

A Letter From LT. HORACE RUSSELL HANSEN - O-1225088  
EX. OFF. CO. - AFO #15310, C/O POSTMASTER, N.Y., N.Y.

England  
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Dear Folks and Friends,

There are three seasons over here, so the natives tell me, early winter, winter, and late winter. It is now late winter. What masters of understatement, these Englishmen!

Just found a couple of boards which have miraculously escaped the endless wet, and have a fire going in the pot that passes as a stove. It feels nice to be able to hold a pencil again.

While I have missed the south-going boat so far, I have been fighting my way thru cow pastures, pardon me, processing depots, (the 4th so far) - and this is about as far south as we can go on land. I guess we've won the inspection battles, unless they decide on surgery, which wouldn't surprise me. We now have our troupes organized and equipped. This leaves us one guess.

The present restriction has rehabilitated my conscience and I will now confess that all of my letter-writing time to date has been spent in avid and widespread investigation of the people, the land, and the pubs. After two days of this nice, restful restriction I feel strong enough to get you caught up.

The boat trip was as pleasant as it could be made, but I know now that I am a congenital landlubber despite my Viking Ancestry.

My first view of the English countryside was a pleasant surprise, and there have been many more since then. When a Minnesotan says it's beautiful here he means even more so than Como Park used to be in the good old days. I have never seen so many shades of green, so many hedges, trees, and flowers, in any other area of comparable size. Of course they've been at it for hundreds of years, and it should be expected that the neatness of it all would be the most striking. Anyhow, this part of England I like, but wait.

Our campsites I've described - just add tents, straw sacks for beds, helmets for wash bowls, and drizzle. There was one short-lived exception. We took over an estate, gardens and all, at one place, and put up in the manor. It was hard to endure such prosperity. When the mess-sergeant tinkled a bell for dinner it was almost unbearable. And don't breathe a word of this to any soldier - we had indoor plumbing too, and a public telephone. (As I said, it didn't last long, and we've long since been back to earth again. Literally.)

After wallowing in this clover for a couple of days we got over some of our inhibitions, and commenced to alarm the nearby villagers with requests for such unheard of services as laundry, dry-cleaning, taxicabs, beer for the lounge, etc. What's more, we got all this. It cost us a few cents worth of soap, cigarettes, and lipstick, but it was worth it.

No doubt we have irritated the upper clawss a bit by teaching these nice people such nasty habits of modernity, but I think the one American phobia of wanting something better all the time wouldn't do any harm over here.

Don't tell the State Department I said so, but our collective, conservative estimate is that the whole civilian works over here is about 50 years behind the times. I'll give you some examples in a minute.

Starting over again, on our first pass we went to the first pub. One of these is like the next - a small bar and about 3 adjoining rooms, one for the old men and the dart game, one for the family and children, and one for the lookers like me. A modern pub is only about 200 years old. If you ask for spirits you get consoling smirks and profuse apologies, the gist of which always is that the one bottle of Scotch is gone, there'll be another in six weeks (if you come between 8 and 9 P.M.), the ladies drank all the gin just this noon, and Irish whiskey might be obtainable if the makers thereof didn't run out for their own use so often. For some silly reason we go thru this same procedure every time (hopeful, anyhow) and settle for mild or bitters, with stout added if available. No matter how or where you drink this stuff it still looks like melted tar and tastes like cough medicine. After determining that all of it is merely liquid gas in disguise, I have finally decided to abandon this distressing project. I'll finish this subject quickly by saying that I have yet to see a plastered G.I. There's nothing exciting about these pubs that Marty would appreciate knowing for improving his business. If he added the dart game it would just cost more for P. L. Insurance.

Being habitual sightseers by avocation we took off first for the big cities, and we saw a lot of them. If we missed more than two the guide book is all wet. Trains run often, the rail net is good, and any sizeable town is easily accessible. The whole of England, Scotland and Wales is hardly bigger than Minnesota, so it is possible to see a lot of places in a short time. Like looking for spirits, we found only by persistently bashing our noggins that this was hardly worth while either. However, we Americans have peculiar habits when we gotta see, we gotta see.

The bomb damage, as we've read, isn't so bad after all. Here and there is a gutted building, the sheer wall of a formerly adjoining building and a bare basement. There has been no reconstruction to speak of yet, but the effect of the damage is so well cleaned up that it is not always very easily noticed. It certainly does not seem to have affected normal activity. Incidentally, the pilotless plane right now is the topic of a lot of conversation, but certainly no consternation. These people wouldn't set their teacups down if bombs blew the windows in. If you believe the German propaganda programs (our all-time favorite comedy hour) the whole of South England is in flames. I can appreciate harmless lying if it is halfway artful - having listened to plenty of it in 328 Court House and various courtrooms - but being told I'm getting a hotfoot while submerged in the bathtub is beyond exaggeration, it's just funny.

In the large cities (wish I could tell you which ones) 99% of the entertainment is cinema. All but very few of the pictures are American - early American. I decided I would see only one that starred Theda Bara. Anyway, I shudder at the sight of long queues (I've developed a complex) so I've never "booked a stall to see a flicker" over here. What's left for a lighthearted shavetail on a pass is one or two dinner-dance spots and maybe a dancehall. These places have concave walls from the heaving hordes of peoples, armies, and navies of the Allied Nations who oscillate therein. That positively leaves only concerts and lectures, of which there is no limit. You can hear a violin up to a symphony, a Commie up to a Lord, any night of the week. Oh, yes, I should add that all doors bang shut at 10 P.M. and you are out on the sidewalk, even tho it's daylight up to midnight.

Philosophically, and in peacetime, I like to see this preponderance of culture. But right now the people don't and I don't, my grey hairs to the contrary notwithstanding.

That brings me back to the dances, as you suspect, and on this pastime I have a comment or two. They go in for a lot of variety here. Besides our styles of terpsing, which are plenty gymnastic for me, they get everybody chummy thru varied forms of proximity, some rather violent. Some of these war dances are called "Boompsa Daisy" (Jim, remember Earl Carroll's?). "Polly Glide", "Lambeth Walk", "Hokey Pokey", etc.

Just for a change, or something, it's an accepted practice for the gals to ask for a dance. They come up and ask "Are you engaged?" The first time this happened, I was about to say "Hell, No! I'm not even close", when she grabbed me and we were dancing. I was too surprised for a few seconds to say anything. The invariable conversation, if much at all, is whether America is just like the cinema, what we do about those awful wild Indians, and those horrible Chicago gangsters. They know the names of 3 American cities, New York, Chicago, and Hollywood - and this is about the limit of their knowledge of our geography.

Another accepted practice at these dances is for the gals to do the cutting, and they do it with determination. The first time this happened I thought I might be suspected of carrying lipstick, but after it happened five times during one waltz I got accustomed to it. It's fun and kind of flattering too. Like grab bags, or the Ladies' Aid Society lunch basket social, you never know what you've got until afterwards.

I don't want to give the impression that English girls are aggressive. On the contrary, they are very reserved. However, if you wear our officers' uniform and say "Hello" you've got one on your hands. After that the reserve melts very rapidly. In fact, these Englishmen are all stone faces, but once you say a word to them they are half-way friendly.

The girls are decidedly not as attractive as ours. The extended shortage of clothing, soap, and cosmetics easily explain that. As one girl said, it is difficult to keep up appearances from head to toe. They use ration points for what is most needed and are forced to neglect something else. Many are obviously impressionable and try to emulate a modern air per our movies and notions they get from our G.I.'s. Some of this is slightly incongruous, some downright funny. Hair bleaching is practically a nationwide epidemic - and what bleaching! You can find anything from pure white to sun-kist orange, with calico brown thrown in. Lipstick is applied anywhere between the nose and the chin, some eyebrows look like PFC's stripes. They say "nuts" when they mean "dear me".

Their craze for wearing military insignia (American preferred, or most offered, I don't know which) should, of all the bad habits we've given them, cause most compunction. I saw any number of married women wearing bars, crossed rifles, QM, ordnance, signal corps insignia, etc. You know, a smart doo-dad to set off the frock. The pay-off was one little blonde wearing a good conduct ribbon!

On one duty-hour pass I contacted an army nurse I knew at Ft. McClellan. What a refreshing difference after the English girls! More spirit, more intelligence, more pretty - everything. We spent the whole time seeing one of England's largest cities. For three hours we went thru the law courts, police department and prison. I wanted to make a comparison, so to get a proper start I saw the Prosecuting Solicitor - a Jim Lynch counterpart with a stiff neck, but the same type of lingo. The office and staff were about like ours in St. Paul.

After exchanging a few trade secrets I had the run of the place. We were shown thru several courts and heard bits of some trials. The Magistrate Court (like our municipal and J.P. courts) handles small claims, petty crimes and preliminary hearings on major crimes. These courts are presided over either by 2 or 3 laymen - business men, labor leaders, etc. (without pay) - or by a stipendiary, a practicing barrister (with pay, of course). Actions are tried without jury. If a jury is demanded the case is committed to the Assizes, similar to our district court, which is in session only as the calendar demands.

The Assize court is impressive. When the judge enters the corridor 4 trumpeters in ancient red costumes sound off, and Ye Judge, with white wig and black gown, head properly drooped, plods his way slowly between two facing rows of bobbies standing at attention. Thus he eventually gets to the bench and sits down slowly, like Mike Kinkead, only Mike does it that way because he's got farther to sit down.

The Assize court room is solid oak, each panel intricately carved in representation of some historic thing or other.

Jim, there's one thing we didn't copy from the English system. The P. S. is very highly respected and his suggestions are usually followed by the Court. They actually believe what he says. Furthermore, he's allowed to gab at will, even during examination of witnesses.

Just think of what all this latitude would do for some of those stinkers the Grand Jury, the Dispatch, and Gibbons make us drag up there on the 8th floor sometimes. And wouldn't Cleary have a picnic! Can't you just see Rolly sitting there grinning while Judge Boerner eats his fingernails? Besides we'd have some fun for a change, and Bill would probably outdo himself tossing in a few manure forks full of pearls, invective, and his own unique brand of sarcasm. Something like this is probably what our forefathers visioned some Irishman might do to this part of English procedure and legislated accordingly.

Nice idea tho, isn't it? I mean, to have an even break with guys like DeCourcy, Hoffman, and Rerat (in the order named).

The police department was about like ours, except that the personnel is about a hundred years, on the average, older than ours. The chief inspector enjoys more eminence than our contemporary, Charlie Tierney, and not because of his waxed mustache or 3 pip uniform, it's just proper to be nice to a cop over here. They even address him as "Sir". However, I suspect Charlie could show this dude a few tricks he never heard of, and get quicker results.

They have two-way radio cars and fairly modern equipment, but their identification system is only sketchy and records are kept in longhand. Scotland Yard helps them like our FBI, only they're slower.

Their lockup, though not old, was almost primitive - oak boards for beds, no private commodes, food passed through a small door, etc. The inspector impressed me with the fact that this whole setup was the second best in England. My own impression is that something besides police work makes their crime record lower than ours.

Cooperatives are big institutions here, doing something like 24% of retail sales. They are in almost every field of marketing, have stores and warehouses in most towns. Some of their wholesales own manufacturing plants, truck lines and shipping.

Co-ops as a whole were recently commended by the Minister for Food for doing an exemplary job on the ration system.

I gather from talking with some of these people that co-ops in some places are an economic necessity to provide themselves with as much as they can with their small earnings and to create new distribution that didn't exist. In any event, inborn English thrift is probably the best reason for the large membership, and thrift here is necessary even in peacetime because of the high cost of so much imported goods. They have the same battle with private shopkeepers as ours do.

I talked with some of the labor leaders and thought they were extremely conservative compared with ours. One thing they want (and British soldiers as well) is more educational opportunity, reserved here for the wealthy and a few scholarship winners. They are amazed to think that our workingman's children can attend a university.

The class system here is terrific. You belong to the elite by birth or money, or you are a commoner forever. One British captain told me that the commoners help perpetuate this system themselves by their traditional awe of wealth. And they just haven't learned to want something better. Very few homes have central heating, running hot water, electric refrigeration, etc.

We finally found that the best place to find some enjoyment is in the country. One day we talked a farmer into giving us a hayride. He called for 3 of us louies and 3 army nurses in a Governess Car, a one-horse affair - cushioned basket on two wheels. This farmer was in the gentleman class. He had 300 acres (really big here) in a very pretty valley. The house was rebuilt manor dating back to the 16th century, large and very comfortable. He had 50 cows, 800 sheep, a stable of riding horses, 2 Fordson tractors, etc. His favorite diversion is horse-racing - there were 29 trophies in his den.

We did some riding, then the hayride. This caused quite a stir. Everyone along the way stared in unashamed wonderment. We were definitely fit for the asylum. Despite the certainty of this reaction, the farmer, with typical hospitality, went along with our whims and didn't explain until afterward that such an antic would not be properly understood, not having been seen before.

We had our first fresh eggs, real cream, strawberries, and fresh garden salad. He taught us a nice, vicious little card game called "Farmers Glory" (something like Montana Red Dog) to his sorrow, as we took him for a few pounds plus quite a bit of hard cider in the process. Incidentally, his chief hired man, George, has been with him for 21 years, has never said anything to him but "Yes, sir" and "No, sir". His new charlady was fired by Lord \_\_\_\_\_, 5 miles down the road, for dropping a spoon during tea, after 8 years of faithful service.

One Saturday night another louie and I stayed overnight at an Inn - a typical English hostelry with pub and dining room downstairs, lounge and bedrooms upstairs. At midnight we had to knock to get in (they never give out keys), had a black-and-tan (stout and ale mixed), and gabbed with the old lady of the place. After a while she produced her nephew from the kitchen and we kept it up until 2 A.M.

The nephew is a British sergeant, just returned from Germany where he had been a prisoner for  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years, since Dunkirk. The last two years he was in a hospital where he saw a lot of German wounded from the Russian front. They told him that the Russians fight like madmen instead of soldiers - described how they strapped time-bombs on dogs, sending them into the German lines; how Russians lay prone, as if dead, and, when tanks approached, sprang up everywhere heaving Molotov cocktails.

His health had been broken down, he said he wouldn't have survived but for Red Cross parcels. On the tram ride to catch the Gripsholm he saw a lot of bomb damage, said, "Hamburg is as flat as this table."

It was an interesting evening. And what a nice sleep for a change, on a feather bed! It was a huge, luxurious bedroom by our standards, and pleasantly warmed by glowing coal in the fireplace. At 10:30 A.M. the maid served tea in bed, later we had breakfast - fresh eggs, ham, toast, marmalade (like only the English can make it), and coffee with real cream.

All this was decidedly a special treat, the usual English fare being potatoes and brown bread, with a little fish, ersatz sausage, and a few vegetables added when obtainable. We have eaten in all the best restaurants we could find, and while we didn't expect much, our conclusion is that even the small amount of fairly good food obtainable is badly cooked.

Before this thing develops into a book, I'll add just a little miscellany.

British officers think our planes and tanks as a whole are better than theirs. They mean this, saying very little else good about us or our stuff, all of which is superior in my opinion.

For once their papers are giving us some credit for the job around Cherbourg. Usually we appear as the master's helper. The attitude toward us as a whole here is one of polite tolerance of an imposed, the necessary, nuisance. I have yet to hear one word of gratefulness for our help, or see any shyness in accepting what keeps them alive. The civilians here will all be very happy when at last we go far away.

One attitude at least is very heartening. Not one I've talked with thinks for a moment that the British will do anything but go all out against Japan when that time comes. One solid citizen commenting on this said, "I rather think at that time Churchill will say, 'Righto, me lads, now the rest', and there's no question of it."

Very few frame homes here, all brick, with fireplace in each room. Railway freight cars and tank cars are about  $\frac{1}{4}$  the size of ours. Most automobiles are about the size of the Austin Bantam, because the license fee is \$25 per H.P. per year. No gasoline is obtainable for pleasure. Those who need it get 12 gallons for 3 months. It costs 43¢ a gallon.

Bad teeth are the rule, not the exception. The water is blamed for this, but I suspect nutrition.

Children here are very bad-mannered beggars, usually picking on us. They like gum, and we hear "Got any goom, choom", every few steps in town. Remember when they called us a "gum-chewing nation"? Wait until this crop grows up!

Most of the people in the country ride bikes, even very old ladies.

If I didn't say so you can gather from my activities that I'm in good health, especially since I quit beer. Our mess is good - only difference has been powdered eggs and milk, both of which aren't too bad.

We are carrying on with training, mostly physical, and just waiting for the boat ride. No one is apprehensive, it's the same old work-a-day existence. Same griping, only now it's about the weather, the endless inspections, longer chow lines and straw sacks. This is very normal and indicates good morale.

The mail situation is very bad. The few letters we get are a month old. I suspect the invasion held it up. We're told it will be better from now on. After waiting so long, the first three letters I got included a magazine bill, a note from the Plaza Hotel in N.Y. asking what to do with the underwear set I left in the bathroom, and one from a friend dated May 12th. The first lone letter one Lt. got was an electric light bill from Texas. I received a batch yesterday, the latest dated May 20th. It's very nice hearing from all of you, even if it's slow getting here. By the way, if any of you see any news clippings I would be interested in, they would be nice to get. American papers and magazines are unobtainable.

I'll try to keep you up-to-date in smaller bunches more often after this - meanwhile, so long,

H.R.H.

P.S.'s

Mother - Just got the first letters from you and Irma. Nice of Dave to take you out to Bea's. Sorry to hear about Stub's accident. What do you do as a Gray Lady, Irma? Got the clipping on Pat McCourt. He has certainly done his share.

Helen Gannaway - Missed seeing Homer by inches. Was once located 10 minutes ride from him, but was restricted for movement and later rode past his camp on the way here. Just got a letter from him only 5 days old. We'll make the meeting yet.

Bill Desmond - Your Tidende Mai edition just arrived. This is a most informative and much appreciated chronicle. You do a good job of telling on everybody but yourself, I notice. I know damn well it isn't altogether modesty.

John Burke - Got a barrage balloon-ful of your Burps yesterday. You know us guys like them or you wouldn't waste so much martini money on postage. Which reminds me of something I want to return some day. In comparison with Bill's communique, your Burps are hair-down confessions. If you're lacking for a new title, how about "Mickology of St. Paul", or just plain "News from the Bar"?

Major Angus Grant - Thanks for your offer, but circumstances force me to decline.

Burnie - If you and Mr. Lawrence were at the place you intend to be right now, I would be close enough but not free enough. How about Paris?

Brother Dick - Just got your letter of 5/16 in the big bunch yesterday. So you can gather what happened. Mother sent me a snapshot of you in the M.P. outfit. How does it feel for an old marine vet like you being one of those nasty garrison cops? And how are you doing with the malaria?

Col. Thos. Sands - The transfer letter to the JAG department dated 5/20 just arrived, and now that I'm in the ETO the change can't be accomplished. I'm committed to AGF and its heavy weapons from here in.