

Storyteller: Timothy J. McCann
1st Air Cavalry Division
Purple Heart, Bronze Star Medal and
Commendation Award Recipient

Ed. Note: Tim's letters home to his parents were edited only for brevity, not for content. They tell Tim's story of the 100 days that changed his life forever.



VIETNAM
DECEMBER 19, 1969—MARCH 28, 1970

100 days, One Bullet, 25 Yrs. of Pain

19 December 1969

I've been assigned to my permanent unit which is in the First Cavalry Division. We are air mobile. We have 433 helicopters for our use.

26 December 1969

Right now we're at fire base "Lee!" Everything I had in my possession was taken away from me. I have a ring and a watch. The fire base camp is about 30 miles from Cambodia and 120 miles north of Saigon.

Early January 1970

We finally made it out to the jungle. Walk through brush so thick you can't see more than a foot all around you . . . cross streams and walk through mud up to your knees and sometimes higher. We are up in the mountains . . . all we do is climb up and down hills and with about 80 lbs. on your back it's no easy chore. After walking through a mud pond the other day, I picked 3 leeches off my legs. Ants crawl all over you and bugs everywhere. It really is a great life.

12 January 1970

All we do all day is hump through the mountains looking for the enemy. My pack weighs 95 pounds and when you carry it on your back all day you're pretty beat by the end of the day.

It seems the leadership lacks one important factor and that is plain old common sense.

16 January 1970

Our unit went 61 days without enemy contact but that changed yesterday! Thanks to our fearless leaders, one man was killed. All because they were in a hurry. That is just one more thing it doesn't pay to do. You make too much noise and the enemy just sits and waits for you.

Last night we took 27 casualties. The enemy must have watched us set up and just as soon as it got dark, bang the crap really hit the fan.

18 January 1970

It has been real scary out in the jungle lately. We have had 4 men killed and 35 injured all in one week. I've seen more mangled, twisted, bloody bodies in the last week than I can do with. The smell of death is a real foul odor and something I can do without!

9 February 1970

Things have been pretty quiet lately and I hope it stays that way 'till I get home! The Army has figured out over the years they have been here, in a year you only have four hours of actual fighting or firing your weapon. That isn't bad, but it only takes a few seconds to get killed.

Letter Received Home March 3, 1970

They took our air mattresses away from us cause they make too much noise when you turn about them at night. So now, we sleep on the good old hard ground. War sure is hell!!

3 March 1970

Everybody knows God over here and are pretty close to him.

12 March 1970

You say everybody says the time has gone by fast. Well it seems like an awful long time for me. You really can get lonely over here. It seems like a lifetime before you will be going home. Keep sending the Kool-Aid cause it comes in real handy. As you know, the water, most of it is pretty bad. The Kool-Aid makes it taste real good.

21 March 1970

Well, I'll be twenty-three tomorrow. Don't bother to send money cause I have no way to spend it. Well I'll say good-bye now so I can mail this one now. Love, Tim

Western Union Telegram

MR. AND MRS. THOMAS D. MCCANN,
MANCHESTER CONN. MAR 30 1970
THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HAS
ASKED ME TO INFORM YOU THAT
YOUR SON, PRIVATE FIRST CLASS
TIMOTHY J. MCCANN WAS WOUNDED
IN ACTION IN VIETNAM ON 28 MARCH
1970 BY SMALL ARMS FIRE WHILE ON
A COMBAT OPERATION WHEN A HOS-
TILE FORCE WAS ENCOUNTERED. HE
RECEIVED WOUNDS TO HIS BUT-
TOCKS WITH PENETRATION OF THE
PELVIS, LACERATION OF THE URE-
THRA, SCIATIC NERVE INJURY, AND
POSSIBLE INJURY OF THE RECTUM. A
COLOS-TOMY HAS BEEN PERFORMED.
ON 29 MARCH 1970 HE WAS PLACED
ON THE SERIOUSLY ILL LIST AND IN
THE JUDGMENT OF THE ATTENDING
PHYSICIAN HIS CONDITION IS OF
SUCH SEVERITY THAT THERE IS
CAUSE FOR CONCERN, BUT NO IMMI-
NENT DANGER TO LIFE. PLEASE BE
ASSURED THAT THE BEST MEDICAL
FACILITIES AND DOCTORS HAVE
BEEN MADE AVAILABLE AND THAT
EVERY MEASURE IS BEING TAKEN TO

AID HIM. HE IS HOSPITALIZED IN
VIETNAM. ADDRESS MAIL TO HIM AT
THE HOSPITAL MAIL SECTION, APO
SAN FRANCISCO 96347. YOU WILL BE
PROVIDED PROGRESS REPORTS AND
KEPT INFORMED OF ANY SIGNIFI-
CANT CHANGES IN HIS CONDITION.
KENNETH G. WICKMAN, MAJOR
GENERAL U.S.A. C 088 115 THE
ADJUTANT GENERAL, DEPARTMENT
OF THE ARMY, WASH, DC.

**Location: Vietnam Patient Ward 887
April 2, 1970**

Well, the Army must have notified you by now of me getting wounded. If not, well now you know! I got shot during a firefight on Easter near Cambodia. I've been in bed for a week and everything seems to be coming along O.K. I just thank God I'm still alive. Pretty soon I'll be going to Japan for recuperation and then most likely back to the world!

I don't feel too much like writing cause of all the drugs so good-bye. Love, Tim P.S. Use my same address 'till I get a new one and don't send any more packages 'till I tell you to!

Location: Japan, Early April 1970

Hi,

Well, I'm beginning to feel a little better now, well good enough to try and write a letter anyways! I'm in Japan and have been since April 3rd. The funniest thing happened here. When they brought me here and put me in bed at the hospital, I looked over two beds and guess who was there? Bob Sposito. It seemed so funny cause I was just thinking about him and there he was. He is getting along good too! We might fly home together?

Well, I still haven't gotten out of bed yet. Well, I can't move too good with my foot the way it is. I still have a great deal of pain from the damaged nerves, but that's what God is for and also pain killers!! I might have to wear a brace on my leg for awhile, maybe even permanent. Well, I'll think about that later?

I know both Dad and you have been cut open from operations and had all kinds of tubes in you, and knows what the pain is like after everything, so no need to say any-

thing about that.

I have been getting so much mail and from people I hardly know and in some cases from people I don't know at all. They are so nice to send me cards and everything and it makes you feel better!

I should start walking or try walking this week and be on my way home by week after next. You know the Army, so it could be sooner or later, I don't know.

I should get a hospital close to home, but I know not where. If my handwriting looks different, it's because I'm on my back and have this special device over me and it's awkward writing.

I've got two huge packages here at the hospital and the only stuff I can keep is the juice. Well, at least what the other guys can't eat the nurses and medics will be able to!! I'll have them send you a thank you note. Ha Ha!

As far as I can recall, it was Easter about 1 p.m. in the afternoon when I got wounded. What a weird feeling it was when I got shot. I might as well explain so you'll know what the story is.

As you must have noticed, the trend has been moving the war maybe to Cambodia, Laos or someplace like that. Well that seems to be where all the enemy are on the borders of these places so off we go to try and get them and kill them!

Well, for the week before I got wounded we were working within a quarter mile from Cambodia & Laos so it is just crawling with them everywhere. We got ambushed the day before and two guys got killed. So we knew we were in store for something? The next day was quiet, too quiet! About noontime we stopped for lunch and then it all began! We sent out a patrol to check out the area and they walked into an enemy base camp. They were ready and really had us trapped! They have both halves of the company separated and pinned down! We finally got together after about an hour of continuous fighting! I know 7 guys, 3 I know real well got killed and God, I don't know how many got wounded? Well anyways, when I got hit our squad was going out to look for two dead guys we couldn't account for. We went out a little ways and the enemy opened up again on us! We thought we got them all, but I guess not!

Well anyways, we were pinned down again! We started crawling back to the somewhat safety of our perimeter we had set up. Well, I got all the way back and into the perimeter before I got hit in the left cheek of my ass, it went sideways through me and out the other cheek! The only thing bad was the internal damage, but still, I was lucky it didn't hit any bones or it really would have done some damage!!

Have you ever hit your crazy bone in your elbow and get that tingly sensation? Well that's what from my waist down felt like then my left side went numb! This was about 1 o'clock and we still fought till about 2 o'clock and it was 5 o'clock before we could get a helicopter in to evacuate us wounded. What's worse, it started pouring and we had to climb a 500 foot hill to get to a spot so the helicopters could land. That was the biggest and longest and hardest thing I ever want to do. If I could have done anything I wanted to do then, it would have been to die!! But I guess it was my faith in God, or just my determination to live that kept me going and I finally made it to the hospital.

The next week was fast, cause I was on so much medication. I don't remember much of anything! Just when they all of a sudden think if they give you another shot you'll become a dope addict and suddenly they stop and here comes the pain!! At least now I can say I understand what it is to be in pain! I feel pretty much better now, but the pain is still there. I've somewhat learned to accept it and pray and cry a lot.. But I'll make it and one thing that counts the most, I'm still alive and I can't thank God enough for that fact!!

I got my Purple Heart and I even got a Commendation for Bravery from the Army Department. They gave me a certificate and all the goodies. One thing I can say about my unit, the 1st Cavalry Division, they didn't forget about me! As soon as I got there they had a Chaplain there and every day, twice a day, they would come through and see if I needed anything like cigarettes, magazine or anything. Some General came and saw me and shook my hand and thanked me for fighting. It is really amazing how nice your are treated after you get wounded and how much they appreciate you after. You're nothing before but after it

happens, they can't seem to do enough for you, when it's too late. Why don't they try a little harder to make things easier for you when you need it most, and maybe these things would never happen?

I think this is the longest letter I've ever written. Well at least it tired me out! It has taken me two and a half hours to write it, but I had to let you know how things are with me.

I'm going to try and write Marilyn and Jr. tomorrow. She writes such beautiful letters and I feel so much better after I read one from her. She knows just what to write and how to write it!

Well, I'm all tired out now, so I'll end it here. All my love, Tim "See you soon"
Peace

Excerpt from

"Old Manchester II... The Storytellers;" compiled, written and edited by Milton K. Adams; photographic reproductions by Anthony J. Thibeau. Published by the Manchester Historical Society, November 1995.

Copies of book available at the History Center, 175 Pine St., Manchester, CT 06040; phone 860-647-9983. Our website: www.manchesterhistory.org

