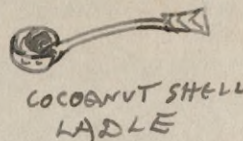


THIS I'VE SEEN NO NATIVE WEAPONS AT ALL, INDICATING THE TRIBES HERE ARE A PEACEFUL PEOPLE.



COCONUT SHELL LADLE



STONE JUG WITH VINES ENTWINED ABOUT IT FOR CARRYING

Netherlands East Indies  
28 Sept 44

Dear kids,

This island is the most naturally beautiful place I've been overseas, large coconut groves, many good sand beaches and generally more healthful than New Guinea, I believe. There is a cool breeze blowing nearly all the time--turning cold at night--and really the worst feature is the increased rainfall, and resultant mud, of the monsoon season which has just set in.

Our camp is in a large coconut grove which we have cleared free of undergrowth, adjacent to one of the nicest beaches on the island. I swim every afternoon (washing my clothes in sea water at the same time) and yesterday the surf was very exhilarating. We had a spirited contest of "catch" with a softball, tossing the ball to one another, with an opponent trying to snatch the ball in the water. Not that we needed the exercise, however, for with digging and improving foxholes and building tentframes and racks and the like with bamboo, I am getting plenty of exercise.

Streams of natives pass along our beach every day, some returning to the hills to which they fled when our bombardment started on D-Day; some of them moving all their possessions on their backs from one village to another; others just lounging around looking the American soldiers over like kids at a circus. Of course we stare right back, finding them as much a curiosity as they do us.

I believe the guide books call the natives "Indonese"--their appearance is that of a possible mixture of Hindu, Chinese, Javanese and Malay. Different families seem marked by various characteristics, some more Chinese-looking than others, some dark brown of the pure Malay. They aren't very big fellows, rather short and slight of stature. Many show evidence of malnutrition, and from the condition we found their stripped gardens, I wonder that many are alive. They're eating army rations now, however, and seem delighted that the Americans have taken their island from the Japs.

A number of their villages, which commonly are built along the coast, were destroyed or damaged, of course, but they are rebuilding, in instances relocating entire villages, under supervision of Dutch government officials.

Generally, I would describe the natives here as having black straight hair, almond-shaped eyes, brownish-yellow skins, adults averaging 5 feet 2 inches, weighing about 125 pounds. As I said before, there are many variations of this description, however.

Of a much farther advanced civilization than the New Guinea native, the islander here is generally literate, and most speak two languages, Malay and their tribal dialects. Many speak Dutch, and I'm sure some speak Chinese. (Chinese emigrants seemed to have been the traders of the island.)

Adults go fully clothed--another contrast to the New Guinea "Boongs." As fully clothed, that is, as their poor means allow. When we landed, the first natives were very poorly clad, with just bits of rags wrapped around them. Nearly every native man and boy now sports at least one garment of regulation U.S. Army "GI" issue. One soldier told me a native would work a week for a white undershirt. Now I see the natives passing, wearing undershirts and underwear shorts, or a pair of khaki trousers cut off above the knees, a GI fatigue cap, a helmet liner, even woolen overseas caps, shirts and trousers--which some soldier had been

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packing about in his duffel bag since we left the States. A number of natives are employed as guides, translators and carriers, of course. These are proud as peacocks in their complete uniforms, which they don't mutilate by cutting off the legs and sleeves. They like our Jungle Boots (rubber soled canvas boots) very much.

At first, most of the native boys we saw were naked while the little girls, and many of the women, wore just a burlap sandbag as a dress, which they had picked up as they first encountered our troops. Now they're wearing sarongs and bodices obviously made from GI clothing.

Most of the natives go barefoot, but there are a few-- the more Chinese-looking--who wear wooden clogs. And I saw one small fry marching proudly down the beach this morning, wearing a huge pair of jungle boots without laces---and nothing more. He solemnly saluted every soldier he passed, and they got a kick out of saluting him, he made such a ludicrous sight. Saluting, incidentally, is the common greeting of the native for the soldier. Every one salutes, without fail, with a snappy and very correct gesture. Now and then one will surprise you with the palm-forward salute of the Dutch and Australian soldier. The men and boys salute, and sometimes the little girls, but the women just stare open-eyed, apparently coveting the clothing they need so badly.

There are many large canoes along the coast. They are made of hand-hewn boards cleverly wedged together, and conveying from two to eight men. The larger ones have outriggers on either side, with a short mast. ~~and~~ The original sails were mostly woven mats, but the soldiers were quick to make sails out of scrap canvas and pup tents.

Some of the more affluent islanders own bullocks and carts, a small bamboo stake body borne by 2 huge wooden wheels. Their draft animals are brahma-like cattle of which there doesn't seem to be too many left. Most of them no doubt have gone into stew pots.

Many of the native families own a goat or two, and dogs, scrawny, mangy, starved animals, generally small, and looking something like a cross between a terrier and a hound---just curs. There are few pigs on the island, as most of the natives are Mohammedans and therefore do not eat pork.

In one village near our camp there is a Mohammedan mosque, with the typical domed room, surmounted by the crescent and star, apparently carved from mahogany. ~~It is~~ The square building is made of split bamboo, woven into intricate designs, with a bamboo-railed gallery running all around the main room. This is constructed on top of a mass of coral about ten feet high, blocks of coral being fitted together in a sort of pyramid formation, making several steps from the ground to the gallery, extending all the way around the building. Inside were individual prayer rugs, made of woven matting and in brilliantly colored designs, contrived from various colored grasses. On the porch is a huge drum, shaped something like a ~~large~~ gigantic potato hamper, or cornucopia, with the ~~skin~~ goatskin drumhead stretched over the smaller end. This drum was used to call the pious Mohammedans to morning prayer.

Many of the natives have a few manufactured dishes and iron pots, procured no doubt from the Chinese traders. Most still use some bowls and cups and ladles made from coconut shells and wood. I've seen a few extraordinarily good examples of stoneware made by the natives. They apparently are made of clay mixed with coral pebbles, and had been glazed in a fire. At almost every house is a huge mortar and pestle, ~~made of wood~~ the mortar made of a mahogany log in which a large rounded hole has been scooped. The pestles are generally of stone, lashed to the end of a bamboo pole. These instruments are used to crush

corn or rice into course flour.

The dwelling houses are of various kinds. The poorer ones are merely palmetto thatched bamboo frames. Unlike the New Guinea houses though, these all have walls, made of split bamboo. Some of the better homes are walled with hand-hewn boards, and some even have floors made of coral blocks—one or two of concrete. Most of the houses, however, have dirt floors, the damp foul smell of which is indescribable. The houses generally have several rooms, with one or more cooking rooms—where fires are built on the dirt floor. This would indicate that these houses are several-family apartments. All are very filthy and smelly of dogs, goats, unwashed humans and rancid mud.

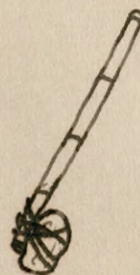
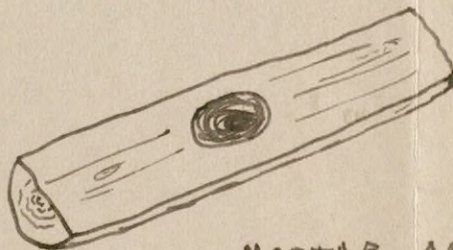
Although, as I said, this seems to be a more healthful island than New Guinea, many of the natives show evidence of disease—the ~~pain~~ yaws, tropical ulcers, and other forms of skin infections. A Javanese doctor, who accompanied us in our landing, has set up a clinic and many of the natives now may be seen sporting white bandages—donated by the American Red Cross.

At the last place where we were in New Guinea, there were no white women at all and very few village natives. Habits acquired there led to an amusing incident shortly after we set up our camp here. One afternoon a lot of soldiers were bathing in the surf. One officer had washed out his coveralls and was bringing them across the beach to leave them while he went for a swim. A group of natives were walking down the beach, and suddenly several girls in the group quickly covered their faces and ran down the beach like startled rabbits. The officer, holding his dripping coveralls, stood and gaped at them for a few seconds—then realized that he was standing there without a stitch of clothes on. That officer is still blushing.

I hope this gives you some idea of what this island is like. The island's principal pre-war industry was production of copra—the meat of coconuts which is dried and sent to the soap factories. So, perhaps that sweet-smelling baby soap you used to have in your baths was made of coconut oil right from this little island.

Love to all—and write to me,

Your dad,



MORTAR AND PESTLE



SMALL CANOE