

Good evening, my sweet:

25 February 1945, Sunday 1830

Another one of those delicious letter days, four from you, one from Irv, and the group of Ben's letters that you sent. I really have no complaints to make about the mail, altho all of these letters are of earlier vintage than letters I have already received. But over here, regardless of the date of a letter, mail is mail, and the appreciation for it is just as great as if it was only one day old. Of course there is another element which enters into your receiving mail from me, and I can well understand that. I don't have any particular worry about the welfare of you and the children, whereas there are certain "hazards of occupation" to which I am exposed and I can understand the date of my letters being far more important than those of yours.

I was a bit perturbed about your mentioning the increase in blood pressure found at the time when you gave your blood to the bank. I feel pretty sure that it was only a matter of excitement but I would like to be reassured. Will you have your BP taken by one of the docs in town, or if you go to cincy have it done there. Sweets, I want to impress on you the importance of not worrying so much about me. My job is a relatively safe one - I still have to hear of a collecting company medical officer being wounded or killed in the type of fighting which we have here in Italy. It is such a rare thing that you simply have very little to worry about. Certain it is that my present spot is about as safe as a spot can be, being too far back to make a valuable artillery target, being off the main highway so that it would not be a worthwhile bombing target, even if the Jerries came over with planes, which they don't do because we have night fighters patrolling all night long. All in all, I am almost as safe here as if I were miles and miles behind the front lines. I expect to continue in this relatively safe situation for some time, and even then the situation should get better and not worse. All these counter attacks and any fierce fighting that you may read about don't involve me personally in the least, and won't as long as my present set up continues. So please, sweets, don't let yourself get worked up. I don't expect you to run into any more mail situations like you did before, since I now write the V mail as well as the air mail daily, and expect to continue doing so indefinitely, but even if you should go a week or more without mail, remember that the mail delivery is not so regular that you should expect mail to come in regularly. I would send you the EFM messages weekly if I thought that they would be delivered promptly, but even they don't do much if any better than mail, so there is no point in that. Gosh, honey, I'd do anything to keep you from eating your heart out if you don't hear from me, but there is simply nothing I can do about it. Just remember honey that not a single shell has lit anywhere near me since September, or at the latest October, and that on the whole in all the time that we have been in combat I can remember only two times when I was truly worried, the bombing and the one shelling, and you will see that you really are worrying yourself far too much. From this manner of speaking one might get the idea that you had been complaining in your letters, but that isn't it at all. I do know how frantic you became when you didn't get any letters from me for ten days and I just want to reassure you that should such a thing happen again, that you mustn't let yourself get all worked up. I don't expect to get any purple hearts in this war, nor any other awards either, which means that I expect to be plenty careful.

Yesterday I was asked by the man of our house to see a sick youngster, which, of course, I did at once. It turned out to be a baby of 7 months that weighs about 15 pounds. The youngster had a temp of 102.2 and altho it wasn't breathing fast it had a croupy sound to its frequent cough. The way these Italian people bundle up their children is a crime. I can understand them doing it to the children that play outdoors all the time, but to a babe in arms that spends very little time outdoors, it is simply ridiculous. Of course these houses are not centrally heated, but even so there was no excuse for the five or six sweaters plus two blankets, one of them quite heavy, that they had on this child. I had to peel away one sweater after another in order to listen to the youngsters chest. The chest was clear and despite considerable difficulty I got a good look at the throat in order to make sure that it had no diphtheria, because each of the communities north and south of this one have large signs warning troops not to fraternize with the civilians because of diphtheria being present in the towns. All I could find on the youngster was an upper respiratory infection and since the temperature wasn't very high for a child that age, I felt that that condition



could easily account for the entire picture. I started the youngster on AAS and some nose drops, and promised to see it later in the day if it was not better. That evening, while I was typing your letter, the father came in and reported. He gave me the temperature of the child in centigrade and I had to do some calculating in order to figure it out in fahrenheit. It turned out that the youngsters temp was about the same as it had been in the morning when I had last seen it, so I felt that there wasn't much to worry about and that I would see it in the morning. However, as I was nearing the end of your letter, Sgt. Tolar (Lard Ass) came to me to report that the youngster's temp was 104.2 and that it was pretty restless. I went down to see it after hastily finishing your letter. Despite the fact that I had told them to take off some of the clothes when I had seen it in the morning and also had instructed the mother to stop handling the baby so much (she wouldn't lay it down but kept stroking it and talking to it, so that the poor thing didn't get any rest at all) the baby was as bundled up as ever, and of course, was in the mother's arms. After taking off the heavy blanket it was surprising to see how quickly the baby's restlessness ceased, and soon it was willing to play. It is quite a cute kid, actually. I checked the youngster over again, and found that it was actually doing OK, with the chest remaining clear and the throat showing no signs of any membrane. It's breathing was still not rapid, despite Tolar's report to the contrary. In my lame Italian (it doesn't get any better since I don't speak a word of it for days on end) plus the help of a dictionary I got across the message that they kept the baby too warm with all that clothes and that a sick baby must not be handled but must be left alone in order to rest. When I used the word handle, the dad, a fairly intelligent man, about whom I shall tell you a bit later, looked completely puzzled and looked into the dictionary to see if I had pronounced the word correctly. I then realized that I was using the word handle as a noun instead of a verb. He laughed when I gave him the correct word, and then picked up a pot and pointed to the handle to show me what I had said at first. I decided that I would start sulfadizene on the youngster in order to make sure that no complications should result, and then had to do some hard thinking to remember the dosage in children and finally came to the conclusion that it was 11 grains for each pound (1 gram for 10 lbs). This struck such a strong cord in my memory that I was sure that I was right (that gives you a slight idea of how much medicine I am going to have to relearn) and gave it 3/4 of a tablet. The baby was so well this morning, looking and acting as if there was nothing wrong with it, that I had the drug stopped this evening. I had a devil of a time getting them to understand me when I asked about the baby's bowel movements. An exact translation of those two words into Italian does not seem to convey the same idea that it does in English. Finally they caught on - the word apparently being latrina. They've been doing a pretty good job of feeding the youngster, except that they have been giving it coffee - in very weak form, but nevertheless coffee - and I put a stop to that. I don't believe that I shall have any more trouble with the youngster, but I'll know more about that to-nite. If this letter is not interrupted I'll know that the youngster is OK.

The father of the youngster, whom we call goat beard because of a stringy goatee, is a partisan leader who fancies himself as a communist, but whom Moe tells me, is not a true communist but nearer to a fascist. He is very active in partisan activities and seems to be a ringleader. All of the partisans come to him with information or with material and he takes care of it from there on. I don't know what he does with the information, but I imagine that it goes to the proper source. We know that it is on the up and up, having checked his card. The material which is brought to him is apparently put on the black market, which as you know flourishes openly in Italy. One of the other men of the community has approached some of our boys to find out if they had anything which they wanted to sell, but I put a stop to that warning them of the seriousness of the charge of selling any army goods on the black market, and I know that the stuff which they get from home is desirable to them and they won't sell that to the black market profiteers. They are really tough on those they catch dealing with the black market. One fellow, in our signal company deserted, stole stuff from a quartermaster supply dump at the point of a pistol, and was later caught. He received a general court martial and was sentenced to life imprisonment in a federal penitentiary back in the states. I know the fellow because I was the Trial Judge Advocate and prosecuted him for going AWOL when we were back in the desert. Gosh, that's a stiff sentence, but not at all too stiff, for believe that men who will sell army material in time of war should be looked on as guilty treason and maybe if we had a few death sentences out of it we would find that the problem would disappear. Fortunately, as far as I know, it is not nearly as prevalent in this theater as it is in others, especially France if we are to believe the newspapers about Marlin's / res.



The ingenuity of the GI is again showing itself in our company. The boys wanted to play some basketball so they proceeded to make themselves a hoop, figured out how they could put it up on a pole against one of the buildings, wired the pole in place and had themselves a basketball court in a lot between the houses. The day was beautiful and ideal for some outdoor fun, so that the boys made the best of it. Some of the boys are quite good, many of them having played high school basketball and one, at least, having played some college basketball. Of course the game was a good deal rougher than one is accustomed to seeing on an inside court with men who have been training, but nevertheless it was quite a closely contested game and plenty fun to watch. That is how I spent much of my morning and a good part of the afternoon until the mail came in. The only drawback to the basketball court is that a wild throw or a high bounce on one side of the court results in the ball going down the side of the hill and it rolls all the way down to the bottom or even into the creek at the very bottom if the boy chasing it is not fast enough. That is a long distance down the hill to the creek, a good 200 yards, and by the time the retriever returns to the court he is so tired out that they have to sit around for quite a few minutes to let him rest. This being Sunday, we had most of the village out watching the basketball game, and altho they didn't know any of the fundamental principles of the game they still had a good time watching the game. I'm afraid that these Italian buildings would wear out much faster if we stayed around them for very long because our basketball striking against the building knocks off more plaster than the preceding hundred years wore away. However, the stones beneath the plaster are pretty substantial (they'd have to be to be still standing after 200-300 years) so that I guess we won't do too much damage.

Another example of ingenuity was the stunt rigged up by Brewer, one of my ambulance platoon sergeants. Because of the uncertainty of the village electric supply, we have our generator going each evening. This also runs the victrola which the boys use. Since the generator is located outside, and it is necessary for someone to turn it off or else it would run until it ran out of gas, we appointed Brewer as the man to turn it off at 10:30 PM. Well, it so happens that Brewer is usually in bed at 10:30 and since he doesn't want to get out of bed to turn off the motor, he rigged up a string from his bedside out of his building, across a wide lot, to the motor where he attached it to a piece of metal which shorts the motor when he pulls the string and thus turns the thing off without ever having to get out of bed. I wouldn't have thought of a set up like that in a million years.

Yesterday I watched one of the handymen of the village making a new knife for himself so I thought that I would get him to sharpen my boyscout knife for me while he was at it. I figured that he would merely sharpen the blade and return it to me at once, but I guess he tried to impress Il Capitan because he really gave my knife a working over. He's gotten the thing so sharp that I'm afraid to use it for fear that I'll cut myself. I'm sure that it would now make an excellent razor, which might not be such a bad idea because many of the blades that I brought over with me got wet at one time or another and are none too good. Whereas I formerly got at least four and frequently more shaves out of one blade, I now get only one or two, and sometimes not even one. No - don't send me any blades, because Wise Center sent me quite a few of them in a chamuka package, and I still have enough to last me a good half year. We haven't been getting razor blades or soap in our daily PX rations which now contain only cigarettes, tooth powder, an occasional tooth brush, and brushless shaving cream. Many of the boys are beginning to run out of blades and soap, but I brought so many of them over with me that this will not become a problem with me for quite some time.

You asked me whether you should send me any more fudge. The answer is no. Not because it isn't any good, because your fudge was really the best fudge which has ever come over to us, but because with the fudge moldy, it is necessary to shave off the mold on each piece, and that is just too much trouble to make the eating of it pleasant. Just send me an occasional box of candy, and I won't complain. As it is I get plenty of sweets to eat, on the whole, so I really have no complaint. I'm still only half way thru the second box of Hersheys Soph sent, and we are having PX rations to-day.

Willie (Lover Louie) Kolarik returned to the company from a pass in the same town where we lived in a hotel for a while. He tells us that every girl in town ~~has~~ is wearing a fur coat, and that the houses have practically all closed up. Apparently the girls made money so fast that they decided to retire from the business. Don't get the idea from this statement that Willie patronizes such houses for he doesn't, having his girl, Irene, ever in mind as his ideal love.

Well, sweets, that's all for tonite. All my love, darling

Wal'