

Pvt. James M. Small, RA19262921

January 3, 1947

Camp Stoneman¹

Note: This is typed just as I wrote it on the ship.

Dear Mother and Dad,

This is going to be sort of a cumulative letter of the trip across, starting with now, the day before sailing. We had final inspections today by the regimental commanders (majors). Due to the fact we have a tough old so & so for a platoon sgt, our platoon got the best award. The major said we really looked ready to ship. Most encouraging!

The rest of the afternoon was ours so I found Bob Mulhall from Seattle, who had just come in, and we played around at the service club and P.X.² the rest of the day. He beat me at ping pong; I must be losing my grip. Then we ate supper and went back to the barracks and to bed around 10:00. At 2:10 the next morning they forcibly aroused us and we had to clean up the barracks. Some of the dopes had goofed around and gotten completely drunk, and the place was a mess. My stomach was still bad from the case of food poisoning and I got sick again and couldn't eat any breakfast. When the bunch got back we shouldered our packs, grabbed our hand-bags, which are heavy, too, and were off. We marched a mile or so to the gathering area and were off; to a thundering two hour wait in the freezing cold for the other thousand-odd men.

Finally they all got there and we lined up in our specified order. I was the 193rd man in Casual Company 30. Most of the enlisted engineers from Ft. Lewis are in 30, too. Some of them I hadn't seen since we left Lewis. When the officers were satisfied that we were all in our proper order and all that, we started off, by companies, on the 3 mile march. We marched through Pittsburg to the ferry landing docks. There we picked up our huge duffel bags and got on the ferry, which was something like the ones that run between Seattle and Bremerton, but smaller. With the 490 men and their equipment, it was really packed. You couldn't even move, hardly. Another long delay, and at 10:00 it pulled out. It was an interesting trip; we saw a lot of ships, bridges, and towns along the way. Passed by Vallejo.

About noon they gave us a ration box of chow but it didn't amount to too much. The bunch of sea gulls that were following the boat were well fed. At 2:30 or so, the ferry pulled into the Oakland docks. We were the last Company off the ferry so it was another long wait. Some paper boys were on a dock above us and had a business throwing folded papers to the guys on the ferry. Of course we had to throw them the nickels first. Enough of their papers went into the water to spoil their profits, though. When our turn came, we put on our packs again, grabbed the big bags and hand-bags and walked (staggered) off the ship in our specified order. Our individual numbers and companies were marked in chalk on our packs so nobody could get mixed up. It was about the first thing I've seen in the Army that was well organized.

Off the ferry we walked around a corner, and there, big as life, was our ship, the "Jumper"³ with the name all over it. It was a pretty sight and I wished I had my camera out but I was plenty busy, as the others were, keeping up with all my stuff. As we approached the gang-plank, a guy hollers your number and company at you, you affirm, then another guy hands you your assignment card and meal ticket. Then, just as you get to the plank, an officer with the list shouts your last name at you. You answer with your first name and middle initial; up the plank and you're on board. Rowdy M.P.s⁴ shove you towards a small door in the side numbered the same as your assignment card and you drag your stuff down two flights of long steel stairs.

I tromped into the sleeping compartment and found a good bunk near to the stairs. I threw my stuff in and looked around from side to side for some friends. Al Mesen, Bud Harris, and Tommy Lusk came by and got bunks near. The "bunks" are hard to describe. They are just a piece of stiff canvas roped to a frame and are so close together you can hardly turn over. They are four high in the dimly-lighted, low ceiling room. There are rows and rows, with a narrow aisle

¹ About 35 miles east of San Francisco, CA, in Pittsburg. Stoneman served as a major troop staging area. The camp operated during World War II and the Korean War. Source: Wikipedia.

² Basically a retail store.

³ Marine Jumper.

⁴ Military Police.

down every fourth row. 32 guys sleep in a space about 16x18 feet floor space, and a good hundred are in the compartment.

Before I forget, I was one of the last guys on the ship. Only eight more followed me. Anyway, we got our stuff loaded in the bunks so Al, who is a camera fiend like me, and I got our cameras and stuff and went topside to view the leaving. We pulled out just after four, a tug pulling at first. Out in the bay, we got under way under our own power and soon passed under the long bay bridge. The bay was very smooth. Then we were going by San Francisco and it was an impressive sight with the sun setting behind the buildings. We went right by Alcatraz. Going under the Golden Gate Bridge was sort of a note of finality and it was so dark Al and I put up our cameras. I had taken 20 some pictures on the Mercury since we left the Oakland docks.

The sea had a strange effect on us at first. Just as we passed under the Golden Gate Bridge, the long, powerful swells began. You sure get an idea of just how big that bridge is when you sail out from under it. Then the loud-speaker blared out for us to return to our compartments so we took a last daylight look at the US and went below. The compartments seemed awfully dismal to us just then. Soon the ever-nagging loud-speaker squawked for "Compartment 2-B, form your chow line along the forward-starboard side, going into ladder 7". We jumped to and got in line. It moved pretty fast and they punched our meal tickets and went into the hot, steaming galley. K.P.s⁵ shoveled food onto our trays and it was the best meal we ate on the ship. We felt pretty good.

Then all of us went topside and watched the brilliant lights of Frisco fade away. Everybody is in sort of a quiet mood and maybe a bit sad. Then a small sail boat swishes up and the pilot leaves for it by rowboat. We are on our own now. There are 2914 enlisted troops on this ship and I think everyone is topside watching. It was the prettiest part of the trip, I think. The colored lights of Frisco dazzled in the sea and the moon was just coming up. The ship was rolling steadily with the swells but I didn't notice it much.

About 8:30 I went below, pushing through the crowd, and looked around. The "head" as in most of the trip, was filled with sea-sick boys. I vacated that place in a hurry and went back to my bunk. I rolled the duffel bag over, put my head on my combat pack, knees over my cargo carrier and wondered why I ever joined this Army, anyway. Just before I went to sleep, I remember hoping that the two guys over me didn't get sick! A few minutes later, it seemed, the loud-speaker yelled "Hit the Deck!" My watch said 5:15, but it was hard to believe. I had to laugh, thinking it was the first time I had ever slept like that, fully dressed, boots, cap, coat, glasses and all!

The sleeping quarters were a mess as over half the guys were sick. A sgt was picking details to clean up the place, so I, still feeling all right, but not wanting to tempt matters any, kept out of sight.

We went to chow first at breakfast and I really felt better. Then we went topside and there it was, nothing but ocean all around. Not too rough, but just the even roll from side to side. It gets you after a while. I got a sort of light-headed, dizzy feeling and went back to my bunk. There I stayed nearly all day, asleep most of the time. For supper we got some apricots, a bit of cooked tomato and a slice of bread. Its hard to get accustomed to this eating, but there isn't much you can do about it. Then back to bed and another night like the first.

Mon. Jan 6. 1947

What a day. First we changed our watches back an hour. We waited for breakfast till nearly noon. When we got in, finally, we were so hungry we'd have eaten anything. "Anything" turned out to be three slices of whole wheat bread. Ye Gods. I went back to my bunk and growled. Then they fouled up dinner and we didn't get any. Supper we got four slices of the same. I hope this doesn't keep up.

We got a small ship's newspaper today and it said we were headed directly for Korea, non stop. The route takes us 500 miles north of Hawaii. It also said it would take only 12-18 days for the trip. We were cheered. From all appearances we were heading into a storm. The paper said there was a bad one off Hawaii. In spite of the conditions I don't feel too bad, except for a slight drunken feeling.

All that bread I ate today doesn't feel too good but I don't think I'll get sick at all for the time being. You never know, though, it seems to hit them fast. Just after noon today, the loud-speaker said they wanted candidates for a ship's band so Tommy and I went over to try out. They only had one old tin clarinet but I won out over my competition on it. Funny, but both sax players can play the clarinet better than I, too. They are pretty good. It was fun to play a little swing again.

Oh yes, I went to church Sunday evening. It was nice, being in the officer's lounge. We listened to the Chaplain and sang hymns. The Chaplain is a nice guy. He also leads the band. Its late so I'll go to bed now. Not too many of the fellows are still sick. The sea is fairly smooth.

Tues Jan 7 1947

⁵ Kitchen Police or Kitchen Patrol.

We rolled out at the usual hour. I haven't had my coat off yet. The sea is getting rougher as we head into the storm. Later on in the day the ship really started rolling. I took a couple of pictures this morning just before we hit a small storm. It would rain pretty hard for a few minutes and then it would be clear for a few more. The ocean, rough as it is, is very pretty. The white spray, as it breaks away from the bow, is over the deep blue-green water and blends with the white-caps.

We've seen three other ships since leaving. They just seem to gradually slide away over the horizon. We have an inspection every morning at nine and have to have all the junk arranged on the bunks before they chase you topside. It seems silly. We spend a lot of time in our bunks for want of something better to do. I just ate chow and finished getting this up to date. We seem to be spending all our time sleeping.

Jan 14 1947

Brother, I thought I'd get to write before this but I just haven't had the chance. I'll try to go back but one day is a lot like the next. We went through a storm the days after I quit writing and it was quite an experience. This ship, which was built by Kaiser⁶ at Portland, Ore., isn't made for troop transport, but a cargo ship. Hence, with no heavy load, it rides high and light. The storm really threw it around. It started in the afternoon and we had an awful time with supper, such as it was. The food is pretty bad. Wish we had K rations. We staggered back to our bunks and got in.

Some of the boys are pretty sick. The kid in the bed next to mine couldn't get up for seven days before he got over it. During the storm he just lay there and hung on, muttering "I wish that this damn thing would hurry up and tip over and get this over with." The off part was that he was quite serious. The bunks are chained in and several were thrown clear out during the night. If you could see the trouble we got to to get in you'd appreciate that. It was the most miserable night I ever spent.

It hurls you from one side to the other; one second you're standing on your head and the next the opposite. Really had a headache in the morning. Al and I went topside to watch it. We were slowed to a crawl and the water was breaking well over the bow. It was quite a sight but it was far too wet to watch it long. Very little food today. That is the roughest part of this life.

By noon the next day the main storm was over but heavy seas continued for a while. It cut our speed to practically nothing and threw us off course a tad. Since then the sea has been pretty good, heavy swells but no more storms, T.G.⁷ We crossed the International Date Line yesterday and jumped from Sunday to Tuesday. Some of the brighter lads were pretty puzzled, "It just ain't possible to lose a whole day," was a typical brainy remark. About every other day we have to set our watches back an hour. Right now we have been out about exactly ten days and have covered around 3800 miles. That leaves 2000 to go. If the weather keeps up (as it probably won't) we should make it in another week. I just came up from below and am sitting against a bulkhead writing. I took a shower and cleaned up, scraped off my beard and changed my clothes.

It sounds horrible but its the first time I've had my clothes off this trip! Tommy Lusk went to the ship's hospital yesterday. He should be all right there as they have good food and cots to sleep on. This is kind of a rough life. I was on K.P. yesterday and saw the food as I went by the officers galley and honestly, it about made me sick to see good food. Brother, but how I'm going to eat when I get back. It reminds me of how Dad used to tell of dreaming of water when he couldn't have any in the hospital. I think we have one track minds at the moment. The first week we could buy stuff of the P.X. but it ran out of stuff. Now you can get a dollar each for candy bars and ten for a can of peanuts if you can find any to buy.

Getting on K.P. was quite a story. Bud and I, along with seventy or so more from our compartment (we were all acting N.C.O.s) signed a request asking that our mess conditions be investigated. Things popped. The major hollered at the mess sgt. Somehow, this individual got ahold of the list and we lads found our merry selves on K.P. the rest of the trip. You go on at 1200 in the afternoon, work till about 10:00 that night, get up and report in 0400 the next morning and work till 2:00, Then you have 48 hours off. You sure have to laugh at these mess sgts. When we reported on, he told all of us that he would work the heck out of us, amid cussing, for intimating we weren't eating first class. We went to work. At inspection we had the place shining for the first time and got the sgt a superior rating from the inspecting officer. That really softened the old boy up. We engaged the old bloke in conversation, told him that we, of course, had no intention of hurting him and a tale of hoey and he got very friendly. We bored K.P.s had to look interested while he rattled on about ten years at sea and how he won the war. Then things got better. For supper we K.P.s got some rice with bean stew on it, some salad, bread & coffee and two whole apples. My stomach cheered. K.P. turned out to be a good deal. It made the time pass lots faster and we got a lot more to eat. That's about all for now; I'll catch up with this later.

⁶ *A shipbuilding yard. Not German.*

⁷ *Thank God.*

Friday, Jan 17 1947

We are currently in another storm. The old ocean is certainly a powerful thing. A big life-raft got thrown off the ship and the waves tossed it around like a cork. It sure does cut our speed a lot. We are heading north towards Japan now and its getting cold. I guess we go just South of Japan and up to Korea through the Yellow Sea. "Jinsen" (Inchon) is the port we are headed for and its pretty well up North in Korea. Our lecturer told us that we would be dispatched in landing craft a couple of miles out and go in like we're making an invasion or something. Then we get on a railroad and ride all day to an Army base. They aren't too encouraging about Korea. One Sgt told us it was the worst place to be stationed in the South Pacific. I hope not, but it can't be very nice from what they say. Oh well, we might as well see both ends of this.

They tell us they are duplicating the conditions that the fellows went through in the war going overseas and you can't appreciate it till you've gone through it. I just got off another shift of KP. We got the sgt another superior rate and he is quite proud of us now. Even gave us each an extra apple apiece, I feel pretty good now, but all of us have lost a lot of weight. The rough seas have slowed us down so I doubt if we get in till Tuesday. Hope I can get some letters mailed soon after I get there. Bet you are wondering how sick I got. Heh, heh, fooled you, but I'm in the minority.

Later

Here I go, going back again. Things kept on about the same.

About the 16th day, Wed, we started going past mountains jutting out of the water forming small islands. We passed a lot of them going past So. Japan. Then, we headed directly North and it got progressively colder. A few more days and we entered shallow water and Korea loomed into sight.

We entered the port of Jinsen and anchored out in the shallow harbor. This was Thurs., I think. We were all ready to get off when the loud-speaker tells us "No disembarking till Sat." We really were disappointed because all of us were sick and tired of troop transport life. I went below, put on my fatigues and went onto another shift of K.P. I was a little hungrier than usual so I went down a deck into the galley. Some galley K.P.s were opening big cans of peaches and I happened to know them. Boy, what a feast. Somebody even brought in a couple of loaves of bread, too. Then back to carrying trays and cleaning up.

Soon it was Sat. and we packed & rolled our stuff and prepared to leave. Disbarking was the same as embarking, too much to carry, guys hollering around and continual checking. They neglected breakfast. After waiting in line, Co. 30 started down the plank onto the LST⁸ and soon we were packed in below decks. A lot more froze on top.

About noon we docked at Jinsen, they lowered the big door in front and we trooped out into the snow. After the hot galley and quarters on board ship it seemed awfully cold. Curious Koreans stood around, watching. Of all the odd looking characters. We carried our stuff a ways and a guy gave each of us a K-ration. A little ways farther and we jammed on an antique train, I sat on my duffel bag and ate the & ration, morsel by morsel, and really enjoyed it. At Ft. Lewis I didn't like them, remember? How ones viewpoint changes.

The train was odd. Koreans crowded through the aisles, trading and buying stuff. Experience has taught them that Americans are the biggest suckers on earth, especially green ones. So a lot of guys exchanged wrist watches and so on for the practically worthless Korean yen. The train ride was a short one, but it took four hours, mostly waiting.

We passed through villages and the poverty of these people is unbelievable. A Korean child stood by the tracks, up to his bare ankles in the snow and only a short ragged coat on. A G.I. hopped off and gave him a pair of old shoes. The kid put these on and ran like a frightened deer and then all of a sudden dozens of little kids appeared, all hiding their sandals behind their backs, begging for shoes. We were glad when the train started. We got to the 1st Replacement Depot after while and put our things in the old barracks, and ate a good meal. I'll let letters carry on from there.

Ta, ta.

PS. Pardon the sloppy typing but it was on an old wreck and I was in a hurry. There is a lot I could add to this in the way of funny happenings but it about shows my mood on the ship. Quite a diary, eh?⁹

⁸ Landing Ship, Tank. A smaller ship for disembarking.

⁹ Jim handwrote the letters on the ship, then typed them after arriving in Korea.