

Chu Lai
March 26

Dear Family -

I just received Momma's letter #15 (20 Mar, how's that for being business-like?), about not getting any mail from me. Hopefully you will receive this one, because, although I've been somewhat delinquent lately, you really should have received more. As far as I know, I've written at what averages out to be one letter a week (actually one letter about every 5 - 10 days). It's probably the Army post office here; everyone has complaints, but nothing seems to ever be done. So far, I've gotten all your letters since you started numbering them, although in rather unusual sequences. However, I shall try writing a little more often; maybe frequency will overcome any irregularities in the postal system. One last excuse: work has been piling up the last few weeks - and (horror of horrors) my electric typewriter, the only one in the office, broke down and wasn't repaired until yesterday. Unfortunately, I still had the same amount of work to do - or more - on a number of manuals in various stages of decompositions -- and all with a waiting line to use them. As a result, I've been working more and more and getting off later and later. All that should change now that the electric is back in service, so maybe a bit more leisure can be found (I hope! I hope!).

I found the French Lieutenant's woman in paperback at the BX the other day, and just finished reading it last night. It's really an excellent book and, after I had time to get into it, I found myself almost addicted to the thing. Fowles' knowledge of the literature of the period is really (to me, at any rate) quite impressive -- and, more important, so is his understanding of it. The book itself could quite possibly stand by itself as a sort of subjective intellectual history of the 1860's (but then, all history is thoroughly subjective, whatever historians might claim). I suppose that it particularly appealed to me at this time as standing, in the period it treats, a little more than midway between EMMA and the Forsytes. The only disappointment for me was the ending, after Charles broke the bad news to little Ernestina (it sounds like a patent brand of something boring) events became, in either of their alternative possibilities, less than entirely convincing. And don't tell me that they're not supposed to be convincing because they're merely alternative possibilities and thus much more expressive of the psychological realities and existential implications of the blah, blah, etc.... The fact is, that I'm still a primitive enough reader to be interested in WHAT HAPPENS, and, as far as I'm concerned, what happens should be consistent at least with the givens of the book. The first possible ending, with the child, sounded a little too much like "Patient Griselda," with Charles in the title role. The second, with his rejection, makes Sarah out to be a sort of ravenous spiritual/psychological vacuum - which doesn't quite fit in with preceding events. So maybe you're supposed to be dissatisfied? But that's a little too much like Nausea, which is supposed to make you bored (among other things). Aagh! The fact that it bothers me this much is proof of something, I must admit.

Zach sent me a copy of Wolff's Louis XIV (he -Wolff- teaches at Chicago, although he's well past retirement age and may not be there by the time I get back. However, it seems he's Zach's favorite professor.). The only trouble is that the thing is HUGE and I don't know when I'm going to find the time to read it. Especially since the next two volumes of Galsworthy just arrived. I also have that copy of the Times paperback review; but I haven't tried to sent it, inasmuch as that requires me to find some way to get to the main APO, which is quite a way down the road and I just don't have the time to do that during the day when it's open. I hope

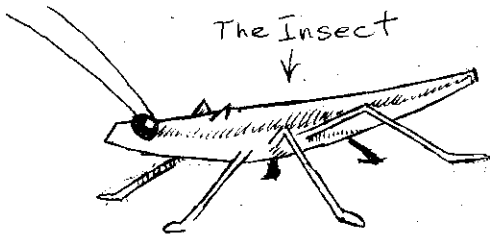
no one had any immediate need for it. I'll try to send it eventually, but right now I'm afraid that means VERY eventually. Did you see the article on the Narnia Chronicles in that issue? If you'd like to have that back I can always clip it out and send it back as a letter, which I can post in the company mail-room.

Just think! By the time you get this I will have completed 1/4 of my tour over here, and in another four weeks I'll have completed 1/3. Unfortunately, after that, the fractions don't move quite so fast, but I'll still be that much closer to coming home. After that a month's leave, and then only a few months left in the Army. If you look at it all in one piece, it still seems like a rather long time,, but subjectively - which is really- it isn't really that long at all. Anyway, there's time enough to decide exactly what we'll all be doing. Right now, about all I can think of is getting back to my studies. I suppose that this might be considered a good thing, for the interruption has convinced me of what I want to do. I don't have to worry about the demon that besets so many people: "But am I sure that this is what I really want to do in life." After I'm done, though, we can think about other things we all want to do. I do think quite a bit about this summer's trip - generally as a series of quite pungent (not quite right word) impressions, visual mostly, but also smells and sounds. Perhaps more of the same will be in order, especially now that I've had some time to think about what I'd like to see. But, even so, the first thing that I require is MY HOME - and that means thoroughly steeping myself in it rather like bathing off the last smells of the Army and this current assinine enterprise.

Other Events -- Caught one of those lizards that live under the office the other day. It seems that they're the type (Durrell had one as a boy, I'll look up the name there) that loose their tails when ~~it is~~ seized. Not that this one did; someone merely pointed out that he had seen one do just that a few weeks ago when caught. The most noticeable thing about it was the powerful suction of the foot-pads (FEARLESS FRED THE FOOT-PAD DREAD/ SET FIRE TO HIS MOMMA'S BED - Can you identify that quotation? A prize is not offered.) which enable it to climb up walls etc. Also found an insect that looked like a cross between a grass-hopper and a submarine, about 2 1/2 to 3 inches long. Not that I've become an amateur naturalist -- these things simply have a way of forcing themselves upon one's notice, crawling up on your typewriter when your back is turned or some such thing. They form a major part of the entertainment around here.

I also managed to put a ceiling up over my room in the hootch, something to serve as insulation between me and the tin roof when it really begins to get hot around here. I also have a small table now, not exactly Chippendale, since it's made from three plywood boards, but it serves its purpose -- which is, to be a table.

I suppose that I'd better get back to work, so I'll finish this and put in an envelope, to make sure that it gets out tonight. I love you all very much.



Rob