

# NORMAN LANE JR. MEMORIAL PROJECT

**"FOR THOSE WHO FIGHT FOR IT, LIFE HAS A  
FLAVOR THE PROTECTED NEVER KNOW."**

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To Friends of Norman Lane,

On his second day in Vietnam, while serving in his initial assignment as weapons platoon commander for Lima Co., 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines (3/4 Marines) at Cam Lo Bridge (<https://tinyurl.com/Nov-13-1967>), 2ndLt. Norman Lane had written a letter to Sarah Shepard with some early observations about the Vietnamese people and the countryside:

Viet Nam is fascinating. . . . Out in the rice paddies are whole families, harvesting the rice, herds of cattle, and water buffaloes. . . . There is mud everywhere — a sea of mud, deep sticky red mud. I see lots of banana trees, papaya trees, palms (not coconut), arums of various kinds, bamboo, tropical figs, and many bromeliads used for hedges. The Vietnamese children are adorable. I always wave at them and try to make friends when I have time.

Norman's promotion to 1stLt. became effective fifteen days later, on December 1, 1967, and on December 6, he wrote to Sarah again:

Well seriously, there is not much I need for Christmas, since the Marine Corps is taking care of most of my basic needs. And love is pretty hard to package.

One thing I would like is a book of poetry, paperback type, with poems by Byron, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Longfellow, or somebody like that.

Two weeks before Christmas, Norman writes again to Sarah, now from the C-2 fire support base (see map, page 8, <https://tinyurl.com/July-27-1967>):

I have been moved to a rear-type position, relatively speaking. . . . I was put in charge of an 81 mm mortar platoon [with Headquarters & Service (H&S) Co.], . . . This place (C2) is a big base (600 men) on top of a big old hill. From my bunker I can see Con Thien [<http://tinyurl.com/Sept-7-1967>], Cam Lo, and Dong Ha. . . . I'll get someone to take a picture of me looking fierce or brave or something and send it to you, Love.

I live in a large underground bunker with big wooden beams. My bed is a shelf with an air mattress on it. Under me is the battalion doctor, . . .

The battalion doctor was Navy Lieutenant "Doc" Wilson, and Norman also listed the names of the other men who shared the bunker with him, for Sarah: LCpl. Dunn, 1stLt. Bill Willett, the H&S Co. commander, 3/4 Marines, Navy Chaplain Anderson and his assistant, LCpl. Peterson, Cpl. Morrison — the mail orderly — and 2ndLt. Jim Singer, a veteran of Con Thien, where he had served as a platoon commander with Mike Co., 3/4 Marines. Norman continued his letter of December 10:

In the evenings we sit around listening to tapes or the radio, reading, writing letters, drinking cokes, beer, or whiskey. We have electric lights.

In February of 2014, Norman's Brownsville/Taylor family/Camp Meeting cousin, contemporary, and Vanderbilt classmate Lynne Thornton Mann recalled a Christmas story from 1967:

In October [most likely November, 1967] after Norman left [for Vietnam], he wrote and asked if I would send Christmas carols (words and music) to him so that he could lead his troops in singing for the Christmas season. The Cokesbury Bookstore [in Nashville] had a gorgeous bigger than 8.5x11 paperback with lyrics and music – also a book with words only (sent quite several Xerox copies of the words). There was a hanging Christmas bell with a pull cord; with each pull of the cord it played a different Christmas carol in classic music-box style; it was so charming (perhaps a touch of home) that it seemed appropriate to send it as well. Mail delivery was quite unpredictable then.

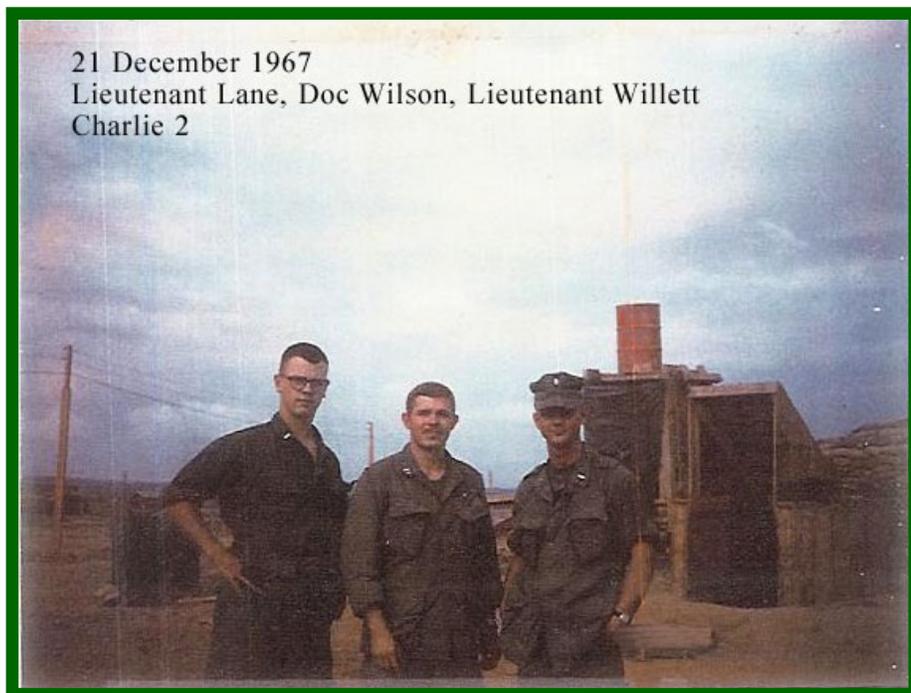
Sometime later, a letter came from Norman; the package had arrived in time. How delightful to read that it was in time for Christmas – to give a bit of "comfort and joy". It sounded as if the singing gave them all encouragement each time they could join in singing – other troops joined in as well. He had found that if he added insect repellent on top of an opened tin of peanut butter that it would burn cheerily as they sang in as much safety as possible (bunker?).

A later letter told of suddenly being under attack. He led his men into bunkers/foxholes to avoid enemy fire. As he landed on his pack, what to his wondering ears should appear – but the music-box sound of the Christmas bell playing a carol merrily.

As Norman had written to Sarah in his December 10 letter,

We have an incredible amount of mud here. It rains a lot.

But on Thursday, December 21, 1967, the skies were clear at C-2 (Charlie 2). Norman had told Sarah just ten days before that he would send her a picture of him "looking fierce or brave or something." In early February, 2014, with a big assist from John "Doc" Nunn, who was serving with 3/4 Marines as a Navy Corpsman in December, 1967, Bill Willett provided this photo: from left are 1stLt. Norman Lane, Navy Lt. and battalion surgeon Doc Wilson, and 1stLt. Bill Willett, CO of H&S Co., 3/4 Marines:



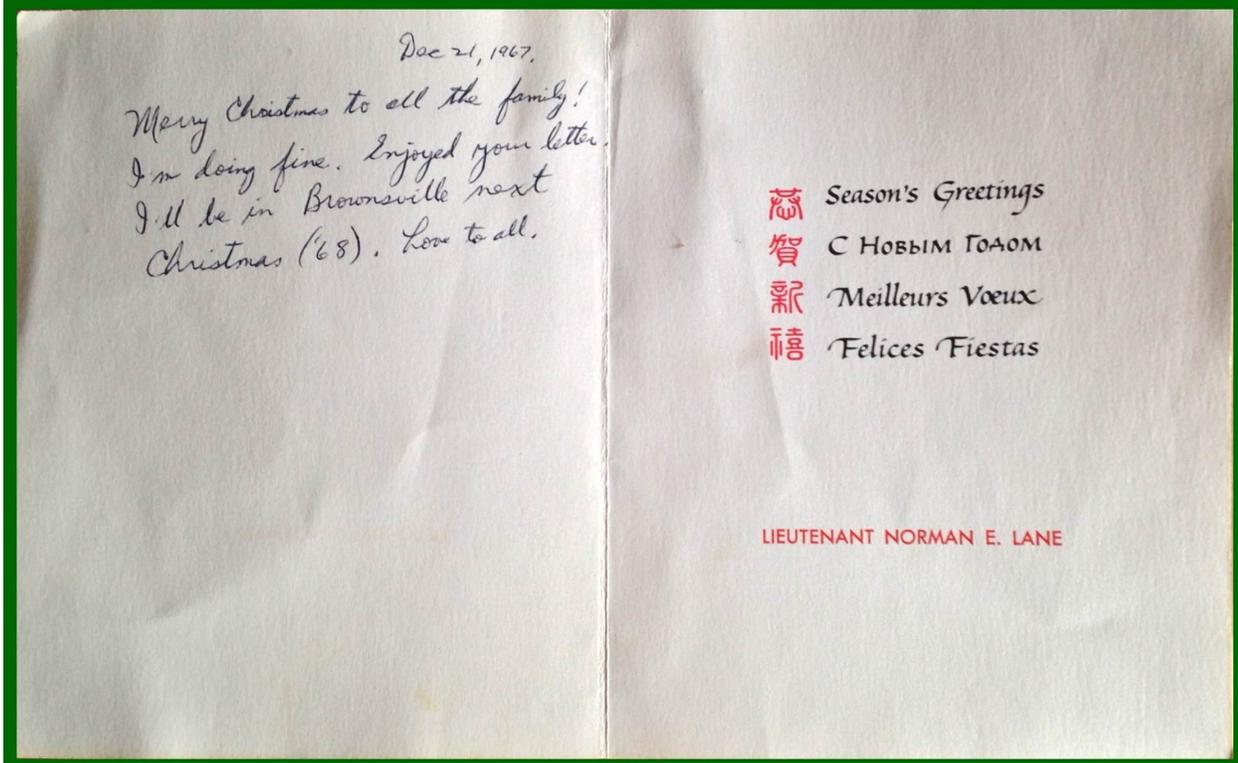
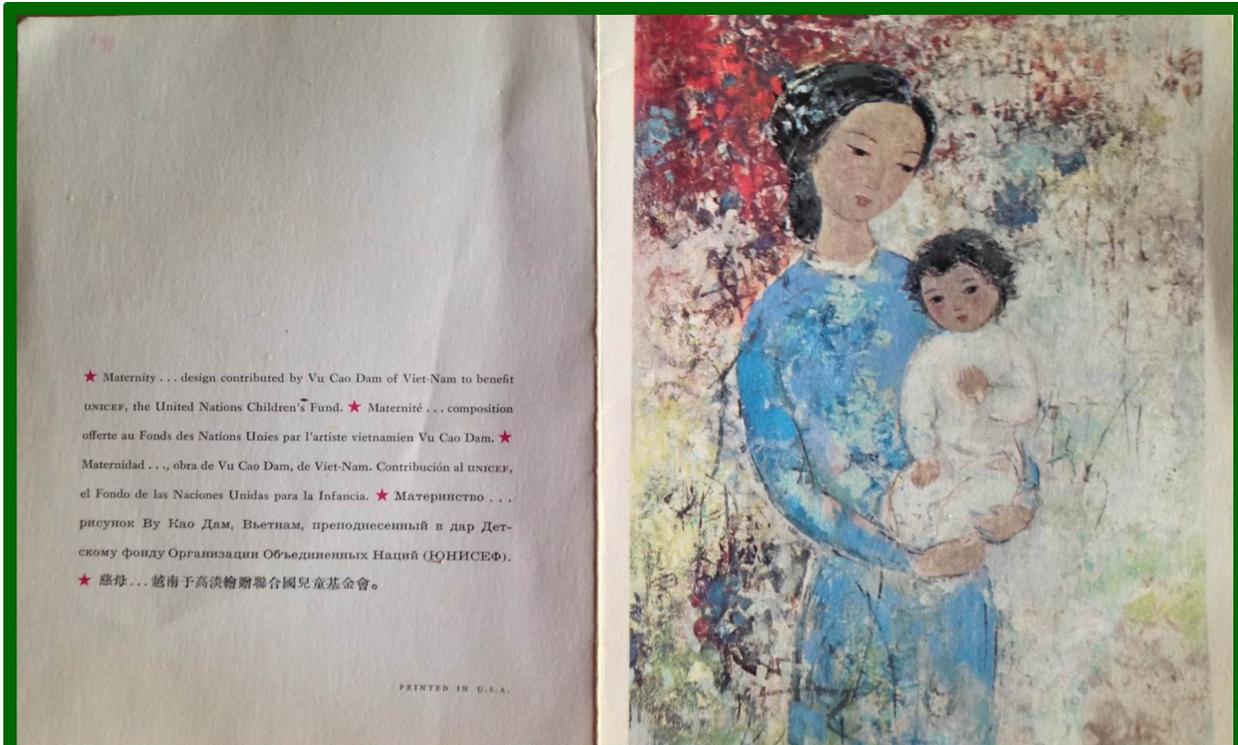
As Bill annotated the photo,

This is Doc Wilson (middle), Lt. Lane (the 81mm mortar Plt. commander) and me. Notice the weather and clear sky – a very nice day. Taken at C-2

At some point on that same day – Thursday, December 21, 1967 – Norman Lane wrote a Christmas card (see page 3) to another of his Brownsville/Taylor family/Camp Meeting cousins and contemporaries, Nicholas Thornton, and his bride of just one year, Jerilyn. Norman wrote, probably in his C-2 bunker that night, by the electric lights:

Dec 21, 1967.

Merry Christmas to all the family!  
I'm doing fine. Enjoyed your letter.  
I'll be in Brownsville next  
Christmas ('68). Love to all.



The story behind the card and the artist will be told another time, but the Vu Cao Dam painting that provided the cover art is titled "Maternity."

For Christmas 2017 – fifty years after Norman Lane's photograph was taken at C-2, and fifty years after he wrote that Christmas card to Jerilyn and Nicholas Thornton – I leave you with what is perhaps a less familiar Christmas carol, the "Coventry Carol" (<https://tinyurl.com/eileen-farrell-coventry-carol>). The story of this English lullaby and its medieval tune will also be told, in time. Its biblical origin, which is found in the story of the Nativity, is perhaps best summarized in St. Matthew 2:18 (King James Version):

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

The timeless theme of that Christmas card, "Maternity," was as much a part of the Nativity story in 1967 as it had been 2,000 years before – it is a theme that "Coventry Carol" first captured in the sixteenth century, continuing to 1940, when it was sung from the bombed-out ruins of Coventry Cathedral during the BBC's Empire broadcast of Christmas, 1940, and to today:

Lullay, Thou little tiny Child,  
By, by, lully, lullay,  
Lullay, Thou little tiny Child,  
By, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do,  
For to preserve this day  
This poor youngling for whom we sing  
By, by, lully, lullay.

And in 1968, in thousands of American homes, the sentiment of that medieval carol would be felt deeply, again . . .

Thank you.