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Letters by Ernest Kuhn. 1967

Kuhn, Ernest

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Jan 12, 1967
Sam Thong, Lao.

~~Dear Sam~~ ⁴ How's everything?
Hope you had a pleasant New Year, etc.
It is now 10:10 and I should be in bed soon but
I wanted to drop you a few lines first. I
have some really bad news - in fact I would
rather wait you most anything than
what I have to say. Don Systron was
killed in an enemy attack on Nakhang on the
morning of Jan. 6-1967. I really came as a
blow to me. He was the only one here in
Lao that I considered a very close personal
friend. When we would come back here to
Sam Thong from the field we would always
sit in my room, listen to records and drink
beer and generally 'chat the shit' about
work, girls, Laos, the future - anything. His
death really has taken the fun out of working
here. I can still picture him - his way of walking -
manners of speech etc. He was always so
fully life - and always looking to the
future, never the past. But I think

He died the way he would have wanted -
to die - a single bullet between the eyes
by a Vietnamese. Don was at Na Khang (the
place I mentioned in my last letter) the Viet Minh
attacked about 0600 in the morning. They overran
part of the air strip and came in behind where
Don was staying. They took the ridge line where we
had a 75mm mortar and 50 cal machine gun.
They took the trenches about 20 yards from the house.
Three groups of Viet Minh started up the incline
to retake the position and trenches. Don for some
reason was in the center column. He just came up
the crest of the hill onto a US about 20 feet
away. He was hit by one shot. The body was sent
to Vaotham that afternoon as the French
held the area. The 1st 28th, 1st and 1st 28th, 1st
the very pretty hard. The next day I went
around to look over some of the dead. The only one
I saw was Viet Minh - no less. I got a few
'souvenirs' - a US hat, trench shovel, several stamps,
etc - and a US toothbrush. The day after the attack
we got word the CIC - (ICC - International Control
Commission) was coming up. As the 2 CAS Gags
were ordered out by the Ambassador. Raboin

I am US410, I am OK. So, for 3 days and 2 nites
 was the only American there. I had to monitor all
 the radios - day or nite and at nite for the B-26.
 Also we didn't know if the VC would attack again
 or not - so I went 3 days and 2 nites without
 going to bed. However the VC did not attack again.
 Also the CIC did not come up anyway - so it
 was a big force. I understand the Ambassador
 was under the impression that there were no
 VC in the area. In fact they were there. The CIC
 did come in one would be there. However we had to
 have someone there to man the radios.

Last week I heard about a UX-PL ammo dump
 north of Da Nang. They had stored ammo in a
 cave in a chf. I sent a 12 man team up on the
 15th and told them to make sure the area was
 secure and make a chopper pad and I would fly
 in on the 16th and haul out the ammo. There was
 about 30,000 rounds of PK stuff, 20,000 rounds of
 7.62 ~~mm~~ ^{mm} and mortar - 100-150 rounds of
 mortar and rocket. We hauled most of the stuff out.
 I kept a lot of PK ammo for my Chinese PK and also
 I kept an 82 mm mortar. It is Russian made and
 has a nice long metal core used Russian
 writing in it. Biggest ammo - although I can

only keep the case. Maybe I can find someone
to de-activate the thermator and keep it as a
souvenir also! I have people among Chinese among
the handgripers etc. quite a collector.

Well. Now I guess I'd better get to bed.
Have plenty to do tomorrow. Please write
as much as possible. I'm thinking about your
idea of going to the U.S. for winter - but it looks
doubtful. Hawaiian maybe? But I think if we
met in Japan or Hong Kong it would be better.
I'll handle expenses (except your plane fare
over and back) - is that fair, enough I'm afraid it is.
is a little far to come for me. What do you think. Come
you mentioned tape. If you want too, I'll have
to pick up a recorder. Oh a guy I met used to be
Hong Konger. If we can set up a time in a few
weeks I can talk to you by radio! He calls a guy
in the U.S. who in turn calls you called and he connects
the phone to the radio and we talk. What'll it be?
Send me your phone numbers. - home and office
phone. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ - I guess I'd better put
Rogers the dog to bed (alone - damn it!)

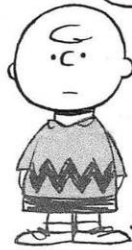
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ end

Dear Mom and Dad
Sam Kheng - 1/27/67
1/27/67

Just got a couple of letters from the post 3 days. I really didn't realize that it had been so long since my last letter. I'll try to send some more often. Got a letter from Uncle John and Aunt Joan today. Things have gone so fast here - as you letter said you know about Don. It was a real blow. Don was the whole WSP program in Sam Nuea province. He had always worked out of Nakhong - the place where he was killed. It is unfortunate because if he had just stayed low he would have been O.K. Instead he was charging up a little rise with some Meo soldiers to try to retake some trenches the Vets had occupied. & he hit the side of the ridge they hit him apparently right between the eyes. I think we lost about 5 friendly KIA. A real waste of life. It has not taken the joy. I am working here because Don was my closest friend here in Laos. We used to always sit around at Sam Kheng when he came in drinking beer and talking about what we had been doing. I don't want you to worry about me - I'll be taking over Don's old area of Sam Nuea. The day after the attack I was in Nakhong for 2 nights and 3 days with no other Americans then because I heard the FCC was coming in and the CRS guys had to leave so I manned the radio to talk to the air plans for night bombing. Was a little scary because we had terrible fog all night and visibility was 0. But the Vets did not count attack. We found 31 bodies of Vets and there were many more that we didn't find. Got a lot of Vietnamese postage stamps and a VN cap

and killed and buried until a star. Last week the VM
attacked Nong Khong in north Sam Nua and got
killed again. I personally saw 23 dead VM killed by
friendly recoilless rifle and small arms fire. Got a lot
more VM stamps, a VM "magnifying" of a gold star and leaf
on a red background, a little special bag for carrying 6
clips for my Chinese AK. 2 more good belts and star
huckle, etc. Most of the stuff like letters and diaries
CPT keeps for intelligence has some stuff I got to keep.
3 weeks ago I had a 12 man team scout and secure an
area around a big enemy ammo dump in a cave. I took
a chopper in and brought some AK ammo, 25,000 rounds
of 7.62 ammo, and many Russian mortar shells. I kept one
until the cave. Hope to have the tunnel disarmed and
make a lamp (?) out of it! Needn't say I'm not
supposed to be doing all this. Refugee work is picking up
now. We go up in a camp of days to help 884 people with
blankets, clothes, pots, bowls, knives etc. Have 3000 more
people who we will have to help as soon as we determine
their exact numbers. Went to Thailand over New Year to see
a Thai girl I know in Bangkok and to buy more old battery.
Sent Christmas present to everyone last week. Let me know if they
all come thru. Used SAM - not air mail but should take about
2 weeks. Finally got all the Christmas presents. Will write to
everyone soon. - You sent me a list of pay checks up thru Nov 29.
Haven't - when is the money? My last check deposit shows Sept 8 - I
am now overdrawn so please add a check in the bank!! I gave everything
paid off the loan and the \$55 in the bank - but can't you let me pay again
and get what I want - check, loan or savings as I am trying to again
straighten out my financial business. Hope everyone is well - at what
day is anyone home in the morning - also from phone number. Maybe
able to call you daily about wave radio. Will be calling call from the
US using a phone patch on the radio. Will write more soon Love Simon

GOOD GRIEF!



SCHULZ

2 pages

1/31/67

Sam Thong, Laos
Jan. 31/1967

~~Dear Gram and Aunt Betty,~~

~~Well, here goes a long overdue letter. I got your Christmas presents OK. Have put everything to good use. Thank you very much. Finally got my stuff off to you all about 10 days ago. Hope you receive them. It's kind of hard to find people and what to get people and record when to buy them! Did get to Bangkok over New Year's however.~~

Work here is moving along quite fast now. After Don was killed, I have moved up to his area in Sam Nuea. He had the largest and most difficult area to handle in Northern Laos. It will be quite a challenge because he was doing such a tremendous job there. I have been spending as much time in the area as possible to learn who is who and what is going on.

The weather here has really been cold the past 2 weeks, although the last couple of nights have been a bit

2.
warmer. A few nights the temperature
was "32-33 F!!" Who said South East Asia
is tropical?

Last week I went up to one of our
big air strips in Sam Nuea near Viet Nam. Our
Lao soldiers had killed 23 Vietnamese. All the
maps and papers and things had to be sent back
to CSS but I did get 2 VM belt buckles with
the Communist star and belts, a big bunch of
postage stamps, VM hat, bag for carrying ammo,
a red button with a gold star etc. Some day I
hope I can settle down to assemble the load
of "stuff" I have accumulated the past
10 years. I am still buying ancient pottery
in Sukkathar ~~is~~ in North Thailand. I guess I
must have over a hundred pieces by now.

I have been getting the US News &
World Report OK now. I call it the magazine of
"death & doom" because they are so pessimistic
about everything!

~~Thanks for all your letters recently.~~

~~I'll try to get off a line or 2 to everyone~~
~~every couple of weeks.~~ Well bye for now
Love Ernie

April 15-67

Dear Mom & Dad,

4 p.m. Just got back to Sam Thong and found 2 more letters. I knew you kept saying write but I had no idea it was 2+ months since my last letter. I'll try to fill you in on every thing. Hope everyone is feeling better now. I guess you know now I had more malaria. Actually I don't think this was very bad. I had been in the field pretty much for a couple of months and was real tired. On Tuesday 3/10 I had gone to #205 (I'll enclose the map in another envelope) to move in some refugees from #36. The place is very high and it was bitter cold. I started shivering and had to sit down. Went to #36 and couldn't stand up. Came back to Sam Thong and straight to ~~Phongtong~~ ^{Vientiane}. Felt better Saturday but Sunday got the chills and Sunday evening went me to the Wilder's (both MD's) and head of USAP Public Health. They put me to bed at their house and the next day in the Embury hospital. Spent 10 days there and the Doc sent me to Thaklarn for 2 weeks rest on the head. Came back good and tanned. Ate seafood for 2 straight weeks! Came back to Laos in time for several air crashes. 1) C-47 crashed in Vientiane

2) Donier (Hain engine)
STOL (short take off/landing) left Luang Prabang
254 and was never heard again. They had
searched out for 2 weeks but have never found
the wreck (?). 5 Americans aboard including
a very good friend who was with USIS
in Luang Prabang. I used to stay at his
house when I went to Luang Prabang.
3 days ago a Communist Radio Broadcast
said 5 Americans had been captured
and taken to Moung Sing (241) but no
verification. I figure they are all dead.
On the SAR (search and rescue) a Porter
(Swiss made STOL plane) crashed - no killed -
then a Helio Caennan (STOL plane) was shot
down (no killed), another Donier crashed (not)
and then a Porter. All this in less than 2
weeks! For a while everyone was a
little jittery about flying but now
everything is back to normal.

The 2 weeks ago a US boy was killed by the PL in
 the south and several USMC trucks were ambushed
 in the south. However everything remains quiet
 at San Thuy and will probably remain so. I
 have been gone the entire week since I came
 back. We have had a lot of refugees moving
 around the North. On the map my area
 covers Plots 7, 8, 9, 12, 13. plus some
 sites scattered in other areas. Primarily I
 cover 7, 8, 9, 12.. Enclosed are some photos that
 Capt John Reed, US Navy attach took. The one of
 Moung Het we captured and held the village
 for 1 week. A real beautiful place. Then we
 lost it. The picture at the bottom - this was
 2 days after the friendly retook the village.
 We lost it Thanksgiving day. The Meo boy
 behind was with me a lot. He was slightly
 injured in a plane crash in Feb. He is OK
 now and back to work. Quite a bridge-burn?
 I just finished marking the map. Will send
 it separate. Getting late so I'd better get
 some sleep - Ah - I'll answer questions as I recall

Then. Got all Christmas, Valentines day and easter
 boxes OK. Much appreciated - especially the cashies.
 I have dozens of letters to write to people - Oh
 when did ^{you} send my sec. mail (books + records
 etc.) they have never arrived. Do you have any
 papers, insurance etc? I need all the info in SB
 and lead for the stuff. Hate to lose the books.

Well I'll write in a few days about
 what I have been doing. I've been more interested
 in work the past few months, so I'll go into more
 detail about it later. Also will go through all your
 letters again to answer questions. Sorry to hear about the
 Wrecked boy. 2-03 KIA from Naval now. but? Saw in
 Star and Strips about the escaped convict captured in Nevada.
 Well - my writing is getting worse - better get to

bed.

I love


Emi

PS sounds as if Jim didn't do too bad in school
 this semester. So bad about the Mel term.

Who was the imitator?

May 26-67

Dear Mom and Dad-

Hi. I still haven't gotten the map mailed yet. I want to go to Vietnam as I get the correct postage on it. I'm trying to think of quarters you have asked me. The little bells - they go in line. Actually they should have a little stand  like this. Did you all ever get the hiking boat like you were supposed to? The little figurines I gave Gram and Granddad and John on paper mache and paper. I have been seeing some of the cookies from Christmas and Valentine's Day. They are still fresh and I ration myself a few at a time. The National Geographic were nice to get. Maybe you could take out some money and send some more. If you send them as 1st class surface in packages under 5 pounds they will come airmail under a special plan of Viet Nam - we are included in Viet Nam wages. My checks should always be the same. The per diem I get when I am away from home is paid to me here in Laos at the end of the month. I finally paid my income taxes - just got my W-2 form 5 days ago. Had a real scare. My total taxable income was \$8990 plus the interest which made me over \$9000 - the bracket was \$6-8000 and \$8-10,000 and the \$6-8000 was \$1200 tax plus 28% on \$6000. But the interest put me in \$1600 tax and 28% on \$8000. I didn't know exactly how to feel the thing out and asked Pop and he didn't know because his son does his. He suggested I send it home to Dad. Then we decided that I would have to pay \$1600 + 28% of \$8000. My withdrawal tax

~~and was \$1200 plus so I wrote a check for \$300 plus,~~
~~the next day I was just getting ready to mail it when~~
~~Pop mentioned how high taxes were. Carol milt an~~
~~secretary asked to check it for me. I had used the card -~~
~~she used the 1040 form and said the gov't owed me~~
~~\$2.10! I had not deducted \$600 for myself and an~~
~~automatic 10% for medical bill and donation! Pop~~
~~and I thought the check had already figured that in -~~
~~but Carol said no. So she owed me almost \$400!~~
~~When it comes to finances I am lost. I am clueless for pay~~
~~raise some plus. All you + employees are supposed to get~~
~~a 4% pay raise Oct 1! It's confusion about inflation~~
~~but keep giving raises. Also, possibly we may get~~
~~a 50% differential instead of the present 25% in Laos. In~~
~~addition I would, now I make \$7200 per year + 20% bonus~~
~~which is almost \$11,000 per year. The new deal would be \$7200~~
~~+ 50% = over \$10,000 even without the pay raise. I still~~
~~don't feel important enough to get \$13,000, plus an extra~~
~~\$150 - 200 per month per diem (the same \$2000 of the month~~
~~per year!). However we get paid for the physical work~~
~~involved. Plus, I make decisions which involve~~
~~thousands and thousands of US \$s and many~~
~~American lives are at stake on my decisions. Not to~~
~~mention thousands of local lives depend on what~~
~~I say or do.~~

I really goofed last week. I have been
working in a new area we took in Luang Prabang
site 225, Ban Se. We rebuilt the millrace

BAN SE 225

Jan 31. On the 2ndnd I went ^{get} in on a chopra and
 spend the night. The village had been enemy for 6 years.
 I was the first American ever there. In the day of the
 French they had an outpost there and it was a
 trading center on a fairly large river. The people
 were few and the village was beautiful - big
 wooden houses, tall coconut trees etc. I got the
 villagers to build a 1100 foot airstrip and plant
 gardens and the river was full of fish and they had
 ducks pig etc. Ith Mont was great. Our troops had
 advanced in the mountain 15 kilometers west of Ban Se.
 So far only PL. Then theynd got mad. In the meantime I
 had 690 refugees there and we sent 54 last men in
 for military training. Things were going great. Then the
 Viet Nam came in April and our group, 200 of them
 were hit by a possible 700 VC, with some PL. They got pushed
 back to the river and fled to #178 Phu Sangam #186
 Hanoi Song. The refugees fled to the jungle. Then we
 got the 54 soldiers back from training and the VC seemed
 to have pulled back. I wanted the refugees to stay
 out of the village for 2-3 weeks but they were hiding in
 the mountains and couldn't take the cold. General
 Yang Bao wanted them to go to #186. I spend the night
 with them in the jungle and most were getting ready
 to go back to the village. I went in on the afternoon
 of the 29 April. 2 companies of soldiers were supposed

P5 ~~2nd time check~~ Q

To have walked in from #17P-156 but didn't show up. I was going to spend the night there at Ban Si. However the people asked me to go to General Vang Pao. So I left. The next morning I flew back up in time to see the village burning and pick up heavy ground fire. Seems the enemy had attacked at 0800 in the morning. Mortars hit the village and burned it to the ground. The smoke could be seen for miles. We had one boy killed and an amputee from Sam Khong to committed suicide by holding a grenade to his chest and pulled the pin! The day before he had begged me to take him out but I said no. He was 20, a Lao Thung, and left a wife and 2 small babies. I came back to Sam Khong pretty upset and Pop told me to go to Vientiane and get drunk and forget about everything for 2-3 days. I did. Ended up only 184 refugees escaped. The rest, about 500 plus 40 soldiers were captured. I heard that when they are held and also that the VC lost 9 KIA and that the VC have moved back to Maung Ngai so we may be able to get the people back.

Everything is going quiet now. Pop said he is going to make Andy Cree Co-ordinator of all of the North Program. Pao, when he is not here I will be in charge. ~~He is trying to get me another permit - to see a 6-month before 3. I really don't want the job - so we will see - Well will write more later.~~
Pop everyone is well know - I feel really tired but OK -
P5 What is Jim now - ? Love Eric

7/27/67 July 22-67

Dear Mom and Dad -

~~you it been a while since I last wrote~~
~~I suppose I haven't really every time but time~~
~~does go fast that I usually love to catch up~~
~~day and month by. I just found these cards~~
~~that you sent me months ago. I suppose you~~
~~still have them. Before I forget please pass~~
~~my next 2 check in the checking account.~~
~~I've forgot each how much I have now and~~
~~just bought the new car and I know I need~~
~~more money. I didn't know it until you wrote~~
~~last time but the extra money in the check is~~
~~due to the fact I got a small promotion and~~
~~raise - the you I didn't bother to tell me that~~
~~I got a raise of \$2.40 per year.~~

Things have been real quiet in the north here.
The PL/VM usually attack during the dry season
but this year they didn't hit us as usual. It
is now the rainy season and we are beginning
our offensive.

~~Sorry have been~~
~~now for a moment.~~
~~will write soon!~~

Love
Ernie

PS Don't forget the check in the
checking account

Sept 6-67

Dear Mom, Dad & Jim,

Well, here is a long overdue letter. It is now about 9:40 but I don't feel tired or sleepy. I am now at Sam Hong - I've been up in Nakhang - (Sam Nue) for the past 7 days. Came down last night to have dinner at Carol Mills' house. She is going home in a month and so she is having people in every night for dinner. Howard - remember the UKS guy (I must have mentioned him when I was home) is back in Loo in Nakhang (Site 36 on the map) and he came down for dinner also. Really stuffed myself - I'd been eating rice and some veg and chicken for so long a good meal tasted real good - plus a few scotch. I was going back up country today but then I decided to stay here and clean up my lawn (!) and relax.

I really feel good - health-wise. Did you get my letter from Bangkok? I was at the ~~University of Chicago~~ ~~and thought that I was doing~~ ~~the thing for things as for graduate work~~ at the Jane Addams School of Social Welfare.

Really a tremendous girl. If can⁸ home for December
~~she I plan I hope she can visit for a couple~~
~~of days.~~ I had intended to be gone for 3-4 days
but instead I took 13 days! I just left and
she was not counted towards annual leave
because I did it illegally! However I did
come back relaxed and feeling good. ~~Pekoway~~
~~(Hag)~~ and flew up to Chingmai in the north
(Hat is her home). Stayed there 4 days. She
had to take another English test in Bangkok and
she was worried that she flunked the written
part. If she did she can't go to the US - However
I think she probably did ok. Then I flew to
Chingmai and drove to Ban Hui Sai in Laos
(L-25 on the map) to see Blaine Jones - an
old friend who worked at Sam Thong nearly 3
years. Then he and I flew down to Sam Thong.
Nice to have "private" airplanes!

Sam Thong doesn't seem like the same
place anymore - I'm one of last of the "old gang":
Don is dead, Blaine is in Ban Hui Sai, Jack
Williamson is in Vientiane now, Sam Adams

is back in the States, most of the CHS guys are new -
 Bob Daler is in Luang Prabang.
 Carol is leaving next month. Only Dee Deid, our
 PHD nurse and Don Douglas, PHD medic and Pop are
 left. Pop is not at all well. I really don't expect
 him to finish his last 18 months here. Thengare
 really in a mess because I am supposed to be
 acting Area Coordinator when Pop is not here. Now
 even I have to stay up north most of the time.
 I really don't know anything ^{about} the operations at
 Sam Thung itself. It seems obvious that Pop
 will have to take off for a week or so very
 soon. Ugh! We've had several "scare" here at
 Sam Thung. ~~10 days~~ 10 days ago everyone
 thought Sam Thung and Long Thung (with 20 A 1 98)
 would be attacked. I came back from Thailand
 just as that mess was going on - however nothing
 happened. At night, though, I can hear the 105
 launcher in the distance. It would be surprising
 me much if the P/V did not attack here - but
 only a sneak attack to blow up the aircraft
 and maybe try to hit some of our buildings.
 The P/V aren't using their usual tactics

this year. Usually they always attack during
the dry season. This year they did not. The
rainy season is now nearly over and we are
wondering if they were building up supplies
during the past dry season and the rainy
season to really hit us this coming dry
season. Strong rumors are that there will
be a general Convention called in Laos at the
end of the year. Intelligence reports indicate
that the enemy wants to knock us out of
Sam Neua and Phongsavang Province so that
if a truce is signed they will control all
the north. Certainly sounds reasonable.

~~I received the book on Pongkay~~
~~and Soudong County.~~ Now I read them clear
through but I have read sections here and
there. My reading time gets less and less all
the time. Also got all the boxes of coasters. Didn't
take long to finish them off.

~~Well, guess I'll drop for now. I'm writing up~~
~~a modeling assignment next week probably. Let~~
~~me know if it arrives. Still haven't gotten the~~
~~book and records yet!~~

Take it for now. - will write again soon.

Love Ernie.

1428767

~~Hoggy R. - 1 P. D. Hoggengeton~~

~~part of my small~~ I just can't get things

did you know I had malaria again in Sept?

My next letter I'll try to get all your last letter.

21 straight days - only 2 night in Sam Khong - so

about Christmas - Must go to Ventura regional

about going back to the state, so the summer

called on Lao. Says the Mes killed 500 Vietnamese per
week in the north / south war.

exist here!

are - south and south east on the map. We

and so far have over 700 new refugees since they are
really enemy soldiers.

...any more we had to send them all south

by plane to site 211. Tomorrow I'm going to 211
to distribute blankets, pots, clothes to the last
216 people. Oh - my shipment finally come last
week. Kind of made me sad to see some old
shirt etc there that I had worn in high school!

I haven't definitely made up my mind - but I
think I'll come back here for 2 more years when
these 2 are up. Either that or go to college for my M.A.
It may be I'll be tired and ready to quit
after 10 more months - I don't know. I am getting
a little itchy to study again. However, I keep
thinking that 2 more years I could save(?) that
much more money - (and I would probably get a
raise and good income) plus I could read on
my own more about the area and when I entered
grad school I would have that much more
background. My last trip to Thailand I really
bought a lot more books on Laos, Thailand and
Burma and Vietnam. Bought some old and fairly
rare books on Laos in French. Plan is to teach myself
to read French!! Hah. However I will have to
know French to study the history of SEA. I know
this isn't too long but at least you know I'm still
around. Well, write more shortly - I promise!

Love

Emie

*They (Golf Green) brought him to our
67 hospital that he died 10 minutes before they got here.*

The loss of a Hero

by Kim Willenson

United Press International

A FEW DAYS ago the US 7th Air Force in Saigon issued a dry little announcement about a tragedy.

The communique said that Lt Karl Richter, a flyer who volunteered for an extra 100 missions over North Vietnam, had been killed on his 198th flight over that country.

The announcement was small and dry and probably a little bitter in the Air Force's mouth, because Karl Richter, 24, of Holly, Michigan, was a real hero of the Vietnam air war.

A mighty going home celebration had been planned for the end of his 200th raid. Richter was to have flown to Saigon in tandem with Maj. Robert B. Piper, 36, of (3699 Laurel Crest St.) Salt Lake City, a man who had been his instructor at the air force academy in 1964, and was his best friend at Korat air base, 150 miles northeast of here, as Piper finished his 100th mission.

Richter was to have been winned, dined, interviewed and celebrated and then sent home to teach other young flyers the marvellous assortment of tactics he had learned to keep his F-105 Thunderchief out of trouble in the flak-riddled skies of North Vietnam.

The dry little announcement in Saigon could not possibly have told the story of Richter's life—and death—but Bob Piper did tell it to me in an interview here yesterday, before he headed for home.

Second and last

"The irony of it was," said Piper, "that Karl was a man who knew the skies, the terrain, the roads and bridges and the gunsites of North Vietnam probably better than any man alive."

"He got shot down, yes. But it was only the second time his plane had been hit in 198 missions—and the first time was inside his first ten and he brought that plane back."

"He got shot down, but it wasn't in package six, where the flak is heavy. It was in package one, where the flak is next to nothing." (US flyers have divided North Vietnam into half a dozen "packages" or territories, graded from one to six on

new man. They saw a bridge and Karl told the new guy to stay upstairs. He rolled over and went in on the bridge.

"As soon as he rolled they started shooting, and they hit him on the way down. But even so he managed to pull out and head for home."

"He managed to eject, and his chute was good, and it wasn't even hostile territory. But on the way down, something happened. He swung into the side of a karst (a sandstone cliff) or his chute snagged on a tree."

Collapsed

"Anyway, the chute collapsed. He fell 200 feet and it broke almost every bone in his body. Still they managed to get him out alive, but he died on the way to the hospital."

"That's the worst of it," said Piper, "to die from a collapsed chute."

But even Piper admitted later that that wasn't really the worst of it. The worst was that Richter was one of the brightest young flyers and best all-around officers the air force had.

Piper first met him in 1964, when Richter was a cadet at the air force academy and he as teaching aerodynamics.

"He wasn't a brilliant student," says Piper, "but he was one of the best all-around cadets I ever saw. He was tall (6 feet one inches) and husky, and he had square features. He wore his hair short but not crew cut, and he looked like he might have been a football player, which he was."

"He was a happy-go-lucky guy. Everybody liked him and admired him. But he was serious too, and very sensitive to the feelings of other people."

After he left the academy Richter went on for pilot training and then to Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada to learn

raids on the North. Piper did not see him again until he himself arrived at Korat in January, and by then Richter, even though still a lieutenant, had already passed him by in terms of future potential.

"It took him a long time to finish his first hundred because he was so good that they kept calling him in to 7th headquarters (in Saigon) to advise them on tactics. That's a real honour for a guy who's just a lieutenant." (A hundred missions can usually be finished in five or six months).

"When I first got here, he was down there as a matter of fact. They needed the advice. We were losing a tremendous number of 105's at the start, and we aren't making them anymore, you know. It's the best bomber we've got."

"They lost 15 planes out of Karl's squadron during his first hundred, and it was tactics that he himself devised that helped them to cut the losses way below that during his second hundred."

"He was working in the tactical operations section of the squadron when I first got here, and he was teaching me how to fly. What was so great about flying with him was that he knew exactly where everything was up there."

"One day we were up and had some extra bombs and he said 'Hey I know where there's a gun site over on route seven. I saw it the other day. Let's go get it. And off we went, and it was just where he said it was and we plastered it.'"

For all that, Richter had his superstitions just like any other fighter pilot, said Piper. The squadron orderly, a boy named Chuong, had taken him to a Buddhist temple outside Korat shortly after he arrived and acquired charms against flak and surface to air missiles.



nichter, 24, of Holly, Michigan, was a real hero of the Vietnam air war.

A mighty going home celebration had been planned for the end of his 200th raid. Richter was to have flown to Saigon in tandem with Maj. Robert B. Piper, 36, of (3699 Laurel Crest St.) Salt Lake City, a man who had been his instructor at the air force academy in 1964, and was his best friend at Korat air base, 150 miles northeast of here, as Piper finished his 100th mission.

Richter was to have been wined, dined, interviewed and celebrated and then sent home to teach other young flyers the marvellous assortment of tactics he had learned to keep his F-105 Thunderchief out of trouble in the flak-riddled skies of North Vietnam.

The dry little announcement in Saigon could not possibly have told the story of Richter's life—and death—but Bob Piper did tell it to me in an interview here yesterday, before he headed for home.

Second and last

"The irony of it was," said Piper, "that Karl was a man who knew the skies, the terrain, the roads and bridges and the gunsites of North Vietnam probably better than any man alive."

"He got shot down, yes. But it was only the second time his plane had been hit in 198 missions—and the first time was inside his first ten and he brought that plane back."

"He got shot down, but it wasn't in package six, where the flak is heavy. It was in package one, where the flak is next to nothing." (US flyers have divided North Vietnam into half a dozen "packages" or territories, graded from one to six on the basis of groundfire strength. "Package six" is Hanoi-Haiphong.)

"He got it on a mission where he was just out on an easy run to check in a

"As soon as he rolled they started shooting, and they hit him on the way down. But even so he managed to pull out and head for home."

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After he left the academy Richter went on for pilot training and then to Nellis air base in Nevada, to learn about the F-105—the primary bombing aircraft used against North Vietnam.

He arrived at Korat 14 months ago and began to fly

7th headquarters (in Saigon) to advise them on tactics. That's a real honour for a guy who's just a lieutenant." (A hundred missions can usually be finished in five or six months).

"When I first got here, he was down there as a matter of fact. They needed the advice. We were losing a tremendous number of 105's at the start, and we aren't making them anymore, you know. It's the best bomber we've got."

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For all that, Richter had his superstitions just like any other fighter pilot, said Piper. The squadron orderly, a boy named Chuong, had taken him to a Buddhist temple outside Korat shortly after he arrived and acquired charms against flak and surface to air missiles for him.

The flak charm was two little strips of rolled copper strung on a piece of thin cotton rope and worn around the waist with one on each of the body. The theory was that no flak could penetrate anywhere between the copper Buddhist "magnets" and therefore the body was protected.

"Chuong was completely broken up by Karl's death," Piper said. "And thought his religion had failed him. But then he found out that Karl himself had not been hit by fire, he took that as some compensation."

Richter's personal affects, his hi-fi set, his Oriental rugs and bronzeware, and his two big pictures of bomb damage at the Thai Nguyen steel mill near Hanoi were still in his room when Piper left Korat yesterday.

"You know, most of those rooms up there were nothing but wall-to-wall playboy," said Piper. "With Karl it was different. You could feel his class."

"Knowing him, and knowing what he could do, I don't see how he could have missed going right up to the top."