

Hello folks:

Friday June 2, 1944

As I write this I am sitting in a house in a small village in Italy with shells of the enemy bursting some 400 yards toward the front, while our artillery is whistling shells over my head at a great clip. Despite the noise of the guns exploding, we are always happy to hear our shell going out because it means that it is making it easier for the boys up ahead. There is no question but that we throw at least 10 shells for every one that Jerry throws. All the prisoners who have passed thru our station have always marvelled at our artillery. Only yesterday morning this town was in Jerry's hands, and when we moved into it yesterday afternoon the streets and yards were strewn with dead, chiefly Germans, thank goodness. Fortunately, it has been quite some time since we have been busy, and we are one unit that feels that the less we do the sooner the war will finish. It is interesting to note that the German wounded who have come thru our station all feel that Germany will lose the war. The great majority of them are quite young and seem greatly relieved that they are now captives and that the war is over for them.

Practically speaking, we have been a front line unit since the start of the present push, and everyone concerned seems to feel that we have done an exceptionally good job. There is no question about it because we have kept a constant push forward despite desperate opposition at times. I understand that the work of our division and another one associated with us has been recognized in the newspapers in the states. We are all quite proud of ourselves.

So far the casualties in my company have been light when one considers that many of my men have been right up with the front line troops. We had our first death Wednesday, and other casualties have been correspondingly light. Of course, there have been a great number of narrow escapes, but misses don't count. Several of our vehicles have been struck but never while any one was in them, and none of them were damaged sufficiently to impair their working for more than a few hours. All this despite the fact that we have been in bombing raids and have had our ambulances all the way up into the front lines and at one time even beyond the front lines. I'm going to keep my fingers crossed and hope that we don't do any worse for the duration. The one boy we lost probably would have received only a minor wound if he had followed one of the fundamental teachings of the fighting man, viz. always keep your helmet on when you are anywhere near where a shell might reach you. A shell fragment pierced his skull when it caught him with out his helmet on, whereas if he had had his helmet on it would probably have caused only a scalp wound rather than a brain injury. It is very rare for a shell fragment to pierce the helmet and cause a really serious injury. Usually those that do pierce the helmet have lost most of the force which is required to break thru the skull, and consequently cause only scalp wound.

Jerry has really been taking a beating here in this sector. Their cemeteries are numerous and well populated (there is one in this town with more than 60 graves) and that doesn't count the number of dead that had to be left behind because of the rapid retreat that they have had to make. The amount of equipment which they have had to leave behind has likewise been tremendous. In one three mile stretch of road I counted 26 vehicles, 9 tanks, and 1 large gun destroyed, and all this right at the road side. I didn't look up into the fields where there was probably very much more lost equipment. Likewise this doesn't include vehicles which were captured intact. Such vehicles are put to use by the units which capture them. Even our company now has an extra trailer, much larger than any which we have in our army. It will make it much easier to transport our company now. Other units have autos, trucks, motorcycles, etc, even half tracks which they have added to their motor vehicle allowance and they are having a picnic with these additional vehicles. The motorcycles, in particular, are a source of enjoyment and many soldiers who never had ridden a motorcycle in their lives, are now riding about over rocky country roads, all smiles. Another source of enjoyment is the capture of german guns, pistols, grenades, machine guns, mortars, and the ammunition which goes with this. It is actually dangerous to be behind the lines because many of the american soldiers can't ~~keep~~ keep their curiosity under control and feel that they simply must fire these weapons. Yesterday, when our company was in an area which was at least 6 miles behind the front line, we all had to duck for our lives when a soldier in a medical unit down the road from us was investigating a german machine gun and it suddenly went off spraying our area with bullets. Gosh, did that guy get some hell from every unit within a mile of him. It seems that every unit sent at least one representative down to find out what the shooting was about, and each unit was sure that the bullets had gone into his area. At any rate, I didn't wait to find out whether they were coming into our area but hit a dugout at once.

Every place which we have occupied lately, has shown signs of the Jerries and their hasty retreat. In our last place there was ammunition all over the area, as well as guns, mortars, etc. In our present area we moved into a house, in fact two houses, which had been occupied by germans only that morning. Rifles are all over the place as well as rocket guns, ammunition, gas masks, etc. I am now using a ~~German~~ German gas mask case (all metal as compared with our canvas ones) as a map case. However, the best thing about this place is the air raid shelter which we have. We are occupying two rather large houses, one for our kitchen and the other for our station. Since Jerry has been accustomed to come over these front line towns at nite and bomb and strafe them, we are not too happy about being in them. In fact we are most anxious not to set up in them, but often we have no choice in the matter because of the tactical situation. We have to be somewhere where we can evacuate patients, and we would set up in an open field in order to stay out of towns, but usually this would mean that we ~~would~~ would be right in with the field artillery and since this draws fire from the enemy, that is no place to be, so we try to find an isolated house outside of a town, if that is possible. Oftentimes it isn't and as a result we set up in the town itself. Well, both of our houses here have the best bomb shelters that anyone could wish. Apparently they were built many years ago as wine cellars. Each one is very deep (it takes a stairs of 40 steps to reach the bottom), is reinforced with thick

immediately set up a spot for my cot, as did one of the other officers. The rest of the company had no intentions of spending the night in "that damp hole". Immediately after dark, as is usually his custom, Jerry came over with a couple of planes and started investigating the area around us, dropping a few bombs at quite some distance and also strafing the roads. It was not surprising to see that that little air raid shelter was filled up in no time. A number of the men returned to the building after the plane finally went off, but they were soon chased back by another plane or planes. Actually, in the safety of my shelter I wasn't able to tell how many planes were over. All in all the men were chased down into the shelter three times, and each time more of the men brought their bedding with them, so that in the end most of the company did spend the night there. I spent my first night of uninterrupted sleep in almost a week. Usually Jerry comes over and the noise of the diving planes and the ack ack bursting is just a bit too much for a normal man to sleep thru. In fact some one usually made sure we all awakened to make sure that we would put on our helmets to avoid any injury from falling flak. In only one case was the spot where our company was then located a target. I mentioned that in my last letter. I hope that we are never in a spot where a real air raid goes on again. It is terrifying when you have no shelter to go into. Last night, half of our station was located back in a town, while the rest of us had moved forward. It was their tough luck to run into another air raid which fortunately did not result in any damage for our company, but scared hell out of all of them as the nearest bomb dropped only 400 yards away, and brother, with the concussion of these big bombs, 400 yards is close, believe me. When bombs fell only 150 yards from our house on the night of that air raid of which I have spoken, it felt like the bomb had fallen just outside our door, and all of our blankets which had been nailed in the doors and windows for black out effect, were blown loose and ended in the opposite part of the building. In fact we were almost blown out of our beds.

This war, in addition to being an infantryman's war, is also one in which the engineers play a tremendous part. If it were not for them it would be impossible to get supplies and food to the infantry. It is their job to build roads where none were before, to repair previously existing roads which have been damaged, and to build knocked out bridges, etc. It is simply amazing to see how efficiently and quickly they do their work. Yesterday morning, when the town in which I am now located, was being riddled of Jerries, my liaison sergeant and Lt. Reynolds, (he is really a hero who has already received the purple heart and I plan to recommend him for the award of merit) went forward into the town to see if we could set up a station there. The road over which they traveled was a one ~~lane~~ lane road (20 minutes later - I ducked into the bomb shelter when I heard a plane overhead and some explosions, but it turned out to be one of ours time out again - this time for 30 minutes. One of the boys found a house which belonged to a former fascist and told me there was some linen there, and I've just returned. There was a man there who showed me some very fine stuff and gave me a sack full of it. I've just finished packing it, honey, and it will be on its way to-night. I hope I can get back into my trend of thought). which road required considerable moving for vehicles to pass one another. About two hours later our company moved up and the engineers had made a completely new road thru fields and up and down hills, so that each road now had one way traffic and there was no difficulty at all. Mind you, there had been no road there at all before, merely vineyards, and they had bulldozed one thru the fields for a couple of miles in a matter of two hours. That is typical of the type of work which they are doing constantly.

Well, folks, if I'm going to get this letter in to-day's mail, I'll have to stop now as the mail clerk is getting ready to go back to the postoffice along with an ambulance load. I'll try to keep up my correspondence, altho I can make no promises. I appreciate the interest that you are taking in writing me. The other day I received letters from Irv, Rosalyn, and Eddie in the same mail. That is a coincidence that is really appreciated.

I'll be seeing you one of these days
Walt.