

Jan 25
Chu Lai

* Dear Family:-

I promised myself to write a bit more regular than I have, so I'd better sit down and crank this out. (That may sound like a terrible way of putting it, but at the moment I'm in Limbo and there's not too much that is worth writing about. I'm afraid that unbaptized children do not make interesting copy and as for virtuous pagans, I haven't seen a one.) Right now, I'm working nights, from 4 p.m. to 7 a.m. (but I wrote to you about that already, or did I?) - anyway, whether or not I did - there are certain advantages to working at night: it's quieter (no trucks driving about), the air seems cleaner (no trucks about), it's cooler & thus much easier to work, and (above all) one isn't closely supervised - & thus can get one's work done & relax for one. As a result, I've been able to do a little reading of my own. I finished At the Back of the North Wind, along with some science-fiction, a thriller, & the last volume of dear old Bertie Russell's Autobiography (the incredible denseness of many of the very intelligent never fails to amaze me). I'm afraid I didn't enjoy the MacDonald a little bit too precious (one doesn't want to be caught saying "dated," but it may not have worn as well as it might). Possibly the greatest difficulty profound a subject. The justification of the acts of God plus religious experience and poetic knowledge in general, treated so directly, are a bit too heavy for one poor fairy-tale to carry. I suppose I'd prefer a story, with occasional glimpses of something larger beyond its confines.

[Interjection: in case my mother is worried about my eating habits with the new schedule, they do serve a midnight meal here which is the equivalent of a rather heavy lunch - so I get three full meals a day, finishing up with breakfast just before I go to bed.]

I helped type up some of those letters from my boss to the families of the new personnel that I mentioned to you in my last letter (from a form, of course). The English is questionable and the typography execrable (I didn't type the one to you people - so of course it isn't as good as the

once & did.) That photograph of me is possibly the worst I have ever seen (I look like one of those green plastic liners to garbage pails). I'll have to see about getting a better one (of course I'm vain - but would you like looking like a garbage pail liner?).

Tomorrow is my half-day off for the week, so I think I'll go take a look for that library, the letter mentioned. Other people have confirmed its existence, so I guess I'll believe in it. Quiet cool places with lots of reading material are at a premium around here.

Also read (last night) Joe McGinnis' The Selling of the President 1968, which was mentioned in the paper quite a bit when it first came out (even Buckley seems to have enjoyed it). I would definitely recommend it to Dad. Of course it is biased (although the author says that it could just as easily have been written about Hubert Humphrey if he'd won), but it's still very interesting to see the kind of calculation that goes into making those political spots on television and the problems of image-building in politics. Incidentally, has Dad read any of the stuff I left for him? I know all of it might not appeal, but most of it is pretty interesting if you hold your breathe and just plunge right into it. I've already started to think about things you might send me to read, and I'll send a list as soon as I can get it together. If you want to pick up some of the smaller catalogues (pamphlet-type) that publishers put out and slip them into various letters, that would be very much appreciated, too.

If nothing else, I'm getting lots of practice with typewriters - which should be excellent for when I go back to school. All of the letters have to be absolutely perfect - and with no erasures. It takes a bit of practice, but it can be done. Anyway, things are so informal (or conditions so inadequate to the work) that everyone just sits down at whatever typewriter isn't being used whenever he has something to type up - and, as a result, I'm getting lots of experience on a variety of kinds & makes. After getting used to the electric (it requires a totally different touch) I'm beginning to like it - & might consider investing in a portable one (they're not too expensive) when I get out. It's much quicker and produces a much better-looking copy.

My goodness, the radio is playing the song (rather schmaltzy, to say the least) that Humphrey Bogart is singing Bergman listened to in "Casablanca." There's no telling what's going to come on the Armed Forces station next, inasmuch as it tries to please everyone. Last night, high lights from Der Fliegende Holländer (Wagner at his most) was followed by a dull - horr of polka music. I'm not quite sure what to say. At any rate, I have my little box of Bach to keep me happy.

The people I work with are all pleasant (in a few cases, interesting) and the person I share my room with is accommodating and civil (a surprising trait in the Army) and (chief among his virtues) owns an electric fan. Since I work evenings and he works days, the room isn't crowded for either of us.

A brief intermission there while we cleaned the office - the guy with the duster pursued by me with the broom with the person with the shop hard on my heels - yelling and shouting the whole time - one finds one's amusement where one can. Now the only thing that remains of the work day is to wait for breakfast and to be relieved - a sort of clerical changing of the guard, accompanied by gossiping, confusion, etc. - Then off to bed (finally - I've been waiting for this for hundreds of years). Then I won't stagger out of my bed until 3 P.M. or so tomorrow (today, actually - but I run on psychological, rather than actual time) when I'll emerge into the afternoon sun, blinking, and crawl off to the shower (rumor has it they'll be installing hot water. I hope so; waking up that way - splash! - is quite a shock.) After that, generally, I'll wander down to the PX, probably not, by anything, look at the airplanes on the field adjacent, buy an ice cream [in January!!] at a concession run by Vietnamese, and read a sci-fi novel. Then I start thinking about getting dinner and going to work. The twelve-hour work day is actually rather fortunate; with more time on one's hand, the uneventfulness would wear on everyone much more heavily.

The scope of the job, the number of people one comes into contact with, and the variety of situations dealt with provides for a broad understanding of military organization & administration all of which could come in useful later on. Not that I'd want to see a school run like an army. But the knowledge of how large military organizations work can be ~~at~~ applied to situations other than this in history - and perhaps supply a sensitivity or

"Feel" for them in dealing with them which I might not otherwise have. Unfortunately, it can be applied to large organizations in general. I'd hate to think what would happen if someone tried to run a business ~~or~~ or a university like this! I doubt that even the Salvation Army really works like an army; it's successful.

I think I've just about run down. At least I really can't think of anything to write about (actually, the only thing I'm thinking about now is bread & fast). Since that's the case, I suppose I'd better do something about it and go out. Then come back & wait for our relief, mail this, and then go to sleep.

Love,
R. 6