

Walt to Ros, Dec. 25th, 1944 - Xmas night.

Well, Xmas is well on its way to becoming a memory, but a most pleasant one. In fact, I can't picture how it could have been any more pleasant other than spending it at home with you and the children. I am very thankful that we didn't have to spend our holiday in the bivouac area which we had had in the rest area since it would have meant that we would have had no civilians to bring in the truly enjoyable element of a celebration of such a holiday. As it is, situated here in this small Italian town, our company being the only American soldiers ever to billet in this town, and broken up into small groups each living with an Italian family, our boys have won the hearts of all the civilians, and they, with their obvious pleasure in housing us, have won our hearts, too.

Yesterday our situation was such that we did not expect to have any Xmas celebration at all. I had a company formation at chow time (that is the only time that the company is all together, since they are living in the small groups all thru the town) and asked the boys to avoid drinking the wine which the natives were so liberally trying to force on them. They were amazingly cooperative and we had no drunkenness in the company at all and I actually believe that you could count the men who took even a swallow of wine on the fingers of one hand. However, at 9:30 word came down that we could permit the men to celebrate the holidays. I had 14 quarts of cognac and rum which the men had bought for the celebration of our anniversary and Xmas, but since many of them were going to Xmas mass and others were sleeping, I sent word around that they could drink as much as the Italian's wine as was offered to them and that we would drink the stronger liquor today. Needless to say they were pickled pink.

Last night being Xmas eve, I thought that I would take a walk around town and see how the various groups were enjoying themselves and make sure that they were behaving. Actually the latter is not necessary because they are so appreciative of the kind welcome they have received by the people with whom they are living that they wouldn't do a thing to spoil this mutual admiration.

First I went into the farthest building where the kitchen is set up and where 39 men are living in 1 small group of isolated buildings. There, in the Italian portion of their living quarters they had fixed up a Xmas tree which was the wonder of all the small community. In fact, the only Xmas trees in the entire community are the ones which my men have put up. Apparently trees are too precious to the Italians for them to cut them down unnecessarily. The boys had strung cotton on the trees, tied small packets of candy and chewing gum all over the branches, laid small gifts at the bottom of the tree. The natives were so impressed by this that they called in practically every inhabitant of the entire community. That Xmas tree and the "wonderful" stoves the Americans carry with them were the featured attractions of the evening. No Italian can go near the group of "kitchen houses" without being called in to see those 3 kitchen stoves which can cook a meal inside a house without causing any soot and needing no stove pipe, and which take no time at all to be set up for cooking. Everywhere we have gone in Italy those stoves have attracted attention. The boys were sitting around a table beside the Xmas tree listening to the radio belonging to the Italians, one group writing letters while another group serenaded the inhabitants with Xmas carols. It was a pleasure to walk in there and note the feeling of friendship which radiated all over the place.

Next I stopped into another place where four of my men are sleeping and found them sitting around a table in the kitchen while 4 girls of about 16 or 17 serenaded them with Xmas carols. Needless to say everyone around here is eating American candy which the boys have been receiving in tremendous quantities in their Xmas packages. I was interested in the fact that in each of these places there was a full flagon of wine on the table which the boys had not touched (word had not yet come down permitting us to celebrate.)



Mass was held last night and practically all of the boys attended, despite their religions. Most of them went to mass with the Italian civilians, while some of them went to the ~~Italian church~~ GI mass being held in the larger town near which we are living. The boys who went to the civilian church told me that when the collection basket was passed around they had put one dollar apiece in it, and this caused a tremendous amount of discussion and interest among the civilians, who had been putting 5 and 10¢ in the basket. Some of the boys also told me that they had given some of the canned foods, etc., which they had received in the packages from home to the people with whom they were living and the people tried to pay them for it, which of course they refused. I can't stress sufficiently the good feeling that exists between the men and the civilians. Except for Rome, this is the first time we have hit a town where American soldiers had not previously been, except of course, some of the towns thru which we fought, and usually we were out of those towns before the civilians returned, and anyway those towns were beaten up, but this town doesn't show any ravages of war except for the railway track which runs parallel to the town about 400 yards away. There we can see the remains of a train which our planes bombarded while in motion, and needless to say, it is a mess.

Yesterday the company received 20 packages of mail and today we received a like amount, i.e., sacks, not packages. Really that is a lot of mail and some of the boys received 8 packages apiece. I received one package from you, as I did again today. In addition I received tremendous amounts of fourth class reading material (8 PMs, 3 NY Times, 4 Israelites, 5 Greenfield Times) and in addition I received 4 letters, so it was a perfect Xmas eve. The latest letter I have received from you is Dec. 03 which I received today.

I was kept busy reading all the newspapers until midnight last night, since there were so many of them that I wanted to get them out of the way. Tag went to midnight mass and I turned off the lights before he came back (we have electric lights from 8 p.m. until 5 p.m.) i.e., the lights can be turned on during the day, when you don't need them, but in the evening hours from 5 to 8, when it is quite black, there are no lights. Then too, the lights have a way of flickering, being bright for awhile and then getting dim for awhile which is most disconcerting. I never did hear Tag come in and in fact didn't waken until 10 this a.m. We had no breakfast scheduled for this morning, planning to have our turkey at 11:30. Our Xmas meal was excellent, with turkey, cranberry sauce, beans, onions, pie, nuts, and all the olives one could eat. There was not quite enough turkey so some of the boys had to eat pork chops, which many of them prefer anyway. We made arrangements for the boys to get the liquor which we had bought for the party we had planned to have in the last area, a combination anniversary and Xmas party, which would have been held last night, and the results have been just what one would have expected. So far we have put 2 of the men to bed, but on the whole the company hasn't gotten very drunk. I stopped in several of the houses after our Xmas dinner to see how everything was and found, at one place, that 6 of the men had come over to the house and were eating a second meal right with the family. Apparently the people in this sector haven't suffered very much from food shortage. Their meat consists chiefly of fowl which they seem to have in plenty quantity. They served chicken, then pork chops (which the men probably brought over from our kitchen) and as a special dish they served sparrows which they had shot.

In another house into which I had gone, a girl was doing her homework, helped by the boys in the company. She was doing some long division and when I checked it out of curiosity I found that it was definitely wrong and the boys didn't have the first idea as to how to do it properly. The better I get to know these men in the company the more I wonder as to what is wrong with American methods of teaching. They don't read, they can't spell, and now I find they don't know the elemental foundations of arithmetic. Maybe we ought to have a company class on elementary schooling.



I stopped into the house where Swede Anderson, about whom I told you in last night's letter, is living. I was curious to see this attractive woman who had misunderstood him and yet had not been at all insulted. She is a very pretty woman of about 32 who reminds me of your Aunt Mary. She has a four year old daughter who is quite cute but very bashful. The boys have a very nice room with very modern furniture, the bed being so big that all 3 men are able to sleep in it. As is the case in the other houses the folks there can't do enough for the men. When they took off their boots, which were quite muddy, and changed to clean shoes, the woman cleaned all their boots for them without them knowing about it. It seems that when the Germans were here they made the natives wait on them hand and foot and they have never been accustomed to the friendly atmosphere that emanates from American soldiers. The British are so cold and austere and distant while the Americans, like Canadian, New Zealanders and Australians, are very friendly. These folks appreciate this and in some cases have even offered to give up their own beds and let the men sleep in them while they slept on the floor. The boys are really picking up a lot of the Italian language under these conditions of living so intimately with the civilians.

I am planning to make the rounds again tonight, since I enjoy it so much. I use the alibi that I am doing it to check up on the men, but actually I enjoy meeting with the Italians and especially enjoy the way my men are hitting it off with them.