

Chu Lai
February 16

Dear Dad

In your last letter, so far I've received only one package from home, the one sent (I think) PHL - at any rate, I've already sent you a description of the contents. The only thing I could really use right around now is a set of reading glasses (although I did request PFL pins, we managed to scrounge up a couple of pins - so don't worry about them) for left. The last one I've received was yours. I'll send a list with dates, but I rather doubt that anyone would be keeping a catalogue of personal correspondence. Mail tends to be a bit slow around here, although sometimes it does surprise me and arrive relatively soon. Like everything else around this place, it depends on the weather, facilities available, and what the Vietnamese are doing.

Today, not only did we not get any mail coming through, we don't have electricity or water. Lack of electricity doesn't especially bother me, although that does hamper the job a bit. Lack of water, though, is a real nuisance. Since the first time it happened, I've kept a canteen of water so that I can shave and brush my teeth. Unfortunately, I haven't found a way to take a shower with a canteen - a real drawback in this climate. It's fortunate that I work at night; it's still a bit chilly, so one doesn't smell quite so noticeably.

Actually, life here isn't bad at all - merely a bit primitive - I still haven't gotten used to seeing the road disappear when it rains. However, you can still (usually) stay reasonably clean - and luxuries are that much more luxurious. At any rate, in learning my job, I'm also picking up the techniques of the minor functionary, e.g. how to disagree without being disagreeable - not always a natural thing for me. More interesting is the opportunity to learn about the functioning of the division; this is probably one of the few jobs in which you can see what's happening on a large scale - and if not what's happening, its results, and

draw inferences from that.

You mention the plagues of the mid-1300s that Boucker writes about. Although, naturally enough, construction did decline quite a bit, I believe there was also a corresponding increase in private wealth, inasmuch as what wealth there was became concentrated in a smaller number of hands. I don't remember if this had anything to do with a change in the type of private building that went on. There was, in the early Renaissance, a tendency for the middle class - the merchants - to build private dwellings that, not only housed their family, but served as a focal point for the neighborhood. It wasn't until much later that they began to try to separate themselves from their neighbors & the style of architecture changed again - more walled in. Exactly how the patterns of building (amounts invested, patterns within the cities, styles of architecture, who was building, etc) relate to the economic picture of the time, I don't really know. There's a book in my shelves, very short, which I think is called The Economy of the ~~Early~~ Renaissance in Europe, and which deals with what did (apparently) happen to the wealth during the late middle ages & early renaissance. The author believes that it had something to do with the fact that there was a renaissance. Anyway, it's written for the non-economist (which is why I read it) & might help you draw some conclusions on that.

Buildings are in some ways one of the most interesting facets of history - in part because we still have many of them and can see what we're actually talking about. Also, it tells you quite a bit about people - the engineering techniques available to them - the way they thought a building should look, and why. I hate to think what the monstrosities we're building today say about us. Hopefully, the worst architecture of any age is the first to disappear.

Anyway, there's more, but more work just came in & I'd better get to it.

Love,
L.C.