

MEMORANDUM
RM-5852-ISA ARPA
MAY 1969

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DOCUMENTS OF
AN ELITE VIET CONG DELTA UNIT:
The Demolition Platoon of the 514th Battalion -
Part Five: Personal Letters

David W. P. Elliott and Mai Elliott

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PREFACE

The present Memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the continuing study of Communist organization and operations undertaken by The RAND Corporation for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) and for the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense. It is one of a series of five closely related collections of captured Viet Cong documents, translated by RAND consultant Mai Elliott and with introductory material provided by David W. P. Elliott, now a RAND consultant but formerly a member of the research staff leading an interview team in Dinh Tuong province. Editing of the documents has been held to a minimum. Published separately for convenience in handling, the complete series consists of the following titles:

- Part 1: Unit Composition and Personnel
- Part 2: Party Organization
- Part 3: Military Organization and Activities
- Part 4: Political Indoctrination and Military Training
- Part 5: Personal Letters

To facilitate the reader's comprehension of any single part, this Preface to the entire series and its appended Chronology are prefixed to each Memorandum.

Although literally tons of documents have been captured from Viet Cong political organizations and military units, detailed records of the entire scope of activities and personnel of such units and organizations are rare. Typically, documents appear to cover only a few aspects of the organization from which they come and often raise as many questions

as they answer. A contributory reason may be that large organizations tend to disperse their records both as a consequence of their size and the diversity of their component parts and as a security precaution. Small units and organizations, while often maintaining central files, are normally represented by documents of limited value.

The collection of documents presented here is unique in presenting a detailed and comprehensive picture of a military unit that, although limited in size, reflects the organizational principles and problems of the larger force to which it is attached. At the same time, the smallness of the unit allows the important factor of personality to come into clear focus, thus complementing the recitation of abstract organizational details.

These documents were captured in mid-May 1967 by an element of a U.S. brigade operating in the Mekong Delta. Their comprehensiveness indicates that an entire file of unit records was captured intact. The records include unit rosters, personnel records, documents relating to Party activities in the unit, training documents, operational plans, unit critiques, and personal letters. Comprehensive as they are, those presented in this series are only a selection from a still larger number of documents. They do, however, exemplify most of the significant data that appear in the omitted documents.

The documents are from the records of a demolition platoon of the 514th Battalion, the Local Force unit of My Tho Province in the Mekong Delta. They reflect not only the organization and command structure of the demolition platoon but that of the battalion as well. Several documents from the battalion command staff discuss problems that go beyond the immediate concern of the demolition unit itself.

An integral part of the 514th Battalion, the demolition platoon participated in many, but not all, of its battles. Since the Battalion often dispersed its companies for operations, not all of its elements were engaged in combat at the same time. Moreover, the 514th Battalion normally played a largely defensive role in its operational area. When it did engage in offensive operations, it relied heavily on the demolition unit as the cutting edge of its attack. The unit leader notes that, "We have the responsibility of being the forward group in any attack, of opening the way for the other elements, and of removing obstacles, erected by the enemy to stop our advance, with explosives."

"Since we are the fighters who have to carry out attacks with explosives," the unit leader adds, "we should always be brave and heroic. We should carry out any task assigned to us, whether it be an attack on enemy forces stationed in posts or in the field." Because of its vanguard role in combat and the need to rely on individual initiative when the unit was operating in a dispersed pattern that makes centralized command difficult, heavy emphasis was placed on developing a unit of highly motivated members. Thus, an unusually high proportion of demolition unit members belong to the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) and the PRP Youth Group.

The period covered in the documents runs approximately from the beginning of 1966 to mid-May 1967, when the documents were captured. During this time, unit records contain at least five plans of attack but mention only three being carried out. In May 1967, the 514th Battalion and the demolition unit were subjected to a series of attacks by a

U.S. infantry unit that resulted in the Battalion's defeat and the capture of these documents.

The years 1963 to 1964 marked a campaign period that was fairly successful for the 514th Battalion. Its fortunes slipped somewhat in 1965 and 1966, then briefly improved in 1967 with a successful attack on a GVN pacification project. In the above-mentioned series of battles in May 1967, the Battalion was put out of action until the Tet offensive of February 1968. As a consequence, the documents show the unit at a low ebb. Under-strength and not often in action, the 514th Battalion and the demolition unit spent much of the time training, reorganizing, and bolstering unit morale. This relatively low level of offensive military activity thus actually allows us a clearer view of the unit's nature and composition than we could normally have gained of a similar unit busily engaged in offensive operations.

Like all records of contemporary events, this one remains incomplete despite its volume and wealth of detail. From the nadir of its fortunes in May 1967, the 514th Battalion and its demolition unit recovered to play a prominent role in the partially successful and immensely destructive Tet Assault on My Tho, the Delta province town, in February 1967. In the absence of specific information concerning the revival of this unit in the intervening months, it is difficult to say how the recovery was accomplished and how permanent it will prove to be. Nevertheless, the following documents give a detailed view of the foundation on which this revival was based, and very likely provide more than a glimpse of underlying strengths and weaknesses of other and larger Viet Cong military organizations.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE C646 DEMOLITION UNIT OF THE
MY THO PROVINCE 514th LOCAL FORCE BATTALION

- May 6, 1966: Request from the demolition unit's Party Chapter to the battalion for additional men to add to current unit strength of 25.
- May 8, 1966: Three-month training course for the demolition unit initiated.
- May 27, 1966: Attack on Vinh Kim District Town by 514th Battalion and the demolition unit.
- June 1, 1966: Conference of all cadres in the battalion to discuss the new political mission set forth by the Battalion Party Committee.
- July 19, 1966: Planning for attack on Cay Son.
- Aug 12, 1966: Battalion assigned a new area of operation by the Province Military Affairs Section.
- Aug 13, 1966: Battalion moves to Hoa Dong District, Go Cong Province (part of the Viet Cong My Tho Province).
- Sept 17, 1966: Meeting of all political and military cadres in the battalion to discuss the attack on "K 100," or Vinh Kim village. There are no records of the attack taking place.
- Oct 17, 1966: Demolition unit commander notes that unit strength is down to 16 men and requests reinforcements.
- November 1966: One month of training scheduled.
- Dec 21, 1966: Unit strength totals 23 men, 19 present for duty.
- Jan 2, 1967: Indoctrination to launch the 3rd Phase of Activities.
- Jan 9, 1967: Six-day training program initiated with emphasis on political training.
- Feb 7, 1967: Battalion in bivouac for Tet.
- Feb 12, 1967: Conference of all cadres in battalion to review the tasks performed in the winter phase and to communicate to all cadres the tasks to be performed during the spring phase.

- Feb 22, 1967: Thirty-day training program ordered by the Battalion Command Staff.
- Feb 23, 1967: Conference of all military and political cadres in the battalion "to discuss the K 140 and K 111 military plans" on the "center of pacification of the enemy."
- Feb 25, 1967: New additions to unit, but active strength remains 19 members.
- Feb 28, 1967: Political indoctrination on the role of the cadres.
- March 1, 1967: Another plan of attack on points "K 11C, K 18C, and K 18B" is disseminated.
- March 4, 1967: Evaluation of the spring campaign.
- April 6, 1967: Orders given for "deep penetration into enemy areas." Battalion splits into companies.
- April 9, 1968: Meeting of all Company Command Staffs and of the Battalion Command Staff to discuss an attack plan, probably a continuation of the February 23 and March 1 plans.
- May 1, 1967: Sixteen-day training schedule issued by the Battalion Command Staff.
- May 3, 1967: Defense against a sweep operation in Long Tien village.
- May 13, 1967: Attack by the unit on Dong Hoa village, Chau Thanh District (K 19).
- May 15-17, 1967: Series of encounters with a US-GVN operation culminating in the loss of these documents.

SUMMARY

The letters that constitute this Memorandum are part of the correspondence that passed between members of a special demolition unit attached to the Viet Cong's 514th Battalion and their families and friends at home. They are the only unofficial documents among the many captured by a U.S. brigade in May 1967 and are chiefly concerned with their authors' personal lives, in this instance, their hopes and fears during the trials of war. The reader will discover nothing here resembling the "scholar at war." These are the private and simple annals of the obscure. But that is perhaps their value, for they succeed where official documents often fail, namely, in showing the enemy to be like soldiers everywhere.

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GUIDE TO THE DOCUMENTS IN THIS MEMORANDUM

The following correspondence provides a highly unusual insight into the personal lives of the fighters in the C646 unit. Most of the letters pertain to the Deputy Secretary of the unit's Labor Youth Chapter, Nguyen Van Be, often referred to by his nickname "Be Danh." There is also a brief correspondence between the unit's Party Chapter Secretary, Sau Kim, and his fiancée, as well as several miscellaneous letters concerning various other unit members.

While most of the documents pertaining to the C646 concern unit matters and official business, these letters reveal some of the personal preoccupations of its members. Since all correspondence between the unit's members, their families, and their friends is channeled through an elaborate Viet Cong postal system, the fear of censorship must certainly inhibit spontaneous communication of personal feelings. The fiancée of Sau Kim, the unit Party Chapter Secretary, complains: "Your letter to me was completely torn up when it reached me; the comrades in the unit censored it again. What a nuisance!"(25)*

Writing to a friend in the unit, a woman is likely to drop a hint: "My feelings are too profound, and I can't express them all on paper." There is reluctance to discuss other personal problems, even those of a nonromantic

* Superscribed numbers in parentheses refer to the documents correspondingly numbered and ordered in the body of the Memorandum. Documents are also listed by number and title on pages 5 and 6.

nature. Be Danh writes to his younger brother: "It is not convenient to talk about the things that concern us here. . . . If I write everything down here, "those guys will object."⁽¹⁷⁾ The objections of his superiors, however, did not prevent Be Danh from voicing this complaint in a letter that he presumed would be seen by them.

Although inhibitions about discussing delicate personal matters give the letters a rather self-conscious cast, there is no reason to assume that the contents are not sincere. Be Danh, whose fiancée was killed in an artillery shelling, composed several stirring patriotic poems about his determination to defeat the Americans and reunify the country. His confidante, Minh Anh, consoling him on the loss of his fiancée, observes that "the deeper your sorrow is the deeper your hatred against the enemy should be. . . ."⁽¹⁰⁾

Many of the admonishments and encouraging words contained in the correspondence are probably no more than the conventional formulae of letter writers everywhere. Nevertheless, they impart a strong feeling of group solidarity and social cohesiveness. The correspondence of Be Danh, and his address book containing nearly one hundred names of acquaintances throughout the province, suggest that a gregarious person may find compensation for the difficulties of a highly mobile existence in the opportunities it affords for meeting new people.

Judging from his correspondence, one can say that Be Danh discovered female admirers wherever he went. Although it is not certain when the death of his fiancée occurred, he seems to have wasted little time in brooding over it and had at least one other unsuccessful romance,

again chronicled by Minh Anh, who appears to have more than a casual interest in Be Danh's romantic preoccupations. (20)

The second correspondence is between the girl Phuong Trinh, a cadre in the Province Education Subsection, and Sau Kim, the Secretary of the unit's Party Chapter. To a proposal of marriage from Sau Kim, Phuong Trinh replies, "Your letter proposing to me shows that you are sincere and that you really want to marry me. I thank you for this." (24) A transcript of Sau Kim's self-criticism in the Party Chapter meeting gives a somewhat different impression: "I slept with a girl before telling the platoon I wanted to marry her." The report adds, "To make amends for these shortcomings, comrade Kim volunteered to marry Miss Phuong Trinh, who is now working in the My Tho Education Subsection."

The final three letters from the unit's correspondence reflect a new situation in early 1967. New members are taken in to augment the unit. The names of the final three correspondents do not appear in earlier letters, unit records indicating that they were newcomers. The arrival of U.S. troops in Dinh Tuong province and the increasing intensity of the fighting are signalled in these letters by more frequent references to "the American," a mention of "our first fight with the Americans," and a letter from the unit's command inquiring after the health of recently wounded soldiers. (27)

The last dated letter in the correspondence was written on May 12, 1967, shortly before the unit received a major setback in combat, resulting in the loss of these documents. A letter by a newly arrived member of the

unit says that ". . . everyone on the front line is in good health and we promise to achieve victory in the coming spring for the whole human race and for ourselves. As for me, I have thought of obtaining for myself. . . ." (28)

On this poignant note, the correspondence ends, without a hint of what the author hoped to gain from his struggle.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS IN THIS MEMORANDUM

1. Poem From a Notebook of Nguyen Van "Be Danh."
2. "Addresses of Friends," Compiled by Be Danh.
3. Letter to the Adopted "Mothers" of NLF Fighters by Be Danh.
4. "Fond Memories and Love From the Person in Phu Kiet Village to the Indomitable Fighter."
5. Letter From Be Danh to His Mother.
6. Letter From Be Danh to His Brothers.
7. Letter From Be Danh to His Aunt and Uncle.
8. Letter From Hoa to Sau Kim, Van Tri Phung, Hien and Be Danh.
9. Letter From Chin Thuan to Be Danh.
10. Letter From Minh Anh to Be Danh and Van Tri Phung.
11. Letter From Ngoc Suong to Be Danh.
12. Spring Letter From the Front Line to My Dear Older Sister in the Rear Area, From Be Danh.
13. Letter From Minh Anh to Be Danh.
14. Letter From Thanh Van to Danh, Manh, Phuoc, Met and Kim.
15. Letter From Be Danh to Ba.
16. Letter From Be Danh to Van Hiep.
17. Letter From Danh to His Brother Lung.
18. Letter From Kim Tuyen to Hien and Danh.
19. Letter From Tu Tuyet to Danh.
20. Letter From Minh Anh to Danh.
21. Letter From Minh Anh to Danh.
22. Letter From Tran Hien to Danh.
23. Letter From Lua to Sau Kim.
24. Letter From Phuong Trinh to Sau Kim.

25. Letter From Phuong Trinh to the Demolition Unit.
26. Letter From Le Hoang Luong to Muoi Thoi.
27. Letter From Huu to Nam Le, Nua and Loc.
28. Letter From Vo Minh to "Older Sister."

DOCUMENT NO. 1

POEM

FROM A NOTEBOOK OF NGUYEN VAN "BE DANH"

Autumn passes away, winter comes, and then spring returns.

I am as always enraptured by my mission.

Before me, flowers bloom in brilliant colors in front of
someone's house,

A bamboo branch sways gracefully, reminding me of the
native village I love.

Our unit stops to rest in an isolated area.

My shoes are still covered with dust gathered during
the march.

I hurriedly compose this letter to you

And send you all my love.

DOCUMENT NO. 2

ADDRESSES OF FRIENDS COMPILED BY BE DANH*

1. Anh Nam Da, X31, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Chau Thanh District Local Force.
2. Anh Ba Ro, X31, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Chau Thanh District Local Force.
3. Ban Thanh, X31, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Chau Thanh District Local Force.
4. Anh Van Thuong, 272nd unit, LT (Inter-province).

*Translator's Note: Forms of address used by Nguyen Van Be Danh, the author:

- (a) Anh: "older brother," form of address used for people of the same age or older, with whom one is close.
- (b) Chu: "younger brother", form of address used for people of younger age, or for men older than oneself, out of affection and respect.
- (c) Ban: "friend", form of address used for people with whom one is not close. There are instances, however, when this form of address is jokingly used when dealing with people with whom one is very close.
- (d) Chi: "older sister", form of address used for women older than oneself.
- (e) Thim: "aunt", affectionate form of address used for women much older than oneself.
- (f) Em: "Younger sister" or "darling", affectionate form of address used for women younger than oneself with whom one is close, or for one's sweetheart. It can also mean "younger brother" when used to address one's own brother or someone of younger age with whom one is close, or children.

5. Ban Tuan Kiet, 272nd Unit LT (Inter-province).
6. Ban Chin Cam, X21, Military Medical Branch, 1st Station, Chau Thanh District.
7. Ban Vien, X21, Military Medical Branch, 1st Station, Chau Thanh District.
8. Ban Chanh, X21, Military Medical Branch, 1st Station, Chau Thanh District.
9. Chu Hai Sanh, X21, Military Medical Branch, 1st Station, Chau Thanh District.
10. Anh Hai Phai, X21, Military Medical Branch, 1st Station, Chau Thanh District.
11. Anh Tam Xich, C 15, 170 X.
12. Anh Hoang, C 15, 170 X.
13. Anh Tien, C 15, 170 X.
14. Anh Muoi Mung, X31, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Chau Thanh District Local Force.
15. Anh Tam Quang, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
16. Anh Nam Bong, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
17. Anh Bay De, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
18. Anh Sau Coi, 311th Unit, Cai Be District Local Force.
19. Anh Tam Do, 311th Unit, Cai Be District Local Force.
20. Chu Sau Tien, 311th Unit, Cai Be District Local Force.
21. Ban Nghia, 311th Unit, Cai Be District Local Force.
22. Ban Bay De, 311th Unit, Cai Be District Local Force.
23. Anh Sau Tin, 311th Unit, Cai Be District Local Force.
24. Anh Sau Lung, Demolition Unit, Cai Be District.
25. Anh Nghia, Demolition Unit, Cai Be District.

26. Ban Dien, Demolition Unit, Hoa Dong District.
27. Ban Phat, Demolition Unit, Hoa Dong District.
28. Ban Duong Tien, Demolition Unit, Cai Be District.
29. Ban Long, 207th Unit, 514th Bn.
30. Ban Chien, 207th Unit, 514th Bn.
31. Ban Be Nam, 207th Unit, 514th Bn.
32. Ban Nguon, 3rd Co., 514th Bn.
33. Anh Nam Chau, Hau My Village Party Chapter, Cai Be District.
34. Anh Tu Hai, Hau My Village Party Chapter, Cai Be District.
35. Anh Ba Hien, Hau My Village Party Chapter, My Chanh Hamlet, Cai Be District.
36. Chu Chin Thanh, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
37. Chu Bay Dien, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
38. Chu Ngoc Thanh, Hau My Village Party Chapter, Cai Be District.
39. Ban Van Thuong, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
40. Ban, 348th Company, LT (Inter-province).
41. Ban Duc, 15th Co., 170 X.
42. Ban The, 15th Co., 170 X.
43. Ban Minh, 15th Co., 170 X.
44. Ban Day, 15th Co., 170 X.
45. Anh Nguyen Van Sau, Ap 2 Hamlet, Cam Son Village, Cai Lay District.
46. Anh Hai Phai, Chau Thanh District Military Medical Branch, X21.
47. Chu Ba Nu, Vinh Kim Village, Chau Thanh.

48. Ban Nam Giao, 964th Platoon, Demolition Unit, Cai Lay District.
49. Ban Muoi Thoi, 964th Platoon, Demolition Unit, Cai Lay District.
50. Ban Nam, 964th Platoon, Demolition Unit, Cai Lay District.
51. Ban Tan, 964th Platoon, Demolition Unit, Cai Lay District.
52. Ban Cuong, Hau Thanh Village, Cai Be District.

ADDRESSES OF FEMALE FRIENDS

1. Chi Be Bay, My Hoa Hamlet, Song Thuan Village, Chau Thanh District.
2. Chi Be Tam, My Hoa Hamlet, Song Thuan Village, Chau Thanh District.
3. Em Huong, My Hoa Hamlet, Song Thuan Village, Chau Thanh District.
4. Em Ba Mai, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
5. Em Hong Anh, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
6. Thim Kim Tien, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
7. Chi Sau Hong, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
8. Chi Bay Lan, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
9. Chi Hai Mai, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
10. Chi Sau Thanh, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.

11. Em Ngoc Suong, Military Medical Branch, X21, Chau Thanh District.
12. Em Minh Anh, GL (Commo-liaison) X19, Chau Thanh District.
13. Em Bay Anh, My Hoa B Hamlet, My Trung Village.
14. Chi Hung Dung, Women's Association, Cai Be District.
15. Em Be Hai, Huu Dien Hamlet, Huu Dao Village.
16. Em Bay Thu, Huu Dien Hamlet, Huu Dao Village.
17. Em Thu Trinh, Huu Dien Hamlet, Huu Dao Village.
18. Em Tam Bieu, Binh Trung Village, Chau Thanh District.
19. Em Be Ba, Binh Trung Village, Chau Thanh District.
20. Em Cam Quyen, Ap Hoa Hamlet, Huu Dao Village, Chau Thanh District.
21. Em Chin Thanh Lien, R79, Tan Huong Village, Chau Thanh District.
22. Chi Nam Hong, My Hanh Trung Village, Cai Lay District.
23. Em Bon Be, My Hung Trung Village, Cai Lay District.
24. Em Be Nam, B5, 860 X 16.
25. Chi Kim Hoa, C. 318 A, X 10, Bieu X.
26. Chi Kim Chau, C. 318 A, X 3, 16 BX.
27. Chi Sau Be, My Trinh Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
28. Chi Ba Manh, Rach Ong Cu Creek, Bang Long Village, Chau Thanh District.
29. Chi Chin Nghia, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
30. Chi Dinh Thi Nga, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
31. Chi Tu Tuyet, My Tuong Hamlet, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
32. Chi Be Muoi, X 16, Chau Thanh District, My Tho Province.
33. Chi Bay Anh, Hau My Village, Cai Be District.
34. Chi Cuc, GT, Tan Hoa Thanh Village, Chau Thanh District.

DOCUMENT NO. 3

LETTER TO THE ADOPTED "MOTHERS" OF N.L.F. FIGHTERS

BY BE DANH

Dear Mothers:

Tonight I can't go to sleep. I keep thinking of one thing and another. I'm lost in thought under the moonlit sky of the 12th lunar month, while all the other men are sleeping peacefully. Your son is clutching a carbine in his hands, and is looking toward the enemy post. Once in a while, a strong gust of wind chills me to the marrow. I think of the waning winter and the coming spring. Nothing has been changed, and we are indifferent to the spring that is approaching.

I recall that before, each time flowers bloomed indicating that spring was coming, everyone was excited and thrilled to welcome a beautiful spring.

This spring, how can we be happy when the Americans are still sowing so many sorrows and miseries, and when thousands of tons of bombs are falling on our fatherland, destroying and setting houses on fire, stripping the trees bare of leaves, forcing the people to flee and wander from place to place, and reducing them to a life of privation and hardship? How can I be happy when I think of all this? Wherever we go, we see only destruction -- heaps of ashes and debris where warm and happy homes used to be. What are we going to do? When the country is plunged in a sea of fire, the only thing we can do is to transform our hatred into action and make use of all our strength to

bring a spring of victory to the people. When victory is achieved, we will rebuild the bridge that links North and South, no matter what, so that North and South will be united again, and so that the loved ones who are now separated will be united again -- they are all anxiously looking forward to that.

This spring your children on the front line have only this letter, sent over the distances to the rear area, to inquire about our mothers and to wish them good health and strong energy to live forever and to enjoy a spring of victory and glory in 1966.

Your son,

Be Danh

DOCUMENT NO. 4

FOND MEMORIES AND LOVE FROM THE PERSON IN PHU KIET VILLAGE
TO THE INDOMITABLE FIGHTER

Love and attachment to the native village.

Strong bonds between the rear area and the front line.

FROM THE REAR AREA TO THE FRONT LINE

Here is all my love, offered to you.

I hear marching music echoing from somewhere.

I miss you and send you my love, my dearest.

I am proud to know a fighter

Who has unsheathed his sacred sword to relieve the country
of its burden,

Whose shoulders are bent under the weight of his love for
the country and for his family,

Who has girded himself for combat, and cherishes his adven-
turous life.

My dearest! Here's all my love to you!

This letter, written on paper from your own village,*

I send to you and sweetly say

Tomorrow, when victory is achieved, come and see me!

The troops will march majestically to the rhythm of the
victory song,

You will be striding heroically in the front rank,

Your warrior's vest will be worn out and faded.

I will welcome you and garland you with flowers,

I, the girl you have longed for,

Will offer you the garland of victory.

Signed: Be Danh

*This poem that Be Danh addressed to himself is written on a blank prescription form of a Saigon doctor.

DOCUMENT NO. 5

LETTER FROM BE DANH TO HIS MOTHER

To my respected Mother:

After completing my work and studies, I hurry to write this letter to inquire about your health and about the farm work of our family. First of all, I'd like to inquire about your health. Is it better than before? How is the farm work of our family this year? Is it progressing more satisfactorily than before? Have you planted the rice fields? What fruit has the orchard produced? Is our orchard bombed and shelled often? Please write so that I can share the good news. I am very anxious to hear from you.

My dear and respected mother, I have been gone for a long time, and yet I haven't sent you any letters. I am really very bad! I hope you will forgive me. Today Kinh is writing you, and so I take advantage of the occasion to dash off a few lines to inquire about your health. I wish you very good health and long life, so that you can enjoy the restoration of peace and witness the day of glory of your sons.

I send my regards to Lung and Ao. I wish you two good health and a strong capability to serve our mother in her old age. Lung, please give my regards to all our relatives and wish them satisfaction in their farm work for me. As for me, I am fine and I'm making good progress in my mission. Just a few lines to let you and Mother know how I'm doing.

Your older brother,

Be Danh.

DOCUMENT NO. 6

LETTER FROM BE DANH TO HIS BROTHERS

My two dear younger Brothers:

It's been a long time since we parted, and yet I haven't written you at all to inquire about your parents, your family, as well as you two. You must have been anxiously waiting to hear from me. Please sympathize with me, your older brother, who is constantly busy.

Today I have some free time, so I dash off this letter to ask about you and your family. First, please give my regards to your mother and father. Tell them I wish them good health and long life, so that they can enjoy a spring of victory in our fight against the Americans. Tell them I hope that they will become prosperous soon. Tell your sister and her husband that I wish them the same thing. I wish you two good health and a strong capability to help your family and make contributions to the Revolution.

I still remember the days when we saw each other often while going on mission. I remember we used to tell each other stories and drink tea merrily together. Even now, I still remember and cherish these stories. These stories will always remind us of each other now that Resistance circumstances have separated us. Even though we are far from each other, I never forget my two younger brothers. Even though we only met briefly, I love and miss my two amiable younger brothers, and my feelings are reinforced by the revolutionary love that binds us -- it

is through my combat mission that I met my two younger brothers. I still remember your innocent and frank talks, and I feel much attached to you both and to your beloved native village.

How have you been lately? Are you in good health? How is your farm work? What is the situation in your village now? Anything happy? Is the village still bombed and shelled often? How is the health of your parents and family?

Be Danh

DOCUMENT NO. 7

LETTERS FROM BE DANH TO HIS AUNT AND UNCLE

From: Nguyen Be Danh
Letter Box 11-207/FO T12

To: Uncle Hai Nam
Phu Kiet Village, Cho Gao District,
My Tho Province

Dear Uncle:

Recently I sent you a letter; I wonder whether you have received it or not since you haven't replied. I've been anxiously waiting to hear from you.

Today I ran into Anh Tu Luom, who is on his way back to the village from a training course, and so I'm dashing off a few lines to inquire about your health and the health of Auntie. Is your health as good as it used to be? Has Auntie recovered completely from her illness yet? Has her old illness gone away for good? How about your farm work? Have you finished planting for the early crop? Do the plants bear many grains? Does the orchard produce as much as when I was operating in the village? Are my cousins in good health? Is Be still operating for the Revolution? Is Be Tu still in school? Do Be Toc, Chinh, and Duc talk about me a great deal? Please write and let me share in the good news.

I wish you and Auntie very good health and long life to enjoy the restoration of peace and to witness the glory of your sons and nephews. I also hope that you will achieve an increase in production. Please give my best

regards to Ong Muoi, and tell him I wish him long life and that I hope he will live to be 100 years of age. Give my best to my cousins. Tell Be Duc that I wish him good health and good progress in his mission. Tell Duc that I wish him very good health so that he can support you and Auntie now that you are both getting old. Tell Thong and Be Ty that they should make an effort to study. If they don't study when they are young, they won't have the opportunity to study again when they grow up because they will have to support their family then. If they grow up ignorant, people will laugh at them. I hope that Be Toc and Chinh will grow up quickly so as to be able to go to school with their older sisters and brothers. As for Chinh, tell him he should be a good baby; otherwise he will be scolded by his parents and beaten by his older brother and sister. I miss Chinh a lot, and please tell him to remember me and to talk about me.

Dear Uncle and Auntie:

It's been a year since I left the village to operate elsewhere. In all this time I haven't been to the village to visit you and the other relatives. I'm really remiss in my duties toward you; it is the circumstances and the Revolutionary mission that are keeping me away from you, and I hope that you will understand and forgive me. Even though I'm far away, I never stop thinking of you and I remember you vividly. I remember that when I was working in the village you took good care of me and helped me. When I fell sick you were worried about me and took care of me. You saw to it that I ate and slept well. I will

remember these things forever, and I wonder when I can fully repay you for them. I think that the only way for me to repay you is to fight with determination to kill as many enemies as possible in order to bring about an early restoration of peace for the nation. When this is achieved we will be reunited under the same roof and will live together again.

This is just a short letter to inquire about your health; when I visit you I will talk at greater length.

Please give my best regards to the families of Anh Ba Lung, Ba Lia, Nam Duc, Ba Sam, Tu Long, Tam Bup, and Duc Nghia; to "Mother" Chinh; to the families of Chi Tu Lung, Chin Lung, Chin Det, Ba Vinh, Bay Tron, and Nam Cuc; and to all our relatives. I wish them all good health and increase in production so as to achieve prosperity soon. Please give my best regards to the infrastructure members, and tell them I wish them good health and speedy progress in their mission.

As for me, I'm in good health and my performance has improved somewhat.

I'm going to stop here. Please tell Be to make an effort and write me, because I miss our native village a great deal. Write to me in care of Letter Box 11-207/FO-T12, and the letter will reach me.

Signed: Be Danh, your nephew.

DOCUMENT NO. 8

LETTER FROM HOA TO SAN KIM, VAN TRI PHUNG, HIEN AND BE DANH

My Tho, April 26, 1965

Dear Kim, Phung, Hien and Danh:

I was very happy and enthusiastic to learn that in the letter to Lien, Danh asked about me. So I hurry and write this letter to inquire about the health of you all.

How is your health at present? How have you been doing in your mission? Life in the unit must be very gay and happy. Please write and let us share in your joy.

My dear older brothers, ever since we got to know you on the basis of our revolutionary work, we have never forgotten you. Even when we are busy with our work, we try to find time to write you and inquire about your health. Please give our best regards to everyone in the 470 unit.

I'm so busy talking about this and that, that I almost forget to tell you about myself. I'm in good health, but my performance in my mission is unpredictable -- one day it is good and the next day it is bad.

Well, just a few lines to give you some news. I have to stop now to start cooking dinner. I'll write at greater length in my next letter. I wish you very good health so as to destroy our common enemy.

Love,

Hoa (D 82)

DOCUMENT NO. 9

LETTER FROM CHIN THUAN TO BE DANH

Hau My, May 30, 1966

Dear Em Danh:

I found out your address from the letter you wrote to Chi Tam, and so I hurry and dash off a few lines to inquire about your health.

Dear Danh, have there been any changes in your health since the day you left Hau My, your native village? * How have you been doing in your mission? I'm sure you are well and I'm sure that you are making good progress in your work.

Hau My, our native village, is no longer as happy as before -- it's become very desolate. The Americans pour their bombs and shells on the village every day without stopping. But the people in Hau My still maintain their revolutionary tradition and still cling to their rice fields and orchards. They devote themselves to the production task in order to contribute large quantities of resources to the Revolution. But in the last sweep operation, many people in Hau My were shot dead by the enemy. The other older sisters and I and our families fortunately escaped unhurt. The father of Nam Rang was seriously wounded but his condition has improved.

* Apparently Danh has family connections in two villages, Hau My and Phu Kiet, and refers to them both as his "native village." Chi Tam means "older sister Tam."

Dear Danh, don't be pessimistic when you read this letter. Instead you should intensify your hatred. The front line and the rear areas should join hands to increase our strength to fight harder and avenge the people of South Vietnam in general and the people of Hau My in particular.

Life in the army must be very gay. Has it ever happened that this gay life makes you forget about Hau My, your desolate native village? If you have, just tell the truth. As for myself, I'm fine and doing well in my mission, just like the rest of the girls -- Rang, Xoai, Anh, La, and Banh. They send you their best regards. This is just a short note to ask about your health; I'll write at greater length in my next letter. I wish you good health and continuous progress in your mission.

Love,

Your older sister: Chin Thuan
(younger sister of Tam Anh)

P.S. If you receive this letter please write. Give my best regards to the other people in your unit. I agree with you, and I think that you should go ahead with your marriage announcement. What do you think?

DOCUMENT NO. 10

LETTER FROM MINH ANH TO BE DANH AND VAN TRI PHUNG

Dear Danh and Phung, and the rest of the older Brothers:

Dear Danh, returning from a mission, the girls shouted with joy that there was a letter from you. I opened and read it. I was very happy to learn that you and the entire unit were in good health.

Dear Danh, I was overjoyed when I learned that you were getting married, and I was happy at the thought that soon I would have a deserving sister-in-law who would contribute to the Revolution to liberate the people. But my joy was shortlived, because I have just heard that she has been killed by the enemy's shelling and bombing. I'm writing you to share your sorrow, my dear older brother.

Dear Danh, I think you should put your sorrow aside in order to concentrate on fighting the enemy and avenge the death of the girl who is now lying peacefully in her grave. Don't give way completely to sadness, because this will have a bad effect on your health and because it won't do you any good. The deeper your sorrow is, the deeper your hatred against the enemy should be, don't you think so, dear Danh?

I don't know what else to say. I can only offer you this advice. I wish you good health to avenge her and the people.

Please give my best regards to Phung, Vinh, Kim, Sang, La, Vang, Phuoc, Ngoc, Thanh, Tam, Phi, Hung, Hai, Hoang, Bon, and the rest. May the future bring you continuous

victories and give you whatever you want. As for me, your younger sister, I am in good health and I am making good progress in my mission. I am running out of paper, so I'm going to stop here. I will write again. Good bye.

We are determined to defeat the Americans.

Your younger sister,

Minh Anh alias Ngoc Phuong,

X19 Chau Thanh District.

DOCUMENT NO. 11

LETTER FROM NGOC SUONG TO BE DANH

June 9, 1966

Dear Danh:

I received your letter a long time ago. I should have answered it right away so as not to keep you waiting, but I was terribly busy. I haven't had any free time until now, and this is why I'm only answering your letter now. I hope that you will understand me and forgive me. From now on, I will write you very often, so as to keep us both happy in our struggle.

How is your health now? Is it still good? How about your mission? I think that it is progressing well; am I right?

Dear Danh, it's been a long time since I saw you last. Perhaps we'll never have the opportunity to see each other again. While we are separated from each other, I, "your younger sister," miss you a lot and talk about you and the other members of the unit a great deal. I follow the news concerning the situation in your area very carefully. I'm much encouraged, and I'm very proud, whenever I hear the news of victories pouring in from far away, because I know that you and the other members of the unit must have made a significant contribution. I've heard that many happy things have happened in the armed forces; is it true? Tell me about them, will you?

Dear Danh, you must know how I feel, so I'm not going to write about my feelings here. Let me tell you that I'm in good health, and that I am doing fine in my studies and

mission so as to make you happy. Once in a while I receive news from my family. Generally speaking, everyone in my family is in good health. Please give my regards to Sau Kim, La, Nghia, Liem, Son, Thanh, and Xe -- generally speaking to the whole unit. I wish them good results in their mission.

Dear Danh, paper and ink cannot convey all my feelings to you. I'm going to stop here for the time being. I'll tell you more in my next letter. I wish you good health, outstanding achievements in your fight to oppose the Americans and save the country. Please write; I will be anxiously waiting for your reply.

Love,

Your younger sister, Ngoc Suong,
Chau Thanh District
Military Medical Branch,
My Tho.

DOCUMENT NO. 12

SPRING LETTER FROM [BE DANH AT] THE FRONT LINE
TO MY DEAR OLDER SISTER IN THE REAR AREA

My dear Sister:

Tonight, July 13, 1966 [Western calendar] I went on operation, marching over a 10,000 mile route. It was raining and the path was very slippery. I had to carry a heavy load, and so had to proceed very slowly and carefully on the muddy path in the middle of an isolated and deserted forest. Our column of troops, back from a victorious battle, were the only people moving in the forest. The sky was without stars and hung like a black blanket overhead. The night was pitch black and quiet. I heard the chirping of crickets and insects, a sad song echoing in the quiet night.

At that moment I thought of you in the rear area, and wondered if you and all the other older and younger sisters knew the hardships that your brother had to go through. I wondered whether you were sleeping peacefully or sitting at the openings of shelters, ready to take cover if you were shelled? I thought that the latter was the more likely. I wondered whether you talked about your brothers on the front line, or whether you had forgotten completely about them. I thought that the latter was also more likely, because just a few days ago, when I met you, my older sister, you couldn't recognize me. You had forgotten me completely. You had to look at me for a long time before you could recognize me, your younger brother. This, of course,

hurt the love and friendship between you, my visiting sister, and me, Be Danh. But I wasn't mad at you, my dear sister. I thought that our feelings toward each other were sacred, and I considered your visit as a delicious spiritual food for me, your brother, on the front line. We are separated by 10,000 miles, and when we meet it is only for a few short seconds. Our emotional needs therefore cannot be fulfilled; is this not true, my dear sister? I think that you understand this better than I.

Oh, I'm so busy talking about "emotions" that I forgot to ask about the older sisters and brothers that work with you. Are they well? They must have made a lot of progress in their mission, right? How about you? Are you well? How are you doing in your mission? You must be making a lot of progress. Have you been appointed Madame the Deputy Commander of the Armed Forces of South Vietnam* yet? Let me know, so I can share your joy! Have you visited your family? Have you received any news from them? Please give them my best regards and tell them I wish them good health and long life, and that I hope they will live 100 years in order to enjoy national reunification.

I would like to wish you good health, good progress, and outstanding achievements in your mission. My best wishes also to your husband. I send you and your husband many, many loving kisses. I wish you both much happiness, a bright future, and many children -- I hope that you will give birth to twins twice, so that you can have four

*A joking reference to female ambition. A woman, Mrs. Ba Dinh, is the Deputy Commander of the Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam.

children in two tries! This is only a short letter to give you some news. I'm going to stop here for the time being. As for us, we are in good health and doing all right in our mission -- we are doing slightly better than our people during the 9-year Resistance.

Good-bye to my very dear sister. Loving you for ever.

Your brother, Be Danh

Letter box 7809,

Demolition Unit.

DOCUMENT NO. 13

LETTER FROM MINH ANH TO BE DANH

From: Anh^{*}

Dear Danh:

I have just received your letter dated July 30. I hurry to write back so as not to keep you waiting for my reply, to inquire about your health and the health of the other "older brothers" in the 7809 unit, and to wish you good progress always.

Dear Danh, if I have made any errors, please let me know; your criticism will not make me mad. My native village is being pacified, and is it because of this that I want to forget about it? Not only do I want to forget it; I also want to forget its name. Perhaps in the future it will be forgotten completely, like Hang Nga^{**} when she was shut up within four stone walls, and no one will even recall what its name is. Well, I'm just talking here! I am not discouraged and demoralized by the difficulties. This pacification will show whether the enemy or our side will survive.

Dear Danh, please don't use these letters CB^{***} with me. If you put them aside, our relationship will be much

^{*}Anh is a girl, listed by Danh (in his list of "Addresses of Female Friends") as coming from the Chau Thanh District Commo-liaison team.

^{**}According to legend, Hang Nga was a beautiful girl who lived on the moon.

^{***}CB may stand for either Can Bo (Cadre) or Chi Bo (Party Chapter).

more intimate, and the friendship between you, the fighter, and me, your younger sister from the rear areas, will be closer. Use these letters with other people, but not with me, your younger sister. I don't want to elaborate; I hope you will understand and sympathize with me. I'm so busy talking about one thing and another that I almost forgot to ask about your health and the health of the other "older brothers" in the 7809 Unit. I am sure that you are making good progress in your studies and mission. Please give my best regards to Kim, Phung, Phi, Vinh, Danh, Hien, Met, Cu, Hung, Manh, Xe, Na, Liem, and the other "older brothers" whose names I don't know. I wish them good health always, enthusiasm in the performance of their mission, and good results to offer the Party.

As for me, I'm in good health. I'm doing all right in my studies and mission. With regard to the Revolution, I'm like the hyacinth -- just drifting and letting the current take me wherever it wills. I cannot go back to visit my family because the enemy has occupied my village. My parents and younger brothers and sisters left the village on July 20 to take refuge elsewhere.

DOCUMENT NO. 14

LETTER FROM THANH VAN
TO DANH, MANH, PHUOC, MET, AND KIM

Vinh Kim, August 2, 1966

Dear Danh, Manh, Phuoc, Met, and Kim:

Today, I received your letter while I was busy packing my clothes to go on mission. I was very happy. Hiep and I hurry to write this letter to inquire about your health.

Our dear older brothers, our friendship is so deep that we cannot express it fully on paper. We talk about you constantly over here. We are not the only ones to talk about you; the other members of our section also talk about you all the time. Nam Du and the other section members send their best regards to you and wish you great progress in your mission. Let me give you some news about Vinh Kim village. The enemy are still holed up in their strategic hamlet. The other hamlets that used to be under firm enemy control are now being destroyed by the people and by our active supporters even during the day. We have destroyed a number of enemy officials and inflicted many defeats on the enemy. The enemy in the Cau Sap area do not dare to stick their necks out or venture far from their post. Recently a sergeant in the post had to sneak out to fish because he was so poor that he didn't have money to buy food, but he triggered a grenade and his soul was forced to travel down to the land of shadows to serve the King of the Other World. The enemy shells the village

every night, but we don't have time to count and see how many lizards have been killed in these shellings. My health is fine, and I am making very good progress in my work -- you have to congratulate your younger sister for this. But, strangely enough, my progress has been backward instead of forward! I received a letter from Hien recently. I planned to write back to him, but unfortunately I am burdened by a chronic disease called "laziness," and this is why I couldn't bring myself to do so. What's more, I have been writing so often to so many of my older brothers and sisters that I am afraid that if I continue to send one letter off after another the fellows on the liaison teams will curse me. So, dear Hien, please understand and sympathize with your younger sister.

After the recent attack on the Cau Sap post, we heard that various older brothers in the unit had sacrificed their lives. We were all agitated and wished that we could see you to ask you all about it. But later on, we heard that only Vang was killed, and so our sorrow was lessened somewhat.

We still have many things to say, so we promise to write you again later. We wish you constant happiness and good health to withstand the bombing and fighting...

Your younger sister in the
rear area,

Thanh Van

P.S. Dear Hien, we want to ask you frankly whether you are mad at us or not. Why haven't you written us? You should sympathize with us. It is not because I'm lazy,

as I have often jokingly said, that I haven't written you. When I received your letter I was very happy, and wrote a reply at once. But then the situation turned dangerous and I had to hide my letter. When I took it out of the hiding place it was all wet. Then I was deluged with work, and this is why I haven't written you. Do you sympathize with me now?

DOCUMENT NO. 15

LETTER FROM BE DANH TO BA*

Dear older Sister Ba that I miss:

I haven't written you for a long time, you must have been anxiously waiting to hear from me. Please understand and sympathize with your younger brother who is very busy! Today, I take advantage of a free moment to dash off a few lines to you. This letter will fly to you and take the place of a personal visit. I wish you good health and extraordinary energy to make fast progress in your mission and quick advancement in your work as the teacher of the Liberated Area of Phu Kiet Village.

* Unfinished letter.

DOCUMENT NO. 16

LETTER FROM BE DANH TO VAN AND HIEP*

October 1, 1966

Be Danh

Dac Cong 646 (Demolition Unit)

Dear Van and Hiep:

There was an entertainment show in my unit today. During the show I thought of you two, and remembered the time when you came to visit me; on that day, too, there were also a banquet and an entertainment show for the unit.

*Unfinished letter.

DOCUMENT NO. 17

LETTER FROM BE DANH TO HIS BROTHER LUNG

My Tho, November 12, 1966

To my dearest Lung:

Dear younger brother, I haven't written you for a long time to inquire about our family and you. You must have been anxiously waiting to hear from me. Please understand and sympathize with me. I haven't been able to write because I had to go on mission far away and also because I had too many things to do. Today I have some free time, so I'm hurriedly writing you a few lines. This letter will substitute for a personal visit from me to inquire about the health of our mother, yourself, and our younger brother Ao.

My dear younger brother, please give my regards to Mother and wish her good health and long life for me, so that she can enjoy the restoration of peace to our country, and tell her I wish her increase in production so that she can become prosperous soon. Please give my regards to our older sister and her husband, and tell them I wish them the same things. I'd also like to send my regards to all our relatives. Tell Anh and Chi Bay, Chuoc, Chi Ba Vung, Chi Nam Huong, Chi Ba Lua, the family of Bac Bay, and the family of Bac Tu that I hope they are in good health -- as good as when I saw them last -- and that I wish them a good harvest. As for Chi Ba Luc, the head of the "section in charge of removing the umbilical cord from newly born babies" of Long Tien Village, I send her my best regards and wish her speedy progress in her mission.

Oh, I'm so busy asking about others that I forgot to ask about Mother's health. How is she now? Is she in good health? How is the farm work of our family getting along? Have you planted our rice fields yet? Has the water level come up high? How about the orchards? Is the village shelled often? And you, have you recovered completely from your illness yet? Are you really in good health now? Please take care of yourself and rest, so you can recover your normal health quickly in order to help our family. Is Ao all right? Since I left, has the unit been to the village to bivouac? When you receive this letter, please write me and let me know. My letter box number is 21.

Dear Lung, it is not convenient to talk about the things that concern us here. I cannot express my feelings with pen and paper. When we see each other again, we will talk at great length. If I write everything down here, "those guys"* will object. I hope that you won't worry much, and that you will overcome all obstacles and weather all storms to keep the solemn promises that we have made to each other. As for me, I just let the days drift by, and I will give you an answer sooner or later. The things that I told you will always be engraved in my heart and mind, and they will never fade away. Our attitude will be shown through our ideological stand. As time passes, we will be able to find out which one of us keeps his word and which one does not.

* In Vietnamese, the term is no, an extremely rude one to apply to one's superiors.

To make you happy, let me tell you that Tu, Kim, Liem and myself are in good health, and we are performing our mission regularly. Finally, I hope that our nephews Danh and Nghiep are helping you in your work, and that they remain good and happy children.

DOCUMENT NO. 18

LETTER FROM KIM TUYEN TO HIEN AND DANH

My two dear "younger Brothers" Hien and Danh:*

I have some free time today, so I'm writing you to ask about your health and to wish you good health. How are you now? How are you progressing in your mission?

After I saw you I returned to my native village, but even now I still remember you and feel that you are as close to me as always. I think of you constantly. When I hear the echo of cannon and see the flames and smoke billowing in the sky I think of you two lying in your trenches on the battlefield, without the care of me, your older sister. I love you very much, and I think that we will see each other again some day. The separation makes us miss one another, but at the same time it makes us more zealous and absorbed in our mission and in combat. Grasp your weapons firmly and wipe out the enemy.

In the rear area I work harder to perform my mission, and struggle enthusiastically to wipe out the enemy, so as to bring the Revolution to an early victory. When the Revolution is achieved we will meet on the road of glory, and our love will be stronger and more complete.

Sometimes when I lie in bed at night I think of the time I met you both. Our love is becoming stronger because of the separation. The imperialists separate us from our relatives in the native village. But they cannot

* Bad spelling and clumsy handwriting suggest a low level of education.

sever our friendship, because our friendship is built on our revolutionary stand, our unity with the people, and on the Revolution which is wanted by all the people in the South. Even though the Americans separate us from one another, they cannot prevent our love from rushing forward like the current breaking the dike.

My mother and everyone else in the family are fine. I'm in good health and doing well in my mission. Dear Hien and Danh, I received the letter you wrote me the other day, and I'm keeping it so that I can take it out and reread the handwriting I love when I'm sad. I wrote you the other day in answer to your letter. I don't know whether you've received it or not because I haven't heard from you. My feelings are too profound, and I can't express them all on paper. I wish you good health and steady progress.

Your "older sister," Kim Tuyen

Send to: Hien, 2nd Platoon, B470, 514 Bn.

DOCUMENT NO. 19

LETTER FROM TU TUYET TO BE DANH

Dear Danh:

I haven't seen my younger brother for a long time to ask him about his health and how he is doing in his mission. You must be doing very well in your mission. We haven't seen each other for such a long time. I remember when you were still at home, you and I shared whatever food we had. It is because of the American bandits that we are being separated. Many years have gone by since the time you and I shared our bowls of rice and rice gruel -- I will never forget this. Dear Danh, you and I are separated from each other because of the American imperialists, and this is why both of us will have to stand up to take revenge and to fulfill our duty. When there are no American imperialists left, then parents will be reunited with their sons and you and I will see each other again, and only then will we be the deserving and grateful children of the nation. When this day comes, how glorious and bright and beautiful will it be.

As far as the family is concerned, grandmother is fine, and Uncle and Aunt Ut are fine also. There have been no changes. My own family is also fine. Nhut came back once in a while from his mission and looked fine. The neighbors in our settlement are also in good health, and there have been no changes. The other women -- Ba Nga, Tam Vung, Tam Hi, Nam Soi, Sau Banh -- are all in good health and making good progress in their mission. Sau Manh has enlisted. I

wish you good and fast progress in your work and hope that you will score many outstanding achievements. Please give my best regards to the rest of the unit. Tell them I wish them good health and success in their combat mission. This is all I have to say. When I see you again, I will tell you much more. I don't write much here, but I'm sure you'll understand much more than what I say. I've received your letter on the 30th day [lunar month]. When you receive this letter, please write; I'm very anxious to hear from you.

6 o'clock,
23rd day of the lunar month
Tu Tuyet

DOCUMENT NO. 20

LETTER FROM MINH ANH TO BE DANH

Dear Anh Danh:

I'm writing this letter to inquire about your health and to wish you quick recovery from your wound so that you can continue serving the Revolution in the South.

Dear Anh Danh! I was very sad when I learned that you and H. had broken up. It is a shame that this happened. Chi Bay and I went to H.'s house the other day and asked about it, and learned that you two had broken up without any reason. I didn't know what to say. I'm writing to you to offer you some consolation. I think you should not give way to sadness because this will affect your health and your fighting spirit. I'm not saying this just to bolster your morale -- this is just the sincere feeling of your younger sister in the rear areas.

Dear Anh Danh, it is because both you and H. are so proud that this has happened. It's really a shame. Well, this belongs to the past, and so you should put your mind at rest and concentrate on your mission. Don't you think that this is best, dear Anh Danh?

In the future, you won't be with the 470 unit, and this means that I will lose a fighting older brother. I think you should brush this incident aside and do your best to resume your mission and advance with the rest of the unit. Please don't leave the unit.

Dear Anh Danh, our feelings toward each other are very deep. I don't know what else to say. I hope that you will

-47-

recover quickly from your wound to resume your mission, and wish you good health and steady progress in your mission.

Your younger sister,

Minh Anh, 139

P.S. When you get this letter, please write. You'll find out the truth from reading my letter. Please do your best.

DOCUMENT NO. 21

LETTER FROM MINH ANH TO BE DANH

Dear Anh Danh:

I'm writing this letter to inquire about your health and wish you good health [so you can score more achievements] and offer them as gifts to the Party.

Dear Anh Danh, how have you been since we parted? I guess you must be making good progress in your mission. Am I right?

Dear Anh Danh, I was very sad when I received that news. You must not have known what to think. If you promise not to get mad at me, I will tell you about it. I'm sure you will make the promise, right? So here it is. I've heard that there have been many conflicts of opinion; is this true? Dear Danh, I thought I was just doing my best to help you, but I didn't expect that this would happen. If this is true, how can I face H. and what can I say? Especially if H. learns of this, she will reproach me no end. Dear Danh, I'm not saying explicitly what this is all about, but I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. If you don't, just examine what you have done and you'll know. I don't know what else to say, so I'm going to end my letter here and wish you good health and steady progress in your mission. As for me, I am fine and have made good progress in my mission and studies. I'm going to stop here and promise to tell you much more when I see you again.

Your younger sister,

Minh Anh,

Letter Box 7-815M,

Chau Thanh, My Tho

P.S. Please don't get mad at me.

DOCUMENT NO. 22

LETTER FROM TRAN HIEN TO BE DANH

From Tran Hien, the 646th Demolition Unit.

To Comrade Danh.

Comrade Danh:

The Battalion Command Staff issued a directive ordering you to return to the unit to accept a new mission. On the appointed day, comrades Ninh and Na, carrying two rifles, went all the way down to the appointed meeting place to take you back to the unit, but didn't see you. Unfortunately, these two comrades were caught in an enemy sweep operation and were killed. The two K44 rifles were also lost. After that the Battalion sent three urgent letters to the P.K. [Phu Kiet] Party Chapter. The letters have been received, but how come you haven't returned to the unit? If you receive this letter, I hope that you will obey the instruction in this letter. No matter what the mission the Province Military Affairs Section entrusts to you is, you must return to the unit at once to take part in the fighting. The Demolition Unit and the Battalion are waiting for you.

For the Command Staff of the Demolition Unit.

Tran Hien

January 22, 1967

Meeting place. Go to the house of Lung in Long Tien village, and the unit will send someone there to take you back to

the unit. Hope you will do your best. You'll have to be present in the unit on the 29th day of the lunar month. (Two letters enclosed for Mother Nam).

Determination to achieve victory in the winter and spring campaign.

Phuoc and Nam were killed on January 21, 1967.

Received this letter on January 25, 1967, signed: Danh.

DOCUMENT NO. 23

LETTER FROM LUA TO SAU KIM

Dear Anh Sau Kim:

It's been a long time since I saw you last. Today, taking advantage of the fact that Sau Met is going back to the unit, I dash off a few lines to inquire about your health and the health of the others in the unit. Recently I heard that Anh Ba was wounded; has his condition improved any? Please give my best regards to the entire unit. Sau Met is in such a hurry to go that I can't write longer. Chi Bay Nhi and Chi Nam Trau send you their best regards, and ask whether you've got a cooperative to buy things from or not. Chi Bay says that you have been reproaching her.

Lua

Dear Anh Sau Kim:

As Chi Lua is writing you and the others, I also want to use this "white sheet of paper and this green ink" to write a few lines to inquire about your health. How has your health been lately? How have you been doing in your mission? You must be doing very well, right? Please give my best regards to Chin Phung, Hien, Cai, Tam, Cu and all the others. I wish you all good health and good achievements in your mission.

Let us unite together.

DOCUMENT NO. 24

LETTER FROM PHUONG TRINH TO SAU KIM

From: Phuong Trinh

C 191

March 25, 1967

My dearest:

I have received your letter. My Section has also received your letter asking for permission to marry me. I have read this letter, and am now keeping it.

It's been a long time since I received your letter. Please forgive me for not having replied to you sooner. You must have been waiting anxiously for my reply. A few days ago, I met Phuoc when he passed through H.D. [Hoa Dong], and he promised to take my letter to you. But he didn't come by to get the letter; perhaps it was because he was in too much of a hurry.

During Tet, my mother and my three young brothers and sisters (the 5th, 7th, and 9th in the family) came to see me. On the 27th day of the lunar month, my father went to Saigon. The car he was riding in overturned, and one of his ribs was broken. My mother had to hurry back to take him to the hospital and so couldn't stay here long with me. She came on the morning of the first day of Tet, and left in the afternoon of the same day. At present, I don't know whether my father has recuperated from his illness or not, or how my family is doing because I haven't had any contact with them. I'm very worried about them!

My love, I accept your marriage proposal, but let me tell you something. Both of us understand very well the importance of marriage. Marriage will make one happy or unhappy for one's entire life. Loving you means that I have thought things out and that I have reflected on this matter very seriously. My acceptance of your marriage proposal is therefore certain. Your letter proposing to me shows that you are sincere and that you really want to marry me. I thank you for this. But, my dearest, our situation does not allow us to get married soon!!! Please understand me. To put on a dress, one has to pull it over the head first [Anglice, first things first]. I don't want to make my parents sad, and I don't dare to make them sad because of me. Besides, I think that -- it will be incorrect to say that we're still too young -- we are in the prime of our lives, a time that should be devoted to serving society, contributing all our strength to the Party and to the Fatherland. We belong to the generation that is advancing speedily forward and that is scoring many achievements on the battlefield. I am determined to sacrifice my personal life and emotions to make my parents happy, and also to be able to continue marching on the revolutionary path that I'm following.

If we wait longer, this will enable us to gauge the faithfulness of us both, to see which of us is really sincere and faithful. Do you see any difficulties for yourself if we do this? Are you mad at me? As for me, I have definitely made up my mind. I've given all my love to you. As long as I continue fighting under the

Party flag, I'll remain your own. Self-respecting and loving people will remain faithful to the ones they love; this is a proof of their dignity. I'll wait for you and remember you forever....Sometime in the future, or when the country is reunified, you and I will be reunited. How precious will our love be then! Do you agree, my love?

Oh, Ba (the head of my Section) has told me that he approved of your request to marry me, but that he wants to ask you a few questions about your organization. Just as you predicted earlier, if you are the Party Chapter Secretary of the independent unit you will have to have the approval of the Battalion, or of the Province Military Affairs Section. What is your understanding of this procedure? Please write to my Section and explain it to them. I don't know much about military organization. Let's do our best to avoid confusion in this respect. Do you have any suggestions for me?

My dear, did you receive any news from your father during Tet? Did our friend Ba Quan talk about me at all? Please give my best regards to your father and to Ba Quan for me.

I'm going to stop here. I send you my unspoken, but profound and faithful love. I wish you good health, happiness, and steady progress. Please give my regards to Vinh, Hien, Cai, Phung, Son, Liem, etc., and to Kiet -- in a word, to all the members of the 646th Unit.

Missing you and sending you thousands of kisses,

Yours,

Trinh

P.S. The entire staff of teachers asked me to give their best regards to you. Miss Be Bay and Bay Hue told me to ask you to send someone here to take them to the unit for a visit, because they miss all the unit members a lot.

DOCUMENT NO. 25

LETTER FROM PHUONG TRINH TO THE DEMOLITION UNIT

May 10, 1961

Dear Fighters:

Upon returning from my mission I learned that Vinh has sacrificed his life. Another sorrow and another cause for hatred of the enemy have been added to my section.

After the attacks in Ap Bac and Long Tien, I wanted to write to you all to ask about the attacks and to ask how you were doing, as well as to tell you that I have received all the letters that you sent. Today I ran into Be Ba, and taking advantage of the opportunity, I'm writing you a few lines to hail your victory and to share in the sorrow of your unit upon the death of Vinh.

Where and in what circumstances was Vinh killed? Are the rest of the unit members all right? It is heart rending. Vinh was a good cadre. He was filled with ardor in fighting and was zealous in improving his knowledge. What a shame! A member of my section has just been killed also, and two others were wounded because of the enemy's shelling. This happened on the same day that you were fighting in Long Tien. These comrades have fulfilled their mission as the sons of My Tho, the province that produced heroes such as Truong Cong Dinh and Nguyen Trung Truc.

My letter is going to be short! My best regards to Hien, Phung, Son, Cai, Kiet, Loi, etc., -- generally speaking, to the whole 646th Unit.

My regards to you, fighters. I hope that you will remain enthusiastic and exemplary in studying cultural subjects. Please give my best regards to Vu and Ba. I'll write to you once in a while.

Missing you,

Trinh

P.S. Your letter to me was completely torn up when it reached me; the comrades in the village censored it again. What a nuisance! I'm enclosing 100 piastres for the unit as condolence money for Vinh -- use the money to buy food for the unit, all right? But is it true that Vinh has really sacrificed his life?

DOCUMENT NO. 26

LETTER FROM LE HOANG LUONG TO MUOI THOI

Dear Muoi Thoi:

I was very happy when I got your letter. We got to know each other through our work for the Revolution, and we've come to understand each other well in spite of the fact that I am with the Province Unit and you work in the village.

How have you been and how have you been doing in your mission? What is the situation in the village now? Is it shelled and bombed heavily by the enemy? Has the revolutionary movement in the village expanded? As for me, my health is just as good as it used to be.

Oh, let me tell you about our attack on the Americans in the Truong Ga settlement.* It was our first fight with the Americans. They lost 150 dead and wounded. I myself participated in this attack, which took place on the 25th of July. The rainy season will come soon, right? If you receive this letter, please let me know. I received your letter on April 14, 1967, but I was busy and couldn't write back, so don't be mad at me. Please give my best regards to your parents, to Mrs. Ba, Uncle and Aunt Tam, and Hay. Vinh was wounded in the left arm; he was hit by aircraft fire. He's all right now, but his arm is slightly paralyzed. Please give my regards to Aunt Bay. I want to

*In the Ap Bac area, and part of the engagement referred to in the previous letter.

say much more, but I'm going to save it for my next letter. Since I've written you, you should write back. I'm anxious to hear from you.

Let's fight against the Americans.

Le Hoang Luong
C646B Unit, 4th Platoon

May 12, 1967

DOCUMENT NO. 27

LETTER FROM HUU HOA TO NAM LE, NUA AND LOC

Dear Comrades Nam Le, Nua and Loc:

I'm writing you to inquire about your health and to find out whether your wounds have healed or not.

Dear comrades, we are like one body, like one man who has fought on the battlefield. We have been caught in bombings and fierce fighting with our enemy. But we are proud that we have defeated them bravely.

Today I remember that you, comrades, have been wounded by the enemy. When I think of your wounds I am very moved. We are comrades in life as well as in death. We share hardships, sorrows and joys, and our friendship is very profound.

Now you are convalescing in one area and I am fighting in another. Even though we are far from each other, it is enough if we love each other and write to each other. I hope that you'll recover from your wounds quickly and that you'll be in good health again.

Please give my best regards to comrade Phiet. I hope that he's well.

For the Command Staff of 646B Unit*

Signed: Huu Hoa

*Designation of the Demolition Unit of the 514th Bn.

DOCUMENT NO. 28

LETTER FROM VO MINH TO "OLDER SISTER"

From Vo Minh Hung
646 Demolition Unit

Dear Chi:

I haven't heard from you for a long time. I'm writing a few lines to you to ask about the situation in our native village, and to send my New Year greetings to all my acquaintances in Nhon Hue. I wish them good health for the coming year, 1967, strong ideological fortitude to overcome all the schemes of the American bandits, increase in production, and many new and happy things.

The people in the rear are attached to the troops on the front line.

The troops on the front line are determined to wipe out the enemy. I'd like to tell you that everyone on the front line is in good health, and we promise to achieve victory in the coming spring for the whole human race and for ourselves. As for me, I have thought of obtaining for myself....*

Signed: Vo Minh Hung

*Here, the letter trails off.

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10. ABSTRACT <i>The report presents a collection of translations of the personal correspondence of members of a Viet Cong demolition unit operating in the Mekong Delta. This is the last in a series representing the entire file of unit records captured by U.S. forces. (The others are RM-5848, RM-5849, RM-5850, and RM-5851.) In the period covered by the records, early 1966 to mid-May 1967, the unit was under- and saw little action. Much time was spent reorganizing, training, and bolstering morale. These letters to friends and relatives reveal the hopes and fears of soldiers in wartime. Although they have a self-conscious tone, perhaps because their authors feared censorship, the contents are no doubt sincere. They impart a strong sense of group solidarity and social cohesiveness. Most of them are the correspondence of Nguyen Van Bo, a young cadre, whose reaction to the death of his fiancée in an artillery shelling is reflected in several stirring poems he composed vowing to defeat the Americans and reunify the country. The letters do not evince a "scholar at war"; they are the private, simple annals of the obscure. But that may be the key to their value--in showing the enemy to be like soldiers everywhere.</i>		11. KEY WORDS South Vietnam Viet Cong Ground forces Counterinsurgency and insurgency Asia	