

New Guinea
19 July 44

Darling,

The mail is still coming in in batches--when it comes in. And a nice batch it was I received yesterday--four letters, June 18, 19, 24, 25, with Nan's and Sue's letters enclosed.

Also, yesterday I received the box you mailed May 25--cigaretts, colors and paper and candy. The package was in good shape, and I appreciate the things you sent.

Incidentally, I've used up my film, so if you could send some more I'd appreciate it. (I know, of course you are sending all you can get, but I just wanted to get another "request letter" for you. I will need an Athletic Supporter for my bathing trunks, too.

I haven't seen Luther in several weeks, but will try to get down to see him in the next day or so. I hope Pauline is getting along okay now. Yes, the picture of me did have a harsh expression--I think Lee tried to make me look like a soldier. But, really, I haven't been mad since yesterday. (I was swimming on the beach at (well, near here) and some soldiers came along and took my peep. So, off I trudged in the sand, madder than a wet hen--only to find the peep about 300 yards up the beach. They were just tranking evidently.

In your letter of the 19th you asked about the two cities--it was the latter, of course. The Ben Hudson who is my tentmate is Major--Provost Marshal. I'm sure you must have met him, either at Blanding, Bowie or Shelby. No, the Capt George Meaders isn't the Press boy--he's a Vicksburger from the Infantry. Incidentally, you remember Neville Harrington, Meridian, who was my photographer. In the Clairion Ledger you used to pack the box, there was a story about him being promoted to 1st Lt. (I think I wrote you that Jimmie Alson (also 1st Lt) was wounded--in the backside--here in New Guinea about a month or so ago.) Nothing serious, I think, but awfully inconvenient at mess.

Tell Sue I'm glad her birthday party was such a success--I like the stationery very much. Also, tell Gene to get that yard mowed. It's good exercise. (they tell me)

Haven't been fishing with Jack in a couple weeks--too busy to be playing around. I did slip off yesterday for a visit to a native mission, and I'll tell you about it.

After driving over a most tortuous trail I reached the beach (that's where the boys borrowed my peep) and then drove about a mile up the beach to the mission--a very famous one whose name no doubt be familiar to you, but which I cannot mention, of course.

The mission proper is located on a sand pint, jutting out into a wide expanse of tidal flats. As at all native villages, there is an Aussie sergeant stationed there, and he received me most cordially--I had introductions from my other Angau Aussie friends and a large tin of tea, too, along with some medical supplies which I knew he needed badly for his villagers.

Sgt Leonard introduced me to Father John, the mission priest, and he invited me to attend his "evensong" service at 4 o'clock. Meanwhile I could look over the mission school and the large village which is located just across the flats.

Father John has two school rooms--one for pickaninnies and one for older students. One of his older students teach the pickaninnies. The class rooms are merely palm-thatched huts, with sand floor, a few crude benches and a couple of small blackboards. The mission is located in a beautiful coconut grove, and in a cleared space between the two classrooms, the native

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children were having an enthusiastic game of soccer--or "kickball." And, you should see those kids boot the ball with their bare feet. All ages were playing, including some very "beautiful" (New Guinea standards) young ladies. One kid, about 8, was prancing about the area on a pair of bamboo "tom-walkers" and having the time of his life.

To get to the village proper, I had to wade knee-deep across the salty lagoon, as the tide was in. From the mission the village could be seen as in snapshot #1 which I'm enclosing. Notice the rail fence behind some of the huts--and the canoe in the right side of the picture. (These pictures were made by Sgt Leonard and he kindly gave me this set--some of the best pictures I've seen down here.)

Crossing the flats I saw a number of "Buna Belles" like the one in picture #2--some younger, some older; all so shy that they ran when they saw my camera. (I find the natives mostly are very shy of picture-taking tourists, although I did get some good shots yesterday.) This particular gal is about 20 and obviously has three or four children. The grass skirt is rare through this particular section, most of the women wearing a length of calico or tapa cloth (like that I have sent you) wrapped about their hips. Even the tiniest girls wore a G-string, but the boys just wear their birthday suits until they get five or six years old.

When I walked into the village I was most impressed by the beauty of the spacious avenue of cool-shading palms, as seen in picture #3. The area was thronged with little coons running about playing tag, or pushing sticks along on the ground in front of them in some sort of game. Also, there were many pigs and dogs and cats about the area, and before I left I had seen several dogfights. When I visited the village, there was a long fishnet spread out like a carpet down the avenue seen in the picture. The men had been mending the net. Alongside each house is a little fire with a wooden pot filled with taro and yams and "pish"--wrapped in cabbage palm leaves and baking in the coals. You can see one of these cooking fires in the center background of #3. Also you can see one of the girls, looking over her shoulder toward the camera, while a buck in G-string is going around the house on the left. Leaning against the palm in the right background is a native boy and a couple of wooden shields--which are rare nowadays. The short, carrot-top palms are sago palms, and the palms in the right foreground are coconuts. The heart of the sago palm trunk furnishes the natives with a starchy tapioca-like food which they think is delicious. It looks--and smells--somewhat like horsehoof glue.

In picture #4 you can see a typical hut of this village. Notice that the shack is built on stilts, because of the tide rising from the flats in the background. Between the center hut and the one on the left you can see a glimpse of the reef which separates the flats from the Pacific. Sitting and squatting on the porches of each of the huts were the old women and men and, of course, children, dogs, and cats. Most of the old people were either eating--digging goo out of pots with their fingers--or mixing and chewing betel nut and lime. This latter practice is common, even among the children. The betel nut has something of a narcotic effect, and polishes the teeth ebony black--which the natives like very much.

Hanging from rafters of the hut porches were strings of large white "money" shells, with a war club or two lying about. The huts I peered into were dark and smelly, the split-bamboo floor bare except for large palm-frond sleeping mats. In picture #4 you again see one of the shy girls, trying her best to get out of range of the camera.

Picture #5 is typical of the New Guinea tourist shots. The natives who will allow you to take their pictures assume stiff poses facing the camera, and it's hard to get an unposed picture. The old ~~diff~~—about 25 perhaps—is shaving his beard with a GI PX mirror and a sharpened shell. The young fellow in front, posing so solemnly, is Areka, a mission-boy. He speaks very good English and for a couple of cigarets acted as my guide ~~through the village~~ and interpreter in the village. But, about all he accomplished for me was to get rid of a couple packs of cigarets. I would tell him to ask a family group sitting around their cooking fire if I could take their pictures. He would jabber with them and then say, "give-em cig'ret." So, I'd pass out cigarets and they'd all light up and puff luxuriantly, and they'd jabber some more with Areka and then he would shrug his shoulders at me and inform me "no pikshures." But, he was quite willing to pose, himself, so most of the pictures I got, were made by pointing the camera sidewise at him, focussing through the view-finder at a group on my right and snapping the shutter. I think I did get some fairly decent shots that way.

About 3 o'clock I went back across the flats to the mission and, naturally, had tea with the sergeant, at his quarters near the mission chapel. Father John's house was just behind the chapel, and he sat all afternoon, crosslegged on his porch, offering counsel to his deacons (I presume). When I met him, he was wearing a dingy cotton undershirt and a pair of khaki shorts, with a large silver cross hanging from a rosary about his neck.

Right here, I suppose, I should tell you that Father John is not a missionary, but a mission-educated Beniari native. He is about 35 or 40 years old, has short, greying kinks, speaks English very well, and has the quiet, dignified manner of any minister.

Well, Father John's conference ran past 4 o'clock, so about 4:15 he solemnly arose and tapped six times on an old ship's bell which hangs on his porch. The soccer game ceased immediately, and people began drifting across the flats from the village, old men, women of all ages, young men, and hordes of children.

At 4:30, Father John emerged from his hut, clad in a long onee-white robe, and tapped the bell again six times. Then, he jumped off his porch and shuffled his bare feet across to the chapel. The congregation then filed in, the men and boys going to one side and the women and girls to the other. For benches, there were skinned logs placed along either side of the chapel, and as each native filed in, he kneeled and crossed himself, then sat on a log.

The altar was covered with green and yellow cloth, with lighted candles, and a white-painted bamboo cross affixed overhead. The chapel floor was sand, and in the entrance was a huge seashell with holy water vessel inside.

When everyone was seated, Father John came to therear and whispered, "will you sit over here, please," and guided me to the only board bench, complete with kneeling rail, in the chapel.

Then, Father John opened his "evensong" service—a rite of the Episcopal High Church of England. He sang the first stanza of a hymn in a resounding baritone. The men joined in the second stanza, and then the women joined in. And, I must say, that those savages could sing. Of course I could understand only a few words—such as blessed, and padre—father, and mamma—mother, but they sang melodiously in their native tongue. Sounded much like the Gregorian chants of the Catholic church. I considered their singing as good as any I've ever heard in an American church.

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After the hymn, Father John carefully opened his spectacle case and placed his glasses on, opened his Bible and announced the text of his sermon--Matthew, Ch 7. He read the chapter, led the congregation in the Common Prayer, then led them in another hymn. Then he assumed an oratorical pose before the altar and launched into his sermon. I must say Father John is a talented orator. I could only catch a few English words now and then--God, Jesu, padre, mamma, blessed, ~~satan~~ satan--but his delivery was so forceful that I could almost follow the theme of his sermon.

I've never seen a more attentive congregation. Even the kids were quieter than most in churches I've attended. One tiny girl began to fret and her mother immediately took her out. The other children just sat or stood leaning over the log-benches, rolling their eyes solemnly at me.

After several more hymns, the service was closed with Father John saying the Lord's Prayer in benediction. I recognized it as the Lord's Prayer, and later Father John verified my guess. After the prayer, with all saying Amen in unison, Father John ~~stood with arms raised around him~~ bowed in front of the altar and then marched out. Each native then came into the aisle, bowed and quietly left the chapel.

As I was about to leave the mission, Father John, again in undershirt and shorts, came out and told me he was glad I had come to his service. He told me that he went to school for three years at Milne Bay, southern tip of New Guinea, studying for the ministry. Then he returned to this mission--his own native village. That was "many years" ago, he said, and he had been teaching ever since. There was a white missionary at the mission, he said, but he had not returned since the Japs invaded New Guinea. All the people of the mission and the surrounding villages fled to the mountains when the Japs came, Father John said, returning after the Americans had killed the Japs.

I would have liked to have talked a long while further with him, but I knew I'd better get back to the main road before dark, so I had to leave. I'm going to try to get back to see him before I leave this section, for Father John is the most intelligent native I've seen, and I know he can tell me many interesting things.

The thing I appreciated most about Father John's mission, I think, is the fact that he--and apparently the missionaries before him--make no apparent attempt to "civilize" the natives. They came to church dressed as they always have dressed. The children naked, the men wearing merely a G-string, the women with a bit of cloth wrapped about their hips. It was the most impressive sight I've ever seen to see the big black bucks, some of the six feet tall, striding in wearing nothing but their loincloths, then kneeling and crossing themselves, and singing hymns like trained choristers.

I learned about this mission--of course I had heard about it ever since the early days of the New Guinea campaign--from Areka, the boy in the picture. We were on a field training problem up the coast from the mission one day last week. A large group of native children came up the beach and we shared our "C" rations with them. This boy, Areka, came up to Major Frank McKee, of Meridian, and myself, and said, "Good day"--the universal greeting of the native to the white man. He stood looking at us for a few minutes, scratching his belly, then his head. "Pardon me, please," he said, "do you have a Testament?" Of course we were surprised at his command of the English language--and surprised, too, at the request. Major McKee was equal to the occasion, however, and rummaged through his duffle bag and found a New Testament. The boy burst into a wide grin, flipped through the pages, looked at the pictures, read the inscription in the front of the Book, smelled the binding with an "Ahh!" and then said, "Your name Mo'key." Frank admitted his identity, then the boy asked my name. "Mock-davee!" he repeated after me. Then he said, "My name is Areka. Me mission boy. Thank you very much. Me Christian. Thank you very much. Goodbye." Then he ran off up the beach, shouting to the other kids and showing them the Book.

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An old man came along then and asked for a cigaret and some "bull beef," which we gave him. He assured us he was "shief" of the village nearby and told us about the mission. So, I resolved then to visit Father John. I had heard stories of him and his work, but somehow I had the impression he was a white missionary. So, when I actually visited the mission and met him, I was most surprised to find him as black as any Buna Boy of the labor lines.

~~mm~~ The way the children played together and their affectionate attitude toward each other impressed me very much and I commented on it to Sgt Leonard. And the way they fondled their cats and dogs--and even pigs. I asked the sergeant if the kids ever squabbled or fought, as children do the world over. He assured me he had never seen a native, old or young, angry. "They lead a most harmonious life," he said, "and you will notice they share everything they have with each other. I really think we could learn a lot from these natives."

And I agreed with him.

One of the pictures enclosed is the best one we've seen down here--most typical of the scenery and native life. That is #3. Many of the boys want a copy, so I'd appreciate it if you would ask Mr. Terreson to copy it and make about a dozen contact prints for me.

Thanks a lot for the package--only don't bother to send more cigarets. They cost you too much, and we're getting our ration regularly now. Photographic material is really the only thing I can think of that I need.

Lots of love, sweetheart. I miss you and the children very, very much,

Your
