

Zack Jacobs
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Saturday June 5th
Fort Custer, Mich.

Tue. May 25th.---

Our Company boarded a train at Fort Custer Mich. at 1:15 pm and arrived in Fort Devens, Mass. about 9am the following morning. Our Train crossed the Canadian Border at Detroit and again at Niagara Falls. I was reminded of a few years back when we all stood at the almost exact spot---viewing the falls together. This time the hour was midnight. The rain was beating against the car windows and the train moved very slowly---giving all a chance to see the wonders of Niagara ^{Gorge}. The falls seemed tall, dark, and weird---and as we passed over the gorge into the United States again, the combination of the falls and rapids beating and churning into foam below me, made one feel very small and insignificant indeed. The train seemed to move even slower over the R.R. bridge and one had ample time to peer into the chasm that seemed in some places to have no bottom.

The rain still came. All lands between Ft. Custer and Ft. Devens were flooded, with the exception only of the Adirondacs....Even a town here and there, could be seen to have flooded streets. I wondered at the time what the flood situation was along the Mississippi Valley. At first---we thought perhaps that's where we were being sent----to the flooded area. But after the train got under way and headed due East, then we had only two guesses left. Prisoners on the coast or to the coal fields, of Pennsylvania, or New York state.

We were in coaches (Seats only) and the positions in which we (tried) slept, weren't very restful. The night finally faded into /bell-tale/ gray and about 10 o'clock am, we pulled into the siding at Ft. Devens, Mass. The rain had settled to a drizzle and everything was made beautiful by the sun, when

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it peeped from behind the clouds a few moments later. The foliage was bright, crisp, green, and I've never breathed air anywhere that seemed so cool and clean. Even the Rockies have nothing on this country for giving one a feeling of rejuvenation. Every day and morning of our stay, there after, was the same nature. The air wasn't cold either,---just like a plunge into a lake. The place was surrounded by Long needled Pines, and Spruce. The barracks were cool and clean and had fshced in grass all about. There were theaters---post Exchanges(P.X.) and Service Clubs. Last but not least it is one of the three main W.A.A.C. ^{Clubs} centers of the states. There were something like 10,000 girls there. Good looking W.A.C.s are few and far between as I've said befor. I went to the Service Club two nights for the sole purpose of seeing if I could find a good looking one. I didn't see all ten thousand of them, but honey, believe me, they couldn't hold a candle to you.

We marched from the train to the barracks and prepared for dinner. The Meals here were delicious in comparison to thoes at Ft. Custer. Immediately after dinner I mailed you a card and a pillow case. We spent the afternoon fixing up, and after supper is when I called you. It was good to hear your voice and I wish I could have told you then, what I know now. However at that time---we still knew nothing as to where we were going. Could Have been to England---easily enough. My only consolation was---they usually give the boys a furlough befor going over seas. I said USUALLY. Many have gone without. The boys I'll tell you about later, had no furlough. They were from California. When I got back to the barracks from supper and talking with you,---the company Commander was giving orders. No phone calls were to be made---no telegrams---no letters or cards to be sent unless passed by the censor. My dirty work had been done. Heh Heh!

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For this reason I had to disguise my letter to you. You knew all I wrote and more, but I had to pretend that you didn't---see? Did the censor cut any of it?

Devens

We spent five days at Ft. ~~Devens~~. From Wed. morning May 28th---until Monday May 31st. We all enjoyed our vacation there but began to get restless as the days went by. The boys sensed something exciting in the air---~~the air~~ something new from the drab basic we had received for seven weeks. They were all "On the Hall", when our orders came through to proceed to Boston, thirty miles away. We were to get our P.O.W.s and be on our way by 6am. We left Ft. Devens at four am and arrived in Boston about 6:30 Monday May 31st. We changed trains and the other three companies as well as our own was assigned to a special string of cars for hauling Prisoners of War(P.O.W.) It was something like this.

*This IS WHERE THE DRAWING OF
THE TRAIN WAS.*

We finally had things arranged by 6 pm that evening and our train pulled off the pier, where we had loaded our convey of four hundred prisoners. From where we were sitting--we could see the boats in the docks and the de-licious station on the pier. All were stripped(including the M.P. Guards) and sprayed with disinfect. Baggage was also given a good spraying and then the "Boys" were loaded on.

We were fortunate in having three of the guards on our car, who came over from Tunisia with the captive men.

They told us quite a number of things of interest, which we otherwise would have missed. They picked up their P.O.W.s at Oran, North Africa, after leaving Ft. Custer sometime in April. We had been in Custer about 4 weeks I guess when they left. They went straight to New York and were included in a 28 ship convoy, which crossed the North Atlantic, went the length of the Mediterranean Sea, to the Port of Oran. They arrived there the day after the fall of NUSSIA AND were there eight days before sailing again. They were in convoy going and coming and I was surprised as to the safety of some. I had no idea of how it was arranged, but from what they said---their troops and supplies were circled with a ring of destroyers and Sub Chasers...They were spaced about a mile apart and their detectors would bring in anything within miles. The subs travel in "Packs"---likes wolves---and they did encounter one of these packs. They destroyed one Sub with depth bombs and said it was quite a sight to hear the explosion and see the great sheet of flame shoot hundreds of feet into the air. They said it was the Sub's oil supply and even tho' hit under water (Water won't put out ~~ANY~~ OIL flame) the concussion sent the burning oil up through the water and into the air. They sighted another but evidently it got away. The only way these packs could attack in force would be to stay on the ocean floor with their motors out---until the convoy was over head. But the convoy travels so much faster on top the water than the Subs can underneath---that they (the convoy) out run them. The convoy stops for nothing. If a ship becomes disabled it is left behind---motor trouble or something similar has no effect on the progress of the convoy, as a whole. A goodly number of M.P.E.C.s stayed over there for duty--the rest returned. The trip back was uneventful. They said the P.O.W.s were even peaceful. When we left Ft. Devens our orders were given by the C.O.---he said something like this;

"Men, we have a job to do and it must be done

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right. When we get these prisoners at Boston, there will be probably about four hundred of them. "When we get where we are going---I still want four hundred of them---dead or alive, I don't give a dam, but I want them-----and when you shoot make it good---I don't want any misses". He wasn't kidding either. The guards on the boat were given different instructions. If they shot a prisoner they were court martialed for murder. I guess this was because they knew the P.O.W.s couldn't get away in the ocean. One did manage to jump overboard. A life raft was thrown to his side but he wouldn't take it. The ship's motors never missed a beat---the raft was recovered and placed on the hook. As for the P.O.W.---they never saw him again. He found his rightful place in the briny deep.

As we passed thru' Mass., New York, Penn., Ohio, Ind., Missouri, and so on---we talked of battles and lost but not least--WOMEN! Naturally we were all ears / about everything. They (the convoy I speak of) reached Oran, the next day after it's capture by the Allies. One of the boys said there were eight hundred Americans killed by their own men, in the seizure of this particular fort. The Ft. was located on top of a hill and when it was attacked from three sides and they all reached the crest, they were in each others line of fire. The mound was similar to the one in Moundville--only much bigger. How true this story is I don't know, but there's poor leadership in many camps, and branches so I'm told. No one has a good word for Ft. Custer and it's leadership. That includes me. From some of the things that I have seen in my short time here---I wouldn't put anything past some of these big headed officers.

The women, they say, are mostly all unclean in North Africa. Maybe the government has a point in stressing this. However they maintain "Houses" and "Women" for the soldiers there.

When we crossed the Hudson River---it was night.

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I just happened to look out the window and saw all the lights. I had no idea where we were, but just from the looks of things I said---"This must be the Hudson we are crossing." (To myself) When I come off guard the boys verified my thoughts. This guard isn't what it sounds like it might be. We were on guard 3 hours, then on screen guard, 3 hours, then we had 3 hours to sleep.----That was a laugh! During our 3 hours of sleep, we cleaned guns---shined shoes---ate our meals---washed---shaved---. I think I had about 6 to 8 hours sleep in our whole trip. ~~There was not sitting down on guard. Eyes on the alert club in hand---one didn't get to watch out the car window much. Just a glance now and then.~~

Our prisoners were mostly Germans. There were some Italians. Hitler's crack troop were these. All ages--17 to 35. Hard as nails, ~~and~~ brown and clean cut. They were seemingly gentle and manerly. Many of them spoke English. They adhered to all rules and regulations, and kept them selves well shavened, and well washed. I didn't see one there without a comb handkerchief and toilet articles. They never missed a thing inside the car or out, and many of them knew exactly where they were in our Country. When we crossed the Mississippi River, one caught my attention (which wasn't hard) and asked me-----"Missouri River?" I said "No, Mississippi".-----He said then---"St. Louis"---I said "Yes" "East St. Louis". You could tell they know their maps but they just couldn't get used to the bigness of this U.S.A. I asked one boy what he thought of America. He wasn't ~~very~~ very talkative but he did say---"ok." said there wasn't much difference in the people. (Cause he hadn't seen any one only us)---Started to say something about "War---no good". I agreed and said that war wasn't good for anyone. Real quick he said "But we need Russia, Germany doesn't have enough room, Russians no dam goot"---I could only make out half of what he was saying so I didn't detain him

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it took

any longer than ^{to} get a drink of water. We went through most of the big cities at night. The flooded area along the Mississippi was quite something. The land is so level that the water creeps back for miles into the states, along the river. Crops were ruined mostly. There weren't many buildings or homes flooded (That I saw) because most of the people have had this experience before and have built their homes ~~at~~ ^{in safer locations}. We headed South along the river from St. Louis and there was an awful lot of R.R. track washed away---bridges were down and stagnant water was everywhere. The mosquitos were bad---even up here in Custer they're eating me up. What I've written so far has been from memory as I didn't have time to write on the way down there. These next few lines were written at-----

St. Alister, Okla.
Thursday June 3rd---

As we pulled into the No Alister yards---the Screen guard jumped to their positions alongside the cars and for the last time. ~~at~~ ^{again} a close vigil was kept for about two hours. The Oklahoma Sun was beating down quite fiercely and our being from the cool climate ~~of~~ ^{of} the North, only served to make the heat seem more intense. We had eaten breakfast at 5 am---expecting the train to be here at 6 am---but at 10 pm we were still an hour or two away, so we had a ham sandwich for lunch. No coffee---nothing else at all---just a ham sandwich. We were all dead tired, aside from being under a strain. Our first assignment don't I can know and it was manifest that some of the boys were at their wits end. Our P.o.w.s just sat and locked and sweat---They drank much water and incidently, made ^{many} trips to the latrine (Toilet). I think many of these short walks were for the ^{purpose} of stretching tired muscles. They had been in these seats for sometime. Something like 70 hours and I knew how they felt.

There were two others trains *on the* siding along with ours. We finally moved out taking our convoy to the Mc Alister Internment camp--about a mile from the city yards. When the prisoners first saw the camp with its row after row of identical black clad buildings, the expression on their faces is something I will remember, a long time. It was a stirring climax--to see their expectant faces, just before the order to de-train was given. Every face was turned with interest in the direction of the camp. Not one moved so much as an eyelash. The proverbial pin could have been heard drop on the matted floor of the coach. For long seconds, everything was motionless. Armed guards with their dirty, tired faces----monocing Tommy Guns and clubs, were no different. They too were quiet and minister looking. Each knew the tact's of the other. We were about finished, and even the down deep in every heart there was a feeling of sadness for the non--our captives, we were more than ever on the alert. We put ourselves in the place of the prisoners. The end was near--our duties were about finished--nothing must happen now--and nothing did. Within ten minutes after they were off the train--they were in custody of the Mc Alister officials. We watched them walk through the high barbed wire gates, carrying their various bundles and equipment. Trails end for them--Vigils end for us--I think we all wondered at the time or other, during the trip--what kind of treatment *we* would receive if the conditions were reversed. Would there be cigars--ice cream--candy bars--the *same* food--? Some of them had never seen ice cream. White bread was unheard of....butter was looked forward to with eager eyes. Hard to believe for people living in America.

We showered and returned to our train--There was a difference already in the actions of the boys. The tension was released with our P.O.W.s--There were laughs and jokes, that had been with held

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for days.

After supper the porter couldn't make the beds
fast enough for the boys to turn in.
I climbed into a lower berth and never knew when
the bumping and changing of cars ceased. *I was by ties.*
I slipped very gently into the oblivion of much
needed sleep. ~~at last I fell.~~

We returned to Ft. Gaster by way of Kansas City
Mo.-----Davenport, Iowa-----Chicago, Ill.-----and
Kalamazoo, Mich.

We are just about ^{reorganized} ~~reorganized~~ ~~at~~ ~~ago~~ now, and
ready to go again.

Arrived here at 3:30pm Saturday night--June 5th.

VELLY GLAD TLOO BLEE BLACK.

Dear Malky;

I have just mailed you a letter that was written last night, but I recieved one from you today, so I am sending the letter you asked for right away.

This isn't going to be a big letter, cause I am right in the middle of clearing your room. I'll answer soon tho', I promise!

I know you said not to use the large envelopes, but I had to this time as the sheets of paper would have been too bulky if I had of folded them crosswise.

Saw Marty again in the store and he tells me that Bonnie, is down there visiting her mother. The town is something that starts with a Mont----and the only two I saw on the map was Montgomery and a small town Montevallo----very near you----~~Montevallo~~
I am sure this is the one he said.

It isn't important, but I thought you may run in to her. I know it is nice to see old friends when you are away from home.

Take care now-----

Be careful-----

Love, Gerley