

Hello Dearling:

14 July 1944

Here I go again. Actually there is very little happening around here now, with noting but a training program of classes going on daily, and with me lying around practically all the day long. However I guess I'll find something to talk about.

Our water here has been quite a problem. It is so absolutely hard that it is impossible to get a lather with soap, and as a result our mess gear feels terribly greasy after we have finished cleaning it. It seems that no matter how much soap we add to the water the only perceptible result is a fine sediment of curdled soap. Since we do not yet have water softener available to us this has created quite a problem, as diarrhea tends to occur whenever you don't clean your mess gear properly. One would not ordinarily consider water as a subject of particular importance, but to troops in the field it is definitely a problem. First of all, aside from the prevention of diseases, which is the paramount idea as far as the army is concerned, there are a number of things which to the soldier seem more important. There is the taste of the water. We are all so accustomed to the strong taste of chlorine in water that we don't pay any attention to it anymore. Of course the chlorine is added to kill any organic material which might remain in the water after filtering. The taste of chlorine in the water assures one that the engineers have added a sufficient quantity of it to take care of this organic matter. Then there is an iodine taste which we note in the water whenever we are located near the sea. This is most unpleasant, and oftentimes we send out water trailer to spots miles away from the sea in order to get better tasting water. Division frowns on this, but we have only been caught at it once, in North Africa. Occasionally water which we get has a metallic taste and at other times a sulfurous taste. Probably the best water we have had at any time is the water which we had in the mountains in Africa. I guess the worst tasting water which we had was back in the California desert. All of the old boys remember the salty, soda taste of that Hopkins Well water, and you had to drink it or suffer the likelihood of a heat stroke. Again there have been times when the water was so soft that you could never get off all the soap, and you felt slimy when you finished washing. On the whole, though, our engineers have done a very good job of taking care of our water for us, and it is not too often that we have complaints to offer.

Well, I finally got myself a pair of honest to goodness combat shoes. I told you I had had the leather tops sewed on a pair of my own shoes to make combat shoes out of them. Well, they finally wore out, so I have gotten a pair of GI combat shoes size 6 - D. Even my foot size seems to have decreased since I have come in the army. I'm afraid that I shall come out a weazened old man. That reminds me - I received your letter telling me of the receipt of my picture. It is a good likeness, but I'm sure you'll like the larger one which you should receive shortly, better. If the latter doesn't appeal to you, I'm afraid that there is nothing I can do to alter it because it is an extremely good likeness. Even I admit that.

Yesterday afternoon Brady, Van, and I took a walk up to the swimming hole in the hills above us and had a nice swim. It reminds me of the country back home. We had to walk thru a hedge, across a plowed field, thru a second hedge, along a foot path running alongside of the bank of a creek, cross the creek onto a cart road, and uphill right to the farmhouse in whose yard was the pool. The farmhouse was occupied by a family group of four women, apparently a mother, a married daughter, and two unmarried daughters, plus three children of ~~one~~ the married daughter, plus the two husbands and a boy friend. Each one of these houses seems to be filled with in-laws as well as family. The pool was the result of damming up a very small creek, but it had resulted in a very nice swimming hole. The overflow was directed under the road leading to the house and flowed thru a pipe into the large concrete tub which was used for washing clothes. The girls kept busy at this all day long, the GIs finding plenty of clothes for them to wash. No one paid any attention to the girls, and the only concession which was made to their presence was the fact that everyone wore trunks. Maybe I shouldn't say that no one paid attention to the girls, because they were noticed by everyone, being not unattractive and having the usual full busts that all Italian girls seem to have. It's a good thing that they don't understand English, or they would have been blushing constantly with the remarks which were made. However, no one made any false moves. One incident did occur while I was there. The inhabitants had a chicken in a little inner yard, and one of the infantry boys stole into the yard to see if he could pick up some eggs. There was only one there, and no sooner had he gotten his hand on it than the matriarch of the house was on him with loud shouts and took the egg away from him. He was quite chagrined by the razzing which he took from the other boys around, and if he had been sufficiently coaxed would probably have done something regrettable. As it was, he felt that these Italians didn't appreciate the presence of us Americans, their liberators. It had to be explained to him that as far as these people here in the country are concerned, we are not liberators, but another set of intruders into the privacy of their lives.

Yesterday, Rudolf, one of the medics in the second battalion, visited with us for a while. He has played cards with the officers in his battalion ever since he has been over seas and

is now more than \$1000 in the whole. He doesn't know how to explain this to his wife, who doesn't know that he has been gambling. It seems that he is playing with a couple of cutthroats who average sending home more than \$1000 per month winnings. He continues to play because he is sure that his luck can't stay bad forever, but as far as I can see, these professional gamblers have sucker bait. He was telling us about his work in the battalion aid station, and believe me I want none of it. They are only a few hundred yards behind the front troops, and on several occasions have made the mistake of being in front of the infantry. That is really a bad policy and when you do something like that it is only by the grace of God that you live to tell the story.

Sick call in the army is a peculiar thing. Rudolph tells me that they have been kept busy with this for better than two hours every morning, while in training area, but just as soon as they go up front their sick call drops to nothing. I noticed that in our company sick call consisted of 14 men on Saturday, only 3 on Sunday, and then back up to 14 on Monday. As a result I felt that most of the men were going to sick call solely to get out of calisthenics and drill, so I changed the time of sick call to 12:30, and now we only run a sick call of 3 to 5 men.

Another thing that I have had to straighten up was the ducking out of classes and away from the area that the men have been trying to get away with of late. They felt that the worst which they would get for this was KP which actually is a better job than having to sit in class, but I fooled them. Instead of giving the usual KP I am giving them 5 hours of extra duty for each hour they miss, and this extra duty consists of marching with full field pack. I have two men who will have to walk 32 hours this week, this in addition to the two hour hike which we take daily. 4 more of the men have to walk for 10 hours. To-day everyone showed up for all classes, and there was no attempt at ducking out. I don't think I'll have any more trouble on that score.

That's about all for now, sweets.

All my love,
Walt.