

June 6, 1945
D plus 365
Weidenbruck

Fletchie darling,

Maybe, at last, I can write you a letter longer than 1 page. Gradually one gets back one's feeling of the facts of life as such.

Yesterday, I drove up to Bad Meinberg taking Howard Romach & Sam Talmadge. We spent the afternoon on the range shooting Smeissirs, grease-guns, burp-guns, Thompson sub-machine guns, 45's, 38's, carbines. It sounded like a small war was on again. Then we went and had dinner at my old hospital where I had arranged for one of those old-time filet-mignon with sauce Beardsaise, meals. And was it good! Then in the evening, we took to the stream, and had some nice fishing. A very pleasant outing indeed, and the last touch of the sporting life for some time.

Today:- details. Trunks & such. How to pack along the liquor? Well, fortunately I am managing to keep my car along. For how long, I don't know. But it has been a god-send, and I'll hang on as long as possible.

The last few days have been a confused and hazy dream. Most everyone has been more or less drunk most of the time. I've never seen so much liquor consumed so constantly. The tremendous feeling of frustration, disappointment, and futility must work itself out. Then at last we can emerge into a realization of the facts of a new goal to be attained and a sense of a new mission. These things take time.

Your letter of May 23rd is full of worry about the looting business. Unfortunately, it is as bad as, and probably much worse, than you know. There are, in general, two types of confiscating:- legitimate, and illegitimate. The tools of war including equipment, arms, special service items, etc. belonging to the enemy are the legitimate prize of conquest. This includes rifles, pistols & other arms, uniforms, military vehicles, etc. It also includes railways, factories, coal mines, food stores, which are of use to our armies. These comprise the legitimate trophies of war. There are also the individual souvenirs --party insignia, plaques, flags, swords, etc. These are symbols of adventure of experience, and are not frowned on by our leaders. Then there is the strictly immoral "looting" of which you write. The taking of personal property, not for the use of the army or the gov't., but for your own personal profit. Of this there has been a tremendous amount! And it thrives in high places too! I have seen a full Colonel, commanding officer of an Evac., who spent every waking hour touring the countryside & the homes of people here - taking silverware, fine china, jewelry, watches, art works, etc. Then sending it home in carton lots. Taking the gun or dagger off a POW is

one thing; systematic stealing of personal property is another! Taking plates or glasses for the use of your soldiers' mess is one thing; using Dresden figurines as targets for pistol practise is another. Wanton vandalism seems to be part & parcel to war, also. I suppose if you are a bazooka or artillery man whose whole effective military life is bent on destruction loses all sense of property. His aim is to kill and destroy. A soldier who has to forage, devise & conquer seldom lets property rights interfere with his safety and the performance of his job. It is easy then to forget property rights outside of his job.

I suspect it is part & parcel of the tremendous moral breakdown which occurs in war. The release of the violent emotions, the sense of ~~release~~ immediacy which it brings, the loss of human values are intrinsic. I have often told you, war is immoral. These things are manifestations of it. The sexual promiscuity, looting, vandalism, rape, and wanton destruction are appallingly common; appalling, perhaps, in that it occurs in any degree. We, as a people, and the vast majority of our army, do not approve.

I have been guilty of real "looting" on one occasion -- the big train I sent Henny. It came from the house of the Gestapo chief of Dulken. (A murderer, torturer, war criminal of nth degree.) He will never return, of course. He's either dead now, or will be. But it wasn't mine. So I had, and still have, pangs of conscience for taking it. It wasn't right. But I would shoot it's owner without a second's thought. Funny, isn't it? All the other things I've sent fall into the category of legal trophies, or else, like the pewter, the projector, the film, etc., were paid for.

It's a tough war!

H.