

IN REPLY REFER TO

FILE NO.

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Rec'd*  
6/26-40

AMERICAN CONSULATE  
Milan, Italy  
June 10, 1940

Dear Folks:

Sarah's air mail letter of May 31 arrived on June 6, which I consider excellent time. I was much chagrined to learn that my letter of Aril 17th had been so long in reaching you. It is one of those that I gave to a courier to put on board the *Washington*, and it seems likely that the person on the ship to whom it was given forgot to mail it when the ship was in New York the first time, and so it didn't get mailed until the ship arrived there again. That's what comes of using informal ways of sending mail; nevertheless, I am going to try it again with this one by sending to Genoa to be put on one of the Export Line boats, which is supposed to leave Wednesday the 12th.

I had a lovely time over the week-end just passed. I was invited by some American acquaintances to spend the week end with them at their Villa at Menaggio, on the Lake of Como. This is a heavenly spot, near Bellagio, which I visited last May (1939) with Hart, and of which you have picture post cards. Everything was so quiet and peaceful there, and it was easier to forget the whole vexed international situation and relax in the sunshine. I got to go in swimming for the first time this year, and enjoyed it very much although the water was very cold and I couldn't stay in long. I also got a little sunburn from lying on the beach. The villa itself and the ground around it were so utterly beautiful that you wouldn't believe me if I were able to describe them.. The ground[s] are not merely tended; they are manicured. Every blade of grass is just the right height; every bush is perfectly trimmed; and the flowers are gorgeous. From the terrace there is a perfect view of the Alps, reflected into the clear blue waters of the lake. The place was well staffed with servants, and never have I experienced such attentive service. For instance, while I was swimming Sunday morning, they washed and ironed my pajamas, so that when I returned, they were all neatly folded up in a closet with a sachet of English lavender on top. They also laundered my shirt, for no good reason at all. Everything else was in proportion. Under such circumstances, the war might as well be in another world, although we couldn't always refrain from discussing it, Returning to Milan was a horrible anti-climax.

The typing on this you will probably find even worse than usual. The reason is two-fold. First, I am already late for my Italian lesson; second, Mussolini is about to make a speech, and from the Consulate one can hear the frenzied cheering of the crowds gathered in public places to listen to it. It is generally supposed to be "fateful", whatever that is. We have got heartily sick here of expecting war any day, and it is getting on everyone's nerves. After a while, one wishes only that they would make up their minds; even war seems preferable to the continued uncertainty. Of this I am certain, however. It was a fine thing that Betty Lou returned when she did. Every time I hear

the news from London, with the laconic announcement: "Last night our bombers carried out raids against railway junctions and other military objective[s] in the Rheinlands", I am relieved to know that she is home again. And no doubt Sarah is even more relieved. As a matter of fact, the first raid was carried out just two nights after she left.

There isn't much more to say, or time to say it in. I will only add that, in case this country (Italy) should enter the war, I hope you will not worry about me, since the consensus of opinion here is that it is unlikely that the Allies will be able to spare the force necessary to bomb seriously the Italian cities. We here are not worried at all, and feel sure that nothing will happen to us. After what our colleagues in the Low Counties went through – without personal harm – it hardly seems likely that anything would happen to us here, since it is anticipated that the principal fighting will take place in the colonies: in Malta, Gibraltar, Tunis, Etc. Of course, we may well be wrong, but that seems most likely. The speech is going on now, punctuated by the eternal cheer at short intervals. Maybe you are listening to it too, but you wouldn't understand much more than I would. As you say, the mails will probably be very irregular from now on. I expect to send all my letters by the pouch, in the belief that the pouches will always get through, even though it may take a long time. Even when you don't hear from me, you will know that I think about you all often, and often wish I were home, away from it all. Give my best to all the friends and relatives. I am anxious to hear how Betty is getting along, and if there are any chances.

With love to all,

*William*

*P.S. The war has now begun. I expect to be very busy.*



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