

by air mail

AMERICAN CONSULATE
Milan, Italy
June 29, 1940

Recd 7/8-40

Dear Folks:

I wrote to you-all last Friday, June 21st, but I have since heard that the ship on which that letter was supposed to have gone is still in Naples. Apparently, both sides have laid mines in various places in the Mediterranean, and neither wishes to betray the location of the fields by guiding a neutral ship thorough, so there is a possibility that the *Excalibur* may be in Naples for some time yet. In order that you may not worry about me, I am sending this air mail, which is supposed to be still functioning. I got Daddy's letter of June 3rd on June 12th by air mail. I hope that mail service through France will soon be resumed, but of course it is hard to tell how long it will be before this is done, and how long it will take the mail to go through once it is done. We have just been informed by the Consulate in Geneva that at the moment, no trains at all are running into France. Two courriers have recently passed through here, trying to get mail from the Balkans to Washington; they had no idea whether or not they would be able to get through. Since Italy entered the war, the Consulate has not received any mail at all from the Department; we have received some cabled instructions, but that is all. Nor has anyone here received any mail, except a little air mail, from the United States.

It seems that it is true that every cloud has a silver lining. Although we all miss hearing from home, not having any instruction from Washington has greatly decreased the amount of work we have to do. All our old passport cases, which had been referred to the Department, are now quiescent. The commercial department is enjoying the non-arrival of trade inquiries, which require a long a[nd] careful letter explaining that there is no chance for importation from the U.S. at this time. All in all, in spite of a slight increase in work due to our assumption of foreign interests, I have never, in all the time I have been in the Service, seen a time when there was so little to do. I don't mind it at all, as it gives me a chance to study Italian and read the books brought over with me. I have now finished "Andrew Jackson" (2 vols.), and am now reading some books on the current situation.

Last weekend I had a fine trip around Lake Garda, which you will find on the map a few miles east of Milan. George Whittingthill, one of the clerks at the Consulate, has a car and permission to use it, and we went together in it this little "Mickey Mouse" car. It is so small and light that one person can easily push it if the battery fails to work. The lake and its surroundings are most beautiful. We left Milan at about three Saturday afternoon, and had arrived at the shores of the lake by six. We drove around the southern end, and stayed all night on the east shore in a town called Garda. Sunday morning, we continued to complete the circle, the farthest point from Milan being at Riva, at the north end of the lake, right in the shadow of the mountains. Riva was Austrian territory before the first World War. By hurrying a little, we managed to get back to Milan before dark. It is very difficult now, driving at night, because the cars are allowed just barely enough light so that they can be seen approaching, but not enough to see anything with. I bought a number of picture postcards of the lake and its surroundings, and I will send you some when normal post service is resumed. Naturally, they are too heavy to send air mail, as I found out when I sent that bunch of pictures for Betty Lou, at a cost of over a dollar. As it is, a letter of this size costs over thirty cents, so I'm afraid most of my friends at home will have to rely on you to relay my greetings to them. Betty Lou will be glad to learn that I have finally received permission from

Rome to send that parcel of miscellaneous groceries to her relatives in Germany. The package actually started on its way yesterday, and I think they should have it within a week, although heaven only knows what further formalities will have to be settled first. In any case, they're off my hands, and we can now let "Tante Gertrud" worry about them.

In spite of the war, life goes on quite normally here. The only obviously unusual feature is the nightly black-out, which, as I mentioned above, acts as a splendid deterrent against going out at night. I, for one, am quite content in these days to stay at home, read and listen to the radio at night. I usually stay at the office, writing letters, etc., until about eight o'clock, and twice a week I have my Italian lesson in the early evening. As a result, I rarely finish eating until about nine o'clock, and there isn't much point in trying to do anything after that. Food is still adequate; we had four meatless days a week before the war, and this has not yet been changed, although there are rumors that restrictions on the amounts of purchases will soon be instituted. Sale of coffee, either for home or public consumption, has been stopped, but that doesn't make much difference to me, as I have enough at home for some time. If transportation is ever re-established, I may ask you to send some things, but for the time being, I am getting along all right.

I hope you are all in the best of health, and having as lovely weather as we are here. I intend to send Janie something for graduation by pouch soon, but that may take a long time to arrive; in the meantime, congratulations and love! If she keeps her promise to take typing lessons, you might ask her to make copies of these letters for Minnie and Jennie.

Love,

William

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