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Chu Lai
24 October

Dear Family -

I have a faint suspicion that my last letter to you didn't make it - it was written the afternoon before last and, from the present condition of the post office (and all of Chu Lai), I'd imagine that it's part of a rather large mass of paper mâché.

Anyway - I'm quite alive, with no bruises, broken bones, or marks of any kind - which is what I wanted to reassure you about. I really don't know what the newspapers have made of our typhoon - (the general concern is what one's family, wife, whatever, will think) - but it's managed quite effectively to eliminate Chu Lai as a military base. At the moment we're in a bit of a mess - most of the buildings crushed or at least extensively damaged, power completely gone, limited drinking water, and rather tenuous telephonic communication. About the only saving grace to the situation is its novelty, and, if I can enjoy that, I rather doubt things can be too bad.

For my own satisfaction (to get down just what happened) and for some reassurance for you, I'll go over our storm:

Friday evening we had storm warnings, which I cheerfully disregarded on the grounds that nothing that exciting could happen to us.

Saturday morning (the 2nd), I reported for fatigue detail and was relieved to find out that it had been postponed until the afternoon if it cleared up. I went back to the office and sat, watching the rain grow progressively heavier - quite opaque, in fact. By the late morning, the winds had picked up to the point at which they were plucking at the corners of the tin roofs and trying to pull them off. A little before 11 o'clock, the mess-hall, the largest structure in the immediate area, fell in on itself - and the roofing on many of the offices began to peel ~~back~~ back and off - like so many long grey bananas (if it may be mildly outrageous). Our power went out completely - which was rather fortunate, considering the maze of lines that Chu Lai has managed to accumulate over the years.

By 11, the Colonel decided the offices had ceased to be safe (a brilliant deduction), and the entire AG made a run for a Butler Building (a comparatively large structure made of corrugated metal). Once inside though, the building seemed a lot less secure than it had - possibly a result of one end of the roof starting to come down and the walls flexing (disconcerting - but a typhoon makes an absolutely marvelous sound on a metal building). We then spread out (with much confusion & people being blown off their feet & dodging of 2x4's and pieces of roofs) to the bunkers and coveys

(140016 metal shipping containers - which are quite unlikely to be blown away).

The storm slackened before noon - to complete calm, in fact (I assume these things have an eye) - long enough to forage up a meal from the remains of the mess hall. Inasmuch as our hootch came through the first half of the storm unscratched, we decided to wait out the rest of it there. After we'd been sitting there for awhile though, the roofing in the corner over my cubicle began to lift away. One of our newbies, with a little more spirit than intelligence decided to try to hold it down from the inside. When the sheet of tin pulled free, our newbie was pulled right off the ground with it, before it was ripped away from him. The rest of the roofing at that end soon followed, and the eight of us retired rather rapidly to the lee-end of the hootch. I was treated to a view of a large portion of my (immediately available) worldly goods being sucked out through the roof and distributed over Chu Lai.

Fortunately, that was about all that happened to our hootch. That was quite a bit of luck compared to those which had both ends cave in or which were blown away entirely. By the evening, we had managed to move our (moderately soaked) bedding and remaining possessions to the intact end - feeling very much like refugees,

even if the move was one of only a few feet.

25 October

Yesterday was spent cleaning up the debris, making as many hootches as possible semi-habitable, and dreaming up ways to ~~help~~ make C-rations hot. We were briefly visited by the XXIV Corps CO, who flew in on his helicopter escorted by 4 gunships, expressed his dismay, and flew out again.

We still have only one telephone line connecting us with the outside - but that's enough: my order for my next assignment came in, which means that I should be leaving here on the 28th, after all, or shortly after. (So by the time you get this I'll be on my way home.)

It seems my next assignment will be, of all places, Ft Riley Kansas - 1st Infantry Division. At least it isn't the ends of the earth - or the South. I'll tell you more when I'm home, and know a little more myself.

I love you all,
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