

New Guinea
1 May 1944

Darling,

I haven't written you in several days--fact is, I have three letters not answered. Yesterday I received a letter--Air Mail--from you dated April 11 and postmarked the 12th. Today I received another air mail letter dated March 20. On the 29th I received a V-Mail letter dated April 15. So, you can see how the mail gets here. On the whole I think Air Mail is faster--with the thin-paper lightweight envelopes getting preference.

I'm always glad to get your letters, however, no matter how late--but the quicker the better.

The March 20th letter enclosed a letter from Nancy--and I read it through thinking it was from Carolyn until I got to the signature. Nan must be making very good progress in school. It was a very interesting letter. Tell her the next time she goes to a chicken banquet to have an extra drumstick for me.

Talking about eating, I played the dickens today. I ate lunch with Colonel Ford and the gang--our weekly meatless meal. This afternoon I moved over where I am now--and ate a meatless supper. So, I think one of my first jobs as Division Medical Inspector will be to recommend uniformity in the menus in the division.

I wrote you in my last letter that I anticipated a transfer. It came through today and I'm officially back at Headquarters again--this time to stay, I hope. I don't need to tell you how I feel about it. The whole story is that the MAC's are coming into their own now. The Med Inspector's major has been changed from MC to MAC which left an opening for promotion of some MAC captain. The general thought about the matter about two seconds, naturally, before deciding who would get the job.

I'm telling the boys that it's a fine thing for me to tell my grandchildren--how I went through the Jan war sniffing latrines. But, of course, that isn't all the job--I also test dishwater to see if it's hot enough. In reality, though, it is an important job, especially in this theater, where the dangers of disease and infection are so great. Mine will be the responsibility of conserving the health of the command--that's what the book says--and I'm sure I'll be the one to "catch it" if too many soldiers develop malaria or typhus or some of the other New Guinea pleasantries.

Colonel Jenkins, the surgeon, under whom I will work, told me I would be a "free lance" and with no supervision. So, I reckon I'll like the job all right. Instead of being confining--which you know I hate--it will again give me a chance to wander hither and yon over the area, seeing things that are going on. I will report direct to the Old Man--recognize his same old fine touch?--and will be answerable only to him. And I feel confident that I can satisfy him.

First thing, however, I pulled a boner. I just happened to be in the surgeon's office, with Colonel Ford, conferring on other matters. I walked the general's current aide and told me to report to the old man. I wandered over and he told me that my first job as his medical inspector would be to accompany him on an inspection of a couple of units this morning. Then, with his icy smile, he said, "Didn't you know I expect my ~~men~~ staff officers to shave every morning? As my medical inspector I can't have you go with me until you shave. I told him that I was glad I was getting off to a good start, but you can imagine how long it took me to get the whiskers off. You can bet the five o'clock shadow won't catch up with me again.

I've got to do a little fussing. You're always saying that you just can't write a long letter because you only have a short time before the mail goes off. The mail goes again tomorrow, doesn't it--and it takes so plagued long to get here anyway that one more day wouldn't make a whole lot of difference. I'm kidding, of course--I know you're busy and I am red ate even the shortest notes. Just make 'em often.

Yesterday I went hunting native fruits and saw some most exotic specimens. One particularly fascinating fruit that I found was the Mangosteen--which the natives call "bio-bio" in pidgen English. It is a citrus fruit, about the size of a large plum, extremely acid with a soft or watery pulp. Some were green, some red, and some purple. I didn't taste them--I'm still a little afraid I'll eat the wrong kind of fruit and regret it. There are some species which aren't so good for the tummy.

I also saw some wild beans--pidgen "bin"--which grew on a vine looking something like garden peas. There was a large cultivated plantation deep in the jungle, growing shrubs about head high and bearing berries which looked very like huckleberries. I asked a native what they were and he said "copi"--but I still don't have any idea what they were. I found a large tree, about the size of a magnolia, bearing large white flowers which resembled gardenias--that is the petals were waxy and smooth and they even smelled something like cape jasmine. This tree also had some fruit on it, about the size of an apple and green in color. These grew in clusters, some on the small outer branches, and some right on the trunk of the tree. Looked like a lot of green Christmas Tree balls. The fruit had a hard rind and pulpy inside, with seed contained in ~~the~~ a hollow in the center--looked like canteloupe. I didn't taste that either. An Aussie said this was the "frangapani" whatever that is.



"Osa"



"bio-bio"

Driving down the trail, I saw an old man and a tiny boy--the pickaninny carrying a huge something on his shoulder. It was the most amazing fruit--or vegetable I have ever seen. Shaped like a huge cucumber, it was about three feet long and had a stem like that of a banana. It weighed at least forty pounds--and the six-year-old native boy who was carrying it didn't weight more than thirty. The fruit was a beautiful red, dark and rich, and its pebbly surface reminded me most of a pomegranate. I asked the old man if it was good to eat and he said, "Yess, kai-kai" which means food. I tried to bargain for the fruit but the boy wouldn't part with it. I asked him how it tasted and he said, "sugre," which I understood to mean sweet. He said the fruit was "Osa". I looked the fruit up in my little book and found that it must have been the mountain pandanus. This is how the book described it: "the pandanus has long narrow leaves, saw-like on the edge and midrib. The leaves are plaited by the natives into baskets and other domestic articles. The trunk is covered with small spikes very painful to the touch. The fruit grows in large red oval-shaped heads, which break up into small pieces when ripe. The surface is rough and covered by small round projections. Upon

breaking open the pieces they will be found to contain a series of small grey, narrow, oval containers closely packed together (still reminds you of the pomegranate, doesn't it). These small containers surround the seed which contains an oily juice. The juice, which may be sucked from the seed when ripe, has a rich 'fruity' or 'winey' smell. The seeds are nutritious and vary in quality, but are rather difficult to extract." (Sounds good?)

The mountain pandanus seems to be the larger type, but is described as "inferior." This kind may be either boiled or roasted. And, that's how the native said he would cook it, and the picture in the book was that of the "Osa"--but the book said it was called, in pidgen, the "marita" or "aran". Somebody is wrong. Maybe the native hasn't read the book, so in his ignorance he thinks it is an Osa. Maybe named it after Osa Martin the explorer. I dunno. *The boy's name was GANOLI & his father was PINDIMU*

From my little book I found that the native pidgen words for cocoanut and banana are "cocoanut" and "banana". Very good. I don't think I'll have any trouble identifying those two.

Here's a poem from the "Down Under" edition of Yank, written by T/5 Don E. Rohrig. I think it's very good, in a morbid, sordid sort of way:

SUNDAY AT SANANANDA

This is the Huggins perimeter.

As you are standing, Gona's ahead of you,
The green desert of Papua and Dutch Guinea
Beyond it; beyond the Halmahera Sea, the islands of Molucca
And the far-off places of the Moros and the temple worshippers.

To your left are the Owen Stanleys--
The spinal column of the Papuan tortoise;
And behind you the mightiest of the oceans,
Though from here it is only a breath and a sigh.

To your right, a scant mile up this devious, bucolic trail,
Around many a bend, through the haunted, primordial tangle,
Past dugout and slit trench, by ford across tropical rivers,
Through mud to your thighs, and the murmuring clouds of mosquitoes,
Through kunai and sun....oh, when you get there.
You'll know....you'll not mistake it, this hell hole:
The bloody black sands, the brown tainted sea water--
This Point Sanananda....

Don't mind the skeletons. We haven't had time to remove them;
And while we sit here with hands limply folded,
We haven't the heart.

No, it isn't the heat or the dampness;
And it certainly isn't sickness, at least not physical sickness--
Though they may come later, the retching, the spewing.

They had it, these grandsons of Heaven
These stench-making ex-patriots lately of Honshu;
From the slums of Kyoto, from gay Nagasaki,
These pallid-complexioned mother's sons from the rice-paddies,
from fermenting Formosa and the smokes of Fujisan...
They had the sickness, and not wholly the fevers,
Though the swamp miasmata weren't the least of it.

And so here's what is left of them....hell, I don't wonder
Your face grows a bit green....it's not a sweet atmosphere
Here with the cadavers.

But after you've slept with them--
There's Charlie the brainless one; and Henry the Horror.
He was clever at sniping, but my ~~un~~obhammas cobber resented him,
and even the tree-boys are shy at machine guns!

That beautiful specimen under the quarter-ton
Will have to grow features or else his ancestors
Might fail to remember him among the chrysanthemums
In the honorable Heaven of Japanese heroes....

But these are the harmless ones. If you wait, until nightfall,
You won't be misled by the quiet out yonder;
You're clever, resourceful, and they're not the half of it....

The jungle draws in on you, the sound of the wild things.
Keeps your heart in your gullet, and I'd not advise you
To sleep with both eyes closed, for fear you might yield to it--
To sleep--for above all, give the go-by to nightmares.
You see, there's the nightmares, and the start-up in cold sweat,
The scream that you can't suppress though the darkness is listening;
And the terror remembered, of the sudden reversal
When these foul, bloody messes that lie here so motionless
Become boys from Brooklyn and Terre Haute or Omaha,
And you recognize all of them and hear the low crying
Just before the death-rattle, since none of them wants to die.

And the shadowy shapes glide around in the midst of them,
And the glinting of bayonets and the steaming red rivers
Of warm blood gushing soundlessly....

You're pale....you're pulling out....back to the cities?
Glamorous cities up and down the land.

Well, don't let me detain you
With ranting and preaching. That's just our habit here.
Your blood turns to wormwood.

Though here it is Sunday
We forget the days. Just tell your newspaper
That the boys are still pushing, the Japs still pocketed.

You'd better tone down a bit--don't tell them too much of it--
Of the corpses and skeletons, the stink and the filthiness
On Point Sanananda.

So, with this beautiful, cheery picture of war, I'll admit this
letter has become too, too long. So, goodnight--I must rest so that I'll be
in shape to sniff lat--I mean safeguard my fellows from disease.

Loads of love as always,

