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Tuesday - 5 Nov 68 - Camp Eagle

Today is election day back in the states, or "back in the World" as the troops say. The election is between Humphrey and Nixon, with Wallace having considerable effect. Today is my first full day at Camp Eagle. Today I find that I am assigned to an infantry battalion, the 2nd Bn of the 327 ABN Infantry, a glider outfit in WWII. I saw a couple of movies outside this evening.

Wednesday - 6 Nov 68 - Camp Eagle

Rain today.

This evening we had a farewell party for "Charger", the departing CO of our No Slack Battalion. After Charger gave his ~~farewell~~ little talk and things settled down to a dull roar, I got eyeball to eyeball with him. I told him that I was the new battalion chaplain. He gave me a little pastoral theology. "When you visit the troops," he growled, "always bring something with you. A case of Coke or a case of beer or a case of grenades. But bring something!"

I would like to have served with Charger.

Thursday - 7 Nov 68 - Camp Eagle

Today we hear that Richard M. Nixon is to be our new Commander-in-Chief, come next January.

Friday - 8 Nov 68 - Camp Eagle

Many of the Negro troopers salute each other with a raised fist. This recalls the raised fists of John Carlos and Tommy Smith on the winners' stand at the Olympic Games in Mexico.

Today I rode in a supply truck all thru the AO (area of operations) of the No Slack Battalion. It ~~xx~~ turns out that I will have to visit four centers of troop population to see all my people.

X Last night we saw a movie about GIs starring Bob Hope. It was interesting to sit on a hillside at Camp Eagle and watch a movie about GIs sitting on a hillside watching a movie.

Helicopters fly around and over us every day. The ground is just plain dirt, and there are big long trenches to jump into during alerts. Charlie shoots rockets in here sometimes (like last night) and we put on flak jackets and steel pots and jump in a trench. Last night Charlie was not a good shot.

Saturday - 9 Nov 68 - Camp Eagle

There are certain things a soldier learns to accept. Like authority. And hurrying up and waiting. And frustration.

Another fact of life for a soldier is poverty. As I look around my tent, there is hardly a single thing I can refer to as my personal possession. I have alot of things -- but they supply people issued them to me and I will give them back when I leave.

This came especially true for me when I picked up my laundry today. Vietnamese natives do it and mine cost 60 cents this time. I had given them one pair of jungle fatigue pants and I got a different pair back. I had given them five pairs of black sox -- I got back five OD pairs. I had given them a white towel -- I got an OD one back. The only identical thing I got back was my fatigue shirt -- and that was because my name is on it.

Like ~~monks~~ monks and nuns, soldiers take a vow ~~of~~ of poverty. They stand to be separated from their possessions at any given time.

Wednesday - 13 Nov 68 - TOC

Today was my first day to travel throughout the AO as battalion chaplain. This morning I traveled with the doctor and this afternoon with one of the company commanders. It is exciting to see the general ~~spirit~~ spirit of willingness and eagerness among the troops. And the desire of the officers to inspire and lead. Life around here is often hard and not a lot of fun. It even takes a lot of effort to care for your own personal needs. I haven't had a shower since Sunday. I was lucky to get one then. Many of our people have gone without a shower for a lot longer. But here at the TOC we get two hot meals per day, plus C-rations for lunch. That's not bad.

This morning I took a walk up to OP (Observation Post) One. A four-man fire team took me up, carrying <sup>three</sup> ~~2~~ M16 rifles and one M79 grenade launcher. We walked for about 25 minutes to get up to the OP. There are four men up there and they rotate with another four-man team every three days. I took four apples up there with me. I chatted with the men for a while and then we came down. That took 15 minutes.

Thursday - 14 Nov 68 - Eagle

Shaving in Viet Nam. Everybody in the Army in Viet Nam shaves every day. Unless he is out on a combat assault. In the field shaving is no ~~problem~~ trouble. You just wait till there is enough daylight, and then shave with cold water and canned lather. But if you are back here in the rear and want to shave before daylight, you may be in trouble. The experienced rear area soldier in Viet Nam always owns his own light bulb. He locks it in his foot locker except when actually using it for shaving. He takes his bulb with him to the shower shack, lights up and shaves. If the generators are working. You really appreciate a good shave over here. When you can get one.

Friday - 15 Nov 68 - Eagle

Today I attend my first monthly meeting with all the chaplains in the 101st Airborne Division. There are about 20 of us. Many of the chaplains who came over together about one year ago are preparing to go home. I will soon be one of the old timers.

Saturday - 16 Nov 68 - TOC

I was driving along Highway One today and saw several of our troops. I gave them some goodie packages people sent to me to give to them. The presents were Christmas wrapped and Thanksgiving hasn't even come yet. But the guys really like the stuff. Gifts they really appreciated were a comb, a pair of nail clippers, and some real live, genuine, green toilet paper. And one of the givers really had his head screwed on straight. He sent several back issues of Playboy. If it is more blessed to receive than give, these troops are more blessed.

Thursday - 21 Nov 68 - Coast of the South China Sea

Sounds: Our two Vietnamese scouts conversing in their native language -- crashing breakers about 100 meters away -- buzz and static of a field radio. -- a chopper overhead. Feelings: A bit of a sunburn -- a stomach full with a C-ration meal, and I have a can of beer for later -- sand between my toes -- a clean body.

A big day. I got off Hill 88 and checked in with Ramrod. He said a man had been killed over in Alpha Company and that I ought to go spend a couple of nights with them. It was a short chopper ride. Joe had been killed by a mine and the men were pretty down hearted. He had only a week to go before going back to the World.

I had a beautiful bath in a little stream with a waterfall and decided I would offer that as my Eucharist for the day. Butk there is more.

The men asked for services. I celebrated the Communion on a rock for a total of 22 men. We remembered Joe and I used the Proper for a Requiem and my white vestments (my green ones turned inside out). Then I walked with two other soldiers over to the command element of Alpha Company. It was a 45-minute walk thru marshes and jungle and swamp, sometimes in water belt-high. I was tired when I got over there, but I dropped my rucksack and walked thru the trees to the ocean. I swam nude in the fine breakers and thought: Is this war? I staggered out of the salt water and walked along the beach of clean, fine, white sand. Did you know that dry sand will squeak under your heels? I picked up some little sea shells to send home and prove I've been here. Thanks be to God!

Friday - 22 Nov 68 - FSB Tomahawk

Just before I came to Viet Nam, Chaplain Schappell told me that here ~~my~~ my emotions would find highs and lows, in rapid sequence, that I had not known before. He was right. When I jumped out of that chopper and joined up with Alpha Company, many of the men had just heard of Joe's death, and some had not yet heard. At two Eucharists I suggested that his death was not tragic, and that we ought to give thanks for his life. Then I crashed around in the breakers of the South China Sea. Then last night the CO of Alpha Company heard that his wife had given birth to their second son, Brian Allen, mother and baby doing fine. I was glad to be here to share the joy of that announcement. We celebrated with beer and gouda cheese. The boy will be an airborne Ranger for sure. There is a time to die and a time to be born. There is a time to weep and a time to give thanks. There is a time for every purpose under heaven.

A religious man is one who uses the English language the same way both when the chaplain is around, and when the chaplain isn't around.

Five years ago today President Kennedy died. Today is the first time the anniversary of his death has fallen on Friday. Everybody can tell you all about his feelings on that Black Friday. But we have to go beyond that now. What is important now is to make him proud of us. Let us begin!



Tuesday - 26 Nov 68 - TOC

Counseling is speeded up in a combat ~~xxxxxxxx~~ situation. You can't expect second interviews and the usual drill. You have to work fast. You have to get the content of what the man is saying and decide which of four categories he fits into. 1) Guidance. The man asks you a question and you answer it. 2) Neurotic. The man has a problem and he knows it. You help him come to his own solution, often by giving him alternatives. 3) Psychotic. The man has a problem but he doesn't know that he has it. You tell the ~~man~~ Surgeon. 4) Reference. The man has a problem and needs the help of someone other than me. You send him to the right place.