

A Letter From Lt. Horace R. Hansen O-1325088
CAS. OFF. DET. APO 15310
c/o Postmaster, New York, New York

At Sea
May 22, 1944

Dear Folks and Friends:

A soldier's greatest personal problem, outside of conniving passes and leaves, is to keep up his correspondence. So this is an attempted solution, the general idea being that I can annoy more of you with one effort - sufficiently, I hope, to the point where some of you may even reply.

We've been at sea for several days now, with not much stirring except our stomachs. Got the first sight of land a few hours ago, so it won't be long now. Anyway, when you get this you will know that the voyage was uneventful.

I'm comfortably seated in the saloon (not "naturally" - that's the dining room on a ship) having just finished an excellent turkey dinner, and I'm taking advantage of the calm sea and the abundant spare time to get this off.

We embarked from the East Coast and were lucky to draw a remarkably clean passenger liner. Before getting on we got the usual coffee and doughnuts, Red Cross smiles and a large folder on how to abandon ship. From that moment on we weren't permitted to forget how to abandon ship to the point where we are practically all drill happy. Incidentally, when land was sighted all the troops rushed over to starboard and almost tipped the ship over. That was soon fixed by another abandon ship drill.

Most of us officers have some sort of duty, chiefly to keep the troops busy - an old army custom. I'm Police and Sanitation Officer for the top 2 decks. Part of my crew raises tobacco (G.I. for picking up butts) while the rest surveil sea sick suspects with mop and pail. With characteristic gift for improvising, most of these ailing soon found yet another use for the steel helmet. A soldier seen carrying one slung on his left forearm on shipboard is not shopping for eggs.

I don't want to give the impression that I was very busy with a disagreeable task. On the contrary, all it amounted to was an infrequent inspection, while most of my time was spent either resting, napping or sleeping. You can well imagine my difficulty of adjustment to such unhampered indolence. O Court House, memory is thy name!

My small bed is a comfortable resting place, albeit a pantry shelf, the food is nothing less than wonderful (too bad so much was wasted) and we have good entertainment - movies, shows, music, etc. Naturally there are no games of chance, the bulletin board says. I'm enjoying this trip, no fooling.

Some of the boys, however, overextended their festive spirit a bit on a bad assortment of harmonicas, scharinas and ukeleles. When the listing of the ship failed to take care of them, we had a little night operation which restored harmony, and no doubt provided some amazement for the sharks.

A few of us volunteered ourselves into a French class which holds forth every afternoon. It's not too serious, we're just getting familiar with the Poilu style conversation covering a few essentials. I suspect we are optimists in more ways than one.

Our Troop Commander is Cap't Carroll Robb. His cousin - same name - is the Minneapolis alderman. This started a long conversation resulting in the discovery that we have several mutual friends, including E. R. Bowen, John Carson, and Murray Lincoln, whom many of you know. He gave me an introduction to Charles Collingwood of CBS, if I get over his way, and some others which should prove interesting.

While buying some cigarettes (for 45¢ per carton) at the ship's canteen, I ran into Lt. John Lawler of St. Paul. He is Commissary Officer. Being a journalist, he wonders like a lot of us if the sorting machine broke down when his classification card was going through.

Some of you may know his father, Earle Lawler, who was with the "Big Three" under Gov. Olson. (Jim - remember he was foreman of the jury on that robbery case we lost?) Well, it seems that he has completely abandoned politics and has escaped from all such earthly futility into a life of things beautiful. He is now director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and lives in its nearby model dwelling - the one with all those pushbuttons and gadgets you've read about. All this is worthy of mention if for no other reason than that there is rarely one among us who displays such uncommon sagacity.

We can see more land now and rumors are thicker than the place they come from as to where we debark. None of us has a wireless set handy, but nevertheless security is so tight that we don't even know what country it is. Maybe I can tell you in the next letter.

I had hoped to see all of you when I was home last month on a brief delay enroute. However, it seems that the Great Uncle needed my services in a hurry. Though short, it was the most enjoyable leave I've had. I managed to see a good many friends, thanks to the get togethers, arranged and otherwise, by the boys in the office, the folks, the Jacobsons and others. Not to mention the motor power of Old Grandad. Also thanks to the excellent hosting of Rowland Burnstan in New York, I spent an unforgettable weekend there. Incidentally, we had dinner one night at the Swiss Pavillion - a double surprise (Burnie knew it would be) in that we had a repast, the likes of which I thought was only a memory these days, and the discovery that the place was run by Paul Burger, whose brother, Al, Chief Examiner of the State Insurance Commission, is an old friend. The special attention we received included some imported Swiss wine from the deepest part of his cellar.

Altogether, I have many pleasant memories of what I can now call "the other side."

More later,
(signed) Horace

P.S's. If you know of someone I've overlooked who would like to receive this periodic drivel from me, give the name and address to George W. Jacobson, c/o Group Health Mutual, 2635 University Ave., St. Paul, 4, Minn. George is my special friend who gets this thing out for me.

Bill Desmond - Received communique No. 4, I don't deserve having such a good story attributed to me. Please give Jacobson addresses of my fellow sufferers so they can get this too.

Jim Lynch - Did you see Burnie?

Andy Brotter - The Zippo lighter you gave me carries a great responsibility with it. As custodian of the Flame I am obliged to provide lights to all within observing distance. Through their looks of envy I think I can detect a ray of larcenous intent and I guard it closely.

Mike Kinhead - In view of the fortune bestowed on me by Andy I didn't attempt to contact Chuck. I think he wasn't back yet anyway. Did contact Col. Tom Sands and gave him my APO. He will see that the letter pursues me.

Joe Donahue - Time was too short.

George Feller- Sorry you couldn't make the party. I missed seeing you.

H.R.H.