

Sunday, Jan. 10, 1943

Hello gang.

I started writing this letter Wednesday but so many things developed after I had started, that I am beginning over again. I was addressing the original letter to Chip with the expectation that it would reach the rest of you via the chain, but since I have access to a typewriter on Sundays and also because the chain has proved so unsatisfactory to us down here, I decided to write a carbon copy letter to all of you. We received a letter from Leo yesterday. He didn't say very much, apparently thinking we have been getting information about him via the chain; but we've had no chain letter in the past month. I'm merely copying the first part of this letter.

Wednesday 1/6/43 2.P.M.

As I write this I am sitting on a litter stretched between two chests in the treatment tent of our clearing company. I am finally having the time of my life because everything is so new and interesting. I finished with intelligence school on Dec. 31, and since then have been with my company. We are now engaged in the third phase of our training. This is to consist of being out in the field for the next eleven weeks, working with the rest of the division. This will more or less unify the combat teams of the division (there are three) and get them accustomed to working together. Of course most of the problems last but a day or two, or so they are starting out; which means that I'll be able to get home every other day.

Monday morning we started out bright and early. By 7 A.M. the first platoon had all its trucks loaded. I am in the second platoon during the present problems, so our group had to wait until the first platoon unloaded the trucks in their bivouac (sleeping or camping) area and returned so that they could load with our supplies. It takes 3 trucks of 2½ tons each plus 3 trailers to carry our supplies, in addition to a separate truck for kitchen supplies and another truck for maintenance. The boys can load all these trucks in an hour and a half, and believe me that is quite a job. I had a lot of fun right at the start because I had to go out to each bivouac area, locate it on the map, and then make overlays to be sent to the collecting company, which must know our location in order to bring their patients to us; to the division surgeon, who might wish to visit us, and who would let the C.O. of the division know where we were for tactical reasons; and to our battalion HQ and company HQ so they could find us. Overlays are maps simplified to the nth degree made on tissue thin paper, so that they can be laid on a map of the same area in some one else's possession and thus show through on the good map the location drawn on the tissue paper. Since I've gone to intelligence school and learned to do this, it seems that I am to be delegated to do this in the company from now on. At any rate the fun part of it came from riding around in the jeep over all kinds of terrain. I've wanted to ride in different types of army vehicles since I first saw them. So far I've ridden in command cars, trucks, and jeeps. The jeep over rough ground has them all beat for roller coaster effect. Going 25 miles an hour over some of the ground keeps you up in the air as much as in the car, and usually the jeep is up in the air with you. They can get out of almost any kind of a mud hole because of the four wheel drive. The only objection I have to the jeep is that it's so terribly cold to ride in. There is no protection from the wind, excepting the windshield, and the wind seems to veer every time you turn into it, so that it keeps blowing in the side. Altho we don't have freezing weather down here, the cold is terribly penetrating. In fact it seems colder down here at 35 degrees that it does at zero up north. To protect myself from the cold I wore, first-a woolen undershirt (sweat shirt) over my underwear, then a woolen OD shirt over this, then fatigues (coveralls similar to those worn by automobile mechanics) which reach from the ankles to the neck, and finally leggings and overcoat and helmet, including both the fiber inner part and metal outer part. Even with this I found that I was not quite warm enough, so on the second problem - on which I now am - I wore a pair of woolen trousers in addition to all this, and I am
(over)

quite comfortable.

That was as far as I got on my letter in the field. To continue.

The first problem was a night problem consisting of one of the combat teams (a regiment of infantry, a battalion of artillery, and the service and supply units attached thereto) moving in total blackout to a bivouac area where they were to spend the night and return the following morning to camp. The whole situation was snafu as far as I was concerned, because our company commander insisted that all the officers were to be in camp by 6 A.M., which meant that I had to get up at 3. Then I had to sit around until almost noon before we were able to load and move out to our area where we were to set up. We were completely set up by 3:30 P.M. and then had to wait until 11 P.M. before we received our first patients. However, everything was extremely interesting to me since it was the first time that I had seen the clearing company set up from start to finish. Zhang

The general area in which we are to set up is selected by the division commander. We must then select the specific area in which to place each tent and decide on the number of tents to be erected. Each tent area requires certain qualities, about which I will not go into detail other than to mention ambulance availability, camouflage, distance of 50 to 100 yards apart, etc. I was surprised to see them set up the tents so quickly. The canvas is rolled up into a bundle about 32x4 feet which it is dumped off the trailer which carries it. It is dropped just at the foot of the area in which it is to be pitched because it weighs 400 pounds when dry (750 when wet) and therefore can't be carried around very easily. Four men carry it into exact position, and unroll it. A total of eight men work on each tent, driving in stakes, etc. After unrolling the canvas on the ground and driving in the stakes, all eight men crawl inside the tent which is still flat on the ground, place the center poles (4) in the notch which receives it and then in unison, with two men per pole, lift the tent up to its proper position. It is quite some job. I was quite surprised at the speed with which the tent was pitched and decided to time the next two groups. One group did it in 16 minutes and the other in 17. The size of the upright tent was also a surprise. It is able to hold 30 cots, being about 45 feet long and 15 feet wide. We put up 4 of these tents, an admission, treatment, ward (where actually sick were treated and kept) and an evacuation tent. Their uses are obvious from their names.

After the tents are pitched the supplies for each tent are placed in their proper place. All this time the electrician is wiring the tents and by the time we are all set up he is ready to turn on the electricity. To generate the electricity they use a gasoline motor which runs for hours on a single gallon of gasoline. The light itself is almost as good as we see in civil life. In fact, in the treatment tent, of which I was in charge in our first problem, we have a battery of 4 lights for the operating table which gives as good a light as is found in most hospital operating rooms.

The kitchen is separated from the rest of the set up by at least 100 to 300 yards, and is surprisingly efficient. They use 3 large gasoline stoves and are able to serve good food piping hot. In fact, the food is fully as good as is served in camp at the mess halls. The garbage is disposed of by digging a pit about 6 feet deep, and throwing all food remains into this. This is covered with dirt between meals, i.e. the top layer of garbage is, so as not to attract flies, etc. and thus to help keep down disease. At the end of the problem, the entire garbage pit is filled in and a sign is stuck into it to keep any other soldiers from digging into it.

The latrine (toilet) was really something. It consists of a pit about 1 foot wide and six feet long by 4 feet deep. It is called a straddle trench for the very simple reason that in order to use it you have to straddle it.

and squat. Now I've always thought that sitting in an outhouse on a farm was a real experience, but this has that beat all hollow. First of all, the fatigues that we wear are a one-piece garment and must therefore be completely lowered. Since this would allow all the contents of the pockets to drop into the trench, these must first be removed and placed into the helmet for safety. Then any other garments which might be in the way have to be removed. Its almost like going to a burlesque and seeing a strip tease. I'd hate to be in a hurry and try to go through the contortions necessary to have a BM in the field. I'd been carefully forewarned by the veterans in the field about the emptying of pockets and the care required to prevent the sleeves of the fatigues from hanging down into the straddle trench and getting soiled, but all the warnings in the world couldn't prepare one for the shock of the sensation of icicles forming on the seat as one straddled across this hole in the ground and squatted as the cold Mississippi morning wind whistled under you. Boys, you can't consider yourselves soldiers unless you've squatted over a straddle trench.

It seems that the straddle trench accounts for the most vivid memories that I retain from my first trip in the field. The first night in the field I found it necessary to go there three times. The first two times I had no flashlight, and found it quite easily in the dark because a light is hung there to guide us to it. The third time I had my flashlight, and by gosh if I didn't get lost and spend at least 15 minutes looking for it. I never did find it either.

It was extremely comfortable in the tents themselves. We erected two stoves in each tent with pipes extending through specially prepared openings in the canvas. In these we burned wood obtained from the surrounding area. The wood down here burns marvelously because it is almost all pine and therefore is saturated with resin and turpentine, both of which burn very readily and with great heat. I'd dread seeing a forest fire in these pine forests down here. In addition to the warmth from the stoves, the interior of the tents are made pleasant by a natural floor of pine needles which also gives a refreshing odor throughout the tent.

It is interesting to know how we arranged for patients. As I said, the problem was one of transporting a combat team in total blackout. This in itself was quite a problem. If you don't think so try driving without lights in a pitch dark street some night. The various units were being graded on their efficiency in performing this problem by umpires. They were therefore very reluctant to give up any men as casualties because it would cut down on their efficiency and therefore lower their grade. A man became a casualty when he was handed a slip of paper designating the type of wound he had received. He immediately had to stop whatever he might be doing and lie down and wait to be picked up by the medical aid men attached to his unit. He was next moved back by litter bearers to his battalion aid station where first aid measures were given, eg. splints actually applied, etc. Next he was moved back to the collecting company by litter bearer and ambulance. Here further first aid treatment was given. Then he was moved back to our collecting company where he received his first definitive treatment. The diagnoses with which they were sent back makes you remember that there is a war going on despite the fact that we are seeing only simulated casualties. Gunshot wound of the abdomen, or chest, or compound fracture of the lower third of the femur caused by a bullet, etc., etc. It's going to be awful if, when I enter actual combat, I should have to take care of things like that. Since I've never been interested in surgery I'd hate like hell to have to do the type of work which I'm afraid that I'm going to be required to do. It's frightening, but I guess if I have to do it I'll do it.

Patients came in all night long and I did more theoretical surgery than most traumatic surgeons would see in a month. We were kept busy until noon (over)

and broke camp about 2:30 P.M. This was also interesting to me, but this letter is already much longer than I expected it to be so I'm not going to go into any detail about this. The next two problems were different tactically for the combat teams, but for the clearing company this doesn't seem to make much difference. Our duties remain just about the same. Well, so much for army life.

Ros and the kids are fine. Elaine is getting so cute it's hard to keep from using superlatives in telling you about her. I've got some pictures which I expected to send you of both Elaine and Judy, but my duties have kept me tied up so, that I have been unable to take the negatives to be developed. That reminds me - Edie - what in the world did you ever do with the negatives of Stephen and of the family group? I've had several requests for pictures from this roll, and Ros turned it over to you before we ever left Greenfield. Judy is well past the baby stage now. She's almost grown up, I'm afraid.

Well, the kids are waking from their afternoon nap, so I guess I'll close. But first there are two things I want to bring up.

1. I got my leave Feb. 23 for 12 days. If any of you other boys can get off during that time, I think it would be swell if we could get together in Cincy.

2. Joke - Oftentimes when giving a lecture, I start the class off with a joke. This is a common procedure in the army. This is one which I told to the intelligence school at my last lecture there. It went over so big that I thought you might enjoy it.

It seems that a man and his wife were driving through from Cincy to Chicago when the wife felt the desire to go to the toilet. Her husband stopped the car at the next filling station, which happened to be one of those counter filling stations which we all have seen, with out house some distance from the station proper. As the husband filled up on gas, the wife started up the path to the two-holer. As she walked toward it she heard a scream and saw a woman leave the outhouse in such haste that she was still arranging her clothing. The wife, thinking that the woman was probably frightened by a mouse, which she did not fear, continued up the path. Suddenly she again heard a scream and saw the same thing happening with a second woman. This was more than she cared to chance, so she returned to the station and told her husband about the incident. He immediately called over the proprietor and told him what his wife had seen. The proprietor laughed and told him that he could explain.

"You see," he said, "I'm out here alone all day long, and things get very monotonous. Therefore, in order to amuse myself, I rigged up a microphone here in the station with the loud speaker beneath the holes in the outhouse. When a lady goes into the outhouse, I give her about a half minute to let her get seated, then I say into the microphone here, 'Lady, will you move over to the other hole? I'm painting down here.'"

Army latrine rumors have it that our division will go on maneuvers in the spring with some units not returning to Camp Shelby.

Lots of love and luck to all of you from,

Elaine, Judy, Ros, and Salt.