

American Consulate  
Milan, Italy  
June 21, 1941

Dear Folks:

This is probably the last time I will have to write to you before I leave Milan, although it may be two or even three weeks before we actually depart. Of course, I will try to write if I have time, but I am afraid that there will be so much to do that there will be little or no time for such pleasant pursuits. The blow fell suddenly and rather unexpectedly, although the boss had expressed the idea a few days before that such an eventuality seemed possible to him. I got the first news over the radio at midnight on June 19-20, and, as usual with me, I received it with skepticism, since I habitually discount most of what I hear over the radio. However, the impression was strong enough to prevent me from sleeping very well, and, strangely for me, I was even able to get up in time to hear a morning broadcast. Since the news was repeated, I knew it must be true, and shortly after someone called me up and said that it was in the local morning newspapers. Then I had to break the news to the maid<sup>1</sup>, which was very sad. She has been a loyal and faithful servant, of a type which does not exist in the U. S. She was content with about \$10 a month, and never asked for a raise although prices have increased considerably. I recently gave her a raise voluntarily, and she was very grateful. She has managed the whole house: all the buying – no easy task these days; all the cooking, washing, ironing, mending and everything else, and never took a day off. Since I haven't taken any vacations, she hasn't either, except when I would be away for two or three days at a time. I can understand much better now why Laukhuff wanted to take her with him to Germany; I certainly would try to take her wherever I went if it were possible.

To the Americans on our staff, the closure of the consulate was a bit of a relief. The tension having been great, it was a relief to have it over with. Most of them are pleased at the thought of returning to the U. S. Our Italian clerks, on the other hand, are naturally very sad. There are three of them, and the youngest, from the point of view of service, has been working for the American government 14 years. It is especially tragic since we are not authorized to pay dismissal indemnities such as is done by all Italian businesses. They will get one month's salary, and that's all. I hope that none of them will experience difficulties after we've gone, and I'm not sure. They shouldn't, for all of them are loyal Italians in spite of their many years' service with us.

I suppose (and hope) that by the time you receive this you will know where your little Willy is going. At the present time of writing, little Willy is much perplexed. My fondest hope is that I will get to come back home; my greatest fear, that I will be "dropped" along the way, in Spain, a country where I haven't the least desire to serve. In times like this, one realizes that the Consular Service is not dissimilar to military service: we get our orders and go where we are told, without having to think or consider about it. I only hope that I will know where I am going so I can know what to take along. For instance, if I go to any European country, I will have to take some of my supplies along; otherwise, I will leave them here. I have in mind to wire you as soon as I know definitely, or even indefinitely. All that is even indefinite now is that the office will probably close for business at the end of June, which is also the end of the fiscal year. We will then have to

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<sup>1</sup> Ottavia. William was able to make contact with Ottavia after the War, and together they arranged for her to come to Caracas, Venezuela, where she continued to serve him and the family – by then, consisting of his wife Laura Philinda, and newborn son, Laurence John.

dismantle the office, shipping the furniture and all the archives to Rome, where, I suppose, it will be placed in storage. Around the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>, we will all go to Rome where we will join the staffs of the other consulates and travel together wherever we are to go. In today's press there are stories to the effect that the officers from Germany are going to be sent by way of Siberia. For their sake, I hope it isn't true and I hope no one here gets similar ideas. It is a striking demonstration of the solidarity of the Axis that the same ideas often crop up here at the same time as, or only shortly after, they do in Germany. It would probably be an interesting trip in some ways, although I have heard that the scenery in Siberia is not only deadly monotonous but goes on for days and days.

And so it appears that I am writing the last few lines in another chapter of my history. The life of a Foreign Service Officer falls very easily into chapters, each with a different place name like "Tom Swift in Stuttgart" or "Don Sturdy in Milan". And sadly enough there's little continuity between the various chapters. Only the main character remains the same. The others all change except once in a while maybe one figure will pop into the picture for a few minutes, and then pop out again. Generally, you get the impression that they don't belong; you are used to see them in one setting, and they don't look right in another. So each scene is populated with a different set of characters, and each transfer means drawing a neat, double line under one list of friends, and turning over to a new – and completely blank – page, which will have to be filled in. Being a sentimental soul (much given to mixed figures of speech) I hate to lose friends, and it always pains me to leave a group of people with whom I have been intimate. As I have said before, each time I leave a little bit of myself behind. Maybe I shouldn't be in the Foreign Service.

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reason for the present lack of annoyance is that I know my way around town much better than I did then. I know the way home from the Piazza della Scala (which passes by the Consulate) so well that I stride along as briskly as if lights were as normal.

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Strange as it may seem in view of the stupendous events of the last days, I don't find much more to say. Politics have, naturally, to be excluded from a letter. It will be better to wait until I get to some other place, where I hope I will be able to write more freely. May God bless you all. Don't be surprised if you don't hear from me for some time, for, as I said before, I don't know where I am going and what the circumstances of travel will be.

With all my love and best wishes,  
William ~~L-Krieg~~ (force of habit)

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