

R. C. WHITE & COMPANY

OUACHITA BANK BUILDING

MONROE, LOUISIANA

Moosburg
Germany
Stalag VII A
April 26, 1945

Dear Dad, Cis, P.J. Dot, Ed & Junior:

It's 0925 - 0125 at home. I've been looking forward to this letter since I was first captured and I had planned to write it on the day of liberation. That hasn't come yet but it is close at hand and at the stage of the game I have no fear of the Goons (Germans) making any more searches.

I acquired this notebook in Zippnow, Germany and kept it for this express purpose. We slept in a schoolhouse that night and I lay right next to a stove. It was most pleasant as we had planned on a barn as usual. This was on Jan. 28, seven days after we left the Oflag at Schubin. None of us will forget that day. We marched 16 kilometers, and spent about 2 hours crossing an open plain which had no sign of a road as the snow was three feet deep. There was the iciest wind blowing which penetrated to your very bones. Another officer and I had a small sled on which we had our equipment piled and every foot it would turn over. Then after finally struggling into the town, we stood for 2 hours in the freezing cold on feet which we could no longer feel. Then came the unbelievable news that we would be quartered in a building. We spent a wonderful night after drinking copious quantities of coffee heated on a fire we made outside. Here Keltag, whom I traveled with until we got to Hammelburg, got a quarter of a big cake of cheese from some refugees for a pack of cigarettes.

At this moment I am sitting in the sunshine in front of my barracks, which is directly across the street from the barracks I was in when I was here in June and July. In other words I've made a complete trip around G. since I left here on July 20 and I can assure you I've seen all of it I want to see.

(The information I had in these erased spaces cannot be given out so the letter might be a little incoherent at times). The answer is that thousands of prisoners have poured into here in the last few weeks. I've been here only 6 days.

The food situation here is excellent compared with the German rations that we have gotten in the previous 3 months. We get usually 1/6 of small loaf or 1/8 large loaf bread a day - about 4 fair size slices, 5 or 6 potatoes, a soup, or sauerkraut, a small piece of cheese, or margarine, or sausage. That is really a large amount of food from these Krauts. We have had at other places as many as 18 men to a loaf. But, of course, we are getting R.C. parcels - 1 a week, and we don't have to worry about them running out as they have plenty of R.C. trucks, big white jugs with Red Crosses on them - the most thrilling sight in the world to a hungry F.O.W. and there aren't any that are not hungry even with parcels.

We, Lt. Cally Dunnam from Miss., with whom I have shared food, my bed, cigarettes, fortunes and misfortunes in general since we left Hammelburg on March 30, got a Canadian parcel this morning and have already "bashed"

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(eaten) the chocolate bar with celerity. The important thing in Kriegy (P.O.W.) life is to find a partner who likes to eat as you do and you know me - I like to eat. In other words we eat while we have it and when it's gone, it's gone. Some fellows are most remarkable to me - a week after I'm out they're still eating. He just left me with our salmon and sardines for which he is going to trade with some British Indian officers for corned beef if we can get it.

The G. government has already announced that they will not attempt to evacuate us from here. Counting Schubin, Hammelburg and Nurnburg, I've been evacuated 3 times as allied troops were getting close and we've been "liberated" twice already. I think that this time we will really be freed, the once on Jan. 23, our guards left us in Poland and we anxiously waited those 8 hours for the Russians to show up, but our guards returned. Then on March 27, we actually were on American tanks and half tracks of a task force that was sent in at Hammelburg to rescue us, but it was annihilated by the Germans and Gully and I started out by ourselves to the west where our forces were 30 miles away but we were recaptured shortly thereafter much to our chagrin by some G.'s who at first couldn't decide whether to be our prisoners or vice versa. It was vice versa. But then I'm getting ahead of my story and I suppose it's best to start from the beginning as every good narrative does. Oh, before I forget - I'm quite sure that you have been in touch with Bob Breazeale who must have been sent home by now as he got sick the morning we pulled out from Schubin, so he stayed with the hospital group. I really envied him.

As to our future plans. When the Allied forces come we will be sent according to what is supposed to be straight poop, to a quarantine area in southern France for 21 days, where we will be fed 9, count them, 8 times a day. Then we receive priority after the wounded on going home. When we get there, we will be processed and paid, then sent for as long need be to the nearest general hospital to our homes - 30 days probably. I imagine that it would be Claiborne for me and the other Monroe boys. Have met 3 of them and understand there are 5 more. Lt. Bill Jones, A.C., is the only one I knew formerly. Have heard nothing about Sackman Marx. Hoping he has been liberated already. After the hospital (8 meals a day) we get 30 days' leave. Oh, happy day. It's all too good to believe. What a time we'll have. And please go easy on those strawberry preserves. I dream about them. Was fortunate to get some in a parcel recently but was only enough to remind me of what they taste like. Another food item for which I have an intense craving is condensed milk which comes in the British parcel. My weight has dropped since last summer. From Oct 15 till 9th Dec. we went without parcels and I dropped to 145. Then we were getting parcels and I put on a few pounds till we started on our walking tour of Germany. Weighed about March 20 at Hammelburg - 140. Probably few pounds more now. Every one lost corresponding amounts.

Munich is about 40 miles S. W. of here and I can here bombing in that direction now. Yesterday hundreds of planes flew over here and we could hear bombing all day. What we want to hear most of all is artillery and the rumble of tanks and to see thousands of G.I.'s swarming around.

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April 27 - It's now 2:30 P.M. It was announced about an hour ago that the G. guards will go off at 3 P.M. and allied officers will go on guard. However, as I understand it, the G. are going to remain here, that is, a skeleton force will remain until our forces come in, whenever that is.
(Censored) I'm beginning to have visions of an Army cooked meal again.

8:30 P.M. Well, the rumors are thick and fast - that our forces are at Landshut only 14 kilos (Censored) We've seen flashes to the W. and S.W. but many say it is lightning. (Censored) Everyone as you can imagine is in excellent spirits and we even forget about food at times altho our big bread issue of 3 slices is about to come and we are going to indulge in some Canadian butter with sugar sprinkled on the top - a delicacy, I assure you.

I've celebrated today by putting on a new khaki shirt today. How wonderful to have clean clothes again and I have a washed pair O.D. trousers that I'm saving for liberation day. The only thing we need now are socks. I'm wearing a pair, given to me by Serbian Officers who were wonderful to us at Hammelburg, giving us food when we were definitely in a bad way. But these socks are in marvelous shape compared with the 2 pair of connected holes I wore from Poland.

We're getting ready to have a flood here so it must have been lightning and thunder we heard to my intense regret, but I think I can sweat out several more days without bursting a blood vessel from impatience.

This afternoon outside we were entertained by a G. I. hillbilly band. You know my idea usually on such music, but believe me any American music sounds marvelous after all the marching songs I've heard from these damned Goons. You know Germans are strange animals. From the lowest private to the highest officer, they are all confirmed believers that by screaming loud and long, you will understand what they are saying, altho you know not one word of German. But I couldn't help but notice the change in attitude of the guards since the last time I was here. They did no screaming at us when we came in on the 20th. They were quite nice when they superficially searched us and in their weak attempt at humour asked us to hand over all 83's and guns of larger calibre. I was standing by an English officer the other day who was talking to a Goon guard. The guard allowed he wanted to leave Germany and go to the U. S. That made my blood reach boiling temperature - when I think of how we treat their prisoners, my vengeful character has lead me to hope that the boys who have been luxuriating in our camps in the States, going into town, going to dances (a Chaplain who gave them a dance was at the Oflag at Schubin and often wondered if he hasn't had a little change of heart), etc. will be the ones who are sent to work for the Russians and I don't ask that they be treated any worse than the G.'s treated the R. P.O.W.'s or the millions of R. workers of whom I saw thousands on my trip. And believe me that is a terrible fate. I've seen R. prisoners marched by us on the road so weak they could hardly walk at almost a run, wearing wooden shoes. And I'll never forget one poor devil, bent almost double hobbling way to the rear of their main column. I suppose they left him to die if he couldn't make it. After we saw them,

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we were always able to make the next hour's march a little easier and we thanked God we weren't in their shoes. And that day we might have had only ersatz coffee for breakfast with nothing in prospect until late that afternoon or night when we would get a thin soup and a few potatoes, and then go to bed in a barn.

I had an interesting experience happen to me one day and I quote from my diary - "Feb. 7 - 3 P.M. Covered 16 kilometers, at this point there is a G. guard sitting next to me to whom I'm indebted. A Russian and British column passed us this morning and I was passing out cigarettes to them when I turned to find one of their guards about to give me the butt of his rifle against my head. Then I saw that our guard had motioned him on." Other officers witnessing the incident said that he was really set to let me have it. As you can imagine, I was leery from then on about such matters.

Have been eating the bread, butter and sugar. I had to laugh at the ration of bread we got - it was about 3 in. long, 2 inches thick, 2 in. wide. But we never complain, regardless of how small it is, for anything is better than nothing and there have been many days that we got none.

April 29 - It's a beautiful day in old Moosburg - the sun is shining, the birds are singing, the machine guns are crackling and occasionally an artillery burst is heard. In other words we are in the process of being rescued again. This is getting to be

(The rest - in another envelope)

Note: This is all my son could send in this envelope. Will send you the balance of this letter when it is received.

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(Second part of letter dated April 26, 1945)

old stuff with me and it fails to get me the least perturbed. It's 11 A.M. now. M.G. bullets started spraying the street in front of the barracks at 10 P.M. The street cleared as if by magic. (A shell just burst not too far from here - shook the building.) One man was hit in the leg. The main thing that bothered me was that the water I was heating for coffee failed to have time to get hot so Cully and I had to drink lukewarm coffee while we listened to the following announcement: The artillery is louder and more frequent.

A major was taken prisoner this morning who is on the detail for taking care of evacuating P.O.W.'s. He seemed to have gotten too far in advance of our troops. Anyway, this camp will be evacuated (when we are liberated) at the rate of 5000 a day, alternately British and American. We will all go to camp 60 miles from here for delousing and uniforming. Then the Americans will go to LeHavre where we will catch a boat for home 5 days after we leave here. It's quite unbelievable. All that has to happen is for us to get liberated and from the firing, I'd say we weren't as yet.

1130 - One of our Cols. just came and gave strict orders for everyone to stay inside. The situation is this. There is an Amer. infantry and armored division about 3 miles from here attacking. There are the S. S. troops in Moosburg who will declare only the camp open and are bent on defending M. which adjoins the camp. He said he thought the fighting would be over in two or three hours. Also he said that we would be flown to France, but I now find that the swift departure on ship is the way the prisoners have been handled to date. It may not be the same for us, but I feel that it will be. Also we were told that 45 day leaves are being given. Man, imagine 45 days at home.

M.G. bullets just started crackling near here, too near, and everyone has taken recourse to the floor and are seriously considering using an axe on the floor to get closer to terra firma.

I'm getting hungry again and we're running low on food. I wish this monkey business would stop and that we would get issued a R. C. box today and have the pleasure of eating ourselves sick. Speaking of eating and I don't seem to do anything else, you will be surprised to learn how my tastes have changed. I can eat anything now - even raw sugar beets, which only cows eat in Germany. I relish peas, carrots, liver pate, even eat turnips. And I've developed a great taste for these smelly G. cheeses. And do I love oatmeal with condensed milk on it?

A big shell just hit near here and gave the building a nice shaking.

I haven't seen Amon since Jan. He dropped out with a sick group. I imagine he is free by now. In fact, I imagine practically everyone is free except us and this would surely be a most auspicious day as I was captured 11 months ago today.

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1210 - Just saw some goons coming out of the woods with their rifles slung - the guards who were not doing any fighting. Their job is to protect us. They were dug in for safety. The firing has ceased so it looks like it may be over. Suppose we'll get an announcement soon.

It's now 1253. Just 5 minutes ago I first glimpsed Old Glory waving over Moosburg. I came to attention and snapped off a salute. I'm knocking on wood with my fingers crossed but this time I think we've got it made. We're still ordered to stay in the barracks.

3 P.M. Well, I'm going to make a brash statement. I am now a free man. I have been liberated by the 14th Armored Division and 68th Inf. Division. About an hour ago a Brig. General in a jeep and Col. Goode, the senior Amer. Officer who led us from Poland in another jeep, followed by a tank so covered with tankers and prisoners that you couldn't see it come down the crowded streets. Pandemonium broke loose. They were the first Amer. vehicles many had seen for years. Was only 1 month, 1 day for me. The tankers were throwing 50 calibre shells to the mob for souvenirs. Lots of them have Goon helmets, lots G. bread (for souvenirs too). Down the street one can see flags of the prisoners of every nation here.

We're lying here in the sun now. Gully is really a great fellow - the type who when you've been on starvation ration for months and then haven't had anything to eat for 36 hours will give you the largest piece of a slice of bread he managed to acquire. (Incidentally, I couldn't let him be more generous than I, so we matched for it and he won). I've really enjoyed knowing him.

April 30 - 1:10 P.M. - Well, I really feel marvelous. We got our R. C. parcels issued about 3 hrs. ago. We already had our fire going and water on for coffee, so we went to work cooking with a vengeance. Between us, we had a dozen crackers, can of brunch, 2 cups of coffee and a box of chocolate drops, and 6 oz. can of pineapple jam. And now we are delightfully full. It really doesn't take much to fill up a Kreigy at one time. The thing is that you get hungry again in about an hour. That is the reason for so many meals in the hospital. Please forgive me for talking so much about food, but is it wonderful to not have to worry about it any more.

Nothing has come down about when we're moving out, but there should be something soon. From now on everyone will be impatient. How wonderful it is to think of the future ahead of us. Clean sheets, hot water and showers, clean clothes, spring mattresses instead of straw ticks, no more Germans, getting newspapers and mags. to read again (I was perusing a Feb. "Reader's Digest" today). Something I long to read are the newspaper accounts of the war. And not to mention lastly - to listen to good radio programs again, or just to listen to a radio.

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Today we got radio news that someone had recommended that returning prisoners be put in charge of P.O.W.'s in the States. I wouldn't care for the job. I don't want to be around them.

I am certainly anxious to hear all the news about all my friends who have been in combat. I've been praying that they're all safe.

One thing that all of us look forward to the most is breakfast at home. I've dreamed about it for months. Getting up when you want to, leisurely coming downstairs to breakfast, the newspaper, a good radio program. Those are the things we all took for granted before. Something I've missed terrifically is good music. Boy, to sit by the radio all Sunday afternoon for the symphony programs. I could name hundreds of other things that I took for granted which I shall always appreciate in the future. So you see, I've really gotten a lot out of prison life.

Boy, I don't know what will happen next. There are 3 Amer. girls sitting in a vehicle a few yards down the street autographing cards for the boys. They're R. C. girls - must say they aren't far from the front line.

1700 - Ass. Press has given us a list to sign and in a few days you will read in the paper that I've been liberated.

The latest rumor is that we will go to England from here. British officers have been alerted to move.

2230 - What a life. I'm lying here on the floor on my straw tick listening to the first Amer. radio program in almost a year. It's the Amer. Forces network. One of the armored boys brought in a German radio they picked up so it looks as if we'll have music. Marvelous, they're playing some light opera favorites now and at the same time I can hear our artillery laying down a barrage.

Well, here's the latest and official dope. The first bunch will move out of here in a max. time of 3 days, possibly sooner, and will take 4 days to evacuate from that time. Gen. Ike E. is greatly interested in P.O.W.'s and certainly is seeing to it that we get every break in the world. What we're waiting on is for the engineers to get a landing strip built near the camp. Then they will evacuate 2 Amer. for 1 British at the rate of 5000 a day in C-47 - 25 men to a plane. We will go to one of 3 places in France for delousing and uniforming and personal belongings. Evidently will get officers' clothing. Then to LeHavre. Said that we would be in the states 21 days from the time we leave here. Also, if desired one can spend his leave in France or England. Don't know how long a leave we will get. There was a Brig. General here today from Gen. E. Hdq. We certainly are on the gravy train for being given attention. The Gov. can't seem to do enough for us. I certainly appreciate it. Also said we would get plenty of food from the kitchen set up. Won't get any more R. C. parcels I imagine.

May 1 - Listening to Kay Kyser. Cold here today. Few flakes of snow have fallen.

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Well, I suppose you're wondering when I will get around to my trek. There are lots of things that I wanted to write about first and I'll have to wait till I get more paper. I probably shan't get a chance to write about it till the boat trip home.

1615 - About 45 minutes ago we all had a big thrill. Whom did we see and hear speak but Gen. Patton himself. When he stepped out of the barracks, in spite of it being a cloudy day, I had to shield my eyes. What a sight - 4 stars on each collar, 4 on each shoulder, 4 on his helmet, pistol on each hip, and more ribbons on his chest than my hand could cover. I was about 5 yds. away from him when he gave, "At Ease." Then he said, "I want to compliment you men and officers on the fine way you have behaved under difficult and trying conditions." And a few words more. Everyone cheered wildly as he got in his vehicle and took off. He was certainly a heart warming and inspiring sight. What a man! His son-in-law, Lt. Col. Waters was with us on the march from Schubin, but stayed at Hammelburg when we left there.

Big news. Was just announced that everyone would get a third of a loaf of white bread (G.I.) later on this evening. I've seen some today and it looks like angel food cake. I've never seen anything that looked so white.

May 6 - 2130 - After days of sitting here being disappointed, getting so many wild rumors that were fruitless, we heard just a little while ago what really seemed to be a pipe dream - 19,000 will be flown out tomorrow. Here's hoping it's true.

May 7 - 1600 - Just heard the war is over. Marvelous, isn't it?

May 12 - Will close this and send it on out with the other letter.

Love,

R. C.