

Genoa, February 21, 1940

Dear Dad:

As you have gathered, I hope, from my cryptic telegram of today, I had quite a surprise waiting for me when I landed at Genoa yesterday. When I reached the dock, one of my traveling companions told me that a bell boy had been paging me with an official letter. I went back aboard the ship and finally found the boy. The letter was from Mr. Ramsey, the consul here, enclosing a copy of a cable from the Department stating that my assignment to Basel had been canceled and that I was assigned to the consulate at Milan and should report there immediately. "The best laid plans of mice and men..."

At first, on the pier, I was so busy trying to get things through the customs and expressed to Milan that I didn't have time to think about it. Immediately after I got to the hotel, I began to count up the reasons for and against. In the first place, Milan is a larger more important office. There will be more work there and more people for company. One of the officers [page 2] who is there now is Perry Laukhuff from Mt. Vernon [Ohio], whom I met once in Washington and gained a favorable impression of. Living is supposed to be cheaper there, although it seems to me as if prices were pretty high. It is near the beautiful lake region which I visited so briefly last Spring.

On the other hand, I had made all my preparations for Basel and had my mind set on it. It means quite a lot to reorient your thinking in such a short time. The greatest advantage of Basel was that I knew something about the language, whereas I don't have the vaguest rudiments of Italian. Why I didn't even know what the expression for "place" was until today. Very fortunately for me, a man from the Consulate was on the dock and helped me get my tickets and ship my baggage. I'm not likely to be able to get up to Stuttgart, much less Frankfurt or Alzay, although Betty Lou would have to come through Milan on her way to the boat in Genoa. Import duties are higher - American cigarettes, tobacco and liquor are out of reach. Scotch is about \$8.00 a bottle. I picked up a case in Gibraltar, and have been advised to have bring it in even if the duty is high, as it would still be well under the local price. I also will have to pay a tax on each tube in my radio. It is a damned nuisance.
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By this time I'm fairly philosophical about it all. The Department undoubtedly has some good reason for changing the assignment, and I suppose it will all work out well in the end. Perhaps I will even get to like the Italians, - something I've never done in the past. It's all part of "the game", part of the sacrifice you make for being in the Service.

I am leaving by train tomorrow afternoon for Milan. Leon and Tilly Corles are sailing about the same time for Barcelona. Although I had plenty to do today, I could have gotten off earlier if I hadn't wanted to stay with them just as long as possible. This trip has been grand largely because of their presence, they are wonderful friends, and I hope - and I believe they do too - that we will be able to get together again some time, and the sooner the better. Carl Norden [?] is off for Prague via Zurich and Berlin, with most his stores of food, etc., left here for shipment. We all hope he gets it.

The war has certainly played hob with communications. Numerous people from the "Washington" en route to Paris and London were hanging around for about 24 hours trying to get accommodations and worrying [page 4] about visas, etc. The Berlin people started off via the Bumer [?] and Munich. Accommodations there are very bad, too. Only with Switzerland does traffic appear to be normal.

My hand and eyes are tired, and my pen is not flowing well, as you have doubtless noticed, so I will sign off. I will write to Betty Lou anyway and do what I can for her. Please give my love to Sarah, Janie, Dorothy, and the others.

With love,