

Sunday Morning

Dear Ones,

It has been quite a morning already but I think that things have quieted down and are running smoothly now. Last night we had a lecture on cold weather clothing which was intended to be shown before the end of the war but which was not cancelled, and I stayed down at the theatre to see the short subjects but not the feature. I wrote to Willie and started this letter to you, but gave it up since I was tired and typing poorly.

I really think that you are overoptimistic in your plans for my return - the blank checks struck a novel note! I just don't want you to build yourselves and me up to a letdown. We can be hopeful as we wait out the twists and changes of Army policy, but there is no point in counting on anything for some time yet. And of course I can assure that nothing will keep me from coming home if I get the opportunity - were it a question of going home or seeing China, Australia, or what have you, there would be no hesitation at all. Nothing in the line of promotion or anything else would induce me to stay in. However, if (and this is extremely unlikely) I were offered an occupation position with a guarantee of getting out in a time that seemed surer than anything in the offing at the time I might accept. But the point is that the Army is ^{NOT} going to be doing any asking - just ordering.

The Lown Camp stationery did make the Goldfine proposition a little tougher - all the complications! I have not yet received the letter containing the PM clippings on Taft and Bilbo - I will give you my reactions when I do. As for my poker playing - the story continues to be predominantly sad; I definitely need lessons - the lessons I am getting now are expensive all right but I don't seem to be learning anything!! I manage to keep solvent but little more - one rule I am strict about: I never lose more than I can afford, I will not owe gambling losses. Last night was an example of how my luck runs: we were playing seven card stud with a joker in the deck and in one round (6 hands) I had four cards to a straight flush in four cards three times - and in none of the three instances did I end up with either a straight or a flush after the three remaining cards fell! I did end up pairing twice on one for a winner. Maybe I had better go back to getting a bridge game organized - but hell, trumps would probably always split poorly for me. I wonder if I will be able to break the spell in September - September!! 1945 is two-thirds gone.

I am on the verge of having nothing to say again. A lot of our casual details have been colored troops lately and it has given me the opportunity to see them at work as individuals and as small groups. The first thing that occurs to me (for I am a member of a social minority group too) is that these boys do not realize that what they do or do not reflects not only on them as individuals but even more on the entire Negro community. They are capable of intelligent and careful work - not all are good workers but certainly not all are bad; and of course the attitude that prevails in prejudice toward them just increases their tendency to be recalcitrant. My experience has convinced me that the average Negro soldier under the same given social conditions is no better or worse than the average white soldier. Thus the test comes in in our (society's) ability to provide equal social conditions. While on this topic, the best workers we ever had were combat troops. We were not able to tell you that the 27th Division was outfitting for its Okinawa operation and resting from the Saipan invasion here on Santo; when the bulk of the Division left for the Ryukyus, the Rear Echelon here was made available to us and we used it in the closing of the depot. They were good workers, always ready to quit right on the dot, but no slacking while they were on the job. These experiences with the packing of the depot have been my closest contact with the men since I left the 730th and my impressions remain the same: the average GI whether white or colored is capable of clear and reasoned thought and he capable both of leadership and of following leadership which he understands or in which he believes. Some day I will write my reactions to the 27th Division from a number of viewpoints; it was a National Guard outfit (as was the 30th) and it has a lesson for those who would use the Guard as the medium of training and maintaining forces after the war.

OK for now - All my love,

Sumner

Regards to Doris

The 27th came here under a cloud - perhaps you recall something of their story. The Division went overseas early in the war and after extended stays in Hawaii did some real fighting in the Marshalls - the Fighting 69th is part of the 27th. Then they hit Saipan with the Marines and General Howlin Mad Smith of the Marine Command relieved General Ralph Smith, the 27th Division commander. TIME magazine took the marines point of view and the Division was accused of buckling under fire, freezing in their fox holes, and the like. The Division got boiling mad and their historian wrote a long resume of the operation in answer to the many charges; the Division was quite definite in maintaining that it and not the Marine Forces had held the Banzai charge and had, in fact, saved the battle of Saipan. Morale was high because of the slight to the Division, and their relieved General became somewhat of a martyr. Anyway, we thought we were going to deal with a pretty good outfit; our job was to resupply and reequip them. They were here for some six months, and I still have not made up my mind as to whether they are a good outfit or not - of course I cannot judge their combat performance because I have had no opportunity to see it.

At times I was firmly convinced that the Division command was completely fouled up. The men were good and willing workers although their morale was as variable as the wind - most of them had years overseas, getting close to 40 months, that tended to lower morale; and there was the normal army factor that they bitched to high heaven about the way the Division was being run, but defended it to the end if an outsider criticized it. But as I say, my contact was with the supply angles and what I saw of Headquarters when I visited Joe Bothwell up there. My impression was similar to the one I have of the 30th - a division set-up lends itself perfectly to politics; there are cliques and groups which have disproportionate importance. The Division is a unit in itself and as the basic tactical-administrative organization is fairly autonomous - outside control has to filter through the Division Commander.

My point is that this tendency to play politics is contrary to the best interests of the Army and the nation, can affect the morale of all the troops, and can harm the efficient functioning of supply and training programs. Very often the bigwigs in the state National Guard outfits were politicians or men with political connections, whose primary interest is anything but military. Therefore I feel that if the NG system is used it must be under Federal supervision. There must be guaranteed uniformity in training programs and in opportunity for advancement. There must be changes in command at frequent intervals by impartial national headquarters to keep the groups from stagnating. What this means is that we must have a national training program and national control no matter what means of training we use, and similarly we must have complete civilian watchfulness over that national program. The civilian element in the National Guard is not the same thing.