

Hello Gang:

Sunday 17 December 1944

I'm afraid that I have been neglecting you but I feel that you all hear about what goes on in my not too eventful life from Ros. The reason that I haven't written is because there has been very little happening to me for quite some time. The latter part of the time that my company was in line was not too exciting because of the static military situation, altho Jerry shells did occasionally whistle in, and Jerry planes came over very regularly at night, but when you are not the direct target of things like these it places you in the position of observer rather than participant, and believe me that is quite an important differentiation. Since I didn't come over here for excitement, I don't at all mind my position as an observer but I hate like hell to be a participant. At the present time we are off of the line resting up from our push through the mountains in all that terrible mud and rain and believe me we could all use this rest. This was especially important because it gave us the opportunity of fixing up our vehicles which had been taking a beating in the mud and bad roads of the mountains so that we had reached the stage where at least one of our ambulances was breaking down every day and our mechanics were going crazy trying to get them fixed quickly enough so that we could continue functioning.

When we left the front lines for our rest we first moved into a hotel, which was quite an improvement over our previous quarters. Now don't get the idea that we were sleeping in beds and had maid service and fancy food in a nice restaurant, because that wasn't the case. The hotel to which we went was a ~~four~~ four story building which, in peacetime must have been quite an elaborate affair, but now, stripped of all of its niceties, including beds, it was merely a large four story building with many rooms. I got cots for all of my men so that they didn't have to sleep on the floor (at that some of my kitchen crew refused the cots saying that they were used to sleeping on the floor and wouldn't sleep as well on the cots). Our own kitchen did the cooking for the company but rations were much better and more plentiful than they were up in the front lines, so everybody was happy. For the first four days in the hotel we had no program whatsoever, other than having the boys in the motor pool work on their vehicles. After that we were supposed to go into a training schedule with six hours of classes per day. For the first four days that company of mine was constantly drunk, but I kept my eyes averted and paid no attention to them just so long as they caused no trouble, which, fortunately they didn't. The harlots in the town did a land office business, even going to the point of putting up signs showing their hours of business. I understand that they boys were lined up in front of these places just as though they were lining up forchow at their companies. The town itself is supposed to be quite a famous Italian town, altho I must admit that I had never heard of it before. It had some very beautiful buildings in it and is located in a beautiful spot, being in a valley with hills surrounding it on three sides. We kept ourselves occupied by loafing and going to the movies, of which there were quite a few which had very recent pictures, such as Casanova 8 rown, Rhapsody in Blue, etc. I even found time to take a nice hot mineral bath but found that I didn't have the taste of an aristocrat because I didn't like it at all, since I felt that it was more or less like going swimming in the ocean (I prefer a clear lake) and soap wouldn't lather well and when you finished you felt scummy. I knew I wasn't going to like it when I first decided to go, but felt that I shouldn't miss out on it, since that would be equivalent to going to Rome and not seeing St. Peter's Cathedral or the Vatican.

After our stay in the hotel we moved to another area where we are now bivouacked. We are now living in tents in the center of ~~an~~ grape arbor. A grape arbor over here is equivalent to what we would call an orchard back home, since it consists of row upon row of trees regularly spaced. Around each of these trees is entwined grape vines, and since the tree branches are kept trimmed down to extremely short length it results in having a grape tree. We have had our share of rain since being in this new area, but we can't complain since we have had no snow, altho we can see snow in all of the mountains which surround us. At present the company still spends six hours a day at classes following which we have some touch football games which are really rough. I stay out of these, feeling that the boys are a bit too young and too tough for me. Occasionally, if the movie is good enough, I go to a nearby village to see a movie run by our special service unit. I saw an excellent one there the other night which I might recommend to you, entitled "Laura" with Jean ~~Hay~~ - a small mystery quite different from the average run of the mill movie mystery. ~~Isn't~~ forget to mention that I met Big Red (Abe) Goldberg while we were in the town

containing our hotel. I had received a news clipping about him in one of Soph's letters and realized that he was somewhere in my general vicinity so I went to one of his headquarters and sent him a note thru message center to get in touch with me. After three or four days he called me up. Here he had been in the same town with me all that time and neither of us had known it. He hasn't changed one bit from the days I knew him as a kid. He still looks as youthful now as he did then. Actually I hadn't seen him for at least 10 years back in the states, but it is always nice to have a get-together with someone whom you know before you got into the army. Red is the second person whom I have met from Cincy overseas, the other being Meyer Margolis in Rome. Red has quite a nice job being a sergeant in an ordnance outfit which is part of one of the divisions which has been fighting side by side with ours for quite some time. His job keeps him well behind the front lines out of range of artillery shells, for which I envy him, but not out of range of Jerry planes which has bombed his company. However, he almost always lives in a house and has enough transportation available when he moves so that he can carry practically anything he wants along with him. As a result of the latter he sleeps on bed springs which he carries from place to place. He is an automobile mechanic, having received his training for this in the army. He says he does not plan to use this new training after the war, but plans to go back to the Times Star where he runs one of the presses. We spent several hours together talking about our various acquaintances and telling of our experiences, and then we parted. It is very likely that we will run into one another again since our units are still fairly close to each other.

The Xmas packages have been coming through in tremendous quantities and it is becoming a problem as to whether we will be able to eat up the stuff which is sent before we move out of here (a very indefinite thing at best, since we have no idea when that will be) or if not, whether we will have enough transportation to carry all of the things we always have with us plus the left overs from the Xmas packages. I don't believe that we will. The various items which most of you have sent have come in extremely handy since we officers have pooled all of our stuff and usually will have a "package" meal whenever the evening meal consists of some C ration food which we don't like, such as Vienna sausage, Corned Beef, or meat and vegetable stew.

I ack in November I ~~sent~~ sent V mail Xmas greetings to practically all of you, but I understand that the mail was burned at that time and some of these may not get to you. Some of the damaged mail has been returned to me in pretty bad condition, while others were only moderately burned but couldn't be photographed for V mailing, and so were returned. So if you don't get any from me, just forget about it. I hope that you folks don't clutter up the mails with Xmas cards to us, over here. You'll do much better if you write a letter instead and include your Xmas greetings in it. May I use this letter to implore some of you less faithful ones to write regularly. As you all know, I'll write you if there is anything exciting happening, and otherwise Soph will probably send on my carbon's of letters to Ros (I've been writing most of my letters rather than typing them, since we have been resting because the typewriter is in the OP where a number of the boys hang around and I find myself yawning instead of writing and so write a rather disoriented letter). It seems that about the only thing that will get some of you to write is newspaper reports of a new drive in this theater or some such incident. 'Taint fair of you. Let us hear about the ordinary things you do, and don't wait for something extraordinary to happen to impel you to write. After all the dearest memories of us who have been away from home so long is the ordinary things that we left. Keep our minds fresh with those memories.

The most important thing that has happened to me since I last wrote you has been the acquisition of busts of Judy and Elaine. I don't know how many of you have seen the bust of Ros but these are fully as good. I had had no hopes of seeing these until after the war was over, since I had made all arrangements for having them mailed home by the British AEC official in charge of the town in which the sculptor lives. However, the other day I received a letter from this Major telling me that the sculptor had been in and seemed upset that he would have to wait until the busts reached the U.S. before he would be paid for his work. He asked the major if he could make arrangements for me to pay for it when he turned them over to him for mailing. Since we are resting I figured that I might be able to take a run back to this town and pick up the busts myself, and spoke to Col. Campbell who gave me his permission. The trip up and back consumed the entire day but was well worth it. Everyone who has seen the busts think that they are well worth anything which I may have paid for them. I am mailing them home to-day. I hope you all get to see them.

Love, Walt.