

September 7
Chu Lai

Dear Family -

I finally got around to reading the Sayers-Gustave mystery - The Documents in the Case - I am about halfway through. Somehow, it seems (when I write) as though I am doing far more reading than I actually am. Either I'm reading more than I realize (which I doubt) or I'm not writing enough (which I really can't do very much about because of lack of material). Anyway, Documents is rather good - especially the mad "lady-help". Sitting in the office the other day, mindling stop while everyone else was at the mess, I did re-read Beerbohm's "Savonarola Brown" - and the play which goes along with it. In the few years since I first read it, the play has become much funnier - the characters (un-)recognizable, & the goblets from William more evident - especially the stage directions. Maybe this education works (occasionally).

It's really rather odd to realize that a new school-year will be starting - that Lois is starting teaching another class & especially that the second year at Chicago since I've been gone is starting. It was decided in one of our usual rambling discussions that a Vietnam tour should

be organized on the basis of the school year - a passing of time that everybody could understand. By now I'd be well into my third quarter! (Of course, it would be a 9-month tour.)

We finally got our lobster - an absolutely huge one which our doorknocker-boiled for us - \$1.50. People back in the World just don't know what they're missing. We heated it up after work and melted some butter abstracted from the mess. Disemboweled with a pair of surgical scissors and dunked thoroughly in the butter, it was thoroughly marvelous - and none of us have died of hepatitis so far. (I suspect Momma-san thinks we're a little crazy to be eating the thing - possibly a point of similarity between the Vietnamese and the Irish.)

Which brings me to my latest project - unfortunately one which I can't realize since I'm still quite ignorant of Vietnamese. However, maybe someone will pick it up - Memoirs of a Momma-san. If someone could get a Vietnamese woman (or several) to dictate reminiscences of working for the Americans, then organize them into some kind of form and translate them into English, it would have

quite an audience - probably most of the G.I.s who've been here - and possibly a few wives who've been absent^{ly} & mindfully addressed: ~~the~~ "La-dai, Momma-sun; you do numbah-one shine today; bic?" It might be quite a surprise to find out how most of these women regard their transactions & relations with the G.I.s. Most of them are accomplished business women, who have made quite a career in profiteering, in addition to their nominal washing & cleaning.

The Division will unquestionably stand down now - the only question is one of time. Our office will be operating on a provisional basis after 10 Nov (that's unclassified) - if all goes according to schedule - and that is a rather large assumption. Even if we do close out - I might try to stay on for another month - if only to be home at a better time & to cut down on time left in service. (Too much might result in being sent to Germany, which wouldn't be unpleasant - but I would like a chance to be with my family.) Anyway, I'll be home sooner or later - & the difference is really rather slight.

Not very much else to report - I received the Sunday Times (including my Mother's

greeting on the crossword page), yesterday, which was ~~my~~ ^{my} 1/2 day off (and which I spent sleeping).

Did you notice the articles in the newspaper about Steiner, that German mercenary on trial in the Sudan (Gordon of Khartoum & all that)? He's probably a thoroughly disagreeable individual in reality; still, the idea that such a person could exist today is fascinating. One's initial reaction is to conceive of him as a late 15th century Condottieri-type - however, the basic "reasonableness" (?) of the Renaissance soldier is lacking - they seemed more interested in the accumulation of power and/or wealth at a minimum cost in blood. Steiner seems, rather, to be one of the Professionals that emerged from the Thirty-Years War: a vague ideologist (for a rationale), quite willing to kill on a large scale, and probably obsessed with ~~the~~ the idea of warfare for its own sake.

Anyway, I'm sorry to say that, murderer though he probably is, Steiner cuts a better figure than the sorry technicians and politician one finds in command, here, from battalion level on up. One

might simplify the matter by saying that the difference between them and Steiner is the difference between the amoral and the immoral. Although I rather doubt that the man consciously considers himself to be working evil, he at least is aware of a distinction - hence, his claim to be an idealist (though I doubt he could define his ideals). Also - hence the distinction between him & our own brand of professionals - who lately have been getting a number of people killed for purely professional reasons (fear of seeming unorthodox or extravagant; fear for their careers). At least he has had the decency to be reprehensible.

Forgive me if the discussion seems slightly morbid - it really isn't, the problem is definitely interesting, particularly in this atmosphere. At any rate - your package #7 arrived just now. One of my friends among the mail clerks brought it over here in advance of the regular mail call. Since only 2 of us ^{are} in the office at the moment, we've decided to run an experiment - opening the box of dog biscuits for Sham and leaving them out on a desk near the door to determine just

who reads labels around here.

[Note: It just worked.]

The lunch-hour's just about over
-so I think I'd better get back to work.
Staywell, be good, enjoy yourselves.

Love
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