

#36

Chu Lai

17 September

Dear Family -

We had our second lobster tonight (i.e., yesterday evening - my sense of time is not what it used to be) - an absolutely mammoth one which fed six people quite easily - also, with extremely tender, sweet meat. I took a photo of him before he was sacrificed, to give you some idea of his size. As soon (whenever that turns out to be) as I've developed & printed them, I'll send them on.

Dad's letter with the photostats of the Chicago material arrived the other day. As soon as I can formulate something intelligible, I'll send off to them so that I can get my application for aid in well before next February. The pleasant thing about it is that it makes getting out of the Army and back to school seem that much closer. At any rate, getting out of Nam is definitely getting closer - and will definitely be before normal Deros (Jan 8) - we'll say a couple of months, in all probability.

In answer to Mom's questions about drops: There are two major varieties,

from Nam and from the Army. The first kind I'll be getting, the second is much less likely. These are the types of drops from the Army:

a) 3 months (max) early out for school. This would only get me out in time to start with the summer term, & really isn't worth it.

b) 5 months (150 days) early out on return from Vietnam. To be eligible for this I'd have to extend my tour here until the beginning of March. If I were here until January, I might be able to take the extra 60 days - but if I'm slated to leave before then, I really couldn't see doing it.

c) 6 months (179 days) early out for those who've been in Nam. This only applies to those drafted between Sep 69 and June 70 i.e. not to me. However - they might extend the time limit. If not, nothing's lost.

Whatever happens - it won't be all that long. I only hope it will be in the U.S. (usually, people with lots of time left go to Germany - but even if it did happen, it would be amusing for someone who didn't have to worry about

transporting a wife & children). I have to confess that I also hope they'll put me back in Infantry - while this is an unusual office, I don't think I'd care for more of the same when I leave here.

18 September

I made the time last night to get to the photo lab and started on those photos - tonight I'll go back and finish printing them so that I can mail them to you some time in the next week. There's one negative that should make a lovely picture - momma-san holding a bobo that looks as big as her. I'm sure Mom would love to see just who it is that's supposed to be taking care of her son while he's here. (Some of the older hooky-maids become quite attached to the GI's, even if they're also trying to get every cent they can from them.)

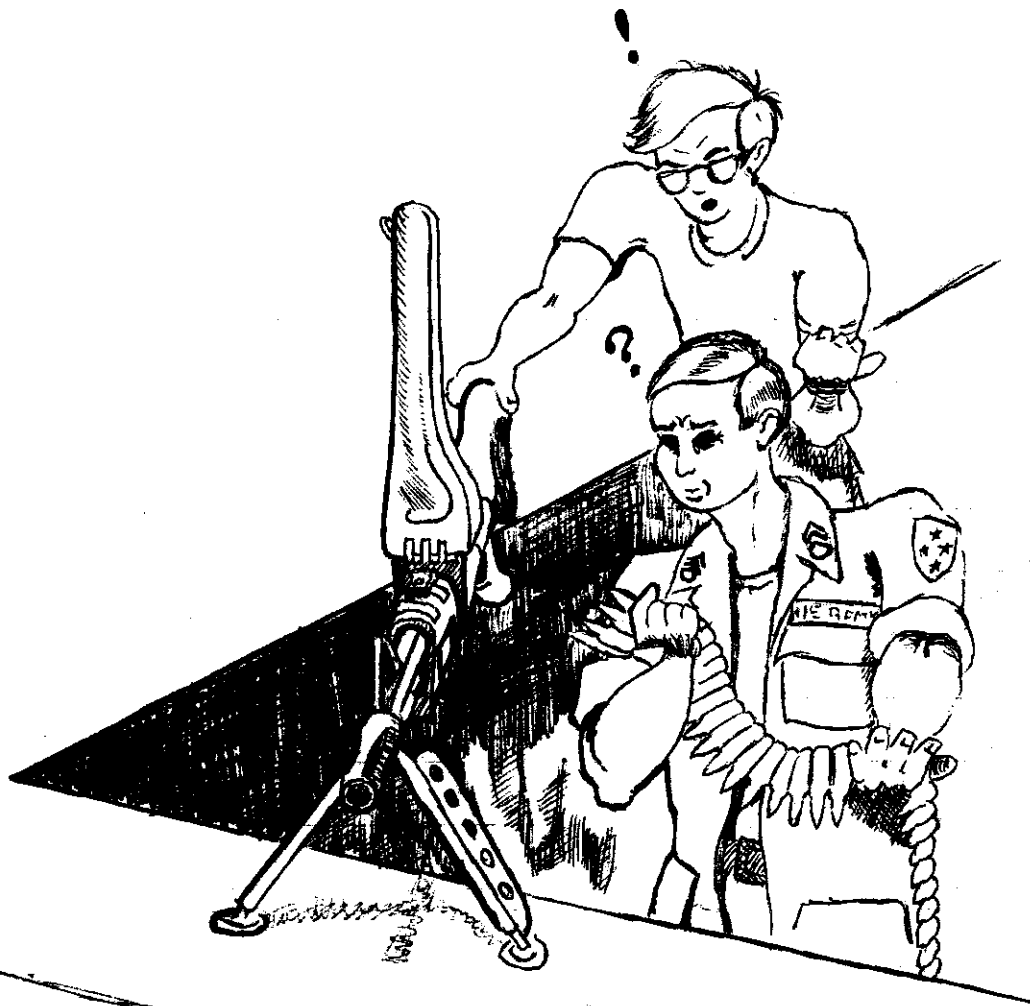
Yesterday, during CQ, I started re-reading That Hideous Strength - this time rather slowly. Of course (O tempora, etc) the first thing I noticed was the beautiful description, 28 years ago, of the frustrated (because?), ~~over~~ over-educated young housewife. Then is Fairy Hardcastle actually Betty Frieden? Slow reading has more

results, as well. Lewis's dissertation on Merlin's Well, providing it with a mixture of actual and invented literary-historical background is quite lovely. Somehow, (and of course I defer to your judgement), Lewis's objectivity renders his personality quite opaque at times (and Surprised By Joy is rather reticent - an unusual characteristic for an "autobiography" ^(or whatever it can be called) written in this century).

Not much else to mention. One of my friends Tom Ord who was hit during Lam Son wrote; he's been discharged & quite happy about it. Jack dropped a brief line; his father died toward the end of last month, and ~~he~~ hasn't felt like communicating with anyone very much.

Morning 19 Sept
I printed those photos last night, so I'll take some time this evening to separate them and annotate them so that I can send them. (I'm not quite awake yet - hence that last sentence.)

It's quite rainy today (which accounts for the ink seeping into the



paper). It's the beginning of the long prelude to Monsoon, in which the rain gradually begins to pick up momentum - just a little bit at a time. So it's still rather pleasant - especially inasmuch as it's cooling off what had been an extremely hot week.

[Above: After the Staff Sergeant in charge of the bunker delivers a lecture on the use of the M-60, and proceeds to put the belt in upside down.] If there is one thing I doubt I'll ever be able to do, it's take the Army very seriously - somehow,

despite all their protests, & rather doubt that anyone - including the lifer - is naturally cut out to be a professional soldier ... and the natural professional is very rare. The best that can be hoped for is "le système D," i.e. "muddle on through." The attitude is much in evidence here - whether or not the results justify it.

And if the above isn't a muddle, & don't know what is, I think I'd better consider a little sleep around noon-time.

Love
Xob