said 1010 or thereabouts, as it could just as well could have been 0500. But fortunately, it was a decent hour. We had the grand opening of our club and a real live Australian singer with some Chinese rock-and-rollers who were quite good. It takes a lot of guts to have a single gal entertain like that out here.

The Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron's (H&MS) schedule officer is twice blessed—he gave me a stately 0930 brief in lieu of his usual 0500 Sunday morning blast. Lots of action around here. It started out with a helicopter escort and ended up close support with another helicopter on an emergency extraction of some sort after a 240-kilometer wild goose chase out over the mountains. The wing coordinator told us 113 kilometers—he meant 27 kilometers—and gave us the wrong frequency to boot, like 301.5 instead of 3015.1, you know. What a mess . . . but not too bad overall.⁴

Oh man, I've been having the wildest dreams about you lately. . . I'm hanging on pins and needles about 23 February. I guess I won't know until the last damn minute. I guess I can CANK [cancel] out at the last minute if it isn't a good date for one reason or another. There's just no way to tell, but I'm going ahead for planning purposes.

Today was number 60 at last. I missed a couple last month—couple of weeks that is. Remember you used to hear “the 50-mission crush” on the World War II Air Force hats.⁵ The only thing that's crushed is my pillow. I've never slept through so much noise and sand and crap in all my life. I hit that damn bed like a ton of bricks and ZAP, like gone. Thank the Lord for eating, sleeping, and the privilege of working hard.

Good night, Darling.

See you later,
Ray



Sunday night
5 February 1967

Dear Sweetie Pie,
If it will make you stop spouting poetry, jumping up and down like a puppy dog, and swinging through trees like an ape-man, I will come to Hawaii, YES. Now, settle down. I had been pretty sure you would stick with

⁴ MABS-13, Command Chronology (ComdC) February 1967, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077121, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

⁵ The term *50-mission crush* refers to an Army Air Corps, or Air Force, service cap with the stiffening ring removed, and it is worn crushed and battered as a symbol of what the wearer had survived.

the original plan just because you hate alternates and because you knew you'd have to make the decision for me—right or wrong—allowing me the barest of minimums to say no. Yes, I'm familiar with Ray Stice tactics, and I had my yes all lined up when your letters and pictures arrived. But I did sleep on it several nights, and I checked with Mom one more time. Now, it seems I am going to Hawaii, and everyone is congratulating me!

I have my Hawaiian lights turned on and my hair appointment tomorrow for a permanent. This *major* step taken care of will get me headed for dress shops and maybe I can turn into something worth seeing. This was my major drawback, the truth being that when you go away my looks go away. Maybe it was the combination of the three weeks of kid's illness, . . . but I sure was (am) at the moment a MESS. House clean, kids well, and I'm a MESS. So, I start tomorrow on the *major* overhaul and just hope it's not too late.

. . .

Well, anyway, that's why I didn't call but will tomorrow morning and then I can give you my plans. Glad you gave me the name of a hotel as that will give us a meeting place for sure!

Ready, gosh yes, I'm ready. Ready for R&R that is. At this point, it's still almost too much to believe, but I did let myself be pleased when I read in today's paper that Waikiki is one of the world's *best* beaches.⁶ Who said beggars can't be choosers?

I'll bring along some extra clothes for you if you want?

I'm going to take the kids to Mom's house and have her get a taxi for them and see if that will help some so she won't have to keep two houses running. Gotta leave her about \$100 or so for expenses.

It's still a blur, but the main thing is GO.

And in the meantime, it's bedtime. One thing for sure—the next two and a half weeks will be wonderful just thinking about it, won't they? Just plain old wonderful.

Goodnight, Dear,
Gig



⁶ Waikiki Beach is almost 100 percent manufactured. See Robert L. Wiegel, "Waikiki Beach, Oahu, Hawaii: History of Its Transformation from a Natural to an Urban Shore," *Shore and Beach* 76, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 3–30.

Monday
6 February 1967

Darling,
Tippecanoe and Ilikai too! Roger, 22 February, all confirmed.

...

Costs \$337. How about *them* apples! You just made a dream come true.

I'm *terribly* excited now and you should have seen me dancing around the house this morning. It was snowing outside—yup, a freak snow storm dumped six inches on us this morning.⁷ I started to write you that it was raining last night but decided that wasn't news. It was news when the kids woke me up and said there was snow, and I hopped out and drove them to school. They got out at 1330, but it had stopped by then. Anyway, it was fun to be dreaming of sunshine while the snow fell. What a contrast! The mailman arrived at 0830, but I had my YES all ready for him and you. . . .

...

Many [wives] are *charging* their trips or draining their bank accounts. I think we can do it pretty easily, and we are very fortunate.

Mom is loaning me her luggage, and we charge out to get clothes when the weather clears a bit. My permanent got delayed today, but it comes off/on Wednesday.

You can get a whole new razor in Hawaii, so make do! Surely someone will donate a razor to a guy on a first honeymoon! And anyway, the arresting crew all looked like pirates, so you can call them Bluebeards Crew!

All children *completely* well today, and they found a stray CAT.

Goodnight, Angel. I wrote Milly the news and must get some *beauty* sleep for my beast.

XXXs,
Gig

∞ . ∞

⁷ "February 1967," *Weatherwise* 20, no. 2 (1967): 78–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00431672.1967.9941095>.

Tuesday
7 February 1967

Darling,

Thanks for your cheering letter. Funny that you said, “Don’t run off to bed without putting your thoughts down.” Tonight, I felt like doing just that. I got hit with a sudden case of the blues tonight. Fine thing too with the kids well, Hawaii bound, and all. The darndest things set me off. I called a girl up who is due to go on R&R on 27 February—a captain’s wife—and she said, “We’ve only been in the Service three years and he’s a captain already. I think he’s doing really well, don’t you?” I nearly choked but said, “Yes.” I then got weepy thinking how many years we’ve been in and where is it getting us? What do I say, mine’s been in 17 years and he’s a major? Somehow, I can’t help but feel bitter at the Marine Corps and want even more for you to get out. They’re just so slow with promotions!⁸

...

I know I need a good talking to. I guess you’re going to have to straighten me out in Hawaii. Right now, that’s the only bright spot on the horizon, if I can ever get myself in shape to go! There I go again. Still not quite out of the weeps. Please forgive. I’m really quite fine and know that seeing you will do wonders for me. I thought maybe I’d tell you all this, so you’ll have some good answers for me. It’ll be nice for a change to have you know all the answers.

I guess you’ll never ask me to put my thoughts down again! Really was kind of funny you saying that. It was just like having a shoulder to cry on. You’re so darn cute sometimes. You know what I thought after that poem? Oh my God, you nut! And I had to laugh because it was so *awful!* So awful it was funny. You always could make me laugh, just when I thought I’d never do it again. What can you do when you are married to a man who makes you laugh. That’s an awful advantage to have. Very hard on my stone face act. Over and out—way out—about you.

Feeling better (sniff) too,
G

⁸ Promotion issues within the Marine Corps is not new. The Commandant of the Marine Corps attempts to address these issues in Gen David H. Berger, *Talent Management 2030* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2021).



Tuesday night
7 February 1967

Hi Honey,

I'm glad to hear that Kirk, Robin, Karen, and Kathy are all better. That's a real drag when they are sick. I'm really proud of Kirk for making his first model airplane. Mine [plane] was sick today. The IFF [identification friend or foe transponder] is an identification feature in the aircraft that helps a radar operator tell who's who. Well mine was malfunctioning and putting out an emergency pattern on everyone's radar scopes this afternoon, and I didn't know it. He must have chased us all over I Corps but finally, as we were on our way back to Chu Lai, all of a sudden, I look out my right wing and here's this damn camouflaged Air Force interceptor care of the old McDonnell F-101 Voodoos.⁹ I knew in a second what it was. First time that has ever happened to me! He wanted to know if we needed a hand off to Chu Lai or if were we out of fuel. Glad to see someone was on the ball though. The system really worked, but I damn sure downed the aircraft!

Yesterday, we got a really good alternate mission out in the mountains. Some people were hit bad, and we escorted three helicopters out to pick them up. Finally found the place and, when the first one landed on a ridge line, he got shot right through the [aircraft] canopy (no injury). We had the friendly's mark their positions and strafed the tree line where the fire came from about six times and there wasn't any more shooting after that. Then the helicopters loaded up and lifted and we escorted them back to the BUMED.¹⁰ Our own "To Save a Soldier" and I forgot to take my camera!

How do you put a gal from 1955 into 1967? Kick her in the butt, that's how! Build a fire under her, that's how! Don't worry about the money—just write a check. They don't bounce. It should be about \$358 round trip coach from San Antonio. Get reservations to be there about 1400 on 22 February. I'll take care of the hotel reservations at the Ilikai Hotel

⁹ The term *interceptor* refers generically to a fighter whose design and armament is best for intercepting and defeating or routing invading fighters.

¹⁰ BUMED refers to the U.S. Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. See Jan K. Herman, *Navy Medicine in Vietnam: Passage to Freedom to the Fall of Saigon* (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2010).

just a block from the R&R center and only a few blocks from Waikiki.

Now that's all settled, I can think about something else for a while (a joke, son, a joke). It's only two weeks from tomorrow yet!

Would you believe someone broke my shower already? I got all stripped down last night and thud—*no aqua caldo* [no hot water]—broken by some dolt. So, if I'm slightly odoriferous in Hawaii, you'd be understanding?

Colonel Owens, who leaves on 15 February for Okinawa, insisted on playing poker until 0200 this morning. I overslept an hour and the new boss didn't have coffee at work. I missed another breakfast and dinner—flying and the aircraft was an hour late coming in—and to top it off the last three people I've flown with were F-4 pilots no longer in the squadrons and having to get checked out in the Grumman F-9 Cougar. Must be a mistake there somewhere? Oh well, there must be answers somewhere.

Got to go to bed early tonight! Today was a baaaaaad day.

Love you!

Ray



Wednesday night

8 February 1967

Darling,

One quick note tonight just to let you know I'm over my silly blues of yesterday and not mad at Mom anymore. She's sitting with the kids for me tomorrow. I got my permanent today, which is like step #1 to Hawaii. I wanted to shop *this* week, because I'll be in a dither by next probably. Now, everywhere I turn I see articles on Hawaii or talk to someone who has been there, and it's all a pleasant whirl. I really do feel like a bride going off on a honeymoon!

Sears in Los Angeles sent me a postcard today asking for the zip code in your address before filling the shaver order. I was so mad! I called them up *here* to see if it was on the order and it wasn't. The girl on the phone must have missed that when I gave your address. I feel *sure* I gave it, as your address is indelible in my brain. But *that* was the reason it hadn't come, and I mailed the card *back* to LA *today*. So sorry about that. I really did try. Maybe it will be there when you get back from Hawaii—crunch!

There will be so much to talk about when we get together. My aren't those pretty words! It really is hard to believe.

...

I may get there a day early and leave a day late—22 February and 2 March—but it will work out.

Some say that R&R place will arrange half-price hotels for us if we go through them. We might check with them to see. I'll bring all the moola I can in travelers checks.

I hope all is arranged on your end. I don't dare ask at this point! No, seriously, I know you can arrange it because I know you, and I feel sure the commanding officer did say yes, though your last letter left that in doubt. I just didn't realize how serious you were in that first letter. The *Ilikai* word made me know it was for REAL and NOW.

Roger, love.

See YOU SOON TOO.

G



Wednesday night

8 February 1967

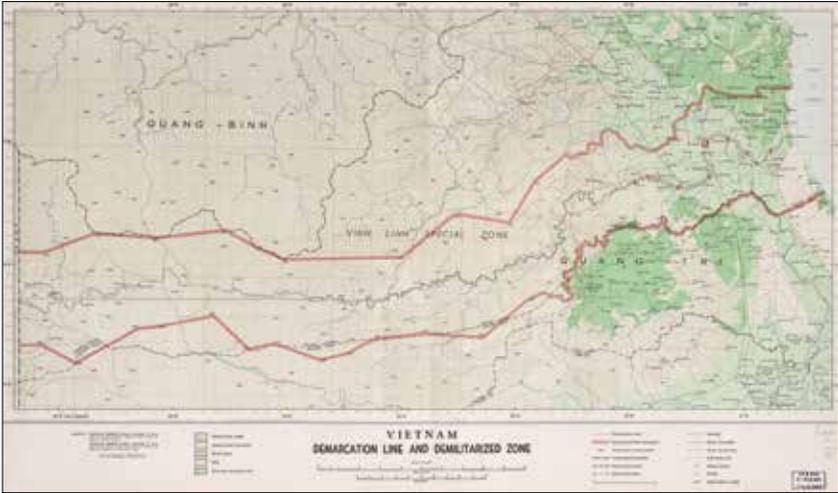
Hello Honey,

Cancel my last and negate my first. The skipper wants me to go on R&R in the middle of March, like the 15th or 16th or whatever date that may be. I won't know the exact date until the March R&R quotas comes out near the end of this month, but cancel your reservations if you made them UFN (until further notice). This is really in line with your last letter. You wanted March for several reasons. Okay, Baby, March it is. About the only problem will be the actual date as "mid" is as close as I can come now. YOU buy new clothes? All I have is fungal shoes and belt, one shirt, a one pair of black trousers, and dingy gray skivvies. You'll probably want to send me back to Vietnam!

This morning, we were checking the DMZ (demilitarized zone) (a 24-kilometer strip along the border of North and South Vietnam). Stupid H&MS scheduled me for another DMZ hop late this afternoon, which I had to CANK. With 700 people, I can only fly one a day and no more. Well, the number two aircraft this afternoon—the one I was scheduled for—must have held his altitude, heading, or air speed a hair too long and damn near got shot down. . . . Some truce! I guess Tet (their lunar holy day) doesn't apply to us.

February 1967

Figure 24. Map of the demarcation line and demilitarized zone in Vietnam, ca. December 1966



Source: official Department of State photo.

XXXs and you know what else!

Ray



Friday night

10 February 1967

Dear Sweetheart,

Oh, I'm so sorry you've had a delay in your mail. At a time like this, that could feel excruciating. I'll be glad when I get a letter that you know I'm coming, if we can squeeze that in before it's time for us to be together! But with each letter I write now, I wonder, "Will he get this before he leaves for Hawaii?" Yes, I know now that it's still touch and go with you there, but I too am just going ahead with plans like mad. Wild horses couldn't keep me back.

It'll just be a waste of \$337 if you can't come, but I think even that would be worth it, as I am enjoying getting ready for the trip so much.

I had a lovely time shopping today. Yesterday was no good (one dress),

but today I found two great dresses and now have three in all. And I've spent \$100, which is not bad, though it probably sounds like a lot to you. . . . I did discover I could have bought cheaper pants, but who needs cheap pants? Who needs pants at all in fact? Don't answer that!

A bit more to get and I'll be all ready. Don't sweat your clothes, just be there. I'm still living in so-called civilization over here though, and it behooves me to look like a lady at least until we get the door locked. I want to dash out after all that . . . and get a muumuu and a wild Hawaiian shirt for you and live like a native from then on anyway. I'm *not* buying a new swimsuit. The old one will have to do, and maybe I'll let you view the Hawaiian scenery in that department. I don't promise to fill the whole bill. I'll be quite content just to eat with you, sleep with you, and be with you! And I'll try not to get jealous while you watch *one* hula. See how generous I can be!

Well, now what else is new? You're a naughty boy for getting smashed at the club opening. And you'll get more words to that effect in Hawaii, but I'll save that as *my* lecture to you after you give yours to me.

Poor old Karen, she's lost her "teeth" already. She tells me not to call them her teeth. They are *retainers*, Mom! But the fact remains, the "teeth" got thrown in the trash after lunch at school and burned up before the loss was discovered. So now she needs a replacement at \$15, I think. I'll find out soon enough. . . .

My you play your cards close to your chest. Here I rant and rave about money and you won't let me peek at your hand at all! What's wrong, afraid I'm going to spend it all? You're *right*. Remember the first honeymoon. I'm glad to hear you are "thinking in terms of hundreds of dollars." Yours or mine? That car bill didn't faze you, but it sure did me. Golly bum, teeth, cars, doctors . . . I'm broker than you. But I'm going to bring all I can, and the gas tank reads \$2,912 now. Subtract \$337 plane ticket, \$200 rent, and what do you get? \$2,375 - \$100 for kids here, which Mom says she doesn't need, but I'm leaving that anyway. That's \$2,275 and getting down there. Add in \$363 on 3 March so that's \$2,638 and subtract \$300 or \$400 for Hawaii so that's \$2,238 and so it goes—up and down. Just don't bring *your* money in cash. They think we're suckers in Hawaii and they're right, but we can at least make them cash travelers checks before we give it to them. And then we'll live it UP!

One thing bothers me though. I can just see you spending two whole

days of luxury *sleeping*. Don't you dare! I'll bring my *spurs*. Wouldn't it be a joke if I'm the one who relaxes that much? Oh well, much fun to think about anyway. *Zzz*.

Tomorrow, the kids have a nice day with a Valentine party for Karen and movies for the others. And I'll daydream some more about what color shoes to get. Yes, my dreams are *lovely* too, these nights. February is a *great* month—a real Valentine month. And this trip will be the best Valentine ever! Will you be mine?

Gig



Saturday night

11 February 1967

Hello there, Baby,

I went to happy hour and I'm slightly stinko, maybe you better just throw it away first.

You say no Hawaii in February, the boss says no Hawaii in February, I say bullshit—Hawaii in February . . . then the wife's letter comes and "well maybe March would be better." March! My God, March? . . . My birthplace, Gig. The first time I saw it as an adult, I thought one thing: one day, I would love to take my wife there and share some of the beauty.

March, I don't know, maybe too cool to swim, but not to stroll in the sand and take in bits of love and sights.

A strong stand, yes, I took a "strong defensive posture" for your indecision. . . . I guess the Commandant was right. If the Marine Corps wanted you to have wives, they'd issue you one!¹¹

At least we're talking about the same thing: get together, on the same island (Oahu), on the same year 1967—an odd year for odd people for odd trips to odd places to see odd things and odd places. . . . One purpose, one thought, one beautiful time—R&R for you, R&R for me—and even the kids may enjoy the notion a bit.

¹¹ Though Stice points to the Commandant as the source of this idiom, LtGen Lewis B. Puller was also known to make such statements. Len Hall and Eric Lichtblau, "The Issue of Marriage and the Marines: Military: Leathernecks, Spouses Admit to Stresses of Created by Dual Loyalty," *Los Angeles (CA) Times*, 13 August 1993.

Clothes—I don't think I left too much worthwhile. I'll buy a new suit and some shirts there, if you can put up with me until then. Oh, shots, you'd better check Bergstrom and get up to date on all your shots just in case. If I don't get mine, they won't let me on the plane! We must have up-to-date shot cards and spare malaria pills (us not you). I need yellow fever and gamma globulin [vaccinations] too.¹² You'd think I was going somewhere!

What do the kids think of all this? I think they're all romantic enough to enjoy the notion if they can fathom the whole thing.

It's raining again, not enough to dampen my spirit just me. CANKED after a 0430 reveille this morning, ugh. Black and wet and cold air from China—sins of the world—I'm probably breathing Communist air! Well, at least the fallout is H₂O not HOx (H-bomb). Must be American rain, but the mud . . . Who'd claim that abysmal morass? I'm really a peace marcher at heart, but my marching gun has a silencer in it!¹³

I knew this was going to be a long day, and it was, BUT not too long to tell you how much I love YOU!

Goodnight, Honey,
Ray



Monday
13 February 1967

Darling,
Everything is just rip roaring along now. So nice and gay. Sandy just called to say Karen is sending some clothes Greyhound Express and it's now on my list of 15 things to do! I don't know how I'll get them all done. I

¹² John D. Grabenstein et al., "Immunization to Protect the US Armed Forces: Heritage, Current Practice, and Prospects," *Epidemiologic Reviews* 28, no. 1 (August 2006): 3-26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxj003>.

¹³ Stice may be referring to the actions of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution sweeping across China at this time. Edward Teller, Stanislaw M. Ulam, and other American scientists developed the first hydrogen bomb on 1 November 1952. Stice's use of the term *peace marcher* likely refers to the Vietnam peace parades and marches taking place across the United States in 1966 and 1967. See Jack Manning and Edward Hausner, "Thousands on Fifth Ave. March in Vietnam Protests," *New York Times*, 27 March 1966.

can hardly think of anything else—one week in Hawaii is sure a month of Sundays!

...

I have visions of us sending orchids to the *femmes* [women] back here and that is going to be a must. Lots of appreciation that we'll have to show for our opportunity. Do you suppose we'll have time for us? Oh, I wake up thinking of you these days. Milly thinks it's great. Everyone does and is getting vicarious pleasure out of the thought. I'm sure it's because of you and what you're going through. . . . You really are terribly well loved and liked and missed by *all*.

Now I *must* quit and get going darling.

I'll see you in Hawaii!

or

If you get this letter after the trip, it's not the hop, skip, and jump over, it's the long haul back. But, oh gee, isn't it grand?

Gig



Monday night

13 February 1967

Incredible! You caught me midair. I was flying to Hawaii, see, on this big American airplane, and this guy says, "Hey you, don't come. Not for another four weeks." Just like that, he says it. Now, I've heard of some guys standing a girl up at the altar, and some gals standing a guy up for an hour or two, but this guy beats them all. . . . And she's left sitting there with her mouth open, her pack on, and her afterburner going. . . . She told him anything was fine with her, but he said he was going to build a fire under her, and he didn't know it but he did. So, she thinks she ought to call the airlines, as they said CANK OUT by 15 February, and she couldn't believe her ears. He's going to have to say it again, because she's got all her gears going and he just put her in reverse. Crunch!

Well, she thinks she'll do it tomorrow, but she's got all these people to tell first, and it's a good thing she's FLEXIBLE.

...

There's this commanding officer man, and he doesn't know what he ran into. If he thinks the Marines MOVE OUT, he's never seen a woman in midair, who just got grounded. It's really too bad he can't meet this

chic, because she would frost his ears and toes and turn him around and go over the backside and he'd wish he'd stayed in bed.

Now then, you say, "Don't come?" Not until mid-March? The Ides of March yet. *Et tu Brutus*. Gad, you're cheerful. Hanging on for dear life to that straw I first threw away back in January when I was whipped from three weeks of four sick children. Heck, I'm raring to go now. Like NOW. Gosh almighty, where in the world do you think I'll find the patience for four more weeks. I don't have a war to keep *me* busy. Only the one I could start with a certain guy—make that two guys. Only one gave it a really good college try, so I can't kick him much. He's only getting a fringe frost for not weeping captiously with his *dear sweet* spending money like mad wife!

One good thing before I close. It appears—and I say this with great reluctance—that March may be the tiniest bit better financially, (but I doubt it) and that the strain on a certain sewing lady may be eased. That's the *plus* side. But, how in the world a certain major's wife can keep from turning into a pauper's wife with four more weeks to dream of Hawaii, I'll never know. . . . Now she's got a bee in her bonnet to buy clothes for her dingy gray man, who says he's in even worse condition that she was (she's come way UP in one week), but she's still broke from that major upheaval and where the \$2,900 ends. Only heaven knows, but when it's gone it's gone and so Hawaii better come quick!

Well, please tell me how the third act should come out. We can't just leave this gal sitting there all frothy like, can we? . . . Right? Right. There's a *good* boy. In the meantime, she'll be sitting there, and you just push the button to make her go.

Over and out and love and stuff.

Attention! Present ARMS, about FACE!

Gig



Monday night

13 February 1967

Hi Honey,

That last letter must have been really something. Saturday night got sort of wild. Would you rather not take the bad with the good? I still love you drunk or sober. It's just that communications suffer in the process.

I don't know if I told you or not, but we almost got another major

February 1967

in to take over the base services half of MABS, and the guy was senior to me! I wasn't sure, but after I looked in the Blue Book, I started to move my gear down to base services.¹⁴ The skipper said, "What are you cleaning your desk?" I said, "No, you just got a new executive officer, so in so is senior to me." He said, "Whoa, halt, stop, and desist!" He subtracted my numbers from so in so's numbers, rogered and called the S-1, lowed as how he'd just as soon not have a new executive officer and commanding officer at the same time. They hemmed and hawed and beat around the bush for a couple of days and finally came up with a newly made major, F-4 flight officer John T. Radich. I've known John for years; the last time at Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Japan, he was a pilot, now he's stopped being an aviator per se and is a RIO (radar intercept officer) commonly called "scope" and not a pilot anymore.¹⁵ Oh well, he knows what he wants and seems happy whatever the reason. Today was his first day. Ugh, it snowed naturally. My new boss [Maj David W. Morrill] is rapidly getting the swing of things and passing me up in many areas. He has a bastardly good memory. Have you ever known a practical idealist?¹⁶ I can see why he damn near made the astronaut program.

Are they still congratulating you for going to Hawaii? Next month! I found a guy who is going on 23 February—Major Michael P. "Mike" Cady—he'll check on a few things for me. Three people have recommended the Ilikai Hotel, like "costs more and well worth it" type statements. SO? GO! I won't know the exact date until about 24 or 25 February, this way I can be here for the skipper's first big inspection on the 22d.

Not too much sleep last night—floor show until 1100, F-4 crash until 0400, and an unusually bleary eyed 0730 morning meeting.¹⁷ No one hurt, I'm just tired and damn near fell asleep reading dispatches this after-

¹⁴ The term *blue book* refers to the lineal list (a.k.a. the Navy Register), which is an annual publication of all the active duty Marine Corps officers within their respective ranks in order of precedence. See *Marine Corps Bulletin 1400 (MCBul 1400)*, *Marine Corps Promotion Manual*, vol. 1, *Officer Promotions* (1967).

¹⁵ MABS-13 ComdC, February 1967. According to the command chronology, Radich relieved a Maj Thomas on 10 February. For Marine air, this was a naval flight officer (NFO) who sat in the back seat of an F-4 and operated the aircraft's radar and weapons systems. Other aircraft also utilized NFOs and RIOs during the conflict.

¹⁶ First coined in 1917, the term *practical idealist* refers to people who believe there is an ethical and moral imperative to be virtuous or good and that personal and social change are connected.

¹⁷ MABS-13 ComdC, February 1967, 2.



Figure 25. LtCol David W. Morrill, Stice's new CO
Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

noon. What's this no bombing bit by LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson]? That's a neat way to treat your avowed killers. Without a blockade or something, what else can you do? Hard to believe he really will do it.¹⁸

...

I haven't flown for two days! Can't have that!

Okay, Lou Gagnon just walked in. He's been stuck in the Philippines for three weeks now with the old Douglas C-117 Skytrain losing engines left and right—one at a time fortunately.¹⁹

GOOD NIGHT, BABY!

Sleep time,
Ray



¹⁸ For more on the political divisiveness at the time, see "The Effects of U.S. Bombing on North Vietnam's Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect," 29 August 1966, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, box 192, The Effects of U.S. Bombing, Johnson Library, University of Texas, Austin.

¹⁹ "Crash of Douglas C-117D Skytrain in Da Nang: 7 Killed," Bureau of Aircraft Accidents Archives, accessed 13 April 2023.

Wednesday, afternoon

15 February 1967

Darling,

I hope you didn't take yesterday's letter seriously. I was trying to be funny, and at midnight it *seemed* funny. I almost didn't mail it Tuesday morning, but then decided you know your kooky wife pretty well and it was safe to mail.

I'm really quite adjusted to not going until mid-March now. It will give me lots more time to get ready, finish dental appointments, etc.

Saved myself \$6 this morning. A [window] pane got broken in the den last night while I was at PTA, and the kids played ball out there with a 14-year-old sitter. I just trotted to the glass place, got the glass, came home, and installed it myself. . . .

I'm anxious to get your letter today just to make sure it's still mid-March now. I'll be able to talk to the other returning wives now and get more Hawaii scoop.

Last night, I watched a special on TV called "Air War in the North." It showed a raid from Da Nang of McDonnell Douglas Phantom IIs (Air Force) hitting targets in North Vietnam and described the three layers of junk they have to outmaneuver: flat, SAM [surface-to-air] missiles, and MiGs. But it was encouraging that they feel it is possible to avoid the SAMs if you see them coming from the ground up.²⁰

They showed the pilots, who were mostly colonels and lieutenant colonels. The leader was age 45. There was much discussion about whether it was worthwhile—no, from the diplomats and, yes, from the pilots—and the lead pilot said it will keep getting more dense to fly through (a more sophisticated defense) in six months and even worse in a year, which they must plan for. Meaning, let us hit them harder now before they get there defenses up stronger. I hope somebody has the sense to say yes to that, though I can see the reasoning about not hitting the MiGs on the ground now for fear it will drive them into China and more escalation. . . .

²⁰ Gig is referring to Bill Stout, "CBS News Special Report: Vietnam Perspective: Air War in the North," CBS, aired on 14 February 1967. The 60-minute episode covered the effectiveness of bombing raids on North Vietnam and interviews with Gen William C. Westmoreland, Adm Ulysses S. Sharp, and reporters Harrison E. Salisbury and Harry Ashmore, who had surveyed bomb damage in North Vietnam.

That's about it, Dear. I'm sort of hanging loose now. . . .

Much, much love,
Gig



Wednesday night
15 February 1967

Hi Honey,
Hey! Thanks for the tit for Tet. Got something special saved for Honolulu? Well, now we've both gone through a highly successful dry run. We ought to be real pros next month! First off, I want to congratulate you for getting with it so well. . . .

And your economics aren't that bad either—\$337, but that must be without tax? What the hell, it's a great price!

But no razor head makes a poor shave, lousy appearance, and even worse disposition. Ever had to shave in the dark with cold water and no shaving cream? Hmm? Not too good. Just buy me a goddamn head. Please? Again? Like last month? If you were overseas, I'd buy you one if I had to go to 15 stores or 100. It's like not having a toothbrush and you can't buy one. Have you ever had to wear an oxygen mask on a freshly cut face?

Don't worry about your three-year captain. How would you like Wuertz and Klingensmith as majors? One of my new hut mates was one of the Marines who landed at Guadalcanal and I'm senior to him.²¹ I tell you, don't sweat other people. Who the hell are they? WE are important to each other, that's the only thing that really counts.

Yes, we will eat at the La Ronde, drink at the top of the Ilikai, more at the Canoe House, dance at the Chinese Junk and Michel's and Chuck's . . . Willows and anything else we can conger up, perhaps rent a car to boot.²²

²¹ See Henry I. Shaw Jr., *First Offensive: The Marine Campaign for Guadalcanal* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1992).

²² The La Ronde, built in 1961, was the first revolving restaurant in the United States. Canoe House is an open-air restaurant at Mauna Lanai Bay. Michel's at the Colony Surf was an upscale French restaurant at Diamond Head. Chuck's Steak House operated for more than 50 years in Waikiki and closed in 2018. The Willows—opened in 1944 and closed in 1999—was known for its Hawaiian buffet, live entertainment, and open-air dining.

You weren't supposed to read that stupid poem. You were supposed to sing it to "Rye Whiskey." Don't you know how to sing a drunk song? As I left the club tonight, they called, "Have another round?" "No thanks," I said, "I've written my wife three drunk letters already." That got a few laughs on that one. Are you laughing? I'll show you—ho-ho, ha-ha, he-he. And how many cigarette cartons a day do you smoke, Madam? Of all my sins, I just let it all hang out on cigarettes. Got to cut loose on something, you know. When they run out of beer at the club, I order Crown Royal and 7Up. Best tasting 7Up I ever had! Everyone turns and looks to see who in hell is ruining such tremendous booze. I'd rather have Korean beer as not and that's about as low brow as you can get—Seoul's finest "Crown."

...

Would you believe it's been raining again for five days? Got so cold tonight that I popped a gallon of popcorn! Sometimes when I get frustrated and don't know what to do—cigarettes don't taste good, beer's too much, scratching don't do no good—you know really in a bind? I just look at that rack, hit it one more time, and ZAP—sleepsville. Think I'll have a tiny bit of that now if you don't mind.

Goodnight, Baby Doll.

Razor head, Dozo. Two is better than none!

I love you, Gig.

(Even if my beard doesn't!)

Ray



Thursday

16 February 1967

Darling, hi,

Not much news really to tell you. Still waiting for the pokey mailman who comes in the afternoon these days.

The dental visit was costly, like \$63! Kirk has a big cavity in a tooth that's supposed to stay in until he's 11 years, plus one in a molar, plus others, and has separated front teeth, which need to be pulled together, so his eyeteeth can come in, *plus* he's "tongue tied!" That was news to me. The doctor can clip the small skin holding the tongue down for \$8 and

will later on. Yesterday, it was *merely* X-rays, an impression, and cleaning for him. Then he starts all the other work.

Robin has the best mouth so far. Only cavities for her that need fillings. And then we got Karen's new retainers (\$15) and paid \$8 still owed on her. Total \$63.

Kirk will have to wear rubber bands for a while and then a small metal clip until the teeth come together. It sure is bad that dependents don't have dental Medicare, though I read in the Service column that it may be passed this year. Probably too late for us. However, I still need to go too and I am overdue again now, so maybe someday it will pay off for me.²³

...

Here comes the mailman.

XXXs,

Gig



Friday, Don's birthday

17 February 1967

Hello Dearest Sweet,

Well, I'm feeling much better about your *feelings*. Yesterday's letter was ample proof that the postponement bothered you a bit too. In a nice, normal way. Your letter was like poetry with thoughts tumbling out, and I enjoyed the ride on the waves of your thoughts! Up-down, back-forth, all around. I had to laugh at the thought of being romantic with my friend and his malaria pills, yellow fever, gamma globulin state. I know it's not funny, but would you *not* kiss me if I said, "Sorry I didn't get my shots?" And you said, "Heavens! In my pure state, don't come near me." You're not debugged enough for me? Well, I will get checked if you insist, but I'll bet the average Hawaii-bound traveler doesn't go through all that. Those are U.S. bugs in Hawaii anyway. I really am horrified you have to go through a bug chamber to get to me. Seems to me we've always shared our bugs before this. Why stop now? Oh well, the doctors are wise, I'm sure. I'll be

²³ For more on military health care and beneficiaries, see Michelle Dolfini-Reed and Jennifer Jebo, *The Evolution of the Military Health Care System: Changes in Public Law and DOD Regulations* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2000), 29-32.

brave—maybe! But I assure you I love you, dingy gray over shirt, bugs, and all. And I think the idea of you buying a new suit is fine. I'll bring over the brown suit to wear while buying the new suit.

...

Mom is having a birthday cocktail party for Don and a few friends tonight, then she has a date with Colonel Hugh McGaw, Don has a date, and I guess I go to the movies with Liz. I've been seeing mostly English movies lately—all raw sex like *Alfie*, which is the story of a guy determined to stay single, though he'll sleep with anyone. But in the end, he doesn't have his peace of mind, which is how he says the “birds” [females] always get you anyway. They don't let you have your peace of mind. I do believe the man has a point there.²⁴

I really think March has more and more possibilities. It more nearly breaks up the year in the middle. Waiting now is better than waiting after, because there still is Hawaii to look to. So, the 15–16 March is it until you say for sure, then for REAL. Roger 15–16! Only three-and-a-half weeks now.

Gig



Saturday Night

18 February 1967

Raining—no fly[ing today]

Hi Honey,

One of these days, I'll get your letter where you know about the change in R&R dates. Oh well, this way everyone has extra time to plan. As far as the \$337 for your ticket, that will still be good just change the reservation date ASAP when I give you the firm date.

Right, who wants pants anyway. Probably get torn up!

...

Remember our first honeymoon? Hell, we never had one. This will be our first real honest honeymoon!

Mid-March could run from the 13th to the 17th. We won't get the R&R quotas from the wing until near the end of this month.

²⁴ *Alfie*, directed by Lewis Gilbert, starring Michael Caine (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1966).

It sure has been a lot of fun just thinking about it, hasn't it? . . . When we do get together, it will have been a full five months (my counting) since we saw each other. Hell, that's like rounding the horn or worse! I don't think it took Christopher Columbus that long to get to America to start with.²⁵ Well, anyway, it is a hell of a long time and I know we both need R&R now!

We have a whole series of inspections starting next week, and I'm still working on awards—four of them that I thought were okay came back today so I have to fix them up. They are a bitch to write up just exactly right. I've been working on a Bronze Star for three months. And I'm starting another one for Colonel Owens. The group executive officer said write him up a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, and I figure if I have to write the damn thing it'll be at least a Bronze Star—medals, that's something else.

All your new clothes and I'll look like hell in one trouser and one shirt. I'll have to buy a suit, skivvies, swimsuit, and the whole bit I guess in Honolulu.

I finally remembered what day I told you about the change in plans—the 8th—so surely you knew by the 14th. Maybe your next letter will say. I sure hope you aren't beaten down by it.

. . .

One of our four 100-kilowatt power plants finally gave up the ghost today after 4,000 hours of continuous output. They bought two Japanese generators before they came in country—only supposed to last about 2,500 hours, so that's really very good, but we figured we could hold our own until 1 February when the civilians were supposed to have our permanent power in. We've gone three weeks past that and they're more than seven weeks late and quitting to boot. RMK/RBJ that's the combine of companies. They are really screwed up.²⁶

Boy, I'll be glad to get back to the land of toilets and running INSIDE water. I had a couple of close shaves! Shave? I had to buy a cheap shaver today. First time they had any since I got here. I can still put the five-blad-

²⁵ Calculations vary but, after sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, land was sighted by a sailor named Rodrigo Bernajo about 10 weeks later, though Columbus took the credit for the discovery.

²⁶ RMK-RBJ was a consortium created by the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War for American construction support. The so-called "Vietnam Builders" included Raymond International, Morrison-Knudsen International, Brown & Root, and J. A. Construction.

ed head to work through. There haven't been any Bangkok trips for a long time.

Lord, it's sleep time. ZAP.

YES, I LOVE YOU!

Ray



Sunday night

19 February 1967

. . .

Finally got your letter where you sat half in and half out of Austin. It really did shoot you down didn't it? I'm really sorry, Honey. I hate to do that to you, although I really didn't have any choice one the matter to start with, with this damned inspection. Would you believe they are coming from—you guessed it, Hawaii—FMFPAC [Fleet Marine Force, Pacific] that's Kaneohe.

Now you know what it's like to be sitting on a catapult on a carrier. You'll be roaring away, full power, feet off the brakes, and not going anywhere until he hits the button. Kind of like you don't have any control over the situation, but there you are anyway! Enough, enough, I've been miserable through two weeks of your ever-increasing bliss knowing the trip was put off for a month. It's been a bad deal all the way around. . . .

“Act III, Scene I, place: Austin, TX, time: confusion. Hence lights dim, shh, ACTION. Lights dim and slowly brighten on WOMAN in a purple muumuu (wife), wringing her hands. . . .”

Love,

Ray



Sunday night and raining

20 February 1967

Hi Honey,

I've been thinking of you all weekend—always on weekends. . . . Everyone else is cavorting around, and I try hard to cavort, but I chicken out without a guiding arm to steer me around. However, I did get out Friday night. Mom's party for Don's business associates was that night. . . .

I also took the letter from Congressman James J. Pickle (D-TX) along and we all allowed as how we'd vote for him, since he read about you in the paper, but we liked it anyway.

...

Saturday was sort of nothing, so I decided to bathe them [children] good Saturday night and go to church Sunday, which we did and all was fine with a seating arrangement of Don, Kirk, me, Karen, Mom, and Robin. Dressing them all alone Sundays is so frantic that I almost give up every time, and certainly that's one of the times I wish for you. But bath night takes a good second and, of course, many other times too numerous to mention!

Don took them to the movies in south Austin—a new theater—while I stayed home this afternoon to read *Look* magazine's first installment of Manchester's *Death of a President*, which is really very good writing.²⁷ Anyway when all came home, I asked Karen where her "teeth" were and she said she had them in her *lap* at the show while she was eating popcorn and they must have dropped when she got up. I *really* hit the ceiling and called Don to find where it [the theater] was, and asked him to come with me to get them. He said, "You'll never find them with thousands of kids in the dark." I hung up on him mad and said I was going anyway! So out we charged at 1730 (luckily a pork roast cooking) and drove *way* across town, with me telling Karen she was going to have to *live* with crooked teeth if she couldn't find them and rode in silence the whole way. She really crawled around and bless her heart *did* find them. All was joyful then and we got to enjoy our pork dinner after all! A happy relieved family.

...

I told Don he owed me a beer for betting I couldn't find them and he apologized for not going with me. In other words, he caught hell from me and Mom! Poor dear, after his noble movie afternoon with five kids.

...

²⁷ William Manchester's *Death of a President* was commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy to serve as an account of the assassination of her husband. She attempted to halt publication until the author made changes to the manuscript she and Robert F. Kennedy deemed "unflattering." Manchester was offered \$665,000 from *Look* for serial rights to the four articles that would be published on 24 January, 7 February, 21 February, and 7 March 1967. See also William Manchester, *The Death of a President, November 20–November 25, 1963* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

News tonight—Oppenheimer died a semihero of throat cancer. [He was] very wan at the end, very human, and very sad.²⁸

I miss you once again. Like all the time. Tell me *for sure* the new date ASAP. I must make new reservations again. I know 15–16 March, but is it for sure? Say Roger, FOR SURE. Bank account now reads \$2,715.

Not too sure I read you right about a new major there to help, and you kept your job anyway because you're so good. Right? Sounds good. Hope it is. New commanding officer is back in the good graces of me. Also, very glad your shower is fixed.

Things sound under control, and I hope they are. I never see how you have time to write. You're such a *good* boy! Drunk or sober, only please stay sober cause I like you better that way. Hawaii *ahi* [there], you can get smashed there one night. Me drive home. Seriously dear, stay away from the club. Beer and popcorn is much better for you and safer all around. Don't let others make you forget us. They don't care, but we *do*. Ever so much.

And so, sweet kisses and goodnight.

Wifsan (issue type),
Gig



Tuesday night
21 February 1967

Hi Baby,

Just a note to say hello. You remember how to say hello? No, okay, I'll show you in Hawaii. . . . I feel like eating and running like Mom used to say, "All Ray does is come home and change clothes. I'm just a laundry service." Don't feel that way tonight. You're a hell of a lot more than a mail service, I guarantee you! When I first started talking about R&R, it was like it belonged to someone else, like I didn't rate it yet. I can assure you I don't feel that way anymore. We're so lucky to have the opportunity to see each other I can't believe it. Couldn't do that the first time, could we?

Takes a war to make people realize there are such things in life as love and families and a reason for things—many reasons. And I'm never too

²⁸ "Obituary: J. Robert Oppenheimer, Atom Bomb Pioneer, Dies," *New York Times*, 19 February 1967.

old to learn a few things about life. I've learned a few new things over here that's for sure. Like how extremely fortunate we are to have each other's love. I guess that's the most important thing, and our children will find their loves when the time is ready and right. I'm certain of that.

Please don't feel too short-sheeted. It's been a very, very busy day. I flew one of the most complete hops I've ever had, even if only one gun worked. I just better hit the rack now. You know I love you, Gig.

Always,
Ray



21 February 1967

Hello Sweetheart,

I've been wondering what's going on around you lately. From the news it sounds like a lot, but I've missed the Vietnam report on the 1800 nightly news for two nights and have just heard snatches like "15 operations going on," a big one near Quang Ngai by the South Vietnamese, another near Da Nang, and I keep wondering which ones you've been working near. Not that you should tell me, as I'd probably worry and you can do without that.

...

Finished more chapters of Manchester's book on President John F. Kennedy and read until midnight last night. Then I stumbled around washing my hair this morning so I'd look presentable as a chauffeur for Karen's class, which had a field day trip to a University of Texas Glass Shop lab.

...

I'm sure sorry about that razor head delay. I'm positive it will get to you now before I could get another, and surely it will be there soon. It's at the point now where you can get one in Hawaii quicker than I could send one too.

Your itinerary of things to do in Hawaii sounds lovely and much too good to be real. I'm going to Bergstrom to get shots on Thursday if necessary. I will check at least.

Kathy is prettier and huskier every day. A *great eater*. She thinks everything is yum yum. . . .

She says "Dad'n Bye-Plane." And she knows your letters now. She can

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ride behind the kids on their bikes and hang on too. How about that? She needs a tricycle, but makes the most of ones she finds at other people's houses.

I'm behind on repairing bikes, mending clothes, and repair work in general. That's a full-time job. Maybe when the weather is better. I find that so many problems often solve themselves in time. (Like razor heads?) Oh sorry, I'm trying to be tactful, but it's hard when I'm being *shouted* at all the way from Vietnam!

Hey man, I love you. Don't be mad at me. Just keep building those bonfires under me. Feels so good!

XXXs and stuff,

Gig

P.S. Got your Wednesday letter from 15 February on my Monday, 20 February. Not too bad.



Thursday

23 February 1967

Hello Honey,

Do you know I'm getting a callous on my writing finger? Maybe I should write left-handed! *No? Why not? It feels pretty good. Looks like your handwriting. Thought that would get you. Does it grab you? Hey, I've got an idea, that is, this is my idea: I'll be the English major, you be the major, major. Okay?*²⁹

...

Thanks to you I got a smallpox vaccination today. It was the *wrong* day but Kathy and I looked pitiful and the allergy clinic turned into the shot clinic in our honor. Somehow, anything a woman does on a base looks *wrong*. I don't mind that, but I resent the satisfaction males always get for being right and telling you so. It's Adam and Eve every time. They say look what you're making me do—breaking the law! And it's all your fault. And I do hope you appreciate it. Then we have to act very dependent. Thanks to you, my god, I'll always come on the *right* day from now on. You've made a righteous woman out of me!

When will men realize that women have their own time schedules. As

²⁹ The italicized text in this paragraph is where Gig switched hands and was writing with her left.

a matter of fact, we kind of follow the moon. I must say, Dear, you show superior knowledge about women. The only thing you forget is that if you ever get smug, that's when I'll either change the rules or kiss you and then change the rules. Just remember the way I play pool—dirty pool that is.

One thing you *can* count on is business—monkey business. No, really.

. . . Robin is just wise, wise, wise. And Karen and I keep using big words on her. Like “I see you’ve *progressed* a lot in the last hour.” (From nowhere to nowhere.) She has a puffed-out cheek from her shots at the dentist. Kirk has a big new crown on a tooth. The bill was \$33. The gas tank reads \$2,656 now and going down. Hey big spender from the Far East, how much do you have? How far can a girl go on one year’s savings? Wanna sell the boat?

. . .

For the moment, where are we going—Hawaii? When—soon? That’s enough.

Goodnight, Love,

Gig



Thursday night

23 February 1967

Hello Baby! How you all, Lazybeth?

I estimated the middle of March. How does 15 March sound to you? Well, it better sound great because that is the date. You get there 15 March, I'll get there the 15th, and KABOOM—look out Hawaii!

You plan to get there anytime from 0800 in the morning to 1400 in the afternoon, and I should be there just before you. I'll have to leave about 0900 in the morning of 21 March and I'll get there about 3 hours before I started!

How's them apples? The IDL (International Date Line) will really foul you up if you don't understand it, and you don't have to—I do. I'll lose an entire day coming back. Tonight, I told the boss I'd chosen 15 March for R&R and he lowed as how why not—do it! Even offered as how he really should write you a note of explanation as to why he chose to upset such a perfect setup. But he's used to a different type—his wife had her bosoms rebuilt through the Navy plastic surgeons, although she won't dye her hair blonde either. I guess he's not to used to explaining, just doing. It's

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Figure 26. Maj Ray Stice in the cockpit (left) prior to a hop, Chu Lai



Source: Stice family collection.

okay, he's good to work for, keeps me on my toes, and creates a continuing challenge. Although sometimes I wish I knew shorthand to take notes, because he expresses himself so well that I forget the detailed words and end up with generalities. I guess I should blame Mom for that. She is a great generalizer even in her own specialism, and I'm sure a chip off that block and my dad's C averages. He didn't help much in the acumen area. I guess I'm a stupid specialist. How's that anachronism?

Damn, I don't have time to get a tan before Hawaii. I'll probably look sick there. I'm not too sure of the temperature; it's 95 and 96 here today and tomorrow. The sun's out for a switch. Last night, even half the moon lit up the terrain like a full moon. When it's clear, it's really clear. But after getting up at 0400 this morning for a 0500 brief, the damn thing moved in all the way up to the DMZ and the wing ended up "hold" then about 0730 CANK. Lost some good sleeping there.

You'll have to forgive me and whatever state I happen to be in. There's

no particular change from here to there, even getting there three hours before I start. . . . I'll have to buy everything there I suppose, nothing here that's for sure. Do you love me, Baby? Guess you should. It would be more acceptable that way.

We sure have a one-way mailman. So and so hasn't produced in about three days. I told him, by damn, he'd better write one himself if I didn't get one tomorrow. I did get a couple of flicks back from Hawaii, but they weren't as good as the others. The air is a little bit rough, and you can't see too much. Besides, I left the dust cover on a couple of times; takes beautiful pictures of the inside of the dust cover!

Hey! . . . Would you believe I love YOU! No? Okay, you just wait. I'll show you. Oops, excuse me, we just lost our second 100 kilowatt [generator]. Work to do.

See you later, love san.

Ray



Saturday night
25 February 1967

Hello Baby,

I'm sure glad I keep those homemade calendars I made at Quantico. I swore I wrote you last night and I didn't! I try to write you every other day and once in a while I miss of course. Do you keep a record? You go three days in a row and then stop three days sometimes. How does a face-to-face confrontation on this matter sound? Okay, you meet me in Honolulu on 15 March and we'll discuss this problem. Today the skipper said, "What's your wife's name?" I explained it. "Why?" Just might drop her a sorry about that letter. I'd be pleased if he had the time. He's sort of hitting it hard right now.

Been practicing one-upmanship today. First up north to recon the DMZ and the new group colonel (Colonel Douglas D. Petty's gone, thank the Lord) was leading. He wanted rocket pods for familiarization I guess. Anyway, I ended up with about 300 pounds more fuel over Da Nang and we broke off and lucked into a great secondary just two or three minutes for each of two runs. [It was a] 100 percent climb to DM, idle descent back

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to home plate, straight in, and not too bad.³⁰ One of the enlisted plane captains had asked me to take his camera along and shoot some movies for him. So, I was alternating back and forth—both cameras and guns going at the same time! I should be able to hit 80 missions before R&R—no sweat—got 75 now and two weeks to go.

Oh man, the thought of seeing you so soon is almost overwhelming, but I know I need it too. Yesterday, I had a headache, and it took five or six beers instead of one or two to unwind and then the noise and pressure combined . . . well, it's time for a change of pace.

Today, it was 96 degrees, and I was worrying about the fact that I would have to become reacclimated after living under air conditioning in Hawaii plus from the high humidity here to the fairly low humidity of Hawaii. But such are the problems of today's intercontinental travelers! Yes, you too are about to join the jet-sets. To play the piper is to pay the price! How about my sweet stick-in-the mud going into orbit all by her lonesome! That's really a big step, now really, no one to lead, no help, no assistance, all alone. Go! Great, my hats off to you (my heart too, more scratchy)!

. . .

Oops, the time snuck up on me. Got to go to bed. Got a 0500 brief again tomorrow (need that beauty sleep) (joke, joke).

For you, Gig. Goodnight, Sweetheart, see you soon (later yeah, but more better sooner huh?)

Love you, Honey,
Ray



Sunday afternoon
26 February 1967

Hi Sweet Pie,
I'm feeling good. Just took a good bath and the house is unbelievably quiet! Kathy's asleep, the girls are at the movies with girlfriends, and Kirk is next door. It's a gray, cold day out but I've been up since 0800 and have

³⁰ DM refers to the decision height or altitude where a pilot checks to ensure they will meet landing requirements.

things really cleaned out for Goodwill bags the kids brought home from school to fill. I guess the combination of being cleaned up and cleaned out is a good one! You would have enjoyed this weekend too. It's been so peaceful.

I took the girls to the civic ballet Friday night, and Kirk and Kathy went to Mom's and spent the night there, so Saturday morning the girls slept late, and I woke at 0800 with nothing to do and really missing you!

...

I am waiting on your definite word on the date to leave. Maybe it will come soon. Time's (March is only two days away) getting there! I do hope to get shoes and extra goodies all bought by next week so all will be ready.

This has been such a nice big house. I do hope we can continue to live in a big house from now on. It's a very sane way to live and I manage to keep up with the work alone, despite the size of house, now that the kids are in school. I may need help again though if our social life expands, as let's face it, now I have too much time! Like a whole year to diddle away. Doodle away? Dwaddle away? Dribble away? Yeah, like waste. Especially this long Sunday afternoon. Bed anyone?

No news from Milly in several weeks. She's been snowed in a lot, that much I know. I would call her today if I weren't hanging on to money like a tightwad at the moment.

The \$337 to Hawaii is a "see America" special rate. You just have to fly during the week, no weekends, or you lose the rate.³¹ Something like that.

The manufacturers don't make your razor head anymore. That's what the drugstore man says, so if the Sears one doesn't fit, we'll just get a new one in Hawaii.

Bye for now, Love. I *do* miss you.

Gig



³¹ The "see America" rate may refer to the attempts being made to increase tourism in that area. See Marguerite S. Shaffer, "See America First": Re-Envisioning Nation and Region through Western Tourism," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (1996): 559-81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3640296>.

Monday
27 February 1967

Hi Dear,

So very glad to get your letter today with the dates to go firm at last: 15–21 March. So, all is well, and I called and made my reservation. . . .

So glad the commanding officer gave us his blessing. I gave him mine too, I guess! I take it back. Wow to getting bosoms fixed. Negate *forever!*

. . .

You've gotten so darn philosophical and mushy—yeah, mushy—since you've been there that I hope a little repair work will restore you to your usual acid self. Can't have a mushy husband. I like mine a little tough, meaner than hell but nice around the edges. However, that I can take care of, I think. I haven't changed. I still think I'm six feet tall.

As a matter of fact though, I am working on a new image. Since you've obviously never liked me the way I am. Hmm? No, not blonde. The new image is ME without KIDS. What in the heck do you suppose that's going to be like?

Kirk just came home, so he's going to dictate to me now. Over and out . . .

. . .

Just one more thing. Kathy saw your letters this morning, smiled, and said "Dad'n!" So, just for fun, I opened it up and read the first line to her. It said, "Hi, Baby!" She stood for a minute and then said, "Hi Dad'n!" She associates you now with your shoes, your boat and plane, and pictures.

Bye for now, Honey. I do love you too, mush and all. How mush? Mush mush.

That's how mush.

Gig nyet Lazibeth!



Monday night
27 February 1967

Hi Darling,

This is going to be so short that I hate to start! Today started out with a 0500 brief and CANK afternoon brief. Almost CANK, go get them in the black. I had to fire the guns to get warmed up as its cool today! Saturday,

I got so eager, I had all the switches turned on and the Bird Dog was really short on fuel (me too) and I dropped down from 10 grand [10,000 feet], pulled it through real hard, pdq. Yeah, I squirted off 50 rounds in the damn turn before I was aligned up with the target! (The trigger is in the stick.) Such a good deal, since I only have 200 to start with! Once in a while, you hear those magic words, "Good shooting. Get 'em, Babes!"

Every night, I dream about us in Hawaii. It's so good I can hardly believe it. You really ready to take on the Chu Lai terror? I'm ready for the Austin Ape'ette (Wif). Yeah, you san. So come on, Baby, I've ready! Takes two to tango. Would you believe tangle, would you believe . . . to hell with it. I'm ready, I'm ready.

I'm also dragging and sagging and only six hours away from the next brief. Xxxs, Honey, many kisses, lots of squeezes, and all my love.

Ray

I got my third Air Medal today in the mail.³²



Tuesday

Farewell February, Hello March

28 February 1967

Darling,

This is going to be sort of short. It's 2300, . . . and I've been buying shoes all day. How's that for a double-barreled reason to be short?

. . .

I should arrive on Pan Am at 1420 on flight 821 . . . only on 15 March this time. I haven't picked up my ticket yet, but they confirmed it all again for me.

I'm not at all satisfied with the way I'm going to look for you, . . . and I feel more like an alley cat than a bird of paradise. At any rate, I shall be *colorful*, and you'll be able to spot me. For some strange reason, I'll be wearing an orange and white suit, so just yell *TEXAS* and that'll be me!

One of my other dresses doesn't seem to have shoes that match it, so I may go native and wiggle a toe at you. Don't you dare say I never saw her before in my life, like that North Carolina greeting. I'm still crushed

³² MABS-13 Command Chronology, 1-31 May 1967, Marine Corps Archives, History Division, Quantico, VA.

from that. Could I help being pregnant with a new permanent? At least *this* time, I won't be pregnant!

I said this was going to be short. . . . I'm worried about money. I wish you'd write me one of your reassuring letters. All three kids have to go to the dentist again tomorrow and I read \$2,409 in the bank book, with the \$337 plane ticket still to go. There goes my \$363, so I'm still where I am.

Mother keeps saying I don't have to pay everything at *once* but what's the difference? She says the difference is cash on hand. I don't know. I just worry and NEED YOU. Now that I've almost got you in hand, like two weeks away, I keep thinking my problems will be solved. You'll say, "It's okay, Honey. Everything will be fine." That's what you'll say, isn't it? No! That's what I'll say to you, and we'll have a fine time fooling each other. Only difference is I trust you, except when it comes to buying boats! All right, I'll take that back. You've really been ribbed enough and I *love* your boat. How's that?

XXXs

Gig

·6·

MARCH 1967

Wednesday night

1 March 1967

Hello!

Just two weeks to you know what! Next week, a guy is going to reserve our hotel room at the Ilikai. Today, I got paid, tomorrow update my shots, and look out! My clothes are going to be a mess probably. I shouldn't need any the first couple of days, right? I guess you heard the news reports. They finally hit Da Nang a couple of days ago and today one of the [units] up north had a real fight.¹ Well, that's the name of the game, you know. Today was our (the group's) 25th birthday and for some idiotic reason General Lewis W. Walt and General Louis B. Robertshaw flew down and cut a cake at the officer's club.² You'd never guess what the cake said, "Happy 25th Birthday MABS-13 and many more." I almost died. It should have been MAG-13; the entire group not just us! Even Colonel Dan H. John-

¹ Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., "Spring Action South of the DMZ—February-April 1967," in *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984).

² Marine Air Base Squadron 13, Marine Aircraft Group 13, Command Chronology (ComdC) 1-28 February 1967, Marine Corps Archives Branch, Quantico, VA.

son the new group commanding officer said, “Got telegrams from the 2d Wing” (he meant 1st Wing and that’s what Robertshaw is). Talk about bloopers. Even General Walt (III Marine Amphibious Force commander) got stuck on “professionalism” and . . . it has been a bad day. Starting with the club not having beer, missing supper, playing poker till 2130, and a 0500 brief this morning. Ugh, weather reconnaissance in I Corps area. The clouds were there all right between my ears!

You say you wonder which operation I’ve been working in. Would you believe 99 percent of them are in I Corps? I can’t keep track of all the names of the campaigns, and all this box score per se doesn’t mean much to me just what sort of a hop do I have and what can I make of it. I got a copy of U.S. Navy lieutenant Dieter Dengler’s evasion report today (the unexaggerated version and well classified).³ We have to turn it back in 36 hours and it is 4.5-inches thick! I’ll read it next year. . . . Finally beat the skipper in buying the drinks after the “party.” I told him his breaking-in period was over and from now on it was every man for himself. I don’t think I’ve ever beat him on a dice roll before. He threatened to write you and say, “Due to the exigencies of the service and the various combat problems in a Marine Aircraft Group in Chu Lai, Major Stice will have to forgo R&R.” I warned him not to mess with my 105-pound, 5-foot-tall monster wife; you’d burn him up and explode all over him! Thank you!

Blam—someone’s trying to break all the glasses. If they’re outgoing, bon voyage! If they’re incoming, stay out, you bastards! I guess it’s outgoing. You can hear the rounds out a ways. Would you believe I have the 0500 predawn patrol again tomorrow? That’s worse than the dawn patrol, you know? It’s drizzly and black and better do it early tonight. Like now, Baby. Don’t mind if I stifle a couple of yawns, do you? R&R where are you? Coming, coming! . . .

Goodnight, Darling.

I love you,
Ray



³ For more on the February 1966 incident, see Stuart Anderson, “Dieter Dengler: Heroic Immigrant Pilot Who Escaped POW Camp,” *Forbes*, 20 March 2017.

Thursday
2 March 1967

Hi Darling,

I'm having a bit of trouble getting a letter off to you. That's what happens to daytime letters. Nighttime ones are the best.

...

You wrote us a great letter yesterday. The one to the kids and me and they were all pleased to be talked to in person. A little surprised that you know so much that's going on! A little birdie told you and they forget that. They were speechless and caught red-handed not writing their letters. Perhaps this will produce some, but don't hold your breath. The weather has turned good and it's like spring, so they are full of beans and play every afternoon.

I'm like a bowl full of mush after one of your letters. You really do get to me in more ways than you know! I feel like a dog for making you think I was so upset about the first no-go. Really, it is so much better this month for us both that we should thank the commanding officer. He was sweet to want to write me an apology. I think the strain of holding back your normal instincts in order to *do* the jobs you have to do is the hardest thing for all of you. You have to put *everything* else aside and that takes such tremendous self-will and discipline. Everything is a life-or-death matter, so you just walk around on alert all day every day, and it's no wonder it takes five or six beers to come down. And even then, you're still turned on a little. I'm so proud of the way you can sleep. That's proof of how intensely you use yourself. Only I wish you could share my peaceful moments like now and listen to the birds. In short, just live a little. I think you must not try to roar around in Hawaii keeping me happy. Really, I'm a very quiet type at heart, and I'll be content just to be near you and watch you unwind. I fully expect to gaze out a window waiting for you to wake up. I did it in Fort Worth the first day you were home from Japan. Your clock has to unwind a long way to get down to my speed. And then we'll tick-tock together at a nice slow speed regardless of the hula hullabaloo! I'll teach you to daydream if you'll let me. You start by pouring sand through your fingers. No, I'll start by turning you off (after a *relaxing* welcome) and then put you back on keel very slowly—no wisecracks—well, maybe a few but only for laugh therapy. You'll probably say, "Do you want to do such and such" 10 times not believing me when I say no. Then after a long while,

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you'll say I want to do such and such, and I'll say, "Yes." I think you're ready to pour sand through your fingers. In short, I'll let you be number one guy—hog heaven. Let's face it, you *have* been working harder than I have, though I put on a good front! I think I'm going to like being a *wahini* [Polynesian woman]! If the Hawaiian types don't steal my thunder!

Well, obviously I'm having a lovely time thinking about it and you are too, and it is quite unbelievable.

...

My only problem is shoes at the moment. No one has my small size and I need to shop some more.

A little noisy alarm clock named Kathy just went off in the bedroom, so best I go turn *her* off.

A thousand kisses and hugs.

Gig



Friday night
3 March 1967

Hi Honey,

No more of that left-handed writing. It's worse than mine!

So sorry you had to get a shot. Would you believe I got five? Gamma globulin, plague, typhus, typhoid, and cholera all dumped in my skinny blood-streamed arm at once? Ugh, well I told them no flying this morning. I could be out to lunch. Course there's no place to turn in bed. There is a certain looseness from the damn malaria pills. I'm not in too bad a condition—almost ready *pour voir* [see]!

Beautiful day today—high 80s and crystal clear. After five months running behind, I'm now convinced you're probably not supposed to even catch up to start with. There's just a certain amount of paper and a whole bucket full of projects that keep getting reprioritized. And then out of the blue, one of these insignificant pimps billows into a multiman hour first class project and I should have completed like last week. And we have to stop teaching so much "improvising" (a.k.a. stealing, shortcuts, and do it now regardless). I guess what they want is a well-oiled (stateside like) garrison in a combat area, and they aren't altogether compatible. Sometimes they are. One of our bunkers on the perimeter is all fixed out with fancy homemade signal/detection devices with corner wire and flashlight

batteries and, next to the entrance, sits a carefully watered and tilled thin little patch of ground with lettuce, watermelon, and celery shoots just breaking the soil—shows they're thinking about it anyway.

Decisions, decisions, always decisions—drink with the boss, play poker with Lou Gagnon and Jack Acey, or write WIFE!

Thought I saw a ghost tonight. Bill Bieber (VT-25) allegedly got hit and punched a couple of days ago down during Operation Desoto.⁴ He was at our bar laughing and scratching, but it turned out he was scheduled for this particular hop but another guy “took it.” Our word about Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12) an something else. Remember Lieutenant Colonel Jerome T. Colonel Hagen? He was recommended for a Distinguished Flying Cross from MAG-12. Both Charles S. Esterline and Lawrence A. “Larry” Whipple same, same. You remember them from Class and Quantico? Well, don't sweat if you don't. Remember ME? I'll reorient you in a couple of weeks if you desire.

Would you believe it's 2100 and bedtime? I just saw the scheduling of officer and he asked about the early, early tomorrow—that's enough for me.

...

Sure would like to kiss you right now. I think I'll do hand flips the first time or just take off in orbit. Mind peeling me off the walls of the Il-ikai when we first clash? Still can't believe it's true and less than two weeks away. Goodnight, Darling.

Pleasant dreams (are coming!)

I love you, Gig,
Ray



Friday night late
3 March 1967

Darling Sweet,
Oh my gosh, I just looked at the calendar and it's only about a week and three days away now. Your letter today, “Are you ready?” No, I'm not ready, not ready at all. Next week will be frantic panic. Everything keeps

⁴ Operation Desoto was a Marine Corps relief mission that lasted from 27 January to 7 April 1967. See Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, “The War in Southern I Corps,” in *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*.

intruding. Like having all four kids home today plus babysitting Sarah all day. That's not thinking about us at all. That's just routine toil. We're both such old work horses now. How can we ever turn into swans? Will you recognize me as work horse covered with swan's down?

You know, I wish we could have shared this day today. It was a freak spring/summer day, and Karen kept telling me she had spring fever. Mother had it yesterday. In fact, we all had it. We had to eat dinner by candlelight and porch light with the cool evening breeze blowing in. Nobody could decide whether we needed the porch light too, so there was much jumping up and down switching it on and off. . . .

Kirk went up and got his first job—50 cents at a construction site at the Methodist Church. A more radiant boy you've never seen. They let him carry boards in and out, and he got thirsty and had blisters on his hands. We couldn't find him and had to leave to get Sarah, but fortunately saw him at the site. Both sisters scolded him for disappearing, but all us women were proud of his accomplishment. On the way back from the Austin's with Sarah in the car, we stopped at the Camp Mabry military display and had a lovely climb on the plane and tanks.⁵ It was that kind of day. . . .

So, there it is. All of us missing you so. I know it must seem strange to you to be writing a wish-you-were-*here* letter with the excitement of seeing you *there* so near, but some days are so full of joyous living with children they should be shared by the eyes of the only other person who can see and feel like you do—meaning *you*, my husband and father of my children. And somehow the seeds of our love are beginning to show such lovely blossoms now. The hard years really are over. They are such *beautiful* children.

Now, back to reality. You flying ever so early hops with guns and cameras going at the same time and so many missions already and so many yet to go. It will all be over when you're home in five or six more months. Got to hang on. Thank God for Hawaii. Is it real? Time for bed. It's 0030. Thanks for being you. Thanks for marrying me. I love you.

Gig

See you at the Ilikai or R&R. I'll find you.

⁵ Camp Mabry is one of the oldest military installations in Texas and houses the Texas State Guard, Texas Military Department, Texas Military Forces, and Texas Military Forces Museum.



Saturday night
4 March 1967

Darling,

Maybe you'll get this before, maybe after, but it's so close now to the time we'll be together I can hardly bring myself to write. Yet, I hate letting a day go by without talking to you like this.

It's been a rugged three days for me. Kids home for one thing—school conference on Friday—and out of town guests in and out today. Saturday, we cleaned house all day and everything was spotless.

...

Then I watched *Porgy and Bess* on TV, and it's midnight again and I am pooped.⁶

Everyone has admired my Hawaii clothes and all are so happy for us. Still so much to do next week!

So, best I close up shop and, Baby, do let's have fun, just *us*, no relatives in Hawaii. I don't want to *think* relatives for two days!

I love and miss you *so*.

Goodnight, Dearest,
Gig



Sunday night
5 March 1967

Hello Sweet Thing,

...

Today the skipper actually did write you a letter. How about that? It's all sealed and I'll bring it along. Naturally, I'm curious what he said, but it's your letter not mine. It's addressed to Mrs. Ray Stice—Hawaii. Are you going somewhere, Baby? Wife, once in a while I let myself go and actually think about it—the trip that is. What else? It's so great, it's still unbeliev-

⁶ The original 1925 play *Porgy* by Dubose Heyward and subsequent *Porgy and Bess* opera by George Gershwin (1935) and then movie (1959) were considered somewhat controversial due to racial overtones. The film adaptation was only shown once on American television in 1967.

able. I guess I won't believe it until I get you in my arms and, even then, it'll take a real long hard hug to remove the doubts. A couple of weeks ago, I quit looking at those damn *Playboy* pictures, closed the locker doors, hung two [pictures] of you sitting next to the hearth on the outside, and said to myself: "That's your wifesan, that's your sweet loving mate, mother of your beautiful children, pride of your life, your wife, the essence of your soul." And if I do peek at one of the fanny's, it's yours not theirs... Rather look at you than some fake pinup.

. . . . Kirk, look what I sent you. This is something that you and Karen and Robin can take to school. It's a leaflet that says, "Welcome aboard. Why don't you stop being a bad Vietcong and come back to your home and family. We'll take good care of you and let you live where your ancestors lived. And if you have any friends that are tired of fighting and killing and want to stop being a Communist, bring him along. Chieu Hoi—the friendly hand." Sometimes we shoot paper at them. These were fired this morning real close to Chu Lai, and some of them blew back into the airfield outside my office.

God, I miss you, Gig—mentally, physically, sexually, socially—the entire bit. I miss your lips, your hands, you, even your lousy feet. Why should I have to look at some stupid *Playboy* picture to see you? All I want is you, nobody else, just you. I don't think it was intended that women were supposed to understand this problem, but it is more than I can cope with. I can hide it in the daytime, but not at night. When I write to you, it's all ALL you—no airplanes, no sky, no job, just you. Sometimes it takes hours to write a simple damn letter—hours. You have to understand the parameters—you're dead or alive—I'm alive. You remember those pictures you found in North Carolina that day you were trying to get life insurance number for me? I wish I had them of you now. It would be the brightest spot on the horizon, barring our R&R in Hawaii. No man in his right mind likes to be with other women, think about other women, that would be a horrible mistake. What ye take before God, forsake not. Covet not thy neighbor's wife. Honor and bless the bonds that bind thee.⁷ It may not be any closer to the bible than I am to church, but that's how I've always felt anyway.

I told the chaplain the other day that I'd break my neck to help him get set up and build a chapel, but I don't know if I'd ever get there when

⁷ Stice's adaptation from the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:17.

Figure 27. Gig Stice at home in Austin, TX, ca. 1967



Source: Stice family collection.

it was built.⁸ We are working more now—not less—can't even do my own laundry now. No time to even go to the PX. We're pushing 800 personnel now, counting the medical and chaplain.⁹ Like busy. Yawns are so good for the soul, and a tired yawn is such a complete 180 from a bored yawn. I'd damn near forgotten their existence.

⁸ For more on U.S. Navy and Marine Corps chaplains during the war, see Cdr Herbert L. Bergsma, *Chaplains with Marines in Vietnam, 1962–1971* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1985).

⁹ According to the command chronology, MABS-13 strength was approximately 755, though this may not account for personnel officially assigned to another unit or those in the process of transferring. Marine Air Base Squadron 13, Marine Aircraft Group 13, Command Chronology (ComdC) for 1–31 March 1967, Marine Corps Archives Branch, Quantico, VA, hereafter MABS-13 ComdC, March 1967.

Goodnight, Darling. It will be so good to see you again . . .

Love you, Ray

0130 [same day]

Hello again. They hit us a few minutes ago, but no tremendous problems.¹⁰ Going back to bed. I still probably have the early early.

XXXs,

Ray



Tuesday night

7 March 1967

Hi Honey,

No electricity, no nothing. The candle is supposed to be nondenominational, so I guess it's safe to use it.¹¹

The Ilikai wouldn't take reservations before 10 March, so I gave our request for a reservation to a lieutenant and a flight surgeon [here]. They're leaving tomorrow, and they'll be on their way home the same time we're on our way to Hawaii, so neither one of us will really know where we're going to stay. Just remember one thing—no, two things—1) have faith; and 2) check with the woman that helps get reservations at the R&R center. If I had my druthers, I'd reserve you a room looking out at Diamond Head for \$26 a day (and it just could cost that much). But the way they operate, it's like Christmas, you don't know until the last minute. At least we have two nice guys looking for a room for us. That's the main thing. I did have the early early this morning like I thought—weather recon. Hell, we had enough of our own weather let alone go out and look for more! Captain Clyde C. Simon was in the back and after checking the weather at one spot below Quang Ngai and climbing back through the crap on top, I gave the aircraft to Clyde. Clyde says, "I'll check Khe Sanh's WX [weather] in a few minutes," thinking he was heading north. I said, "What's your head-

¹⁰ MABS-13 ComdC, March 1967, 2. The official record reported: "At 0030 6 March 1967 approximately 20 82mm Mortar rounds fell on the Chu Lai Airfield. No Casualties were received."

¹¹ Decades after the fact, the candle was was still visible on the original letter.

ing, Clydson?" He says, "210 (southeast)." "What do you want, Clyde?" [It should have been] 310. Would you believe we're headed for either Laos or Pleiku, not north to Hue, Phu Bai, or Khe Sanh. Life's little mistakes, and we were both instructors yet! After a full day, which started with the mortar attack at 0030 and ended with my favorite mess sergeant's only can we change this to "biological" son's (with three older adopted sons) death tonight. Of course, we got him a ride to Okinawa in two hours with 26 days emergency leave. Really a shame . . . six months old and never saw him. Quite tragic. We were quite fortunate in the attack with only seven wounded. . . .

Don't quite understand it, but the group executive officer is still monitoring my flight time. He told the boss that he had two majors that were flying too much for the jobs they held (me and the base operations officer). I didn't know four-and-a-half hops a week was "too much."

If you'd believe me, I'd say I was tired as hell and it's been quite a long and very thorough day any way you slice it.

So, and therefore, I submit it's time to sleep now.

Goodnight, Baby,
Ray



Thursday
8 March 1967

Darling,
I'm still going around in circles but getting there! Have to return some shoes this morning. Dear Karen Kirkpatrick sent two pairs up from Houston, which fit and go with my clothes, so that problem is solved.

And I changed my reservation to come back 22 March instead of the 21st. Your letter said 21st absentmindedly probably still thinking 21 February, and I made it for 21 March but then decided to change it to the 22d to make it safe.

Things are shaping up though, and it seems very probable I'll make it to Hawaii after all! . . .

I'll arrive around 1420 on 15 March and go I guess to the Ilikai and call the R&R people or something like that! Hope you got our reservations okay. I know you are looking forward to it even more than I if that's possible!

I almost stopped writing on Tuesday, figuring I'd get to you before a letter but, just in case, here one is!

Sorry about your shots, but it probably needed doing anyway and I'm sure the effects are over by now.

All for now.

Whoopee!

See you,

Gig



Thursday night

9 March 1967

Hi Honey,

First off, let's get one thing straight, I love you . . . unequivocally, even if I'm the type that doesn't write his own mother. You're my wife, not her. You probably won't get this letter until after you get back from R&R. I've hardly dared let myself think about it too much. All I know is keep working and one of these days I'll be swept up and gone like a bird back to you . . . too much to describe and, according to your latest antimush letter, shouldn't be described at all! Never should have said that! All you get is hard times now, Lulu Belle. . . .¹²

Your finances slay me—probably the only Vietnam wife with a \$2,600 headache of too much loot. Just thank the Lord it's not in reverse and you didn't have that much. You're right, I'm saving, you're spending. It's okay, so don't sweat it. Just manage your expenses at the rate of a balance of \$200 less each month and you're at the right expenditure rate. Besides, you're learning how the buck does get spent and that's good experience.

. . .

Hey *wahini*, you sound like you have some real sweet children! Like to share them with you again one of these days. Well, guess I'd better not think about that too much.

This morning we shipped out over 1,500 Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)—the ground forces of the South Vietnamese military—

¹² This may be a reference to Lulu Belle from the husband and wife country music team of Lulu Belle and Scotty, who were known for their WLS Chicago radio broadcasts and themes of perfect relationships and rural life.

all rigged and ready for anything, and this afternoon had an F-4 with an engine fire that was almost spectacular before we got it out. Plus, Colonel Owens finally flew in from Okinawa, only I missed him. He was only here for a couple of minutes, had to get on over to Hong Kong, sorry.

Whoa, my eye lids almost won the battle. Sleep time, I guess! It's a good, tired sleep. Not too bad just lonely, of course.

You sure had a good notion of turning off and running down and unwinding. Yeah, sounds like what the doctor ordered. Let's have a little, as long as it's together, I could care less what!

I sure do love you,
Ray



Wednesday night
22 March 1967

Hello Darling,

I just smiled at myself in the mirror. It was the thought of our shared moments in the bathroom at the Ilikai. It just hit me that you really did see me in the mirror over there and now there's only one reflection. I miss that other one who hogged the mirror!

Oh Baby, it really was weird coming home last night. I let myself cry a bucket finally on the last hour in the dark to Austin. Don was there to meet me, and we walked in the house around 0130. The house seemed so strange, like I'd never been in it before. Mom had moved furniture in every room, which I didn't mind, but it added to my sense of isolation. I didn't really want to be back, but I couldn't wait to open the suitcases and somehow bring Hawaii in with me.

That did the trick. In short order, the living room looked like a flowerpot with muumuus spread all over the place and the three sleepy-eyed kids, Mom, and Don stunned by it all. I wanted them to share the feeling of being overwhelmed and they did. Finally, around 0300, we were all in bed, only to get up again at 0700.

By then, the lack of sleep and crying showed and felt in my eyes, but I was still keyed up and didn't collapse until later when Mom left. . . .

The sleep really helped me get over the awful part of missing you. I think I'd never have stopped crying if I hadn't slept. Somehow, this time leaving you, I didn't have to be brave for the kids and I think I cried for

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Figures 28 and 29. Ray and Gig Stice during R&R, Honolulu, HI, ca. 1967



Source: Stice family collection.

every leave-taking you've ever made. I just kept wishing you could have had that kind of release too. But I consoled myself that you were disciplined enough to sleep on the plane. I couldn't see which window was yours, though there was a lot of waving at the back and I just wish we had thought to make one last window signal. But the waves were like heartbeats from each window, and we all felt the same at that moment.

Fortunately, I didn't let down then but raced for the women's room and left physically better if not mentally! Figured you did the same.

I was overweight with the bags, but he said to get them weighed again at Los Angeles (LA). So then, I had breakfast and sat by a corpsman's wife (Da Nang), who ended up being beside me on the LA flight and helped me carry the four bags to the Air Bus and to the American terminal. She didn't know the way, so I helped her find it and on return she helped me. I was \$6 overweight at LA—not bad. . . . The important thing was the planes all *worked*! So, the kids aren't completely parentless. Leaving them parentless for even a week is pretty hard on them.

I realized this today when Karen said the teacher and class made a "big deal" after she mentioned some of the danger you had experienced at takeoff from Da Nang, and she said it made her nervous that they were

Figures 30. Maj Ray Stice, pictured here as a captain, in front of the operation board



Source: Stice family collection.

talking about her daddy all of a sudden and she actually shook. I guess she knows we can talk about it and be brave, but she doesn't like others to, and I told her I agreed and understood completely.

I'm much more conscious of the danger surrounding you now, probably because of hearing the other girls and people talk, but I'll work on controlling that. I've just suddenly started biting my nails!

It was so great, Sweetheart, every bit, even the fighting and the wonderful making up. Boy, old eagle-eyed Robin asked if we had a fight and I lied like a trooper. Some things she'd *never* understand!

The old USA looked so dull after Honolulu and I wondered how you'd ever stand it. Now I know a little bit about the way others live again. You forget that here, and it's good to get a refreshing look at others. We certainly aren't as kind, gentle, thoughtful, colorful, etc. as they are or as imaginative in the art of living. I learned a lot.

Now, it's midnight and I'm tired again and can't play Cinderella anymore, but I'm so glad for that oasis in our year. It will keep us both going over this last hump. When our hands reach out again via these letters, I can readjust. I'll tell you this one last thing, Sweetheart. I never loved you

March 1967

more. Now, do let's be brave and all will be good like that again ever so soon.

Sweet Kisses,
Gig



Thursday
23 March 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

Hate to start this up again. Finally got to Da Nang yesterday afternoon about 1600 and couldn't get on down here until today. Da Nang always has something impressive going on and, about 0300 this morning, a Grumman A-6 Intruder ran into a big, huge Air Force transport, and we had fireworks and 500-pound bombs going off next to transit quarters for two hours.¹³ Used the same bunker again.

I don't know how or any other way to say it, but Major David W. Morrill went in just below the DMZ Saturday afternoon. He was making his fourth run on this machine gun nest and must have been hit during the pull-out from the side. They thought there was only one position, and it turned out there were seven. Tried to search the area, but it's strictly Indian territory. He's (and the radar observer) listed as missing, but there doesn't seem to be much doubt about the matter. They almost recalled me from R&R, but a Lieutenant Colonel Kenny C. Palmer volunteered to take over MABS, and when I got in today he had just been assigned commanding officer.¹⁴ Some homecoming, huh? It's a terrible thing, hard to adjust to. He was such a tremendous individual in all respects, really a shame.

Hate to put a dent on things. Our R&R was so beautiful and this is hard to accept.

¹³ This incident was one of the worst aviation accidents of the conflict, when an air traffic controller mistakenly cleared two aircraft for takeoff at the same time. The Marine Corps A-6 Intruder attempted to avoid the collision, but sliced through the nose of the Air Force Lockheed C-141 Starlifter, causing the fire and subsequent explosions. The intruder rolled, but the crew escaped serious injury. Five of the C-141 crew were killed. See Chris Hobson, *Vietnam Air Losses: United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Fixed-wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961-1973* (Hinkley, UK: Midland Press, 2001)

¹⁴ MABS-13, ComdC March 1967, 1.

Best thing now is to get some sleep for a change. Sure didn't get any last night. It was wonderful, Honey, just truly great.

Love,
Ray



Thursday night
23 March 1967

Darling Sweet,

...

I'm getting itchy for a note that you're back myself. It's hard to get back in our foxholes again, but there's still 32 weeks to go. Do hope the weather is better for you and that you weren't too exhausted when you got back. The way I collapsed, I was surprised at myself. . . . We did get *some* sleep over there, that I know!

Everyone has loved their shirts, muumuus, and all of it. The only one that didn't fit was the pink muumuu. Too small. So, I get to keep that one and end up with four, which makes me the big pig and I love it!

Mom tried on the blue one meant for Milly and, since her disappointment over the pink one was so great, I let her have it and I'll order another one for Milly. But both of the tent muumuus were great and even Helen liked hers.

The kids have enjoyed the ukulele tremendously. They took it and a guitar to school for lessons today in music class. Kirk made his boat immediately and is sanding and lacquering it. And went out and got another model car to make after finishing the boat. He took his picture to school, wore his shirt to school, and the girls are waiting until theirs are shortened breathlessly!

Kathy really made me laugh when she looked at our picture at the airport and saw you holding my bag. She was in the bedroom *standing* on the bag at that moment, and she couldn't figure out how it could be in two places at once! She said *bag* and pointed to the picture and her feet several times. Her pride and joy was to say, "I got shoe," when I got home. Mom had bought her new pair, and she was showing them off all over the place. She likes the flower bracelets too.

...

I guess I'm coming out of the clouds a bit but still miss you terribly.

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At least, I don't weep anymore. It was just so *darn* good being with you. I'll admit I'd like it on a full-time basis again. Everybody warned about the wrench of leaving, and I knew it too, but it was still worth it.

Well, goodnight, Dearest. There's a long Easter weekend of kids ahead (four days) and I'm *not* going to Houston, so best I save my strength.

P.S. I bought a pineapple, guava jelly, and Hawaiian punch today so the kids could have a "taste" of Hawaii. But it's still not like the real thing.

So glad we have the memory of the *real thing* to share in private.

Goodnight again, Sweetheart,
Gig

P.S. Did "Dave" like my letter? I know I was a bad girl to be so flip at the end of it. Sorry about me. Will you keep me anyway? I love it best when you wince and say nothing. There must be something there you like. Thank God for that.



Friday night
24 March 1967

Hello Darling,
Strangely enough, I happened to turn the TV on tonight just as CBS was showing a naval photograph essay on Marine air at Da Nang and Chu Lai. Mostly Da Nang and mostly about Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323 (VMFA-323) commanded by Lieutenant Andrew W. O'Donnell.¹⁵ They showed McDonnell Douglas F-4B Phantom IIs, plus building the runway on the sand at Chu Lai, so it was probably an old film. But it showed bomb runs, some captured Viet Cong, the mechanics at Da Nang, and one *arrested* landing at Chu Lai. It was a smaller aircraft, which I assume was an F-9. So how about that? It was pretty blurred, but I sat on the edge of my seat just because it involved you. Your films will be much better, I'm sure.

We're all wet here in a nice rain we had today. There is such a thing as a welcome rain! The grass is beginning to need mowing and the trees are all almost out. Makes everything nicer, of course.

¹⁵ Col Gerald R. Pitzl, *A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1987), 29-35.

...

Kirk brought home a clay dinosaur he made at school which he calls a “Brontoborus” *not* Brontosaurus. We’ve gotten some laughs out of it because it’s unsteady on its feet and *looks* like a *Brontoborus*.

I’m feeling much more relaxed about bills since our chat. That really did me worlds of good. I was beginning to get quite tense about money, as you know. I didn’t even wince when the washing machine leaked. So, it leaks, so maybe I’ll get it fixed. Everything’s going to be okay cause my papasan says so. At least I’m not worrying alone anymore! In fact, no worries just short fingernails. Hmm, they’re good!

I seem to notice . . . the full Vietnam reports now, but maybe that was mostly to hear if you got back okay, and I feel sure you did now. Of course, a letter will be “more better” than working it out myself.¹⁶

Karen said, “Yeah” to a report that the Viet Cong could be rehabilitated. She wants “our” side to win in typical small-girl fashion. I told her to be skeptical of long-term rehabilitation, but it is hard for her not to take the news literally. At least she knows which side is which!

Well, Sweetheart, it really is bedtime. I’m back to my old habits of making time by staying numb and dumb. For a while there, I sort of sparkled though, *n’est-ce pas* [isn’t it so]?

Many XXXs,
Gig
I LOVE YOU



Saturday night
25 March 1967

Hi Honey,
Well, things are slowing down to the usual whirlwind, although it’s still hard to accept the fact that Dave isn’t around anymore. That particular

¹⁶ The CBS and ABC news broadcast reports on the evening news throughout much of the conflict, including prime-time specials from Walter Cronkite, Morely Safer, and Dan Rather. See Victoria E. Johnson, comp., “Vietnam on Film and Television: Documentaries in the Library of Congress,” Moving Image Research Center, accessed 14 April 2023; and Sarah Rouse, “South Vietnam’s Film Legacy,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 6, no. 2 (1986): 211–22.

area is quite hot, and they just haven't been able to get a team in there yet to verify the whole thing, but the evidence is quite strong.

Have you been undergoing the postpartum blues? Not yet? Well, I hope you don't. So far, I haven't had time fortunately, although I managed to have a headache the first day, symptomatic at least. If you do feel an attack coming on, WORK LIKE HELL!

Had the early weather reconnaissance this morning. Nice way to start the day, although it's about 88 degrees, the breeze is blowing, and it started out to be quite a nice day after all.

...

Yeah, hello later, two weeks of not writing and I forget how.

The new skipper, Lieutenant Colonel Palmer, is trying to help get me into VMFA-314. If they go out of country in June, it would be okay; but if they don't go until August, it wouldn't work at all. It's a chance anyway you look at it. They just don't know and VMFA-323 looks dimmer all the time. I'm not alone in this particular problem, but that doesn't make it any easier.

When I was gone, the major's slate came out—those are tentative assignments. I haven't seen it yet, but Lou Gagnon said he thought I was slated for the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (2d MAW, Cherry Point or Beaufort). I'll try to get a copy tomorrow. That isn't what I've asked for, unless that came off an old training communication and fitness report and they haven't updated their cards yet.

Boy, this afternoon was dustville, blowing sand in every nook and cranny, ears and eyes. When the wind gets up to about 15 knots, we've had it. I am slightly discouraged about this F-4 bit, everyone sympathizes, but I still remember when my old drill instructor (DI) used to say sympathy wasn't in his book.

Huh? Think NICE thoughts? At a time like this? Okay, I'll think about you and the kids. How's that for a nice thought? Mrs. Sex Box of 1967 and her four trained—gotta be careful or I'll get bopped—beautiful children! See, no guts.

Maybe I can get some Vietnamese to paint some eyeballs on your snapshot. It looks like the half blind leading the blind!

Good night, Darling,
Ray



Figure 31. Maj Ray Stice, pictured here as a captain, wearing his flight suit



Source: Stice family collection.

Saturday night
25 March 1967

Darling Sweet,
Not much news to report tonight, except that I'm guilty of watching an

March 1967

Alfred Hitchcock movie until 0030! Shades of you *last* Saturday at the Ilikai. Bet mine was better than yours—Grace Kelly.¹⁷

...

I find myself glad the kids didn't come on the trip, because they aren't going through my bad case of missing you all over again. That's why I'll be glad when a letter from you comes so I can feel something with you. It's no good to miss you alone! Misery loves company, it's true.

And yet, I really don't begrudge your being there. It's just that I had you for a while and didn't really want to give you up. I'm not so generous in my old age. Oh boy, it is nice when you're around! Married life is pretty good, especially when you don't have it for a while! Then it's heaven for sure.

Well! Enough of that talk. Tomorrow is Easter, church, and dinner at Mom's and a hunt at Liz's. . . .

I dream of Hawaii now when I fall asleep. That's a safe time to remember lots of silly things like the man in the stuck elevator, you on the trash can binge, etc. I realized today I still haven't finished my roll of film on the old camera, so I finished it up and you'll get both rolls one of these days—not too long now. I know how hard it is to wait and I'm going to be more prompt where you're concerned. Maybe even that little bit will help.

That's what is hardest to do without you—be a disciplined person. When you're around, it doesn't seem like work, but alone I have to boss myself and I'm a lousy worker!

Well, this is going to be short. Alfred Hitchcock got the best of me tonight. I'll never scold you again on *that* score! Remember that.

Goodnight, Sweetheart,
Gig



Monday night
27 March 1967

Hi Baby,
Kathy baby that is! Fooled ya, didn't I? Tell your mom, "Shut up, Mom," and then kiss her quick before she bops you!

¹⁷ Grace Kelly made three movies with Hitchcock: *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Rear Window* (1954), and *To Catch a Thief* (1955).

Matter of fact, Kirk, you ask Mom to dance. Robin, you sing, and Karen, you show them how! Then we'll ask Pris to take movies of the whole bit, because no one else has no camera guts. Uncle Don can play the music. . . .

Yesterday afternoon, things started out wrong, and they've been wrong ever since! I was scheduled for a jobber where you're supposed to refuel twice and come back about four hours later. Ugh, so I headed for the head—first things being first—hung my pistol on a nail, preflighted the aircraft, suited up, *nada pistole* (shit, or words to that effect), and couldn't find my dog tags to boot. Bad start. . . . Oh, that pistol, I gave it to the uniformed police officer (UPO), he gave it to Clyde, he gave it to Kostanza, he gave it to Bill, . . . he gave it to someone, and it appeared out of the black in my hooch tonight after some mighty strange wanderings!

But behold, today is Monday. A chance to shine for our glorious Corps. Somethings not quite right in the beginning though. . . . I was scheduled for another one of those four-hour double in-flight refueling bastards with a 0500 brief, and the guy wakes me up at 0530. See what I mean? And worse yet, my playmate is none other than a guy I had to play training command with just before R&R and salvage his landing. It's pitch black, but I jump down to MABS, grab my gear, (can't get in because the doors are locked). . . . Down to H&M's flight line late and stumble out to the aircraft (no pistol, no chow). He's preflighted it (with or without a flashlight; never did find out), light off, ground control, taxi . . . there's a purely characteristic noise to aluminum scraping on concrete. The left wheel collapsed and dragged the wing tip so we lurched to a stop (the usual "What the *f—k!*"), unstrapped, leaped out of the sickly thing just as the moon sank and the sun popped up to reveal he had taxied into an uncovered unlit access hole in a new concrete refueling pit and broke the left main gear like a toothpick, completely off. . . .

I know exactly how the mouse feels sniffing the cheese on the loaded trap! Actually, it was worse still. As we landed yesterday after the abortive 2.2 [hours in], a plane captain came to get us in a NC-5 Curtis flying boat . . . Clyde stood in the center and I stood on the right side. The driver, feeling his oats, gunned the motor, shifted gears, did a hard left turn, and LAUNCHED me into a low orbit! I had my helmet in my left hand (with my movie camera and kneeboard inside) and my maps and hat in my right hand. I thought two things: first, this vehicle was going too fast to run. . . . By this time, Clyde and the driver are running back, I got up, every-

thing intact, camera still in my helmet, maps still in my right hand, sore elbow, and ribs. I asked the driver to slow down his cornerings, Dozo, and put Clyde on the outside this time! Had a lousy time trying to sleep on those particular spots. That's why this morning seemed to start wrong. . . .

I have a goose egg on my left elbow, damned sore rib cage on the left, and the most embarrassed face after that idiot taxiing into the hole this morning. Some happy Easter! . . . I guess it's time to take a belated hot shower, clean my cruddy teeth, sweep the sandpile out of my bed, and tune out the whole damned world, except the afterburners, and SLEEP.

Ah, life's sweet remedy—sleep.

Good night, Baby,

Love YOU!

Ray



Monday night

27 March 1967

Darling,

I don't know what to say to you about Dave. I've torn up three sheets of paper already, so I won't say anything. You said it all anyway, and you know how I feel.

I was relieved to get your letter. God almighty, what a homecoming. Sounded pretty awful all around. I don't understand about these bombs going off, but I'm glad you were safe. Poor Da Nang has really had it. The crash of the Intruders was in the news too. I don't know if that was the same one. There have been so many. But the base must be huge, and therefore it will recuperate. I'm just glad you're not there.

We're all fine here. The kids go back to school tomorrow. I will be glad to get things back in shape again by going to the commissary. We've sort of been existing on beans.

Everyone was colorful yesterday at the backyard party, Easter egg hunt, and Sarah's birthday. The girls and I wore our muumuus, leis, and strummed the ukulele. Mom was bright as a red cherry in her red muuu, as were Don and Sam. . . . As you can tell from the kid's letters, it was a full day. I practically slept through church, but revived at Mom's Sunday dinner.

About Kirk's letter, I said, "We never say anything to make Daddy scared." So he said, "I'm not scared" in his letter. He's not scared much! That one cries if I put butter on bread that he doesn't want buttered. He's got a long way to go before he fills his daddy's shoes, but he's learning. And he said what he did over my protesting, which shows he has guts at least! It would appear our son has a little of us both in him. The weepy part is me!

He wanted to see your medal, but I said you would show it to him when you come home because it is yours. Besides which, I don't want him bragging, which seven-year old's love to do. We struggled tearfully through plus and minus tonight again. He felt better when the girls laughed at the memory of how you *stuffed* the multiplication tables down Karen. Karen said, "Daddy was in the yellow chair and I was on the floor, wasn't I?" You "taught" her math in a hurry! I give you *Kirk* next year. Same, same. I take the second grade. You take the third.

The washing machine has a leaking filter. Parts ordered. Joe comes tomorrow to cut the grass, which is nice and green. Austin is suddenly as beautiful as Hawaii in its spring colors and weather quite perfect, only I keep thinking there's no place to go except to the lake or country. No ocean that is! I'm a walking tourist guide for Hawaii still.

Goodnight, Darling. Take good care.

I love you.

Gig



Tuesday night

28 March 1967

Hello Darling,

One week ago, we parted. It seems like a year. *The* year. The whole damn year.

I missed the news tonight, reading *A Day in the Life of President Johnson*.¹⁸ Funny that it seemed interesting to me tonight. Last week, getting off the plane in Dallas, the headlines seemed almost foreign to me, like

¹⁸ Jim Bishop, *A Day in the Life of President Johnson* (New York: Random House, 1967).

I was a foreigner. Now, I'm a groovy American again. Maybe I shed my American self so completely on the trip, I lost me along the way. I remember feeling awfully sympathetic toward a Hawaiian GI! I still feel like I left a part of me behind. Must have been you. That's it. Part of me went that way. Well, hey you! Bring me home.

...

I went to the commissary today. That's news? I always think of you on the way out. It was fun when you drive. Pretty dull alone.

...

A letter I really wish I could write would be to your commanding officer's wife. Boy, I *really* sympathize with her, but that one would be too tough for me I'm afraid.

...

I hope you got that main order of the day: sleep. I suppose you are checking out the new commanding officer. A pretty rough adjustment for everyone, I'm sure. I'm not expecting any letters until you have things squared away again, but I keep writing just in case you come home tired some night and a letter from me calms you down.

I would like to think so anyway. In a way, seeing you in Hawaii calmed me down too. . . .

Goodnight, Darling Love.

Take good care,

Gig

P.S. Tell me if you need anything I can get for you.

P.P.S. Kirk found the medal by himself. Can't hold that boy back. He was very proud of it.



Wednesday night

29 March 1967

Hi Honey,

Got your crying postcard, your crying . . . letter, and finally it looks like you're out of the woods safely.

We've continued to have our own problems: another two big generators gave up the boot, a command staff noncommissioned officer (NCO), Staff Sergeant Percy L. Wilford, dropped dead (28 years old) yesterday,

the water station burned down, and a liquid oxygen bottle blew up at the LOX [liquid oxygen] plant, hurting a couple of people some.¹⁹ This sure has been a wing dinger of a week, and then there's Mom's letter about Uncle Hobey dying, and today's only Wednesday!

One good thing, I got the two rolls of film from R&R today. I'll borrow a projector tomorrow and see you again, even if second hand!

Did I tell you they darn near called me back from R&R? Apparently, there was much discussion as to do it or not. Finally, some kind soul intervened, and they decided not to. I think it was the new commanding officer, Colonel Palmer. Anyway, I'm sure glad they left us alone. I'm sure it was a hard decision, but I would have done the same thing. There are times to just leave things alone.

But I have to admit, I had the damndest guilty feeling the first couple of days, especially that first night at Da Nang when I heard about it. That was grim. I'd been off having a ball while he gets killed fighting my war. When I got back the next day, and Colonel Palmer had just been assigned that minute, he handled it very well. He told me he could have had the group S-3's job, but he wanted Dave's job out of respect for him and the job he was trying to do and the sheer challenge of the job itself. Plus, he figured I needed some help. He figured right—800 people is damn near half of the entire group, all three gun squadrons, and H&MS to boot.

Listen to me, will you? Carrying on like a storm. Do me a favor and turn me off, will you, Dozo? Its late and I need a shower, like yesterday after that three-and-a-half-hour hop. And I have the 0500 weather hop in the morning. So, would you believe I dreamt we were walking in the shade of some trees somewhere?

Kiss everyone for me, well almost. Sure glad everyone liked the muumuus and other goodies.

Goodnight, Darling, I love you,
Ray



¹⁹ MABS-13, ComdC March 1967.

Wednesday night

29 March 1967

Hi Sweet,

Your Saturday letter came today. We're only four days off, that's not bad at all. You always seem to one up me though. Your news sounds fresher than mine. But I've finally figured out why that is. You just ignore my letters and—absorb and ignore, I should say—I'm the one who *answers* your letters. You don't answer mine unless it's a scornful aha! So, you've spent another thousand bucks. As a matter of fact, that's just what I did spend in March \$1,000. The bank statement came today and the incoming \$363 did look a bit puny in comparison to the outgoing.

. . . A man on Johnny Carson's show with ESP (85 percent accuracy rate) has an ESP hunch the war will be over in Vietnam in April or May!²⁰ That really upped my spirits.

I saw pictures of the guys in the Mekong tonight, and really Chu Lai is 100 percent better than that. They were in water up to their *necks* in Viet Cong country.

Report cards in today. Robin practically all As (i.e., all satisfactory or excellent). One "needs to improve." Karen had two "needs to improve," and Kirk 3. Kirk is the question mark.

The kids were in fine spirits tonight. . . . They all bubble. Such happy kids.

And you do a lot for *my* spirits. I laughed out loud at you putting eyeballs on my/our picture. You're not supposed to *stare* at it! Just *glance* and say, "Gee they look happy." For heaven's sake! My eyes are orange.

As for your advice to *work like hell*, that is good, very good, only I don't happen to have a war going on here. So, I just work like putter. . . .

I paid bills today, that I did, and drove out to take Mom's car to a garage, bring her back, and climb through trailers on display. We both nixed buying a camper trailer *ever*. I just told her airily that we thought we'd take the kids to Hawaii when we feel like a vacation. Why not? She was impressed. I'm still fighting a battle that Austin seems dull after Hawaii. So, Cherry Point, North Carolina, or Beaufort, South Carolina, even sounded kind of good. I just hate getting the kids stirred up though.

²⁰ Episode no. 1,145, *The Tonight Show*, starring Johnny Carson, NBC, aired on 28 March 1967.

It's so peaceful here. They do seem contented. No problems. That I like, of course.

Goodnight, Love, it's midnight and this it is off to bed.

Yes, I miss you. Yes, I love you. Yes, yes, yes.

Gig



Friday night

31 March 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, I just wrote Aunt Myrtle. It's a difficult thing to do and I always look to your approval on something like that or that important. I hope I said the right thing. . . .

Would you believe I have a real box of Cracker Jacks? Heard about them for years, and this is the first time I ever had any. I see why Buster Keaton seemed to enjoy that so much now!²¹

I warned you this would be short SHORT. I had a real fanny-busting double refueler today (three and a half hours). Besides that, after today's 106-degree temperature, well yeah, have to crank up the JP shower.

Goodnight you all, all of you, all.

And love to YOU!

Ray

²¹ Cracker Jacks, first introduced in 1896, are individual boxes with molasses-flavored, caramel-coated popcorn and peanuts that are well known for being packaged with a small prize like a baseball card, rings, stickers, toys, temporary tattoos, or booklets.

·7·

APRIL 1967

Saturday

April Fools' Day, 1967

Hi Dear,

Lord, I'm running a tight race with the mailman, but here goes anyway. I didn't write last night as I was reading about Captain Cook the one who "discovered" the Hawaiian Islands. It's a great book and I'd really like to buy it for you.¹

Your third letter came yesterday, and it looked like you were celebrating April Fools' Day early. Such a day! I really was sorry and surprised about your jeep bump. Thank God, it was not serious. I can't imagine what it felt like, but I'll bet you minimized it for my sake. You sounded shook up, but plenty cheerful that no bones were broken. And the other "accident" certainly didn't sound like your fault either. That's the trouble with life; half the stupid things that happen aren't our fault.

I just lost the race with the mailman. But that wasn't my fault either. Obviously, I was trying? . . .

. . .

[Jane Ball, the landlady] . . . said her husband, Vernon, was flying

¹ Gig is likely referring to Alan Villiers, *Captain James Cook* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967).

out of Saigon—stuff for South Vietnam, and she's only seen him five days since January. That equals *my* average for seeing you almost! She said being a Marine wife was the only thing that could have prepared her for that kind of life. He gets some hazardous duty pay I think, and that he'll look you up maybe. . . .

. . .

Now, back to your letter. I think those four-hour refueling hops sound really rugged and I'm impressed, but I hope you don't have to do them often. And two in a row was too much. Almost found myself glad that landing gear snapped. How's that for close wife support!

Read about the mishap below Quang Ngai, where some bombs dropped short. I hope it wasn't anyone from Chu Lai that you know. Thank goodness, you have such a really terrific attitude. Don't ever stop having it no matter what. By that I mean you don't get emotional except about things like gold charms that get thrown down incinerators and stupid wives who do stupid things like throw gold charms, etc.

. . .

More rain. I sure buy sprinklers at the right time. Hallelujah, it's \$363 time. April is a nice short, lovely month too. So glad we used up good old March with our holiday. It really *was* perfect, wasn't it? Perfect with a capital P. I know you had a lot on your mind, and that accounted for some of those silences, but I guess I did get your mind off of things for a while and as for me I lapped everything up like it was the most natural thing in the world. Home to me is you, and you on a silver platter is even better. What do I mean by that? You, without the kids around, treating me like a queen that's what.

No orders, no worries. Boy, we sure are going to do *that* again or something darn close. One week off every year just for us. Or at least one weekend!

Well, no more dreaming. Do you want me to mail you some movies? It sounds like you have a place to run them off. Do you? I sure will get hot on them if you do. I'm so glad you've got the ones from Hawaii. Do tell me how they came out.

I'm going to play cards with Mom and the Austin's tonight. Big Saturday night again!

All for now, Sweet Man. I love you ever so much.

Gig

April 1967



Sunday night

2 April 1967

Hi Sweet Pie,

Wow, Sunday night at last. Every weekend is like pulling teeth—four teeth that is. The kids run me through their personal high jumps, and each time I wonder if I'll make it with everyone still happy. Not that there's really *that* much sweat. But they put me through their paces.

. . . . How's your elbow by the way? And ribs?

This afternoon (Sunday), we took a picnic lunch and drove to Lakeway on Lake Travis. It was windy and we ate in the car, then drove around Lakeway. Don was "worn out" from driving us, and I laughed and said, "Think of Ray driving us all the way from Virginia trailing a boat!" He said, "I don't envy him," but considered it a head-shaking feat, which it was.

. . .

We talked of other trips to make this summer, and I even suggested Colorado, but we were all pretty tired after just 24 kilometers to Lake Travis! I lowed [bragged] as how Hawaii still beats all beauty spots I've seen so far. But Texas looks very pretty right now, of course, being spring and all. The kids are really going into the active stage, wanting to ride horseback, swim, etc. All *physical* things. . . .

And Kirk wants to try to build another orange crate car. I stalled him (barely) from searching for crates at the grocery store today.

. . .

Mother says, "How do you *stand* Kirk?" He's a running, jumping noise maker. I just grab him by the arm as he flies by, and he automatically ducks. And we all glare at him hard in restaurants, but even then, he's under the table getting old chewing gum.

Well, Dear Sweet, I didn't mean to write a book about us. Just like to talk to you, that's all. We all dumped water out of the boat again and I got it all dumped on me as usual! That boat doesn't like me, I think! Going to bed.

XXXs and hugs,

Gig



Sunday night

2 April 1967

Hi Honey,

No letters today, but that doesn't mean I haven't been thinking about you. Yesterday, I was blessed with four letters: yours and the three writing children. Now, those letters really were something else, really cute, and just like each of them fortunately. I entertained notions of separate answers, but not tonight. One of these days.

Last night, I slept under my fan. It keeps the mosquitoes off and me cool at the same time. Although, coolness is relative; it was 108 degrees yesterday. This morning, I had the early early weather reconnaissance, and there was lots of detectable weather to recon and all the other lines were out between weather stations. It's really nice flying in good weather when your instruments are working right, all the navigational aids and radars help, and Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, 362 kilometers away, fuel permitting. My pen just ran out. . .

We're really trying to fix up the hooch. I'm going to put in a back porch for the TV, shower, and icebox, and one guy thinks he can scrounge up an air conditioner. That would really do it. . . .

. . .

Between TV and afterburners, it's hard to decide whether to listen to the poker game or try to write, but I got some of those acoustical ear covers they use down on the runway. I went to bed last night at 2030, and I'm still yawning!

I bet I've told the R&R story 100 times, and it really was as great as it sounds, wasn't it? You're sure over your return adjustment, aren't you? Still a little something there? . . . I have to admit, you're RIGHT! I am glad you're not sweating the money so much. You must be *aware* of your expenses. . . .

Pretty night here. The wind's blowing hard, and the black skies are splotched with deep pink areas behind the clouds. You know the feeling just before a storm or during a quick break in a storm? All you want to do is go outside and watch.

Slight delay of four hours here. I had to go meter loading a ship. It's late, and they'll load like hell when they hear all the artillery. I'll sleep (it's ours) good tonight, but the colonel still wants to be down at the docks at dawn to see the ship before it pulls out.

April 1967

Good night, Sweet Baby.

I do love you!

Ray



Monday night

3 April 1967

Darling Sweet,

It's so good when Monday comes at last and there's your letter making me laugh at my "tearful-sleep-in . . . days." You reduce my torrent of words to a workable trickle. I try but I simply cannot be as succinct as you. Terse maybe yet? No, you aren't terse, you're *succinct*, even if I can't spell it. I feel it.

It was a good day for me today. . . .

But back to my good day. Number one, I got off a 10-page letter to Milly, plus pictures of you and kids, plus beads. *Very good*. . . .

Then number two good news was the orthodontist said to wait another 8-12 months before we start orthodontic treatments for Karen. . . .

So no more dental visits for the kids until fall, and we'll get the name of a good orthodontist whenever we move and maybe in the meantime, we'll get dental Medicare passed this year, who knows?

. . .

Yes, you did mention the near recall, and I wasn't surprised at the grim night at Da Nang, but I was glad to see you snap out of it when you saw the need to keep on. It sure helps to keep your head on.

I read about a GI who got overrun, but a volunteer managed to bind his wounds and stuff dirt around him, so the next day he was found and saved.

On to the ironing board! Goodnight, Dearest.

Gig



Tuesday night

4 April 1967

Hi Baby,

How's yours? Mine's fine! And here's a picture to prove it. Looks tired?

Yep . . . three early earlies in a row and a blinding sun yesterday afternoon, that's what happens to us middle agers.

. . .

Seat belts in airplanes were made to use all the time, not just when the storm lights up. See, I don't ignore your letters (completely!)

You think you're confused! I'll give you an example of "who done what to whom." Inbound and outbound stuff—KABOOM. "We're being attacked," [and a] call for "mortar illumination rounds so we can see." KABOOM, KABOOM, KABOOM, KABOOM! "We're being hit again. More illumination rounds quick!" "What?" "Are you kidding me?" "CEASE FIRE!"

End of soliloquy. This one took some real figuring. First, a short artillery round caused them (MAG-12) to think they were being hit. Then their request for illumination just made matters worse because some jerk fired high explosive mortar rounds instead of illumination. Get the picture? All this was Sunday night, our own post Easter egg roll, or "Here's eggs in your bunker. Ha, ha, ha."

Same same on orders—I don't believe nothing from nobody. Seeing's believing.

ESP that's "extra stupid possibility."

. . .

Boy, my ribs and elbow are still so damn sore from being launched off that NC-5 nine days ago that I can hardly sleep or cough. If I'm not flying tomorrow, I think I'll get my ribs X-rayed. I might have cracked one. Well, what can you do, stop breathing?

Slight break for popcorn—mm—much better. . . .

Hope the kids liked their story. I didn't have time to read it, but it looked good.

Hey! Goodnight lover. I have a chance to get to bed by 2100 and sleep until 0600 for a change. Better take it!

Yes, Darling, I miss you too—damn it—and there's still a long way to go.

See you later, Honey,

Ray



Tuesday
4 April 1967

Hello Sweetie,

Like wow, I feel like I've been to Vietnam. I just finished watching a two-hour CBS special called "Morley Safer's Vietnam: A Personal Report."² It was only one hour, but they had it on twice, so I saw it two times. He showed General William C. Westmoreland, Saigon, an R&R place, war shots—air and ground, though mostly helicopter, a gun ship, a tank, and helicopter stopped—even interviewed a soldier by the tank and then said the tank was blown up seconds after the interview by one *short* round by artillery (81 mm), which got a soldier by mistake and himself pinned down, plus scenes in Saigon bars and an interview with helicopter pilots.

It's been a day of thinking about the war, Hawaii, etc. It started with a phone call from Nonnie Haight (husband is Marine major correspondent at Da Nang) asking me how was Hawaii. . . .

Well, anyway we talked for an hour while Kathy dumped out drawers and turned over Kirk's plants.

. . .

That's the limit of my day. I did tell the kids about how *maybe* we'd go to North Carolina or South Carolina, and they were all for it in typical good-natured fashion. Nonnie, however, said South Carolina is sometimes hazy—like swampy and mosquitoey—but at this moment anything will be fine with you back. *Anything*.

I'm yawning, so I'll close before I make you yawn. Ready for bed yourself I'll bet. So, let's do it. I wonder if I'll dream about Vietnam? More better of you.

Goodnight Love,
Gig



² "Morley Safer's Vietnam: A Personal Report," *CBS News Special Report*, aired on 4 April 1967.

Wednesday
5 April 1967

Hello Angel,

Well! You did sort of short sheet me in today's letter, but somehow you came out smelling like a rose. I decided to read it to the kids and, of all letters, it got right to them. You mentioned Cracker Jacks for one thing, misspelled commercial for another—not *tialcial*—which delighted your whiz girls. . . . Then there was a discussion about the temperature here versus there and the time of day here versus there. We decided our dinner time was your breakfast time?³

. . .

I've had a pretty dull day waiting for the Sears washing machine serviceman to fix the drain on the darn thing. First it leaked, then wouldn't drain. . . . He tightened the pump in back and got a surprise. Man says, "I found your gun under the washing machine, young man." Kirk says, "No, that's my baby sister's!"

. . .

Johnny Carson has quit the *Tonight Show* during AFTRA strike because they showed his reruns. Reruns still going on, but he's in Miami. Tune in tomorrow.⁴

Life magazine had really interesting pictures of North Vietnam made by a guy who had to get a visa from Cuba first then travel 1,609 kilometers. Several *color* pics of prisoners of war (POWs) as well, I'll try to mail the article with this or in another envelope.⁵

Going to bed, yup, yup. I think we're over the year's hump almost. Maybe, yes? After this teeny tiny month.

. . .

³ The time difference from Austin, TX, to Vietnam would be, for example, 0600 Tuesday in Austin would be 1800 in Vietnam.

⁴ AFTRA refers to the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. For more on the strike, see Lawrence W. Lichty and David J. Leroy, "Missing the Newscaster: Reactions to the 1967 AFTRA Strike," *Journal of Broadcasting* 16, no. 2 (1972): 175-84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838157209386341>.

⁵ The article Gig refers to is about freelance photographer Lee Lockwood, who was the first and only American journalist allowed into North Vietnam since 1954. See Lockwood, "North Vietnam: Under Siege," *Life* 62, no. 14, 7 April 1967. Ironically, the publication date on this issue predates the letter.

Kisses and hugs,
Gig



Thursday night
6 April 1967

Hi Honey,

Would you believe this afternoon that I turned on my radio for the news and what did they have? Austin city news, believe it or not!⁶ Really took me back, just like I was right there—weirdo.

We properly dedicated our mess hall this morning—white picket fence, trees, flowers—with 1st Marine Aircraft Wing band from Da Nang, cake, and short speeches to boot. Guess I should have dedicated my hot shower! Well, seriously, we have done extremely well in some areas and that is one big important element of our daily living. We all eat the same food.⁷

Did you have that serious talk with Kirk yet? Hope so. We sure want him to try to do well, and that sure takes a lot of work from Kirk. I hate to tie a second grader down so hard, but the purely fun days just for fun itself are long gone. This is part of growing up and, in order to get going and catch up with our high order of living, the children have to start sooner than we did. Kirk will surely have some subjects in grade school that my dad first saw in college and I saw in high school. So, better get hot buddy! We want you to get ready for the world when you're a man and ready to work on your own.

The weather's been sort of poor the last few nights, and I've been using my fan as sort of a steady background noise, to keep the mosquitoes off, and sleeping three to four hours at a time. It's really nice for a change. And the Grumman F-9 Cougars have been down since Tuesday, so no flying, maybe next week.

The wing finally changed David Morrill and his radar intercept officer's (RIO) status from missing in action (MIA) to killed in action (KIA)

⁶ Stice could have been referring to several of the early stations based in Austin, including KNOW, KLBj, KMFA, KOKE, and KUT.

⁷ For more on mess halls during the conflict, see Fox Butterfield, "For 'Best Chow in Vietnam' They Even Risk Enemy Fire," *New York Times*, 29 February 1972.

this morning.⁸ They had two different teams out to the scene of the accident and there just wasn't any indication of an ejection. We'll close out his books; his gear has already been sent. Damn shame.

You know I still haven't seen our R&R flicks. I better borrow a projector and meter them tonight. Flicks—the last stupid flick we had here was *Fireball 500*.⁹ Remember one night when Kirk and I got mad at you and drove off in a huff and ended up seeing 500 way up outside at Fairfax, Virginia, somewhere? . . .

Time to say goodnight, Baby. I'm going to fire up the shower and take a long hot soak under the stars (and the mosquitoes).

It's kind of hard sometimes, with all the noise, but I have been able to work up a few dreams of you in case you're interested. Not all that bad!

Love you,
Ray



Thursday night
6 April 1967

Hello Honey,
I got your letter written on Sunday today. Not bad at all! Things sound hot but not too bad there too. *If* you get the air conditioner, if you get those earphones etc.! Shall I send you our old air conditioner out in the garage? Be glad to if you pay for it! Also lift it and crate it. Hmm.

. . .

Glad to hear you've got traces of memories of Hawaii left. I've got more than that, but somehow can't bear to look at all the folders yet. I really do want to order another muumuu for Milly, and I dream of porch furniture, so maybe I'll study them again.

⁸ The Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13) command chronology (ComdC) for 1-31 March 1967 notes that Maj Morrill's aircraft was downed over unfriendly territory and he was declared MIA on 18 March; there was no mention of his RIO, but he is later identified as 2dLt Maxim C. Parker. The MABS-13 ComdC for 1-30 April notes that Morrill's status was changed to KIA on 5 April. MABS-13, ComdC April 1967, Box __, Folder 077, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

⁹ *Fireball 500*, directed by William Asher, starring Frankie Avalon, Annette Funicello, and Fabian (Los Angeles, CA: American International Pictures, 1966).

It seems we *were* lucky to get this house. A real estate lady told Mom that people are desperate and offering to pay \$400 for a house in a good neighborhood like ours. It really has been pleasant, that's for sure.

Darling, don't try to write or answer all my letters. You know I write to keep up your spirits when there really isn't much news per se, but you don't have to do the same as much as I do. Remember I have *tons* more time, and I'm not fighting a war. Just relax and enjoy the sweat of *my* brow!

...

Which do you want, an intelligent cowardly wife or a happy dumb brave one?

Tell you what, you bring all my letters home and answer my questions at home. That's easy. All you have to do is climb in bed.

Hmm, nice thought.

Good night, Love,
Gig



Friday night
7 April 1967

Hi Sweet Pie,

...

But it was a pretty good day in all. The conference with Kirk's teacher was better than I'd hoped for. He was ready for third grade in all levels except spelling and has shown much improvement since fall. He's still a bit below average, but not much, and she thinks the summer months will make a lot of difference. Summer school costs \$25 and lasts six weeks. I think I'll enroll him, though he's antisummer school at the moment. They'll put him in third grade next fall and test him again before we move.

...

Tonight, we all went in the backyard and played march, which was fun because no one knew their right from left and either bumped into each other or went in opposite directions. They directed each other into fences and rose bushes, and Kathy made loud noises so we were all shouting over her. Just lovely! Had to tell the kids not to play scare with her anymore as all of a sudden, she was scared of the dark. She got over that though. . . .

I felt around in the dark at the movies last night on my ring, and sure enough one diamond was gone. I guess it came out while I washed dishes.

It's a wonder I haven't had one fall out before this. It looks like we'll have to go diamond shopping when you get back. Now there's a nice thought!

No letter from you today, but I put mine out and it fell in a puddle of sprinkler water. I hope it was readable. I was trying to trap the mailman by sprinkling in front of the mailbox, but somehow he sneaked in and left a Sears ad but didn't take my letter.

Speaking of Sears, which is on my blacklist too, I called *again* as the washing machine was still not draining. I'm collecting dirty sheets while all this Mickey Mouse goes on.¹⁰ Each time they ask how old is it, I say four to five years, which is approximate, right? I bet you have to open a charge account with them before your sheets come. I wish you luck with them.

...

That's about it, Love Dove. I hope things are a bit more smooth for you these days. So glad we got our vacation in early and without a hitch. Despite the sad homecoming for you, the week itself was beautiful and it was ours to remember. I'm sure Dave would have wanted it that way. His letter was proof of that.

Well now, I really think this is enough news for one letter. . . . I always hate to say goodnight so. . .

Good night!

...

P.S. You can be mushy again. I'll let you.

Gig



Sunday afternoon

9 April 1967

Hi Baby Doll,

Sunday already. I finally slept on my ribs awhile last night, so I guess things getting better. Had to go down to sick bay today to stop an upset stomach. I'm glad I did, but it's hell to get any particular place and their normal hours. Lots of work lately . . . Friday a full 12 hours and then a really full 8 hours of night flair, dropping up beyond Dong Ha, 3 hours of the usually after burner sleep, back on the job yesterday bright and early,

¹⁰ The *Encyclopedia Britannica Dictionary* defines Mikey Mouse in this usage as "not deserving to be taken seriously; having little value or importance."

and a 16-hour day yesterday. I finally went to sleep about 2330 last night. Hence, no letter for you last night. That's why I didn't go to sick bay yesterday. It's hard to tell whether I was sick or just tired. Ha! Turned out I was right; it was both!

...

I wish the Sears catalog would get here. I want to order a flush head and a sink. I think I can make a septic tank out of oil drums. Hey, why don't you order a catalog for me? If I get two, I'll put one in the office.

It's nighttime now, and here are a couple of pictures Lou Gagnon took. He's shipping his gear out tomorrow and wanted to send off his Polaroid. He caught me writing this letter and then taking a "shower," where our new shower will be out back. . . .

Right now, I think I'll go to bed—still tired and the stomach too.

Goodnight, Sweetheart . . . heat? How about heart? That's better.

I sure miss you, Darling, and you know I do love my wife.

Ray

Where are our R&R pictures, Honey?

∞ . ∞

Sunday

9 April 1967

Hi Darling Sweet,

My goodness! Two days of news to report, plus a letter from you to answer! It's 2130 on Sunday. Weekend over at last but a fairly good one. My weekends are like your "more illumination quick. I'm getting hit. Cease fire" letter. A really big burst of activity, then all is quiet.

...

Darling, your picture was wonderful. No, I couldn't see how tired you were. It didn't show in the picture. You looked just fine! I had a good time putting the picture of me in this letter next to your picture. Even Karen said we looked happy together. Must be remnants of Hawaii showing through.

And the story you sent really made me laugh. Not the story but the fact that you sent me a magazine story and I sent *you* one, obviously thought

communion! I started to read it to them [the kids] last night—it looks like a grand story—but it was 2100 and they all got eager to sit by me and ended up in a fight, so all went to bed spanked. We'll try again on another night! Last night was confused anyway, as I promised a roller-skating rink outing, but then got cold feet at the thought of a Saturday night at the rink. Might be a rough crowd.

I had to give Robin a lecture on “I know it isn't as good with Dad gone, but you just have to understand that your mama gets cold feet!” or words to that effect. She just can't understand why weekends aren't as adventurous with me. . . . Whoosh, life without Father is a pain for Mother and for Robin!

Enjoy your freedom, Dear Sire. We are going to use you when you get home. What really got Robin to simmer down was telling her how wonderful you were to me in Hawaii—how many things you did for me—and she is convinced once again that life with Father is surely heaven after life with Mother!

. . .

Thanks for answering and/or commenting on a bit from my letters. At least, they haven't been falling on deaf ears. Nor have yours, actually. I live each experience with you, and they do make for some tall tales. I do hope no one was hurt in all that rocket and artillery shell business. Talk about trigger happy! No seriously, that must have been a scary comedy of errors for the men in the bunker. Glad you or someone got it straightened out.

Best I close now for your eyeball's sake.

Darling, you make a really great husband and father. You know that, don't you?

. . .

I love you,
Gig



Monday night
10 April 1967

Well Darling,
It's a bit late to start this, as I've been watching the stupid *Academy Awards*,

which lasted much too late, so I'm a bad girl.¹¹ Then to top off my badness, it started to rain hard, which was my excuse for staying up to shut windows, put clothes in the dryer, clean up the kitchen, and write you. All at midnight? Yup. . . .

Your nice letter came today—written last Thursday, good going mailman—sort of full of talk for Kirk, and he happened to say, “Seems like we haven’t had a letter from Daddy in a long time.” So, I very handily whipped it out and read it to him at bedtime. Robin snuck in and listened too. She had another bad day with me, poor dear. She’s so darn smart and can’t take no for an answer and the last three days we’ve had a go around. But I hope some of her kinks are ironed out or spanked out! Lord, she’s so big now that I can’t really hurt her without getting hurt myself. So, I even said, “What would Daddy do?” And she said, “Spank me *hard*.” But actually, I’m beginning to hit on another way to get her to calm down. I just make her sit still and she hates to do that! . . . I told them all they’d have to get hobbies for summer and she’s been panting for marbles ever since. But I said no to the store at 1800.

Speaking of summer, I really think they should go to a day camp to learn to swim this summer. But it will cost about \$300, I fear. Mom and I are investigating. Mom is so eager, she wants to put up half the dough. I said no that I’d write you first. So, Daddy-o, this is a nice little touch for \$300. Dear sweet home bankroll reads \$1,904. Anyway, you think it over and I’ll bill you later! School isn’t out until 31 May, and I’d probably send them in midsummer.

Glad to hear you are practicing looking at my pictures with one eye shut. That fanny shot may make you close the other eye too!

So very sorry again to get that news about Dave. I really grieved for him one whole day, but that helped take the ache away. I accepted the news today, but still find myself sorry I couldn’t have helped her [Morrill’s wife] during this period.

Well, we mustn’t talk about it anymore. It’s not good for us.

Your mess hall was certainly initiated! I can’t get over the way the Marine Corps christens everything. I really think you justify any reason to have parties and speeches! Or maybe it’s to inspire the cooks!

¹¹ The 39th Academy Awards was hosted by Bob Hope and took place on 10 April 1967 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. For a full list of winners and award categories, see “The 39th Academy Awards | 1967,” Oscars, accessed 18 April 2023.

...

I hope the flicks of us were good. I have the feeling we took too many of mountains!

The rain sounds good to my water bill ears.

...

Gosh almighty. It is bedtime, like 0100. Good morning, Love. Even better, good night, Sweetheart.

XXXs and such,

Gig

P.S. Elizabeth Taylor won best actress for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*¹² And *A Man for All Seasons* won all the other awards.¹³ I haven't seen that, just *Blow-Up* with Don about a photographer who blows up a picture and discovers a murder.¹⁴ It had teenagers getting stripped to the nude to get their pictures made. Charming!



Tuesday night

11 April 1967

Hi Honey,

And how is you? I'm better. I got cigarettes, money, beer, half a back porch, near half an *insulated* back stoop, so no more runs (at this instant). Ribs are getting a little better and I can bend my left elbow again, so life grinds, pops, snaps, crashes, bangs, and booms on!

Yesterday, we had memorial services for David Morrill.¹⁵ I wrote Pris and caught up on my sleep so much that I woke up at 0200 and just sat around having a lazy cigarette and eased off back to sleep after watching the flares for half an hour.

Hey, how come you sent Mom certain snapshots and where's MINE?

¹² *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, directed by Mike Nichols, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1966).

¹³ *A Man for All Seasons*, directed by Fred Zinnemann, starring Paul Scofield (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1966).

¹⁴ *Blow-Up*, directed by Michael Antonioni, starring David Hemmings and Vanessa Redgrave (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1966).

¹⁵ A 1993 investigation of the crash site discovered Maj Morrill's wedding band. Human remains were repatriated on 9 June 1993, but identification of Morrill and Parker's remains was not announced until 9 May 2001.

Huh? I just might forgive you one more day's delay, but watch your step!

Lou's leaving in 13 hours and 26 minutes (didn't even have to ask for some reason).

Oh, got my fitted top sheets yet? Not so sure I can hack the Vietnamese laundry. I sent 16 shirts and only got 12 back.

...

They had a floor show the other day, where I just happened to catch the last couple minutes of a torrid exotic dancer. No one whispered or moved. They were cross-eyed, tongue-tied, knock-kneed, and flabbergasted. I was merely paralyzed, just having been exposed to R&R at the right time, so I applauded for them. They (those who could recover their voices) said she should've been on the Johnny Carson show, ha! Not like that! I hope she doesn't come back. I'm not sure the thatched roof could stand the heat!

Speaking of heat, time out for popcorn! . . . Damn, lots of flying going on tonight, like at breakfast the group executive officer saw me in my flight suit and very sarcastically said, "Expecting the F-9s to be up today, Ray?" I said, "Colonel, I'm going to fly something today, even if it's a god damn desk!" . . . Finally, umm delicious. Bad butter, but what the hell, not that bad! Not really all that bad.

Good night, Darling,

I love you!

Ray



Tuesday night

11 April 1967

Dear Heart,

There was a news flash on TV at 2200 tonight about the mortar attack. They said 30-40 rounds fell and 37 were wounded, 1 killed at Chu Lai.¹⁶ It sure scared me for a minute, but I'm all right now. It's going to be hard to wait for your letter telling me you're okay and, on top of that, you'll probably be too busy to write. Now is when I'll really have to be patient.

I heard the Austin broadcast of a tape of hillbilly music today that they are making daily. Must be the same one you heard.

¹⁶ MABS-13, ComdC March 1967.

I had all sorts of things to tell you tonight, but that TV news sort of makes it seem trivial. It came on seconds after I got the news channel tuned in, and I felt like somebody hit me in between the ribs. Just shuddered all over. I know news like that is going to come on from time to time. In fact, I've been wondering if that mass of Viet Cong that hit Da Nang were the same gang going on down the coast. Anyway, you all sure give them hell for me!

I just tuned in to the radio and the news was on all the stations. Not 300 rounds, 30-40. And that's a lot better than what I heard the first time. But 37 wounded is an awful lot though, and yet out of 800, I guess that's not as bad as I thought either. It sounds like everyone was dug in.

Well, there's no use speculating. I just hope you get the SOBs [son's of bitches]!

We're all fine here. I got the Hawaii pictures, and they are *marvelous* of you. Terrible of me, except one that isn't all *that* bad. We'll send them soon.

Oh dear, it is hard to write you in the dark this way. I can't think about much else and know you can't either. I know you'll get word to me as soon as possible. I sure hate to think of you anywhere near that sort of business. Oh, you know what I mean.

Best I just go to bed and wear my "be brave" hat! I carry the little radio you gave Kirk with me all around the house. Just one of those little things that you did that still comfort me.

Goodnight Dearest,
Gig



Wednesday
12 April 1967

Dear Heart,
All I can think of is you. It's been a rough day, as the news of the attack was still on the air this morning and in the paper tonight, though it said 45 were wounded in the paper and 1 killed. Also, some planes damaged.¹⁷

Whatever happened, we have all been upset of course, though I know

¹⁷ "Mortar Barrage Strikes U.S. Airstrip at Chulai; American Is Reported Killed and 37 Are Injured," *New York Times*, 12 April 1967.

you would be the first to tell me not to panic. Strange the way hearing news on the air that way frightens me more than when it comes from you. You've always been so gentle with me. Also, I know you would not want me to worry, so I am not. I just got a lot of work done today while I was "not worrying!"

...

The kids know about the mortar attack and were very brave about it. Real Marine troopers!

I was tempted to call Milly but decided not to. I'll let her know when I hear from you about it all. God bless, I just pray you were in a damn good bunker. I feel pretty sentimental about the whole base though, just because you and the other good men work there, especially you! I remember how you said once, "Don't worry about keeping the troops happy, just keep me happy." Lord knows I'd like to do my job now. Looks like the attack made a Christian out of me! (Or a Marine)

Goodnight, Darling. Let me know when the all clear has sounded. In the meantime, I'll be waiting. Don't get discouraged. As you say, that's the name of the game.

XXXs, loves, hugs, and things,
Gig



Thursday
13 April 1967

Hi Honey,
When I finished eating the popcorn, I went to bed and drifted off to sleep. Lou was pulling on one of my legs, and I could hear the crump, crump, crump of the mortars. Only from the south this time. They were hitting all around the south end of the runway back and forth and up and down. That's where MAG-12 has their first new squadron set up and a big U.S. Army air lift that we are supporting.¹⁸ They dropped in there for about 45 minutes. Hit an aircraft and part of a fuel farm but no fires, only a whole slew of trucks with flat tires and spouting radiators. The next morning (yesterday) General Louis B. Robertshaw (wing command-

¹⁸ According to the command chronology, MABS-13 was supporting the U.S. Army's involvement in Operation Oregon. MABS-13, ComdC April 1967, 3.

er) flew down from Da Nang, and we rounded up our 3 wounded (the Army had 63) and he pinned Purple Hearts on them immediately.¹⁹ No one was more surprised than they were. It was a long night, no one got more than four hours of sleep at most. Then yesterday afternoon Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314) had a beach party and with the “CO, XO, and SgtMaj being invited,” we went over for “just a beer.” Their greeting was spontaneous—bodily run down the beach and sling out into the South China Sea with clothes, cigarettes, and all! . . .

This morning, I started checking out in the old Gooney Bird—Douglas C-117—Hummer, we call it, and flew to Da Nang a couple of times.²⁰ Still not sure that’s what I want to do. The F-9s are still grounded and the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom IIs seem fairly useless for me. The only thing I don’t like about the Hummer is the long trips you have to take when I still have basically an administrative job that won’t quit. Well, I don’t know. I’ll try it for a while and see how it works. It beats flying nothing.

How about an intelligent, happy, brave wife? Whatever you’re being, that’s good enough for me! So, you have the kids playing march, huh? That’s a good Marine. Close order drill is best discipline the troops can ever get!²¹ What, not that type of marching? What a bunch of yellow-livered pansies! Kirk’s on my side, I bet!

. . .

Good night, Baby.
Loves you!
Ray



¹⁹ MABS-13, ComdC April 1967, 2.

²⁰ A C-117 or Gooney Bird (also designated an R4D8) refers to the naval version of the Douglas DC-3 (civilian aircraft) or C-47 Skytrain (military) cargo aircraft.

²¹ The MCO describes close order drill as: “The object of close order drill is to teach Marines by exercise to obey orders and to do so immediately in the correct way. Close order drill is one foundation of discipline and esprit de corps. Additionally, it is still one of the finest methods for developing confidence and troop leading abilities in our subordinate leaders.” *Marine Corps Order P5060.20 with change 1, Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 5 May 2003), v.

Thursday
13 April 1967

Hi Darling,

I'm feeling a bit more cheerful but like, wow, this has been a long week with no mail since Monday's letter from you.

. . .

Kids are fine. I'm reading them your "story" in installments.

I got a nice letter from Myrtle today. She really appreciated both our letters, especially yours. I'll mail it on to you later. Somehow, I have the feeling you have enough on your hands right now, clearing up from that episode this week.

I'm going to the movies with Liz tomorrow night. Anything that will make this long week go by is fine with me. A letter from you will be the only thing to set me on course again.

Until then, my dearest one, my thoughts are with you.

Sweet kisses,
Gig



Friday night
14 April 1967

Darling Sweet,

Your letter was *so* good for my morale today with the pictures and comments on all sorts of small problems I've been having. I really could see the tiredness in your face, and it's no wonder with all that really incredible period of about three-hours sleep in three days (and sick). Sounded like a new record for you—a notorious camel, but not a very healthy one, so I do hope you got some rest. Reading that letter written Sunday afternoon, I really wondered what shape you were in when that mortar attack came. Enough energy to run to a darn bunker, I hope! Gadzooks, I'll be glad when that Monday letter comes telling me about all that.²²

²² The term *gadzooks* was a mild oath or exclamation first used ca. 1652 as a contraction of God's hooks, or a reference to the Crucifixion. "Gadzooks," Merriam-Webster, accessed 18 April 2023.

It really shook me up. Sounded like the whole base got attacked. Well, whatever, I'm sure you were more calm than I was hearing about it.

Roger on the Sears catalog. It's all wrapped and ready to mail. I almost got it mailed today but ran out of cash and the post office closed.

Regarding the R&R pictures. They cost \$4 at the base (\$6 in town), so at that price I didn't want to ship them right off to you and have the sand mess them up. So, at the moment, I'm enjoying them and I was generous to give you one! After all, you've got the *movies*, remember? I'm going to get copies made though, but in the meantime, stingy old me, they're mine! Even if you did buy the film! By the way, I take good pictures of you. But, gosh, you sure make mincemeat of *my* nose!

No, the truth is, they aren't all bad and I'll send them to you soon. One a day? I just was a bit disappointed in my looks and don't want you to be. Not that you'd ever say so. Just female vanity, I guess. I felt so beautiful over there because you made me feel that way.

...

Miss you, but more than I know how much I am not so brave where you're concerned. So PLEASE take good care.

Goodnight, Dear Heart,
Gig



Saturday night
15 April 1967

Hi Baby,

Yeah . . . no banging, no shooting, no mortars, no flying, no nothing—Dullsville. Remember Major Thomas K. “T. K.” Burke in our wedding? The big, tall one? He's the commanding officer of a radar squadron here and I just saw him tonight. He's been here since October too. I just never saw him for some reason. He was at our club. We had a big group wetting down party for all the majors who never had one plus VMFA-314's skipper made lieutenant colonel.²³ You should have seen the cake—big seal of

²³ Wetting down refers to a wild party for newly promoted officers, where the crowd liberally sprays the individuals to celebrate their new rank. See *Marine Corps Lore*, Marine Corps Historical Reference Series no. 22 (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1960), 5.

VMFA-314 and in small letters on top MABS-13. I really laughed. When the general was down celebrating our 25th birthday a couple of months ago, the cake said, “Happy Birthday MABS-13” when it should have said “MAG-13.” Always thought that was just a mistake until tonight, but now I know better. Our baker has a lot of guts!

...

What happened to the R&R pictures? I never did see them. Surely, they’re done by this time! If they are, I want a copy. My movies of R&R are so spotty that they are terrible. The camera was acting up and there just isn’t much to see.

I was going to pop some more popcorn, but I just remembered what a hectic night that last time it turned out to be, so I’ll wait a couple of days if you don’t mind.

...

We had the first half of our MABS party today—have to do it in halves—or there wouldn’t be any air station if we all quit at the same time. This is our third party, and it’s the first time they threw me in the ocean. They must have been talking to some of the hoods from VMFA-314. They did remove my pistol, but that’s all. After I took a shower and was back to work—the colonel was out on a medical hop at the little town south of here—I got this note from the group executive officer. He had already left for the party and I’m sure glad they didn’t throw him in! He’s the type that practical jokes are great as long as he’s doing them—no one else! Not sure how much more salt water my boots and watch can hack. The money and ID cards are doing great.

Got your real cute snapshots of the kids today. I’m downright insulted to think I didn’t know Kathy’s leg in that one! Who in the hell else’s leg would it have been? You think I don’t know my own daughter’s leg? Well, thanks a lot! I also know whose fannies those were and whose head of hair was all frizzled up. You think I don’t know you all? You can’t hide from me! And I sure know who was not there too. Where was he?

... We spent the morning rounding up an interpreter. I went to the major of An Tan, but he was busy, so he sent the chief of police (on his bicycle) and then to see a “restruant” owner. One of our troops had been UA [unauthorized absence], drunk, no liberty, and running from the MP [military police]. He ran in this guy’s house, urinated in this front room, and then hit him [the owner] in the mouth when he didn’t like it. All was

Figure 32. Maj Ray Stice pretends to shower in their new makeshift bathing facility at Chu Lai



Source: Stice family collection.

very bow tie and double handshakes and graciously forgiven. Six months in jail ought to slow this creep down. Nice thought for a goodnight caress and a kiss or two.²⁴

²⁴ An Tan is a small village near Chu Lai. MABS-13, ComdC April 1967, 2.

Goodnight, Honey,
Ray



Sunday
16 April 1967

Hello Darling Sweet,
Whoosh and splash. The end of another long weekend. Lots of swimming.

...

Saturday afternoon, we mailed your Sears catalog off to you via air mail. It cost \$4, so I hope you get my money's worth! Then the temperature was 89 degrees, so we drove to Barton Springs (the kids and I) and had a fine time.²⁵ Beautiful hot weather for *cold* swimming. Kathy said, "Wow! Wow! Wow!"

...

Frank [Shalleen, family friend] got the message that I didn't really trust him [Kirk] swimming out there alone, so he brought him on in. That went into the lecture too. Also, I read him your letter about bops on the head and I think we may get through to him. But his male wings are sprouting fast, and Momma better learn to fly. When I was all through with the lecture, he just said, "I think I'd better go to sleep now, Mom." His little eyes had been big for an hour of lecture. He tries hard, but there's a lot to learn. One of us is getting gray hairs.

I'm glad for this year alone with him in some ways though, as I feel if he can get beyond the point of showing off for me and just learn to trust me as a second-best friend (you being first), I will have scored. Seven-year-old's love to rebel from Mother though, so it's kind of like holding back a wild horse. That is, he knows I'm a woman (female) now and sometimes not to be trusted—in fact in need of protection at times—but that I can be something else now too.

... This being Mom and Pop gets me confused sometimes too! Well, hell, he knows I'm *not* Pop and *wants no substitutes*, but as I tell him, "Sorry

²⁵ Barton Springs is a set of four natural water springs located on the grounds of Zilker Park in Austin, TX, resulting from water flowing through the Edwards Aquifer. The largest spring supplies water to Barton Springs Pool, a popular recreational destination.

about that, Kirk. You're stuck with a substitute, but it's only until Dad comes back." That seems to satisfy him.

We will both heave a sigh of relief when you're back!

Frank said to tell you hello. I showed pictures of you in front of the hut, and he said he knew that hut. It has a road by it and is on top of a hill with a view of the ocean on one side. Also, he said he still gets the runs about once a month since he's been back. Cheerful though. He still gets a faraway look in his eyes when he talks about Vietnam. I do believe he misses the Marine Corps a bit, or maybe it's just that he has shared that experience and thinks a lot of you. Once a Marine, always a Marine, I guess.²⁶ Anyway, it's always nice to see him, as he is polite, courteous, and thoughtful with me. He offered to drive the six kids and three women out, but I led him a merry chase. No flies on me. Our white 1964 bird held a good candle to his 1966 station wagon.

That's it for Sunday night.

I love you, Angel. And yes that is a lover, an expensive lover. He cost me \$4 only yesterday! But I'll get a \$6.50 dinner out of him in return. Wanna bet?

XXXs,
Gig



Monday
17 April 1967

Hi Sweetheart,
Hey, that snapshot at the Ilikai is beautiful! Are you sending me one at a time so I'll drool longer? That's not a bad idea.

The papers were pretty close on the last mortar attack—104 rounds, 2 down, and 61 wounded, though 99 percent were Army troops. They happened to catch them in the right spot at the right time. If the Viet Cong had known, they could have gotten a couple hundred. It was that close for them (Army). We were all deep in our bunkers. And those of them where

²⁶ This statement is credited to Marine Corps master sergeant Paul Woysner, who shouted during a barroom argument, "Once a Marine, always a Marine!" "Russian-Born Marine Ends 40-Year Service," *New York Times*, 1 February 1956, 6.

Figure 33. Maj Ray Stice with the Marines at a “wetting down,” Chu Lai



Source: Stice family collection.

the rounds were hitting that could get into the bunkers were only very slightly wounded, like our three, and even ours were running between bunkers or they wouldn't have been hit at all.²⁷

Most bunkers are filthy, dirty, rat-tracked holes—sand bagged, of course—but when the rounds start popping, those particular things are the furthest from your mind. Sort of nice to have.

The next morning, we were working on our own pressing problem of the day—running out of water. Our well is going dry, and our usage exceeded our pumping by 30,000 gallons one day. We had to cut everyone off except sick bay and the mess hall. Just happened by chance to be the

²⁷ MABS-13, ComdC April 1967.

day of the attack. So, when the colonel called a Marine bulk fuel company the next morning and wanted to borrow five huge 10,000-gallon fuel tanks (rubber) for our water system, the guy almost fell all over himself breaking them out! So, in a couple of days, we'll have more than double our previous storage capacity and a brand new well—Seabees helped us finally—to boot. They [Viet Cong] must have thought our water point got hit; a fuel point had been hit but the damn thing didn't burn! All in all, a very successful attack as far as they were concerned. They were audacious, and we were lucky. Yesterday, we found some prepared positions they had laboriously set up and wiped them out—much easier—no casualties.

Honey, you are going to wear your damn pen out. SLOW DOWN! You've been writing every damn day since Honolulu. I'm okay. I love it, but relax and write as you like. . . . And send me the rest of the pictures one at a time. That's the best way so I can drool forever. I left the one you sent in the hotel room and showed it to everyone who came in my office. I'm proud of you, Darling, no holds barred.

. . .

Well, you're still "Miss Lover of Last Month" as far as I'm concerned, and that's pretty damn high in my books.

Love you, Baby,
Ray



Monday night
17 April 1967

Dear Sweet Pie,

So good to get your two letters today telling the before and after of that mortar attack. It was certainly weird to hear about it last Tuesday and not know until today how it really went for you. And the way you described it. . . . Not exactly like the terse TV news commentator! That was more boom, boom, bang, bang.

Well, I am mighty relieved, though Friday's letter took off the tension. It was a long wait from Monday to Friday with that news on Tuesday. Still, it was interesting to read your casual observations. I sure chewed a lot of unnecessary nails.

We had a little excitement here today. Nothing big, only dynamite.

April 1967

After school today, I was talking on the phone to Mrs. Robertson. . . . And she was telling me about the ranch birthday party with swimming and riding for Kirk and the boys this Wednesday. I said it sounded great, but to watch out for Kirk because “you know how seven-year-olds are, grownup one minute and immature the next.” She said, “Yes, I know Randy just walked in the house and said, ‘Here’s a stick of dynamite, Mother.’” I laughed and we hung up.

The phone rings seconds later. “Mrs. Stice, this is the principal of Casis [Elementary School]. Some boys just came in and said Kirk and some boys found a stick of dynamite and there *has* been some construction going on. Do you know about this?” “Yes, I just talked to Mrs. Robertson [about it] . . . I think you’d better call her. She has Randy, Kirk, and the dynamite.” . . . Me and you deserve a medal. Don’t faint if you find out it really was dynamite. Kirk came home at last . . . said he didn’t pick it up, Randy did and threw it.

All’s well that ends well. End of story.

So, what else is new? . . . Life has its amusing moments.

. . .

I was amazed to hear about the belly dancer, but your description was tremendous. I got the picture. So glad you were synthesized by the R&R to the point of being *semiobjective*! Uncle Sam often teases me about whether you’ve mentioned any women over there and I always said *no tactfully*. . . .

The pictures I sent Milly were old Christmas ones you already have, plus the desk one of you and an outdoor group picture you gave me in Hawaii. Don’t get jealous eyes.

. . .

It’s midnight. Far too much talking.

Time to take my dynamite and blast off to bed.

Va va va voom!

Goodnight, Love,

Gig

P.S. Dave’s memorial service program told me a lot. That was a hard one to accept. Thank you, Dear.



Tuesday night
18 April 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

Kind of wish you could see me tonight. I look halfway decent! I got my haircut and set today while Mom babysat, and I'm wearing one of the muumuus—the one that looks like spring flowers. Mom took pictures of me in it, so you'll see. Both hair and dress make me feel good at any rate.

We had a busy afternoon getting a toy for the party Kirk's invited to tomorrow. . . . Everyone had a fine time at the toy store *except* me. Five kids in a toy store is hair raising!

. . .

Tomorrow, I go to Bergstrom for food and the waiting wives coffee and then I have school conferences on Thursday and Friday (Karen and Robin's). It's a full week for me! I'm always peppy at the thought of doing something besides housework, though I get a great deal of satisfaction out of staying ahead of the family's needs. But someday, I'd like to turn that over to a maid and get a job. It would probably be very good for me. I'd have to reeducate the family though, including you!

I wonder what you're doing now. I think building the porch on your hooch has been good therapy for you. Hawaii was such good therapy for me! Snatches of it keep popping in my mind at the strangest time. Like the glow of our first evening together. Such marvelous fun all of it. I keep thinking, "It will always be that much fun with Ray." Life just has lots more meaning with you around, even the dull routine parts like wrapping birthday presents, which I really must do now for Kirk. Ugh. He picked out a Batman card that says, "The Dynamic Duo do it again." I told him that sounded like *dynamite*, so he was sold on it!

Sweet Pie, I miss you. Hawaii pictures more scratchy. Don't rush me!

XXXs and *much such*,
Gig



Wednesday
19 April 1967

Hi Dearest,

It's a weary wife you've got tonight. Too much socializing, of all things. But more on that in a minute.

I got your "Shall I pop popcorn?" letter today, and it really made a very amusing end to the saga of the Tuesday mortar attack. I read those three or four letters to Mom and Don tonight, and they certainly understand how the last time you popped corn, all hell popped loose! So, who needs popcorn?

I got my biggest bang out of your fatherly insult about not recognizing your own daughter's legs. I must say you sure pegged that frizzed hair and broad beamed one right. Shamefully completely and totally me. Why do I even try to fool you? You always were they type of guy . . . to make a girl at her worst feel her best. That's quite an art you have!

I saw a chaplain blush today. Yup. At the Vietnam wives coffee. He just got back from 17 months on an atoll in the Pacific and is waiting for his wife to come down from Virginia. One of the wives wanted to share a house and the Red Cross man suggested the chaplain. He really blushed when 30 wives laughed. And shook his fist! Can you blame him?

. . .

Tonight, there was a thing on TV about Operation Lejeune in Quang Ngai going on now. That's where you are, isn't it? Reconnaissance—that's what you meant when you said 63 Army wounded, perhaps staging for that? How's my radar working?²⁸

. . .

Now that you've got your hooch almost fixed up, all you need is a hoochie coochie girl. I'd come, but I'm booked until November at this hooch.

Why do we always (moan) move (moan) in November? I have a real thing about November-December moves and/or babies. . . .

I can see you now like a tornado whirling across the world from Viet-

²⁸ Operation Lejeune was conducted by 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, in Quang Ngai Province. See Charles S. Sykes Jr., *Operation Lejeune: 6–22 April 1967*, Unit Historical Report No. 10 (Republic of Vietnam: 1st Air Cavalry Division, Office of Information and History, 1967).

nam to North Carolina or South Carolina, picking us up en route and plopping us down and off you go. Sort of like the *Wizard of Oz*. Just call me Dorothy.²⁹

There's a place here where I can make tapes free. Could you play them there? I'm not too surprised about the R&R movies. It was lucky we took a few good snaps at any rate.

I still owe you candy (chocolate type again) but I just never go downtown. Maybe soon. But really, the dental fodder bid holds for you too, Master Masticator! Eschew that word if you can!

Goodnight, Pet. You *are* a LOVER.

Gig



20 April 1967

Hi Honey,

I sure hope I've written you since 13 April! My stupid calendar didn't show a thing for damn near a week. It's hard to believe I missed that much, although anything's possible out here. This has been one of the damndest weeks I've ever seen—weapons stolen, people knifing each other, making stupid erroneous reports, and tremendous backfiring. . . . Lieutenant Colonel Gordon H. Keller (skipper of VMFA-323) punched out yesterday with his RIO [Captain Hugh L. Julian]. We finally get both back from the dark dank seas one at a lengthy exasperated time. One bruised and happy colonel back down here this morning, but his RIO is still at Da Nang. Don't believe it was enemy caused, just aircraft. You know how these things go—he did not make it. Kind of hard on commanding officers these days.³⁰

²⁹ *The Wizard of Oz*, starring Judy Garland as Dorothy, was released in 1939 as one of the first full-length films shot in Technicolor. The film was based on L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York: George M. Hill, 1900).

³⁰ The command chronology for VMFA-323 reports LtCol Keller's air activities for 6 April, but there is no direct mention of an accident other than a vague reference to battle damage on an aircraft. VMFA-323, ComdC March-April 1967, 1201098108, Box __, Folder 098, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 4. The squadron history, however, offers more detail on the incident. Col Gerald R. Pitzl, *A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1987), 32.

I've been chewed out so many times lately. I'm getting callouses—I'm shaken but unfettered. I'll probably need a couple dozen hops to get straightened out. The F-9s should be up shortly.

...

Goodnight!

P.S. Well, damn near 2230 and I must go to bed. Yep, you done been short-sheeted in the flesh.

Awfully quiet tonight for a change. I guess the Army has finally settled down. Lord, they were restless this last week.

Goodnight, Darling. . .

Love,
Ray



Thursday
21 April 1967

Hello Love Dove,

I'm so tired that I'm goofy tonight. I've already fallen asleep on the couch once and can't even remember what the heck I did that made me so tired. I think it was the nervous strain of seeing Karen's teacher. Lord, my heart even palpitated. Somehow, they always drag your family out in front of you, forgetting that mothers *prefer* to think their families are perfect.

...

And then I look at the teacher and wonder about *her* background. It's obvious the kids are intelligent—they all say so—well adjusted for the most part, but somehow underachievers with their peer groups (i.e., behind). They all would be A students one grade back. The fault lies in the moving? Schools? Worries of Mother? The teacher points her finger vaguely at all of them and then pats me on the back and acts like maybe it's their fault. All because Karen never took map reading and can't solve math written problems. I never could either. Yes, she's going to promote Karen; yes, Kirk; yes, Robin. But I sure come away feeling they do it reluctantly and with hopes of their improving and *growing* as all are shortest in their class.

Right about this time, I find myself needing papasan. You always could snow teachers. I've learned to stand up to them, but they always give me a thousand doubts. Fortunately, I have a quick time forgetting it all. It

would be nice to hear what *you* think of the kids. Let's face it, schools are . . . wives are sleepy, that's what!

I'm going to bed. In *my* opinion, they are all working like demons, changing daily, and devoted, loving, darling children.

I bought you a *Playboy* today and the *it* girl is truly marvelously endowed.³¹ There's hope for the female race. If it (she) rests your eyeballs, I (sob) will mail her PDQ [pretty damn quick], but just don't forget that a bird in the hand is worth two in the magazine. And tonight, this one is too tired to even put up a mock battle against her overwhelmingly fresher opponent. She wins, bosoms down.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Friday night
21 April 1967

Hi Darling,
Thanks for the Sears catalog. That was expensive! Sears does it free—ho, ho, ho.

Sounds like your Barton's splash in the heat was cold as ever. Damn water is *always* cold. Kirk really keeps you hopping for sure. Just keep bopping.

My hut is not on a hill and I damn sure can't see the ocean. He's [Frank's] thinking of the MAG-12 side. He really would hardly recognize the place now, even just in the past two months there have been amazingly sweeping changes. This place wasn't even built when he was here, I don't think. . . . We're having a cookout at the club and I'm invited to a bosses night at the staff club. Whew, that's a lot of potential boozing!

Now, look a here young lady, I understand your consternation about these attacks. But I'm sure if I got hit, you'd know it before I did, certainly before I could scramble a letter out. Yes, it is frustrating not *really* knowing *what* for a letter to *finally* arrive, but that's the distance purely. Can't change it much either. I will move my rack to the east end of the hut if you'd like me to be a little closer, Honey. Okay, I'll do just that!

³¹ Playmate of the month for April 1967 was Gwen Wong, a Filipino American model and actress. She later appeared in a single film, *The Witchmaker* (1969).

Later now, much later, one of the old original MABS ideas was to send some choppers out to the hospital ship USS *Repose* (AH 16) and snake their nurses . . . out by chopper to our club. Well, tonight the group staff outdid us. The *Repose* went back to Okinawa and was replaced by the USS *Sanctuary* (AH 17). Well, they beat us to the punch, and sure enough here they came bobtailed and ready to dance. They only stayed a couple of hours, but it was kind of nice to see them.

Oh, remember Major Henry D. “Hank” Fagerskog? He just came down from Da Nang to join VMFA-323. Someone else’s joy is another sorrow (me!). Major Joseph B. “Joe” Wuertz–Finkerskoy–Maeksey–Major Charles W. “Charley” Brown (old VMFA-312). Bastards all.

Well, screw it. Tomorrow, I start pushing all my scrounge sources for a flush commode and water pipe. We have three wash basins, a lot of ideas, and damn little to back it up. Hot tonight and I need a shower, Baby. . . .

Seems like you have to have a lot of talks with Kirk. Ever let him have one with you? If he doesn’t want to, I’ll volunteer right now!

. . .

So ends another day at Chu Lai, vacation spot in the South China Sea. . . .

Goodnight, Honey. I love you and to hell with the bugs!

Love,
Ray



22 April 1967

Darling,

. . .

You caught me in my act of overwriting, and I must admit some of it is this pen, which I dearly love, though it is wearing out just as you suspected it might. My you are *preceptive*!

So, okay, I’ll try to simmer down, but it’s Sunday night and I haven’t written in two days. . . .

You needn’t worry though. I’m not worried about you now. That Chu Lai news bit did get me into a tight spin though, and it took a week to come out. I’m out again though, breathing free and easy. Your letters did the trick. Even so far away, you calm me down and it’s very, very nice to have a man calm me down.

...

Gotta close now. My husband says I write too much. Ah, he is a *brave* man to fling those words into her face before she mails the *Playboy*.

Don't you pick on her. She's a good, brave, stupid, dumb, ugly, beautiful, ignorant, intelligent [wife]. . . . She's a good speller too. But sometimes she gets the curse, and her stupid husband can never figure out when and she fools him all the time. Only sometimes, he fools her too, especially getting out of elevators.

Hey, come see me sometime. The red flag is down.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Friday at midnight
22 April 1967

Darling,

This has certainly been a week for writing you late letters. You are becoming the new *Late, Late Show*. I just got in from a big night on the town. Went to a Mexican restaurant with Mary Jane, Liz A., and Don, then on to the Civic Theater with Don and Mary Jane. I actually had a frosty beer too. My second, as I had three sips of one alone last night. Getting down to the dregs of the beer *you* left.

...

No letter from you today. That's okay, but I always miss them when I don't get one. I've tried to write every day since Hawaii. I hate to lose the wonderful feeling of togetherness we had there and maybe this helps a bit. Do you think so? If so wink, blink, and nod.

Kids all fine. They didn't miss me a bit tonight as the babysitter was Molly.

...

Well, Dearest, I'll hold this letter open until the mailman comes tomorrow. But on second thought, if I do, I'd ruin my record of a letter a day. Tonight, I heard no news, which is probably okay since I need a night off once in a while from being a girl camp follower.

I miss you, Love. All the time. Such a life. I tell everyone that I don't think I could go through *another* year like this!

...

XXXs and loves,
Gig



Sunday night
23 April 1967

Hi Honey,

How is yours? Better? Mine's not so good tonight, but that's not bad. You should see how big the moon is tonight—huge! And no one to share it with except the lizards. We don't have crickets and frogs here. . . .

Yesterday, I had an abortive hop in the F-9. First time in six weeks, and I had the early early but not told the night before and readily awakened at 0430 to no breakfast. Chopper pilot in the back seat had never been in the aircraft before. I was supposed to go up north and spot artillery. No plane captains to preflight the aircraft. I left my pistol in the head too. CANK to a weather reconnaissance. I take off with a bum radio, transfer the wing fuel, get over Da Nang, change back to arty spot [artillery spotter or forward observer], reserved fuel used already, so wondering if the tanker will be up soon. Go up north to Dong Ha and the weather's lousy, the tanker's late, poor radio communication with the tanker, and I haven't in-flight refueled since the Fighter Trainer 2 (FT-2) in 1956 (2 times). Refuel or land, um, worse than you thought [when you] can't get your damned probe in the drogue.³² No finesse? Damned turbulence, no wonder the Air Force doesn't try this type . . . let's see, 148 kilometers to Chu Lai and only 1,800 pounds of fuel to go (low light comes in at 1,200). . . . Oh to hell with it! You can't win them all and I don't want a damned incident out of this. Screw it! I head for home, climb to 30,000 feet, and idle a bit down to Chu Lai. Some bastard's voice ones up on air, "That'll cost you one beer, Ray." Who in hell is that? Colonel Owens? Lord knows. Ugh, what a mess. . . .

By God, I was ready today. I planned and briefed for two hours this afternoon. What happens? Damned aircraft is down—CANK. Not even a test hop after three tries.

³² The probe-and-drogue refueling method relies on a flexible hose that trails from the tanker aircraft and the drogue, sometimes called a basket. For more on the aerial refueling process, see Derek Ferwerda et al., *Aerial Refueling Probe/Drogue System: ARSAG Guidance Document* (Xenia, OH: Aerial Refueling Systems Advisory Group, 2018).



Figure 34. Unplug the APU cartoon

Source: *Savage, Stice family collection.*

Even the beautiful moon is gone right now and it's raining of all stupid things! Oh well, the lizards sure don't know the difference. . . .

Late, Baby, late. Need some sleep and a new day. These last two weren't too much. Thank the Lord, we can start all over again each day, huh?

Goodnight, Sweetheart.

I sure love you,
Ray



Tuesday
25 April 1967

Hmm,
How did you like the two-day silence? There's a teeny tiny thundercloud brewing, and news of the nurses did not help matters much today. How would you like it if I said I had some men in, just raring to "dance," all freshly shaven? Well, that's what I thought of your bob-tailed nurses. Like zilch. Please don't tell me they were kinda nice. . . . No female is nice. They are all bitches and may the good bitch win. That's me.

How come you are so dumb? Like do I have to come over and take care of you? Sweetheart, there is only—repeat after me—ONE WOMAN in your life. That’s what the marriage license says and *I* say. There is only ONE WOMAN in your soul. I believe in good husband brain washing and right now you sure got (bad English) a dirty brain and it needs washing. So, just remember my arched eyebrows, my dirty looks (cold, cold looks)—in fact, I think I’ll send you my *worst* picture in this one, as that should put a good wifely scare back in to you. Also, if you can’t remember that, do remember I can unscrew doors, smash seashells, stop talking for two days, ah, oh yes, dump out drawers, and hell hath no fury, etc.

Please do not feel henpecked, because you know darn well that I am the world’s most generous woman about other women as long as I am there to guide you through the maze.

It’s not that I don’t trust you, it’s just that I don’t trust you. Got that? As a matter of fact, I trust belly dancers more than I trust nurses. At least they are honest.

END OF LECTURE

And I’ve been so good writing every day! It’s enough to make me go boo hoo. You rake!

REALLY, END OF LECTURE.

...

I don’t even know if I’ll tell you what I did today. I saw *A Man for All Seasons* and he got beheaded and now I don’t even care. He was nice enough to tell his wife she was a lioness. That really was kind of sweet. All I can be is a monster, because I married a monster man and have four monster children.

...

It’s midnight and I’m not going to sit around here talking to you all night. I just wanted you to know how much I enjoyed hearing about the nice time you had with the nurses. It sure sounds like a lot of fun over there, and I would sure like to be there only I bit all my nails off today. You tell the nurses that your wife, Fang, says hello. How do you want their eyeballs—rare, medium, or well done?

P.S. How do you want your bed—made or unmade? Ever tried sleeping on the floor? Don’t bother about moving your bed so you can be closer to me. Just dump it on the floor and crawl under it.

Got that? . . .

Hmm, two diamonds would be nice. Dear me, turn your back for one second and just look what happens!

I guess I'd better go to bed. It's obviously a hopeless case. Three diamonds are even better. Some things really cost you.



Tuesday night
25 April 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

How is you? Your letters say you're just great. That's to my liking. . . . Do you have to put your pen in the icebox to cool it off? You've been writing up a damn storm!

I was all set to pop some corn tonight and decided better not. I don't think the Viet Cong are ready yet and I sure don't want to foul up their schedule, maybe next Tuesday.

. . .

The Army has moved two brigades in here to replace the Marines who have gone up north. The Viet Cong hit us the day they got off their aircraft. That's why their casualties were so high. They hadn't had a chance to dig in yet and I'll be damned if they didn't hit right where we were unloading their aircraft.³³

. . .

My back stoop is almost done. Today, I got the most beautiful 195-pound ugly monster in the world—our own WC [water closet]! Still have to scrounge all the dock floats for a septic tank and all the necessary goodies to make it go “swish.” Think I'll just break it out and sit on it for practice. I want to refamiliarize my fanny with the better things in life slowly. I can't afford a mistake, you know!

. . .

Terrible tonight, huh? Well, has my love changed? Yup, worsen and worsen.

I do too!

Ray

³³ MABS-13, ComdC April 1967.



Thursday night
27 April 1967

Hi Baby,

. . . Just finished two beers and a steak dinner. The Army's shooting up a storm, and I'm going to bed . . .

Your siege with the teacher sounds grimsville. Don't back off—strike out at the vein. I mean straight to the eyeball. Hit her over the head. She asks you about your husband, you ask her about hers. . . . Don't let teachers scare you, that's for the kids! I'm not so sure we can expect mental giants from near morons in the first place! I was a C student, whether I tried or not, and you sure didn't attempt anything special in math or electronics. I'm not sure at what level we can expect our kids to peak out, just average, I'd say offhand.

. . .

Appreciate the thought on the *Playboy*. You win fannies up and down. Did you know I got a bill in the mail the other day from the Ilikai for a broken bed spring? \$18.32—cheap at half the price! I was going to send you the bill, but I thought Bill Austin would like it better!

I never have figured out whether it was the first night or the last night.

Oops, it's sleep time before it's quitting letter time. So. . .

Yeah, you're right I'm a dirty rotten bastard so-and-so.

Good night, Darling. I know you don't believe it, but I do,

LOVE YOU,
Ray



Friday
28 April 1967

Dear Friend,

Next thing you know, it will be dear comrade. Check your six. You sounded harassed in today's letter. Perhaps I should melt and let nurses be nurses. I'm feeling a little harassed myself though. Kathy has strep throat. Nothing serious. She just is fussy. . . .

Actually, I'm kind of bored. Sort of like the man who painted himself into a corner. . . .

. . .

The weather has been in the 50s. A cool front blew in and, for a minute this morning, I remembered the Virginia fall vividly. Also had a slight feeling of the excitement we'll all feel when the cool weather comes here next fall and blows you in. I never thought I'd liked Virginia, but it really has its moments in the fall.

. . .

Actually, I am glad we have the warmth and playfulness of summer coming up. That will make me sweat for real, but not mentally. . .

As far as our taking pot shots at each other, I really regret some of those times, but I don't worry about them. If we could learn not to step on each other's boils, we'd have it made.

One thing I found myself *not* regretting today at the birthday party. All the girls had only *one* baby—just beginners—I was the oldie and I wouldn't go back through those ouch years for anything! Life has really been worth living again these past two years with no more drooling burpie *babies*. I really enjoy the company of girls my own age much better. And your company is best of all. Nice and raunchy old! If that's what we are.

It was almost a relief to come home to your nice grimmsville letter. I'm much too old to be around sweet young things, especially when they make me feel my horns! For instance, I didn't dare talk about my 7-year-old son, much less my 9- and 10-year-old girls! I live in another world from theirs, but I have one toe still in with Kathy. That's the weird part.

. . .

It's Huntley-Brinkley time. Write me a *sweet* letter. I need one. One that says I do not like nurses. I like you.

Gigabeth



Friday night
28 April 1967

Hello Darling,
There! You are back in my good graces again. I guess your poor pitiful Pearl letter did it with the lizards and mud hens and absolutely weird

description of midair refueling.³⁴ I never could tell for sure if you got it or got it, lost it, to hell with it. It was *vivid* but I missed a few details. But that's okay. You can retell that one when you come home! Seems like you used your head, which was working just fine despite the weather, radio, and aircraft.

I know it's disappointing to go to that much *effort* and feel it's wasted, perhaps if the primary mission doesn't come off, or secondary too sometimes. But considering all the facts, you do just fine. Can't win them all as you say.

I think sometimes of the guys who fly over Hanoi and then are told by the politicians here that it's not doing any good. They must feel frustrated too. But this whole WAR is frustrating to *everyone*. Seems to be a matter of degree.

Karen's latest philosophy tonight is "at this age (10) all the *unimportant* things make me happy." Isn't that cute? She said that after sitting on the porch sketching her sister and feeling at peace with the world after making a 100 on a math test.

...

Kathy got her shot today in her fanny for the strep throat and the doctor said he'd listen to her heart again when she's all well, "as the heart works harder when there's an infection." She was fine getting the shot, but it hurt most when she thought about it!

Karen is spending the night with "Gramma" and Robin and Kirk are in the same room as a treat too, though Kirk had to get a spank and a lecture first. Shall we just say his behavior leaves much to be desired? He's a restless, noisy bundle of energy and he makes *noises* all the time. Why do boys make noises? I live with rockets, bombs, bangs, etc. And he's teaching Kathy too, which disturbs her grandmother to no end! But delights Kathy.

But for all that, when I put on my father look—a long hard stare—he simmers right down. As a matter of fact, he really doesn't bother me much at all because I'm used to him, but Mother isn't and she calls my attention to him, like putting his hand in the glass to get ice out just *isn't* done! . . . I love it when he shouts defiantly at the girls, "Don't *brag* on me!" And *we* all know he means, "Don't tell on me." But tonight, he learned the

³⁴ *Poor pitiful Pearl* refers to a cartoon character and doll created by author and cartoonist William Steig ca. 1956. He is most well-known for his 1990 picture book *Shrek!*, which was later adapted by Dreamworks Animation for the film in 2001.

real meaning of that word, so he won't use it anymore. The girls got "put down" too, so he was satisfied at least.

I'm also teaching him not to expect instant success. He hated to spell, but I've taught him the trick to it (sounds) and he can face a few mistakes at last without fear. It's been such an effort for him all year that he wanted only praise.

Guess I'll close now, before you say I'm wearing out my pen again.

I get depressed when I *don't* think about you, so it's really better to think about you and get it all on paper. That way I'm downright cheerful. I don't know how you are, but I'm fine! If you were home, you'd have fallen asleep on the first page.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Sunday afternoon
30 April 1967

Hi Honey,

Better late than never I say. I was all set to write you last night and I got a pleading call from H&MS for a night F-9 arty [artillery] spot hop the wing wanted. So, four hours later, I finally got to bed tired, hungry, and odoriferous. I had already read *your* latest letters fortunately and the group Robin/Don one. I sure wish I could answer them individually, but don't count on it.

I'm getting behind at work—the colonel went to Cubi Point, Philippines, Friday afternoon and isn't back yet. He must have liked what he found!³⁵

Would you believe we scrounged a total of four wash basins plus a regular shower head, 200 feet of water pipe, the commode, and a big pontoon section from an old floating dock on the beach for a septic tank, and today I have a couple of plumbers helping put it all together! May be another week before it's all working, but it sure will be nice, any or all of it. I may be a bit premature (socially) on the septic tank because there are a couple of commanding officers that don't have flush facilities, but neither

³⁵ Naval Air Station Cubi Point served as the primary maintenance, repair, and supply center for the 400 carrier-based aircraft during the Vietnam War.

have they asked for them. Besides, I'm still not sure where the commode came from; it's not Marine Corps, I know that. I'm sure the group executive officer will have a few terse comments any way you slice it. *We do* have two executive officers and two very senior majors.

Whoeee, it's getting hot down here, and the winds are from the south to boot. Already wearing light night jungle utilities and working and sleeping under a fan. Keeps the bugs off too.

Tomorrow is May Day.³⁶ I wonder what sort of tricks the bastards will drum up tonight. I'm sure not letting any of our people go on liberty today, that's for sure. The Vietnamese are also voting local elections today and tomorrow. These little villages look like teeming ant hills on election days. They come from miles around, all in black P.J.s and white straw hats just like the Viet Cong.

...

It's almost time to get back to work. I think I'll see if the mail goes out in the morning.

You'd think this was a damn Army base. I lost count but *Stars and Stripes* say 4,000–5,000 or thereabouts but it looks like 10,000.³⁷ Choppers—Lord, they're all over the place. Bell UH-1 Iroquois (Hueys), they drive them like cars all bunched up roaring down the freeway, and artillery—every sandpile has something sticking out of it. Matter of fact, we found a bunch of their machine guns all set up and sandbagged in exactly our direction. We turned them around in a hurry.

Time to go. I love you, Baby Doll. I'd like to leap in bed with you, but I gotta go to work so maybe next time!

Love,
Ray



³⁶ Originally celebrated through much of Europe, May Day marks the beginning of summer, with most activities based on nature, including bonfires, the maypole, garlands. For Canada and the United States, the holiday would later mark International Workers' Day.

³⁷ For more on U.S. Army command roles and structure in Vietnam, see Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 314–20.

Saturday night
30 April 1967

Hello Dearest,

This one will be a short one tonight. Nothing really very much has happened. I had the Austin's and the Kirkpatrick's over for a cookout last night, only I didn't cook. They did and outdid themselves. We just furnished the house and barbecue pit.

...

If I put our life under a microscope, you might be surprised at some of the things I want and don't talk about, like music lessons for the kids, a bike for Kirk, new furniture, the rugs we don't have, the stove, icebox, etc., we will need someplace, somewhere—not to mention house!

I just don't know how many more years we can go on denying the things we really need. We had a nice pact about saving while the kids were young, but if the truth be known, they aren't so young anymore and I have three hungry hands dipping into the purse every day and wondering why they don't get an allowance. You're probably thinking, she needs some money and it's true, I'm feeling broke at \$1,781.63—that's counting May's \$363 deposit. But it's not really that. I'll admit this would have been a nice year to occupy myself with house redoing, but I figure we'll get that done together when you come home and we're feeling more flush.

No, I know all these things will be done *eventually*, it's just that I find I have more time to think of them now with no more babies coming along and there's a new direction to take. I just wondered if you'd noticed. There's no pressing need for some things, like absolutely needing a baby bed, but the needs are subtler now. And since you've always left a lot of the keeping the family happy bit up to me, I've tried to make everything seem honkey dory all the time.

But the truth of the matter is telling our little needs now embarrasses me. It's so easy to sound wrong, and I think we need a new approach to needs. A family putting heads together sort of thing. I guess I kind of need you to talk things over with. I hate to be the one to say always, "The kids need new shoes; we need a this or a that." What we need is a new trust in each other, a fearlessness, but not a foolhardiness.

...

I know I'd like to be able to discuss everything with you. . . . I liked the way you told me to tell *you* if I'm unhappy or worried about something.

That you didn't want to hear it secondhand from relatives. That's the way I want it too, but I'm *not* masculine—have you noticed—and it's a masculine thing to be aggressive.

I wonder if you know what I'm trying to say? I guess it's just that our life is changing, and I hope we can weather all the storms and trials ahead as well as we have the past 12 years. Maybe together, we can come up with some magic glue.

Hmm, some short letter, huh? Crazy old me. I just miss you, that's all. You can move your bed back to the near side of the Pacific Ocean now.

Such a funny man, such a funny wife, such a funny life. No, I haven't forgotten the war. I just like to not think about it once in a while. Take good care, Love. I'm glad you think we're fine, because we really are. Blessedly fine, only I can dream, can't I?

XXXs,
Gig

8

MAY 1967

Monday

1 May 1967

Hi Sweetie,

Oh, I'm highly insulted that the dear old Ilikai Hotel charged us with that atrocious bill! I feel thoroughly had. Something must be wrong with us. We thought it was such a *good* bed too! I swear, I raved about it as much as I did the whole vacation. Sure proves I'm not a princess. Only don't tell a soul. Well, you're a prince to pay it with such nobility and tell me it was worth it. I thank you, My Love!

...

Thank you for your bugs—they *are huge*—but you can keep them. I have your teeth. I really don't need your bugs. I also have your children, which is about as generous as I can get.

Speaking of children, we are all becoming baseball players as of today. Kirk and Randy ran out of stores to raid for candy, so I hauled out your old softball, glove, and bat, and we are the hit of the neighborhood. We have wild games in the front yard, with the tops of trashcans for bases. Much yelling and screaming. Very good therapy. I recommend it to you.

. . . Also, they've been busy making Mother's Day presents, and this will be a way for them to celebrate what to them is a big sentimental day. I'll tell them tomorrow.

...

They say the mail is stacked up in San Francisco, and they're shipping it to Seattle to unplug.¹ But your letters come through fine.

I appreciated all that good advice on how to give a double whammy to a teacher, but I repeat, next time, *you* talk to them!

...

Gotta go to bed. We changed to daylight saving time and I get up with the birds now.

XXXs, love, prince, lover. You are an \$18.32 LOVER!

Gig



Tuesday night

2 May 1967

Hi Honey,

Nurses? What nurses? Those horse bags? . . . Don't send me your worst look. I got it—I got it—no looking at nurses! Damn, seven pages of no nurses. You would have written a book if I'd even spoken to one, which I didn't. . . . They even had a Navy captain with them—that's a Marine Corps colonel who swims.

Oh well, to hell with them. I do see the ship *USS Sanctuary* (AH 17) at sea, and it's nice to know there's a hospital floating out there.² The Marines from Dong Ha and Khe Sanh filled it up the other day. Matter of fact, I was up calling artillery Sunday and, after a couple of hours, they asked me if I could please locate the damn mortars that had been dropping in on them for the last hour! I dropped down and searched but I never did actually see where they were shooting from. They did stop, however. I made them think I saw them apparently. Finally got to refuel with the tanker again twice that day. It did tons for my ego. That's the second time I ever refueled air to air. The last time was in 1955 at Marine Corps

¹ For more on postal issues at the time, see *Report to Congress: Problems Affecting Mail Service and Improvements Being Taken* (Washington, DC: Comptroller General, 1974), particularly chap. 1.

² For more on medical support during the war, see Cdr F.O. McClendon Jr., "Doctors and Dentists, Nurses and Corpsmen in Vietnam," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 96, no. 5 (May 1970).

Figure 35. Maj Ray Stice and GySgt W. “Scotty” Vinson after one of their “Shoot through the teeth F-9s” missions



The F-9 aircraft that got shot through the shark’s teeth painted on the bottom of the aircraft

Source: Stice family collection.

Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, and it was just a temporary dry run, not the real thing.

The picture I sent is an old sergeant that worked for me back in Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312 (VMFA-312) at Cherry Point. He’s Gunnery Sergeant W. S. Vinson now and that’s one of our Grumman F-9

Cougars I fly in the back. Some idiot painted shark's teeth on the guns and the eyeballs are streaked with red now. Funniest looking eyeballs you ever saw! Just right for the early early!

Tonight, really is something special. We have a pipe instead of the old moldy water hose and four sinks and the shower and a brand new set of copper coils for the heater. Voila—hot water in the hooch! . . . All we have to do now is finish up on the commode and septic tank. Want the honor of the first flush? GET BACK. It's not hooked up yet. I sit on it now and then, so the shock won't be so great when it's for REAL! I've been telling everyone that big steel tank out front is really a new bomb shelter. Not too sure they all believe it.

Well, Nurse, I mean WIFE, good noggin flogging!

Ray



Thursday
4 May 1967

Hi Sweetie,

It's Thursday—a wet, cool, rainy trash day. Yesterday was a wet, cool, rainy Wednesday party day. I let Karen and Robin have 4 girls each over for a Coke party and we had 10 screaming, yelling, giggling girls in the house. They had a dance contest and a kickball contest and a lovely time. Mother came to the rescue and took Kirk and Kathy away to do errands, and they came home with a red-striped kitten the shade of Kathy's hair.

So, today, it is a wet, cool, rainy Thursday and trash day with a red kitten, which Kathy is chasing, while I write you amid the breakfast dishes. The kids got up, scolded me for forgetting to turn on the dishwasher, washed some bowls themselves, and barely got off to school because of a lovely game of kitty with giggles. Kitty also made them late to bed. But kitty is not my problem, except feeding, cleaning, and lifesaving it. It also sat on my lap late last night, so I guess it stays.

I had the heat on last night and, as usual, got hot around 0300 and had a dream about you before I could go back to sleep. A bit confused that kitty was on the table. Funny thing about the dream, a letter from you came, and I was chasing the letter as it was blowing around.

Well anyway, I do dream about you sometimes too, because I was awake enough to remember that one last night. . . . I went to the commissary Tuesday and left some pictures to be developed. That's good news for the future anyway.

I hope a letter from you comes today. Your last one was written to me last Thursday night. It's too bad we're a week off, but we do pretty well considering. . . .

XXXs and love,
Gig



Thurs noon
4 May 1967

Okay, Comrade Nurse!
Enough is enough is enough! No more . . . nursing your jealousy, okay? . . . See, you are easy to please. That's why I love you, you give in so gracefully. I forgot how to spell "begrudgingly."

. . .

It really is getting hot now. The other day (yesterday), it hit 110 degrees. You know how that feels, and it was the day I flew 3.8 hours in the damn F-9. Man, I was bushed all day long and even drank a whole canteen of water airborne during three in-flight refuelings and calling artillery. And it's only the first week in May yet . . . ugh! . . .

Slow but sure, we are able to solve a few problems. We have a good water supply now and we are beginning to tip in our semipermanent electricity a little at a time to get out of these poor overworked short life generators.³ But people and parts are still our two biggest problems. We have one-quarter of all the Marines over here as it is and need at least one-third or better. And the highest priority requisition still takes months instead of hours. We just got a few parts they ordered in September. I saw a rebuilt generator we sent out when I first got here in October just come back last week. Man, that is what you call a long lead time! Whoa, back to work!

And a sleepy hello again. It's dark out and my eyes shut with the sun. I

³ MABS-13, ComdC May 1967.

do have that problem over here. . . . We're going to have sort of a campfire tomorrow. We're going to cook something at the officer's club every other Friday—maybe hot dogs, maybe steak, not sure. . . .

Goodnight, Darling, I'm falling asleep already.

Love you, Honey,
Ray



Friday night
5 May 1967

Hi Sweetie,

I think I didn't write yesterday, but like you I can't remember now. The days either fly or drag by. This one went pretty fast.

The darn cat woke me up nibbling on my feet. Last night, I searched for it high and low and then around 0200 I heard the thud of feet hitting the floor as Karen padded to the jon. That woke the cat, and the cat woke Robin, and there I was with two lively girls giggling in the middle of the night. The cat had been in bed with Karen, who put it in with Robin, and then was afraid she'd "smush" it in her sleep, so she woke up Rob. I got it corralled in the little back den room finally only to have it play with my feet this morning. . . .

I discovered Kirk's been hoarding oodles of change as his "allowance." We had to jimmy open the piggy bank to get order restored. He was a bit nonplussed, but all is righted again. He just hates to spend his money, knew I used it sometimes, so felt he could do the same with mine, that way having plenty for both of us. A pretty good system, but I was beginning to doubt my sanity when my wallet was empty every day! Not stealing, just mutual appropriation. I gave him a \$1 bill plus two 50-cent pieces, which are his alone, and promised I wouldn't steal from him anymore! He felt much better. He in turn gave me \$4 in quarters and nickels!

We had a slight scene also about his *not* going to San Marcos to the Aquarena Springs.⁴ (You and I took them there once already.) I was called names (old meanie) and then I told him what I thought of him (pow

⁴ Located in San Marcos, TX, just south of Austin, Aquarena Springs, open from 1951 until 1994, is now Meadows Center for Water and the Environment that works to preserve the biological and archaeological resources in the area.

pow), and all is fine again! . . . Oh, I wish you could see them all. They are so adorable.

Darling, I haven't forgotten you. I see you in all of them.

You sound very busy with the colonel in the Philippines again. I don't mean Philippines again, just you holding the fort alone again. I loved the story about the Army pointing its machine guns at the Marines and the Marines setting them right! Glad to hear the Army is there, nevertheless.

Hope your flush commode is working by now. I can't imagine what it's like to *not* have one but take your word that it's good for a man's dignity to have one!

Gotta close up shop here. Saturday is a long day and I have children to drive to a birthday swim party at 0930 at the Austin Country Club.

XXXs and such,

Gig

P.S. Obviously, a midnight closing. I can't even think of a clever one! Will you forgive me if I'm plain old wife tonight?

P.P.S. For the record, *I Love You*.



Sunday

7 May 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

It's midnight, Sunday night. Somehow, it took me three hours to unwind tonight or maybe it was the three back issues of *Time* magazine I got from Mom's house. Whatever, it's still late. I wish you were here to put me to bed. Or would I be pulling you away from the TV?

We had a fine, fine time today—a perfect Sunday. Got up medium latish; had a sausage, egg, grapefruit, and sweet roll breakfast; cleaned the whole house with prods at three big kids; then wrapped ham and peanut butter sandwiches and headed for the lake.

Wild Bill Coleman bought a *houseboat* and wanted to christen it with Mom, Don, and all of us. It turned out to be in a cove by the dam on Lake Austin. . . .⁵

⁵ Formerly Lake McDonald, Lake Austin is a water reservoir on the Colorado River and most of the coastline is privately owned.

...

Karen had a fine time at the Austin Country Club birthday swim party but felt her swimming was still shaky and she sat on the side a lot. They need lessons this year for sure!

...

Speaking of buying things, I'm buying a new diamond for my wedding ring. Mom dragged me in the jewelry store, and they all somehow talked me into getting the missing diamond for \$35, which didn't seem too outrageous. And I knew you'd approve of that. You do approve? Do you approve \$35 worth? No? Okay, I'll buy my own diamond. *This* time. I feel very bare without my ring. Very very bare. That was a wrench. Can't wait to get it back.

Got to go to bed.

I love you, Sweetheart,
Gig



Monday
8 May 1967

Would you believe they tried to show us *Gulliver's Travels Beyond the Moon* last night?⁶ Someone really gave some dozo thought to the distribution out here.

I hate to tell you, Baby Doll, but every time you have too many family members over in force, your depression shows like a bright red flag. Their problems are NOT YOURS. Be a little more open minded in your relations with them. Sympathize, yes, but JOIN—NO! . . . We have a beautiful, relatively happy family with our OWN particular problems. We damn sure don't want anyone else's. . . .

Well, enough of that, sort of like getting your boots stuck in the mud.

Yesterday, I finally got the damned artillery to hit something definite. I was working back and forth on a railroad bridge for almost three hours and we finally got some direct hits. I sure hated to leave, but we were getting low on fuel, and I never got to get a damage assessment on their final barrage.

⁶ This movie was considered a Japanese classic for the period. *Gulliver's Travels Beyond the Moon*, directed by Yoshio Kuroda (Tokyo, Japan: Toei Animation, 1965).

I just heard about Illinois not being able to play in the Big Ten. That sure is stupid.⁷

...

I finally got all the requirements for a fifth air medal last week, and one of these days I'll hit 100 missions.⁸ I'd like to get 200 before I go home.

...

Don't get mad if I get in bed early? It's almost 2100 and it's a rare opportunity. Want to come along with your \$18.32 fanny? Don't break my bed! Might be worth it at that! Damned inflation!

Goodnight, Darling.

Love you!

Ray



Monday

8 May 1967

Hello Darling,

Just a page note before I go to bed. I've been thinking of you very strongly tonight—all the nicest thoughts. It's a shame you can't hear them or that I can't write them. Those funny little random thoughts—sometimes comparisons about your character and personality and they all add up to an A report card.

You started the day and week off very nicely with that really great color shot and some very nice chuckles regarding the subject of wives versus nurses, and you were pleased with yourself about the tanker refueling, so I felt good with you. And it's no wonder you got such a nice reception in my mind tonight. If I told you all I thought, your head would fairly swim, so it's better to keep you innocent. . . .

I've decided you have your mother's lightheartedness and your father's serious side in just the right combination with some of your grand-

⁷ Evidence showed that athletic and university administrators had been violating the conference rule that forbids paying for more than room, board, tuition, and fees to athletes. Dan Jenkins, "The Fighting Illini," *Sports Illustrated*, 6 March 1967.

⁸ MABS-13, Command Chronology (ComdC), 1201077124, May 1967, Box ___, Folder 077, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

mother's sweetness like you described her. There's a lot of pure Ray there too. I wish I had my personality so easily defined. Whatever it is, it's worth all these *years* (check that plural!) without you. That's the main thing. You *are* worth waiting for. And I'm glad I'm the one who's doing the waiting. It would have been so much easier with someone else, but I would never have been satisfied deep inside my soul. So! There it is, you satisfy my soul, in memory as in person. That's about as good as you can get where marriage is concerned.

. . . . I got tired of being a "Father" tonight and told him [Kirk] if he didn't get better, I'd tell his daddy on him! My goodness, you loomed like a real mean Daddy image then and we both got scared. I was ready to run to his rescue! Probably undid the whole bit again. I have a terrible time being a father, but when I do, it only makes it harder on me to be a mother again. I found out that boys sure do pull the wool over their mother's eyes! I found that out while being a father! Please come back and be a father, only be sure to be a nice one. After the struggle we've had this year, we both deserve a rest. . . .

Got to go to bed. I love you, Dearest. I wish I could say it in two pages like you do. But I may be able to act out a father image, but the male act absolutely defies me! That calls for the real McCoy.⁹ . . .

XXXs and such,
Gig



Wednesday, almost night
10 May 1967

Hi,
How is yours? Mine's going around in circles—two of them. First, they asked for all the lieutenants through majors (me) to screen all record books for all air liaison officer/forward air controller (ALO/FAC) trained or experienced personnel (remember I went to that 1958 Jacksonville, North Carolina, and that two- and three-week school I had at Norfolk, Virginia, first). Well, three majors in MABS alone fill that order from the

⁹ The term *real McCoy* refers to something or someone that is neither an imitation or a substitute and it was first used ca. 1898.

wing at Da Nang. Guess they need some fresh fannies up at Hills 881 and 861.¹⁰ Well, only time will tell who gets nominated for that clerk duty.

...

Did I leave a box with NBC [nuclear/biological/chemical] notes in it in the closet? I remember now—finally after eight hours of searching my brain—all my notes are in my brown briefcase (leather). It's in the closet there by the garage door, up top I believe next to my blue hat box and aluminum cover stretcher. That's where they are. If I do get selected for this job, you'd really have to pack that case six ways to Sunday—in a real heavy and deep packing box and about six to eight wrappings with addresses at each layer and the whole thing insured for \$300 and sent air mail special delivery.

The colonel said coyly as he was holding the phone, "How'd you like to spend the rest of your tour in Iwakuni?" . . . I said, "Voluntarily?" He says, "Yes." I said, "Only if I'm ordered too, for which I would gladly volunteer." . . . I guess we'll know next week. Uncross your toes, damn it! Odds are bad enough. Maybe they'll catch Major Ray E. Bright as he slips into the system!¹¹

...

There's only one thing that could possibly have a chance at weathering all the tremendous variances and complexities of this stupid atmosphere and that's our love. Thank the Lord for that. If I ever learn to pray, it will be because of our love. Nothing else would be that meaningful. And love I do you.

Ray

¹⁰ These hills were in the Khe Sanh area and likely this personnel shift was leading up to the first Battle of Khe Sanh. See Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984), chap. 4.

¹¹ Maj Bright was the first Marine to fly more than 400 fixed-wing combat missions in a one-year tour of duty. On 30 July 1968, Bright flew his 400th mission as the executive officer for Marine Attack Squadron 121 (VMA-121) in a Douglas A-4E Skyhawk. See the Jonathan Abel Collection (COLL/3611) Marine Corps Archives, Quantico, VA; none of the command chronologies for the period list Bright or his achievement. VMA-121, ComdC July 1968, Box __, Folder 079, 1201079077, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.



Wednesday night
10 May 1967

Hello Dearest,

You one upped me this week. I got a letter from you—my third long one this week and I'm overwhelmed—but I didn't get one written this morning. But I've got a nice bonus for you tonight. The lovely pictures of Kathy and me. I hate to part with them myself! You've got to promise to bring them back as it costs \$5 for a set of two each and Mom took these, so I'll have to get more if I want some for me.

Monster man, pictures cost *money*. MONEY. That stuff you've got lots of and I don't. Remember me, the girl who doesn't make money, she *uses* it? The bankroll here reads \$1,672. Does that give you a picture of my financial straits? Well, maybe not strapped but hanging on for dear life with my teeth.

But this isn't to be a financial tirade. I'm not in the mood for that. Your letter to the kids was too sweet and too cheerful to put you in any kind of bad mood. I feel so good when you're cheerful. I even bless the Australian girls for coming to Chu Lai, especially since you said they were such ugly ones. How sweet of them to be ugly! . . .

Our anniversary falls on Father's Day this year. That should make it a significant day. Only what do I give a father/husband far away? Maybe cookies baked now would arrive by then! Yum, yum. . . .

I promised you cookies 12 years ago to get you to come up from Kingsville, Texas. The bait still works. Imaginary bait at that! . . .

I'm glad you are sleeping better. That is just great news. If you've gotta do what you've gotta do, you gotta do it with a healthy, rested, calm body. I try to keep the same thought, and I'm in fine shape. No fair counting my two-hour naps with Kathy every day. A girl needs her beauty sleep. Oh, I'll never live that down. Never again can I complain of working too hard. And I *do* work hard. I cleaned silver, scrubbed the couch and floor on my hands and knees, vacuumed, mopped, defrosted an icebox, mopped up milk, and mopped this week.

Going to bed now. I think we're both doing *just fine*! . . .

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Friday morning

12 May 1967

Dear Sweet,

After yesterday's big letter to you with those glopslush pictures, there's really nothing big to go in this one. But I probably won't have a chance to write Saturday or Sunday and I don't want you to get lonesome!

...

Did you notice how Kathy put her hand on her hip to imitate my pose? I can't wait to hear your comments about her. She calls herself "Kaki Tice!" And then she's "Two, Two years old. And likes to 'im in the 'ake." Swim in the lake. . . .

I saw on TV about some fighting going on pretty near Chu Lai. I hope things have simmered down. Things seem pretty hot all over the damn world though, and it isn't even summer yet! If, oh well, no iffy side of life. I just have started tying my legs in knots again. I can't seem to find that hairy leg when I feel it in bed. Used to wrap a toe on your ankle too and it puts me to sleep thinking about it.

Gotta pack clothes now. Mom is driving. She says it would take me five hours if I drove. She's another get-there-in-a-hurry person. Me? I'm a foot dragger. And I love *your* feet.

XXXs and love,
Gig



Friday night

12 May 1967

Hi Honey,

It's Friday again, and I just got your last Friday's letter. Close your eyes and delete a week and we're in step! Tonight was not too good in one regard—VMFA-323's farewell party—and those are the people I was supposed to go with originally. Joe Wuertz will be their operations officer. Darn near made it by default. Their skipper and radar intercept officer (RIO) had to punch out about three weeks ago and it was a long, long night before they found them. After a few prayers, they finally found them one at a time fortunately. I'd just as soon not get into a squadron that way.

May 1967

I guess I can relax about being MAG-15's NBC officer at Iwakuni. They took a chance and offered a guy's name who has a September rotation tour date—they wanted October or later—and he'll probably go. We still have our work cut out for us. Major General Louis B. Robertshaw has named this an air station—a Marine Corps air station (MCAS) mind you—the first one south of Japan. We've been working on it ever since Colonel Kenny C. Palmer took over the squadron and the real work hasn't started yet.¹² I'm not sure whether we're afraid the Army will take over or what, but only the secretary of the Navy can actually designate an MCAS, not a wing commander. Anyhow, we're going through all the low orbital motions anyway with signs all over the place, meetings, plans, the whole bit. Nothing to guide on—writing our own table of allowances (personnel mostly).

...

Sorry, Baby, got to take a shower before my skin falls off and get in that lonesome bed!

Goodnight, Darling.

I love you, Gig,

Ray



Sunday night

14 May 1967

Hi Honey,

I just got your seven-page "note," where you couldn't decide whether to beat up Kirk or to love me or both! Why not both and then reverse the process when I get home, then I can beat up Kirk and you can love him.

...

... One thing you can count on is that I honestly and truly do love you with all my soul, even during the storms that rage now and then and seem to mean otherwise. Hell, just look back at all the horrible things we have said and done to each other—they've only been transitory. The deep-rooted basis of our marriage is like an underground river—strong, deep, and continuous—and likely to pop to the surface and gush all over you if you're not careful. . . .

¹² MABS-13, ComdC May 1967.

Did you read anything in the papers about Chu Lai getting mortared on 12 May? They hit our dock area and wounded some sailors.¹³ Then last night, they hit a unit right beside Da Nang. The war obviously continues the march. Yesterday, a Douglas A-4 Skyhawk's engine quit up where I was just below the DMZ, and they had him picked up and taken to Dung Ha so fast I couldn't believe it. It was as "instant" recovery as I'd ever heard of.

Luck piled six ways from Sunday—I got five cases of Schlitz beer for practically 11 cents a can. Not too bad! That should take care of me for a while—couple of days anyway!

I'm still full from steak supper and I have the early, early tomorrow, so I'd better take a hot shower and go to bed quick.

I hate to leave you when we're thinking about each other so much. It's really hard to turn it off—watch out for the gushes, Honey—goodnight.

Love you,
Ray



Tuesday in Austin
16 May 1967

Hello Sweetie!

Long time no write. We got back from Houston Sunday evening after a drive through some rain. No problems except the ones we had in Houston, and we haven't figured them out yet. Mom and I "discussed" until 0100 last night but came to no conclusions. More on that in a minute.

Your letter was here and another came Monday canceling the four-inch flange to my relief. I was just as bewildered as you at the two lovely choices that you may or may not have! Of course, I don't want you to be a FAC on the DMZ. But I can see that NBC is not your joyful cup of tea either. However, it's the lesser of two evils you might say. And you could do it for my sake. At least I would be happy if you went to Japan, even if you weren't! Does that surprise you?

Well, seriously, your NBC papers are where you said they were, and I'll be glad to get them off to you when and if you say so. As for the other, I couldn't hack that and I'm not going to even consider it. That's bad En-

¹³ "Mortar Barrage Strikes U.S. Airstrip at Chulai; American Is Reported Killed and 37 Are Injured," *New York Times*, 12 April 1967.

glish (split infinitive), but I feel that strongly about it. I'll sure be anxious to hear what evolves.

...

Gotta quit now as here's Mom and the mailman.

More in my next [letter].

Love,

Gig

P.S. . . . Glad you don't have to go to NBC after all and it sounds like you can stay there and help them turn it into an air station (maybe). I can see why you said that the Marine Corps says, "Hurry up and wait." That still seems to be the case. If you're quick, you can make it a Marine base before the Army takes over! Maybe. Pretty wild.

. . . . I love you. You know?



Tuesday night

16 May 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, saw Phil Elliot this morning. He's at Iwakuni and can't wait to come down here. He looked real good. He saw Major Theo F. "Jack" Aschenbeck somewhere in the states just last month.

Had another butt-buster artillery spot hop today. They are as slow as molasses and have absolutely no conception of what they ask you to do for them even when you explain it over and over again. I take a canteen full of water and a fresh pack of cigarettes now. Hell, you have to take off your oxygen mask and helmet to talk to them on their own radio anyway so you may as well refresh in your labors. I got scrambled up there a couple of weeks ago at nighttime—pitch black, no moon, no flare ships. You know what they wanted? A battle damage assessment (BDA) on some damn target they had shot at that morning!¹⁴ I told the guy, "Are you going to use your flashlight, or do you want me to use mine?" No answer naturally, and then finally, "Wait!" Then, in their utmost ineptness, reiterated, "BDA!" I asked him, "Have you looked outside? It's dark out there, Friend." Finally,

¹⁴ For more on the complexities of BDAs, see Ben Connable, "Vietnam-Era Assessment," in *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2012), 95-152.

he allowed as how “if we couldn’t give him a BDA, we could go home.” . . . I’m not so sure about those artillery people sometimes. I’ve seen them do some wonderful things with their guns that have never been done before—ever—and then there are some real close-minded ones too. Major Earl D. Litzenberger was unusually *metza metza* [so-so], not a good example per se. I’ve known some really dynamic ones and the same number of NERDS—and that’s the way they are. Two opposing minds basically.

. . .

Wish I’d had a tape recorder this afternoon. For about 35 minutes, I listened in on one of the most dramatic commentary’s I have ever heard: “Live from above the DMZ.” Some Navy puke in an old propeller AD Skyraider (Korean vintage) should get written up for at least a Silver Star for the way he handled the pickup of two fellow aviators who had been shot down. This throttle jockey really was savvy. The crewmen (pilot trio) were in two separate ravines with Viet Cong in the middle and all around them. They were using the survival radios we all carry. The AD took inventory of all their injuries, flares (including color), ammo, controlled two flights of fighters and attack aircraft on the Viet Cong, and directed two Sikorsky HH-3E Jolly Greens on them.¹⁵ The first one got hit in the engine and had to scoot back to Dong Ha and personally kept their morale up—“Don’t sweat your radio’s batteries. I’ll throw you down mine.”—relayed innumerable messages back and forth to the guys on the decks, the helicopters, the fighters, the attack aircraft and personally hand guided the second Jolly Green left right down over the injured pilot first then talked the Jolly Green into picking up the RIO next, even though the Jolly Green was so full of fuel he protested mightily. Then had to hand carry him over to the RIO and practically land him on top of the RIO and he still couldn’t see him in the brush. He had to tell him to lower his lift hoist down into the boonies and had to tell him not to move while the guy was being hoisted up through the trees. Whew, such a pro, such a pickup. Those guys probably will never know how much they owe their lives to that old Navy spade pilot. He was the only one that actually saw them and did just marvelously. All this was on my guard frequency. We always have turned on besides our regular radios. Tomorrow, I’m going to write it all down before I forget the details and try and find out who this

¹⁵ The Sikorsky HH-3E Jolly Green Giant helicopter was typically used for combat search and rescue.

Figure 36. Maj Ray Stice in flight suit at the Chu Lai airfield



Source: Stice family collection.

character is and where in hell he flies from. I think he should get the proper recognition for the professionalism he so clearly demonstrated today.

Lord, it's late again . . . real sleepy tonight. Goodnight, Darling.

Love to you,
Ray

∞ . ∞

Wednesday
17 May 1967

Please don't mind this paper. I just like it because it's so big and I can rest my arm on it. The kitchen table, you know, is often very sticky.

We are having a spell of absolutely gorgeous perfect weather in the 70s and 80s in the day, 50s at night, and I've got spring and fall fever mixed. It's a perfect day in June weather, only it's May. It's also the kind of day that reminds me of you always. Our first few days in autumn up there especially.

...

Went to the last PTA [meeting] last night, and the kids (older) went

with me. Kirk decided to leap over a bush as we left in the sunset and conked his head on the cement. Didn't quite make it. But no tears.

I'm sending his letter, which is cute anyway. He was in tears over wanting to make a car, as they are studying transportation, so I told him to write you. Then he also went next door and the boys there told him to go to the Boy Scout department at Scarboroughs and get a kit.¹⁶ So he decided he didn't need your advice after all if he can get me to get him the kit. Hence, he threw the letter away, but I salvaged it.

I sure hope you stay where you are. Seems like that's the best place to be, and there's plenty to do there! So proud of your having enough missions for five Air Medals. That really is *great*, Sweetheart. Much hard work I know.

Hmm, I miss you today. You add such a good spice to my life. It's really ever so dull without you. But just having you as my husband is enough. I know you're *there* even if *there* is *somewhere*!

Do you know you'll be home in five months? That's like nothing. We're really over the hump. Bet you get itchy feet to go back as soon as you are home. I hope not. The war is going on such a long time that I'm afraid there's no sense staying to the point of getting Asian fever. If you stay too long, that sometimes happens. And I don't mean malaria, I mean Asian oriented. Like the guy who owned this house and had to go to Guam.

I'm as loose as a goose about you these days though. I'd fly to the moon to be with you, or go to North Carolina even! Bitching but happy! Sort of like when we got married. It's no fun in Austin without you.

Karen just came in, so best I close. She can end up for me today!
I love you, Angel.

Gig



Thursday
18 May 1967

Hello Sweetie,
I'm starting this letter at midnight, and I'm really half asleep. I've been

¹⁶ Scarboroughs was a family owned department store that served the Austin area from 1893 until 2009. See Michael Barnes, " 'Makes Me Smile': Readers Share Scarboroughs in Austin Memories after Our Story," *Austin-American Statesman*, 19 September 2022.

watching the new city council on TV and never knew how a city council worked. Now, I know. They drone on and on and put you to sleep. And dear old red-headed Emma Long keeps everybody mad and awake.¹⁷ Except me.

...

The big kids are good and sweet and thriving these days. Kirk is getting more handsome, I think, despite his scraped nose and broken tooth. And the girls are both beautiful. They are such a comfort to me. I'm never discouraged when they're around. The world is so beautiful to them. Austin is a good place for them to be while you're gone. I know that's been a comfort to you too. And we were so lucky to get this house.

Only a week and a half more of school now and POW, BANG, ZOWIE, Kirk will be home! Kathy and I will be kind of glad—for a while at least. All for now, Love. It's goodnight and see you in my dreams time!

XXXs and hugs,
Gig



Friday afternoon
19 May 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

Those tremendous pictures you sent were all stuck together. I'm going to put them in the ice box and see if freezing them will help. Fortunately, they are all stuck at the top so I can see them. I just don't want to tear them up yet.

You didn't get written to yesterday. I figured I owed Mom a letter. Sorry about that, especially since you have been so great about writing.

...

You're lucky your air conditioner works well. It's so hot here that my hut masters taking a sunbath with his fan outside! . . . Were you your usual "sweet-san"? Well, I moved my bed back to the other side of the hooch, just in case!

¹⁷ Emma Long was a long-time liberal Austin city government official. She was the first woman elected mayor pro tem by the Austin City Council and was often considered controversial due to her brash and outspoken ways. "Emma Long," Biography Files, Austin History Center, City of Austin, TX.

...

Today is Ho Chi Minh's birthday.¹⁸ One of the squadron flight schedules had on the bottom: "Happy Bombs Day—Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Things have not simmered down a bit. Everything is up, up, up.

You say I'm a foot dragger and you love my feet? Well, you're a butt dragger and I love your a—s. So there too! And I also love other delicate and indelicate portions of you just as well!

I'm not sure how today is going to end up. I'm in a standby status in the F-9 in one of those long, double plug, triple, ugh, hops and tonight I finally sniveled a back seat F-4 radar drop hop with an old friend of mine—Major Robert T. "Bob" Roche—plus inspect the 75 barracks, get a seat check, and borrow a miniature O₂ regulator and mask for the F-4 hop. So, it could be a crazy Friday afternoon.

In view of the above, best I get hot and do a lot.

I love you, Darling,
Ray



Saturday night
20 May 1967

Hello Sweetheart,

This is my third start on a letter. I think my mind is in Vietnam at the moment. I just finished a *very* long, *very* comprehensive article—overall and specific—about the war, written in the *Saturday Evening Post* and I'd send it to you only I don't think you'd have time to read it.¹⁹ Although, I may send it anyway. Typical female logic there, nah? I would so love to hear your comments about it. I hate not having you to share stuff and junk, even if it's only a nod and a reaffirm or, for heaven's sake, don't believe that!

...

From now on any purchases you make from the Far East are going to be strictly for *us*. I'm quite tired of admiring stuff in other people's houses.

¹⁸ Ho Chi Minh, founder of the Indochina Communist Party and the Viet Minh, was born on 19 May 1890 and died in 1969 after almost 30 years leading the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

¹⁹ Gig may be referring to Stewart Alsop, "Our Naïve President," *Saturday Evening Post* 240, no. 9, 6 May 1967.

We need some. You hear! You can just buy up a storm on your way home. I'm about ready to do a little "impressing" of my own. You never were against it. You were just married to me, an old humble foot dragger. Well, I've had my babies, and now I'm *very* interested in my home, papasan. Ready to live it up once more! Feel like framing your citations, putting out trophies, fixing up that den (a la the general in Washington!) and being doggie. Hot doggie! Especially if I have you to play around with it and me while we do it.

Too much pride is a bad thing, but a little honest pride wouldn't turn our heads, would it? I really think I love that wooden plaque from Quantico the best though. And I'll go on from there. You've got enough citations to fill a wall. They just need framing. Well, it's a lovely thought anyway. Hear, hear!

Goodnight, Dear Heart. Miss you ever so much. You sound just fine and you're taking good care of yourself and I'm very pleased with you, even if you are umpteen miles away! And thank you for taking the time to tell me you love me and gushing all over me. I don't mind a bit. It's such a lovely change from when you're around! Gotcha there, didn't I? Nah, I'm teasing. I like you anyway, anytime I can get you and I'm glad you feel the same. Sometimes!

XXXs and loves,
Gig



Sunday afternoon
21 May 1967

Hi Baby Doll,
And how is it? How is it that you are there and I am here? I never do come up with a good answer.

Was all sweated and suited up this morning [to spend] over two hours of waiting for the mechanics to fix various parts on the aircraft. Colonel Palmer had picked up a small-arms round and we had to change a rocket pod and the hydraulic pump didn't work. Finally, everything ready, strap in, just get the fire lit, and the wing CANKS us.

Yesterday, I was just finishing the preflight inspection and up walks the wing commanding general. He asks where I'm going, and he grabs

my map and points out a road up north he wanted especially to get hit just like *Twelve O'Clock High* on TV.²⁰ He's the hand shakingest general I've ever seen in my life; he salutes and shakes all in the same motion to anyone who's within spitting distance. Quite a character.

We had a weird floor show last night—Korean band, two Korean dancers, and a henna hairdoed Aussie twitcher. A twitcher is a twisting stripper. Ha! Made a funny! In street clothes, you'd throw up [to see her], but on the stage, she did have a few things to twitch. She pulled off a dual strip with one of our new lieutenant colonels, Frank D. Topley.²¹ She would strip something off of him and he would strip something off of her, all the time supposedly twisting or whatever it is now swim, I guess. Well, you know who had the most clothes on and it sure wasn't Frank. All he could say was, "Well, at least they were Marine green!"

Slight interruption . . . the colonel just called. We're going to the beach for an hour and a half—not that bad; first time actually in seven months.

It's nighttime now, although it's hard to tell with the red glow of my skin. I'm slightly on the warm side too! Yeah, sunburn, how did you guess? Saw a guy named Black and Major Robert L. "Bob" Grandek. Bob's flying the new Grumman A-6 Intruders that Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12) got last month.²² He wants to come over and see Joe Wuertz (another good Catholic).

Oh, did I tell you about the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II ride Friday night? Really great—like an old Douglas F4D Skyray with a light fuel load and that was with 3 tons of bombs aboard (12 500-pound bombs)! It would take two or three Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses in WWII to carry that much, and this damn thing is a fighter! Shimmies and shudders on

²⁰ The general Stice mentions is likely MajGen Louis Robertshaw, who was the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing commander from May 1966 to June 1967. *12 O'Clock High* was an American military drama based on the movie of the same title set in World War II and broadcast on ABC from 1964 to 1967. The series starred Robert Lansing and followed a fictitious U.S. Army Air Forces group.

²¹ LtCol Frank D. Topley was with the Marine Fighter Attach Squadron 314 (VMFA-314). See Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*.

²² MABS-13, ComdC April 1967, Box __, Folder 077, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 3.

the deck, but a sweet swan in the air. I kept wanting to grab the stick and throttle, but there aren't any in the rear. That's the radar officer's "desk." Goodnight, Darling. I have to catch up on my sleep, sunburn or no.

I love you, Gig,
Ray



Monday night
22 May 1967

Hi Sweetheart,
Just 24 weeks until you come home! I just counted. About five months and one week. Less than the time for a baby. But harder than having one! The reason I counted was because I'm jealous. Betty Wattinger's husband is back after 10 months. That gave me green eyes all right. . . .

The kids and I had a Sunday and a half bailing out *your* boat. Did you feel our heat waves? We had a line of pans. I was in the bow of the boat, and I passed pans of oily water to the girls and they heaved it over the side. It took an hour. Yes, the cover has ripped and, yes, it rained hard. But we have the boat dry again. That's all we know how to do at the moment. I thought of lassoing a college boy to pump the tire and be our man at the lake, but I don't reckon I could find such a man. The only one I know like that I trust is you. Like YOU. We were a pitiful crew with no captain at the helm, but you've never seen a prouder one! That is one *dry* boat! Land locked maybe, but *dry*. What the hell do you do with a dry boat? You stand back and look at it, that's what you do. If there's one thing I can't stand it's a *wet* boat!

. . .

Mother said she can't go to Colorado with us. She can't stand the kids. I said, okay, I'll go and you take care of Kathy. She said okay. Now all I need is guts and money to go to Colorado. I gotta go someplace this summer or I'll go nuts. Hong Kong is out. Too many riots there.²³

. . .

²³ The riots Gig refers to are the 1967 antigovernment riots in Hong Kong against British colonial rule. Ray Yep, "The 1967 Riots in Hong Kong: The Diplomatic and Domestic Fronts of the Colonial Governor," *China Quarterly*, no. 193 (2008): 122-39.

I gotta bed to go to and a commissary.

Wanted: one husband and father to go places, do things, and hit heads. Must have slightly graying distinguished looks, like bow-legged ladies with droopy hair, and have a sexy deep voice. Pay: \$1,000 kisses. Reward!

S'nuff, S'nuff,
Gig



Tuesday afternoon
23 May 1967

Hi Honey,

I'm not sure why I'm writing to you. Your paper ran out or your pen broke or else the mailman has it in for me. All I received the last week was a caustic "thanks for the no Mother's Day" letter from Washington. Our calendars damn sure don't have that crap on them. Who knows what day it is over here to start with. They're just days like any other day. I do know today is Buddha's birthday because all the hops are recons, not drops.²⁴ I guess she [Stice's mother] forgot there's a war on over here. Well, it's a good thing I wrote her before I got her letter or I wouldn't have written at all.

At least you are redeemed. I got yours, Kirk, and Karen's letters this afternoon—your post-Houston letters.

...

Home in five months? No, not quite—June (1), July (2), August (3), September (4), October (5)—well, you're almost right. It's probably about 5 months and 10 days. I should be in Da Nang on 1 November. That sure is the downhill pull. No, Honey, don't worry about my wanting to come back again. My problem will be listening to jerks like Fulbright. Boy, the

²⁴ According to the operational report for Task Force Oregon, their activities were limited to surveillance and defensive operations during the cease-fire on 23 May. "Operational Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 July 1967," in *Operational Report: Lessons Learned, Headquarters, Task Division, Force Oregon (Americal Division) Period Ending 31 July 1967* (Washington, DC: Office of the Adjutant General, Department of the Army, 14 February 1968), 20.

Viet Cong sure love him, as evidenced by their leaflets found near the DMZ.²⁵

This sure is a crazy war and, of course, the grunts are taking the brunt of the whole bit. We get ours from time to time, but they get theirs daily. They have my complete sympathy.

I used a little sympathy on myself this afternoon. I couldn't sleep a wink the last two nights from this stupid sunburn, and this afternoon it not only sunburned but it itched so bad I was at my wits end. I zapped down to sick bay and got some tetracycline ointment that slowly reduced the itching down to when I could think about other things. Then, this afternoon we got deluged in sand—a damn storm rolled off the hills to the west and really clobbered the place. Good day not to be flying considering the burn and the sand. I do have the early, early—it's my 100th combat mission, if I've counted right. Flew many that were not "combat" per se. And yesterday, I finished enough combat flying for a sixth Air Medal. Not too bad for an 800-man squadron executive officer paper man, and not that bad for our (trusty?) old F-9s either.

...

You know, the moon was so bright last night that you cast a very distinct shadow and it really isn't full for a couple of days. Sure reminded me of Quantico and some of the beautiful nights we had there. Time to get some sleep, Darling. Kisses to them that's appropriate and handshakes to them that aren't!

Love to you, Gig,
Ray



Tuesday night
23 May 1967

Hi Lover,
I don't know whether to be pleased or insulted. First, you put my picture in the icebox, then you call me doll, and you ask where I got my hair

²⁵ Stice is referring to Senator James W. Fulbright (D-AR) who chaired the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and held hearings questioning the Lyndon B. Johnson administration's handling of the Vietnam War. See David C. Humphrey and David S. Patterson, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 4, *Vietnam, 1966* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1998).

done. Like it's not for real, it must be fake. Kathy got raves too! That is me. The real me, and I just happened to get my hair done and Mother just happened to grab a camera quick. I *always* look that good. For all my public relations (PR) pictures, that is. Mother got an enlargement for you, but I'm keeping it. I'm not about to let the Vietnam weather spoil that gorgeous hairdo! So, it is on ice here for you.

Also, on ice here for you is a present from McDonnell Aircraft Corporation. It came today—a model of the Phantom II. I'm keeping it in the box it came in, in your closet. Kirk and I merely peeked at it.

. . .

Robin brought home a certificate saying she's a good reader and Kathy tore the red seal off, so she got scolded and ran out to the den, fell, and got a goose egg on her head. That's life. Karen got a star too for library work (both got one) and they are good girls. I was hoping to get Kathy's picture drawn this week by a good artist Mom knows, with the cat, as it is the same color as Kathy's hair. But now the goose egg may delay that. . . .

Mother is still dreading the summer months. . . . Best you enjoy my letters now, this is the last week before school is out! God, three months at the swimming pool! Next summer, they are all yours! Now I know why people send their kids to Europe.

But I'm looking forward to it in a way too. Kathy and I have had some long lonesome days. She will be delighted to have them home.

Forgive my one-sided conversation here, Dearest. You are having some wild and woolly days of your own—like every day—and I love hearing about them, even if I don't always comment. I adored your dry remark to the artillery guy, "Shall I use your flashlight or mine?" I wondered if maybe he thought there were still some live Viet Cong out there and wanted flares instead of a damage assessment. Can't blame him if it was that!

Hope you found that great pilot who directed so many things while flying over the downed pilots, or wounded, whichever. He did sound terrific. Nice to know how good the others can be sometimes, nah? You have been that great many times too and taught others to be also. I say have been because I haven't been around to hear how you been doing this year, except snatches here and there, and you usually tell me only the bad parts. I get the good parts from other people. Best you check out a PR man for me. Not that I really need one. I'd rather have you checking yourself out. Only add a couple of kisses from your PR girl here. Just to even things out a bit and all that schmaltz.

May 1967

Goodnight, Love,

Gig

P.S. I am pondering over your financial assessment of my finances. I'm glad you're happy, but just remember, "Woman cannot live on \$363 alone!" When I yell HELP! Please help. . . .

P.P.S. Do you like to see me sweat? I think you do. I *really* think you do. Tears, no. Sweat, yes.



Wednesday

23 May 1967

Darling,

Today was big flap day at the UN Security Council. They were on TV *all day* and came to the conclusion they can't do anything until U Thant gets back from Egypt anyway, and the meeting should not have been called in the first place.²⁶ Egypt was pictured with shouting mobs, and Israel buttoned up. And the United States told Russia to grow up and do something since it's their neighbor.²⁷ The crisis is over the closing of the Gulf of Aqaba, a tiny gulf near the Red Sea to the Israelis. Tune in tomorrow!

After the excitement of the DMZ invasion, it was like a ping pong game to suddenly be looking in the other direction.

. . .

Our future is still so tied up in with your future, naturally, and we yearn for it to come. The kids have settled in, of course, but despite being scared of the unknown (North Carolina or South Carolina) they voted to move! They were somewhat leery of being taken out of school for the move, as that's practically like disobeying the teacher, but then cheered up at the thought of getting to stay out of school the day after you came back.

I will be glad when you can tell them, "Now hear this!" They have

²⁶ U Thant was a Burmese diplomat who served as the secretary general of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971. *Report of the Secretary-General on the Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force* (New York: United Nations, 1967). After the UNEF withdrew in June 1967, tensions exploded between Egypt and Israel into the Six-Day War.

²⁷ The Soviet government would break off diplomatic relations with Israel and attempt to assist Egypt and Syria. See Isabella Ginor, "The Russians Were Coming: The Soviet Military Threat in the 1967 Six-Day War," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 4, no. 4 (December 2000).

brains now and the orders may need Papa to enforce. No more docile, “Get in the car, kids” days! “Why?” they’ll say? Don’t worry. The answer is, “So I can make some money.” They love money and will go anyplace for it, as they are developing a very healthy respect for it after a year of scrounging up 30 cents in coins for lunches, etc.

I get quite a bit of very normal, healthy back talk, but would worry if I didn’t get it. Nothing I can’t control at this point, but it will be nice to have you to watch them through the so-called “difficult years.” To tell the truth, I think ours won’t be difficult. We’ve trained them pretty well.

Goodnight, Dearest,
Gig



Thursday night
25 May 1967

Hello Darling,

Still got some? For me? Prove it! Ha! That’ll stop you for a while.

Otherwise, I’m great—sunburn’s stopped hurting, washed 20 sets of skivvies, and got a haircut—so I can make do for another month and a shorter swim period this time, thank you.

I met my first real live dragon lady today. The wing contracting officer from Da Nang brought this UN gal down to discuss trash and garbage pick-up. She has all the Marine units in Da Nang, and she wants to try it down here. They pick up all the trash, refuse, and garbage for nothing and sell it to their own people outside.²⁸ All except the Navy. The Navy in Da Nang pays them umpteen thousand dollars a month. Some negotiators, huh? We told our naval officer to keep his wallet in his pocket, take notes, and shut up! Well anyway, we had representatives from all the various Marine units around here today and had a big conference. In a couple of weeks, if all her Viet Cong drivers pass security checks, we’ll get out from tons of trash every day. That will ease the load on our vehicles, troops, and phone calls from irate “citizens.” She’s going to try it for a month anyway.

Did I tell you about the milk we have now? It’s reconstituted, but the

²⁸ Russell Baker, “A Better Idea,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1972.

flavor is exactly right! A hair thin, but we're drinking it as fast as some American dairy unit in Da Nang can make it.²⁹

Looks like the Army is doing a pretty good job of keeping the Viet Cong out of here. They shoot up a storm every night. It helps keep them off balance, and their choppers are becoming more aggressive at night-time also. Hell, they have more money—shoot 'em up!

I just may go see the first half of the flick. I've got the early, early tomorrow with the commanding officer of H&MS if the aircraft is up.³⁰ I had to down it yesterday morning for smoke in the cockpit. There's a hydraulic leak somewhere.

I sure hope Kathy is over her tonsillitis by this time. That isn't any fun, is it Kathy? I almost got a headache reading about how Kirk tried to jump over the potted plant at the school that night. I'm sure glad he's hardheaded. . . .

I love you, Gig,
Ray



Thursday night
25 May 1967

Hello Dearest,
Gosh, such creepy crawly days without you. Especially ones with no mail to answer. . . .

Really, nothing else new here. I'm playing bridge tomorrow as my last peaceful day without kids. Monday is their last full day of school. They are already slowing down and acting droopy, like when do we go swimming. I had to play drill with them in the backyard again tonight. It stays light until 2000 and they piddle around until 2115! Kathy can ride a tricycle now, one that Liz A. [Gig's cousin] loaned me. But all watch too much TV, because playmates are still rather scarce in this neighborhood, but then discover each other as playmates right before bedtime! Pow, sock.

²⁹ See Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese*, 1967, 229.

³⁰ The commanding officer of Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron 13 (H&MS-13) from 1 January until 30 March 1967 was LtCol Walter E. Domina. The official history does not list his replacement for this period. See Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese*, 1967, 280.

I could sure use a whiff of a good strong male you to gaze at, smell, pelt, lean on, go to bed with, and in general live with. The TV really isn't good for any of those things!

Goodnight, Lovesan,
Gig



27 May 1967

Hi Honey,

Not much news tonight. It's late and I've torn up four starts already. I probably ought to go to bed instead! It's Saturday night and I balanced the checkbook. It's been a pretty uninteresting day for a Saturday. Kathy gave me a headache that's all. Sometimes, I really think she needs you, or maybe she senses I need you.

We went to a drive-in movie last night with Liz A., who really needs to get away, and all kids stayed up until 0100 for both shows: *Shenandoah* and *Any Wednesday*.³¹ Pretty brave. We've never done it without you before. And tonight, we ate watermelon. Old Kirk kept after me until I bought one. We took it out on the patio and just slurped away. If I can just keep on coming up with nice simple pleasures like that, we'll have the summer made!

I got your letter about getting to the beach for a swim and sunburn last Sunday, and I'm so glad you could—get to the beach that is! And I'm glad to hear you saw a strip show? That sounded more interesting than some of the movies they've booked for you all. I'm sure anything is a welcome break from routine and work. I just wish wives had USO shows too!

...

Had a fine meal though, and afterward we played Monopoly—Don, the kids, and I—until Don could stand it no longer. Kirk was winning with all the property, but wouldn't trade so we could build, and we were all stuck with our power mad seven-year-old winning! He didn't want to build; he was happy just collecting rent! Karen is a dignified banker these

³¹ An American western in *Shenandoah*, directed by Andrew V. McLaglen, starring James Stewart (University City, CA: Universal Pictures, 1965); and a romantic comedy in *Any Wednesday*, directed by Robert Ellis Miller, starring Jane Fonda and Jason Robards (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1966).

days. The fifth grade has finally made an elementary mathematician out of her! Wonder of wonders! Robin is a screacher at the Monopoly table, and Kirk of course just sits back and can't read the Chance or find the rent or make the change. But he *loves* to make money! It is wild and wonderfully woolly.

...

The sweet innocent boy sometimes curls my hair though. . . .

Anyway, tonight I tried to explain that sometimes boys get chewed out by adults when they really aren't bad, but adults think they are or that they *will be*. A rather difficult lecture. I suppose I was explaining why one has to conform sometimes. It's better than prison is always my best point! Kirk's eyes get as big as saucers.

Well, Love, I will close. I miss you more than you could dream, but I'm doing fine and know you are too. Life will seem incredibly easier when we're together again though and I'm all for that.

Goodnight, Sweetheart,
Gigabeth



Saturday night
27 May 1967

Hello Baby,

Did you get my letter written Thursday, 25 May? I sure hope so. I had the early, early that day—0400 reveille, usual routine in the dark, drove off to the briefing room at group headquarters, ran in, briefed, and I'm out. Oops, no letter. I had it. Where is it? Gone! Damn! Later, got to go! Aircraft was down, no flying—CANK—turn in the maps, etc. Where in hell is that letter? No one saw it. I hope someone saw it and mailed it. Tell me you got it please? I thought it was kind of a nice letter. I'll be repeating myself for months, you watch.

Still no toilet to flush. Some things move slowly, eh?

I feel like a snake. My skin is molting all over. I'm getting a new birthday suit! Ha. Stupid, stupid. I'd give you hell if you got sunburned like that, huh? Hey, you know what? You don't? Sorry about that.

I've only gotten to fly one time since Saturday. The old F-9s are really showing their lack of parts now. Hey, there are probably only 10 of them in the world outside Beeville.

Damn regimental ALO [air liaison officer] jobs are in style again—NA major with five months remaining 3d Marine Division—Dong Ha, I think. Someone's up for grabs. That five months remaining is the real bridge over here. Usually that's the basic requirement. After 1 July, the pressures should ease off and by 1 August, it'll stop.

...

Well, it's time to get some sleep. I've been accused of letting my alarm run as long as 20 minutes before I punch it.

There's three-days mail stacked up at Da Nang. I wonder if our mail has even gone out? It'll all straighten out eventually, but the temporary halts are bothersome.

Goodnight, Sweetheart. Do you love me? Must be awful hard up!

See you later, Honey,
Ray



Monday
29 May 1967

Hi Dearest,
Here goes a fountain pen letter—Karen's fountain pen. I haven't used one in years, and it makes me feel pretentious. My ball point seems to have disappeared though.

A wonderful Monday. Two letters from you. I practically hated to open them, because it sometimes is a long wait until the next one. But I shouldn't complain. How awful a whole week would be without one, like the week you had. What a shame. And the Houston trip really wasn't worth it. Never again! Without you that is.

My poor little lambs were tardy today. One hour late to school on the last full day of school. Robin sets the clock and gets everyone up. Kathy and I get up after they leave (on account of my late hours writing you!). But I got up promptly as they left and thought I was crazy when the clock said 0900. They thought *they* were crazy when they asked why there were late. Robin got called "little dickens" in mock scolding because she wasn't tardy all year until today. A darn good record for kids who get up and go to school without their mother.

...

Your letters were especially good today. The kids do appreciate when

you talk to them, though Kirk was ashamed of his letter to you and got so mad at me for sending it he almost wouldn't listen. But I told him I'd told you that he asked me not to send it crumpled up, but that I knew you'd like it anyway. He was mollified enough then to listen, but you didn't understand that he built a *model* wooden car. He's sensitive about the soap box kind because he thinks he ought to know how to do that alone because *you* did! He really wanted to attempt that alone (with a little cheating help from Mom to get boxes etc.) and we *did* attempt one that was such a fiasco he hasn't gotten over it yet. It fell apart! Well, anyway he was delighted that you shared his leap over the bushes with a pseudoheadache. That got a grin and a chortle.

So sorry to hear you don't care for J. William Fulbright. Intellectually, I'm crazy about him! I'm sure he's talking to the likes of me and not the Viet Cong! He's just against war, that's all. And we're all against that. He's trying to soften the Viet Cong up, not you all! I'm sorry to hear it backfired like that. I understand he put out an apology that said he was for the war, not against it, only against wars in general. They're supposed to understand that! I did when I thought about it twice while reading *Time* magazine!³² The poor old Viet Cong just aren't up on intellectual mumble-type, American style. Now, don't you go getting narrow minded just because you're dealing with g—s. There's supposed to be an inch or two of you tucked away that's intellectual. He is the chairman of foreign relations and that is supposed to be the art of getting along with folks. So, okay, it's your business to not like them, but eventually somebody's got to deal with them someday on another level than killing them. Hopefully!

Well, it's not very good taste of me to discuss a man you don't like. If you don't like him, that's okay with me. . . . A jerk is a jerk to you. Heaven help the poor jerk.

Hey, you've got a jerk for a wife. It's true. But she's such a good, noble, humble, brave jerk! You've got your dragon lady and I've got my Fulbright. I wonder which one is worse. You watch her good now, you hear! A place that has female garbage collector's—now that's some place! . . .

Yes, I feel very well loved. Surprisingly well loved considering you get an A in wife happiness! The only thing that would make me really happy would be for you to love Fulbright like I do. No? Well, I guess I can't have

³² Gig might be referring to *Time Magazine* 85, no. 4, 22 January 1965, that featured Fulbright on the cover.

everything. I have to settle for a husband with a STEEL-TRAP mind. I'll pry it open when you get home. I've got my WAYS.

XXXs and such,
Gig



Monday night
29 May 1967

Hi Honey,

Still got some? Where? Well, save it for me. I'll need it!

Yesterday, I finally got airborne again. I went up north, found the tanker, just plugged in, and he started to drop down below some clouds. A little sine wave started down the refueling hose and, by the time it zapped back at me, it was five-feet tall and snapped the nose refueling probe clear off! Six feet of my nose probe broken off. Damn. First time I ever hurt an airplane nose more than a blown tire since I started flying. I don't think his take-up reel was working properly, but I'd never be able to prove that. One minute, they're okay, the next they're no good. Anyway, he took my nose probe home to Da Nang with him; it was still stuck in his drogue! Broke off so clean, the F-9 almost looked natural. We robbed old number three's probe and stuck it on last night so the aircraft's up again today. I flew it just a few minutes ago and it works. I noticed a slight sigh of relief from the line crew as we taxied in the rain today. Wonder why? Trials and tribulations—today, no approach radar. I had to use ground-controlled interception (GCI) and then the ground-controlled approach (GCA) blew a fuse on final, so I had to use the tactical air navigation system (TACAN) and eyeballs. Good day for ducks, that's why I'm waddling around going quack, quack, quack.

I guess the NA major five months remaining regimental air officer has been selected and no one knows who. Mighty secretive. Colonel Palmer says for me not to sweat it as I "already had it." Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, remember?

So, you finally have a dry boat and Don's company went bankrupt? You have your problems too I see. My bank balance? Are you out of your gourd? My balance is between Uncle Sam and me! You have \$1,515; I have some too and that's good! Day camp for kids at \$399 is too much. All day and all month, maybe. Colorado? Who says Colorado? You've done

May 1967

flipped your girdle! As a matter of fact, that's probably what happened. You probably wore a girdle up to Houston and everything's been wrong since then.³³

. . . Sorry, Honey, the sandman just clobbered my eyes and ran my clock up to 1030. I'd hate to think I may have the early, early. Well, the damn schedule just came in and I do!

Goodnight, Baby.

Sleep now!

Ray



Wednesday

31 May 1967

Darling Sweet,

. . . Oh man, I would like to talk to you tonight. The world is too much for me, as the man said.³⁴ Up to here, I do just fine as long as nobody rocks the boat. Somebody rocked the boat. Kirk was "retained" in the second grade. However, I remembered the teacher saying they might retest him in the fall and then have a conference to decide this for sure or maybe to pass on information to another teacher. But for the moment, the crisis was here today, tears, etc. as both sisters passed into fifth and sixth grades, respectively. We all held no celebration because we all suffered briefly with him together. . . .

I felt very much like spanking him (and did) for no reason other than my own disappointment too, but then I realized how silly that was, and he's done darn well considering his lousy first grade.

. . .

Goodness, how I go on. But they change so fast that I hate for you to miss any of it.

I got a permanent today. And it's hot and humid and I smell like a permanent even at 2330! Me and my lousy hair.

³³ The term *flip your girdle* dates to women wearing foundational undergarments so tight that the bottom edge would flip up. In this usage, it refers to someone losing their mind. Similar terms can be seen in popular culture; for example, to flip (one's) lid "lose one's head, go wild" from 1949 or the variant flip (one's) wig in 1952.

³⁴ Gig may be making a reference to William Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much with Us," in *Poems*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807).

Now to you for a moment. You're too big a subject to mention most of the time! Look what happened to Fulbright! Forgive that teasing. I understand leaflets were dropped today from him and the 16 others anyway. Shows maybe he had a guilty conscience after all!³⁵

I've spent most of tonight reading another Vietnam report in *Life* magazine.³⁶ Honestly, I'm so well informed and nobody asks me a thing! But seriously, the more I read, the more I wish I could be there like those nurses helping out. So many are being so brave. And still there are stupid ones here who wonder if they should "call it a war." . . .

I've even reached the point of saturation on the subject as if I'd been there myself, and when a Marine was asked on TV why he worked so hard to save a dying or obviously dead buddy, and he choked out about three words with a look like "you asshole," I practically cheered! I really can't blame the reporters for playing dumb though, as that's the only way *usually* to get someone to talk. Overall, they do a great job of reporting, and I've got a marvelous overall picture.³⁷ Enough so that when I *seriously* picture myself over there, I know I'd get shot at, no matter how sweet I looked. At least you can blend in with the foliage! And you be sure you do!

Oh, I know you're not jungle fighting. That's just a manner of speech. My way of trying to stay light on a subject that scares me to pieces. I will say this much, I let myself get frightened—scared—once and decided then never to let myself again. It was a good but horrible experience. Good because it taught me how not to be scared. Rather like you chucking in your first airplane ride! I guess I qualify as a combat wife now. Hmm. That sounds fierce, doesn't it? Grr.

Just hand me my Green Beret. The one with pink tassels. Someday, the Marine Corps *will* issue us one! I think that's the best idea I've had all day. Just call us Batwives or Comwifs, like come wif me, Baby. . . . Better quit there. . . .

Back to reality. The bank balance is \$1,174. Tomorrow, I add \$363. Total \$1,537. And then I go shopping for shoes and food. Kathy's tonsillitis cost \$14! Tomorrow is 1 June, no, today is 1 June. It's 0030.

³⁵ J. William Fulbright, "The Price of Empire" (statement, American Bar Association, Honolulu, HI, 8 August 1967).

³⁶ Colin Leinster, "The Two Wars of General Lew Walt," *Life*, 26 May 1967.

³⁷ Kyle Hadyniak, "How Journalism Influenced American Public Opinion During the Vietnam War: A Case Study of the Battle of Ap Bac, the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, the Tet Offensive, and the My Lai Massacre," *Honors College* 222 (Spring 2015).

XXXs and such, and I *do* love you. Yup!

Gig



Wednesday night

31 May 1967

Hi Baby,

Well, I feel a little better (in reverse that is). Lieutenant Colonel James E. "Jim" Miller [H&MS-13] just rebroke the probe off the old number one again. That's three in a row, and we will have to rob number two's to fix it, so I guess our arty spot days are limited to one more nose probe!

For months, I've been thinking that disbursing was short-sheeting me \$40 every payday. Come to find out, one of their idiots had misinformed me back in December. I thought my separation allowance was \$145 and it is only \$30.³⁸ I had lost or misplaced the W-2 forms also, so I couldn't figure out our income tax. They're making a new copy tomorrow. I'd sure like to get that out of the way before I come home. They are only giving 20 days of leave now (plus travel and 4 days proceed time), so our leave won't be quite as long.

I'm not sure what the problem is, but we're just not getting any people in—all outbound.

...

No mail for three or four days now. It's receiving the command's attention it should have long ago. Stuff just sits up at Da Nang.

I take it all back. The mail clerk just brought your two latest letters and a very small box from Mom! Four days of mail had been tied up.

...

You know it sure is hard to tell what's incoming and what's outgoing around here. If the first noise is loud and the second noise is quiet, it's outgoing. So, when you hear a boom, boom and his shooting point [is] so far away you don't hear the hits, it could be incoming like they do up north. All of ours and Da Nang's is as fast as they can shoot.

These pages are too BIG! I get sleepy back here! Why don't you hop

³⁸ See Public Law 90-207, "Monthly Basic Pay and Allowances," DFAS.mil, 1 October 1967, 2.

Figure 37. Maj Ray Stice outside his hooch, Chu Lai



Source: Stice family collection.

in my hot—it's still about 90 degrees and the sun's been down for several hours—little bed and I'll tell you all about it.

My roommate just came back from Hawaii R&R. They took their four-year-old boy and I think that's a little young to watch all that!

...

Wow, it's late yet.

Goodnight, Darling, I love you all to pieces!

See you later, Honey,
Ray

9.

JUNE 1967

Friday

2 June 1967

Good morning Sweetheart!

Would you believe I have a quiet, bird singing, cool moment to myself? I can hardly believe it. The kids have gone up the street to play. All of them.

How's it going? Well, up until this minute, it's been bedlam. I've tried not to admit it was bedlam, but it has been. The temperature has gone from 70 to 90 degrees, which has meant a lot of opening or shutting up. Yesterday, we stayed closed until nighttime and the kids made a fort in the living room out of pillows, tables, etc. I won't begin to describe what it's been like with them all home, but it isn't easy, and I am gripping my sanity and hoping things will get better.

We've plotted a chart of activities for them to go to and that will help some. Now, to be specific for a minute. I have \$1,495 left now with all bills paid except the \$22 electricity one that just came in—that will probably go to \$40 or \$50 in midsummer with the air conditioner on—\$35 for the diamond, and the new pump for the washing machine, which I haven't ordered but should. Costs about \$27. It doesn't drain. I wring things at the moment by hand.

Anyway, the point is, I think now is the time for you to send the money for camp. Two weeks at Crenshaw costs \$45 for the first child and \$40

each additional child.¹ That's \$80 + \$45 = \$125. We think two weeks to start and then maybe two more weeks later if they like it. Of course, I can do it now, but it would throw me off balance, and I'd hate to get too low and then get desperate. *Wakari maska* [understand]?

So, okay, papasan. Can you swing camp? Please say yes soon, as I have to enroll them.

I cut the girls hair yesterday. In a Twiggy haircut up over their ears.² It's a bit severe, but we'll have it grown out by the time you get home and will be okay for swimming.

I've heard reports that Quang Ngai Province is a big Viet Cong stronghold, and they just uncovered some of it.³ Not the most settling news in the world to hear!

Oh no, all are coming home. Peace . . . it was lovely! I must close. Enjoy your peace while you're over there, Dear. It really has *some* advantages!

I love you, Dearest,

Gig

P.S. I've had some awfully lovely dreams of you lately. They all make me smile.



Friday afternoon

2 June 1967

Hi Baby,

It's been a rugged morning so far. No warning on the early, early, so I got slightly stinky last night. I was home around 2100 and to bed (early fortunately) and had to get up twice with the runs.⁴ The whole darn group has them now, and damned if I didn't get awakened at 0400 for the stupid

¹ Crenshaw Athletic Club in Austin was founded as one of the first private gymnasium studios in the United States in 1949

² Twiggy, or Lesley Hornby, was a British fashion model whose thin frame and mod look, including very short hair, drove the fashion and beauty industry for much of the 1960s and 70s.

³ An account of the treatment of civilians in this area by the Viet Cong regime was later published in Fox Butterfield, "Life under Vietcong: A Portrait by Refugees," *New York Times*, 11 April 1975.

⁴ Research on wartime health maladies shows that medical support for diarrhea and its side effects outnumbered that for malaria in Vietnam four to one. Mary Roach, "Diarrhea Is the Wartime Enemy No One Mentions," *Cut*, 9 June 2016.

early, early. Ugh! So, okay, you know—God and country and all that good stuff. I leaped into the black, shot the artillery, though with their dispersion you'd think they were hungover. I'm glad we stayed outside their firing area, although some idiot jerk in Da Nang F-9-jockeyed through the same area about six times. He acted like he wanted to get hit. You just don't get low and slow into a live firing area in North Vietnam or North Carolina.

I finally got back, debriefed, and back to work and who descends from the north but the dragon lady bearing gifts for the commanding officer, me, and Major John T. Radich [base services officer]. Mine was a beautiful black lacquered platter in a stand covered with mother of pearl from a rural scene of Vietnam—really choice. WE all lowed as how our wives would “appreciate” the thoughtfulness (No?) and thanked her. Then, to top it off, some Army major commandeered the car we had waiting to show them where they would be picking up their trash and we had no wheels! After an awkward wait, we ended up with two cars and two jeeps!

Your mother gets an enlargement of that beautiful hairdo for me and you keep it?! BS—I want it. You don't want me to start looking at *Playgirls* from the bunny book, do you?

...

Sounds like everyone got a star but YOU! Karen, Robin, and probably Kirk plus Kathy's stolen one from Robin—so enclosed please find one Bronze Star for Mom for her attention to duty, loyalty beyond reproach, and fantastic ability to be a (ugh) mother, something I could never do! Okay? Feel better, huh?

I'm still amazed to see you sweating at \$1,500! And you never have answered me as to whether your bank balance has only gone down \$200 each month. Has it?

Well, in any case Sweet San, all of a sudden, it's almost 2230 at night, and time for you know what—yup, even that—like saying goodnight, Darling, and mailing this letter!

Love you, Gig,
Ray



Sunday night

4 June 1967

Dearest,

It's 1100 and I'm back from a 1500 to 2200 Sunday outing at the lake on Bill's houseboat. . . . It is all meant to be very relaxing but somehow, we all work very hard, and of course old Kathy stays plastered on/and to/me most of the time. She's still pretty screechy about the whole bit.

. . .

Yesterday was a full day too. I let Karen and Robin go with girlfriends to Enfield Road pool, which they said was full of colored people! And they were shocked when they saw a bunch of teenagers shave a guy's head in some kind of gang jump on. I guess I won't let them go there anymore.

. . .

Well, to add to my bed woes, your letter came, with *only* the loss of a nose probe and an eyeball landing in duck weather. *Only*. But that sounded fairly minor. I do share your distress over parts for the F-9 and know that only you could make do so splendidly. It's a shame it has to be such a daily struggle though. That's like fighting a battle with one hand practically. I know those crews must do a splendid job. Thank God, you're practically an expert. But continue to be very careful, as I can tell you are being.

I'm sorry your first reaction to camp for the kids was negative. I was very let down by it. Perhaps you were trying to tell me to be cautious and not overspend, but really Dear, I am cautious. Please try to reconsider camp. The children would gain a lot even from two weeks.

Monday morning . . . the news is all black on the radio this morning. Robin woke me up because the UN Security Council was on all over the TV stations. They are fighting it seems and both sides said the other started it. There's even been some fighting in Jerusalem and the Pope is up in arms. Or is it alarms?⁵

It looks like the Israelis are outnumbered by the Egyptians, Arabs, Jordanians, and Iraqis. Doesn't seem like a fair fight at all. Big mess. We're thinking of putting a second war map up in the kitchen. I can't imagine

⁵ Gigg is referring to the Six-Day War and the UN Security Council's efforts to push through UNSC Resolution 242 regarding actions in the Middle East. UNSCR 242 was eventually passed on 22 November 1967. See also Rory Miller, "Frank Aiken, the UN and the Six Day War, June 1967," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 14 (2003): 57-73.

what's the matter with people. People are the matter, that's what's the matter!

Must close now or I'll miss the mailman, and Mom just walked in. More later.

Much love, etc.

Gig



Sunday night

4 June 1967

Hi Honey,

This will be short I'm afraid. I'm behind the time ball tonight. Now how noble are you? Didn't even wince? You've been so great about writing that I hate to short-sheet you.

...

Damn, if I can't write, I'd better do something I can do—SLEEP.

I got my 100th combat mission Friday, and today when the tanker didn't show up, I could have cared less. The guy in the front seat needed some practice landings anyway, so we came home and bounced. When a tanker doesn't show, you only have 15-20 minutes of fuel up where we've been working past the DMZ the last several months. So, you don't have much time to find each other and get refueled. I've only had one of them find me one time yet. I've always found them first. Usually, they're way out over the South China Sea somewhere away from everything. They're never in the same place twice.

The wing has decided that both probes we broke were due to the basket and hose take-up reel failing to wind up when you first plug in. They say that's what caused the hose to transmit your plug-in forces back into the nose probes (only vertically) and broke them off. Well, anyway it's still a tricky and delicate maneuver whatever the problem, and yet you have to do it rapidly or you don't get the fuel you need to start with. Besides that, I still need a shower and sleep, sleep, sleep.

Goodnight, Darling.

I sure do love you,

Ray



Monday
5 June 1967

Darling,

We missed you tonight while stargazing. It's that time of year again. Only we have a little more privacy here than down in Beeville, Texas. But we all decided the sunrises were better down there. And we missed you as our star reporter. All we can do is count and figure the red star must be Mars and sing Jingle Bells to the sound of katydid. The kids love to talk about the past. So much happened to them so fast.

Your letter made me feel better toward you today. I've been very snappish lately. . . . But a peek at the calendar made me feel better about myself. Still, today, I could barely stand Mother. I try so hard to keep her happy, and she me, but sometimes her gaiety bores me, and her enthusiasm! . . .

I used the flat tire on the boat as an excuse for not selling it. Maybe the truth is, it reminds me of you, but she doesn't know that, and she says call the filling station or shut up! Words to that effect.

. . .

I have been torn asunder by the three older ones fighting, and it's been hard on us all, living together all day again. They just all want my attention or my judgment in *their* favor, or my help, and I am fighting all the while to maintain my life and right to listen to the news or time to do something besides think of them.

. . .

Being in the Marine Corps is quite impossible, being in a war is quite impossible, being parents to four kids is quite impossible, and being separated is quite impossible. But somehow, we seem to be living an impossible life! Possibly!

The only thing that really kind of amazes me is that we have so little time alone together to show for the 12 years of marriage. How is that possible? I find myself going back to past wedding days as our *alone* time, other than Hawaii!

And yet, I've had times when I ached to be doing something with you and friends. It's all so weird.

We are "alone" in these letters as much as we almost ever have been together. And now I know what you think about mostly when you're

alone! Only really, Dear, I ought to be good for something besides that after all these years.

Well, one thing I know I'm good for is you like my letters, even if they're bitchy or crazy. Otherwise, you wouldn't mind it when the mail gets stuck at Da Nang. I'm always sort of relieved when I hear you got one on a day when you'd been waiting awhile. What a disappointment not to get one after a wait. I know. The feeling's mutual. They *do* help. So, don't make me mad. I get silent when I'm mad and then you miss a letter because I'm trying not to upset you!

...

I've got a new way of going to sleep now. I take an aspirin for my aches and pains, then I think of saline solution. That's what washes away the dark circles under our eyes. Not enough saline solution at night makes for circles! So now I turn over my beauty and my problems to saline solution, manufactured by the body, of course. That's what the article on sleep said. Good sleeping, Love, and lots of saline solution to you!

XXXs,
Gig



Tuesday night
6 June 1967

Hi Darling,

I was sorry to hear about Kirk's problem in school. That's pretty darn hard to take. I had to take my first year of college at Annapolis, Maryland, all over again so I know what that is like. I know Kirk will find it hard to believe, but I was a lot better student after that. I'd do whatever the teachers say, Kirk, they do know what's the best thing for you. Why don't you write me a letter and tell me about it? And your model car—I'd like to hear how that turned out too. As far as a soapbox racer, you'll have to wait for me to come home and help you quite a bit. I needed a lot of help, and I was several years older. That's something we can do together.

The skipper is sending me to Okinawa tonight or tomorrow for about a week. We need some high-powered scrounging in a dozen different areas. So, I have my green [money], pills, bottles, and orders and 50,000 different items from trucks and transformers to tubes and wire from brake

cylinders to steel cots. All scrounge—no money. If I can find one-tenth of the things, I'll be happy.

This snapshot was taken a few days ago by Captain Walter T. "Walt" Zinowski our communications officer. You met with his wife at the officers' beach at Fort DeRussy, Hawaii. It's really quite cool with drywall plaster board halfway up the walls and open pine slotted strips the upper half. The ceiling is insulated with white foam squares from rocket fuse boxes. All the exposed wood has been seared with a blow torch, and then with a fan (see the chord) blowing from behind it's not that bad. Of course, the runway is right outside, and we're all going deaf, but it's the coolest non-air-conditioned place I've seen yet out here. Relatively speaking purely at 120 degrees outside and 100 degrees inside. I think he said, "This is for your wife." Hence, the stupid look—you, alas, did stupefy me. And of course, my hanging rope for the malcontents and my pistol for Charlie.

After eight months of looking at our sign outside, it finally dawned on me what is wrong. It says: MAJ RAY B (EX) OFFICER; for Colonel Owens, it read: COMMING OFFICER. They do remind us on occasion that they are combat engineers not artists.

Wow, it's getting late I'd better finish packing in case we get an Okinawa flight out at midnight and take a shower in case there isn't one till tomorrow. Hell, I'll have to buy some stamps to write you from Okinawa just like a common citizen!

So, goodnight, Sweet Gal. By the time you get this, I'll be back here. Don't try to write me in Okinawa per se.

I love you, Honey,
Ray



Thursday afternoon
8 June 1967

Darling,
I feel so utterly ugly for the letter I wrote you this morning. Please forgive me. I really . . . feel more tired and tense than usual.

I just let myself get in a state over nothing. And you're right, it is nothing.

Here you are just being sweet as pie, giving me your Bronze Star as

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your way of saying “Thank you for being a good wife,” and there I am being just the opposite of what you thought I was! Am-was-is. Isn’t so good, whatever I is/was!

. . . I only have a minute now as I am fixing dinner before going to the movies with Don, Mom, and Karen Kirkpatrick. She arrived this afternoon with her folks back okay from Thailand. Mrs. Tellepson went to the beauty shop during the Hong Kong riots!

Oh Darling, do have a happy anniversary. I’m so sorry I had to cry a bit before really meaning it. Just like on my wedding day! I guess you do things to me!

Oh damn, I’ve got a new decision coming up. Seems like there’s always one every day. The rumor is the Austin’s want to take Karen and Robin back with them for a visit to Houston. This is the first time my babies have an invite to go out of town and I don’t know what I’ll say. I guess I’ll sleep on it. . . .

War news is better. The Arabs say they’ll quit. The Israeli’s bombed one of our ships by mistake.⁶ I guess you know about that. I’ve been so worried about all that. I don’t want anything to spoil our next year together! Nice and selfish, aren’t I?

Must close now. Do you forgive me? Just this once? Especially if I say I love you and want 12 years more? Or more? *Much* more!

Gig



Thursday
8 June 1967

Darling,
It’s sort of like a complete madhouse around here. . . .

. . . . I stayed up until midnight writing you a seven-page letter that I tore up. The gist of that letter had to do with money, and I decided I’m tired of talking about it. If you haven’t gotten my *message* by now, I give up. I’ve told the kids NO CAMP, and the subject is closed.

⁶ Gig is referring to an incident in early June 1967 when Israeli Air Force fighter aircraft and navy torpedo boats launched an attack on the USS *Liberty* (AGTR 5), killing or wounding more than 200 on board. See William D. Gerhard and Henry W. Millington, *United States Cryptologic History: Special Series Crisis Collection*, vol. 1, *Attack on a Sigint Collector the U.S.S. Liberty* (Washington, DC: National Security Agency, 1981).

I don't know if my bank balance is going down more than \$200 a month, but I assume it is. It sure isn't getting any bigger that's for sure!
I've got to close now.

Happy anniversary!

Gig

P.S. If you think there are some pages missing. There are.



Thursday night

8 June 1967

Hi Honey,

It's been a crazy day! Missed an early, early direct flight yesterday morning, despite the fact that several people had my phone number. Finally, at noontime, my old skipper Lieutenant Colonel Owen L. Owens lands—on a Lockheed C-130 Hercules transport—and I told him my problem. He said I could ride up to Da Nang with him, although there wouldn't be any passengers because of the KIA cargo. At Da Nang, I borrowed their phone and called the Air Force side and then their jeep hurriedly; they had something going out if I could get right over. Of course, when I get over there, there wasn't any such animal. Finally, about 1800, I was ready to go back to Chu Lai and catch one of Colonel Owens' aircraft today when the passenger clerk asked me if I wanted to go to Taiwan, China, because there just wasn't anything else. Well, you know me, a bird in hand is worth two in the bush, and it's in the right direction (plus I'd never been to Taiwan).⁷ I landed at Ping Kahn Pek Tu something or other Air Force Base in Taiwan about midnight last night.⁸ I went to their club for some refreshments and, about 0130 or 0200, we left again for Nobu, Japan, got a bus to Futenma, checked in to lousy wet old bachelor officer quarters (BOQ), checked out, and came over here to Kadena by cab just as the sun came up this morning. Took a shower and got a shave and then went shopping at the PX (down to four undershorts for some reason, probably

⁷ This proverb originates in medieval falconry, where a bird (falcon) in hand was more valuable than two in the bush (the prey). The earliest known usage in English comes from a fifteenth century work by John Capgrave, *The Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, which was reprinted by the Early English Text Society of London in 1893.

⁸ Stice is referring to Ching Chuan Kang Air Base, Taiwan. See Seth Robson, "Taiwan Preserves Legacy of U.S. Air Force Operations on the Island," *Stars and Stripes*, 3 March 2023.

the civilian laundry at Chu Lai). I found the air station cafeteria and had a big pork chow mien dinner with iced tea, apple pie ala mode, and coffee. On the way back, I saw the movie had started and caught Jane Fonda and someone in *Any Wednesday*, munching on popcorn.⁹

Fortunately, my stomach seems better today. Tuesday afternoon the flight surgeon made me drink a whole bottle of Paregoric right there at sick bay—whew—and pills to keep things going right.¹⁰ So far so good. And the niesen just brought back my first load of clothes.¹¹

Tomorrow, I'll start scrounging. Sure was a job getting here from Chu Lai this time. Before Christmas, I caught a plane direct.

...

It's cool, windy, with light rain, and must be close to 1,600 kilometers farther north than the Republic of North Vietnam (RNV) and so quiet my ears almost ring.

Don't get upset if I get wrapped up here and miss a letter. I'm not sure how this is going to turn out.

Goodnight, Darling, I love you and miss you like hell!

Ray



Friday night
9 June 1967

Hello Dear,

I feel like I should throw my hat in first. I'm not sure whether you are speaking to me after my brickbat letter.¹²

Well, I'm out of the woods at last . . . after one of the most intense weeks I've had since you left! I'm feeling perfectly fine tonight and awfully ashamed of my abnormal behavior. The kids were magnificent through it

⁹ *Any Wednesday*, directed by Robert Ellis McGinnis, starring Jane Fonda and Jason Robards (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1966)

¹⁰ Paregoric was a common household treatment for diarrhea and upset stomach, though by 1914 it would later be classified as an exempt narcotic due to the inclusion of opium as an ingredient.

¹¹ A direct translation for the term *niesen* is not available; though given the content, Stice is likely referring to the laundry delivery service.

¹² The term *brickbat*, ca. 1640, refers literally to a weapon but figuratively to negative comments or insults.

all. I was taking potshots at everyone and couldn't stop myself. A couple of ghastly sleepless nights added to my physical problems. . . .

...

Tonight, the gang all went for a Mexican dinner and a quick trip to Zilker Park in the cool summer evening. Kathy was enchanted and ran all over the place. She can run without falling now and is so proud of her new ability. . . .

Kirk, too, seems to have new feelings about you. We barely got the Father's Day messages off to you because he wasn't satisfied with his. We had to squeeze his spaceship and he didn't like that one bit! Finally, he wrote you a message—I didn't see what—and that satisfied him. Whew!

...

It's been a week and a half of world crisis. Only a week, but it feels like the other. All day National Security Council sessions on TV, which drives the kids wild, and I've had radio and TV going at the same time, but still have missed a lot because of the kids' noise.¹³ Gamal Abdel Nasser resigned today but by tonight has gone back.¹⁴ The Israelis have won the war, the Arabs quit, then the Jews attacked after the ceasefire, nobody believes anybody, and the Russians have been their usual awful selves, twisting everything. . . . The newspaper headline tonight was "Israel Invades Syria for 'Violating' the Cease Fire."¹⁵

...

I'm glad you got your 100th mission in despite the drogue probe, wind-up, plug-in, take-up reel, etc.! That description you gave me was a lulu. I don't like to hear you say you're over the DMZ at all, but then I'm not too happy about where you are in general either!

My dad got the Bronze Star too. Now I have two reasons to make that my favorite medal.

...

¹³ Jack Gould, "TV: Spotlight on Crisis; 3 Networks Cancel Shows to Cover the Security Council Session on War," *New York Times*, 7 June 1967.

¹⁴ On 9 June 1967, Nasser gave a speech to the Egyptian people, announcing his retirement from the presidency but reassumed the office in the wake of mass demonstrations. See "Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser: Resignation Broadcast," Center for Israel Education, 9 June 1967.

¹⁵ Though the original reference is not available, headlines around the world on the date focus on the attack on Golan Heights and Israel's defeat of three Middle Eastern armies. See Avner Cohen, *The 1967 Six-Day War: New Israeli Perspectives, 50 Years Later* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, 2017).

Say you're not mad and all is okay. I don't need any money, Honey. Not at the price of a fight anyway. But if you want to continue same discussions on the matter, I'll resume my efforts to keep you informed. The countdown is \$1,383 now and holding.

Hey, did that get a little laugh? Nothing like a wife trying to get her husband to laugh about money. . . . Best solution, both laugh and start all over again. Peace! Peace it is, and I win hands down. All's fair in love and money.

Goodnight, Love. It's so nice to *be* in love again. Much easier. I'll be good. I promise. (Until next month.)

XXXs,
Gig



Saturday night
10 June 1967

Hi Baby,

I'm back over at Futenma now. Most of my work will have to originate from here, so I just up and moved. Yesterday, I found six pickup trucks in various stages of decay in the Kadena salvage yard. They set them aside for me, and I arranged for trucks to take them down to the docks for loading out to Chu Lai. Then I have about 15 million forms to fill out at three different places. The damn pickups sure aren't much to look at. I just hope we can get three or four of them running. We sure couldn't have gotten along without the other scrounge trucks we have. One of the hardest things is to get wheels for all the running around you have to do here to accomplish anything. Things are really spread out and I don't know too much about this side of the island. We always landed at Noha, North Korea, before.

I just read your last two letters. Ha! You think the Viet Cong aren't up on Fulbright? That shows how much you don't know about them. They're as intellectual as hell and smart enough to use a stupid asshole like him in their propaganda.¹⁶ Sorry drum, but your viewpoint stinks and you're

¹⁶ For more on this sentiment and how the hearings exposed the American public and the world to the administration's actions, see Lee Riley Powell, "Fulbright and Vietnam: The Emergence of an Adversary Role" (thesis, University of Virginia, 1984).

wrong as could be. He's putting us one step back for every two steps forward. They think we're going to just walk out because of the peace marchers and idiots like him. Better not side up with him, I heard stories up on the DMZ that would make you sick at what they've done in his words and his name. Don't even write to me about him. That's really not very smart, Gig. You know I hate his guts.

If it wasn't for idiots like him and Robert S. McNamara, we wouldn't have to travel thousands of miles looking up someone else's trash to fight a goddamn tough war.¹⁷

Just don't ever mention his name to me again, I'm tired of throwing up.

Goodnight,
Ray



Monday
12 June 1967

Darling,
So glad to hear you got to Okinawa (via Taiwan yet). I wasn't expecting to hear about it all until you got back, so imagine my surprise when a letter came today, telling me you were there and soaking up the good life but quick!

How funny that we saw the same movie *Any Wednesday* the same month. We're not so far off after all. I was practically eating out of your popcorn bag when you described it.

Also, glad to hear you got a big swallow of Paregoric, so the runs didn't ruin your visit to outer space! You sounded in hog heaven just to get away for a while, and I even breathed a sigh of relief with you. It *made* my weekend. You really pleased me by writing me from there, when you had such a good excuse not to!

I hope the trip is/or was fruitful too, and I'm sure it was, as anything you scrounge up will probably look better than nothing. If they really left it to you, you'd probably package the whole of Okinawa and drag it

¹⁷ McNamara was secretary of defense from 1961 to 1968, and he disagreed with how the war was being waged. See David Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped: A History of the Pentagon Papers Case* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

back with you. I imagine someone will try to prevent that, however, and wonder what sort of tiger they are tangling with. Ray Stice, original A-1 scrounger of the Marine Corps! I know!

Well, they are playing the song “Stranger in Paradise” on TV right now.¹⁸ Must be a little like what you felt that first night.

...

I’m tempted to start going to church. You should have heard the blast some old Arab gave to the National Security Council last night. He was a moralist and said please keep your miniskirts at home. We don’t want them. Words to that effect. The strangest part was that he sounded like a Jewish rabbi. It was the first non-Communist blast I’ve ever heard. Just a guy saying he thought the world was in a pretty sorry mess because people play games with semantics.¹⁹

I’d describe it better, but Kirk is breathing down my neck wanting to play with this machine. Natch.

...

He wants me to go buy him some sandals and so I must close. He is not one to wait very patiently. “In a few minutes we are going to get Kirk some sandals.” That’s what HE says.

Kirk says . . . Love, Kirk and Mom. You do, don’t you?

Gig



Tuesday
13 June 1967

Hello Dear Heart,
Boy, it looks like I said the wrong thing at the wrong time over Fulbright,

¹⁸ The song was originally from the 1953 musical *Kismet* and was made popular by Tony Bennett, vocalist, “Stranger in Paradise,” by Alexander Borodin, Robert Wright, and George Forrest, recorded 13 October 1953, Columbia Records.

¹⁹ Gig is referring to Jamil M. Baroody, a Saudi diplomat, who addressed the UN Security Council on 11 June 1967 in the days following the Six-Day War. His comments focused on the hypocrisy of Western powers and the attempt to push their morality on other nations: “Every day legislators are criticizing us, calling us slave-traders. What about their white slaves? What about their narcotics? What about their promiscuity? Let them have their mini-skirts and hot dogs. We do not want that kind of civilization.” United Nations Security Council, 22d Year, 1357th Meeting (speech, Baroody, UN Representative from Saudi Arabia, New York, 11-12 June 1967), 13.

and I've yet to get a blast back over money. I should feel bad, only I don't. I feel pretty good at the moment, in general, that is. Too good to blast back a blast back, because I really think we get confused when there is more than one blast back. Maybe you don't, but I do. Besides which, I surrender! Who wants to blast away at somebody who's throwing up anyway? What kind of intellectual discussion is that when somebody says I disagree, and the other person throws up. I don't throw up when *you* disagree, do I? Barf—I mean arf.

...

Hey, it's midnight. I've defrosted the icebox all damn day and feel utterly de-iced. I got so worked up I had the kids cleaning out their drawers too. It hit me that 20 days is 20 days and I've got to be ready to MOVE OUT like a good Marine ON THE DOUBLE in November. We're getting an early start. Robin finally caught on and said, "For heaven's sake, we're not moving out *today!*" Darn her anyway, and just when I had a good steam up on them.

...

News. Kathy is talking—*think* thoughts talking. I mean she's expressing herself and she's *delightful*. The cutest female in the house at the moment, and I find her much company to me. To all of us. . . .

The new bed has given her a new grownup feeling, and she is turning into a little girl right before my eyes.

As for your *big* girls, they have run into a new family—two girls ages 11 and 13 and are terribly impressed. They were "dared" to ring doorbells and stand in the street—and on top of a car—but Robin felt guilty and told all. That gave me a good chance to help overcome the guilt feelings with her, point out that she was right to feel guilty about standing in the street, and that the rest wasn't too bad, but better they not try to keep up with the 13-year-old.

However, the whole bit made me realize they are getting older, and it's the older kids who bring about the inevitable changes. This will be the biggest change for you when you come back. . . .

Well, anyway, the summer will bring changes in them all, and though they are the same in many ways, I can see the stirrings of new and different things in them.

This is the age for girlfriends and giggling for Karen and Robin.

So! How I do go on. I just need you to talk to, but there seems to be so much for us to talk about—the world, kids, money, jobs, war—that

I wonder where *we* are in the whole picture. Hagglng over Fulbright? Incredible! Never happen, GI. Don't discourage me. I have to be adult about something once in a while. . . .

. . .

Goodnight, Love. Who do you love? I don't believe you. But that's okay. I love *you* throw up and all! You can stop blasting though. I heard you.

Gig



Thursday
13 June 1967

Darling,

What a way to start a day! I felt like you, getting—no leaping—off into the dark on an early, early. Only mine wasn't an early, early, it was a late, late. I stayed up late and got up late to the sounds of Mother bringing in the toy chest, which she antiqued for Kathy's room. She also redid an old picture frame and put the oil you made for Karen as a baby (clown picture), and they were tiptoeing around putting it up. I got up, threw on a winter bathrobe by mistake, looked at the room blearily, and started for the kitchen to make coffee. Only Kirk had taken the coffee jar for an experiment, but I was prepared for that emergency as I had bought a real tin coffee pot for emergency real coffee drinkers and was rather pleased to have an excuse to use it. I got the coffee on and started cooking some sausage. The phone rang and it was a lady from school asking to have Kirk tested for second grade ability next Wednesday as part of a university survey. So, okay, yes, he can be in it. I try to explain this to Kirk and head for coffee, saying goodbye to Mom, who is busy taking chairs to the car to take to the Austin's for the anniversary party tonight. I just poured the coffee when the phone rings again. . . . I start talking (news of Hawaii, etc.) and the *doorbell* rings. . . . "Sign here," the postman says. I sign. It's your package. God almighty. All those good things at once. . . . Beautiful pictures! I like them all and am wild about the beads and earrings. I will wear the earrings tonight with the Hawaiian long muumuu to the party. Coffee by this time is cold.

. . .

Then it's lunchtime. I fix bean sandwiches, oranges, peanut butter,

and jelly. . . . Robin goes swimming.²⁰ Kirk and Karen are bouncing off walls to do likewise. I dress the girls and drive Kirk and Karen and all to the pool. I come home to put the little girls to bed! And in between, the beds are made, dishes washed, and hair set.

It's now 1530 and I have a quiet house and just finished a *good* cup of coffee. . . . Now you can see why I stay up late and get up late. The pace is either dreadfully fast or agonizingly slow here, just as it is for you there.

. . .

Oh yes, last night I watched an hour-long TV show put out by Annapolis of a little boy yearning to be a sailor. No words. Just a boy marching and playing around the Naval Academy and the town.²¹ Good PR but *that* I had to watch. Brought back such good memories of us at Annapolis last year and the years you were there that I still try to share vicariously.

I do miss sharing things with you, like mainly life, but mostly loving! That sure is an empty bed in the morning. It will be so wonderful when you are home. Well, no sense getting excited about that yet. But it *will* be good to have you home.

These are my two best weeks in the year—anniversary and birthday—and I thank you, Dearest, for my lovely gifts. My little toothbrush gift was just a token. I can't seem to get out to shop except for groceries and shoes, so I'm glad you had the fun of shopping for *real* goodies. You did beautifully! We'll wait to frame and hang them *together*.

All for now, Darling. Big sigh. I *do* miss you. You know that, don't you? You are my life.

Many XXXs,
Gig



Wednesday night
14 June 1967

Hi Honey,
Getting older? Boy, I did get wrapped up like I was afraid I would. The

²⁰ Recipes for baked bean sandwiches can be traced to ca. 1909 in a cookbook, *Cooking for Two*, by Janet McKenzie Hill as an option for meatless meals.

²¹ Though the reference is unclear, Gig may be talking about *Men of Annapolis*, with 41 episodes filmed from 1957 to 1958 and was the only television show to have been filmed at the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland.

only way you'd know I was still thinking about you was when I finally found: 1. your wedding anniversary present; 2. your birthday present; plus, 3. some other goodies I wish you would save till I get home and don't give them away. There's no card. You can guess which one is which, no doubt. Everything is "real" as far as I can determine, so don't sell them short. I hope you get them either 18 or 19 June. I sent the box air mail on 13 June. Why don't you wait until 22 June and open it up?

Gee, you're sure getting OLD Mrs. Sticestone. I'm glad I don't have birthdays as fast as you!

Anyway, you sweet thing, I love you ANYWAY! Even if you were stupid enough to marry me! Damn, do you always have to have two such critical anniversaries the same time? It sure puts certain husbands in a bind at times! Anyhoo, I'm back at cheerless Chu Lai—the vacation land of the South China Sea—wishing you the most energetic well wishes and many more of them both as you can in a stupid letter!

And I know it would be appropriate to apologize for the last letter. Neither one of us should write when we're mad, because it takes so damn long to straighten it out. So, I hereby will make an honest attempt not to write when I'm mad at you and that won't amount to a hill of beans, though only one time in eight-and-a-half months. Really not that bad.

Hell yes, send the kids to two weeks camping. I'll send you a postal money order in the next letter for \$125. The post office is closed tonight. That should be really good for them—and you in the daytime—and I know they will enjoy it.

...

Well, back to the salt mill. I only got two hours sleep last night trying to get back here, and I have to get up at 0400 for the early, early tomorrow. Yeah, happy anniversary to you too! We both sure do have problems, Honey, and I really am sorry I added to yours with that last letter—no more.

Hang on, Baby, the finish is bound to be better than the start!
I love you, even if you are a year more elderly!

Love,
Ray



Thursday night

15 June 1967

Hi Darling,

Today's letter showed how much you can forgive when you apologized about the day before's letter. I wish I'd done the same thing at Okinawa. You're going to be mad for a long time on that letter. Maybe you will get the package and know I still wasn't mad, just that one time. Going back over the calendar, it looks like you had a bad empty week before our anniversary. I really am sorry, Honey. I'm not a mean person usually. Maybe you got the box early enough to understand that I do love you, and I want you 100 more years! I hope you had some semblance of a happy anniversary, and I know you'll have a happy birthday. There's still time for that!

Goodnight, Sweetheart,

Ray

P.S. I have the cash, but the post office was closed today for an audit. I'll get the money order tomorrow for sure.



Friday

16 June 1967

Darling,

Well, all the flurry of the 46th anniversary party is over. . . .

I couldn't go to sleep for several hours later and finally took an aspirin and dropped off. You know me and my overpepped-up state. I need the warmth of you to relax, and so without you, I just toss and turn and decide parties aren't worth it without you to come with or to!

Must close now and go get the kids at the swimming pool. More later. I love you!

Gig



Saturday night

17 June 1967

Hi Honey,

It's been a week now since I wrote that stupid letter in Okinawa. I just

June 1967

hope you get the package fast, so you know I really wasn't mad—maybe stupid, but not mad.

Do you feel OLDER yet? Getting a few gray hairs? Little flabby? Pooching more? Hmm? Can't see so close-up? Feel tuckered out sooner? Hmm? . . .

Tomorrow is our wedding anniversary. How about that? Twelve lousy, wonderful years to the same old slob, warm, sweaty, sweet, Wif! Whew! How's them one-upmanship brinkmanship apples?

Newspapers? Lord, don't send me any papers please. We get enough here, and I never met Emma Long anyway. We have a real live Filipino floor show tonight—three males and one female—and so far, we can't tell which is which. They all have the same hair and the same clothes. Maybe one of them will put on some lipstick and go to the ladies' head so we tell which one to whistle at.

My real problem is that I haven't flown in two weeks—that's the trouble. Plus, our officer strength is getting so low I don't know who to put where.²² And the ones we are getting are the wrong kind! Plus, last night, we had a going away party for Major James F. "Jim" Newell, our utilities officer who built three quarters of this containment. It did get a little drunk out. He topped it off with a champagne breakfast, and he'll be in Okinawa by now. He had been with MABS before Colonel Owens took the squadron in Japan while we were at Officer Candidates School in Quantico. . . .

I got my Silver Star in lieu of my sixth Air Medal today. Now, these silver and bronze stars are not a real Silver Star or Bronze Star Medal like our dads had. These just signify an additional award. You got confused I think. I'm trying to get Colonel Owens a Bronze Star Medal and I got one for my explosive ordinance officer, not me.

Hey, like it's almost late yet. Kisses and hugs and all that good stuff, Baby Doll. I still love you even if you have AGED slightly.

Ray

²² According to the May 1967 command chronology, MABS-13 had 18 Marine Corps officers; by June 1967, their officer corps was at 17. Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13), Command Chronology (ComdC) May 1967, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077124, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University; and Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13), ComdC June 1967, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077125, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.



18 June 1967

12 years later

Hey, you know what? We got married on a *hot* night! How come I was so cold? Don't answer that! Well, I could use some of the cold air tonight. It's in the 90s and the windows are open. I froze up the air conditioner last night. Can't I please say A/C? I put it on intermittent to save fuel, and it doesn't work on intermittent. So, we sweltered, fled to Mom's by noon, and went swimming at the lake by late afternoon. We came back so cool we thought it was cool and opened up. Wrong move. Anyhoo, that's how I know we got married on a hot night!

It's been a pretty good weekend, all told. I went to see *Hurry Sundown* with my neighbor friend. . . .²³ Anyway, that was pleasant, and we parked in the parking lot across from the Driskill Hotel, where we ran out to get our car after the wedding, and I thought of that as we waited for the car and watched busloads of people in evening dress pull up to the hotel for the president's \$1,000/plate dinner that was going on that night. . . .²⁴

...

This morning, I was presented with "our" anniversary present: an olive jar painted (they painted) green with crinkle paint, with three lovely pink roses and a bow on it. Charming! The card was *most* appropriate for us too and I'll enclose it.

...

Swimming at the lake was a boon to me with the kids of course. . . . Kirk mostly leaped on Don's back, but we did calm him down and taught him the two step and he was grateful. He gets very giggly about dancing. Karen and Robin do the new dances, and we all laugh at what you'll say when you see how they can wiggle now!

Kathy still has a hard time warming up to Don and men. I *really* can see how she misses you there. She really needs some Daddy hugs and play.

...

Karen is growing *one* bosom. She *told* me she was, but I didn't be-

²³ *Hurry Sundown*, directed by Otto Preminger, starring Michael Cane and Jane Fonda (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1967).

²⁴ During Johnson's presidential tenure, the Driskill served as the headquarters for the White House Press Corps and a suite was permanently reserved for President Johnson. "Timeline," DriskillHotel.com, accessed 30 June 2023.

lieve her. I saw it tonight, however, and she *blushed*. I think it was her first blush too.

Robin is brown as a berry and plump as a berry too with femininity. Men are beginning to say, “Well! A room full of pretty girls,” when they see them. And they *are* pretty. Thank goodness for *your* good looks.

That’s about it, darling. We miss you terribly, but we are managing *somehow*. The weekends are the worst, and we have to work harder to cover your absence. So when we succeed, it only shows how much we needed you. But there are so many hours to fill in a year! *Wow!* Lucky you with *real* work to fill the gap.

I’m yawning, sweetheart. My “work” is showing! I know one thing for sure this 12th anniversary, I wish we were back in that *cool* motel . . .

Do let’s make a date for that next year. Same time. Better *place*. Better place than *this* year that is. The first place was fine. My hindsight is better than my foresight obviously. Maybe because now I got you, Babe.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Tuesday
20 June 1967

Darling Sweet,
I have two of your letters to answer, and I can tell the crisis is over. You sounded so darn guilty that now I feel guilty all over again! It *really* was my fault too! Not yours at all. Heavens, that bit about Fulbright didn’t faze me a bit. The crisis was over my waiting and getting myself into a stew over not having enough money to send the kids to camp or get the machines fixed. But the longer I’ve thought it over, the more I’ve decided money isn’t my problem or your problem, it’s *our* problem. That’s the way it’s always been—share and share alike—and the problem arose when I didn’t think I was getting your share of interest in my share of money problems. You were interested, but I couldn’t seem to get you *concerned*. Well, you’ve shown me finally that you *are* concerned and that was all I really wanted in the first place. I wanted *you* to make the decision. Isn’t that silly? So now, I’m the one to feel terribly humble that I have such a good husband who cares so much about me! And you are a precious love and I’m a dirty dog to worry you the way I did. But oh, I dearly loved all that good attention!

I'm just lapping up all those presents and apologies and promises to send money! That's just lovely!²⁵

...

The kids started swim lessons at 0845 this morning and that's *real* early, early for me! I'm amazed, really amazed, at your two-hours sleep bit. Not that you only had two hours of sleep, but that you didn't sound like you'd only had two-hours sleep. That takes real control and discipline. And when I think you had to face my bad letter on that much sleep, it's even more amazing. That's what really got me. Now, no more feeling bad on either of our parts and more sleep for both of us.

...

Awfully glad you don't have my age problem, my childcare problem, my money problem . . . but I'll be glad to *give* them to you next November! Won't it be fun when we *trade* problems then. I can hack yours if you *can* hack mine. You just proved that.

All for now, Dear. I miss you *ever, ever* so much and hope all is going well there. Were they pleased with your trip results to Okinawa? I hope so. We really are on the road to each other. June is almost gone and that leaves only four short months to go. They will fly by. *Literally* for you!

Lunchtime here.

XXXs and hugs,
Gig



Wednesday night
21 June 1967

Well, Hello Tribe!

You overwhelmed me with my Father's Day letters, pictures, spaceships, and handmade cards and plates. All beautiful and very much appreciated. They all came yesterday, which was great since the whole Chu Lai area was a few days late on all the mail. So, I didn't feel let down or left out, on the contrary, it was just great. And thank the Lord, you got your gifts. The earrings match your ring for the wedding anniversary, the stone necklace

²⁵ Gig may be making a reference to the song "Wouldn't It Be Lovely" sung by Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*, directed by George Cuko, starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1964).

was for your birthday tomorrow, and all the pictures are for us just like you said. Some of them will be beautiful when they are backed and framed right. The real thin ones are Burmese rock rubbings. They grind the colors in the thin matting with rocks. Then there are two types of Batiks: two in plastic are a Chinese copy and one a Thailand original (the rather dark mountain scene). I think we can have some fun with them anyway.

I want to try to answer everyone's different parts of my Father's Day now, but I could hug and kiss all of you for your thoughtfulness.

...

Somehow all of a sudden, it's like late. So, I better get in bed. Hmm, tomorrow is 22 June. Some mighty strange people born that day.

Kiss all those monsters for me, Honey.

I love you,
Ray



21 June 1967

The longest day to be 37. Do I feel older yet? Yes, Dear, I guess I do as 37 up there looks positively young; 38 feels much more *mature*. Thank you for your welcome into this new age. The best thing to me about simultaneous anniversary-birthdays is that they never feel bad because I never feel alone. You've been there before me, in case of birthdays, or are with me, in case of anniversaries, so somehow the water doesn't seem so cold. You have been and are my buffer zone! You're just one step ahead and have a hand reaching back to help me up and mine is reaching up to you.

...

For heaven's sake, let's get off the subject of age. I've still got tomorrow to "celebrate" it! . . . Your money orders came today, and I really don't know what to do with them. I don't deserve them at all. Meaning I should have been able to *lure* it out of you. But at this distance, it's so darn hard to be *alluring*. . . I'm losing my *touch*. Gotcha worried now, don't I?

Well, no, I *did* need the money. Probably gross mismanagement. Certainly, gross mishandling, but I will say in my defense, I had a great deal of pressure applied. *My own*. I got myself in a big stew, and you just helped me out by taking all the blame like a good gentleman should! The children were pleased, of course, but they had never been particularly worried! Robin said to tell Daddy, "Mommy was all wrong and we don't

need the money after all, and we'll send it back . . . *maybe!*" How's that for diplomacy?

...

Glad you're getting some entertainment there and a party now and then to spice things up a bit. I just need people, grown-up types, to make my day. . . .

...

Time for work on a birthday package. Please send me a list. Your usual birthday sport shirt is OUT this year. Unless, of course, you really could use one.

Gee, I miss you. What's the latest on where we go from here? What are you trying to prepare me for with this cat and fleas and Hawaii bit. How about Corpus Christi? Well, whatever and wherever, I guess we can hack it together. And so . . .

Goodnight, Love. It's midnight. Happy birthday to me, you say? Okay!

XXXs,

Gig



Friday night

23 June 1967

Darling,

It's my turn to be short in a letter this time. I've got to look like something human at the class of 1947 reunion tomorrow! Only I really look like a peeled grape with one of those ghastly bubble hairdos. I prefer looking tan and slightly harassed and frowsy to looking prim and proper. Oh well.

I had a *very* nice birthday after all. Everyone else enjoyed the whole day; but since I was guest of honor, I had to wait until nightfall, and it seemed like a long wait but was worth it. The kids were bubbling with excitement. They worked on it three days and came up with a new hair dryer bought with green stamps, and much scolding of Kirk's lousy pasting, and three pickle jars painted themselves with crackle paint for flour, sugar, and coffee. Also, a cake they baked, which was *very* good (all chocolate), and a well-set table with pink flowers, blue plates, homemade birthday cards, and lovely new glass goblets from Uncle Don (and cologne) with Uncle Sam and Helen for guests, as Helen was *there* when I was *born!*

...

June 1967

Your letter today with news that you could be commanding officer if you want just seemed to fit in with the general happiness of the week. Maybe some weeks aren't so bad after all! It's not every week I show off in front of Kirk by cashing \$125 at the post office either! But this week it seemed quite the normal thing to do.

But now, it's midnight—how does that crawl up on me?—and Don and I have to go on a tour of Austin High School at 0930 tomorrow as a *start*, so I can't stop now. Gotta finish the week in a big way!

...

Not a hair on my head got ruffled, however, as I am plastered down good for my "graduation"! I did God bless Robin for showing me her kick at the pool, however. There was no joy in kicking a good splash and getting a dirty look from the one with the bubble top. She almost popped my bubble! For heaven's sake. She looked properly mournful and told me to get in the middle of the pool. Guided me out there, in fact, as it was safer there! She wanted to set the clock for me too to get me up on time. Nothing like cranking up your mom for her cranky old 20th reunion. Too bad you can't wake me up. . . . "Don't you dare you beast! You'll mess my hair!"

Goodnight, Dear,
Gig



Friday night
23 June 1967

Well, hello, hello,
I mean if you tolerate this half-smashed writing, you're awful big and easy, or would you rather have nothing? That's what I wrote on the last two orders before I left the club "1 Nothing." But on the way home, I noticed the water farm didn't have any lights and a poor private first class trying to pump and chlorinate in the dark, so I helped him find where the wire was broken and fixed his lights. So, time wise, I guess you get short-sheeted, Honey. My eyes close X hours after sunset, regardless of what's going on.

Where in hell today went is still a mystery. I've been rushed since breakfast and it's noon already and used and it's nighttime. Where did it go? Each minute feels like you have all day, and the day went like a minute.

Supposed to get an F-9 test hop tomorrow. Keep your fingers crossed. Oh, I forgot, a couple of us have been “requested” to check out in the old Lockheed Hummer (C-117 or Douglas C-47 Skytrain) that big ugly antique two-prop transport. They want us for supply runs and flare hops, I guess. You fly all day, and it’s not even a “combat” mission unless you get shot at and hit. It’s the one Lou Gagnon was flying all the time.

You know, we only have four months and two weeks to go? Hmm, not all that bad. Colonel Palmer keeps saying he’s going to get me checked out in the F-4 sometime. I’m afraid he’s going to leave MABS and take a gun squadron (F-4) in the next few months maybe. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314) and their skipper of two days is on the hospital ship *Sanctuary* (AH 17) already with renal cellulitis.²⁶ I think that’s kidney stones in Greek. Pat Faulkner got a Distinguished Flying Cross and Ray Pendergraft got a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry today. Those are some advantages to flying the F-4.

The 46th wedding anniversary sounded swell thanks to Pris and you and all the work that went into it. . . .

I wandered out on the runway last night to see why some idiot taxied off into the sand (taxi lights went out on him apparently) and an F-4 came in, dropped his hook, caught the arresting wire, blew a tire, and dropped a 500-pound bomb on the runway. Tomorrow, I’m going to present the arresting “point” man the “twinkle toes of the year award.” He saw sparks on the runway of that huge bomb roaring down on him on the runway and, not even knowing what it was, had the sense to jump out of the way. Whew! Talk about close shaves—and there had been another one that morning too! And this week—Wednesday, I think—a damn napalm tank fell off, exploded, and damn near got three of them.²⁷ They rate hazardous duty pay if anyone else ever did. They get fired at more than the Viet Cong!

And out at the bomb dump last month, a wire in a battery in a forklift shorted out and caused a huge roaring fire in the napalm mixing stand. One guy put it out so fast no one else knew it had happened. And an-

²⁶ According to the official history, VMFA-314’s commanding officer at the time was LtCol Frank D. Topley. See Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984), 280.

²⁷ The command chronology for the period offers limited details other than to report 405 arrested landings. There is no mention of accidents. MABS-13, ComdC June 1967.

Figure 38. A U.S. Marine Corps Douglas A-4C Skyhawk from Marine Attack Squadron 225 (VMA-225) lands at Chu Lai, Vietnam



At the time, the airstrip was only 1,050 m (3,500 ft) long. The total length of the strip after completion was later 2,440 m (8,000 ft). Note that the aircraft's tailhook is extended to catch the mobile arresting gear designed to stop planes in 40 m (130 ft).

Source: official U.S. Navy photo 1112164 by PH R. L. Dukes.

other kid tackled a guy who had doused his clothes with diesel fuel and was lighting flare pots for the runway and his clothing caught on fire. This kid tackled him even though his clothes were also soaked with diesel fuel, rolled him in the sand, put the fire out. I'm telling you, Honey, we have some of the most tremendous people in the world out here and they aren't really fighting the war themselves—just wonderful people working their butts off.

Good night, Darling.

I love you,
Ray



Sunday night

25 June 1967

Hey, do you know what? Yes, we did get married on a cold night and that damn cold air conditioner made it even colder. Didn't it, Dear? And now you're freezing up the air conditioner? Must be pure spite! "Clean the filters every two weeks," the man said. Remember?

...

I think the olive jar sounds beautiful. . . .



Monday morning

26 June 1967

Hello Dearest,

Move over, I'm coming to Vietnam! Boy, you just don't know what I'd give to do just that. I'm drained, depleted, and spent after my emotional look backward 20 years. They gave me my diploma—an honorary one framed in gold—and I made a little speech (three lines), and it was all *TOO MUCH!* Especially without your shoulder to cry on afterward.

Well, I'm very glad it's all over. The kids couldn't figure out where and why I was going all day Saturday. . . .

They [the school] made a big deal out of the "wrong" done to me with no diploma and how they had gone to the Board of Education, and it still voted NO! But two board members were old classmates and one of them finally said, "*Hell, yes! Give her a diploma.*" The other one did too then, so I got two votes, hence the "honorary" deal. Actually, they didn't have time to check records and the rule is if you're gone a year, you don't get to graduate. But since I'd graduated from the University of Texas, they were sort of nonplussed! I sure had a hard time graduating even at the end! . . .

Everyone is fine here. I've still got to get going on camp and the next big deal, which is Karen's birthday and yours! It's 98 degrees here and I'm not moving too fast.

...

Your pretty girl is sitting by me now playing with screw drivers. Her hair is getting longer. We're going to finish the portraits this week and maybe get Karen and Robin in the picture too. We'll see.

I miss you more than I can say and know more every day that I *did*

June 1967

marry the right guy after all. How lucky we are, regardless of the miles between us.

I sure hope I get a letter from you today. I need a big dose of the present to offset the large dose of the past.

I love you, Darling.

Gig



Monday afternoon

25 June 1967

Never really got started as the colonel came in with the good news that one of our people had shot and killed a soldier cleaning his weapon, and we just got started on that when a man I had been counseling half the afternoon was going nuts outside my hut. I had warned the skipper about what I thought about his case at supper, even though the colonel had talked to him two days himself. I felt the guy was psychotic and should be sent to a psychiatrist immediately. By 0830, this guy had really flipped, and we were chasing him all over the air station, through barbed wire, and falling into bunkers. He got away four times and finally picked up a seven-foot-long 4 x 4 and was going to kill someone. We finally got the board and him down, and he asked for me to get everyone off of him. I talked to him for a while and finally decided it would be okay if he was good. I finally talked him into an ambulance and up to sick bay for some more long talks (with me, the colonel, and the doctor). He refused to sleep overnight in sick bay and, when he saw the senior noncommissioned officer (SNCO) he worked for, he started up again. It took 12 corpsmen to hold him down to give him a shot and put him out. Then they took him over to the big hospital.²⁸ Whew, one hell of a Sunday night!

When the poor H&MS office clerk brought the flight schedule into the hut about 0430 this morning, he had four pistols pointed at him until we made sure who he was!

²⁸ According to a study done by Columbia University and the Harvard School of Public Health, 19 percent of the 3 million troops who served in Vietnam came home with post-traumatic stress disorder. An earlier study from 1990 showed even more dramatic results with more than 30 percent suffering from PTSD. See "Vietnam Era Health Retrospective Observational Study," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed 27 April 2023.

Didn't get out on a test hop yesterday either—five starts and six fuel leaks and to hell with it.

What made the problem worse with Cory last night was that every time I'd get him calmed down someone would get too close or try to grab him and off mentally and physically he'd go. That's why I had to eventually just have them stand back and let me handle him until the ambulance came. I wanted him knocked out after the doctor had a chance to talk to him, not out there near the runway. Need I say that we sure don't want him back! That was an emotional experience to say the least, but I was glad he trusted someone, because he sure was a wild man and had been fighting all his life. We took his gear over to the hospital this morning, and they're going to keep him asleep until they can get him out to the hospital ship this afternoon.

And how did your quiet peaceful Sunday evening go? More relaxing, I hope.

...

Well, better get back to work. I've got meetings back-to-back, plus a test hop and fitness report to write on the warrant officers and second lieutenants.²⁹

See you later, Baby.

Love,
Ray



Monday night
26 June 1967

Hello yourself, Big Chief Wampum!³⁰
You snuck one in on me. Before I finished my letter this morning, the

²⁹ NAVMC 10835, USMC Fitness Report (1610), describes a fitness report as “the most important information component in manpower management. It is a means of evaluating a Marine’s performance and is the Commandant’s primary tool for the selection of personnel for promotion, augmentation, resident schooling, command, and duty assignments.” For more on current requirements, see Shannon Phillips and Adam Clemens, *The Fitness Report System for Marine Officers: Prior Research* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2011).

³⁰ The term *wampum* originated from the Massachusetts or Narragansett word meaning “white strings of shell beads,” which was considered a symbol of status or power. American slang transitioned it to mean money.

mailman brought yours. That's always sort of fun. It's a game that particularly works on Monday mornings. I always lose on purpose, I think because I pretend you were thinking of me first. But then I feel guilty that mine wasn't out there waiting for yours. I can't seem to win. I just caught my boo-boo up there. No, I not always *lose* on purpose! I just goose on purpose!

I kissed all your monsters for you and watched the satisfied expressions on their faces as they got their thanks for their Father's Day work.

...

You remind me of Robin. Old eager beaver Robin. She doesn't take no for an answer these days, and today I just turned around and took a swing at her. She ducked of course. But for a while there, I was at the controls again, especially after I caught her on the second swing! She's full of respect again. We don't talk about the fact that she got treated to a doughnut downtown and new sunglasses. . . .

We sort of moseyed around downtown this afternoon. I deposited the camp money and Kirk turned in his \$7 in nickels and pennies. He kept his change from school lunches etc. instead of sharing it like the girls. That isn't fair, but wild horses can't get it away from him now. We're all pretty tolerant of his new wealth.

Kirk is going through a rather awkward stage, slightly sadistic toward the cat, Kathy, and the girls. . . . He just seems terribly restless because he has no boys to play with. Walt is still gone, and boy playmates are *very* hard to come by. I'm sure it will all disappear when he has more boy friends. He's a very gregarious type of boy. This is mostly a social problem. Just a darn shame Kathy wasn't a boy. He adores her and she him, but he's at an age to want to shoot water pistols and drop water bombs. Kathy walks around with a gun in her pants and tries to be a boy too, but of course that's pretty small comfort. It just makes her more adorable.

...

Must close now. I didn't mean to talk about the kids so much, but your interest stirred me too. I know you miss them too, not just me. No more Avon toothbrushes for you! Such a pretty red one too!

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Wednesday night

28 June 1967

Hi Honey,

You're right, this month has sailed by faster than May, and it was a whirlwind to start with. Matter of fact, with our nuts and shooting, this week itself has been wild. And to top it off, Colonel Palmer was gone to Cubi Point, Subic Bay, Philippines, for two and a half days.

I've never seen so many people with psychological problems, we've had four this week and two last week. I've got three more in the brig, all various stages of nuts. Antisocial, schizophrenic, maladjusted, psychotic young hoods. They write pleading letters to their congressmen, the secretary of the Navy, the Commandant, and one to the president himself—ugh. That was the only one that didn't have to be answered, by the way, "Forwarded for such counseling, guidance, and advice as the commanding officer may deem necessary." Most of them are threateningly endorsed, "Forwarded for action. Provide necessary information to this headquarters within 36 hours to base a reply to the next higher headquarters." And the damned things take four to six days to get from office to office, and you're a month in the hole by the time it gets to you!

How was your class reunion? Horrifying? Didn't recognize the bald and fat ones? Quite a shock to see some of them, I'm sure.

It sounds like the kids did great on your birthday supper. Did they really bake you a cake? Pris had a hand in it I'm sure. She should write a book: "How to bust your ass organizing a party without looking like it!"

We talked some more about my being the commanding officer, and it's been decided that the group commanding officer wants a lieutenant colonel commanding MABS, even if he can't have any for his staff. It's that big a job. I can and have done it, but that extra horsepower sure helps get other people to do things at times.

Oops, the clock just jumped ahead four hours and I have the early, early tomorrow.

...

I just remembered July is instrument card and annual physical month, plus annual flight time reporting—all a hell of a mess over here. None of the gun squadrons have to mess with it.

Figure on Cherry Point, North Carolina, or Beaufort, South Carolina. So far, my orders are to the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing period.

June 1967

Goodnight, Darling.

I love you!

Ray



Wednesday night

28 June 1967

Hello Angel Love,

I got your newsletter and long letter. I thought the poem by the sergeant was especially touching about how they keep you all happy. And I noted that R. B. Stice is keeping up with his commanding officer in stars! . . .

. . . It is very nice indeed to have a respected man for a husband. I seem to be custodian of “Ray’s friends” until he comes home, and I give your address out often. Somehow, they all take comfort just knowing where you are and being able to boast a bit about you. They all seem to really miss you in a way that would probably surprise even you.

Of course, that was why I latched on to you long ago and thought I’d have you to myself, but I’m afraid I’m doomed to share you with men. And only by the grace of God not with too many other women! . . .

. . .

I know you feel very strongly about the brave men you work with, and those stories certainly do prove that point, but I just wanted you to know that men feel the same way about you. Bill Coleman always tries to help me accept the fact of your being gone for a cause that is totally right for you (even as you do too), but I prefer to keep it on a more elementary plane. I just miss the physical Ray Stice—the boy I married and the man I love. There isn’t much you can do about that. Where you’re concerned, I’m very selfish. Who else can tell me what a nice smelly old hag I am?

My X eyes are closing too. They don’t close as easily as yours unfortunately, but they do now and then. I sure am tired of tossing and turning though. Some man sure did spoil me . . .

Will July ever come?

XXXs,

Gig



Friday
30 June 1967

Hi Darling,

Here comes the mailman, but here I go anyway. Well, he didn't leave anything today, but that's probably because you're busy. Right? Right! He picked up our homemade invitations to Karen's skating party next week, which we've all slaved over this morning.

It's going to be another busy week coming up. Don has Monday off, so we may all go to New Braunfels for the day and then spend the 4th of July at the lake on the Coleman's boat and then get ready for Karen's party Friday. Makes me tired already to think of it all!

It's really dry here now, and I'm watering like mad, but it only seems to grow green in patches. I had a broken hose for two weeks and it got out of hand.

. . . Are you any good at taking 11 girls and 1 boy to the skating rink? We tried to shuck the boy, but he clouded over so much we gave in and will probably be sorry! He's been having plenty of boy play lately and Walt comes home tomorrow, which will be a *big* help!

Really not too much else going on at the moment. It's sort of exactly midyear today and that's really the hump, isn't it? It should be all downhill from now on.

Must close now and use my new green stamp hairdryer. If that doesn't help, I'll cut it all off and start all over again.

XXXs and such,
Gig



Friday night
30 June 1967

Hi Baby,

We're having one of those work stoppages—glad I'm not flying—sandstorms at the moment so I have a few minutes to write you until it blows over.

Your last few letters have been priceless. Your attitude is great, so keep it up as we're on the downhill haul! Even after the worst of your stormy seas, you came popping back to the surface roaring to go again, and I love

Figure 39. Maj Ray Stice (fourth from right) with his groomsmen that included T. K. Burke on the day of the wedding



Source: Stice family collection.

you every bit of it. Not your agonies, but your resiliency, your long-term durability. Take me, for example, stubborn bastard that I am, and it really takes a special kind of something to put up with me all these years and you even want more! Well okay, more you get! You've named your own poison (now sleep with it). Yeah!

Remember Major T. K. Burke in our wedding—real tall, lean, and dark headed—I'm going to see him in a little while at happy hour. The skipper invited him over for chow and drinks. We decided to keep all our drinks healthy by serving chow at the officers' club Friday nights, so we alternate between hot dogs and hamburgers on Friday to charcoal broiled steaks and lobsters the next week. The RVN's learn how to make charcoal and we've learned how to barter with the Army on the langosta [spiny lobster] or lobsters, whatever they are. If the meat is in the claws, it's lobster, if the meat is in the tail it's langosta, I think.

I've discovered one slight reward for all this hard work. As the exec-

utive officer, I get invited to all the section beach parties (with the commanding officer) and we GO! For at least a couple of hours, usually over the noon hour, and this way I get to have a couple of legal beers, a bite to eat, and a nice swim before coming back to the office—not all that bad. The water here is so salty, I can actually float!

Whew, filthy dirty with the sand. At least you can see the runway now, and we've started to launch again! Last night at the same time, the wind and rain ripped off the roof of one of the squadron's operations offices. Seems to be the duty thunderstorm these days.

...

Whew, sure looks dark back over the hills. Still some fight left in that storm. They get so fat and sassy that they can't hold themselves together and leap off the damn hills right down our necks this time almost every day now. I used to look into everyone's eyes—their red eyes—and wonder what sort of a boozier you look like. It's the damned blowing sand! Mine cleared up in two days in Okinawa.

Whew yeah, it's 0400 in the morning and time to go brief.

See you later, Sweet Love.

Love,
Ray

• 10 •

JULY 1967

1 July 1967

[partial letter; pages 1 and 2 missing]

... Everyone was bike riding except Robin, so I felt guilty or sorry enough to say she gets a bike very soon.

...

The Penn boys are all home from camps (next door), so the kids had a fine game of hide and seek tonight, and when Kirk got discouraged running, they helped him seek. After clocking his running efforts on their driveway, they finally are feeling like big boys who can help the little boys. That pleased Kirk, of course. But then, Kirk was pretty worn out from lots of swimming. Usually, he doesn't accept help so graciously or want it particularly. He's a good boy, but had one of his "moments" this afternoon trying to see if the cat would go around in the dryer. Caught red-handed and red-faced, he *promised* never to be cruel again and knows I meant it like never before this time. I don't care if he is just experimenting, which I hope is all he's doing. He got a licking and then a firm forgiving. I'm hoping that my spankings will be all he'll ever need. They are rough enough!

Robin got a swift kick this morning, and I broke my sandals doing it. My precious Hawaiian sandals. That bothered Rob more than the kick, because she knows I won't fix it and worries that I might just go barefoot

on her account! One never knows about Mama! Mama would do anything to prove a moral point. Maybe be immoral! Nope, I haven't tried that yet. Father was immoral enough for both of us in his heyday. Right, Father? Ooo, low blow. That's okay, Pop. I rather liked the idea of your premarital escapades. As long as you got out of them as well as you did. And I guess you did. Don't you love it when I leave things hanging that way? Well, since you are the lion in the family, your stripes *should* be a little bit blacker than mine.

I miss you. Can you tell? Goodnight, Dear Man. I love you.

Gig



Sunday

2 July 1967

Darling,

Kirk and I are rather at loose ends at the moment. The girls have gone off to play, Kathy is asleep, and it's hot out . . .

We had a full day yesterday with Don.

. . .

Later, Don took the kids to a play along with the Coleman kids and found that being Uncle Don to so many is quite a job! If he can last out through tomorrow, they are looking forward to a trip to New Braunfels for the day. Mom begged off after her weekend in the hills near Mo-Ranch, but says she'll take care of Kathy.

. . .

Kirk was really thrilled over his new bike, but a little miffed over not being wanted by the girls today, hence the letter. I had to twist his arm as he doesn't like to write when he's in a bad mood, but he warmed up at the thought of drawing these pictures. He tried to copy off of a Marine diploma—your corporal discharge that hangs in his room—but then decided on the gun fights instead. The pictures don't have any significance, Papasan. Don't try to read into them. Just remember this is typical seven-year-old shoot 'em up drawings. We decided to label them, so you'd know who was who.

. . .

Well, it's bedtime for mamasan. The days go slow for me and the

July 1967

nights too fast. Just the opposite for you. How will we ever get synchronized?

I love you, Dearest,

Gig—the girl who needs a wig.



Noon Sunday

2 July 1967

Robin,

I want to thank you for that swell letter about your mom's birthday. It sounded like a really fun time, and you were a good girl to tell me all about it. Keep ducking (Mom's hits)!

Kirk,

When are you going to go to camp? I was just about the same age the first time I went, and I still remember some of the things we did. It was a little work and a lot of fun, and we learned how to make all kinds of things.

Kathy,

Hi! How are you? Kiss your mom for me? I won't need any help in about four months, thank you. If Mom gets bad, you can spank her, okay? You're a girl; Kirk's a boy.

And now to my eldest daughter, good evening, Miss Stice,

Have you enjoyed the day's reverie? I'd appreciate some of your culinary delicacies if you could persuade your mother into properly prepaying the postal package for its precipitous plight.

All of you should get your old lady to show you how to pop popcorn, so I can really be lazy. How's that for starting a war, hmm? See, you can't really bug me, like I can bug you. Cause I have four little arm-twisters to help put on the pressure . . .

Sunday night

In Beeville, Texas, I had two students who were head and shoulders above all the others. One Navy guy you met and one Marine—Lieutenant Napier—you didn't meet. Well, today he had his umpteenth baptism of fire

and had to watch Major Ray D. Pendergraft get hit and go in.¹ I didn't see it, but I heard it all on the emergency frequency we guard all the time. We think an enemy artillery shell actually hit him—although that sort of thing is extremely rare—I think he was gone before he hit the water, because knowing Ray, he would have clawed his way out if he could. Why the radar intercept officer (RIO) didn't get out is sheer speculation. He was the one that called Mayday and that they had lost all their fuel. He should have ejected, even if Ray couldn't. Can you take all this? It's pretty heady stuff; always hard to believe and never quite forgotten. . . . He was trying to get back together with his wife and they went to Hawaii a couple of weeks ago. Well, that's the way it goes, damn it.

Goodnight, Darling, sleep tight. Only four months—count them!—to go, really.

Love to you, Honey,
Ray



4th of July 1967

Hi Honey,
It's supposed to be a holiday if I remember correctly; it's a Tuesday that's for sure.

Who told the mailman to quit? Where's the old "the mail must go through" philosophy we used to have?

Well, things are sure getting hot up in the DMZ, aren't they? Some pretty big operations going on. Nothing more on Ray Pendergraft and his radar officer. He was their squadron executive officer, and the only thing Captain J. P. Faulkner, their Safety Officer, and I can figure is that he [the RIO] must have been hit at the same time the aircraft was hit. There just isn't any other answer to why he didn't eject. They really need a dual

¹ The Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA-542) command chronology stated, "One squadron aircraft was lost due to enemy action while conducting a [close air support] CAS mission against NVA in the open. The pilot, Major Ray D. Pendergraft and RIO, Captain David G. Spearman, were killed in action." VMFA-542, Command Chronology (ComdC) July 1967, Box __, Folder 108, 1201108032US Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 2.

RAY D. PENDERGRAFT



Major Ray D. Pendergraft was Stice's commanding officer in 1960 at Cherry Point, North Carolina, and they served together in Chu Lai.

At 1000 on 2 July 1967, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, were on patrol about 2.4 kilometers northeast of Con Thien when they made contact with what they thought was a small, well-entrenched enemy unit. Alpha Company, also on patrol nearby, came to help, and the two understrength companies found themselves in a meat grinder. The small enemy force turned out to be five North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalions that had crossed the DMZ. The NVA troops were supported by artillery firing from within and north of the DMZ. Two battalion landing teams—one each from USS *Tripoli* (LPH 10) and USS *Okinawa* (LPH 3)—were committed in support of what became a week-long pitched battle. Fixed-wing air support also was called in to support the Marine infantry.

Major Ray D. Pendergraft, pilot, and Captain David G. Spearman, radar intercept officer, in a McDonnell Douglas F-4B Phantom II were part of the response. While attacking NVA forces near Kinh Mon, within the DMZ proper, their aircraft was hit by ground fire. His wingman followed Pendergraft out to sea and watched helplessly as the F-4B crashed at sea. Both crewmen died in the crash.

Major Bruce A. Martin, flying a Vought F-8E Crusader with Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 232 (VMF[AW]-232), observed Major Pendergraft's aircraft leaving the target area trailing smoke; he also saw it go into the water. Only minutes later, Martin was hit by ground fire while making a low-level bombing run on NVA positions near Thon Cam Son, also within the DMZ. His aircraft on fire, Major Martin headed for the open water, escorted by a section of Douglas A-4 Skyhawks. By the time the fire forced him to eject, an Air Force Sikorsky HH-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopter was on scene, having launched from Da Nang in response to the search-and-rescue (SAR) call for Major Pendergraft's aircraft. Major Martin was picked up and survived the incident.

On the ground, 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, had been inserted by helicopter on the enemy's left flank and the massive weight of U.S. air and artillery support was taking its toll on the NVA. By evening, the NVA had broken contact, withdrawing into the DMZ. By that time, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, had been destroyed as a fighting force, with 58 men killed in action, Alpha Company had 13 killed in action, and H&S Company 15 lost, including 8 corpsmen.¹

¹ "Ray Daniel Pendergraft," Virtual Wall, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, accessed 7 November 2023.

command ejection system, where either pilot could eject the other and then themselves. That type of system would really save a lot of lives if we had it, but it's only in one brand new basic trainer and hardly tested at the time being. It would be great where one guy is hit or unable to eject and the other guy could punch him out and get out before the aircraft stops.

Hey, you know we're down to 120 days now. How about that? The last four months, nine down and four to go.

Get Kirk some boys to play with, that's what he needs. A boy just needs other boys and men, and this is going to be a long hot summer as it is without him not having someone to hassle with. Maybe you can trade off with the Colemans for Lance.

Sold the boat yet? Next week? That's nice!

You know, I've been thinking it over and I've decided that if anything should happen to Mom or Lucille, I should be notified by the Red Cross by telegram so I could come home right away.² Lord, I hope nothing should occur, but if it did, I'd want to return. Okay? And through the Red Cross is the only way to do it. They just keep you in the states your last 120 days.

Well, your letter was just delivered describing the weekend with the Austin's in Austin. It sure will be swell to take part in all that again—the whole bit.

So, you're tossing and turning too? That makes us a pair. There are only about four basic positions where my bed fits right enough to drop off and none of them are quite right. I always end up thinking that if Gig was here in bed, she would be right there and, if I turned here, then we could both go to sleep. We used to go through a regular song and dance before we'd settle down, remember?

I spent all afternoon figuring out my annual flight time report. Whew, it's done; physical and instrument checks next.

I lost my 32-year-old gunnery sergeant career advisor. He had a massive heart attack and is out on the USS *Sanctuary* (AH 17) just making it. Got 2 nuts off to Japan and 3 more getting discharged, then to top off the weekend 10 people in the guard went on liberty out in the off-limits village and got caught. And to really top off the whole mess, I think Col-

² Lucille was Stice's sister. She was very ill with Huntington's disease and in her last stages when he deployed to Vietnam. Lucille was married to U.S. Army BGen Albion W. Knight Jr.

onel Palmer is going to get relieved in the next couple of weeks, dammit.³ This will mean the fourth skipper to break in, and Palmer has done more for this command than anyone else I've ever seen—a real dynamo who has learned how to be patient at times—just great.

A huge bomb fell off of an aircraft the other night and damn near caught the nearest (arrested) crew again when it detonated KABOOM, yeah! Sounded like Da Nang the first night back from R&R. I've always had 15/15 hearing, which is (was) about as good as you can get, so it would sure be interesting to see the hearing test results.⁴

Goodnight, Sweetheart. I miss you something fierce.

Love to you, Gig,

Ray

KISS THE KIDLETS, DOZO!



Wednesday

5 July 1967

Hello Darling,

My goodness, things have been wild around here. I'm a bit confused and having a summer cold. . . . But it seems quiet for the moment, and I'm not sneezing too much, just snuffling and peering through watery eyes!

We drove to New Braunfels Monday with Don and had a fine swim, though it wasn't as much fun as when *you* took us. Best part of the day was coming home to find two letters from you. What a wild chase you had! I'd comment on it, but the kids seem to be interrupting me constantly and my brain just won't work. I'll wait and comment tonight. But I wanted you to know we got back from there okay and then went to the lake yesterday (on the fourth), though by then I was completely weathered in with a cold, so I had a dry fourth. The kids got plenty of swimming, enough to skip a swimming lesson this morning. They also went to the country club

³ According to the MABS-13 command chronology, LtCol Richard E. Carey was the commanding officer for the period. MABS-13, ComdC July 1967, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077126, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 2.

⁴ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 decibels is considered within the normal range of hearing. See "Inquiring Ears Want to Know: A Fact Sheet about Your Hearing Test," CDC.gov, 2008.

to watch fireworks, but I stayed home with Kathy. Don came through for me all this week. The week isn't over yet, as there's still Karen's birthday to work on. Whoosh!

Darling, you shouldn't try to comment on all our doings here. That takes too much of your valuable time. I know you are getting the gist of things. . .

I can tell what really, really full days you are having, and they make very exciting reading. I'm rather glad they need a lieutenant colonel for a commanding officer. I couldn't stand the strain! Must close now and get some groceries.

I love you ever so much,
Gig



Evening
5 July 1967

Darling,
I don't know if I even made sense this morning. Such energy! Such life surrounds me with the kids home. Even now as I sit here at the kitchen table, it is neatly set for breakfast (cereal bowls filled) and I am drinking my "coffee" (ahead of time). Robin mistakenly made *tea*, because coffee is what pries me up in the morning to take them to swimming lessons. And they are as religious about that as about school. Getting me up is part of the ritual! They cannot do much, but what they can do they do with great love, joy, and confidence!

. . .

Well, I got put on the spot tonight. I knew I was getting behind, but when Milly *called* and wrote all in the same day—I'm a month behind! Poor dear, she hadn't had news of you in that long and she's been reading about secretary of defense Robert S. McNamara's plans or ideas to have Marines just use helicopters and ground flight, she got concerned about what this would do to your career as a jet pilot.⁵ Well, I guess we'll all soon

⁵ Edward J. Drea, *Secretaries of Defense Historical Series*, vol. 6, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965–1969* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), particularly chaps. 2 and 3.

know about all that since McNamara is on his way there now.⁶ I will send her some of your letters and bring her up to date. . . .

...

I'm really finding Hawaii has some fringe benefits now. Whenever I want to put myself to sleep, I think about our wonderful bed there and the fun we had—the whole bit—and I grin myself to sleep! I had to laugh when I thought, "What if someone heard me?" Still, it's a pretty fresh memory and one of my nicest ones because it feels like *now*. I just wish I had kissed you in the car instead of waiting until we got to the hotel. Sometimes I'm a prude, or maybe we just stay frozen so long it's hard to unthaw for a minute or two. I'm going to whittle that down to half a second.

...

I'm still glowing from your remarks about my letters today. I felt like I got a fitness report. No, I didn't feel that way at all. I was just delighted if I did manage to say something that amused you even for a moment. That makes my day as a woman. You have, of course, been doing the same thing for me dearest—many many times when I don't even mention it. I just worry that you shouldn't take that much time with me. Maybe my last tantrum worried you. Well, I'm all fine really, Dearest. Rigid and ready for running another three to four weeks. . . .

Karen sort of ran out of steam on her letter to you, but I'll send it anyway. She still says, "The day after yesterday" and means it! Both girls are getting bosoms, and that is the *big* (tiny) growth change going on at the moment.

Little Miss Red is up to her usual too. Count today: 1) one broken catsup bottle; 2) one angry attempt to open the icebox, which *worked* (oh joy!); 3) one time with Mama's lipstick all over the hands and up to the nose; 4) one black eye from a fall; and 5) one fight with Jennifer.

Goodnight, Darling, that's par for the course tonight!

XXXs,
Gig



⁶ McNamara was in Vietnam from 7–11 July. See *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967*, vol. 1, *The Air War in North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), 19. This document was declassified and made public in 2011.

Friday (Karen is 11 year's old)

7 July 1967

Hello Darling,

Yes, it really is her 11th and, even with all the hubbub of the birthday party today, the years don't seem to be there. The only way I could notice a difference was those infinitesimal little bosoms. I can't hug her as hard now as I used to! It hurts her a little bit and me too to think the first 10 years are over and she's into the next 10.

Well, no use getting morose. It's been such a long day, and we all stayed busy every minute. Several things went wrong, but it all came out okay in the end. The big mistake I made was not calling to see if the skating rinks were open. I loaded up the car with the nine kids and set out for the rink. We had the air conditioner on because it was 1400 in the afternoon and 100 degrees out. Well, the car died on me at a light, and I tried not to panic. I just told the kids to open up, waited for traffic to go by so I could *hear* the engine, and finally got it going again. We found the *north* rink closed. But undaunted, we decided to try the south rink clear across town. I raced the motor at every pause and light and still it died once more. I got it going and made it with weak knees and very quiet children to the south rink, also closed. Well, then we crossed town going 30 miles-per-hour and came home. I guess I had the car overloaded! We were all hot and a little shaken but glad to be home. Then we tried to rev up the party. When even Kirk and Walt, crammed in the very back of the car were quiet, you know we were all listening for the motor. But after drinks, cake, and ice cream, spirits lifted a bit, and we started playing games.

...

And your letter came. That put a happy note into the day, since you had written to the kids, and I was reading it to them when I came to the sad news that was for me. So of course, I reread the letter later on again to see if I understood it right. You were so gentle with the news that I am fooled for a moment, but only a moment. You didn't seem convinced of it yourself though and I know you always hope for the best until it's proven otherwise and so I hope with you. It's been so long since I saw Ray Pendergraft that, of course, I hardly remember him. But I still feel like you, that I've known him a long time and I know how you respected his flying abilities.

I don't know if it's good news or not, but the news said the president

July 1967

was going to promote more Marine captains sooner.⁷ Perhaps this will make some lieutenants happy. What does it do to majors? I think they've just noticed you're not a captain anymore!

. . . Now, Ray Stice, quit siccing the kids on me to make you food. We made green icing today and that's *enough*. I'll send you some green icing if you're not careful. It matched the napkins.

Goodnight, Dear.

XXXs,
Gig



Saturday night
8 July 1967

Hi Honey,

Mail is fouled up again, so packages only today. The colonel's doing fine, although they are still feeding him intravenously, maybe that's the style nowadays to keep gas pains down. He was surrounded by Korean Marines in all stages of trauma. One was cooking rice on top of a loaded ammunition box and it blew, and the rest were trying to disarm a booby trap and it detonated. Almost as pathetic was a tiny Vietnamese baby who had a temperature of 108 for a long time. They really were working hard to keep him going.

It's been a busy day: busted nine, promoted three, meritorious mast for two, one Good Conduct Medal, one psycho lost, plus the group Adjutant's Office lost my annual flight time report that I worked on for two days and balls.⁸

. . .

Yesterday morning, this unannounced propeller plane idles up to our air freight area, shuts down its engines, and a huge rear door opens up. And who is there with all his tommy gun guards and tittering girlfriends peeking out the door but Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky and three-star

⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, Executive Order 11361—Suspending a Provision of Section 5751(b) of Title 10, United States Code, Which Relates to Officers of the Marine Corps in the Grade of First Lieutenant, American Presidency Project, 6 July 1967.

⁸ *Meritorious mast* refers to a formal ceremony that a commanding officer uses to acknowledge superior performance. A Good Conduct Medal can only be awarded once every three years for outstanding service to the Corps.

General Robert E. Cushman (III Marine Amphibious Force commanding general) (took over General Lewis W. Walt's job).⁹ Well, they had a problem. The aircraft back there is about 16 feet high and we don't have a stand or steps to fit that old bird and he's getting madder than a wet hen.

...

See you later, Baby. I love you,
Ray



Sunday night
9 July 1967

Hello Sweet Pie,

Not too much news to write tonight, except I've been thinking about you a lot. This weekend you had some really good kids. They cleaned your boat inside and out like little troopers, and even Kathy enjoyed the job in the nude. Kirk kinked up the hose a lot, because it made the two main workers so blooming mad, but he'd done his big job already, which was to go get the boat with Uncle Don, so he figured he could harass the girls. Natch! Well, even Uncle Don came through with a bit of coaching. He's been really great.

...

Today, we all slept late and went for a nice swim at Barton Springs. The kids went in the springs (the deep holes) with me watching, and I threw the plastic ring out now and then. But boy did they love playing in those cold clear springs. You would have been proud of them there too. They felt very big and brave.

The evening was beautiful, and we drove home from Mom's at dusk eating popsicles very contentedly thinking of you.

...

⁹ Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984), 91. Ngyen Cao Kay was chief of the Republic of Vietnam Air Force in the 1960s, before leading the nation as the prime minister of South Vietnam in a military junta from 1965 to 1967. Gen Walt, known for the Marine Corps pacification campaign and the Combined Action Program, was relieved after two years in command of III MAF. Walt's successors would continue to emphasize pacification as a central component of the Marine effort in South Vietnam, especially in the heavily populated area around Da Nang.

Darling, I know this is your busy month with renewing your cards and all, so please don't try to write long letters. I've been astounded that you've done as well as you have. We really are going to get hot on some birthday goodies for you, if not homemade at least home wrapped. And if I sell the boat, that would make a nice present, yeah?

Goodnight, Love. I miss you!

Gig



Monday

10 July 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, I guess I'll have to buy a bike for me to match all your new ones. It sounds like you're running a bike exchange!

...

Don't worry about what I'd do if McNamara took all our jets, and that's not exactly what he had in mind by the way. Hell, if you can drive a car, you can fly a chopper as far as the aircraft is concerned. How to use it to its utmost and keep alive is the big problem over here.

Remember Ralph Brubaker from Beeville? He got hit by a surface-to-air missile (SAM) last week and spent the night with a badly dislocated knee just above the DMZ in NVN [North Vietnam]. The choppers finally got him out the next morning and he's going back home to get his leg fixed. What some people will do for a little R&R!

I sure am getting shorthanded. I lost two majors (and one more to go), four captains, three lieutenants, one warrant officer, and no relief in sight.¹⁰ I just got another new dentist, dammit. I need him like a hole in the head. And of course, the colonel's been gone almost two weeks now. He had been to Cubi Point in the Philippines for a week and only back two days when we put him in the hospital. Oh, Lieutenant Colonel James E. "Jim" Miller just checked in to the group. He still looks the same. My six scrounged trucks arrived and one of them started up immediately with a new battery! Wonder of wonders. Got to take a shower and sleep. I was up until 0230 this morning, but the bastards never did hit us.

Goodnight, Darling.

¹⁰ MABS-13, ComdC July 1967.

Have fun this summer!

Love,
Ray



Tuesday
11 July 1967

Dear Majority R. B.,

This is Minority G. Q. speaking. We got a large nibble on the boat this morning, an ex-Marine no less. He called, and Robin told him I was asleep, which whetted his appetite no doubt. He came by to see the boat around 1100 and was “very interested” in it and wants to take it to run it tomorrow. . . . He couldn’t figure out where all the wires went, but said he’d never seen a boat he couldn’t figure out eventually. And also, he had a friend who is a diver who knows a lot about boats. He even had a license to put on it temporarily while he takes it out, since he works at the Department of Public Safety. . . .

. . .

Your two good letters have come this week and so full of news I can hardly keep up. I was most surprised to hear about Colonel Palmer, but so glad he’s recuperating so fast! How wonderful to have that marvelous ship nearby. Also, your sergeant, he sounded like a goner, and so young for such an attack, but here he is up and about too. That’s great!

And of course, the story about the brave young men is most touching of all. Aren’t they something! No wonder you are proud of them. I think your question was good for him psychologically too. It shows how good a leader you are. Of course, if you asked me that under those circumstances, I’d just rare up and shoot you—or myself!—but then, I’m just a truthful cowardly woman!

. . .

I was so glad to hear you’ve gotten down to the 120-days limit, since that means in an emergency you wouldn’t have to go back. I’ve been sweating that too, just because it’s so far to come and go and you did have two possible emergency situations. Makes you feel a little more secure at any rate.

Oh darn, here comes the crew back for lunch. Gotta quit for lunch. “Un some juicy” is back.

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All for now, Love,
Gigabeth Q



Wednesday
12 July 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, I'm really getting down to the dregs, when this is all the paper I can find at the moment.

. . . I haven't been able to fly since the colonel went to Cubi Point over two weeks ago.¹¹ They still have tubes all over him, and he can't really recover beyond a basic point if they won't let him eat. I thought he'd be back on some of the paperwork a few hours a day. I'll go see him shortly and see what the story is.

. . .

Actually, this is a really rough time for me. So damn many different things going at the same time, and many with absolute schedules that can't slide, like fitness reports, investigations, and awards. We haven't even had time to write up Colonel Owen's Bronze Star yet and that's no good. He goes home in September. So, if I miss a few letters, please bear with me as this next month is going to be a bitch. I'll try to keep up the same every other day, but they will be shorter letters, okay? You do so beautifully—seven to nine pages at a whack—I can hardly believe it. And the kids too, they sure help a lot.

It's nighttime now and I saw the colonel. He had all the tubes out and was out taking a shower. . . .

Whew, we just got hit by a tremendous rainstorm. It sure called things off in a hurry and just enough warning to get all the aircraft back.

Tonight, for supper, we had liver—I took a thin one cooked hard—and real live corn on the cob! Lord knows where they get the corn, but it was the first corn on the cob I've had since I left home. It sure was good.

. . .

Karen's birthday sounded really nice. Busy for you, but nice for her. That's the sort of day I really hate to miss, and I sure missed the one at Quantico too. Well, Karen, I won't have to do that many more times.

¹¹ Naval Air Station Cubi Point was an important U.S. Navy aerial facility located at the edge of Naval Base Subic Bay next to the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippine Islands.

Everything happens at once around here. The rain stops, the sun drops, the electricity goes out, and the artillery starts up. Ten minutes of fumbling for my one and only candle stub and on comes the electricity. I just pulled the plywood flaps (window covers) up and the sun gave out one last flare of champagne-colored lighting to the broken-up pieces of clouds with dark blue splotches scattered behind. Just beautiful! Awe, it's gone. Man, that sure was pretty with the edges of the clouds lit up like silver with all that champagne and blue.

Well, I better go to bed after all that. I need some extra sleep anyway.
Goodnight, Darling.

I love you,
Ray



12 July 1967

Darling,
Would you believe \$550 for the boat, *cash*? Well, that's what I just got from the policeman this morning. He made the offer last night, and I was trying to hold out for more when Karen piped up in the background and said, "Ah, let him have it, Mom," which got me so tickled that I said, "Well, okay." And the man said, "Okay you want it back, or okay you'll let me have it?" I said, "Okay you can have it for \$550 if you use the saved \$25 to get the starter checked. . . ." At any rate, he said he'd promised his wife he would reupholster the seat if he could get me down from \$575 to \$550, which he did, so everyone is happy.

Don was scared I'd not get a certified check, but since the man showed up with *cash* that was no problem. I told Don I'd treat him to dinner for his help, and I will. I had two other calls about the boat, and might have gotten more, but I hope you'll think this was good enough.

Oops, here's the mailman. Oodles of kisses. . . .

Gig



Thursday night
13 July 1967

You know, babe, I just had a thought, a calendar thought, that is. I'm sure

glad it doesn't take 13 months for a baby to be born. All of a sudden, I'm just plain worn out from waiting for things to happen. When you add the 4 times of 9-months baby waiting, plus the 2 times of Ray waiting that makes: $9 \times 4 = 36$, $13 \times 2 = 26$, $36 + 26 = 62$ months. Five years divided by 12 is 62 months . . . 5 years and 2 months of waiting! Hmm, I wonder if it's all been worth it. Always a good question, or is it?

. . .

I got a *wonderful* long letter from you today, you bad boy. You're not supposed to write me that long. But I got a big bang out of your description of General Cushman being unloaded like supplies. Yes, I read about Major General Ky and Cushman and, of course, his name stuck because of your *cush* story! Maybe he's the original! Ky's rival is Thieu. Do you know Thieu? If he arrives you can say, whew, now here's Thieu! Cush! Maybe P. U. would be better?

. . .

I took \$10 out of the \$550 boat cash and took everyone to eat last night at Christie's Seafood place on Town Lake. Then we all went to Zilker Park to hear a chorale group sing and all had a fine time. It was my thank you to Don for boat helping. Don was grateful as the company is still on the verge of bankruptcy and every day they totter nearer, and it's painful! Somehow, the millionaire hasn't come through either.

The boat money is safely in the bank today, so no more fish dinners. We are all buying \$35 winter coats for the girls, however! They look much more attainable now that the exchequer is sweeter. What do you say, Pa, new winter coats for all? Come on, be a big spender from the East! I'll let you mull that one over for a while. We have three months before we're all screaming. But when the heat's gone, the heat's going to be on.

. . .

Sincerely yours,
Miss Etc.



Saturday afternoon
15 July 1967

Hi Honey,
See what happened? I missed yesterday, and this is still going to have to be cut short. I have to get started in my instrument exam pronto.

The colonel had his stitches out and came back to work for a couple

of hours yesterday. That's a big relief, and we finally got a relief in for Major John T. Radich, my base service officer, that has been a real sweat.

They hit Da Nang last night. All the casualties so far have been Air Force, and I'll have to admit they do expose themselves more than we do. I spent yesterday inspecting all our bunkers and they're getting better but they're not good enough yet.

...

I got a call from (Da Nang) Captain Walter T. "Walt" Zinowski this morning. I asked him what he thought of the show last night and he said, "Spectacular and in living color." You met him and his wife in Hawaii. He also mentioned about 1,000 prisoners breaking out. . .¹²

Got to get started on the instrument test, dammit. See you later, Sweets.

Love you,
Ray



Saturday
15 July 1967

Dear Heart,

Another nice long letter from you yesterday, making it one of your best weeks yet! Or should I say mine. . . .

I'm feeling *much, much* better. Mom says I've been being a martyr and wouldn't take her sleeping pills, but I had one whole night without sleep Thursday—all that book reading had made me an insomniac—and so I took a sleeping pill last night and just feel *superb* today! Sure was good to turn off my brain at last. . . .

Seems like I've lectured the kids all day, so I took them swimming and brought Kathy home for a nap. I suppose the idea of the camp makes them livelier than ever, but it's been like the day before Christmas here today!

Kirk was so pleased you liked his pictures. You're right. I worry too much about you two understanding each other, but someday you won't need me as an interpreter. Still, it's a good thing I understand boy Greek as well as I do! Admit it! He's developing his own radar fast though.

¹² Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *Fighting the North Vietnamese*, 1967, 108.

Kathy has been climbing in bed with me to wake me up in the mornings now that she's out of her crib, and the others have tried, but I've said a firm no. So, the only one you'll have to kick out of bed is Kathy when you come home. Mostly though, she just wants her wet diaper off, then she dresses herself. Today, it was her bathing suit inside out.

The kids got invited to Baptist bible school for a day and almost turned into Baptists on the spot. But we just didn't show for an evening session and did a lot of laughing at the songs, so they got the idea. Best I get hot on some church going soon though! They are ripe converts!

...

Gotta close now, Love. Thanks for the belated advice on the boat's spark plugs. I wouldn't know what to do with a spark plug if I saw one. I know where the air filter on the car is now though. That's a *big* old thing! With coaching, I might pass first grade in car knowledge.

XXXs,

Gig

P.S. Kids are home. . .



Tuesday night

18 July 1967

Hi Baby,

... I've been working on the instrument exam all day long, and I'm almost finished finally.

I know what you mean about not too much sleep at times. I have had to get up the past five nights for various reasons, and it sure eats into your sleep. Last night after the party at T. K. Burke's, I had to go out and inspect the runway and by midnight I was starved. I stopped by the chow hall and ate beef croquettes, corn on the cob, and some kind of small hard cakes. I felt much better. The chow's sure to slip. The Viet Cong hit so many transports at Da Nang the other night that I'm surprised we got any mail today.

I had a young corporal check in this morning with his foot and arm all bandaged, face cut up. He had been sleeping in the R&R temporary housing at Da Nang when the rockets started dropping all around him. He took off at high post running toward a bunker, blam, when all of a sudden he was flying through the air back toward the building he just ran out of and was blown completely through the wall with all the trash and

everything falling in all over him. He counted the pieces and out through the wall-less hulk of the building he stopped just a second to see if maybe anyone else was back in the building and, kablooey, another rocket went off in the building and the concussion threw him up against the bunker he had been trying so hard to get to in the first place! There was some more, but you get the gist of it. I never heard such a funny story in all my life! And to top it off, he had spent an entire tour with the grunts on all their operations and had never been hit, had gone back to Quantico, and immediately requested to be sent back overseas with the nice safe air wing! Now that's a story for your grandchildren!

. . .

Well, super sale, that's it for now. Chowtime and winter coats? Hell, it's HOT here! Tell old Bosoms, Sunflower, Red, and the Gandy Dancer hello and kisses to all.

See you,
Ray



Friday
21 July 1967

Hello Sweetheart!

Guess where I am? Sitting at the kitchen table once more and rather glad to be here. I drove back from Mo-Ranch all by myself, forded about 10 streams, and only got lost once. I nearly drove Mom crazy when I wouldn't pass a truck. I did great, ahem, ahem. It was great to come home to your two long letters, and I hope you haven't missed mine too much. I forgot to take paper and only could mail one postcard when we drove into Kerrville 24 kilometers one day. So, it looks like I have a week of news to tell you.

We drove up last Sunday with Mom helping in the last-minute preparations. Got to the ranch about 1400 and got our "cabin." It turned out to be a stone house divided into three big apartments. . . .

It seemed so quiet that my ears rang the first day. The river was dark green and the "slide" was too advanced for our kids. We investigated the river the first day and really enjoyed it, but the kids had to wear life jackets, and all we had for Kathy was a plastic ring, so we mostly played on some steps with her as it was very deep. Then we went up to the swimming pool, which turned out to be much better for our fishes. . . .

...

With no TV, no kids, no nothing, we were really on our own. We told the kids no swimming except at 1000 and 1500 and that made our only routine. Had to drive the car to the pool each time. Wednesday, we decided to go to Kerrville and lucked out. There was a hill country art/drama open-air theater, which was practicing for a children's play, so the kids had a ball watching the rehearsals all one afternoon, and then we ate at a cute screened-in porch restaurant overlooking the river. Very cool and delightful, despite the glass of spilled iced tea. Then we went antique shopping and found an \$8 *not* antique green paper weight and tin elephant for Kirk. Mom and I enjoyed that.

We also came home with rocks, driftwood and bones, and a *giant* snake skin, which turned out to be armadillo skin. Each night, Mom fixed elegant simple meals—I don't think she trusts my cooking, but I do hers!—and it seemed delicious because we were all starved from the open air and swimming. Kirk always woke us up too early trying to feed Kathy, who doesn't seem to like his Rice Krispies! Kathy was the joy and delight and nuisance of the trip. . . .

...

Then the last night, we were rained in, as a deluge closed the roads, so we went up to the big house and watched the teenagers dance and sing. The kids gawked and drank Cokes and Kathy's popsicle ran down both arms as she wiped her hands on all of us. Mom and I felt too ancient for words, but Karen reassured me that I looked like a chaperone and would fit in if I sat on a bench! . . .

On top of all that, we "bowled" in the alley at a lodge on the rainy day with the kids being pin boys, and we shot pool, gouging the table nearly, played shuffleboard, Yahtzee (a dice game), and explored a river in the shallow part. . . .

And today, we stopped for a tour of Lyndon B. Johnson's boyhood home in Johnson City and a peek at the ranch. Kathy had to go "wee" in the middle of the dignified tour guide's speech!

I came home to my *clean, defrosted* icebox to find the door had been shut and it was full of mold! Oh crunch. . . .

...

I missed my daily writing to you, but I was glad to have yours waiting for me. That Da Nang shelling was awful and I'm so glad you weren't up

Figure 40. Kathy, Karen, Kirk, and Robin Stice at the river on Mo-Ranch



Source: Stice family collection.

there then! Also glad to hear the colonel is back. I'm not at all surprised that he needed *food*. That's the only answer!

I know you'll be relieved to get past your birthday. What a lousy way to always celebrate it, taking exams, but really maybe next year will be different for all birthdays. I'm just so delighted to see that calendar narrow down to three months more. It is practically getting skinny!

Must close now, Dear Heart. It's midnight. It was a pretty lonesome vacation without you, but we managed. I heard a jet go over the hills one night and felt like it was you saying, "Hi there! What are you all doing?" Well, now you know. Just trying madly to get along without you. Gosh that's a job!

XXXs and *such*,
Gig

∞ . ∞

Saturday night

22 July 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

By now you're out at Mo-Ranch, I guess. Sounds really pretty. How close is the river? Down by New Braunfels, it is beautiful. I hope you took lots of camp-it-yourself kits too to keep all the roaring campers busy.

I wrote Mom a letter yesterday finally. I hope it doesn't shock her. The next week is just going to be a headache, that's all there is to it. For a while yesterday, I thought the group was going to waive my instrument flight check, but they aren't. I have to do it tomorrow somehow.

I thought I heard something outside. It was a damn chicken, a real live chicken pecking around the huts!

Sleeping pills? No! Suppose one of the kids was sick and you didn't hear it, or a fire started up, or a million things. No, you should not take sleeping pills. When I get home, if you want to, that's a different story. But alone, you have entirely too much responsibility not to be able to wake up clearly and either call a doctor or drive to the hospital yourself.

. . . Promise me you won't until I get home, okay? If you have to rely on pills to calm and pills to pep and pills to sleep, you don't have a very strong hold on life. When we're older sure, but not yet!

I already opened the two packages from Scarbrough's, umm, delicacy number one. I've got the pralines in the ice box and the poppycock in my locker—tremendous. Thank you or Pris or whoever in hell sent them! I bought myself a little present. Two weeks ago, I ran out of beer, so today I had a chance to buy six cases. I guess that'll do for the duration!

I got a real-live headache today. I told you I was working hard. Would you believe it's slowly going away just writing to you?

Thank you, Babysan.

. . .

Can't keep my eyes open much longer (sans pills, dope).

Good night, Darling.

Love you,

Ray



Monday
24 July 1967

Dear Love,

How are you tonight, or today, whichever it is for you? Happy birthday night or day and my very nicest thoughts to you. We sang happy birthday to you. Did you hear us? Robin said we should have served steak tonight in your honor, but I told her pork chops would have to be good enough! Corn was also picked, as it is your favorite, and baked potatoes. Thanks for liking just what I had on hand!

We all watched *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* after dinner, which was *almost* appropriate.¹³ Kathy got a little bored at the end and wanted to play guns.

...

But I'm not going to get on the subject of them tonight, except to say that the big girls are going to Houston with Mother tomorrow for a few days. . . . Kirk, Kathy, and I will certainly rattle around without them.

...

The race riot in Detroit, Michigan, is the big news here. They are sending in 5,000 5th Army federal troops *maybe*.¹⁴ A really hot night in the old town tonight it seems. I sure am glad we're safe where we are. We really have so much to be grateful for.

...

Goodnight, Dear Love. I do hope the big sweat of your birthday annuals are over and all goes well. I noticed I was missing a Monday letter today. Guess *your* creative urge got hung up on a test. All is understood.

I love you,
Gig



¹³ *Gidget Goes Hawaiian*, directed by Paul Wendkos, starring Deborah Walley, James Darren, and Michael Callan (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1961).

¹⁴ After five days, 43 people were dead, 342 injured, nearly 1,400 buildings had been burned, and approximately 7,000 National Guard and U.S. Army troops had been deployed. Hubert G. Locke, *The Detroit Riot of 1967* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2017).

Monday afternoon

24 July 1967

And happy birthday to you too! Yeah, I mean it really has been one—first class—and the day’s only half over (being noon now). I got off to a late start, went through two aircraft before we finally got started, reconned this A Shau Valley where the bad people are building up in, then checked in with a Cessna O-1 Bird Dog near the DMZ, shot the hell out of a Viet Cong village we had been getting shot at from, flew instruments all the way back . . . finished up the instrument check, and landed with fumes. I checked in with Colonel Palmer. He wished me happy birthday and really floored me with, “Oh by the way, several months ago, I put you in for the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. Would you believe a message from RVN Provincial Headquarters came in today and you are the proud owner of the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star.”¹⁵

I thought he was kidding but he wasn’t. How about that! Man, that’s the first one for MABS and H&MS-13 has never had one. Usually they get a few (three or four) for each group every six months, and most of them have gone to the gun squadrons. Well, I mean, my goodness! The actual citation will take up to a year probably, but that’s always the case on any award.

I sure hate to see Colonel Palmer leave tomorrow. He really has been great for this squadron. I was always afraid we’d lose him and yet grateful for the time we’ve had him—an honestly outstanding commander.¹⁶

I’ll try to get this on the afternoon plane, so see you later, Babysan. It’s really been a great birthday!

Love you!

Ray



¹⁵ Headquarters, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, “Foreign Decoration; Case of Major Ray B. Stice, U.S. Marine Corps,” letter dated 27 July 1967, Stice family collection.

¹⁶ MAG-13, ComdC July 1967, Box ___, Folder 077, 1201077026, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, I-1.

26 July 1967

Hello no writer!

Lost your pen? Every time I get on you for not writing, the mail plane comes in and I get two or three letters. At this interval, it has been long enough. I'm ready, I'm ready!

Things have simmered down to a subheadache roar now. Maybe I can get some more flying in. I haven't flown with any real regularity for the last two months. Colonel Richard E. Carey told me to be my own judge about that, so these aren't any artificial restrictions anyway.

We got a new administrative officer in yesterday. He starts out with the Congressional Medal of Honor on down; our sergeant major has a Navy Cross (#2); and his own brother has a Medal of Honor, so we have a few "experienced" people around.¹⁷ That stuff sure is good for the troops. They really like to talk about that sort of thing.

Oh, my last letter was written birthday afternoon. Well to really top things off, about 1530, Colonel Palmer came up to my desk and said, "Ray, let's go into Base Services" (next office). So, I grab my pen and pad and zap, they had a goddamn birthday cake, iced tea, coffee with this . . . thing across the cake, singing hastily "Happy Birthday." I told them how great they had capped off an already tremendous day, with that real fine shooting hop, the instrument check, the Vietnamese award, and now this!

Well, it was all very nice indeed. That Colonel Palmer was really tremendous. We gave him the best change of command ceremony—had the wing band down—we could and he's busy finishing up fitness reports and getting ready to take over VMFA-115 day after tomorrow.¹⁸ After the ceremony, we had cake, pictures galore, I gave him our homemade inscribed MABS plaque (the real ones didn't arrive from Japan in time) and one of the officers presented him with a chicken with a tag around its neck saying, "I am an Eagle." His new squadron is called "The Eagles!" All in all, not that bad!

¹⁷ Stice is likely referring to Capt Muriel Davis and SgtMaj Anthony B. Kouma. MABS-13, ComdC July 1967, 2.

¹⁸ MAG-13, ComdC July 1967, I-2.

Goodnight, Darling, write to me.

I love you, Honey,
Ray



Thursday
27 July 1967

Hello Dearest,

What a little family we are today! Just three of us and a lonesome little trio we are, with all the big guys gone. We managed a few wild times, but not any good *major* ones! . . .

Kirk, Kathy, and I went to the commissary Tuesday afternoon after getting the girls off with Mom to Houston, and Randy came over *that* night. Wednesday, we went downtown, and I got my ring back. That “little” diamond cost \$37.50 to replace! . . .

So glad you got the candy. Mom will be pleased. Yes, she did the shopping for me on that one. The pralines are from me, and the poppycock from her. They won’t let us mail chocolate to Vietnam in the summer. . . .

Yes, I did sell the boat by using my “power of attorney”. . . and it always scares me because I’m not sure what the *fact* is. You say, “Do I really have some sort of financial control through you?” which really makes me laugh. . . .

The “fact” is I spend *thousands* of your dollars. I’m your chief buying officer and scream the loudest when the treasury gets low. I’m secretly hoping you are building a new treasury while I’m depleting this one here. You are, aren’t you? . . .

Mom and the girls came home today. Enjoy your “peace” there, Dear. It’s still a madhouse here. Oh yes, I don’t have any more sleeping pills. I sent my spare to you. Send it back! Would you believe three months and four days? As a matter of fact, I “use” you more than you know to bolster my spirits. This year sure seems longer than that last one. Oh well, at least it’s getting shorter.

Really gotta go,
Gigabeth Q. Stice, Attorney in Need



Friday afternoon

28 July 1967

Hello Dear Heart!

I seem to be a day behind with my letters. Please forgive me. . . . I felt all in, plus Karen, Robin, Mom, and two Austin girls—Beth (11 years) and Mary (10 years)—showed up last night, full of bubbles from their trip. Robin had a new outfit on, and Karen had bought a toy, and they were full of stories about their visit. . . .

We're all going to Barton [Springs] for a picnic supper tonight. I'm delighted to have another week filled so nicely for the kids. The days have really been hot, no rain at all. I've been watering all day and wonder what in the world the water bill will be.

. . .

Well, Mom just called regarding the picnic and was full of stories about cancer after an afternoon of bridge playing. She gave me a lecture about not smoking again, and I must agree with her. We *must* stop, somehow, both of us. There! I've given you food for two thoughts—retirement and smoking. Both lousy subjects!

No letter from you today. I figure I'm getting the silent treatment, which I gave you the week at Mo-Ranch. I didn't mean to, just no paper, but you're probably enjoying a week off from writing anyway. Not much else to report here. I'm feeling very human tonight. This time, I just had a bad headache. . . . Really funny that it worked that way. Just like a rain cloud.

Bye for now, Dear Heart.

XXXs,

Gig



Friday night

28 July 1967

Hi Honey,

Okay, you're in my good graces for a while. I got two letters from you and two from Mom; one would have been acceptable, but two was even better!

. . .

Three days and three months don't look all that bad, do they? First time I really thought about it was this morning. I've never allowed myself to even talk about how much longer, let alone think about it. My roommate Ken Baker woke up with "three more days until August" and I blurted out "and three more months until November." The weather we normally associate with November is so foreign to what we have here that it still doesn't seem like the right month, but it is. The exact dates we will have to "play by ear." I should be in Da Nang close to 1 November, but it could be as late as the 10th. Just keep an open mind on that, okay? That's an order, Mama. And they're still only giving 20 actual leave days plus 4 [to] proceed and 4-7 travel. So, the total time to the new duty station, wherever it is, would only be about a month from the day I hit the West Coast.

I guess you had better write to the Balls [the landlord] and ask them what they want to do about the house if we do have orders out. There is an infinitesimally small chance I could have Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) or Reserve duties in that area, but exceedingly slim.

How are your finances? Pot full of gold getting slim, like me?

I'll bet you a beer you never look at your cotton-picking envelopes, do you? I've been bugging you all year long and you've never said a damn word!

Sorry, Baby, I have to cut this one short. More next time.

Goodnight, Honey.

See you later,
Ray



Sunday night
30 July 1967

Hello Dear *Gallant One*!

What a lovely birthday surprise! I'm so happy for you! I think it is absolutely marvelous and it even *sounds* grand! I have been happily boasting about you all weekend, and even called Milly so she could share the fun.

The news came Saturday. The mailman was extra good to me as he brought a check from Penn Square for \$56 too! How about that? Two good things in the same mail. I could hardly believe my eyes. I'm savoring them both tonight. Things were a bit too busy until now.

...

So, you see, it really has been too busy here to do much but keep my head in water. Karen's temperature is 99 degrees tonight, so I guess she's getting better *regardless*. Things should quiet down a bit now.

Milly was so full of her letter from you—my Monday letter, *that's* where it went!—that she could hardly listen to my news. You said all the right things and she was *very* pleased. She told *me* a bit of news. Said she read your orders in the *Army-Navy Journal* as 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. Neither of us knew where that was—Cherry Point? —but she's going to call Quantico. Nothing like getting it straight! She probably *will* too! Quantico is Milly's private source of the straight poop! Mother suggested I call the Marines here and ask! I believe I can call a certain Marine and get it straight from him instead. He's probably already told me. . . . Well, anyway, I can wait to hear. I'm just privately hoping it's North Carolina because someone told me that South Carolina smells, is swampy, and mosquitoey. . . .

Time to close up shop here. I seem to be rambling and it's midnight. I'm terribly pleased about your medal. It's such a beautiful *sounding* one. Bill Austin quipped, "Did he get it for chasing girls?" Well, I'll vouch for that. There have been times when you have been gallant to me! Darling, I miss you. I love you, and I'm proud of you. What more could you ask?

XXXs,

Gig

P.S. Kirk got the wibble wobbles thinking about school tonight, but knowing you'll be home in November calmed him down. It is a nice thought!

• 11 •

AUGUST 1967

Tuesday early
1 August 1967

Hello Dear,

And good new *month* to you! I am writing in the morning today because I was up quite a bit with Kathy last night. I took both Kathy and Karen to the doctor yesterday. Both had sore throats, and Kathy had a fever of 101 degrees. It went up during the night, but she seems better this morning. Karen was hardly sick at all, but he put her on penicillin too, plus ear drops for Robin for a total cost of medicine \$10. Whew! Too much swimming, I guess. . . .

So nice to hear about your birthday party! I'm sure a cake is always welcome, and you had two in a row there with the colonel leaving! Sounds like his ceremony was nice too. I bet he likes the homemade plaque better than the one from Japan anyway. I just love your "homemade" one.

I know you were so glad to get your instrument check done too. My what a lot did happen on that day! A day to remember.

Mom saw a 14-year-old Viet Cong being interviewed at Chu Lai by a major on TV last night. I missed it. She said the Viet Cong said they were all drafting all 14-year olds now. Such a sad war it is. But still a bad one, nonetheless. I read about some Viet Cong killing 12 villagers near Quang Ngai.

They showed pictures of the USS *Forrestal* (CVA 59) last night. I was so impressed at how fast they clean up after such a disaster and go on from there. Really amazing.¹

Lots of riots in the United States these days. All over the place; not here though, thank goodness.²

The kids are all playing around this morning, waiting for me to give them orders. I rather dread a day with no swimming and a cross Kathy. Somebody is bound to get restless. We all played Chinese checkers yesterday. Only one in tears afterward: Robin, who usually wins. I helped Kirk and Karen so she felt cheated. Next time, I play all four sets of marbles at once!

Best I close. A big whiner is standing by yelling for pants. I love you, Dear!

Gig

P.S. I haven't "lost my marbles" yet. But it is tempting . . .



Tuesday night

1 August 1967

Hi Baby,

Get you down to two kids and immediately you're lonely! There's no help for people like you unfortunately.

My orders to the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing are in, so that's more than likely Cherry Point, North Carolina, but it could be Beaufort, South Carolina. I hear there's several months on the housing lists at both places.

. . .

Who in hell told you not to send chocolate to Vietnam? Don't listen to that crap. Just have it sealed really tight, and you don't have to tell them exactly what's in the stupid packages. I just wanted a couple cartons of Hershey bars and Mounds bars (24 bars in a small carton). I thought you would send me something if I asked you. I do have an icebox now.

¹ Gig's comment here seems out of line with the Navy's official history and timeline of events, though it is likely a reaction to news headlines at the time. Between 30 July and 11 August, the ship continued to experience flash fires. "Forrestal (CVA-59), 1955-1993," Naval History and Heritage Command, accessed 30 June 2023.

² During the summer of 1967, more than 150 race and war riots took place across the country. See Kelly Gonsalves, "The 'Long, Hot Summer of 1967,'" *Week*, 2 August 2017.

My eyesight dropped to 20/25 in my left eye, and I couldn't get my hearing checked.³ I have to go back Thursday afternoon. I can still fly for a long time, that's the main thing. I still think your eyes are very poor and should be checked. You probably should wear glasses when you read and drive. . . .

I finally got to fly again today, but it was only a test hop and not a real combat mission of any sort. I had Major Thomas K. Burke all scrunched down in the back seat. I practically had to sit on him to get the canopy closed for takeoff! I'd forgotten how big he is. He said he wanted a check-out, so I really worked him out.

. . .

We finally got the fly away dates for August a couple of days ago. It's pretty late for that. These are the dates when people leave Da Nang for Okinawa. They leave here the day before and remain overnight (RON) at Da Nang. Then they spend a couple of days in Okinawa and zap on to the West Coast.

You were right, this year is longer than the last one. First off, it's 13 months not 12; secondly, we hadn't had one before to remember before like we do this time. My real concern is the kids' school and housing.

Are you getting my letters every other day? Yours sure come in spastically. It's just the system, not the sender . . .

Got to go. Tomorrow is another day. I'm sure of that anyway.

Goodnight, Sweet Pea. See you sooner than the last time.

Love to you, Honey,

Ray

P.S. Kiss and hug all my children, even the four bad ones!



Tuesday late

1 August 1967

Hello Love,

I got your Friday letter today and I feel very "up" on you, and I'm glad you're finally over the hump of my vacation lag.

³ Current standards for Marine class 1 aviators are for uncorrected visual acuity of no less than 20/40 in each eye and correctable to 20/20. See *Aviation Physical Standards* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2017).

...

Why is your “pot full of gold getting slim?” You certainly are mysterious about *your* finances! You’d better come home loaded, because that’s what I’m hoping, nay, demanding. Yes, I’m feeling rosy (\$1,728) but it’s only temporary. I’m just hanging on until you get home, Dear Big Moneyman. . . . Did you understand my envelope finances? This has been a skinny year, but rich in experiences for you at least.

...

It’s midnight plus, Dear, so I will close. Kathy feels cool and all is well.

XXXs and such,
Gigabeth Q



Wednesday night
3 August 1967

Hello Dearest Man,

I’ve had a ladies’ night out on the town with Mom and Alberta Crawford (age 75). We went to see *Divorce American Style*, a movie with Debbie Reynolds, Dick Van Dyke, Van Johnson, and Jean Simmons—all “older” Hollywood.⁴ How’s that for a racy night out? I’m afraid the above actors were all showing their age if not their maturity. There was a pretty good scene about the trials of sharing a bathroom, and that at least hit home here!

Things are fine here. Another quiet day (i.e., no swimming). I went to a jammed pay day commissary, got a \$65 electricity bill (ouch), and called the doctor about a shot for Kathy. He said the penicillin is working better than shots for the types of bugs they are seeing nowadays, so no shot. She improved as the day wore on, and the fever was all gone tonight, so I guess it’s working. I need another bottle of medicine now.

...

Golly bum, there’s not much to write you about when there’s no real action around here, and no letter to answer today. Not that I’m complaining, you’ve been marvelous. Way ahead of me these last two weeks in fact.

...

Kirk made another model today. He’s pretty good now. He also drove

⁴ *Divorce American Style*, directed by Bud Yorkin (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1967).

us crazy with sock bombs! Swinging sock bombs that is. Have you ever been hit with a swinging sock bomb? A sock bomb is a sock full of socks, natch. We also got water pistoled quite a bit today. Nothing ever happens around here.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Thursday night
2 August 1967

Hi Honey,

Yeah, August, how's them apples? Getting better every month, huh? We're losing a whole flock of real outstanding troops this month. I hate to see them go. They are the ones who built this place from out of the sands to an operational reality. The men who will relieve them will never know what they've had to accomplish. Fortunately, we're never really finished. The tents turn into huts, the lean-tos turn into shops, the huts turn into paneled offices. Men fight and die just meters away, and the survivors return to watch *Batman* on TV that night. Yesterday, one of our Grumman F-9 Cougars came back all shot up and bleeding red hydraulic fluid all over the place, and today it's ready for a test hop. It's an odd serious business. It's a weird peacetime war and it's all for real. Daily for us, every other month for the troops.

My scrounge trucks really worked out well. People who haven't had wheels for a year have them now, and we have 15 more en route, then we can really relax on that problem. We have semicommercial power to most places (not all) and 20 Koreans who babysit and provide TLC to keep them [generators] humming. We have a fantastic water well that several other units borrow from and no spare well. We have charcoal broiled steaks and chops on Friday in the club but no lettuce, cake but no ice cream, champagne but not always beer, a TV antenna but no TV, popcorn and no cooking oil, a huge dishwasher and no boiler for hot water. Yep, you might say in the colloquial this sure is a half-ass war. And I'm ready to come home too. . . .

I went to bosses' night last night and damn near fell off the stool. I met a Staff Sergeant Fred Stice, a real live Marine. I was half smashed to

start with—we'd both missed supper—so we got drunk together. I finally got some sense and left about 0130, but we sure had a time trying to figure out if we were related. He knew of some of his people who had left southern Illinois for Oklahoma, but we couldn't get much closer than that. The real purpose of the "party" was to say goodbye to some of our finer staff noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who left today, and we did that up properly, plus it gives the others a chance to air their problems.⁵ And some of them have problems that should be their officers in charge, not theirs. All in all, it was a highly effective exposé. I guess I wasn't as drunk as I thought . . .

I have to go back to work in a few minutes. I had to call a selection board meeting for warrant officer applicants. Seems the wing wants them tomorrow morning. Such a good deal. I will be typing and retyping all damn night. I missed taking my hearing test this afternoon, as I was getting everything set up for the board. Maybe tomorrow.

Hey, Sweetsan, I really have to eat and run like now. We're supposed to have ham for supper, so I better get some before the mess hall closes.

I love you, Gig,

Ray

P.S. Kiss all the GOOD children this time!



Thursday past midnight
3 August 1967

Hello Dear Man,

I just looked in our *World Book Atlas* and found out what time midnight is to you there. It is 1400. Your midnight is my 1000, and your 0800 is my 1800. How about that! Your noon is my 2100, and my noon is your 0200. I sure can't think. I started to say think about you at noon, but I would be getting a sound sleeper on the wire. It looks like I'm talking to you in the

⁵ Marine Air Base Squadron 13 saw significant personnel changes during the period. MABS-13, Command Chronology (ComdC) August 1967, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077127, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 2.

afternoon, only my back says it's midnight. Just let me know if you want to know what time it is.

...

Whenever it seems like you've been gone a *long* time, I look at the kids and think well, at least they prove he was around *some* days! I keep thinking I wish I had someone to play bridge with and that I should get out a bit, then I realize I'm really just missing your company. I even call Mom absentmindedly, as if what I'm looking for is over there, and she sort of senses I don't really have anything to say because there's no enthusiasm in my voice. It's like getting the wrong person on the phone. Very confusing!

Well, I'll be glad to have you home to set me straight again. Damn, damn, and double damn to being apart, yeah?

Obviously as Milly would say, no letter from you to answer today, which only makes tomorrow look brighter. *Bound* to be one then! I've been reading *Stories of Hawaii* by Jack London, which are very vivid now that I've been there.⁶ He stayed near the Halekulani Hotel—the one where we had breakfast by the sea—and mentions the Moana Hotel. Lots of stories.

I had to stop here as Kathy woke up with a fever again. I guess she overdid it today, before she was all well. Darn. Got to keep her real quiet tomorrow. This is her first case of tonsillitis—real one that is. I'll call the doctor again tomorrow. Babies sure can fool you.

Goodnight, dear.

XXXs,
Gig



Saturday night
5 August 1967

Hello Dere,

How is you? I'm sore, tired, and soaking wet, working the hell out of the A Shau Valley. I had four flights of aircraft to control. Usually, you have one or two and I had a very cooperative tanker fortunately. We uncovered a whole complex of tunnels, storage areas, and bunkers—a real go hop.

⁶ Jack London, *Stories of Hawaii*, ed. A. Grove Day (Honolulu, HI: Mutual Publishing, 1965).

...

I finally got to do some washing yesterday—23 sets of skivvies down and only 1 to go! Pretty close, me.

I must pause for chow: roast beef, mushroom gravy, creamed corn, lettuce for a change, milk, and jelly cake. Plus two beers before supper; I'm full.

Would you believe you're getting cut short for a floor show? No? Guess again, Sweet Friend (slipped ya, didn't I?). Not sure I can stay awake for all of it, but I'll start it out.

Goodnight, Honey.

See you later,

Ray

P.S. XXs to the good guys, seven bops to the bad guys.



Saturday night

5 August 1967

Hello Dear Man,

It's midnight here, so good afternoon there! I'm on quite a kick while you're gone—I'm free to read late or watch TV late, although I feel pretty lousy the next day. . . . Last night, I went to bed so stimulated by stories I could hardly sleep, and I promised myself I'd be good tonight, but Alann Burke, the ghastly TV interviewer, had author Norman Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*) on.⁷ And better yet, a scientist telling about a guy named Ted something who can make pictures of his *thoughts*. . . . Most interesting.⁸

Well anyway, that's why I *am* sometimes spastic about writing as you divined. You really are a pretty good diviner all told.

I am bemused by your strange desires for me to have a bigger bosom. Hopefully, it is just a joke made on a wife with a 13-year-old figure, who is loved regardless! If, of course, you really harbor secret wishes that I should do something like that to prove love, then I must conclude you need some

⁷ Alan S. Burke was a conservative radio and television talk show host from 1966 until 1970 who was known for his caustic personality. Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (New York: Rinehart, 1948).

⁸ The scientist was Dr. Jule Eisenbud and the man was Ted Serios. They worked on what was then termed *thoughtographic photography*. See the Jule Eisenbud Collection, Special Collections, University of Maryland.

love and aren't getting enough from me. This probably is the case, literally and physically! That's too bad. Your eyesight is *too* good when you're away from me. Usually when you are home, I can bemuse you into *forgetting* my figure faults, but here I am miles away competing with *Playgirls* and losing like mad. Well, if it's any comfort to you, I miss the security and peace of you near me and my body feels very incomplete and frail without you. I'm just a girl without you—not a woman!

However, we've been through all this before and I'm really not too concerned. I'm happy with the way life has turned out so far and wouldn't change a hair of it or you. . . .

. . .

Ray, it's taken a lot of stubbornness and love on both our parts to have these four [children] and I am just as amazed as you are with how beautiful and wonderful they are. You gave me the kind of family I always wanted but could never visualize, and you are the kind of husband I always wanted and couldn't visualize. I think that is remarkable right there! How many never achieve that dream.

. . .

Hey, see what a letter from you does to me? I hadn't had one since Monday, and you fairly leapt out at me! That picture was, well, not my favorite haircut! Would you please let some of those darling gray hairs show? I love gray hair on men! I also love weather-beaten men. The young ones don't thrill me anymore. . . .

I do not feel old yet, but I do want to settle down soon. These other lives are a bit too lively to bounce around with much longer. They are getting so big, and I do hate *complicated* things, like housing and schools. That is *lousy* news about housing in North Carolina and that is exactly what I hate. . . .

Oh well, I guess we shall all manage. Things do have a way of working out, and I think at least we won't have diapers on this trip. The kids scoffed at leaving Kathy behind. After all, we didn't leave her behind when we went to Virginia! All for one and one for all and me for bed.

Monday, Scout, you get your package worked up. This is the *first* time you've been specific!

Hang on to that raunchy skin. Dial soap will be on the way.

Kathy is all well, and everything is fine and, in case you really wondered, no! I will NOT GET MY BOSOMS LIFTED. Perish the thought.

They remain delicately yours—SMASHED.⁹ Broadly speaking, however, the rest of this broad is still in working order. So! Dream on, McDuff. I'm right with you.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Monday
7 August 1967

Hello Sweet,

I was just starring at the officers' club picture and noticed there weren't too many pilots in the group. I counted about five in the picture, and they all seem to have the cool-eyed look about them. Like, "Where's the runway?" "I got it, now hold it right there." That is what you say, isn't it? . . .

Since we had already lugged the TV to the repair shop—it blew a tube I guess yesterday—and we had antique shopped a bit at old cane chairs (6 for \$70, no thanks) we were all hot and tired.

We spent the afternoon putting up the bulletin boards. It was quite a process, as they had to *drill* holes, and wire and hang them themselves, plus hunt for treasures to put on the boards. It filled the whole afternoon, as I had to run around exclaiming how great they all looked.

Then there was dancing and exercises and chasing and dinner after that. Imagine, a whole day with NO TV. I'm *exhausted*.

Tomorrow, we go to get it back. I have another upside-down sprinkler, and I can't find the guarantee. I just about don't give a damn. . . .

Gotta go to bed. I can't seem to hold my head up. Aren't we a pair? I hope things are going well with you. The letters do seem to be coming in slower now for you too. But I'm glad to hear you're writing them regardless.

Goodnight, Lovesan,
Gigabeth Q

⁹ The first known breast augmentation surgery took place in 1962. See Christodoulos Kaoutzanis et al., "The Evolution of Breast Implants," *Seminars in Plastic Surgery* 33, no. 4 (November 2019): 217–33, <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0039-1696985>.

That was a goodie letter I wrote Sunday, wasn't it?
P.S. It's 100 degrees here every day!



Tuesday night
7 August 1967

Hi Honey,

Got your two Tuesday letters today. . . .

When does school start? To me, the summer is really just getting started good.

I could have stayed home from that floor show Sunday night. It was a Filipino act, and they didn't have too much life in them after their third show.

. . .

Damn, do you realize it's been five cotton-picking months since we were in Hawaii? Seems like maybe last month or maybe two, but not five!

. . .

Oh, guess who's here over at Marine Aircraft Group 12 (MAG-12) next to the beach—Major Ray E. Bright in all his glory. One quick handshake, a grin, and off he goes. Well screw him, he never was really friendly.

. . .

I've got one of the finest Negro (second lieutenant) officers in the world as our crash crew officer. His name is Ed Hicks—Edwin Quintard Hicks—I call him "Uncle Ed." . . .

It's about that time, Baby, to take a shower and catch the last couple of reels of the flick, hit the runway, and go to bed! It's still hot—103 degrees in the shade!

Goodnight, Darling.

Love YOU,
Ray



Wednesday
9 August 1967

Hello Dearest,

My bloodshot eyes did behold a letter from you today—a sort of drunk out tonight letter but deservedly, so I guess from the real "go" hop—you

Figure 41. 2dLt Edwin Q. Hicks (seated, second from left) with Col Palmer (center), Maj Stice (right of Palmer) and the rest of the unit



Source: Stice family collection.

summed it all up in one paragraph so fast I swear! You're becoming a jet talker. . . .

. . .

Today was beastly hot again, so we didn't go for a swim until 1700 with Liz and Sarah, and then we had her over for supper. She left about 2000 and Mom came over to fit a dress on Robin. Mom is suddenly discovering the art of sewing for her granddaughters.

. . .

The kids are having a draggy month so far. Their friends are out of town, and they are lonesome and watch too much TV. It got fixed to the tune of \$22, did I tell you? We'll all be glad when school starts. August is the worst month in Texas. Rather like a winter month up north.

Mom and I never fight anymore, and it's so peaceful we can't get over it. I could wish our marriage would get that peaceful. Do you suppose it's possible? It would be nice. If only things will break even for us for a while.

August 1967

We could use some good deals.

...

Gotta go to bed, Love.
Mille [thousand] XXXs



Friday

11 August 1967

Hello Dearest,

You know really it is kind of amusing the way we try to answer each other's letters and half the time I can't remember what I wrote you unless it was something big like someone sick and you probably don't know which of your letters I'm referring to either. I've about decided we need carbon copies.

...

Do you know—do you *know*—I haven't had a cigarette since last night? It's hell at the moment. I ran out and told the kids to guard me and maybe I'd stop. They chased me around this morning and crumpled up three cigarettes. Kirk went up to get some because he couldn't stand my suffering, but I forgot to say how much and he only took 25 cents. So, I'm still on the wagon. Writing you is a test. But it's hard!

...

School registration is 31 August, but school starts on 6 September (To answer one of *your* questions.)

...

I am *really* out of cigarettes. That is my problem.

I'm sleeping awfully well of late. That's sure a help. I feel fine at any rate. Every plus helps. Would you believe, I think I'll go get some cigarettes? It's 1330. Whew! I'm having a nicotine fit.

XXXs,
Gig



Friday night

11 August 1967

Hi Baby,

If you don't object to a slightly stinky letter, fine. If you do, read no more.

I would rather have you get something than nothing, so bear with me and we'll have a post-happy hour chat. I darn near flipped at you looking up in the *World Atlas* the different time zones. It's 2115 Friday night here. What time is it there?

Nothing worse than seeing former students from Beeville who are flying better than you are. It's quite a letdown frankly. And the guy I saw tonight wasn't even particularly a good student. So where does that grab you? About the only good news he had was that Major Ray Fortmeyer was over at MAG-12, holding hands with Ray Bright.

Today, our chaplain [Lieutenant Commander Wayne L. Niederhuth] just got back from Dung Ha. He went aboard a landing ship, tank (LST) and went out about 14 miles at sea and held services for Major Ray Pendergraft and Captain David Glenn Spearman. They both wanted a burial at sea if it could be arranged, and although I'll admit I almost choked reading the summarization of the ceremony, it sounded like the chaplain did everything he possibly could. Even getting shot at by the Viet Cong waiting for the high tide to pull out from the Dun Ha River and out to see where they went in.

They sure have been stupid about hitting us. I would have hit here 1,000 times to their one. Maybe they have to have everything just too much set up. They are real planners you know, sand boxes and the whole bit. They practice a hit 80 times before they do it and, if the tide and weather is right, that's the catalyst and off they go, regardless of the other circumstances whatever they may be. . . .

Tomorrow, I'm not quite sure what the deal is, but Major Phillip "Phil" Jacobs and I are having our pictures taken at 0530. We flew together yesterday—reconned from Khe Sanh down through the south to the northern end of the A Shau Valley and then finally found the valley itself and reconned the center and south end. There was an Air Force Cessna O-1 Bird Dog that had held off the artillery while we worked the valley and, at the end, he said if we were through reconning we could hit the bridge and four automatic weapons positions next to A Shau airport. We finally picked it out, made a 7-G run under the clouds, wherein I almost blacked out. We got some pretty good battle damage assessment (BDA) for an F-9 (probable damage), destroyed the bridge, and damaged one automatic weapons position. We had to hustle about 200 kilometers back home through the swamp, and damned if a Douglas A-4 Skyhawk hadn't closed the main runway here at Chu Lai. We finally begged and pleaded

and got in and trapped (arrested) a MAG-12's aluminum strip in the rain. Not sure what kept the remaining rocket from leaping out of the pod, but it stayed in. Interesting hop overall, I guess we hit the "highlights in the BDA" that day, so this guy wants to take a picture. So, if you see something stupid, it's me and Phil Jacobs.

Right now, it's late and, drunk or not, it's time to go to bed and take a shower. So, if you don't mind, I'll see you sooner and get some sleep like now. I know you don't hate me drunk, but you never did like me too much either. That's fine as tomorrow I'm sober and I'll still love you anyway, so there. And I love you regardless—dead or alive.

XXXs yourself!

Ray



Saturday afternoon

12 August 1967

Hello Dear Man,

I'm writing you in blissful peace. Not a child within spitting distance. It's the kind of Saturday afternoon we love with windows open, a nice breeze, lots of sunshine but only in the 80s. Kathy is asleep and the kids are at a University of Texas play with Mom. Heavenly! I'm supposed to be washing my hair, but I'd rather write you. Yes, I'm smoking and, yes, coffee.

Fall is somehow in the air already and I have fall fever and just want to watch the leaves and listen to a plane drone over. I'm sleeping like a bear these days, except for an occasional cocked ear for burglars. House noises and burglars are the same. They both give me shots of adrenaline.

We all had a great evening last night at the drive-in movies—Karen, Robin, Kirk, and I. Kathy spent the night with her grandmother! We went to see *Born Free*, about a tame lion who had to be taught to be wild, and *Georgy Girl*, about a rather strange English girl. The last was too adult for the kids to understand, but I enjoyed it. And *Born Free* was wonderfully educational about life in Africa. . . .¹⁰

¹⁰ *Born Free*, directed by James Hill, starring Virginia McKenna and Bill Travers (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1966); and *Georgy Girl*, directed by Silvio Narizzano, starring James Mason and Lynn Redgrave (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1966).

A SHAU VALLEY MISSION PRESS RELEASE



Maj Ray Stice and Maj Phillip Jacobs in front of their F-9 after a mission west of Phu Bai on 10 August 1967

Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo #70114.

Chu Lai, Vietnam, Aug. 20—The F-9 Cougar jet was designed as a fighter, then utilized as a trainer. Used in Vietnam as armed reconnaissance jets, the four Cougars of Marine Aircraft Group-13 still get involved in a lot of action.

Majors Phillip M. Jacobs, Hunt, Ark., and Ray B. Stice, 2618 Spring Lane, Austin, Tex., had completed a reconnaissance mission August 10 over Ashau valley, 30 miles west of Phu Bai, when they were called on a target by an Army airborne controller at the north end of the valley.

The two Marine Air Base Squadron aviators made a “dry run” on a bridge, establishing their approaches and spotting the target. They received heavy machinegun fire during the run.

“We made the only two runs on the target, but you have to remember the Cougar we have here in Vietnam is used primarily for reconnaissance, and is not heavily armed. All we had with us was six 5-inch rockets and out two 20mm cannon,” said Jacobs.

The two majors were credited with destroying the bridge, the automatic weapons position and killing its four-man crew.¹

¹ Force Information Office, III Marine Amphibious Force, Military Assistance Command Vietnam, “1st MAW Release No. 900,” Release No. 2461-67, Da Nang Press Center, 20 August 1967.

. . . These last three months instead of being the worst, are really the best because there's you to look forward to and I can work around that. I think you are beginning to get the same feeling. *However*, why do we *move* every time we *meet*? Just when I get things fixed for you, they get all geehawed again. . . .¹¹

The biggest problem really is that housing bit again. I really think we should fly out and get that solved before we pack the crew up. Mom could keep them at her house and in school until we're ready for them. Is it a three-year tour? If so, we could buy a house, a car, an icebox, a stove, a-a-a! Duh.

. . .

I'm going to a Vietnam waiting wives luncheon next Wednesday. That should be nice. I missed the one last month.

Nothing else really newsy. . . . All for now, Dear One.

Many kisses,
Gig



Sunday
13 August 1967

Hello Dearest,
Everybody else is writing you, so I might as well too! It's a Sunday afternoon and the windows are still open—an amazing fact in August—and it still gives the most peaceful sensation. No machines going except the sprinklers. . . .

The noise volume just went up two decibels. Kathy woke up crying, and Karen is scolding Kirk. That's more normal. . . .

Monday morning, I had to quit there to take them for a swim as it was 1630 and getting late. We went to a pool with Liz and Sarah, then home, and after dinner as I was putting Kathy to bed and the hall light went click and . . . guess what? The light bulb is full of water, which means the air conditioner, having been off for three days, defrosted and overflowed and caused a short! Golly bum, this is the second time for that. . . .

It's trash day and kids are getting up, so I'll close. Looks like I've got

¹¹ The term *geehawed* refers to someone or something moving in a zigzag way, harking back to the term gee, turn right, and haw, turn left.

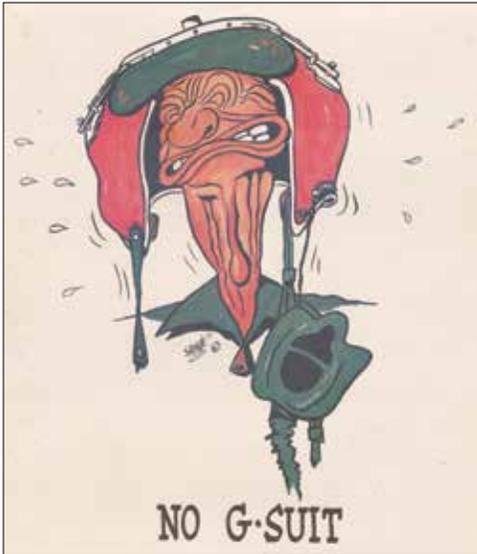


Figure 42. Cartoon illustrating the pilot's struggle with G forces

Source: Savage, Stice family collection.

some work to do! All my love and tune in tomorrow to, *As the Air Conditioner Turns!*

XXXs,
Gig



Tuesday noon
15 August 1967

Hi Baby,
And how is it yet? We'll find out more shortly.

I guess if you say I sold one bond for a boat and one for a car, then I'm guilty as charged. However, I do recall I got 90 percent of the car money back, and you yourself got 80 percent of the boat money back, so watch your allegations, ma'am. Your second answer was most correct. It all goes to the same pot regardless of who's name it's in or in what shape or style it's in.

Ugh, I got caught with my chin down looking at the gauges, and Phil Jacobs up front all of a sudden started pulling 7 cotton-picking Gs. Damn neck will take a month to unscramble. Felt like an idiot. . . . Some Viet Cong had one of our recon teams almost surrounded, and we had to shoot pretty close to the friendlies. As we were leaving, another flight

took over, and they were in pretty good shape. Not a bad morning's work.

...

I'm writing at noontime because tonight we're having a *sayonara* [good-bye] party for Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314), and we're all putting on skits. . . .¹²

I used the girls' bonds, rather than Kirk's on purpose. Psychologically, they should be prepared to realize it's generally the man that actually is permitted to make the money per se, but if Kirk can't handle the load, then we'll sell it too. Okay, Daughters, en garde! Zap, zap—sliced you while you were making up your minds! Have to be quicker than that to out fox the fox!

Well, see you all later. Be good and have fun or vice versa.

Love,
Ray



Tuesday
15 August 1967

Hi!

Don't you lub dub me, you rubber neck! Flattery will get you nowhere. That's the world's lousiest trick to make me do the move, and you know it. But the luck of it is, that seems to be the only solution to me too. Anything else would cost a mint. But at least this way, I can blame it on you. And I do! I do!

I talked it over with *mi madre* [my mother], the world's most sensible woman, and she thinks 1 November would be a good moving date. I was thinking of stalling until 15 November. Lucky for you, we aren't thrown out into the streets. Because of her kindness, we have two weeks or so before hitting the highways. But from then on, Dear Heart, you've got us, lock, stock, and whines.

Seems a shame you can't enjoy this house for a little bit though. It would be nice for sorting gear and reassimilating you.

...

¹² VMFA-314, ComdC August 1967, Box ___, Folder 098, 1201098054, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

Had a crazy day yesterday. A woman with three kids came to inquire about the house across the street, and I tried to interest her in this one, while seven kids roared around. Then I lost my car keys and found them again (Kathy) and various other little stirring events.

...

I remain your stunned wife, who has to make a move all by herself, and boy is she telling the world and the sympathy is just oozing in. Being a *real* martyr is even more fun than being a make believe one!

And what have *you* done lately for the good of your poor little suffering wife and family?

Hrumph!

G



Wednesday night

16 August 1967

Hello Dearest,

I got your very big fat, fat letter all about your very good fat, fat hop and felt very, very good that I got such a nice letter while you were in an expansive mood. That's *expansive* not *expensive*. If that's what it takes to loosen your tongue, rave on! I mean, drink on! Sounds like you certainly *deserved* a drink that night and you were sweet to think I deserved a letter. You don't think I deserved a letter? Well, that's true, but at least I made a good listener. And when you get back, you'll probably enjoy reading that letter again.

I saw films of the A Shau Valley tonight on TV and can understand what the big problem is now. That's quite a road they *have* there. TV said they manage to use it regardless of all the bombing too, so it's more than just a little problem.

There's some other battle brewing below Da Nang too, but that's the extent of my intelligence tonight!

I'm delighted to hear about your picture being taken! I got mine taken today too—a "set-up" picture where, for publicity of waiting wives, they showed a group of us admiring a princess ring and talking about it. Guess what I said in a silly mood to make the girl laugh—"Mine is bigger!"—would you *believe*, she didn't crack a smile. But I thought it was hilarious!

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Because I told the truth, and she wasn't quite sure if I was joking or not. That's what she gets for boasting! Poor dear. That's life. I almost gave it away though when I let it slip that you got mine in Okinawa, I thought, or was it Thailand? She didn't know quite what to make of me!

...

The kids are all fine. Oh yes, before I talk about them, one more thing about Vietnam wives . . . a Red Cross director said he was going to mail a big bunch of paperback magazines to all the husbands for them to distribute to any and all. The money for postage came from collecting \$55 from old folks who saved newspapers for salvage. So, we all gave our husband's names, and you will get some in the future! I guess you can send them over to your library.

We also heard a speech about mental health, so we can all be beautifully mentally healthy when you all come back!

...

Goodnight, Love, and why was I the only one at the luncheon with orders to move out by myself? The others are going to wait for their husbands. Say the word and I'll wait too. LUB DUB. No, as a matter of fact, there were only three Marine wives, and one has orders to Pendleton, California, for the third time and said her welcome aboard stuff and said the name goes on housing from overseas date of departure, and a man doesn't have to be at the duty station. How come a second lieutenant wife makes me look so dumb?

I stuck to my guns and urged her to move out early like I'm going to do. How's that for misery loves company?

G

P.S. Some people like me are so screwed up, there's only one way to unscrew them. I'm ready, I'm ready!



Thursday night
17 August 1967

Hi Baby,

Started out bad yesterday with a flat tire and a slight hangover from VMFA-314's party, which we started off with a bang. I finally got to fly, carrying 38 rockets on each of the 2 F-9s and, after staggering around the mountains, clouds, and airborne refueling for nothing, nothing, noth-

ing. We finally got a secondary mission. Troops pinned down by the Viet Cong needed help badly. Had a fine “Jake 7-4” (Air Force Bird Dog) controller. Good shooting on both parts—only they missed us. We got 10 of them, plus 5 buildings destroyed and 1 secondary explosion (ammo dump or something). That’s the best BDA I’ve ever seen in an F-9, more like one of the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom IIs in one of their spectacular ordinance deliveries. They carry 40 times what we can carry. Well, it was a right fine hop all around.

Today, we couldn’t coax a secondary out of the six different control centers all up and down the I Corps! One thing we’ll never get flying F-9s will be the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross)—tons of Air Medals but no DFCs. Even Major Robert L. Gondek was in for a DFC.

I saw that flick *Born Free*. I knew the kids would like it and I’m sure glad you took them to see it.

Well, you’re right, moving does recreate old problems—babysitters, cleaning and ironing help, and schools—and worse yet, the entire bit is one huge pain in the ass.

You know for almost a year now you’ve been signing your letters “XXXs” and “many kisses.” When the hell do we get beyond that stage?

...

That’s what marriage is, helping each other solve the other’s problems.

...

Well, anyhow, it’s late and tomorrow IS another day.

See all of you and you all later,
Ray



Friday morning
18 August 1967

Darling,

Just a note this morning, as I am in the middle of a flood of newspapers and magazines. Literally! The kids are collecting. It all started yesterday when they raked a yard with Walt Penn and came in very discouraged as they didn’t get paid. They weren’t asked to rake, they just did it. They were trying to think of jobs to get money and I told them about the \$55 the Red Cross man got for collecting newspapers and they went wild with enthusiasm. It was hot and humid, but they made quite a haul. In between

August 1967

hauls, it poured rain and they all got cooled off running around in that, and at 2000, I turned off dinner to drive up and get a “gold mine” that Kirk had found.

...

I got another nice letter from you yesterday, and I like those big sheets of paper!

No thank you to Kirk fixing the sprinklers. They are far beyond his scope and yours too! Right now, the big problem is a leaking roof in the little room off the den. The rain did that and I will have to do something about getting it repaired and notify Mrs. Ball as per our contract.

I liked all your comments about your beautiful children. You *do* say all the right things, and I roared at your white hairs popping out in the sunlight. Don't say I gave them to you!

Must close now and do something about four kids and 500 pounds of magazines. How would you like to have that for a problem? Fine. You can have them!

XXXs and white hairs,
Gig



Saturday afternoon
19 August 1967

Hi Baby,

It's about noontime and I just got down from a real good hop—choppers getting shot at in a landing zone—and I just happened to be at the right time and the right place with the right fuel and ordinance. These things are so damn chancy. You can never plan on them, but they sure are nice when you get them. As a matter of fact, they want our picture again for Wednesday's hop I told you about. It happened to be written up in both the group and wing daily highlights.

Last night, it was cool enough to sleep without a fan, and the mosquitoes were such that I didn't have to use a net—not that bad. After all our hard work on the Dial soap, I've discovered that Lifebuoy really gets after these minor skin irritations even better, and I can buy that here fortunately. I'm halfway presentable already.

Those snapshots of the kids at Mo-Ranch are really cute. Next time, get a little CLOSER. And many thanks to Pris for the copies. The place

looks very pretty. Sure glad you went there. Little local R&R for the kids.

Slow but surely, we're building a church—bars first (clubs I mean)—one of these days I'll have to go.¹³ The last church I really enjoyed was there in Omaha. I was beginning to like it.

...

About the move. Agree, 1 November would be a good day to move, and you don't have to pay the rent in October for November because you won't be there or in September because we already paid the "last" month before we ever moved in, remember? Well, I do and it's right. You have already paid your last rent. I'm counting on that \$400 to help pay for the trip to Cherry Point.

Anyway, don't save anything out for me. I'll have too much to start with, with all my uniforms. Matter of fact, save me a hole in the car please? I'm going with you all!

Ha, you think I need rehabilitating, how about you? And the kids, I guess we all have our work cut out for us. Hmm. Wait until the first time I swear at Kathy. Oh brother, I can just hear her now, "Top that!"

Well, it's late and I better "top this," take a shower, and get some sleep. I'm sure I have the early hop tomorrow.

Goodnight, Honey.

Love YOU!

Ray



Sunday night

20 August 1967

Dear Love,

How are you? Me, I'm not so sure . . .

I don't think I've written for two days, but I can't remember. When I don't write you, I lose my sense of time and everything sort of floats along. I've told everybody three or four times that the kids only got \$1.24 for their magazines. Somehow, this depressed me more than it did them. It was so much work and so heavy for all of us and then only \$1.24. Another day, another dollar. Wow, that was us.

...

¹³ MABS-13, ComdC August 1967, 3.

We've been working on a puzzle and the kids have made potholders and we went to see a Walt Disney movie today and had dinner with Mom and Don later. . . .¹⁴ Don was back from a Fort Worth, Texas, barbershop quartet contest—they won. He finally had a date with a gal I've been urging him to take out and, when I asked how was she, he said, "Fine, if you like Japanese girls." Which is okay and made me laugh and shut up.

The rain was great and much needed, though the yard is looking puny from pill bugs and crabgrass.

I've just finished reading two *Look* magazines and my respect for that magazine has gone up. But then, they are the only two magazines in the house! The locusts cleaned me out.

Kirk was disappointed when he didn't get to go see *Barefoot in the Park* last night. Jane Fonda is too raunchy for them I decided.¹⁵ He pouted, I blew, and then we made up. Poor dear, he had taken a bath and combed his hair in anticipation! He sure looks nice when slicked up that way. . . .

Kathy is coming out with new words every day and said, "You're naked!" the other night as I put her to bed. I acted properly horrified. At breakfast, her first words were, "Are you happy, Mama?" How's that for an early morning eye opener? Duh, yeah, like happy baby. She likes to look at your pictures and we have to sit on the floor when we do it. She directs, I sit, that means she wants to talk about them. You have a devoted little girl baby.

Lots of other tidbits about the kids but they'll have to wait for tomorrow. I'm out of steam tonight.

I miss you so much it's stupid and not good sense. But at least I've learned to sleep it off, and that's a help in the morning! One thing I noticed about me today, I'm getting a *pudge* that even I notice in the middle and I weigh 110 pounds! It really is time you came home and blasted me off my duff. It might help? Tomorrow, I shall swim the length of the pool and no more eating off Kathy's plate.

XXXs to you too,
Gig

¹⁴ Based on the date, the movie could have been *The Gnome-Mobile*, directed by Robert Stevenson (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1967).

¹⁵ *Barefoot in the Park*, directed by Gene Saks, starring Robert Redford and Jane Fonda (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1967).



Monday

21 August 1967

I just got down from what could have been a fine hop—Viet Cong in the open—but I only had enough fuel for one run, we were on the wrong target, and I had to head for home. There was no tanker up for some reason. I swear the guy I joined up on (in a Vought F-8 Crusader) was Lieutenant Colonel Roger D. “Bucky” Walters. It sounded just like him. A hell of a place to see a friend up north of the DMZ. Anyway, I just couldn’t stay another minute without refueling, and we had both picked out the wrong Bird Dog controller—frustrating. I thought I heard him yesterday too. The way things are going, I’ll end up with just over 150 combat missions; none of the test hops and admin runs count for anything. The average man in tactical squadron has more at about 200. I have about 124 as of today. That’s more than Lieutenant Colonel Arthur A. “Art” Nelbach got, and he spent half of his time in a squadron.

Wednesday night, I was going to Da Nang and then Thursday I was going to Bangkok to do some shopping, but the bit (jet set says the “DELT”) fell through, so maybe next month.

. . .

I have succumbed to 15 November too. I tell you what, I’ll leave it up to you. If you want to stay until the 15th, it’s okay with me. I probably won’t get to leave here until 3 or 4 November anyway and one day in Da Nang plus anywhere from one to three days in Okinawa. It really is hard to say exactly which day I will get home, and believe me I really won’t know until after each day is over, just how far I’ve gotten. . . .

Oh, before I miss it, thanks for the soap, Hershey bars, and Mounds—nothing quite ever hit Chu Lai like that!

Thanks to you phantom shoppers, I’ll probably have the only real live chocolate in Vietnam.

So, 15 November is the date; Austin is the place; and you are the one and only for me.

Goodnight, Sweetheart,
Ray



August 1967

22 August 1967

Dear Heart,

I seem to have just bought a new refrigerator. How about that? I'm still a little stunned, so we'll be stunned together. It cost \$329, and it is a 17-cubic foot Gibson.¹⁶ The cost was \$335.55 with tax, all told though.

. . .

I hope you'll approve and that it works out all right in the next place we go. If it doesn't, well, that's just the way it goes. Done is done. It does put the exchequer down a bit, like we're reading \$1,039 now. And rent time is rolling around so that's $\$1,039 - \$200 = \$839 + \$363 = \$1,202!$ I guess we'll make it. I'd like to do some other things too, but you wouldn't let me, like deciding on a washing machine for \$239 or getting some new towels and some furniture. A thousand little things, a thousand could do! It's definitely house upkeep time. We could use new mattresses for the girl's beds and a new queen-size bed for us. . . .

Now, to other matters, I'll admit my XXXs endings haven't been too inspiring, but my inspiration (you) hasn't been around, so I've sort of got those emotions locked up. Yours seems to be roaring along in high fashion, and I'm amazed I'm the object of so much emotion. Was I that good in Hawaii? Well, simmer down, Love, it's just me over here. Still the imperfect wife and more mother than wife at the moment, so let's face it kisses are the only commodity in stock around here at the moment! *It does* take a husband for me to be a wife you know! It also takes two blankets to get me warm enough to sleep, which should prove something. But at any rate, you should be glad I can manage without you, because think how awful it would be if I couldn't manage without you? As it is, I flub all over the place, blubbering about what heck it is without you, and if I did it any more than I do, you'd really begin to worry about me!

I'm just pleased as punch that you're able to do your job so well and not worry about me. That's exactly the way I want it. Anybody who goes around with a 300-pound head has enough to do holding his head up. I do believe that 300 pounds was the refrigerator landing on you. How did you guess? Well, it's done landed, and I'm going to be in seventh heaven

¹⁶ Originally established in the early 1900s, and after several mergers and acquisitions, Gibson was bought by the Electrolux Group in 1986. Refrigerators are now manufactured under the Frigidaire brand name.

with it and awfully pleased to show it off to you when you come home.

Your hops sound great and I'm really proud of them. . . . Just keep being nice and careful. That's the main thing to me. Enough, enough, are you satisfied? No? Well, that's all I can womp up at the moment. You can zap me later.

XXXs once again yet!

Gig



Wednesday

23 August 1967

Hi Dear One,

Don't expect any more great openers like in yesterday's letter. One doesn't buy a refrigerator every day. It's still not here though, as Bill C. [family friend] is out of town and I have to get his out first. Now I'm itching to get the new one in though.

We spent a quiet day here. Kirk was "working" all day with two backyard neighbor boys looking for "fossils" in a construction spot. . . .

. . . . All the kids need shoes and supplies among other things.

I will miss them so when they are back at school. Some days, I've had eight kids in and out of the house! . . .

The TV show *The Fugitive* is finally going off the air and the doctor's brother-in-law did it, *not* the one-armed man!¹⁷ We'll know for sure next week. Mom was quite excited about that. I was more interested in watching an exposé about *The Hippie Temptation*, but decided the kids shouldn't see that. . . .¹⁸

I reread your letter about your raid on the ammo dump, buildings, and the Viet Cong and it really was quite a hop and quite a BDA! Mom and I want to know if BDA is Bird Dog Assessment. What does the B stand for? . . .

It's a bit cooler these days, so maybe fall really is around the corner. I

¹⁷ The television show *The Fugitive* was originally released in September 1963 on ABC about Dr. Richard Kimble who was wrongly convicted of the murder of his wife. The show ended in August 1967 after four seasons. It was remade into a feature film in 1993 and starred Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones.

¹⁸ *The Hippie Temptation* was a CBS news special hosted by Harry Reasoner that explored the 1960 hippy culture and the Haight-Ashbury psychedelic LSD scene.

do have the feeling that life will be picking up in a few weeks and I wonder if I'll be ready for the change. The kids are definitely ready.

This sure doesn't seem one of my more thrilling letters. . . . You said to say, "Let it all hang out" but golly, what do you want to do. . .

XXXs anyone?

Gig



Friday

25 August 1967

Hi Dear One!

I guess I jumped the gun a bit. I just called Bill and he doesn't want the old icebox until 10 September, so I'm stuck with it until then. Isn't that silly? I got a new box, and I can't even play with it for two more weeks. I would have had time to write you and have you scream no. But just think, I spared you all that. . . .

Say, you laughable man, you really shake me up too, don't you? What's all this about using the "remaining" \$400 for the trip to Cherry Point. First off, is it really Cherry Point? That's the first time you named it. Before it was either/or North Carolina-South Carolina. You might keep me up to date if it is Cherry Point. And if so, for how long and doing what? Youth wants to know.

Secondly, here I am counting on you returning flush with \$3,000 to \$4,000 saved in the wilds of South Vietnam and you're counting on *my* \$400 in the civilized spend-it-all culture of Austin, Texas, USA? Are you out of *your* mind? Let me refresh your memory. You left Texas and me with \$3,000 all saved by me the year before in the snowy yonder, plus a monthly stipend of *only*—I repeat—only \$363 per month. After a trip to Hawaii, a sea of encyclopedias, a new refrigerator, and a broken car, TV, toaster, and various sundries like four kids to feed and bathe in 100-degree heat in an enormous house that costs \$200 per month to rent and \$60 to heat or cool and a yard that never ends and car insurance that would crush a poor girl's struggling soul, and dental/doctor bills, you *expect* \$400 to be *left*? Well, \$3,000 will only stretch so far and then it's all gone. . . . We don't live like in the field you know!

. . .

Well, maybe I'm the one in the dark but, whatever it is, please enlight-

en me. I'm just your wife and I don't know how to do things any better than I am. (Violins.) I could use some straight financial talk. Otherwise, I go out and buy refrigerators all by myself. No, I'm teasing there. That's exactly what I like and need to do. . . .

So, what else is new? We went to see *The Dirty Dozen* with Lee Marvin last night.¹⁹ A dirty half-dozen went that is. We are absolutely out of things to do. That goes hand in hand with no money. The gang just left to go buy me a magazine. I don't need a magazine, but they need something to do.

Uncle Don has been talked into maybe taking us to San Antonio on Sunday. He's a noble soul too.

. . .

Thank you so much for all the nice things I've sent you that you didn't need, like Dial soap, Avon toothbrushes, Kool-Aid, mosquito net (that's mosquito, not misquito), innertube mattresses, and wrong-size shaving parts. Is there anything else you don't need? Oh yes, Sears catalogs, mustn't forget those.

I think that's what you're going to get for Christmas too!

In the meantime, I remain respectfully yours.

Madame X (School of Music)²⁰



Sunday

27 August 1967

Hi Honey,

If the calendar is correct, Friday is 1 September already. Good!

Your purchase sounded a bit early to me. Did you check the prices for a refrigerator at Bergstrom? I hate to tell you, but I could have sent one from Okinawa for \$100 less. That's the one thing you have to learn—shop, shop, shop, shop, then buy. When you don't take time to really study the problem, it costs money. I missed a chance to make about \$300 over here on a savings plan because I didn't study it enough. Remember the old

¹⁹ *The Dirty Dozen*, directed by Robert Aldrich, starring Lee Marvin, Ernest Borgnine, Charles Bronson, Jim Brown, John Cassavetes, Richard Jaeckel, George Kennedy, Trini Lopez, Ralph Meeker, Robert Ryan, Telly Savalas, and Robert Webber (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1967).

²⁰ Gig is likely making a reference to the movie *Madame X*, directed by David Lowell Rich, starring Lana Turner (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 1966).

railroad signs—stop, look, listen? They should have added and look again.

How in hell could I disapprove of your purchase? You know what you need. My main concern is how you do it. I don't think we'll ever be able to afford impulse buying on major items. The penalty is the long-term personal association you're forced to live with your mistakes usually.

If you really want me to retire after the next two-and-a-half years, I'll still be a major and half of my base pay is not very much. I'll be 41 years old and looking for a new job and trying to keep the old scale of living at least, and it's not going to be easy. I have no job prospects and going back to school is the least income-producing effort I could think of. Hell, the kids are just getting started. If they were grown and married, you and I could do just about anything. But they won't be in that stage for another 10 years at least. If I stuck around for an additional year (beyond March 1970), I would be picked up for lieutenant colonel and have to serve at least two more years before I could retire, and the possibilities of coming back overseas are extremely high. The other day, they put out the word that they are almost doubling the lieutenant colonels' list this next time. That could knock off maybe a year for me if we decide to do that route. . . . Financially though, it would mean the retirement pay difference between \$415 a month and \$546 a month as a retired major in 20 years or lieutenant colonel in 22 years, respectively. Or \$503 if I made lieutenant colonel one year early and only have to serve 21 years.²¹

Well, anyway, do you follow some of my thoughts? I've had a lot of time to think about the near future, and it is mighty uncertain, I'll tell you!

Those pictures were taken last week? They sure are clear.

Got to get to bed, Baby, it's late. I love you, Sweetheart.

See you later,

Ray

P.S. Go ahead, you buy—I'll save!



²¹ For more on the ranks and grade structure, see Bernard C. Nalty et al., *United States Marine Corps Ranks and Grades, 1775-1969* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1970).

Sunday
27 August 1967

Hello Dearest One,

I miss you tonight. How's that for news? I'm feeling sort of guilty for my last few letters, wondering if I upset you, hoping I didn't, wishing I could if only it would bring us closer together. Any kind of feeling is better than no kind of feeling, and this is such a lousy way to communicate here in public on paper! No privacy at all. . . . Hmm, I wouldn't even mind hearing that if it was in your voice. . . .

The kids and I shopped \$7 worth of school supplies on Saturday, and I've cleaned most of the house in preparation for the grand opening of the icebox tomorrow! I decided to have them deliver it and they said they'd put the other one in the garage for me. So, maybe I'll have me a new box tomorrow. I still am wishy washy over no ice maker and hope you won't tell me I should have gotten one with an ice maker. . . *Do* hope you approve!

So—forgive me it's 0130 and I'm a bleary eyed—the last weekend before Labor Day is over and school is getting close. That will be a big help. School, that is. I'm getting as excited as they are. I wish you could have heard my nice talk with Don tonight. It was full of our courtship days and why we chose each other and really was sort of an eye-opener to Don, or so he said. He's so changed now, a much calmer happier guy and he's been offered another job, which he may have to take if this company goes bankrupt. It still totters on the brink.

Well, Darling Love, he thinks we're very lucky to have each other and our beautiful family and I couldn't agree more. I *do* love you, and tonight I don't mind admitting it at all. Isn't that nice?

And so, to bed, thinking of you, with all my love,
Gig



Monday night
28 August 1967

Hello Sweet Man,

My goodness, the world feels so good after a bath, doesn't it? Or are you a shower man these days? Well, I've just finished a late-night solo bath and

feel very warm and nice. A good thing to do before writing you. (That rhymes.) You must beat me if I don't make it a nightly habit when you're home. With Kirk telling me to stop smoking and you telling me to bathe, I might become very respectable!

It was a very full day today, starting before I had breakfast when the refrigerator showed up. It's a charming, nice refrigerator only as Kathy would say, it's too big. Yup. The dear thing is sitting out from the wall about eight inches. It won't go under the cabinet. The man said to plane the cabinet and paint it and it will fit. And the salesman said that one fits in 90 percent of the cases, in fact, I'm the first one it hasn't fit for, so to keep it. I was inquiring about exchanging it for a smaller one. So, I decided to get a carpenter and somehow, we'll get it under. In the meantime, my kitchen has shrunk.

...

The kids played in the "boxes" box all day. It's a lovely big cardboard box. Then I decided to clean out the garage and, by noon, I was exhausted.

Your big envelope came plus the two letters and one from Mrs. Ball, so I settled down for an hour with all that news. And good news it was that you want me to stay here until 15 November. . . . That is only 10 weeks away and a very lovely date indeed, one day before Kathy's third birthday!

I loved the pictures and the write up and think you were all doing marvelously well with that bird. Between you, you are both racking up quite a score. I wish I could be there to give you a nice "Well done!" to all hands. Felt like yelling "Hurray for our side!" Will that do?

You look absolutely great in the pictures—no gray hairs showing at all. I really think you've exaggerated there. You just look like you to me and better than that you sound fine, despite the absolute lunatics in wing who steal your stolen trunks! Best not to dwell on lunatics.

...

I feel tremendously good about your having a home to unload in and us a few days of privacy. Much, much, more better.

So glad you got the candy. Even the kids wanted to know if you were going to share it. I said probably yes, after you gorge yourself. I think they envy you a bit there. Like, "Wow look what Dad gets!" Fathers are exempt from dental lectures.

Kathy had a talk with the cat after seeing your picture and hearing all the talk! She always tells the cat important things like, "My Daddy."

Gotta, gotta, gotta go to bed. Goodnight, Love. I'm cold. That hot bath water does *not* last! I need my *real* hot water bottle man.

XXXs,
Gig



Tuesday
29 August 1967

Hi Honey,

It's damn near like not August anymore, isn't it?

You are \$300 (not \$400) richer! I told you once and you missed it. We "paid" the last month in advance last year that would normally be applied for the month of October. All you have to pay in October is \$100 for 15 days rent in November. And you don't pay in September at all. Understand?

Maybe you better cut that out and put in your checkbook. Do you understand? . . . Oh, BDA stands for battle damage assessment and KBA means killed by air. They go through and count later if they're working in that particular area. . . .

Umm, so you did jump the gun a bit in the frig! Ah-ha! Caught in the act and a grave social error indeed! Umm, which wounds can I pour the salt in?

Cherry Point is North Carolina, right? Beaufort is South Carolina, right? Okay, now both Beaufort and Cherry Point have 2d MAW units stationed there. So, if I have orders to the 2d MAW, which T. K. Burke swears I do, then they could be either one. When our wing at Da Nang receives orders like this, they hold them and wire the 2d MAW (headquarters) at Cherry Point and ask them, "Where is he going to be sent?" All of this takes time, which is getting delectably short, and all eight of us that "have orders to the 2d Wing" are awaiting the same answer. . . .

This is also another reason why I want to keep the house until 15 November. We have had several people without orders to anywhere—Phil Jacobs in the picture, for one, and he's leaving next week. They'll get him while he's on leave probably. Not the best of answers, but at least he won't have to do his waiting time at Chu Lai! So, who knows what is what? Not me, Baby.

. . .

August 1967

Figure 43. Two U.S. Marine Corps Douglas A-4E Skyhawk of Marine Attack Squadron 211 (VMA-211) refuel at Chu Lai air base, Vietnam, in 1967



Note: the aircraft on the right appears to be BuNo 150038, which was shot down by ground fire on 28 August 1967.

Source: *official U.S. Marine Corps photo.*

Hey, this lieutenant colonels' list is really getting better. All my classmates in the academy should be lieutenant colonels by the end of next June—except Ray Bright—and then the following fiscal year 1 July 1968–30 June 1969, if I'm going to make it at all, I should be a lieutenant colonel by a year from Christmas! I'd only have to serve about eight or nine months that beyond 20 years (March 1970) up to about Christmas 1970 and retire in 21 years pay at about \$500 a month. How about that?

...

Things do work out, don't they?

Hey, Honey, I do love you. You know that—spots and all—even your children.

Goodnight,
Ray



Tuesday
29 August 1967

Darling,

It seems a bit silly to be writing you after my nine-page letter yesterday night, but I'm stewing and stewing alone is no fun, so I thought I'd write you. The kids have gone swimming and Kathy's asleep.

I just finished balancing the checkbook, and I have \$763 after paying the rent. Granted that Friday I add \$363, which ups it to \$1,146, but this is the first time I've gone below \$1,000 and it worries me.

...

The monthly average outgoing is usually much less, from about \$550 to \$650. I just thought you ought to know that situation before it gets worse. You've counted on our living on the \$363 and using \$200 out of the reserve for rent, which is \$563 a month, and that's fine except when unusual expenses hit, like the refrigerator, ring, and appliance repairs. There goes the reserve! And that's what worries me.

So, Darling, there's the monthly wrap-up. You might say I've gone in the red or into the reserve money. You said to tell you if that happened, and I'm telling you. It's really not all *that* bad as you would say, but bears watching, and I'd love to have your thoughts about the situation.

...

How am I doing, Papasan? Have I got a flat tire? Give me the word.

Your droopy wife, running out of sight,
Gig



Wednesday, 1330
30 August 1967

New day, mailman not here yet, so I'll add a note to this one. I felt like I left you up in the air with only money problems there anyway. And who wants to be left with money problems? Actually, that still is a problem, but it doesn't seem to be bothering me today like it did yesterday. . . .

I'm really enjoying it [refrigerator] though. The bread stays so nice and fresh, and I even bought some ice cream, which I could never put and keep in the old box.

August 1967

Tomorrow, I register the kids for school, and they have two parties to go to for the weekend. . . .

Don's company is declaring bankruptcy and he will take a job with Geo Sandlin, a realtor and promoter businessman. At least, that's the latest as of yesterday.

. . .

I feel excited about September coming and all, but mostly it's just the thought of you being home that really brings a lift to my heart.

It's time for the mailman to pop into view, so I'll close. Take good care and don't sweat me too much. A little bit if you want though!

I LOVE YOU,
Gig



31 August 1967

Hi Honey,

I just got home from a hop and had a good secondary and not enough fuel to shoot it. Yesterday, we had the fuel (or gave it to them anyway) and couldn't shoot! Damn most frustrating thing in the world! A truck convoy had been ambushed about 48 kilometers north of Hue/Phu Bai and they had one truck blown up and burning and the column pinned down. We had just finished working in A Shau Valley and spotted them. We only got two rockets out of one pod and none out the other, and you could hear their guns banging away at each pass, so we switched to guns, and I'll be damned if the guns wouldn't fire either! Some big show, huh? I was so damn mad. The darn Viet Cong were shooting more than we were. I almost felt like putting the ordinance man in front of the guns and test firing him. Well, that's what you get flying antiques. You have to make do and make do until there's nothing left of the original. We're supposed to lose all the F-9s in September or October and pick up new two-seat A-4 Skyhawks in November. I guess I'll have to go over to MAG-36 and fly choppers the last few weeks.

I just went over the temporary lieutenant colonel message again.²² They stopped right about where I thought they would (I missed it by 35

²² Officers are eligible for promotion based on their published lineal precedence and seniority. This listing is referred to as the "Blue Book" and is published annually.

numbers). I'll be in the zone next summer along with all my screening course buddies—Jerry Hogen, Dan Wood, even George Walker (about 26 numbers ahead of me). I wouldn't be surprised (if I make it at all) if I didn't get promoted right around Thanksgiving of next year or possibly Christmas.

I also got a questionnaire from the G-1 2d Marine Aircraft Wing asking what and where and a lot of other baloney. I put in for Beaufort, of course, but you know how these things go. We'll probably end up at Cherry Point.

Did I tell you we finally got our office air-conditioned?

Oh man, that's the greatest! Never thought I'd see it. Where do I ship over?

You were right! You're always right! Sooner or later, you're bound to be right. Miss June (*Playboy*) was convicted of prostitution last week!²³ But the Moral League of America in Uniforms and I didn't notice any teas for George L. Rockwell, former U.S. Navy aviator or not.²⁴

. . . . I just found out you can't retire at your highest rank or 20 years of it is a temporary promotion; you retire in 20 on the highest permanent rank you held. Mine will probably be major at that. Tell you more later, right now it's after 2200 and I'd better get some sleep now. . . .

Well, I am one tired—

Good night, Darling.

Love you!

Ray



A rainy Thursday night

31 August 1967

Hello Darling,

Finally, the heat wave broke and some cool rain came. We couldn't stand our unairconditioned house at all today and fled from it whenever possible. Mom and I went to the commissary this afternoon and left Karen and

²³ Joey Gibson was convicted on 23 August 1967. "Playboy's Playmate Convicted," *Desert Sun* (Palm Springs, CA), 24 August 1967.

²⁴ George L. Rockwell was the founder of the American Nazi Party, who was assassinated on 25 August 1967 in Arlington, VA. Charles S. Clark, "The Assassination of an Arlington Nazi," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, October 2005, 5-17.

Robin to babysit at Mom's. They did fine. Kirk went to see *Old Yeller* and loved that with his friend Randy.²⁵

And I registered the kids in school this morning. They were up, dressed, and had the table set, so all I had to do was collect myself and Kathy. All the mothers looked tired and the teachers fresh! I filled out tons of forms, and everyone was happy except Kirk, who wants a different teacher. I said no sweat, you'll get a different one in North Carolina!

Karen has the biggest jump. In the sixth grade, they get to be in a band and also be a patrolman/or girls. She's in the air-conditioned part of the school too. One of her classmates was *taller* than I am!

Yesterday was a madhouse really. A roofer came by . . . plus phone calls, plus, plus, plus. So, by 1500, I decided to take the kids swimming and a neighbor child who has been a thorn in our side all year, asked to go along. Usually, she stays in her mother's clutches. She ran home for her suit and off we went. But at the swimming pool, we were met by a hornet's nest, her mother, who insisted I took . . . her child swimming *without her permission!* Obviously, I'm a kidnapper at heart. I was so mad, I could only growl. Well, I take her home and I haven't calmed down yet, though I'm under sedation. Not really, but practically. The darn woman has done everything to pick a fight for a whole year and this was our first eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. Fortunately, but barely, I controlled myself. It was pretty funny, because in her crazy rage she thought Liz Austin was me. Liz couldn't imagine why the woman was attacking her. I had stepped behind to get Kathy out of a tantrum and then she got accosted by her. . . .

It was really funny. All the rage was intended for *me*. The child *had* snuck off from her overly strict mother and the mother was trying to blame it all on me. In fact, she bribed her brother a dollar not to tell! But I didn't know all that. I just had my mind on other things and absentmindedly thought of course she had permission. The girl is *11!*

Well anyway, it was a wild melee, and I was suddenly a kidnapper. That's a new one, n'est-ce pas? I guess four [kids] aren't enough.

Well, things have calmed down a bit. Don and Mom came over to raise the heavy blind and admire the pictures last night. . . .

. . .

²⁵ *Old Yeller*, directed by Robert Stevenson, starring Dorothy McGuire and Fess Parker (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1957).

Meanwhile, back in Vietnam, I get the *exciting* news that my husband is washing his underclothes. Naturally I grin and bear this with him, but it makes me wonder why things seem more peaceful there than here? As you so often say, could it be the source?

Actually, things aren't as bad as they sound. The new icebox is here, it is working, albeit in the middle of the kitchen floor, we are all *delighted* with it and rave over the freshness of our food. . . . And things are not all *that* bad at all! In fact, quite good. And tomorrow is 1 September!

You, Dear Nutsky, are dreaming of a Marine Corps Ball, and I don't know if you are way ahead of me or way behind me.

I *do* know I'll be glad when we're in the same time zone, in the same house, and in the same bed. That sounds a lot easier than trying to keep each other up on things the way we're doing now! You really are way ahead of me I do believe, because somehow you always say it first in just the right way.

I envy those mosquitoes on that good smelling man, but tell them I get the first taste.

I *am* up on all that's going on over there, the elections and all, and I just can't comment on it all because I can hear about it, but I can't talk about it. Which, for your sake, is probably just as well. But if someone asked me what my "major" is doing, I'd say my "major" is in Vietnam. It's still *the* number one topic of conversation in the USA. The people over here really do live the war with all of you over there every day, and I feel sure that thoughtful people really care very deeply.

Well, enough said. This armchair general is going to bed. I wish I could say what I feel on paper, and I know you feel the same frustrating way.

Goodnight, Dear Love,
Gig

· 12 ·

SEPTEMBER 1967

Saturday night

2 September 1967

Hi Honey,

This is the first time I have a chance to write to you in September in six years and it's too late. We had a "Welcome aboard VMFA-323" tonight, and I was flying this noon when I normally would have written to you—safe and *sober*.

Today was my 133d combat mission and Phil Jacobs' last. He leaves Monday, and he still doesn't have orders.

We had raw spareribs at the club tonight and no salt or bread. The skipper's nursing an ulcer, so I ate some of his cookies with my beer, but I still wouldn't really call it a meal. Can you imagine Major Lee T. Lasseter (VMFA-312 days), Major Joseph R. Wuertz, and Major Henry D. Fager-skog all in that same stupid squadron?¹ The one I was supposed to be the operations officer of—numbered by numbers—never was sure if you knew why I couldn't get in that lousy outfit and it all centers around Wuertz. Oh well, screw them. Feed them fish, that's what good cat lickers are for.

¹ VMFA-323, Command Chronology (ComdC) September 1967, Box ___, Folder 098, 1201098113, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

They (Viet Cong) made a half-hearted attempt at hitting us a couple of days ago—40 mortars and almost no real damage to speak of. I'll bet they're boiling mad at their cousins to the north and all their fancy 140mm rockets around Da Nang. I guess Da Nang Valley is the second largest city in Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and there are more political implications to anything they do up there than down here.

I'm glad you're pleased with the icebox. Play away, friend, have a ball (and no ice cubes) ha. Your ribs were burned, mine were raw! May we meet in the middle sometime and may you cease to get letters that are written at the wrong time. Drunk letters could be fun, but they can be obnoxious too, I'm sure. It's my stupid loyalty that won't quit.

You get a letter, you get a letter, with hell and high water to boot. I'm going to eat a Hershey bar and go to bed. Thank the Lord, it's early. I should get some good sleep. Good night, Gig. Kiss my children good night if you can still catch them all.

Some days you just can't *win*. We had the fuel *and* the ordinance, and no one wanted it. Can you believe that? One of those quiet days.

Good night, Darling, see you after next month—hmm, that's better.

Love, Honey,
Ray



Tuesday morning
5 September 1967

Hi Honey,
We had a going away party for Phil Jacobs last night, and I was flying yesterday afternoon, so I'm sorry all you get is this very short one this time.

I can hardly believe it's time for school again. Where did the so-called summer go?

Don't take on a string of parties for when I get home. I want to "unlax" as much as possible.²

I'm sorry about Don's company busting, but he knew it was a long shot to start with.

Hey, Money Bags, don't forget to *not* pay the rent for October. Please? You keep talking about paying the rent, and you haven't answered about

² *Unlax* is a less common term for slowly relaxing or gradually relieving tension.

the “last month” part yet. Not including those 15 days in November, you pay them separately. I’m not counting on living off your \$363 or anything else, I just don’t want you to pay something we’ve already paid for.

Sounds like your cleaning up and throwing out splurge is paying off. Keep it up, but watch out for my “goodies.” Wrathful husbands are fierce—grr.

See you sooner, huh?

Love to you, Gig,
Ray



Labor Day
1967

Hello Precious Love,
It’s late Monday evening here and raining and I’m feeling like the last rose of summer.

We had quite a lot going on here, as I told you in my last letter three days ago. In my life, three days is a *book*, and I’m wondering how not to bore you. Mostly it was three nights of parties, which is a *lot* for me! . . .

. . .

I, like an idiot, stayed up too late then watching Alan Burke on TV interview a religious guy who uses LSD as a sacrament.³ A hippy and, the awful part is, these guys really do influence the young here now. Just wait until you get home to see and hear all that. . . .

This afternoon, the kids wanted their turn at last and I took them swimming at Deep Eddy and we got home before the rain.⁴ So, you can see I have been busy! Worse though, I didn’t sleep well last night from the excitement and so just dragged today. I figure I can collapse a bit though, having accomplished a whole summer without you!

The kids are raring for school, and I have to face the lonesomeness of Kathy tomorrow. I dread that, but guess we’ll manage. She wants to go to school with them already though, poor dear: “I go scoo too!”

³ *The Alan Burke Show* was a syndicated talk show from 1966 until 1970. He was known for his controversial topics and counterculture guests.

⁴ Deep Eddy Pool is a historic artificial swimming pool in Austin, TX. It is considered the oldest swimming pool in the state and features a bathhouse built during the Depression era by the Works Progress Administration.

I blasted the kids several times today, which shows I can't be a socialite and mother too, but gee it was fun while it lasted!

Goodnight, Dear Love. I wrote Milly a long letter and that's why you missed one, plus Labor Day. Whew! Do you forgive me? I LOVE YOU!

Gig



Tuesday night
5 September 1967

Hi Baby,
That letter this morning was what you call rushed.

Obviously, you are a kidnapper, stealing children from their mother's breasts. Aren't you ashamed? After all the dust settled, who won the battle—Mrs. Z or Miss K?

...

Your food bill was \$181.44? Golden steaks at 7-11? It would be \$60 cheaper at Bergstrom, I'll bet. I can see you need some reindoctrination too. . . .

Fathers aren't completely free from the dentist either. I had to go have a filling replaced just last week, and I'll get them cleaned before I come home, I hope. I thought the kids would like that!

I finally got recommended for a Distinguished Flying Cross, but I wouldn't be surprised if the wing knocked it down to another Air Medal—working on number 10 right now.⁵ The real fine hop we had on 16 August—I told you about that one, I'm sure—if we do get it, it'll be the first Distinguished Flying Cross ever given to Grumman F-9 Cougar pilots either here or Da Nang. They have a couple too. Right now, we only have one up. Major Stephen R. Foulger, my base services officer, came back with a big hole in the wing yesterday that will take a while to patch up. I'd like to finish up here with 150 missions, but right now I only have 134 and things are a little slow with only one aircraft. Oh well, "We shall overcome."

⁵ According to the command chronology, two Air Medals were awarded. MABS-13, ComdC September 1967, Box __, Folder 077, 1201077128, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 2.

Did I ever tell you what a big lift your letters give me? Well, they really do. Sometimes I read mine over again (that's the first mistake) and I think, boy if you can take all this trip, you're a woman with a big heart because sometimes you do miss what I say in a letter and I get madder than hell. I'm just built that way unfortunately, but thank heavens you are as resilient as you are to take all my gruff and not blow it back my way. Of course, I wish you would read some things twice, like no October rent and the Marine Corps ball if any, at Austin. But, generally speaking, you read me pretty darn well. . . . it has been much better this year than six years ago. We both have progressed there, I will say.

Sorry, it's 0430 the next morning, and I've got to go brief.
Goodnight morning, Honey.

I love you.
Ray



Wednesday
6 September 1967

Hello Love,
Hey, you're ahead and I'm behind! Three letters and three pictures ahead, and I don't know which to answer first. I'll pop off as I remember the big points in your letters.

Thanks for my \$300 raise. I guess that was the missing piece of the puzzle, but I still don't believe it will BE ENOUGH! I wish I could just say, "Hey Honey, send me some money," but I know you'd call me chicken if I did that. You don't know about the dryer breaking down though, do you? And you don't know that things like that cost 50 cents for parts and \$6.25 for labor. And you don't know that clothes for the redhead cost \$26 today but are worth it because she has new "jello" pants—yellow—also a sweatshirt that says Texas in orange, and a new red coat, pink PJs, a blue dress, and she still needs shoes. So, anyway, thanks for the reminder. *It did* make me feel more flush, a bit (enough to go shopping!)

The air conditioner condenser is still out, though Mr. Frye swears it was due to Labor Day. . . .

The rain stopped and the roof did leak. . . .

But enough of mundane house problems. *Your* air conditioner is working, and I think I'll just move in with you.

It's relatively sane here again with school two days underway.

Back to you, Tam Ky is in the news, and it sure looks close to Chu Lai on the map. I hope that simmers down and was just due to the election.⁶

Regarding your delightful news about staying in until December 1971, I'm afraid you still have a battle on your hands there from me. But I'm not about to discuss it at *this* distance—though it might be safer—I'm only pondering now whether you would about to *not* be a lieutenant colonel and get out on 20. Is such a thing possible? Like, no thanks, I'll retire as a major because that's what I'll retire as anyway? Lord, the way I see it now, each nibble of promotion has a hook of commitment behind it. Like go back to Vietnam or stay in even longer and make permanent lieutenant colonel. Where does it end? I want to taper off like NOW. Retiring as a major is FINE with me. If I hadn't moved for 25 years before marrying you, maybe I'd be more Gung Ho, but all I want now is to have you in shape for a second career as a husband, father, and civilian wage earner. Color me BAD GUY. Well, anyway, that's a sample of my side of the question. You can report me to the Department of Internal Marines if you'd like. That's me and I'm president.

Let's see, what other goodies did you tell me about. Oh yes, South Carolina *was* news. I had everyone set for North Carolina. Now we're back to North Carolina/South Carolina. Now I know which way *your* wind blows at any rate. I also suspect it has something to do with superior jets. Also a man who loves to smell out the best deal of all possible deals. You're a gambler at heart. Too bad your wife knows you so well, isn't it? Just be sure to tell me when I'm wrong.

Now, about my shining new refrigerator. There's nothing wrong with it except I broke a Sears salesman's heart. I promised I wouldn't buy until his September deals came in. He called and said mournfully, "See me about a range?" I said sure and hung up because it took 11 years for a box, it'll probably take 11 more for an oven with you home. There's no hope. I was such a hot customer too! A wild woman from Borneo on the loose with nary a husband in sight to say NO. POWER. HOW I LOVE IT!

⁶ For more on Marine Corps operations in the area, including Task Force X-Ray's Operation Swift, see Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984), 119; and Kent Sieg and David S. Patterson, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 5, *Vietnam, 1967* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002).

Trouble is I still have bones that turn to water at the sound of a noise at night. I'm very tired of my night watchman job.

Oh Sweetie, I hope you understand all this silliness. It's just another way to say how much I miss you over and over. You've really taken all my letters, ups and downs, and femaleness so very, very well and only called me a "goddamned female" once. That's a very high compliment to you. And all this in the midst of a war. I could shut up and be really brave, but I wouldn't have anything to talk about if I did that!

On that sweet note, I quit. You win. Kirk's racing track stays. You both fought so nobly for it. Your heads are going to be under a jalopy in another few years anyway, so I'd better enjoy you while you're both up. Kirk lives in the garage now, waiting for you to come home. He picks up saws like they were jewels.

Thank you for your love, Dear. I need it and I'll take it. You may have it back COD in November.⁷ Would you believe nine weeks away? That sounds close anyway. So, okay don't let it all hang out. *You're* the one who told me to say it. Tell me another inside joke. Your loving, sweet, tender, gentle, kind, clean, womanly (quit reading *Playboy*) devoted, ladylike, whew, etc.

Wife



Thursday night
7 September 1967

Hi Honey,
And how is it today? Mine's tired! I thought the longer we were here, the more things would settle down and we could relax a bit, but the opposite is true. The noises get louder and the hours longer. My new administrative officer Chief Warrant Officer Harold E. Wilson may have a Congressional Medal of Honor, but he can't read or write, and I'm having to kick him in the ass more every day. He should have retired several years ago.⁸

⁷ COD refers to cash on delivery or collect on delivery for purchases made in the United States and Canada, usually as a result television commercials, and was out of use by the late 1980s.

⁸ MABS-13, ComdC September 1967. Wilson was awarded the medal for heroism as a platoon sergeant of a rifle platoon in Korea on the night of 23-24 April 1951.

I've been up in the valley almost every day for the last three to four months. We're finally going to "rearrange" things here. I saw a working party of about 15 people up there this morning. They disappeared before I could turn around. They're foxy. You blink and they're gone in their holes.

...

Are you deducting all the roof repair bills from the rent? Just how do you get credit for all the money you've spent on the house that wasn't your fault? I hope you have something worked out.

Ugh, school already? Bear with it, kids. You only have another 100 years in school. Yuk, yuk. Karen, what's the greatest race of all time? Give up? The *HUMAN* race, idiot! Ho, ho, ho—gotcha that time!

No more, not another word. My left eyeball just gave up the ghost. I gotta shower and you know what—get some *sleep*, huh!

Goodnight, Sweetheart.

See you later,

Ray

P.S. I love Karen.

P.P.S. I love Robin.

P.P.P.S. I love Kirk.

P.P.P.S. I love Kathy.

Must be someone else. Who did I miss? The cat? Mom? OH MOM. Yeah, you too!



Thursday night

7 September 1967

Dear Majority Stice,

Minority Stice speaking here. How do you read me? *Do* you read me? Would you rather not read me? Don't answer that. King Kong, the cat, is howling outside. Somehow, it is distracting me. It doesn't take much does it?

I'll bet you'd love to wake up the way I did this morning. It seems the alarm didn't get pulled, but our human alarm, Kathysan, woke Karen by putting her blanket over her. She likes to cover people and King Kong. People don't mind, King Kong does.

I arose to the dire emergency of it being 0730 and school starts at

September 1967

0800. First order of the day, calm Kirk. Robin was making him nervous with her fear of being late. Robin will *always* be on time. Everyone *did* have time to eat cereal. And then I hear a bright little voice saying, “Good *morning*, Mom!” Everything stops while Kathy and I greet the morning and each other. Then as they scramble, Kathy stops everyone and says, “I WANT A KISS!” So, each one has to stop and kiss her goodbye. She follows them and says goodbye as they scurry off in the dewy grass.

It’s a lovely way to start the day. Kathy and I go into a blue funk for an hour then and neither of us speaks. I listen to the news and she dances.

...

More news about the Que Son Valley and Tam Ky battles.⁹ They are near you, aren’t they? They said air support helped win the battle.

...

Sweetie, I miss you so much I’d try anything to get you here.

XXXs,
Gig



8 September 1967

Darling,

It just hit me that tonight is Friday and there’s room for one more letter to you this week. I don’t have that much to say—said it all in Wednesday’s letter I think—and despite not getting one from you to answer, which would make this more interesting, I’ll gibberish on.

We got home from the drive-in movie tonight after staying for only one show (*Up the Down Staircase*) about New York City schools.¹⁰ The preview was about “sadism” and “riots on Sunset Strip” so I hastily got the kids out of there. I bopped Robin once for taking it all in despite my yells of *trash* and that reminded Karen somehow of you, because she said, “Better hurry up and see all the movies you can, Robin, because Daddy

⁹ Gig could be referring to news reports of Operation Swift. See Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967*, 114.

¹⁰ *Up the Down Staircase*, directed by Robert Mulligan, starring Sandy Dennis (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1967).

will make us lie down on the floor when he comes back!” Wasn’t that cute of her to remember? *Mondo Caine* still rings a bell, I guess.¹¹

. . .

Not such a very interesting day here, though Mom and I did commissary shop. All the kids brought home friends after school and things got lively with all their comings and goings.

The air conditioner man fixed the condenser and did *not* mention a bill, so I guess it *was* guaranteed after all. That really is all the news I have. It’s so meager, it’s pitiful. I did notice today that I miss you more now, because it’s getting near my turn and I’m not feeling so generous!

Goodnight, Dear Love,
Gig



Saturday night
9 September 1967

Hi Honey,

I got your Labor Day book today. It’s been a long four or five days between letters this time. It sounds like the weekend was a rip-roaring success—well, rip roaring anyway! . . . I really cannot top that. Until your letter, I *didn’t* even know it was Labor Day. Thanks for reminding me!

I’m glad it’s cooling off there. We are getting down to the bearable stage here—95- to 98-degree average—with fantastically huge thunderstorms all over the mountains. It’s getting harder to get into A Shau because of the rain and clouds. Sort of a transitional monsoon time now. The stupid war runs in spurts. One day, everything is boiling over all over the place, and the next day nothing. And our runway is closed for repairs. We take off on a taxiway and land into an arresting gear on a tiny SATS strip made out of aluminum.¹² Jets, airplanes, choppers, and transports blotting out the sun

¹¹ *Mondo Cane*, directed by Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara, and Franco Prosperi (Italy: Cineriz, 1962). *Mondo cane* is Italian for “a dog’s world,” and in this case was considered a curse word.

¹² According to MABS-13, ComdC September 1967, “The Crosswind runway (SATS) was utilized for the recovery of F-4 type aircraft during the period 3 September to 21 September 1967, with the exception of when emergencies prevailed on the SATS, at this time the F-4’s were either recovered on the East Field or on the West Taxiway. A total of 1,092 aircraft were recovered during this period on the SATS.”

almost. Interesting, very interesting. Almost like back at the DMZ a couple of weeks ago, some guy came up on guard saying, "There's a [surface-to-air missile] SAM on your tail. Dive down to the right!" You could see contrails for 48 kilometers as everyone who heard it pulled the wings off airmast—little double sets of white curlicues all over the place!

Still nothing on Cherry Point or Beaufort. That's such a good deal, I can't believe it.

Would you believe it's past time to go catch some sleep? Would you believe it's the next morning already? That's how quick the night went . . . Been doing pretty well for flying, only 2 days in the past 30 that I haven't been on the schedule. The main thing as far as Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Carey is to make it *appear* as though I'm not flying more than him. You know, get out of the flight suit before and after the hop and at night at the club. It's psychological more than anything else. He's finally getting all he wants. He wanted me to play a part in our welcome aboard skit for VMFA-323. Ha! I told him those were the last bastards I wanted to see back. They were the ones I was supposed to be with.

Well, I've got to get this in the mail. See you later, Honey.

I love you,
Ray



Sunday night

10 September 1967

Hello Love,

This one I'm writing propped on my knees. Somehow, I can't stand the kitchen light's glare anymore. I really do think I need glasses.

I ended my Friday letter to you in a hurry because of a rather dramatic thing that happened as I was writing it. The windows were all open and it was 0030 in the morning and I heard a car zooming up Exposition Boulevard, screech its brakes, silence, then crash. I flew outside, but it was pitch black out, so I came in, called the police, and reported what I heard. They already had gotten one call. . . . The car was going 125 miles per hour and landed *inside* the corner filling station. Three 19-year-old kids inside, one a girl.

The next day, I learned the girl was the daughter of Charles E. Green,

the editor of the *Austin-American Statesman* and she had a fractured skull. . . . The car went through a brick wall but left the front window intact.¹³

. . .

We spent a quiet Saturday night *at home* watching *The Miss America* contest. Poor old Bert Parks microphone went out just as he was supposed to sing “There She Goes! Miss America.” The other 1967 Miss America showed off what she did for the troops in Vietnam. Did you see her? Probably not. They only stayed a week. This year’s Miss America was Miss Kansas and an ice skater. The talent of all was unbelievable.¹⁴ Karen, Robin, and Kirk were all impressed.

Hey! Here’s some hot news—Lynda Byrd Johnson is engaged to a MARINE CAPTAIN! An aide, 28 years old, dark haired named Schab or Yaub or something, check me later on that.¹⁵ Can you see old Lynda in a Quonset hut? He’s going to Vietnam next year, so maybe she’ll never have that choice experience. I’m delighted. Maybe the housing officers will get hot and fix us all up in her honor. I reckon it *took* a Marine to pin her down!

We all went swimming at the lake—Mom, kids, and I—today and the girls each swam across and back without life jackets on, with me and/or Mom beside them with the inner tube. And we had our ski belts on, us oldsters that is. I’d say they passed their summer swimming with high colors. . . .

Well, you shall soon see, more vividly than I can describe.

They all have new sweatshirts. The girls’ shirts say, “Twiggy,” and Kirk’s loud orange says “Texas.”

I must close now. Enough? I love you tenderly and sweetly and all sorts of other good ways. Kirk loves your toolbox and polished a silver ring

¹³ The car accident where Beverly R. Green was injured was reported in the *Austin-American Statesman*, 11 September 1967; and her release from the hospital was covered in the *Austin-American Statesman*, 28 September 1967.

¹⁴ Miss American 1968, Debra Dene Barnes, was selected during the 41st Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, NJ, on 9 September 1967 and aired on NBC. The 1967 Miss America was Miss Oklahoma, Jane Ann Jayroe, who made a 17-day trip to American bases in South Vietnam in August 1967. Bryan Painter, “Jane Jayroe Remembers 1967 Vietnam Tour as Time of Tears, Smiles,” *Oklahoman*, 9 October 2011.

¹⁵ Johnson’s fiance was Capt Charles S. Robb. Roy Reed, “Lynda Johnson to Marry Marine; White House Ceremony Set for December—Fiance, a Captain, Is Milwaukeean,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1967.

and showed Walt Penn your corporal's stripe. He's the world proudest boy of his dad's gear! Hang on someday to your ties.

XXXs,
Gig



Monday afternoon
11 September 1967

Hi Honey,

I just got back from my 140th combat mission. Not quite as good as yesterday where we had another fortified villa all to ourselves, but creditable overall. The 0400 reveille after last night's so-called floor show was a bit rough, I'll be yawning all afternoon probably. Ever see a major with his mouth wide open—pretty. Yesterday, we supported the 5th Marines, and today the Korean Marines plus A Shau each time to start with. The runway is so hot we have to “defuel” a lot so we can still get off the ground. The taxiway we take off from is 3,000 feet shorter than the runway, which is being repaired right now.¹⁶

Last night, the Army's 101st Airborne Division came through. About 80 of their officers hit our club. They had been refused service at the 196th Army Regimental Club here; just could hardly believe that story, but it was true.¹⁷ We made them feel at home, and even got several of them to fall for our club initiation ceremony, which looks like a lifting contest with betting all over the place and actually ends up with all the “contestants” getting soaked with beer. It's about the stupidest thing I've ever seen anywhere, but these damn doggies eat it up. We get about 10 every week; plus, our own new joins who haven't happened to hear of it. Like me!

Would you believe that the office air conditioner has cleared up all my skin problems—not that bad. I'll still need some fattening up though. Our diet's a hair lean overall, and we sweat it off immediately. Can you do that? Hmm? . . .

¹⁶ MABS-13, ComdC September 1967, 1-2.

¹⁷ Though the MABS-13 ComdC does not mention their presence, see Glenn F. Williams, *Taking the Offensive: October 1966–September 1967* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2016), 55.

Still *nyet* [nothing] on the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing orders. Have you called the Marines there in Austin about the Marine Corps Birthday yet? I may just make it in time, or if you'd rather wait, I'll do it myself if I get there early enough.

. . .

Time to take a shower and get back to work. More later . . .

More work and more yawning that's for sure! It's nighttime now. Ever see a day go so fast? Zip and gone, it didn't stand a chance.

The sun went down and took my eyeballs with it clunk. *Zzz* . . . Whew, I've got to do it. Goodnight, Darling, one of these cotton-picking days I can tell you myself. What? That I love you, stupid, that's what.

See you later,
Ray



Tuesday

12 September 1967

Dear Sweetie,

Finally, two letters from you today. I do believe you missed a few days from the second to the fifth, and I missed getting them, but all is forgiven. I gave you a few stinky letters in there about bills and such, and really felt you let me off the hook very nicely. I've just about decided I've got to quit crying on your shoulder at this distance anyway. You just can't get that involved with my problems here, because your own are too compelling.

I do feel like sometimes you've missed *whole pages* of what I've said, not because you mean to but because as Mom said once, "He's got to remember the really important things." So, for once, I apologize. You are doing the most important thing now—your job—and I *do* expect too much. I'm going to quit trying to analyze—hell, decipher—your answers to my problems and try to solve them myself. If I go broke, *then* it's your problem, okay?

I almost did today. Picture me trying on \$100 coats. Then picture me buying the children three coats for \$36. That's better.

I drove to San Antonio today. Me. *Watashi* [me]. . . Only "San Antonio" is now North Star Mall, a huge shopping center. No one gets beyond that. . . .

September 1967

The kids liked their coats (too big) and I'll exchange them tomorrow at the Lerner's shop in *Austin!* . . . The house was full of kids when I got home as usual! I guess that explains why this letter is a bit jumbled. I'm tired. My goodness, I took a trip!

I do hope you get the Distinguished Flying Cross. That *would* be nice and a good one, wouldn't it? Gosh knows though, the only thing I want you to "get" is to "get" home!

. . .

Baby, I'd love to get excited about the Marine Corps Ball, but you didn't dance with me at the last one, and besides I'm bottomless. I got an evening top from you, but no bottoms. And my check book read \$782, all of which is rather depressing. So, ask me again later. Maybe your bright, bubbling hazel eyes will inspire me. I've got a date with you at the airport and one to drive to North Carolina/South Carolina in November with four kids. Isn't that enough? You just celebrate all you want before you leave Chu Lai with the men who *deserve* a toast. The ones here in Austin are mostly Reserve recruiters you know. That's a pretty civilized affair over here, meaning women have a *sobering* effect. But I repeat, ask me later. As you say, "I dunno, I dunno." . . .

Enough? Gig. Enough!

P.S. I LOVE YOU. And I get madder than hell too. Amazing, isn't it?



Wednesday afternoon
13 September 1967

Hi Honey,

Yeah, you got it. I can unlap, right? Not pay for October, because it's already paid last year, and I'm sure you have \$100 worth of bills to take out for those 15 days in November. Not confusing—it's right.

You're right about the action picking up here left and right and all around. For the grunts and us too. Hit two different fortified villas this morning. It looked like they'd been digging in for 20 years.

Yes, I could retire as a major in 20 years at \$415 a month, but that's not very much to live on if I'm stuck job hunting for a while, when I could stick around for a couple more years, make lieutenant colonel, and retire on 22 years at \$546 a month. There's quite a difference there. You're

right, the hook and bait are there, dangling away! We'll have to play it by ear for a while and see better later on.

...

The other night we saw—that's right, saw, because the speaker was broken—*Georgy Girl*. What did she say?

Is that cat's name *really* King Kong? It will take a powerful cat to live up to that omnivorous name. My alarm didn't get pulled out either, but the H&MS duty NCO still woke me up at 20 after 0400 for the—ugh—early, early. Horrible way to start the day.

...

Sleep time! It's been a long day and I'd be crazy if I *wasn't* tired.

Love you, Gig,
Ray



Friday

15 September 1967

Sweet Pie,

It's Friday night and midnight and I've finished watching *Auntie Mame* on TV with the kids and reading *Time* magazine.¹⁸ We all cuddle up on the beat-up couch in the den, and anyone who wiggles gets glared at. But the two wigglers, Kirk and Kathy, don't seem to get the message. Everyone takes turns sitting by me to get warm and I come out of the whole deal feeling like a popcorn. You just hear a good line and pop, somebody kicks, or pop someone shifts, or pop, Kathy climbs up or down off my lap.

It's weekend time and I'm glad for their company though. The days have been rainy and gloomy and there is still a maybe hurricane down near Cuba.¹⁹ Hurricanes love me. . . .

I started to sort out the flurry of pictures and news copies you have sent me and really did a double take on rereading all of them. When they first came, I was more impressed with the pictures and didn't read the

¹⁸ *Auntie Mame*, directed by Morton DaCosta, starring Rosalind Russell (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1958).

¹⁹ On 20 September 1967, Hurricane Beulah made landfall near Brownsville, TX, as a category 3 storm with 160+ mph winds and average rainfall of between 15–25 inches.

copy really closely, and then this time I discovered the different dates and how very much you did accomplish under like—wow!—real combat conditions and I got weak thinking about it.

I am very proud of you dear, and I really do think you deserve the Distinguished Flying Cross for one or both of those missions.

I keep reading about Quang Ngai being Viet Cong country, and yet you never talk about it being such off base. Whatever it is, I guess you'll be able to tell me about all that when you come home. We didn't talk about it in Hawaii, and it's probably just as well if I don't know too much for the time being. . . .

Don is really on me to quit smoking and has taken my carton of Kents, which I swear I just bought in a hurry instead of Old Golds.²⁰ I'm lying. Mother tried to tussle with him to get them back for me—feeling sorry for me—but he was stronger and she held up two fingers and said, "I'm only 62!" (a la Kathy). . . .

Kathy was impossible today. We drove out to pick up the kids' record player at the appliance store and then the traffic was so bad we ended up at Shoppers World. She told the world in a loud voice she had to go PEE PEE—a new word for it learned today from another child—and then we all searched frantically for the bathroom. . . .

Karen was thrilled that a music test showed she has "superior" music ability, and I got a note to see about music lessons for her Monday morning. How about that? We may have to rent an instrument for her, but I think I will do it for her ego's sake. . . .

I keep remembering things we did last year in September like back-to-school night. I did not go to Kirk's tonight because I already knew his teacher. But I remember the way you were mad because I sent you off to Karen's class and I went to Robin's. I wish now we had gone together.

Robin is still a tiger and had a tiger tantrum tonight when I told Kirk he could have the extra sausage as she was "fat enough." . . . Then I lectured her on too many second helpings, which I let her have, and it was all my fault, which made her feel better. She really wants to behave in all aspects and hates to be wrong on any account.

²⁰ Kent cigarettes were introduced in 1952 by R. J. Reynolds Tobacco as one of the first filtered cigarettes, though the original version used an asbestos-based filter. Old Gold cigarettes were also R. J. Reynolds products released in 1926.

...

I must go to bed now, Love. I don't like to share couches with kids but don't mind sharing beds with you. However, I really do think a bigger bed is #1 order of the day when you come home. Let's make that our present to us.

Sweet XXXs,
Gig



Sunday
16 September 1967

Hi Honey,
How you doing? Hope *your* monsoon season hasn't hit yet. Ours hit full blast yesterday and ZUNK—it's here! Canking flights left and right. Looks like the flying will really slow down, darn it. Got canked myself.

A few of the new lieutenant colonel selectees you remember: Earle Litzenberger, Paul K. German, Walter R. Limbach (by the grace of God), Ken Vanek, Robert Chapin, Thomas K. Burk, John Rapp, Don J. Slee, but not Ray Fostmeyer (passed over), Bob Ferguson, or Ray E. Bright, plus many others I know but you don't probably.

Yeah, a bad accident like that is really a wasteful crime. We had one of our men lose an arm hitchhiking a ride in a Korean laundry truck a couple of weeks ago and another Marine with a broken neck plus one killed several months ago—all stupid driving right here *on* the base.

Did you read a *LOOK* article by Edwin O. Reischauer about his views on Vietnam? He has a deep understanding of the Asian mind, and our own of course, pretty savvy all around. His closing remarks were perfect. See if you can find the copy. The outside cover photo is of Julie Andrews new look or something like that. Extremely thoughtful weighing all of the *real* Vietnam problems and possible solutions.²¹

So, okay, spend all your loot. Who gives a hoot? (sob) \$100 coats? Gold lame? Don't scare me like that, Dozo. I have only one ulcer spot left and I'm saving it for my grandchildren! See I do read and heed. It's the reaction that differs, not the assimilation.

²¹ Edwin O. Reischauer, "What Are Our Choices in Vietnam?," *LOOK*, 19 September 1967.

So, you took a trip all the way to San Antonio? *With* your mother, I note. One of these rainy days, I'm taking a trip myself—like home, Baby—and it promises *not* to be all that bad. . . .

October birthdays—Robbin, 9 October? Kirk, 24 October? Pris? Lucille's is 22 October. Did you send her the picture I sent?

Do you need glasses? *Ha*, are you kidding? You've needed glasses since we were courting.

. . .

Have you ever heard of the movie *The Professionals*?²² It's playing to-night, so I better slip up to the club (literally slip and slide in the mud).

Do you remember Ben Miller—he's here—and Major James R. "Jim" Throgmorton?

Less than two months now, huh?

Just came back from the flick. It really was good, not for the kiddies, I'm sure. Ugh, I have the early tomorrow, so I best get some sleep.

Good night, Darling.

I love you,
Ray



Wednesday
20 September 1967

Darling,
You couldn't find a much gloomier, wetter day than it is here today. Old Hurricane Beulah has landed and is around Corpus Christi right now. There are tornadoes around and all sorts of interesting things to hear on the radio. They say it's worse than Hurricane Carla, which hit when I was here in 1961.²³ I swear hurricanes love me—maybe because I love them—

²² *The Professionals*, directed by Richard Brooks, starring Burt Lancaster, Lee Marvin, and Jack Palance (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1966).

²³ Hurricane Beulah made landfall near Brownsville, TX, on 20 September 1967 as a category 3 hurricane with 160 mph winds. It generated approximately 115 tornadoes in the area and killed 15 people in Texas (58 casualties total). Hurricane Carla made landfall near Port Arthur, TX, on 11 September 1961 as a category 4 storm with 145 mph winds, killing 43 people.

only it's not as much fun when I can't go to bed with you and cover my head.

We have no trees to blow over in the front yard and not much to worry about in the backyard either.

...

Just got your itchy or was it bitchy letter from the mailman. Not much news there! But I'm glad you still have the urge, if not the itch. That's *not* a very romantic way to talk about it though, *really!* However, I decipher a slight note of anticipation about homecoming, which probably accounts for the raunchy talk. I used to say I had to put you through a decompression chamber before you came home, but now I think I'll add desalinization to get some of the old salt out of you. . . .

Went to a coffee this AM with Mom—Armed Forces Wives. . . . We agreed Marines have *big* families. It's getting costly to move them. I expect \$25 a night for a room for our family now. It might be cheaper to fly out there. Our car is not so new now anyway. It sure won't hold trunks like the old Mercury. Maybe we could sell this one and get a new one out there. School is a factor now, you know. Well, I'll check on a family plan air trip, just for fun.

...

I'm sending Kirk's latest "picture." I said, "Kirk, the Nazis were our *enemies* in the last war." He said, "That's okay, Mom. That's me in a frog suit about to plant a bomb and blow them up!" Oh.

Gotta check on the latest weather bulletin. You and the monsoons. Me and the hurricanes. . . . That's it! You read me! At last.

XXXs,
Gig



Wednesday
20 September 1967

Hi Honey,
You're right, I couldn't write to you last night. We had a "command" show plus my freshly washed clothes were out on the line in the rain three

different times. I finally just got them put away now and they're still damp. I hope they don't start mildewing.

...

Back to the war—I'm not partaking today, just supporting, so I'm not on the schedule. They're saving me for the early, early, I'll wager. They ought to give the kid that wakes us up for the early a personal decoration for guts, tact, and perseverance! A belated happy birthday to Pris please. Thanks for telling me AFTER it's over.

...

I'll gladly trade all the action minutes in the world for the time we begin our first minute together again. That's when things will really start all over again.

Goodnight, Sweetheart, kiss all my children and a firm pat on the fanny for Pris. I'm sorry I missed her birthday.

Love you, Honey,
Ray



Thursday night
21 September 1967

Hello love,
I haven't stared a hole through my calendar yet, but I've tried to. . . . I play so many games with myself to help pass the time that I fool myself. Can it really be that six weeks is a short time? I'm used to thinking in terms of six months.

It's a rainy wet night. Hurricane Beulah hangs on in dregs. Nothing here but rain and one twister hit the Villa Capri. It really hurt Brownsville though.

...

I have also been amused by our older daughters. Robin found one sheet of paper I had written you and then changed my mind and didn't send it. I had said, "It's supposed to be moonlight and roses, not itches and bitches." She got a very quizzical look on her face when I said don't read that and said, "I don't even know what it MEANS!" I told her enigmatically (good word), "That's secret talk between Daddy and me."

Karen in the meantime, made a 100 on a math test today and drew a picture, which tells her problems with Kirk graphically. He is untrainable

at the moment to her. However, I made her drill him tonight on math and they ended up good friends for a while. . . .

. . .

On the whole, I'd say Kirk has obeyed me beautifully all year as much as he was able to; his problem has been convincing others that he didn't have to obey *them*. He's saving that for you. This is a fine distinction that he and I understand but others don't. In other words, he is saving his loyalty for you and doesn't have too much more to spare, except some for Miss Mink. Don and Mom report that he is very good when alone with them. It's just babysitters, other children, and especially sisters whose orders he rebukes.

I'm planning a bit more school pressure on him (i.e., drill) this year. His spelling, arithmetic, and reading especially are still lousy, so I guess he did need to repeat the grade after all. . . .

I just finished reading a *very* funny book about a family of 11, written by the father, called, *But, Daddy!* He keeps trying to escape the kids with a lifetime subscription to *Playboy*, a case of beer, and a color TV. Sounds like you. He has only one leg, was a pilot, and has problems like getting out of the bathtub on one leg on a floor full of jacks. He hops around, yells for his wife, who says "Fall down!" and gets impaled by jacks on his backside.²⁴

I was amused that you saw *Georgy Girl* with no sound. Imagine that scene on the couch being seen by our impressionable young daughters. Hard to explain. They *seemed* to understand that men are rapacious. Look that word up. Means greedy. I told them all Georgy *really* wanted was a baby, which seemed to satisfy their mother instincts. . . .

I had on my mustard dress today, which fit my mustard complexion and crinkly mustard hair, and though I groaned at a mirror, Kirk said, "I think that's a *nice* dress Mother," and melted my heart. Isn't it *wonderful* that love is blind? Be sure to wear your rose-colored glasses when you come home, Dear. I'm so distressed over my looks, you really don't need to worry about yours at all. Not that you *ever* needed to, damn it. I'm warm in bed. Will that help a little? Think of *something*.

Goodnight, Love,
Hopefully, Gig

²⁴ Tom Buck, *But Daddy!* (New York: Morrow, 1967).



Friday

22 September 1967

Hi Honey,

Your typing is better than my writing. You should get an award for even having to try to decrypt it!

I guess hurricanes do love you. The radio this morning said something about 50 twisters in the Texas Gulf Coast area and as far north as Victoria. Did they get up to Austin? I'm sure the high winds and heavy rains did at any rate. Beulah—was that the name of the storm? Radio reception isn't too clear here, dear. Hear?

Quang Ngai is just over the river south from us—about 29 kilometers. We've been getting quite a few secondary missions down there supporting the Korean Marines mostly. Same with Tam Ky to the north, only supporting our Marines and the 101st Army Airborne Division.

Charlie Henry is here. You met him at Quantico. He was in VMFA-312 with us, and he and Colonel Paul K. German and I were corporals together a long time back. He's having a wetting down party over at MAG-12 (on the beach) tonight for his selection to lieutenant colonel and I've been invited. I could be a bit smashed out tonight, and I don't have one hell of a lot to celebrate per se, except these last 38 odd days!

...

Whoops, it's nighttime already. Just came back from a tremendous hop. Normal VR [visual reconnaissance] A Shau DMZ plus tanking up with a Lockheed C-130 Hercules and a fine secondary about 32 kilometers west back into the mountains and rain here at Chu Lai. Recon team, I think, was really close at only 100 meters away from the target. The Viet Cong were in a clump of trees halfway up a mountain shooting at the team and the choppers were trying to get them out, only the fire was too strong. Couldn't see too much through the trees, but the fire stopped after the third run, and they [the choppers] were picking up the team as we left the area. Not too bad an afternoon. Good enough for a couple of beers, I think, and only 5 or 10 of those extra-long minutes I mentioned on the secondary (two hours on the VR).

See you later, Honey. Love you!

Ray



Sunday night
24 September 1967

Darling,

It seems like forever since I've heard from you. My last letter from you was Thursday and that's four days ago! But it was a newsy one. Yes, I'm glad so many made lieutenant colonel, but they all deserved it, even Fort and Bright. . . . Also, glad to hear Ben Miller is there. It's good to have some familiar faces around.

I missed the LOOK article but will try to get it. You're very much up on the news at least over there! I say that wryly because so much has changed over here. We noticed it tonight (Mom and I) on the way home from a movie on the Drag.²⁵ Shoes are square toed, low square heeled, and buckled; dresses are like orange with purple stockings; buildings are three-quarter parking lots, one-quarter housing on top for students with coed dorms; and we got honked at and called "Grannies" for slowing traffic while we parallel parked.

Also, we went to Zilker to picnic and swim and were surrounded by a "Love In" with bongo drums, long hair, beards, beads, bells, sandals, and loud music plus motorcycles.²⁶ Kirk and Walt climbed a tree and heard, "I really dig that music, Man," and Robin wanted to know what *that* meant. They came home to our "old fashioned" Herman's Hermits records.²⁷

But back to us. Please just fly on home, Dear. Dallas or Houston, it's a short hop. I really can't find my way around in those big cities alone, and I was terrified the time I met you in Fort Worth. These "trips" I've made have all been with someone else showing the way. I get lost anyplace

²⁵ The Drag refers to a section of Guadalupe Street near the University of Texas campus. For more on the derivation of the term and history of the area, see Alyssa Weinstein, "Why Is the Stretch of Guadalupe that Runs Parallel to UT Campus Called 'The Drag'?", KUT 90.5, Austin's NPR Station, 27 August 2020.

²⁶ Vulcan Gas Company and Night Productions hosted a community concert in Zilker Park on 24 September 1967 that offered live music and food. See *A Living Legacy: Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present and Creating Our Future—Austin Parks and Recreation Department, 1928–2003* (Austin, TX: Parks and Recreation Department, 2003), 26.

²⁷ Herman's Hermits are a British rock/pop music group formed in 1964 who were popular in America with songs like "I'm Into Something Good," "Henry the VII, I Am," and "Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter."

but Austin and sometimes even here! I really lead a very sheltered life and always have, truth be told. Surely you know that! Every time you've trusted me to read a map, we get lost, remember? And I can't even read a map anymore. The kids read it for me. Bit of myopia there. My talents lie in other fields, ahem.

Now, we really are moving out on 15 November, aren't we? I've given the Balls that date, and someone called about the house yesterday. I'm so hoping you'll get home in early November, like the 3d because the 15th will roar on us with so much to do. I know better than to *count* on it, but I can hope! If it's 12 months and 20 days as you say, that gives you 5 days to proceed, and *I* know it only takes 1 day from Hawaii.

The hurricane is long over, but Barton Springs still showed the effect. It was closed to just a dribble, and yet we still got a good splash in the drain water.

...

I miss you, miss you, miss you, and begrudge every day now. Nasty of me, isn't it? I can admit it just a little bit, can't I? For the sake of good mental health? Shouldn't suppress feelings too long you know. Bottled up and the cork wants to pop out.

...

Kirk's birthday is 9 October and Robin's is 24 October. I wanted to get Rob a new bicycle but can't afford it. Can you, Daddy-o? Now *that's* a pointed question. I've only begged and pleaded for money for a whole year, but I haven't asked for more than \$100 and that's a pretty damn good record for me. No joke.

...

Now, what do you think about that? You don't ever answer my financial thoughts except hey, we've already paid one month in advance. Whoopee, but leave me to juggle alone and I keep telling you anyway, so you can't say, "You didn't *tell* me!" Yes, good coats for women cost \$100 nowadays and the cost of living *has* gone up. Dreadfully. I don't mind that so much, but I do want to protect my integrity as a solid gold shopper. I know I scared you in Hawaii, blowing money, but *really* sweetie, that was a once in a lifetime blow! . . .

Goodnight, Dearest. Thanks for listening this long. Wish I knew your reactions in person. I bet it would save six pages. Don't try to answer in kind. I know you don't have the time. But at midnight with the kids in

bed, I've got all night and love every minute of it when I'm writing to you!
Hate to close up shop! That's you, my love, that's you.

See you in bed, soon, soon, soon . . .

Gig



Tuesday night

26 September 1967

Darling,

I'm sort of bushed, beat, tired, and fagged out tonight.²⁸ But I got two of the nicest letters from you yesterday and today, and you are so "up" on me at the moment that I feel we are on the same wavelength, so I can't drop the ball now. It's so nice when you "hear" me.

. . .

I had my hair done today. No, I haven't gone ape, it's just part of the after-permanent treatment. Then to the commissary to buy me, *watasi*, two pairs of the new square-toed shoes. And I picked up three dresses for the girls at the PX. All of this made me feel even broker than usual, but the fall shopping is almost over, thank God. Only shoes for the girls left to go. Dear old bank account is reading \$529! I told you it might be rough come fall, and it hasn't been easy because of the icebox, among other things that you are very well informed about!

. . .

I was really struck by your comment about these "heart-stopping" "extra-long" minutes of action while doing your job. You are rarely dramatic about describing it, because who has time to describe action when it happens so fast and so frequently, but it was fun to see a tiny glimpse of what it feels like in combat and in action. No, combat is the wrong word for your experiences. I mean the moments when you are on a secondary over a live target! You say they are "extra-long," which means something happens to time out of the ordinary and that's vivid enough for me. I passed out in the back seat long ago!

. . .

But now down to Earth. Karen says moving will mean she won't hear

²⁸ *Fagged out* is a British idiom for being exhausted and bored.

the “combo” that plays for graduating 6th graders into junior high, but I’ve just about decided life is one big move anyway. Somebody is always pushing us on, age or otherwise.

...

Gotta quit, Babe. I love you. Be a good boy! No more wetting down sorties.
XXXs,
Gig



Sunday
24 September 1967

Hi Honey,
How is it today? Wet? Beulah get to you? I god da code—first cold in ages so I have to make this afternoon’s hop *low* and *short*. Boy, finally our own runway is open again—or at least half of it half the time, never really sure—some people tear it up as fast as we can fix it!²⁹

Worst problem seems to be no beer, plus it looks like Colonel Carey will be getting relieved around the first or second of the month.³⁰ Damn it, I was hoping he’d stay until *after* I left. It’s one hell of a lot of paper-work every time the commanding officer changes—fitness reports, award recommendations—the whole bit. I can see one thing blinking off in the horizon. It’s going to be hard to keep my interest up this last six weeks. We’ve already done just about everything there is to do many times over.

How does a civilian think these days? Probably just as frustrating, only over different things.

Colonel Carey is going to be the commanding officer at VMFA-115, and Colonel Palmer is moving up to the group executive officer (he’s been selected for colonel). Many changes of command ceremonies. My new boss will be a Leroy Madera. He’s been selected for lieu-

²⁹ MABS-13, ComdC September 1967, 1.

³⁰ According to the command chronology LtCol Carey was replaced on 5 October by LtCol Leroy A. Madera. MABS-13, ComdC October 1967, 1201077129, Box __, Folder 077, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

tenant colonel. I don't know too much about him. He just got here.³¹

...

The noise over here only Kirk could really appreciate with the trucks, tanks, big guns, little guns, 10 different jets, 8 different choppers, and 9 different propeller aircraft! Plus, the lizards make really funny noises like birds, but the big cobras don't make any noise, and the ducks, geese, mud birds, and one lousy chicken—no one knows *where* he came from.

It's nighttime now. I just came back from flying in some of the wildest weather and a GCA [ground-controlled approach] final still in the gunk. They toss out the tidbit of "Oh, the field is closed. What are your intentions?" Well, you know me: persistent, stubborn, determined, and all that bull. I lowed as how my "intentions" were to land somewhere here at Chu Lai if they didn't object too much. But, first things first, "*Keep up the radar approach, Stupid!*" About a half kilometer out, I saw the runway lights and continued my approach right over the tower, shaking a stern finger at them and thinking, "I still have my rockets. I'll *shoot* my way down!" After much discussion on just where the runway was really broken, they let me land. I wasn't about to go back to Da Nang. Their weather was even worse, if that's imaginable. I no more than cleared the runway and was getting my rockets unarmed when—swoosh—there goes a Douglas A-4 Skyhawk off the end of the runway into the mud. Some people should walk, you know? Fortunately, they picked him up, lifted him back on the hard surface, lit him off, and he taxied back over to MAG-12.³² Pretty lucky and pretty stupid.

Then I went down to the club and sure thought they had a good flick going: *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*.³³ Outstanding flick. Did you ever see it? Really great!

And lightning hit one of VMFA-323's huts, and all the guys thought it was an attack and they had been hit by the Viet Cong. They dived out in the rain and gunk and into their bunker. It took the crash crew 10 minutes to get them and the fire out! Ha! They'd been hit by JC not VC!

³¹ According to the MABS-13 ComdC for October 1967, LtCol Leroy A. Madera took command on 5 October.

³² The MABS-13 command chronology references a McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II aircraft recovery. MABS-13, ComdC September 1967, 1-2.

³³ *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, directed by Ken Annakin, starring Stuart Whitman and Sarah Miles (Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century-Fox, 1965).

Figure 44. A bomb-laden U.S. Marine Corps Douglas A-4E Skyhawk at Chu Lai, Vietnam



Source: official U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation photo 1996.253.4993.

Brother, some night! Little bit for everybody. Time now to heat a good hot shower and get some sleep. I've got the early, early tomorrow, I hear.

Goodnight, Darling.

I do, do, do, love you,
Ray



Tuesday night
26 September 1967

Just got back from my 152d combat mission. The photograph was taken

Sunday. The colonel was presenting my seventh Air Medal—got four more in the mill somewhere, plus that not too strong DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross).³⁴ Why don't you send one to Mom?

...

I'm sorry, no rose-colored glasses for me. Tell you what, you rent me a pair to look at *you* and I'll rent you a pair of *fat* glasses to look at me! I'm skinny as hell, in case you haven't noticed in pictures.³⁵ We all do have our problems don't we, Baby Doll?

Remember the last letter I wrote? It rained six damn inches that night! Looked like "Waterland of the Pacific" around here. Last October, we had 30 inches of rain in one month. Looks like more of the same.

Gomen [I'm sorry], time for supper. Lamb chops, I hear.

Back from supper—it *was* lamb—not sure I'd vote it too high up on the chow parade. But it was edible. Now, the flick was something not so palatable. After two reels of Frankie Avalon in *Ski Party*, everyone up and walked out.³⁶ Lord, what a mess. I wouldn't say he was our most popular movie star!

...

Just heard I have the early hop tomorrow. It's getting to be a bit of a drag. I know every fox hole, bunker, trench, automatic weapons position, and SAM [surface-to-air missile] site for 400 kilometers. I don't even carry a map anymore; and when the TACAN [tactical air navigation system] unlocks, the other guy will say, "How far out are we?" I'll say, "Oh, about 40 kilometers." Later, the TACAN locks on again at 39 kilometers. What can I say?

³⁴ MABS-13, ComdC September 1967, 1.

³⁵ In Vietnam, U.S. rations (a.k.a. meal, combat, individual, or MCI) were distributed in a cardboard box, which contained 1,200 calories from a can of meat (e.g., ham and lima beans, or turkey loaf), a can of bread (e.g., crackers, hardtack, or cookies), and a can of dessert (e.g., applesauce, sliced peaches, or pound cake). The packaging caused significant issues with pack weight and Marines would alter or abandon the meals until resupply, which often meant going without. Though rations and supply had improved, feeding troops in Vietnam was a particular challenge due to an undefined or shifting front. Mobile kitchen trailers could carry food to units, but they did not offer refrigeration, leaving fresh foods out of their daily caloric intake. See Chrissie Reilly, "Good Eats: Military Food Research and Development," DLA News, 20 April 2016.

³⁶ At the time, musical-comedy beach party movies were popular, so *Ski Party* presented a winter twist on that theme. *Ski Party*, directed by Alan Rafkin, starring Frankie Avalon, Dwayne Hickman, Deborah Walley, Yvonne Craig, and Robert Lewis (Los Angeles, CA: American International Pictures, 1965).

Figure 45. Maj Ray Stice with Marines at Chu Lai during a rare moment of relaxation



Source: Stice family collection.

Time to sleep, that's what I say. Boy, if it wasn't for my alarm clock, I'd *never* get out of bed in the morning. I think I'll sleep for a month—not alone idiot!—when I get home.

Good night, Darling.

See you later.

Love,
Ray

∞ . ∞

Wednesday night
27 September 1967

Hello Sweet Man,
Look there. Only three days and five weeks from now, you'll be home. And today, our first cold front blew in. A beautiful breezy fall day in the

middle 60s. You left home on 8 October 1966, and here we are almost there again. Hard to believe, though we've both felt every long day and "extra-long" minute.

...

I called the new principal at Casis about the clothing drive for Bong Song (An Khe) Refugee Center and he said he will "think" about it if I write him a letter. . . . This is going to be a whiz bang drive, as I said I'd store the clothes in our den, providing they are out by 15 October. I don't want to mess with it after that, having messes of my own to contend with! Many kids around this afternoon. Too many.

Tonight was peaceful though, and I read all about the new ABM [antiballistic missile] system in *Life* magazine. Designed for erratic Chinese, not sophisticated Russians, so Robert McNamara says.³⁷

Also, about a new drug called DPH [diphenhydramine], used as an anticonvulsant for epileptics, which Dreyfus of the Dreyfus Mutual Fund, discovered as a *layman*, to have calming effects on the nervous systems by some strange process. Anyway, I'm going to write Milly about it for Lucile. He called his discovery a 10,000-to-1 chance and used it to cure his own hypertension.³⁸

...

I'm going to close this letter briefly tonight because I'm falling asleep on my haunches. Floods are still bad in Harlingen and the valley. Even Lynda Johnson and her Captain Robb cut short their Acapulco holiday due to the rain and mess in Mexico. They showed Captain Robb reviewing troops before Lynda and Lyndon B. Johnson [LBJ] right after their engagement. Think you can hack LBJ's daughter as a Marine wife? . . .

Oh yes, Evelyn Penn, my San Antonio trip playmate and next-door neighbor, just came back from New York and Washington where she saw her "friend," James Hagerty, the ex-presidential press secretary.³⁹ She flirt-

³⁷ "Defense Fantasy Now Come True," *Life*, 29 September 1967, 28A-28C.

³⁸ Albert Rosenfeld, "Wall Streeter's Hunch Opens a Medical Frontier: 10,000-to-1 Pay-off," *Life*, 29 September 1967, 121-28.

³⁹ James C. Hagerty was the White House press secretary during the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. He is most well-known for the Hagerty incident that occurred in June 1960, when Hagerty arrived in Tokyo and was mobbed by 6,000 protesters. The American group was eventually rescued by a U.S. Marine helicopter. See "180. Telegram from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, vol. 18, *Japan and Korea*, ed., Madeline Chi and Louis J. Smith (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1994).

ed with him by mistake on a plane and became his friend thereafter. Anyway, they discussed YOU because Mr. Hagerty's son is a *Marine*, so they had lots in common! . . .

Gosh, it's time to go to bed! When you meet Evelyn, you'll understand. Her son Walt has been our little friend all year to Kirk. And may you never have to go away for so long again, because it's too hard to explain at this distance.

Goodnight, Love,
Gig



Thursday
28 September 1967

Hi Sweetheart,

You'd think that one of these days I'll be able to get to the PX and buy some stationary. Well, it is hard, but this is my last envelope so somethings gotta give! I've got it! I'll just stop writing! No good? Want something else? Okay, Saturday night I'll steal some envelopes, then they'll put me in jail and give me some more stationary! . . .

Boy (girl?), do you realize this is the last week in September already? I thought August was a bit slow, but not *this* month! Zap, and it's damn near shot clean through. As a matter of fact, the group S-1 [admin officer] is having a hell of a time scrounging up my replacement. I'll sure be glad when these are the good old days!

Still god my nose cold. The group flight surgeon is going up with me this afternoon, so that should fix it.

I'm going to have a heck of a time finding everything I've had to sign for, especially in the early days—bunker covers, bunks, and tents etc. Most of it is long worn out or gone. I better work up a big survey list.

Remember *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*⁴⁰ It played here last night. I think I missed half of his comments the first time, but still a bitchy picture though.

⁴⁰ *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, directed by Mike Nichols, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1966). Gig's brother, Don Kirkpatrick, cowrote the music for the theme song of the movie that was first recorded by Jimmy Smith in 1964.

Still haven't seen *The Blue Max*.⁴¹ Don't want to miss that one.

It's nighttime now. You never met Jerry Ellis. He sat right beside me all the time at AWS [Amphibious Warfare School] at Quantico.⁴² Gutsy bastard. He got hit this afternoon up near the DMZ just as he started to roll into his run. He rolled on in and called the hit, dropped his bombs on target, pulled up with a flared-out engine, zoom climbed to get some altitude, headed for the sea, and ejected over water. The [Sikorsky HH-3E helicopter] Jolly Green picked him up and headed for Dong Ha 19 kilometers away. Not Jerry, no sir, he talked his way all the way past Phu Bai, past Da Nang, and all the way back here to Chu Lai more than 240 kilometers away! I sure was glad to see him. Hadn't seen him since a month ago, when I was controlling an airstrike in A Chau Valley and I kept hearing this familiar voice rolling in. Well, he sure looked good tonight at the club.

Good Lord, it's after 2200 and I have the you know what tomorrow. The flight surgeon was so busy using his glove for a bag he forgot to fix my cold. Oh well, things *do* get better, I'm told. Think positively, that's what Jerry says.

Goodnight, Sweetheart.

I love you, Baby, really, really, really, and I miss you something *fierce*!
Ray



Friday
29 September 1967

Hi Sweet Man,
The mailman isn't here yet, so I'll play a quick game with you and see if I win. Oops! I just lost. He's rounding the corner. Max nix, I'll write anyway. It feels so good to sit down. I've been working. No letter from you.

⁴¹ Based on the 1964 novel by Jack D. Hunter, *The Blue Max*, directed by John Guillermin, starring George Peppard, James Mason, and Ursula Andress (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 1966).

⁴² AWS was originally the Company Grade Officers Course in 1921; it was renamed the Amphibious Warfare School Junior Course in the 1930s; it was renamed simply Amphibious Warfare School in 1964; and evolved into the Expeditionary Warfare School in 2003. See "EWS History: History and Educational Philosophy," Marine Corps University, accessed 1 June 2023.

...

I went out and got new clay parts to the gas stove. Kathy knocked it over and broke them—\$5 worth! And we have the oven and electric stove. Perhaps it will warm up too in a day or so. We were okay last night, all under blankets.

I'm not even surprised when things like that happen now. I know in one month or so we'll be out and away from the problem of this house and probably will wish we had it back! At least a leaky roof is better than none. Your housing hasn't been exactly plush either, but at least it hasn't cost you dollarroos! I'm sure going to check heating and A/C units in *future* houses.

...

A note [came home] from Casis that they want Kirk in a speech therapy class. I can't *imagine* why. He sounds just fine to me. I'll talk to them. It's free, but there's hardly a reason or time.

So many things not done—teeth, eyes, etc. neglected for us all. Maybe on a base, I can catch up on that. Hope so. I need an internal exam too, my yearly (SOP), and haven't had one since Kathy was born. Maybe you can tell me what's going on when you come back! Okay, Doc?

So sorry you've got to change command at this late date. What a pain. Just keep plugging as I am. It'll all be over soon. In this case, life is *bound* to get better!

President Johnson is to make a "major" speech on Vietnam tonight.⁴³ Sure wish it would be good news. I love you tenderly and will see you soon! October is a coming!

Gig



Saturday

30 September 1967

Hi Honey,

Yep, it's actually the last day in September, only one to go now. You probably gathered from the last envelope that we have orders now to [Marine Corps Air Station] Beaufort. I still don't have the physical papers but

⁴³ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Address on Vietnam before the National Legislative Conference" (speech, San Antonio, TX, 29 September 1967).

T. K. Burke was coming back from R&R, and he stopped at the wing G-1 and that his orders to Cherry Point and ours to Beaufort were the only two order modifications they had out of over 20 people. Beaufort is South Carolina down on the coast between Charleston and Savannah. It's about 16 kilometers from the ocean with a big river to the north and a small one just to the south.⁴⁴ The base housing is all central air conditioned and heated, and I hear the field grade quarters have fireplaces. Also, I hear the grade school is right there in or next to the housing. Sounds tremendous and far better than Cherry Point. I'll be assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 32 (MAG-32), which is the F-4 group, so I guess I'll finally get checked out in the F-4.⁴⁵ Really too bad not to have flown it in combat though. I'd have so much more to offer a squadron. Oh well, facts are facts. We almost got to Beaufort in 1958, remember? And then the wing changed my orders to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

The past couple of days have been hard on people. Colonel Palmer and his RIO had to get out and swim yesterday morning, then Cullen B. St. Arnes . . . at noontime, and then Lieutenant Colonel Paul Sigmund (commanding officer H&MS-13) and his RIO this morning. They're pretty sure they know what's causing it fortunately. Otherwise, the weather has been really beautiful the last two days. It's still not enough to take six salt pills before each hop, but cool in the evening, just right for a small fan and a sheet.

I think Ray Fortmeyer got passed over because of his general outlook on life. He always was totally inflexible and very hard set in his ways and vocal as hell in expressing them. You have to be a little more flexible in this day and age. That's great for corporals and sergeants back in World War II, but not for colonels in 1967.

I know Dallas or Houston is a "short hop," but if it takes eight hours between flights, forget it. It would be better to meet somewhere like at the airport. We won't be able to solve that one until I hit the coast.

So, 3 November is a rough date—it could be 5 or 6 November—we just won't know until pretty late in the month when all the booking lists come out. And don't forget the stopover in Okinawa that could be anywhere

⁴⁴ Stice may be referring to the Beaufort, Coosawhatchie, Combahee, Coosaw, or Ashepoo rivers. As a coastal area, there are a number of water features in the region.

⁴⁵ According to Stice, Chronological Record of Duty Assignments, family collection, MAG-32 was redesignated MAG-31 in March 1968.

from one to two days there, again booking. They shuffle thousands of people every day and it's a hell of a job, I'm sure. At least there's no delay in Hawaii unless the aircraft is down, which is highly unlikely, and they breakout another one right away.

...

You haven't been to church ALL YEAR? Hm, what can I say, I haven't either, working around the clock. You know I've never had even a half a day off in the last year?

As far as letting the world know you're ready for me, yes, it's good for your brain to scream it out, "I'm tired of waiting."

...

Pardon me. Both eyeballs just plum gave up the ghost. Goodnight, Darling, see you in bed YET!

Ray

· 13 ·

OCTOBER 1967

1 October 1967

Like Wow!

Hello Sweetheart,

I thought September would *never* end! Couldn't believe my eyes when I saw October was really here. It turned beautiful here—perfect fall days with not a cloud in the sky. The kids and I had races out on the front yard. Kathy got run over by eager beaver kids trying to keep up. But she got up and kept running.

I must a god your code. Mine's just a scratchy throat though. Hope yours went away quickly.

...

Kirk, Kathy, and I had a quiet morning planning Kirk's birthday, and this afternoon we went to the park where we'll have the party next Saturday for six boys. I'm glad to have his birthday to work on, plus the Vietnam orphanage clothes drive this next two weeks. It all helps. We got very excited about some big waxed iced chicken boxes to mail the clothes in, *if* Casis Elementary School comes through. We brought eight boxes home from a forage behind the grocery store. Mom thinks she can get the armed forces wives club—generals, colonels, and admirals' wives—to pay the postage.

A wild thing happened Friday night. There was a *Victory Party* from

Austin High School on Spring Lane. . . [and] 400 hopped-up teenagers arrived, zoomed in and out our driveway, walked in the middle of the *pitch-black* street, slammed on brakes, had amplified music blaring at 2300, and then a girl got hit. The police car arrived and there was a real traffic jam, and finally an ambulance and it was all over. I watched fascinated and turned on the floodlights and hoped I wasn't being invaded! Friday night is just a wild night in Austin. It was in the paper the next day. . . .¹

Karen and Robin asked about you Saturday and I read your two latest letters, which fortunately had a note for both of them in it and one for Kirk and Kathy too. It's always nice when it works out that way. Naturally, many letters are mostly to me, and they know it, so they were very surprised and pleased you were thinking about them. They know a lot of changes are coming for them, but like all children, they take things one day at a time. They will feel this move more than others though, so it helps when they know the reason (you) will be worth it. And they are beginning to anticipate your homecoming. Kirk sewed an Air Force sergeant's patch on his shirt upside down and got an admiring look from Walt. Karen and Robin are looking forward to some more popcorn binges with Dad (a treat Mother does not indulge in), and Kathy knows I want a new bed like her new bed. She's a little vague about you because she doesn't understand *soon*. It's best to let time go by without them getting excited *too* soon. But Mama (me) is about to pop at the thought of only four more weekends. Maybe five? Six never hatch. I'd place my bets on five.

We had a *great* drive into the hills Friday afternoon. Really growing over there! . . .

Well, anyway, we filled a weekend. It was lonesome at the park without you. Hurry home. I love you!

Gig



¹ *The Austin-American Statesman* ran a story dated 29 November 1967 that stated: "the grand jury has opened an investigation apt to shake many a westside family." It was an in-depth inquiry into an after-game Austin High "victory party" on 29 September that turned into a near riot.

Monday

2 October 1967

Hi Honey,

You've been writing me such nice letters lately. Must be that last inning stretch we're both going through.

Well, it *really* is October. Next month, I'll be home. Never know exactly when but it's there pure and simple.

...

Your bank account should be around \$815 or so by today, so go ahead and give Kirk a nature trail party and Robin a new bike (from the PX). You don't have to pay anymore rent.

You're absolutely right. I took all those household bills with the ease of the ancient mariner. Course I'll have to get the *roof* fixed, and I think sick bay has some more tranquilizers. I blow up so gracefully, you *won't believe it!* (Safer not too).

...

Oh, the houses at Beaufort aren't new by any stretch of the imagination, in case I may have misled you, but everyone says they are really nice. T. K. Burke's going to call the wing tomorrow if our orders aren't down here by then. I'll send you a couple copies so you can really believe it and go out to Bergstrom to get the move set up. I'll be there for the actual move, of course, but they'll need more time than that for coordinating all their other moves. I'd say have them pack and pick up all the same day—14 November—and that would give us the majority of the 15th to see that the house gets cleaned up. Or pack on 13 November and pick up on the 14th if they need two days.

It's dark now. I just came back from a not too bad hop, although the weather was so bad I couldn't get into A Shau. We've added Con Thien (western DMZ), the Rockpile, and Cam Hoa to our recon routes and, if the tanker isn't up, well you have to be a real Scotsman to make the rounds properly.² Today, [plane] number 4 had this freakish new orange nose probe on it, and my new room/hooch mate Major Laurence A. "Lar-

² *The Rockpile* refers to a military base (a.k.a. Elliot Combat Base) in the mountains south of the DMZ and north of Route 9, which ran from the Laotian border to Dong Ha. For more on Marine Corps use of this base, see Maj Gary L. Telfer, LtCol Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1984).

ry” Campbell passed over lieutenant colonel S4 [logistics/supply] says, “It would NEVER EVER happen to him.” He came back this morning sans his refueling probe. Ah ha! NEVER? Well, ALMOST never! Ha, he too done got behind the “response curve!” And a former Lockheed C-130 Hercules pilot to boot! What a hell of a way to get ones yucks, I’ll admit, but he’s the one that said it “can’t happen to me Ray. Gotta use a little finesse!” Well, he done finessed himself out of a nose probe, that’s what he done!

Had another nut knocking at my door last night. Everyone thought he was drunk. He said his stomach hurt and he wanted to know where sick bay was. I recalled how Dad had almost died from a ruptured appendix when everyone thought he was drunk, so I took him over to sick bay. He was really carrying on, swinging and swearing. A real number 10 wild man. They kept him and took him out to the USS *Sanctuary* (AH 17)—one of the hospital ships out here. I just don’t understand these young kids getting that hit up about *nothing*. I don’t think I’ll ever understand that aspect. If they were on the front lines, maybe it would make sense on occasion. But not these guys. We haven’t been hit good since April! A lot of stuff flying around outside the base, but not inside the perimeter. I guess when we lowered our standards to those of the Army draft, that’s what you get—these nerds.³

...

Whoops, past my bedtime, Honey. I gotta shower and sleep. Can’t wait to try a little of each with you. Plus a few niceties that I seem to remember more clearly now.

Goodnight, Sweetheart.

Love YOU,

Ray

P.S. Did you know that Major Theo F. “Jack” Aschenbeck had been passed over *twice*? Apparently, he was the executive officer of a McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II squadron and taxied out the mat at Cherry Point and

³ The Army was not the only Service impacted by Project 100,000 (a.k.a. McNamara’s Morons), which was a controversial program initiated in October 1966 by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to increase troops for the war in Vietnam by significantly lowering draft standards, including mental and medical requirements. See Capt David A. Dawson, *The Impact of Project 100,000 on the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1995).

all of a sudden decided “this isn’t for me” and taxied back to the lines and shut down. I guess he got relieved of duty and written up. One hell of a fitness report. Weirdo.



Tuesday
3 October 1967

Hello Dar!

It’s morning (0800) and I woke up with the birds this morning. They are an excitable lot. I think they’ve heard about a female hurricane called *Fern* that’s 805 kilometers from Brownsville. Poor old Brownsville is now wetsville and due for more from *Fern*.⁴ It’s sort of misty moisty warm and I don’t dread rain from that, but the weatherman says these lows pull down cool air from Canada. I can do *without* cool air for a while since we are sans furnace.

The kids just left for school. A few giggles caused Robin to dump a bowl of corn flakes in her lap. And Karen wanted to carry a “chicken” box to school bigger than she is for the clothes drive. I got Robin out of the house mad, but with a clean dress on, and *promised* Karen I’d bring the box “early!”

I feel very good and don’t know why. Maybe because I switched to True cigarettes (less nicotine) and figure I’ll really quit when you come home. You switch too.⁵

Also, I woke up thinking of you, which is a *great* way to wake up! Had some nice goodies happen yesterday. Your pictures came and your smile was radiant. You’ve got that maneuver of handshake, smile, grab award, hold it down so pat it looked like the colonel was surprised. Have you done that before? Like YES, *several* times! I think I taught you how in Beeville, and you’re so glad I’m not in the picture you beam at the thought! Or maybe it was your training as a movie director with the kids—cheese! Anyway, you’re halfway there toward running with Ronald W.

⁴ By the time Hurricane Fern made landfall on 4 October near Tampico, Mexico, it had been downgraded to a tropical storm. As it immediately followed the destructive Hurricane Beulah, it had significant impact on the area already dealing with the damaging effects of the late September hurricane.

⁵ The True line of cigarettes was developed in the 1960s as the Lorillard Tobacco Company’s “low-tar, low-nicotine” offering, with branding for the health concerned market and messaging denoting loyalty, faithfulness, and trustworthiness.

Reagan in 1968!⁶ Don't wince. I'll quit. It was a great picture and I like it. That's all. I like it. I like it!

...

I was so glad to hear you say how well you know the terrain by now. That is a nice confidence builder. I'll admit that flying to Hawaii surprised me. If flying really has gotten that safe, I guess I've been behind. I don't have to hold the airplane up with my hands anymore! Are you as good as they are? Better, you say? Well, then next time, *you* fly me to Hawaii. I'll go! Sorry you can't buy me a million-dollar jet. Richard Burton just bought Elizabeth Taylor one.⁷ Sort of a waste of money, don't you think? But a noble gesture!

You can do me a noble gesture by coming home, like sometime soon. I'm already worrying how I'll get the work done and look at you. That's like working with one hand tied behind your back. You just go ahead and sleep late. I'll do it then, providing you let me crawl out of bed and don't tempt me too much. My 2 hands have to cook for 10 hands. That calls for *some* concentration occasionally! I might even tackle my skinny husband and try to fatten him up. This euphoria may only last 3 months, so take advantage of it! Kathy thinks I'd better quit. She's right. I'd better.

XXXs (lots of them),
Gig



Wednesday
4 October 1967

Hi Dear,
Well now, your last tidbit really was news. It's kind of nice to know where

⁶ In addition to a presidential election, 1968 was a tumultuous time: assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April, riots, assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in June, and continued opposition to the Vietnam War across the country. Reagan served two terms as the Republican governor of California and would make an unsuccessful bid for president in 1968, coming in third at the Republican convention behind Richard M. Nixon and Nelson Rockefeller, respectively. See Glen Moore, "Ronald W. Reagan's Campaign for the Republican Party's 1968 Presidential Nomination" (unpublished paper, Columbus State University, 1992).

⁷ Hadley Hall Meares, "Crazy Love: Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's Epic Romance," *Vanity Fair*, 11 August 2020.

we're going at last. Now, if I just knew when you were coming home (the third?) (For sure that is.) I'd really get on the ball.

We're sort of beginning to simmer here anyway. . . . The clothes drive is coming along nicely, though the school principal limited it to just Karen, Robin, and Kirk's rooms. We're going to send it to the Bong Son Center near An Khe.

...

The kids took the news about Beaufort well. They just wondered if they will need their new coats in South Carolina.

I just wonder how in the heck we'll all get settled, make the trip, etc.

...

...

The whole Houston gang (Tellepsens and relatives) comes up in late October for a football game and Mom is hosting a party for them again. I tell her not to, but she says she owes them all. It's the weekend before you come home, so they'll just have to make another trip if they want to see you. . . .

I owe a bunch of females for social favors which bothers me a bit. I try to keep that down but it piles up like bills regardless, as you know from your countless promotion or going away parties. If I could entertain in this house, I'd be fat, but the damn rug ruins the looks of the house and I don't want to clean it until we move out.

Well, I'm not going to sit here and stew about my insignificant problems. Nothing is really important except your homecoming. I'm amused and pleased that you try to worry with me about my hair. If I really took you up on it, you'd scream at the price tag. Those lovely wigs cost \$100!

No, nut, just worry about new mattresses, stove, second car, house, schooling, move, furniture, income tax, etc. and you'll be on my wavelength. Or would you rather dream about sexy blondes, cars, boats, and futures in the stock market? Your mother-in-law just made \$600 on a sell the other day incidentally. . . . That's a good deal if I ever made one. Boy, I'll be glad when you're HOME!

Gig



Wednesday
4 October 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, we're all done switched over now and had the change of command in a hanger because of the rain. The wing sent down a general but no band. The usual goofs were made, with our new skipper introducing Colonel Edward N. LeFavre as Colonel *Keller* (the general's name). Afterward, I told the general about introducing "my wif." He said, "Hell, that's nothing. Sometimes I can't think of my wife's name!" (Does that qualify me for general?)

Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPAC) came out with a dispatch that should get me in Da Nang a few days early, but I'm not sure there will be anymore aircraft to fly us out. I should be in Da Nang about 28 October roughly, with a couple days there, two or three in Okinawa, and home! I should get home about the time I would have been leaving Da Nang (3 or 5 November) if it works.

...

I am getting more Gig conscious, however. Every time I look at my bunk, I think "You're too damn small and, worse yet, you're damn empty!"

All the people who weren't here last monsoon season keep asking, "Is it always this bad?" I keep telling them, "No, as a matter of fact, you'll look back as this sort of day as being a welcome relief from the real rain and wind."

Awful lot of going away parties. One of these days, It'll be MINE! Matter of fact, I have to go to one very shortly tonight. Colonel Williams is leaving (group executive officer). Speaking of Williams, did you know Lieutenant Colonel Lynn F. "Frank" Williams was back in jets and at Da Nang of all places. I'll have to look him up when I go through there.

Got to go. Oh, there are actually orders for us as you can see. They just came in. How about that?

Goodnight, Darling, see you sooner than you know!

I love you, Gig,
Ray



Friday afternoon
6 October 1967

Dear Nutsky,

Now look who's writing 10-page letters! I'm puffing to keep up.

Things are slightly whirling dervish around here anyway, as Kirk's birthday is coinciding with the Vietnam orphan clothes drive. So, this afternoon I'll be lugging clothes home in chicken boxes and getting things ready for Kirk's party tomorrow morning. Mom threw up her hands and said *she'd* make the cake. Don is taking the seven boys on a hike and the rest of us bring up the rear echelon with a barrel's chicken on Saturday morning. I just got home from the commissary too—puffa, puffa.

...

Anyway, life is hard when you're out of matches and have to singe your nose and lashes to get a light on an electric stove. Being out of matches is part of my cutting down on smoking campaign. Only, I'm about to burn up in exasperation.

...

Mom thinks our car with 22,000 miles on it will make the trip. The car Don is considering has 29,000 on it!

Yes, I'll go ahead with the paperwork on the move. It's going to be a wild move, and I'll appreciate all the sanity and forethought we can garnish. English majors are impossible, aren't they? Bet you never "garnished" anything in your life.

...

It'll be nice I'm sure to have all that new dough when you're home, but I won't have Austin shops, babysitters, or time like I've had here. You blew all my good intentions like recovering furniture, buying mattresses, etc. All the things I wrote and said I'd kinda like to do. But I guess you didn't get my message, Lunkhead. Don't say I didn't tell you so. Thanks to Mom, a few things got repaired, that's all.

Honey, I'm going to scold you for the last time this year. I may make mistakes, like \$10 fruit, but you've got to trust me to do the best I can when you're gone. When you leave me to make decisions, you must have faith that I can make good ones. Otherwise, I am hamstrung, and nothing gets done. You overprotect me, yet expect miracles. Well, miracles don't happen without dough.

You give me enough rope so that I don't hang myself, but meanwhile I

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strangle to death. You're the head of the house. You make the money and I like it that way. But bosses have to remember to encourage the initiative of their employees. You've got to loosen the reins a bit. I get disappointed, yup, I really do.

End of lecture #1967.

Be prepared to face the same old bed, same old nightgown, same old towels, same old dresses, and same old me. Sure, I'll be delighted to have you back to help me make decisions. I just would have enjoyed making a few ones all alone. Minor ones that is. . . .

Well, I hope not the latter. If there's one good thing we can garnish—love that word—from 1967, it will be mutual respect, except at curse time. Maybe even then! I'm due next week.

Your loving, impossible lunkhead wif.

Gig



Sunday

8 October 1967

Hello Sweet Thing,

You *are* still sweet, aren't you? If you're NOT, well, watch out because I'm going to sweeten up the hell out of you! I'm still the thoughtful, *peaceful*, kind, patient—aren't those beautiful words?—explosive bastard I always was. No worse I *hope*! Are the kids ready for head popping and the fanny dusting? Well, better get ready soon. I figure about four more weekends and lookout!

If I hear a loud noise and you can't find me just look under the table. I'll come out when they stop falling and the all-clear sounds. And don't worry if I toss down about six salt pills when we go for a cruise or if I insist on carrying a loaded pistol all the time. And I'm sure the kids will understand if I make them spread out on the hikes. And I'm sure I'll take the sandbags out from under the hood and floor of the car after a while. If we're coming up to a red light too fast and I yell, "Speed brakes now!" you'll understand, won't you? You won't have to boil the water for very long, I'm sure. But I'll raise hell if everyone doesn't take their malaria pills on time! You don't think the kids will mind a foot inspection every day, do you? Don't want them to get trench foot, you know. And I'm death on rusty weapons, man. Better get the kids some WD40 for their packs. And

if I ask everyone if their harness is locked prior to take off, just answer up. If I dress the tailhook and catch the wire, I'll find out who didn't have it locked! The one with the bloody nose. The kids will understand if I yell, "Turn down the audio!"

Brother, I can't joke much longer, the darn hut is about to blow away! This is one of the foulest nights we've ever had—storm right offshore and monsoon rains plus typhoon winds. Poor trees are darn near flat over. And *wet*, like a shower in here. I just hope the roof doesn't blow off. What a mess that would be. I just opened up my Hawaii bag (blue one) and, sure enough, it had leaked in there too. My civvies are all wet. I guess the only thing to do is go have a beer and forget—hah!—it for a couple of hours.

It's the next morning now. Whew, what a night! The whole bit.

Better write to Lyndon B. Johnson and have him declare this a disaster area for foreign aid or something.

See you later, Baby. I got to get to work.

Love you,

Ray



Sunday

8 October 1967

Hello Darling!

It's been a year today. It really has. And guess what? Everything is exactly the same, weather wise that is! The same gorgeous crisp fall day and the same me, only I think I looked better last year. You said I was pretty enough—"good enough" in your words—to take me with you then and I felt highly complimented. Now I look in the mirror and think, "Major's wife?" I'll never make it!

Well, anyway it's *very* good to reach the landmark (calendar mark) of this day and look back over a successful year instead of forward into an unknown year. I'd celebrate with you if you were here. A nip of rosé wine perhaps. But meanwhile, a cigarette and coffee and the sounds of the kids outside on skateboards is enough. . . .

I scolded you in my last letter and have been regretting it for two days. Can I rescind that letter? Resend that is? I try to be objective and logical and end up sounding pained and hurt. Stupid, you say? I'm really "not all that bad," and I appreciate the times you ignore and forget or whatever

October 1967

you do. Just keep on that way. You're doing fine! Now that I'm back in your good graces, forgiven, or whatever, I feel better.

...

It's dusk now and I've got a steak cooking. In your honor, if not presence! I had a busy afternoon Friday collecting the clothes. Three fat boxes from Casis Elementary School from our kids' rooms. The principal limited it to that. Then I tore around and got more toys for a grab bag for the boy's party. Saturday was cloudy but Don and Mom showed, the house got picked up, and the six boys came. They grabbed their toy airplanes, made them, and flew them off the roof of the house before you could wink. Don hustled them off to the park for their hike, and we went after fried chicken at 2-Js.⁸

...

Gotta quit now and celebrate—chomp, chomp. . . .

And now it's near midnight. I feel really drowsy, like pre-curse time. No energy either. I'm not 38 tonight, I'm 108.

Just wanted to say one more thing. I got to see *Raymond Burr Visits Vietnam*, a TV special about Vietnam, which was really good. They showed ships shooting north and south of Chu Lai off the coast and the fishing boats going untouched. It was nice to know those guys are there near you all.⁹

I want you to call me long distance the *minute* you get to either Okinawa or Hawaii. It will be worth it to know when you get out of Vietnam. Save me a few gray hairs. And, oh Honey, come home soon!

I love you,
Gig



Tuesday
10 October 1967

Darling,
I can't seem to get going on a letter to you tonight. I have torn up four

⁸ 2-Js was a neighborhood burger and chicken joint with several locations in the Austin area. It was known for its family atmosphere and cheap eats. They went out of business in the 1990s.

⁹ In October 1967, NBC aired *Raymond Burr Visits Vietnam*, a documentary of one of his visits to the country.

starts already. Just a bit late at night. I rewarded myself with a TV movie for several good deeds, none of which seem important enough to tell you about. All I can think about is your homecoming, and I'm trying to keep extra busy so the time will go by. So, my letters may sound exhausted for the next couple of weeks!

. . .

Don came by with his new Ford Falcon (1964) and we all went out for a spin in it.¹⁰ I had a bit of car trouble myself. The gas filter got plugged and the car was flooding, but the Texaco people fixed me right up. . . .

The weather is great, new furnace works great, and I've swept the garage already, though it still needs sorting. I can't seem to make much headway out there.

Told [the landlord] to try to advertise the house, so we can have a free week without people tromping in. Gonna get the rug cleaned and, oh man, I'd hang up a welcome home flag if I could. Even Mom has the bug. She's painting her kitchen and got a new permanent.

Well, Love, just drop me short lines from now on, get your work done, and come on home. I've got the hardest job right here waiting for you I know for sure.

I must quit thinking about it and go to bed. Be a sweet, good man and I'll see you soon and love you up good!

Goodnight, Dear One,
Gig



Tuesday
10 October 1967

Hi Sweetheart,
Well, things are shaping up a bit for me anyway. Yesterday, a new Major Daniel I. Carroll checked in (from Beaufort) as my relief, and the group

¹⁰ Ford built this model between 1960 and 1970 as a smaller and less expensive version of the larger sedans on the market. It came in several variations, including two- and four-door, hardtop and convertible, and even station wagons. The 1964 models ranged from as low as \$1,380 for the basic trim package to \$4,070, though in today's dollars that sticker price would equate to approximately \$13,027 and \$38,422, respectively.

has requested a Da Nang date of 28 October be reserved for me.¹¹ We shall see what we see there. And yesterday, the group executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kenny C. Palmer, ordered me to go to Bangkok on Thursday, 12 October. I'd forgotten I'd talked to him about one more quick trip out of country before my time ran out, but it had slipped my mind. I think we stay two days in Bangkok and then back to Da Nang Saturday and, of course, hitch hike back to Chu Lai after that. I'll have to leave here tomorrow afternoon to make sure I'm in Da Nang at 0700 Thursday morning. That will give me the last two weeks to pack, survey lost items, get shots, and start checking out. I have Dan a place next door and then he's going to move over here in my hooch.

It's a lousy time for the squadron itself. In the last two months and the next two months, all of our officers will have been rotated or relieved. MABS came in-country just 13 months ago and that is our normal rotation time individually.¹² Well, that's the way it goes.

I hate to leave in some ways. Lord knows our efforts are there physical all over the place and now we're shifting into a new phase of air station concepts and redoing a lot of things that were done in haste because of the pure out-and-out demand for certain things. But that's all in every other sense. I'm home already, like shots, I got five today and I only need one more—tuberculosis skin test or something like that and even that's through.¹³

Would you believe my relief knows all the people here that I had never met before and had been in the same squadron with Colonel Madera before a few years ago, so he'll fit in like a glove. Not a bit worried about him.

Oh, by the way, this afternoon I got you a check for \$100 and mailed

¹¹ The MABS-13 command chronology lists Maj Carroll as the base services officer not the executive officer, which was Maj Stice's billet. See MABS-13, Command Chronology (ComdC) November 1967, 1201077130, Box __, Folder 077, U.S. Marine Corps History Division Vietnam War Documents Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 1.

¹² The command chronologies for October and November 1967 show fairly consistent average monthly strength at 556 in October and 546 in November, while October 1966 reported 454 personnel. See MABS-13, ComdC October 1967, 1; MABS-13, ComdC November 1967, 1; and MABS-13, ComdC October 1966, 1.

¹³ For more on this test on military personnel, see James D. Mancuso, "Tuberculosis Screening and Control in the US Military in War and Peace," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 1 (January 2017): 60–67, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303502>.

it at the pay office (stupid rule there), so that should do the trick, I hope!

Time to take a shower. Shower taken and time for bed. Shots feel so good!

Goodnight, Darling, I'll try to write you from Bangkok.

Love you, Baby,

Ray



Thursday

12 October 1967

Hello Darling,

So good to get your letter yesterday. I calmed down again. A couple of days without mail and I start climbing the walls.

Three little girls are here this morning, making an awful racket, but here goes anyway.

I'm delighted to hear the news that you'll make it home by the 3d or 5th of November. That will give you 10 days here, and you'll need it for all reasons. That's only three weeks away—marvelous!

I wrote [the landlord] that we're going to start advertising the house, so people won't be tromping in while you're home. Wish me luck. I'm getting the rug cleaned early. . . .

. . .

Mom is having a party for the football gang 28 October (the Houston crew), and I'll be bubbling that last weekend, glad for something to get me over the hump.¹⁴ Just wish you'd be back for that, but it's probably just as well not to have to face a mob the first day back. They want to get football tickets for you on 11 or 18 November.¹⁵ Are you interested? Will we be here? Good questions?

. . .

The kids are really excited about your homecoming. Kirk wants to hang a sign "Home Sweet Home!" Karen says it's hard to talk to you on paper, but she obviously appreciated your sympathy over her not hearing

¹⁴ The University of Texas football had a winning season in 1967 with a 7-3 record. On 28 October, the Longhorns played against the Rice University Owls in Austin and won 28-6.

¹⁵ The Longhorns played in Austin on 11 November against Baylor University and won 24-0; on 18 November, they played in Austin against Texas Christian University and lost 24-17.

the combo. They are all so pretty now and grownup in the sense of trying to become ladies, or “yeadees” as Kathy calls them. You’ll have to become a proper father for sure now and watch that swearing.

I don’t see much of Kirk these days. He’s too busy playing with boys. He did bring his first girlfriend home the other day. A blonde with glasses. He took her for a coke and went to her house and said, “Okay, Mom,” to me for not giving him 50 cents to splurge on her.

I got to get Robin her new bike. Her birthday is 24 October and I promised that. Money seems pretty okay (\$593) and really should last three more weeks! You were right. I made it after all and I apologize for my worrying, but hell, it’s no fun to worry alone you know!

All for now, dearest. Call me collect from Okinawa! . . .

XXXs,
Gig



Friday
13 October 1967
Hotel Siam Intercontinental
Sripatum Palace Property
Rama I Road
Bangkok, Thailand

Hi Honey,

Well, guess where I am? Wrong! Right! Bangkok. Lord, what a plush palace! You all would be tittering and gushing all over the place—strictly number 1. We got here yesterday afternoon, and we’ll leave tomorrow afternoon. I have been shopping like hell and got me a Thai silk tie (ty-ty) and a Thai shirt (my white one got ruined in the rain the other day). You don’t pronounce the H in Thailand.

Bangkok is one of the most beautiful cities I’ve ever seen. It is modern as hell and building like crazy and yet the old is so indescribably on note, it fits in great at the same time—the temples and pagodas and golden Buddha’s and the palaces. Even the dress is progressive and full-blown minis to boot, and their crazy mod styles and haircuts. Can’t get around these people. Everything they have is either older or newer! You’d go out of your living skull in the shops. It’s best you aren’t here for that as I’d hate to see my wife having a heart attack not being able to know where to go next.

Last night for supper, we went to the Shai Thang. Good Lord, what a plush place to eat! You take off your shoes, of course, and go upstairs to a beautifully old Siamese decorated, semidarkened single room with carpets four inches thick and low, low tables. You sit and lean sort of (not completely like the Japanese) and the wildest oriental (Siamese) food you ever had with eight or nine courses, no menu, all the same, unheard of meats, wild salads, way out vegetables, and lush fruits all spiced one way or another.¹⁶ Drinks of Lord knows what, and then these exotic beautifully embroidered costumed dancers. And the music was out of this world too, naturally. For about two hours, you're actually back in the old regal Siam. Once back downstairs, you pay \$6 a head or, excuse me that's 1200 baht, and a little girl passes out a loose handful of the sweetest smelling tiny white fresh flowers. Well, I mean it was *really* something special.

Oh forgot, "we" means Lieutenant Colonel Roger D. "Bucky" Walters of all people and one guy from the wing staff and a grunt from Con Thien. We'll have to drop in and say hello to his wife if we go up that way next month—Kilgore, Texas, I think. It sure was a surprise to see him waiting for the same plane in Da Nang yesterday. Had a fine time talking about old times. He still remembers how good the kids were and how he liked Kirk—thought he was *quite* a boy.

I got your latest letter just before I left Chu Lai day before yesterday. I saved it for on the plane to Bangkok. Love to buy you your own personal jet, however, I'm just damn near bought out at the moment! Maybe next year. I just need a few more things and I'm done here anyway.

You think it's going to be hard for you to concentrate on your work when I'm home, what about me? I can see me packing the car now with everything upside down and either too much or forgetting something, like soap and saipt (MPC). I had to take a shower in Da Nang and they won't take green [cash] there. Hell, at Chu Lai, we use whatever a man has and give him whatever he doesn't or can't get. Maybe not too legal, but it's a whole lot more livable.

Gotta go get those last couple of Christmas goodies—sure going to be hard holding out until Christmas.

¹⁶ A traditional Thai meal strikes a balance between sweet, sour, salty, spicy, and bitter elements in a variety of family-style dishes that are shared by the table and fall into specific categories: rice, fried noodles, noodle soup, salads, curries, soups, vegetables, meat or fish, and dessert.

I love you, Gig, more than a stupid letter would ever say.

Ray



Saturday night
14 October 1967

Hello Dearest,

It's near midnight here, and I sat down to write you an hour ago, but when looking for paper, I ran across your college book *Southeast Asia and the World Today*.¹⁷ I peeked inside and, an hour later, here I am absorbed in the drama of the past of that little country when the present is changing even *that* past. Or something. I wish you were here to discuss it with me. How about that? Your brain up there at University of Omaha, reading all that interesting stuff, and now you're there seeing it. That ought to make you qualified to write about it too! Professor R. B. Stice, Associate Professor of Asian Studies.

Hey, Love, back to us. I haven't written for a couple of days. I've been busy, but I can't remember why now. Oh yes, I went shopping with Mom Friday and had a lovely time. Then I had to go shopping today to take it all back and exchange it. Man, that's work. And to top it all off, we came home and ruthlessly cleaned out my closets. Last time I did that was five years ago when you were in Japan. It was time again. . . .

Well, Sweet, that is surely the least of your worries. I just wanted you to know how the thought of your coming home has given me enthusiasm and interest in my looks again. I might be *going* to places with you again. That's pure heaven!

Oh, I tried on my lovely, beaded top you gave me for Christmas and it's *perfect* and we are dashing out to get a bottom to with it. Might make it to the ball after all! It's very satisfactory to know my *husband* knows what looks good on me as well as my mother. Husband gets three stars at last!

And now to bed. Such a lonesome house with both of my men gone. Kirk really has been a "little man" for me this year and gets three stars from Dad for that. His physical help is nil but his moral support swell. Oh yes, shades of his father, he was busy fixing his "bed" just right as he drove off in the car.

¹⁷ Claude A. Buss, *Southeast Asia and the World Today* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1958).

Goodnight, Dear Man. See you soon!

XXXs,
Gig



Sunday night
16 October 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, no more swanky hotels and back to you know where! The wing's hummer picked us up yesterday afternoon and, after a frantic taxi trip out to the airport and a mad dash in the civilian terminal to change baht to green (at a 10 percent discount naturally), I'm back in the cab. Whoa, get in the military side?! Switch cabs—it's a damn good thing we kept some baht for souvenirs or he wouldn't have gotten paid. Right on time, only to wait an hour for three late captains, and back to Da Nang in the rain. I *fortunately* caught a C-130 down here (in the rain) and got "home" about 2030. I washed a month's load of clothes this afternoon and stuck them outside really quick to dry between showers. While I was gone, they had reroofed our hooch, so everything was filthy, dirty, and damp. Finally clean and dry tonight. Well, relatively so.

Garnish means to brandish or cover. *Garner* is what you wanted, English Corporal, means to gather about or steal your forces. I think you better look up the word (or should I?)

Kirk's party sounded swell in spite of all the problems. I'm sure he looks back at it as great. . . .

As far as a flyaway date from Da Nang, I still don't have one. Wow, the rain just turned on (literally) again with a fury. Good thing I just pulled my clothes off the line! Plus three phone calls, that's more than I had all afternoon at work today.

. . .

Mom's disappointed about our not going to Cherry Point? Sorry about that. Beaufort is not too much further, so it depends on what she has in mind. When the hell is Thanksgiving, the 23d of November? It's too far off to plan anything like that anyway. Housing is first and foremost and nothing else matters right yet. Where, but mostly when. They have lousy four-bedroom trailers you can rent—very few motels—while you wait for base housing. Bucky spent a month in one. One guy zapped right in.

October 1967

Figure 46. Maj Ray Stice, pictured here as a captain, at his desk



Source: Stice family collection.

We just won't know until I get home. I'll either call him or fly on out if I have to get on the list as soon as possible.

Did you get the \$100 check yet? I started to write \$100 sweat yet? It sure has been the wettest, hottest everything-ish year I've ever spent.

One captain who should be leaving 20 October doesn't have his fly away date yet either. I'm using him as sort of a planning gauge for me if our names don't come out on the same list.

Time to take a shower and crawl into the pad. What else can you say for three inches of foam on a hard board? I think I have the early, early tomorrow. See you soon, Honey. Sorry I can't say precisely when. Try to

relax on that if you can, then you won't be disappointed if I'm a few days late. Good night, Darling.

Love YOU!

XXXs yourself,
Ray



Tuesday
17 October 1967

Darling,

Such a bonanza day for me yesterday from you. I really was terribly surprised by all three letters and couldn't believe my eyes about the Bangkok one. I kept saying, "No, he can't be there. What's he doing *THERE?*" Good heavens, maybe it means a DELAY! I was certainly relieved to find it was only a wonderful, unexpected trip for you and it *did* sound terrific! Almost worth going to Vietnam for! Golly, bum, this makes Europe, Panama, Vietnam, China, Japan, Puerto Rico, and now Thailand all without me. Double damn.

But aside from my green eyes, I was so happy you had Bucky Walters to take my place for company. He's pretty good company. A cheerful soul at any rate and says nice things about our son. I hope you said likewise about *his* or do you just rave about his blonde wife? It really was interesting to me, having just read chapters in your *Southeast Asia and the World Today* to read about their progress. I had no idea the Asians were so nationalistic minded. Your report was slurpy good, and I could feel how plush it was in my bones. I particularly liked those flowers you bought me!

It was *all* good news, and I even liked my \$100! Saved in the nick of time. You're back soundly in my good graces. Now I really can get a new bike for Robin and say it's from Dad and not go around with a pinched pocketbook. I feel like I'm fairly rolling in a sea of unexpected husbandly love. That was a good little fanny boost from way across the sea.

So glad your shots are almost over too. Everything is pointing in the right direction. By the way, I read today that mosquitoes love dark-skinned, physically active, warm-skinned, males who shave in dark clothes, healthy types who breathe heavily and have enough salt to be tasty. That means they love you and you're better off away from those jungle types, that's for sure.

October 1967

...

The boys (Kirk and Don) got back from camping in my filthy car. I had to get it washed yesterday, and it seems to be in good condition despite their fording a swollen river.

It's two weeks and three days approximately now until you're home. So glad your replacement is there and a good guy. That's the best news yet. Must close now as all are coming home from school.

I love you, Sweet Man. Call me from Okinawa collect—promise!

Gig



18 October 1967

Darling Babe,

How's it going? Going my way? Sure, hope so. I couldn't *stand* another week as a real estate lady! Man, the calls are coming in thick and fast. I've talked myself blue, telling people about the house and showing them around. It's not that I care about the house per se, I just want the people off my back before you get here. They all sound like they have problems. I say, "This is a *really* big house," and they say, "That's *just* what I need," then tell me they have two kids and work. And I repeat that it's really big and needs a full-time housekeeper and costs like fury to scare off the little fish. Only big fish need apply!

...

Hey nut, how you be? With me? In two weeks and three days? I be ready.

Robin is in tears tonight over no birthday party. I had a little chat and told her to bring a favorite friend to see her NEW BIKE, special presento Daddysan on birthday. She lowed as how Daddy *did* remember after all, and oh yes, "It was possible Daddy might have Thailand birthday present in bag" brought slight \$ to my eyes, and before long there was a happy little 10-year-old girl back to normal. She had slipped and told all girlfriends about nonexistent birthday party and this was causing small discomfort. New bike saved the day and all needs doing now is to go buy a new bike. Hooray! Daddy saved the day. Mama is a no good louse.

Whenever there's that slight doubt if Mama loves Robin as much as Karen, Robin needs her Daddy. And Daddy *always* comes through—with a slight nudge from Mama and women's intuition wins again. As a mat-

ter of fact, I enjoy the game of “Help! Daddy!” just as much as Robin does.

...

That’s about it. I know the world will be right side up when you’re around our side again. It’s cold back here. Cool to you, cold to me, so wear a warm coat. But have no fear, it goes from 50 to 80 degrees everyday here. That’s Texas.

Goodnight, Darling, hurry home!

Gigabeth



Thursday

19 October 1967

Hi Honey,

Well, you can take your pack off. I just flew my last hop. The gun squadrons don’t fly their pilots on the last couple of weeks before they rotate. So why should we? Besides, I only have one more week, not two. Yesterday, T. K. called up and told me I have a fly away date from Da Nang on 27 October, which is a day sooner than the best I could have hoped for and a whole week before the worst possible date. I’ll have to leave here the day before (the 26th) in order to be at Da Nang early the 27th and that is precisely one week away. So I figured okay, you bastards, one more hop and finite—no more! So, you approve? Thought so!

After say three days in Okinawa, say around 31 October, I leap out of there for the coast and home and watch out for them goblins and ghosts and gray-haired old aviators. It could be a wild Halloween, huh? I can just see me elbowing my way through all the tricksters yelling, “This is my treat. Get outta da way!”

...

Well, any who, from 30 October to 2 November, standby for the bad guy (me in case you couldn’t guess.)

I missed Frank Williams. He went home last month.

Oh, by the way, I’m not going to call you from Okinawa. The fact that I’m not flying anymore is worth a lot more believe me.

I ended up with about 163 combat missions as of this morning. That’s enough for the kind of job I’ve had I think. Nothing to jump and shout about, but tolerable. Just enough for 12 Air Medals. And unfortunately,

October 1967

only that one hop got written up. I had many more as good or better. It's hard to get all the damage assessments back.

Well, better quit, anymore good news and you couldn't stand it.

See you sooner now, Honey.

Love You!

Ray



Sunday

22 October 1967

Honey Baby,

I don't know whether to write you or not, but it's lonesome not to write, so here goes a short note anyway. I've been cleaning house like mad, but no renters yet, darn it. It's a strain to be so clean in a house I'm going to vacate so shortly! Not much incentive, except your homecoming. But I can see you now, too bleary eyed to notice! However, it keeps me busy.

We bought Robin's new bike yesterday. It took four hours and \$38. First an hour in the store to assemble one. They assembled the wrong one, so offered the floor model for an even \$38. I said okay and brought it home. Chain fell off first thing. Took it to gas station and fixed. Then he noticed no *brakes*, so back to store to weld on brakes. Whew! She loves it.

Meanwhile, Karen went to her first boy-girl party. Boys (6th grade) played band. Girls listened and one "SMILED" at Karen for "NO REASON!" Also, both Karen and Robin went to their first slumber party, plus another birthday. They had a fine weekend, but all *I* did was play bridge . . . and clean house.

I'm cross with everybody and know it's cause I only want you. Nobody else seems to fill the bill anymore. Funny thing though, nobody wants to share the waiting agony, but they'll all want your attention when you're home.

Don's going off to sing in Dallas on 3 November, and I'm mad he won't be here to greet you. But I guess the world doesn't revolve around you for anybody but me and the kids and the Marine Corps! Karen almost dropped the milk today when I said you *might* call from Okinawa.

I swear, waiting for a baby was never this bad. Doggone, we should be able to suffer together. We could at least be company that way. This

Figure 47. Ray and Gig Stice dressed for the Marine Corps Ball



Source: Stice family collection.

way I just wring my own hands. I'm not worried, just getting eager now. You said don't get too eager and I appreciate that you're trying to keep me calm. That *does* help a lot. Really

I bought a skirt to go with the top. I'm ready in spirit for all Marine Corps Balls for the next two years. Ready or not, here I come. This one is ready for 1967 or '68 at least. In 1969, I'll need a new one! . . .

I am absolutely missing you tremendously and there's nothing to do about it but go to bed.

There's one small comfort. Somehow, you *have* managed to convince me you've really missed me too, and that spells LOVE, and on the last week of a long year, that is a wonderful word to quit on.

Darling, would you believe me if I said I love you, very humbly? The humble part is because I allow myself the luxury of believing you love me. You at least have proved it to me. If it's because I've proved it to you,

then I would be amazed, because you've so far outstuffed me. You win. Hands down.

I am truly convinced man is a superior being to woman in the breadth and depth of love. Funny thing to admit that, but a comforting one. As a woman, it's absolutely awe-inspiring. When a man loves you like that, it's like a grand slam in spades.

Enough, enough. I'll turn your head. This one time, it's safe to tell you, I think! Goodnight, Dear One, my last midnight letter to you.

Your very devoted wife,
Gig



Sunday
29 October 1967

Hi Honey,

Finally got my revised fly away date for next Friday, 3 November. I'll go up to Da Nang Thursday the 2d of November and stay overnight there. I checked with the CID yesterday about my pistol and apparently it will be okay to ship it on to Beaufort.¹⁸ What an agonizing last week, and still no on-hand relief. Oh well, that's the way it goes. I didn't get one either when I took over the job.

They sure are exacting on this "only five days allowed" for travel back to the states. Up until last week, they let you have 10 days to get back in. Seems like I always get caught in these stupid administrative shuffles.¹⁹

Sounds like getting Robin's bike squared away was really a blast. I hope you gave the store one in return. But slumber parties—never happen, no more!

Damn, I just heard that Dan Carroll, my original relief that I've been working with the last two weeks and his RIO got shot down just a few minutes ago. Have to keep my fingers crossed for them. Nice way to start out? Whew, they made it back (*almost!*) to Da Nang and ejected in the bay and

¹⁸ CID refers to Marine Corps Criminal Investigation Division, which would have been responsible for approving the shipment of a military-issued weapon.

¹⁹ Though the policy was not available for this date, the current federal regulation for permanent change of station states that travel time is based on the official distance in travel orders or 1 day for every 350 miles traveled.

Figure 48. Maj Ray Stice receives commemoration plaque from MABS-13 commander



Source: Stice family collection.

a chopper picked them both up. Well, if they don't have back problems, okay, at least their seats worked.²⁰

Looking at the calendar, I really only have three working days left to finish some awards, fitness reports, and to finish sorting and packing and checking out. They ought to go fast enough. I know the last week for you has been lousy too. It's damn hard to be patient *all* the time! A few bitches and grunts and groans are well in order. I notice it the most after I wake up in the middle of the night and I watch the flares and burners and everything and have a quiet cigarette, thinking about you, of course.

By the time you get this letter, I should be in Okinawa. How long I

²⁰ Notably, the MABS-13, ComdC October 1967, does not report the incident, though Maj Carroll is not officially on the rolls for the squadron until November 1967.

have to stay there is anyone's fair guess, maybe one to three days. It only takes about four or five hours to get to Okinawa, so I'll get there Friday afternoon. I'll have to go from Kadena, all the way up the island (Camp Hansen) to where my trunk is stored, and break out my greens to get them cleaned and pressed right away. I have to wear the winter uniform for the trip home. And they control all the flight booking for all the Marines returning from out there too. I think we have to have TB tests and X-rays out there too.

Excuse me, I got to go over to the liquid oxygen [LOX] plant. One of our troopers just broke both legs under a full lox trailer.

It's nighttime now, Dan looks great. He had been hit up near the DMZ and almost made it to Da Nang when both engines quit from no fuel from too many holes. He'll be stiff tomorrow I'll bet. His RIO is in pretty good shape. And the man at the LOX plant is all set up for a trip back home. He's in a cast up to his ears almost. Good thing probably, he was about to marry a Filipino bar girl he had met taking lox samples all year long.

The snapshot was taken yesterday at a MAG-12 beach party the skipper and I went to for a short time.

Late, late, late. I gotta do it, Honey, catch some zzzs. Love you, Sweet-heart, getting short *finally*.

Love you,
Ray

CONCLUSION

By John M. Curatola, PhD

Ray and Elizabeth “Gig” Stice established the next chapter of their life as the war raged and American society continued to transform. Ray returned from Vietnam in November 1967, but came home months before the war’s next inflection point. The Tet Offensive began on 30 January 1968, signaling a new phase in the war. Hoping to cause a general popular uprising in the south, a collapse of the South Vietnamese government, and a surrender of the ARVN, the Tet Offensive hit military and political objectives throughout the Republic of Vietnam. The large-scale Communist offensive came as a shock to many. What made it all the more ironic was that for most of 1967, U.S. Military Advisory Command Vietnam (USMACV) commander, General William C. Westmoreland, espoused that the Viet Cong could no longer conduct sustained combat operations. Thinking in terms of conventional military metrics, the USMACV commander reported that Viet Cong forces had reached what he referred to as the “crossover point.” This meant that the enemy had now expended more troops than they were gaining, which precluded any sustained offensive combat operations for the future. While Westmoreland believed this goal had been reached, the crossover point proved a chimera. Despite overwhelming amounts of firepower

and military hardware, Communist forces continued their offensives.¹

Even before the Tet Offensive, most Americans had soured against the war and continued U.S. involvement. In summer 1967, public opinion polls supporting the war dropped below 50 percent for the first time and would continue a downward trend. By October only 28 percent were in favor of the war while thousands of Americans protested at the U.S. Capitol and the Pentagon.² While the January Tet Offensive ultimately failed in its three-fold mission, it succeeded in another way. It exacerbated calls to end the war, with CBS *Evening News* anchorman Walter Cronkite calling the entire endeavor in Southeast Asia into question.³ Tet served as the catalyst for the end of the Lyndon B. Johnson presidency. But on a larger scale, after more than four years of conflict in Vietnam, America had little to show for the effort. Decades earlier, the nation had defeated the Axis powers in World War II in less time.

With Tet occurring in January, the rest of the year was equally turbulent as America witnessed the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, protesters at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago turned violent, and militant student activists on college campuses reflecting growing social and political unrest. The frustrations of the Vietnam War seem to reflect the larger American society. Perhaps the only saving grace for 1968 came in December as the Apollo 8 space program sent three astronauts to orbit the moon.

Ray Stice flew his last combat sorties on 19 October and departed Vietnam the next month. Once home, he and Gig viewed this next inflection point from their new home at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. After his return from Vietnam, Stice was assigned to VMF(AW)-333 in December, serving as the squadron's executive officer. Here, he finally got to check-out in the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II that he had so coveted in his previous tour. Unlike his earlier aircrafts like the Douglas F4D Skyray and North America FJ2 Fury, the Phantom II was a two-seat, twin-engine aircraft with advanced fire control systems

¹ "Notes on Discussions With President Johnson," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, vol. 5, *Vietnam, 1967*, ed. Kent Seig (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002); and U.S.G. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978)136.

² George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1972).

³ Walter Cronkite, "Report from Vietnam," *CBS Evening News*, 27 February 1968.

and capable of Mach 2 supersonic speeds. Ten months later, Stice was transferred to Headquarters & Maintenance Squadron 31 (H&HM-31) and served as Marine Aircraft Group 31 (MAG-31) S-4 logistics officer for the next 18 months.

Stice continued his Marine Corps service until 1970, finishing his career at MAG-31. He had seen much during his years as a Marine. He, Elizabeth, and the entire Stice family witnessed a transformation of America in the decades following World War II. During this time, the United States emerged from the global conflict as a world power both militarily and economically, becoming the guarantor of democracy in the face of Communist incursions, and despite its many flaws remained the best hope for democracies around the globe. The Stice family were witness to these new roles for the nation, but also experienced the changes to the country's social and political fabric. Their letters offer a first-hand account and testament of a changing America—a nation that continues to change today.

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