

EXCERPTS FROM LETTER FROM DAKAR, SENEGAL

JULY 20, 1965

This comes to you from my hotel in Dakar. There was a slight change in my plans because we were unable to land in Bathurst (capital of The Gambia) due to a storm. Since I was scheduled to come to Dakar in 2 days anyway, I decided to skip Bathurst and stay here. As originally planned I would have been in Dakar only 5 hours—from 9 PM to 2 AM. This is much better, even tho much more expensive.

I was very lucky at the airport last night. An English-speaking French lady interpreted for me, gave me a ride the 15 km to town, and brought me to this hotel where the owner speaks English.

This morning after buying myself a map I've been exploring the town. The three cities—Freetown, Conakry and Dakar—are as different as can be.

Freetown is essentially an African city—the gov't buildings and stores are modern, but the side streets are dirty, narrow, crowded, and twisting. The African houses are very, very old wooden ones, or shanties constructed of salvaged metal, or laterite block, or usually a combination of all three. Freetown inhabitants' dress varies, but often is dirty and raggedy. It's not unusual to see bare-breasted women on the streets, but not in the true business section. Every half block some man is urinating into the gutter; this can be disconcerting when he speaks to you or is facing you.

NOTE: Freetown's gutters were up to 1.5 feet wide and up to 3 feet deep to handle the 120 inches plus of rain they get in the 6-month rainy season.

In Freetown the men's dress is about half European and half African. The educated ones generally wear European style clothing.

Conakry immediately impresses you with the difference between French and British colonization and influence. Wide, tree-lined streets, driving on the right side of the road, much cleaner, more flowers and trees, more modern buildings, and nicer looking houses for the natives. Although the latter are constructed of mud, stick and plaster, the same as many of the upcountry houses in SaLone, they have a much better appearance.

On the surface Conakry is better, but Seke Toure cut Guinea's throat when he refused to join the French Community upon gaining independence. France withdrew in a huff taking everything with them, including the phones. The U.S., Red China and the USSR are the three main suppliers of aid now. To better to look at, Conakry has nothing. I saw many stores where the only things on the shelves were U.S condensed milk, red Chinese tomato paste, and locally produced mango jam. One Bata shoe store had no shoes—not a single pair. Their entire stock consisted of about 50 gray plastic raincoats, all the same size. And everything is very expensive—a dish of ice cream and a soft drink cost 300 Francs. While peanuts we paid 2 cents for in Salone cost 50 Francs.

Guinea's money is in very bad shape. Officially the exchange rate is 250 Francs equals \$1.00 U.S. On the black market you can get up to 1500 Francs for \$1; and it is absolutely worthless outside of Guinea. They won't let you take it out. I was told that I had to spend my remaining Francs at the airport. I bought some stamps while waiting for the plane, which was an hour late.

Dakar is another world altogether. You wouldn't realize you were in Africa except that 1/5 of the people are in traditional dress or you come upon the African market. Otherwise Dakar is a very modern city. The plazas, circles, buildings and tree lined streets remind me of D.C. Also there are many more Europeans.

My last week in Freetown was really hectic and fun. Except for the first day I was invited out to lunch and dinner every single day. There were 2 weddings with champagne punch receptions, and a huge pre-wedding party with roast pig, spaghetti, and plenty of booze until 3 in the morning.

I got very sick the other night in Conakry. During my exit physical in Freetown I tested positive for amoebas. The first batch of pills the PC doctor gave me did not get rid of the amoebas. So he gave a different kind right before I left Freetown. These were what made me so sick because I could taste them every time I threw up. Between vomiting and violent diarrhea, I was quite empty and weak yesterday. Several of the Guinea volunteers at the rest house took pity on me and took me to see the PC doctor in Conakry. She told me to stop taking the second batch of pills and gave me something to calm my stomach. I feel much better now.

NOTE: I have never been so sick in my life, either before or since. If I moved a muscle or eyelash, the motion made me throw up or have another diarrhea attack, or both. When I got home over six weeks later, I went to the U.S. Public Health Service in Salisbury for testing. Fortunately, the amoebas were no more. That batch of pills were definitely of the kill you or cure you variety.