

#41

Chu Lai
22 October

Dear Family -

Re. Sergeant Major just came tromping by, yelling "Storm warning! Storm warning! Winds of up to 60 m.p.h.!" After considering his bulk, I have to assume that he was bent around as the only person unlikely to be swept away by those supposed winds. On the basis of the weather alone, this seems to be just the time to be leaving Viet Nam. The sun seems to have permanently disappeared, and the hootch maids have been coming to work in sweaters. Still, the temperature, which seems to be rapidly dropping, remains in the 70's and should never (at least not often) drop lower - so I have a suspicion that I'll be in for a bit of a shock when I come home, especially when I first step off the plane at Itzehoe.

We're busy now preparing the base to be taken over by the ARVN's - which is to say, rendering it totally unfit for human habitation. We've been busy the last few days burning our classified documents (and anything else that seems burnable) as well as tearing out the inside of the office and the hootch, and preparing equipment for shipment to Da Nang. Some of our people, confronted with a mountain of paperwork to incinerate, hit upon an efficient method all their own. In the process of liberating enough gasoline to get the pile started, they drained the fuel tank of the Adjutant General's personal jeep. One can only hope that he has enough of a reserve to be stranded someplace remote.

Over the last few weeks, we've been participating in a demonstration of just what the Army means by the Chain-of-command. Essentially, it happened this way: 1) The company commander decided we would all look more military if we wore baseball caps instead of bush hats, and outlawed the latter within the company. 2) The division's Chief of Staff notified the company CO that "in 23d Inf Div, we wear bush hats." 3) A few weeks later, the CO of XXIV Corps (under which the Division falls) announced that bush hats were unauthorized. 4) The Division commander demurred, on the

grounds that there is no regulation governing the matter, especially since our hats are government-issue. 5) The Corps Co then issued a direct written order to the effect that no one would wear a bush hat unless ~~he~~ he was in the field & needed its mosquito net. (Before this, no-one was quite sure of his name - however, there are now about 25,000 GIs who are quite familiar with it. 6) Several days after that Gen Abrams, C USARV, came through with a statement to the effect that bush hats are authorized (co-incidentally endearing himself to thousands - we have only good guys and bad guys here, no subtle gradations).

During this whole time we wore bush hats, Baseball caps, and steel pots in rapid succession (admittedly, there are a few occasions when one is happy with the pots - but a humid day can't be one of them), changing fashions as commanders at various levels flexed their administrative muscles. I suppose it sounds rather dreary, but the mild absurdity of the whole thing lends it a bit of humor.

So far, our storm shows absolutely no sign of materializing - however for all I know, it may be the proverbial "silence before the." At any rate, there's a flick tonight, so I'll see if I can chance the elements (as to "brave" or "oppose"), since I have a decent seat saved. More important, orders for my next assignment may have come in - and I should get a chance to examine them this evening and end the suspense.

If all goes well, I may actually leave Chu Lai on the 28th. At any rate, the process (of leaving) is by now quite irreversible; I can only sit back & hope that nothing delays it.

My love to you all

Rob

Dear Family -

A quick addition to the following letter - and to be read first,

Because of the storm damage and the necessity to repair it (before Chu Lai is closed down completely as per schedule - typical logic) - I'll be staying another 5 days - until November 10.

Fortunately, the place is beginning to recover - and we've been treated to a pleasant, Spring-like day today - a bright sun, moderately warm, but with mild little breezes. Fair compensation, I suppose.