

#30

28 Aug /1

Dear Family -

Supposedly, this typewriter has been repaired - which, in Army terms, means that someone looked at it and put a new ribbon in it. However, it's always fun to experiment. Now, what that's absolutely important and earth-shattering do I have to tell you? For one thing, I'm in receipt (officialsleee rubbing off on me) of the food package with the shrimp chow mein; you put in so much extra shrimp that we took someones pizza mix from home and had shrimp pizza as dessert - a coordinated dinner, if somewhat ecclectic. Next food package, why don't you include a couple of pizza mixes and hold off on the Melba toast (there's more than I can eat, and, unfortunately, the cockroaches are inordinately fond of it and will eat through anything to get at it - I know that they're just added protein, but there are limits to my adventuresomeness). Anyway, the pizzas are quite good, can have just about anything at hand added to them, and are immensely popular. At the moment, we're negotiating with "Momma-san" for a couple of lobsters so that we can have our own party (unofficial, not an office party, thank heavens) Monday. She's already brought a couple, and they're very large - quite beautiful - and non-poisonous. She's already brought a couple in, and I have a photograph of her (I hope I can have it developed) holding one, which is almost as big as she is. By the time she can get them, we should have hoarded enough soda and beer (both are extremely scarce, along with tobacco products, soap, and a few other sundries and luxuries) to have quite a successful affair.

Also, Lois's envelope with the second-hand books arrived a few days ago. It almost makes me feel bad to see them here, considering what the environment does to books. The Holborn, which I took out on guard with me a while back, looks quite diseased. The humidity has wilted it; the roaches have sampled (and rejected) it; and there are spots of mosquito repellent and small-arms lubricant all over it - a rather sad pass for a respectable book to come to. Anyway, I just read the "Crystal Cave" - because it went quickly. The idea of writing a novel about Merlin before Arthur is definitely intriguing - and the first part is definitely good. But I have to admit that in the second part, with Amrosius's expedition to Britain and Merlin's recognition she seems to have run out of steam. It loses the feeling of authenticity (which is rather difficult to create in a fabrication of that nature) of immediate post-Roman Britain and begins to compromise to much with the medieval Arthur. I.e., there are too many horses and too many Anglo-French sounding names among the non-Bretons. Merlin's aid in Uther's seduction (if you could call it that) of Ygraine smacks too much of comedy, purely accidentally. Isn't there another "how-it-would-have-been" novel about Arthur that's rather recent (last 15 years)? Still, it was definitely fun, and has been passed on.

I finally got my military driver's license - and license it is indeed. Night before last I was driver of the guard (excuse me Driver of the Guard; everything around here has a title), and enjoyed myself thoroughly, driving all over Chu Lai Defense Command in my little jeep - straight up the sides of sand dunes in four-wheel drive. Plus, I had friends of mine in two of the bunkers I had to check out and bring Midnight show to, so I had conversation (which is never lacking on guard anyway) whenever I drove by. Anyway, I had a marvelous time driving all night long and got the morning off for it, which was definitely needed.

As for your questions about what is going to happen with the Division and whether it might mean coming home early. The answer is: That all depends. First of all it depends on when the division is finally closed out - which will be quite a while with something of this size (It's the largest division in any army at the moment - with an official strength of about 22,000 and an actual strength, which the Army doesn't like to mention, of about 35,000). If it waits long enough to stand down, then it wouldn't be profitable for people with about, say, 60 days left to be reassigned in Vietnam - and I would be one of them. This seems quite possible, if it manages to close out before my tour ends (which is always an assumption). Actually, I'd rather be able to spend the Christmas period with my family than to come home too early and have to go away again at the same time of year. Anyway, I won't consider myself to really be home until I've gotten out of the Army.

There is one thing that I didn't write about: Happy Birthday to my Father, I'm afraid that I'm already branded as the sort of person who can't remember any sort of holiday or other important date. Ah well, my own birthday this year wasn't exactly the most thrilling I've ever had either. How positively pathetic! Bah. Time passes, even in Nam, and that's the important thing. Considering the speed with which this year has passed, I really have nothing to complain about.

What else? Just that I love you all very much - and I'll be home before you know it.

Tob
