

Dear Mom & Dad,

What a Merry Xmas this may be if our present set up can last. We are beyond the sound of the never ending pounding artillery. If this lasts any length of time we could spend Xmas in this town. There are five of us who sleep in a front room of this private home. The family still lives here, but in other parts of the house. They are a people with two countries one might say. They are French and they are German, however I believe the German influence dominates. The father speaks only German, but the wife speaks both German and French. There are two children, one about 7 (boy) and the other a girl about twelve. Joseph & Mary respectively. They are very nice people. They are extremely clean. The

house is spotless. We have to learn our old civilian habits once again—mainly to take off the overshoes with all their mud. There is a nice big double bed, table, stove, dressers, mirrors, etc. in our room. The lady has even given us bedding. We have to go thru their kitchen to come or go which means a lot of tracking in and out at times for her, but that can't always be helped.

I wrote to Taylors last nite and thanked them for the olives

I heard from Mrs. Aomodt yesterday. So far today I haven't seen the mail so I dont know if I have any yet.

We are having a spell of very nice weather. It has really been a very nice day today. The sun has been out. I even saw dust on the roads. That is almost unbelievable.

One of the boys can speak German so they are going to town out in the kitchen. I think she is going to do some laundry for us tomorrow—I hope.

Dave wrote a V mail to me which I received a few days ago. He must be in reserve if he is still in Luxemburg. He wrote a nice letter. {Dave Smolen?}

I sure wish I had a letter or package tonite to pass the time away. We do have a small radio but the batteries are low, as a result we have only a few minutes of music before it dies out.

{Dr. Arthur C. Taylor and a very cherished family friend who after the war drove to Britton, South Dakota, to be whatever assistance he could be to my father, Elmer, who suffered a heart attack there and died}.

{Aomodts were from Baldwin, Wisconsin. Ole was a druggist there. The Aomodts were friends and stayed at the resort for years.}

Yesterday the American Red Cross doughnut truck came up and gave with the sinkers & coffee. There were three nice looking good American girls. Make up and all. That all helped the flavor of the doughnuts of course.

Well my pen is soon dry so I'll bid you good nite—and Bordens still have contented cows. _____

{ Well, I think Borden and bidding good nite refers to Borden's closing remark on their radio programs. }

Love,
Dick

{ Now once again pops up this line in different colored ink and different penmanship. }

Please send me cake, cookies, & _____
candy.

{ Could it be the censor? We'll never know. }

{ The letter is stamped January 22, 1945. }

January 17, 1945

In der Faterland

Dear Mom, Dad, & Bob,

If it weren't for the letter and package I received from home tonite I might not have been in the mood to write, but since you were so super to write a nice letter then so shall I.

From the tone of your letters I can picture how you must appreciate yourselves in Ashland. At least you have more company and make more friends. Today is the seventeenth and I have your letter of the sixth. It came very fast. That of course does not mean the mail is coming good for actually it is lousy. The worst it has been for a long time.

For dad's sake mom inform him that he is wrong about censorship. Each organization has its own censor. Our censor is living across the street. Oh yes, there are what you call base censors somewhere on the continent or maybe on the United Kingdom. They handle special mails such as the blue envelope which is furnished if you have private concerns that you do not wish your own officer (censor) to read. Then too the base censor spot checks mail to more or less check on other censors. I believe all of the above is

correct or at least I'm led to believe so.

Tonite I received a box from home which contained two sacks of candy and some pink and white cookies. The package arrived swell. I appreciated the caramels. You know these small things are so enjoyed.

So Ronald is in the Infantry. Well, I hate to here {hear} that. I hope he can stay in the States- I might say, for his sake.

Yesterday and this morning a few of us stuck our noses out and caused a little excitement. I have been longing for a little of late. I was up and saw my Infantry Company too. They were near at hand so I stopped and talked to them for a while. One of my best friends is the company mailman now since the other was a sniper's victim. He gave me the low down on the fellows who was left, etc. It made me think for a while. Little do we know how fortunate I was to be born on Lake Superior. There must sure be a guiding power. At least I was elated to know my very closest buddies were not killed. Altho several are in evacuation or general hospitals. That of course means they could be in the hospital for the simplest things as stomach ache, sprained ankles, slight wounds, etc. I expect to hear from Beatty one of these days. I missed seeing him.

Thanks a lot for the package it was swell. I'm going to get skinny again when the packages are far and few between. Give my love to all.

{The following bits of a letter are from a pivotal part of my experiences on the Moselle. I'm saddened that they are not intact. I believe they make reference to the previous letter where the boys went out to stir up some excitement. It also alludes to the fact that we were nearer the front than we wished our families back home to know. What is lost of the letter can only lead one to imagine the rest. I will try to help.}

{We were on the South of the Battle of the Bulge.}

{Outboard motors mounted in barrels to sound like we were making an invasion, crossing the river at night.}

{Especially interested in mounted artillery on rail cars.}

{More guys were shot in the butt than anywhere else. I believe you could get that verified by my cousin and friend, Ralph Bodin.}

Love,
Dick

....a terrific barrage on the enemy. Our Infantry opened up with all types of machine gun fire. Then we started our motors. More fun, more racket. Now what did the Heinies think? We hoped to draw a hell of a lot of artillery fire for that was the reason for all the racket. The Krauts were too smart to disclose their artillery positions. They gave us a bad time {real bad!} with their machine guns instead. A few feet away shells spat & chewed concrete off of one of the houses. I kept my rear end in behind the house we used for our outboard & barrel. {barrel filled with water.} No need sticking that out!!!

In the basement of the house was the sign off some G.Is. having a touch of the Xmas spirit. There were Xmas tree ornaments hanging from the rotted beams. Too many G.Is. spent their Xmas that way. We had better see a change for next year.

Poor Eleonore {President's wife?} is getting hell tonite. I expect Clare Booth Luce will be next. {?}

Your escapes {escapades} in oil brought a big laugh, but, oh, 50 gals. and rationed too!

It would be nice if after the war you could buy the store & lot, but not at the present price. You could rebuild on said lot

says I had better hurry home. Ha. It has come to the point that those who were my friends back in U.S.A. are like strangers now. I'm going to feel like a stranger myself when I get home. Slowly one loses his closeness to others "of olde".

(A good positive attitude about coming home.)

I'm glad to hear of your heart condition dad, {Oh?} but how about the stomach.

(Many years later I began to learn that when my father's stomach was upset, the problem was from his heart.)

There were newsreel men on the Moselle and several of the fellows in {the} company are in it. I'm not aware of being in one myself, so don't go to too many conclusions.

I'm glad the perfume came safe. Mrs. Gustafson said Gus's came too.

I'm getting a kick out of our language adaptation. Being situated as we are it is O.K. to fraternize a little, but the people speak only Kraut, of course. So if the kids get in the way we add a Brooklyn touch and say, "scramenzie," or "rouse mit ya."

(The little kids are usually without adults and seem homeless. They seem to fend for themselves. They are hungry and have stomachs that extend as an early sign of starvation. We are not allowed to openly feed them, but there isn't a soul who doesn't do so. They appeared to be friendly and they never were harmful to us.)

I have a bunch of stamps {looted} I wish you would keep for me. I hope by now you have decided to have a special box for all the things I ask you to save for me. I'm going to enclose the stamps in this letter.

(These are sheets of Hitler on the stamps and are of various denominations.)

I hope everything continues to go O.K. at home, folks. I hope you both feel good and that your health improves. I'm fine.

Love,
Dick

February 2, 1945
Belgium

Dear Mom & Dad,

I'm going to start this letter tonight, but I doubt if I shall be able to finish it. The chief problem is "light".

It is a semi-balmy nite. The water is running down the hilly road passed this Belgian farm home. We have seen winter melt away in two days, but I'm certain it shall be cold once again before the inevitable Spring. We have forceably moved in on this family and occupy a greater part of this house. It is a white washed concrete and stone house with a shale roof. There is the usual manure pile in front. The roof of the house is chopped off giving it the atmosphere of a large country cottage. Behind the house the road turns and ascends up into a small

{German vehicles were still smoldering on the streets. Some of this was too sensitive to write home about and would only add more fear and anxiety.}

village. The manure piles jet out into the road. The chickens have their fun. There are carcasses of dead animals and the stomachs of either man or beast lying about.

There are a few burnt-crisp corpses too.

Tonite in a room on the second floor are six G.Is. doing everything from letter writing or fixing a gasoline lamp. A few minutes ago the small stove smoked everyone out. Now it is burning with renewed vigor and in a kettle on the top of the stove a kettle boils water at 100 C. Stove pipes extend half the length of the room. From the rafters hang three pairs of recently washed woolen socks. There are two windows in this room. One is choked with old pillows to supplement for the broken glass and also satisfies the black out regulation. It, however, aids little toward ventilating the smoky room. The other window is intact, but is hidden behind a shelter half which is used for blackout. In the next room there are bed rolls from wall to wall where seven of us sleep on the floor. There is no light, there is a heatless & pipeless stove, and little air. On the table I'm writing on is a half loaf of bread, a few orange peelings, bayonets, cigarettes, gum, magazines, stationery, and almost everything else imaginable. The lamp now burns brightly. That is the setting of my "home" tonite. What more could one want. There is comfort, companionship,

{Every foot soldier has a field pack in which he carries his total belongings. Everything is rolled up inside the outer canvas shelter half. Two shelter halves make a pup tent for two men. Here, a shelter half is being used to block out the light that appears will be lit inside the house}.

peacefulness, and all that can be expected under circumstances. There were letters for me tonite, the chow was good. I feel fine. Isn't that about all a fellow could want, but still our human ways cause us to gripe and complain about the most trivial things. Some say we wouldn't be happy if we couldn't complain. I do my share of it, but all I need for a cure is to think of how lucky I am and then I stop complaining. For many weeks I have felt I should be doing more, but I do what there is to be done here. I so often think of my pals in the Infantry. I often long to be with them.....

February 8, 1945

(The balance of this letter is missing. It is perhaps the one letter where I have truly expressed in words what our conditions were at the time.)

Feb. 18 '45

In Holland

Dear Mom & Dad,

How time does fly. Soon February will be gone and then spring. In the XXXX(censored)XXX I have been in five countries: France, Germany, Luxemburg, Belgium & Holland. Everything seems to be so top secret there is very little I can explain to you.

Among the more recent happenings is the fact that I now have a Jeep to drive for the Engineers. In all appearances I'm going to be drafted into the job of driving the C.O. of the 320 Engrs. I'm highly displeased with the idea. If I find it too much to my disliking I'll make certain I don't continue driving—(it says here)—I have been driving our Executive Officer for a week. He & I along with another truck came here into Holland several days before the rest came. We made arrangements for quarters, C.Ps. etc. {Command Post} We were the first American soldiers that most of the people had seen. Some American soldiers were here four months ago, but since then the English were in this Sector. For several days we lived with the English soldiers who had quarters in a school & surrounding homes. Their food was good tasting & clean, but it did differ from ours of course, it was tea and

{Their swear word; their very worst swear word was bloody. Bloody this and bloody that.}

more tea. They don't get a regular issue of coffee. For breakfast we had porridge, fried toast, bacon and tea. They eat four or five times a day including the regularly scheduled tea. The men would work on the roads and come in on their "lorries" for tea ever so often. Every other word was a swear word—much like the G.I. soldiers.

Holland is typically Holland. The land is flat and wet. There are many windmills, canals, and of course wooden shoes, and true to form a Mr. Winkle makes the shoes.

On the way up we paralleled a canal for a short distance until we came to a bridge that was in tact along the road in one particular spot was a fisherman with a fine assortment of fish. A few must have weighed close to five pounds. Most of them, however, looked like rock bass.

I had the opportunity to go thru a windmill the other day. It was a beautiful mill. The arms were brightly painted and so was the revolving top. Inside were many floors. {levels} Each floor had its purpose. The windmill was full of huge wooden gears, axels, wheels, shafts, etc. It seemed the mill did everything but bake the bread.

I'm going to buy another pair of Holland wooden shoes and send them home.

Again I am living in a home with civilians. They are an old couple. She is 70

& he is 65. He is a cobbler by trade. It is interesting to watch him work. We, that is 3 of us, have a room upstairs. It isn't very warm up there so we come down & write or talk in their living room. That is the way they want it, & of course is nice for us. The electricity is on until about 10:30 at nite.

There is an English N.A.A.F.I. or N.A. F. F., here in town. It is like our Red Cross, only they serve tea and buns. There is quite an atmosphere in such a place. Next to the "canteen" is a theater also run by the British. Charlie Chaplin in the Goldrush was playing of course. G.Is. go too.

I have at least 15 letters from home & friends in the last two days. I like that.

Don't feel too badly about the scolding you got, but then too don't let it happen again! Of course, I still love you both.

Every six months overseas you get an overseas stripe. That is not a stripe to designate rank. I had a big laugh over that. There are & will always be Pvts, & Pfc over here.

Echelon is a form of grouping. Forward Echelon is up front or in that general area. Rear Echelon may be back to Cherbourg etc. Zone of Interior is U.S.A. We are in the forward echelon. We are combat engineers. (What questions you ask!) tsk tsk.

It is a cold rainy day—very miserable. The tulips are beginning to sprout up.

(At home they must have thought I was a big time sergeant with all the stripes I was accumulating.)

Must have been left over from
Christmas at home.)

I received two boxes yesterday. One
was of cookies & part of a fruit cake.

{There were olives, caramels & nuts in the
other —I should say in one or the other.
Mrs. Rhody's hood will definitely be late.
That is a shame, but I faired without it o.k.

This is a scribbly letter, but I'm with-
out my right stationery & pen as well as
several other articles.

As usual I am feeling fine. There will
be a definite lack of letters so expect that.

Love,
Dick

{It appears the censor was going to scratch
that out but didn't.}

March 1, 1945

Belgium

Dear Mother & Dad,

I see it is March 1st. once again. Soon it will be summer. Spring seems well on its way as there are a few flowers in the gardens. (snow crocus) There are many signs of spring in fact. Nevertheless it is still quite cold out. Today there is a cold wind. It reminds me of fall.

March 6, '45

In Germany

Dear Folks,

First of all I want to again remind you that letters will be long in coming. It has

{Note that the letter began in Belgium and is being continued in Germany.}

been several days over a week since I last got a letter off to you. It will no doubt be that way for some time. There is a lot I would like to say to explain why, but we will say there just isn't time. We are on the move almost without any stopping. _____

{The rush to the Rhine.}

A little mail is catching up to us each day. That is what I like.

There is so much to write about, but am having trouble to remember all. I had a few notes somewhere, but I'll be darned if I know where.

I saw my good friend from Chicago (A.S.T.P.). He was the Swedish lad. He sees Beatty very often. Both are fine & look good. I've seen most of my old company in the past week. There are a lot of new faces though. _____

{ This is a sign that we are at the front lines. }

It makes me so ashamed to not be able to write more often as I know you must wait for my letters very much. You are so faithful. There is a letter dated for every day in the year from home. {THANK YOU!} You two are sure swell & faithful. Thanks ever so much. Yes, I even received two more boxes from home. Olives, cookies, fruit cake (white) jelly role, chocolates & hard candies. It is all gone already. Mrs. Gustafson & Taylors I expect. _____

{I'm beginning to know that home means from anyone back in the States.}

{Boy, what do you supposed that looked like when it arrived?}

{This gives you an idea that when one soldier gets a box from "home" that it almost becomes communal property.}

Dad, dont be too low in the jaw if you haven't received anything better than a pair of wooden shoes. I'm about ready to send you a good box soon. _____

(Next four months is considered soon the way I operate.)

{I glossed over that bit of news!}

I'm protected now since I have a sub-machine gun. I'm going to get a Mauser off to you, dad. Previous to this we couldn't send them. Now we can. The one I had I gave away.

{Do you supposed that was a bit of humor?}

Germany looks swell. There are very few bricks stuck one to another, but contrary to my own words we have a nice big apartment house to live in for a short while. All the bricks are in tact so naturally we stayed. The civilians who once were Hitler's pals of course had to move. They cried, etc., but we are conquerors not liberators. (You wont want me back as a son when I get back.) It is a bit hard to chase the people out, but they will think twice before they "Heil Hitler" again. The cruel part is the old women have to go too. They cry hardest. Some say, "My brother in America would feel badly if he knew this." Others realize it is war & they take it like troopers. Some start to argue, but a harsh word, a flick of the gun barrel changes their mind. By rights they should be pushed back with the German Army, but there are too many of late. Must close.

Love,
Dick