

# **LETTERS HOME**

**Gene Wolfe**

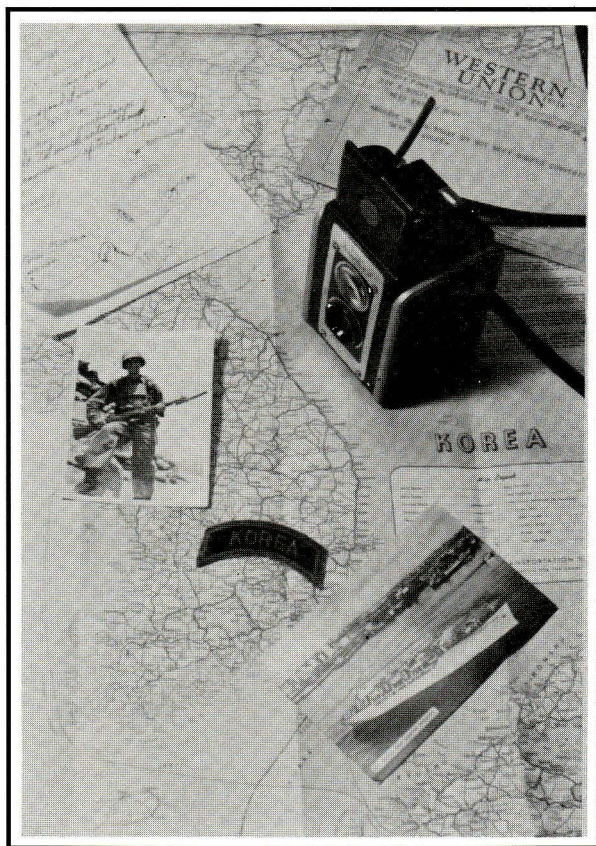












*Gene Wolfe*

This First Edition of Letters Home is offered in a limited hardcover edition of 250 numbered volumes each of which have been signed by the author.

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This book is 33 of 250.



# LETTERS HOME

Gene Wolfe



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"In some ways it wasn't a modern war at all, more like Flanders or the Somme or even the Wilderness campaign. There were jets and tanks and warships but you didn't see them very often. Korea was fought mostly by infantrymen with M-1 rifles and machine guns and hand grenades and mortars. There was artillery, of course, quite good on both sides. And barbed wire, lots of that, and mines, always the mines. We lived under the ground, in sandbagged bunkers, and stood watch in trenches. Men who fought in France in 1917 would have understood Korea; Lee's and Grant's men would have recognized it."

--from THE COLDEST WAR, by James Brady





Early in 1952 I dropped out of Texas A&M, losing my student deferment. In August I was drafted. After Basic Training and Army Leadership School, I was sent to Korea. This book contains all the letters, and fragments of letters, that have survived from that period.

Most readers of my novels will find little of interest in these letters, yet I feel they are worth preserving. To those who enjoy them, I recommend a much better book, THE LETTERS OF PRIVATE WHEELER (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1952). Wheeler served in Wellington's army.

In transcribing my own letters I have left intact the original spellings and punctuation whenever they seemed in any way defensible, no matter how incorrect -- that is to say, whenever I felt they added interest, or humor, or even mere variety, or any other good quality, I have left them as I set them down so many years ago. The countless remaining errors I have corrected without comment, finding it far easier to forgive the weary boy hunched over his little pad of stationery than he ever found it to forgive himself.

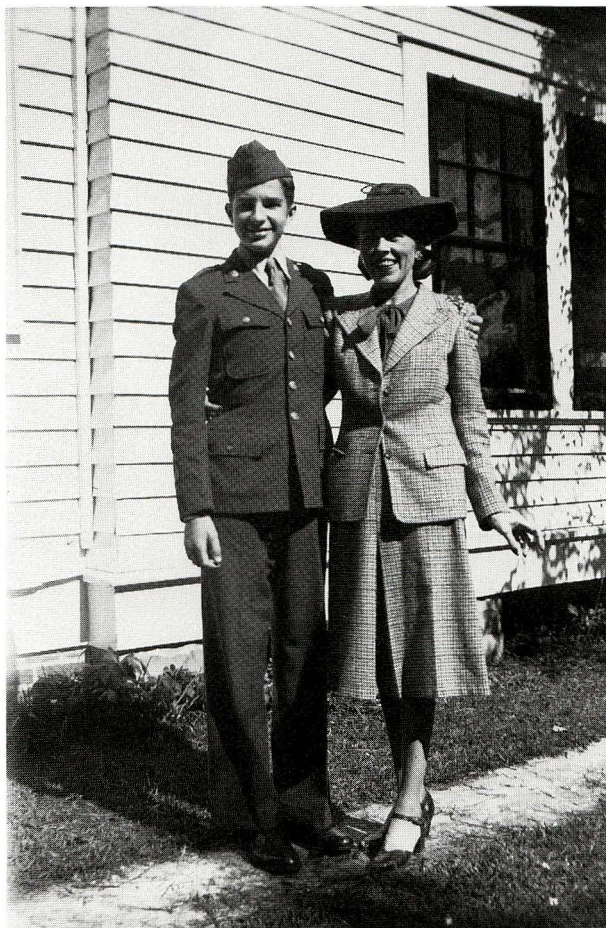
Many were originally undated and were subsequently dated by my mother, I believe some years after she received them; I have marked all such datings, a few of which seem clearly wrong. I should add that some of my own dates are almost certainly wrong as well. It is not always easy for a soldier in the field to determine the correct date; nor am I, even now, always as careful as I ought to be about such matters. Comments, corrections of fact, and anecdotes added to the original text are enclosed in brackets.

Like the letters themselves, the photographs reproduced here were safeguarded by my mother until her death at the end of 1977. I am tempted to say that this book would not exist without her -- but that is true of all my books.

-- Gene Wolfe, 1990







This book is dedicated to my mother, Mary "Fannie" Olivia Ayers Wolfe, to whom these letters were written; to Lou Hampton, who first suggested that I write stories; and to Ken Clough.

Gene Wolfe

Barrington IL  
1990





14 August, 1952  
7:20 p.m.

Dear Mother;

I did not plan on writing to you until I had learned where my station would be; however, since it appears that it will be some time until that occurs, I have decided to write lest you think I am neglecting you.

Since I presume you are interested in every tiny detail of my experiences (past conversations with you have taught me this only too well), I shall recite my experiences in chronological order.

When I left you and entered the induction station, I underwent a wait of about an hour. After that came a quick inspection for venereal disease. After this came another wait. Then we were called into the hall where a major read our names and announced the service into which we were to be placed. It was the army in all our cases. As each man's name was read he was required to take a step forward. That step, we were told, made us members of the armed forces of the United States. Immediately after this we repeated the oath.

We were herded into the bus as soon as we had repeated the oath. We were off! It took the Negroes on the bus about five minutes to start the crap game. At one time there were 2 dice games, a blackjack game, and a poker game on the bus.

We stopped in Schulenburg for food. We were allowed \$1.25 for our meal. We arrived in Fort Sam Houston about 3 p.m.

We underwent another inspection for V.D. and were issued bedding. After this we underwent an inspection for weapons, cards, liquor, et cetera. I could have smuggled a submachine gun and a thousand rounds of ammo past them. We were then informed that we were to retire at 9 and arise at 4. Following this we went to chow. It was the most abominable meat I can recall eating! We then retired.

We were awakened at 4 this morning. At 5:30 we ate breakfast, which was fair. The other guys got their uniforms afterwards. I got K.P., and as a result have no uniform to date. We K.P.'s cleaned after breakfast, had a rest of about an hour and a half, then ate lunch, which was delicious. We then worked until about 1:30, when we were relieved. After we were relieved, we were addressed by an officer who greeted us in the name of the army, and a chaplain and a representative of the Red Cross, both of whom were almost bursting with sweetness and light. The officer said we would leave here Wed. We went to chow after their talks, and heard the Articles of War. Then I took a bath and started this letter.

Do not write me here. In case of an emergency, write to me (at) Co. "A," Ft. Sam Houston. I will write you as soon as I learn where I am going.

Love,  
Gene

17 August, 1952

1:10 p.m.

Dear Mother;

I am writing you this time simply because I have nothing else to do. I have almost nothing to report.

We took classification tests Friday. They covered various subjects such as reading retention, auto repair, mathematics, machine-shop knowledge, et cetera. There were ten in all. They did not tell us our grades, but ten of us were singled out to take the test for O.C.S. I was one of these.

I had to get my uniform right after the test, so I never found out what I made. I will find out Monday, I hope. If I did pass the test, I will have to go through basic training first anyway, so I don't have to decide whether or not to go right away anyway.

I know you must think my handwriting is going to pieces rapidly, so I had better explain that I wrote my last letter on my bunk, and this one is being written with the stationary package in my lap.

I'll know where I am going in a few days.

Love,  
Gene

(O.C.S. -- Officer Candidate School)

(On the letterhead of the Reception Center, Fort Sam  
Houston, Texas)

18 August, 1952  
8:15 a.m.

Dear Father:

I thought it might be wise to write you just to tell you that I was unable to learn my grade on the O.C.S. examination. I had no opportunity to ask today.

I have made arrangements to have one \$18.75 war bond deducted from my pay each month. It will be mailed to you. You will be listed as co-owner.

Give my love to Mother and my regards to Ann G., if she is around.

Your loving son,  
Gene

P.S. Gen. Boatner is to be commander of the fourth army here. Tempus fugit!

(General Boatner had commanded the Corps of Cadets while I was at Texas A&M; decades later, I was to meet his daughter at a science-fiction convention.)

19 Aug '52

Dear Folks,

I haven't got much time, but I want to tell you that I am being sent to Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. I leave here Thursday.

Best regards,  
Gene

(Fort Leonard Wood is about one hundred miles southwest of St.Louis.)

24 Aug 1952  
9:35 p.m.

Dear Folks,

We have been assigned to our permanent platoons now. Since the platoons were made up by height, I am in the first. The new platoons broke up a gang of us who were becoming pretty good friends, but Geo. Anthony, Breeding, and "Digger" Gartener are still with me. ("Digger" is an ex undertaker.)

Since I have been in the army I have discovered why they drafted me over the protests of A&M, et cet. The draft is really scraping the bottom of the barrel. There is a negro boy in my barracks who has four children. In this company is one of the shortest men I have ever seen. I would guess his height is 4 ft. 6 in. You may think I'm kidding you, but it is the truth. Another boy in here has his entire torso covered with scar tissue.

A sergeant here told me that the group which just finished its basic contained a boy with only one eye and one with a partially paralyzed arm. As you may recall, I got in without ever having a hearing test of any sort. In the army it is common knowledge that the standards which are supposed to be used in the examinations are not being actually employed.

I am including in this letter a slip they have given us with my address; it will be easier for you to refer to than my letter.

Love,  
Gene



24 August 1952

5:00 p.m.

Dear Mom;

I'll bet you never thought I'd be such a faithful correspondent, but while we have a little time off here, there is so little to do that writing is about the only form of escape I have.

Up until today we were restricted to the company area and only got about two hours off -- anyway, today we got the afternoon off, but tomorrow we go back to the old grind.

Today I went to the small P.X. near us and to the small Service Club, then to the big P.X. The small one was out of some things I needed. I got a copy of Astounding Science Fiction and read it in the Service Club. In a few minutes I am going to the movies with a guy named Tracy.

Continued

27 Aug 52

1:35 p.m.

Among the things I woul (interrupted at this point by a 2nd Lt.) d like to know in your next letter is where you got that hybrid address you put on the first one. I trust that you have my correct one by now.

I am barracks orderly today. It is a pretty easy job, all I have to do is sweep and mop the barracks and clean the latrine and tidy up generally. I'm not supposed to write letters though, and I had to slip this one under the mattress quick before that 2nd looie saw it. I'm not sure if he saw it or not, but he sure as heck can't demote me.

Love,

Gene

22 Aug 1952

10:05 a.m.

Dear Mother;

I want to start this letter by telling you my mailing address. It is:

Pvt. Gene R. Wolfe US 25890073

Co. "D" 86 Ren Bn C.C.R.

6th Armored Division

Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo.

You have been getting letters from me, but I haven't gotten any, of course. So use this address soon and tell me everything that has been happening in Houston.

We left Fort Sam Houston Thursday. Those of us who were bound for Fort L.W. went by air. It was my first ride in a big plane, of course, and I enjoyed the experience very much.

Our departure was somewhat delayed because the car carrying our pilot, copilot, and hostess (we went by civilian airline, Pioneer) was in a wreck. The hostess had to be sent to the hospital, the copilot had a wrenched knee, and the pilot had a big knot on his head. It was not a very reassuring way to start a flight. We flew from San Antonio to Springfield, Missouri, and from there to some place I never did get the name of. From there we went to the fort by bus, a distance of about 50 miles.

I would like to see you and dad in person, but it will be many months before I get a leave.

Love,  
Gene

(The army still employed serial numbers at this time. The US before mine marked me as a draftee; if I had enlisted, my serial number would have begun with RA, for Regular Army.)

(undated)

Dear Mother;

I do not have much to write you about tonight except to say hello. We had lots of training on the B.A.R. today, and that would not make very good reading. I learned a good gag today. One fellow comes up to another and says, "Boy, did I see an exciting accident today."

"What was it?" the other fellow says.

"A strong man tied an iron bar into a knot and left out the assistant gunner."

OK so it was corny. I had to write something, didn't I?

Most of the boys are very homesick. I am not homesick, but I sure am tired.

The weather here is boiling hot during the day but cool at night. There are only two kinds of people here, those who drink all they can at every opportunity and those who faint in the heat. I am one of the former. If I urinate more than once each day, though, it is unusual.

Yours,  
Gene

(The Browning Automatic Rifle weighed twenty pounds and was normally fired from a bipod. It used the same ammunition as the M-1 rifle. In theory one was assigned to each infantry squad.)



29 Aug 1952

Dear Mother;

I got four of your letters and Louis's letter yesterday. I am going to go through them and answer the questions in them before I do anything else.

I didn't play poker (or anything else) on the bus. Mostly I talked with a boy named Oscar Cavellero.

Much of Ft. Sam Houston is modern, but the barracks in which I slept was built in 1887.

I got: 5 suits of kakies (or however the duce you spell it)

3 suits of fatigues  
2 ties  
7 suits of summer underwear  
3 " " winter  
2 pairs of combat boots  
1 " " lowquarters

and incidentals. (All new.)

The flight to Mo. took about five hours, as I remember. About twenty-six men flew in my plane.

My basic training takes 8 weeks; after that I will take eight more weeks of specialized training, probably engineer. Then I may get a pass.

Don't know if I passed O.C.S. or not.

I don't need money.

All basic training is infantry training. It's very rough indeed. You work 16 hours a day. (This is not an exaggeration.)

Living conditions are not bad. Our company is not crowded and the latrine is in the barracks. (It was not at Ft. Sam.)

The food is a little better than it was at A&M, but scanty at times. I never want to even see another potato. We always get them twice a day & sometimes three times.

It would be nice if you sent me some cookies et cetera; but don't go overboard.

You can get food at the P.X., but we are not allowed to go there most of the time.

I can't expect a weekend leave for a long time.

The abbreviation is Rcn. The whole thing is 86th Reconnaissance Battalion, Combat Command Reserve.

Do not come up here. I wouldn't get time off to see you.

Please excuse the poor writing in this letter. I am writing in the Service Club, and it is very noisy in here.

They have kept us very busy this week with training on everything from bayonet to supply economy. We took a three mile hike this afternoon with full field packs, rifles, and steel helmets. One boy collapsed, I hear.

I believe I wrote you before about the poor physical condition of some of the men here, but it has impressed me very strongly. Besides the ones I wrote about before, I have found one with curvature of the spine, one reclassified 4F with a trick knee, one cancer (operated on last Tuesday), and about twenty ulcer cases. The sergeants here don't ask if you have anything wrong with you, they ask what you have wrong with you.

The boys in my outfit are mostly from Texas, Chicago, and Michigan, with a scattering of New Mexicans and Louisiana boys, in case you have been wondering.

One of the New Mexicans is Les Wilcox, a real cowboy. "A lover and a fighter and a pretty damn good windmill man," as he would say. He is a very nice guy, too. He is twenty, married and separated, and got out of high school by pure dumb luck, he tells me.

Our undertaker (I can't spell mortician) is an interesting guy to talk to. "Digger" worked for Fogal West in Houston. He has a bad habit of saying it looks very natural if you ask him if your tie is well tied.

Time slipped up on me, and I have to close in a hurry.

Love,  
Gene

30 Aug 1952

Dear Mother,

There is not much more to write since yesterday, but I'm waiting for Post Theater #2 to open, and I thought you might like to hear from me again.

We cut brush all this morning and part of this afternoon. It is not a very tiring occupation, but I was afraid that I would get blisters from swinging that brush hook.

I'm trying to see the company commander to see about getting the increase in pay due me because of my National Guard service, and about O.C.S.; haven't worked it yet, though.

Yours,  
Gene

(I had poison ivy all up and down both forearms and went on sick call next morning. A quarter or more of our training company went on sick call every day; that morning our company commander was determined to put a stop to it. He lined us up and went from man to man, demanding to see what was wrong with each of us.

(And he did -- the oozing rash on my arms, the raw and bleeding feet of the man next to me whose boots were at least two sizes too small, the hideously swollen feet of one who was allergic to the dye in GI socks, the withered arm (a birth defect) of one who had even less business in the army than most of our sad assembly -- on and on. When the company commander was finished he apologized to us, and I thought a great deal more of him than I had. I wish I could remember his name.)



7 Sept 52

Dear Mother;

I wrote you another letter earlier (oh brother! get that spelling) today, but I am afraid it won't go air mail. (It was five pages long.) If it kicks back on me I'll send it by regular mail. If it does not, I'm sure you won't object to getting a little extra mail.

Did I tell you there is a little diarrhea in camp? I had a touch of it yesterday, but not enough to bother me much. I think it is due to the overcrowded mess hall. They have to wash dishes very rapidly.

We had to work all day Sat. to make up for the Labor Day Weekend. Today we worked from 10 to 2 policing up the company area.

After I wrote you I went to see "Yankee Buccaneer." A smeller in my opinion.

A boy fell in the shower today and cut his head open.

I don't know if I told you before, but on one of the first days I was here one of the boys tried to commit suicide. They're still raising stink about it. He tried to do it by ramming a straightened out clothes hanger in his ear. Did you ever hear the like?

Love,  
Gene

(Domestic air mail generally provided next-day delivery at a fraction of the cost of today's Express Mail.)

13 Sept 1952  
8:20 p.m.

Dear Mother;

I suppose you are a little surprised at the stationary (Beck-Cross Hotels, from the Colonial in Springfield, Missouri), so I had better explain it first of all. They broke down this weekend and gave some of us passes. They are good from Sat. noon until midnight 9 p.m. Sun. (That kind of thinking will get us into trouble, won't it?)

I know that the pass makes you think of coming to see me, but the trouble is that I don't know when I will get another, and I won't know until I get one.

Since I got this pass, I decided to go into town and get a good night's sleep.

Last night we cleaned our rifles, bayonets, and all our equipment, besides cleaning the barracks & arranging the stuff in our footlockers. We were scheduled for a big inspection today. We worked until 1:30 and then got up at 4:00 this morning. At about 7:45 I was called out of Physical Training class to make up a class in rifle marksmanship I missed. They kept us so late that I didn't get inspected at all, and all my work went for nothing.

I don't have your letter here with me, of course, so I'll put off answering your questions until I can check it.

I went to the personnel office this weekend and put in for my extra National Guard money. I have been trying to get this appointment ever since I hit camp, so I was pretty glad to get it. I think it's all straightened out now.

Do you remember Colbert, the colored guy with four kids? His wife just had another baby. He got so excited when he received the news in a long distance call that he forgot its name, but it's a boy. He is trying to get discharged, but it has not come through yet.

14 Sept. 1952  
10 a.m.

I got pretty sleepy while writing you last night, so I just quit, took a shower, and went to bed. I suppose I should tell you that Colbert gave everyone in the platoon a cigar. King Edwards, and very good, too. I wish he would get his discharge. It seems unfair to keep a man with so many dependents in the army. He was a wrecking-truck driver in civilian life, in case you are wondering.

Do you recall the very short boy I told you about? His name is Kerchoff, and his height is 4 ft. 11 in. He is trying to get a discharge, too, and he says things look pretty good. Another fellow, Russell Hastings, is trying for one, too. He is 6 ft. 7 in. tall, and that is 1 in. over the limit. He says he does not think he will get one.

I got something this morning, that I have been wanting for a long time: corned beef hash for breakfast. Also I indulged in the luxury every soldier promises himself. I had my shoes shined.

I saw Son of Paleface last night. It was not as good as Paleface, but still worth seeing.

Friday I got my GI glasses. Every soldier who needs glasses gets two pairs free from the government. One pair has plastic frames very much like the ones I had. The other pair has gold-washed steel frames. These glasses are actually classified as off-duty and duty. You may wear the duty glasses off duty, but you can't wear the off-duty pair on duty. I understand that this regulation is only enforced during basic, though. The steel framed pair are the duty glasses, of course. Since I must wear them on duty, I wear them all the time. They make me look horrible, but I was glad to get them since I had broken my civilian glasses Mon. I didn't write you, because I knew I had these coming.

I'm glad Ann (Gennuso) is back with you, but I'm sorry you are still working. Try not to overdo things.

Love,  
Gene

(Both films starred Bob Hope and Jane Russell.)

21 Sept 1952  
10:30 a.m.

Dear Mother;

I can't tell you how glad I am to be able to write you again. First of all I want to thank you for the cookies you sent me. We were out on the range all last week. We camped there and lived in pup tents. Your cookies served as emergency rations. In between them and some deviled ham and crackers which Pvt. Pope had, we made out all right.

I don't believe I have told you about Pvt. Pope before this. He is from Chicago and has a law degree from the U. of C. A fast man with a cookie.

I believe you asked about segregation in your last letter. There is none at all. My squad happens to be all white, but that is only a coincidence. I would estimate that our platoon is between one third and one half Negro.

The first squad consists of six Negroes, two whites, and one Jap. (Pvt. Tammakaw.) The two white boys are "Stupid" Criddle and "Baseball" Taylor. Baseball is so named because he was a player in civilian life. He played in a league smaller than the Texas League, I believe. I don't recall the name of the town. He was a first baseman. He says he never struck out more than once a game last season.

We have to call our Taylors by some sort of nickname because we have three in the platoon. Two of them, including Baseball, are Thomas Taylor. The other is Robert Taylor, believe it or not.

Our barracks contains thirty-two men. I think you asked about that.

Did I tell you that we marched out to the range? About seven miles. We wore full field packs and steel helmets, and carried rifles of course. To everyone's surprise, no one in our company fell out. One man in C company did, though. We got back to camp about 6 o'clock Friday night, then we had to get ready for inspection Friday morning. We worked on that until 3 a.m. I was never so tired in my life. We had inspection Sat. morning, then a regimental parade. Co. D won the parade. I didn't pass the inspection, so I didn't get Sat. afternoon off. Spent all afternoon scrubbing tables in the mess hall instead. Saturday evening Pope and I went to Where's Charley?

I hope everything continues to be all right at home, and that you write me if there is any trouble. Write me if there isn't any, too.

Your loving son,  
Gene

(I am perhaps the only living writer to have shared a meal with Alexander Pope.)



28 Sept. 1952

2:45 p.m.

Dear Mother,

Yesterday I got a letter from you which said that you have not been receiving any mail from me. This rather puzzles me since I wrote you a long letter Sunday. I hope it has not been lost in the mail.

I know that you must find it hard to believe that I have absolutely no time to write you during the week, but it has been that way so far. We had it pretty tough this week. Yesterday (Sat) we worked all day. At about 5 o'clock two men collapsed. Both are all right now, though.

There is some sort of sickness going around here. I think it's flu, but some of the guys say it's strep throat. One man in our platoon is in the hospital with it now. Two guys in our platoon went AWOL Tues.; one was caught Thurs. and is in the stockade now.

Miller Porter wrote to Bob Breedin. He asked if I was in the same company.

To my list of the lame, the halt, and the blind, add Pvt. Roseman, who is totally blind in one eye.

Pvt. Kerchoff, who is the short boy I wrote about, is trying to get a discharge. So is the fellow with four children. I'm glad to hear that there is some hope of getting Mrs. G back to help you. Don't work too hard until you get more help.

As I recall you asked about the weather up here in one of your letters. It's very cold here at 4:30, when we fall out. We are inspected to make sure we are wearing nothing but a T-shirt, shorts, and fatigues. They are hardening us up for the Korean winter. We've had several classes on cold weather hygiene and such. We were shown a lot of nice cold-weather clothing in one of them, but our instructor, a second Lt. who spent last winter in Korea, says they didn't get much of it.

After about 11 o'clock, it gets very hot, about 102 at the peak. I attribute the extremes of temperature to the fact that we are in the mountains (the Ozarks) and the cloudless days.

Speaking of Korea, a lot of our officers and noncoms are Korean vets. They are all pretty bitter about the civilian "no war" attitude. They miss all the whoop and hooraw of W.W.II, I think.

Disease over there seems to be pretty bad. We get lots of lectures about it. We are especially warned about Wild's disease, which comes from food or water polluted with rat droppings. A lot of soldiers get it from eating snow.

I hate to ask you to write all the time when I can't reply nearly as often, but it means a lot to me to get a letter at mail call.

New friends can take the place of old, but nothing can take the place of parents. According to the grapevine, some of us will get passes for Thanksgiving. Since I did not get one on Labor Day, I may be one of them. Did I tell you I got K.P. on Labor Day itself? The passes then were for only 72 hours anyway, so I didn't mind not getting one much. Even if I had flown home, I might have been picked up by the M.P.'s because they were only good for 150 miles. We will be paid Wed., so don't worry about money.

Love,  
Gene

(To this day Congress refuses a monument to the dead of the Korean War. The Korean War Veterans Memorial Fund hopes to erect such a monument by private subscription.)

3 Oct 1952  
8:15 a.m.

Dear Mother;

I am very glad to be able to write to you again, especially since we will not get Sunday off this week and I was afraid that I would not get a chance. Right now I should be back at the barracks working, but a kind sergeant has let me stay here at the personnel office and write.

I have decided to apply for O.C.S. as a matter of fact; I just finished filling in my application. I need either photostats or "True Copies" of my birth certificate and my high school diploma; please send them as soon as possible.

I know you will want a lot of information about O.C.S., but I have very little to give. I must have another physical exam, and take some more tests. I will not be able to go until I have completed my Engineer Basic. There will probably be quite a bit of delay after that.

#

As per instructions in your last letter, I am sending this unfinished.

Gene

(I was permitted to write until the next would-be candidate arrived.)

3 Oct 1952  
3:35 p.m.

Dear Mother;

I don't recall quite all that I said in that incomplete letter I sent you, so please excuse it if this letter is a little bit repetitious. I think I told you about OCS, so I won't speak too much of that here.

You know, your packages seem to come at the most opportune times. The first one came when I was on bivouac, and the third one when I was on guard Monday. We have to stay in the guardhouse at all times except when we are walking our posts, you know. Thanks to some of your little cakes I got a bed to sleep in. A rare thing when there are sixty-two men on guard and twenty-three beds.

We leave Sunday noon for another bivouac, and your next package should come Monday, judging from your letter. Just right.

We fired the 3.5 bazooka this week. We only got two shots apiece, because the rounds cost eighteen dollars. My shot from the kneeling position, which should have been easy, was a little high and hit the turret. (Where a tank is most heavily armored.) My standing shot was right on the upper part of the tread, though. This is not very difficult at 250 yds., however. We use old tanks as targets, in case you are wondering.

We also fired the light machine-gun this week. I got 42 out of a possible 60 and had the range instructors come around and congratulate me. This was very nice, but I had an exceptionally good gun. The average score was twenty or twenty-five. Even the best never make 60.

Kerchoff, the short boy, and Hastings, the tall one, are still trying to get discharges.

Colbert, the man with 5 kids, has been AWOL for weeks; I forgot to tell you before. (The colored boys say A.W.O.Loose.)

Some of the boys are getting assigned as prisoner guards now. They carry loaded carbines and slouch along behind three prisoners. Pretty soft, I'm told. I doubt if I'll get it since the huskies are chosen for the most part.

Did I tell you I got out of a big inspection when I went to get my OCS papers checked? I should have gone back to the company when I was through, but the sergeant let me write that partial letter, then we (meaning the D Company officer candidates) all got into Bob Breeding's car and drove around until eleven. Since I stayed up till two-thirty last night working on my OCS papers, I needed the rest.



Did I write that we have a new platoon sergeant? He is an Indian, Sergeant Cloud. Did you ever meet an Indian with a Swedish accent? He was pretty tight last night and pretended that I was writing a girl when I was working on my OCS papers, and reading, or rather pretending to read all kinds of mush from them. I didn't mind, but it delayed me a little.

I hope all is well at the cafe, and at 1619. (My parents' house number.)

Continue to send news of those fighting Texas Aggies. Sure wish I could see a game.

Have I told you that I got my extra pay all right? Well, I did. Got my bond yet?

Yours for shorter  
hours and better  
working conditions,  
Gene

P.S. Hey Dad, still shorting the customers?

Sun.  
8:15 a.m.

Dear Mother;

I am glad to be able to write to you once again. I had a rather frustrating experience along this line Thurs. We got Thurs. night off, so of course I came over here to the Service Club to write to you. I wrote about three pages, then time caught up with me and I had to return to the barracks. I put aside the letter I had started, planning to finish it later. In arranging my equipment for inspection Friday night I lost it. I feel pretty badly about it because I know how much you would have liked to get an extra letter from me.

We fired on the transition range and the assault range this week. I think that a description of these might interest you.

On the transition range, the firer moves from one point to another firing four shots at two targets at each point. Each point duplicates a possible battle firing point. For example, at one point the firer is behind a pile of stones, in another he is in a foxhole or a bunker. The firer has one minute to fire his four rounds. I fired 150 out of a possible 200. This is rated as expert.

On the assault range the firer walks down a path through the woods and targets jump out at him. The targets are quite close, but only four seconds are allowed for each shot. My score was 95. Expert is 120 to 85.

We went over the infiltration course Friday. That's the one on which live ammunition is fired over your head. To accustom us to artillery fire they also set off explosive charges in pits on the course. The course was eighty-five yds. long and well garnished with barbed wire. We crawled it once in the afternoon and once at night.

I was surely glad to read of the Aggies victory. Thanks for telling me about it. But it was no surprise to me. The Aggies always win, you know. In some games they are outpointed, but they always win. I mean this seriously.

I'm glad you liked the card I sent you. Sorry it got off so late. You wrote something about me being at the end of my stay at Ft. Leonard Wood, didn't you? Have you forgotten that I must take eight weeks of engineer training when my basic is over?

Thanks in advance for the cookies. I guess I'll get them Monday.

Do you get my air-mail letters sooner than the regular ones? I've decided to send this one regular mail to find out.

My money has just about run out now, but we will be paid Tuesday, so don't send me any.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. Had K.P. Wed. 2a.m. to 8:30p.m. Whew!

Oct 12, 1952  
9:00a.m.

Dear Mother;

We got back from bivouac Sat.; as you may recall, we left Sunday. It was pretty cold all week. The low at night was usually about 26. In the morning the weeds would be covered with frost, and the puddles slicked over with ice. It was very pretty. We each had three blankets in our puptent; since we had to lie on the ground these were not sufficient. I woke up about every hour and rubbed my feet to keep them warm.

We got all sorts of training out there, including some classes on how to escape if captured and how to resist interrogation. At one time we made a mock attack on a hill with 105 howitzers firing over our heads and Patton tanks supporting us.

The escape class was taught by a 1st Lt. who was captured three times by the Germans and escaped twice. He is thirty-five years old now and looks fifty. Due to five months of starvation, he says.

We finished the whole thing with an eighteen mile march with full field packs. Real murder, believe me. I had sprained my ankle Tues.; luckily it was just about well by Friday.

Love,  
Gene

(undated)

Dear Mother;

I wrote you another letter earlier today, but I was rather hurried and the noise was so great I couldn't think straight. Since it was probably a little incoherent, I decided to write this to augment it. I sent the other by regular mail, but I shall send this air mail if all goes well.

I think I told you how I almost died of exposure on bivouac, so I won't dwell on that grim matter any more. As I remember, you were a little confused about how much basic I had left. I have one more week of infantry basic to do. After that I must do eight weeks of engineer basic. After that I will be eligible for OCS, but it may be a matter of months before I can go. Any questions? Put 'em in your next letter.

Have gotten two packages since I last wrote you; the one with chocolate cake was the last. Thanks for both. Everything was swell. I can't understand why the cake didn't get torn up in the mail, but it came out fine.

My sprained ankle is all right now, though it was a little painful while it lasted. Did I tell you that I fell out on a march Wed. because of it? Got lost, too. Got found, though. I got a boy to take a picture of me on bivouac. I'll get a print if I can.

Love,  
Gene

19 Oct 52

Dear Mother;

This has been a pretty eventful week for me. Monday four men were picked to be voted on by the rest of the company; the winner was to be the best trainee. After that four more were given honourable mention. Yours truly got an hon. mention -- much to his surprise.

Friday the Marksmanship badges were awarded. I got a sharpshooter's.

Saturday the graduation parade was held and we were shipped to our new units. My new address is:

Pvt. Gene R. Wolfe US 25890073

Co. "C" 50th AIB CCA

6th Armored Div.

Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo.

You will notice that I have underlined the points which differ from the old one.

I have been separated from many of my friends, but I suppose I'll make new ones.

Do you know, I saved that last letter of yours so that I could answer all the questions in it, then went off and left it in the barracks? Maybe I can find time to write in the middle of the week and answer them. I'll try.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. Tell Dad "Saludos" for me.



Oct 27 - 52  
(Dated by my mother)  
Sat. 3:30 pm

Dear Mother;

I have a little spare time right now, so I have decided to spread a bunch of your letters out in front of me and answer some of your questions.

My ankle just sort of sprained itself. I was on a march & carrying a lot of equipment, and I stepped in a hole. I was lost about 30 minutes. My discoverer was Pvt. Peterson, who had been sent to find me. He was all the search party there was.

Yes, I do need something. How about sending me my little overnight bag? Also a tin box of some sort. You sent two full of cookies awhile back which would have been fine, but I didn't know I'd need one and so threw them away.

There is quite a bit of petty thieving here in "C" Co., much more than in "D". I had my shoe brush stolen, but I got it back.

Don't know whether or not I'll be home Thanksgiving.

Dad's right about the AIB. CCA means Combat Command A. Yes, I am taking Engineer Basic. Accommodations at Co "C" are about the same.

You don't have to send so much food, but the cookies and cake were swell.

I don't really know how I like the Engineer training yet, because I have been on K.P. one day and I've spent several days filling out papers for OCS & taking a physical exam.

(Three or four words lost) for her card. I'd write her myself, but there was no return address.

Don't think too much of me; I'm liable to foul up some way and I don't want to hurt you too much if I do.

Love,  
Gene

Nov. 3 - 1953

(So dated by my mother; the year is certainly 1952, not 1953.)

Dear Mother,

Surprise, surprise! I've got guard duty tonight, so I'm writing this from the guard house. I lucked out, as they say, and got the job of supernumerary. As "super" I stay in the guard house and wake the next relief.

I did know Pvt. Engelbreck. He is not quite as dumb as he looks. Besides, marksmanship does not depend on intelligence. It's more of a knack.

Thus far this week we have had classes on rigging, power tools, and field fortifications, in case you're interested in the curriculum here.

We get paid again tomorrow (wow! get the spelling!) and some of the boys can hardly wait. Those who have allotments only get thirty-eight dollars, and it's pretty tough to live on that.

Did I ever tell you that I received the photostats? Well, I did. I also got your package with THE DAMNED in it. The cake took a beating, but it still tasted good. Thanks loads.

I think that I could get time to see you on a weekend if you were to visit now. If you want to consider such a visit, please write details.

Love,  
Gene

(undated 1952)

Dear Folks,

I imagine that you have already received the letter I wrote on guard duty. There is not much more to tell.

A boy who had been transferred from C to B company tried to kill himself Friday. He had gotten hold of a round of ammunition somewhere and intended to shoot himself with his own rifle. A barracks orderly saw him load it, however, and tackled him before he fired.

Perhaps he wished to be prevented. I am always sceptical of unsuccessful suicides.

We have had Indian Summer weather here for the past week, but it appears to be getting colder now.

Would it be too much trouble to put a can or so of sardines in oil in my next package? They seem to be unobtainable here, but I have a craving for some.

Good luck with the used car business.

Love,  
Gene

Nov 10 - 1953

(So dated by my mother, the year is certainly 1952, not 1953.)

Dear Mother;

I am mailing the form you sent me at the same time as this letter. I got it earlier but had no chance to post it.

We have been studying demolition all week, and I bet I've shot off enough explosives to destroy half of Houston.

We've been using nitrostarch mostly. It's an obsolete explosive left over from WWII. The Army decided it was too tricky to handle and quit making it. Ours is mostly circa '44 and '45.

Demolition was fun, though; I got a big bang out of it. (I must be feverish.)

I'm happy because Ike won, but that is about all the election news I've had. Wish I could have heard the returns.

I hope your tooth does not give you too much pain.

Love,  
Gene

(It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the Korean War was fought with left-over equipment and materials from the Second World War, though at one point I was issued some First World War mess gear. Quite a few of the men were left over as well.)

Nov 17 - 1952

(Dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

We have had mine warfare and Bailey bridges this week. I imagine you know enough about mines to have an idea of what we did. The Bailey bridge is a prefabricated steel bridge. To give you an idea of how fast it can be erected, our platoon, about 40 men, put up a bridge over an 85 foot gap in three hours. This bridge was capable of carrying 39 tons. Remember, we had no prior training.

I am enclosing in this letter a cheque I cashed for a very good friend of mine. He needed the money in a hurry, and facilities for cashing cheques, money orders, etc. are very poor here. For that reason, I would appreciate it if you would send the money back in cash.

I have had a very bad cold for the last few days and may go on sick call if it doesn't get better soon. It will be the first time I have been on sick call since I got poison ivy during infantry basic.

I don't believe that we will get a Thanksgiving leave, so it seems unlikely that I'll be home before Xmas, if then.

Love,  
Gene

(undated, November 1952)

Dear Mother,

I have mislaid my pen, so I am forced to scribble this missive in the graphite smears you see before you.

I have received your first five-dollar letter.

I went before the OCS examining board this week. The examination, or I should say interview, lasted about an hour, and I had no more idea what their recommendation would be when I left than when I entered.

I will definitely be unable to go home on Thanksgiving; we will get Thur., Sat. afternoon, and Sun. off, period. Don't know about Xmas yet.

If you want to call me long distance, you can do it with the information you have. But don't come if you feel unwell; also, I may be home for Xmas anyway.

Love,  
Gene

Thanksgiving Day

Dear Mother;

This will have to be a short letter, and full of bad news, I guess.

The cold is still around. We have had a cold, wet spell lately; and today it stayed below 32° all day. We have a week long bivouac next week, and I'm afraid it will be rough.

Here is the real bad news. I won't get a leave, either after basic or for Xmas. This is because I am an officer candidate.

I can't seem to find anyone who will make the trip with you. I suggest you give the idea up. It would be too much of a strain, I'm sure.

Love,  
Gene

(My mother dated this Nov. 25 - 1953. The actual date was November 27, 1952.)



Nov. 31 - 1952

(So dated by my mother, though she made me learn that little rhyme. From internal evidence, November 29, 1952.)

Sat  
2:00 p.m.

Dear Mother;

I imagine you have already received the letter I wrote Thanksgiving Day, so I shall confine myself to my movements and activities of the last week in this one.

On Monday we had T.O. Construction. This abbreviation indicates construction of a temporary nature, intended to stand no more than five or six years. In the morning we had classes outdoors. It was raining and cold, so we were pretty miserable. In the afternoon we were divided into groups for practical work. I was lucky enough to get into the only group, eight men out of the company, who worked indoors.

Tuesday it was still raining and cold. We went to Combat in Cities and spent the day jumping through windows, running over roofs and generally behaving like Burt Lancaster. That night we were supposed to bivouac. It was still raining, and the prospect looked miserable. After I had resigned myself to the situation, I received another stroke of luck or providence. I was ordered to go back to the company area to straighten out a small error in my OCS papers. I did not return to the field Wed, but stayed in the company area cleaning the barracks.

Thursday was a holiday, of course.

Friday we went to the Timber Bridges training area and built a bridge. It was cold, but otherwise pleasant. Last night it snowed, and it continued to snow until about noon today. I would guess that at least two inches fell. It will be cold in those pup tents next week.

If you are wondering about my preoccupation with the weather, you must remember that to a field soldier a slight change in weather can mean the difference between happiness and misery. You may spend two hours a day outside, while I spend fifteen.

Meteorologically  
yours,  
Gene

Dec 3 (1952)  
8:30 p.m.

Dear Mother,

Please excuse the pencil. My pen has run dry and my ink bottle has departed for the opposite bank of the River Ocean, which, as you know, surrounds Terra Cognita. Or the other side of the Atlas Mountains, maybe.

As I believe I told you six days ago, we are having bivouac this week. There was heavy snow Monday morning, and the bivouac area has been a Norse hell of alternately freezing and melting slush ever since. We call it Valley Forge.

The maddening part of the whole business is that we have been issued a pair of fine overshoes -- and are forbidden to wear them.

The Wolfe luck still holds, however; I went into camp Tuesday night to be barracks orderly and am still here (Wednesday). It is raining as I write this. God help the boys at Valley Forge.

I hope that your illness has completely disappeared by the time this arrives. My cold is gone, but my feet are extremely sore. Whether it is due to having been soaked and freezing for two days, or to the constant stamping I did to keep up circulation I don't know.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. How about some jelly & and some jars of cream cheese in the next package? When you are well enough to fix it.

Dec 7 (1952)

Dear Mother;

This will probably reach you a little late, thanks to my procrastination in the matter of buying stamps.

I hope that your sergeant knows what he is saying, but I have little confidence in it. I'm afraid that the directive to which he refers applies only to nontraining units.

I believe I wrote you that I spent Wed (and Tues) night in the barracks. Well, I spent Thurs night in the field again & came in Fri.

There is not much more to tell about this week. The next time I write will be when I get my orders. There are four kinds I may get.

By far the most probable are orders to report to Leadership School. I definitely don't want these, they will mean another hard eight-week grind with very little payoff in the end.

The alternatives are orders directly to OCS or to act as training cadre here. Of course the last possibility is that I may be refused OCS, in which case I will remain in the replacement stream and will probably be sent to Korea.

Love,  
Gene

Dec. 11 - 1952  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

I got my orders today. Leadership School as expected, darn it.

Now as to Xmas. What I will want is a pair of good army boots. Size 11D. I'm up against two problems in regard to your presents. First, I don't have much money to spare, and second, that I will have a tough time mailing anything. I feel badly about both, but I can't do much about them.

I gave a pint of blood Tues.

Your loving son,  
Gene

15 Dec 52  
9 p.m.

Dear Mother;

I'm in Leadership School now. The hustle of moving prevented me from writing over the weekend. They really keep us moving here, so there is no telling when I will be able to mail this.

My new address is:

Pvt. Gene R. Wolfe, US 25890073  
Hq. Co., 5th Armd. Cav. Group  
6th Armd. Div.  
Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo.

We will have to work hard here in Leadership, but there is the great compensation of living with men whose education and intelligence are close to my own. I heard two boys discussing the types of girls to be found in various sororities last night. It was refreshing beyond belief.

Here in school we are called Leader. It's odd to be addressed as Leader Wolfe. I feel like a dictator.

I've had no mail from you for some time, due to the weekend moving. Hope they get it over here soon. You cannot know how much good it does, or how much I'd like to come home.

Your loving son,  
Gene R. (Leader) Wolfe

(In those benighted days, the post office functioned -- and functioned well -- without zip codes.)



20 Dec 52  
1050 a.m.

Dear Mother;

I want to apologize for a rather unforgivable piece of negligence on my part. When I received your last letter, I was shocked to discover that I had not made it plain to you and Dad that there is no possibility of my coming home for Christmas. I thought I had made it clear in another letter. I know what a disappointment it will be to you to learn it at this late date. I'm really very sorry.

While I'm on the unpleasant aspects of Christmas, I'd like to write a few words about presents. Would you mind if I delayed sending you presents? The worst obstacle to Santa Claus is that I have no free time when the post office is open, but there are others, too. Might I be allowed to bring them with me when (and if) I got to return home?

About those boots I asked for -- what I need are paratrooper, or jump, boots.

What I have had of Leadership School so far has not been too bad. Discipline is very rigid, and the hours are long; but a lot of the work is in the classrooms, so I don't get too tired.

Your loving son,  
Gene

(On back of a Christmas Card. The card reads: "Thinking of you at Christmas/And the friendliest thoughts/And the warmest remembrance,/And every good wish in the world to You!" It's signed: "Gene R. Wolfe (Who was once the little scorpion)." 1952?)

Dear Folks,

When it says "Thinking of you," on the card, it isn't kidding. I'm thinking of the tree that steals Dad's chair's place about this time every year, and about how he liked to sit in the dark and watch it. I'm thinking of the cookies we always had, and about how I once found a bicycle set up in the front room, and how miraculous it looked there.

There's not much Christmas here, since we're a little short on kids and radios & dept. stores & so on, but Merry Christmas, Dad! Merry Christmas, Mom!

Gene

Jan 25 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

I know you will be wild at me for not writing you earlier, but let me explain now or wire me if you have sent any time bombs through the mail.

When you left I decided it would be foolish to write you before the next weekend. Well, when the weekend came around, I found that I had to pull Special Police Guard. That means I was a sort of auxiliary M.P., with a .45 and a light green arm band. The first time I ever carried a loaded weapon on duty, by the way. I spent most of my time on the main gate, so I guess you know just about what I did. We did 12 hrs. on duty and 12 off, so I was exhausted when I got off.

I really don't recall what kept me from Monday, but something did. Tuesday and Wednesday we had night problems. Thursday we had to clean the barracks. So here it is Friday and I'm writing.

The big news I have to report is that I got a notice today to come down and see the OCS clerk. I won't know till Monday whether it is acceptance or rejection -- I'll write then.

Take care of your cold and don't work too hard.  
I'm well now and still taking vitamins.

Love,  
Gene

(We were taught to carry our pistols with an empty chamber -- I believe this is now called Condition Three. Most of my SP work consisted of searching incoming cars for liquor, and it was my firm policy to find none. After twenty or thirty cars, however, I opened the glove compartment of one and discovered a pint bottle. Before I could close the glove compartment, I was threatened by a soldier who had been a passenger in the car. I turned him in, and carried my pistol cocked and locked (that is, with a round in the chamber and the safety on, now called Condition One) for the rest of my stint as an SP. When it was finished and I handed the pistol over to a bored MP, he was quite surprised to have a cartridge fly out when he racked the slide.)

Jan 27  
(dated by my mother)  
10:30 p.m.

Dear Mother,

I would not write this except that i know that you are anxious to hear if I was accepted for O.C.S. Well -- I wasn't. The only reason given was "competitive standing," so you know as much about it as I do.

This is the first of my two weeks as line cadre. You'll get a rundown on that later.

Your loving son,  
Gene

Feb 8 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Folks;

Please excuse the pencil; my pen seems to have been mislaid somewhere.

While I am acting as cadre here, I have to pick up my mail back at 5th Cav. Since I don't get a chance to do that very often, I may be a little behind in the letters you have sent me. At the time you wrote the last one I received, you did not know I had been refused O.C.S., but I'm sure you have gotten my letter by now. It's odd, but I didn't get a big shock from being turned down; but I've felt sort of empty ever since.

This training Cadre stuff sits pretty well with me. Up at 4:45 and down at 10, but I like the authority.

By the way, I'm a P.T. instructor here. Can you see me up on the stand giving calisthenics? We are up to 12 repetitions of each exercise, and 48 squat jumps almost kill me.

One of the boys cracked up in the mess hall Friday. He must have broken all the china in the place before they grabbed him. About six of them managed to grab him and carry (Letter resumed three days later, found pen.) him to the orderly room; then they couldn't get an ambulance and had to wait, sitting on him, for over an hour.

I left the 115 E(C)B, where I was doing my cadreing, Friday night and went back to Leaders Course. That was the night I had all my money stolen. Another guy lost his money, too. The thief was feeling under the pillow of one of the cadremen when he woke up and chased him out.

I've only seen one picture lately, Niagara with Marilyn Monroe. The aforesaid actress tries hard to carry the whole picture with no help from anyone but the cameraman, but she can't quite make it. Like the falls themselves, Niagara thunders on endlessly without actually saying anything.

I graduated from Leaders Course Saturday, as I believe I told you on the phone. You will find my diploma in this letter.

The \$75 you telegraphed me (bless your heart) came quickly enough, but you have no idea of the trouble I had wrenching it from the suspicious hand of Western Union. The thief had stolen my I.D. card, too, of course, so I had to get a note from my Co. Commander, Lt. D.H. "Tweedy" Bird. One of the most decorated men in the army, by the way. He has everything I can think of except the C.M. of H. I finally located him in the B.O.Q. (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) lying in bed reading Life. Then they gave me my money in twenties, and I couldn't get them changed.

No orders yet, I'll tell you when they come.

Love,  
Gene

Feb 15 (1953)  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

As you have already no doubt deduced, I'm in St.Louis, but you would never guess who I'm here with. (Don't use a preposition to end a sentence with.) Do you remember Bill Weishaupt? Well, believe it or not, he has been at Ft.Wood since late September, and I ran into him for the first time last Tuesday.

No orders yet, I'm on pins and needles all the time, as you can well imagine.

I didn't tell you on the phone because I didn't know it at the time, but the thief who got my wallet also got my vitamin pills. He took a whole suit of fatigues, you see, with all that was in the pockets. Because I had moved that night, the pills happened to be in there. I had forgotten to put them in the duffel bag when I packed it, so I had just stuffed them into my pocket. I bought another bottle here yesterday, and the price almost knocked me down; costly little devils, aren't they?

Love,  
Gene

(This letter is on the stationery of the Jefferson Hotel, in St.Louis, Missouri.)



March 11, 53

Dear Mother

I am leaving tomorrow on the Patrick. If you've read the above sentence you know all that I know about it.

Please don't worry any more than you can help. I'm in fine shape, and I'm hoping you and Dad are, too.

Love,  
Gene

(I had been home on leave between this letter and the previous one, and had gone from Houston to Camp Stoneman, California, by train, changing trains in Chicago.)

March 19, 1953  
Aboard the USNS  
Patrick

Dear Mother,

I'm sure you must be starved for news since you haven't gotten a real letter from me since I left Houston. But remember how I feel; I haven't got so much as a note or a telegram.

I arrived at Camp Stoneman on Monday and left Thursday, which just about constitutes an all time record, I'm told.

I did not send anything other than the telegram because I had so little to say until I got word Wednesday at noon that I was shipping. They rushed me through after that, and I left Thursday at 10:45. We rode buses to Oakland and boarded the Patrick there. Maybe I should explain that when I say "we" I mean the advance detail. We went aboard a day early to get things lined up for the rest of the troops. I was made a Cpl. of the Guard, so all I did was to pull guard duty.

Friday morning we cast off and sailed, if I may use that word with reference to a vessel propelled by fuel oil, to San Francisco. That afternoon the rest of the men boarded the ship. I continued on as cpl. of the guard. As a matter of fact, I'm on duty right now. I've got twenty-four men under me. (Goody!) You know how I enjoy a supervisory job.

Before I tell you about the voyage itself, perhaps I should give you my impression of Camp Stoneman.

It is within walking distance of Pittsburg (California), and about one fourth the size of Leonard Wood. The library, however, is excellent. On one side of it are the most beautiful green hills I have ever seen. They are covered with spring grass, dotted with an occasional pine tree, and rise, each one slightly taller than the last, until they seem purple against the horizon. Camp Stoneman also boasts the largest, dirtiest mess hall I have yet seen, and an enlisted men's swimming pool. About half the size of Lana Turner's, I would say. (Ah, there, boy, don't get bitter.)

The Patrick sailed about 4:00 p.m. Friday; they had a band there, but I could not see it from where I was. Since we have soldiers, sailors, and airmen aboard, they played the Marines Hymn. (What else?)

About twilight we hit some rough water, and about nine out of ten of our men were seasick. I was the lucky tenth man. Honestly, though, I don't see how I kept from it. You haven't seen anything until you've seen a ship crammed with seasick troops. My guards were sick at their posts, but I could not relieve them because their replacements were sick, too.

The food on board was excellent at first, but some of the meat has gone bad now. I've had a touch of diarrhea myself, and one of my men spent a couple of days in the infirmary with ptomaine.

No doubt you are anxious to hear my views of the Pacific Ocean. Mighty big, son, mighty big. Seriously, though, the thing which impresses me most is the color. I'd heard of the blue Pacific and the blue sea and so on before, but I always thought that it would really be grey or green in most places. Which shows, I suppose, that cynicism can be as misleading a creed as any other. The sea about us is a rich, deep blue which I thought solely confined to technicolor pictures.

If I add another sheet to this it won't go air mail, so I am closing here. If this reaches you, I've gotten to Japan safely.

Love & kisses,  
Gene

(All of us boomed "The Marines' Hymn," making our departure something less than picture perfect. In mid-Pacific, I very nearly went over the railing while inspecting my sentries during a storm at night. I still remember the abject terror of it, the darkness and the driving spray as I clung to the bulkhead afterward, afraid to take a single step.)

24 March 1953

Dear Mother;

We are one day from Japan now, and the blue water around us has taken on an oriental quality somehow. When we left San Francisco it was an American ocean, later on it became an impersonal or perhaps I should say an international ocean; now one senses somehow that it is more used to sampans than steamers. You may laugh at this if you wish, but I'm here and you're six thousand miles away.

I don't think I mentioned it in my last letter, but we crossed the international dateline awhile back. That mean't that Friday was about an hour and fifty minutes long. It also means that I have become a subject of the Golden Dragon, the ruler of the 180th meridian.

(Wed.)

As I am writing this, we are entering Tokyo Bay. About two hours ago we saw the eastern peninsula of the bay, our first view of land since leaving California.

At about eight this morning the weather was as warm as a July day; now at 10:30, I am wearing my overcoat and glove. According to our short-wave it is 36°F in Yokohama.

So far we have passes two fleets of sampans -- tiny boats with high prows. They have one tiny lateen sail mounted in the stern and are painted red, blue, green, yellow, or white. They sail with a rocking motion similar to that of a hobbyhorse. All in all, they are a sight which would set any child's heart dancing -- a toy fleet belonging more to Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado than to the real world.

(Later) There is a heavy fog over the harbor now. We have passed through a submarine net and by a small island which is one huge concrete blockhouse; a relic of WWII, I suppose. We've seen some more sampans, too. They are the rockiest, rollingest little craft you ever saw. I'll bet it would make Dad seasick to watch 'em.

To go on to more sordid matters -- in case you're interested, one of the officer's wives was caught sleeping with a master sergeant. She's an Austrian, I understand. I've seen her around the ship, a small blonde, quite pretty.

I've met some interesting people on this trip, a man who spent 14 days in a box 4'x4'x4', for example. He was a prisoner of the Germans and was boxed up as punishment for an attempted escape. He was out five days before he was caught. (He escaped successfully later.) The way in which he was caught was pitiful, but rather amusing, too. He had gotten several cans of food for escape rations but forgot to bring a can opener. He was trying to open a can with a rock when the noise attracted a German patrol.



He feels that he revenged himself on the Germans, though. He was in the army of occupation and lived with the wife of an S.S. captain who was in prison for war crimes. The girl was the daughter of an S.S. colonel and hated her husband. The marriage had been forced on her, or so he tells me.

If you've had enough of the sordid now, I'll tell you that I got a letter of commendation put in my 201 file for my work on this ship. If I don't get a chance to slip a copy in this letter, I'll send one later.

I pray you are both well & happy. Give my regards to Lou, Frank B., and Noel, et cetera.

Love,  
Gene

26 March 1953

Dear Mother;

We got to Yokohama at about two p.m. yesterday. There was a band on the dock, and they played the Marines Hymn just as the one in Frisco did. We landed in a grey drizzle that kept up all night. As soon as we disembarked, we loaded up on a little narrow-gauge Jap train. When I say little, I mean little. Everything is made for a person about 5'2".

The ride from Yokohama to Camp Drake, which is on the outskirts of Tokyo, is 37 miles. It took us about 3 hrs. The reason for this is that the whole ride is through the two cities; the edges of the cities meet, in other words.

There was ample opportunity to look through the train windows, so I shall now give you a synopsis of my forthcoming book ON A SLOW TRAIN THROUGH JAPAN. These Japs are great ones for advertising signs. I got my first shock when I saw a John Wayne western advertised with Japanese characters all around it.

The real clincher, however, was a familiar rest-room-wall type drawing with Jap writing under it whose content I could well imagine.

We got our mail on the train, the first I have received since leaving home. I had a grand time opening all your letters in chronological order and showing my pictures to my friends. For the present write to me as follows:

Pvt. Gene R. Wolfe US 25 890 073  
Prov. Co. 323 A.P.O.  
613 c/o Postmaster  
San Francisco, California



When I had read all my mail, I went back to staring out the window at Japan. The districts we passed through were pretty run down, of course. The best people don't live next to a busy three-track railroad in any country, I suppose.

The houses all have heavy tile roofs and unbelievably flimsy walls. The most impressive thing about the houses is the way in which even many of the poorest attempt some form of decoration. They give the houses a definite "down but not out" look.

When we reached our station, we loaded into buses and drove a little way to Camp Drake. It is an old Jap army base. More about it, and Japan, in another letter.

I am enclosing the letter of commendation I mentioned in an earlier letter and a money order for \$37.50. Buy me a defense bond with it, and put it with my others.

I hope Dad is through with his tooth trouble by now.

Love,  
Gene

(I apologize for the ethnic slurs in this and various other letters, but I think it best to present an accurate text; the slang terms habitually employed by Japanese and other orientals to describe Westerners are far worse than anything that will be found in these letters.)

28 March 1953

Dear Mother,

I believe I discontinued my last letter at the point where I had just reached Camp Drake, Japan. Before I continue my account of the adventures of Gene the fun-loving Rover, let me make a special request in regard to my last letter. As well as I can remember, I very foolishly forgot to put a return address on the letter with \$37.50 P.M.O. in it. Please notify me as soon as it reaches you so I can stop worrying about it.

I got to Camp Drake at about 6:00 p.m. or a little after. As soon as we had climbed out of our buses we drew bedding and moved our duffel bags into the barracks. It was raining quite hard and very dark. After a moment we were back out and taken to the initial processing station. We had our records checked there and then received twenty dollars partial pay. After that we had to change all our money into M.P.C., or script. This is a currency used by our armed forces to keep dollars out of the hands of the Communists. It is very clumsy to use because all the change is in paper also. As an example I am sending a 5¢ bill in this letter. After our money was changed we took shots. I don't know what sort of malignant little bugs they pumped into my arm, but my arm is still sore, and for two days it was darn near paralyzed. (No, don't send a dictionary; I have no place to put it.) After the shots I got a chance to buy the money order to send you.

We started off the next day bright and early with reveille at 4:00 a.m. We ate in a huge mess hall a la Camp Stoneman. There is no K.P. here, by the way. We each pay thirty-five cents to pay the Jap K.P.'s. After breakfast we had a four hour lecture on Korea, disease, dope, and so on. Dope is very easy to get and very cheap here. The Communists ship it in from China deliberately. That afternoon we were all issued rifles and spent the rest of the day cleaning them.

Yesterday morning (Friday, if you're losing count) we zeroed our rifles on the range. In the afternoon I was assigned to a unit. I'm going to the Seventh Infantry Division in Korea. After the assignments were given out, those of us bound for Korea were issued a lot of new clothing, and almost all of the old was taken from us.

We will leave Camp Drake at 4:30 today.

I hope that both you and father are well and happy. I know it would be foolish to say don't worry, but don't worry any more than you can help.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. Have seen Mt. Fujiyama. A very very purty mountain indeed.

March 29, 1953

Dear Mother,

Do you remember the time we went to see Kiss Me Kate? If so, perhaps you recall the song about the touring Italian repertory company. It went, "We start out in Verona, and then we reach Padua," etc. As you may recall, the song and the company went round and round three or four Italian cities. That song kept running through my head at about seven o'clock last night as I rode the same little narrow-gage Jap train back to Yokohama. It was raining and cold in Yokohama, just as it was when I got off the Patrick. We all lugged our duffel bags off the train and onto this ship without even knowing its name. I feel sick at having to leave Japan after seeing so little, but I suppose I'll be back.

To a civilian I suppose it seems silly that I don't know the exact itinerary of the Sturgis, but I don't. Our next stop is Okinawa, but when we will get there and where we go from there I don't know.

(Later) Well, it seems as if I must close this now if I am to get it mailed at Okinawa.

Love,  
Gene

(The song is "We Open in Venice"; the other cities are Verona, Cremona, Parma, Mantua, and Padua. One thing I saw in Japan, that few tourists see, has remained vividly in my mind to this day -- the blood-red disk of the sun rising in fog. Looking east one sees, as though in a vision, the immense reality of which the national flag is a feeble imitation.)

1 April 1953  
 (Aboard USNS Sturgis  
 anchored at Okinawa)

Dear Mother,

No April fool jokes in this letter, so you can relax. It is 8:10 now, and we are in the harbor at Okinawa. The sun is shining brightly, quite a relief after the cold and rain of Japan. The harbor does not look very oriental here, although there are a few sampans about. It's mostly oil storage tanks and galvanized-iron buildings. We passed a sunken ship with some of the superstructure showing above water. It looked like an armed freighter to me; I could see some antiaircraft guns showing, anyway.

We are letting the Puerto Ricans off here. I don't think I told you about them, but we have a passel of 'em on board. Also a few Belgians wearing U.S. uniforms with Belgian markings and black berets. There is one who looks like David Poor, or Danny Kaye as the case may be.

I have read the four books I bought in Japan already and I am starting on one from the ship's library, an anthology, or omnibus, rather, by Graham Greene.

I haven't gotten any mail since the Yokohama to Tokyo train, so I'm getting a little lonely. I know, of course, that your letters are piling up at the Seventh Division, but I sure wish I had them here.

(Later) We all got permission to leave the ship and roam about the base here today. There wasn't much to see, of course, but I bought a good meal at an army restaurant and got some books at the PX and saw a bit of the island. The meal was chop suey by the way, so now I've eaten chop suey in the orient.

The natives look like Japanese, only scroungier. They also have that fish-faced look to a more pronounced degree than the Japs have. The waitresses at the restaurant knew very little English, but were very proud of what they knew. When one of them tangled with one of the Mexican boys the result was ludicrous. To top it all off, a Gypsy came in. He is from our ship and seems to be a professional foreigner, equally inarticulate in all tongues. He's really quite a person to meet, large and greasy, with a heavy black mustache -- he's the very picture of frank dishonesty and rampant chicanery. He almost drove four of the waitresses crazy.

I did do one thing that was really interesting though. I found some old tombs and went in them. The tombs are dug into the side of a hill, and the entrance is stoned up to look like a house or temple. Inside is a low cave with a shelf like a seat cut out of three sides of the cave. On this shelf stand jars three or four feet high. Some of them are shaped like temples. Within are cremated remains. All of these tombs are more or less ruined, you understand, and there are bones and shards of pottery all around.



I went into one, and it was rather frightening. You may laugh at me being a little scared at high noon in an army base, but you weren't in that dank cave surrounded by decaying Buddhist shrines in blue pottery and skulls and ribs and so on. I was, and the sunlight glaring off the coral beach looked very far away seen through the weed-overgrown two-by-three entrance of that deserted tomb.

Well, I have one more page to go on this letter, so I suppose I had best finish it up and start another. As you probably realize, I write a bit on one of these letters, and then stop and finish the letter when I have more to say. Four of these sheets will go airmail, and I see no reason to waste postage by sealing each day's reports in a separate envelope. For example, I started this letter on April Fools Day, and I am writing now on April 3rd.

We are due in Korea (Inchon is the port, I believe) tomorrow. Let me repeat that you and Dad shouldn't worry just because I'm getting close to a little fighting. There is nothing you can do about it anyway, so you might as well resign yourself. After all, I've been in uniform ever since 1946 (one uniform or another, anyway) and if I don't know how to duck by now it's my own fault.

Tell Dad that I hope everything is going well at the cafe. I wish I could get my hands on some of the good food they have there. The chow on this bucket is terrible. The meal I got in Okinawa is the only good one I've had since leaving Japan. I hope Mrs. G. still works for us. If she does, say hello for me and tell her that I wish that I could help her with her crossword puzzles again.

Well, I'll mail this in Korea if I get a chance. Look out for more adventures of the "Fun-Loving Rover Boy in the Orient" in your mail box tomorrow.

Love 'n kisses 'n stuff,  
Gene

(The Belgian who looked like Danny Kaye had been everyone's benefactor at Camp Drake. He spoke elegant, Oxfordian English, and a dozen of us had collected around him asking questions. In a tent nearby, a Red Cross girl was giving one -- and no more -- package of cigarettes to each soldier, taking each man's name and checking it off. We told the Belgian he could get his free pack if he wanted it, and complained bitterly about the one-per-soldier rule. (Most of us were broke.) The Belgian said, "I see no special difficulty here. If you chaps will follow me, I shall see that each of you has a carton." We followed, wondering what he intended to do.

(Frowning, he strode into the Red cross tent. "Me U.N. soldier."

(The Red Cross girl asked his name.



(Me U.N. soldier!" the Belgian repeated, scooping up a whole armload of cartons. Out he went, followed by the shrieking Red Cross girl, and threw one carton after another as if they were footballs. In a few seconds the whole place was covered with wide receivers hugging their cartons and scattering in all directions.

(That, I think, was the first time I realized that we could do virtually anything we wished without being punished for it. We were cannon fodder -- "food for guns," as the Germans say -- and a courtmartial and a year in the stockade would prolong our lives while depriving combat units of badly needed replacements.)

April 3, 1953

Dear Folks,

I am starting this letter only a few hours after I finished the last one. I don't have much to say, but I have run out of good books and have nothing better to do. What is more important, I have a chance to write on a table instead of the palm of my hand -- the normal practice. So all in all you can consider this a sort of free shot.

Since there is nothing new to say, this will have to be a sort of review; as I don't keep records of my previous letters, I may repeat myself a bit.

Have I ever told you just what it's like on one of these troop ships? (I'm a man of wide experience; I've been on two of them.) We live in compartments below the main deck -- in the hold in other words. These compartments have seven foot ceilings (approx.) and in them we have our bunks stacked four deep. That gives us about two feet between bunks vertically. There are two tiers of bunks side by side, and then a two-foot aisle. As you can imagine, it gets pretty crowded in there.

There are three main forms of recreation here: reading, writing, and gambling. There are also movies shown twice a night, but they are in a room so small, compared to the number of men on the ship, that they hardly count.

Speaking of gambling, the amount that goes on here would cause raised eyebrows in the fo'c's'l' of a pirate sloop. I'll bet the kings and jacks on board outnumber the men.

Possibly you have been wondering what my job is on board, since I was cpl. of the guard on the Patrick. Well, surprise, I don't have any. Gets a little boring, of course, but it's better than washing pots.

By the way, if you ever get near a copy of Bartlett's QUOTATIONS, or some such work, will you look up something for me? The first is just a shorty. All I can recall of it is: "Of ornament it had none, save the stains upon the blade." They're speaking of a sword, as I recall. It's not by Kipling or Khayyam; neither is this other one.

Jenny kissed me when we met,  
 Jumping from the chair she sat in.  
 Time, you thief, who love to get,  
 Treasures in your list, put that in.  
 Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
 Say that health and wealth have missed me.  
 Say I'm growing old, but add,  
 Jenny kissed me.

I think that is the whole poem, but I don't recall who wrote it. Ask Mrs. G.

I almost wish I hadn't sent you that Postal Money Order from Japan. I worry about it too much. I'll surely be glad when you write that you've received it. I really had to send it; I had too darn much money to carry around on a troopship. I got fifty dollars in California and twenty in Japan, you know.

I'm sure you've heard of the latest Communist peace offer by now. There is a good bit of optimism here on the ship because of it, but I'm inclined to look on the dark side myself. I just don't trust them people. Ferriners, I should have said. Seriously, I am very much afraid it's just an attempt to halt our spring offensive.

Tell Dad I dreamed of one of his western sandwiches last night. I tell all the guys that they ought to eat my Dad's cooking. Tell him that things aren't nearly as good as shown in the cartoon, either. I wish they were, though. Seems a shame to waste these tropic sunsets.

I've been trying to get my hands on some Japanese or Okinawan money to send you, but I've had no luck so far.

To get back to this cartoon, it comes from a paper published here on the Sturgis, which gives us the national and international news and chronicles the adventures of the Ultramarine Humming Bird -- a character who has the power to cloud men's minds so he can't see them. Also a supersonic hearing aid and a ram-jet pogo stick.

(Later) Rereading what I have written earlier, I wouldn't be surprised if it is my most confused missive to date. That's what comes of having nothing to say.

I got to talking with a lad who has a degree in art today. Reminded me of Louis (Lou Hampton). How about sending me his address, if you're still seeing him once in a while.

Do you recall the story about the spy who marked all his reports "Burn Before Reading"? That's what I should do with this. Mark it, I mean.

I was looking at a map tracing our course a few minutes ago. Yokohama to Okinawa to Pusan looks a little silly. Don't ask me why they do it, but that's my route.

Well, as Tiny Tim said: God bless you, every one.

Gene

(My mother has penciled "Strange Courage" beside the first quotation and "Lee Hunt" beside the second. The first is actually (mis)quoted from "The Death Feud," supposedly at least a translation of an Arab war song:

"Terrible he rode alone,  
With his Yemen sword for aid;  
Ornament it carried none  
But the notches on the blade."

Signed only J.S.M. it appeared in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine for July 1850, and was later excerpted in the HOME BOOK OF QUOTATIONS. I am indebted to Elliott Swanson of the Kitsap Regional Library, Bremerton, Washington, for this information.

(The second is of course Leigh Hunt's well known poem:

Rondeau

Jenny kissed me when we met,  
Jumping from the chair she sat in;  
Time, you thief, who love to get  
Sweets into your list, put that in!  
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
Say that health and wealth have missed me,  
Say I'm growing old, but add,  
Jenny kissed me.

Verse that is not free is thought slave now, and comfort that it once brought those far from home is a thing of the past. Forty years ago some trace remained.)



April 4, 1953

Dear Mother,

When I went on deck this morning we were cruising through the islands on the western Korean coast. I think I wrote you before that I was going to Pusan. I was wrong, of course. The final destination was Inchon. The coast is quite pretty -- one tiny island after another, most of them rising straight from the sea. I saw quite a few fishing boats, most of them larger than the Japanese sort. Some of them sported three sails. Unlike the Jap boats, most of them were unpainted, and consequently not as pretty. The sails were various shades of brown, apparently made of burlap. We unloaded from the Sturgis into an L.C.T., and thence to shore. This was necessitated by the poor qualities of Inchon as a port. When the tide goes out it leaves a vast expanse of muddy flats, so that many of the islands become hills above a fetid plain. From the dock I boarded the train on which I am now. We have not left the "station" yet. I understand that our destination is Chuchong. This spelling is strictly impromptu since I have only heard the name spoken. (Ch'unch'on?)

(Later)(5 p.m. to be exact.) We got on this train about 2:30 and it hasn't moved an inch. I just finished lunch; since I ate breakfast at about 6:30, I was starved. "C" rations for lunch, by the way. The tide has come back in now, and the islands are islands once more. The journey from here to Chuchong, or whatever it is, is supposed to take from six to fourteen hrs., and we must go on by truck after that, so it looks like no sleep tonight.

(4 April 1953) (Either this date or the one at the beginning of this letter is obviously incorrect.) I did get a little sleep after all. I crawled up onto the luggage rack and got a few hrs. sack time. At about 4 a.m. we reached the 7th Rpl. Co. I slept until 7:30, missing breakfast by so doing. In 7 Rpl. Co. we turned in our overcoats and got some more equipment. Packs, parkas, field jacket liners, sleeping bags, etc. This camp is really a mess, with various compounds of the American and R.O.K. armies scattered all around, separated from the huts and shanties of the Gooks by barbed-wire entanglements.

It gets very cold here at night, then quite warm during the day. You can't stay comfortable here unless you can put on all your clothes in the morning, take them off one by one as it grows latter, then start putting them back on at night.

I got my assignment this morning. It's to the 17th Inf. Rgt. I am now waiting for the train to take me there.

(Next Morning) Arrived here at the 17th Reg. at about 9 last night. The 17th is in divisional reserve now and is supposed to remain so for about a month, I'm told. By the way, the 17th is called the "Buffs" because of the buffalo on the regimental crest; so I'm right at home. I suppose you're wondering how far I am from the front. Well, I don't know in miles, but I'm close enough to hear our artillery firing and see the flashes, but too far back to see or hear the enemy's. I haven't been assigned to a company yet. I'm staying with Service Company right now.

(Still Later) Don't you get tired of getting this letter in dots and dribbles? I haven't done much this day. I trenched a few tents this morning and piled some boxes and so on. No hint of orders yet, so I'm still here with Service Company. The front has been very quiet. I haven't heard any artillery since early this morning. The boys here say it has been quiet since they got rid of Sam the Sniper. He was one of the Korean K.P.'s who had a rifle hidden up on a hill and used to shoot at his employers in his spare time. Oh, why must these colorful characters pass?

I still haven't gotten any mail since I left Houston, with the exception of that one time in Japan. I hope everything is all right at home. I miss you and Dad, and it is made much worse because I don't know if you are all right.

In case you are curious about the makeup of the 7th Infantry Division, we have 3 rgts., as per the T.O. These are the 17th, and, I believe, the 31st and 32nd. The latter two have an extra battalion each, one of Columbians and one of Ethiopians. I met some of each at Chunchon. The Columbians look and act like Mexicans; some of the Ethiopians look like Hindus, and the rest look like Negroes. They speak a language I don't recognize. Some of the men say it's Italian and the rest say it's Ethiopian. (Presumably it was Amharic.) The ones who speak English speak it like Englishmen, and I have never asked one directly, so I don't know.

I imagine you have been wondering what it felt like coming up here on the train. Of course no human can express his feelings exactly to another, but I will make a quick try. On the train I went North for miles, always getting closer to the front. The landscape did not change. Korean huts and rice paddies remained just the same, and I found it difficult to realize that I was getting closer to the enemy. Then, very suddenly, everything changed. There were no more huts or peasants, and the land looked practically uninhabited. This was the twenty-mile cleared zone. It was getting dark at this time, and my feelings changed from unreality and wonder to a sort of expectation. I don't know quite how to say this, but I had trained so long that the idea of a real enemy was strangely satisfying.

Love,  
Gene



(Some of the parkas were bloodstained, and many had ammunition, grenade pins, and so forth in the pockets. A few showed bullet holes, or the ragged tears of shrapnel. The parkas had been stripped from the wounded and the dead, and were being issued to us without even a cleaning.

(That 9 p.m. arrival, passed over so lightly in this letter, was actually one of the most traumatic moments of my life. Piling out of the train in black-out darkness, we were confronted by a long line of trucks, each holding an NCO who bawled the name of his unit. It took fifteen or twenty minutes, perhaps, for us to sort ourselves out. When we had, and the bedlam died down, I heard the 105s firing in the distance. It was only then that I came to grips with reality: all the stratagems through which my parents and I had hoped I would escape this had failed; I had not remained a student, had not joined the Air Force as my father had advised, had not gotten into OCS, had not contrived to get a safe position as a clerk stateside or in Japan or somewhere far behind the lines. I was going to have to fight, and to stay alive in whatever way I could. Foolish people who have never fired a shot say that it is a soldier's duty to die for his country. In point of fact, it is not. It is his duty to see to it that the other man dies for him, and to stay alive and well himself, for himself and for his country, if he can.)

11 April 1953

Dear Mother,

I have finally gotten my new assignment; in the future my address will be:

Hq. Co. 1st Bn.  
17th Inf. Rgt.  
A.P.O. 7 c/o Postmaster  
San Francisco, Cal.

I am assigned to Hq Co here as part of the P&A platoon, an engineer platoon which is attached to every infantry battalion.

I still haven't received any mail, but I'm still hoping. Here in divisional reserve, we take training just as if we were in the states. We had quite a time yesterday. We went out to watch a practice parachute drop of supplies. The men in my platoon (The P and A) were the only enlisted men there. The rest of the audience was made up of Army and Air Force officers. You ought to have seen the Air Force officers when we came up, all dirty, carrying rifles, carbines, bayonets, knives, etc. They oh'd and ah'd and nudged each other. In fact, they did everything but take pictures of us to show how close they had been to the front.

When the drop came, everything fouled up. About half the cargo went into a two hundred foot chasm off to one side of the field. The smoke pots which were supposed to show the plane the wind direction caught the grass afire. First we had to put out the grass fire, then we had to lug the cargo up a path up the side of our little grand canyon. I carried a parachute and almost collapsed when I got to the top. In short, the whole thing was a farce.

It is amazing how quiet it is here, just six miles from the front. Some of the tents even have electric light in them. (Mine doesn't.) It's a great blessing that we have air superiority. As soon as you're out of artillery range, you're safe and can do whatever you want. For example, today we are having a battalion parade; think what a target that would make! What a war!

(Later) Just back from the parade. It looked pretty good. We had a band, and just when the parade was assembling the general came down in his helicopter, just like a rabbit being pulled out of a magician's hat.

The helicopter was one with a glass bubble over the cockpit and the rest of the fuselage bare. It had two runners like skis for landing gear.

The climate here is cold, sunny, dusty, and windy right at present, and the food is good. We think the 17th will stay in reserve until the end of this month, if nothing happens; but we are not sure.

I pray every night that you and Dad are all right. Hope I get some mail soon.

Love,  
Gene

(The cargo was cases of C rations and crates of carbines; the parachutes were the lightest loads. The "chasm" was the gorge of the Han River, I believe; its water was clear and very cold, and we were parched and exhausted from fighting the grass fire. Some of us drank it, although I did not.)

April 15, 1953  
(date in my mother's hand)

Dear Mother,

I'm sure you have been expecting this for months, but I just got this tonight, 8 p.m., April 14. The letters you wrote me at Cp. Drake & Cp. Stoneman are dribbling in now. You did right to buy a war bond.

Love,  
Gene

Use \$9.00 to buy items I have requested you send. XXX  
(Note in my mother's hand: ("This" was endorsed Income Tax Return ck.))

15 April 1953

Dear Mother,

I am starting this letter just after finishing the one you last received. It is about seven now, and I'm writing by candlelight, so the quality of penmanship may be expected to go sharply downward, though I shall do my best to uphold it.

(Later) Interrupted to go to a party. The guys in the P&A pooled their beer rations, and raked up some food and threw a whing-ding. It was quite a party, about fourteen GIs and ten Katusas. One of the main entertainments was group singing. Did you ever hear a bunch of Koreans warm up on "Goodnight Irene"?

There is also a little tune called "China Night" which is knocking 'em dead in oriental circles around here. Some of the GIs knew that, so they sang it in Chinese or Japanese or Gook or something.

Number 99, one of our Katusas, had a sick wife, so we took up a collection for him. He also got a fifteen day leave to see her. The collection was needed because the Katusas make 70¢ a month. We hit the sack at about 10:30. At 11:30 the squad leader woke us up to go fight a forest first.

While we are back here we are taking a little training and pulling a few details. Also we are having quite a few inspections.

Before I forget it, I want you to send me a package containing the following items:  
A large sheath knife, good quality  
A sewing kit -- lost my old one.  
Stationery -- the stationery I am using now comes in a little waterproof case & is ideal for a serviceman; see if you can get some.

It has occurred to me that you may be curious about some of the fellows who are with me in this platoon. There is a fellow Texan here. "Tex" Myers is a right nice fellow from San Antonio.

Bill Matthews is a good-looking Jewish boy from Philly who used to be an assistant buyer for Wannamakers, and he is always arguing with John, who is of German Pennsylvania coal mining stock. John is a sort of self-made neo-Nazi, while Bill is more than a bit left of center. Also Bill lost some cousins in German concentration camps, and I think that John is of the opinion that they got just what they deserved, so they have some monumental scraps.

Tennessee (is that right?) has an interesting history. He was drafted in '50 and became a prisoner guard. He took a hundred dollars to let two fellows escape & got caught. Before he was incarcerated he went AWOL for 118 days; when they caught him, he did a little over a year in the stockade and then was released with the provision that he do two more years in the army and go to Korea. During his AWOL time he was a moonshiner, by the way.

Well, I'll close this now so I can get to the box today.

Please don't worry about me. You remember that guy who predicted he would be killed? Well, I have a feeling I'll get out without a scratch.

Love,  
Gene

(KATUSA -- Korean Augmentation To the United States Army. These were generally sergeants in the Army of the ROK, the Republic of Korea. Because it was considered a preliminary to promotion, and because Katusas had the opportunity to learn English and pick up some extra money, the position was much sought after.)



15 April 1953

Dear Mother,

This the next to last of my stationary, so I'll have to borrow until I get that which I asked you to send me. I got two letters from you last night, including the one with the PMO in it. I will now proceed to answer the question you asked in the letter postmarked March 23.

I did not see any more of LA than the railroad station. I had taken an earlier train than we planned.

I only took two shots at Stoneman.

On the ship we slept on pieces of canvas stretched between iron pipe frames.

We ate in a mess hall.

Never seasick.

Haven't seen Jayne.

I brought four books from Stoneman, and then swapped them when I had read them.

We got a new man in the tent today, a boy named Russo. He has been transferred from one of the line companies and his nerves are all shot. This makes thirteen of us, including three Koreans, which is sort of overcrowded.

Since I wrote the first page of this letter, we have moved our camp to the left about 15 miles. I got all the dope from the chaplain. It seems that the Reds are massing troops at this part of the line, and we are being moved to block any move they may make. This is a pretty important sector because the RR runs through it.

The trouble with this army is that one gets to write so darn little. Since I wrote that last paragraph we are moving again. The Reds are after White Horse, Arsenal, and Porkchop. I don't know where we are going.

I did get a bath during my two days here. My first this April.

Enclosed find Prop. leaflets and love.

Love,  
Gene

(We took sponge baths whenever possible, theoretically using our helmets, actually from wide aluminum basins we bought from the Koreans.)

\* \* \*

Dear Dad,

When someone asks you what the writing on this means, just smirk.

"Ho, ho!" Numba one Chinese pinup.

Gene

(On the back of a propaganda leaflet.)



18 April 1953

Dear Mother,

This letter will probably arrive at the same time as an earlier one with two leaflets, since I have had no chance to mail it yet. We moved last night, as I wrote in my earlier letter, and then at three o'clock this morning we moved again. We are about half a mile from the front here; they drop an occasional shell where we can see it, but I don't think they've done any harm for some time. "A" Company was hard hit on Arsenal last night. The C.O. was killed, among others.

(Some days later -- it's Monday, but I don't know the date.) We are moving out of this position tonight. I don't know, but I think to the rear. The battalion has been pretty badly shot up. They gave 'em hell on Porkchop night before last. Four hours of intermittent hand-to-hand. Caught thirteen prisoners, including one who could speak English and had a wad of money on him. Last night one was captured about a 1000 yds. from my bunker. I think he wanted to give up & went far enough behind the lines that he wouldn't get shot. I don't think any of our prisoners weighed over 90#. They make our Koreans look like musclemen.

I got your letter asking for Japanese shoes and some others today. I don't need anything to give to the Korean kids, since all civilians have been cleared from this zone. I hope the sweat-gland operation does not give Dad any trouble.

I have gotten an armored vest now. One of the old style or marine vests. I worked up at the aid station as a litter-bearer last night & we did not get any casualties wounded in the area covered by the vest.

Right at present things are very quiet. I have not heard a shell in a long time, and the machine (ran out of ink; I have more in my duffel bag, but I don't want to dig it out right now) gun on the hill and the shantytown mortar are both quiet.

No doubt you have been hearing a lot about the ammo shortages here. I have been working at the Bn. ammo dump. We don't handle any big stuff, but we are always short on flares and .50 cal., especially flares.

This is my last sheet of stationery, but I'll try to borrow some and write again.

Love,  
Gene

(C.O. -- Commanding Officer; an infantry company is normally commanded by a captain.)

April 20, 1953

Dear Mother,

Well, here I am again after an absence of a few days. We have moved again. No more than half a mile at most, but as much trouble as twenty.

I got two letters from you yesterday. To give you an idea of what happens to some of your letters I am enclosing an envelope. That's a letter that has really been places.

I can't tell how much I appreciate those letters, and the funnies, too. Do you read Pogo while you're clipping it for me? I'm getting a big kick out of "Little Arf an Nonny".

You ask in almost every letter if there is some favor you can do for me or if there is something you can send me. Well, I am going to burden you with another, which should teach you not to ask for trouble. Will you please send me the May issue of Astounding Science Fiction, if you can still get it, and get me a subscription to the same? Don't confuse this with Amazing SF or others. Thank you, you're a real sweetheart.

It's hard to think of anything to write you. Everything that happens is either dull, disgusting, or dangerous. For example, I spent most of the day collecting junk from our old campsite, which is dull however you slice it. I never did tell about the day spent collecting bodies on Porkchop. There is nothing exciting about a two-day-old corpse, American or Chinese. I did not write about that at the time because it was too much with me, and I'm not sure I should write of it now. I've written of danger sometimes, though I know I shouldn't. Just a big kid, I guess. Nothing dangerous recently, though.

I wish they would get down to business at Panmunjom or quit altogether. You folks at home cannot realize how patently artificial the war seems here at the front: an endless bloodletting. Imagine a nonstop gladiatorial game fought with a limited list of weapons in which a gladiator is removed from the arena if he survives a certain length of time, and in which the gates open periodically to let in a new crop of gladiators. Every week or so a truckload of replacements arrives with white, well-shaven faces and new green equipment, but the arena never changes between the two MLRs. (MLR -- Main Line of Resistance) There are three knocked-out tanks that have been rusting for over a year.

They tried out the new 240 mm ("atomic") cannon on Poke-eye (a Chinese hill) day before yesterday. They used chemical explosives in the shells, of course, but I heard that it cratered for 36 feet. I feel no pride in it. I can only feel sorry for the poor Chinese soldiers when a Chinese 122 mm scares me silly. (Sometimes.)

Love,  
Gene

(I clearly considered myself a hardened veteran after less than three weeks in Korea. The Chinese artillery piece referred to is the Soviet-made 122mm howitzer.)

April 22, 1953

Dear Mother,

Sure 'nuff, I borrowed some stationery, so here I am again in your mail box. As I believe I have said before, I am getting some of your letters now; most of the comments relating to me are obsolete, but I am very grateful for them anyway. Since you seem anxious to send me something (you ask about it all the time anyway) send me a little candy. Something that will keep well, and not take up much room. In case you have gotten confused by my many moves, I will outline them for you. I am sorry I can't include a timetable, but my memory is not that good.

1 We are in Div. reserve.

2 We are shifted to blocking position (grand strategy y' know).

3 We are shifted up as Bn. goes into combat.

4 They decide we are not close enough to line companies, so at 3 a.m. we move up again.

5 Bn. is shot up, so we go back again.

I have heard that A company lost forty men out of one hundred and twenty night before last. The Chinese, who as the attacking force could be expected to lose much more heavily, especially since they were repulsed, are estimated to have lost between three and four hundred. Not one inch of ground changed hands.

By the way, did I tell you that when we moved back that last time, we moved back to the same place that we were in when they woke us up at three? Who says this is a static war? We just do our moving behind the lines.

You know, there are a lot of times I wish you could be here to hear and see some of the things that go on. These Koreans we have working for us are mighty cute, and real nice people when you get to know them. I don't have time or space or initiative to pass on all they say, and it would not be amusing anyway, because you don't know the background material. For example yesterday one of them was loading a truck with us, and he put on a long, sad face and said, "Rotate, rotate, rotate. Me ol-ee soldier." See, that wasn't funny, was it? But if you had seen it, it would be.

(A few hours later) Oh, joy. Got a whole passel of letters from you, with comics, too! Just like a newspaper. The trouble is that you ask questions in them, and I am never sure that I have not answered them in an earlier letter. I will now sort through your letters & answer all questions I have not answered.

(Short pause) No, not dunked on boat at dateline crossing.

Yes, send vitamins. (I keep forgetting to write for them.)

Get me a War Bond for my birthday, I guess. I already have a rifle, a helmet, and an iron shirt -- what more could a growing boy want?



Wish you could meet Bill Matthews, the Jewish boy I wrote you about. He likes to translate songs into dialect, and goes around singing, "Mule train, oy, oy!" and such like.

Incidentally, we moved again this morning; it was only about 1000 yds. this time, but we still have to strike our tents and load all the equipment in trucks. The reason for the move was that the Bn. Commander did not think we were in good enough defilade. We're in good defilade now, but everything is very inconvenient because of the terrain. A creek runs through my tent.

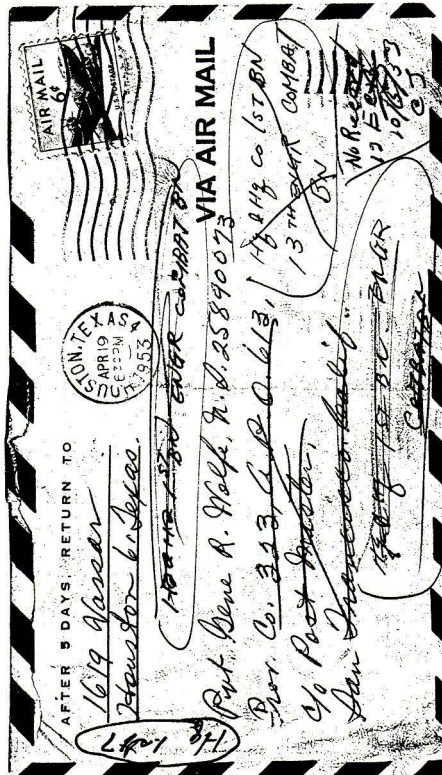
Looking back over this letter, I am awed by the scraggly appearance and rambling style of it. But please remember that it was written over a period of several days, mostly by candlelight, and I was using my right hand for a desk. Hope you can read it, Mom & Dad.

Love,  
Gene

\*

\*

\*





4-23-53

Dear Mother,

Looky, looky! I got this Red Cross stationery from the chaplain. I'd tell you to hold up on the stationery you are sending me, but you have probably already mailed it anyway. (I suppose you are wondering what happened to my writing up there. Well, I was doing tricks for the same Korean I wrote about before, writing upside down and such. By the way, that boy was a Lt. in the Jap navy during the war. (Ever think I'd be sleeping next to a Jap looie?) I can use the stationery later anyway. I'll probably run through this pretty quickly.

I suppose you'll be getting this on or about May 10, so I'll say happy Mother's day, Mother. I wish I were home to spend it with you. Wouldn't that be nice.

(Some Korean now has a page of a Korean newspaper and is pretending it's his rotation paper.)

There was a lot of fighting on the front last night, and word is out that the 2nd ROK Division is making a big push. There was an English-speaking Chink on our radio net yesterday, but he did not know the proper recognition signals and they found him out.

In between paragraphs here, Lee the ex-Louie and I have been having quite a gab-fest accompanied by much yelling and pointing. It seems he has a book about a spy in California in 1823 and he tries to tell me about it.

No letter today. The trouble with the mail system around here is that one gets no letters for several days, then they arrive in a batch. I am always eager to hear what you and Dad are doing. I suppose that much of the stuff I write you must be either boring or disquieting; but that is the way the war is. For example, we have been loafing all day today, but there is constant firing on the front, and we expect something any moment. I can only hope that you and Dad are not worrying too much, and that you are both well.

Love,  
Gene

4-25-53

Dear Mother,

In the words of the song, "Well, what do you know, it's morning already!" And I'm waiting for P.T. to start again. Our platoon sgt., Sgt. Mathias, rotated today; we threw a party for him last night. It was a big to-do with everybody in the P&A platoon attending, including Lt. Nelson, the platoon leader. Also attending was Sgt. Taylor, the mess sgt. He got to come because he baked the cake. A good time was had by all.

During the party I heard Lt. Nelson say that we would be going up front in four or five days.

(Later) Finished P.T. now. Not so bad. You know, I've sort of run out of things to write about, so if the rest of this letter is pretty trivial don't you object, because it won't be my fault.

Do you recall the stream that ran through my tent? Lee and I fixed up a pipe that takes it through underground now.

I was talking to K59 the Katusa yesterday. His real name is Kim, but half the people in Korea are named Kim. We call most Katusas by the last two numbers of their serial numbers. Well, anyway, it appears that the fact that two people in our tent (Pvt. Thomas and myself) are from Texas, and two from Tennessee ("Tennessee" and Sgt. Mathias who just left) has confused Kim a little. He was talking with one of the men from the ammo squad yesterday, and he said, "You from Tennessee?"

"No."

"Tex?" (Koreans have trouble with "S" sounds.)

"No."

"Unity States?"

I don't think that Thomas's map of Texas, which makes it appear to be about the size of Asia, has helped any.

By the way, I may be wrong but it seems to me that 3/4 of the guys I've met are from Texas or the South. Don't they draft any Yankees? We do have one man from Maine who works in the tool room.

He talks like Percy Kilbride.

Love,  
Gene

(The man who talked like Percy Kilbride was Ken Clough, who soon became my closest friend. He was the best soldier I have ever seen, and the only soldier who was invariably cool under fire. I remember seeing him pinned down in the open once by a mortar concentration; just when I thought he was surely dead, he rolled onto his back and lit a cigarette. Though largely self-educated, he was intelligent and well read, and in any rationally administered army would have been at least a captain.)

(undated)

Dear Mother,

Lee, the Jap sailor, and I have had another long conversation, greatly aided by a copy of Time with lots of useful pictures. It seems he was a sailor or an officer\* on a merchant ship after the war. He was drafted in 1950. At the end of the war he intends to get a fishing boat of his own. (This discovered by drawing a fish on the dirt floor of our tent. Make tok-san money that way, he informs me. Tok-san = very much.)

Continuing my little survey of professions, I questioned Tennessee about his post-rotation plans. It seems that he intends to return to his profession of brewing fine whiskey without government blessing.

(Next day - 7:15 a.m.) Well, up again to greet another new day. A fried egg, french toast, Wheaties, and preserved figs for breakfast. Pretty good, too, but I have P.T. at eight, and it kinda dampens my spirit. It seems odd to take P.T. with a 155 firing over your head.

I tried to buy a camera last night, but an insufficient number came in on our PX rations. Maybe I'll be able to get one soon. (This letter is just getting too full of errors; the boys are hitting up on "Poison Love". I'll have to tell 'em to quiet down.)

(Later) I've had P.T. now & am sitting in the supply room waiting to get a haircut and to get a pair of dry-rotted boots changed. I got those boots new in Camp Drake, but they were made in 1944.

(Even later yet.) (In fact, about 5:30 p.m.) Well, I got to fight another forest fire today, the umpteenth since I have been in Korea. In fact, I got to fight it twice, since it broke out again after we thought it was out and went home. The thing I hate about these fires is the way they climb up on the top of these hills, thereby causing me to do likewise. These hills are steeper than the price list at an after-hours club.

I got a letter from you today mailed about April 10th. I'm somewhat surprised that you had not yet gotten my letters mailed in Korea -- on the 2nd, as I recall. I suppose you got them shortly afterward. The letter told me about your drive to Gonzales, and said something about the ammunition shortage. I believe I have already written all I have been able to observe from here.

Well, keep your chin up, kid. I'll write again tomorrow if all goes well.

Love  
Gene

\*I can't make out which.

(The mainstays of U.S. artillery in Korea were the 105 mm and 155 mm howitzers. In general, the power of a shell or bullet increases with the cube of bore diameter, though there are many exceptions and adjustments; thus the 155 mm was about three times more powerful than the 105 mm.)



4-25-53

Dear Mother,

I don't recall whether or not I dated my last missive, but if I did not, consider yourself informed that I am writing this one in the evening of the same day. Today has been quite uneventful. I spent it cleaning saws and similar tools.

I often wonder whether or not you are getting all these letters I write to you. If you don't, I'll certainly feel silly. I feel silly anyway, since I have no real news to write, and have to blather on like this.

(Next day) I went to the movies last night. We are having movies shown every night now. I saw "Meet Me at the Fair." Pretty good, too.

Talking to Cpl. Sweat last night. In pursuance of my poll, I asked him what he intended to be when he got out of the army. It seems that he intends to become a policeman in Panama. Sweat served several years in the army there, and is married to a Panamanian girl. No. 59 says he will return to his old profession of tending bar in Taegu.

Taegu means Great Confucius, did you know that?

Since you have already sent the last package, I presume, I'll get you started on the next one. How about sending some #620 Kodac Plus X film? While you're putting up the package, slip a little cocoa powder and candy in it, will you, please? Remember, please, to package it very strongly. I feel rather bad about asking you to send me so many things, but they will comfort me more than they will inconvenience you, I think. Out here, things which seem trivial in the States assume a great importance because the really important things are gone completely.

The more I am over here, the more I appreciate our air superiority. It protects us not only from enemy air strikes, but from a great deal of artillery fire as well, since the enemy does not know where we are, though we live within range of their guns.

You and Dad stay happy and well while I am gone, and I'm sure we will all have a grand reunion nine or ten months from now.

Love  
Gene

4-27-53

Dear Mother,

Just received your first letter bearing my permanent address. Thanks for the comics. Keep sending Pogo and Li'l Abner.

I may have told you a bit about my outfit in earlier letters, and anyway I'm sure that my descriptions of my day-to-day activities have given you a pretty good idea of my duties. But I am determined to get this straightened out anyway. In the first place, I am in Headquarters Company, as you should have seen by my mailing address, silly. Look in my letter; I'll bet you a thousand won (enclosed are my stakes) that I said P&A platoon.

P and A stands for pioneer and ammunition platoon. We do pioneering engineering work and run the battalion ammunition dump. We also do a little simple demolition work. We also fight when they need a few extra men, but I haven't run into any of that yet.

You must excuse me for not explaining what P&A meant in my first letter, but I am prone to forget that neither you nor Dad are familiar with army life, while I have been in one uniform or another for seven years or so.

Today was just another day. While we were doing P.T. a defective artillery shell (one of our own, I think) went off over our heads, but no one was hurt. I have finally gotten Lucy the Beautiful Rifle back. One of the jeep drivers from the motor pool accidentally switched rifles with me about a week ago. I finally found him and got it back.

I've got guard tonight, 10 to 12 and 3:30 till 5:00, so I'd better get a little sleep.

Love,  
Gene

(I had been in high-school ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps), college ROTC, and the Texas National Guard.)

4-28-53

Dear Mother,

Well, here it is another morning, and raining, the first rain we've had except for showers. I was lucky last night; I got off guard just as the rain started.

No P.T. this morning because of the rain. You should have seen our breakfast this morning. The longer I ate, the more milk I had on my Wheaties. We had hotcakes, too; but they weren't very hot, what with God pouring a bucket of cold water on them every time I took a bite. It was while drinking my coffee that I really understood for the first time the quotation, "My cup runneth over."

The field in which we are encamped is an old rice paddy, and it's flooded even in dry weather in the spring. We have dug all kinds of drainage ditches, but generations of Korean farmers have designed this place to flood, and flood it will. The soil hangs on to the least drop of water like a miser to a Mexican dollar and just won't give up.

They have moved the artillery in the valley next to us much closer. It sounds like a shotgun fired in the backyard when you're sitting in the living room now. I hope they are too far back to draw return fire.

According to the radio the US is offering \$100,000 to the first Communist pilot who lands his plane in UN territory. I guess they want a look at the Communists' planes pretty badly.

This paper is in pretty bad shape, and that's all the news for now anyway.

So-o-o

Love,  
Gene

4-30-53

Dear Mother,

I've gotten quite a bit of mail from you in the past two days; I won't give the dates you wrote on them, since if you are like me, you have forgotten what you wrote on a certain date by now anyway.

Among other information I got was your description of the knife you are sending me. Sounds swell. I'm always clumsy about thanking anyone for anything, but I could only wish that I could thank you properly for all the time and money you spent on it.

I'm afraid that I have no colorful events to write about this time. For the last two days I have been painting signs, a rather unexciting task, I must admit. We had a bit of an uproar last night. We were sitting in the tent chewing the rag when we heard what sounded like an incoming shell. We all hit the dirt like crazy. There was a whistle, but no bang. "Dud," we all said, scraping the dirt off our clothes. About two minutes later another one "came in"; we clawed the dirt again but still no bang.

Well, it developed that the jokers in the next valley were putting tin cans on their shells to stir up a little trouble. May the sparrows build nests in their barrels on inspection day.

According to the latest word from Lt. Joshua Nelson, my platoon leader, we will move out on the second. That way we will miss May Day on the front, which is to the good.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

May 2, 1953

Dear Mother;

We are pulling out for the front again today. In fact, right now I am sitting on a truck full of supplies after a short adventure. A few minutes ago we pulled out (our truck only) and went banging down the road. After we had gone about three miles down the road I spotted Lt. Nelson chasing us in his jeep. He was standing up in the front seat like Ben Hur, waving his arms and shouting. It seems that our driver had taken a wrong turn, and that the road we were on went to Porkchop and was exposed to enemy observation at one point.

We're not settled yet, so I'll have to sign off. I'll write again soon.

Love,  
Gene



2 May 1953

Dear Mother,

Well, we are all moved and settled now. I'm writing this from a small bunker in which four other men and myself are sleeping. I got five letters from you today. I'm enclosing the questionnaire you sent and returning your postage stamps. I don't need them here, of course.

About those vases on Okinawa, you misunderstood me. I couldn't possibly have taken one. They were big enough to hold one of Ali Baba's thieves.

I'm sorry kiddo, but I just can't think of anything else to write.

Love,  
Gene

(These bunkers were built of sandbags and ammunition boxes filled with dirt; most were partly underground. Their doors and windows were always very small, to exclude shrapnel.

(One afternoon on Arsenal I saw a man emptying a hand grenade. He had unscrewed the fuse, and was using a stick to scrape out the charge. It struck me as odd, but I didn't know him, and it was none of my business. A short time afterward, when we had to search the outpost for him, I learned what he had been up to.

(He had been sent away from his squad on some errand. They were finishing their noon meal of C-rations when he returned; his share -- the only can left -- was the dispensed ham and lima beans. Each case contained one can of fruit, intended to be divided among the men of the squad; he asked whether they had saved him any. They had not. He left the bunker, apparently very angry, and appeared in the doorway a few minutes later with the grenade I had seen him emptying. "I'll teach you bastards to eat my fruit!" He pulled the pin, tossed in the grenade, and ran.

(One soldier picked up the grenade to throw it out of the bunker, the only way the squad could have been saved if the grenade had not been disarmed, but there was no place to throw it. A man was trying to climb out the tiny firing-slit window; I saw it afterward, and it would have been a tight squeeze for a small dog. Three more jammed the doorway. The fuse cap went off, and the unfortunate soldier holding the grenade voided his bowels.

(We had to take their rifles from the rest of the squad and put them under guard; they had been combing Arsenal for the grenade thrower, intending to shoot him. They thought the grenade had failed to explode by pure chance, of course, and that he had meant to kill them all. We found him after several hours, hiding under some fallen roof timbers in a knocked-out bunker. He was immediately transferred.)

3 May '53

Dear Mother;

OK, kid, get set for another thrilling installment of my adventures in the Orient. (Who's this guy Terry Lee anyhow?) But before continuing our story, I'm going to scan some of the old letters I have in my pocket & give you the poop you're pining for.

(After rereading 6 or 7 letters) Firstly, talk to Noel again; my division has an hr. glass insignia. The buffalo is my rgt.'s insignia. Find out his division, regt., bn. and co. Secondly, I find lots of questions: "Wot you doink, boy?" I'm inna P&A Platoon momma, is doing pioneer engineer work, demolitions, delivering ammunition, substitute fighters, standing guard, picking up bodies, and so on. Today I painted signs while the rest of the boys built bunkers. Just got a letter asking if I like the knife; don't know since I haven't gotten it yet. It sounds swell, though. Hope it comes soon.

Just learned I'm on guard 10 to 12 and 3:30 to 5:00. Got to get to bed soon.

Funny thing happened last night. K96, the Katusa in our bunker, had a nightmare and started screaming in his sleep. We all woke up grabbing our rifles, and the guard in the ammo dump darn near started blasting.

Love,  
Gene

(Terry Lee was the central character in the now almost forgotten comic strip Terry and the Pirates, begun by Milton Caniff in 1934; it concerned the adventures of a teenage American boy in China during the warlord period. At times the temptation to see myself as Terry, Clough as his mentor and tutor Pat Patrick, and our ROK soldier-servant Lee Won Cue as their Chinese servant Connie was irresistible.)

5/4/53

Dear Mother,

Use this dough to buy one one-hundred-dollar defense bond and one fifty-dollar bond. Believe me, I earned this money. I had to go to \$112.50 worth of trouble to get the money changed to PMOs.

Not much to report today. I had to change bunkers for reasons too dull to write. I'm now in with Matthews, the Jewish boy I wrote you about before. He is really a character. He is in the ammunition squad, and when one of the line companies sent a rather dumb boy down to pick up some 81 mm mortar ammunition a few days ago, he really went to work. The conversation went something like this:

"81 mm mortar? You want 81 mm mortar? We got very, very little left, and it's not in such good shape. They don't make it like they did in the old days anymore. They don't put the material in it. They use this cheap stuff."

"They does?"

"Why don't you take some .50 caliber instead? Wonderful stuff! We just got a new shipment in and we're overstocked. I'll let you have it for practically nothing. For a song I'll let you have it. A steal!"

He almost got the kid to take it.

Love,  
Gene

5/5/53

Dear Mother,

Nothing much to report. I just fooled around all day making signs and so forth. I had one very pleasant surprise. Your package arrived with the knife, whetstone, and sewing kit. It made a swell birthday present.

Hard to realize that I'll be twenty-two in a few days. I suppose it comes all in a lick on the seventh, and I'll feel a year older.

I had an interesting conversation today. Started talking to a small oriental character who I naturally assumed was a Katusa. I said something about his being a Korean, and he said, "Me no Korean, me Chinese." Since I was at least theoretically fighting the Chinese while I was sitting on that sawhorse, I was startled a bit. It turned out that he was a Nationalist attached to a psychowar team attached to the bn. He talks to the enemy every night over a loudspeaker. It seems that he joined the Chinese army as a young man to fight the Japanese.

"Japs come, me fight. Communists come, me fight. They do this."

He showed me his wrist. He has no control over three fingers of his right hand.

Me go to Formosa. You know Formosa? Now me come here."

His hair is well shot with grey now. It's been a long war for Chung Ki Suik.

Love,  
Gene

PS Tell Dad I sympathize with his dental troubles.



5/9/53

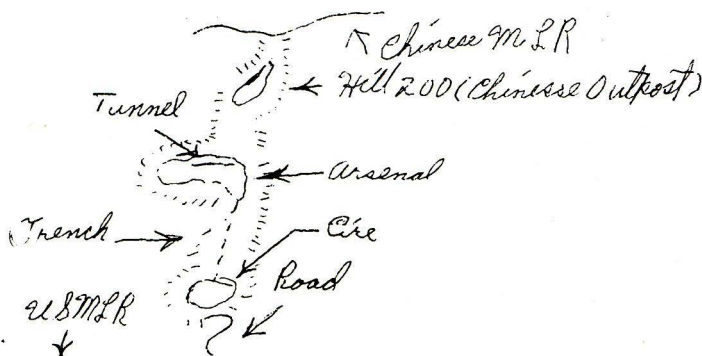
Dear Mother,

I am very sorry I have not written you in so long, and that this letter must be so short. They have been keeping me very busy for the past four days. I have been on KP, on an outpost, and so on.

I got a whole bunch of cards, for which I thank everyone, and two packages from you, for which I thank you. The fountain pen was an especially good gift, since I broke my old one yesterday.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*



5/10/53

Dear Mother,

I received two letters from you today (April 10th & May 1st) they made me feel good, of course, but they also made me feel bad about that short-short (the Koreans say skoshy) letter I wrote you last night. I had only three hrs. of sleep the night before, and had been working up on Arsenal all day, so I hope you will please excuse it.

I have been up on Arsenal twice now. Wednesday and Saturday. Arsenal is an outpost in front of an outpost, you know. Come to think of it, perhaps the best thing to do is to draw a map.

I suppose I am a real soldier now, since I have been shot at and shelled. We were building a bunker Wednesday and several other fellows and I were working on the roof in view of the Chinese Hill 200. They started sniping at us. Each time they fired, we'd jump off the roof and tell the Lt. about it. He had a pair of field glasses and was directing the fire of a 57 mm recoilless at the hill, trying to locate the sniper. I suppose they got mad because we would not quit working; whatever the cause, they started throwing big stuff at the hill, and we had to quit.

As you can see from the map, the road from Erie to our MLR is in view of the enemy. Coming back we ride in an armoured personnel carrier, although we go up in a truck when it is still dark. Wednesday we were on the receiving end of two shells but no one was hurt. The APC was not big enough to hold all of us, so most of us were riding on the outside. When the first shell hit we all dived into the APC, you never saw such a mess of struggling humans and waving arms.

You said you wanted to know how I was living, et cetera. Fourteen men sleep in my bunker. I sleep in a bunk made of logs and wire. We get our washing water from a spring about fifty yards down the hill. Satisfied about my living conditions? Today I worked on a bunker for the officers; personally I think that they are building it all wrong, but I'm not paid to think, as they say.

Glad you got the letters with the leaflets in 'em. If you look more closely, I think you'll find that those are not American soldiers.

Love,  
Gene

5/12/53

Dear Mother,

Sorry for not writing more often, but they have been keeping me pretty busy. We have been working up on Arsenal every day, which means we get up at 3:45 each morning. It has been very quiet, though we drew a little sniper fire yesterday and today. Yesterday we spotted the sniper and fired about thirty rounds of M-1 and carbine ammo at him. I don't know if they got him, but he gave us no more trouble. I'm not working very hard since we have KFCs to work for us. I'm sort of a foreman, you might say. The KFCs are just like anybody else, I guess, some of them are pretty good workers and some of them aren't. It feels sort of funny to badger and rough up a bunch of men old enough to be my father, even if they are orientals. If I do this much longer I'll be ruined as a civilian labor boss, too much of the slave driver in me.

Gene

(The Chinese had a good many bolt-action Mausers that the Soviets had captured from the Germans in WWII. Although slow firing, they were excellent weapons in the hands of an expert marksman. I'd had one of them kick dirt in my face as I dropped off the roof of a bunker.)

5/13/53

Dear Mother,

I got a bunch of letters from you yesterday, May 1st through 6th. Thanks for all of them and for the comics, too.

Perhaps you wonder sometimes just where these letters are written, in what surroundings & so forth. Well, this one is being written at about 7:00 a.m. while I am sitting at a fire waiting for the APC to take me up to Arsenal. To add a bit more, I'll say we have been waiting for a h\_\_l of a long time.

I forgot to tell you before, but I got that book of quotations yesterday, too. I read some of it last night and enjoyed it very much. Joe toe, as the Koreans say. By the way, toc sawn is Korean, not Japanese.

Not much of interest to tell, I'm afraid. I've been building bunkers on Arsenal every day for the past few days. I already have a camera, thank you. Maybe sometime I'll be able to get some time to take pictures.

Love,  
Gene

(Many Koreans spoke good Japanese, which they tended to use whenever they addressed foreigners; American soldiers on R&R in Japan often discovered that the Japanese understood their "Korean" better than some Koreans did.)



5/14/53  
Arsenal Hill  
1:00 p.m.

Dear Mother,

Extra rough day today so far. We went all the way to Arsenal in the APC instead of using the trench as we usually do. The reason was that the APC had to bring in some wounded, and we thought that we might as well save ourselves the walk. We got there just as the patrol was coming in. As the wounded were being loaded, mortar shells started falling all around us. One hit no further from me than the distance from the kitchen to the living room.

When it was over I was more amazed than I can possibly describe to find that no one, not one, was hurt. In those few seconds when rounds were dropping about us I was certain that men were dying all around me, and I thought, "swing low, sweet chariot." Since then we have been shelled on and off all day. A mortar and some direct-fire weapon, a Chinese 76, probably.

I got your candy and cigars yesterday; thanks more than a million. (Wish I'd brought some of that stuff with me.)

Love & kisses from,  
your son Gene

(During a lull I got my head up enough to see a friendly-looking hole, sprinted over to it and dove in. It was a garbage sump, full of rusting C-ration cans.)

Sunday  
 (May 17, 1953 added  
 in my mother's hand.)

Dear Mother,

First letter you've gotten in a long time, I'm afraid. They have been keeping me pretty busy on Arsenal though, & yesterday as a KP. I took some pictures yesterday; the film you sent has not come yet, but I managed to get hold of some here. I hope they develop all right. Took pictures of some of the people I have been writing you about.

Today I am bossing a bunch of KFCs; "we" are digging a ditch to bury telephone wires so that enemy patrols cannot cut them.

I haven't gotten a letter from you in a couple of days, so I guess I'll be getting a bunch of them soon. I've been reading that book of quotations every night. It's very pleasant to have something like that around, although sometimes a familiar one makes me homesick. You cannot know how nice it is to have someone at home to send me things. I feel so sorry for those fellows who have no one to write them.

There are all sorts of rumors buzzing about these days. That we are going into Corps reserve, that we are going to Japan, etc., etc. ad infinitum, ad nauseam. I don't put much stock in any of them, myself. I would, however, like to go back to where we can see some movies and get a hot bath once in a while. I have had two baths since coming to Korea, none since we have been up front.

(Later) Still out being a "honcho," (that's "boss" in Korean). No one here but me and six KFCs. As a man who has done both, I can definitely say it is better to boss than to dig, though bossing has its problems, especially when none of one's subordinates speaks one's language. I really prefer to boss alone, though. "A single throne is worth a thousand divided."

Love,  
 Gene

(Honcho is actually Japanese for "squad leader." Boss is Dutch (baas) for "master.")

May 23, 1953

Dear Mother,

Did I thank you for that nice box I got from you? I think not. The box I'm writing of is the one with the candy and film and cocoa in it. Everything was swell; the candy was delicious, the cocoa still is, and the film fit my camera.

I haven't taken any pictures for the past few days -- too rainy. I should get my first roll back Wednesday, and I'll send you the prints. I only had two pictures taken of myself. I was having too much fun working the camera to let anyone else use it. Well, at any rate you will be able to see what some of the people I have been writing about look like.

I wish I could have taken a picture of an officer I met up on the MLR today. He was wearing a steel helmet, an armored vest, and a machete. (Also a .45 and a dagger.) He said he never hit a Chink with the machete, but he was on Porkchop during the Chinese push. And he surely wished for one during the hand-to-hand fighting. I suppose you already see what I'm getting at. Here in our Mid-Twentieth-Century war I see men carrying swords and knives. Ain't this the durndest war ever? A war neither side is trying to win. A war in which air fighting is limited to a certain area. (Our planes cannot go north of the Yalu, theirs cannot go south of the MLR.)

While I am speaking of prohibited weapons, let's see how many I can name.

1. Atomic bombs
2. Hydrogen bombs
3. Atomic shells
4. Radiological warfare
5. Biological warfare
6. Poison gas
7. Soft-nosed bullets

(Later) I got two letters from you today, including "Meat Hammer." What's the matter with you? Don't you read my letters? I'm in the 7th Inf. Div., and if we aren't in Korea they sure have Japan well disguised. Arsenal Hill is in front of our line, not behind it. (See the map I sent you.) I don't know about the Chinese attack on the Turks, but they are crazy. The Turks and the Ethiopians are supposed to be the best fighters here.

Love,  
Gene

(Like the M-1 rifle, the Colt Government Model (Pistol, Caliber .45 M-1911 A-1) has a magazine capacity of eight rounds. A soldier always needs a knife, and the closer he is to the enemy the more he needs it.)

May 24, 1953

Dear Mother,

Well, here I am again, with the usual line of small and large talk. Gripes and grins and so on. Yesterday we got eleven new men in the P&A Platoon. They had been transferred from various line companies. One of them applied today to be returned to his old unit. I asked him why he wanted to go back. It seems that he likes to kill people. You meet all kinds here.

War gets pretty monotonous at times. Once in a while you have a close shave or meet an interesting character, but not often. When you say a shell missed you, you have said it all. I read today that the ROKs beat off an attack in four hours of bloody fighting. How much does that tell you? Hundreds of little brown men screaming and dying with tortured grimaces? No, it doesn't, no more than my last sentence can convey what it's like.

I have been talking lately to Pvt. Clough. He has done about five years in the army and 2 1/2 years in the marines. He has been a sergeant, but stayed out of the army too long & lost his rank.

He's a remarkably educated self-educated man, and as interesting a guy as I ever ran across. I don't think I have a picture of him, but I'll try to get one.

I don't know what else to write about here. I got two letters from you today. I hope Dad's operation is not painful. I am writing a letter to him tonight, since I can't get Father's Day cards. It seems a little silly since I know he reads these letters too, but I guess most nice things are a little silly.

Love,  
Gene



May 25, 1953

Dear Dad,

I think that you will receive this on or about Father's Day, so I'm writing you this as a Father's Day card, since those are a wee mite hard to obtain up here. Since I have been here I have suffered with you through your wisdom-tooth trouble; and I'm now "sitting out" your piles. So don't think you haven't been thought of. One thing I've thought about is how lucky you were to miss all the wars. On the other hand you had to go through the Depression, which was probably worse. No rotation. On the other hand there's warts, as you always say.

Well, all the above was just gab to introduce the idea that you have a son in Korea who is thinking of you on Father's Day, and on other days, too. So best wishes and congratulations for sweating out Mother's time in the hospital and all the headaches and pains in the neck and elsewhere since.

Your loving son,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

May 28, 1953

Dear Mother,

Today is just another day, I suppose. I'm afraid that after parading what few events of interest there are before you I shall have to sign off.

We dug up two dead soldiers on Arsenal today. Evidently their bunker had been caved in on them by an artillery shell and they were listed as missing in action. We estimate that they died in December or thereabout.

They have replaced our old pit-type armored personnel carrier with the new type, a sort of box-car on treads. One enters by a door in the rear instead of climbing up and into. Ichabod, Ichabod, the glory hath departed.

In regards to your sketch of Arsenal and me, I shall now present the true facts.

/\_sketch showing "Millions of bloodthirsty Chinese"  
"Arsenal" and "Me."\_/

But I don't live there, I just work there. I commute by APC.

I don't think I have ever been able to get across to you just what Arsenal or any other outpost in this war is like. It is just a little knot of bunkers on top of a hill with nothing between it and the enemy but a few barbwire fences. On Arsenal the distance is about a thousand yards.

I'm sorry to hear that Dad is so despondent. Do your best to cheer him up. I'm sure that he will feel better as soon as he is able to work again.

Love,  
Gene

(There was a tunnel across the front of Arsenal with firing slits for rifles and BARs every five or six feet. The Chinese artillery pounded it, and repairing it was one of our regular jobs. You got a magnificent view of the valley and the Chinese outposts and MLR from the roof of the tunnel, but were liable to draw sniper fire or worse; so we tried to go up there as little as possible, except at night or in dark, rainy weather. Mostly we toiled from within like so many ants, with hammers and spikes and timbers and sandbags and hydraulic jacks, removing the smashed timbers and replacing them, passing sandbags up through holes to cover the new timbers we had just put in. From time to time the Chinese would figure out what part of the tunnel we were working in and throw a few shells in to destroy what we had just rebuilt.

(The closest call I can remember there came at a spot where the supporting posts had broken, leaving the heavy roof timbers intact. In such cases, we put short temporary posts under two jacks and raised the timbers a few inches, put slightly taller posts under a second pair of jacks and so on. This time, when we got the timber high enough we could see a dud Chinese mortar shell lying on the ruined roof a few feet down the tunnel. When we set the permanent posts in place and took away our jacks, some vibration disturbed it. It began rolling, ever so slowly, toward the opening we had made by jacking up the fallen timber. I should have grabbed it; but I jumped back instead, bumping into the men behind me. It reached the edge, seemed to hang there for a second or more, then fell to the tunnel floor -- still without exploding. For five or ten minutes we stepped over the damn thing while we worked; eventually someone scooped it up on a shovel and tossed it out one of the firing slits.)

May 30, 1953

Dear Mother,

I received two letters from you just a few minutes ago, and I will endeavor to answer all your questions before proceeding with this letter.

First -- points. I received four points for each month spent at the front. (Where I have been ever since my arrival in Korea. Consequently I now have eight points.) If I were to move back I would receive three. Farther back, two.\*

I have no idea how long I will be here. I don't live on Arsenal Hill. I live about one mile behind the MLR and go out to work on Arsenal & the MLR during the day (and sometimes at night).

Yes, we usually go through the trench between from Erie to Arsenal, but that is because the APC doesn't go to Arsenal with regularity. That time it was going out to get wounded, so we took it.

Arsenal is vulnerable to attack since it is almost impossible to reinforce it when attacked, but it is a steep hill surrounded by several belts of barbed wire, mines, etc. There are, of course, many machine guns, 57s, BARs, flame throwers, etc. on it to defend it, and the men there can call for mortars from Erie & artillery from the MLR.

It has been attacked five times and taken once. It was retaken that same night. The Chinese send a battalion against it each time. It is held by two reinforced platoons.

For the past few days I have been painting signs. I am living in the carpenter tent now with only two other men, Clough and 99 (Kim Suik Goo). Which is a big improvement to my way of thinking. It's a lot quieter, and I can go to bed whenever I choose without having a radio blaring in my ear or a lot of yelling over my head.

For the past few days we have been getting movies. I saw "She's Back On Broadway" last night. It was good, but not as good as I expected. (Of course, up here anything looks good.)

I got a shower today after an interval of only a week or so. Maybe things are picking up.

The woods are full of rumors of war and peace. I imagine you people at home really know more about it than we do. "Of the greycoats' coming, who can say?/When night is falling all is grey."

Love,  
Gene

\* Thirty-six points are required for rotation.

(By this time I had liberated a .45 I wasn't supposed to have; I wore it under my fatigue shirt in a Korean-made shoulder holster. You can't dig and hammer and carry while packing an M-1 rifle, and I found the .45 very comforting. At night it crawled into my sleeping bag with me; we couldn't lock our tents or bunkers, and the Korean sneak thieves, called "slicky boys," were a perpetual problem.

(A tent I shared with Clough was dug into the side of a hill, one end opening out onto the hillside, the other onto a vertical wall of raw brown dirt. We decided to hold a plinking contest one afternoon; we closed the front of the tent and put a cot across it to sit on, opened the back, and set up empty cans there as targets. Sitting side by side on the cot, we passed the .45 back and forth, naturally with a good deal of conversation. All in all, we probably fired about twenty rounds in half an hour.

(When our match was over, we went outside and found the company in an uproar. Shots had been heard, repeatedly, in or near the area. Patrols were out. Regimental headquarters had been alerted. Clough and I expressed amazement -- we hadn't heard a thing. We volunteered to join the patrols and searched the surrounding hills until well after dark.)

\* \* \* \*

3 June 1953

Dear Mother,

I know you have not gotten a letter in a long time, but you know how it is, they keep me hopping. Please use the enclosed PMO to buy a \$25 and a \$50 bond, with Father and myself as co-owners.

I'm getting along tolerably well and not working very hard, but the hrs. are long. Played chess with the chaplain's asst. last night. Lost, but I put up a good fight.

Keep a stiff upper lip.

Love,  
Gene



3 June 1953

Dear Mother,

Well, here I am in your mailbox once more. As usual, I don't have much to say; but I plan to take quite a little while to say it.

As I think I mentioned in my last letter, I have been playing chess with Lindenhauer, the Chaplain's assistant. Chess is like the rubber bone you give to a puppy. It's good exercise for the mind, but there is no nourishment in it. I doubt, though, if anyone plays for exercise, or nourishment either. We play to cut ourselves loose from our own environment and enter that silent and terrible little world where knights move and dodge as though darting, broadsword in hand, through the crooked corridors of some medieval castle, and bishops sidle between piece and piece spreading the word of some intrigue in the court of Francis III. Perhaps because we are all higher than kings in that world, while we are pawns in this one.

"The world's a chequer-board of nights and days,  
Where Destiny, with men for pieces plays,  
And for a while, moves and mates and slays,  
Then, one by one, back in the closet lays."

Ah, Omar, what a poet!

I got a shower today, so I suppose I'm in good spirits. It rained today until twelve thirty, and then the sun came out as bright as a Mexican dollar and the green hills all about looked like diamond-studded jade.

Oh, happy world! Ain'tcha glad you're alive?

Love,  
Gene

(I was quoting "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" from memory, Quatrain XLIX:

"'Tis all a chequer-board of Nights and Days  
Where destiny with Men for Pieces plays:  
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,  
And one by one back in the Closet lays."

(While on the subject of quotations, I should give Clough's favorite.

"I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;  
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art.  
I warmed both hands before the fire of life;  
It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

That is by Walter Savage Landor.)

7 (?) June

Dear Mother,

I suppose I should commence this letter by apologizing for not writing more often, but literary instincts rebel at using the same opening gambit so frequently. It smacks too strongly of the inevitable "once upon a time," formula of Kiddies' stories. I wish that there were some way to ask forgiveness for my ingratitude without sounding like a Tibetan prayer wheel.

Today has been a bit more interesting than usual. This morning I received three of your letters. I want to thank you for putting up (and, no doubt, putting up with) Wain and Lou. Yes, I did know W. was wed. He married before I left A&M, I think. Thanks for passing on Lou's anecdote of the "Kipling Man." I wish I knew who it was he met. My intuition says Bob Williams.

I had a couple of adventures on Arsenal today. Through a series of circumstances I won't bother you with, we were compelled to saw some timbers outside the trenches. While we were working a Chinese shell hit very close to us, but fortunately in a garbage pit. As it was we suffered nothing more than a shower of stones and dirt.

On the way back from Erie to the MLR, the APC broke down. Since, as I think I have written you, it is often shelled, we were pretty frightened. We all piled out of it and walked the rest of the way to the MLR, receiving not a shell. Ol' Joe Chink must have been asleep at his field glasses. We were a pretty target.

Did I ever write you about the private who was transferred from a line company to P&A and requested to return to the line? He went insane today.

This evening the gasoline used to fuel our generator caught fire. Most of it burned, but occasionally a can would explode. There were forty gallons of gas destroyed, and the generator is a total loss.

Ninety-nine & his friends had a big poker game here tonight. Strange to say, I have never seen these Koreans play a native gambling game. They use American terms in their poker game, too: pass, raise, duce, et cetera.

Ninety-two has just come in. He returned this evening from a three-day pass to Seoul. From what I know of Korean, I gather he is telling Ninety-nine of his amorous adventures there. I imagine he will soon enlighten me in Korean, broken English, and graphic gestures.

I'm so glad to read that all is well on the home front; and glad, too, (selfish me) to read of all that you are doing for me.

Your loving son,  
Gene

June 10, 1953

Dear Mother,

Sorry I am letting such a long time pass between letters, but you know how it is.

We have moved again. This time we are out of the Arsenal area and into that of Porkchop. You may recall that I spent a few days here before. I went up on Porkchop yesterday, but I got to stay here in the Co. area today.

Don't know how long we will be here, of course. Hope it is not long, since they want us to work from seven to six on Porkchop. I am an old union man myself. (Unione Siciliano.)

God bless you and Dad and keep you safe.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

June 11, 1953

Dear Mother,

I got a bunch of your letters yesterday, and I must explain something. You won't be getting those pictures I wrote you about, because my deal for getting them developed fell through. You see, I was getting them made through Bill Matthews, who gave them to a friend of his every time he went back to Regimental Rear for Jewish services. This friend had them developed in Seoul and gave them back to Bill the next Wednesday. Well, Bill has been reclassified physically and sent back to a two-point zone. (He was partially deaf and had high blood pressure.) I'm very sorry I forgot to write you about this before.

I went out to Porkchop today. We had a bad day on Porkchop -- two killed and seven wounded. None of these were out of P&A, thank goodness. The two killed were both KFCs. There was one Negro boy who was wounded just about everywhere his vest had not protected him. He kept saying, "Oh, me. Oh, me!" It sounded like a woman crying at a funeral.

A little later they found two Chinese FOs on Hill 200. (Not Chinese 200, which is in front of Arsenal, but US 200, which is in back of Porkchop.) They were killed with a flame-thrower. A whole bunch of guys on Porkchop were looking on and taking pictures; bet it will be the most photographed flame-thrower operation in history.

By the way, Arsenal Hill is not an Arsenal. Erie is not a lake. Porkchop is not a piece of meat. The Three Sisters are not girls. Hadacol is not medicine and The Orphan is not a kid named Annie.

Snook Hill has no relationship to Fanny Brice, either. If you don't like those, try Jane Russell Ridge, Alligator Ridge, White Horse Hill, Iron Horse Hill, or ferocious Stay and Fight Hill. If none of these suit you, try No Name Ridge. The medieval influence is shown in Castle Hill, Sandbag Castle Hill, and Luke the Gook's Sandbag Castle.

Your loving son,  
Gene

(We had discovered that Bill couldn't hear incoming rounds. He hit the dirt only because he saw the rest of us do it; and if no one was in his field of view, he remained upright until the shell exploded.)

\* \* \* \*

12 June 1953

Dear Mother,

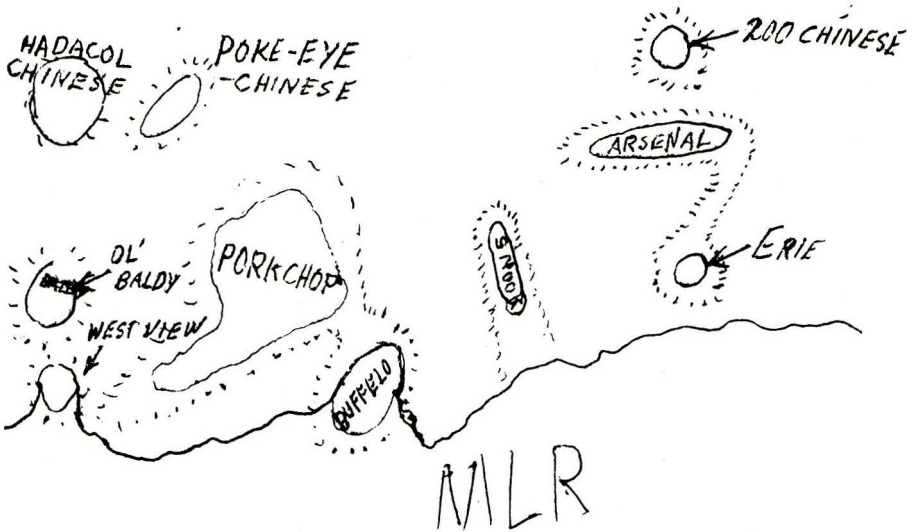
Just writing to be writing; I've got nothing special to say. Clough is on R&R now, so 99 and I are living alone in the tent. I have finished THE HOODS, and very good it was too; now I'm reading STAR MONEY.

I rode shotgun on an ambulance jeep last night. Not much action, though. I think I'll draw you a map to show where Porkchop is.

The hill called Buffalo on my map was referred to in my last letter as 200. The name has been changed recently to avoid confusion with Chinese 200. It was on Buffalo that I saw the two Chinese F.O.'s burned to death.

Love,  
Gene





June 14 - 1953  
 (Dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

I got your package today, the one with the Pogo book and the cocoa and seegars. It's surely grand of you to keep sending me things. You don't know how much I appreciate it. Did you read the book before you sent it? You should have.

"Speedy" (Edward Ray) was wounded today (groin and lower abdomen) by a shell burst. He is the first friend of mine who has been hurt. I did not get to see him after he was hit.

You and Dad take good care of yourselves now. Don't work too hard.

Love,  
 Gene

June 15, 1953

Dear Mother,

Yesterday I received two packages from you, my dearest cornucopia. They contained Astounding Science Fiction, POGO, and the anthology of poetry, besides candy, chew'n gum, etc. Thanks a lot, Mom, I enjoyed everything. I want you to know that I appreciate the trouble you went to, to get everything, especially the S.F.

We all are hoping that the war will be over in the next few days. We have already received instructions concerning our conduct in case an armistice is signed. (Not the first time such instructions have been disseminated, I'll wager.)

We have been told that the ending of the war will not speed our rotation in the least. Everything seems to indicate that we will keep a huge occupation force here. Of which I will be a part, I suppose.

Ah well, I have known unhappier shelters than this one, this patched wall tent in which I live now, and worse beds than my canvas cot. (Guess what? Yep, ol' fountain pen conked out.)

(Later) Started this letter last night, and I'm finishing it this morning. I quit last night because I had to go to a class on Chem. Warfare. Well, sir, we were about three quarters through the class when Wheeeew! Bang!! a round came in and missed our tent by about twenty feet. Two people in the class slightly wounded, a Lt. outside severely wounded. We got about eight rounds in altogether. Two KFC's who had been wounded on Porkchop were hit again as they lay in the ambulance outside the aid station. Just a little reminder that the war is not yet over.

By the way, in the course of our lecture on proper behavior after a truce we were warned that the Chinese were tricky and untrustworthy; an example of this, we were told, was their unexpected attack on the Japanese Empire at the beginning of the Second World War. O tempora, O mores!

Yours,  
Gene

(Japan never formally declared war on China. Hostilities arose from Chinese resentment of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and consequent boycott of Japanese goods. Open warfare may be said to have begun with the Japanese seizure of Kalgan on September 3, 1937. On November 20th, the Chinese capital was moved from Nanking to Chungking, with the executive branch of government in Hankow. Nanking fell to the Japanese on December 13th.)

June 18, 1953

Dear Mother,

Got five letters from you today, Mother, all chock full of cheery sentiments, news, newspaper clippings, funnies, et cetera. Thanks for all. I'm sorry I don't write you more often. But I'm so tired some days, and sometimes there is nothing to write. I was on K.P. today. The first time in a long while since I missed it once by volunteering to go to Porkchop instead. I dug up another corpse on Porkchop yesterday, just bones with enough meat to stink. Think it was Chinese since it had what seemed to be quilted clothing. Did I ever mention Barker? He's in trouble. He shot at K72, one of the Katusas. Neither one of 'em is any good. Got to get some sleep now.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

June 19th, 1953

Dear Mother,

I'm here again. The big news of the day here is the release by the president of Korea (Syngman Rhee) of thirty-four thousand (this figure by hearsay) war prisoners. I cannot understand the reason for this action. The men here are in an uproar, including the Koreans attached to our units. If S.R. is reelected after the war it will not be by the veterans' vote. Ninety-nine and I have been talking it over. He is really hopping since he remembers the days of guerrilla fighting in '50, '51, & '52.

To tell the truth, we are worried sick about the thousands who will undoubtedly try to sneak across the lines and back to the Chinese army. We will have to watch our rear as well as our front now. We have no doubt that a large number of these "patriot prisoners" are, so to speak, "rice Christians." I shall be very alert on guard now, you bet.

Love,  
Gene

(Twenty-seven thousand is the accepted figure, I believe. They were, at least by declaration, anti-Communist North Koreans who would otherwise have been returned to North Korea when the cease fire went into effect.)

21 June 1953

Dear Mother,

Hello again! This is G. Rodman Wolfe, your far-eastern correspondent with the 7th Div. in Korea. Glad to hear from me again?

We are still raging over Korea's release of the prisoners. The chaplain preached his sermon on it this today. Text from Peter about the devil roaming about like a roaring lion, then told how devil persuaded S.R. that his evil act was good. I spoke with Chaplain Hall today in private, and he referred to Rhee as that "lousy, stinking, miserable, miserly crumb." So you can see that he feels pretty strongly about it. (Pretty good for a Lutheran Preacher, huh?) The effect of the prisoner escape has been one of greatly increasing the amount of guard duty so far as I'm concerned. In the past, division policy has been that guards carry no round in the chamber; and some of the men did not even bother to load their weapons. Now everyone carries a fully loaded weapon and releases the safety before challenging. Some of the men are voluntarily doubling up on posts. (Each man stands twice the required time in order to have a companion.) I guarded the ammo dump last night and was told to kill anyone who did not immediately identify himself in English when challenged. A force of 30,000 men behind your lines is no joke.

Speaking of guard duty last night, Bill Mauldin said it, "This damn tree leaks." Rain? Kiddo, you don't know what rain is. And me with just a field jacket. Have you read this poem? It expresses my feelings exactly.

#### Ode To Duty (Excerpt)

Oh, Duty, Duty!

How noble a man should I be hadst thou the visage of a sweetie or a cutie!

But as it is thou art so much forbiddinger than a Wodehouse hero's forbiddingest aunt,

That in the words of the poet, When duty whispers low, Thou must, this youth replies, I just can't.

Clough is back, which is one big load off my mind. Frankly, I was worried to death about him. There was an awful plane crash, you know, in which 129 men returning from R&R were killed. Worst air disaster in the history of the world.



21 June 1953

Dear Mother,

Hello again! This is G. Rodman Wolfe, your far-eastern correspondent with the 7th Div. in Korea. Glad to hear from me again?

We are still raging over Korea's release of the prisoners. The chaplain preached his sermon on it this today. Text from Peter about the devil roaming about like a roaring lion, then told how devil persuaded S.R. that his evil act was good. I spoke with Chaplain Hall today in private, and he referred to Rhee as that "lousy, stinking, miserable, miserly crumb." So you can see that he feels pretty strongly about it. (Pretty good for a Lutheran Preacher, huh?) The effect of the prisoner escape has been one of greatly increasing the amount of guard duty so far as I'm concerned. In the past, division policy has been that guards carry no round in the chamber; and some of them men did not even bother to load their weapons. Now everyone carries a fully loaded weapon and releases the safety before challenging. Some of the men are voluntarily doubling up on posts. (Each man stands twice the required time in order to have a companion.) I guarded the ammo dump last night and was told to kill anyone who did not immediately identify himself in English when challenged. A force of 30,000 men behind your lines is no joke.

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Clough is back, which is one big load off my mind. Frankly, I was worried to death about him. There was an awful plane crash, you know, in which 129 men returning from R&R were killed. Worst air disaster in the history of the world.

I did get THE HOODS, and I'm very sorry I forgot to thank you for it.

Shorty Hammond was hit today. A little nick in his lower lip. It will require about seven stitches, they say.

Love,  
Gene

(I neglected to tell my mother about the joke I played on Barker. We had boxed a day or two before, and he had beaten me badly. That night he was to relieve me on guard. Murders were common, and both of us knew that this was a perfect setup. All I had to do was wait until he came, shoot him, and say that he had failed to answer my challenge. Of course I wasn't about to do that, but he didn't know it.

(I could hear him coming when he was at least fifty yards away, even through the drumming of that merciless rain: "Wolfe! Oh, Wolfe! Get some sleep! It's me, your buddy Barker!" I hid behind a stack of ammunition boxes and tapped him on the shoulder as he went past.)

\* \* \* \*

23 June 1953

Dear Mother,

Greetings from far-off Asia! On wings of steel this scrap of paper has flown to you to bring tidings from the bitter eroded hills (sic -- Newsweek Mag.) of Korea to your very doorstep.

Actually the hills in question are spread with greenery at this season and present the appearance of a giant's rock garden. Ferns, soft grasses, little shrubs and pine trees abound, and "Oh, glorious land!" there is no poison ivy and the big, black ants seldom sting.

This is one of those warm, rainy days God sends as a boon to plant life. I was not sent to Porkchop today, so I have stayed in my tent all day. The powers that be seem to have either forgotten I exist or run out of details. (Knock on wood.) Most likely the former. This sweet repose is dear indeed to one who usually wears his lungs to the bone bullying KFCs from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Think not, however, that I have squandered my time in slothful indolence. "Time is too precious to waste resting."\* No indeed. The morning I have spent cleaning my weapons, reading my book of verse,\*\* and writing you, O light of the world.

There have been no big-news happenings around here that I know of. The war is still by patrols, platoons, and squads on a field "Where ignorant armies clash by night." And by shells and shells and shells and shells. Two to three hundred a day often hit Porkchop.

Shorty, who was hit a few days ago, is up and about now with seven stitches in his lip. We haven't heard from Phillips since he was wounded. I guess he was taken to a hospital somewhere, although he was not badly hurt, from what I hear.

I spend my odd moments thinking over the things I hope to do when I get out of the army. Since most of them are mutually antagonistic I suppose I'll never realize them, but it is pleasant to dream and plan anyway, and I could have worse vices, I expect, limited as the field is here.

I'm always glad to hear of you and Dad enjoying yourselves; you both need more of it. It often strikes me that we have here the almost ideal situation since we can exchange thoughts by friendly correspondence while there are no unpleasant little incidents brought on by my nervous irascibility. Have you seen Peter Pan or The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T yet? I surely miss the movies since we have moved into this area.

Your loving son,  
Gene

\*Quotation from G.R. Wolfe, and pretty damn profound if I did say it myself.

\*\*If only I had a loaf of bread and jug of wine and thou, now.

27 June

Dear Mother,

I don't doubt that you have been put out at my silence for the last few days, but for once I have a good excuse. I was called, with five minutes notice, to be in the general's (Trudeaux's) honor guard, and have been away from the company for the last few days. I carried the guidon (those little Co. flags, you know, Mother) in the honor guard, and it was a real racket. We got to see a movie every night and could buy two cans of beer a night.

You should have seen the parade. It was only a small one with about 400 men, but really nice. A lot of bronze and silver stars were given out, one to a man from Maine. I almost fainted. All others read, "Entered the Federal Service from Virginia, entered the Federal Service from Mississippi, entered the Federal Service from Texas, etc. Total scores: Texas 1, Virginia 2, Mississippi 2, Georgia 1, Tennessee 1, and Maine 1.

I have been given the Combat Infantry Badge, which all us combat infantrymen get. No ceremony for that, of course. It's the blue rectangle with the rifle on it. You've seen it, I'm sure.

I got 3 letters from you when I got back to the company. Thanks for all. I'm glad you got to see the coronation pictures. There are so many pictures I want to see. The armistice was not signed on the 25th, as you know by now. I saw a bunch of replacements coming in today and yelled at one, "Thought the war would be over when you got here, didn't you?" He just looked at me and nodded.

The reason I was sawing timbers outside of Arsenal was that they were too long to be carried through the trenches.

In regard to your batman story, I have long been convinced that this planet has been periodically, at least, visited by the inhabitants of other worlds. I won't try to convince you, but if you want a little intellectual exercise, find out the number of stars in the universe according to the latest scientific estimates.

Our own star, Sol, has 9 planets, of which two are probably habitable to life similar to our own (carbon, oxygen) (Earth and Mars). Now allow each of these myriad stars 1/2 planet apiece and one in fifty habitable. Or one "good" planet to one hundred stars. The number of habitable planets you will find to be simply staggering.

Go on, look the figure up; I will bet you 2 combat stories and a souvenir (payable when I get home) that the figure is at least ten times what you guess when you read my letter. (Your stake in the bet is a kiss, a glass of ice tea, and a salad with anchovies.)



Why haven't these "ferriners" been seen? Obviously they have. They have been witches, demons, fauns, werewolves, ghosts, devils, angels, fairies, elves, gnomes, gods, ifreets, and jinn.

As a matter of fact, your batman sounds like a vampire to me, or like the cloaked Satan.

How many Americans who saw, say, a little green "man" climb into a pile of brush which a moment later took off with a flash of flame would report it. How many who did report it would recant after a month of being laughed at by neighbors, press, and radio, but mutter under their breaths with Galileo, "But it does move!"

If these things are true, you ask, why don't they make themselves known to us? Let's see what their motives might be:

Economic acquisition through trade or conquest. Not likely, since they must be more advanced than we, and the cost of shipping goods across space would probably be enormous.

Slaves. Not even needed much today, certainly not needed by a more advanced race. (Specimens for biological examination could be kidnapped without causing a ripple in our missing persons roles.)

Land. There are three reasons for colonies: 1. To relieve population pressure. 2. As a market for goods. 3. To increase military strength by permitting a larger population. 1. Shipping individuals would be as costly as shipping goods. Anyway, a really advanced culture would control its population if necessary. 2. Economic cost again. 3. Maybe no wars, maybe cost of supporting colony. Who knows? Maybe even ethics?

What remains? Anthropological, biological, and sociological study. For each of these studies it is best to leave the specimen as undisturbed as possible.

Oh, well, I could write a whole book about this. (Maybe I will.)

Don't cry, Momma. I think you are beautiful, cantankerous, and tart.

Love,  
Gene

Mountain Target

Gun

FO

1st Hit

2nd Hit

600 yds

300 yds

50 yds

1 FO says 300 right and six hundred down

2 50 left & 50 up

July 1, 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

Enclosed is your questionnaire with, I hope, all the answers. "Forward observer" and "R&R" look as though they might need more explanation.

Suppose you wish to fire on an enemy installation not visible from your lines. There are two ways to do this:

1. Use an artillery-spotter plane.
2. Send out an FO.

The FO will infiltrate the enemy's lines and get to a position where he can see the target. Then he will direct your fire to the target by radio.

(See diagram previous page. ed.)

Rest and Rehabilitation means the 5-day vacation in Japan that every soldier gets while he is over here.

(Later, gave Kim's pen back.) I went to Porkchop today; no trouble except that I cut one finger on a tin can.

Love,  
Gene

(The soldier who was with me ran for an aid man, who arrived expecting a shrapnel wound. I shall never forget the look he gave me when I explained that I had cut myself opening a C-ration can. He asked if I wanted him to put me in for the Purple Heart. I almost said yes, but something in his eyes dissuaded me. I think he might have throttled me on the spot.

(This mention of artillery may be the best opportunity I'll get to describe the most exciting denouement I've ever been privileged to witness. The film was Gigi, starring Leslie Caron, in which she plays an orphan who joins a carnival; in the final reel she leaves it, and at the end of the film she is walking down a twilit road in France, all alone. She hesitates, thinks things over, spins around, and runs up the road again -- back to her friends in the carnival.

(On the night that I saw Gigi, the artillery outfit in the next valley got a fire mission at the very moment that Leslie spun about. The thunder of their guns woke Lucky, our medics' big German shepherd, who chased her up the screen.)

(Typed by my mother, completed in pen by me.)

### Questionnaire

What are KFCs? Korean Fatigue Corps

What are Chinese FOS? Forward observers

What is R&R? Rest & Rehabilitation

Do they have just one shotgun on ambulance? Yes

Why do they have shotgun on ambulance? For snipers? To ward off attack by guerrillas? Or what? Infiltrating enemy patrols; also in case of big attack shotgun and driver go out with litter.

What is approximate distance of Porkchop from MLR? 1-½ miles

" " " " " " Arsenal? 8 "

" " " " " " Baldy? 4 "

We ask all this so that we will know if you are under attack or whether attack is close to you. I believe it would be easier for us if, when we read in the papers that certain sectors are under attack we could tell whether you would not be involved, if you understand what I mean.

\* \* \* \*

2 July 1953

Dear Mother,

I am on scoshee R&R today, which means that I spend two days at rest camp. (R&R Center)

I saw a sure sign of peace's approach yesterday. The first steel bunker or pillbox was set up.

Heard a colored guy singing a song. (I suppose of his own making) the other day. Excuse the vulgarity, but I am a good reporter or none.

"See ol' GI a-squattin' in the grass,  
Gwine to play the burp-gun boogie on his ass."

Gene



5 July ?

Dear Mother,

I am back from scoshee R&R now. I got seven letters from you today, six of them being installments of the book (1, 2, and 5 through 8).

To write frankly I am appalled at the amount of work you have cut out for yourself. Since you say it is too heavy to mail I presume it is a clothbound volume of considerable weight. Honestly, though, wouldn't it be worth the three or four dollars the book costs to rip out pages and send them instead of copying them, if you insist on my having it? Figure out how much money you are saving yourself per hour of work, and I think you will know what I mean.

I have enjoyed what I have read so far, but if you decide at any time to quit, please do so without feeling guilty.

All is well with me still, mentally and physically the same pink-blooded American boy I was when I left you.

(last page missing)

\* \* \* \*

5 July 1953

Dear Mother,

Once again I take pen in hand (Clough's in this case) and address you in the grand old tradition of Lord Chesterfield. By the way, I suppose you are wondering what happened to the pen you sent me. A pox on your scurrilous suspicions, Momma, I did not lose it. It's just that it has run out of Everlasting Goosegrease, or whatever the propellant is supposed to be.

I got parts three and four of ONE OF US IS WRONG today; thank you very much for them.

I have just completed RIVERS OF GLORY, a novel of the Revolutionary War that I managed to lay hand to. Fairly good, it gives the impression that the author studied the period quite thoroughly. However, one character has his hat shot off twice in the same battle. Since he was charging on horseback the first time, it seems improbable that he stopped to pick it up.

Upon reflection it seems odd for me to be reading about one war while an active combatant in another, but I have seen the same sort of thing occur in others. All wars are frequently monotonous, I suppose.

Love,  
Gene

(Everlasting Goosegrease -- ballpoint ink. Ballpoints were not new technology in 1953.)

6 July 1953

Dear Mother,

Nothing new recently. We have had a Puerto Rican boy move into our tent. He is as handsome as Tyrone Power, but speaks almost no English.

We now have four people in the tent and three languages:

Clough -- English  
 Kim Suik Goo -- Korean  
 Martinez -- Spanish  
 myself -- English?

Kim Suik Goo, in case you don't remember, is your old friend K99 in his formal clothes. Kim is his last name, last names coming first with Koreans as with Chinese. Kim means gold, and there are enough of them in Korea to shingle Hell. Let the Smiths and Joneses and Browns take to their mattresses as they will, I'll wager the whole pack of them will never hold a candle to Korea's Kims.

Korea means Land of the Morning Calm, and it's called that because it is either too cold to get up in the morning or raining.\* It's been raining here for the past twenty or thirty years, as near as I can remember, and I am sick unto death of it. All I need is Sadie Thompson in the next room playing The Saint Louis Blues on an old victrola.

This rainy season is caused by cold air from Siberia meeting warm air from the East Indies. The Japanese current meets the Siberian current off the coast of Korea, and it confuses the hell out of the fish. It confuses the Gooks, too; they don't know whether to have a New England Boiled Dinner or Fish and Poi. Unable to reach a decision, they compromise by chopping the fish up, adding a bottle of old shaving lotion and all the garlic they can lay their hands on, setting the whole business out in the backyard until it's so ripe a white man can't get within a hundred yards of it, and using it as a sauce for rice. Yum, yum! Head, eyes, entrails 'n everything. (If they have any vegetables, they put those in too; if they don't, they put in weeds.)

Gene

\*or both.

7 July 1953

Dear Mother,

I'm sure you're worried to death about me, since you probably read about the big attack on Porkchop last night. Well, I had a hectic time of it, but I was neither killed nor wounded. (That "killed" is a little superfluous, isn't it?) The worst part of the whole thing was that it was (and is) still raining, and the whole thing is a hog wallow; some of the lowlands are about two feet underwater.

Ask me, I know. I jumped out of an APC (armored personnel carrier) into one of these young lakes at about 11 p.m., my feet went out from under me, and I went through the rest of the night wet to the skin.

I have heard from several people that Lt. Shea is dead. He was in charge of the general's honor guard. He has a southern drawl you could stir coffee with, and is one of the few officers and gentlemen I have ever met. I haven't heard from Clough since the attack, and I'm a little worried about him, too. He went out to an observation post before the flap started.

As things stand now, the Chinks hold one finger of Porkchop, and it's a good bet that one of us will attack again tonight; but I think we will be ready, and P&A won't have to go out.

I got seven (count 'em, seven) letters from you yesterday including six installments of one of us is wrong. (Looky, no caps, me and T.S. Elliott.) (t.s. elliot?) Thanks a heap, Kiddo; sorry it takes some of my letters 15 days to reach you.

Love,  
Gene

(Fifty-four thousand Americans died in Korea in three years. (Fifty-eight thousand in Viet Nam in ten years.) South Korea lost about forty-seven thousand combatants, Britain 686, Canada 294, and Australia 261. Total deaths on both sides, including civilians, are estimated to have been about one million.)

11 July 1953

Dearest Mother and Dad,

I know that you have been missing my letters over the past four or five days, but we all got separated from gear a while back, and so I could neither use my own stuff or borrow someone else's.

You have no doubt been reading about the fighting on Porkchop, so the first thing that I want you to do is get it through your heads that I am completely well and never even got a scratch, although I smell like an old hog.

After it stopped raining, it got as hot as a hen on a wool nest. (Remember that?) Our battalion did most of the fighting up to date, but we have been pulled off now and are in reserve. The battalion is cut to bits, and Maj. Fritz, the bn. executive officer, is dead, a great blow to all of us.

I have been fortunate in the matter of friends, only one was hit, and that was lightly, although he almost bled to death before we could get him to a medic. Shrapnel cut the vein in his wrist.

When we went back today, I got my picture taken by a newsreel cameraman; but I suppose I'll end up on the cutting room floor. In case you do see it, I am sitting on the ground with my shoes off smoking a cigarette. It was the first time I had my shoes off in four days, and I thought my feet would come off, too.

Speaking of pictures, do you remember those I told you were lost? Well, I got them today from Sgt. Summers. I will send 'em two at a time since I doubt if airmail would take them all at once.

Love, your son,  
Gene



14 July 1953

Dear Mother,

Here I am again. We are still in reserve at Indianhead. I've gotten several magazines from Louis and one long letter written at night while he was watching that darn machine of his.

I sent you a telegram yesterday, which I supposed reached you before any of my recent letters. They gave all of us a chance to send a telegram to show we had not been hurt on Porkchop.

General Trudeau addressed the bn. today and told us that we (this bn. did almost all the fighting) stopped an entire Chink division which intended to drive six miles south and capture the airport and cut the railroad. I don't know how much of an exaggeration this was.

Ninety-two, Ninety-nine and a lot of the other ROKs left the company today. I don't know why.

We are going up on line again today -- this time near Alligator Ridge.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

18 July 1953?

Dear Mother,

Here I am again, talking with nothing to say. Hope you like the pictures. We are behind Alligator Ridge now, as I think I told you. Haven't had any letters from you for the past few days now, but I know you're writing and I'll get a mess of them one of these days.

I haven't had anything to read these past few days, so I can't talk about that. Oh, yes, I got a package with vitamin pills in it a few days ago. I don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth, but you should package these things a little more strongly.

I have another roll of film I want to get developed whenever I get a chance -- or perhaps I'll just mail it to you if I can.

Love,  
Gene

22 July 1953

Dear Mother,

This is just a note to let you know that I received five letters from you yesterday, and glad to get 'em, too. Nothing much is going on now, so I don't have much to write about. I hope you like the pictures I am including in this letter. They are, as I think I explained before, all pretty old, taken when I was near Arsenal.

I am now engaged in reading Freud's INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOANALYSIS, which I picked up out of a trash can.

The Korean dish I wrote you about is called "go-hung." Now, in case you want to serve it to your bridge club, you know what to call it.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

22 July 1953

Dear Mother,

There's good news tonight! I haven't written you about it before, because I did not want to make you unhappy for me, but I have been trying to get out of P&A ever since I got in it. I suppose I have actually had seven or eight schemes which have fallen through. Well, today one of them finally succeeded. I am now an (this in ornate, florid script) "Operations Specialist," sounds fancy, don't it? Really, I am just assistant to the operations specialist until he rotates. To make a long story short, I make maps for S-3.

I received a letter from you today, thanks for the news, comics, and good wishes. I surely hope that you and Dad are as well and happy as you seem to be.

Love,  
Gene

(The battalion staff was made up of four departments. S-1 was Personnel, S-2 Intelligence, S-3 Operations, and S-4 Logistics. Haber was the intelligence clerk, Howland the operations sergeant, and Pickens the operations clerk; these three are mentioned frequently in the following letters.)

26 July 1953

Dear Mother,

I'm sure you must be furious because I have not written you since I told you about my new job, but although there are two of us, Sgt. McClure and myself, on the job now, they are keeping both of us hopping.

One thing I want to get straight now. How did you get the idea that I was in Tokyo? You have no idea how frustrating it is to have someone tell you that you are in Tokyo when you have not seen a flush toilet in four months. The only thing that I can figure out is that the cable I sent you was relayed from Tokyo. Well, Mom, I sent that cable from Indian Head, our lovely little rest camp on the banks of the Han River. I am not wounded, even slightly, nor am I down with the flu, even a little bit.

We are still behind the Alligator Jaws, as I wrote you before. Nothing much doing on our section of the line. There was one small flap on outposts Dale and West View, but they are over by Baldy, not near us.

I get to see some interesting things working in here with the big wheels; it has already occurred to me that an interesting and amusing play could be written in which the entire action would take place in an S-2 S-3 bunker. To give a true-life illustration:

Telephone rings, Lt. Bond, a young Second Lt., answers it. He listens a moment with an expression of mounting excitement, then hangs up.  
Lt. Bond: "Brooklyn and the Bronx have been hit!"  
Loud murmurs of excitement from all present; the Col. begins to sputter and fizz.  
Lt. Bond, blankly: "Where are Brooklyn and the Bronx?"

You see what I mean? In case you don't understand the whole business, Brooklyn and the Bronx are code words we use over the phone instead of the names of certain hills for security reasons.

Well, you see what I mean, don't you?

Love,  
Gene

26 July

Dear Mother,

Here I am again, but instead of being pleasant and chatty, as I was in my last letter, I am going to make demands. Drafting supplies are pretty scarce around here, and since I'm sure you want me to continue in my new job, how about sending me the following list of supplies, strongly packaged?

- 1 bottle black drafting ink
- 1 " red " "
- 10 black grease pencils
- 5 red " "
- 1 box paper clips
- 1 " thumb tacks
- 1 " assorted Speedball pen points
- 1 roll (large) of Scotch Tape

If you're not sure what grease pencils are, ask Dad.

Everything is all right over here. I hope you and Dad are enjoying the same sort of tranquility.

Love,  
Gene

(My mother has checked the items in pencil. She appears to have sent everything except the red ink.)

\* \* \* \*

27 July 1953

Dear Mother,

In accordance with the wish you expressed some time ago, I am writing you this to let you know that I am all right at the time the cease-fire goes into effect. At the time of writing, we are still receiving an occasional shell from the enemy, since it does not become official until 10:00 p.m. However, I shall hold this letter until that time, so when you read this you may be sure I came through "my war" unscathed.

Love,  
Gene



28 July 1953

Dear Mother,

Well, here I am, the day after the cease-fire. Things are very calm here, with a lot of rather bitter jokes and general looking around to see who is still here.

This morning the Chinese are out in the open on Chink 200 tearing down bunkers, while the Ethiopians watch them from Arsenal with the air of hungry but leashed dogs eyeing a juicy bone.

By the way, if you want to get a look at one of those Burp-guns they have been shooting at your li'l boy, you can see one in the hands of a Yugoslavian soldier on the cover of the July 20th Newsweek. Of course the Chinks used a terrible welter of stuff, but that is the one that showed up most frequently. Fires a bullet about like a .38.

(The rest of this letter is missing.)

\* \* \* \*

29 July 1953

Dear Mother,

Here once again is G. Rodman Wolfe, your Far Eastern Correspondent, reporting on the progress of the Korean truce.

Today, thus far, the front has been quiet, with the orderly, planned withdrawal of the UN force proceeding amid a dense haze of telephone calls, curses, new plans, revised plans, corrected plans, superseded plans, crawling lieutenants, and raving colonels.

The difficulty is that we are like the village in Maine which voted to build a new meeting house using the materials in the old meeting house, and to continue to use the old house until the new one was done. We are trying to withdraw, destroying all our fortifications as we go but keeping the line defendable as long as we are here.

This bn. will go into a reserve position for three days, then occupy a part of the new MLR. I hope to goodness I can get a bath while we're back there.

Love, kisses, and best wishes for you & Dad.

Love,  
Gene

(Clearly I borrowed the simile from Clough.)

30 July 1953

Dear Mother;

I received your letter dated July 24 today. In answer to your questions, I cannot get Life or True magazines, but I can get the other items you asked about, Time, toothpaste, et cetera.

No, the soldier in the newsreel was not me. There were no wounded where I had my picture taken. I can now announce that you have received all my pictures; hope you like them.

We are now back in reserve position, that is to say that we are not on the MLR. I haven't gotten my bath yet, but I'm still hoping. We don't know for sure yet how the point system will be revised now that the cease-fire has been signed, but according to the best authenticated rumors I should leave here about the end of January. Travel time, you understand, may take up to a month.

I have been getting letters from Lou regularly, giving the latest scuttlebutt from A&M. You entertain Lou so much that I fear you are putting yourself out. I hope not.

I seem to be doing well on my new job, aided immeasurably by the fact that we have done nothing since the truce was signed. Almost nothing, anyway.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

Aug. 11, 1953  
(Dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

I know you must be worried to death because you haven't gotten a letter in such a long time, but there has been nothing to report, I've been busy, so I've put it off again and again.

I guess that peace is really here; we no longer get free cigarettes and razor blades.

In reply to your questions about our opinion of the truce, I can only say that opinion is divided here. Some are optimistic, others don't think the peace will last over 90 days.

I hope every day that you & Dad are still well & strong; I surely wish I could come home, now that I've ended this war.

Love,  
Gene

(The cease-fire has now (October 1990) lasted 37 years and three months. U.S. soldiers still occupy our old positions south of the demilitarized zone.)

13 Aug.

Dear Mother,

This is the anniversary of the day I was inducted into the army, of course. And I've been doing a good bit of reminiscing. Do you recall how you and Dad and I went for a fish dinner on the eleventh, thinking I would be drafted on the twelfth? I can recall a lot of things that happened a year or so ago with more clarity than I would have thought possible. I now have a feeling of awe at preparing to watch the seasonal cycle go round again which I have never felt before. I suppose it's because I've spent ten times more time outside this year than I ever had before.

I suppose my feeling for the weather and the seasons is intensified because I expect to leave Korea a year after I came. The carousal has gone around, and it's time to get off.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

Aug. 17, 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

It just occurred to me that you might like to see some of the ads we get in the overseas editions of American magazines. These are from Newsweek. See how it feels to belong to the international set?

Sgt. McClure is on R&R now, so I am the whole show in the mapmaking department. Doing OK.

Newsweek had a good write up on R&R, did you see it?

We are going into Corps Reserve in a few days. It will be my first time (except for the trip from Incheon) below the Farm Line.

Hope you and Father are as happy as you make out.

Love,  
Gene

(The ads were for Japanese cars, motorcycles, and the like, forerunners of the wave of Japanese goods that was to break upon the US soon. The Farm Line marked the southern boundary of the area from which Korean civilians had been evacuated.)

Aug 20 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

I don't really have much to report now, but I thought that I had better write you before you started to get on my neck about it. The mousi may situation has quieted down a bit now, though things are by no means dull on the sin front. I've managed to read two of those books you sent me. By the way, while I'm thinking of it, will you thank Aunt Marie for me for the candy she sent? I mean to do it, of course, but I lost her address.

I seem to be doing all right in this job; at any rate, no one has said, one more mistake like that and you go back to P&A, Wolfe! Not yet. The Ruskys have the hydrogen bomb, I see, and the Shah is in power in Iran. I like that last part; I have always been a sucker for royalty.

I'm having one of my shirts cut down by one of the native women here -- hope it comes out all right. Look sharp, feel sharp, be sharp with the wolfe, WOLFE, WOLFE.

I got some books from Lou a few days ago, but no letter. Sorry to hear of his romantic difficulties in the way of transportation. However, love will find a way, so they say. Tell him that for me, but I bet that a pair of skates would do him more good.

There doesn't seem to be anything more to write, so I think I'll have a little statistical review, in case you have forgotten.

It has been 377 days since I swore to defend the United States from all enemies, foreign or domestic.

353 days until I get my discharge.

147 days since I landed in Korea.

164 days since the Patrick sailed.

Best wishes,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

21 August (1953?)

Dear Mother;

Did you hear the one about the bop fan who went into the restaurant? It goes like this.

Bop fan: "Give me a piece of apple pie."

Waiter: "Mister, that apple pie is all gone."

Fan: "Well, dig that crazy pie! Give me two pieces."

All's well on this side of the pond. Don't work too hard.

Love,  
Gene

(My mother redated this appalling note 21 September, I do not know what basis.)



Aug 23 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

I'm sure you must be pretty worried because of the drought of letters in recent times. I won't attempt to excuse myself since there have been times when I could have, and should have, written to you (but did not) because my stationary wasn't handy, or I could not think of anything to say, or I didn't feel like writing, or something. Anyway, I will try to make up by making this letter a good one.

We have moved again since I wrote you last; we are now in Corps Reserve near Chongdamchon, about twenty miles north of Seoul. We are still in tents, but we get movies every night, and beer; the PX facilities are still pretty poor, though. They stopped giving us razor blades and such at the end of the war. I won't ask you for anything, though, because I'm sure we will be able to get things like that before your package could reach me.

This is the first time that I have been out of the Military Zone, you know, and there are lots of things of interest. We can have our clothes washed here by the native women quite cheaply, which is a blessed relief. You have it tough on wash days, I have no doubt; but you should have seen me with a cold stream, a cake of GI soap, a flat rock, and a club.

This rear echelon stuff brings up one good problem, though, for the brass at least. We call this the mousi mai war, except that the GIs say "moosy may," of course. Mousi mai is Korean for girl, and you know what kind of girls these are. A little after sundown they start hanging around the camp by the dozens, and I mean DOZENS. The first night we arrested about twenty-five, and of course that was just a small fraction of the total.

My friend Clough is in the hospital now, prostrate trouble, I don't know how serious. I am enclosing a snap of him which I begged off another guy. It is not a very good likeness, but it is the only one I've got.

I hope I don't lose him now that he is in the hospital; it isn't often that you meet a guy who has been a professional guide, a merchant seaman, a hand on an Alaskan riverboat, a rum runner, a tug-boat skipper, a house painter, a trapper, a soldier, a marine, and a lumberjack.

I have gotten several packages from you recently, one of drawing equipment, and several books. Thanks a heap, especially for the books, since they were not a "request item."

You don't know how much I hope that you and Dad are well. Don't work too hard, please.

Gene

Aug 28, 1953

Dear Mother;

Here I am again with nothing to say, nothing to talk about except the usual high-jinks here. For example, McDuffy, who I don't think you know of, got a few cans of smoked oysters the other day, and he gave one to Clough. We all came crowding around to get one, so Clough said, "Boys, I'll give you all one, but first i want to tell a little story. One time there was a bar in San Francisco that had a huge oyster in the window and a sign saying, '\$10 to the man who can swallow this oyster!'

"One day a big lumberjack came into the bar, and he saw the sign. 'I can swaller that thing,' he says, and he takes the oyster and gulps her down. 'Give me the ten dollars,' he says to the bartender. 'You wait a minute,' says the bartender. 'Fifteen men has swallered that oyster already today, and ain't a one of 'em been able to keep it down.' And sure enough, up she come.

"Now, boys," says Clough, "have an oyster."

Not a one of us was fazed, and we all got one. Then he gave the can to McDuffy, who looked pretty green but took one anyway. Just as he was ready to bite it, Haber said, "you think it's an oyster, but it's not." (Say it fast.) That got him.

Well, you can see what it's like here. Most of the time I just sit around and make drawings. We may move away from here soon and we may not.

I figure I should leave here about the end of April.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

Sept 2, 1953

Dear Mother;

Here I am again, and in more ways than one; I am in the area I was in before I came to the area I was in last. This is where we had all the Mousi Mai trouble, in short.

Capt. Patrick, my boss (the S-3) is on R&R. I gave him some pictures to get developed for me. I'm not sure how they will come out, since they are pretty old.

I think I made some remark in one of my recent letters about being well traveled. Well, Sgt. Howland, the Operations Sgt. here, has been to 27 countries, islands, and colonial possessions. (Pretty good, huh?) He was in Merrill's Marauders in the Second World War.

All well here.

Gene

(Merril's Marauders operated in Burma in 1944.)

August 38th

Dear Mother,

Another day in peaceful Korea. Got a letter from you (framed in flowers) full of questions. Fie, fie, F-I-E. Who says I (accompanied by a sketch of an angel) don't answer questions?

I get 3 points this month, 2 next month, will leave Korea about the end of April.

I paid 50¢ for 1 suit of fatigues plus one pair of pants and 3 handkerchiefs & T-shirts washed and ironed. We wear nothing but fatigues in Korea.

I'm still a map maker in reserve, take no training except P.T., no K.P.

I could spend one month talking about Clough.

I have only gotten one box of drafting equipment.

Miller may still have a market at J.P. and home weddings.

I still like my job and, as far as I know, am set for the rest of my stay.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. They aren't Mousi Mai girls, they're mousi mais. Mousi mai means girl, an unmarried woman.

Sept 8 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

I am enclosing in this letter another which I started a few days ago and did not get an opportunity (to) complete, so don't be surprised at its sudden ending.

We have moved again, and are now preparing a secondary line of defense behind the M.L.R. No sweat, but I have a bad cold which keeps me pretty miserable. Yes, I am taking my vitamins. I caught the cold anyway. It is warm here during the day, but very chilly at night.

The News  
Of The Day

"Fanfare"

"FLASH" Kenneth Allen Clough, prominent member of the I&R Plat. & the best d\_m soldier I ever met has been transferred to Japan.

"FLASH" I have been appointed Bn. T.I.&E. NCO. (Can't understand it, eh?) (Means Troop Information and Education. Still hold my old job (Operations Specialist -- Cartographic Draftsman, too.))

Last package I got from you was a detective story and an SF.

I got a pack of drafting equipment quite a while back, and I'm sure I wrote you about it. I hope you & Dad are as well as you seem to be.

Love,  
Gene



2 Sept

Dear Mother;

For once I have something to write about. I got a pass to Seoul yesterday. It's an interesting city to an American to wander about in, although not as interesting as Washington would be for a Korean, I dare say.

To begin my description of the city, I'll say that you wouldn't like it. It smells bad, and most of it is pretty dirty. It's full of little boys who will shine your shoes or take you to a house, and girls who won't shine your shoes and will take you to their house.

On the whole, it looked like a Mexican city except that the people are Koreans and a lot of the architecture is oriental, if you get what I mean.

There is quite a bit of bomb damage. Part of the ginza is in what was a John Wannamaker department store. The ginza, by the way, is the marketplace, and you can buy anything from a 25¢ fountain pen with a Parker 51 top to real antique Korean brass there.

(Presumably this is the incomplete letter referred to in the letter of September 8.)

\* \* \* \*

12 Sept.

Dear Mother

Nothing out of the way to report. We haven't moved since I last wrote you.

As I think I've written before, I expect to go on R&R at the end of Oct or early Nov. I think I'll leave Korea on or about April 20th.

I still have my cold, but it's a little better than before.

You and Dad take care of yourselves and don't work too hard.

Love & Kisses  
Gene

18 Sept 1953

Dear Mother;

Here I am once more. We will soon move back to where we were before we came to where we are, if you follow me.

I got a letter from you yesterday saying that Dad was wearing elevator shoes. When I come home, I'm going to say, my, my, Dad, how you've grown!

At the pictures last night I saw Split Second and a Bugs Bunny cartoon with the little fellow with the red beard (Yosemite Sam, in case you recognize the name) as a diehard confederate still defending the Mason-Dixon line. Very good, too.

Love  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

Sept 26 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

This is just a note to serve as an excuse for sending pictures. Theses were all taken during the war, some on Rotation Hill and some behind Arsenal and Erie.

All is well here.

Love  
Gene

(Rotation Hill was so called because it was thought safe from attack.)

27 Sept 1953

Dear Mother,

Saw a good picture last night, and I'd like to tell you about it. You should see it if you get a chance, of course; but if you don't, I will at least have the fun of telling you about it.

The name of the darn thing is The Siren of Baghdad. Wait a minute, it's not what you think. It's a take-off on the typical Hollywood near-eastern extravaganza, and it doesn't have a star in it, which doesn't hurt it a bit.

The pictures opens upon a travelling magician and his troop who are on their way to play a split week in Basra. The magician makes good use of a box into which girls disappear to carry on a clandestine love affair with one of his assistants under the jealous nose of the other. In the course of this he does a pretty good take-off on the Continental, of Tee Vee fame. "Don't be afraid, darling, it's only a man's tent." He is really hilarious lighting two waterpipes at once, like the Continental does cigarettes. The magician's girls are stolen by bandits, and the rest of the picture is concerned with his efforts to rescue them from a harem-happy sultan. He is eventually reduced to transforming his assistant into a girl, a gravel-voiced peroxide blonde. The climax of the picture comes as the magician duels the sultan's evil vizier, while his stooge, once more male, duels the sultan, pausing to observe the boss and imitate his actions. For example, the magician bounds, Errol-Flynn like, onto a table. The stooge and sultan pause while the stooge clambers laboriously atop another, then resume fighting.

All in all, it's the best low-budget I've seen in a long time.

All is well here; don't work too hard.

Gene

(Such films were made, frequently in a week or less, with budgets of fifty or a hundred thousand dollars. They played in drive-ins or as the lower half of double features, were called B pictures, and were often surprisingly good. Science fiction fans may be familiar with The Incredible Shrinking Man, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, and I Married a Monster from Outer Space.)

30 Sept. 1953

Dear Mother,

I want to acknowledge receipt of the picture of you and Dad in the cafe, and of a package containing an SF mag. and a cartoon book. Thanks for everything. I'll stop worrying about you and Dad now, you both look better now than you did when I left. By the way, how do you like the pictures I've been sending you? I don't think I've had one taken in Korea that looks like me. Do you? In this letter you'll find negatives of the boys here in the office; I didn't take them, but I talked Pickens, who did, out of the negatives. Along with these you'll find two pictures of mine that probably won't have much interest for you since there is no one you know in them, but they do show the tallest Korean I have ever seen. I hope you are keeping these snaps for me, I want to look at the whole bunch when I get home. I'll go through all of them and name all the names and bore you both to death.

LOVE,  
Gene

(I wish I could "name all the names" now. There are far too many whose names I have forgotten.)

\* \* \* \*

7 Oct 53

Dear Mother,

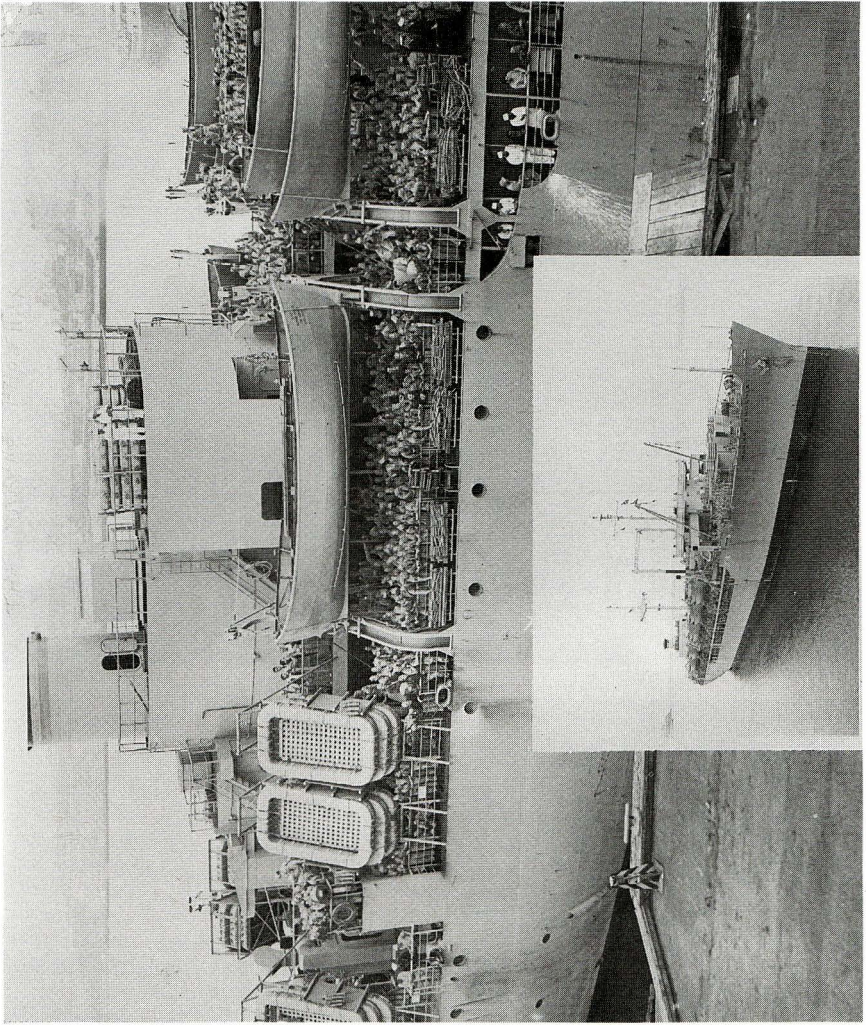
Since I have received four or five letters since I wrote you last, plus a package with candy, cookies, books, and cigars, I thought it might be a good idea to drop you another line.

The picture of you and Dad in the cafe made you both look so good that I'll stop worrying about your working too hard.

About my duties as TI&E NCO. Each co. in the bn. has a TI&E NCO and an officer. The bn. has a TI&E Officer (Capt. Patrick) and an NCO (me). I am also PIO NCO (Public Information Office) -- assistant publicity man for the bn., in other words. (Capt. Patrick, too.)

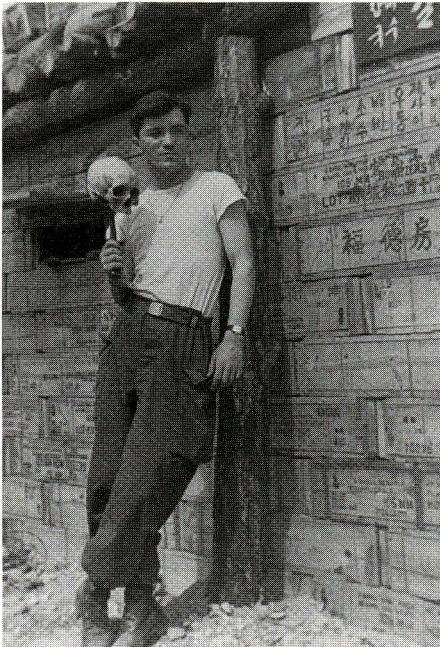
Love,  
Gene







II



The Home Team:  
Front- Barker, Joe Griggoli,  
unidentified  
Rear- unidentified, Brooks

Left: Bill Matthews

Prev. Page:  
The troopship Marine Phoenix



III



D-Handled Shovel Operator  
Wally Gleekman



IV

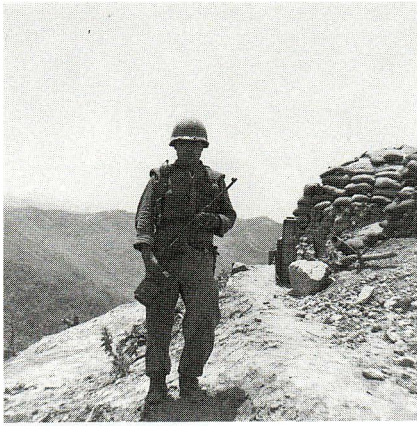






Above: The Boys In The Office  
 Front- Pickens, Howland, McClure  
 Rear- author, McDuffy, Haber

Preceding page:  
 Top- Sergeant Kirkwood's desk  
 Bottom- Ken Clough with his .45 calibre "grease gun"



Top Left: Sgt. Carrara  
On Arsenal Hill

Top Right: A floating stage  
at Inchon

Bottom Left: "Shorty"  
Hammond

Bottom Right: Cpl. Wallace  
& Pfc. Wolfe



VII



Above: It's Spring!  
K-92, a Katusa

Proceeding Page:

Top- Pickens and Gleeckman with representations  
of the Combat Infantry Badge and the Regimental Crest.

Bottom- Lieutenant Wilcox



VIII





Oct. 11, 1953

Dear Mother;

I'll start this in the usual way, by apologizing for not writing sooner. I have received the package containing nose drops and antihistamines. I'm over that cold now, but I'll probably get plenty more before the winter is over. I always feel like a crumb requesting things, but could you send me some stuff? I'd like two of those pocket handwarmers and some Scotch Tape, some black grease pencils, and some black india ink, that kind that will write on plastics and acetate if you can get it, the ordinary kind if you can't. Send these things in air-mail packages if you can, please.

We are up on the Kansas line again now; things aren't so tough, but it gets colder every day.

They caught three saboteurs here day-before-yesterday, a woman and two men, all over seventy. The woman was wearing a belt of dynamite sticks.

I hear that there is some trouble in Trieste. I pray to God it isn't the start of another war. Sgt. Howland is worried sick; his wife, a Triestine, lives there.

McDuffy, who transferred out of there during the war because it was so chicken and he couldn't save any money, is happy as a pig in high mud.

Don't work, and don't worry.

Love,  
Gene

14 Oct 1953

Dear Mother;

Not too long ago I received a letter from you full of gripes and martyred groans because "you don't know how I live." To cure your malady I'll send you an average day's schedule.

5:45 Get up. (Brrr! Colder than a witch's kiss.)  
 6:00 Reveille. (Brrr! Still cold.)  
 6:15 Chop Chow. (Scrambled eggs, coffee, cold toast, no butter, and puffed wheat again.)  
 6:45 Shave. (Ouch!)  
 7:00 Work. (Draw maps, charts, overlays.)  
 10:00 Coffee Call. (Ahhh!)  
 10:15 Work. (I have an asst. now, did I tell you?)  
 12:00 Chow. (Franks, sauerkraut, dried potatoes, creamed peas, canned pears, coffee.)  
 12:30 Work.  
 5:30 Chop Chop. (Liver, mashed potatoes, boiled carrots, slaw, ice cream, coffee.)  
 5:45 to 7:00 Work if necessary, if not, read, write letters, chew rag.  
 7:00 Movie. (Laurel & Hardy Meet the Son of Dracula, four-month-old newsreel, Caspar T.F.G. or Dinky. Freezing by the second reel.)  
 8:00 Projector breaks down.  
 8:20 Projector fixed, on with the show.  
 8:25 Projector breaks for good.  
 8:30 Go to bed, no stove, no lights, no candles, inside of sleeping bag like a shroud.  
 All clear now?

(No signature.)

16 Oct 1953

Dear Mother;

I have received two packages of goodies from you in the last week, and the boys here in the office have been twisting my li'l arm to get me to write their thanks. So thank you from M/Sgt. Howland, Cpl. McDuffie, Pfc. Pickens, Pfc. Haber, Pvt. Gorski, and Pfc. Wolfe, of course; not to mention Maj. Barrell, Capt. Patrick, and Lt. Wilcox. You have, I believe, pictures, or negatives anyway, of most of these people, the enlisted men anyway. Sgt. McClure, who appears in one of them, has gone where all good soldiers go: to San Francisco. And I believe Pvt. Gorski, my asst., is new to you, but the rest are all there. (Pictorially if not mentally. This d\_m typewriter has no close parenthesis key, so this will continue throughout the rest of this letter.

Big News! We got stoves yesterday. Maybe things are picking up around here. I made hot chocolate on the office stove last night, thanks to you. When a feller can sit in a real chair and drink hot chocolate and read by electric light, well, it is a heck of a war, that's all I can say. Don't feel sorry for me, Mother, I'm WALLOWING in luxury.

I have already read THE GOLDEN ASS, which you sent me, so I gave it to Lt. Wilcox, who happened to be around when I opened the package. (He is around when I open all my packages, come to think of it. What makes Lt.'s so lean and hungry?) (Close added with pen.) It's a very good book, did you read it before you sent it to me? I suppose it would be considered a little dirty today, because the characters shack up with each other without being driven half mad by inhibitions and repressions and neuroses and such. In a modern novel a man can't even sleep with his wife unless he is a bundle of nerves. The Ancients slept with other people's wives, and went away singing. We may not approve of their morals, but their mental health was so good that they had to take a dead man's brain out and beat it with a stick before they could bury him. I'm going to lobby for a return to ancient ways, with more aqueducts and less asylums. Maybe the gladiatorial games had something to do with it. We should reinstate them in place of baseball, then we could give a year's supply of free Band-aids to our synthetic heroes instead of Cadillacs. There would be more new faces -- that could be insured by a few all-star games -- and a man who lasted two seasons would be comparable to Satch Page. The umpires would be old ex-stars, and anyone

who wanted to "Kill the Ump." could come down and have a crack at it. A sportswriter who panned the Detroit Tigers, let us say, would be obliged to show what he could do against the tigers, real or Detroit, whichever he preferred.

On Ladies' Day the Houston Hussys would be pitted against lionesses, bitch wolves, and mad cow elephants. Provided they did not have an engagement with the Port Arthur Amazons, of course.

Enough of this fol-de-rol, have a nice Halloween, don't work too hard, don't take any wooden hwan, don't get robbed, or burglarized or mugged. Watch out for other women drivers, men drivers, child drivers, or drunken drivers. Above all, save your money. Remember, watch the .47¢ pennies and the 47¢ dollars will take care of themselves.

Love XXXX  
Gene

P.S. Tell Dad to put more cheese in the au gratin potatoes.

(Mother had sent an earlier copy of THE GOLDEN ASS during the war. John and I were reading it together when our platoon sergeant snatched it out of our hands and threw it into a garbage sump. When he got a good look at our expressions, he climbed down into the sump, retrieved the book, and returned it to us. By Apuleius, translated by Robert Graves, it concerns the adventures of a man who has been transformed into a donkey, and is one of the earliest fantasy novels.)



18 Oct 1953

Dear Mother;

Glad to hear from me again? I hope so. I am going on R&R tomorrow, unless something comes up. I will try to phone you from Japan, but if you do not receive the call by the time you get this letter, it will not come, so don't wait for it. I want to see what conditions and rates are before I make any definite promises. I am going to the city of Kokura, don't know what I'll do there, but I'm sure there will be some interesting things to see.

As I recall, you got an interesting letter from me not too long ago. I like to go off the deep end once in a while, and that book that you sent started me off, I'm afraid. By the way, did you read THE AVENGER before you sent it to me? WOW! Private eye kills man with broken bottle, eye's secretary is slain while awaiting eye in black negligee, eye is almost seduced by sixteen year old girl, later seduces girl's mother in a dark room under the impression that she is her own daughter. EVERY PAGE BURNING WITH PASSION!!! I don't know that I should lend it to some of the younger boys here, might warp their adolescent minds.

Haven't found much of interest in the news lately, except the two kidnap killers, who make one regret that there is no place for boiling oil or molten lead in our judicial code.

I've been reading LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI, by Mark Twain, which I picked up somewhere. Very good, but a bit dated. Twain seems younger than in anything else I have read, alternating between rapture and venom.

Be a good girl.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. Pickens read what I had written you about THE AVENGER and was shocked. Is Korea making me shameless?

(The old city of Kokura is now a part of the city Kitakyushu. It is at the northernmost point of the island of Kyushu.)

19 Oct 1953

Dear Mother;

This is just a note to go with the pictures I'm enclosing. Nothing new to report. You know Pickens and McClure, I think. Pickens doesn't always look that silly and McClure seldom smiled, that is to say, he smiled only for pictures. But otherwise they are pretty good likenesses. Pfc. Smiley Carruthers isn't quite as dumb as he looks, but almost. He and I got in a couple of tight places together in the old days, and out of them, too, thank God. In case you can't interpret his expression, that is his bashful or "Aw shucks," look. I don't have to tell you who the other fellow is, the sneer of high disdain identifies him.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

24 Oct 1953

Dear Mother:

I'm writing this from a hotel room in Kokura, Japan, where I am, as you have guessed by now, on R&R. I suppose that the best thing is to save you my observations on Japan so that I will have something to talk about when I get home. Suffice it to say that I'm well, and happy to be back in a civilized atmosphere even if it is not my native one. I'm enclosing a few pictures I took in Korea and had developed here. Hope you enjoy them and do not worry about your son.

Gene

25 Oct 1953

Dear Mother,

Here is another, and I hope longer letter than that I sent you yesterday; it should arrive (in Houston, Texas, my God!) at the same time as the other, since I have not yet had the opportunity to mail the first one yet.

As I wrote you, I am staying at a Japanese hotel, which means, of course, a hotel which is neither truly western nor in the pure Japanese tradition, but a blend of both with a few touches of Japanese mistakes about western customs added. My bed, for example, is hybrid, with touches of couch, western bed, Japanese bed, and knickknack cabinet. The head of the bed has shelves, a glass-doored cabinet, and a drawer. Very handy for magazines, cigarettes, ashtrays, etc. The toilets are pure Jap, the bowls being set flush with the floor so that one squats over them. Guests furnish their own paper, but the hotel furnishes foreigners with a kimono to lounge about in. (Never use a preposition to end a sentence with.)

The bath is Japanese and beats all for getting clean in. (See?) The cost of the hot water required (about 60 ft<sup>3</sup>) would be prohibitive in the States, but these poor primitives make no objections about heating it up for me every night over an open fire.

On the streets one sees every sort of vehicle, cars from America, France, England, Italy, and Belgium, as well as the native Jap makes, three-wheeled trucks with motorcycle engines, many motor scooters, bicycles, bicycle-type rickshaws, ox carts, and hand-drawn carts.

There are at least three mammoth dept. stores, and for a few hundred yen one may hire a street-corner wizard to cast spells, mix love potions, or cure all ills. You know, kiddo, I am constantly amazed at this crazy world, for all the hours I spent lying on our living-room couch I never dreamed I would see a wizard extracting tortoise blood with a hypodermic syringe for his potions.

American and Japanese food are both quite reasonable. I have eaten squid here. The fish market is really something, and not as odious as one might expect. The Japanese have learned to eat everything that grows in the sea, and it makes an American market look like the strictest of specialty stores. Japanese cigarettes, like Korean cigarettes, are strong, dry, and not to be endured for any length of time. (Both Japanese and Koreans prefer American cigarettes when they can get them, and every cab driver bums a smoke off you.)

A cab is slightly cheaper than a rickshaw, and a little faster, but one loses the "Terry and the Pirates" feeling. No one tips at all, period. These rickshaw boys really earn their money.

Prices here would be odd indeed to one unprepared for them. One can buy a quart of excellent Japanese beer for the price of two Coca Colas. Good grades of beef (From Argentina, I think) are very cheap by US standards.

I bought a knife yesterday for 900 yen (\$2.50) which has a spoon, fork, knife blade, saw, 2 screwdrivers, metal file, corkscrew, leather punch, can and bottle opener, a blade whose purpose I simply cannot divine (Should I consult a wizard?), and a pair of scissors.

Odds 'n Ends: Japs drive on the left, as do the English. Almost no one walks. A man and a woman may not ride in the same rickshaw unless it is screened all around with canvas. Ever see a Buddhist priest riding a bicycle? The flag on a Japanese taxi is a real one of white silk about 1' by 2', and covered with characters.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

28 Oct 1953

Dear Mother,

Some time after you receive this letter. you will get four packages from me; I hope they will arrive in time for Christmas. If "they\*" leave the customs tags attached, as I suppose they will, there's no keeping the knowledge of the contents from you, but anyway don't open them until the appointed hour. One of the small ones contains a pipe I couldn't resist buying and reserving for my return, while the other item is a special gift for Dad. The rest of the stuff is for you both.

Hope you like it.

Love,  
Gene

\*Officialdom, of course.



Oct 31,

Dear Mother,

I've gotten two packages from you recently, one full of goodies and one containing hand-warmers, etc. Thank you, of course. The drafting stuff will be useful, especially the grease pencils.

You don't have to be a NCO to be TI&E NCO or PI NCO. As PI NCO my job is to get the bn. mentioned in the Buffalo, the Bayonet, and Stars and Stripes.

Hope you like the snaps.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

3 Nov 1953

Dear Mother,

Sorry for the long silence. Have I thanked you for the hand-warmers? If not, thank you now. Arregoto, shay shay, como semi da. (Boy, am I ever a linguist! Those were Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, in case you did not recognize them, not being an old oriental traveller like me.) You can dern near fry an egg on those warmers when they get going good. I bum lighter fluid for them. I've been putting them in the foot of my sleeping bag at night; you should try it sometime.

I got three letters from you today, but you asked no questions that I can think of now, so I can't give any answers.

I don't think that the pictures require any explanation; no one can walk past that desk of Sgt. Kirkwood's without stopping. The picture of me was taken outside the tent in which I am now sleeping.

Haven't had time to read any books outside the SF mags you sent me, and I know you haven't read those, so I can't discuss them with you.

"We" found a bunch of Koreans hidden up in the hills, with little planted fields and everything. The colonel (Col. Harris) has given them 48 hours to move out, then we will burn the village.

They found a pair of prostitutes in a cave near there. Real pigs. You can tell winter is coming; the Korean women are all sweater girls now, GI sweaters, of course. The Korean police won't do anything to the prostitutes (it's not a crime in Korea) and we can't punish civilians, of course, so we just take 'em out in the boondocks and dump 'em, and hope they starve.

This system makes it possible for us to pinch the same ones over and over so that we get to be real good friends.

Love,  
Gene

(It should be noted that over a third of Korea's housing was destroyed by the war. Seoul, the capital, fell to the North Korean People's Army on June 28, 1950. It was retaken by the U.S. First Marine Division on September 26th; but before pulling out, the NKPA executed thousands of Korean soldiers, policemen, and government workers.

(Seoul fell a second time, to the Chinese, on January 4, 1951. It was retaken for the second time on March 18th. Military historians speak of the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Battles of Seoul.)

6 Nov 1953

Dear Mother;

Couldn't help writing this letter, since I've owed you one for so long, though I've really got nothing to say.

You asked for suggestions for packages in your last letter, at the risk of seeming avaricious I'll make a couple. Firstly, vitamins (I should have written for these before, I'm completely out), secondly, cocoa.

I don't know if I can cook those tortillas or not; if they require frying, I can't. About all I can do here is to heat up a can or a pan of water.

We've only had one newsworthy event here. A jet plane exploded in the air and crashed (the remains, anyway) into a hill some of the boys were fortifying. Killed one (besides the pilot) and injured six others.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. Rereading, I suppose I should explain that the plane was pulling out of a dive when it exploded and was very near the hill.

P.S.S. Weather cold but clear, no snow.

9 Nov

Dear Mother;

I have just gotten your letter, that is to say, the letter you wrote after receiving the letter I wrote from Japan. Glad to get it, too. I did not say anything else about the furniture in my room because it was strictly western in style and did not require any explanation.

I know you must be mad all the time because I write so infrequently, but darn it, there is just nothing to write about. I sit down with a blank sheet of paper before me and a half hour later it is still blank. Capt. Patrick is gone now, and we have a new S-3, Capt. Gallina. He is a pretty good officer; we have been lucky so far.

Well, I can always talk about the weather; it is still very cold, but there had been no snow or rain. Lt. Wilcox shot two pheasants yesterday, and is as proud as a peacock himself. This is the native land of the ringneck pheasant, you know.

Speaking of guns and shooting, Cpl. Wallace has converted a Very pistol to fire burp-gun shells by fitting a sawed-off burp-gun barrel inside the regular barrel; you should see it. Yes, I know you don't know what a Very pistol is, but I am going to make you look it up.

By the way, this whole letter was written in almost total darkness. How did I do?

Love,  
Gene

(We shot pheasants at every opportunity, and raged against the Korean farmers who put out poisoned rice for them; our company cooks would prepare a pheasant for half the meat, which was delicious. A Very pistol is a flare pistol.)



Nov. 20 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

Yesterday I got your letter with the enclosed questionnaire. I hate to tell you this, but I can't answer any of the questions. I will be coming home, or at least leaving Korea, about the middle of April. That could vary as much as ten days. Some ships take ten or eleven days to make the trip, others take eighteen. When I land in the States is anyone's guess. I will spend three or four days in a reception center, then get a thirty-day leave.

We had a little disaster here last night. Capt. Gallena, who replaced Capt. Patrick as S-3, has been prospecting in the hills where we are working, and is always making tests on his findings. Last night Gleekman, who was helping him, set a bottle of  $H_2SO_4$  on the stove. It broke, of course, filling the tent with acid fumes. We moved off smartly. We have two stoves in the office tent now, but one of them never works for long. It has a punctured float, and some other mysterious malady Pickens and I have been unable to fathom. It is burning now, thanks to our efforts, but I don't know how long that will last. I just have not got any confidence in the darn thing.

We have a gasoline lantern to use when the generator is off now. It sure beats candles. We had another one a while back, but Gorski broke it almost at once. One good thing has come out of this war anyway: when I come back home, I am going to know a heck of a lot about camping equipment. And can openers.

I have not been getting much mail lately, but I know that is due to the Xmas rush. Don't worry your pretty head about an Xmas present for old Watashi. You have sent me enough stuff since I have been here to fill anyone's stocking.

Don't work too hard on that room of mine. And don't worry about the Aggies; we thrive on defeat.

Love,  
Gene

27 Nov 1953

Dear Mother;

I'm afraid that there is not much to write about around. Just the usual things happening. Capt. Gallena and Wally Gleekman are still prospecting for whatever minerals take their fancies at the moment. Lt. Wilcox has returned from R&R and is hunting pheasant again. Some others are hunting wild boar with M-1s and carbines. No luck there yet. The weather was much warmer than it was a few days ago. You would never think that we have had our first snow.

Some of the men in the office here will be rotating pretty soon; others will not leave until well after I do. Did you know that Capt. Gallena has fourteen months yet to do? More than my entire term. Of course he was training a New York National Guard outfit during the war.

The generator has been broken, so we have had no movies lately. Do you realize that I have never seen a 3D or wide-screen show? A Colliers I latched onto has a big write-up on a comic named Red Buttons whom I have never seen, or even heard of before I got this issue. I'm getting to feel like a real expatriate.

Carlo Virden and Jayne Gibson are married now. I got an invitation to their wedding addressed to me at Ft. Leonard Wood. I wrote Jayne a letter of congratulation and explanation. Don't know Carlo's address; he is a Lt. in the Air Force now.

That's all for now,  
Gene

(Charlton Ray "Carlo" Virden had been a close friend at Texas A&M; he died in a plane crash shortly after the honeymoon.)

Thanksgiving Day  
1953

Dear Mother;

I lay down my M-1 blunderbuss and fur-lined stovepipe hat today and take quill in hand to write you on this three hundred and thirtieth Thanksgiving Day since the first banquet of the first foreign nationality club.

How is things over there?

Over here is not so bad. The year's first snowfall has melted off the ground, and the weather is warm, considering. I am as healthy as is to be expected from a guy who smokes and drinks as much coffee as he can wheedle out of the mess hall.

Enclosed you'll find a picture of me and a Korean ox. I'm the one smoking the pipe.

Love,  
Gene

(I quit in 1962.)

\* \* \* \*

Nov 28 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

No real reason for writing, I just wanted to show off this regimental stationery and send "you all" (yaw! ya'll? you'll?) (you and Dad) the enclosed pictures.

The only thing that happened around here that I know of was that Grigoli, Riccio, and Poratta washed a large, fuzzy, fussy puppy named Butterball. Did you ever hear three Italian boys from Brooklyn wash a dog?

Grigoli: Ya tink da watta's cool enough, Ricco, huh?

Riccio: Naaa! Ya scald him.

Grigoli: It's cool now. See? (Sprinkles a few drops on puppy.) See? Ya see? Cool!

Riccio: Ya wanta boin him, huh? Okay, so boin him, ya dumb dog-boiner. I don't give a dirty d\_.

Poratta: Put him in, Joe, gowan, put the little son of a b\_ in da can. It won't hoit him.

Grigoli: I'll wash him outside. (Splashes water on puppy.) Come here! Come here, ya little b\_! Catch him, Pete!

Poratta: I got him. Put him in da can, Joe.  
 Grigoli: I do'n' wanna put him in da can. He'll boin. I should boin my own dog? I'll put him in ta rinz him.  
 Poratta: What's dat stuff ya puttin' on him?  
 Grigoli: Shampoo. (Looks at label.) Blake's shampoo for fine hair.  
 Riccio: Shampoo! Ha! Ya'll have da cleanest fleas in da business. Ya oughta get dog soap.  
 Grigoli: Dog soap I should get, yet. I walk into da PX an' say "dog soap." Ya tink I'm nuts? I should get a Section Eight yet, huh?  
 Poratta: Put him inna can now, Joe.  
 Grigoli: Yeah, I tink I will, he's-a soaped up now, anyways. In ya go, Butterball.  
 Poratta: Da tail! Watcha tail! Ohmygod!  
 Riccio: Ya almos' bust da tail off, ya dumb slob! Ya tink he gotta elbow jernt in his tail? Huh?  
 Grigoli: I put him in again. Help me, Pete.  
 Poratta: I got him. Put him in, Joe. Hey! Watcha leg! Oh! Oh, Jesus! Ya cut my hand onna can, ya dumb bum! Oh, Christ!  
 Grigoli: Watch out! Ya gettin' blood onna dog. I just wash him an' he looks like a butcher.

Love,  
 Gene

(A Section Eight is a discharge due to mental instability.)



Nov 30 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

I have been staring at this darn piece of white paper for fifteen minutes now and have come up with 1 (one) 1 topic for this letter, so I guess it is all you'll get. It is simultaneously sad and comic, if you like your humor morbid. Do you know the quotation which goes, as I recall, "Each man's life, viewed in its larger aspects, is a tragedy. But reduced to its minutiae it becomes a comedy, and has little dignity."

A boy in the 3rd Bn. of this regt. was killed yesterday. Some men set a charge (to blast a hole in the rock deeper for a bunker position) and ran, yelling, "Fire in the hole!" (This is the customary cry to warn of demolition.) One of them must have yelled after he passed the boy, because the boy ran and jumped right in the hole with the TNT. There is no let-down ending to this. The charge did go off, and it blew him higher than a Cabot's nose.

But it would have been funny in a movie, if the boy was a character you didn't like. I didn't know him; maybe he deserved it; a good many of us do.

That is about all, except that I want to ask you to put some more black ink in your next package. Please.

Love,  
Gene

PS We moved into winter quarters Dec 1.

Nov. 30 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

I'm writing this one to acknowledge the receipt of your package, the one containing the Pogo comic and the crackers, etc. I can't tell you now the condition of the stuff, since I have not opened it yet -- the individual boxes, I mean. The chocolate-chip cookies came through in pretty good shape.

I'm writing this at about eight o'clock at night, and all the boys are in here chewing the fat, so look our for errors. There is a movie on now, but i never heard of it, so I did not feel like facing the cold. Our shows are out of doors, you know.

Gorski is sounding off on the subject of health, as usual. He is a country boy, from Madaryville, Ill., and he is always talking about how eating melon seeds will make your blook run back wards. (You know, Mother, this machine does not spell so good.)

Most of the boys are gone now. Only Gleekman and Sarge and I left. Gleekman, in case you didn't know, is the guy who teaches out little school. It is for those men whose educational level is below fourth grade. He has a Masters in Education, so of course they made him an ammo bearer until some one dug him up to teach this school.

All well here, thanks again for the package, you're a swell mother.

Love,  
Gene

(I now live in Illinois, but I have never been able to locate Madaryville. It's quite possible Gorski was making it up; that would have been just like him.)

Dec 2 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

Well, here I is again. Wally Balloo, your private Far Eastern correspondent, whose Asia News Letter brings the smells of the Orient right into your home.

According to the scoop I get from your latest batch of missives, three of which arrived today, A&M is getting more play in the Texas press than the water faucet at a WTCU convention. Some writer on one of the Houston papers (the Press?) seems to think the world of us. About time. I suppose that by now you know the result of the Turkey Day game. I don't. I'm sure that you will send me the clippings, though.

Will Pogo get out from under all that potato salad?  
(They keep it in a bucket?)

Will April M. rescue Tyrone S.?

Will Honest Abe Yokum escape the clutches of Marilyn Monster? (Man, get that real cool, real crazy name! No wonder she's such a nervous mixed-up kid.)

Will the Jedge ever succeed in whompin' up a jury?

WAIT FOR MOTHER'S NEXT LETTER, WHEN ALL IS REVEALED!!!

No news at this end, but no news is good news for us. The generator is fixed and it is not as cold as one might expect. I am well, if not quite as happy as the law allows. Say hello to Mrs. G. and all the gang.

Love,  
Gene

(Mrs. G. was Mrs. Gennuso, a cheerful eccentric lady of deceptively spinsterish appearance who managed my father's cafe in his absence.)

Dec 3 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

Just writing this one to show you that I can send clippings, too. (See enclosed.)

Everything is just peachy here. We move "mosh scosh," and I have no idea where I will put all my darn junk. I have been given a huge (but huge) parka which takes up a whole bag to itself, almost. It isn't cold enough to wear it yet, by the way.

In a way I'm lucky, though. I have only one pair of boots and no thermo boots to wear. By the way, in case you are hearing about how soft the troops here in Korea have it now that the fighting has stopped, I have not had a bath since Oct. 27. That was in Japan when I was on R&R. Of course I wash myself with a cloth and a pan of hot water now and then.

Smellily yours,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

Dec 3 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

Well, Kiddo, (remember when I always called you that?) we have finally made that move that I have been talking about for so long; and it rained all day. We have tent frames and wooden floors in this area, but we are bivouaced in a sea of mud and we are very close to Regt. HQ, so that they can, and no doubt will, harass us all the time. Mixed blessings, you might say. Personally I would have preferred to stay on the Kansas Line. It was getting to be home. We stayed there longer than we have stayed in any other place since I have been here. (Korea)

The move was a terrific SNAFU, as might have been expected. The bunch here assembled the diesel stove all wrong and then fiddled with it for an hour before they would let me at it. It is amazing how little untrained people know about hydraulics, or for that matter about the simple mechanics of a liquid-fuel stove.



By the way, we opened that blue box of cookies that you sent me. They were really scrumptious, take it from an old cookie fighter, keed.

Our mess hall was left with the detail up at the Kansas Line, so I am eating with D Co. The food is very good, but we must eat outside, and I declare I don't know what I am going to do when it gets real cold again.

Love,  
Gene

(When we had to carry cans of diesel oil and water to the outposts during the war, I discovered that most soldiers thought that the oil was heavier, I suppose because it was thicker. I nobly volunteered to carry a can of oil every day, which impressed them.)

\* \* \* \*

Dec 4 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

This is really a quicky, because I have very little time to write. I just wanted to tell you that I got the package of vitamins and SF. Both were very welcome, thank you ever so much. I opened, and ate, the package of chocolates yesterday. A rare treat in this neck of the woods, you may be sure.

Thanks for everything, have a white Xmas.

Love,  
Gene

Dec 6, 1953

Dear Mother,

This will be just a note, I'm afraid. I haven't got much time, and I am going to have a heck of a time thinking of anything to write about.

You'll be glad to hear that I got a bath today; now if I can just get a change of underwear I'll be a happy man. You have to climb a hill and go through an abandoned Korean cemetery to get to the shower; I'd take some pictures if the weather would ever clear up. It is cold and cloudy, but no snow. The ground stays frozen all day long.

Still reading THE TALL DOLORES. Did you read it? It has a rhyme clue so simple a schoolchild could solve it, but all the sherlocks go around scratching their "heads" (sic).

My very best to you, Dad, Lou, et al. (Don't forget Mrs. G.) Wish I could get back to the little white house on Vassar St. and see all the improvements, but please watch your health. Both you and Dad work too hard. Don't you want to be a grandmama? Thanks for being so nice to Lou, but don't let him put you out.

Your loving son,  
Gene

(All four of my children were born before my mother died.)

Dec 6 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

Here I am again, goofing off from a considerable amount of work to write to you. We are building a door on the tent and making other improvements. Oh, well, I never was much of an improver anyway. I'm generally pretty well satisfied if things just don't get any WORSE.

It is a bit warmer today than it has been recently. Very welcome, too. Where we are situated here, the sun goes down behind a peak; consequently, sunset is at about three o'clock.

Things are really tough around here. While I am trying to write this letter, Gleekman is reading the amusement section of a month old El Paso paper. While I am laboring to think of nice things to say to you, he is going, "3D GIRLS, NO GLASSES needed!!!! West Drive-In -- Fury of the Pecos, with JOHN WAYNE. THREE FEATURES FOR 75¢." Honestly, how am I ever to turn out my usual page of high ideals and educational information?

We have a new Bn. Commander, by the way, Maj. Ford. Pickens told me yesterday that he did not think that the Major liked him. "He sneers at me," says Pickens. I told Pickens that the Major sneered at everyone else that way, too. "Well, I don't think he likes anyone."

He reminds me of what someone said about the first Thanksgiving: "I'll bet that rockbound coast lost a lot of self-confidence when it saw how stern those Pilgrims were."

Lt. Wilcox just came in, which reminds me to tell you he just made First Lt. That is okay by me; he is a heck of a nice officer, which is more than I can say by some people.

Grigoli just brought out his copy of The New York Mirror, which started an argument over yellow journalism between him and Gleekman. Grigoli is a bit handicapped because he isn't quite sure what it is.

Reading over this letter, I find it reads a bit like Lum and Abner, so tune in tomorrow and see what's happening on the little jot-'um-down store.

Love,  
Gene

(Lum and Abner was a radio sitcom laid in a country store.)

Dec. 6 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

That reminds me, Sgt. Pratt was looking at one of my letters yesterday; he said that "Dear Mother" was too formal; he says I should say "Hi Mom" or something of that sort. I don't think I'll change though. It would give you too much of a shock after all these years, I'm sure. (All these years means since 1949, I suppose.)

Nothing much doing around here today; our big event was the opening of that cheese you sent. We whittled a good chunk off it, although a little piece goes a long way on a soda cracker.

I see that the "Big Three" are meeting at Bermuda. Hope they catch a lot of fish. Wish I was W.S. Churchill, only younger. It is so cold here that you can dip your finger in hot water, and it will freeze there before it dries. Hurts, too.

Speaking of Sgt. Pratt, as I was a bit ago, he is Plt. Sgt. of the I&R Platoon. He has to go out every day to keep the Koreans out of the training areas, and has taken to eating lunch at the native village. Go-hung and Kim-chee and such. (Kim-chee is a dish featuring pickled cabbage.) Think he is going native? He has been here almost a year.

Well, that is all for today. If you insist on more, read the envelope twice.

Love,  
Gene

(I had graduated from high school in 1949, and left home for Texas A&M that fall. Sgt. Pratt had the only Thompson submachine gun that I saw in Korea; there was another, but Pratt had that one too, and kept it as a source of spare parts.)



Dec 7 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

The time is really very short this morning, so forgive me if this is pretty short and a little obscure.

They have given me a terrific job to do and only forty-eight hours to do it in, so I have been working till eleven o'clock for the past two nights. Job due at five this afternoon.

I see by the papers that they are trying to cut the army's pass and leave time down to a par with the Civil Service. Ever see a swivel chair hit by a direct-fire weapon? Or, for that matter, did you ever see a civil servant like Sgt. Howland, who has been in the States for three of the last twelve years?

Boy, is it cold here! Everything is frozen but the gasoline, and we are looking for the drums to crack any minute.

Glad to hear that you have received three of my boxes. You should get two big ones and two small ones. I suppose you have by now.

Love,  
Gene

(At about this time, our battalion was so low on gasoline that the battalion commander ordered a raid on the division fuel dump. Sgt. Howland was told to lead it and permitted to name his raiding party; he choose Pickens, Haber, and me. We kicked off well after midnight, knowing that we might be shot by the sentries and would certainly be courtmartialed if we were caught. I doubt that any truck has ever been loaded with fifty-five gallon drums of gasoline faster -- or more quietly.)

Dec 8 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

I seem to find myself writing to you again. You know, I often wonder if you really like to get these darn fool letters all the time. When I read them over after I finish, I always find that they are just a hash of nonsense and typing errors. This one will prove no exception, I'll wager.

Holiday today. The ump-ti-umpth anniversary of the organization of the 7th Infantry Div. Truly a gala day. We are going to have a parade and a field meet down at Div. Hq. I am not going to go.

I have finished all three of the SF mags you sent me, and I am now reading THE TALL DOLORES. Did you read it? Has a girl 6'3" in it. You don't run into that very often, you know. In fact, I have not seen a dame over 5'9" in a heck of a long time. That is one of the penalties one pays for being a poor man's Terry and the Pirates. No Dragon Lady. Ah, the Orient, the sights, the smells, the little boys trying to steal your fountain pen. The next time I decide to see the East I'll head for New York.

Speaking of THE TALL DOLORES and the package that it came in, I am now preparing to make some of that cocoa you sent me. It is a nice big can, but I bet it will be just about gone by the time the next can arrives, if you mail the next can now. What you want to bet?

Well, that's about all for today. I am running out of paper, and you know that it is against my principles to write more than a page a day. CHIN UP, CHEST OUT, KEEP A STIFF UPPER LIP.

Love,  
Gene

Dec 10  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

The letter tonight is about Lt. Wilcox. I'm sure I've written you about him before, but the enclosed paper should show why "Davy" deserves special mention. The pistol he used was a .38 Colt revolver, by the way, not a service automatic.

I believe I wrote you a few days ago that the lieutenant got a promotion, and you can read in the paper that he got the Silver Star. He should rotate next month, and he plans to leave the army, finish college, and re-enter the army. I thought I had a picture of him to send you, but I guess I have already mailed it. The little dog in the picture got himself lost long ago.

Well, that is about all the news for tonight. It rained all day, snow in the hills. McDuffy is back from R&R, and Gorski left for R&R tonight. Haas is going on the same shipment, come to think of it. There was surely a long time between the time I went and his turn, since we came to the company on the same truck. Haas was pretty angry because he did not get to write the story of Lt. Wilcox.

Give my very best to everyone at the cafe.

Gene

(Lt. Wilcox had killed thirteen enemy soldiers on Porkchop, twelve with his pistol and the thirteenth -- who attacked him while he was reloading -- with a knife.)

Dec 12 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

I got a whole bunch of letters and Christmas cards and so on from you today. I will do my very best to dig up that negative that you requested, and if I succeed you should find it in this letter. One thing in one of the letters sort of confused me. You mentioned "Pandora's Box" sitting in one corner of the living room. Did one of my packages arrive? If so, which one? Describe it, please. I sent you four.

WEATHER REPORT. Very cold this morning, and it started to snow. Oh, boy!, thinks I, if the weather keeps up like it has been this &#x201c;O"x201d;& STUFF will be here in March. Then it turned warm and the rest of the day was more temperate than Shakespeare's girlfriend.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate,

Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

You know.

HUMAN INTEREST: Sgt. Ballonti, from the S-1 Section next door, is in hot water. He normally has only one fight with his wife, every six years. That is when he reenlists in the army for an "indefinite" or six-year hitch. Mrs. Ballonti is, or rather has been, under the impression that when you enlisted for six years you served six years, and that was all there was to it. Now she has learned the fatal truth, that at any time after three years he can get a discharge by refunding a portion of his enlistment bonus. Sgt. Ballonti is now faced with the alternatives of fighting with his wife for three years, or refunding his bonus, being discharged, and reenlisting for three years.

McDuffy is back from R&R today. He is a guy put in the army by marriage. Mother-in-law and brother-in-law trouble. Brother-in-law is now in the hospital, having been shot by a cop in self-defense.

Pfc. Gleekman and I put nut shells in Pvt. Gorski's sleeping bag today. I can hardly wait for nightfall.

I saw The Caddy with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis last night. Very, very good. I suppose it has long ago played the first-run houses in Houston, but if you have not yet seen it, I recommend that you do so at the first opportunity.

Well, that is about all the news that is fit to print. The food over at B Co. is LOUSY. My work is coming along okay. I have already mentioned the weather. My friends are all healthy, and as sane as they ever were, which is not saying much. We will probably move again pretty soon, but I do not know the exact date.

MERRY XMAS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT!!!!!!

Gene



12 Dec 1953

Dearest Mother,

Once again I must apologize for the brevity of a letter. As I told you, I've been working like a slave. Got through at 10 p.m. tonight, but that finishes the job. We are moving again tomorrow, back to Line Kansas, but in a new sector.

Got your letter today saying that the last package arrived. Restrain your curiosity. (Will this letter reach you Christmas Eve? That should be about right.) But don't think of not opening them; I'd be terribly disappointed.

Merry, merry Christmas,  
Mom, Dad.  
From your son,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

Dec. 12 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

Another day, another \$3 and some odd. Also another letter, eh what? Let me see now, what would be of interest to you today? Like dog fights? I saw a doozy today. We have more &\$'%(# dogs around here than we have frozen mud puddles, and believe you me, we have lots of those. Oh, yes, the stove caught on fire today; the burner leaked some diesel into the bottom, and it caught. I was not there at the time, but judging from the amount of sand the boys threw on it, it was quite a blaze. I fixed it this afternoon; I had to, before we all froze to death. I also made a step for the front of the tent. Aren't I the clever little devil, though?

I got fried chicken twice today by the clever little stratagem of eating supper with Baker Co. instead of with Dog Co. where I am supposed to eat. (Our Hq. kitchen is still on the Kansas Line with a detail we left there) When I get out of this man's army I am going to be so crooked that my right hand will steal out of my left pocket. (You may have noticed that my spelling is getting a bit obscure already.)

Love from your sneaky little son,  
Gene

Dec 18 - 1953  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother,

Well, here we are, at our new positions on the Kansas Line. Another move under my belt. Eye don't know how many Eye have made since Eye have been here inn Korea. You may bee interested to know that as a result of my Herculean labors in the past few days wee are entirely out of overlay paper. They had better get sum soon ore put me back too digging sumps. That is the way it goes, Eye suppose. Feast ore famine. Eye don't think two much of this area, because ewe have two walk half a mile too eat. Also it is almost impossible to get any drinking water. That is almost always true in this company. The next time you hear how well equipped the U.S. Army is, remember that Eye still have know winter footgear. What's more, amazingly enough, neither does my boss, Capt. Gallena.

Duffy is phoning write now two ask about the male, maybe Eye will get a letter ore a package from ewe. Lucky me.

It is colder than Billy-o up here. (Wee are way up in the mountains here.) It is so cold that ewe can put your hand write on a read hot stove and not burn yourself. Feels cold inn fact. One of our puppies stepped on an old bulldozer blade that the engineers had left lying around; it froze two his paw, and the poor thing had to drag it around all day until someone poured molten lead on it too melt him loose.

Good ie-goodie-gumdrop!! I did get a letter from you. It says that your got three letters from me, and a lot of other stuff.

Well, if you just got three, you won't really need this one.

Love,  
Gene

(In a card showing a Japanese snow scene. 1953)

Dear Mother and Dad;

I never thought, up until today, that I could get ahold of an Xmas card for you; but here it is. Nothing very Christmasy around here except for the Dec. pages on the calendars, but I can remember a lot of Christmases with you both. The bygone ones a long time ago. The bicycle I got, and the monopoly set, and the complete Omar Khayyam and Rudyard Kipling.

Well, until 1954, here is a real wish for (A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year) for you both from your only, loving son,

Gene

(The monopoly set and the bicycle are long gone, but I have Kipling and Khayyam still.)

20 Dec. (1953)

Dear Mother,

I hope you and Dad enjoyed a pleasant Christmas, and are looking forward to an equally pleasurable New Year's celebration.

Having little else to say, I will post you on recent events in my little corner of the army and closer. (After(ward) making a few modest requests.)

Lt. Wilcox, of whom I have written several times (last when he was awarded the Silver Star, if memory serves) will rotate soon, and is being replaced by Lt. Patton, formerly of the Wichita Falls police force; this will make three Texans in the office. Pfc. Haber will replace Cpl. McDuffy, who should be leaving soon also, and Pvt. Chalmers is going to get Haber's present job. If you care to look, I think you'll find several pictures of him among the ones I sent you.

There has been a great deal of trouble here with bandits (or guerrillas, if you prefer). They have made several bold raids for guns and clothing. Apprehending them is next to impossible because they vanish into the "loyal" and "law abiding" population when our soldiers, or those of the First ROK Division, appear. We did arrest four men of the 3rd Bn. I&R Platoon who were operating a brothel. That is to say, Lt. Wilcox arrested them.

The mail just came in; I got a huge package from you. I'll save your things until Christmas.

McDuffy's just gotten a telephone call saying that Clough is rejoining the company. No details as yet.

The native Korean grapevine has it that the Chinese will attack on Jan. 1. I wonder.

I have bought a pocket-book edition of I, Claudius at the PX. It occurs to me that the same company might decide to publish Claudius the God also; if you see it on the news stands, will you please send it to me? Do not send our cloth bound edition.

More requests (in case you have some spare time): send me some colored drafting inks and some black grease pencils, and some art gum. Please? You wouldn't want me to lose my job, would you? Huh?

Love,  
Gene

PS I did mean thermo boots (Mickey Mouse boots, Frankenstein boots).

(Pocket so dominated the paperback field at this time that all papaerbacks were frequently called pocket books.)



Christmas Day, 1953

Dear Mother,

Christmas in Korea sounds like the title of a short story. We are having a white Christmas at any rate; it started snowing before I got up this morning, at about five o'clock let us say, and it has continued, alternating with rain, ever since. It is not as cold as it has been, but the wetness makes it hurt more. Speaking of cold, if you ever again write me that it is cold in Houston, and then that you expect a temperature of thirty-five degrees tonight, I am going to quit writing these letters to you. Thirty-five indeed.

Every Christmas letter deserves a little bit of Christmas cheer, so I'll tell you that we are acting as hosts to a bunch of 1st and 2nd grade kids from the nearest villages. Cute as all get-out and beautifully behaved. Of course if we had them all the time we would spoil them rotten.

Clough, who is really back as reported, took a patrol out last night and arrested about twenty GIs in the whorehouses. He was bringing them in, in groups of threes and fours all night. (I was up until eleven-thirty or so waiting for Santa.)

This morning I opened your box, which I received several days ago. I want to thank you and Dad for everything. It all came through in good shape with the sole exception of the cigar box, which was broken, spilling the cigars, which fortunately escaped all injury. All the edibles sent will be put to good use. If I should prove incapable of utilizing all the goodies, already I have the sworn statements of numerous friends promising their complete cooperation in this matter.

Pfc. Haber just came in with the report that in his opinion this snow is here to stay. Pfc. Haber is considered a reliable source.

The reliable source listed above wants his typewriter back, soooo....

Love,  
Gene

P.S. (01' post Scripto, don't ya know.) (In pen.) I suppose you have opened my presents to your gracious selves by this time. Merry Christmas, and if you don't like them, just hop a plane for Kokura, Japan, and exchange 'em.

(Grigoli had organized the party for the children, collecting cookies from home and the like from all of us to give them. The mess sergeant, who had the belly for it and had contributed liberally from the mess stores, was Santa Claus; and Grigoli was Santa's six-foot-plus elf. Santa's sleigh was Grigoli's jeep.)

28 Dec. 1953

Dear Mother,

I'm afraid that my letters are getting further and further between these days. There really isn't much to say in this one, but I'm writing it anyway so that you'll know I'm not dead, and to acknowledge the receipt of a package from you. The one with the tamales and so on.

To fill this brief missive out, I'll tell you about the adventures of Pfc. Chalmers. He went out night before last to steal some stove parts we needed. He was apprehended in the act by the Co. Commander of A Co., from whom he was trying to get the parts. While the lieutenant was taking him up to see the adjutant, he made a break for freedom. The lieutenant hollered for the guards, but he stiff-armed two of them and ran into the movie theater. We are, as you may recall, new in this area, and Chalmers had never been in the theater before. Imagine his consternation when, instead of losing himself in the crowd as he had planned, he burst through the door and found himself directly in front of the screen, with the light of the projector right in his face.

Love,  
Gene

(When someone had stolen our blankets, Clough and I delegated Lee Won Cue to steal new ones for us. He was gone so long that we became quite worried, but returned at last staggering under a load of fifteen or twenty blankets. "Where the hell did you get those, Lee?" Clough demanded. "Oh, Able Company, slickee. Baker Company slickee. Charlie Company slickee. You look. Takee Number One.")

(We chose the best blankets and left the rest in front of A Company's Headquarters.)

## HOLIDAY SEASON

Dear Mother,

Here it is the holiday season, and I am full of glad tidings and merry-ments. Since I am quite sure that by the end of this letter I will have thought of something to ask for, I will preface my request with a bit of suitable carolling.

"We is NOT daily beggar men,  
As begs from door to DOOR.  
But we IS neighbor chIL-der-en,  
Which you IS seen before."

As I said, the holiday season is upon us, and illegal whiskey is floating everywhere about the camp, under the eyes of stone-blind and ever-noseless officers. Some of these are so blind that they will even take a drink when an enlisted man offers it to them, thinking that it is Pepsi-Cola, I suppose.

While I'm in a poetical mood, let me treat you to a bit of verse which I got out of one of those True magazines you sent me. I suppose you read them before you mailed them to me, but you may have missed it. In re Belle Gunnis:

"There's blood upon the Hoosier moon,  
For Belle was strong and full of Doom,  
And think of all those Norska men,  
Who'll never see St. Paul again."

H\*A\*P\*P\*Y\* \*N\*E\*W\* \*Y\*E\*A\*R\*  
Gene

(My mother dated this Dec. 28 - 1953; my guess is Dec. 31. The first song is from Pogo, of course. The Indiana murderess fed her victims to her pigs.)

11 Jan. 1954

Dear Mother;

I know that I have not written for days and days, but I have an excuse: I have been sick. Just a little bit, anyway. Intestinal flu, I think.

You can tell all your friends that I'm sorry, but I am no longer in Japan, and I can't get stuff like that any more. I'm talking about all those ivory pipes and such, of course.

I got your two little air-mail packages with the books and art gum and ink safely. Thanks just heaps. The ink and art gum are especially welcome. Want to send me some more stuff? If you don't, just ignore this, but if you do, send me some regular pen points such as little children use in school and some GI socks. I mean the heavy cushion sole socks. Size twelve. If you can't get these, send a similar civilian sock. Some needles, too, while I am thinking of things.

Nothing worth noting has happened here, just the same old routine. Besides, I have to save some stories for the time when I get home. Ah-h-h-h!

Love,  
Gene

(Those steel pen points were once sold in every 5-and-10; try find some now. For that matter, try to find a 5-and-10.)



17 Jan, 1954

Dear Mother;

Here I am once more. Not too much to report. McDuffy will be rotating any day now. They have gotten a new man, Sfc. Graveline, to take M/Sgt. Howland's place when he leaves in early February. Graveline went hunting today. And got a pheasant. Capt. Gallena plans to go out tomorrow after wild boar, using my rifle. I don't go out much because I'm afraid of old mines, and have foul luck when I do go. Renfro, one of the men in the I&R platoon, went after pheasant one time and was "treed" on a big boulder by a boar. I asked him why he did not shoot the boar with his shotgun. He said he did and the boar ate the pellets with cream and sugar. Boars aren't really much of a menace, though. Usually it is more a question of you finding the boar than of one finding you.

We had a Command Post Exercise, which we call a CPX, a few days ago. The idea of the darn thing is that a bunch of officers come down from Regt. and act, as an actor acts his part you might say, as higher, adjacent, and lower commanders. As the lower unit commanders, companies in this case, they report the enemies activities; and the officers of the Bn. HQ. must tell them what to do, request fire from Regimental HQ. and so forth.

Sounds easy, but they played every dirty trick in the book. For example when Capt. Gallena called one of them acting as the CO of the Columbian Bn., he pretended that his interpreter was AWOL and he could not understand English. They also sent in weather reports saying that there was a heavy fog in the valley in front of the MLR and that the wind was in our faces so that if we used White Phosphorus it would blow right back on us, which I think was downright unfair. They finished it off by having the Chinks use gas.

I played about five games of chess tonight with Clough and Chalmers and won them all, which made me feel pretty good. John has a set.

It is not too cold here. Snows every few days, then melts off. Not as bad as I expected, or as bad as it was earlier in the year. I am enclosing a bit of poetry in this letter that I thought you might enjoy.

In case I have been forgetful enough to have neglected mentioning that your enjoyment of my gifts makes me very happy, let me say it now. The trouble is that I don't answer your letters right after receiving them and forget a lot of things I ought to say. Don't tell me that is no excuse; I know that it is not.

I see that Marilyn Monroe is now Mrs. DiMaggio. What a honeymoon that will be!!!! How do you get to be a King of Baseball, Mummy? Our tent is papered with her pictures, thanks to Joe Grigoli.

That seems to be all for now.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. I give it eighteen months, top. Want to bet?

Jan 24 - 1954  
(dated by my mother)

Dear Mother;

Just a line to let you know I am not dead. I can't think of any cute occurrences to write of, so I'll tell you a story you might find suitable for your bridge club and let it go at that.

A man with a very large stomach of the "pot" type got on board a bus on which two ladies were riding, and one of them said to the other, "If that were on a woman, you'd think that she was in a family way."

The man, overhearing them, turned around in his seat and said, "Madame, it has been, and she is."

Well, if you don't like that, find your own jokes. No news to speak of, but no news is good news.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

27 Jan. 1954

Dear Mother;

Just got a letter from you (in which there was a very welcome picture of Dad posed with one of those U. of H. girls who ride at the Palace) saying that you have not heard from me in quite a spell. Come to think of it, I guess you haven't at that.

We had some sort of maneuver a couple of days ago. We all loaded up our full field packs and took off at dawn. The temperature was about two below, but we were all warmly dressed, so it was not unbearable.

We have a new man, Sgt. Graveline, who is to replace Sgt. Howland when he rotates. Sgt. Howland is on his second R&R.

McDuffy is due to rotate on 1 Feb. He is long past due. I figure I have about 80 more days, by the way. It seems as though I have been here an awfully long time. Most of the men here now have never been shot at.

I went to a display of enemy equipment a while back, and saw what they had been shooting with, including that great big mortar we dreaded most.

Take care of yourselves; I'll be back before too long.

Love, your son,  
Gene

("That great big mortar" was the 120 mm. It packed the punch of heavy artillery, but because it was a mortar it could be fired much faster and could drop its shells virtually straight down. Supposedly the U.S. had a mortar of similar size, the 4.2 inch (107 mm); but I do not remember seeing one in Korea.)

1 Feb. 1954

Dear Mother,

I don't have any real reason for writing this except that I want to send the enclosed PMO and pictures. Put the money from the PMO in my piggy bank or something.

I am sending two almost identical snaps and negatives so that you can choose between them for that panel. I'm sure you would not want to use them both. These were taken in the Castle Rock area. Unfortunately Castle Rock came out just behind my shoulder bone in both pictures.

McDuffy rotated this morning.

We will move again tomorrow, to the same area where these pictures were taken.

Love,  
Gene

(McDuffy, whom we always called Duffy, was one of the most amiable and obliging men I have ever known. He was a World War II vet, and outdid even Clough in passing inspections. He kept two complete sets of gear, the other for use. I can recall being angry at him only once, when he woke me from a sound sleep by trying to club a rat with an empty Scotch bottle; the rat was stealing his glasses.)

Feb. 6, 1954

Dear Mother;

There is not really much purpose to this letter; I am just writing to let you know that we made the expected move to Area Eight, and that I have been sent back here to the rear again to do some work. We made the move by helicopter. You may have read about it. I was not in any of the newsreel pictures, unless they got my back.

Enclosed you will find a couple of pictures and negatives taken at this same camp at a much earlier date. I rather fancy the one of me.

I think that I have sent you shots of this sign before; but in case I have not, I'll explain that the figure in the upper right hand corner of the shield is the original regimental insignia, adopted when the regiment was formed for the War of 1812. The stone wall shows that it was under the command of Stonewall Jackson during the Civil War. (The Seventeenth was originally a Tennessee outfit.) The sea lion was captured during the Spanish-American War, a sea lion being the crest of the Spanish commander of Manila, which the 17th helped to take. The Iron Cross is a memento of the First World War. Nothing was added during the Second World War, although the regiment fought in the Pacific. The Buffalo was acquired here in Korea. Buffalo is the code name of the unit. The Seventeenth Infantry Regiment has not been inside the continental United States since 1939. It has been in Korea for almost 3000 days (1945 - 1954).

Gene



& FEB. L(%\$

DEAR MOTHER:

I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY, BUT I THOUGHT THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO HEAR FROM ME. SO DETERMINED TO SAY IT GRACEFULLY, HERE I GO. NOTHING OF INTEREST HAS BEEN HAPPENING AROUND HERE. I"VE BEEN PLAYING A LOT OF CHESS AND WINNING ALL THE TIME. ONE OF THESE DAYS ONE OF THESE GUYS IS GOING TO BEAT ME AND THINK HE IS GETTING PRETTY GOOD. IF HE ONLY KNEW.

I am enclosing a pair of snaps. something about that first one fascinates me. i mean the one of gleek and i. the contrasts of expression and pose, i guess. the 2nd one i would like to have for a keepsake, but it has no such arresting quality. the central figure, in case you don8t know, is duffy, flanked by pickens and gleekman, both of whose names are legible on their shirts, as is mine in the first shot.

iamforcedtoadmitthatihavebeenplayingtypewriterwith youthroughoutthisentireletterifyouhavebotheredtodecipherthis finalmishmashyouhavefoundoutthatyoursonlovesyouaheckofalot despiteindicationstothethecontraryoccasionally

love  
ovel  
velo  
elov  
Gene

(My mother beat me at chess regularly, but she seems not to have decoded the date, dating this Feb. 9 - 1954.)

Feb. 17th (1954)

Dear Mother;

I just got a letter from you, and in the past few days I have gotten two packages, so it seems to be high time that I wrote you my thanks.

I would like to have you meet me in Frisco, but I do not yet know if it would be practical. I figure that I have 65 days left at this time.

Big doings. Marilyn Monroe has been through here, and I, little ol' humble me, saw her at a distance of no more than 10 yards. Did you ask how she looked? She looked cold.\* I would have liked to take a picture, but it was too dark. Her hair looked so bleached that it must be her own; a star would not have so bad a job.

Love,  
Gene

\* I don't mean this the way you think; she looked as though she needed a heavier coat.

(Marilyn's husband, Joe DiMaggio, was playing winter ball in Japan. She sat up on the back of the rear seat in an open jeep, and smiled and waved. We whistled and cheered, knowing it was expected of us; but I think that what all of us really wanted to say was, "Yes, you're very beautiful and very brave -- but this is worse than silly. For God's sake come inside and sit by the stove, and let me fix you a cup of hot coffee.")

(She was surrounded by generals and colonels who knew nothing about our little corner of the army. They took her to our mess hall, and on opening the door were confronted with an almost life-sized version of her famous nude pinup, pocked with shrapnel holes from the time our company headquarters had taken an incoming round. Friends who saw it said that those had to have been the most humbled and mortified generals and colonels in the history of war; but that picture might have been a blank wall as far as Marilyn was concerned.)

Feb 22, 1954

Dear Mother,

For once I have at least a couple of things to say.

Firstly, I think it would be advisable for you to write to Camp Stoneman to see if you can get answers to the following questions:

1. How long will it take me to process there?
2. If I get my leave time, can I travel with you or will I be required to take gov't transportation?
3. If I get a discharge, will I have to take gov't transport back to the place of my induction?

In the letter, explain my U.S. status, date of induction (August 13th) and time in Korea (since April 1st). I can't get any information on these things here.

By the way, you should soon be receiving an ivory chess set I picked up over here. Please notify me when it arrives.

Everything is going as well as is to be expected around here, provided you don't expect too much. Nevertheless I will not be sorry to leave. I figure I should have about 57 more days.

Love,  
Gene

(I had actually landed in Korea on April 4, 1953, as these letters make clear. Presumably April 1 was an "official" date, chosen to make accounting easier.)

28 Feb, 1954

Dear Mother,

Well, here I am again, at last. We have been having a lot of maneuvers lately, and I have had a pretty tough time of it. We had one Thursday and Friday of this week, and it rained all the time. A pretty miserable affair, you may well believe. The whole dern place is flooded now, bridges washing out every which way and so on. Yesterday I got caught on the other side of a flooded stream and had to walk a couple of miles upstream until I found a ford and a jeep that would take me through.

My rotation situation is all fouled up. I don't know that I should write you about it since it may make you feel worse, but I am going to anyway because I think you ought to know what to expect. In the first place, men have been rotating very rapidly recently because of the transfers from the 45th Division, and the list is well ahead of schedule; on the other hand, there is a new law coming up which tacks an extra month of Korea on some men's time. It goes into effect April 1st. I am right on the borderline, and I don't know whether it will affect me or not. So-o-o, because of the early rotation list I may leave at the end of March. If the law does not affect me, I may leave in early or middle April. If the law gets me, I may not leave until late May. Understand?

Well, that is about all from this side of the pond.

Love,  
Gene



March 1st 1954

Dear Mother,

I have been going through my photo file today, and I have dug out some miscellaneous pictures I would like to keep. None of these will be very interesting to you, I'm afraid, so just consider that I am sending them to you for safekeeping. Most of them were taken some time ago. Lt. Wilcox shot one bird on the ground and one in the air, by the way.

No news on rotation yet. Let's hope for the end of March, shall we?

Has my chess set come yet?

If I don't rotate in March, I may get another R&R.

I am going to send you a roll of undeveloped color film with a lot of pictures of me posed with captured enemy weapons as soon as I can scrounge up something to package it in. Color film is hard to get developed here. You can show them to me when I get home, huh?

We are going on another @!#!"XXX!!! maneuver tomorrow. Four \*\*@WW#?%! Days. I would write these words down, but they would set the paper on fire.

This darn place is like a prison, with no parole (and no flush toilets). I wish they would start shooting again -- makes the time fly.

Love,  
No. 2589073

(Lieutenant Wilcox had killed the pheasants with his .38 Special revolver.)

March 3, 1954

Dear Mother,

Bad news, Mama. I hate to tell you this, but I've been extended to the middle of May. I found this out yesterday afternoon, but I put off telling you, which I suppose I shouldn't have done. There is one redeeming feature, though: when I get back to the States I will be discharged immediately. That should be in early or middle June. Well, you can stop worrying about whether or not packages will reach me for a while. I'm just a short-timer now, still using Stateside razor blades.

I should get another R&R now. I figure that I deserve it. I've been in the Orient longer than Steve Canyon. Ever since I got here I have been planning the first meal I would eat at home. Now I have finally come to a decision. Sukiyaki. Pass the preserved squid, please.

Love,  
Gene

P.S. Maneuver postponed. Leave midnight tonight.

\* \* \* \*

March 8, 1954

Dear Mother;

I received your letter containing the clipping from Life today. I could not say for sure whether it is me or not. Doesn't show enough, or say where the picture was taken.

I am enclosing in this letter a few negatives I want to keep. You have the prints already.

Has my chess set come?

Have my color pictures come?

I have seventy-three days to go now.

By the way, I will be discharged when I get back to the states. Should be in June sometime.

Love,  
Gene

(The clipping from Life concerns Marilyn Monroe's USO tour, and mentions the picture in our mess hall.)

March 15, 1954

Dear Mother;

Knowing what a poor correspondent I am, you will not be surprised to learn that my pen has been forced to paper today by an almost irresistible combination of circumstances, i.e.:

1. Today I received two packages from you. One medium-sized one containing five books, and one large one including books, cocoa (how thoughtful, I was just running out), cookies, nuts, and marshmallows. I hereby acknowledge receipt of both boxes with sincere thanks.
2. I got a bunch of pictures developed, some of which I will include in this letter.
3. I got my sweaty, publicity-loving little mitts on this article (also enclosed).

I am healthy, happy, and hoping to go home.  
Weather is windy but warmer.

My erstwhile assistant Gorski has been fired by Capt. G. -- insubordination towards Pickens, now acting operations sergeant.

Tell Dad not to shoot anyone until I get home, I want to watch. Hope you feel better.

Love,  
Gene

(I no longer know what the article was, unfortunately.)

\* \* \* \*

March 24, 1954

Dear Mother;

This letter is to tell you that, contrary to rumor, I am not dead.

We have moved again; I am now very near the area I was in at the end of the war. Of course we are not quite so far north, because our old positions are now in the Demilitarized Zone. To make a long story short, we are a little behind Rotation Hill; Yoke, Uncle, and the Alligator Jaws are straight ahead. Alligator Ridge is to our right, and T-bone, Arsenal, Erie, and Chink 200 are on our left.

News Briefs:

Clough has rotated.

A Co. mess hall burned down. \$8000.

Well, that is about all; thanks for the letters and packages.

Love,  
Gene

(The mess hall was a Quanset Hut; its corrugated steel glowed red hot before it collapsed.

(I have never seen Clough again.)

28 March 1954

Dear Mother;

Well, here I am again. You know, I think that the trouble with these letters I write is that I am always trying to think of something to say. If I just were to blather on in my usual way I could write pages and pages of stuff. We have a bunch of new guys in the section now. Including a new assistant for me, boy name of Holman.

I'm sending you some pictures in this letter, just like I usually do. One of them is a view of Camp Hovey showing A Co. mess about two days prior to its burning to the ground, the result of an exploding gasoline stove. Another is a candid portrait of jovial Sfc. Kirkwood of Hq. Co. Supply. A very nice old soul. The very grim looking captain is Joe A. Gallena, my boss. The insolent looking chap with CIB and cigarette is me.

Guess that finishes the pictures.

Today's Sunday; I got three fried eggs for breakfast, an accomplishment that has permeated my day with a rosy glow, up to the time of writing at any rate.

I can't think of anything else to say, so I suppose that is about it.

Love,  
Gene

(CIB -- the Combat Infantry Badge)

\* \* \* \*

March 31, 1954

Dear Mother;

I'm afraid I have nothing much to say today, but I have nothing to do either, so I might as well scribble this out to you as do anything else. I got a little nap this morning (since I was CQ last night) and had what I really believe was the most vivid dream of my life. It would really be impossible for me to describe to you the degree of conviction it carried. (At this point I was going to tell you the details of the dream, but they are pretty dull. It was the ring of truth it had which was startling.)

Today is payday. I hope to collect some debts owed me.

By the way, buy me the desk set for my birthday. I am afraid that anything you sent from the States would come too late to do much good. Best of luck with the painting and varnishing.

Love,  
Gene

(I have always been a frequent and vivid dreamer, and have dreamed two short stories, "To the Dark Tower Came" and "Kevin Malone.")



Monday, April 12 (1954)

Dear Mother,

Right now it is 2:00 a.m., and I am on C.Q., so there is no reason why I should not make this a nice long letter provided I do not run out of material for discussion or of ink.

The mail yesterday brought no letter from you, but the day before there were two, one of them telling how Dad received what shall, in the future I'm sure, be referred to as The Forty Dollar Tip. Besides the simple cheering note (contributions to the family exchequer are always welcomed on this side of the great water, you may be sure) the event brings the comforting philosophical thought that perhaps money is not always fated to go to the pockets of the wrong persons after all. Were I a millionaire able to award \$40 tips on whim, I should not do so, you may be sure. I would award 5¢ tips and buy \$39.95 worth of AT&T, after which it would drop like a rock, no doubt. Furthermore, I would ride about in an ultra ostentatious gold-plated Rolls, marry every star and starlet MGM's got, and in general carry on in such a way as to make Li'l Orphan Annie and the Republican Party weep for shame.

As I think I told you, it's late and I am up because I am in Charge of Quarters. There is a wild, wild wind blowing, and as the poet says, "A wilder never blew." Furthermore, it is raining like Billy-o. I say "Billy-o" because I have need of exercising some of the milder epithets after their long confinement, before I rotate. My Korean-bred ones would feel lost in the States, having absorbed the roughness and ruggedness of these hills, which the press tells me are "bitter and eroded." (I would not know, never having tasted one.) In short, they would peel paint, and in effete America I intend to reserve them for major crises only, such as stuck ice-cube trays, collapsible thumb tacks, et cetera, etc.

I know what you are thinking, dearest of dear, dear ladies. You are thinking that over here I would say, "Raining like hell." Well, rest happy in your sweet innocence, kid. You don't even know these words, or if you do I am going to hit Dad when I come home -- hit him up for about twenty dollars hush money that is, or I'll tell the neighbors.

As I was saying, it is raining something just awful, and this damn Quonset leaks; I've got a big #10 can sitting at my elbow, and it splashes every 13 seconds and in between it tinkles and if it doesn't shut up and quit interrupting my train of thought moush cough I'm gonna throw it across the room, no doubt hitting Lt. Benedict (the new adjutant, tonight's duty officer, and a dirty knave if ever there was one) and then I'll return a Pvt. E-1 (a buck private) instead of a cpl. and you'll be eternally disgraced.

I shall now give you the lowdown on happenings over here. (Flourish, trumpets, hautboys and hoboos.)

The News Behind the News Behind the News behind the news....

My ex assistant Pvt. Gorski alias Raymond Devilero Valentine, alias Sidney Bartell is up for courtmartial. He lost the job waiting on table at the officer's mess that he got after being separated from the 3 Section (battalion operations), and has been malingering, I'm told. I know he tried to go on sick call a few days ago, and the 1st Sgt. chased him away from the Aid Station with a pistol belt. (A distance of about 500 yds.) The quickest cure in medical history.

The 1st Sgt. got drunk and shot up the place with his .45 a few nights ago.

The mess sgt. and Cpl. C. got into a fight. Score: sgt.'s nose broken, cpl.'s rib the same. The company put in the reports that they fell down a hill (in each other's arms presumably) and that it was in the line of duty. But the Doc had put on his report that they were both intoxicated, so there was some quick changing done. The mess sergeant is in a morose mood recently because his wife just had a baby and he hasn't been home in over a year. (Don't ask how I know these things. I just do, that's all.) Some fellahs let things like this hit them hard. He's the emotional type anyway.

Honestly, after my experience over here, if I ever get married I'm going to divorce my wife whenever I leave on a long trip and save myself some trouble. Whenever you see a guy over here telling how sweet and faithful his wife is, either she is tied down with five kids or he hasn't been here over four months. Considering the unpassionate nature of most women, they seem willing to wreck a lot of trust just to have someone take them dancing. You no doubt have heard of the famous letter:

Dear John,

I just couldn't wait for  
you any longer, so I married  
your father.

Love,

Mother

Our puppy Snooper got his paw crushed under a drag a few days back. The medico put a splint on it, and for a while he was a regular little Pegleg Pete. The splint is off now, and he bounces around quite cheerfully with a gate similar to a rocking horse. He is a halfbreed German shepherd, doubtless related to Lucky, the medics' full-blooded one. A natural born watchdog by the way. He mistook me for a slicky boy (pidgin for thief) one night last fall when we were not so well acquainted, and I can testify that seen at night in full charge he looks like the Hound of the Baskervilles in wide-screen 3D. Fortunately he recognized me just before he amputated my left leg by methods less antiseptic than his masters would have employed. Well, so much for Lucky, who between defeating all transient males of his own race, cadging food from the G.I.s, and putting terror in the hearts of visitors to the area is fully employed without my aid. Strange to think that this noble dog, so much more effectual in his realm than I am in mine will be dead and gone when I am still

a young feller. "Equal time hath shoveled it beneath the wrack of Greece and Rome." Sic transit gloria mundi. That's the way the ball bounces.

Scrutinizing the upper right hand corner of this letter I see "ten" encircled. (I'd better see it; I just put it up there with Haber's ink.) Concluding that this is the tenth page that I have written you, and feeling that eleven pages is too long for any letter save Lord Chesterfield's, I am going to sign off and put the army's notepaper into one of Parker's envelopes and send it via U.S. Air Mail with "Free" written where the stamp should be, a moocher all the way.

Love & Kisses,  
Gene

P.S. What is the Chateau d'If? Monte Christo? Ask Mrs. G. if you don't know. To whom, all my regards.

Yours once more,  
Gene

(Gorski delighted in signing the payroll with fictitious names, driving the pay clerks raving nuts. I was walking next to a squad tent when Lucky charged me; and I had not thought myself capable of leaping onto its roof, where I abruptly found myself. Lucky sniffed my boot and trotted away muttering, "Pass, friend.")

\* \* \* \*

12 April 1954

Dear Mother;

This is just a note because I could not resist sending you this snap before I lost it. Hope you like it as much as I do.

Love,  
Gene

(Now I wish I knew which one it was.)



April 16, 1954

Dear Mother;

Do you remember the storm which was blowing while I was writing you the last time? Well, it was a typhoon, and did it do damage!! Blew down about half the tents in the area, including the P.X., the Day Room, and the First Two Graders' Quarters. By the way, have you ever noticed how a Q looks like an evil old Chinaman? (Sketch illustrating this point.) This has gone far enough.

Have you heard this one? Farmer (Seeing soldier float down into his field): "You must have had a tough time coming down in that parachute in this wind." Soldier: "I didn't come down in a parachute, I went up in a tent."

This is a swell letter, cartoons & jokes and everything right in the context. Next time I'll write. I don't have a snap of me to send, so I'll draw one in case you've forgotten.  
(Cartoon)

Pardon all the silly stuff, but all the men who are rotating now came here after I did, and it makes me feel pretty blue. Oh well, mosh cosh.

I got a nice big box from you yesterday, in fact I am eating your candy and drinking your chocolate now. Thanks heaps, as the bobby soxers used to say when the ol' man was a lad himself.

Joe Grigoli has just gotten word that he is going home; you may recall him as one of the boys who were in my famous dog-washing scene. Riccio, another of them, died some time ago of hemorrhagic fever. (Manchurian fever.) I don't know if I mentioned it. Poratta rotated some few days ago.

Gorski's courtmartial is set for Wed. of next week; I don't think he will beat the rap. Of course I may be looking on the dark side, but he does not sound well when he defends himself, too much self-pity and resentment.

Rest assured that I'll do my best to let you know when I rotate, hit the States, etc. I would like for you and Dad to meet me wherever I process, then return home & leave for the West Coast a few days later. I'll want to pick up a few civilian garments and home-cooked meals before resuming my travels.

You know, I've been writing this letter for three days now and I still haven't finished it. I got a letter from you awhile back dated April 9 saying that on May 9 you'd be packing. Don't kid yourself, on May 9th I won't even be packing. I will be lucky to be home by June 15. You know, I didn't mind when the guys who had just arrived when I came left; or when the men who came with me left; but now that the guys who came after me are leaving, it really hurts.

I got a birthday card from Lou today. You put him up to it, I'm sure.



Well, I am going to have to sign this off now since if I don't do so soon I'll be delivering it by hand.

Love,  
Gene

(The First Two Graders were master sergeants and first sergeants. Hemorrhagic fever is spread by ticks. The patient bleeds from the nose, then from the eyes and ears, and at last from beneath the nails.

(My parents planned to take me with them on vacation as soon as I was discharged. It was one of the best, as well as one of the last, trips we took together.)

\* \* \* \*

May 1, 1954

Dear Mother,

I'm afraid I must once more declare my poverty of mind by saying that I have nothing of note to say.

This, then, is just a letter intended to tell you that I am neither dead nor dying. On the contrary I am in good health and awaiting rotation with that stolid wistfulness usually found in tombstones viewing the prospect of a glorious resurrection.

Your loving son,  
Gene

(There may be more in this note than I intended at the time I wrote it.)

May 4, 1954

Dear Mother;

Well, here eye am. (This is bad taste, I suppose, but I must do something that will break the monotony of these openings.) (Otherwise you'll just die, I imagine.)

Nothing ever happens here, or, if something did, (or does, I should say) I save it to reminisce over upon my return. I have quite a bit of that sort of thing saved up now, and I intend to use it all, not at once, but time and again. Living in the same house with me, you will find it almost impossible to escape. At the end of six or eight weeks you should be fully prepared to be my Boswell. How does it feel to be a prospective lady Boswell, Madame?

I have carefully reviewed my war experiences and decided that they will not do for a FAREWELL TO ARMS type of novel (too many cowards, thieves and fools) so I guess that I, like Johnson, will have to be famous for my conversation. (I have no intention of writing a dictionary, the time involved in learning to spell all those words is too great, not to mention drawing all those little pictures.)

So I intend to just sit around and talk and get fat. (Because a thin person with brains is just an impractical mystic,

(This letter was interrupted at this point, you may be interested to learn, by the unexpected arrival of General Pile. 'Tench-Hut!! I have just spent the last 15 minutes trying to look busy.)

but a fat man with brains has a real, down-to-earth wisdom and humor. Why are a thin man's jokes not funny?)

Of course, I always laugh at my jokes, which hurts.

Jester, laugh not  
At thy own wheeze,  
A snuff box has  
No right to sneeze.

Which puts me in mind of another bit of doggerel; please pardon my use of one vulgar word. But I am a factual reporter always.

"When the ice is on the rice across the Yalu,  
And the Chinness come a-creepin' through the snow,  
Don't look around for me to come and stop them,  
I'll be sitting on my ass in Yungdungp'o."

(That is the worse spell of Chinese we have had around here in quite a while.) Yungdungp'o, by the way, is the Po celebrated in "Ambulance Run to Po" the only poem of any merit whatsoever that I have seen on the Korean War. Radio has killed all the old, spontaneous folk art by suffocation. Ichabod, Ichabod.

I am enclosing three snaps of the cull variety. Have no better ones to send. I should bring several rolls of undeveloped film home with me.

Love,  
Gene

Oh, I sail the ocean blue! (With a sketch of a sailing ship and a fish surrounded by musical notes.)

(After discharge I lived with my parents while completing my mechanical engineering degree at the University of Houston.

(An old joke concerns a teacher who asks a boy to spell weather. He misspells it badly and she remarks, "That's the worst spell of weather we've had around here in a long time.")

\* \* \* \*

May 5, 1954

Dear Mother,

I know that this will be a short letter, 'cause I only stole two sheets of this sort of paper.

The principal purpose of this little missive is, of course, to return this safety deposit thing to you. However, feeling that you would be sure to appreciate a few notes and comments from the sole heir of the Wolfe House, I determined to accompany it with a few "Mosses from the Old Manse".

Firstly, I am counting the days until rotation, and that gives everything I do an impermanent air which makes me more anxious than ever to shuffle off.

Secondly, if you are interested in my amusements, I am reading a book of Arthur Machen's short stories. Good, too, although they were written in the '80s and '90s. Either he stole an idea from A.C. Doyle's "Dancing Men" or Doyle stole from him. They wrote at the same time, so it is hard to tell. (Machen outlasted Doyle anyway; he was born in the early '60s, died in Dec. 1947.)

Love,  
Gene

\*Mister Hawthorne no longer needs the title, and I rather fancy it.

May 6, 1954

Dear Mother,

Well now, isn't this a big sheet? Wonder if I'll ever get to the bottom, especially with my conversational store depleted as it is by the letters of the last few days. The big news of the day is the rotation order didn't come down today. No news is not good news in this case, is it?

However, I am bearing up, with a stiff upper lip and a heart of lead. In these trying times I present to the unmoved world a countenance something like this. (Sketch of a sad, bravely smiling face.) My head, in short, is, if not bloody, at least bowed to a noticeable degree. (Say about 40°.) Despite my low morale, though, I will hang on with bulldog-like tenacity. The tenacity that is, that keeps a chained bulldog (or any other animal) from straying far from the vicinity of its stake. Vive la legion! Se la guerre!

Well, what do you know! I did get down here after all.

Love  
Gene

(By dint of writing large.)



May 7, 1954

Dear Mother;

Happy Birthday to mee.

Well, here I is -- twenty-three years old and aw red dy to fine out what the big ol' wurrl is like. Just think ,not so long ago I was a mere boy of twenty-two. Seems like yesterday.

Wouldn't it be nice if my drop were to come down today. What a birthday present!! But it hasn't come yet. (It is 12:30 p.m. ((half past noon)) as I write.)

This is a good time of the year to leave Korea; the days are warm and lazy, the nights chilly enough to make every stove a center for cozy comradeship. The stony hills flaunt every shade of green; the pale undersides of new-born leaves, the deep, enduring tones of longleaf pine. There are boar and bear, pheasant and fox here. And the small, swift grey deer.

Pardon the reverie. I have spells of poetry as others have fits, and with the same result.

To tell the truth, I have never seen one of the bears, except in a cage. They are very much like our own black bears. The pheasants are so common that the peasants poison them so they don't eat the rice.

That is, they are common except when ol' Magambo Wolfe goes hunting; then they all cross the Yellow Sea to China, and leave the country in the hands of the sparrows.

Speaking of nicknames as we were, in a way at least, I think I'll take this opportunity to list my Korean ones so that I can look them up later when I get home. I'm sure, somehow, that you save my letters.

Well, here goes:

Trigger

Hoppy\*

Singin' Sam\*\*

Wuppee\*\*\*

That dumb corporal (pfc., private)\*\*\*\*

Well, now you know.

Love,  
Gene

\*You know how I walk.

\*\*The cooks call me this; it's a long story.

\*\*\*Lee Won Cue calls me this. Clough tried to teach him to call me Wolfe-ee because of the silent e in Wolfe.

Wuppee is my spelling of his nearest approximation.

\*\*\*\* No comment.

May 8, 1954

Dear Mother,

Today I received two packages from you. (Who else?) I suppose you meant them to come on my birthday, and I must admit that you did not miss by much; as it happened, they could not have come at a better time. No more appropriate day could be imagined than good old May 8th, the day of days. May it henceforth shine out from the calender like a precious gem in a leaden setting, making its plebian brothers hide for shame their lusterless heads. (I really need purple ink for this purple prose.) In short, dear Mother (you know, I have been calling you Dear Mother for so long that I am afraid I will do it when I get home, like a character in a Victorian novel. Come to think of it, the customary letter salutation is pretty Victorian itself. "Dear Mother" is not too bad, but "Dear Sam" smacks of sodomy. Why? Because the phrase is Victorian. When Mr. Sherlock Holmes addressed the beloved, bumbling British medico as "My dear Watson," it seems natural; but should some modern Sherlock, say Perry Mason, call his amiable familiar "My dear Drake," we would think our detective queer. A more unusual characteristic than cocaine addiction or even violin playing.

I see now that I have devoted three quarters of a page to a parenthetical remark. Back to the letter proper.) in short, as I said, it was on this day, the Eighth of May in the year of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, 19 and 54, that, at two thirty in the afternoon, I was informed (by Corporal Erikson) that a date had at last been set for my rotation to the Z.I. I will leave Hq. Co. at 6 A.M. on May 14. There, now I've said it. I am empty, devastated.

All kidding aside, this is for real. I'm leaving the company on the morning of May 14th. Thanks a lot for the packages, I am going to throw a real whingding tomorrow night. (I am on C.Q. tonight.) Home soon.

Love,  
Gene

(I had never met anyone who used cocaine, and had probably encountered fewer than half a dozen homosexuals; things are different now, but the violinists have not kept pace. Z.I. is or was army jargon for the United States, the "Zone of the Interior.")

May 9, 1954

Dear Mother,

One more day closer to the fourteenth. I guess that sentence just about covers everything of importance I have to say today. (Although I think that "more" could have been omitted without loss.)

I got three letters from you today. In answer to your question: I applied for the income tax refund from here. Buy me a bond with it, please.

Don't worry about keeping informed. I'll write at every stage of the trip, so far as I am able.

I do get off-duty time, and do just about as you supposed. (I am off duty now, writing letters and drinking Del Monte tomato juice.)\*

Well, that is about all there is to say today. I should be talking to you in person in about thirty days or so. For your own benefit I feel compelled to mention that I talk best over a glass of iced tea and a bowl of your delicious salad.

Love,  
Gene

\*I could be worse off.

\* \* \* \*

May 10, 1954

Dear Mother;

Well, here I am once more, not for the last time, but perhaps fairly close to it. I have no doubt that you will be happy to see the big gap between letters that means I am making a long sea voyage. No? I have heard rumor, of late, that they have closed Camp Stoneman, Cal. So perhaps I'll process at Ft. Lewis, Wash. Well, it cannot be soon enough. I want to be able to sit at home and worry about the reserves being called up.

Love,  
Gene

(I need not have worried; I, at least, was never recalled.)

May 13, 1954

Dear Mother;

Fourteenth months since I left the States.

This is the last letter I will write from Hqs. Co. I'm leaving bright and early tomorrow. If I get a chance I will write from 7th Rep. Co. or some such place.

Wait for me.

Love,  
Gene

\* \* \* \*

16 May 1954

Dear Mother;

I'm writing this from the 369th Replacement Company at Inchon. I have forgotten just what I told you in my last letter, so I'll go over the main points for insurance.

Date of Sailing: May 18

Ship: the Marine Phoenix

Destination: Seattle

Approx. Time of Arrival: June 5th

Deprocessing Station: Ft. Bliss

Well, say a prayer for those at sea.

Love,  
Gene

(Fort Bliss is near El Paso, Texas.)



And that was the final letter. My mother kept them, but I never reread them until I began to prepare this book. Now, in the Fall of 1990, I am astonished at how little I have changed. The private of 21 who rode those slow trains through Japan and Korea has aged a good deal and learned a few tricks, but that is all. If you, who have read these letters to the end, are curious about my childhood or my writing career, you have only to look in Volume 9 of Gale Research's CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS: Autobiography Series. Almost every public library has these books.

But where are all the rest now? Saturnine Sergeant Howland? Careful, conscientious Pickens and jolly Wally Gleekman? Lee Won Cue? Irrepressible Joe Grigoli and heroic Lieutenant Wilcox? The inimitable Ken Clough?

For the future, they are here.



