

Friday Night
13 April 1945

Friday Nite, April 13, 1945

Hello Everybody:

Dee & Milt; Peg & Mort; Ralph; Regina & Paul; Tippy; Willine:

This isn't a regular letter.

I have a story to tell you. But before I begin, let me advise you as follows; if you are bothered reading about unpleasant things, don't READ this.

I'm not much of a storyteller; but if ever I wanted to tell a story vividly enough to convey my visual and mental impressions, this is IT.

I'll begin this story by mentioning the town of Ohrdruf, Germany. You may or may not have heard or read about this town via radio or newspapers on or around the above date. If you had, then you know what I'm writing about. But you may have missed it in the anxious glance for the rapid advances on both fronts. Anyway, Ohrdruf was a small Kraut town in the path of our advance. To casually run through it, it would look like any other small town that we have come through. But, it wasn't. In this town I saw a horror, the works of fiends; and that's what I want to tell you about.

(If there is any part of this which challenges your reason, I'll forgive and understand your choice to doubt it. This is the time when you include the statement "you'd have to see it with your own eyes to believe it". I ask you to believe it. I'll take an oath and vow that all I write here now is the truth and what I saw; and if anything came as hearsay, I'll point it out.)

Today, I saw the labor camp, or concentration camp, or extermination camp (all three apply) that the Nazis managed in the town of Ohrdruf.

From the outside, when I got out of my jeep, I saw little pine and spruce trees which only partially hid a double strand of barbed-wire fence about nine feet high. As I passed through the gate, I noticed that between the barbed wire fence there was a "concertina", (a concertina is a rolling mass of barbed wire about three feet high. This is so that if any poor soul was fortunate enough in mounting the first nine-foot barbed wire fence, he would fall into the rolling mass of barbed wire, and then he would have to try to climb the other nine foot barbed-wire fence. Of course, all this he would have to attempt under the surveillance of the Gestapo with machine-guns who were posted outside the double fence about twelve feet off the ground with a command view of the whole camp). This fence, I saw, confined an area of about four hundred square yards.

For the most part, the interior of the camp was composed of one story wooden shacks. Some shacks had rotted wooden floors, others had cement floors, and others were just plain earth. On these floors were rotten, soiled, spoiled cloth sacks of straw that were the beds of men. The sight of these alone with their accompanying smell was enough to turn your stomach. If you can possibly conjure up in your imagination an odor that would be a combination and conglomeration of unwashed bodies, human waste, decayed scraps of foods, and stale air, you would be smelling the experience. Small pans that looked like a combination mess can and wash can were strewn about the floors. There were torn and battered clothes, worn and broken wood and cloth shoes scattered all over. And to top all this filth, the

bad, and the rotten, the stench of the dead filled your nostrils so that you wanted to give way to the muscles and retch.

Not all the shacks had dead in them. But of the ones that did, the dead were shot through the head. They were dead because the Gestapo shot them as they lay asleep or too ill to move when the rapid advance of our army forced them to flee. One they didn't shoot, though, died of Typhus the day I got there.

From there I passed on to a courtyard in the middle of these shacks where I witnessed something that made me gasp in horror and in distaste; I wanted to shake my head and say NO, NO, I wasn't seeing right. Yet, there it was! I saw shapes that were once men. Some were naked, some were half-clothed, some fully clothed. They all lay in different positions, mostly funny-like, twisted and turned, crumbled over, unnatural-like. Some looked like they were resting on their heads, others with their arms and legs underneath them and twisted in all manners and shapes.

These men had been shot through the head. They were kind of greenish looking then. But to all this was the added shock of their physical condition. You could easily tell that by the naked ones. If you can visualize placing a layer of very thin cloth of a human skeleton, just to give it bare contour and shape, you'd have a good picture of what they looked like.

You see this Nazi camp held both soldiers and forced labor – French, Russian, Polish, as near as I could learn. Obviously they were not fed enough to keep them alive – as I witnessed. When the rapid advance of our army made the Gestapo flee, they took all those that could walk or weren't sick. The rest of them that could fall out for a formation were shot as they formed. A survivor told the story that they were all called out, and then told to bend over. The Gestapo then went around and applied the pistol to the head. And of course, the ones that couldn't fall out were shot where they lay in the shacks.

If ever I felt sick over a sight, this was it. After the initial shock, I said what almost every other GI said, "Those dirty low sonofabitches". I saw this about four or five days after it had happened. The bodies had already begun to spoil. I can't dwell here too long because the mental recapitulation gives me a slight nausea.

As I left this part, for the next scene, I saw with satisfaction, that some of the townspeople were loading the remains onto trucks.

From here I went to an area several hundred yards away, up to a small knoll. There lined up in hasty rows were still more remains, products of Nazi culture. These remains had been hastily sprinkled with lime, prior to some kind of disposal. I couldn't quite decide what they were going to do with this batch of dead; I thought perhaps they meant to place them in a common grave – when they got around to it.

The day I came, the army had gathered up the male population of the town and brought them out to this area where they were all busily active in digging single graves for the dead here. I should estimate there were around a hundred and fifty to two hundred supermen digging graves. I enjoyed the thought of the terror speculation in the minds of these citizens. I hope they thought they were digging their own graves. They didn't look like the flawless Aryan race then.

Close by, yet separated from, these dead workers, were two freshly killed Gestapo. By some rightful strange twist of fate, they had returned to the scene of their crimes – believing that their "crimes" had

either been all removed or were all dead. But fortunately that was not so; there were a few workers who had escaped and were in the vicinity. What those few did to the two returning Gestapo should be the justice meted out to them all. As I looked at their battered red bodies (one had virtually no face left and the other had six holes in his chest), I felt only satisfaction, a feeling of gratitude that at least some of these bastards were paying a price. And even this was an easy out.

I had one place left to see. I hope that it will be the last that I will ever have to along these lines. About a mile away, off the main road, through some plain open fields, to the edge of some small woods, lies some further evidence that these people have lost any claim to sanity. At first, you saw only a black shadow against a green background. As you get closer, you see that the black takes form and shape... it looks like burnt logs.... yes, it is burnt logs... but intermingled with them are charred legs, arms and heads.

First, they would lay railroad ties, each running parallel. Vertical to this they would lay logs and small branches. On top of this went bodies, and on top of them oil. Then they set fire to it all.

I can remember back when I would read about such things in newspapers. I would attach some distasteful significance to it. I was bothered by it yes, because it was human to react against it. But I confess that I read it all then in a detached sort of way. And after awhile perhaps I forgot about it. I DON'T BELIEVE THAT I WILL EVER FORGET WHAT I SAW THERE!!

And could you believe that what I saw and what I am telling you about is mild in comparison to some other camps that some of my friends have seen?

That there could be any camps worse than this makes me shake my head and wonder how could it be? But they have told me of torture chambers that would make your hair stand on end.

That's the story. If I have made your stomach feel ill, then you have recaptured some part of the nausea that I experienced. I hope that you didn't mind hearing about it.

Dee, will you call Rabbi Feldman and thank him for his very nice letter. Someday I would like to write him. If you want and you think that he would be interested, you might let him read this one. I don't believe that you ought to allow the folks to read this one, because it is not the kind of letter that they could enjoy.

I believe that we, over here, must have been keenly moved by the death of the President as you all. None of us wanted to believe it. If any man in recent years approaches being worshipped, that man is Franklin Roosevelt. We will all miss him.

You-all be good and keep well and I'll be seeing you sometime.

Much love,
George