

From Walt to Ros, Sunday, Oct. 1st, 1944.

It's a beautiful morning and am I thankful for that, since we have no building in which to set up and we're close to the top of a fairly high mountain. It's bad enough being cool in the supposedly hottest part of the day, but it would be hell if it was a cold rain. At the present moment, I'm sitting on a slope with my back facing the front lines and a sharp outcropping of rock jutting about 100 ft. into the air just a few feet behind me, giving me the best protection in the world against enemy artillery. From my vantage point stretches a picture which would thrill the soul of any war artist. On all sides of me stretch the numerous mountains and valleys from the Appenines. Immediately below me are trucks filled with ammunition and in the very center of these is a kitchen truck busily cooking a hot meal for its unit. To my left winding its way from ~~XXXX~~ one ridge to the next is a road filled with all types of vehicles and lined like trees by troops marching their way up to the front. 50 yards to my right are a group of tanks, momentarily parked after having put on a show for us only a half hour ago. 100 yards behind them is a group of guns which are busily firing away at the enemy. We can see the gun crews working rapidly to fire their shells, and can even see the shell as it leaves the muzzle of the gun. It is a queer feeling to hear these shells swish thru the air above us, so close that one feels that he could reach up and grab them and yet totally invisible to us, for the only time you can see a shell after it leaves the gun is immediately after it leaves the muzzle. Then there are the omnipresent bulldozers, waiting until the next town is completely cleared of the enemy before going up there to fix a road. Of course, we mustn't forget to mention the medics--which in our case consists of 4 or 5 of our vehicles, only part of our personnel, and a ruined house to serve as our station. To protect all this from air attack we have a few anti-aircraft installations spread around. All this array of war material on the day that the war was supposed to end, or at least so said a senator quoting a supposedly "reliable war dept. source". Well if it is, I don't know what all the shouting is about.

The situation was such that we had to move forward this morning and since the spots along the road were both unsuitable and dangerous because of lack of shelter from enemy artillery fire, we had to keep moving closer to the front until we finally reached this relatively safe point which at the time we arrived was less than 2000 yds. from the front lines. In fact, while we have been here (since 9 a.m.) our boys have fought for and taken a town just 2000 yds. in front of us.

A coordinated attack was made against an enemy strongpoint only a short time ago and tanks were scurrying past us at a great rate, hurrying to the crest of this hill we are located on, stopping on the skyline and firing furiously for a time, backing off the skyline out of enemy vision, then returning to do more firing. It was really a thrilling sight to watch. Above all this flew a group of planes which first circled over the enemy each suddenly going into a dive and strafing them, then circling again over our lines--really just above us and returning to bomb the enemy. Then, as a farewell gesture before departing, they circled once more and ended up by strafing the Jerries and then scooting for home.

Yesterday, knowing that we would probably be moving forward today, I sent back for Leip and his crew whom we had left behind in the small town to which we had moved from our mountain top in the clouds. He and his group had been living the life of Riley doing nothing but lay around all day long well out of range of enemy artillery. As you know, we usually leap frog stations whenever we are moving frequently. We have two stations, Leip in charge of one and Van of the other. Usually we keep one station loaded so that if we have to move suddenly it can pull out at once while the unloaded station and its personnel can take care of casualties until we reach the place where we set up the forward station. Then if there is room, we will send for the rear group to come up and join us. However, that is not the case now, so Van is remaining behind with his group.

I learned that while they were in the rear of us. Keip had given Willie (Lover Louie) Kolarik permission to visit a neighboring division in search of his brother who had been in Italy for quite some time at a replacement depot, and had just been assigned to this other division. After a great deal of trouble and practically no cooperation from the unit (it was a miserable rainy day and no one wanted to leave his tent to help Willie in his search) Willie himself finally located his brother, but spent so much time in looking for him that he could spend only 15 minutes with him. However, now that each knows where the other is, they should be able to get together one of these days.

When Leip's crew moved up with us to spend the night before moving out again, the boys had quite a job confronting them to make room for sleeping. It was because we didn't have enough room that we hadn't sent for them earlier, but necessity is the mother of invention and in order to get an early start this morning we figured that everyone would have to crowd together; but leave it to the boys--they found a room filled with straw and furniture and proceeded to carry all the furniture up to the attic and swept out the room. It was quite a job but made nice sleeping quarters. If it had been Jerries occupying the house, I'm sure that they wouldn't have bothered carrying the furniture up to the attic but would have thrown it out of the window.

I talked to Maj. Minor yesterday--he is an extremely capable officer who is gradually working his way up. I'm sure he is one of the smartest tactical officers in the entire regiment. He told me about a medical aid man that was killed by a sniper. When he learned about it he sent a group of men out to get the sniper and they did. They didn't bring him back alive either. It is still the general policy of the Jerries not to shoot at medics, altho an occasional sniper does pick on them. However, they do pull some unreasonable stunts. A patient came thru our station yesterday with the following story: His buddy had been wounded and he went out to help him. He in turn was wounded. He then played dead for he was lying out in the open where he could be shot if he tried to get away. While he lay there, 3 Germans took turns shooting at him and the other wounded man, using them for a contest in straight shooting. Finally one of the Germans came down and went thru his pockets, all the time the soldier continued his act of being dead. Apparently the German was too interested in the contents of his pockets to examine him very closely, so he got away with it. When night fell, he got back to our lines and medical attention. He doesn't know what happened to his buddy. It's Jerries like that that should be shot in cold blood when captured.

Tag has the job of paying the men in the company and he must have gotten careless because he ended up \$38 short. That will come out of his own pocket--in the Army there is no allowance for monetary errors. It is a tremendous job to try to pay the men when they are spread out the way they are at present--some with one battalion, some with another. He has been paying for two days now and still hasn't paid all the men. The same thing has happened with PX rations. We received more than a week ago. He still has more than \$36 worth of PX rations left because he can't get them to the men.

John went out last night to get the tactical situation straight so we could determine where to move the station. He was back at 5 p.m. and sent Drady out with some ambulances to be taken forward along a road to the large rock where we are now located while John took some other ambulances up another way. He gave Drady very specific directions about how far to go, but when Drady returned he had the feeling that he had not gone far enough. Finally John returned at about 9 pm and when they studied the map, they saw that Drady had stopped 4 miles short of his goal. So John and Drady had to go out again and go all the way forward to spot those ambulances properly. They didn't get back until almost 2 pm and we had to get up at 5:30 in order to get our station forward in time to care for casualties. One would think that this life would be getting easier and more pleasant with the breaking of the Gothic line and the gradual nearing of the end of the war, but in this business there is always another hill in front of you which must be taken, no matter how many hills you may have taken before, always another shell to dodge--just as deadly as all the others which have been thrown

in your direction previously; death is still as final as it was in the early days of the campaign--so really, whether it is late in the war or not, war is still hell.

It is now 5 pm so you can see that I haven't accomplished very much today.

Monday, Oct. 2, 1944

As beautiful as yesterday was, today is just the opposite extreme. At the present moment I am sitting inside a ruined building surrounded by quite a few fellows who are standing around a fire which we have going right in the center of the floor. It is raining outside, a cold, cold miserable rain which has made everything so muddy that I believe it to be the most miserable weather we have encountered, barring none, since we have been in combat. I believe it is even worse than it was in the Mississippi maneuvers. But more about that later.

As I told you in yesterday's letter, we started up to the new area fairly early in the morning in order to be in position in case casualties started coming in. As a result, we started out at 7 AM. Since we didn't know exactly where we were going to set up, I had to run ahead of the company to pick a spot for them to set up in. The roads were quite muddy and because of this we had to use the front wheel drive on our jeep quite a bit. Now, when the front wheel drive is in, that means that the front wheels, instead of just rolling along being pushed forward by the power of the rear wheels pull right along with them, and as a result they splatter mud constantly into the front seat of the vehicle where I was riding. I was a regular mud man. Add to the mud the fact that I didn't wash all day long because of lack of water and you will get the idea of what I looked like. We were rushing on the way forward to find a spot far enough ahead of the rest of the company which was following us on the road, so that we would have the spot picked out by the time they caught up with us. When we finally reached the general vicinity where we should start looking for a place, there simply was nothing to be found that was not in direct observation of the enemy. We were able to see our field artillery showing shells at them near the tops of a couple of hills in front of us and since we were in direct view of these places, we knew that we couldn't set up there.

On we rushed, and caught up with a bunch of tanks. Well, that simply made us rush faster in order to get ahead of the tanks, since they so frequently draw fire, and we didn't want to be near them in case Jerry should decide to throw a few shells at them. We next saw some houses down a road just behind a small mountain and we decided to take a run down there to see what it was like. However, the road turned out to be so narrow and so steep that we decided we couldn't use it, so we turned around and headed for the main road again. However, we found that altho the road permitted us to go down it, it was simply too steep for the jeep to pull the trailer out to the main road, so we had to unhitch the jeep and leave it on the sideroad with plans of sending a weapons carrier to pick it up later. We left Tag stay with the trailer so that some one wouldn't empty it before we got back and rushed on ahead again. Every available inch of worthwhile space was already taken and finally we had gone just as far forward as we could safely go, only 2000 yds. behind a town which was being fought for at that moment. We still had no building in which to set up, the 2nd battalion aid station being in one bldg. which was nothing but ruins, and another building, mostly ruined, being occupied by a battalion CP. I put in a reservation for both of these buildings with the hope that when these units moved out we would be able to move in but someone else had the CP building already reserved, so we ended up with the ruins, only. This was so bad, that Leip decided to put up a tent for a station. Now tents are no protection whatsoever against shrapnel, and ruined buildings are, so I decided to use the ruins for the officers sleeping place. The building did have a roof, if you want to flat-ter it, but had large holes in the front and side walls, with the front wall half-caved in and threatening to cave in the rest of the way. Some rafters overhead the equivalent of a ceiling without any finishing work, tended to hold the walls in place, so that we felt that the place might be fairly safe. Of course, every time one of the big guns around us went off, it would shower plaster down on us, from the cement between the bricks, but as long as the bricks themselves

Cap. Little's heroic work in addition to leading his company on the perimeter of the hill
to time, was to go entirely out of his sector with an artillery liaison officer, dig in at the
bottom of a hill occupied by Jerry's only 50 yards away, and direct artillery fire from his
vantage spot so that the Jerry's on the hill were annihilated. This hill happened to be mighty in
portant since the Jerry's there were holding up the advance of the adjacent unit so we gave
them a hand. All in all, we're mighty proud of our outfit.

Incidentally, I wasn't particularly scared in the shelling I underwent, being aware of every-
thing that was going on and not trembling perceptibly. I'm sure that if terror can be measured
that I was several thousand percent more terrorized in the air raid in London than I was during
the shelling.

Well, that's about all for the time being, and probably until I get something interesting
enough to write all of you about.

Up by the way, Eddie, the first class parcel of candy you sent took 35 days instead of the
usual 8 days the previous one took to get here. I also received the Hershey's you sent me.
Thanks lots.

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

Walt: you'll have to hold this up to the light.