

Thursday Noon  
December 13, 1944

Somewhere in Germany:

Dear Folks,

I shall never forget Germany for its gloom and its hate -- with the grim stare of the people and the contempt in which they hold us and the suspicion and derision that we hold them. Every inch of ground is an inch of protracted killing and desolation and every tree and bush is grim testimony to the struggle. Nowhere have the Nazis failed to lay mines and booby traps, to erect great pillboxes with walls yards thick -- to overthrow giant trees along the road -- determined to hold with the scathed earth -- and the ugly whine of the artillery with the grey sky, the drenching rain, the dead, stinking cattle -- blended into the scene of New Germany.

My platoon and I climbed into new tanks just assigned us -- tanks that will amaze you when I describe their type and thickness sometime when I am free to do so. The Nazi artillery and mortars began falling at once -- not for a moment did respite come as we sweated and hoped, for we knew our hide was thick -- but what thickness can stand up under such tremendous assault? As darkness came, we listened for Nazi patrols, for stealthy Germans to get us with their bazookas. I dared not use my radio -- for a mere flash would reveal my exact spot -- and the answer would be clear. We opened our hatches to guard against infantry, and flung them shut as the whining artillery pounded us. Mortars bit us again and again -- and we flinched and sweated. For six days we stuck in our tanks -- never did we dare to raise our heads shoulder high above the turret -- for we heard the snipers as their silencers swished overhead. Not one moment of sleep or rest -- six days of cold and wet -- of nervous munching of "D" rations -- of relieving ourselves in the helmet and casting it out -- six days of terrible odors and total sleeplessness. My men were weary and tired, and I was hopelessly exhausted -- but pretended it was nothing. The seventh day I led the attack -- why I was so calm I don't know. But I came to a certain town -- and in the dark I dismounted to contact my infantry support, and as I climbed through the streets I heard the snipers fire at my shadow, and as I leaped into a broken dwelling, a hand threw a grenade at me, but only the cap exploded, and I was spared. I got the dispositions from a Nazi prisoner who spoke with a glib tongue, a braggart and a fool. I saw infantrymen die -- as the snipers picked them off. I saw a fortified bunker wiping out man after man. I attacked it and gave it everything we had -- and 18 Nazis walked out pleading "conrade." I put 15 machine gun slugs in a Nazi whom I saw shoot a dough boy and we hurled our shells at everything to our front. But I hit a mine field, and my tank was knocked out, and I took the next tank and continued. The Nazis spotted me from the high ground, as I took my tank into defilade -- but they knew my spot and the 88's began to pound the ground about me. My engine compartment was struck, and immediately my crew and I were submerged in carbon monoxide fumes. I was faint as I groped for air -- my gunner dropping over -- and I grabbed him and pulled his head through the hatch and blew into his mouth and I tried to help him breathe as if like a baby. He revived, but I felt a great weight on my chest, and I fell over -- and in my stupor I saved my life as I ordered one man to rub my legs, the other to keep reviving me with the fainting stick. But my crew was half in a stupor too, and one man closed the hatches as I ordered him to reopen them and another refused to raise me -- so afraid was he of the sniper who seemed to be but a few yards away.

The infantry medics slogged through the mud, knee high -- God, bless them and evacuated me -- and the oxygen and treatment has restored me to complete strength. I lay on a cot next to a Nazi who had been shot twice in the belly and we whined and moaned, and I hoped to see the day when all Germany will moan and cry like him -- when everyone of these human murderers will suffer for the pain and misery which they have brought upon us all.

I feel strengthened and ready for the future, and I shall always do my best.

Jerry