

4th DIVISION VIETNAM CHRONOLOGY

(Summary of Letters & Tape Cassettes sent by Richard Cazeault to Anne Stefanak)

Since my graduation from Lowell Technological Institute's engineering school in **June of 1968**, I had been working on the wiring systems for the Apollo Spacecraft with the Brand-Rex Company in Willimantic, CT. The project also carried a draft deferment.

In **July of 1969**, shortly after the landing on the moon, my deferment was rescinded by my draft board and I was sent for an induction physical in Springfield, MA. I passed the physical with only one defect, the inability to distinguish red from green. The Sergeant assured me that we were not fighting Indians or Martians and that I only had to identify the color yellow.

On **August 21st** I was ordered to report for induction at the local draft board in Southbridge, MA on **September 24**. From there a group of us were bussed to an army base and I entered the Army in September at Fort Dix, New Jersey where I celebrated my 23rd birthday on the 29th. About a week later, because of lack of space, our entire barracks were shipped to Fort Campbell, Kentucky (Home of the 101st Airborne) for basic training. Upon the completion of Basic Training, I was shipped to Fort Gordon, Georgia to be trained in the Airborne Infantry. They were short of volunteers, so I was drafted again. Upon completion of training, I was given the choice of going to Fort Benning, Georgia for two weeks to finish my training by jumping out of an airplane or going to Vietnam after a two-week leave. Since I was afraid of heights, I took the ticket to Vietnam. The rest are excerpts from my letters and tape recordings that my future wife saved. She gave them to me around 2000. The rest is history:

MARCH 1970

5th - Leave Bradley Field in Hartford, CT in the morning for a connecting flight from O'Hare, in Chicago, to Seattle.

6th - Rainy and mild (IN the 50s) at Fort Lewis, Washington.

8th - Missed plane to Vietnam due to overbooking (3 seats).

9th - Left at 6:30 AM from McCord Air Force Base on a Flying Tigers DC-8 bound for Japan. We made two stops in Japan, one in Northern Japan at Misawa and another unscheduled one at Jakota near Tokyo. The delay was caused by the shelling of the airstrip where we were supposed to land in Vietnam.

11th - Arrived in Cam Ranh Bay after losing a day crossing the International Dateline.

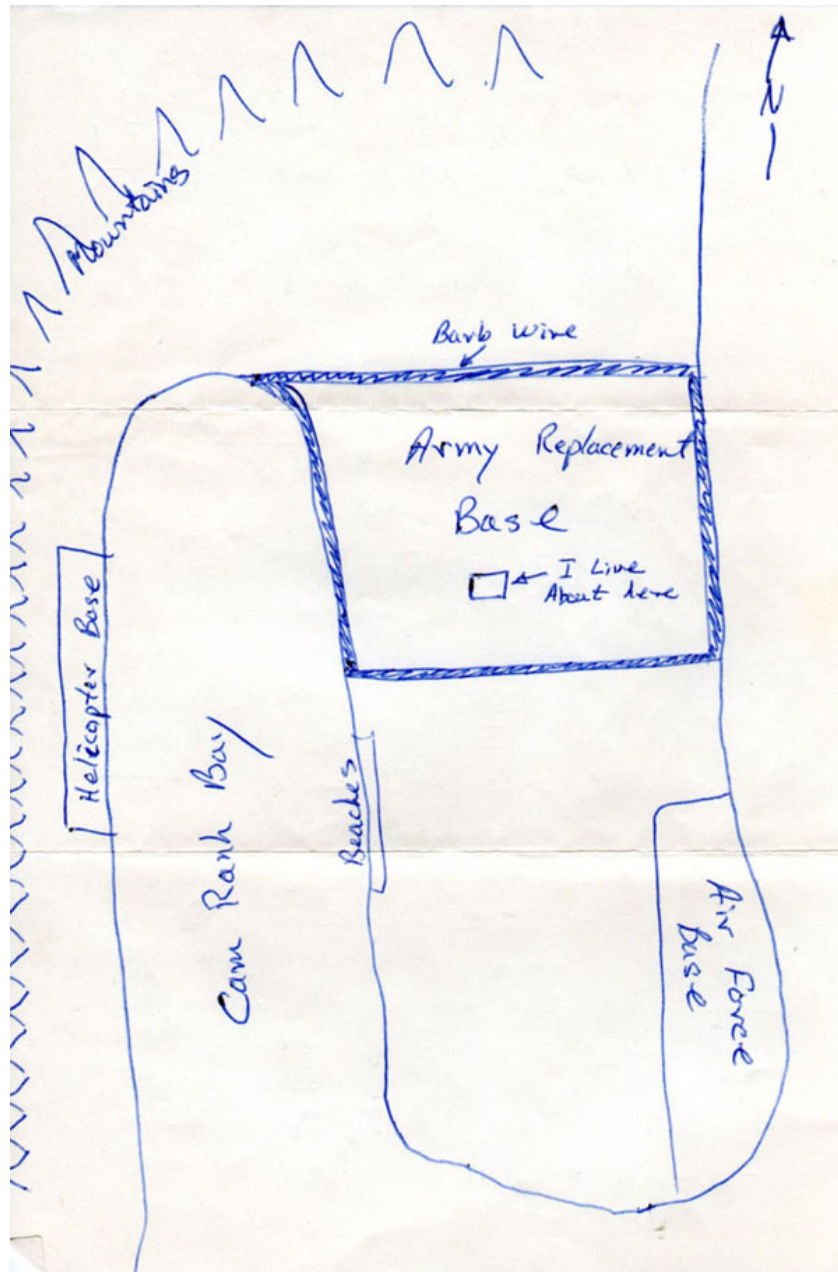
12th - While on night guard duty, the helicopter base across the bay (5 miles away) was mortared. No damage or casualties. There is no need for replacements at the moment. I may be in Cam Ranh for a while.

13th - Assigned to a guard barracks. Maybe I'll get a permanent job?

14th - Doesn't look like I will leave before the 20th for a permanent assignment.

15th - No change, just keep on working.

16th - I write a description of the area and include a handmade map.



17th - I will be getting a permanent assignment within 3 days.

18th - I start growing a mustache. Vietnam is boring.

20th - Left Cam Ranh Bay by **C-123 Aircraft** and landed in 4th Division Training Center in Pleiku (**Camp Enari**). We will train for 8 days and then head east to An Khe (**Camp Radcliff**). I probably will be assigned to the 8th Infantry Brigade.

22nd - I will be getting a permanent address soon so that I can receive mail.

23rd - We went on a training patrol near Banana (Actually Dragon) Mountain where I met and traded with a **Montagnard Tribe**. I got a **Montagnard aluminum bracelet** from a little girl in trade for some C-Rations. They are very friendly and primitive people. The women breastfeed publically and some of the men only wear loin cloths.

24th - I get interviewed by the recruiting sergeant. He offered to get me out of the field (as in grunt) if I enlist for four years. No way! He says that I will make a good

M-60 machine gunner because of my size! Flattery will get you nowhere, Sarge! We get lectures on soldier attitudes, the proper way to fight a war (there are rules you know, called the **Geneva Conventions**), and enemy medivacs (Must take good care of the enemy?).

25th - We are told about the dangers of base accidents. There is a US mail strike. The last day of training is tomorrow.

26th - Due to leave for An Khe tomorrow by convoy.

28th - Arrived in An Khe yesterday via the **Mang Yang Pass** and was shipped to firebase (Challenge) today via a **Huey Helicopter** (No road to the firebase). I had to leave my underwear back in An Khe. No underwear is allowed in the field due to skin diseases. To my surprise, I met Lt. Wajer, a neighbor from home (Dudley, MA), upon landing. I am assigned to Delta Company of the **2/35th Infantry** also known as Cacti Blue.

29th - Easter Sunday. I went to mass and got a medal which I sent home. The talk is that the 4th Division will be home by January, and so will I?

31st - Our platoon (1st) arrived at FSB Challenge. I meet my new friends. I was assigned to the 1st squad as a rifleman carrying an **M-16 Rifle**. So far, I haven't gotten the M-60 as predicted by the recruiting sergeant. They don't give the gun to just anyone in my platoon.

April 1970

1st - Landed in Happy Valley, just below and west of FSB Challenge, for the beginning of my first mission. What a wild ride down in a chopper, especially since I'm afraid of heights. It was a cold LZ. Only the 1st squad is on the mission. The 2nd squad is somewhere else.

2nd - Set ambush near the river and went on a 5-man patrol. Found a bunker complex. Another company was sent in to assault the complex. We set up as a blocking force. We saw no action, but the assault force did.

3rd - Crossed River (Dak Kron Bung) to a new area of operation. We are due for resupply tomorrow.

5th - Took a bath in the river. Really felt good, but I didn't feel secure being in the open.

6th - We found an old NVA campsite along with punji sticks and booby traps. We observed a banana grove across the valley.

7th - Our squad got resupplied by a chopper. We are very low on water. We are about 3/4 mile from the water. The 2nd squad rejoins us during the resupply.

8th - Found an abandoned NVA Village with a little trickling water spring that produced about a pint a minute. We have 27 guys in the platoon plus a scout dog. We sighted flashlights in the distance at night. I mention carrying an M-16 bayonet as a personal weapon. I wear the sheath off my right hip. To date, two of our sister platoons have made contact and have killed 3 to 4 NVA. We have had two of our men wounded by punji sticks. I tell about my fear of diving for cover into a bed of punji sticks during an ambush.

11th - Got resupplied again. We have been covering a lot of territory to cover on this mission.

12th - Hope to call home from a **U.S. Army MARS Station** after the mission. I mention being with a really good company. We have come close to the NVA, but no contact yet. The NVA smells like charcoal and we smell like C-4. We cook with it and they cook with wood, therefore the difference in smells. Like Tarzan smells animals we smell the enemy, and they us.

13th - Made a night laager (camp) on top of a forested hill, unlike the jungle. It really is a nice spot. Some trees are four feet in diameter! There are one-day-old signs that the NVA also likes this hill. Lousy living conditions, but the excitement makes up for it. I feel like a character out of an adventure book.

14th - Had artillery lay a barrage on a neighboring hill that is suspected of being an NVA complex. Went up the hill and found nothing but a booby-trapped mine. Looks like the work of the VC. They say it would be odd to see the VC this far in the jungle.

15th - Got resupplied today, including water. We got the 3rd platoon's mail and they ours. I volunteered to go along to the 3rd platoon to exchange the mail. They were only located about one mile away. We had to traverse a large hill and swamp to get there though. It took 3 hours for the round trip. Got clipping about MA passing a law against the war? I'm thinking about extending an extra 50 days so I can get an early out on May 1, 1971.

16th - Mission ends and we are extracted to build a new firebase called Welch (The actual name was Raquel located in a valley just below another firebase called Welch).

19th - Building the firebase is the pits. It is long on work, and short on sleep. I got the first package from home (Anne) on the 17th. The helicopter got blown up a few weeks ago about 20 miles from here. Cookies are great, but hard candies don't taste good. I also got a package from my parents on the 18th which includes a camera. I was shown a map of the firebase called Navel (Belly Button), located west of Challenge.

22nd - I talk about punji sticks, request a tape recorder, and the new **M79** grenade launcher I am now carrying. Simms (Texas) couldn't wait to get rid of it. I will depart on another mission tomorrow. Treatment on the firebase is "disgusting". I would rather be in the field. Is the treatment on purpose to make us love the field?

23rd - We march off firebase on a mission.

24th - Too many goodies in a rucksack (heavy)! We are working on a huge NVA trail. Waiting for artillery to barrage an NVA hill (fork trail, artillery inaccurate) Did not go uphill. Looks like a huge complex, but no artillery support. 2nd or 3rd Platoon made contact in the morning with one wounded troop. No enemy casualties.

25th - On 24th found a waist-high punji stick trap. Also, Messer, our pointman, accidentally shot a guy from the 2nd platoon, patrolling in the area. Set up an ambush at the empty bunker complex with no luck. Found out we had bad grenade fuses. They exploded after one second instead of five.

27th - Got resupplied on 26th. On the same day ran into a really fresh bunker complex including 4 hootches, 10 bunkers, and fresh supplies. One hootch showed signs of four women being housed there. A total of 15 to 20 people lived there. Documents indicated a major offensive planned against cities and firebases in the area. We set up an ambush on the main trail today.

30th - Missed resupply helicopter on 29th for mailing letters. We were supposed to get resupplied with food and mail every 4 days and one fresh but used clothes every 2 weeks.

MAY 1970

1st - Suffering from a bad case of diarrhea.

2nd - Found a large bridge going over a creek. Set ambush and then blew the bridge. Heard rumors that we may be invading Cambodia. Nixon is supposed to withdraw 150,000 troops over the next year. The 30-60 drops have stopped. Maybe the troops will be withdrawn into Cambodia!

3rd - End of mission, left for An Khe.

4th - Supposed to leave for Cambodia on the 5th, but has been rescheduled for the 6th instead. The mission will last two weeks. I explain the difference between VC (South Vietnamese Rebels fighting against their government and the U.S.) and NVA (North Vietnamese Army that has invaded the South to aid the VC.).

6th - Convoyed to within 10 miles of Cambodia, also near the Laotian border. Located at a dusty place called FSB Meredith. Tomorrow we land 5 miles into Cambodia and search for NVA bases and caches.

8th - Landed in Cambodia yesterday. Found a large NVA village this morning and destroyed it. We are chasing the NVA to the Laotian border. Maybe we will continue the chase into Laos. This invasion should certainly have changed the complexion of the war in Vietnam by disrupting the NVA supply lines.

11th - Waiting to get airlifted to another part of Cambodia this afternoon. Heavy fighting upon arrival at hot LZ. Got resupplied yesterday. Very hot in Cambodia, drank 7 quarts of water a day.

12th - Got mail this morning.

14th - Describe chopper crash after arriving at New Plei Jereng. Convoyed back to An Khe.

18th - Back in An Khe after the mission. Sick and suffering from diarrhea. Tomorrow we head out on a new mission a few miles south of FSB Challenge. Looking for a Sapper training camp. I explain the meaning of Sapper. Never thought that I would be this close to the action. Always nervous before a mission. Earned CIB in Cambodia and have been put in for a promotion. It's so hot in Vietnam that when it rains we freeze!

19th - Still in An Khe because of the bad weather. Choppers don't fly in bad weather, usually.

20th - Still stuck in An Khe. Explain problems with R&R in Hawaii; married couples usually get priority. Attitude changing dramatically. Getting more mature?

22th - Left An Khe yesterday. We are located on top of a huge mountain about 10 miles NW of An Khe, near Mang Yang Pass.

26th - Arrived at FSB Warrior on the 24th. Mission cut short. The second Platoon had a man wounded badly on the mission. Our elevation is about 3500 feet. Can see An Khe on a clear day.

28th - Talk about cameras in combat. The advance in camera technology over

WW II. Our squad is going on SERP (Short Range Patrol) on a hill overlooking Warrior.

JUNE 1970

2nd - Back in An Khe.

6th - Sick with diarrhea (Actually dysentery). Will return to the field either today or tomorrow.

7th - Talked to Anne through MARS Station at 1 am in the morning.

8th - Back in the field again. Now carrying a **PRC-25 Radio** and an M-16 rifle. I am designated as a junior RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) for the Platoon Sergeant and now march with the 2nd Squad. I replace Screwy Lewis who got promoted to Senior RTO for the Lieutenant and he now marches up front with the 1st Squad. The old Senior RTO got a rear job. Got dehydrated from lack of water. Salt tablets and water cured the severe cramps in only a few minutes.

10th - Talked about the big bats we encountered. Waiting for supply chopper.

14th - Raining. We're supposed to go back to An Khe today. Out of food. The supply bird did not show up yesterday. An Khe was canceled until the 17th. Will get resupplied instead. When we go back to An Khe we are supposed to guard the base airstrip called the **Golf Course**.

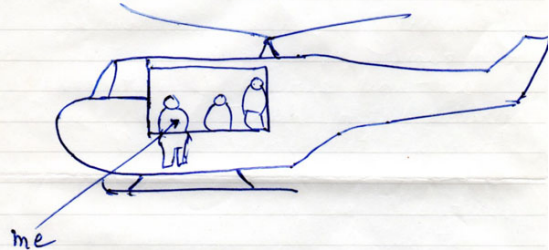
15th - Still raining miserably. Haven't had mail in a week. A bird (chopper) is due shortly. On the 17th I will be in Vietnam 100 days (18 days processing in the country, 53 in the field, and 29 on firebases).

16th - Still no mail. Due to go to An Khe tomorrow. Rumor has it that we will head back to Cambodia again, although Nixon promised to have all the troops out of there by the end of June.

20th - Back in An Khe. Guard duty at night and details all day. Only get about 4 hours of sleep a night. Terrible treatment. Can't wait to return to the field again. **Sketch & Picture** of me riding in a chopper included in the letter.



P.S. There's 2 or 3 pictures of me landing in a helicopter. My friend landed ahead of me with my camera and took them. I'm the guy sitting on the right waving.



P.S. That's the way we ride the choppers, on the edge with our feet hanging out. No seat belts either! It's real fun.

23rd - More talk of rotten treatment and pig pen living conditions. Low morale and hot tempers. Everybody is in terrible shape physically from dysentery, skin diseases, and mysterious low-grade fevers.

26th - Back in the field. Humping radio. Setting up night camp. Getting resupplied tomorrow.

29th - Got resupplied yesterday, no mail. Our next resupply is on July 2nd. Our 6th day in the field. Found a large trail with bicycle tracks. The trail runs east to west to Cambodia?

JULY 1970

6th - On Firebase Welch. Two weeks between letters. On July 1st we ran into a group of NVA and had a firefight. One of our guys (Simms) was wounded in the shoulder, we got none of them. Found abandoned villages and bunker complexes. Arrived on Welch on the 3rd. Once there we had to get ready to go out and rescue a **LERP Team** but never left. The next day we got ready to reinforce another platoon in contact, but again did not go. Built a bunker on firebase. Talked about pictures of captured bicycles and carts from the last mission. Now I'm the LT.'s radioman and being considered for the CO's radioman. The next step is the Battalion radio, which is a rear job. I'm being recognized as a really good radioman?

12th - Working North of An Khe on the same trail (Highway 101) we were on in April. Caught four dinks eating in a hootch and bathing. No one got hurt including them. I captured a rucksack, knife, potato peeler, and porcelain bowl. The next mission is supposed to be to the An Loa Valley. More VC and less NVA due to the nearby population. Have ten new guys in the platoon.

17th - After spending a few days on a dusty LZ near Bong Son, including a scary bath in a nearby river, we landed on a mountain in the Southern part of the An Lao Valley (actually the Bong Son Plain). Will move in a Northerly direction into the valley. It will take about a week. We will be searching for caches. Had a restful stand down with a lot of beer.

18th - Having a tough time because of the heat. Using 6 quarts of water a day.

20th - Tomorrow we'll be at the valley floor and get a resupply. Really hot and humid and lots of mosquitoes at night. A miserable mission. Had a night laager near a tiger lair. We could hear the tiger all night prowling around our perimeter.

23rd - Waiting for the 3rd platoon. Got a resupply on the 21st. Have been covering a lot of territory on the mission. Due to get resupply tomorrow. No signs of dinks or even old trails. Had to cut trails in the valley to move. Due to go in for a stand down on the 28th, which will be good as long as they don't harass us.

26th - Finished mission by humping into Firebase Abbey. Located on river at bottom of Abbey for two days of stand down. Explain the reason for wearing a watch around my neck; the leather band rotted out a long time ago and it is better protected under my shirt. The Peace Metal was a gift from a friend before he went home.

31st - Busy building the firebase. Got a new set of clothes yesterday, the first since the 15th. We got them because a general was going to visit! Since we arrived on the coast it has been really quiet. No dinks.

AUGUST 1970

2nd - We got a new LT. because the old one got a rear job. He will be missed.

6th - Humped off FB Powder yesterday. Took sniper fire on firebase a couple of times. Sent out a sweep and found one of the snipers, but he got away. The new LT seems to be OK, time will tell.

10th - We'll be working in this area for the next 3 months. I got allocated a 3-day pass to go to Danang (**China Beach**) on an "in country" R&R. I will leave from An Khe on either the 18th or 25th.

16th - Back on Powder, waiting to hear about my 3-day pass.

18th - Doesn't look like I will get the 3-day pass.

21st - Went back into the field yesterday. The CO gave the 3-day pass to someone else. That's life!

22nd - We're getting extracted to a new area. No dinks in this area. Will continue to search and avoid the new area. We only run into dinks accidentally now.

30th - Called Anne from MARS Station yesterday. At MARS waiting to call my parents tonight.

SEPTEMBER 1970

11th - Instead of going to Ban Me Thuot, we headed east on Route 19 and south on Route 1. We're 40 miles south of Qui Nhon and 20 miles from the coast. We CA'd (Combat Assault, which was always done by chopper) in yesterday (leaving helmets in the chopper) and found an NVA hospital complex. "Yesterday we found an NVA hospital complex with operating rooms (warm gall bladder in a tray?), a pharmacy, etc. (dump with new C-Ration cases and Care Packages, and graveyard). All told there were 19 hootches capable of holding 50-bed cases and many more on just a treatment basis for minor cases. They even had a shower with running water piped in from a nearby stream. It looks like they may have had some female nurses there from the clothes we found. I didn't get any pictures because the NVA left a sniper around who kept us busy. It seems like they just evacuated the village before we got there. We finally burnt the hospital and left."

19th - We are scheduled to go back to An Khe for a 2 day stand down from Phu Xuan on the 27th. We are 10 miles NW of Phu Xuan now. After the stand down we will either go 10 miles south of An Khe to VC Valley (appropriately named) or NW 25-30 miles to Happy Valley which is full of NVA. Our firebase in Happy Valley will be Challenge, my first firebase. Starting to rain.

21st - The army won't let me leave Vietnam with a mustache? They wouldn't let me leave Fort Lewis for Vietnam without a haircut. I didn't get it cut and here I am!

23th - Talk about a new guy from California (Red) who builds fiberglass car bodies for a living.

OCTOBER 1970

5th - The platoon left for Phu Cat and Bong Son and I stayed behind with a severe rash and looking for a rear job. I won't rejoin the platoon until the 11th.

13th - Small talk in the letter, from where?

15th - The 4th Division is going home at the end of the month without me. I will be assigned to another unit, I know not where.

19th - I'll be either going to the **Americal Division** near Chu Lai or the **173rd Airborne** near Qhi Nhon. Pulling guard duty all night and sleeping all day. Boring.

20th - Still on guard duty wondering where I'm going next. The army really is a stink hole.

22nd - Assigned to the **101st Airborne** Screaming Eagles near Hue and the DMZ. They are supposed to treat their men like kings but see more action. I report to them on the 28th. Will be separated from my best friend and junior RTO, Ronnie. He's a physicist from Texas A&M, class of 69. His father is a shrimp fisherman from Galveston. (I later found out that Ronnie was badly wounded after he joined the Americal. **Sal Armato**, also from our platoon, went to the Americal and was KIA within a couple of weeks.) I had originally hoped to get assigned to the Americal since it was the unit my Father served with during WWII. He was one of the original members of the unit when it was formed in New Caledonia. It stands for Americans in New Caledonia.

24th - With all the unit withdrawals, I don't know when I will be going home. When I was at Fort Campbell (Home of the 101st) they were preparing for that unit to come home by the beginning of 1971. Will I go home with them?

26th - Left An Khe this morning for Qhi Nhon by convoy. Will spend a couple of days there and leave for the 101st. We will land either in Hue or Phu Bai on the 28th. My parents sent me a letter hoping they would see me for Christmas when I come home with the 4th. "The longer I stay in the army the more I distrust it. It's a bad system."

28th - Supposed to leave for Phu Bai this afternoon, if the weather clears. Been out of the field for almost a month, apprehensive about returning.

30th - Been in a typhoon since the 28th. It is supposed to end this afternoon. Oh well, one less day in the field.