

Sat. Feb. 13, '43
Camp Davis, N. C.



UNITED STATES ARMY

Cher ami François:

At last - a pretty long last, at that, - I've managed to drag out the "avec quoi écrire", find myself with 8 hours ^{of the night}, partly at my disposal, and seat myself at a lieutenant's desk, all preparatory to writing you. Finally, I've gained two of the conditions conducive to writing - time, and a place to write. Allow me to explain. Right now, I am on 24-hr. fireman duty, tending to the wants of 2 soft-coal burning furnaces (one in our barracks, and the other, in another building, the Day Room (A day room is a place set aside for the use of the soldier when he has a leisure moment and wishes to read a magazine, or write, in surroundings other than the barracks. Not that they're any more luxurious or attractive, in this case, but ~~it~~ ^{the building is} there anyway, and has to be heated.)) To continue - the furnaces seem to function properly for about an hour without care, so until the hour arrives, the intervening time is mine. (Until daybreak, of course, when sergeants might appear to queer things, letter-writing & reading being "verboten" while on duty.) At this moment, awaiting the hour of 2300, I am in the Orderly Room sitting at one of the lieutenant's desks. The Orderly Room is "open all night", with a man on duty, likewise for 24 hours. It is deserted except for the C. Q. (Charge of Quarters, i.e., charge of the Orderly Room, i.e., the man on duty), another fireman, and myself.

That explains the circumstances. Say, chum,
are they so backward up at City C. in the R.O.T.C.
that they actually give cadence count in
English? — hup, two, three, four; hup, two, three, four.
In reality, it should sound: up, tuh, tip, fuh,
up, tuh, tip, fuh, with variations encouraged.
Each sergeant or loocy has his own pet arrange-
ment of those 4 ~~to~~ breath expirations, some
gasping, others muffling, & still others abbrev-
iating. So help me, it's bad enough being out
of step, but you can't tell when you should
fall back in. Then the sarge urges: "Pick
up that cadence. — Pick it up! — Pick it up.
IT AIN'T SHIT! To go on in same vein, or
worse, so pardon my blush, (got out of that
stage the first 3 days in the Army) we have
a corporal who, in the ungodly hour of
reveille, at 1730, flashes the lights on, and
before you've fallen completely out of sleep's
stupor, instead of incanting the usual
"Rise & shine, boys" bellows out — "Let down
your & pull up your socks".

One moment, please, have to see how the
fires are making out. (It is now 2300, and taps
have just been sounded. It's just the 2nd time
I've ever heard them. Once, I happened to awake
while they softly carolled their mournful notes
to the still nite.)

There, that should hold 'em for at least
an hour and a half (getting reckless) ^{now that can't be ~~must~~ it was} ~~have been~~ the previous week.

You know, during ~~the~~ week Feb. 7 to 14, I was
in the camp hospital recovering from a severe cold,
cough, fever, sore throat, and a few incidental
blisters accrued previously. When I reported
for sick-call I felt so disgustingly weak &
loose-kneed that another day would have seen
me clutching the sands of Camp Davis. As it was,
believe it or no, I slept 20 out of 24 hrs. for the
first 3 days at the hospital (no drugs) After that,
I was good as new, even better, since I was already
broken in.

4.3

The hospital was located about 50^{ft.} from, and ~~running~~^{ran} parallel to, the airport. They would have done just as well had they built that groan-garage in a R. R. yard.

Every 3 or 4 mins. the window panes would actually rattle from the beat produced by powerful motors lifting some plane skyward. They even shook when single-motored planes took off. But those surging beats and the crescendoes & diminuendoes of a motor being ~~*gunned~~^{to a roar} and then throttled to a purr would have proven fatal to a nerves patient. But I thrived on it.

Recently we underwent a demonstration of the effectiveness of the gas-masks which had been issued us a week previously. (Mine fits — and feels — like a glove) We went thru 2 gas chambers containing a lachrymator, and SO₂. Of course, the lachrymator concentration was a mild one, since each man, before leaving the chamber, had to pull his mask from his face and tarry a moment. When that part of the game had been completed, he could, and everyone did, tear and tear for the door leading out. Each of us in the group of 20 that went thru each chamber had watery eyes for about 5 minutes later, and the group looked comical, everyone crying as though each had just suttered a terrible sorrow.

So far, I haven't asked for any passes (bet you fellows get plenty, now) to see the outside world, but expect to see what "Boom-town," just outside the camp boundary, and Wilmington, 18 miles distant (we have a bus service) have to offer ^{this week-end}. Everyone says there's nothing to see or do, but I suppose I'll have to go at least once for the record, and for the bus ride.

To go back to the paragraph preceding the last one, — I forgot to mention that that the process for entering the SO₂ chamber consisted of each man's entering without his mask

on, and then slipping it on, once inside. All went well with me. Following instructions, I took a deep breath of clean air, held it until I reached my place in the chamber, fumbled and fluked out my mask, and gratefully poked the pass into the bag. Now, once you've your mask over your face, you're supposed to hold the exhaust valve and exhale the deep breath that you've been holding. The excess pressure would free itself thru the edges of the mask, and it would be "cleared" of any traces of gas which had entered before the mask was adjusted to the face.

Unaccustomed as I was to breathing via tubes and filters, I forgot to hold the exhaust valve shut. As a result, I cleared the mask through the valve instead of through the edges. My next inhalation made me aware of a tinge of SO_2 . After that, there were no more traces of it. My point is this — is the mask, ^{as} effectively cleared through the valve or thru the edges? The same amount of air is displaced in each case, so I think that one doesn't have to hold the valve. But I didn't get a chance to ^{repeat} performance, so couldn't ascertain whether clearing the mask thru the edges would still leave a tinge of gas. ~~In~~ ^{However} ~~any case~~, I dare say the amount of gas remaining by either method is so small that it would have no physiological effect, even were it a lethal gas.

Time to quit now, so until you write, "Au Écrire". (Is that allowable?)

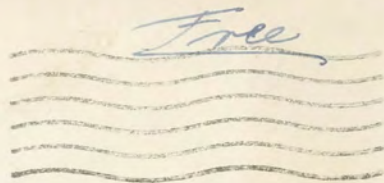
— Fug. Pombinski

Say, see if Joe doesn't owe me a letter. I think I wrote last, but can't remember exactly. It's been quite a while since I've heard from him. At least 2 mos.

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