January 6th ,1966 I’m Private First Class Rick Wood. I serve in the United States Marine Corps. I have graduated from USMC Boot Camp five weeks ago, since then, I have been waiting with my buddies from 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, Company K, to be deployed to Vietnam. The war began 4 years ago, many our boys died there. Now, they are sending us to die…

January 27th ,1966 It’s been a long time since I wrote something here. We’re in Vietnam. In US Marine Da Nang base. Since we landed here, nothing special has really happened. We wake up every morning, do PT, eat, and then we are bored the rest of the day. That’s basically what our lives look like here, thousands kilometers away from home. I hope it will be like this to the end of the war. I hope we’ll all get back home in one piece.

February 14th ,1966 The Vietnamese attack was quick. We would never think that they would attack during as quiet and peaceful day as today. We held them off, three our guys are wounded but fortunately none fatally. Well, what a “wonderful” St. Valentine’s Day!

February 19th ,1966 The situation is getting really bad. Our troops are being forced to keep moving back from the frontline by Vietcong soldiers. Every fighting Company is getting heavy losses. NVA is re-arming and regaining control over new territories . Our Company was ordered to leave the base, and catch up with our main forces in Chu Lai, then wait for more orders. We’re moving out tomorrow.

February 21st ,1966 Today we got to Chu Lai. Our Company K along with Bravo Company from 1st Battalion 3rd Marines was ordered to help ground forces of the US Army to fight in the jungle. None of us ever has ever seen combat. We’re all rookies, freshly out from Boot Camp. The only soldier from our company who has ever seen combat is our leader – Sgt. David Scott. Back in Da Nang, everyone was joking, smiling and laughing. Here, in Chu Lai everyone is scared to death. We don’t know where are we are going, we don’t even know if we will ever come back home.

May 3rd,1966 We set up a temporary base in the jungle along with the company Bravo. We helped boys from the Army with pushing NVA back into the jungle. Now, the area seems clear and safe. Even though, we lost some guys during the fight. We must watch out. This isn’t our safe base in Da Nang. The jungle is full of bamboo spikestrips, booby traps, holes with explosives, mines and other stuff like this. Any wrong move can kill - stepping in a wrong place, pulling a wrong branch, or even sneezing near explosive. Anything. Those gooks are clever…

May 8th,1966 Today my Company leader got an order from HQ telling that for actions during fight in the jungle me and four my buddies are promoted to Corporal. Well, I got a new shoulder patch on my uniform. That’s nice. But now I have got a team under my command. Five guys – Pfc. Cooper, Pfc. Jackson, Pfc. Wright, Pfc. White and Pfc. Bailey. They are exactly the same rookies like me. So why HQ thinks I am the right person to lead these guys? I’m afraid I won’t handle it. And, the thing I fear the most is that those guys under my command won’t make it back home…

May 13th ,1966 Yesterday my squad was ordered to go and recon the area. Everything was going well but we got into an ambush. Fortunately another squad was near and helped us but Pfc. Wright was wounded and now he’s staying in coma in field hospital in our temporary base. He will be transported back to the USA with the next transport. The war has ended for him, he is going home.

May 15th,1966 Pfc. Wright was taken away with the air transport to the US. But without him, our squad doesn’t have a machine gunner. In conditions like that, when a giant platoon of Vietcong or NVA could show up anywhere in any second, the squad without a machine gunner is like a garden with flowers – it doesn’t exist. So we got a guy from Bravo Company. He doesn’t talk a lot. We only know his name, rank and why he was switched to our squad. His name is Pfc. Butler, he was in some squad from Bravo Company but they stepped on AP mine. Everyone except him was killed.

May 17th ,1966 Today our squad has witnessed that despite the fact that Pfc. Butler isn’t talkative a lot, he is well trained Marine and cold-blooded machine gunner. He saved some of our buddies from visiting “the other side” by eliminating the whole Vietcong platoon which sneaked up to our camp outskirts during the night. Well, at least for now this war seems to be kind for us. But we all know that this is only a sensation.

June 3rd ,1966 My squad was redeployed back to Marine air base back in Da Nang because reports of our intelligence say that the enemy is resupplying, rearming and shuffling-up again near the air field and it seems they are preparing to try to regain control of it. Almost every company which was able to fight was deployed from here to the jungle a couple of months ago. Well, it seems my squad and my company are really very lucky to finally say we’re safe, just a little bit.

June 13th,1966 While I was writing my last words here I couldn’t predict or even suppose how wrong I could be. Our intelligence was right. The enemy attacked right after they found out we’re preparing defenses. I have to say this was the hardest and the worst battle I have been in since my first step in Vietnam. It was supposed to be an easy victory, it was supposed to be a light fight. Until NVA brought tanks and motorized units. All that gear comes from the USSR. They are training NVA soldiers and Vietcong. Our governments hate each other. Why? Is it worth it? It’s not our duty to judge that. Let them solve this between themselves. If only the price of politics weren’t wounds and corpses all around….

June 26th ,1966 We have already cleaned all that mess. All the injured and dead are back in the US. Defenses have been set up again on a base perimeter. I think we don’t have much time left for another attack. Our Company colonel was killed during some raid on Vietcong base in the jungle, We got news that now we’re under command of a young captain, freshly out from West Point Academy. He’ll join us tomorrow along with a new delivery of supplies and new troops.

July 2nd ,1966 Our new commanding officer seems to be a really nice guy. Except for maybe the thing that he seems not to know the word “defeat”. In Company we’re all afraid he will someday lose his temper during fight and for his own ambitions he’ll send his fellow guys to a certain death in field. But these are just our little thoughts.

July 4th ,1966 Our thoughts turned out to be true. The commander got reports from the field that our battalions which are dug-up in a temporary base in the jungle are taking heavy fire and have many men down. We didn’t have to wait long for a move-out order. We’re flying there tomorrow morning. I have bad feelings about this flight…

July 5th ,1966 Just like it was planned. On 5th of July we boarded our UH-1 “Huey” choppers and went back to the jungle to help our guys. Just on our first day I lost two guys from my squad… Pfc. Jackson was shot dead by enemy marksman and Pfc. Cooper felt into a booby trap. HQ didn’t make a decision to fill up the losses with new soldiers, there are no reinforcements. We’re now in the jungle, all alone, with death glancing at us from every single corner.

July 17th,1966 During these days I have witnessed things about which I have heard only in terrible stories from older soldiers who were in Medical Point back at Da Nang waiting for transport back to home. I saw wounded and dead people, many of them. I heard injured cry for help, for their mothers and medics while docs were doing their best with way not enough resources to save everyone who needed their help. I saw our F-16 dropping napalm bombs in the jungle. A loud whistle, then bang, then silence and after that there shows 20 meter high wall of fire, spreading uncontrollably in all possible directions. People running from it, some made it out, some did not. I bet nobody would even recognize these poor guys if they didn’t have their dog-tags. Also, Pfc. Bailey was badly wounded in the leg, and he was taken away to transport to home. From my Squad there are only left Pfc. White and Pfc. Butler. We still haven’t got any reinforcements from HQ but our Company commander placed an order to not retreat and hold positions at any cost. So we’re doing it. What else shall we do? Tomorrow we’re attacking from choppers the main reloading point of NVA. I hope it will give us a break, at least for some time.

July 20th,1966 This last page is written by Ssg. James Grimes. Corporal Wood was shot and killed during the battle on July 18th ,along with the rest of his squad from 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, Company K. The war ended for them, but there is no indication that it will also end for us soon. We’re staying here, still fighting, executing our orders, and hoping to have more luck than Cpl. Wood and his men. Semper Fi, Marines.