

Chapter 6

January–February, 1944

January 1, 1944—Matawan

Happy New Year darling,

It's quite early in the morning but I had to tell you I've been with you so much the last few hours. We worked until almost ten-thirty, then it was nearly another hour before we got home. The boss and his wife brought us home. We had a lunch and here I am, not sleepy but tired. We had a grueling day... twelve hours of figures and money but it's all over now and I have you to come home to.

You know, I've never really celebrated the New Year the way I've heard so many tell. It seems I always had to work or something interfered so I'm looking forward to a real celebration with you on our first New Year's Eve together... next year?

Marguerite is curled up in the big chair reading so you see we are really having an exciting time, but since we can't be together I like it this way.

El said we were to get flowers for Christmas. We'll keep you posted as to delivery. The florists have been quite short of flowers for the holidays. I noticed a piece in the paper the other day. It's a shame they didn't come. Mom received hers and loved them. I had a letter from her today.

One of Marguerite's customers... she's in the note department... brought her a bottle of 8-year-old scotch so if we were party girls we'd have a party right here. If she keeps one, she'll have quite a stock... she brought back almost two quarts of scotch from Canada.

I'm taking the bonds we have to Father John. Marguerite has them in her safe deposit box but I don't want her to be worried with them and I don't like the idea of taking them home with me. I don't think he'll mind holding them for us. He has one of yours from the Jersey Journal. I know he's mentioned giving it to me any number of times.

I'm going to Dottie's tomorrow to spend the night. I called her last night to see if they had planned anything and to ask if I might camp on her sofa since there won't be anyone at 195 this weekend... they went to Long Island for the New Year. I was invited but since I had to work tonight, it was no go.

The bank took us to dinner from cocktails to mints and brandy—not too bad, but not too good either—on Friday and it was fish. I love good fish but this was terrific. I'm glad I wasn't paying for it.

I haven't heard from my brother since before Xmas. I'm hoping it's just the mail held up and that he hasn't been moved yet. I'd love to see him before he goes.

Still more reports on the coming invasion. I think that more than anything else is sending me home. I have the picture of Mom by the radio listening and knowing Warren will be “over there” somewhere. She’ll need someone with her to soften the news a bit.

A cousin of mine, a sister of the one that was killed in Guadalcanal, leaves this weekend for California. She will have a military wedding. She’s a swell person and deserves the best. Her husband to be must be going to be shipped soon after... she plans to be gone a month.

It’s a gorgeous night. The stars are very bright and there is a bit of moon, a little more than new... just made for a good time.

All my life, since I can remember, I’ve wanted to see New York on New Year’s Eve and here I am an hour away and here I sit... but it wouldn’t be any fun without you. I’ll bide my time and wait a bit longer.

I keep waking up instead of getting sleepy and it will be early in the morning because we’re going to nine o’clock Mass.

I’m getting used to my ring now and it really feels like mine, except now and then I do have to pinch myself to really believe. I do love you so much and miss you dreadfully this night. Wouldn’t it be wonderful ... but there I go again. I’d better say goodnight while I still can.

My New Year’s resolution? To love you even more in ’44 than ’43. That will be easy to keep.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

Hope you managed a little fund to welcome the New Year in. Tell me about it. B.

January 2, 1944—London

Hello sweetheart,

Forgive me for being a little late, but all the very best for the New Year is what I’m sending to you tonight, with my fondest hopes that we will be together this time next year... and my very best love.

I’m a little late (a day or so) because I’ve been away. I came back last night but will have to leave again in the morning. I wish I could say I offered a toast to you when the New Year bowed in. But I can’t. Believe it or not, I was in bed by 11:30. I read a few magazines in a hotel lounge during most of the evening, thinking I’d stick it out to the dry, bitter end. But I couldn’t. I was wondering what you were doing.

I received your cable the day I went away last week. It didn’t say much, but still told me a lot. It told me you were pleased with the surprise. Sorry I couldn’t put the ring in the pocket of the fur coat and deliver them both myself. Wouldn’t that have been a surprise.

While I was away the race between the flying members of the office to Berlin was won by Lt. Hodenfield. It was his first mission and he made it with the RAF. While Bud, Andy and I were sitting out the daylight trip for months, he quietly buzzed off to an RAF base last week, not thinking he would get to Berlin the first time out. But he did. Can you imagine luck like that?



John Kiley, 1912 or 1913.



Charles Kiley, 1914.

El sent me a dozen pictures last week, mostly of the baby. After looking at them, I concluded that Annice is definitely a Kiley. If you have ever seen the old snapshots they have of Father John and I you must have seen the resemblance. It was like looking at those old snaps again.

Coming back to town today gave me an opportunity to see more Americans in London than I've ever seen before. Sunday is usually "movie day" here and to get the proper picture you'd have to see it yourself. There were literally thousands of people in lines of three and fours waiting to get into at least 12 theaters I passed, and for seats ranging from \$.80 to \$2.10!

There were so many Yanks it looked like New York. And, naturally, for every Yank there was a girl. Looked positively fantastic to see civilians and British soldiers walking in male pairs, trios and quartets, and then see our guys with all the women. The films which are currently attracting the crowds are "Jane Eyre," "This is the Army," "The Nelson Touch," "Sahara," "Best Foot Forward," "North Star," "For Whom the Bell Tolls," and "Cry Havoc..." all but "Jane Eyre" having a war angle to them.

Have you been reading of the proposed bill to give soldiers mustering out pay up to \$500? I did an opinion roundup last week and found 25 soldiers spending it already.

Be back soon.

All my love, Charles

January 2, 1944—Matawan

My darling,

I'm a bit weary but from what I can't imagine. I came back tonight on the 5:54 from Dot and Al's. I had a pleasant visit with them. I went in Saturday afternoon hoping I'd see the two Ruths, too, but they were busy with their U.S.O. work.

I told Dot and Al about my going home but not the others. I didn't want to say so many goodbyes. I hate them... saying goodbyes. It was hard enough saying goodbye to Dot and Al. It was like leaving a part of me behind. They are so much a part of your life and you mean so much to them. When I go there it doesn't seem so long since we were together.

I still get awfully jealous of their homes and families. I can't seem to help myself. I want so much to be settled. I wouldn't mind being an old married woman right now. Not just any old married woman... I'd have to be Mrs. Charles Kiley.

Dot's baby is darling, Charles. She's definitely a little baby girl, so feminine and such a good baby. You should see how she loves her bath. She kicks and squeals from sheer delight. I hope you can see the babies before they get too old. Dot liked the napkin ring. She's like me... she likes things you can keep. The baby makes up to me and has the cutest smile. Couldn't tell you who she looks like. How her grandfather adores her. He takes such good care of her and helps Dot so much. She nearly always gives her the six o'clock bottle and he changes her so Dot can sleep until eight.

We went over to the Daly's on Saturday night. Al had gone New Year's calling in Jersey City so you can imagine the kind of glow he had on when we all finally got together. Bill and his father-in-law, Mr. Schofield, came for Dot and I about seven so we could see Janet before she went to bed. She's cute and smart as can be. Talks a blue streak... Marty has to interrupt. Bill made us two lovely ash-trays for our two-by-four. See how our hope chest is expanding? Edie and her mother were there, too. I met them in the summer, so we all had fun. Mr. Schofield told us some cute stories and we saw all the baby's things. What a lucky child she is. Edie's Christmas from John was a sheared beaver coat and hat... very lovely and she looks like a dream walking in them. They all thought my ring lovely and agreed that Father John has excellent taste. The size took them back some. Mrs. Schofield held my hand and proceeded to tell me for about ten minutes how very fortunate I was but hastened to assure me that she thought I was deserving of you. You would have burst to hear the compliments flying around. They weren't telling me anything I didn't already know.

Al came in about eleven. He was very happy. What a guy. He and his brother did away with a bottle of scotch so then he and Bill started drinking rum straight. You probably know about the liquor shortage here. You can tell, I guess, from Bill and Al drinking rum. Dot was so exhausted from the party the night before... we practically had to help Al home but he made it. He went to sleep on the sofa, so Dot and I slept together. She feels better today after a good night's sleep.

Berta and Jack and little Jackie came over this afternoon. Berta's picking up weight... she's heavier than when I saw her in the summer. They both look good. The New Year's party they had in the development must have been a riot. Next year we'll help them celebrate.

They've all been wonderful to me, Charles, taking me in and making me feel like one of them. After all, I was a stranger. We'll make up for it when you come home... in part. Things like that can't ever be repaid.

I was asking Dot about the apartments. They are starting new ones in the spring to be a part of this completed development. Perhaps we should put our name on the list. The three rooms are \$48 a month. You pay the electric and gas. Does that seem like too much rent for us to pay? Marguerite says you shouldn't spend more than a quarter of your salary for rent. The apartments are nice and so convenient... handy to the bus and the shopping district.

Al's Class B came to an end yesterday. That was part of the reason for the glow... he's 1A now. His deferment will have to be renewed again. I hope he doesn't have to go. That would be plenty tough for Dot.

More invasion talk and I get more jittery... I get chills when I think of what it will mean. Still haven't heard from Warren since before Christmas. I must sound like a perpetual worrier but I can't help being concerned and anxious.

I was reading some of your recent letters a bit ago and I see in one of them you closed by telling me to be a good girl. Hmmm... doesn't seem to be anything else I can do except be good. It's fun being good for you. Really, it isn't hard at all.

It's getting late and I want to dash a note off to Mom. I still can hardly believe I'm going home. Now it seems like I've always been here.

Tuesday I go to 195 so El and I can have our pictures made. I'll have a small one made for you.

I missed you very much over the weekend, more than usual. I love you more and more if that's possible. Please hurry home. Edie's John is to come home in March a major. Isn't that wonderful?

Keep well and remember, my prayers and love are always with you.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 3, 1944—Matawan

My dearest Charles,

This would have been a perfect "blue Monday" if it hadn't been for your letter and Warren's. What a nasty day it's been, and tonight the wind and rain are something fierce.

I loved your letter. I picture you curled up comfortably in your new dressing gown (that's what I wanted to send you for Xmas but the size of the box vetoed the idea) and slippers... my slippers? Saturday night and all you needed was me, but we do the next best thing... spin day dreams. The similarity between our dreams is amazing.

Telling me of your thoughts, I couldn't help but smile because I've tortured myself by the hour with the same questions. The most frightening is, will I live up to the picture you carry of me in your heart? Scares me sometimes and I lose confidence in myself. Like Claudia, I'd love to have a little "glamour" to fall back on... especially that first moment when we find each other again.

Do you want me to answer some of them? I'll try. "Will she really love me as much as I want her to?" There aren't any words in my vocabulary or anyone else's. I'd have to show you. "Could I love you any more than now?" I melt every time I see your grin by my pillow or close my eyes and see you in my special dream room. Plain and simple, I love you truly. You're my whole life.

Everything is at a standstill until you come home and we begin life together, you and me. Just stick around. When you come home and you'll make me as happy as you want to. Patience is one of my best virtues and I hope you're well supplied with it, too, because you're going to need it, getting used to having me around.

I've had us in so many places, doing so many things. We've had our ball team and raised them already, and we're getting old and gray, but I'm still loving you as much as ever. We've had a lot of fun, you and me together, sharing the things I thought you'd like.

Come to think about it, I don't know too much about your likes and dislikes. I've learned a little from the gang in Arlington and from 195, but I guess I'll have to learn from you.

I've been wondering how you'd feel at the wedding. Seeing "Claudia" on the same day, I can appreciate your "mood" when you were writing. Glad our "first fight" didn't change your letters. Who gave in, then? I guess I did...

I can see where "Claudia" would remind you of Marty a little, especially a younger Marty. I like Marty, mostly I guess since she reminds me of my sister, Letty, but then there's a little "Claudia" in Letty, too.

Marty is growing up being a mother but the role becomes her very much. She's very proud of Janet and justly so. She and Bill can both be proud.

I think that's one of the reasons I love you so much... you're understanding. I think that's why you are so well liked by everyone.

I have a long way to go to grow up. Sometimes I wonder if I ever will. Funny, I don't feel any older than when I took my first job. A little more confidence in myself, but I still have such a "young" feeling if you can understand what I mean. I should be growing up. I'm old enough... past 23 now.

There was something so appealing and simple about the story in "Claudia." I left the theatre refreshed and a bit eager... wondering what our first year would be like. I hope you are blessed with as much patience as the David character and somehow I know you are.

Had a letter from Warren today. He's still at the same place. Speaking of complaints, he was in rare form. Your letters are meaning a lot to him. The whole crew is enjoying your letters. To quote, "He writes a very intelligent letter. The boys really like them. In fact, the minute I open one they know who it was from and snatch it from my hand and read it aloud, but I don't mind." I'm praying he'll be sent somewhere near you if he has to go, and that seems pretty definite.

I still have to watch my ring glitter and sparkle, but the stone is cut so beautifully... it takes your breath away. I went to have a guard put on it today and asked the jeweler the size but he wouldn't tell me. Father John asked me to find out since he forgot to ask the jeweler. It's a good half-carat so you can imagine now how lovely it is. It makes me feel a bit glamorous and very proud.

I'm tired and weary. Everyone has gone to bed. I still have a bath to take and the clock is striking eleven, so I'll say goodnight. I'm missing you more than I can say. The ache gets bigger every day but my patience is still holding out. I love you as much and more than you want me to.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 5, 1944—London

Darling,

Here is part of my photo collection. Can you find room for them? I don't know whether or not some of them belong in our album. Perhaps you can just put them away for awhile. I want to keep a separate "pic" record of Dorothy Jean, anyway. I'm sending them to you because there is always the possibility of me having to leave them behind somewhere, or losing them.

You've seen some of the pictures; others are new. The pictures of the "Stars and Stripes" with her crew were made just in time. Jimmy Harbison is missing now. Eddie Barret, tail gunner and Bill Williams, bombardier, were in the hospital when these were taken. Incidentally, the plane is no more. Another crew took her up last week and, well, until I can tell you about it, there isn't any more of the "Stars and Stripes." However, Mac is getting another ship and he's calling it the "Stars and Stripes, Second Edition."

'Bye for awhile... I love you.

Charles



The picture Charles mentions in this letter has not been found. Above is the crew of "The Second Edition." Lt. McIlveen is front row, right.

January 7, 1944—Matawan (V-mail)

Darling,

You've been neglected again this week but it seems as if everything has been preventing me from writing. I wanted to write Tuesday, the fourth, but that was the night I went to Jersey City to have my picture taken. El went with me and afterwards we took in a movie at Loew's; a swell picture: "Thousands Cheer." A little of the "Stage Door Canteen" type but we enjoyed it. Jose Iturbi, the pianist, plays an important role in it and I enjoyed that. Even the other picture was good, which is unusual, so we both enjoyed the evening.

An aunt of Marguerite's died this week so I've been helping out a little more at the house since they have had to rush to the funeral parlor each night. I had a letter started last night when company came and Theresa was putting the baby to bed, so I had to entertain. Funny part was that Theresa fell asleep herself putting the baby to bed and so it was late again before I got to do anything for myself. Did you ever see such an array of excuses?

We've been having weather this week... rain, snow and sleet. You mentioned seeing snow flurries on the walk you and Ben took. I didn't know it dried up over there long enough to snow.

Received some *Stars and Stripes* this week from the week of December 11. I enjoyed the article on the "glamour gals of the Air Force." Incidentally, there is an article in yesterday's New York Times written by a woman who just recently came back from England, or the story was sent from England... anyhow, I think she did a rewrite job on your story because it's practically word for word your story. I'm saving it for you. I went through all the *Stars and Stripes* I have and put them in order according to date. I don't have any at all for August and September but I've decided to save these anyhow. Think I'll take them to 195 and see if El can find a little space for them. I have them all wrapped neatly in a package.

I get my proofs Saturday [of her engagement picture] so guess I'll stay for the weekend again. Really, I feel just like I'm going home when I get to 195. Even Annice is knowing me from one time to the next. She is getting to be so adorable... she has the bluest eyes I ever saw.

I'm dashing this off at the bank, and I want it to be picked up in the ten o'clock mail. So far, I haven't had the misfortune to have any customers this morning. I have a million things to do so I hope they cooperate and stay home.

I love you.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 8, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

You will have to forgive me again for remaining away so long. This is the first time I've been with you in six days, but it's our date night and I have three of your letters to keep me company. In my last letter, I said I was going away for awhile. It lasted almost a week, one of those things I can't tell you about. Since my activities can't be discussed, we'll just have to talk about you.

I have read your letter written at 195 on Christmas so many times I almost have it memorized. It's difficult for me to explain... what it did to me. It was all inside, making me want to be near you, making me love you more and more... everything I've felt before only more so.

I doubt if I could have had a better picture of your Christmas unless I were with you. The manner in which you talked of the ring made me feel your reaction. May I just thank you for giving me the opportunity of putting it on your finger by proxy?

I'll promise you, Billee, we will have our own special ceremony wherein I'll place the ring on your third finger, left hand. And, I'll be close by to collect my reward, too.

It wasn't hard for me to understand your tears. If it's all right with you, I like you the way you are... even though you confess to being a sissy. I'll let you in on a secret, although I know I may regret it. You can get anything you want from me with tears. It's a very weak spot in me.

Father John must be popular with the jeweler. Your gold bracelet sounds swell.

So, you liked the Doyle-Drayton Christmas decorations. We'll have ours, Billee, and while it will be hard to surpass theirs, I'll bet we do it.

I haven't had mail from Dot and Al since before Christmas so I can't say whether or not they were "surprised" at the ring. I really don't believe they were too surprised.

The letters I received were those of Christmas, your birthday and a V-mail of Dec. 23. Good service for the airmails.

About the engagement announcement... anything you do is o.k. with me. I'll let you know about that in a V-mail tomorrow. Then, you can go ahead when you get this or the V-mail.

I received Marguerite's Christmas card. Will you thank her for me? It was a beautiful card.

Since you didn't mention it, I took it for granted that the flowers I cabled for your birthday didn't arrive. I haven't had an opportunity to make a check but I will in a few days.

A bit of good news and a little bad before kissing you good night. Lt. McIlveen's brother is a prisoner of war... good news. The "Stars and Stripes" flew her last mission... bad news. Mac and the crew were grounded one day last week and a new crew took her and crashed. Mac is getting a new ship and calling it the "Stars and Stripes, Second Edition."

'Bye until tomorrow.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

January 9, 1944—Matawan

My dearest,

It's a quiet Sunday afternoon at 195. Your cousin Jack and Marilyn are here. The baby is in her rocking horse, the center of attraction. Bette is in the kitchen knitting a sweater for the baby. Miriam, her girlfriend, is with her. El just laid down her crocheting to see how the baby is.

Your Uncle John was here yesterday and today. He asked to be remembered to you when he left. He thought our ring was lovely.

The pictures turned out fairly well, the proofs I should say. He must have a wonderful camera. The family thought the sober one the best. It shows my ring and I look as if I were looking at you, darling. Some of the other poses, especially one, are good. I'll have one made like that later and send it to you. Before I get finished, you'll have enough pictures to pin all over... so you can just take those other pin-up girls down. I'll have no competition, please. The pictures won't be ready for two weeks.

Father John suggested I come in and see Frances Dear about writing the announcement. Since I'm leaving next Sunday, I'll come in this week and arrange the announcement.

I haven't told you but I'm almost sure I'm only taking a month's leave of absence and coming back. This way I can see how Mom is going to take Warren's leaving. Maybe I won't have to stay home. I'm afraid that going home to stay will only make it harder later on. It's a little hard to explain, and would take a lot of paper to tell you about it so we'll just leave it as it is for now. It has nothing to do with just you and I. Mr. Peterson, my boss, is to let me know tomorrow or Tuesday if my leave of absence will go through. I hope so, but if not, I won't worry about it... just have to make the best of it.

I just heard your cousin and your dad say they don't think the war will be over this year. It makes my Irish boil because I'm believing Eisenhower's statement: Victory in 1944. It has to be or I'm afraid I'll join up myself and find some way to reach you. Oh, I love you so much and I've needed and wanted you so much the past few days. I've been so in doubt as to what's right to do. Just to have your arms around me and I could rest my head on your shoulder for just a few minutes... everything would be cleared up.

You should see Annice today. She's a dream baby. How I envy El. What a treasure she is. Our infant might look like her since she is so much like you. Poor El, how she misses her Tom but she does swell. We're making such plans for you two. You should have been a mouse and heard us last night. Today El said something I've waited so long to hear. To quote: "I was thinking how nice it would be if you lived here." She really meant it and it wasn't just because I'm to be her brother's future wife, but just because of myself and that's the way I wanted it. She's a swell person and has been a real sister to me.

Your dad said today after dinner... I had told him how good it was... that he'd come over on Sunday and send us off to Mass and cook dinner for us. Bless him. I'm really making a haul: you and a real family. You don't know how fortunate you are to have such a family, but then, I have an idea you do know. You aren't one to take everything for granted.

El and I are taking in a movie tonight. One of the twins is going to be nursemaid. You should have seen your dad waltzing with the baby today. How he loves her and she laughs so when he comes near her.

You know what I love? The picture of you and Father John in your soldier suits that hangs over the radio. Maybe, someday we can have it. I was cleaning my trunk out and found some baby pictures of



John and Charles, 1918.

me. I was about three. You should see what a little monkey I was. Ruffles on my pants and down over my knees under my dress. Some style they had then. I'd forgotten I had the pictures.

It's really a cold day... bitter. Clear, but oh, my.

El and the baby's pictures were taken Wednesday at Davis. You'll get one. She had both of them taken together. It should turn out.

El has assured me you were the best-dressed guy in Jersey City and vicinity in your civvies, so I won't have to worry about the shock of seeing you as a civilian.

I'm using up all El's paper here. Hope there's a letter waiting for me tomorrow... think maybe I need one.

I'll say 'bye for a little while. Do you mind? I love you so very much. It's amazing how much you can love someone. Can you love someone too much? If you can, I've passed that stage. I'm missing you more than just a little.

All my love and kisses, always and forever, your Billee



Billee with her older sister, Lettie. 1923.

January 9, 1944—London

Hello sweetheart,

Two more letters from you today... airmail of Dec. 28 and V-mail of the 29th. And how is my "old engaged lady" today? Looking across the room at your picture, I find you don't look so old. Perhaps the incidents of the past few weeks added a few years. If so, I'll never become engaged to you again. Before I make a decision, however, I'll wait until I see the new picture you have.

In an airmail last night I said it was ok to go ahead with the announcement if you care to. I'm repeating it now in case this reaches you before that letter does.

Before I go any further... I saw you in a dream last night. Strangely enough, I was coming home in it. You were with the family at home when I arrived, wearing a black skirt and white blouse. You had your hair done in an upsweep with lots of curls. I can't remember the rest of it, but at least I remembered what you looked like.

When this gets to you the \$100 I said I was sending will have reached you, I hope. I was prepared to get it off a week ago but a couple of the boys were short of \$\$\$ after the holidays and I agreed to give them a lift until the 15th.

I realize now I should have known you were well on the way to filling your hope chest. A glance at the list you sent indicates we have a good start. What we need mostly, I guess, is a lot of \$\$\$.

I had a letter from Warren today, too. He still maintains he'll be on his way soon. He'll have a new boss when he gets here. You probably have read that Gen. Spaatz will be U.S. Air Force chief here with Gen. Jimmy Doolittle as head of the Eighth Air Force. Gen. Eaker, who made the Eighth what it is today, takes over command of the Air Forces in the Mediterranean.

The wildest guess you made about the "surprise" was that trans-Atlantic class business. Those things are strictly verboten. I thought of it a long, long time ago.

I hope your boss at the bank wasn't too upset over your leaving. Still, Perth Amboy's loss will be Asheville's gain. I'm sure you'll miss Jersey, but you'll be happy with your mountains.

I liked the engagement clipping you sent. I don't know about that horoscope, though. I wonder what it is I could be running away from?

Be back tomorrow...

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

January 10, 1944—Matawan

My darling,

A week from tonight will be another of our anniversaries and I'll be at home... really home. I'd like to go to Mass and communion that day but I don't think my train will get there in time so I'll go Sunday instead for our anniversary.



I'm tired. Guess I can't take it any more. The darn double features tire me out. It takes a couple of days for my eyes to feel as though they belong to me. El and I saw a good movie last night, "No Time for Love," with Fred MacMurray and Claudette Colbert.

We had a hectic day. Besides me being riled up about going home, the boss wants to know if I won't take my two week's vacation now to be with Mom and when I come back I'm to have a better job and a raise. I think I'll take him up on the vacation offer, break the news to Mom and see how she takes it. If she's ok, I'll come back. If not then I'll stay.

I had a letter from Warren and they are to leave there the sixteenth or seventeenth and proceed to a staging area and then about the first of February commence the hop across. He sent me his will. I get the chills... I know it's only a matter of form but still I don't like it. Maybe I'll get to see him before he leaves. I sincerely hope and pray I do.

We think Eddie has left. We haven't heard a word since Christmas week after he left on the 26th and he said he'd be in over New Year's if he were still there. Eddie Newell is in California by now or on his way. Bette received a card with an A.P.O. number in California, so that's that. I didn't expect him to go out here. He's a nice fellow. I like his quietness.

You should see how lovely it is out, like daylight the moon is so bright and the stars are beautiful. I noticed mine again tonight. It's still so bright. Here I am writing to you and you're probably fast asleep, maybe dreaming about us. Wish I could have a few dreams like that instead of some of these corks I do have.

You and Ben can celebrate our anniversary Monday. It's a shame when days like these come along and you can't share them, but we'll make up for it.

Goodnight, my darling. I love you more than just a bit and the way I miss you is terrific. When do you get your vacation? I think we'll go to Canada this year or maybe Maine. 'Night. I'm so tired and sleepy. Love me.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 11, 1944—Matawan

Hello my darling,

Back again, but after I mailed the letter this morning, I forgot to tell you about receiving your V-mail of December 18.

I've been wondering about the boys in your old outfit and how they were making out. I'm glad you remembered to tell me about them. From the newsreel I saw the other night, the mud alone in Italy, without all the other, would be enough to send me home. What a mess it must be.

I'll drop Theda a line and see how she's getting along, still being a "war widow" as they call them. Don't know just what category I fall in.

I forgot to tell you also... Sunday night we were listening to Gildersleeve and Lila... she's the southern gal on the program that has an accent you really expect to find down there and don't. Father John out of a clear sky says to me, "How come you have no accent?" and all I could say was I



Willard Waterman (center) and the cast of "The Great Gildersleeve," a popular 1940s radio show.

hadn't acquired one and added, "You wouldn't want me to sound like her." He said if I did I'd have been choked long ago. How do you like that? Maybe it's a good thing you found me and not a real southern gal with an accent.

I'm taking the bonds to him tomorrow, just in case I won't be able to come back. I haven't been able to get a safe deposit box yet and have had them in Marge's but hers is small and she needs the space. I don't wish to travel with them so I think they will be safe in his hands.

Wish you were here tonight. I'm trying to compose our announcement and am not doing so good at it. El called about it and they said they didn't want to know anything about you, just me, and everything there is. Now that gives me a lot to work on...

How is it going to feel to pick up the paper and see your engagement to me announced with my picture? I don't know myself since I've never had my picture in the paper before.

I'm still anxious to hear about your Xmas. By the way, still no "corsage" or "bouquet" so better check on it.

Please forgive the crossed out words but my pen seems to want to spell one way and me another. Could be because I'm a bit tired, as usual.

Marge is going to New York with me Saturday and we'll spend the night there and I'll leave for Asheville Sunday.

El and I were having fun Saturday night buying furniture in our imaginations. I think she and Tom will live in Long Island. Your dad says he's going to give up the house after the war but somehow I can't see him doing that.

This is something... taking a vacation in January. Oh well, maybe I can take time off for my honeymoon in the fall (I'm being generous with that much time, too). So, maybe this time next year we'll be an old married couple. Sounds heavenly just reading it back to myself. I'll go around pinching myself trying to make myself believe it's really true.

Received week of Nov. 29 *Stars and Stripes*. You must write without a byline. Some of those articles with no name sound so much like you. Do you rewrite a lot? Father John said you probably did.

Speaking of Father John, he is so busy. He hasn't had any help since Father Nuberg [?] was given a parish. You can imagine what he's having to do. He has a Franciscan helping with the masses but all the other duties he has to take care of.

It's nearly twelve and I have a bath to take yet... but I wanted to write tonight. Don't know when I've missed you as much as I have the past few weeks. So much so that you must feel it across the miles.

It's being so unsettled in my mind about what to do, I guess, but it will all work out and I shouldn't worry, I know, but I guess I can't help it.

Dearest, guess I'll say goodnight for now. All my love and prayers are with you, so love me and remember...

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 12, 1944—London

Hello sweetheart,

Are your mountains as beautiful now, in January, as they were two years ago? I wonder if they have snow-capped peaks like they did when we last saw them together. Strange as it sounds, that was the last snow I saw. That is, aside from about six seconds of snowfall here a month ago.

Remember how you pictured London in winter? To me, snow and London went together. I guess we'll have to blame Dickens, Shakespeare, Charlotte Bronte and other writers of old England for the illusion. On the other hand, snow wouldn't be so good now... to many men in the field who would have an additional hardship. In their last letter from Italy, the old gang said they had seen enough snow for a lifetime. What started me on this subject, anyway? Nevertheless, I'll bet those mountains look good, snow or not.

Your V-mail of Dec. 30 arrived today. So, this is my first letter going back to Asheville again.

When you mentioned the attitude taken by your boss, my Irish boiled over. Who does he think he is? He sounds as though he has a mind as narrow as a piece of string. I wonder if he has anyone at war? Probably not. Oh, well... perhaps you have to pity someone who can't see past the bridge of his nose.

Don't ever think yourself selfish for going back with Mom. Neither you nor I can know how much your companionship will mean to her when she is thinking of Warren. And, don't worry how soon it will be before I come for you. It will be just as quickly as possible, you know that. We'll just go on as we have... hoping, praying and planning. I know our days and weeks are so long now but... well, look at all the happiness we're going to have raising that ball team, crowd, umpires and bat boys!

You asked me how much the silver cost... our wedding gift to Tom Bernard. I was told it was a bargain, especially at this time when silver is scarce, at 31 pounds (\$124.00).

Speaking of money reminds me... I finally have the \$100 together and will send it in a few days. I'm leaving early tomorrow for a few days and will have to wait until I get back. You should receive it on or about Jan. 21.

I was just thinking, Billee. You will be home, really home, for our second anniversary, in five days. I'll try to picture you as I found you that night. And together we'll pay our calls at the same places, even to the door of 412 where I, allegedly, didn't kiss you goodnight. Try me out again, will you, and see if I kiss you goodnight.

Give my love to Mom, Billee, and love me lots. 'Bye until I get back.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

January 13, 1944—Matawan

My darling,

Not such good news today. A letter from Warren tells me that he is being moved to a staging area somewhere in Nebraska and that the prospects of seeing you are slim since now he's afraid he will be sent in the opposite direction.

That's going to make it doubly hard to tell Mom. She has said before she could take his going to Europe all right but the Pacific Theater of War... never. That's because of my cousin being killed on Guadalcanal.

I've been busy getting things together. I'm packing everything as if I was really going to stay... then, if I see I can't come back, all Marguerite will have to do is bag what dresses I'll leave hanging in the top of the trunk and lock it.

There's a mirror at the foot of my bed over the dresser and when I look up, there you are smiling at me. Your picture on my night table is reflected in the mirror.



Charles on the pony. Jersey City, circa 1920.

El was showing me pictures of you again last night. I love the one of you on the pony. It's so like you. You haven't changed much. You have a grown-up look when you aren't smiling but when you grin that gives everything away. It's the same grin on that younger Charles on the pony as in the picture of Sergeant Kiley that I have... the same ears, too. I hope our pitcher looks just like that. I've decided we'll have a Charles Kiley III. Do you mind? I think it would be kind of nice. Then, the second one we'll name for Father John. Maybe one of our ball team would follow in his footsteps. I'd like that very much. How proud we'd be, you and I, to have a son that would be like your brother.

El was telling me last night how you went to Dickinson School at night to study journalism. You never told me... and how you won a scholarship to St. Regis in New York but wasn't able to take full advantage of the opportunity. She told me, too, how you helped Father John. That gives me a very warm feeling in my heart. Bless you, your modesty is becoming.

My hair is all washed and pinned up. You wouldn't like me like this. I'll have to pick my moments to wash and dry my hair when I'm sure you are going to be out because I hate beauty parlors. I only go when I have to have a permanent.

I had to laugh. El asked me last night if I ever counted up how much I'd spent for railroad fares in the past year? The sum shocks me. If I had it, I wouldn't have to worry about how I'm going to pay for my wedding.

It's a little premature but what do you think we should have... a wedding breakfast for the family and wedding party, like El had, or a reception? The latter would be pretty steep, I'm afraid. It would be nice if we could move Oak Lodge up for the occasion.

I took the bonds in to leave with Father John. All together, we have from Sept. 1942 through Nov. 1943, with the exception of March. I've written again this week, asking them to check on it to see if it had been issued. It might be that it was lost in the mail being forwarded. I hope not, but I asked them, in the event of such a happening, what procedure must I go through?

I want to send you another box. I have the request for stationery and cigarettes that came when I sent your Christmas boxes so I decided to hold it until after the holidays when you'd probably be short again. If there is anything else you want or need, let me know.

I want to go home and see Mom, but I hate that trip home. I'm getting old, I guess. I don't want to travel any more. I hate the sight of a suitcase. I'm going on one more trip after this one. That will be my honeymoon... than, I'm going to settle down. It will be amazing to me if our first-born doesn't come into the world part gypsy or something, with a knapsack on his back... all the wandering around we've done.

I'm falling asleep. Guess I'd better say goodnight for the time being. Keep well and remember, I'm loving you and missing you more than ever.

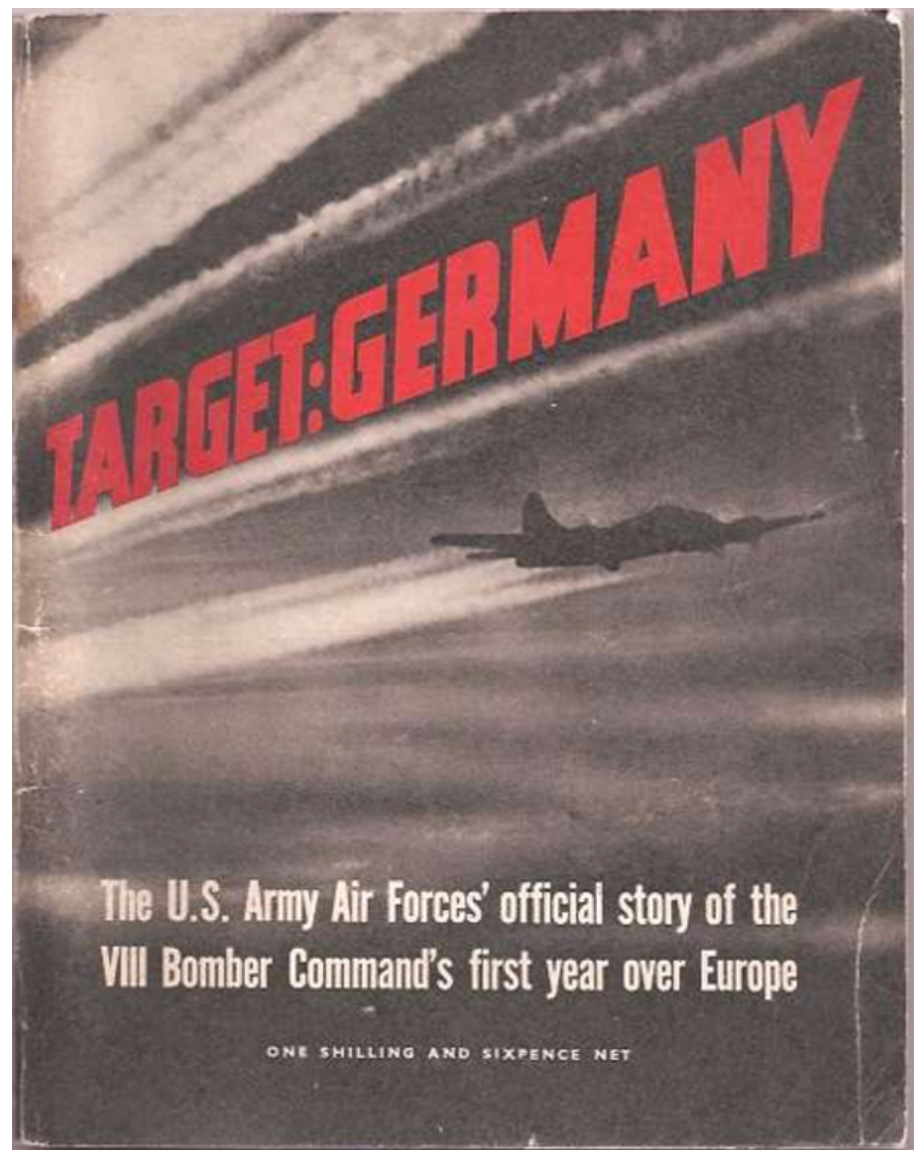
All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 15, 1944—New York City

My darling,

We're having a date in New York. Let's see... in a twin bed of a double room at the Martha Washington with Marguerite to keep us company in the other bed... scandalous, isn't it?

We wanted to make a show but the lines together with the snow shoved us to the station. I picked up my ticket and browsed through the bookstore. I bought "Target, Germany." Looks good. Part of it was in Life Magazine several weeks ago and the photographs I remember seeing in *Stars and Stripes*. I thought it would be nice in our library, and too, I'd like to compare notes with you on it. I saw a couple of good selections of collected poems I'll pick up for you to read to me in front of our fireplace on those long winter evenings.



"Target: Germany" was published by Simon and Schuster in November 1943



Breakfast is often at 3:30 the morning of an Eighth Air Force raid on Europe. Clothes for such a raid depend on each man's whim and post requirements. Usually a gunner wears heavy un-

derwear, a bright blue, electrically-heated "zoot suit" made of flannel, O.D. trousers or fleece-lined leather pants and a sheepskin jacket. Temperature over Europe goes as low as 40 below.



Young but determined faces greet the "Old Man" (Group Commander) as he speaks to the crews in the briefing room. S-2, Flak and Weather officers also give their specialized informa-

tion at the briefing session. Below, as their B-17 approaches the French coast, two waist gunners man their machine guns. They are wearing goggles, masks, helmets and throat mikes.



curse, in deliberate silence, or with laughter. Each man faces the black morning in his own fashion, for each knows that Group 500 is going out. The weather has held. The combat crews—the pilots, the copilots, the navigators, the bombardiers, and the gunners—get into their flying outfits. First, the heavy underwear, then the bright-blue, electrically heated "zoot suit" of flannel, O. D. trousers or fleece-lined leather pants, and a sheepskin jacket. No two dress alike, each man catering to his whims and the requirements of his post. Heated gloves and boots in one hand, and Mae West and helmet in the other, they're ready for the truck to the mess hall.

By 0330 the barracks housing the combat and the maintenance crews are emptied and the mess halls filled. The station is awakening now, as the intimation of action spreads like an ever-widening ripple. Across the rolling plain of central England this gradual stirring is duplicated at each Group assigned to Mission 95. The tempo quickens; a note of urgency is for the first time apparent in the movement.

At 0405 the briefing room is ready, maps spread upon the wall and benches ranged along the concrete floor. The crews drift in, blinking at the light, and fill up the benches—officer pilots, navigators, and bombardiers to the fore and sergeant gunners at the rear. The square of transparent talc with its red route lines is pinned to the map. Group 500's crews look first at that. Then they look away and make small sounds of disapproval. *FW's, here we come. . . . Johnny boy, you're touring Europe today. . . . Oh, oh, who thought this one up? . . . What is it, anybody know?*

The Old Man speaks

When the Old Man turns and faces them there is a sudden hush. Through the blackout curtains there drifts, in the moment of silence, a sound that reaches every ear in the room. It is far away and muted. It is the sound of a Fortress engine at its dispersal point. The line crews are on the job. The combat men stiffen for a moment. Then they relax. They look up at the Old Man, who stands facing them gravely.

At Command, Weather is having a round-robin talk with the meteorological officers of the Air Divisions and the Combat Wings. The weather chart is developing as predicted. Front moving eastward across Irish Sea, but planes will beat it back to base. Weather's final judgment: the attack is feasible. Mission 95 has conquered its first great enemy—weather.

The Old Man is talking: *I don't need to tell any of you what we did at Kiel on the last mission. The bombing was good—some of the best we've done. I can't say as much for the formation we flew. We hashed all that over at the critique after the mission. I want you pilots and copilots to profit by that discussion today. Our target is the synthetic-rubber plant at Hüls, near Recklinghausen. A smaller force will be attacking the Ford and General Motors plants at Antwerp, approximately half an hour before your Time Over Target. There will be an RAF fighter sweep over this part of the Dutch coast at 1935, an RAF diversion in here, and one of our own Groups will fly a diversion to this point in order to draw off enemy fighters from this area. I want all pilots...*

The pilot of *Tarbaby* is seated in the front row. A quiet young man of twenty-five in a leather jacket and O. D. trousers, with a white silk scarf draped about his neck. Two years ago he was an insurance adjuster, eight months (or was it eight years?) ago he said good-bye to his wife and small son in Savannah. The pilot is a conservative flier. He is also a worrier, in a mild way. Now, as he listens to the Old Man, he is fretting about *Tarbaby's* No. 3 engine, which has been giving them

Page from "Target: Germany" published in "Life" magazine on November 29, 1943.

Copyrighted material

So, I'm back in this hotel. Saturday night bath over and all snug and comfy in bed, but wide awake. We tried to get a room somewhere else for a change but no luck, so had to resort to Martha again. They have the hardest beds in seven counties. I didn't notice it the week I was here and near you. I was up in a cloud and probably could have slept on the floor and known no difference.

We did a little shopping. I wanted to look for a wedding dress but the shop I had heard about has discontinued their bridal department for the duration so we didn't have any more time. That mission will have to be saved for another trip. So, we went to St. Patrick's to confession and paid a visit to "Our Lady" chapel behind the large or main altar and I burned a candle for you and Warren. Have you ever been there? To the new chapel? But no, it was only opened late in '42 so you have a treat in store. Its simplicity is what stays with you. Enclosed is a postcard of it.

We ate in a cute place on 50th, alongside of St. Patrick's called the Waffington Coffee House. It's a little on the English side. At least, that's the impression I received just going by what I've seen in the movies. We had a fairly good dinner. When we came out it was snowing so down Fifth Avenue we walked. We stopped in a card shop and bought your Valentines. You rate two again. I saw just the one I wanted but it was for a husband so I'll have to wait until next year to send you that one.

Uncle Sam was good to me yesterday. He brought me your letters, the ones of Dec. 26, Jan. 2 and Dec. 28.

The one written on the twenty-sixth was the one I was waiting for. You said just enough that I know you understood what I was trying to say. I'm glad you always seem to know just what to say at the right time. I never seem to be able to come out with the right words.

You haven't changed a bit. The kiss was just as sweet as ever. In fact, I went back for more. An extra one for my birthday since you wrote the letter that day.

All I can say is, if you have such plans as two teams and accessories, you'd better ask for a discharge now. I'm sure when you explain the reason they'll send you home with a special escort to me. Our infants will undoubtedly come higher so that will probably curtail production... sounds as if we're turning them out on an assembly line.

I'll love having you for a postage stamp and never fear, I'll never be sorry you have arms. Tom wrote El and told her to do all her gadding about now because when he got home she wasn't to let him out of her sight.

I'm glad Lt. Hodenfield beat you. That's one you weren't in. I'm still a bit on the shaky side, waiting to hear that you weren't in this last big raid... 60 bombers... 5 or 8 fighters lost. From the stories told by the crewmembers, it was like something out of this world.

You don't see the girls with the British sailors or soldiers here. Maybe there is something wrong with them.

My train leaves at one-thirty tomorrow and we're going to ten o'clock mass at St. Patrick's so I'd better say goodnight. My mass and communion will be for our anniversary Monday. Remember? Of course you do... couldn't forget, could we? I love you, oh so much.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 17, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

This is one night we are really together, I am sure. It's 11:30 p.m. here but only 6:30 in Asheville. Nevertheless, while you may not be saying hello to me so early, I know you will before long.

I'm trying to picture you... sitting in our corner, perhaps, or helping Mom with the dinner dishes... as I say, "It's been ever so nice knowing you these two years, sweetheart."

How many times we have recalled our first night together I don't know. But I never tire of reliving the memories so precious to us. I am thinking of them again tonight and I still can remember every moment.

I got back from my most recent trip today, perfectly timed so I could be with you. A glance across the room at your picture gives me the impression that you are smiling a "Welcome home, darling." The only thing I can say in return is that I have had to neglect you these past six days.

A lovely letter from Dot was waiting for me. Dot told me of your visit on New Year's Day and how sorry she was to see you go, and also what a sorry hostess she was, a little peaked after holiday celebrations.

I know how much you wanted to stay, but we'll be going back again one day, together. Dot asked me to "hurry home and get married immediately." I'm beginning to wonder who is more important... Dot and Al, or us! We'll do it so quickly we'll make their heads swim, won't we?

I didn't forget our anniversary while I was away. I called Ben on Saturday and asked him to send a cable for me. I hope it reached you today. And when I got in this afternoon I immediately sent the \$100, at last!

My return coincided with the first appearance of Gen. Eisenhower in London since his appointment as Allied Chief of Invasion Forces. During a press conference, he named Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, veteran of the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns, as the American ground invasion forces' leader. Gen. Montgomery, as previously announced, will command British ground forces.

With these rather important news breaks, I had to forsake the rest of the day off and do a background story on Gen. Bradley. With that to start me off, I pitched in and did a 2,000-word piece on a story I uncovered on my trip. Between you and I... I believe it was one of the best I've ever turned in. It was the story of a fantastic personality, a soldier called "Molotov," who performed incredible feats during the African campaign. He was killed but his story will live long with the men who knew him. I'll send it to you when we use it.

I won't make this too long because I'll be back with a V-mail tomorrow.

I was just trying to remember when it was I first told you, "I love you." Do you remember?

Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

January 17, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

This will be brief. I'm exhausted after being up all last night on the train. You'll have to forgive me.

I'm sitting here in our corner, remembering two years ago tonight and it doesn't seem like that long ago. Your cable was phoned to me this afternoon. Bless you for not forgetting. The two years have been hard, but not too bad. I'm still going strong and my love is unshaken.

As I said before, the two years seem like yesterday tonight, now that I'm home. It might have been yesterday that I said goodbye to you for the first time at the bus station. Remember how I tagged along, taking for granted I was wanted.

I found Mom better than I hoped. Warren is expected home tomorrow for a leave so I guess everything is set. I haven't told her yet. I thought I'd wait until he came to be sure.

I think I'm going to be able to go back East but I'll cable you definitely. Poor darling, you must be in as bad a state of confusion as I am, wondering what I'm going to do.

The trip down was uneventful. I slept part of the way. One of these days, I'm going to travel in style in a Pullman or a compartment. I can appreciate what you mean when you say "I'm a bit train weary," because that describes the way I feel. I slept part of the way from Salisbury but it was just enough to tease you.

When I arrived, it was minus luggage so I stopped in St. Lawrence's on the way home to say a prayer for us and for Mom.

Home is just the same... a bit brighter on the outside with the new paint. Incidentally, nothing but a Marine and his wife here in the way of soldiers. Relieved? I can't even give you a reason to be jealous.

Mom told me you spent Xmas with the Frosts. I'm glad because I know they made it as "homey" as possible for you. I hated to think of you and Ben just eating out and spending the day alone. I hope he was as fortunate as you.

I'm so tired. Mind if I curl up and lay my head on your shoulder for awhile, but before I do, lean down a bit and I'll kiss you goodnight, along with a special anniversary kiss and prayer that our third anniversary will find us settled in our own two-by-four, whatever and wherever it is.

But, I did feel something when you told me to close my eyes. I can just close my eyes any time and find you. I haven't forgotten the taste of your kisses so just tell me anytime... I'll be there.

I'm falling asleep. Goodnight for now, until tomorrow. I haven't regretted one second of our two years and I'm more than happy to say I love you so very much and miss you even more.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 18, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

Remember... this is an anniversary, too. Two years ago today started our round of correspondence. You wrote your first letter while I waited patiently in the lobby wondering what could possibly be keeping you so long. I didn't know then that that was only the beginning of a long wait that still goes on but still with the same patience.

Warren came home this morning. How happy Mom was to see him. He has a date with an old girlfriend tonight. He hasn't been in Asheville in several years now. We had a chicken dinner for him, and one of the fellows that stayed with Mom came in and had dinner with us.

I haven't been able to tell Mom yet, but I think she guesses. She must by now. I'll see if I can get it out tomorrow or tonight, yet before he comes in. He seems so terribly young to me and old at the same time. Hard to explain. He looks swell and how he loves his work. Now, besides being tail gunner, engineer, and second radioman, he's doing some flying. He has four hours of stick duty.

I think one or both of my sisters will come down. He'll be here until Sunday. I hope they do come because heaven only knows when they'll see him again.

Today was gorgeous; clear and warm. I think tomorrow Warren and I will go out to the hospital. I'd like to go out and see it. We were able to get film today, too, so we can take some pictures.

He is still carrying your letters around. He's so anxious to meet you, but now he's afraid he's going the other way, as I told you last night.

Mom was just telling me she can't figure out, after all the years I lived down here and never acquired a southern accent, how is it that I should live in the East ten months and come home with a decided Eastern accent, but I can't see it. They can tell up there that I'm not from the East. Mom doesn't like the change, she says. She says I sound like I'm from Brooklyn or the Bronx but I assure you, it isn't that bad. It won't be any worse than your English accent.

We've been discussing the war and the termination today. They aren't as optimistic as I am.

Warren gave me your letters and he forgot about the one where you mentioned me coming home. As always, somehow you understand me even as far away as you are and know me better than anyone. Making decisions is one of my failings. The part of growing up that I don't like. The only one I ever made and was sure of and still am is the one about you. I knew before you asked me to be Mrs. Kiley that this was what I was cut out to be. There are so many angles to it but I guess coming home would be the most sensible and practical thing to do. Your dad said, "Stay with her as long as you can," when I mentioned coming home.

It's late again so I'll say goodnight for now and I'll be back tomorrow. I'm awfully glad you wrote that first letter. We've covered a good many miles with pen and paper since then. Almost enough to cross the ocean.

Be back soon.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 19, 1943—London

Evening sweetheart,

This is my third date in as many nights with you. Mind if I monopolize your time? That's what no mail does to me. So, whenever you feel I'm slowing up with my correspondence, just see to it that my mail is delayed.

Still, when I have the opportunity, I'd rather spend this time with you than anyone or anything else. I can't do the things I would do if I was really with you, but I can think about them.

Haven't anything special to talk about tonight. That is, except you, and you are very special. I know just what you're thinking... "There he goes with his blarney, again." If it's blarney, Mrs. Kiley, then you may as well be prepared to hear it for the rest of our lives.

Remember tonight two years ago? Seems like I'm always going into the past for something. Nevertheless, I recall being in the recreation hall at Croft writing to you and saying you were bad for my morale; that you kept me awake for a good part of the night thinking of a girl I had met 48 hours before... a girl with a funny tilt to her nose that I loved so much.

I remember, too, having asked you if you would share the weekends I had left and telling you I would be in Asheville the following Saturday. That Saturday was the first one on which we were affected by the "work all day Saturday" order. I remember rushing from camp to Spartanburg to catch a bus, waiting impatiently for a bus that was 90 minutes late. That was the first night we spent in our corner, and I knew then that I loved you as I love you now.

I'm sure neither of us could prophesy at the time how much happiness was in store for us, and how much misery through separation. I'm sure I was more interested at the moment in the present: how comfortably you fit in my arms; the heady scent of your perfume that I've never quite forgotten, resting my head in your lap while you ran fingers through my hair; the warm glow of the fireplace; and, more than anything, the touch of your lips on mine.

I know I never wanted that night to end. When it did, I wanted to hurry the dawn so I could see you again. All these things you have symbolized on your third finger, left hand.

It's when I think back like this that I realize how much all this waiting has meant to you... how we still cling together despite everything... and how lost I would be without your love.

It won't be long. We've said that a thousand times before, but it sounds hopeful, doesn't it?

What were you thinking about two years ago tonight?

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

January 19, 1944—Asheville

Darling,

You'll have the cable by now. It won't surprise you, I don't suppose, but I wanted you to know so you could start the mail back to Asheville again.

I have a job already. I'm amazed myself. With your two airmails of Dec. 27 and Jan. 6, a letter from the bank here wondering if I'd be interested in an opening here. The guy almost passed out from shock when I called him because he thought I was in Jersey. Hmmm, he doesn't know me very well, does he?

I can start Monday at \$125 a month, more than Perth Amboy, so maybe I can save a little money for that four-star wedding that's on my calendar for 1944.

I went to see the man at the bank this afternoon and told him I'd let him know in the morning. From there I went to St. Lawrence's and stayed from practically the afternoon, making up my mind, but I did it... and went from there to Western Union and sent you the cablegram. I knew no one would bother me in St. Lawrence's and I could think things out for myself pro and con.

My heart jumped to my throat when I read about your "Stars and Stripes." What a tragedy. You didn't mention how many survived. I know how you must have felt. I'm relieved to hear about Lt. McElveen. It's wonderful that he's been reported a prisoner. At least it's better than just "missing." I know how his brother must feel better.

Looks as if the stage were set for the big day... just any time now. What a day that's going to be. You still haven't said what your role will be. I'm wonderful if I'm guessing right and you will take part. There are so many questions in my mind, but I guess I'll know the answers soon.

The big puzzle is this rumor of a German-British separate peace. What's the answer to that? Propaganda? We'll have to wait and see. [The Russian news agency Pravda had published a report that Ribbentrop had met with British authorities to negotiate a separate peace treaty; the British immediately denied this.]

Wish I knew what the "awful truth" is, too. She's [Marguerite] always threatening me with it. Maybe some day she'll tell us. I can't imagine what it is. Maybe I snore! Or talk in my sleep. Who knows?

Say, what do you mean going back to the dark ages? A 2x4 and a path? I have in mind a 2x4 and a bath. I know we're going to live in Arlington but that isn't the country. A new drawing, please.

I loved finding you at the end of my most recent letter. You always think of the nicest things. The grin is in super form. You must be using it a lot. There's something awfully special about that grin.

I promise not to take advantage of your weakness. Besides, when I cry after you come home, they'll be happy tears.

These are the letters I've been waiting for. I'm glad I was able to make you feel my reaction on Christmas day. I was so up in the clouds I didn't think it made sense at the time but I had hopes.

Just caught myself asleep, pen in the air. I'm stretched out in "our corner." It is late, but I decided I'd have a date with you when I finished writing El, Marguerite and Father John.

Again, I'd better say goodnight for now.

I love you so much. Everything about you suits to a T. Keep well and keep warm... the latter I'm taking a chance on but I can tell you to be a good fiancée, also. Goodnight for now, to be back tomorrow.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

The March 1943 bond arrived along with December's, so that's cleared up. I was getting worried about March.

January 21, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

Missed our date last night but that was because we all went out. Mom had a new experience last night. Warren, his present girlfriend and Mom and I went to a movie. I couldn't help but remember your Mom the day she met me the first time. I remember now, too, Bette telling me how jealous she was of all the girls you had. (That's strictly confidential.) I know now what she meant. You have in mind someone very special for your brother and somehow no one ever seems to fit the picture. Mom took it very well. Warren has spent most of his time with this girl but that's to be expected.

We've taken pictures and will take more Sunday, so you'll get some of those. I hope they turn out ok. One of Mom's "boys" got the film for me.

Radio reports another raid over London. I have such a feeling you're invincible, but still it gives me the whimsams when I hear them being over London again. I say a little prayer that you are all right.

El called me tonight to tell me the corsage and bouquet arrived. I told her to keep it for me. She said they had heard from you, and Eddie was home for the weekend but that she thought it would be the last time. Maybe you, Eddie and Warren will have a reunion over there. That would be wonderful, wouldn't it? Warren is getting excited. We're trying to figure out a way for me to be a stowaway. If I had a way tonight, I'd come.

The girls at the store were telling me about a girl, a former employee, who married a fellow home on leave from Pearl Harbor. She's going back with him. She has to go to work when she gets there but she's going. I believe they could put me to cleaning the London streets if they'd let me come over.

The weather is lovely. I went to the store without a coat on. Can you imagine? In January?

I had to go and have an examination for my new job. The doctor said I was disgustingly healthy, and couldn't find a thing wrong. Isn't that good? First examination I've had in five years. The only thing I dislike about staying home... Mom is so pessimistic. I'll have to keep my plans to myself. Maybe I'm too optimistic, but I can't help being that way.

I'm going to miss the east. Especially am I going to miss your family, my family they've become now. It's been a long time since I had a real family and having one now is a wonderful feeling.



I almost forgot to tell you what a good movie we saw last night, “What a Woman,” with Rosalind Russell and Brian Aherne... really good and no war background, which is amazing.

It’s late. Mom and I have been gabbing between paragraphs. Once again, I’m missing you very much. Sounds so inadequate to describe the ache I have in my heart, but I’m being a good fiancée, especially good. I love you, amazing how much it is, too, and keeps growing every day. Remember, and goodnight.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 25, 1944—London (V-Mail)

Hello sweetheart,

All good things come to him who waits. In short, after a mail-less week I received three airmails and a V-mail. The former took a bit longer than usual... Dec.

13 and 21, and Jan. 1. The V-mail was dated Jan. 7. In your Dec. 13 letter, you said you hadn’t received any mail from me in three weeks! That hurts.

I like the crazy dreams you have. Especially the one where you get cold feet at the altar and leave the poor guy stranded. It’s okay as long as you leave him... don’t ever weaken and go through with it.

You mentioned “Chaplain Jim,” and wanted to know if I did a piece on him. No, I didn’t. I intended to but didn’t get enough material. Moreover, I haven’t had the opportunity to see him and get more.

I finally got together with Al’s brother over last weekend and had a swell time talking about home, old times, etc. I stayed overnight with him at his camp and started back Sunday morning. He doesn’t know when he’ll be able to get to London so I may get back to see him again in a few weeks. While I was there, I made an effort to locate some of Mom’s people in Cardiff but without success. I couldn’t find the name in the telephone directory and of the few people (natives) Larry knew, none knew the name Esaias. Larry promised he would do a little investigation in the meantime.

In your letters, too, you mentioned my mom. I’m having a Mass celebrated for her on Feb. 4 here. If I don’t often talk of her, it’s not because I don’t think of her. It’s just that... I like to keep it inside.

Did I tell you I received another group of pictures from Dot? Most of them were of the baby and some of the Doyle clan. I brought them with me to show Larry. He got a big kick out of seeing his family. I’ll send them along to you.

And, speaking of pix, I’m waiting to determine which of them is the best... the one I have of you now or the one that’s on the way. Don’t see how the one I have can be improved upon.

Not much excitement around the office these days. One of the best stories of the war broke yesterday, though. Lowell Burnett, 24-year-old INS [International News Service] correspondent who first was listed as missing from the Dec. 2 RAF raid on Berlin, then later was changed to prisoner of war, not only escaped but sent a story out called “Inside Nazi Europe.” It told of the raid, his experience in parachuting from a Lancaster [primary British bomber], his capture and escape. Also that he was in hiding and will soon do a piece on the aerial destruction in Germany. He’s got a million \$ waiting for him when he starts telling about his experiences. I’ll be back with an airmail.

All my love, Charles

January 25, 1943—London

Billee dearest,

I hate to say this but I’m listening to Berlin Radio and enjoying it. It has been playing some of the best recordings I’ve heard since I left home. It plays about 10 minutes of recordings, then gives about five minutes of news. Now and then, I hear words like “London,” “Italy,” “Americans.”

Just now, a swell band with a hot clarinet sounds good but the British are trying to “jam” the program. I’m waiting for the news in English to find out what we didn’t do today.

I sent off a V-mail this morning and this is the promised follow-up to your airmails of Dec. 13 and 21, and Jan. 1. They were beautiful letters, long and told in your personal way I love so much.

In one of them, you furnished a reaction to “Norway.” I was wondering, but no more. You see everything just right. I loved the way you said, “I feel kissed and made up.” Did you really? Sorry it had to take so long. I promise it won’t take more than a few seconds when we’re together. It will be so much nicer, too.

The announcer just said something about Hamburg. I didn’t think there was anything left there to talk about.

Your New Year’s Eve was just as free of celebrations as mine was. We’ll make up for them though, even if we are in that “cabin in the woods” you spoke of. Too bad you weren’t at North Arlington so you could spend it with the Doyles and Kennys.

Billee, about the *Stars and Stripes* you are saving... Father John said he was keeping a file of them for me. In your letters you might check with him and if he is still saving them you won’t have to, unless you want them for yourself.

I’m still burning about the flowers not reaching you. I did want you to know I hadn’t forgotten your birthday.

I received a letter from one of my old high school teachers today... Sister Gertrude Jose. I’ve never failed to send her a Christmas card and she commented on my faithfulness. She is still my favorite teacher after all these years. I sound like ancient history, don’t I?

I should bring you up to date on my work, Mrs. K. (The ring is a month old today.) I picked up half a dozen stories in the infantry last week, one a magazine feature, and did a bit of Air Force re-write in

the office, a bit more on the soldier vote bill, a story on the Lowell Bennett piece from “Inside Nazi Europe” that you must have read about... and today, a feature on some WACs who came to the ETO with Gen. Eisenhower from Africa.

Last night I sat down with nine WACs to get the material. I enjoyed it insofar as comparing their lives in Britain and in Africa.

And now, to bed. Tonight I’m missing you so much, as always. But we’re together in more ways than one. Miss me and love me.

Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

January 25, 1944—Asheville

My darling,

You’d laugh and probably exclaim, but it’s two-thirty and I’m not being a very good fiancée, but since it was Warren’s last evening at home, he asked one of Mom’s “boys” to be my escort and Warren took his girl and another couple. I had planned on spending the night at home with you but I thought you’d make an exception this time.

We had a fair time but they seem so young to me. Warren and his girl. Guess I’m getting old.

I’m sitting in our corner wishing I were saying goodnight to you as we did two years ago tonight. It seems like it was this hour when I finally said goodnight and you made your way upstairs. It was our second date. The second Saturday night we were together. Oh, I’ve missed you so much. Tonight was worse than any if that’s possible.

It keeps coming back to me, sitting here in our corner. The sofa is in the same place, in the same corner. The time is different. You’re either sleeping since it’s your day off or perhaps you are at early mass. Close your eyes and I’ll lift my face to yours... I can still taste your kiss.



Billee, Warren and Elizabeth Gray. Asheville, January 1944.

Mom said something today... “After all, you only knew Charles a month.” Even if it had been a day, it would be the same. She says I plan too much... that I’ll be hurt... that I have too much faith. Mom is a little disillusioned when it comes to men so don’t mind her. I didn’t inherit it.

This sounds like a love letter written at this hour of the morning. You’d think I’d be sleepy but I’m wide awake. Just a bit drowsy so that, were you here I could snuggle on your shoulder and you could put me to sleep.

Guess I’d better get along to bed so I can get up a little later on in time for mass. I love you so very much. Miss me and love me, as always.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 26, 1944-Asheville

My darling,

Today brought two letters, a V-letter written Dec. 22 and your latest airmail of Jan. 12. Since I’ve had mail received since your illness, I’m not so concerned. Still, I don’t like the picture of you propped in bed. I hope not again at least not until I can take care of you. Since Mom said she had mail telling her you stayed at the Frosts for Xmas, I know you must have been well enough to go. Still haven’t received the letter you wrote Xmas Day.

Warren left last night. My two sisters were to meet him in Cincinnati and stay during his wait for the train. Mom insisted on going to the train here. She did pretty well, better than I thought. One of her “boys” went with us so he helped. He has been swell to Mom. He always comes, since he’s been at the camp, on his day off to see her.

I called my new employers and asked them if I could start next Monday instead of today. Mom was pretty much broken up today and I hated to leave her alone in the house. We have no regular people in the house, only the apartment and cottage rented, so she would have been really alone.

It’s a lovely night, quite warm in fact, surprisingly so. I went to see “Guadalcanal Diary” to see if I could see Fred, my cousin. A lot of the scenes and background were actual photographs. I saw him... not actually but all the way through the picture, the hell he must have gone through until the end. I left the theater with a bitter, dry taste in my mouth and all I could think was the dirty, yellow b_____. I think I un-



derstand why our newspapers play up the Pacific more. They've done such a lot with so little and truly, it is our war with Tojo.

The two hours made me feel helpless and a little ashamed of us as a whole. All the lack of cooperation and understanding of the grim realities of this war. It's a big thing this is on either side of us. Makes me dizzy when I think of all of it, what has happened, and what still has to be done. Perhaps it's wrong to say and maybe it didn't affect you that way but you must have had a feeling of satisfaction taking part in that raid over Germany. Even though you didn't participate, still you must have felt a part of it.

I'm really getting worked up but seeing a picture like that makes what little Irish I have boil up with all of me that's American because I know and realize that it wasn't just a picture.

I missed the snow they had here by about ten days; nevertheless, the mountains are as lovely as ever. The fellows in Italy have seen plenty of mud. I'd think the snow would be easier than that knee-deep mud.

My boss doesn't have any children, just a sort of butterfly for a wife. His child is the bank. Everything for the bank. He sees no further than the front door. Oh, well. He doesn't bother me now. He was nice to me so long as I did my job and didn't ask any favors.

You will have my letter written the seventeenth. I'm still going to collect that first goodnight kiss. I know after the first one I wasn't quite responsible and maybe you did slip up on me. I'll collect just to be sure... in person, please.

Mom just turned in. Guess I'd better follow her. Must dash off a line to Marguerite before turning in.

I'm loving you, so much, in our corner right now, spending this date with you. Sending you my prayers and thoughts along with this.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 26, 1944—Asheville

My darling,

Another day of my leisure time almost gone but I worked today. Mom and I washed and then I chased her out to her club meeting this afternoon.

You know, my Mom never throws anything away and we have a storage closet upstairs that becomes a nightmare every now and then, until I take matters into my own hands and start discarding. I took advantage of Mom going out and made a clean sweep. You'll probably be able to hear the roar over there when she finds out what I got rid of but I hate clutter. You'll have to guard everything with your life because when I go on a rampage of cleaning, nothing is missed. I'm just itching to take Mom's desk over. She never throws away even an advertisement. When I do that, she has to be standing over me so I don't throw any valuable papers out. You're going to love finding out my pet hates. I don't have many, but messed up drawers and cupboards is one.

It's been like spring still since I'm home. Last night was lovely. I haven't been out tonight. I saw "So Proudly We Hail" on top of "Guadalcanal Diary" the night before. If I was mad then, I'm fighting mad now. That was supposed to be taken from the records of the Army Nurse Corps. Seems like something could have been done to get aid to those on Corregidor and Bataan. Guess we did our best but they really must have felt forgotten.

I had a letter from El today. She wants me to come back and stay with them, bless her. I asked her to come and see me this summer with Annice. It won't be exciting but it will be a change. We get along pretty well together.

Mom has had the dining room closed since she's back so we're going to open it up again. We're moving upstairs. We have our room where the dining room is so tomorrow is moving day.

My trunks haven't arrived yet but I'm getting everything set so all I have to do is put them away. I hope that I just get everything all settled and started on my new job when you'll come home and I'll have to pack up again... won't that be super?

The night El called me my heart jumped to my throat and back down to my toes. What a scare. The operator said, "Jersey City calling." You can imagine what I thought.

I went bowling yesterday and I'm all stiff today. I had a time getting around but I haven't done it in a long time except the one game with Warren last week, but I bowled three games and that was a little too much. I'm paying for it today.

I'm missing you even more. I pass your picture and that grin and I just melt. This weekend will be another anniversary... our last date in Asheville at the President's Ball. More of our memories to come back. I'd love to close my eyes, open them and find you there, just for a minute or two, just to know you're there and really all right, and to hear you say "Hello, sweetheart." Such little things to ask.

I had a feeling today, cleaning out that closet, you'll like to have been lending me a hand. I've heard you're good at that, lending a hand around the house. It'll be fun when it's ours. You'll probably have a time prying me out of our two by four. I'll be so happy just being there.

I'd better go to sleep before I get moody. I'll be back, maybe tomorrow. Miss me and love me always.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee



January 28, 1944—Asheville

Received your anniversary letter of January 17. Nice work, Uncle Sam.

I'm a bit on the exhausted side. Mom and I have been doing a little house cleaning. The dining room and kitchen. She has only used just enough dishes for herself since spring so I washed every last dish and piece of glassware in the place today along with all the other jobs, too numerous to mention. I must admit the china closet looks nice. It shines and sparkles like the stars I saw tonight.

I was in the middle of all that when the airmail arrived. I read it through hurriedly and decided to save it for a "night cap."

I think I told you the cable arrived on the seventeenth. I have it to add to the rest of our collection. The check arrived a few days later and is now resting in the bank.

Didn't feel neglected for six days. You didn't really neglect me... just didn't find the time. You're forgiven.

I'm thinking of two years ago tonight when I was looking forward to a Saturday night date with you. I didn't know then that it was to be our last in Asheville. What a time we had that night. Grove Park Inn, our moment, then the President's Ball and Lucille's. Theda was there missing her Jack, not hers yet but almost. Doesn't seem very long ago. The years go by quickly. It's the days and the months that seem so long.

I don't think you really told me you loved me until the night or morning in the Hawaiian Room when you asked me to be the future Mrs. Kiley, but you didn't have to say it. I could read it in your eyes and hear it in your "hello, sweetheart" over the phone and could feel it when you held my hand and when your lips were on mine. Saying it wasn't important... knowing is what counts.

Funny, as long as we've been apart your face and being has stayed so clear in my mind. Not the picture of you, but the you that I know. Your face stands out so clearly, especially on the last night I saw you in New York. The ride from Arlington... it was such a grim face. Your GI shirt and tie looked strange. I had only seen you in your white shirt and black tie. I even remembered sitting in the Penn drug store and making my brazen proposal [that they get married immediately] but my heart was breaking because I knew you wanted it as much as I. My sleepless night walking the hotel floor. I'll never forget that. I wish I had had another moment that night with you. I'd have told you for the first time that I loved you and come hell or high water I'd be waiting for you but I was a bit bewildered and shaken.

I've really gone on a journey back through our memories but I haven't forgotten for a second any of them. I shock myself every now and then by remembering something I had forgotten.

Don't fail to send me a copy of your story because I can't depend on the subscription. Sounds very interesting. You didn't say where you gathered the materials so I take it that the source isn't available for publication.

The revealing of the Japanese atrocities to our prisoners over there is really a blow. Now what will be in store for those remaining? It would have been better to have fought to the last man than to have surrendered to a fate such as theirs has been. Doesn't seem possible living in a civilized world that

such primeval methods of torture could exist. Agnes won't enjoy hearing or reading this latest report. She's held such faith and hope for her Jack that he was all right, but with this you can't believe the cards she's received.

It's like spring again. I went out to take some blankets and draperies off the line and the stars were so bright and so many and the new moon gorgeous. I made a wish on it last night.

I told Dot she wasn't to be a hostess to me. I had fun helping her out. They have been super swell to me and you know how much that means to me. After all, I was a stranger in their midst. But it's nice now. I'm not a stranger any longer to them or to 195 and I'm awfully happy about that.

I'm going to sleep and Charles Kiley, civilian, is looking very wise at me from his frame as if saying, "Young lady, you should be in bed, asleep." You know I have a treat in store getting to know Charles Kiley, civilian. I don't care how many changes there will be just so he loves me as much as S/Sgt. C.F.K. of South Carolina, North Carolina, New Jersey and New York did and, oh, forgot Ireland, England or the British Isles, Germany and Norway.

Goodnight. See you again tomorrow. I'm in love with you, honey. Seem to remember that from somewhere.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

January 30, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

I'm being a night owl again but I had to have a few minutes alone with you. I went to a movie and afterwards we all sat here and talked and had coffee. Finally got them all settled in bed so I sneaked back down to our corner.

Two years ago this time we were sitting here. It's two a.m. You're probably at mass or getting ready to go or maybe you're just sleeping. I've never seen you asleep. I imagine maybe you look a little like Father John. I've seen him asleep in the chair at 195. I'd love to raise up on my elbow and watch you sleep on the other pillow. I'll probably be doing it too, to reassure myself that I'm not living in that dream world we've imagined together.

Right now I'm sitting on my cushion and your corner is empty but now this minute I can close my eyes and hear you whisper to me and I can almost... yes, I can feel your shoulder under my head. Somehow, my head always seemed to fit so comfortably, as if maybe it was made to order for your shoulder. Nice shoulders you have, too.

We had fun tonight. It was a night like this only a bit colder. Our precious moments at the Inn... remember how we tiptoed across the lobby and how we were peered at over eyeglasses, newspapers and crocheting. We were really intruding on their snug little world. I'd love to have been a mouse and heard them paging, "Private Kiley." We really got around that night. I was just looking at the first sentence at the beginning of this paragraph... that means us, in case you misunderstood. I'm just living in the past for a bit... I'm all right now.

Mom just hollered down in a quiet sort of way, “What are you doing?” She thinks I’m a bit whacky when I do things like this. Maybe I am but I’m happy, at least when I’m with you this way.

Hey... this is a love letter, isn’t it? Guess I have been writing quite a few like that but I’ve been living in the past. Those memories associated with Asheville... they are strictly our memories. The beginning of our beautiful... not friendship... love story. The climax will be when I see that unforgettable grin and hear that “Hello, sweetheart.” Then it will be different than most stories. We’ll start all over again, you and me. What a day that will be... the whole universe will know.

I’d better turn in. Mom will hit me over the head if I don’t go up. Just for a minute I’ll close my eyes and reach over and kiss you goodnight for me, and good morning for me. No lipstick on so it’s just my brand. I love you.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 1, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

I have three long letters to talk about since our last pen and ink date. Your letter written Christmas night arrived yesterday along with Jan. 19’s airmail and a V-mail today written the 18th. The mail has been swell. Can’t understand the delay over these. I’ve been keeping our usual dates.

I should be in bed since I’m a working gal again but I went to a movie... I’ve had that awful, miss-you feeling... wrote a letter last night and half way through tore it up and went to bed. I decided there was no point in subjecting you to that mood. The strain of the first day on my new job together with your two letters yesterday sent me way down. Today is better and the movie helped. “Princess O’Rourke...” amusing and very diverting. I wanted you so last night. When I came home, I was exhausted physically and mentally. I just wanted you to hold me for a few minutes, just to feel the warmth and comfort of your arms around me. That’s how I needed you.

Your Christmas sounded wonderful. I’m glad you had the Frosts to be so hospitable and gracious to you. I’d like to thank them all personally for taking such good care of you. Especially do I like you waking Christmas morning and wishing for me. I’ve done that so many mornings, especially at 195. It’s kind of hard to pretend in a twin bed with only one



pillow, but with my imagination I manage. I never saw you asleep so you're always awake in my dreams. Your "Good morning glory," amazed me because I've never heard anyone use that but myself. I used to say that to Mom. Strange but yet expected coming from you.

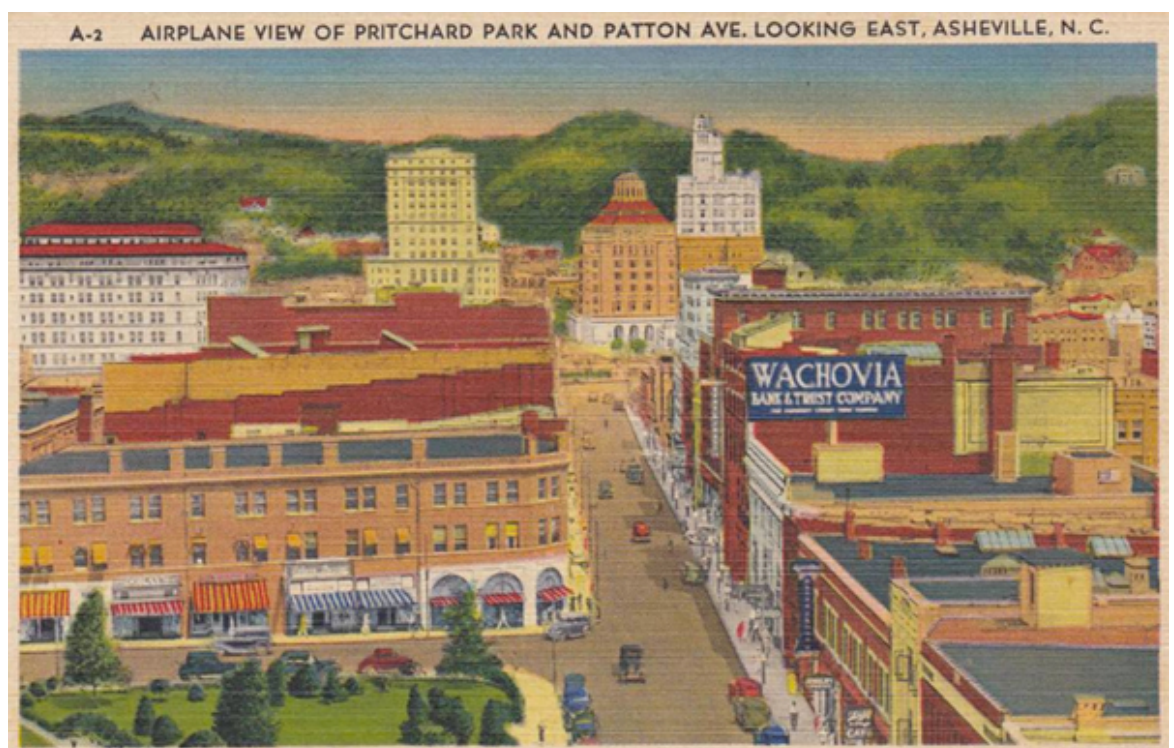
You remembered writing to me two years ago from Croft on the 19th... that was the day I received my first letter from you, written from the hotel. I tried to imagine all day what you could be wanting to say to me via mail. I nearly died from curiosity until I got home that night. You seemed so unbelievably wonderful. I couldn't quite take you all in at once, so to speak. I knew something wonderful had happened but I was afraid and kept telling my heart to be sensible and practical but you know how well I listened, don't you? I threw caution to the winds finally and listened to my heart. It was singing a beautiful song all about a certain GI Joe, an Irishman from Jersey City. What a time you had convincing me in the beginning. It's a wonder your patience didn't wear thin and make you give up. I'm awfully glad it didn't. I'm glad you kept writing and I'm more than happy for all the moments we spent together. I'd be lying if I said there hadn't been untold misery with our separation when I've been so restless and aching for the sight of you, as last night and there will be more nights of it, I know. We'll survive, you and I and our love together. We'll come out on top, and we'll try to compensate for those long nights alone.

I have rambled on. I'm in our corner again and it always seems to bring you closer. Funny, I didn't remember your head in my lap. I remembered the Sunday at Dot's when she and Ruth T. so obligingly left us alone for a bit and I held you close to me. You really seemed to belong to me for a moment. Between the two of us, we seem to account for every moment we were together. Nice, isn't it? I find myself every now and then remembering little things you did or we did that I had forgotten.

Bud Hutton must be proud of his Air Medal. I know that wasn't the reason he went but still he should be proud. If it takes five missions, I hope you don't wear one. You haven't said much about your part in "the big show" that will open soon. What's the verdict? Can't help but be anxious and selfish about it.

I started to work at the Wachovia yesterday doing the same kind of work as I was doing in Jersey. I'm going to like it. This bank is larger and pays better and there are more benefits to the job such as insurance and sick benefits but I'm still missing Jersey. I'm afraid you have an easterner on your hands.

Have I mentioned a Freddie in any of my letters? Don't get excited now... I'm being a good fiancée. He's one of Mom's "boys" who have been so nice to her while I was away. He

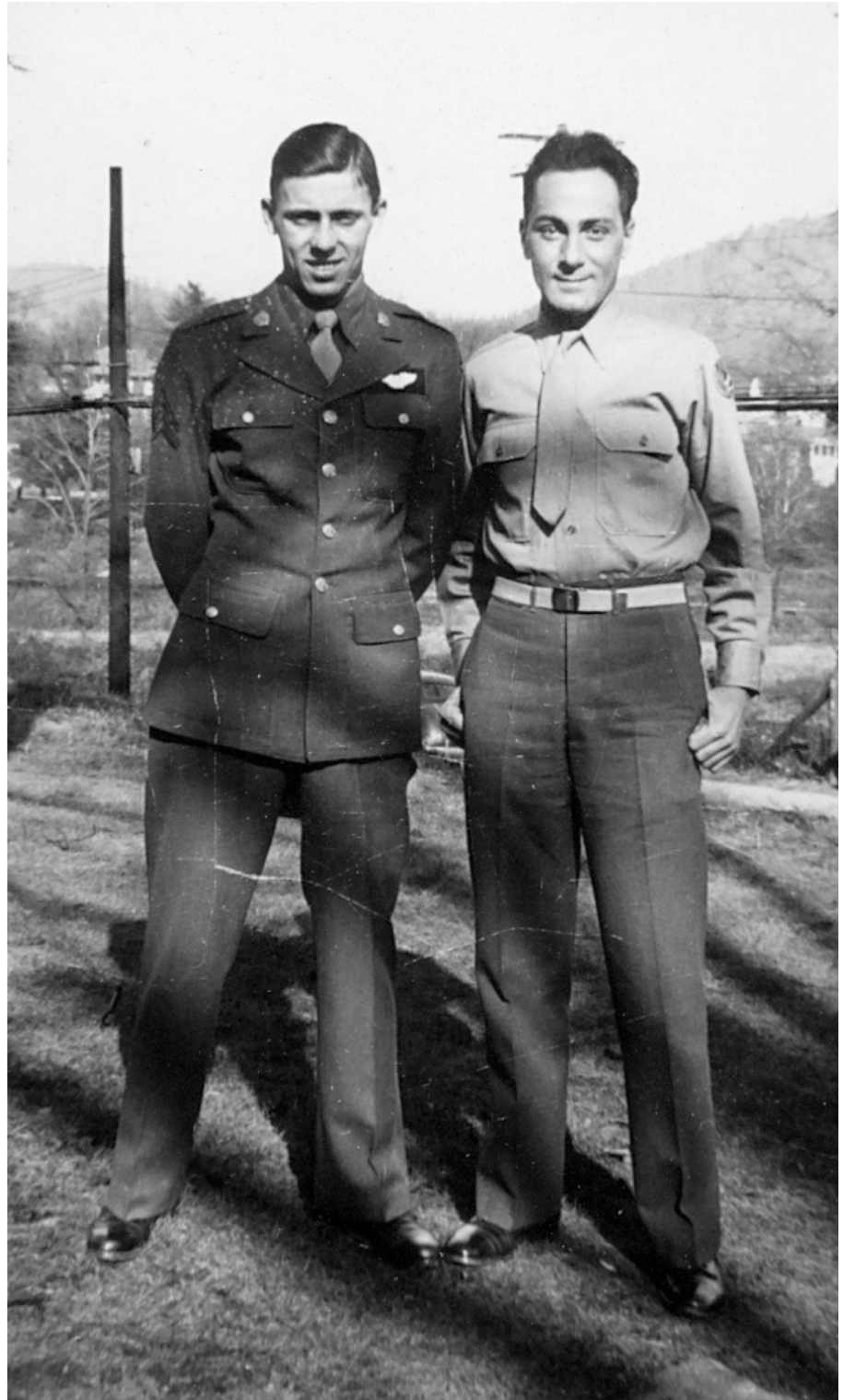


lives at the camp now but spends weekends here. He's from New York and does photo-static work for the intelligence department of the Air Corps... formerly with the New York Library doing the same kind of work. His ambition is to be a member of the Yank staff. He's about 32... a thumbnail description. He got an awful dirty deal from one of the girls in Mom's apartment. He really fell hard and she led him to believe she did, too, until another soldier came to live here and she dropped Freddie like a hot potato. He's still trying to recover and not doing such a good job. I'd like to kick her or give her a good shaking because he's a swell fellow and deserves better treatment so Mom and I have been nice to him. I went to mass with him Sunday and we took a walk to the Inn and back in the afternoon. I didn't want to go because it's one of our special places but he was interested in taking some good camera shots of it. It was a gorgeous day.

All the way up I kept remembering our walk as if it were yesterday. Little things... the racket my heels made going down the hill... your "Present arms!" .. the way you held my hand and how impressed you were with the Inn... you made a date for the following Saturday for the cocktail lounge. You can imagine what good company I was, especially talking about you as much as I do. "Charles says," creeps into all my conversation before long when I'm talking to someone.

It's after one and I want to go to mass and communion in the morning. I'm remembering a year ago tomorrow... I'm sure that's the date and I want to receive for her anniversary. I know that somewhere you will be, too. I'll be thinking of you and praying for that special loneliness you have for her. I know that somehow she's trying to ease that ache for you. I'll say goodnight. Close your eyes and I'll come close for a moment. I love you...

All my love and kisses, always your Billee



Warren with Freddie Daddasio. Asheville, January 1944.

February 1, 1944—London

Evening sweetheart,

Two letters today... yippee! Airmails of Jan. 11 and 12. Just got back from a trip and I'm dashing this off right away. I'll follow with an airmail (the kind both of us like) tomorrow.

First, I have to tell you one of the best stories I've heard in the long time. I met a lieutenant who has been in the ETO for about a year. Last week he received a letter from his eight-year-old son, written (or shall I say, scrawled) in a kid's' handwriting. This was the letter: "Dear Pa, I want a baby brother. Mum says I can have one if you say I can. I sure would like you to tell her to get it while you are away. I sure wish I had been with you when you went shooting. Write soon and tell me about the baby. Your son, Buzzie."

The moral of the story: don't get any funny ideas. And, since there is a lot of space between us, I can risk a playful slap in the face. Seriously, though, it's one way to keep the boys over here laughing. That kind of a letter, I mean.

You asked me if I knew Sally Reston, the NY Times writer who did the flight nurses piece. Yes, I know her. She was the Times magazine representative in Washington before she came overseas to join her husband, Scotty (James L.) Reston, also of the NY Times. I might have something else to tell you about her in a couple of weeks.

I'll be keeping my eye out for Warren. And for your word that he finally has left. Don't worry about the will he sent. Just as you said, it's "form." I never told you before but I made one out to you, which was to be mailed "in case" anything happened. I still have it. Whenever I set out on anything risky I leave it with Ben. I've already willed him my personal GI belongings. I hope he never has to send it. But I'll save it and you can read it some time when we're warming up in front of the fireplace. It was written before Frankfort. I didn't think I'd need one until then.

I can't get over the boss's proposition... vacation, better job and a raise. Always told you your ability was underestimated. Even if it doesn't work out it's always nice to know you were pretty valuable, huh?

Be back tomorrow after a nice, long sleep. Goodnight.

All my love and kisses, forever 'n' always, C.



Scott and Sally Reston. London, 1943.

February 1, 1944—London

Hello sweetheart,

This the airmail follow-up to last night's v-mail. It also introduces new stationery... a Christmas gift. Looks like I'll have to make my letters at least a dozen pages long in order to say anything. [The stationery paper was not very big.]

I liked the stationery you last sent so much that I'm asking you send more... if you can get it.

One more request, hon... a couple of bottles of shampoo. Don't laugh, now. I know it is an odd request, but...

I smiled when I pictured you composing the engagement announcement. I can't understand why you had so much trouble, inasmuch as girls usually love that sort of thing. The Journal didn't want to know anything about me because it probably has my "obit" on file. I'm going to fool 'em, though, and not give them a chance to use it.

I've given up all hopes of getting any satisfaction from the florist who messed up on Christmas orders. All they could tell me was that the order was muffed in New York. So, it cost me almost \$12.00 to learn the hard way. We need to be able to cable flowers through the bank but that was stopped. I ordered Mom's on the last day the bank accepted orders.

You wanted to know if I were doing any rewriting. Yes, quite a bit recently. I did most of the soldier-vote stuff from special cables out of Washington. That is a big issue with the men, believe me.

Big news in the Pacific today... the landings on the Marshall Islands. I think it's the biggest undertaking yet out that way. Occupation of the Marshalls will mean the Japs may have to evacuate their greatest naval base at Truk, since it will be flanked and open to air attack from the Marshalls, Gilberts and Solomons. First reports were that the landings were successful without too many casualties.

Over this way, Berlin is practically on her knees after the latest R.A.F. raids. Our heavies have been over four days in a row.

I'm anxiously waiting to hear of your trip to Asheville. If you didn't get a sleeper this time, I'll tan your hide, so help me. I know what an all-night ride is in a coach. I don't know what the restrictions are on sleepers but I hope you were able to get one. There may come a time when we will have to ride the all-night coaches but at least we'll have each other's shoulders.

I'll be away tomorrow but I'll be back at night. And, if you are free, sweetheart, I'd love to have another date with you. Think you can chase your admirers away to "date" me three nights in succession? Seems like I want to be with you more often than ever now.

Love to Mom. 'Night, angel.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 2, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

Here's that man again. Arrived back from a one-day trip to keep the date I made last night. Stopped in the office before I came home and found your airmail of Jan. 17 waiting for me.

Thanks for still being in love after two years that haven't contained much more than hope, aside from more than a few very precious memories.

My fear of last night was borne out in your letter, too. So, lady, consider yourself "fanned" properly for not getting a sleeper on the train! I'm ready to believe that you couldn't get one.

You have me upside down trying to figure where you are going to settle. I realize how difficult it is for you to decide so I sympathize with you. I'll be ever so glad when I have you and know where you are.

From your letter I gathered you hadn't received mine, written over Christmas. I believe I addressed them to Matawan, which means they will be delayed until Marguerite forwards them to you.

I'd like to know if you favor a change in the address for bond deliveries. I'd just as leave continue to have them sent to Matawan and forwarded to you rather than go through all that red tape again. That is, if you don't think Marguerite will mind. Otherwise, I'll put the change request through.

Will you do me a special favor? You said Mom baked you an apple pie. Do you think you could take lessons from her so you will be able to keep me happy with them? I had better warn you, though... I'll be asking you to make them at least five times a week.

I'll be back again tomorrow and will tell you about my trip today.

If you close your eyes again... 'Night, sweetheart.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 4, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

Haven't had a date with you in a couple of nights. Miss me? Yesterday brought a V-letter enclosed with a letter from Marguerite written January 9.

I'm glad I do appear now and then in a dream. Upsweep with curls? A little on the glamorous side... sure it was me? The few dreams I've had of you, we've been together, so that's something.

I've had a busy evening. I took a bath, washed my hair, did my week's laundry and quite a bit of ironing. One of these days I'll do my laundry in the daytime instead of spending a perfectly good evening this way.

Mom went to a play tonight with a good friend of hers. I'm going tomorrow night. All local talent... a benefit play but it's supposed to be good.

I discovered yesterday that my new employers only pay once a month. Yech, I have to work a whole month before I see any folding money that belongs to me. It's a good thing I'm living at home. I'm

going to try and save the biggest part of it. I won't have a lot of commutation to pay out and, too, it will eliminate the extra board I paid in Matawan. I'll continue to give Mom her usual amount.

We had a letter from Warren with a temporary A.P.O. # from New York. He is still at the staging area, however, and will be for a few days yet.

As you know by my other letters, I'm missing Jersey but it won't be for so terribly long. I had a long welcome letter from Eleanor. She was a bit down since she hasn't heard from Tom in a few weeks. Eddie is still in Pennsylvania waiting.

The weather is lovely here still, almost too good to be true. If it's nice Sunday, I think I'll go and see Mother Müller at St. Genevieve's. I haven't had an opportunity to go out there yet.

Marguerite is a bit disappointed that I didn't return to Jersey. She doesn't want Mom to get too dependent on me. She has an idea I might let it stand in the way of our marriage. Can you imagine? Mom wanted me to go back and she wants us to be happy more than anyone, so I'm not worrying about that.



Enclosed are some pictures of the house and the ones we took on Warren's furlough. Freddie, one of Mom's "boys," that I told you about, made Mom three 8x10s of the house and the three of us together. They are really swell. I'm going to send you my big one that Mom gave me. I have the negative in case something happens to this one but I thought you might like it. I'll send it with my new picture.

Things seem to be going well on both fronts. The Marshalls was a surprise but quite welcome. I still

get a chill when I see a raid over Frankfurt mentioned in the newspaper, I guess because that's where you went on your first raid.

Mom said she heard over the radio yesterday that there was a bill to give those men in the armed forces that had served 18 months or longer overseas would be eligible whenever it was possible for a leave to come back to the states. It gave me a hope but I'm not counting on it too much since you are in a special service.

I slipped one of my pictures on the other side of your picture in the double frame I have. We don't look so bad together. I'm not bragging now... just wanted to see how we looked together.

I get so mad... there has been something I've been trying to remember to tell you for so long. I always remember at the dumbest times and then when I want to remember it at a moment like this, I can't. Fine thing. Maybe I'll think of it...

Guess I'll go to bed now. I just have to say my prayers and hop in. Please, close your eyes and keep still. I'll come close and kiss you good morning, since it's almost time for you to get up. I love you and that miss-you feeling has been running wild again. Love me...

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 5, 1944—London ["London" is censored]

Evening sweetheart,

We are here together, you and I, at the end of one of the most enjoyable days I have had in a long time.

To begin with, the weather was beautiful, a snapping cold day but the sun was out, and the air was clear. It was an unusual day here for this time of year.

Ben and I were up at 9:30, lazily enjoyed breakfast on our day off, and set out for a walk that took us along the Thames embankment from Blackfriars Bridge to Parliament and the Abbey, along Whitehall to Trafalgar Square, then along Pall Mall to Buckingham Palace and Hyde Park.

We just about ran out of "gas" at that point and took a cab to the Churchill Club for lunch. We spent the entire afternoon in the Club's library, after which we met Andy Rooney and Joe Fleming and saw "Panama Hattie" at the Piccadilly Theater. Andy was given four tickets to a box by Ben Lyon (Major) before the latter left for service under Gen. Eaker in the Mediterranean. Bebe Daniels (Mrs. Ben Lyon) stars in the show. With the tickets was an invitation to drop back stage for a "hello" and a drink with Bebe.

She was very gracious, informal, talked with us for about an hour. Before we left, she asked us to have dinner with her next Saturday night at her home. Said nights were going to be lonely with Ben away. So, we are dining with her after the show next week.

I couldn't help remembering the picture in which I last saw her, "Rio Rita," which must be all of 15 years ago! Bebe must be in her 40s but she is still vivacious. She and Ben probably have enter-



tained more servicemen over here than any 50 people. Since our men first came over in Jan. 1942, they have been constantly having men to their home for tea and all that goes with a visit with “old friends.” The Lyons have been in London for about seven years now, I believe. They could easily have gone back to America when the blitz started but stayed on to continue their radio program, one of the most popular in Britain. Ben came into service with the Air Force as head of the radio end of public relations with a major’s commission. He held a commission in the service during peace. In fact, I believe he was promoted to Lt. Col. a short while ago although I’m not sure.

After the show, the four of us went to Olivelli’s for spaghetti. And, here I am in time to keep our date, even though I forsook you for another woman tonight. Forgive me?

You were responsible for making my day what it was, too, because I received the letter you wrote only six nights ago in our corner. When the mail comes that quickly it really brings you close to me.

We just naturally think along the same channels too. On the same night, I was recalling the same incidents. Sometimes, it seems like such a short time ago and again so long.

‘Night, sweetheart. Be back tomorrow. Love to Mom

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 7, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

No date this weekend. Did you miss me? I wrote a long letter Friday but I still missed not being with you this weekend.

I went to a play Saturday evening. All local talent for the benefit of the Orthopedic Home. I was amazed, it was so unusually good. The businessmen in town played all the parts, both male and female. Sunday we had a late dinner and went to see “Madame Curie.” Really a wonderful picture. She is so lovely... I enjoyed the picture a lot.

No mail today and I could have used a letter. They put me on my own today. I didn’t do too bad... balanced to a penny after handling a mere fifteen thousand.

My trunk arrived today so I’m officially home. All I have to do is unpack them. Oh, me...



Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon. London, around 1940.

Mom is busy in her chair hemming pillowcases and answering all the questions for Clifton Fadiman on “Information Please.”

Did I tell you we received a temporary A.P.O. from New York on Warren’s letters. He’s still in Nebraska but not for long. He told Mom not to worry, but she is doing swell. I’m proud of her. She is fairly well... could be better but it’s mostly worry.

It’s a lovely night. I went to church this evening. We’re having a mission this week with services each night and morning so I’ll be busy. The missionary is from Connecticut but definitely New York. Makes me feel right at home.

Sunday was St. Blaise... when you get your throat blessed. Remember the morning two years ago... the first and only time I knelt beside you at the altar? I haven’t forgotten. I was awfully glad Marguerite gave me a push that morning.

I’m tired tonight... mentally exhausted. That machine attached to the savings department has been my Waterloo but I’ll master it yet. I did all right with the customers this morning but balancing up this afternoon wasn’t so good. The auditor is going to wish he never saw me when he checks the tape off it tomorrow but in a round-about way it balanced Here I am telling you about my day’s work.

Our weather continues to be too good to be true. You should see that moon tonight and going to waste. I wished we could have been to the mission together tonight and walked home. It was or is a good night for walking... like spring. My star is shining just as bright tonight.

I was checking through my things and found a ticket from Perth Amboy to New York and several from Matawan to Perth Amboy... Guess I won’t be needing them so I’ll send them to Marguerite. She can take a trip to New York for me.

I’ve had that miss-you feeling terrifically. It’s probably because of seeing so many servicemen here. It seems like I should find you somewhere, waiting for me outside St. Lawrence’s or on the corner of the square. Remember the night we got a bit crossed up on our meeting places and I sneaked up behind you with, “Looking for someone...” and you almost got picked up before I got there. Girls in Asheville were pretty desperate then and there wasn’t gas rationing then so they could cruise around.

Things look as if they will explode any minute. There seems to be a tenseness in the air, a sort of expectant feeling. You never know when you push the button to turn the radio on what it will bring. There’s a terrific battle going on near Rome now. What will the outcome be? How much longer?? I’d rather be taking part, than waiting so helplessly.



I'm falling asleep and I have a bath to take yet. I love you... always love me and don't let anything happen to our love. I miss you more than ever.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 9, 1944—London

Hello sweetheart,

More mail today... lots. And, to bring you up to date on what I have received from you in January, I can bring out those of the 1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 11, 13, 17, 19 and 24.

Today's mail brought five of those and straightened out a lot of puzzling items. You might say today's letters were in the form of a reward, for this is the fourth consecutive night I've been with you.

We have an awful lot to talk about tonight, so get yourself comfortable. We may as well get a pillow for the censor, too.

Let's talk about Warren first. I'm glad he had a chance to get home. You have probably written another letter between the 19th and the 24th, which tells more of his visit. In any case, I know he was home.

As for his possibilities of going to the Pacific are concerned, it really doesn't make much difference. Service overseas is as good, or bad, in any theater. In fact, as flying goes, the Pacific is actually about 30 to 40 percent less dangerous than it is over here. If he does go to the Pacific I have a lot of figures that may change Mom's opinion. I know they won't console her entirely but they may help.

Now, about you and your job. You had a big decision to make and I believe you made the right one. First of all, you will be with Mom, and secondly, the salary sounds super. I loved the way you made the decision, alone in St. Lawrence's.

I shouldn't worry too much about the wedding expense. My proposition is to determine what our combined assets are when the time comes and go on from there. I know I'm going to save everything I possibly can for several reasons. One is to give us a good start. The other is to give me time to pick the job I want [after the war].

I don't want to be in a position where I have to take the first one that comes along. I know I can fall back on the Journal but they will have to talk my language or I won't be interested. I know what I am capable of without over-estimating it. The job will be to find people I can convince. I've made a lot of friends in the business over here. They may be worth knowing later.

About the wedding...

I favor something intimate for our particular people, those closest to us. And I know how to arrange it without breaking any rules on "How to Keep Friends." You leave it to me.

Billee, I didn't receive the cable you sent from Asheville. But now that I practically know what it contained, it doesn't matter. You should have received the \$100 I sent on the 16th. Perhaps it is mentioned in a letter on the way. If you didn't get it by the time this reaches you, send a cable.

And, while I think of it, the money I send still goes into our pool and should be used for anything you see fit, OK? If an emergency arises and you are short, I want you to use it. I'll have more on the way at the end of this month.

I'd like you to have a Xmas present like Edie's but you'll have to wait until I'm a captain.

You spoke of the rents in N. Arlington. I think \$48 is reasonable but I'd love to see the place first. I'd like to put in a bid for one but things are up in the air a bit yet, aren't they? We won't have much trouble finding our 2x4, you'll see, when the time comes. In fact, I've become so impractical all I'm thinking about is how quickly I can push you to the altar.

I'm going to continue this tomorrow, Billee. There's still plenty to cover. I would just like to say you have more glamour than you give yourself credit for. You could easily fall back on it. But I'd rather you didn't.

'Night, Claudia. Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 9, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

Once every so often, when you tease me, you ask me why I love you so much. Sometimes, I say it's that funny little nose or just the way you look at me with your sleepy eyes. A better reason is because you love me. I have 15 letters written last month alone, to prove it. You must love me to sit down and talk with me once every two days.

If we went into statistics I'm sure that's a new record... 15 letters, one of which was a V-mail, written in one month.

Your beautiful Valentine was among the latest arrival of five airmails. Now that I have 15, I'm going to put them in order and re-read them. After hearing you say you decided to stay in Asheville I'm getting letters now saying you didn't believe you would stay more than a month.

The latest letters were those of the 9, 10, 26, and 29, so you can see how confused I was for a time.

You practically melted me with the Valentine. Made me feel a bit bad, too, because I couldn't get anything but very cheap ones here after trying several times. In the end, I decided on a cable. Speaking of cables, I'm still waiting to hear if you received the \$100 I sent Jan. 16.

Before I go into the new letters there are a few things left unfinished from those received previously. See how busy you keep me?

From what you say, El apparently has been telling family secrets like the picture of me on a pony, my evening school studio, Regis High, etc. Oh, I suppose there are many things we have to learn about each other. I was saving mine for those nights in our corner. You already know the vital statistics but there are a lot of supplementary items in my history that we'll talk of one day. How about you?

I'll have to thank Mrs. Schofield for her flattery, too, although she must have let her imagination run wild. She doesn't know the devil in me.

Now, about the names for our pitcher and catcher. I like your selection of Charles III and John. And you were right in surmising I was proud of my brother. I am so proud of John I almost think it's hoping for too much to have one of our children equal to him. Still, we will be just as proud of Charles, John and the rest, won't we?

I'm still in favor of Elizabeth for our first "miss."

I'll be back tomorrow to talk about the letters just received.

'Night, sweetheart. Love me and miss me. Love to Mom

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 10, 1944—Asheville

My darling,

A lone V-letter so far this week, received Tuesday and written Jan. 25. Not bad for timing. I've been wanting a letter so very much, just a page with your writing and it hasn't come. I still don't like these V-letters. They are about as personal as Grand Central Station.

I haven't had any crazy dreams since I've been home. Maybe my conscience isn't bothering me any longer... or something.

You'd love the picture of me. I look like I belong to the yogi cult, sitting in bed with my feet crossed under me but I wanted to write you tonight. I'm still going to the mission... I've only missed Sunday night... morning and night I've gone. I came home yesterday from work and stretched across the bed and fell asleep immediately with my shoes on even.

I'm glad you and Larry got together. That must have been a reunion. Thanks for trying to find Mom's folks. She says now that she thinks they live in a suburb called "Cym Bach." Sounds as if it might be spelled that way but the Welsh names and language are something else... worse than Chinese. [In fact, the Esais family came from Cwm Bach in the Rhondda Valley coal mining district, nowhere near Swansea. Elizabeth always insisted (wrongly) that her grandfather and father were not coal miners, but rather mining engineers.]

Warren's instructor was a flight officer who was shot down over Germany, interred and then escaped. Speaking of Warren, we received a letter at the bank from him, from an undisclosed place 48 hours away from Nebraska and colder than an icebox was all he could say. The letter itself wasn't even postmarked in any way. He must be at an embarkation point.

My trunks arrived yesterday plus three weeks of *Stars and Stripes*... all December. Your feature was swell on the ground crew of the Air Force. I notice you used quotation from "Target, Germany" and here I was telling you all about the book. I picked out your story on the bonus?? You didn't say what you would do with yours.

One of Mom's old guests came in last night. He served overseas eleven months during the last war. I was reading the *Stars and Stripes* when he came in. He said they used to stand in long lines to get that paper and nine times out of ten there wouldn't be half enough copies and by the time you finally got hold of one it was practically confetti. He brought out, too, how much the paper meant to the fellows.

What a rain we had Tuesday. Pitchforks... made up for all this lovely weather we've been having here.

I'm getting along better with my new work. As I said, I made it home by 4:45 yesterday and it has been five and six, working overtime. We're only supposed to work 40 hours a week... get paid for overtime, we do.

That seems to be all the news on this "front," my dearest, except how much as always I'm missing you. It seems to get worse. Love me, don't lose your patience. Keep well.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 11, 1944—London

Hello sweetheart,

This is a continuation of Wednesday's letter. Today is Friday, incidentally. So I'll go into what I wanted to say about your last four letters by way of picking up our conversation. I was terribly tired when I cut Wednesday's letter short. Why is it you and I always save our letters until we're half asleep? Guess it's because we miss each other more when day is done.

You like the picture of John and I in our 1918 soldier suits, do you? I actually remember the day it was taken. Uncle John, who gave the uniforms to us when he came back from France, and Mom were with us. I believe the photographer wanted me to smile, but being obstinate then as now, I didn't. If John was a chaplain, we could have another taken now and make comparisons.

How about one of your baby pix for my gallery? The one with the ruffles. Come now, don't be like all women. I'll put it in the office with our cheesecake pix of Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Jane Russell, et al. I dare you!

Incidentally, I got an office letter from Katie Dear telling me they ran your picture and wanted to know what you ever saw in this "ugly puss" of mine. She should look in the mirror and talk!

I loved your letter written from the Martha Washington. Sure did recall priceless moments. You mentioned "twin beds with Marguerite in the other to keep me company." I like that, young lady. Since when do we need chaperones, or even twin beds? Don't you trust me? Hmmm, don't blame you for saying, "We-e-e-l-l..." rather hesitatingly.

Glad you are keeping "Target Germany," Billee. In fact, I was going to ask you to get it. You are reading my mind now and that's a good sign. The book will give you the best picture of Air Force operations here you will ever get.

Your letter of Dec. 28 said you received the check, so that was a load off my mind. I was ready to make a little more noise like I did about the flowers.

It also furnished me with another revelation. I may not have kissed you goodnight early in the morning on Jan. 18, 1942 but when you say I didn't tell you I loved you until the Hawaiian Room... well, I can't believe it. Seriously, I had a reason for holding back. I can confess now... I didn't tell you in Asheville because of a possibility of not seeing each other for years. When I went north, I knew I had to tell you and wanted to wait until I could really tell you and look at you. But, as you said, we didn't have to say it. We showed it in so many other ways. Still, I am looking forward to your first "I love you."

And now, goodnight, sweetheart. I'll be back tomorrow night after our dinner date with Bebe Daniels. And, I love you so much for the ever-so-beautiful letters.

Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 12, 1944—Asheville

My beloved,

I feel almost as if someone presented me with a million dollars today. Two airmails arrived, from Feb. 1 and 2nd.

How are we doing? We are having a storm. The wind was terrific coming home from the mission tonight. I had to tie my scarf over my hat to hold it on. I wouldn't be surprised to see a couple inches of snow in the morning.

My laundry is done for this week, and ironed, too. My hair is washed and my bath taken. The time is 11:15... not bad. "Speedy" they used to call me.

So I'm to consider myself "fanned" for not taking a sleeper. Someday I will, just to see how it feels. When I come to meet you in New York... that will be so I won't look like a hag when I get there.

Say, this is two nights straight we've had dates. Happens to me, too. Could it be we are missing each other a little more than usual? Maybe you are feeling that awful "miss you" feeling I've had so often lately. Maybe a little mental telepathy working overtime.

I finished early today... 4:00 p.m. My new boss was amazed but pleased. They don't like to pay overtime. The rainy day kept the customers away today and gave me a bit of a break.

I thought perhaps you were doing a lot of rewrite work. Father John and I were talking about it one evening. They are once more trying to play politics with the soldier's vote. Makes me wonder when they are going to wake up in Washington. They will one of these days, and it will be GI Joe himself and he won't have his gun put away.

I can't figure out why you want two bottles of shampoo. The shampoo is ok, but the number gets me. Why not one or three? I'll see what I can do for you. The stationery I purchased in Bambergers in Newark, but I'll see what I can find here. I liked that myself. I see you still have some envelopes. You

should see the concentration of old envelopes I have from all the stationery I've bought in the past ten years.

I hate that about the flowers. They should make some kind of adjustment even though the flowers were delivered late. That's a shame. We could have done a lot with twelve dollars... start us out on a good Saturday night, that much would. I sound like all I want is a good time. I just want to see you across a table from me, just anywhere and if I want to I can put my hands across the table and you can hold them. Just to see you for a minute... but there I go again. Excuse it, please.

The cartoon is a riot. Didn't you have the Help Wanted desk once or is it still yours? Hmmm, you all haven't taken on any WACs by chance? I hope not.

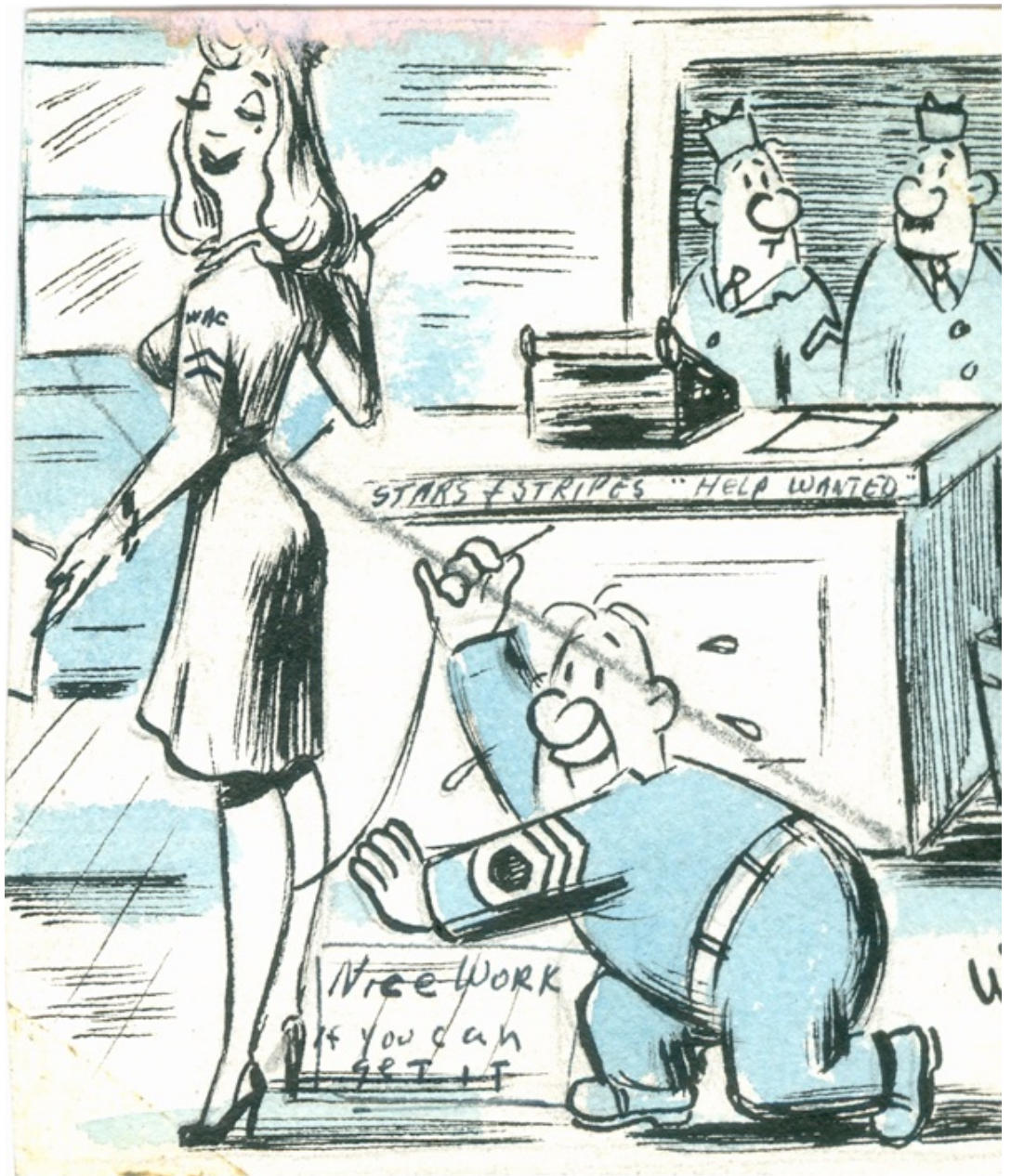
The boys aren't faring so well below Rome. Hitler's last desperate move, or one of them. He's pulling reinforcements from other fronts. Seems like hell that those fellows should have to take it all. There's a report tonight that the situation is somewhat better. The Marshalls are practically ours... that was wonderful. Those lousy yellow so and sos will think twice before they try to pull something like that again.

[Eddie] Rickenbacker is in town. He spoke at a dinner tonight at the Grove Park Inn. I heard it via radio... very good, too. I have a lot of respect for him somehow or other. He talks sense for one thing.

Are you belittling our two years?

How many people could keep what we have alive all this time? Two years, yes... there were long days and longer nights in those two years, but our love is and was worth every second. We have a lot more than just home. We have each other in a proxy sort of way but nevertheless, I'm yours until you decide differently.

You were probably as upside down as I was, trying to figure out what to do. How do you stand me? You must have had some exasperating moments over me. Feel better now that I'm settled.



Cartoon drawn for Charles by Stars and Stripes cartoonist Dick Wingert.

Please, don't change any more addresses. I never did get any bonds sent directly to Matawan. They have all come via Massillon. We should have January's now. The bond officer will expect to see me next if you tell him I've moved again.

I'll do my best to try out an apple pie. I'm having a time trying to make good coffee. It turns out differently every time. Can't understand it and I used to make good coffee.

I'm falling asleep. Goodnight... I love you. Close your eyes and I'll roll over for a goodnight kiss. Goodnight...

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 13, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

Three more letters over the weekend. One of them was written at 2:30 a.m. of Jan. 23 after Warren's last night at home. It made me take a back seat because when we got home from Bebe Daniels' at 4:30 this morning, I made straight for bed. I did want to sit down and tell you all about it right away but realized I'd make more sense with it tonight.

Briefly, it was one of the most pleasant evenings I've had over here.

Andy, Ben, Hoe and I arrived around 10. Shortly afterwards, Bebe came in with three fellows from the cast of "This is the Army," and two girls from the chorus of "Panama Hattie." guess she didn't want to be surrounded by too many GI values.

We had drinks, gabbed for about an hour; then, we had dinner. One of Bebe's two maids wears corporal's stripes, to denote her seniority.

The fellows from "This is the Army" were Earl Oxford, who sings "I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen," and Julie Oshins, the comedian who you may remember as the one who sings "The Army Made a Man Out of Me." The third fellow doesn't have a leading part.

After dinner, we had about three hours of a game called "charades." Ever play it? We divided into teams of five. The idea was for one to act the title of a book, play, film, quotation, poem, etc., trying to convey the title without speaking. Sounds a bit corny but it turned out to be filled with a lot of laughs.

Felt awfully tired when I got up for Mass this morning. Incidentally, in one of your letters you mentioned Sunday being my day off. Sunday is a working day. Saturday is the holiday, since we don't publish on Sunday.

The "Army" show is finished here and is leaving for Africa soon. It made almost \$400,000 for British service charities.

Besides the Jan. 23 letter, I received the ones of the 18th and 21st. I'm sure that makes about 20 January letters. I'll let you know for sure tomorrow.

I loved you so much for remembering all of our wee “anniversaries,” Billee. Like the day we first started writing and the first night we became familiar with our corner.

I know Mom must be feeling low these days. Guess we all are in one way or another. But, what is it she is so pessimistic about? The length of the war?

I hesitate to try and talk about this because we may not be able to get a clear picture of what I mean.

You said Mom remarked how I only knew you for a month. I can’t, somehow, fully grasp the meaning of it.

Is it that Mom is pessimistic about our future? Does she think we don’t know each other long enough to plan our lives together? You never did say how Mom reacted to our “official” engagement, and while I don’t even want to think of it, I can’t help but wonder, suddenly, if she approves of me as a prospective son-in-law.

Billee, dearest, I’m talking pretty much off-the-shoulder, as it were, but I’ve got to know No matter what anyone says or think, you are mine. Nothing will ever change that.

Of a sudden, I’m imagining things I should have thought of before. I’ve just gone ahead taking everything for granted.

Mom is blameless if she is doubtful of lots of things concerning us. You and I, perhaps, would certainly be the same way if our daughter fell in love with someone we didn’t have a chance to know as well as we’d want to.

Billee, please tell me anything I should know. Damn it, I wish I could be home for a short time to straighten things out.

If you believe there are some things that are better left untold until we can iron them out together, I’ll abide by your decision. We always have trusted our faith and we’ll do it now. But if you want to tell me, I’ll be waiting.

If the ache in your heart continues to grow, the feeling is mutual because my longing for you has been at a peak for ever so long.

Now let me have a big smile and an extra-special kiss before we say goodnight.

Be back tomorrow. ‘Night... love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 14, 1944—Asheville

Dearest Charles,

Just received your Valentine. I was beginning to think I was forgotten until about a half hour ago. Ten o’clock and the phone rang. Anymore when that phone rings late of night I start getting a case of butterflies until I know it isn’t you.

I really hit the jackpot today. Your envelope of pictures arrived. It’s a good thing I bought two albums when I bought the first one because it’s filled so I can put these in the other. I’ll try to find a

small white album for your godchild's picture. But, I'm hoping and praying I have all the pictures because when they arrived the whole one end was the victim of a case of gapasis... the whole side was split wide open.

Along with the pictures came your V-letter of February 1 and an airmail written January 25th.

I think I told you all the *Stars and Stripes* were turned over to Father John. I have quite a few he didn't have so he is keeping all of them. You remember I started a scrapbook of your articles but when I didn't get the paper for so long I gave up. I have quite a few yet that you sent me, so I'll put them in anyway. When we get all the duplicate *Stars and Stripes* together I can start clipping them. Maybe then it will be fairly complete.

I feel badly about the flowers, too, even though they were delivered you should receive some kind of adjustment on them.

I bought Mom primroses today for Valentine's Day. Can you beat it? I couldn't find a card for her. Freddie brought us both candy. He thoroughly enjoyed the pictures, especially the ones of the "Stars and Stripes" plane and crew pictures. Being a photographer, he appreciated the shots. Mom is worried about Warren. We haven't heard any more so she thinks he's on his way. She missed his Valentine.

All these years... you sound older than your years. I'm sure Sister Gertrude José doesn't think of it as being so long ago.

You really put in a busy week. I love you telling me about it all. It makes me feel as if I might be sitting with you, hashing over the week's work. Maybe you've been away from home for a week... Me and my imagination. But I can still dream.

You, surrounded by nine WACs... I'm jealous of all nine of them. Oh, I have had that awful, awful, "miss you" feeling these past few days. I think it has to do with Freddie being around so much. He's like you in little ways and it brings all our memories back with such a rush. Don't get alarmed...

I loved the story about the little boy. Bless his heart. "Out of the mouths of babes," all right. Moral of the story... hmmm. What makes you think you needed to add that? Consider yourself slapped. Rest assured, I'll be sure and write for permission if I get any funny ideas... ouch! I should have ducked.

Don't you think your will should have been made to your dad or Father John? I do. I know we'll not need it for a long, long time but that is what I think. Let's not talk about that... I'm a sissy.

I love the enlargements... the shot of you boarding the plane and the one taken at Torquay. You look elegant and swell. I always get a special glow of pride when I get pictures of you, and say to myself, "my darling..."

What awful soupy weather... a heavy snowfall of five inches during the night, sleet this morning and rain all day. You can imagine the mess.

Almost forgot to tell you... I went to a Valentine dance Saturday night at the new army camp. It was a nice party, a good GI orchestra and I enjoyed dancing. Haven't done any since I waltzed with your

dad. I had a ride in the GI bus out and back. It dropped me at my very door. That's the first time I've ever been inside an army camp. This one's quite small, only about 3 or 4 hundred men.

I finished the mission yesterday morning. I really appreciated sleeping until 8:00 a.m. this morning.

I saw a good movie last night... a fairy tale but I enjoyed it, "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves."

Speaking of WAC, there are quite a few stationed here in Asheville.

That seems to be all the news tonight. I haven't heard from 195 in a while. Maybe something this week... El keeps pretty busy writing to Tom. I miss them so much, Charles.

I'm tired... to bed so I can dream about you maybe. I love you and please hurry home.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 14, 1944—Asheville

Hello darling,

Me again, but I thought I'd like to be with you when you opened this, my first picture as the official future Mrs. Kiley. What do you think? Have I changed? A little solemn perhaps but I was thinking of being Mrs. Kiley then.

You still have time to change your mind. Think you want me "tagging along" the rest of your life? It's a serious matter. Take care. I'm saying this with a prayer and both fingers crossed because if you decided to change your mind... oh, I can't think about that now. Goodnight.

Billee

February 17, 1944—Asheville (V-letter)

Darling,

Received your long letter written February 3 Incidentally, the third [letter] this week and all in consecutive order, believe it or not. You really are being showered with letters. You'll have to take a day off. At least some of the gaps are filled in now and you know a little of what goes on.

I can't understand why the cable didn't arrive. Think I'll check. \$2.57 shot but at least I tried.

I was glad to hear what you said about going back to the paper. Your dad will be more than pleased to hear. He told me if I let you go back he just didn't know what he'd do, that there would be better opportunities for you than there. We'll just have to wait and see and when the time comes we'll know what to do. Like your dad, I do feel that you are better qualified for a more responsible position and a better salary.



That has been worrying me a bit. A secondary worry, you might say, as to how we were going to keep on terms with everyone and still not go over our head in regard to the wedding, but I'll leave it up to you. We can work it out when you come home To hear Mom talk, you'd think it was going to be next week. She was telling me last night what she was going to wear, and I don't even have a dress yet. How about that?

We haven't heard from Warren since last week so we're just waiting and praying that he is all right. I have an idea that he wrote that last letter from a P.O.E. since it wasn't postmarked in any way.

I took Mom or rather she took me since I still have fourteen days to go to payday, to see "Thousands Cheer." I saw it with El but I enjoyed it just as much. That was last night. I had a letter from El yesterday and she said Eddie had been home on a 12-hour pass from a camp nearby but wasn't able to say where and they haven't heard any word since, so maybe you'll be seeing him along with Warren. What a reunion that would be. That's almost too much to hope for.

You'll have to write me a request for the picture. I took it to the post office and they wouldn't accept it. I was burning. I thought sure they would take a picture without a request. Maybe I can slip it in with the shampoo and stationery, just in case I can't send one.

This is the first V-letter I've been able to write in quite awhile since I didn't have access to a typewriter but I finished early today so I thought I'd dash one off. Two years and a month today... remember?

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 18, 1944—Asheville

My darling,

Back again today. Think you can stand me around for another day? Such a nice day and a lovely evening. We could be going for a walk or something.

We could be curled up in our corner with my head on your shoulder all nice and comfortable, not thinking about anything but just... How long until we can do that? Little things that don't amount to a hill of beans are going to mean so much. I won't want to let you out of my sight. We'll go on a long honeymoon so I'll get over the dream of you belonging to me enough that I'll be able to stay away from you eight hours a day when you go to work.

Today brought two letters from Warren, "somewhere in Newfoundland," he said. I'll be giving your message to Charles so you know what that means. After Mom getting the news about the tragic hap-



pening to the convoy in the E.T.O., she went to pieces last night but she's better today since she got the mail from Warren. Poor kid hasn't had any mail since he left home and you could tell he'd give his right arm for a letter from somewhere.

I found a smaller mailing envelope for the picture. You'll not get a folder again, just a picture so you'll have to go frame hunting again.

We had a busy day at the bank today, busier than a one-armed paper hanger for a couple of hours. I didn't get home until after five. I still haven't found myself a stool so I stand but I guess I'll survive.

Bill Stern and W.V. Kaltenborn are discussing the post-war Olympics and the possibility of inviting Germany and Japan to participate. What do you think?

This latest news about the convoy is heartbreaking. A thousand boys! It makes you bitter and questioning. [The S.S. Rohna, carrying over 2,000 troops, was sunk in the Mediterranean in November of 1943, but the news was not released until February 1944. This was the worst troopship disaster of the war.] The news of the bombing of Japan's "Pearl Harbor" [Kwajalein] doesn't make up for that, even though it is good news.

There's a girl that works in the bank from Jersey City. Her husband is stationed at Moore General Hospital. She's a cute girl. I like to hear her talk. She reminds me of Journal Square. I miss hopping the train to Newark and New York on Saturdays. As I said before, I'm missing 195 a lot.

Our January bond arrived via Massillon yesterday so we're still up to date. It would be swell if we could let them mature. Maybe we can find a place to buy. I always did think it silly to pay rent. Mom said after the last war they accepted bonds as full fare value for property so that would mean quite a bit. Maybe a place like Marty and Bill's and wasn't completed inside, so we could finish it to our taste.

I fell asleep awhile ago, tonight after I did some laundry. I took a bath then and washed my hair. Now I'm sleepy again. Last night was the night for our corner... a real thunderstorm and such rain. I was wishing as usual. Guess I'll turn in now. I love you. Hurry home to our corner... it needs you an awful lot.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 19, 1944—A Fortress Base

Evening sweetheart,

It's a strange meeting place for you and I tonight. Not too strange, though. We've met here before, remember? Yes, it has been quite some time and while a girl would look a bit out of place among the boys around me now, I'm sure they don't mind us being together.

I've been here since Tuesday and this is Saturday. That's right, our date night. The fellows claim I'm a jinx because every time I come up to make a trip with them, I bring bad weather with me and they stay on the ground for a week or more. The last time I was up (one which I failed to tell you about inasmuch as I didn't fly) I waited for four days before giving up and returning to London.

But this time... well, I'm going to stay here until we do one. We have been alerted for one tomorrow but may not go. You see, this will be the last mission for Mac (Capt. McIlveen) and I'm doing it with him. The angle? Well, as pilot of "The Stars and Stripes, 2nd Edition," he rates a finale story. Two of the crew, Lt. Shober the navigator and Danny Sullivan, one of the gunners, finished up last week. John Scarborough, the engineer, and Lt. Williams the bombardier, finish up with Mac. Charlie Rondunda, radio operator, will have one more. Ray Malmfelt, another gunner, will have two and Eddie Barrett, tail gunner who was in the hospital for five weeks, will have nine to go. Lt. Cygan, the co-pilot, transferred to another crew a couple of months ago and Mac has been taking different co-pilots on each trip.

I don't believe I ever told you what the "night before a mission" was like, did I?

Picture the brick hut where I am as one room, lined on both sides with double-decked beds. Between each bed is a rack where the uniforms and flying equipment for each man hangs. Ingenious as they are, the fellows have rigged up light extensions so that most bunks have "bed lamps." The lamp cover is a painted tin can. Everything is neat. Men are sprawled on their bunks, fully clothed or in pajamas. Some are shining shoes for the want of something else to do. A couple are sitting around the two stoves at opposite ends of the hut reading. Three men are sitting at the table in the center of the hut writing letters. Two are off in a corner making models of planes from the kind of a kit you'd buy a 10-year-old at Christmas. Others are talking shop... the new men listen to the "veterans" and say little, all anxious to learn what they can and hear about "that tough trip to Brunswick" or Kiel or Leipzig or Schweinfurt or Frankfurt or the "milk run" to Pas de Calais or Bordeaux or Tours.

Somebody steps outside the door to look at the sky. "Looks bad, guys. Damn snow has started again." Eddie Barrett calls across the room, "Charlie, if we don't go tomorrow so help me I'm going to ask the Colonel to ground you." He puts on his heavy jacket and wants to know if I'll stroll over to the Aero Club (Red Cross) and have coffee with him. I tell him I've got a date but if he waits I'll walk over with him.

Outside, it's dark. Real, coal-black dark. When your eyes get accustomed to the darkness you can make out the outline of the hut-tops on the skyline. A few small lights creep along the roads... GIs on bicycles. You hear the engines of a Fortress start up, coughing a little at first then falling into a smooth whirr. The sound of the engines rises and falls as the crew chief pre-flights the engines. It's a little early for pre-flighting. That doesn't start, usually, until four hours before takeoff. But in this case, a ground crew probably has been feverishly working all day and night to get a bomber in shape for the next mission. The unsung ground crews who work in all kinds of weather, faces stained with oil and dyed reddish-purple by the cold, fingers numbed, conscientious at their work. Only they know how much depends on the work done by the mechanics. The slightest bit of carelessness can cause the lives of 10 men and send a quarter of a million dollar plane to its doom.

Inside the Aero Club men in flight jackets, coveralls, uniforms sit in pairs, trios and quartets drinking coke or coffee, munching on snacks. Somebody in the corner pecks away on the piano... "Melancholy Baby." Two guys lean over the counter talking to a British volunteer worker of about 20 who

titters when one of the boys, obviously from Brooklyn, tells her that “these English goils can’t stack up to our goils back home nohow, ‘cept once in a while when you meet a nice one.”

Back in the hut, Harry Edgins (tail gunner on the “Lady Liz” with 21 missions) berates his pilot in a Georgian drawl for going off on pass without telling him. “Hell, man,” Harry says. “Here I am with a chance to fly tomorrow and he blows out on a pass, leavin’ me high and dry. Looks like I’ll have to bum a ride with another crew. Hey, John... think Mac will take me? I’ll fly the waist.” John thinks Mac will take him so Harry makes a mental note to look up Mac in the briefing room in the morning.

One by one, the boys begin to “hit the sack.” After a while there are only five or six still up, sitting in a wide circle around one of the stoves. Joe Carbonetti, pint-sized smoothest Latin Lover you ever did see, with a thick mustache and jet-black curly hair, and Eddie Barrett talk about the “good old days” in Salt Lake City, Seattle, Spokane, Myers Field, etc. Harry wonders what his wife and three kids are doing. Another guy wonders what his precious bit of femininity is doing, too. Wonders what she could be doing at six o’clock in Asheville. Figures it’s a darn sight warmer than it is here, too.

Everybody will be in bed soon. The lights will be out and although it will appear as if everybody is sleeping peacefully, you will only hear a few snoring in complete relaxation. For, even though tomorrow’s mission may be a “milk run” they know anything can happen. Maybe it’s a long haul. They won’t know until briefing at about 4 a.m. If the mission isn’t “scrubbed” somebody will stick his neck in the door at about three and say “Everybody listed for today’s mission... hit the deck. Breakfast at 3:30, briefing at 4:15.”

Nobody will say much on the way to breakfast or briefing. Can’t waste time. Besides, everybody is still half asleep. It will be a good breakfast. Most everybody will be tense at briefing, veterans as well as rookies, until they hear the target. If it’s a tough one, there will be a spontaneous whistle. If it’s an easy one, comparatively speaking, there will be hundreds of broad smiles.

After briefing, the gunners get their 50s, climb on trucks and ride out to the perimeter where the bombers rest in the dispersal areas. There will be faint, flickering lights around the ships where ground crews are making last-minute checks, pre-fighting engines. The guns are put in, Mac will have a look, Bill Williams will check his bomb bays. Everything will be set. We’ll hang around the edge of the plane, smoking cigarettes. We’ll ask Mac if he’d like to be starting all over again and Mac will say, “Are you kidding?”

Pretty soon the big boys will taxi from the dispersal areas, line up one behind the other until the fleet is assembled. We’ll rumble down the runway, gathering speed until we reach the maximum, lift into the air... and from then on, we’ll be in the hands of God.

I’ll have you with me all the time. And when I get back I’ll tell you all about it. ‘Bye for awhile. Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 21, 1944—Asheville

My darling,

I've been neglecting you for a couple of days. I started to write last night but I couldn't find you. That has happened a few times but not in a long time. You seemed so far away. I sat in our corner but you weren't there. Tonight you seem close by.

Today is lovely, really spring-like. I finished early and the sun was so warm. Tonight is as lovely as today was.

We had a quiet weekend. One of Mom's boys' wife came down from New York so we had them to dinner. I baked a lemon pie for you yesterday, my first pie and I tried it out on company, and they are still walking around. Mom said it wasn't so bad. You don't know what you're missing, not being a guinea pig. Here I am going to be a first-rate cook when you get home.

I had a long letter from Marguerite the other day, telling me all the "dirt." She went window shopping for us in New York and bought all our linens, etc., for our "two by four." I think she wants to see us settled and happy as much as we do.

Sitting in our corner last night after everyone turned in, I just sat and stared, and couldn't help but say to myself, "How much longer?" Just for an hour, what I wouldn't do to have you near. I kept remembering our moments there in that corner, my head on your shoulder, so close to you.

I've had a sort of sick feeling since the news of Jerry's retaliation on London the other night. I missed your letter today. I sound "down," don't I? Forgive me, please. I'll recover and next time I won't be so downhearted. Definitely, I'm in a "mood." Think you'll be able to stand me when I get like this?

I just heard today that a kid I used to go to high school with—he ran around in our gang—is a bombardier, a Capt. Edgar Dickinson. Have you ever run across him? Everyone I used to know is scattered far and wide and a few won't be among those to return. Gives you a strange feeling inside. They were such kids when you last knew them.

We have a new Lieutenant and his wife in for an indefinite stay. He's a dentist stationed at Moore General. A nice couple from Los Angeles.

I met an old girlfriend on the street today. Her husband, Capt. Allen Wilson, is in Air Corps Intelligence. He was stationed for a time in England and is now in Corsica. She has a ten-month old baby girl. Her birth announcement appeared in the *Stars and Stripes*.

The latest developments in the Pacific Theater are really something. The Marshalls and now Truk and today's news of Tojo removing the army and navy heads. They must be getting a bit confused. Seems too good to be true. We still have a long way to go but the task doesn't seem so ominous.

I'm listening to Carole Landis. Remember her and the day she was married? She's still married to the major I think. He was home on a leave, too.

I saw a good movie last night, “Cry Havoc.” It was quite good but another war picture... the Philippines. A bit like “So Proudly We Hail.”

“For Whom the Bell Tolls” starts this week so I’ll see if I see the resemblance. You said she reminded you of me. I’ll probably not be able to tell. “Junior Miss” is to be played here next month. It’s supposed to be the original cast from New York. I’ll try and go. I’d kind of like to see it.

I went to a canteen dance Saturday. Quite a few convalescents there, both Army and Navy. You should see them dance with an arm in a cast. Then there are those that have to sit and watch but they don’t seem to mind... they’re just glad to be there.

I feel better already, just being with you. What you do to my morale!

The Easter season starts again... our second one away from each other. I’m going to miss being in New York. Perhaps next Easter we’ll be together. I said that last Christmas, too, but I’m going on hoping and praying. I want to walk down the avenue again in the Easter parade with my best bib and tucker on and your flowers perched on my shoulder.

Back again to our memories, wishes and dreams again. Can’t seem to stop but then we don’t want to, do we?

I’m going to turn in. I should write to Marguerite but I’m tired. Think I’m getting a cold.

I love you. Miss me and love me.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 24, 1944—London

Good morning angel,

This isn’t going to be a very pleasant letter. In fact, I was going to break one of our promises and not write it at all. But, I know we can take the good with the bad.

If you have received the letter I sent from the Fortress base, you will be able to make better sense of this, because this is the first I’ve written since.

I went out to do the 25th and last mission with Captain Mac and the boys last week. Bad weather kept us on the ground for five days. Then, last Tuesday, we were “alerted” and that’s when I wrote to you, giving you a picture of “the night before a mission.”

The following morning we were “briefed” to raid Schweinfurt and took off. After being in the air for 3 1/2 hours, the mission was called off and we came back. The next day we started out again and



once more, it was called off because of bad weather. It looked as if the bombers would be idle for a few days so I came back to London.

Yesterday, however, for the third day in succession they went out. This time they kept going and when I heard it I was more than a little disappointed. In the office I had already written a story on the boys' last trip... how they all would be home in a few weeks.

Last night I called the base and was told Capt. Mac and the boys didn't get back. They were hit by enemy fighters over Germany. Crews in other planes in the formation saw five to seven men bail out and saw Mac going down under control which means, I hope, that everybody got out safely. Before he went, Mac told other planes over the radio, "I won't be going back with you today, boys."

So, there it is, and I'll always thank God for watching over me. Furthermore, it all made me fully realize one thing.. I've made my last mission! From this day on, I'm looking out for us, and us alone. So, you can stop worrying about me in the air.

I told 195 I made a practice flight while I was away but I'm not going to say anything to them about this.

I'll be back with a nicer letter tonight. 'Bye for awhile.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 25, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

Two months ago tonight I was at 195 still trying to get used to all the sparkle on my third finger, left hand and wishing with all my might you could be holding my hand and assuring me that all this was really happening to me.

We're having a "date." Mom has gone out with a lady-friend to see a show so I'm here with you and my sniffles, my first bad cold this winter. Can't imagine where I got it but I'm doctoring... nose drops, cough syrup, etc. This unseasonable weather I guess... not dressing properly.

We had a party last night. One of the fellows that used to live here and goes with one of the girls in the apartment is here on a leave and Freddie opened a Christmas present... a quart of Park and Tilford [distillers]. We killed it last night. Mom helped, too. She's cute when she has just a bit. We had fun. There were seven of us, dissipating we were but it was fun. Couldn't help but wish you were helping us.

El's pictures of her and Annice arrived this week. You'll be getting yours soon. It's so good of both of them. I love it. I've asked her to consider coming down in May or June for a visit. I think it would do her good. We'd love to have them. She might get a bit homesick but we'd do our best to make her feel at home.

It's raining out, a quiet, comfortable rain. I like the sound of it.

They're playing the nicest songs: "I Wish That I Could Hide Inside This Letter," a new song, and another one, "Easter Sunday With You." Both nice.

Your evening and day with Ben and the fellows sounded swell. Two-timing me, eh? It's all right. I'm glad you had fun. "Panama Hattie" is a cute story. I saw it in the movies with Ann Southern. I've heard a lot about Mr. & Mrs. Ben Lyons and their hospitality to the boys "over there." They have done a swell job. I miss hearing them on the "Stars and Stripes." You knew that we are no longer able to get that on the radio.

Fifteen letters a month... did I really write that many? I've been missing you and feeling more rebellious than ever lately. Maybe that's why. It's the only way I have of being near you.

I can't say I like your reason for loving me, Charles.... just because I love you. That's no good. It has to be more than that. Maybe, like me Charles, you get a lost feeling sometimes. It has been so long. Not to see you... I don't know how to say it but it kind of makes you bitter inside when you see other young couples together, living a reasonably normal life. At least they are together. So many are stationed here. They go to work at eight and finish at five. They have apartments and except for the khaki, live like civilians. One girl in the bank has been here with her husband for eighteen months. It's things like that that make you wonder why you have to be over there so long without an opportunity to come home. But then, this is war and I shouldn't complain. At least you aren't on the front line and our mail gets through and you're well. Guess we shouldn't ask for more... or should we?

We received a cable from Warren that he arrived safely overseas so perhaps you'll be seeing him soon. Mom is taking it well. He must have flown over because we had a letter from him written Feb. 15 from Newfoundland and received the cable a week from the time his letter was written. I'm glad that's the way he went over. I'm anxious to get his impression of his experience going over and arriving, etc.

Your package will be sent this weekend. I should have gotten it off sooner, but I had to wait until payday. The sweater will come with it, too. I'm going to try and find the Virginia Round cigarettes down here. They never carried them here before, but maybe since so many outsiders have come in they might have some.

I opened a checking account to pay my insurance, etc. I feel very business-like, paying off some bills tonight and mailing them... almost like a housewife.

For the first time, your letters have been censored. The envelope torn and sealed with scotch tape. The heading "London" was cut out but that's all. You've never said... are my letters opened?

I had an argument with someone... I didn't think they were, but he said definitely that they were.

I had lunch with an old girlfriend today. We had fun talking over what we'd done since I'd last seen her.

By the way, I have a new hair-do. It's flat on top and makes me look younger, but it's easier to fix and it's getting a little long and unmanageable.

Mom received a letter from the Sheraton Hotel in Newark to see if we didn't want to have our reception there. Today I received a Bride's Book from a store in Richmond, Va. I get around, don't I?

"For Whom the Bell Tolls" is here. Guess I'll go see it Sunday. Mom went to see it yesterday and liked it very much.

The picture of Dorothy Jean arrived yesterday. Cute, aren't they? Mom says she looks like Dot. I had a long letter from Dot this week telling me all the news. She tells me Ruth T. is ready to take her oath in the WAVES. I'm enjoying her but I won't say anymore, so relax.

I'm getting tired. We worked late tonight and together with this cold, I'm a bit low, so excuse, please. Maybe I'll be back tomorrow night. Mom is going out so I'll be keeping house again.

A special anniversary kiss... I'm loving you but not because you love me... just because you're you. do you mind?

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

February 26, 1944—London

Hello angel,

I hope there won't be another occasion for me to write a letter like the one I wrote yesterday. In one way I'm sorry I did write it because it wasn't very pleasant and I'm sure it was written in such a way that it was difficult for you to understand everything.

The latest news on Mac and the boys, however, is that their chances of landing safely and being prisoners of war are very good. [In fact, none of the crew survived.]

Now, let's talk about the brighter side of life, huh?

Is my sweetheart looking as beautiful as ever today? I can make a guess that you are getting more beautiful with age because the clipping of your engagement picture makes me swell with pride and murmur, "That's my honeychile." You look positively gorgeous, except I wish it were a moving picture; you'd smile with a wrinkle in your nose.

Since your pictures make me love you more and more I'll have to send you some and see if it works both ways.

I see you are still subject to our mutual "miss you" moods. Your letter of Feb. 2 told of writing a letter and tearing it up. It is an awful feeling, isn't it? There was a time when I was anxious to stay over here until it was over but no more.

You said it is hard to pretend and sort of dream of us being together in a train bed and with only one pillow. I'm sure we'd be snug and cuddled, don't you? Why, we would just fall asleep in each other's arms. And that's the way I want it to be always.

About Freddie... you did mention one of Mom's "boys" a few times but never by name.

You did give me a start when you said, "Have I mentioned Freddie in my letters?" But after hurriedly reading on, my mind was put at ease. I'm terribly jealous. You will find that out as time goes on. Too bad about his experience with the girl.

I'm wondering today if Warren isn't over here already since he was given the New York A.P.O. It may be that he is part of a new group or squadron and his departure will be delayed until the whole unit is assembled.

I enjoyed your recollection of St. Blaise's Day in Asheville and how we knelt at the altar together. I long for the day when we'll be kneeling together and Father John says, "I pronounce you man and wife."

Another question you asked, about my part in the mission... I have purposely held it back until I could be more definite. As it is now, three or four men on the staff may go with the troops. Naturally, I want to be one of them and have been promised a place. But, things change quickly.

They wanted me to take a desk job, for the third time, a couple of weeks ago but I turned it down. It would be ideal if I was cut out to stay inside and wait for everything to happen but I guess I'm not built that way. It would mean editing other men's stories but I'd rather get out and do them myself. It's bad enough when I have to put in a week or so of re-write when an emergency arises.

Besides, I have too many good contacts in the Air Force and infantry to throw them away. No, I believe I could do a better job the way I am, and I'd be happier.

Have to get ready to meet Al's brother and a lieutenant in his company. They'll be in London for 4 days, staying with me. Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 27, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

At about five o'clock this evening, I received a phone call at the office. The voice on the other end said, "Is this Staff Sergeant Kiley?" After I had answered in the affirmative, the voice went on... "This is Sergeant Gray."

You could have bowled me over with something lighter than a feather. I had to laugh over the formalities, what with ranks and all.

At any rate, Warren has just arrived at a Combat Crews Reception Center, about 30 miles from here, and I'm planning to get out and see him Tuesday.

He will be there for three days before going to a gunnery range for a "refresher" course. Then he will be assigned to an operational group. All this is a follow-up to the cable I'm sending after I meet your brother. I'll have a lot to say after I give him a chance to size up his future brother-in-law. Now that I know Warren is here, I'm sending Mom the letter I said I would write. It should arrive with this.

Since you are naturally worried over Warren's presence here, I suppose the letter I wrote about Mac and the boys will upset you more. I hope not because I didn't mean it to do that.

Al's brother, Larry and his friend, Lt. Jerry Coopersmith of New York, arrived yesterday and are out "seeing the sights" again tonight. I tried to be the perfect host last night and paid the penalty today. I awoke with a throbbing head and exceedingly thirsty. You can fill in the missing pieces from that.

I was to carry on with them tonight but begged off and told them I'd wait up. It's 11:30 and they are not home yet. I'm getting tickets for a show tomorrow night by way of finishing up their stay. They are going back to Wales on Tuesday.

Benny told me today that Bebe Daniels called while I was away and invited us to dinner again. He turned it down for the present because Andy was away, too. Looks like we made a good impression to get a second invitation.

I'll leave early tonight. Forgive me, please. Just one of your kisses would give me new life now and give me something to stay awake for. But, I can't have that kiss.

I'll be back Tuesday after I see Warren. 'Bye for now. Love me and miss me.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles

February 28, 1944—Asheville

My dearest,

Received your letter Saturday written Jan. 11, but I think you must have meant Feb. 11, since you refer to my letter written Jan. 28. What goes? For Pete's sake, don't push the time back... it goes slow enough now.

I wanted to write Saturday but we had a lonely officer's wife here. She came all the way from California to be with her husband only to have him sent to Fort Benning on detached service... fine thing. Her name is "Billie," but it's a nickname. She's cute... a blonde.

Yesterday, I went for a walk and to church at five o'clock... benediction and the stations. Last night we went to a movie and saw "Song of Russia." I had all I could do to sit through it. They used our concerto as a background all the way through the movie. I'll never enjoy hearing that until you're with me.

I got some stationery... typewriter-sized airmail. It seemed to be the best I could do. It was either that or that awfully small size.

I'll break down and send the picture, ruffles and all, but take care of it. My grandchildren might want to see what their "grandma" looked like.

Father John, I know, would love to be able to have that picture made of you both in uniform. He hasn't ever reconciled himself to being out.

Hmmm... you didn't like the idea of chaperones or the twin beds... hadn't taken into consideration "trusting you." I guess because I've slept in a twin bed or by myself so long. You'll probably get pushed out. I was missing you the night I wrote that. The memories of our last few days together were so vivid that night.

Our spring-like weather has turned chilly today. My case of sniffles got me down today so I came home. I slept for five hours this afternoon but I still feel a little lousy, if a bit more rested.



Mom has been gallivanting here and there the last few days, but it does her good. She feels a little more free since there is someone here to stay with the house. We'll be in the midst of spring cleaning directly. We have a lot of painting and redecorating to do upstairs.

Hey, it was so warm yesterday when we came out of church, I had to shed my coat. The officer's wife asked if she could go. She had never been to our service before. She is a Seventh Day Adventist. I remember we used to call them "grass-eaters" when we lived in California. The little town we lived in was inhabited almost entire of Adventists. They never eat any meat, you know... that was why we called them "grass-eaters."

I'm remembering he paragraph in a letter last week, about the flattery Mrs. Schofield paid you and about the Devil you say you have in you. I hope that's true, because I won't have to try so hard to be good. It's a bit hard to explain, but sometimes I think you think I'm too much of an angel.

Seems to be all the news this time. Maybe I'll be back tomorrow. I tried to find a white album for Dorothy Jean's pictures. They have little pink corners now, too, for the pictures. I'm really going to be kept busy. I'm making Warren heavy white socks to wear inside his flying boots, so that's keeping me busy.

That seems to be all. Said that before, didn't I? Miss me and love me.

All my love and kisses, always your Billee

The last few letters have all been opened and pasted over again... just thought I'd let you know.

February 29, 1944—London

Billee dearest,

Warren and I are going to make a pair of pretty good brothers-in-law. I decided that during the first minute of our meeting today.

He doesn't look at all like you, does he? If I were looking for someone resembling you, I never would stop at Warren.

I took an early train out of London this morning and met him at 10:30 in the gunnery office of the post where he is staying until the end of this week. After another week at an advanced gunnery range, he will move on, together with his crew, to an operational station.

I won't see him until after he is settled at his permanent base but he is sending me his address as soon as he reaches it and I'll keep in touch with him. He probably will not get a pass, which would enable him to come to London for a while yet. In the meantime, however, I'm sure I'll get an opportunity to visit him. Naturally, I expect he will be spending most of his free time with the boys in his crew. But, we'll be seeing a lot of each other, and I'm afraid we are going to be very good friends.

I liked your brother immediately. He's all you said he was. You didn't tell me he's wearing something that resembles a mustache, did you?

Incidentally, Warren is stationed at the same gunnery school at which I earned my "wings." I knew most of the boys who are permanently stationed there as instructors so the visit gave me a chance to

renew old acquaintances. When I introduced one of the instructors to Warren and mentioned him as the brother of my sweetheart, the instructor wise-cracked, “So, you came over to check up on him?” I had to smile when Warren flushed and stammered, “Not me.”

You can tell Mom her son looks swell, Billee. And, I’m not saying that to make her feel good. He really has a well color in his face and his quiet confidence leads me to believe he is going to do all right with his work.

Before we parted, some of the 25-mission boys who are serving as instructors until they go home joined the group and began giving him tips, or “tricks of the trade.” One of them, a lad named “Smoky” Hess, was a tail gunner at “my” station, and was one of the best.



Charles and Warren. England 1944.

After three hours, I had to rush off and catch a train back to London. After today, I’ll be back to normal. Al’s brother and his friends are going back tonight. Because I was tied up at the office during the biggest part of their stay, I was only able to spend evenings with them. But everybody had a good time.

Since we have been talking of everybody but us, suppose we put everything aside and cuddle in our little corner for awhile.

I’ve been missing you terribly, as usual, but it is an old story to us. Seeing Warren... well, it helped a little but not much. One of the first things I asked him was how he liked your ring and I know he was sincere when he raved about it.

I’ll admit I was so enthused about meeting him I actually forgot, or didn’t think of, asking him to give me a broad picture of how you look, and ever so many things about you. I thought of all those things on the train coming back.

I’m going to say goodnight now, while looking at you smile from your picture only a foot away. May I tell you again how beautiful you are? And how much I truly love you?

There is a French quotation that speaks for my thoughts... “J’amour plus que hier et nous que demain.” (I love you more than yesterday and less than tomorrow.) Love to Mom.

All my love and kisses, forever and always, Charles