

1968

Captured Enemy Correspondence between a Dead American Child Who Fell into His Swimming Pool Early this Morning and The Viet Cong

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Recommended Citation

Kiesel, Stanley. "Captured Enemy Correspondence between a Dead American Child Who Fell into His Swimming Pool Early this Morning and The Viet Cong." *New Mexico Quarterly* 38, 4 (1968). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol38/iss4/32>

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CAPTURED ENEMY
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN A
DEAD AMERICAN CHILD WHO
FELL INTO HIS SWIMMING POOL
EARLY THIS MORNING AND
THE VIET CONG

Stanley Kiesel

Dear American Child Who Just Drowned,

We would like very much to make contact with you. We are sure you do not represent that segment of the American people who encourage white teeth.

Cordially,
The Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong,

I am glad to write to someone across the ocean.

I go to Henry David Thoreau Elementary School and I am in a class for the gifted.

My mother saves coffee cans of cooking grease for the poor Mexicans in Acapulco. I have a lot of things I can send you if you're interested. Last Christmas I received a set of bombs. They are rubber and inflatable and come with three patches.

Sincerely yours,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse,

We are so happy to have heard from you. Your letter gave us excellent opportunity to practice our English.

Please tell us about your swimming pool. While there are many pools of water here we do not swim in them.

We all thank you for the sugarless gum.

Please say hello to the film stars.

Your friends in Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong Friends,

In reply to your last letter, my pool is just great. It's completely enclosed with two wading areas, a diving board, a heater with thermostat that keeps it always at 70 degrees, two automatic filter systems and a man who comes every third Friday to vacuum clean it for leaves and dead bugs. We wouldn't be without one.

Do you have any hobbies?

Yours sincerely,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse,

There are Chinese here and Burmese but to the best of our knowledge we have been unable to discover any Hobbese.

Since last hearing from you we have been busy strengthening our earthen dikes which have been badly in need of repair.

My older brother asks if it is true that in America used swimming pool water is shipped to impoverished rural areas for drinking purposes?

All best,
Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong,

There is no truth whatsoever to the story about used swimming pool water going to negroes. Water is free in America.

I'll explain what I mean about hobbies. It's what you like to do in your spare time. For instance, I am a rock hound. I have a very good collection of igneous rocks. And I also have over a thousand abalone shells. My sister collects dolls from all nations and my mother travels every summer and hunts up sayings from old gravestones. Dad used to have a miniature railroad. Then he changed to photography and his own dark room. Now he's taking a wine-tasting class. That was lucky for me because I got to keep the corks for my bottle cap collection.

Your friend,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse,

We are reading your letter by our one candle here in our cave school. We have a number of rocks we can send you for your collection. We attend school by night as it is unsafe to go out by day. The light is poor and many of us are suffering eye and head aches. But your letters afford us much joy. Do you have many friends? We are so interested in your mother's collection of gravestone sayings. Please send us some. We go

to school from dusk to midnight. We are studying punitive tactics in wars of liberation and English colloquial speech.

Your good friends,
Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong,

I look forward to your letters so much. I have a lot to tell you. First, my dad was drafted today. Second, to answer all your questions. We go to school in the daytime here. It's nighttime that the streets aren't safe. I don't have any friends here yet. There is an old man next to me who nods to me but doesn't say much else. He was in the army a long time ago and still wears his uniform. On the other side is a very nice lady named Miss Mortimer who was a school teacher and died from inhaling too much hair spray. She's been trying to teach me sentence structure. But of course she's not my own age and sometimes goes for days without talking to me she's so busy pulling roots out of her hair. Her hair, by the way, is very long. She is proud that it still is growing. It's hard for me to remember my mother's gravestone collection because I'm forgetting a lot. I think one goes like this: Here lies Thaddeus Putnam, famous Orator who, like his predecessor, now holds pebbles between his teeth. Silly isn't it? Grandma Betty visited me today. She was my babysitter when my parents went to Las Vegas to gamble. Who sits for you?

I miss my grandmother most. Do you have a grandmother?

Your friend,
Little Corpse.

I hope you answer real soon.

Dear Punctual Little Corpse,

Please send us a description of your father. We are most anxious to meet him.

Now dear friend, we wonder if you have ever read Karl Marx? Our study group anxiously desires to acquaint you with his work and thoughts.

We are expecting the rainfall momentarily. Until it comes we cannot plant the rice. We are kept busy however sharpening bamboo stakes.

Thank you for sharing your mother's collection with us. Do you also have a stone with a saying? We would enjoy hearing it. Yes we have grandmothers. Lately they are very busy smearing stakes with buffalo dung.

We hasten to tell you to please give your father this good advice:
Throw it back. Don't fall in. Lie down quickly.

Affectionately,
Your friends in Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong,

How are you all? My father is five foot eleven, weighs one hundred and sixty-seven pounds and whistles through his teeth. My picture is in his wallet.

My grandmother is very good with her hands also. Crocheting and such. I keep thinking about how my grandmother blamed my mother for my falling in the pool because she said Mom should have been home with me instead of at the Beauty Parlor. And Mom said it was Dad's fault because he didn't want to spend the money on fencing the pool. Whose fault do you think it is?

Always your friend,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse,

We have had several heated discussions in our cadre about the ideological ramifications of the question you posed in your last letter.

It seems that the problem of possible male chauvinism on the part of your grandmother plus the larger issue of low priority economic goals in relation to safeguarding the interests of a rising class of fenceless children demand a broader national commitment to programs involving the peasantry.

Your friends,
V. C.

Dear V. C.

Thank you so much for your interest. It rained today. The box I'm in is leaking.

—What does Karl Marx say about roots?

All my best,
Little Corpse

Dear Friend,

Today we found your father's wallet but your picture was not in it. Yes, it is starting to rain here also. But not enough. It has been necessary to use our scoop to maintain proper level in the fields.

We are sending to you, under diplomatic pouch, two books: *The Roots of Marxism* by Franz Lehar, and *Marx and Rootism* by Jacques Offenbach.

All our love,
Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong,

I don't know why but I feel sort of sad today. I haven't heard from you in a while. What have you been doing? By the way, you misunderstood my letter. Roots, tree roots, that's what I meant. They're a real problem here. Miss Mortimer resents them something awful. Once they get their hooks into you they never let go.

My mother planted a weeping willow over my grave and it's got two long roots. One is near my neck and the other is over my right foot. I try to talk to them. Miss Mortimer says it helps, for a while anyway. It startles them, she says. She has three birch trees over her head (it's a habit here to plant them in threes), and she says she's persuaded them several times to go in the other direction. But she's getting discouraged.

I was wondering what kind of a machine a scoop is? Is it like a power shovel? I had one that really worked. It cost twenty-five dollars and ran on batteries.

Always your friend,
L. C.

P. S. Colonel Jensen really doesn't have a uniform on. I got a better look today. All roots.

Dear Friend, Little Corpse,

Since our last letter to you, I know you will be concerned to hear that our crops have all been destroyed. We have been eating only rice husks. We have gotten the impression from your letters that in America there is an oversupply of roots—is this true? We hope someday to catch up.

The scoop is a basket hung on a tripod that shovels water up from one level to another. It is operated by one man who after several hours of scooping enables the water to rise to a proper level. This is, as you say it, one of our hobbeses. (Did we spell that correctly?)

Best,
Viet Cong

P. S. Of what political persuasion is your Colonel Jensen? Which war is he?

Dear Viet Cong,

I was sorry to hear about your crops. I tried to talk to Colonel Jensen yesterday about you but he got very angry. He said you were the yellow peril (please explain that). He's working very hard, he said, on a project he wants to promote for everybody, he says, who isn't "true blue." It's called Suits of Roots. I'm not sure what that means, but anyway that's how he's persuaded. I don't like him. Miss Mortimer says he's from a very early war. The root over my head has grown down to my arm and if my handwriting is shaky it's because it jiggles my wrist every so often.

All my regards. Will sign off now,

Your little Corpse.

P.S. What is a rice paddy? Is it like a salmon paddy?

Dear Friend, Little Corpse,

I regret to say we were much put out by your refusal to accept the books we sent you. The package has come back stamped: *Whereabouts of Addressee Unknown*. Our French friends have informed us that you presently lie in Rosebud Cemetery, plot number 302. We urge you to reconsider and react with a more favorable attitude towards those who have always loved you and respected your memory.

Viet Cong

P.S.: We saw your father today but will not say anymore until we are sure he is five foot eleven.

Dear Viet,

Of course I didn't reject the package! Plot 302 is Colonel Jensen and did he raise a ruckus when he saw the books! He's talked to all the friends who were in his very own war and they're going to contact people in high places and make trouble. But Miss Mortimer said not to worry because the Colonel can only contact people in very low places, and they don't count, she said.

My mother visited me today. She kept crying and whispering, "Come back, please, come back." I told her I was really O.K. except for the willow tree but she didn't hear me. She pulled out some weeds around the tree and that gave it so much confidence it grew an extra inch. One root is around my chest and the other is tangled in-between my toes. I had a long talk with the roots. Today they listened. "We can't stop," they whispered to me. "Nothing stops." They really give me the creeps.

I know you're going to ask me what creeps mean so I'll just say it means the shivers.

Please answer soon,
Little Corpse. Plot # 304

Our Dear Little Corpse,

This time we have successfully bypassed your Fascist Provocateur Jensen. So now what do you think of Lehar and Offenbach?

Thank you for the Band Aids. Do they come in, as you say, life-size? Please thank also Miss Mortimer for the boxes of ball point pen refills. We are not sure yet how we can put them to best use.

Regards,
Viet Cong

Dear Friends in Viet Cong,

What a wonderful surprise! They brought father in at ten this morning. He looks real neat in his uniform. His beret matches the grass.

"What the hell has happened to you?" was his first remark. I was a little embarrassed? I laughed.

"I fell into our pool, don't you remember?" Then I looked at him carefully. "Gosh," I said, "where's your other leg?"

"Where the hell do you think it is!" he replied, pretty miffed. Anyway, I talked up his medal and that gave him a big boost. It's the Congressional Medal of Honor. I certainly feel proud of him. Colonel Jensen has been so friendly. I never heard him talk so much before. As for Miss Mortimer, she just nodded to Dad and turned away.

There's a new root coming down. It's very impressed with Dad's medal, it seems to be heading straight for it.

Devotedly,
Your Little Corpse

Dear Little American Corpse,

We have been incapacitated by the loss of our water buffalo and have not been able to plow. Nyat San Get, my older brother and some of his friends have surreptitiously procured several what you call GOLF CARTS—am I correct?—from your officers' headquarters in our capital.

These are a boon to us except they have a tendency to stall in furrows. We have been able to keep them running on rice wine. They are

STANLEY KIESEL

especially worthy as one man can plow and another stand and be a lookout for mines.

The entire cadre wishes to thank you for the ball and jacks.

Best wishes and regards
to your roots,
Your friends,
Viet Cong

Dear Viet Pals,

I know that you will be happy to learn that father is right here with me in the front lines fighting the roots. I don't dare tell him however about our correspondence as he gets upset when I mention you. He doesn't say anything but I know he misses his leg. I have a special favor to ask you. Do you think you could locate Dad's leg and ship it out here by Christmas? I would really appreciate it so much. Miss Mortimer talked a long time to dad this morning. She says he must cultivate a *world view*. And stop feeling sorry for himself. He called her a bony Socialist. She said she would never speak to him again.

Mom visited Dad today, and did lots of crying. The roots get excited even when the ground gets a little damp. Mom planted a new tree by Dad which has caused us a lot of concern. However it's a pine and Colonel Jensen says they're slow growers.

You don't mention any of the latest things I sent you. Just add milk, there's already dried strawberries in the corn flakes—it is really delicious and satisfies minimum daily requirements. —Actually what fruit over there is now in season?

The paper umbrellas have been coated with a special plastic to resist the sun's rays. I know it is hot where you are.

Love,
Your Little Corpse

P.S.: Dad's in a stew. He said he expected the ribbon to go but not the metal.

Dear Dear Little Corpse,

You must excuse us but we have eaten both the Corn Flakes and the umbrellas.

As regarding your request about your father's leg. Please send us a brief description. You must understand there are many legs here, some of course, belonging to us.

We must end now as our entire village has just been ignited. Thatch burns incredibly fast.

V. C.

Dear Viet Cong Pals,

I've been talking to Colonel Jensen about Dad's leg. I haven't told him much except that you might be willing to help us look for it. I've never seen him get so excited. All day yesterday he was tossing about composing a letter to you. He's insisted I send it to you.

Best wishes,
Your Little Corpse

Gentlemen:

According to Agreements of the International Control Commission with respect to severed limbs I quote article 21 Final Declaration, Slash and Hack Dismemberment Conference at Smithereens, Nova Scotia, signed, Supreme Military Commander, General Piecemeal; I quote:

"The liberation and repatriation of all limbs detained by each of the two parties at the coming into force of the present agreement shall be carried out under the following conditions:

(a) In cases in which place of burial is known and the existence of said limb or limbs has been established, the Commander of the Forces of either party shall, within a specific period, permit the other party to enter territory under their military control for the purpose of finding and removing arms, legs, hands, feet, heads and any or all intact organs except individual fingers and toes or unidentifiable fragments of same.

(b) It is understood however that these limbs shall not be surrendered to the appropriate authorities of the other party unless due and circumspect recognition be given to them under present international law by a Joint Commission representing both parties.

(c) Not more than fifty (50) limbs including those belonging to officers, shall, during any one month, be permitted to depart that portion of the area north of the provisional military demarcation line unless properly replaced by process of rotation, "rotation" being defined as the replacement of limbs by other limbs of the same echelon. Rotation shall be conducted on the basis of piece-for-piece of the same type and with similar charac-

teristics, such as, one blue eye for one blue eye, one hairy arm for one hairy arm, etc.

(d) Each party shall notify the Joint Commission at least two days in advance of any arrivals or departures of separate or single limbs, which units must enter and leave only through enumerated entry points.

(e) In the event that said limbs cannot be adequately identified or are contested by either or both parties, said limbs shall be displayed for a period of thirty (30) days in the demilitarization zone after which time said limbs shall be converted into bone meal and distributed under auspices of International Under-developed Foreign Aid Assistance Program.

"In accordance with clause fifteen (15) article ten (10), description of missing leg herewith appended:

Left leg, blue-veined, full calf, knobby knee, slightly fatty joints marked by several freckles with tattoo of mushroom cloud in three colors just below thigh; exceptionally large big toe; blood vessels slightly distended, healthy and red; bold instep and prominent heel; unmistakable American leg."

Dear Little Corpse,

We received your letter today with Jensen enclosure. Disappointed that you alone could not undertake leg project. However all available facilities alerted but must warn you of extenuating circumstances which may develop and delay plan, namely an overplentifulness of legs, some of which are spurious counterfeits planted by enemy insurgents designed to inculcate a false sense of security among our forces.

We are affixing a list of questions to this letter and hope you will answer them promptly to the best of your ability. My Battalion Commander, who by the way, is just your age, would like to know if you are a Caucasian or a Negro. If you are the former, are you by chance, as white as this paper?

Awaiting your reply,
V. C.

To All My Friends in Viet Cong,

I shall try to answer all your questions. First, I have always gotten all "A's" in school. "A" means one dollar. "B's" are fifty cents. My

parents could never agree on what to give me for "C's," so I tried not to get those.

Secondly, I wear braces on my teeth because my occlusion is not normal. (By the way, I was disappointed in the snapshot to see how many of you guys suck your thumbs. Believe me, you'll be sorry later on.)

Yes, I like cookouts. Have you ever baked potatoes outdoors? It's just great.

Oh and about how white I am. That's hard to say because I'm so tan. When I peel I still am brown. Of course my bones are white. I know you are a dark color. Are you the color of Puerto Ricans or our cleaning lady? I'm just curious.

Sincerely,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse,

It has taken us a while to reply because both your letter and those friends we gave it to are not here anymore. However, we remember nearly all you asked.

Enclosed is a sample of our skin which has peeled. Many of our people are peeling now, but do not be deceived by the color, our skin is normally brown, not black. You are indeed fortunate to have your father close by. I have not yet located my own. We have been offered 16,000 piastres to enter this camp. So we have moved. With some of this money we can buy a hoe and a hammer.

The search goes on for your father's leg. There are many here with fatty calves but none yet with cloud tattoo.

In our foraging for legs we have located many medals—would you like us to send you some? There are French medals, Japanese medals, Portuguese medals, Chinese medals and Mongol medals. Which would you prefer? Many are in excellent condition.

As always, your friends
in Viet Cong

note new address: Strategic Hamlet 237A

Dear Old Friends,

The leg arrived safely yesterday and we have been in a dither ever since. Father swears it is not his! Colonel Jensen also declares that the tattoo is a fake and that it is obviously an Oriental leg. Miss Mortimer took a long look and muttered something about she hasn't experienced too many American men's legs but she's positive it's like no leg she's ever seen.

STANLEY KIESEL

Father doesn't want it, and I don't know what to do with it. I don't want to hurt your feelings because of our friendship but can you take it back and send some of those medals instead? About six of each? That would cheer Dad up I know, since now his own medal has become so rusty and covered with roots. Speaking of roots, they're all over me now. Quite friendly but I don't ever get the feeling I'm alone anymore. But things are getting better. Nobody visits me anymore so there's less crying and that cuts down a little on root growth. We had a lot of dry weather too so that one of Miss Mortimer's Birch trees died. We're celebrating that tonight. The other trees are holding on for dear life. Today they mowed the lawn and accidentally ran over the new Pine that's over Dad. It's stopped growing! Excuse this long rambling letter. But I have to stop now as we are expecting a lot of Dad's buddies momentarily.

All my love,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse, our American,
as you say, Pal,

We are distressed to hear about the leg. You must know this situation has split our cadre wide open. Some of us believe we must continue to cooperate and seek yet another leg; others in our group demand we abrogate our original agreement and withdraw the leg immediately; and yet another group—a splinter group to be sure—wants the leg to be placed under international controls, a trusteeship of the non-aligned.

Actually, the discovery of your father's leg was relatively easy because his seemed to stand out among the rest; the others we found being mostly from women and children.

However it is vital that we critically reappraise our position on legs in general. Absolutely essential to unmask all unprincipled revisionists.

By the by, did we ever get the chance to tell you that those packages of sugarless gum really helped us, as you say, get "over the hump" with the cavities from all the candy bars?

Keep in touch please,
Viet Cong

Dear Viet Cong,

They've opened a new section here for Dad's buddies who arrived last week late at night. They're awfully noisy. Even the roots can't take it, a lot of them have gone off in other directions. I'm angry at Dad and

haven't talked to him lately because of what he called you. He said you were sneak-eyed yellow-skinned little dickheads. And he said all your mothers who were cleaning his barracks and washing his shirts were lazy little dirty bug-outs. Dad's always been fussy about his collars.

Dad's buddies liked your medals but they did complain about their being dirty. Finally one guy figured out that if he could get one between his teeth he could polish it by rubbing it on his shoulder.

Now I have a special favor to ask of you. I am awfully lonely without kids my own age to talk to. I would sure love some company. Do you think you could send me a friend or two? I would prefer someone who has their arms and legs, maybe somebody who fell into a swimming pool.

Thanks for your consideration,
Little Corpse

Dear Little Corpse, Rosebud Cemetery,
Plot number 304A,

We are sending you, under separate cover, nineteen (19) children, seven of whom were drowned when a dam was destroyed, the other twelve dying from eating poisoned rice. They range from six months to fourteen and are most anxious to make your acquaintance.

Much love,
Viet Cong

Dear V.C.,

There must be a mistake! I got 19 children but they're all black, covered with burns, and refuse to say anything to me! I think all three of your groups ought to seriously investigate your shipping room people what with Dad's leg and now these kids—someone's flubbing up the works!

Your disappointed friend
at Rosebud,

L. C.

* * *

Dear Viet Cong,

It's been so long now that I've heard from you that I've forgotten who wrote last.

It's been wonderful here since my new friends came. There's John and Michael who got killed on the freeway, Alice and Debbie who died from playing with matches (they don't look half so bad as those kids

you sent out), Tommy, who was smothered in an old refrigerator, Pamela who swallowed ant paste, Timmy who got bitten by a rat, little Joey who drowned in his tub, Marsha who choked on her mother's credit card, Gregory who fell off his father's motorcycle and of course the twins Jay and Janet who both drowned in a flood control reservoir. So you see things have a way of working out!

I've saved the best news for last. They've opened a new Veterans' section next door to us and they get all the attention, lots of visitors, lots of crying. The gardeners hardly ever water here anymore, all the trees are dying, the roots are very weak and only need to be nudged to make them grow in another direction. There's even talk of blacktopping the entire area and building a supermarket.

Don't bother sending out any more kids. There's plenty here now and more coming.

So long for now,
regards to all,
Always your pal,
Little Corpse

P.S.: A new one just came in—nice kid named Sammy—played with his mother's electric knife—