

June 12, 1944

Dear Father,

I've grown accustomed to the comforts of the service. The biggest of all is the comradery. Everything I do is shared at a minimum with twelve other soldiers ranging in ages from eighteen to twenty-eight. The oldest have wives and children. Every one of them is a character and real pleasure to be around.

From the very start in the services, one is surrounded by others. The talking is incessant. It feels like a new introduction is made every minute. Remembering names is impossible. There are just too many. After the introductions are made, then there are constant questions about where you are from and what do you do.

Our barracks are a lot like the barn. It's just a big space lined with a bunch of beds. The sound echoes and to compensate, everyone talks a little louder. The sound keeps growing and growing until it becomes just a wash of noise.

The first night I hit the sack, my ears were ringing. It felt like I had been on the Massey all day long in the field. My ears actually hurt from the noise of people talking! I figured that things would quiet down after lights out, but the talking was replaced by snoring and heavy breathing. You can't get away!

It is hard to get used to all of the noise. During chow the trays are crashing on the table or forks and knives are scratching the plates and someone is telling some story about something back home. After chow, it's calisthenics and counting loudly. Then drills or class time lead by a brash Sergeant or Lieutenant who can only yell. Then the firing range. Then chow again followed by something else that requires way too much noise.

I miss the days of walking the fields to check on the crop and have nothing around. All you hear are the birds and the breeze. Not a person in sight. Heck, no evidence of a person for miles. I look forward to the chance to be the one who determines whether I hear another person's voice or not.

Unfortunately, I think that returning to that life will be just as equally jarring as my current life. I wonder if the quiet will be painful? Will I be able to sleep in silence? Will my meals feel empty with just the sizzle of mom's frying pan filling up the room with noise and greasy smells?

I truly look forward to going home and being with you and mother once again. I've made some wonderful friendships that I cannot wait to tell you all about! My closest pal, Bob, whom I've written about in the past, lives in a one room apartment in New York with his sister and parents. One room for four people! It is quite likely that more people live in his apartment building than all of Andrew! There are ten rooms to a floor and a minimum of four people living in each room. I don't know how many floors there are in the building, but there may be more people living in that one building than all of Iowa!

It's these kinds of stories that I long to tell you. I have been truly blessed to have this opportunity to meet so many people and eventually call them friend. Nothing against home, but there is no way I would ever have the ability to be changed by so many lives from all walks of life if I hadn't left. I feel like a better person for knowing them and experiencing their lives.

Father, I know that you are proud (you tell me in every letter) that I am serving and protecting our country. When I come home, I want to show you what serving truly means. While I'm over here, I'm going to rip down a Nazi flag and then have all of my friends sign it. The flag will represent the strength that I've achieved and the names will signify the friendships I've developed during my service. When I get back home, we'll sit at the kitchen table each night and I'll pick a name to tell you all about the man behind the signature.

I hope you never read this letter.

Your loving son,

Walt