

PARTING SHOT

Dear Dad...

18 June 69

You can take this letter for what it's worth. I am now in Cam Ranh Bay 6 Convalescent Center, which is a hospital.

OK, here I go. First of all, I have been drinking pretty hard tonight, so if I write bad please understand.

I have about forty days left in country and I was offered a job here. I'll give you the background of how I got it. When I came here I was made Barracks Sgt. of three wards, which means making sure that the men got their medications and that they were taken care of properly. The NCO in charge was so pleased with my work because the wards had been a mess. I got them in A-1 condition. They offered me a job caring for a company of patients.

I thought about taking the job to keep me safe until I got home with my loved ones.

I had to make one of the biggest decisions of my life. My platoon leader is also wounded and in Japan. So that leaves my platoon (which I have fought, cried, helped, laughed, and instructed with) with an E-5 Sgt. who is new in country and don't know nothin' to lead my platoon of men to kill the Viet Cong and NVA.

So I made the decision not to cover my own ass but to help my men to maybe live. I'll go back to the field and lead and fight.

So what I want to say now is if I get hurt or killed it was my own decision.

We are in the A Shau Valley, which is an area that has a lot of Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army soldiers. My platoon has had three killed and I don't know how many wounded.

Please take care of Mom, Dave, Tom, and especially Barb if anything happens to me. I'm sure you understand what I'm trying to say. My men need me and I'm sure I can save somebody's life if I try.

What I want you to please do is give this letter to SSgt. Kitchen and let him read it. Dad, SSgt. Kitchen helped me a lot once, and I want him to know what I thinking right now.

May God watch over me and help me,
SSgt. Franklin W. Underwood
101st Airborne
In my Father's name.



Citation of Award of the Soldier's Medal

For heroism not involving actual conflict with an armed enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 23 June 1969. Staff Sergeant Underwood distinguished himself while serving as platoon sergeant in Co. C, 2nd Bn., 506th Inf., during combat operations in the A Shau Valley. At approximately 1400 hours, a CH-47 helicopter in which he was a passenger crashed into the supply pad at Fire Support Base Airborne. The crippled ship instantly burst into flames, which ignited the highly explosive fougasse and artillery ammunition stored nearby.

With little regard for his own safety, Sergeant Underwood selflessly began to guide the injured personnel out of the burning craft toward safety. By carrying injured men and offering words of encouragement to the others, he aided in the evacuation of seventeen men from the burning craft. Fearing that more of his comrades might still be trapped, he remained inside the burning helicopter valiantly searching for injured personnel. It was during this courageous attempt that he died.

Sergeant Underwood's personal bravery and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army. ■