

27 April 1945, Friday 1030

Good morning, my darling:

I guess I should say that I am sorry that I haven't had time to write you your usual letter the past couple of days, but actually I'm not because it means that we have been on the move, and being on the move means that things are going very well, and they are. On our way to and north of Rome I thought that we had moved rapidly, but that is nothing compared with the way we are going at present. It's a glorious feeling to be able to keep on the move this way without a single round of artillery coming back at us and prisoners being taken right and left, and the roads being lined with people all in a holiday mood because they have been liberated.

In my last letter I was still in the hospital. I had planned staying there until we received orders from the regiment to move, expecting this move to be a good long one. However, the clearing company moved up ahead of us and it is against their principles for the collecting company to be located behind them, so they suggested that we move a part of our station up forward. We had already had a building reserved for us up forward, so that it was no problem for us to make the move, but it was really unnecessary at the time. However, since their suggestion is equivalent to an order, I sent Leip and his station crew up forward and remained behind to move up the rest of the company when our orders came thru. As luck would have it, I read until midnite, finishing Edna Ferber's Great Son, (which is quite good and could easily have made a number of good books, since it ~~is~~ traces ~~the~~ one of the famous families of the Seattle region from the time of the settling of Seattle up until the Pearl Harbor Sneak attack) and at 1:30 AM I was awakened with news that we were to move within a couple of hours. I stayed up after that, awakening the company at 3 and getting away at 4. The trip to our next stop, a farmhouse, was uneventful in that nothing happened, but not so with respect to emotions. Altho Jerry has very little in the way of planes he does come over every night with the few he has left, and does a bit of strafing and bombing. It is amazing that he gets no casualties at all out of this, in fact the only casualties being Jerry planes that are knocked down. The night we spent at the ~~hospital~~ hospital, i.e. the night before our move up to the farmhouse that I just mentioned, Jerry came over and strafed the road where we had previously been located. It is hard to understand the reason for this for there wasn't a single installation on that road, all of the troops having moved forward the previous day. I learned about this because I had left some of my baggage back there with a man to guard it and he had been awakened by the civilians who went into an improvised air raid shelter. Because of these air raids I don't move the company at night, and in fact don't even send out any ambulances, etc. at night unless it is absolutely necessary. Thus we haven't had any real scares. The clearing company, on the other hand, was moving just the other night when they were bombed and strafed which of course scared hell out of them but there were no casualties of personell or vehicles. Well, knowing about these air raids, and realizing that I could hear no plane while riding in a vehicle because the motor makes too much noise for one to hear the rumble of the plane motor, one is constantly ill at ease during night moves. That I was, that I was. However, seeing no flak going up anywhere I realized that I had nothing to worry about. That didn't keep the peculiar sensation of emptiness from developing in the pit of my stomach, and it wasn't hunger that caused it either. At any rate, we pulled into our farm house just before dawn, for which I was thankful for that is one of Jerry's pilots preferred times. In fact he was over just a few minutes after my last vehicle had pulled in.

The group at the new place had had a good night's sleep, but the rest of us had only a few hours of sleep at most, and I had had least of all. However, I was quite a busy man for the rest of the day so I didn't mind the lack of sleep. Our farm house consisted of a single building with a couple of barns, and since there was no room to put up the men, I let them sleep sitting up in the ambulances. There were quite a few not unattractive girls in this place and I learned that they had ridden up there from a town quite some distance away on some tank destroyers, the TD men having told them that they would return them to their town, but they did not. The girls tried to get us to take them back, but that was out of the question. It seems that they were good girls, for the TD boys didn't get anywhere with them despite the fact that the girls spent the night practically with the men. One of these girls told Tag quite a long story about having been in prison for 4 months because she was antifascist and when her town was liberated, the fellow who had had her put into prison was immediately killed by a partisan who had returned to the town to learn that his mother and father had also been in the prison, put there by this same fascist, and the mother had died there, supposedly from starvation.

The next part of my activity is taboo for the time being. Suffice it to say that I was aggravated no end by certain incidents. I met a Lt. Strauss who is now attached or rather assigned to the field artillery in our combat team, replacing Capt. Thompson, the medical officer from Detroit who has gone to a hospital to do some real medical work for a change. Strauss was one of the group who was at Percy Jones for a short time, and faintly remembers Chip, but not very well. He is fresh out of internship and comes from Chicago.

Because of the situation I loaded half of the station on an ambulance and took a few of the station crew and Gar with me and set out. I was supposed to meet Vince who was to pick out a house for us in which to set up, but I didn't run into him and as a result went quite far ahead of the spot where we would have ordinarily set up. Finally I came to a town which had been cleared of Jerries only an hour or two before, and decided that that was far enough forward to go. By that time I was only a short distance behind the front troops, who were moving at a steady pace without any trouble at all. In fact they were moving so fast that they were using vehicles to transport them rather than having them walk. The trip up to the town where I went was swell, in that all the way up I was being hailed as a liberator. People were out at the roadside offering eggs, wine, freshly baked bread, or anything else they had in the way of food. I was plenty glad to get some of it, because I had been on the move and hadn't had anything to eat for 16 hours. Oh, I forgot about an egg sandwich which I had had just before I left the company. At any rate when I finally arrived in this town I took a look thru it and found only one place which could act as a station and house the entire company, and that was the school house. This was mobbed at the time that I drove up by a tremendous number of partisans all armed with cast off German guns. It seems that the school house was the partisan headquarters. As soon as I pulled the ambulance up before the building I was mobbed by the partisans, each of whom wanted to touch me. Finally I got them to quiet down enough for them to hear me ask for the commandant and I was immediately taken into the school building where I found him in one of the noisiest rooms I have ever entered. These Italians really can make the noise, just in ordinary conversation. I explained that I wanted the building to set up a hospital, and he told me that it was mine just for the asking, so I put a reserved sign on it and then went to look for Vince, whom I had not yet contacted. I couldn't find him, so I left a man at the road junction and returned to the school where we unloaded and were all set to work. We were simply mobbed by people who wanted to do all sorts of favors for us. If I hadn't restricted the amount of wine that I took I could have gotten gloriously drunk. At about dark Tag drove up, all excited, because he had been worried about going forward too far. However, by that time the troops were at least 4 miles ahead of us (by morning we were rear echelon again). Tag brought the rest of the company with him, but he had left them parked down the road until he investigated. The only portions that weren't with us were the kitchen and the Jerry ~~Waller~~ truck. I had expected to eat cold rations for a couple of days until the kitchen truck did catch up to us once again, and have found out that our new type of C rations are not at all bad. Some of our litter bearers returned to the company because they weren't needed and the battalions had no transportation for them, and they really had the eggs. One of the boys came back with 50 eggs, all of which he had hard boiled. Needless to say I had hardboiled eggs for breakfast yesterday. We did not contact Vince until yesterday morning. He had found a house a few miles back on the road and had then looked for us for a couple of hours and not being able to find us to his rear had gone to bed for the night and then come forward in the morning. I was thankful to see the company pull in just at dark because Jerry had been over and had strafed the road about a half mile in front of them, as usual without any casualties.

Yesterday morning we really had a picnic. The partisans were out rounding up the fascists which they did without any difficulty, for the fascists gave no resistance whatsoever. The entire village seemed to have congregated around our schoolhouse and everytime a partisan brought in a fascist there was applause from the villagers for the partisan, and boos and catcalls for the fascist. It was the type of thing which you have seen in the movies and in news photos.

Regiment had moved up early yesterday morning, and I sent Vince out to get in contact with them to see if we should move up. Tag, in the meantime went to the rear to see if he couldn't bring up the rest of our vehicles. After waiting a couple of hours for Vince to come back and tell us to move, during which time everybody and his uncle passed by us on his way forward, I finally got disturbed and sent Macri forward in an ambulance to contact regimental. He was back at 1130, just in time to keep me from having a meal with some fam-

ily which the chaplain had arranged for us. We hurriedly packed and got going. I had quite a problem on my hands for part of the company was quite some distance behind me, the part that Tag had gone back to get, and here I was moving on without them having caught up. However, there was no choice in the matter, I had to keep going even if I strewed the ~~whole~~ company over the entire boot called Italy. We started right on out and kept going until we had reached the spot where Macri had left Regimental parked at the side of the road. I parked the company there and continued on up until I found regimental and learned what the tactical situation was. From this I could figure out where best to put up the company. On my return toward the company I ran into Vance, who was taking Leip up to see some casualties and determine how many ambulances we would need. I sent Leip back with Vince who had already had a house picked out for the company to move into. I waited for him at the cross roads near regimental, where every Italian who passed by had a word of welcome for me. Finally Vince returned and we set out to find the patients. They were all German casualties and believe me I have never seen such a picture of stark destruction and devastation as I saw at that street corner where the patients were waiting to be picked up. The entire setting was one of destruction, first of all because this was at the edge of a large city right next to the railroad tracks and our planes had been giving the place a workover for quite some time. As a result there just wasn't anything left but total ruins. Then, at a road junction just next to this railroad track I saw a number of vehicles which had been knocked out and which were still smoldering. Here it was that I found my patients. It was difficult to tell which were dead and which were alive. In a bomb crater I found eight live Jerries, all badly wounded, and then scattered around over a distance of 100 yards I found a total of 12. I sent for 3 ambulances but happened to run into one of Renzi's before mine came and since he was located a bit closer than I was I had him furnish two and I furnished the third. I took the four worst ones into my ambulance as litter casualties - one with a chest wound which had practically exposed the heart, two with abdominal wounds wherein one could look right into the abdomen, a fourth one with numerous wounds, one of which was a total castration. I had the opportunity, then, of looking around a bit, and what a scene this was. I thought that I had seen some bad things up on mount altuzzo, but for concentrated havoc this corner took the prize. It seems that most of the damage had been done by a couple of tank destroyers. The incident took place at a Y road junction and the TDs were on one arm of the Y while the Jerries were on the other arm heading toward the junction intending to continue down the leg of the Y toward safety. The TDs called to them to halt but they either didn't hear or wouldn't for they kept going. The TDs opened fire right at the junction and caught four vehicles which must have been loaded with men and equipment. At any rate the vehicles caught fire after being struck. I don't know whether the men were burned to death or had been killed first by the shell, but at any rate I counted 16 bodies at that street corner, at least half of whom had been almost completely burned up. Hands were lying around at random, as were other limbs. If I hadn't seen so much of this type of thing I am sure that I would have gotten sick and vomited. The incident had occurred at 7 AM and I picked them up at 2 PM. I imagine that a number of the men would have been alive if they could have been gotten earlier, but after all we are not running a medical service in front of the front lines. I imagine that two of the four patients that I sent back to our company will die, since a good bit of their abdominal wall had been shot away and they were lying there for 7 hours with the only treatment consisting of a dressing put on by some aid man before we had gotten there. At that I'm afraid that I didn't feel sorry for the men. We don't let it interfere with our medical treatment of them, but we have no sympathy at all for these Nazis who don't have enough sense to give up. Two of these men that I took in to our company have been in the German army for 7 years. I'm sure that they have performed their share of inhumane acts.

Oh I forgot to tell you about the 6 German prisoners who had been brought into the school house while we were there the previous evening. They had been picked up by the partisans. 2 of them were poles, 3 Austrians and the other German. They were kept in our building for the night, so I and a couple of my men searched them for whatever we might find of value to the intelligence group. They had nothing of value on them. Matusik, one of my men, hearing that there were some roles in the group, came up and spent the rest of the night with the men, even sleeping there.

On my return to the company I found that Vince had put up the company in a farm house in which there wasn't nearly enough room, so despite the fact that we already had unloaded the station and taken care of the Jerries there, I sent him out to do a bit more reconnaissance

for a place large enough to house the entire company. I'm afraid that some of the men were disappointed because they had two beautiful girls in this place, one of them as pretty as anything which I have seen over here in quite some time. However, I didn't like the idea of some of them having to sleep outside so we looked further. We found a small farm village built around a large central square, where we would have no trouble putting up both men and station, so as soon as we sent off the Jerries we moved over to this place. All day long we had been hearing a rumor from the Italians that the war was over and the Germans had been ordered by Hitler, who thereafter had committed suicide, to lay down their arms. We did not put any stock into this rumor, but believe me these Italians did. In the little farm community into which we moved the entire village was drunk and singing at the tops of their voices. They called us their liberators and wine flowed like water. We told them that the war was not yet over, proving it by turning on the radio and continuing to hear war news, and also by the continuation of artillery fire. They believed us before long, but that didn't stop the celebration for after all, were not they liberated, and were we not their liberators?

As I write this I am sitting in the second floor of the home of the superintendent of this farm community, every one in it worked for the same man, an absentee owner. From here I can overlook the large central square of the town, which really consists of four long houses (each composed of individual houses which are continuous as far as the outside appearance is concerned) one on each of the square's four sides. The community has 40 to 50 cows which give only 70 quarts of milk because of the dry weather which they have been having here (no rain in 90 days) and the lack of forage resulting therefrom. The Germans blew up the canal systems which were used for irrigation, when they blew up ammunition just before they pulled out of this vicinity. As if to celebrate along with the civilians for their liberation, it rained a bit last night. Apparently the community functions on a share crop type of business, in that the various families that brought in milk to the superintendent, had the milk measured out by him and then received half of it back. If they work on halves, they are a fortunate bunch of farmers, because that is better than the average farmer is able to do back in the states. The village is populated by a tremendous number of children, which isn't surprising, since it is quite isolated, so that the people can't go to the big city for entertainment, and after all what better form of entertainment is there on cold winter nights when there isn't enough heat in the house?

Last night, Tag pulled in with our kitchen and another ambulance, for which we were thankful, however, he hasn't gotten the Jerry truck up to us yet, and it contains a number of things which we need, including a set of maps which is of this area. We used up all of our other maps because of the rapid pace we have been moving at.

Well, honey, if I'm going to get this in the mail I'll have to stop now, since we are sending in an ambulance load of patients in a few minutes. I will save the story about the German prisoner that I took for a later letter.

Love,
Walt.

Chap. ✓
Louise ✓
Leo
Edith
Gummy
Iro
Soph