

Have Faith in Your Buddies

July 3 – 3rd Platoon suffered 9 casualties – twins clipped. Send one squad up to Lt. Shaw to fill in gap. Caution men against air bursts.

July 4 – Move rest of 2nd Platoon on line. Send squad leaders up to look over area. Relief will be right after evening chow.

July 5 – Report to Battalion through Company. 1. Outpost observes Jerries moving about in houses down in valley (look up map coordinates) – 1 sniper shot. 2. Mortars (60 mm) fired 120 rounds – killed and wounded some enemy. 3. Enemy Machine gun emplacement spotted. Cannot neutralize with artillery fire.

July 5, 1944

Sweetheart, I love you. (Big secret) You're very extra special, and I still think it's incredible that I am going to be able to have you with me all my life. It's a great life. I got lotsa mail today – 11 letters (4 Of them v-mail) from you. Your letters were all the back dates – from May 22 to June 3. I laughed myself sick at your description of your picnic in the rain. I can just picture your getting soaked. But throughout your letter you mentioned that you weren't receiving my letters. As you probably now realize I wasn't in England for very long (although I did write quite a few letters) and I suspect that the authorities held a lot of mail up prior to D-Day. By now with my permanent address things ought to improve.

While I was in England I got to Liverpool and Bristol, but I was whisked out of there before I had a chance to visit London (just purely off the records – I think I made the fastest entry into combat of any soldier in the Allied Armies.) Bristol, which is known as the city of churches and pubs has a population of over a million. The whole downtown section was leveled in the Blitz. Another lieutenant and I had dinner at the Hotel Royal right on the square, where Normans in 1291 established a headquarter.

Back here in France, I have very little time for visiting – although occasionally in the course of my activities I see things. Today, believe it or not, our whole company took HOT showers! No, our army isn't following us up with Swedish masseurs and manicurists. We captured the shower equipment and converted it to our use. That was the first time I washed my body in a month, and I almost froze to death when I took that layer of dirt off. This afternoon I went over to see the wreckage of one of our P-51's in the next field. Rummaging around I came upon some writing (via lipstick) on the inside of the wing structure. It was evidently put on there by the riveter back in the factory. I also mosied over to a town and went inside the church. The church is rather modern, having been built in 1691. I'm not trying to be funny – some of the structures around here are ancient.

If I don't write in the near future don't worry, sweetheart. We'll probably just be chasing Hitler's robots around. So far I've been only slightly harassed and have had a minimum of close calls. All you can do is keep your eyes open and stay on the alert. Then if anything happens you can say "to hell with it," because it's out of your hands anyway. Some of the kids think they lead a charmed life around here, and they're inclined to say "God will see me through." That may be so, but if you stick your head above a hedgerow, Jerry'll knock it off! I gave a little lecture this morning, and hard-heartedly pointed out that God is still on the side with the best cannon, and if they hold a little more faith in man, particularly their buddies, they'll not meet God so soon.

Write soon, darling –
All my love, Wayneo

Finally, a long letter from Wayne! Earlier, I had gotten used to receiving very descriptive letters from him regularly. His short notes were appreciated because any correspondence meant he was still all right. But I wanted to know more, and this letter was more like what I had come to expect.

His mentioning that he had a "minimum of close calls" did not escape me. I said an extra prayer for his safety that night.

Wayne's mention of a hot bath reaffirmed the fact that soldiers in the front line were lucky to be able to shave and get haircuts, let alone have the luxury of a hot bath.

July 6 – Report: 1. Fired MG mortars into valley. Burned down 3 houses and destroyed fake brush pile with .50 cal. incendiaries. 2. Enemy very bold. Taking sun bath under observation. Probably SS or paratroops. 3. Mortar fire landed near outpost. Knocked me off hedgerow. 4. Machine pistol fire spraying my position.

July 7 – Report: 3 dead doggies in valley (probably from 2nd Division patrol) 38th Recon. got patrol within 50 yards of enemy machine gun. Request tank to knock it out. 5 enemy seen to move into house 20 yards in front of my position. Burned house down. Fired 6 bazookas into house. Ordered by Battalion to take patrol into house.

July 8 – 0430 Fires from house died down. Took patrol past outpost. Jerries pulled out but 1 enemy wounded in house. Can be heard 150 yards away. Four enemy carried him away in stretcher. Prepare to move platoon to rear. One man blinded by bazooka.

July 9 – 5th Division to relieve 1st Division on line. 10 trucks to report to company. Moving to rest area in rear of Isigny. Caution men against excessive movement during relief. Sg. Misa to report immediately to quartering party.

July 10 – Report in to rest area. Division to participate in coming offensive. Check platoon and personal equipment. Do not harass men – check men's feet.

July 11 – Take men to movies tonight 2100. Men must take weapons. Platoon calisthenics from 0900–1000.

They took weapons to a movie! Mortar fire knocked him off the hedgerow! In spite of seeing his men dead in the valley, hearing a wounded German scream though 150 yards away and having a man blinded by a bazooka, he continued to write without a hint of what he had witnessed.

Reading the relevant information in his notebook now gives me a picture of the war as Wayne lived it, something I did not learn from his letters.

July 11, 1944

Dearest darling Laura,

I'm glad you're getting my mail now, sweetheart, so you won't worry about me. Lucky me – I've received all my back mail now – the latest three from you, June 16, 18, 19, were delivered right up here to me today. I think pretty soon I'll be getting mail delivered to this address directly, because surely you've received some of my letters from France already. I wrote beaucoup.

I love you and I appreciate you more than you'll ever know. You're always worrying that you're not doing enough for the war effort, but sweetheart, don't be silly. I'm very proud of you because of your attitude, but what you sometimes seem to forget is that our own extra special team is up here. I may be here alone physically, but you're mostly what makes me go. Honest, darling, be a good girl and stop fretting.

Last night I did not sleep very well. We ran into a little trouble and had some men hurt (none will die) and the men were jittery. Somebody woke me up about every forty-five minutes.

I got a letter from Red – he's flying missions from a Liberator base in England. Wants to know why I haven't written. (I didn't know his address.)

Altogether I got 14 letters from you in the past 4 days, darling, and I think I'm the happiest soldier in France. They were dated from May 31 to June 19. One letter was written on June 6. It was nice. You didn't know where I was and you were worried but

you weren't scared. God knows, it's no fun to be scared. I am doing the best I can, and if anything happens you will know that I was a pretty good soldier. And you'll be a good soldier too, in a different way, because you'll know that I want it that way. If you'll promise me that, my mind will be eased and then when I come home we'll both laugh about it all.

Goodnight, sweetheart –
for you alone, all my love, Wayne

In my letter written on June 6, D-Day in Normandy, I wrote that I wasn't scared. I lied. Actually, I was petrified. But I hid my fears. I knew it would not help his morale for me to cry and worry in my letters, so I tried to be cheerful, and apparently I succeeded.

July 12 – Caution men to stand up with helmet on to avoid flak injury. One Jerry ME-109 shot down – pilot bailed out and 1500 doggies ran to capture him. “Never have so many done so little to so few.”

July 14 – Captain visited Cherbourg. All towns on rd to Cherbourg completely destroyed. No dope about coming offensive.

July 15 – Inspect all weapons in platoon. Men getting careless with arms. Any man accidentally discharging weapon will be courtmartialed. Censored mail to be sent to CP.