

Monday, 11.15, Sept.18th, 1944.

Well, I'm sure that I won't make this morning's mail since I have been much too busy to do any writing before now. Fortunately it hasn't been casualties that have kept me busy, but rather tactics, since things are once again going our way. We have been capturing Jerry prisoners by the score, many of them wounded severely enough to come thru our station so that I have had the opportunity of talking to them.

Don't ask me how we broke thru those "impregnable" German positions, because I'm not sure even now, as to how we did it. After watching them shell those pillboxes for 3 days, and seeing no appreciable damage I figured that the situation here would be stalemated. However, an awful lot of brass came up and spent quite some time in figuring out how we could get around these obstacles and somehow or other they figured it out. I know that the artillery played a great part in the breakthru and they feel that they nullified practically every pillbox on the mountain above us. Maybe so. I know that they threw enough stuff in there to kill anything and everything that was above ground. It all started yesterday AM. The night before the situation had remained unchanged, but we had an inkling of what was going to be tried. Apparently it worked, because the following AM we could see our own soldiers climbing all over the tops of those hills. What a pleasure that was, particularly in view of the fact that casualties were amazingly light in view of the opposition expected. A couple of messages were intercepted that helped us considerably. One was to the effect that a company was coming up to replace the casualties the Jerries had suffered. It was possible to figure out just what route this company would have to take to reach the hill it was heading for, and the artillery gave them a chance to get started and then really laid it in on them. Only 12 men and one officer got through and these were captured. Believe me, these Jerries are plenty impressed by our artillery, and rightly so. Another intercepted message told of a meeting of company commanders at a certain spot at a definite time. All of our artillery battalions and everything else around here in the way of artillery laid it in on that spot at one time. I am sure that no one got out of the alive, altho I'll probably never know the story. I wish I could give you the figures on the amount of artillery which we have been throwing at the Jerries but I'm afraid that that is not permitted. Suffice it to say that we have listened to many, many guns shoot continuously day and night, and that a German prisoner said that for every round the Jerries throw we throw 20, and believe me that is no exaggeration, and you can get some idea as to why we are progressing against such a difficult object. However,



I believe that we are past the hardest part of it and the situation should be similar to what it was after we finally broke thru the line down at Minturno, with Jerry running and us chasing him just as fast as we can go over the mountains, and with casualties very light. We'll have to wait and see just what Jerry has beyond this line of mountains. I feel that we must have really gotten those commanding officers with the barrage that was sent over because the Jerries have been giving up in droves.

We are still running into some interesting casualties. Yesterday we had a boy come in whose helmet had been hit by a bullet and the steel of it peeled back similar to peeling back the skin of a banana. He wouldn't have been hurt at all but for the fact that one of these strips of steel turned in instead of out and gave him a small laceration of the scalp. You simply can't explain some of the unusual types of things that bullets will do. Regarding the boy who had the top of his head blown off, I heard what is probably the true story on that. He had committed suicide by placing the rifle in his mouth and pulling the trigger. There is no question but that he did a good job. Having no proof of this, of course he will go thru as having been killed in action.

I spent the greater part of yesterday rereading your August letters and have already mailed them home along with the gifts that Leip got for me. I put a slip in the gift box to let you know just what I had sent.

Another funny case came thru the station yesterday--a somnambulist. That's a mighty dangerous thing to have when you are a front line soldier. If you go traipsing around in your sleep, either the Jerries will get you or else some of your own guards will. That certainly is no place for a sleepwalker. Of course, we sent him back to the clearing station. Better a live citizen than a dead soldier.

The first wounded Jerry prisoner who came thru our station was seen by Van, who was very impatient with him, threatening (in English) to sock him one, and barely examining him and sending him back with his guard saying that he was ok. The fellow had been wounded thru his wrist and apparently was bleeding pretty badly so the Prisoner of War (POW) enclosure sent him back to us. I saw him the second time and redressed his wound which was really quite nasty, with both radius and ulna broken, many tendons cut, and quite a bit of tissue missing. He was a master sergeant of a prominent brigade and told me that he was 29 years old, had been in the army for 9 years, was unmarried, got to go home for 3 weeks once a year, and that his entire group had been captured while they were sleeping. He had had no news for the past 6 days, and had no idea that the West wall had been broken thru. The prisoners who have come thru since are all of the opinion that the war will be over before another month goes by. I hope they are right.

We had several other prisoners through, from one of whom I obtained a cap of the German infantryman which I'll send you when I am sending some other stuff home. I should say if and when, since I have no idea when I shall be able to get to a town to do any more buying. They are not particularly pleased to part with these caps, but after all when you don't ask any questions, they don't have too much to say about it. They will receive other headgear in the rear anyway. The other prisoners who have been thru seem to be terribly hungry and as thirsty as can be. It seems that our artillery fire has been so heavy that supplies can't get thru to them and many of them have not had a drink for 4 days, and most of them have had nothing to eat in the past 2 days. More power to our artillery, because Jerry will have to give up if he can't get water, and that will mean that we will have less casualties.

Our nice house is no longer a ringside seat for combat since our troops have gotten over the ridge and beyond our sight, and so no artillery fire or small



arms fire is landing in the area which we can see. I can't say that I'm put out by this. It's a pleasure to know that our boys don't have to fight their way past those pillboxes.

Yesterday Johnnie Newsack came up again to see how things were going on up in front of us. He did get to see a show, since one of our planes was hit by ack ack and exploded, and he also was able to see our infantrymen swarming over the mountainsides on their way to the top.

Capt. Thompson, not the regimental surgeon, but the one with the field artillery, is staying with us, and spent quite a bit of the evening telling us about the tactics of the artillery. It was quite interesting and most impressive, i.e. the effectiveness of the artillery. He is kept in much better contact with the tactics of the situation since the Field artillery has to know where the front lines are in order to keep from firing at our troops. As a result they are always right up to date on where the front lines are, a thing which we only learn from patients who come thru our station, as a rule, altho we do occasionally get it from HQ of our regiment.

Van was quite a headache to me yesterday. Early in the day he wanted to put up a volley ball court out in the woods near our station. I put a stop to that in a hurry since shells have been dropping not too far away and I can't afford to risk 15 or more men just so they can have a bit of fun. Apparently this upset Van and he wasn't to be seen all the rest of the day. When he came in he told me that he had been up to one of the battalions, far in front of us, and had seen the artillery shell some officers just a short distance out in front of him, fortunately without any casualties. I asked him not to go up to the front since I felt that I would be the one who would have a lot of explaining to do if anything happened to him up there. He still has the habit of roaming all over the area whenever he has a chance. He seems to be oblivious to danger. I guess that's all right, but if I'm going to have to explain his wanderings, in case he gets hurt, I'm not going to take the rap for his eccentricities. He had no explanation to offer for his going there, but later in the day, after he had time to think it over, he came in and handed me a malarial survey report which he has to make twice a month, and said that he had been up at the aid station getting the information for this. Actually this was not so, since he had reports for 3 units and had only visited one. He was still quite angry and suggested that before I made any rules for others in the company I should abide by them myself. I asked him what he meant by this, and he told me that he was aware that I had traded in some rations for some objects in barter. This was a bit silly, but I didn't tell him so, letting it go at that, rather than argue with him. The reason he has this idea is that one day I was going to the clearing station and took back some rations that our mess sergeant owed the mess sgt. back there. Van saw me leading the rations in the jeep and immediately had the idea that I was going to do some trading with them. I felt that it was none of his business, since this was a legitimate thing which I was doing, so didn't offer him any explanations. I have laid down the law to him, telling him that he will not be able to trappse over the countryside without getting permission from me. WE'll get along with one another by steering clear of each other. He'll get over the worst part of his pique in a few days. He really is a hard guy to keep in line. It's a helluva job to have to tell docs what they have to do or shouldn't do. But after all, what am I to do if I am held responsible for what goes on in my company.

Now that things are moving, we are going to have a tremendous job in trying to evacuate casualties. Needless to say any roads which pass thru the mountains have been thoroly bombed by our planes, and for the most part there are only paths. If the infantry moves now as rapidly as we expect it to, we are going to have a devil of a time ~~bringing back patients~~ trying to get up there to bring back patients. Of course, whenever the infantry moves fast, it is because of little or no oppos-



ition and as a result there are a few if any casualties. But, since it is our object to get back every casualty as quickly as possible, the problem to us, is still as great as if they were having many casualties.

In answer to some of the questions which you wrote in your letters during the past month (I still have the habit of ignoring your questions until I reread your letters for the past time). Regarding any possibility of promotion, that is totally out of the question. The T/O (table of organization) calls only for a captain as CO of a collecting company. The next step up requires holding the job of commanding officer of the clearing station or executive officer of the medical battalion, or being a regimental surgeon. Personally I would just as soon hold my rank with the job I have than to hold any of the other jobs. Anyhow, I am outranked by far too many captains, to even consider the possibility of any promotion.

You never did mention whether you received the copper pot when you visited Mrs. Van in Columbus. If so, did you like it? If now, why not?

I read until 2:30 last night, having gotten started on Ashendon, by Somerset Maugham. Altho it wasn't particularly good, I wasn't very sleepy so I read until I finished it, being interrupted a number of times after midnight, to see patients who had been brought in, seeing them rather than having Leip, who was on duty, awakened. Most of the patients who were brought in were German prisoners, and they were all surprised to hear that American troops were on German soil. They are not nearly so cocky as they were a few months back when we were seeing German prisoners, even the many of them who come thru are young. We also are having some older ones, one being 42. He had been in the army one year. Most of them have seen action on the Russian front and express the desire that it is the U.S. that captures Germany and not Russia. In some of the letters which the prisoners were writing home, and which were found on their persons, they tell how terrible the artillery has been and that it has been by far the worst experience which they have had in combat, and that from men who have been in the army for 9 years on all fronts. I guess we're not so ~~bad~~ bad.

Well, that's about all for now. I'll talk to you again in the A.M. if we are not on the move.

Walt.

Wait.

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...move.

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