

IN REPLY REFER TO

FILE NO.

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SEP 18 1940

AMERICAN CONSULATE
Milan, Italy
August 9, 1940

Dear Dad:-

Your letter of June 24th arrived August 3rd, together with the back issues of magazines and quite a bit of other mail, including bills. I guess one has to take the bad with the good. You should have seen the stack of mail the courier had when he arrived: about a month's accumulation or more. He had thirteen sacks for Italy alone, and besides that, he had many others for the Balkans. It took a small truck to haul the bags from the railroad station to the Consulate. It was very irritating to look at the bags marked "Rome" and to know that all our mail was in there and that it would all have to go to Rome and then back, taking a couple of days more. Being a courier is a nasty job nowadays. He said it took him about three days to get from Bern to Vichy, the seat of the French government, a distance of only about two hundred miles. Of course all his experiences were not that bad, but all trains are terribly crowded these days, and it was often difficult for him to get sufficient room for the bags. When he arrived here, for instance, he had one compartment on a sleeping car for bags alone, and another for himself and the confidential sacks.

Incidentally, his report of conditions in France was very interesting, although perhaps you have read it already in the papers. He says it is hard to describe the confusion, both physical and mental. According to him, the people are generally apathetic; they do not place any great confidence in the present government, which is dominated by Laval, a Politician even shadier than the ones he replaced. The old marshal Pétain is, of course, just a figure-head, although he has influence in matters of general policy. The people do not know what kind of a government they want now; all agree that some kind of a change is necessary, but none know in which direction this should be carried out. In the meantime, the industrial organization of the country is in the worst possible condition. In unoccupied France, practically no gasoline at all is available, even to people to whom ration cards have been permitted. I read in a Swiss newspaper that dairy products have virtually disappeared from the cities, while thirty miles away, the farmers are unable to market their crops and products; all this is because there is no gas for the trucks to haul things into town. Shipments arriving in a station are indefinitely delayed because there is no means of distributing it. In other words, the whole structure of society is in a state of collapse, and all the government can think of to do is abolish the Constitution and bring up various former leaders to trial for alleged malfeasance. I hardly think this course would satisfy the people long if they were free agents, but with the majority of the country under occupation, of course, there is no normal political life.

Things here remain much as usual, except for the mail service with the United States, which is very erratic, to put it mildly. They have changed the meatless days around so that meat is sold only on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. We therefore have to buy enough on Monday to last for five days, but so far this seems to be working out all right. The electric refrigerator is the thing that makes this possible. This system shows that Italy is not yet as egalitarian as Germany. Instead of rationing everything, they allow those who can afford refrigeration to buy all they want on certain days, while the poor (and those who eat in restaurants) have to do without meat most of the time. We still have plenty of butter, although I notice that it costs me about 20 cents American a day or more. The government is doing its utmost to prevent a rise in prices, and I certainly hope they will be successful. On the other hand, if prices are fixed, it usually works out that sooner or later the supply runs short. This is what happens all the time in Germany, and necessitates rationing. It is a new form of inflation; perhaps I should say "new", because that is the way things have been done in Soviet Russia for many years. I was glad to hear that the U.S. Department of Agriculture thinks there will be enough food in Europe this winter, even if the war continues. We shall see.

The most unpleasant thing at present is the blackout at night. A few nights ago, Phil Hubbard, the consul, and I were invited out to dinner, and afterwards we sat around and talked until almost midnight. When we got down to the street, our host thought of calling a cab, but said there was a stand just three blocks down the street, and that we would easily find it. We walked three blocks, only to find that the cabs had all disappeared. After asking a few people, we found that a bus line leading to the central station went by there, and we took one that eventually came along in the hope that we would be able to find a cab at the station. Arriving at the station, we discovered about fifty people waiting for cabs, but no cabs. I decided to take a street car which would get to within four blocks of home; the car arrived, but the anxious waiters who swarmed around it were brusquely informed that the car was simply en route to the car barn, and that there would be no more. Finally I found a bus which got me close enough to home so that I could walk, although I wasn't sure for some time whether I was heading in the right direction or not. I got home at 1:15, very hot and exasperated. At that time I swore I'd not go out again in the evening, but I have now amended this to say that if I do go out, I'll wait until a car arrives before leaving. No more wandering around strange streets in the dark; I must say, however, that the attitude of the people from whom we inquired about taxis, buses, etc. was uniformly polite and helpful. They went out of their ways to be of assistance, although they must have known at once that we were foreigners.

I didn't want to mention the radio in my previous letter because it was going by open mail. You may have read that it is now forbidden to listen to any hostile or neutral radio station, so I didn't want to commit myself in writing that I had been doing so. About once a week I get the news (Christian Science Monitor) from Boston. This comes on at 4:30 (I think), 10:30 P.M. here. Most of the time it is too faint to be intelligible. Sometimes at 2 in the afternoon I can get the special broadcast of the American correspondents from Berlin for those morning programs at home. This comes on the 25 meter band, near the Turkish station. It must be very heavily beamed on North America, for it is hard to hear here. Generally, the German stations come in very well. Generally speaking, I get most of my information from the London radio and the Swiss newspapers.

Regarding the insurance premium which is due now, I am enclosing a check for \$18, as my check stub indicates that the annual payment is \$39.78. I am also enclosing a check for

Janie of \$30. \$25 is a graduation presents and \$5.00 is for her birthday, which will be coming along about the same time as this letter, I suppose.

I'm glad to hear that Betty Lou likes it in Ohio and that she is having a chance to be at the farm and go riding. I wish I were back home too. It is so hot now, and so late, that I am going to close this. Our poor old file clerk is waiting to put it in the pouch, which is ready to be sealed.

My very best love to all. I am sending a copy of this to Aunt Vonie and Ninnie; I hear they have been asking about me.

As ever,

William



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