

Nov. 19. 1918-

Dear Mother:

We've made another country. This time its happy Belgium. The hospitality we receive knows no bounds. This country, at least the part we are in, hasn't suffered as has Northern France, and the people have some modest means of celebration. I have a room to myself with a Belgian family and am most comfortable, with a fine feather bed, and warm stove. The first night we reached here the Madame prepared me a delightful supper of potatoes and ham and salad and fresh milk, and when I expressed my appreciation, she remarked with a glow of happiness in her face "What wouldn't I do for you Americans".

As we crossed the border between France and Belgium, we passed beneath a banner stretched across the road between two pine trees with something like Xmas decorations on them. On the banner was written in English "To the sons of the true freedom". From there on it has been a rather glorious celebration. I'm afraid for my part, that I will grow more homesick with celebrations and peace, and watching the Rhine than with war. But its certainly a rare privilege to witness the happiness of these people.

There is a dance going on tonight with our band playing. Some of our boys may not have gone to some of the Soldiers Rest Rooms that I have read about, where instruction is given by beautiful young women in dancing and they may not hop about quite quickly enough for the Belgian girls, but they can't be worried by such mere trifles. On with the dance! The first dance here in four years and over.

Intermission: We have been on the move for several days since this was started. We now rest in Luxemburg. The total population of the Duchy of Luxemburg is 350,000, so I am told, and the size of the army 250 - I don't know how many generals. You can see from this that Luxemburg wasn't in position to say very much when the German marched there in 1914. They all speak German, some speak French and in the City of Luxemburg, English is spoken quite freely, I hear. The people here are practically all pro-ally. They have celebrated quite extensively in the City of Luxemburg.

I am most fortunately billeted here, in fact, I would say the best place in this little village. My roommate is my Montana friend, Birely. One girl in the family - which consists of a mother and boys and girls in their twenties on down - speaks French, having lived in Paris. Being among people now who speak German almost altogether, French seems almost like my native tongue. Picking up a word of French here and there as I have, I am afraid that my conversation could hardly be taken as a model of grammar. Still, being with such a hospitable family as I am with, I have no trouble in getting my needs attended to in a most luxurious manner - in fact, instead of ever asking for anything to be done, I have to constantly ask them not to try to do so much.

The weather is cool, but winter is probably later than usual. Still we are having plenty of ice, but its not bad at all, when it doesn't rain. A hike, on a clear cool day thru this country, which is usually very pretty, is very enjoyable - unless an inspector comes

2.

around, perhaps, altogether, since armistice has been declared, my time has been spent most interestingly. We have gone back to the many details of peace time soldiering, which makes considerable work for us, for although we may even perhaps call ourselves veterans of the war, certainly as far as Americans are concerned we are nearly all green in the many details of a peace-time operation.

I have received recently letters from Stanhope and Kate and from you and Cliff. The latest news was that you had volunteered to nurse the influenza cases at camp. The young men who come under your care are certainly most fortunate. It wasn't a surprise to hear that you had volunteered for this work, and I can only hope that you keep well. Its a rather curious twist of fate that place all the risks on you now.

It seems that Father is worried about the money I have sent home by the Y.M.C.A., and my liberty bonds. I have sent in an investigation about the Y.M. Money, and it will probably reach home in the course of time. The Y.M.C.A. probably doesn't possess in its personnel a great quantity of businessmen. The Liberty Bonds will also reach there in the course of time I think. He also wrote me that I should cable him after each fight, I had been in. This was absolutely impossible to do, as we were ~~never~~ never in contact with the means of communication. I tried to get a cable thru the day of the armistice, but couldn't make it. I also haven't written home as frequently as should have been the case in the past two months. I won't say that it was impossible for me to have written more, but it was the next thing to the impossible. I have written letters and lost them because we were for several days out of touch with the mail department and I for a great part of the time was out of touch with most everything. I have lost practically all personal possessions except what I had packed up and stored away long ago. However, with the help of a friend here and a friend there, I now make a presentable appearance, though by no means a dashing appearance. I remember on one of my last liaison jobs, when I was covered with mud and whiskers and ragged clothes, having run into some neatly groomed staff officer - a Lt. Colonel - who wanted to get some information from me. He later asked our Major who that ragged young officer was. We being so unfortunate as to have had two liaison officers killed in the same drive, the major replied "Thats my only remaining liaison officer". Whereupon the staff officer replied "Oh, that's different".

If you happen to know any of Lt. Sankey's people at home, you can tell them for me that he is well known in the regiment as an officer with all sorts of nerve, even though he has been with us a comparatively short while.

If I can gather up the citation that our division has received and it is permitted, I will try to send them to you sometimes. Our object now is to be first in peace - also (if our friends in the "Rainbow" will permit me to write this even to my family) I have received several of the papers you sent. Some war news therein is very amusing - and some things are very true. We relieved the "Rainbow" in our last drive of the war, having come directly without rest from another front. Bets were even made as to the possibility of

2.

an advance in that sector at that particular time. I forget exactly how many miles we went the first day of the attack. The least of my worries is that the Alabama regiment will get the glory back home, they have won a right to this privilege and to all that the people can give them.

Some day, however, I think I will take a little time off and write up our division. It hardly ever in press dispatches gets an accurate write up. Even the Stars & ~~TRIPLEX~~ Stripes, which is supposed to know something of the army, in giving the various attacks that different divisions had been in, entirely forgot the fact that we were in the second battle of the Marne. And I have frequently seen in print, where other divisions were mentioned as having taken places that we ourselves had taken. There seems to have been some doubt even as to who took "Blare Mont" the stronghold on the Campagne front. Gen. Foch on that occasion spoke of us in his citation as "That Glorious American Division, who made possible the extensive advance on that front".

In regard to sending Xmas boxes, I hope all of you and Aunt Liza will forgive me for not sending in the necessary card. But I had seen where the package had to leave before Nov. 20th, and I didn't get a card until it was too late to send one in, being on the front and not having much time to investigate such things. And besides the various prescriptions as to size and weight I thought would prove too nerve-racking.

My love to everybody.

Affectionately,

John.

I wrote a letter the day armistice was signed, suppose it reached you. The young lady in the family here sends you an embrace.

O.K.

Jno. W. Durr, Jr.,
2nd Lt. 12th F.A.