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Lagos, Nigeria; December 9, 1942

Dear Folks:

Since I last wrote, I have received a very nice letter from Melody and another from Herman Bauman. Melody's was especially interesting; please tell her that I enjoyed reading it very much, and that I will answer it just as soon as I can. Unfortunately, the chances don't look very good just now, as Mac is leaving Friday for Accra, and our clerk, John Burleson, is in the hospital with some kind of stomach trouble. Consequently, I am very busy, and am having to familiarize myself with the accounting procedure, which I have been successful in dodging at every office so far. The accounts here require a good deal of supervision, as the native clerk who is supposed to keep them, although honest, is not very intelligent.

Mr. Shantz recently took a trip up to Northern Nigeria, leaving me in charge of the office for about ten days. Nothing unusual happened during this time, except that we got a cable saying that the Department had decided to open a new Vice Consulate at Freetown, Sierra Leone, and that one of the junior officers here should be selected to take the job. The same cable said that Philinda had been appointed to a job here, so poor Mac will go on to Freetown as soon as a replacement arrives from the States at Accra. I rather envy him the chance to start out on his own, but opening a new office is no fun, and neither is Freetown. Freetown is a terrible place, and the thought of going there is enough to send chills up and down your spine. However, if Mac can get a decent place to live, he will be all right there, as he has a good supply of foodstuffs and liquor, which, together with housing, are the principal lacks there.

Meantime, word is that Philinda will proceed by air as soon as the Department can arrange transportation - but at my expense. Perhaps it is just as well, as otherwise she would be obligated to continue to work for the Government for some time to work off the passage. (Thus typewriter has no bell, so I am always running over the end of the line.) I have suggested that she follow through with her original plan to go to Lisbon, and from there with a government priority, she should have no difficulty in getting a place on a plane. It is always easier to get a place west bound than east bound, since there is so much freight moving east all the time. I am anxiously awaiting news of her departure, but I think it will take several months to get things straightened out. On arrival, she will replace Burleson, who will go to Accra.

We had quite a bit of excitement here Saturday, which I can tell you about since it has already been announced on the radio from London. In the morning Mac and I were on the way over to the airport

L-09

when I noticed a pall of smoke rising from the harbor not far away. Underneath it was a solid mass of flame, and it seemed to be running along ~~xx~~ the shore. We pulled the car to a convenient place and stopped to watch. There is a soap factory in that vicinity, and we thought that was what it was at first, but we soon realized from the rapidity of the spread that it must be oil burning on the water. That turned out to be correct. Mac suggested going over to see if we could help, but we had some diplomatic mail in the car, and I thought it would be better to take that to the airport first. We had just started the car when I saw a terrific column of flame and smoke shoot skyward, and a few seconds later we heard the roar of the explosion and felt the very strong concussion. We could see pieces of debris flying through the air; fortunately, none of them hit the car. After the explosion, the fire seemed to disappear.

According to reports, what happened was that a tanker was discharging fuel oil, and a leak developed. Oil slick spread over the water, and somehow or other was ignited. The whole water front became a raging inferno in a second. There were three trawlers anchored nearby and were surrounded by flames. Within a few moments the plates became so hot the ~~em~~ could stand it; those who had no shoes on burned their feet. Apparently the plates buckled under the heat, and the magazine of one of them exploded; this simultaneously set off the depth charges, and caused the explosion which we had seen. All three of the trawlers were sunk, and the pieces of one were spread around for miles. Two officers and 21 men were killed, and the number of casualties among the natives cannot be accurately determined, since no one knows exactly how many were around at the time. Probably not many, because we could see them running in all directions provided it was away from the fire. Later I saw a house near the waterfront. Every door and window was blown in and the walls were cracked open. It was a complete loss. The soap factory was also damaged and will have a suspend production for about three months. There was also considerable damage in the dock yard. I was surprised that the Admiralty announced the loss of the three ships so quickly. I think it was done to prevent the enemy from claiming they had something to do with it.

Another big event of the week-end was a visit from Bud Francis. It was the first time I had seen Bud since I left Accra in August. He called me up Friday morning, and I had him to dinner here. We had a great time talking over the news from Newark, about which he was much better informed than I. (Shame, shame) He knew, for example, that Janie had been at home, and thought that she was going out to the West Coast as a result of Norman's being transferred. He got this from Jimmy Tiemann, whom he had seen in Accra when Jimmy was on his way East. I certainly would like to hear about these things, and I hope you will soon send me Janie's new address. We had a very pleasant evening together. Due to trouble with the engine of his plane, he had to stay over till Monday, and we took him out to the beach on Sunday. There was an excellent movie that night, so the day was practically perfect. It is possible that Bud may be stopping over from time to time; I certainly hope so.

I have to force myself to say, "Merry Christmas" to you all, because one doesn't think of Christmas when it's as hot as it is now. I won't wire; I have to save for Philinda now. Also, no Xmas cards - paper shortage. Much love to all of you.