

A letter from Lt. HORACE RUSSELL HANSEN, O-1325088

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c/o Postmaster, N.Y., N.Y.

Germany  
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Dear Folks and Friends,

These have been two wonderful weeks of resting, magazine reading and radio listening. The relaxation that goes with healing a bruised knee has made the discomfort of the splint seem very much worthwhile. After the first couple of days I became so tired I felt weak, and only now feel thoroughly rested. Apparently the tension of this life obscures fatigue to the point where it feels natural to be tired. It is noticeable in all the men here. After a short while they sleep day and night like victims of a heavy drug.

The X-Rays showed no fracture so I was kept here in the Collecting Station. It is normally a field outfit, using tents and moving often to keep within the shifting routes of evacuation. In the present static situation it is located in a building, the most nearly-whole one in this town. Many of the facilities are improvised but it is very efficient. Blankets cover the broken windows and shell holes and we have an oil drum for a stove. There are captured German blankets and electrical heat appliances, operated from a portable generator. They also thoughtfully left a good coal supply, some cots and a radio.

The success of combat medicine in this war is no accident. It is as thoroughly organized as an infantry outfit. To show how it works, there was a typical case here this morning. A rifleman went into the enemy lines with a combat patrol last night to feel out enemy defenses. The mission was accomplished but on the way back to our positions, he was hit by mortar shell fragments. The company medical aid men carried him on a litter to the Battalion aid station, where the Battalion surgeon, deciding his wounds were beyond treatment of his facilities, stopped the bleeding, dressed the wounds and called the collecting Company nearby, which dispatched an ambulance and brought him here. A complete examination was made to determine if adequate treatment could be rendered here. Deciding against this, the surgeons next determined that it was not an emergency case for the Field Hospital and therefore sent the ambulance on to the Evacuation Hospital.

There they have complete facilities for any type of wound or injury and specialists in all branches of medicine. The fragments will be removed, the wounds sutured and in about a week, when movement is safe, he will be transferred to a General Hospital as complete and efficient as its name implies, until final recovery. It may sound complicated, but is really simple and efficient. Each case comes to rest for treatment at the first point where complete recovery is possible.

The same fine treatment is given to German prisoners. When I first came here there was a daylight raid and seven planes were shot down in town. The two surviving Kraut pilots were brought in here, dressed and evacuated to our field hospital.

In the big room here, in various stages of wakefulness, are privates to majors. The inhibitions attending rank are absent and the atmosphere is congenial. Many have not heard the radio for a long time and there is novelty for some in listening to the music, Lord Haw Haw and Dirty Gertie--for a while. Reading magazines and writing letters in a warm, lazy place is very nice too. But, eventually these luxuries become a little tiresome. Bull sessions are the favorite Army pastime and this is a favorable place. Soldiers, especially those with the same shoulder patch, need no introduction and always have plenty to talk about.

Some of you have asked me to write what our men think and talk about over here. I have conveniently neglected this mainly because it is a big order, covering myriad and censorable subjects. But, after several days of bull sessions it occurs to me that the subjects we talk about most frequently and seriously come under two simple headings. Contrary to what you might think, they do not concern women, home, personal future and, more presently, our chances of survival. These things are always in our minds and occasionally we talk about them, but they are second-line matters compared to the conduct of the war and the peace to follow, on which they are staked.

The average Private in this war is no dummy--and he is anything but the storybook or novice version of a hellbinder on a lark, having an occasional tiff with the enemy between rounds of bottles and women. He is frequently capable of clowning and wisecracks, but normally he is grim and profound in demeanor and thinking. He has been facing the enemy without letup for so long he can't be otherwise. In this Division, from D-day to now, he has been in the front lines and fire constantly, except during two long movements, taking a week in one case and two weeks in the other. In all this time he has had one 48-hour pass. In addition to the enemy, he is now having two more troubles--trench foot and frostbite.

So, when these men talk, it's often serious talk. What we call "bull sessions" usually come around to things related to the conduct of the war and the peace to follow. For example, the other day we started talking about the counter attack into Belgium, then talked for hours on the whole strategy here, going back to the invasion. A Captain and a Private (a Yale lawyer) started it and soon another Captain, two more Privates and myself gathered around on the empty cots and joined in. Re-arranging the agreed conclusions in chronological order is as good a way as I can think of to show you what we are thinking on conduct of the war, and it goes like this:

First, the Air Corps. All of us always have thought that it is a miracle the way the Luftwaffe was made impotent before the invasion. The promise that "if you see a plane on D-day, it will be ours" was kept then, and since then, except for rare, sporadic and small raids in daylight. The Luftwaffe dared to come over in strength only at night, until we reached the German Frontier and their situation became desperate. Much of the time our men flew in weather considered suicidal in their training days. They pulled our infantry out of many nasty holes, and good deal of the credit for the breakthrough in Normandy belongs to them. We know that they spent a long tough time before the invasion getting this big edge and the comfort for us that goes with it. Only one enemy raid is necessary to acquire an abiding affection for our Air Corps.

Then, the Navy. All of us admitted some apprehension in crossing to England and especially to France, but never lacked confidence in the Navy for a moment. We know that only a long battle against subs, E-boats and mines before the invasion made these safe crossings possible. Enemy sea activity was present on D-day and still is, but the record shows that for each of the millions of men landed, 5 tons of supply came with him and 1 ton a month for maintenance has come in since, mostly over the beaches. We have a deep respect for our Navy.

We think that the invasion was possible and its success inevitable because the Air Corps and Navy cleared the way. It could not have happened sooner than it did, and until their job was done beforehand.

We don't think there is a man in the Army who will not agree that hitting the Cherbourg peninsula was brilliant strategy. The enemy was taken completely by surprise, as shown by the fact that a whole German Division was there, practicing anti-invasion maneuvers, armed only with dummy wooden bullets. The coastal defenses were tough, but were probably a lot worse in other places.

Incidentally, you might be interested in the general reaction of the men who crossed the beach on D-day. At the time, and since, it seems unreal, like a bad dream. Their

nerves and emotions then were fresh and hardened by long training. The shocks of violent explosions and falling comrades were taken in stride. But as these shocks kept impinging upon them thru more bloody battles, their sensitivity sharpened. They became as wary and cagey as animals, and often have felt like one. Their ears are constantly tuned in for every sound of battle, no matter how small or distant. For example, not long ago I was visiting my friend on a defense line about 200 yards from the Krauts, in a defilade position. I started to blow my nose and he hit the ground instantly, explaining afterward that is sounds exactly like the flutter of a mortar shell coming in. Anyone who has been in the combat zone very long gets that way, and I'm no exception.

The Normandy breakthru, General Patton's audacious drive which cut off the Brittany peninsula, his slashing drive to the Seine, and the Falaise trap were cleverly conceived, and boldly executed. When they happened, we all felt that our command was performing miracles--and it was. The climax of the eastward drive was so fast that one drove of 20,000 Krauts walked into our hands at Mons, Belgium, completely unaware that we had come so far.

Looking back at it now, the whole campaign is probably unprecedented in history of warfare. Almost a million enemy was killed, wounded and captured and their equipment destroyed. We recall easily that exhilarating taste of victory, the wild cheers of the liberated people and how we all added up our points for priority under the demobilization plan. When we went thru Belgium into Holland, we wrote letters envisioning Christmas at home as a real possibility. And all this had happened in only three months after the invasion.

Then we stopped at the German border. The longer we stayed there, the more we wondered--were the Krauts bigger than we thought, or were we just being over cautious? Then we found there was no gasoline.

We had gone too far and too fast. We were told that supply units had the stuff but transport couldn't keep up with us in the quantity needed. We wondered, frankly, if the command had slipped--had muffed the glorious opportunity.

It wasn't all too clear then, but it is now. As we went thru France, we used aircraft and everything else we had to smash all the railroads and bridges behind the enemy lines--to cut his supply and hamper his retreat. As he retreated, he destroyed what little we had missed. Now we had to turn around and rebuild the very things we had done our best to destroy.

Northern Europe is crisscrossed with streams and canals. They all had to be re-bridged. But this was not an overnight job, despite the great efficiency of our Engineers. We marveled at the speed with which they threw across pontoon bridges, rebuilt wrecked bridges with prefabricated parts, and rigged up improvised ferries. At one place on the Seine they simply tied up all the boats in sight and lashed on the stringers. Still, all that effort was not enough.

Trucks rolled night and day at high speed, and even planes hauled gasoline. The Red Ball express, given road priority, blew up corner buildings in some towns to get the big trailers thru faster. There were organized campaigns to gather every gas can from the battlefields. A pipe line from Normandy was extended to Paris.

There is no doubt that our command did everything--absolutely everything--to keep up the supply. But there is always a physical limit to any human endeavor. The whole of France had been torn up to make it impossible for the enemy to move and fight. We could not be expected to repair that vast damage in the course of a fast, decisive battle. And 500 miles is a long supply line, even with the largest fleet of trucks in the world.

While the trucks rolled around the clock, the Engineers resurrected the railroads, using hordes of civilians to help. While our forces were organizing at Germany,

special assault divisions were striking for northern ports, some of which were fanatically defended by suicide garrisons. Several million men and motors are not easily supplied and good sense demanded that we have a shorter route.

Waiting for Antwerp to be cleared was not only good sense, but a necessity, we think, even though it gave the Krauts a chance to dig in. There would be no sense, certainly, in gaining a quick initial advantage by plunging headlong into Germany only to be caught short again, perhaps in a spot where their shorter supply line might be decisive, or at least disastrous for us.

We have often discussed what it should have been last September--a big gamble with what we had, or a longer, planned campaign with all that it takes? The impelling factor in that question, we think, is the possible cost in lives. We are certain that present strategy will see more of us home, for cost in lives is in inverse ratio to the amount of fire power employed. There is no sentiment in this reasoning because manpower in a war machine must necessarily be counted like shells, especially with two wars on our hands. Finally, we know, it comes to this--victory over the type of enemies facing us will come only by killing them on the field and the more of us alive to employ our superior armament, the surer the victory.

So, altogether, all the men over here are thoroughly satisfied with the way that the war has been and is being conducted. They say so overwhelmingly and if they thought otherwise they would freely express it, the American Army being what it is.

We have jostled with the Kraut on his own soil for 3 months and we know he is still pretty big. The fact that he has been able to punch a hole in our line in the Ardennes proves that, and confirms the strategy of complete preparation for the final phase. This drive proves another thing--that we can beat his best, even when he has the initiative. When the tide turned after three weeks, we had already captured more than our total of dead and missing alone. His loss of armor and vehicles is tremendous compared to ours. His major attempt has already turned to disaster and we have only started turning on the heat.

A few have stated that our intelligence men must have fallen down in underestimating enemy potentiality in that sector, but the battle wise men know some of the limitations of intelligence. For many days prior to the drive there were thick fogs, sleet and snow, and a constant, low overcast. Aerial observation was at a minimum, even ground observation was limited. Also mechanized units can be shifted and concentrated quickly, and this time he had both day and night to do it in. There were no forts ahead of him and the ground was firm for his tanks. It was just one of those things that must be expected in a mechanized war stretched over hundreds of miles.

Another time we discussed the shortage of artillery shells. There is no mystery in our minds about this, and certainly nothing wrong with supply. We simply used more in Germany than ever before. During the three months we have been in the Siegfried Line, there has rarely been a clear day. There was almost constant rain and later, sleet and snow. Low flying for support of ground troops was seldom possible. Tanks can't operate in a sea of mud.

Ordinarily, as in France, when the ground was firm and the sky clear, aircraft and armor shared their normal parts of the combined firepower with the artillery. Here, artillery has had to carry most of the burden for all three. In one action in this sector, for example, we had to use the coordinated fire of 17 artillery battalions, over 200 guns, to support our advance into one key town. The weather has forced us to use artillery out of all normal proportion. And, incidentally, the lack of air and armored support against these defenses means more than loss of advantage. It means loss of the necessary and indispensable fire for movement--a fact that has temporarily given the enemy equality on the battlefield. The ground is now firm and covered with snow, and our immediate attention is skyward. We understand that the sky normally clears this month and anxiously look for it to happen.

Radio Goebbels has long been harping that "unconditional surrender" means slaughter for most of the population and enslavement of what is left. The unfortunate Morgenthau statement added color to this twisting and the Nazi exhortation to fight for a chance or accept certain death goes on and on.

We heard President Roosevelt's speech the other night when he said that unconditional surrender applies "only to the armies". We have never thought otherwise, but we discussed it anyway because this subject is near and dear, and the ultimate end of our job. To us, it means simply that the entire German army will become our prisoner and that occupation of the country will be on our terms.

We know that this means a harder, longer fight because the enemy is aware of our aim to destroy both the Nazi Party and the German High Command for all time, and that he will fight to the last on the theory that we will grow tired of the fight and relax our terms. Despite the hardships for us, we do not want any mitigation of that aim. It is the prerequisite of a lasting peace, and if our government settled for less we would feel cheated. Senator Wheeler to the contrary, that aim steadies our morale and gives us something sound to fight for. It would be boresome simply to fight against an enemy, with no further aim than to stop his present evils.

In the last war the Armistice was arranged with the German government which gave the High Command the argument later that it was betrayed and cheated of victory. The army was demobilized, not by us, but by the High Command, and its core was preserved for the new Wehrmacht. War criminals melted away and escaped prosecution. The soft-hearted occupation that followed was short and unimpressive.

Unconditional surrender on the other hand contemplates complete control by us with no dickering for deals of any sort. The practical steps will be the freezing of the German army where it stands, a systematic disarming and demobilization by us, and a relentless prosecution of war criminals in the process. The High Command will surrender this time, on our terms, to end the myth that "it has never been defeated".

Occupation will be hard and strict, and continue until every ally agrees to its ending. These are the minimum objectives we all want. A truce and a long period of negotiation is out of the question, if for no other reason than that it would provide the opportunity again for the real criminals to disappear and escape prosecution.

In our daily paper, "Stars and Stripes", we have a gripe column called "B-bag--Blow It Out Here". Recently this column has been full of stuff about surrender terms. The overwhelming feeling is that we want to keep the Krauts beaten for all time and the way to do that is to start with unconditional surrender, proceed to demobilize and disarm the forces, screening them for war criminals, and imprison at once all Nazi Party leaders, the entire Gestapo and S.S. and all like outfits and prosecute the lot of them as war criminals. In other words, a complete purge. In the summary trials by our military commissions, the defense that the accused was "ordered" to commit the atrocity charged should be denied, and heard only in extenuation of punishment, if at all. The occupation should be firm with fairness, and the average G.I. thinks that some of the 4-F's and rear area boys should form the army of occupation and let him go home.

Naturally, the G.I.'s over here think plenty about the peace, and firstly what it will hold for them personally. They are glad to see things like mustering out pay and the "G.I. Bill of Rights", but they are not looking for handouts. Their talk along this line has consistently been--"All I want is a decent job and just a faint recollection of this damned thing when I got back." The only thing unusual about this is the complete lack of talk about bonuses and pensions, especially since the politicians of the veterans' organizations are again proposing them. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of strong talk here about starting new veterans' organizations that will be more democratic in operation and more profound in their economic purposes. Already, this impetus has started several new organizations in the states

that we have read about in our service papers, and the various "B-Bags" are stirring up more. Undoubtedly the army of this generation, with sour history behind it and with idealistic intentions for the future, is capable of more reflective and intelligent thinking than is traditionally accorded it.

When G.I.'s over here talk about the peace generally, they are handicapped by lack of full information, but still have some very definite notions on certain things. "Stars and Stripes", which gets foxhole distribution every day and is pretty thoroughly read by all the men, carries the highlights of all the important news concerning peace. And if you think such things aren't discussed, you should have a listening post in any one of our reserve positions. In these places the men usually shack up in basements of bombed-out houses, to take a rest and get warm, between turns on line positions. There is both inclination and time for serious "bull sessions". These are going on all the time and I've heard a lot of them, especially since the end of the war is in sight.

Most of these sessions start with a news item. When the Morgenthau plan was announced, the immediate reaction was that people back home should keep their traps shut about postwar plans for Germany. The men here are getting more and more disgusted with having this stuff bounce back on the Goebbels' radio. Each time something like that happens, it nullifies the efforts of Psychological Warfare work and makes the Krauts tougher. Every man on the line knows what happens. They have seen the Krauts surrender right after they are told by radio, pamphlets or loudspeakers that we will abide as always by the Geneva Convention and will not torture and kill them as they have been made to believe. Then something like this announcement happens and ostensibly makes liars of us. We think public discussions on postwar Germany are necessary, but without official statements. It's going to be tough enough "conditioning" the enemy to unconditional surrender.

There was an item about France "ordering" seven hundred locomotives from us, and later on getting some of our merchant ships. Then another one about lend-lease to England being continued after the war. And more and more about Uncle Sam Santa Claus proposing to finance this and reconstruct that almost anywhere in Europe. Right or wrong, this burns the boys up. It isn't only that it's going to cost us in taxes, and probably won't be repaid, it's also a question of where our moral responsibility ends.

We started out to defend ourselves against world fascism, then rightfully assumed leadership for a free world organization as an affirmative war aim. In the process we have helped to feed and equip all the allies and have spent a lot of blood and money liberating a lot of people. When Germany quits we will have done a good job of defending ourselves and right then our contribution of material things ought to cease. Such food and medical supplies as we can spare to prevent starvation and plague is another matter.

The men here think we are well on the way to becoming the Sucker all over again. In England the papers said that they stood at the vanguard of our safety and very existence, and lend-lease was apparently accepted as payment therefor. And all over the continent we have heard, "Oh, you have so much, and we have so little". So once again they are all going to cry on the shoulder of the Rich Uncle.

One G.I. said, "No one helped our pioneers build America--they just went ahead and built it. These countries only have some fixing to do." What he meant was that if they did their own fixing, and just thank us for our trouble, it would be a small enough price for peace and freedom. Usually he would add, "And whose fault was this mess anyway?"

Most men over here will know that despite the crying due to come, these countries are far from being prostrate. Most of them have seen firsthand that in England most of the damage is in London and that her production machine is still humming. In the

liberated countries, all mainly agricultural, they have seen comparatively little destruction outside of Normandy towns, seaports and communications; and that already we have made considerable repairs to ports, railways, bridges and power stations. So if we have any moral responsibility to do the fixing, where does it end? The fighting men think we have none and that these people should be happy to pioneer their own reconstruction, difficult as it may be. They are not going to like any more donations of our tax money.

All of these countries have empires and they want them back intact. They will get them back, with our help. And these empires will be stronger and safer than ever under protection of a world organization, mighty with our leadership.

We accept this as the inevitable result from things like the Atlantic Charter, official statements from all sides and from having the man on the street in all these countries repeatedly tell us, "without our colonies we cannot live." The discussion here gets hot, not on territorial claims, but on accessibility to us of vital raw materials without paying tribute to the empire system.

Our soldiers feel that this war has developed into a sort of world crusade to correct a lot of these old evils. This feeling is strong in our army because it is an affirmative goal, and morale is better for it. We do not have the same hatred, born of atrocities, humiliation and destruction of home, that sparks the armies of our allies. Ours is motivated by crusading spirit and high purposes. Ask any man on the line and he will tell you he is there to beat Hitler and to help make a better future for himself and his children.

These men firmly believe that our country will take the load in this direction, but sometimes have doubts about how far we can lead. They hear great talk by European statesmen who "sound off" for home consumption about strong empire, their rightful place among first-rate powers and a comfortable future. Our men do not know too much about the European mind, but enough to sense that it is shrewd, and selfish. The necessity for economic survival has made it so, and there is no reason, just because of the war, to suppose it will suddenly change. All of these countries can be expected to want and take all they can get. Thus, the doubt of full cooperation. Our men feel that we need to be firmly insistent about our proposals, and that we should make them specific right now. They would like for example to see free access to such things as tin and rubber, controlled by a world government. They don't appreciate pussyfooting about our intentions in this field anymore than on the battlefield, and neither do I.

The fixing of boundaries in Europe and spheres of influence is too much for these men to fathom. About the only definite notions they have on this is that Russia ought to control the Baltic States, the eastern half of Poland and probably all of the Balkan States. They think that this is what Russia wants, and that it is probably the best way to keep Germany boxed-in on the East. If incidentally these places all became Soviets, it wouldn't alarm them. Every man over here is awed by the power Russia can generate on the battlefield. If they talk about the aspect of communism, they usually say, without further thought, that if Russia can fight like that there must be something to it. At any rate their notions along this line have changed considerably.

Well, those are the main highlights about what our men over here are thinking and talking about on the serious side. As I read it back it sounds awfully philosophical, but this life seems to make us that way.

A Judge wrote me recently, "You fellows over there ought to have something to say about the peace, and should see that you do." Amen. We would like to-- but how? It looks like that tremendous responsibility on which we pin so many hopes is up to you folks.

Holland  
February 2, 1945

When I left the hospital three weeks ago I was transferred as indicated by the new APO. I've been so busy ever since that I've only now found time to finish this thing and get it off.

The mission of the new assignment has just been released so I can tell you a little bit about it. It has to do with the prosecution of war criminals and will be so broad in scope as to include violations of the Geneva and Hague conventions and all Rules of Land Warfare, as well as civilian persecutions and atrocities of whatever nature, even those perpetrated against German civilians and Jews.

I've been going into occupied Germany almost every day, collecting evidence and preparing the cases. I'm rubbing my hands at the prospect of this thing. The war somehow now seems a lot more worthwhile. It's down my alley and I like it so much, it hardly seems a duty. In fact, I think it's going to be a pleasure.

More later,  
H.R.H.