

New Guinea
5 July 44

Darling,

And, so, there came the Fourth of July, with fireworks and everything. At least, fireworks.

Of course we have no holidays down here, so we just took a few minutes off and tossed a couple grenades into the river—simulating firecrackers and with the double purpose of surfacing a few fish. But the attempt was futile.

Last night, however, at the Division Red Cross banteen, "Dixie Dugout" they fired a lot of colored flares, in observation of the Independence Day custom.

I chose to attend a native "sing-song"—dance—instead of joining in the camp festivities. I drove my car right into the native village and illuminated the dance with my headlights. There were two groups of dancers, representing different tribes, and they were surrounded by the rest of the villagers. When I drove up, the circle of natives parted so I could sit in my car and watch the dance. A dozen or so boys, each beating a drum, ~~mama~~ pranced and swayed in waltz time and in unison. As the dance progressed, the ~~mama~~ drumbeats became faster and faster and the dancing became frenzied. Then, with a final ruffle of the drums, the dancers stopped for a moment. Then, one dancer would tap a new rhythm out on his snakeskin drumhead and one at a time the others would join in. This went on and on until finally about 1030 the Aussie master rang his gong for ~~lights out~~ quiet, and the natives broke up into small groups and began playing cards. Looked as if they were playing with a half dozen decks of cards, with dice, too. I doubt if they even knew what they were doing. I certainly didn't.

Peculiar as it might seem, the dancing was carried out in a most solemn manner. I think that's the first time I've seen a group of natives who failed to laugh and joke with each other. Every one's face was serious, and the only words uttered was a "cornfield nigger" sort of chant, over and over. The couple dozen drums created quite a din, of course, and I was very much surprised to hear a harmonica accompaniment at one of the dancing groups. The native boy was playing a definite tune, I could tell that, but the drums were so loud that for awhile I couldn't make anything of it. Finally as the drums died down a bit, I recognized the tune the harmonica-player was playing—it was "Home Sweet Home!"

When the dance was ended, we of course had to drop in for "tea" at the Aussie's cottage, and I was back home in bed by 1130.

So, that was my Fourth of July.

Haven't received any mail in several days, but am sure I'll get a big batch soon.

Missing you lots and love you all very much,

