

Sunday, 7th December 1941

en route to Lumut.

*wish couple.
H.M.*

Dear Brenda,

This is to wish you and Horrie and Ken a very Happy Christmas, and to thank you for your long letter which I was terribly glad to receive. I have meant to write to you before this, but after I have written my scripts for work, and typed some inchoerent pages to the family, I generally fell that I couldn't write another word. At the present moment I am sitting very precariously in the back of a recording van of the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation while it jolts and bumps its way among rubber estates and over creeks and through cocoanut groves. Everywhere you look you see the scarred sides of the trunks of rubber trees, generally with their thin stream of white dripping into a tiny cup. The Malays or chinese generally do the work on the estates. You see them in their sarongs and kabya - the most lovely colours - have just passed over a flooded road with much splash-ing. We have now got into the rice areas with the malay houses built on stilts right in the middle of the fields.

This letter is a bit disjointed, as I am sitting most perilously balancing my typewriter against the recording apparatus, with my legs tied round a microphone. The Malay syce (driver) is driving, Sawhi is his name, and he is always grinning. He is a dear. Today on the job we have the recording engineer, myself and a Malay Fisheries Officer. We are all going down to record hauling songs of the Madrassi fishermen. It means getting the mike fixed up on the beach. It also means that I shall have to spend my time shooing away from the mike the innumerable small children, chinese, malays, indians who always congregate round. We have just passed an Army lorry in the ditch, surrounded by small children - funny that although there's not a house in sight for miles, the minute anything happens out hop myriads of natives. This lorry is well and truly in the ditch. In this country ditches are very wet, so I don't envy the Malay soldier who has to try to get it out again.

The news is pretty bad today - it is just like being back again in Europe - of course we can't tell whether it is another false alarm or the real thing. However, in Penang last night, rumours were flying round and troop trains were rushing north. Today we can't find out anything but one thing seems certain, war pretty soon, if it isn't in the next twenty four hours or so. The trains are all running behind the timetable so it looks as though there is some pre-paration for things ahead.

However, we shall just go on with the job, it gets a bit tiring sitting day after day in a badly sprung van, but it is tremendously interesting. We have just come from Grik near the Siamese frontier where we have been making records of tribal music of the original people who first came to Malaya thousands of years ago. These people are not Malays who are fairly civilised and live in the cities nowadays and work in white men's jobs. But they are the jumble people who only wear bark loincloths, and who have blow pipes and who live in long houses and whose religion is to perform dances to their spirits. They

believe that these spirits come from the trees from motor boats from aeroplanes, etc. In the tribes there are special men called who are called halas. They get messages from the spirits and they interpret them in songs and dances. These dances are some of the most beautiful I have seen. They are so rhythmical that they beat the Russian ballet easily. They dress up on gold and green palm leaves and while the women beat hollow skin drums (tell Ken with a really swing rhythm) and the old men beat gongs and hollow bamboo sticks, the male dancers sing and dance on the bamboo matting floor of their long-houses. I stayed up all night listening and watching the Temair dance. In the corner of the long house was a fire and during the dance the dancers took live hot pieces of coal and danced with them in their mouths. There were rush light torches stuck in the wall, and the whole effect was most eerie. I think I am the first white woman that these people had ever seen. They were most friendly, and one mother gave me her baby to hold. The smell lasted in my hair for days, but it was only a jungle smell, and not really unpleasant - just different from the smells we generally like around. There was a small boy of about seven - stark naked, who danced with the grown ups. He was the liveliest thing I have seen for a long time, and did all the steps just as well as the others. Some of the women when they dance, get themselves into a hysterical state, and rush round laughing and crying. But you don't wonder much when you get to know them. They are just like ~~xxx~~ very small children who smile at you in a simple and very lovely way. Some of the smiles of the men when they were told that the job they had done was good, would have made Hollywood very envious. The Malays and Chinese gape at our recording van, but the Temiar, when they listened to their own songs being played back, just began to dance. Pat Noone, the protector of Tribes in North Malaya, and who lives with them in the jungle, said that ~~xx~~ very probably a hala would be visited by a spirit who would tell him a dream dance about the great white recording van that came north, and of the spirit that came inside it, and probably the temairs would make up a new dance all about us. We also recorded a Wayang Kulit which is a puppet show, with a narrator (in this case he had so much opium before the show that he could hardly do anything except cough).

However, I suppose you will be getting tired of hearing so much about broadcasting. But I don't seem to do much except work these days. I've been ~~th~~ here for three months and I've been to the pictures twice and the theatre once. We hardly ever swim, as there's so much barbed wire about the beaches. I go dancing quite a lot, as there are a good many Aussies up here that I know, and dancing is the only exercise you get here.

I went to a party of the Air Vice Marshall for some American Pilot Officers who were passing through Singapore. I see quite a lot of odd people who come through Singapore. I interviewed Andrea in our session in Port today. I don't envy her having to go up to Chunking these days. Well, I must stop typing as we are almost at the coast, and what with the lurching of the van, and the swerving to avoid bicyclists, and what with buffaloes and wagons and pigs and army lorries on the road, things are much too difficult to try to type sensibly.

So a very happy Christmas to you all, when you next write to Tony give him my love. I sent him a note on a Christmas card. I have sent no Christmas presents except

to the family, and the girls in the A.B.C. office. I hope you will forgive me, and remember that on Christmas Day I shall be thinking of you all.

Much love from

(Sgd) Peggie Broadhead.

P.S. 11/12/41. In the thick of things now - please tell the family whenever you see them that I am alright. In haste
Peg.