

22 September 1945

Dear Willie -

While reclining in the barber chair today, I had visions of a story that may appear in the San Francisco Chronicle around 1950 sometime:

MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY AT ESPIRITU SANTO

Last week, the Captain of the SS Sally Ann reported a strange incident along the deserted shore of Second Channel on Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. The Captain who was somewhat inebriated at the time of his talk with your correspondent explained that he had come to that forsaken spot (which the US Army gave up as uninhabitable over five years ago) in search of brides for the Australian aborigines. As he sailed up the channel searching for a likely place to land, the Skipper noted what appeared to be a deserted pier, overgrown with jungle weeds and vines; a moment later he noted a movement amid the leaves. As he swung the little schooner close to the pier he found himself face to face with a man - a man who was obviously not a native. This strange apparition stared blankly at his visitor, a can fell from his hand. (The can was later identified as the container for an American relic of the war known as "C rations.") The Captain of the Sally Ann was amazed to hear a babble of intelligible english come from this derelict's lips - "Ordnance, ammunition, Chemical warfare, send me the trucks, where are the ships, reports, reports, Ordnance, ammunition..." - these words were repeated over and over again until this creature reached a high pitch of excitement, and fell exhausted. The Captain went back through the jungle which had crept to the high tide mark and soon discovered a path which led him in a circle back close to the starting point; along the circle he found various signs, "Ordnance Depot" "Chemical Depot" "Maintenance Stocks" "Salvage Yard" and several others. Near a sign marked "Officers' Area" he found a beaten-up, mildewed barracks bag which seemed to be the only thing of value in this little territory; beyond the path the jungle was impenetrable. The Captain noted that a great many boxes and crates with the same markings as the stranger's cannister had had were lying around but that all were empty and that a pipe which mysteriously brought water was in the last stage of clogging and rusting into disuse. Carrying the duffel bag, he ordered his crew to carry the man aboard and returned to this port. During the voyage he had opportunity to observe the man but not to speak to him since he slept most of the time; the only breaks in his sleep came when he arose and mumbled his string of words again. However he showed signs of realizing his situation since he added, "Shipped at last - they must have finally lowered the point score to 46." The captain reports that the man's face was covered with a heavy growth of beard and that much to his surprise after pushing away a sizable lock of hair he discovered a pair of glasses on sleeping man. Only when the stranger was delivered to the United States hospital on this island was the duffel bag opened and part of the story of the beachcomber discovered. His name was bluffed but was believed to be Norbern Stein and apparently he was a soldier. After three days of sleep and day of uninterrupted eating, as well as two shaves and three haircuts, the man was able to explain. His name was Sumner Bernstein - the error was caused by a mistake on the Army reports for August 1945 rather than change his reports, he decided to change his name. He had been left on Santo with the last remnant of government property to await a ship; later investigation showed that he was subsequently forgotten by the Army command when a request came through for all available shipping to carry the Geisha girls back to Japan from occupied China. He was able to survive on the Quartermaster rations in his char but as the months and years went by he started carrying his stocks toward the front; in the process he consumed them all and only the chance but timely arrival of the Sally Ann saved him for a certain death. His jeep and all his other supplies long since been lost to the irrepressible jungles. After a rest of some five the patient was sent to local Army headquarters and his records were more or less straightened up. The climax of this wierd story perhaps comes in the fact that in

going over this strange case the personnel officer discovered that Bernstein with his 46 points under the release plan of 1945-1946 became eligible for discharge in the spring of 1946 but that since he had failed to communicate with his base command it was interpreted that he desired to remain in the service and he was automatically reenlisted for 30 years in the grade of private rather than the temporary rank of lieutenant which he held. It was further discovered in the musty old file which had contained the request for a ship for Bernstein that the property he was charged with was valued at six thousand dollars while his accrued pay only amounted to some four thousand dollars. Since Bernstein is now in the local guardhouse awaiting trial for using government property for personal reasons without getting prior approval of his base command, your reporter was unable to speak to him for a first hand account of his problem; it is understood in some quarters that Bernstein may be released and returned to Santo to be held for later trial since no replacement for him has been sent to this area and since he failed to apply for either leave of rotation to the United States. Local police who happened to be near the room where the investigation of the Bernstein affair was held have said that when he heard the results of the investigating board he returned to his previous state of coma, started to babble again, and this time added, "Wait until FM hears about this." This report is not confirmed however; neither is the rumor that Bernstein asked whether or not there were still four rows of street-car tracks on Market Street in San Francisco and that when he was told yes, he volunteered to return to Santo. As yet the Army has issued no official statement, although a clerk in the General's office was heard to remark that they were waiting for disposition from higher headquarters and this was interpreted as referring to the Santo survivor.

I may be going a little too far, but that little bit probably summarizes my prospects and my thoughts about Santo right now!

I was riding around with Don this afternoon when the above idea came to me - so I carbonned it once for you, and the second copy to use as a reference so that I can rewrite it to others as is my custom when such an idea comes to me. For one thing it has helped me laugh at my own predicament and started my smiling again; then again in the course of the day things began to shape up, the Major who is filling in for Moore is proving to be easy and helpful in his own way, and the auction of vehicles to the local populace went off like clockwork. I am very grateful that I have good non-coms. I have two corporals - Jack Sprague (U of Washington '44) in general supply and Bob Rauth (Georgia '44) in Chemical and Ammunition - and boy, do I depend on them.

Thanks for your long letter of the 6th, Daddy. I am glad that you agree with my approach to the current education prospects I face - I still like to think about them despite my fears as expressed in my hypothetic clipping!! Thanks also for your comments on my sizing up of Russia in the Far East - I hope that the rest of my analyses prove to be as justified. As for your musing over the questions as to whether I should have had more sisters and brothers I have often thought about "if's" like that - and it occurs to me that I might have been an entirely different personality had I grown up in a larger household: whether that difference would have been for better or for worse is hard to say! Similarly, whenever I wish that some phase or another of my past might have been different I realize that it fits into the total picture of me, and that even the slightest change might have altered whole courses of events. The present seems to be the only evaluation to make, that is, when you are happy.

I saw Rudy Lewsen today and he will be going home on leave one of these weeks; I asked him to contact me before he goes in case I do not have the opportunity to see him for a while and I hope he will take a personal message to you for me. The Baruch report to the Veterans' Administrator, General Bradley, had a lot of important points; if he follows it and combines it with his own knowledge of the soldier problem and an efficient administrative system, he can well build one of the most important transition-constructive forces in our post-war period.

OK for now - this is the first night I have come down to the office to write for many a moon - we have a bridge game tentatively scheduled for 9.

Regards to Doris

All my love,

Sammy