

## Excerpt from Introduction

“.... I found a shoebox full of the letters Daddy wrote to Mama while overseas. I actually already knew these existed because I had stolen all of the stamps off of them in the late 50’s for my stamp collection, but I did not know they had survived the various family moves. I immediately put off any actual work (i.e., sorting through more stuff on the table) and started reading the letters, not just because of laziness, but I thought they would add to the ‘lore’ of Bill Law during the war years.

I soon noticed a rather large disconnect between what he wrote in his letters to Mama, and what he wrote, and told, in his ‘war’ stories decades later. In fact, from his letters, it appeared that his time overseas was “a walk in the park”. He may have suffered some discomfort, boredom, and homesickness, but was never in danger, and got to see some nice, ‘touristy’ sights. So, who do we believe – the young Daddy or the old man Daddy, who has written that one of the advantages of being old is “it’s OK to start making up things”? .....

. It seemed best to present them in chronological order, then add some historical information about what was going on where he was, since he wasn’t allowed to so. Then, after adding the other documents I found (commendation letters, etc) along with his own descriptions of the events he wrote and told much later, Daddy’s activities during the war came to life, along with the little white lies and minor omissions he wrote in his letters....”

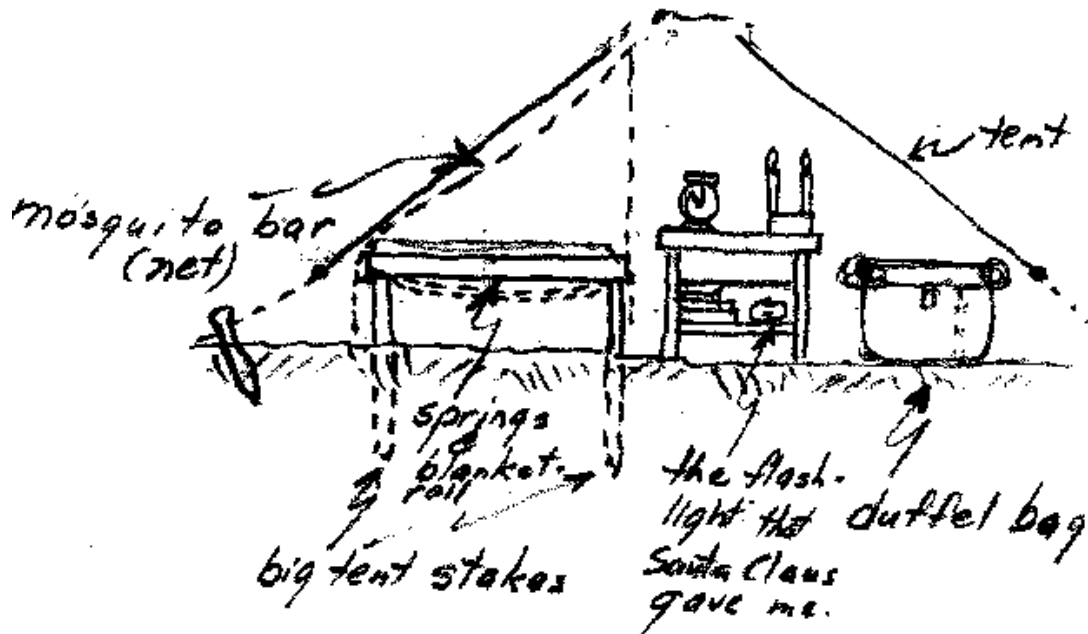
## Typical, but unusually long letter

“20 June 1944

Still in Italy

My darling Dot:

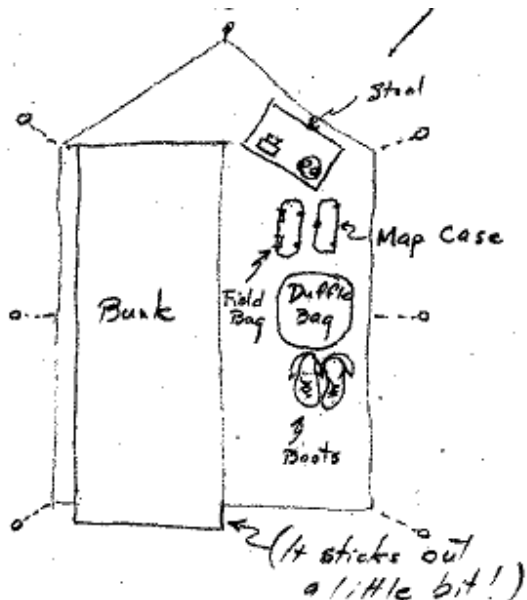
Well, just as I start writing this, "taps" is being sounded. But I have two of your candles to light my way across this paper and last night I got some mighty good sleep, so I'll write for a while tonight. Wish you could see how nicely I'm set up here for everything -- especially sleeping. I'm still under this big, nice, cool, cork tree, and still am able to live in my pup tent. And I still have the cot springs I stole from regimental headquarters when I moved out in the dark of one night. Have them up on tent stakes -- like this: .



It's

the nicest set up I've had for some time, and I'm really enjoying it. I can even sit up in here on the edge of my bunk to write (by leaning forward a little), as I'm doing right now. I guess you see your candles burning there! (The little stool also brought out from town). See the little alarm clock I bought to use when possible? It's a nice one, but cost two prices (five dollars). But I could find nothing else to spend our money on, so....

And now I've got my baggage down to what I need, without a lot of stuff to waste my time keeping up with and packing and unpacking, and to get in my way. Oh, here's my floor plan!



See, I pitched my tent up off the ground about a foot (see front elevation) so I wouldn't have to crawl in and out. And it works fine. It's

rained quite hard here a few times in the last day or so, but I've been as snug as a bug in a rug (except when I had to go out to all during the day).

We are still having it fairly easy as far as living conditions go, but are quite busy, as I think I've told you yesterday. We must be with company during the entire training time, yet some of our "additional duties" take a great deal of time. Mine, for instance: in addition to being mortar platoon leader, I'm company executive officer (considered a full-time job elsewhere) and Battalion awards officer. Well, we'll get over it, I guess; and in the meantime, it surely beats some of the stuff we've been through!

Today had a bath, by helmet, of course, and clothes-change planned for the warm part of the day, and finally got to it, just about dark tonight (about 9:30 PM). It was my first in nearly 2 weeks again, and my shirt was really getting in quite bad shape. This time it was due almost solely to neglect or procrastination, however.

Well, here's Jerry again. I'll take another "break" and now it's a few minutes later and he's gone again. This has been written with many such interruptions, as a Jerry overhead calls for "lights out". They're a nuisance. Sometimes I forget to put this down and found myself sitting on the edge of a hole in the dark with this clipboard and paper in my hand. Here we go again!!

You know, this consumes an awful lot of matches. It's good we have plenty.

I'll tell you some of the stuff that was in the two bags I sent home to you for. First, they will take maybe two months to get there (they were mailed yesterday). I sent my good boots, as I finally got some combat boots. Maybe Philip will wash and saddle-soap them for me for a quarter or so. Or has he outgrown that? And there's a very cheap secondhand watch that one of the fellas gave me. Maybe Gus or Philip could use it, though I am afraid it's not worth the new strap I put on. And there were a bunch of old used maps there, too. I would like especially to know how many, if any, of these get through to you. I wish now I'd kept them all here. I'd hate to lose them to some censor. They are my only record, or diary.

Now a lot of that stuff you're going to want to throw away, so go right ahead if it's in the way and you think it's no good. Or, if somebody we know can use it, let them have it.

Dot, I didn't mean for you to account for what you spent. Please don't feel that you should do that. I'd just like to know what we have put away, whenever the change is appreciable. So just let me know when you want to. It does seem that you are getting by on very little. Don't try too hard, Dot.

And, speaking of money, this month I was unable to save anything much. Had to pay my back mess bills, of course, spent some time in Rome, and then the screwballs started two officer clubs while we were in town, which cost me eight dollars (for stuff the other fellows drank). Incidentally, only one had time to open, and for only two nights, as we did not stay as long as we expected too. Well, maybe next month, I can send you enough for a very small bond.

Here's the letter Mr. Campbell sent me a while back. And reading over it, I find that he did hear from me first. Thought you might like to see what he's like. I think he must be nice.

And I sent your old letters to me home in one of the bags. They mean more to me than words can say, so I expect you to keep them safe for me. I just don't have time to read them again here, and might lose them.

I guess I have been falling down on all my requests lately. Have been thinking for months of these boxes on the way, and not looking enough into the future. So, please do send me some more similar to the last two: Candy, canned fruit, crackers, cookies, film, etc. They are all wonderful helps in breaking monotony of food here (no, not the film. I'm not that hungry!) But no more razor blades or gum (nor candles -- at least for a few weeks). And I'll try to remember to send your request every week. You're good to me, Dot.

There's one fellow who gets three Cokes every week or so from his wife. Says postage is about \$.20. They do come in mighty good, but probably are great deal of trouble. That's too often anyway.

What with interruptions in all, it's now 11:15 PM and we get up at five tomorrow.

So goodnight, Dot and Billy. However, miss you both, Dot. I love you with all my heart -- you are in my every prayer. Bill"

## Excerpt from one of Daddy's Essays

### "27<sup>th</sup> Birthday-August 16, 1944

(This was written Aug. 16, 1995 during Radio and TV celebrations of D Day, VE Day, and VJ Day, etc)

Just before dawn I was lying on my back in front of a German tank with its machine guns firing just over my face. I remember almost exactly how it happened:

Fifty years ago yesterday, Aug. 15, 1944, I was on some sort of little navy boat en route from Naples to a beach in southern France along with a few riflemen and my machine gunners. Crafts and ships were everywhere I looked, to the right, to the left, and to our rear — but none in front!

We were assured that our craft would ram the beach just as in our training, and we would rush off into knee-deep water. It didn't happen that way.

Before our boat touched bottom, it's props were reversed and we were moving astern, away from the beach, still a hundred or so yards away with us was doing an excellent job of cursing the navy and the situation, then shouting, "Dammit, Get off! Get off! Get off anyway! Dammit!"

We jumped off into the water up to our waists, the last off were in water up to their shoulders. But our normal 20 or so pounds of personal weapons plus about 40 pounds of MG ammo of the gun itself, or its tripod, helped us get traction on the sand, and the little waves helped us along. The bullets and shells splashing in the water helped some too.

We lost a bunch of stuff in the surf, but very few men were lost. Fortunately, the German units were mostly satellite (Balkan) troops and our preliminary naval and air bombardment had been good, so resistance on our beach was not as heavy as expected. But, to our right, our 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had a very bad time.

By night we were about 8 miles inland, having had maybe a dozen fire-fights, but moving at the same time. Some of our captives were smiling in relief. The war was over for them.

Then we turned left, moved very fast during the night, and before daybreak we were behind Marseille, on a bluff overlooking the city and listening to German armor pulling out. (I believe the armor was their rear guard. I know their Command and Supply, etc. had already pulled out because we later intercepted them at Montilimar in the Rhone Valley.)

Somehow in the dark a German tank got up on our bluff and was only 50 or so yards away before he could see us and we see him. He was on a sunken dirt road, about 3 or 4 feet lower than the surrounding area, thereby giving his guns perfect grazing fire. And a few of us were in a small, freshly, plowed field when he opened fire on us. At this time we had no heavy weapons to fire back with, being out of Naval Gun range and our naval spotters gone, and heavy support not yet brought up for us.

So, we lay on our backs, digging to our sides, with tracers cracking like horsewhips just inches above our eyes. I was lying on the edge of the field on hard white clay, impossible to dig, unable and afraid to move. But, in front of us was a real nice little mound of dirt covered with brush, so I lay still and secure. In just a little while, as day broke the tank withdrew...Leaving us for dead, and I could see daylight through my mound of dirt. There was no dirt there---just brush!  
..."

### **First letter written after the events described in the above essay:**

"23 August 1944

Southern France

Dearest Dot:

Have had only one chance to write you since we landed. Did you get it? It was long before time mail was supposed to go out and maybe it was lost. Anyway, you know, I'm in France, one of those "veteran American divisions," and we've been going pretty good, and very hard. There won't be many letters for you for a while, so don't worry -- just know that I'm all right, as I know

I will be. So far, there's been no break for us. If so, you know I would've written. Yesterday, our first mail came and, and I got one from you and one from Unk, telling me about your's and Billy's visit. I think he (Unk) must have enjoyed it more than anybody. Of course, I couldn't keep the letters, but I do remember you asking if your mail was reaching me. It is, Dot, and is certainly welcome. I've not had time to put them together, but I don't think many are missing.

I still like France and its people very much, particularly the peasant class in good farming areas. Have "visited" in their homes, and they do everything for us possible, and in instances giving us their rooms, food, kitchens, beds, and such. Have stayed with some a whole day before moving, and I'm learning to talk to them. They come right out and watch the fights, and many help us a great deal. Hope I get to know them better.

I love you, Dot.

Bill "