

From Walt to Ros, June 16th, 1945.

Well, things are beginning to break. I'm pretty happy about the way it is working out for me because it looks as tho I shall come home, possible for good, when I finally do get there. Here is the situation as far as I am able to gauge it. We are receiving numerous medical officers and MACs and enlisted men into the battalion. All of these men and officers have over 85 points. We are going to send out all officers with less than 85 points and all enlisted men with less than 70 points. This takes in practically the entire battalion. But let me get more organized in my tale.

I had mentioned to you that Tag knew something but wouldn't tell it to us. Well yesterday the colonel came up with 3 men, all from the 10th mountain division, and turned them over to me. I asked him whether he had any more news and he said "plenty." I learned that we had been requested give up 16 medical officers, 15 MACs and almost 400 enlisted men. This is impossible because we don't have enough in any category to fill the request. The men are to go to the 34th division and will probably get home before our division does. The story is going around that when we do finally get home we will be completely disbanded. Of course, I have nothing official on that but the fact that we are getting all high point men, that is, men with more than 85 points, strongly suggests the truth of this rumor. The situation is so turbulent at the present time that I am not even allowed to give one day passes to Venice to men with less than 70 points. That is OK with me as well as with the men, for all the men who were interested in seeing the city have already done so and don't want to go back a second time. As far as officers are concerned, my company will ~~XXXXXX~~ be the least affected by the changes in store. Tag is the only one who will leave since he has only 80 points. I believe that he resents the fact that I didn't put him in for a bronze star but after all he did nothing outstanding to merit such a recommendation.

It is expected that Johnnie Newsock will go as S3, Tag as S1, Roy as an MAC in a collecting company. That's all from the headquarters group. I am amused that Roy is going to a collecting company for he will certainly be of no use to them at all. D Co. will lose Sal, Cona, Herzlick and Pollard who are temporarily working with one of the field artillery units, and Brady. "A" company will lose its 2 remaining officers, Runde and Eliscu. B company will lose Renzi, Zeman, Hendricks, Basanese, leaving them with only Miller. You can imagine what this will do to our medical battalion. There won't be anything left of it.

Of course, we are getting other officers to fill in these vacancies, but it won't be the same place. We're not losing any officer of field grade so that means that, at least, for the time being, Duncan, Jones and the colonel will remain with us. The colonel is the only one of this group with more than 85 points, so that it is very possible that we might lose the others. Needless to say everyone is upset by the change of events, even tho they were expected. I imagine that all of the medical officers were hoping against hope for a chance to get to the States with the division and then to go to the Pacific. Then there is the constant worry that they might be sent to a battalion aid station once they get into their new division and believe me that would be something to lower morale.

Last night I decided to go to the officers club to see the various fellows and see what their reactions were to the news and to try to find out if there was any more definite news about things. It seems that the above news is definite enough. Al Zeman thinks that I am a cinch to get out of the army when we do finally hit the States. I wish that I felt as confident as he does. Of course if they should continue to count points I should have 101 points at that time, rather than the 93 points which I now have. It certainly would be a nice birthday present to be ushered out of the army on my birthday. Well, that is something that I shall have to wait to see for I am not going to build up my hopes on that score.

Setting of our infantry regiment as ringleader that would start out in the morning and continue all thru the day. On Wednesday one of them had gotten the crazy idea of drinking beer out of flower pots, and they each tried to outdo the other one in the size of flowerpot which they could find. They finally found a flower pot that was four feet tall, but found that this was too hard to handle, so they passed around the five gallon one which was next in size. Well, on Thursday flower pots were old stuff and they looked for something crazier than that to drink from. They finally found it. Someone brought down a portable douchebowl from his room and that became the community drinking bowl. Have you ever drunk out of a portable douche bowl? No, I guess you have never even seen one of the double kidney-shaped contraptions. Well, I have. When that gang walked around the hotel trying to get you to drink from one of their crazy containers, it was far simpler to do it than to have them follow you all over the hotel carrying the bowl and shouting in unison at the tops of their voices, "Come on! Aw, come on" until you finally give in. Of course, the portable douche bowl was only the community drinking bowl. Each of the members of the drinking crew had his own little chamber pot from which he also drank. Needless to say these had been thoroughly cleaned by the waiters before they were used for drinking purposes rather than for the purposes for which they were intended.

I had an amusing experience at supper. As I told you, I had missed the noon meal in Milan, and I was simply starved. Well, supper wasn't a very big meal consisting of a few potatoes, some thin slices of roast beef, and a leafy vegetable, plus ice cream for dessert and soup for an ~~extra~~ opening dish. When I asked the waiter for a second helping, as did several of the other officers at my table, we were refused, the waiter saying that they did not have enough to give seconds. Well, that was the first time I had ever been refused seconds in a 5th Army rest hotel. However, I had learned the solution of that when I had eaten at the British hotel Luna in Venice. They never give seconds and the only way you can get them is by buying a second meal ticket. I explained to the waiter just what I was going to do, so that there would be no suspicion that I had walked out and then merely walked back in again. It was OK with him, since I explained that if I had brought in a girl with me as a guest, they would have had to feed her, and I was being my own guest and treating myself to a meal. The head waiter like to died laughing about the incident, but he did not suggest that there was any other remedy, so out I went and bought a ticket. They really gave me swell service on the second meal and I did it complet justice, too.

After supper I wrote your daily letter, stopping only when I heard the music denoting the start of the outdoor movie. I saw "Destiny" a movie with Gloria Jean and some male whose name I have forgotten. The idea behind the picture was excellent and it wasn't badly played, but if they had taken full advantage of that idea they might have had another "Miracle Man" movie. I wonder if you remember that picture with Lon Chaney taking the part of one of the cripples. It really is an old timer. At any rate this picture was only good instead of being superb.

I spent the rest of the evening packing, for I intended leaving early Friday morning and going all the way down to the coast at San Remo. Well, Friday morning I had signed out of the hotel and was on my way by 0915, being held up a bit by a long waiting line at the gas station for many other officers were also leaving and they all had long trips to make to get back to their outfits. We headed south to the vicinity of Novara and then took the Autostrada to Turin. I had already seen Turin, which I liked much better than Milan. It is more up to date, being very much like an American city. Its shopping district is as neat and attractive as any shopping district in the states. The main shopping street, Via Roma, is lined for many blocks with high columns of marble, about 2 to 3 stories tall, with the stores set back from the street, the entire sidewalk being protected from the elements by extensions of the buildings all the way out to the street. It really makes a beautiful cool walking place in any kind of weather. We didn't tarry in Turin, but continued right on down to Caragnola, where the 109th battalion headquarters was located. Tag and Johnnie and Brady were all there. They like their set up very much.

quite an enjoyable time where they are. Roy Barker has been shifted out of the outfit, having been sent to a separate clearing station. They seem to be getting rid of most of their MACs even tho they themselves are short. It is really hard to figure out this business of redeployment. I believe that I told you that the 34th division had split up all of the men that they received in order to break up cliques, and as a result my company of 68 men that I sent them are spread all thru the medical battalion. This has resulted in a disproportion of non-coms in the various companies and they are having a devil of a time getting it straightened out. Add on to that the fact that the battalion headquarters group, thru Johnnie, is transferring all the good athletes up to headquarters so that they can win the various athletic contests of the battalion, and you can get some idea of the confusion that is going on at the present time. However it should straighten out after another week or two. I had dinner with them at battalion and then got directions for my trip down to see Runde. I wanted to see my boys down there, but the main reason I picked his company rather than one of the companies nearer was because he was near the French border and it was very likely that I could go into France in one of his ambulances without having to do any explaining as to what I was doing there. At any rate, they showed me how to get down to San Remo, where Runde was located, but before I arrived there I realized that they had never been down there before over that road, nor had they even inquired as to which road that Runde was using. I headed south to Cuneo, making excellent time, but south of Cuneo there was a detour where both ends of a tunnel had been blown closed by the Germans. As a result I had to take a detour of at least 20 miles going up one side of a mountain to its very tip by making at least 100 hair pin turns on my way up, only to find that going down the other side was even worse. I was somewhat surprised to find that this road was guarded by French Colonial troops, but thought nothing much about it figuring that they should normally have been in that vicinity since it was close to the French border. On the way down some of the hairpin turns were so ~~near the edge~~ sharp that the jeep had to back up to make them without going over the edge. At the very top of the mountain the Jerries had a fort which was beautifully camouflaged from the air but could be seen easily from below. That mountainside was simply covered with pillboxes and I would have hated like the deuce to have had to attack that area for the Jerries could see every move made by anyone for miles around. When we finally got down to the bottom of the mountain and were again on the main highway I ran across a French officer that wanted a lift. Well, nothing is too good for our allies so I took him along. Its a good thing I did too, for without realizing it I headed right into France without having a bit of trouble. I was stopped at the town of Merlo by a road block composed of both French and American troops. I explained to the Americans where I was heading and they said that it was OK. However, they didn't tell me that France was on the other side of the road block, so I entered France without realizing it. There had obviously been some pretty severe fighting in this vicinity for not a village was left, all of them having become ghost towns. At the town of Breil a bridge had been knocked out and had not yet been fixed so we had to backtrack and really go up into the mountains between France and Italy, actually mountains in France. My French officer, with whom I could converse only by single words, wanted to go to Nice, but I had intended going to Menton, which was also in France, but then I decided that I'd still have to do some explaining when I crossed the border into Italy so I decided that I might as well go to Nice while I was at it. So we headed up into the mountains to the town of Sospel and then took the road down to Nice. I was disappointed in that France, in this sector, is not as pretty as is Italy, nor do the villages look as nice. Nice turned out to be a resort town on the Mediterranean right at the foot of the mountains. When you get out of the mountains you are in Nice. It consists of a tremendous number of hotels right at the water front and GIs are all over the place. We drove up and down the water front for a bit and then decided that since it was getting pretty late and we still had the border to cross that we had better head over to Runde's place. To do this we had to avoid Monaco, the lit-

the kingdom famous for Monte Carlo and its gambling casino. I had read that it was off limits and I didn't want to run into any MPs who might want an explanation as to what I was doing in France. We therefore took the road that ran high in the mountains along the coast. Here we could see all of the surrounding coast cities, including Monte Carlo, and it really was a pretty sight. We did run into a couple of MPs but they weren't interested as to why we were in France, they were merely making sure that we did not take a side road into Monaco. There had obviously been considerable fighting in these coast towns, apparently much of the shelling having come from the sea. Pill boxes and barbed wire lined the entire coastal area. Finally we came to the border, just beyond the French city of Menton, and before the Italian city of Ventimiglia. There I was stopped by a soldier from the 34th division who took my vehicle number and then let me pass on. I imagine that I may hear about my trip from the General, one of these days, but that can't be helped. I imagine that the worst he will do is to fine me a few dollars. Then it may be that the 34th will not send down this information to the 85th at all. At any rate, I am not going to worry about it at all. I continued on over until I hit San Remo arriving there at 8 PM. Runde's company was occupying three houses practically on the sea shore. All of them were quite nice, but the one in which the officers were living was really a beautiful home. It had sun porches all over the place, had a beautiful bathroom on the second floor, as modern as those we have in the states, and a shower in the basement, of which I availed myself before the evening was over. As I drove up some of the old boys from my company saw me on the main highway and called to me but I didn't hear them.

They came arunning when I drove into the area. They all were quite happy to see me, as I was to see them. They are most unhappy, partly because the entire group was split up, but more so because Runde seemed to be taking care of the men from company A, and Basanese of those from company B, but they had no officer to look out for their benefit. As a result they felt that they would have no chance to get any ratings and would pull all of the poor details in the company. They really hate Basanese, who is very strict with them (Renzi's company always was extremely strict with its men). However, Tag had told me when I was with him, that he was seeing that some of my men got promotions, telling me that he was shifting them from one company to another where vacancies existed for promotion. Ed Ferris is to be shifted to Co D, where he will probably get the 1st sergeancy, Christensen is already an acting mess sgt, Willie Kolarik is in for a T/3 and Hugo Simile for a T/4, while Bitzberger is to get a S/Sgtcy. Hugo simile was a most unhappy man away from his friend Willie and got word to Tag to please shift him with Willie, so Tag is seeing to that, too. Apparently, most of the men are unhappy in their new set up. They had heard how easy the 34th was as far as discipline is concerned, but their general has turned over a new leaf with the new group of men and now they are having more chicken s--- than we ever did. I fell sorry as the devil for the boys but there isn't a thing that I can do about it other than let Tag know the situation, and I intend to do that. After going around and kidding with the boys for about a half hour or so I went up to Runde's villa. I must tell you about their bath tub because I like it and may have one similar to it put in someday to replace our old one. It is sunken in the floor with a shallow stepup into it from the black tile floor of the bathroom. The outside of the tub is black tile, the inside the usual white. At the wall end of the tub there is an offshoot where soap, etc, can be kept, and at the top of this offshoot ~~the room~~ are a couple of fluorescent lights hidden from view, and it is these which give the room a delightful soft glow. The remaining light comes from a couple of fluorescent lamps over the washbowl. All in all it is a most attractive bathroom.

I spent the evening talking with Runde, learning that they take their patients to a hospital in Nice, if the patients are too sick for them to keep them at their own building in San Remo. If such a patient has to be sent to the states, Runde has to go back to Nice, pick them up and take them to Genoa because the hospital in Nice is in one army and it would confuse the paper work to send ~~them~~ a patient from one army home from a hospital in another army. That sounds a bit silly and it is when you consider that the trip to

Genoa takes 7 hours if they patient is very sick or in a cast. Runde has four officers in his company, Pollard, of our clearing company, Basanese of Co B, and a foreign born refugee from Austria who is quite alinguist. He has had an interesting army history. First of all he was born and lived in Austria where he got two of his four years of medical school training. He then went to the University of Pisa where he finished school. He practised in Pisa for a while but moved on when the fascists made things tough for him. He ~~ende~~ next went to Argentina and finally to the states. After applying for citizenship he was told that he would have to live in the states for a certain length of time but in the meantime he was drafted into the army as a private. He was sent to a general hospital unit where they learned that he was a doctor and raised his rank to master sergeant and had him take sick call while the other officers ran around to their heart's desire. Since he could not become an officer until he got his citizenship papers he had to be an enlisted man for two years and now is a first lieutenant. He is well thought of by Runde and Pollard and is quite an ambitious fellow, working all the time. He speaks English well, but with a definite accent, and also speaks, French, Italian, Austrian, Spanish and German.

I stayed up until midnite battling the breeze with Runde and Pollard and then decided that I had better get some rest for I had a trip of more than 400 miles for the morrow. I forgot to mention that they have given Capt. Holley of the 337th charge of their company A, and he has Van as one of his officers. Rudolph is one of the other collecting companies. I imagine he is quite happy at being shifted farther back, but I'm not sure about how Van feels on the subject. I know he liked to be his own boss, but then he wasn't so enthusiastic about it after walking 25 miles a day for several days in the push thru the Po valley.

Yesterday we got an early start and were on our way by 8 AM. We followed the road along the coast and it was amazing to see the number of refugges on the move both east and west. We aren't permitted to pick them up unless their passes are in order, and rather than be bothered by MPs all along the way I decided that I would pick up some GIs instead. I picked up a couple of them at Imperio and learned that they were going to Milan, so I was really able to give them a good long ride. The road along the sea shore was excellent except for a few by-passes where bridges had been blown out, so that despite the winding of the road as it followed the sea shore we were still able to make excellent time. We passed thru Allassio, which is the Italian Riviera and which has been taken over by the 5th Army for an enlisted man's rest center. It is quite a nice city, but the beach consists of stone rather than sand. I'm sure that I wouldn't care very much for that. In fact both the French and Italian Riviera don't compare with either Florida or California as resort areas. I really see no great advantage in leaving the states to come over to Europe for any sightseeing, for we can match anything they have over here, and better most of it.

I had been told that it would take me four hours to get to Genoa and another four hours to get to Milan, so that I had figured that I would have to rush like the devil to get back to the company by midnite, but I was in Genoa in 3 hours. It is the big seaport city of Italy, and quite a city it is, too. I didn't waste any time there, merely driving thru on my way north, and seeing what I could from the jeep. We kept right on to Milan, which took us only 2½ more hours, so that we were well ahead of our schedule and I had no doubts but that we would get back in time. Next we headed for Brescia then Verona. The highway was jampacked in this vicinity by all types of vehicles as well as refugees. For some reason or other there were more refugees on the road than I had ever seen at one time before. It is a pitiful sight to see these folk trudging along the roadside carrying heavy suitcases, begging each vehicle that passes for a ride, and then trudging on when they were refused. Practically all of them are women, many of them with babes in arms. The people of America have no idea how fortunate they have been in not being displaced from their homes, or having their homes blasted to bits in this war. That is the

rule rather than the exception over here. I had taken sandwiches from Rundo's kitchen so that we wouldn't have to take time out to stop for meals, since one spends too much time finding a place in which to eat, and we really had to make a long journey for one day in a jeep. It reminded me of our trips across country with the kids. From Verona I decided that we would follow the same route we had during the last days of the war, since we had made the long trip from Verona to Cornuda at night. I thought that the trip was a beautiful one, and it really turned out to be more beautiful than I had expected. From Verona we went to Vicenza, then to Cittadella, then Bassano, Cornuda, Peltre, and finally Belluno. Once we reached division area near Peltre I created quite a bit of attention with the suitcase that I was wearing. Almost everyone at Strass was wearing them, so I decided to wear mine and wore them all week until I got back to the company last night. The trip in the open jeep, between the wind and sun had reddened and tanned my face until I looked like an Indian. After all in one week's time we had travelled 1684 miles, and that is considerable travel in an open jeep.

On my return to the company I learned that we are to lose all of our men of less than 35 points, most of them getting excellent jobs. Harris and Kitten left today for a corps engineer group, which means a rear echelon job. 8 more men are to go to the 15th Field Hospital, and two Hiler and one other are going to a light construction battalion, also a rear echelon job. So it seems that for the most part they are due to get good jobs out of it.

One other thing of importance - Our Battalion has received a unit citation from the war department, something which we had all been hoping to get and it has finally come thru. This is apparently for the work that we did at Minturno, but I haven't read the citation as yet and so I am not sure. I imagine that you have seen some soldiers wearing the unit citation badge which consists of a wreath around the wrist of the right sleeve. That and the combat service badge are two things that I shall be proud to wear.

There's more to tell you, but after all I've been at this letter all afternoon and we are shortly leaving for the movie so I'll say goodbye for now. I hope to see you in August, my sweet.

Love,
Salt.