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17 August 1954

Dear Mom,

Well, my twenty-fifth birthday has come and gone. I never thought I'd spend it Indo-China. Several American girls here who work in USIS heard that the 10th was my birthday so they baked me a cake. It was lousy cake but a very nice gesture.

Saigon is very large with over 2 million inhabitants, about 25,000 of which are French but everybody speaks French although the Vietnamese do with the strangest accent you've ever heard. The Vietnamese language itself is tonal like Chinese and I understand even more difficult to speak. You asked me about Japanese once - it's very easy to learn and very phonetic. They have no gender and only two tenses and their verbs are not conjugated - the only complication is in having a polite form, a very polite form and a not polite form of saying everything. Vietnamese is indescribable, sounding more singing than Chinese, and it's very hard to pronounce any.

their records. Somehow they managed to transfer the language phonetically into the Portuguese alphabet - which makes it fairly simple to read.

I haven't gotten any mail from Korea yet - hope things are going well with you. I'm involved in helping to set up U.S. help for the refugees from North Viet-Nam as is the rest of MAAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group). U.S. prestige has gone up considerably out here since we seem to be willing to help the Vietnamese now after playing the French game for so long.

The politics of this area is complicated beyond description but in some ways we have been as much at fault as have the French. But now that half the country has been given to the communists, French prestige is non-existent, even with the most anti-communist of political groups.

The shops ^{here} are full of beautiful native handicraft and art as well as French perfume which I think you might like.

My French is coming back slowly and I'm presently negotiating with various people for some French lessons, preferably beautiful young

French girls which are apparently not available or interested. If I stay out here for any time I'd like to really get ~~a~~ command of the language.

I've joined the local (what amounts to) French country club and have played tennis several times. It's hot here but not unbearably so at the moment and it gets cool in the evenings. However everyone walks up the sidewalks from 12 to 3 in the afternoon. The nets on the tennis courts are taken down at 10 in the morning and put back up at four in the afternoon. No wonder these people couldn't win the war.

There are several things which I can't get out here which I wish I could send me by parcel post. One is that new pair of army low-quarter shoes which I bought just before I left and which should be in a box in my closet. Also several tubes of Luger's shaving cream and some Gillette thin blades (the red ones).

I don't know what the stock market is doing - and Lehigh Valley in particular. I bought Lehigh Valley at 20. so if it's rising I'd like to hang on a little longer. I still want to buy some stock this fall - probably. G.F.

I don't know whether you've told any-
one I was here. If not I'd like
to keep it that I'm in Korea. Mail
sent to Korea will get to me eventually.
In any case I'd like to be still in
Korea to anyone outside the family. If
anybody else knows, then you might
as well tell everyone. It's not of
earthshaking importance but I think
I can handle my personal matters
better that way.

Give my love to Daddy and
Lucretia. Although the mail is pretty
slow I hope to hear from you
soon.

Love,

Rufus