

31 Jan 68

Hi,

As I am sure you know, we had a little excitement here at Bien Hoa and adjacent Long Binh (Army) last night. We were on condition red (imminent attack) from 6PM on. Most of us went to bed around 9PM. The first mortar and rocket rounds hit at exactly 3AM. As a result of having practiced it before I made very good time from asleep in bed to inside the bunker carrying my flight suit, boots, and gun belt. The VC were trying to overrun the base and it was very impressive watching the army Huey Cobra choppers strafe and rocket the VC. The attackers got to within 100 yds of our squadron before being pushed back by the security police with M-16's and large machine guns. The only fire which our housing area received was sporadic sniper fire and a little shrapnel from mortar rounds hitting near the army chopper pad next to our area. I was scheduled to fly the first daylight sortie but the flight was cancelled because some VC were holed up

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at the end of the runway and had machine guns and grenades. In other words, it wasn't considered safe to taxi by them to take off to the west and we would have surely been shot out of the sky taking off to the east. (The major attacking force was concentrated just on the east perimeter of the base.) They finally killed most of the VC entrenched at the end of the runway and took some prisoners. The way the ARVN troops handled the VC was just like the newsreels - VC kneeling, hands behind their backs (tied), chin on their chest and a machine gun barrel against the back of their head. The VC prisoners tend not to make any trouble in that position.

I snapped a couple of slides this morning of some of the damage. I wish I had thought to bring my camera home from the squadron (where I keep it locked up) last night; I probably could have gotten some fantastic pictures of the battle down by the runway and the ammo dump explosion at Long Binh which was unthinkably large.

Well - to change the subject: It is possible that the finance office here decided to wait

until today (payday) to send one large check (around \$1200). So wait until two days after you receive this letter before raising Cain with 'em. If it hasn't arrived then, I will ch... (9 HOURS LATER, for intervening activities, see below) check with our finance office.

The most exciting experience of my tour here so far took place in the 9 hours noted above. The phone rang and the C.O. said to get right down to the squadron. As soon as I arrived I went into cocked alert status. This means that I have all my equipment in my airplane and have everything prefighted. Then when they need an immediate air strike I run from the squadron to the airplane, jump in, and push the start button. I strap in while taxiing out.

At 1645, after 4 hours of alert status, the phone call came. The 101st airborne had surrounded a North Vietnamese company right off the end of the runway and was engaged in heavy fighting. The NVA's were also shooting at the base. We orbited over the base for 1 and a half hour

and 20 minutes while the army tried to relocate and the army general tried to handle it with artillery. The artillery strike was ended when rounds started hitting our army troops. Then we were called in. They were very hesitant about an air strike because the troops were so close to the target and there was absolutely no margin for error. The friendly troops marked their positions with colored smoke, which was very difficult to see due to haze and the sun low in the sky. My leader, Major Bulger, rolled in and put his napalm on target. I followed with my napalm right on target. We could see them shooting at us the whole time. We each made 2 bombing passes after that and put all bombs right on target. My bomb which was the last one dropped scored a direct hit on a storage building and caused numerous secondary explosions. I pulled off this pass, changed to tower frequency, declared emergency fuel, and headed for downwind by for landing. (I had about 10 minutes of fuel left when I landed)

I might reiterate that this strike was about 1000 yds from the flight line and is the closest F100 airstrike to the base. The flight line was filled with crew chiefs and others cheering every pass we made. They said it was like a three ring circus. They said they could see track rounds all around us on our passes and watched the bombs and napalm come off the airplanes and head toward the ground. I will try to get some of the scores of slides and movies that were taken of us.

You are probably wondering since this letter so far is filled with so much excitement how I feel about all this. Since I have been here I have only been scared *once and that was when I was napalming this afternoon. Not because of the VC shooting at me - but afraid I might miss by a few feet. It is an awesome responsibility.

The * above denotes a lapse of 15 minutes spent in the bunker because a mortar attack was expected momentarily. They changed their minds and I am back in my room waiting for tonight's attack. (act)

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The only attack last night was a gun battle at the gate of the officers quarters compound. We were all out there with our sidearms and M-16's but nothing very serious developed.

I had best get this in the mail now. I have enclosed a news release about my first mission here (The bomb I'm talking about was napalm - but that's bad for public relations etc etc).

Love Rick