

May 9, 1945
Germany

Darling

V-E day here is a bright hot sunny day. It would be fun to be playing tennis and swimming instead of hanging around the O.R. waiting for the patients who have either shot themselves or been shot by their buddies with their new German pistols.

I haven't written for a day or so, but things have been very interesting. I must tell you about it, as it's all news that's been released already anyway. About three days ago, in order to avoid the oncoming Russians, the Germans threatened to attack us over the river unless we would accept their surrender. This had been previously refused as they were on the Russian side of the boundary line, and nobody wants Kraut prisoners these days - they already have more than they know what to do with. But in order to avoid any bloodshed at this late date, the surrender was accepted. So one evening they began to file across the river on a plank bridge, and over they came, thousands after thousands, young boys, old men, crack troops Wehrmacht and S.S., every type and breed of Kraut soldier there is. The rifles were piled here, the bayonets there, pistols over yonder in ever growing mounds. Needless to say, it was the trophy hunter's paradise. The Russian artillery could be heard approaching in the distance, and the Germans were seared. They were a tired, haggard, meek, and motley crew, and, apart from some of the S.S. men, there were no incidents of violence necessary. This stream went on without let-up for almost three days, until the Russians closed up and cut off the other end of the bridge. In spite of efforts to stop them, civilian refugees swarmed across the river between the towns and at night - swimming or in little boats. They will do anything to get away from the Russians!

The following day Nick and Red and I visited Hamburg. It is a most interesting sight. The entire city proper, with the exception of the central square and the town hall, is pretty much in ruins. The dock area seems little touched by bombs, and the Germans didn't have an opportunity to demolish the harbor facilities; or else they didn't wish to destroy them, hoping to use them for receiving food and equipment from us! The city seems populated by an extraordinary number of people. One wonders where they live. There are only a very few British to be seen. German cops direct the traffic; thousands of German soldiers walk or drive around in full uniform. They just haven't had time to process these people and get them in cages, and, of course, more keep coming in who have escaped from Holland or Denmark. While there we had lunch with the CIC boys, and had an advance tip-off on the V-E day announcement, which was exciting news indeed.

Driving up and back I was impressed again by the beauty of this northern Germany. It isn't the mountainous beauty of the South, but low-rolling country-sides, with little pine groves over the hill-tops and green pasture lands and fields between. The orchards are in bloom. The roads are usually lanes between rows of birch trees. The forests are immaculately cleaned of all under-growth. This Kraut-country is beautiful, and there

is plenty of lebensraum right in their own yard. It's hard to see why they want to go somewhere else and grab somebody else's land. At one point along the river a pontoon bridge has been erected. The area on the far side is a maelstrom of confusion! At least forty or fifty thousand of the Wehrmacht came to surrender. Their vehicles and lorries are massed in fields and along the roads. Their surrender was not accepted and they were not allowed to cross the bridge. So they are bivouacking in the fields, lying around glum and disheveled in lean-to's or tents. Meanwhile in the neighboring fields are thousands of liberated civilians, men, women and children; living from hand to mouth as best they can, in brush huts, fox-holes, or just under the trees. They too are awaiting processing, before they can get across. And in addition are German civilian refugees who have fled the Russians, or who are seeking shelter in other parts of the country, their homes having been destroyed. All these various groups are milling around in a state of unhappy confusion, trying to exist, and save their little bundle or cart-load of belongings, until they can be straightened out and sent on their way. Needless to say, the sanitary conditions are terrible; they have no decent water supply; and epidemics threaten. You can scarcely imagine such a spectacle of uprooted and disorganized humanity. Typhus, diphtheria, the enteric infections, and tuberculosis will take their toll before these people find their way to sanctuary.

In the concentration camps, the hospitals, the evacuation centers, are millions of people in need of food, clothing, and medical care. These, plus the disrupted German population and the hundreds of thousands of prisoners are our immediate legacy of victory. The problem is immense; it staggers the imagination. One begins to get an idea of it if one realizes that in this army area alone there are more displaced persons to be handled than there are American soldiers in Europe.

This is the immediate aftermath of war! Perhaps you can understand why we over here don't have such a feeling of fulfillment on "V-E day" as no doubt exists at home. But I have written you of this before.

This has a practical relationship to my own immediate future. The teams are being broken up. My men and my nurse will return to headquarters. The officers will soon proceed to different civilian and POW hospitals to try and help clear up this tremendous medical problem. Whether this is a break-up of the Aux. is not clear, but it is not thought to be so. The duration of this type of duty is not known. I'm expecting to leave here at any time.

Meanwhile, yesterday was one of the most exciting days I've ever spent. I nearly put my foot into it that time, and I'm lucky to be here where I can write a letter to you! It all happened like this. I went back

over to the bridge where the prisoners had been coming in. The Russians were on the far bank, so no more were coming in. I dropped around to visit one of the companies of the regiment there to see if any of the boys had picked up a camera to sell, as I thought I would like to improve on that little one that I've been using all along. While we were chinning around, in comes a Russian lieutenant and a Russian soldier with an accordion. Much clapping of hands, copious drinks of fire-water, dancing in the streets, and general celebration. After a bit, nothing would do but we should go over as his guests and have lunch with him. Since they weren't letting anybody across the bridge, we went out south of town, found a boat, and rowed it over - two G.I.'s, two lieutenants from the company, and me, together with these two Russki's. The Russian soldiers thronged around and we had much hand-shaking. Finally, a "liberated" German jalopy arrived, and we all piled in to go back, I know not where. Ivan with the accordion was beating out a lively tune. The driver was making great time across country, oblivious to the absence or presence of a road, ditches, or other impedimenta. The only parts of the mechanism which he'd learned how to use were the horn and the throttle! All bid fair to be a joyous affair of international good-will, when disaster struck in the form of a convoy of about four or five sleek looking sedans, who gave us to understand that we should stop, which we did with difficulty. Whereupon, out of those vehicles poured more darn Russian brass than you could shake a stick at. Three Generals, two Colonels, some Lieutenant Colonels, and a Major or two. They viewed us with a distinctly jaundiced eye, and wanted to know what the hell was going on. One lean and hawk-eyed, lieutenant-general seemed to take considerable offense at the sight of these alleged Americanski's three miles into his lines. There was talk of "interning" us, and they started to collect our guns & cameras. Obviously, the time had come to have a little better meeting of minds with these big-chief Russki's, or it looked good for us to cool our heels in the local hoosegow, and for how long, God knows. So I set up a line of communication as follows: One of the G.I.'s spoke Polish; another was a liberated Russian, who understood Polish. I spoke to the one G.I., who translated to Polish; this went to the other, who converted it into Russian for the General. The responses came down in reverse order, thru channels. I started out with the offended American officer technique, pointing out that we were invited guests (albeit, of course, illegally) of one of his own officers. This was apparently a good stand to take, as pretty soon we began to get back our guns & cameras. They were apparently convinced we weren't Krauts in disguise. Then, as things started looking up a little, I gave him the business about the Americans being glad to see the Russians at last, that I thought they were being a bit stuffy about the whole thing, and that if he would come over with me, I was sure our Generals would be quite hospitable. (Thank God, he didn't take me up on that one!) This rather brash move appeared to have good effect, for some reason or other, as the sparks stopped flashing out of his eyes, and though he didn't smile, I thought the corners of his face relaxed just a little. Whereupon I threw him a snappy salute and made them shake hands all around, and we departed back where we came from, escorted by two Majors whose job was to see that we damn well got out of there. I never thought I'd be so glad to get across a river as I was that one!

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So it was quite an adventure. We didn't have any business being there, of course, and pretty near got in trouble for it. But, what an experience. We saw the Russian army as far Back as division-forward as it really is:- an uncensored and unescorted trip. I wish I dared tell you about my impressions, but they must wait. However, as you can gather, it was not all a frank and open-hearted meeting.

I must go now dear - -

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2 hrs. later - a lad got crushed by a truck and we had to snag out his badly lacerated spleen.

I love you sweet, I wish I knew anything about the future, but it's anybody's guess. We'll just have to sweat it out. Until the next time, darling.

All of me -

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