

September 25

1945

My dear family:

Having returned from a four weeks' European tour during which I visited England, France, Germany and Italy, I will confine my contribution to the family letter to an account of it.

A group of radio people, sixteen in number, were invited by the U. S. Army to make this tour. After being equipped with uniform as war correspondents (we wore these uniforms during the entire trip) and going through processing in Washington we left New York at midnight on August 10th in a big C 54 plane. We made stops at Labrador and Greenland and arrived at Prestwick, Scotland in the wee hours of Sunday morning, August 12. Actually flying time was about 19 1/2 hours.

We then went down to London where we spent three days and were there during V J day. I was fortunate enough to get a ticket to the opening sessions of Parliament where I saw and heard King George read his speech from the Throne and Mr. Atlee and Mr. Churchill speak to the House of Commons. That evening I made a broadcast (my first and I hope my last) on very short notice which was beamed to the United States and carried by CBS. We spent some time looking around London and a day in examining the operations of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

My overall impression of England (really London) was very favorable - in fact more favorable than it has been heretofore. The bomb damage is ~~too~~ not too apparent, and what there was is very well cleaned up. The English people while still a little shabby seem to have a very good spirit and a considerable determination to get on with their solution of their post-war problems. As to the political situation, I obviously could form no very intelligent opinion, but I did get the impression that the program of the new Labor government will not be nearly so world shaking as many of us had thought.

From London we flew to Paris (we went every place by plane having one assigned to us for all of our Continental travel). Paris was quite a shock to me. There was very little bomb damage or physical destruction but business seemed at a practical standstill and the people filled with defeatism and lassitude. The shops had very little to sell and the majority of them did not bother to open, food and clothing were very scarce and expensive, and everything to be dealt in only on the black market. This situation did not affect us on our trip, however, as we did all of our eating at army messes.

I looked up one of our old friends from our Paris days who is a lieutenant in the French Army and found that he, too, despaired of the future of France unless the people quickly came to their senses and buckled down to work. I learned that the Frenchman who was perhaps my best friend had died during the last year of the war, but I could not learn the details.

We spent considerable time examining the work of the Army which is headquartered in Paris and also the operations of the French radio system.

We spent a day in and around Reims looking over a series of camps where the G.I.s are being assembled for shipment back to the States. These were temporary camps and life seemed to be pretty rugged. Each camp had attached to it a contingent of German prisoners of war who were doing most of the work. They seemed to be well-fed and the ones I saw, at least, did not impress me as specimens of a beaten people. We then went to Luxembourg and toured the battlefields around Bastogne (in the corner of Belgium) where the Battle of the Bulge took place last December. The countryside was pretty well littered with tanks which had been shot up and we could see how it was touch and go with the Americans when the Germans were on the rampage at that time.

We then flew into Germany, flying over Bremen where I got my ^{first} glimpse of real bomb damage. Our first stop was Hamburg where we toured the city and made a motor launch inspection of the Hamburg harbor - probably the greatest in Europe. Here also the bomb damage was immense - most of the harbor installations being bombed out, ships burned even while remaining afloat, and many half-submerged ships, and in the city itself whole sections nothing but rubble with a few walls standing here and there which would have to be torn down before reconstruction could commence.

From Hamburg we flew to Berlin. Having seen Berlin before the war, the bomb damage here impressed me more than anywhere else. For example, Unter den Linden which was perhaps the richest looking street that I knew anything about was so completely plastered with bombs that every building was either a mass of rubble or so damaged that repair seemed impossible. The same was true for blocks around, and this included the Chancellory, the former American Embassy and Propaganda Ministry building.

In Berlin we saw our first Russian soldiers, and to my unpractised eye they were not very impressive. The control area by the Russians, British and Americans seems to be working pretty well, but it will continue to be an interesting and informing experiment in international cooperation. The language difference and the great difference in the background of the Russians on the one hand and the Americans and British on the other constitute

obstacles of the first magnitude.

From Berlin we went to Salzburg and Berchtesgaden where we saw Hitler's retreat (pretty well demolished by bombs) and his Eagle's Nest house on top of the mountain. This was really a sort of tourist sightseeing expedition.

We then went to Frankfurt where we had a conference with General Eisenhower (I still think he is one of the great men of our time - and from Kansas) and saw something of the operations of the Army of Occupation. For example, we attended a brief trial of a German woman who had sworn she did not belong to the Nazi Woman's Auxiliary (when she did) and looked over the recaptured loot which the Germans had taken from the conquered nations - even including gold and silver fillings from the teeth of their victims.

Back to Paris and thence to the Riviera where we fully enjoyed two and a half days at the Army rest center there. This is run by the Army in order to give the soldiers a vacation - generally seven days - in perhaps the most famous playground of the world.

We then went to Rome where the principal event was an audience with the Pope. Incidentally, several persons remarked how closely I resembled him, and as he bears the name Pius XIII some of the boys thereafter referred to me as Josephus Reamus I.

We returned to Paris and from there left for the United States in another C 54 stopping at the Azores and Newfoundland on the way back and arriving four weeks and one day from the time of our departure.

I can't say that the trip was enjoyable but it was most interesting and informative. I arrived home considerably fagged out, physically and emotionally, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems facing Europe today - the principal one for a great many people being how to keep alive this winter, and too confused to have a final opinion on anything. That's not quite right, because I do have a definite opinion on this - no matter how things go here or how badly we manage our own affairs, America is still so much better off than the rest of the world that comparisons are pretty meaningless.

With love to you all,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Joe', written in a cursive style.