

Jan. 8, 1945

Belgium

Goodmorning, darling,

Last night it began to snow and this morning there is about an inch and a half of nice, light, powdery snow on the ground and silhouetting the branches. Perhaps it may help make things more difficult for the Jerry, but right at the moment it seems to be serving only to ground our air force. One gradually gets so that one interprets all weather phenomenon in terms either of how it affects the tactical situation or of how it affects your personal discomfort. The fact that the world is a fairy-land of snow today is of no import, and gets scant heed. Thus, too, with all of life in time of war.

Yesterday promised to be a gala day, so we started out in high expectation. The afternoon was spent clinching our entree into the upper crust of village society. We visited the old doctor and his family, who live in the big white house, and own a good part of the land hereabouts. The one son is dead, but the other collects stamps and is an amateur photographer of some enthusiasm. We're getting him to photograph Ernie's cartoons tomorrow. The old Doc's story of the history of Liege was very interesting, and threw much light on the attitude of fatalism and acceptance of hardships of these people of north central Europe. Their entire life history has been one of warfare, waged by others over issues not their own, but waged in their land, in their villages, on their farms. Sack & pillage,- rebuild; sack & pillage,- rebuild; and thus life goes on, to the tread of the march of some foreign soldier.

After the conquest of the Romans came a thousand or more years of local fights between the counties and duchies and baronies. The town of Tongres, mentioned in Caesar, the home of Ambiorix, later one of the bigger Roman citadels in Gaul, was sacked and burned no less than three times, in these local fights. Then came the emergence of Austria as the great power in Europe. The Austrian conquests spread north & Liege became an Austrian principality. Then arose the power of the French; again the drums & fifes of the foreign soldier, and Liege became a department of France. Came the rising power of the uniting German peoples, and in '71 once more allegiance to a new power was forced upon her. In the split up in Northern Europe, it fell to Belgium. In '14, one remembers the valiant siege and subsequent sacking of Liege. And again in '40; & now, in '45, the tides of battle surge at its gates. Now it is the American and British soldiers who are quartering in their homes.

Thus they live in a continuously unfolding battlefield, battles fought by other people. We in our young, robust national enthusiasm and pride can little understand these people.

A fact of some interest to me was that the windmill is a Turkish invention, and was brought to Northern Europe by the returning Crusaders.

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Page 2 - of letter dated Jan. 8, 1945

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No doubt most of my packages have shared in the evil fate of being in the hands of the Jerry. Hope opening those Christmas gifts all lovingly wrapped meant something to those guys. The fact that we should spend so much effort, time, & shipping space to "worthless" packages of tinned goods no doubt appears ridiculous to them, weak and foolish. Perhaps a few of them can realize the significance of those packages, the faith in the home, in the family, in the humane relations of mankind, which they represent. We think it is important to keep alive the spirit of Christmas, for it is, to a large measure, this spirit for which we fight,- and we are willing to prolong the war to do it.

I was informed yesterday that I have been awarded the Bronze Service Star for my participation in the Normandy invasion. Official notification has not yet reached me, so I don't know how the citation reads. So your husband has been decorated, my sweet, if that gives you pleasure. It is nice, of course; but I can think of a thousand G.I.'s of those early days who deserve it a hundred times more than I.

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