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Letter Written by Victor A. Speert to Edith Speert Dated December 25, 1944

Victor A. Speert

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25 December 1944
Christmas Day in
Belgium

My Adorable Darling,

Sweetheart, I love you and miss you like mad on this Christmas Day. We had a very elegant Christmas day dinner - Turkey and all the trimmings. Despite the fact that we have moved so rapidly it's truly remarkable that we have the chow that we do.

Well, here's the long letter that I promised you. By now you have read the headlines in all the papers and have learned of the great enemy counter-offensive which I'm sure will be crushed completely before long.

I had heard on the radio, etc that they were making gains in Belgium, but I never realized that they had gained the actual proportions that they did; so before we knew it we were on our way to Belgium to stop the bastards, er, pardon me. Let me tell you that never in all my life did I see such a concentration of U.S. personnel and material coming to help the threatened area. It was amazing and thrilling all at the same time.

We arrived in this Belgian town and I got most of the outfit set up in homes of civilians. You should have seen these Belgian people - they were panic stricken. They were under the impression that we were retreating American troops and so they immediately started to pack their bundles and evacuate the town. They told me that the Nazis warned them that if any Belgian boys or men were found when they returned, they would cut off the hands of all civilians found.

It was a tragic sight to see the young kids taking off to the forests and their mothers crying and waving them good-bye. I mean it when I say that the United States doesn't know what it means to despise and hate the German.

This letter may be incoherent but you'll have to forgive the ramblings, darling.

Yes, we had all kinds of experiences. Here's one that was a pain in the neck. I got a place for Haygood Shelton & myself in a house since we had to remain at a first aid station that we set up. We also billeted some of the men in a large barn adjoining the house. Shelton and I were talking, some time later, when a soldier came up to us and told us that the house in which we were staying was on fire. It seems that some of the soldiers had been smoking and had dropped their butts in hay of the barn starting the fire! Already I envisioned total loss of my sleeping bag and contents - a mighty loss in these parts. We dashed over immediately and found the barn blazing and home burning but all our equipment had been removed and all the furniture had been removed.

Using my very commanding french I got all the civilians to form a bucket brigade to fight the fire - the barn was totally burned down but the home was scorched pretty bad. I'm trying to get some compensation for me from the Civil Affairs.

Imagine the moral integrity of the people around here who steal some of the possessions of a stricken person. The woman later told me that many of her possessions which were carried out of the burning house were stolen.

by some of the civilian on-lookers. The Nazi occupation was truly distorted the morals and ethics of the people. We got a GI vehicle and moved her possessions to a nearby house. I was sorry to see this incident seem to this woman. She went out of her way to find me place to put up the men. One old couple was afraid of soldiers - any kind. When they said that they had no room she answered "Very well then let the Boche come!" They immediately produced two rooms.

Truly dear, I've had a chance to get a slant on peoples and peoples thoughts that I never had before. Modestly, I say, darling that my French is approaching a state of fluency.

So being turned out of one house we got rooms in the house that we set up headquarters. Everything went fine until the evening when I was told that there was a lot of people huddling in the cold cellar among them being a sick little boy. I went down to the cellar and found a bunch of people huddled together with knap-sacks etc. who were planning to spend the night there. These people have an unreasonable fear of planes and shells which almost approaches a psychosis. These people made up their minds that they were going to remain in the cellar and "hell or high water" would not budge them. Well, if they didn't want to move, we decided to fix up a stove for them and hook up an electric light. We fixed up a light but we couldn't get the stove to work, in fact. It backfired and filled the tiny cellar room with smoke. The sick baby coughed and wheezed and we had to take him out of the room. "Doc" Ludduke came down later looked at the baby and said "get him upstairs to a warm room."

They all said "We're afraid of the bombs, etc."
I told them very sternly "you'll have to go upstairs
The lady of the house put the baby to bed in a warm
room and I dispatched the others to their
rooms. They probably bitched at me but doc
admitted that had I left them in the cellar for
the night all would have been ill the next morning

The next morning I dropped in ^{the room} across the
hall where the sick baby lived. Here I was ~~introduced~~
introduced to Joseph aged 4 and Mimi aged 2 who
remained with their mother and grandmother when
their father left to join the Belgian underground
when the Belgian army is to go underground. By the
way dearest, Joseph is the boy at the left + Mimi is the
girl at the right. Joseph is a doll + doesn't have any
more blood & curbs. Mimi is one of the most attractive
babies I have ever seen. She has reddish blond hair
and black, luring eyes. I told her mother that
I was going to take Mimi with me when I left.

Joseph was much improved when I saw him
the next day and recovering from the effects of pneumonia
which he had. Doc had a difficult time giving
Joseph his medicine and Joseph would only accept the
medicine when I gave it to him. Yet, I had to bribe
him by giving him a tea-spoon full of medicine + a
teaspoonful of grapefruit juice. As long as we're
around the kids get grapefruit juice regularly.

I got the mother to write a letter to
Eloine in French which I think Eloine should enjoy
as well as get an insight on the struggle of the people.
I think it is a very fine letter.

I know that you will fall in love with
these kids, too, they are so darling. They fight
quite a bit and their mother refers to them as the
"German and the American".

on the street

The Nazis counted on bad weather for their drive but the weather cleared up totally and our air crews have been pouring the hell out of them". Golly, I never thought I'd ever see so many planes that have been flying over head. They make a thrilling sight.

The men are behaving themselves very well, and treat the civilians beautifully - I called them together and gave them a talking to and they have responded well.

Today I notice that the panic among the people has increased - they feel more secure with the Americans around.

I was visiting Doc. yesterday, when a truck pulled up and ~~said~~ the driver said "Where, do you want this dead kraut?" It seems that the Jerry pilot was shot down by one of our planes and when the Kraut bailed out - his chute failed to open - He only bounced once. Darling, I've developed such an intense hatred for the nazis - I despise them with venom. They are dressing enemy soldiers in American uniforms and American tanks to try to penetrate our lines. They are pulling such stinking rotten kind of warfare! - the lowest type. In one way I'm glad since they are revealing what they are and America will know how to handle the occupation properly - with machine guns.

I'm not bitter, sweetheart, just a realist! Yesterday, I was called to meet some war correspondents from France & Brazil. The Col. Perry gave the correspondents from Brazil the situation and I briefed the correspondent from France. The war correspondent made me feel very important when he said in french "The people of France want to know - - -"

When we concluded the interview he literally
kissed me on both cheeks.

I have really enjoyed my experiences
so far and time passes quickly when you're
busy but still not too busy to idolize my
precious darling. Oh, I want to crush
you in my arms and bruise your
lips!

I got a laugh out of Doc today, too.
All the civilians are exploiting Doc's presence
by coming to him with all their aches and
pains. Doc enjoys it and we have fun
talking about it.

Sweetheart, I'm getting sleepy so I'll
say good night, sweet dreams, and a
very happy birthday. bubie,

I love you,
Vic