

My dear Tuck and Plum:

2 July 1944 Sunday

I guess I should apologize for not having written you earlier, but I find that most of my time is pretty well occupied and what time I have to spare is spent in writing to Roslyn and the children. I am at present spending the day in our bivouac area (we are at rest in Italy far behind the front lines) and since I have caught up in my mail to Roslyn I thought that I would try to drop you a line. Much has happened since we left your loving care more than a year ago. I know that Roslyn has been corresponding with you so I won't go into any detail about the trips back and forth across the ~~convex~~ country. We really did get to see pretty much of the United States, though, and enjoyed it tremendously, even the California desert; but I'd enjoy anything just so long as I had my little family close enough so that I could see them occasionally. Would that that were the case now.

My trip overseas was made on a modern troop ship and was very pleasant and uneventful. We went to North Africa where we spent a few months in additional training. North Africa was interesting to me for I had never seen such poverty, not even in the worst places in the US. From North Africa we came to Italy, where I have been spending my time since. I have had the opportunity of seeing several of the famous cities of Italy. Rome is the most beautiful city that you can imagine and I have really had the opportunity of seeing it well. In fact, I stayed in a hotel in that city for a few days. It is a fortunate thing that it was possible to prevent its being damaged by the war. As for the small towns that I have seen, you simply can't picture the amount of damage that this war has caused. In several of these not a single house is left undamaged, and yet people move back into these ruins, clean up one room and all of the occupants of the whole house live in that one room. If some of our folks back home could see a few of the things that we have seen over here, they would give thanks to God that they have been spared all this.

Most of the time that I have been in Italy has been spent in the front lines, and I can assure you that I have had my share of excitement. It was pretty hard going at first but once we got the Jerries on the run things eased up and it was more or less like maneuvers. Actually, on the whole, we have been very comfortable while here, even when the fighting was hardest, since we have almost always lived in houses, and some of these were quite beautiful. One place, in particular, was an estate right on the Tyrrhenian sea. At that time the Germans were retreating so fast that we didn't have any work to do, so we spent a couple of days swimming about in the sea and sunning on the beach. It really was a lot of fun and the only thing missing was my family.

I'm sure that you have seen pictures of our march through Rome. We were among the first troops to go through the city and you can't picture the welcome which we received. I know that you have seen pictures of this event, but to have actually experienced it is something that no soldier will ever forget. The crowds were larger than I had ever seen. Every street was so jammed with people that it was almost impossible to move and it took us hours to get through the city. We were in a hurry to get through the city because we didn't want to lose contact with the Germans, but you couldn't make the people understand that. The Romans really rejoiced that day, and we gloried in their happiness. We can now understand why they were so happy to see us, since the Germans had not fed them too well, and had taken much of anything which they wanted. I was talking to a priest of one of the many monasteries over here, and he told me that the Romans loved the American soldiers. They were not arrogant like the Germans, smiled easily, were kind to the natives, and loved the children. In fact, the only thing about the American soldiers which they don't like is their getting drunk. Actually, drunkenness is not as common over here as it was in army towns near camps back in the state.

I guess that by now you have read about the good work which our division did over here. I had always felt that we had a good division, and the test of combat proved this. The boys really did some marvellous fighting, and fought hard and long, over mountains as well as flat lands. The first portion of the push was really tough going, and after we finally broke through and got into the German positions and looked back to where we had been, we had no trouble in understanding why those first few days were hard. The Germans were located in the mountains and could see every move that we made, and the surprising thing is that we were able to break through at all. However, those infantry boys, heroes every one of them, fought tooth and nail until they finally overcame those positions by sheer force. I'll always have a warm spot in my heart for the brave infantry boys.

I understand that Byron and Berle are at the Great Lakes Training Center. I'm glad that they are remaining together. The life in the navy is much easier than that in the army and altho I wouldn't trade them places, I am glad for their sakes that they have gotten into the navy. I understand that one of them is interested in medicine. I wonder if I had anything to do with that. At any rate, the navy offers courses at medical college to enlisted men, and if he can get selected to attend medical college he should do so by all means.

Regards to you, and the twins, and your other son, (for the life of me I can't think of his name, altho I can picture his husky stature plainly). All my love and good wishes to you

Walter Felson