

VIII. MAKING OVERSEAS PREPARATIONS

Sept. 3, 1944. "... I am still down in Dixie. Today has been about the hottest it can get before it is hell. Everyone is wringing with perspiration. The sun is setting and I am writing this on our little back porch. Now that the sun is down the gnats are out and do they irk me! Gnats, cockroaches, and ants are the most numerous of insects here, but we are also troubled with flies and mosquitoes. One old timer in this company says he didn't mind the tropics as much as this ... All company equipment is packed and crated... I worked until 10 one night loading heavy crates on trucks... Yesterday all our weapons were inspected by the ordnance department. Half our rifles have been declared unserviceable, but I still have my old faithful. (Note: I remember the serial number 1037911 50 years later.) Those who ever get new weapons have a day's work cleaning off the packing grease. I think we might be a little late for the fight in France, but we might be used for army of occupation ... I get a lot of enjoyment eating sandwiches and milk at the service club and going to Fayetteville for a steak dinner. Most of the time we just talk and most of it is about the war... I hope you noticed that I now wear a stripe and earn an extra \$4 a month... We are a happy bunch... I'll sign off and write again maybe when I ride the waves."

Sept. 4, 1944. "... Today and yesterday have been the hottest on record here. I couldn't stand on the pavement with my civvie shoes. The soles are wearing thru and I guess I'll toss them in the ocean. We aren't supposed to take them but everyone is taking his. Today we turned in part of our unserviceable equipment. One floor of the next barracks is full of new equipment. No more passes are to be issued after Sunday night... All married men were told to make arrangements immediately. Way last July we heard that training ceased on the 10th of Sept. I scoffed at the rumor at first, but it proves how a rumor can become a fact. I just came back from a delicious steak sandwich and three pints of milk at the service club. I didn't think much of today's scrambled egg and prune breakfast... Tomorrow we go on a 2 hour hike the first thing..."

Sept. 10, 1944. "... I have been up in the first city of North Carolina... Raleigh is a nice city full of hotels, churches, and monuments. There are very few soldiers there compared to Fayetteville... This afternoon our battalion went to the theater and we had a demonstration on handling German prisoners of war. Most everyone thinks we will leave within 2 weeks and I think New York is the destination... On Saturday I worked hard on the targets on the rifle range... The

targets are raised and lowered by a counterbalance on a pulley system. It isn't a snap and you're glad when the day is done."

Sept. 10, 1944. "... This next week a big Inspector General Department [inspection] is scheduled. They checked up and found we have 3 AWOL's ... I left camp on 5 o'clock Saturday with 2 friends and we were back in 24 hours. It was a hair-brained trip and we got going within 10 minutes after the idea was conceived. We caught a bus to town and by 7 we were on the way to Raleigh. Two Negroes driving a furniture van picked us up and before we had traveled the 60 miles to Raleigh we had 15 soldiers in the van ... we arrived at the hour of 8:30... The fun started when we looked for a room and could find none. However, three different rooms were occupied by men from our company. I ended up sleeping on a mattress on the floor with a bedspread for cover. It was a welcome change from the GI life... I didn't get paid last month... In your next letter send a ten-spot as all I have is a five. I don't owe anyone and I don't like to borrow... I'd sure hate to arrive overseas with empty pockets... In the near future I am sending home my furlough bag, shoes, and other odd items. You needn't send any 'Lifes' as a kid up here gets it on a subscription. As fast as I read my magazines someone else is always anxious to read them..."

Sept. 14, 1944. "... It looks as if we may be here for another 2 weeks. This morning I was issued a new kind of intrenching shovel and a new bayonet full of cosmoline. The shovel is super as it can be used as a shovel or a pick. [*This was just plain wrong, as we soon learned. These things might have been useful in the sand of Fort Bragg, but not anywhere else. To dig a hole fast enough and deep enough to make it useful one needed a standard D handle shovel, which were available, but never to the extent that they were needed. Two men taking turns using a regular shovel could finish a hole much faster than was possible with both using their own entrenching tools. Most of these tools were soon discarded in combat.*] Cleaning anything packed in cosmoline is a messy job. It is a brown grease that is dissolved by boiling water and soap, but it messes up everything. We have most of our new equipment, but I still need a pack, shoes, and a blouse. I sent home my bag full of unnecessary stuff... Earlier this week we had lots of work on chemical warfare. Everyone thinks Hitler is going to use gas. We are well prepared both on the defensive and the offensive. It is a good thing I get paid today as I have exactly 22 cents in my pocket... Yesterday morning a hurricane headed this way, but it hit the sea and then hit New York and New England..."

Sept. 19, 1944. "... The water is thick around here. At least 4 inches have fallen in the last 12 hours... there is 16 inches of water flowing past our barracks in a regular river. This morning and yesterday morning I filled in as latrine orderly. A snap job and a swell chance to take it easy. Last night we turned in our khakis and now we wear our winter O.D.'s. I still need to be issued shoes and a pack and then I am ready to go. Yesterday we had another clothing check... About all we do is pack and unpack our duffel bags... The next stop is New York... At 11 this morning we are going to practice getting on the trains. It is the expression called a dry run..."

Sept. 23, 1944. "... The division starts moving around Saturday or Sunday and our turn comes the first of the week... I have every bit of equipment now except one pair of shoes and a haversack. Since I have been in Co. G I have always been in the third platoon. Yesterday I was transferred to the second platoon... The higher ups think I am a good automatic rifleman so they sent me here to fill in a vacancy... The day before yesterday I hit KP and fared excellently as the cooks weren't too bad natured. On that day we had fresh rolls, donuts, and roast beef ... While walking back from the Arsenic and Old Lace movie through another regiment I saw them all packed and ready to move... Our passes have to be turned in for good on Sunday..."

Sept. 23, 1944, timed at 0930. "... Last night and this morning I have been on regimental guard. So far I have put in 7 hours... Right now I am in the prisoners room writing this letter. We have 3 guards on duty in this room and there is but one prisoner in here. The rest of the prisoners have been farmed out to their respective companies [*We had one man in the Company—and I don't know if it is he who Bud refers to here—who quite good-naturedly and undramatically kept disappearing. He never went very far, and he freely admitted that he was just hiding out in hopes that he would be overlooked and left behind when we started our overseas movement. As I recall, he left with us in due course, still under guard, and his performance in combat was as respectable as that of most of the rest of us.*] ... They allow up to 50% of the men to be sent out on 12 hours passes at one time at the port of embarkation... Any mail sent here will probably be forwarded to wherever we go..."

Sept. 23, 1944 timed at 10:30. "... They still haven't got me a pair of shoes or a pack. I'll never wear shoes unless they fit so I guess I'll have to wait until POE to get my shoes. Everyone is busy throwing away excess junk and marking new clothes and equipment ... As to your question about a P.F.C., it is an honor in the infantry and you have to work for it. More men in combat areas are privates than PFC's. According to regulations only so many men can make it regardless of your ability or length of service. [*Everyone got it in December though, after about 5 weeks of combat action.*] We say that a PFC in the infantry is worth a corporal in the cavalry, a sergeant in the artillery, a staff sergeant in the Air Corps... After we leave the country 5 days, they mail our change of address cards with our overseas address..."

"My change of address card to my Winnetka aunt was postmarked Sept. 15, 1944 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was my last piece of mail from Fort Bragg. My last two letters written in the United States were written under military censorship. My Sept. 29 and Oct. 5 letters were from Somewhere in the United States. We remember now it was Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and part of our overseas experience."