

Nov. 11, 1944

Darling,

Today is Armistice day, the monument of defeated purpose. How vapid to have ceremonies, - to commemorate the futility of the sacrifice of so many lives in the debacle of '14-'18? I stood on the old earthworks and trenches of Verdun, St. Mihiel, Thionville, Metz - the graves of the Americans & the French are the roads of the tanks of this war. There is always the Boche! And this time will our sentimentalists set the stage for our sons? Let us, if we must, remember Nov. 11 as a day of infamy - when men who fought and bled and died for an ideal and for a purpose were forgotten.

Today was clear and cool, and the evening a picture post-card ~~xxxx~~ in pastels. This part of Belgium has a nice, quiet charm, with feathery trees, over-grassy meadows, very low hills, and quiet pastoral scenes. Not far away the city lies in a valley, crawling up the hillsides, and spilling over their crests like batter from the waffle iron. It is modern, industrial, famous, & old. Its morals are French.

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As the story of Lublin becomes more definite and documental, it becomes clear that it represents the blackest mark against a nation in the history of the world. Before this cold, calculated, highly organized murder of one and a half million people the deeds of Genghis Kahn pale as the antics of a mischievous child. I still wish I was a pilot! I think dive bombing would please me most!

When I was in Landerneau I met a surgeon who was coping, in the French hospital there, with the many wounded filtering out of Brest, a harried, tired, valiant man! For years he had been doing surgery by candle light in a barn for the Maquis; - the price of discovery - oblivion. He had a picture in his pocket - a photograph - and thereby hangs the tale. There was a French woman in Chateaulin who was the mistress of a German corporal, who had served in Russia, - Rostov. She was a spy as well, and was by way of passing in incriminating data resulting in the mysterious disappearance of certain local patriots in the Maquis. When the day of liberation came the F.F.I. took from her purse, before they shot her, the picture of her German paramour taken in Russia. He is standing in front of a pit about 30 feet square and 10 feet deep, three-quarters filled with the nude, emaciated, grotesque bodies of the starved and frozen dead wivilians of Rostov. It is said he was not loth to boast that sometimes when they became too weak to protest, they were thrown in still alive. He was apparently proud of the picture - he looked very straight, and strong and handsome; he gave it to his mistress.

He was not captured or killed in Brittany. His unit was removed in time. His name is in the books of the F.F.I. Just another nice, misled, innocent boy? What do you think?

When I was at Ploudaniel I met one day a charming French-woman, about thirty-five. She had two stalwart boys, 12 and 8. She was the wife of a doctor of Brest. He had moved his family to Lesneveu a year ago for protection from our bombing attacks, but he remained in Brest. He was still there, caring, as best he could, in an ill-lit, dirty, underground "hospital" (spelled "Hovel") for the civilians who remained in Brest after our siege began. They were Red Cross workers, city officials, doctors, nurses, social workers - and the wounded. There was a large abri well-built, deep, concrete covered, into which you descended by a flight of 67 steps on a steep staircase. This was allotted to the civilians, as a shelter, by the Germans. But, because it was so well-constructed it was also used as a storage dump for gasoline and powder. One day about 50 of the Todt workers, slave labor from Poland, Russia, and Czechoslovakia, revolted, refused to work, and took refuge in this civilian abri. They were pursued and attacked by Boche paratroopers who stood in the entrance and poured machine gun & grenade fire at them. There were 454 civilians in there at the time - the Mayor of Brest, 27 nurses, 8 doctors, sundry others. The gasoline caught fire - there was a flash-fire, fumes, burning gun-powder. A narrow stairway -- (the Coconut Grove was as nothing in comparison).

All 454 French civilians burned to death there.
Dr. Kerjean, husband of my acquaintance at Lesneveu was among them.

I entered the story as a messenger. Through Madeline came the news that a certain doctor, husband of a refugee in Chateaulin, was not in the abri. I had the pleasure of bearing her that message as I returned thither from a social call. She was quartered, with thirty other refugees, in a barn there. A young and lovely woman. Can you imagine how she looked when, in halting French, I told her of her husband's escape from so horrible a disaster? If she cried, eyes staring and brilliant with tears, her hand to her throat, I did not see it. These things were commonplace.

Goodnight, my darling. Do you mind these stories of mine? I may be a little different when next I see you. I want to help you to understand why --