

SERVICE BATTERY 691st Field Artillery Bn.
Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Friday, May 28, 1943

SUBJECT: Information concerning the activities of Pvt. John J. Schroeder,
Service Battery, 691st F.A. Bn.

TO : Assorted relatives of said Pvt. Schroeder.

Dear Folks:

Bathed in perspiration I am determinedly taking typewriter in hand and sending you an overdue letter. One copy to Cedarburg and one to Syracuse, and I would make another for the new top kick if I knew where he was going to be in the future.

Evidently you of New York are under the impression that my "morale" is low from the number of letters and packages you are sending. And the same applies to Cedarburg, although their contribution is mainly packages. I appreciate all of them and though I am feeling very well, you needn't stop the good work.

Now I'll tell you just what has happened in the month I've been here. I arrived on April 29, was assigned to the Service Battery and was promptly put to work on the rations truck, loading and unloading food (and eating a little of everything I loaded and unloaded.) After about a week of this, I was sent down to Headquarters for half the day to watch the Battery Clerk, and sent to Driver's School the other half day.

That Driver's School was really the nuts. I went to it for about a week and did everything but drive. Then one day as I was puttering around a huge truck, I was suddenly instructed to get in the monster, drive it to the garage and wash it. I found out that trucks are a lot different than cars. In the first place, the thing had six speeds forward and two reverse, making that shifting lever very complicated. Then, you had your choice of high or low gear and whether or not you wanted front wheel drive or not. And the whole business had to be double-clutched. What an experience. I got it down to the garage but someone else took it back. I didn't want to drive anyhow and made no secret of it, as a driver leads a dog's life.

Then something else happened. A week ago Wednesday, I was roused out of my bed (I really shouldn't call it a bed) at 4 a.m. by a friendly sergeant who said I was going on a little ammunition detail. This consisted of going to the ammunition dump, loading an appalling amount of 105 mm. shells into trucks and trailers and, jouncing around on that live ammunition, proceeding to the range where the big guns fired the stuff as fast as we brought it. The stuff comes in long clover-shaped cartons, containing three shells, and weighs some 150 pounds. It's very awkward stuff to handle and very very heavy.

We got the stuff out on the range and then had to unload it next to the guns while they were firing. I just can't describe the sensation you experience when you are between two 105's when they fire. The concussion is something terrific, as is the noise. The air pounds at you and you feel as though you're made of jelly. If you stand to the rear of one of the guns, you can actually see the projectile come out of the muzzle and go through the air. Very interesting stuff.

Very interesting, but backbreaking. And when I went through the same routine Thursday, I determined to try to get out of it. So our first sergeant made me acting battery clerk and I now work at Battalion Headquarters every day. In due time I may become a corporal. I spend my day trying to unsnarl the maze of red tape down here and only, I fear, snarling it worse. However, I hope this is not permanent.

I have again put in application for the Army Specialized Training Program. I have all the qualifications and am hoping that I may get in. Nine months in college at the Army's expense and after that OCS or a high Non-Com's rating, you have your choice. If you apply for officer's training before you apply for ASTP, you can't get into the latter. That's why I'm going to wait until every hope is gone before applying for OCS and then I probably won't get in because of my eyes. However, only time will tell, and boy, have I got the time.

And now for some current events. The beds are still hard. The food is bad. The weather is lousy. We shivered in this place this morning while the rain came down in sheets outside and barely escaped being struck by lightning which hit about 10 feet from the building and made everyone jump. In the afternoon the sky was clear blue and it was unbearably hot. And that old Oklahoma wind keeps blowing all the time. An average day down here compares to a windstorm in Wisconsin and I'm not exaggerating.

Received your candy, Mother, and your cookies and hangars, Ruth. Also am getting the News regularly--reaches me on Sunday. Will enclose Bob's letter in this as you are saving them. It looks as though the war might be over by 1944 if things go well and I'll probably be a civilian again in 1945.

Knew about your anniversary and tried to get a card but couldn't. Had my name taken for furloughs yesterday. I guess you have to take your furlough in turn here so don't know when it will come. When I know more, I'll tell you more. It will be either in June, July or August, unless my ASTP application goes through--then it's out.

That's about all--love to all.

Jack

June 4, 1943

Dear Syracuse, Cedarburg and Frostbite, Florida:

Received your letter this evening, Dad, and it gave me quite a shock. Are you inferring that I don't write? It seems to me I just wrote you a letter. Anyhow, you needn't send those self addressed cards—they're too broad hints and you make me feel like a mental incompetent. I mean, after all, I still know your address. And now to answer that pressing question before I start anything else. No, I'm not floodbound, I'm mudbound. We started all those floods that you're reading about.

I am now established as battery clerk and am still waiting for my school to materialize. In my capacity as clerk, I have to get our Battery Commander's signature on various bits of useless red tape and I had quite an experience while doing so the other day. He is a very nice fellow, tall and soft spoken (thank God I've found an officer who doesn't yell) and he is also very hard to find. I cornered him in the orderly room the other day and after he had signed the silly thing we started talking. Discussed my prospects for school and we both agreed it was a great thing to get into if one could. That started us talking about colleges and we both discovered that we each had two years in. I asked him where he went to school and he said De Pauw. In turn he asked me and when I told him a glint came into his eyes and he asked, "Are you from Milwaukee." I gave him that time worn sentence, "No, a small town a little north of it." (I don't say Cedarburg any more) He asked me the name and I told him. He almost fell off the chair. It seems that his home is in West Bend and we practically fell into each others arms talking about Rosenheimer's and Gonnring's. How's that for a coincidence. His name is Herbert R. Hackbarth, maybe you know something of him Adlai.

I'm still not recreating a great deal. Last night a fellow that I had known in Robinson came over and asked me to go to church with him where there was some kind of a social. I hemmed and hawed but couldn't think of an excuse so off we went. I decided I needed some refreshments about halfway there so we stopped at the PX where I had a sandwich and a bottle of beer and he a coke. He reminded me that I was going to church and shouldn't drink beer but I gave him a fishy glance and finished the bottle of ersatz. About the time we got to the church I was liking the prospect less and less and refused to go to the shindig when we got there. However, I finally consented to go in for five minutes and then he promised that we both would leave. The party consisted of about 10 WAACS (the silliest creatures on God's green earth) and 4 soldiers, including the chaplain's assistant. The minute we arrived the chaplain pounced on me and appointed me bartender so I had to dish out a round of cokes. Then chairs were pulled around a piano and the singing started. Just like a bunch of black cats sitting around howling on a fine evening. This was a little too much for me so I quickly left and went to a ball game. Never again will I be socialized again.

That's about it for now. Don't expect letters every few days for after all this is war and typewriter ribbon is rationed. Going back to the tent and read now. After reading about the army I have come to this conclusion: the army that you read about is very different from the army as it really is. I imagine the First Sergeant will concur.

That's all for now

Jack

11 Jan 45
England

Dear Folks:

It's about 1 AM and here we go again. I have as yet received no mail or word of any kind from either of you. If I don't hear from you in the next few days, I am afraid there will be another delay in the mail service, as my days here are definitely numbered now. I'm sitting tight and waiting.

Not much to write about tonight--I haven't been to town and have been spending my days sleeping and my nights working. So I guess I'll tell you a little more of my activities on the Continent, in lieu of anything better to write about.

I can't tell you much, of course, since I don't know just what comes under the heading of restricted military information. So I'll just tell you what I have seen in the papers over here and a few other little scraps, which I am sure can give no "aid or comfort to the enemy".

As I wrote to you before, the 104th Division was a part of the Canadian First Army for a time this fall. This army was to clear the Germans from the Scheldt River in Holland in order that the port of Antwerp could be used for supply purposes. The Germans did a good job of wrecking most of the ports in France and Belgium, but we managed to get Antwerp in good condition. If you'll look on a map you'll see that Antwerp is a river port and therefore, it could not be used until the Germans were cleared from the Scheldt river.

It looks a lot different from back here, of course, than it did while we were up there. Most of the time while I was there, I didn't know where I was and I didn't want to know. The country was weird-low meadows criss-crossed by ditches and waterways, filled with water and surrounded by dikes. The very nature of the country made it rather difficult for us. It was swampy and of course we had to cross and recross those ditches and waterways many times. And of course, I and everyone else got wet. And the flatness of the country gave the Germans good observation for their artillery--(and by the way, they do have good artillery). We received quite a bit of shelling. It was a little scary at first, but if you have a hole you're pretty safe. I used to sit and chain smoke in my hole while we were being shelled and listen to the whistles. Each type of shell has its own sound, and you can soon distinguish what's coming. The old whistle would get louder and louder and just as you started thinking that it was going to come into the hole with you and ask you to buy it a drink, it would pop off somewhere around. It's a great comfort to have the planes on your side. The RAF worked with us up there and they are plenty good. When we were finished, the division went to the American First Army in Germany, and, as I read in the "Stars and Stripes" recently, it is still there.

Well, that's enough of that baloney. I hope no one cuts any of that out when this is censored. It's all old and officially

announced. I'd better quit now--this last paragraph looks drunk
love Jack



TO: Mrs. J.C. Schroeder
206 W. Board St.
Syracuse
New York

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

FROM

McLaren J. Schroeder 267727
Cal - 415 Tol - 11411 - A.M.
Postmaster, New York, N.Y.

(Sender's complete address shown)

Dear Folks:

Germany
17 March 45

Well, I'm right up front again and things are pretty noisy tonight, with the Germans making much of the noise. I'm jumpy as the dance, as is almost everyone. I predict that this war will produce a generation of nervous wrecks, especially among those of us who have had the dubious honor of serving in the infantry.

I am receiving back mail now, and in one of your letters you said you were going to use V-mail. Don't do it. It will reach me no faster and I don't like the stuff. Once it because I have no alternative.

Got to go on guard in a little while. Don't suppose I'll get much sleep tonight with all the racket. I wish some of those congressmen who blab about the war being over every time we advance a little could be here now and see how much saugy the Germans have right now.

That's about all. Hope you are all okay and, to reverse the usual greeting, "wish I was there".

Love
Jack.



HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE
ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY
V-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE
ADDRESS AT TOP?

KARL RUDOLPH

Brachstedt über Halle, Nr. 54

Reparatur-Werkstatt für Landmaschinen und Traktoren
Wasserversorgungsanlagen für Landwirtschaft und Gewerbe

Bankverbindung: Spar- u. Darlehnskasse Niemberg

Brachstedt, den 27 May 1945

Dear FolksÖ

Got a letter from Dad today dated the 17th and thought I'd drop a line in return and at the same time make a carbon for Cedarburg. As you can see, I am still in the same place and nothing much has happened. I will be seeing all of you this summer--I suppose you know that by this time but just thought I'd make it official. I can't give you any information about the movement and to tell you the truth, I know little about it myself. It shouldn't be too long now.

Was reading a Life magazine tonight that told about the crossing of the Roer River by "picked men of the 104th Division". I don't know how they picked them, but I was one of those picked. I was up to my neck in that thing. Was the first bath that I had had in some time, though. We haven't yet received issues of magazines that were published after the end of the war over here so we are still reading about the darn thing. I still hide under the table whenever I hear a loud noise and I am afraid I'm going to be gun shy for a long time.

My finances are pretty low again--I won about thirty bucks last night at cards but lost it all again after paying all my debts. Still haven't been paid so I will have a pocketful when I get there, which I will do my best to put back in circulation in the shortest possible time. By the way, I'm keeping that thirty dollar allotment in effect even after I get there, since I won't be there long. I presume that you have been getting it and also the two fifty dollar money orders I sent home. You told me about the first one but I don't remember if you ever said you got the other.

Just about everyone is bring home souvenirs--pistols, cameras etc., but I don't think I will. It sort of goes against me. I'd be no good for the army of occupation--I'm sympathizing with the Germans already instead of being hard hearted. They have had enough trouble, as far as I'm concerned, without putting a bunch of foreign troops all over the place, but that's the way it is going to be. As long as they are punishing the right people it is all right, but how are you going to tell?

That's enough on high politics and just about enough for tonight. I got another package of cheese, tonight, Ruth. That's about all that gets through to me, the cheese. And by the time it gets to me it is so ripe that people avoid me when I wald down the street with it. Oh well, you can't have everything. Pretty soon I'll be drinking Schlitz again, for a little while, anyhow.

Love

Jack