

27 Dec. 44

Dear Everybody:

This is to be an appendage to my individual letters to each of you. And I hope you 'll forgive the duplicate ... but Christmas here was so completely out of this world that I must share it with you. I have some misgivings about teasing those of you who are overseas with it, but I know you're all big enough to understand my reasons and to appreciate what some of our officers and cadre really are.

To begin with, some of you know that I had been invited to town for the holiday week end with Dottie Held and a few more kids. But I insisted that I wanted to see the season thro at camp. However, at the last minute I discovered there WAS to be a Midnit Mass out at Brainerd, about 17 miles from here and I felt that would be more like going to Mass at home. So I managed to get me a single room at the Read House and went in there about 7PM Xmas Eve. Of course I spent the evening with the kids who had two double adjoining rooms and who tried to make things as homey as could be. They had a small tree which they set up on the phone table and completely decorated with hand made thingamajigs. They had the Venetian blinds decorated, and on one window sill had set up some holly, a large Xmas candle and 2 little choir-boy candles which they burned all evening. They had brought in all their gifts form home and in addition had wrapped just oceans of little packages for each other and me ... all gifts based on our personalities, pet peeves, foibles, etc. Dottie insisted it was her party so bought all the "wher-with-all" and I indulged in two rum cokes before 10 PM and fasting time arrived. At 11 off to a cute little country church but alas and alack, it was so crowded we had to stand up. But it was a solemn High Mass with three priests on the altar, myriads of little white clad altar boys, and the nicest choir so the standing was well worth it. When we got home we were dog tired, it was 2 AM. And so to bed. Before I went up I stopped at the desk and placed a call to be put through to Joe at 7 the next morning. Incidentally it stayed "through" all the next day but never reached him, for which I was truly sorry. At 9 AM Xmas morning Dotty called me and I went down and joined them for breakfast in their room. During coffee we took turns opening gifts from the stockings and then from under the tree. This took absolutely all morning. I had planned on going back o the post for dinner so insisted on dragging myself away at noon ... for I can't think of anything colder than Christmas dinner in some hotel room or restaurant. And I was so glad I went

When I got back to the barracks there was a long filled

stocking on my bed and everybody flocked around to watch me open it and to tell me all about the previous evening "at home". Everyone was in bed at least by midnite and felt as if they had just dozed off when on went the lights and everyone was awakened by the jingle jingle of Xmas bells and sounds of "Merry Christmas". It was 4 AM and there were our CO, Capt Chick and her executive officer to give out with the stockings. The noise went on and on while the Officers visited and the kids opened their gifts. Each stocking had coal, fruit, nuts, candy, pencil, Kleenex, some female unmentionables, a home wave-set gizen only to those with curly hair, sewing cotton, soap, AND a ladies' red leather wallet. To add to the warmth of the whole thing, they tell me that much of the stuff was donated by merchants in town.

The kids had just about gotten back o sleep, or so it seemed, when at 8AM they were awakened for BREAKFAST IN BED ... coffee hot buns, and tangerines. YES, there is a Santa Claus, at least in 4443 SCU. Shortly after, Sgt. Thompson, a cook from Officer's Mess who lives in our barracks, broke out some EGG NOG which she had made just for the occasion. All of which brings us up to just about the point where I arrived home for dinner.

We had watched the mess hall decorations grow all week but were completely unprepared for the surprise which was to greet us at dinner when we saw the finished product. To begin with every window in the place was decorated in water colors, with the various windows depicting the Wise Men, the Infant, shepherds, Virgin, Angels etc. The Christmas tree was really wonderful considering that there is no such thing as "boughten" decorations;; they made long astrings of pretzels and popcorn which hung from branch to branch; little figures made of crushed colored paper; peanuts and walnuts colored and hung on the branches; and just hundreds of little sweet cookies, all different shapes, each in - dividually decorated and each containing the name of one of the gals in the detachment. I forgot to mention that the entire tree had originally been brushed or sprayed with white paint and the whole thing was absolutely wonderful. Well, we had seen all of these decorations in process; but the results were really sur - prising when we walked into the mess hall especially if you try to visualize this set-up:: the tables which are ordinarily lined up in two sections all the way from back to front with an aisle in between, had been turned around and formed into just 3 long rows which seated about 50 each, and extended, lengthwise, from the kitchen to the back door. We had our Sunday tablecloths festooned with holly leaves; about every ten feet or so there were Xmas candles burning in little home-made silver holders(wooden blocks painted by the cooks); in between these were little water-filled soup dishes containing four or five burning candles just about an inch high. Considering that we used no elet ric lighting and that the painted windows let in little light you can imagine that all the candles shed a lovely soft glow over the whole place and gave you just the right soft, mellow feeling to start off the day. The mess sgt called on Capt Chick who said grace and then we were off to a wonderful dinner, for the contents of which you can consult the menu. Just one last teaser :: we started off with a large serving of SHERRY wine, with seconds and some thirds, on request.

All during mess one of our cooks gave out on the accordian with carols and Jingle Bells and Roll Out the Barrell, all of which left me choking and teary-eyed especially that last number since it always reminds me of the Chief at our home parties. In fact only the hardest heart could have gone unmoved this season in face of all the work that the officers, cadre, and cooks put into their preparations weeks and weeks ahead of time.

After mess Judy and I went back to town and downed a few more rum cokes and then all of us came back in the evening to help stow away the turkery we had all chipped in for and which Sgt. T baked for us. This time the mess was just for our own barracks and was spread out buffet style on field tables up on our floor in the barracks. Believe it or not there was more egg nog, and our first sgt and CO came up to join us for awhile. It was after this second feast that I opened my packages of muchly-needed slippers, scads of undies, hankies, hose, perfume nuts, food, candies, and the loveliest bracelet from Mary Case in New Guinea. Had stowed all the packages under my bed and had just managed to get my avoirdupois into the bunk when someone announced that there was a whole bucket of forgotten shrimp and sauce down in the laundry room. So up we got and downed a dozen or more iced shrimp, praying all the while that the whole day's mess would stay down where it belonged and not cause nightmares and continuous trips to the latrine. But once we hit the bed nothing got us up till reveille.

Needless to say the day after was really "raunchy" as Joe would say and we simply dragged around all day. But it left all of us with the warmest feeling and the conviction that it was the pleasantest Christmas we will ever see in service.

Copies to Jac, Frank, Lane, Sherman, Home.