

LETTERS DEC '44 TO MAR '45

MEMO

84

LETTERS	V-MAIL	LETTERS	V-MAIL
DEC 27		FEB-	1
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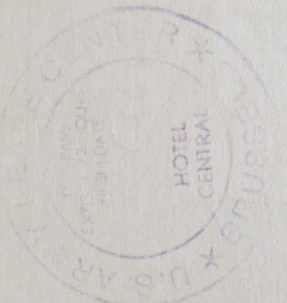
CONTINUED ON PRECEDING PAGE

" MARCH 1 "

85

Today my sweet of Rebel wife is leg-ally a lady, of course actually she's been a lady from the moment she was born. I didn't realize what a momentous day it was Mar. 1, 1924, perhaps the fact that I wasn't quite 2 1/2 years old will pardon me some what. Yet I am sure that an especially bright star burned in the heavens for me that day. Somehow I must have known that the most import-ant person in the world first open-ed her big brown eyes for the first time. Today being payday I collect-ed finally for Dec. Jan. and Feb. to the tune of \$295 which is good considering all the allotments and partials deducted. Spent Erik \$200.00 through the P.T.A.





HOTEL CENTRAL  
BRUXELLES  
1944

CANCELLATION

THE SOLDIER BEARING THIS PASS HAS BEEN ORDERED TO REPORT DIRECTLY TO HIS UNIT. IF FOUND LOITERING HE WILL BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AND TURNED OVER TO THE MILITARY POLICE.

REASON

PLACE DATE AND HOUR

NAME GRADE ORG APO NO  
SHOW YOUR PASS ONLY TO OFFICERS, MILITARY AND CIVIL POLICE REQUESTING IT & TO CLUB WHEN REGISTERING.

To be executed in triplicate.  
Original to Finance Officer.  
Duplicate to Personnel Officer.  
Triplicate to Remitter.

WAR DEPARTMENT  
FINANCE DEPARTMENT  
FORM No. 38 (MODIFIED)

WAR DEPARTMENT No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Finance Department P.T.A.

( ) \* FR. \* LIRA RECEIPT FOR FUNDS TRANSMITTED TO UNITED STATES  
\$200.00 417th Night Ftr Sq, APO 650, New York, NY, 1 March, 1945

RECEIVED IN CASH FROM : F/O DAVID F. DIEHL, T-180287  
(ORGANIZATION AND APO NO. OF REMITTER)  
(PRINT IN CAPS : RANK, FULL NAME AND ASN OF REMITTER)

Two Hundred Dollars Only DOLLARS AND \_\_\_\_\_ CENTS  
PAY TO Mrs. Frances L. Diehl, 422 West Craig Place, San Antonio, Texas.

WHICH SUM I HAVE PASSED TO THE CREDIT OF THE UNITED STATES, AND HOLD MYSELF ACCOUNTABLE THEREFOR.

*James K. Pence*  
JAMES K. PENCE, 1st Lt, AG.  
FINANCE DEPARTMENT

\* STRIKE OUT WORDS NOT APPLICABLE  
NOTE : IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE REMITTER VERIFY NAME AND ADDRESS OF PAYEE PRIOR TO SUBMISSION OF THIS DATA TO THE FINANCE DEP'T.



MARCH 2

This inactivity finally drove us on and after lunch we found ourselves, with orders for detached duty in our possession, on the highway to Aix. We arrived late in the afternoon and went to the Septius Hotel. The last war had found it Peaking headquarters, while it returned to its purpose as a mineral health resort until the German took it over and now were requisitioned it. With orders the rooms cost nothing and very delicious meals cost only 5 francs per. The bar also enjoys such ridiculous prices. It seems as though the 417<sup>th</sup> has more or less taken it over, and what an ideal set up it was. Developing a light buzz on Martinis we headed for our beds at 10 pm and a longed for Erin.

MARCH 3

0730 found us awake and aware that the beds were actually too soft for us to sleep well. We ate a delicious breakfast and off we went. Aimlessly we wandered along the narrow twisting cobbled streets, absorbing the quaint beauty. Past countless shops, squares, with utter disregard for direction and often enough lost, we ambled on. To us each ancient arch or special spot of beauty was our own discovery. Eventually, after several hours of wandering and making a few small purchases we found ourselves back on the main drag. Returning to the hotel, we left immediately after lunch, and hitched a ride through the rolling countryside on a British truck. Irish Erin could have been along to enjoy it.



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France certainly goes in for March winds. Especially this Rhone Valley. The wind started on the day we went to Arignon after a very long nice spell and they haven't stopped or even slowed down since. It has turned much colder also. It quickly built up to 45 mph on the first day and it hasn't been less than that since. Often it hits 60. Flying has virtually stopped. According to local tradition the winds blow for multiples of three days, there's no sign of abatement tonight, perhaps Wednesday. Now I know why these wind screens of trees dominate the fields in this locality. Today I bought a cleverly done silk 12th Air Force Scarf for Erin, from Major Jensen.

Today, held much in store for me. Today I got ten of the most loving letters possible, masterpieces that left me aghast. How any man could deserve such a wife beats me. The love, the trust, the tenderness and consideration of my beloved Rebel is the most wonderful thing in the world. Gaud. I love my wife! Today, I was also O. D. and as usual something had to happen. I was in the show enjoying the very enjoyable "Saratoga Trunk" when a loud popping similar to firecrackers was heard, accompanied by the shout, "Fire!" It was one of enlisted men's tent & it was an inferno beyond help, apparently so before it was noticed as no one was in it. The adjoining tents were saved but nothing was saved in the tent itself. One of the dogs was tak-



MARCH 6

ed in the tent and here may lay the cause.

This morning found the men who lost their tent last night well on the way to having a new one. They have taken their misfortune with the very slightest concern. It seems as though every thing they valued was personal and most of this they had in their pockets. Of course all of their clothes, equipment and even home had been furnished by Uncle Sam, and will quickly be refurnished by him. They now have the joy of building a new abode, and it is a joy. I just wish Uncle Sam would decide to send me home and Erin and I could face the joys of building "our home" and resuming "our life!"

MARCH 7

For once Uncle Sam issued some thing when it can be used as today issued us another jacket. The B-11? It's a splendid affair similar in construction to our B-10 but has the huge fur hood. It's really a warm outfit and a splendid addition to our equipment. Today I did something I would never have even thought of doing before. Namely upon receiving the jacket I altered it to make it more form fitting. I did the job without any hesitation and trouble. It turned out surprisingly well. The jacket will be splendid for night patrols and for this heavy wind which is still blowing. It was reputed to stop today so it started to blow all the harder. It's six days at around 50 mph now.



MARCH 8

The wind doth blow, and the tent cries for mercy. Accordingly we once again found ourselves confined in doors rather than meet these "Mistral Blasts". We were issued the heavy Arctic sleeping bags today and they certainly came in handy with this cold that accompanies this wind. Combat stared us in the face today when word came that Putman, Mounovich, of our original shipment were shot down in their first mission, over the Po Valley. Flak got their 61 but word had arrived that they had bailed out and were lucky enough to be picked up by the paratroopers. They will walk out through the underground. They are in the thick of it and we are not even in the thin of it. I love my wife.

MARCH 9

I started making a model of a P-61 today and being very ambitious decided to make every thing except the out-board wing sections and the horizontal stabilizer out of one piece. Also used a very small scale which has many advantages but entails so much tedious carving. My thumb bears very decisive evidence of my carving, it being whittled almost as much as the model. The wind doth howl, still, going on its eighth day. Maybe tomorrow it will follow its tradition of multiples of three and once again be calm. Life goes on with even less event than before as the wind keeps us in our flapping tents. Combat in this instance is a very boring but thankfully safe existence. Certainly miss that tele.



MARCH 10

to and behold tradition conquered and we had no wind today on the ninth day. In fact it's downright balmy. Bob, fearing he might be called to fly the unmentionable "it," took off for Cuzco. Our surprise was great when he returned with a "droppable gas tank which had been dropped." He is going to build an automobile. Bob is a strange sort, where others would deem something childish daydreaming with him any scheme is an imminent possibility. As I carved merely on my P. of he spouted wild plans for his proposed vehicle. I hope he goes through with it but I fear not. He is a dabbler in many fields but a perfectionist in none as he seldom finishes anything.

MARCH 11

This afternoon as Bob worked on his automobile, and I laid aside my minute 61 model, Pete + Groundhog and I decided to flush some rats out of the mound in back of our tent. They have become rather bold lately, deciding that two entrances under our floor wasn't enough. They constructed another right next to the door and widened the two old ones to boulevard proportions. We filled these and then proceeded to fire about a hundred feet of the mound. Pouring gasoline along this length and a small line of fire so fuse, we touched it off with a match. The ensuing wall of fire was an awesome sight and we hope a bit unsocial to the rats.



MARCH 12

At 1100 this morning I went outside to watch a B-25 being the runway for its "overhead" and was just going back to the tent when Bob yelled "Dave, what does this plane look like to you?" I scanned the sky startled by his eagerness when I spotted it. No sooner had the cry started up my throat when it left simultaneously through the area "IT'S A P-61!" It was, and it is ours, sent up by 414<sup>th</sup> immediately the whole field ran a strange gauntlet of emotion, from hysterical joy to heated arguments, and feeling gay, confused and hurt. The rank flew the "Willing Widow" and the prejudice of the "Beaufighter Boys" such an ugly note into an otherwise very happy day. That is as happy a day can be without Eric.

MARCH 13

The rank again flew the "Willing Widow" and Maj. MacBray put on an exhibition with a French P-47. He bravely licked the fighter amid upon trails at 3,000 ft. Bob, Gronberg and I went over to the Royal Salvage Unit in hopes of finding some wheels for Bob's car, and we stumbled onto a surprising rumor. The British C.O. told us that he heard that as soon as the 61's started coming in we would go off operation and a British "Moosey" outfit would come to replace us. Where we might go no one knows, but this is a rather reliable indication. We could go to the front, we could go to Asia, or we could just go home. A sadly celebrated "our" anniversary but the best.



MARCH 14

Pete filed down the sear on my gun and I now have a lighter trigger and a surprising increase in control. I'm finally getting so I can shoot that .45. I was amazed to discover that while I thought I had been squeezing off my shots I have been jerking them off consistently. This realization proved amazing in effect.

We had a base ball game between the officers and enlisted, we tonight but it had to be called because of darkness. Otherwise the play passed lazily almost boringly. It's a shame to even say we are in combat. Significantly they recently closed the race tracks at home, while here they saw fit to reopen them. Ed came through with five very succulent missiles. Love my wife

MARCH 15

Today the rumors we picked up at the P.S.V. started to materialize with the arrival of five C-47's from Italy bearing a good portion of the British Mosquitos that are supposed to replace or at least temporarily relieve us. Also flown in were four Mosquitos, as the Finns hastily established themselves. How this develops only time can tell but it can prove very significant. The report that our P-61's are on the way was also confirmed by the powers to be today and the whole squadron is alive with anticipation. So much or so little can develop from all this as life and the war move on incessantly and here being by. I just swore in Texas with much Rebel.



MARCH 16

Grenberg and I had to go out to the line to the Radar lab for 720 refresher. Naturally we inspected the "Mossies" and that wonderful looking '61 on the way. It was a definitely good feeling to get my hands on that 720 again and I was surprised at the amount we had retained and the new things we learned, especially about the fuses. While we were in the lab they finally collared Bob and he solved "his first Bearfighter today. He got along O.K. made a slightly rough landing but it was O.K. He has developed a very understandable reluctance toward flying the infamous Bear. He prefers, and I don't blame him, to await the P-61's.

MARCH 17

At noon everyone was amazed when a C-47 landed and disgorged six new crews. We have too many already, but with these it's quite a crowd. They are all sales to Bob and Pete but the only R.O. I know is "Red" Graham.

The Majors continued to jealously monopolize their toy, the new P-61. This afternoon Major Brown staged a poorly executed dog fight with a French P-47 over the field. He muffed several chances to get on the Thunderbolt's tail. The crowning event was when he skidded so much in his turns that he "sucked off" the gunner's escape hatch, and naturally left our only 61 unoperational. I wish I were in Texas.



As I returned from Mass in Sabon this morning I was surprised to see Pete and Frank out on the highway and all decked out in their best. I returned to the tent to find that they had taken advantage of their day off and left for Nines. It was strangely and pleasantly quiet with their absence and I realized that it was as good to get away from each other once in a while. The two Majors and several of the select took the "25" to Italy this morning to get our first batch of P-61's, "Duroy then brand spanking new." While they were absent the other pilots seemed to get rather "buggy happy." And finally after scanning the skies all day they arrived, and a heart warming sight it was to see those "Widows."

Bob and I underwent a series of similar stimuli today and worked not only all day but until 1 AM on our Black Widow Models. We really bore down amid the poundings as our new neighbors constructed their four new tents and periodically consulted ours for reference. Bob and I got some sleepless from loud and proceeded to a little damn same to the minute dimensions of our tiny cockpits fore and aft. Considerable whittling and filing and sanding was involved but we finally accomplished our aim with excellent results. The tent was a mess with all the shavings and dust from all of our sanding. We finally retired after a stack of egg and of course writing my Rebel



MARCH 20

The B-25 again loaded with the selected and again took off for Italy and three more P-61's. Once again the boys got very busy happy, and thoroughly "raked" the place. Bob, Gronberg and I got eager and decided to build the long planned back and windows to our tent. We talked the officer in charge of the new hangar into giving us the necessary lumber, Bob had already received some aluminum and <sup>we</sup> started. All afternoon we worked on it amidst the usual caustic remarks from Pete. We completed it just as the B-25 arrived shepherding the three new ones into the flock. We now have eight of the Black beauties and hopes. Bob built a desk and table under his window & I built a desk under the

MARCH 21

The 9th P-61 came today and it was piloted by Rensch, of our original shipment, as it was sent down by the 414th. He came with both good news and bad. The good news being that he was up for the Air Medal for flying his ship in after the elevators had been shot out, and that Putman and Maransovich were safely out of the Po Valley. The bad and quite shocking news was that Jensen and Connolly had "gone in" on their first night transition ride. Their Mosquito had failed them on single engine, one mile about a week ago. It must be hell on earth to be alone with Jimmy now. It's strange the way death strikes so suddenly and indiscriminately. Good bye & best!



MARCH 22

Today was one of those worthless days when I accomplish nothing. I was in fine spirits this morning and wasted away the time writing letters and attending to a dozen or so little odd jobs. This afternoon I didn't do a damn thing and tonight I find myself in a very tyrannical mood. I'm just generally P.O.'d about something. I don't feel like anything in flight except Erin, and I don't want to do any thing, yet my mind screams for activity. I don't want to write, I don't want to paint, I don't want to work on my model. What I want is for Erin to make a face at me and then kiss me in her own wonderfully wifely way. God, but I miss that Gal of mine.

PISA

MARCH 23

Shortly after noon today while skanking a stool with May. McCray, I talked him into letting me make the trip to Italy in the B-25. Accordingly after noon we took off. Woody Grange and Andy Anderson flying the job with a bunch of G.I.'s for the 414<sup>th</sup> N.F.S. The crew chiefs were going to check out in P-61's. We landed at Pontedera dropped off the men ate lunch and took off again for Pisa, 20 miles away. Following our pattern with a nice busy job in the "leaning tower" we landed at the 415<sup>th</sup>. Andy and I did a little sight seeing, climbing the tower, and seeing the Cathedral and the Baptism. Pisa was once a beautiful town, and is a very ancient one. It is walled, rather small and has the Arno



MARCH 24

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blowing right through it. The buildings were once beautiful, being primarily of marble, beautifully carved and designed. The graceful bridges that spanned the town are now down, the homes gutted and smashed and the marble sidewalks pocked with bullet marks. The tower and cathedral still stand unharmed, majestic walls over the city. It was started in 1179. The 416th Infantry is in the shadow of the "tower" near Hoover's. I got the straight dope on Jensen's and Connolly's "exodus," Hoover and Hess. I had a very enjoyable time, meeting Prince + Boone, but I was amazed at the fatalistic attitude and tension that prevails. Taking advantage of an empty sack, we "F.O.N." + returned this noon.

MARCH 25

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The mistral blew again today, or perhaps it is only the weather front laying ominously over our heads. The wind blew at my rate at a terrific rate accompanied by rain this afternoon. In fact it blew so hard that it blew out one end of our newly constructed barge, much to some engineers' anguish. This was caused by an unforeseen direction from which the wind might blow at such a velocity. Practically all of the P-51's have undergone their acceptance checks now and we could possibly start flying soon and maybe even get operational, that is if the rank design is not approved. Went to our martine today and saw "Keys to the Kingdom" and wished that my succulent of Red's wife had been with me to enjoy it.



MARCH 26

It started to rain last night and this morning we awoke to find a seething mass of mud. Everyone was more or less confined to the tents and along with the rain activity seemed to also come. I started to paint partly because of my conscience a-bought these lines, partly because of the energy the rain instilled but mainly because of the goading Bob has unwittingly been giving me. He is good to have around in this respect although he makes me mad as hell on his theories on art. I painted a sultry dark skinned wench that turned out well and taught me much. During a lull in the rain we went out and inspected the kanger. The wind had actually picked it up and moved it 28 feet.

MARCH 27

Thanks to Bob I'm really in the mood for painting. The general arrived this morning at the same time our spare parts for the P-61's arrived in three C-47's. We had a parade in the mud and the citations were hastily distributed, and after a short ride in the P-61 the General left, being here at the longest two hours. Immediately after the parade I started painting again and did a full length version of the lusty wench I painted the head of last night and it really turned out sassy. Then I started the head of a H.P. with sunglasses and "H.P. hat" mainly to see what effects I could get with sunglasses. So far it's turning out O.K. I just wish Erin were here or rather Clave there.



MARCH 28

Everyone and myself included had looked forward to the day of the 61's arrival as we hoped it would mean a change in life here and an upstep in activity. Actually, however, they have only caused more unrest and discontent than before. The rank and the select alone are flying and we can't get any satisfaction out of MacLay as to when we will start flying. He in the meantime is including more hate in his direction by his childish attitude. He is, as Lambert says, a good head but he doesn't use it. I think his rank must to him be a veil between he + the squadron. A discussion rolled on I pointed on not much giving a damn about the 417th. The thoughts are of Erik and our future.

MARCH 29

Rumors along with unrest fairly screamed around the post today as we learned that we are being put into the 1st TAC. AF and changed from the 12<sup>th</sup> AAF to the 9<sup>th</sup> AAF. This may and probably will mean that we will move. Rumor has it that we are to be completely replaced by the "Hoosier" outfit and concentrate all of our efforts on checking out in the 61's of which we now have eleven. Still slinting I spent most of the day doing same. The more I do now the better off Erik + I will be later on, and the better outfit I will be. Golly, I miss that of Rebel wife of Mine. I certainly wish this war would fold so I could get back and start living again.



MARCH 30

Good Friday - and the many rumors humming around the base started to materialize. Major Hansen called a confab and announced that we are now a part of the "first tactical Air Force" which is a part of the Ninth Air Force. He also announced that all men in the 417<sup>th</sup> are restricted as of today. Gronberg of course is off on a wild goose chase to times. The major also announced that strict security is to be maintained. We will be off any day now and north is the topical direction. This move may bring me home to my Rebel much quicker than I had hoped. I painted while the area rickotted with drunks. It's very drunk out to night as the unrest and uncertainty continue. I wish I were in Texas.

MARCH 31

The rumors were what you might call numerous and the whole Squadron was tense with the excitement of the coming move. Some fellows are already packing, others are unperturbed and continue their ceaseless chow, sack, bull session, chow sack ritual. As for me I spent the day painting. Bob, apparently got edgy at an ideal moment as his going out to the line the other day to fly means that we will fly to our new destination and thus leave a few days after the rest. It's really a shame when you realize how little flying time we get in. Maybe this will change with our new destination but I doubt it. I'm not eager, my conscience just hurt about flying.