

extend forlænge
extension forlængelse
outlook livssyn
compatible forenelig
improve forbedre sig
challenge udfordring
corn on the cob kogte
majskolber

Bernard Edelman

DEAR AMERICA: LETTERS HOME FROM VIETNAM (1985)

The two letters below were written during the war and portray the lives of American soldiers. They are included in a large collection of letters, which were gathered as part of the design process of the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In the film version of this book of letters professional actors read the letters aloud and the letters are accompanied by amateur footage from Vietnam.

The first letter was written by Capt. Rodney R. Chastant from Mobile, Alabama, who served with Marine Air Group 13, 1st Marine Air Wing, based at Da Nang. Although his 13-month tour in Vietnam was up in September 1968, he extended for an additional six months. He was killed on 22 October 1968. He was 25 years old.

Mom,

Today I received your letter in reply to my extension letter. You replied as I knew you would – always the mother who tries to put her son's wishes before her own, even when she is not sure it is the best for his welfare. It made me sad. I want so much to make you proud. I want so much to make you happy. At the same time I have my life to lead with my own dreams, goals, and outlook. And I know all these things cannot be compatible – particularly over the short run.

But understand I love my family more than anyone or anything in the world. March 1969 is not really so very far away. I have been in Vietnam more than 11 months. I have only eight more months in the country. My chances of coming away unhurt improve every month because I know so much more than I did as a beginner. I know much better when to take a chance and when not to. Please trust my judgement. Try to understand that you raised a son who likes the excitement and challenge he finds here, and these qualities will see him through the opportunities he will face in the 1970s.

Know that I dream of that day when I return home to you and Dad, and hold you in my arms again. Sometimes I get lonely. Sometimes I want nothing more than to sit down at the dinner table, see before me roast beef, corn on the cob, mashed potatoes, bow my head for the blessing, and look up and see my mother – pretty and smiling – searching for any way she can [to] make her son more comfortable. Know that it is hard to turn your back on these things.



opt for vælge
alien fremmed
adjust to forlige sig med
invaluable uvurderlig
indispensable uundværlig
undisputed ubestridt
relish værdsætte
proficiency dygtighed,
færdighed
staggering kolossal

A reconnaissance patrol in South Vietnam in 1965.

It is not easy to say I opt for six more months of heat, sand, and shooting. I know there will [be] the nights that I suffer the loss of another friend. And nothing can make a man feel so alien or alone as [a] walk by the seashore as he tries to adjust to the loss of another friend in this godforsaken country. But that is part of the draw, the attraction, the challenge. Here there is a job to be done. There are moral decisions made almost every day. My experience is invaluable. This job requires a man of conscience. The group of men that do this job *must* have a leader with a conscience. In the last three weeks we killed more than 1,500 men on a single operation. That reflects a lot of responsibility. I am needed here, Mom. Not that I am essential or indispensable. But my degree of proficiency is now undisputed as the best in 1st Marine Division. The young men coming in need the leadership of an older hand. I am that hand. I am the man. I relish the opportunity.

I am sorry I have hurt you. But if I thought I was needed at home more than here, I would come home. Things are going well at home. So where do I belong? This is an unusual time in our nation's history. The unrest around the world is paralleled only a handful of times in history. Young men are asking questions – hard questions. Much of the focus of the entire world is on Vietnam. The incompetence and the wrongs committed in Vietnam are staggering. But through it all I see a little light. Some men choose to fight on the streets. Some choose to fight in the universi-

peritonis bughindebetændelse
 pneumonia lungebetændelse
 baptism by fire ilddåb
 mechanized platoon
 mekaniseret, motoriseret
 deling
 antipersonnel mine
 fodfolksmine
 track bæltrekøretøj

ties. Some choose to fight in the parliament. My choice is between two options – fight in Vietnam or shut up. I choose Vietnam. If I am to contribute, it must be Vietnam. And when I get home, you too will see that little light.

Your son,
 Rod



President Johnson decorating American soldiers during his visit to South Vietnam in January 1968.

The second letter was written by 2Lt. Robert C. ("Mike") Ransom, Jr., from Bronxville, New York, who was a platoon commander with Company A, 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade. He was wounded for the first time in early April 1968, one month into his tour. Then on 3 May, he was wounded by a mine during a night ambush near Quang Ngai. His death on 11 May was officially attributed to peritonis and pneumonia resulting from his wounds. He was 23 years old.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, I've had my baptism by fire, and it's changed me I think. Two days ago my platoon was on a mission to clear three suspected minefields. We were working with a mechanized platoon with four tracks, and our tactic was to put the tracks on line and just roar through the minefields, hoping to blow them. Since the majority of the VC mines are antipersonnel, the tracks could absorb the explosions with no damage done to them or the people inside. My platoon rode along just as security in case we were

attacked. We spent the whole day clearing the three fields and came up with a big zero.

The tracks were then returning us to where we would stay overnight. When we reached our spot we jumped off the tracks, and one of my men jumped right onto a mine. Both his feet were blown off, both legs were torn to shreds – his entire groin area was completely blown away. It was the most horrible sight I've ever seen. Fortunately he never knew what hit him. I tried to revive him with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but it was hopeless to begin with.

In addition, the explosion wounded seven other people (four seriously) who were dusted off my medevac, and three others lightly, who were not dusted off. Of the four seriously wounded, one received a piece of shrapnel in the heart and may not survive. The other three were almost completely riddled with shrapnel, and while they will be completely all right, it will be a slow and painful recovery.

I was one of the slightly wounded. I got three pieces in my left arm, one in my right knee, and twenty in both legs. I am completely all right. In fact I thought I had only gotten one in the arm and one in the knee. It was not until last night when I took off my clothes to take a shower that I noticed the other spots where I had been hit.

I came back to Chu Lai yesterday because my knee is now quite stiff and swollen, and will probably be here a couple of days, what with x-rays and what not. Believe it or not, I am extremely anxious to get back to platoon. Having been through this, I am now a bonafide member of the platoon. They have always followed my orders, but I was an outsider. Now I'm a member of the team, and it feels good.

I want to assure you that I am perfectly all right. You will probably get some sort of notification that I was lightly wounded, and I just don't want you to worry about it at all. I will receive a Purple Heart for it. People over here talk about the Million-Dollar Wound. It is one which is serious enough to warrant evacuation to the States but which will heal entirely. Therefore, you might call mine a Half-Million-Dollar Wound. My RTO, who was on my track sitting right next to me, caught a piece of shrapnel in his tail, and since he had caught a piece in his arm about two months ago, he'll get out of the field with wounds about as serious as a couple of mosquito bites.

I said earlier that the incident changed me. I am now filled with both respect and hate for the VC and the Vietnamese. Respect because the enemy knows that he can't stand up to us in a fire fight due to our superior training, equipment and our vast arsenal of weapons. Yet he is able. Via his mines and booby traps, he can whittle our ranks down piecemeal until we cannot muster an effective fighting force.

groin skridtet
resuscitation genoplivelse
medevac helikopter til
borttransport af sårede
shrapnel granatsplinter
riddled gennemhullet
swollen opsvulmet
bonafide ægte
Purple Heart medalje som
gives til soldater, der er
blevet såret i kamp
warrant berettigede
RTO = Radio-Telephone
Operator
vast umådelig
booby trap minefælde
whittle nedskære
piecemeal stykke for stykke

verify bekræfte, bevise
dink vietnameser (nedsæt-
tende)

In the month that I have been with the company, we have lost 4 killed and about 30 wounded. We have not seen a single verified dink the whole time, nor have we even shot a single round at anything. I've developed hate for the Vietnamese because they come around selling Cokes and beer to us and then run back and tell the VC how many we are, where our positions are, and where the leaders position themselves. In the place where we got hit, we discovered four other mines, all of them placed in the spots where I, my platoon sergeant, and two squad leaders had been sitting. I talked to the mechanized platoon leader who is with us and he said that as he left the area to return to his fire base, the people in the village he went through were laughing at him because they knew we had been hit. I felt like turning my machine guns on the village to kill every man, woman and child in it.

Sorry this has been an unpleasant letter, but I'm in a rather unpleasant mood.

All love,
Mike