

Vietnam,
April 14, '66

Dear King,

Just a note to say hello and ask a favor. As you can see I'm still alive, in case you heard to the contrary. One of our team was killed on Easter Monday night. His name was Bill Pitsenbarger. He was a real fine fellow and a good friend, and it was a bit of a kick in the teeth to me. I've seen more than my share of dead and dying guys, but when it gets to be a friend, well that's something different.

On Easter Sunday night both choppers went out to help some army guys who were wounded in a VC ambush. It was one of those missions that really made me pucker. We had no FAC, and so had to search for the guys ourselves. They said, over the radio, that they were beside a bonfire. From where we sat we could see six fires. Anyway, we found the right one and #1 bird went in. He picked up two guys, one had a few holes in his chest so they decided to rush him back to the hospital. Pits (Pitsenbarger) was looking after him in the chopper. Then we went in and picked up three guys. While we were at it (both choppers) the G.I.'s and the VC were still fighting away. On the pick-ups we had to use our flood-light and this made us stick out like a sore thumb in the night. As it is, I'm a confirmed coward. I knew we had to pick up those guys but I didn't like being there. Thank God, the G.I.'s kept Charlie too busy and he didn't bother us. The next night, Easter Monday, I went off to school, - I'm trying to hold down a college course, - and about the same time our two choppers took off again to help the army. When I got back from school I found out old "Charlie" had finally shot up one of our birds. Both birds had gone in and made one pick-up apiece. It was decided to put one paramedic on the ground to help expedite the loading. There were some sixteen wounded troops. Pitsenbarger was lowered in and got things moving. The guys on the ground really don't know much about our set-up or the loading of stokes litter for the hoist. On the sixth run in, the VC had set up a 30 cal. in a tree and they put eight holes in the machine. They shot out the rudder controls and jammed the fuel controller wide open. This forced the bird to fly itself out of the hole, and the pilot just hung on. By some damn good flying he brought it in to a spot some seven miles away. Meanwhile the army told the second chopper not to go in as the fighting got worse and the VC were in all the trees. Back to our base they came. Pitsenbarger joined up with the army. That night we received a call to say that everything was okay, and that the G.I.s were moving out to another area where a Chinook would pick them up plus our paramedic. The next morning I was on alert, fat dumb and happy. About 0900 we got a phone call asking us why we were not out there helping the army. Out we went. We had to fly around for about half-an-hour as the jets were bombing and strafing. The G.I.s dynamited a clearing and we were able to land. While our bird took some seriously wounded back to a hospital area, I was left on the ground to help out. As I left the landing zone an army captain asked me if I was a paramedic. When I told him I was, he said, "Your buddy was killed last night. He's over there if you want to identify the body." That was a kick in the teeth. To get to him I had to cross over a fair number of dead G.I.s. I began to see that we had got our ass kicked. They were all lying about where they fell. To

identify the body I had to pull off his steel helmet and gas mask. It's odd when you're accustomed to seeing someone so lively and then to see him lying so still and dirty. He had been hit four times and I believe, from the location of the wounds, that he had been wounded before he was finally killed. With the help of an army guy, I put him in a body bag. Two guys who survived the battle, both of them badly shot up, told me what happened. When our chopper had been hit and pulled out for the night Pits started to tend the wounded. The army medics, both one week in Vietnam, had been killed. Those in charge on the ground decided to move to a different position. You see the VC had been using the choppers as a reference point to "walk" in the mortars. The shells were now exploding among the Americans. Pits and some army guys made some litters from ponchos and saplings. They moved about twenty yards before "Charlie" hit them with heavy sniper fire and two 50 cal. machine guns. The VC broke the G.I. perimeter, overran them, and killed off quite a few of the G.I.s. Then the VC took to the trees and they seemed to be everywhere. The young G.I.s were firing off bursts of ammo trying to hit them, and then the VC would fire at the G.I. muzzle flash and pretty often get them. During this time old Pits was crawling around searching for ammo clips for the M-14 he had taken from a dead guy. He also took the guy's helmet and gas mask. He collected quite a bit of ammo off dead guys and started calling out to find out who needed ammo, and threw it to any G.I. who answered. To me, this was quite something in itself and I take my hat off to Pits for doing it. After awhile he crawled back to his own little dent in the ground with 20 ammo clips. There were six guys there at this time. Half-an-hour later the fellow beside Pits noticed his head fall and he didn't move any more. He was one of the very few guys who had been firing single shots so they figured he knew and could see his targets. Of the six guys in the hole, two survived and these are the two that I talked to.

Like I said he was quite a fellow. I may have mentioned that I extended over here till July '67. Well, Pits asked me to go to school with him as we both planned on becoming the same thing, a male nurse. I put in the paperwork to curtail, and three days ago it came through. I now leave here sometime in September or October. Don't know where I'll go to school but I don't think it will be Arizona like I first planned. Now I'm toying around with the idea of Alabama or Florida. Since I left Mobile I've been writing to a Helen Griffin. No, you don't know her. She's Linda Griffin's sister (the girl I bought the birthday cake for, at your house). At the moment she's up at the Ala. Univ. and is full of praise for their school and thinks I should give it a twirl. Also there's the new university in Mobile but I don't know if it has a Nursing Degree program or not. Anyway, I've written to it. The South is the area I think I'll end up in, for I like it for it's scuba diving. Ever since Wake Island that's my favorite sport - second to girl-watching of course.

Whenever I get out of the Air Force I hope to go back to Mobile for a visit. I told a lot of people back there I'd drop back someday, and lately I told Helen the same. Before you get any ideas in your head, there are no wedding bells ringing. We are just good friends.

If I do end up in the Alabama area I'll have to buy a car and here comes that favor I want to ask you. Would you please price a '65, '66 & '67 Volkswagon for me - and let me know as soon as you can? I'd appreciate it. You see if I do become a student I'll need a car and a Volkswagon is economical. I won't have very much money to squander around. There is a car-

sales program here in Saigon thro' which I can buy a car and have it delivered in Mobile. They say it saves a couple of hundred dollars, while other guys say it doesn't save anything at all. I'd like to be able to compare prices. However, I have to make up my mind soon and do it - or it will be too late for this program over here. If you could send it to me I'd really appreciate it, King.

There isn't much else. On that battle I told you about we suffered some 164 casualties. Between 40 and 60 were dead, the rest wounded. 182 of our guys had gone in. 164/182 isn't a good figure. By the way, this info is for yourself - you know how the AF is. Last Saturday another 40 guys got killed about twenty miles from here, and some 50 wounded. We are daily promised with a mortar attack and the VC are getting close to the base. Hope they don't make it.

That's about all for now. Say hello to Pat and Taylor for me. Please say hello to anyone who remembers me at Lucedale and in the club.

Good luck, good health, and God bless.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Harry', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Harry

Medal of Honor

ROBINSON, JAMES W., JR.*

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company C, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division.

Place and date: Republic of Vietnam, 11 April 1966.

Entered service at: Chicago, Ill.

Born: 30 August 1940, Hinsdale, Ill.

Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Company C was engaged in fierce combat with a Viet Cong battalion. Despite the heavy fire, Sgt. Robinson moved among the men of his fire team, instructing and inspiring them, and placing them in advantageous positions. Enemy snipers located in nearby trees were inflicting heavy casualties on forward elements of Sgt. Robinson's unit. Upon locating the enemy sniper whose fire was taking the heaviest toll, he took a grenade launcher and eliminated the sniper. Seeing a medic hit while administering aid to a wounded sergeant in front of his position and aware that now the 2 wounded men were at the

mercy of the enemy, he charged through a withering hail of fire and dragged his comrades to safety, where he rendered first aid and saved their lives. As the battle continued and casualties mounted, Sgt. Robinson moved about under intense fire to collect from the wounded their weapons and ammunition and redistribute them to able-bodied soldiers. Adding his fire to that of his men, he assisted in eliminating a major enemy threat. Seeing another wounded comrade in front of his position, Sgt. Robinson again defied the enemy's fire to effect a rescue. In so doing he was himself wounded in the shoulder and leg. Despite his painful wounds, he dragged the soldier to shelter and saved his life by administering first aid. While patching his own wounds, he spotted an enemy machinegun which had inflicted a number of casualties on the American force. His rifle ammunition expended, he seized 2 grenades and, in an act of unsurpassed heroism, charged toward the entrenched enemy weapon. Hit again in the leg, this time with a tracer round which set fire to his clothing, Sgt. Robinson ripped the burning clothing from his body and staggered indomitably through the enemy fire, now concentrated solely on him, to within grenade range of the enemy machinegun position. Sustaining 2 additional chest wounds, he marshaled his fleeting physical strength and hurled the 2 grenades, thus destroying the enemy gun position, as he fell dead upon the battlefield. His magnificent display of leadership and bravery saved several lives and inspired his soldiers to defeat the numerically superior enemy force. Sgt. Robinson's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity, at the cost of his life, are in keeping with the finest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon the 1st Infantry Division and the U.S. Armed Forces.

ALFRED RASCON

Rank and organization: Specialist Fourth Class, U.S. Army, Reconnaissance Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate)

Place and date: Republic of Vietnam, 16 March 1966

Born: 1945, Chihuahua, Mexico

Citation:

Specialist Four Alfred Rascon, distinguished himself by a series of extraordinarily courageous acts on 16 March 1966, while assigned as a medic to the Reconnaissance Platoon, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate). While moving to reinforce its sister battalion under intense enemy attack, the Reconnaissance Platoon came under heavy fire from a numerically superior enemy force. The intense enemy fire from crew-served weapons and grenades severely wounded several point squad soldiers. Specialist Rascon, ignoring directions to stay behind shelter until covering fire could be provided, made his way forward. He repeatedly tried to reach the severely wounded point machine-gunner laying on an open enemy trail, but was driven back each time by the withering fire. Disregarding his personal safety, he jumped to his feet, ignoring flying bullets and exploding grenades to reach his comrade. To protect him from further wounds, he intentionally placed his body between the soldier and enemy machine guns, sustaining numerous shrapnel injuries and a serious wound to the hip. Disregarding his serious wounds he dragged the larger soldier from the fire-raked trail. Hearing the second machine-gunner yell that he was running out of ammunition, Specialist Rascon, under heavy enemy fire

crawled back to the wounded machine-gunner stripping him of his bandoleers of ammunition, giving them to the machine-gunner who continued his suppressive fire. Specialist Rascon fearing the abandoned machine gun, its ammunition and spare barrel could fall into enemy hands made his way to retrieve them. On the way, he was wounded in the face and torso by grenade fragments, but disregarded these wounds to recover the abandoned machine gun, ammunition and spare barrel items, enabling another soldier to provide added suppressive fire to the pinned-down squad. In searching for the wounded, he saw the point grenadier being wounded by small arms fire and grenades being thrown at him. Disregarding his own life and his numerous wounds, Specialist Rascon reached and covered him with his body absorbing the blasts from the exploding grenades, and saving the soldier's life, but sustaining additional wounds to his body. While making his way to the wounded point squad leader, grenades were hurled at the sergeant. Again, in complete disregard for his own life, he reached and covered the sergeant with his body, absorbing the full force of the grenade explosions. Once more Specialist Rascon was critically wounded by shrapnel, but disregarded his own wounds to continue to search and aid the wounded. Severely wounded, he remained on the battlefield, inspiring his fellow soldiers to continue the battle. After the enemy broke contact, he disregarded aid for himself, instead treating the wounded and directing their evacuation. Only after being placed on the evacuation helicopter did he allow aid to be given to him. Specialist Rascon's extraordinary valor in the face of deadly enemy fire, his heroism in rescuing the wounded, and his gallantry by repeatedly risking his own life for his fellow soldiers are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.