

American Consulate
Milan, Italy
March 7, 1940

Dear Folks:-

It is now two weeks since I arrived in Milan, and it is high time that I gave you an account of myself. I took the train up from Genoa on the afternoon of Washington's birthday, and was met at the station by Perry Laukhuff, vice consul here, whom I met once before in Washington. He is from Mt. Vernon [Ohio], and was born and raised in Dayton. He took me to a hotel, the same one where the consul general lives, so that I got to meet this gentleman immediately upon arrival.

The American colony here, which is fairly extensive, was giving a Washington's birthday party that night, and nothing would do but that I must attend, even though I would have preferred to go to bed. Further, my tux was packed in my trunk, which had not yet been cleared through the customs, so that I had to wear ordinary clothes. The affair turned out to be somewhat more pleasant than I had expected; there were lots of people there, and a good orchestra for dancing. I got to meet a lot of the Americans whom I might not ordinarily have seen for some time, and I danced with more elderly ladies than I had during the past two or more years.

For the time being, I am staying at the Albergo della Città, formerly the Hotel de la Ville, where I get a room with bath for 50 lire a day (\$2.50) and three meals for 25 lire more. The food is very good, and I consider this a very reasonable arrangement. However, Laukhuff has been transferred to Berlin, and as soon as he leaves, I am going to move into the apartment he has been occupying. It belongs to an American lady, a Mrs. Gallo, who decided not to return to Italy until after the war. The place is well furnished, although more according to Italian taste than ours. The facilities are very modern, and it is located within easy walking distance of the office. The rent is 1100 lire monthly - about \$55, and in addition there are expenses for telephone, light, and other incidentals. Perry says the place has been well heated during the winter, which is distinctly in its favor, for Sarah knows how reluctant Europeans are to heat their quarters. I fear next winter may not be so pleasant, however, especially if the war continues, as there is much talk of a coal shortage. Until the present, the bulk of Italy's coal has come by ship from Germany, via Rotterdam. After allowing this to continue all during the present winter, the British have decided that it must stop. The Duce has protested and broken off negotiations for a trade treaty, but the general feeling here is now that Italy is too weak to be able to do much about it, and it is expected that negotiations will be resumed. This may mean that for next winter they will have only such coal as can be hauled by rail from Germany. Not only is this an expensive procedure, but it is doubtful whether there is sufficient rolling stock available to carry such a load.

Among other shortages to be noted at present are coffee and sugar. Small amounts of coffee can be bought in restaurants and cafés, but householders are allowed only a quarter of a pound a month. I am going to take steps to import some soon, as I am supposed to have free entry for six months for my personal effects. There is some doubt, however, about whether this includes foodstuffs, and I think the amount of coffee one can import is limited to 10 kg. (22 lbs.). Laukhuff is so lucky: he has no vices at all. He doesn't smoke, so the high price of cigarettes (50 cents U.S.) doesn't bother him. Neither does the high price of Scotch - \$10 a bottle, and worst of all, he prefers tea for breakfast, so he doesn't miss coffee either.

One of the minor difficulties I have encountered so far is the question of importing my radio. I don't know whether or not I mentioned in my letters from the boat and Genoa that the RCA Co. had the radio on board the Washington in New York. The sight of a radio is to the Italian customs men as a red flag to a bull. They just blow up at the mere thought.

Apparently, the idea is not so much propaganda, as you might suppose, but tax. Casting a reflective eye on mine, the official opined that a radio of that size should pay at least 3000 lire – \$150. That is something, since the original cost was \$40.20. I have written to the Embassy in Rome to have them get permission from the Foreign Office for its importation, and I am assured that permission will be granted in time, but it is expected that several weeks may elapse. Since I am not now in a position to use the set, I do not care. I only hope that they are not charging storage on it, which is not unlikely.

Last Saturday night I made my first visit to the famous Scala opera house. I was invited, together with one of the other men from the office, to sit with the Hungarian consul general, Baron Abele, and his family. The box they had was very poor – so close to the edge of the stage that one couldn't see more than half the stage at once. We heard "Prince Igor". It was well sung and beautifully staged. From what I have heard, I gather that the settings, costumes, etc. are both more elaborate and more modern than those in use at the Met. The government stands behind La Scala, and uses it as one of its show places, so no expense is too great. The leading tenor was Hungarian and knew the Abeles, so we all applauded vigorously, and every time he made a curtain call, he made one bow directly to our box.

The following evening I saw the Abeles again, this time at the home of a wealthy Italian-American who has the title of Count. Laukhuff has recently had him expatriated as an American. This was one of the most elaborate dinners in one of the fanciest houses I have ever seen. The Count's home is virtually a museum, but done in good taste and not overcrowded with museum pieces. I should explain that the reason for my being there was to be company to Abele's daughter Alice, a very attractive girl. I was relieved, however, to discover that they had already been informed about our rules regarding marriage, so I have nothing to worry about. Knowing Alice gives me an opportunity to refresh my German a bit, as English is practically the only major language she doesn't speak. She knows German, French Italian and, of course, Hungarian, very well indeed. Her father is even more accomplished as a linguist.

While on the subject of languages, I might mention that I began yesterday to take Italian lessons from an Italian lady of good family who has instructed most of the other officers here. I am planning to take two lessons a week, after office hours in the late afternoon. I am not very hopeful about making very rapid progress, however, as the other officers speak very badly with the exception of Laukhuff, and he, though good, is not exactly fluent in over a year of industrious labor. I have the feeling that this lady is such a grammatical purist that her pupils tend to know a little very well but are rather inclined to fumble a bit and be very slow and careful. In many ways, that is a best way, but I had hoped for quicker results.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter to Betty Lou that I wrote a couple of days ago. I hope you will find it satisfactory. I am also sending a copy to Curt and Mary, as they had also asked me to write. If Betty Lou decides to leave, she will undoubtedly pass through Milan on her way out, since all traffic from Germany comes through here. I will, of course, look after her and do anything I can to help her. If you buy the ticket, I strongly recommend the U.S. Lines. They are considerably cheaper than the Italian Lines, there is plenty of room, and good service. I have some acquaintances on the Washington who would, I am sure, look after her very well.

It is now considerably past my lunch time, so I am going to quit. I might add that I have been in excellent health so far. The weather for the past few days has been mild and pleasant – one of the nicest parts of the year, the natives tell me. I hope that you are equally well and in good spirits. I expect to mark this for the Manhattan which is sailing on Saturday, March 9th and is due in New York about ten days later. Please let me know when this arrives. As most of the eastbound mail is being stopped by the British, I suggest you send your

letters to me through the pouch. To do this, they should be marked:

William L. Krieg
American Vice Consul, Milan, Italy
Care of the Diplomatic Mail Section
Department of State, Washington

The letters should bear the regular 5 cent postage.

With love and best wishes,
[William]