

Hey girl:

Sunday 22 April 1945 2030

I'm continuing the letter which I have already started, now that I am in position to use the typewriter instead of writing with my pen.

I'm going to take you back to the house we were living in next to the church, with the nice mountain spring and the beautiful mountains entirely surrounding it. We had been there a couple of days, avidly listening to the radio news reports waiting for the war to be over without our help. Our set up was pretty nice in that we had a large open field across the way from us where we would play ball in the evenings, even tho when we were first up there we were a bit leery of staying outside any more than absolutely necessary. However, after not hearing a single Jerry shell the entire first day there, we decided that it was OK to mess around outdoors as much as we wanted to, so we started in playing ball in the evenings. The last day we were there I decided that I would do some laundry in the large vat of mountain water, which was ice cold, and then would finish up by getting into the vat and taking a really cold bath. I was busy at the first part of the task, washing away for all I was worth and absorbing sun at the same time by wearing only trunks when a message came that I should be ready to move at a moment's notice, and I had to stop my washing right then and there. I knew that I would have time to finish my laundering if I wanted to but that the clothes would never dry by the time we would have to move out, so I quit immediately and got everything ready for the move. Then, as luck would have it, I didn't get to move for quite some hours, time enough for all of my clothes to have dried. In fact I even had the opportunity to start in on Edna Ferber's "Great Son" which is quite interesting, altho I haven't yet finished it. You can be sure that if I haven't time to write you letters then I haven't time to read books. I wish that I had some floodlights to have taken a picture of our room before I pulled out. There were soldiers stretched out on the floor sleeping as soundly as if they were in the most comfortable bed at home. As I have repeatedly said, these GIs can sleep anywhere after they've been in the army for a while.

I didn't tell you about our move to the mountain "retreat". In reaching it I had to pass thru one sector between the artillery and the enemy and believe me it had me plenty worried not because there was anything falling in, altho that could have been, too, for if our artillery can reach them theirs can reach us; but rather because I had to continue going for an interminable distance after passing the artillery, and to me that suggested that I was getting closer and closer to the enemy which was no place for your old man. Actually, however, as I continued going I was getting farther away from the enemy for the artillery was firing off to the side away from which I was going. I was sure that I was on the right path, but as I went farther on I began to pass some infantry units with guns all set and apparently ready to grapple with the enemy at any moment. When I saw that I decided that I had gone far enough and that I'd better check with the soldiers I was passing in order to make sure that I wasn't making any mistake. Macri, who is usually imperturbable, was also quite worried and was getting more jittery all the time, being more and more certain that I had made a mistake and taken the wrong road. A check with the infantry unit reassured me and we continued until we reached our temporary mountain home. It was the first close shell fire that I had heard in a coon's age. In our new house, however, we could barely hear our own guns the first day and after that we couldn't at all.

On the move from the mountain house things were very quiet for the entire trip. I did hear a few shells fired by our own guns and not a single one by the enemy. We ended up in a valley with a mountain on each side of me. I pulled in just at daylight and immediately put my cot up and proceeded to catch forty winks. That is all it amounted to, for I was awakened twice during the one hour I slept, once to see a Jerry prisoner who had a bad back, and the other time to see an American officer who was sick. I heard quite a bit of gunfire in the mountains on either side of me, but I didn't think too much of it until I heard a Jerry machine pistol. I then decided that this was pretty far forward for me to be, for I am not usually within close sound of that vicious little weapon. However, since nothing whined about the area I felt that I didn't have too much to worry about. However, later in the day I learned that the hills had been full of Jerry snipers who were being rounded up by our troops. They could have easily have taken pot shots at us, but that would have given their position away and then too maybe the red crosses kept them from shooting down on me. The Jerry prisoner that was brought in came from a prisoner of war enclosure not far away. He was moaning bitterly because of pain in his back and when I examined him I saw that his back was quite excoriated, but that he had no serious injury. It looked almost as if he had been dragged over the ground by his feet. He was raising much more fuss than his wound warranted and I suspected him of wanting

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order to make sure that they would notice him. Tag was sure that they were going to end up in the ditch, but somehow they got by without any accident. Finally Tag told him that we needed the vehicle and had no difficulty at all in persuading him to turn it over after giving him all of 7 cigarettes. Tag was quite proud of this business deal, 1 ford truck for 7 cigarettes. A few more deals like that and he will begin to consider himself a business man. Who wouldn't?

The radio tonite announced that in the past two days the 5th and 8th armies have taken 40,000 prisoners, and believe me that is no exaggeration. All day long trucks have been passing by loaded with prisoners, and when I say loaded I mean just that for they are packed in as tight as is humanly possible, 65 men to a truck that will only carry 20 - 25 men seated. Of course, in order to get this many men in the truck they have to have all of them standing bunched together from front to rear, and believe me they are bunched. Usually a guard will ride either on the cab of the truck or on the very rear of it, with no room at all for him to really do anything in case there should be a break, but after all the Jerries are so crowded that they couldn't do very much in that respect anyway and even if they did they wouldn't get very far, because the partisans would be after them in no time at all. In addition to these vehicles filled with prisoners two groups of 600 each of prisoners were marched past our hospital ~~with~~ on their way to the prisoner of war enclosure. What a sight that was to behold. We had been expecting them for several hours before they arrived, because some drivers who had come from up the road had told us that they were on their way toward our place. However, they had a long way to go and so didn't arrive for quite some time. When they did, our whole company was out there as a welcoming committee and I got a couple of good shots of them being marched along. They were a pretty docile bunch and looked anything but supermen. They had a guard in front, a guard or two alongside, and a jeep carrying a heavy machine gun to their rear. Thus with only a half dozen or so GIs it was possible to control the entire group of 600 prisoners. They were marched to the enclosure which is only two blocks away from our set up. From here they were to be taken farther to the rear by truck. Some of us decided to go over to the enclosure to take a look at them, and I took Tag's camera along in order to snap some pictures. That was a sight that I'll never forget. A large field at the edge of town had been enclosed in barbed wire and this field was almost filled with prisoners of every type and description. They ranged in age from youngsters who looked no more than 16 to old men, one who actually gave his age as 56, and many who looked older than he. On the whole, they were average looking. I climbed up on a pole and snapped a picture of the entire group from the side. I'm really hoping that that one turns out. The one of the MPs offered to take me inside if I would see that I snapped him in one of the pictures, which of course I did. These prisoners had marched quite a distance with much of their packs and equipment, altho most worthwhile items had been taken away from them. However they had scads of stuff with them, most of it just plain junk, but some of the GIs outside the fence were lucky enough to get some pretty nice souvenirs such as watches, a couple of cameras which had been overlooked farther forward and later on the prisoners were giving Italian money to the GIs figuring that they wouldn't need it where they were going. I didn't bother talking with any of them but some of my men did. I can't begin to tell you how much the average German fears the Russians. When they heard that Berlin was practically in the hands of the Russians they said that Germany was now Kaput. They insist that the Russians take practically no prisoners but this, like some of the atrocity stories which they tried to get us to believe is probably propaganda of the Hitler type. They insisted that they would have given up earlier but they had been threatened with the death of their families back home if they were taken prisoner, and that is the reason they continued to fight. It was only after their home towns had been captured by the allies that they were willing to give up in large numbers. Many of them had fought on the Russian front and they really developed a dread of the massed Russian artillery.

I could probably have gotten some pretty nice souvenirs if I had tried but I didn't care to go after it. Some of the MPs walked thru the prison enclosure which was simply covered with all sorts of things, since the men couldn't take any of this stuff with them because of the necessity of loading them tightly into the vehicles, and found quite a few worthwhile ~~things~~ things.

The Italian civilians soon began crowding around the enclosure and the partisans who were helping guard the enclosure ordered them away from the fence because they were stringing some of the prisoners thru the fence. When this order was not quickly obeyed one of

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partisans shot into the air with his "paper cutter" machine pistol and you should have seen those passanos clear out then.

This evening I spent standing outside the gates of the hospital watching the people of the city pass by. They are simply amazed at the amount of equipment which has been passing by, having never seen anything like it in quantity or quality. They don't understand how we can possibly have so much stuff. They are still extremely friendly and very happy to see us. The novelty hasn't worn off yet and troops have been moving thru too fast for them to get too well acquainted, if you get what I mean.

This morning I had an interesting and pitiable experience. The civilian hospital asked me if I could get rid of three German prisoners in order to give them a couple of more beds which they badly needed. I went over and checked the Jerries and found that all three of them were pretty badly wounded but that they could be transported so I agreed to take them away, sending them to the clearing station. The prisoners wanted to know where I was taking them and I explained that they were going to an American military hospital. They wanted to know where they were going from there and I told them I didn't know. One of them, apparently thinking that I might have some influence in the future told me that he was an only son and asked if it wouldn't be possible to be sent home after he got well. I wouldn't be surprised, since the poor youth has had one leg amputated below the knee and the other one pretty well mangled. It's a shame, but after all I'm sure that he will get better treatment from us than we would get from the Germans under the same circumstances. It was from one of these wounded that I got the tent and the cap that I mailed to the kids to-day. That tent might be able to give them some fun if ~~if~~ you can figure a way of putting it up.

I forgot to mention that our men captured a whole hospital intact yesterday, including some 450 patients. They had the Jerries evacuate their patients in their own ambulances to some of our hospitals in the rear, even letting the Jerries drive the ambulances. That will give you some idea as to how busy one can be when he gets a lot of prisoners. We simply can't spare the manpower needed to drive all these vehicles.

As is usual at times like this one hears some odd stories. One that Macri came back with ~~the~~ resulted from a conversation he had with an Italian civilian in whose yard a tremendous German gun had been blown up. It seems that the Germans had been shooting the gun from his yard and had been living in his house. When they saw that they would have to get out of ~~the~~ there or be overrun by our troops, they decided to blow up the gun. But before they did this they captain in charge assigned one of his men to take the civilian out to the barn and shoot him for no good reason at all. The civilian was headed toward the barn about 5 paces in front of the soldier when the other men exploded the gun. One piece of it weighing several hundred pounds flew all the way over the roof of the house and landed on the head of the soldier, killing him instantly and thus saving the life of the civilian. He had the piece of metal and the spot where it landed to prove his story.

Well, darling, I'm going to call it a night. Life here at present is continuing to be very very interesting, but I still would be willing to forego all of it just to be home with you and the kids.

All my love, sweets,
Walt.

Chip
Louise
Leo ✓
Edith
Ginny
Irv
Soph