

Darmstadt, Hesse
Feb. 27, 1919

Dear Marie,

I received your letter a few days ago. It was so interesting I could not help but smiling a little reminiscently and I set about to conjure up the kind of girl you are: Young, enthusiastic, jolly and pretty - and naive. Does the description suit you or fit you?

Now the war is over and it would be foolish as well as tedious to go through the battles and campaigns again. Perhaps I will let you see my diary when I get back. Hardly that, though. I would compromise by reading you some extracts. Some of it is written only to keep alive incidents in my own memory and not for the entertainment of others. It would be a little "risque" for a school girl. As Kypling says, soldiers are not plaster saints.

So instead of telling you about the war I will take you on a trip to Paris with me - the City of Light - The Heart of the World. Recently I spent a few days there. My trip came about this way. A great many soldiers are going to be allowed to go to English and French Universities if they can qualify. I want to take up some post-graduate work at the University of Paris, and becoming anxious about my application I got permission to go to the city for a few days. You know I spent all last winter there before going to the front, and I almost feel at home on the wonderful boulevards.

It is quite a trip from Greisheim, Hesse, on the other side of the Rhine to Paris. All the trains are crowded with soldiers going on permission [?] or going home to be demobilized.

I am with the French Army of Occupation fortunately and therefore can ride first class and nothing is said. Perhaps I have told you we have only 40 Americans in a section and only one Section with a French Division. Hence we are few and far between and the French do not look upon us as regular soldiers at all. Their guards rarely stop us. We associate on terms of equality with the officers. In a word, we are half-independent, semi-detached. This helped me on the train, for I got into the officers coach, and in a compartment with two French Captains, two Fr[ench]. Lieutenants and an American Lieutenant, the last named wandering up and down the Rhine Valley like a lost sheep, trying to have a good time on permission by himself. He was from Leland-Stanford University and was quite congenial, so we became travelling companions. The French officers and myself got into a discussion on the relative merits of the French and German

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girls and that helped to pass the time away. the time [sic]. Of course, we decided in favor of the mademoiselles.

At 7:00 p.m. we reached Strasbourg, the famous citadel on the Rhine in Alsace. The Lt. and I knew nothing about the city so we hailed a taxi and told the sleepy man on top to take us to the best hotel in town. I asked him in French. He did not understand. The Lt. asked him in German and he understood. One of us could speak French and one German - a very fine division of the linguistic spoils. I was rather surprised at the size of the hotel he took us to. It was large, brilliantly lit up, and sumptuous [sic] on the inside. The man at the desk spoke English and had worked in a hotel in N. Y. The elevator-boy was an ex-prize-fighter and also spoke English. We obtained an excellent dinner at an unreasonably high price and then went out to take in the sights. It is a very interesting city, as I found out that evening and the following morning. The French, of course, occupy that territory and there are no Americans in town. I saw only five - at a big cafe', sipping their wine and listening to the music and imagine my astonishment when they walked [?] over to me, shook hands and all began to talk at once. They were old friends of mine who had been stationed in Paris with me last winter. They, too, were going on permission and had decided to take in Strasbourg. The most entertaining thing is to watch the people trying to talk French. Naturally, it is all the mode now. German signs have been torn down and French put up in their stead. Across the glass of one big show window the word "Boche" had been smeared. Everybody pretends to be a patriotic Frenchman whether they are or not. The better class and the older people speak French very well, but the rest make a sorry attempt.

On the following morning the Lieutenant and I took a look at the fine old cathedral, the University and other interesting places. We bought a lot of post-cards and took a few snapshots. I caught the 3:15 train for Nancy.

I have a sort of affection for Nancy for I have spent some pleasant days and nights there. Before the Armistice it was just a little ways from the German lines and it was bombed by the aviators literally hundreds of time[s]. I never shall forget my first night in the town. It was last August and the moon was shining most brilliantly - an ideal night for the aviators. I had a room on the top floor of my hotel, and I was stretched out in my soft bed reading an old romance when suddenly a siren on the roof of the adjacent building began to scream - the signal for a raid. I slipped on my clothes in one second flat and made even better time getting to the cellar. I thought I was pretty fast, but I

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already found several French officers and soldiers and a few ladies there. Well, we sat around on boxes of potatoes, etc. for a few minutes then the first bomb! A pretty little girl on a sack of onions next to me screamed. Both the bomb and the girl made a fearful noise. The former shook the house from top to bottom, broke some of the glass and made all of us look at each other, wondering when the next would hit. Then two more fell in quick succession and still close enough to shake the house. At the same time a hundred anti-aircraft guns were firing. After a while the guns ceased and the bombs stopped falling. I went out with a Frenchman to see what damage had been done. A hotel near the one I was in had been struck, killing and injuring several people, among them one American officer. Guests were running about the streets clad "a la nuit" and hugging a pillow or something. At another place a big fire had started and the fire department was working like mad trying to put it out. I did not make any more visits but returned to the hotel and my room.

Hardly had I undressed before the sirens began singing again and the anti-aircraft guns firing. We all hurried to the cellar again and sat amid the wine-bottles, onions, etc. More bombs fell. I began to feel the need of a stimulant so I purchased a bottle of champagne, and after the alarm was over I invited several up into my room to share it with me.

This time a French Adjutant, myself and a young lady were seated around the table in my room drinking the champagne (Don't feel shocked about the lady. One is not very conventional during an air-raid) when again the siren on the roof adjacent let out an awful scream. Well, I laughed in spite of myself. The girl shot up out of her chair and almost hit the ceiling. I caught a fleeting glimpse of her dress as she dived down the elevator shaft or something like that. This was the last raid and the following morning I was glad to go to the quiet front we were then located on. Later we spent several weeks in Nancy. So, as I say, I feel that the old city and I went through some trials together and I was glad when a change of trains forced me to spend a few hours roaming over it.

But I will never get to Paris at this rate. Guess I will have to take you there on the next trip. Anyway, I had a wonderful time - met many old friends - went to the theatre, and best of all was assured that I stood a fine show of entering the U. of Paris for four months. Guess it will be a long time before I get back. But I have a wonderful girl in Paris and I am almost praying I will be able to go to the University.

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Sorry to hear you enumerate your bad qualities for I thought you were a very attractive little girl - so nice, etc. (I like to write like that for it always makes a girl a little angry). Send me your picture and let me see what you are like now. I'll bet you are pretty. I will tell you about my girl later.

Sincerely,

Louis

Henry L. Amonette
S.S.U. 649, Convois Autos
Par B.C.M., A.E.F.

P.S. I am not a real soldier I am a camouflaged civilian.