

Good evening, my sweet:

23 April 1945 2030

Well, for once, Ben doesn't have anything on me because I, too, am now located in a hospital. Of course, I'm considerably closer to the front lines than he is and I don't get to do any medical work, but just the mere fact that I'm living in a hospital does make me feel better. I'll tell you more about that later in the letter.

Last night we were located in the partisan's house with the men in the barn. I told you about our set up there. I had to quit my letter at 10 because Leip had gone to bed early and I didn't ~~feel like~~ want to keep him awake with my typing, so I decided to finish the letter this morning, which I did. I decided that I might as well go to bed and read some of the newspapers which I had received in the mail along with a V-mail from you of April 12 and an air mail from Soph. I was sorry about that in just a few minutes because a couple of Jerry planes came over and there was plenty of ack ack going after them in short order and that is always a pretty sight as long as you aren't near enough to the ack ack to have it bursting in your vicinity. However, I wasn't going to get up and dress just to see something which I have seen not infrequently before. This morning I learned that the men who were sleeping in the barn heard the planes strafing in the distance and then they flew directly over our buildings and someone got the idea that they were going to strafe our building, too and headed for the ladder leading to the ground from the barn. Well, that got some of the more level headed ones panicky, too, and before you knew it the fellows were jumping down from the second story barn, a distance of about 8 feet, because going down the ladder was too slow to evacuate the building in a hurry. We officers in our building were completely unaware of the goings on, or we would have easily been able to put a stop to it. As it was, several of the men in the company spent a good part of the night going from the barn to the field behind the house where the former Jerry occupants had built a very complete dugout. The whole incident was quite regrettable because there really was nothing to worry about since we were located on a by-road, and in an isolated house to boot the type of thing which would never attract a Jerry plane unless we had made some flagrant violation of blackout security or camouflage. It is funny how one or two nervous fellows can panic an entire group of fellows who never show any particular nervousness in much more dangerous situations.

This morning I took a run over to the clearing station, which was supposed to move up to within a mile of our location. They had not yet arrived when I got to the area they were supposed to be in, so I thought that they might have given us the wrong spot on the map and proceeded to look for them farther along the road. I happened to pass Duncan and Johnnie and Jones on the road so I knew that they were heading for their area and turned around and followed them. It turned out that they went to a different place entirely from the place they had informed me that they would be and they explained this by saying that they wanted to get a bit farther from the main road. I knew the reason, of course, having heard the planes over the preceding night, but I learned that the planes had strafed the road near the clearing station off and on during the night and as a result the men of the clearing station and headquarters had spent most of their night lying in ditches. After all a tent is no protection against a strafing or a bombing. As a result none of them had more than an hour's sleep all night long. The funny thing about the whole incident is that there was not a single casualty that entered the clearing station from any of the strafing that Jerry did. This business of strafing at night is not very effective, but oh my, what we do to them in our daylight strafing. The roads in this vicinity are simply lined with destroyed vehicles which have overturned and burned and Jerry helmets are strewn all about them which is a pretty good sign that the Jerrys have been destroyed with the vehicles. The bodies are already removed, most likely by the Italian civilians who live in this rather thickly populated country, for it doesn't take long for a dead body to develop the sickeningly sweetish nauseating odor in this Italian sun, and these people don't like it any more than we do. In fact, we saw them burying several bodies on our way up here to-day.

So far we have done practically no work whatsoever, in our station. Aside from four Jerries and one partisan we have done no medical work at all. One Jerry captain was brought in along with three enlisted men. He was a handsome slightly gray haired man who looked like an intelligent business man of the States. However his story wasn't so intelligent. He had already been wounded in his chest at the time he and his group had been taken prisoner and when they were disarmed he turned in his revolver just like the others did. However he had a second revolver in his person and he tried to use this on his guard when the guard turned away from him. Fortunately for the latter he happened to notice the captain's move and hit him in the chin before he could pull the trigger. It was fortunate

for the Jerry captain that the guard had been told that he was to be held for questioning or I'm sure that he would never have come back to us alive. I still feel that the guard was a fool not to kill the captain after he had been questioned. I believe that I would have and in cold blood, too. After all, I'm sure that the Jerry would never have done otherwise. I know that I was angry enough with him to have beat his brains out. I hope that he understood English, for I cussed him out plenty. I believe he knew what I was saying but he denied understanding English, and I didn't know any German cusswords to throw at him. There was no point in going into a German discussion with him, which I could probably have done with some difficulty. I've lost all sympathy for any of these Germans, wounded or otherwise. If the occasion arises where they require treatment from us, we shall give them the treatment which we would give a GI, but I'm damned if I like the idea. I don't believe that they do as much for our men, on the whole, altho they may do so in isolated cases.

Van dropped in on us to-day back at our farm house. I'm not sure of his reason for dropping in for he didn't have very much to say when he did come in, but in he came. He had been walking with the infantry for days and was dog tired, altho he had no particular complaints to offer on that score. He always was a good walker.

This afternoon I moved on up to the present town. It was a victorious trip up here because I was only a few hours behind the Jerries. In fact the partisans were still clearing them out of some of the isolated spots where they were hiding out in order to do a bit of sniping. Every once in a while we could hear a rifle shot in a distant house, for all the houses along the road had been cleared out, and we knew that it was probably a partisan "persuading" some Jerry that it would be wise to give himself up. No matter where we went, whether over main roads or over back roads, the people were all lined up outside their houses to wave at us and smile a welcome. There is no question but that they were glad to see us arrive. Arrangements had been made previously with Vince that I would meet him in this town and pick out a site for our station. When I arrived here he was already on his way back to the company to lead them up here, so I checked with regimental and learned that he had made arrangements for us to move into a hospital here in this town. I had noticed the hospital when I had passed by it, so had no trouble finding it and found that Vince had put a reserved sign on it for us. Tag and I went in and talked to the superintendent of the hospital and he turned over an entire building to us. It consists of two 15 bed wards, plus about 8 private rooms, each large enough to hold 3 beds, and two larger rooms one large enough to house all six of us officers (the sixth being the chaplain) and the other being ideal for the station. This hospital is in active use at present, housing 170 patients in a number of different buildings. Their surgical ward is the busy one at present and not infrequently local vehicles drive up with a wounded partisan who is taken care of in the hospital. They also have a contagious ward and several other wards. I really should call them buildings rather than wards for each one is housed in a different building. Before the war they took care of 120 patients here, but now they have increased their capacity to 170. Two days ago the Germans were using this place for a hospital, but they pulled out along with all their patients as we forced our way toward them. The nurses here are all nuns who have had graduate nurse training, and they are quite friendly.

The partisans around here have really done a marvellous job for us. In our trip up here we passed over a couple of bridges of quite good size which had not been blown up and I learned that the Jerries had left a man behind to blow up each of these bridges but that the partisans had killed each of them so that the bridges remained intact. Then their job of rounding up stray German snipers has saved our troops for the work of continuing the advance. They simply swarm over the countryside riding all sorts of vehicles from bicycles to Jerry vehicles and even horses. They are frequently accompanied by nurses who take care of their wounded for them. They are tickled pink to see us Americans as we drive by and invariably wave at us or salute us. They have captured amazing numbers of prisoners for us. I was told by some of the boys who were in the last area before I was that the partisans had quite a few prisoners and they took turns at marching them up and down the road apparently intending to fire them out to the point of making them lose all ambition toward trying to escape.

This morning one of our battalions recaptured three jeeps which had been captured by the Jerries earlier the same day, along with the Lt. Col. that they had captured with the jeeps. It seems that a pocket of Jerries had captured the Lt. Col. and the group with him, but because they had a chance to get back into their lines with them the whole group was recaptured. The Lt. Col. was sent back to his outfit but the battalion held on to the 3 jeeps.

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I had to stop typing in order to let Leip go to sleep, and then he proceeded to talk until 11 PM.

Since the hospital in which we are located is functioning, I had to place the areas away from the building which we are occupying off limits to the troops so that they would not interfere with the working of the hospital. Otherwise they would be stopping everyone going in and out of the hospital doors to shmoos or if of the feminine gender and attractive, as many of these girls are, to proposition them. Some of the patients from the contagious building came out to talk to several of the men, and I went over to check on what was going on. I found that one of them was talking French with Mos Blier, another one Neapolitan (which is really different than true Italian, with Rabito, and I ended up talking German with a partisan from Innsbruck (a city in the most southern part of Austria just north of the Brenner pass). The latter had been wounded in the arm the day before while helping the partisans take German prisoners. In the last place we were not a single partisan had been injured in rounding up the Jerries, but it is a different story in this vicinity where partisan casualties have been moderately severe. The hospital here takes care of most of these and it is only an occasional one that comes thru out stations. One of the patients had been a prisoner in Germany for more than a year, and had only been able to return to Italy because he had developed tbc. In fact, of the five patients to whom we talked, four of them had tbc. This ex-prisoner told a story of very harsh treatment, brutal from the standpoint of physical punishment since he was repeatedly kicked by his guards when he complained of being sick. At 3 AM all prisoners were called out to start their day's labors which did not end until 8 PM. The food consisted only of bread and water and not too much of this. As a result many of the cases became ill and tbc was rife in the group. The fellow from Innsbruck was very bitter toward Hitler telling the old story of the march into Austria and the subjugation to Hitler Germany. He didn't blame Schussnig for this, feeling that they had no other choice since they were a poor and weak country. Poor as they had been before they became even poorer after annexation by Hitler because he took almost everything into Germany to feed the Germans and let the Austrians get by as best they could on what was left. He was a very talkative individual and wouldn't let any of the others get a word in edgewise and finally our conversation was broken up by chow being served. I was surprised at how well I understood his German. In fact I was able to follow everything he talked about without trouble.

The officer's set up here is quite nice, for we are at the back part of the building with a porch right outside our window. We have put a table on the porch and eat our meals there, being served by Patterson from the kitchen truck which is located right next to this area. We did not take the trouble of unloading the kitchen truck because of the fluidity of the tactical situation since it would be too much trouble to unload it and then have to load it again only a few hours later and move on. We have developed a system whereby we leave the truck behind while it cooks the meal and then it catches up with us with a hot meal all ready to serve. Not bad.

The hospital is furnished with a considerable number of cots, with very poor mattresses. I thought that it would be a good idea to give the men a break by letting them spread their bedding right on the springs and thus have a relatively soft bed for a change, instead of letting the officers have the beds. We have our cots and have no trouble sleeping. Vince was quite upset by this because he always reserves the bed for himself, if there is one in the place where we are setting up. Since he is always the first one there, as he is the one who is forward and picks out the places into which we move, he ~~lets~~ has the opportunity of grabbing the bed for himself before any of the others of us get there. I don't care for the beds as a rule because I sleep so well on my cot, but Leip likes to sleep in beds if he can get hold of one, which isn't very often.

We have another example here of the German violation of the Geneva convention. They use the grounds around this hospital as an ammunition dump. All thru the grounds underneath the trees outside the buildings are piles of shells, protected by their closeness to the hospital buildings. This town is another example of the accuracy of our bombing and strafing, which impresses me more and more as we go along. The town has been fairly thoroughly bombed by our planes, but this hospital which is just across the road from the main part of the town has not had a single bomb fall into its grounds. That is good bombing, believe me. We had an experience, i.e. Vince did, on the other side of the ledger, so that one must admit that after all our air corps is human, too. He was out on a quartering party when a group of our planes flying over the column of vehicles. When the first plane peeled off the men in the ve-

hicles immediately pulled over to the side of the road, realizing that the planes had mistaken them for the enemy. They hurried and got out their identifying signals but not before the 1st plane had done a bit of strafing. The second plane was already in its dive before the signals were gotten out, but he recognized them in time to hold his fire and wig wag his wings in recognition. It scared a year of growth out of Brady and the rest of them, and it made me hurry to headquarters and get the identifying signal at once, as soon as I heard the story. After all my jeep is the first one in our convoy and I don't want to have any run ins with our air corps because those fellows are just too accurate for me. I now ride around with this identification on the hood of my jeep and there is no difficulty of seeing it for a long way, so I won't have anything to worry about on that score. I probably wouldn't have anything to worry about anyway ~~but~~ for I am not usually anywhere near the front lines, but I won't take any more chances than I have to.

Well, sweets, that's about all for the time being.

I send you all my love, dearest, and believe me I've stored up a lot of it in my year and more away from you.

Walt.

Chip ✓
Louise ✓

Leo ✓
Edith
Genny
Irv
Soph