

Somewhere in Luxembourg

2 January 1945

Dear Miss Blaney,

At last I have gotten around to answering your letter. It seems to take me a long time to reply to people who have been kind enough to take the time to write to me. However, I am not really to blame all the time. We are kept very busy and time flies by so rapidly.

Yes, Miss Blaney, we fellows are living in a world of our own at the present time, but I am sure we shall all be very happy to return to our former ways of living. I know that I for one shall be more than delighted to return to it this very minute.

War is a monotonous affair. Oh, it has its thrilling moments and adventuresome experiences, but you soon realize that the lives of men are at stake and wonder about the "why" of it all. Frankly, I am, in the vernacular, all fed up with this old business. The sooner I return to the States, the better I shall like it.

Yes, I have had some very interesting trips. Take the one to Metz, for instance.

My Operations Sergeant was posting some recent reports on the situation map one morning and as I looked at the little red circles (they indicated the forts which encircled the city) I wondered what it was like up there and if I should ever have the chance to see the city and the forts.

My thoughts were interrupted by my boss's "Say, Nick, we are going to Metz today and will be leaving in a few minutes. Get everything ready for the trip." By the way, he always calls me Nick instead of Sergeant unless he is angry with me.

Off we go. The country on both sides of the Moselle is quite hilly, but a bit farther east it becomes rolling. Most of it is farm country, but there are some large woods. Look at all the water! The rains have flooded all the low areas and the streams are swollen to overflowing.

There is a village ahead of us. It is pretty well shot up, but it should offer us shelter from the rain which is now pouring down upon us. However, by the time we finish our K ration lunch, the rain should have passed.

As we drive into the village, we notice that there is not a soul in sight. The village is as many others in this area --

small and generally reduced to almost nothing. This village has been spared most of the destructive bombing and artillery fire, but hardly a house remains which has not been shot up by small arms fire. Someone apparently blew out that loft with a mortar shell. Hardly a pane of glass is left intact in the entire village. And look at those ground level rooms! What a mess. There are broken chairs, tables turned upside down, broken pottery, and other household goods. Oh, there are a few pieces which have come through unscathed, but not many. Ah! There is a relatively clean looking garage across the street. It should offer us a nice dry spot in which to eat our lunch.

In we go. We find ourselves in a garage or stable with an earthen floor. It is one of many in this long solid row of houses. Each house is a combination barn-garage (if an automobile was owned) living quarters and the houses are built together as are the row-houses in the States. Most of the people living in these houses are the French peasant farmers, who live in these little villages with their many domestic farm animals and work farm plots in the neighboring countryside.

Well, the place in which we have our Jeep is between the farmer's living quarters and the barn. To our right is an open doorway through which we can see a rather large room covered with straw. There is a hay loft above. There are traces of farm animals about and over in the corner are some pieces of a doughboy's equipment -- an overcoat and parts of a pack. On the floor is a Jerry's pair of pants and a belt. We will not investigate closely as there may be booby traps about.

We take all this in as we eat our lunch. We also look into the farmer's part of the house through the door, but we cannot see very far because the door opens into a hall and not into a main room.

We have finished our lunch and the rain which was quite heavy for a while has stopped. So off we go.

As we drive out of town we pass a group of refugees coming back to what was once their homes. They are a rather sorry looking lot. The group consists of poorly dressed men and women of varying ages - mostly elderly - and several children. They are all smiles as they wave to us.

Now we are traveling over rolling country. Gosh, look at that field. It is cut up by the tracks of vehicles - possibly some tanks - and there, you see those tracks with the ground scraped off? One of our field guns made that. I saw one towed out last month by a little "cat." The wheels were completely mired in and it was pulled along with most of its weight carried on its belly.

Now look at that field ahead of us -- puddles of water standing all over the place. Do you see those small ridges of dirt?

They are spoils dug out of fox holes. We shall see them better as we get closer. Yes, there is one filled with water. What a job those boys must have had fighting through here -- wading, crawling, creeping through the mud and water -- but they did it and Jerry did not think it could be done particularly by these "soft" troops of the Democracies.

There must have been some tough fighting in these woods. This must have been the location of one of Jerry's main lines of resistance. Look at those fox holes. Each one is nearly an individual dugout. See the big logs on top for roofs - shelter against artillery fire. Some of them have straw in them and even little stove pipes for fires. Jerry must have thought he was staying for the winter.

Those fallen trees you see at the side of the road were pushed into their present positions by our troops. They were felled across the road for road blocks. Most of them were felled by the use of explosives. You can see the ragged splintered trunks as we drive by. Then there is an entire row ahead all prepared to be felled, but we must have overrun the position before the charges could be blown. Do you see those notches on the trunks about 3½ feet above the ground? A charge of TNT is placed in there and exploded. There are a couple of trees with wire loosely hanging around the trunk. That wire held the charge in place.

Say, turn around and take a look at that low ridge covered with old concrete emplacements. I wonder what they are. They are about the same design as those used in the last war. However, there was little if any fighting here last time. Germany gave up before her troops were driven back quite this far. You know our guns were ready to fire on Metz when the collapse came in 1918.

We continue on down the road. We see a few dead horses and cattle, but not many in comparison to those we saw a while back in another sector. We also pass some shot-up anti-tank guns and artillery pieces.

We see some modern concrete bunkers by the roadside, a few shot-up villages, and finally we draw into Metz.

Metz is nearly as desolate as many of the villages through which we have passed. It had a large German population and I suspect most of them were evacuated. There are a few people left; in fact, quite a few in some portions of the city. On the whole, though, the city is desolate - almost foreboding.

We drive down the main streets only. Many of the side streets are strewn with broken glass and fallen masonry. Here again, we find hardly a house missed by the effects of small arm fire. However, there is relatively little damage by the heavy weapons.

We pass over several bridges which were reconstructed by our engineers. The engineers have really played an important roll in this big drama.

Let's take a look at that big cathedral over there. As we draw near, we see much broken glass; otherwise only minor battle scars on the outside.

I enter first in order to discover booby traps, etc. Well, what do you think of that? The scoundrels have cleaned the church out and have been using it as a storage place for fuel or something of that nature. There are big steel barrels all over the inside. And here is a room in which they must have lived. At least, it looks that way. That door to our right looks pretty well cracked up. The shell that took the big chunk out of the column over there must have come through it.

There is a dead Heinie over there, but we do not get too close to him as he may be booby trapped. Jerry has a way of doing things like that. Looks as though the rats had been chewing on his leg. Guess he has been there a day or two.

After you have seen some of the cruel things they have done, you do not mind seeing them dead. In fact, you rather enjoy it. They are much better off and so is everyone else. He would have killed one of our boys if they had not gotten him first.

We leave the cathedral rather disgusted and drive toward one of the forts - Fort Privat. The shots you hear probably come snipers' guns. That is why we drive along the widest streets and keep watching the upper stories of the houses.

There are people walking about and some children playing in the streets just as though nothing was happening or had happened.

It is a dirty city. All that garbage and rubbish must have collected during the days of the siege and just before. The Germans had taken away everything they could find that had wheels and forced many people to work on defenses so they have no tools or time for anything else.

We visited the fort^t amid the din of machine guns and artillery. It was very interesting. Built a long time ago - I could not get the exact date - talk to the commander of one of our units.

We will stay at one of the headquarters in the city and continue with our business in the morning. I do not know just when we will return to our CP.

So you see, Miss Blaney, we do have some interesting experiences, but I am ready to go home. I have been over here for one whole year and feel all burned out. Of course, I have not done one third as much as the boys at the front and I should not feel sorry

for myself. I should be and am thankful that I am assigned to an Army Headquarters.

I am always happy to hear from you and about the College activities. I guess I would not know many of the students now.

Please remember me to all my good friends there and wish them all a Very Happy New Year for me.

Au revoir, Miss Blaney.

Sincerely,

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