

Good evening, darling:

29 May 1945 Tuesday 1730

I'm neglecting you again, my sweet. I didn't get my letter written this AM as I should have, and about the only excuse that I can give is that I wasn't in a writing mood. As it is, I'm starting this now, but in a half hour we are to have a volleyball game with the battalion, and following that I expect to go to the movie. I shall probably get home too late from that to do any letter writing so that I shall have to finish this in the AM. For the first time in about a week I am making a couple of carbon copies of my letter because I am going to tell you about my trip to Venice rather than the little items of my relatively uneventful life. Before I start in that I want to answer a question that you ask in the letter I received this evening. Send the dictionary back. It has been so long since I ordered it from you that the PX got one in in the meantime and altho it isn't as good a one as the one I ordered nevertheless it will do for the relatively little use I give it. Regarding the film, if you can get it send it. Even if I am fortunate enough to be on my way to the states at the time it comes over, it will finally catch up with me. I wish I could tell you just how long I will be over here, but I simply do not know. I do imagine that it won't be terribly much longer, but that is my own opinion and not from any official news which I have. There are all sorts of rumors, most of them pretty similar, and when that happens things usually occur in accordance with the rumor. Suffice it to say that the rumors are encouraging to say the least. Now don't interpret that as meaning that I am getting out of the army or any such happy break as that, but rather that I shall be back in the states before another winter comes. I am not a part of the 15th Army that is to occupy Europe. The 5th Army is part of the 15th Army Group and has nothing to do with such occupation. So don't worry yourself about that, honey. I won't remain in Europe. The main question is how long I'll be here before I get to go back to the states and your guess on that is almost as good as mine. I don't expect to go to the Pacific without first seeing the states, and once I get to the states I imagine that I will be permitted to get out of the 85th and into a hospital. I'm afraid to hope for anything better than that, viz. getting out of the army. That waits to be seen.

Sunday our company was to supply one truck and one officer to accompany the men on pass to Venice. Since Tag was away on a five day pass, or rather had just come back from one, that eliminated him as a possibility. Vince having just returned from the states didn't rate it, so it was between Leip and I. I decided that I would give him the choice of whether he wanted to go or not. He decided against it because it was Sunday and all the stores would be closed. So that is how I got to go. In order to have a full day in Venice we had to leave at 6 AM so I had to get up at 5 to clean up, shave, and eat. It was really a beautiful day for such a trip, altho a bit chilly until we got down out of the mountains. Of course, this portion of Italy has no visible scars of the war, since it was just along in this region that the Jerries gave up. The only damage that one saw in the first portion of our trip was the junked German vehicles along the roadside where they had been pushed after having been knocked out by our air corps. However, as we went farther south, just south of Vittorio Veneto there was more and more damage to be found and the city of Treviso was really quite beaten up, with hardly a block of the town not being pretty badly damaged by air attack. Because of this damage several of the roads were one way, and as a result we got lost for about 15 minutes trying to fathom our way out of the maze of roads. The British are in charge of this sector and their signs are not the same as ours so that we got a bit confused about the proper road. However, it didn't take us too long to get straightened out and on our way again. I know that you have read stories in the newspapers about the tremendous migration of refugees that is going on thruout Europe. I have often mentioned it in my letters. On the highway to Venice we ran across a camp which is taking care of these individuals who are slowly heading their way home. The allies are trying to help them along now by furnishing trucks to them and they really had quite a line of loaded trucks on the highways, most of them heading south. The closer we got to Venice the more traffic we ran in to. After all Venice is a sea port and supplies come into it from the various allied nations and these have to be taken up to the troops by trucks, so you can imagine how many trucks were rushing hither and yon on the road. Finally



we were able to see Venice in the distance. It is a city built on islands and is not really a part of the mainland of Italy at all. A causeway, 3 to 4 miles in length connects it to the mainland. We drove down this causeway and reached the first island, where, to my surprise we had to leave our vehicle. There are no vehicles at all in Venice, since there are no streets on which one could drive them. In fact in the entire day which I spent there I saw only one bicycle. There is a good reason for this, since the bridges which go over the canals have steps up and down, and it is no fun lugging a bicycle up and down steps every few hundred yards or less.

Now to try to give you an overall picture of Venice. It seems that it was originally populated by Italian mainlanders who went to the islands to avoid being destroyed by their enemies. They built many buildings on these islands and as time went on gradually became a power themselves and had a little empire. This was ruled by a duke, the Duke of Venice, who was elected by the patricians of the islands. The title was not hereditary, but as one duke died another was elected in his place. Finally they lost all of their power when defeated in war and became part of Italy proper at the time that Garibaldi united the various parts of Italy to make it a nation, that was in the 1860s. Venice is separated from the Adriatic by a spit of land known as the Lido. It is supposed to be the most exclusive part of Venice, but was off limits to us so that we didn't get to see it. It is now being used as a rest center for troops, as well as a residential area, but those troops to whom I talked who are staying there were not too enthusiastic about it because they claimed that it was too dead. Of course, their idea of that and mine differ considerably. This spit of land separating Venice from the Adriatic results in the formation of a lagoon between the city proper and the mainland. Venice has now reached the point where practically every square inch of land on the islands has houses built on it right down to the very edge. In fact, probably over the edge for the houses go right to the water with no soil visible anywhere that I saw. As a result one does not get the impression that these are islands, but rather that this is a city in which the streets are replaced by canals. All in all there are 120 canals in the city and a total of 360 bridges over them. All of these canals are simply filled with gondolas, which are the main means of locomotion. They remind me very much of the taxis in New York, and one marvels at the skill of the gondoliers just as one does the skill of the taxi drivers. Of the canals there are several that are very much wider than the others. One of these is the famous Grand canal which is about four times as wide as South St. and is about two miles long. I understand that the larger canals are about 18 feet deep and the smaller ones, somewhat similar to fairly large alleyways back home, are 6 feet deep. There are several especially large canals that lead from the ocean in to the docks that are deep enough for the ocean going liners to travel without difficulty. When our truck stopped at the end of the causeway the first thing that any of us wanted to do was to take a gondola ride. The main reason for this was that we had no idea where the main part of the city was nor how to get there if we did know. I knew that St. Marks was the most famous place in town, so that was where I intended to head for. Kirby and I were the only officers with the men and we spent the entire day together, separating from the men at once. We got into a gondola, apparently pulling a faux pas, by picking our own gondola out of a group rather than taking the one which was offered to us. This resulted in a commotion and arguing the like of which I have never heard. Ah, thinks I, this is what I had heard about the gondoliers, a bunch of squabblers who are always raising a fuss with one another, but it turned out that this was not the case at all. They really are a pretty cooperative bunch. The gondolas are long and black and can seat 6 men without crowding. At each end, which is raised at a sort of point, there is a steel prow shaped somewhat like a large toothcomb. In addition there are some brass metal ornaments on the center of the gondolas sides, varying with different gondolas. I would like to describe the way the boats are propelled, but I'm afraid that it is beyond my power to give you a word picture of it. Suffice it to say that the gondolier uses a single oar as a rule on a very peculiar oarlock. He stands at the rear of the boat and propels it forward with a quick jerky movement of the arms and shoulders. Occasionally he will use two oars, but this too he does facing forward from a standing position, and not like rowing a boat. Oftentimes there are two gondoliers



eers to a boat, in order to propel it faster, and thus make more trips and more money. As our gondola headed for the great San Marco Cathedral (St. Marks) we were stopped by a couple of policemen in a boat who made our gondolier turn over his price card, which he had had lying on its face at the forward end of the boat. It was only then that we realized that there were standard fees. When we had gotten into the gondola I had asked the charge and he had told me "Anything you want to pay." The charge for three persons is 20 cents for the first half hour and then 15 cents for each additional half hour. I'm sure that we would have paid him at least 50 cents. We were quite amused at signs along the canals giving the speed limit as 5 miles per hour in the smaller canals and 8 miles ph in the Grand canal. However, we soon learned that this was not meant so much for the gondoliers as for the numerous motor boats that passed back and forth along the waterways. As it was, keeping them down at that speed still resulted in moderate sized waves which would slap against our gondola just short of hard enough to splash us. The canals themselves are not too sweet-smelling, having quite a bit of floating debris in them, but it isn't as bad as some of the smell of the Italian mainland cities. It took us just a half hour to arrive at the San Marco Cathedral which is near the eastern edge of town (we came in at the northwest, chiefly west). The Piazza San Marco is quite impressive, being a tremendous open area surrounded on four sides by large and famous buildings. It is the only large open place in the entire city and is therefore used as the meeting place and focus of all of the cities activities and fetes. I was interested in looking around a bit but Kirby suggested that the first thing which we should do was to locate the officers hotel and restaurant, so that we would not have to look for it at noon. That wasn't a bad idea, altho I was a bit amused because Kirby is pretty much heavier than I and it was pretty typical of him to be interested in his food to the degree of making sure that he didn't miss a meal. It didn't take us long to locate the hotel for it was just in the next block and extremely well marked by signs leading to it. Once we located it we returned to the square and decided that we would go thru St. Marks Church. We had no trouble finding a guide, for one of the main businesses of Florence is that of entertaining tourists, and the guides hang around in the square of St. Marks because that is the focal point for all tourists. From the outside the Basilica of San Marco is strongly reminiscent of Byzantine architecture because it was modeled on a church in Constantinople. It has a number of large Byzantine style domes and the outside of the church is composed of numerous columns and varicolored marble. The inner portion of the church is divided into two parts, the atrium, which is the part near the outside, and the inner portion. In the atrium there are a number of domes which have glass mosaics depicting scenes from the old testament. The inner portion of the church contains mosaics depicting the new testament. None of these mosaics compare in beauty with those of St. Peters. All in all the mosaics in the church cover an area of 40,000 square feet. To me the place seemed a bit too ornate and did not compare in beauty with St. Peters. This church is built atop a church which is supposed to have burned down more than 1000 years ago. Since Venice is built on islands composed of sand and mud, the soil is not firm enough to hold up the numerous heavy buildings erected on it, so that before buildings were put up innumerable piles of wood and stone were placed in the soil to support the weight of the buildings. As a result of this the buildings have a tendency to settle a bit and sink over a period of years. This is true of St. Marks as well as the other buildings. We were told that St. Marks settles at the rate of 6 inches per century. That may not seem like much but it is enough to result in the cracking of many of the mosaics and portions of the building resulting in almost constant necessity of repairs, so that scaffolding is almost constantly present in the church. This was true at the time we were there. The floor of St. Marks is composed of marble which has sunken considerably in some spots, and is not particularly attractive because several a year the tides are excessively high and the water covers the Piazza of St. Marks and even comes into the church itself.

Following our tour of the church Kirby and I decided to walk around a bit see the town. The streets are narrow alleyways between the buildings and are confusing because they seem to have no special destination, oftentimes ending abruptly at the water's edge. We strolled around and found the market place, ap-



parently the central place for the entire town to do their purchasing of food. Needless to say, despite the fact that this was Sunday, the place was tremendously crowded. However, there was not a very great selection to choose from. In addition to a small amount of meat and a larger amount of various types of fish the food was limited to artichokes, cherries, and potatoes. The meat sold for 1.60 per lb., the fish varied in price for the type being sold, and the potatoes were 10 cents per lb., the cherries between 20 and 25 cents and the artichokes 5 cents each. That gives you some idea of prices over here. The bridge which we crossed over to go to the market is a famous one, being only one of two that crosses the grand canal. It is called the Rialto bridge and is much larger than any of the other bridges, having two sets of marble stairs with a series of shops in between them. These shops were the money center of the city in the days when Venice was in its zenith of power, but now they act as ordinary shops.

After walking around until we were tired, and still finding it too early to eat, Kirby and I decided to take a gondola ride and see the city from a gondola. That is one nice thing about Venice, when you are tired you can get into a gondola and continue your sight seeing while still resting. We told the gondolier that we wanted to be back at the Hotel Luna, the officers hotel, by noon, so he adjusted his trip to just the right length to get us there at that time. We followed the grand canal around from the vicinity of St. Marks following its circuitous course with the gondolier pointing out various palaces to us. The canal has some 200 palaces along its course, but one would never realize it without being told. We saw only a few of these for the gondolier took us to just past the Rialto bridge and then cut thru numerous small canals taking us finally behind the island containing St. Marks, passing under the famous bridge of sighs, and back out into the large canal, and thence to the hotel.

It turned out that dinner was not to be served until 1230 so we sat in the lobby of the hotel shmoozing with a couple of 2nd Lts. from the 88th and 85th divisions. While we sat there a number of air corps kids came in, I say kids with premeditation, for none of them was over 25 years old, and yet not a one of them was under the rank of a captain, and there were several Lt. Col. and full colonels. It got so that we started laughing when we would see only the air corps insignia on the fellows collar and try to guess his rank. We never guessed below captain, and still we were almost always at least one or two grades below his rank. Really, something should have been done about this terrible discrepancy in rank between the air corps and the other services. In the army a man has to be a company commander to have a rank of captain, but it seems that in the air corps all he has to do is fly a plane. Oh well, it's too late to do anything about it now, but it seems a shame that in the infantry the platoon leader, whose job is infinitely more dangerous than that of a pilot (the mortality of infantry 2nd lieutenants is notoriously high, and they are seldom in a company long enough for us, who are a bit farther back, to get acquainted with them because they are either wounded or killed before they are in the outfit long enough to become well known) and yet they rate only the rank of 2nd Lt. These are boys with the intelligence to have been able to make the grade at OCS or to have shown their skill in combat and warranted a combat promotion. I cannot see what logic can explain this terrible discrepancy in rank. However, that has always been a sore spot in the other services.

Since Venice is in the British sector, the hotel was being run by the British, and the meals therefore were not nearly as substantial as we Americans are accustomed to. However, the food was excellent and we enjoyed what there was of it. Following the meal we joined a tour which was being held by the British information center and had an excellent English speaking guide. There were large numbers of soldiers interested in these tours and the guides would take them out in groups of 24s, limiting them to this because of the fact that the tour ended with a gondola ride, and since the gondolas could take only six men each they would be too far apart to hear the guide if there were more than four gondolas. We started off right in the square of St. Marks, the guide pointing out the various parts of the cathedral, showing us the famous clock tower which has a couple of giant bronze figures on its roof which strike the hour against a large bell by pivoting on their pedestal. Pointing out the Doges palace and



explaining the various styles of architecture exhibited init. Finally he took us thru the cathedral, which I have already described. Next he took us thru the Doges palace, which was the home of the ruler of Venice in the days of its power. This was entered thru a famous doorway called the Porta della Carta because in the former days notices were posted there. It was quite ornate, having a number of statues representing certain things. Originally it had been covered with gilt, but the salt of the air had gradually eroded this, as it had most of the gilt in the vicinity, so that it was difficult to recognize it as such. The doorway led into an inner court in which were stored some of the works of art which were being replaced. I was quite fortunate in a way in having come when I did because most of the works of art had already been replaced. There were still signs all over of the precautions which had been taken to prevent damage to the art treasures by bombing. The fronts of all of the famous structures had been bricked in, but this brick had been removed almost entirely except for a few mounds of it which had not yet been finished. We next went into the palace itself, which not only acted as the home for the ruling duke but also was the seat of the government. This we entered via the golden staircase, so called because of the gilded ceiling, much of whose gilt had been worn away. In this palace there are numerous world famous paintings - Rape of Europa by Veronese, an original Titian, Mercury and the three graces by Tintoretta, and many others. A number of ceiling paintings had not yet been replaced, but after all enough is enough, and I didn't mind particularly. The guide next took us into the prison part of the palace, which was in the next building across the canal and required our passage thru the bridge of sighs, made famous by Byron's poem, "Childe Harold". It consists of two narrow passageways, one for the guards on duty and the other for the prisoners who were brought from the prison to the palace to hear their sentences. If the sentence was death they were killed in the small square between St. Marks and the canal, in front of the Doges palace.

Next we went on the gondola ride, but the guide did not do any talking. The gondolier pointed out a few of the palaces along the Grand canal and returned us to the square just in time to reach there for the end of the 3 hour tour. All in all, the tour was well worth the 70 cents it cost. By the time we finished it, we still had a two hour wait before supper so we planned to do a bit more walking around but ran into a couple of officers whom we knew who were sitting in the piazza San Marco (St. Marks square) at one of the numerous tables that are so popular. We ended up sitting there with them for some time having a few drinks and then decided that we would go to the top of the bell tower in the square to look over the city. This tower collapsed in 1902 and was rebuilt by public conscription. One reaches the top by elevator, which probably explains why we went up there, for I am sure that I would not have walked it. It gives a beautiful view of the city, and one realizes how large a city it is from this point of vantage. The smaller canals cannot be seen from here, being overshadowed by the tall buildings (most of them at least four stories). I had learned from the guides that the first floors of the buildings thruout the city were not occupied because they were too damp. The waters of the lagoons and the large canals was a beautiful deep blue, very similar to that which one commonly sees on postcards of various water views. The scene out toward the Lido is so beautiful that it is the first time that I have seen a view that is prettier than the picture postcards of it show it to be.

We next had supper at the hotel, and it turned out to be steak and french fries, but the steak was razor thin and not large enough to cover more than the palm of one's hand. We ordered seconds, as we had been accustomed to doing at the American run hotel in Florence, but the British don't give seconds so we bought another ticket and had second helpings. In fact we had seconds of the entire meal, so that we weren't hungry when we arose, altho we weren't overstuffed. The meal was accompanied by beautiful music furnished by an native orchestra and a couple of soloists that sang operatic arias. By the time we finished there we had to rush to get back to our place where the trucks were to meet us. We had a devil of a time finding a gondola to take us there because everyone had the same idea and the gondolas were all filled or were on their way back to get another load.

All in all, we had a most enjoyable day and I don't believe that I