

17 October 1945

Dear Ones,

What with the virtual stopping of mail service to this island, my morale has dropped to new lows. As I understand it, ATC has discontinued its service and from now on we will depend on irregular plane and/or boat service to bring us our mail. One might think that in view of the nature of our tour of duty on these forgotten islands that mail service would at least be emphasized - no such luck. The result is that I haven't written because there just isn't anything to write about.

I have heard partial reports of the Indonesian independence movement in Java; what detail I did hear said that the Dutch were willing to work on the basis of their wartime promise of eventual independence within the Dutch commonwealth for the native peoples but that the British forces were intervening to end the open rebellions without coordination with the Dutch authorities. Combined with the British action against the natives in Indo-China, the British have apparently earned for themselves again their old role as the protectors of the "White Man's Burden." How the rest of the world will react I do not know - my own feeling is that the contradiction between the promise of the Labour Party and the accomplishments of its government is growing more serious day by day; it is clear that for all the programs of social emancipation at home, the Empire policy will remain as rigid and as uncompromising as ever before. The Levant was only the first case we now know.

I have just finished reading Denis Brogan's "The American Character" a book which was written to help explain the American spirit to our wartime allies; it is quick and easy reading, light and humorous at times, but I think that the average Briton would be quickly confused by the unexplained references to American history, legend, and idiom. It is good reading for Americans, for Brogan is a clear sighted critic; however I feel that he never quite gets down to what to my mind is the basic key to the American Character, if there is such a thing at all in terms of an integrated national personality that can be examined. We are a union without unity, we are a nation without nationality. It is almost impossible to define America in the terms which you use to define the other countries of the world. There is no such thing as an ethnic or a geographic line of demarcation in English speaking North America but those are minor points. To say that we are a nation of individuals is not enough; the British are individualistic, the French have a strong feeling for personal liberty. But these Western democracies combine with their support and practice of personal liberty a strong loyalty within each individual for certain basic policies which are recognized as to the best interest of all. The most obvious example is the institution of the British throne; more important are British Empire policy, the French-German rivalry along the Rhine, the deep rooted attitudes that find their sources in the annals of European growth. There are no equivalent values for the American community; the closest we come to it is in the Monroe Doctrine, but even in the days of Pan-American unity that has been primarily a negative rather than a positive element of our policies. In the modern United States we do not have the elements which create a common interest by agreement; our great ventures have to be hammered out. Our results are more or less unpredictable since we have no permanent policy anchors to which we cling - we waver between free trade and tariff, between intervention and isolation, between social reform and laissez-faire - oftentimes contradictory notions will be applied simultaneously. The American Character becomes a very difficult thing to analyze. I read somewhere that the melting pot notion is finally being given the heave-ho and it is about time: the melting pot suggests a refined, uniform result while America is no more than a rough mixture. The whole secret of America is that its many elements have retained as much of their original characteristics as possible - the strength of America up to this point in our history has been the strength of these elements working together or in conflict to arrive at some necessary synthesis. They guarantee originality and they guarantee open minds and a willingness to change and progress. America will have come of age when it can combine these qualities of democratic action and flexibility with a minimum number of permanent policies, such as the guarantee of world justice, freedom and peace, the readiness to commit our national wealth to oppose any threat to those factors. Well, this subject can be elaborated up for page after page, those are just my first thoughts.

The news last night carried Eisenhower's answer to the Harrison report on the condition of Jewish displaced persons in American zones of occupation; I hope that the General is correct in saying that their lot has been markedly improved and that their housing and sustenance needs are being properly cared for. However his saying that the Harrison report was overly critical since it failed to consider the immense tasks facing the US Armed Forces of Occupation makes me think that perhaps the Army was in need of a slight civilian reminder that this question could not be allowed to slide.

I was at the airfield this morning and as far as I could tell there was no mail in - great. Last night, believe it or not - I lost 9400 points in 9 rubbers of bridge! A new record without a doubt! Nate Wolfe is due to leave in the near future so I think that the steadiness of our playing is about to come to a halt - from here on I guess that we will play once or twice a week.

OK for now -

All my love,

*Sumner*

Regards to Doris.