from Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam

Letter from Captain Rodney R. Chastant
Hhe-Phu Bai
29 June 68

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 best for his welfare. It made me sad. I want so much to make you proud . . .

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 . . .


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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 in 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 the 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 . . .

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 universities. Some choose to fight in the parliaments. 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

**Letter from PFC George Robinson**

Dear Mom,

. . . I’ve seen some things happen here lately that have moved me so much that I’ve changed my whole outlook on life. I’ll be the same in actions, I guess, but inside I’ll be changed. I feel different now after seeing some horrible things, and I’ll never forget them. It makes you glad you’re just existing. I can’t say what I mean, but some of the things you see here can really change a man or turn a boy into a man.

Any combat GI that comes here doesn’t leave the same. I don’t mean the cooks, clerks, or special service workers, but the fighting man. I doubt if anybody realizes what combat is really like. I thought I knew until a few days ago when I started facing
harsh realities and forgetting TV and movie interpretations. I never had much respect for GIs even after I was in for a while, but since I’ve seen what his real job is, I have more respect for him that any man on earth. To shoot and kill somebody, turn your head and walk away isn’t hard; it’s watching him die that’s hard, harder than you could imagine and even harder when it’s one of your own men.

I’ve said enough about it. Don’t ask any questions. When I come home, if I feel like talking about it I will, but otherwise don’t ask. It may sound dramatic, and I’ll tell you, it is. It’s just something you don’t feel like discussing and can’t begin to write about.

Well, Mom. I’ll sign off. Be careful driving.

Love,

George

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What do you think of Rod’s reasons for wanting to stay in Vietnam?

__________________________________________________________________________

2. How might George’s outlook on life have changed by what he has seen in Vietnam?

__________________________________________________________________________

MAKE A COMPARISON

1. In what ways are Rod and George’s views of soldiers similar?

__________________________________________________________________________

2. From George’s letter, do you think he would agree or disagree with Rod’s decision to stay in Vietnam? Explain your response.

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