

Chu Lai
February 13

Dear Family-

I just received Momma's letter from the 6th. It began so business-like, "Your letter of January 27...", that I thought it was from Dad. (Your handwritings are in many ways that similar). Of course, I also got Thomas & Kristine's offerings along with it - and as soon as I can I'll have to send them something in return. However, I've let a backlog of unanswered letters pile up and have to do something about it. I replied to Aunt Dorothea's letter & in turn got one from Ted - a signal honor (although it took a little while to decipher the handwriting). In addition, Lucia sent a very nice, thoughtful letter - which, unfortunately, requires some thought for an answer... a time-consuming operation which has yet to get off the ground. All this mail is, of course, very pleasant; the only trouble is that it comes in spurts, depending on the weather. So I'll have to reply to those quite soon - also to a very pleasant one from Sarah, and ~~we haven't even written to~~ Ted, yet... or any number of other people. What am I to do? I've never found myself with so many "social" obligations.

However, my immediate family comes first and they're easier to write to (let my prepositions dangle; I don't care). That may in part be a result of your willingness to put up with my stylistic inelegancies, lack of anything in particular to say, etc. The general complaint about letter-writing around here is, "but I don't have anything to say; nothing ever happens." Which is quite true. About the only way to tell the passing of the week is by one's Monday-morning-malaria pill (Birth-control posters are put to a different use here. "Have you had your pill today? It's just as easily the one that keeps the mosquitoes from winning the war").

I now have a room to myself. The Personal Records people, expecting re-inforcements, threw me out of their hootch (Not the people who work there, but their sergeant). So I've been moved into the Casualty Branch hootch, into a single room in Microscopic, but all mine. The person who'd been there before me left it in an incredible mess, but I managed to clean it out thoroughly - doing everything short of burning it down to cleanse it.

Now with all the junk gone & only a bed & a locker (I'll try to knock a table together) it looks positively austere - like a monk's cell. However, it's easy to keep clean now & has plenty of light. I'll probably fall back on the standard G.I. method of brightening it up... sticking magazine ads with lots of color on the walls. Perhaps I should begin with the charcoal of Diana Tegg which appeared in Stars & Stripes (you wouldn't suspect me of harboring pinups, would you?) - It seems that Abelard and Heloise is coming to Los Angeles; good heavens.

There is one passage in The Wind in the Willows which illustrates the "sense of place" you mention, and quite forcibly. As a matter of fact, on reading the book again I was struck by what seemed ~~at~~ to me (it could just be an immediate reaction) to be a remarkable degree of emotional force, beyond the sentimentality (which is quite laudible in itself). I'll have to append it to the letter when I get off from work. Durrell was delightful, but I would point out that we have almost as much wild-life (strictly non-domestic, except for all the dogs). There is, especially, a lizard that hangs around the office door and makes noises rather like a rusty winch, during the early hours of the morning.

Now all I have to do is wait for breakfast - generally indigestible (awful syrup on the pancakes, eggs that taste of iodine, etc, etc, but filling). However, today we're going to try supplementing the standard diet with a pizza - I hope the experiment works.

Feb 14
(Specific) Hm - I can't seem to find that passage; how very frustrating. I'll find it later & send it on. Anyway, the pizza turned out quite nice (the directions said that the yeast should rise in a warm, dark place - so we put it under someone's electric blanket). Incidentally, don't worry about packages - they'll get here reasonably rapidly & the situation seems quite stable. I will make out a list.

Love,
Rob