

From Walter to Roslyn

Jan. 4th, 1944.

I'm starting this letter in the Red Cross office while I wait for one of the executives to arrive. I'm going to try to borrow \$125 to lend to my men so that they can go into town today. Almost every one of them is completely broke, as I mentioned in the last letter. I had to mail that letter before I was finished because the mail was going out and I feared that I might be a whole day behind if I waited to finish it. There is so much I would like to tell you, but can't because of military restrictions. I wanted to go into more detail about the natives in my last letter, but didn't get the opportunity. The native women have the veils that one expects, but they are not nearly as careful to keep their faces covered as I expected they would. I'd like you to get some pictures of Arabs in their native habitat so you can show them to the kids and let them know where their daddy is and what he is seeing. You might be able to find these in the school library in the Nat'l Geographic Magazine. The clothes that the majority of the natives wear seem to be merely rags thrown together in sufficient quantity to furnish a moderate covering of the body. On our trip out to the camp we were shouted at by myriads of small, dirty urchins who begged for "smokey, smokey". But we had heard that cigarettes would be hard to get so we didn't permit any tossing of these out of the truck. In reprisal the urchins would curse us in the foulest English that I have heard, even from adults, anywhere else. Some of the kids ~~xxx~~ were smaller than Judy. One of them yelled to us "Wanta f----" and then pointed to a nearby house. It was very disgusting to hear youngsters of this age acting as pimps. We had noticed the scarcity of autos as we drove thru town. The only vehicles we saw were army vehicles and an occasional bus. They do have electric buses. The laxity of morals, from our viewpoint, is terrific. The natives think nothing of standing in town and urinating against a wall. Some of the boys saw one native woman squat in full view and have a BM. Of course, she pulled her rags around her so that all they saw was a woman squatting. It's amazing and disgusting to us. Our chow here is similar to the chow we had in the desert, but unfortunately I don't have a home to run to every other night to make up for its shortcomings. However, it really isn't too bad. The first night we spent in camp our bedding rolls had not arrived and we had to sleep on the wooden floor of our tent. Roy and I slept together (I believe I told you about it in ~~xxx~~ the last letter.) Being accustomed to having a bed partner I didn't mind at all, but I must admit that Roy had many shortcomings compared to my last bed partner. However, I'll make up for it when I get back. I mentioned about the rationing here. I don't remember whether I mentioned the water rationing. We are definitely limited in the amount of water which we can use. In order to make sure of this, they turn off the bath water between 8.30 am and 5 pm so that it is impossible to take a shower during the warm part of the day, with the result that only the more rugged individuals will take a shower during the cooler hours of the morning and evening and therefore less water is used. So far I haven't had the chance to take a shower here, but I did the last morning on the boat, so that only 3 days have passed since I last took a shower. The morning after we got here the funniest sensation persisted with us. Every time we bent over or closed our eyes, the floor seemed to rock just as the we were still on the boat. This sensation persisted for a whole day. Some of the fellows actually became dizzy from this, just as the they were seasick again. I felt it fully as much as I had noticed the rocking on the boat the last few days. The first night here, one of our men developed chills and fever and we had to hospitalize him. It was simply too cold, without any possible relief from the cold, to permit him to remain in our area. Just as soon as he got into the warmed hospital bldg. he began to improve and now is well on his way to returning to us.

Jan. 5th, 1944.

Yesterday we learned that we would really be able to go into town, so I hurried to the Red Cross to try to borrow the money mentioned above so that the men in the company would have a little money to spend in town. I had to make 3 trips there to try to find the man who had the authority to lend me the money, and finally did to corner him while he was eating dinner. I then

learned that it was impossible for them to lend me the money. It seems that they can only lend money for emergencies, otherwise they have to go thru channels which takes 15 days. Since we needed the money within the next hour that was obviously out of the question. I then tried to get him to cash the \$70 in express checks that I had, but he couldn't do this. Next I tried to get him to allow me to write my personal check for the money but he couldn't take a USA check. So I was really up against it. I only had \$35 and John had \$60 and that wasn't enough to go around. So I called all the men who were getting passes into a formation and had those with any money step forward. I determined how much money these men had, and attached the others to them so that each man would have between two and three dollars to spend. It was a share the wealth program to an extreme degree. When this was all over I still found 3 men who had been left over, so I peeled off one of my few remaining \$10 bills and handed it to them. It was really funny to watch the procedure. However, there is a nice feeling of comradeship and I don't believe that anyone resented the action. It was all for one and one for all. Next I had to warn them of their conduct in town. They are terribly strict in the town on military courtesy of every type. Officers are required to salute officers of equal grade, as well as superior grade. This results in every officer saluting every other officer he sees. Apparently this is to impress the civilian population. Since the men have to salute every officer this means that every officer has to salute every other army person he sees in town. However we didn't find it too much of a hardship.

I also had to warn the men about staying away from native women, who are almost 100% infected with venereal disease of one type or another. Likewise they were to stay away from the European type of white women for those of this type could be coaxed to respond to any amorous actions would certainly be infected. In other words, women were taboo. Since they place the responsibility of the men's actions on the shoulders of the company commander, in this theater, I warned the men that if they did not keep out of trouble that as long as I was company commander they would never receive another pass. Maybe it was this threat or maybe it was the fact that I handpicked the 50% of the men whom I allowed to go into town but at any rate not a single one was picked up by MPs. I was quite proud of them. We were also allowed to have all of the officers, excepting one, go into town; so I took the prerogative of the company commander and decided that I would go and let the others draw to see who was to stay behind. It turned out that Leip was the one to stay behind, and since he is such a damper on anything or do we weren't sorry. We proceeded to get our clothes out of our valises, and found that our blouses were moderately wrinkled, but since we were wearing overcoats, this didn't matter much. By 2 pm we were ready to take off into town. We got a ride to the MP gate, which isn't very far from our area, then had to stand in the road and wait for a lift into town. Town is about 4 miles away but you usually get a lift on Army vehicles so that you save time by waiting. While we waited along came several taxis which were nothing more or less than horse-drawn carriages of somewhat the style of the 1890's. They were driven by Arabs. The charge was 50 francs per person (\$1) since we had left all but \$10 apiece at camp in order to avoid losing too much in case our pockets were picked, we didn't want to waste any money. So we waited for an army vehicle to pass by. Natives passed by walking alongside heavily laden camels, or riding small jackasses, much smaller than the ponies back home. Almost all of these natives were barefooted and the robes which they wore, for the most part, were of the cheapest material conceivable. We were standing there garbed in overcoats and still not feeling uncomfortably warm and these natives walked about half-dressed and barefooted and didn't seem to mind the chilliness at all. (The break in typing is due to the fact that we went into town again today, most unexpectedly with the result that I didn't get to finish the letter.) Finally we got a ride into town in an army truck which of course, was packed to the gills. I had an enlisted man sitting in my lap. The driver took us into the very heart of town and we detrucked and started walking around. The first thing we noted was that the buildings were incredibly modern and attractive compared to the native population. They are of a type which I believe is called Bauhaus, and are functional in design, so



that all of the floors have balconies. Many of them are 6 or even more stories tall. They are cream colored for the most part, but many of them are white and are consequently extremely attractive. To walk on the streets here you would never believe that there was a war going on except for the uniforms, and these are of such variety as to defy description. Apparently the French have no set uniform for each officer has a different style and coloring to his. It is quite confusing to decide on his nationality. The parks here are very attractive and plentiful and have blooms of Rose of Sharon trees, poinsettia, and numerous others which I did not recognize. The trees are chiefly palm trees and a type of willow. The main thoroughfare in town is very wide with a garden plot dividing the two lanes of traffic. The entire business district, which is immense, has balconies extending over the wide sidewalks except for a few feet, and in many places where there are eating and drinking, tables and chairs are set out under the balcony so that you can watch the passersby while you eat. We continued our explorations and reached an area which was marked off limits. We went over to read the sign and two young lads of about 10 came over to tell us that it was off limits and realizing that this was our first time in the town, they attached themselves to us. They spoke English well enough for us to understand what they were trying to say, and we could get our messages over to them, so all in all it was a working union. We inquired of them as to whether they were refugees and learned that they were Jewish boys who were born in this town. They spoke six different languages, English, Yiddish, French, Italian, German and Moroccan. I thought that I'd try some of my Yiddish on them but they said mine was too mixed with Americanese for them to understand me. They took us in tow and proceeded to take us wherever we asked them to. We wanted the biggest department store in town, so they took us there where we did some shopping. I saw some dates, which I thought would make a nice souvenir for you from North Africa, so I bought them. However, before the day was thru I had bought so many things that I don't think I'll send you the dates. The main item down here that is worth its price is leather items. They use goatskin, and camel skin and make beautiful things of them. So I decided to buy you and the kids a few leather things. I started off with a nice coin purse, which I felt that you could use, and bought Elaine a leather elephant. However as I continued window shopping I became enamored with an unusual purse the like of which I had never seen before, so I ended up by buying it for you. I hope that it gets to you unharmed and doesn't end up at the bottom of the ocean. (I'm typing this letter by candle light so please forgive mistakes because I can't see the line I'm typing because of the shadow of the typewriter). The streets of the town are very winding and are therefore quite confusing. We walked around a great deal in circles, but the boys would straighten us out all the time.

It is was interesting to see their reaction to the fact that I was Jewish. First they patted me on the back, then noting that I was a captain and the other only lieutenants, they inferred that this was so because of my Jewish race. They knew all the military courtesies, and insisted that I walk in front with them and the other officers follow in the rear. This soon wore off after they were with us for a while. However, they really were a big help to us in finding our way around. Most of our day was spent in window shopping and sightseeing but finally we got around to purchasing, and Van, John and I bought the leather elephant which I mentioned. Then we each bought purses and I bought a cigarette case of Moroccan leather. By this time we were both hungry and found ourselves in need of emptying ourselves before eating. So we went to the officers club which is in a beautiful stone building similar to the other buildings in town but more elaborate and with a beautiful garden next to it, i.e., in front of it. We were quite surprised to find that in a building as nice as this that the toilet was only very mediocre. In fact one toilet seat was broken off so that it was necessary to squat in order to use it but to an old field soldier like me, used to straddle trenches, this presented no problem.



Following our short visit to the officers club, we went to a French restaurant with sidewalk seats, and sitting at one of the sidewalk tables proceeded to to order a meal from a French waiter who spoke no English. Roy, who thought that 3 years of high school French should entitle him to at least order a meal, found himself unable to cope with the situation so we let the ~~waiter~~ waiter bring what he wanted. Of course there was the ever present bottle of wine which is drunk here instead of water. In fact we have been warned that despite its strength, the wine is much safer than the water supply so we didn't touch any water. The first course was soup which was brought to the table in a large earthenware dish, and ladled out by Garcon into our individual beaten silver dishes. It was quite tasty and by the time I had finished the soup I was feeling some of the effects of the wine which I had drunk on an empty stomach. Next he served hard boiled eggs with a very appetizing sauce over it, accompanied by a separate dish of carrots, also quite good. All this time we were eating that French bread which we both tasted in the south. However, this was a darker bread than the usual French bread of our previous acquaintance. There was no butter placed on the table, and we didn't figure that we would be able to get any so we didn't ask. For dessert, we had the choice of an orange or cheese, and we all chose cheese. It was a very fine, moderately dry cottage cheese, but with a much stronger taste, somewhat tangy, and I guessed that it was either from goat's milk or camel's milk. We were all completely satisfied as to our hunger.

But I had drunk two full glasses of wine, and boy, did it make me nice and warm and feel good. Roy was scared to death that we would get drunk so he only drank a little bit of it. It was interesting to note that he was the only one of us who noticed that the air got appreciably colder after the sun went down. We didn't hang around town after this, but headed over to one of the places where we were to catch a truck back to camp. We waited there for quite some time, without any luck as far as getting a truck was concerned, but with plenty of opportunities or solicitations to ride a vehicle of another type, of the female gender. However, we weren't interested.

Finally we went over to the area where the enlisted men were to catch the trucks and got into one of these before it was filled. It so happened that it was loading up on colored soldiers to take them back to the camp, and we had a picnic listening to them kid one another. There were a couple of drunken white soldiers who boarded the same truck. I'd like to tell you some of the cracks we heard because they were really funny but this letter is going to be too long just trying to keep up with the daily events. We were back at camp by 9.30 but then we still had to censor the letters that the boys had written. Since many of them had not gotten to go to town, they had plenty time to write so that by the time we finished it was time for bed. I had no trouble sleeping because I was quite worn out with the walking I had done, and since my sleeping bag is very warm I had no trouble sleeping. X

This morning I started typing this letter to you but was called away to attend a meeting and there learned that they were going to allow another 50% of the men to go to town, and all but two officers, so then the problem arose as to where I was going to get money for the rest of the men. I was pretty nearly broke, as were everyone else in the company. So I figured and figured and finally decided to cash the company fund check which I have been carrying with me for quite some time. It was for \$70, and with \$20 which I added to it it totalled the \$90 which was needed to supply \$3 each to the 30 men that needed money, so it worked out all right for the second day. This left me with \$25 for myself. Leif and John went in with me. We got a ride into town or rather to the railroad yard with a truck leaving camp and there got to see what the trains around here are like. They are actually freight cars of the type used to transport cattle in the U.S. only a bit more closed. They are the famous 40 and 8 of the last war, 40 being the capacity in men and 8 the capacity in horses, respectively. I am told that they put 30 men on each of these trains and make a trip which is moderately long. Since there are

no latrines, it is necessary to stop every 5 hours and build latrines along the side of the track. These 30 men have to sleep in the car which really results in such crowded conditions that it is necessary for the men to sleep with their arms on their chest in a folded position, otherwise they can't all lie down at one time. I still can't see how even in this position it is possible for all of them to sleep at the same time. Then too, with these extremely cold nights I can't see how they can sleep because of the cold. One of these days it may be necessary for me to make a trip on one of these and I dread to think of the discomfort.

We saw the depot, which was very attractive from the outside, but most mediocre ~~inside~~ inside. Here we entered the toilet and really were surprised when we looked into the latrine. It was a shower-like stall structure, with two raised blocks to place the feet on, but no toilet bowl at all, merely a hole of the same size as you would expect leading away from the bowl at home. It is obvious that it is necessary to squat in order to have a BM. Then they have a flattened out faucet, similar to the bottom piece of the vacuum sweeper which flushes down whatever stool remains. We really felt that we had made a discovery.

We continued our walk into town. (The wine in town has affected many of our boys, but they seem to be getting back OK. Right now they are outside singing hill-billy songs). The next place of interest was the city market. This is a tremendous oblong dome shaped building with innumerable wagons pulling into it laden with vegetables of all types. Urchins run alongside the wagons reaching between the bars and stealing whatever vegetables they can get hold of. Outside the gates of the market are hundreds of Arabs of varying degrees of wealth. The poorer ones are dressed in rags and bare of foot, while the wealthier ones have the typical sandal-like slipper without any heel, some of which are very fancily embroidered and quite expensive. Their clothes ~~also~~ also show the difference in that they are made of good quality and the outer garment is not so unattractive while the inner garments are quite beautiful with very intricate embroidery. X

We stopped to watch a boy weave a large vegetable basket about 4 feet tall. He certainly was adept and worked quite rapidly. We continued on into town, walking all the time. A bus passed us with a load of Arabs, so full that they were sitting on the roof, looking all the world like a laundry truck at home on Mondays with the bags of laundry piled on top. We saw many shops that we hadn't seen the previous day and I saw a gorgeous ivory beaklace with beads of varying size from pea to plum but it was \$18 and I didn't have the money to spare. However, I'll get paid one of these days and I've decided that I might as well buy some of these curios as souvenirs as to have the money accumulate. I think that your allotment will take care of things at home. I did see a beautiful Moroccan doll which would have been swell for Edie's collection, but I decided to buy it for Judy and send the elephant to Elaine. I didn't have enough money left to buy one for Edie but maybe I'll get the chance later. Leif bought his wife a purse, and a couple of tams for his kids. I then saw some really practical purses which I decided to buy for the kids. They are of leather and have drawstrings which make them quite simple to close so you really are due to get a big package from me in the distant future. I have no idea how long it will take to get to you. Oh! I forgot to tell you that I cashed the American Express checks yesterday. I had no difficulty at an Army bank in town. I really spent a lot of money, but don't worry honey, it won't be often that I'll have the opportunity to spend money so I might as well when I do have the chance. After we concluded our purchases we went to the officers club restaurant where we were served a GI meal which was quite good and which cost only 20¢. Incidentally the meal at the French restaurant the day before was on 60¢ each with tip. After the meal we decided to return to camp wanting to start early so that we would have a better chance of getting a lift in an army vehicle and not have the 2 hour wait we had had last night. We got a lift in a jeep from an American boy ~~driving~~ driving a French jeep.