

P.O. Box 1205

July 15, 1941

Dear Dave,

We aren't so very far out (we deal with Wake, Midway, Palmyra, Samoa and Guam daily), and it doesn't seem at all like a distant colonial outpost - yet mail means so much more than on the Mainland. Which is backing up to telling you how much I enjoyed hearing from you. And now mail boat time is here again, so I want to get off at least a brief acknowledgement. Even though it's in my poor hand (I'll soon have unlimited access to a typewriter, then to hell with this, to me, laborious method).

I've just this minute finished reading your "Who Says It Can't be Done?" of May 27.* Believe me, it sent a thrill up my spine. You know, too, how well I admire your great restraint in not hanging the blame for aluminum shortage squarely where it belongs. I can see, even from here, what a great temptation you faced. Yet the talk was immeasurably stronger with the stones left uncast (except in your delightfully oblique reference to 30% power contracts in the face of 100% need). All of us in these times must bury a good many of the things that cry, in our spirit, to be said. I am learning much of that out here. This is the time to be about our business. If we cannot fight with a solid front now, there will be no tomorrow in which to get back to the unfinished business. If all of us, on the other hand, join in this fight, by God we have won our right - and perhaps gained our strength - for those other internal questions of a future day.

I cannot tell you Dave, how proud I am of TVA - and of having had even a tiny part in its development. And I am proud, too, that that association meant working with you, because while Norris was the sire, God knows you were everything else - the spirit, the guts, the vision and, too much, the whipping post. If you had no other mission left to you - and of course you have - this would be worthy of you: to keep before the people the story of that great Valley and what has been, is being and what will be done. We don't see far, these days, with the black night spreading everywhere. And there isn't much time from day to day to take those backward glances so essential to perspective. But it may well be, I'll venture to guess, that in some distant day an historian will look up from his notes and records, and placing his finger on Norris Dam will say: "It was at this place and in that day that the Democratic forces of the nation began a new march forward - it was then and there the real beginning was made in creating what President Roosevelt years later called the 'Arsenal of Democracy.'"

Of these Islands, my job and our new way of life.

I'm afraid I'm going to be a poor reporter of the nature of my job - and a not too good observer of the things out here that would, I know, be intensely interesting to you. Until you experience it, you cannot even imagine what tight lips are in this service today. We admit nothing - and I speak so little of my work to Elizabeth that I know she imagines it to be dull indeed. Officers do not talk to wives - and ashore talk practically no shop even among themselves. There is even an absence of small shop-talk

aboard ship. Wives have been going through a helluva 12 months or so, I can tell you. They have had to learn, too. And they actually do not know whether their men will be coming back when they sail on what should be the most routine kind of employment. Perhaps it is overdone. But this is readiness for war. Wives have to be trained along with the others. It is upsetting, of course. But the world is upset much worse.

I cannot say I agree with some phases of this. I think the people are entitled to know more than they are being told. But I am not at liberty to argue or make contentions outside the organization. There are, I may assure you, plenty of arguments within in regard to such basic policies. And I am vain enough to think that the side of the question which appeals to my good sense will prevail. I hope soon.

I do wish the country could be given a clear and vivid picture of these Islands. Colliers sent our old friend W. Davenport, and to my way of thinking, he made a colossal flop of it. He was brought out there in a battleship. He was taken everywhere, shown virtually everything. Yet he couldn't get away from a gin-mill, honky-tonk, Hollywoodian dream vantage point. You do not have to live here long - especially with the advantages given W. Davenport - to sense the situation here. The great, unrelenting push on the fortifications; the unceasing alertness, aloft, at sea, on the land. It is so constant and persistent, in fact, that folks soon become accustomed to it and heedless of it. There is little "play" to it. There are no "games" of any consequence here. The boys are playing for keeps, now. They are working unbelievably tough schedules. War could make them little tougher. War would bring surprisingly little change to the Navy here. You may have to read that sentence twice.

As I sit here the patrols are droning overhead. I could sit here all night to that accompaniment. The black ships are out there now, tomorrow - always. Sunday is just another day.

We hear surprisingly little of "defense." Most of it is by the tourists and townfolk. My thinking - and I have simply taken on the color of my associates - is hardly conscious of that word. We use another, shorter, word. And, as a matter of fact, there is surprisingly little talk of the "situation." Most of that is by folks not directly concerned with the military. That is done, also, by those on a much higher level than mine - and you could call it, I suppose, the war plans section.

My confidence in this outfit continues to grow. I honestly believe it will be as great a surprise to the world as was Hitler's great Army. That is why I am so anxious that some means can be found to tell the people whose Navy it is a little more about it - so they can feel a small part of the glow and pride I feel.

This is not paradise, of course. There are fat cigar crunchers who are squeezing filthy money out of their country's dire need. There are mean and greedy gougers of those who must come here to do the job. There are men who think of personal careers before they think of anything else. There are the dissatisfied, the bored, and the unhappy.

But if you can see and feel and understand what is going on - then I think you will pound your chest and say: By God, this is it. This is what that Madman is taking on. This is the way it will be everywhere before long.

And I pray that is right.

My best wishes to you and love from both of us to Helen.

Sincerely,

Forrest

*Kennedy sent me a copy. Can you please ask Sturde to put me on the mailing list? Franked mail costs no more out here.