

JILL TO AL JANUARY 18, 1943

Darling -

Sunday nite

Surprise! Surprise! A letter from me. It seemed to me, after I talked to you yesterday, that I had omitted a few \$ 50 observations.

Such as - how is your burned hand? I hope it is surviving the results of malpractice by Lt. Falk, J. O. De G. & the U.S. Army medics.

Secondly - a few straws in the wind in re finance. You never did endorse that \$228 check & it is still lying around. If we have to leave in a hurry, it had better not be on a weekend. We have a bank balance of about \$155 in the bank here & both sources will have to be tapped if we must pay for plane tickets for two.

I missed you an awful lot this weekend. Last night we three went to the Newsreels on Hollywood Blvd, leaving Diane with the children. All the other movie houses had lines a block long in front of them.

Today the King & Bob were over. The older folks just left but Bob is still here. We broke out the Muscatel & Burgundy as soon as they left, which accounts for my shaky handwriting.

I couldn't sleep last night til about 4:30 so read Lloyd Warner's "Yankee City" I looked for the cat to pass the time. The latter stayed out all night & didn't show up til noon today. She's been sleeping all afternoon.

I am scared shitless about the blood transfusion tomorrow. And I once wanted to be a soldier!

All my love to you, darling. Do you think you'll be able to get me a foot locker (no causal connection between those two sentences). Anyway, in conclusion, I love you and wish we were together right now.

Jill

THE days of the Lieutenant, too, were numbered. Mysterious forces in Washington, D.C., were at work. On the 16th of January, 1943, a Special Order 16 of the War Department appeared in the Battalion mails. It was most impressive, printed, no less, rather than mimeographed. A Copy was especially marked for 2nd Lt. Alfred J. de Grazia, Jr., 0-1043313 and a single line encircled in Paragraph 10 read cryptically "rel'd 531 CA & det to 2 Sig Rad Serv Section (Psychological Warfare Unit, Camp Ritchie, Md.)" At the end came, "By Order of the Secretary of War, G.C. Marshall, Chief of Staff." The Headquarters officers and men of the 531st stood stock-still in their sandy shoes and stared fascinated at the document. It was like the Hand of the Lord reaching down and tapping you on the shoulder, saying "You are Called!" They acted as if it said "You are Chosen." Since no one knew what it was all about, not the least the Lieutenant, they could regard him with awe. The Colonel told him that he might depart off any time he pleased.

Whatever it was, he felt ready for it. The clarion calling him to a challenging new duty, however, had to be harmonized with personal interests; he was getting the habits of an Army Regular. He fell to contriving means of taking along his frau and of laying over in Chicago en route. She looked up the trains, although he intended to drive a fictitious or maybe real automobile at an unreal 35 miles an hour (the formal recommended speed limit for cars) from the Mohave Desert to Camp Ritchie, Maryland, even should the Axis be enabled thereby to surrender days later. She duly reports:

Well, here are some statistics. The Southern Pacific route through San Francisco, which takes approximately 41 hours from there, adds up to \$224.54 for two persons. That includes the 15 dollars extra fare per person for going on a streamliner, also a roomette which is the minimum satisfactory accommodation for two persons. Presumably, we would not enjoy sleeping in two separate berths or together in one lower berth. Tack on about \$15 for meals, drinks and tips for two. That adds up to about 241 dollars for the trip to Chicago. The Santa Fe Superchief, which leaves from here, is the same price. Sweet monopoly. That takes 41 hours straight through. The

airlines come to \$231 for two persons, with no extras, of course. (Our employees positively do not accept gratuities.) Oh yes, except baggage transfer, and I do not know how much that is. The City of San Francisco leaves every three days, and the Superchief sails on Tuesdays and Fridays. So there!

So they went by train on the City of San Francisco, up the sunny California Coast to the Golden Gate, across the sky-high snowy Sierra Nevadas, along the marvelous gorges rushing across the Rockies and swooping down upon the Great Plains leading into Chicago, where all trains stopped, and then, after embracing the Home Folks and Friends, proceeded on their familiar streamliner, the President, to the Capital of the Free World. And never regretted it ever after.

In Washington the address given him belonged to the Office of Strategic Services. He reported to a suave gent named Earl Looker, a Colonel. This one's appearance and manner suggested an advertising or media executive, an acquisition of OSS directly from civilian life. Looker introduced him to a Lieutenant Martin Herz and that ended Looker's role in his life. It was Herz who did say, on one or two occasions, that Looker had bought De Grazia as a Second Lieutenant, not a First Lieutenant; he wanted to reserve any promotions to himself. Too bad, he had to accept the orders when they came through: score one for Our Hero. Second, Looker wondered why it took him so long to get from California to Washington; but he failed to interrogate Our Man personally, a mistake, since Herz gave an understandably garbled explanation of what was byzantine logic to begin with, such that Looker gave up the inquiry. Not that there was a mountain of work awaiting our Lieutenant, once his job was detailed.

Here was the set-up, according to Herz. OSS was not Part of the Armed Forces, but then again it was: the Highest Officials were continually disputing over this question, and no answer had been or would be shortly forthcoming. (Herz had a hacking laugh, which chopped the air on matters like this.) The missions of OSS concerned intelligence, espionage, counter-espionage, and dirty tricks against our enemies. Since the Army and Navy, not to mention the FBI, Treasury, Immigration and Naturalization, and the State Department, were also in the same business, or could be, were they so inclined, OSS might

step on many toes and did so do.

Still, in the present case and as our Lieutenant entered the picture, OSS and the Army had agreed to mingle their personnel, uniformed and civilian, and their resources to devise, staff, and equip a special outfit -- an exceedingly complex company it would have to be -- to reach out to our enemies by propaganda. This company, to be called deceptively the First Mobile Radio Broadcasting Company, was even now forming up, and they, the two young lieutenants, would be responsible for the analysis of the psychology of their enemies in the theater of operations and for preparing the messages to be delivered.

Our Lieutenant found the prospect most engaging, even before he knew more than this. He could see that Herz was on the ball, honest and straightforward, at least with his peers, serious, objective, using a curt rasping voice and speaking a proper exact canned English. His wiry frame and thrust-back head passed him as a soldier, whether he had been much of one or not before the present operation began. He had black hair, snapping black eyes, and a hooked nose. His movements were somewhat jerky, but he could repose calmly when there was no reason to move. He seemed to be the type who was always quite busy, and, in his case, usefully, or, at least, intelligently.

"How did I get here?" he was asked. I happened to meet your brother, Sebastian, said Herz, at a little conference. I told him that we were looking for someone with military training, a knowledge of propaganda, and an acquaintance with Italy and the Italian language. I said that we had the authority to procure a transfer. He said, my brother would be right for you. Herz was himself bi-lingual in German. He had been born in Austria, where perhaps he had learned to laugh and play with words, and had been working on international money transfers at a New York firm before induction.

The Newcomer didn't feel he should tell the whole truth. Yes, he had the needed military training, he had the rare tutelage in propaganda (he was, incidentally, now hearing a term being used as a synonym -- "psychological warfare") afforded by Professors Harold D. Lasswell and Nathan Leites at Chicago, and, yes, he had travelled in Italy, but, he had to inform Herz, he didn't speak, read, or write Italian well. Fact was, although he didn't say so, he was totally incompetent in the

language. Herz had no intention of questioning a language deficiency in any event. He was delighted with finding a genuine soldier who was an officer and more than that, an intellectual, and even versed in the field of public opinion.

We have two platoons, he said, one dealing with German matters, the second with Italian. I head the one. You can head the other. That's the understanding of the Commanding Officer, Colonel Oren Weaver -- he's at Camp Ritchie, you'll meet him. Then we have a printing section and a radio transmitting section with three 1KW transmitters. The whole company numbers about three hundred soldiers, almost all from the signal corps, or recruited directly from civilian life, especially in our sections, with high language capabilities.

Our Man lacked a marvelous quality that the United States Army bred in its Regular Officers, an unruffled acceptance of command over matters of which they knew nothing. He felt it was unconscionable to be falsely ticketed as a linguist. It was not his fault, but he must do something to redress the situation. Upon leaving Herz he hastened to the room that his wife had found for them in the comfortable Victorian home of Mrs. Singleton, a pleasant Southern lady whose husband was an attorney and who was happy for every indication of getting closer to the War. Taking Jill by the hand, he escorted her from one phonograph store to another around town until they came upon a single unsold set of Linguaphone in Italian. They brought it back to their room, he closed the door as a security measure, and, unwrapping the cellophane cover, placed carefully upon their portable gramophone Lesson Number One, then listened attentively as the needle scratched it out: "La Famiglia Bianca: La Famiglia Bianca e'..." Mrs. Singleton could not help overhearing the strange phases in that beautiful language; when he met her in the hallway, her eyes lit up excitedly, he had to warn her to secrecy; she was delighted additionally with the stamp of a secret. Her home was a staging area for the invasion of Europe! Unfortunately she could not have her nice young Lieutenant couple for long. Before he had finished "Lezione Quattro," he was ordered to Camp Ritchie, along with Herz.

If Camp Ritchie, now Camp David, has become a retreat for the President and his entourage, the Lieutenant would be able to explain.

The area was hilly, abundantly supplied with trees both deciduous and evergreen. It was speckled with cottages and small settlements, flowers blooming among them with the first sign of Spring. Its brooks were poetically exact, with the proper gushes and gurgles, the right proportions of accelerations and decelerations, glistening beds and warm banks of pebbles and sand, rugs to the barefoot. He and She tripped along a stream lengthily and dreamily until his and her bodies fell down together upon some sandy niche, nor did they rise up until shadows fell upon them from the low bluff behind and they had finished dissevering, one by one, the sounds and lights of the mild exterior Nature from their orgasmic explosions. There was more of this in the sanctuary of their large-windowed wood-framed room, but Cousin Singleton could not have been surprised, after what she would have heard from Mrs. Singleton. However, something was happening to them that they did not now realize.

He warmed to the Camp itself, too. It nestled in the mild hills, with buildings here and there, not uniformly placed. Wavering paths wandered hither and yon, unlike Tyson, Davis, Bliss and the Desert encampments. Most striking was the absence of large formations. Rather, at any time of day or night, you could observe human figures, from the many singles to the multiples, typically from a dozen to a score, moving this way or that, sometimes armed, sometimes carrying strange packs, sometimes scurrying about empty-handed.

The Lieutenant found his Company, the 1st MRBC, scattered about, the Radio Station crews setting up and taking down their transmitters on one field, clusters and couples conversing in several languages around a set of offices, men off by themselves quietly reading an intelligence report of interviews with prisoners or a manual on the portable Mergenthaler offset printing press, or, for that matter, one of a score of books that the Lieutenant had well in mind, and helped persuade him that he was well equipped for his job. What job? There was no manual, no routine, no training program, no tests, nothing but serious talk and good fellowship, it would appear, for the forty intellectuals of the Company.



Al on the grounds of Camp Ritchie (taken by Jill) on one of several warm afternoons which he credits with the conception of their daughter Cathy.



Jill (taken by Al) on the grounds of Camp Ritchie.



Jill (taken by Al) on the grounds of Camp Ritchie.



Jill (taken by Al) on the grounds of Camp Ritchie.

Never mind the manual of arms, firing of small weapons, booby-traps and mines, vehicle driving and maintenance, and in the

actual preparation of propaganda. Snippets of all these things were to be had. Russian Front leaflets were passed around, cleverly written, well designed and illustrated: Herz was of the opinion, which Our Man accepted, as did others, like Hans Habe and Hans Wallenberg, but perhaps not Peter Viereck or Klaus Mann, that Soviet propaganda was too political, too ideological, too demanding. The mentality of the German soldier was too Nazi to believe the message; the practical tactic and consequences for any German soldier who might accept the message were not made explicit.

There was a Headquarters staff, of course, consisting of a red-headed, red walrus mustachioed, cheerful blustery Executive and practical Commander, a former advertising man named Caskey; there was, too, his Assistant, a full-cheeked down-plumbing-resonant-voiced Captain Rathbun who knew some Italian because he had studied singing, a Lt. Jerry Stern who had been a radio programmer and was now personnel officer, a Lt. Zimmerman, who had been a radio announcer in Milwaukee, a Lt. Tommy Anglin who had been and was, well, a nice guy. Two facts were apparent: the 1st MRBC stood high in priority for shipment overseas, and the 1st MRBC was in a state of happy confused ineptitude.

Rarely to be seen was Lt. Col. Oren Weaver, the Commander, who appeared in jump shoes, paratroop uniform, and beret, out of the skies, so to speak, a former CBS radio man from Chicago, exuding confidence, smiling, teaching nobody anything, although, to conjure up excuses, he may have been helping to develop and obtain equipment: he had to be doing Something! Supernumeraries and redundancies were structured into the Army brain from the time when every cavalryman led a couple of spare horses.

They were a charming group, whatever their military bearing or fire-power. The Company had been granted permission to commission several of the men from the ranks, and their designation had been left to Lts. Herz and De Grazia. Consequently, he personally interviewed them all, beyond the normal variety of contacts.

At that time the most conspicuous officer candidate was Hans Habe. Little objection might be raised to him. He was older than the ordinary lieutenant, tall, with a confident manner, ready with a big

smile, cordial, almost effusive. He had published a novel. His Hungarian accent was scarcely noticeable. Complexion ruddy, hair reddish blonde maintained by dyes. A *bon vivant*, luckily he could be indulged and indulge others, especially Captain Caskey, with drinks and dinners, because he had married a rich woman, old and ugly some young sports might say, quite nice said many another. He wore custom-tailored khakis and fatigues. He was enthusiastic. He knew Central Europe very well. He was anti-Nazi. He was ever so clever in human relations. Beyond everything else, he was rational, not addled, visionary, or nonsensical. You could imagine him operating a system consistently without breakdown. They agreed, and Captain Caskey heartily concurred, on Habe.

In fact, they agreed on all three candidates who were to be finally commissioned. Peter Viereck was very bright, a poet, a dedicated anti-Nazi and liberal. His father had been the most famous of pro-German Americans in World War I and had spent time in jail as a traitor of sorts. The mark of this (in)justice was clearly upon Peter, in his clashing determination and hesitancy of manner. (A wild psychoanalyst would venture, aha, there's one who wanted to kill his father but couldn't let himself do it.) Physically, he did not cut a dashing figure; he looked as if he had just escaped a concentration camp. He seemed quite uninterested in managing others, though fully cooperative at work.

More ambitious and a fine figure of a man was Corporal Costas, who told the Lieutenant, with an educated Greek accent, that he was expert in seven languages, but in none better than English. He had a way with Germans as well, he recounted. His calling card when in *the Reich* carried him as Alexander, Graf von Costas, Sparta, Greece. The Germans swooned at this. He had been born in Sparta!

Sergeant de Lattre taught French at Northwestern University. He was a large man overflowing with flesh, whose bullet-head put him credibly in the ranks of the French infantry in Morocco as he claimed. He was heavy-handed, obstinate, opinionated, endearing because of his good will and harmless role of the moment. He had the war all figured out, of course.

This could not be said of Corporal Grigis, who kept his own

counsel, obeyed instructions promptly, and exhibited a judicious temperament under incitement. He had the manner and speech of a Near Midwesterner and there was no question that his stocky body could support a heavy load over long distances. He showed no obvious source of his knowledge of Italy and Italian, which was satisfactory; "I've always listened to Italian radio programs, " he said. There were Italian-Italians in the platoon, Jewish refugees, Fabio Coen, Raymond Guetta, and Kaminski, a version of Viereck; all were young, bright, intellectual, congenial, and militarily untrained.

Hans Langendorf was an older man, lean and depressed of temper, a German refugee whose perspective upon the War and World were those of a political extremist from a worker's party. He gave no sign of leadership, or of caring about managing others. In this he was like Klaus Mann, who was even more depressed, with sunken haunted blue eyes, which the Lieutenant ascribed to an autocratic father, Thomas Mann, whose home in California had been the scene of a visit by the de Grazia's with Mann's younger daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, Giuseppe Borgese, Professor at the University of Chicago. Klaus could be voluble on occasion. His knowledge of what had been occurring in Europe, historically, and his mastery of German prose were unsurpassed in the Company. He had a beautiful intelligence.

Hans Wallenberg was a short stocky pugnacious-looking Prussian Jew, baptized Catholic along the line. His father had been a leading publisher in Berlin in earlier years. Hans would never lose a strong German accent, but he spoke clearly, like Henry Kissinger, and was naturally authoritative. He was not out front among the men. He led from within, by his forceful personality and competence with ideas. Of his self-sufficiency and hardihood, there could be no doubt.

So there you have it, the candidatures. Besides Habe, the choices were Wallenberg and Grigis. Their names were seconded and duly forwarded. It was time to turn to other matters. Ready or not, the Mediterranean Theater of Operations was beckoning the 1st MRBC. There was a large army of German and Italian troops, hard-pressed, but well-situated to put up an extended defense of Tunisia. They

should be suffering a barrage of propaganda. Elements of the 1st MRBC should have been flown over by now and in action.

End of January 1943 letters

