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5-10-1968

1968-05-10, Lawrence to Robert

Lawrence Emanuel Houck II

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1968-05-10, Lawrence to Robert

Keywords

U.S.A., U.S. Soldiers, correspondence, San Francisco, CA, army, troops, postal service, postal stamp, Palmyra, PA, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Hanoi, Phu Bai, Da Nang, Chu Lai, An Khe, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Cam Ranh Bay, Bien Hoa, Saigon, Dong Ha, bunker, Tokyo, prostitution, marriage, wife, husband, health and sickness, soldier slang, morale, post-war hopes, recreation and entertainment, leisure, culture, race, sex, loneliness, homesickness, leave, rules and regulations, comradery, assignment, training, rank, weapon, food, military kit, rations, foreign occupation, USS Princeton, USS Iwo Jima, naval warfare, tanks, air raid, air craft, helicopter, medical personnel, medical treatment, military intelligence, shrapnel, injury, death, thoughts on the enemy, military equipment, hospital, transportation, humor, map, uncle, man power, war wounded, public opinion, casualties, artillery, discontent, territorial forces, territory, U.S. Seventh Fleet, Ready Room, bunker, Helicopter (the UH-34D), medevac, modernization, westernization, capitalism, ROKs (Republic of Korea soldiers), USS Princeton, USS Bon Homme Richard (CV-31), USS Repose (AH-16), USS Iwo Jima (LPH-2), Hospital ship, Cua Viet Base, People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), North Vietnamese Army (NVA), etc., Socialist Republic of Vietnam, demilitarized zone

Identifier

2014.051.w.r._Houck_vietnamwar_1968-05-10_001

1/8 Lt. Houck 0100336
HMM-362 MAG-36
Ready Room
FPO S.F. 96602

FREE



Rd#1
Box 99
PALMYRA PENN 17078

Sp/5 Robert E. Snyder Jr.

US 52677797

~~528th Med. Lab. (Mob.)~~

~~APO San Francisco 96238~~

UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES - VIETNAM

10 May '68

Fri. 1200

Hi the Old buddy,

How's everything going with you? Hope you're still getting along O.K., here on the Two I'm fine.

Guess with just a few days left in country you're among the guys who sleep in the bunkers at night. When we were at Phu Bai short-timers put a light bulb in the bunkers to cut down on some of the dampness & slept there all night. Probably the next letter you send up this way will have a good old Palmyra postmark on it.

Reading about your experiences with the pretty call-girls in Tokyo was really amusing. You were in quite a predicament & I really felt for you. I haven't laughed so much since getting in country! Your face must have been as red as your hair again. Those gals can get pretty tempting can't they!? It's good your better judgment prevailed, it would be terrible to go home with the chap, not only because of what it could do to you but also because of what it might do to your future wife & children (come on now Bob admit it, you are thinking about getting married someday). No doubt you'll appreciate letting your wife teach you what you

call the "fine art of making love."

Wouldn't it have been nice to have been able to travel around the world a few years ago when other countries & cities still had that "old world" atmosphere. It will forever be disappointing to me that nations with such beautiful cultures, such as Japan & Thailand, must modernize & Westernize in order to survive in this competitive world. And most of the pressure to change among other nations has been wrought by our own country.

Undoubtedly Joanne does miss Herb a lot, 2 years is a long time to be away from close (wonder how close?) friends. The guys who spent several years away from home during past years must have gotten quite homesick.

If we desire to win this war, however, I feel our military men should be kept in country no less than 2 years, possibly 2 for an E. M. & 3 for officers. As the rotations presently are being scheduled a guy spends only a few months at maximum effectiveness because he's spent the previous months learning his job. The 2nd & 3rd year would be getting the greatest potential from our manpower.

Rebuttal would come both from the public

& from the military were rotation dates extended, & in my opinion would effect multiple military resignations among senior officers & enlisted. Our people still appear to be unwilling to fight anything but a gentleman's war, which in large part is what the Viet Nam conflict is.

When we worked with the ROK's we didn't get any C-rats, but if they're as foul as you say we didn't miss anything.

Next week the Twojima is heading back to the states so our squadron will be off loading at Phu Bai for about 1 week after which we'll go aboard the USS Princeton, an old WW II carrier in the Valley Forge class converted to haul helos only; it's larger than the Two. We'll be aboard the Two until 1 July when we're scheduled to go back to Phu Bai until 1 Sept., then we'll again board the Princeton until 1 Dec. & then get off at Phu Bai. So we're in for a lot of moving around which helps break monotony even though at the time it's a pain in the neck. And we're all happy about being able to spend so much time aboard ship, even the flying in the daytime might be the same as when we were at Phu Bai but the living spaces are clean & the food is A-1.

The beginning of last week while the ship was about 4 miles out from Cua Viet it took 2 incoming rounds which just missed by about 75-80 feet, both rounds overshot, fortunately. The old ship's captain immediately put every body at emergency stations & went full speed in a zig-zag evasive course out to sea, he never stopped til we were 20 miles off shore. That's the first reported incoming taken by a large naval vessel off shore.

The ship stayed far off shore all last week, then it got brave & moved back in about 5 miles off shore on Tuesday. Wednesday it took 5 more incoming rounds but the closest one hit 700 yards away. Again the captain headed out to sea. This time he intends to stay out here, he's taking no chances because next week they're going home. That incoming scares these Navy guys who've never seen it before, they go into a panic for several days!

There's been a lot of action up around here lately, especially from 27 Apr. to 4 May. During that period the battalion our squadron is supporting was rendered inoperative as a fighting force by NVA troops infiltrating from the DMZ. Most of the fighting has been in an area 2-5 miles north of Dong Ha. On

Tuesday night a forward observer for a platoon spotted 5 enemy tanks just 4 miles away from Dong Ha. It's difficult to see how those NVA survive the repetitious air strikes & pounding artillery, but somehow they manage to hang on, they even were counterattacking all last week.

Those helos on that postcard are UH-34 D's & they're a good bird to fly even though they're the oldest helicopter the Marine Corps & Army has, our squadron has the oldest helicopter in the Marine Corps, I don't know just how many years it's been around but there's going to be a big ceremony when it retires from active duty. The 34 is the only helo in operation with the services that uses a reciprocating engine (except for the small Bell), all others use turbine engines. There's nothing like the instant power that 9 cylinder, 1525 horsepower engine puts out the instant it's called on.

And the old bird is a real fun bird to fly because it's not as sophisticated as the turbine jobs & there's a lot more for the pilot to do, it tests a pilot's skill much more than the newer birds do. If you have

any old time Army pilots who flew Army 34's ask them about the bird & what they thought of it. Every Army pilot I've talked to swears by it if he's flown it.

The old bird takes a real beating too, I know, I was in one the other week that took 26 hits & still flew.

28 Apr.

Last Sun. morning, I was on night medivac duty when at 0110 a call came to go pick up 3 emergency & 2 priority medivacs at a zone 7 miles north of Dong Ha.

We got to the zone & landed O.K., but just as the last medivac was placed aboard all hell broke loose! From only 30 feet away on our right, left, & dead ahead the NVA opened up on us with 30-cal. automatic weapons fire & grenades. Almost as soon as they opened up the pilot got hit in the eyes & an AP or a piece of shrapnel hit my clear right visor sending pieces of plastic into my right eye & putting 6 cuts on my cheek below the right eye.

When he sat the bird down the guy who was flying it dropped his rotor RPM below flying RPM in an effort to keep sand & dust from blowing all over the medivacs, that's something we just never do at night in an unsecured zone. For a few seconds he didn't know whether to fly out or shut down & his

grip was frozen on the controls making it impossible for me to fly. Suddenly he realized that he couldn't see & threw his hands to his face. When he took his hands from the controls I attempted to get back flying RPM & power, after precious seconds & what seemed like an eternity they built up & with a bounce or two we were airborne. ~~Since~~

Since it was NVA territory to the west of the DMZ 2 miles to the north, I decided to head to the right (east) toward the ocean. We flew at treetop level for about a mile before picking up altitude, Cua Viet was in the distance about 4 miles so I flew there & shut down. Our chase helo picked us up at Cua Viet & took us back out to the ship.

Ben, the other pilot, lost his left eye & still has only partial vision in his right one. Everybody in our bird was hit & the medivacs were rewounded (one died 2 hours later). The crew chief, gunner, & corpman each got shrapnel wounds, & I got some on the cheek. After spending a day aboard the Navy hospital ship USS Repose where doctors cleaned the plastic out of my eye & treated the ~~so~~ scratches on

the eyeball & cleaned up the cuts on my cheek. I was back flying again in 3 days. I wanted to get back flying soon so as not to lose too much nerve.

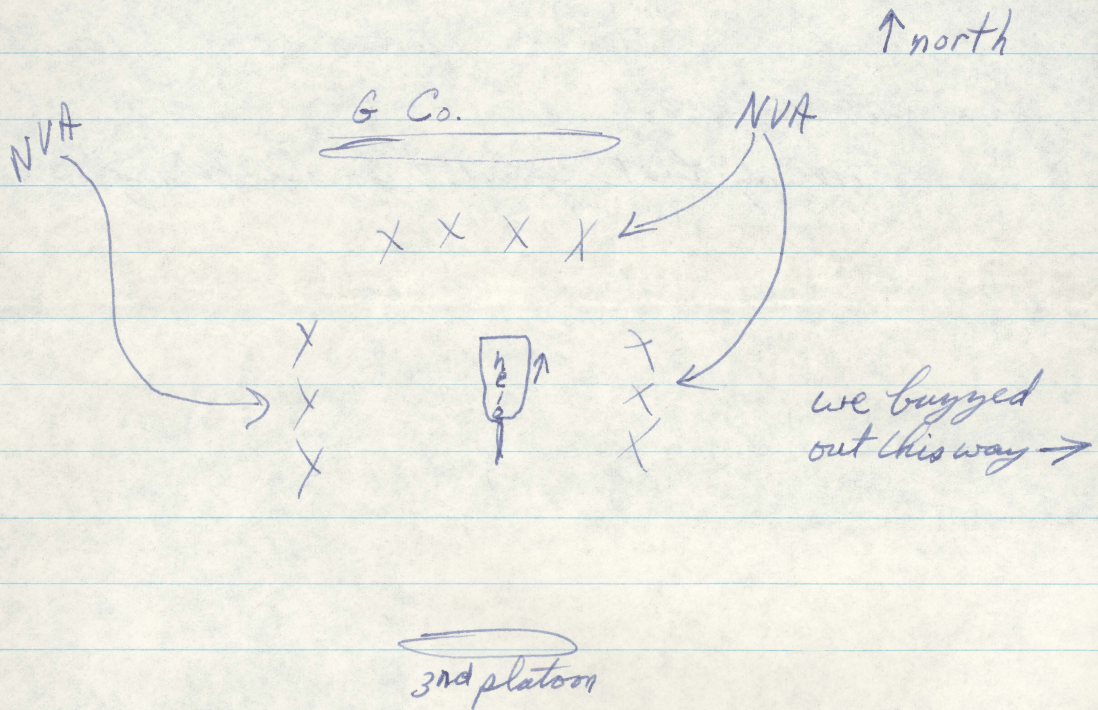
7 of those armor-piercing rounds came in my area of the cockpit & 4 came within 2 inches of me. Never in my life have I felt so small & completely helpless as I did that night when those rounds were hitting the plane! There was just no place to go!

The 34 had 3 cylinders, the carb., the front fuel cell, & the rotor head (2 rounds) all hit by armor piercing, plus other AP & shrapnel hits which knocked out most of the instruments & it still flew.

Seconds after the NVA opened up on us my crew chief & gunner opened up with their M-60's and were responsible for 20 confirmed enemy KIA.

We sat down between a company & separated platoon & the NVA slipped in between them. Neither the company nor the platoon fired a shot for fear of hitting us or each other, & as soon as the helo disappeared the NVA stopped firing & slipped away so the only guys who fired were my crew.

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Sure hope those NVA were surprised when we flew over their heads & disappeared!

Well, there's a lot to praise the Lord for as there always is.

And there's work to be done so guess I better drop this letter in the mailbox & go do it.

Take care Bob & have a nice trip home. My prayers are with you.

OVER ↓

Your Pal,
Larry

P.S. The racing articles I cut out of the Patriot, I haven't seen any about Mitch but my uncle said in a letter that Mitch won Port Royal's first ~~grand~~ feature.

Give my best regards to your folks from me.

[[Nick Dante 6/22/2016]]

[[Houck Correspondence #1]]

[[Page 1- Envelope]]

1/ Lt. Houck 0100336
Hm-362 MAG – 36
Ready Room
FPO S.F. 96602

FREE

[[image- a printed-on map of southeast Asia
Featuring Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and
Cambodia, with Vietnam highlighted and
the location of the U.S. Seventh Fleet identified.]]

Rd #1
Box 99
PALMYRA Penn 17078
Sp/5 Robert E. Snyder Jr.
US52677797
[[strikethrough]] 528th Med. Lab.(Mob.)[[/strikethrough]]
[[strikethrough]] APO San Francisco 96238 [[/strikethrough]]

[[text: UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES – VIETNAM]]

[[Page 2- Letter]]

10 May '68
Fri. 1200

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[[Page 3- Letter]]

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[[Page 5- Letter]]

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[[Page 8- Letter]]

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[[Page 10- Letter]]

9

[[image- drawing of the positions of the soldiers during the event told on the previous page]]

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we flew over their heads + disappeared!

Well, there's a lot to praise the Lord for as
there always is.

And there's work to be done so guess I better
drop this letter in the mail box + go do it.

Take care Bob + have a nice trip home. My
prayers are with you.

Your Pal,
Larry

OVER

[[image-arrow pointing down]]

[[Page 11- Letter]]

10

PS. The racing article I cut out of the
Patriot, I haven't seen any about Mitch but my
Uncle said in a letter that Mitch won Port Royal's
first ~~feaut~~ feature.

Give my best regards t your folks from me.